

**TOWARDS A SITUATED READING OF *L'URBANISME, UTOPIES ET RÉALITÉS. UNE ANTHOLOGIE (1965)*, ORGANIZED BY FRANÇOISE CHOAY**

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Abstract

*The present article is dedicated to undertaking a close reading of *L'Urbanisme, utopies et réalités. Une anthologie (1965)*, organized by Françoise Choay. It seeks to situate this anthology within the intellectual trajectory of the author, as well as in the discursive, urban culture in which it was conceived and had its first distribution. In order to develop this work, the approach adopted was based on authors who study books as “practices and representations”, with particular emphasis on Roger Chartier. It has also been guided by the notion of “nebula”, as conceived by Margareth da Silva Pereira. The article has been structured into three parts: in the first, the anthology is presented, especially, its introductory text; following on, situations are investigated in which it is possible to contemplate its conception process and how it was received; and, lastly, the findings are problematized by returning to a reading of the introduction to Françoise Choay's anthology.*

Keywords

*Urbanism; Françoise Choay; Historiography; Intellectual Biography; Critique.*

**POR UMA LEITURA SITUADA DE *URBANISMO: UTOPIAS E REALIDADES. UMA ANTOLOGIA (1965)*, DE FRANÇOISE CHOAY**

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Resumo

*No presente artigo, nós nos dedicamos a uma leitura aprofundada do livro L'Urbanisme, utopies et réalités. Une anthologie (1965), organizado por Françoise Choay. Buscamos situá-lo na trajetória intelectual da autora, bem como na cultura discursiva e urbanística em que foi concebido e teve sua primeira difusão. Para desenvolver este trabalho, nossa abordagem baseia-se em autores que estudam livros como “práticas e representações”, com destaque para Roger Chartier. Orientamo-nos também pela noção de “nebulosa” como concebida por Margareth da Silva Pereira. O artigo foi estruturado em três partes: na primeira, apresentamos a antologia e, sobretudo, o seu texto introdutório; na sequência, investigamos situações em que se possa ponderar seu processo de concepção e recepção; e, por fim, problematizamos o exposto ancorados no retorno à leitura da introdução da antologia de Françoise Choay.*

Palavras-chave

*Urbanismo; Françoise Choay; Historiografia; Biografia Intelectual; Crítica.*

# TOWARDS A SITUATED READING OF *L'URBANISME, UTOPIES ET RÉALITÉS. UNE ANTHOLOGIE* (1965), ORGANIZED BY FRANÇOISE CHOAY<sup>1</sup>

Priscilla Alves Peixoto

## Introduction

Since the 1990s, a succession of texts and investigations has sought to recognize and problematize the contributions of the work by Françoise Choay [1925-]<sup>2</sup>. Graduated in philosophy, at the beginning of her career, Choay dedicated

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1. The present article consolidates results from the research study entitled “Uma história do urbanismo em construção. As práticas historiográficas de Françoise Choay (1965-1973)” [A history of urbanism under construction. The historiographical practices of Françoise Choay (1965-1973)], developed, between 2014 and 2018, within the scope of my doctoral studies on urbanism as part of the Postgraduate Program in Urbanism at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (PROURB-FAU-UFRJ), with funding from the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), and through a doctoral internship undertaken at the École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture (ENSA-Paris-Belleville), funded by the Research Support Foundation in the State of Rio de Janeiro (Faperj). Within this process, emphasis should be given to the fundamental role of my interlocution with Margareth da Silva Pereira (PROURB-FAU-UFRJ), the thesis advisor, together with the comments and suggestions from members of the dissertation committee, Laurent Coudroy de Lille (EUP-UPEM), Gustavo Rocha- Peixoto (PROARQ-FAU-UFRJ), Rodrigo de Faria (PPG-FAU-UNB) and Andrea de Lacerda Pessôa Borde (PROURB-FAU-UFRJ), as well as the supervisor of my internship conducted in France, Corinne Jaquand (ENSA-Paris-Belleville). They have all made a significant contribution to the research conducted since the defense, and which I conducted between 2019 and 2020 as associate professor at the Department of History and Theory at FAU-UFRJ, and as a researcher on the Postgraduate Program in Architecture (PROARQ-FAU-UFRJ) with resources from UFRJ. Among the projects in which I have been involved, during this latter period, are the “La Fondation Le Corbusier et l'Histoire de l'Histoire. L'Origine des études corbuséennes racontées par leurs principaux intervenants” (coordinated by Véronique Boone, Daniela Ortiz dos Santos and Marta Sequeira, at the Fondation Le Corbusier) and “O Congresso de 1959: arquitetura no centro da crítica da arte?” [The 1959 Congress: architecture at the center of art criticism?] (for which I acted as coordinator at the PROARQ-FAU-UFRJ).

2. Since the 1990s, a succession of texts and investigations has sought to recognize and problematize the contributions of her work. Outstanding among these are: a recent text published by Thierry Paquot, *Die Städtebauteoretikerin Françoise Choay. Eine diskursbildende Propagatorin der Disziplin* [The urbanism theorist Françoise Choay. A discourse-building propagator of the discipline] (2019a); the interviews that Paquot conducted with Choay, for the journal *Urbanisme* (PAQUOT, 1994a; 1994b); and a monograph by Rachid Ouahès, *Chronique d'une mort annoncé. Essai d'interprétation de la théorie d'urbanisme de François Choay, en regard du concept de “mort” appliqué à l'architecture et à la ville* [The chronicle of a proclaimed death. An interpretation of François Choay's theory of urbanism, with regard to the concept of “death” as applied to architecture and the city] (1999). However, other works,

herself to art and architecture criticism, while later she became more recognized as an author, writing on the theories of urbanism and heritage.

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while not being specifically dedicated to the production of the author have also made significant contributions. Examples of these are: a book by François Dosse, *Michel de Certeau: Le Marcheur blessé* ([2002] 2007, p. 473-488), and another by Viviane Claude, *Faire la ville. Les métiers de l'urbanisme au XXe siècle* (2006, p. 5-25). In Brazil, there has been a long history of Choay's work being received. Until 1965, mention of her work was in connection to her accomplishments as an art critic. Most outstanding among these are references made by Ferreira Goulart (1960, p. 6) and, particularly, by Mário Barata (1960, p. 6; 1961, p. 6; 1967, p. 6) in widely circulated newspapers. Nevertheless, the attention given by the author to cities was not unknown to Brazilian readers. The articles that Choay wrote on Brasília (CHOAY, 1959a; 1959b) appear to have been widely read in Brazil. Indeed, one of them, "Une capitale préfabriquée" [Brasília, a prefabricated capital], was translated and published in Portuguese by Hidelbrando Giudico in three parts in a widely circulated newspaper, the *Tribuna da Imprensa* (1960a, p. 11; 1960b, p. 11; 1960c, p. 8). Furthermore, her critique of Brasília is addressed in an article written by Yves Bruand (1962, p. 2), and published in the literary supplement of the newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo*. On investigation, mention was also discovered of her book *L'Urbanisme, utopies et réalités. Une anthologie* [Urbanism, utopias and realities. An anthology] (1965) in a newspaper report written by Guilherme Figueiredo (1966), "Um dia depois do outro... injustiça a Le Corbusier" [One day after another ... injustice to Le Corbusier], in the literary supplement of *O Estado de S. Paulo*, on February 6, 1966. This news item indirectly cited the work of Choay, in an opinion piece. In it, Figueiredo positioned the author alongside a line of critics who, shortly after Le Corbusier's death, had made their objections to the architect's positions more outspoken. It is from 2010 onwards that we begin to observe more systematic efforts by Brazilian researchers to delve deeper into Choay's production. Among them, mention should be made of: (i) the pioneering efforts of Margareth da Silva Pereira, who, in 2010, at PROURB-FAU-UFRJ, presented the "Seminário Teórico Avançado" [Advanced Theory Seminar], which was dedicated to reading and analyzing Choay's texts. It should be highlighted that a close dialogue between this researcher and the work of the French author goes back to her doctoral thesis, "*Rio de Janeiro: L'Ephemère et la perennité – Histoire de la ville au XIXème siècle*" [Rio de Janeiro: The Ephemeral and Perenniality – The History of the City in the Nineteenth Century] (PEREIRA, 1988); (ii) the "Seminário temático: Leituras dirigidas de Françoise Choay" [Thematic Seminar: Readings directed by Françoise Choay] (RIBEIRO PEIXOTO, 2013), given at the PPG-FAU-UnB, by Elane Ribeiro Peixoto. From the same researcher, mention should also be made of the recent research project "Diálogo entre culturas: traduções em Arquitetura e Urbanismo" [Dialogue between cultures: translations in architecture and urbanism] (RIBEIRO PEIXOTO, 2020), which addresses the translation of the entries in the *Dictionnaire de l'urbanisme et de l'aménagement* [Dictionary of urbanism and development] (CHOAY; MERLIN, 2015); (iii) the research efforts by Virginia Pontual (MDU-UFPE), in creating the project "A contemporaneidade do urbanismo no Brasil e a fortuna crítica de Françoise Choay. França e Brasil" [The contemporaneity of urbanism in Brazil and the critical wealth of Françoise Choay. France and Brazil] (PONTUAL, 2019); (iv) and, lastly, my own efforts may be mentioned with regard to developing the abovementioned thesis: *Uma história do urbanismo em construção. As práticas historiográficas de Françoise Choay (1965-1973)* (PEIXOTO, 2015; 2017; 2018).

PAQUOT, T. *Die Städtebauteoretikerin Françoise Choay. Eine diskursbildende Propagatorin der Disziplin. In: FREY, K.; PEROTTI, E. Frauen blicken auf die Stadt. Architektinnen. Planerinnen. Reformerrinnen. Theoretikerinnen des Städtebaus II. Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 2019a. p. 275-293.*

OUAHÈS, R. *Chronique d'une mort annoncée. Essai d'interprétation de la théorie d'urbanisme de Françoise Choay, en regard du concept de "mort" appliqué à l'architecture et à la ville* [Mémoire de diplôme d'études approfondies]. Paris: École d'Architecture Paris-Belleville, Université Paris VIII. 1999.

DOSSE, F. *Michel de Certeau: Le Marcheur blessé* Paris: La Découverte, [2002] 2007.

CLAUDE, V. *Faire la ville: Les métiers de l'urbanisme au XXe siècle. Marseille: Parenthèses, 2006.*

GOULART, F. Casa do Brasil em Paris: uma lição de arquitetura. *Artes Visuais. Jornal do Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, p. 6, 10 jan. 1960. Available at: [http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/030015\\_08/272](http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/030015_08/272). Viewed on: January 9, 2021.

BARATA, M. Valores de Buri e vitalidade da arte. *Diário de Notícias*, Rio de Janeiro, 3 abr. 1960. Artes Plásticas. Suplemento literário, p. 6. Available at: [http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/093718\\_04/2455](http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/093718_04/2455). Viewed on: January 9, 2021.

In view of the history of the author's work being distributed, the present article seeks to contribute towards delving deeper into Choay's work by analyzing one of her best-known books, *L'Urbanisme, utopies et réalités. Une anthologie* [Urbanism. Utopias and realities. An anthology] (1965), published in Brazil under the title *O urbanismo: utopias e realidades. Uma antologia*, published by Perspectiva.

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BARATA, M. O "informal" e a importância de Wols. *Diário de Notícias*, Rio de Janeiro, 22 jan. 1961. Artes Plásticas. Suplemento literário, p. 6. Available at: [http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/093718\\_04/10650](http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/093718_04/10650). Viewed on: January 9, 2021.

BARATA, M. Livros e atividades culturais. *Jornal do Commercio*, Rio de Janeiro, p. 6, 5 fev. 1967. Available at: [http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/364568\\_15/43418](http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/364568_15/43418). Viewed on: January 9, 2021.

CHOAY, F. Une capitale préfabriquée: Brasília. *L'Oeil*, Paris, n. 59, p. 77-83, nov. 1959a.

CHOAY, F. Une capitale sort de terre: Brasília. *France Observateur*, Paris, n. 492, p. 15-16, 8 out. 1959b.

CHOAY, F. Brasília: Uma capital pré-fabricada. Tradução: H. GIUDICO. *Tribuna da Imprensa*, Rio de Janeiro, 20 abr. 1960. [1960a]. Artes Plásticas, p. 11. Available at: [http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/154083\\_02/1192](http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/154083_02/1192). Viewed on: January 9, 2021.

CHOAY, F. Brasília: uma capital pré-fabricada (cont.). Tradução: H. GIUDICO. *Tribuna da Imprensa*, Rio de Janeiro, 26 abr. 1960. [1960b]. Artes Plásticas, p. 11. Available at: [http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/154083\\_02/1254](http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/154083_02/1254). Viewed on: 9 jan. 2021.

CHOAY, F. Brasília: uma capital pré-fabricada (conclusão). Tradução: H. GIUDICO. *Tribuna da Imprensa*, Rio de Janeiro, 27 abr. 1960. [1960c]. Artes Plásticas, p. 8. Available at: [http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/154083\\_02/1265](http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/154083_02/1265). Viewed on: 9 jan. 2021.

BRUAND, Y. A experiência de Brasília: tentativa de síntese. *O Estado de S. Paulo*, São Paulo, 20 out. 1962. Suplemento literário, p. 2. Available at: <http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/098116x/1838>. Viewed on: January 9, 2021.

FIGUEIREDO, G. Um dia depois do outro... Injustiça a Le Corbusier. *O Estado de S. Paulo*, São Paulo, p. 15, 6 fev. 1966. Available at: [http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/110523\\_06/49803](http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/110523_06/49803). Viewed on: 9 jan. 2021.

PEREIRA, M. A. C. da S. *Rio de Janeiro: L'Éphémère et la pérennité: histoire de la ville au XIXe siècle*. Paris: Ehes, 1988.

PEIXOTO, E. R. Seminário temático: Leituras dirigidas de Françoise Choay (2013). In: CNPq. *Currículo Lattes*. Elane Ribeiro Peixoto. Atuação Profissional. Universidade de Brasília. Atividades. 2021. Available at: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/1796841203235489>. Viewed on: May 21, 2021.

PEIXOTO, E. R. Diálogo entre culturas: traduções em Arquitetura e Urbanismo (2020). In: CNPq. *Currículo Lattes*. Elane Ribeiro Peixoto. Projetos de Pesquisa. 2021. Available at: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/1796841203235489>. Viewed on: May 21, 2021.

CHOAY, F.; MERLIN, P. *Dictionnaire de l'urbanisme et de l'aménagement*. Paris: PUF, 2015.

PONTUAL, V. P. A contemporaneidade do urbanismo no Brasil e a fortuna crítica de Françoise Choay. França e Brasil (2019). In: CNPq. *Currículo Lattes*. Virgínia Pitta Pontual.

PEIXOTO, P. A. A construção de uma abordagem: Françoise Choay e seu horizonte historiográfico em 1970. XVIII Seminário Nacional de História – ANPUH, 2015, Florianópolis. *Anais [...]*. Florianópolis: Anpuh, 2015, p. 1-15. Tema: Lugares dos historiadores: velhos e novos desafios. Available at: [https://anpuh.org.br/uploads/anais-simposios/pdf/2019-01/1548945018\\_f9e428197935530523397f94b86c1606.pdf](https://anpuh.org.br/uploads/anais-simposios/pdf/2019-01/1548945018_f9e428197935530523397f94b86c1606.pdf). Viewed on: April 11, 2021.

PEIXOTO, P. A. A escrita da história como um processo: as práticas historiográficas de F. Choay. *Oculum Ensaios*, v. 14, p. 99-110, 2017. Available at: <http://periodicos.puc-campinas.edu.br/seer/index.php/oculum/article/view/3221>. Viewed on: April 11, 2021.

PEIXOTO, P. A. *Uma história do urbanismo em construção*. As práticas historiográficas de Françoise Choay (1956-1971). 2018. Tese (Doutorado) – Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2018. Available at: [https://minerva.ufrj.br/F/GVILU3XT99FPXUVL3G2SBYMXCV2V28DC2TY4SNQKHT1C RI9GKR-04709?func=full-set-set&set\\_number=003037&set\\_entry=000001&format=999#.YHL7ruhKJIU](https://minerva.ufrj.br/F/GVILU3XT99FPXUVL3G2SBYMXCV2V28DC2TY4SNQKHT1C RI9GKR-04709?func=full-set-set&set_number=003037&set_entry=000001&format=999#.YHL7ruhKJIU). Viewed on: April 11, 2021.

This publication, organized as a collection of theoretical texts and marked by a wide distribution, was translated into at least three languages - Spanish, Italian and Portuguese<sup>3</sup> –, with successive editions until the beginning of the 2000s.

Despite the perpetuity and scale of this work's distribution, in a text written by Thierry Paquot, *Die Städtebauteoretikerin Françoise Choay*. Eine diskursbildende Propagatorin der Disziplin [The urbanism theorist Françoise Choay. A discourse building propagator of the discipline] (2019a), the author reported a contemporary problem regarding how *L'Urbanisme*<sup>4</sup> had been received (CHOAY, 1965): “Fifty years on, this anthology [...] continues to nourish generations of students and urbanists, without taking into account the evolution of its author”<sup>5</sup> (PAQUOT, 2019b), especially with regard to interpreting the urbanism models at the time it was published. Paquot draws our attention to the need to understand the anthology as a historically situated book, representative of a specific moment in Choay's intellectual trajectory.

In view of this observation, the present article maps the “condition of possibility” (KANT, [1781] 1987, p. 1) of the book's production, thereby situating it in space and time, taking into account its specificities. Thus, it aims at something similar to that which inspired Roger Chartier, by repositioning the relationship between the history of literature and cultural history, “It is therefore, above all, a matter of building an intellectual space, which requires the works to be inscribed within the systems of constraints that limit, but also enable them to be reproduced and understood” (CHARTIER, [1998] 2009, p. 326).

In the case of this article, moving more specifically between the history of writing on urban planning and the history of urbanist practices, what Chartier has called “The Time of the Work” is included. In other words, the different temporalities involved in a publication are emphasized and, therefore, “implies the involvement of a number of people, places and operations that make it possible for the text to circulate” (CHARTIER, [2001] 2014, p. 308)<sup>6</sup>. He concludes:

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3. The first edition of the publications in Spanish, Italian and Portuguese are respectively: CHOAY, F. *El Urbanismo, Utopias y Realidades*. Barcelona: Lumen, 1970 (Translated by Luis del Castillo); CHOAY, F. *La città: utopie e realtà*. Torino: Einaudi, 1973 (Translated by Paola Ponis); CHOAY, F. *O urbanismo. Utopias e realidades. Uma antologia*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1979 (Translated by Dafne Nascimento Rodrigues e revised by J. Guinsburg).

4. In order facilitate reading, from this point on, *L'Urbanisme, utopies et réalités. Une anthologie* (1965) will appear in a simplified form – as *L'Urbanisme*.

5. This and all other non-English citations hereafter (French and Portuguese) have been translated by the translator, Brian S. Honeyball.

6. N.B. - For direct citations, the English version was used of CHARTIER, R. *The Author's Hand and the Printer's Mind*. Translated by Lydia G. Cochrane. Cambridge: Polity Press. 2014, p. 281. Kindle Edition.

[...] It is in this sense that works should be understood as collective productions and as the result of “negotiations,” [...] “transactions” that are always unstable and always renewed, between the work in its perpetuated identity and the various forms of its transmission and its representations. (CHARTIER, [2001] 2014, p. 308-309)<sup>7</sup>.

Chartier’s writings, therefore, indicate that, even if we dwell on the study of an object, such as a book, we similarly have access to the cultures that condition it and that receive resignification from it. This leads us to consider that *L’Urbanisme* enables access to the urban culture in which it was produced and also in which it interfered.

However, when compared to the analyzes undertaken by Chartier himself, many of them centered on reading practices and on the processes of republishing books across wide temporal spans, this article appears to build a particular path, since it stops more precisely at the moment when the book was designed. Somewhere between the year in which its author published her first texts on architecture, 1956, and the date when *L’Urbanisme* went public, 1965. This cross-section sometimes stretches through until the beginning of the 1970s, due to the need to analyze the places in which it first circulated: the schools of architecture and urbanism in France.

In urban studies in Brazil, attention similar to the “history of culture” and to “historiography” encounters an echo in the writings of Margareth da Silva Pereira, especially those in which she describes the notion of “nebula” (PEREIRA, 2018, p. 13). The author associates the craft of the urban historian with the activity of interpreting clouds in the sky, given the dynamic nature of their objects, possible approaches and observational situations. Within this metaphor, the moment that precedes the storm - when the clouds swell in the sky - is compared to the moment when, when faced with a particular issue, multiple histories are related, compared, and connected (PEREIRA, 2018, p. 13).

With particular reference to the study of a book, the act of “thinking through nebulae” helps us to compare it to one of those moments of the storm, to observe it as a specific, ephemeral configuration of discursive cultures, of exchanges between people, of practices (urbanistic, editorial and of teaching).

Lastly, it should be noted that, in the field of urbanism, attention to textual production also presents a history, in which Choay and *L’Urbanisme* (1965) both

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7. N.B. - For direct citations, the English version was used of CHARTIER, R. 2014, p. 281-282. Kindle Edition.

play a unique role<sup>8</sup>. However, it is in her other texts - such as *La Règle et le modèle. Sur la théorie de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme* [The Rule and the Model. On the theory of architecture and urbanism] (1980) and, particularly, “Le De re aedificatoria et l'institucionalização de la société” [On the building and institutionalization of society] ([2004] 2006, p. 374-401) – that her contributions to this article become more evident. In these, Choay makes an approximation between a certain anthropological pretension and textual analysis. A game between the anthropology of discourse and space, between the enunciation of ideas and the way in which they establish spatial practices.

Taking this anthology of hers through this bias, using operations similar to those that the author employed in order to interpret the books by Morus, Cerdà or Alberti, led to reading *L'Urbanisme* (1965) in its first edition, to finding the vocabulary presented there strange, to confronting it with other texts and denaturalizing it in order to place it into perspective, to situate it<sup>9</sup>.

Therefore, in order to develop this interpretation, in addition to reading *L'Urbanisme* (1965) in its first edition in the original French, other important sources were texts and interviews by Choay, published in the press (referenced in the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, in Paris); teaching documents and books on the history of urbanism safeguarded in the collections of the Bibliothèque Historique Poëte et Sellier (École d'Urbanisme de Paris, Upem); and correspondence located at the Fondation Le Corbusier, also in Paris.

Having completed this introduction, it should now be mentioned that the present article has been organized into three parts. In the first, the structure of the anthology is presented, focusing particularly on its introductory text. Following on, situations are investigated through which it is possible to ponder upon the process of its conception and how it was received. Lastly, the findings are problematized by returning to a reading of “L'Urbanisme en question” [Urbanism in question], an introductory text from the anthology and authored by Choay herself.

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8. According to M. Pereira, alongside Irich Conrads, with *L'Urbanisme* (1965), F. Choay introduced the literary genre of anthology into architectural and urban studies. Both may be seen as a thermometer of reflexive movements of architecture and urbanism regarding their own practices (PEREIRA, 2014, p. 10). PEREIRA, M. A. C. da S. Apresentação. A antologia como um gênero no campo do urbanismo [Presentation. Anthology as a genre in the field of urbanism] In: GAUDIN, J-P. *Desenho e futuro das cidades. Uma antologia*. Rio de Janeiro: Rio Book's, [1991] 2014. p. 9-16. CONRADS, I. (org.). *Programme und Manifest zur Architektur des 20 Jahrhunderts*. Berlin: Verlag Ullstein, 1964.

9. Similarly, R. Chartier alerts us to the importance of using “peritextual” and “paratextual” elements in the analysis of a book (CHARTIER, [2005] 2014, p. 235-257). CHARTIER, R. Paratextos e preliminares. In: CHARTIER, R. *A mão do autor e a mente do editor*. São Paulo: Unesp, [2005] 2014. p. 235-257.



## 1. *L'Urbanisme. Utopies et réalités. Une anthologie* (1965)

In her book, Françoise Choay collected fifty-six fragments of texts, twelve of which were first published in French<sup>10</sup>. The anthology totals thirty-nine authors.<sup>11</sup> They were grouped into nine chapters, the titles of which present the “tools of analysis” (CHOAY apud PAQUOT, 1994b, p. 3) used by Choay to interpret urbanism. In the introduction, the author justifies this organization. It is briefly presented herein.

Initially, Choay identifies three production models of urbanism: progressive, culturalist and naturalist. The models are distinguished by the prospective attitude of their actors. While culturalist proposals seem to be governed by a founding nostalgia, progressivism signals a belief in the future resulting from a discontinuity with the actions of the present. In the third model, the naturalist, the texts constitute an “anti-urban” current, which remains attentive to the specificities of the territory.

Identifying these models is simply a first round of interpretation. Added to this is a second, which interrogates them in the light of different temporalities. Thus, Choay identifies three distinct moments. The first, “pre-urbanism”, circumscribes the reflections in which urbanism has not yet been distinguished

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10. In the anthology (CHOAY, 1965) the following sections of text are referenced as having been translated by Choay herself: RICHARDSON, B. W. *Hygeia, a city of health*. London: Macmillan, 1876, p. 18-23, 30, 32, 39; PUGIN, A. W. N. *Contrasts or a parallel between the noble edifices of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and similar buildings of the present day, shewing the present decay of taste*. London: [edited by the author], 1836, p. 1-3, 30-35; PUGIN, A. W. N. *True principles of pointed or Christian architecture*. London: [edited by the author], 1836, p. 16; MORRIS, W. *Art, wealth and riches* [a conference given on March 6, 1883]. In: *Collected works of William Morris*. London: [s. n.], 1915, t. 23, p. 147-150; WRIGHT, F. L. *The living city*. New York: Horizon Press, 1958, p. 17-23, 31, 45, 47-54, 62-65, 109-110, 112, 116-122, 139-140, 148-153, 158, 161-162, 166, 168, 176, 188, 217; BUCHANAN, R. [president of the report]. *Traffic in towns, a study of the long term problems of traffic in urban areas*. London: [s. n.], 1963, [selected paragraphs]; GEDDES, P. *Civics as applied sociology* [conference given before the Sociological Society, at the University of London, on July 18, 1904]. In: *Sociological Papers*. London: Macmillan & Co., 1905, p. 111, 115-118; GEDDES, P. *Cities in evolution*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1915, p. 248, 253-257, 359-365; MUMFORD, L. *The highway and the city (1960)*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1964; JACOBS, J. *The death and life of great American cities*. New York: Random House, 1961, p. 35-37, 41, 55-56, 58-59, 62-63, 65, 71, 74, 76-77, 79-84, 87, 90, 101, 111, 168-169, 218-221, 348, 372-373, 375-376; DUHL, L. *The human measure: man and family in megalopolis*. In: WINGO JR., L. *Cities and space: the future use of urban land*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1963, p. 136-139; LYNCH, K. *The image of the city*. Cambridge (MA): MIT & Harvard University Press, 1960, p. 1-6, 8, 9, 11-13, 46-48, 83-84, 95-96, 99-102, 110-112, 115. It should also be mentioned that the texts by the architect Iannis Xenakis were published in the anthology based on the manuscripts made in Berlin in January 1964.

11. The authors published in Françoise Choay's anthology (1965) were: Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, Victor Considérant, Étienne Cabet, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Benjamin Ward Richardson, Jean-Baptiste Godin, Júlio Verne, Herbert George Wells, Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, John Ruskin, William Morris, Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx, Pierre Kropotkine, N. Bukharin e G. Préobrajensky, Tony Garnier, Georges Benoit-Lévy, Walter Gropius, Charles-Édouard Janneret (Le Corbusier), Stanislas Gustavovitch Stroumiline, Camillo Sitte, Ebenezer Howard, Raymond Unwin, Frank Lloyd Wright, Eugène Hénard, Rapport Buchanan, Iannis Xenakis, Patrick Geddes, Marcel Poète, Lewis Mumford, Jane Jacobs, Leonard Duhl, Kevin Lynch, Victor Hugo, Georg Simmel, Oswald Spengler, Martin Heidegger.

as specialized knowledge. In the second, the conformation may be perceived of a specialty and the construction of an allegedly scientific field. This would be the time of urbanism itself. Lastly, the third moment is that which is contemporary to the book and presents a second degree critique of the discipline, when the urban debates cease to be directed towards the cities themselves in order to address the discourse of urbanism. Thus, the culturalist model, for example, may be rendered into “culturalist pre-urbanism”, “culturalist urbanism” and “anthropolis”.

This interpretive architecture, erected in the minutest detail, clearly marked by a structuralist perspective, despite appearing overly taxonomic, involves displacements and tensions. For example, on reading Choay’s introduction, her obstinacy is neither panoramic nor prescriptive. It is governed by seeking “[...] to highlight the reasons why mistakes are committed, the root of the uncertainties and doubts that arise today by any new urban development proposal [...]” (CHOAY, 1965, p. 8).

Another aspect that deserves emphasis is that her “tools of analysis”, the chapter titles, seek to broaden and complexify interpretations restricted to the political ideologies of their authors. Commenting on the work by K. Mannheim, *Ideologie et utopie* [Ideology and Utopia] (1956), she writes:

We have not been able herein to resume his [Mannheim’s] classification of the forms of utopian mentality: our progressive model encompasses both his “liberal-humanitarian idea” and part of his “socialist-communist idea”. Moreover, our culturalist model cannot be fully assimilated to the “conservative idea” (W. Morris was a socialist).

As may be certified, Françoise Choay’s book is a reaction to the urbanism applied during the 1960s, as well as to its interpretations, in relation to which, her harsh criticisms should be highlighted. In all models, Choay identified an idealization of both the future and the past, because “[...] the city, instead of being thought of as a process or problem, is always posed as a thing, a reproducible object. It is ripped from concrete temporality and, in the etymological sense, it becomes utopian, i.e., from nowhere” (CHOAY, 1965, p. 25). Thus, urbanism and its second-degree criticism are problematized by the author in the degree to which its utopian matrix<sup>12</sup> becomes evident and distances it from the “real” city.

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12. In *L’Urbanisme* (1965), the use of the term “utopia” became a beacon through the author’s reading of *Ideologie et utopie* (MANNHEIM, 1956), which indicates “the active character of utopia in opposition to the social status quo and its disintegrating role” (CHOAY, 1965, p. 15). In addition to the reference to Mannheim, in relation to the term “utopia”, in the same book (CHOAY, 1965, p. 16), she mentions

However, despite the negative criticism, Choay indicates possibilities for the renewal of the discipline. This intention may be observed, albeit with reservations, due to the description of “pre-urbanism without a model” and of “anthropolis”. In view of this, it may be observed that Choay’s expression of hope is tied to actions that replace the utopian drive - to model - through dialogue and an investigation into the “real”. Despite her warnings regarding the evils of the excessive data collection and diagnoses, attention to “realities” traces the guidelines for a renewal of the city, understanding it as something alive and lived in.

## 2. The “nebula” of a book

As we have sought to demonstrate, the organization of Choay’s anthology problematized the urbanism that was applied during her time. However, for contemporary readers, to a large extent, this past situation does not seem to have clear-cut contours. In order to feature the impasses against which the anthology positioned itself, in this second part of the text the “time of the work” (CHARTIER, [2001] 2014, p. 308-309) will be investigated. Therefore, two excerpts are referred to, which may be found in the introduction of the anthology:

First and foremost, this term [urbanism] needs to be defined since it is fraught with ambiguity. Attached to current language, it designates both engineering works and projects for cities or urban forms that are characteristic of each era. Indeed, the word “urbanism” is recent. G. Bardet dates its creation back to 1910\*. The Larousse Dictionary defines it as the “science and theory of human settlement”. This neologism corresponds to the emergence of a new reality: towards the end of the nineteenth century, the expansion of the industrial society gave rise to a discipline that stood out from previous urban arts by its reflective and critical character and by its scientific pretension. (CHOAY, 1965, p. 8-9)

\*According to G. Bardet (*L’Urbanisme*, PUF, Paris, 1959), the word “urbanism” seems to have appeared for the first time in 1910 in *le Bulletin de la Société géographique de Neufchatel*, penned by P. Clerget. Société française des architectes-urbanistes was founded in 1914, under the presidency of Eugène Hénard. The Institut d’urbanisme de l’Université de Paris was created in 1924. Urbanism only began to be

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*The History of Utopian Thought* (HERTZELLER, 1926), *L’Utopie et les utopies* (RUYER, 1950) and “Some Observations on Community Plans and Utopias” (RIESMAN, 1947). It should be noted that this theme was to be further explored years later, in her *thèse d’état*, in *La Cité du désir et la ville modèle: essai sur l’instauration textuelle de la ville* (1978), published later, in a revised version entitled *La Règle et le modèle*. Sur la théorie de l’architecture et de l’urbanisme (1980). HERTZLER, J. O. *The History of Utopian Thought*. New York: Macmillan, [1923] 1926. RUYER, R. *L’Utopie et les utopies*. Brionne: Gérard Monfort Éditeur, 1950. RIESMAN, D. Some Observations on Community Plans and Utopia. In: *Yale Law Journal*, n. 57, 1947. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/ylj/vol57/iss2/2>. Viewed on: May 21, 2021.

taught at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris from 1953, by A. Gutton, and only in the “scope of architectural theory”. The classes taught by A. Gutton became volume VI of his *Conversations sur l'architecture* [Conversations on architecture], under the title *L'Urbanisme au service de l'homme* [Urbanism at the service of mankind], Vincent Fréak, Paris, 1962. (CHOAY, 1965, p. 8)

In these two excerpts - a paragraph and a footnote, respectively - the author outlined the scope of her anthology, sharing the meanings she adopted for the word “urbanism” and revealing the institutional practices and places that the neologism conformed in France. In view of this information, it may be observed that, at that moment, Choay understood urbanism as “a discipline which may be distinguished from the urban arts previously practiced, due to its reflective and critical character, as well as its scientific pretension”. (CHOAY, 1965, p. 8-9)

Thus, she clearly distanced urbanism from a simple operation of urban design or embellishment, as the operations of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Rome and Paris were often interpreted, as well as the notion in vogue between the 1920s and 1940s, when the neologism itself still fluctuated (GAUDIN, [1991] 2014, p. 28).

However, re-reading these brief passages with care and attention, it may be observed how Choay reacted and moved within a markedly French environment. Although one of her major contributions was the translation and dissemination of a series of authors previously published only in English, and even in the introduction mentioned Brasilia, Chandigar and Boston (CHOAY, 1965, p. 7), her apparent interlocutors, sources and the question of the institutionalization of urbanism were limited to French texts and actors.

This apparent contradiction of terms, which presents an image of Choay that substantiates her criticism anchored in a reaction to experiments conducted around the world, but aimed at a specifically French - or even Parisian - audience, seems to be a throwback to the years when she began building her career as a critic.

Thus, three aspects deserve to be called upon: one more directly linked to Choay's trajectory and the network into which she was sensitized and that delved deeper into urban issues; the theoretical field configured by the books on urbanism in which the one she authored became part of; and the places that taught urbanism, where her book was mostly circulated.

### *2.1 A book as dialogues*

With regard to the first aspect, it is necessary to remember that Françoise Choay was introduced into urban debates (and even built a public career) as a journalist and critic. Between 1956 and 1965, the period preceding the publication

of the anthology, she wrote regularly in widely circulated journals that specialized in art and literature, of which the newspaper *France Observateur* and the art magazine *L'Oeil* are of particularly note.

In the news items and opinion pieces for these vehicles, it may be observed that her attention to urban issues was initially defined through dialogue with the works of Jean Prouvé and Michel Écochard. Some of her first articles published in *France Observateur* (CHOAY, 1956a; 1956b; CHOAY; ÉCOCHARD, 1956) are testimonies to this attention, which, observed in the interview given by Choay to T. Paquot, in 1994, also represented a circle of friendships. For example, on talking to Prouvé, she commented:

Philosophy studies lead to everything ... In this case, they have guided me towards the history and philosophy of art. However, it through a stroke of luck - meeting Jean Prouvé at a country wedding - to discover modern architecture and construction; a revelation. (CHOAY apud PAQUOT, 1994a, p. 5)

In order to further expand the design of this network, in a statement to the journal *Urbanisme*, in 2007, on the occasion of a retrospective exhibition of the work of the Franco-Colombian architect Rogelio Salmona, the author provided a number of clues from more interlocutors of those early years while working as a critic. In addition to the abovementioned architect, she also mentioned Iannis Xenakis, “his accomplice and friend at the Agence Le Corbusier” (CHOAY, 2007, p. 90). Commenting on the same passage, Ingrid Guerrero presented some other signs of this network. She wrote (2016, p. 121):

[...] Salmona began a friendship with Françoise Choay, [...] who the Franco-Colombian had first met in 1955, thanks to his visits to 35 Rue de Sèvres - she developed editorial projects on “Corbu”, together with the photographer Lucien Hervé [...]. Choay’s friendship contributed to Salmona’s contemporary pictorial culture [...]. Promising future contemporary artists were invited to meetings organized at the Choay home. In addition, together with the architect, the philosopher discovered neo-realist painters exhibited at Daniel Cordier’s gallery, which opened the first headquarters of his prestigious gallery on Rue Duras.

Further on, outlining the interlocution network even better between Choay, Salmona and Xenakis, Guerrero (2016, p. 122) presented their common interest in Trotskyist ideas:

Françoise and Xenakis (who fought in the Greek People's Liberation Army in 1945) shared a friendship with other Greek Marxists exiled in Paris, who attended soirées organized by her and her husband, [...], in the couple's apartment in Neuilly-sur-Seine. The Kostas Axelos group, Boris Fraenkel and Émile Copfermann, were definitive figures for the Franco-Colombian approach to Trotskyism [...].

As with Prouvé, the friendship with Xenakis led Choay to include him in her articles. Hence, on March 20, 1958, his collaboration in the project of the Philips Pavilion for the Brussels exhibition, overseen by the Agence Le Corbusier, was addressed by Choay in the article "Le Sens d'une architecture nouvelle" [The meaning of a new architecture] (1958b).

As a result of her interlocution with the young architects working in Paris, Choay made a broader examination of the projects in which they participated. The debates in which these architects were directly involved, such as the issue of habitation, also became the object of her articles. This theme – habitation - gained even greater prominence in the press and in F. Choay's articles brought on, in the French context of *Les Trente Glorieuses*<sup>13</sup>, by a policy of popular dwellings being drawn up in France. Moreover, Choay herself, having achieved increasingly more prestige as a critic, began to receive invitations to visit housing projects abroad and, consequently, to compare what was in her eminent Paris with these experiences around the world.

They became beacons for reflection on dwellings in the Hansa district in Berlin, Germany, an ambitious prototype of a "city of the future" (die Stadt von morgen) produced for Interbau<sup>14</sup> in 1957; the construction site of the new Brazilian capital, Brasília, in 1959; and the single-family homes designed by Kiyonori Kikutake in Tokyo, Japan, in 1960, as well as the collective habitation that was being produced in the suburbs of that same city. This debate was spanned, in turn, by three publications: *Casablanca, le roman d'une ville* [Casablanca, the novel of a city], by Michel Écochard, in 1955, the Athens Charter by Le Corbusier<sup>15</sup>, in 1957,

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13. *Les Trente Glorieuses* corresponds to the period from 1945 to 1973 of great economic growth in a group of countries in the West, among them, France. .

14. The Interbau was an international architectural exhibition held in Berlin in 1957.

15. Although this publication came from the meeting of the International Congress on Modern Architecture (CIAM) of 1933 and that, throughout the 1940s, there were numerous versions prepared by different authors, it was in this version published by Le Corbusier, that the charter became "known to the general public" (BRAUSCH, 2016, p. 212). It ceased to be a document that circulated among the architects who had attended the CIAMs and became a book, written in French, accessible to anyone interested in the subject. BRAUSCH, G. (right). CIAM/Le Corbusier. La Charte d'Athènes (1933/1941/1957). *Dérivations. Pour le débat urbain*, n. 3, p. 212-219, Sep. 2016.

and the first translation in French of *Building Dwelling Thinking* (*Bauen Wohnen Denken*), in 1958, by Martin Heidegger<sup>16</sup>.

Thus, reflection on habitation unfolds within a critique on the limits of the practices instituted by urban planners and, more clearly, outlines the scope of the impasse that Choay's texts on urbanism would embrace during the 1960s: the tension established between the search for universalizing principles - such as dignity, democratic values, health and citizenship - and the recognition of the cultural and environmental specificities of each project. As Choay herself would summarize in a clarifying manner, "a dwelling is not simply a shelter" (CHOAY, 1959c, p. 12).

This same aspect was made explicit in *L'Urbanisme* when Choay described the image of the "type-man" present in Le Corbusier's Athens Charter (CHOAY, 1965, p. 34-35) and, with it, outlined the characteristics of the "progressive model". She concluded that the dissemination of Le Corbusier's ideas, safeguarding his humanistic aspirations, revealed an unfortunate capacity to homogenize settlements of distinct cultures.

As may be certified, the interlocution with the young architects who worked at the Agence Le Corbusier did not necessarily signify a friendly or cordial relationship with the owner of the office. As mentioned by Guerrero (2016), Choay had editorial projects on Le Corbusier's work and, in fact, between the late 1950s and early 1960s, it had been the subject of several articles. In her writings, Choay addressed the project for the Unesco headquarters in Paris, in which Le Corbusier had served as a member of the International Committee (CHOAY, 1957; 1958c; 1958d), as well as Brazil House, for the Cité internationale universitaire de Paris, in which he worked on developing Lúcio Costa's initial plan (CHOAY, 1959d; 1959e). Choay also wrote about the manner in which the architect's works had been addressed by the *Premier Salon d'Architecture*, held in Paris (CHOAY, 1961). In book publishing, her focus was on works photographed by Lucien Hervé, *Le Siège de l'Unesco. Symbole du vingtième siècle* [The Unesco Headquarters. A twentieth century symbol] (CHOAY, 1958a) and *Le Corbusier* (CHOAY, 1960d).

It is with regard to these publications that the relationship between the critic and the architect was different from that which she maintained with colleagues who worked at his agency. When analyzing the exchange of correspondence (Figure 1) between Le Corbusier and Françoise Choay, currently available at the

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16. In French, *Bauen Wohnen Denken* (1951) was translated by André Préau as *Bâtir, habiter et penser*, edited as part of the collection *Essais et conférences*, in 1958, by Gallimard. Cf. BONICCO-DONATO, 2019, p. 6. BONICCO-DONATO, C. *Heidegger et la question de l'habiter. Une philosophie de l'architecture*. Paris: Parenthèses, 2019.

Fondation Le Corbusier<sup>17</sup>, certain misunderstandings may be observed concerning the authorization for producing the books. In these letters, Le Corbusier demonstrates surprise in discovering that the texts had been published by Choay without his prior knowledge. She goes on to respond respectfully, indicating the occasions on which they had talked about the most recent of them (*Le Corbusier*) and of her expectation that the publisher had undertaken the necessary dialogue in relation to the oldest (*Le Siège de l'Unesco*), since at that time they had not yet met one another.

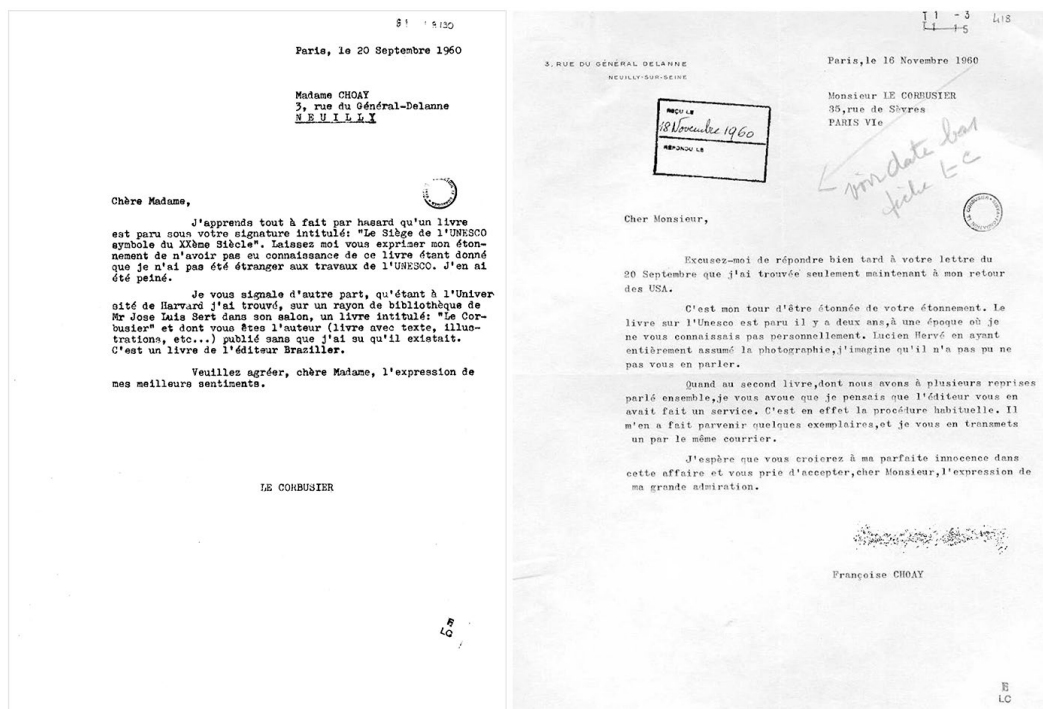


Figure 1. Letter from Le Corbusier to Mlle. Françoise Choay (September 20, 1960) and a letter from Mlle. Françoise Choay to Le Corbusier (November 16, 1960)

Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, 1960.

At all events, between 1956 and 1965, both in articles and in books, Choay's attitude was much more descriptive rather than critical when it came to the works of Le Corbusier. This situation changed after the architect's death in 1965. At this new moment, *L'Urbanisme* itself became a significant piece and the article for the

17. Documents consulted at the Fondation Le Corbusier: a letter from Le Corbusier to Mme Choay (Paris, September 20, 1960) and a letter from Françoise Choay to M. Le Corbusier (Paris, November 16, 1960).



journal *Transmondia* - “L’Épaisseur d’un mythe” [The measure of a myth] ([1966] 1995) - may be read as its complement<sup>18</sup>.

In an attempt to circumscribe a schematic overview of what Choay exposed in the article regarding Le Corbusier’s urban theory, four points may be observed: (i) she presented the role that Le Corbusier’s books fulfilled in France, “[...] given the shortfall of official teaching provided by the École des Beaux-Arts [...]” (CHOAY, [1966] 1995, p. 37); (ii) she identified the role that his theories played in training urban architects and the manner in which they went on to spread “[...] a concept of universal urbanism, [...] irrespective of geographical or cultural contingencies [...]” (CHOAY, [1966] 1995, p. 41-42); (iii) she denounced, therefore, a form of conceiving that, due to its reductionism and schematism, had gone on to achieve a planetary scale; and (iv) lastly, she contemplated. Choay suggested that Le Corbusier’s position as the main propagator of the progressive model contained a number of cracks. Antagonistic tensions incorporated within his work that the author summarized in the presentation of two of her lines of thought: “[...] one, manifested and proclaimed in the writings [of Le Corbusier], is the idea of modernity; the other, latent, never admitted and nonetheless legible in all his achievements, is the nostalgia for certain pre-industrial values” (CHOAY, [1966] 1995, p. 42).

Thus, to some extent, Choay drew attention to the blemishes of “[...] nostalgic elements that represent the ideal of community life and the reconstitution of the individual “house” within the heart of the housing unit [...]” (CHOAY, [1966], 1995, p. 42), thus, a certain conservatism (or culturalism) of customs. Such aspects, written around one year after the publication of her anthology, also demonstrated a deepening of her criticism towards Le Corbusier and how the models of interpretation that she herself had outlined were not watertight.

However, in addition to the criticism of Le Corbusier, the points raised by Choay in the article for *Transmondia* help to access two other layers necessary for the exercise of situating the production of *L’Urbanisme*: the editorial field in which she moved and the reception and circulation of this book in the architecture and urbanism schools of Paris, to which the continuation of this argument will return.

## 2.2 A book on the theories of urbanism

As has been demonstrated, the book by Françoise Choay is a reaction to urban practices that, in the years immediately preceding the publication of *L’Urbanisme*,

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<sup>18</sup>. During the research, it was not possible to locate the publication of the journal *Transmondia* and, in order to conduct the analyzes that follow, a reissue of the same article published in the journal *Urbanisme* was used, with the title “Que faut-il maintenant penser de Le Corbusier?” (CHOAY, [1966], 1995).

radically altered Paris and its surroundings. Furthermore, it should be remembered that, between 1950 and 1960, complexes were being built in Aubervilliers, La Courneuve, Drancy, Bagnolet, Romainville, Créteil, Vitry, Fresne, Poissy, Chatenay-Malabry, Nanterre, Gennevilliers, Edinay, Stains, Massy and Sarcelles. One further aspect that should be remembered is that, during the same period, the planning of the metropolis was under debate, as attested by the exhibition organized by André Bloc, *Paris Parallèle*, the results of which were published in the journal *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (1960a; 1960b) and made public in 1961, at the *Premier Salon d'Architecture*, held at the Grand Palais. Both the exhibition and the publication were severely criticized by Choay (1961). She considered them utopias, with all the negative meaning that this word would take on in her later writings<sup>19</sup>.

Here, however, one further aspect deserves mention. This is the role that different vehicles played in the editorial field, helping to intensify and encourage the debates and criticism of the urbanism then practiced. Historiography has generally been dedicated to demonstrating the importance of specialized journals, such as *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* itself, and even those with a broader readership, such as those in which Choay worked. However, here the role played by the publication of books is included, particularly those focussing on the history of urbanism and its theories.

In addition to the previously mentioned books with which Choay had approached a reflection on habitation, a survey conducted at the Bibliothèque Historique Poëte et Sellier on the history books of urbanism and its theories was able to demonstrate that, until 1959, the books by Pierre Lavedan and urban and architectural guides dominated the titles of publications. During the period that followed, between 1961 and 1963, practically nothing was published on the subject. This aspect changed substantially between 1965 and 1967 with publications by Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe (1965), Henri Coing (1966), Marie-Geneviève Raymond (1966), Roger-H. Guerrand (1967), Anatole Kopp (1967), as well as the republication of Marcel Poëte's book "Introduction à l'urbanisme" [Introduction to Urbanism] by Hebert Tonka (1967) and a translation into French by Edmond Bacon (1967), authors who were mostly the main professors at the Institut d'Urbanisme de l'Université de Paris [The Urbanism Institute at Paris University].

As a complement to this survey, reference may be made to the footnote written by Choay mentioned earlier. In order to situate the theoretical field into which her work was inscribed, she referred<sup>20</sup> to the books by Gaston Bardet (1945)<sup>20</sup>

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19. Cf. note 7.

20. Although Choay mentioned the 1959 edition of G. Bardet's book, *L'Urbanisme*, it may be observed that the first edition of this book is dated 1945.

and André Gutton (1962). The first, a recognized professor and director of the Institut d'Urbanisme de l'Université de Paris during the occupation period (DE LILLE; BUSQUET; CARRIOU, 2005, p. 22), and the second, a small part of a theory of architecture course at the École des Beaux Arts, by an author who had also served as a teacher at the Institut (LILLE; BUSQUET; CARRIOU, 2005, p. 25).

Thus, it may be observed that *L'Urbanisme* was published at a time when more attention was once again paid to the historicity of knowing how to build cities, immediately after a short period of pause. In other words, unlike the process through which the journals had passed, after an editorial silence, there was a timid growth of books covering the history of the theories of urbanism. Furthermore, by observing, primarily, from where the declarations came by the authors of the books cited – the vast majority being professors from urbanism and architecture schools –, it is believed that the data collected deserve not only to be considered together with the practice of urbanism, itself, but also alongside the teaching of the knowledge that built cities during those years, in Paris.

### 2.3 *A book and its role in teaching*

In her text for the journal *Transmondia* ([1966] 1995), Françoise Choay stated, as observed, that, in France, around the 1960s, Le Corbusier's books were significant. However, in the period immediately after the publication of *L'Urbanisme*, the scenario quickly changed, and several books started to be published and the anthology she organized seems to have played a prominent role.

Testimonies from architecture and urbanism students of the 1960s and 1970s in France are examples of the new references. In a statement to the journal *Urbanisme*, Philippe Panerai recollected his readings as a student at the École des Beaux-Arts. He stressed the importance of Choay's anthology along with books by Chombart de Lauwe, René Kaës and Jean Labasse (PANERAI, 2019, p. 33). In the same journal, Jean Haëntjens had similar recollections, stating that, in the 1970s, books by Henri Lefebvre and Françoise Choay were essential reading (HAËNTJENS, 2019, p. 50). Both of these testimonies may be complemented by the work of Jean-Louis Violeau, *Les architectes et Mai 68* [Architects and May '68] (2005), in which, when illustrating the panorama of the bibliography used by architecture students in the late 1960s, he commented on the importance of the work by Choay: "an anthology that will also owe its considerable success to the fact that it responds precisely to the need for 'theory' and references in an environment where translations are almost non-existent" (VIOLEAU, 2005, p. 123).

Violeau also revealed another significant aspect regarding the diffusion of F. Choay's work during the 1960s, which is a crisis in educating French architects. This conjuncture, in May 1968, led to the well-known uprisings of Sorbonne students, but

that, some years before, had already been felt at the École (VIOLEAU, 2005, p. 21-23): a graduation course centralized in a single school, located in Paris, which seemed to be insufficient to serve the number of students who were then entering higher education during the years of *Les Trente Glorieuses* (VIOLEAU, 2005, p. 44-52).

In the teaching of architecture, this process gave rise to the atelier of George Candilis, which, in the autumn of 1964, began to operate at the Grand Palais, away from the headquarters on Rue Bonaparte, and which became known as “Atelier C”. The pedagogical practices experienced in Candilis’s studio contrasted with those adopted by the other *patrons d’atelier*. Thus, if, on the one hand, they responded to the student unrest, on the other, they heightened the feeling of crisis. Within the scope of these experimentations, in addition to the greater proximity between theory and practice, with visits to construction sites and with research using scale models, two other new practices are of particular interest: the introduction of theoretical debates in the design atelier and a special interest in urbanistic issues<sup>21</sup>.

This crisis, which took place between 1964 and 1965, added to the uprisings of 1968, resulted both in the separation between the teaching of architecture and the fine arts and its decentralization, as well as in the creation of the urbanism course at the Center universitaire expérimental de Vincennes [Vincennes Experimental University Center].

The period in focus, which includes the creation of Choay’s book and its first distribution, finds this process in its initial stage and, therefore, oblivious to its results. As previously mentioned, the urbanism classes at the École des Beaux-Arts were very circumscribed and, before 1962, did not even exist (CHOAY, 1965, p. 8). It was probably for this reason that some architects who started to work in urban projects also completed their training at the Institut d’Urbanisme de Paris [The Paris Institute of Urbanism]<sup>22</sup>.

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21. Much of the consideration on the organization and practices of George Candilis’s atelier was collected from the classes of the course “Architectes et urbanistes: visions d’histoire, de société et d’espace”, taught by Marie Élisabeth Mitsou and Yannis Tsiomis at École des Hautes Études en Science Sociales, 2016-2017, more specifically from the second class of the course, given on December 7, 2016 and conducted by Professor Tsiomis, under the title “Les Cours d’architecture by Georges Candilis à l’École des Beaux-Arts: 1966-1969. Entre la politique et l’anthropologie”. Part of the information presented herein was published in an interview granted by Tsiomis to Caroline Maniaque, Éléonore Marantz and Jean-Louis Violeau (2019). MANIAQUE, C.; MARANTZ, E.; VIOLEAU, J-L. Yannis Tsiomis, figure de l’architecte-intellectuel. Entretien avec Yannis Tsiomis, juillet 2017, Cité de l’architecture et du patrimoine. In: Matériaux de la recherche. Les Cahiers de la recherche architecturale urbaine et paysagère, 16 mar. 2019. Available at: <http://journals.openedition.org/craup/1297>. Viewed on: September 26, 2020.

22. This observation is made based on the indicative analysis of some of the biographies of architect who worked on urban projects in the late 1960s (CITÉ DE L’ARCHITECTURE ET DU PATRIMOINE; PANERAI, 2019, p. 33). A more exhaustive survey on this aspect still needs to be conducted. CITÉ DE L’ARCHITECTURE ET DU PATRIMOINE. Fiche descriptive. Fonds Marot, Michel (1926-). 325AA. Archiwebture. Available at: [https://archiwebture.citedelarchitecture.fr/fonds/FRAPN02\\_MAROT](https://archiwebture.citedelarchitecture.fr/fonds/FRAPN02_MAROT). Viewed on: February 24, 2018.

A spin off from the *École des Hautes Études Urbaines* [School of Advanced Urban Studies], founded in 1919 by Marcel Poète and Henri Sellier, the Institut had experienced a loss in numbers in the immediate post-war period. This scenario, however, changed progressively in the first half of the 1960s<sup>23</sup>, when it stopped receiving only technicians working in the municipalities and increasingly more, began to receive architects seeking a dual qualification. During the same period, the Institut changed its teaching staff. With Lavedan's retirement, who ran the Institut from 1944 to 1965, other longstanding professors, such as Chabot, Clozier and Santenac, withdrew, and a new body of teachers was organized. Janne Huguency, Pierre George, Philippe Pinchemel and Jacqueline Beaujeu-Garnier joined. Later, from 1966-67, Henri Lefebvre and Hubert Tonka became part of the team (DE LILLE; BUSQUET; CARRIOU, 2005, p. 25-26).

External and administrative demands related to university management were also imposed. Among them, there were budgetary problems and growing pressure to integrate the Institut into higher education and structure scientific research within it (DE LILLE; BUSQUET; CARRIOU, 2005, p. 26).

This double vector of change – both in the teaching staff and university administration - led the Institut to reformulate its teaching. Also, according to De Lille, Busquet and Carriou (2005, p. 26), “From 1965 onwards, the Institut's management attempted to restructure how urbanism was taught. This was no longer known as a list of disciplines, but needed to be organized in levels, in which theory and practice function in a complementary manner”.

The document mentioned by De Lille, Busquet and Carriou (Figure 2) is part of the Pinchemel collection regarding the restructuring of the Institut, conducted between 1969 and 1971. However, the document refers to the structure of the course before the restructuring was implemented. Louis Picard undertakes a form of diagnosis of the teaching schema that had been practiced until then.

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23. Analyzing the number of theses that were defended there, it may be observed that it practically doubled in relation to the previous decade, and the number of urban planners that graduated from the Institut was once again similar to that of the 1940s (information collected in the archives of the Bibliothèque Historique Poète et Sellier – École d'Urbanisme of Paris).

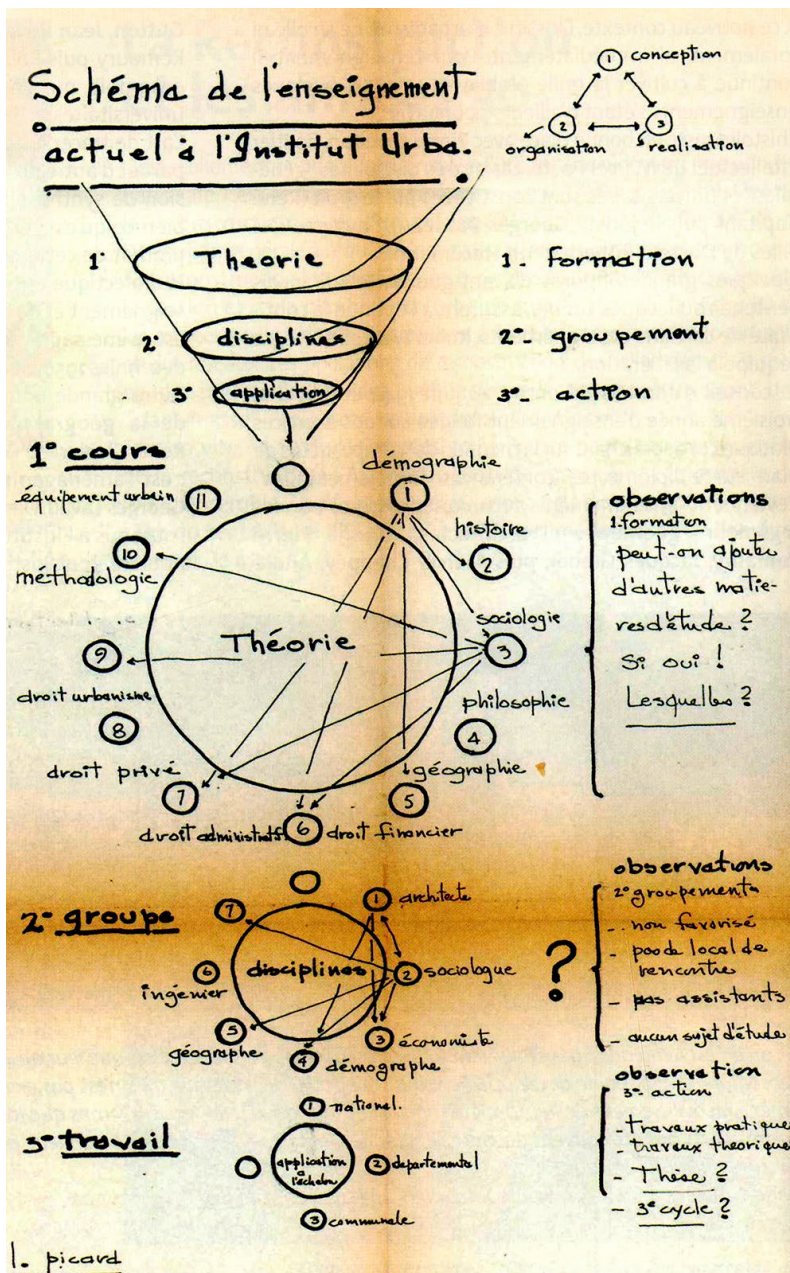


Figure 2. Louis Picard, "Le schéma de l'enseignement actuel à l'Institut Urba" [The current teaching schema at the Institut Urba]

Source: Bibliothèque Poète et Sellier, fonds historique de l'Ecole d'Urbanisme de Paris, ca.1969-1971

Examining his analysis, it is possible to observe other, as yet unexplained, aspects: the development of the practical dimension of the course seems restricted to the last cycle of studies; architecture seems to be absent from the theoretical cycle and, lastly, sociological theory and practice occupy a central position in linking the second and third cycles.

These observations lead to the consideration that, between 1965 and 1969, throughout most of the course, the students at the Institut, just at the end of the course, were instrumentalized to propose a problem or an action. Moreover, this action seemed to be largely guided by sociological knowledge. This leads to the belief that, between the social and material dimensions of the urban space, the second possibly took on a secondary value<sup>24</sup>.

Comparing the teaching in the two institutions that formed the city builders during the years when *L'Urbanisme* began to circulate, it may be considered that, if at *École* the teaching of urbanism was restricted to a small part of an architectural theory course, at the Institut the teaching of architecture appeared to be absent from its theoretical framework, with a marked presence only in the disciplinary framework. In the latter, the impression was that architecture was seen as applied knowledge.

### 3. Towards a situated reading

It is precisely within this impasse that the introduction of *L'Urbanisme* seems to be linked. At the conclusion of this text, Choay writes:

[...] Through other means, we introduce here the intuition of Engels in condemning the models of pre-urbanism as illusory and of seeing in the crisis of the city only one particular aspect of the global crisis of the capitalist society. But it seems unnecessary to follow Engels through to his conclusions. In society [...] [in which there are leaders], the particular issue of urban planning seems to us, contrary to what Engels thought at the time, has to figure among the fundamental problems: far from being divergent, it may, through its evolution, exercise a transforming, creative action within the set of other social structures.

The foregoing analysis may lead to some practical conclusions.

The urbanist should stop conceiving urban agglomeration exclusively in terms of models and functionalism. It is necessary to stop repeating fixed formulas that transform discourse into an object, to define systems of relations, to create flexible structures, a pre-syntax open to meanings that have not yet been constituted.

It is now important to begin developing this urban language which is currently lacking. [This is] An enterprise in which the resources of structural analysis will enable the disclosure of the common patchwork of the different semiological systems linked to urban agglomeration. As of then, the economist, the engineer and

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24. The different paths traced by these two formations became tensioned and a demand for interlocation with the student mobilization grew in order to reformulate the system of teaching architecture, between 1958 and 1960 (VIOLEAU, 2005, p. 25; CHOAY, 1956c). CHOAY, F. Pourquoi le Français boudent l'architecture moderne? *France Observateur*, Paris, n. 321, p. 10-11, Jul 5 1956c.

especially the esthete will no longer exercise the demiurgical role they currently play. Urbanistic language will lose its specificity in order to achieve a higher level of generality; indirectly, through its reference to the set of other significant systems, it will contribute to and imply collectivity.

With regard to the inhabitants, their first task is lucidity. They must not be deceived by scientific claims, nor should they alienate his freedoms in the achievements of current urbanism. Care must be taken with both the progressive illusion and the culturalist nostalgia. [...] It is to facilitate the necessary awareness throughout the pages that follow that we have selected and gathered a series of particularly significant texts. [...] (CHOAY, 1965, p. 81-82).

As may be observed, Choay does not react to just any or a hypothetical situation. She encompasses urban issues of her time, being disseminated and used in her own country. Thus, the collection of texts that she proposes is not illustrative. On the contrary, it seems to be an “anthology for combat”, thereby paraphrasing part of the title of another of her books (CHOAY, 2009). In its wake, it brings contributions both from authors who had participated in her sociability network and from those who were the object of her criticisms in newspapers and journals and, particularly, by the desire to respond to the impasses that had arisen.

Certainly, Choay’s determinations were, to some extent, conditioned and limited by their “conditions of possibility”. The abovementioned passage, for example, explains a vocabulary and syntax clearly dealt with through readings taken from the linguistics of Benveniste and Saussure, a practice of the time among certain progressive intellectual circles of the 1960s (DOSSE, [1987] 2010; [2005] 2011; [1992a] 2012a; [1992b] 2012b), and a philosopher who followed Lévi-Strauss courses at the Musée de l’Homme [Museum of Mankind] for two years in the 1950s (CHOAY, 2007, p. 80).

Another situation that demonstrates the position that Choay occupied when composing her anthology is related to her interpretations of urban practice outside France, such as in Brazil and Japan, for example. It may be stated that they preserve much of their Parisian and bookish experience and demonstrate little actual reference to the debates in the places of origin. To some extent, they helped her to think more about urban planning in France than the other way around.

Still focusing on the limits of Choay’s anthology, it may be seen that basing a large part on an opening for the renewal of urbanism on an English language bibliography, produced mainly in the United States, possibly contains reverberations of the consumption practices (also of cultural values and goods) of the French



*Les Trente Glorieuses* and the transit of a Parisian intellectual and economic elite that established increasingly more frequent relations with the Americans<sup>25</sup>.

However, in the anthology, it should be mentioned that the structure, which supports her argument, is not a preconception. On the contrary, it is an interpretation based on a set of specific texts, its sources. In addition, the proposed groupings are faced based on the stated impasse. Such operations were not far from their periodic practice, as a critic in the newspapers, but in the book they gained a more systematic character and, possibly, made a more explicit formation of poetics: that of an author who perhaps sought to intervene in cities and in urban practice through critical writing.

Over time, *L'Urbanisme*, unlike other books by Françoise Choay, has not been the subject of revised editions<sup>26</sup>. However, its interpretative structure has been taken up in several other writings, modified or expanded with each new text or object of study. It may be observed, for example, that the writings of Haussman, Cerdà and Alberti only became the object of Choay's interpretation sometime after the publication of the anthology and, in addition to becoming central in her approach to urbanism, gave rise to other interpretive architectures.

At the same time, as new questions of the present time emerged, Choay did not abandon it at all. Regarding the models outlined in *L'Urbanisme*, although the naturalist model became less and less an object of reflection (CHOAY apud PAQUOT, 1994b, p. 3), in her later writings the tension between progressivism and culturalism, with other names, remained present, as in *Pour une anthropologie de l'espace* [Towards an anthropology of space] (CHOAY, [2004] 2006), in which both the *fetishization* of heritage and the relationship of the city and society with cyberspace are addressed.

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25. As set out at the beginning of our explanation, the present research was limited to consulting Brazilian and French collections. It should be noted, however, that specific forays into US archives could bring forth interesting material to better include Choay's attention to English-speaking authors. Her interlocution with the publisher Braziller is indicative of this possible research (in the abovementioned letters she exchanged with Le Corbusier, F. Choay informed him of passing through New York for a meeting with its editors, after having been in Brazil in 1959) and her trips as a visiting professor at Princeton University (1971), Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1971), University of Milwaukee (1972), Coop Union NY (1973) and Cornell University (1982; 1987) Cf. CORNELL CHRONICLE, 1982, p. 2; 1987, p. 7. CORNELL CHRONICLE. Architectural Lectures Plannes, Ithaca, p. 2, 7 out. 1982. Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/1813/25034>. Viewed on: January 9, 2021. CORNELL CHRONICLE. Choay to give White lecture. Ithaca, p. Jan. 7, 29. 1987. Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/1813/25225>. Viewed on: January 9, 2021.

26. Perhaps the main example of having a taste for successive updates of her books may be found in her thèse d'état, *La Cité du désir et la ville modèle. Essai sur l'instauration textuelle de la ville* (1978), which, with some structural changes (among the most visible is the title), gave shape to the book *La Règle et le modèle. Sur la théorie de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme* (1980) and which, in 1996, would gain a "revised and corrected" edition.

As this article has attempted to demonstrate, Françoise Choay herself was not concerned with leaving *L'Urbanisme* as a monolithic, static piece. On the contrary, in the texts that followed it seems to have remained open, attentive and reactive to sources as yet unexplored and to the new impasses of urban practice. Distant, therefore, from the image that many built by not taking into account the “evolutions” of the author, as stated by Paquot (2019).

To paraphrase Choay herself when writing about Alberti, it is hoped that this text has managed to make an author’s intellectual operation come to light within her culture, in her time. Although apparently contradictory, it is hoped that the situated reading of *L'Urbanisme* has contributed in such a manner so that references, apparently aged or dated, have caused “[...] the actuality of the theoretical approach to be brought to the fore [...]” (CHOAY, [2004] 2006, p. 380) by Françoise Choay herself in her anthology.

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**Submitted:** September 29, 2020.

**Approved:** March 29, 2021.

**How to cite:** PEIXOTO, P. A. Towards a situated reading of *L'Urbanisme, utopies et réalités. Une anthologie* (1965), organized by Françoise Choay. *Revista brasileira de estudos urbanos e regionais*. v. 23, E202117en, 2021. DOI 10.22296/2317-1529.rbeur.202117en.

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