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Introduction. Neighborhoods and narratives

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- 1 In recent years, the history of neighborhoods has seen a resurgence of interest, with regard to questions about the qualitative objectives of institutional urban planning practices, and the return to human scale and proximity¹. In the era of flow and trade globalization, inscribing architectural and urban spatial recomposition in time is expected to give meaning and encourage the anchoring and appropriation of space².
- 2 Renewing the mobilization of history concerns not only habitat and housing, but also transportation facilities, employment, and neighborhood relations. It is a narrative of everyday life, being woven and questioning public intervention. Thus, the canonical narrative of the Man and the Monument, providing a hagiography of a work, an architect, an urban planner or a landscape designer, loses its relevance with regard to contemporary issues. The revolution of the Annals³ continues in the field of architecture, urbanism and landscape.
- 3 In this context, the neighborhood as an object, as a place where construction practices and different levels of spatial representation intersect, proves particularly relevant. As many sociologists and political scientists have shown, it is without a doubt particularly ideological⁴. Nevertheless, it brings the history of architecture and cities into dialogue with public intervention, allowing us to understand the intentions and dynamics of contestation, such as the confrontation of narratives. Indeed, the narrative devices developed by actors do not obey the same structures, nor the same objectives and intentions. The performative will that characterizes the voluntary intervention of public authorities⁵ is not of the same order as that of inhabitants and users concerned with guaranteeing their implantation. The narrative space of architecture, urbanism and landscape adheres to dynamics of struggle and competition, which practitioners cannot ignore as they insert their “project” into the future. Thus, the sequence of events transcribed by different narrative frameworks make sense within the context of spatial and social issues. The narrative of “origins”, “causes” and “consequences” that makes an architectural, urban and landscape project appear “obvious” must be

revealed to enlightened and informed practitioners, as well as researchers who are sensitive to past uses, even if they are not historians.

- 4 This is the focus of this issue on “Neighborhoods and Narratives” which, on the one hand, develops methodological and epistemological components as well as research strategies, and on the other, explores the production and use of narratives with actors in specific urban contexts.

From microanalysis to games of scale

- 5 The articles come from various disciplinary backgrounds and geographic contexts. Their diverse research paths are not always comparable in terms of approach or objective. The very definition of the neighborhood as object changes depending on the field of analysis, be it architecture, an urban sector, or housing. There are noteworthy common or transversal attitudes, however, pointing to general problems that the history of neighborhoods must address today. The most remarkable commonality lies in the situated nature of the research presented in this collection. Regardless of the intellectual or practical issues at stake, these studies all focus on the detailed analysis of one or more cases, serving as points of departure for the examination of a larger problem⁶.
- 6 This preference, which is partly explained as a response to the solicitations of our call for papers, finds its support in several paradigm shifts that affect both the social sciences and project disciplines, resulting in a distrust of knowledge based on overly simplistic generalizations. Challenging tendencies to read housing through the lens of typological classification⁷, these studies employ fine-grained observation of specific contexts as a strategical step in achieving forms of generalization that are more sensitive to the nuances of built settings and social practices.
- 7 This pro-microscopic observation attitude takes divergent paths, ranging from anthropological practices of participant observation, to archival interrogations inspired by micro-historical currents. At stake is always a dimension of understanding, stretching far beyond the limits of the subjects or contexts studied: microanalysis is the starting point for an interpretive movement involving several scales, in a constant exchange between the specific and the general. It is indeed a “game of scales” that residential areas — which are also multiscale almost by definition — encourage us to play⁸.

Methods and tools: disciplinary perspectives and hybridization

- 8 This issue examines attempts at interdisciplinary hybridization among research practices, methodologies, and tools from different disciplinary backgrounds. This includes archives, ethnographies, history written by public institutions, oral history⁹, field observations, as well as methodological dialogues bridging the gap between quantitative and qualitative research, subjective or objective observation, micro and macro history¹⁰, architectural typology, and uses of space.
- 9 The authors offer different disciplinary perspectives that are reflected in various forms of research and writing about the histories of the neighborhoods studied; and are

drawn from urban anthropology, sociology, ethnographic observation, architectural, urban, or environmental history, and public history. The diachronic investigation around housing and habitat becomes the ground for an exchange between researchers who experiment with various research practices and tools.

- 10 The collection reflects a recent trend in historical housing studies that, over the past decade, has called for new forms of contamination and hybridization between methodologies, research strategies, tools and sources. The articles in the dossier include fascinating attempts at constructing a comparative history or a transnational framework of observation, proposing typological studies or intersecting archival research with field studies, ethnographic analyses of spatial transformation, or anthropological investigations. The articles testify to a strong interaction between architectural history and the social sciences, in turn mobilizing quantitative approaches and micro-analytical observations, the study of individual and collective experiences and memories, field surveys, and interviews conducted in specific urban contexts. This issue of *The Cahiers* thus addresses the interweaving and multiplicity of narratives, along with the more operational issue of how to integrate this complexity into urban and professional strategies, inviting the co-production of narratives and their inclusion in “environmental history”.

Multiple, stratified, and intersected narratives

- 11 A recurrent theme in the articles published in this issue is the multiplicity of narratives that can be collected or produced around an urban space. Several authors reflect on this plurality and try to analyze its rationale, highlighting the connections between the possible histories of neighborhoods and the multiple actors involved in their production and dissemination.
- 12 The overview that emerges leads us to question the positioning of research, given the wealth of stratified diachronic narratives on neighborhoods, some of which do not circulate within academic literature but rather through forms of oral or written transmission, conveyed by political, administrative, professional, associative and residents’ networks, etc.¹¹ This raises questions about the ‘demand for history’ on the part of planners and other social groups, and the need to produce historical narratives capable of grasping the questions raised by the transformation of places, but also the risk of producing atemporal, factitious or ‘presentist’ spaces¹².
- 13 The role of the researcher can here be identified not only in the work of documenting and critiquing already existing representations, but also in producing alternative or complementary narratives. The research testifies both to a synchronic plurality — where different stories seem to “compete” in the neighborhood at a given time — and a diachronic plurality — where certain historical phases of the neighborhood’s transformation seem to be marked by the hegemony of certain narratives over others.
- 14 The diachronic intersection between multiple narratives, and the use of a plurality of narrative devices by different actors during distinct phases of the building’s history, is discussed in Yaneira Wilson Wetter’s article “Torre David au Venezuela : récits sur fond de politiques publiques menées par le gouvernement d’un ‘État magique’” (“Torre David in Venezuela: Narratives against the Backdrop of Public Policies Conducted by the Government of a ‘Magic State’”). This investigation enables a cross-referencing of the history of Venezuelan housing policies over the last twenty-five years, with

governmental discourses on informal settlements, and the history of forms of resident-initiated appropriation of the tower space.

- 15 This interweaving of narratives is reflected in a methodological hybridization that combines field surveys, analyses of institutional representations and discourses, residents' narratives, elements of political history, and urban anthropology.
- 16 Among the articles that reflect on the various temporalities framed by narratives is that of Darysleida Sosa Valdez "Il était une fois le *barrio* El Libertador. De la construction de la maison à la formalisation d'un quartier précaire à Saint-Domingue (République dominicaine)" ("Once upon a time, in the *barrio* Libertador. From the home's construction to slum upgrading in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic"). In this case, the narration builds upon three stories recorded during an ethnographic survey, conducted over the course of three years, between 2016 and 2018. This period coincides with different stages of housing construction and the neighborhood's densification, consolidation, and formalization processes; which allows for a deeper understanding of the periodization of the construction and renovation of the neighborhood's houses, by intersecting analyses of inhabitants' aspirations and users' intentions, mutual aid networks, and the implications of urban and planning policies.
- 17 The assumption that the history of habitat can contribute to questioning the 'limits' associated with a neighborhood, as defined by the diverse actors involved in the planning process, is at the center of Caterina Quaglio's article "The Grand Ensemble of Orly-Choisy-le-Roi: the Construction, Deconstruction and Reconstruction of a Neighbourhood". By tracing the history of the Grand Ensemble, from the time of its construction, to the rehabilitation and renewal programs carried out up until today as part of the *politique de la Ville*, the author questions the role that different perceptions of spatial delimitation have played on the physical environment and the production of collective narratives and imaginaries.
- 18 The synchronic production of multiple narratives and their intersection in the historical study of contemporary neighborhoods is the focus of Martin Minost's article, "Quelle histoire pour les quartiers d'architecture étrangère en Chine? Entrecroisements des récits et des enjeux d'acteurs à Thames Town, en périphérie de Shanghai" ("Which history for the neighbourhoods featuring foreign architecture in China? The interweavings of narratives and actors' issues in Thames Town in the outskirts of Shanghai"). Built around Shanghai as part of the "One City Nine Towns" program, the reconstruction of the recent history of the new city of Thames Town becomes a terrain for identifying the complementary or alternative narratives that have been developed by a range of different actors involved in the project.

Demand for history, co-production and participation

- 19 A significant number of articles collected in this special issue deal with the practical implications of research, especially with regard to urban planning and transformation. In particular, several authors question the status of researchers and their active role, both in the production of histories and in mediation with residents and experts. Neighborhoods' histories can be seen as the result of a negotiation process, in which experts co-produce their interpretations within the framework of a dialogue with other narratives, arising from different arenas, especially political ones, and carried by actors with contrasting objectives and forms of communication.

- 20 In this context, multiple interpretations of the researcher's role are possible. The history of neighborhoods can be seen as a tool for social mediation, contributing to the construction of shared identities. It also serves as an instrument for revealing divisions and conflicts, which can expose asymmetries in the distribution of power and resources. Finally, in a more radically militant understanding of reconstructing the past, it can additionally be seen as support for urban demands made by specific groups of actors to whom the research seeks to give voice.
- 21 Examined from this perspective, the historical research integrating participatory inquiry methods and involving non-academic forms of narration and representation raises questions regarding the coordination of narratives and memories, the contribution of oral testimonies in relation to archival research, and, more broadly, the accumulation of narratives. Facing memorial and heritage groups and their tools, the contribution of the architect, the urban planner, or the landscape designer could be addressed in the production of a common or consolidated history, or even of history as a common good, simultaneously capable of integrating a plurality of perspectives, even potentially conflicting ones¹³.
- 22 Ana Vaz Milheiro and João Cardim's article, "Residential Landscapes Sponsored by Companhia União Fabril (CUF) in Barreiro (1945-1972). Promotion of Multi-Family Working-Class Housing in Post-WWII Portugal", draws on a variety of sources to introduce actors into Portuguese urban history, whose intertwined spatial co-production logics have not yet been observed. By studying the corporate intervention strategies of a large chemical company in the construction of working-class housing in Portugal between 1945 and 1972, the research analyzes the interaction of different actors within the framework of urban laws and policies, questioning the traces left on the ground and in the urban landscape.
- 23 In the article "Coécrire l'histoire locale face à la démolition des quartiers populaires, de Plaisir (France) à Belo Horizonte (Brésil)" (Co-Producing Local History in the Face of the Demolition of Poor Urban Districts, Experiences from Plaisir (France) and Belo Horizonte (Brazil)), Philippe Urvoy and Élise Harvard dit Duclos propose a comparative perspective of their analysis of collaborative research conducted in Plaisir, France, and Belo Horizonte, Brazil, through forms of local history co-production by groups of residents and researchers. In this case, the dynamics of participation and mediation between inhabitants and experts reveal the intention to oppose the demolition programs proposed by the two municipalities, through urban renewal operations. The article examines the impact of such a method in producing spatial interpretations of both neighborhoods, which are conceived as being the result of negotiation.
- 24 The dissonant use of local history is also the focus of Antonella Di Trani's article, "Histoires et pratiques dissonantes dans un ghetto en devenir. Anthropologie contemporaine du cas de Venise" ("Dissonant Histories and Practices in a Ghetto in the Making, Contemporary Anthropology of the Case of Venice"), which approaches actors' practices and forms of spatial appropriation in a Venetian Ghetto, from an urban anthropological perspective. These actors record different material and social transformations by creating narratives in various contexts, and using several forms of communication. Dissonant stories emerge among the community of young Hasidic people recently settled in the ghetto, and those of Jewish people living in other parts of Venice, creating different senses of belonging to the place. Thus, we witness a process

of the Ghetto's history being reactivated, whereby new meanings and different uses of history emerge, accompanied by efforts to reappropriate academic works on the history of the Ghetto, in order to build a common local narrative.

- 25 “Au croisement des temporalités et des processus post-catastrophe : Canaan et le camp Corail” (“At the Intersection of Post-Disaster Processes and Temporalities: Canaan and the Camp Corail”), by Astrid Lenoir is one of the articles that reflects on the role of researchers and on forms of co-production with regard to history of place, as tools for social mediation and the construction of a shared identity in order to oppose recent transformation projects. Here, the author offers a new perspective to observe the history of a temporary housing camp.

An environmental history of neighborhoods?

- 26 A third section brings together the articles that seek new approaches of investigation for topics that may seem, at first glance, relatively traditional. In this case, the researcher's work consists of mobilizing new questions and/or work strategies to observe the transformations of urban housing from an unexpected angle. The question of sources becomes central here, as it is often a diversification of an investigation's available sources that proves the examination of the understanding of a topic or a built landscape to be heuristically productive.
- 27 This is especially true with regard to the interest shown by certain works in the methods and tools of analysis specific to environmental history. While the study of the history of contemporary cities from the perspective of their relationship with natural resources is well established in Francophone research¹⁴, drawing up an environmental history of neighborhoods represents a more specific and less explored challenge. It is only very recently that histories of twentieth-century residential neighborhoods have opened up to the potential of an outlook that places the notion of nature — as ambiguous as it may be — at the center of the analysis¹⁵.
- 28 In the two articles on Strasbourg and Toulouse that appear in this collection — “Du lieu de production à la production des lieux : histoire socio-matérielle de la brasserie Gruber dans son contexte territorial. Strasbourg-Koenigshoffen, 1828-1914” (“From the Place of Production to the Production of Place: The Socio-Material History of Gruber Brewery in its Territorial Context. Strasbourg-Koenigshoffen, 1828–1914”) by Nicolas Handtschoewercker, and “Du sol pour l'habitant au sol pour le vivant. L'histoire des traces génératrices de biodiversité dans le projet de recherche Morphobio Toulouse” (“From Ground for Inhabitants to Ground for the Living: The History of Biodiversity-Generating Traces in the Morphobio Toulouse Research Project”) by Laura Girard, Constance Ringon and Anaïs Leger-Smith — the authors offer a good example of this change of view in the study of residential landscapes, using an approach to urban studies that questions the relationship between historical knowledge and natural sciences, and showing sensitivity to an integration of questions concerning the modification of nature and ecosystems. We find here the influence of the notion of “second nature” put forth by William Cronon¹⁶. The neighborhood is seen as an ecosystem with several interlocking scales, structured by interdependencies and exchange flows that only a multi-situated approach can describe in terms of their complexity. Dear to Descola¹⁷, this ecology puts the relationship between nature and culture into a different perspective.

- 29 In short, this issue of *CRAUP* on “Neighborhoods and Narratives” shows the diversity of potential angles of approach, both disciplinary and transdisciplinary, in response to the challenges presented by transformation processes and to the questions posed by inhabitants. As a place where narratives intertwine, the neighborhood shows, once again, its potential for innovation.

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