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► **To cite this version:**

Hélène Noizet. Fabrique urbaine : a new concept in urban history and morphology. *Urban Morphology*, 2009, 13 (1), pp.55-66. halshs-00419700

**HAL Id: halshs-00419700**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00419700>**

Submitted on 24 Sep 2009

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# ***Fabrique urbaine: a new concept in urban history and morphology***

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*Revised version received 1 August 2008*

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**Abstract.** *The concept of fabrique urbaine can be described as a socio-spatial process of development of ordinary towns and cities. Practices and representations of the residents and other users of urban areas must be first analysed as a series of historical moments, which may be termed 'social temporalities'. Then the spatial structure of the town, especially its plots, the aggregation of plots into street blocks, and the street system, can be precisely described, but with its own temporalities, and only as the final result of the history of the inhabitants. The link between social history and urban morphology is in important respects indirect: social temporalities are not conscious steps in the process of the development of the urban fabric. Nevertheless, there is a dialectical interaction between these two orders of facts. This method of articulating the historical development of urban areas is illustrated by studies of French cities.*

*Key Words: history, terminology, French towns, urban form, disciplinary links*

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The historian B. Lepetit has shown how the status of the city has gradually been transformed from that of a mere backdrop to historical research to being a focus of historical analysis. He posed three questions which it might be argued have subsequently defined, in large part, the problematic of urban research. First, what are the connections between urban representations, planning and results on the ground? Secondly, how do legacies from the past mould town planning? Thirdly, how does society treat the inherited built environment in order to give it new meaning?

In the last 15 years, a growing number of scholars have come to share an interest in these questions. They are searching for 'regularly occurring rather than exceptional features and pay more attention to housing than to monuments'.<sup>1</sup> They seek out the 'diversity of

life forms behind the rules of town planning'. Not least, they are aware of the 'dialectic between past and present (a present constantly freighted with the past, but generative of new values)'. This interest in the forms of towns and cities has led to renewed interest in the discipline of urban morphology. Because urban morphology has developed at the margins of several different disciplines, its content has tended to vary according to the disciplines of its proponents. All, however, share some central concerns.

My own field is medieval history. Working on medieval written sources aroused my interest in urban morphology. This led eventually to my doctoral thesis on the city of Tours. The starting point of my research is morphological, beginning with observations of urban form. I make use of planimetric documents: notably the French cadastre, dating

from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Having identified this specific material, it has to be harnessed to provide historical explanations. And this is where the specialists in early periods have a role to play. It seems to me that what is required is to go beyond mere morphological observation and seek understanding of how things became as they are now. How can we explain the differences in spatial structure from one neighbourhood to the next? Why do certain spaces contain forms that are denser and more diversified than others?

The analysis of street plan and plot pattern presented in this paper might be regarded as a fairly simple description of spatial structures. However, the main purpose is to uncover connections between morphology and social facts within the context of spontaneous, unplanned urban growth. In achieving this we shall show how the notion of *fabrique urbaine* helps explanation of the development of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century plot pattern, without referring to the intentions of town planners. Furthermore, the social facts are seen in a long-term perspective and through medieval written sources (mainly diplomatic sources, both originals and copies preserved in later cartularies). The plot pattern is the result of a long process that can be reconstructed by examining the functioning of past societies. Scholars specializing in early periods (especially Antiquity and the Middle Ages) hold the key to the explanatory material but lack knowledge of the latest urban forms that have resulted. Contemporary geographical and architectural research focuses directly on the city (the end product) but rarely reaches back beyond the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, except in matters involving town planning. Most French cities, however, have a 'historical centre' whose often unplanned spatial structure is the result of a long historical process. The problem is how to relate historical heritage to the morphological structure of the town. The concept of *fabrique urbaine* provides a possible solution.

After an outline of the historical background to the development of urban morphology, the French notion of *fabrique urbaine* will be

defined as a possible analytical tool to delineate the relationship between space and society in an unplanned urban milieu. To back up the theoretical definition, two concrete examples will be provided that highlight the concept's usefulness as a tool in urban research. Finally, the term *fabrique urbaine* will be explored. Since the meaning of *fabrique urbaine* is not identical in French to that of its literal translation ('urban fabric' in English), the English translation is avoided.

### A field of research under construction

The contributions of four 'parent disciplines' to the emergence of urban morphology at the beginning of the twentieth century have been identified by A.-S. Clemençon.<sup>2</sup> The disciplines are urban geography, typomorphology, urban history and the history of architecture and town planning. One of the difficulties of this field of research lies in the separation, according to discipline, of questions and objects: we look to the spatial sciences for the analysis of urban forms, while the historical sciences have at their disposal the historical elements necessary to perform an analysis of forms that takes social processes into account.

These differences between the disciplines are echoed by a linguistic difference. In fact we find two distinct traditions – one Anglo-Saxon, the other Latin. The main representative of the Anglo-Saxon tradition is M. R. G. Conzen. The Latin group comprises a number of French and Italian scholars familiar with one another's work.<sup>3</sup> Until recently there was little communication between those working in the two traditions.<sup>4</sup> However, with the foundation of ISUF in 1994,<sup>5</sup> this shortcoming has begun to be rectified.

The Anglo-Saxons include British urban historians such as H. J. Dyos and A. R. Sutcliffe, but more especially urban geographers, notably Conzen. In his study of Alnwick, Conzen developed several concepts, especially concerned with the morphological period, plot series, the burgrave cycle and the fringe belt.<sup>6</sup> These influenced both urban geographers, such as J. W. R. Whitehand,<sup>7</sup> and

historical geographers, such as T. R. Slater.<sup>8</sup> Conzen gave particular attention to the urban fabric. In his investigations of the street network, plots and buildings, he analysed in great detail historical town plans.

The Latin tradition has arguably had a more complex genealogy than its Anglo-Saxon counterpart. It has been more influenced by the historical sciences. Certain scholars from the first half of the twentieth century (notably M. Poëte, M. Halbwachs and L. Febvre) whose work encompassed both the fields of sociology and history have had a lasting influence on both French scholars, such as art historian P. Lavedan and geographer M. Roncayolo, and Italian scholars, such as C. Aymonino and A. Rossi. Several Italian schools – first that of Muratori and Caniggia, and then that of Aymonino and Rossi – laid the foundation of a typomorphological approach, which gave a fillip to research into the analysis of urban forms in architecture and town planning north of the Alps.<sup>9</sup> In France outside of the world of architecture and town planning important geographers and historians who worked on the analysis of urban form remained relatively isolated.<sup>10</sup> B. Rouleau, O. Zunz and A.-S. Clemençon are examples. The only French scholar to have built up a genuine school of thought is M. Roncayolo.

Despite barriers between disciplines and between languages, the work of the different scholars researching in urban morphology has many common features. First, there is the precise study of the spatial dimension, taking into account three components – streets, plots and buildings.<sup>11</sup> Emphasis is on the pattern of plots and the construction of maps of past plot patterns is fundamental. This differs from the approach of most architects, who tend to stress the buildings, and most historians who tend to stress the street plan. Secondly, an integrated temporal perspective is a fundamental aspect of urban morphology. This entails recreating the historical processes that have given rise to the town of today. Thirdly, there is the relationship of the development of urban forms to social, demographic, economic and political change.<sup>12</sup> Fourthly, there is the multiplicity of time periods. These are not analysed

separately (as happens generally when we employ Braudel's three periods) but they are treated as overlapping.

Braudel's division into three periods of French medieval history is problematic. It tends to lead to the writing of three disconnected histories. With multi-temporal analysis, in contrast, meaning is derived from comparing historical periods.<sup>13</sup> After having written these different histories, i.e. after having analysed each object in its historical context, the objects in the different time periods are brought together, paying particular attention to the interactions between different periods. Here we may invoke the aid of that tired, old war horse of the social sciences, the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic.<sup>14</sup> It has always been one of the most useful analytical tools and is of use in the study of the relationship between space and societies, even if the reasoning might seem somewhat eclectic.<sup>15</sup> We should also draw attention to the use of the English term 'urban fabric', which is the origin of the French *fabrique urbaine*.<sup>16</sup>

### **Definitions of the emergent notion of *fabrique urbaine***

The term *fabrique urbaine* first made its appearance in the Anglo-Saxon world with the *physical* connotation of 'urban fabric'. Nevertheless, according to Pierre Merlin, unlike the equivalent Latin term in common use by the French and Italians since Muratori and Caniggia, it has connotations of evolution, dynamism and process.<sup>17</sup> The term begins to occur frequently from the 1970s onward in the work of geographers and architects.<sup>18</sup> It has also been used in archaeology and history.<sup>19</sup>

In France, the expression *fabrique urbaine*, which is less common, is used in a greater variety of ways, most of which are more or less conceptual. It is found in sociology, geography and history. While sociologists<sup>20</sup> use the term to mean the study of the representations of the city and the actors who have made the city, geographers<sup>21</sup> and, more sporadically, historians<sup>22</sup> have, like their Anglo-Saxon colleagues, taken an interest in

the physical forms of urban space, even if very few have seriously taken into account the pattern of plots. Although Roncayolo does not directly employ the term in the manner indicated, all his work is imbued with the underlying reasoning that gives *fabrique urbaine* the conceptual meaning suggested here:<sup>23</sup> namely the interplay between the social factors at any instant and the forms inherited from the past.

It is the British-trained French archaeologist Henri Galinié who has taken theoretical reflection on this new notion the furthest.<sup>24</sup> He has been able to synthesize elements taken from sociologists Max Weber and Norbert Elias, the historian Lepetit, and the geographers Roncayolo, Jacques Lévy, and Michel Lussault. His work brings out the distinction between the study of social practices (which he calls 'function') at the scale of human decision-making and the study of the *fabrique urbaine* taken as urbanization on a much longer time-scale. The hard part is to explain the urbanization process. Mostly this cannot be explained in terms of planning in the sense of a purposive social project. Requiring, as it does, centuries to develop, the urbanization process cannot be properly understood at the scale of individual human life or social convention. Urbanization is one of those processes that requires subtlety in analysis comparable to that required to understand the civilizing process, studied by Elias,<sup>25</sup> or the increasing individualism of current societies. Such processes continue for centuries. Change, when it comes, is generally not foreseeable nor is it systematically initiated by particular individuals. Though unplanned, the process really exists. The characteristics of urban space did not develop haphazardly, even if, most of the time, they are not consciously organized by human actions. It is true that in many cases plans and operations of land subdivision exist, but this consciously programmed construction of urban space is quantitatively rare compared with unplanned urbanization, often termed 'spontaneous' or 'organic'. However, bibliographical analysis suggests that the number of works devoted to planned urbanization far exceeds that devoted

to its unplanned counterpart, whether in architecture, history or geography. This is perhaps because it is easier to analyse planned material, both practically (because of the availability of documents) and conceptually: the explication of urban form can be linked directly to the intentions of the planners in a quasi-mechanical cause-effect relationship.<sup>26</sup>

Urban space can be described and characterized accurately, yet it is rarely thought out beforehand and deliberately planned. One way to investigate it is to employ Galinié's concept of *fabrique urbaine*. Its demonstration in the present paper requires the separate analysis of two orders of reality: first, social practice, in the widest sense of the term, and secondly, the city as it manifests itself as matter in space. Finally the two are put together, and their mutual influence is examined.

To describe social practices it is necessary to understand how people live and involve themselves in a particular space, with their projects, their achievements, their conflicts and their agreements. All these things have their own outcomes, which it is necessary to discover. The inadvertence, but fundamental importance, of many developments is evident in the urban outcomes of the emergence of the bourgeoisie in Western Europe in the twelfth century. The bourgeoisie did not particularly desire to found a city or to organize space in any specific manner. What they wanted was their share of the rewards from urban economic activity, as well as a degree of autonomy and social recognition from the *seigneurs*. Likewise, in the thirteenth century, the mendicant friars did not generally move into the peripheral areas of towns with any intention of extending the urban area. Their purpose was, in fact, to be close to and to aid the unemployed poor who were thought to inhabit the *faubourgs*. In Lepetit's terms, we need to understand how and in what way, at several points in the history of a town, social agreement was reached.<sup>27</sup> The aim is to understand how people agree together to do something.

The description of urban space accurately in terms of its three constituents (the pattern of plots, the street infrastructure and the

buildings) presents a problem because for early periods there rarely exist records of buildings over large areas.<sup>28</sup> We should not, however, copy the majority of historians and concentrate on the street infrastructure. What is required is an in-depth analysis of urban space. We should not reduce the town to simple urban topography, whose reference points are, in general, confined to city walls and the seats of power. It is not enough to describe the city in terms of points and lines. These may provide structure but plots are also needed to provide the surface dimension. The aim here is to describe the structure of urban space that is the product of a process of urbanization that has gone on for centuries. It is possible to make use of the oldest available sources of information about plots: the French and Italian cadastral plans dating back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Our analysis must focus on morphological characteristics at the scale of urban neighbourhoods that have a link with earlier periods, such as the Middle Ages. What is required is to discern the presence of homogeneous ensembles of plots, plot series in Conzen's terms, whose formation owes a good deal to the Middle Ages, being situated in an area that was already urbanized at this time.

The third and final stage of the analysis consists of linking the two separate analyses: the history of social practices on the one hand and the spatial structure of the city on the other. The view taken here is that the relationship between these two orders of reality is fundamentally dialectical. In this light, we need to search the history of social practices for sequences that have an indirect link with spatial form and which are more likely to be found in social and economic history than in strictly political history. Placed in historical context, these social sequences will be seen to have at least an indirect influence on urban space.

At different points in its history, the spatial structure of the city has been partly conditioned by certain forms of social agreement, which helped fashion it in certain respects. However, at a later stage, this structure will in turn affect later social sequences. The *fabrique urbaine* is also a

long-term process, characterized by the permanent and dialectical interaction between urban space and varieties of social activity. It can be compared to a long chain in which each link is both the consequence of the preceding link and predetermines the one following it. It is therefore necessary to realize that the idea of urban history as a continuous narrative is no longer viable. In this classical view, which is false in my opinion, there is a tendency to see urban space as a finality: it leads to social activities that were not originally conceived as urban becoming characterized as such. In this paper we shall examine how the spatial dimension of the city, made up of the pattern of plots, the street infrastructure and the buildings has, in part, been determined by the social practices of its inhabitants, but also how this spatial dimension in turn influenced social functions.

Two examples will be described. The first example is the product of a synthesis of the work of Roncayolo on Marseille. The second is based on my own doctoral thesis on the medieval history of Tours. In each case the focus is on areas in the urban core: in Marseille the North neighbourhood from the north bank of the Vieux Port to la Joliette; in Tours, the neighbourhood of St Julien.

### Marseille

For Marseille, Roncayolo has shown the appropriateness of the principle of 'social division of urban space'.<sup>29</sup> This refers to the opposition of north and south, whose dividing line is the axis Vieux Port – Canebière (Figure 1).<sup>30</sup> Each of these areas has a distinct socio-spatial configuration. The north and north-western parts of the city, which were inherited from the medieval city, extend northwards to la Joliette and further to the public housing estates of the northern area. They are characterized by the trade and industrial activities of the port area. The area was once inhabited by working-class people but is today home to the most deprived members of society: immigrants and low-income earners for whom living here, far from being a choice,



**Figure 1. Marseille in 1840: reproduced from Roncayolo, *op.cit.* (note 21) 372.**

is a matter of passive acceptance. In contrast, in the south and south-east the new town created by the enlargement of 1666 extends southwards along the prestigious Prado axis. It is the smart neighbourhood *par excellence*; the residential area of the bourgeoisie, including its shops, banks and places of entertainment.

Roncayolo<sup>31</sup> concluded that this pattern is totally unplanned, and was unforeseen. The socio-spatial segregation cannot be attributed to any precise moment or to any particular actor. It is the result of no particular strategy but of a succession of events reinforcing one another. The following is the succession of events that led to the unplanned descent into squalor in the northern area.

First, in 1666, the royal enlargement plan joined the medieval 'Old City' to the 'New

City'. The Old City was characterized by a fragmentary, dense and heterogeneous plot pattern and by a labyrinthine network of curvilinear streets. In contrast, the New City was ordered according to the classical rules of geometrical reasoning: amply-spaced plots, grid plan, and network of orthogonal roads. This gave the city its earliest morphological frame, and was the basis of the social division that was to come.

Secondly, in the eighteenth century, the industries of the *Ancien Régime* (oil mills, soap factories, etc.) were concentrated in the north of the city. This is evident in the conversion of convent buildings in the neighbourhood of the Carmes into workshops and factories. This would inevitably make the area unattractive at a later stage. Though a few industries moved into the south quay of

the River Neuve, it is clear that most of the activity of the port and most manufacturing developed in the north, mainly because this was where labour could be found.

Thirdly, in the years 1750-1770, the somewhat repulsive aspect of this northern sector was reinforced by the return of charitable institutions. The *Hôtel-Dieu* was rebuilt in 1753 and remained in the north. The parish cemeteries were transferred to the space it vacated.

Fourthly, the site for the construction of the port at la Joliette in the north was chosen between 1842 and 1844, and it began to function as early as the 1850s. This new port gave birth to Marseille's 'third city', which was needed to house the port's workforce and the economic activities linked to maritime trade.

Finally, the proposal to build Fos on the Etang de Berre emerged as early as the 1920s but the complex only began to function in the 1970s. Child of the model of industrial development that prevailed at the time of its conception, Fos only began to function when the nineteenth-century model of industrial development was in crisis.

A number of attempts were made to regenerate the northern city. In 1752 the Belle-Isle project aimed to open up the urban tissue of the Old City by building more streets, but the project was abandoned. The project of the Benet brothers and their representative Clapier at the beginning of the nineteenth century was to demolish 500 houses in the old city, but this was abandoned. There was also the Mirès plan, which the Pereire Brothers took over in a more moderate form during the Second Empire. The idea was to build private housing for the middle and upper classes in the vicinity of la Joliette and attract Marseille's large capitalist institutions. This was intended to create an axis linking the new city of la Joliette and the new city of the south by constructing the rue Impériale (the present rue de la République). However, the hoped for recovery of the area did not take place.

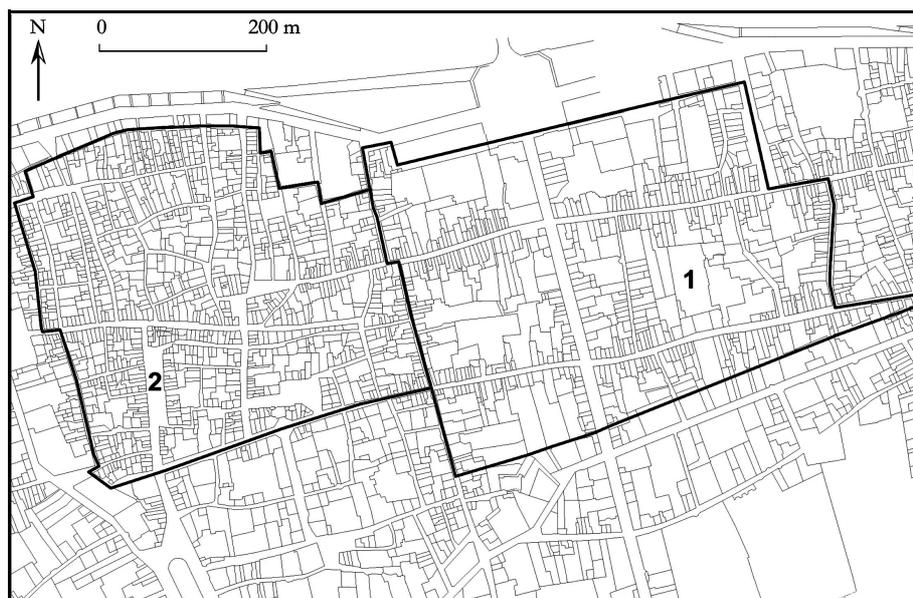
The Bourse operation of the 1960s was an attempt to push business activities and the crowd-drawing areas north of the Canebière.

Despite the construction of a shopping centre and a landscaped public garden, using the archaeological vestiges of the ancient port, the area has been occupied by society's misfits and outcasts.

These attempts at regeneration were either abandoned or led to failure. Each stage in the downward spiral may well have had its own particular cause, but it is clear that these projects ran counter to the prevailing forces that were influencing the city's form. It was as if these projects were denying the existence of the old city. The old city acted as a kind of obstruction between the bourgeois city and la Joliette, the third city, and prevented any significant modification of Marseille's socio-spatial configuration. A force of inertia was structuring social activities. For example, at the end of the eighteenth century, the policy of relegating charitable institutions to the north was in part conditioned by the devalued image of this part of the city due to its factories and its poor inhabitants who were the patients of the hospitals. Later on this belt of social welfare institutions, which concentrated the poor and the sick in this area, fed the myth, evident in the 1830s, of an off-putting old city articulated by the proponents of social hygiene. At this point it becomes clear how this medical policy contributed indirectly to the failure of Mirès, who, in the 1850s, tried to get affluent citizens to move closer to the very areas that according to advocates of social hygiene were veritable slums or ghettos, from which any well-bred person would flee. On each occasion social action reactivated the old opposition between the old and new cities, first in the opposition between city proper and port, and later between suburbs and city centre. While consistent with its own logic, each of these moments is both the consequence of the preceding one and one of the causes of the following one: it is this chain of events, unplanned yet real in its effects that we call *fabrique urbaine*.

## Tours

In Tours, morphological analysis based on the



**Figure 2. Plot patterns in part of Tours, from the Napoleonic cadastre (1830).**

Napoleonic cadastre<sup>32</sup> reveals two very different urban tissues. The first, in the St Julien area (Figure 2, Area 1), has a simple street network and a relatively low-density of plots. There is a contrast between the large plots of the interiors of the street blocks and the small strip plots along the sides of the streets. The second urban tissue is found in the area of the Bourg St Martin (Figure 2, Area 2). Here the street plan is complex and interspersed by several squares. The density of plots is much higher.

At St Julien (Figure 3) a succession of five developments helps to explain the spatial structure.

First, in the period 938-943, the monastery of St Julien was re-established by Téotolon after the destruction caused by the Viking incursions. The restoration of Benedictine rule and the associated limited physical needs of the monks accounts for the low density of plots. St Julien had only about 40 monks. This was far fewer than the neighbouring monastic community of St Martin. There was a relatively low level of consumption (practically no meat, numerous fast days, no quality material for clothing) and, as the monks had to do manual work, little recourse

to lay workmen from outside. The vast monastic enclosure underwent little change until the French Revolution.

Secondly, from the middle of the eleventh century, at the latest, the lay workers at St Julien (the baker, the cook, the shoemaker and the porter) were housed well outside the monastic enclosure. The monks considered their proximity would disturb the smooth running of the monastery and they were moved to St Martin. To reach the monastic enclosure the lay workers had to cross an uninhabited zone of vineyards and arable land within large plots in the interiors of street blocks.

Thirdly, in 1114 the monks of St Julien obtained the agreement of the Count to close a road that had recently been built near their walls after the Loire overflowed its banks. This helped to maintain the low density of plots around St Julien. This agreement was, in part, responsible for keeping the landscape uncluttered. Access to the Loire was impossible and all the space around St Julien was sealed off. By prohibiting all movement of people and goods near the monastic enclosure, the monks prevented a market from developing there.

Fourthly, in 1171, at the latest, the canons of



**Figure 3. Plot patterns in the neighbourhood of St Julien, Tours (1780s).**

St Martin leased a relatively large piece of land to the monks of Cluny. It was there that the monks of Cluny built the monastic priory of Saint-Michel-de-la Guerche (Figure 3). This accords with the dialectical nature of the process of *fabrique urbaine*. A thinly populated space with little land use variety was maintained. One of the reasons for the canons' willingness to vacate this space is that Saint-Michel-de-la-Guerche was, at the end of the twelfth century, still surrounded by vineyards and fields. There was no immediate possibility of development. The development of a market like the one at St Martin near the Loire would have required significant planning, considerable construction, and the moving of people into the area. Rife, as they were, with internal dissensions, the canons did not have the impetus to initiate anything of that kind. This combination of factors led to the maintaining of an almost rural type of plot pattern: the monks held back the urbanization of the area because their monastic infrastructures 'froze' this space.

Fifthly, between the years 1420 and 1430 the price of building plots began to increase in the St Julien area.<sup>33</sup> Throughout the fourteenth century, there had been a continuous

downward trend, as supply exceeded demand. From 1445, however, the monks began to sell off part of their enclosure. Houses were built on the Grande Rue (Figure 3) and let to private tenants. These plots are some of the strip-shaped plots occurring at high density along the streets. This agreement between the monks and the inhabitants at the end of the fifteenth century constitutes a further stage in the process of *fabrique urbaine*. Urbanization was enabled because there was already a road network. For the inhabitants, who needed to be well positioned and move around freely, the most desirable residences were those that were near the busier thoroughfares, like those on the Grande Rue. This explains why urbanization developed in a linear manner. There was, however, a major influence on the structure of the plot pattern. Since the houses were built along the main thoroughfares, the fields, vineyards and open land were now behind them and inaccessible within the street blocks. The only way of gaining access to these walled-in plots was through narrow, inconvenient passageways. This became a major impediment to building denser housing in this part of the city.

As in Marseille, there was a failed attempt to

change the course of development, mainly at the end of the fifteenth century. In 1482/3 the inhabitants of this neighbourhood successfully petitioned the king for the building of the Rue Ragueneau. It ran through the monastic enclosure of St Julien and was expected to facilitate access to the Loire in order to develop urban activities in the area. This went against the grain of everything that had occurred previously; the inhabitants were well aware of the role played by the monastery of St Julien in holding back urban and economic development. However, a colossal effort would have been required to modify the effect of inertia induced by the earlier configurations. The only solution would have been to create new streets. But this would have required setting in motion the heavy machinery of the administration to acquire land from the numerous inhabitants: the spatial inertia was now too great to reverse a trend unchanged since the tenth century. This area, therefore, constitutes an intermediate space between two more densely urbanized centres, St Martin in the west and La Cité in the east. It has remained, until the modern period, part of a fringe belt<sup>34</sup> in the heart of the city.

Seen in a long-term perspective, the interaction of these multiple social configurations with the spatial structure allows us to give an account of the self-regulating ability of the *fabrique urbaine*. Though there is no direct way of linking each one of these configurations, they nevertheless embody, each in its own way, the characteristics of the structure of the plot pattern: in the St Julien area this was one of low density. There is clearly a common trend discernible beneath each of a series of developments or non-developments, albeit that the individuals and bodies involved were at most only dimly aware of it.

#### **Use of the term *fabrique urbaine*: pros and cons**

Compared with ‘urbanization process’, the term *fabrique urbaine* has the advantage of emphasizing the spatial and physical dimension of the city. Nevertheless, though

fundamentally justified, the term is still somewhat problematic as to its formal expression and translation. For French speakers, especially historians of the medieval and modern periods, the word ‘fabrique’ is heard through a degree of semantic interference since it is used by these historians with two distinct meanings. The first designates the parish council, which manages the movable possessions of a church: the second refers to the building construction activity in a city.<sup>35</sup> Though these meanings differ from the meaning presented here, they resonate in ways that connect them to our argument, whether we refer to the meaning of building and construction activity or the more classical sense of parish council. The latter is interesting from the point of view of etymology because, with the medieval notion of *fabrica*, we have the material dimension of the church, in so far as initially this referred to the management of the church’s liturgical objects. The multiple connotations of the word can therefore be said to converge and this justifies the use of the term here with the meaning of interaction between social practice and urban space. As far as English speakers are concerned, there is an unfortunate echo of the similar English term ‘urban fabric’. The English term is too close to the idea of ‘tessuto urbano’ for us to envisage using it in the French sense of an unplanned process.

Other possible terms have been considered to designate the type of analysis proposed here. Among these are ‘urbanization’, ‘urban morphogenesis’, ‘fabrication of the city’, and ‘structuring of the urban tissue’. As the historian E. Hubert has pointed out, the term ‘urbanization’, which does not refer specifically to urban space, is vague and polysemic,<sup>36</sup> far more so than the term *fabrique urbaine*. Another commonly used term could be used, that of the ‘morphogenesis of the city’. This, however, might suggest a concern with origins rather than a continuous process that does not stop in the present. There is also an organicist connotation, but a city is not an organism that is born, develops and dies. The term ‘genesis’ clearly has organic connotations, deriving, as it does, from

the Latin, which, in turn, derives from the Greek and means ‘birth, generation’. Other scholars whose work moves along similar lines employ the term ‘the fabrication of the city’.<sup>37</sup> The suffix ‘-tio’ comes from an Indo-European morpheme expressing ‘process’ in the sense of development of action,<sup>38</sup> which is consonant with my idea. But insofar as any idea of fabrication is the result of a conscious operation, this runs counter to what is proposed here. My concern, however, goes beyond issues of terminology: what I seek to promote here is not so much the term *fabrique urbaine* but the underlying reasoning.

### Conclusion

The type of analysis discussed in this paper could be integrated, on an operational level, into contemporary architectural and town planning work. Keeping in mind the process of *fabrique urbaine* will help imbed new projects in the inherited urban space in the best way possible. Above all, for each new construction to be successful it must be compatible with the inherited forms of the existing urban space. Indeed, if a new project violates the historico-geographical trend it might well fail to develop. In my view a ‘successful’ form is one that crystallizes time, in the long-term; while a ‘failed’ form is one that denies time. But, for this view to have success in practical application, researchers must reveal knowledge of this process to architects and town planners.

### Notes

1. Lepetit, B. (1996) ‘La ville: cadre, objet, sujet. Vingt ans de recherches françaises en histoire urbaine’, *Enquête* 4, 18.
2. Cléménçon, A.-S. (2007) ‘La fabrication de la ville ordinaire: des processus pérennes?’, unpublished paper presented to the Conference on *Pérennité urbaine, ou la ville par-delà ses métamorphoses*, Nanterre, 15-16 March.
3. There are many scientific exchanges between Italian and French researchers about urban morphology: in this case language is not an insuperable barrier. The Italian architect Aldo Rossi, for instance, writes that he was influenced by French geographers and historians of the first half of the twentieth century (L. Febvre, M. Poëte and P. Lavedan are examples), while French researchers (for example, Jean Castex, Philippe Panerai and Jean-Charles Depaule) were influenced by Italians (see Merlin, P. (ed.) (1988) *Morphologie urbaine et parcellaire* (Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, Saint-Denis) 42, 173.
4. See, for example, Merlin, *ibid.* (note 3) 45-8.
5. Moudon, A. V. (1997) ‘Urban morphology as an emerging interdisciplinary field’, *Urban Morphology* 1, 3-10.
6. Conzen, M. R. G. (1960) *Alnwick, Northumberland: a study in town-plan analysis* Institute of British Geographers Publication 27 (George Philip, London); Whitehand, J. W. R. (ed.) (1981) *The urban landscape: historical development and management. Papers by M. R. G. Conzen* Institute of British Geographers Publication 13 (Academic Press, London); Conzen, M. R. G. (2004) *Thinking about urban form. Papers on urban morphology 1932-1998* (Peter Lang, Oxford).
7. Whitehand, J. W. R. (2001) ‘British urban morphology: the Conzenian tradition’, *Urban Morphology* 5, 103-9.
8. See, for example, Slater, T. R. (1990) ‘English Medieval new towns with composite plans: evidence from the Midlands’, in Slater, T. R. (ed.) (1990) *The built form of Western cities* (Leicester University Press, Leicester) 60-82.
9. See, for example, Boudon, F., Chastel, A., Couzy, H. and Hamon, F. (1977) *Système de l'architecture urbaine. Le quartier des Halles à Paris* (CNRS, Paris); Castex, J., Depaule, J.-C. and Panerai, P. (1980) *Lecture d'une ville: Versailles* (Éd. du Moniteur, Paris).
10. Darin, M. (1998) ‘The study of urban form in France’, *Urban Morphology* 2, 63-76.
11. Since Conzen’s study of Alnwick (Conzen *op. cit.* (note 6) 4-5), most researchers in urban morphology recognize that this trio constitutes the minimum to be examined in the analysis of the ground plan, though some do not deal adequately with these components in their analysis.
12. Not everybody shares this view: see Hillier, B. (1988) ‘La méthode de la syntaxe spatiale’, in Merlin *op. cit.* (note 3) 129-37.
13. For investigations that go beyond the urban ‘facts’, see the ‘archeogeographic’ approach

- presented in Chouquer, G. (2003) 'Crise et recomposition des objets: les enjeux de l'archéogéographie. Introduction', *Études rurales* 167-8, July-December, 13-31.
14. Berthelot, J.-M. (1990) *L'intelligence du social. Le pluralisme explicatif en sociologie* (PUF, Paris) 2nd edn, 43-50, 82-3.
  15. Di Méo, G. (1991) *L'homme, la société, l'espace* (Anthropos Economica, Paris) 145.
  16. Also 'fabrique de la ville' (fabric of the town), with the definition of town as proposed by the French geographer Jacques Lévy: namely, a spatial situation defined by the concentration of society in a place tending to maximize the density and diversity of social interactions (Lévy, J. (1999) *Le tournant géographique. Penser l'espace pour lire le monde* (Belin, Paris) 16-19, 195-268).
  17. Merlin *op. cit.* (note 3) 26-7.
  18. Whitehand, J. W. R. and Whitehand, S. M. (1983) 'The physical fabric of town centres: the agents of change', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* NS 9, 231-47.
  19. Palliser, D. M. (ed.) (2000) *The Cambridge urban history of Britain. Vol. 1 (600-1540)* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge) 186; Lilley, K. D. (2002) *Urban life in the Middle Ages (1000-1450)* (Palgrave, Basingstoke) 4-5.
  20. See Topalov, C. in his introduction of Lepetit, B., in Topalov, C. (ed.) (2001) *La ville des sciences sociales* (Belin, Paris) 12.
  21. Roncayolo, M. (1996) *Les grammaires d'une ville. Essai sur la genèse des structures urbaines à Marseille* (EHESS, Paris) 277.
  22. Boucheron, P. (2004) *Les villes d'Italie (vers 1150 - vers 1340). Historiographie, bibliographie, enjeux* (Belin Sup Histoire, Paris) 127; Boucheron, P., Menjot, D. and Boone, M. (2003) 'La ville médiévale', in Pinol, J.-L. (ed.) *Histoire de l'Europe urbaine*, Vol. 1 (Éditions du Seuil, Paris) 285-592; Backouche, I. and Montel, N. (2007) 'La fabrique ordinaire de la ville', *Histoire urbaine* 19, 5-9.
  23. See Merlin, *op. cit.* (note 3).
  24. Galinié, H. (2000) *Ville, espace urbain et archéologie* Vol. 16 (Maison des Sciences de la Ville, Tours) 73-84.
  25. Elias, N. (1991) *La société des individus* (Fayard, Paris).
  26. A similar contrast between the amount of published writing on organized and unplanned leisure is noted by Corbin, A. (1995) *L'avènement des loisirs* (Aubier, Paris) 323-4.
  27. Lepetit, B. (1995) 'Histoire des pratiques, pratique de l'histoire', in Lepetit, B. (ed.) *Les formes de l'expérience. Une autre histoire sociale* (Albin Michel, Paris).
  28. This minimalist approach to urban morphology needs to be complemented by other concepts often employed by researchers, such as 'centrality', 'fringe belt', and 'degree of specialization' (for example, of plots and street type).
  29. Roncayolo, *op. cit.* (note 21) ch. 8, 14 and 18.
  30. Unfortunately Roncayolo does not provide a map showing plot patterns for the whole town, even though his studies deal with the urban morphology of Marseille. This example of Marseille is presented from Roncayolo's work, and not from a personal study.
  31. Roncayolo showed perfectly all the nuances of this outline, but they can only be summarized here.
  32. Noizet, H. (2007) *La fabrique de la ville. Espaces et sociétés (IXe-XIIIes)* (Publications de la Sorbonne, Paris) 373-93.
  33. Chevalier, B. (1975) *Tours, ville royale, 1356-1520* (Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, Paris) 381.
  34. Cf. Ducom, E. (2006) 'Le modèle des ceintures limitrophes: une application aux villes françaises', *ESO Travaux et documents* 24, 79-83.
  35. Crouzet-Pavan, E. (1996) 'Entre collaboration et affrontement: le public et le privé dans les grands travaux urbains (l'Italie de la fin du Moyen Âge)', in *Tecnología y sociedad: las grandes obras públicas en la Europa Medieval XXII Semana de Estudios Medievales* (Departamento de Educación y Cultura del Gobierno de Navarra, Pamplona) 363-80.
  36. Hubert, E. (2004) 'La construction de la ville. Sur l'urbanisation dans l'Italie médiévale', *Annales HSS* 59, 1, 109-39.
  37. Roncayolo, *op. cit.* (note 21) 299; Cléménçon, A.-S. (1999) 'La fabrication de la ville ordinaire. Pour comprendre les processus d'élaboration des formes urbaines, l'exemple du domaine des hospices civils de Lyon (1781-1914)', unpublished thesis, Université de Lyon-2.
  38. See [http://www.etudiants.ch/upload/documents/superuser/sem\\_ling\\_lat2.pdf](http://www.etudiants.ch/upload/documents/superuser/sem_ling_lat2.pdf)