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► **To cite this version:**

Geoffrey Mollé. Skyline desire: the value of the views from home and above Producing and living in high-rise buildings in the metropolis of Lyon. 2023. ujm-04466278

**HAL Id: ujm-04466278**

**<https://ujm.hal.science/ujm-04466278>**

Preprint submitted on 19 Feb 2024

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# **Skyline desire: the value of the views from home and above Producing and living in high-rise buildings in the metropolis of Lyon**

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*Today, the comeback of high-rise buildings in the skyline of French metropolises confirms the re-valuation of urban forms of vertical habitat. Compared to previous generations of towers, mostly dedicated to social housing in the peripheral areas, contemporary towers are socially selective. A distinctive feature of these "immeubles de belle hauteur" that real estate promoters insist on is that they offer to their future inhabitants the possibility of acquiring a view on the city from above. The aim of my contribution to this book is to understand the reasons why this skyline desire seems so important, but also to know if they extend to the case of social housing. I use a mesological approach based on the study of materials related to the conditions of production of old and new luxury and social housing towers in France as well as to the dwelling experiences of these towers. My point is to demonstrate that the domestic view on the city from above can be considered as a privilege of the body in the context of urban densification. Indeed, the value of the domestic experience of the skyline is now conditioned by many factors such as the cultural background of inhabitants, the financial capacities of households but also the location of the tower/flat within the city and the technical insulation of the housing from the outside. Incorporated, they express themselves singularly depending on their mesological positions and reveal a situation more complex than it seems.*

*Volumetric urbanism - high-rise living – urban density/intensity - metropolization – mesology.*

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## **1. Introduction**

Since 2010, the proliferation of belvederes, observation platforms, skyscrapers, and luxury high-rises offering unobstructed views on metropolitan areas is accompanied by a growing scientific interest in the vertical and volumetric dimension of space (McNeil, 2020; Nethercote, 2018; Graham, 2016; Harris, 2015; Graham & Hewitt, 2013). This feature of globalized urban culture has been analyzed all over the world through different lenses and case studies (Appert, 2016; McNeil, 2002). Today this field of research seems divided between the study of political economy of urban verticality, spatial distribution of towers and their landscaping, technical and ecological matters of conception of elevated spaces, and also daily practices of urban verticality. As far as the residential towers appear to be an object of common interest in the *volumetric studies*, the question of the view on city from above can be considered as a shared perspective in that field of research. Indeed, city views from home are not simply a matter of experiencing urban verticality but also a matter of producing it, of making it attrac-

tive (Dorignon, 2019; Graham, 2015a). In other words, dealing with the topic of city views from home and from above is a way of questioning the value of urban verticality in today society.

The city views are now at the core of the new processes of producing residential towers (Melbourne: Dorignon, 2019; Lyon: Mollé, 2019; London: Atkinson, 2017; Mumbai: Graham, 2015; Dubai: Acunto, 2010). In the neoliberalized city (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Harvey, 1989), high-rise buildings are no longer simply intended to house people, as they were in the aftermath of the Second World War, when height made it possible to concentrate more people while lowering production costs (Lacoste, 1963). There are now the setting for a secure "global lifestyle", reserved for the "elite" and offering numerous personalized services for the inhabitants (Fincher, 2007) which growingly include the view on the city as a mean of "socio-spatial distinction" (Dorignon, 2019). My first research on the comeback of residential towers in the French metropolises verified this ongoing process (Mollé, Appert, Mathian, 2019). But at the same time, other works were showing that the city views from above were also valued in the case of the oldest social housing towers (Baxter, 2017; Jacobs, Cairns, Strebel, 2007). Thus, the focus of my work evolved to understand why this "skyline desire" seems so true today, regardless of the social types of residential towers.

My contribution to this book is based on the first results of my PHD in geography. Here, it exploits two interview corpuses (mainly the second one): (1) 30 interviews made with public and private actors of the production of old and new luxury and social housing towers (developers, urbanists, architects, social landlords, relocation officers); (2) 50 interviews made with inhabitants of twenty different towers in Lyon metropolitan area. I analyse the relationship between the conditions of production and living in Lyon's high-rise buildings through a mesological approach. Mesology is a scientific perspective that emerged at the crossroads of social and natural sciences in the nineteenth century (Taylan, 2018). Today, mesology has shifted towards philosophy to remedy the aporias of research on landscape sensitivity and environmental physics (Berque, 2014, 1990). Now situated between structuralism and phenomenology, this perspective lacks methodological anchoring to lead empirical surveys at the age of Anthropocene (Augendre, Llored, Nussaume, 2019). In my thesis, I propose to solve this problem by "resocializing" mesology in the light of a sociological tradition (Bourdieu - Durkheim) with which it is epistemologically close (Taylan, 2018; Berque, 1990).

Mesology thus studies the way in which social institutions, always physically located, and the environment, always socially produced, together condition the valuation of towers, their dwellings and the views they allow, but without fully determining the experiences that the inhabitants have of their elevated *milieux*. After having stabilized the theoretical and practical framework, I begin to show that the contemporary valuation of the domestic views from above has to do with the densification of metropolises. Now considered as advantageous positions by developers of new towers, higher flats are negotiated differently by individuals. The analysis of their ways of acting and giving meaning to the world, always mesologically conditioned, shows that the wealthiest inhabitants of the best located towers are not the only ones to notify what will be called a "privilege of the body". Therefore, we will see that the growing

skyline desire is less a novelty than a shared trend which, because of its intensification, raises afresh the question of the meaning of contemporary metropolitan urbanization.

## **2. The valorization of the city views from home and above: a mesological issue?**

“Neither meaning nor value belongs to things since they are produced by the desiring forces that seize on them” (Lordon, 2010, p.90).

For more than a century, a school of sociologists ranging from Durkheim to Bourdieu assume that « the de-essentialization of the value of goods and services is intrinsically linked to taking into account the specific contexts that make up the “value” of an object » (Boulay, 2011, p.366). Hence a critique of political economy by that school. « Because this man in general, this systematic egoist of whom she speaks to us, is only a being of reason. The real man that we know and that we are is more complex: he is from a time and a country, he has a family, a city, a homeland, a religious and political faith » (Durkheim, 1970 [1888], p.85; quoted by Bourdieu, 2017 [1992-1993], p.163). This attempts to disabstract the meaning of the value doesn't mean that it is only relative to a single person « because market coordination requires an agreement, therefore a social recognition of these estimates which gives it an objective character » (Boulay, 2011, p.368). This can be understood through the concept of « habitus », defined as « a collective individual », the result of « past experiences », a set of « preferences » that is the « product of collective and individual history (Bourdieu, 2017 [1992-1993], p.243-250) that is to say again « durable and transposable disposition systems, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures » (Bourdieu, 1980, p.89). As Bourdieu explains, the rational agent of political economy has to be replaced by an agent endowed with a « habitus ». While urban verticalization is generally analysed through the angle of neoliberalism and financialization, the spatial fixation of globalized capital and the (de)regulation of built heights (Rosen, Drozd, Charney, 2021; Nethercote, 2018), the Durkheimian socio-economy invites us to grasp what is hidden behind these relatively abstract processes: human choices and actions constrained by a set of ideas and values that are currently dominant. From this perspective, the actors are not simple intermediaries regulating and fixing the circulation of capital vertically (Nethercote, 2018) but the vectors of a socially constructed reality expressing the systems of values, preferences and tastes in force today in the metropolitan areas (Dorignon, 2019). As Louise Dorignon showed in her thesis, the concept of habitus makes it possible to understand the link between the production and the habitation of the towers through what Bourdieu calls « social space », it says the « structure of the distribution of forms of power or species of capital » (Bourdieu, 1996 [1986-1994], p.53). All these Bourdieusian concepts, including the variations of the notion of "capital" (economic, cultural, social and symbolic) will be central for the analysis to come in the following sections. Still classic today to study trajectories and residential preferences, they help compose the social aspect of our mesological approach, which lacks an ecological and landscape comprehension.

To Augustin Berque, the habitus is problematic because it comes from a socio-centered research perspective that identifies the choices and actions of human beings with purely social logics (Berque, 1990, p.101). However, according to mesology, pure social logics don't exist. Indeed, its main guideline is to recognize that the human beings, insofar as they are always in relation with a certain « *milieu* » that is both objective and subjective, material and immaterial, physical and sensitive, live in a world which is never social or ecological but both at the same time. As with Bourdieu, Berquian mesology implies placing oneself simultaneously from the point of view of the most structural aspects of the *milieux*, the « environment » for Berque and the « social space » for Bourdieu, as well as the most phenomenological aspects, namely the « habitus » for Bourdieu and the « *habiter* » or the « landscape » for Berque. Although the two logics are similar, they have not yet been linked at present because the more encompassing Berquian logic is carried out at the expense of scientific analysis. In this article, I propose the following hypothesis: the mesological approach, interested in the individual incorporations of the social and ecological structures of the metropolized « *milieux* », makes it possible to renew knowledge on the phenomenon of urban verticalization. The sub-hypothesis that underlies it is that the understanding of the challenges of enhancing the view of the city from home and above, inseparable from a certain skyline desire, is not exhaustible by the socio-centered theory of the habitus.

### **3. Valuing city views from home and above: a struggle for places in the dense metropolis**

"To preserve a quality of use by densifying, we are obliged to go up, well I don't see any other solution. Afterwards, why we are doing it now, I think it is a question of culture, perhaps we were not ready before" (Head of Bouygues Immobilier Lyon, Top 3 French developer).

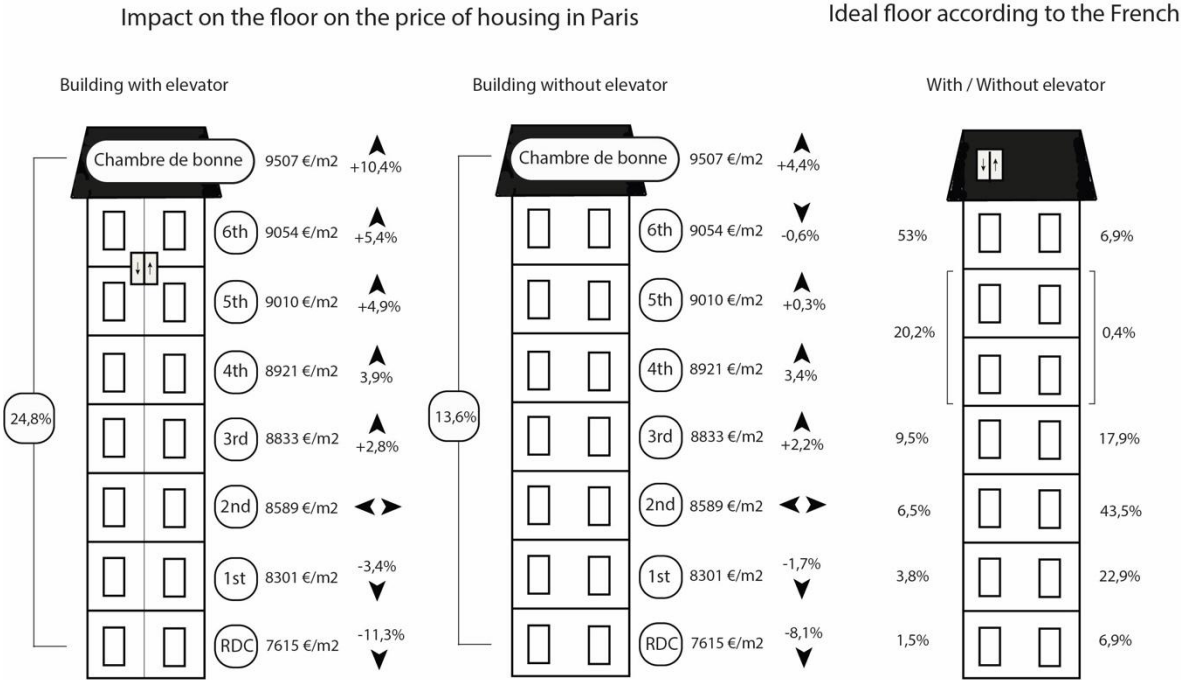
We can observe today in France a rise in real estate prices according to the height of the dwellings. (1) Apartments in residences built between 1948 to 1980 are on average 9% less expensive than those in their neighbourhood but the difference is only -5% for those located in the 7th to 8th floors, and -1% for those on the 10th floor and above; (2) the price of apartments located above the 7th floor in residences built after 2000 is 25% higher than the average price in the neighborhood where they are located (Bonneval & Gentil, 2021\*<sup>1</sup>). These statistics echo my previous work, which demonstrated that the upper floors of new residential towers were particularly expensive and therefore socially excluding (Mollé, Appert, Mathian, 2019; Mollé, 2019), a trend also confirmed in other work on the oldest heritage towers in Lyon (Bottea & Legrip, 2021\*; Chabardès, 2018\*). We can now go further, understanding that this economic valuation of upper floors means something of a general change in terms of social and spatial ways of life. Indeed, the situation seems to have reversed in comparison with the socio-economic topography instituted by the Haussmann building of the ninetieth

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<sup>1</sup> This marking aims to indicate that the article has been produced within the framework of the High-Rise project without having been validated by the scientific community. It is available on the project website.

century. While the most popular accommodation was on the first floors at that time, the figures put forward by sociologists demonstrate the existence of a threshold around the seventh and eighth floor beyond which accommodation seems particularly valued. Moreover, the figures show that the age of the building has an importance in the general assessment: the general condition of the buildings matters, whether it is for example in terms of the operation of the elevator, the maintenance of the common areas, the plumbing network or even the insulation. In this regard, a survey carried out in 2017 by the real estate website *MeilleursAgents* reveals the floors most sought after by the French based on price differences according to height and the presence or not of an elevator (figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1. What is the impact of the floor on the price of an apartment?**



Data source : <https://backyard-static.meilleursagents.com/press/270c923805468437e1acc35c1e47266e34f6897f.pdf>.

According to the survey, this increase in the value of higher dwellings is explained by the gain in sunshine and the unobstructed views from above, but on the strict condition that there is an elevator in the building. How to interpret this trend in a more complex way? A mesological approach requires a historical analysis. My goal is to demonstrate that the present situation stems from an incorporation by the inhabitants of the metropolises of a set of practices, habits and meanings inherited from the evolution of the urban environment.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the need to manage the concentration of population and to control built and human density is at the core of urbanism (Clément & Guth, 1995). The pressure of urban density was expressed by the overpopulation of the centers, the proximity of polluting factories to residential areas in the suburbs, and the insalubriousness of housing after centuries of uncontrolled urbanization (Choay in Brun et al., 1985). Urbanism

then took different volumetric forms depending on the culture: while access to the street remained highly privileged in Europe (Hausmann's plans in Paris or Cerda's in Barcelona), the projection of skyscrapers and high-rise apartment buildings in New York and Chicago transformed the order of values between the ground and the sky (Koolhaas, 1978). The beginning of the twentieth century provided, taken from the planes, photos of the "undignified spectacle" of an architecture that "suffocates in uses" while the roofs of the cities, "an inexcusable paradox", "continue to rage" (Le Corbusier, 2012 [1923], p.71). In his *Plan Voisin* (1922), Le Corbusier then proposed a modernist vision of Paris *intra-muros* where the industrial elite lived in tall buildings in the center while small apartments with gardens on the outskirts were reserved to the working classes. The enhancement of these built volumes was supposed to optimize the functional organization of uses on the ground and to euphemize the pressure linked to the density of cities. "From the 14th floor, it is absolute calm, pure air" (Le Corbusier, 2012 [1923], p.43).

It seems that the modernists' strategies have noticeably anticipated the current situation. However, they faced numerous obstacles at the time. In the 1920s, French urban planning laws were insufficiently developed to organize the large-scale housing development programs desired by the modernists. Taylorization of construction in the housing sector, called for by Le Corbusier, was not yet fully launched. French society was still marked by a "peasant economy" (Braudel, 1986, t.III, p.9) delaying the "urban revolution" (Lefebvre, 1970). It became "urban" only after the Second World War according to recent demographic works (Moriconi & Chatel, 2021). The volumes sketched by the architects-urbanists regained their relevance. But within the framework of a state capitalism, quantitative objectives were carried out to the detriment of the quality that architects advocated (Le Goullon, 2016). The "*grands ensembles*" were not simply the translation of their work but also the response to the housing crisis (Lacoste, 1963; George, 1963). Initially conceived to solve overdensity in central areas, high-rise buildings became massively built and grouped in virgin or agricultural peripheral areas, on plateaus such as in *La Duchère* in Lyon (figure 3.2), it says places where the cost of land was advantageous.

**Figure 3.2. The built volumes of La Duchère in Lyon (1960-1970)**



At that time, the great utility of height was to maximize the land areas available and build a lot more at low cost using the crane-way technique. The stakes of "social promiscuity" were then moved to peripheral spaces (Chombart de Lauwe, 1965; Kaës, 1963) and the sense of gaze soon associated with the enclosure, once the "stigmatization" of HLM towers and their inhabitants decreed (Morovitch, 2014; Gilbert, 2012; Koci, 2008).

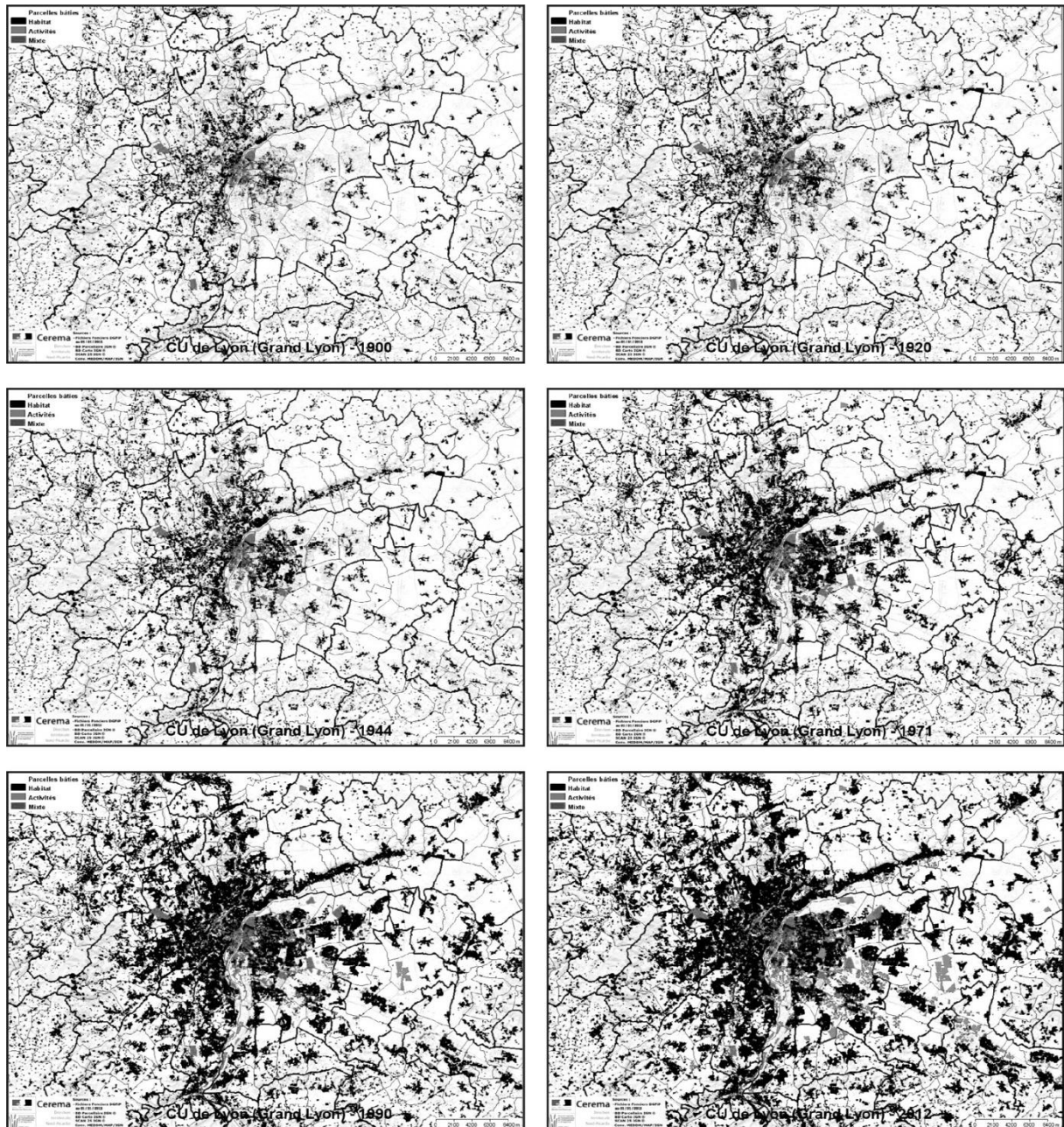
With three million dwellings built between 1945 and 1975, including one million in the form of "*grand ensembles*" (Fourcault, 2006), begins from the middle of the twentieth century "a real urbanizing urbanization, which has contributed to ensuring, through these mechanisms of self-training and internal regulation, an overall mutation of society and of the French space" (Burgel *in* Brun et al., 2001 [1985], p.230). Urban verticalization of housing is part of a deep transformation in terms of cognitive structures, imaginaries, systems of values et set of practices that affected both individual and collective levels. The massive production of housing would not have been possible without a complete mutation of the legal apparatus of the State, including guiding principles of regional planning and a reorientation of the secondary sector of the economy towards the tertiary sector, historically maintained in the cities (Roncayolo *in* Brun et al., 1985). This takeover by the state was accompanied and manifested by a new public sphere of propaganda discourse on the pioneering character of modern lifestyles, which invests the virgin or agricultural spaces of the urban peripheries (Voldman, 1997). With three out of four French people living in cities in 1975 compared to one out of two at the end of the Second World War, a profound change of habitus took place through the "rural exodus" (Burgel *in* Brun et al., 1985). New city dwellers discovered modern comfort and for some of them a vertical life based on wide views towards the countryside from within the towers (Chombart de Lauwe, 1965). At the same time, they became more and more dependent on urban functions such as circulation, consumption and housing (George, 1963). Yet it is on the basis of this dependence and the institutions that guarantee these functions that the modern utopia withered from the years 1965-1970. As the devaluation of large housing estates began,



several sociologists demonstrated that their material uniformity conceals an increasingly fragmented French society (Chamboredon & Lemaire, 1971).

Today, the French society is even more subdivided, due notably to the consecration of motorization, deindustrialization, the patrimonialization of old city centers, the explosion of suburbanization, metropolization, mass tourism, the intensification of the "problem of the suburbs" and the demolition of large housing projects, the financial crisis, urban decline, the ecological crisis, financialization, neoliberalization of urban policies (Pinson, 2020; Faburel, 2018; Donzelot, 2009). For forty years, geographers have thus been warning of an intensification of inequalities between the highest and lowest categories in the social space (Fourquet & Cassely, 2022), as the paradigm of urban densification became more established, despite criticism Charmes, 2010; figure 3.3). Nowadays, 40% of the French population lives in the area of larger, more populated and more compact metropolises than ever (De Bellefon et al, 2020).

**Figure 3.3. Evolution of urbanization in Lyon metropolitan area (1900-2012)**



Source : Personal realization (2022) based on CEREMA (Centre d'Étude et d'Expertise sur les Risques, l'Environnement, la Mobilité et l'Aménagement) land files (2013).

For Augustin Berque, what Fernand Braudel calls the “long time” is essential for understanding the dynamics of “*milieux*” (Berque, 2000). In this section, I have laid the first milestones of the mesological analysis. I’m finally suggesting that the valorization of city views from home and above can’t be separated from the collective and individual changes that have accompanied the densification of the urban environment since the nineteenth century. The interest of this historical perspective will have to be demonstrated in the next section by looking at the narrative of practices and inhabitant experiences, the imprint of certain values erected in the past with regard to residential height. However, a central fact can already be noticed. The threshold of the seventh and eighth floors, presented at the start of the section as a limit beyond which the economic value of housing increased markedly, corresponds to the level immediately above the average height of urban buildings, six floors in Paris and five in Lyon

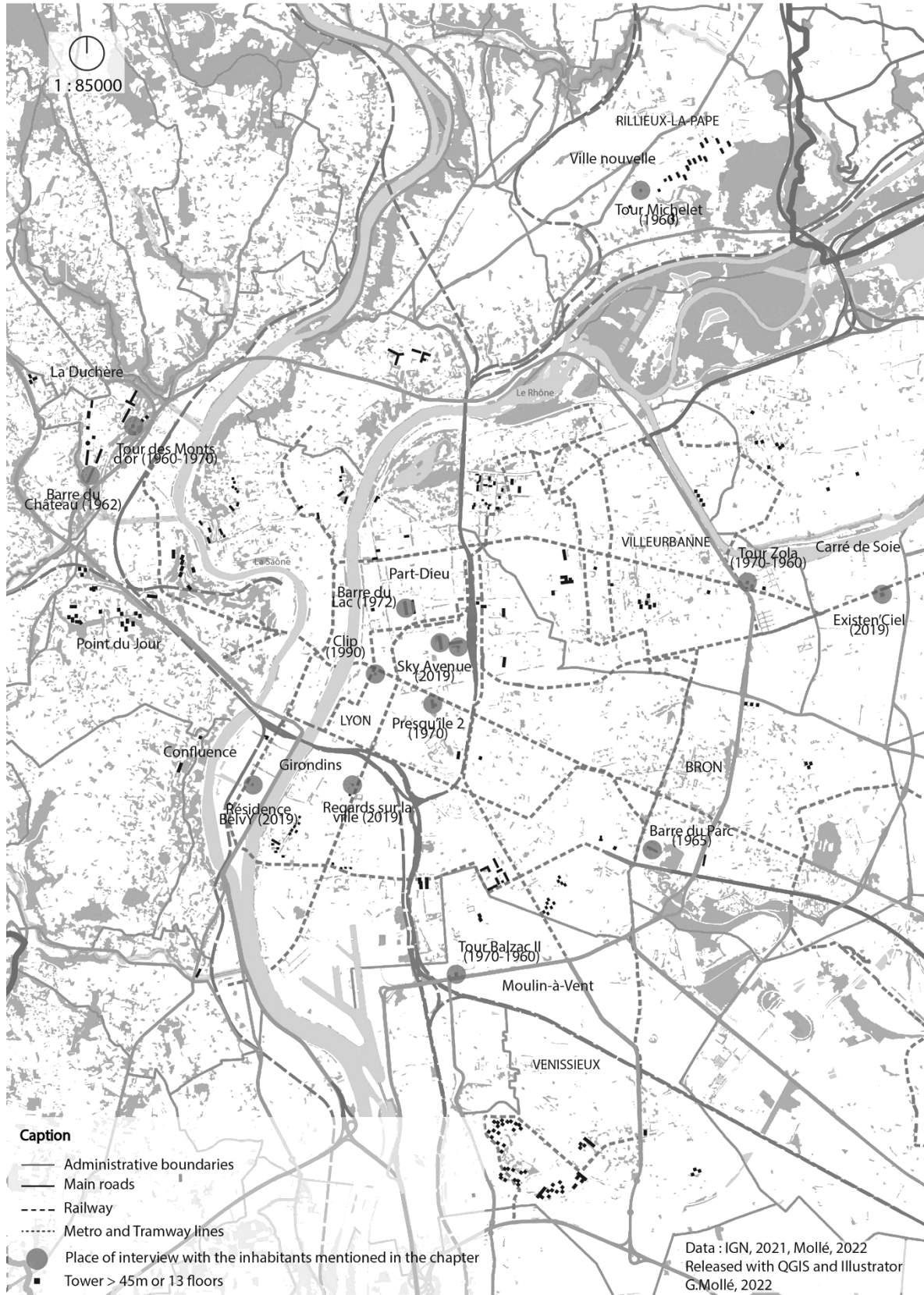
according to the *Meilleurs Agents* survey. This threshold is therefore far from being abstract. It seems to be the indicator of a mesological change specific to the new metropolitan culture, that of a struggle for the best places in town, whose geography would be refined, passing from the scale of the district to that of the buildings, no longer only according to the ground plan but also the skyline.

#### 4. Skyline desire : a privilege of the body ?

“Everyone loves the view, it’s universal don’t you think ?” (Catherine F., 17<sup>th</sup> floor, Presqu’île 2 (1970), Part-Dieu, owner, retired).

The return of residential towers in France is inseparable from the communication strategies of these same towers (Mollé, 2019). Interviews with developers, architects and urban planners have highlighted the question of views in these same strategies (Mollé, Appert, Mathian, 2019). Thus, can be found in the communication brochures slogans such as “take the height you will see the difference” (*Référence* project, Paris XIII, developer Cogedim). In France, the system known as "sale in the future state of completion" requires the prior purchase of 50% of the housing units in the towers before the start of their construction, which implies that urban verticalization is partly conditioned by the desires of potential buyers. The role of developers is therefore to build, through their discourse on views, a space for projecting the desires of future buyers. The scenario is different for the old so-called “intermediate” housing towers, even if certain real estate techniques are also based on the enhancement of views to condition the “*coup de coeur*” effect (Bonneval, 2014). In social housing, it is still different since a large majority of inhabitants do not choose their accommodation. But landlords also sometimes insist on the advantages linked to views to convince the inhabitants of HLMs to settle high up in the towers on the outskirts. Some social housing towers are even requalified in the light of these views, such as *La tour Bois-le-Prêtre* in the seventieth arrondissement of Paris by the architects Jean-Philippe Vassal and Anne Lacaton (Pritzker Prize 2021). They sought to keep the same inhabitants (Lacaton & Vassal, 2009) while other rehabilitations have on the contrary led to a gentrification of the old social housing towers (Botea & Legrip, 2021\*; Chabardès, 2018\*). The following map shows the different towers investigated in Lyon metropolitan area and quoted in this chapter to analyze the conditions of desirability of the view from above, from the inhabitants’ point of view (figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1. Map of the towers investigated in the field survey and quoted in this chapter**



Source : Personal realization (2022) from personal data (2021) and data from IGN (2021), national institute of geographic and forestry information.

The initial objective of the survey was to vary as much as possible the conditions of habitability, both in terms of location, transport service, year of construction and social type of habitat.

The fields investigated, marked by black dots on the map, are not all covered in this article. They can be grouped into three categories: (1) social housing towers located in the peripheral *grands ensembles* districts, not well served by public transport and built during the 1960-1970s such as the *Barre du Chateau* (La Duchère, Lyon), the *Tour Michelet* (Rillieux-la-Pape) and the *Tour Balzac II* (Vénissieux) to the West, North and South respectively ; (2) intermediate housing towers which are often old condominiums well served by transport and built in the 1970s such as *Presqu'île 2* (Lyon), *Barre du Lac* (Lyon) in the central district of Part-Dieu station or the *Tour Zola* (Villeurbanne) to the North-East ; (3) the new residential towers built since 2018, located in new strategic peri-central districts very well served by public transport, such as *Residence BelvY* (Confluence district, Lyon), *Regards sur la Ville* (Girondins district, Lyon), *Sky Avenue* (Part-Dieu district, Lyon) or *Existen'Ciel* (Carré de Soie district, Villeurbanne) going from the South-West to the North-East. We will see that all these differences considerably affect the meaning given by the inhabitants to the view from their homes.

Let's start with the address, or the location of the towers, which involves a profound distinction between households. In a compact city context, the different towers don't have the same degree of attractiveness. Most of all, it depends on their distance from the center, from transportation networks and from service nodes. This is clearly seen in the prices: Chantal De., retired from the national education system, who lives on the sixteenth floor of the *Résidence BelvY* in Confluence, in a 90m<sup>2</sup> apartment, tells me that she and her deceased husband paid 200,000 euros more to be able to afford the top floor than the second-to-last, while Monique pays, without social assistance, 350 euros in rent for an apartment on the ninth floor of the *Tour Michelet* in Rillieux-la-Pape. Here, environment and social space intersect, a struggle is played out for the best urban locations on the basis of the economic capital of individuals. But even with such price differences, there are nevertheless relatively common logics of valuing height from one social class to another. Recently, several authors have insisted on the logics of distinction that play out behind the social valuation of the view (Bonneval & Gentil, 2021\*; Bottea & Legrip, 2021\*; Dorignon 2019; Graham, 2015). The interviews also confirmed it. "There's a prestige aspect to living on high floors. If you meet the people on the sixteenth floor, they'll put you in your place properly," explains Pierre-Emmanuel, owner of an apartment on the fifteenth floor of the contemporary *Sky Avenue* tower: "Big money, that's what gives you a feeling of power". The desire for height appears to be concomitant with the possibilities of social distinction offered by the tower and praised in real estate marketing discourse by promoting the imaginary of height and the view of the city (Mollé, 2019). These discourses convey *bourgeois* values that are found in the behaviour pushing to convert one's economic capital into symbolic capital to better distinguish oneself socially (Bourdieu, 1979). Economic capital is not an end in itself but a mean to accumulate symbolic capital. However, it is interesting to note that when economic capital is reduced, the logic of social distinction seems also verified. A project manager at Appertise, an organization in charge of rehousing social housing tenants, shares his point: "My feeling is that they realize that they don't necessarily have much more than his little extra thing that differentiates them from others: the view. And they feel a little different, it's a resource".

The position of the towers dwellers in the social space is relative to that which they occupy in the physical environment, as much as to the symbolism of the landscapes that these positions confer. Accessibility to famous visual perspectives of Lyon Skyline is thus valued by the inhabitants but also the urban actors. Indeed, Mr. K. and Mrs. M., respectively owners of apartments on the fourteenth floor of the *Existen'Ciel* and Sky Avenue towers were particularly seduced by the views on the *Mont Blanc* or the *Cathédrale de Fourvière*, just like a "recalcitrant tenant of the social housing stock, [previously] difficult to rehouse" (Project manager at Appertise). This example shows to what extent the cultural capital of individuals is a driving force in the appreciation of living conditions at height because it is involved in judgments of taste and positive value with regard to visual access to historical heritage. But it also clearly counts, alongside economic capital, in the prior knowledge of the advantages of living at height. As such, a significant concentration of artists, town planners and architects live in the modernist apartment buildings built in the 1960s and 1970s in the Lyon Part-Dieu district. "We knew that by looking in this type of building, we could have well-made accommodation and incredible views" explains Laura, former tenant on the twelfth floor of the *Barre du Lac* and now owner of a flat located on the fifteenth floor in a housing unit of the same period in Villeurbanne.

**Figure 4.2. Laura and Luc's view from the twelfth floor of the *Barre du Lac***



In her work on Melbourne, Louise Dorignon integrated the notion of "spatial capital" into the range of bourdieusian capitals to understand more accurately the values attributed to the view of the city (Dorignon, 2019, p.202). Defined as the set of resources accumulated by an actor "that allow him to take advantage - according to his strategy - of the use of the spatial dimension of society" (Lévy, 2003, p.147), this notion seems perfectly relevant to account for the "fantasy" that certain inhabitants of the new towers maintain with regard to the fact of living as high up as possible (David, 7th Résidence BelvY (2019), Confluence, tenant, active). Likewise, it is completely appropriate to emphasize the sense of domination conveyed by the

skyline experience and the vertical views on the city life. "In front of us, ants are working, life is swarming down below (...) we are up high, we dominate the world (...) we are in our ivory tower except that we dominate everything else" (Pierre-Emmanuel, 14th Sky Avenue (2020), Part-Dieu, owner, active). However, the usefulness of this same concept seems questionable with regard to social housing. In this context, other capitals seem to take precedence, such as economic capital, or quite simply the fact of having a decent social position. "What's the point of having a view if you don't have a job?" asked me one day Aboubakar, a social housing tenant living on the fifteenth floor of the *Tour Balzac II* who had, to me, a beautiful view (figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3. Some of the views from the higher floors of Lyon metropolitan area**



**In the direction of reading :**

- Tour Michelet (15th floor, 1960, social housing, Ville Nouvelle district, Rillieux-la-Pape)
- Tour Zola (14th floor, 1960-1970, intermediary housing, co-ownership, Laurent Bonnevey district, Villeurbanne)
- Tour Balzac II (15th floor, 1960-1970, social housing, Moulin-à-vent district, Vénissieux)
- Sky Avenue (14th floor, 2020, standing housing, co-ownership, Part-Dieu district, Lyon)
- Résidence BelvY (16th floor, 2019, standing housing, co-ownership, Confluence district, Lyon)
- Existen'Ciel (12th floor, 2019, intermediary housing, co-ownership, Carré de Soie district, Villeurbanne)

At this stage of the demonstration, Bourdieusian grid appears to be valuable for analyzing the conditions of desirability of skyline views from home, but on condition of also having a material understanding of what he calls “social space”. Indeed, the conditions for appreciating views depend not only on the systems of taste embedded in the state of mind of the inhabitants, which are clearly expressed in the accounts made of their daily landscapes, but also on the ways in which their bodies are affected by the physical environment. The economic and cultural capital accumulated by the inhabitants is tied to the technical characteristics of the towers in the ways of describing their sensory experiences. The importance of the elevator (McNeil, 2020; Graham, 2016) and the windows (Jacobs, Cairns, Strebel, 2007) have already been identified in volumetric/vertical studies, but too rarely in terms of physical effort to reach the highest spatial positions or body exposure to ambient phenomena. Nevertheless, those two devices relate to the social conditions most firmly inscribed in the materiality of the everyday setting of high-rise residents. The unequal quality of elevators and windows expresses itself through the mesological position of high-rise dwellers inhabitants. Insofar as it is embodied, it affects the valuation of high-rise living and of the views by extension. Elevator breakdowns are often frequent in social housing towers, more than in condominiums built at the same time, and more so than in contemporary towers. Even more significant is the time it takes to repair the elevators. "Here we hear stories about the record breakdowns, three weeks, one month, two months..." (Catherine H., 13th Barre du Château (1962), La Duchère district, social housing tenant). In the recent towers, "we know that the functioning of the elevator is a priority. I can have the dedicated service within 5 minutes if ever" confirms the manager of the condominium association of the Existen'Ciel tower (2019) in Villeurbanne. Since the 1950s-1980s, frequent elevator problems expose their inhabitants to a threshold of difficulty that varies according to the height of their dwelling. It is now necessary to add sociological criteria to this threshold based on: (1) the socio-technical state of the tower; (2) the age, or rather the physical conditions of the inhabitants, a parameter that definitely counts in the "acceptability" of living in the higher floors (Project manager at Appertise).

Like that of the elevator, the quality of the windows is not specifically related to the question of the views cause it concerns also the sound and kinaesthetic insulation (thermal and wind). As I showed in previous work, this question of self-regulation of bodily exposure to ambient phenomena depends here again on the position of the inhabitant within the tower, but also on the very position of the towers in the urban environment (Mollé, 2022). For if the temperature is more diffuse in space, the prevailing winds or sources of noise and/or pollutants particularly emitting, such as a major road for example, are more localized. The ability to "choose to have only the view" (Chantal De., Résidence BelvY (2018), Confluence district, owner-retired) then becomes a privilege for owners of the new towers, even if there are located near very passenger roads: "I feel so good up there from my ivory tower ahah" (Chantal De., 16th Résidence BelvY (2018), Confluence district, owner-retired). At the opposite, isolation is sometimes impossible in social housing. "It's been three years since they tell us they're going to redo the insulation, here we almost never open the window, and we draw the curtains to block the noise and dust from the highway. We want to see the view as little as possible" (Amin, 11th Tour Balzac II (1970-60), Vénissieux, social housing tenant). Thus, it could be tempting to join the conclusions of Stephen Graham in his “political ecology of air” : while



the working classes have no choice but to breathe the polluted effluvia of the urban climate, the elites secede with the soil and isolate themselves in “luxury cocoons of pure air conditioning” (Graham, 2015b). Similarly, we could join Marx for whom “the man who is in worry and need has no sense for the most beautiful sight” (Marx, 1972 [1844], p.87). However, the situation is more complex and escapes the primacy of economic and cultural capital because inside the same tower and almost on the same floor but on a different side, the discourses of the inhabitants change completely. Rather exposed to the South than Chantal De, Amina and Guy, owners of accommodation on the 14th floor of the Résidence Belvy (2018) in Confluence tell me that they receive fragrant black dust from the highway which seeps into the window frame. Conversely, this discomfort is absolutely not perceived for the inhabitants of the North face of the Tour Balzac II. Therefore, it appears to be more and more obvious that the study of positions of individuals in the “social space”, always expressed through their habitus, is not sufficient to understand the conditions for valuing the view from above from home. The immediate temporalities of their experiences reveal other issues that seem specific to the ecological circumstances of their bodies and therefore of their exact position in physical space (figure 4.4).

**Figure 4.4. From the seventeenth to the first floor of the Presqu’île 2 (1970)**



This panopticon shows quite easily that the increase in height of the observer within the tower is accompanied in all cases by a wider "perceptual field" (Gibson, 1979) which results in : (1) an increased number of elements to perceive ; (2) a reduction in the number of "occlusive surfaces" ; (3) a better and longer exposure to light sources (sun, moon, etc.) ; (4) and therefore a wider spectrum of colors to contemplate (not here visible in black & white). More than a feeling of height, most of the inhabitants questioned about their skyline experience report a feeling of space. The view is therefore associated with a "feeling of freedom" (Laura, 12th Barre du Lac, Part-Dieu district tenant, young worker), the "impression of being in an aquarium" (Catherine F., 17e Presqu'île 2, Part-Dieu district, owner, retired), a "sense of tranquility with the absence of vis-a-vis" (Sandrine, 11e Existen'Ciel, Carré de Soie district, co-owner, active), a "breathing space" (Mathilde, 10e CLIP, Part-Dieu district tenant, student), an "exceptional emotion" (Jean-Jacques, 13e Résidence BelvY, Confluence district, owner, retired), a "spectacular landscape" (Mr. T, 15e Tour Zola, Villeurbane, co-owner, active), "magnificent sunsets" (Anonymous, 8th Tour Balzac, Vénissieux, social housing tenant, unemployed), a "disappearance of all borders" (Asra, 8e Barre du Parc, Bron, social housing tenant, unemployed). This series of qualifiers invites us to understand that the skyline desire is not only a

matter of accessing a spatial position marked by positive or negative social representations of height and towers, but also of experiencing this volumetric sense of space that this position confers. "Behind the height lies the depth" (Merleau-Ponty, 1947, p.296). At first glance, the fieldwork results seem in line with those of the studies carried out in environmental psychology, which showed that the value of a view is measured through: (1) the degree of luminosity it confers; (2) the variety of elements that it allows to perceive; (3) the presence of singular elements, vegetation and water in particular (Mirza & Byrd, 2017; Hellinga, 2013; Kaplan, 2001). Many residents have insisted on these criteria, citing in particular their healing properties, such as Gisèle, social housing tenant on the eleventh floor of the Michelet tower in Rillieux-la-Pape: "the light from here, it's my own medicine". However, we cannot restrict ourselves to such conclusions insofar as any judgment of taste is necessarily conditioned by social determinants. While these considerations are absent in this type of study, they could be overcome by reversing the causal chain followed so far. My wondering is the following: could the daily experience of the view (from the towers) affect the position of the inhabitants in the social space? Such a question would require in-depth analysis, but we can imagine at least two ways of answering it.

The first relates to the representations that the inhabitants have of their own position in the social space and therefore to the role of the idea that one has of one's own body conditions in the effective process of accumulation of capital. Whether they have substantial economic capital or not, whether they are wealthy people or not, owner in a recent tower or tenant in a social housing tower, the discourses that the inhabitants hold about their living conditions, as they are proven by their bodies (elevator still functional or broken, perfect or defective insulation, ideal or unpleasant exposure) reveal that they are sometimes ready to modify change trajectories, signs of strategies of repositioning in the social space for Pierre Bourdieu. In spite of negative social representations of higher floors and social housing towers for the tenants of the social park, some of them decide thereafter to seek high floors elsewhere "once they have tasted it" (Project manager for Appertise). Furthermore, during the processes of demolition of social housing towers and relocation of inhabitants, some of them refuse to leave, invoking notably the views : « I'm ready to fight I'm ready for anything, I know a lot of people like me in the building who don't want to leave, we're fine here we have everything, but look outside it's beautiful (*crying*) I don't want to leave...» (Catherine H., 13<sup>e</sup> Barre du Château (1962), La Duchère, social housing tenant, disabled person). Even in the case of contemporary towers, some owners are already considering to leave such as Mr & Mrs P. because of the impossibility of enjoying their balcony on windy days with the particles, the smell and the noise of the motorway beside (Mr & Mrs P. 14<sup>e</sup> Résidence BelvY (2018), owner, retired).

The second, more retrospective, concerns the previous residential trajectory of the inhabitants of the towers, trajectories during which some had already experienced wider views for quite a long time. If the arrival in the contemporary towers but also in the first modern towers during the 1960s-1970s can be considered as a social promotion in terms of symbolic capital, then we can reasonably think that daily experience of the view (from the towers) affects the position of the inhabitants in the social space. Precisely because they might not necessarily have

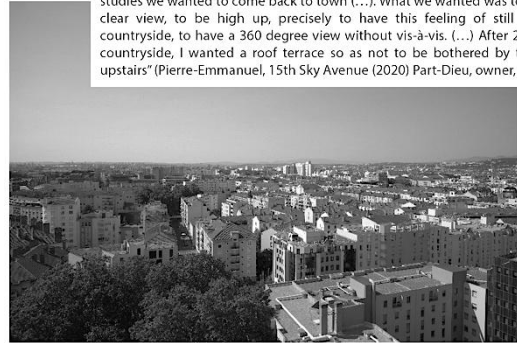
been attracted to these spaces if they hadn't already had a pre-conception of the experiences they would allow. Hence their skyline desire (figure 4.5).

### Figure 4.5. Views and residential trajectories

"My parents arrived in the tower when it was completed in the 1960s. Before that, we lived in a small pavilion near Point du Jour. When these buildings were built it was really cheap to access them and in addition the accommodations were huge, we could all have our room here, so they moved. Much later we got help to become owners and I still live there. It's amazing to think that we have more space here when we don't have a garden, right? (Edith, 9th, Tour des Monts d'Or (1965), co-owner, retired)



"We lived in the countryside and when our children passed the BAC and started their studies we wanted to come back to town (...). What we wanted was to have a super clear view, to be high up, precisely to have this feeling of still being in the countryside, to have a 360 degree view without vis-à-vis. (...) After 20 years in the countryside, I wanted a roof terrace so as not to be bothered by the neighbors upstairs" (Pierre-Emmanuel, 15th Sky Avenue (2020) Part-Dieu, owner, active).



"We were in a house without vis-à-vis, which we wanted to sell because we were reaching a certain age when it was too difficult to maintain, too big because we had more children at home. I didn't want to find myself with a vis-à-vis and be forced to close the curtains all the time when I walk around the apartment, that was my criterion" (Mme P., 14th BelvY (2018), Confluence, owner, retired).



Before living in the Paris region, I lived in the Dordogne with my two sons, so when I arrived in Lyon there was no question of locking them in an apartment, so it was necessarily outside and in an area that was not too urbanized. I didn't want to live in the suburbs. Because the children had grown up and that involved taking his car and taking them if necessary. So I said to myself it will be an intramural city. (...) We are used to volume when we live in a house so it was difficult to find but when I saw this one it was a crush (Catherine F., 17th Presqu'île 2 (1970), owner, retired).

Finally, the comparison of these four similar excerpts shows that the role of the strategies of enhancement of views by the actors of the production of the towers should not be overdetermined in the study of the process of urban verticalization, as well as these forms of self-rationalization of residential trajectories constructed *a posteriori*. Although referring to the scale of the entire life of individuals, these discourses indeed require to be recontextualized in the temporality of the interviews. Thus they both relate to: (1) the intersections between the biological and social life of people; (2) acclimatization to certain socio-spatial configurations marked by periurbanity, rurality or intense urbanity; (3) the specific attributes related to the dwellings which aroused their interest, and which they now dwell. In short, what the meso-logical approach shows is that the individual values attributed to the unobstructed view from home, insofar as they themselves derive from collective value systems, are driving forces in the attractiveness of contemporary living spaces. But in the city, the pursuit of these values can only be established in height, so that the analysis of the desire for a skyline becomes a way of questioning the meaning of urban verticalization today, and more generally still that of metropolisation.

## 5. Conclusion

A concept at the heart of the mesological approach, "mediance" designates the set of conditions that coexist in a singular way in the experience of an individual at a certain moment (Berque, 1990). At the end of this study, we realize that these conditions are not only social but also ecological, even geometric, because they are linked to the spatial dimensioning of individuals' milieux. This aspect is often missing in the contemporary literature on high-rise buildings, for fear of determinism. Indeed, after a long European tradition of post-occupancy studies that explicitly sought to measure and record the variability of high-rise residents' satisfaction as a function of their housing height (see, for instance, between 1980 and 1950: Conway & Adams, 1977; Gillis, 1977; Amick & Kviz, 1975; Goodman, 1974; Wekerle & Hall, 1972; Jephcott, 1971; Mitchell, 1971; Hird, 1967; Fanning, 1967; Chombart de Lauwe, 1965; Willis, 1954), some authors such as Jane M. Jacobs expressed the idea that "many of these studies reflect a technological determinism, in that it is the form of the tower (and its new technologies) that is invoked to explain the quality of life of its inhabitants" (Jacobs, 2006). We now know that it is much less a question of determinism than of the mesological position of bodies, both in social space and in the environment that affects the meaning of experiences. Hence that question of privilege of the body. But the interest of these works lies less in themselves than in the dialogue with the current era. The fact is that this dialectic shows that certain values seem to have maintained over time when it comes to live upwards. Of course, it is not a matter of confusing the issues of the past with the current ones: the meaning of urbanized *milieux* has changed considerably as cities have become denser. The first generation of urban planning fueled the acclimatization of French society to modern urban comfort and then to the spatiality of socio-economic inequalities by removing it from its "peasant" history (Braudel, 1986). The second animates neoliberal habitus and launches a struggle of metropolitan places based on the privilege of the "deepest" landscape experiences.

That said, the fact that height is so highly valued today may mean that past situations could shed some light on the present. Such is the advantage of a scientific mesology: to link distant eras by showing that the successive re-elaborations of collective imaginaries, since they depend on the very diversified trajectories of individuals that make them, mean that the past never completely disappears. It is even the opposite. Because it is indeed because these imaginaries are sedimented in the form of values that we can consider the inhabitants of the towers, the former as well as the current ones, as economic agents participating today in the attractiveness of residential height. Historian of mesology, Ferhat Taylan presented Emile Durkheim as one of the last executives of this science at the beginning of the twentieth century (Taylan, 2018). At the time Durkheim saw the "density of social morphology" - we would now say the density of milieus - as the "cause" of the "social division of labour", that is to say of the very dynamics of society (Durkheim, 1909). The form of these tensions persists. Insofar as it is aroused by the densification of urbanized environment, the skyline desire lies in the conditions of an escape from this density. Such is the whole paradox of our contemporary metropolised *milieux*.

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