Naming, Dedicating: Street Names and Tradition

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Naming is always dedicating, that is to say offering to the ancestors, inserting the person or the named object in a lineage of some sort. Only street names will be considered here because they have two characteristics of sociological relevance: they are chosen and they pertain to a social group in relation to which they are supposed to express some deep and ancient value. They can be studied from two different perspectives: the kind of action that is the naming of a street and the fact that street names express something of the social reality. Or, in other words, if naming is dedicating, when and how is it possible to shift from one tradition (to which the name refers) to another? A further question could be if street names express something of the social reality, does it imply that different types of social stratification are linked to different types of street names? Both questions will be examined here in reference to two different situations—Paris, France and Évora, Portugal.

Keywords: Social stratification; symbolic marking; Township; Portugal; Tradition

Naming as Dedicating

What kind of action is street naming? Street names necessarily express something essential that has to be commemorated by means of an enduring mark. They may be linked to a well-known person or to a forceful abstraction or to the date of an event; the essential value embedded in these names comes through its designation an emblematic sign of the community. An objection can immediately be raised: it is well known that the original relevance of street names often sinks into oblivion. Many
personal names that eventually became street names have no more meaning than an address in a telephone directory: who in Paris knows what the claims to fame of their possessors were? Who, for example, can recognize all those Josephs (Bara, Bédier, Bouvard, Chailly, de Maistre, Dijon, Garnier, Liouville, Sanboeuf)? The case of Jules is similar in spite of the fact that many of them can easily be identified as actors of the Commune of 1871, but what of the Juliettes (Dodu and Lambert)? I lived for years near the rue Juliette Lambert without ever asking myself who she might have been. The case of dates is even more pathetic: I very often go along the rue du 19 janvier without having the slightest idea of the event to which it is related. As to names connected which actual things, the situation is no less strange: who could say what was the Porte jaune, the name of a street I used to cross everyday, or what was the Moulin vert? The City of Paris made a pathetic effort to indicate the meaning of the name on the plaque itself: thereby one learns that Vercingetorix was a Gallic chief and Mozart an Austrian musician; I do not know whether this praiseworthy pedagogical effort includes the Champs Elysées, where it would be advisable to indicate “Greek mythological place”. All this is obviously absurd from the symbolic point of view: it is not because the signifier has lost its original meaning that it has lost all meaning. Most Parisians would certainly be astonished if they were told that Saint-Germain and Saint-Michel were formerly saints before being the main axes of the Quartier Latin. Who ever wondered why Sulpice should be sanctified or what kind of thing was the contrescarpe? It is clear that street names have gradually acquired a meaning or connotation independent of their original one.

Is this a reason to forsake all interest in street names and, more specifically, in the fact of naming? Obviously there remains a very good reason to uphold an interest: it is a political fact. No one knows why the rue du Sommerard was called so, but it is plain that the one who named it rue du Sommerard knew very well what he was doing, and at the time everyone did. To bestow a name on a place is to oblige a community to make the name a common patrimony of everyday life and, in so far as the original meaning is remembered, this is the sign of a tradition or of an ideology. Furthermore, naming a street often consists in suppressing a previous name—that is to say in substituting an ethical element for another. And this cannot be done without resistance. One can trace back these resistances to two different sources. If the street name still means something, it is a reputation that is substituted for another and if they do not pertain to the same register, some sensitivities will be hurt. As a result, one would expect renaming to be rare, to happen under exceptional circumstances.

If the street name no longer means anything, or, more accurately, if it has acquired a meaning totally disconnected from its original significance due to its peculiar sonority or to special circumstances (e.g., rue de la Contrescarpe), the act of renaming can also be perceived as a profanation or, at least, as proof of bad taste. Actually there are no “dead names”, which could form some kind of wasteland liable to be renamed; on the contrary, one can suppose that street names, as seen from the point of view of the inhabitants, are organized in a well-defined and permanent whole. In such conditions, any attempted modification acquires the importance of a christening (integration of
the street into a new community of ideas and values) and runs the risk of usurpation. Furthermore, in the mixed population of big cities, unanimity does not and cannot exist, so that the naming of a street must necessarily appear as a bid for power. When and in what circumstances does this appear so?

In order to summarize, one can say that naming a street, or any public place or building, is necessarily a political action, since it imposes some intellectual or moral tradition on the place. It is difficult to imagine that such an action can possibly be peaceful since either it is not performed unanimously (and this is usually the case), or, when the decision is unanimous, it can only be taken at the close of very troubled situations (revolution or war). Whatever the case, the inhabitants may be unpleasantly surprised to find out that the rue de l’Abrevoir or the rue des Sources where they led uneventful lives has suddenly changed to rue Youri Gagarine, or worse, rue Joseph Staline. It is fairly obvious that all street names are not invested with the same symbolic value, but this does not imply that they are not liable to excite emotional involvement, which, in turn, arouses resistance to change.

Street Names and Social Stratification

Considering the second of the two possible axes previously suggested, street names can be held as an indication of the subtle but nonetheless fundamental relationship existing between social hierarchy and spatial differentiation. It is my contention (Augustins 1996, 2003) that this relationship is always closely connected with the type of hierarchy and more loosely related to professional specialization or environmental constraints. Europe experienced two major forms of social hierarchy: class and order (i.e., dominated by the aristocracy). So if the hypothesis suggested is right, one can expect to find different forms of spatial occupation in societies dominated by different forms of social stratification. At least, if history has obscured ancient patterns, one can expect to discover traces of them.

More specifically, the hypothesis suggested here is twofold. First, in a society dominated by a principle of hierarchy based on the supremacy of the aristocracy, social status must be expressed in a very obvious way since membership of any order is self-evident for members but may raise a doubt about its legitimacy in the mind of non-members. In other words, one has to express social status conspicuously towards non-members who, in turn, will be impressed by the congruence between rank claimed and way of life exhibited. Typically, in cities dominated by a principle based on order rather than class, one can expect to find magnificent buildings (palaces, mansions, hôtels particuliers, etc.) distributed throughout the city and surrounded by other types of constructions. Second, in a society dominated by a principle of hierarchy based on class, membership of a class is never something simply given, it has to be shown, not to non-members, but to equals. Membership is demonstrated by the sharing of all possible signs indicating conformity of life style to the canons of the considered class, and a very efficient one is the place of residence (see Goblot 1925). Consequently, in cities dominated by a principle of hierarchy based on class, one can expect to find a segregated occupation of space: bourgeois and non-bourgeois quarters.
Since European cities have shifted from order to class, and since the remodelling of towns is always a long and difficult process, one can expect to find traces of both forms of spatial differentiation (dispersed prestigious buildings, segregation), but one can also expect that the former model will prevail in ancient cities and the latter in more recent ones (built since the nineteenth century). What about street names? If the hypothesis suggested here is relevant, the distribution of street names should follow different patterns according to the forms of spatial occupation. In other words, in a city dominated by the order principle, the most strategic places (i.e., those that have to be symbolically marked) should be situated near buildings of importance and the names they bear should express a tradition linked to the order, while other places, being less important, could be named after futile or peculiar things. Conversely, in societies dominated by the class principle, areas always have a social connotation, and the names of the streets should therefore be chosen so as to be consistent with the image of the place—that is, explicitly linked to a particular tradition. Furthermore street naming has political and even diplomatic implications that can be compared to the attitude concerning the memorials as recently demonstrated by Blades (2003).

The Case of Paris and the Suburbs

In Paris, street names pertain to three different themes: places, events and persons. Names related to place features have the advantage of remaining perfectly understandable long after they have ceased to be meaningful. It remains a pleasant prospect to live rue de la Bidassoa even if one does not know where that river flows, or rue de Constantine, let alone rue d'Annam. These names do not connect the street to any distinguishable tradition (except, for some of them, to a distant colonial past), but one must admit that they are evocative; in such a context, no self-respecting politician would ever think of changing their names to that of some of his late and lamented colleagues.

Names related to events may take the form of the name of the event (rue de la Libération) or more simply consist of a date. These names are necessarily connected with a tradition (historical and political) and one can suppose that the importance of the event must be related to the size of the street. As opposed to names related to the peculiarities of places, such names only have a short life span, either because the events they symbolize may have disappeared from the memory of present-day persons, or because they pertain to very specific traditions, now vanished. A glance at a map of Paris dating back to 1911 would reveal the existence of a quai de la Conférence just in front of the Grand Palais: which conference was that, one wonders today? Probably a very quaint one since the name changed very quickly. On the other hand, the rue du 4 septembre still remains in spite of the fact that many people simply do not know what happened on this particular 4 September.

Names related to permanent or less permanent heroes imply political, or at least ethical, choices. The political act that has a street named after it depends on an assumed legitimacy. There must be a scale of legitimacy: there is no risk involved in naming a street after Voltaire, Diderot or Jean-Jacques Rousseau since they all are at the root of
the Révolution—that is to say of the foundation myth of modern France. Such street names are deeply embedded in the Republican tradition as well as in the pretence to universality of French culture. It is, on the other hand, a much more risky business to use the name of Danton, let alone of Robespierre, the latter bordering on provocation. No personal name is unimportant, not even those that have to do with show business or sport.

It frequently happens that naming a street using a personal name results from a conflict and expresses that conflict. For example, in Suresnes (a suburb near Paris), a stadium was once named after Salvador Allende at the time when the Communist Party was dominant in the Town Council; later on, when the communists had been beaten in the local elections, the same stadium was renamed after Jean Moulin, the Resistance leader killed by the Germans in 1942. These events exemplify the strategic use of personal names: Jean Moulin is related to the most widespread and legitimate tradition, and it is thus perfectly obvious that the name of the stadium cannot be changed any more. It would not be a political act, it would be a sacrilege. When an event or a person symbolizes a foundation myth—Révolution, Résistance and Libération have this status in France—solemnization becomes sacredness. Acts of solemnization are ceremonials, and the attempts to ruin them are vandalism or mockery (depending on the point of view adopted); on the other hand, acts aimed at conferring sacredness are rites, and the attempts to ruin them are blasphemy and sacrilege.

It is assumed that any social group is strongly attached to the names of places where people live; such names seem to be conceived of as being an integral part of the place and its traditions. Thus, any change implies that the new names are considered to possess some kind of superior legitimacy, and this is not likely to happen frequently in a big city where the names are ancient and seem to be rooted in the essence of the city itself. Therefore, it is not very surprising that in Paris intra-muros very few names have changed over the last hundred years. Allowances are made for important urban operations that eliminate ancient streets and create new ones, but deliberate renaming is extremely rare. A rapid comparison between two Paris maps (Baedecker 1911 and Michelin 1992) shows very few examples of such changes: for instance, the rue d’Allemagne disappeared during the First World War and was replaced by the rue Jean Jaurès; much later; the avenue du Trocadéro became the avenue du Président Wilson; and the quai de Passy became the avenue du Président Kennedy. One could say that street names in Paris are equated with historical monuments such as the Arc de Triomphe or the Tour Eiffel. Obviously, this is not the case in the suburbs.

Three reasons can be identified to explain this difference. First of all, suburbs have been the theatre of considerable urban changes since the beginning of the twentieth century: from semi-rural, these zones have become semi-urban and, more recently, densely urban (see Rouleau 1988). Not infrequently, the street network has been completely changed. Second, Parisians despise everything that is not intra-muros: they highly praise the street names of their own city, but outside Paris itself it seems as if it were in really poor taste to speak of symbolism. Third, it is well known that Paris remained politically right-wing for many years, while a majority of the suburbs has long been left-wing and even communist. One used to speak of the red belt around Paris.
Consequently, one can easily imagine that street names in suburbs were liable to take very strong ethical and political connotations.

The following conclusions can be drawn from a comparative observation of two maps, dated 1960 and 1992, on which the areas immediately surrounding Paris are included. As expected, there are significant differences between the north, east and south, on the one hand (mostly communist boroughs), and the west (right-wing boroughs), on the other. An inventory of street names in the left-wing boroughs shows the predominance of names linked to the Révolution and the Libération. Voltaire, Rousseau and Diderot appear everywhere, just as Kléber and Marceau, but Danton and Robespierre appear only rarely. Whereas Leclerc appears everywhere, the name of de Gaulle is less widely distributed; the Résistance heroes are also widespread. The differences between left-wing and right-wing boroughs are essentially connected with three series of names: those which pertain to socialist political thinkers, to the French and Russian Revolutions. Practically all left-wing boroughs have streets named after Jaurès, Blum, Renan, Garibaldi, Vallès, Zola, Louise Michel, and one has a street named after Olaf Palme. Only a few communist boroughs dare give names connected with the Terror period, such as Robespierre or Marat (Ivry), the others are satisfied with names pertaining to other, somewhat less bloodthirsty aspects of the Revolution, such as Camille Desmoulins (Issy, Levallois), Mme de Staël (Clichy), Vendemiaire (Saint-Denis), Fructidor (Bagnolet) Rouget de L’isle (Issy, Les Lilas), Mirabeau (Montreuil), La Marseillaise, la Convention et Delescluzes (Le Kremlin-Bicêtre).

Generally speaking, what one used to call “une culture de gauche” ruled over the designation of streets. Neuilly-sur-Seine stands out alone: while apart from Charles de Gaulle, Winston Churchill and Louis-Philippe (France’s last reigning monarch), street names bear no relation to the political world, one notices a wide range of right-wing writers such as Céline, Paul Déroulède, Maurice Barrès or the antiquated Daniel Rops. Furthermore, Neuilly-sur-Seine is probably the only place in the world where a street bears the name of a corporation necessary to the economy, but universally hated—that of the huissiers (bailiff).

Turning to the changes affecting street names, the period between 1960 and 1992 witnessed relatively few changes: in 1960, some boroughs (Saint-Ouen, Saint-Denis, Ivry, Gentilly) sported a street, and usually an important one, named after Joseph Stalin; this was later renamed after Lenin or Marcel Sembat. Other important changes are recorded: in every communist district, a street was dedicated to Salvador Allende. All other changes were minor. Whom or what are the newcomers substituted for? In Saint-Denis, Che Guevarra replaces the rue de Suresnes, Lenin is substituted for Stalin, Leblanc for Jeanne D’arc and Robespierre replaces the rue de la Ruche; in Bagnolet, Lénin replaces Montreuil; in Pantin, Salvador Allende replaces the rue de la Gare; in Ivry, Gosnat is substituted for Stalin, Maurice Thorez replaces the rue de Paris and Stalingrad the boulevard de Choisy; in Montrouge, the 8 mai replaces Stalingrad; in the Kremlin Bicêtre, Lech Walesa is substituted for Carnot and Robert Schuman replaces the rue de l’Espérance; in Vanves, Kennedy is substituted for Falleret; in Malakoff, Brel replaces the rue du Clos, Brassens the rue Sabatier, Védrine and Mermoz the rue du Fort; in Boulogne Billancourt, Malraux is substituted for Victor Hugo.
Most often the new names correspond to new places (streets or private residences) and in such circumstances anything seems possible (e.g., in the Lilas, a whole quarter was named after all the Russian cosmonauts). Nevertheless, these observations are somewhat paradoxical: in spite of some audacity probably due to very special circumstances (*Libération, Front Populaire*) prudence seems to have prevailed. On the whole, the ancient order is preserved (surprisingly enough, streets named after Queen Marie-Antoinette or after Joséphine, Napoleon’s first wife, can still be found in these communist boroughs). Usually, the renamed streets bore names that were relatively unimportant from a symbolic point of view; most often the places renamed are not streets, but junctions or squares—that is to say places that are not lived in, but are constantly travelled across. The suburbs around Paris have been the theatre of an enduring, but rather cautious, marking using all sorts of names liable to recall socialism (*Les lumières, La Révolution, le Socialisme, les écrivains et artistes de gauche*). The result is amazing: a quick glance at the map or, better, a walk in these places gives the impression that they are entirely placed under the banner of socialism. The reason is simple: the marking was cautious, but no strategic place was overlooked.

What about entirely new towns? Is the range of naming possibilities as wide as might be imagined? A major difficulty is that, in such places, there is no such thing as a tradition to hand down. Furthermore these so-called “new towns” are not absolutely new: they are situated on the territory of pre-existing rural or semi-urban boroughs, which retain their own limits and administration. It is extremely difficult to name all these new streets, since one has to please everybody and avoid giving newcomers cause for anxiety, or, at the very least, suspicion. As a result, a way of dealing with this problem is to give ecological names pertaining to the plant kingdom (e.g., *rue des Saules, rue des Chênes*). Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines—a new town near Paris—provides a good example of this attitude, most street names deriving from some item of vegetation.

From the point of view of the hypothesis suggested at the beginning of this article, what can be said about the relationship between social hierarchy and spatial differentiation in Paris? Apparently, the distribution pattern of street names has only very slightly changed since Paris was redeveloped by Baron Haussmann in the nineteenth century. This is probably significant of the fact that these building works were undertaken at a time when French society had already shifted from an order society to a class society. In such a situation, one can expect the prevalence of spatial segregation (bourgeois quarters being contrasted with non-bourgeois quarters) and can infer from this prevalence a distribution of street names clearly marked by references to distinct intellectual, political and ethical traditions.

Nonetheless, the actual picture is slightly more complicated: on the one hand, there is no doubt that new quarters were built and colonized by the bourgeoisie (mostly in the western part), even though old ones were not abandoned (the Faubourg Saint-Germain, for instance); on the other hand, a mixed population continued to exist even in very bourgeois quarters for the very simple reason that social prestige was expressed not only by one’s address, but also by the floor on which one lived. Later on, this situation was modified, albeit very slowly, by the installing of lifts. The consequences of these facts are that distinct bourgeois quarters appeared and tended throughout the
twentieth century to accentuate their bourgeois appearance, but that genuine working-class quarters are also extremely difficult to find, with the exception of Belleville and possibly of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, but both for mainly industrial or commercial reasons. The situation is further complicated by the fact that under the Ancien Régime different quarters were already in being (the sections of the Révolution), exhibiting different traditions basically due to occupational variables. If one could retrace the history of Paris streets, one would probably observe that hôtels particuliers were scattered throughout these different quarters; however, once again, the picture is not so simple, because most of these noble houses tended to be concentrated in the same area (the Marais) owing to the proximity of the Place des Vosges where the nobles were once supposed to be grouped.

From the point of view of street names, the new streets created by Haussmann either bore some relation to the First Empire (the boulevards des Maréchaux or the avenues radiating from the place de l’Etoile for instance) or were deprived of political meaning; they seem to conform to the pattern of present-day new towns (high frequency of streets named after foreign capitals, plants or illustrious and distinguished artists). In other words, there is a congruence between bourgeois occupation of space and street names, but there is no distinct congruence between non-bourgeois (or less bourgeois) quarters and street names because genuine working-class quarters hardly existed long enough to have stimulated a naming procedure. In the suburbs, however, as previously discussed, the situation is radically different.

The Case of Evora (Portugal)

Evora is a provincial town of 35,000 inhabitants and Paris a city of at least 5 million—what do these towns have in common? Apart from the fact that Evora was the second city of Portugal until the seventeenth century, which gives her a great symbolic importance despite her small size, the resemblance between both cities is linked to their morphology. Evora was—and still is—circumscribed by a wall; intra-muros and extra-muros are two clearly distinct spaces. Furthermore, it is only after the last world war that the extra-muros part began to develop. This was due to intra-regional migrations: the population of Evora doubled in fifty years. This extra-muros development took different forms: usurpation of land and unauthorized constructions, or, on the contrary, planned urban development including a large amount of low-rents buildings or housing sites. During that time, the intra-muros city remained unchanged, it became part of the world patrimony and this warded off the risks of speculations.¹

Before the nature, distribution and changes of street names are examined, the importance taken on by the main streets of the city must be underscored. Main streets are important obviously because they are main streets, but there is yet another reason linked to the form taken by social hierarchy. Evora is one of the main towns of a province called Alentejo, in which property has long taken the form of latifundium. This means very rich landowners, a relatively wealthy bourgeoisie and very many poor people co-existed in the city. Typically, rich landowners (mostly nobles) lived in palacios or solares, palaces dispersed throughout the city along the main streets. During the
nineteenth century, nobility and bourgeoisie tended to merge into a single ruling class as demonstrated by Fonseca (1992), and all wealthy people sought to live in “noble houses” situated along the main streets. A “noble house” is locally defined as one that possesses at least six front windows in a row and two stories. Thus there was not a social segregation of space in terms of areas appropriated by a class, but a distribution of the wealthiest along the most prestigious and busy axes of circulation. This situation may explain why the names of these streets are really important from a symbolic point of view.

A typology of street names would show something rather different from what is obtained in Paris. Up to the nineteenth century, the name of the main axes bore either the names of eminent persons from influential noble families or the names of places or names of Arabic origin, the meaning of which is frequently lost. *Rua de Aviz, rua de Machede, rua de Mendo Estevens, rua Joaquim Henriques da Fonseca, rua do Raimundo, rua do menino Jesus* constitute the first category, and *rua da lagoa, rua ancha, rua das alcaçarias, rua do alconchel* are examples of the others.

Obviously, one also finds the same category of names reminiscent of a person or an event, as well as descriptive names. However, one discovers a new category of names, which could be termed “humourous names”: one does not know exactly what they designate, possibly an event of daily life in the distant past, possibly a person. They are tainted with humour and completely deprived of emphatic pretence. One does not want to see such names changed when one lives there. The best way of illustrating this is to give the list of some names of the streets situated in a small quarter: *rua da oliveira* (olive tree street), *travessa de seminando riris* (possibly the street of the laughing priest), *travessa do roma, travessa do mal barrado, travessa da bola, travessa do pão bolorento* (mouldy bread street), *travessa das façanhas* (street of the knives), *rua de pedro Colaço* (?), *travessa das gatas* (street of the cats), *travessa do loureiro* (laurel street), *travessa da pomba* (dove street).

From the point of view of change, one observes a very strong conservatism. There still exist street names related to the Arabic domination: in addition to those already mentioned, others examples are *rua do Mohamud* or *largo da porta moura*. Since the end of the nineteenth century, Portugal has experienced three major political changes: the proclamation of the Republic on 5 October 1910, the proclamation of the *Estado Novo* during the two world wars, and the Democratic Revolution in 1974. Only the first of these events affected the street names of the *intra-muros* city, and then only the main axes, but they are the most significant. Actually, the renaming operations concern the Republic in three cases only: the name *rua da República* was given to one of the largest streets, whose previous name was *rua do pazo*; a narrow street, but important in terms of circulation, the *rua da sellaria* was renamed as *rua do cinco de outubre*; and the *rua dos infantes* was renamed after a well known republican author, Miguel Bombarda. Two changes are obviously related to the re-conquest from the Arabs: the main square of the city lost its name of *praça grande* to become *praça do Giraldo* (after the name of a famous soldier and bandit who re-conquered the city) and the *rua da mesquita* (the mosque, which even at that time no longer existed) was renamed *Eduardo Nunes*. One must add that the most important street of the city was
renamed after Serpa Pinto, a very well known explorer who died in Africa at the end of the nineteenth century.

The survey of changes in street names in Evora leads to the same conclusions as with Paris: in old cities, one is very reluctant to change street names whatever they are; only major political or historical events can affect this reluctance and only to a moderate degree. From the point of view of the relationship between social stratification and spatial occupation, the case of Evora is very clear. In the old city, the pattern of spatial occupation and street name distribution is perfectly consistent with a principle of hierarchy based on the supremacy of the aristocracy. Furthermore, it should be noted that this pattern—occupation of the main streets by palaces and noble houses—can very easily be adopted by a society based on a class system (the main streets becoming some kind of special area equivalent to a quarter). It has already been mentioned that during the nineteenth century the ancient nobility and the new bourgeoisie tended to merge to form a single ruling class occupying these streets, thereby reinforcing their symbolic value. The situation of the surrounding suburbs is equally clear and perfectly consistent with a social organization mainly dominated by the class principle.

Conclusion

Some questions remain. For example, is it possible to say that street names, and especially changes in street names, reveal something of the culture considered? The example of Portugal suggests that the very old names are related to a somewhat humorous vision of daily life, whereas the new names emphasize the republican orientation and overseas ambitions. Seen from a distance, these are precisely the major traits of Portuguese culture as I can describe them. The example of France is equally convincing: the traditional stock of names is far less humorous than the Portuguese one, but more descriptive, whereas the new stock reveals the universalistic ambitions of republican ideas and a strong tension between opposed tendencies. Is this not a characteristic trait of French culture?

Concerning the fact of naming or renaming, one can draw the following conclusions. The importance given to street names (and consequently to their distribution) varies with the form taken by the social occupation of urban space, which in turn mainly varies with the type of social hierarchy prevalent in the society considered. When they no longer seem to mean anything special (i.e., are no longer symbolically significant), street names are usually perceived by the inhabitants as an essential element of the urban landscape and cannot be changed easily. Seen from afar they are a relatively good element of appreciation of the content of culture. When they still have a symbolic meaning, street names can be related to a political tension—that is to say to an attempt to impose the tradition of a group to the nation as a whole—they thus raise the question of the legitimacy of power.

Since all these names, whatever their nature, cannot be changed in the old parts of cities as long as these old parts are perceived as the real city, the suburbs are the places where the imposition of tradition by means of street names is effected. This process is accelerated by the general fact of geographical segregation, which leads to
the appearance of “red” suburbs and “white” suburbs; the street names reveal completely opposed traditions. This process was impossible in old cities where the different social classes (i.e., different traditions) were more or less mingled. It is not inconceivable that city centres could be affected by street renaming when important urban operations are made necessary by the well known “pourrissement des centres”, which affected American cities and might also affect European cities. Furthermore, the expression “class system” seems relatively odd and inadequate to describe present-day society, which is highly diversified, ranked along different lines and much more mobile than in previous times.

What will the consequences be for space occupation? Probably a diversification of space—that is to say a specialisation of urban areas in terms of social recruitment based on life style as well as on profession (micro-quartiers) and a great importance taken on by public works. In Paris, the new Museum of Modern Art very quickly became the Centre Pompidou and, later, in a very similar manner the Très Grande Bibliothèque was renamed after the recently deceased François Mitterrand. This last process was easily predictable since French presidents seem to like being remembered as great builders. Consequently, as far as name giving is concerned, the strategic places are no longer the streets, but the state buildings, which from now on will impersonate presidential destinies. A whole crop of new museums is expected.

Notes


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