Editorial - Getting Architects Interested in Users

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Summary

This article retraces the vicissitudes of the first years of *Architecture & Behaviour*'s existence. In spite of its title, or precisely to stress another meaning of the word 'behaviour', *Architecture & Behaviour* has, since its inception, tried to take the opposing view of behaviourist reductionism. The articles published by the journal show that Behaviourism cannot offer adequate descriptions of the complex ways in which behaviour interacts with architecture. However, a difficult task for *Architecture & Behaviour* is to touch the architect's awareness of questions related to behaviour. These difficulties may be attributed to architects' atrophied awareness of users' needs and of the workings of behaviour in general. The causes for this are, possibly, to be found in the architects' training. The aim of *Architecture & Behaviour* is, notably, to stimulate its architect readership to think more about users.

1. Architecture & Behaviour

Architecture & Comportement / Architecture & Behaviour is a quarterly journal devoted to the study of the relationship of man to his built environment. I propose here, as I relate the story of the journal, to bring up again some of the questions that have preoccupied me in my work as editor.

2. Origins

It was during the preparatory meetings for a symposium on man and his built environment in Louvain (1979) that the idea for this journal was born. I shared many of the questions my colleagues were asking themselves about the portrait of the architect that emerged from the contributions submitted to the symposium.

Several texts revealed a gap between the intended use of certain spaces and the way they were actually used, to the general dissatisfaction of their users it must be added. These observations gave rise to doubt: did architects in fact know anything about users? Were they interested in knowing anything?

But the same thing could just as well have been said of several contributions by researchers from the social sciences: the portrait of the user that emerged was that of a unidimensional being reacting solely to colours or forms, or making only certain well-defined gestures. This being the case, we wondered how it might be possible to transcend that mutual incomprehension between architects, researchers and users.

A journal devoted to this question would, we thought, enrich the debate by proposing new and stimulating answers.

It was thanks to a favourable reception by a publisher (Mr Georgi of Saint-Saphorin) that the idea for the journal was able to take form in 1981. In order to leave the door open to any original perspectives that might appear, I had formulated, rather naïvely, a wide range of thematic areas as a starting point for the journal. Thus, it proposed to make available - to English-speaking as well as French-speaking readers - articles reflecting research in the areas of behavioural ecology, space and communication, community participation, environmental decision making, epistemology of space, personality and environment, spatial behaviour, environmental cognition, environmental aesthetics and symbolic interaction, all in relation to the built environment.

3. Title

The title of the journal, *Architecture & Comportement / Architecture & Behaviour,* was intended to be informative with, however, a controversial edge. It was not appreciated by everyone. For those familiar with the history of psychology, the term 'behaviour' is associated with Behaviourism or, in other words, conditioned reflexes, those fixed responses produced by fixed stimuli. Associated with architecture, the term seemed to suggest precisely that highly mechanistic outlook which the broad orientation of the journal was designed to avoid. My credo, and that of all the researchers associated with the journal, is that the relationship between architecture and behaviour is much more complex that the one-to-one relation of stimulus to response.

For that reason we thought it necessary to assert that complexity in order to make the reader aware of the multiplicity of pertinent ways of looking at the question of architecture related to human behaviour. In short, *Architecture & Behaviour* was to take the opposing view of behaviourist reductionism by showing that Behaviourism was not the only model for defining that relationship.

In truth, determinist thought on this subject has haunted architects since the beginnings of the profession. Traces of it can even be found in the great treatises on architecture that have come down to us through the centuries since Vitruvius. But that was not determinism in a strict sense. The aim of those treatises was rather "to elevate the soul of the user through the nobility of the buildings". It was thus that Durand, an influential teacher at the Royal Polytechnical School in Paris at the beginning of the 19th century, wrote, in his *Précis des leçons d'architecture* [1], that the "magnificent, noble and agreeable" appearance of hospitals "could influence the effectiveness of remedies". He wrote of the relation of sanitary conditions, spiritual elevation and respect of traditional values to forms and architectural arrangements as if it were *self-evident.*

What seemed self-evident then is no longer deemed so, for we live in another *Zeitgeist.* It was, nevertheless, a form of determinism based on notions of proportion, harmony and beauty of the whole. But, in the stimulus/response perspective of Behaviourist psychology, which started becoming influential in the United States in the 1920's, it is reduced to a caricature when the latter is applied to architecture.

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[1] Durand, J.N. L. Précis des leçons d'architecture. Paris, Firmin Didot, 1819 (reprint: Unterschneidheim, Uhl Verlag, 1975). cf. in particular Part III, section II: "Des édifices publics".

Architecture & Behaviour advocates a completely different reading of behaviour showing the failure of determinism. Behaviour thus becomes a subject for reflexion, for interpretation and even a source of inspiration for the architect.

4. Socio-psychology of the contemporary environment

This allows us to comment on research into the socio-psychology of the environment which has been developing since the 1970's in a good many countries.

Confronted with the wealth of built environment and the variability of what happens in it, even in short periods of time, it soon became apparent to researchers that it was pointless to propose conclusions even remotely pertinent to architects while a mechanistic outlook was maintained, unless the questions treated were of an extremely limited scope. This obviously has not kept researchers and architects from maintaining a deterministic perspective, even now. Such an attitude can only be understood when one considers the complexity of the questions that arise as soon as the architect-behaviour relationship is examined in the context of everyday life[2].

Most researchers today take their inspiration from complex interactionist models, *in which the temporal dimension offers at least a key for comprehension, in the absence of a means of prediction or control.* History and memory are also privileged subjects in articles published in *Architecture & Behaviour* . The analysis of social forces which shape the environment, indeed ideological analysis, is another important thematic area in an approach *which takes complexity into account, and has been en-couraged by the journal from its beginnings.*

5. First Issues

The first issues of *Architecture & Behaviour* , from 1981 to 1983, were made possible by the collaboration of a few colleagues who were well-disposed towards this outlook, although a widely circulated call for papers did bring in some contributions as well. It is worth noting that the authors of these contributions, with a few rare exceptions, adhered, in a greater or lesser degree, to a broad conception of behaviour. We thus found our preoccupations shared by researchers scattered over the world.

However, I make no secret of the fact that certain articles, indeed certain issues, did not come up to our expectations. In such cases, we felt that it was necessary to forge ahead as best we could until we were able to offer something better.

In the meantime an advisory committee, composed of colleagues who had already published a number of studies on the various aspects of the architecture-behaviour relationship, was formed. It was the responsibility of the committee members, in accordance with the usual practice of scientific journals, to evaluate the scientific quality of the papers submitted to the journal. In cases of differing opinions, the editor's ultimate criterion was the diversity of the viewpoints to be offered to its readers. In fact, the evaluation of submitted papers by the members of the advisory committee, which is customary practice for a university journal, did not always go smoothly. The judgement of two "experts" on the same text often resulted in a contradictory evalua-

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[2] I have developed this viewpoint in more detail in another text: Noschis, K., "Approche globale et approche partielle", Recherches sociologiques, XVII, 1, 1986, 125-146.

tion. From this I could only deduce that, in matters of research, a concensus on norms and acceptable divergences was still far from being established.

Individual perceptions of a text can vary because of several factors, one of which being the sensitivity of the evaluator to the main drift of an article to be published. I often had the impression that the interest a text might hold for an architect wishing to pursue serious reflection on behaviour was not considered of prime importance to the evaluation. Today, I still consider that over and above the scientific value of a piece of research work, the criterion of its appeal for the architect and the stimulation it can offer him must have priority if the journal is to fulfil its aim to develop architects' interest in the theme of behaviour.

6. New Publisher

Up to this point, the journal had not encountered any major obstacles and its history resembles that of numerous other initiatives of the same type. The rather more difficult period that followed our initial enthusiasm was probably no more atypical. After the first volume, the publisher fell behind in the publication of the following issues, articles of quality became rare, the search for new subscribers became laborious and then, after the publication of the first five numbers, everything seemed to come to a standstill. Nevertheless, the thematic perspectives of the journal seemed important to the people contacted in our search for a solution. I concluded that it was worth continuing. Thus it was that after some rather laborious discussions I succeeded in recovering the publication rights from the journal's original publisher who, in the meantime, had ceased all activity. Thanks to the support of two professors[3] in its Department of Architecture, the Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne took an interest in the publication. This found its concrete expression in the form of financial support from the school administration, as well as editorial support from the Department of Architecture.

The impetus thus given to the journal made possible its revival in the form of a publication backed by the Federal Institute of Technology, with its own association[4] and an office at the Built Environment Research Institute, the latter thanks to a subsidy generously granted by the 'Société d'aide aux laboratoires' in 1986.

Today, *Architecture & Behaviour* seems to have its worst days behind it, and the content of the 17 issues (including two double ones) published so far also deserves some attention. Since the journal is sailing in calmer waters, seems to have found an audience, is distributed in twenty or so countries and has contributions regularly submitted to it, it is now possible to look at things in their proper perspective.

7. Reaching Architects

Before examining the content of the journal, I would like to begin with a few general remarks on the architecture-behaviour relationship as I understand it and as I have experienced it.

[3] They are Professors M. Bassand and P. von Meiss.

[4] The publisher of the journal since 1987 has been the 'Association de la revue *Architecture & Comportement* , which is based at the Federal Institute of Technology. Its President is Professor R. Crottaz, and its Vice-president is Professor M. Bassand.

I admit to feeling it my duty to defend the journal's content, as the reception to it - measured in numbers of subscribers - remained for some time rather mitigated.

I can only defend it by taking the offensive, with a critical evaluation of architects and their training.

In short, although I accept the conclusion that the journal's limited number of subscribers is due to the incapacity of its articles to reach the architect's awareness of behaviour, I do not hesitate to assert that such awareness is atrophied in architects, for they are unprepared to receive it. I maintain that here lies the most important challenge for *Architecture & Behaviour* .

If the imagination of the journal's architect readers is fired and they are stimulated to question themselves about users - their portraits, their roles and their needs - and if the number of such readers increases, then the journal will become the detonator that it has aspired to be since its inception.

I cannot resist describing the almost invariable scenario that is played out whenever I find myself engaged in a conversation centred on the journal. The person I am speaking to, though a non-specialist, always shows an immediate interest in the subject: "Architecture and behaviour, that *is* an important topic". He/she generally adds: "Indeed, I remember when I was in ...", and gives a vivid description of a certain place in a favourable or an unfavourable light, and which, in any case, underlines the influence of architecture on the behaviour in question.

When I express my approval, they frown and formulate the rhetorical question: "When you see what is being built today, you wonder if such questions really interest architects, don't you?". It is then my turn to frown and, according to the circumstances, either to commiserate with them or try to explain the complexity of the architect's task and the difficulty of integrating ideas on behaviour or knowledge of it into a project. How can we find ways of looking at behaviour and of talking about it which, while recognizing the complexity of our relations with the built environment, will reach architects?

My aim, as editor of this journal, has been to further the search for answers to this question.

8. Content

We have tried to explore the following directions:

- A historical and diachronic perspective. Publication of several articles whose historical analysis shows the inevitability of their redimensioning in time of certain urban or architectural projects with regard to their original forms. "Self-evident" criteria and intentions were radically modified in the course of things by their relationship to their environment.

- An opening up to cultural diversity. Both the relationship of the inhabitant to his habitat and the attitude of the builder - whether architect or not - to his task show considerable differences from one culture to the next. Several articles, which often refer to vernacular architecture, show culturally specific processes which would remain impenetrable without such keys to understanding.

- A variety of viewpoints according to the field of study. The relationship between architecture and behaviour is subject to widely varying interpretations by psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, semiologists, historians or epistemol-

ogists. When they focus their analyses on a common phenomenon, one can even begin discussing the complementarity of these different viewpoints.

- Diversity of interpretation of the notion of behaviour. This depends on epistemological choices, field of study and the relative scale adopted. In any case, the result is a certain way of looking at the multiplicity of factors that reveal and that constitute any given form of behaviour.

- Reflexion and epistemological criticism. It is only when case studies and epistemological reflexion are carried out together that new ways of envisaging problems can arise. We have published several articles which raise questions about the ways in which architects work or the ways in which researchers show interest in architecture.

Architecture & Behaviour would also like to open its pages to researchers' personal view points, as well as to remarks inspired by travel to different places or by participation in projects specifically devoted to the relationship of man to his built environment. Such recent initiatives have appeared in our latest issues.

To this enumeration must be added the special thematic issues published with the help of research teams working in specific directions on the relationship of man to habitat. These initiatives have, on the whole, been well received. Several articles, received from one group of researchers and grouped together systematically, shed light on the interdisciplinary work done by different teams working in the same research institute. It gives readers a chance to obtain an overall view of work done by such and such a team and, for the researchers in question, to make their work known in another language as well as their own.

The question of *Architecture & Behaviour* 's publication language, with each volume striking a balance between texts published in French and others in English, remains an open one.

Criticized by readers who only understand one of the two languages, the bilingualism of the journal is the very thing that attracts others. Knowing what is happening in another linguistic environment can only be enriching for one's work. The policy of the journal is to make every one of its texts at least globally understandable to readers of either language through bilingual summaries and legends to the illustrations. On this basis, the reader who wants to know more can always ask a friend or make direct inquiries to the author.

9. Awareness of complexity

In the final part of these thoughts I would like to explain the choices described, since it could be argued that there is something immoderate about this project, that it is hybrid to a point that the journal is deprived of any clear identity, just a sort of ragbag. This is certainly one thing that could frighten some readers away from *Architecture & Behaviour* .

Any of our architect readers, thumbing through the numbers published thus far, will find two or three articles holding a direct interest for him, while most of the other texts remain obscure. The direct consequence of this is that he will probably not subscribe to the journal. Moreover, there are several architectural journals which, while devoting the main part of their space to purely architectural subjects, willingly publish articles that occasionally treat certain aspects of the architecture-behaviour relationship

as well. This being the case, can the existence of *Architecture & Behaviour* still be justified?

My viewpoint is as follows. I have tried to show how my editorial choices were dictated by a concern to make readers aware of the necessary complexity of any serious investigation of the architecture-behaviour relationship. This complexity implies that only a multiplicity of approaches to the question and of viewpoints on it an lead to a realization of all that is involved when one tries to approach the study of behaviour in relation to architecture, or vice-versa, without attempting to master the whole, but only to become more aware of what one wishes to favour.

Therefore, I believe that the challenge to the journal is to last, until a large number of published issues finally constitute a readership which will, as it grows, justify the perspective that favours complexity.

Architecture & Behaviour supports a research movement that is asserting itself today and which believes in complexity, while, at the same time, seeking to establish a dialogue with architects.

Certain "experts" on behaviour are called on nowadays by public authorities, by users' associations or by architects' offices. At first such requests for help can be perceived as part of a wish to legitimate decisions by planners who have, in fact, already defined their solutions or proposals for the integration of the behavioural aspects of an architectural project. Today, however, such requests spring from what is felt as an urgent need on the part of users of a given project to make integration more explicit and to further it.

Such examples of narrowed gaps between planners and users are obviously important for the journal, all the more so because researchers in the social sciences play an essential part in it.

10. Human Sciences and the Training of Architects

I would like to conclude this survey of *Architecture & Behaviour* 's vicissitudes by coming back to a problem which remains my fundamental theme: the training of architects.

As long as the work of sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists is only marginally present in this training it is futile to think that important changes will take place in architects' attitudes to users.

Even today an architect's apprentice learns that people who live in, work in or simply go through certain spaces have, above all, *functional demands and that, other-wise, they are generally adaptable, though sometimes unpredictable.*

However, only reflection in depth, backed up by studies and analyses, can bring architects to the realization that *homo symbolicus et politicus* is not an animal to be studied, but an essential part of his project.

It is a question of the image of man that architects resort to in their creative work. That image is there, whether they like it or not. The more aware they become of factors that shape it, the more architects will take complexity into consideration.

It is my belief that this result can only be reached through a good introduction to human sciences. Only then will architects not be tempted to evade the too unfamiliar aspects of users, nor take refuge in oversimplifications. He will accept the need for

well-informed choices. *Architecture & Behaviour* still aspires to further the development of architects' training and professional work in this direction[5].

[5] This text was written for the journal *Habitation*, 1988, 6, 16-19. It is reproduced here, with a few changes, for our readers. The English version is new.