VADEMECUM

77 Minor Terms for Writing Urban Places

edited by Klaske Havik, Kris Pint, Svava Riesto and Henriette Steiner

nai010publishers
VADEMECUM

77 Minor Terms for Writing Urban Places

edited by
Klaske Havik, Kris Pint, Svava Riesto
and Henriette Steiner
In 1931, philosopher Walter Benjamin wrote a short piece titled ‘The destructive character’. This text, one of Benjamin’s Denkbilder (‘thinking images’) was written during one of the worst periods in German and European history: after the crisis of 1929, when European fascism was on the rise. Benjamin states:

The destructive character knows only one watchword: make room and only one activity: clearing away. It clears away the traces of our own age and has few needs, and the least of them is to know what will replace what has been destroyed. First, for a moment at least, empty space – the place where the thing stood or the victim lived. Someone is sure to be found who needs this space without occupying it. (Benjamin, 1999b, p. 541)

In a broader sense, the destructive character had equally been a feature of both the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, which presented themselves as new developments from the root. The concept also appeared in the works of the architect and writer Rem Koolhaas, where it set itself as a strategy of ‘emptiness’. Koolhaas points to a number of different cities undergoing ambitious renovation plans and starting from a large urban void implemented for various reasons (Mehan, 2017).

Asma Mehan
University of Porto
Research Centre for Territory, Transport and Environment (CITTA)
asmamehan@fe.up.pt

Further readings


Acknowledgement
This publication is based upon work from COST Action CA18126 Writing Urban Places, supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology). COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) is a funding agency for research and innovation networks. Our Actions help connect research initiatives across Europe and enable scientists to grow their ideas by sharing them with their peers. This boosts their research, career and innovation.

COST Action Writing Urban Places core team
Klaske Havik
Kinga Kimic
Jorge Mejía Hernández
Lorin Niculăe
Susana Oliveira
Marcel Pikhart
Mark Proosten
Svava Riesto
Luis Santiago Baptista
Henriette Steiner
Slobodan Velevski

Weblink
www.cost.eu
www.writingurbanplaces.eu

©2020, COST Action Writing Urban Places and the authors. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be used and/or reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recoding or otherwise without the prior written permission of the authors or the editors.
COST Action CA18126 Writing Urban Places: New Narratives of the European city

Writing Urban Places proposes an innovative investigation and implementation of a process for developing human understanding of communities, their society, and their situatedness. By recognising the value of local urban narratives – stories rich in information regarding citizens socio-spatial practices, perceptions and expectations – the Action aims to articulate a set of concrete literary devices within a host of spatial disciplines; bringing together scientific research in the fields of literary studies, urban planning and architecture; and positioning this knowledge vis-à-vis progressive redevelopment policies carried out in medium-sized cities in Europe. Working Group 2 of the Action, led by Svava Riesto and Henriette Steiner, is concerned with how theoretical reflections can stimulate the thinking and praxis of narrating urban places of medium-sized European cities. In 2019-2020, the group focused on the collaborative project of compiling definitions of Minor Concepts for Writing Urban Places into this Vademecum, a short guide that can be kept at hand for consultation when being in or writing about urban places.