

PASSAGE

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The etymology of the word goes back to the Latin "passus" which means "step" and refers to the movement, the action to cross a space. Quoting J.F.Geist, "The Passage":

1. Place or way by which it is necessary or convenient to pass to go from a point to another.
2. (1835). Small street prohibited to cars, generally covered and often crossing a building, which links two arteries.

(Translated from the Le Robert, Dictionary of the French language).

A passage is a short path, in a street block, a district... Its function is to shorten, serve, protect, or facilitate the circulation of pedestrians in a privileged way. It can be open or covered and to be used for commercial activities.

As of the first civilizations, the passage was used to infiltrate dense and often anarchistic street blocks, thus facilitating circulation in the city.

The word passage indicates both non covered and covered paths.

The examples from the history of architecture illustrate various types of passages:

Antique **colonnades**, Eastern bazaars, **andrones** (1) of the bastide towns, **alleys** (2) of the mountain villages, which are often like a flight of stairs, **gallery** (3) of a cloister or a market square, the guardroom of a medieval **town gate** (4), the famous **traboules** (5) in Lyons that are now - thanks to a recent agreement with the city council - maintained and freely accessible to all, the foot bridges (6) which connect two buildings, all must indeed be taken into consideration.

The cities of the Middle Ages

"la lumière moderne de l'insolite... Elle règne bizarrement dans ces sortes de galeries qui sont nombreuses à Paris aux alentours des grands boulevards et que l'on nomme d'une façon troublante des passages, comme si dans ces couloirs dérobés au jour, il n'était permis à personne de s'arrêter plus d'un instant... importé dans la capitale par un préfet du second Empire, qui tend à recouper au cordeau le plan de Paris va bientôt rendre impossible le maintien de ces aquariums humains qui sont déjà comme morts...et qui méritent pourtant d'être regardés comme les receleurs de plusieurs mythes modernes, car c'est aujourd'hui seulement que la pioche les menace, qu'ils sont devenus les sanctuaires d'un culte de l'éphémère..." Aragon "Le paysan de Paris" 1926.

promoted the creation of a network of very narrow and varied transportation routes which took advantage of the rare vacant spaces.

In the 18th century, the development of a land speculation changed the deal. One built wider transportation routes, in order to allow for an optimal use of the pieces of land. The provision of public areas becomes increasingly important, leading to the creation and expansion of the covered passage dedicated to commerce. Since 1820, the word passage has been used for covered spaces assimilated to **galleries**. "The passage is a way reserved to the pedestrians, which connects two lively streets; it is bordered on each side by lines of shops; it is covered by a glass roof which gives light from above. The upper stories may have further shops or even a few dwellings. It is a public space arranged on a private property, an interior space found outside" (Translated from the Encyclopédie Universalis. T.17).

In the most banal case, the covered passage crosses a street block on a straight line, like the Passage du Grand-Cerf (7) in Paris; it takes also more complex, staggered, forms like the Passage Jouffroy (8). It can also establish a link between various levels, like at the Passage de la Pommeraye (9) in Nantes. The same 19th century saw the fashion for covered passages rise and the fall.

At the beginning of the 20th century, town planning tended to eradicate this "digest of urban life which was the passage", not conform to the new interest in hygiene (Encyclopédie Universalis).

In the 1950's, Corbusier interpreted the passage by including it in his unités d'habitations (blocks of flats). It designs his "cité radieuse" (beaming city) with the provision of internal streets. Each storey is a neighbourhood served by a street. The passages of the third and fourth stories are dedicated to shops (10). Since the 70's, one sees a renewed interest for the old passages and many of them have been rehabilitated.

The word passage is also used in French to indicate other facilities:

- The **pedestrian crossing** (passage piéton) is a relatively space arranged on a private property, it underwent various evolutions (11). As long as urban traffic was not too heavy, pedestrians and vehicles used the same areas (12). It later became a need, initially marked by studs (13), then by more visible - but not very aesthetic - white strips. Today, one currently tends to arrange and sign the pedestrian priority in a more original, more significant, way: using a slope to connect pavement and carriageway. Or still better, in order to mark the priority the pedestrian has over vehicles, connecting the pavements of

both sides of the road by a raised section of the carriageway with slopes on either side of the crossing, to encourage vehicles to slow down (16).

- The **level crossing** (passage à niveau) is the place where a road crosses a railway line at the same level, with a barrier prohibiting road access when trains pass. There are two types: with either horizontal (14) or vertical movement (15) of the barriers. There could be some design research to improve the aesthetics of these crossings.

- The **pedestrian bridge** (17) can be useful to connect together two street blocks without exposing the pedestrians to traffic and bad weather.

- The **underpass** (18) is a tunnel beneath a transportation route. When it is reserved to pedestrians, it can - as in Cergy new town, on the initiative of an artist - be the occasion for a colour mural with appropriate lighting that also brings a feeling of cheerfulness and safety by night or by day.

Today, in the new districts, or housing estates (19), the passage remains an element of the useful and pleasant urban composition to facilitate the access of the pedestrians.

When it is in the open air, it must give access to the service vehicles (firemen, ambulances, removers...) and give to the children the opportunity to play the games of their age, away from the dangers of the street, without disturbing the residents.

Cf. ALLEY/VENELLE, ANDRONE, LANE/RUELLE, TRABOULE, GALLE- RY / G A L É R I E , BLOCK/ILOT.

