REFERENCE MARK

REFERENCE MARK: Mark or unspecified object allowing people to find their bearings, to locate something, to evaluate a distance. (Translated from the Larousse-Bordas, 2000. Dictionary)
- All that makes it possible to recognize, to find an object in a unit. (Translated from the Petit-Robert, 1997. Dictionary)

A reference mark is an object which either concerns perception by an observer of an urban unit, or is located in the field of the lived space of proximity of a walker.

It is also advisable to consider the route which leads a visitor to an address thanks to the reference marks which mark out this route.
From time immemorial, the monuments of old cities have constituted visual reference marks for the population and structured their perception of the urban unit.
The **silhouette** lets emerge bench marks which allow the observer to identify the city in the expression of its institutions and capacities.
The builders chose geographically high points, in order to observe the surroundings and to express their power by the height of the buildings. **(1)**
The monuments can be the expression of dethroned royalty, religion, republic, artistic action or even of technological progress. (the Eiffel tower)

According to Lynch (who was a MIT Professor Emeritus of City Planning), quoted by F.Choay on p.93 of "Urbanisme, Utopies et réalités (Town planning, Utopias and realities)": "*the contrast with the background of the surrounding scene seems to be the principal factor (....). The fact of having a prevalent space position can make elements become bench marks, in two different ways: either by making the element visible from many places (...), or by creating locally a contrast with the nearby elements, i.e. a variation in alignment and height* **(2)**."

"Un point de repère n'est pas nécessairement un grand objet: cela peut-être une poignée de porte tout aussi bien qu'un dôme. Si la porte brillante est justement la vôtre, elle devient un point de repère."
Kevin Lynch, image de la cité. Edition Dunod, 1969, p.118.
"Dans la perception du cadre de vie, l'homme ressent plus souvent l'environnement sous forme de symboles que de signes. La plupart des communications humaines passent par ces symboles. La complémentarité signe-symbole est ainsi un des éléments de base de la perception."
A.S Bailly, la perception de l'espace urbain. p.137.

The space position is thus essential, and it is reinforced when a significance is attached to the "reference mark object", as when they merge on the same site. "*One can group the reference marks by motives which have a form in themselves and can indicate, according to their appearance, the direction from where one looks at them. The two landmarks of Florence, the dome and the bell-tower, dance one around the other in this manner.*" Kevin Lynch. (p.119.) **(3)**

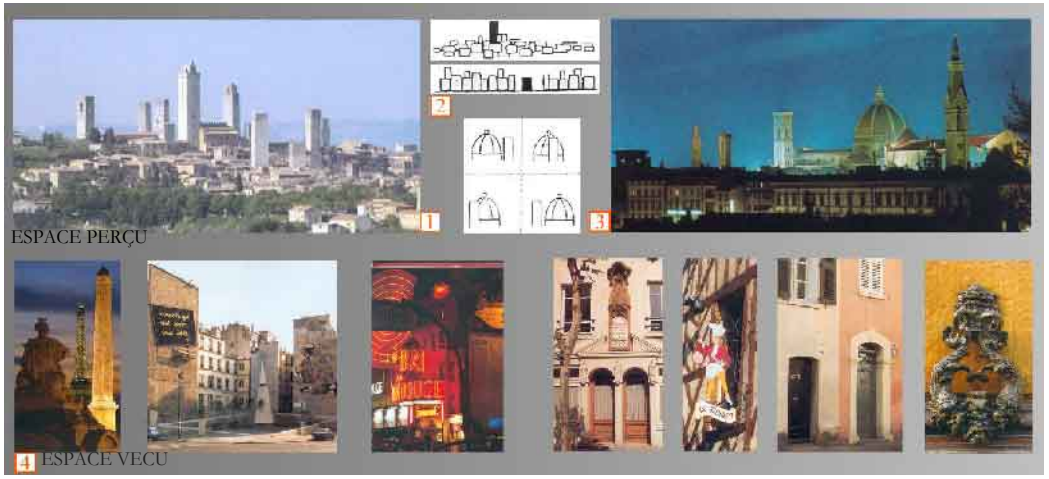
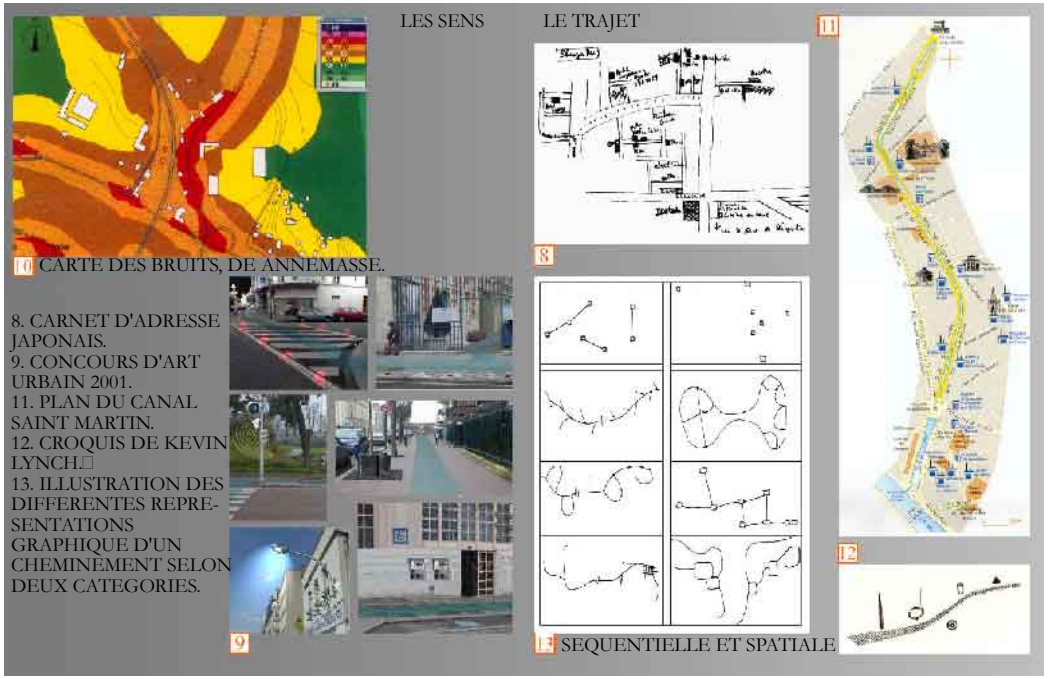
These reference marks are at the level of perception of the urban unit. Complementarily, there is another scale, that of the walker, of his experience **(4)**.

These "*reference marks are, conversely, local and only visible in one limited context and according to certain angles. It is the case of the innumerable signs, shop fronts, trees, doorknockers, and other urban details which fill up the image of the majority of observers. These types of reference mark are frequently used for the identification and even the structuring of cities; they are always more useful as a route becomes more familiar*" According to K.Lynch, p.393

By giving priority to the autonomy of the building over its environment and the latter's standardization, modern town planning retained only one street map style of representation using a grid plan **(5)**, which contrasts with a location finding process based on visual reference marks such as those described by R. Barthes in "L'Empire des signes", to locate the address of a place in Japan. (8)
Le Corbusier in "L'Urbanisme" (Town planning) proposes a new modern city with the **city entrance** as the only emblematic reference mark. **(6)**
And it is at ground level, in the open air, that the walker will find reference marks (stadium, church, wood...) to guide him in the park - city **(7)**
In addition, it is difficult for people deprived of one or more senses to move around autonomously in the city. There are, therefore facilities provided for this purpose.
In the Paris Métro, one can put one's foot on a tactile strip which indicates the platform edge and see the lamps on the surface which warn of approaching trains.
A "courtesy way" was imagined by a team of training teachers (see the urban art contest of 2001) for a very used route. The characteristic of this project **(9)** is a tactile touch which guides the walker.
For a few years the question of the sound nuisances has been raised and the communes are obliged to draw noise maps. They are three different categories, all indicating decibel measurements**(10)**.
The reference marks are found all along the route in order to lead the walker to a specific address **(12)**.
In the example of the taxi driver (J.Pailhous "La représentation de l'espace urbain - Representing urban space"), the location of the address indicated by the customer results from a combination of a plan type representation with visual reference marks **(11)**. As with the racing drivers or the ski champions, there is a process of memorization by **visual sequences** of the route and checking the visual reference marks during the race.

Indeed, the citizen cannot perceive his town globally, he reconstructs it in a representational form using the information in his possession which comes from his own repeated trips and the map **(13)**.

Orienting people in agglomerations of developed countries, as well as those of developing countries, today tends to being dealt with by **urban direction signing**, in a standardized way. This type of international reference mark, although it meets a social need, can in a certain manner attest an absence of significant visual reference marks, allowing the visitor to find his way.
In a current context of social change and generalized standardisation, F Choay in her "Dictionnaire de l'Urbanisme et de l'aménagement - Dictionary of Town planning and development" indicates to us that town planning is powerless against the absence of space tradition and references specific to a given minority culture.

Consequently, it is precisely up to the elected members responsible for the quality of urban life to pay special attention to the aspect of buildings and the studies for the localization of public buildings, rows of trees, and public lighting intended to help people locate themselves in town.

V. TOWN ENTRANCE, VISUAL SEQUENCE, URBAN SIGNING, SIGN, SILHOUETTE, SYMBOL.