

# “DEAR ALISON”

## The Diffusion of J.A. Coderch’s Work through his Participation in Team Ten

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### ABSTRACT

In March 1967, the Spanish architect J.A. Coderch (1913-1984) responded to a questionnaire he had received from Team Ten in a letter to the English architect Alison Smithson. It is a short text in which Coderch regrets having little to say about his work in response to the questionnaire, despite having practiced for nearly 30 years, while recognizing having been unable to collaborate with Team Ten as much as he would have liked. Attempting to respond to Smithson, whom he addresses as “My dear editress” in the letter’s greeting, Coderch makes a list of the professional questions of most concern to him at the time: the wide variety of commission types and the resulting inconsistency of one’s built work; teaching in architecture and what stance to take when dealing with young architects; the always problematic relationship between architects, developers and construction companies; and the difficulties of group work, an aspect Coderch found tiresome. And also, especially, “the necessity that we have to project great blocks of dwellings”, recognizing that George Candilis “was right when he answered me in Royaumont that we had to face the problem and answer yes leaving aside romantic positions that cannot compete with the modern systems of construction”.

In the late 1960s, when he wrote the letter to Alison Smithson, he had received the commission for a housing complex in Barcelona: the project known as “Las Cocheras”, which he eventually presented at the 1971 meeting in Toulouse-Le Mirail. The project, around 500 apartments, became the largest residential complex of Coderch’s career, the great big yes to addressing the problem of housing, which his friends from Team 10 had encouraged him to pursue, in a relationship that is no doubt fundamental to understanding the project. “Las Cocheras” inevitably represents the built project with the closest ties to the fundamental questions addressed by the group: humanizing the city, rediscovering the street as public space, the need for collective housing, preserving identity amid the masses, the hierarchy of groupings, etc.

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### KEYWORDS:

*Coderch; Team Ten; Las Cocheras*

In March 1967, the Spanish architect J.A. Coderch (1913-1984)<sup>1</sup> responded to a questionnaire he had received from Team Ten in a letter to the English architect Alison Smithson<sup>2</sup> [Fig. 1]. It is a short text in which Coderch regrets having little to say about his work in response to the questionnaire, despite having practiced for nearly 30 years, while recognizing having been unable to collaborate with Team Ten as much as he would have liked. Attempting to respond to Smithson, whom he addresses as “My dear editress” in the letter’s greeting, Coderch makes a list of the professional questions of most concern to him at the time: the wide variety of commission types and the resulting inconsistency of one’s built work; teaching in architecture and what stance to take when dealing with young architects; the always problematic relationship between architects, developers and construction companies; and the difficulties of group work, an aspect Coderch found tiresome. And also, especially, “the necessity that we have to project great blocks of dwellings”, recognizing that George Candilis “was right when he answered me in Royaumont that we had to face the problem and answer yes leaving aside romantic positions that cannot compete with the modern systems of construction”. At the end of the letter, Coderch’s closing takes a very pessimistic tone, “my english is worst every day and I feel myself ill, old and stupid”, yet he attests to a great confidence in Team 10, “I have a great faith in the Team 10 and you all.”

In fact, just five years earlier, at the Team 10 meeting at Royaumont Abbey (September 12-16 1962, organization: Candilis-Woods), Coderch

1. Antón Capitel, Javier Ortega, *J.A. Coderch* (Madrid: Xarait, 1978); Enrique Soria, *J.A. Coderch de Sentmenat. Conversaciones* (Barcelona: Editorial Blume, 1979); Carles Fochs, *J.A. Coderch de Sentmenat 1913-1984* (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 1989); Antonio Pizsa, Josep M. Rovira, eds., *Coderch 1940-1964. En busca del hogar* (Barcelona: COAC, 2000).

2. The Coderch Archive contains at least two different versions of the letter: an undated typed version in Spanish, and another typed version in English dated March 27, 1967 (the transcription maintains spelling errors from the original). The Coderch Archive is currently being inventoried and photographed at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía. The documents cited in this article were consulted before the move, at the Coderch Archive, ETSAV-UPC. For the purposes of this article, the archive documents are referred to using the label CA (Coderch Archive).

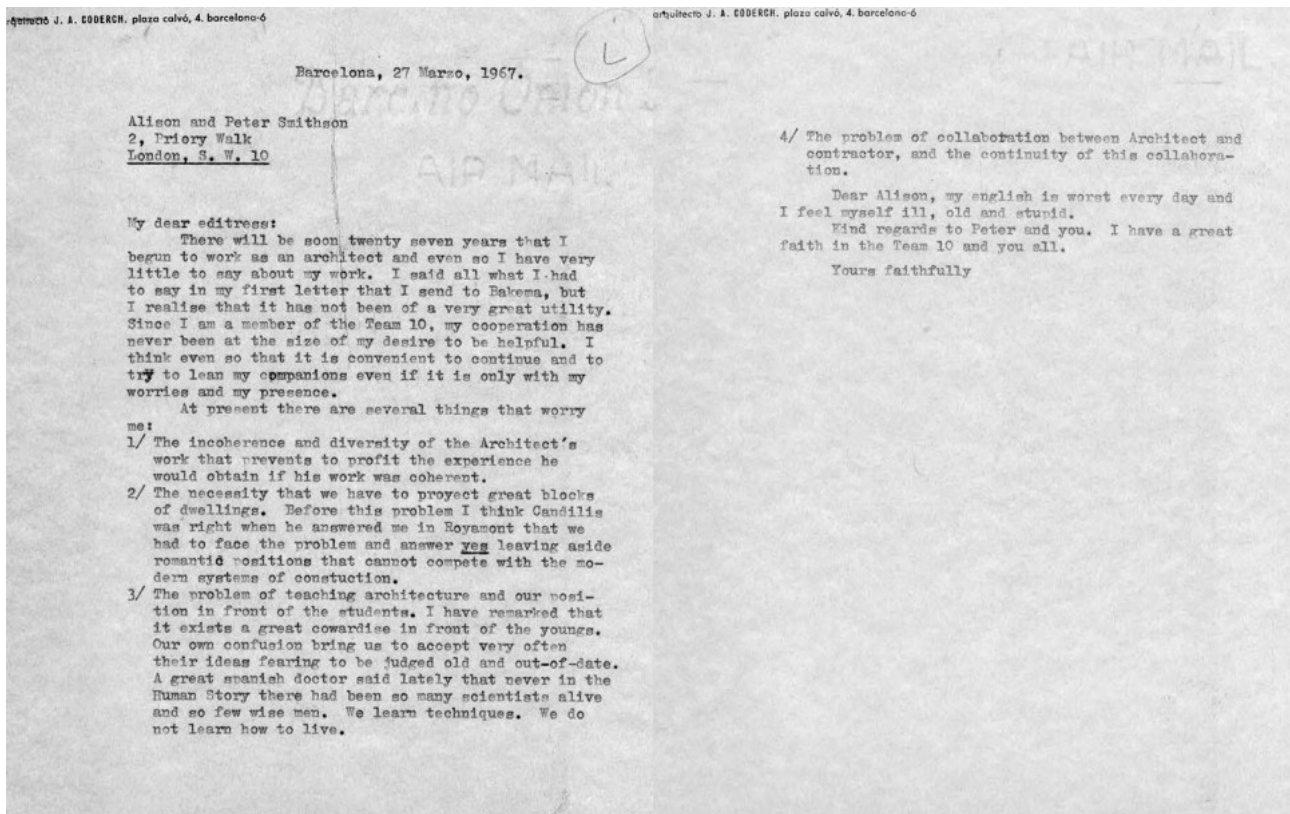


FIG. 1 Letter sent by Coderch to Alison Smithson in 1967.

was there for the presentation of the design developed by the team Candilis-Josic-Woods for the competition for Toulouse-Le Mirail, a new neighborhood with 25,000 housing units, intended for 100,000 inhabitants. After the presentation of the project, and in the presence of some of the most influential members of Team Ten, including Jaap Bakema, Georges Candilis himself, Giancarlo De Carlo, Aldo van Eyck, and Alison and Peter Smithson, Coderch, who was skeptical about large-scale housing projects, defended the need to spend at least six months on designing a single house, contrasting with the ease with which Candilis designed an entire city.<sup>3</sup>

Bakema responded immediately to Coderch, despite not being very familiar with Spain, that he was sure “there are many people who need houses.” Along with Bakema, Amancio Guedes, G. Candilis, P. Smithson and A. Van Eyck joined the debate, in an intense exchange regarding the architect’s moral responsibility, the difficulty of envisioning the spaces for Toulouse-Le Mirail, the need to think about large numbers of people, (but not like Le Corbusier), and the limits of architectural knowledge and technology in the design of large housing complexes. The heated debate brought to light the different points of view of each of the architects, in some cases in clear opposition, but it also revealed the Team 10 members’ respect for J.A. Coderch, despite not sharing some of his opinions.

### Coderch as a Member of Team Ten

What was the foundation for this respect for a Spanish architect who was a newcomer to Team 10? Before the CIAM Conference held at the Krölller-Müller Museum in Otterlo (September 7-15, 1959; organization: Van Ginkel / Bakema), it is likely that most members of Team 10 would have had very little information about J.A. Coderch; they might even have known nothing about him. However, in early 1959, J. L. Sert, president of the CIAM since 1947, proposed Coderch’s participation in the Otterlo Congress. The Spanish architect J.L. Sert (1907-1983),<sup>4</sup> also born in Barcelona – alma mater of the CIAM Congresses until the late 1930s – and one of the most contemporary-leaning and least dogmatic members of the “old guard”, had maintained an interest, from his exile in the United States, in the development of Coderch’s career.<sup>5</sup> As such, he decided to sponsor his participation in what was officially the last Congress in the history of the CIAM and, unofficially, the first meeting in the history of Team 10. In March 1959, Coderch confirmed his attendance in Otterlo in a letter to Bakema.<sup>6</sup>

During the Congress, Coderch presented his design for Torre Valentina, an apartment building and hotel on the famous Costa Brava, in northern Spain. In a privileged landscape by the sea, Coderch and his partner Manuel Valls designed a tourist complex comprised of a series of rows

3. “It’s only that, to me, it seems that it would take me six months to plan a house. I can’t understand it.” in Alison Smithson, ed., “Team 10 at Royaumont”, *Architectural Design* vol. XLV (1975): 687.

4. See: Josep M. Rovira, *Jose Luis Sert, 1901-1983* (Milan: Electa, 2000); Josep M. Rovira, ed., *Sert. 1928-1979. Medio siglo de arquitectura. Obra Completa* (Barcelona: Fundació Miro, 2005).

5. Letter from Coderch to Gio Ponti, 08/31/1951. Gio Ponti Archives, Milan. Cited in Antonio Pizza, “Raigambre y universalismo de un proyecto doméstico” in Rovira and Pizza, *Coderch 1940-1964. En busca del hogar*.

6. Letter from J.A. Coderch to J. Bakema, 03/17/1959. CA.



**FIG. 2** Otterlo, 1959. Coderch during the presentation of the Torre Valentina project.

of terraced houses, adapted to the sloping terrain, guaranteeing good southwest orientation, views of the sea, and the independence of each of the dwellings by staggering them in plan and in section.<sup>7</sup> The design sparked the interest of the main members of Team Ten, as can be seen in the well-known photographs of the presentation, which feature Bakema, A. Smithson, G. Grung, J. Solztan and Ernest Rogers [Fig. 2], among others, and from its later publication among the Congress materials.<sup>8</sup>

The initial consequence of the meeting in Otterlo was that, unexpectedly, Coderch came to be considered as one of the members of Team 10, something like “one of us”. The theoretical concepts that had been posited by the group in the preceding years – variety, flexibility, elasticity, the adjustment of density, the systematization of solutions, etc. – were captured in a design by an architect who was as much unknown as he was both serious and circumspect (in the photographs from the presentation, he is wearing a suit and tie, compared with Bakema, for example, in shirtsleeves), and although he came from the unfamiliar territory of Spain, he immediately caught the attention of Team 10 members.

Nonetheless, he was not part of the core group formed by J. Bakema, G. Candilis, G. De Carlo, A. Van Eyck, A. and P. Smithson, and S. Woods. He was an unknown who, despite not having attended the CIAM IX in Aix-en-Provence in 1953 dedicated to the “Charte de l’Habitat”, not being familiar with the Doorn Manifesto from 1954 (one of Team 10’s foundational documents in which the famous city of four functions from the Athens Charter is replaced by the sequence house-village-town-city), not participating in the meetings from 1954 and 1955 (London, Paris, Le Sarraz), or attending the CIAM X in Dubrovnik in 1956, etc.,<sup>9</sup> put into practice, in a project designed in far-away Spain, some of the principles that concerned

7. Fernando Távora et al., *J.A. Coderch. Torre Valentina* (Barcelona: ETSAV and Ediciones UPC, 1999).

8. Oscar Newman, *CIAM’59 in Otterlo: Group for the Research of Social and Visual Interrelationships* (London: Alec Tiranti, 1959).

9. Max Risselada and Dirk van den Heuvel, eds., *Team 10: 1953-81: In Search of a Utopia of the Present* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2005).

Team 10, such as clustering, growth and change, identity, the hierarchy of human associations, mobility, collective housing, etc.<sup>10</sup>

The second consequence of the presentation of Torre Valentina in Otterlo was the immediate appearance of the design – and with the design, Coderch; and with Coderch, Spanish architecture – in specialized international media. It became the architect's most widely published project outside Spain, despite the fact that, paradoxically, it was never built. Coderch's designs and his name had appeared regularly in the Italian magazine *Domus* since 1949, due to the influence of Gio Ponti, with whom he had forged an intense professional and personal relationship, and, to a lesser extent, in the French magazine *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, beginning in 1959, from one day to the next and as though by magic, the Torre Valentina project appeared over the following years (1960, 61, 62, 63, etc.) in specialized publications in France, Germany, England, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Portugal, Norway, and so on.<sup>12</sup>

In the right place at the right time. The project had sparked curiosity among the members of Team 10, having been designed by an architect who was as unexpected in the international forum as the country he came from, isolated from European democracies since the end of the Spanish Civil War. He belonged to their generation (Coderch was born in 1913, like G. Candilis, R. Erskine and Jerzy Soltan; Bakema was born in 1914; Van Eyck, 1918; Giancarlo De Carlo, 1919; Peter Smithson, 1923; and Alison Smithson, 1928) and apparently shared their interest in breaking free from the rigid orthodoxy of the early Modern movement.

For one or more reasons, whatever they may have been, Coderch fit in with the group. He fit in so well that, a few months later, when he was unable to attend the following gathering in the French city of Bagnols-sur-Cèze (July 25-30, 1960; organization G. Candilis) – which could be considered the first official Team Ten meeting, some of the members wrote him a charming postcard [Fig. 3] sending their regards and hoping to get together soon. The signatures on the postcard include, among

10. As the reader will note, these are the concepts that appeared on the famous cover of the magazine *Forum* from September 1959, which Coderch logically could not have seen before his attendance at the Congress in Otterlo. See: *Forum* vol. XIV, no. 7 (1959).

11. Antonio Piza, "Raigambre y universalismo de un proyecto doméstico".

12. Joan Teixidor, "Jose Coderch & Manuel Valls", *Zodiac*, no. 5 (1959): 147; Gio Ponti, "Un albergo e centotrentum case a Torre Valentina, Costa Brava", *Domus*, no. 364 (1960):1-4; "Bebouwingsplan voor Torre Valentina", *Forum*, vol. II, no.9 (1959): 292-299; "Siedlung von Einfamilienhäusern und ein Hotel an der Costa Brava", *Bauen + Wohnen*, no. 6 (1960): 203-207; "Project d'hotel et de villas a Torre Valentina, Costa Brava", *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 89 (1960): 27; "Hotel und Ferienhausprojekt bei Palamós an der Costa Brava", *AW Architektur und Wohnform-Innendekoration*, no. 6 (1960): 21-24; "Hotel & Apartments at Torre Valentina", *Architectural Design*, no. 5 (1960): 198-199; Liv Schiodt, "Under forvandlingsens lov", *Bonytt*, no. 9 (1960): 151-153; Rafael Echaide, "Espanha. Os pequenos congressos", *Binario*, no. 31 (1961): 197-202; "Hotel und Apartmenthäuser in Torre Valentina, Costa Brava", *DBZ Deutsche Bau Zeitschrift*, no. 2 (1961): 143-146; "5 obras de José A. Coderch e M. Valls Vergés", *Arquitectura: Revista de Arte E Construção*, no. 73 (1961): 3-18; "Hotel und Apartmenthäuser in Torre Valentina, Costa Brava", *Deutsche Bauzeitschrift*, no. 2 (1961): 143-146; "Spanische Architektur", *Werk*, no. 49 (1962): 186-212; "Village de vacances sur la Costa Brava", *Realités*, no. 207 (1963): III-IV; "Urbanización Torre Valentina, Gerona Costa Brava: José A. Coderch, Manuel Valls", *Lotus: Architectural Annual 1964-1965* (1965): 26-31; "J. A. Coderch", *Zodiac*, no. 15 (1965): 58-61; RED, "Twee woonhuizen in Spanje: architect José A. Coderch en Manuel Valls", *Bouw*, no. 52 (1968): 2142-2147.

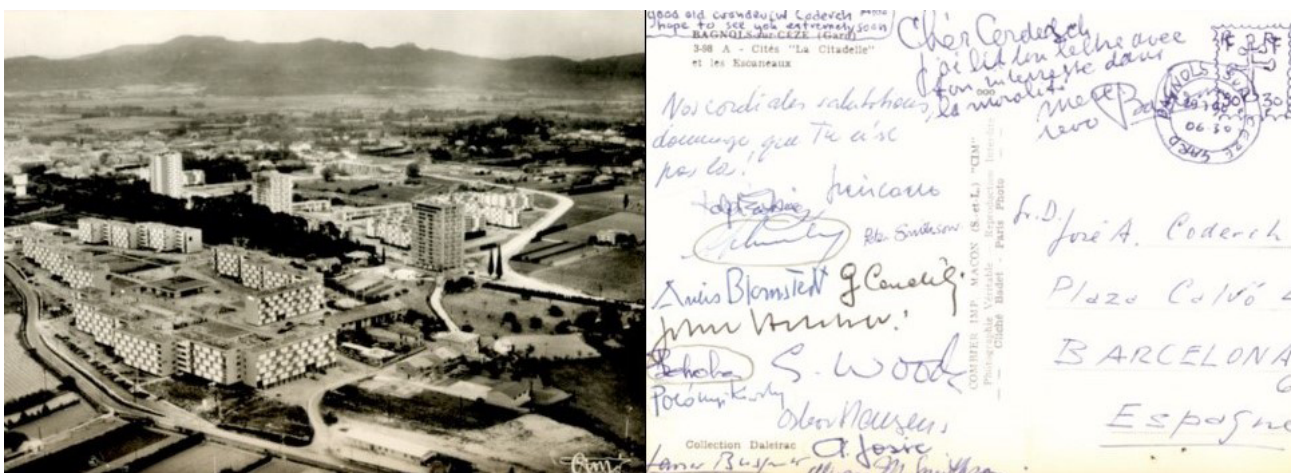


FIG. 3 Bagnols-sur-Cèze, July 1960. Postcard addressed to Coderch and signed by the members of Team X.

others, those of A. Van Eyck, J. Bakema, R. Erskine, P. Smithson, Blomstedt, G. Candilis, J. Voeckler, S. Woods, O. Hansen, A. Josic, A. Smithson and the Spanish architect J. Busquets (who participated in the meeting as a representative of Coderch, and who was responsible for hand delivering the postcard, as can be inferred by the drawing imitating a stamp with which the card was “posted”).

Despite this initial absence, Coderch maintained a relationship with the group, beginning a constant correspondence with a few of its members, sending letters during 1960 to Bakema, Candilis, De Carlo and Hansen, among others. In August 1961, he sent the text of “It is not geniuses that we need today” to Bakema, as secretary of Team Ten, through the “Post Box for the Development of Habitat” in Rotterdam.<sup>13</sup> It was a declaration of intentions, between professional and personal, in which he defends – instead of grand figures in architecture (geniuses) – a sense of professional responsibility, supported by both the living tradition and modern technology. Written in a hermetic tone in some of its fragments, the text, which was also published in the Italian magazine *Domus* in November 1961,<sup>14</sup> became the cornerstone of Coderch’s limited theoretical production, open to a variety of interpretations due to its sophisticated tone.

The correspondence also helps us confirm the date of Coderch’s “formal” admittance to Team Ten. In a letter from May 1962, Coderch sent Bakema a series of thoughts on the Congress in Otterlo (nearly three years after it was held), proposing a number of ideas to improve how the meetings worked (including technical aspects such as the presence of stenographers to take notes on the presentations and guarantee their subsequent discussion and dissemination). In the postscript, Coderch also requests acceptance as a member of Team Ten.<sup>15</sup> Following the local “failure” of Grup R, founded in Barcelona in 1951 in his own office, the relationship with Team 10 was likely the only element of sociability within Coderch’s reach. He held onto it, convinced that it was worth maintaining contact with an international group that was paving the way to overcoming the most orthodox currents of the Modern movement, an issue that had preoccupied Coderch since the beginning of his professional career.

In 1962, Coderch attended the meeting at the Royaumont Abbey (September 12-16, 1962; organization Candilis-Josic-Woods), accompanied by the architect F. Correa – collaborator, colleague and friend at the time). He was recognized on the invitation as a “member” of Team 10, which suggests his automatic acceptance by the group following his letter from May of that same year. At the meeting, which was the setting for the debate cited above, Coderch presented his project for the apartment building in the Barceloneta neighborhood of Barcelona, designed in 1951, and made reference to a study of the shack typology (“barracas”), which he had carried out in 1952.

13. Letter from Coderch to Gio Ponti, J. Bakema, 08/01/1961. CA.

14. Jose A. Coderch, “No son genios lo que necesitamos ahora | It is not geniuses that we need to-day” in *Domus*, no. 384 (1961); 1-10. It was also published in several Spanish and foreign magazines: *Arquitectura* (Portugal), no. 73 (1961); 3-4; *Arquitectura* (Madrid), no. 28 (1962); *Hogar y Arquitectura* (Madrid), no. 42 (1962); *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui* (Paris), no. 100 (1962), as well as in: Alison Smithson. (ed.), “Team 10 Primer 1953-1962”, in *Architectural Design* (London), no. 12 (1962).

15. “P.S.: As I am convinced that the Team-ten is really useful and may become the impulse of many necessary reforms and initiatives for our trade of Architects, I have made up my mind to beg you – as the Secretary of the Team 10 – to accept me as member of the Team 10 – if you think that my taking part in it would be useful.” Letter 05/22/1962. Team 10 Archive NAi. Published in Ana Rodríguez, “No son genios lo que necesitamos ahora’. Una reflexión sobre el escrito de J.A. Coderch en el contexto de Team 10”, in *l Congreso Pioneros de la Arquitectura Moderna Española: Vigencia de su pensamiento y obra. Actas digitales de las Comunicaciones aceptadas al Congreso* (Madrid: Fundación Alejandro de la Sota, 2014).

In 1964, he attended the seminar organized by the Stylos students' association at TU Delft; the only participants were Bakema, De Carlo, Coderch himself, A. van Eyck, O. Hansen and S. Woods. In 1966, he attended the meeting in Urbino (September 1966) organized by Giancarlo De Carlo. In 1971, he participated in the meeting in Toulouse-Le Mirail (April 9-12, 1971) organized by Candilis, where he presented the Las Cocheras apartment complex in Barcelona. Finally, in 1976, he attended the meeting in Spoleto, Italy (June 2-6, 1976), organized by De Carlo, accompanied by his two children.

As such, following Otterlo, a total of five participations in Team Ten meetings and some 60 letters,<sup>16</sup> bear witness to Coderch's relationship with the intelligentsia of European architecture during the long postwar period. It is surprising enough for someone with such a complex character, who was openly right-leaning in his politics and a declared conservative, and who also had certain difficulties with the English language, to have participated in a progressive, clearly leftist atmosphere. 16. CA.

### **1967. "LAS COCHERAS" IN SARRIÀ, BARCELONA.**

Of all the times J.A. Coderch participated in the debates and meetings held by Team Ten, perhaps the most unusual was the meeting in Toulouse-Le Mirail in 1971. There, Coderch presented his design for Las Cocheras in Barcelona, a fact that provides an opportunity to investigate the fruitful exchange that resulted from his involvement with the international group during those years.

That participation cannot be understood without looking back at the letter from 1967 that opens this article: the short text in which Coderch recognizes the need to address the problem of housing with a big "YES" – emphasized in the text of the letter – while setting aside romantic approaches that conflicted with modern building systems. It was a clear recognition of the lesson learned during the debate in 1962, five years earlier, at the meeting in Royaumont.

Until that point, and for more than two decades, since the early 1940s, Coderch had dedicated six-month periods – if not more, to the exasperation of clients, contractors and collaborators – to the design of individual single-family homes, most of which were located in towns along the Catalan coast, including Sitges, Caldes d'Estrach (the famous Casa Ugalde, from 1951) or Cadaqués, among other places. In Barcelona, he had also built the apartment block in the Barceloneta neighborhood (1951), presented at Royaumont, and the building on Compositor Bach street (1958), as well as the Girasol apartment building in Madrid (1966).

However, in the late 1960s, when he wrote the letter to Alison Smithson, he had received two commissions for housing complexes in

Barcelona. In 1967, he began the complex known as Banco Urquijo, and in 1968 the project known as Las Cocheras began, which he eventually presented at the 1971 meeting in Toulouse-Le Mirail. The latter complex was much larger than the Urquijo building, around 500 apartments, on the land that was once occupied by the old depot for buses and streetcars [*cocheras*, in Spanish] in the neighborhood of Sarrià, an old village that was annexed to the city of Barcelona in the early 20th century. The project became the largest residential complex of Coderch's career, the great big yes to addressing the problem of housing, which his friends from Team 10 had encouraged him to pursue, in a relationship that is no doubt fundamental to understanding the project. Las Cocheras inevitably represents the built project with the closest ties to the fundamental questions addressed by the group: humanizing the city, rediscovering the street as public space, the need for collective housing, preserving identity amid the masses, the hierarchy of groupings, etc.

From this perspective, we can no doubt rethink some of the generalized assessments of the project in its time, which reduced the design for the Las Cocheras complex to the extrusion in section of one of the many single-family homes Coderch had designed up to that point. That extrusion would have resulted in a densified, if not populist, version of the Banco Urquijo project, without any of its interest or quality.<sup>17</sup>

However, in the design for Las Cocheras, Coderch takes up a new urban scale, for which he proposes – and builds, for the first time – an ideal city founded on firm personal positions and a variety of origins. The design moves away both from the traditional model, exemplified in Barcelona by the Eixample, and from the main tenets of modern orthodoxy, which were summed up in the planning for the site that had been proposed two years earlier by A. Bonet Castellana. Coderch explored both those models in detail in the preliminary studies for the design and openly ruled them out. Instead of a city with a single function (or four separate functions), instead of buildings comprised of a commercial ground floor and housing towers above, and instead of giving importance to cars, Coderch based his strategy on one fundamental element: a landscaped pedestrian street. A “garden-street”, as he called it in the design brief,<sup>18</sup> open to public use and oriented north-south. [Fig. 4]

The garden-street has a variable width, from 20 m – the width of a regular Eixample street – to 40 m in the areas that correspond to the more private sections of the housing units. Vehicle circulation is limited to the underground level, pedestrian crossings are

17. In Coderch's own words and those of his interviewees, in both Sòria Badia, *J.A. Coderch de Sentmenat. Conversaciones*, 74; and José A. Coderch, *Entrevista pòstuma a Coderch*, interview by Antonio Pizza, *UPC Comunicacions* (1984): 9.

18. “It has become fashionable to talk about public parks. It's great to have them in cities; there's no doubt about that. But people generally have to get there by car, and if their time is limited, they don't end up making use of them. I think it would be better to put one or two squares in each superblock, and to make the pedestrian walkways into garden-streets,” in José Antonio Coderch, “Memoria de la Propuesta de ordenación de supermanzana singular que afecta a la manzana limitada por las calles Benedito Mateo, Farmacéutico Carbonell, Paseo de San Juan Bosco y Paseo de Manuel Girona” (Barcelona: CA, April 1970), 6.



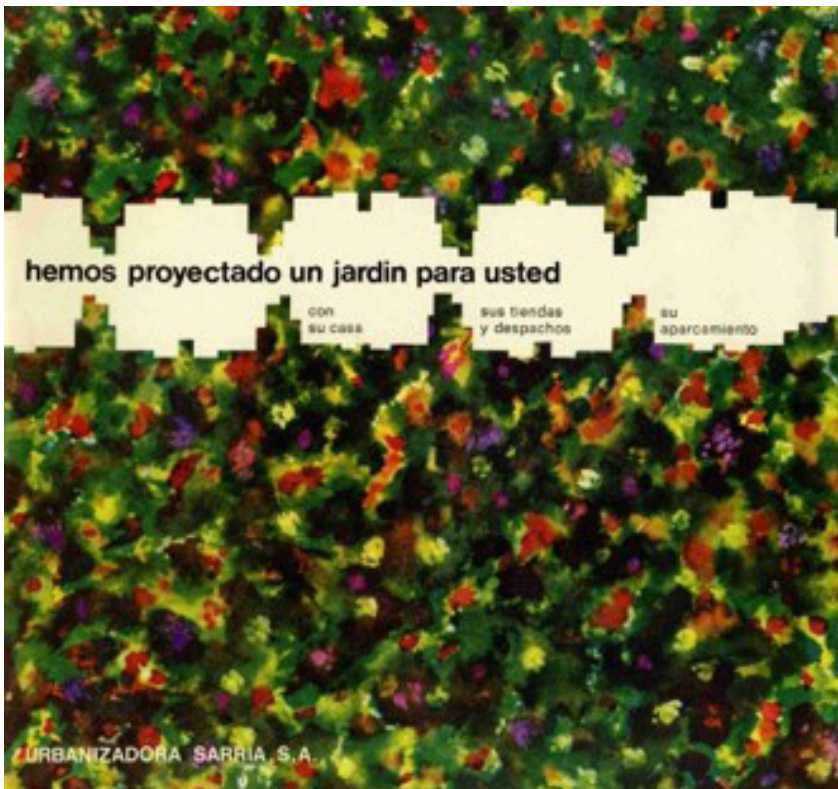
FIG. 4 Las Cocheras de Sarrià, 1967. View of the one of the garden-streets in the complex.



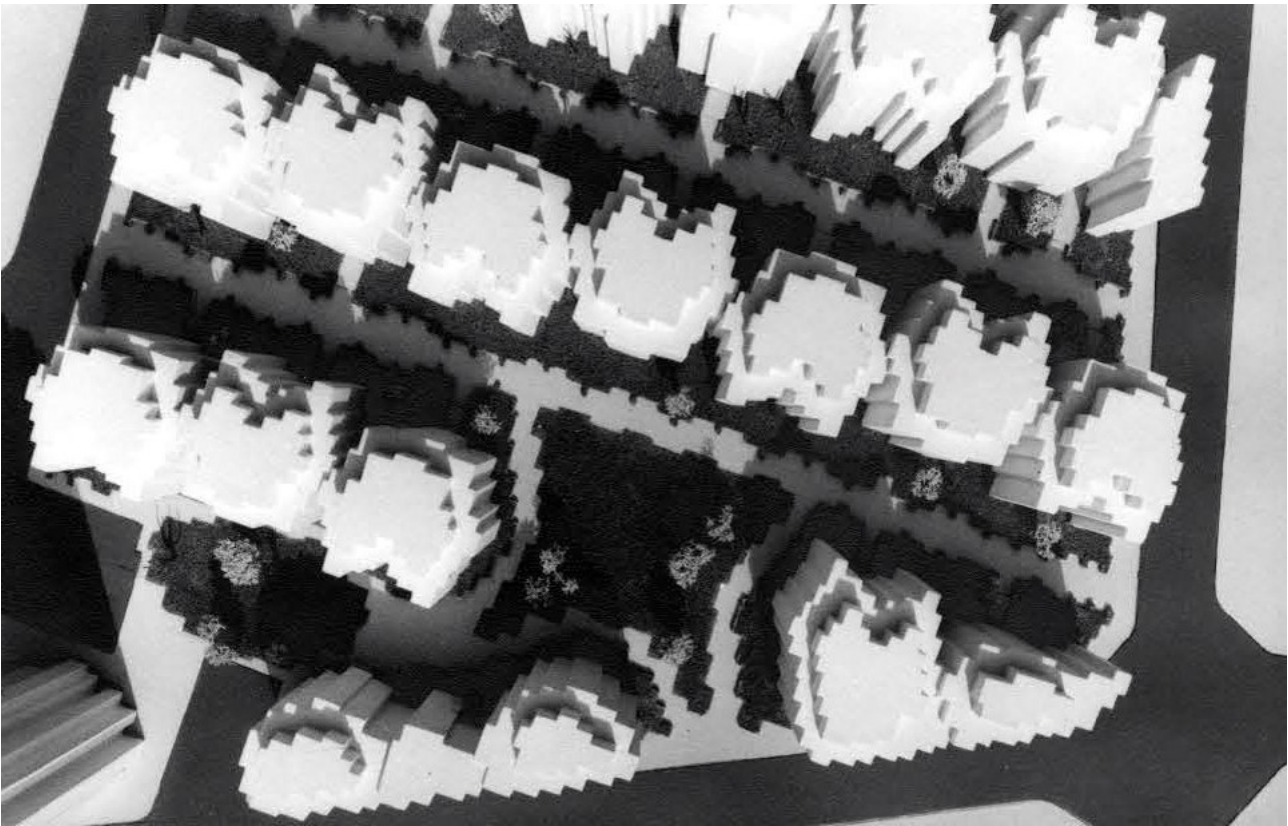
located on the garden-street level, lengthwise, following the natural slope of the plot, and access to the apartments for residents take place on different levels of the landscaped terraces that protect the ground-floor levels of the housing blocks, leading up to the covered entrances, generating a shaded threshold for each entrance. The complex generates a space that has a human scale, with small landscaped squares, and promenades without vehicle traffic, where residents mingle with passing pedestrians. It is a pacified street, as can be seen in the black-and-white images taken by the photographer F. Català Roca in the early 1970s. A street that is urbanized with brick pieces, following the criterion of restriction to a single material – and color and texture – which makes the exposed brick façade uniform, while also providing a permeable and public use of a space that is still private property.

The complex takes on the appearance of a linear building, nonetheless characterized by the fragmentation of its volumes. The resulting block actually corresponds to a series of towers with a staggered perimeter, six stories each, articulated by their tangent in plan [Fig. 6]. Contrasted with the rectangular volume – so rationalist, so CIAM..., so monotonous – the complex melts into the repetitive diversity of the voids and openings of the façades, highlighted by the depth of the shadows, where not even the block's front wall seems differentiated from the whole. It is all the result of the possibilities of technology (normalization and repetition)<sup>19</sup> emphasized during the Team 10 debates, harnessed for the design of collective housing.

19. "This can be achieved in the context of normalization and repetition necessary today – the only way to reduce the cost of the apartments, taking advantage, as far as possible, of the means that technical advances in construction have provided us." Again, in José A. Coderch, "Memoria para la propuesta de ordenación de supermanzana", 7.



**FIG. 5** Advertisement for the housing complex developed by Urbanizadora Sarrilà S.A.



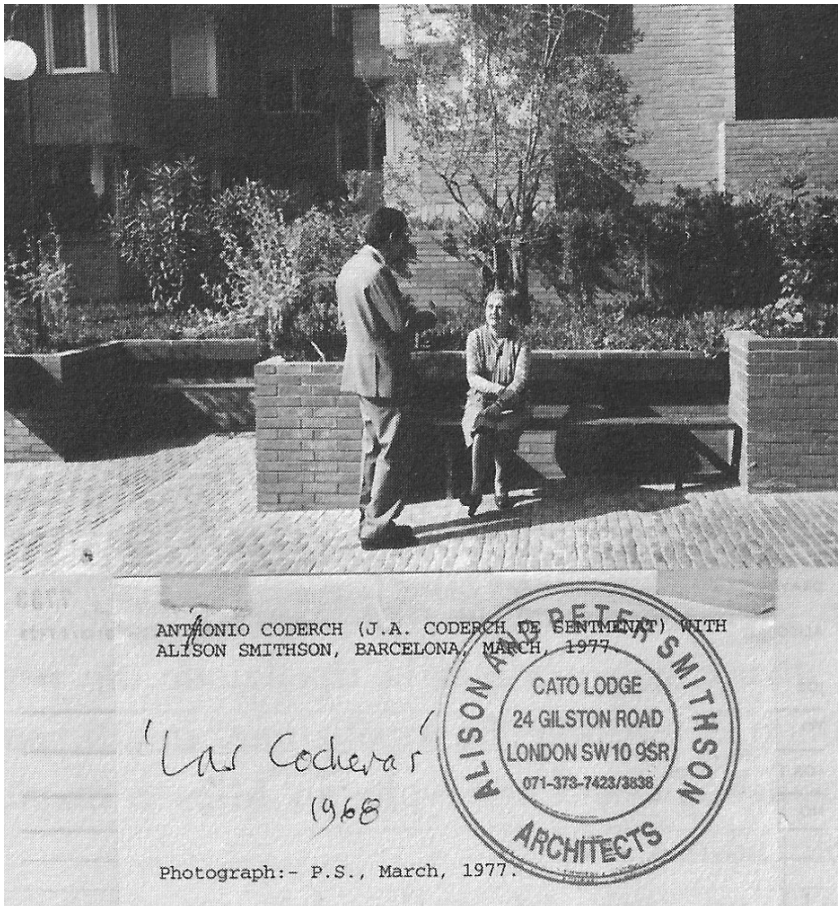
**FIG. 6** Las Cocheras in Sarrià model, aerial view, c.1970

Although it is not, evidently, a public housing project, Coderch's design, very much in line with the ideas of his foreign colleagues, connected with the local "masses" in Barcelona. The advertisements and commercial leaflets – which, incidentally, aptly reflected the architectural spirit of the project – were not put to any use, since the units were all sold off the floor plans before they were built.<sup>20</sup> [Fig. 5]

In terms of the apartments, the adjusted extrusion of the single-family models designed by Coderch over the preceding years hides a series of unexpected aspects, including typological variety, which, in the initial versions of the design, grouped together offices, one-bedrooms, and apartments with 3, 4 and 7 bedrooms all on the same floor, a flexibility within an apparently rigid framework, which, unfortunately, disappeared from the definitive version. Another example is the corner window, inserted into an apparently repetitive and boring extrusion. It was a new element in Coderch's repertoire, with a type of opening – hardly ever seen before in the single-family homes he had designed previously – in both perpendicular directions, in response to a particular relationship to the street, providing diagonal views of the exterior.<sup>21</sup> And there were many other aspects: such as maintaining the distribution scheme of day area (living room, dining room), night area (bedrooms), and working area (kitchen and services), which reduces much larger single-family units into a caricature of 110 m<sup>2</sup>; the requirement for all bedrooms to open onto an exterior; the absence of interior courtyards, and ventilation for the stairways through the laundry rooms; the kitchen as laboratory, with up to 12 smoke doors,

20. "I'd also like to say that people have reacted amazingly to this project. The construction of the foundations began just three months ago, and nearly all the apartments have been sold already. All the advertising has been word of mouth. The mockup leaflets that were put together are just sitting in a cabinet somewhere." From José A. Coderch, "Un proyecto de viviendas", *Arquitectura*, no. 162 (1972): 20.

21. Víctor Rahola, "Coderch", *Revista Otto Zutz* (Barcelona, 1992): 22. "The door is located at one end. The entrance of light is vertical, from floor to ceiling (never a window). Opposite and diagonally, the space will appear larger than normal, since the dimensions of the spaces depend on the light and their location. When you open the door, one of the walls acts as a lightbox. The corner that lets in light disappears. There is an effect of *chiaroscuro*, a magical effect on your perception of the space, using purely architectural resources. Nothing is borrowed."



**FIG. 7** Barcelona, 1977. Photograph of Coderch and Alison Smithson taken at Las Cocheras in Sarrià.

divided circulations... with an adjacent independent “apartment” for the house staff; and the symbolism of the home, with the fireplace presiding at the center of family life, similar to his designs for single-family houses.<sup>22</sup>

It all shows a commitment to a detailed investigation, developed over three decades, centered on the domestic sphere and the definition of the home, as well as a commitment to the vocabulary – flexibility, elasticity, variety – defined by Team 10 to imagine a new “habitat”: intermediate spaces, thresholds, labyrinthine clarity, etc. How can we not see the influence and dissemination of Team 10’s principles in Coderch’s work? How can we not read, in the elements of this architecture, the words, snippets and conversations from the meetings in which the architect participated? How can we not unearth the relationship of mutual admiration? The Smithsons’ words, upon visiting Coderch in 1977, when they were photographed at Las Cocheras [Fig. 7], leave no room for doubt. “He wasn’t a traditional architect. It seems strange to say, since he was a professional. But he didn’t work to make money. He worked like a doctor or a priest, because he believed in something. Maybe he was the only architect, in that sense, in Team X. The rest of us were more like artists.”<sup>23</sup>

Just as he had presented the Torre Valentina project in Otterlo in 1959, Coderch attended the 1971 meeting in Toulouse-Le Mirail with panels and

22. See the publication prepared for the exhibition on Las Cocheras organized in Barcelona in 2005; Julio Garnica and Josep Maldonado, eds., *J.A. Coderch a Sarrià-Sant Gervasi: Les Cotxeres* (Barcelona: COAC, 2006).

23. Simona Pierini, “Los amigos de Coderch. Entrevista a Peter Smithson”, *Circo*, no 110 (2003). See also: Simona Pierini, “Jose Antonio Coderch e il Team 10”, *Passaggio in Iberia* (Milán: Christian Marinotti Edizioni, 2008), 85-123.

a model of “Las Cocheras” to present them, 12 years later, to his Team 10 colleagues.<sup>24</sup> However, just before the public presentation, he left the Congress in a hurry to avoid running into F. Correa, his former collaborator, colleague, and friend, with whom he had fallen out due to political reasons.<sup>25</sup> Given Coderch’s sudden absence – or disappearance, even – from the Team 10 meeting in 1971, who better than Candilis [Fig. 8], and where better than Toulouse-Le Mirail, to present the project for “Las Cocheras” in Barcelona?



**FIG. 8** Toulouse-Le Mirail, 1971. Candilis presenting the design for Las Cocheras in Sarrià to the other members of Team X.

24. In this case, and paradoxically, the project had less of an impact in the international media of the time, even though it had actually been built, unlike the Torre Valentina project. See: José A. Coderch, “Un proyecto de viviendas”, in *Arquitectura*, no. 162 (1972): 16-21; José A. Coderch “Hauteur moyenne et forte densité”, in *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, no. 177 (1975): 71-73; “Conjunto de viviendas en Barcelona”, in *Nueva Forma*, no. 106 (1974): 42-47; “Conjunto de viviendas. Barcelona. España”, in *Informes de la Construcción*, no. 273 (1975): 35-53; “José Antonio Coderch”, in *A+U*, no. 62 (1976): 62. More recently, the design has been revisited by a number of authors. Notably, Kenneth Frampton, “Homenaje a Coderch”, in *José Antonio Coderch, Casas*, 2G, no. 33 (2006): 4-13.

25. It was a personal issue – which we would prefer not to delve into more than is strictly necessary – that momentarily complicated Coderch’s relationship with Team Ten. In the following years, the Smithsons remained in contact with their friend Coderch. In a letter from February 1973, they sent him the program for the Berlin meeting and hoped he would leave old history behind him, forwarding the list of participants “I hope you find no enemy here and that we shall meet this time.” (Letter 02/05/1973). The following year, Bakema invited him to the meeting in Rotterdam, but Coderch did not go. In 1976, he went to the meeting in Spoleto, Italy, accompanied by his children. In 1977, Alison invited him to the meeting in Paris, but Coderch was unable to attend. He had just undergone an operation and was showing the initial symptoms of the degenerative disease that would gradually force him to leave behind his work in the architecture studio. From his family home in Espolla (Girona), Coderch hand wrote a letter, his daughter Elvira typed it, and his son Pepe imitated his signature and sent it to Alison Smithson.