At Home in Postwar France

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At Home in Postwar France: Modern Mass Housing and the Right to Comfort
*Nicole C. Rudolph*

# At Home in Postwar France

## *Modern Mass Housing and the Right to Comfort*

Nicole C. Rudolph

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For my parents and for Michael,
for whom books are an integral part of a home,
and
for Vandana and Desmond,
who have had to share their home with this book

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# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| AFNOR | Association française de normalisation |
| AUA | Atelier d'urbanisme et d'architecture |
| CCAFRP | Caisse centrale d'allocations familiales de la région parisienne |
| CDC | Caisse des dépôts et consignations |
| CEDER | Centre d'études des équipements résidentiels |
| CEGS | Centre d'études de groupes sociaux |
| CIAM | Congrès international d'architecture moderne |
| CNRS | Centre national des recherches scientifiques |
| CPTFM | Cahier des prescriptions techniques et fonctionnelles minima |
| CPTFMU | Cahier des prescriptions techniques et fonctionnelles minimales unifiées |
| CRI | Commissariat à la reconstruction immobilière |
| CSTB | Centre scientifique et technique du bâtiment |
| DATAR | Délégation à l'aménagement du territoire et à l'action régionale |
| DGEN | Direction générale à l'équipement national |
| DGUHC | Direction générale de l'urbanisme, de l'habitation, et de la construction |
| ENA | École nationale d'administration |
| ENSBA | École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts |
| FNA | Front national des architectes |
| FNAH | Fonds National de l'Amélioration de l'Habitat |
| HBM | Habitation à bon marché |
| HLM | Habitation à loyer modéré |
| ILM | Immeuble à loyer moyen |
| INED | Institut national d'études démographiques |
| ISAI | Immeuble sans affectation individuelle (or, sometimes, immédiate) |

| | |
|---|---|
| JOCF | Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne féminine |
| LEN | Logement économique de première nécessité |
| LOGECO | Logement économique et familial |
| LOPOFA | Logement populaire et familial |
| MC | Ministère de la Construction |
| MEL | Ministère de l'Équipement et du Logement |
| MLAC | Mouvement pour la liberté de l'avortement et la contraception |
| MLF | Mouvement de libération des femmes |
| MRL | Ministère de la Reconstruction et du Logement |
| MRP | Mouvement Républicain Populaire |
| MRU | Ministère de la Reconstruction et de l'Urbanisme |
| ONRI | Office national des recherches scientifiques et industrielles et des inventions |
| OPHVP | Office public d'habitations de la Ville de Paris |
| PADOG | Plan d'Aménagement et d'organisation générale |
| PAN | Programme Architecture Nouvelle |
| PMF | Pierre Mendès-France |
| PSR | Programmes sociaux de relogement |
| SAD | Société des Artistes Décorateurs |
| SADG | Société française des architectes diplômés par le gouvernement |
| SAM | Salon des Arts Ménagers |
| SAS | Syndicat des Architectes de la Seine |
| SCIC | Société Centrale Immobilière de la Caisse des dépôts et consignations |
| SEC | Services des Études de la Construction |
| SEMIDEP | Société d'économie mixte immobilière interdépartementale de la région parisienne |
| SERPEC | Société d'études et de réalisation de procédés économiques de construction |
| SNCF | Société nationale des chemins de fer français |
| SNEC | Syndicat national de l'équipement de cuisine |
| SONACOTRAL | Société nationale de construction de logements pour les travailleurs algériens |
| UAM | Union des Artistes Modernes |
| UDSR | Union Démocrate et Socialiste de la Résistance |
| UNCAF | Union nationale des caisses d'allocations familiales |
| ZUP | Zones à urbaniser par priorité |

# Introduction

> *[H]ow recent the idea is that life should be "comfortable," that those who live it should be "happy."*
>
> —Joan Didion, 1967[1]

How can a revolution be invisible? A revolution, by definition, entails the replacement of one social or political order with another. Surely, such an event would not escape our attention. Yet, Jean Fourastié, writing his classic work on the years 1946 to 1975 in France, chose to entitle it *Les Trente glorieuses, ou la révolution invisible de 1946 à 1975* (*The Thirty Glorious Years, or The Invisible Revolution from 1946 to 1975*). The first part of the title has become a widely used term in French, a shorthand reference to the period of economic growth and prosperity that France enjoyed during the three decades following World War II. The "invisible revolution," never similarly invoked, is usually described instead by the use of another word: modernization. When speaking of postwar France, modernization is understood to signify a number of (often interrelated) large-scale political and social transformations, including rural exodus and urbanization, development of mass consumerism, industrialization, Americanization, and decolonization.

It may be that the "invisible revolution" seemed so because much of it took place not in the streets, public space of the *citoyen,* but at home, within the putatively private space of the domicile. *At Home in Postwar France* argues that domestic space was a key site for a number of the social changes mentioned above and aims to tell the story of the modern French home from 1945 to 1975.

Housing was of critical political and economic importance during this period. For French architect Marcel Lods, World War II represented a "monstrous opportunity."[2] He meant by this that wartime destruction had its silver lining: a chance to rebuild French cities according to modern principles that would create a more just social order. The extent of the destruction—one out of every twenty buildings was destroyed, one out of

every five damaged and a total loss of 1.2 million homes[3]—was such that reconstruction came to the fore as a national priority. Nor did the nation's attention to housing wane in the years following the first decade of reconstruction; demographic factors, including the baby boom, repatriation of French citizens from Algeria, immigration, and rural exodus, contributed to an enduring housing crisis. By 1975, over 8 million new housing units had been built, bearing out Lods's perception of a tabula rasa.[4] Lodging this many people meant literally incorporating them into a collective project to build modern France.

Home, that purportedly private sphere, and indeed celebrated as such by its inhabitants during the postwar period,[5] was thus also a means by which nations literally rebuilt themselves at the end of World War II. In a specific historical context governed by massive wartime destruction, shortages of shelter, manpower, and materials, and an evangelical belief that technocratic planning could create a better world, the planners and policymakers of the postwar period included domestic space in their modernizing projects. France was not alone in this regard; many nations sought to effect economic and social change through the design and construction of modern homes. At the 1951 Festival of Britain, a London neighborhood comprised a "Live Architecture" exhibition of modern flats that demonstrated the Labour government's commitment to bringing comfort to the masses. In 1959's famous "Kitchen Debate" between Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and American Vice President Richard Nixon, the home eclipsed the missile as proof of each nation's superiority.

Moreover, many nations turned to a Modernist vernacular during reconstruction, adopting its streamlined forms and use of concrete, glass, and steel. The postwar housing production of the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sweden, Central and Eastern Europe, and the USSR manifests an enthusiastic embrace of International Style.[6] Yet the ubiquitous forms of Modernism obscure a diversity of meanings and pathways. In the USSR, for example, modern high-density housing was meant to parry the consumerist thrusts of the United States; its ability to be erected quickly combined with its emphasis on a collective way of life would demonstrate Soviet superiority.[7] In England, municipalities drove the erection of the "council flats," and they tended to favor lower-rise configurations of duplexes, row houses, and clusters of four- or five-story apartment complexes. Though housing policy was also state-led in Sweden and in the Netherlands, scholars have shown how interest groups mediated and intervened more substantively in state plans in those countries.[8] In France, on the other hand, the extent to which the state apparatus drove not only the construction but also the design of housing was exceptional.[9] Top-down programs and institutions like housing ministry design competi-

tions, bonuses for using state-approved model plans, and the creation of a state-funded large-scale public housing developer worked to homogenize French housing design for the first two decades after the war.

Among the nations building modern homes and employing International Style, only France needed to overcome the shame of defeat and collaboration and a fear of decline. Even in the face of continuities of staff, agencies, and policy ideas that reached back into the 1930s and the Vichy regime, the leaders and planners of the mid to late 1940s subscribed to an ideology of rebirth and progress, hoping to rectify past errors, permanently solve recurrent problems, and regain a powerful role for France on the world stage.[10] Their ambitions included accelerating industrialization, promoting population growth, spurring scientific and technological innovations, putting the economy at the service of the nation instead of entrenched interests, and reducing the effects of social inequalities. Housing was well suited to the renewal paradigm because the scale of destruction precluded a return to business as usual; one could not simply pick up from 1939 because whole neighborhoods were damaged, and manpower and materials were in scarce supply. The situation was unprecedented and called for revolutionary approaches.

Beyond the physical act of reconstruction-as-rebirth, the French looked to the design and construction of modern homes to herald their renaissance because of Modernism's connotations of newness and democracy. Unlike Rastignac and Père Goriot's nineteenth-century boarding house, where, although members of different classes inhabited the same building, the furnishings, layout, and equipment of the apartments on each floor varied with one's station in life, and unlike American urban areas where modern apartment complexes were designated for either the middle or the working classes,[11] French mass homes were, at least in the first generation, imagined and built to be one-size-fits-most-classes apartments. In the context of a transnational adoption of Modernism for housing reconstruction, the French experience retains a distinct shape because of its particular vectors of production and dissemination and because of the historically specific meanings—of renaissance, renewal, and redemption—that the French assigned to Modernist forms.[12]

* * * * *

As architectural historian Gwendolyn Wright has observed, "Embedded within the spaces, between the objects, of all homes are implicit roles for men and women, for individual and community, for majority and minority groups within any society."[13] In other words, the production of space is never neutral but reflects instead normative beliefs about social life. In France, the centralized and technocratic state set out to reconfigure

domestic space to correspond to revised conceptions of gender roles, family life, and social organization. *At Home in Postwar France* aims to recover the acts of embedding, to unearth the debates around and reactions to choices made about how the French should dwell, and hence, who they should be. What can these debates and choices tell us about what was felt to be at stake in a changing France? Did the home itself actually change? And how did members of different classes, genders, and generations experience "modern" domestic life as it could be lived in these new constructions? Did living in these homes change them?

To answer these questions, *At Home in Postwar France* focuses primarily on interiors. Both the form of interiors and their importance have been largely neglected until now. They have most often served as a minor detail in larger narratives of reconstruction, urbanization, urban policy, or housing policy. These macro-level stories take a quantitative approach to housing, discussing the housing crisis and the state's efforts to resolve it through the large-scale production of the rent-controlled apartments known as *habitations à loyer modéré* (HLMs), or they focus on the qualitative insufficiencies of the ultra-high-density housing complexes. The latter, known as *grands ensembles,* quickly earned the nickname of "dormitory cities," due to their lack of collective services. From the beginning, they were—and continue to be—associated with juvenile delinquency, crime, and marginalization. As for architectural histories, these tend to highlight exceptional projects rather than the banal apartments into which hundreds of thousands of families moved between 1945 and 1975. Histories of women's lives have looked at the effects of the growth in household technology and mass consumerism as these pertain to women's relationship to domestic space over the course of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, but, touching on many subjects including employment, family policy, and representations, they fail to provide a deep understanding of how the home interior evolved in response to—or prompted—such changes.[14]

When we put interiors at the center of the narrative, however, we better understand the goals of the policymaking for and the lived experience of ordinary citizens, for these spaces were at once the private "hearth" of the family and also the basic unit of a *grand ensemble*'s site plan. That is, just as the family was viewed as the building block, the biological "cell"—to invoke the contemporary term—of the organism that was French society, so the apartment was the keystone of the urban. Looking at apartment blueprints permits us to see quite clearly the relationships and roles imagined by planners for inhabitants of different genders and social classes specifically and for citizens in general. Homes were the object of a domestic civilizing mission, an attempt to acculturate rural and working-class dwellers into a modern art of living, a quotidian modernity that would

reflect well on the nation. Planners also focused their efforts on women, who were not excluded from state modernization efforts, but at their center. State-sponsored endeavors to remake the home allow us a fuller view of French modernizing policies that encompasses more than economic growth, industrial and technological development, and a burgeoning consumer society.

Studying domestic space also helps us to understand attempts to shape, control, negotiate, and adapt to modernizing projects. Looking at postwar modernizing projects via the home, we can grasp the significance of the question splashed across the page of a 1946 issue of an architectural journal: "Do the French Want a Separate Kitchen?"[15] The article described the results of a survey performed by the Institut français de l'opinion publique (IFOP), which asked respondents to weigh in on the ideal kitchen. Should it open into the living area or be closed off? Should it be large enough to dine in, or should the dining area be elsewhere? The following year, the Institut national d'études démographiques (INED) published a lengthy examination of the preferences (also gleaned by survey) of the French in the "matter of urban habitation." The INED project asked the French to share their opinions on burning questions like terraces versus balconies, and whether they preferred to hang pots and pans on the wall or hide them from view.[16]

For a nation confronted at that moment with the preparation of a comprehensive social security program, bombings in Indochina, a referendum on the Constitution, and the adoption of the Monnet Plan, such questions might appear of little consequence. What possible difference could it make whether the kitchen was open or closed? Put another way, what was at stake in the various suggestions for urban housing? The IFOP and INED surveys suggest there was a shared sense that the home should be remade. That is, as France embarked upon an explicit project of economic modernization, it is clear that reconstruction planners also meant to extend the modernizing project to the domestic sphere in the interest of rebuilding the nation.

What were the dominant "traditional" models of housing that modernizing agents found insufficient or inappropriate for dwelling in the new, modern France? Before World War II, a handful of archetypes dominated French domestic architecture. The middle class and upper class lived in country villas or urban apartments, both of whose interiors comprised public, private, and service areas. Service regions were the spaces where domestic help worked, such as the kitchen, pantry, washroom, and nursery. The public quarters, like the parlor, foyer, and dining room, were devoted to receiving and entertaining visitors. Bedrooms and, for this lucky few, bathrooms composed the most private spaces in the house. The

higher one ranked on the social ladder, the more the number of rooms proliferated to include highly specialized rooms like smoking rooms, libraries, offices, sitting rooms, boudoirs, or children's playrooms.[17]

For the working class, one- to three-room dwellings were the norm. Rural families' farmhouses blended the indoors and outdoors but were often much larger than the apartments and furnished hotel rooms into which working-class urban families squeezed. Some of the latter opted instead to live on a city's outskirts, building or renting homes on a small piece of land, in order to have access to jobs in the city and independence (and a vegetable garden) at home. Depending on their size and condition, these houses were either called *pavillons* (modest bungalows) or *taudis* (run-down shacks). Most of the rural and suburban homes that housed the French were poorly equipped, served by little in terms of infrastructure and even less in the way of household technology. In the first decades of the twentieth century, another type of housing for the urban poor had emerged. The *habitations à bon marché* (HBM), inexpensive housing also known as "social" housing, aspired to provide hygienic and wholesome living environments for large, primarily working-class, families, but, due to limited capital investment, such options remained restricted to only a small number of families.

The postwar French home diverged from these predecessors. The functionalist "4P"—four *pièces,* or rooms—introduced a new way of dwelling for all families, regardless of social class. The upper middle class lost their specialized rooms for receiving, as the parlor, the dining room, and the sitting room were all fused into the *séjour,* a living room–dining room area designed to be the sole public space and locus of family interaction. The rural and working-class families who gained access to indoor plumbing and central heating for the first time also lost their common rooms, where they were accustomed to preparing meals, dining, and gathering together as a family. Instead, the meal-taking "function" moved to the *séjour,* while meal preparation transpired in a miniscule space known as the laboratory kitchen, where built-in cabinets and counters offered storage and work space for the scientist-housewife, the archetype around whom the room was literally constructed.

Who was responsible for these changes, that is, for the construction, design, and popularization of the French modern home? Two groups of actors were particularly dominant; the first included officials at the Ministry of Reconstruction and Urbanism (MRU) who had the mandate to rebuild France. A new ministry created by Charles de Gaulle in 1944, the MRU oversaw construction and shaped the modern home by establishing the parameters and guidelines governing home designs. The second influential group was architects, of course, and specifically, Modernist architects.

During the interwar years a group of avant-garde architects interested in reinventing domestic architecture as a basis for remaking society had gathered together at the meetings of the Congrès international d'architecture moderne (CIAM). This pan-European association sought to mobilize new techniques, materials, and designs to re-create the home and its relationship to the urban. One of their leaders, Le Corbusier, had thrown down the gauntlet in 1923, declaring in his manifesto, *Toward a New Architecture*: "Architecture or revolution." While World War II staved off that revolution, the postwar period offered these architects a golden opportunity; because they had pioneered the use of inexpensive building materials like reinforced concrete and the first techniques of mass construction, planners eagerly sought their expertise for a rapid reconstruction.

The interactions between state planners at the MRU and Modernist architects form only one part of the story, especially since the modern mass home ultimately emerged from a process of negotiation among planners, architects, tastemakers, and dwellers. The book thus also examines the diffusion, mediation, and reception of ideas about modern dwelling. One of the most important vectors for this process was the Salon des Arts Ménagers (Domestic Arts Exhibition, or SAM), a yearly exposition showcasing all the novelties having to do with modern domestic space, including appliances, paint, siding, and furniture. While other nations had similar exhibitions (like the *Daily Mail*'s Ideal Home Exhibition in Britain), the scope of the Salon des Arts Ménagers, which ran from 1923 to 1983, was unique to France, since it was not only a commercial exposition but also the publisher of a monthly women's magazine. Moreover, the SAM organizers worked with home economists to promote good housekeeping, even sponsoring an annual contest to choose the *Fée du logis,* the best homemaker in France. The SAM was not only a point of contact between housing professionals and potential inhabitants of the modern home, but also an actor, actively engaged in teaching the French how to make and inhabit the modern home.

Most important, of course, is the reception of these homes. By embracing or rejecting certain features of the standard HLM apartment, residents helped to shape its form. Inhabitant surveys, sociologists' studies, memoirs, interviews, the minutes of the associations formed by new HLM residents, and the homes that residents themselves designed reveal what becoming modern meant to ordinary people. The modern home as a product of the postwar period was thus a composite result of all of the debates, conflicts, discussions, and compromises among state officials, architects, tastemakers, sociologists, and residents.

My analytical approach situates the story of postwar French housing at the nexus of social history, cultural history, policy history, and architec-

tural history: the book parses change and continuity in the material aspect of homes, in the demographic and professional groups building and inhabiting them, and in the representations of domestic space in the mass press, the professional press, and popular cultural events like the Salon des Arts Ménagers. Two kinds of sources form the basis for my analysis: traditional discursive sources, taken from archives, the mass and professional presses, and resident surveys, but also material evidence, like floor plans of projects that were actually built, as well as the blueprints submitted to architectural competitions and the idealized depictions and models of the "average" home shown in women's magazines and at the SAM.

The book is divided into two sections. The first, which includes three chapters, covers the period from 1945 to 1953 and examines the genealogy of the modern French home and what the different sets of actors had at stake in its development. Chapter 1 considers the creation of the MRU and its efforts to pursue experiments with new housing, ranging from prefabricated bungalows to neoclassical apartment building interpreted in reinforced concrete. Seeking to use housing as a means of finally resolving the social question, state planners looked to the implementation of technical "comfort"—indoor plumbing and central heating—to raise the standard of living for French families. Chapter 2 describes the architects involved in MRU experiments with mass homes and locates the origins of the postwar functionalist modern home in the Modernist designs of the 1920s and 1930s *and* in interwar models of social housing. Through a close reading of blueprints, we learn that the one-size-fits-all-social-classes apartments designed by these avant-garde architects owed more to middle-class dwelling practices than to revolutionary interwar projects. Chapter 3 analyzes the SAM as a proponent of a domestic ideal that celebrated the modern home as ground zero for individual happiness and family unity; while promising to liberate housewives from their domestic slavery, however, the SAM also firmly reinscribed modern homemaking as the primary responsibility of French women. Acculturating the French to the new housing forms being designed by architects, the SAM identified a key role for women in modernizing France by modernizing their homes.

Part II takes the reader from the 1950s through the beginning of the 1970s, tracing the evolution of the modern home and focusing on important moments of change. These chapters present the interactions between and decisions made by groups of actors that had real consequences for home design. Chapter 4 depicts the turning point in housing policy that resulted from the effects of a worsening housing crisis in 1953–1954 and the state's decision to accelerate the mass production of housing. The embrace of the *grand ensemble* resulted in an ever-smaller and highly standardized—but still relatively well-equipped—apartment known as the

*cellule*, or cell. Chapter 5 pauses to analyze events in 1959. As French residents moved into *grands ensembles* and reactions and evaluations of the new modern homes began to generate national study, publicity, and response, including feedback and counterproposals from the women whose housewifery made these homes function. A new figure in the debate—the urban sociologist—appeared on the scene, and, working in conjunction with residents, managed to successfully challenge the Modernist and technocratic orthodoxy of functionalism in dwelling. Finally, chapter 6 assesses the years from 1965 to 1970, during which the functionalist 4P fell out of favor with state planners, and a new period of experimentation with housing commenced. The political and social upheavals of the 1960s were accompanied by attempts to rethink the relationship of the domestic to the urban by considering the development of single-family detached homes as well as inventive juxtaposed apartments in large complexes. Just as these new efforts took off, however, they were brought to an end by the oil crisis of the 1970s, which prompted the state to stop financing new construction directly and to give loans instead to private initiatives, effectively terminating the state's job as a developer. Subsequently, attempts to shape social life through domestic space would devolve to non-state actors, such as activist architectural firms or private builders and developers like Maisons Phénix.

A note about terms: referents for the words "modernity," "modernization," and "modernism," as well as for their common adjective, "modern," are unstable. "Modernization," as employed by contemporary housing professionals, generally operated as a shorthand reference to the changes—social, economic, and cultural—taking place in postwar France; modernization could describe industrialization, urbanization, democratization, a decline of formality in social life, or the use of technology in the home. The term should not be understood as an endorsement of "modernization theory," the ideological framework of 1950s and 60s American social scientists who posited a teleological theory of the desirable transformation of the nation-state. Scholars have challenged the explanatory power of "modernization theory" on the grounds that tradition and modernity are not mutually exclusive, that the social does not necessarily have the same boundaries as the national, and that modernity does not have a single definition that includes specific and fixed political, economic, and social characteristics.[18] To analyze contemporaries' actions, I prefer the expression "modernizing project" to the word "modernization." *Projets de modernisation* and *plans de modernisation* figure prominently in contemporaries' discourse, and hence my use of "modernizing project" recoups actors' intentions rather than placing emphasis on a measurable or teleological result.

As the story of a modernizing project, this history of the French modern home also figures in the history of the "French model" of state power, which has been described as "part 'concerted economy,' part 'parental welfare state,' part 'technocracy'."[19] A number of shared assumptions guided the postwar policymaking that contributed to the genesis of the French model, particularly in the realms of economic, family, and housing policy: that planning would bring progress through prosperity, that specialists making decisions on the basis of extensive research were preferable to politicians guided by warring ideologies, and that the state should protect its citizens equally (we will return to this idea in a moment). Above all, leaders believed the errors and weaknesses of the Third Republic could be avoided by using studies and experts to solve problems and by mobilizing state power to implement their solutions.

Shared assumptions contributed to shared goals. Like family policy, housing policy was concerned with supporting the nuclear family and encouraging natalism. On the other hand, housing policy lacked the political infighting that marked family policy. Though there were tussles with other offices and agencies—turf wars with the Ministry of the Interior, or struggles to get Jean Monnet's General Planning Commission to include housing in its priority sectors—housing policy was relatively devoid of political wrangling during the Thirty Glorious Years. Day-to-day housing policy was often guided by technocrats like André Prothin, a civil engineer who became active in planning agencies in the 1930s and traversed Vichy urban planning and housing ministry posts, surviving ministerial shifts right through to the regime change of 1958. Like the Monnet Plan, housing policy sponsored research, used indicative planning, and suggested target goals for production, but it diverged from economic planning since it focused on only one sector of production. More generally, the history of housing encapsulates both the reach of and the limits to a *dirigiste* and technocratic approach to policymaking, and we will see how policy initiatives were shaped, reshaped, or rebuffed by constraints or critiques.

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The once-experimental tall towers and long bars of Modernist architecture are now a permanent feature of the European landscape, and the critiques have never stopped coming. Maligned for their standardized concrete unsightliness, their location on the outskirts of city centers, and their paltry proportions, HLM neighborhoods in France have continually been associated with juvenile delinquency, poverty, racism, and urban unrest, most recently during the October 2005 riots. Critics include sociologists and historians, who see these housing projects as acts of hubris by Modernists who refused to give the people what they wanted, or as

acts of authoritarian control over low-income populations. Supporters argue that recalcitrant traditionalists clinging to individualism foiled the realization of the Modernists' utopia. This interpretation of the *grands ensembles,* popular with architectural historians, sees them as affirmations of collective identity and community, whose full promise was negated by petit-bourgeois concerns with backyards and privacy. In the French historiography, discussions of postwar modern housing tend to invoke this failure-of-modernism argument in reference either to hypotheses about the causal relationship of *grands ensembles* to social unrest and class oppression or to consideration of whether such projects merit preservation and rehabilitation, as patrimony or as salvageable housing.[20]

Apart from being a thoroughly inadequate causal explanation of juvenile delinquency and institutionalized racism, either in the postwar period or in the twenty-first century, the "failure-of-modernism" discussion distracts us from other lessons we might take from the *grands ensembles.* As this book recounts, the historical specificity of the reconstruction—a massive need for homes combined with a privileging of the ideas of Modernist architects—facilitated two of the state's social engineering efforts: reduction of class conflict and the promotion of a nuclear family characterized by traditional gender roles. When one steps away from the "failure-of-modernism" debate and looks at the assumptions and goals of housing policy, one can see that the right to comfort guaranteed by the state in the form of an equipped home—along with other welfare state benefits like retirement pensions, unemployment insurance, and family allocations—was part of a belief that the French citizenry, regardless of class position, was entitled to state protection from insecurity, physical discomfort, and inequality.

Various commentators have identified this principle as the basis of a "new social contract" or a "new deal" established at Liberation in the form of the modern welfare state, even as its creation had roots in institutions and policies stemming from the 1920s, 1930s, and even during the Vichy regime.[21] While it built on principles of morality and solidarity affirmed by bourgeois social reformers, social Catholic activists, and Socialists in each decade since the 1890s, the new welfare state anchored its compact in a notion of social debt, affirming a break with the past. Contemporaries remarked how war had deemphasized social differences, calling equally upon all citizens for their sacrifice to the nation, and it was time for the nascent Fourth Republic to repay that debt by reinforcing in peacetime the social solidarity produced during wartime. Consensus around the notion of expanding and adding to preexisting redistributive schemes of health insurance and family allocations led to the creation of the welfare state, even as political groups on both left and right struggled to shape and control the forms the apparatuses would take.[22]

The modern mass homes designed and built in the postwar period were part and parcel of this mission, and we see this even more clearly if we follow historian Philip Nord's definition of the postwar compact as a "pledge" that "the state would undertake to make a better France for every citizen and that it would do so not just by reducing the risks and anxieties of day-to-day existence but by enriching the lives of all through the dissemination of a culture of quality."[23] This democratizing aspiration to enrich the average French person's cultural life reverberated in projects of home modernization, too. Planners, architects, and tastemakers all expected that construction of housing equipped with indoor plumbing and central heating would protect health and offer security; further, the rational and functional layout of these homes' interiors would not only offer men and women tranquility, but through their ease of upkeep, the leisure time to develop residents' minds and passions.

In the postwar period, one-size-fits-all domestic architecture *was* the revolution: modern homes became a synecdoche for a modern nation. If clean, comfortable modern homes failed to become the birthright of every citizen, it is no less true that the campaign for modern homes resonated with the postwar generations, raising the standard of living—and expectations—for millions. Since Henri IV, the benchmark had been a chicken in every pot. The planners of the Thirty Glorious Years audaciously raised the bar to having the equipped kitchen to cook it in. As the epigraph suggests, the idea "that life should be 'comfortable,' that those who live it should be 'happy'," was new. In France, it was a political and cultural invention of Fourth and Fifth Republic planners, Modernist architects, tastemakers, and mass marketers; that these beliefs became commonplace, that mentalities were changed, is due, at least in part, to the invisible revolution that took place at home in postwar France.

## Notes

1. Joan Didion, "The Seacoast of Despair," in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1981 [1968]), 209.
2. Joseph Abram, *L'architecture moderne en France,* vol. 2, *Du chaos à la croissance: 1940-1966* (Paris: Picard, 1999), 47.
3. François Clanché and Anne-Marie Fribourg, "Grandes évolutions du parc et des ménages depuis 1950," in *Logement et habitat: l'état de savoirs,* ed. Marion Ségaud, Catherine Bonvalet, and Jacques Brun (Paris: La Découverte, 1998), 77; Frédérique Boucher, "Abriter vaille que vaille, se loger coûte que coûte," in "Images, discours et enjeux de la reconstruction des villes françaises après 1945," ed. Danièle Voldman, a special issue of *Cahiers de l'Institut d'histoire du temps présent* 5 (June 1987): 157.

4. Figures derived from yearly production figures listed in Marcel Roncayolo, ed., *La Ville d'aujourd'hui,* vol. 5 of *Histoire de la France urbaine,* ed. Georges Duby (Paris: Seuil, 1985), 646.
5. On residents relishing the privacy of home, see Nicole Haumont, "Habitat et modèles culturels," *Revue française de sociologie* 9 (1968): 180–90; Claire Langhamer, "The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, 2 (April 2005): 341–62; and Susan E. Reid, "The Meaning of Home: 'The Only Bit of Life You Can Have to Yourself'," in *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia,* ed. Lewis H. Siegelbaum (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006), 145–70.
6. For an examination of European postwar housing that traces the differing national contexts, see the special issue of *Home Cultures* 7, 2 (July 2010) on "European Housing in the American Century."
7. On Khrushchev's move to building single-family occupancy homes, see Steven E. Harris, "Moving to the Separate Apartment: Building, Distributing, Furnishing, and Living in Urban Housing in Soviet Russia, 1950s-1960s," Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2003 and Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Modern Design* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), esp. 161–70.
8. Mikael Hård, "*The Good Apartment:* The Social (Democratic) Construction of Swedish Homes," *Home Cultures* 7, 2 (July 2010): 117–33; Liesbeth Bervoets, "Defeating Public Enemy Number One: Mediating Housing in the Netherlands," *Home Cultures* 7, 2 (July 2010): 179–95.
9. Patrick Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain, 1945-1975* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).
10. On the tragic flaw of Third Republic self-interest and stagnation, see Marc Bloch, *Étrange Défaite* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990 [1946]); on renewal, see Richard Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), esp. chap. 7 on "the spirit of 1944," and Philip Nord, *France's New Deal*: *From the Thirties to the Postwar Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).
11. See for example, Samuel Zipp's chapters on New York City's Stuyvesant Town (for the white middle class) and the George Washington Houses housing projects in East Harlem for working-class blacks, whites, and Hispanics in *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
12. The edited volume by Frédéric Dufaux and Annie Fourcaut, *Le Monde des grands ensembles* (Paris: Editions Créaphis, 2004) offers an overview of international examples of high-density housing complexes. As an edited volume, the collection lacks a sustained comparison but includes reflections on case studies in South Korea, Iran, South Africa, and Algeria.
13. Gwendolyn Wright, "Prescribing the Model Home," in *Home: A Place in the World,* ed. Arien Mack (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 214.
14. Anecdotally, I have noticed that French bookstores with a subsection on *grands ensembles* feature primarily sociological works on "difficult" or "sensitive" neighborhoods, suburban renewal, and the "paradoxical patrimony" of this housing. Book-length studies on urbanization, social housing, and housing policy include Jean-Paul Flamand, *Loger le peuple. Essai sur l'histoire du logement social* (Paris: La Découverte, 1989); Marcel Roncayolo, ed., *La Ville d'aujourd'hui,* vol. 5 of *Histoire de la France urbaine,* ed. Georges Duby (Paris: Seuil, 1985); Thibault Tellier, *Le temps des HLM, 1945-1975: La saga urbaine des Trente Glorieuses* (Paris: Autrement, 2007); and W. Brian Newsome, *French Urban Planning 1940-1968* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009). Architectural histories that cover the period of the Thirty Glorious Years include Bruno Vayssière, *Reconstruction-décon-*

*struction: le hard French ou l'architecture française des trente glorieuses* (Paris: Picard, 1988); Abram, *L'architecture moderne en France,* vol. 2; and Gérard Monnier, *L'architecture moderne en France,* vol. 3, *De la croissance à la compétition: 1967-1999* (Paris: Picard, 2000). For histories of women's lives in France consult Claire Duchen, *Women's Rights and Women's Lives in France, 1944-1968* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) and the essays on France in Françoise Thébaud, ed., *Histoire des femmes: Le XXe siècle,* vol. 5 of *Histoire des femmes en Occident,* ed. Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot (Paris: Plon, 1992).

15. "Les Français veulent-ils une cuisine séparée?" *La Maison française* 1, 2 (November 1946): 35.
16. Institut National d'Études Démographiques [INED], *Désirs des Français en matière d'habitation urbaine* (Paris: PUF, 1947).
17. See Monique Éleb and Anne Debarre, *L'Invention de l'habitation moderne. Paris 1880-1914. Architectures de la vie privée* (Paris: AAM/Hazan, 1995).
18. For a description of modernization theory and a summary of challenges thereto, see Dean C. Tipps, "Modernization and the Comparative Study of Societies," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15 (1973): 199–226.
19. Nord, *France's New Deal,* 20.
20. See, for example, Vayssière, *Reconstruction-déconstruction,* and Frédéric Mitterrand, "Mettre en valeur l'architecture du XXe siècle," in Île-de-France, Direction régionale des affaires culturelles, ed., *1945-1975, une histoire de l'habitat: 40 ensembles de logements, patrimoine du XXe siècle* (Paris: "Beaux-arts" editions/TTM editions, 2010).
21. See Nord, *France's New Deal.* Pierre Rosanvallon (*The New Social Question: Rethinking the Welfare State,* trans. Barbara Harshav [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000], esp. 27–28) and Douglas E. Ashford (*Policy and Politics in France: Living with Uncertainty* [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982], esp. 228–29) emphasize the development of the new social contract as rooted in the notion of national debt to the citizenry. Bruno Vayssière sees the "new social contract" offering a commitment to equality that drilled down to quotidian concerns, such as the guarantee that the newly created nationalized electric utility, Électricité de France, would offer, for the first time, identical connection fees for all clients ("Des premiers objets de l'après-guerre aux années molles…" in *Les bons génies de la vie domestique* [Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2000], 132).
22. Herrick Chapman, "France's Liberation Era, 1944-47: A Social and Economic Settlement?" in *The Uncertain Foundation: France at the Liberation, 1944-47,* ed. Andrew Knapp (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 103–20.
23. Nord, *France's New Deal,* 382–83.