

Communicative Action for Building Agencies

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When designing public buildings architects have to work for an organization that caters for the needs and expectations of its patrons, so that they are one step removed from the final users, even two steps removed when a building developer is acting on behalf of the organization.

An example drawn from a large modernization program for Young Workers' Housing Associations in France is used to show that bridging the gap between architects and users calls for a special effort to change the builders and the managers' culture. A process predicated upon communicative action about modernization projects for organization leaders is presented in practical details. It has led to unsuspected difficulties and to some new questions. A tentative generalization of these questions is proposed as an open conclusion.

Theme: Building Bridges

Communicative actions organized around preliminary designs for young people's hostels in France has allowed small groups of housing managers to develop modernization briefs and to help bridge the gap between users and architects. This example is used to suggest new perspectives for user-oriented design.

Modernization of Young Workers' Housing Associations

Young Workers' Housing Associations are small local associations which have been created mostly after World War II in order to offer accommodation to young people coming into a city to make a living. They were meant to give full accommodation, group activities during leisure hours and moral supervision. Changing

times and changing mores made survival of most of these associations difficult through the 70's and the 80's, and their physical structures went into decay. In the middle of the 80's a modernization was planned. It was meant to provide support for social integration into mainstream society to young people, of whom only a minority earned a full time wage. This modernization called for new services. This meant a new organization within a totally rehabilitated building. Special grants and loans were made available by a joint commission comprising the ministry of Housing and the ministry of Health as well as the National Savings Bank (the Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations, CDC). This program was meant to help modernize about fifty foyers per year out of the four hundred and fifty existing foyer associations in France.

Evaluation of the Modernization

CSTB¹ was commissioned by the CDC to carry a formative evaluation for this program². The modernization policy had been carefully thought out, since its authors had been able to avail themselves of pioneering modernizations carried out by a handful of associations in the mid-80's. The evaluation concentrated on producing a contrasted picture of actual experiences of life in the foyer by all stakeholders, and of its functioning rules. There are many occasions when two independent conditions collide: in particular when one of them is caused by the necessity created by an organizational rule or some usual way of operation, and when the other is caused by the ways of life of some stakeholders. This is what we call "problems of daily life". So that a few general difficulties surfaced very quickly. Most project leaders were foyer managers. They had a personal knowledge of many residents, and they were very devoted to their welfare. They tried to imagine a number of new activities that could be carried out in their foyer, and they tended to believe that a catalogue of interesting new ideas pasted upon the existing functioning of the foyer could stand for a strategy supportive of young people's integration. Besides they had no sense of possible relationships between spatial organization of the rehabilitated foyers and modernization goals. They were unaware of most of the "daily-life problems" that depend upon spatial organization. They were understandably trying to look at the modernization process from the

standpoint of the culture of post-World-War-II foyers that they had inherited. Some efforts were put into using the evaluation to develop tools that could be used to improve upon that situation. This was not very successful. It became quickly apparent that a change in the manager's culture was necessary before they could master the use of these tools. Meanwhile a growing number of foyers had started their modernization and a new phase of evaluation brought home a much more precise type of information. It turned out that in a vast majority of cases the same type of accommodation, akin to what a motel would offer a traveller, had been offered to residents. Young residents showed a high satisfaction with their own bedroom, and displayed a surprising sense of isolation, and complained about a lack of intimacy even in single bedrooms, and about rumors and clique formation in the foyers³. At the same time one could observe that the prices of the meals were too high for them, that only a small part of the total time of the staff was devoted to supporting their attempts to enter into mainstream society, that no effort was made to encourage them to take personal responsibilities or to take part in selfgoverning organizations. Besides no attention was paid to a possible relationship between the internal rules of the foyer and the optical surveillance made possible by the new spatial organization, a typical example of a "daily-life" problem. Last but not least the economic future of these modernized foyers seemed to be rather uncertain because of these lingering sources of discontent.

A search for better quality design

The improvement of the quality of the accommodation offered to the young residents was so clear that none of the leading administrations hesitated to pursue the modernization program and to encourage new Young Workers' Housing Association to join it. Yet both the national union of Young Workers' Housing Association and the CDC shared the opinion that the modernization project development and the design process for each foyer could be greatly improved. They set for themselves the task of devising new techniques allowing each project leader to propose an approach of his own, taking into account all the ideas of the national modernization policy and the specific goals of his board of directors as well as all relevant aspects of the social environment. This is probably one of the great challenges in this kind of national program of modernization: Each association may have specific aims and may target its services to a specific group of young persons, each one is located in a particular town where all sorts of other public and private actions are taken in favor of young people, and the situations of these young people differ from one region to the next. Henceforth it is very doubtful that there could be a single best project that might be emulated all around the country. Instead it seems necessary that each project leader be helped to devise by himself and through cooperation with other local decision makers a modernization project adapted to local aims and circumstances. In order to do this Eric Daniel-Lacombe, an

architect who had been taking part as a private consultant in the previous evaluation, suggested that project leaders should take part in the development of a shared critical culture⁴. It should allow them to avail themselves of the experience of already completed modernizations by young residents and other staff members in order to question their own views of what a modernization should be. Instead of trying to teach them a new model for a foyer Eric Daniel-Lacombe suggested attempting to help a group of foyer directors and board members of associations who were engaging in a modernization project to jointly develop a critical culture, and to discover practical ways of disseminating it.

Organizing communicative action

Practical organization of the group meetings

Managers of the national union wanted to organize this process in such a way that it would be possible for them to do two things at the same time: first help a number of project leaders who were in some difficulties irrespective of the stage of preparation they were in, and second to learn how to manage by themselves this kind of cultural development in the future. It was decided that they would organize, on a monthly basis, two days meetings for a group of people in charge of developing modernization projects in four foyers. The project leader and the chairman of the board of directors for a few associations were invited to take part. They were asked to come with either the plans of their existing facilities if they were still at the beginning

of the preparation of their project, or with the draft of the architectural plan for the rehabilitation of their buildings to be achieved for the modernization of the association otherwise. This was advertised as a working session driven in order to enable them to make progress in the preparation of the rehabilitation of their buildings. Since the national union takes part in the commission in charge of attributing grants and state loans for construction many project leaders came there out of political acumen, rather than driven by some deep concern about the quality of their project. And since the emphasis had been put on building rehabilitation most board members of the foyers felt that this was merely a technical question and that they had no reason to delve into it. Actually, almost all of the foyer managers acting as a project leader came to the two-days meeting at which they had been invited, whereas only one in four board members came, and none of the managers of the national association took part in a full session. They were very active, though, in preparing these meetings, and they skillfully managed to invite four project teams that were at a very different level of preparation at each session. They also offered meeting rooms, and working facilities. Some of the associations were in the throes of starting to think about what they could do, others had already worked out a program and they were discussing with their architect and the owner of the property, and some other already had a fully developed architectural sketch which could be used to ask for public authorization to build. All of

them had brought the plans for their existing facilities, or for the proposed rehabilitation with them so that practical conditions for collective work were always met. The first day was devoted to a detailed analysis of the rehabilitation program, and the second day was given to an indepth analysis of social praxis in the building.

Discussions of the architectural program for a modernized foyer

Reading is a difficult activity which can be achieved effortlessly once it has been mastered. Architectural plans call for special reading abilities, which architects tend to forget about. We were very surprised a few years ago to discover that carpenters had difficulties reading architectural plans and that architectural students misread carpenters' drawings. Besides it is quite obvious that a knowledge of the Greek alphabet is sufficient to decipher a Greek text, but that reading ability is only achieved when the meaning of the text is reached at the same time that it is being deciphered. There was no reason to assume that the project leaders from the foyers would have sufficient literacy in architectural writing for a useful discussion to start immediately on their plans. Hence Eric Daniel-Lacombe had decided to spend a whole day helping them to learn how to read plans of a foyer, and how to start thinking about what they were reading.

Fig. 1. Plans for the Foyer du Mont-Joly
One of the difficulties with plans is that they offer neither symbols for the practical life that they are meant to shelter, nor sequential narrative order.

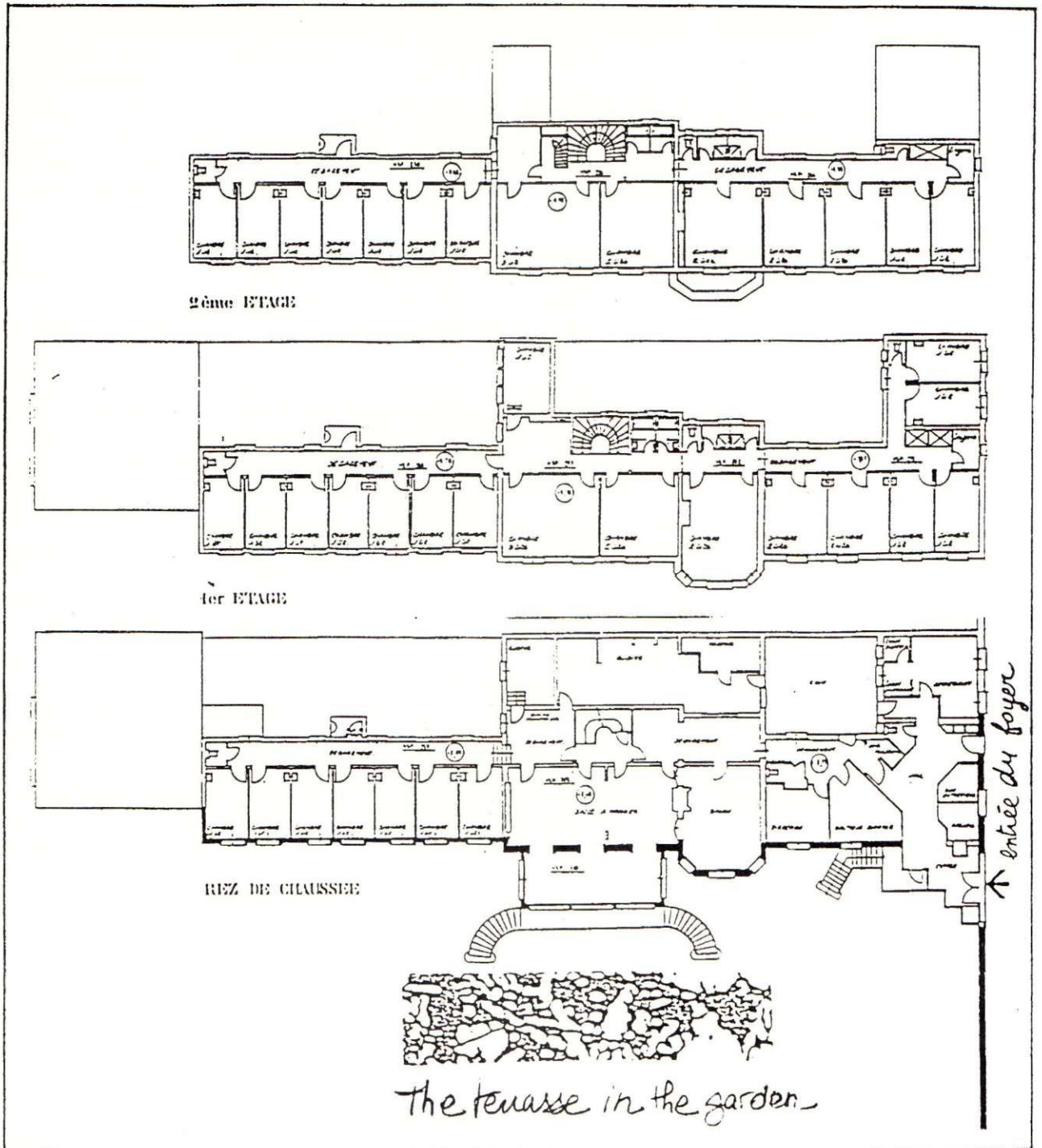


Figure 1. Plans for the Foyer du Mont-Joly.

Eric Daniel-Lacombe started by introducing a specific unit of meaning, the “interaction setting”. This is unfamiliar to most architects because the stock of their trade is mostly concerned with drawings that convey building construction symbols, rather than everyday-life symbols for practical activities. An interaction setting is an arena in a building which is used on a highly repetitive basis by any people having one of a number of possible roles who engage in usual interactions following customary patterns.

Fig. 2. Collective eating facilities at the Foyer du Mont-Joly

Each interaction setting calls for a three-fold description: first it is a limited space in the building that can be localized on the plan, second it allows a number of organizational rituals to take place all of which can be clearly articulated in writing, third since interaction between two persons depends upon their respective roles it is useful to specify which are the roles (and not the persons) who are engaging into mutual interaction in any given interaction space.

The plans for each of the four foyers were laid on the walls and the group was given the task of defining on each of the plans a whole number of interaction settings that were introduced by Eric one at a time. He could start with the street environment of the foyer, or with the public entrance, or with the private dwellings of the residents depending upon the expectations of the group members. Each project leader had to draw, with Eric's help, a line on the corresponding plan

around the interaction space being discussed and to explain which rooms and spaces it comprised. This always led to a discussion of activities and social interactions taking place there, which stimulated in turn discussions about the number of staff people involved in each setting, and about economic costs.

The first difficulty was for project leaders to find their way on the plan of their own foyer; and very often they discovered that the plan was not representing the existing building in a totally accurate way or that some changes that they had demanded from the architect in his proposal and which he had agreed to make were not to be found.

Fig. 3. Entrance setting at the Foyer du Mont-Joly

It was not always very easy to decide on the precise limit of any interaction setting even when the foyer leaders had become familiar with the architectural representation of their own place. Deciding upon the precise limits of any interaction space called for clarifying the meaning of all the interactions taking place there, with respect to the general aims of the modernization. For instance it demanded wondering whether the office of the director should be thought of as belonging to the public entrance or not. Contrary to belief by outsiders this is far from an easy question in a foyer because it engages attitudes with respect to discipline, authority, and autonomy of young people. Such questions stirred lots of debates among the group members. When the setting had been drawn on

the plan, the discussion moved on to a description of the roles of the various actors who would perform in this setting. This stimulated discussions about the modernization policy. Each project leader would start explaining what interactions were expected to happen in this setting. Other project leader reacted usually by passing rapid judgment on what kind of behavior was permissible or mandatory, and what was strictly unacceptable. Entrance halls always raised lively discussions about mail distribution. For a number of reasons some foyers demanded that residents should come to the secretariat to claim their mail, while other objected to this practice as contrary to their ethics. Many examples of power relationships of this kind kept popping up in the debates.

These discussions made very clear the importance of a detailed description of rituals taking place in each setting. The whole of the group members were asked to take notes so that they could later on write for themselves descriptions of the rituals they expected to take place in their own modernized foyer. Afterwards they were asked to measure on the plan of their foyer the area of the interaction setting being discussed, and to write the results into a table describing for each interaction setting of their foyer its area as well as the number of full-time staff members using it, and an estimate of the corresponding number of residents using it in a random week, in order to allow summary comparisons between them to be drawn.

The evaluation of the modernized foyers had produced a list of possible

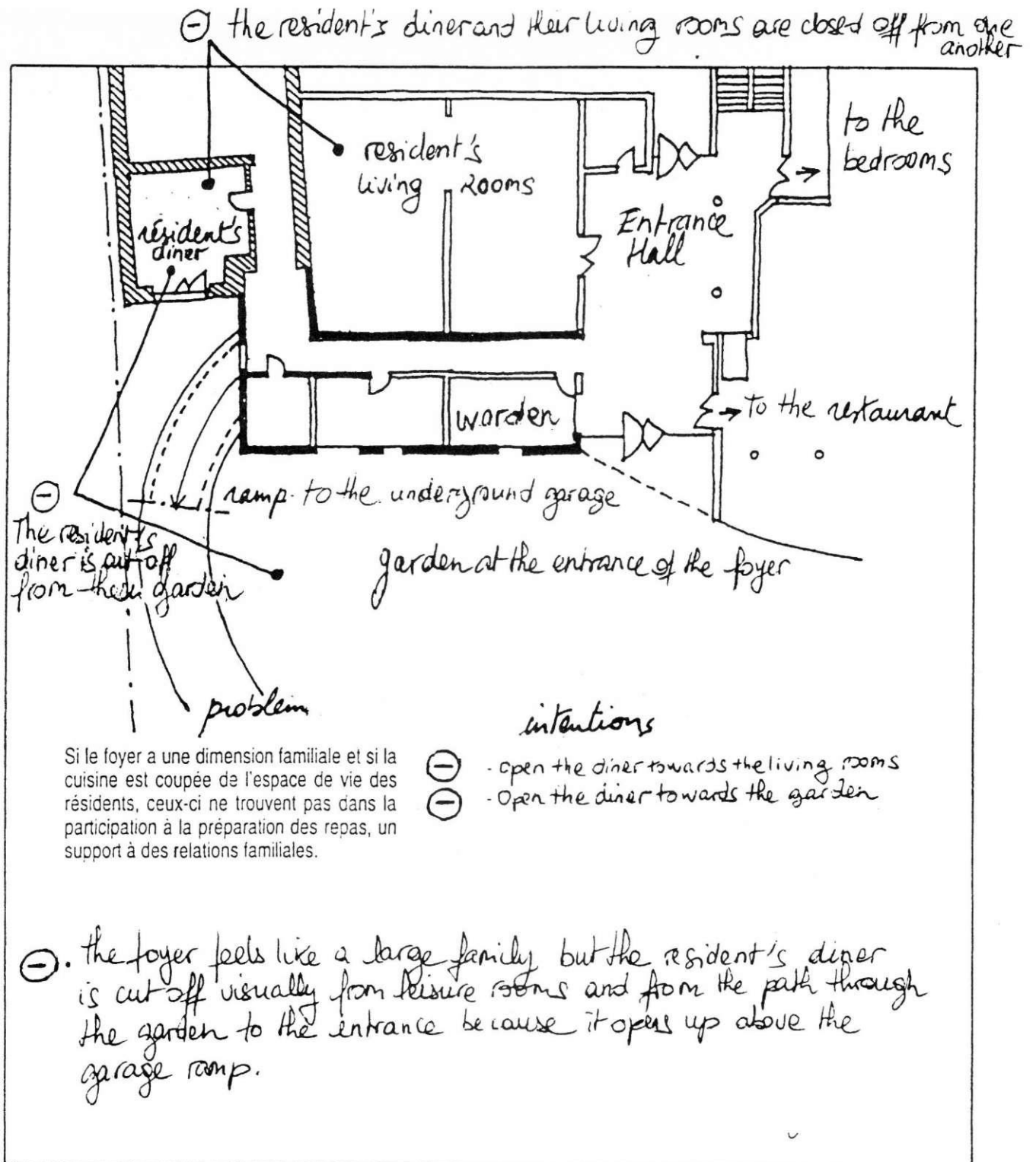


Figure 2. Collective eating facilities at the Foyer du Mont-Joly.

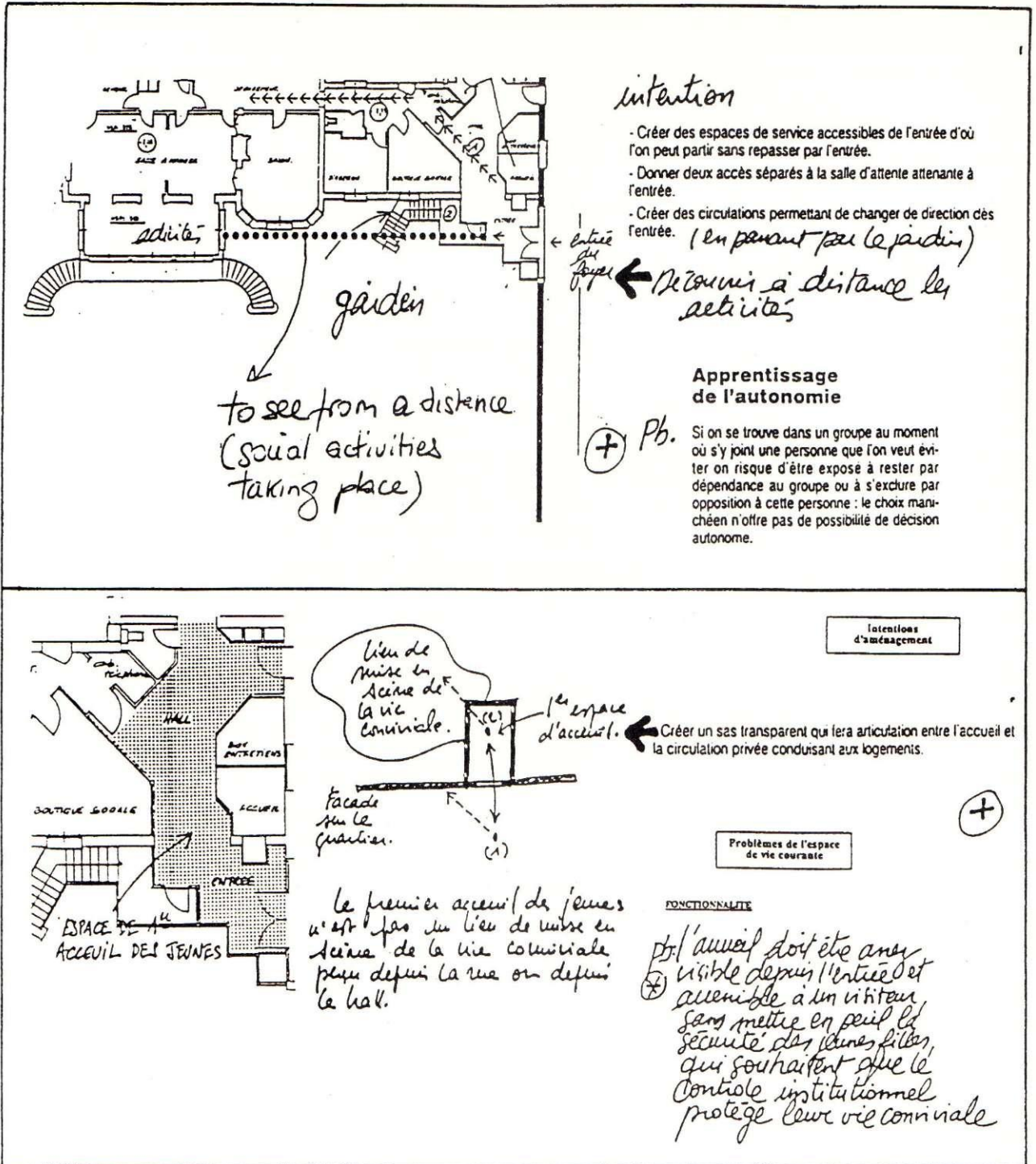


Figure 3. Entrance setting at the Foyer du Mont-Joly.

Drawing by Eric Daniel-Lacombe.

interaction settings that could be useful for the sake of meeting some of the general goals of the national modernization policy. This list was used to make in each of the four foyers as comprehensive a description of the interaction settings as possible. Henceforth, the group was able to stand back a little bit at the end of the afternoon in order to take a comprehensive look at the architectural programs for the existing foyers or for the rehabilitation projects, thanks to the descriptive table that they had been building up all day long. In order to make the comparison easier areas of interaction settings were converted to a percentage of the total floor area in each foyer.

Not very surprisingly it showed that many interaction spaces were to be found in all of the foyers: single bedrooms, common restaurant, local resident services, hallways, entrance halls, staff offices. It was more surprising though for the group members to discover that the total floor area that was given to rented accommodation never reached as much as 50% of the total floor area. Besides a number of interaction settings that could contribute to the new missions to be fulfilled by modernized foyers such as settings for supportive interaction with residents, settings under direct management of the residents, settings for democratic decision making (including the board of the association), settings for educational purposes were never to be found in any of the projects. Besides a discussion of the total budget for each of the projects which were already advanced enough revealed that expected construction

costs varied between 4 000 francs per square meter, which is slightly above usual prices, and 2 000, revealing that the total budget had been fixed without any rough estimate of the construction work to be carried out.

These discoveries led to different reactions according to the state of preparation of the modernization. Project leaders whose architectural plan was already fully drafted were understandably fairly defensive when discussing their choices. They tried to reassure themselves that economic reasons were preventing them from doing anything else than what they had already planned. The other ones felt very critical of this attitude and tried to distance themselves from what they would perceive at that time as rude pragmatism. Notwithstanding such differences of attitudes, it should be noted that all of them had learnt how to read some information out of the plans of their foyer, and that they were pleased with a unique opportunity they had been given of exchanging on the everyday activities that made up the fabric of life in their respective foyers.

Discussing relationships between space and practical problems in daily life

Everybody turned up on the second morning, which is not always the case in a meeting in Paris. A new idea was introduced on that morning. Since any interaction takes place in space, the formal organization of the setting may hinder or to the contrary facilitate its performance. One may be rightly critical of a place where the formal organization of space is a source of maladjustment in everyday-

life. Hence it is valuable to look at a plan for problems of daily life the occurrence of which could be blamed, at least partly, on a faulty design. The whole day was devoted to an effort to discover in the four foyers, as many as possible of the design aspects that might contribute to "problems-in-daily-life" in a modernized foyer.

The organization of the working session differed slightly from what had been done previously. The four plans were set along a wall, and each project leader had to scrutinize the plans of the foyer to the right of his own. The evaluation of modernized foyers had produced a set of possible daily-life problems each of which had been observed in one foyer at least. These problems had been gathered in a memorandum book. We call them "mementos" for short⁵. The total list of these problems does not apply in any foyer since their likely occurrence depends upon the organizational rules, and ways of life which are not the same everywhere. Yet it is always permissible to ask in front of any foyer whether a particular problem applies. The board member of a foyer association who was present would read each problem aloud. Then every project leader would start scrutinizing the plan in front of him in order to see whether such a problem may arise there. Then he would report to the rest of the group. In short, group members' attention was focused on conflicts arising from coexistence of some ways of operation, and of some attitudes with respect to life of staff and residents. Their attention was drawn as well as on internal contradictions between the rules and the

expectations of different persons in each foyer. It is enough to say right now that this raised in particular questions about exercise of power, and about appropriation of space in each foyer. This always started active discussions between group members, while Eric remained as silent as possible. Very often the manager of the foyer that was criticized by another project leader would feel compelled to intervene in order to straighten information, and explain in detail ways of operation in this particular setting, exposing himself to new accountability questions. These discussions stimulated much more accurate discussions than the ones which had taken place on the previous day, and enabled group members to challenge the wording of some problems with respect to their own foyer. In these cases they were encouraged to suggest a new way of expressing the problem.

Fig. 4. A problem about an entrance setting with a rewritten problem inscribed into the memento

The working group spent a large amount of its time discussing the point of view of the various persons living in the foyer according to their roles. Unexpectedly this made quite apparent to most project leaders that they had never really tried before to put themselves in the shoes of other staff members. Nevertheless each of them had some knowledge about the kind of interactions that go on between secretaries and educators, or between cooks and wardens, or between residents and cleaners, so that the all of them could develop together a rather comprehensive understand-

ing of issues raised by the modernization and its space for all stakeholders in the building. They were discovering in particular the importance of appropriation of space by competing user groups in the foyer. This allowed them to make sense personally out of most of the problems in our memento and to suggest ways of improving its content. Thus, fairly brisk mutual interpellations in the group allowed each of them to engage in a personal appropriation of the memento. Each project leader was asked on the spot to adapt as much as possible of the memento to the particular organization of life in his foyer which meant deleting some of the problems because they were irrelevant and rewriting a few of the others, and also to take notes of the design features which seemed to contribute either to avoidance of a common problem, or to the contrary to its enhancement in the foyer that he was criticizing.

Fig. 5. Critical analysis of the entrance setting for the Foyer du Mont-Joly

Besides, discussion of the problems revealed very often that it was not possible on the sheer basis of information available on architectural drawings at hands to decide whether a given daily-life-problem was likely to happen or not, because there was not enough information about the height of window sills, the space occupied by opening doors, the location of heating radiators, electrical plugs, the kind of locks and keys that were to be used... The project leaders were asked to make a list of such pieces of information to be discussed with their archi-

texts later. It used to become the more obvious, as the day was passing, that this approach of architecture led to most fundamental questions about the meanings of modernization itself and about the kind of life experience that newly modernized foyers would entail both for young residents and for staff members. For instance, instead of considering that for budget reasons it was necessary to have a common restaurant, they started wondering about the meaning for the young residents of restaurant being closed during the weekends, or about residents' feelings when they came to understand that the restaurant used to serve the same meals at lunch when only outsiders are eating in the foyer and in the evening when only residents are there. It became possible for them to reflect upon contradictory demands issued by their institutional or social system and by the groups of persons living in the foyers. Project leaders had clearly gained a new vantage point from which they could reflect upon the modernization process and upon their part in it. They came to share a large number of common questions, and a sense that the national union was really supportive of their individual endeavors because all of these discussions had been organized by the national union and was taking place in its precincts. Project leaders walked out of these meetings determined to call upon the support of the national union. Board members took usually a more radical view of the situation. They had discovered that architectural choices allowed to raise fundamental questions about goals of their association which they

PROBLEMES DE L'ESPACE DE VIE COURANTE

⊗ The entrance office should be visible enough from the street entrance for a visitor to find it and for avoiding to compromise the security of maidens who wish an institutional control to protect their convivial life.

Lorsqu'un espace administratif est situé en retrait de l'espace d'entrée, il est difficile d'assurer la surveillance des entrées et sorties sans que les jeunes ne se sentent soumis à un contrôle.

La distribution du courrier à chaque jeune ne peut être assurée par les PTT (trop grande rotation) mais si les jeunes doivent réclamer leur courrier à l'accueil, ils risquent de l'encombrer de leurs demandes et de se sentir soumis à son contrôle.

Du fait de la rotation des jeunes dans le foyer il n'est pas facile de retrouver quelqu'un qu'on a rencontré, et de lier connaissance ou de laisser un message.

INTENTIONS D'AMÉNAGEMENT

- Créer un sas transparent qui fera articulation entre l'accueil et la circulation privée conduisant aux logements.
- Disposer, derrière le bar et face au sens d'entrée, un grand miroir permettant de contrôler indirectement les entrées et sorties du foyer de quelque côté du bar que l'on se trouve.

- Mettre dans l'entrée un miroir à la disposition des jeunes, leur permettant de vérifier leur présentation. Le miroir étant visible de l'espace administratif renvoie aussi l'image du passage obligé des jeunes et des autres visiteurs.

- Créer un panneau de boîtes aux lettres individuelles à ouvrir avec la clef de la chambre et accessible au personnel de l'accueil par derrière par de grands panneaux.

Figure 4. A problem about an entrance setting with a rewritten problem inscribed into the memento.

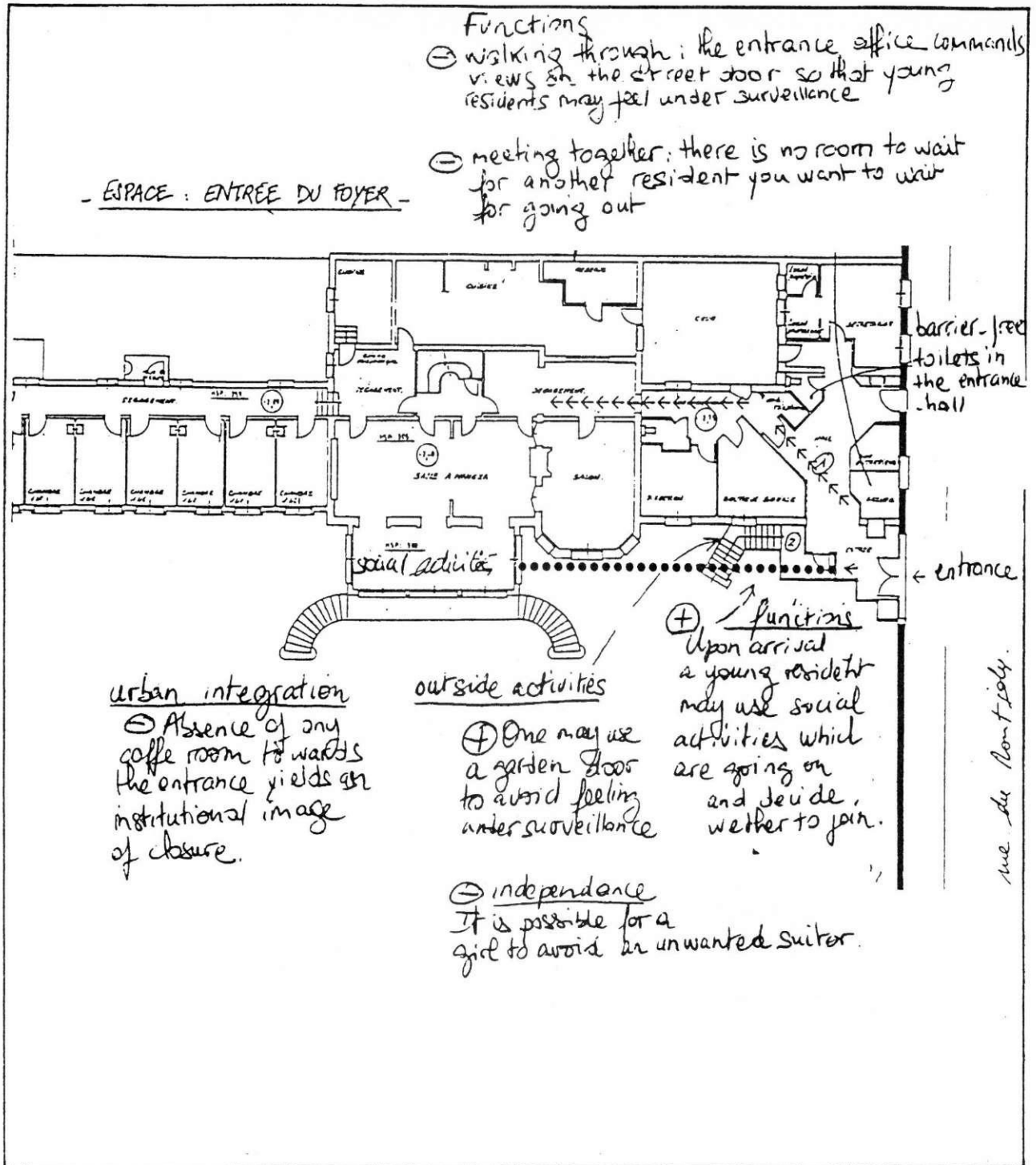


Figure 5. Critical analysis of the entrance setting for the Foyer du Mont-Joly.

Drawing by Eric Daniel-Lacombe.

had seldom discussed in the board, and they felt the obligation to start some serious debates there.

The limited impact of a working session

Eric had devised a small number of practical tools in order to help project leaders and the expert from the national union who was consulting with a large number of them to pursue this reflection in a practical way. They are worth presenting very briefly.

It is actually very difficult to acknowledge positive contributions of architectural space to everyday life because we, as humans, always tend to naturalize the habitat that we are using on a daily basis. When starting a rehabilitation, project leaders can be so taken away by the excitement of creating some new spaces that they may tear down spaces that were providing some unrecognized services of great value to common life in their foyer. Hence Eric Daniel-Lacombe suggested a simple way for them to keep in mind aspects of the existing building contributing to present aspects of quality of life that should be maintained.

Fig. 6. The critical analysis of a residents' dining in a foyer in Brittany
Project leaders were encouraged during the working session to carry out an analysis of the existing space of the foyer and to develop an adapted version of the memento through debates inside the foyer around each interaction setting with present stakeholders, and through discussion with the board of directors of the association. This was meant to help the pro-

ject leader develop a thoroughly negotiated and carefully pondered modernization project with its corresponding architectural brief. Collaboration with an architect was expected to start on this basis. In order to help the project leader and board members to review the architect's proposal it was simply proposed that the same technique that had been used during the second day be put into practice, and that a written appraisal of difficulties of everyday life should be inscribed on a xeroxed copy of the sketch proposal.

Figure 7. Searching the national experience of architectural space in foyers for inspiration

Negative instructions (of the kind "Do not misbehave") are not always clear, or at least they may leave a sense of incompleteness in the expression of a demand. Hence it may be helpful to show the architect examples of foyers where any problem that is pinpointed on his proposal was solved in an interesting way. Searching through the memento that was pulled together during our evaluation, would allow a project leader to select different examples of architectural responses to problems of daily life that he foresees when reading the design proposal that have caught his eye. He would then be able to show them allowing hopefully the architect to improve his project in some way that satisfies the designer's sense of aesthetics and the project leaders practical expectations.

The residents' dining of the figure 7 remodeled

Eight of these sessions took place. On each of them, Eric Daniel-Lacombe

was under the impression that all working group members had gone through a fascinating discovery for themselves. He expected large changes in the kind of project that they were carrying out to take place. It did not happen for two main reasons as far as we know. Firstly, most of these project leaders had to convince the owner of the building (either a church, or a public housing company) that a new attitude with respect to the kinds of service and of accommodation provided by the foyer might be preferable. Since the group work that they had gone through did not prepare them to understand the interests and the goals pursued through this modernization by their owners they were unable to convince them. Secondly, they called upon the help of an expert from the national union who had not been attending any of the meetings organized by Eric. He had read the mementos and he probably believed that he knew everything that was written in them. This may have been true. But he did not realize that the experience of communicative action was more important than the mere text that helped to lead these very dense and self-searching discussions. And since he had never shared any of these experiences he lacked a sense of belonging to a process of cultural development. On the other hand the project leaders had felt that the national union was supportive of this process and thus led them to believe that this expert was sharing their questions and to trust his advice. Unfortunately this was leading to the reproduction of the kind of foyer facilities that created a

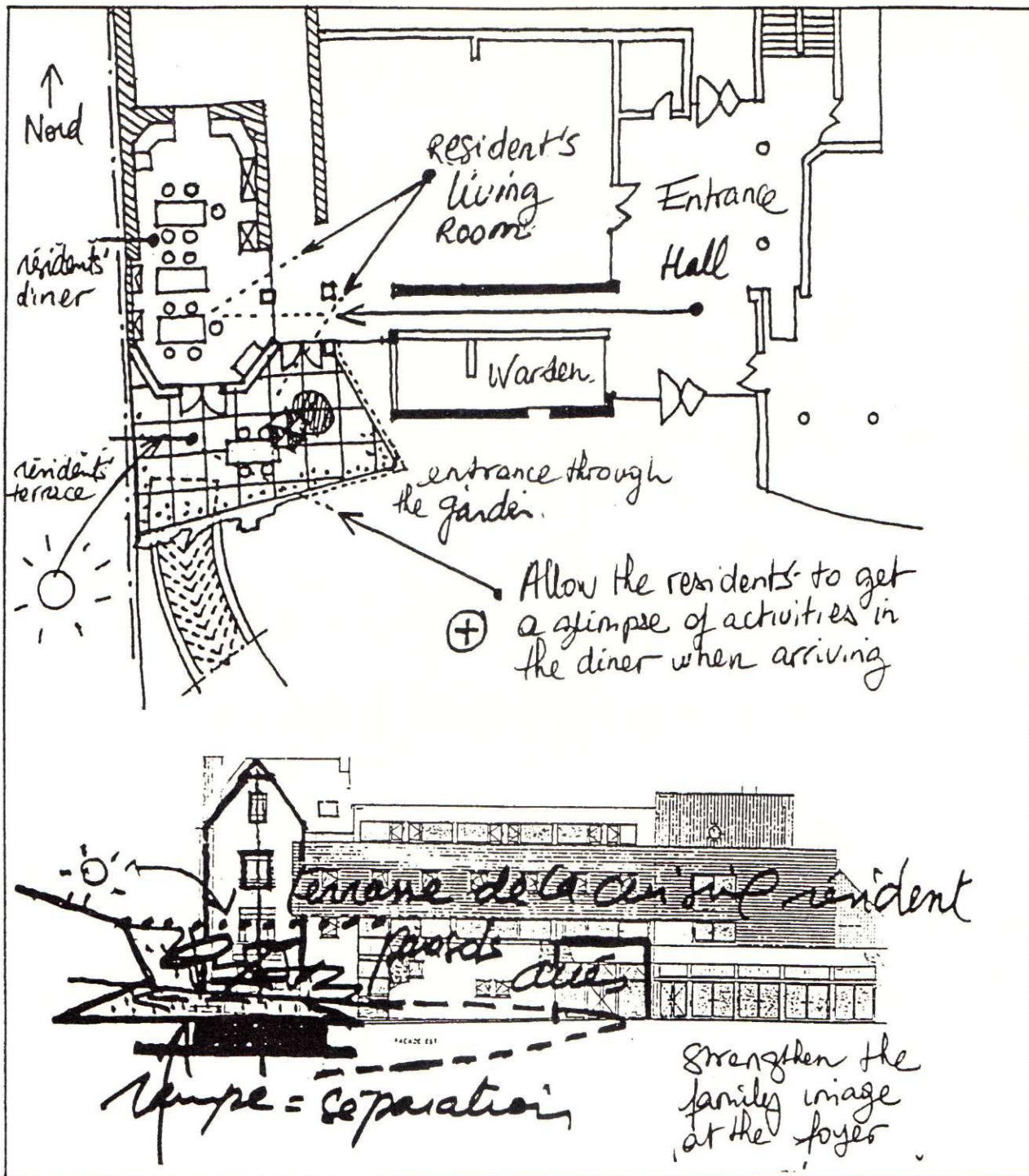


Figure 6. The critical analysis of a residents' dining in a foyer in Brittany.

Drawing by Eric Daniel-Lacombe.

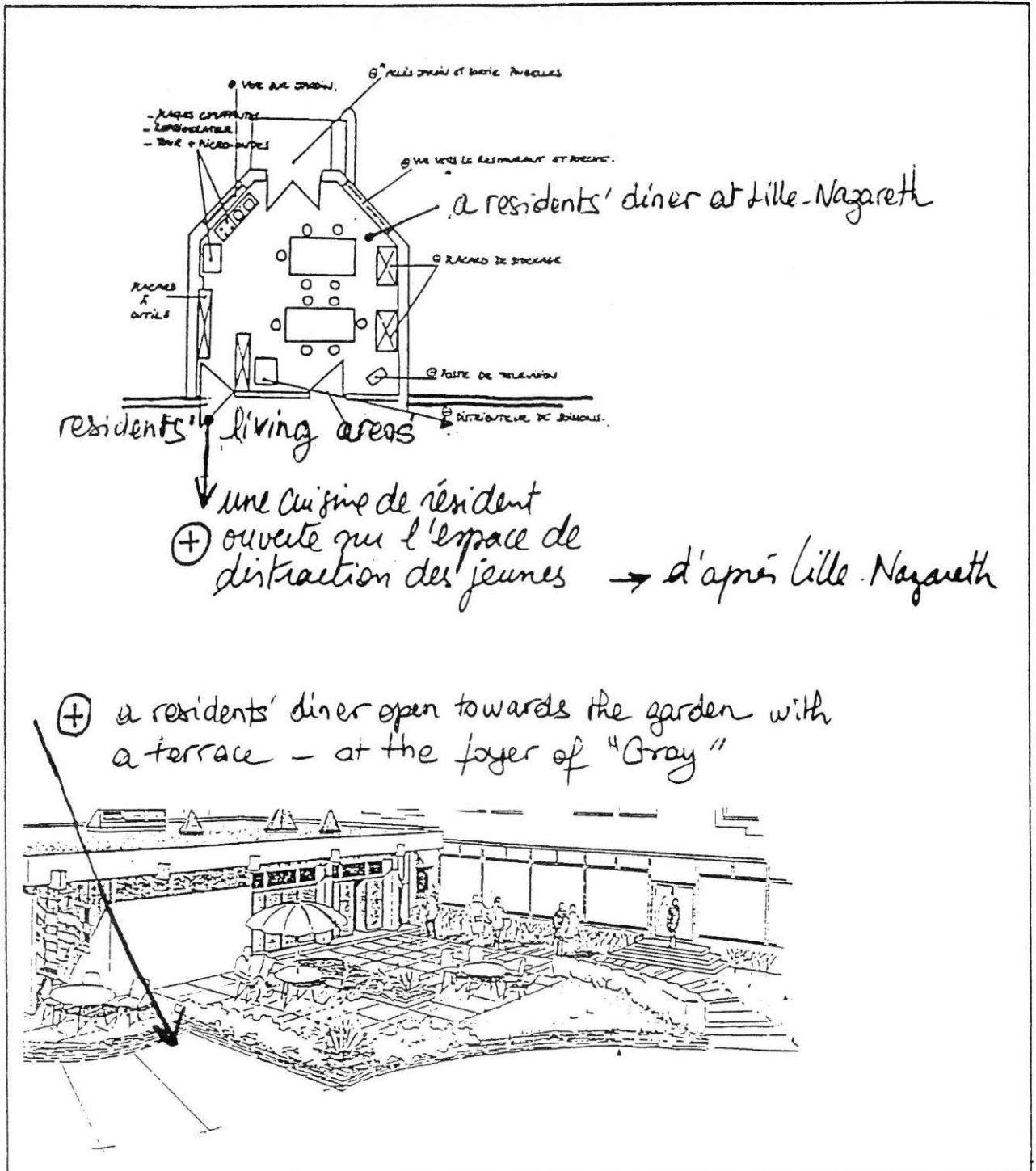


Figure 7. Searching the national experience of architectural space in foyers for inspiration.

Drawing by Eric Daniel-Lacombe.

sense of isolation and loss of intimacy for residents despite its physical comfort.

Only one of the board members who had taken part in these sessions has called later upon Eric and asked him to help develop a memento with the local residents. But this lady did not know how to communicate with the public housing agency that owned the premises and that had commissioned an architect to design a rehabilitation of the foyer. The project he had drafted did not pay much attention to her detailed analysis of problems-in-daily-life in her foyer. When on top of that she discovered that the total cost of the rehabilitation would cause her association to go bankrupt she called upon Eric for help to devise an alternative project. The owner felt unsecured and he was concerned that this small association would not be able to pay the rents (he had multiplied them by a factor of 6 in order to pay back rehabilitation loans), and he wanted to be able to transform parts of the building into small apartments that could be let to single adults and families. Eric decided to look with the project leader and the lady chairman of the board for a solution which paid attention to the problems raised by the chairman and allowed a better use of the available space by the association as well as an easier transformation of the bedrooms into small flats. His proposal also allowed a very substantial diminution of the monthly cost of living for the young residents by allowing them to do their own cooking. But he was intervening too late since contractors had already

been commissioned to build the project designed by the owner's architect. It created some tension between the owner of the building and the association that received clear support from the welfare administration. So that instead of accepting the new plan the owner bought his way out of the conflict by maintaining his project and proposing a lower rent for the foyer that should allow at least a balanced economy during the coming years. But it is worth noting that other public officials responded very favorably to the second modernization project and expressed some disappointment at the final issue.

This has revealed some of the deep limits of the strategy that Eric and the National Union of Young Workers' Housing Associations had been following. It showed that despite an ability to steer project leaders and board members into adopting a new cultural perspective leading to a genuine effort in favor of social integration of young residents they had not anticipated the difficulties to be met in translating this culture into a practical dialogue with the owners on the one hand, and with the architects on the other. It is impossible to draw any conclusion from such a limited example, but I would like to suggest some of the assumptions that I am tempted to formulate now, and to reframe them in a slightly more general language. I shall use a few ideas borrowed from Johan Asplund *Essä om Gemeinschaft och Gesellschaft* to suggest a possible outline of changes in cultural awareness of issues raised by public architecture⁶.

Developing a sense of accountability for architectural choices

Young Workers Housing Associations provide a particular example of a fairly general problem that touches a growing number of public organizations nowadays: Modernization is necessary in order to adapt services to the public to new national standards in a way that reflects local circumstances. Besides, leaders of public organizations at the local level lack expertise in the management of building projects and they are bound to call upon the help of experts who have little knowledge and understanding of the new directions that their operations should take. This invites a paradigmatic description insisting on the general features of this situation.

(1) These public institutions comprise a large set of similar organizations which are themselves part of larger organizational landscapes of which they may be very dependent, so that their choices of a course of development depend as much upon their ability to make sense of their own situation as upon their capacity to win other organizations of which they are dependent to share a sense of commitment to their own constituency⁹. This is a difficult task which each of them meets according to local circumstances. They can learn from each other's experience and strengthen their common identity provided the form of knowledge they build up as a group helps them adapt to local environments.

(2) Let me assume that each organization can be described as a dialectical structure made of two mutually exclusive entities, none of which can exist in isolation of the other. Each person in the organization belongs to both entities. One of them is *the social system*, it is predicated upon an instrumental logic of action, the other one is *the life-world*, it is predicated upon an existential logic⁷. (These can be thought of as the two colliding worlds described by Eva Öresjö.⁸) Since this is a dialectical relationship, communication between the two entities is necessarily of a symbolic nature. It gives rise to two communication logics which support mutual interactions: *power relationships*, mapped mainly from the social system onto the life-world, and *appropriation relationships* mapped mainly from the life-world onto the social system.

(3) Leaders of public organizations tend to privilege instrumental thinking and to behave as if the organization was *reduced to its social system*. They acknowledge usually the life-world as a source of backward resistance. They drive modernization projects according to instrumental rationalities geared to change in the social system, ignoring a large part of the dynamics at work between the life-world and the social system. This may backlash when members of the organization lose a sense of the common good and of a shared identity that is worth defending.

(4) Their social environment follows the same approach which reinforces the trend towards taking a purely instrumental view of the life-world. This prevents them as a whole from learning from their experiences because their representations are systematically distorted. So that *they cannot be expected to follow adaptive behaviors by themselves when instrumental rationalities meet their limits. Development of a shared critical culture is needed.*

(5) Allowing them to take, as a group, *a critical look at living conditions* in the physical structures that shelter their organizations may give them a chance to discover the impact of power relationships and of appropriation relationships upon the life of all members of the organization. It allows them to start thinking of the various representations of the organization which are entertained by the staff and the users according to their different roles. Focusing upon the “problems-in-daily-life” which are made more or less difficult by architectural settings they may take a fresh look at the operations which are carried out by the organization, and to question their sole reliance upon instrumental rationality to devise their projects.

(6) This kind of exploration calls for *communicative interaction* between members of a group of similar organizations at different levels in the organizations, and internally within each organization. This communicative interaction should

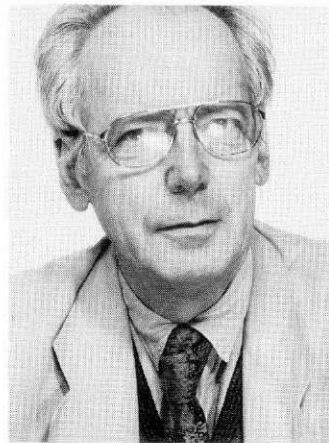
enable them to explore issues raised by the domination of the social system over the life-world. It can be very much time-consuming unless they have been organized. I want to suggest that it can avail itself of a knowledge of problematic situations in daily organizational life which is best prepared by architectural evaluation of practical uses of buildings. Producing this knowledge, though, demands specialized training of architects carrying such evaluations.

(7) A similar effort should be made in order to understand the “landscape of organizations¹⁰” in which each of them stands, and the way in which it impacts upon the process of change and the building process. Some of these landscapes of organization features are very frequent so that, to a certain extent, a common culture could be furthered in that respect as well.

(8) Each organization may develop its own modernization project and an architectural brief. The management of the modernization of public facilities can be greatly facilitated if architects are trained to act as mediators between members of organizations who are engaged in these processes. It demands in particular a capacity to draw attention upon dialectics of the social system and of the life-world that can be facilitated by sensible architectural design.

As a personal note I would like to say that I believe that it is the personal responsibility of architects in a world that is becoming dominated by in-

strumental rationalities to look after all possibilities to be responsive to the maintenance of the dialectics of the life-world and of the social system which is not meant to imply that this is an easy task. This is a totally different approach from the one advocated a decade ago under the name of citizen participation in architectural design which was attempting to achieve a reduction of the organizations to its life-world. It requires analytical work and some communications skills, and besides it is certainly fraught with difficulties which are still to be explored.



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Notes

1. CSTB stands for Center Scientific at Technique du Bâtiment, which is the national center for housing research in France.
2. Conan, Michel, 1993, *Evaluation dynamique du programme développement solidarité de la CDC Programme de modernisation des foyers de jeunes travailleurs Evaluation de la première phase de mise en oeuvre* (sept 1990–oct 1992) avec Bernard Salignon, 25 p., annexes de méthode, CSTB, Paris.
3. Conan, Michel, 1995, "Paving the way towards mainstream housing for young people", Colloquium at Lund organized by Birgit Krantz and Eva Öresjö, June.
4. Daniel-Lacombe, Eric, 1995, "Maîtriser l'économie de la réhabilitation des FJT pour assurer l'insertion urbaine des jeunes", in Conan, Michel, ed., *Perspective pour la maîtrise d'ouvrage publique*, CSTB, Paris.
5. Conan Michel, Daniel-Lacombe, Eric & Schorter, Claire, 1992, *Mémento des problèmes de l'espace de vie courante et des intentions d'aménagement pour la modernisation des Foyers de Jeunes Travailleurs*, 78 p., CDC/UFJT/CSTB. An English document which was partly inspired by this method is available: *Design Handbook for Foyers*, translated and adapted from the Foyer de Jeunes Travailleurs by Tarmac Construction Ltd, 105 pages et annexes, Foyer Federation for Youth, 91 Brack Lane, London.
6. Asplund, Johan, 1991, *Essä om Gemeinschaft och Gesellschaft*, Bokförlaget Korpen, Göteborg.
7. Ahrne, Göran, 1990, *Agency and Organization, towards an organizational theory of society*, Sage Publication, London.
8. I am using here the vocabulary introduced by Habermas because it seems to be relevant to link his analysis to the dialectical interpretation of society suggested by Johan Asplund.
9. Öresjö, Eva, 1990, *Medbestämmande och medinflytande i planerings-, boende- och omsorgsfrågor ur ett välfärdspolitiskt perspektiv*, Lunds universitet, Institutionen för byggnadsfunktionslära, Lund.
See also Scheele, Annika, Elander, Ingemar & Rundlöf, Björn, 1990, *När olika världar mötas, om samordnad bodeservice och områdesförnyelse*, Bostadsdepartementet, DS 1990:69.
10. Ahrne, Göran, Op. Cit.