

## Fernand Pouillon 1912-1986, Part I

### *IV Grand Ensembles in Paris*

#### Local Heroes #2

Fernand Pouillon, Paris

Editor Uri Gilad

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Photos

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J. Hovenier, J.P Wingender

My first encounter with Fernand Pouillon's work was when I stumbled upon a few photographs of his project *Residence Victor-Hugo* (1955-1957), which was presented in a publication I was reading. I remember thinking that it was just another example of a large-scale classical 20th century development, and typical architecture that one would try to avoid as a student. It wasn't until later I learned that in order to appreciate Pouillon's architectural legacy, I had to look at it from afar and try to understand what he called 'the finished composition'. Those who are familiar with Pouillon's work know that he was an architect that meticulously combined urban and architectural agendas. He was an architect that had a remarkable ability to develop large-scale residential projects that were characterized by their individuality and integrity. If you are not familiar with his work, it would appear on the surface that Pouillon's projects are just like any other classical post war development; the type of development that one loves so much to criticize (and even demolish) today.

Pouillon studied at Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Paris (1934). He started his career in Aix-en-Provence and Marseille and collaborated with Auguste Perret on the reconstruction of the Vieux Port district.

Unlike the open-plan designs of post-war, large-scale construction projects, Pouillon preferred forms that resembled squares and courtyards. "When planning a town, it is not a question of simply drawing up a plan: one must imagine each architectural structure in minute detail. [...] The shape and appearance of the buildings should dictate the layout of the town." Pouillon's firm, *Comptoir national du logement*, was involved in the development, the construction and architecture of his projects. This fact probably allowed him to achieve his ambition to create 'the finished composition' and to "imagine each architectural structure in minute detail."

Pouillon focused on the power of evocation and as a result the buildings that he constructed were coherent and consistent. He had a great ability to combine urbanism and architecture and to view construction, architecture and the urban form as a whole. As a result his work has its own autonomy. Although Pouillon's architecture is in some way influenced from the familiar classical proportions, he avoids neo-classism and the result of his work is somehow timeless. His ability to combine diversity and repetition in his architecture is remarkable. In his work, the bay - a unit of form - provides repetition and tempo, which defines and punctuates the overall appearance of the building.

In *Residence Buffalo* (1955-1958) Pouillon was able to develop a social residential cluster, which is comprised of royal-like proportions and materials. The project's proportions, its inner courtyards and the usage of one single material - natural stone - feels like an homage to the ambience that one experiences when encountering *Palais Royal* or *Place de Vogue* in Paris. The subtle changes between the different bays and the proportions of the openings, gives this project its robust and rich character. Till today the quality and maintenance of the project's public spaces, is remarkable. By creating such a 'royal' environment, the inhabitants are able to appreciate the place they live in. >



Since 2009 Uri Gilad organizes for the students at the Academy of Architecture Amsterdam, a Paris tour as a part of the Urban ensemble study program.

Tutors

U. Gilad, P. Kuitenbrouwer  
S. de Rudder

*Residence du Point du Jour* (1957 -1963) is a plan with 2,260 dwellings that uncannily achieves a pleasant urban environment. In this specific project Pouillon exemplifies his ability to address urban and architecture agendas. Once again, the composition of the buildings in the ensemble and the transition from one façade bay to the next expresses Pouillon's ability to create a rich and diverse architectural and social environment. The public gardens, fountains, colonnade and transparent entrances on the ground level all take a part in this unique "finished composition," which define the project as a place that reflects the city with in itself.

On one of my visits to *Residence du Point du Jour*, I had the chance to meet an old man that had been living there for more then thirty years. He mentioned how nice it was to live there and the fact that almost nothing had changed. He then invited me to his apartment on the 11th floor. As I was entering the apartment I was immediately exposed to the quality of the plan. His first question to me was, "Did you know that he was in prison?" The fact that Pouillon's architectural and engineering firm, *Comptoir national du logement*, collapsed in 1961 from bankruptcy is something the French can not forget and therefore his work - for the most part - has been eclipsed. Pouillon's career in France stopped the moment he was arrested and after serving time in prison, he migrated to Algeria in 1965. He then continued to develop projects in such places as Algeria, Iran and Morocco until he returned to France in 1983 at the age of 73. He had several projects under development when he passed away in 1986.

All *IV Grand Ensembles* in Paris can be visited in one busy day. In my experience, in order to understand the work of Pouillon, and to appreciate his ability to create an architectural whole that is visually striking and exceptionally robust, one must visit these projects in person.



## IV Grand Ensembles in Paris

### 282 apartmants and commercial

Pantin, Résidence Victor-Hugo, 1955-1957

101 Avenue Jean Lolive, 93500 Pantin, France

5 minutes walk from Metro 5 - Église de Pantin to Avenue Jean Lolive

### 466 apartmants and commercial

Montrouge, Résidence Buffalo, 1955-1958

Avenue Fort, 92120 Montrouge, France

15 minutes walk from RER B - Laplace to Avenue Fort

### 2 260 apartmants and commercial

Boulogne-Billancourt, Résidence du Point-du-Jour, 1957-1963

Rue Neuve Saint-Germain, 92100 Boulogne-Billancourt, France

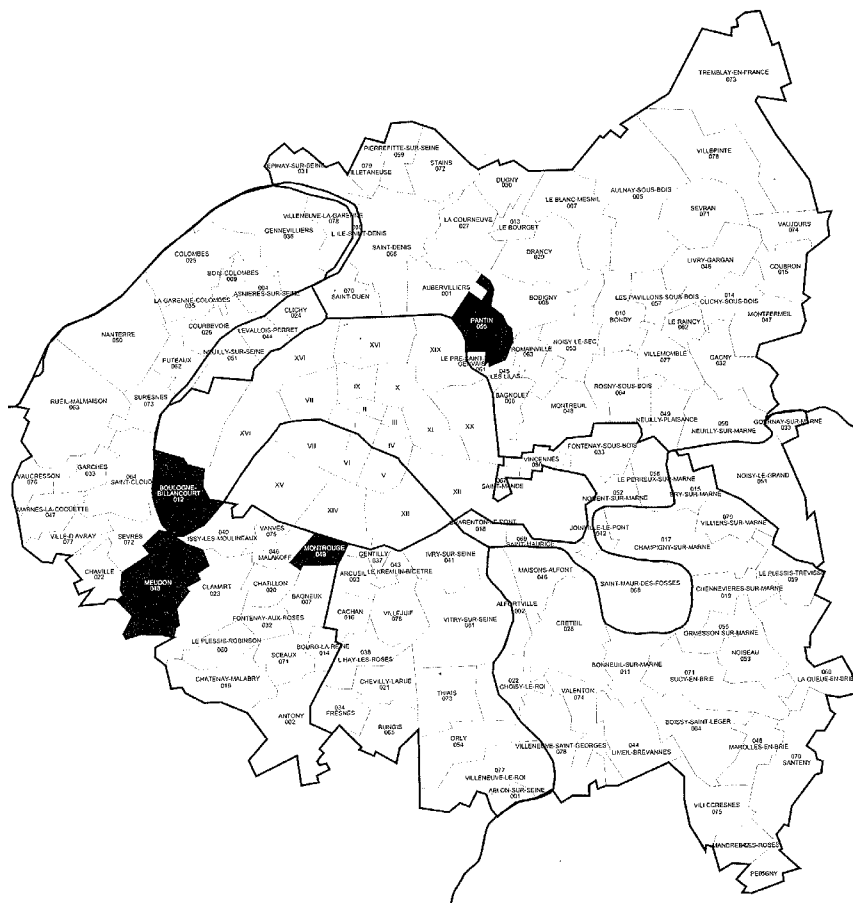
10 minutes walk from Metro 9 - Marcel Sembat to Rue Neuve Saint-Germain

### 2 635 apartmants and commercial

Meudon la Foret, Résidence Le Parc, 1957-1962

Avenue du Général de Gaulle, Meudon, France

RER C - Meudon Val Fleury from the station bus no. 289 to Eglise de Meudon-la-forêt

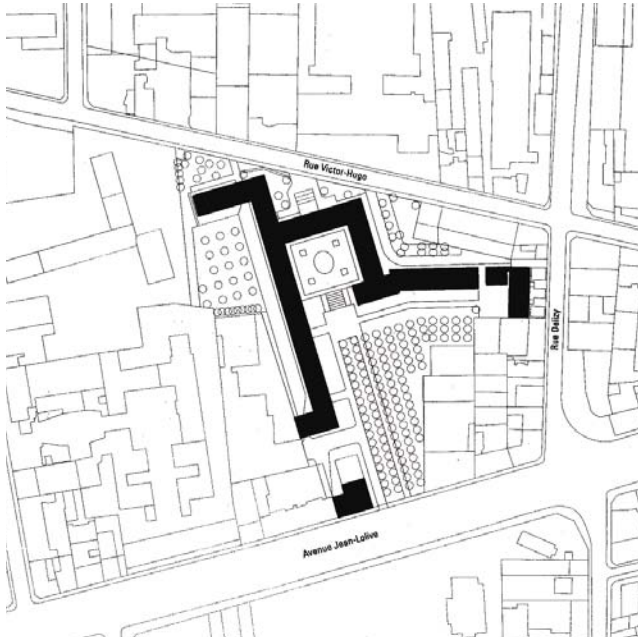


## Selected bibliography

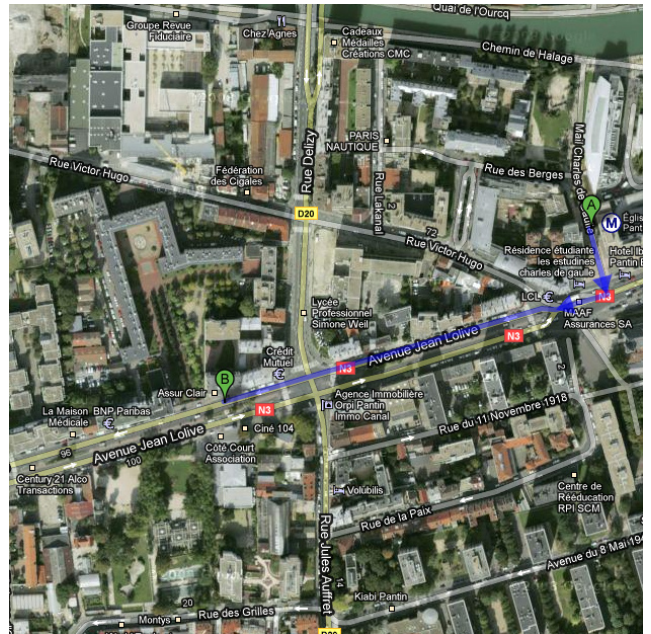
- Books (selection): Fernand Pouillon, Architecte  
Pantin, Montrouge, Boulogne-Billancourt, Meudon-La-Forêt (French)  
Jacques Lucan  
Editions Picard ISBN 9782708406919  
(The best book for a Pouillon trip to Paris)
- Fernand Pouillon, Architetto delle 200 colonne (Italian/French)  
Bernard Felix Dubor  
Electa ISBN 978-2866530396 (French edition)  
Elacta ISBN 88-435-2308-2 (italian edition)
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Jean-Lucien Bonillo  
Editions Imbernon ISBN : 2-9516396-0-0.
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Editions du Seuil ISBN: 9782020010238 (French edition)
- Mémoires d'un architecte (French)  
Fernand Pouillon  
Editions du Seuil ISBN: 978-2020011143
- Internet: <http://fernandpouillon.com/>



Pantin, Résidence Victor-Hugo, 1955-1957  
 282 appartments and commercial



101 Avenue Jean Lolive, 93500 Pantin, France



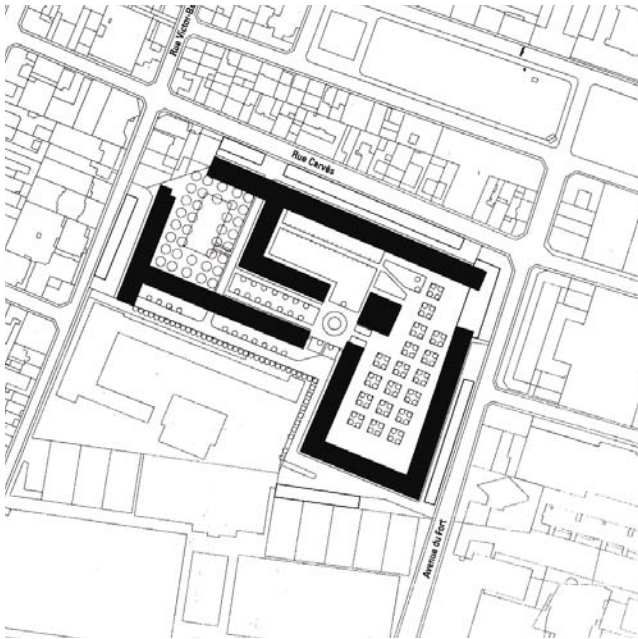
5 minutes walk from Metro 5 - Église de Pantin to Avenue Jean Lolive







Montrouge, Résidence Buffalo, 1955-1958  
466 apartments and commercial



Avenue Fort, 92120 Montrouge, France



15 minutes walk from RER B - Laplace to Avenue Fort



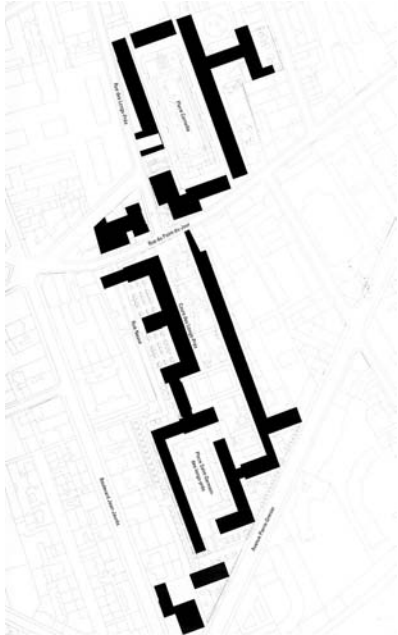




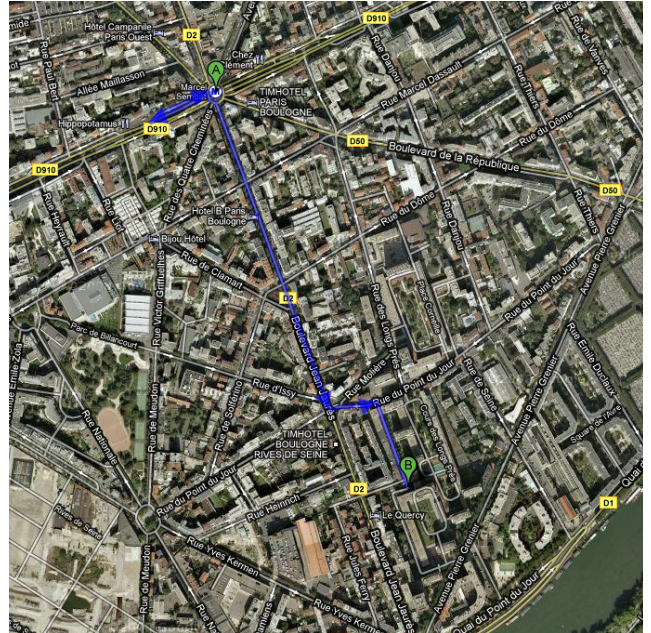




Boulogne-Billancourt, Résidence du Point-du-Jour, 1957-1963  
2.260 apartments and commercial



Rue Neuve Saint-Germain, 92100 Boulogne-Billancourt, France

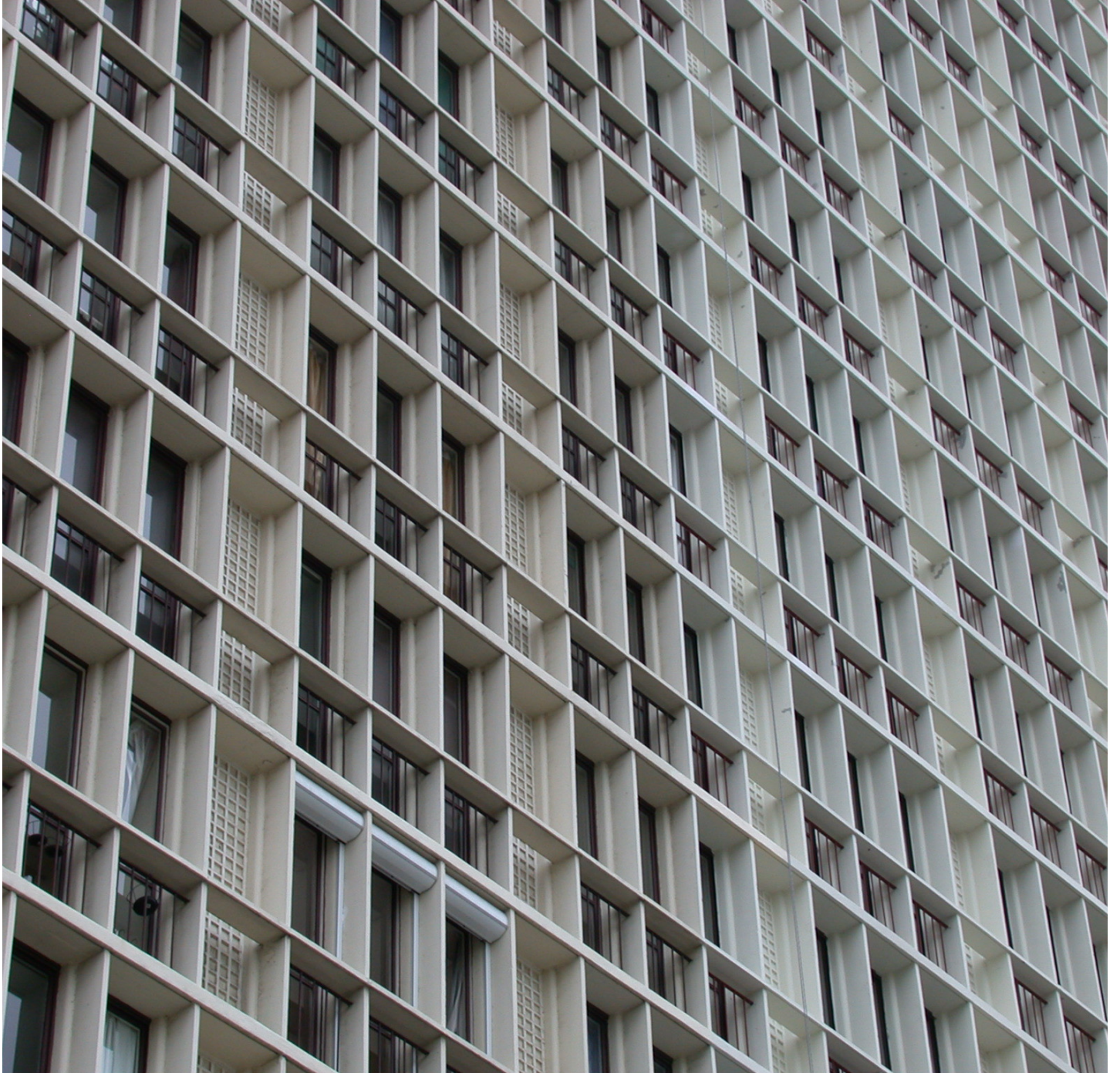


10 minutes walk from Metro 9 - Marcel Sembat to Rue Neuve Saint-Germain

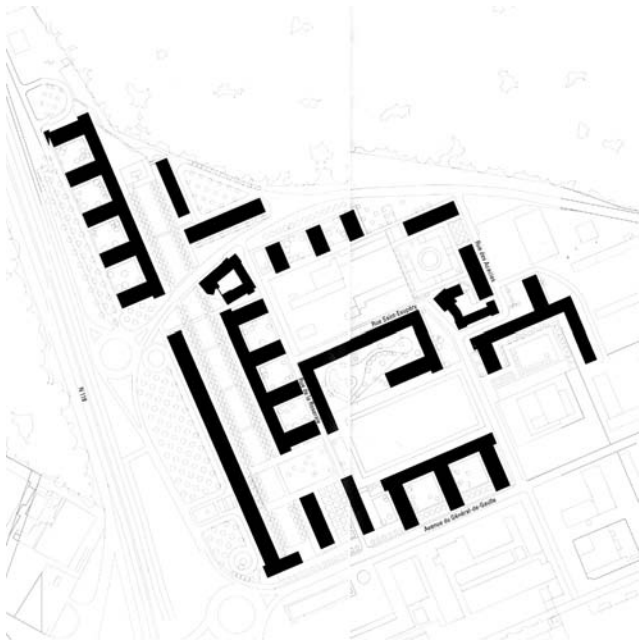




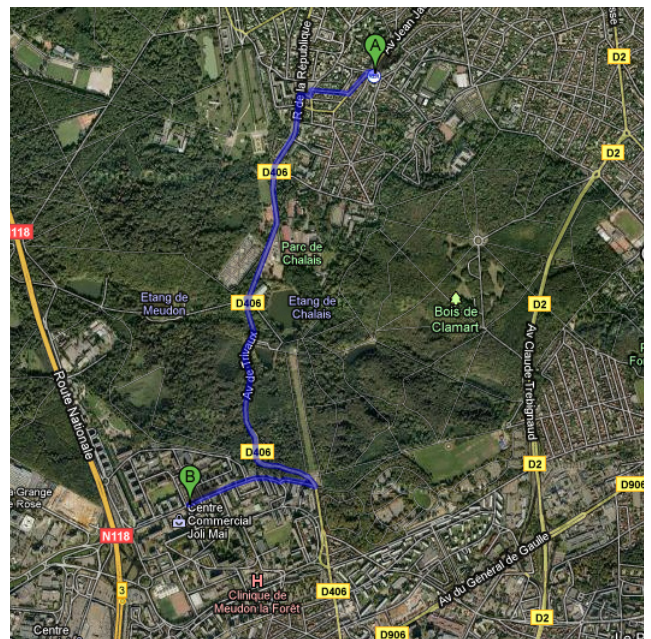




Meudon la Foret, Résidence Le Parc, 1957-1962  
2.635 appartments and commercial



Avenue du Général de Gaulle, Meudon, France



RER C - Meudon Val Fleury (see point A)  
From the station bus no. 289 to Eglise de Meudon-la-forêt (point B)







