

Ricardo Bofill Meets Henri Lefebvre: La Ciudad en el Espacio, Benidorm and the “Concrete Utopia”

Ricardo Bofill, Henri Lefebvre, Mario Gaviria, 1968, Benidorm

/Abstract

Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) was a regular visitor to Spain from the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s, due to his close relationship with sociologist Mario Gaviria (1938-2018) who had been a student of his in Strasbourg. As a result of this relationship, Gaviria introduced urban sociology to Spain and translated the philosopher’s main texts. In turn, Lefebvre came into contact with the country’s urban and architectural situation. These were the final, convulsive years of the Franco dictatorship. They were marked by increasing social politicisation and opposition to the regime, accelerated economic growth and an exodus from the countryside to the city, which transformed the cities and expanded the working-class suburbs, especially of Madrid and Barcelona. For an entire generation of young technicians, most of whom were politically committed, Lefebvre provided tools for a critical analysis of this reality and for criticism of the limits of the field. In this context, Henri Lefebvre became interested in the works of Ricardo Bofill’s (1939-2022) Taller de Arquitectura, which proposed an alternative to the urban development of “barres et tours” and to functionalist precepts, and was strongly influenced by the defiant spirit of 1968. The debate that was taking place in France on “grands ensembles” and “villes nouvelles” resounded in the background. Lefebvre considered that the Taller de Arquitectura’s *La Ciudad en el Espacio* was an example of “concrete utopia”, like the *New Babylon* by Constant Nieuwenhuys. However, Bofill did aim to build his utopias.

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Henri Lefebvre and May 1968¹

As year 1968 came to a close, the cover of one of magazine *Triunfo*’s last issues of the year showed a model of *La Ciudad en el Espacio*. The issue was called: “De la utopía a la realidad: La Ciudad en el Espacio, una respuesta española a los problemas urbanos” (From utopia to reality: The City in the Space: a Spanish response to urban problems).² The same year, the Taller de Arquitectura, led by Ricardo Bofill (1939-2022), had published its book-manifesto *Hacia una formalización de la Ciudad en el Espacio* (Towards a formalisation of the City in the Space). This work summarised Bofill’s professional path up to that point and described his definitive urban model, which made him a clear Spanish representative of the “international utopia”. *La Ciudad en el Espacio* had its roots in previous designs such as the Barrio Gaudí of Reus (1966), the Castell de Kafka (1966) or the Muralla Roja and Xanadú (1968), both of which are in Calpe. Soon these designs would boost the international scope of the Taller [Fig.1]. All of them formed part of a series of studies that sought to define a “cell-type” that could be easily reproduced by industrial means and that, as the cells were added following strict combination rules, would produce complex spatial models.³ The final result was very similar to Habitat 67 by Moshe Safdie, that is, a kind of standardised casbah that sought, ultimately, to reproduce the rich complexity and spontaneity of the historical city, shaped by the anonymity of time, through industrialisation and modern planning. It was like an “architecture without architects”, but with architects. This is what *Triunfo* praised in its article, using the words of members of the Taller:

[...] its creators want it to have the traditional character of an old [city]: “We are in favour of the anarchistic city, whose growth meets needs as they arise. Things develop as society wants, as the historical city developed. We propose some certain structures that are capable of supporting the changes.” They want to avoid the false rationality of commuter towns, with all the blocks the same, and the appearance of a concentration camp. Faced with badly done, dictatorial planning, they say: “the living city corrects planning errors”.⁴



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Fig. 1
Cover of the December 1968 issue of the magazine *Triunfo*, in which there is an interview with Henri Lefebvre along with *La Ciudad en el Espacio* by the Taller de Arquitectura. *Triunfo XXIII*, no. 341 (December 14, 1968).

1 See also Jean-Louis Violeau, *Les architectes et Mai 68* (Paris: Éditions Recherches Blume, 2005).
2 Víctor Márquez Reviriego, 'La Ciudad en el Espacio', *Triunfo XXIII*, no. 341 (14 December 1968): 39–51.
3 Anna Bofill Levi, "Contribución al Estudio de la Generación Geométrica de Formas Arquitectónicas y Urbanas" (PhD diss., Universidad Politécnica de Barcelona, 1975), <https://doi.org/10.5821/dissertation-2117-96091> (last accessed March 2025). Anna Bofill's doctoral thesis explains the mathematical model behind the generation of the urban forms in this stage of the Taller.
4 Márquez Reviriego, 43.

Thus, the Taller echoed the criticisms of rationalist urbanism. In traditional urban forms, it sought what had been lost along the way, the root of the complexity that made urban forms vital. Without looking any further, in the publication *Hacia una formalización de la Ciudad en el Espacio* they said that “it was based on the traditional conception of a town” and that the key was “the repetition of a cell or model of a dwelling that is developed, over the years, through juxtaposition and adaptation to the land.”⁵ From this, their module emerged; from this emerged the minimum cell that, when repeated, generated the urban landscape: the “town”. Which “town” in particular? That is another story.

The same issue of *Triunfo* that contained *La Ciudad en el Espacio* as the main topic included an interview with French philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) [Fig. 2].⁶ This was no mere coincidence. In fact, the French philosopher was particularly interested in the Taller de Arquitectura projects. What lay behind this interest?

Lefebvre had been one of the philosophers of 1968. A heterodox Marxist from the outset, he had left the French Communist Party at the end of the 1950s due to ideological and political discrepancies, like so many other intellectuals. He had gone on to become a lecturer in sociology at the Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines in Nanterre from 1965. The campus had been one of the hotspots of the student movement during 1968. In fact, Lefebvre had counted some of the student leaders among his students.⁷ He participated, although with reservations, in the new ideological climate of the left. He tended towards greater cultural and political liberalisation, was open to new topics of discussion and fiercely opposed structuralist antihumanism. He even took on romantic overtones at times, although he was sharp enough to always maintain his Marxist dialectic intact. During his classes in Nanterre, he easily filled the lecture hall with 2,000 students.⁸

Once he was away from the discipline of the Communist Party, Lefebvre had begun a prolific and original stage. From 1957, he came into contact with members of Situationist International (SI), mainly with Guy Debord (1931-1994), who was interested in the “critique of everyday life”.⁹ Out of this relationship emerged many of the ideas that both Lefebvre and the situationists shared in relation to the city. At the same time, this was



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Fig. 2
Interview with Henri Lefebvre for the Spanish magazine *Triunfo*. *Triunfo* XXIII, no. 341 (December 14, 1968).

when Lefebvre became interested in the work of artists such as Constant Nieuwenhuys (1920-2005) and his *New Babylon*. Lefebvre also undertook relevant research on urban and rural sociology in the heart of the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS). Initially, the research was focused on the profound changes that rural society was undergoing in the postwar period. Thus, he began an important stage in which he centred his research on urban phenomena. He was also interested in architecture and had a number of contacts in the professional world.¹⁰ In 1965, *La proclamation de la Commune* was published, in which Lefebvre provided his own view of the Paris Commune as a revolutionary “immense and magnificent fiesta” in which the Parisian proletariat took over the city center of Paris. In addition, *la Commune* provided a totalising understanding of the urban process, the understanding of the city as a “total oeuvre”. In 1968, the year in which *Hacia una formalización de la Ciudad en el Espacio* by Bofill was published, a highly influential urban manifesto appeared, *Le droit a la ville*, which would be translated into Spanish in 1969.¹¹ That same year, *L'irruption du Nanterre au sommet* also appeared, in which Lefebvre emphasizes the link between May'68 and urban phenomena.¹²

In reference to Western industrialised societies, Lefebvre considered that the question would now be superstructural, as the “ship” of France continued to function at full throttle, as he stated in the interview in *Triunfo*. In other words, economic growth and uninterrupted progress continued to exist. The “cultural revolution” (at least in France), that everyone was talking about that year, was a revolution of the superstructural element, “a revolution that takes place in the cultural field, not just in economic and political spheres.”¹³ This is how Lefebvre explained the May 1968 of which he had been a privileged witness. In other words, there was a contradiction between society’s production structure and the elements of social reproduction, including urban development and architecture. For this reason, Lefebvre, in reference to the society of his time, stressed the idea that urban development “gives purpose to industrialisation”.¹⁴ Industrialisation-urbanisation would be two sides of the same historical process, the process that modernity had interpreted as progress, and the industrial city would be the result. In a post-industrial society, that is, a markedly urban society, urban development took precedence. Lefebvre called it, simply, “urban society”.

Notably, Lefebvre emphasised concepts such as “alienation” or “playful-

5 Ricardo Bofill, *Hacia una Formalización de la Ciudad en el Espacio* (Barcelona: Blume, 1968), 18.

6 Eduardo García Rico and César Alonso de los Ríos, “15 Preguntas a Henri Lefebvre”, *Triunfo* XXIII, no. 341 (14 December 1968): 32–36.

7 Henri Lefebvre, *Tiempos Equívocos*, 1st ed. (Barcelona: Kairós, 1976), 107–125.

8 Rémi Hess, *Henri Lefebvre et l'aventure du Siècle* (Paris: Métailié, 1988), 229.

9 Hess, 215–217.

10 Łukasz Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research and the Production of Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

11 Henri Lefebvre, *El Derecho a la Ciudad*, 4th ed. (1978) (Barcelona: Península, 1969). First edition in Spanish edited and with a preface by Mario Gaviria. Curiously, Habitat 67 by Moshe Safdie was on the cover.

12 Henri Lefebvre, *L'irruption du Nanterre au sommet*, 2nd ed. (1998) (Paris: Éditions Syllepse, 1968). See also Łukasz Stanek, “Lessons from Nanterre”, *Log*, no. 13/14 (Fall 2008), 59–67.

13 García Rico and Alonso de los Ríos, “15 Preguntas a Henri Lefebvre”.

14 García Rico and Alonso de los Ríos, “15 Preguntas a Henri Lefebvre”.

ness” in contrast with the “boredom” that society would produce in the individual. All of these elements, consciously or unconsciously, were present in the proposals of the Taller de Arquitectura and in “the air of the era”. They were present in the criticism of the new, boring and alienating housing blocks in Spanish and French cities designed to house the working class. Whether it really achieved it or not, the aim of *La Ciudad en el Espacio* was to provide an alternative to this “barres et tours” model of the city that populated the suburbs. For this reason, Lefebvre was interested in the proposal. In his intellectual autobiography, *Le temps des méprises* (1975), the author compared Ricardo Bofill with other utopians:

I also know people who, unlike Nieuwenhuys, are trying to achieve concrete results, such as, for example, my friend Ricardo Bofill in Barcelona, who I have known for seven or eight years and whose great talent has been widely recognised in France. He constructs and at the same time has the imagination of a concrete utopian. La Ciudad en el Espacio that he tried to build in Madrid was an attempt at utopia that was more concrete than the “New Babylon” of Nieuwenhuys.¹⁵

Lefebvre’s interest in Bofill was not arbitrary, as it directly reflected the debate that was taking place in France on the “grands ensembles”. Bofill attracted not only the attention of the philosopher, but also that of the director of the Groupe Central des Villes Nouvelles (Central Group of New Towns), Jean-Eudes Roullier, as well as Paul Chemetov. Both were deeply interested in Bofill’s proposals and wanted him to contribute to *villes nouvelles*.¹⁶ In post-war France, there was an acute housing crisis. High demographic growth, the exodus from the countryside to the city and the complete standstill of construction during the armed conflict were its causes or, in other words, the “urbanisation” of society, in Lefebvrian terms, the “urban revolution”. In response, a large number of dwellings were built quickly at the lowest possible cost. They were amassed first in “grands ensembles”, with no real concerns for quality, location and facilities, and later in what were known as “villes nouvelles”, which were designed to be more independent from the centrality of Paris and other major urban centres.¹⁷ As mentioned above, this sparked an interesting debate that questioned the limits of functionalist urbanism and sought alternatives: Candilis, Josic, Woods and Toulouse-le-Mirail (1961); La Grande Borne (1964-71) or Tours Nuages (1970-78) by Emile Aillaud; Renée Gailhoustet and Jean Renaudie in Ivry-sur-Seine (1969-81) and Givors (1974-81); and Paul Chemetov designs and the AUA, which subsequently worked with the Taller on the Evry competition in 1972, among others.¹⁸

15 Lefebvre, *Tiempos Equívocos*, 151.

16 Dominique Serrell, *Bofill. Les Années Françaises* (Paris: Norma, 2023), 20-21; Ricardo Bofill, and François Hébert-Stevens, *L'Architecture d'un Homme* (Paris: Arthaud, 1978), 111.

17 Pierre Merlin, *Las Nuevas Ciudades* (Barcelona: Laia, 1978), 327–93.

18 Jacques Lucan, *Francia. Architettura 1965-1988* (Milano: Electa, 1989), 84; Serrell, 67–71.

Lefebvre considered that urban planning was an essential technique for organising the urban space according to the interests of the dominant class and that it would not be possible with technical arguments alone to revolutionise social relations¹⁹. However, he did believe there was a window of opportunity. The key was “concrete utopia”, which a socialist design for the city could anticipate. In *La Ciudad en el Espacio* and in the New Babylon by Constant, explained Lefebvre, “a new unit that would bridge the gap between architecture and urbanism”²⁰ would take shape. As Mario Gaviria had already said, “on the one hand, the city, the agglomeration is too vast; on the other hand, the building, the separate, isolated house is outdated, from other times.”²¹ This is a kind of negation of urban planning in favour of architecture, so that the city is only produced by strictly architectural means.

This is where our third and final figure comes into the picture, the link between Bofill and Lefebvre: sociologist Mario Gaviria (1938-2018). In the same year of 1968, the magazine *Arquitectura*²² published Gaviria’s analysis of Gran San Blas, a foundational milestone of urban sociology in Spain that was strongly influenced by Lefebvre. Ricardo Bofill would almost certainly have met Lefebvre through Mario Gaviria on one of Lefebvre’s visits to Spain.²³

Mario Gaviria, Urban Sociology and the Fight against Boredom

Mario Gaviria was a student of Lefebvre at the University of Strasbourg between 1961 and 1964, before Lefebvre arrived in Nanterre. Poorly received by the conservative society of Strasbourg, Lefebvre’s classes provided the stimulation that Gaviria needed to introduce urban sociology into Spain and to teach an entire stratum of the technical classes, who were increasingly politicised and critical of the Franco regime.²⁴

In Strasbourg, Gaviria read Chombart de Lauwe, Mumford and Alexander. He absorbed the criticism of the precepts of the *Athens Charter*, the methods of French urban sociology and Lefebvrian ideas regarding “everyday life” and “consumer society”.²⁵ Gaviria also absorbed Lefebvre’s teaching methods, which would lead, once he had returned to Spain, to the founda-

19 See also, for the critique of “technocrat ideology”: Henri Lefebvre, “El Urbanismo de Hoy. Mitos y Realidades,” in *De Lo Rural a Lo Urbano*, 4th ed. (1978) (Edicions 62, 1971), 205–214.

20 Bofill et al., 8. “In the same way that in the architecture field we work with designs conceived in space, the aim is also to achieve in the urban planning field an organic and spatial design, that is, a design that enables us to work on a larger scale and expands the possibilities of controlling urban development, which is still projected on the region based on the plan.”

21 Lefebvre, *Tiempos Equívocos*, 252.

22 Mario Gaviria, “Gran San Blas”, *Arquitectura*, no. 113–114 (June 1968): 1–154.

23 Ion Martínez Lorea, “Henri Lefebvre, en Busca del Espacio del Placer”, in Henri Lefebvre, *Hacia una Arquitectura del Placer* (Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2018), 13–57.

24 Martínez Lorea, “Henri Lefebvre, en Busca del Espacio del Placer”, 18.

25 Martínez Lorea, “Henri Lefebvre, en Busca del Espacio del Placer”. Specifically, Lefebvre called this the society of bureaucratically controlled consumption, which would become Debord’s society of the spectacle.



tion of the Seminario de Sociología Urbana (Seminar of Urban Sociology) in the heart of José Vidal Beneyto's CEISA school.

Lefebvre joined the CNRS in 1948, at Georges Gurvitch's Centre d'Études Sociologiques (CES), where his research focused on the transformation of the French rural environment—an area he would later further develop at the Institut d'Études Urbaines (ISU), which he and his colleagues founded in 1962. Lefebvre's analysis of Lacq-Mourenx [Fig.3] is notable, as it would directly influence Gaviria. Lacq-Mourenx had been built ex novo in 1951 to house the workers and technicians of an industrial complex established to exploit a natural gas field. This city, which emerged out of nothing in a very short time, followed the patterns of functionalist urbanism. Lefebvre considered that it was the epitome of the "urbanisation" of the French rural environment. "From that moment, my interest in the city was revived. I suspected that this emergence of the urban in a traditional rustic reality was not a simple local local coincidence, but instead formed part of urbanisation and industrialisation, global phenomena," stated Lefebvre.²⁶

In Lacq-Mourenx we can find the precursor of many of the concerns that Lefebvre would subsequently develop. His analysis provides a clear example of how functionalist planning worked: the socio-professional and class segregation was explicitly expressed in the space and in its architecture.

26 Lefebvre, *Tiempos Equívocos*, 226; Merlin, *Las Nuevas Ciudades*, 333.

Fig. 3
A moment in the "everyday life" of inhabitants of the "ville nouvelle" by Lacq-Mourenx. Source: Archives of the Communauté de Communes de Lacq-Orthez. Photographic collection of Claude Roux, "Départ en promenade depuis l'école Victor Hugo en 1961", Claude Roux, 1961.

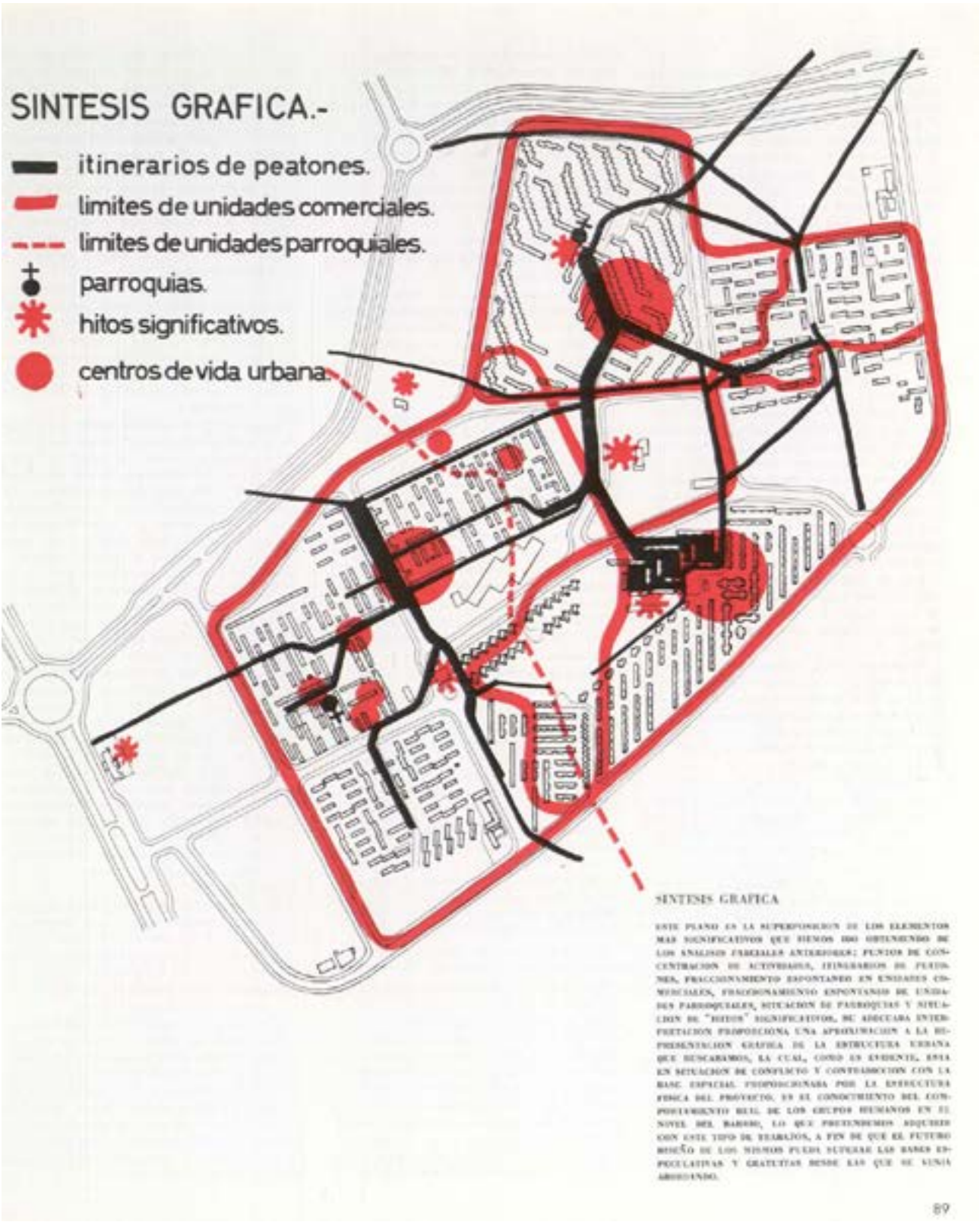


Fig. 4
Graphic analysis analysis by Mario Gaviria's team from the Seminario de Sociología Urbana. The image represents the places that were selected by residents when they were asked where a meeting of inhabitants of the neighbourhood should be held. *Arquitectura*, no. 113–114 (June 1968).

There are no roots, no symbols or monuments, there is no “historical” content. The inhabitant is totally subjected to “boredom”. Lefebvre contrasts the case of Lacq-Mourenx with that of Aix-en-Provence, with the “spontaneity” of the urban fabric of the “historical city”. “The fight against boredom has begun, [...] and, to a certain extent, the fate and meaning of modernity depends on this fight, this challenge.”²⁷ Here, too, is the playful element present in the Taller de Arquitectura’s designs and the reason for looking to the historical city, which was also the start, for many, of a reverie, a romantic escapism due to the feeling of loss: a certain type of urban life. It was also the start of a search for a lost “new monumentality”.

The relationship between Mario Gaviria and Henri Lefebvre would lead to the book *Du rural à l’urbain* (1970), an anthology of articles prepared by Gaviria that included, among others, the analysis of Lacq-Mourenx. This book was rapidly translated into Spanish, partly as a theoretical tool that could be applied directly to the studies of the Seminario de Sociología Urbana. For the same reason, other books such as the Spanish version of *El derecho a la ciudad* (1969) soon appeared.²⁸ Gaviria directly applied Lefebvrian teachings to two very influential critical analyses of two working class housing estates that had been recently constructed in Madrid. These analyses were promptly published by the magazine *Arquitectura*: one on the neighbourhood of La Concepción (1966) and one on Gran San Blas (1968), referred to above [Fig.4].²⁹ The articles criticised the lack of architectural and urban planning quality in the Franco regime’s housing policies, also in terms of the “everyday life” of the inhabitants. In general, these housing estates were a poor version of functionalist precepts. However, the critical analysis of Gran San Blas pointed to a far more significant issue—one that affected the theoretical foundations of the profession itself. Architects and urban planners exhibited a subjective, schematic, intuitive, and scientifically underinformed understanding of the true complexity of contemporary urban phenomena. Fernando de Terán, one of Gaviria’s collaborators in the analysis of Gran San Blas, emphasized the need for “a new urban science”—one that would integrate knowledge from other disciplines such as geography and urban sociology. As the Gran San Blas analysis demonstrated, architects held a flawed image of how cities function from a sociological standpoint. One clear example was their attempt to recreate “closed urban communities” in the form of so-called *unidades vecinales* (neighborhood units) or supposedly autonomous barrios (neighbourhoods). For Terán, this revealed “a lack of understanding of

the current social dynamics of urban life,”³⁰ echoing Henri Lefebvre’s own critique of the “ideology of the neighbourhood”.³¹ Terán himself acknowledged the value of proposals like those of Ricardo Bofill, which aimed to embrace urban complexity and he collaborated with Gaviria on the Cerdanyola urban project prize (1969), which followed these ideas.³²

In November 1968, Henri Lefebvre went to Madrid and gave a brief talk to members of the Seminario on the Gran San Blas study, of which he approved: “I would like there to be similar studies on the main neighbourhoods in the Parisian region.” In addition, Lefebvre highlighted the value of analysing this type of urban planning operations to understand how a specific group, in this case specialists serving the state, “project their ideology and their conception of social relationships in a certain space.” Ultimately, Lefebvre said, “the more the urban reality unfolds in the frameworks of today’s society [...] the more segregation is affirmed.”³³ Both the Frenchman and Gaviria believed that Gran San Blas would be one of the concrete forms taken by the process of urbanisation of society in Spain, separating in a classist way the city’s space and gradually banishing the working class to the suburbs.

The works of Mario Gaviria and the Seminar appeared in a monograph on Spanish architecture that was published in the magazine *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui* in 1970, which presented a critical overview of the state of the profession in Spain. In his article entitled “Les nouveaux quartiers périphériques des grandes villes espagnoles”, Gaviria noted that the quality of Spanish suburbs was even lower than that of the French “grands ensembles” and that they were more densely populated and even worse equipped. He also indicated that an alternative to the sad Spanish situation could be the design of *La Ciudad en el Espacio* by Ricardo Bofill [Fig. 5], which was soon built in Moratalaz, Madrid, and that it would be an interesting experiment to achieve an “intense urban life”.³⁴ Some pages further on were full colour images of the Barrio Gaudí of Reus, which had



27 Henri Lefebvre, *De lo Rural a lo Urbano*, ed. Mario Gaviria, trans. Javier González-Pueyo (Barcelona: Peninsula, 1971), 121.

28 Lefebvre, *El Derecho a la Ciudad*. Some works did not get through the censorship and were not published in Spain until the twenty-first century. These included Henri Lefebvre, *La Proclamación de la Comuna* (Pamplona-Iruñea: Katakarak, 2021).

29 Mario Gaviria, “Estudio de Funcionamiento de la Ampliación del Barrio de la Concepción”, *Arquitectura*, no. 92 (August 1966): 1–42; Gaviria, “Gran San Blas”.

30 Fernando de Terán, “La situación actual del planeamiento urbano y sus antecedentes”, *Ciudad y Territorio*, no. 2/71 (1971), 13–23.

31 Henri Lefebvre, “Barrio y vida de barrio,” in *De Lo Rural a Lo Urbano*, 4th ed. (1978) (Edicions 62, 1971), 195–203.

32 Fernando de Terán, “Evolución del planeamiento de núcleos urbanos nuevos”, *Ciudad y Territorio*, no. 1 (1969): 13–26.

33 Henri Lefebvre, “Intervención en el Seminario de Sociología Urbana de Madrid,” in *De Lo Rural a Lo Urbano*, 4th ed. (1978) (Edicions 62, 1971), 221–24.

34 Mario Gaviria, “[Espagne: Madrid-Barcelone] Les Nouveaux Quartiers Périphériques des Grandes Villes Espagnoles”, *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, no. 149 (April–May 1970): 17–21.

Fig. 5
Page on *La Ciudad en el Espacio* by the Taller de Arquitectura in the monographic issue of *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, on Spanish architecture. *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, no. 149 (April–May 1970).

already been built, and of the model of *La Ciudad en el Espacio* along with a text that promised: “a structure of forms that permits a continuous mix, in a continuous urban fabric, of forms, social classes and uses, so that each individual can develop in their own space the way of life that suits them best, according to their possibilities, their needs and, especially, their personality.”³⁵

Indeed, as Gaviria indicated, what had up to that point been an architectural utopia, *La Ciudad en el Espacio*, could now be accomplished. The opportunity arose from Ricardo Bofill’s contact with Vicente Mortes (1921-1991), the future minister of housing who had been interested in the design of the Barrio Gaudí.³⁶ Taller obtained a plot of land in Moratalaz, a suburb of Madrid, and had to take full responsibility for managing the entire process of design, construction and sale. The idea for funding the construction, as Bofill himself explained, was that of creating a corporation in which the tenants themselves would participate and thus they would take decisions from the outset, in a kind of model of “autogestion” (self-management).³⁷

The “experience” of Moratalaz provided a lot to talk about. Gaviria’s Seminar also participated in this experience, undertaking interviews and selecting potential future inhabitants depending on their suitability for the project idea. Indeed, Lefebvre himself also took part.³⁸ Bofill described the philosopher’s interest in the project as follows: “It was the first time, he said [Lefebvre], that a utopia would be built and that the plans would be made real.”³⁹ In short, the entire process was accompanied by a considerable propaganda effort, including all kinds of “performances”, concerts, a show that was clearly provocative. It was also accompanied by the scepticism of other colleagues in the profession and general controversy, which would end up, according to the popular version of the event, angering Carlos Arias Navarro (1908-1989), who was Mayor of Madrid at the time and had vetoed the project.⁴⁰

35 Atelier Bofill, “[Espagne: Madrid-Barcelone] Vers la Ville dans l'Espace”, *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 149 (April-May 1970), 32–41.

36 Ramon Faura, “Ricardo Bofill en Madrid: La Ciudad en el Espacio (1970)” (Escola Tècnica Superior d'Arquitectura de Barcelona, 17 June 2014), <http://hdl.handle.net/2099.2/3837> (last accessed March 2025).

37 Bofill and Hébert-Stevens, 108. As Lefebvre said: “As long as there is no direct involvement in urban planning matters, no possibility for self-management at the scale of local urban communities, no emerging tendencies toward self-management, and as long as those concerned do not speak out to express not only their needs but also their desires [...] a crucial element will always be missing in the resolution of the urban problem.” Henri Lefebvre, “El Urbanismo de Hoy. Mitos y Realidades,” in *De Lo Rural a Lo Urbano*, 4th ed. (1978) (Edicions 62, 1971), 213.

38 Bartomeu Martorell, ‘Henri Lefebvre en España’ (Master diss., Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, 2022), 182–84, <http://hdl.handle.net/2117/376152>. Specifically, we refer to the interview with Carlos Sánchez-Casas, a former member of Mario Gaviria’s Seminario de Sociología Urbana.

39 Bofill and Hébert-Stevens, *L'Architecture d'un Homme*, 107.

40 Baltasar Porcel, “Ricardo Bofill y las Propuestas Imaginativas”, *Destino*, no. 1679 (6 December 1969): 54–55.

Ricardo Bofill and the Space of Enjoyment: Learning from Benidorm

The three also coincided in the coastal city of Benidorm, in relation to research undertaken by Gaviria’s Seminar between 1972 and 1974 on the ecological consequences of exploiting the coasts for tourism. In fact, Gaviria defended certain positive aspects of the urban development of Benidorm. This really surprised a sector of the Spanish left-wing, who considered the phenomenon to be the quintessence of capitalist land exploitation, and in bad taste.⁴¹ To research the phenomenon, Gaviria’s team had set up in a “communal” apartment, through which all kinds of people passed, including, as could be expected, Ricardo Bofill and Henri Lefebvre, who ended up buying a house in the neighbouring town of Altea.⁴² In relation to Benidorm, Gaviria suggested to Lefebvre that he write a text in connection with the research that was being carried out by the Seminar. However, the result was unexpected: *Vers une architecture de la jouissance* (Toward and Architecture of Enjoyment), a book that Gaviria did not like and that ended up forgotten on a shelf until it was rediscovered by Łukasz Stanek.⁴³ In addition, since 1962 when it received a commission to develop La Manzanera in Calpe, the Taller de Arquitectura had been working in the area: the Muralla Roja (1968-73) and Xanadú (1968-71) are some examples.

In addition to our three main figures coming together, some other themes of the time emerged around Benidorm. One is the considerable growth in the Spanish economy, based partly on the exploitation of the coastal region for tourism, which had led to cities springing up that were specifically designed for the leisure market. Another is the fact that more stratum of Spanish society could access the goods and services of consumer society, such as going on holiday during the summer. In general terms, this could be interpreted as increasing specialisation of the region according to certain functions of the population’s everyday life: a place to work, a place to sleep, which could be the Gran San Blas or any other dormitory suburb, and a place to have fun and forget about work, that is, Benidorm. *Triunfo*, significantly, would even refer to “Benidorm, the most distant neighbourhood of Madrid”.⁴⁴ In this way, leisure and work were but two sides of the same coin.

Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment (1973) was a fragmentary and chaotic text. However, it can contribute some interesting and, at the very least, symptomatic ideas. In Lefebvre, there is a “feeling of loss”, which in architectural terms means the disappearance of the monumental nature

41 Mario Gaviria, *Turismo de Playa en España* (Madrid: Turner, 1975); Mario Gaviria, *España a Go-Go: Turismo Chárter y Neocolonialismo del Espacio* (Madrid: Turner, 1974).

42 Martorell, “Henri Lefebvre en España”, 176-81. Specifically, we refer to the interview with Juan Ramón Sanz, member of the Seminar on Urban Sociology and Leisure.

43 Łukasz Stanek, “A Manuscript Found in Saragossa”, in *Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), xi–lxi.

44 Luis Carandell and Martínez Parra, “Vacaciones a la Española I: Benidorm”, *Triunfo XXIII*, no. 322 (3 August 1968): 10–20.

of historical architecture and, ultimately, of the preindustrial city. The democratisation of the discipline undertaken by the Modern Movement resolved the more prosaic problems inherent in the industrial city (the question of mass housing for the proletariat). It also entailed setting aside the functions of the discipline that went beyond the merely rational: the capacity to “symbolise” something, the power of the “meaning” of architecture. “The building dethrones the monument,” said Lefebvre, “the destruction of meaning, this practical reduction, leaves a void. Who will fill it? Nothing and nobody.”⁴⁵

This is when Lefebvre reached out to authors such as Heidegger, to concepts such as “inhabit” and to phenomenology; it is also here that we find Lefebvre at his most romantic, more evasive and less Marxist. The question would be, following Lefebvre’s argument, what should be symbolised in a future classless society; the monuments of the past, aside from their heritage value, tend to be symbolic expressions of power. For this reason, the *communards* toppled the Vendôme Column. Lefebvre considered that perhaps we could symbolise “pleasure” or “playfulness”. This brings to mind again the image of Constant’s *New Babylon* where *homo ludens*, totally liberated of the need to work, simply has fun. The Taller pointed in similar directions. However, it was more a form of evasion than a liberation. Did not the Barrio Gaudí of Reus or *La Ciudad en el Espacio* seek a way of fighting boredom? Did they not have, deep down, a romantic and nostalgic patina that sought to offset the maelstrom of the contemporary city, the alienation that the working class suffered in its unbearable and monofunctional dormitory suburbs, in all of the Lacq-Mourenx, in each one of the Bellvitges of each modern city? The Taller revealed its work to the public as follows: “We are waiting for you in Reus, where a city has emerged that is not in this world and above all is not in Spain. Experience perpetual holidays. Experience a perpetual charter towards the cliffs of the south. This is advice from the General Directorate of Fugitives [Fig. 6].”⁴⁶

In this regard, someone like Christian Norberg-Schulz (1926-2000) recognised the power of evocation in all Bofill’s work. He even saw arguments for getting out of the cul-de-sac it seemed that architecture had entered. “The loss of the image is a fundamental characteristic of the current crisis of the environment,” he said.⁴⁷ In this respect, Bofill did create “images” that gave architecture significance. This is clear in the critic’s praise in the introduction to the monograph that *GA Architect*⁴⁸ published about the Taller de Arquitectura, or in *Principles of Modern Architecture*.⁴⁹

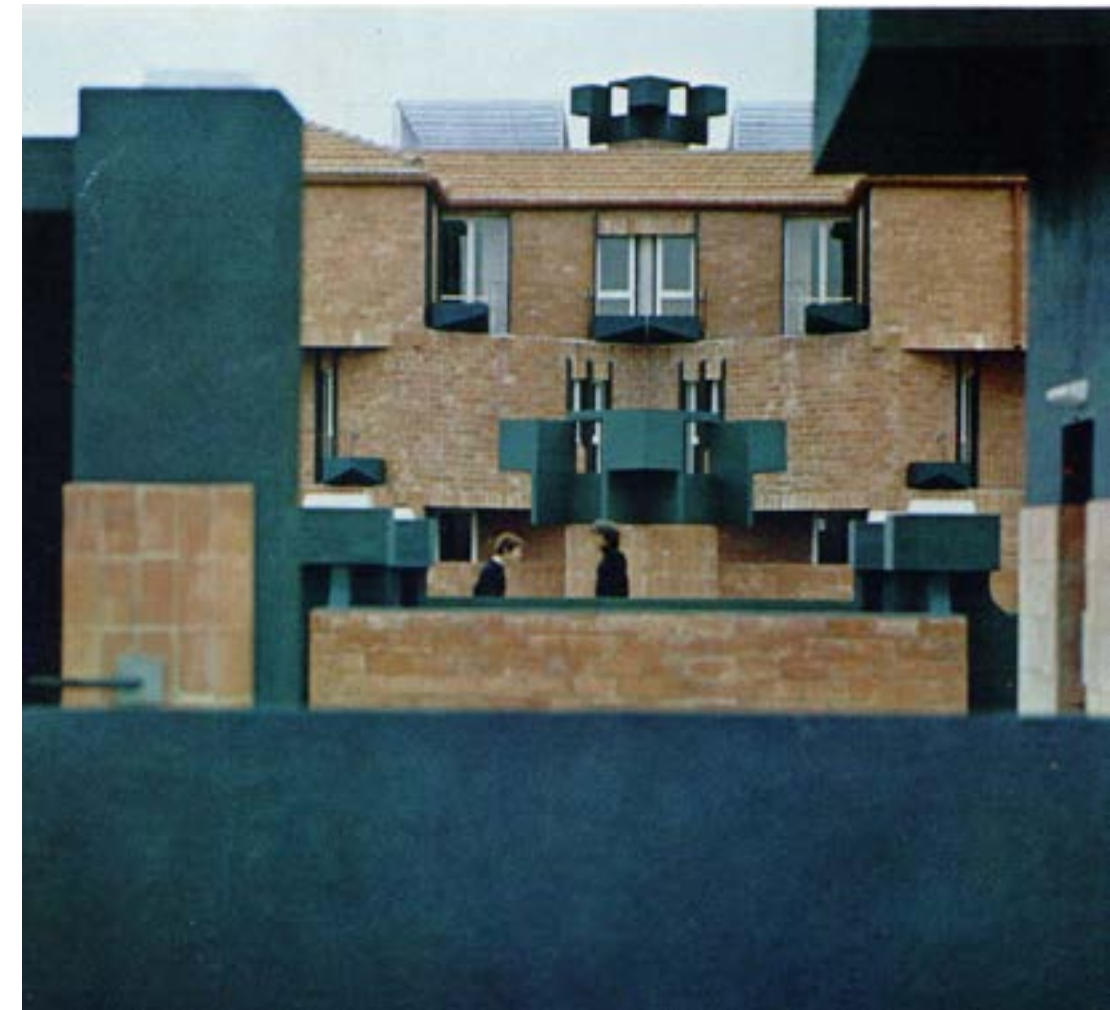
45 Lefebvre, *Hacia una Arquitectura del Placer*, 73.

46 Hogares Modernos, “Erec y Enide en el Barrio de Reus”, *Hogares Modernos*, no. 54 (1970): 3–9.

47 Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Los Principios de la Arquitectura Moderna* (Barcelona: Reverté, 2005), 248.

48 Christian Norberg-Schulz, “Form and Meaning-The Works of Ricardo Bofill/Taller de Arquitectura”, *GA Architect* 4 (1985): 8–22.

49 Norberg-Schulz, *Los Principios de la Arquitectura Moderna*, 246–248.



The idealised “image” of the historical city is present without nuances in Bofill’s works and, in a more nuanced way, in the Lefebvrian texts. Lefebvre’s Romanticism seemed to be forward-focused but was marked by profound loss, by a profound defeat of class: the “working class” of the streets, the Paris that rose up in the *Commune*, of which ever fewer traces remained. This was Lefebvre’s image and the image of the *casbah*. Bofill’s references to the vernacular, to popular architecture, had something to do with this, even if they were naïve, simple or impregnated with a certain nostalgic populism.

However, once Bofill and the Taller de Arquitectura opted for classical language and the core ideas of Baroque composition, the “image” brought with it other meanings: Bofill wanted to give his Versailles to the people. Projects such as the “ville nouvelle” in Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines Le Lac (1972-87), *Les espaces d’Abraxas* in Marne-la-Vallée (1979-82), even *Les Arènes de Picasso* by his former collaborator Manuel Núñez Yanowski, seemed to recall the opposite: the city had been drawn up by popes, kings, the bourgeoisie and their architects, who wanted to be in the limelight and leave their mark on history.

Fig. 6
Erec and Enide, represented by Serena Vergano and Ricardo Bofill, walking on the roofs of the Barrio Gaudí, avoiding the outside world. *Hogares Modernos*, no. 54 (1970).

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