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Places, gestures and words of comfort at home

Monique Eleb

This article is an excerpt from a chapter of our book "Vu de l'intérieur: Habiter un immeuble en Ile de France (1945-2010)" [Seen from inside: Living in a building at Ile de France (1945-2010)] (with Sabri Bendimerad, Archibooks/Order of Architects of Ile de France, 2011.

Comfort is a built notion as well as a conquest. During the twentieth century, the notion of comfort has increased from the expression of a qualitative, subjective feeling to a measurable, objective notion, linked to the idea of habitation equipment and of progress. It is thus questioning the relationship between society and the body, and the changeable concept of well-being. The idea of providing everyone a minimum of this well-being, evaluated by technicians or even technocrats, will guide many choices. Comfort also refers to the ideals of a society. Thus the conception of happiness promoted in the fifties, after the times of deprivation, was it related to the possession of goods and equipment seen as easing the housework and "liberating women", mistresses of their hygienic house and, more importantly, supporting the man status. Who today would dare to sustain this speech?

Comfort, between positive value and way of living

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the term comfort, borrowed from the English, become confort [comfort], is understood as a daily pleasure or a necessity, turned into a need: to take care of one's body, to learn how to relax and slowly to get used to wash oneself every day, it changes the habitation. From the perspective of the rich, comfort is a lifestyle choice which now incorporates requirements. The hygienists positions have been internalized and, now that we know the importance of ventilation and sun, it is about living in houses with large windows well oriented. The arrival of the technical networks already from the late nineteenth century (water, gas, electricity, telephone) will continue to improve daily life, yet reproducing social inequality: some of this equipment arrive very late in disadvantaged areas and running water is not installed everywhere in the Paris area, still in the early 1950s.

The International Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAM) will continue the hygienic tradition between 1928 and 1959, promoting both aeration and functionality, sometimes to the detriment of the symbolic complexity of housing and its environment. The healthy body is central in their thinking, but it is a sportive body, very little sensual, especially when it comes to house the working class in the minimum habitat. At the same time, less radical architects will build courtyard buildings, airy, no less healthy, often more urban, such as those of the red bricks belt in Paris. The working class arriving in the Parisian region from the rural world discovers comfort and convenience in some well-designed dwellings, learns to love the "home", to enjoy the charm of an interior clean, tidy, charming, bourgeois values until then (Eleb, 1994; Knibichler, 1991, 1987).

Planted terraces, the houses on the roof characterized Parisian luxury habitat in the 30's and will reappear, when the client is open to social demand, at different times in the second half of the twentieth century (Simon and Leclercq, 1994), especially in the social housing. Henri Sauvage's stepped buildings, the "step-back gardens", the pyramids buildings of the seventies, especially Andrault and Parat's in Evry, marked the spirits. This desire of reminding nature at home, of an externalized interior or vice versa, has led many architects to revisit these devices. And from the 80's, some buildings roofs, including those by Edith Girard, are surmounted by houses.

The conquest of hygiene and comfort for all

But the sanitation for all, scheduled before the war of 1914, will encounter the catastrophic dwelling situation after destructions as well as a declining supply. The moratorium on rents, very low until 1940, does not allow owners to maintain their deteriorating buildings. This housing situation and the large number of "poorly housed" people will be moreover denounced by the Abbé Pierre, in 1954. The period of Reconstruction was marked by an involvement of the State both in funding and setting up programs or in aiding industrialization, intended to accelerate the pace of construction. While it is known that the French prefer the detached house, the State chooses to build collective dwellings in "large housing complexes" [N. T.: *grands ensembles*, in French]¹, which, initially, will be very welcome. The starts of these operations, usually located on the outskirts of cities, accelerate. The unified image that characterizes them today - they would all be poorly constructed, reserved for working classes, and landlocked - is not due to field observation. And some of them, difficult to live in concerning their connections to their reference town, also possess high quality dwellings, which have been the object of a thousand thoughts to reflect lifestyles, and which people sometimes transmit from generation to generation. But others are mistaken because of an outdated conception of comfort, following a rush on the construction site or the drastic reduction of costs that does not achieve an acceptable quality. By the end of the Reconstruction period, they will be severely criticized. For their part, luxury buildings experiment devices both functional and adapted to the ways of living observed by the architects.

The comfort offered in magazines or exhibitions in the 50's seems to most of the French out of reach. Yet at the same time, devices that are still considered modern are experienced in social housing units such as open kitchens (although they are struggling to gain acceptance), sliding partitions and housing adapted to daylight timetable or the family's evolution. France engages

¹ Cf. Maurice Rotival proposing this term [*"grands ensembles"*] as early as 1935 in *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* (June 1935).

entirely in the acquisition of "home appliances" that becomes a real "object of desire" (Forty, 1992), and decorators and architects try to spread in all social classes light, clean furniture, rid of the "rustic" and the "padded", with a great success. Two pieces are central to the rise of comfort: the kitchen and the bathroom. The first one changes and moves through the dwelling throughout the twentieth century; the second is to be created and will quickly replace the nineteenth century luxurious bathroom, furnished and decorated.

Comfort for all but normalized

After the war, the general population census of 1946, which includes for the first time questions about "the elements of comfort: water, gas, electricity, sanitation facilities", shows that one household out of three lives in a situation of overcrowding (2 people per room), but also that only 6% of primary residences have a shower or bath, a home in five has a private toilet and only 37% have running water! But in 1951, a survey by the INED² shows that 32% of respondents "find normal to wash oneself in the kitchen"³. The Salon des Arts Ménagers [Home Exhibition]⁴ are also supposed to bring the French into the era of modernity through the possession of objects, furniture and equipment designed to increase comfort. In spite of intensive standardization and prefabrication, the ideal of comfort remains in the range of aspiration. And heating being scarce "many families of modest means are forced to live in the cold season, ie for eight months, in the kitchen [...] central heating remains the dream of all. No housekeeper would admit to have two fires at once, one in the alcove kitchen, and one in the great common room" (Laprade, 1950, p.6). A concern which will soon become obsolete.

Other habit(s), other techniques, other lexical

Post-war spaces, photographed or drawn, these objects, these texts, show the evolution of ways of doing and saying, of gestures and vocabulary. They actually show the slow acquisition of the daily need to wash, to take advantage of "progress", but with different rates according to social class. The representation of comfort changes along with the feeling these new items of comfort allow to discover. While we are only 60 years later, a whole new world appears, in homes where one has cold too often, where women boil the clothes with hazardous products spoiling their hands and where they carry basins of boiling water from the kitchen to the bathroom when they have one. Forgotten gestures and risks, such as climbing the "shower tray-washing" (until what age are we able then?), where the laundry was sometimes soaked in a toxic product... And where one perceives as natural, given the long and tedious laundry cycle, to have an open laundry room, which serves to remove vapors and to dry, and sometimes to have a laundry chest on his balcony.

Laprade besides shows how commonplace it is: "the bathroom to boil and wash the laundry and a dryer either in an attic or outside and made invisible by a concrete grating [a concrete claustra?] are essential" (Laprade, 1950, p.6, author's emphasis). An evidence, all the "natural" of a period!

The name of the refrigerator is still known only by the "happy few" and the airy cupboard under the kitchen window is still the rule. We can not imagine then the small "Machinist revolution" that

² N.T. National Institute of Demographic Studies. In French, *Institut national d'études démographiques*.

³ "Comment le Français veut-il être logé" *Sciences et vie*, n° hors série, L'habitation, mars 1951, p. 27.

⁴ Cf. at *Vu de l'intérieur*, the article by Lionel Engrand on the *Arts Ménagers*.

will follow, because obviously the dissemination of the washing machine and the fridge will make obsolete all those objects and organizations of daily life related to them.

The rationalization of housework in the continuity of reflections on domestic Taylorism, engaged in the twenties, is still very present in the post-war journals, magazines and exhibitions of the house. It legitimizes women's work in the home and encourages recognizing it as such. And "modern" equipment which "facilitates" it is then presented as a necessity. The specialized press devotes special issues to "the equipment of the home" and participates of this enthusiasm for the democratization of welfare⁵. Pierre Sonrel, architect and journalist, in a 1947 article on "The functions of the home" (Sonrel, 1947, p.242-243), analyzes the "basic needs" to be met by contemporary dwellings: food, entertainment-conversation, sleep, childcare, storage-annexes, sanitation, circulation. In passing, he gives a definition of comfort which would be: "The set of rules to follow, on the one hand to preserve the individual from the rigors of the natural environment without depriving him of its invigorating influences and, on the other, to increase the possibilities of physical and moral development by freeing him of tedious tasks." In popular magazines, the focus is instead on the practical aspect of equipment, facilities and DIY while specialized magazines have a scholarly approach of functionalism that is close to reflections on the minimum habitat and reinforces the image of a regulated, standardized, not very flexible dwelling.

But some architects resist and the still dominant functionalist position will be however questioned, as shown by the approach of Roland Bechman when he does, in 1948, a plea for flexibility (Bechman, 1948). He proposes the new concept of the "house-envelope" within which a greater freedom is given to distributions, "as independent as possible of the construction" to take into account changes in the family. It is in a way a free plan but whose partitions are prefabricated. He also refers to "movable partitions (sliding, swing, eclipsable)", referring to the culture of the Japanese house and to the "editable partitions (dismountable, removable)." However, he raises the question of sound insulation to improve for these solutions to be admissible. Poorly resolved issue until today.

This position, which seems so contemporary, will be applied by a few but will be swept away by the needs of reconstruction and industrialization of the building, as construction methods which are becoming commonplace leave little room for distributive diversity and to reflection on the interior spatial organization. The dwellings' plans are marked by the redistribution of responsibilities between engineers, architects and enterprises. And we can make an observation: since the Second World War and the Reconstruction, cultural variables, the rituals associated with the different social groups are reduced. Relations male / female and parents / children in the home, are less and less the basis for reflection on the organization. Construction methods, the search for cost reduction and technical standards largely explain it.

But if the "container", the envelope, freezes in types such as bars and towers, the development of contents, of equipment, is the object of much attention: the French then develops a great appetite for objects of modernity. And of course, we turn to the "America" and its conception of comfort. Thus the "common room" of popular housing, mixing kitchen and dining, will be renamed by developers "American kitchen", a term which is intended to present it as at the forefront of modernity, to better acceptance of its very small surface. In addition, the manufacturer saves a

⁵ As *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, Techniques et Architecture or *l'Architecture Française*.

partition and / or a door. We know the future of this perceptive illusion.

From the 50's and during the next three decades, the furniture tends to decrease, padded furniture still hold the upper hand in some social groups, but are joined, for those which are cutting-edge and have the will to live at ground level, by lighter furniture, sofas, ottomans, inflatable seats, cubes of foam brightly colored, often orange in the 70s, as some lamps⁶.

The dwelling organization or how did we get here?

Standards, codes, know-how of the entire chain of housing production eventually produced a type of characteristic French dwelling. A definition of nowadays "classic" dwelling is given by a site of the Ministry of Housing, with a hint of criticism behind. The habitation of our time would be "a home for a family with child(ren) when young (which is expressed by the size of rooms and their low level of autonomy one with respect to others), where the public portion (kitchen-diner) and the private area (bedroom-bathroom) are separated. This model, which has multiple doors and an enclosed entrance hall, usually blind, describes the apartment known as "classic" which is opposed to any other type, then called 'atypical'."

Such normalization of devices and surfaces is set up in the fifties with the buildings industrialization and continues to this day with slight adjustments, sometimes reversible, due to concerns that have followed such, for example, as not to waste energy sources (oil crisis) or adapting the dwelling to persons with disabilities. The family itself is standardized because the most common target of manufacturers is the nuclear family with its two children. While in the bourgeois habitat the internal tripartition, which is the dissociation between the public, private and service areas, adjusting for several centuries the interior home organization, is still present, it is the bi-partition that dominates the rest of the production with the "find" in the early 50s of the division into two zones day/night (Moley, 1985). This French exception was created by technicians eager to group the fluids who will present it as a result of the uses while it mainly helps to reduce costs.

Two types of plans become commonplace. Accommodations with double orientation have a kitchen in front of the "living room" and wet rooms are grouped together, while in terms of popular housing it continues to be structured around the common room, distribution center that must be crossed to reach other rooms⁷.

The interior of collective dwellings changes also in terms of decor. The enthusiasm for easy maintenance coatings, such as Formica, show a final burst of the wave officer of health of the late nineteenth century, incorporated by all social classes. The *salon*, called before the war "living room" (in English) or "studio" for the upper and middle classes, and "common room" for the working classes, becomes "*salle de séjour*" (living room) for all, with "furniture element" then spread, and with dining area, signing thus the disappearance of the dining room.

Throughout the period of construction of large housing estates (from about 1950 to 1974),

⁶ Cf. the joyful exhibition just ended at the Museum of Decorative Arts, in Paris, *Mobiboom. L'explosion du design en France, 1945-1975*.

⁷ Model reproduced the most of the very modest dwelling with distributive common room from the 1st competition for the construction of low-cost housing for the City of Paris, rue Henri Becque, won by Albencque and Gonnot (1913).

industrialization and prefabrication of identical and repeated modules, less expensive than current materials, marginalize the issue of internal organization and leads, in most social housing operations, to repetitive plans submitted to the construction systems employed, without further reflection on the uses⁸. Private development will follow this direction by taking, for a long time without further reflection, the devices developed for social housing.

Still very good architects still innovate and think about ways to make comfortable the habitat minimum, and to open it, even in the case of a large ensemble, on a nice outdoor space, garden, terraces overlooking a wooded landscape. Observed everyday use are then the basis of design.

Since 1962, the state of the housing is considered by the INSEE⁹, "which combines the features of structural work and elements of interior comfort of dwellings". The quality of new homes has improved in the decade 60-70, according to certain criteria because they are larger than in the old park (3.5 rooms instead of three) and eight times out of ten health facilities begin to resemble those we have today. At the same time, housing built before the war, which had only rarely toilets were rehabilitated and we pass from 13% serviced accommodation (so "comfortable" according to the INSEE) before 1945 to 90% in 1996 and to 99% today. In addition, the decline in household size is important and a dwelling hosts an average of 2.6 people today against 4 in the early twentieth century, which should increase the feeling of comfort. The general improvement in living standards in the postwar period is also reflected in the habitat that is for a long time the first item in consumption expenditures of households.

Back to urbanity?

Utopian proposals of the 70s are intended to face the mediocrity of the 'industrial housing': specially designed dwellings for specific groups, adaptable units with movable partitions following the changes of the family, and so on. Subjects perceived as utopian in the fifties are updated. These organizations are supposed to promote the dwellings appropriation. Respect for the users and their ways of living, the discovery by the architectural milieu of the idea of cultural model, a term adapted by Henri Lefebvre and Henry Raymond, based on the concept of *habitus*¹⁰ from Marcel Mauss, reminded the architects that the habitat is a fact of culture. The type that has persisted in relation to this abundance of proposals and experiments is the intermediate home, between individual and collective, enjoying of a separate entrance and external extensions currently undertaken by architects eager to "give collective housing the qualities of the detached house."

The intermediate habitat allows to penetrate directly at home, to have a terrace as well as close neighbors, to live in a single dwelling together but still in a complex. The most notable of these experiments is that of Jacques Bardet in Val d'Hyères (1967-1969), but many operations of pyramidal buildings will have the same purpose. This is of course a variation on the stepped

⁸ As shown by the *Cahiers du Centre Scientifique et Technique du Bâtiment* of the time.

⁹ National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies. In French, *Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques*.

¹⁰ Cf. Henri Lefebvre, *Critique de la vie quotidienne*, vol. I and II, ed. de L'arche, 1958 and 1961, and his preface to H. Raymond and M-G. Raymond, A. and N. Haumont, *L'habitat pavillonnaire*, ISU, CRU, 1966. Mauss proposes seeing the ways to do, the gestures of everyday life as an internalization of values and ethics of a society. Cf. *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, cf. especially "Les techniques du corps", Paris, PUF, 1966.

building, inaugurated by Henri Sauvage and Charles Sarazin in Paris in 1913, at rue Vavin, and proposing an art of living in town enabling a relationship with nature, to observe the seasons, to get some fresh air and to bask in.

It points out already the return to urbanity in all senses of the term: a city that would restore the desire to live together, with places to meet and which would reintroduce a diversity of architectural types in order to recreate a social mix, such is the credo of this period. All subjects that can be found today. Planted courtyards have been back. They are deemed to facilitate neighborhood sociability as much as helping ventilation.

Regarding furniture, the taste to lie on mattresses to receive or watch TV that characterized some avant-garde in the years from 1965 to 1975, gradually fades and furniture resumes its high seatings. Yet little by little, padded furniture, copies of the old, are replaced in most social groups by industrialized furniture, but designed by Swedish, English and sometimes French designers.

Through all those changes the stereotype of the couple with two children has nevertheless remained the basis of the habitat program. We are just beginning to consider the transformations of the domestic group structure (single parents, gathering of several generations in the same house, co-habitation...) as well as its rhythms of life. The specific habitat has emerged with particular attention to student accommodation and those for the elderly. Large reconstituted families and co-inhabitants are still considered only in the ideas competitions on the parallel evolution of housing and ways of living. Many thoughts, few realizations.

Surface, beauty, health

This century is that of the remarkable reversal of a trend that had persisted for centuries: luxury habitat suggested models that were reduced and transposed to create more modest housing. In the early twentieth century, the hygienic progress in social housing makes it a model at least in certain domains: the equipped kitchen, the calculated ventilation, the attention to children's rooms. But today, in the homes of the middle class, wealthy or more, some norms of surfaces are reviewed and lead to distributions that can only be justified with difficulty. Tiny bedrooms were imposed in all kinds of dwelling in most social classes, despite the negative reactions many residents. It contains the minimum of 9 m² of the beginning of the century, required for bedrooms of the working classes housing. Responding to multiple functions, it is now seen and organized, for adults as for children, as a place to play, resting, work, receiving friends, so it is both private and public, and it should be wide as it has often become a living room (Neitzert, 1990). The norms on disabled people can now enlarge the rooms, for a wheelchair should be able to rotate. But if the corridors have also expanded, living rooms are reduced.

Beyond the question of the type and the program that qualifies the dwelling, the question of its average size is critical today because, in the apartment building, it has stagnated in France since 25 years and is now among the lowest in Europe (65 to 66 m² on average).

According to Jean Nouvel, "A beautiful apartment is a large apartment". This is obviously not enough, and the role of architects is to propose distributions that correspond to the ways of living of the moment. Currently they are penalized as much as the residents, and propose dwelling extensions which are not calculated in the same way as living spaces area. We observe the

proliferation of terraces, loggias, wide balconies connected with the living room and with the kitchen, a device that allows many uses, different in summer and winter. Flat terraced roofs or green walls are now conceived by architects to increase thermal comfort. The courtyard and even more the patio or private garden are acclaimed. And it is often the only innovation in apartment buildings.

The massive construction effort undertaken since the war renewed for more than half the housing stock in France. Comfort in its objective, quantifiable, standardized dimensions has therefore greatly improved since then¹¹. At the same time, the demands of the French in terms of comfort have also significantly changed and the inhabitants of new apartment buildings in major cities still complain, as we have seen, of the surface of rooms, the poor solutions for the laundry issue, the maintenance problems in the assisted community, and a lack of urban integration (relationship with central areas and quality of the urban landscape). Especially, should we pay for access to the comfort for all and some beautiful abstract ideas related in particular to sustainable development, with the perspective of a dwelling increasingly standardized, organized in an increasingly stereotyped way, less and less close to the actual uses of their inhabitants. For example the quite agreed need of ventilation condemns solutions that prohibits the opening of windows and reduce their size. Field surveys show that one of the first inhabitants criteria for choosing a home is, besides its location, its clarity, luminosity. Overestimate a variable leads to questionable choices. Indeed, architects are resisting this diktat by reintroducing large windows and even full-height bays that they double for insulation to cold and noise¹². These windows thus become genuine protective devices often aesthetically very successful providing quality to the rooms: beautiful wood, shelves and play of light. It is a choice in the delicate negotiations that they operate to give a pleasure of space to inhabitants under very tight limitations of cost.

Environmental concerns of this beginning of the XXIst century increased attention to the influence of the built environment on the health of inhabitants. Since the beginning of the century the relation with the air has changed considerably. Air space per room was measured and ventilation was a guarantee of sanitation. Today we try to ensure that the air is clean inside and outside homes. The ecological reliability of materials, condensation and humidity that cause allergies as well as sound insulation have become issues to manage. The heating engineer has emerged as a dwelling specialist after the oil crises and in the national campaigns for energy savings.

The taste for loft, released by the decoration magazines and television shows applies to only a small portion of the population and is now called loft any large area with double height, so that the original term a designated industrial and commercial buildings converted into dwellings. The large polyfunctional room, the one where everyone lived under the gaze of all characterized the habitat of the Middle Ages until the late sixteenth century. The division into specialized rooms appeared with the rise of individualism. How then understand this return today, the taste of some people outside the world of architects, who have always associated beauty with large volumes?

¹¹ The average size of homes has increased from 2.7 rooms per unit in 1946 to 3 rooms in 1962 and 4 rooms in 1992, and remained at that figure since then. Cf. François Clanché, Anne-Marie Fribourg "Grandes évolutions du parc et des ménages depuis 1950" in *Logement et habitat, l'état des savoirs* (coll.), Ed. La Découverte, 1998 and *INSEE première*, 2006.

¹² Jean Dubuisson devices, particularly in his buildings of Montparnasse, had led the way in the years 60s to 70s.

Would this desire for loft indicate a return to family values? They were evident in some homes designed in the 70s, for example, with their distributive living rooms, that one had to cross to reach every room, and to which we return today for economic reasons, since the surface of the corridor has been removed... Our field surveys show, however, the continuing need for intimacy among residents who install an airlock when the architect has planned an entrance through the living room, or close priorly proposed open spaces (room or kitchen open to living room).

Paradoxes of comfort

If attitudes have changed among producers of housing, many variables could be analyzed to show some inconsistency between the choice of the dwelling organization, certain standards and the idea of comfort among the French (Eleb; Châtelet, 1997).

Even today, only a few experimental operations are able to incorporate changes of the society such as cohabitation, desynchronism of the households activities or work at home, for example. Current production takes rarely into account the ways of living. And facing a shortage of homes, the quality of supply and the real satisfaction of residents can not be assessed.

In families where at present the meeting around the table or in the living room is valued, but where everyone, too, lives at their own pace, a private room that allows many activities, including noisy ones, is an aspiration. Can it also be seen as a place for intimate reception? To address the need to be alone or engaging in noisy activities without disturbing the rest of the domestic group, rooms of recess and retirement were proposed as the "*insula*", a sort of alcove making it possible to isolate oneself while the rest of the apartment is very open, or as the single rooms soundproofed associated with a large communitary space.

Questioning about the relationship parents/children is also to rethink the issue of autonomy and dependence in the dwelling, the question of the position and the respective size of the common rooms of life and private territories. The idea that different people who share the same apartment are individuals who live together and not a family with unified goals and desires of the same order, is a trend that is spreading in French society¹³. If we organize the space so as to provide a possible autonomy to everyone, we already provide an answer to these questions.

Enlarge the kitchen or multiplying sanitation surfaces, illuminating them or opening them onto balconies or loggias takes them from their usual role of service to that of space for living or even a place of pleasure. Many outdoor activities end up now privatized, internalized in the house. Finding a place from the comfort objects remains a topical issue as the devices associated with leisure or work in the home are increasing: computers of all kinds, flat-screen TVs or not in the living room and in the children room, exercise bikes etc.. These new lifestyles require more qualified areas, taking practices more into account; new rituals and requiring reduced noise inside the housing.

The social aspect of sustainable development seems bound to the taking into account of the phases of life: development of representations and new conditions of different ages (single or couples, with or without children, elderly or very aged...) and therefore succession of passages of

¹³ Cf. the work of François de Singly, and particularly *Libres ensemble. L'individualisme dans la vie commune*, Paris, Nathan, 2000.

life. These situations have since long driven at dreaming that the habitat follows, adapts, that its surface is reduced or increased depending on the time without having to leave one's area of familiarity, neighborhood, school children, one's neighbors, friends, shopkeepers. A flexible space or even modular, therefore reversible so that it would avoid moving if one is attached to one's district or neighborhood. This point of view opposes the idea of external mobility and promotes a kind mobility at home, especially since housing supply is reduced now. In 2005, the average number of persons per household was 2.31. It will be (perhaps) between 2.04 and 2.08 in 2030 according to INSEE because the behaviors of cohabitation have changed: more and more people live alone and life as a couple seems to disaffection¹⁴.

Which ways of living show us these thoughts? One might venture to say that there is a tendency to valorize more sociability among peers compared to the couple. A tendency to valorize by co-inhabitants, a common life where shared spaces do not mean sharing a life together. The trend seems to be to "familialize" friendly relations in spaces that allow it, with shared common areas but intimacy protected. Moreover, the increasingly long presence of adult children at home poses as never before the issue of intergenerational cohabitation as a result of the economic crisis, but also of the greater tolerance of parents to the sexual life of their children. And it requires spatial solutions. Indeed, many adult children still live with their parents and sometimes in couple¹⁵. How to organize it, how to avoid frictions when so many activities can be found? The demand for homes follows these new ways of living. If an adaptation to this situation can be seen in some operations, such as the cohabitation of parents and adult children helped by the annexation of a studio to the main apartment¹⁶, on the whole the evolution of the domestic group structures are still too rarely taken into account. This cohabitation can both relate to a teenager in transition, a young adult, young couple or a grandmother. From the examples in social housing, private developers are those who invested this feature in recent years. Some public housing agencies, still very few in number, are trying to play the reversibility: they offer "trivialized" dwellings", such as a 3 rooms which can then be rented to families.

While working on a site, in analyzing the historical and geographical context, dreaming and projecting a building, the architects allow people to insert their own history, to build it giving it a material substratum they will seize. Habitat is not a product, it must provide us a daily pleasure, stimulate our senses and help us get to become, to evolve. Talk about the future of the habitat is also understanding why sometimes in the past changes have taken place. Means learning to recognize the solutions tested sometimes too early, because they were not in phase with the ways of life and values, and remain relevant for the future. The effects of all these ideas on the dwelling space are still barely visible even though they represent the inhabitants' request. When they call for a consideration of their way of life, they are answered double flow, insulation, solar panels, and so on. These techniques can or should be employed but they can not oust the observance of rituals and culture of living in a society, thus the work on the dwelling design in

¹⁴ "Since 20 years the couple is losing ground," writes Alain Jacquot from the INSEE Housing Division Housing . And he continues: "In 1982, 83% of men age 35 lived with a partner; in 2005, 71% (women: 85% and 74%). At the age of 35, in 2005, 11.3% of women are head of a single parent family and 8.7% lived alone (in 1982, 6.7% and 4.5%)."

¹⁵ And when they leave, it's more often to live alone, at least transitionally (INSEE, Household Survey Projection, Metropolitan France in 2030, 2009).

¹⁶ It can be next to, above or below and the easiest solution is to have an equipped room close to the dwelling entrance.

accordance with changing attitudes, desires, pleasures, as expressed here and now.

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