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PSY-CONDITIONING

by

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Low-cost, lower-cost, or any-cost housing is a problem in every part of the world. The situation is nearly balanced in a few West European countries, but it is grave to desperate to hopeless in most other areas. Professionals, industry and governments are everywhere engaged in research and planning, much of it repetitive or overlapping: many features of the problem are thoroughly exploited and solutions offered, but some possibilities are surprisingly overlooked. We shall try to find an internationally valid approach to the whole problem, and we will point out features generally neglected, although probably very helpful if utilized: establishing satisfaction horizons, and proposing more psychological conditioning in housing.

As an overall approach we shall use the Athens Diagram, that we have introduced recently with a guest lecture at the School of Architecture, Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, and developed together with architect Laszlo G. Koe-Krompecher, my son, an Asst. Professor in Athens.

The proto-state Athens Diagram I shows the present situation in world housing, horizontally proportioned to the population of the continents, vertically recording the estimated various living levels. The technological-biological horizon marks the minimum "health" level as accepted in advanced countries. The tech-bio (technological-biological) horizon is generally the flat compliance with the parameters of building codes and similar regulations. The great majority of mankind is living, surviving, and multiplying below - often far below - that tech-bio horizon.

We know about the ridiculous \$8,350 (sans land) housing unit recently worked out with a fat grant, and we have read about the recorded cry of the West Coast agitator: "we want a close copy of the kind of housing the richer can afford." This would mean a program to raise living conditions of four billion persons to West Coast establishment levels. Such irresponsible programs are impossible in every respect: materials, labor, equipment, transportation, time, and in money. We don't even care to estimate the material and financial cost of bringing up world housing to that West Coast level. Subject of a first serious consideration can be the idea of bringing the world housing situation to the tech-bio horizon as shown in Diagram I. But that sweeping solution is also far beyond the possibilities as to materials, etc., and even if

realized it would mean a dead stop in most housing operations in the United States and much of Europe, - areas generally above the tech-bio horizon: and acceptance of such general program would mean no other but just tech-bio horizon housing for the next thirty years for everybody in any country. The absurdity of such program clearly leads us to a more elastic solution, that of introducing the varying minimum satisfaction horizons.

The satisfaction horizons as distinguished from the tech-bio horizon are pictured in Diagram II. A realistic and honest average minimum satisfaction horizon can be recorded or established for every continent, every region, and, if necessary, for every country. As presently shown we only wanted to project the idea, without any claim to accuracy. The idea of the satisfaction horizons can be exploited in two different operations: first in recording the present satisfaction horizons, level or sloping, in any area, and then, if deemed necessary, suggesting means and aims of changing the location of such horizons.

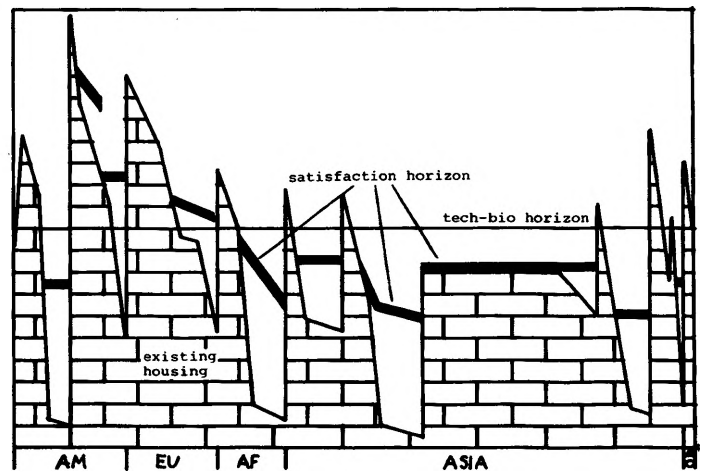


Fig. 2. The Athens Diagram II

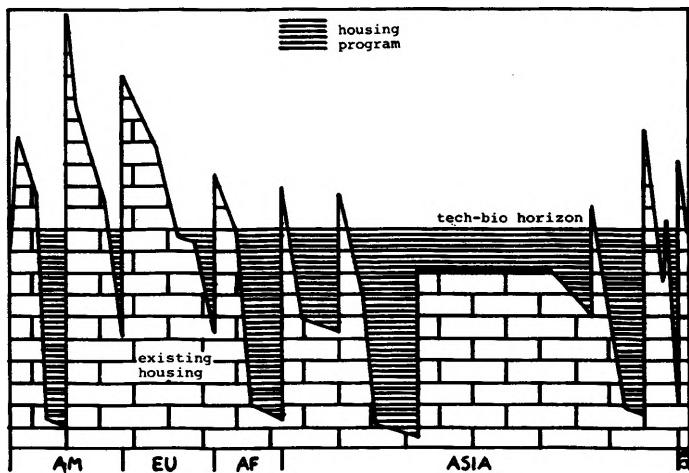


Fig. 1. The Athens Diagram I

Satisfaction horizons can be found lying above or below the tech-bio horizon. Their recording and the investigation of the reasons of their present location can unveil latent social background conditions. The reasons of below tech-bio level may be religious or quasi-religious contentment, the surrendering to age-old circumstances or to solidly established totalitarian limitations, it may be the result of total isolation from any knowledge about better living possibilities, or it may be due to effective brainwashing. Well planned housing politics may require lifting or lowering of satisfaction horizons: they may be the most complex operations in mass psychology.

In more developed countries the satisfaction horizons may be found lying above the tech-bio horizon; especially in countries where yesterday's restraining influences are not applicable any more. Such satisfaction horizons may be found to be located very high because of surrounding affluency, but they may have been unduly forced higher either by reckless commercial publicity for status seeking, or by irresponsible political demagoguery. Deeper study of the satisfaction horizons, both as to their recording and as to their possible planned relocation, can result in serious changes in the quantity and quality of housing in any country, as can be clearly envisioned from Diagram III.

But as we have introduced psychological factors by recognizing the satisfaction horizons as different from the parametric tech-bio horizon, we may as well add psychological factors when creating,

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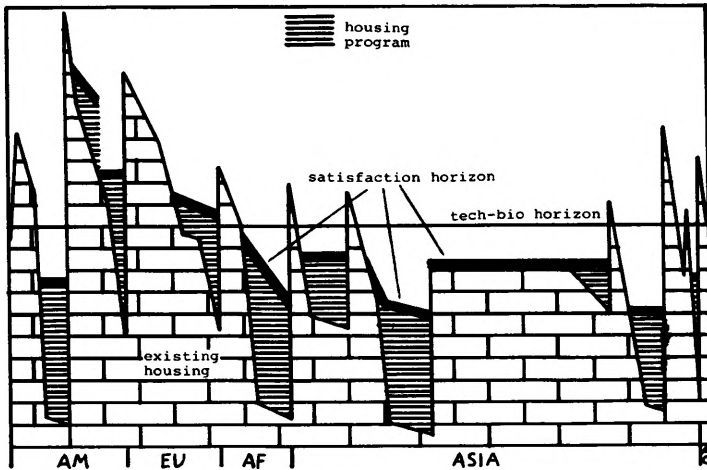


Fig. 3. The Athens Diagram III

constructing, offering the houses themselves. It is undeniable that e.g. parametrically, dimensionwise identical 150 sq. ft. area rooms - changing color, light effects, proportions, surfaces, curtains, decorations, furniture, knick-knacks - can be either disgusting, or drab, or neutral, or homey, or depressing, or even excitingly lovable. We may call the drab ones psychologically poor, and the lovable ones psychologically positive conditioned. Sanitary inspectors would temporarily disagree, but below-tech-bio shelters can be loved, happy homes if psychologically conditioned (psy-conditioned). Psy-conditioning may be a new word, but the idea itself is not new. Psy-conditioning can bridge gaps between momentary material-financial capacity and the satisfaction horizons, and it can even improve living conditions above any satisfaction horizon; both cases can be found recorded in Diagram IV.

Psy-conditioning (first introduced in the July '71 issue of the magazine *Systems Building News*) can be traced in architectural history and in modern interior design, but also in primitive, non-architectural dwellings. In architecture it is cultivated by religions or by civil authorities, generally trying - and often succeeding - to impress the laymen, the subjects. Interior decoration does the same with the visitors in executive offices, or it mellows the patrons in restaurants, or impresses the guests of the nouveaux riches; recently it started creating better environments in schools. We have found that both in formal architecture and in interior design, psy-conditioning used to appear in the high-cost, high investment levels.

But another area has had effective psy-conditioning for thousands of years, although unrecognized, ignored and misunderstood: folk art. We used to find folk art in museums. There is it stripped

from its original background, it is hung on walls, displayed in vitrines. Or it is remanufactured and sold as curios.

We should recognize that folk art, now reduced or withdrawn to a few inaccessible areas, is the original, poor-man-made psy-conditioning of parametrically low-level housing. It was folk art that made into homes the millions of low-level huts, and tents, and dens, and caves. But civilized man suppressed folk art, un-individualizing every poor house. And when civilized man today himself starts fabricating the houses of the poor, he unwittingly makes the houses drab, dead, un-lovable: he fabricates un-homes. However, civilized man should reach back to the stripped past of these same poor people, to the unrecognized, original millenarian psy-conditioning of their past: to folk art.

Whether we call it interior architecture or interior decoration or folk art, this psy-conditioning should be the integral part of every housing project. But there is a condition to be observed. Psy-conditioning can be suggested, it can be taught, but finally it has to be created and made - as it has been done for thousands of years of folk art--by those in the home themselves. Or--one single concession--by persons who can identify themselves with those in each home. Artists? Psychologists? Educators? Friends? Social Workers? - better all of these in one person. It may be a single flower shown above the bed, it may be the pleasant coloring of the family room, or curtains framing the window, a candle on the table, or lush trees painted all around: they will make the house into a home. This is the way from parametric or even sub-parametric houses to para-human homes - by psy-conditioning.

Psy-conditioning - or call it revived folk art - doesn't strain the budget. It may be nothing else but offering a choice of simple materials (paints, textile, etc.) to the people, and let them make it themselves, or at least let them have the feeling that it is their own creation. Teach them the methods, give them suggestions. Collect ideas from their religion or racial background or their rural homes: it is surprising how people are conscious of their real background, and they are proud to apply it.

Psy-conditioning shall start in the home, because it is a manifestation of the personality. If it has conditioned the home, it may step out to its immediate or wider surrounding: this is the natural creation of human environment. The first step is in the house, and the neighborhood is the second step. Try to imagine a neighborhood of psy-conditioned individual homes: it will be an individual, a loved neighborhood.

There is no talk about the correctness of the planned level in housing: it is the tech-bio horizon. Blueprints are manufactured, fed into the budget computers of every country, then hyperbolic (or hypocritical?) five-year plans are presented to an impressive public. In the meanwhile technical men are trying to re-combine new structural solutions, financial wizards conjure up money or mortgages. People are neglected.

We propose that we should concentrate on a new standard: the satisfaction of the people. Guided by the ideas shown in the Athens Diagram, two operations should be initiated: establishment of realistic existing or relocated satisfaction horizons on the one hand, and--when meeting these probably lowered temporary standards--the production of more economical human homes by the combination of technical and psychological efforts: by parameters and by psy-conditioning. This two-front approach may eventually soften the housing situation.

So far nobody questioned the level of the code parameters, only their implementation is debated: whether by the rigid lists in codes, or by performance research.

We propose to correct and improve either procedure from the flat laboratory level in the direction of the humans themselves.

The Athens Diagram, through stages I, II, III, and IV, has led us from parametric houses - the houses we are today fabricating--thru the satisfaction horizons to psy-conditioned homes. Psy-conditioned homes are less costly than parametric houses. Psy-conditioned homes are never vandalized. Psy-conditioned homes keep the families together. Psy-conditioned homes keep the citizens: citizens, and not un-persons.

But to create psy-conditioned homes we need more than blueprints, we need dedicated architects. And the built-in anti-

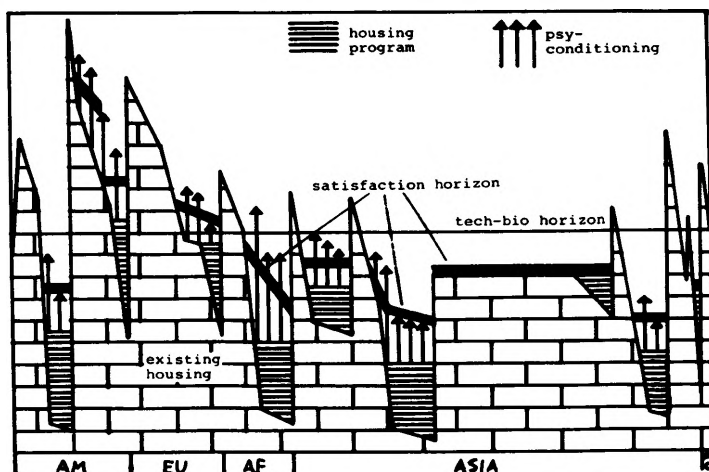


Fig. 4. The Athens Diagram IV

individualism of industrialized housing has to be counterchecked by psy-conditioning.

POSTSCRIPTS

1. We have collected specimens of folk art from the backgrounds of different people and from different areas. They show regionally and racially differing types, and it can be definitely established that some groups prefer glaring colors and others muted harmonies, some like lush vegetation and others romantic allusions, these enjoy textiles, others ceramics, and there are many other specialities. After some study one can easily identify people from decorations, and vice versa. Pseudo-heroic past and bucolic pseudo-happiness creates mini-Parthenon porches, imitation coats of arms, reprints of hunting etchings, or even afro-hairedos make people proud, happy and satisfied. Let us acknowledge this and make the most of this human sentiment. Any psy-conditioning shall be selected and molded to the people who shall occupy the houses.

2. An important example of operation with the satisfaction horizon can be found in Red China, where the quasi-religious totalitarian regime managed to lower the horizon to a relatively low level of the built housing. China is the only area--a vast area housing a quarter of this world's population--where we can find the coincidence of the existing housing level with the satisfaction horizon. True, it is near impossible or very difficult to get reliable data from any totalitarian country--their published

statistics do not always agree with simple mathematics--but diligent collection and evaluation of data, and personal experience with various forms of government makes reconstruction possible. As in the convents of Medieval Europe, in the rank and file of Mohametan armies of the same period, or with fanatics past and present: people can be satisfied with conditions "as they are". People are satisfied with their housing "as it is" in today's China: the satisfaction horizon has been lowered to the exact level of the technical condition of today's housing. It is interesting that there is not a trace of psy-conditioning in Red China, as it does not appear in any other Communist country: there individualism and centripetal family life are not coveted.

3. A few words should be told about another application of psy-conditioning. Presently we have applied it to homes, where its only aim was to tie, to link its occupant to the house, by reviving personal memories, or by projecting personal desires. This tying-in, this linking effect is only one of the possible operations with psy-conditioning. We should try to imagine the depressing, regimenting effect of long prison corridors. Remember the closing-the-hands-to-prayer impact of the magnificence of Gothic domes, the impressiveness of rich Baroque churches, the silencing authority of columned halls of justice. Or the mass self-consciousness evoking scale in the Hitler and Stalin party buildings. Psy-conditioning can be not only emotionally linking-dreaming, but it can be exciting, regimenting, educational, too. Housing is not an area for this other type of psy-conditioning.