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S. GROMARK

SUMMARY As a current observation this contribution intends to situate origins of the notion of the primacy of residential quality in urban creation in a historical context before May ’68 and to show the relevance and actuality of this concept in emerging contemporary projective urban architectural practices. This is done through a retrospective re-reading of a major research contribution of architectural residential sociology elaborated by Henri Raymond and his team of ISU directed by Henri Lefebvre. A summary of results were published in 1968 as ‘Habitat pavillonnaire’ and re-published in 2001 with the three different components together with the never published applied methodological instruction for inquiries of deep interviews with residents in suburban single family urban zones. This groundbreaking qualitative interpretive approach in social sciences with repercussions in residential architectural design orientations is regarded by the author as a still valid example of how social sciences can provide a more profound understanding of residents’ perceptions of their spatio-social residential situation, hábitat y habitar, than what the standard survey can offer for design guidance.

KEY WORDS urban residential studies; suburban zones; sociological methods of interpretative enquiries; architectural sociology; biographical qualitative research; Henri Raymond; Henri Lefebvre

RESUMEN Como observación actual, esta contribución pretende situar las orígenes de la idea de la primacía de la calidad residencial de la creación urbana en un contexto histórico antes de mayo del 68 y mostrar el relevancia y la actualidad de este concepto en los contextos urbanos contemporáneos emergentes. Esto se aborda a través de una retrospectiva de la importante contribución de la investigación de la arquitectura residencial de la sociología elaborada por Henri Raymond y su equipo de ISU, dirigido por Henri Lefebvre. Un resumen de los resultados se publicó en 1968 como ‘Habitat pavillonnaire’, reeditado en 2001 con sus tres volúmenes, junto con la metodología aplicada y nunca antes aplicada de encuestas a residentes en zonas urbanas Unifamiliares suburbanas. Este método de interpretación cualitativa innovador en ciencias sociales con repercusiones en la arquitectura contemporánea es considerado por el autor como un ejemplo de cómo las ciencias sociales pueden ofrecer una comprensión más profunda de la percepción que los residentes tienen de su situación espacial–social residencial, hábitat y habitar, que aquella que se encuadra estándar se ofrece como guía de diseño.

PALABRAS CLAVE estudios urbanos residenciales; zonas suburbanas; los métodos sociológicos de las investigaciones interpretativas; sociología arquitectónica; investigación cualitativa biográfica; Henri Raymond; Henri Lefebvre

IN A CONTEXT OF URBAN RESIDENTIAL SOCIOLOGY: HENRI RAYMOND

In contemporary social history of architecture concerning the post war period the May events in Paris 1968 were crucial moments of a genuine rethinking of the social in architecture but with the main focus directed towards the emerging urban society. Of the many seminal contributions to this rethinking, premature to the actual events, the prime example of Henri Lefebvre and The Right to the City was produced in the midst of upcoming student protest movement located to a great extent at his own university in Nanterre1. Other similar books contributing to the situation were in particular by Guy Debord with The Society of the Spectacle from 1967 with his strong but conflictual relation to Lefebvre2. We must also in this context mention Lefebvre’s assistant Jean Baudrillard with his early focus on the emerging iconic turn and the society of consumption3. Other related later celebrated events concern Michel Foucault on Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias from the lecture in 1967 extensively referred to and finally published many years later but also the less acknowledged but sometimes mentioned early contribution of Gilles Deleuze: Différence et répétition, in many ways distantly echoing in slogans on the streets and in graffiti on walls during the uprisings like ‘métro, boulot, dodo’ or ‘vive la dif’ference’.

But there is yet another event in the intellectual world amidst these intense and creative moments of upcoming eruptions that has a more obscure but to my mind crucial position in this image of the decisive years leading up to the situation that spring in Paris. Even if dedicated and limited to residential problems and not directed towards a general audience perhaps this research played an even more influential role in the aftermath of this society suddenly struck by great turmoil, of political convictions, philosophies and architectures profoundly re-quested and re–formulated. That moment is the publication of ‘l’Habitat pavillonnaire’ in 1966, of the sociologist Henri


Raymond and his transdisciplinary team of the research institute ISU, as a summary of results from the research work initiated in 1964 and carried out in 1965. It is no exaggeration that in spite of being limited to the fairly isolated French context, this book has definitely had a substantial and groundbreaking influence on the practice of residential architectural design and on applied methodologies in the related social sciences. A thesis by Lukasz Stanek that has never before been published backbones to this whole sociological endeavour authored by Henri Lefebvre with his lengthy foreword to the whole entire programme was basically concerned with the relation between individual isolated ways of residing and collective concentrated ways of residing, of the virtues or traps of dispersed single family residential patterns or dense mass housing concentrations: a contested focal point of the original Housing Question once raised by Marx and Engels as they focused on the housing conditions of the working classes in their early political thinking. The programme was basically concerned with the relation between individual isolated ways of residing and collective concentrated ways of residing, of the virtues or traps of dispersed single family residential patterns or dense mass housing concentrations: A contested focal point of intense debate within the social sciences and the design and planning professions. But the final conclusion of the involved researchers in historical hindsight reveals that this contradiction is less a question of different virtues or deficiencies of the two models, individual and collective, but rather what had been revealed through the research was the need of “...an architectural concept that enables and empowers the inhabitants becoming the masters of their own residential situation, not to be dependent on the outside world, being in control of the most intimate residential spheres of a home”.

Their unique approach and the decision to mainly focus their research on suburban detached residential areas –“les zones pavillonnaires” – was most courageous because at this point in time when these vast areas of low rise suburban detached houses “sprawled” out in the Paris agglomeration with ever greater pace they were generally met with scorn and harsh criticism from a radical left intelligentsia; considered as an urban nightmare and a political trap ever since the early days of Le Corbusier, still repeated today considered as a “suburban hell zone” on earth. But they consciously took the opportunity to seriously challenge this established opinion and decided to let the pavillonnaires themselves have a say in this, in order for the researchers to discover and to unfold the basic symbolic and spatial realities of residents in these areas. The background to this was the major initial and commonly known fact in this matter –still as active– that the general opinion on different residential preferences and as dream choices clearly preferred the same ‘individual’ way of residing: the socio–physicality of relations and capacity. This was made perfectly clear”.

THE PARISIAN SUBURBAN WAY OF LIFE – ‘LES PAVILLONNAIRES’

In the research programme initiated by 1964 Raymond and his team engaged with a fundamental question that might be coined as the Residential Question in relation to the original Housing Question once raised by Marx and Engels as they focused on the housing conditions of the working classes in their early political thinking. The programme was basically concerned with the relation between individual isolated ways of residing and collective concentrated ways of residing, of the virtues or traps of dispersed single family residential patterns or dense mass housing concentrations: A contested focal point of intense debate within the social sciences and the design and planning professions. But the final conclusion of the involved researchers in historical hindsight reveals that this contradiction is less a question of different virtues or deficiencies of the two models, individual and collective, but rather what had been revealed through the research was the need of “...an architectural concept that enables and empowers the inhabitants becoming the masters of their own residential situation, not to be dependent on the outside world, being in control of the most intimate residential spheres of a home”.

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S. GROMARK. “The primacy of residential quality in urban creation. A current observation...”.

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20. Raymond, Henri; Naumont, Nicole; Raymond, Marie-Geneviève; Haumont, Antoine: L’habitat pavillonnaire (Préface d’Henri Lefebvre) / Ed. Paris: CRU, Centre de Recherche d’Urbanisme. Raymond was active in ISU, Institut de Sociologie Urbaine with Lefebvre as the leading figure. Following some former experiences of the same kind of research together with Nicole Haumont, a sociologist with experience of and a profile in psychosocial issues, they fairly easily convinced the leadership of CSTE, the planners Jean Canaux, and the CRU to fund a huge project dedicated to deep interview inquiries with residents in suburban areas with owner occupied detached houses, les zones pavillonnaires. The team was composed of the two mentioned first and foremost but included also Antoine Haumont, a geographer and the, according to Raymond, brilliant young political scientist Marie-Geneviève Deslair, that he actually also was married for a shorter period.

The major axis of orientation for this research was the study of urban ways of life that implied two predominant aspects; the massive urban development on one side and on the other how this drastic transformation was experienced in the urban residential life worlds of residents. A secondary focus was put to address the urgent contradiction between citizens’ massive preferences for individual housing while the official political ideology favoured collective mass housing.

It is interesting to see in the report finally submitted, with the profound analysis of the life of les pavillonnaires, how the perception of collective housing in their minds comes out as a sharp contrasting anti-image and reflection in the mirror.

For pavillonnaire ideology, actually, collective housing represents disorder. The multiplicities of social relations (besides being illusory) that could be the result of the presence of all and anyone is perceived as a dangerous hazard; the multiplicity of apartments is the source of a mixtures of all and anyone is perceived as a dangerous hazard. The multiplications of social relations (besides being illusory) that could be the result of the presence of all and anyone is perceived as a dangerous hazard. The multiplicity of apartments is the source of a mixtures of all and anyone is perceived as a dangerous hazard. The multiplicity of apartments is the source of a mixtures of all and anyone is perceived as a dangerous hazard.

What was particularly discovered with some surprise in this context was that interviewees always tended to move unhindered and ecstatically without boundaries from symbolic levels to actual spatial and material levels of considerations -a fact that supported the strong mental unity of these levels of perception. In the end analysis much focus was put on oppositions or dualities and even triangular conceptualisations, searching for universalities beyond the actual local conditions in the residential situations so observed-.
The role of Henri Lefebvre in this whole grand sociological undertaking was quite superficial and distanced according to Raymond. “...Lefebvre indeed was the somewhat distant boss of the whole project, but he was following it from the planet of Sirius. He wrote a preface à la Lefebvre that did not have much in common with less Pavillonnaires”[1].

In spite of this, to conclude, it is evident that the work on Sicily and the Val di Noto after the earthquake 1693[2]... a quite striking and particular feature in Raymond’s relation to the social intellectual environment in the Paris post war academia that he has been working within is his relation to Pierre Bourdieu. Their joint orientations are turning around the growing importance of symbolic exchange in cultural and social interaction. They were actually for some time also colleagues as young assistants at the Sorbonne University. They both shared the notion and strong focus on symbolic social interaction mediated by material culture, as Pierre Bourdieu’s initial work related to significations in urban creation, has recently been reformulated in the extensive discussions with inhabitants premature to the realisation of the Tour Bois-le-Prêtre in Paris. It seems even that this demanding and exhausting procedure getting to know the unknown user of every one of the hundred apartments and their relevant needs and desires could be conceived as the key condition for the great success of this unique refurbishment project at least as measured in professional and public recognition[3].

A lot of other tendencies in the contemporary architectural world indicate a return to residential quality as the prime basic component of urban life qualities. The high ambition of the municipality of Bordeaux to initiate a consolidation for an urban residential strategy to a number of teams, with Ducrot, Lacaton & Vassal included, thus relating to spatially and materially mediated relations of power[4].

This attitude, towards the primitiveness of residential qualities in urban creation, has been recently formulated in projective practice by architects Ducrot, Lacaton & Vassal. It is a currently recurring notion from the past worth reiterating. This principle of ‘planning from the inside out’ is re–validated as confirmed recently in a published discussion with Anne Lacaton: ‘...an apartment is the first step, we are convinced that the question of urban planning should be totally changed and that architecture should be the first step in urban planning’...[5].

Huet and Liane Dufour, led to the fascinating account of the firsts step in urban planning... to define their urban proposals by defining residential qualities in urban creation, has recently been reformulated in the drastically formulated principle of ‘planning from the inside out’ is re–validated as confirmed recently in a published discussion with Anne Lacaton: ‘...an apartment is the first step, we are convinced that the question of urban planning should be totally changed and that architecture should be the first step in urban planning’...[6].

...the intention is to produce 70,000 housing units per year in Île-de-France in order to reach a territorial balance of habitation and work and to make housing a tool for urban development and territorial inequalities”[7].

31. http://www.lacatonvassa.com/index.php?cp=748 access 8/8 2013; Fr (orig. “La mission d’architecture, d’urbanisme et de paysage porte sur la réalisation de 50 000 logements nouveaux sur le territoire de la CUB. La mission prend en compte l’enrayement de l’étalement urbain, la réduction des dispenses dus aux déplacements, la réduction de la pollution de gauche à effet de serre, la réduction de l’investissement et des charges urbaines. Elle apporte une réponse à la question du logement, à son accessibilité pour tous, à sa durabilité, à sa généralisation. La proposition dresse l’inventaire des situations existantes, s’attache dans une même économie à transformer les logements existants les plus fragiles et à produire sur les territoires viables les nouveaux logements et services. Sans démolir, sans coupes, sans désorganiser les situations existantes, sans master plan mais au cas par cas, petit à petit, avec une précision, délicatesse et attention.’

CONCLUSION – TOWARDS INTEGRATIVE WAYS OF RESIDING?

We might conclude that these related events points towards the relevance and persistent validity of the urban residential approach once adopted by Henri Raymond. Nicolas Haumont, Marie-Genoveve Deozs and Antoine Haumont with Henri Lefebvre: only that today the huge problem ahead is primarily to turn the existing modern era mass housing into decent and resilient qualities of life as has been pointed at in the ambitious CLUB project in Bordeaux.

And what has happened in social housing construction since the early sixties? Isn’t it a persistent search for integrative ambitions, in terms of resilient residential quality, becomes strikingly evident especially when supported by qualitative and innovative structural, architectural and esthetical contributions of symbolic character? As an extreme and introspective expression of such tendencies mixing in an almost surrealistic manner and with a lot of irony these predominant residential typologies into one building -tenanted town houses as foundation, mass housing slabs in between and detached individual family houses on top combined with integrated commercial and public premises- is Edouard François’ project Urban Col- lage in Champagne-sur-Marne 2012(16).

Another current example of programmatic component micro mixture is architects Casanova & Hernandez finalis- sing a winning entry to EuroPan 6 competition, “Hybrid Apartment Block” in Gironingen, Holland, 2013. This apartment tower, eight-stories in height, contains 41 apart- ments with 16 ‘focus’ housing units for disabled people. The final lines and ultimate conclusion in 1.Habitat par- elliteur from 1966 has an optimistic message to pur- sue, still valid after so almost 50 years passed of resi- dential architectural social history. “The residential plasticity, the perfection of technolo- gies, and the imagination of architects and urbanists makes it possible, whatever strategy adopted, to materialize apart- ments adapted to the profound needs of residents. It is thus relevant to challenge the modernist self-confidence, and to soften it up, in order to make housing all over again what it was for long periods of time: an unconscious, obvious, but very important collective creation” 16.

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36. Raymond, Haumont, Deozs, and Haumont: L’Habitat pavillonnaire. Prélude des auteurs. Prélude de Henri Lefebvre. 4th ed. p. 114. All translations to English in this article from French original texts are done by the author.

In relation to the 60ies the current residential situation at large is, in many regards and according to many sources, characterised by processes of both accentua- ting individualisation and accentuated fragmentation of lifestyles. We should therefore move towards residential integra- tion since the early sixties? Isn’t it a persistent search for integrative ambitions, in terms of resilient residential quality, becomes strikingly evident especially when supported by qualitative and innovative structural, architectural and esthetical contributions of symbolic character? As an extreme and introspective expression of such tendencies mixing in an almost surrealistic manner and with a lot of irony these predominant residential typologies into one building -tenanted town houses as foundation, mass housing slabs in between and detached individual family houses on top combined with integrated commercial and public premises- is Edouard François’ project Urban Coll- age in Champagne-sur-Marne 2012(16).

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