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La Cité That Care Forgot: Public Housing and the Perception of 'Ordinary Modernism' in Paris and New Orleans

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LA CITÉ THAT CARE FORGOT: PUBLIC HOUSING AND THE PERCEPTION OF
'ORDINARY MODERNISM' IN PARIS AND NEW ORLEANS
BROOKS CAMERON PIPER

A DEPARTMENT HONORS THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE
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Introduction

The Lafitte housing complex in New Orleans, Louisiana and the Barre Balzac apartment tower outside Paris typified the ordinary modernism that transformed cities around the world in the mid-twentieth century. I use the term “ordinary modernism” to refer specifically to buildings that exhibit characteristics of modern architecture, but lack the pedigree of iconic buildings designed by famous architects for illustrious clients. Lafitte and Balzac were public housing projects, possessing neither the opulence of a private villa nor the grandeur of a house of parliament. Although contemporary scholars and new residents alike admired the projects for their modernity at their construction, housing authorities later destroyed them. Policymakers, conflating the buildings themselves with the socio-political problems their residents faced, turned to demolition as a solution. However, preservationists today once again understand “ordinary” buildings like Lafitte and Balzac as architecturally innovative and significant and are making efforts to save and preserve them. As the status of modern buildings redefines itself, and preservationists attempt to restore and protect buildings like public housing projects, they must reconcile the artistic elitism associated with both modern architecture and preserved structures with the buildings’ egalitarian legacies.

R&P Farnsworth Contractors constructed the Lafitte public housing complex in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1941 and the New Orleans Housing authority demolished the original buildings in 2008. Rather than an architect or group of architects, newspapers credited the contracting firm with Lafitte’s construction. The firm arranged the two and three-story brick buildings in a series of horseshoe-shaped clusters around central public spaces shaded by oak trees. Craftsmen evoked vernacular architecture through terra cotta roofs and cast iron balconies.

In their design, the architects responsible for the complex employed Ebenezer Howard's modern methods of planning, as he described them in his books about the Garden City. Howard envisioned a decentralized city that prioritized communal interaction and access to green space. Lafitte's architects aspired to make clean, modern housing accessible to working class New Orleanians. Howard's model offered a template for design which fostered community and contributed to residents' quality of life. The locally significant architecture of brick townhouses in the French Quarter inspired Lafitte's designers as they constructed the buildings. The Lafitte housing complex reflected the relationship between new ways of conceiving urban form and vernacular traditions.

The Barre Balzac, a sixteen-story concrete public housing block with rigidly geometric fenestration patterns, stood until 2011 in La Courneuve, outside of Paris in the *Cité des Quatre Mille*, a larger public housing complex composed of many high-rise towers. Under the direction of Clement Tambouré and Henri-Charles Delacroix, construction workers completed the tower in 1963 and it opened in 1964. Erected during France's postwar construction boom, when the French government funded the creation of public housing was across France, Balzac met Paris's growing need for housing in the midst of the nation's economic and demographic expansion. The building's design evoked Le Corbusier's plans for *The Radiant City*, in which the Swiss architect reimagined the city as a series of high-rise towers that provided housing and office space for inhabitants in separate buildings. The higher density of these towers allowed for land below to be used as green space. The apartments within the towers, with their walls of glass, supplied residents with abundant natural light. Balzac employed Le Corbusier's theories in order to provide its residents with modern, efficient, and comfortable housing. Tambouré and Delacroix,

through Barre Balzac, utilized Le Corbusier's modern architectural theories to construct housing and meet the demands of real world situations.

The housing developments developed a stigma over time in the eyes of scholars and the public due to socio-political conditions: an increase in poverty, a decrease in opportunity, and high crime rates. Authorities demolished both projects because of these deeply negative associations in the public eye and the resulting opportunity for demolition to appear as a solution. The difference in the two developments' formal appearance and location further articulates the story the buildings tell about changing attitudes toward modernism, attitudes that are not limited to one location nor to one visual style. The histories of Lafitte and Balzac testify that scholarly and public attitudes toward modern architecture evolved in their evaluation of its artistic and socio-political function over the twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries. The buildings, once associated with architectural and social innovation, grew to be associated with architectural and political failure, to the extent that the local housing authorities decided to demolish them. Were they standing today, would scholars and the public ever describe them as *historic*? An analysis of the history of Lafitte and Balzac permits a better understanding of the way architects, scholars and the public define and value modern architecture today.

In my first chapter, "Modern Architecture and Public Housing," I will elucidate the formal and conceptual links between Lafitte and Garden City principles and Balzac and Radiant City principles. I will prove that both housing developments belong to the history of modern architecture and reflect distinctly modern approaches to housing and planning. In my next chapter, "Guilt by Association," I will delineate the history of each housing project from construction to demolition to illustrate how both scholars and the public promoted fluctuating associations with modern architecture and came to view it negatively. I will argue in this chapter

that the demolitions of the two housing projects illustrate observers' and critics' conflation of modern architectural forms with socio-political problems afflicting the buildings' residents as the innovative aspects of the design receded in importance in popular and scholarly discussions of public housing. In my third and final chapter, "Modern Architecture and Historic Preservation" I will assess how contemporary organizations dedicated to historic preservation address modern architecture and its built legacy. Employing the mission statements of several organizations, I will show that architectural historians and preservationists newly regard modern architecture, even ordinary examples like Lafitte and Balzac, as an important part of architectural history. Thus attitudes toward the modern architecture of public housing projects form an arc, beginning with associations with high art and design at their construction, progressing through many years of associations with failure and despair due to socio-political factors, only to rediscover associations with artistic elitism in the twenty-first century.

Lafitte, Balzac and their histories attest to the ways in which the status of modern public housing changed in the last century. At the projects' construction, architects and scholars associated them with progressive architectural theories and principles, while residents viewed them as a desirable alternative to improvised housing. Like the infamous Pruitt-Igoe, the modernist housing complex demolished in St. Louis in 1973, Lafitte and Balzac became deeply associated with the socio-economic problems that characterized public housing in twentieth-century public consciousness. Yet buildings like Lafitte and Balzac typify the kinds of projects that preservationists and architectural historians increasingly focus on today. The history of these housing developments thus constructs more broadly the associative arc of aging modern architecture—how architects, scholars, and the public viewed it in the past, and how those same people view it today.

Chapter One: Modern Architecture and Public Housing

Introduction

In the mid-nineteenth century, English architect and craftsman William Morris pioneered the Arts and Crafts movement, a movement many interpret as a precursor of modern architecture. Like modern architects, Morris aspired to break with conventional designs of the age in order to affect social change. He accomplished this by emphasizing handcrafted architectural elements and furniture, in the midst of expanding mass-production, and referring to vernacular architectural types in his own projects, like Red House, where he lived and had a studio (Fig.1).¹ Later, at the turn of the twentieth century, responding to recent technological innovations, a rejection of traditional historicist design and aesthetics, and new ways of understanding social conditions, architects now thought of as “modern,” like Ernst May in Frankfurt or Constructivists in the Soviet Union following Morris’s example, designed buildings they thought could create a better society.² Some modern architects envisioned unprecedented ways of constructing and organizing entire cities, rethinking systems of housing and infrastructure. Frank Lloyd Wright dreamed of the Broadacre City, Howard of the Garden City, and Le Corbusier of the Radiant City. Planned public housing communities of the early and mid-twentieth-century in the United States and western Europe embodied the legacy of this form of social-minded, community-focused planning.

Addressing this legacy, I will analyze the Lafitte housing projects in New Orleans just after the Great Depression constructed by the Housing Authority of New Orleans through New

¹ William J. R. Curtis, *Modern architecture since 1900* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), 87.

² Charles Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture Second Edition* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1985), 31-35.

Deal initiatives (1941), and the Barre Balzac, a subsidized apartment building outside Paris built during the construction boom that followed the second World War (1963) (Figs. 2 & 3). I will show that the two housing projects belong to the evolution and development of modern architecture because of the way in which they formally evoked architectural principles established by key modern theorists like Le Corbusier and Howard. These evocations expressed themselves in the innovative relationship between the buildings and the existing urban fabric, a departure from classical architectural vocabulary, and subtle references to craft. Government housing organizations constructed the two projects at low costs so as to remain affordable for their residents. R&P Farnsworth contractors, as opposed to an individual architect, designed the Lafitte housing complex under a nationwide drive for public housing.³ Henri-Charles Delacroix and Clément Tambouré, who enjoyed little fame in circles of high modernism, but designed many housing developments across France in the 1960s designed the Barre Balzac.⁴

Analysis of these two particular housing developments illuminates problems common to many modern buildings being considered for preservation or demolition. UNESCO recognizes famous works of modern architecture such as the Villa Savoye (Le Corbusier 1929-1931) or Oscar Niemeyer's designs in Brasilia (1956-1960) along with many other modern buildings as World Heritage Sights.⁵ However, much of the modern architecture protected today is the work of world-famous architects for wealthy and influential patrons and often fits neatly within the canon of the International Style—flat roofs, white walls, and dominant straight lines—as Phillip Johnson established it when he curated “Modern Architecture: international exhibition” at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1932. Architectural elements of the Lafitte housing

³ “Start demolition in Lafitte Avenue Housing Project,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), Apr. 28, 1940, 8.

⁴ “Barre Balzac (La Courneuve),” *Paris Sky Scrapers*, last modified July 22, 2011. Accessed November 04, 2016. <http://www.pss-archi.eu/immeubles/FR-93027-4093.html>.

⁵ “Brasilia,” UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Accessed March 09, 2017. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/445>.

development and Barre Balzac, though far from MoMA's prescribed modern aesthetic, reveal that despite the projects' significant differences, both reflected central ideas in architectural modernism. Similarities between the Lafitte Housing development, the Barre Balzac and cities and buildings described in modernist architectural theory suggest that the two housing developments constitute a part of the body of modern architecture that preservationists consider worthy of protection and preservation. In this chapter, I will analyze the Lafitte housing development as it relates to the writings of Ebenezer Howard and Raymond Unwin's *Garden City* and I will connect Barre Balzac to Le Corbusier's *Radiant City* and the principles of the *Congrès International de l'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM), a conference at which architects came together to define the characteristics and goals of modern architecture, to demonstrate how the two housing developments fit into the history of modern architecture: as examples of modern architectural theory employed by government bodies to respond to real-world problems in the mid-twentieth century.

Lafitte Housing Project: Formal Analysis and connections to Garden City Principles

Claiborne Avenue, Orleans Avenue, Rocheblave Street, and Lafitte Avenue bounded the Lafitte housing complex in New Orleans's historically African-American Tremé neighborhood, and Prieur and Galvez Streets crossed directly through the complex (Fig. 4). On one side the development faced the urban grid of the Tremé, while the other side faced an undeveloped grassy space. It consisted of 896 apartments in seventy-eight separate two and three-story buildings that architects arranged to construct plentiful yet intimate communal spaces at a human scale.⁶ Lafitte's planners angled the buildings into horseshoe shaped clusters with gaps between them.

⁶ "Start demolition in Lafitte Avenue Housing Project," *Times-Picayune*, (New Orleans, LA), Apr. 28, 1940, 8.

Spaces inside the clusters and in the areas between them functioned as public courtyards. The geometric layout of the buildings created a cohesive, communal space rather than a continuation of the existing urban street network. While long, straight rows of houses can create narrow unwelcoming spaces, Lafitte's irregularly-shaped, verdant courtyards formed roughly circular areas for communal recreation and interaction. This departure from a traditional spatial organization demonstrates how Lafitte's design exemplifies modern as opposed to traditional architectural thought.

In this layout, the Lafitte complex exhibited similarities with utopian urban planning concepts developed thirty years earlier. British stenographer Howard developed the plan of the Garden City, which significantly influenced architectural thought and city planning in the twentieth century, mostly in suburban planning (Fig. 5). Howard envisioned a decentralized city composed of concentric rings in which residential, industrial, and commercial architecture were all kept in separate districts. Park space occupied the centermost circle, while Howard kept industry on the outskirts. Residents' "cooperation," as embodied in the public spaces and planned interactions between them also constituted an important element of the Garden City. Lafitte embodied this aspect of Howard's theories with its courtyards.⁷ The communal emphasis in Howard's planning was ideal for a public housing community. In a strictly formal sense however, Lafitte's series of horseshoe-shaped clusters in the middle of a dense urban environment bore little resemblance to the sprawling rural circles of Howard's design. But the city of Letchworth (1905-1907), the first realized Garden City, overseen by Howard and designed by architect Raymond Unwin, offers a closer formal comparison. Letchworth's planners abandoned strict concentric circles, but still favored curved streets over a rigid grid-iron

⁷ Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books Inc, 1977), 40-47.

pattern. Unwin's designs resembled Lafitte both in the organization of the buildings and in the formal references to vernacular architecture.

An urban planner himself, Unwin incorporated his own ideas and vision into his design of Letchworth. In his book *Town Planning in Practice*, he described his ambition to “try the experiment of developing a town on the rational method of first making a plan, and, by the exercise of foresight, providing in that plan for all the public needs likely to arise.”⁸ R&P Farnsworth Contractors planned The Lafitte complex as a public housing community and constructed it in this manner. Unwin included horseshoe-shaped arrangements similar to those of Lafitte in his designs for Letchworth (Fig. 6). Unwin aspired to provide accessible green space for all town dwellers: “We shall need to secure still more open ground, air space, and sunlight for each dwelling; we shall need to make proper provision for parks and playgrounds.”⁹ The layout of both Unwin's buildings and the buildings of Lafitte, reflects the significant role green space played in both designs.

R&P Farnsworth's designers organized Lafitte's clusters in a way that prioritized the green, shady courtyards, just as green space surrounded the two building clusters in Letchworth. Lafitte's designers honored Unwin's wishes by constructing a layout that favored green space over the urban grid through careful planning. Erected thirty years after Letchworth, Lafitte manifested the ideals of turn-of-the-century urban planning. Lafitte's architects responded to nineteenth century concerns about overcrowding and lack of green space with twentieth century solutions stressing innovative planning and communal focus. The emphasis on green space combined with the notion of a “cooperative” city indicated the convergence of utopian

⁸ Sir Raymond Unwin, *Town planning in practice: an introduction to the art of designing cities and suburbs* (London: T. F. Unwin; 1911, 1920), 2.

⁹ Unwin., 4.

architectural theory with a specific moment in American history, when the government attempted to address social problems through a combination of architecture and policy.

While Lafitte evoked the Garden City in program through its focus on accessible green space, it further referenced Unwin's design and theory in elevation by referencing a romanticized vernacular architecture, in this case the brick creole townhouses of New Orleans's French Quarter. When designing the residences of Letchworth, Unwin took inspiration from the English village of the thirteenth century, a historical moment he regarded with nostalgia.¹⁰ This period was a time of solid construction and social cohesion. Unwin described his fascination with the architectural prototype of the medieval village:

We are impressed by the generous use of material and labor revealed in the dimensions of the beams, in the thickness of the walls, and in the treatment of all necessary features, which suggests that the two prominent elements in the tradition which influenced builders in old times were that work should be done well, and that it should be comely to look upon when finished.¹¹

Unwin wrote this at beginning of the twentieth century, toward the end of Britain's Arts and Crafts movement. As the architects of the Deutscher Werkbund, the German movement concentrated on harnessing the industrial aesthetic of mass-production, those participating in the Arts & Crafts movement responded to modernity by taking inspiration from what Unwin describes as "builders in old times." Unwin's designs for houses in Letchworth revealed this fascination with medieval village architecture. By referencing a vernacular architecture within

¹⁰ Fishman, 52.

¹¹ Unwin, 12.

the innovative organization of Letchworth, Unwin fused Howard's idea of a modern approach to urban planning with a vaguely historicized architectural program (Fig. 7).

Lafitte's architects similarly bridged new and old. While its layout reflected a new way of thinking about communal space and interaction, the visual language of the buildings echoed that of the French Quarter, Lafitte's own variation of Unwin's English village. R&P Farnsworth evoked the creole townhouse, a popular building type in New Orleans in the early nineteenth century, in its design of Lafitte's buildings. The creole townhouse was New Orleans's vernacular architecture, a building type unique to the city. The buildings often featured high ceilings, floor to ceiling windows, iron balconies, and courtyards adapted specifically for the region's steamy climate (Fig. 8). By constructing buildings out of red brick at Lafitte, its architects evoked the creole townhouse's own building material. Most other building types in New Orleans, and certainly in the Tremé neighborhood surrounding Lafitte, were made of wood and clapboards. The two or three-story height of the buildings also referenced the similarly-scaled architecture of the French Quarter. Architects further evoked the creole townhouse by including a side-gabled roof ending in a chimney, and decorative ironwork on the entrances and the balconies. If the English village represented the quintessential communal environment to Unwin, the creole townhouse characterized New Orleanian design.

Instead of copying the creole townhouse directly, Lafitte's architects reinterpreted its architectural elements in a distinctly modern way, balancing the cost-effective use of mass-produced cast iron with crafted details like terra-cotta roof tiles and brick quoins at the buildings' corners. As with Unwin's "English Village" homes, or the constructions of William Morris, visual investigation reveals the buildings to be clearly inspired by but not imitative of their historical precedents. Just as Morris took inspiration himself from the English country home but

adapted it to his own minimalist (for Victorian England) aesthetic, the builders of Lafitte presented the creole townhouse through the lens of 1930s taste and its function as a public housing development. Unwin himself cited Morris in explaining his modern approach toward architectural form:

‘Beauty, which is what is meant by Art, using the word in its widest sense, is, I contend, no mere accident of human life which people can take or leave as they choose, but a positive necessity of life, if we are to live as Nature meant us to—that is, unless we are content to be less than men.’ The art which he meant works from within outward, the beauty which he regarded as necessary to life is not a quality which can be plastered on the outside. Rather it results when life and the joy of life, working outwards, express themselves in the beauty and perfection of all the forms which are created for the satisfaction of their needs.¹²

Lafitte’s architects prioritized the needs and well-being of the complex’s residents, thus allowing the “joy of life” to dominate the buildings’ design. In this sense the Lafitte housing development continued the legacy of the Arts and Crafts movement. Although creole townhouses rather than English country homes influenced Lafitte’s architects, they stripped this type down to its essentials just as Morris modified the medieval manor to suit his own tastes. While the balconies above each entryway evoked the wrought iron galleries of the French Quarter, they were simpler and less prevalent. The architects employed by R&P Farnsworth interpreted the creole townhouse with much less “plastered on the outside”. Morris, an ardent socialist, advocated for an egalitarian architecture. The buildings at Lafitte adhered to Morris’s philosophy insofar as

¹² Unwin, 9.

they employed a vernacular building type to respond directly to a particular need, specifically to house the working class of New Orleans, in a way that reflected contemporary tastes.

Barre Balzac: Formal Analysis and connection to Le Corbusier's *Radiant City*

Architects again utilized modern architectural theory to construct public housing in France twenty years later. Tambouré and Delacroix designed Barre Balzac (1963) to consist of three hundred and seven apartments of various sizes. Structurally, the building was composed of a series of reinforced concrete slabs, stacked vertically and horizontally to form the skeleton and walls of the building. These slabs extended to the building's two main façades on its vast outward facing elevations, which contained the apartments' windows and balconies. The architects divided the façades into ten vertically aligned sections through outwardly visible slabs which descended the height of the building, creating uninterrupted vertical components and dissecting an immense surface into more manageable pieces. The ten sections had an arrangement of balconies, sliding glass doors, and windows.

Within each section, four square shapes extended out from the balconies and were flush with their railings. These squares, each two stories in height, divided space between windows and solid walls, forming a repeated and recognizable compositional element and breaking up the façade within each vertical section. Concrete slab balcony barriers extended between sections every four stories at the middle level of the compositional squares. These horizontal elements provided a visual link between the ten vertical sections and broke up the vast façade once again. The slabs and the squares, on the same plane, played with mass and void along with the windows and sliding glass doors arranged on a recessed plane behind the balconies. Three voids, each four stories in height and two thirds of the width of one of the facade's ten sections, enhanced this

playful approach to mass and void. These rectangular voids were each painted, one green, one red, and one blue, further contributing to the façade's playful character. Tambouré and Delacroix juxtaposed the balcony railings' plane with the recessed plane to add further visual interest. The ground floor served as the building's entrance and thus contained no apartments.

The architects responded to the façade's vastness and its risk of visual monotony by breaking the surface up both vertically and horizontally, employing varied planes, and by including colored voids. Balzac stood apart from other buildings within the *Cité des Quatre Mille* which had visually overwhelming and monotonous façades (Fig. 9). In designing Balzac's façade, the building's architects went a step further than those of other hurried postwar housing construction projects and utilized a visual language fundamental to French architectural modernism of the preceding decade. Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation* (1947-52, Marseille) best represents this visual language. The *Unité's* façade also used the concrete slab to form its principle visual elements, and relied on a similar play of flush and recessed planes (Fig. 10). Though the organization of the two façades varies greatly, they are united in their playful approach, manipulation of height, and sporadic employment of color.

In addition to Barre Balzac's formal relationship to Le Corbusier's buildings, established by a similar emphasis on the structural possibilities of reinforced concrete and modularity, the housing block also evoked the Swiss architect's writings and illustrations. In his book, *The Radiant City*, originally published in 1933, Le Corbusier envisioned a futuristic city of self-sustaining high-rises and high-speed roads, with the higher density of living allowing for expanded parklands and more sunlight. In the 1930s, Le Corbusier was reacting against the overcrowding and poor hygiene of nineteenth-century Paris that largely defined his contemporary built environment, and a government that was doing little to alter it. He saw a

reinvention of the city based on modernist principles and driven by government authority as the obvious and inevitable solution to urban woes. Le Corbusier expressed this vision: “The City of Light that will dispel the miasmas of anxiety now darkening our lives, that will succeed the twilight of despair we live in at the present, exists on paper. We are only working for a ‘yes’ from a government with the will and determination to see it through.”¹³ The *Cité des Quatre Mille*, as a government-funded community of high-rises, thus represented the fruition of plans and hopes from well before the housing crisis of the 1950s and 1960s.

Formally, Balzac’s architects departed from the “twilight of despair” that Le Corbusier spoke of. Unlike the mixed-use, five to seven story buildings that lined the streets of interwar Paris or the small detached *pavillons* that dominated construction after World War I, Barre Balzac, a skyscraper, set apart from Paris’s urban fabric, replaced the traditional Parisian streetscape with long corridors linked by elevators. Le Corbusier addressed this scenario, at the time hypothetical, by proposing a new conception of the street: “Most of the city’s streets will be inside the buildings. There will be twelve or fifteen of them, one on top of the other, the highest being forty-seven meters above ground level.”¹⁴ At a height of fifty-three meters and containing fifteen residential floors, Barre Balzac did not stray far from this vision. Its arrangement can be considered in an altogether different light when one thinks of the building not as one tower containing over three-hundred units, but as a collection of fifteen “streets,” each harboring its own community. Balzac thus represented a desire not to destroy the urban neighborhood, but to adapt it to the possibilities and needs of modern times.

¹³ Le Corbusier, *The radiant city; elements of a doctrine of urbanism to be used as the basis of our machine-age civilization* (Phoenix, AZ: Orion Press, 1967), 94.

¹⁴ Le Corbusier, 114.

Le Corbusier illustrated his “streets in the sky” in *The Radiant City* (Fig. 11). In one image, he presented a series of buildings that resemble the Barre Balzac in their stacked appearance and immense elongated facades. The trees in the image illustrate another important element of Le Corbusier’s revolutionary new city, expanding green spaces. He described this goal, “The *earth itself* will be occupied by lawns, trees, sports, and playgrounds.”¹⁵ While Tambouré and Delacroix didn’t match his desired ratio of approximately 1:9 of built space to park space, they did include playgrounds, sports grounds, and greenery in their design in a way that was absent in the old city and certainly absent in Paris’s slums. In this way and in others, Barre Balzac embodied the changes Le Corbusier advocated for in domestic architecture. He and other architects and urbanists of the interwar years sought to bring about great change not only in aesthetics, but also in daily life.

The egalitarian concept of using architecture to make decent housing available to the working class was central to the ideals of Le Corbusier and other thinkers and architects of the modern movement. In 1914-15, at the beginning of WWI, Le Corbusier designed the “Dom-ino” house, which was made of concrete slabs and could be easily and cheaply reproduced to provide housing for those whose homes were damaged or destroyed.¹⁶ Tambouré and Delacroix approached standardization and reproducibility in a similar way when they designed Balzac’s reinforced concrete structure. The cheap costs associated with this type of construction allowed them to include modern amenities. Behind the concrete balconies and geometric façade were apartments with ample natural light, showers, indoor toilets, running water, central heat, and a varying number of bedrooms based on family size.¹⁷ In the early 1950s, before France’s postwar

¹⁵ Le Corbusier, 108.

¹⁶ Curtis, 84.

¹⁷ Pierre Merlin, *Des grands ensembles aux cités : l’avenir d’une utopie* (Paris: Ellipses, 2012), 4.

construction boom, 29% of the nation's population lived in substandard conditions, 90% of homes lacked an indoor shower or bathtub, and just 58% had running water.¹⁸ Barre Balzac offered its residents a way of life that was for them, modern and even luxurious. Reflecting on the importance of natural light in his new form of housing, Le Corbusier explained how “once inside his home, [the] city dweller, through the sheet of glass that constitutes an entire wall of the apartment, can look out on a magnificent vista of parks, of space and light and sun, stretching out below him (and I am talking about the average worker, not about millionaires).”¹⁹ This element was easily identified in Barre Balzac's design, through the balconies and glass visible in its facade. Such features defined the character of its interior spaces, as well as the inhabitants' relationship with the outdoors. In any case, the improvised housing where many resided before Balzac, certainly featured neither balconies nor sliding glass doors. Balzac's architects realized Le Corbusier's hopes to extend light and air to “the average worker.”

Le Corbusier established six key topics to be discussed at the first *CIAM (Congrès Internationale de l'Architecture Moderne)* in 1928: “modern architectural expression, standardization, hygiene, urbanism, primary school education, governments and the modern architectural debate.”²⁰ Tambouré and Delacroix, in their design of Barre Balzac, responded pragmatically to each of these issues, representing the thirty-five years of thought, debate, and social change, between the congress and Balzac's construction. Concrete slab construction and geometric façade exemplified “modern architectural expression,” while the regular facade and the layout of its apartments represented its architects' employment of “standardization”. “Hygiene” played a dominant role in the lifestyle that Tambouré and Delacroix offered Balzac's

¹⁸ Florian Urban, *Tower and slab: histories of global mass housing* (Abingdon, Oxon [England]: Routledge, 2012), 41.

¹⁹ Le Corbusier, 114.

²⁰ Eric Paul Mumford, *The CIAM discourse on urbanism, 1928-1960* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000), 14.

inhabitants, while the building's setting and relationship to central Paris offered a distinctly modern variation of "urbanism". An elementary school built at its base (primary education) also served residents.²¹ The *Cité des Quatre Mille*, as a subsidized housing complex, represented the French government's own investment in the modern architectural debate (albeit thirty years after design circles began the debate).

Conclusion

The Lafitte housing development and the Barre Balzac did not resemble one another visually. So why compare a smattering of three-story brick structures in Louisiana with a fifteen-story slab in the Île de France? This juxtaposition highlights not only the differences but also the key similarities between the structures, and forces us to question the definition and scope of modern architecture. Having analyzed the developments in terms of influential writings, one extremely important similarity becomes clear: in both cases, architects used ideas that had been circulating for thirty to forty years to respond to contemporary situations. Both Howard and Le Corbusier's ideas depended on the government playing an extensive role in urban development, and in the two housing developments we see their ideas employed at a time when the American and French governments were more involved than ever in urbanism and housing. The Lafitte housing complex and the Barre Balzac revealed how architects channeled Le Corbusier's and Howard's theories, far-removed from their original contexts. When thinking about modern architecture, there is reason to include pragmatic—if not glamorous—buildings like those compared in this essay.

²¹ *Quand il a fallu partir*, Film. Directed by Mehdi Meklat, Monte Laste, and Badrouline Saïd Abdallah. 2015. Paris: Les Films de Pierre, 2015. DVD.

The Arts and Crafts movement, vernacular architecture, new materials, standardization, and architectural modernism each contributed to Lafitte's formal qualities and function. Unwin, by quoting Morris in his own writing, underscores the relationship between Garden City planning and the Arts and Crafts movement in Britain. The Garden City is thus rooted in an architectural response to the changing social conditions due to industrialization. In the industrialized world, Morris wanted to reinforce the link between design, craft, and utility. Unwin, then Lafitte's architects, follow in embracing these concepts in the midst of a modernizing world. Unwin and Lafitte's architects also mirrored Morris's attention to vernacular architecture. Morris utilized a roughly medieval vocabulary in his designs to express a desire for an "authentic" architecture that could evoke a certain degree of groundedness and moralism.²² These ideas influenced architecture across the globe, from national romanticism in Finland to America's brand of the Arts and Crafts movement in the mansions of southern California.

I propose that the Lafitte Housing Development and the Barre Balzac be viewed as products and generators of the evolution of architectural modernism. I propose further a definition of architectural modernism that incorporates not only buildings conforming to the rigid flat-roof and plate glass aesthetic of the 1932 exposition of "The International Style" at MoMA, but buildings more broadly that prioritized function over historicism and tried to use new technologies in partnership with architecture to respond to society's needs. Both housing developments epitomize this definition. Lafitte and Balzac's architects took advantage of construction methods that allowed housing to be built at a scale that responded to the needs of their communities at a cost that permitted construction through public funds so as to remain affordable for working class residents. While the Lafitte Housing Development and the Barre

²² Curtis, 87.

Balzac were not designed by famous architects for wealthy clients, and did not fit within the International Style's criteria, the two buildings were both results and active participants in the history and evolution of modern architecture. Ordinary modern buildings like Lafitte and Balzac, rather than masterworks by famous architects, shaped many United States cities and French suburbs in the twentieth century. The fact that such buildings comprised the fabric of so many places makes understanding them in a long, wide history of architectural modernism particularly important.

Chapter II: Guilt by Association

Introduction

In 1973, a series of implosions famously brought down the massive Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis, Missouri (Fig. 12). Minoru Yamasaki designed the complex of high-rise buildings, which was first occupied in 1954. Because of the dire living conditions that developed there in the following two decades, many scholars quickly adopted Pruitt-Igoe as justification for their critiques of modern architecture, the welfare state, and liberal policies in general. Aiming to house the working-class population of St. Louis, a city that was expected to expand rapidly and suffer from overcrowding, Yamasaki arranged the high-rise towers of Pruitt-Igoe in a way that resembled Le Corbusier's Radiant City (Fig. 13). Ultimately however, industry waned in the city after the Second World War and many of its white residents abandoned the center for surrounding suburbs, leaving it blighted and deeply segregated. The effects of this abandonment were compounded for Pruitt-Igoe, which became largely vacant and perilously underfunded as there were more vacant apartments and fewer rent-paying tenants. By the time of its demolition, the complex was in disrepair and suffered from a high rate of violent crime.²³ In 1977, the architect and critic of modern architecture Charles Jencks declared famously: "Modern Architecture died in St. Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3:32 PM (or thereabouts) when the infamous Pruitt-Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final coup de grâce by dynamite."²⁴ The tendency to blame design for the failure of Pruitt-Igoe neglects to account for functioning modern high-rise housing across the world, such as Ludwig Mies Van

²³ Joseph Heathcott, "Pruitt-Igoe and the critique of public housing." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 78, no. 4 (2012): 450-451.

²⁴ Charles Jencks, *The New Paradigm in Architecture: The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 9.

der Rohe's 860-880 Lake Shore Drive Towers in Chicago (Fig. 14). The socio-political context of the housing towers differed dramatically, even though their designs were similar. The buildings of Pruitt-Igoe served as a convenient scapegoat for non-architectural problems like racism, systemic inequality, inadequate funding, and lack of political foresight.²⁵

Architectural forms have no inherent socio-political meaning or agenda. They are neither capable of solving social problems, nor culpable for political failures. Scholars and in pop culture assign associations to architecture as social factors and tastes change over time. Like Pruitt-Igoe originally, and like similar housing projects, Lafitte and Barre Balzac provided safe and modern alternatives to improvised housing for low-income residents, who left behind dreary and unsanitary spaces. They moved into buildings equipped with modern conveniences such as running water and central heat. Over time, however, conditions changed in these buildings. Once-modern technology became outdated and new investment in the structures waned. The housing developments replaced the slums in public consciousness as centers of poverty. By the twenty-first century, in the United States and in France, public housing acquired a distinctly negative stigma in the public and scholarly eye. Policymakers so deeply associated the buildings with the problems that occurred within them, that their demolition served as a symbolic solution to these problems. Having established both housing complexes as part of the history of architectural modernism in the previous chapter, in this chapter I will reveal how the socio-political context of the buildings changed through their lifetime and resulted in a shift in public and scholarly attitudes toward the projects from associations with modern art and egalitarianism to associations with urban poverty and decrepitude.

²⁵ Heathcott, 450-451.

Lafitte and Balzac's architects reflected utopian ideas that shaped many important works of modern architecture. As discussed in the last chapter Le Corbusier, Ebenezer Howard, and Raymond Unwin designed architecture to respond to specific problems. Their proposed solutions depended, however, on sustained financial support and active involvement on the part of the government. Le Corbusier's designs for apartment blocks included services and amenities like education, and retail establishments. Howard's planned Garden City was similarly contingent upon an economically functioning city in which residents had access to transit, employment, and services. Utopian architecture required socialist policies, which had less and less popular support over the course of the twentieth century. The demolition of Lafitte and Balzac reflected policymakers' adoption of the public's negative associations with the architecture, which were rooted in political failures rather than architectural ones.

Public Housing in the New Orleans and the United States in the 1930s

In the 1930s, the United States government began funding the construction of public housing units for those who could not afford rent or who were living in substandard housing.²⁶ While there was a surge in poverty and an immediate housing crisis due to the Great Depression, government housing solutions at that time addressed much deeper divides in housing, stemming from industrial revolution in the nineteenth century, when rapid industrialization caused cities to grow at an unprecedented rate. The housing stock could not keep up. Between 1870 and 1930, the population of New Orleans rose by over 139%, from 191,418 to 458,762, as people moved to the city from rural areas or immigrated from abroad, while the city's surface area remained

²⁶ M. B. Schnapper, *Public Housing in America* (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1939), 80.

circumscribed by levees.²⁷ The people who moved into United States' cities in the late nineteenth century settled wherever they could, often in tenement homes or shanty towns. By the 1930s, one third of Americans lived in substandard dwellings, or slums.²⁸ This deep-rooted crisis was keenly felt in New Orleans, for several geographic and political reasons.

In 1939, a survey of urban dwellings in the United States found that "cities in the southeastern region are found to have the largest proportion of substandard units" anywhere in the country.²⁹ These substandard units lacked sanitary facilities, were structurally unsafe, and overcrowded. The study found that 23% of urban dwellings in the southeast were "unfit for use."³⁰ The problems faced in the southeast were exacerbated in New Orleans by its unique geographic situation. The levees that separated inundated swamps from the city's relatively high ground made it impossible for the city to extend beyond its fixed boundaries. This unintentional growth boundary made it difficult to accommodate the population increases after the Civil War and subsequent waves of immigration. The city's housing limitations were thus met, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with overcrowding and improvised housing on the unprotected sides of the levees.³¹ During the Great Depression, problems worsened for those living in substandard housing. The priciest housing lay vacant as no one could afford to live there, construction came to a halt, and affordable housing filled with those who could no longer afford the more expensive real estate.³²

²⁷ Peirce F. Lewis, *New Orleans: the making of an urban landscape* (Sante Fe, N.M.: Center for American Places in Association with the University of Virginia Press; Charlottesville, VA, 2003), 62-63.

²⁸ Schnapper, 4.

²⁹ Schnapper, 13.

³⁰ Schnapper, 16.

³¹ Lewis, 51.

³² Schnapper, 26.

The housing crisis commanded the attention of politicians responsible for New Deal legislation. Congress created the United States Housing Authority to oversee the construction of public housing communities to provide housing for economically disadvantaged people and rid cities of the many problems associated with slums.³³ In 1940, an article in New Orleans's main newspaper, the *Times-Picayune*, recorded the razing of houses in the area that would become "the Lafitte avenue low-rent housing project."³⁴ The United States Housing Authority assisted and distributed funds to local housing authorities, which allowed local authorities to construct buildings on a shoestring budget. Cities of 500,000 or less were lent just enough from the federal authority to construct family dwellings at \$4,000 per unit, (around \$72,000 in today's money).³⁵ Lafitte was the New Orleans Housing Authority's fifth housing project, and was constructed at a price of five and a half million dollars, comprising 896 units.³⁶ Designed at a time when architects had both tight budgets and unprecedented freedom and opportunity to create new communities and neighborhoods, Lafitte's architects were both resourceful and innovative.

The National Housing Agency and Federal Public Housing Authority published a book in 1946 entitled *Public Housing Design* which outlined successful design and construction practices in public housing. While it was published after Lafitte's construction, it described many of the design choices employed in the project. At this juncture, these agencies distinguished between architectural forms and the policies surrounding them and recognized the necessity of supporting the social services the project included: "The management of a project is no less important than its physical form: the program of operation should be formulated at a very early stage and

³³ Schnapper, 79.

³⁴ "Start Demolition in Lafitte Avenue Housing Project," *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), Apr. 28, 1940, 8.

³⁵ Schnapper, 80-82.

³⁶ "Start Demolition in Lafitte Avenue Housing Project," *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), Apr. 28, 1940, 8.

reflected in the design.”³⁷ While the design of public housing developments like Lafitte *reflected* their overall program, it is clear that the buildings themselves were never intended to act as a comprehensive solution to housing woes. Above all, the purpose of public housing programs was “to provide healthful conditions for the development of family life, and especially of children.”³⁸ Architects intended for Lafitte and projects like it to offer former residents of slums and improvised housing a living environment conducive to a productive and fulfilling life. The Public Housing Authority favored projects that constructed housing directly on cleared former slums, maximizing the efficacy of their desired transformation.³⁹ It recommended development that acknowledged its relationship to the surrounding urban fabric and minimized the distance to services, amenities, and necessities. Describing the aesthetic of the housing, the PHA claimed that “the chief characteristic seems to be an attempt, deliberate or subconscious, to give the buildings something of a local flavor.”⁴⁰ Lafitte’s architects created the PHA’s desired result—housing constructed over a former slum, designed to subtly evoke local architecture, with integration into an existing neighborhood and access to public transit. Such was the state of public housing at its conception in the New Deal era. Scholars, architects, residents, and policymakers associated the program with improved living conditions and sensitive planning and design.

However, to understand popular associations with public housing in the 1930s and 1940s, one must look beyond the goals of government agencies and initiatives. Scholarly attitudes

³⁷ *Public housing design, a review of experience in low-rent housing* (Washington: National Housing Agency, Federal Public Housing Authority, 1946), 1.

³⁸ *Public housing design, a review of experience in low-rent housing* (Washington: National Housing Agency, Federal Public Housing Authority, 1946), 2.

³⁹ *Public housing design, a review of experience in low-rent housing* (Washington: National Housing Agency, Federal Public Housing Authority, 1946), 15.

⁴⁰ *Public housing design, a review of experience in low-rent housing* (Washington: National Housing Agency, Federal Public Housing Authority, 1946), 112.

towards public housing at the time were overwhelmingly positive. In summer of 1936, The Museum of Modern Art organized the exhibition “Architecture in Government Housing” which focused on New Deal public housing in the United States (Fig. 15), curated by Ernestine M. Fantl, who worked for the museum’s architecture department. The same institution that brought Diego Rivera, and the “International Style” into the mainstream for MoMA visitors selected the architecture of public housing as a significant artistic movement worthy of a place among them. This inclusion suggests that at the time, MoMA regarded public housing in the United States as belonging to the canon of modern art. In a press release, MoMA curators declared that, “the material to be exhibited has been selected chiefly from housing designs that exemplify or show the influence of modern architectural principles.” The press release clarified that the exhibition would feature six public housing projects.⁴¹ This installation in an institution whose patrons deeply associated the venue with high art combined with the explicit connection between “modern” architecture and housing constructed to replace improvised slum communities affirmed the strong association at the time between public housing and architectural modernism. Catherine Bauer, wife of influential architect William Wurster and author of the book *Modern Housing* (1934) wrote the foreword to the exhibition. She made explicit the connection between public housing and modern architecture:

the economic fact that most families do not have enough income to pay a profitable rental for a decent dwelling; the industrial fact that unemployment is still rife in the building trades; the social fact that slum living conditions are prevalent in cities and open country, the technical fact that we know how to build a better human environment; the cultural

⁴¹“Architecture in Government Housing, Press Release.” New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936.

fact that a housing movement would provide the one great opportunity for a real modern architecture.

According to Bauer, the social conditions of the age collided with the modern artistic movement to produce public housing and its distinct architectural forms. She continued, “the emphasis here is entirely on concrete examples of new construction which may be of vast significance in the future not only of our architecture, but of our entire environment.”⁴² Looking back at the years surrounding and immediately following Lafitte’s construction, one discovers a building program associated with newness, modernity, and architectural and artistic integrity. Public housing was a symbol of both social and artistic optimism.

However, these popular architectural forms did not exist in a vacuum, and were soon subjected to the harsh social and political realities that defined urban areas in the United States after World War II. From its placement in the halls and galleries of MoMA, public housing plummeted in the esteem of American culture by the 1950s and 1960s. An architectural program which once symbolized artistic novelty and optimism to the design community, public housing grew synonymous with urban blight, high crime rates, and a pervasive lack of order to the American public. In the 1950s and 1960s, Lafitte and New Orleans, like public housing and urban centers across the United States, experienced shrinking budgets, mercurial politics, poor management, heightened racial tension, and widespread social conflicts.⁴³ While architects designed Lafitte directly address a need for housing while providing its residents with the opportunity to live a fulfilling life, the architecture itself could neither manage nor fund social programs. As federal government officials reduced budget allotments to public housing,

⁴² “Architecture in Government Housing, Press Release.” New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936.

⁴³ Nicholas D. Bloom, Gregory H. Umbach, Lawrence J. Vale, and Joseph Heathcott, *Public Housing Myths: Perception, Reality, and Social Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 1.

management suffered. The Federal Housing Authority offered loans to the white middle and working class, incentivizing the move to the suburbs. This policy led African American residents to concentrate in the inner city, as they were not eligible for the FHA loans. Opportunity and government funds—important elements in the success of public housing—also left the inner city for the suburbs.⁴⁴ Even though Lafitte was already occupied by almost exclusively African American residents, FHA policies after World War II reinforced racial barriers and tension, further separating the public housing tenants from a broader working and middle class.

By the 1950s and 1960s, public housing had critics on the political right who viewed the program as a product of the leftist ideology and of over-reaching government that to them typified the politics in the United States in the 1930s.⁴⁵ Though public housing began in many cities as a straightforward solution to the market's failure to provide for the working class, by the 1950s it was perceived by its political enemies a failed attempt to solve urban America's social problems. Critics of modern architecture saw the 1973 demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe complex in St. Louis as a testament to the failure of both the design and political structure of public housing.⁴⁶ The modern aesthetic that in the 1930s symbolized improved living conditions to scholars, architects, and the general public, had become synonymous through the twentieth century with an “unwanted difference” between public housing projects and the neighborhoods around them. From the 1960s on, scholars viewed public housing increasingly as “anti-communal” blaming its architecture and design rather than changes in policy. The popular image

⁴⁴ Bloom, 2-4.

⁴⁵ Bloom, 7.

⁴⁶ Heathcott, 450-451.

of public housing was especially negative in the last decades of the twentieth century. In the 1970s and 1980s, social divides deepened and government funding continued to decline.⁴⁷

By the 1990s public housing had acquired such a stigma among policymakers that a popular solution, under the federal program titled HOPE VI, was to demolish existing housing stock and replace it with lower-density, newly-constructed, mixed-income units that in theory were more cohesive with the surrounding urban fabric (Fig. 16). These buildings were often vaguely historicist and cheaply constructed, with less elegance and flair than their predecessors. By this point, Nicola Mann, a writer for the Chicago Tribune, described public housing as the subject of “provocative headlines, dramatic photographs, [and] sensational imagery” and she declared further that housing projects “get mythologized in late twentieth-century visual culture as sites that truly deserve to be demolished.”⁴⁸ The writers of the book *Public Housing Myths* argue in summation of their introduction, “Popular opinion rarely views public housing as simply one aspect of contemporary urban poverty—a condition that often has less to do with architecture’s power or government’s failure than with the fact that poverty and social exclusion are common occurrences around the globe.”⁴⁹ This statement offers perhaps the most insight as to why housing authorities across United States demolished projects like Lafitte in the past few decades. It is easy to blame architectural form for deeply systematic problems for one reason above all: buildings *can* be demolished in a day, with the fanfare of dynamite and wrecking balls. Cyclical poverty and social exclusion cannot.

Lafitte’s demolition in 2008 followed hurricane Katrina and the widespread damage it caused across New Orleans in August of 2005. While Lafitte sustained only minor damage

⁴⁷ Bloom, 8-11.

⁴⁸ Bloom, 13.

⁴⁹ Bloom, 19.

during the storm due to its location on relatively high ground and sturdy construction, city leaders used the storm damage to justify the demolition of housing projects across the city. Lafitte was in fact the last of the so-called “Big Four” public housing projects in New Orleans to face the wrecking ball when it was finally demolished. The hesitation to demolish the complex was due in part to the vocal support of architectural preservationists, former residents, and urban planners. Walter Gallas, head of the New Orleans field office for the National Trust for Historic Preservation described the project as being “given the most care in terms of its design: the brickwork, the detailing of its tile roofs, even the ironwork on those porches...” And yet the architecture could not fully lift Lafitte out of the deteriorating conditions plaguing public housing across America. Seven people were murdered within the development in 2004, the year before the storm. In spite of the sense of community that residents observed—it was considered by many as New Orleans’s *best* project—in spite of its reputation as a “hub of culture,” and in spite of the shelter it offered thousands for the better part of a century,⁵⁰ Mayor Ray Nagin signed the bill to demolish Lafitte, and the buildings have since been replaced with vinyl-clad mock historic low-rise units, designed to look like any southeastern suburb.⁵¹

Post WWII Public Housing in France

Barre Balzac emerged from a historical context that, while it was quite different from that of the southern United States, bore notable similarities to the history of the Lafitte Housing

⁵⁰ Katy Reckdahl, “Lafitte Demolition Permit Unsigned,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), last modified 12 March, 2008, Accessed January 11, 2017. http://blog.nola.com/updates/2008/03/katrinamas_damage_to_lafitte_cal.html.

⁵¹ Reckdahl.

Projects. Lacking sufficient affordable housing stock to meet a growing demand, Paris inaugurated its first public housing development or HBM (*habitations à bon marché*) in 1890.⁵² After World War I, new demographic patterns and challenges strained the already limited stock of affordable housing. From northern France, many people flocked to Paris and its environs after their own homes were destroyed during the fighting. Another wave of migrants arrived to fill the posts of workers lost to the war. There was also an influx of immigrants from nations damaged or destabilized during the war, as well as from French colonies, especially Algeria. These new *Parisiens* found a city that few could afford to live in, and therefore established themselves in the surrounding suburban communities of Île-de-France, known as the *banlieue*. The region grew by 1.38 million between 1911 and 1936, and this growth took place overwhelmingly in the *banlieue*, as the central city remained out of reach for the working class. Most newcomers to Île-de-France haphazardly constructed small single-family dwellings known as *pavillons* in increasingly distant locales, as the state neglected to intervene directly in the housing crisis. The poorest of the poor however, who lacked the resources to construct even a modest home, were left to squat in abandoned apartments, or seek shelter in improvised housing communities.⁵³

After World War II, the housing situation in Paris worsened once again. Many of the factors that contributed to the housing crisis after the First World War still applied, in addition to the dearth of construction of new housing during the Great Depression and during the war. Over 500,000 housing units were destroyed in Paris over the course of the war, and one and a half million were damaged. The city's depleted housing stock was ill-prepared for the demographic shifts caused by the large numbers of people from the countryside who moved to the city after

⁵² Marissa Ellis Plouin. "Chicken Coops and Machines of Interminable Errors: A history of the *Grands Ensembles* in Parisian Suburbs." *Berkeley Planning Journal* 20 (2007): 46.

⁵³ Plouin, 46-47.

the war, the “baby boom,” and the continued stream of immigrants looking for work.

Unfortunately, pressing needs like infrastructure repair, modernization, and military involvement in colonies in northern Africa and southeastern Asia, took priority and the government neglected to address the housing crisis in the years immediately following the war.⁵⁴

In the winter of 1953-54, temperatures in Paris plummeted to dangerous lows. Several homeless people literally froze to death on the streets. These traumatic occurrences led a priest, Henri Grouès, or Abbé Pierre as he is more commonly known, to demand dramatic and sweeping legislation to address the housing crisis in an open letter to the Minister of Housing, which he published on the front page of the newspaper *Le Figaro*. This act, combined with his constant efforts to raise lawmakers’ awareness of housing conditions, eventually led those in power in the French government to write legislation that provided for the construction of affordable housing through the Courant Plan (1953). Under this legislation, the French government gained the power of eminent domain, then created the *Société Centrale Immobilière de la Caisse des dépôts* or SCIC, which was responsible for building and developing public housing. 1,000 *Cités d’urgence* (emergency cities) were also created at this time to provide emergency housing, yet these units were often small and very shoddily constructed. A massive construction plan was still needed to truly address France’s housing crisis.⁵⁵

Not only did France need to construct modern and affordable housing, it needed to do so at an unprecedented scale. Luckily, with the writings of Le Corbusier and the *Congrès International de l’Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) at their disposal, the French had a template for what the country’s modern housing might look like. Architects across France, funded by

⁵⁴ Plouin, 47-48.

⁵⁵ Plouin, 48-49.

government investment, implemented Le Corbusier's plans and theories, designing high-rise towers in park-like settings often accessed by high-speed motorways. And yet, Le Corbusier called for a level of subtlety—the exact scale, the recreational space, and the amenities offered at a tower's base were as important as the building itself—that many French architects and builders overlooked in their desire to construct the most housing in the least amount of time.⁵⁶ In a way that Le Corbusier couldn't have foreseen, the technical advances and new possibilities that fueled the development of the modular forms of modern architecture allowed for relentless reproduction of buildings that focused more on the quantity of units than on the building's relationship to its residents. This gave way to the development across France, but especially on the outskirts of Paris, of enormous housing complexes that lacked green space and services and were hastily built.

Even so, these buildings provided the comparably luxurious combination of running water, central heat, and a bath or shower—which was only available in 2% of French residences in 1945—to many residents coming directly from slums.⁵⁷ Thus residents received the *grands ensembles*, clusters of high-rise towers of affordable housing, often at the periphery of urban centers, quite well at their inception. The complexes offered residents housing that was more spacious, more modern, and more affordable than anything they could have secured in the aging housing stock available to them before. In 1964, the year when Barre Balzac opened, 75% of residents of *grands ensembles* felt that the advantages of their living situation outweighed the inconveniences, and 90% were satisfied overall with their housing.⁵⁸ Furthermore, in their early years, the *grands ensembles* were composed for the most part of young households with an

⁵⁶ Merlin, 46.

⁵⁷ Merlin., 48.

⁵⁸ Merlin., 58-59.

income near to the national average. Residents of these new housing complexes represented an accurate cross-section of France as a whole at a time when the national economy was prosperous and the birth rate was high across the board.⁵⁹ Modern architecture, at least superficially, succeeded at addressing the housing crisis and rapidly providing homes for huge numbers of people.

The fate of the *grands ensembles* changed dramatically as France entered a different era in the late 1970s and 1980s and the *trentes glorieuses* (thirty years of relative prosperity in France after WWII) came to a close. In the early 1970s, the immigrants that flocked to France for the abundant employment and stability that characterized the French economy at the time began to concentrate in the *grands ensembles* partially as a product of recent legislation that targeted existing improvised housing communities. Over the course of the 1970s, the *grands ensembles* provided homes for many recently-arrived immigrants, with whom they were increasingly associated. As in the United States, French public housing in the late twentieth century replaced the slums in popular consciousness. Government policies also made it easier for the more affluent residents of the *grands ensembles* to seek housing elsewhere. The subsidized housing complexes thus housed a higher and higher concentration of immigrants, echoing the racial segregation prevalent in United States public housing. In the midst of economic turmoil, the *grands ensembles* increasingly became the housing option only of those who could not afford to live anywhere else. Today, youth in some suburbs where the *grands ensembles* are the dominant form of housing face unemployment rates of thirty to eighty percent.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Merlin., 52.

⁶⁰ Plouin, 53.

Far from basic social services and employment opportunities and often far from public transportation, the residents of the *grands ensembles* struggled in the 1980s. As in the United States, politicians and ordinary people alike blamed the physical structures like Barre Balzac for the social and political problems that surrounded them. In the French language, there is even a word, *sarcellite* or “sarcellitis” taken from the housing development, Sarcelles, that characterizes a state of severe social and spatial isolation.⁶¹ The widespread riots in the 1980s and again in 2005 originated largely in youth living in the *banlieues* who felt alienated and excluded from the French mainstream (Fig. 17). In France as in the United States, officials turned to demolition of the buildings as the solution to the social problems that plagued their residents. President Sarkozy went so far as to say that the French needed to “*nettoyer la banlieue*” or “wash the suburbs” of Paris. In 1995, the famous art film by Mathieu Kassowitz, *La Haine*, in which several unemployed friends from the *banlieue* venture into central Paris, demonstrated the alienation felt by residents of the *grands ensembles* but also offered insight into the sense of community and cohesive diversity that existed within these developments.

The Barre Balzac illustrated the best and worst of the associations that scholars, policymakers, and the public typically assigned the *grands ensembles*. It made headlines in 2010 when a young man was shot at its base, near the entrance. This type of desperation and violence calcified negative feelings towards the public housing in France. Housing authorities decided to demolish Balzac in 2011, and like Lafitte, the demolition gave way to the construction of newer housing units that housed many fewer people than Barre Balzac had. While it served the government’s aims to improve the image of the neighborhood, residents were divided about the demolition. Nadine, a thirty-eight-year-old lifelong resident of Balzac at the time of its

⁶¹ Plouin, 54.

demolition reflected, “It was like a village here. As neighbors, we helped each other out. Even in the nineties, when the situation worsened, we always had this solidarity.” However, she recognized further that, “even if it hurt to see it go, I understand why it was destroyed. At the end, it was no longer possible.”⁶² Her reaction reflected both the ideal and the reality of public housing. While the sense of community survived into the recent past, the support necessary to sustain public housing eroded as buildings required maintenance and the socio-economic conditions of the *banlieue* deteriorated.

Conclusion

People attribute powerful associations to buildings. As they cannot speak for themselves, the social and political conditions in which they exist invariably inform public and scholarly views of them. Formally, the Lafitte Housing Project and the Barre Balzac bear little resemblance to one another—one was a collection of low-lying brick structures around shaded courtyards, the other was a soaring high-rise slab. And yet historically, the two buildings shared a similar genesis, trajectory and fate. Government initiatives funded the construction of both developments to respond to housing crises, and the projects began their lives as symbols of hope, optimism, and modernity. In each case, ensuing years and policy changes transformed their symbolism into one of poverty and despair. Finally, the stigmas attached to these architectural forms reached a fever pitch, and demolition seemed to policymakers the only cure to the problems that plagued the buildings’ residents, and the image of the governments that

⁶² “Le grignotage de Balzac à La Courneuve a démarré,” *Le Parisien*, last modified July 21, 2011, Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://www.leparisien.fr/la-courneuve-93120/le-grignotage-de-balzac-a-la-courneuve-a-demarre-21-07-2011-1539765.php>.

constructed them. 2005 marked the beginning of the end in both cases, for one a hurricane, for the other, widespread riots.

By demonstrating how stigma led to the eventual demolition of these two architecturally disparate housing developments I wish to illustrate the extent of the separation between architecture and the socio-economic conditions that surround it. By demolishing the housing projects, policymakers targeted and destroyed the architecture, and yet the systemic poverty and social inequality that pervaded these communities persisted. Their stories provoke complicated questions: What is the role of architecture so inextricably associated with governmental failure? How can and why should these buildings function in today's world? These questions have no simple answer, but going forward, I will frame these buildings not within the context of twentieth century social history, but within that of twenty-first century historic preservation.

Chapter III: Modern Architecture and Historic Preservation

Introduction

The architects of the Lafitte Housing project and Barre Balzac both interpreted innovative approaches to urban planning laid out in the theory of influential architects and used modern forms to respond to social problems. Despite their patrons' lofty ambitions, both complexes were demolished in the early twenty-first century due to negative public associations. In this chapter I will discuss the fate of these housing developments in relation to changing attitudes toward modern architecture to show how scholars and preservationists have come to embrace even ordinary modernism as an artistically and historically significant built heritage. Though the artistic community distanced itself from modern housing projects over the course of the twentieth-century, by the beginning of the new millennium those concerned with historic preservation began to take an interest in modern architecture.

The passage of time requires property owners and governments to make choices about preservation and demolition. Entities responsible for preservation like UNESCO, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Register of Historic Places in the United States, DocoMoMo (Documentation and Conservation of buildings, sites, and neighborhoods of the Modern Movement), and the *Monuments Nationaux* in France have awarded historical status to multiple modern buildings and today are forced to develop and refine criteria to decide *which* modern buildings to protect. This is why understanding buildings like Lafitte and Balzac is so crucial at our particular historical moment. As modern architecture emerges as a target of historic preservation, examples of ordinary modernism like these housing projects push preservationists to decide exactly what aspects of the modern architectural legacy they wish to preserve. These

movements in historic preservation reveal how, as buildings age, preservationists and the public view modern architecture as historic rather than dated. This new element poses new problems, as buildings belong to *both* the artistic movements they embody *and* their real world surroundings. In this chapter, I will examine how different preservation authorities articulate their criteria for preserving works of modern architecture and relate Lafitte and Balzac to current attitudes toward modernism in order to illustrate how they fit into the broader narrative of the scholarly and artistic community once again embracing modern architecture and expanding the definition of what it means for a building to be modern.

Evolution of Historic Preservation

First, however, I will offer an introduction to the movement of historic preservation and examine how the Modern Movement (a popular term used by preservation organizations to denote buildings constructed generally between 1920 and 1980 that fit into the loose visual description of “modern” architecture) fits into its history and evolution. As architecture ages, the way it is perceived and valued changes as well. Historic preservation evolved as a response to architecture associated with historical events, ideologies, or artistic styles. In France, architect Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc pioneered the discipline with his restoration of medieval buildings across the country, including *la Cathédrale de Notre Dame de Paris* starting in 1845. The building’s restoration gained public support because of its gothic style (associated with a sense of national pride), location at the center of Paris, and Victor Hugo’s novel, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Fig. 18).⁶³ In 1913, French government officials voted into law a text protecting built heritage, with two main categories of protected status: *classement* and *inscription*.

⁶³ Bernard Zirnheld, “Viollet-le-Duc: les visions d’un architecte,” *Journal of the Society Of Architectural Historians* 74, no. 3 (September 2015): 386-387.

Classement was reserved for more monumental buildings, that could be visited regularly by the public, while *inscription* applied to buildings still in consistent private use but that were still seen as meriting protection. The core of the legislation was the protection of culturally significant structures for the public good. Today in France, there are 14,499 buildings that benefit from *classement* and 29,470 from *inscription*. These classifications not only protect the appearance of the structures and neighboring buildings, but also provide the buildings' owners with funding for maintenance. Each year, usually in September, France hosts the *journées du patrimoine* where normally private historically significant buildings are open to the public free of charge.⁶⁴

In the United States, buildings like Independence Hall and George Washington's home at Mount Vernon were among the first buildings to be protected and preserved, as a result of the efforts of community activists and organizations (Figs. 19 & 20). Historic preservation in the United States in the nineteenth-century focused on buildings like these with ties to Revolutionary War history that could function as small-scale museums, as opposed to structures like the *Cathédrale de Notre Dame de Paris* in France, which were protected also for more stylistic architectural significance. In 1876, the centennial celebration in Philadelphia further popularized eighteenth-century architecture and the national heritage it represented.⁶⁵ In the 1930s, Colonial Williamsburg marked a milestone as it attempted not only to preserve individual buildings but to restore and reconstruct the entire capital of colonial Virginia to operate as a living museum. Also at this time, preservationists in Charleston, South Carolina began to conceive of the preservation of the *tout ensemble*, a concept which included not just the buildings, but all aspects of an environment that contributed to its historic character. In 1935, congress passed the Historic

⁶⁴ Sophie Flouquet, "Faut-il encore protéger les monuments historiques ?" *Beaux Arts Magazine* no. 351 (September 2013): 104-107.

⁶⁵ Robert E Stipe, *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina University Press, 2003), 1-3.

Sites Act which paved the way for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which created the National Register of Historic Places.⁶⁶ In the United States, even with this federal act, preservation legislation varies greatly from state to state, even from one municipality to another. States have their own office of historic preservation, and towns and cities have begun incorporating historic preservation into their planning departments. Today, as many modern buildings age past the fifty-year threshold used by most preservationists to denote “historic” architecture, the discipline must address the problems specific to modern architecture, such as replacing and restoring deteriorating materials and an unprecedented scale, retrofitting buildings designed at a time when energy was cheap and plentiful, and developing a new set of criteria for “historic” designation for the built legacy of the still recent past.

Preserving Modern Architecture: Approaches to Aging Modernism

Towards the end of the twentieth-century, as modern architecture aged, it gained the attention of preservation organizations at international, national, and local levels. To underscore this fundamental shift in attitude toward modern architecture and how it relates to buildings like Lafitte and Balzac, I will analyze organizations devoted to historic preservation at various levels and specifically their approach to the preservation of modern architecture.

UNESCO World Heritage

In 1987 UNESCO, an arm of the United Nations, designated Brazil’s modernist capital Brasilia, planned by Lucio Costa with prominent buildings designed by Oscar Niemeyer between 1956 and 1960, a World Heritage Site—the first example of modern architecture to be awarded

⁶⁶ Stipe, 5-8.

this status. This title had previously been given to landscapes and buildings as varied as the Galapagos Islands and the Palace of Versailles. Today, many of the world's most influential modern buildings, like the Bauhaus in Dessau (Gropius, 1926), the Woodland Cemetery in Stockholm (Asplund, 1940) and the totality of Le Corbusier's architectural oeuvre, also benefit from this status. The organization justified the designation by claiming that "Brasilia is a definitive example of twentieth-century modernist urbanism." In 1987, preservationists asserted the claim that "modernist urbanism" was a significant player in the world's built legacy. The organization continued:

The city brought together ideas of grand administrative centers with new ideas about urban living as promoted by Le Corbusier in six-story housing blocks (*quadras*) supported on pylons which allowed the landscape to flow beneath them and around them. Brasilia is a unique achievement, a prime creation of the human genius, representing, on an urban scale, the living expression of the principles and ideals advanced by the Modernist Movement and effectively embodied in the urban and architectural planning of Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer.

UNESCO considered Brasilia's ties to the theories and principles of modern architecture, explicitly including those of Le Corbusier, as reasons for awarding the city the same status as the world's most famous architectural examples of the Baroque and ancient Roman eras. Granted, Brasilia was the capital of a world power constructed on what had been barren grasslands. Yet UNESCO's criteria reflect the attitudes of preservationists towards modern architecture by the late twentieth-century, and anticipate the attitudes of the twenty-first.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ "Brasilia," UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Accessed March 09, 2017. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/445>.

In 2001, UNESCO went beyond awarding World Heritage Status to individual examples of modern architecture, and along with DocoMoMo and ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), established “a joint program for the identification, documentation, and promotion of the built heritage of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—the program on Modern Heritage.”⁶⁸ Through this program, organizations worked together and pooled efforts and resources for the protection of modern buildings and their legacy. The year this program was founded is telling: 2001 is fifty years after 1951, a year when the “Modern Movement” (UNESCO’s chosen term to designate modern architecture) was in full swing in both the United States and western Europe. By the new millennium, UNESCO clearly associated modern architecture and its driving principles with a unique historical value. While Lafitte and Balzac lacked the monumental notoriety of modern buildings protected at the international level, UNESCO’s designation of World Heritage status to modern buildings demonstrates how attitudes toward modern architecture shifted: that which was once outdated and outmoded became *historic*.

National Trust for Historic Preservation

The National Trust for Historic Preservation, a non-profit organization in the United States, “protects significant places representing our diverse cultural experience by taking direct action and inspiring broad public support.”⁶⁹ Preserving architecture involves the public as well as scholars and legislators. The National Trust for Historic Preservation describes the legacy of modern architecture in the United States:

⁶⁸ “Modern Heritage Program.” UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Accessed March 09, 2017. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/modernheritage/>.

⁶⁹ “About the National Trust.” National Trust for Historic Preservation. Accessed March 09, 2017. https://savingplaces.org/we-are-saving-places#.WMH_9ld7BV0.

the Modern Movement in architecture in the United States flourished beginning in the 1930s and encompassed individual design movements that expressed modern ideals in different ways, including the International, Expressionist, Brutalist, New Formalist, and Googie movements. Technical innovation, experimentation, and rethinking the way humans lived in and used the designed environment, whether buildings or landscapes, were hallmarks of modern architectural practice.⁷⁰

Through this description, one can perceive the broadening of preservationists' interpretation of modern architecture's significance. The National Trust for Historic Preservation's definition of "hallmarks of modern architectural practice" addresses buildings beyond the limited scope of national capitals designed by famous architects, incorporating a wider range of buildings at a more inclusive scale. For every modern structure of international significance like Niemeyer's famous parliament building in Brasilia, there are scores of modern buildings of local significance that are preserved with help from the NTHP and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, or granted status locally. As the NTHP statement illustrates, appreciation for modern architecture is currently permeating multiple layers of the historic preservation infrastructure.

The NTHP also addresses the challenges linked to the fifty-year threshold in declaring buildings "historic." The institution addresses the threshold on its webpage devoted to modern architecture:

You'll also see stories here about buildings from the recent past—a moving window encompassing places constructed or designed within the last fifty years. Because federal, state, and local preservation programs typically exclude properties less than fifty

⁷⁰ "Modern Architecture." National Trust for Historic Preservation. Accessed March 09, 2017. <https://savingplaces.org/modern-architecture#.WMIAGld7BV0>.

years old from historic designation and review processes, many historically and culturally significant properties are left vulnerable to demolition, neglect, and other threats.⁷¹

This statement evokes the histories of both Lafitte and Balzac. Just before the fifty-year threshold, the 1980s in Lafitte's case and the 2000s in Balzac's, the buildings' had already been deeply stigmatized in the eyes of both architects and scholars. Immediately after its construction, a building is perhaps considered novel, and demands less maintenance. At fifty years, it can be considered "historic," protected and preserved through legislation. But any building must survive the dearth of intervening years.

National Register of Historic Places

At the core of historic preservation in the United States today is the National Register of Historic Places. This register, operated under the National Park Service and created officially by the National Preservation Act of 1966, found a precedent in the Registry of National Historic Landmarks. This registry drew attention to existing historical landmarks, focusing only on buildings already recognized by the National Park Service. The National Register of Historic Places, in contrast, expanded historic designation to buildings of local significance across the United States. It operates both as a planning tool for municipal and state governments, and as the nation's most comprehensive inventory of historic buildings of local, national, and international significance.⁷² Many modern buildings in the United States are listed on the Register, from small-town gas stations to the famous Seagram Building (Johnson & Mies van der Rohe, 1958) in Manhattan. Today on its website, the National Register of Historic Places provides an

⁷¹ "Modern Architecture." National Trust for Historic Preservation. Accessed March 09, 2017. <https://savingplaces.org/modern-architecture#.WMIAGld7BV0>."

⁷² James A. Glass, *The Beginnings of a New National Historic Preservation, 1957 to 1969* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1990), 78-79.

interactive map with a point at the location of each of the over 90,000 buildings listed. Clicking on one of these points allows access to photos of the building, information, and a link to the building's application for nomination, which explains the scope of the building's significance and its reason for being included.⁷³ The National Register of Historic Places is the primary vehicle for ordinary buildings to gain historic status and recognition. If buildings like Lafitte for example, or other New Deal era housing projects, were to benefit from the preservation community's interest in modern architecture, the National Register of Historic Places would be the place to start. Forms for the nomination of all New Deal era housing projects, including Lafitte, to the National Register were submitted in 2004, though they failed to gain traction. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, France established its own registry of *classements* and *inscriptions* in 1913.

DocoMoMo

DocoMoMo, a modernism-focused preservation organization operating on international, national, and local levels maintains its own mission statement and definition of modern architecture:

DocoMoMo promotes the study, interpretation, and protection of the architecture, landscape, and urban design of the Modern Movement. It promotes the exchange of knowledge about this important legacy which extends from the planned city and the iconic monument to the house next door.⁷⁴

⁷³ "National Register of Historic Places," *National Park Service*, Accessed April 08, 2017. <https://www.nps.gov/Nr/index.htm>.

⁷⁴ "About DocoMoMo." DocoMoMo US. Accessed March 09, 2017. <http://www.docomomo-us.org/about>.

DocoMoMo explicitly stresses the importance of including both “iconic” and “next door” buildings in a conception of the modern architectural legacy, and the obligation to understand and protect both types of examples. What the *next-door* examples lack in iconic status, they make up for in scale. Lafitte and Balzac were examples of *next-door* modernism; they were by no means monumental, but their architecture and the historical moment they embodied nevertheless contributed to their respective communities. Once again, for each building of global significance, there are many more buildings that are significant examples of modern architecture within their own communities. DocoMoMo also acknowledges the distinct problems facing modern buildings in the twenty-first century:

In the last decades, the architectural heritage of the Modern Movement appeared more at risk than during any other period. This built inheritance glorifies the dynamic spirit of the Machine Age. At the end of the 1980s, many modern masterpieces had already been demolished or had been changed beyond recognition. This was mainly due to the fact that many were not considered to be elements of heritage, that their original functions have substantially changed, and that their technological innovations have not always survived long term stresses.⁷⁵

DocoMoMo addresses the problems in the recent past associated with negative attitudes towards modern architecture, functional obsolescence, and structural challenges. In order to successfully preserve the legacy of modern architecture, each of these problems must be understood and contended with.

⁷⁵ “About DocoMoMo International: Mission,” DocoMoMo International. Accessed March 09, 2017. <https://www.docomomo.com/mission>.

Centre des Monuments Nationaux

In France, the *Centre des Monuments Nationaux* is the principle state actor on behalf of the preservation of the nation's historic buildings and monuments, from the towers of the *Cathédrale de Notre Dame de Paris* to Roman amphitheaters in Arles and Nîmes. The organization hopes to generate “respect for heritage (monuments, collections, parks, and green spaces) and a constant concern for its transmission to future generations.”⁷⁶ In 1963, the French government added Le Corbusier's *Villa Savoye* (1931), as its first example of modern heritage, to its inventory, saving the country estate from demolition (Fig. 21). The *Centre des Monuments Nationaux* describes the building today as:

An iconic building. This weekend retreat is the last in Le Corbusier's white villa cycle and perfectly encapsulates the Modernist architectural vocabulary. Abandoned, it was restored by the French state from 1963 to 1997. It was listed as a historic monument in 1964 when Le Corbusier was still alive, an extraordinarily rare occurrence.⁷⁷

The *Centre des Monuments Nationaux* expresses its respect for modernism as part of France's built heritage and its commitment to preserving it through the example of the *Villa Savoye*. It is a case of “iconic” modernism—a building designed by a famous architect for wealthy patrons—but its history as a building saved from demolition by preservation efforts only thirty-two years after its construction speaks to the potential to save and restore buildings in similar situations.

⁷⁶ “Our History, Our Values,” *Centre des Monuments Nationaux*. Accessed March 09, 2017. <https://www.monuments-nationaux.fr/en/Who-we-are/OUR-HISTORY-OUR-VALUES>.

⁷⁷ “Villa Savoye at Poissy.” *Centre des Monuments Nationaux*. Accessed March 09, 2017. <http://www.villa-savoye.fr/en/>.

Applied Theory: Lafitte and Balzac

These five preservation entities—UNESCO, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the National Register of Historic Places, DocoMoMo, and the *Centre des Monuments Nationaux*—and the way they interpret modern architecture are directly connected to the Lafitte housing projects and the Barre Balzac, insofar as these organizations deal with modern buildings at risk for demolition on a daily basis. Their statements make clear that they include buildings like Lafitte and Balzac, which demonstrate principles established by pivotal theorists in modern architecture within their conceptions of architectural modernism. UNESCO demonstrated interest in *modernist urbanism* in its selection of Brasilia as a World Heritage Site, which both housing developments evoke through their function and design. UNESCO also espoused Le Corbusier's architectural principles, many of which were present in Balzac's design, and even explicitly cited housing blocks. Furthermore, UNESCO's 2001 commitment to the preservation of the modern architectural legacy is especially pertinent to the analysis of two modernist developments demolished early in the twenty-first century.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation also expressed a commitment to buildings similar to Lafitte and Balzac. The organization claimed a key element of modern architecture was “rethinking the way humans lived in and used the built environment.” Both Lafitte and Balzac manifested this goal in elements of their design. Lafitte changed the way its residents interacted with the existing grid-iron neighborhood, directing focus to the shared courtyards as places of interaction and recreation. Balzac lifted the concept of the street high into the air, and established new modes of interaction, while its balconies changed the relationship of residents to the outdoors. The NTHP also addressed the struggles met by buildings of the recent past. Lafitte and Balzac illustrated these challenges with their neglect and demolition, though the National

Register of Historic Places offers a pathway for other examples of locally significant architecture to acquire protected status.

DocoMoMo's statement expanded the definition of *modern* architecture to include the "house next door." This concept is especially pertinent when considering buildings like Lafitte and Balzac. They were never *icons* of modern architecture. They were not designed by famous architects and did not house famous patrons. Yet DocoMoMo suggested that the preservation of modern built heritage encompassed these buildings as well. This organization's recognition of even non-iconic modern structures as works of art, contributing to an architectural legacy for future generations reveals how current associations with modern housing evoke those of the 1930s, when "government housing" was exhibited as "modern art." DocoMoMo also evinced the challenges Lafitte and Balzac confronted including stigma, removal from initial function, and structural concerns.

The *Centre des Monuments Nationaux* also expressed how preservationists interpret modern architecture in the twenty-first century, and their comments related to Lafitte and Balzac insofar as they illustrated the "modernist architectural vocabulary" that the organization valued in the *Villa Savoye*. These five different organizations come from different sectors and different scales. An international NGO dedicated to "world" heritage, an American non-profit dedicated to preservation within the United States, a legislative program under the United States Parks Service, an international organization explicitly devoted to the preservation of modern buildings composed mostly of private architects and scholars, and a French governmental organization committed to all monuments that preserve French heritage—all of these diverse organizations demonstrated by the twenty-first century a commitment to the preservation of modern architecture.

Conclusion

Modern architecture resulted from architects' optimistic idea that with improved technologies, increased efficiency, and thoughtful planning, architects could use the built environment to make life better for people across social barriers. At its genesis, scholars and architects identified this architecture with certain formal characteristics: flat roofs, abundant use of glass, lack of historicist elements. As the twentieth-century progressed, architects employed the same core idea to generate buildings with a wide variety of formal characteristics. From glistening corporate towers with glass curtain-walls to solid concrete city-halls, modern buildings across type and form embodied architects' aspirations to improve the world through technical advancement. When some buildings were unable to make life better for those that used or lived in them, did architects fail in their pursuits? Especially in the case of modern housing projects, the academic and optimistic ideas of theorists confronted the practical reality of policy-making, and no design could stand up to funding cuts and mismanagement.

In 2007, as modern buildings around the world were demolished or deteriorating, AMC's *Mad Men* dazzled both the design community and the general public with its glamorous images of modernist interiors complete with stirred martinis, businessmen in tuxes, and housewives in Dior. Whether it was the work of the TV show, or of deeper currents in design circles, fascination with modernism, from the Guggenheim Museum to the neighborhood mid-century post office or Esso station, is today decidedly in vogue. But can this vogue be extended to public housing? It certainly can. With the right conditions, even the most mundane modern projects can come to be associated with the glamor of *Mad Men*. But if this is the case, it seems that associations with modernism have left both scholars and the public to establish a binary: modern architecture is either glamorous and elitist or dated and deteriorating. Either architecture firms

reclaim modern buildings as boutique hotels, luxury apartments, or chic restaurants, or policymakers decide to demolish them. This binary leaves no place for their original function as a tool to improve life for the working class.

As the preservation community embraces modern buildings, their original functions are often abandoned for more economically viable ones. The privatization of public housing is no more considerate of its residents than demolition. As nonprofit, state, and private actors preserve more and more examples of ordinary modernism, preservation authorities must remember that these buildings originally represented, far from elitism, aspirations of egalitarianism. This tension between elitist associations and democratic goals echoes that of the 1930s, when curators and museum-goers at MoMA contemplated “Modern Architecture” in exhibitions like the International Exhibition of 1932 or the Government Housing Exhibition of 1936. While the public housing that curators selected to display in the 1936 show was designed to house and contribute to the wellbeing of the working class, a disparity persisted between those who appreciated the modern forms within the museum’s walls and those who inhabited the housing projects.

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