

Liberalism, Sovereignty and Emancipation: Designing A Contemporary Palais Royal for Les Halles in 1974

Ricardo Bofill, Liberalism, Les Halles, Paris, Urban Renewal

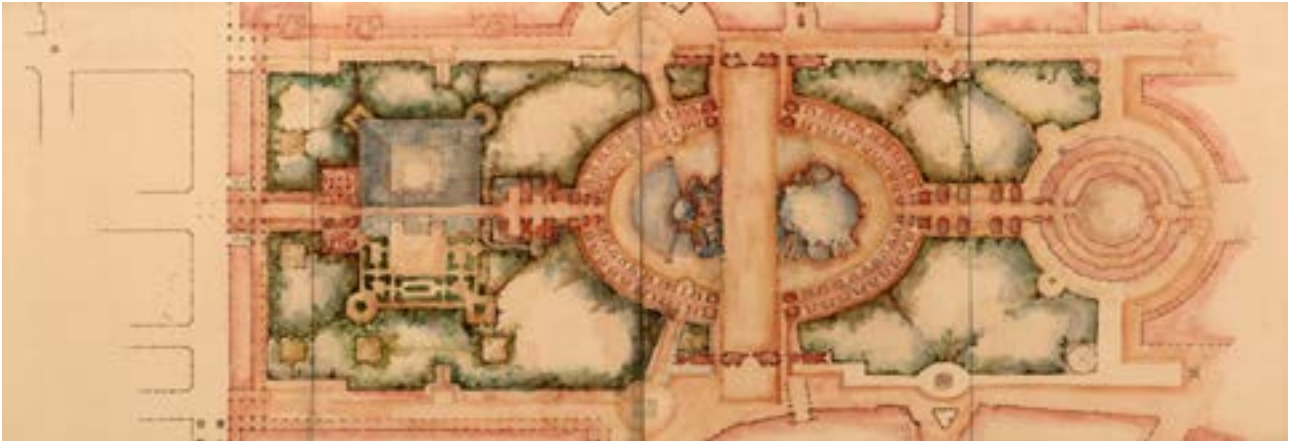
/Abstract

This paper analyses the complex power struggle at play in one of Paris’ most emblematic urban renewal projects at the dawn of the neoliberal turn. Architecture played a decisive synthesizing role in this struggle that spanned, gentrification processes, and the rediscovery of the historic city as a site of resistance against modernization agendas. In September 1974, this debate took a decisive turn towards postmodernity as the newly elected President Valérie Giscard d’Estaing launched an invited competition for the Plateau Des Halles. Its entries were to both articulate Giscard’s new architecture politics and address the loss of collective identity caused by the relocation of Paris’ wholesale food market Les Halles to the southern banlieue in 1969. The president’s selection of Ricardo Bofill–Taller de Arquitectura’s neobaroque garden sequence as the winning entry sparked another political battle over Les Halles in a debate that intertwined party politics of French liberalism with the discourses surrounding postmodern urbanism. Drawing on archival evidence, this paper situates Bofill’s 1974 competition project within its historical and political contexts and uncovers the governmental strategies surrounding the competition within Paris’ ministerial bureaucracy. On the one hand, the project exemplified Giscard’s urban politics of “advanced liberalism”, which merged liberalism with authoritarian governance, implemented the retreat of the state from the politics of social redistribution, and anticipated the rise of designers in shaping urban marketing strategies. On the other hand, Bofill’s 1974 design for Les Halles epitomized the French discourse of “architecture urbaine” that understood the return to historic urban forms as an emancipation from technocratic and economic constraints. Taller de Arquitectura’s design synthesized these antagonistic political goals: it both embodied and resisted political instrumentalization.

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Anne Kockelkorn is an Assistant Professor of History and Theory of Housing and Urbanism at Ghent University. Her research focuses on the political economy of housing and its impact on social relations. Her recent book *Cooperative Conditions: A Primer on Architecture, Finance and Regulation in Zurich* (Zurich: gta Verlag, 2024), co-authored with housing scholars Susanne Schindler and Rebekka Hirschberg, delves into the role of non-speculation in cooperative housing. Anne’s forthcoming monograph *The Social Condenser II: An Archeology of Neoliberalism in Paris’ Banlieues* analyses architecture’s role for housing politics within the societal transformations of the 1970s by investigating the housing projects of Ricardo Bofill – Taller de Arquitectura in the Parisian Banlieue. This book is based on her PhD dissertation, which received the ETH Silver Medal for outstanding doctoral theses from ETH Zurich in 2018. Prior to her position in Ghent, Anne worked as a research assistant at ETH Zurich (2009–2015), taught as guest professor at the University of Cyprus in Nicosia (2018), co-directed the post-graduate program for history and theory of architecture and the city (MAS ETH GTA, 2019–2020) and held a position as assistant professor at TU Delft thanks to a Delft Technology Fellowship (2021–2022). Between 2013–2015, she co-edited the theory journal *Candide*, with Susanne Schindler, Axel Sowa and Andres Lepik. Between 2006 and 2012, she worked as an architecture critic for the periodicals *Bauwelt*, *Archplus*, *Baunetz*, *TEC21* and *archithese*.



Introduction

Starting in the interwar period of the 20th century, the relocation of the wholesale food market of Les Halles to the urban periphery, and the destiny of its urban neighborhood polarized the French planning debate. What was an appropriate size for such a comprehensive urban renewal project? What was the right program for an infrastructure that would link the heart of Paris to its metropolitan region? And what the best urban design for the public space above the underground commuter station and shopping center? Two French Presidents, Charles de Gaulle and Valérie Giscard d’Estaing, failed to solve these questions and to represent their presidencies through an urban project for this site. In this debacle about the heart of the city, Ricardo Bofill played a key role for four years. In September 1974, Giscard d’Estaing declared the then 35-year-old architect the favourite in his presidential competition for the Plateaux des Halles. In autumn 1978, newly elected Paris Mayor Jacques Chirac had the remaining project by Taller de Arquitectura demolished after four years of power struggles over repeated project revisions in varying actors’ constellations.

This paper focuses on Bofill’s first project from October 1974, which re-assembled historic European references of public space into a surreal theater landscape. The design subdivided the Plateaux des Halles into a neo-Baroque sequence of squares and gardens; the main elements were two colonnade buildings framing the eastern facade of the site, followed by maze-like forest filling most of the square, and a central oval plaza framed by another double colonnade [Fig. 1]. The proposal and its representation in beaux-art style watercolor sketches not only met the expectations of Valérie Giscard d’Estaing (Giscard): it also hit the aesthetic sensitivity of architectural critic Bernard Huet, the new editor-in-chief of *Architecture d’Aujourd’hui* and one of the most vocal opponents

Fig. 1
Master plan for Les Halles,
Competition for Les Halles,
October 1974. Source: Archivo
Bofill Taller de Arquitectura.

of the Baltard market halls' demolition.¹ For Huet, the design connected the political demand for collective participation in public space with the art of creating a monumental urban space. He wrote, "This is a wonderful useless space, thus available for all uses, appropriable by everyone, beyond any symbolic support."² His observation resonated with what urban sociologist Henri Lefebvre had claimed as a new "playful centrality" for a future urban society. "Playful centrality" referred to prioritizing time over space and to re-establishing the notion of "oeuvre" in art and science within spatial practice.³

How does Bofill's competition design and the conditions that led to it exemplify the socio-political change of urban governance and design doctrines – from central interventionism to "advanced liberalism," from modernism to "architecture urbaine"? In the following sections, I discuss the historical and discursive context of the urban question of Les Halles and the conditions of the competition launch. The last two sections of this paper situate the Taller de Arquitectura's design within this discursive field and reveal Ricardo Bofill's strategic response to Giscard's new architectural policy of "advanced liberalism". With this term, the French president distinguished himself from a radical free market economy and described a synthesis between "individual liberties" and the "rational organisation of collective functions."⁴ This French form of liberalism in the 1970s aimed to construct "both an efficient market economy open to the world and an advanced social project" as Michel Foucault observed in his lectures on biopolitics.⁵ Within this framework, the redistribution of wealth remains possible as long as tax subsidies do not interfere with economic proceedings, and as long as budgets supporting sustaining economic growth and social benefits are kept strictly separate.⁶ "Advanced liberalism" thus saw state intervention as crucial to protect the market for the sake of its own functioning and to balance individual and collective liberties. For architecture and urban politics, advanced liberalism meant a rediscovery of the historic city center in terms of a leisurescape: it meant finding an aesthetic expression of continuity and

nuance of scale in relation to the existing built environment and building upon the forms, shapes, and qualities of the existing city.⁷

To relate the design proposal of the Taller de Arquitectura to this shift in governmental reason, I analyse four types of sources. First, documents from the French National Archives regarding "Les Halles" and the 1977 symposium "Pour une politique de l'architecture"; second, the publications of the competition of Les Halles and the notion of "architecture urbaine" in the architecture journals *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, *Architecture Mouvement Continuité*, and *Techniques et Architecture* (T&A); third, publications by and about Taller de Arquitectura in France; and fourth, interviews with office members and French new town planners undertaken in 2011 and 2012.

Le fait du prince. Architectural Politics of "Advanced Liberalism"

The election of the centrist Valérie Giscard d'Estaing as French president in May 1974 marked the end of the French post-war boom years "Trente Glorieuses," and their euphoria of progress and growth. One of Giscard's first governmental actions was to override his predecessors' plans for the City of Paris, by either stopping or restricting planned expressways, mass housing developments, and high-rise projects, thereby symbolically ending the "70 years of mistakes in contemporary architecture."⁸ Giscard's architecture policy focused on the aesthetic quality and vibrancy of the urban public spaces and two of its key terms were "the art of the urban" and "the new French architecture".⁹ In an interview given to the journal *Le Point* in 1974, Giscard distanced himself from the urban planning concepts of his predecessors, and described his ideal urban form in terms of a pedestrian leisurescape that was sequenced by urban parks, Baroque fountains, and Italian plazas: "I observe that through history eternal rules emerge such as the distance a pedestrian can walk, the dimensions of a square where one enjoys pausing, etc."¹⁰ If social housing was the top priority of urban planning and architectural policy during the post-war boom years, the performative park with open boundaries became emblematic of the deindustrialized city, and the 1974 competition for the Plateau des Halles signalled this shift. Three years later, the 1977 master plan of the

1 Among the individuals in the international art and cultural world who sent pleas for the preservation of Les Halles to the president and other public officials, see Jacques Hébert, *Sauver les Halles, coeur de Paris. Un dossier d'urbanisme contemporain* (Paris: Denoel, 1971). Ricardo Bofill also signed a petition letter, see Ricardo Bofill and François Hébert-Stevens, *L'Architecture d'un homme* (Paris: Artaud, 1978), 10.

2 Bernard Huet, "Quelques objets autour d'un trou – La revanche du cavalier Bernin," *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 176 (1974): 110: "C'est un merveilleux espace inutile, donc disponible pour tous les usages, appropriable par tous, au-delà de tout support symbolique."

3 Henri Lefebvre, *Le droit à la ville* (Paris: Anthropos, 2013 (1968)), 121–123.

4 Francis-Paul Bénéot, "Démocratie française de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing", in *La Démocratie libérale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1978), 125–146; citation by Valérie Giscard d'Estaing, *Démocratie française* (Paris: Fayard, 1976) in Bénéot on page 129.

5 Michel Foucault, "Lecture 8, 7.3.1979", in *Birth of Biopolitics. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79* (Hampshire, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008 (2004)), 185–213, here 194. Foucault bases his evaluation on reading Christian Stoffaës, *La Grande Menace industrielle* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1978), citing from p. 743 in note 19, p. 209: "(...) there is no incompatibility between an effective market economy open to the world and an advanced social project that would proceed faster in reducing inequalities of fortunes, incomes, and opportunities and above all in redistributing power in the enterprise and in public life."

6 Foucault, "Lecture 8, 7.3.1979", 201–207.

7 For an overview to Giscard's architecture politics, see Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, "Discours de clôture du symposium 'Pour une politique de l'architecture,'" in *Écrits et conférences. Symposium du 20 octobre 1977, Maison de l'UNESCO, Actes complets*, edited by Gilbert Dumas (Paris: Académie de l'architecture, 1978); Éric Lengereau, "De la postmodernité 'à la française'", in: *L'État et l'architecture 1958–1981: une politique publique?* (Paris: Picard, 2001), 301–317.

8 For an overview of the Giscard's annulment or transformation of large-scale projects, see Robert Franc, "Le Paris de Giscard", *Le Point*, August 12, 1974, 44–46. The quote appears in Giscard d'Estaing, "Discours de clôture du symposium 'Pour une politique de l'architecture'", 59–70.

9 Giscard d'Estaing, "Discours de clôture du symposium 'Pour une politique de l'architecture'", 59–70.

10 Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Robert Franc, "Changeons la ville (Interview)", *Le Point*, no. 133 (April 7, 1975): 21–24: "Je constate, qu'à travers l'histoire se dégagent des règles éternelles, comme la distance que peut parcourir un piéton, la dimension d'une place où l'on aime s'arrêter, etc."

City of Paris also projected also future parks on the industrial brownfields of La Villette, Bercy, and the Citroën site in the 15th arrondissement.¹¹

The prominent role of squares and parks in Paris’s urban policy of the 1970s reflects several processes. First was a massive restructuring of Paris’s urban and demographic structure that occurred in the decades prior to the center’s rediscovery. This transformation was accelerated by large-scale redevelopment projects in the outer arrondissements (Maine-Montparnasse, Front de Seine-Beaugrenelle, Hauts-de-Belleville) and in Les Halles between 1962 and 1974.¹² Paris became more bourgeois, older, and more conservative: between 1954 and 1975, the percentage of workers in the labor force decreased from 30.4% to 22.2%, while the share of people older than 65 rose from 11% to 18%.¹³ The relocation of the wholesale market from Les Halles to Rungis in the southern banlieue near Orly Airport in 1969 and the demolition of Victor Baltard’s market halls starting in 1971 were thus key indicator of Paris’ deproletarianization. Together with the relocation of other major industries like Citroën, the urban proletariat’s milieu vanished from the city center. Simultaneously, the construction of the Paris ring road – “Périphérique” – began which enclosed enclosing the 20 arrondissements like a city wall and split the City of Paris from its metropolitan region.

Second, the idea of a renewed Parisian urbanity presupposed the idea of a peaceful, governable and wealthy city and articulated a shift in how conservative political elites viewed the City of Paris. By 1974, Paris was no longer a source of fear for the bourgeois faction of society but rather its political bastion, as revealed by the city’s governance structure. For the first time since the Paris Commune of 1871, the city regained the mayoral mandate in 1977 after being governed for a century by police prefects. The election of Gaullist Jacques Chirac as mayor immediately ignited the power struggle over control of the Plateau des Halles, a conflict that illustrated the tension between state and city, between president and mayor over decision-making authority in the capital.¹⁴ The 1978 battle over who could dispose of what and who had to pay for the Plateaux des Halles was waged between two factions of the conservative camp: between the centrist party (RPR) under Giscard d’Estaing and the Gaullists (UNR) under Jacques Chirac.

Giscard’s authoritarian attitude towards the prefect of Paris and the City Council in the early months of his term established the concept of the “fait

du prince” (Prince’s Fiat), which refers to the absence of explanation in the decision-making of a political sovereign.¹⁵ His veto of the ongoing construction of an International Trade Center on the Plateaux des Halles on August 6, 1974 not only nullified the decisions of the Paris City Council and its planning department but also confronted the powerful semipublic planning institution for Les Halles, the Société d’Economie Mixte de l’Aménagement des Halles (SEMAH).¹⁶ The Prince’s Fiat highlights the contradiction of Giscard’s urban governance. On the one hand, the presidential veto of the ongoing Gaullist projects in Paris confirmed the sovereign power of state authority; on the other hand, Giscard’s time in office laid the groundwork for the empowerment of municipalities and for the decentralization of the state, which was legally instituted in 1982.¹⁷

The City of the Sovereign and the City of Security. Architecture and Urban Politics Surrounding Les Halles

In many respects, Giscard’s conservative architectural policy aligned with the goals of politically engaged Parisian architects who sought to develop alternatives to functional determinism and to strengthen their position toward the construction industry. One prominent strand of the French architectural scene gathered under the term “architecture urbaine”, and its members’ interest in urban history from the 16th to the 19th century united three overlapping agendas.¹⁸ The first was the mobilization for heritage protection in response to the ruthless and authoritarian demolition of historical monuments, including the demolition of Victor Baltard’s cast-iron market halls (built between 1857 and 1874) and the panoptic prison complex Roquette (built between 1825 and 1839) in 1974.¹⁹ The second agenda concerned the rationale of the architectural project and the questioning of modernisation and modernist design doctrines. Architects

15 François Chaslin, “L’effet du prince. Paris et les champs élyséens,” in *Le Paris de François Mitterrand. Histoire des grands projets architecturaux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 11-19, here 15.

16 Private institutions under public law are typical of Gaullist urban planning initiatives like the new towns or La Défense. See Roger Zetter, “Les Halles. A Case Study of Large-Scale Redevelopment in Central Paris,” *Town planning review* 46, no. 3 (1975): 267–94. The influence of SEMAH stemmed from its close connection to the Paris City Council: the company was 51% owned by the city and 25% by the state. Its director, Christian de la Malène, was a Gaullist city council member, see *ibid.*, 274. For a recent account of the power stakes in the controversies about Les Halles and the project by Bofill – Taller de Arquitectura, see Dominique Serrell, *Bofill. The French years* (Paris: Editions Norma, 2023) 94–107.

17 Loi du 2 mars 1982 relative aux droits et libertés des communes, des départements et des régions, <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000000880039/>; For Giscard’s architecture and urban politics of decentralization, see Giscard d’Estaing and Robert Franc, “Changeons la ville”, and Éric Lengereau, *L’Etat et l’architecture 1958-1981: une politique publique?* (Paris: Picard, 2001), 373–381.

18 See Jacques Lucan, “Architecture Urbaine,” in *Architecture en France 1940-2000. Histoire et theories* (Paris: Le Moniteur, 2001), 257–274; Nan Ellin, *Postmodern Urbanism* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999 (1996)); Juliette Pommier and Bernard Huet, *De l’architecture à la ville, Une anthologie des écrits de Bernard Huet* (Paris: Zeug, 2020); Juliette Pommier, *Vers une architecture urbaine, La trajectoire de Bernard Huet* (Paris: Paris 8 – Vincennes-Saint-Denis, 2010). For the complex political agendas surrounding architecture urbaine, see Isabelle Doucet, Janina Gosseye and Anne Kockelkorn, “From Le Droit à la Ville to Rechte Räume: Legacies and legends of the Movement for the Reconstruction of the European City”, in *Architecture and Democracy 1965–1989: Urban Renewal, Populism and the Welfare State*, ed. Dirk van den Heuvel, Soscha Monteiro de Jesus and Sun Ah Hwang (Rotterdam: Jaap Bakema Study Centre, 2019), 10–18.

19 See Bernard Huet, “Faut-il détruire la petite roquette?”, *Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, no. 172 (1974): XXII-XXIII.

11 see *Schema Directeur d’aménagement et d’urbanisme de la Ville de Paris*, Paris: March 1977, rapport I, chapter 19 and Simon Texier, “La ville verte 1975-2001,” in Simon Texier (ed.), *Les parcs et jardins dans l’urbanisme parisien, XIXe-XXe siècles* (Paris: Action artistique de la ville de Paris, 2001), 198–210.

12 For a summary of the urban renewal in Paris see Francis Godard, *La rénovation urbaine à Paris. Structure urbaine et logique de classe* (Paris, La Haye: Mouton, 1973).

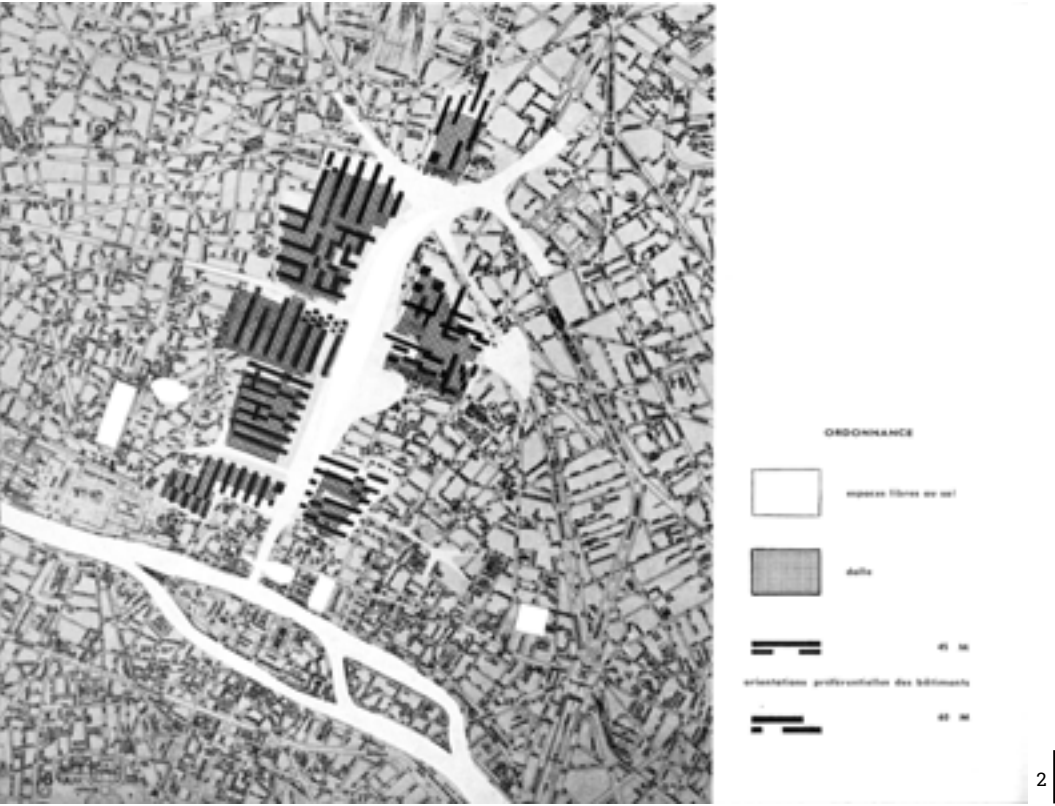
13 Yvan Combeau and Philippe Nivet, “La formation du bastion gaulliste (1958-1977)”, in *Histoire politique de Paris au XXe siècle. Une histoire locale et nationale* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2000, 228-272), 250–51.

14 Combeau and Nivet, “La formation du bastion gaulliste (1958-1977)”.

aligning with the idea of “architecture urbaine” started to relate concepts of urban life, urban density and mixed-use to the spatial continuity of the existing historic fabric. They also rediscovered design themes formerly discarded by modern design doctrines, such as mimesis, affect and the autonomy of architectural form. A third agenda was to position the discipline of architecture within the shifting landscape of knowledge in Paris’ universities, with the intent to reveal its discursive origins and understand its conceptual core.²⁰ Architect Bruno Fortier, a student and member of Michel Foucault’s research seminars, expressed this goal by uncovering the “principles” of the “blatant impoverishment” of modernity understanding the power of the hygienist discourse that had arisen in the late 18th century.²¹

In autumn 1974, the open competition for the demolished Roquette prison and the invited competition for the Plateaux des Halles epitomized a turning point for “architecture urbaine”. For the first time since the *Trente Glorieuses*, architects openly embraced historic languages and historic urban morphologies for high-stakes projects. The Les Halles competition, however, involved conflicting demands: evoking an adequate urban and social model for the leisure society while Giscard’s advanced liberalism rejected the idea of collective consumption;²² addressing the need for a strong collective identity and the possibility of political participation amid a city that had just undergone a violent process of deproletarization; and, finally, synthesizing these ambitions into an urban design that would suggest continuity. Meanwhile, the Les Halles neighborhood had been radically transformed by the relocation of the wholesale market to the urban periphery and the demolition of Victor Baltard’s famed pavilions.

Proposing historical urban forms as a viable solution for a forward-looking vision of urbanity brought about a radical departure from what had been planned for this site since the interwar period.²³ Urban planner Maurice Rotival’s modernist urban planning vision for the right bank of the Seine, developed between 1961 and 1963, illustrates this shift. Rotival proposed replacing the entire city center from the Seine to the Gare de Nord with a modern new town, much of which would be covered by a



pedestrian elevated zone six meters above ground.²⁴ [Fig. 2] The Paris City Council, in shock, rejected this vision of “urbanisme sur dalle” in November 1963.²⁵ And yet, the project, its publication, and commentaries in academic circles reflected several notions and arguments about the urban renewal of Les Halles that remained in place until the early 1970s. A first recurring notion was that of a political sovereign strong enough to demolish and reshape large parts of central Paris, which was driven by the argument that modern urbanism and its architecture could offer to its members a more livable society, including the spectacle of enjoyment and continuous animation.²⁶ Another important discursive trope in the debates of urban renewal was the argument for the hygiene and discipline of the city as prerequisites for economic growth that implicitly justified the relocation of lower-income groups to the urban periphery.²⁷ Responding to a letter from a citizens’ initiative against the urban renewal of Les Halles in 1968, the prefect of Paris, Maurice Doublet, declared that demolishing 40 percent of the neighborhood was absolutely necessary to provide sanitary housing

20 For discussions about the orientation of architecture schools toward the university between 1968 and 1978, see Jean-Louis Violeau, *Les Architectes et Mai 68* (Paris: Éditions Recherches, 2005). An example of this orientation is the research funded by the Committee for Research and Development in Architecture CORDA, founded by the Ministry of Research in 1972. See also the study on the housing typologies of Les Halles initiated by André Chastel in the early 1960s and published in 1977, Françoise Boudon, André Chastel, Hélène Couzy, Françoise Hamon, *Système de l’architecture urbaine le quartier des Halles à Paris*, vol. 1; Françoise Raby, André Chastel, Hélène Couzy, Françoise Hamon, Jean Blécon, *Système de l’architecture urbaine le quartier des Halles à Paris*, vol. 2 (Paris: CNRS, 1977).

21 Bruno Fortier, “Preface” in *La Politique de l’espace parisien à la fin de l’Ancien Régime* (Paris: CORDA, 1975), 1.

22 Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 197–98.

23 Proposals for the urban renewal of Les Halles appeared, among others, in Albert Léon Guérard, *L’Avenir de Paris* (Paris: Payot, 1929), 138–139, and A.H., “Les grands projets des halles de Paris,” *Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, no. 3–4 (1940): III–IV, 48.

24 The proposal was developed starting in 1961 within a working group of the newly founded I.A.U.R.P., now IAU, and finalized under the leadership of Maurice Rotival until 1963, see Bertrand Lemoine, *Les Halles de Paris* (Paris: l’Équerre, 1980), 208; Rotival, Maurice, “Essai sur le centre de Paris,” *Urbanisme*, no. 84, Numéro spécial: destin de Paris (1964): 36–47.

25 “Les halles et le quartier des Halles à Paris,” *Vie urbaine*, no. 4 (1963), 303–14. “Urbanisme sur dalle” refers to the planning jargon for separating pedestrian zones and motorized traffic through horizontal concrete slabs.

26 See explanation of the 1967 competition program in “Paris: les Halles,” *Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, no. 132 (1967): 23–28.

27 Economic considerations prevailed in the decision of the ministerial council session of January 6, 1959 regarding the relocation of the wholesale markets, see Lemoine, *Les Halles de Paris*, 207.

Fig. 2
Project for the Urban Renewal of Paris, as proposed by the team of Maurice Rotival, 1963. Source: *Urbanisme*, no. 84 (1964), Numéro spécial: destin de Paris, 52.



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and fulfil basic human needs for light and air.²⁸ His arguments drew on empirical evidence. Until the beginning of World War II, the neighborhoods adjacent to the wholesale market recorded the highest mortality rates from lung tuberculosis in Paris, and in the mid-1960s, most of its housing consisted of single-room apartments without heating and running water.²⁹ By 1967, 40 percent of the working population in the redevelopment area earned less than the lowest income category for unskilled workers in the Paris metropolitan area.³⁰

From the mid-1960s onward, metaphors of life and death proliferated in the discourses of urban renewal advocates and their opponents, as both referred to the urban life that was to be preserved or newly projected on this location. For the opponents of the urban renewal, the notion of “vitality” referred to constant mixing of people from different class and professions arising from the market activity.³¹ The national and international press used the metaphor of an amputated organ for the move of the wholesale market and the demolition of Baltard’s market halls.³² Urban historian Norma Evenson concluded in her 1973 essay “The Assassination of Les Halles” that “for many, the destruction of Les Halles” was “symbolic of the destruction of Paris itself.”³³ However, the idea of a vibrant heart of the city that would largely transcend functional separation was also a core objective of the competition launched by Maurice Doublet for the

28 AG/5(3)/2270/quartier des Halles –aménagement. Press release from the Prefect of Paris dated September 24, 1968, in response to the information note on the development of the Halles sector (July 1968) from the Comité Parisien de recherche et d’action sociale (COPRAS), the main actor against the planned neighborhood renewal.

29 Jacqueline Kerhervé, “Le quartier des Halles à Paris,” *Vie urbaine*, no. 2 (1959): 137–142.

30 Zetter, “Les Halles,” 269.

31 Comité Parisien de recherche et d’action sociale (COPRAS): Note d’information sur l’aménagement du secteur des Halles (July 1968), 18. 5AG3-2270-quartier des Halles –aménagement.

32 Paulhans Peters, “Bauch’-Transplantation. Die Verlegung der ‘Hallen’ von Paris nach Rungis,” *Baumeister* 66 (1969); Charlotte Ellis, “News from nowhere,” *Architectural Review* 180, no. 1078 (1986); Norma Evenson, “The Assassination of Les Halles,” *Journal of the American Society of Architectural Historians* 32, no. 4 (1973).

33 Evenson, “The Assassination of Les Halles,” 315.

Fig. 3

Architects and their models of the architectural competition for Les Halles in 1967, showing architects Charpentier, Faugeron, de Marien, Maron, Arretche and the Atelier d’urbanisme et d’architecture (A.U.A.), 1967. Source: *Paris Match*, no. 953, July 1967.



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megastructure at the Plateau des Halles in 1967, the “most important and complex operation ever undertaken in a capital.”³⁴ The six invited architects responded to the uncertainty about how to generate urban life with a layered programmatic openness in the formal repertoire of late post-war modernism that featured futuristic high-rise clusters (Jean Faugeron) or meandering megastructures (A.U.A. and Louis de Hoym de Marien).³⁵ [Fig. 3] In 1968, the competition models were publicly exhibited at the Hôtel de Ville, and seen by an estimated 60,000 visitors. However, the visibility did not increase public acceptance but appeared as a soulless protocol of technocratic reasoning.³⁶

In 1968, the Parisian City Council rejected all projects from the 1967 competition and reduced the proposed program by half.³⁷ It also assigned a new development plan to the Atelier Parisien d’Urbanisme (APUR), a newly established planning department of the Paris City Council under the lead of architects Louis Arretche and Pierre Faucheux.³⁸ The new design by APUR in July 1969 represented a significant consolidation effort that remained unchallenged for the next five years. [Fig. 4] In an act of urban lobotomy, the APUR project relocated and condensed the dense mix-use megastructures of the 1960s into an underground commuter station. Above ground, it left an open lawn, a hotel and an

34 For a documentation of the competition results oriented to professionals see, “Paris: les Halles,” *Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, no. 132 (1967): 23–28, quote by Doublet on 23. For a documentation oriented to the general public, see *Paris Match*, no. 951, July 1, 1967.

35 Doublet invited the architecture firms by Louis Arretche, Claude Charpentier, Jean Faugeron, Louis de Hoym de Marien und Marot & Tremblot; the firm A.U.A. was invited by André Malraux. For a historic survey on the role of model exhibitions in the sequence of Les Halles competitions, see Maxime Zaugg, “Talking Urban Scale Models: Les Halles Redevelopment Project in Paris and Its Public Exhibitions (1968–1982),” *Livraisons de l’histoire de l’architecture*, no. 45 (2023).

36 Yvan Christ, “Les Halles our la démesure,” in: *Revue des deux Mondes*, March 1968, 275–280; *Les Actualités françaises*, “Après le transfert des Halles à Rungis: Que deviendra le vieux quartier parisien?”, March 12, 1968, INA, Paris, [online, video], <https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclaire-actu/video/afe86001145/apres-le-transfert-des-halles-a-rungis-que-deviendra-le-vieux-quartier> (accessed October 13, 2025).

37 Between 1963 and 1968, the area of the redevelopment zone shrank from 470 hectares (scope of the designs by Rotival and Lopez from 1963) to 43 hectares (competition of 1967) and then to 22.4 hectares (city council decision of October 24, 1968); the program decreased from 800,000 to 400,000 square meters between 1967 and 1968. Lemoine, *Les Halles de Paris*, 209–212.

38 The Atelier Parisien d’Urbanisme was established in June 1967 to develop urban planning projects for the City of Paris. The chair was held by the Prefect of Paris while the board of directors (Conseil d’Administration) consisted of 10 city council members and 8 officials.

Fig. 4

Megastructure of Les Halles by Atelier Parisien d’Urbanisme (APUR), 1970. Source: *Paris Projet* no. 4 (1970).

international trade center, whose construction was vetoed by Giscard in August 1974.

The genealogy of these projections for Les Halles and their attempt to anticipate an urban milieu showcase two Foucauldian models of urban governmentality: the model of the sovereign, whose capital occupies the geometric and symbolic center of a national territory and represents its crowning ornament; and the biopolitical model of security that responds to potential future needs “within a multivalent and transformable framework” that aims to minimize government intervention.³⁹ Together, the models embraced the contradictory future designation of the site as a city center, a working-class neighborhood, a recreational landscape, and a luxury district. Recalling how these metaphors of urban governance permeated the discourse about Les Halles helps to understand Ricardo Bofill’s project—first, because both the sovereign notion of ornament and the biopolitical notion of an open framework influenced the design approach of Taller de Arquitectura; and second, because Bofill conceptualized his project as a means of governing the city through design.

A Contemporary Palais Royal

Ricardo Bofill’s eligibility for the assignment of Les Halles had been quitly established behind the scenes since 1971. At first glance, it was the creative power of the transdisciplinary team at Taller de Arquitectura, along with Ricardo Bofill’s consistent media strategy, that positioned him for Les Halles. His professional experience also cast him in a favorable light: at the age of 32—“an age when French architects are just receiving their diplomas,”—his built oeuvre in Spain already included several residential and commercial buildings and a large-scale social housing project.⁴⁰ French new town planners recalled him as a “jeune Bonaparte au pont d’Arcole”⁴¹ alluding to his determination as well as his reputation for combining professionalism and creativity.

Archival evidence, however, offers a crucial counterpart to public storytelling: it reveals the central role of the president’s closest advisor, the economist Pierre Richard, born in 1941, whom Bofill had met during a trip of French town planners to Barcelona in the autumn of 1971. Since Bofill was invited to France by Parisian new town planners in that same year, none of three commissioned housing schemes for the Paris new towns Évry, Cergy-Pontoise,

and Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines had come to fruition. However, the constant meetings and project discussions had established a strong network among French new town planners and state officials, including Robert Lion, Pierre Richard, Jean-Eudes Roullier and Guy Salmon-Legagneur, and this network was solid enough to push him upward.⁴² In 1971, Richard worked as deputy general director of the Cergy-Pontoise new town and had established a close relationship with Bofill during the first months of negotiations for the “Petite Cathédrale” housing scheme. In 1972, he took a consultant position at the Secretary of State for Housing and, following the May 1974 elections, became one of Giscard d’Estaing’s closest advisors within the policy framework of advanced liberalism.⁴³ The cordial tone of the correspondence between Pierre Richard and Ricardo Bofill regarding the architect contract for the “Petite Cathédrale” reveals ties of friendship and solidarity; and when Pierre Richard moved to the Ministry of Housing and Transportation in August 1972, Bofill and his associate Salvador Clotas urgently appealed to him to not neglect his support for the “Petite Cathédrale”.⁴⁴ In June 1974, Pierre Richard started to advocate for Ricardo Bofill at a crucial moment: at this time, the new interior minister, Michel Poniatowski thwarted the “Petite Cathédrale” by threatening the city planning director of the Cergy-Pontoise new town, Bernard Hirsch, with loss of support.⁴⁵ In a handwritten note from June 29, 1974, Pierre Richard wrote to Bernard Hirsch that the “well-connected” minister of culture, Michel Guy, was, in contrast to Michel Poniatowski, a “strong advocate” of the “Petite Cathédrale”, which he could communicated to indecisive individuals.⁴⁶ Two weeks after writing this note, Pierre Richard prompted Valérie Giscard d’Estaing to intervene at the Plateau des Halles.⁴⁷ Another three weeks later he positioned the phantom image of Ricardo Bofill as a desirable candidate for the task.⁴⁸ The correspondence between Valérie Giscard d’Estaing and Pierre Richard in the summer of 1974 also highlights the tight intersection between political program and aesthetic form, as Richard proposed to the president to let the Plateau des Halles be designed as a “contemporary Palais Royal.”

42 Observation based on archival sources and actors’ interviews (except for Jean-Eudes Roullier who died in 2010).

43 Pierre Bourdieu and Rosine Christin, “La construction du marché,” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 81-82 (March 1990): 69.

44 Letter signed by Salvador Clotas and Ricardo Bofill dated 02.08.1972, Archives Val d’Oise, 1083 W6–1971-1974, WM2: “Je pense que ta présence dans cette opération, dans laquelle tu as été un des éléments decisifs, continue à être importante à fin d’assurer la direction et le dynamisme nécessaire à cette realization.”

45 Bernard Hirsch, *Oublier Cergy*, 235.

46 Handwritten letter from on the letterhead of Ministère de l’équipement – Groupe central des Villes Nouvelles dated 29.6.1974, 1083 W6 – 1971-1974, WM3.

47 Note for the Président de la République signed by Pierre Richard, dated 17.07.1974, subject: Opération de l’Aménagement des Halles. AG/5(3)/2270/quartier des Halles. The five-page document includes an A4 page with three site plan sketches from 1971, 1974, and a future perspective from 1979.

48 Note à l’attention du président de la République, signed by Pierre Richard, Paris, dated 5.8.1974, 2 pages, AG/5(3)/2270/quartier des Halles/aménagement. Later documents show further evidence of the close relationship between Pierre Richard and Ricardo Bofill, including indications of how to manipulate the Paris City Council and statements suggesting that Ricardo Bofill is the sole architect to adequately fulfill this task. Note pour Monsieur le Président de la République signed by Pierre Richard, dated 29.10.1974, subject: Affaire des Halles; Note pour Monsieur le Président de la République signed by Pierre Richard, dated 31.05.1975, both in AG/5(3)/2270/quartier des Halles/aménagement.

39 Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège De France, 1977–78* (Hampshire, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2009 (2004)), lecture 1, 16–38, here 35–38, quote on page 35.

40 Bernard Hirsch, *Oublier Cergy. L’invention d’une ville nouvelle. Cergy-Pontoise. 1965–1975* (Paris: Presses de l’Ecole Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées, 2000 (1990)), 231: “À 32 ans, c’est-à-dire à l’âge où les architectes français obtiennent leur diplôme et commencent à ouvrir une agence, Ricardo Bofill avait déjà à son actif une oeuvre importante”.

41 Guy Salmon-Legagneur, Interview with the author, June 2011: “Il me faisait penser beaucoup physiquement à une peinture célèbre de Bonaparte au pont d’Arcole, c’est-à-dire pas très grand, très fin, très caractériel, très déterminé.”



5

To clarify this proposal, Richard incorporated a scale duplicate of the Palais Royal's floor plan into the city plan of the construction site in his note to the president from July 17, 1974.⁴⁹ In that same document, Richard also noted that current planning would fragment the site into a heterogeneous ensemble of isolated architectural elements, and that involving eight different architects would never lead to a satisfactory result. In subsequent documents of July 30 and August 5, 1974, Richard presented the Palais Royal as an established formal and political solution for Les Halles.⁵⁰ To successfully realize it, Richard suggested that the President could either ask the Culture Minister Guy to announce a new, invited competition or directly commission a "young architect" with a new master plan.⁵¹

Neither the presidential archives nor in the archives of the Ministry of Culture contain competition briefs.⁵² However, I assume that at least some participants were informed about the task of creating a "Palais Royal," whereas others learned about it indirectly.⁵³ At the same time, Pierre Richard emphasized to Giscard in the preparatory evaluation of the competition documents on September 18, that the architects "had received few restrictions."⁵⁴ Bofill

49 Note pour le Président de la République signed by Pierre Richard, dated 17.07.1974, see note 43.

50 First, in a sober summary of the measures to be taken for Les Halles, "Déclaration on Aménagement des Halles et du Plateau Beaubourg" dated 30.7. 1974, 2 pages, AG/5(3)/2270/quartier des Halles/aménagement; second, in the preparation for the city council meeting and the President's press release "Note à l'attention du président de la république, subject: conseil restreint sur les HALLES – Mardi 6 Août 1974", AG/5(3)/2270 /quartier des Halles/aménagement.

51 "Déclaration on Aménagement des Halles et du Plateau Beaubourg" dated 30.7. 1974, 2 pages, AG/5(3)/2270/quartier des Halles/aménagement; second, in the preparation for the city council meeting and the President's press release "Note à l'attention du président de la république, subject: conseil restreint sur les HALLES – Mardi 6 Août 1974", AG/5(3)/2270 /quartier des Halles/aménagement.

52 Ricardo Bofill described the invitation to the competition for Les Halles as a telephone call followed by a personal conversation with Michel Guy, see Bofill, *Architecture d'un homme*, 9-10.

53 The press releases by Taller de Arquitectura and ACT Architecture refer to the Palais Royal, see Taller de Arquitectura, "Projet Taller de Arquitectura (1^{er} Projet pour Les Halles)", *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 176 (1974): 112–113, and 116. The presidential archives include an urgent message by Bernard de la Rochefoucauld, president of the development company Serete-Aménagement for the Forum Les Halles, which explicitly situates the company's project along the lines of classical urbanism from the 16th to the 18th centuries. Note to Mr. Richard from Mr. Sérisé, including a two-page project description by Bernard de la Rochefoucauld, dated 9.9.1974, AG/5(3)/2270/quartier des Halles/development.

54 Note to Monsieur le Président de la République, signed by Pierre Richard, dated 18.9.1974, subject: Projet d'Espaces Verts aux HALLES, AG/5(3)/2270: "Les architectes qui ont été consultés ont eu toute liberté pour imaginer un projet original, peu de contraintes ayant été imposées."

Fig. 5
Jardin à la Française for Les Halles, 1974. Source: Archivo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura.



6

also stated, in retrospect, that he only accepted the invitation to the competition if he could design the project free from programmatic constraints.⁵⁵ While I assume that the aesthetic commission to design a "Contemporary Palais Royal" was clearly communicated, the final design of the Taller is indeed free from any technical and other type of pragmatic constraints: the evocative collage of archetypical historic fragments developed by Manolo Núñez Yanowsky and Xavier Llistosella clearly privileges atmospheric qualities over technical feasibility or spatial coherence.⁵⁶ [Fig. 5, 6, 7] Taller de Arquitectura's design approach was not unique in ignoring the underground megastructure; the designs of Émile Aillaud and ACT Architecture also have no recognizable connections between the surface and the underground, neither for air and light nor for people. Richard and Bofill's assertion of programmatic freedom thus elevated the artistic act above technical and programmatic demands, while silencing the aesthetic commission beyond the realm of public view.

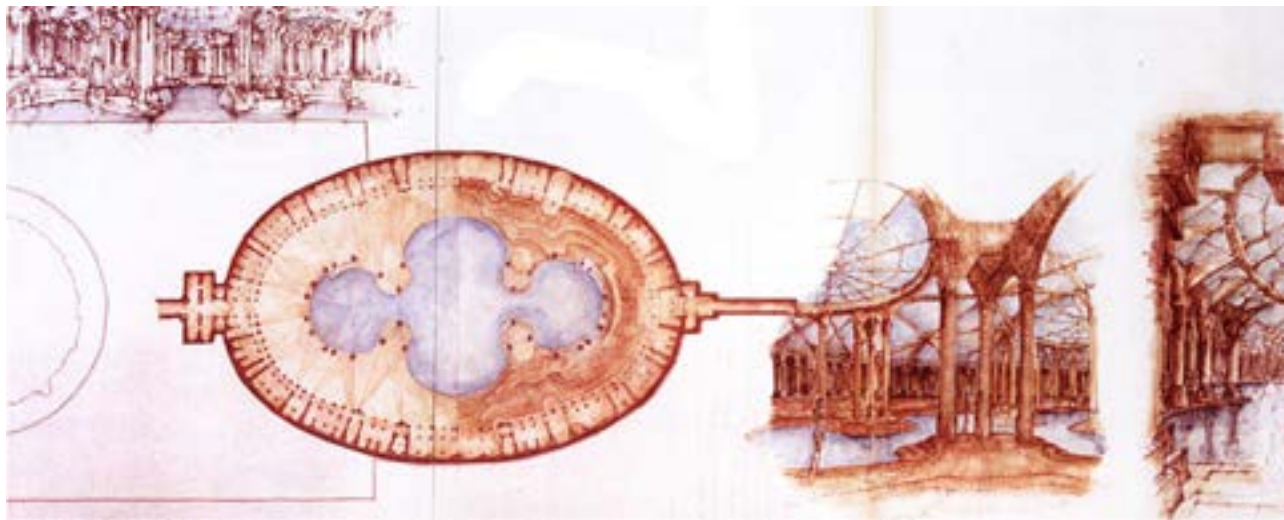
To better understand this contradictory coexistence of artistic autonomy and political instrumentalization, I juxtapose the 1974 presidential correspondence with the stance of architecture critic Bernard Huet, then editor-in-chief of the influential magazine *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*. From the perspective of presidential corresponsance and press releases, the project should represent Giscard's new urban policy, mark his term in office and shape the architectural history of the 20th century.⁵⁷ Thus, the design of the Taller served as a strategic tool to embody a politics of advanced liberalism, while adhering to the anti-liberal logic of political sovereignty within which the capital represents the crowning ornament of a governed territory.

55 Bofill, *Architecture d'un homme*, 10, 31.

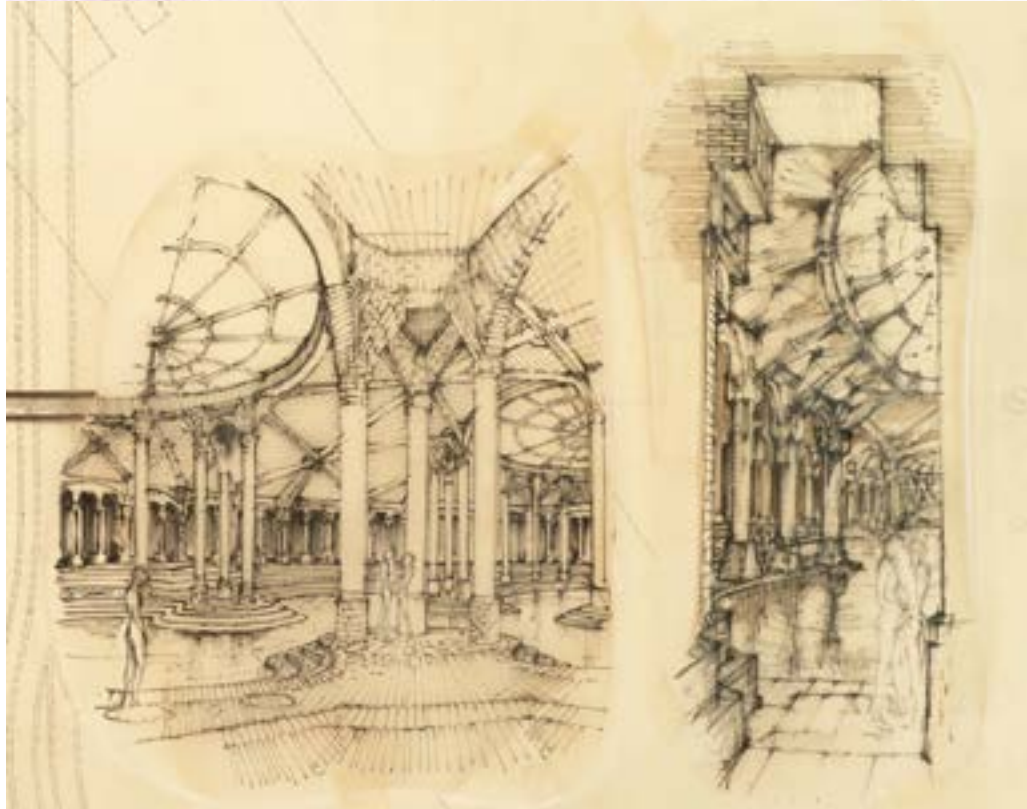
56 For a brief summary about the internal design process for les Halles, see Serrell, *Bofill. The French years*, 98–99.

57 Undated presse release AP117, ranged after the note concerning the meeting between Christian de la Malène and the project on 7.7.1976, AG/5(3)/2271/quartier des Halles/aménagement: "Lors d'un déjeuner qui réunissait le 10 février les quatre architectes – M. Henri Bernard, Ricardo Bofill, Marc Saltet, et Bernard de la Tour d'Auvergne – le chef de l'état avait souhaité que ce projet soit exemplaire, (...) et qu'il représente un (en)semble (sic) représentatif de l'architecture du XX^{ème} siècle."

Fig. 6
Central Plaza, Les Halles, 1974. Source: Archivo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura.



7a



7b

From the perspective of architectural criticism, Bernard Huet insisted that the project's poetry of the non-utilizable was a valid response to the societal problem of alienation. In the publication of the competition results in November 1974, he presented Bofill's project on a two-page color spread, sniping that all other participants had failed to grasp the significance of the task.⁵⁸ The spatial quality of the design would have been usable "for everyone" through its uselessness, while its visionary power reaffirmed the very core of architecture. For Huet, the project successfully embodied a manifesto of urban architecture and the Lefebvrian promise of a right to the city; its offer of collective participation through aesthetic experience transcended the functionalist reduction to quantifiable minimal needs. Huet's interpretation

⁵⁸ Bernard Huet, "Quelques objets autour d'un trou – La revanche du cavalier Bernin," *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 176 (1974): 110.

Fig. 7a, 7b
Thermal Baths for Les Halles,
watercolour overview and
detail of original pencil
drawing, 1974. Source:
Archivo Bofill Taller de
Arquitectura.

is particularly notable because he was aware of the political ambiguity of the urban renewal for Les Halles. His competition critique appeared in a thematic issue that compared renewal projects and gentrification processes in Paris and London, where another text by him, co-authored with Marie-Christine Gagneux, used the term "deportation" regarding the relocation of low-income groups from the city center to the Banlieue.⁵⁹ For Huet, the wealth of associations sparked by the project of the Taller functioned like an adaptable mental framework open to future transformations, and resonated with a biopolitical logic of architectural politics. These seemingly opposed possibilities of interpretation delineate the tremendous act of assembly that the first project of Taller de Arquitectura successfully contained. On the one hand, it marked the shift in architecture's role from a social to a cultural project and served as an instrument of gentrifying urban politics; on the other hand, and at the same time, it represented a powerful space of emancipation from technocratic functionalism and its rationality of endless growth.

The Promise of Performative Urbanity

The synthesising power and ambiguity of Bofill's project for Les Halles bore many similarities to the tourist environments of the post-war boom years. During this period, the leisure worlds of mass tourism played an important role in the process of social redistribution across both sides of the iron curtain in Europe.⁶⁰ However, their emancipatory potential was flawed with alienation and conformism, as sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre observed in his seminal 1974 publication *The Production of Space*. As reproducible spatial products, tourist environments were as alienating as industrial labour; yet condemning them would be as uncritical as accepting them unchallenged.⁶¹ According to Lefebvre, leisure heterotopias represented a „space of contradictions“ that exposed the fractures, potentials, and paradoxes of capitalism, “as prodigal of monstrosities as of promises (that it cannot keep).”⁶² The following section examines these contradictions through published and archival sources from Ricardo Bofill and Taller de Arquitectura regarding the 1974 design for Les Halles and the proposal for an unrealized program for a national architecture institution in Paris.

⁵⁹ Marie-Christine Gagneux and Bernard Huet, "Une politique, deux stratégies: La stratégie de l'araignée," *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 176 (1974): 70-71.

⁶⁰ For an appraisal of the impact of tourist urbanization on Spain, which deeply influenced the design strategies of Taller de Arquitectura in the 1960s and 1970, see Eugenia Afinoguénova and Jaume Martí-Olivella (eds.), *Spain Is (Still) Different. Tourism and Discourse in Spanish Identity* (Lanham et al: Lexington Books, 2008); for an appraisal of tourist urbanization in Eastern Europe, see Elke Beyer, Anke Hagemann, and Michael Zinganel (eds.), *Holidays after the Fall. Seaside Architecture and Urbanism in Bulgaria and Croatia* (Berlin: Jovis, 2013).

⁶¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, Oxford, Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 1991 (1974)), 383-385; Łukasz Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 177.

⁶² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 385.

The guiding theme for Bofill's design on the Plateau des Halles in 1974 is the staging of a theatrical landscape. "A romantic park (...), conceived as an elongated labyrinth, full of surprises, a framework for a continuous total spectacle, (...)" summarizes a line from Ricardo Bofills' handwritten project description to Michel Guy from September 1974.⁶³ In terms of design approach, the project follows the principle of framing, layering multiple spatial levels much like cinematic depth of field. Bofill describes this approach in *Architecture d'un homme* as the overlay of the „Place Royale" (the Plateau des Halles) with the more intimate "Place à l'Italienne" (the oval colonnade in the center). To create meeting spaces and evoke depth, the royal square is planted with trees "à la française," that subdivide the larger square into smaller spatial units and relate visitors to one another like the furnishings of a room - similar to a French baroque garden.⁶⁴ [Fig. 1, 5] The unpublished project descriptions from the national archives further highlight the importance of designing the project in terms of actor-spectator relations. A brief poem in the project documents from September 1974 suggests to animate the Plateau des Halles with extras that would attract the attention of viewers "like in a 19th-century operetta."⁶⁵ Another proposal from October 1974 proposed placing an oval swimming pool directly below the colonnade, accessible via the colonnade staircases and illuminated by the pool in the center of the square. "This playful swimming facility would be unique worldwide and, though on a different scale, reminiscent of ancient baths," concluded Pierre Richard in his summary of the project idea for Valérie Giscard d'Estaing.⁶⁶ [Fig. 7]

At this point, the reference to the Palais Royal as a blueprint for centrality holds particular significance, as it alludes to both the surrender to and transgression of normalizing spaces of consumption. In a close reading of the writings of Charles Fourier (undertaken in 1972 and published in 1975), Henri Lefebvre interpreted the use history of the Palais Royal before and after the French Revolution as performative model of collective luxury, bringing together consumption, political dissent and sexual transgression.⁶⁷ To illustrate this conception, Lefebvre described the Palais Royal from the experiential perspective of a child who observes its contrasting spaces of action while in a state of semi-sleep. The members of Taller de Arquitectura similarly drew on the realm of dreams: in their 1974 press release, they stated that the project must capture and

reflect the contradictions and dreams of the "collective unconscious of the urban".⁶⁸ In their descriptions of the historic Palais Royal and its contemporary reenactment, both Lefebvre and Bofill referred to the carefully choreographed experience of pedestrians and to the stimulation of curiosity and desire to explore [Fig. 8] Ricardo Bofill himself recalled in 1978 that the essential task of Les Halles was to create an affective relationship between the space and its users and spectators to trigger a déjà-vu at the boundary between conscious and unconscious.⁶⁹ At the same time, the idea of a counterworld to the "horror of the Metro" recalled the staging of holiday heterotopias like Club Méditerranée.⁷⁰ That's where the impossible synthesis of emancipation and alienation of tourist environments, and their likening to the experience of centrality, becomes tangible: the choreographed illusionary worlds of leisure heterotopias intensify the alienation of capitalist consumer society through industrial reproducibility and, at the same time, offer the possibility of desire and enjoyment beyond economic exploitation. When the members of Taller de Arquitectura defined the project's rejection of functionalism in terms of a "social profitability" that would transcend the limits of "economic profitability", they also alluded to this contradicting feature of consumer environments.⁷¹

The topos of a tourist counterworld also emerged in the program for an architecture institution and festival for the City of Paris. Under pressure to secure the commission, Bofill had to demonstrate to state institutions that he had of the cultural and symbolic capital necessary to successfully pursue the Les Halles project. He adopted an assertive approach with a proposal aimed at showcasing his intellectual and organizational abilities.

Two days before the official presentation of the competition results, a six-page letter from Ricardo Bofill to the president arrived at the Élysée Palace on September 14, 1974. It contained a proposal to establish an architectural institute that would include an international festival for architecture and urban planning, an architecture museum, and a research facility



Fig. 8
Sketch of the Colonnade,
1975. Source: Archivo Bofill
Taller de Arquitectura.

63 "Le Parc des Halles", Sep 1974, AN Ministère de la culture, 20090131 art. 227, 13 pages, p.7-8: "(...) un parc romantique, émmélé à la morphologie accidentée, conçu comme un labyrinthe long, plein de surprises, cadre pour un spectacle permanent et total."

64 Bofill, *Architecture d'un homme*, 17; "Projet Taller de Arquitectura (1^{er} Projet pour Les Halles)", 113.

65 "Le Parc des Halles", 1974, 4.

66 Rapport au Président de la république sur l'aménagement de la zone de rénovation des Halles de Paris, October 1974, 21 pages, AG/5(3)/2270/quartier des Halles/aménagement. Richard's document also presents a 100 million Francs budget for the thermal baths.

67 Henri Lefebvre (ed.), *Actualité De Fourier: Colloque d'Arc-et-Senans* (Paris: Anthropos, 1975), 14-15; Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory*, 178.

68 Taller de Arquitectura, *Projet Taller de Arquitectura (1^{er} Projet pour Les Halles)*, 113; "Quelles idées, quelles craintes, quelles contradictions, quels rêves communs existent dans le subconscient urbain collectif pour une solution des Halles?", *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 176 (1974): 112.

69 Bofill, *Architecture d'un homme*, 27.

70 "Le Parc des Halles", 1974.

71 Taller de Arquitectura, "Projet Taller de Arquitectura (1^{er} Projet pour Les Halles)", 113.

under Bofill's leadership.⁷² The letter begins by discussing the break from traditional French urban planning caused by modernity and the resulting neuroses impacting everyday life and the use of urban landscapes.⁷³ The letter then proposes an architectural and urban policy analogous to the film industry; it suggests that architecture and urban planning could regain popularity and cultural recognition similar to those engendered by cinema. After all, cinema and architecture are structurally related: both are conditioned by industrial production while relying on intellectual critique and popular acceptance.

His proposal hit the mark. Two weeks later, Culture Minister Michel Guy announced at a press conference on October 1, 1974, that he had commissioned Bofill to lead an expert commission of French planners, architects, and sociologists. The commissions was tasked with establishing a international institution for architecture and with conceiving an international festival for architecture and urbanism, of similar scope for architecture as the festival in Cannes was for film.⁷⁴ Guy presented Bofill's appointment as head of a prominent think tank for French architectural production as part of a broader heritage protection initiative by the Ministry of Culture. The initiative aimed to safeguard one 100 historical city centers while expanding heritage protection to industrial monuments and buildings from the 19th century and early modernism. The convening of such a decisive institution signified a shift in architecture's political role from a societal project to a cultural one. At the beginning of postmodernity, tourist spaces and consumer worlds came into focus for inner-city urban renewal and were no longer an exclusive theme for holiday resorts. The aestheticization of public space became central to this process and served as an essential means of conveying cultural identity. By autumn 1974, Bofill was heading the institutional landscape that should steer this cultural and urban transformation process.

Discussion

In the historical turning point around 1974, the design by Taller de Arquitectura and the project for an architectural institute articulate a thin line between emancipation and repression, where opposing political interests converge. In doing so, they evade clear categorization in the sense of an open work of art.

On one hand, the design by Taller de Arquitectura addressed the imaginary and notions of elsewhere and conveyed notions of centrality and participation in urban life which had characterized Les Halles since the 19th century. For critics like Bernard Huet who were marked by the technocratic growth euphoria of the post-war boom years, this design approach appeared as emancipatory practice.

On the other hand, Bofill's design for Les Halles served as an instrument of urban politics that prepared urban space for a new mass of affluent consumers. Bofill's aestheticization of the environment and his staging of urban spaces evoked positive emotional connections that were crucial for affirming the culture and identity of the leisure society. At the same time, Bofill's proposals and the designs of the members of Taller de Arquitectura reveal the contradiction typical of unconscious chains of association, connecting an authoritarian totalization of everyday life to the anarchic subversion of dreamlike counter-worlds.

The commissioned task to embody a sovereign and liberal urban policy was paradoxical insofar, as this state authority prepared to withdrawal from social redistribution, effectively leaving it to market regulation. As Jean-Louis Cohen observed, Giscard's new architectural policy of advanced liberalism was an attack on social housing and a repudiation of architecture's social contract within which architectural design synthesized social and cultural demands.⁷⁵ In this historic constellation where the Paris metropolitan area was further divided into an interior and an exterior, Bofill and Taller de Arquitectura responded to the task creating a new city gate with a surreal dream world of the useless, thereby obscuring the economic potential inherent in the aestheticization of urban space and collective affect.

The proposals by Ricardo Bofill and Taller de Arquitectura thus adressed and satisfied their clients' wishes and the initial reactions both the president and his minister of culture were unequivocally positive. The festival and institutional program of Ricardo Bofill and Taller de Arquitectura also anticipated two central architectural and cultural policy measures of the early 1980s: the founding of the Institut Français d'Architecture in 1981 and the activation of urban space through the Fête de la musique under Mitterrand's culture minister, Jack Lang in June 1982. By then, however, Bofill had already withdrawn from the scene.

Coda: Exit Bofill

The strong resistance to Bofill's project for Les Halles can also be attributed to Valérie Giscard d'Estaing's authoritarian approach in designating Bofill as his personal favorite, an action that the daily press immediately

72 14.09.1974 "Idées pour définir une politique d'architecture et d'urbanisme dans l'optique et selon les possibilités du secrétariat d'Etat à la Culture," 6 pages, quoted after Éric Lengereau, *L'État et l'architecture 1958-1981*, 302-303. During my consultation of the national archives and the Ministry of Culture's archives, I could not find the documents cited by Lengereau. I assume they were lost during the archive classification that took place between my consultation and Lengereau's consultation.

73 14.09.1974 "Idées pour définir une politique d'architecture et d'urbanisme."

74 Michel Guy, "Cent villes à l'inventaire et création architecturale" Press release, *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 176 (1974): XXVI.

75 Jean-Louis Cohen, "Giscard l'architecture," *La nouvelle critique*, no. 85 (1975).

described as undemocratic and outdated.⁷⁶ The project ideas of participation and individualization, as described by Bofill and Taller de Arquitectura, rarely received coverage in the Parisian media and architectural journals.⁷⁷ The conflict between the Paris City Council, the president, and the developer SEMAH intensified over the next four years, leading to prolonged revision rounds with different configurations of architects. Ricardo Bofill increasingly became a psychological lightning rod for the political establishment, the architectural scene, and the city administration, whose protagonists could not forgive him for his role as the president’s favorite.⁷⁸ By January 1976, it was apparent that the project for Les Halles with Ricardo Bofill as the central actor would not be feasible. For Giscard’s symposium on architectural policy in October 1977, Ricardo Bofill was no longer among the invited architects.⁷⁹

By the end of 1977, all that remained from all the master plans was a housing project by Taller de l’Arquitectura at the northeast parcel of the site, which obtained its building permit in April 1978. Six months later, the newly elected mayor, Jacques Chirac, a declared political opponent of the liberal centrist Giscard ordered the demolition of the construction that had already grown to the level of the second floor.⁸⁰ But even after Bofill’s departure, Les Halles remained an unresolved problem for Jacques Chirac and for Paris. The design commissioned by Chirac also did also not satisfy critics’ demands, and in spring 1979, the architects’ union, SACI, launched an international ideas competition for the Plateau des Halles, that attracted 600 entries from all over the world.⁸¹

Bofill did not participate in this event; he had since ventured into other territories. The preparatory work for Guy’s architecture festival had allowed him to broaden his international networks, including representatives

from MoMA in New York and the Venice Biennale.⁸² Since 1977, Bofill had been negotiating for housing projects with the Algerian government, one of which was the village of Houari Boumedienne in Abadla. In southern France, he began negotiations with Georges Frêches regarding the urban development of Antigone in Montpellier. In 1977, the project “Les Arcades du Lac” for the new town of St. Quentin-en-Yvelines received its building permit, and the initial negotiations for “Les Espaces d’Abraxas” took place during the summer months of 1978. “We had the impression that he had been wronged in the affair of Les Halles,” recalled Michel Rousselot, head of the planning department of the new town Marne-la-Vallée, regarding the commissioning of Bofill for the site at Mont d’Est.⁸³

76 See the ironic headlines like Jean Audouin, “Choisir entre Bofill et Bofill: un baroque napoléonien,” *le Quotidien de Paris*, October 22, 1974, 15; Maurice Cazeaux, “Au conseil de Paris. Les Halles: On cherche un majorité pour le projet Bofill,” *Le Figaro*, October 29, 1974.

77 For a positive view on Bofill in the affair of Les Halles see Marcel Cornu, “Bofill en France,” *Urbanisme*, no. 164 (1978); Claude Boris and Jean-Paul Miroglio, “politique et architecture dans le trou des halles,” *Politique hebdo*, no. 149 (30.10.1974): 32–35.

78 See Michèle Champenois, “Les nouveaux projets des Halles sont présentés aux élus,” *Le Monde*, October 23, 1974; “L’aménagement du quartier des Halles à Paris: la commission des sites examine un nouveau projet de Ricardo Bofill,” *Le Monde*, November 18, 1977, 40c; for an overview, see Serell, *Bofill. The French years*, 79–157.

79 22.1.1976 Richard an Giscard. Note à l’attention de M. le Président de la Rép., objet: Les Halles: “(...) il faut dépersonnaliser le projet.”

80 François Chaslin, “L’effet du prince. Paris et les champs élyséens,” in *Le Paris de François Mitterand. Histoire des grand projets architecturaux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 11-19, here 17. See also François Chaslin, “Le Bonheur est une idée neuve en architecture (sur Bofill),” *Macadam*, no. 6 (1978); “simple et de bon goût”. Les Halles enterrées” *Macadam*, no. 8-9 (1979). For a chronology see Christian Michel, *Les Halles, la renaissance d’un quartier 1966-1988*, edited by Christian de La Malène (Paris, Mailand, Barcelona: Masson, 1988), 272-297.

81 Association pour la consultation internationale pour l’aménagement du quartier des Halles, *600 contreprojets pour les Halles: consultation internationale pour l’aménagement du quartier des Halles, Paris* (Paris: ACIH, 1981).

82 Le Festival International d’architecture à Paris, Automne 1975. Note complémentaire à celle du 19.12.1975, 20090131 art. 215 – CREA-CRCA; FIA, 5 pages, p.1: “Pendant les trois derniers mois, nous avons fait un léger sondage, tant national qu’international auprès d’organismes ou de personnalités liés à la problématique de l’Architecture, comme la Biennale de Venise, le Musée d’Art Moderne de New-York et certains architectes français et étrangers.”

83 Interview with Michel Rousselot (1931-2015) in Paris, June 2012.

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