

# EXPERIENCED, DREAMT OF, IMPOSSIBLE APPROPRIATION: THE CASE OF PUBLIC SQUARES

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## Summary

Public squares have long housed numerous social, political and religious activities summing up the social life of a period. Is it possible to define them without restricting ourselves to the description of their physical shape or of their functions? Having proposed a few criteria for the definition of public squares, it becomes possible to observe the modalities of appropriation of these spaces by the users. Hence a theoretical reflexion on this notion, and the proposal of a definition. This reflexion refers again to field studies. Three old squares in the heart of the city of Strasbourg are chosen and studied, and they emphasize the different degrees of reality in the appropriation of public squares.

## Introduction

Very early in history, the city grows and is shaped by collectively concerted or authoritarian decisions (from a caste or an autocratic authority) so true is it that there is a constant temptation to make it a discourse for oneself and especially for the others, the strangers, a kind of *ornament* of a given group. An ornament, that is to say at the same time a narcissistic, but vital act, a *revealing* and a *concealing* language, truth and lie intermingled, expression of reality, of the most down-to-earth, the most concrete social reality,

but also expression of the imaginary, of the collective dream of a society or the dream of a man. The city tells of everyday life and of men's pomps. It is the most tangible manifestation of the style of people's coexistence within a given human group. That is why it can only provoke men. To take a stand towards the city and its order, is first to *express one's position in relation to the style of human relationships* it shelters.

But we do not yet know how to recognize the signs, the specificity, the degrees of intensity of this provocation. The city is a dialog between a space that must be made, modelled and a group that wants to mould itself through it. On these grounds, it may be perceived in various ways, without ever being neutral. It may, ultimately, be viewed as the natural environment of man, a fundamental datum, as coercitive and un-pliable as a region's climate, but it cannot be absent from our preoccupations, from our daily life style. Always present, but more or less intensely according to places.

The city is one and yet in atoms, divided in specific differently characterized spaces. This variety is an integral part of the urban experience. Therefore it cannot be eliminated by the psychosociologist who attempts to elucidate the nature and the degrees of this provocation we already mentioned. What guiding thread can we follow to apprehend the city when it gives itself as a whole? How can we approach its various aspects?

Unity and variety, this opposition is found at the level of the use, of the daily practise of the city that is made of alternances, of *participation* and *withdrawal*, of insertion of the individual in the life of more or less close homogeneous groups (family, work group or religious community), of isolation (with the family, with friends or alone) and of participation to more remote and more heterogeneous groups, to social life as a whole (parties, institutions). To respect this basic experience of the practises of urban life, it is necessary to choose a revealer of the global city, as a wholly apprehended phenomenon, then to tackle the study of one of its specific areas.

This revealer of the city would be the novelist, and even more perhaps, the poet. This choice is restrictive. It is not arbitrary. Poets and novelists answer the city's provocation by a freer, richer discourse than the one of our daily life. We grant them this privilege of the personal, even secret language, the one of the multiple, independent message. That is why, they are, at the same time owing to us and against us. They are the specialists of the bringing to light, of the clarification of what we sometimes confusedly perceive and of what we often refuse to see and to assume.

## The public square: as a privileged place in the town

There too, the option is not arbitrary. The ordinary experience of the city as well as the reflexion of historians and urbanists on its order reveal the privileged status of the public square as space of the concentration; the meeting of city-dwellers and of the isolation of the individual.

Even our old readings, of illustrated history books, but also the textbooks on urbanism and architecture, the accounts of famous travels through remote cities have left us the memory of palaces dominating public squares, of monuments in the middle of vast settings. High deeds, historical events seem to take place, in a privileged way, in public squares. This is where people are tortured, but also where the most popular farces are performed. There the market takes place, the procession passes along. God, the Church, the Monarch, the Police, traders and customers, bourgeois and poor, thieves, tramps brush against each other and, often, pit themselves against each other, attack each other on today's squares as on the ones of history. After the carriages, the handcarts, cars and bikes of all kinds nowadays carry on, to increase the encounter with pedestrians, with citizens of all ages variously attacked in their walk, affirming the ever fundamental part played by the public square among urban spaces.

Public squares have thus in the history of cities a few major functions that evolved with the transformation of the building processes of cities and of the modes of urban living. Four great functions are retained: (P. Korosec-Serfaty, 1974)

—centrality—meeting—market—play,

that aim at foreshadowing the wealth of the field to be observed, and its first-rank part in the definition of the specificity of the urban.

This great variety of the psychosocial functions of the public square is quickly contrasted to the relative poverty of its classical architectural description (Lavedan, 1960): ordered space, of regular shape, often closed to the most intense currents of traffic, a kind of more or less empty casket for a statue, a column, a symbolic architectural object.

Pulled between the temptation to speak of the square's functions and of their priority and the temptation to describe a framework without which its roles would not exist, the psychosociologist is led to give up siding for a sociological or architectural definition to the advantage of a new definition rendering its

specific character. (P. Korosec-Serfaty, 1974). To speak of public squares, what conditions must be fulfilled?

### Objective criteria of definition

— The square is a *public space* which has sometimes known exclusions pronounced against some social groups (i.e. foreigners, women...)

— The square possesses *several possibilities of access*, it is therefore preeminently the place of *movement*.

— The square spreads *in the open*. Many of the traditional functions of the public square are found in *inner spaces*, in commercial galleries, in underground spaces, etc... The square is properly the space whose use is rhythmized by the seasons, the variations of the weather, the alternance of day and night activities.

— The square is an "*empty space*" deliberately kept as such.

— The square is a deliberately *arranged* "empty space", made to last, to tell of the group (ostentatious squares) or to make the group (popular squares for collective ceremonies, play, meetings, rest etc...).

— The square has a stable existence.

### Subjective criteria of definition

We are in a square when some rites or certain subjective, personal attitudes of adaptation to the space one passes through are experienced.

— For the user, a square is characterized by its *limits*, at the same time concrete (buildings) and psychological (from *what moment* is my tread modified?) because the square is essentially a place where people *pass*.

— The square is the place of socialized freedom. The scale of the acts tolerated in a public square is wider than the one tolerated in the street, for example. It is also nearer to the strictly "private" acts which take place "at home" exclusively. The tramp or the stroller sleeping on the benches of public squares, the mother feeding her baby or straightening her child's clothes, the group of adolescents picnicking, are conscious of this greater freedom, which does not attack the other, but makes a witness of him. In the square, all are somewhat the "owners" of a *public, but psychologically closed space*.

### For a typology of public squares

This definition has the quality of describing the square in the mode of ordinary use and not in function of the specific activities in each one of them. It gives us the possibility to take into account the modern, contemporary role of the public squares we are interested in, thereby introducing a typology of squares, that remains to be done, and about which we could, in a first stage, suggest that it would directly express the nature of the preeminent function of a given square, and, at the same time, the *relationship* between this function and a certain form of space.

We would thus see:

— *the garden-square*, almost a resting-place, demanded by the users for children's play, quiet leisure, strolling etc . . .

— *the "drawing-room"-square* (Place de la République at Strasbourg) with its central area permitted to pedestrians only, its clean, straight flowerbeds, its pruned trees, its benches regularly arranged round the war memorial . . .

— *the silo-square*, or car-park, the one we all know in our cities . . .

— *the postcard-square*, fixed in its scenery, protected by municipal laws, carefully kept clean, so familiar in Alsace villages . . .

— *the ostentations square*, that would express power (former Place des Vosges, in Paris).

— *the carousel-square* today's crossroads roundabout square or square surrounded by highways (Place de la Concorde in Paris).

It is not certain that a rigorous typology of public squares is possible. But the systematic observation of behaviours in public squares, the statements of the users, the bringing to light of a relationship between a spatial configuration and the prevalent functions of a square, open on the premises of a typology which would on no account claim un-temporality. On the contrary, it would be dated, and it would be this situation in time which would legitimate the specificity of the modalities of appropriation of these public squares.

It is therefore modern squares we are speaking of, of today's users, of a moment of the appropriation of space. For though the description of the modalities of appropriation may become, without any distortion or

misrepresentation, a philosophical question, for the psychologist it remains linked to a *dated social demand* and therefore to the study of everyday life itself at a given period.

The daily life, the conception of work, the definition of family life, the collective dreams and myths reflect a reading of space, just as the familiarity with. Then the knowledge of space reflect the ideas and ideals of a period. It follows that the study of the public square cannot be the study of an element isolated from the city or from urban life. The square is a space integrated to a city, which, in its turn, expresses the social life of a period.

Integrated to the city, revealer of a certain form of social life, the public square kept in our eyes a special status among the public urban spaces. Better than the street, for example, it seemed more likely to be appropriated by the user, the resident. In other words, *could we formulate the hypothesis that some city-dwellers, residing in public squares, or, much more modestly, in this or that kind of public square, mastered a given place in the city and could we verify this hypothesis?*

### Three public squares in the historical center of the city

There are, in Strasbourg, several public squares, very different from each other, linked to the early or the most recent history of the city. The local authorities take great care of some of them, and at first we had undertaken to study ten of them. Within this sample, and in the course of our exploratory work (systematic observation, historical investigation, study of the population, study of the topographical situation), it appeared that three of the squares shared the characteristic of being a part of the town's council project to transform these spaces in a "pedestrian zone". It seemed pertinent to us to address ourselves to their study a long time before this transformation occurred (Saint-Etienne Square), in the course of the transformation (Cathedral Square), and some time after it (Marché-aux-Cochons-de-Lait Square).

Indeed, the plan for a "pedestrian zone" in Strasbourg provoked and still provokes today heated controversies in the city and members of the town council had, on various occasions, to explain and justify their project, in the written or spoken press. We therefore have at our disposal a body of documents providing the main lines of an option for the transformation of the city.

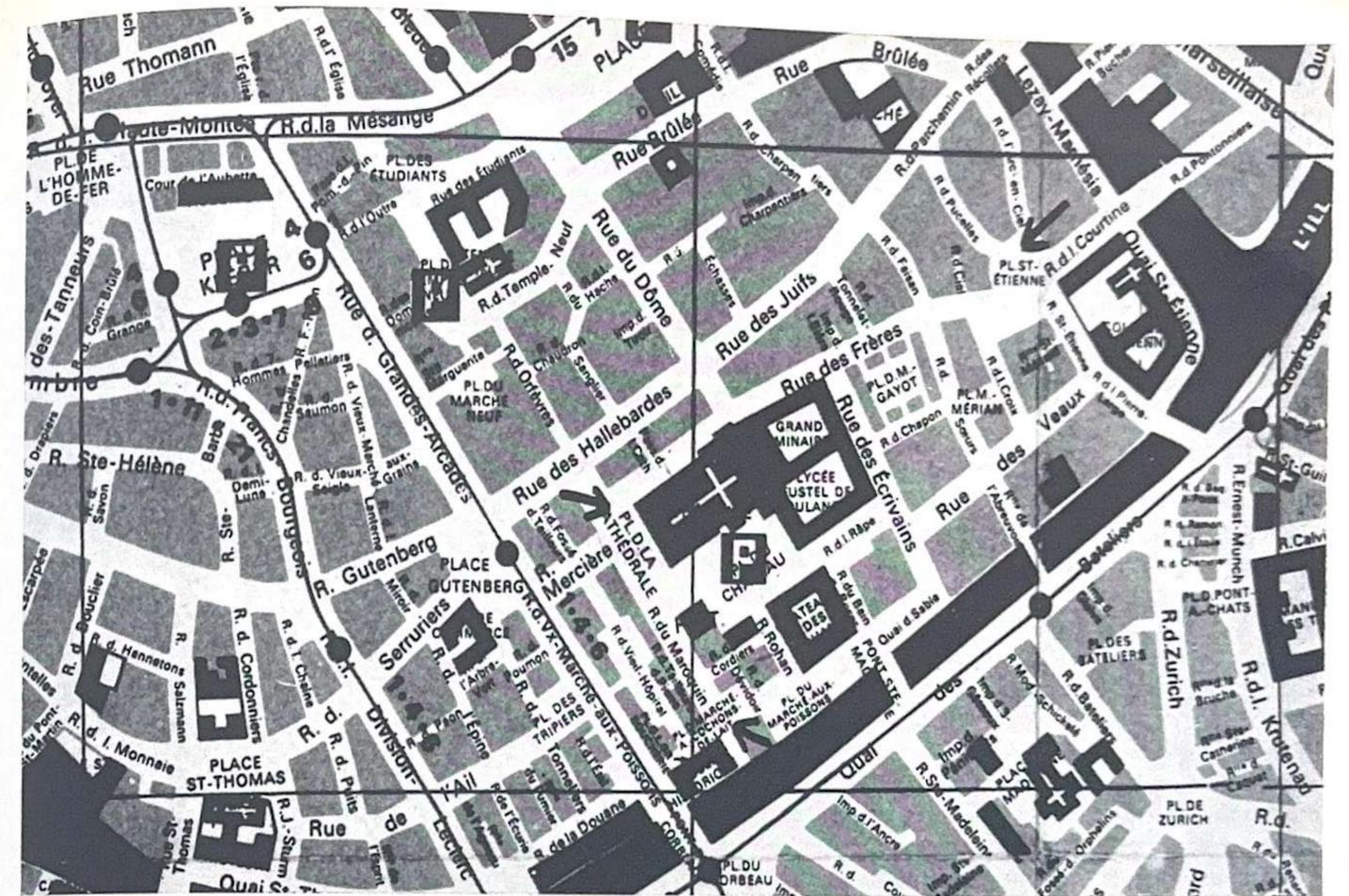


Fig. 1. Plan of the old city core of Strasbourg. The three squares which are dealt with in the article are marked by arrows.

These squares are part of the "safeguarded area" of Strasbourg, i.e. of the old core of the city, located between the branches of the river named Ill. This area developed from the creation of the city to the 19th century. The decision to create a "pedestrian zone" within the "safeguarded area" was officially justified by the intention of protecting and preserving in its unity and its beauty, the old heart of the city, which contains numerous and remarkable examples of the traditional local architecture, from the Middle-Ages to the 19th century. This reason therefore confirms the population in its feeling of owning a precious property. Other arguments, as well known and as familiar in many cities in the world, concerned the congestion, the asphyxiation of these spaces by cars, the embarrassment, the pollution they represent. Finally, and in particular, by contrast almost, the statements gave the hope of an appropriation of these spaces by the pedestrians, at long last kings, the children, the tourists etc . . .

In the course of our study, all these statements were put between brackets. The fieldwork focused on a systematic observation of behaviours in public squares, on the bringing to light of a *hierarchy in its functions* and the *description of the users* (permanent, passing etc . . .), on the *study of the concrete (physical) and psychological limits of the square* etc . . . The residents of the squares were invited to participate to sessions of semi-directed interviews. We have retained, in the framework of this limited presentation of our work, only the informations drawn from systematic observation and interviews, that concerned the modalities of appropriation of public squares.

It follows that we were guided by a theoretical reflexion on the very notion of appropriation of space, introduced by the fundamental questions asked by the vocabulary in itself: to appropriate, to "occupy", to "inhabit", to "own" a place . . . What specificity can we grant to the notion of appropriation?

### Appropriation of space: a tentative definition

Appropriation of space is not a simple expression whose connotations are immediately plain. One perceives that it evokes well-being in a given space, and better still, a mastery over this space.

But according to what modalities? What conditions privilege it or impede it? Are there any levels or degrees in the appropriation of space? It is not possible to bring this notion down to other, more familiar ones like the "development of space", "possession", "inhabiting"? In the last case, there is a strong temptation to identify one term to the other. Our hypothesis consists in distinguishing between the two notions, but to grant them, at a certain level of analysis, some common characteristics.

*To inhabit is not to stay somewhere.* The closed space, the walls surrounding me are more than a shelter for me. I inhabit (live in) a place when it evokes for me the warmth and intimacy of well-being, but also when I take over this space and make it the privileged place of a certain number of the events of my life. I inhabit my house, my room etc... when I perform actions in it, when I want to experience in it events I do not want to locate anywhere else. Inhabiting is a psychological and affective taking possession of a given space, that has already exerted its appeal on me, as a space to model.

*To inhabit is a dynamic state.* I inhabit a space when, by a series of successive actions, I want to make of it a shelter, a home, a shell, a place for reception, when I want to create a continuity from me to it. It therefore is an idea of integration of *harmonisation of the person to something exterior to him*, that is revealed here. To inhabit is an involvement in the creation of a specific environment which makes sense for the subject and as such constitutes a kind of partial image of the inhabitant, an image that makes a great deal of sense for himself and for others.

This is to say that to inhabit is specific to closed spaces. But this does not necessarily imply that it is specific to spaces occupied in a personal, entirely original way. Many authentic ways of inhabiting express a quasi-total submission, a quasi-perfect adequation to the social stereotypes (of a moment, of a culture) of "gracious living".

Whatever the constraints imposed by a definite plan of the house or apartment, the individual reveals his quasi-unconditional adequation to a certain definition of inhabiting when he does not hesitate at taking upon himself all the psychological and material costs demanded by the setting up, the *staging* of the objects

that must say for him, in his stead, that he "inhabits well".

Therefore it would be both naïve and erroneous to say that inhabiting consists in creating a personal shell irreducible to cultural stereotypes, to customs, to economic determinisms. If it is true that inhabiting is by definition the occasion to *express oneself*, and primarily to *express oneself for oneself*, it nonetheless remains that it is, in most cases, the opportunity to *express oneself according to socially determined criteria*, because one deeply believes that he has no other way of expressing himself, or because he does not possess other elements of reference. The notion of inhabiting foreshadows the notion of appropriation of space. What is the specificity of the latter?

### Appropriation is not ownership

The assimilation of appropriation to ownership is abusive insofar as it limits this notion to the certainty of occupying a space lawfully. If it were so, all the nomads, all the temporary occupiers of public anonymous spaces, would live through idle periods in any place they would not judicially own. The look cast on a hotel room, a public square, or on a street, a house, is selective. It *re-arranges* the elements concerning the individual and forms a *kind of strictly personal setting, whose elements stabilize insofar as the appropriation is affirmed*. That is the reason why the tenant can appropriate spaces whose legal owners they are not.

Though ownership is not the condition necessary to achieve the projection of the individual on space, the fact remains that lack of ownership may sometimes exclude or at least hamper certain forms of appropriation. How many tenants give up running into expenses to adjust their space to the ideal image they have of it? To own is indeed to insure the stability of the modalities of appropriation. This does not mean that stability, permanence, the plan of "lasting" are inseparable from the appropriation of a place. A tourist may appropriate, according to particular modalities, the space he is passing through. It is therefore necessary to dissociate the notions of *Possession* and *Stability* from the notion of *Appropriation*.

Appropriation is a statement of authority which expresses itself in a variety of modalities.

1 — *Reorganizing the structure* of space around the person, who then makes himself the center of an immediately apprehended space. It follows that it is necessary to find one's bearings and thus to introduce a more or less privileged relationship in this space.



Fig. 2. Place Saint Etienne (St Stephen's Square). An oval area with benches embraces, among other things, the Meise-locker statue.

2 — *Creating limits*, concrete or psychological, that make it possible to distinguish between the sub-spaces within a zone, to designate a place as a whole or in its different aspects.

3 — *Arranging objects* around oneself, in a kind of silent language bringing forth the self-image each one of us would like to impose to others.

4 — *Freely modulating the opening of this space to others*, being able to receive others without restraint in the limits of this territory. Appropriation of space is just as apparent in the possibility to select, control, but also to *accept* certain intrusions of the outside world, other people's worries, for example.

5 — *Modifying this space*: extending, partitioning, creating zones of light and shadow, delimitating sub-spaces within the appropriated place:

Appropriation derives from familiarity with a space. This familiarity is a gradual apprenticeship of the specificity of a place, of its daily aspects which then acquire a reassuring, predictable character. An appropriated space provides the individual with security and even in the case of a public space, with a certain amount of privacy.

There are many levels in the appropriation of a given space.

— Appropriation through the senses:

- *by touch*: of walls, of the objects within a space.
- *by creating a landscape of distinctive smells*, as is the case in fairs, markets where fires and cooking in the open air invade space.
- *by sounds*, with musical instruments, so as to create a specific acoustical landscape, or simply by shouting, singing, speaking loudly.
- *by sight*, a minimal form of appropriation of the outside world. It is everyone's luxury to possess the world through sight which affords aesthetic emotions, curiosity, familiarity. Through photography, it becomes an act of symbolic appropriation.

— *Appropriation by residence*

To reside in a place does not necessarily mean to inhabit it, but may be the means of participating to a communal life as happens in public squares where political demonstrations or religious activities often take place; it may be also the means of retreating, of isolating oneself.

— *Appropriation by delimitation of a territory, i.e.*

- distinguishing between an "inside" and an "outside"
- marking space (objects, walls...)
- being free to perform certain actions within this territory *in order to* distinguish it from the outside.

— *Appropriation by play*, freely accepting rules and exploring one's own resources.

*Appropriation by the exploration of forbidden zones*, even those which could be dangerous.

The notion of appropriation therefore evokes dynamism and it seemed possible to make out its signs during the period of systematic observation of the squares of our sample. Indeed, they were all characterized by a kind of effervescence, of movements of people. It is now time to present them.

## Piace Saint Etienne (Saint-Etienne Square)

Before speaking of the St-Etienne Square, we must cite the St-Etienne Church, dating from the 7th century whose history is inseparable from the Square's. First Church, then Temple, Synagogue, municipal theater, quarry in exploitation, stadium for olympic games, warehouse, it becomes in the 19th century and has remained to this day a college for Catholic teaching. The local nobility buys a few houses, installs a nobility directory, a special court composed of officers and noblemen, and later a café. One of these noblemen's houses has nowadays become the Center for Catholic Students, a familiar place for the Strasbourg's students. Around this square, each building has its history, whose trail is easily found in the accounts of inhabitants, the works devoted to Strasbourg etc...

The square therefore has a History and its petty historical details, all imbued of the presence and the

way of life of ecclesiastics. It is located with a religious symbolism which confers a great unity to the whole. The names of the places, the buildings, the alleys, the very architectural style, everything expresses the concrete presence of an institution whose major part in the history of the city is well known.

The "Rue des Frères" (Seminary Street), for example, transforms the latter in a long austere corridor. In the square used to live the representatives of an authority that competed or dealt on a footing of equality, according to the moments of history, with the political, judicial and economic authorities.

The St-Etienne Square is also a *crossroads* in the full sense of the word since it links the island, on which the heart of the old city is concentrated, to the more recent city. Located, properly speaking, in the old city, it offers several possibilities of traffic and access to the busier streets of the center of the city. By the Frères Street we reach Cathedral Square, by



Fig. 3. Place Saint Etienne (St Stephen's Square). The Center for Catholic Students in Strasbourg (FEC).

the Courtine Street, we have access to the administrative and cultural center of Strasbourg, by the Pucelles and Arc-en-Ciel Streets, we reach the commercial center.

The observation, the inventory of the square's function, the animation, everything seems to indicate a certain success. The St-Etienne Square, in which several houses are classified as "historical monuments", is a protected site, whose frontages are well looked after, decorated with flowers, restored. The constant presence of cars (traffic, invading parking) led to the setting up of an oval area, without cars, with benches round a locally famous statue: the Jay Lurer or "Meiselocker". Of small dimensions, it houses various trades and activities. Is therefore all for the best in the best of possible squares? What do the inhabitants think of it?

Who are they? Tradesmen, booksellers, antique dealers, a confectioner, a shoe-shop, a baker, an electrician... Besides the traditional cafés ("Winstub"), "cafeterias" and "pizzerias" have recently set up shop instead of too old butchers, grocers, craftsmen. Recently also, architects, professors, students have settled there.

The interviews have first of all revealed a very real attachment for the square—the residents very often chose to live in "an old square", sometimes "this" square. Some were born in buildings their families have occupied for several generations.

For the residents, the St-Etienne Square represents the ideal square, of small, intimate size. The everyday life is rhythmized, it seems, by the neighbours' activities, the presence of the high school and of the children. Exchanges and meetings are frequent at the *tradesmen's*, especially at the baker's. Small favours, done by the ones to the others, make of the square a family space, a *warm* space, according to the people we interviewed. Meetings outside, in the square, seldom occur, but the space is presented as a *familiar, secure* space, whose life is *rhythmized* by the high school bell, the children's shouts etc...

### Sense of community

The residents also make plans for the development of the square: music, poetry readings etc... They have leaders, cited during the interview. All the users are quite well classified, *situated*: tramps, distinct from foreigners, students, etc... They even distinguish between "our tramps", the ones of our square, and the tramps of many neighbouring squares who are, they say, much less bearable. And the foreigners are poor. They live in the still un-restored buildings of neighbouring streets, *but* they frequent the square...



Fig. 4. Place Saint Etienne (St Stephen's Square). The so called Meiselocker statue (The Jay Lurer).

Thus we little by little pass from the warm, sometimes enthusiastic statements to the localization of negative elements. But this positivity—or this negativity—in relation to what reference?

— *the old*, often patiently looked for, makes it possible to assert clearly and vigorously the rejection of the monotonous and banal modern...

— *the beautiful*, represented by the anonymous but traditional and original architecture of the buildings in the square, but also by the building's *integration*, the conviction that the St-Etienne Square constitutes an authentic, harmonious whole, independently of the fact that the buildings belong to different centuries. The

residents are well acquainted with the history of these houses, and the history of their *renaissance*, of their progress towards "authenticity", i.e. for the people we interviewed, renovation, the uncovering of half-timberings, the restoration of family coats of arms on some facades etc... During the interviews, *this mastery of space through knowledge* seemed to be a stable datum.

— *the intimate*, and the semblance of family life, in a word the "neighbourhood life". To this family atmosphere, plants and pets participate and are generally well tolerated. The dimensions of the St-Etienne Square are often mentioned, with a clear reference to the possibility of mastering this space. *Easy access to*



Fig. 5. Place Saint Etienne (St Stephen's Square). Traditional Alsatian house (restored).

*services and to other people* seems more probable, and therefore gives additional security.

— *the identity*: the well-looked after, flower-decorated, old St-Etienne Square, is presented as a kind of image, that must not be changed. It is frequently visited by tourists and this fact does not fail to be reported. Hence the rejection of the tramp, of the poor foreigner, who often are in the square. These "elements" would interfere with "a whole" (formed by the residents and stable users). They disturb the continuity the latter would like to insure between "themselves", "their" square and the image of it they would like to give others.

#### Isolation

This discourse, though reassuring, must be compared to other facts concerning the life of the square's residents, and first those, elementary facts, concerning the occupation of the public territory, the spaces outside the apartment. Though it is true that the square is in a way an extension of the apartment, the fact remains that the outside spaces are quasi-permanently occupied by cars. The really dominated spaces are the ones inside.

The residents readily present themselves as living in a "neighbourhood", a familiar, easily accessible space. They profess to be a *social group* held together by an attachment to similar values. They therefore give this term only a very limited sense, the one of *opening* to the neighbour, of sociability, of a *certain benign conception of urban life*. In fact, they do not represent a social group, but, at best, *an aggregate of interdependent residents*. The scale of values they have in common (valorization of the old, of the patrimony, rejection of modern life, protection of the old, spontaneity) is limited, and, recently, the square does not even anymore provide its residents with the services that made it self-sufficient for the satisfaction of everyday needs. Each is separated from the other by his work, and the families, whose solidarity is evident, remain separated for the essential. In other words, the residents *experience the feeling* of an appropriated space, and this feeling corresponds to a *reality*, but a *limited reality*. It is as if each act of appropriation was a victory over another daily life, experienced and observed "somewhere else", at other people's, and which would *threaten* them. The meeting at the confectioner's, receiving the neighbour's child are perhaps small things. *But they represent a great deal in comparison with the utterly negative image of life in large blocks of flats, or in the vast new towns.*



Fig. 6. View from the Place de la Cathédrale (Cathedral Square).

#### Dispossession

Yet this appropriated space cannot remain protected. The residents are obscurely conscious of this and indirectly express their fear of being *dispossessed*. The St-Etienne Square, registered as a protected site, cannot on any account be modified by the residents: façades, urban furniture, everything is referred to the local council, the flowers on windows included. Villages in Alsace are traditionally decorated with flowers, but in this case, the local council purposely asked for flowers in balconies, for the re-dressing of façades, suppressed some sign-boards, asked for modifications to be brought to some shop-windows. When a resident admits that the St-Etienne Square is "beautiful", the only possible affirmation is that he has *appropriated an aesthetic code*.

This appropriation, matched to the rejection of the symbols of modern life, leads them to approve of the local council's project of prohibiting cars and turning

this very busy crossroads into a "pedestrian zone". But a pedestrian zone means an all-out invasion by tourist, and tourism calls forth a special kind of trade: postcards, local handicrafts etc... against which the inhabitants have no way of fighting, since the shops are private properties. All the residents dread the impending disappearance of everyday life trades, in favour of luxury of tourist-oriented trades. That kind of trade will relegate the residents to the rank of absents or at best of supernumeraries. It is not the traders who are the neighbourhood's life, they do not perform the appropriation of space. Yet in some cases they are important elements, as for example, in the St-Etienne Square.

Caught up in ambiguity, the "better than elsewhere", the dread of the ratification of the immobility and mostly of the *institutional character* of the square, the residents experience *their appropriation more at the level of shared values* than at the level of communal or simply collective acts, which remodel or afford a mastery of space.

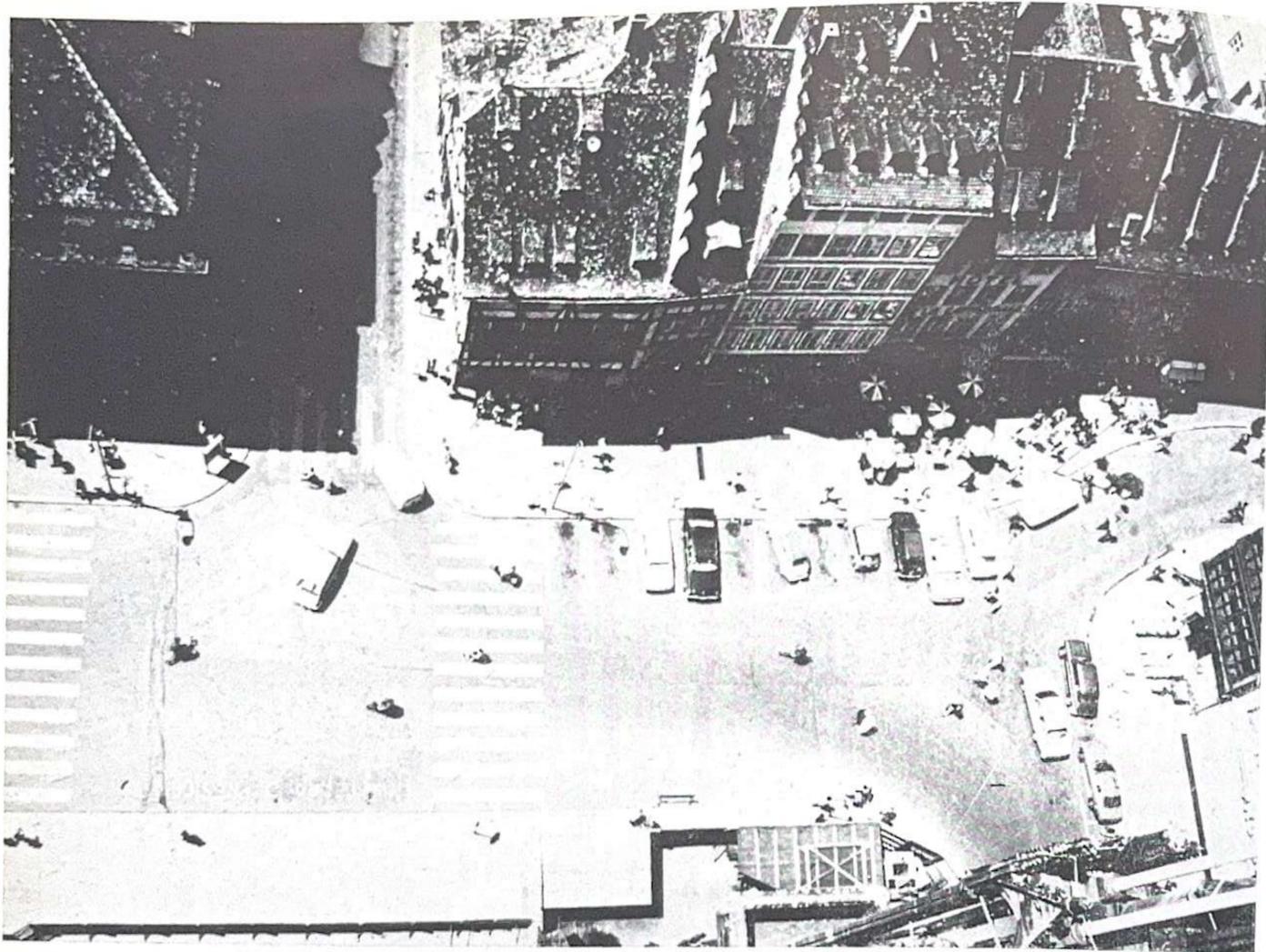


Fig. 7. Place de la Cathédrale (Cathedral Square). View from the tower of the cathedral.

### Place de la Cathédrale (Cathedral Square)

The Strasbourg Cathedral, masterpiece of Gothic architecture, has been and remains more than a splendid religious edifice. As soon as its building, extending from the beginning of the 11th century to the end of the Gothic period, is completed, it attracts on Cathedral Square, all the activities summing up the social and political life of the city. In addition to all kinds of markets, all the solemn political ceremonies (the swearing-in of town councillors, the handing-in of the city's charter . . .) take place in Cathedral Square. The edifice itself is not isolated, at a distance from all others. Innumerable shops lean on it. Neither is it a space reserved for prayer. It is within the Cathedral, for example, that lawyers used to receive their clients.

The Cathedral is therefore the center of activities and its religious role, through it is important, it not separated from its other functions.

This multiplicity of functions corresponds to a period where the secular and the religious were closely linked, often interdependent. The religious often intermingles with the political, when it does not compete with it, often in acute conflicts. As long as the State does not assert itself as the sole authority above other powers and in particular separated from the Church, the cathedral is more than a religious edifice. It *structures* the urban space. When the fight is started between the Church and the State-in-making, in the 18th century, the cathedral is temporarily turned into a Temple of Reason. Though it has again become a place of Catholic worship, the cathedral has permanently entered the

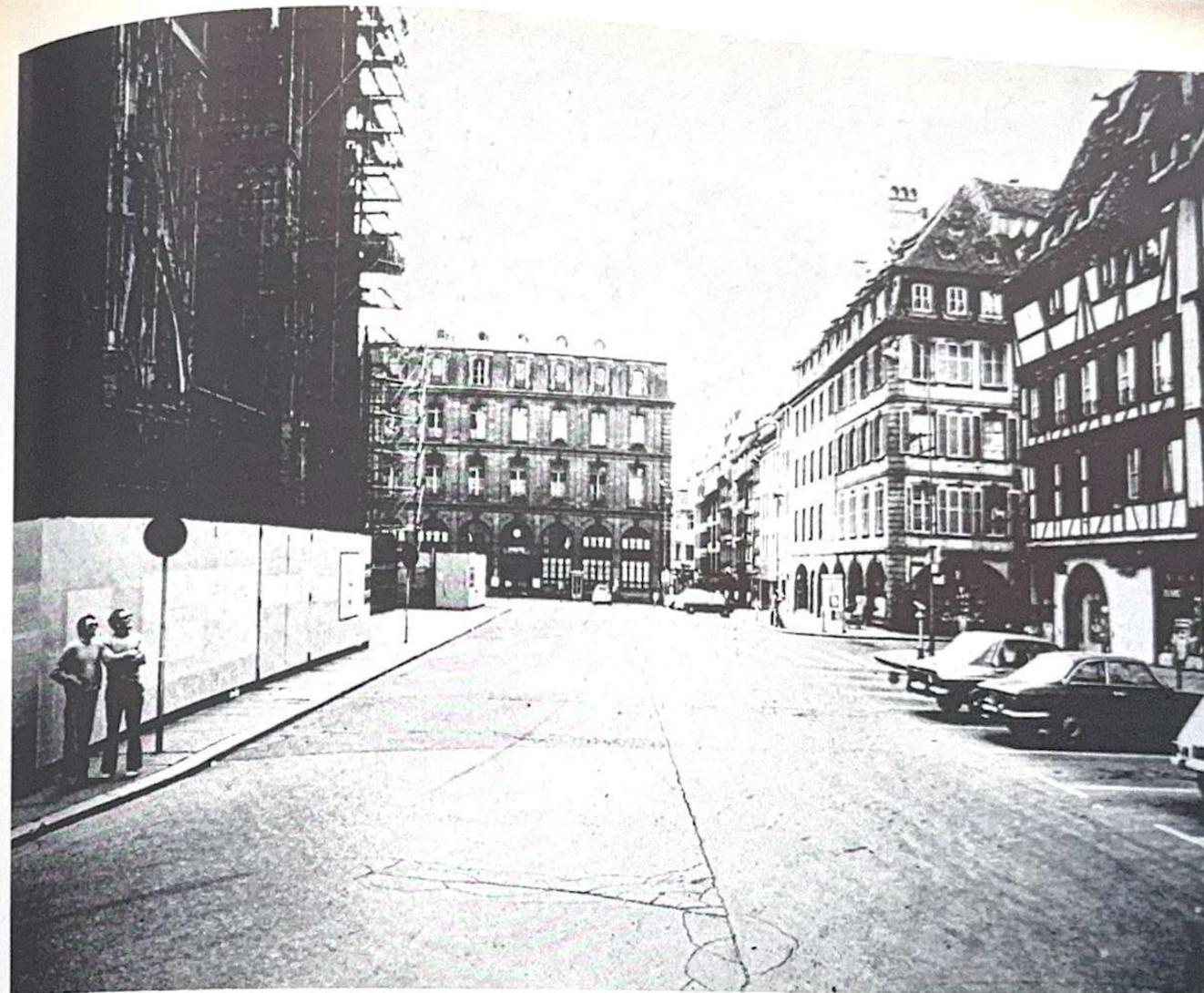


Fig. 8. Place de la Cathédrale (Cathedral Square).

common inheritance of the city, as a marvellous edifice, with a religious function certainly, but whose aesthetic and testimony value are prevalent. Thus it gradually loses its function of structuring urban space. It becomes the *city's symbol*. During the last three wars that opposed France to Germany, the victorious soldiers always wanted to assert their presence, their new authority by hoisting their flag up the cathedral's spire.

Cathedral Square, in its modern functions, sanctions this separation of powers. It remains the center of an intense commercial and touristic activity.

A real crossroads at the center of the old city, Cathedral Square was, until a recent period, open to a very intense car traffic, generating permanent conflicts between pedestrians and car drivers. Only some sidewalk-café are set up, in spite of everything, two

meters away from the crowded car parks. Cathedral Square is thus characterized by the user's movements, the predominant presence of tourists from the beginning of spring till the end of autumn. The cathedral then becomes a real touristic expendable item. There too, as for the St-Etienne Square, we asked ourselves whether this effervescence concealed, or corresponded to any form of appropriation of Cathedral Square.

We interviewed essentially tradesmen, in various fields. For Cathedral Square houses a few luxury shops: photography, clothes, optical and measuring instruments, and a great many Alsace handicrafts shops containing in general all "souvenirs from Alsace".

There are also some residents, men and women about 40—55 years old, with average or comfortable incomes.

### Delimitation of sub-territories

The occupation of the outside, open-air spaces of the square itself derives from real conflicts between the users and those among the tradesmen (keepsake sellers, restaurant owners) who essentially try to attract tourists. Since morning, one must first extend one's territory, normally limited to the shop, by marking the exterior spaces with displays, revolving stands, terraces. Another conflict, more complex but often mentioned by tradesmen, concerns the displays on the ground of African articles, by peddlers, themselves Africans. Thus ivory and wood come and compete with Alsatian ceramics. The often gay and apparently unselfconscious presence of the peddlers is not, however, mentioned by the inhabitants.

The appropriation of outside spaces by staying in them is, of course, the act of tourists on sidewalk-café, in restaurants. But these stays are induced and, we might say, conventional. Some sub-spaces of Cathedral Square are reserved for them.

This is not the case for other groups, and in particular



Fig. 9. Place du Marché-aux-cochons-de-lait (Suckling Pigs Market Square).

for religious groups whose stay is more oriented, and whose purposes are more clearly signified. Songs, dances, handing out of pamphlets make their stay remarkable (appropriation by sound, shouts, songs). Ritual groups of all ages, sit down on the Cathedral's parvis or on the portal's steps, and have lunch, drink, talk etc. . . . This form of appropriation by staying is normally prohibited, but Cathedral Square being very touristic, is often tolerated.

There remain the folk groups, the tramps, the car-drivers . . . None of them appropriates space in the real, rich sense of the word. The folk groups are officially the guests of the city. They are integrated in a policy of institutionalized spectacles. Tramps are tolerated, they go to the near-by Maroquin Street, towards the benches, and are generally passive.

Among the forms of appropriation identified in public squares, "appropriation by objects", corresponding to the extension of territory by tradesmen, reveals a territorial conflict on a densely occupied space. The induced stay (sidewalk-café) is conventional. Only the appropriations by the shouts, songs and dances of the non-folk groups, only the un-induced stays are real, ephemeral, and linked to the traditional functions of public squares.

### Appropriation by sight

In the interviews, the inhabitants do not speak of the appropriation of the public square, but of attachment to the old setting represented by the cathedral, and of pleasure at seeing the cathedral, of pleasure at its proximity: there is a widely shared feeling that it is a privilege to live in Cathedral Square, and though people complain of the cars, the noise, the pollution; they evoke the cathedral as an object to contemplate. That is why we may say that for our residents, it is the outside which comes and super-values the inside of inhabited spaces. The Cathedral is recognized as beautiful, old, exceptional. It stands in an old square whose edifices are also old, traditional in style. The Kammerzel House dating from the 16th century, the Pharmacie du Cerf (Pharmacy of the Deer) which is said to be the oldest in France, all these elements confirm the inhabitants in their feeling of belonging to a rich community, to a city possessing a precious architectural inheritance. In this sense, there is a continuity between the aesthetic choices of the cultural environment to which they belong, and the people we interviewed. In a way, though the cathedral has lost its structuring function, it performs another equally very important function, because it affords, facilitates, the identification of a population to its city.



Fig. 10. Place du Marché-aux-cochons-de-lait (Suckling Pigs Market Square).

### Place du Marché-aux-Cochons-de-Lait (Suckling-Pigs Market Square)

A popular square, housing workshops, stores, warehouses, located near the Cathedral, the Suckling-Pigs Market Square was rebuilt in the eighteenth century, in the traditional local style. It is this style that is nowadays preserved, directly transforming the square's status. Its essential function, which always was the one of market, linked to the proximity of the Ill and of the Old Customs-House, has disappeared only recently and, nowadays, the Square is for pedestrians only. It is repaved, surrounded by barriers guaranteeing its new status, its house fronts are renovated. Today, the user apprehends the two neighbouring territories (Cathedral Square, Suckling-Pigs Market Square) as a liberated,

continuous space, consistent at the same time at the levels of architecture, urban furniture and functions. The possibility of an unbroken advance in two neighbouring squares linked by the Maroquin Street, the paving-stones, strengthen the impression, often expressed by the residents, of a unified territory, belonging to one and the same past. The residents and tradesmen of the Square are today middle-aged people, most of them tradesmen; and a few of them aged, in modest circumstances.

All of our interlocutors evoked the massive presence of the Cathedral and insisted on the architectural and aesthetic unity of the whole formed by "Cathedral Square-Marquain Street-Suckling-Pigs Market Square". They differentiate neither the architectural styles nor the functions specific to each space, but assert the

topographical and aesthetic continuity of this zone. This unitary conception of space corresponds, in the case of the Suckling-Pigs Market Square, to a certain, also unitary and idealized image of the past which the local council authorities, consciously or unconsciously, also endorse, by pointing out the two squares as institutionalized spaces, as touristic places and settings. The residents, when they evoke this "return" or this "recovery" of the past, give much importance to the urban furniture, whose style must blend harmoniously with the "scenery" of these squares: benches, street lamps, flower-tubs are mentioned, and accepted or rejected. Thus the concrete flower-tubs are viewed as a mistake, a dissonant note, modern elements in an old framework. The prime function of the square being to *testify of the past*, the road was paved, and in spite of the often mentioned discomfort the paving-stones cause to old people while walking, or swift walking etc..., they are accepted as elements integrated in this scenery, with however a neat devalorization of today's craftsmen, who "do not know anymore how to pave streets." Finally, the typically alsatian half-timbered houses become frontages to be preserved, regularly restored, meant to be contemplated for pleasure's sake.

The setting-up of the pedestrian zone, justified by the desire of giving users free spaces, for free behaviours, therefore seems to call for appropriation. The benches, the flower-tubs, the absence of cars, the newly-installed sidewalk cafés, everything seems to recommend it as a pleasant place to stay and linger in.

#### Impossible appropriation

This description is understood by the ones primarily concerned, the tourists, whose ephemeral, constantly renewed stay, attracts a whole idle population: youngsters, and tramps who make a living out of begging... The only feature shared by all these users is therefore their availability. The inhabitants of Strasbourg, but not of the square, sometimes try to slip in this atmosphere of leisure and, through songs, attempt a certain form of appropriation of space. The interviews reveal that these kinds of stays are rejected by the square's

residents. The pedestrian zone attracts, in their opinion, too many idlers who do not inspire confidence and the spontaneous songs do not really "enliven the Square". "Concerts ought to be organized", we were told. In other words, the real using directions of this postcard-square are accurately perceived by the inhabitants. The space is said to be "free", but everything expresses staging, "made-up scenery" and, in this sense, calls for organized activities only.

The residents *do not wish to be given this space*. They all concur in the thought that it must be protected and their regrets are expressed only in low key: thus, they mention the contrast between the spruce aspect of the house fronts and the old apartments without comfort, the necessity for the tradesmen to have heavy loads handled by their employees, for they cannot be carried by trucks etc... *The significance of the aesthetic aspect of the Square*, in comparison to comfort in the apartments, to the facilitation of everyday life by modern technological means, is such that all that does not unambiguously express the *supposed past* of this square is violently rejected. The benches themselves signify ugliness simply because of their modernity. Like the flower-tubs, they are condemned by their symbolism. *The imaginary unity of the Square, the "good form" represented by the past is broken*. Thus, the appropriation of space is established only as an *alternative* between the past (beautiful) and the present (ugly) and therefore can only *amount to an appropriation by sight*.

In order to always function as a setting, the Square is the occasion of a structured arrangement and a regular maintenance. The acceptance, by the inhabitants, of this global status of a place, without any personal intervention is a form of *appropriation of a cultural code*. The official character of the Square is, for the residents, valorizing, and it leads them to reject the social categories and groups liable to disregard the using directions of the square.

Ultimately, the Suckling-Pigs Market Square is *sacred*, untouchable, inappropriable, except by sight. The "beautiful" is defined by culture and must be kept up as such. Therefore beauty would only be enjoyable through sight.

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