

CITY MARGINS, ART and IDENTITY in Contemporary French Literature: Jean Rolin's *La Clôture* and Michel Braudeau's *Loin des forêts*

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It is well-known that the city was a central theme in modern French literature, characterised from Baudelaire to Verhaeren and beyond by the figures of *le flâneur* and *la foule* that expressed the contradiction between the attraction of the hectic and anonymous life of the modern metropolis and the threat it was taken to represent to artistic individuality, human singularity and social values in general.¹ Rapid demographic growth and the acceleration of technological progress, along with the emergence of new forms of political struggle, made the modern metropolis in art and literature 'a dynamic configuration of the conflicting hopes and fears of the twentieth century' (Timms 1985: 4).

Suburbia – *la banlieue* – has a problematic place in this tradition.² In Baudelaire and Verhaeren, it often stands in opposition to the city centre: if the latter is characterised by the crowds, technology and hectic pace of life, the former is calm and not crowded. Speaking in a semiotic fashion, suburbia is the unmarked term in this binary opposition, characterised by the lack of the city's distinctive features. However, during the last 50 years, the cultural and social status of suburbia has radically changed twice. Straight after the war, the outskirts of the cities saw the rise of new, rapidly designed and built housing districts. The architecture and urban planning of the post-war period was marked by a will to make use of *tabula rasa* and to implant everywhere modern and functional mod-

¹ See for example Benjamin 1990, Thum 1994. Georg Simmel's essay *Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben*, first published in 1903 (Simmel 1997), offers a classical sociological analysis of the relationship between modern metropolis and subjectivity.

² The difference between suburbia and *banlieue* is noteworthy, since the growth of the former in Great Britain and the USA at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th was sustained by middle- and upper-class values, whereas in France at the same period the city centres became the chosen areas of the *bourgeoisie* and the working class was pushed towards the outskirts of cities. This was particularly clear in Paris after Baron Haussmann's works in the 1850s and 60s.

els for housing that were taken to be rational, universal and democratic (Eaton 2001: 217–218; Nacher, Zamour 1997). The semantic vacuum of suburbia offered a perfect setting for the realisation of a distinctly modern social utopia. This utopia has, however, been reversed during the past 20 years. Suburbia has become a heated political topic in France, associated with delinquency, drugs, violence and considered as a problem in need of urgent and drastic measures. This dystopian turn of French suburbia is parallel to the fragmentation and disappearance of modern urban articulations and the heightened role of ahistorical places and generic landscapes in the everyday life of contemporary urbanites of the Western world in general. This process is reflected in modern art, where ‘the urban image seems to be no longer determined by kaleidoscopic contrasts, disjunctions, and intoxications, as was the case for the prewar avant-gardes, but rather by repetition, monotony, emptiness, distance and detachment’ (Jacobs 2002: 35–36).

This short overview shows that the role of the contemporary, post-urban city in literature is in need of analysis, both from the intrinsic point of view, concentrating on the development of literary forms and themes, as well as from the extrinsic point of view, concentrating on literature’s ways of shaping the cultural conceptions of living environment. In this article, I will analyse works by two French writers, focusing in both cases on what I consider to be the crucial issues in the city literature of the post-urban period. The first issue is the strategy of representation in Jean Rolin’s *La Clôture* (2002), and the second is the relationship between art and suburban marginality in Michel Braudeau’s *Loin des forêts* (1997). In addition to these topics, the texts share a common preoccupation with the writer’s difficult position in relation with the suburban marginality. Indeed, the very fundamental question in all these texts could also be formulated as: How can one write about marginality, when the very means of representation, literature, is a culturally valued form of communication and consumption and thus in itself foreign to marginality?

Writing about suburban marginality in *La Clôture*

Jean Rolin’s *La Clôture* addresses the issue of writing about marginality in the very project that sustains the text. Rolin explains that his intention was to ‘write about Marshal Ney from the point of view of the boulevard that is named after him’ (Rolin 2002: 17), and *vice versa*, on the boulevard from the point of view of

Marshal Ney. This project provides the text with its basic narrative strategy, a chronological biography juxtaposed with city descriptions.

For our purpose, it is important to note that this strategy is metaphorical in its construction, bringing in parallelism two distinct domains, the Boulevard Ney which is one of the main streets in the northern suburban districts of Paris, known for its social problems, and the life of Marshal Ney, one of the most successful officers in Napoleon's army. This metaphorical parallelism sets frames for the basic approaches of the text towards its topics. The war, as a constitutive element in Marshal Ney's life, determines from the very beginning the representation of the suburban space, the Boulevard Ney and its surrounding streets. At the same time, the representation of history is marked by the present state of the northern suburbs, their violence, drugs, prostitution and delinquency. Rolin's novel, however, is not a dystopian text representing the city as a setting for violent confrontations, as is often the case in texts using the metaphor of the city as 'war', 'jungle' or 'chaos'. Due to its metaphorical construction, the basic narrative strategy provides the text with means to represent its topic in subtler ways, seeking to avoid binary oppositions and negative judgments. The very project underlying the text plays with the iconic aspects of metaphors, with the *moment iconique* (Ricoeur 1997: 221–272), the parallelism created between the two domains. It makes the reader perceive the similar in the dissimilar, Napoleon's time in contemporary marginal suburban life and *vice versa*, but it does not establish a logically or epistemologically valid relationship between the two. In this sense, it eschews generalisations and arguments and thus works for the 'the recognition of each term on its own behalf' (Bessière 2001: 178). Marginality remains marginal, but it is brought into the realm of reflection proper for literature.

Three aspects in Rolin's novel are crucial in this respect: (1) the strategy used in description, (2) the work on time structures in narration, and (3) the status of the subject developed by the text. As we shall see, they all depend on the writing project that sustains the text, and contribute to the specific approach to marginality developed by the text.

As Jean Bessière has claimed, metaphors have as their condition an anaphoric relationship that 'is an act that presupposes an agent, a faculty and a questioning of this act according to the play of perspectives established by the anaphora' (Bessière 2001: 221). Representing something as something else is thus an intentional work that proposes a specific way of conceiving the terms of the meta-

phor. It offers a perspective on its topics, a perspective that cannot be achieved by other means. In *La Clôture*, this perspective is explicitly developed by the writer: it gives him both lexical means and descriptive strategies for the representation of suburban settings and the marginality encountered there.

In several passages the narrator uses military vocabulary derived from Marshal Ney's life for the description of the Boulevard Ney. For example, the area of the boulevard is characterised as *le territoire*, and the limits within which the writer acts are named as *aile gauche* and *droite* (Rolin 2002: 25). The writing project and the metaphorical parallelism it is based on thus offer lexical means for the writer to take possession of his topic. It also has wider relevance. Rolin takes the parallelism between Ney's life and the Boulevard Ney to the extreme in one passage, where he describes the street on the day of the Battle of Waterloo, the major event in the Marshal's military career. The description of the boulevard as a battlefield, however, takes place in the first decade of the twenty-first century. With a dose of humor and irony, the writer assimilates the noise of passing cars to the roaming sounds of war and changes big black garbage bags to dead horses. It is difficult for the reader not to compare the defeat in Waterloo and the end of urban utopias in the northern district of Paris.

On the other hand, the comparison also foregrounds the difference between the glory and grandeur associated with Napoleon's time and the dereliction and misery of the city at the end of the 20th century. In this sense, the underlying metaphor permits similarity and dissimilarity to be worked with at the same time. The northern districts are and are not Waterloo. Moreover, the metaphor also permits the writer to distance himself from his topic, but in a singular way that makes his very conception of the subject of representation problematic. This happens when a lonely man he meets in the street is frightened and runs away, even though he did not know 'that it was actually question of the battlefield of Waterloo' (Rolin 2002: 117–118). Seeing the Boulevard Ney in the year 2000 as the battlefield of Waterloo is obviously idiomatic, valid only within the limits of the project Rolin sets for himself. Because of this, the very topic of representation, the suburban space may resist the perspective established by Rolin's project. As a result, the way of writing is indirectly questioned and the common metaphor of the city as 'war' is foregrounded and problematic. The passage underlines that the metaphorical perception of the city space is always a construction not necessarily shared by other people.

The metaphor that sustains the writing project offers Rolin the particularly fertile and subtle means of representing his topic. It determines his perception of suburban space and offers lexical means for description, but at the same time it maintains the distance between suburban marginality and literary representation. The district is described, but in a way that foregrounds the constructional nature of the representation and the writer's artificial position.

The treatment of time structures in the narrative unfolding of the text also resists the unproblematic ways of conceiving the situation in the northern suburban districts. In a concrete sense the writing project determines the basic structure of the text, the alternation of passages on Marshal Ney and the boulevard named after him. The writer traces the life of the Marshal through history books and visits the places that carry memories of him, narrating his life in a roughly chronological order. At the same time, he describes the life of the marginal people he meets in the boulevard district. Two different historical periods, Napoleon's time with its military successes and defeats, and the end of the 20th century with its suburban decay, drugs, prostitution and homelessness, are thus juxtaposed. The text, however, again resists simplistic comparisons.

Even though Marshal Ney played an important role in Napoleon's wars, the text is more focused on the individual than on the political or historical aspects of his life. The text begins with the Marshal's modest childhood and his rise in military hierarchy. What interests the writer is, however, the element in his character that 'resembles a *midinette* and an *artiste de variété*' (Rolin 2002: 17). Ney's career is bracketed by the aspects of his life that do not correspond to the common idea of a great man, but resemble more the marginal figures that live in the district surrounding the Boulevard Ney. This parallelism is further elaborated into a chiasmatic structure in the unfolding of the text. The beginning describes the modest childhood of the Marshal and the writer's meetings with the people living around the Boulevard; the end narrates Ney's death and the equally modest childhoods of the other characters. This chiasm foregrounds the similarity between the personal life narratives of the characters, but again in a form that underlines the differences between historical contexts. Through a parallelism between Ney's and the other characters' lives (the common element being their modest origin), the text points to possible further resemblances, maintaining, nevertheless, at the same time the distance between two historical periods and undermining easy and unproblematic comparisons.

The two elements that I have analysed thus far, the strategy of description and the work on time structures, sustain the third crucial aspect in Rolin's novel, the status of the subject the text develops. The notion of the subject must here be understood in two senses: both as the thinking or acting power, and as the topic treated or handled, with the text's intention being exactly to question the difference between these two definitions.

By defining his work as a project and the topic as a terrain for interventions, the writer gives a degree of independence to the subject of representation, understood as that which is treated or handled in the text. The writer poses himself as an observer making operations and interventions, the purposes of which are to produce small events, to meet the marginal people living in the district and to learn about their way of life. Rolin notes that his project is 'rather wide and confused' (Rolin 2002: 17). Actually, the text narrates the failure of the project: the topic escapes from the narrator's control, the planned meetings do not always take place and uncalculated events happen instead. In this sense, the foregrounding of the project shows the difference between the writer's intentional operations and their result, pointing to the limits of the writer's control over his work and also to the independent status of the topic, the life of the marginal people living around the Boulevard Ney.

The topic in *La Clôture* is thus not only the subject in the sense of that which is treated, but the subject also in the sense that it has its own independent agency and capacity to act. Rolin's writing project defines suburbia and marginality as the subject for representation, but also foregrounds their independent status, their functioning as the subjects shaping the outcome of the writing project. Correspondingly, the work of writing is to be understood as a process of negotiation in which the dynamic, unstable and unfixed reality of suburbia is brought into the domain of literary representation, but in a way that does not subjugate it to literary conventions and models of representation. Marginality can maintain its status, its situation on the border zone where cultural and social structures are partly dissolved, and become at the same time the topic in a literary work of art.

Art, artist and social marginality

Michel Braudeau's *Loin des forêts* is a novel about the painter Louis, his work and his relationship to his family, his lover and to a society where social marginality has become a part of the fabric of everyday urban and suburban life. In his work, Louis enters into contact with homeless people. This meeting gives rise to paintings that foreground the relationship between art and marginality and finally leads to reflections on identity that can be extended to the metatextual level. Louis functions thus as the narrative element that binds together the themes of art, marginality and identity, and whose story can be read as an effort to reflect on the dilemma between art and the social and cultural elements that are foreign to it, but which it nevertheless seeks to represent. Three aspects are again central from this point of view: (1) the meeting between Louis and the marginal characters; (2) the parable on art and marginality that can be traced in Louis's work; and (3) the reflection on personal and textual identity the text gives rise to.

According to Marc Augé, the meeting with the figures representing social forms of marginality is critical in the sense that it foregrounds the pre-suppositions, conceptions and beliefs that support cultural identities:

Dans ces silhouettes anonymes ... nous reconnaissons les limites et les marques de notre identité collective: ces mendiants sont ce que nous ne sommes pas, ... ils symbolisent par la négation et jusqu'au vertige le tout du social, terriblement concrets, terriblement complets – trous noirs dans notre galaxie quotidienne. (Augé 2001: 86.)³

In Louis, this speculative relationship calls forth emotions of both fear and fascination. He feels that a hierarchy has changed, that the one who gives money for the marginal figures no longer has a feeling of superiority. The beggars and the homeless do not beg any more; instead, they transfer a feeling of shame to all those who watch them and force them thus to give in an act that does not confirm a hierarchy, but undermines the very certainties society relies on. Louis even imagines that the beggars and the homeless, present everywhere, are the members of a 'a non-declared underground network' (Braudeau 1997: 50) and know more than the police of what is happening at the low levels of society.

Louis's hypothesis is confirmed. In his work, he gets acquainted with mar-

³ 'In these anonymous silhouettes ... we recognize the limits and signs of our collective identity: these beggars are what we are not, ... they symbolize by negation and up to vertigo all the social, terribly material, terribly complete – black holes in the galaxy of our everyday life.' All translations by the author of the article.

ginal figures and, to his surprise, finds out that they are actually not exactly unhappy. They are proud, they feel free, and they do not regret the life they had before entering the margins of society. They have their own network of communication and help that unites people with different backgrounds, making no distinction of race, education, or (lost) wealth. This network constitutes a utopian community, a 'government of the *bas-fonds*' (Braudeau 1997: 135), founded on the principles of freedom and equality, but without the constraining hierarchies that regulate ordinary society. And it is a powerful community: when the police are incapable of solving the death of a homeless person, the community takes charge of the investigation and punishes the murderers. In this sense, through a mirror-like reflection proper for a utopian discourse, the community of those on the margin creates 'recognition of the gap between what is and what should be' (Riot-Sarcey 2002: 239), thus exposing the shortcomings and distortions of the society Louis and his friends live in.

The ambiguous feelings and reactions evoked by the meeting of the figures of marginality are developed further in the other two central elements of the text. The parable on art and marginality can be read in the narration of Louis's work and his artistic ambitions. He wants to paint scenes from battlefields. Why? Because

...cela correspond à son goût des grandes organisations et des actions compliquées, parce qu'un tableau de bataille doit, pour bien faire, donner l'histoire de l'engagement jusqu'au dénouement, avec au besoin le rappel parfois symbolique des causes directes ou indirectes de la bataille, le territoire disputé, les ambassadeurs humiliés, les femmes enlevées ou contraintes, comme des conséquences, la prison, la tête tranchée, la couronne tombée, être en quelque sorte un récit de l'événement et l'illustration d'un moment exemplaire. (Braudeau 1997: 95–96.)⁴

Louis's desire to paint battles thus reveals a phantasm of power and control, which is perhaps not alien to the aspirations of the traditional realistic novel, as we shall see later on. This desire is accompanied by an egoistic attitude towards the anonymous marginal figures Louis perceives in the city. He observes attentively their faces and looks for expressions and gestures that could be used in his

⁴ '...it corresponds to his taste for big organizations and complicated actions, because a painting of a battle must, in order to be good, give the whole story from the beginning to the end, with a sometimes sybolical recall of its direct and indirect motivations, the disputed territory, the humiliated ambassadors, the kidnapped or forced women, as well as of its consequences, the prison, the heads cut off, the fallen crowns, be in some way the story of an event and the illustration of an exemplary moment.'

paintings, showing ...*la curiosité inhumaine de l'artiste pour ses semblables, qu'il est tout à fait prêt à cannibaliser jusqu'au trognon, à dévorer tout cru en ne recrachant que les pépins* (Braudeau 1997: 105).⁵

In his search for picturesque models Louis gets acquainted with a homeless man, to whom he gives the name 'Judas', because the man corresponds to Louis's image of the betrayer in the Bible. This pejorative name already points to the difficult relationship between social marginality and art. Judas is actually the leader of the utopian underground community of the homeless and possesses qualities that position him far above his biblical patronymic. The artist reverses the cultural and social rank of the marginal figure. This process becomes even more evident in the work Louis finally paints with Judas as his model. It represents a scene after a battle, at the moment when three robbers come to search for valuable objects among the dead bodies in the battlefield. The scene is violent and does not offer any glimpse of hope. The model for the robbers is Judas. The head of the utopian, egalitarian underground community is thus first named as a betrayer and then used to represent the negative characters in Louis's painting.

It seems to me that this passage can be read as a parable pointing to a moral stance towards the difficult relationship between art and social marginality. A work of art always belongs to a highly evaluated sphere of communication and consumption, from which social and cultural marginality is excluded. The transition from the latter to the former can only be deforming. Louis's painting does not carry positive signs of the utopian underground community, as if art could retain of marginality only those elements that are capable of adapting to the artist's aesthetic demands and phantasms, and cast all the other aspects into shadows. Art is egoistic, just like Louis's attitude towards the marginal figures he encounters in the everyday urban and suburban situations.

The reflection on marginality in *Loin des forêts* also demands, however, a reading of the intertextual relationships and the narrative outcome of the story. This also extends the analysis to the questions of personal and textual identity. The central element in this respect is the topic that Louis paints, the defeat of the Duke of Burgundy Charles the Bold, represented in a series of sketches and paintings. The subject of the paintings is a relevant topic for analysis, since the

⁵ 'the artist's inhuman curiosity for his fellow humans, which he is ready to cannibalize to the carcass, to eat raw, spitting out only the stones.'

Duke's will to power and his tragic destiny resembles, according to Louis, our life in contemporary societies. Moreover, the subject in the painting points, on the one hand, to a historical intertext that corresponds to Louis's experience, and, on the other hand, to a metatextual reflection that can be developed towards the end of the text on both thematic and structural levels.

According to the historical chronicles mentioned by Louis in the text, Charles the Bold was found dead after the Battle of Nancy, laying face-down, half of the cheek eaten by wolves.⁶ Louis draws the scene and shows it to his friends, commenting on it in the following way:

Des Bourguignons s'approchent du corps qui gît face contre la terre dans la boue gelée ... C'est le dernier moment où il est encore lui-même, tout en n'étant plus. Parce que dès qu'on le retourne, la peau de la figure prisonnière de la glace est arrachée et reste dans le sol. Il n'a plus de visage. (Braudeau 1997: 193.)⁷

The theme of the destruction of the body, earlier connected with Louis's attitude towards the marginal figures, appears now in the very subject of his work, within the phantasm of control that sustains his desire to paint battle scenes. Moreover, the passage indicates that identity is not lost in death, but at the moment when the body is turned and the face mutilated. Interestingly, Louis relates this historical intertext to his own experience in a way that makes it possible to give positive value to the losing of identity and physical integrity. He says that he was reminded of the Duke's death when he was lying and bleeding alone in a forest after an accident with his motorcycle. In the description he gives of this experience, the disappearance of the body is seen as positive:

...dans la forêt, j'avais connu l'envie de me laisser aller à saigner à mourir ... je voyais mon corps comme dans un film accéléré s'affaisser, changer de couleur, tourner au vieux pain mouillé et se dissoudre dans l'herbe, quittant mes bottes et ma ceinture, mon jean et mon blouson, qui dureraient un peu plus que moi, quel repos magnifique. (Braudeau 1997: 195–196.)⁸

⁶ The same intertext can also be found in, for example, Aragon's *Le roman inachevé* (1956) and Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brügge* (1910).

⁷ 'The Burgundians are approaching the body that lies face down in the frozen mud... This is the last moment when he still is himself, and is no more. Because when he is turned around, the skin of the face, prisoned by the frost, is torn off and stays in the ground. He has face no more.'

⁸ '...in the forest, I felt the desire to let me bleed until death arrives ... As in an accelerated movie I saw my body shrink, change colour, become like wet bread and dissolve in the grass, leaving my boots and my belt, my jeans and my coat, which would stay a bit longer than me, what a magnificent rest.'

This positive disappearance of body and identity – ‘the magnificent rest’ – point to the third and last part of the story, where Louis enters a state of drift and loses his social and professional contacts. This new state is seen as the first step in the discovery of a new form of diffused and fragmentary identity, as a step on the way ... *qui n’a pas de fin, aucun terme, ... où l’on est immergé dans l’instant, dans l’oubli complet de soi, un pur ravissement, où le corps se défait, perd ses limites, se fond en un éclair dans le tout environnant* (Braudeau 1997: 333).⁹ The phantasm of the disappearance of the body as well as the dissolution of structured social identity each share the same value: they are both seen as desirable. The curiosity and anguish felt by Louis when meeting the marginal figures finally gives place for a new type of identity, freed from the constraints of social hierarchies and based on a flexible and unstable relationship towards the others.

This possibility of a new type of identity emerges at the same time as the narrative structuring of the text changes considerably. The first and the second parts of the book develop a rather traditional plot with several characters and dialogues, whereas the third and last part concentrates on Louis only and are interrupted by thematic digressions. There is a significant parallelism between the development of the character and the change in textual structures: at the same time as Louis discovers the new type of identity, the text abandons the traditional realistic discourse of the novel with its large set of characters and a clear plot, as if the end of the phantasm of control in Louis’s art would point to the end of similar phantasms in the writer’s work.

In this sense, the meeting with social marginality and its mediation through parables finally leads to a questioning of the forms and modalities of literary representation. The third part breaks the structural and narrative unity of the text, creating a tension within the work itself. This tension does not allow the text to constitute itself as a semantically closed and controlled entity, but opens a possibility for a complex and non-reductive representation of marginality. The text not only describes and narrates the difficulties in the relationship between art and social marginality, but also incorporates this difficulty into its own structures and forces the reader to question the very art of the novel.

⁹ ‘...which has no end, no fixed points, ... where one is immersed in the moment, in a complete forgetting of oneself, where the body is undone, loses its limits, melts in a flash to all that surrounds.’

Art, marginality and community in contemporary literature

The relationship between the community and the individual was a central theme in discussions on the metropolis all throughout the 20th century. According to Georg Simmel's early interpretation in *Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben* (1997: 175–185), the flux of impressions and the role of money in human relationships in the modern metropolis had become dominant to the point that the individual had to find refuge behind a screen of sensory anesthesia and to develop a *blasé* attitude towards other people. Dissociation became a form of social relationship. This situation also provided the individual with better possibilities for self-expression, anonymity and alienation, supporting in Simmel's thinking creativity in identity construction. Raymond Williams (1985) has further argued that artists from different social and cultural backgrounds faced with anonymity and strangeness in the modern metropolis found shared ground in the medium of expression. Their own practices and media were the only bases for community available to them. In literature, this was an important cause for the emphasis on language and the conventions of writing characteristic for modernism and its logic of aesthetic rupture with the past.

Williams assumes that 'it can be foreseen that the period in which social strangeness and exposure isolated art as only a medium is due to end, even within the metropolis' (Williams 1985: 23). It is indeed possible to claim that the contemporary fragmented city offers for artists and writers a milieu that is significantly different from the modern metropolis. According to Marc Augé (1992), contemporary societies produce 'non-places' where the traditional configurations between place, culture and social structures are no longer relevant. The 'non-places' are typically sub- or post-urban settings, places of transition and passage, like the public transports and shopping malls, where subjectivity is defined contractually and communication takes place between solitary individuals and through signs, texts and screens. In such 'non-places', space no longer carries the signs of shared history, values and ideas, and does not function as a principle of signification for the members of the community. Within this context, the problem of the writer's inscription in society and his or her representation of the urban community is significantly different from the modern period. The tradition of art and literature that provided the standard and the challenge for modernism is absent. The writer works in a non-historical and non-cultural milieu, where art and literature are at best present only as citations and fragments

detached from their original contexts and deviated from their original purpose. Moreover, the marginal figures encountered – junkies, homeless, immigrants in a precarious situation – are not likely to share the interest in the medium of literature as a possible ground for community. However, the suburban world with all its fragmentation, deprivation and tension is the subject to be represented, and the value of representation is to be judged not only in relation to aesthetic standards, but also in relation to the possible suburban community. Rolin foregrounds this last aspect at the end of his book. He describes a young African woman standing in line at a center for immigrants in the following way:

Ses lunettes sur le nez, elle était plongée dans un livre, et, même en faisant la part des choses – et même en tenant compte de la nécessité, pour la lectrice, de se composer une attitude susceptible de tenir à distance les emmerdeurs –, on aurait aimé savoir quel était ce livre, et ce qu'il avait pour mérite d'être lu dans des conditions si précaire. (Rolin 2002: 246–247.)¹⁰

Literature can be present in the precarious settings of *la banlieue*, but the qualities that offer this possibility are difficult to know. Obviously, the modernist aesthetics of rupture, as well as the postmodern play with intertextualities, are not the answers, since they both finally privilege the tradition and thus remain foreign to marginality. Rolin and Braudeau both choose forms of writing that oscillate between novelistic narration and a suspicion towards the illusions of transparency, knowledge and control this very discourse develops. Their purpose is to narrate real and fictive lives, describe locations and characters, reflect on their identity and the identity of the writer, but in ways that refuse generalising arguments on marginality and the transformation of social otherness into material for the artist's work so clearly criticised in Braudeau's paintings. The challenge is not only to confront language with tradition and reality, but also to create, through literature, the possibilities for sharing – stories, perceptions, ideas, values – and thus also for community.

¹⁰ 'With her spectacles on the nose, she was immersed in a book, and, even if one takes in account the facts – even the necessity for the reader to build up an attitude that would keep troublemakers at a distance – one would have liked to know which book she was reading, and what made it good enough to be read in such circumstances.'

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Linna äärealad, kunst ja identiteet kaasaegses prantsuse kirjanduses:
Jean Rolini *La Clôture* ja Michel Braudeau' *Loin des forêts*

Kokkuvõte

Viimase kahekümne viie aasta jooksul on äärelinnad olnud Prantsusmaal tuliste poliitiliste vaidluste teemaks. Äärelinnu seostatakse õiguserikkumiste, narkootikumide ja vägivallega, peetakse vajalikuks kiiret karmide meetmete kasutuselevõttu. Prantsuse äärelinnade muutumine düstooopiaks vastab kogu Läänemaailmas üldiselt toimuvatele muutustele: modernistliku linnastruktuuri fragmenteerumine ja kadumine, ajaloota paikade ja tüüpmaastike osakaalu suurenemine. Äärelinnad näivad kontsentreeritult kehasavat kõiki neid probleeme, mis on muutnud ruumi ja koha sedavõrd olulisteks teemadeks tänapäeva poliitika, teaduses ja kunstis.

Käesolevas artiklis analüüsin kahe prantsuse kirjaniku teoseid, keskendudes seejuures post-urbaanse linnakirjanduse olulisimatele teemadele. Esiteks käsitlen representatsioonistrateegiaid Jean Rolini teoses *La Clôture* (2002) ning teiseks seoseid kunsti ja äärelinliku marginaalsuse vahel, nagu neid kujutab Michel Braudeau' *Loin des forêts* (1997). Neid tekste seob huvi kirjaniku positsiooni vastu äärelinna marginaalsuse taustal. Mõlema teksti kõige põhjapanevama küsimuse võiks formuleerida järgmiselt: kuidas kirjutada marginaalsusest, kui seesama representatsiooni vahend, kirjandus, on kultuuriliselt väärtustatud kommunikatsiooni ja tarbimise vorm ning sellisena juba isenesest marginaalsuse jaoks võõras?