



HPA

Histories of Postwar Architecture

n.15 2024  
vol. VII

**Ricardo Bofill Abroad:  
The International  
Projection of the *Taller de  
Arquitectura***

edited by

Antonio Pizza, Marta García Carbonero, Marisa García  
Vergara and Julio Garnica

Raquel Alvarez Arce  
Pablo Arza Garaloces  
Giovanni Bellucci  
Iñaki Bergera  
Federico Camerin  
Gregori Civera  
Íñigo Cobeta-Gutiérrez  
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The editors would like to thank Bofill Taller de Arquitectura for their collaboration, and R. Bofill's family and heirs Pablo and Ricardo Bofill, for their support and willingness to contribute to initiatives that raise awareness of their father's work. We are especially grateful to the Bofill Taller de Arquitectura Archive for granting us permission to publish the architect's drawings and other graphic and textual materials marked as BTA Archive. These drawings, along with the extensive BTA Archive collection, were digitised at the Barcelona studio during the research carried out for this monographic HPA publication. This gave us the opportunity to delve deeper into the archive of Ricardo Bofill, which remains largely unknown. With the consent of his heirs, we are using these reproductions to further knowledge of his work and publish new studies on the architect Ricardo Bofill. We would particularly like to thank Alexandra Garzón, the BTA Archive's archivist, and Gregori Civera, the photographer, for their invaluable assistance.

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**Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura**, **Jardin des Halles**, planning proposal for Les Halles competition, Paris, 1974. Perspective sketch. BTA Archive.

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**Ricardo Bofill** with some members of Taller de Arquitectura. BTA Archive..





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# Ricardo Bofill Abroad: The International Projection of the *Taller de Arquitectura*

edited by

Antonio Pizza, Marta García Carbonero,  
Marisa García Vergara and Julio Garnica

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**Marisa García Vergara, Julio Garnica, Marta García Carbonero, Antonio Pizza**

## Editorial

The present issue, number 15 of *Histories of Postwar Architecture (HPA)*, examines the international trajectory of Ricardo Bofill (1939–2022) and the Taller de Arquitectura, a multidisciplinary team founded in 1963. Over more than six decades, the Taller developed a prolific, multifaceted and at times controversial body of work. Following Bofill's death in 2022, the Taller remains active, maintaining—if not accelerating—the pace of production that characterised its work under Bofill's direction. From the 1980s onwards, the practice increasingly engaged with projects across the globe.

Bofill's extensive architectural output and his prominent, sometimes polarising role have made him a central figure in the ongoing scholarly reassessment of Postmodern Architecture—a field that is still relevant more than half a century after its emergence. In this context, a 2024 Call for Papers invited analyses of the Taller's international works, their reception and their influence on contemporary architects, to contribute a critical, updated perspective on Bofill's global practice.



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Fig. Editorial page:

Interior view of the Bofill  
Taller de Arquitectura Ar-  
chive, Barcelona. MGv.

This Call for Papers is part of the research project *RETRANSLATES (Reflections, from Europe, on architecture in Spain: urban projects, public facilities, design and interventions in heritage [1976–2006])*,<sup>1</sup> which investigates the international reach of Spanish architecture across global territories, focusing on the processes of circulation, reinterpretation and reception of architectural works in diverse cultural and geographical contexts. Bofill and the Taller de Arquitectura are among the project's most significant case studies, illuminating transnational trajectories in contemporary architecture.

Bofill began his career in Barcelona in the early 1960s, producing buildings that combined local architectural traditions with ambitious urban utopian ideas. Dissatisfied with the limitations imposed by architecture and Spain's political and social reality, he founded the Taller de Arquitectura in 1963. This diverse team of architects, engineers, sociologists, artists and filmmakers sought to analyse contemporary urban challenges and design alternative architectural solutions.

Rooted in the legacy of Antoni Gaudí, the political engagement of the GATCPAC and the professional ethics of José Antonio Coderch, Bofill's early works—including Compositor Bach Street (Barcelona, 1962–1963), Barrio Gaudí (Reus, 1964–1970), tourist complexes in Calpe (1965–1970), Castillo Kafka (Sant Pere de Ribes, 1966–1970) and Walden 7 (Sant Just Desvern, 1970–1975)—attracted international attention and coverage in leading European architectural publications.

Critics and historians such as Bruno Zevi, Reyner Banham and Geoffrey Broadbent engaged with the Taller's theoretical project *La Ciudad en el Espacio* (City in Space), which proved too innovative for late-Francoist Spain. Following setbacks with projects such as Moratalaz in Madrid (1972–1974), Bofill turned to France, where the Taller's international trajectory truly began. During what are known as the 'French Years', the team proposed works like *La Petite Cathédrale* (Cergy-Pontoise, 1971), *La Citadelle Fort de Saint-Cyr* (1973) and *Les Halles* (1975), many of which remained unbuilt, despite Bofill's close connections with French political authorities. From 1980 onwards, the Taller completed major urban residential projects in France's *villes nouvelles*, including *Ville Nouvelle Le Lac* (Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, 1972–1987), *Les Espaces d'Abraxas* (Marne-la-Vallée, 1979–1982), *Le Crescent Vert* (Cergy-Pontoise, 1981–1985) and *Antigone* (Montpellier, 1979–1996). These projects blended classicism and technology, monumentality and prefabrication, and have become embedded in contemporary cultural and visual imagination.

From then on, the Taller expanded its work to new geographical locations, typologies and scales through various projects. Experiences on the African continent began with Algerian agricultural villages, such as *Village Houari*

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<sup>1</sup> *RETRANSLATES (Reflections, from Europe, on architecture in Spain: urban projects, public facilities, design and interventions in heritage [1976–2006])* (PID2022-138760NB-C21), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities (MCIU)/ State Research Agency (AEI)/ 10.13039/501100011033 DOI, European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Union.

Boumédienne (Abadla, Algeria, 1978-1980), and extended over decades to other countries in the region, including Morocco, where the large Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique complex remains under construction (Benguerir, 2016-2022).

The Taller's international reputation arguably reached a turning point in the early 1990s with the construction of two iconic buildings in Chicago: the West Wacker Drive office skyscraper (1988–1990) and the Dearborn Center (2003). These buildings, built in the heart of the nineteenth-century American school of skyscrapers, but amid heated debates on postmodern architecture, solidified the Taller's standing on the global stage. Since then, the Taller's global reach has expanded to include projects in Asia, such as the Shiseido Ginza building in Tokyo (completed in 2001).

The contributions published in this issue of HPA reflect the breadth of the Taller's global practice. They are written by authors with diverse backgrounds and interests, whose variety contributes to the creation of a multifaceted itinerary—a kind of diachronic cartography that effectively delineates the Taller's extensive international reach.

Thus, the "Articles" section examines the growing interest in the Taller's French Years, particularly in relation to urban planning, political management and power dynamics. Special attention is given to early projects that, although unbuilt, largely mark the start of Bofill's international career. Raquel Álvarez Arce, María Soledad Bustamante and Mercedes Sanz Rojo focus on the Le Petite Cathédrale project (1971) for the Ville Nouvelle of Cergy-Pontoise. They view this project as the final example of the team's modular work, which was initiated with La Ciudad en el Espacio and realised in Walden 7, before the Taller increasingly emphasised form and image. Anne Kockelkorn analyses the turbulent 1974 competition for the redevelopment of Paris's Les Halles, which was described as a contemporary royal palace. This was set against the backdrop of near-monarchical power struggles at the heart of Giscard d'Estaing's liberal urban renewal policies. Much of the Taller's subsequent international work was conceived during this period.

In Italy, Federico Camerin analyses the Waterfront Revitalisation Project in Salerno (2007–2009), highlighting how imported models of success constrained the architectural response to local urban, social and environmental conditions. He questions the political legitimacy imposed by public authorities in smaller cities, which sought to replicate successful models—such as crescent and sail-shaped buildings—from major capitals. Giovanni Bellucci examines the 1990s Södermalm project in Stockholm, where the Taller adapted the crescent to Nordic conditions, tempering the neoclassical excesses that were developed contemporaneously in France.

Outside of Europe, Laura Sánchez-Carrasco, Brett Tippey and Íñigo Cobeta-Gutiérrez study Bofill's pursuit of a "high-rise classicism" in the United States. There, Bofill fostered an intense intellectual engagement through his buildings,

writings and presentations in museums and galleries over the course of three decades.

The section also addresses the international reception of the Taller's work in the mass media. Pablo Arza and Teresa Larumbe examine the critical reception of Bofill's architecture in the specialised press from the 1970s to the mid-1980s. During this period, his work was traditionally framed within postmodernism, positioning him as a precursor of the architectural star system that emerged in the 1990s and early twenty-first century. David Mesa considers how Bofill's work was received in divided Germany, where the Taller's monumental classicism and prefabrication were interpreted differently on either side of the Berlin Wall at a time when the Cold War was coming to an end.

Bartomeu Martorell examines the relationship between Henri Lefebvre, Mario Gaviria and Bofill in a Spain that seemed more turbulent from an external perspective. He highlights how Lefebvre's interest in *La Ciudad en el Espacio* broadened the Taller's sociological and cultural horizons.

The "Invited Papers" section features contributions by authors intimately familiar with Bofill's work. Andrés Medina traces the internationalisation of the Taller's first five built projects in Spain: Barrio Gaudí, Castillo de Kafka, La Manzanera with Xanadú and Muralla Roja, and Walden 7. Dominique Serrell examines Bofill's French career based on her experience as former director of the Taller in Paris. Iñaki Bergera analyses the visual dimension of the Taller's work through an unpublished 2025 conversation with photographer Gregori Civera.

Finally, the "Sources" section, curated by Marisa García Vergara and Julio Garnica, presents a selection of the Taller's key international projects, detailing chronology, location, collaborators, clients, bibliographic references and, for the first time in many cases, key project materials. The essays are accompanied by excerpts from original project typescripts, carefully selected to enhance the interpretation of each project and to provide direct insight into the conceptual and narrative framework of the Taller's works.

Works include the Sanctuary of Meritxell (Andorra), French projects such as Les Arcades du Lac, Les Echelles du Baroque, Les Espaces d'Abraxas, Le Crescent Vert and Antigone, as well as Houari Boumédiène Agricultural Village (Algeria), 77 West Wacker Drive, Shiseido Ginza, the Dearborn Center and the Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique. This exhaustive documentation was developed in collaboration with the Bofill Taller de Arquitectura, which has long maintained a rigorous professional archive. The archivist Alexandra Garzón and the photographer Gregori Civera should be especially thanked for their valuable contributions.

# Ricardo Bofill's Critical Fortune in the International Architectural Press between the 1970s and the Mid-1980s

*Ricardo Bofill, Architectural Journals, Criticism, Spanish Architecture, France*

## /Abstract

From the mid-sixties onwards, Ricardo Bofill's work began to be published in various foreign architectural magazines. From that moment on, his presence would be constant and would increase as the years went by. Aware of the active role of the media in the architect's work, Bofill made conscious use of them. It could be said that he was the first media architect as we know them today, a celebrity precursor of the star system of the nineties and early twentieth century. Within this framework, the article explores Bofill's critical fortune on the international scene. To this end, the study analyses the scope of his work in foreign periodicals, setting out the keys to explaining the interest his architecture aroused in the foreign context. It focuses on the period between the 1970s and the mid-1980s, when he carried out his most mediatic projects in France. These works, with a monumentalist character, have traditionally been framed within the postmodernist trend. The research was carried out as output of the Grant PID2022-138760NB-C22 funded by MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and "ERDF/EU".

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Teresa Larumbe Machín. Architect (2011), master's degree (2012) and PhD (2018) from the University of Navarra. She has carried out academic research stays at the Architectural Association of London and the Royal College of British Architects. Since 2018, he combines research with professional practice.





## Introduction

In 1981 Louis Hellman, British architect and cartoonist, published a cartoon dedicated to Ricardo Bofill in his satirical section of *The Architects' Journal*. The architect is depicted as Don Quixote, accompanied by Stirling, who appears as his faithful squire Sancho Panza. Both contemplate a factory building while Bofill remarks: 'See yonder magnificent castle that I have caused to be built, Sancho Sterlino. Soon we will return to the age of classical chivalry'<sup>1</sup>. Years later, in 1990, Bofill was again the subject of another Hellman cartoon in the same magazine. In this case, at the gates of Barcelona 92, he is presented as a 'classical' bull ready to charge against Bohigas, who, characterised as the bullfighter, holds the cape of modernity in his hand. Both cartoons illustrate the critical presence that the work and figure of the Catalan architect enjoyed on the international architectural scene. These caricatures synthesise the image of the architect that history has left us [Fig. 1].

<sup>1</sup> Louis, Hellman, "Don Quixofill de la Catalonia," *The Architects' Journal*, no. 3 (1981): 104.

Fig. 1  
Satirical cartoons by L. Hellman about Ricardo Bofill in *The Architects' Journal*.

Ricardo Bofill began studying architecture in 1955 at the Barcelona School of Architecture. After the first year, he moved to Switzerland, where he completed his training at the School of the University of Geneva. On his return to the Catalan capital, in 1963, he founded El Taller de Arquitectura, with a motley group of architects and designers, amongst others. This cosmopolitan profile, marked by his stay in Switzerland and by the presence of some foreign personalities in his Taller<sup>2</sup>, was reinforced from the 1970s onwards, when he set up a team in Paris and focused his activity especially on France<sup>3</sup>.

The work of Bofill found resonance in the pages of many magazines in the mid-1960s, and from then on his presence was constant, increasing considerably in the following decades. Some works, such as "Bofill, heterodoxy and mass media. From utopia to history (1960-1975)"<sup>4</sup>, have come close to this reality, analysing the dissemination of El Taller's early Spanish works in foreign journals. However, it has yet to address the critical fortune of his works in France, which, with a monumentalist character, have traditionally been framed within the current of postmodernism. Within this framework, this article starts out to analyse precisely this last question, setting out the key elements that explain the interest aroused by Bofill's architecture in the international context. To this end, an exhaustive search and analysis has been carried out of what has been published in architectural journals, mainly European and North American, on the work of El Taller between 1970 and 1986, a period that includes his most mediatic projects in France<sup>5</sup>.

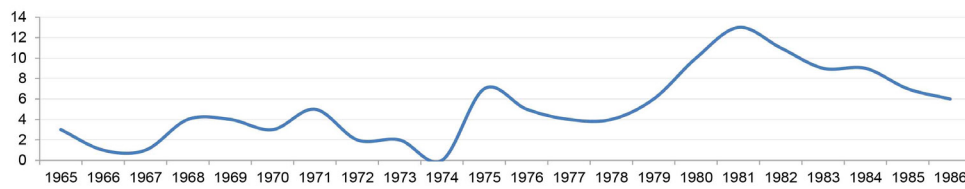
This survey shows that the evolution of the architecture designed by Ricardo Bofill, more than that of any other architect up until that date, can be self-explained through the magazines. His presence in the media is not only limited to specialized publications; the most significant moments in his career, and his own personal biography, have also been recorded in newspaper archives, press clippings of the time, and society magazines, whose impact would merit a much more exhaustive analysis than this article allows us to cover. Aware of active role of the media in the architect's work, Bofill made conscious use of them, and they ended up

2 Among them Peter Hodgkinson, who joined the team in 1966.

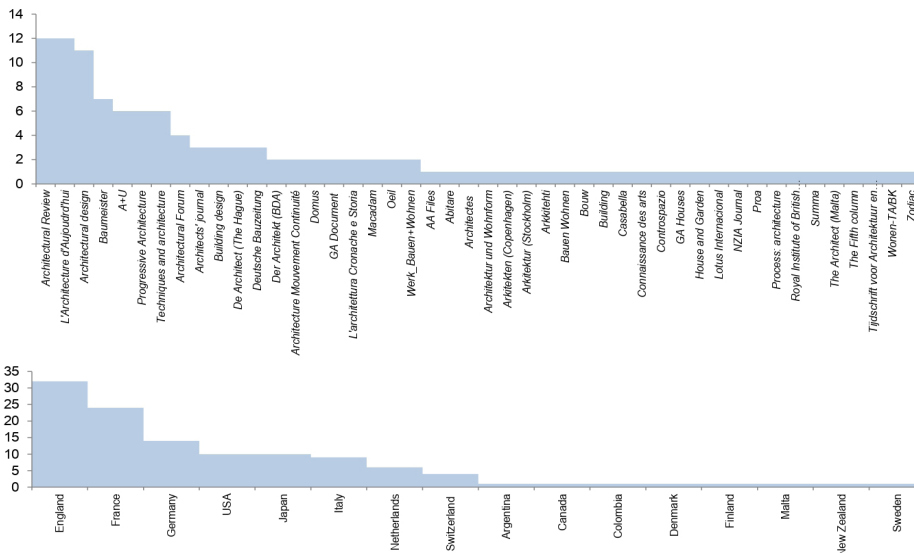
3 For further information see Bartomeu Cruells, *Ricardo Bofill: Taller de Arquitectura*, (Barcelona: Editorial GG, 1998) and James A. Warren, *Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura*, (Barcelona: Editorial GG, 1988) or Ángel Urrutia, *Arquitectura española siglo XX* (Cátedra, Madrid, 1997), 582-588.

4 Marisa García Vergara and Julio Garnica, "Bofill, heterodoxy and mass media. From utopia to history (1960-1975)," in *Crossing frontiers: International networks of Spanish architecture (1939-1975)*, ed. Antonio Pízza and Enrique Granell (Madrid: Ediciones Asimétricas, 2021), 116-137.

5 This analysis is one of the results of a broader study on the process of reception and diffusion of Spanish architecture in Western architectural culture, as it can be traced in foreign periodicals, between 1949 and 1986. Nearly 180 different titles were analysed and consulted in the British Architectural Library of the Royal Institute of British Architects, which holds more than 2,000 titles of architectural journals. The search resulted in the location of 1440 records on Spanish architecture in foreign journals, with which a database was generated and worked with the Excel tool. For more information, please consult: Pablo Arza Garaloces, "Arquitecturas exportadas," in *Actas II Congreso Iberoamericano redfundamentos. Experiencias y Métodos de Investigación* (Madrid: Redfundamentos S. L., 2018), 375-378.



2



3

conditioning his public image, constructing a persona. It could be said that he was the first Spanish media architect, a celebrity who defined himself as “the beginning of the star system”<sup>6</sup>.

## An Analysis of the Data. First Works

Between 1965 and 1986, Ricardo Bofill’s work was the subject of 118 articles [Fig. 2] in 46 journals in 16 different countries [Fig. 3]. More than half of the articles, 65, were published between 1975 and 1986, focusing on his work in France. These figures make him the Spanish architect with the greatest presence in foreign journals in the aforementioned period. Behind him is the studio MBM (Martorell, Bohigas and Mackay), with 79 articles, José Antonio Coderch with 54, and Rafael Moneo with 40. In number of pages, Bofill is still in first place with 642, followed by MBM with 299, Moneo with 182 and Coderch with 177 pages, all of them in foreign architectural journals.

The first articles on Bofill’s work appear in 1965. The first, in July, was published in the magazine *Deutsche Bauzeitung* on the dwellings in Compositor Bach Street (1963)<sup>7</sup>, in an issue devoted to residential typology;

Fig. 2  
Number of annual references to Bofill in international journals (1965-1986).

Fig. 3  
Number of references to Bofill’s work by journal and country (1965-1986).

6 Anatxu Zabalbeascoa, “Ricardo Bofill: Yo fui el principio del star system”, *El País Semanal*, [https://elpais.com/elpais/2017/01/30/eps/1485731127\\_148573.html](https://elpais.com/elpais/2017/01/30/eps/1485731127_148573.html) (last accessed July 16, 2025).

7 “Wohnblock in Barcelona,” *Deutsche Bauzeitung*, no. 7 (1965): 559-562.

in August, *Domus*, possibly thanks to Coderch<sup>8</sup>, included a report on the flats he built in Castelldefels (1962)<sup>9</sup>. Both works, together with the preliminary project for the development of the Barrio Gaudí (1964-68), also appeared in the important monographic issue that *Zodiac* devoted to Spanish architecture in 1965<sup>10</sup>.

At the end of the sixties, El Taller began what Urrutia calls its second stage<sup>11</sup>, when it focused on the Archigram phenomenon, and which 'was characterised by intense experimental work (...) and by groundbreaking proposals as an alternative to conventional architecture'<sup>12</sup>. The architecture of this second stage attracted the greatest number of references in the pages of specialised magazines. This fact reveals that the projects of this period are the ones that managed to arouse the interest of architectural critics, both for the polyphonic and interdisciplinary way of working in El Taller and for their unprecedented formal results<sup>13</sup>.

Xanadú (1968) is one of the first works of this time to be published. There are several reports on this project, of which we have identified three published in 1968 in the German *Baumeister*<sup>14</sup>, the American *Architectural Forum*<sup>15</sup> and the British *Architectural Design*<sup>16</sup>. All of them have the particularity that their author is Peter Hodgkinson, one of the members of el Taller, of British origin<sup>17</sup>. Hodgkinson will also be the author of new articles presenting other works, such as the Sitges flats, called Kafka's Castle (1966-68), for *Architectural Forum* and *Architectural Design*<sup>18</sup>, or the one on the Barrio Gaudí<sup>19</sup>. These examples seem to place Hodgkinson as the person 'in charge' of publicising and disseminating the work of El Taller in the international magazines, and also demonstrate a clear intention to make its works known in the global panorama through the printed medium.

8 The Catalan architect, in addition to sending his projects, acted as correspondent and sent the works of other Spanish professionals (see Antonio Pizsa, "El desenlace de una cultura autárquica en la prensa nacional e internacional: hacia la IX Trienal en Milán y la I Bienal Hispanoamericana en Madrid, 1951," in *Las revistas de arquitectura (1900-1975) crónicas, manifiestos, propaganda*, ed. José Manuel Pozo (Pamplona: Ediciones T6, 2012), 45 - note 16).

9 "I muri rossi di Castelldefels," *Domus*, no. 429 (1965): 6-9.

10 "Ricardo Bofill," *Zodiac*, no. 15 (1965): 44-49. It is worth remembering that this monograph, prepared by Vittorio Gregotti, is one of the first and a reference for other magazines when publishing news on Spanish architecture.

11 The first, according to Urrutia, "coincides with some of the revisionist concerns common to other Spanish professionals of the time, specifically those of the Catalan sphere or those of the so-called Barcelona School" (Ángel Urrutia, *Arquitectura española siglo XX*, (Madrid: Cátedra, 1997), 583). This first stage includes, for example, the projects mentioned above.

12 Urrutia, *Arquitectura española siglo XX*, 583.

13 El Taller's interdisciplinary approach is one of the features that most attracted the attention of international critics, as can be seen in articles published in *AA files*, or the conversation with which *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* introduces the issue dedicated to Bofill in 1975.

14 Peter Hodgkinson, "Xanadu," *Baumeister*, no. 6 (1968): 673-676.

15 Peter Hodgkinson, "Xanadu in Spain. A fanciful apartment building evokes some literary 'gold and garbage'," *Architectural Forum*, no. 5 (1968): 52-59.

16 Peter Hodgkinson, "Xanadu," *Architectural Design*, no. 7 (1968): 327-330.

17 We have already referred to him when talking about the people who spread Spanish architecture.

18 Peter Hodgkinson, "Kafka's Castle. A turn-on, plug-in science fiction apartment-hotel near Barcelona," *Architectural Forum*, no. 4 (1969): 35-41; and "Kafka's Castle," *Architectural Design*, no. 3 (1970): 117.

19 Peter Hodgkinson, "Barrio Gaudí. Taller de Arquitectura," *Architectural Design*, no. 8 (1971): 482-484.

In the late seventies, Geoffrey Broadbent<sup>20</sup> published a series of extensive articles in three well-known magazines: in 1973 in *Architectural Review*<sup>21</sup>, and in 1975 in *Architectural Design*<sup>22</sup> and *Progressive Architecture*. Broadbent's interest in Bofill's work must be understood in the context of his research on method and also to the semiotic theories that were in vogue on the architectural scene in the seventies. The first contact Broadbent seems to have with Bofill's architecture was at a symposium entitled 'Architecture, History and Theory of Signs', which took place in Castelldefels<sup>23</sup> between 14 and 18 March 1972<sup>24</sup>, where he presented the paper "The deep structures of architecture"<sup>25</sup>, playing, as Tomàs Llorens points out, a 'decisive role in its gestation'<sup>26</sup>. This article was included years later, in 1980, in the book *Sings, Symbols, and Architecture*<sup>27</sup>.

## Bofill's Arrival in France

Contrary to what it might seem, given the media success that Bofill would later enjoy, El Taller's works were barely mentioned in the specialised critics in France until 1970. Only two brief mentions of his residential projects in Nicaragua Street (1962-65) and San Gregorio Square appear in the magazine *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* in 1967 and one in 1968. However, throughout the 1960s, this magazine showed great interest in Spanish architecture<sup>28</sup>, and played a fundamental indirect role in Bofill's emergence in the neighbouring country.

In April 1970, in a monographic issue on Spain, the magazine published an extensive article on the Gaudí district, devoting 11 pages to it<sup>29</sup>. In the same year, one of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*'s correspondents in Spain,

20 He is an English architect, theorist and critic, director of the Portsmouth School of Architecture from 1967 to 1988. He has published extensively in the fields of design methodology, design education and the semiotics of architecture.

21 Geoffrey Broadbent, "The Taller of Bofill," *Architectural Review*, no. 921 (1973): 289-297.

22 Geoffrey Broadbent, "Bofill Taller de Arquitectura," *Architectural Design*, no. 2 (1975): 402-417. In this article the magazine includes a brief heading presenting the work of the Taller, whose approach to each project begins with a poetic concept, as a counterpoint to that of Piano & Rogers, who had published an article in May of that year, which relied on technology.

23 Where El Taller had several works.

24 The international congress, which included various participants such as Oriol Bohigas, Charles Jencks, Nuno Portas, Peter Eisenman and Alan Colquhoun, dealt with the subject of semiotics in architecture. Its origins lie in the interest aroused by Jencks and Baird's book *Meaning in Architecture*, published three years earlier. For more information on these questions, which we cannot go into here, I recommend consulting: Harry Francis Mallgrave and David Goodman, *An introduction to architectural theory. 1968 to the present* (Malaysia: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 37-52, as well as the book that compiles the interventions of the different participants in the Symposium: Justo Gonzalez Beremendi, Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Cataluña y Baleares, *Arquitectura, Historia y Teoría de los Signos* (Architecture, History and Theory of Signs) (Barcelona: Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Cataluña y Baleares, 1973).

25 Gonzalez Beremendi, Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Cataluña y Baleares, *Arquitectura, Historia y Teoría de los Signos*, 156-184.

26 Gonzalez Beremendi, Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Cataluña y Baleares, *Arquitectura, Historia y Teoría de los Signos* (Barcelona: Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Cataluña y Baleares, 1973), 12.

27 Geoffrey Broadbent, "The Deep Structures of Architecture," in *Sings, Symbols and Architecture*, ed. Richard Bunt and Charles Jencks (Bath: The Pitman Press, 1980), 119-168.

28 Pablo Arza Garaloces, "L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui, testigo del desarrollo moderno español (1950-1986)," *Bitácora Arquitectura*, no. 43 (2020): 12-26.

29 "Vers la ville dans l'espace. Quartier Gaudí a Reus," *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 149 (1970).



Patrice Goulet, would also encourage the publication of a photo essay on the same project in *Jardin des modes*, becoming “a first for an architect to be published in a women’s magazine”<sup>30</sup>. The formal audacity of the project and its ability to embrace and recreate traditional and popular ways of living, contrasted sharply with the lacklustre tone of official French town planning, made up of blocks and towers. The colourfulness of the Gaudí quarter was also accentuated by its appearance in the mass media. This freshness will attract the attention of the Central Group of the ‘Villes Nouvelles’, a team of senior civil servants, created to promote new state urban developments in France with an innovative spirit, far removed from the French establishment. The report on the Gaudí neighbourhood, together with the magnetism projected by Bofill in a television programme at the time, led this group to make an initial enquiry to El Taller, as shown in the pages of Dominique Serrell’s recent book<sup>31</sup>. This first contact would be reciprocated and nurtured by Bofill himself, and in this way he would be introduced into the upper echelons of French politics and administration, which would give him access to important commissions throughout the seventies.

In 1971, Bofill received his first commissions in France, the City in Space and the Petite Cathedrale, and in 1974, he was invited to take part in the Les Halles competition in Paris, which lasted four years. If we stick to strictly professional publications, during this time, the Spanish works that had earned him the attention of the French authorities multiplied his presence in national magazines such as *Techniques et Architecture*, *Macadam*, *Connaissance des arts*, *Architecture Mouvement Continuité* and, above all, *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, whose editor, Bernard Huet, took a position in favour of Bofill’s proposal in the controversy of the Les Halles competition<sup>32</sup>.

This project marked a before and after in Ricardo Bofill’s career in France, favouring El Taller’s establishment in Paris<sup>33</sup>. The proposals submitted to the competition began to be published in 1975, shortly after the decision (which took place in the autumn of 1974), in France, England<sup>34</sup>, Switzerland<sup>35</sup> and the United States<sup>36</sup>, and were disseminated years later in the Netherlands, Japan and Denmark. In 1975 alone, Bofill’s work was mentioned in 7 publications, more than in any other year to date. The reasons for this increase seem to derive from his participation in a competition with great media repercussions (“Paris, capital of Europe?” is the title

30 Dominique Serrell, Bofill, *les années françaises*, (Paris: Norma éditions, 2024), 27.

31 Serrell, Bofill, *les années françaises*, 27.

32 Serrell, Bofill, *les années françaises*, 90.

33 The postulates close to other professionals from the Catalan sphere or the Barcelona School, present in the works of his first period, have completely disappeared.

34 “Les Halles,” *Architectural Design*, no. 7 (1975): 402-417.

35 “Les Halles,” *Oeil*, no. 236 (1975).

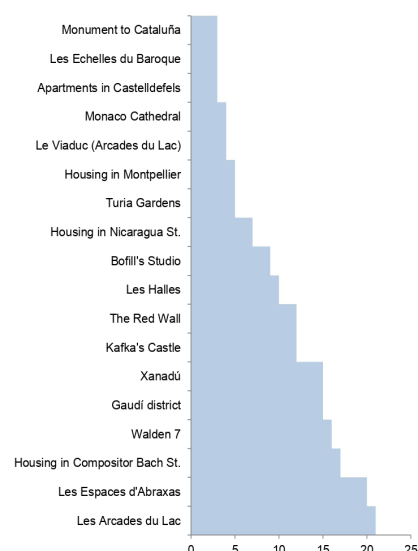
36 “Les Halles,” *Progressive Architecture*, no. 16 (1975): 68-83.

*Architectural Design* dedicates to this event)<sup>37</sup>. Although it is not Bofill's most reported on project in architecture magazines (only 10 mentions have been recorded, compared to the 17 mentions of the dwellings in Compositor Bach Street, the 16 mentions of the Walden 7 project (1970), the 15 mentions of the Gaudí district or Xanadú, or the twenty or so publications of later works, such as Les Arcades du Lac (1982) and Espaces de Abraxas (1978-82)), the critical reception of this work will place it at the centre of the international scene, detached from the trends and interests of Spanish architecture at the time.

## The Leap on to the International Stage

The commitment to a classically inspired urban structure in the Les Halles proposal will be the continuation and result of the theoretical reflection on the way of inhabiting the city, which El Taller had been developing since its experimental projects on the Spanish coast. At the same time, the explicit choice of figures taken from the architectural tradition was a way of responding to the political will to erect *French-style* architecture in the centre of Paris. This reference to French neoclassical architecture was also reinforced by the presentation of the project in large watercolours, in nineteenth-century style, which accompanied the publications of his project<sup>38</sup> and which further triggered the controversy in France, given that the *École de Beaux Arts* had been forced to restructure after the revolution of May '68. The question of the restitution of classicism became the subject of a heated debate that transcended strictly disciplinary boundaries to reach the political and social spheres<sup>39</sup>. It was to this controversy that the failure of the project was attributed, which was halted on the orders of Jacques Chirac when he became mayor of Paris in 1978. However, the stylistic exploration started at Les Halles, continued in the new urban developments commissioned to El Taller throughout the 1980s in France.

From 1980 onwards, the French projects attracted the most attention from international magazines. If we look at the graph that measures the dissemination of his works over these years [Fig. 4], we can see that the dwellings in Compositor Bach Street, Xanadú, Walden 7, the Gaudí quarter and Kafka's castle have a large number of references. However, it is actually Les Arcades du Lac and Les Espaces d'Abraxas that cover the most pages, occupying first and second place. The data reveals that, while



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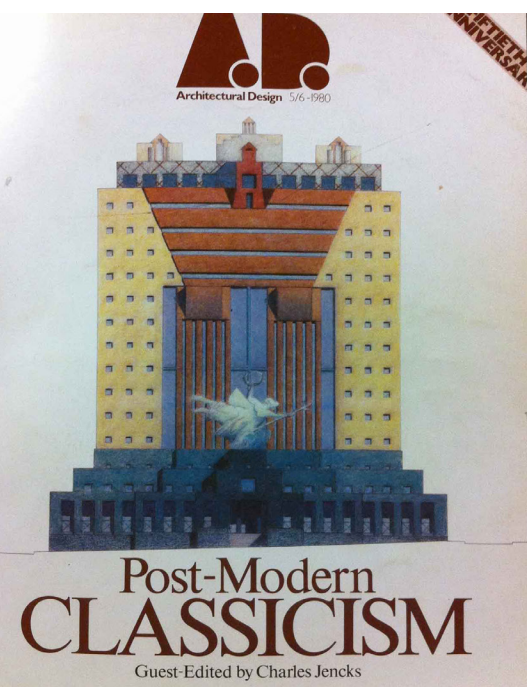
Fig. 4

Bofill's projects with three or more references in international journals (1965 and 1986).

37 Grahame Shane, "Paris, capital of Europe?," *Architectural Design*, no. 6 (1975): 371.

38 These watercolours are published in the 28-page article that *Architectural Design* devoted to the Les Halles competition in 1980. "Les Halles," *Architectural Design*, no. 9-10 (1980): 118-145.

39 More in detail, the role of the newspaper *Le Monde*, whose development deserves an exhaustive study that goes beyond the scope of these pages, should be highlighted.



the projects of the "second stage", built on the Mediterranean coast, are the ones that managed to capture the interest of international architectural critics, as we indicated earlier, the classicist projects generate the most literature, fuelling the architectural debate of the time around the so-called *post-modern language*. In Urrutia's words, this third stage comprises 'a long period of great activity in France and, as one more of the so-called postmodern currents, aims to definitively overcome the Modern Movement through a classicist order recovered and updated by means of new technologies'<sup>40</sup>.

In fact, El Taller's formal exploration was partly inspired by the theories that Charles Jencks had been developing since 1975 on the language of postmodern architecture, as Peter Hodgkinson himself, one of the members of El Taller, acknowledged in a conference at the time<sup>41</sup>. On the other hand, Charles Jencks, the discoverer of this felicitous epithet, used Bofill's French projects to exemplify what he sought to define as a new stylistic current, overcoming the theories of modern architecture.

Among his publications, two stand out for the English magazine *Architectural Design*, a bastion of postmodernism since the late seventies and throughout the eighties, in which Jencks participated as guest editor. The first of these is from May-June 1980, under the title "Post-Modern Classicism: The New Synthesis". In an introductory note, the magazine presented it as 'the most ambitious issue of *AD* to date'<sup>42</sup>, after several issues devoted in recent years to 'the *École des Beaux-Arts*, *Art Nouveau*,

Fig. 5

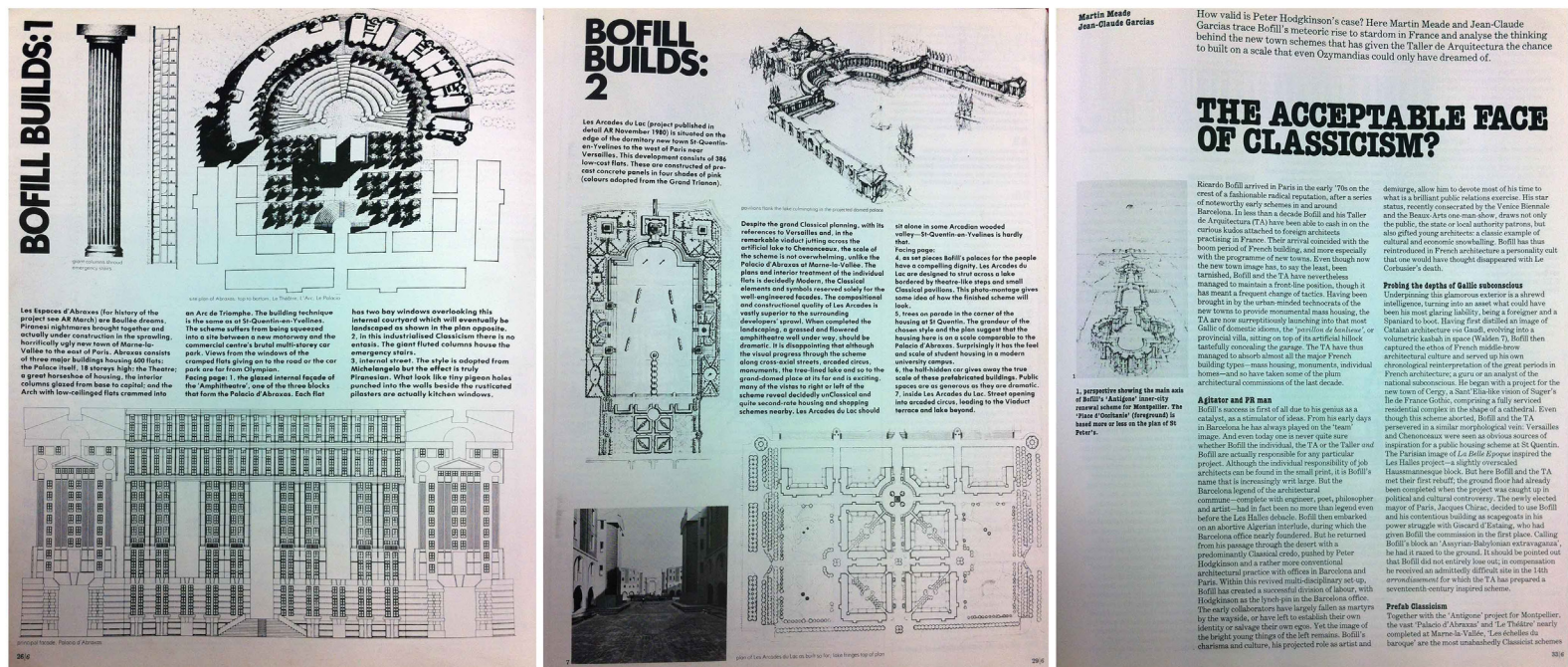
Cover and some pages of the issue 'Post-Modern Classicism: The New Synthesis', *Architectural Design*, no. 5-6 (1980), in which 'Les arcades du Lac' appears.

40 Ángel Urrutia, *Arquitectura española siglo XX* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1997), 583.

41 Peter Hodgkinson, "A new urban classicism," *Pidgeon Digital*, <https://www.pidgeondigital.com/talks/a-new-urban-classicism/play/> (last accessed December 30, 2024).

42 "Post-Modern Classicism: The New Synthesis," *Architectural Design*, no. 5-6 (1980): 1.





Alberti or Neoclassicism<sup>43</sup>. In it Jencks presented around forty projects by architects such as Venturi, Stirling, Robert Stern, Michael Graves, etc. Among them he included Ricardo Bofill, of whom he wrote a five-page article on Les Arcades du Lac<sup>44</sup> [Fig. 5]. The next issue of the postmodern theoretician's work was published in January-February 1982, this time entitled "Free Style Classicism: the Wider Tradition". In it he once again presents the work of several architects belonging to this trend, including Bofill, this time with a five-page article on Le Palace de Abraxas<sup>45</sup>.

Charles Jencks' stylistic interpretation of Bofill's architecture will set the tone for other publications' readings of his work. An example of this can be found in another British magazine, *Architectural Review*, which also devoted issue 1024 of 1982 to postmodern classicism. In this case, the work of El Taller takes on even greater prominence as the standard-bearer of this trend. The cover features a drawing of the elevation of the Palace of Abraxas, and inside, Jonathan Glancey publishes two articles on this work and Les Arcades du Lac<sup>46</sup> and a long interview with Peter Hodgkinson<sup>47</sup> [Fig. 6]. In the same spirit, Paulhans Peters also published several articles in *Baumeister*, such as "Vorfabrizierter Klassizismus. Zu zwei Wohnquartieren bei Paris von Ricardo Bofill"<sup>48</sup>.

43 "Post-Modern Classicism: The New Synthesis," 1.  
 44 "Post-Modern Classicism: The New Synthesis," 53-57.  
 45 "Ricardo Bofill. Palace of Abraxas," *Architectural Design*, no. 1-2 (1982): 42-46.  
 46 Jonathan Glancey, "Bofill builds," *Architectural Review*, no. 1024 (1982): 26-29.  
 47 Jonathan Glancey, "TA talker to AR," *Architectural Review*, no. 1024 (1982): 30-32.  
 48 Peters Paulhans, "Vorfabrizierter Klassizismus. Zu zwei Wohnquartieren bei Paris von Ricardo Bofill," *Baumeister*, no. 11 (1983): 1043-1057.

Fig. 6  
 Some pages of the article, by Jonathan Glancey, 'Bofill builds', *Architectural Review*, no. 1024 (1982).

## Conclusion

As the years went by, Bofill himself would continue to feed the interpretation of his work disseminated through the media with new examples, such as the National Institute of Physical Education of Catalonia (1988-91) or the National Theatre of Catalonia (1991-97). In them, the architect would continue to make use of classical forms and images, and employed them in an increasingly explicit manner, which, far from generating only expectation, debate and controversy, ended up becoming an object of mockery. An example of this can be found in *The Architects' Journal*, which published several satirical cartoons about the architect and his classical style<sup>49</sup>. Also in *Architectural Review*, in 1984, in issue 1050, William Curtis published an article entitled "Principle v pastiche. Perspectives on some recent classicisms", in which he argues that "the classicist-postmodernists, far from effectively reinterpreting history as they claim, have succeeded only in capturing the outward appearance"<sup>50</sup>.

This overview of interest in Bofill's French work illustrates how his architecture will, over time, develop a very close symbiotic relationship with the media. They will not only determine the critical reading of it, but will also condition the creative development of its creator and his subsequent career, being partly responsible for the legacy that has survived to the present day. Bofill made use of the media to make his work known, as we saw in this analysis, which enabled him to project his professional career and progressively extend his radius of action, from his beginnings in Spain to France, to end up achieving international projection. However, although the magazines will play a very important role in the dissemination of Bofill's architecture and will contribute to the architect's consecration, they will also significantly reduce the density of the theoretical arguments present in his early works, reducing it to a semantic and visual game. Photographs of Bofill's architecture were used in magazines as headlines or advertising posters, in the service of an argument, a propagandistic idea or a stylistic classification. The image, in short, would end up overshadowing the reflection on architecture and the city that lay behind it, and would end up caricaturing, as in Louis Hellman's cartoons, the character and his work.

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49 *The Architects' Journal*, no. 3 (1981): 104 and no. 2 (1990): 12.

50 William Curtis, "Principle v pastiche. Perspectives on some recent classicisms," *Architectural Review*, no. 1050 (1984): 11.



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# Ricardo Bofill from Both Sides of the Wall. RBTA's reception in German Architectural Journals during the Late Cold War (1975 –1990)<sup>1</sup>

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*Ricardo Bofill, Villes Nouvelles, West Germany (FRG), East Germany (GDR), Cold War Architecture*

## /Abstract

This article examines how *Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura* (RBTA) was produced, contested, and instrumentalized in the architectural journals of West and East Germany between 1975 and 1990, with brief antecedents from the early 1970s. Using a reception-studies approach to texts from *Bauwelt*, *Baumeister*, *ARCH+*, *Der Architekt*, *Deutsche Bauzeitung*, and *Architektur der DDR*, the paper argues that RBTA's combination of classical monumentality and prefabrication during the so-called "French years" operated as a technology of image whose meaning shifted with the patronage regimes and evaluative frameworks on each side of the Wall.

In the FRG, criticism crystallized around three value regimes—moral-aesthetic (the trauma of monumentality), urban-functional (the user and the built environment), and political-economic (the image of public power and corporations)—turning RBTA into touchstone of local cultural debates. In the GDR, reviewers acknowledged technical prowess yet evaluated RBTA primarily through the lens of industrialisation and socialist planning priorities. By triangulating these readings with Bofill's own programmatic texts, the article shows how German journals did not merely "reflect" RBTA; they constructed it as a sign within late-Cold War urban politics. The contribution is twofold: a comparative map of RBTA's German receptions and a broader diagnosis of how prefabrication can act as symbolic accelerator—either as a public expression of authority or as an operation of urban legibility—depending on the political context.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is part of the research project *RETRANSLATES. Reflections from Europe on Architecture in Spain: Urban Projects, Public Facilities, Design, and Heritage Interventions (1976–2006)*, funded by ICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and the European Union through FEDER. The author's work is supported by the FPU-2020 predoctoral fellowship programme of the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities.

In the late 1970s, Ricardo Bofill remarked: “the world is divided into two blocs—socialist and capitalist—each seeking to appropriate it”<sup>1</sup>. For the *Taller de Arquitectura* (RBTA), the task was to explore “the intermediate zones”, where the contradictions of both systems might be resolved “at the level of form, through new syntheses and new lines of development”. The point of departure is RBTA’s first, journal-led internationalization: during 1960–1975, works executed in Spain circulated widely through international architectural periodicals<sup>2</sup>. Building on that media platform, this article examines how architectural journals in the Federal Republic (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) during the 1980s received and reframed the subsequent internationalization associated with RBTA’s French-built projects—in contrast with the earlier wave of German publications. In doing so, the journals are treated as privileged witnesses from both sides of the Wall: they reveal how West and East codified the same work under distinct evaluative regimes, thus operationalising Bofill’s initial claim about his architectural synthesis attempt in a world divided in two.

The hermeneutical procedure of the analysis is to confront the main concepts used by Bofill’s praxis during those years—mainly “historical expression”, “industrialization” and “power”—with the professional discourse developed in German architectural periodicals. The sources and methods follow a media-reception approach applied to a fixed corpus of journals between 1979 and 1990: *Bauwelt*, *Baumeister*, *ARCH+*, *Der Architekt*, *Deutsche Bauzeitung* from the FRG and *Architektur der DDR* from the GDR. The central claim is that the same concepts—under specific regimes of patronage and representation—elicited divergent criteria across the Two Germanies. The analysis argues that FRG and GDR periodicals produced, rather than merely reported, Bofill’s public meaning, and that their contrasting readings map onto the cultural logics of the two Cold War blocs. Throughout, the German texts are cross-checked against Bofill’s own programmatic writings—*L’architecture d’un homme* (1978), *Espaces d’une vie* (1989), and *L’architecture des villes* (1995)—to confront intention with reception. Analytically, the argument proceeds through three cross-cutting themes: (1) grammars of history (type, legibility, monumentality), (2) from technique to image (prefabrication, series, standardization), and (3) the political economy of form (patronage, representation). In the West German material these themes crystallize as three evaluative regimes—moral-aesthetic, urban-functional, and political-economic—against which the FRG press positioned RBTA; the GDR readings mobilize the same themes through the lens of construction industrialisation, social utility and planning priorities. This framework turns the journals into a compar-

1 Ricardo Bofill, *L’architecture d’un homme* (Paris: Arthaud, 1978), 72.

2 Marisa García-Vergara and Julio Garnica, “Bofill, heterodoxy and mass media. From utopia to history (1960-1975)” in *Crossing frontiers. International networks of Spanish architecture (1939-1975)*, eds. Antonio Pizza and Enrique Granell (Madrid: Ediciones Asimétricas), 116-137.

ative laboratory for testing how prefabricated monumentality can register either as theatre of authority or as operative urban legibility, depending on context.

### **Between Form and Technology in the Late Francoism**

The creation and early internationalisation of the Taller during the second half of the Franco regime (1960–1975) unfolded in the pursuit of materializing a utopia as a response to the social ways of life developed under the Spanish dictatorship. It was in this anti-establishment period that projects such as *el Castillo de Kafka* (1968) near Sitges, *el Barrio Gaudí* (1968) in Reus, *Xanadú* (1968) and *la Muralla Roja* (1973) in Calpe and *Walden 7* (1975) in Sant Joan Despí took shape. Their formalisation drew on the mathematical research introduced to the *Taller* by Bofill's sister, Anna, following her incorporation in 1963 and condensed in her 1975 dissertation *Contribución a la generación geométrica de formas arquitectónicas y urbanas* (Contribution to the geometric generation of architectural and urban forms). The main objective was to get over "the uniformity and monotony of the *international rationalist*" by establishing a standard unity that allowed "an industrialisation of its construction" and could be replicated in all space directions by finding those "geometric laws capable of generating volumetric structures" <sup>3</sup>. This subversion of form underpinned the intention to create "an architecture without a façade", in which the interior was articulated through "a multiplicity of walkways", reviving "the urbanism of the Casbah" with a "surrealist note" <sup>4</sup>. What these works share is a location away from historical centres, enabling utopian refuges capable of subverting the National-Catholic family model upheld by the regime. As Bofill later put it, in Spain they had worked little "with the constraint of history": "we operated on peripheral sites, where everything was to be invented", and the regime's inertia "pushed us to do entirely new things, architectures that no one had yet dared to imagine" <sup>5</sup>.

From a West German vantage, *Baumeister 10/1969*<sup>6</sup>—under the headline "Kafkaeske Burg"—read the Sitges project as a paradox: a plug-in spiral "castle" achieved on ordinary budgets and schedules. The piece stressed that the self-service hotel of about ninety units in Sitges was assembled from brick stair-core towers, simple steel posts, and lightweight "plug-on" elements. In so doing, the article stripped mainstream architects of the pretext that standardised block architecture was the inevitable price of efficiency and cost rationalisation. While the formal logic was compared

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3 Anna Bofill, *Hacia la ecomorfología: Entre la utopía y la realidad* (Madrid: Asimétricas, 2025), 67–69.

4 Ricardo Bofill, *Espaces d'une vie* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1989), 145.

5 Ricardo Bofill, *L'architecture des villes* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1995), 242.

6 "Kafkaeske Burg. Do-serve-yourself-Hotel mit 90 Appartements in Sitges, Spanien", *Baumeister*, no. 10 (1969): 1293–1300.

to Archigram's capsule urbanism, in Bofill's hands the plug-in/plug-on vocabulary was re-engineered to local means: independent staircase towers received "mother units" in a rising spiral, onto which further pieces were attached. *Architektur und Wohnform 7/1971*<sup>7</sup> echoed this appraisal, noting that "It was built with traditional means, although the hotel could also have been realised using prefabricated assembly systems (at the time not yet introduced in Spain)". In short, German critics located RBTA's formal experiment at the bridge between form and technology: a modular, capsule-like conception executed with conventional craft given Spain's infrastructural limits in the late 1960s. As Marisa García-Vergara and Julio Garnica report<sup>8</sup>, Zevi's contemporaneous critique centred precisely on this disjunction between form and technique—precisely what Archigram sought to conjoin. On the contrary, that did not appear as a deficiency to German journals, but as an example of the conjunction between form and available technologies within a rational cost-time efficiency framework.

In the FRG press, RBTA's formal experimentation was read as internationally legible, even as it emerged from the periphery. West German reviewers recoded RBTA's 'capsule' formalism as an adaptive use of available techniques rather than as a failure of technological coherence. This would change markedly with Bofill's turn to France, in both formal expression and technological innovation.

### Bofill's French Turn after the Transición

As noted by Dominique Serrell—former member of RBTA—in her recently published monograph about Bofill's French years, the international trajectory of the *Taller de Arquitectura* (RBTA) in the 1980s centred on the *villes nouvelles*—a state response to the housing shortage that sought "to organise urban expansion in the Île-de-France region by finding an alternative to the existing suburban realm" of the *banlieues*<sup>9</sup>. In parallel with the launch of the Walden 7 project in 1970, Bofill had "the opportunity to take part in a congress on the industrialisation of housing, held in France, where I was able to meet the administrators of the villes nouvelles"<sup>10</sup>. RBTA's projects attracted the attention of the French administration after a documentary on *Barrio Gaudí* (Reus) was broadcast on French television. Following visits to Reus and to Walden 7, Bofill was invited to develop a project for Cergy-Pontoise comparable to Reus—seed of the French-Gothic-inspired, ultimately unbuilt *Petite Cathédrale*.

7 "Apart Hotel 'El Castell', Sitges, Spanien", *Architektur und Wohnform*, no. 7 (1971): 300-302.

8 García-Vergara and Garnica, "Bofill, heterodoxy and mass media", 123.

9 Dominique Serrell, *Bofill. Les années françaises* (Paris: Norma éditions, 2023), 25.

10 Bofill, *L'architecture d'un homme*, 110

The move to France entailed a stylistic turn: from experimental, peripheral megastructures and ‘utopian’ modularism to a Beaux-Arts–inflected classical monumental vocabulary—what Bofill called “the memory of French architecture”<sup>11</sup>. This formal shift also involved a recalibration of politics: if, under the dictatorship, his “utopias” had acted as safety valves shaped by a student-era oppositional stance, in France his posture pivoted towards navigating—and persuading—state and municipal power brokers across party lines. Bofill himself frames this post-Transition shift in *Espaces d’une vie* (1989) and its Spanish counterpart *Espacio y vida* (1990), whose tones and details notably diverge despite the latter being a translation. In the French edition he recalls early contact with Santiago Carrillo around 1956 and having aided the PCE’s policy of national reconciliation, despite not having “taken part in the party’s mass actions”<sup>12</sup>; once the party was legalized in 1976, he “then ceased all collaboration” because “the mechanisms of resistance and the seizure of power had interested me” while their exercise “left me indifferent”. By contrast, the Spanish edition omits Carrillo and the PCE, noting instead that he “spent time with communist students”<sup>13</sup>, that he and his generation supported the democratic transition, and that by 1976 he lost interest in political activity, adding that all ideologies seemed partial and politicians lacked creativity. This self-fashioning also tapped a broader rhetoric of resistance—a response to the Spanish dictatorship that crystallized the topos that “contra Franco se vivía mejor” (“against Franco life was easier”), to the point that sectors of the Catalan bourgeoisie (the so-called *Gauche Divine*) could appear progressive, even anti-system, simply by opposing the regime, often in defence of privileges they felt the dictatorship impaired.

Those editorial asymmetries become sharper when read against *L’architecture d’un homme* (1978). There, Bofill recounts: “I began to read Marx, whose books were forbidden at that time, and I became a Marxist”<sup>14</sup>, and, when asked directly, replies: “I am ‘also’ a Marxist. Marxism gave me a method of thought that I have preserved”, while noting that his intellectual formation was “necessary, but not sufficient”. In the same sequence he insists on “never being a victim” of Francoism—contrary to the prevailing attitude of left-oriented parties—and even declares that “we were therefore all responsible for Franco’s rule,” since no genuine force had been capable of resisting it. Read together, these claims expose a revealing tension: Marxism is retained as a portable “method” while political commitment is bracketed, enabling a pragmatic, ideologically undetermined posture that suits his French commissions. That self-styled distance—method without

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11 Bofill, *L’architecture des villes*, 242.

12 Bofill, *Espaces d’une vie*, 13.

13 Ricardo Bofill, *Espacio y vida* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1990), 17–18.

14 Bofill, *L’architecture d’un homme*, 102–103.



militancy—sits uneasily with the very rhetoric of resistance just evoked (including the bourgeois progressivism it often licensed), and helps explain the ease with which his architecture could oscillate between oppositional narratives and the imperatives of state-led urban development.

Nowhere is the entanglement of form, technique and power clearer than in *Les Halles episode* (1971–1979)<sup>15</sup>, which Bofill himself presents as a lesson in “the politics of architecture”—a shift in scale and patronage he would leverage thereafter<sup>16</sup>. As this public image consolidated, German editors were already parsing the costs. In his 1985 *Bauwelt* review of the recently published book *Ricardo Bofill Taller de arquitectura* edited by Annabelle d’Huart<sup>17</sup>, Gernot Bayne called the luxuriant, wordy self-explanations a kind of “forward defence” against charges of eclectic classicism, and—crucially—observed that the book accompanying the French phase said little about the immense technical and co-ordination apparatus behind those precast ensembles. That silence reinforces a core claim of this article: a mid-1980s pivot from oppositional utopias to the construction of power imaginaries.

In 1985 the Museum of Modern Art presented the joint exhibition *Ricardo Bofill and Léon Krier: Architecture, Urbanism, and History*, effectively aligning RBTA’s French production with Krier’s postmodern neo-traditional urbanism and projecting their shared concern for legible form onto an American stage. The catalogue<sup>18</sup> showcased RBTA’s French set-pieces—*Les Arcades du Lac* and *Le Viaduc* at Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, *Les Espaces d’Abraxas* at Marne-la-Vallée, *Les Échelles du Baroque* in Paris, and the “Green Crescent” at Cergy—thereby consolidating Bofill’s international profile from within France’s grands ensembles context. Bofill’s own project notes fixed the terms of reception: *Les Arcades* and *Le Viaduc* were cast as a “paradoxical synthesis between classicism and industrial and constructive rationalism”; *Abraxas* as a heavy-prefabricated composition whose “complex and wide architectural language” came from series and repetition; Cergy’s crescent as a monumental, semicircular colonnade with “voluntarily constant and repetitive” rhythm in architectural concrete; and *Les Échelles du Baroque* as a triad of urban rooms (circular, elliptical, theatrical) tuned to the surrounding street profiles. In short, the book paired prefabrication with monumental legibility and presented stand-

15 The *Les Halles* competition in Paris marked Bofill’s first major attempt to intervene in the historic core of a European capital. In *L’architecture d’un homme* he presented it as a lesson in the “politics of architecture,” signalling a shift from peripheral utopias to centralised commissions; in practice, RBTA’s early involvement was abruptly halted and the commission effectively withdrawn—an episode later described as a “courtly intrigue”—after which he was pushed toward peripheral operations. He would later characterise France as “a democracy, with a monarchic tendency, but a democracy nonetheless,” a remark that helps situate his navigation of French patronage. See Ricardo Bofill, *L’architecture d’un homme*, 104–109; *Espaces d’une vie*, 21; *L’architecture des villes*, 242.

16 Dominique Serrell, “The ‘Jardin des Halles’: Creating a Promenade from the Palais-Royal to Beaubourg,” in Bofill. *Les années françaises* (Paris: Norma Éditions, 2023), 95–107.

17 Gernot Bayne, “Ricardo Bofill – Taller de Arquitectura,” *Bauwelt*, no. 43 (1985): 1702.

18 Arthur Drexler, ed., *Ricardo Bofill and Léon Krier: Architecture, Urbanism, and History* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1985), exhibition catalogue, exhibition dates June 27–September 3, 1985.

ardisation as civic order rather than mere economy. These are precisely the concepts around which the German journals would subsequently coalesce—accepting, qualifying or disputing the coupling of prefabrication and monumentality.

### The West German Reception of the “French Years”

West German architectural journals registered sharply polarised reactions of Bofill's French years, with a first crest in 1983 as *Les Arcades du Lac* (Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines) and *Les Espaces d'Abraxas* (Marne-la-Vallée) came into public view. The same autumn Bofill lectured in Karlsruhe—“*Stadt, Industrie und Eklektizismus*”, 2 November—during the city's Catalan Weeks<sup>19</sup>, helping to frame a debate that would intertwine design, technology and politics<sup>20</sup>.

The article entitled *Prefabricated classicism. About two residential quarters in Paris by Ricardo Bofill* published in *Baumeister* 11/1983<sup>21</sup> [Fig. 1] offers a key testimony about the general feeling of the projects in the West German context, as it comprehends fifteen different voices from the architectural panorama including professionals, academics and students. The collected texts analyzed and criticized Ricardo Bofill's constructions on the outskirts of Paris, particularly *Le Palacio d'Abraxas* and *Les Arcades du Lac*. Authors expressed both fascination and, above all, skepticism toward the monumentality and symbolism of these buildings.

Some contributors praised the serial precision, material finish and the ambition to confer dignity upon social housing—Peter Kulka noted a “strong spatial formation” against suburban chaos; Jens Freiberg observed how names like *Le Palacio* or *Le Théâtre* rebranded social housing with festive grandeur. Yet the same writers worried about functional concessions and an authorial image that left “little room for others.” The recurring charge was not only one of style but of urbanity: Gabriel Epstein argued that axial symmetry without contextual integration reinforced a sense of urban chaos and disconnection with the environment; others pointed to the lack of shops, cafés and everyday programmes as evidence that urban life cannot be conjured by scenography alone.

The most contentious strand linked RBTA's monumental language to authoritarian associations [Fig. 2]. Rolf Keller warned that the public's fascination with Bofill echoed the affective pull of spectacle in the 1930s; more

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19 Stadt Karlsruhe, *Europäische Kulturtage Karlsruhe 1983. Kunst und Kultur Kataloniens* (Karlsruhe: Stadt Karlsruhe Kulturreferat, 1983), 88. Although we have not been able to access the full content of the conference, the title suggests a close relationship with the French years' projects and a temporal coincidence that must be noticed.

20 As Gernot Bayne later noted, however, parts of the talk slipped into a “naturalist” register (learning “the relation between horizontals and verticals” in the Sahara), a telling divergence from the industrial/eclectic brief signalled by the title.

21 Helge Bofinger, Wolfgang Braun, “Vorfabrizierter Klassizismus: Zu zwei Wohnquartieren bei Paris von Ricardo Bofill,” *Baumeister*, no. 11 (1983): 1043–1057.



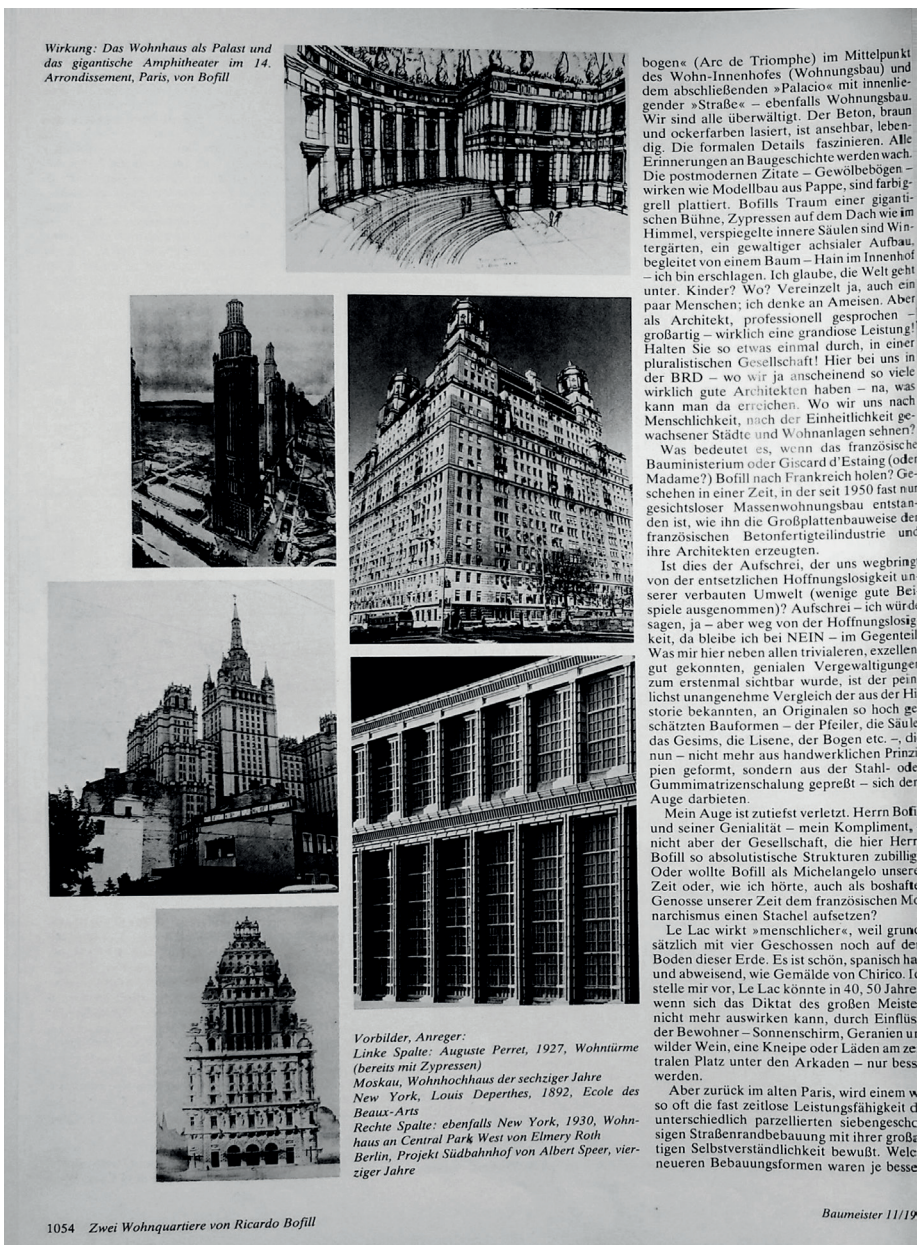


Fig. 1  
Pages of the article "Prefabricated classicism" in *Baumeister 11/1983* depicting both Palacio de Abraxas and Les Arcades du Lac. November 1983.

Fig. 2  
A page of the article "Prefabricated classicism" in *Baumeister 11/1983* comparing Abraxas main courtyard with monumental architectures: Perret's residential Skyscraper (1927), a residential tower in Moscow from the 60s, A building from Louis Deperthes in New York (1892), a residential tower from Elmer Roth in Central Park (1930), and the Albert Speer's project for Berlin's South Station from the 20s. November 1983.

broadly, West German caution around monumentality—amid renewed discussions of Speer’s legacy<sup>22</sup>—favoured an austere modernism as the sign of democratic transparency. Part of that allergy was double-coded: monumentality was suspect not only because of Nazi classicism but also owing to the didactic gigantism of Soviet socialist realism. Caught between those two “forbidden” genealogies, FRG discourse steered architects towards an ostensibly neutral repertoire—transparency, lightness, exposed structure and pure geometric form—the techno-rational idiom that High-Tech discourse elevated as democratically legible and historically unburdened.

Set against that frame, RBTA’s prefabricated classicism read to many not as process-led construction but as a return to symbolically charged representation. As Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm<sup>23</sup> argued, a specifically German *Ausdrucksmangel* (difficulty with architectural expression) made classicist references culturally fraught and pushed practice toward “neutral” technocratic forms as a safe default; a complementary, historical account by Simone Hain and Hartmut Frank<sup>24</sup> shows how, in the post-1945 FRG, monumentality was routinely equated with compromised politics while transparency and lean geometries were cast as democratic virtues. Bofill, for his part, defended monumentality as a necessary symbolic register: “men need signs and spaces besides television and bathtub”<sup>25</sup>.

A parallel, more political-economic reading came from Otto Steidle: rather than ideology per se, RBTA’s classicism indexed the commodification of architecture—grand imagery as market value, where “the more monumental, the better.” In this sense, he compares it to advertising, stating that the more visually striking a building is, the more value it holds in the consumer market. That line of critique converged with concrete habitability complaints (Asmus Werner on deep rooms, tiny windows, unusable loggias) and Keller’s insistence that dwelling should be intimate rather than staged, all of which sharpened scepticism toward the Paris ensembles’ liveability claims.

By 1988, *Deutsche Bauzeitung*<sup>26</sup> radicalised the verdict. In a polemical review of Antigone, Holger Fischer described “theatrical architecture from monumental stage sets,” invoked a “faschistoider Schock,” and criticised plan and climate performance (no cross-ventilation, overheating) as sacrificed to image. He also noted that a symposium in Heidelberg, held that

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22 Albert Speer, *Architektur: Arbeiten 1933–1942* (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Vienna: Ullstein, 1978). In 1985, a French-English edition appeared with commentary by Léon Krier and the Swedish architectural historian Lars Olof Larsson: *Albert Speer: Architecture 1932–1942* (Brussels: Archives d’Architecture Moderne, 1985). This publication sought to distinguish Speer’s architectural language from its National Socialist political context and to reclaim it as a valid stylistic tradition.

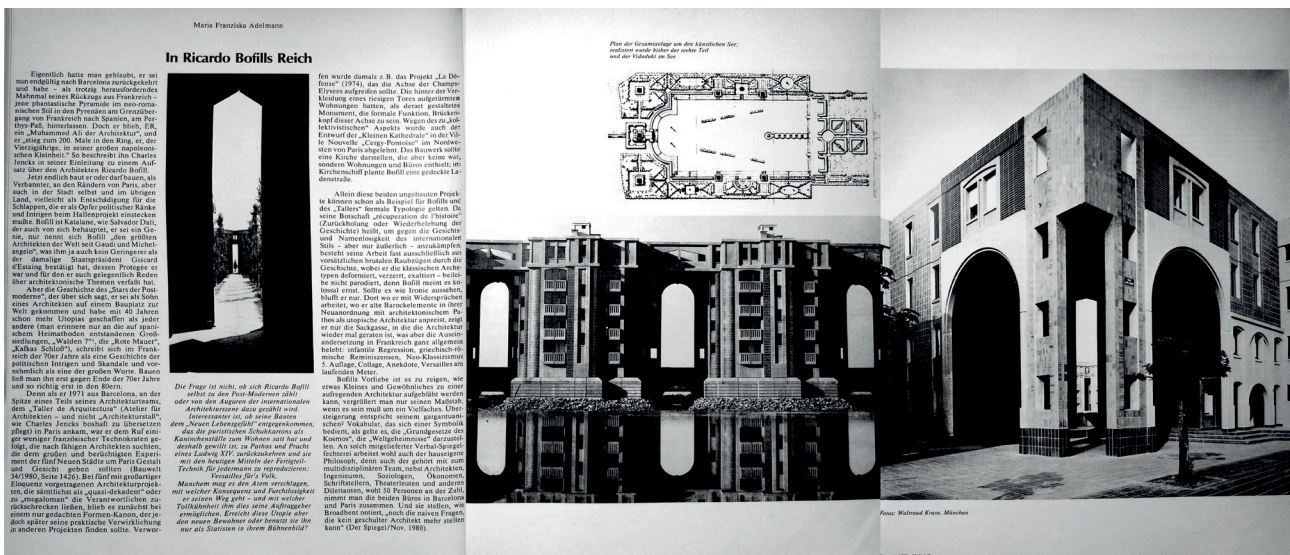
23 See: Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, “Warum ist die deutsche Architektur so subaltern?“, *ARCH+*, no. 118 (1993): 92.

24 Simone Hain and Hartmut Frank, eds., *Zwei deutsche Architekturen 1949–1989* (Berlin: Edition Axel Menges, 2004), 12–25.

25 Bofill, *Espaces d’une vie*, 175.

26 Holger Fischer, “Menschenfeindlicher Profilierungswahnsinn? Ricardo Bofill gestaltet das Montpellier der Zukunft,” *Deutsche Bauzeitung*, no. 2 (February 1988): 95–99.





November to accompany an exhibition on the Antigone project—organized as part of the city's twinning with Montpellier, and moderated by Heinrich Klotz—had deliberately avoided ideological questions, a sign that the FRG debate had shifted from design to image politics.

For its part, *Bauwelt* 1-2/1983 [Fig. 3] published a monograph entitled *Post-history, Postmodernity, or The Impossible Present*, which included a critical review of Bofill's work<sup>27</sup>. Beyond aesthetic concerns, the article placed particular emphasis on the political context of his French projects, highlighting the intersection between architecture and state power. Similarly, *Bauwelt* 7-8/1986<sup>28</sup> then traced his shifting fortunes at Les Halles (a "courtly intrigue" turned political exile), mapped the zig-zag of sponsorships from Giscard d'Estaing to Chirac and to socialist mayors like Georges Frère in Montpellier (where "there is no left- or right-wing architecture" served as an alibi for monumental representation), and showed how these alignments displaced RBTA from the historic core to the periphery.

Threading through the FRG debate was a process-and-technology frame. The MoMA catalogue (1985) itemised RBTA's construction systems—in situ tunnel formwork with factory-cast cladding/panels at *Les Échelles du Baroque* and mixed systems at *Cergy-Pontoise*—and thus codified an export script of prefabrication joined to legible monumentality. Yet *ARCH+* 77<sup>29</sup> (1984) [Fig. 4] had already atomised the mechanism in greater detail: it read the façade as a device (thin precast skins and surface treatments that let concrete read as "stone"; the concealment of two storeys behind a single "classical" bay) and then turned from envelope to urban use, asking whether the new plazas were a "Kulisse oder Erlebnisraum" (stage-set or lived space). It flagged lifeless pedestrian axes and an emerging "touris-

Fig. 3  
Pages of the article "In the Realm of Ricardo Bofill" in *Bauwelt* 1-2/1983 depicting Les Arcades du Lac. February 1983.

27 Maria Franziska Adelman, "In Ricardo Bofills Reich," *Bauwelt*, no. 1-2 (1983): 26–35.  
28 Ruth Henry, "Architektur machen wie man Theater macht," *Bauwelt*, no. 7-8 (1986): 240–243.  
29 Hans-Jürgen Serwe, "Antigone, Monumental, Grün, Sozialistisch und Mediterran," *ARCH+*, no. 77 (1984): 14–15.



Fig. 4

Pages of the article about Antigone appeared in the Zeitung section of *ARCH+* 77/1984.

tic" reception of the ensembles, suggesting that the scenographic charge risked outpacing everyday programmes. By doing so, *ARCH+* registered how RBTA's French classicism leveraged industrial means to produce a pictorial, highly legible order, while casting doubt on whether that order translated into robust urban life.

*Der Architekt* sharpened both the critique and the counterpoints. In 1984, Andrea Mesecke's piece on Valencia's Gärten des Turia read RBTA through an additive, tree-and-water urbanism—legible sequences by stretches and unusual civic participation—reminding readers that Bofill could operate beyond the grand theatricality of façades<sup>30</sup>. In 1985, Günter Bock flipped the register, stressing popular acceptance and the disciplinary merit of RBTA's push for *Großtafelbauweise* (large-panel prefabrication), arguing that Bofill had put industrialised building back at the core of architectural practice<sup>31</sup>. In 1986, Dieter Robert Frank's dissection of *Les Échelles du Baroque* cast it as a "monument of the administration"—a *Betonbarock* of staged voids, desocialised columns, fuzzy public/private boundaries and an over-heated glass crown—turning industrial means into bureaucratic spectacle<sup>32</sup>. And in 1987, Volkmar Nickol's visit to *La Fábrica* proposed an alternate grammar summed up by the triad "carve, clean, complete", a process meant to awaken memory rather than impose a façade<sup>33</sup>. Taken together, these texts map the FRG spectrum—from urban-functional appreciation to moral-aesthetic suspicion and process/technique recognition—complementing *ARCH+*'s concern with façade-devices and the everyday life of the new rooms.

Across the FRG journals, three evaluative regimes coalesced: urban-functional doubts about everyday life; moral-aesthetic suspicion of monumentality's associations; and political-economic/process critiques that prized integrated technics over pictorial order. The West German line did not deny RBTA's technical prowess, but disputed the direction from technique to image and the social claims attached to it.

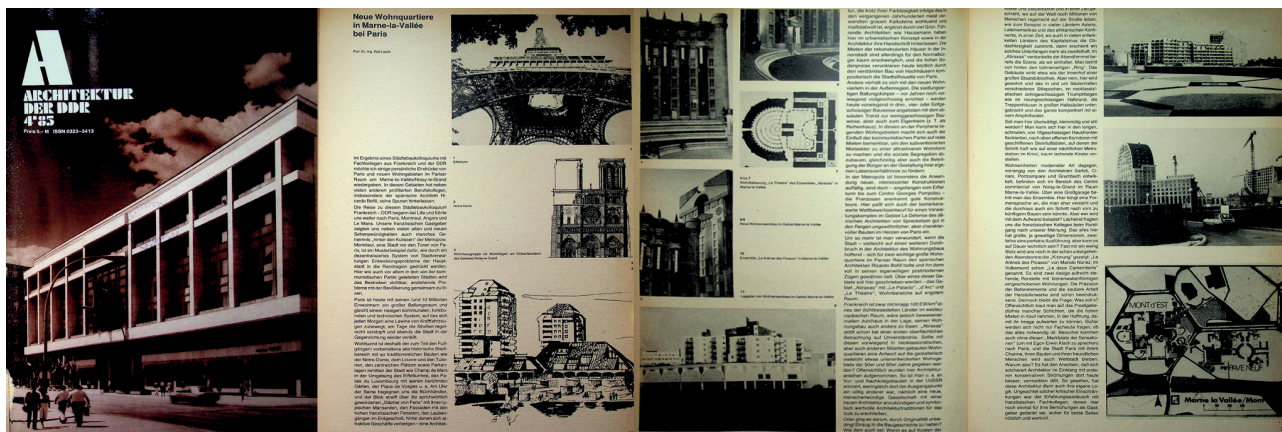
30 Andrea Mesecke, "Die Gärten des Turia. Ein Projekt der Taller de Arquitectura Bofill in Valencia," *Der Architekt*, no. 4 (1984): 189–190.

31 Günter Bock, "Eine Meinung zu Bofill," *Der Architekt*, no. 7–8 (1985): 295–296.

32 Dieter Robert Frank, "Bofill fürs Volk?," *Der Architekt*, no. 4 (1986): 193–197.

33 Volkmar Nickol, "Der Kuß der Fee," *Der Architekt*, no. 6 (1987): 334–336.





## Reception in the GDR: Social Utility, Typification, and Spectacle

As for the GDR, East-German readings filtered RBTA through the standards of social utility and typification. The GDR's leading journal, *Architektur der DDR* (1985), reported from a Franco–GDR planning colloquium that toured the *villes nouvelles* (Lille, Paris, Montreuil, Angers and Le Mans)<sup>34</sup> paying particular attention to the work of Bofill [Fig. 5]. Against a background of decentralised governance and communist-led suburban councils seeking regulated rents and resident participation, the article tracks a policy shift in Île-de-France from earlier high-rise estates to mid- and low-rise fabrics—and then tests Bofill's ensembles against those priorities. The verdict admires French engineering prowess and the precision of prefabrication but doubts the necessity and liveability of prestige set pieces in Marne-la-Vallée and Noisy-le-Grand.

The article notes how soaring land prices and towers at large residential complexes disrupted the city's silhouette. The effects of urban speculation were most visible in the periphery, where new residential districts have emerged—often at the expense of architectural and social coherence. Initially, the emphasis was on high-density, high-rise developments, but by the 1980s, there was a clear shift toward lower-density, mid-rise housing and even single-family homes. This change, the article explains, was driven by a desire to counteract the social isolation and aesthetic monotony of earlier developments. In communist-run suburbs the emphasis fell on rent control and citizen involvement, with the aim of reducing social segregation. Within that frame, RBTA's work appeared as architectural extravagance that subordinated everyday parameters (costs, maintenance, integration) to monumental image; the authors professed surprise that France entrusted two major housing ensembles in the Paris region to Bofill.

One of the most striking observations in the article is the comparison between Bofill's work and Soviet-era architecture. While the Stalinist

Fig. 5

Pages of the article "New Residential Quarters in Marne-la-Vallée near Paris" in *Architektur der DDR* 4/1985 depicting Palacio de Abraxas from Bofill and Les deux Camemberts from Manolo Núñez. April 1985.

34 Rolf Lasch, "Neue Wohnquartiere in Marne-la-Vallée bei Paris," *Architektur der DDR*, no. 4 (1985): 247–249.



architecture of the USSR was designed to symbolize a new socialist order, Bofill's neoclassical references seemed to serve no ideological purpose beyond aesthetic spectacle and historical pastiche. On site, the delegation experienced *Le Palais d'Abraxas* as a theatrical machine: a triumphal-arch axis, semicircular blocks, colossal half-columns, and amphitheatre motifs. The report questions what ideological or social purpose such neo-classical rhetoric serves beyond aesthetics—especially given unmet housing needs globally and growing homelessness even in developed economies<sup>35</sup>. The architects were left wondering: Was the goal to create awe? To make the inhabitants feel insignificant? The long, narrow corridors, enclosed by 18-story facades, created an environment where footsteps echoed like in an empty metro station at night. The author found it impossible to imagine children laughing or playing in such an environment<sup>36</sup>. The underlying doubt was both ethical and programmatic: does this “representational” monumentalism correct earlier estates' monotony, or does it merely deliver image value at the expense of habitability?

Read against that GDR framework, Bofill's own account of his USSR engagements is revealing<sup>37</sup>. He contrasts East/West uniformities—calling the Soviet territorial order “stricter, more rigorous” and warning that émigré architects of the 1930s were “absorbed by the system” and their work banalised<sup>38</sup>—an explicit caution about ideological capture<sup>39</sup>. In *Espaces d'une vie* he pivots from “objects” to process: after a Soviet delegation visited Antigone in Montpellier<sup>40</sup>—at a moment when Moscow was planning roughly 40 million dwellings within a decade—RBTA proposed a mixed-economy joint venture with government, local research cells of architects and engineers, and even a pilot prefabrication plant to reconcile beauty and industry, supplying a catalogue and standardised systems that could be massively applied. He stressed that “true success does not lie in producing one-off objects but in setting a creative dynamic in motion.” The stance acknowledges the Soviet institutional landscape—no private practice, architects embedded in multidisciplinary state combines—while preserving RBTA's managerial authorship. It also sits alongside concrete entries in the late-1980s portfolio: Khabarovsk–Vladivostok engineer-

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35 After Stalin's death, the USSR focus shifted from stylistic representation to mass housing production, prioritizing affordability and standardization to address homelessness and economic inequality. Achim Feltz, *Zwischen Feuerstelle und Vollkomfort* (Berlin: Neues Leben, 1986), 3-37.

36 In contrast to Abraxas, Noisy-le-Grand's housing projects by architects such as Sarfati, Ciriani, Portzamparc, and Grumbach emphasized livability and human-scale urban design, providing an alternative to the rigid formalism of earlier mass housing developments.

37 For Bofill's USSR strategy, delegation context, targets and the process-first programme, see *Espaces d'une vie* (esp. the passages on joint ventures, research cells, pilot plant and “réconcilier le beau et l'industrie”).

38 Bofill, *L'architecture d'un homme*, 210.

39 That was aligned with the soviet context, where no private architectural practice was found. Instead, architects integrated multidisciplinary teams in public office in order to create architectural typologies that could be industrially mass produced. See also Thomas Barth and Thomas Topfstedt, *Vom Baukünstler zum Komplexprojektanten: Architekten in der DDR. Dokumentation eines IRS. Sammlungbestandes biographischer Daten* (Erkner: IRS, no. 3 Regio Doc, 2000): 20–23.

40 Ricardo Bofill, *Espaces d'une vie*, 101-105.

ing studies for a prefabricated housing complex (1988), the International Quarter, Moscow (studies begun 1989), and an office building in central Moscow (1989–91).

From a GDR perspective, this Soviet-facing, process-first narrative aligns—at least in principle—with socialist criteria (typification, maintenance, distributional logics) and with Bofill's own critique of Soviet serial monotony at the level of lived urbanity. Yet it also throws into relief the gap that East-German reviewers perceived in France: if RBTA could advocate “system and typification” in Moscow, why did the French ensembles lean so visibly toward theatre? The GDR reception thus recasts RBTA not as an ideological adversary but as a case of misaligned optimisation—industrial means that can serve typified reproduction (USSR discourse) or prestige scenography (French practice), depending on patronage and programme.

The upshot is a double-edged lesson. GDR critics acknowledged RBTA's technical finesse, but kept judgement tethered to use-value, long-term upkeep and allocation—criteria by which French-period monumental classicism remains rhetorically compelling yet programmatically weak. Bofill's own Soviet chapter—joint ventures, research cells, pilot plants—shows he could theorise an alignment with socialist planning metrics; the East German reception simply asks why that alignment seldom materialised in the celebrated French works.

Recast from the East, the contrast is stark. GDR writers could recognise RBTA's command of prefabrication and Soviet-style serial logics, yet judged value by typification, allocation, maintenance and everyday use. By comparison, in France the same techniques were redeployed to deliver rapid, economical construction in the service of a singular, emblematic image in each case—an image first legible as “classical” monument, even when underlying family resemblances persisted. Bofill himself underlined the translatability of his practice across blocs. In *Espaces d'une vie* he notes that, though he had opposed skyscrapers in Europe, in the United States he drew his “first skyscraper,” with work under way in Chicago—evidence of a deliberate shift to match ideological and market contexts<sup>41</sup>. He frames his role as adapting the project's “stakes” to each situation—“the context determines the nature of the project”—in order “to overcome political divides,” presenting himself not as a mere servant of power but “as a partner” operating at the intersection of politics and economics. His self-presentation discloses prefabrication as a mobile instrument: systematic where socialism demanded it, image-driven where capitalism rewarded it.

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41 Bofill, *Espaces d'une vie*, 79.

## Conclusions: Form and Ideology

The German reception of RBTA at the end of the Cold War makes plain how postmodern architecture, politics and urban representation were tightly entangled. Bofill's French-period ensembles became lightning rods for questions about the appropriateness of monumentality and aesthetic formalism in social housing. Beneath those disputes lay deeper ideological and economic concerns: the standardisation and commodification of architecture. Under the capitalist logic, industrial techniques can slide into making architecture an interchangeable commodity—yet they can also be mobilised to produce a distinct civic order. Which tendency prevailed depended on patronage and on the evaluative frameworks applied in West and East Germany.

On the FRG side, the unification of industrial means and legible classical figures in Bofill's French projects met a reception that prized process, programme and everyday life. Critics parsed RBTA's façades as superficial and theatrical devices (thin precast skins, two storeys masked behind a single "classical" bay, surface treatments that read as stone) and then asked whether the resulting spaces functioned as habitable rooms or stage-sets. Liveability critiques (deep rooms, small openings, climate performance) further undercut any claim that scenography alone could deliver urbanity. In parallel, other writers reframed RBTA's classicism less as ideology than as market strategy—monumental images as exchange-value in an economy of attention. Taken together, FRG debates did not deny technical competence; they also questioned the transition from technique to image and the social and political claims attached to it.

The GDR comparator sharpened the stakes. East German journals weighed RBTA against criteria aligned with socialist planning—typification, allocation, maintenance and use-value—acknowledging the precision of French prefabrication while doubting the necessity and liveability of prestige set-pieces. The Soviet model exemplified in the GDR was premised upon the belief—mistaken yet ideologically powerful—that scientific and technical rationality should guide political action whereas, in reality, it is politics that directs science towards objectives<sup>42</sup>. Ironically depicted in Eldar Ryazanov's satirical film *The Irony of Fate*<sup>43</sup>, this approach resulted in architecturally monotonous, context-insensitive mass housing, dissolving the liberal figure of the individual architect into bureaucratic multidisciplinary teams. By contrast, RBTA leveraged prefabrication and technical mastery precisely to facilitate aesthetic flexibility, enabling the strategic creation of distinct architectural entities, disguised by abundant but ultimately empty social utopic rhetoric. Ricardo Bofill himself embodies this duality, an entre-

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<sup>42</sup> It remains to be seen whether these "objectives" are ultimately compatible with democratic principles—whether they genuinely reinforce democracy or instead lean toward a paternalistic form of state control.

<sup>43</sup> Eldar Ryazanov, *The Irony of Fate, or Enjoy Your Bath!* (USSR: Mosfilm, 1975).

preneurial figure skilfully employing the commercially appealing persona of the *enfant terrible*, cloaked in provocative rhetoric yet fundamentally detached from genuine ideological commitment<sup>44</sup>. Experimental formalism allowed Bofill to create a politically undetermined architecture that should ultimately be sold around the globe. It can clearly be seen in the contrast between Bofill's own critic to serial planning during the post-war reconstruction and yet, when addressing the USSR, advocated a process-first alignment (joint ventures, local research cells, even a pilot plant) to "reconcile beauty and serialised architecture."

Bofill's self-presentation complicates the ledger. In *L'architecture d'un homme* he keeps Marxism as method— "nécessaire, mais non suffisante"—while suspending militancy; in *Espaces d'une vie* he casts himself as a nomadic professional able to operate across political economies, noting that while he had opposed skyscrapers in Europe he nonetheless designed his first skyscraper in the United States, adapting to the ideological and market context at hand. This entrepreneurial stance—method without militancy—helped his work oscillate between oppositional narratives and the imperatives of state-led or market-led urban development.

Taken together, the German dossiers and Bofill's writings show that architecture here was never "just" form. It mediated ideological struggle, political representation and economic calculation. Postmodern eclecticism promised release from modernist uniformity; RBTA's career shows how readily that promise could be co-opted into spectacle and commercial success, yet also how the same industrial means could deliver operative urban legibility when aligned to programme and long-term maintenance. As debates on reconstruction, social housing and representation continue, the "Bofill case" remains a live test of whether architectural commodification can be squared with democratic ends or whether it rehearses a subtler, market-driven paternalism under the guise of social innovation. By 1989–1990, as the Wall fell, FRG and GDR evaluative frameworks began to merge; RBTA's French ensembles survived that transition less as models than as exhibits in the argument over post-socialist urban identity.

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<sup>44</sup> Lefebvre's later disenchantment with Bofill stemmed from ideological differences. However, it must be noted that Lefebvre's aestheticized hedonism concerning the "popular classes" fell far short of the Marxian concept of proletarian revolution. Instead, it represented a fundamentally reformist position—conservative and ultimately aligned with maintaining the *status quo*.

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

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*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 1968<sup>1</sup>

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).<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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".<sup>4</sup>



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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.

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).

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.”<sup>5</sup> 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].<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

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”.<sup>9</sup> 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



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.

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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> That same year, *L'irruption du Nanterre au sommet* also appeared, in which Lefebvre emphasizes the link between May'68 and urban phenomena.<sup>12</sup>

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.”<sup>13</sup> 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”.<sup>14</sup> 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-

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.<sup>15</sup>

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*.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup>

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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 relations<sup>19</sup>. 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”<sup>20</sup> 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.”<sup>21</sup> 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*<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup>

## 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.<sup>24</sup>

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”.<sup>25</sup> 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.



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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.<sup>26</sup>

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.

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.

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



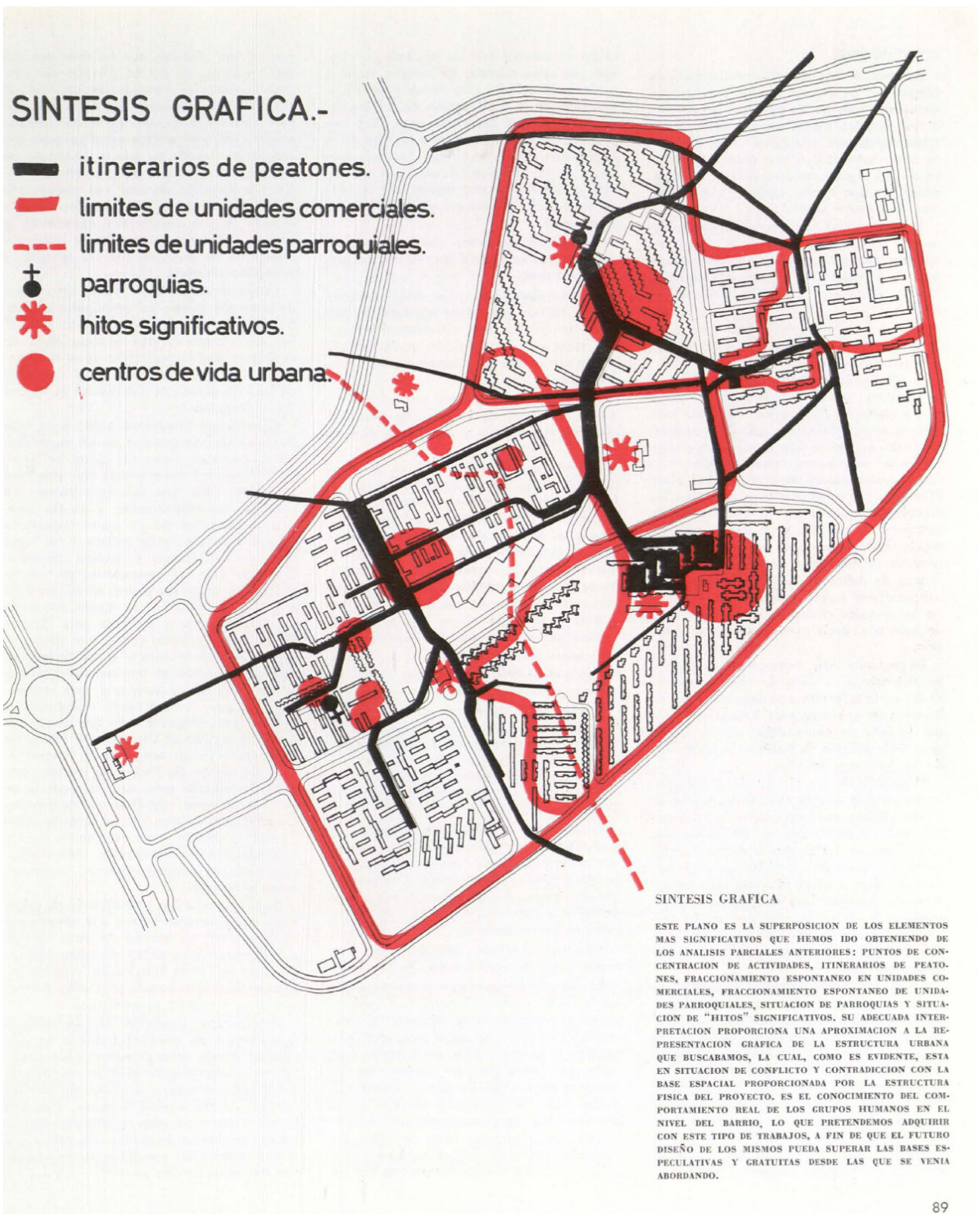


Fig. 4

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.”<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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].<sup>29</sup> 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

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

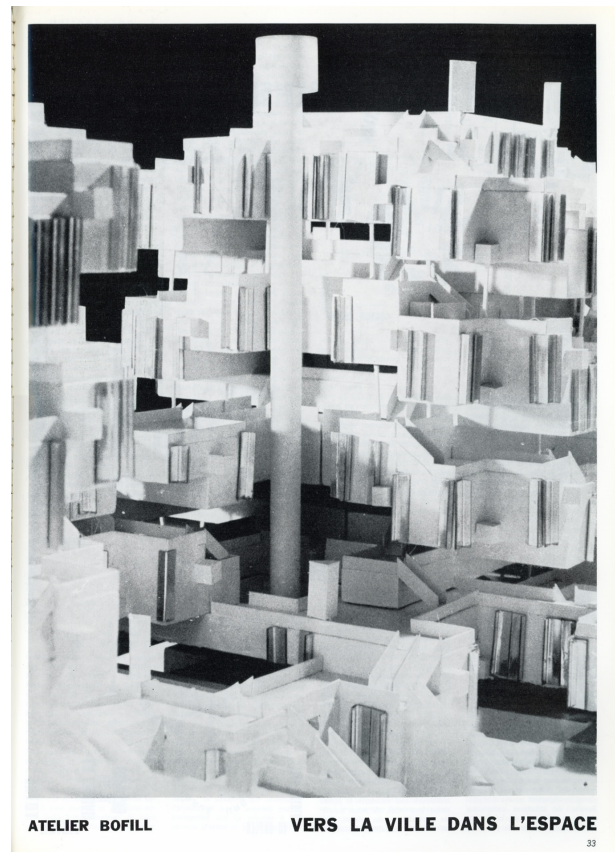
28 Lefebvre, *El Derecho a la Ciudad*. Some works did not get through the censorship and were not published in Spain until the twenty-first century. These included Henri Lefebvre, *La Proclamación de la Comuna* (Pamplona-Iruñea: Katakarak, 2021).

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”.

the current social dynamics of urban life,<sup>30</sup> echoing Henri Lefebvre's own critique of the "ideology of the neighbourhood".<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup>

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."<sup>33</sup> 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 to be built in Moratalaz, Madrid, and that it would be an interesting experiment to achieve an "intense urban life".<sup>34</sup> Some pages further on were full colour images of the Barrio Gaudí of Reus, which had



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.”<sup>35</sup>

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.<sup>36</sup> 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).<sup>37</sup>

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.<sup>38</sup> 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.”<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup>

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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.<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> 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 strata 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".<sup>44</sup> 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

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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.”<sup>45</sup>

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].”<sup>46</sup>

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.<sup>47</sup> 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*<sup>48</sup> published about the Taller de Arquitectura, or in *Principles of Modern Architecture*.<sup>49</sup>

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

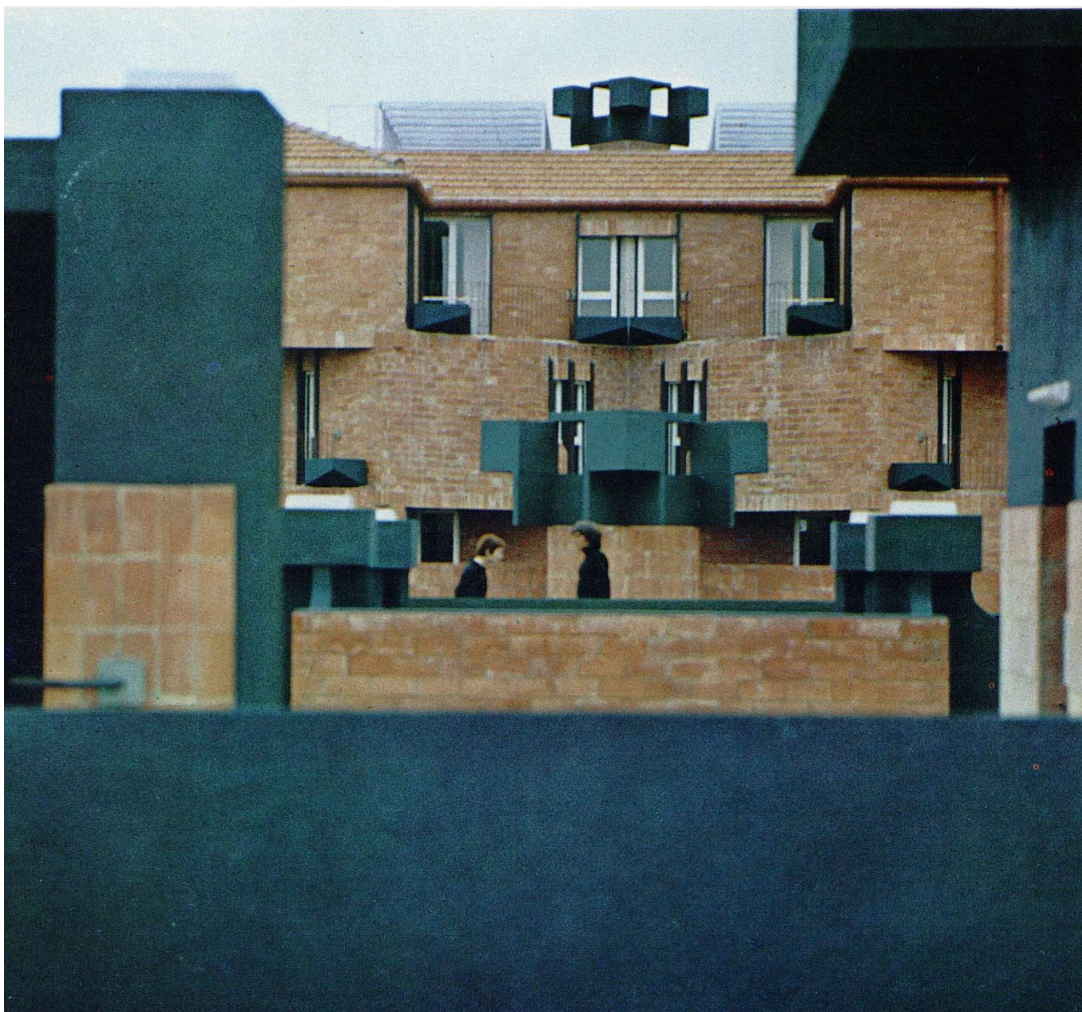
46 Hogares Modernos, “Erec y Enide en el Barrio de Reus”, *Hogares Modernos*, no. 54 (1970): 3–9.

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.





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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 Gaudi, avoiding the outside world. *Hogares Modernos*, no. 54 (1970).

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

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*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.

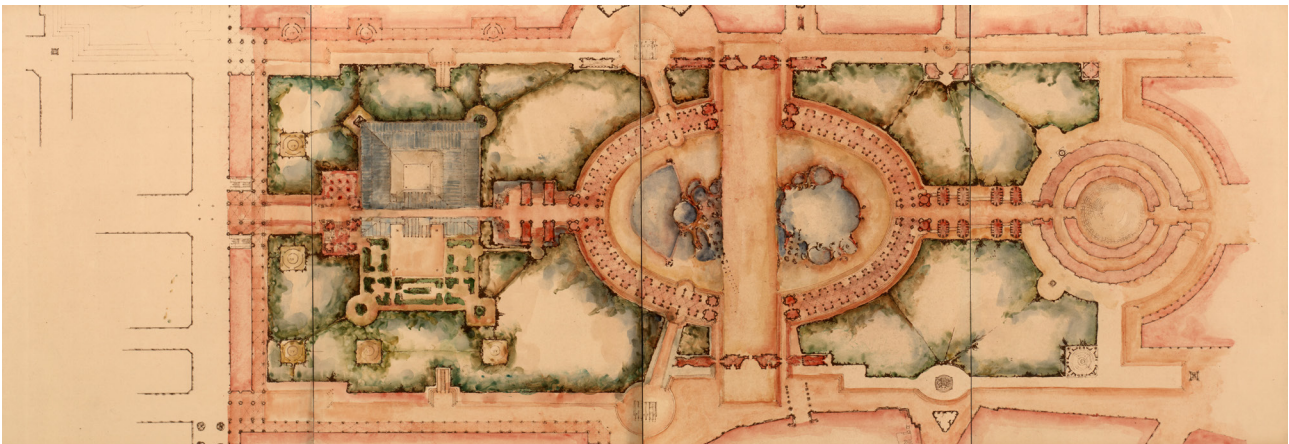
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Anne Kockelkorn is an Assistant Professor of History and Theory of Housing and Urbanism at Ghent University. Her research focuses on the political economy of housing and its impact on social relations. Her recent book *Cooperative Conditions: A Primer 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.

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## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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."<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> "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

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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 Bénéit, "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 Bénéit 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.

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

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 Valéry 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.”<sup>8</sup> 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.”<sup>9</sup> 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 leiscapescape 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.”<sup>10</sup> 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

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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 Lengèreau, “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.<sup>11</sup>

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.<sup>12</sup> 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%.<sup>13</sup> 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 indicators 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.<sup>14</sup> 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

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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)".

du prince" (Prince's Fiat), which refers to the absence of explanation in the decision-making of a political sovereign.<sup>15</sup> 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).<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

### 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.<sup>18</sup> 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 pan-optic prison complex Roquette (built between 1825 and 1839) in 1974.<sup>19</sup> 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 Mitterand. 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 Eric 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.

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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>

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;<sup>22</sup> 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 deproletarianization; 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.<sup>23</sup> 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

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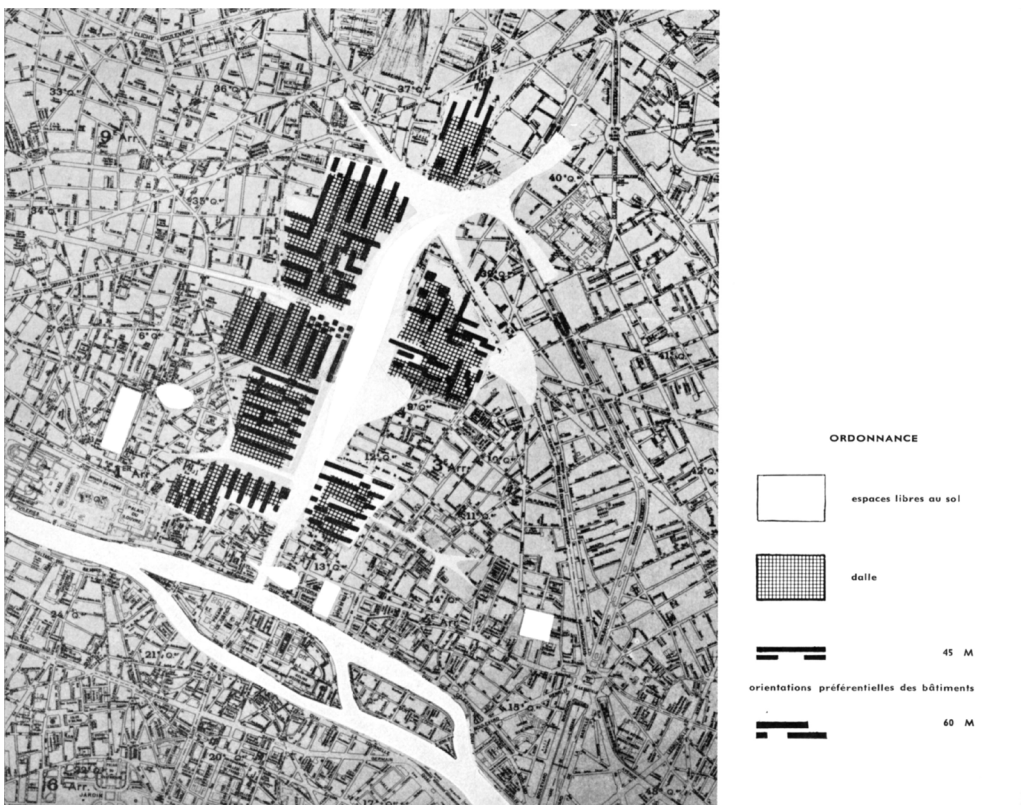
20 For discussions about the orientation of architecture schools toward the university between 1968 and 1978, see Jean-Louis Violeau, *Les Architectes et Mai 68* (Paris: Éditions Recherches, 2005). An example of this orientation is the research funded by the Committee for Research and Development in 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.





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pedestrian elevated zone six meters above ground.<sup>24</sup> [Fig. 2] The Paris City Council, in shock, rejected this vision of “urbanisme sur dalle” in November 1963.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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

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.<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup>

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.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> 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.”<sup>33</sup> 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.

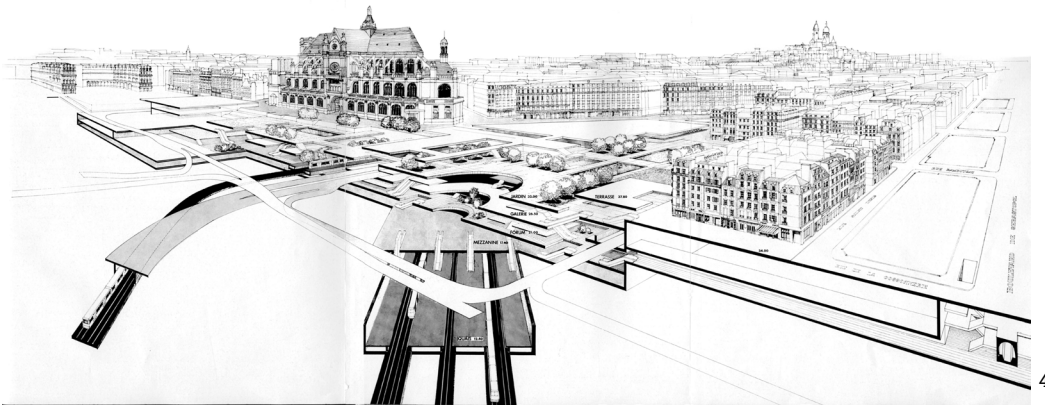
31 Comité Parisien de recherche et d’action sociale (COPRAS): Note d’information sur l’aménagement du secteur des Halles (July 1968), 18. 5AG3-2270-quartier des Halles –aménagement.

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.



megastructure at the Plateau des Halles in 1967, the “most important and complex operation ever undertaken in a capital.”<sup>34</sup> 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).<sup>35</sup> [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.<sup>36</sup>

In 1968, the Parisian City Council rejected all projects from the 1967 competition and reduced the proposed program by half.<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup> 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'Urban-  
isme (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.<sup>39</sup> 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 quietly 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.<sup>40</sup> French new town planners recalled him as a “jeune Bonaparte au pont d’Arcole”<sup>41</sup> 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,

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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.”



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.<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> 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”.<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup> 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 communicate to indecisive individuals.<sup>46</sup> Two weeks after writing this note, Pierre Richard prompted Valérie Giscard d’Estaing to intervene at the Plateau des Halles.<sup>47</sup> Another three weeks later he positioned the phantom image of Ricardo Bofill as a desirable candidate for the task.<sup>48</sup> 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 décisifs, continue à être importante à fin d’assurer la direction et le dynamisme nécessaire à cette réalisation.”

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.





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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.<sup>49</sup> 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.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup>

Neither the presidential archives nor in the archives of the Ministry of Culture contain competition briefs.<sup>52</sup> However, I assume that at least some participants were informed about the task of creating a "Palais Royal," whereas others learned about it indirectly.<sup>53</sup> 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."<sup>54</sup> 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.

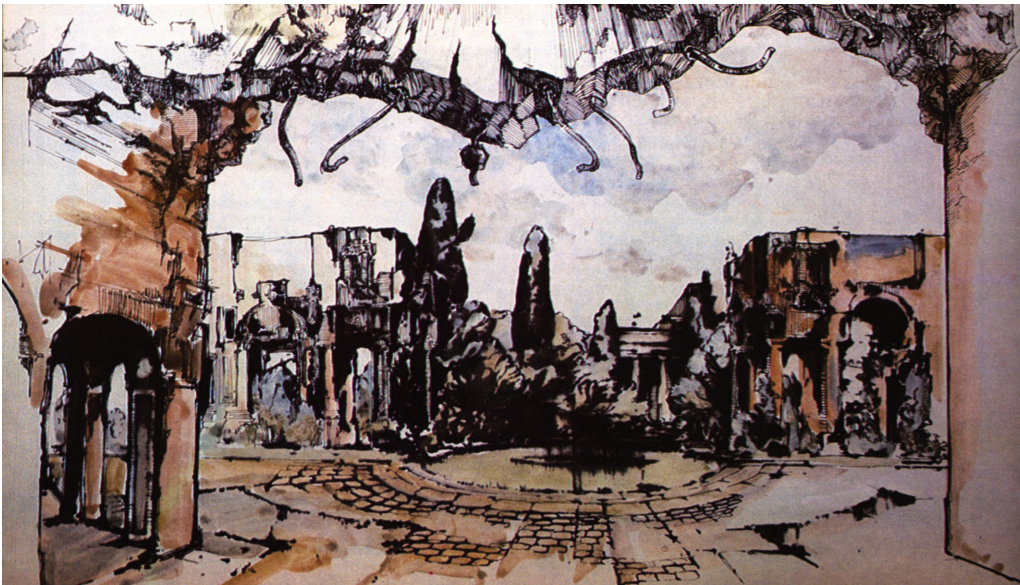
52 Ricardo Bofill described the invitation to the competition for Les Halles as a telephone call followed by a personal conversation with Michel Guy, see Bofill, *Architecture d'un homme*, 9-10.

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<sup>er</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Note to Mr. Richard from Mr. Sérési, 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.



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also stated, in retrospect, that he only accepted the invitation to the competition if he could design the project free from programmatic constraints.<sup>55</sup> 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.<sup>56</sup> [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 correspondance 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.<sup>57</sup> 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.

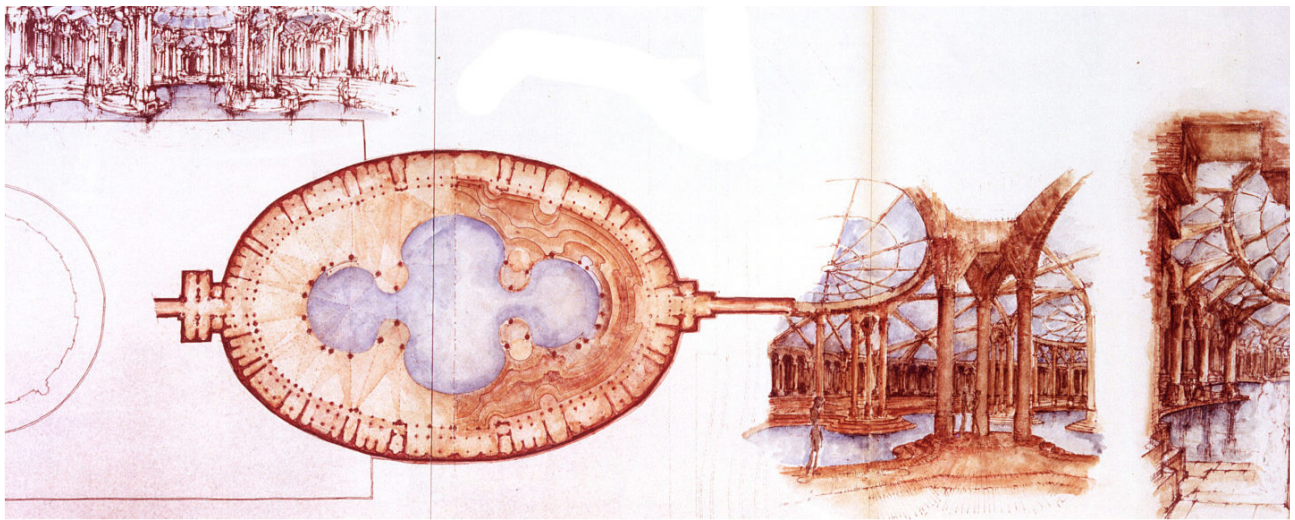
<sup>55</sup> Bofill, *Architecture d’un homme*, 10, 31.

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

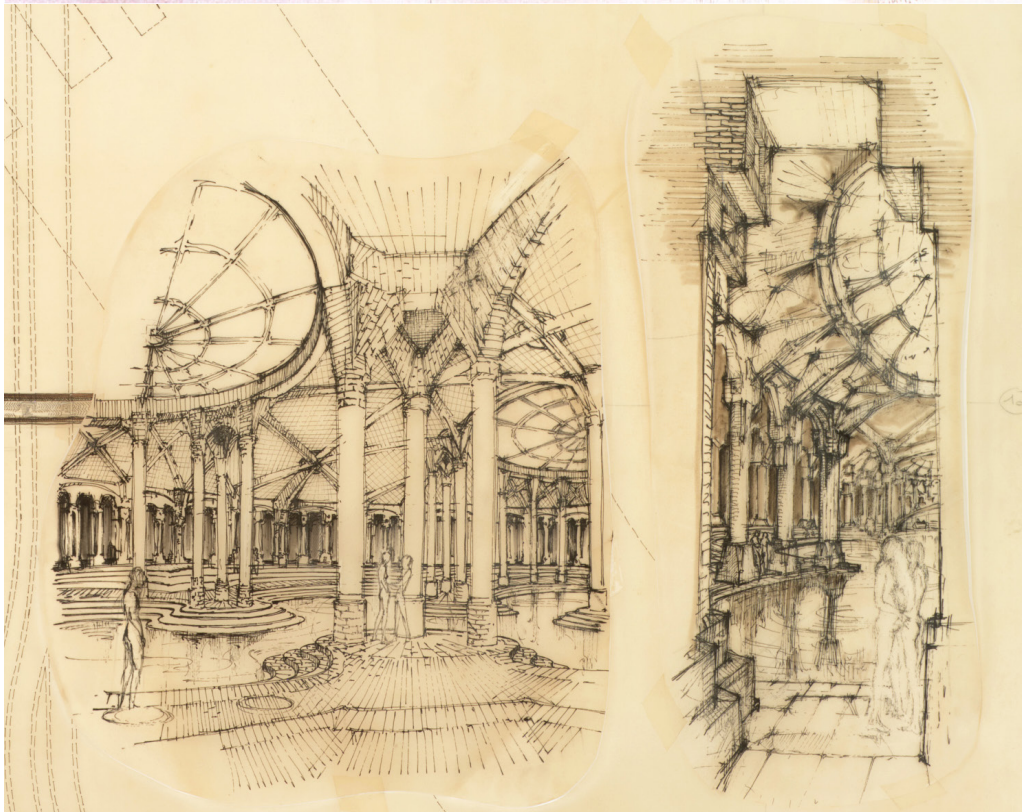
<sup>57</sup> Undated presse release AP117, ranged after the note concerning the meeting between Christian de la Malène and the project on 7.7.1976, AG/5(3)/2271/quartier des Halles/aménagement: “Lors d’un déjeuner qui réunissait le 10 février les quatre architectes – M. Henri Bernard, Ricardo Bofill, 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 XXème 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.<sup>58</sup> 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

<sup>58</sup> 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.<sup>59</sup> 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.<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup> 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).”<sup>62</sup> 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.<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup> [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."<sup>65</sup> 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.<sup>66</sup> [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.<sup>67</sup> 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

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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<sup>er</sup> 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.



reflect the contradictions and dreams of the “collective unconscious of the urban”.<sup>68</sup> 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.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, the idea of a counterworld to the “horror of the Metro” recalled the staging of holiday heterotopias like Club Méditerranée.<sup>70</sup> 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.<sup>71</sup>

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



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68 Taller de Arquitectura, *Projet Taller de Arquitectura (1<sup>er</sup> 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<sup>er</sup> Projet pour Les Halles)”, 113.

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

under Bofill's leadership.<sup>72</sup> 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.<sup>73</sup> 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 commission was tasked with establishing an 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.<sup>74</sup> 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 hundred 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.

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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.

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.<sup>75</sup> 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 addressed 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

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

described as undemocratic and outdated.<sup>76</sup> 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.<sup>77</sup> 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.<sup>78</sup> 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.<sup>79</sup>

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.<sup>80</sup> 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 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.<sup>81</sup>

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

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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 grands 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).

from MoMA in New York and the Venice Biennale.<sup>82</sup> 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.<sup>83</sup>

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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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# One Last Modular Game. Taller de Arquitectura and Le Petite Cathédrale

*Taller de Arquitectura, Le Petite Cathedral, Modular Housing1, 1970s Architecture, Unbuilt Project*

## /Abstract

In 1971, while the *Taller de Arquitectura* was beginning the project for *Walden 7*, the team received the commission to build a housing complex in the *ville nouvelle* of Cergy-Pontoise on the outskirts of Paris. Continuing with the working method that began with the book "*Towards a Formalization of the City in Space*", the *Taller* established a construction system for the project of 1000 homes, which they would call *Le Petite Cathédrale*, based on working with models and creating a clear spatial order.

However, unlike the *Walden 7* project, this small cathedral began to address the concerns of the *Taller* members, seeking formal relationships with the architecture present in the Mediterranean city. For the team, in this project, the form is the "what," the final objective, and the "how" is the Cartesian arrangement of the modules. Thus, *Le Petite Cathédrale* becomes the last example of the team's modular work; an unbuilt project that marks the end of a line of research, that of the city in space, and opens the door to a new attitude in approaching a project, based on form and image.

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## Building the Cities in Space

In the early 1970s, after the failed opportunity to build the proposal of Taller de Arquitectura for the *City in Space* in the municipality of Moratalaz in Madrid, Ricardo Bofill embarked on the promotion of a housing complex in the town of Sant Just Desvern on the outskirts of Barcelona, which we know today as *Walden 7*.<sup>1</sup>

Both projects, the one in Sant Just Desvern and the one in Moratalaz, aimed to put into practice what the members of the Taller<sup>2</sup> proposed in their publication *Hacia una formalización de la ciudad en el espacio* (Towards a formalization of the city in space).<sup>3</sup> In the book, the team theorized about the search for an urban system based on “an open, flexible structure that would allow growth and adaptation to new forms of life and relationships”,<sup>4</sup> based on their previous projects. And so, the *Walden 7* project could be presented as the end of a line of research since this way of addressing collective housing problems had a short subsequent development in the Taller’s trajectory.

However, in 1971, the same year Taller de Arquitectura embarked on designing the *Walden Island* project, the team began a little-known project that, as we will see in this text, marks the end of the Taller’s search for the *cities in space*. The project, a new city 30 kilometers from Paris that was to house 1000 homes, was a proposal that was never built and that the Taller named *Le petite cathédral*.

## A Ville Nouvelle in Cergy-Pontoise

In the 1960s and 1970s, France was in the midst of a major housing crisis due to the destruction of cities following World War II. This situation was exacerbated by the rural exodus to urban centers and the demographic growth experienced throughout Europe during the 1960s, known as the *baby boom*. The problem was particularly acute in the Paris area, so in 1965, the *Schéma Directeur d’aménagement et d’urbanisme de la région de Paris*, the master plan for development and urban planning of the Paris region, developed a plan to build a series of new urban centers called *Ville Nouvelles*.

These cities were conceived as complete nuclei, with residential, commercial, industrial, and service areas all contemplated in the same plan.

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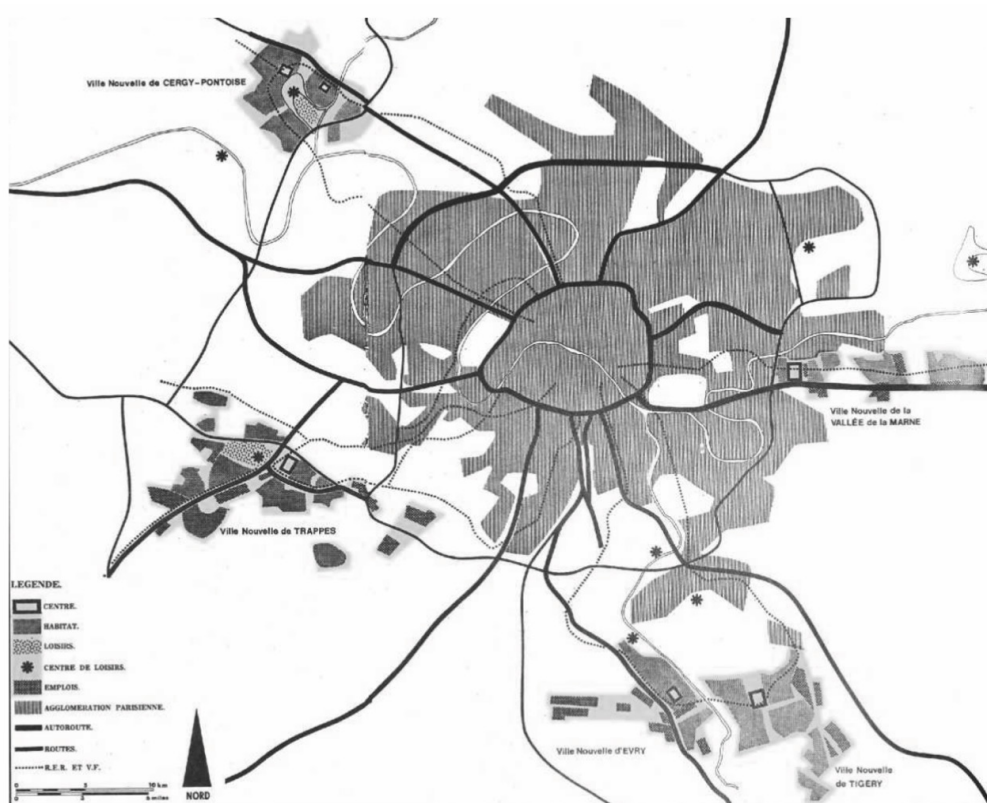
1 The housing promotion was carried out together with his economic partner Carlos Ruiz de la Prada and the Catalan Industrial Bank, forming the developer CEEX3, an acronym for *City in Space Experience 3*.

2 *Taller de Arquitectura* is a multidisciplinary and international team formed around Ricardo Bofill in the 1960s, some of its most prominent members are Manuel Nuñez Yanowski, Peter Hodgkinson, and Agustín Goytisolo, who together with Xavier Bague signed the publication *Hacia una formalización de la ciudad en el espacio* (Towards a formalization of the city in space).

3 Manuel Nuñez Yanowski, Peter Hodgkinson, José Agustín Goytisolo, Xavier Bague, *Hacia una formalización de la ciudad en el espacio*, Barcelona: Blume, 1968.

4 Nuñez Yanowski, Hodgkinson, Goytisolo, Bague, *Hacia una formalización de la ciudad en el espacio*, 30.





1

The cities were designed to be self-sufficient to avoid the problems associated with the uncontrolled growth of large French cities such as Paris, Rouen, Lille, Marseille, and Lyon. These cities were not to house a population greater than 500,000 inhabitants, and their goal was to create urban centers that presented favorable conditions for the emergence of urban life.<sup>5</sup>

Nine new cities were planned, five of them located in the *Île-de-France* region around Paris. These five new cities were to establish alternative growth poles in the Paris region and thus reduce dependence on the capital as the only economic and administrative center, while also improving the quality of life for residents through the reconstruction and reorganization of urban landscapes. Additionally, all the cities were equipped with public transportation connecting all the nuclei of the *Île-de-France* region. The five new cities planned around what was called the Greater Paris were named Cergy-Pontoise, Marne-la-Vallée, Évry, Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, and Sénart [Fig. 1].

Specifically, the center of Cergy-Pontoise encompassed fifteen municipalities, and it was in this place that Taller de Arquitectura received the commission to design a complex of 1000 homes along with spaces dedicated to other uses. The residential complex was to accommodate middle-class working families, provide commercial space, offices, and solve vehicle parking for users. The project was in an exceptional location, on an elevated point of the future city of Cergy, with views of the Oise River

Fig. 1

Location of the *ville-nouvelles* at the *Île-de-France* region. Cergy-Pontoise is in the northwest of Paris. Barrado, J., (1974), *Las nuevas ciudades de la región de París*, p.4.

<sup>5</sup> Juan Barrado, "Las nuevas ciudades de la región de París", *Ciudad y Territorio Estudios Territoriales*, no. 18-19 (March 1974): 75-82.

and its lake, and very close to the historic center of the original municipality.<sup>6</sup>

Like in *Walden 7*, Taller de Arquitectura sought to reflect in this project their ideas of what the city of the future should be. Their proposal, given the political character of the team members, was influenced by the philosophical ideas of late 1960s Europe and social movements such as the May 1968 protests. From these ideas, Taller de Arquitectura proposed a large, monumental complex called *Le petite cathédral*.

## City as Housing

As mentioned earlier, the ideas Taller de Arquitectura proposed about the city reflected the political concerns of the team, as well as the theories present in international architecture. The Taller members were influenced by both the culturalist ideas of the neo-rationalist Italian architecture and the neo-futurist proposals of *Archigram* or *Archizoom*. Also, they were in contact with the international architectural scene due to the different international publications that could be found in the studio.

Thus, in 1970, the *Taller* published a theoretical basis for their collective housing works in the Spanish magazine *Hogares modernos* (Modern Homes). The text began with a reflection on the city titled *De la ciudad histórica a la ciudad del futuro* (From the historical city to the city of the future), where Taller de Arquitectura presented their hypothesis of how the settlements of tomorrow should be, from historical cities to the super-industrialized city and its conversion into centers of “knowledge of technique and art”.<sup>7</sup> The Taller’s vision of the city had a marked leftist character, blaming urban capitalists for the city’s ills and emphasizing the different social groups that are part of the city and the class struggle. For the Taller, the class struggle between owners and wage earners is one of the engines of city growth, and despite the opposition of the interests of “both classes, both rival for their love of the city,” which leads the wealthy to “justify their privileges to the rest of the community by spending their money on palaces, sumptuous buildings, and public parks,” beautifying the city “according to a classical criterion,” but this process of city embellishment has disappeared due to the pressure of consumer society<sup>8</sup>. For Taller de Arquitectura, it was necessary for the metropolis of the future to recover the communal character that they believed had been lost due to different plans and zonings; to once again have the appearance of a work of art, an integral spectacle in which all its inhabitants are actors and spectators.<sup>9</sup>

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6 This information has been obtained thanks to the study of the project plans located in the Bofill Taller de Arquitectura Archive.

7 Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura (RBTA), *El Barrio Gaudí: una solución para viviendas económicas*, S.I: Hogares modernos, 1968, 10.

8 RBTA, *El Barrio Gaudí*, 11.

9 RBTA, *El Barrio Gaudí*, 11.

Years later, in 1975, the magazine *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* dedicated a special issue to the Taller's work, in which Salvador Clotas wrote a text further developing the team's ideas for the city of the future. One of the main points of interest in the city's development was the incorporation of working-class neighborhoods within it, and he proposed a series of mechanisms to achieve a change in the urban structure of the time. One of these mechanisms was a "deep understanding of form",<sup>10</sup> according to Taller de Arquitectura, through the control of formal issues, ideas can be translated into forms, allowing a continuous mix of city zones, achieving a continuous urban fabric of functions, social classes, uses, etc., so that each individual could develop within their own space the way of life that best suited them.<sup>11</sup> In this way, housing becomes the starting point of the city proposed by the team.

Taller de Arquitectura proposed, therefore, that through the study of a system of combining cells in space, different types of housing could be integrated within the same structure.<sup>12</sup> The various methodological investigations carried out by the team embraced a wide field of operations, but there was a premise regarding the functional criterion that helped delimit the solution:

"The creation of spaces for community life (streets, squares, promenades, avenues, gardens, etc.), regardless of the level or direction of space, without hierarchy of one over the other (horizontal over vertical, or diagonal, for example), which means understanding all space as homogeneous, implying that architectural volumes develop in all directions of space".<sup>13</sup>

This idea of infinite space, subject to a geometric law, seems to simulate the continuous structures proposed by *Archizoom* with their *Non-stop city*. However, the Taller avoids the uniform character of the continuous spaces proposed by the Italian team, as according to Norberg-Schulz, the Taller and Bofill's desire for dramatic and magical environments cannot be satisfied solely by spatial organization.<sup>14</sup> To the geometric order, other characteristics such as the conscious use of form, material, or even color are added to give their constructions character, in the sense of building as an identifiable place,<sup>15</sup> placing the Taller at the threshold of Postmodernism that was about to arrive on the international architectural scene.

10 Salvador Clotas in *L'architecture aujourd'hui*, no. 149 (1970): 32.

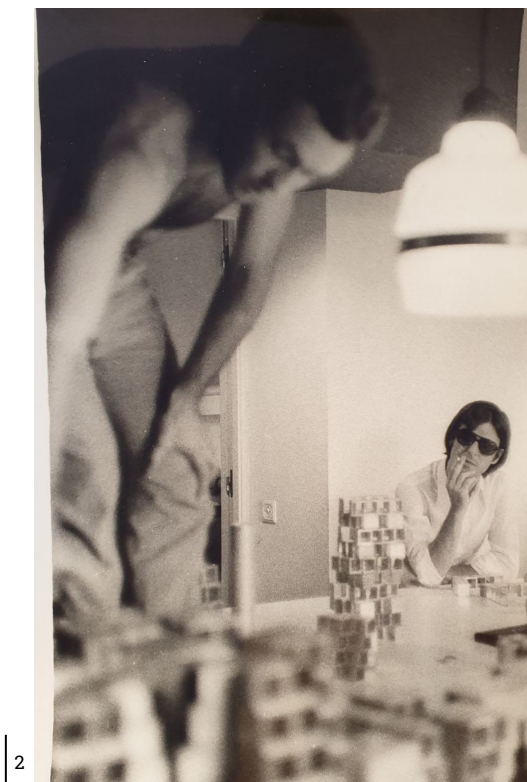
11 Salvador Clotas in *L'architecture aujourd'hui*, no. 149 (1970): 36.

12 Salvador Clotas in *L'architecture aujourd'hui*, no. 149 (1970): 36.

13 Salvador Clotas in *L'architecture aujourd'hui*, no. 149 (1970): 39.

14 Ricardo Bofill, Yukio Futagawa, Christian Norberg-Schulz. *Ricardo Bofill: taller de arquitectura*. Tokyo: A.D.A, 1985, 11.

15 Bofill, Futagawa, Norberg-Schulz, *Ricardo Bofill: taller de arquitectura*, 11.



2



3

## Systematizing the Cathedral

To achieve an open and flexible way of working, Taller de Arquitectura defines a system capable of allowing growth in all dimensions. This system is “an orthogonal mesh structure that allows vertical and horizontal circulation, is easy to develop and grow, and makes it possible to organize life in space”.<sup>16</sup> This system was based on the work of Taller de Arquitectura with their *Model Maker*<sup>17</sup> and allowed the team members, led by Nuñez Yanowski, to work in three dimensions.

We can state without any doubt that the *Model Maker* was part of the formalization of *Le Petite Cathédrale* proposal, just as it was in the formalization of *Walden 7*. If we compare the photos where we see Manuel Núñez Yanowski standing on a large table in the Taller’s first studio, arranging modules under Ricardo Bofill’s watchful eye [Fig. 2], with photos of the working models of the Cergy-Pontoise project, we see the similarities between the two groupings. In both, Manuel Núñez plays with the modules as if they were Lego pieces to find the solution that the entire team will agreed upon. And just like in *Walden 7*, it is possible to understand the mathematical order with which the housing modules are arranged in *Le Petite Cathédrale* [Fig. 3].

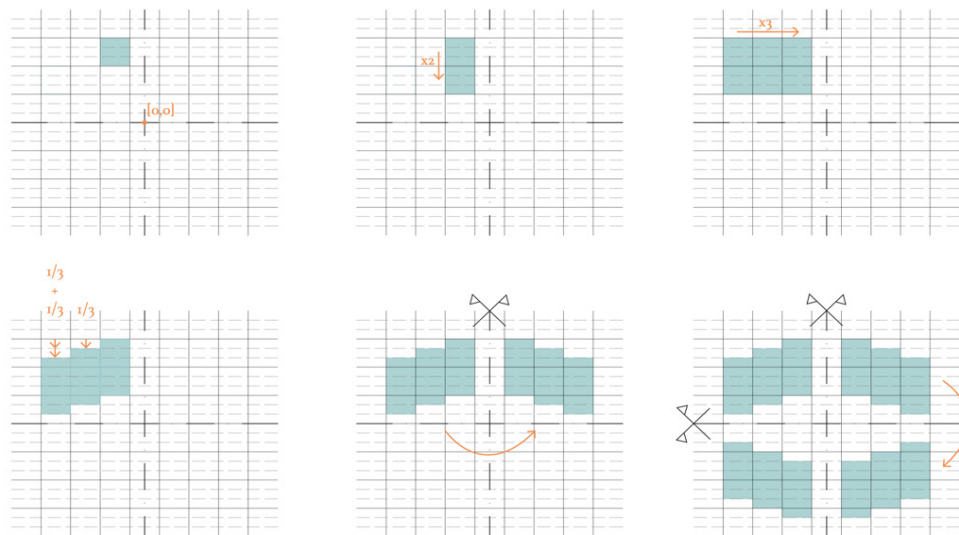
The Cergy project, like the Catalan project, responds to an orthogonal grid that arises from the Cartesian grid of the *Model Maker*. The grid starts from a

Fig. 2  
Photograph of Ricardo Bofill and Manuel Nuñez Yanowski debating on the *Walden 7* work models. Courtesy of Manuel Nuñez Yanowski.

Fig. 3  
Work model of *Le petite Cathédrale*. BTA Archive.

16 Nuñez Yanowski, Hodkingson, Goytisolo, Bague, *Hacia una formalización de la ciudad en el espacio*, 28.

17 Álvarez Arce, Raquel, Galván Desvaux, Noelia, and Martínez Rodríguez, José Manuel, “Maquetas y vivienda modular: la experiencia del taller de arquitectura de Ricardo Bofill”, *EGA Expresión Gráfica Arquitectónica*, no. 26 (2021): 182–193.



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square module of 5.70 meters, establishing the two main axes in the X and Y directions. A second order is superimposed on this grid in the Y axis, dividing the module into three parts, which will mark the order of displacement of the housing cells between the different levels by one-third of the module, as it does in the *Walden 7* project.

This displacement results in a diagonal section, a stepped configuration reminiscent of the building at 13 Rue des Amiraux, designed by Henri Sauvage in 1927—a reference that is far from coincidental, given that his work was admired by Manuel Núñez Yanowski<sup>18</sup>. However, the use of the diagonal also served as a critique of modernist orthodoxy, embracing the complexity of non-conventional geometries. Although Venturi did not promote in his book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966) the diagonal as a formal system—as was the case with Taller de Arquitectura—he encouraged architects to embrace ambiguity, contradiction, and layered meanings, which often manifested in spatial arrangements that defied the orthogonal grid. This created space for the diagonal to emerge as part of a postmodern vocabulary that challenged the rigidity of modernism.

When organizing *Le Petite Cathédrale*, we could establish the center of the project as its origin, what we would call the Cartesian geometric center, the spatial [0,0]. This center establishes on the ordinates in X an axis of order on which up to five vertical axes will be arranged in the ordinates Y, establishing different partial symmetries. However, while the X axis coincides with the arrangement of the modules, the vertical axes will

18 “There is a predecessor who greatly opened my eyes to this idea—well, actually, there are several. Yona Friedman, of course, is one of them, and I agree with you on that. Another is Henri Sauvage, who, quite by chance, discovered the diagonal”. Manuel Núñez Yanowski in an interview with the authors on January 19, 2021.

Fig. 4

Diagram of the geometrical laws that creates the *Petite Cathédrale*. Prepared by the authors.



be placed in the center of these. By defining the axes, Taller de Arquitectura will group modules two by two on the vertical axis and subject them to displacements of one-third of the module on the horizontal axis to compose the project's floors [Fig. 4].<sup>19</sup>

The modules will be placed following a strict geometric order but responding to a formal will, resulting from working with models rather than mathematical equations.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the housing cells are placed level by level generating a third order on the Z axis. The modules are repeated in height three times, establishing a reference level, and at each level, they are displaced by one-third of the module until defining seven arrangements from the origin floor. The result is a 21-story building, with the first two floors semi-buried due to the conditions of the site where *Le Petite Cathédrale* was located.

These site conditions cause the generating grid of the Cergy-Pontoise project to undergo variations in the arrangement of its axes. If the grid that ordered the unbuilt Walden Island project underwent 90-degree turns to respond to the site's preexistences<sup>21</sup> in *Le Petite Cathédrale*, one of its ends presents a 60-degree turn of the vertical axes. This modification responds to one of the building's arms being oriented towards the views of the Oise River and the Les Étangs de Cergy lake, and the other towards the road that allowed vehicular access to the building [Fig. 5].

Taller de Arquitectura will arrange the different modules following the rules they had established. The result is a covered street of 300 meters long that evokes on a large scale the nave of a church, providing a monumental and symbolic atmosphere. This character is emphasized by a formal play of the Taller. On the vertical axes, the team places ribs that resemble pointed arches, emphasizing the symbolic character of the space. Even in the Taller's sketches or what could be understood as promotional models, it can be observed how at the intersections of the main axes, the team proposes covering the equivalent of the transept with glazed vaults [Fig. 6, 7].

Beyond the various formal gestures, the Taller is capable of generating a system with a clear order that can be easily translated into a mathematical order. This allows the team to extend the system in space, opening the door to the construction of different phases of their small cathedral, as observed in one of Taller de Arquitectura's drawings [Fig. 8].

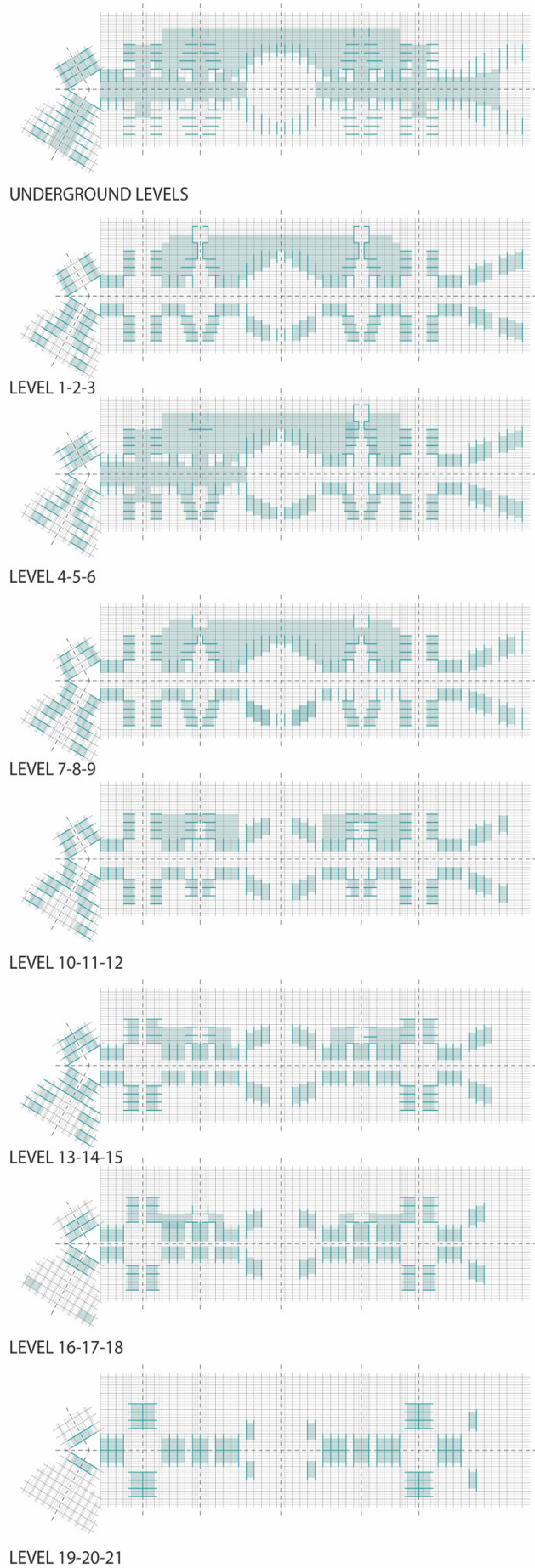
The *Petite Cathédrale* project exemplifies a vision of monumental

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19 There is a series of modules that are displaced by half of the cell, located on the lower floors and intended for commerce and offices.

20 Anna Bofill's doctoral thesis translated the works of *Taller de Arquitectura* into mathematical formulas, but this translation into matrix systems is subsequent to the team's work and draws from it.

21 Raquel Álvarez Arce, and Noelia Galván Desvaux. "La Isla Walden: Reflexiones En Torno a La última Ciudad En El Espacio De Taller De Arquitectura", *ZARCH*, no. 21 (December 2023): 132-43. [https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs\\_zarch/zarch.2023218928](https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_zarch/zarch.2023218928).



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Fig. 5

Diagrams of the different floors of the project, made from the plans in Ricardo Bofill's archive. Prepared by the authors.



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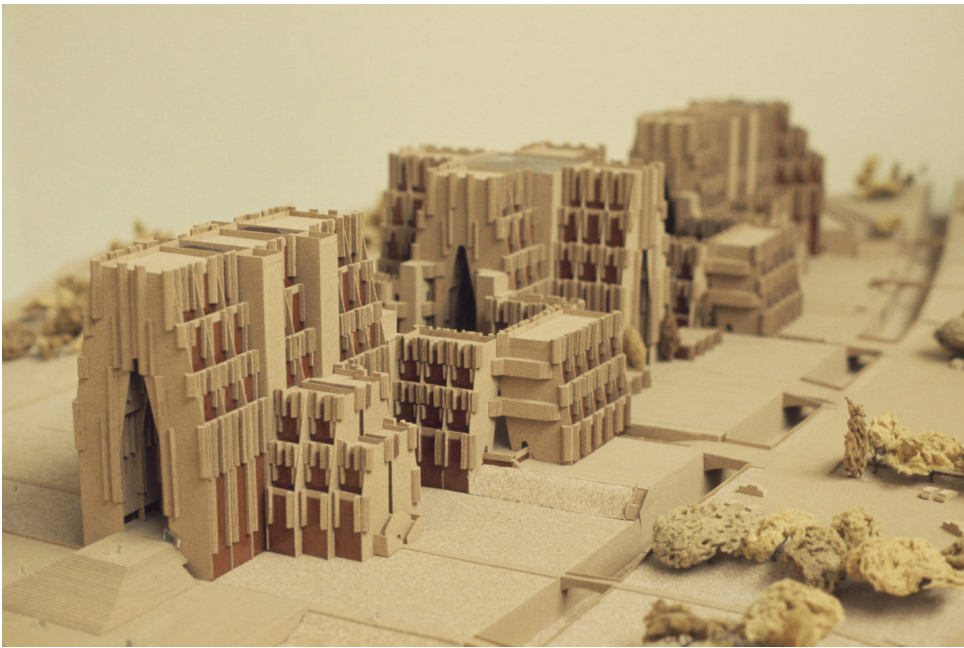
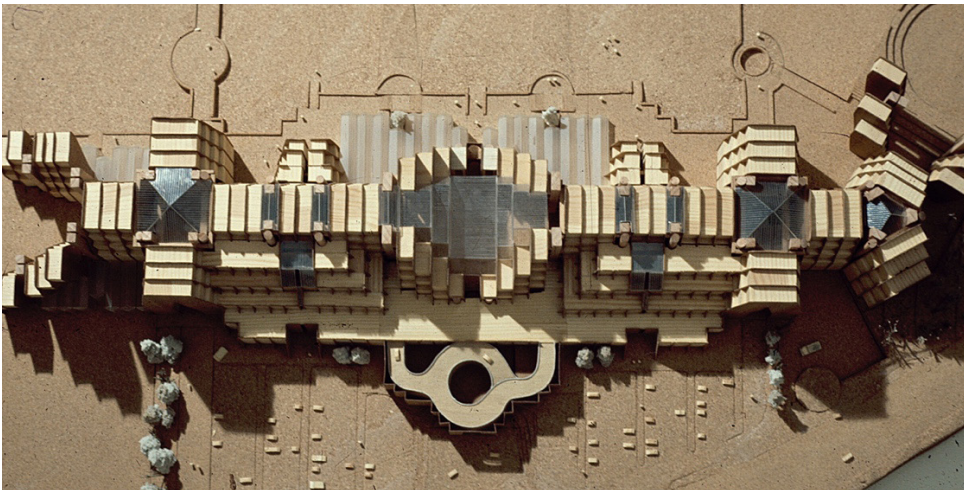


Fig. 6  
Model of *Le petite Cathédral*.  
BTA Archive.

Fig. 7  
Model of *Le petite Cathédral*.  
BTA Archive.

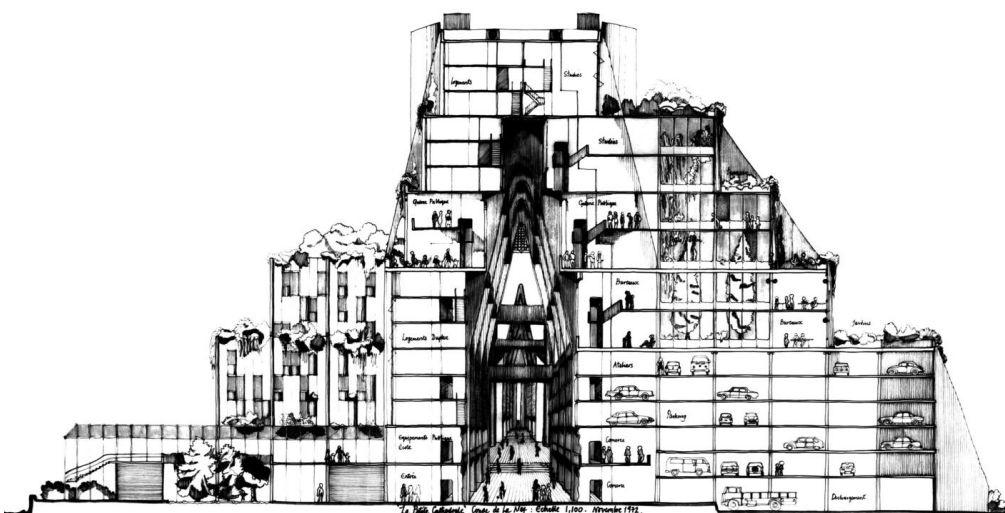
Fig. 8  
Drawing of *Le Petite Cathédral* conquering the space, demonstrating Taller de Arquitectura system's ability to grow. BTA Archive.

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megastructure, where architecture becomes an all-encompassing framework. This concept resonates with Reyner Banham's idea of a vast and monumental infrastructure—comprising structure, transportation, and services—within which individuals, groups, and entire communities could autonomously shape their own environmental conditions.<sup>22</sup>

This vision contrasts with the urban strategies implemented in the *villes nouvelles* of France, which were shaped by the principles of Team X and exemplified by the work of Candilis, Josic, and Woods in *Toulouse Le Mirail*. Their approach emphasized a flexible urban grid that allowed for individual appropriation and social integration. A comparable yet distinct proposal was developed by the AUA (Atelier d'Urbanisme et d'Architecture) for Marne-la-Vallée, where the team expanded upon Team X's ideas by introducing linear and axial compositions, typically organized around an interior street. This design gesture reflects a generational shift between the architects of the third generation and the younger practitioners of the 1960s, marking a transition from open-ended frameworks to more structured and monumental urban forms.

## Inhabiting the Wall

When Taller de Arquitectura faces its urban projects, it does not renounce the idea of place. To achieve this idea, Anna Bofill, in 1971, in a presentation called "*New Urbanism*," stated that formal mechanisms were necessary to create spaces where life could develop: clear urban spaces with a clear exterior delimitation that provided identity.<sup>23</sup> Thus, by the 1970s, the Taller would bet on figurative compositions, where geometric distributions end up responding to a formal image, as in the case of the *Walden* project, the

22 Reyner Banham, *Guía de la arquitectura moderna*, Barcelona: Editorial Blume, 1979, 5.

23 Bofill, Futagawa, Norberg-Schulz, *Ricardo Bofill: taller de arquitectura*, 13.

Fig. 9

Section of *Le petite Cathédral*. Bofill Taller de Arquitectura Archive.

unbuilt *Viaduct* project in the *Manzanera* complex in Calpe, or the project focused on in this text, *Le Petite Cathédrale*.

The Taller's idea was to build a place, but a recognizable place. This place would present the image of a street, a porticoed street like the passages of the 19th century, filtered through modern language, continuing the Taller's search for that new modern Mediterranean city

This search for a city image opens the door to the idea that form "*is the 'what'; design is the 'how'*",<sup>24</sup> and in the manner of Kahn, Taller de Arquitectura will build a form in which the material that constructs it is not mass but habitable space. Each of the housing modules with which the Taller will work in their not-so-small models will form the pieces capable of building the walls of their *petite cathédrale* [Fig. 9].

Thus, the walls of this construction are inhabited walls, the sum of housing allows the team to create a cathedral, turning the house of God into the house of man. Recovering the scenic spaces of the city, but this time, responding to the leftist character of the team members, they would not be intended for the wealthiest classes but for the working class.

## One Last Game

Although the reasons why *Le Petite Cathédrale* was never realized remain unclear, we can hypothesize why it remained only in the realm of ideas. In 1974, France suffered an economic recession that severely impacted the real estate sector, causing a slowdown in the construction of the *ville nouvelles*. Even Jean-Eudes Roullier, a high-ranking French official and key figure in the development of planned cities, questioned the viability of such a project, had it been pursued in the midst of the economic crisis.<sup>25</sup>

Additionally, the first post-war Paris reconstruction projects carried out from 1958 with the *ZUPs* (*Zone à urbaniser en priorité*) and the *Grands ensembles* quickly began to show their limits. These projects, carried out between 1958 and 1969, were sectors marked by standardized architecture and a clear profile of social housing, so Taller de Arquitectura's proposal for Cergy-Pontoise could remind French authorities of these ZUP projects. The ambition of the *ville nouvelle* program was to create real cities, not closed districts, so approaching the project for the new city of Cergy-Pontoise calmly could have led to the abandonment of the Taller's proposal.

Moreover, the Les Halles project placed Taller de Arquitectura- and particularly Ricardo Bofill- at the center of public scrutiny. *Le Petite*

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24 Raúl Castellanos Gómez, *Plan Poché*, Fundación Caja Arquitectos, 2012, 189.

25 Dominique Serrell, *Bofill: The french years*, Paris: Norma Editions 2023, 61.



*Cathédrale* proposal was described by architect and political activist Rolando Castro as “*totally megalomaniac, and he was pilloried for it*”.<sup>26</sup>

But *Le Petite Cathédrale* project was also a turning point for Taller de Arquitectura. Both the unbuilt *Walden Island* project and this project perhaps made the Taller members understand the limits of systematic architecture as a way of building the *city in space*. Additionally, *Le Petite Cathédrale* project introduced a series of formal mannerisms, such as the ribs to emphasize the character of a large, covered street, heirs of the great commercial passages of the 19th century, which initiated the Taller into the new ideas of postmodernism [Fig. 10].

The opportunity that came to the Taller with this commission was also to start working in France and its new technologies. With prefabrication now within their reach, a new world of formal and aesthetic possibilities opened up for the team, which would be seen in the denigrated projects of *Les Halles* or the *Espaces d'Abraxas*.

However, perhaps the most important point in this change of mentality in how to approach the city is the dissolution of the original Taller de Arquitectura team. The first departure from the core of the team that had begun to dream of this *city in space* was Xavier Bagué, who left at the beginning of the *Walden 7* project. Years later, in 1978, Juan Agustín Goytisolo left due to economic disagreements with Ricardo Bofill. And shortly after, Manuel Núñez Yanowski also left,<sup>27</sup> which perhaps marked the most significant change in the way the Taller worked, and finally Anna Bofill also left. The disappearance of the creative core of the Taller de Arquitectura during the 1960s and 1970s justifies the end of this line of research in the search for this new modern Mediterranean city through a modular game. A way of designing that for Ricardo Bofill was a utopian architecture that could not have further development, leaving the architect alone in view of a new paradigm. A set of ideas with which Bofill had already begun to work on *La Fábrica* project, opening the door to Postmodernism after this last modular game, after *Le Petite Cathédrale* [Fig. 11].

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26 Serrell, *Bofill: The french years*, 122.

27 “And when at a certain moment in 1975, in a traffic jam in Paris, we were sitting with Ricardo in the car, chatting, and Ricardo said to me, ‘Manolo, we have to stop inventing, we have to start building.’ And I said to him, ‘Ricardo, the day you want to do this, let me know, because I won’t be there.’ And indeed, three years later, I left. And Goytisolo too. We were, let’s say, the three creatives.” Manuel Núñez Yanowski in an interview with the authors on January 19, 2021.

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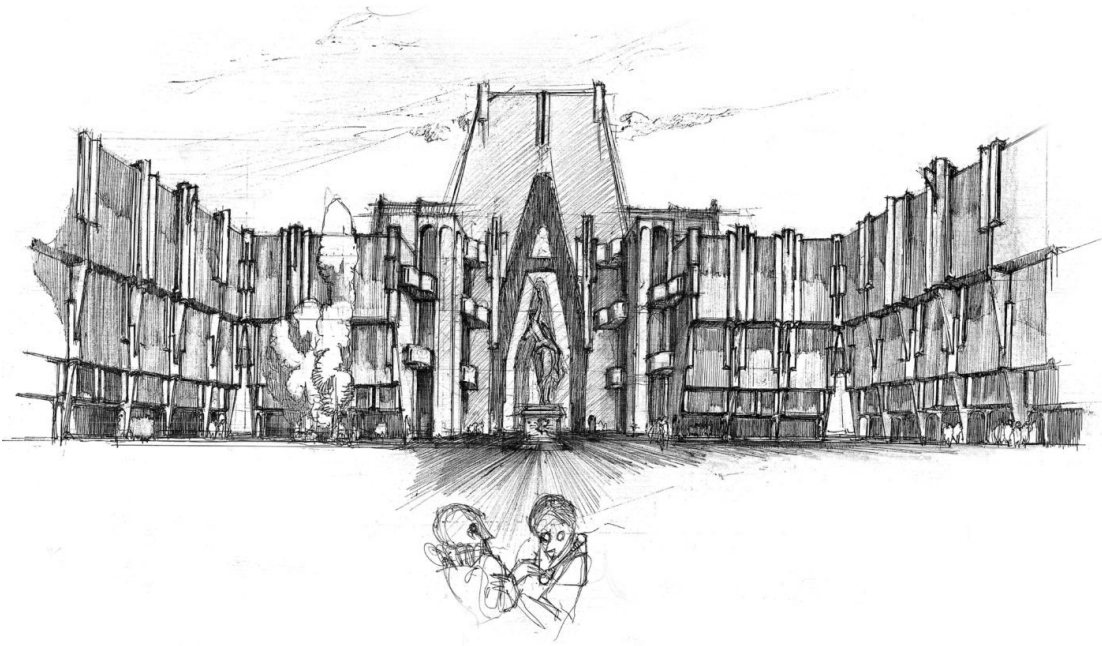


Fig. 10  
Drawing of *Le petite Cathédral*. Bofill Taller de Arquitectura Archive.

Fig. 11  
Photography of Ricardo Bofill and Peter Hodgkinson sitting next to the model of *Le Petite Cathédral*. Bofill Taller de Arquitectura Archive.

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# The Ricardo Bofill's Proposal for the Waterfront Revitalization of Salerno (Italy)

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*Star-architecture, Port-city, Seafront, Decision-making, Planning visions*

## /Abstract

This paper reflects on the proposals elaborated by the *Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura* for the waterfront revitalization of the Italian city of Salerno in the attempt to replicate two of his previous architectural projects, i.e. the crescent- and sail-shaped buildings.

By the review of planning documentations and the scientific and non-scientific literature, this work highlights the challenges regarding the building of the Crescent and the failed implementation of the Sail. The case study analysis provides new insights on the role of star-architecture in triggering waterfront revitalization in a second-tier city following the tendency of public authorities to translate ideas and approaches from other international cities.

In particular, this work demonstrates that the elaboration of spectacular projects designed by international architectural firms cannot automatically adapt successful projects implemented in other contexts, but needs assemblage with the local urban, social, and environmental facets. Furthermore, it is observed that the success or failure of these types of projects may be attributable not just to the mere transposition of identical schemes and the political legitimization, but also from the inadequate implementation of architectural and urban design that face criticism by the public opinion.

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I have served as external reviewer to evaluate R+D+i projects of 'COST Association', 'Agencia Estatal de Investigación' and 'European Research Executive Agency' (Horizon Europe programme, 'New European Bauhaus' and 'MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships' calls) and I am currently secretary of the scientific journal *Ciudades* (edited by IUU-UVa). My research and working interests intertwine 19th- and 20th-century city-making process with architecture and planning history, spatial planning, and urban governance.

## Introduction

The copy-and-paste of star architecture buildings has played a remarkable role in the revitalization of urban waterfronts and port cities since the 1980s<sup>1</sup>. In fact, the emulation of such dynamics from first-tier port cities to second-tier ones seems to be a global phenomenon, although recent literature insists that further evidence is needed to enrich the broad spectrum of star architecture projects' effects and their origins in the project.<sup>2</sup>

This paper contributes to add new knowledge to star architecture projects implemented in medium-sized cities by adopting a qualitative single case-study approach, specifically using the projects elaborated by *Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura* (RBTA) in Salerno, Italy, as a case study. This work comprised a qualitative content analysis of white (peer-reviewed works such as books or journal articles) and grey literature (literature that is not formally published after a double peer-review, thus including local government's planning schemes, newspaper articles, local associations' manifesto). In particular, the analysis outlines the main characteristics of RBTA's proposal within the wider discourses related to Salerno's waterfront revitalization<sup>3</sup> and detects the main factors contributing to its partially failed implementation.

The city of Salerno constitutes a proper example because since the mid-1990s underwent a huge transformation with the objective of becoming the "Barcelona of the Tyrrhenian Sea" according to the four-time Mayor Vincenzo De Luca (1993-1997, 1997-2002, 2006-2011 and 2011-2015). As detailed in the book "Another Italy between old bureaucracies and new cities",<sup>4</sup> the then-Mayor's vision of Salerno was anchored in European urban models, drawing parallels with prominent cities such as Barcelona, Berlin, and London. This aspiration was encapsulated in the idea of a "permanent architectural laboratory," a term that draws parallels with Barcelona during its hosting of the Olympics.<sup>5</sup> This long-standing ambition has demonstrated a resolute and unyielding commitment to its realization as Salerno first enlisted the MBM Architectes studio to implement the ideas previously realized for the Barcelona's waterfront in occasion of the 1992

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1 Ponzini Davide and Mina Akhavan, "Star Architecture Spreads in Europe: Culture-Led Waterfront Projects Between 1990 and 2015," in *About Star Architecture: Reflecting on Cities in Europe*, ed. Nadia Alaily-Mattar, Davide Ponzini, and Alain Thierstein (Basel: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 71-72.

2 Dreher Johannes, Nadia Alaily-Mattar and Alain Thierstein, "Star architecture projects and their effects: tracing the evidence." *Journal of Urbanism: International Research on Placemaking and Urban Sustainability* 16, no. 1 (2021): 65-83.

3 Giorgia Iovino, *Riquilificazione urbana e sviluppo locale a Salerno. Attori, strumenti e risorse di una città in trasformazione* (Napoli, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2002), 155-188; Giorgia Iovino, "La rigenerazione del waterfront nelle città marittimo-portuali. L'esperienza di Salerno," *Bollettino dell'Associazione Italiana di Cartografia*, no. 157 (2016), 41-43; Maurizio Russo, *Il progetto urbano nella città contemporanea. L'esperienza di Salerno nel panorama europeo* (Napoli: CLEAN, 2011), 143-162.

4 Vincenzo De Luca, *Un'altra Italia tra vecchie burocrazie e nuove città* (Bari-Rome: Laterza, 1999).

5 Roberto Gerundo, "Salerno: un'urbanistica spericolata/Salerno: a daring approach to town planning," *Urbanistica*, no. 122 (2003), 28-31; Roberto Gerundo and Isidoro Fasolino, "Nuove centralità costiere. La costa salernitana nella pianificazione urbanistica e territoriale", in *Waterfront d'Italia. Piani, politiche, progetti*, ed. Michelangelo Savino (Milano, Franco Angeli, 2010), 172-175.





Summer Olympics.<sup>6</sup> Then, the Mayor enlisted the expertise of renowned architectural studios to create landmark buildings, i.e. David Chipperfield Architects for the Palace of Justice (1999–2018),<sup>7</sup> Zaha Hadid Architects for the maritime station (2000–2016),<sup>8</sup> Ateliers Jean Nouvel for the redevelopment of the former Antonio Amato pasta factory (2007–2017 but not implemented), Santiago Calatrava Architects & Engineers for the Marina di Arechi port-island (2008–2024), and RBTA for the waterfront revitalization of the sector comprising Santa Teresa and Piazza della Concordia squares (2008–2023, partially implemented).

Here the research question arises as to whether this perspective was too focused on the immediate economic development and image-making of post-industrial cities, potentially overlooking broader, long-term implications. Is it appropriate for second-tier cities to make comparisons and implement resembling strategies of those adopted by such distant metropolitan realities? The case study analysis of the RBTA's proposal for Salerno seafront serves to demonstrate that the fundamental error of this strategy appears to lie in the attempt to emulate realities other than the original, yet De Luca aspired to elevate Salerno to a global metropolis, establishing it as a point of reference for the South and Italy as a whole.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, De Luca had been elected for various term as Mayor, and had consistently garnered appreciation from the citizenry for his efforts to reinstate dignity and identity to the city of Salerno, which has historically been regarded as the “little sister” of Naples.<sup>10</sup> In response to any criticism or reproach, De Luca posited that the city revitalization should rely on European models

6 Oriol Bohigas, Joseph Martorell, David Mackay, Albert Puigdomènech and Oriol Capdevila, Salerno. *Nuova coscienza di identità, nuova esigenza di urbanità. Documento Programmatico* (Salerno: Comune di Salerno, 1994), 2-5.

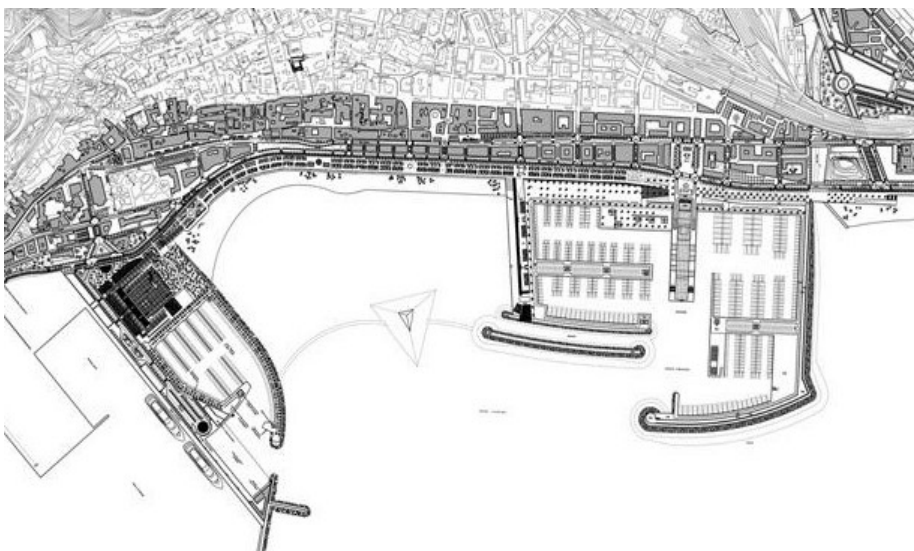
7 <https://davidchipperfield.com/projects/salerno-palace-of-justice> (last accessed March 2025).

8 <https://www.zaha-hadid.com/architecture/maritime-terminal-salerno/> (last accessed March 2025).

9 De Luca, *Un'altra Italia tra vecchie burocrazie e nuove città*, 6-9.

10 De Luca, *Un'altra Italia tra vecchie burocrazie e nuove città*, 3.

Fig. 1  
Salerno's waterfront in 2007.  
Source: Author's elaboration  
from Google Earth (2025).



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based on the fact that «We are the solely reality in Europe where the concept of Europe is being worked on. What we have planned is a concrete transformation, which is complicated to achieve in a country like Italy. Here, thinking and decision-making is a business, with decision-makers obstructing projects and poisoned democratic process. We are here for enabling an act of democratic transparency».<sup>11</sup>

### Santa Teresa's Crescent and Piazza della Concordia's Sail

Salerno's coastline redevelopment was initially drafted by MBM Arquitectes with a number of amendments until its inclusion in the 2003 General Master Plan [Fig. 1].<sup>12</sup> However, this planning tool had to be adapted to the new 2004 Regional Planning Law and this process involved substantial changes, among which the removal of the MBM Arquitectes' proposal [Fig. 2].<sup>13</sup>

In 2007, the City Council launched the international design competition "*Fronte del mare–Area e Piazza Santa Teresa ed Area e Piazza della Concordia*" for the waterfront redevelopment comprising the seafront from the Manfredi docks to the Masuccio Salernitano touristic port. With an expenditure of €115,000,000, the competition aimed to find solutions for the «most appropriate use of the city's seafront, which has been discussed on multiple occasions over the past years due to the urban, social and economic significance ... In particular, the centrality of the extreme points of the project areas, St. Teresa and Concordia, makes them functional centers

11 Vincenzo De Luca, Parte 1 Presentazione De Luca Piazza della Libertà Salerno, 2009, March 29. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xd5tFQqAPx0> (last access March 2025).

12 Alessandro Dal Piaz, "Progetti urbani a Salerno. L'attività di programmazione delle trasformazioni urbane a Salerno," *Archivio di studi Urbani e Regionali*, no. 69 (2000), 9-14; Ornella Albolino and Fabio Amato, "La riqualificazione di Salerno tra progetti e realtà. Un esempio di turisticità al servizio di aree limitrofe," in *Turismo e competitività urbana Cagliari, Sassari, Salerno, Bari, Lecce, Catania, Palermo, Siracusa*, ed. Luca Ruggiero and Luigi Scrofani (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2011), 58-63.

13 Comune di Salerno, Piano Regolatore Generale-Bozza dicembre 2002 (2002); Comune di Salerno, Piano Urbanistico Comunale 2005, 2005.

Fig. 2

MBM Arquitectes' proposal for the waterfront revitalization. Source: MBM Arquitectes (2005).



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in relation to the waterfront revitalization. The sector involving Piazza della Concordia, Piazza Mazzini, and Masuccio Salernitano touristic port plays a crucial role in relation to the functions allocated in the urban centre, such as the Santa Teresa future sports port and the future activities».<sup>14</sup>

RBTA-designed masterplan was awarded with the prize of €2,673,900 with two main solutions located at the two extremes of the project area [Fig. 3].

On the one hand, the redevelopment of a 72,000-sqm area comprising Piazza della Concordia, Piazza Mazzini, and Masuccio Salernitano was centered on the so-called Sail. This structure was a 75-meter skyscraper resembling the W Hotel of Barcelona (2009), along with other existing sail-shaped buildings devoted to luxury tourist accommodation, symptom of an established tendency to replicate similar spectacular pieces of architecture across the world [Fig. 4].<sup>15</sup> The Sail comprised 17 floors, of which six devoted to offices, while the remaining to 100-berth hotel without any housing units [Fig. 5]. The project foresaw the unification of Concordia Square with Mazzini Square, and the Masuccio Salernitano port would double its size, with the square extending towards the sea. This transformation involved also the construction of soft barriers to create a new beachfront connecting this port with the new one to build in Santa Teresa and two gangplanks extending 80 meters into the sea equipped with two restaurants offering panoramic views. Furthermore, two interventions on mobility regarded the proximity of Piazza della Concordia: the burying of 260 meters of streets and the building of 100 parking lots [Fig. 6]. The total estimated cost of the project was €220 million, with €70 million allocated for the construction of the Sail and €150 million for the development of its surroundings.

Fig. 3

RBTA's masterplan winner of the 2007 international design competition. Source: <http://www.progesengineering.com/project/piazza-della-concordia-sea-front/>.

<sup>14</sup> Comune di Salerno, *Fronte del mare–Area e Piazza Santa Teresa ed Area e Piazza della Concordia. Relazione illustrativa* (Salerno: Comune di Salerno, 2007), 3.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.spanish-architects.com/es/ricardo-bofill-taller-de-arquitectura-barcelona/project/w-barcelona-hotel> (last accessed March 2025)





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Fig. 4

From left to right are the pre-cursors of all the sail-shaped hotels: InterContinental Yokohama Grand Hotel (Japan, 1998); Burj Al Arab Hotel (Dubai, 1999), Haifa's Sail Tower (Israel, 2002), Barcelona's W Hotel (Spain, 2009), Ulaanbaatar's Blue Sky Tower (Mongolia, 2010), and Trump Ocean Club International Hotel & Tower (Panama, 2012).

Fig. 5

The Sail. Source: <http://www.progesengineering.com/project/piazza-della-concordia-sea-front/>.

Fig. 6

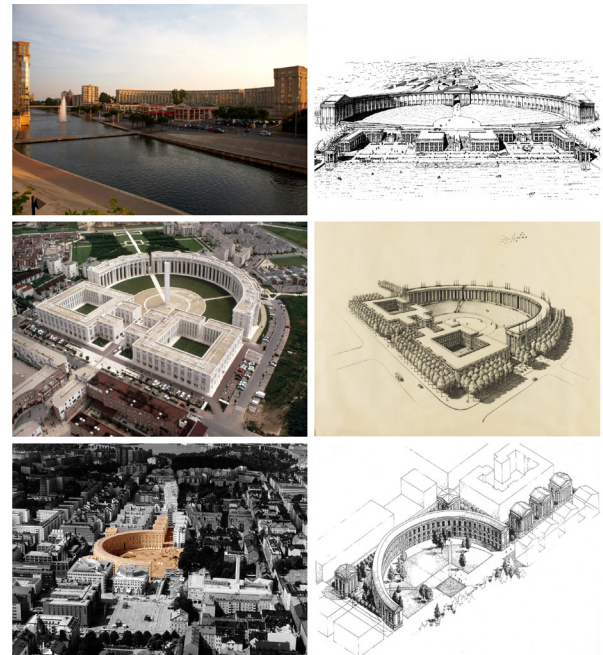
Public spaces resulting from the burying of street infrastructure. Source: <http://www.progesengineering.com/project/piazza-della-concordia-sea-front/>.



On the other hand, the crescent-shaped building<sup>16</sup> devoted to luxury housing in Santa Teresa. It evoked previous RBTA-designed buildings for accommodating social housing units in Montpellier (Port Juvenal, 1989),<sup>17</sup> Cergy-Pontoise (Les Colonnes de Saint-Christophe, 1986),<sup>18</sup> and Stockholm (Pa Soder Crescent, 1992).<sup>19</sup> These kinds of buildings, resembling amphitheatres facing a large plaza acting as a congregation point for local residents and as a venue for recreational and representative activities, use of classical/symmetrical planning and building strategies to create a new area of centrality. [Fig. 7]

The proposal regarded the implementation of the action plan approved in 2007 by the City Council,<sup>20</sup> and was different from the one planned by MBM Architects in the frame of the 2005 General Master Plan [Fig. 8]. It regarded the construction of a large semicircular square, conceived as a panoramic terrace overlooking the sea and a monumental gateway to the city. The idea was to surround a square, which is to be constructed beneath a two-level subterranean parking facility, by a classical hemicycle, the Crescent, with a glass facade overlaid by a double-order colonnade. The crescent-shaped edifice would stand 33 meters in height and encompass an area of 300 meters, inclusive of two 33-meter towers set apart from the central body [Fig. 9]. The structure, with a total volume of 190,000 cubic meters, was designed to accommodate 120 high-end residential dwellings, 50 offices, and 26 commercial boutiques situated beneath the primary arcade. A variety of commercial enterprises, including bars, restaurants and stores, would be situated in the area between the slightly elevated square and the height of the marina, where a promenade was planned. These interventions included the sealing of 4,865 sqm of sea and beach, which implied the deviation of the Fusandola stream, historically linked to destructive floods, without a proper environmental assessment.

The estimated expenditure for the construction of the plaza, the underlying parking lot and the urbanization works was €28 million, in addition to a further €10 million allocated for the property transfer of the state-owned land. This amount was covered by European funds (€14 million)



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16 The term 'crescent' is used to denote a series of housing units arranged in rows to form a unitary block along a semicircular perimeter.

17 <https://architecture-history.org/architects/architects/BOFILL/OBJ/1989,%20Port%20Juvenal,%20Montpellier,%20France.html> (last accessed March 2025).

18 <https://architecture-history.org/architects/architects/BOFILL/OBJ/1986,%20LES%20COLONNES%20DE%20SAINT-CHRISTOPHE,%20CERGY-PONTOISE,%20FRANCE.html> (last accessed March 2025).

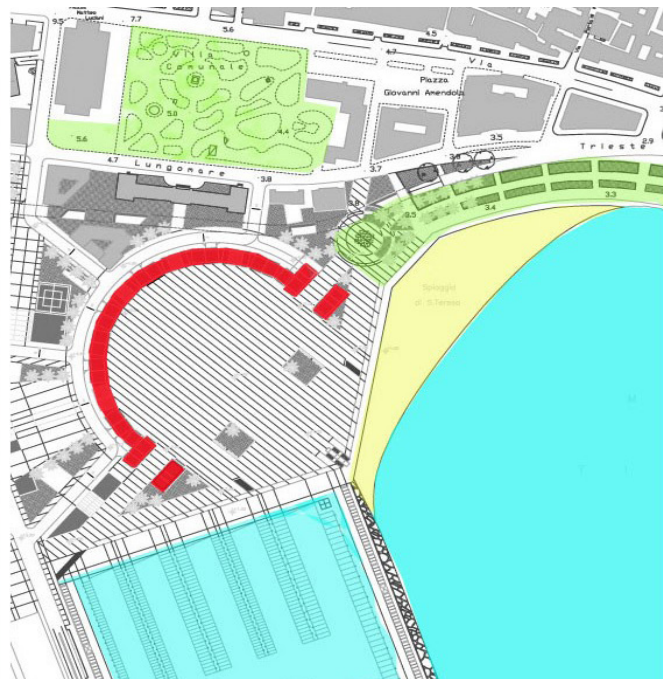
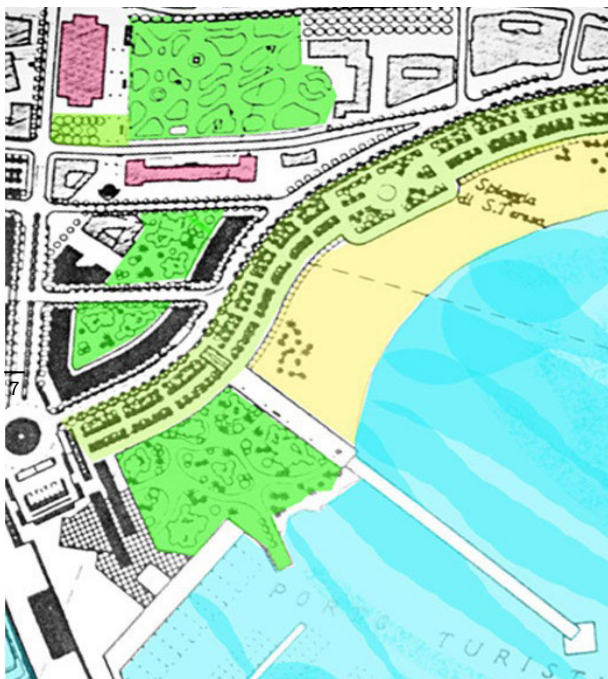
19 <https://architecture-history.org/architects/architects/BOFILL/OBJ/1992,%20Pa%20Soder%20Crescent,%20Stockholm,%20Sweden.html> (last accessed March 2025).

20 Comune di Salerno, *Indirizzi per la redazione del Pua di Santa Teresa*, May 25, 2007.

Fig. 7

From top to down, an image (on the right) and a sketch of respectively Port Juvenal, Les Colonnes de Saint-Christophe and Pa Soder Crescent. Source: Bofill Taller de Arquitectura.





and municipal funds coming from a loan of €24 million from the Italian bank Cassa Depositi e Prestiti).

### Controversy and Disputes over RBTA's Masterplan: from Crescent Retention to Sail Cancellation

Despite being awarded in 2007, the final version of the RBTA's project was showed only in a public presentation held on 18 March 2009 in Salerno City Hall.<sup>21</sup> Afterwards, controversy and dissent had emerged, leading to the formation of the "NoCrescent Committee", which was actively supported by Italia Nostra and joined by other associations, both at local (*I figli delle Chianchiarelle*) and national levels, including *Legambiente*, the *Stop al consumo di suolo* (Stop Soil Consumption) and *Salviamo il paesaggio* (Let's Save the Landscape) (Comitato NoCrescent, 2013). In addition, a total of 50 among academics and intellectuals, including Salvatore Settis (1941) and the planner Pier Luigi Cervellati (1936), issued an appeal to the Minister of Culture to publicly expressed their opposition to the masterplan, claimed to be «a speculative intervention of enormous proportions that, by bending to the logic of profitting from public land ... has already resulted in very serious damage to the protected heritage».<sup>22</sup>

The RBTA masterplan for the waterfront revitalization was blamed to

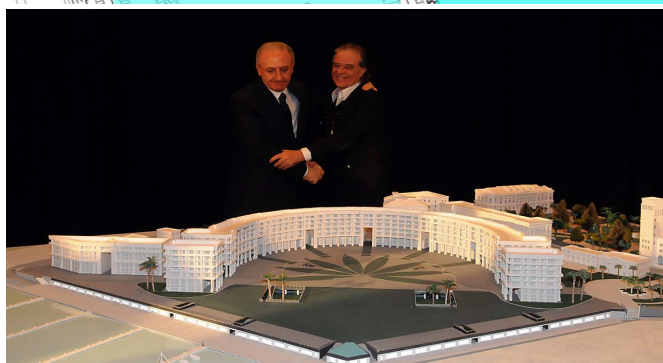


Fig. 8

In the left-hand design, MBM Architectes' proposal entails the continuation of the sea-front promenade in the direction of the marina, whilst maintaining the integrity of Santa Teresa beach. In the right-hand design, the RBTA's Crescent proposal. Source: Comune di Salerno (2007).

Fig. 9

The Crescent mockup, with Vincenzo De Luca and Riccardo Boffil. Source: Comune di Salerno (2009).

<sup>21</sup> De Luca, *Parte 1 Presentazione De Luca Piazza della Libertà Salerno*; Vincenzo De Luca, *Parte 2 Presentazione De Luca Piazza della Libertà Salerno*, 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Italia Nostra, *Crescent: un appello al Ministro Franceschini*, May 14, 2014, 1.

lack territorial coherence for the following reasons.<sup>23</sup> Firstly, the creation of a new urban environment out of context and out of scale with respect to the existing urban fabric, obstructing sea views, and overshadowing the city's historic center. Secondly, the privatization of strategic public sectors and open spaces for placing luxury functions. Thirdly, the excessive costs associated with land purchase, RBTA fees, and engineering and environmental complexities due to massive anthropization (including the sealing of sea, beach and Fusandola stream in a city hit by a fatal earthquake in 1980). Eventually, the top-down approach to the waterfront revitalization, with nor transparency or democratic engagement.

From 2009 to 2014, the NoCrescent Committee and Italia Nostra submitted over 30 complaints to the judicial authorities, citing numerous illegitimacies.<sup>24</sup> These included the incomplete clearance of the area, irregularities in the authorization process, and lack of the environmental impact assessment, which was never requested by the Regional Commission despite the detour of the Fusandola stream encumbered by at least three constraints.

The situation was further complicated by the collapse of 12 support pillars in the parking lot below the Crescent square due to design errors. In December 2013, the square was placed under seizure and only partially released in October 2014 to allow for safety works. In December 2014,



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Salerno City Council approved the modification of the Santa Teresa project in compliance with the prescriptions of the Superintendence.<sup>25</sup> This modification provided for a partial downsizing of the Crescent, entailing the elimination of the two towers, the reduction of the hemicycle to a 28-m height to not exceeding the city skyline, and other minor interventions [Fig. 10, 11]. Furthermore, the investigation into alleged irregularities

23 Marco Preve and Ferruccio Sansa, *La colata. Il partito del cemento che sta cancellando l'Italia e il suo futuro* (Milan: Chiarelettere, 2010), 419-438; Gaetano Troisi, *La grande Muraglia nel porto di Salerno. Come si sfregia una città* (Napoli: Contracorrente, 2013); Irina Di Ruocco, "The waterfront of Salerno: from product of urban regeneration to diffuser of sustainable urban equity," in *Partecipazione, inclusione e gestione dei conflitti nei processi di governo del territorio*, vol. 07, ed. Tedesco Carla and Elena Marchigiani (Rome-Milan: Planum Publisher e Società Italiana degli Urbanisti, 2024), 115-118.

24 Pietro De Rosa, "La riqualificazione urbana della città di Salerno e il caso del Crescent," *Amministrativ@mente*, no. 5-6 (2014): 11-15

25 Comune di Salerno, Piano Urbanistico Attuativo: Variante al sub\_1 del Comparto CPS\_1 Area S. Teresa di recepimento delle prescrizioni del parere BAP di SA\_AV del 27.10.2014 n. 168052, (2014).

Fig. 10, 11

Renders of the modified project for the Crescent (2018). Source: <http://www.crescent-salerno.it/gallery-e-rendering/>.



in the building of the Crescent commenced on 23 December 2014, with a total of 57 hearings held prior to the initial ruling in September 2018. Further 22 hearings were held for the Appeals trial. The first-instance trial in September 2018 culminated in acquittals, as did the appeal trial in July 2021.<sup>26</sup> In September 2022, the Supreme Court of Cassation upheld the ruling of the Salerno Court of Appeals, which had recognized the full legitimacy of the actions of then-Mayor Vincenzo De Luca, who was accused of abuse of office, and all the others – politicians and technicians – variously involved.<sup>27</sup>

While the project for the Crescent was modified and eventually completed in 2021 [Fig. 12], the City Council cancelled the RFTA's ideas for the Piazza della Concordia, Piazza Mazzini, and Masuccio Salernitano sector [Fig. 13], including the Sail tower, because its «construction in the central area of Salerno, occupying one of the few remaining open spaces in the city centre, would profoundly and irreversibly impacting the urban landscape ... A more rational and consistent approach would be to construct an extensive subterranean multi-level parking facility to fund the environmentally sustainable redevelopment of Mazzini Square».<sup>28</sup>

During the entire process, it is remarkable the persistence of the former Mayor towards the design and implementation of the RBTA's ideas. De Luca expressed a strong conviction in the merits of the project, perceiving it as a catalyst for the city's future development, up to the point that «I have conceptualized the city of the future with the Sail as a center of attraction, but the extraordinary thing is that it is not just a dream»,<sup>29</sup> because it «marks the beginning of modern Salerno since the 1960s and a functional place destined to become a symbol of Campania, the Southern Italy and the whole country»<sup>30</sup> and «it is a work worth my life...it must be our Plebiscite Square, our Colosseum...to stop it they will have to shoot me».<sup>31</sup> However, it remained questionable the absence of the RBTA in the local



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26 "De Luca assolto anche in Appello nel processo Crescent, crollano ancora le accuse della Procura", *Il Riformista*, July 23, 2022.

27 "Cassazione assolve De Luca e chiude la lunga vicenda giudiziaria del complesso immobiliare Crescent", *Occhi su Salerno*, September 15, 2022.

28 Comune di Salerno, Approvazione variante parziale al PUC "Salva Piazza della Concordia", 15.

29 De Luca, Parte 1 Presentazione De Luca Piazza della Libertà Salerno.

30 De Luca, Parte 2 Presentazione De Luca Piazza della Libertà Salerno.

31 Bocca, Il mostro del golfo di Salerno.

Fig. 12

Crescent in 2023. Source: Comune di Salerno.

Fig. 13

Salerno's waterfront today. Source: Author's elaboration from Google Earth (2025).

debate since the award of the international design competition,<sup>32</sup> as well as the omission of the project on Salerno waterfront in the architectural firm's website.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

According to a strategy that uses architectural firms following the example of global cities based on focus on design excellence, the less-told story of Salerno concentrated on the sea-front revitalization by landmark items that modified the local General Master Plan from the 1990s. The focus of this research lies in a subject that, regrettably, cannot be ascribed exclusively to Salerno or RBTA. This case study is also not the first of its kind, although Mayor De Luca overemphasized its significance as he intensively showed off about his flamboyant urban initiatives, giving the impression to be a sort of pioneer in this strategy of star-architects attracted in medium-sized cities.

As demonstrated by the RBTA masterplan for Salerno waterfront, the success of a star-architecture-led project does not depend on the quality of the designed building or the single urban project, but its relationship with a shared vision of the territory. The solo intervention planned for the Salerno seafront by RBTA imagined a new part of the city that involved a huge modification in terms of land-use and infrastructure without being in dialogue with the entire city. This aspect was in contradiction with what happened in the case of the 1992 Olympics held in Barcelona, whose waterfront revitalization was based on a shared scenario established at metropolitan level according to a system of new areas of centrality. Another critical issue characterizing the case study was whether the allocation of a substantial amount of public funds to the waterfront represented the most efficient use of resources for the benefit of local citizens. Although most of the expenditure was tied to the failed project centered on the Sail, the allocation of a large investment to a private luxury condominium with parking lot (Crescent) constituted a matter of concern. Beyond aesthetic considerations, the Crescent serves as an unfortunate example of private investment in public land triggered by a public entity. The reasons for the lack of public equipment and green spaces in the Crescent's surroundings, which would have positively impacted its acceptance by the public opinion, remain unclear.

Moreover, a more democratic governance process should have involved citizen participation through instruments such as a referendum or a real participative planning process, which would have facilitated a direct confrontation with the execution of the proposed transformation. The

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32 Alessandro Castagnaro, ed., "Dossier Salerno," *Rassegna ANIAI*26, no. 2-3 (2015), 2-105.

33 <https://ricardobofill.com/es/projects/> (last accessed March 2025).

incongruence of the RBTA project with the previous MBM Arquitectes-led General Master Plan was a politically-decided change and constituted a pivotal element in the redesign of the waterfront line. Instead of elaborating an impacting and high-costing proposal involving luxury structures like the Crescent and the Sail, others could have been the uses more in line with the territorial identity of Salerno. This is especially true for the Crescent, which, in its previous versions in other countries, was devoted mainly to social housing instead of high-end apartments. Despite these shortcomings, the Crescent constituted an urban intervention that has returned a portion of the city to its citizens, where previously there was only degradation. The strengths and weaknesses of the project can be determined through the use and users of the new spaces of this new sector of Salerno's waterfront, as well as its capacity to deal with possible threads coming from the fragile ecosystem of the waterfront and earthquakes.

To conclude, a broader investigation of various topics scarcely addressed by this research can involve three further works in order to confirm or clarify the results presented in this paper. Firstly, a more in-depth reflection and a graphic comparison with other projects in which the forms that RBTA resorts to in the Salerno project, such as the hemicycle and the sail, are used. Indeed, from the reflection induced by this comparative exercise, the reasons for the forms used in this project as well might emerge. Secondly, a comparative study in planimetric and volumetric terms of the two proposals by MBM and RBTA using their original drawings. This would allow for a critical judgment regarding urban qualities in support of one or the other proposal that can provide a truly original perspective on the subject. Eventually, surveys of MBM and RBTA architectural studios, policy-makers, citizens and other stakeholders involved in the case study, along with the enlargement of medium-sized cities could prove useful in further studies for detailing insights of the effects and implications related to the replication of star architecture projects from first- to second-tier cities.

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# Highrise Classicism: Ricardo Bofill and Taller de Arquitectura in the United States

*Postmodernism, Chicago Skyscrapers, Venezia Biennale 1980, New York MoMA and Architecture, Architectural Journals*

## /Abstract

A glance at the catalogue of works produced by Ricardo Bofill and his Taller de Arquitectura is enough to reveal their international ambitions. From Barcelona, the firm expanded to Paris, New York, Tokyo, Moscow and North Africa. But Taller de Arquitectura, established a special relationship of mutual respect with the architectural profession in the United States that lasted several decades and bore fruit in three unique architectural projects: two skyscrapers in Chicago and the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University in Houston.

This article analyses Taller de Arquitectura's relationship with the profession in the United States, taking into account not only its built work, but also its own writings, exhibitions of its projects in museums and galleries across the country and the development of design proposals for projects, both built and unbuilt, within this new cultural and economic context.

In short, the article provides a comprehensive overview of the more than thirty years during which Ricardo Bofill cultivated an intense intellectual and professional relationship with the United States, which contributed greatly to the development of his commitment to postmodern classicism.

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## Highrise Classicism: Ricardo Bofill and Taller de Arquitectura in the United States

At the end of the 1960s, Spanish architecture was hardly a reference for the profession in the United States. By then, few Spaniards had made their mark on the other side of the Atlantic. Catalanian architect Josep Lluís Sert was certainly seen as a leader; he participated in CIAM's US branch, served as Dean at Harvard's Graduate School for Design and built several buildings in New England and New York. But by the end of the 1970s Sert had been practicing for three decades in Boston, so US-based professionals would have viewed him more as an American than a Spaniard. Madrid architect Javier Carvajal received critical acclaim for his Spanish Pavilion at the 1964 New York World's Fair, which subsequently appeared in several American magazines. But apart from these and a few other noteworthy exceptions, modern Spanish architecture was almost entirely unknown in the United States. In fact, in the late 1970s and early 1980s *AIA Journal*, the official voice of the American Institute of Architects, presented Spain as a backwards hinterland, describing the country as "wild and remote at the uncharted western end of the Mediterranean."<sup>1</sup> It was as if some sectors of the profession in the United States refused to see Spain as anything other than a source of worn-out, traditional ideas.

Against this backdrop, from the late 1960s onward, the Catalanian firm Taller de Arquitectura established a relationship of mutual respect with the country that had given birth to the skyscraper. Lasting for several decades, this friendship gradually grew until it materialized in three singular built projects: two Chicago highrises and the Rice University School of Music in Houston.<sup>2</sup> Founded in 1963, Taller de Arquitectura was an innovative, multidisciplinary collaborative of forward-thinking designers, writers and artists including sibling architects Ricardo Bofill and Anna Bofill, along with Salvador Clotas, Ramón Collado, José Agustín Goytisolo, Joan Malagarriga, Manuel Núñez Yanowsky, Dolors Rocamora and Serena Vergano.<sup>3</sup> However, while the firm's initial appearances in US magazines sometimes acknowledged the work as that of Taller de Arquitectura, over time American editors and critics eventually attributed the work to Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura (RBTA), or even more frequently, simply to Ricardo Bofill.<sup>4</sup> For example, in an April 1988 article in the Los Angeles

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1 Norman Carver, "Villages of Iberia," *AIA Journal*, 71 no. 5 (1982): 48. The *AIA Journal's* insistence on seeing Spain as a backward hinterland was the focus of Brett Tippey, Íñigo Cobeta Gutiérrez, Marta García Carbonero and Laura Sánchez Carrasco, "From Folk to Modern: The AIA's Evolving Criticism of Spanish Architecture, 1975–1992", Architectural Transatlantic Dialogues Conference, October 2024, Escola Superior Artística do Porto, Portugal.

2 The studio also built the home of singer Paulina Rubio in Miami, but it is not analyzed in this article since it reflects personal relationships rather than professional circles.

3 Vincent Scully, "Ricardo Bofill: Vincent Scully Assesses the Radical Classicism of the Spanish Architect's Housing Projects," *Architectural Digest* 45 no. 4, (1988): 59.

4 In order to reveal the impressions American professionals would have had, throughout the article we attribute authorship of each project exactly as it is attributed in the US press.

edition of *Architectural Digest*, critic Vincent Scully centered his analysis of the firm's "radical classicism" on Bofill as a singular figure. Scully buried his only recognition of Taller de Arquitectura towards the end of the article, where he described the collective as "Bofill and his team."<sup>5</sup>

Bofill's acceptance in the United States resulted from several years of travels throughout the country, the growing critical acclaim his architecture and ideas on urban planning received in the US press, and a series of exhibitions and recognitions of his work. It also benefitted from the wide coverage of his European oeuvre, especially in journals dedicated to the professional public, such as *Architectural Forum*, *Architectural Record* and *Progressive Architecture*.

In contrast with Europe, Bofill noted significant differences in both the professional discipline and the role of the architect in American society.<sup>6</sup> In the US he discovered the ways in which market forces applied to the arts (including architecture), and it was here that he came to understand that "good architecture is good business for everybody."<sup>7</sup> As a self-proclaimed nomad, Bofill knew how to readily adapt to the changes provoked by his American adventures, yet without compromising his own interests:

"[...] This isn't about arriving in New York expecting to change the system, transplanting European methods or objectives. [...] What should we do, then? We submit to the system, we accept it, and then we take it, from the inside, to a higher level of beauty that it has yet to reach."<sup>8</sup>

In this article we will analyze Bofill's and Taller de Arquitectura's relationship with the profession in the United States over several decades, considering not only design proposals and built work in the US, but also its writings on and exhibitions of its oeuvre in museums and galleries across the country. On one hand, it will argue that Bofill's adaptation of classical motifs in his own buildings corresponded not only to the post-modern aesthetic that dominated the US at the time, but also to the widely held belief amongst American architects that Spain continued to be a viable source for older ideas. On the other hand, it will investigate the ways this new cultural and economic environment produced nuances in Bofill's architectural theory. It will also reveal that, although Bofill operated as the head of an innovative collective of architects (Taller de Arquitectura), the

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5 Scully, "Ricardo Bofill: Vincent Scully Aassesses the Radical Classicism of the Spanish Architect's Housing Projects", 59.

6 In this article, the term "American" is employed to mean "from the United States," a simplification that emerged from within the country itself and, although it constitutes an unjust metonymy, it is commonly accepted and enhances readability.

7 Ricardo Bofill and Jean-Louis André, *Espacio y vida* (Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 1990), 91. Translated into English by Brett Tippey from the original quote in Spanish: "una buena arquitectura es un buen negocio para todo el mundo."

8 Bofill and André, *Espacio y vida*, 103-104. Translated into English by Brett Tippey from the original quote in Spanish: "[...] no se trata de llegar a Nueva York esperando cambiar el sistema, trasplantar métodos u objetivos europeos. [...] ¿Qué hacer, entonces? Someterse al sistema, aceptarlo hasta llevarlo, desde dentro, a un grado de belleza que todavía no ha alcanzado."



US professional press presented the collective's projects to their US-based readers primarily as works created by a single architect: Ricardo Bofill.

## The Debut in the US

Their first projects quickly began to appear on the other side of the Atlantic following the firm's founding in Barcelona in 1963. With editor Peter Blake at the helm, in 1968 *Architectural Forum* rushed the publication of the Xanadú Condominium complex in Calpe on Spain's eastern coast, years ahead of the building's completion in 1971<sup>9</sup> *Forum* attributed this project to "Bofill-Arquitecto." Appearing alongside articles on Eero Saarinen's Gateway Arch in St. Louis and images of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill's John Hancock Tower in Chicago (then under construction), the article on Bofill's condos drew attention to fragmented volumes, vernacular gestures and impish combination of formal motifs. The article was written by English architect Peter Hodgkinson, who had collaborated with Taller de Arquitectura since 1966. Hodgkinson showed off the firm's bookish, eclectic and unconventional character to *Forum*'s American readers. To describe the project, Hodgkinson used Jimi Hendrix's lyrics, George Orwell's commentary on the Sagrada Familia and quotes from Robert Venturi and Reyner Banham. The following year *Forum* portrayed the 1968 Kafka's Castle in San Pere de Ribes (Barcelona), which it attributed to "Bofill Architectural Workshop"<sup>10</sup>. This time Hodgkinson's prose was more precise and conventional, and he openly acknowledged Archigram's influence over the project. *Forum*'s final piece on Taller de Arquitectura appeared in 1971. It presented an English-language translation of an article originally written in Spanish by José María Carandell.<sup>11</sup> Carandell described the collective's project for Barrio Gaudí in Reus, Gaudí's hometown, as an imaginative solution built with local materials and a flavor of Spain, "an underdeveloped economy [...] on the brink of becoming a consumer society."<sup>12</sup> Even more surprising, for *Forum*'s editors this project was so relevant to their American readers that they featured it on the cover.

After these initial exposures, Bofill visited the US for the first time in 1969. This trip sparked his first critical reflections on American architecture across a range of scales, from the regional to the individual building site. In subsequent writings, like his 1990 book *Espacio y vida*, he reiterated these reflections and references to the United States.<sup>13</sup>

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9 Peter Hodgkinson, "Xanadú in Spain," *Architectural Forum* 128, no. 5 (1968): 52-59.

10 ED., "Kafka's Castle," *Architectural Forum* 131, no. 4 (1969): 35-41.

11 "Barrio Gaudí," *Architectural Forum* 134, no. 4 (1971): 22-27. Text written by Jose Maria Carandell, "a well-known Spanish journalist" and translated from Spanish into English is by Tom Burgess.

12 "Barrio Gaudí," (1971): 25.

13 Of special interest is the chapter titled "En el seno de lo político y lo económico" ("In the bosom of politics and economics"), in which he included a conscientious review of skyscraper typology. See: Bofill and André, *Espacio y vida*, 81-114.

While Bofill was familiarizing himself with the profession in the United States, other US magazines joined Forum in noticing his work. Known for its readiness to publish innovative, forward-thinking projects, *Progressive Architecture* took interest in the office's work in the 1970s. The July 1975 issue used its "News" section to announce that Bofill/Taller de Arquetectura (sic) had won the competition for Les Halles thanks to a popular vote amongst the city's residents.<sup>14</sup> A few months later, in September 1975 it published a retrospective organized by British theorist Geoffrey Broadbent, titled "The Road to Xanadu and Beyond."<sup>15</sup> Broadbent's exhaustive analysis gave American architects a glimpse of the rapid evolution then underway in the studio: Taller de Arquitectura was quickly moving away from the artisanal vernacular of the first houses in Calpe, towards the classicism of Les Halles (never built) and the additive, modular composition of Barrio Gaudí (1968) and Muralla Roja (1973). *Progressive Architecture* even featured this last project on the issue's cover (figure 3, left). Broadbent's theoretical discussion linked Bofill's work with the central ideas then being postulated by architects in the US, such as Peter Eisenmann's "deep structures" (as Broadbent called them) or Robert Venturi's and Charles Moore's preference for symbolism over orthodox functionalism.<sup>16</sup> In fact, for *Progressive Architecture*, Bofill's reliance on symbolism was so relevant that the journal returned to the subject a year later in an article titled "To a Once and Future State". It featured Bofill's 1976 Le Perthus Pyramid, which Taller de Arquitectura envisioned as a postmodern homage to Bofill's native Catalonia.<sup>17</sup>

But these were not the only projects by the Taller that drew attention in US journals in the 1970s. Although throughout the 1970s and 1980s *AIA Journal* typically presented Spain as a backward hinterland, in October 1978 it did publish three projects designed by the office: Xanadu, Walden 7 and Muralla Roja. These buildings by Bofill were among the few modern Spanish buildings to appear in the journal prior to *El Milagro* of 1992, when Barcelona hosted the Olympics and Seville hosted the World's Fair. However, reiterating its treatment elsewhere of Spain as a backwards looking country, *AIA Journal* (renamed *Architecture* in 1983) described these buildings as the "natural descendant of Gaudí and the Moorish tradition." Clearly, for the editors of *Architecture* these projects were more

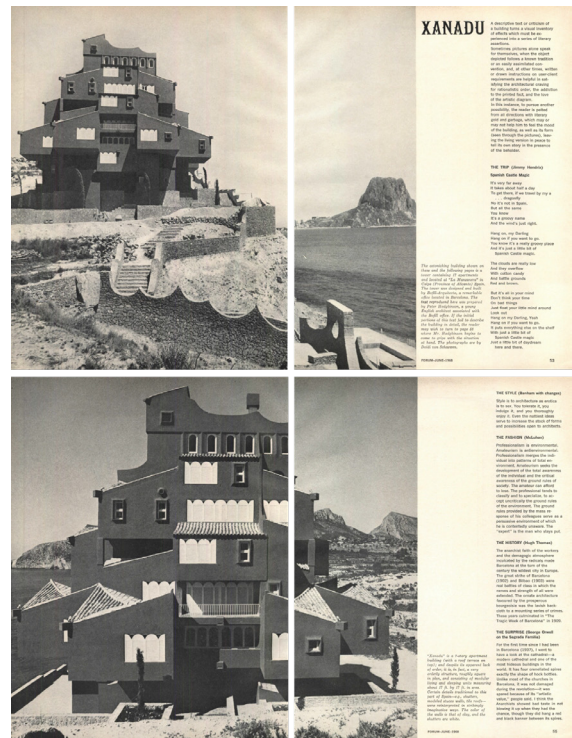


Fig. 1  
Inside pages of the June 1968 issue of *Architectural Forum* magazine dedicated to RT-BA's Xanadu complex.

14 "Parisian vote on Les Halles project," *Progressive Architecture*, no. 7 (1975): 22.

15 Geoffrey Broadbent, "The road to Xanadu and beyond," *Progressive Architecture*, no. 9 (1975): 68-83.

16 Broadbent, "The road to Xanadu and beyond", 76.

17 Eleni Constantine, "To a once and future state," *Progressive Architecture*, no. 5 (1979): 90-91.



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past than present.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, author Nory Miller included Taller de Arquitectura in a broader investigation of the greatest architects of the 20th Century. Miller used a direct quote from Bofill to introduce the Taller's projects: "Through color, architecture can be brought to life, a living breath to animate the coldness of the building."<sup>19</sup> For Miller, Bofill no longer represented the faraway Spanish Mediterranean, but an authority on color in architecture.

Charles Jencks and Arthur Drexler also contributed to Bofill's expanding presence in the United States and abroad. Their books published in the 1970s helped to establish Bofill's image as a singular architect, thereby downplaying the role of the Taller. In his 1971 book *Architecture 2000: Predictions and Methods*, Charles Jencks included Bofill in Chapter 7 ("The intuitive tradition"), alongside Hans Hollein and Archigram. For Jencks, the common thread among these three architects was that they all intended to improve architecture by incorporating references outside of itself.<sup>20</sup> Jencks also noted that, for Archigram, Hollein and Bofill, form was an end unto itself. As evidence, Jencks offered Bofill's Xanadú and Kafka's Castle. Likewise, the chapter titled "Historicizing", in Drexler's 1979 MoMA exhibit catalog *Transformations in Modern Architecture*, praised Le Perthus [Fig. 2] not for looking forward, but rather for flirting with history.<sup>21</sup> Although the exhibit also included Spaniards Miguel Fisac, Francisco Javier Sáenz de Oíza, Lluís Clotet and Óscar Tusquets, Bofill was the only one to maintain a consistent presence in the United States thereafter.

By the end of the 1970s Bofill and Taller de Arquitectura became known in the United States for creating architecture that emerged from an eclectic and constantly changing array of influences. This incipient success was confirmed by US-based awards such as the American Society

Fig. 2

"Transformation in Modern Architecture", MoMA exhibition (1979). On the left is the Xanadu project in the foreground. In the center of the second image, on the right, is Le Perthus pyramid. MoMA, accessed November, 2024, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1773>. Left: Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN1250.10. Photograph by Mali Olatunji / Right: Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. 250.15. Photograph by Mali Olatunji.

18 Nory Miller, "The Re-Emergence of Color as a Design Tool," *AIA Journal* 67, no. 12 (1978): 41-55.

19 Miller, "The Re-Emergence of Color as a Design Tool", 49.

20 Charles Jencks, *Architecture 2000: Predictions and Methods* (Praeger Publishers, 1971), 93-95.

21 Arthur Drexler, *Transformation in Modern Architecture* (New York: MoMA, 1979), 162. The exhibition catalog only included the Le Perthus pyramid, but the exhibition itself also included a photograph of Xanadú.

of Interior Designers International Prize in 1978 and their growing presence in *Progressive Architecture* [Fig. 3] and other publications.<sup>22</sup>

### Postmodern Classicism

The circulation in the United States of Bofill's work increased throughout the 1980s. US-based press outlets readily embraced Bofill's recent turn towards the classicist idiom, perhaps influenced by the spirit of the moment and the wide reception of two exhibits separated by five years. The first of these events was the 1975 MoMA exhibit "The Architecture of the École des Beaux-Arts." A half-century had passed since the heroic period of modern architecture, which by 1975 was facing increasingly intense critique and scrutiny. Arthur Drexler's exhibition catalog mused that this show attempted to investigate what lessons the contemporary vanguard might learn from history. And Drexler posited the nineteenth century as a prime source.

The other event was the first annual Venice Biennale, directed by Paolo Portoghesi in 1980, titled "The Presence of the Past". In *Architectural Record's* March 1981 interview with Robert A. M. Stern, Taller de Arquitectura-Ricardo Bofill's façade fragment appeared alongside those of other noteworthy American architects such as Frank Gehry, Michael Graves, Hans Hollein, Charles Moore and Venturi/Rausch/Scott Brown.<sup>23</sup> But readers did not have to content themselves with viewing the facades of the Venice Biennale only from photographs. "The Presence of the Past" traveled from Venice to Paris, then to the Fort Mason Center in San Francisco from May to July 1982. Here, American architects could see Bofill's façade in person and touch it physically.

It was a good moment for the classical idiom in the United States, and *Progressive Architecture* dedicated an entire issue to the topic in October 1981. In this issue Taller de Arquitectura/Ricardo Bofill's work was literally front and center. The firm's Le Viaduc project in Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, France, was featured on the cover (figure 3, right). Inside the issue, editor John Morris Dixon situated Les Arcades du Lac-Le Viaduc among the most impressive and successful projects for the *villes nouvelles* designed to relieve congestion in Paris.<sup>24</sup> A year earlier, Dixon had



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Fig. 3

Two covers of *Progressive Architecture* magazine with RBTA's work. To the left, the Muralla Roja on September 1975 issue. To the right, Les Arcades du Lac-Le Viaduc on October 1981 issue.

<sup>22</sup> Warren A. James, *Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura: Buildings and projects 1960-1985* (Rizzoli New York, 1988), 215.

<sup>23</sup> Charles K. Gande, "Behind the Facades: a conversation with Robert A.M. Stern," *Architectural Record*, no. 3 (1981): 108-113.

<sup>24</sup> John Morris Dixon, "Wageearners' Versailles," *Progressive Architecture*, no. 10 (1981): 94-97.



reported on these newly created cities, applauding Le Viaduc's successes:

The brilliant, unpredictable designers from Catalonia are combining 18th-Century formalism with 20th-Century technique to give the Paris new towns one of their few truly precedent-shattering landmarks.<sup>25</sup>

In that same issue, Dixon cited Peter Hodgkinson, who recognized the expedience of a return to classical ideas in architecture. But Hodgkinson asserted that Taller de Arquitectura effected this return to history by making use of the most up-to-date prefabricated construction systems. This paradoxical blend of the old and the new echoed Bofill's contribution to the Venice Biennale. The oversized keystone and exaggerated rustication of his façade presaged his later use of precast concrete to reclaim classical forms or, as he quipped, to "prefabricate the Renaissance."<sup>26</sup>

*Progressive Architecture* continued this discourse by publishing *Les Espaces d'Abraxas* exactly one year later, in October 1982.<sup>27</sup> From that point onward, *Progressive Architecture* gradually lost interest in the firm's work, as well as the broader postmodern movement. But *Architectural Record* quickly took up the cause and eventually became Taller de Arquitectura's primary connection with the United States. With Walter F. Wagner as *Record's* editor, in 1986 the magazine published three of Bofill's latest projects in France in its engineering section, a surprising place to discuss projects driven by formalism and Classical motifs. Moreover, by including these European buildings, *Record* contradicted its own ostensive goal of focusing on the latest developments in the profession within the United States.

Debora K. Dietsch's headline ("Precast Classicism") and opening paragraph stressed the paradox and irony apparent in Bofill's work.<sup>28</sup> Dietsch highlighted the virtuosity of the application of precast concrete in residential buildings in three housing projects (*Les Echelles du Baroque* in Paris, *Les Espaces d'Abraxas* in Marne-la-Vallée and the *Green Crescent* in Cergy Pontoise) a sector in which the material and construction technique were uncommon.<sup>29</sup> Simultaneously, the Max Protetch Gallery in New York attested the fact that the interaction between classical forms and modern construction techniques was central to Taller de Arquitectura's work. Having established its position as a preeminent venue for avant-garde ideas and the progressive work of young architects since 1978, in Autumn 1986 the Protetch organized an entire

25 John Morris Dixon, "Environs de Paris," *Progressive Architecture*, no. 9 (1980): 67.

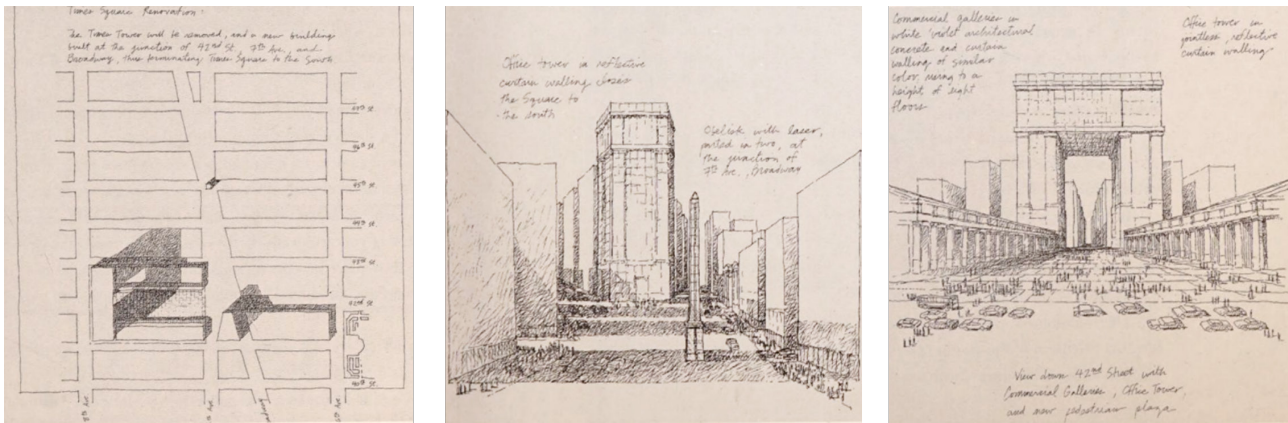
26 Fondazione MAXXI, "Dentro La Strada Novissima," [https://www.maxxi.art/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/MAXXI-StradaNovissima-PressKit\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.maxxi.art/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/MAXXI-StradaNovissima-PressKit_ENG.pdf). (Accessed on July 31, 2025).

27 Barry Bergdoll, "Subsidized Doric," *Progressive Architecture*, no. 10 (1982): 74-79.

28 Deborah K. Dietsch, "Precast Classicism," *Architectural Record*, no. 1 (1986): 131.

29 *Architectural Record*, no. 1 (1986): "Neo-Baroque in Paris," 132-134; "The Theater, the Palace and the Arch," 135-139; "New Georgian, New Town," 140.





exhibition on the office titled “Ricardo Bofill, Taller de Arquitectura: The City, Classicism and Technology.”<sup>30</sup>

Thanks to Dixon and Dietsch, Taller de Arquitectura acquired new recognition among US-based practitioners. Their recent successes in Paris showed Americans that these Spanish architects were no wild and remote bumpkins. Instead, their ideas were both contemporary and relevant for similar projects in the United States. The firm’s trend towards classicism and away from regional and vernacular sources made its work even more germane to market forces in the US in the 1980s. Bofill-style Classicism afforded precisely the kind of legibility and monumentality that capitalist-minded American clients wanted. Not surprisingly, commissions for Bofill and the Taller to design US-based projects quickly followed.

In the early 1980s, Taller de Arquitectura designed a pair of never-built and little-known projects for sites in the US, including a 1980 residential complex in Houston and a 1984 urban design competition to revamp downtown Escondido, California.<sup>31</sup> More media-worthy was the invited competition for a private residence and winery in California’s Napa Valley, convened by the founders of vintner Clos Pegase in collaboration with the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Ultimately, the team formed by Michael Graves and Edward Schmidt took first place and eventually built their proposal. But SFMoMA displayed Bofill’s entry in its corresponding exhibition on the competition.<sup>32</sup>

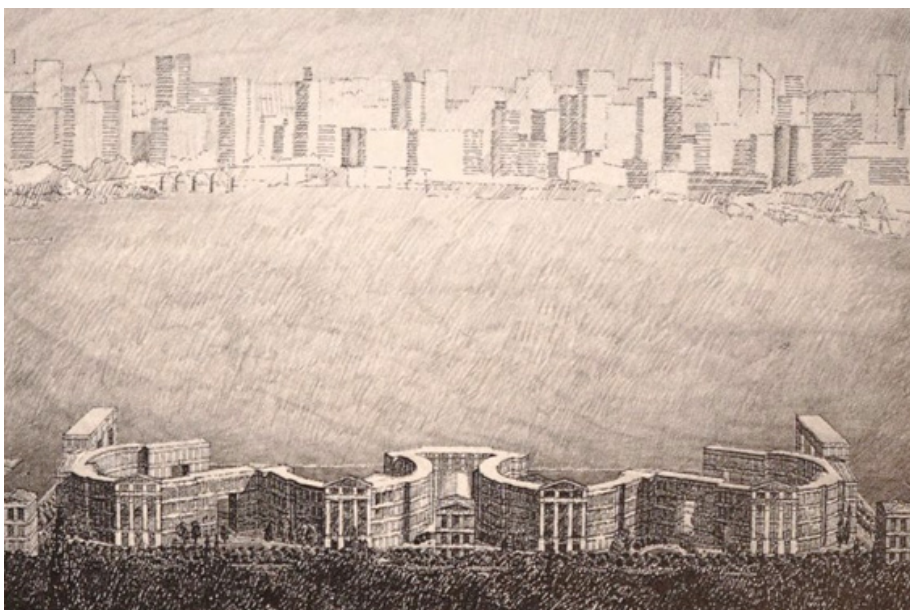
That same year (1984), Taller de Arquitectura was also unsuccessful in another important competition convened by The Municipal Art Society to remodel Times Square, which received 565 entries. This time the competition focused on stimulating debate about urbanism and the problem of the city, following the controversy generated by Johnson’s and Burgee’s previous plan. Taller de Arquitectura’s proposal explored an integration of

Fig. 4  
Proposal for the redevelopment of Times Square, New York. From left to right: site plan showing the full proposal, image of the tower at the intersection with Broadway and office building on the west side. In: James, Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura: 153. Drawings: Archivo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura.

30 The exhibitions held at the Max Protetch Gallery in the 1980s can be consulted on its web site: <https://www.maxprotetch.com/home-2-4-2>. Accessed on January 20, 2025.

31 The project in Houston and the Escondido competition are mentioned in Warren A. James, *Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura: Buildings and projects 1960-1985* (Rizzoli New York, 1988), 210-212.

32 James, *Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura*, 217.



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pedestrian space, architectural elements and New York's famous grid that recalled bygone historical periods [Fig. 4]. These elements included an obelisk cloven in two by a laser beam, a triangular tower at the intersection with Broadway and an office complex that emulated a triumphal arch with its two towers unified by an upper bridge. Formally speaking, this last component recalled his 1982 proposal for the Arche de la Défense in Paris.

In 1985 the firm took on another urban development project, the Port Imperial in New Jersey, on the banks of the Hudson River.<sup>33</sup> In this case, the site faced Midtown Manhattan, one of the world's most emblematic skylines.<sup>34</sup> This unique American context dominated Bofill's thinking during the design phases. The project arranged over 2000 dwelling units and a diverse array of services around two symmetrical, circular plazas that opened views towards the Manhattan silhouette. The less desirable view (towards New Jersey) was obscured by a rhythmic composition of four narrow porticoes [Fig. 5]. The original version included a campanile and three urban voids of varying shapes, while the subsequent plan was more geometric and uniform. Both the composition of urban space and its individual elements came from the classical European tradition, yet Bofill respected the singularity of this new context and described the project as "un projet sculpté, des espaces traités de manière classique, mais en tenant compte de l'échelle de New York."<sup>35</sup> In the 1980s he used a similar urban strategy in a housing project (never built) located on the outskirts of Chicago, which he described in *Espacio y vida* as a Greek theater around which he organized residential towers, 150 meters in height. Again, the central void opened onto views of the city.<sup>36</sup>

33 James, *Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura*, 174-179.

34 Bofill and André, *Espacio y vida*, 38.

35 Annabelle D'Huart, *Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura* (Milano: Electa Moniteur, 1989), 151.

36 Bofill and André, *Espacio y vida*, 132.

Fig. 5

Port Imperial, New Jersey. Second version with Manhattan skyline in the background. In: James, Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura: 179. Drawing: Archivo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura.

1985 was a prolific year in Bofill's activity in the United States. He designed the unbuilt Urban Palace in New York's Upper West Side. This corner residential structure housed 120 units divided into two volumes differentiated by height but united by pilasters and bay windows. He described this building as "the first serious attempt to deal with other architectural issues present in the United States which are not perceived from a European point of view."<sup>37</sup> Mostly, these "issues" boiled down to the distinction between public and private space according to the American mindset.

As evidence of the reputation Bofill had built in US professional circles, that same year the American Institute of Architects named him Honorary Fellow. Bofill was the fourth Spaniard to earn this award. He followed Luis Jesús Arizmendi (1972), Juan González Cebrián (1975) and Rafael de La-Hoz (1980). But Bofill's naming as Honorary Fellow preceded, by several years, those of other noteworthy Spaniards: Oriol Bohigas (1993), Rafael Moneo (1993), Juan Bassegoda Nonell (1994) and Ignasi de Solà-Morales (1995).

But Bofill's greatest achievement in the US in 1985 was MoMA's exhibition titled *Ricardo Bofill and Leon Krier: Architecture, Urbanism, and History*, held between 26 June and 13 September. Curated by Arthur Drexler, it was the first of five shows financed by the Gerald D. Hines Interests Architecture Program to recognize new trends. In the following years the Hines program financed four other exhibitions, three of which focused on the work of other leading foreign architects: Mario Botta (1986–1987), Emilio Ambasz (1989, with Steven Holl) and Tadao Ando.<sup>38</sup> In the first exhibit, MoMA rejected modernity in favor of classical architecture and its ability to revitalize cities. To emphasize this point, Drexler organized a symposium with Robert A. M. Stern, Colin Rowe and the show's protagonists, Bofill and Krier, on 27 June 1985, one day after the exhibition opening. The symposium speakers opined about the ability of architectural tradition to enrich contemporary architecture. Despite obvious differences in their work and speech, the exhibition transformed Bofill and Krier into elegant dance partners. *Record's* Roger Kimball perceived two crucial differences in the exhibit's material.<sup>39</sup> One of these differences was the relationship between form and technique. While Bofill embraced modern construction materials and processes, such as precast concrete, Krier rejected them to the point of inciting a return to load-bearing stone walls. This discrepancy was already apparent in Krier's and Bofill's writings. Krier was much more antagonistic towards modern architecture, while Bofill openly accepted the ideas of Mies van der Rohe and Alvar Aalto. The other difference was

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<sup>37</sup> James, *Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura*, 166.

<sup>38</sup> Mario Botta (20-11-1986 / 10-02-1987), Emilio Ambasz y Steven Holl (09-02-1989 / 04-04-1989) y Tadao Ando (03-10-1991). The fourth exhibition focused on Deconstructivist Architecture (23-06-1988 / 30-08-1988).

<sup>39</sup> Roger Kimball, "In search of the ideal city: The architecture of Ricardo Bofill and Leon Krier," *Architectural Record*, no. 8 (1985): 77.



apparent in each architect's response to Drexler's invitation to design a project for New York to be shown in the exhibition. Based on his disdain for the city's high density, Krier ignored Drexler's proposed New York location, choosing instead to work in the setting of Pierre L'Enfant's neo-classical Washington DC. But Bofill accepted the challenge and took his first stab at the skyscraper as a quintessential American type. The result was the never-built Jefferson Tower.

Bofill had already declared that the skyscraper had no place in the European context, but he fully appreciated its worth in the American city. He even affirmed that, as a type, the skyscraper could not easily or rationally be transferred to any other continent because it was the perfect embodiment of the American capitalist system.<sup>40</sup> As Bofill retraced the history of the skyscraper, he highlighted the stylistic variability that the type underwent in its earliest days, the subsequent formalist simplification that culminated in the 1940s and its transition towards weightlessness and transparency in the works of Mies van der Rohe and SOM in the 1950s.<sup>41</sup> And regarding function, he claimed that the skyscraper's greatest virtue was the views it gave its inhabitants.<sup>42</sup>

By the 1980s, it was time for another revolution in skyscraper design, and Bofill used the Jefferson Tower to project his own contributions to the development of this American type. The elevation drawing of the Jefferson Tower occupied the terminus of the main axis in the MoMA exhibition, and it extended from the gallery's floor to its ceiling [Fig. 6]. Bofill designed the skyscraper for a fictitious site in New York's Upper East Side and he highlighted its slenderness. The tower's footprint, measuring 30 meters by 30 meters, and the maximum height of 210 meters—self-imposed by Bofill—allowed him to evenly divide the façade into seven perfect cubes stacked in a classical tripartite organization.<sup>43</sup> The five middle cubes formed the central shaft, each separated by a double cornice and housing ten floors. According to Paul Goldberger, Bofill's lowest and highest cubes, serving as

Fig. 6

Two views of the section dedicated to Ricardo Bofill in the MoMA exhibition "Ricardo Bofill and Leon Krier: Architecture, Urbanism, and History" (1985). MoMA, accessed November 2024, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1778>. Left: Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN1402.5A. Photograph by Kate Keller. / Right: Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN1402.2B. Photograph by Kate Keller.

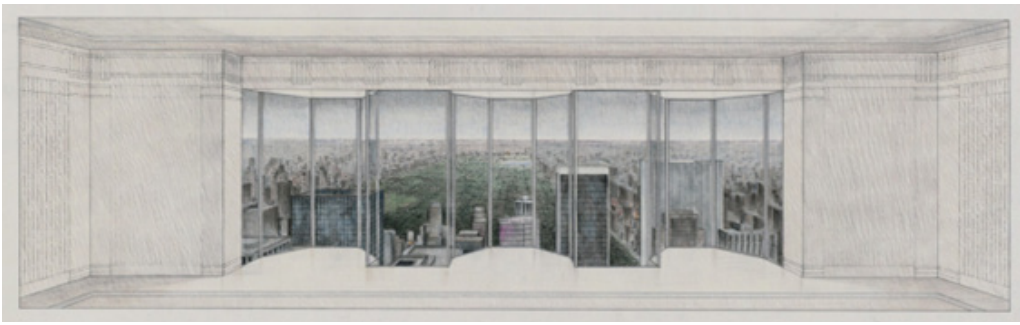
40 Bofill and André, *Espacio y vida*, 99.

41 Bofill and André, *Espacio y vida*, 100.a

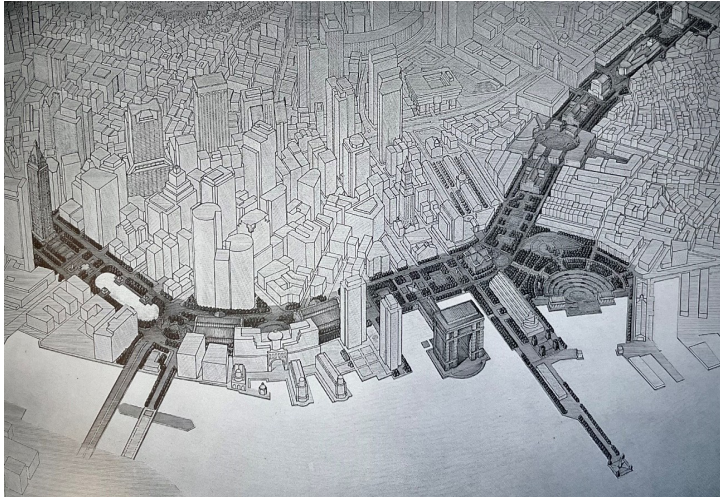
42 Bofill and André, *Espacio y vida*, 99.

43 James, *Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura*, 172-173.





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base and capital, followed a compositional strategy that “applies classical devices more successfully to the problem of the skyscraper than most of Mr. Bofill’s predecessors have been able to do.”<sup>44</sup> But for Bofill the Jefferson Tower presented a problem that he would attempt to resolve in future skyscraper designs: the façade was 40% solid, a composition that significantly diminished the skyscraper’s most characteristic and valuable quality: its views [Fig. 7].

With the exposure provided by MoMA, and the foresight that Bofill’s ideas would quickly materialize in built work, Taller de Arquitectura opened its New York office in 1987. That same year, Boston’s Central Artery project [Fig. 8] offered the collaborative a unique opportunity to explore its ideas on the urban scale. For several years the city had carefully studied multiple options to bury the interstate highway that bifurcated the downtown and to investigate solutions to convert the highway’s ground-level footprint into usable urban space. Among the competition’s many entries only four, including Taller de Arquitectura’s, advanced to the stage of public comment. The other three proposals that accompanied it were submitted by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), Alex Krieger (then Associate Chair of GSD’s Department of Architecture) and the Central Artery Task Force of the Boston Society of Architects.<sup>45</sup> Bofill and the Taller proposed a

Fig. 7

Interior perspective. Jefferson tower (1985). MoMA, accessed January 2025, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/467>. © 2025 Ricardo Bofill.

Fig. 8

RBTA proposal for Boston Central Artery (1987). In: Annabelle D’Huart, Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura, (Electa Moniteur, 1989), 163. Drawing: Archivo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura.

44 Paul Goldberger, “Architecture view; embracing Classicism in different ways,” *New York Times*, June 30, 1985.

45 See: Avigail Shimshoni, “The Central Artery Project in Boston: A Museum to Grow With,” (Master Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1992), 53-67.





unified composition that connected directly with the port along a bending axis that terminated in spaces designed according to historic European urban design strategies.<sup>46</sup> Bofill had recently completed part of a similar project, Los Jardines del Turia in Valencia.

The result of this design competition demonstrates the level of respect Bofill had earned by then in the US professional community: BRA hired Bofill as a consultant for the continued development of the project, along with his competitor Krieger. The final version of the Central Artery was inaugurated in 2008 as the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway.<sup>47</sup>

## The Materialization of Ideas

In 1988 MoMA opened “Deconstructivist Architecture,” the third of the exhibits financed by the Gerald D. Hines Foundation. By then both the profession and academia had begun to tire of Postmodernism’s excesses. But many US clients, like universities and large corporations, were smitten with the style’s symbolic value and contrived sense of history. Such was the context for Taller de Arquitectura’s first two commissions to build important projects on US soil. Both came from clients that continued to place their bets on classicism’s sustained value in the US marketplace.

Construction on Bofill’s first built work in the United States, Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music in Houston, finished in 1991. The US professional press’s wide coverage of Taller de Arquitectura’s housing projects in France must have had an impact. Dr. Michael Hammond, Dean of the School of Music, confirmed to *Architectural Record* in 1992 that the committee’s selection of Bofill’s office was motivated by “the need for the ‘neutrality of Classicism.’”<sup>48</sup> In plan, the school’s composition organized the various functions around interior patios, while the compact red brick façade, with its blocky entablature and its overscaled engaged columns

46 Shimshoni, “The Central Artery Project in Boston,” 55.

47 Alex Krieger, *Boston 2000. A Plan for The Central Artery Progress Report* (City of Boston, 1990), 35. Bofill’s proposal could not be built because the plan approved in 1991 required more green space and fewer buildings than in Bofill’s version.

48 Gerald Moorhead, “Classical Music,” *Architectural Record*, no. 3 (1992): 76.

Fig. 9

Main facade of the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University, Houston. RBTA website. Archivo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura.

in a quasi Doric order, complemented Ralph Adams Cram's (1863–1942) original design for the campus [Fig. 9]. For Bofill, this solution, "tinged here with critical regionalism," adapted Classicism to Houston.<sup>49</sup>

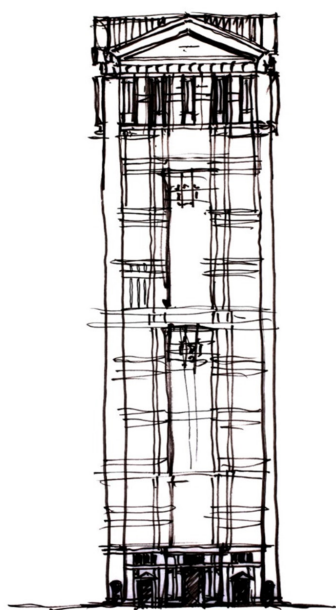
But for American observers it was more than an adaptation. In *Architectural Record*, Gerald Moorhead wrote that this project combined "monastic, Mediterranean and Wrightian imagery."<sup>50</sup> The first adjective paired the lives of monks with those of the musicians that would use the building, because both lifestyles require great discipline and hours of solitary concentration. Moorhead's parallel was evident in the building's cloister-like organization of multiple practice cells. His second reference, to the Mediterranean tradition, stemmed from the building's axial organization along two streets that divide the building into quarters. For Moorhead, this strategy was reminiscent of the urban plan of Roman cities. Moorhead also recognized the building's use of interior patios with fountains and channels of water, which he connected to Islamic spatial ideas. Perhaps most surprisingly, Moorhead linked the building's horizontality, asymmetry and insistence in crowning the colonnade with a heavy entablature to similar compositional strategies in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, whom Bofill had praised on multiple occasions. Moorhead also pointed out the facade's subtle curvature, the alternation between square and circular columns, and the variation between double and single height. These aspects integrated the building into a campus in which all the buildings, irrespective of their style or year of construction, were built with orange brick and gray limestone. In these ways, Bofill maintained the inertia of his European sources, yet he replaced the limestone with precast concrete, which gave the columns a greater sense of monumentality because they could be manufactured in a single piece.

Taller de Arquitectura developed the Shepherd School of Music in parallel with Bofill's first skyscraper, 77 West Wacker Drive in Chicago, which finished construction in 1992 [Fig. 10]. This project resolves his self-critique of the Jefferson Tower's all-too-solid façade. On West Wacker Drive, Bofill and partners transformed the Jefferson's heaviness into a much lighter object. Bofill had already used this strategy in a project for northern Manhattan: Central Park North (New York, 1988, never built). More ambitious than a single tower, Bofill designed the project as a series of skyscrapers that would become Harlem's new façade towards Central Park. One drawing incorporated the historic pyramidal setbacks of New York's 1916 zoning regulations [Fig. 11, left]. The tower was a stack of rectangular volumes in which each piece took on a different formal solution: solid and massive at the base, a combination of glass and solid in the shaft, and slenderer and more transparent at the top.

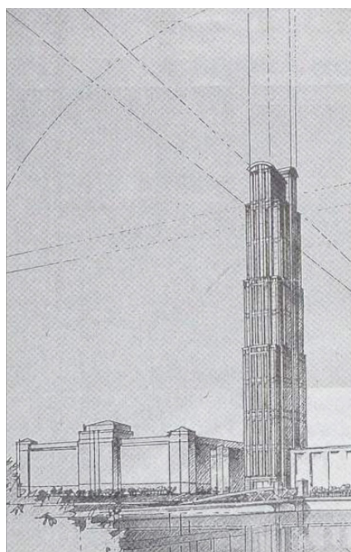
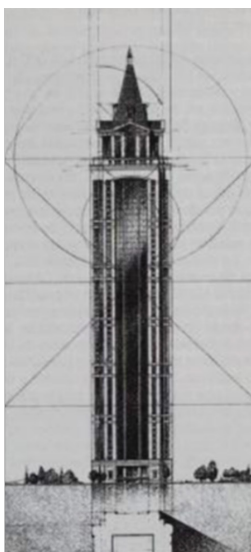
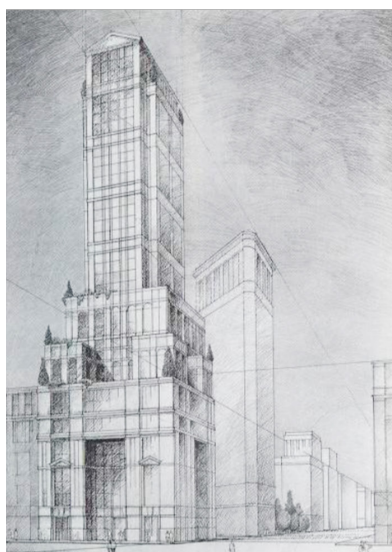
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49 D'Huart, *Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura*, 154. Translated from the original French by Brett Tippey: "se teinte ici de régionalisme critique".

50 Moorhead, "Classical Music", 75.



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Fig. 10  
Sketch and image of 77  
Wacker Drive building. RBTA  
website. Drawings: Archivo  
Bofill Taller de Arquitectura.

Fig. 11  
Unbuilt skyscrapers proposal  
in the United States. From  
left to right: Central Park  
North, NY (1988); Houston  
Lighting & Power (1990); 300  
North Lasalle, Chicago (1990).  
In: Cruells, Ricardo Bofill  
Obras y Proyectos: 141, 145,  
147. Drawings: Archivo Bofill  
Taller de Arquitectura.

Bofill reprised this idea for the site in Chicago. But this time the solution was even more materially and volumetrically unified. Bofill was convinced that the developers had trusted his sense of Classicism “because they do not want International Style architecture and its coldly ostentatious materials. When you live in the country of steel and triumphant industry, you dream of stone and tradition.”<sup>51</sup> So, on the shore of the Chicago River he proposed a dialogue between white Portuguese granite and the up-to-date technology of silver-gray glass and curtain wall construction. In the façade he used stone only to emphasize the structural and organizational lines with a mannerist’s sense of symbolism. For the crown he recurred to the temple archetype that he had used so often in his European projects, but this time without compromising transparency. The stone demarcated the compositional lines of the gable, cornice and triglyphs, while he filled the tympanum and metopes with glass. He also highlighted the base, constructed entirely of stone interspersed with voids that terminated with pediments according to the Renaissance strategy of alternating geometries. The shaft was much lighter in appearance and was subdivided vertically into three zones defined by triple-height panes of glass. The plan, nevertheless, is arranged in a conventional core-and-shell organization. The recessed corners provided a unique yet efficient means of resolving and illuminating the corner offices. After it was completed in the early 1990s this combination of solid and fragile materials was attractive even to Hollywood. In the 1998 crime thriller film *The Negotiator*, Samuel L. Jackson played wrongfully accused Chicago police officer Danny Roman, who holds hostages inside Bofill’s building as a last resort in his demand for justice. Despite the inevitable gunshots and explosions, this skyscraper-temple stood strong.

In 1990, Bofill further refined these ideas in two never built skyscrapers: the Houston Lighting and Power Building and 300 North LaSalle in Chicago. The Houston tower maintained 77 West Wacker’s core-and-shell plan and recessed the corners, although with a double setback. But in this building he invented two new solutions for the exterior volume. He converted the façade’s central module into a single, multistorey pane of glass and, he topped off the building with a Gothic needle, whose four facades and cruciform plan again resembled a temple [Fig. 11, center]. Although the project advanced through several development stages and even had a projected date of construction, it was never built.

The project for 300 North LaSalle in Chicago also demonstrated Bofill’s willingness to question his own prior critiques of skyscraper design. Previously, Bofill had rejected the use of multiple overlapping elevator shafts, a strategy used by some skyscraper architects to gain additional

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51 Bofill and André, *Espacio y vida*, 81-82. Translated into English by Brett Tippey from the original quote in Spanish: “(...) porque ya no quieren arquitectura internacional y sus materiales fríamente ostentosos. Cuando se vive en el país del acero y la industria triunfante, se sueña con la piedra y la tradición.”

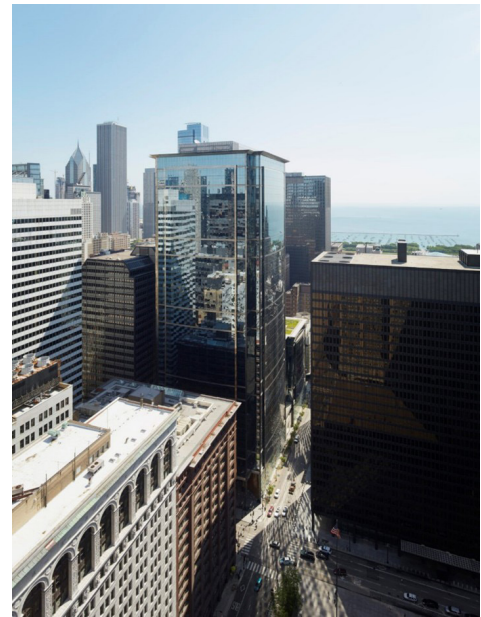
height. But here, Bofill used precisely this same strategy. As it rose the tower grew ever slenderer, and he demarcated each of the shaft's four parts with pairs of four-story windows framed between exaggerated vertical lines. Again, he differentiated the upper part with a cruciform plan and four identical facades, but this time he crowned each of them with a shallow curving pediment [Fig. 11, right]. These solutions fulfilled the image of the skyscraper as Bofill comprehended it: "To understand the mechanisms secreted by this strange object, the skyscraper; to study the capitalist system; and, as a result, to synthesize these with my own aesthetic disposition."<sup>52</sup>

Following these projects the US professional press continued to promote Bofill's European projects. His continued presence in the United States was partly due to his work, along with other Spanish architects, for the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona. By then, Bofill had earned his own place among the most referenced architects in the United States.<sup>53</sup>

At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, he built his last Chicago skyscraper, 131 South Dearborn Street (2003), across the street from Mies van der Rohe's John C. Kluczynski Building [Fig. 12]. The building sits on a half-block and is divided in two parts vertically. At the intersection of Adams and State Streets, an eleven-story volume is veiled from the surrounding context. At the intersection of South Dearborn and Adams Streets, its thirty-five stories sit catacorner from Calder's Flamingo. Among Bofill's long list of designs for skyscrapers, this building, more than any other, has the most cohesive aesthetic. Although the vertical division of the building's forms is clear thanks to the double lines of stainless steel, the tall form is composed as a single classical shaft built of reflective glass. Both volumes are capped by a flat cornice that overhangs and offsets the perimeter and reveals a subtle curvature in the curtain wall. Having spent years introducing European elements into this quintessential American type, with this building, the most American of his skyscrapers, the Catalanian bid *adéu* to his adoptive country.

## A Legacy of Classical Rigor

Between the construction of this last building and Bofill's death in 2022, Taller de Arquitectura and the profession in the United States moved



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<sup>52</sup> Bofill and André, *Espacio y vida*, 105. Translated into English by Brett Tippey from the original quote in Spanish: "comprender los mecanismos que secreta ese objeto extraño que es el rascacielos; estudiar el estado del sistema capitalista y realizar a partir de eso una síntesis con mis propias orientaciones estéticas."

<sup>53</sup> Some examples of these publications about his work for the 1992 Barcelona Olympics are: H. Aldersey-Williams, "A Designer Olympics," *Progressive Architecture*, no. 6 (1988); David Cohn, "Barcelona Gets Ready for 1992 Olympics," *AIA Journal*, no. 9 (1989): 23-26.

Fig. 12  
Dearborn Center. Archivo  
Bofill Taller de Arquitectura.



apart. But for roughly thirty years Bofill had worked to establish himself as a reference in the United States, a country in which, according to his own words, "the real history of post-war architecture is centered."<sup>54</sup> Other Spaniards like Rafael Moneo and Ignasi de Solà-Morales also made their marks in the United States, having arrived in professional circles only after extensive sojourns in American universities and theory-focused journals like the *Oppositions*. But Bofill's focus was always on integration with US professional circles.

In the earliest years, the US professional press presented the Taller de Arquitectura as an innovative, multidisciplinary collaboration of creative individuals. Texts written by various members of the collective, such as Peter Hodgkinson, appeared in magazines like *Architectural Forum* and *Progressive Architecture*. However, as the editorial boards of US-based journals increasingly assigned these articles to American architectural critics like Vincent Scully, Charles Jencks and Arthur Drexler, or to staff writers and correspondents like Deborah Dietsch and Gerald Moorhead, the focus shifted away from the collaborative spirit of the Taller and towards the individual figure of Bofill. Ultimately, Bofill became the most published Spanish architect in the US professional press in the 1970s and 1980s and the only Spanish architect to design and build two skyscrapers in Chicago at the close of the twentieth century.

In the US Bofill learned to introduce rigorous classicism at all scales. He effectively adapted geometric spatial organizations from past centuries, such as those with which he had previously experimented in France. But he never replicated his French projects such as Le Viaduc or Les Espaces d'Abraxas. Instead, he adapted his US projects to suit American sensibilities. As Bofill stated in *Progressive Architecture* in 1971: "Better to be crazy than copy or repeat yourself."<sup>55</sup> Far from "crazy", Bofill's combination of Classical forms and modern construction materials and techniques were exactly what American capitalist clients desired.

His approach produced two distinct results. On one hand, the US economy and marketplace, along with the physical restrictions of the site and municipal ordinances, required him to rethink, and in most cases to dramatically increase, the scale of his projects. And, in general, his solutions for these projects were much more aesthetically restrained than his more exuberant European projects. On the other hand, he appreciated the beauty of the American city, as well as its ambition to conquer ever greater physical heights. As a result, he transformed the skyscraper into a *mirador*, a belvedere of sorts from which the American people could contemplate expansive views of their skylines while inhabiting grand open spaces in

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54 MoMA, *Ricardo Bofill and Léon Krier: architecture, urbanism, and history* (New York, MoMA, 1985), [https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma\\_catalogue\\_1778\\_300296406.pdf](https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_1778_300296406.pdf). (Accessed on January 20, 2025).

55 "Barrio Gaudí", 25.

the sky. Had they been built, his urban design proposals for places like Boston and Times Square may well have been equally evocative places from which to contemplate American ideas at the ground level.

Nonetheless, the three buildings Bofill did build on US soil demonstrate his success in translating the classical language into an American context, even in the skyscraper, the modern American building *par excellence*. He never abandoned the geometric rigor that always characterized his work, and all his designs for skyscrapers reveal a clear tripartite organization and systematic modular composition. Whether built or not, his tall buildings are characterized by a meticulous application of classical proportions, as well as by his interpretation of archetypal elements such as Doric columns and pilasters, or overt references to Greek temples. These elements confer on his modern buildings a strong sense of monumentality and permanence, two characteristics that are visible even when heavy classical stone yields to lightweight modern glass. Although glass dominates his two built skyscrapers, Bofill successfully steered clear of the stereotypical glass and steel box through subtle moves such as curvature in the glass panes, or the use of glass as fill for the voids between composition lines that are derived from classical sources.

But even the growing distance between Bofill and the profession in the United States did not diminish his status as an important cultural reference in the US. Savvy moviegoers might have recognized his work in popular dystopian films. Les Espaces d'Abraxas served as Lowry's apartment building in Terry Gilliam's 1985 cult classic *Brazil*, and as the neoclassical backdrop for a battle scene in Francis Lawrence's 2015 action film *The Hunger Games Mockingjay - Part 2*. If, as Bofill claimed, "good architecture is good business for everyone", then the bond between the architect and the United States was a win-win liaison.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Bofill and André, *Espacio y vida*, 91. Translated into English by Brett Tippey from the original quote in Spanish: "una buena arquitectura es un buen negocio para todo el mundo."

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# The “Bofills båg” in Stockholm. Nordic Peculiarities of a Postmodern Crescent

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*Bofills båg, Stockholm, Housing, Ricardo Bofill, Taller de Arquitectura*

## /Abstract

The facts about the redevelopment of the area formerly occupied by the railway tracks and the train station in the centre of the island of Södermalm in Stockholm began in 1981 with the competition for a new residential area. From the 125 projects evaluated by the jury, no winner was found, so the “Project group” coordinated by architect Jan Inghe-Hagström, who led the Stockholm City Planning Department at the time, implemented the best ideas in the final master plan Områdeplan84 (Area Plan84). The large area was subdivided into 14 districts entrusted to cooperatives and construction companies, including HSB, which was assigned the area to which a crescent was to be built and included a park. HSB selected the designer following a new invitation-only competition, which Ricardo Bofill won in early 1985. Until 1987, the project’s implementation details were studied in an iterative process involving Taller’s designers, architect Inghe-Hagström and contractor Ohlsson & Skarne. The start of construction in 1989 was followed by two years of building work, which resulted in Stockholm’s first crescent characterised by an extremely reduced decorative apparatus compared to Bofill’s similar residential complexes in France in particular. The demands of the client and the construction company, in view of the Nordic context historically reluctant to insert redundant decorative devices, led Bofill to make a number of changes to the first version of the project, leading to the final solution inaugurated in 1992. Although the subject of conflicting assessments, the ‘Bofill båg’ is today one of Stockholm’s most emblematic and recognisable architectures, where it stands out for its elegance and essentiality, combining traits of classical architectural language and tradition with the functional requirements of the north.

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Giovanni Bellucci trained at the Marche Polytechnic University in Ancona, where he obtained a master’s degree in Building Engineering-Architecture and a PhD in History of Architecture. His research focuses mainly on 20th century architecture with reference to the Italian and Swedish contexts, with studies conducted in major archives including MAXXI and the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome, the CSAC in Parma and the Arkitekturmuseet, Stadsarkivet and Riksarkivet in Stockholm. He has carried out periods of study in Sweden that recently led to the publication of a book on Sven Backström and Leif Reinius that earned him the “Bruno Zevi International Prize”. He is the author of articles and essays in reviews, books and conference proceedings. He is a member of AISTARCH (Italian Association of the History of Architecture), AISI (Italian Association of the History of Engineering) and since 2025 member of the Technical Scientific Organising Committee of AAA/Italy (National Association of Archives of Contemporary Architecture). He has been a research fellow and scholarship holder. He is adjunct professor in History of Architecture at the Faculty of Engineering of Ancona and Bologna.



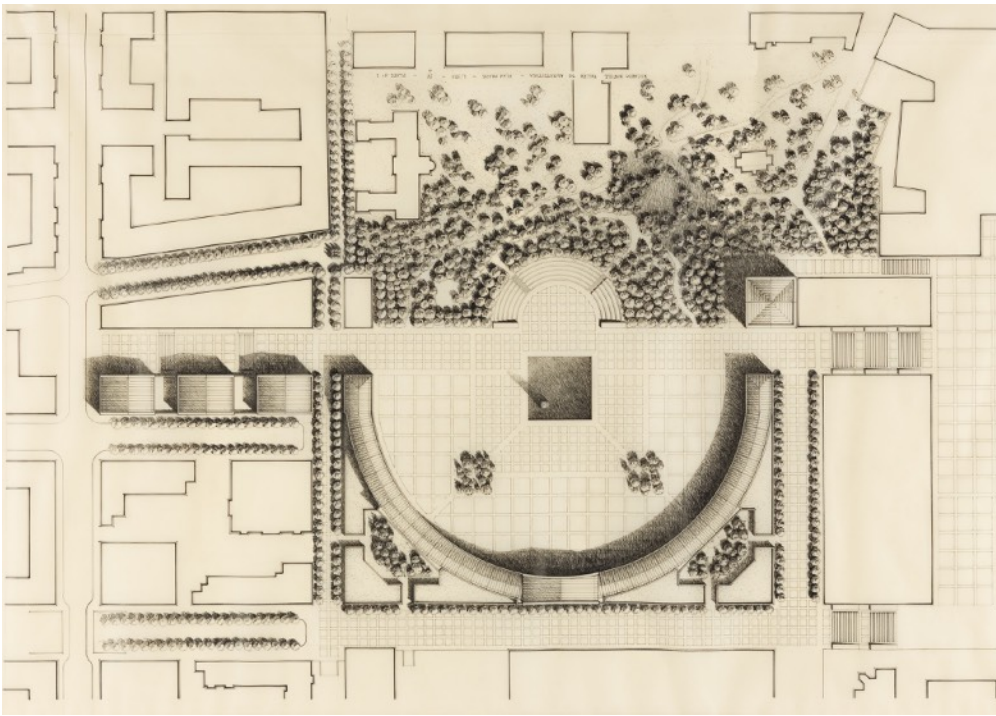
## Introduction

Ricardo Bofill's (1939-2022) project for the redevelopment of an area of approximately 25 hectares in the centre of the island of Södermalm in Stockholm took place at the same time that Taller de Arquitectura in France had just completed or was engaged in the construction of other well-known projects. Inaugurated in 1983 Les Espaces d'Abraxas in Noisy-le-Grand a few kilometres east of Paris, the contacts between the HSB Hyresgästernas sparkasse- och byggnadsförening (Tenants' Savings and Building Society), the project leader of the Stockholm city planning office Jan Inghe-Hagström (1944-2005) and the Catalan architect started in Stockholm in 1984, which led to the first version of the "Bofills båge", the Bofill's arch [Fig. 1, 2]. In the meantime, work is in full swing on Le Temples du Lac in Voisins-le-Bretonneux, Les Colonne de Saint-Christophe in Cergy-Pontoise while in Montpellier, work is underway on Le Port Juvénal in the eastern part of the urban plan known as Antigone.<sup>1</sup> The projects that Bofill worked on from the late 1970s onwards became the subject of a heated debate involving designers, critics and historians, which was followed by feedback in European contexts such as Sweden and then by a worldwide audience. These projects are typologically, semiologically and figuratively comparable given the constant use of crescent.

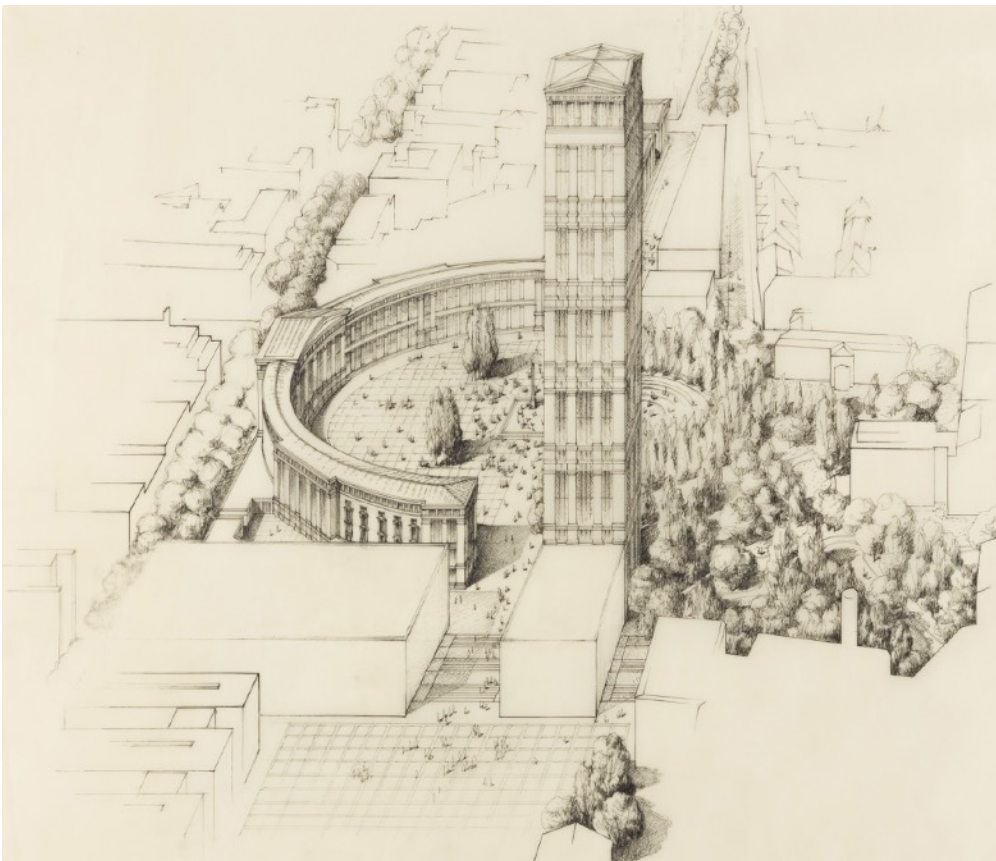
These projects are comparable in terms of typology, semiology and figurative aspects, given the constant use of the crescent. This specific compositional typology, often used by Taller, is certainly one of the most recognisable in terms of residential projects worked on by the Catalan group, particularly during the decade between the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>2</sup> The choice of this particularly iconic morphology brings to mind the famous Royal Crescent in Bath, built in the second half of the eighteenth century by the architect John Wood the Younger (1728–1782). On the one hand, the serial repetition of modular elements represented by the thirty terraced houses highlights the desire to socially and formally equalize the residents, while with the openness to the landscape, the English architect aspires to reconnect humanity with nature while still maintaining a segment of the city. This compositional exploration, conducted on multiple levels, also characterizes the crescents of the Taller, where the intended use is popular (although these are no longer terraced houses but a multitude of apartments arranged on various levels), where the properties are formally homogeneous and therefore intended to avoid social separation between residents. The tendency to juxtapose these urban areas with

1 On Ricardo Bofill's biography and works up to the 1980s, see the 1985 monographic issue of 'GA Architect' and the catalogue of the exhibition held at the Musée d'Ixelles - Museum van Elsene in Brussels in 1989. See also: Joseph Maria Montaner I Martorell, "Bofill (Levi) Ricardo", *Dizionario dell'architettura del XX secolo* (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2003), 264-268.

2 Peter Hodgkinson refers to these projects in the initial phases of the Taller's activity, clearly identified as "Historicism, Adventure and Research 1972-1978" and "Classicism, Concentration and Success 1978-1985." See: Peter Hodgkinson, "A personal point of view," in Bartomeu Cruells, Paul Van Remoortel, eds., *Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura* (Brussels: Centre d'Art Nicolas de Staël, 1989), 13-21.



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Fig. 1, 2  
 Ricardo Bofill and Taller de Arquitectura, first version of the redevelopment project for the former Södra Station area, Stockholm, January 1985, urban plan and axonometric view. The crescent has strong classical elements, the park takes on a natural configuration towards the north and the tower has a marked vertical development. Source: Bofill Taller de Arquitectura Archive, Barcelona.

“natural” features as much as possible (even if artificially) such as parks, bodies of water, or gardens also indicates Bofill’s complex exploration of a more nuanced idea of the city and civil coexistence.

## **The Reception of Postmodernism and the Works of Ricardo Bofill in Sweden**

One of the decisive events for Bofill’s global fame was the exhibition *Ricardo Bofill and Léon Krier: architecture, urbanism and history* which opened on 26 June 1985 at the MoMA in New York, curated by Arthur Drexler, director of the museum’s architecture and design department. In the catalogue published in conjunction with the event and presented on 27 June at a symposium in the presence of Bofill, Krier and Drexler and the participation of Robert Stern and Colin Rowe, the curator writes:

Bofill makes good use of modern construction techniques, particularly precast concrete [...] Bofill rejects vernacular forms, old or new, and seeks to reinstate a kind of classical grandeur once associated with the Court and the Church. Bofill has built some of the most humane and beautiful large-scale public housing of this century, succeeding dramatically where modernism has so often failed [...] Bofill has proved that the axial geometries and grand scale of French neo-classical planning can yield pleasures that cost nothing [...] Bofill is saying some thing of great importance regarding urban life at the end of this century: it is both desirable and practical to dramatise housing. Rather than being mere background, or an indifferent prop on the urban stage, housing can become the stage itself.<sup>3</sup>

This excerpt highlights some of the key elements common to most of Bofill’s projects of those years, including the use of modern construction techniques such as prefabrication and at the same time the reference to classical language. Central to Bofill’s work is the theme of housing, with respect to which the Catalan architect has hinged research from the earliest assignments of his career, both from a formal point of view and on a large scale in an attempt to build a living, participatory city. Decisive in this sense are the special skills brought by the Taller members, who range from sociology to philosophy, from art to philosophy, from mathematics to poetry, implementing the contents of the projects of the architects who, moreover, like Bofill, refer to a geographic-cultural background

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3 Arthur Drexler, ed., *Ricardo Bofill and Leon Krier: Architecture, Urbanisme, and History* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1985), 12-13.

or at least to an international academic-university education.<sup>4</sup> In this international context, it is worth highlighting the success achieved after the organization of the exhibition "Nordisk Klassicism" in Helsinki in 1982 and the publication of the catalogue.<sup>5</sup> The result of collaboration between the Finnish Architecture Museum where the exhibition is being held, the Swedish Museum of Architecture, the Norwegian Museum of Architecture, Arkitek (Archives of Modern Danish Architecture) and the collection of Architectural Drawings of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, is the catalogue that includes essays by major historians and designers from the Nordic countries, to which was added the critical contribution of Kenneth Frampton, was distributed and translated into many languages until the Spanish edition was published in 1983 by MOPU – Spanish Ministry of Public Works and Urbanism.<sup>6</sup> Rich in references to the projects of some of the most famous architects, who were certainly important for the critical success of what the English critic Philip Morton Shand called 'Swedish Grace', with regard to Sweden in particular, the architecture of Erik Gunnar Asplund, Carl Bergsten and Ragnar Österberg is highlighted. No less important is the mention of the work of Ivar Tengbom and, in particular, the Konserthuset (Philharmonic Hall) with its façade marked by 10 giant granite columns, which seems to refer more than any other work to the plastic façades of many of Taller's French crescents.

In Sweden, the postmodern movement and in particular the contribution to contemporary architecture made by a charismatic personality such as Bofill was well known and the subject of publications even before the commission for the redevelopment of the Södermalm area. It can be assumed that the press campaign promoted both internationally and in the Scandinavian country may have led Jan Inghe-Hagström and HSB to involve Bofill in the project for the Söder area. In April 1980, the magazine «Arkitektur» published a first long article entitled "Rummet och arkitekturen" (Space and Architecture) in which the author Sten Gromark goes into detail by comparing Bofill's research topics with those of the French philosopher Henri Lefèbvre (1901-1991), who devoted many comparative

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4 On the composition of the Taller and the philosophical-design approach of the group see: "Le Taller de Arquitectura de Barcelona," *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 182 (November-December 1975): 57-95. Among the Taller members in addition to Ricardo who trained at ETSAB (Escola Técnica Superiore d'Arquitectura de Barcelona) and at HEPIA (Haute École du paysage, d'ingénierie et d'architecture) in Geneva and the architect and pianist-composer Anna Bofill Levi (1944), we mention the philosopher Salvador Clotas (1938), the Englishman Peter Hodgkinson (1940) trained at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London, the Spanish architect of Uzbek origin Manuel Núñez Yanowsky (1942), the poet and writer José Augustin Goytisolo (1928-1999).

5 See: Simo Paavilainen ed., *Nordisk Klassicism. Nordic Classicism 1910-1930* (Helsinki: Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1982).

6 See in particular the Spanish translation of *Clasicismo nórdico 1910-1930* (Madrid: Servicio de Publicaciones, Ministerio de Obras Públicas y Urbanismo, 1983) and the Italian translation of *Classicismo nordico. Architettura nei paesi scandinavi 1910-1930* (Milan: Electa, 1988).

studies to architecture and sociology between the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>7</sup> The following year, Bofill was invited to Stockholm to participate in the *Architectural Theory Lecture Series* sponsored by the Swedish Board of Architects and also gave a lecture at the Faculty of Architecture of the KTH Kungliga Tekniska högskolan (Royal Institute of Technology).<sup>8</sup> At the centre of both speeches is a historical excursus and examination of the links between the ancient and the contemporary from Palladio to Alvar Aalto, the concept of 'prefabricated classicism' to understand the possible interrelationship between historical languages and modern construction techniques, and in closing an interesting reflection:

The violin, as we know, consists only of four taut strings and a sound box, but from it and with the help of a solid theory of harmony and a skilled, sensitive and artistic hand, we can play popular music, Bach, Beethoven, Chopin and the Beatles.<sup>9</sup>

Decisive for the dissemination of postmodernist projects and theoretical positions in Sweden with particular reference to Taller's contribution was the review «Magasin Tessin» published between 1980 and 1987. Under the leadership of editor-in-chief Thomas Hellquist (1948), the Swedish review helped to open up the debate on the postmodern movement in northern Europe as well, introducing Scandinavian readers and scholars to a broad and well-documented overview of the contemporary international environment and its deep links to the past.<sup>10</sup> In the first issue of the journal Hellquist published an article on the role of Charles Jencks and his recent volume *The Language of Postmodern Architecture*, which preceded an essay on Leon Krier published a few months later in the second issue of the review. Limited to the first year, the space reserved for Italy is important, starting with the figure of Paolo Portoghesi introduced in no. 4 of «Magasin Tessin» where Hellquist focuses on the first "Biennale di Architettura" of Venice on the Postmodern movement and the "Strada Novissima".

7 Sten Gromark, "Rummet och arkitekturen", *Arkitektur*, no. 3 (April 1980): 23-29. In the comparison between Bofill and Lefebvre, particular reference is made to the following publications: Henri Lefebvre, *La Production de l'espace* (Paris: Anthropos, 1974); Ricardo Bofill, *L'architecture d'un homme* (Paris: Arthaud, 1978); Jean-Pierre Garnier, Denis Goldsmith, *La Comédie urbaine ou la Cité sans classe* (Paris: Maspero, 1978); Manfredo Tafuri, *Projet et Utopie* (Paris: Dunod, 1979).

On Lefebvre's important theoretical contribution regarding the relationship between city, architecture and sociology see: Henri Lefebvre, *Le droit à la ville* (Paris: Anthropos, 1968); Henri Lefebvre, *La révolution urbaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970). On the planning of new cities or parts of them and a brief mention of Bofill's "utopian" approach, see also: Jean Claude Widmer, "Questions à Henri Lefebvre," *Archithese* no. 2 (1971): 11-15.

8 See: Sten Gromark, "Ricardo Bofill och stadens arkitektur," *Arkitektur*, no. 10 (December 1980): 31-33; Carin Brand, "Dialog mellan stad och människa. Från Ricardo Bofills Stockholmsbesök," *Arkitekttidningen*, no. 15 (1981): 8-9; Ann Jonsson, "Hur bostäder blir monument," *Arkitekttidningen*, no. 7 (1982): 4-6.

9 Brand, *Dialog mellan stad och människa*, p. 9.

10 On the Taller see: Sten Gromark, "Bostadsfrågan som arkitekturfråga," *Magasin Tessin*, no. 2 (1983): 7-26; "Den franska scenen," *Magasin Tessin*, no. 4 (1984): 44-73.





3

## The Competitions for the Söder Area and the Involvement of Ricardo Bofill

The Swedish story of the project in Bofill's Söder area began a few years before the Spanish architect was commissioned. The area that was the subject of one of the most substantial urban redevelopments in central Stockholm in the 20th century also underwent considerable changes in the previous century. Where Fatbursparken (Fatburs Park) stands today, bordered to the south by the Bofill crescent, until the mid-19th century there was the Fatburssjön (Fatburen Lake), which was silted up in order to lay tracks and build the railway station.<sup>11</sup> The project management entrusted to the engineer Nils Ericson (1802-1870) meant that the area was ceded from the City of Stockholm to the Swedish state and then to the railway company, and after extensive work, the Stockholm-Södertälje section was opened on 1 December 1860, the first step of the railway line that would take convoys from the capital to Gothenburg in 1862 [Fig. 3]. The connection of the railway tracks in 1867 between the Södra station and the northern station completed in its final structure in 1871, assuming the function of the capital's main station, quickly made the Södermalm railway junction lose its importance for passengers but retained its function for the transport of goods.<sup>12</sup> Nothing changed until 1967 when the "Söder-67" urban plan envisaged significant changes for Södermalm, including a new use for the station area, but it was not until 1979 that the SJ (Swedish railway company) returned the area ceded a century earlier to the city of

11 On what happened in that area throughout history see: Carsten Bergendal, ed, *Fatburen 3000 år. Från en vik i skärgården till Bofills båge* (Stockholm: Sigma Förla, 1992).

12 On the Södra station see also: Ann Katrin Pihl Atmer, *Södermalm. Husen - historien - människorna* (Stockholm: Bonnier Fakta, 2019), 240.

Fig. 3

1930s view of Söder Station. Source: Carsten Bergendal, ed. by, *Fatburen 3000 år. Från en vik i skärgården till Bofills båge* (Stockholm: Sigma Forlag, 1992), 47.

Stockholm. At this point, a "Project group" led by Jan Inghe-Hagström<sup>13</sup> was appointed to organise the competition for what was to become a new residential area already predominantly surrounded by neighbourhoods and residential buildings. The pre-eminent objective of the call was to have design solutions but also a clear picture of the critical issues and aspirations of the residents, who were therefore invited together with architects and engineers, to send in suggestions even anonymously. The competition jury consisting of a group of technicians and administrators evaluated 125 proposals that responded to only one, two or all three aspects (Housing and Work, Design, Energy) identified by the call, selecting around 80 projects worthy of attention and among them at least 20 worthy of mention and financial recognition.<sup>14</sup>

The most striking proposal was the one coordinated by architects Gösta Nilsson, Ragnhild Walter and Gunnar Malm on behalf of HSB, the country's largest building cooperative. Marked by the motto "Söders Manhattan", the idea was to build large building blocks with more than 20 storeys with thousands of flats, a grandiose and unrealistic project on that scale. Michal Borowski's "Le Söder" proposal, which suggested the burying of the railway line and the construction of residential buildings with an average height of six storeys, was much more balanced. Also worthy of interest is the "På gång" solution by the architect-scenographer Sören Brunes, characterised by a series of circular and linear buildings<sup>15</sup> which, although on a smaller scale, was somehow reminiscent of Le Corbusier's 1933 urban plan for Stockholm and the gigantic curvilinear plan structure in the southern part of Södermalm.<sup>16</sup>

In 1982, the group led by Inghe-Hagström on the basis of what they had received as a result of the competition drew up a draft Områdseplan83 (Area Plan83) where the idea of the crescent was introduced for the first time. The choice of this particular type of building has mainly technical reasons, as the foundation soil of the area previously occupied by the

13 A graduate in architecture from the KTH in Stockholm in 1970, Inghe worked for most of his life at the Swedish capital's planning office, managing major urban regeneration projects such as Södra and Hammarby Sjöstad. See: Rasmus Wærn, *Jan Inghe - en stadsbyggare, in Postmodernismen i Stockholm* (Stockholm: Samfundet St Erik - Appell Förlag, 2021), 107-117.

14 On the desired topics and the contents of the call discussed at many public meetings in early 1981, see: Stellas Fryxell, "Idétävling om Södra Stationsområdet", *Arkitekttidningen*, no. 1 (1981): 15-16.

15 On the results of the competition and descriptions of some of the projects, please refer to the monographic issue of «Arkitekttidningen» no. 1 of January 1982 and the following references: Gunnar Mattsson, "Detta ofångbara något ...", *Arkitektur*, no. 1 (January-February 1982): 25; Robert Lavelid, "Ett politiskt alibi?", *Arkitektur*, no. 1 (January-February 1982): 26; Jan Strömdahl, "En jury- ledamots bekännelse", *Arkitektur*, no. 1 (January-February 1982): 26-27; Jan Inghe-Hagström, "Manhattan, rutnät eller park?", *Arkitektur*, no. 1 (January-February 1982): 28; Stellas Fryxell, Jan Inghe-Hagström, "Södra Station: byggstart 84/85", *Arkitekttidningen*, no. 10 (1982): 14-15. See also: Jan Inghe-Hagström, "Den nya staden vid Södra station" in *Fatburen 3000 år. Från en vik i skärgården till Bofills båge*, ed. by Casten Bergendal (Stockholm: Sigma Förla, 1992), 66-78.

16 Le Corbusier's overall urban development plan for the new Stockholm, similar to those proposed a few years earlier for Montevideo (1929) São Paulo (1929) Buenos Aires (1929) Rio de Janeiro (1929) and Algiers (1930), envisaged demolishing every building in Norrmalm and Södermalm and building five huge residential blocks, four of which were arranged in a geometric form in the northern part for 170,000 residents and a single complex in Södermalm for 110,000 residents. See: "Le Corbusiers Stockholmsdröm," in *Svenska Dagbladet*, 23 December 1933.

lake has mechanical characteristics that are not suitable for supporting multi-storey buildings, and therefore all that area was used as a park bordered on the south side by the arched building. Completing the project as far west as the Ringvägen street ring were dozens of residential complexes no higher than eight storeys, while on the eastern edge at Medborgarplatsen a skyscraper and a covered market were proposed.<sup>17</sup> In the summer of 1984, the final Områdeplan84 (Area Plan84) was approved with the identification of 14 distinct work areas assigned to developers and/or construction companies that were given wide freedom over the choice of designers to whom the executive tasks would be entrusted [Fig. 4]. The leading Swedish architectural firms that had participated in the 1981 competition were selected, including White Arkitekter, Axelsson & Borowski, Kjell Forshed and Sören Eriksson<sup>18</sup>, and from abroad, the Danish firm of Henning Larsen.

The HSB group was assigned the most important area of the plan, which included the crescent, the public park and the buildings between Bangårdsgången and Fatburs Brunnsgata in the direction of the new underground station serving commuter trains. For this reason, HSB decided to organise a new competition specifically for that area, inviting three architectural firms to come up with a project between the summer of 1984 and 15 January 1985: Gunnar Malm, who had already participated in the first competition in 1981 on behalf of HSB, Bengt Lindroos<sup>19</sup> also among the deserving designers three years earlier, and finally Ricardo Bofill and Taller were called in. The jury called upon to evaluate the three projects paid particular attention to the way the building relates to its context and the detailed solutions chosen for the crescent and the organisation of the interior spaces. Bofill's project emerged as the winner, certainly benefiting from the experience gained in the work already mentioned in France and for the skill with which he was able to modify certain details of the master plan. The first version of the crescent, characterised by a radius of 91.7 metres with gables, columns and friezes, had a width reduced to just 11 metres (compared to 22 metres in the first version), significantly lightening the impact of the building, as well as having apartments in line that opened onto two sides. Bofill also, unlike the other two competitors, only inserted balconies on the south façade [Fig. 5], while on the north side there are large glazed surfaces and in the centre of the composition is a kind of temple with a large pediment supported by pilaster stripes. The

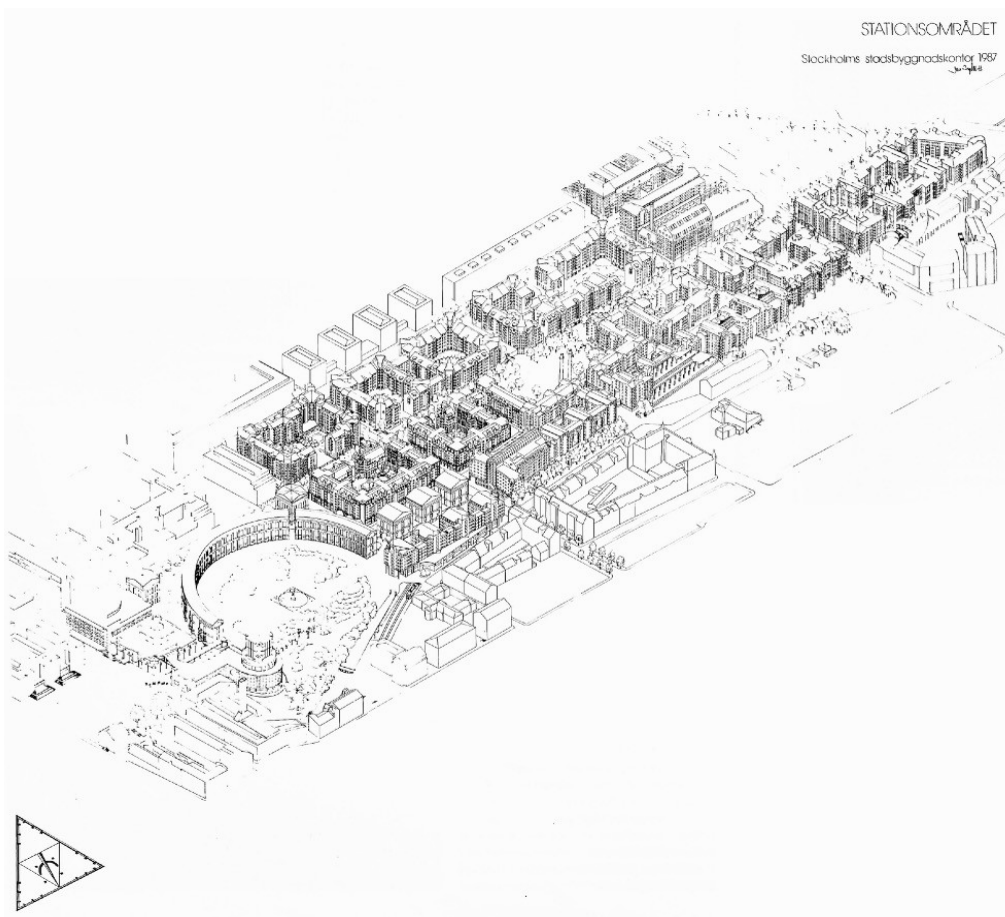
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17 On Områdeplan83 and Områdeplan84 see: *Södra Stationsområdet. Förslag till program* (Stockholm: Programgruppen för Södra Station - Stockholm stad, 1983) (Stockholms stadsarkiv - Liljeholmen, Volym: F:3, (1983-1984), SE/SSA/4708/F/F 4/3). On realised projects see: Pihl Atmer, *Södermalm. Husen - historien - människorna*, 241; Jan Inge Hagström, "Södra Station Stockholm," *Arkitektur*, no. 7 (September 1987): 32-33; Torbjörn Ericsson, "Måttbandet och designationen FFNS ARKITEKTER AB," *Arkitektur*, no. 7 (September 1987): 34-35.

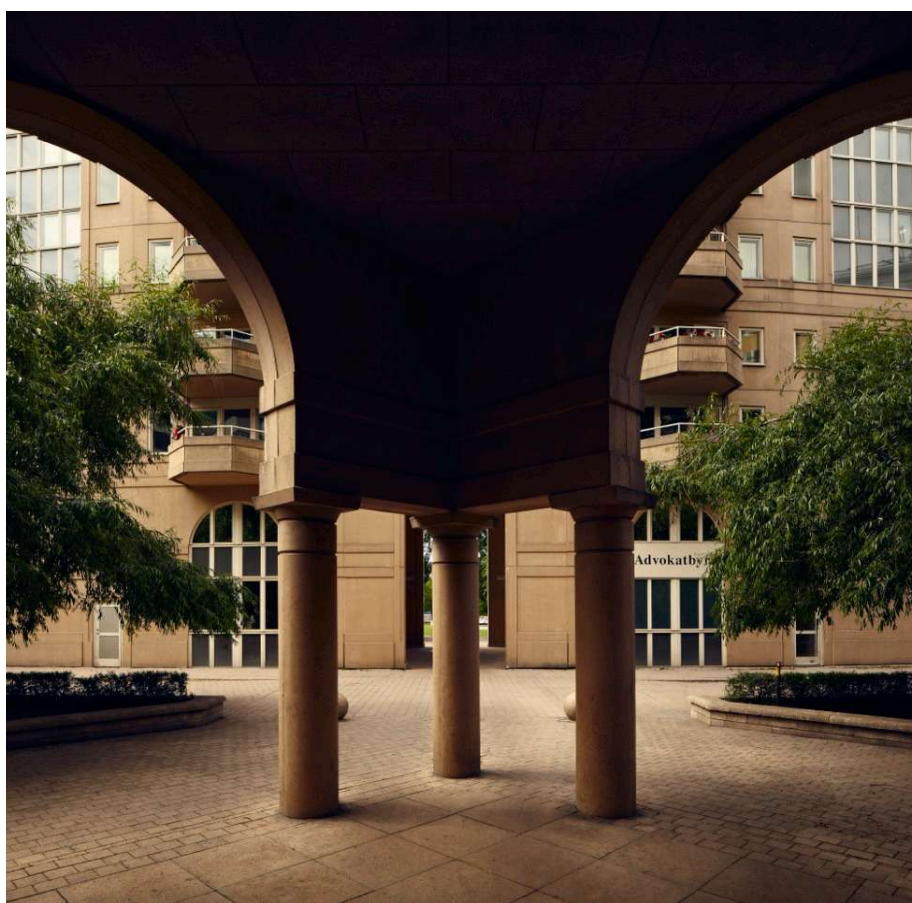
18 On the Brunnberggruppen project by architects Forshed and Eriksson: Olof Hultin, "Södra stationsområdet, Stockholm," *Arkitektur*, no. 10 (December 1986): 22-23.

19 See: Bengt Lindroos, "Erfarenheter vunna ur försök att rita en vacker bostad," *Arkitektur*, no. 4 (May 1985): 4-9.





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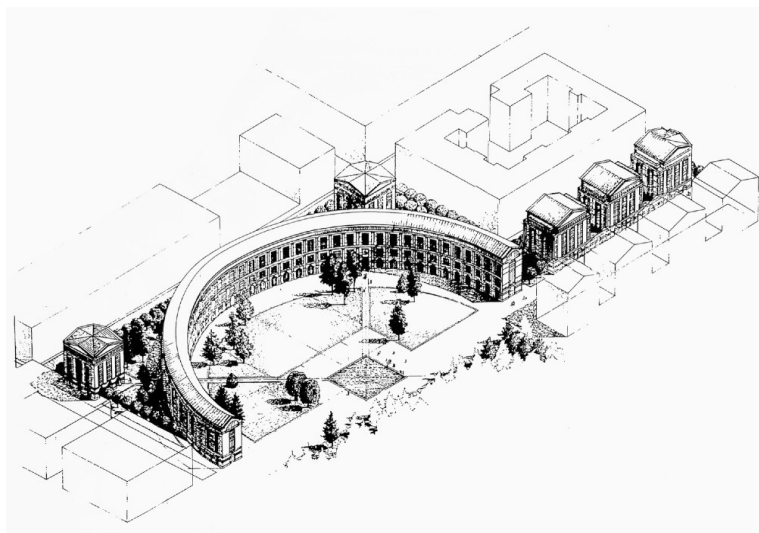
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Fig. 4

Stockholms stadsbyggnadskontor, axonometric view of the Södra Stationsområdet plan, updated to 1987. The part designed by Bofill with the crescent and the park is at the eastern end. Source: Carsten Begendal, ed. by, *Fatburen 3000 år. Från en vik i skärgården till Bofills båge* (Stockholm: Sigma Forlag, 1992), 66-67.

Fig. 5

The north crescent elevation with the balconies and the two types of windows seen from one of the corner buildings (introduced in the second version of the project) in axis with one of the portals. Source: Bofill Taller de Arquitectura Archive, Barcelona.



crescent would have accommodated commercial and service spaces in the double height of the ground floor and on the seven upper levels a total of 92 flats of varying size and cut from 1 to 5 rooms [Fig. 6].

### The Construction of the Crescent and Its Reception

The process of adapting the final version of the project [Fig. 7] to the Swedish environmental requirements particularly involved solving technical details that Jan Inghe-Hagström did not fail to point out to the Taller's designers.<sup>20</sup> Crucial in this respect was the positive contribution of the construction company Ohlsson & Skarne, which through the technician in charge of site management Gerhard Herkommer collaborated effectively with Patrick Genard (1954), a Belgian architect and civil engineer graduated from UCL Leuven and member of the Taller sent to Stockholm to supervise the construction. In the final solution in Stockholm, unlike the French projects, the plastic appearance of both main elevations was not only significantly differentiated but also considerably reduced. While the concave part facing south is characterised by small balconies and all classical references have been eliminated, the convex north-facing façade has large glass panels separated vertically by a double row of extremely simplified pilasters, which Bofill probably intended to link to those of the nearby Lillenhoff Palace, a 17th-century building on the north side of Medborgarplatsen characterised by giant pilasters on two of its public façades. The absence of plastic elements, cornices, grooves and even deep projections or recesses in the vertical surface of the façades, as well as any kind of decorative element,

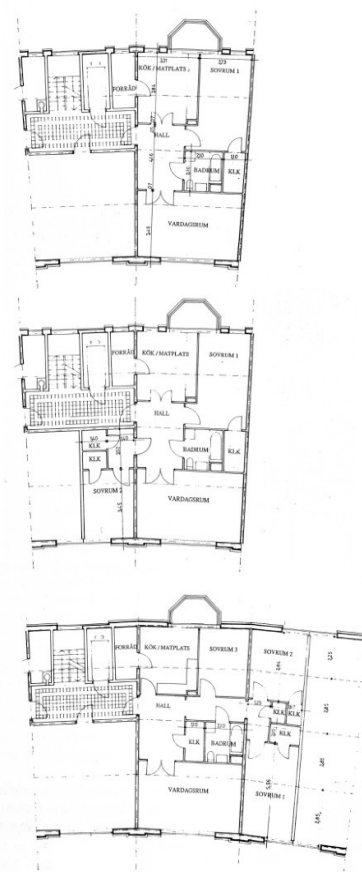


Fig. 6

Ricardo Bofill and Taller de Arquitectura, Stockholm 1987, floor plans of some crescent flat types. Source: Carsten Begendal (edited by), *Fatburen 3000 år. Från en vik i skärgården till Bofills båge* (Stockholm: Sigma Forlag, 1992), 113.

Fig. 7

Ricardo Bofill and Taller de Arquitectura, last version of the redevelopment project for the former Södra Station area, Stockholm 1987, axonometric view. On the south side two new corner buildings complete the project. Source: Bofill Taller de Arquitectura Archive, Barcelona.

<sup>20</sup> An excellent summary of Bofill's project in Stockholm in: Daniel Sjöborg, "Bofills båge - tre kritiska texter," in *Postmodernism i Stockholm* (Stockholm: Samfundet St Erik - Appell Förlag, 2021), 129-137. See also: "Crescent HSB och Taller de Arquitectura," *Arkitektur*, no. 7 (September 1987): 36-37; Bartomeu Cruells, ed. by, *Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura* (Bologna: Zanichelli editore, 1994), 236-237; Olof Hultin, Bengt OH Johansson, Johan Mårtelius, Rasmus Wærn, *The complete guide to Architecture in Stockholm* (Stockholm: Arkitektur Förlag, 1998), 156; Pihl Atmer, *Södermalm. Husen - historien - människorna*, 242.





distinguishes the Nordic crescent from the others. This choice is the result not only of a search for harmony with the sober Swedish aesthetic sense but also of a purely technical necessity: in fact, recesses and, more generally, plastic decorative elements are weak parts that are easily damaged and deteriorate as a result of the harsh Nordic winters, so it was decided not to include them, to the advantage of a greater visual cleanliness of the vertical fronts. One of the most debated issues was the need to add a window serving the kitchen, which Bofill's design did not initially provide for. This has led to the inclusion on the south façade, alongside the usual vertical glazed fields and in addition to the aforementioned pentagonal balconies, of more canonical rectangular windows also chosen to create a sort of frieze-like glazed crowning to illuminate the flats on the top floor.

Two four-storey high portals lead through the building, connecting Fatbursparken with Södermalmsallén in the southern part of the crescent [Fig. 8] where the initial design envisaged a kind of plinth that was to delimit two courtyards. Even this initially planned detail is eliminated in favour of two buildings with a square plan and vertical development, completely similar to the three buildings that Bofill identified as 'Templen' (Temples) [Fig. 9] that mark the road leading from the park to the entrance of the new underground railway station.<sup>21</sup> No less simple was the choice related to the colour of the prefabricated panels used for all the material parts of the project: usually Bofill proceeded by using sand taken from the building site in the concrete mix or in any case of a colour similar to that of the context and then having the surfaces washed with an acid solution in order to obtain smooth surfaces and non-accentuated colour tones.

<sup>21</sup> Parallel to Bofill's building site the construction of the buildings in the other 13 areas identified in the plan also proceeded at different times including the one with the entrance to the new Södra station completed in 1990 by Axelsson & Borowski Architects. See: Jan Larsson, "Stockholm Södra. Coordinator Arkitekter AB," *Arkitektur*, no. 6 (June 1987): 18-21.

Fig. 8

Detail of the north front of the crescent with the portal. Source: Bofill Taller de Arquitectura Archive, Barcelona.





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Fig. 9  
The three "Templen" and in the background the crescent.  
Source: Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura Archive, Barcelona.

Fig. 10  
Aerial view of the former Söder Station area from the east. Photo: Lennart Johansson.

But the greyish substrate of Stockholm's granite stone was an unpleasant colour to the eye, so Bofill opted for a different solution; in agreement with the construction company's technicians, yellow sand from Lake Vättern was used, mixed with white marble from Örebro and dolomite from Masugnsbyn; a warm pastel tone was thus obtained, changing according to the sun's influence between a peach colour and natural sienna. Finally, in the first version of the project Bofill also addressed the design of the tower, the height of which he emphasised in relation to all the other buildings in the plan, a design theme he later abandoned. Characterised by a naive design that was all too close to the image of bell towers with a Mediterranean flavour, the tower was topped by a sort of temple with a central plan.<sup>22</sup> The construction site was opened in August 1989 with the excavation and casting of the crescent's foundations and then proceeded with the installation of the first precast concrete panels, a well-known construction technique already used on other major construction sites by many Swedish construction companies. The timetable, which envisaged completion in about 31 weeks, was substantially adhered to and finishing works followed, most of which were completed by the end of 1991. The opening took place in the spring of 1992 in the presence of Anna Lindh, then Deputy Mayor of Stockholm and Environment Minister in the government headed by Ingvar Carlsson.

Recalling the mention of the violin with the four strings in which we could ideally recognise Ricardo Bofill, Jan Inghe-Hagström, Gerhard Herkommer and Patrick Genard and the sounding board represented by the crescent, one can conclude by asserting that this work, like the melodies possible with a violin, was certainly well heard but not uniquely appreciated and understood. In addition to the sources already mentioned, during the execution phase and even more so after the inauguration, both the whole area and Bofill's crescent aroused discordant opinions [Fig. 10]. On the one hand, Swedish contemporary architecture historian Fredric Bedoire expresses doubts about the results of the project as a whole due to the marked stylistic inconsistency of the sections, which highlights the cultural differences between the designers involved. Conversely, he recognises in Bofill's contribution the maturity of a designer who has skilfully and modestly adapted his language to Swedish conditions, moderating the hyperbolic choices seen in similar projects.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, among the inhabitants of the area and the citizens of Stockholm in general, there was no lack of perplexity about the totally new image of the crescent in relation to the architectural history of the city and of Sweden as a whole, an outcry that was certainly increased by eminent personalities of the country's culture

22 Other architects also made some attempts to define the image of the "Söder Torn" whose project was then assigned to Henning Larsen who abandoned the assignment during the works due to the insurmountable disputes that arose with the clients. See: Eva Eriksson, "Höga Hus. Tävlings om Skyskrapa i Stockholm," *Arkitektur*, no. 9 (November 1985): 14-15.

23 Fredric Bedoire, *Den Svenska Arkitekturens Historia 1800-2000* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2015), 442-443.

such as Bengt Lagerkvist who were not fully convinced of the goodness of inserting such architecture in that type of context.<sup>24</sup> These reactions are difficult to fit into a hypothetical framework that encompasses exclusively positive or negative opinions, but rather critical assessments that almost always include nuances and oscillations, as is the case with Ricardo Bofill's projects in the French suburbs. In the first major analyses of the popular megastructures of St. Quentin-en-Yvelines and Marne-la-Vallée, conducted by more renowned contemporary historians, Kenneth Frampton, as early as 1980 in "Modern Architecture. A Critical History," praised the architect's pursuit of formal dignity and monumentality applied to popular buildings, while also expressing doubts about the Taller's conscious choice to make no concessions to those social amenities (nursery, meeting and community spaces, sports spaces, etc.) notoriously essential to creating a socially acceptable context.<sup>25</sup> More recently, Jean-Louis Cohen, in his 2011 book *The Future of Architecture. Since 1889*, recalls how Bofill skillfully fused technical research and decorative, albeit oversized, themes in a perhaps exaggerated impulse towards monumentalism and the citation of a repertoire all too rich in classical references.<sup>26</sup> Controversial opinions are also expressed by younger generations, particularly by the emerging class of architects, critics, and professionals affiliated with Stockholm's two main academic institutions (the aforementioned KTH and the Kungl. Konsthögskolan – Royal Institute of Art). In a recent publication accompanying a 2024 exhibition focusing on architecture built in Stockholm between the 1960s and 1990s, a chapter focuses on the former South Station area and Bofill's project. Authors Arram Eckerbom, Marina Ilic, Johanna Redell, Susanna Sjödin, Åse Skaldeman, and Pilvi Vanamo once again emphasize the alien nature of the crescent language and other architecture built in the adjacent blocks compared to the solid and visually reassuring buildings of the early twentieth century. The young authors also describe the feeling of "abandonment" and relative marginalization of the Fatbursparken area and in particular of the public-commercial spaces on the ground floor of the Bofill arch which, despite being located in a context characterised by a significant flow of people, are today unused and closed. A sort of enclosure also characterizes the public areas of the district, which the surrounding architecture seems to somehow seek to protect, even to the extreme of rendering them seemingly private. At the same time, however, these residential blocks, mostly characterized by courtyards, contribute to enhancing the perception of the area's green space, with the notable merit of breaking the monotony of material and sculptural references with new detail elements (arches, porticoes, polychrome decorations, etc.) that

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24 Sjöborg, *Bofills båge - tre kritiska texter*, 129.

25 See: Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture. A Critical History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 310-311.

26 See: Jean-Louis Cohen, *The Future of Architecture. Since 1889* (London - New York: Phaidon, 2011), 414.



reference a historical tradition not always geographically close. A kind of enclosure also characterizes the public areas of the complex, which the surrounding architecture seems to somehow seek to protect, even to the extreme of rendering them seemingly private. At the same time, however, these residential blocks, mostly characterized by courtyards, contribute to enhancing the perception of the area's green space, with the notable merit of breaking the monotony of material and sculptural references with new detail elements (arches, porticoes, polychrome decorations, etc.) that reference a historical tradition not always geographically close to Sweden and therefore clearly comprehensible.<sup>27</sup> From a social perspective and in terms of creating a widely shared and participatory part of the city, the urban structure of the crescent in Stockholm, and even more so in the French context, has not contributed in the way its designers expected. The architecture, often intended for disadvantaged or marginalized social classes in the French banlieues, appears oppressive to the point of being disorienting and repulsive to the residents, often leading not to the constructive debate repeatedly hoped for by the Taller but to outright clashes with administrators and law enforcement, resulting in the damage to the architecture and the abandonment of many spaces. Criticisms repeatedly raised not only in France<sup>28</sup> particularly regarding the Espaces d'Abraxas, following the feared possibility in 2012 of demolishing the entire complex, helped bring Bofill's project back into the media spotlight, leading to the decision by well-known directors and generous international productions to set famous film hits in that context. This unexpected turn of events, with fan tours and dozens of reports by amateur film buffs, is certainly not in line with Bofill's idea of participation, but rather in total continuity with the dystopian social and cultural complexity that characterises our cities today, a reality that was completely unpredictable a few decades ago when the Taller was embarking on this and other contemporary crescent projects.

27 See: Arram Eckerbom et alii, "Södra Stationsområdet," in *Arkitektur I om- prövningens tid* (Stockholm: Kungl. Konsthögskolan, 2024), 51-61.

28 See for example: Jean-Louis Violeau, "Le Palacio d'Abraxas par Ricardo Bofill," *Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, no. 408 (September 2015): 116-123; Iryna Isachenko, "Inhabited monument. Correction of mistakes?," *Pragmatica*, no. 00 (March 2018): 190-201; Owen Hatherley, "Modern neoclassical architecture," *Apollo*, May 12, 2022.



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# The Origin of the Internationalisation of the RBTA: La Manzanera, 1963-1978, in the Mass Media

*Barrio Gaudi, Kafka's Castle, The Castillo-Plexusm, Xanadu, The Red Wall, Walden 7*

## /Abstract

This article delves into the origins of the internationalisation of the first works of Ricardo Bofill's Taller de Arquitectura (RBTA), tracing a genealogy that goes through five pieces built in Spain in the decade 1965-1975 that had great repercussions in the professional mass media abroad: the Gaudi Quarter (Reus), Kafka Castle (Sant Pere de Ribes), La Manzanera with Xanadu and the Red Wall (Calpe) and Walden 7 (Sant Just Desvern). All of them, with a greater or lesser profusion of pages (first with black and white photographs and, after, in colour), were reproduced in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (Paris), *Architectural Design* (London), *Architectural Forum* (New York), *Architectural Review* (London), *Architecture and Urbanism* (Tokyo), *Abitare* (Milan), *Baumeister* (Munich), *Global Architecture* (Tokyo), *Progressive Architecture* (Stanford) and *Zodiac* (Milan), among others.

In addition, the text traces, in particular, the media fortune of the different tourist properties of the La Manzanera complex in Calpe: the Castillo-Plexus (1963-1966), Xanadu (1966-1968), the Red Wall (1968-1973-1975) and the Viaduct (1975). In this journey, the magazines' eagerness to supply iconic images to the detriment of plans to a public eager for novelties is evident, but this strategy served for the RBTA to disseminate its own poetics and signs of identity through architectures that were striking in their material and chromatic formality. The text stops when RBTA is developing the Les Halles competition in Paris in 1973-1975, reflecting on the evolution of the compositional systems from the modular combination to the hierarchy of the *Beaux Arts* systems, entering into a new historicism that the magazines once again sanctioned.

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## Introduction: Ricardo Bofill, the Taller de Arquitectura and La Manzanera

'We are against the utopia of a 'scientific' architecture, we are against the imposition of a rational and schematic order of the territory, against those obvious and simplistic modern cities, those thousands of houses all identical, aligned, repeated, stupid; against those anonymous cities, without form or style, that nobody has dreamt of or wished for. The architect's job is to turn dreams into real things. This seems incomprehensible to those who have a rationalist conception of art and history, to those who, in an attempt to rationalise apparent chaos, turn the product into real chaos. The Taller de Arquitectura has been prepared to invent possible cities, full of dreams, realisable and imperfect'. Ricardo Bofill, 1968<sup>1</sup>.

Ricardo Bofill Levi (1939-2022), son of the architect and builder Ricardo Bofill Benessat and the Venetian Maria Levi, was born in Barcelona in 1939, where he studied, although he graduated from the Geneva School of Architecture in 1962. In 1963, he founded the 'Taller de Arquitectura' (RBTA), a team made up of architects, engineers, sociologists and writers, including the English architect Peter Hodgkinson (from 1966) and the French architect Jean-Pierre Carniaux (from 1976), who helped the international expansion of the Atelier's production. According to the magazine *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* in 1975<sup>2</sup>, the Taller was made up of Bofill himself, followed by his sister, Anna Bofill, an architect and mathematician, Salvador Clotas (writer), the aforementioned Peter Hodgkinson, Manolo N. Yanowsky and Ramón Collado, all three architects, and José A. Goytisolo, poet and philosopher. Some of the workshop's first works in Spain were under his father's signature, such as the partial plan for La Manzanera (1962), a rustic plot of land facing the sea in the vicinity of the Ifach Penon in Calpe, Alicante, owned by Natalia Pérez Ortenbach, a member of a saga of landowners - the Feliu-Ortenbachs - with a long history and historical presence in this region, albeit resident in Barcelona<sup>3</sup>. The following buildings were developed on this land facing the Mediterranean during the period under study: the Castillo-Plexus (1963-1966), Xanadu (1966-1968), the Red Wall (1968-1973-1975) and the Viaduct (1975); the latter would never be built.

In general, the texts that accompanied these works when they were published in foreign magazines tended to be rather brief and, in some cases, did not even seem to describe or explain the works, but were intended to arouse the interest of readers, who were much more attentive to the

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1 Ricardo Bofill, cited in: "Vicino ad Alicante, una casa-paese: la Muralla Roja", *Abitare*, no. 161, (1978): 4.

2 "Le Taller de Arquitectura de Barcelone", *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 182 (1975): 57-98.

3 Antoni Banuyls i Pérez, "Arquitectura per al turisme: la utopia urbana de Bofill i el taller d'arquitectura a la Manzanera (1962-1985)", *La Rella*, no. 19-20 (2003): 122-143.



graphic gestures, forms and images, decidedly new and fresh on the national scene, we might say unprejudiced and somewhat provocative, materialised with an abundant mass of traditional consistency that rebelled against the technological excesses of architecture that saturated the international magazines. These works by Bofill and his Taller seemed to propose an architecture closer to the earth than levitating in the sky: graver and heavier than sharp and light. Inevitably, these early works of the RBTA were non-conformist in the face of the established status quo, assumed and supported by the Academy itself, quite faithful to the axioms of the already crisis-ridden modern movement in this same decade of the 1960s.

The Taller quickly gained notoriety in Spanish magazines. Five works built between 1964 and 1968 were published in *Arquitectura*, Madrid: the residential building in Compositor Bach Street (1964), a second in Nicaragua Street (1966) which had won the FAD prize and a third in Sant Gregori Square, all in Barcelona, to which were added the Xanadu tourist residential building in the La Manzanera complex and the Laboratorios building in Granollers; These last three buildings were reproduced in the same issue in 1968<sup>4</sup>. Something similar happened in the magazine *Cuadernos de Arquitectura*<sup>5</sup>, of Barcelona, which reproduced some of these works in the same years and where it is interesting to note that, in 1966, the group of terraced houses the Castillo (which years later would be called 'Plexus') was published as the first of the tourist buildings of La Manzanera to have media repercussions, a work that, surprising for its material finishes of sienna and brown plaster (shades of grey in the magazine) and its strange silhouettes with curved tile roofs, would nevertheless have little fortune outside Spanish borders, beyond being mentioned in articles reviewing the trajectory of the Taller de Arquitectura in its first decade of work, as will be detailed later on.

## From Spanish Magazines to the Pages of International Magazines until 1976

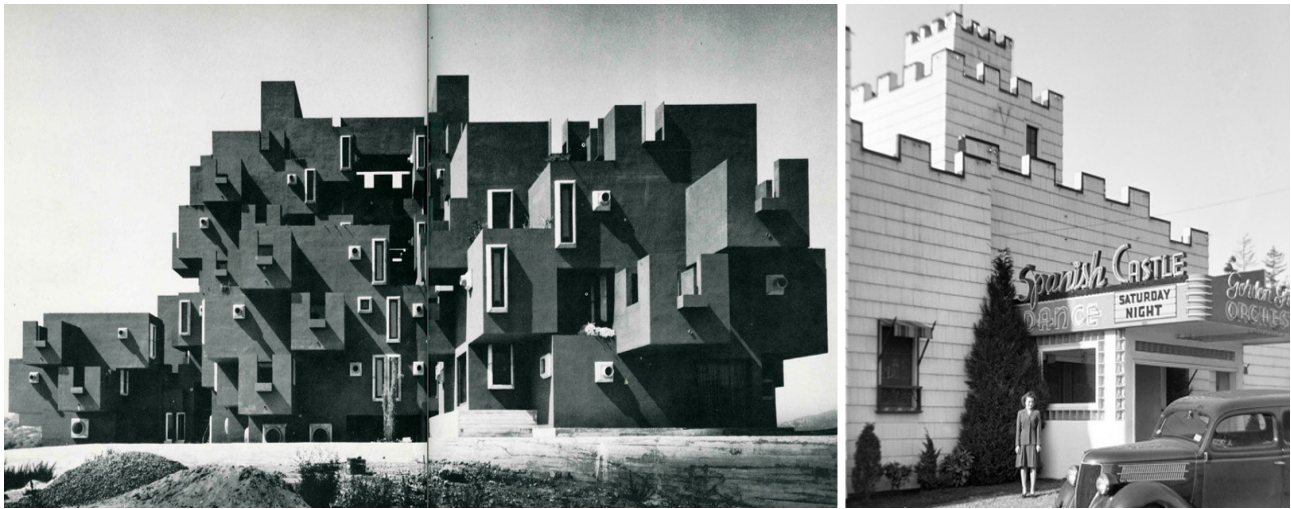
Probably the first RBTA works to be reproduced abroad were the housing building in Compositor Bach Street (1964) in Barcelona, the El Sargazo tourist flats (1962) in Castelldefels and the preliminary project for the Gaudí social housing district (1964-1968) in Reus, all three of which were included in a monograph devoted to Spanish architecture in the Italian magazine *Zodiac*<sup>6</sup>. Also, in 1968, the FAD prize property was included in an issue of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, Paris, entitled "Tendences"<sup>7</sup>,

4 "La Manzanera, Calpe (Alicante), 1966", *Arquitectura*, no. 112 (1968): 30-34.

5 "La Manzanera, Calpe: Bofill, arquitecto", *Cuadernos de Arquitectura*, no. 65 (1966): 38-40.

6 These three buildings are reproduced in: "España", *Zodiac*, no. 15 (1965): 44-49.

7 "Tendences: Espagne 68: Epigones et Novateurs", *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 139 (1968): 93-108.



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partly a monographic issue devoted to Spanish architecture at the time (under the heading 'Espagne 68: Epigones et Novateurs'), a magazine that would be key to the international projection of the Taller, given the leadership of this French magazine in the professional world, where the Granollers Laboratories also appeared. Kafka's Castle (1966-1968, Sant Pere de Ribes), perhaps because of its modular combinations and its appearance of abstract sculpture, close to Moshe Safdie's macles of prefabricated volumes in Habitat 67 in Montreal, was visually attractive enough to be published in other magazines such as *Architectural Forum* in New York<sup>8</sup> [Fig. 1], *Baumeister* in Munich in 1969, *Architectural Design* in London in 1970 and in *Global Architecture* in 1973<sup>9</sup>.

It is possible that the monograph dedicated to Spain in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* in 1970, entitled 'Espagne: Madrid-Barcelone'<sup>10</sup>, which included a selection of works by masters such as Fisac, Fernández Alba, Sáenz de Oíza, Cano Lasso and Coderch and some younger architects such as MBM (Martorell, Bohigas and Mackay) and Lluís Domènech, among many others, by including Ricardo Bofill's Taller de Arquitectura, placed this team on the same level as that of the notable Spanish architects linked to a certain degree to the two main Schools of Architecture in the title of this issue, although in 1970 there were already three more Schools of Architecture in Spain: Seville (1960), Valencia (1966) and Valladolid (1968). However, RBTA used the pages of the magazine to theorise on 'Vers la ville dans l'espace'<sup>11</sup> by including images of modular housing types and zooms of models of residential blocks that came to life in the photographs of the Gaudi Quarter in Reus<sup>12</sup> [Fig. 2].

Two years earlier, Bofill and his collaborators had published in 1968 the

8 "Kafka's Castle", *Architectural Forum*, no. 4 (1969): 35-41.

9 "Taller de Arquitectura: La Manzanera, Calpe, Spain (1966, 1972) and El Castell, Sitges, Spain (1967)", *Global Architecture*, no. 19 (1973).

10 "España: Madrid-Barcelone", *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 149 (1970): XI-XCIV, 1-106.

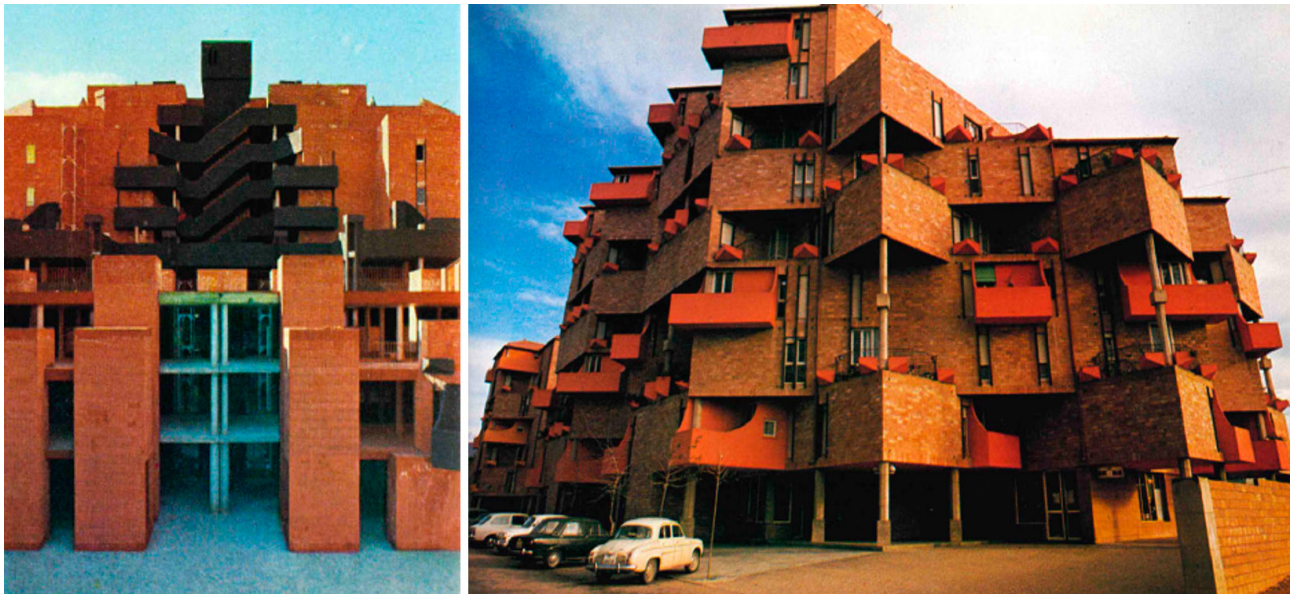
11 Salvador Clotas, "Vers la Villa dans l'Espace", *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 149 (1970): 32-36.

12 "España: Madrid-Barcelone", *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 149 (1970): 37-41.

Fig. 1

Kafka's Castle (1965-1969), Sant Pere de Ribes, double-page spread in AF (1969: 36-37) and detail of the Spanish Castle party hall in Seattle (<https://pnwbands.com/spanishcastle.html>).





book *Hacia una formalización de la ciudad en el espacio*<sup>13</sup> and, on this occasion - rather than advertising their works already in use - they chose to give a lesson on their experiments in modular residential architecture, which they illustrated with snapshots of the aforementioned Gaudí Quarter, many in detail, in full colour, where the gravity of the facings -the predominance of the wall- and the contrast of lights, shadows, textures and vivid, intense colours -a whole festival of reds, warm colours, mauves, violets, creams, greens, greys and blues- are evident: thirteen full-colour photographs occupy four pages against a single, tiny floor plan. No other work by Spanish architects in this issue occupies so many pages or is reproduced in colour: it is clear that the editors of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* were sufficiently seduced by RBTA's work to give it this feature, which would set off a chain reaction in other international magazines with an even wider technical readership.

13 José Agustín, Ricardo Bofill, Joan Ponç, Deidi von Schaerwen and Oriol Durán, *Hacia una formalización de la ciudad en el espacio* (Barcelona: Blume, 1968).

Fig. 2  
Gaudí Quarter (1964-1972),  
Reus, in the pages of *L'Ar-  
chitecture d'Aujourd'hui*  
(AA, 1970: 38) and *Architec-  
ture+Urbanism* (AU, 1976: 37).

Fig. 3  
Covers of *Architectural Fo-  
rum* (1971) with Ricardo and  
Anna Bofill; of *Architectural  
Design* (1975) and *Architec-  
ture+Urbanism* (1976) devo-  
ted to Walden 7 (1970-1975),  
Sant Just Desvern.

The Gaudi Quarter would appear the following year, in 1971, in the pages of *Architectural Design* in London<sup>14</sup> and *Architectural Forum* in New York<sup>15</sup>, in both cases with a certain amount of black and white photography, without plans, but with some outlines of the general floor plan and some colour images; the issue of *Architectural Forum* devotes its cover to a detail of a work in Walden 7 where, in two of its superimposed loophole windows, the heads of Ricardo Bofill (above) and his sister Anna Bofill appear [Fig. 3]. The Gaudi neighbourhood would also be published, in an extensive report covering the works of this period of RBTA, in *Architecture and Urbanism* in Tokyo<sup>16</sup> [Fig. 2] where Walden 7 also appeared. Walden 7, the first real 'mini-city in space' of the TA, would be published, among other magazines, in *Architectural Design* in 1975<sup>17</sup> [Fig. 3], where it would feature on the cover, and in *Architecture+Urbanism*<sup>18</sup> [Fig. 3]; in addition, like the Gaudi Quarter, Walden 7 would be published in the pages of *Progressive Architecture* in Stanford in 1975<sup>19</sup>. José Agustín Goytisolo, poet and philosopher, member of the RBTA, would say of Walden 7 that 'Just like in a cave or magic castle/ Everything was going to change in that place...' thanks to a massive block of 446 social housing units on 16 floors. In the 1960s and early 1970s, it seems that the TA only conceived its large residential, social or tourist complexes as castles or as fortresses of ever larger dimensions: small cities within cities; An expression coined by M. Tafuri and F. Dal Co in 1980 for the skyscrapers of the Chicago School at the end of the 19th century<sup>20</sup>.

Perhaps we have anticipated too much by announcing the reproduction of the first works in colour and we should go back a few years to give a new impetus to this story. The origins were in black and white and, in turn, Bofill was always good at writing, preaching, advertising and denouncing. In fact, his first text on architecture in foreign media took place in the aforementioned monograph of *Zodiac* in 1965, writing an extensive text entitled 'On the current situation of architecture in Spain' (Bofill, 1965: 34-43) which, after the background in Gatepac (the group of avant-garde architects of the 1930s in Spain), described a somewhat chaotic situation, both politically and urbanistically, in the mid-1960s, noting 'the beginning of a miracle' in economic terms and drawing attention to the phenomenon of mass tourism that was colonising the Mediterranean coastline: 'Architecture on the coasts (...) is perhaps the least dignified architecture, the most sold and lacking in any principle (...), where the only thing that matters is to give sun, sand and folklore to the English civil servant, the

14 "Barrio Gaudi. Taller de Arquitectura", *Architectural Design*, v. XLI, no. 8 (1971): 482-484.

15 "Barrio Gaudi", *Architectural Forum*, v. 134, no. 4 (1971): 22-27.

16 "Ricardo Bofill", *Architecture and Urbanism*, no. 12(1976): 34-38.

17 "Bofill Taller de Arquitectura", *Architectural Design*, v. XLV, no. 7 (1975): 402-417.

18 "Ricardo Bofill", *Architecture and Urbanism*, no. 12(1976): 34-38.

19 Geoffrey Broadbent, "The road to Xanadu and beyond", *Progressive Architecture*, no. 9 (1975): 68-83.

20 Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, *Arquitectura Contemporánea I*. (Barcelona: Aguilar, 1989), 62.

German (...) worker or the Italian merchant. (...) Our beautiful coasts will be converted, from the formal point of view, into a strange city where vulgarity and hollow decoration will prevail<sup>21</sup>.

This reflection is necessary to understand the Taller's architectural explorations (of modular grouping in space, with ascending metabolism) with his projects in La Manzanera from 1963 onwards, in particular in the two apartment complexes: Xanadu (1966-1968) and the Red Wall (1968-1973-1975); Both buildings would be responsible, to a large extent, for RBTA's international projection. The proper names of both properties did not anticipate the future, but referred to a hypothetical timeless oriental past: Xanadu was the summer capital of the Mongol empire between the 13th and 14th centuries that attacked the Great Wall of China (and is a proper name widely used in the Anglo-Saxon world to evoke a place of luxury and mystery or exuberance) and the Red Wall refers to the 'red forts' (more specifically the Red Fort in Delhi), characteristic of another empire: the Mughal empire based in India during the 16th and 17th centuries. In both cases: fortresses and forts, castles after all. Oriental architecture was always a source of knowledge and inspiration for Gaudí, whom Ricardo Bofill admired.

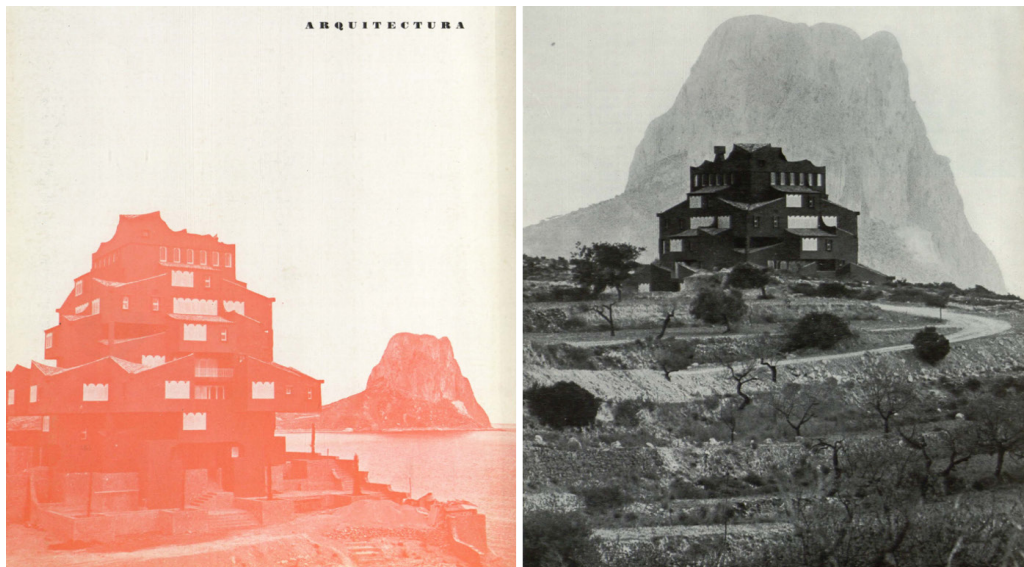
### **Xanadu, 1966-1968: a Green Rock in Black and White**

'In 1962 we began the study of a typical tourist development on the coast of Alicante facing the Rock of Ifach (...). We were asked to build slowly (...). It would be useless to recount the motivations and the methodology of the project. Perhaps we could sum them up in the attempt to create an island, in a certain paradisiacal way, which corresponds to a somewhat idyllic and bucolic vision of the world. The very special characteristics of the landscape, built by man, based on stone walls to contain the terraces, its natural amphitheatre shape, which causes considerable isolation from the monstrous surroundings, as well as an express desire for formal creation, were the factors that determined the project to transform that splendid natural landscape into a landscape expressly built for holidays (...). This development project, as well as the constructions begun (...), continue to aim to create a particular climate, with a certain mystical-materialistic tone, capable of provoking a certain psychic relaxation within the limitations inherent to architecture. [And as for Xanadu]: The tower-apartments are part of a greater methodological concern, which acquire a visualisation that in our own language we call post-cubism<sup>22</sup>.

21 Ricardo Bofill Levi, "Sobre la situación actual de la arquitectura en España", *Zodiac*, no. 15 (1965): 43.

22 Ricardo Bofill Levi, "La Manzanera, Calpe (Alicante) 1966", *Arquitectura*, no. 112 (1968): 30-34.





In this foundational text, first partially published in Spain in 1966 in Barcelona<sup>23</sup> and two years after in Madrid<sup>24</sup>, the year Sigfried Giedion died, and not reproduced abroad, perhaps the most extensive, explanatory and coherent text published by the TA on Xanadu (a building with 15 flats) [Fig. 4], the principles of his architecture in those years are set out: expresses a formal will capable of generating an emotive atmosphere of psychic distension through a project methodology of post-cubist exploration in space, a principle he finishes off with: 'I believe that works cannot be considered closed and complete, especially when they aim at a certain amount of research'<sup>25</sup>. In the case of the pages of *Arquitectura* de Madrid, this text is accompanied by others chosen for the occasion: the poem-story 'En el Xanadú' by Goytisolo, which contains several references to heroes and villains - Montezuma, Cabrera, Lenin and Tiresias - as well as sieges of fortresses and cities - Messina, Morella - where he states that: 'Don't think it was all a delirium, a marijuana cigarette is little explanation for so much certainty'<sup>26</sup>, where the hippy, rebellious and psychedelic attitude of the members of the Taller comes to the fore.

The text was illustrated with two photographs of El Castillo (first name), Plexus (name years later), the floors of the standard flats and eleven snapshots of Xanadu, all in black and white; Two of them would become iconic: a first one where the profile of Xanadu was placed in front of the rock (insinuating their volumetric similarities, saving the scale) and a second one taken from the sea, where, on the horizon and at both ends, the solidity of Xanadu perched on the cliff was contrasted with the mass of the Ifach Penon in the middle of the Mediterranean. Vázquez Moltabán, Catalan writer, reaffirmed this analogy in 1972: 'Xanadu (...) in its structure seems

Fig. 4

Xanadu in La Manzanera (1966-1968), Calpe, with the Ifach Penon in the background: separated on the cover in red tones on the cover of the *Arquitectura* (AM, 1968) and on an inside page the two silhouettes superimposed: Xanadu and Ifach Penon (to be repeated in: AA, 1968).

23 Ricardo Bofill Levi, "La Manzanera, Calpe (Alicante)", *Cuadernos de Arquitectura*, no. 65 (1966): 38-49.

24 Ricardo Bofill Levi, "La Manzanera", *Arquitectura*, no. 112 (1968): 30-34.

25 Ricardo Bofill Levi, "La Manzanera", *Arquitectura*, no. 112 (1968): 33.

26 José Agustín Goytisolo, "En el Xanadú", *Arquitectura*, no. 112 (1968): 32.



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to prolong indefinitely the project of chameleonic architecture, given its silhouette evocative of the Ifach Penon that serves as a backdrop'<sup>27</sup>.

This was in April 1968, the year in which Xanadu would travel around the world, printed in the pages of the most prestigious architectural magazines. In June Xanadu was reproduced in *Bausmeister*, Munich, and a month later, in July, it was published in the pages of *Architectural Design*, London, where Carlos Flores<sup>28</sup> was a correspondent. Here the authorship of this 'fantastic work' (described as 'A tower of 17 flats for all the people of the world without distinction of race, religion or colour') is attributed to Ricardo Bofill, Peter Hodgkinson, Xavier Baguel and Mando Janowsky, members of the TA<sup>29</sup>. The three pages devoted to Xanadu reproduce some of the texts that appeared in *Arquitectura* de Madrid, which would be repeated in various publications (in this case by Hendrix, Banham, Thomas, Orwell and Clotas), as well as the two iconic images, of rock on rock and rock in front of rock, similar to those that appeared in that magazine (now due to the photographer Deidi von Schaewen), as well as the section of the building and the housing modules, without it being understood what relationship they bear to each other: the documentation provided in plans was not sufficient to explain the planned and constructed building, and its scale made it difficult to understand. In September, the magazine *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, Paris, devoted another two pages similar to those of *Architectural Design*, without texts and several snapshots, heading the article with the iconic photo of Xanadu from the sea and the Ifach Penon at the ends of the panorama<sup>30</sup> [Fig. 5].

Three months earlier, in June, in 1968, *Architectural Forum*<sup>31</sup>, New York, devoted six pages in black and white to an extensive report on Xanadu. After the very brief presentation of the building, 'Sometimes pictures alone speak for themselves', the brief texts that follow on this occasion, in English, supplied by the Taller to the editorial staff, belong to a selection

27 Manuel Vázquez Moltabán, "La Muraille Rouge. Atelier Bofill, Barcelone", *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 162 (1972): 41.

28 Carlos Flores López (born 1928) was the first architect to study Modernist Spanish Architecture since 1925; his most famous work, *Contemporary Spanish Architecture* [Arquitectura española contemporánea], was published in 1961.

29 "Xanadu", *Architectural Design*, no. 7 (1968): 327-329.

30 "Tendences: Espagne 68: Epigones et Novateurs", *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 139 (1968): 98-99.

31 "Xanadu", *Architectural Forum*, no. 5 (1968): 52-57.

Fig. 5

Xanadu in La Manzanera (1966-1968), Calpe, left, and the Ifach Rock, right, in the pages of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (AA, 1968: 98) du Lac' appears.



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of authors (which had already been reproduced in *Arquitectura* from Madrid, not in *Cuadernos de Arquitectura* from Barcelona), including *The Style* by Banham, *The Fashion* by McLuhan, *The History* by Hugh Thomas, *The Surprise* by George Orwell on the Sagrada Familia, *The Shane* by Salvador Clotas (member of the Taller), *The Playful* by Emmerick, *Bon Mot* by Venturi (*Less is bore*) and *The Trip* by Jimmy Hendrix with the lyrics of the song *Spanish Castle Magic*, which was the name of the dance hall in the singer and musician's hometown during his adolescence, south of Seattle, a 1930s building that resembled a crenellated castle to which homage was paid and which disappeared in 1968 [Fig. 1]. Among the images were four photographs (an iconic one of Xanadu and the Ifach Penon), the standard floor plans of the flats, the vertical section of the building and a compositional scheme of the grouping by floor of the living quarters. The magazine included a text by Salvador Clotas (a member of the Taller) in which he referred to certain human behaviours: 'The attempt to reiterate the closeness between the artist and the schizophrenic is based on the profound conviction that a madhouse can encompass more reality than a city, assuming one accepts that a madhouse is a place for the sane'<sup>32</sup>, insisting on the need to create architectural environments that catered to moods and not only to strict functional requirements.

Although Xanadu would be published in other magazines as *Architectural Review* in 1973 [Fig. 6], we end the media tour (after Madrid, Munich, London, Paris and New York) in the 1973 monographic issue of *Global Architecture (GA)*<sup>33</sup>, Tokyo - perhaps the most relevant architecture pub-

32 Salvador Clotas, "The Shane", *Architectural Forum*, no. 5 (1968): 57.

33 "Taller de Arquitectura: La Manzanera...", *Global Architecture*, no. 19 (1973).

Fig. 6

Xanadu in La Manzanera, Calpe, with the Ifach Penon in the background in *Architectural Review* (AR, 1973: 293) and with the Mediterranean behind in *Global Architecture* (GA, 1973).



lishing house of the 70s and 80s, with large format photographs with great resolution by Yukio Futagawa - dedicated to the 'Taller de Arquitectura' with the display of La Manzanera (1966, 1972), and the Kafka's Castell (1967). In this case, plans and images of Xanadu and the Red Wall were reproduced, not only in black and white, but also in colour, including the iconic image of the two rocks at the ends of the bay of Calpe and another frontal image highlighting the stepped profile of Xanadu and its dark green cubes, a black and white report and the section with a certain level of detail. The front cover was occupied by a single photograph of the green Xanadu with the blue Mediterranean in the background [Fig. 6]. The text of the TA dedicated to Xanadu succinctly stated: 'A green rock composed of pure cubes, structurally arranged in space with a displaced symmetry'<sup>34</sup>. The fact that GA magazine dedicated an issue to three RBTA works was Ricardo Bofill's entry into the star-system of architecture that had just been born, another sign of the globalization that the mass media were building.

### **'Working in Progress': La Manzanera as a Piece in a Chain of Experimentation**

In case there were any doubts about this triumphant entry into the architectural firmament, three years later, in 1976, the Japanese magazine *Architecture and Urbanism* published an issue where RBTA's trajectory occupied a third of the pages<sup>35</sup> (AU, 1976: 23-46), through which the three Barcelona buildings of the 1960s and the experiments of Barrio Gaud, Kafka's Castle, La Manzanera (Xanadu and the Red Wall: 'la Muralla Roja') and Walden 7 paraded (in black and white and in colour). In it the works are analyzed highlighting the play of volumes, textures (brick and tiles) and colours (intense, vivid and in large surfaces), among other formalisms that made this architecture recognizable according to Shingo Yoshida<sup>36</sup>. In addition, Ricardo Bofill's statements were included in which he stated that architects should return to the earth and explore the meaning of architecture, because the new architecture should be emotional, since the role of the architect in those years was to turn dreams into reality<sup>37</sup>.

Xanadu would be published again in these years, although not in a monographic way, but in articles that reviewed the brilliant career of Ricardo Bofill's TA, as in 'The Taller of Bofill', by Geoffrey Broadbendt, in the pages of *Architectural Review* in 1973<sup>38</sup>. The text focuses on the works of La Manzanera (the Castillo-Plexus, Xanadu and Red Wall) in which Xanadu (Fig. 6) was described as: 'a seven-storey cluster of apartments (...), which

34 "Taller de Arquitectura: La Manzanera...", *Global Architecture*, no. 19 (1973).

35 "Ricardo Bofill", *Architecture and Urbanism*, no. 12 (1976): 23-88.

36 Shingo Yoshida, "Bofill's Color Space", *Architecture and Urbanism*, no. 12 (1976): 39.

37 Yoshida, "Bofill's Color Space", 35.

38 Geoffrey Broadbendt, "The Taller of Bofill", *Architectural Review*, no. 291 (1973): 289-297.

has been more widely published than most of Taller's work. (...)The overall massing in this case was derivate, by analogy, from the Ifach Penon, a Gibraltar-like rock at the far end as Calpe Bay, and within this silhouette the square apartment units are suspended or cantilevered from a concrete forme, around a central core, in a further development of the principles worked out for each of the clusters of Kafka's Castle. (Although Xanadu was built first, Kafka's Castle was projected a year earlier)<sup>39</sup>. Apart from the formal analogy, so often repeated in all the magazines, it is interesting to note that Xanadu was not an isolated case, but part of a chain of compositional experiments in space that would continue, among others, with the Red Wall, which was about to be completed at that time.

The same author, Director of Architecture at Portsmouth Polytechnic (UK), would revise and extend this text (in which he narrated the trajectory of the Workshop in the 1960s until the mid-1970s) in a new article in 1975: 'The road to Xanadu and beyond' in *Progressive Architecture* magazine<sup>40</sup>, Stanford, where he stated that La Manzanera was a pop fantasy village intended for summer holidays for a commune of artists, poets, architects and other professionals, insisting on that rebellious and somewhat ecstatic point of non-conformist bourgeoisie, both of the Workshop and of the users of its works. And, with regard to Xanadu, he recalled that it was too 'cubic', so local vernacular details were added, such as the sloping tiled roofs, the Gaudi-style curves and the painting 'in that brownish-green to which the local landscape burns at the height of summer'<sup>41</sup>. What the professor did not mention was that the roof tiles in Xanadu do not cover inclined planes, but hyperbolic paraboloids of reinforced concrete that are visible inside the flats (which have between two and three levels, depending on the type) and that the cubic volumes were held in the air in a virtuoso exercise of static equilibrium thanks to the 5m flights of the metal beams on the ground floor ceiling, that is to say, that underneath the appearance of the striking appearance of the building, there is the fact that the building has been built with a high level of concrete and that it has been built with a high level of concrete: that under the appearance of a striking abstract sculpture with finishes apparently inspired by traditional architecture, there was hidden a structural and spatial experiment that was overshadowed by the silhouette, the mass, the colour and the location of the work; An experiment that included the development of the flats on different levels.

However, this text (to which we shall return) includes comments on the compositional guidelines of the city in space<sup>42</sup> and lasted until 1975, when

39 Broadbendt, "The Taller of Bofill", 295.

40 Geoffrey Broadbendt, "The road to Xanadu and beyond", *Progressive Architecture*, no. 9 (1975): 68-83.

41 Broadbendt, "The road to Xanadu and beyond", 74.

42 José Agustín Goytisolo, ed., *Hacia una formalización de la ciudad en el espacio: Bofill, arquitecto taller de arquitectura* (Barcelona: Blume, 1968).



some projects appeared in which compositions changed their laws: from apparent randomness to the axuality and the hierarchy of symmetries evolved, where a certain monumentality stood out. Regardless of this theoretical analysis by the professor, it was evident that most of the magazines exploited the iconic condition of the surfaces of Xanadu synthesised in the photographs (that which entered through the eyes) and did not go deeper, an issue encouraged by the Taller itself when it sent materials on La Manzanera: photographic reports were displayed, while the plans were scarce, small in size and with little information. As is sometimes common in the mass media, the impact of the image was more important than the intellectual and material structure that supported it.

### **The Red Wall ('la Muralla Roja'): a Systematically Modulated 'Fotress'**

After the Castillo-Plexus (1963-1966) and Xanadu (1966-1968) it was the turn of 'la Muralla Roja' or the Red Wall (1968-1973-1975), and, following in the wake of the media success already achieved, the Red Wall - by now almost always reproduced in colour even before the works were completed - would have even greater repercussions. The first time the Red Wall was published in Europe -something that did not happen either in *Arquitectura* from Madrid or in *Cuadernos de Arquitectura* from Barcelona - was in mid-1972 in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*<sup>43</sup>, when it was still under construction. With a good 'clinical eye', the magazine devotes four colour pages to 'La Muraille Rouge' [Fig. 7], including a somewhat surrealist image of a naked man in profile lying on a staircase pretending to be climbing it [Fig. 7], something impossible which inevitably evokes certain paintings by M.C. Escher (1898-1972), and an outline of the complex, two floors of a Greek cross module of four dwellings with considerable detail [Fig. 8] and photographs of the building under construction with parts in concrete. The only colours in the colour range are burgundy, on the edge of the sea, as the blues and mauves had not yet been applied to the interior of the courtyards and roofs.

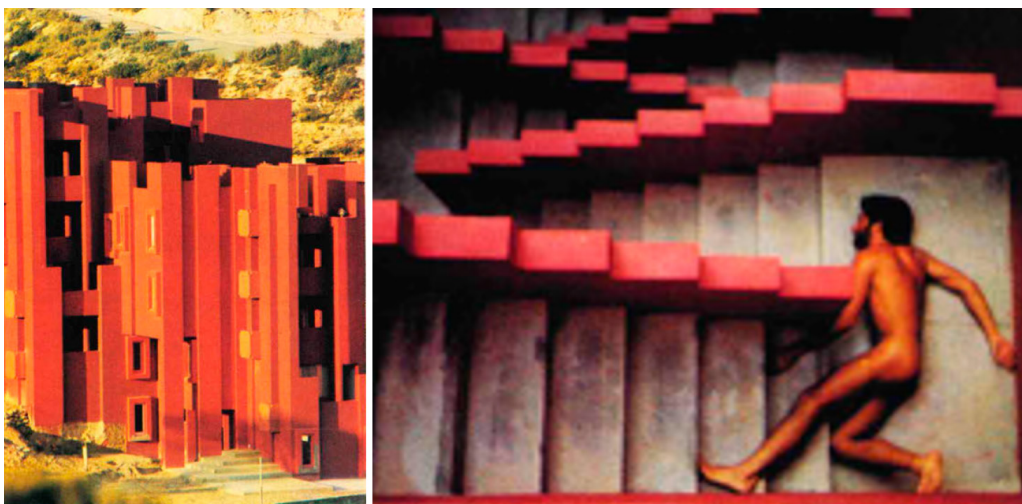
The article is accompanied by a poetic text by Vázquez Moltabán:

'Fifty red flats are currently being built in front of the sea (...). From the heights, nightmares stain the sea with the colours of postcards (...) We must not transcend the freedom to stain the landscape red (...). The Mongols run towards the Great Wall, waiting for the invasion (...), and they will never understand why it does not come. The invasion is us'<sup>44</sup>.

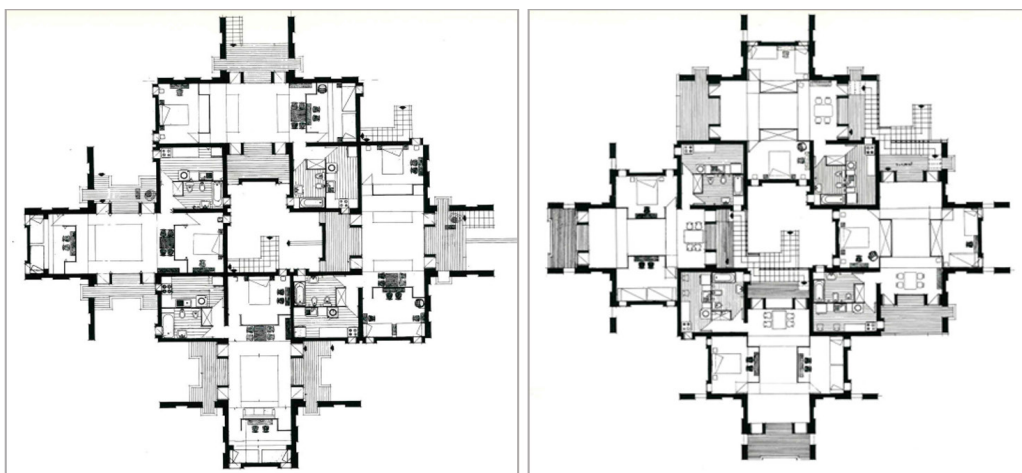
43 "La Muraille Rouge", *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 162 (1972): 41-44.

44 Manuel Vázquez Moltabán, "La Muraille Rouge. Atelier Bofill, Barcelone", *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 162 (1972): 41.

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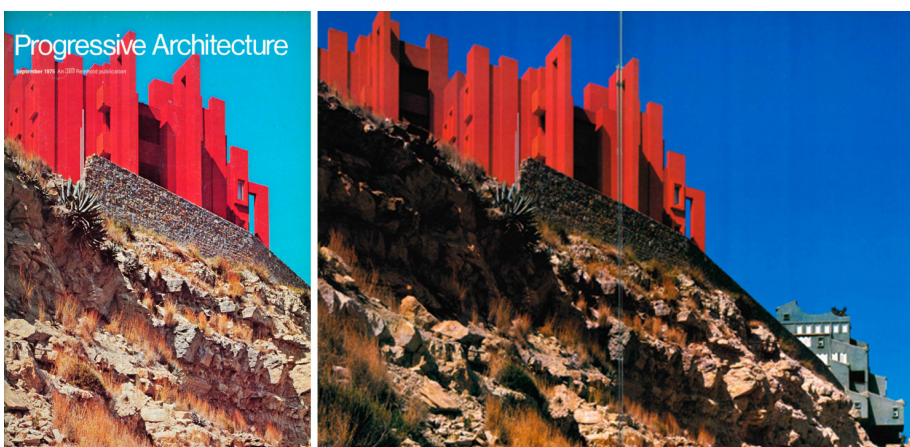


Fig. 7

The Red Wall at La Manzanera (1968-1973-1975), Calpe, and man lying down simulating climbing an interior staircase in the pages of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (AA, 1972: 41, 44).

Fig. 8

The Red Wall at La Manzanera (1968-1973-1975), Calpe, two-storey four-apartment Greek cross in the pages of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (AA, 1972: 42-43).

Fig. 9

The Red Wall at La Manzanera (1968-1973-1975), Calpe, as the cover of *Progressive Architecture* (PA, 1975) and double-page spread in *Global Architecture* (GA, 1973).

And a poem by J. Goytisolo who said that:

'It was a labyrinth, a/ painting full of colours/ red, like blood,/ red,  
like fear/ that makes the feet tremble/...'45.

Texts that hardly explain the building, composed of a single 4m module on the ground floor that generates a cross-shaped habitable cell of up to 80m<sup>2</sup>, which shows a diagonal symmetry that is not appreciable either in reality or in the photographs, because it seems to contradict the double symmetry of the basic Greek cross cell and because the floors reproduce the module of four houses with the same orthogonality of the pages instead of rotating them at 45 degrees.

Half a year later, the 1973 monograph (reissued in 1981) of *Global Architecture*<sup>46</sup> devoted to three works by the aforementioned TA, which displays in large format the snapshots taken by Yukio Futagawa, includes a double-page photograph of Xanadu and the Red Wall looming over the top of the cliff from the seashore, an image that reinforced the idea of the archetype of impregnable fortresses that concealed and protected the privacy of the domestic spaces contained behind their walls [Fig. 9]; Two photographs of these homes show that some of the furnishings in the rooms were made on site. The telegraphic text provided by the TA defined the Red Wall as 'An intricate village of enclosed and tortuous spaces that emerges to confront the landscape, a challenge to the sea'<sup>47</sup> without false mimicry.

The residential complexes of Barrio Gaudí, Castillo de Kafka, Walden 7, Xanadú and Muralla Roja were links in a chain of projects that seemed to undermine the principles of modern architecture by rejecting structural sincerity and denying the transparency of function in favour of the opaque, dense, surprising and emotive object, capable of influencing the mood of its users. At the same time, as we have already mentioned, *Architectural Review* in 1973 devoted an extensive article to the trajectory of the RBTA, written by G. Broadbendt, a professor of Architectural Theory specialising in Semiotics, referring to the modular methodology and the geometric games of permutation of these base modules. He also linked the Red Wall to the architecture of M. Safdie and Archigram, drawing similarities with 'the Chinese wall' and pointing out that the 'battlements at cliff level (...) turn out to be windbreaks enclosing a labyrinth of private enclosures for sunbathing, conversation and other forms of relaxation'<sup>48</sup>.

In the pages of the July issue of *Architectural Design* in 1975 - the cover of which is devoted to Walden 7 [Fig. 3], where a brush gives colour to the exterior volume - RBTA team member Peter Hodkinson writes an extensive article that reviews the TA's history to date, providing technical

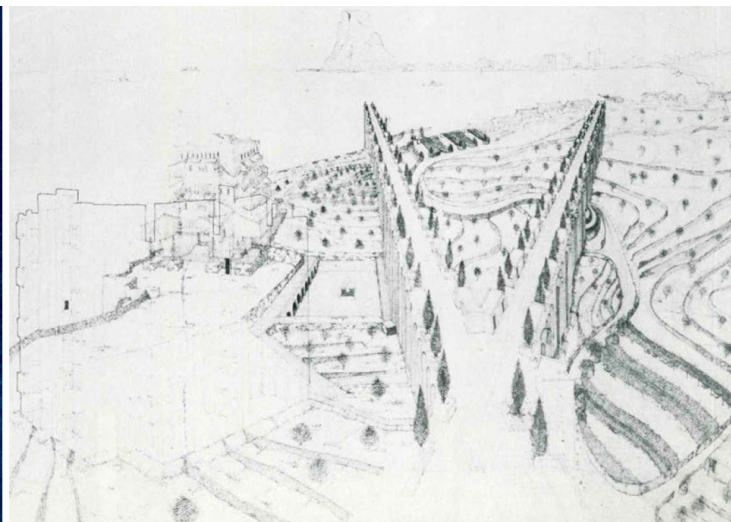
45 José Agustín Goytisolo, "Untitled", *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 162 (1972): 44.

46 "Taller de Arquitectura: La Manzanera", *Global Architecture*, no. 19 (1973).

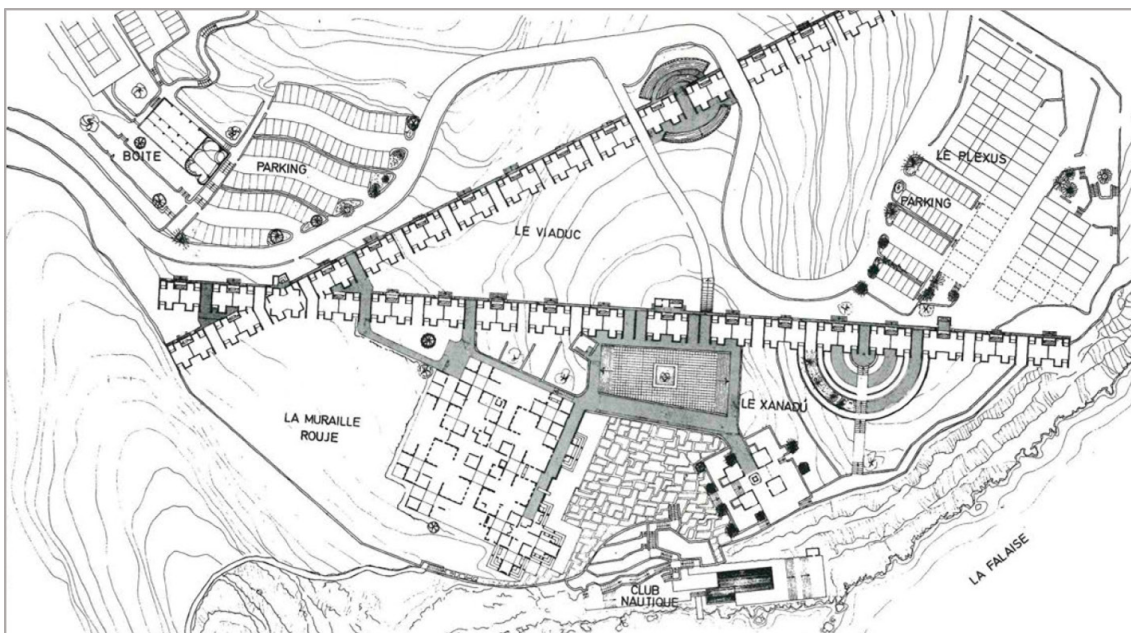
47 "Taller de Arquitectura: La Manzanera", *Global Architecture*, no. 19 (1973).

48 Geoffrey Broadbendt, "The Taller of Bofill", *Architectural Review*, no. 291 (1973): 295.





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data, as well as reporting that both the construction of individual villas (which were already underway) and a new project, Roman I (later The Viaduct), for which no drawings are provided, are also planned for La Manzanera. This member, in a detailed text on the trajectory of the TA, analysed, among others, the Red Wall (which now had 52 flats) describing its compositional system of Greek crosses of 5 squares with a base module of 4x4m in plan; The combination of four modules generated interior courtyards that expanded their surfaces as they were raised towards the sky by the simultaneous reduction of each dwelling in cross. In addition, the architect pointed out the importance of colour and the criteria for its application: red on the outside, and pink, purple, mauve and blue in the transition from the light of the exterior to the penumbra of the interior<sup>49</sup>.

In the same year, in the pages of *Progressive Architecture* - the cover of which is now devoted to the Red Wall perched on the hill photographed foreshortened from below [Fig. 9] - Professor Broadbent published a new

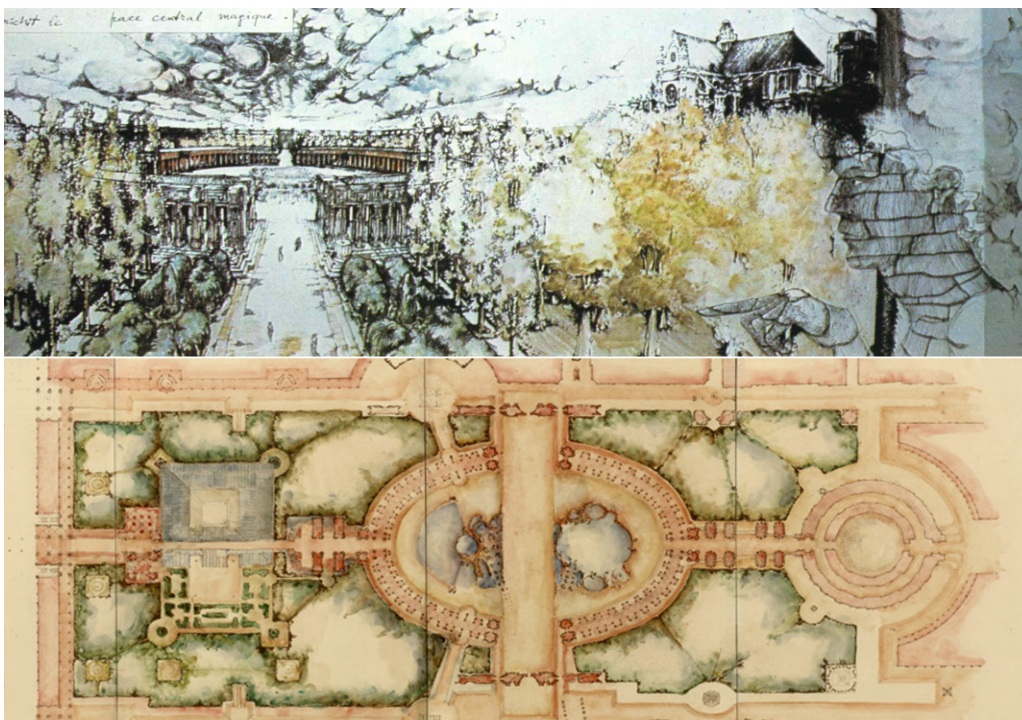
Fig. 10

'Sphere of Gold' in the Citedelle of Abraxas as the cover of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* and rotated perspective of La Manzanera with the new Viaduct project (AA, 1975: 69)

Fig. 11

La Manzanera Urbanization in 1975 with Plexus (1963-1966), Xanadu (1966-1968), Red Wall (1969-1973-1975) and Viaduct (1975) in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (AA, 1975: 68)

49 Peter Hodgkinson, "Bofill Taller de Arquitectura", *Architectural Design*, v. XLV, no. 7 (1975): 402-417.



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and even longer essay on RBTA's production entitled: 'The road to Xanadu and beyond'<sup>50</sup>. A long text that we have already referred to when talking about Xanadu and which reviews RBTA's trajectory, including Plexus (which is definitively renamed as such), Xanadu and the Red Wall, even a conic of the next building projected for La Manzanera, which he called 'Roman I' (and which that same year would receive its definitive name, in the pages of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, of 'El Viaducto' [Fig. 10, 11], never built), is even published correctly, emphasising even more the compositional question of the spatial experiments and insisting less on the formal aspects of the results, until reaching the winning proposal of the competition for Les Halles in Paris in 1973, which would raise Ricardo Bofill as *l'enfant terrible* of contemporary architecture with a proposal with classicist roots that caused some critics to wonder whether Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680) had returned to the French capital for the project of a large square between oval and elliptical [Fig. 12].

The Red Wall, which had received considerable media coverage<sup>51</sup> (both in Europe and in the United States and Japan), was to be reproduced in 1978 in the pages of the Milan magazine *Abitare*<sup>52</sup>, where, along with a detailed description of the complex, the visually appealing formal allegories still resonate: 'Not camouflaged, but rather embedded in the landscape, the Wall rises like a sculpture, like a fortress whose perimeter walls are so thick that they contain the entire flats. It is, in short, an inhabited

Fig. 12

First planning proposal, in 1973, for the Les Halles competition and its perspective with Ricardo Bofill, on the right, contemplating it, in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (AA, 1974: 112).

50 Broadbendt, "The road to Xanadu and beyond", 68-73.

51 The Red Wall ("La Muralla Roja") was published in 1972 in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, in 1973 in *Architectural Review*, also in *Global Architecture*, in 1974 once again in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, in 1975 in *Progressive Architecture* (PA), in the same year, for the third time, in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, also in *Architectural Design*, and, finally, in 1976 in *Architecture+Urbanism*.

52 "Vicino ad Alicante, una casa-paese: la Muralla Roja", *Abitare*, no. 161, (1978): 2-9.



wall, bright red on the outside, inside, on the other hand, all shaded in its labyrinthine evolutions, from pink through blue to purple. Pleasant shadows, courtyards, gardens, are enclosed in the heart of the fortress<sup>53</sup>. At the same time, he echoes the words of the TA which point out that this building is part of the Mediterranean urban tradition of creating ambivalent public spaces, present in ancient civilisations (Crete, Greece, Sicily, Rome), but also in Arab countries and in the Spanish Levant. This last reference is the one that Warren A. James would affirm a decade later that, in this work, the Red Wall, the TA 'set out with this building to break with the post-Renaissance segregation of public and private spaces by wielding a reinterpretation of the Mediterranean tradition of the casbah'<sup>54</sup>, although this comparison, lyrical and poetic, is no more than a casual proximity between the Red Wall and the casbahs, but this is not the generating principle of the complex which obeys other spatial experiments.

But the panorama for the TA had changed radically since 1973, when it had won the Les Halles competition in Paris with a proposal that was as strangely classicist as it was monumental. But this monumentality was not something accidental and fortuitous, but the result of the evolution of various proposals by the Workshop since 1970 in which the Red Wall contained some seeds because, unlike Xanadu (which is still an architecture floating in the air and, therefore, with modern roots), the load-bearing skeleton and the enveloping enclosure were the same compact and homogeneously impenetrable skin that emerged from the rock of the land itself, affirming a clear vocation for verticality, for obeying the laws of nature, not defying them, a character much more characteristic of classical gravity than of modern weightlessness.

### **From *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'Hui* in 1975 to the Exhibition at MoMA in 1985**

In the November-December 1975 issue of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'Hui*, half of its pages are devoted to RBTA<sup>55</sup>. It is a careful selection of works and projects, illustrated with ample graphic documentation (and photographs by Serena Bofill and Deidi von Schaewen), which outlines the trajectory of the TA from its beginnings until this year, when Ricardo Bofill has already embraced the *Beaux Arts* composition systems, as a revelation team after winning the competition to remodel the land hitherto occupied by the nineteenth-century central market of Les Halles in Paris. The cover of the magazine corresponds to a conical of the 'Golden Sphere' (a large constructed 'ball' [Fig. 10], reminiscent of

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53 "Vicino ad Alicante", 2.

54 Warren A. James, ed., *Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura. Edificios y Proyectos, 1969-1985* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1988: 37).

55 "Le Taller de Arquitectura de Barcelone", 57-98.

the architectures of C.N.Ledoux and E.L. Boullé, from 18<sup>th</sup> century, and set within a giant-scale portico of some five storeys) belonging to the unbuilt project of the Abraxas Citadel (1973). The list of works and projects, over 40 pages, includes the first residential buildings in Barcelona (synthetically), the Gaudi Quarter in Reus (1964-1972), the City in Space in Moratalaz (1970-1972), the Red Wall and Viaduct in La Manzanera (1969-1975), Walden 7 (1970-1975) and the Cement Factory (1971-1975) in Barcellona, and among the projects not executed: the Small Cathedral in the Ville Nouvelle de Cergy (1971), the Abraxas Citadel (1973), the Forum Blanc in La Defense (1973), the Meritxel Bridge and Sanctuary (1974) and the Park of the Marca Hispánica (1974-1975), a new repertoire of fortress. It is an eclectic formal repertoire that draws on his own experiments as well as on a large group of historical and classicist references of diverse origins.

The selection is well thought out and the plans reproduced in the pages (sketches, perspectives, plans, sections) make quite clearly explicit the evolution from the systems of combining modules according to mathematical principles established a priori, giving rise, apparently, to random volumetries, to the transformation of the guiding axes into hierarchical ones and the bodies into vertical masses, announcing a serious, almost ancient monumentality, which only needed to adopt the neoclassical forms adhered to its surfaces. It is significant that the Red Wall (Muralla Roja) stands out more from the La Manzanera complex than Xanadu (which appears in a photograph as a figurehead behind the Wall) and that a new building is added to La Manzanera in the form of two blocks intersecting in an X shape; These two blocks face the sea, one of which points towards the Ifach Penon, and define the double prism of flats called 'El Viaducto' (that which Professor Broadbendt had called 'Roman I' that same year in 1975), both of great length and implacable implantation in the natural amphitheatre of the grounds of Calpe, propitious in its verticality to house a simplified classicist language, which is included in the new floor plan of the residential complex [Fig. 11] and a definitive environmental perspective of La Manzanera [Fig. 10], although, by mistake, this conic is upside down.

Obviously, things had changed for RBTA: it was no longer a question of the internationalisation of his works in Spain, but his works were already international, a position that no other Spanish architect had achieved to date. In fact, although RBTA won the competition for Les Halles, he drew up three projects (1973-1978) [Fig. 12] to specify the solution that would be diluted in its execution, but which certify the definitive linguistic turn of his architecture towards a prefabricated and didactic classicism, both in semantics and *Beaux Arts* syntax in plans and elevations, and in his new urban principles that squares and streets should be the elements that configure residential

neighbourhoods. A second, even more prolific phase of TA's work then began, the epicentre of which would be in France and which would last beyond the year 2000. Bofill's new book of 1981: *The Spaces of Abraxas: the Palace, the Theatre, the Arch*<sup>56</sup> gives an account of this new industrially produced iconographic repertoire that would colonise the urban extensions of Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines (the Arcades, the Viaduct, the Palaces), Marne-la-Vallée (the Palace, the Theatre and the Arch) or Cergy-Pontoise (the Columns) on the outskirts of Paris and also in Montpellier, in what has been called 'the Versailles for the people'.

Ricardo Bofill and the TA may be remembered, among others, for this new kaleidoscopic imaginary in terms of social housing, although its origins lie in the city-in-space experiments of the 1960s and 1970s. This movement would be confirmed in the mass media when RBTA was selected for the 1980 Venice Biennale 'Novissima Strada', curated by Paolo Portoghesi, sharing the bill with Frank Gehry, Arata Isozaki, Aldo Rossi, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, Christian de Portzamparc, Léon Krier and (the young) Rem Koolhaas. A Biennial where, in the words of Jürgen Habermas, those selected sacrificed the tradition of modernity in order to make room for a new historicism. In 1983, *Global Architecture*<sup>57</sup> dedicated a monograph to the first 'Versailles' residential complex of the new phase of the RBTA: *Les Espaces d'Abraxas*. The MoMA in New York consecrated this postmodern movement in 1985 with the exhibition Architecture, Urbanism and History curated by R. Bofill and L. Krier<sup>58</sup>. And in this new stage that was opening up for architecture, once again, the professional mass media (with a decisive power of influence), and until the emergence of the internet in the new millennium, would dictate the old, but reinterpreted, canons to be followed. From the 1980s onwards, the dissemination of RBTA's work would not only take place through the pages of international journals, but the first monographs on his professional career began to be published, which took stock of the decades of work, success and media repercussions.

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56 Ricardo Bofill Levi and Annabelle d'Huart, ed., *Los espacios de Abraxas: El Palacio, El Teatro, El Arco* (Venezia: Electa, 1981).

57 "Ricardo Bofill/Taller de Arquitectura: Les Espaces d'Abraxas", *Global Architecture*, 1983.

58 Ricardo Bofill and Leon Krier, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1985.

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# The Visual Dimension in the Work of Ricardo Bofill / Taller de Arquitectura.

## In conversation with Gregori Civera

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*Ricardo Bofill, Architectural Photography, Gregori Civera, Media, Visual Culture*

### /Abstract

Conversation with the photographer Gregori Civera on January 28, 2025 to discuss his personal trajectory in relation to architectural photography and in particular his long collaboration with Ricardo Bofill's Taller de Arquitectura, which makes him the main visual interpreter of the formal, material and plastic identity of this fiery architecture, deserving today a new recognition precisely because of its remarkable visual nature.

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Iñaki Bergera holds a PhD (2002) and a professional degree in Architecture (1997) from the University of Navarra and teaches architectural design as Full Professor at the University of Zaragoza since 2008. Supported by Fundación 'la Caixa', he obtained an MDesS with Distinction from Harvard University in 2002. He has been main researcher of the national project "Photography and Modern Architecture in Spain" and curator of two major exhibitions on the same topic held at ICO museum in Madrid (PHotoEspaña 2014 y PHotoEspaña 2016). Author and editor of over twenty books (for publishers such as Abada, Turner, La Fábrica or Arquia), he has written numerous scientific papers in journals and has participated as a speaker in over thirty international conferences. In 2001 he studied photography at the Harvard School of Visual Arts with the British photographer Chris Killip, and since then he has carried out a personal photographic work around the same research topics embodied in various individual exhibitions such as America, Urban Landscape (2006), In the Landscape (2010), Twentysix (Abandoned) Gasoline Stations (Scan Tarragona 2014, PHotoEspaña 2015 and MUN 2018) and Empty Parking Spaces (Madrid-Zaragoza 2020); as well as in collective shows such as The Creation of the Contemporary Landscape (DKV-Alcobendas, 2016), Unfinished (Venice Biennial, 2016) or Motion, Autos, Art, Architecture (Guggenheim Bilbao, 2023). [www.bergeraphoto.com](http://www.bergeraphoto.com).

Gregori Civera (A Coruña, 1971) graduated from the Institut d'Estudis Fotogràfics de Catalunya in 1991. Over the course of more than three decades, he has developed an extensive photographic practice, mainly focused on architecture and editorial commissions (portraiture, fashion, advertising, etc.). His work has been featured in major newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *Financial Times Weekend*, *The Guardian* or *El País*, magazines such as *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair* or *Wallpaper*. He has also worked with clients such as *BMW* and *Zara*. Civera first photographed one of Ricardo Bofill's works in 1996 and, from 2009 onwards, became the official photographer for the Taller de Arquitectura, documenting both contemporary works and the entirety of the studio's legacy. This role has positioned him as the foremost interpreter of RBTA's passionate architecture, which, over five decades, has engaged with postmodernity and metabolism in an interdisciplinary fashion, encompassing collective housing, urban planning, and singular architectural landmarks. This diverse body of work is underpinned by a powerful visual substrate, defined by its formal, material, and chromatic syntax—precisely the universe that Civera knows intimately and interprets with technical coherence and visual sensitivity.

**Gregori, how long have you been interested in architectural photography?**

I finished my photography studies at the Institut d'Estudis Fotogràfics de Catalunya in 1991, a year before the Barcelona Olympic Games. At that time, architecture, photography, design, and even comics were in a state of profound transformation. The latest venues designed by Tusquets or Alfredo Arribas quickly became places of pilgrimage. Photography was a way to engage with that wave of modernity. During my studies, I had photographed architecture, but I hadn't yet practised architectural photography—an important distinction for me. In fact, I still don't consider myself an architectural photographer. At the Institut, there was a strong emphasis on categorising photographic genres—fashion, architecture, etc.—as separate disciplines. That approach never resonated with me. I've always been drawn to photographers like Irving Penn, who applied a singular, recognisable perspective to vastly different subjects. I'm a photographer who happens to photograph architecture, among other things. The genre of architectural photography, as such, doesn't particularly interest me, nor does its professional practice—even though I do practice it. I'm interested in architecture as a system for analysing and understanding the world, which, in many ways, mirrors photography itself. I'm interested in the process, which is ultimately about a way of looking.

**Knowing how this activity has changed and evolved, how do you think architecture should be photographed?**

I've often discussed this with my friend Manolo Laguillo. The first question is whether to use a tripod or not—not so much for technical reasons, but because it allows for a more precise definition of the point of view. I'm interested in describing the material world, and architecture is deeply intertwined with that. Jorge Ribalta and I are currently collaborating on a photographic project centred on the GATCPAC Tuberculosis Clinic in Barcelona, which Ribalta has titled 'Fiebre de la materia' [Material Fever]. This is what drives me: the exaltation of materiality, of how things are constructed and how they function. What makes this project particularly interesting is how it takes me back to my very first commission in architectural photography.



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**What was that commission? Did you work for any of the architects involved in Olympic Barcelona?**

In 1993, Antonio Pizza approached me through a mutual friend and asked me to photograph the Tuberculosis Clinic for a book he was preparing<sup>1</sup> [Fig. 1]. When I graduated in 1991, I teamed up with Josep María Molinos, a photographer from Barcelona who had extensive experience in industrial photography. Together, we set up a small studio equipped with nothing more than a typewriter, a Hasselblad 500, an 80mm lens, and a 50mm lens—that was all we had. We worked together until 2000, collaborating with numerous architects and clients closely linked to the construction industry.

**And when did you first come across Ricardo Bofill?**

In 1996, he completed the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya, and thanks to one of our industrial clients—though I can't recall exactly whether it was an installation company or what its specific role was—we were commissioned a photographic shoot on the project. It was more extensive than

<sup>1</sup> Antonio Pizza, ed., *Dispensario antituberculoso de Barcelona, 1933-1937: J. Ll. Sert, J.B. Subirana and J. Torres Clavé* (Almería: Colegio de Arquitectos de Almería, 1993).

Fig. 1  
Tuberculosis Clinic in Barcelona, a GATEPAC project. © Gregori Civera.



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initially requested, as we took full advantage of having access to the building, just in case it might be of interest to others. I also remember that, for a short period around that time, David Cardelús was collaborating with us and he contributed some of the photographs. I took the initiative to contact the Taller de Arquitectura, which led me to Serena Vergano, who was then in charge of publications and communications at the studio. The photographs were shot on plates and slides—a highly professional process that required significant technical expertise. They were very pleased with the results [Fig. 2], and the photos have been widely used and reproduced since. I thought they might call us again after that, but they didn't.

### Did you throw in the towel?

After 2000, I parted ways with my business partner and distanced myself from architectural photography. I didn't feel totally fulfilled by the professional dynamics of the field. Two years earlier, in 1998, I had given it one last chance and travelled to Stockholm to work on something that I genuinely enjoyed, something that wasn't a commissioned assignment. I photographed Rafael Moneo's Museum of Modern Art. I had arranged to meet Moneo, and during our encounter, I also took several portraits of him. The photographs of the Museum turned out to be intriguing but they weren't particularly publishable because the building wasn't finished, although when I planned the trip, I was told it would be. But the portraits themselves were good. Before leaving, I handed my card to the museum's communication manager, who had been very kind. A few days later, I received a call from *Vogue España*. They had followed the same logic I had: Ghery

Fig. 2  
Teatre Nacional de Catalunya, Barcelona. © Gregori Civera.





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had achieved acclaim in Bilbao and a Spaniard, Moneo, was making his mark in Stockholm. They had visited the Museum but hadn't taken a photograph, so they asked me for the photographs. I sent them the images and they published a full-page portrait of Moneo. Over the next four to five years, I worked for *Vogue* and *El País Semanal*, focusing on portraiture, which eventually led me to venture into advertising photography. These projects broadened my repertoire significantly.

### **And when did you resume contact, this time for good, with Bofill's Taller?**

I had forgotten about architecture until 2009, when *Vanity Fair* commissioned me to take a portrait of Ricardo Bofill at La Fábrica. After more than a decade, I reached out to Serena again. Ricardo's younger son, Pablo Bofill, had just joined the management team at RTBA. The assignment for *Vanity Fair* went well and Pablo, knowing my work and my earlier connection to the Taller, made me an offer: to photograph the entirety of the studio's built work—everything constructed over the span of 50 years. The idea was to photograph new projects while gradually revisiting the archive.

### **And what was the RTBA archive like at that time? Going over that documentation, which photographers had Bofill worked with during the most celebrated years of his career?**

The archive was managed by a single person, responsible for both the plans and the photographs, but it was in a state of considerable disarray. The topic of period photographs is fascinating. Many of the photographs

Fig. 3

77 West Wacker Drive, Chicago, 1992 © Gregori Civera.



were taken by the Taller's own people, especially Serena—an accomplished photographer—and Annabelle d'Huart. Some may also be by Català-Roca. Yukio Futagawa photographed several projects for *GA Architect*, and there were contributions from a German photographer who was living in Barcelona, Deidi von Schaewen, as well as some images by Hisao Suzuki.

**It's curious, then, this lack of interest in photographic documentation of the Taller de Arquitectura's work.**

Let me share an anecdote. Pablo Bofill told me one day that we might need to go to Chicago to photograph the skyscrapers [Fig. 3]. The Taller had built two impressive towers in downtown Chicago and they only had a single slide—and a bad one at that—provided by the developer. Ricardo was never interested in the past; he always looked to the future.

**As one would expect in the 1960s and 1970s, rather than viewing architecture as an object, there was an interest in documenting it as a setting, as a backdrop to collective life.**

Certainly. There are some incredible photographs from the time of La Fàbrica, Gaudí district, Walden-7, and other projects, that I'm now rescuing from the archive, digitalising and editing them, because photography played an extremely important role during that phase of the Taller's development. Everything was documented. There are some amazing photographs, for example, of the performance-concert held in the late 1960s in Moratalaz for the launch of the City in the Space. These aren't strictly

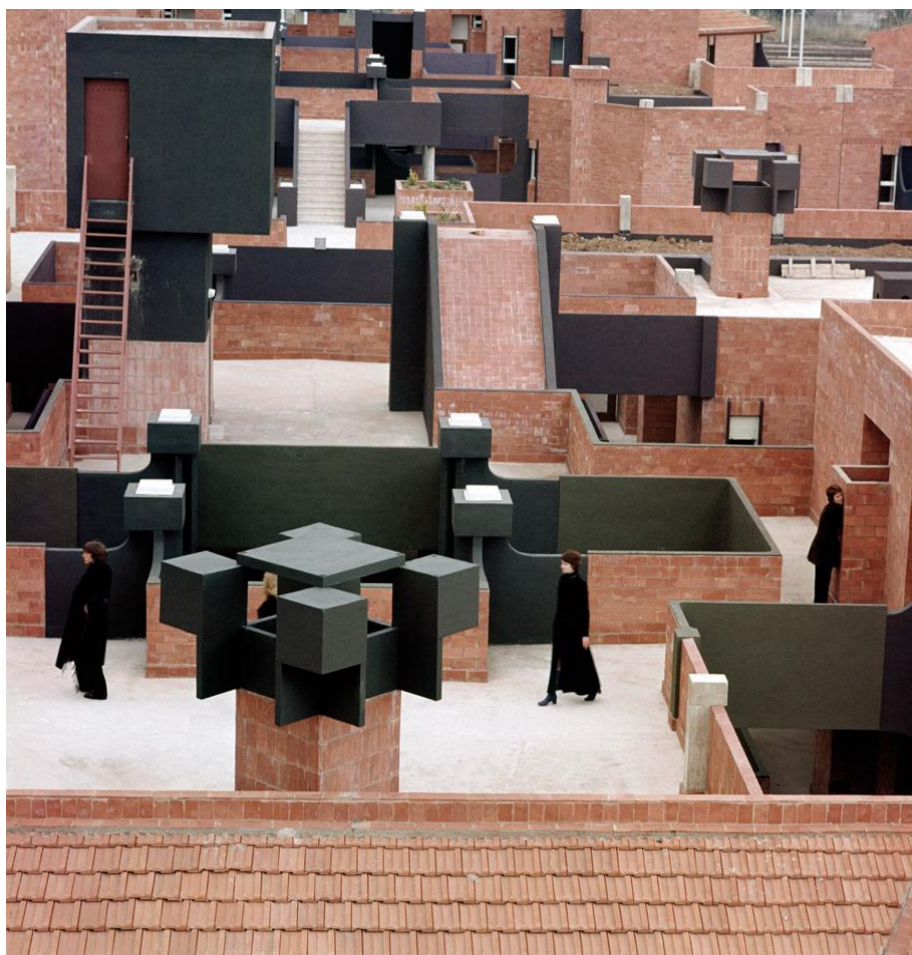


Fig. 4  
Gaudí District, Reus, Tarragona, 1968 BTA Archive.

architectural photographs, but rather documentary or even performative. In the photographs of the Gaudí district, there are artists and actors. Photography was used as another tool within the architectural project and, in a way, they flout convention. There was more interest in the experience of architecture than in describing it [Fig. 4]. These photographs are also sensual and experimental.

**Your definitive arrival at the Taller in 2009 did indeed mark a more structured interest in the photographic documentation of the projects.**

That's right. My first assignment was the Hotel Vela in Barcelona, followed by the Sanctuary of Meritxell, in Andorra. Later I photographed the Gaudí district and the Mont-Ras house. We began combining newly completed projects with historical ones. In 2015, Pablo Bofill asked me to go to Calpe, though I wasn't entirely sure what I would find there or in what condition. This photo shoot of La Muralla Roja [The Red Wall] ultimately became a significant milestone in my photographic work on Bofill's architecture, as well as for the Taller itself. The vertical photograph of the staircases is my most successful and widely reproduced photo [Fig. 5]. For 30 years, no one paid much attention to that project. It had been largely neglected, the price of the apartments had plummeted and the community was on the verge of bankruptcy. These were the years of the rise of *Instagram*. That precise shade of pink, *Millennial Pink*, had just been named Pantone's colour of the year. The algorithm did its job and the photograph triggered a snowball effect that swept us all along—both us and La Muralla Roja itself. The place began attracting floods of tourists and enthusiasts, which allowed the community to recover financially and undertake the restoration and repainting of the buildings.

**It's an extremely fascinating case study of how a single architectural photograph can produce a radical change in the collective acceptance of architecture and architects.**

It wasn't just one photograph; others soon followed. The photos I took at the time are good, but this isn't solely my achievement. It was Pablo's idea to give renewed value to the older projects, and this, among other things, ultimately contributed to Ricardo Bofill being awarded an honorary doctorate by the ETSAB in 2021, shortly before his passing. His relationship with the School had always been peculiar. The architects who studied



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Fig. 5  
Muralla Roja, Calpe, Alicante,  
1973 © Gregori Civera.

in the 1980s and 1990s thought that Bofill's architecture was rather out-dated. When the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya was completed, the harshest criticism came from my architect friends. Moneo, who later designed the Auditori, compared his work to an oil tanker and Ricardo's to a luxury yacht. However, younger architects, who are active consumers of social media, have begun to reassess not only La Muralla Roja but also Walden-7 and other examples of utopian architecture in a new light. This interest extends beyond the architecture itself to the interdisciplinary model of architectural production as a collective experience whose transformative ambition is once again highly relevant in today's re-evaluation of the means and ends of architecture itself.

**It is also true that Ricardo Bofill's career is remarkably broad, spanning many stylistic registers, especially in his early years. Projects like the housing on Juan Sebastián Bach Street in Barcelona or the Nicaragua apartment building, for example, still adhered to a certain orthodoxy of the Modern Movement and the Barcelona School, as embodied by Coderch.**

We shouldn't forget that Ricardo's father, Emilio Bofill, was already aligned with the modernist ideals of GATCPAC in the 1930s. Ricardo's early projects were developed in collaboration with him. Emilio, for instance, was the builder of La Ricarda. We're currently working on the correspondence between Emilio and Antonio Bonet regarding the project, and it is clear that certain design decisions came from Emilio Bofill. In any event, Ricardo launched the Taller de Arquitectura very soon afterwards, an interdisciplinary space for experimentation that challenged orthodoxy right from the start.

**In 2023 you held an exhibition of your photographs of the Taller de Arquitectura's work at the Unité d'Habitation in Marseille. How do Bofill and Le Corbusier engage in dialogue, so to speak?**

Bofill used to say that Le Corbusier was the devil incarnate. Yet, the programme of Walden-7 is essentially the same as that of the Unité. Ricardo and the Taller team, with all the arrogance of youth, embraced Le Corbusier's concept of collective housing but chose to reinterpret it in a far more sensual and fun way, breaking free from the shoebox. The spirit is entirely different—much more playful, challenging social conventions in a way. At Walden-7, people are free to live as they please; the project not only addresses the problem of access to housing, but also proposes a game of communal life, loosening social norms and customs. The interiors of Walden-7, with their carpeted level changes, invite you to lie down, to let go of formalities.

**However, your photographs do maintain a sense of composure. You photograph Bofill's work with exquisite technical rigour and an undeniable formal orthodoxy in terms of framing, much like Ezra Stoller photographed Saarinen in the 1950s, to draw a parallel. Moreover, your recent photographs of Bofill's career succeed in lending his work—anachronistic in its time—a timeless quality that comes to its rescue, as we have seen with La Muralla Roja, and which has contributed to its critical acclaim.**

For me, photography is an exercise in composition. My photographs are fragments of architecture because, for me, that's a photographer's task. The modern overuse of wide-angle lenses means that it's the lens, rather than the photographer, that takes the picture. It's a technical resource that creates a language based on repetition. I am interested in being the author of my photographs. It may seem blatantly obvious, but I want to take good photographs that, removed from their context or the need that prompted them, work as images. That's my goal. I don't manage it in every photo, but that's what I strive for, beyond merely explaining a project. The photographer's work lies in framing. Framing and composition receive far less attention than they deserve. Photography is a cut into reality, and the 'what' and 'how' of the reality you represent are framing and composition.

**The concept of authorship, in the positive sense in which you use it, is what actually defines the identity of the best architectural photography. It's not so much about what I see, but how I see it.**

Julius Shulman, for example, had a highly theatrical approach to photography. His photographs not only serve the architect but also work for him as a photographer. Stoller's photographs of the TWA terminal possess an elegance, a plasticity, a composition... one can't wish for more in architectural photography, though I wouldn't settle for less either.

**Some argue that one of the goals of architectural photography is to capture the essence of a building, much like a good portrait of a person—their gaze—reveals the soul of the subject.**

I find that absurd. Capturing the essence of a building is to confuse the thing with its image. I produce images of things, buildings or people, it's all the same to me. But they must work as images. When you look at them, they should make you question something. A photograph must work apart from its subject, have its own identity. It must take flight, transcend, detach itself from the subject—otherwise, it doesn't work. Well, it might serve the commissioner's purpose, but that doesn't interest me. In the 1990s, when I photographed architecture, I expected a call from Gehry



to shoot the Guggenheim in Bilbao. Now I think it would have been difficult, it would have been very complicated to achieve that level of image autonomy: you would always see the Guggenheim, not the photograph.

**But undoubtedly, some architectures are more photogenic, offering a richer visual load from which to construct a new image. Think back to the early 2000s, before the real estate bubble burst, when, leveraging the star-system architecture, many architects designed buildings thinking about their skin, their outer layer, crafting facades that might end up as images of another kind of facade, the cover of an architecture magazine.**

Bofill's architecture offers certain elements on a platter, but it's up to the photographer to make something of them. There is a photograph of one of the studio's skyscrapers in Chicago that is impeccable [Fig. 6], partly thanks to its urban context. If a client commissions a photo shoot, I must return with something worthwhile, not just the first thing that comes to mind. But I'm interested in being able to remove that photograph from the context of the assignment and have it work on its own. And how does an architectural photograph work? For me, composition involves an essential sensual and plastic quality.

**You also worked several years in fashion photography. What did you take from that field to architecture?**

Unlike my approach to architecture, at first I wanted to experiment and find new angles, unconventional framing, etc. Soon I realised that I was wrong, that my way of looking was much more graphic. So I returned to my large-format camera for fashion photography. Why did I eventually stop working in fashion? Because I understood that most of those photographs satisfied the client, met requirements and expectations, but they didn't satisfy me. They didn't work outside their intended context. I could see how much effort went into creating something with an extremely short lifespan, as they had no autonomy beyond the specific context for which they were made for. I'm not particularly interested in genres as such—whether fashion or architecture. I am a photographer, not an architect or an architectural critic. I'm interested in gaining access to certain things and capturing them from my own point of view.



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Fig. 6  
Dearborn Center, Chicago,  
2003 © Gregori Civera.



**What's curious is that architectural photography these days lacks that sense of authorship, most images are markedly similar.**

A particular style of photography has become clearly established, shaped by the nature of digital photography and the excessive use of wide-angle lenses that make it possible to take spectacular photos. In the 1990s, incredible wide-angle lenses began to appear for large-format cameras. However, the classic photographs of Stoller, Shulman, and others were taken with standard or moderately wide lenses. Those photographs are elegant, expressive and well-composed. From the 1990s, commercial architectural photography began to show signs of this exaggeration. The characteristic vignetting in those photographs is a good example of how a technical issue generates a language. A technical flaw becomes a defining feature, a sophistication that reveals the use of a large-format camera. The flaw—the vignetting—becomes a code, signalling a certain technical sophistication. I'm not particularly interested in sensationalism. In my conversations with Laguillo, we identified two schools of thought in architectural photography, each of us aligning with a different one. The first relies heavily on wide-angle lenses, often positioning the camera very close to the building to create a monumental image. This is something I try to avoid. The second involves stepping back as much as possible, using lenses that offer a more natural, normal angle of view. This is the approach I follow. I mainly use a 135mm lens and 180mm lens with my large-format camera, both of which closely resemble the normal angle of view. This method aligns with how I see things, and ultimately, what I see is what captures my attention.

**Also in technical terms, we're witnessing a return to analogue processes today, much like vinyl in music—whether through physical means or the application of digital filters that emulate the patina of old chemical films.**

Many of my photographs of Bofill's work are digital. I now have a fantastic drum scanner that allows me to scan film really well. But in the past, I worked with an Alpa tilt-shift camera with a digital back. I mention this because it's not always easy to distinguish the processing of my digital images from those shot on film. They share the same plasticity. Film for the sake of film doesn't interest me; I'm not drawn to nostalgia. I'm interested in the image itself. That said, film offers something that digital photography doesn't: a three-dimensionality that particularly benefits architecture. To replicate that three-dimensionality digitally, you need to stitch multiple shots together. For example, the photograph of Cergy [Fig. 7] is actually a composite of two vertical images merged into one. No one notices, but a particularly observant viewer might spot a child with a ball



who appears twice, on the left and on the right. By merging them, I achieve a larger format and begin to get that three-dimensional quality inherent to film.

**Earlier you mentioned your interest in describing the materiality of architecture, which isn't obvious.**

Architecture is both material and language, and I try to respond to that. When you photograph architecture, you're, in a way, producing architecture. Consciously photographing architecture is a constructive exercise, a way of rebuilding. With the tripod, the large-format camera and other tools, you engage in a compositional exercise that is inherently constructive. You move the camera until the composition feels right. The world is chaotic and disorderly, yet, from a specific viewpoint, the camera creates an illusion of order, suggesting relationships between elements that would otherwise seem unrelated. All of this is achieved through light and composition. These are the kinds of plays that interest me in architecture. Consider Hervé's photographs, for example. Le Corbusier's work is dry, austere, and sober, yet Hervé, through his play with light and shadow, reveals something sensual in that architecture—something tied to the experience of architecture rather than its mere description. His is a subjective photography that narrates what he's experienced within those works by Le Corbusier. Guido Guidi's *5 Architectures*<sup>2</sup> is brilliant. It features photographs of details of buildings, rather than the buildings themselves. The photos are almost identical, with subtle changes in the camera or light. That's what interests me, exercises that involve living and experiencing

Fig. 7  
Les Colonnades de Saint-Christophe, Cergy-Pontoise, France, 1986 © Gregori Civera.

<sup>2</sup> Guido Guidi, *Le Corbusier, 5 architectures* (Berlin: Kehrer, 2017).

architecture. If I need to produce an elevation, I do, but I like to include a counterpoint. I'm drawn to the unfinished, the imperfect. Something unexpected that shouldn't be there but enriches the image and makes the photograph work. A perfect photo of a flawless elevation doesn't interest me. Architectural photography often avoids anecdotal elements to focus on the permanent. But the anecdote is inherently photographic; it gives the image autonomy from the object, making it specific.

**Gregori, what is your current work with RBTA in the short and medium term?**

Since Ricardo's passing on 14 January 2022, the situation has been quite atypical. After 15 years of collaboration, my relationship with the Taller de Arquitectura team is one of close friendship. My role at the Taller reflects this and on many occasions I do consultancy work. In 2020 we began revisiting the archive and we discovered incredibly interesting material that no one had seen in 50 years. This material— catalogued and restored in my studio—will help to better understand and share the fascinating history of the Taller de Arquitectura.

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Fig. 7

Les Colonnes de Saint-Christophe, Cergy-Pontoise, France, 1986 © Gregori Civera.

# Bofill: the French Adventure and the Launch of an International Career

*Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura, Les Halles, Paris, Spanish Architecture, Social Housing*

## /Abstract

This text is a special contribution to this monographic issue on Ricard Bofill Taller de Arquitectura, commissioned from Dominique Serrell, author of *Bofill. Les années françaises / The French Years*, published by Norma Éditions in 2023. As the former director of the Taller de Arquitectura in Paris, Serrell provides a comprehensive analysis of Bofill's principal projects and achievements during his career in France between 1971 and 1985.

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Dominique Serrell is a professional advisor in the fields of design and architecture. From 1975 to 1983, she worked as the Director of Taller de Arquitectura in Paris. She played a pivotal role in the Les Halles project in Paris and was instrumental in the success of most of the Bofill's projects in France. In 1983, she established the agency Terres Nuages, which has since supported numerous creators, now internationally recognised, in their professional development. She is Professor at both ENSCI41 Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Création Industrielle, Paris, and LISAA42 Institut Supérieur des Arts, Paris. She authored the books *Exercer le métier de designer: Du statut au contrat d'exploitation* (Paris: Eyrolles, 2015) and *Ricardo Bofill, Les Années françaises* (Paris: Norma Editions, 2024).



## Part One: 1971-1974.

### From La Petite Cathédrale of the 1970s to Les Halles de Paris project 1974-1978.

Ricardo Bofill was invited to France in the 1970s by the engineers responsible for the new towns, developed under the leadership of General de Gaulle and particularly of Jérôme Monod, Michel Picquard, and Paul Delouvrier, to provide a solution to the expansion of cities in the Île-de-France region by finding an alternative to the existing suburbs.

Indeed, it was through a mission formed by a small number of high-ranking officials, mostly engineers from the Ponts-et-Chaussées, that the Central Group of New Towns (GCVN) was created in 1970 under the direction of Jean-Eudes Roullier, an inspector of finances.

The works of the Taller de Arquitectura in Spain, along with its research in social housing and intergenerational living, resonated within the European architectural scene and drew the attention of the French mission. The latter was seeking young talents to propose alternatives to the “*grands ensembles*.”<sup>1</sup> A documentary produced by the advertising agency Hautefeuille<sup>2</sup> under the direction of Jeanne Girardot was broadcast on French television, introducing these engineers to the Barrio Gaudi in Reus, built by the multidisciplinary group from the leftist movement, Taller de Arquitectura. Ricardo Bofill, its leader, appeared on screen in full view.

### “Bofill’s arrival in France was akin to Bonaparte at the Pont d’Arcole...”

One could observe a population originating from agricultural provinces, bringing their chairs out onto the streets, recreating the atmosphere of a traditional Mediterranean public space, characterized by strong intergenerational interaction. Bofill presented himself with the appearance of a wise sage.

Ricardo Bofill was a true phenomenon. Guy Salmon-Legagneur<sup>3</sup> remarked upon seeing him for the first time: “He is Bonaparte at the Pont d’Arcole.” At the age of thirty-five, Bofill had already completed remarka-

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1 The term *Grands Ensembles* refers to large-scale high-rise public housing developments built in France during the mid-20th century. While often translated as “housing estates” or “large housing complexes,” the phrase carries specific historical and social connotations tied to post-war urban planning and state-subsidized housing policies. Similarly, HLM (Habitation à Loyer Modéré) denotes a regulated social housing system with subsidized rents, a concept that may not have a direct equivalent in other contexts. (*Translator’s note*)

2 The Hautefeuille advertising agency gained notoriety through the publication of a full-page advertisement in the October 23, 1970 issue of *Le Monde*, featuring a photograph of Albert Einstein with the caption “Einstein had long hair,” as a form of protest against the dismissal of a carpenter who had been fired for having long hair.

3 Technical advisor to the Prefect of the Paris Region, Deputy Secretary-General of the Groupe Interministériel des Villes Nouvelles de la Région Parisienne, then of the GCVN: Group Central des Villes Nouvelles (Central Group for New Towns, 1968-1978), Secretary-General of the GCVN (1978-1983), Vice-President of the GCVN (1983-1984).

ble architectural works in Spain. A few weeks later, the first study trip to Spain was organized in early summer 1971, followed by a second one in September.

Paul Chemetov, an influential architect and founding member of the A.U.A.,<sup>4</sup> was the first to collaborate with Bofill in submitting a proposal for the Évry competition.<sup>5</sup>

Following the broadcast of a documentary on *Barrio Gaudí* on television, a segment of the French avant-garde press seized upon the magnetic, youthful, and refreshing figure of Ricardo Bofill, likening him to a charismatic young matador. Under the initiative of Patrice Goulet,<sup>6</sup> Alice Morgaine—then editor-in-chief of *Jardin des Modes*—published a photographic feature depicting Bofill in this neighbourhood of Reus, near Tarragona. The images captured him leaping from one staircase to another amid the peaceful residents and women hanging laundry on the communal terraces.

For the first time, an architect was featured in a women's magazine—a ground-breaking moment that sent shockwaves through the French architectural establishment. This establishment, largely composed of dignitaries from the era of the Modern Movement, reacted with growing resentment. The controversy that ensued marked the beginning of an unprecedented public debate on architecture, amplified by *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, the leading architectural journal at the time, directed by Bernard Huet.

In the 1970s, as Spain was emerging from Francoism, Bofill declared that he was young and eager to invent new forms that bore no resemblance to anything familiar: "Ancient architecture seemed condemned to us. I sought my models elsewhere—in the desert, in the Moroccan South. It was an interesting yet narrow path (...) If one wants to understand my work, what connects my projects and why I was so determined to change styles (which the French fail to grasp), one must know that the city was the primary reference for all my explorations. Everything revolves around the city; I have always wanted to be part of it".<sup>7</sup>

The A.U.A. partnered with the Taller de Arquitectura for its first competition in France, focusing on the urban design of the new town of Évry. The competition model was later incorporated into the collections of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. However, deemed too avant-garde, the project was ultimately not selected. Nonetheless, this endeavour led to the Taller being invited to participate in a second competition, this time for the

4 Atelier d'Urbanisme et d'Architecture (Urbanism and Architecture Workshop), associated with Boja Huidobro.

5 Jean-Eudes Roullier, interview with Sabine Effosse, 10 July 2002.

6 Patrice Goulet, architect, architecture critic, head of the Création-diffusion department at the Institut Français d'Architecture (French Institute of Architecture).

7 Bertrand de Saint-Vincent, interview with Ricardo Bofill in *Le Figaro Magazine*, May 6, 1995.



1

new town of Cergy-Pontoise. For this project, the team proposed an urban design comprising housing, commercial spaces, and public facilities, structured around a master plan inspired by the layout of a cathedral. [Fig. 1] *La Petite Cathédrale* (The Little Cathedral), an emblematic and ambitious project endorsed by the Secretariat for New Towns (*Villes Nouvelles*), was ultimately rejected by the Regional President on political grounds, as it was considered too subversive. The project was never realized, marking the Taller's first major disappointment in France—an experience they perceived as a profound injustice.

## Second part: 1974–1978 Les Halles Competitions.

### The Garden of Les Halles de Paris: A Promenade from the Palais Royal to Beaubourg

In the summer of 1974, shortly after his election, French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing invited the Taller de Arquitectura to participate in an international consultation for the redevelopment of the central district of Paris, where Baltard's *carreau des Halles* once stood.<sup>8</sup>

Since 1971, the demolition of Baltard's pavilions—initiated by former President Georges Pompidou in his pursuit of modernity—had deeply unsettled the cultural world, outraged many Parisians, and ignited intense controversy.

Fig. 1  
Design perspective of the *Le Petite Cathédrale* project for the new town of Cergy-Pontoise. Ink drawing by Peter Hodgkinson. Source: BTA Archive

<sup>8</sup> Wholesale food market in the centre of Paris, since moved outside to RUNGIS.

It was through this competition—of which the Taller emerged as the winner—that Ricardo Bofill burst onto the French media scene as a veritable “star.” The project sparked lasting controversy, led by proponents of modernist architecture and defenders of Le Corbusier’s legacy.

This period saw the development of four projects, which demonstrated Ricardo Bofill and his team’s unwavering determination to challenge the prevailing norms of modern architecture. Their proposals sought to offer a response to the historical fabric of Paris, drawing inspiration from the classical architectural tradition of the École des Beaux-Arts while reinterpreting the design principles of Haussmann and Adolphe Alphand.<sup>9</sup>

Bofill continuously advocated for what he termed an “*architecture à la française*”—a vision that his critics dismissed as “*baroque*” or even as “*pastiche*.” His designs were structured around a rectangular plan aligned with the axis of the Bourse de Commerce and the modern *Beaubourg* (now the Centre Georges Pompidou<sup>10</sup>), featuring a formal French garden reminiscent of the Palais Royal, located nearby, close to the Louvre [Fig. 2].

It is important to emphasize that during this period, the postmodern movement—particularly in the United States (with figures such as Charles Moore), in England, and elsewhere—was shaping architectural discourse. This movement, extensively documented in Charles Jencks’ work,<sup>11</sup> sought to break away from a modernism that had strayed from its original clarity and had been diluted by the oversimplification of large-scale housing developments.

Following his victory in the initial consultation, Bofill found himself at the centre of intense political controversies. These tensions arose between the French administration, the various agencies responsible for the redevelopment of Les Halles,<sup>12</sup> and the Ordre des Architectes, which upheld the principles of the Modern Movement, as previously mentioned. Additionally, the newly elected President’s demand for a “classical architecture” and a formal garden clashed with the grandiose projects previously envisioned—most notably, the International Trade Center—whose realization depended on substantial state funding.

Ricardo Bofill observed that in France, what truly mattered was the arrangement of buildings within the public space. His aim was to create a façade and develop a compatible architectural language that could integrate with prefabrication techniques while maintaining control over the

9 Adolphe Alphand (1817-1891), ‘Ingénieur des Ponts et Chaussées’ is known for his work on the embellishment of Paris with Baron Haussmann and later as director of works for the city of Paris. “He is considered to be the father of the green spaces of Paris. He directed the development of promenades, tree lines, planted squares, parks and gardens designed to clean up Paris”. Source: Wikipedia.

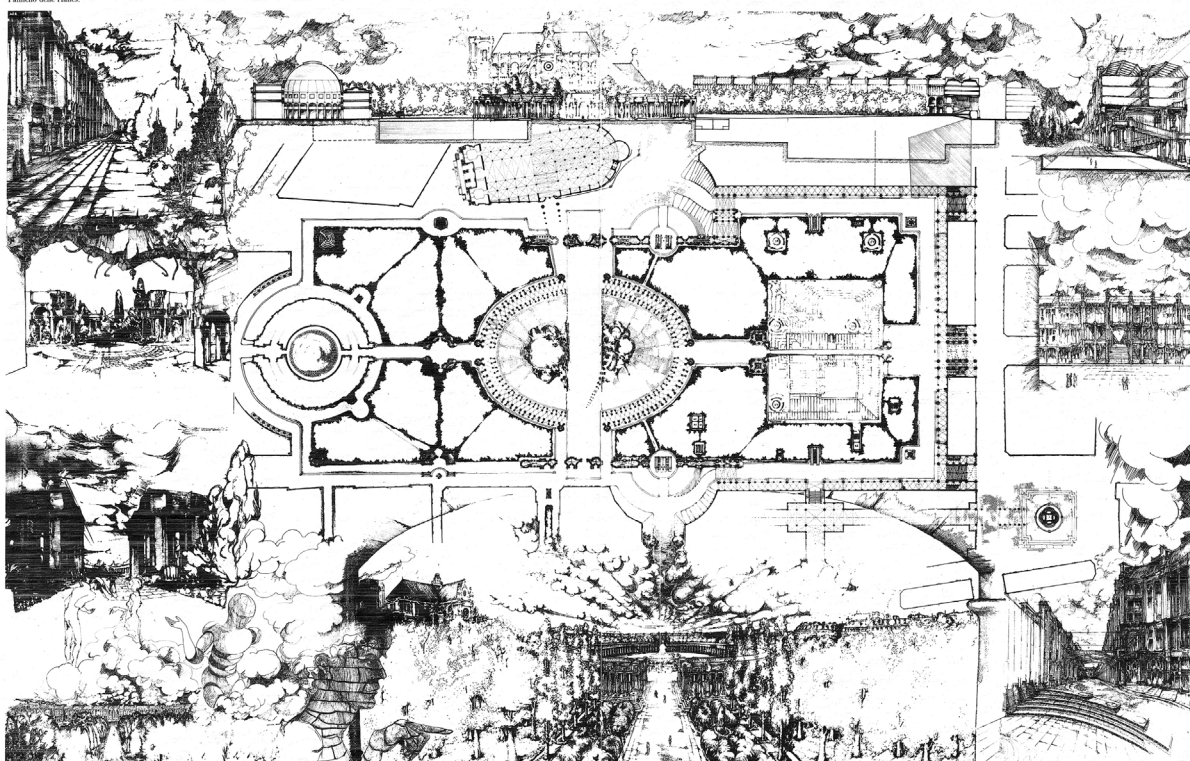
10 Centre Georges Pompidou inaugurated by Valéry Giscard d’Estaing in 1977.

11 Charles Jencks, *The language of post-modern architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977).

12 The S.E.M.A.H (Société d’Études Mixte pour l’Aménagement des Halles- a semi-public company for the development of Les Halles) headed by Christian de Malène, an opponent of Valéry Giscard d’Estaing.



Projet des Halles.  
 Plan de la Halle.  
 Plan de la Halle.



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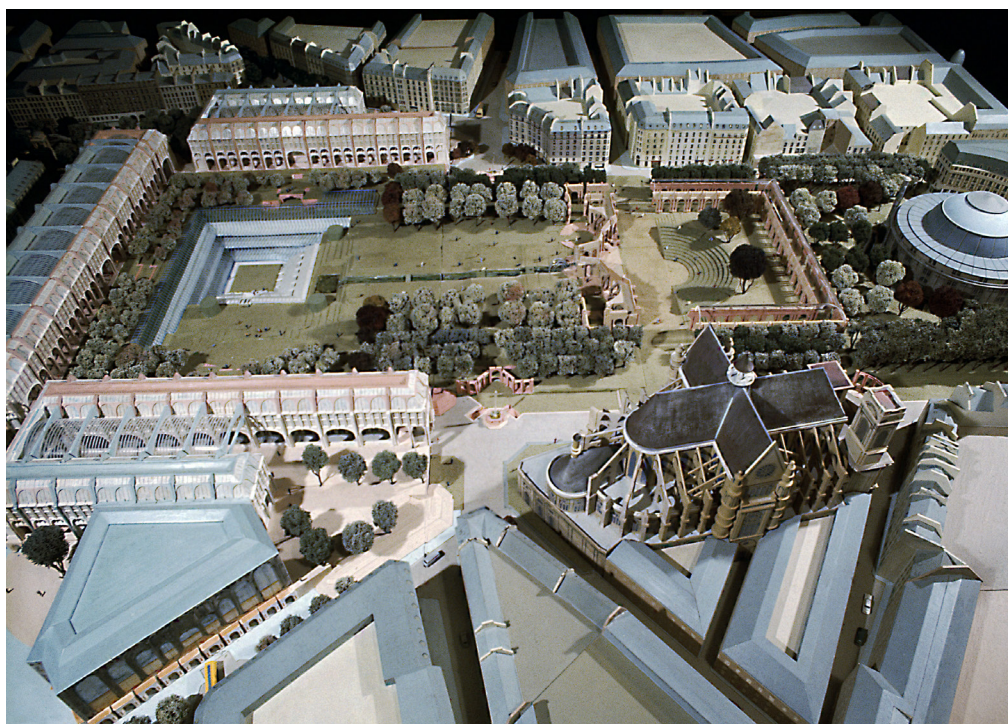


Fig. 2

Presentation panel of the master plan for Les Halles, with perspectives and details, Project 1974, T.A. Watercolor on paper. Source: BTA Archive.

Fig. 3

Model of the Les Halles de l'Hôtel de Ville project, 1975. © Deidi von Schaeuwe. Source: BTA Archive.

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architectural project. In response, he devised a new architectural language for prefabrication—one that was richer and more classical in its expression.

“For me, Postmodernism is a critique of the Modern Movement. It engages in dialogue with the city, ornamentation, architecture, and urban form—embracing the square, the street, and the relationship between architecture and the urban fabric.”<sup>13</sup>

During this period, Bofill frequently made headlines in newspapers and appeared on radio and television programs. His bold and provocative statements—such as “I am the best architect in the world”—sparked both fascination and irritation. Although he lived between Barcelona and Paris, he primarily resided in the French capital. At that time, France became the primary source of commissions, while the design team, led by Peter Hodgkinson, remained based in Barcelona.

Manolo Nuñez-Yanowsky, co-founder and resident member of the Taller, took charge of the Les Halles project. He brought in his Catalan collaborators—exceptional draftsmen from Barcelona, the Guardia brothers and Xavier Llistosella—before assembling a team in Paris. In September 1974, this small group settled in a suite at the Hôtel Pont Royal, in the heart of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. It was there that I joined them.

The institutions requested revisions to the initial project, prompting Nuñez-Yanowsky to collaborate with the architects of the commercial forum, Claude Vasconi and Georges Pencreac’h, as well as landscape architect Alain Provost. This partnership resulted in the creation of a massive scale model, crafted in Barcelona and unveiled to the public in April 1975 at the Hôtel de Ville in Paris [Fig. 3]. Over several days, large crowds gathered to view the project, which was met with widespread public enthusiasm. However, once again, the institutions ensured that, despite its positive reception, Bofill’s proposal was never officially selected.

Bofill was then asked to collaborate with two additional architects, including one of his competitors from the Hôtel de Ville competition—Bernard de la Tour d’Auvergne, a close friend of President Giscard d’Estaing—and Henri Bernard, a Prix de Rome laureate, author of the Maison de la Radio, and a staunch defender of the Modern Movement. To this trio, Marc Saltet, an architect specializing in historic monuments, was also added.

Following the sudden death of Bernard de la Tour d’Auvergne from a heart attack in October 1976, the partnership was dissolved. This unlikely and incongruous collaboration produced little beyond countless nights spent refining models and 13 notebooks filled with original ink and water-colour drawings of remarkable artistic quality, created by the Taller’s team.

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13 Interview by Dominique Serrell on 20 June 2022 with Antoine Grumbach, architect, town planner, direct witness.

The garden project was put on hold. However, the Taller was entrusted with the design of a residential development along Rue Rambuteau, comprising over 200 housing units. A building permit was secured, and construction began in late 1977. Yet, shortly after his election as Mayor of Paris, Jacques Chirac abruptly halted the project, cancelling the permit he himself had approved just months earlier. He declared: "From now on, the architect of Les Halles will be me—plainly and unapologetically."<sup>14</sup> This statement was not directed at Ricardo Bofill, but rather at his political rival, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing.

The exclusion of the Taller de Arquitectura and Ricardo Bofill from this project caused an earthquake in the team and in the mind of Ricardo Bofill, who, in order to avoid legal proceedings and in accordance with a secret agreement with Jacques Chirac, undertook never to speak of this project again and that Chirac would never criticise Ricardo Bofill's architecture, entrusting him with the realisation of an equivalent programme in Paris-Montparnasse.

Ricardo Bofill was then commissioned to provide technical assistance for the construction of 100,000 housing units in Algeria through the creation of a workshop of multidisciplinary Algerian architects, the 'Taller de Arquitectura style'. Young Algerian philosophers, poets and sociologists joined Juan Goytisolo and Xavier Rubert, who travelled between Algiers and Barcelona.

Ricardo Bofill and his team of Catalans, French and Belgians lived between Paris and Algiers. Franco had died and the literary critic Salvador Clotas had left the directorship of the Taller de Barcelona to become Secretary of State for Culture. His sister Anna and Peter Hodgkinson were in charge of the Taller de Barcelona during this period.

### **Third part. 1972-1987: Bofill's Low-cost Housing.**

#### **Living Organisms, a Monumental Setting in which the Inhabitant is the Actor**

"The Industrial Revolution made its mark on the evolution of architecture; above all, it caused a rupture in the continuity of that evolution. From then on, there was excitement about certain short-sighted visions of the preeminence of the machine. There was the belief that the house was a machine for living in, and that the city could be mastered by certain mechanisms, in the same way as a car or a business can. I don't believe any of that. I think that the city, or the home, is not akin to a machine, but instead to an organism [...]. Technological, functionalist thinking postulated that form resulted from

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14 François Chaslin, «Le projet de Chirac», *Macadam* (Feb. 15- March 15, 1979): 151.



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function. I fought against that. [...] Of course there are correlations between society and form, and between technology and form, but the task of architecture remains that of geometry and its translation into physical form."<sup>15</sup>

### 1972-1987. New Town of Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines: Le Lac. An Iconic Project whit Enthusiastic Residents Forty Years on

"It is the architect's duty to magnify people's everyday lives"<sup>16</sup>

Le Lac (The Lake) is the first major social housing development to be commissioned from Taller de Arquitectura in parallel with the battle for the Les Halles district in central Paris.

Le Lac is a social housing complex (HLM type<sup>17</sup>), comprising 676 dwellings offered through a state-assisted purchase programme.<sup>18</sup> There are apartments and terraced houses spread around an expanse of water [Fig. 4].

The three main parts of the development were built between 1978 and 1987 around a rainwater retention lake: La Sourderie, on land within the the town boundaries of Montigny-le-Bretonneux and Voisin-le-Bretonneux; Les Arcades du Lac (The Lake Arcades, 378 housing units spread across 5 storeys) and Le Viaduc (The Viaduc), 74 units spread across five storeys, [Fig. 5] and finally Le Temple and Les Templettes (224 housing units),

15 Ricardo Bofill, *L'Architecture d'un homme*, entretien avec François Hebert Stevens (Paris: Éditions Arthaud, 1978), 24-25.

16 PAP: *Programme en accession à la propriété*. (State-assisted purchase programme for home ownership).

17 HLM: «habitation à loyer modéré» (lit. 'Housing at moderate rent'), is a form of low-income housing in France. It may be public or private, with rent subsidies. (TN)

18 From 1977 to 1995, the now extinct PAP played a key role in helping low-income households buy a home (usually a new one). In 1977, it took over from HLM accession loans and special loans from Crédit Foncier de France.

Fig. 4  
Les Templettes, viewed  
from Le Viaduc. Source: BTA  
Archive.



some of which are individual terraced houses, other grouped dwellings in detached blocks in the centre and in the side pavilions.

### 1972-1980. Les Arcades du Lac: “Versailles for the people”<sup>19</sup>

“To give back to humanity that which humanity would give to its gods”

“Although it’s never its primary or main meaning, my architecture also has a sense of militancy. Some people reproach it for disguising functions. A social housing scheme that doesn’t look like a social housing scheme. Uproar, jealousy, social tensions: y social housing projects are better-looking than the housing blocks around them. [...] This apartment block looks like a palace. Of course, inside them, because of budget constraints, the apartments are sometimes more conventional [...], and the charm of a harmonious street on the top of the pure satisfaction of every-day functions. People need signs and spaces just as much as they need televisions and baths.”<sup>20</sup>

It was a very different time from the present. The architect -and Ricardo Bofill in particular- wanted to reverse the balance of power and play at least on an equal footing with the men in power. As he said: ‘Successful projects are those based on a relationship of complicity and trust’.<sup>21</sup>

Serge Goldberg, then director- general of the Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines New Town, summarizes the objectives of that he had given to Taller:

“I wanted to come up with something quite snobbish, something that would bring in fashionable people who could serve as a show-

19 The epithet used for the complex by the press, and notably by the newspaper *Le Monde*.

20 Ricardo Bofill, *L’architecture d’un homme* (Paris: Éditions Arthaud, 1978).

21 Ricardo Bofill and Jean Louis André, *Espaces d’une vie* (Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 1989), 147.

Fig. 5

Le Viaduc and the Arcades du Lac. Source: BTA Archive.

case for publicity (...) Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines was invented from scratch for the sake of promotion (...). I thought we could do something that would astonish. But who could do that? I thought of Ricardo Bofill (...) I said to him: 'I'd like us to make housing that attracts a very snobbish population, celebrities. I said to Bofill: 'You couldn't do the La Petite Cathédrale project (...) You're going to do a five-storey social housing project for me. But what I want you to study is the relationship between housing and the street' [...]. One day, he came to see me with an extension out over the Viaduc pond (which is in fact a rainwater regulation reservoir). It was tough, but at the same time, it was strict (...). And it's true that the façades had a relationship with the street. So he responded to my request."<sup>22</sup>

## **Prefabrication, a Technique for Controlling Costs**

On the subject of social housing, Bofill pointed out:

"I managed to demonstrate to France as a whole that social housing is not synonymous with brutality or resignation, but that on the contrary a certain solemnity, a sense of rhythm and beauty are appropriate. Without necessarily the costs to shoot up.

'Suburbs are not necessarily wastelands, but can also be monuments to mankind. Concrete, long considered a second-rate material, can be a noble one [...] Classicism allows us not to impose a building type, but provides the principles needed to create new ones [...] A new industrial aesthetic? [...] Arcades, windows, doors, each of these elements can be manufactured separately, mass-produced, in line with the imperatives of industrial production. The building is made up of a basic structure, onto which factory-moulded elements are placed. To be profitable, the moulds need to be used as many times as possible. The aim is therefore to design a limited number of elements, which means very seriously paring back decorative motifs. I can therefore be faithful to classical architecture, which provides the rules of composition and the basic vocabulary, while at the same time conforming to the demands of industrial production. [...] Always within the constraints of an economic system. I was excited to discover this, some fifteen years ago."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Excerpts from an interview with Sabine Effosse, professor and doctor in history, lecturer at the University of Tours, 2002.

<sup>23</sup> Bofill and André, *Espaces d'une vie*.



## **1978-1982. Le Viaduc, named Le Chenonceau.<sup>24</sup>**

### **1982-1987. Le Temple and Les Templettes.<sup>25</sup>**

"I wanted to give back to humanity what which humanity would give to its gods: to introduce the archetype of the temple into a 'social' dwelling, to divert the nobility and solemnity of religion towards the most underprivileged in our society'.<sup>26</sup>

The project asserts a fusion of theories from the Renaissance and Antiquity: the group of buildings is laid out around the banks of the lake according to a typical Palladian villa layout. It is composed of building-objects inspired by the archetypes of Greek temples, spatially isolated and interconnected by voids rather than solids. These units are linked by rigorous geometric relationships that reflect the project's overall compositional system. Classical composition and modern architectural language.

As Bofill explained:

"Three recurrent forms: a courtyard temple, a crescent and two small temples. And always the same parts, deliberately repeated. The construction itself loses its weight, nothing distracts the eye and architecture reconnects with its essence: beyond the anecdotal, the composition of space".<sup>27</sup>

The housing scheme comprise three architectural pieces:

The Temple. This large, four-storey, rectangular building, with a large grassy inner courtyard at its centre, is composed of through-planning, dual-orientation flats.

They are entered through a small hallway to the side of the living room. On one façade there is a suite that comprises the living room at the centre, opening onto two bedrooms –one to each side. On the other façade are the other bedrooms, separated by a small hall or antechamber between them and the bathrooms. All of the openings are placed centrally within each of the rooms or on the through axis, which is treated as transparent, making the double orientation of the dwelling really perceptible.

Particular care was taken over the shared spaces and staircases: comfortable dimensions and gradients, well-finished surfaces and materials, natural light and specially designed landings, each belonging to two of the dwelling units.

Les Templettes. These two edifices, each ranged around a quarter-circle in a continuum, are composed of small two-storey detached houses. Access is via the convex rear façade, on the park side, through a private

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24 Social housing with 74 dwelling units. Client: Société de HLM – CNH 2000, directed by Michel Vitry.

25 224 detached housing units in strips.

26 R. Bofill, *L'architecture d'un homme* (Paris: Éditions Arthaud, 1978).

27 Bofill and André, *Espaces d'une vie*.

individual garden. The entrance lobby and kitchen open to the rear, while a large living room had glazed double doors to the inner side that open onto a terrace overlooking the lakeside.

The single-flight staircase has a false perspectival plan and is positioned on an axis, counterbalancing the distortion caused by the radial structure, similarly to the arrangement in large 'crescents' of houses. It provides access to the upper storey, which is composed of a large bedroom on the lake side and two smaller bedrooms on the garden side to the rear, as well as bathrooms set to either side of the central landing.

The Pavilions. These two four-storey buildings on a centralized square plan comprise four double-oriented flats per floor, around a central square module with vertical circulation, accessible from a double-height entrance hall opening onto the lake. The upper level contains large two-storey apartments in the pediments.

A park. The backbone of the entire project, a romantic counterpoint to the three classical buildings, the park is laid out according to the rules of French-style gardens (perspectives, alignments, framing of views and backdrops). Integral to the park, the planted areas, clearings and vistas are planned out as if in urban fabric composed of squares (living rooms) and streets (paths). The immense garden in this composition, with its expansive, wide open lawns, grassy pyramidal platforms and substantial plantings, completes the exceptional natural setting for this twentieth-century garden city.

## Marne-la-Vallée : Les Espaces d'Abraxas

### 1979-1982. Le Palacio d'Abraxas.<sup>28</sup> Promising Urban Utopia: 'a Monument-Project'

'The project for the Theatre and the Palacio d'Abraxas consisted of building 600 social housing units at the entrance to the new town of Marne-la-Vallée, 10 kilometres from Paris [...] While discussions and conflicts were going on in Paris about the Les Halles project, I was in Algeria [...], and at that very moment, the representatives of the new town of Marne-la-Vallée commissioned me to work on this 'monument project', which I soon realized was an excellent opportunity. The objective for the town council and for the architectural coordinators, Aymeric Zublena \_ Macary-Zublena SCAU\_ was to give the New Town a strongly expressed symbol that was both striking and representative. "<sup>29</sup>

28 441 social housing units. Client: Société de HLM-CNH 2000.

29 Ricardo Bofill, memory report on "Marne-la-Vallée", 1981. Rep. in Ricardo Bofill Taller de arquitectura. *Los Espacios de Abraxas, el palacio, el teatro, el arco*, Annabelle d'Huart ed. (Paris: Editions l'Equerre, 1981), 14.



As the partner of Taller de Arquitectura, Peter Hodgkinson assets: 'It's a Walden 7 with façades inspired by the Arcades du Lac, and influenced by Charles Jencks.'<sup>30</sup>

The pursuit of the overall composition concept includes the operation of homeownership acquisition for Le Théâtre and L'Arc de Triomphe (the Theater and the Arc of Triumph).

Jean-Pierre Carniaux, partner of Taller and architect collaborator in the project explained:

"For France we wanted an assertive aesthetic, particularly for the three buildings in Marne-la-Vallée: Le Palacio, Le Théâtre, the inhabited Arc the Triomphe and the tiered gardens. As with the earlier project at Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines and the Jardin des Halles, and later Cergy-Pontoise for the Saint-Christophe district, our aim was to maintain a strong overall composition to provide the town with an identity and a theatrical framework for the lives of the inhabitants, who would become the actors in the space constructed".<sup>31</sup>

Bofill explained how "the project slowly took shape and was added to the list of a long series of assignments. But gradually became our most important achievement, and in terms of both theory and fulfilment, one that would mark an essential step forward, in the series of successful and unsuccessful ventures that had punctuated Taller de Arquitectura's constant evolution".<sup>32</sup>

Le Palacio is a 19-story building, representing the maximum height chosen for this compositional exercise. Its façade, structured through a combination of geometric forms—rectangles, triangles, cylinders, and

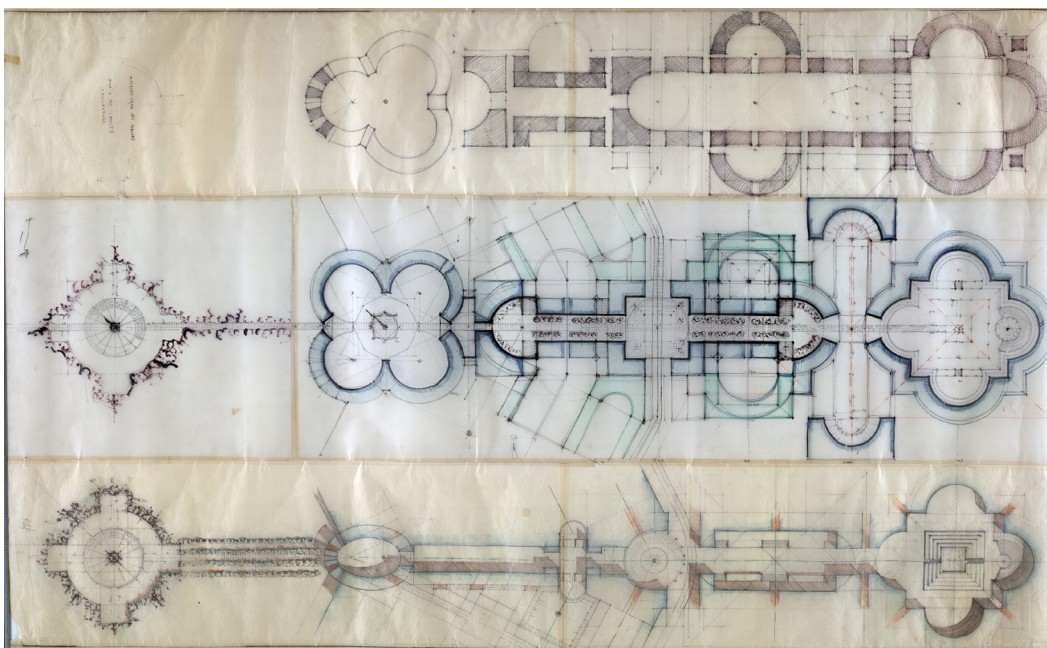
Fig. 6

Les Espaces d'Abraxas, Marne-la-Vallée. Press excerpt. Marie-Hélène Camus, interview with Marcel Cornu, "Modernité ou prudence passéiste?", *L'Humanité*, Dec. 11, 1981.

30 Peter Hodgkinson, architect from the AA of London, interviewed by Dominique Serrell in 2023.

31 Excerpts of an interview to Jean-Pierre Carniaux, MIT architect and RBTA partner, with the author, November 3, 2022.

32 Ricardo Bofill, report memory on Marne la Vallée, 1983.



cubes—is arranged in a U-shaped layout. It incorporates a front wall on the garden-facing façade, which serves as the backdrop for the Theater.

The façade is made up of three orders structured around a central urban gateway, two windows onto the town and two additional corner windows on the side elements. The whole is a monumental composition [Fig. 6]. For the Taller de Arquitectura, this project represents the first compositional exercise on such a large scale, integrating both a reflection on volumetry and its spatial integration.

### The Theater & the Arc de Triomphe<sup>33</sup>

The Theater is a protruding semicircle, structured by a grid system that maintains regularity both in its longitudinal and vertical development. The theatricality of this inhabited temple is expressed through its vertical order, composed of a series of reflective glass columns that transform according to the light, energizing the structure and directing the gaze elsewhere. A fluid, elemental, and fragmented theatricality. A closed, convex space—rigorous yet ever-changing.

The theatricality of the plazas encourages a reversal of roles: the actor becomes the spectator, and the spectator, the actor.

The Arc. Located at the centre of the interior space, a third building comprising 20 housing units enhances the overall theatrical composition. As both a spatial and temporal divider, this central and essential element appears as the formal resurgence of the two other structures.

Fig. 7  
Antigone, Montpellier: Master plan drawing, ink on paper, by Jean-Pierre Carniaux. Source: BTA Archive.

33 150 Social Housing Units with state-assisted ownership. Client: HLM Society Les Trois Vallées.

## Late 1979 – 1994: Antigone, Montpellier

The project was commissioned by Georges Frèche, Mayor of Montpellier, with the directive: “Grandiose, powerful, and Mediterranean.”

“I advocate for a structured and controlled urban expansion policy... In Montpellier, my objective was to revive the approach attempted during the Renaissance by Francesco di Giorgio Martini in Urbino: to integrate a newly designed district into a city shaped by successive empirical interventions and historical additions—what is now known as ‘L’Écusson.’ Rather than creating a completely independent new town, which would have been destined to fail, this approach ensured that the city’s expansion remained anchored in a comprehensive vision. A system of pathways, staircases, and passages was established to connect the Place du Nombre d’Or with the historic city center.”<sup>34</sup>

While Ricardo Bofill and his team were returning from Algeria, a request came from the newly elected socialist mayor of Montpellier, Georges Frèche, and his deputy, Raymond Dugrand. Without hesitation, both men drove to Barcelona to ask Bofill to design a new city on a 25-hectare military site stretching to the Lez River and the sea [Fig. 7]. Their vision was for a “grandiose, powerful, and Mediterranean” city, in stark contrast to the developments of their right-wing predecessor, François Delmas, at Polygone commercial centre.

Bofill recalls:

“For me, it all started at Montpellier, with an election that was won by a man who had pinned his flag to the mast with the slogan: ‘Change the city.’ Young and eager, Georges Frèche was an academic, a historian and former HEC student. His deputy, Raymond Dugrand, was a geographer. Both men knew what they no longer wanted to see: the dull, grey buildings of Polygone and Nouveau Monde tower blocks. They sought to reconnect with Mediterranean architecture. Initially, they considered Pouillon, but then they approached me [...] We flew over the city with the mayor, Peter, and Jean-Pierre. To the east, the land was open and vast. The Place du Nombre d’Or serves as both the driving force and the reference point for the Antigone project. From this square, the axis extends toward Place du Millénaire, whose dimensions mirror those of Piazza Navona in Rome, with a width of 48 meters. This axis continues to the Esplanade de l’Europe, where Montpellier is reconnected with the Lez River. The esplanade is framed by a crescent-shaped colonnade that opens onto the revitalized water basin. The Arc of the Hôtel de la Région, dominating the composition with its height, becomes the essential articulation

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34 Bofill and André, *Espaces d’une vie*.



point, linking to the emerging new axis: Port Marianne. Where trees and gardens will have more space. The catalyst of the project will be this 300-by-100-meter water basin, which will be developed around the harbour master's office."<sup>35</sup>

However, challenges soon arose, as the plan required modifications to the Plan d'Occupation des Sols (POS- land use planning), a decision of national jurisdiction. The former mayor, François Delmas, actively sought to block the project for nearly four years.

After 1981, with the new governmental majority, the project moved forward. A semi-public development company, SERM<sup>36</sup>, was established to oversee its implementation. Initially resistant to the involvement of an architect from outside the region, local architects eventually embraced the project's ambition. Drawing from his recent experiences in Paris and Algeria, Ricardo Bofill abandoned the idea of designing the entire project himself. Instead, he integrated local architects into the overall plan, while retaining control over the master plan and certain key elements, including Place du Nombre d'Or, the Hôtel de Région, Port Juvénal, and the Olympic swimming pool.

### 1979-1984. La place du Nombre d'or: a Strong Gesture

The Place du Nombre d'Or (Golden Ratio Square) was a huge project, vast and disproportionate compared to the size of the city at the time.<sup>37</sup> [Fig. 8] As Bofill points out: "I then decided to make a bold statement by starting with the construction of Place du Nombre d'Or."<sup>38</sup>

Jean-Pierre Carniaux, responsible for the overall design, recounts the project's evolution:

"As a confirmed Hellenic academic, Frèches was won over by the classicism. The initial proposal for this one-kilometer urban axis featured an office building adjoining the current Galeries Lafayette. The original idea was to create an open-air street cutting through the shopping centre: the Les Échelles de la Ville (City's Ladders). Unfortunately, the Galeries Lafayette never allowed for a clear passage through their premises. As a result, visitors coming from the city centre only discover Antigone after trekking the shops. The Antigone district unfolds as a sequence of plazas leading toward the Lez River. Each one serves a residential complex and each was assigned to different architects and

35 Bofill and André, *Espaces d'une vie*.

36 SERM: Société d'Équipement de la Région de Montpellier (Public Amenities Association for Montpellier) created in 1961.

37 224 social housing HLM in the town center. Client: SERM.

38 Bofill and André, *Espaces d'une vie*, 147.

developers, who were to follow the pre-established specifications on composition, heights, horizontal and the general architectural vocabulary as defined by us.

The façade of the square serves as the city's face, embodying the expression of communal living and shaping public space. There are neither balconies nor shutters; instead, '*béton architectonique*', a material pioneered by the Taller, acts as the new regional stone, with a sand-coloured finish. [...] The second square follow the axis and is similar in form and dimension to the Forum of Rome. The Olympic swimming pool was the subject of a competition won by the Taller. It is both a competitive facility and a recreational pool, with a gymnasium housed beneath a suspended roof." <sup>39</sup>

Thanks to the Taller's expertise in construction techniques using pre-fabricated '*béton-pierre*'—referred to as '*architectonique*'—the project adhered to the cost constraints of HLM housing at the time, with only a 10% increase, which was offset by revenue from the ground-floor commercial spaces [Fig. 9].

With broad support from stakeholders, the project was able to expand toward Port Marianne through a series of operations awarded by competition to local architects. These competitions followed a general framework established by the Taller, which acted as the project's chief architect. The lessons learned from the Les Halles project in Paris had left a lasting impact.

Gradually, the project attracted renowned national and international architects, including Chemetov, Krier, Portzamparc, Architecture Studio, Rogers, Tusquets, Meier, and Foster, who were invited to participate in design competitions for various sections of the development.

The Antigone district sparked controversy, particularly among certain journalists and architects associated with the modernist movement [Fig. 10]. However, Jean Nouvel, in an October 1989 issue of the journal *Actuel*, cited it as "an example of architectural independence: Montpellier reimaged by Bofill."<sup>40</sup>

In 2022, Roland Castro, the French architect who passed away in 2024, shared his perspective—offering both praise and critique:

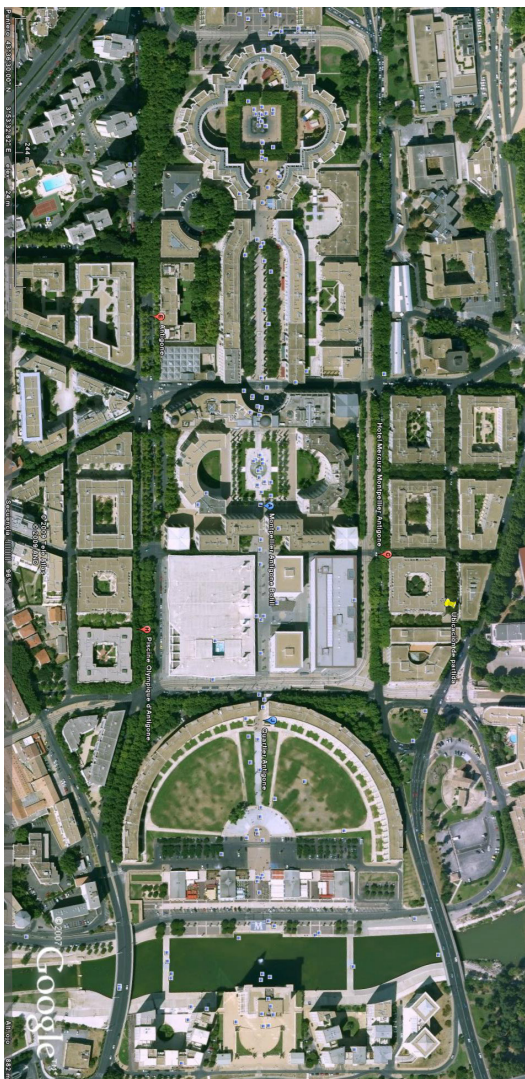
"I was surprised by Place du Nombre d'Or in Montpellier and fascinated by the fact that Ricardo was doing something exceptional. However, the design guidelines imposed on the district, when interpreted by architects lacking his talent, resulted in failure—'it never works,' as they say.

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<sup>39</sup> Excerpts from an interview with Jean-Pierre Carniaux, partner at Taller de Arquitectura, conducted on November 3, 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Jean Nouvel, "Montpellier reimaged by Bofill", *Actuel* (October 1989).





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II LE MONDE ALGEROIS/III DIMANCHE 17 LUNDI 18 JUIN 1984

FORMES

## L'architecture classique *est-elle sur le point, sous la bannière socialiste, de reprendre*

### Du social de gauche en grand appareil

Un maire PS et l'ordonnance des bâtisseurs de la Grèce antique.

**E**n architecture, les rapports du style et de l'idéologie ont toujours été étroits, pour des raisons évidentes. Le socialisme en était la principale preuve, une véritable sociologie politique et explicable aux enfants pour leur éducation, une doctrine inscrite dans la pierre.

Il paraissait définitivement engagé du côté des despotes, et on oubliait qu'il avait aussi pu être, jusqu'à un passé récent, le style officiel des grands édifices d'Etat dans la plupart des démocraties occidentales, en particulier l'américaine et l'anglaise. L'architecture contemporaine de style international, souvent d'ailleurs véhiculée outre-Atlantique par des réfugiés politiques d'Allemagne, d'Europe centrale ou d'Espagne, semblait tout naturellement le produit de systèmes politiques non totalitaires, révolutionnaires comme celui de la Russie des années 20, sociaux-démocrates comme ceux de la nouvelle Francfort et de la République de Weimar, de la Hollande des pays nordiques, ou bien bourgeois libéraux, mais toujours progressistes, également après d'émancipation technique, artistique, culturelle et sociale. C'était, comme disait Gropius, « *l'apogée dans la démocratie* ».

Le néo-classicisme, quant à lui, taxé de pompéisme, d'académisme stérile, sans vision, archaïque et ennemi des progrès avait la réputation d'un bien mauvais genre, définitivement compris avec les tyrannies d'avant la guerre : comme elles inspiraient, chez vain, policier et conservateur, on le tenait pour une attitude fondamentalement grotesque, jointe et autodestructrice.

Et voici que des municipalités socialistes revendiquent maintenant le droit de recourir après : il n'existe pas de style de gauche ni de droite. Le classicisme est le style de la Grèce antique, qui a inventé la démocratie en même temps que l'ordonnement des villes et la colonne ; et de Rome, à qui nous devons des forums, les ingénieurs, et les souverains pontifes. Il faut, pour ce professeur agrégé, spécialiste de l'histoire du droit romain, dépasser ces vœux *a priori* : et il est heureux d'avoir été remercié par une équipe de la télévision allemande pour avoir eu l'audace de transgresser ces in-

mille habitants, trois cent mille en comptant l'agglomération. Caractéristique de l'urbanisme sur dalle de ces années-là, de médiocre qualité architecturale, il d'aurait « la plus grande surface commerciale à vocation régionale au sud de Lyon », drainant des visiteurs depuis Nîmes et Béziers, et regroupant, à 300 mètres de la place de la Comédie, bureaux et centres administratifs, hôtels (dont l'un culmine à 90 mètres) et commerces, dont un grand magasin des Galeries Lafayette.

François Mitterrand a choisi Sévigné pour sa campagne électorale.

La libération par le génie militaire d'un vaste parc de matériel, abandonné en 1968 et vendu à la ville au printemps '79, le rachat des propriétés de la communauté religieuse Dom Bosco et de l'emplacement d'anciennes usines, permettaient de rejoindre à 1,5 kilomètre les rives du Lez, de tirer la ville vers l'est sur une surface d'environ 25 hectares. Le projet de Boffil s'organise autour d'un long

et de couleurs, rythme des façades et alignements des balcons, rapport équilibré des pleins et des vides, enfin division tripartite des constructions, avec base, corps central et couronnement.

La place du Nombre-d'Or offre ces qualités de spécificité et de scénographie urbaine qu'on aime à retrouver chez Boffil : lieux théâtralisés, assez emphatiques et grandioses, mais sans cette dimension d'angoisse et de hors d'échelle qui a fait de son opération de Marne-la-Vallée le décor idéal des films français à suspense de la saison dernière, qu'il s'agisse du dernier Boileau ou du *A mort l'arbitre !* de Mocky.

Imprieur du plan d'une église d'Ombrie parfois attribuée au Bramante, la Santa-Maria della Consolazione de l'odylité est formée d'un carré enrichi sur ses faces de quatre niches demi-rondes, et donc d'une succession de huit creux alternés qui lui communiquent des mouvements d'amplitude variée. Une corniche extravagante, en saillie de 5 mètres, amorce un effet de coupole gigantesque. Les solaires, plantés comme des jardins, y pousseront leurs plantes grimpantes qui devraient s'accrocher comme sur une pergola puis retomber vers le sol en splendides rideaux verticaux, ruisselant de feuilles.

Au manquement régulier des pilastres, bientôt adossés au sol par les restaurants et les commerces qui vont s'y implanter, s'opposent les fortes horizontales des corniches et des moulures des derniers étages, accompagnées d'une frise de modillons. Cela forme un ensemble homogène, fortement contrasté quant aux lumières, imposant dans sa masse mais

Fig. 8  
Antigone district, overall aerial view.

Fig. 9  
Les Arcades du Lac, architectural concrete panels tinted in the mass with terracotta in the mold background.  
Source: BTA Archive.

Fig. 10  
Antigone, Montpellier. Press excerpt, François Chaslin, "Du social de gauche en grand appareil", *Le Monde*, June 18, 1984.

"In reality, Bofill disrupted established narratives, particularly within the so-called 'humanist' movement that emerged in Berlin as a break from the *Beaux-Arts* tradition. Through a series of projects that fostered a strong sense of livability and an intelligent approach to domesticity, Bofill challenged this movement. To some, including Castro himself, this made his work appear regressive.

"In my view, the legacy of the Taller de Arquitectura and Ricardo Bofill is largely positive. Bofill sought the well-being of people and championed 'decor.' He aimed to create monumental living spaces where people could feel at ease. Ricardo Bofill is the architect in all his splendor. His works are the only ones from this era that will endure over time."<sup>41</sup>

As Bofill said: "Renovating the city and putting an end to the discomfort it spreads is one large-scale project that a country should be undertaking today".<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, it was this project that brought Ricardo Bofill recognition as an urban planner and launched his international career, with projects in China, the USSR, India, and other places, where colossal projects were entrusted to him.

### **1981-1986: The Saint-Christophe District, New Town of Cergy-Pontoise**

"Les Colonnes": 380 social housing units for rent and for homeownership, design by Peter Hodgkinson, in collaboration with Dany Karavan. As Patrick Génard assets: "A very beautiful project, an axis that runs down to the Seine and climbs up to the other bank!"<sup>43</sup>

And if Ricardo Bofill had succeeded in his bet to rethink the city for its inhabitants?

The master plan is organized around a major crescent-shaped square on six levels to the south, overlooking the valley, and includes two square plazas of four levels to the north. Strongly articulated geometrically, the buildings create perfectly regular volumes and controlled spaces. The crescent layout, applied later to Port Juvenal in Montpellier and in Stockholm, refers to the famous Circus and Royal Crescent by John Nash in Bath, United Kingdom.

The apartments are through units with double exposure. The entrance

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41 Statements by Roland Castro, French architect and political activist, collected on July 13, 2022.

42 Bertrand de Saint Vincent, citing Ricardo Bofill in *Figaro Magazine*, May 6, 1995.

43 Patrick Génard, Taller's partner and architect responsible for the project. Interview with the author on November 3, 2022.



distributes all the rooms, and the architecture of the façades enables the creation of spacious interior volumes.

In this modern garden city, the landscape, nature, and architecture are treated and mastered within a single grand and harmonious vision of space.

### **Prioritizing the Design of the City: A Building is Not a Beehive**

“What is a social housing? It is the response to an economic and social system that requires fast, affordable housing for a disadvantaged part of the population. My concern, when I started building in France, was to demonstrate that this function and these stringent costs did not impose an aesthetic limitation. [...] In Marne-la-Vallée, in Cergy-Pontoise, I was constructing these theatres, arches, temples—culturally significant forms that belonged to the collective memory of a country that had spent fifty years trying to forget them. [...] A building is not a beehive. The façade must be composed. One can stretch an opening over two floors, masking the floor with glass [...]. It is out of the question to line up blocks one after another just to ensure each apartment had the same orientation and sunlight exposure: whether we built in a circle or an ellipse, all the apartments crossed through the building from one side to the other. Distributing day and night spaces based on the sun’s curve wasn’t complicated. Our objective was to design a space, to regain a sense of the street that had gradually been lost, and to create distinct landmarks in new cities that had never been conceived in a holistic way. New-town housing programmes would then naturally find their place.”<sup>44</sup>

“We segment, we talk about the housing problem, about the suburbs, but we refuse to understand the city as a whole. It remains a distant, unknown thing that we do not know how to confront. Yet, renovating the city, putting an end to the discomfort it spreads, is the only large-scale project that a country should be undertaking today.”<sup>45</sup>

At that time, some ambitious projects that would have changed the face of certain iconic cities in the “territories” did not come to fruition. This was the case in 1975 in Sainte-Maxime, where plans were put forward to restructure the town centre: the project involved the development of the port, with housing, shops, offices, and the creation of a square. The aim was to transform Sainte-Maxime into the 20th-21st century, but the project was abandoned following the sudden death, at the age of thirty-one,

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44 Bofill and André, *Espaces d'une vie*, 147.

45 Bertrand de Saint-Vincent, *Le Figaro Magazine*, May 6, 1995.



of Aymeric Simon Lorière, its mayor and UDR (Union of Democrats for the Republic) parliament member for the Var.

In Dreux, a proposal for a terrace overlooking the town was drawn up to request of the new socialist mayor, Françoise Gaspard, but, withdrawn for political reasons. And it was the same for Saint-Cyprien, Occitanie.

#### **Fourth Part: 1985-1995: Prestigious Headquarters. The Development of the International Career**

The Antigone project in Montpellier stretched over more than twenty years and introduced the urban planning work of the Taller de Arquitectura and Ricardo Bofill to the world.

In Paris, the notable projects include “Les Échelles du Baroque”, a complex of 270 housing units located on Place de la Catalogne in the 14th arrondissement, given as compensation for the break in the contract regarding Les Halles by Jacques Chirac. Also noteworthy is the Market Square of Saint-Honoré, housing the headquarters of the Banque la Hénin, positioned along the axis of the Tuileries Gardens and the Opéra Garnier. His style marks a departure from postmodernism and incorporates the double-skin curtain wall technology.

In 1985, the American adventure began, marking the end of the social housing programs and the opening of the New York office. The exhibition with Léon Krier at MoMA brought eight original drawings into the museum’s collection.

In Paris, Bofill designed numerous corporate headquarters, including those for Jean-Claude Decaux, AXA, Rochas, Banque la Hénin, and Cartier, as well as the Retiro near La Madeleine. The 1992 Barcelona Olympics brought attention to Ricardo Bofill and his son, Ricardo Emilio Bofill Maggiora Vergano Junior,<sup>46</sup> a Harvard graduate. From San Just Desvern, where they have operated internationally, they expanded their work across Japan, China, India, Russia, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia, with over 200 collaborators led by Pablo Bofill-d’Huart,<sup>47</sup> Ricardo Bofill’s second son, born in Paris.

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46 Graduate at Harvard, 1992.

47 Graduate at ESADE Business & Law School in Barcelona.

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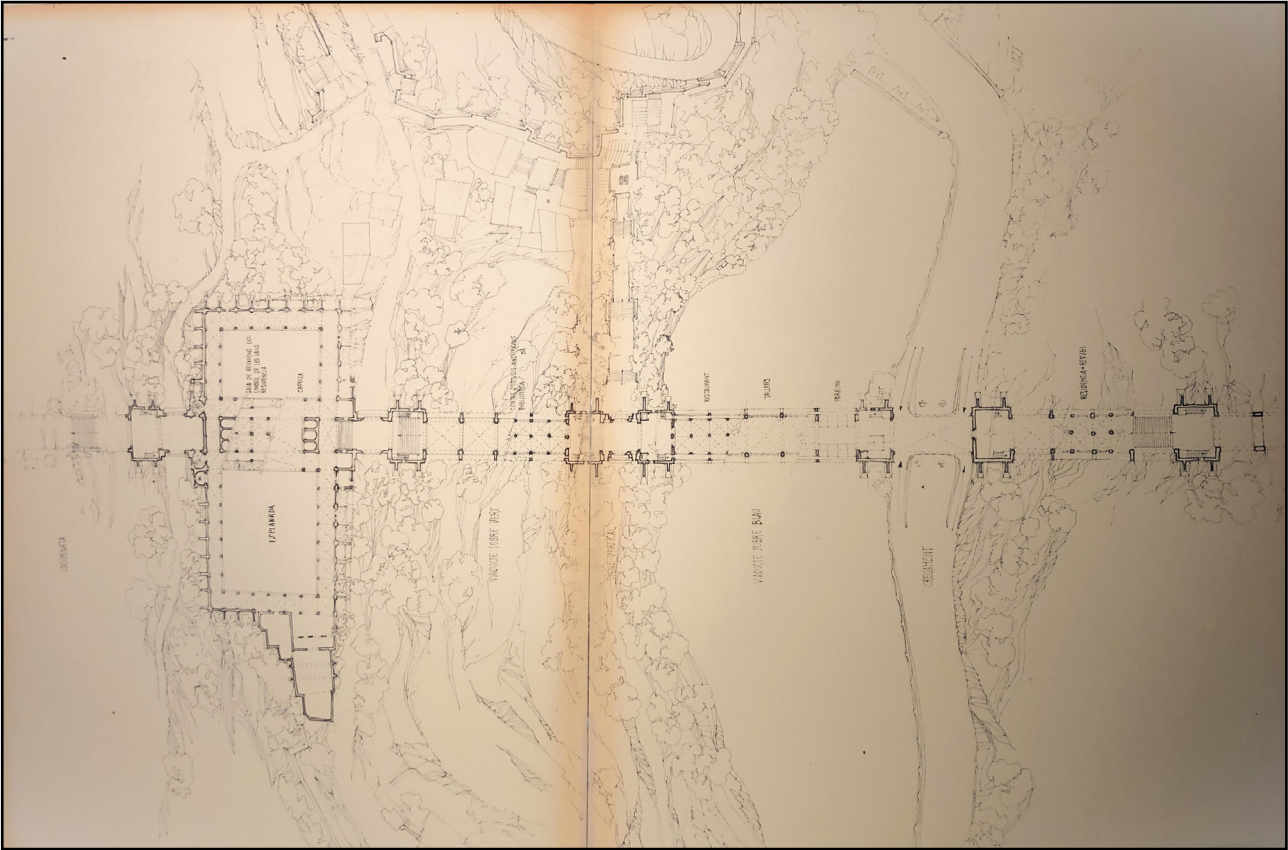
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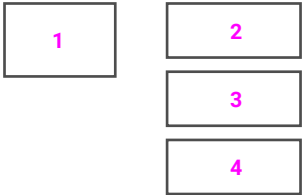
# Meritxell Sanctuary

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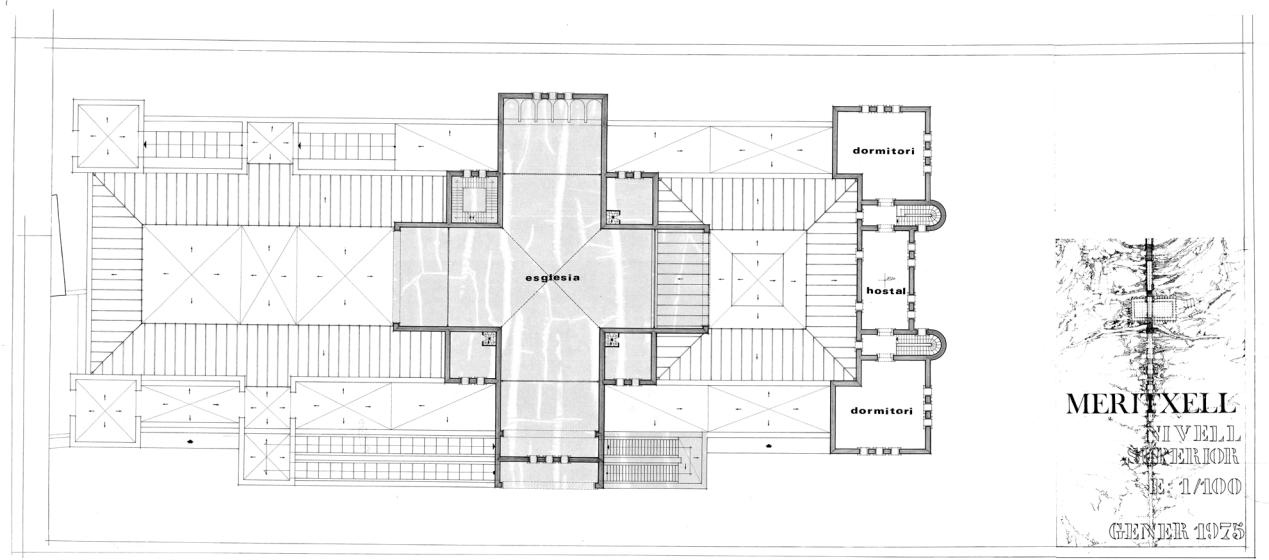
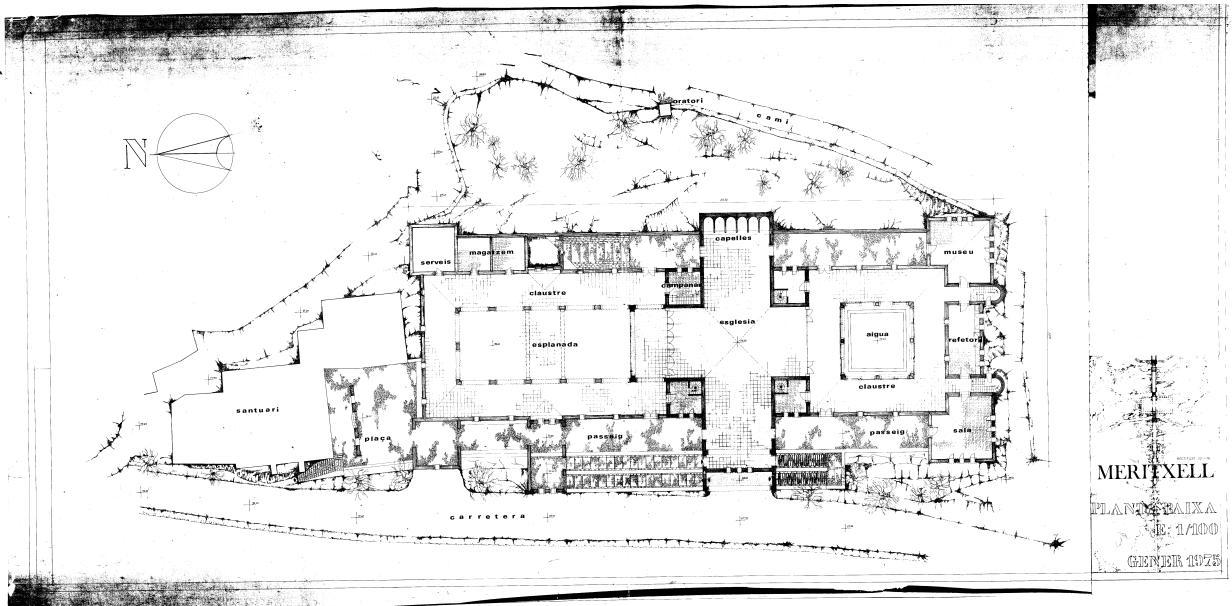
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CUSTOMER	Government of Andorra
SOURCES	RBTA Archive

## ESSENTIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

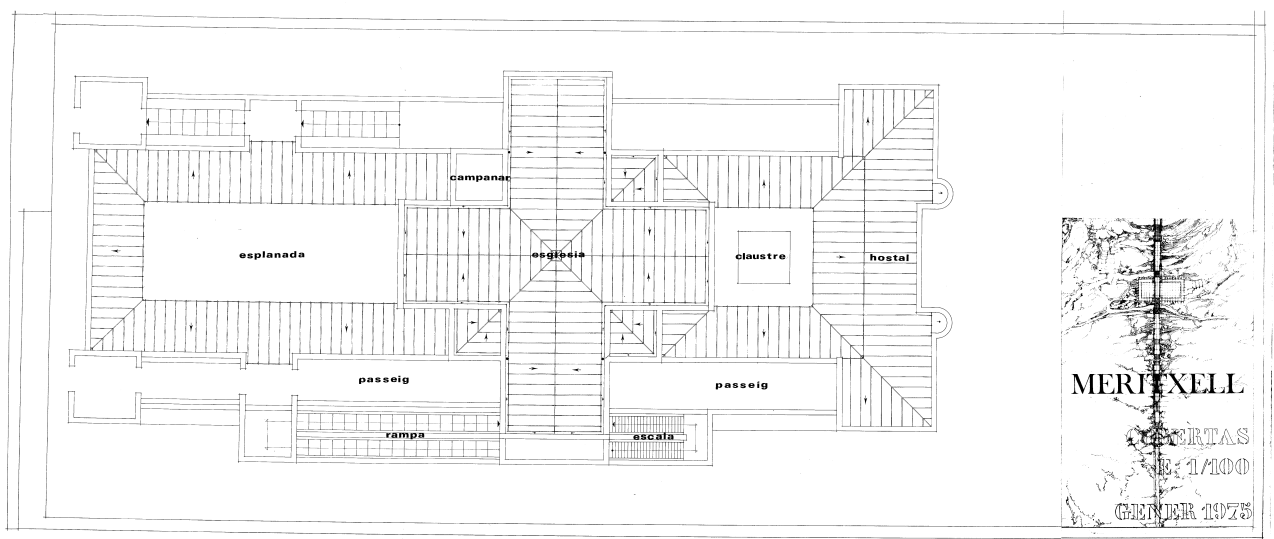
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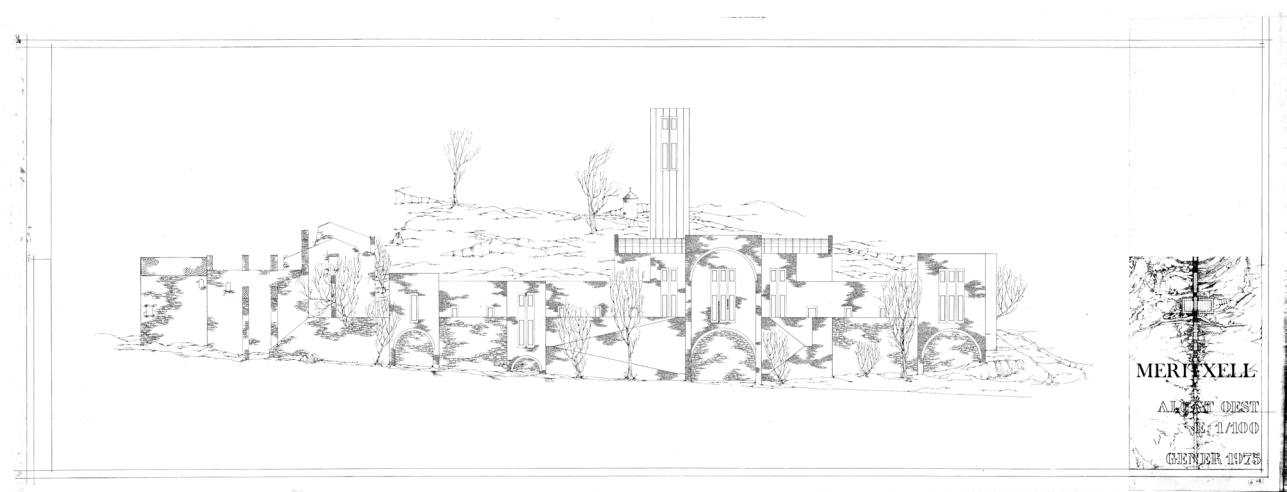
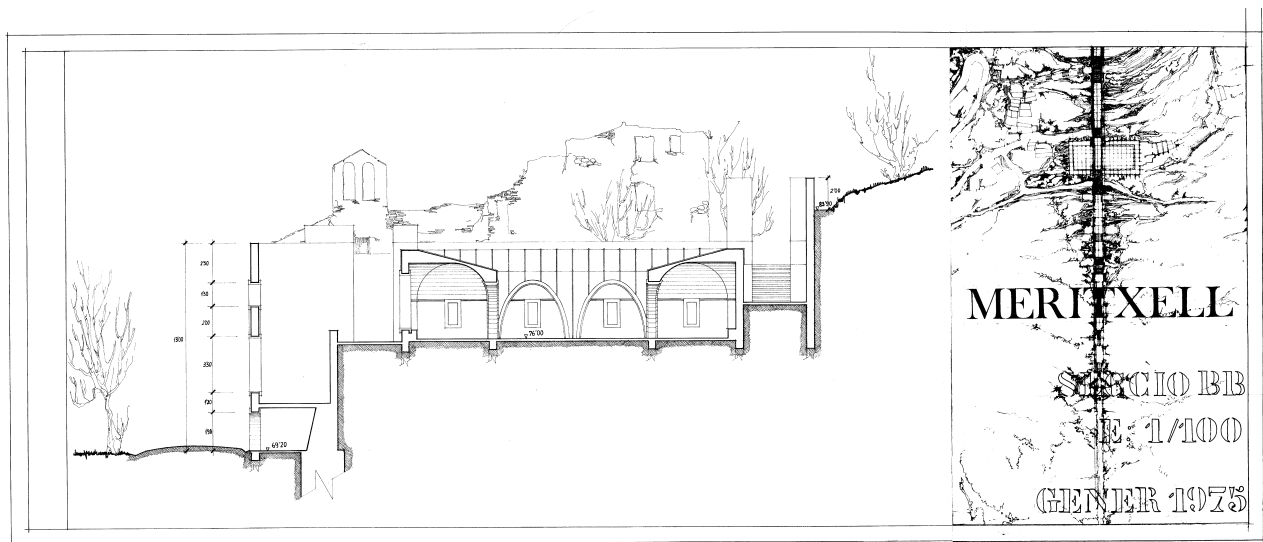
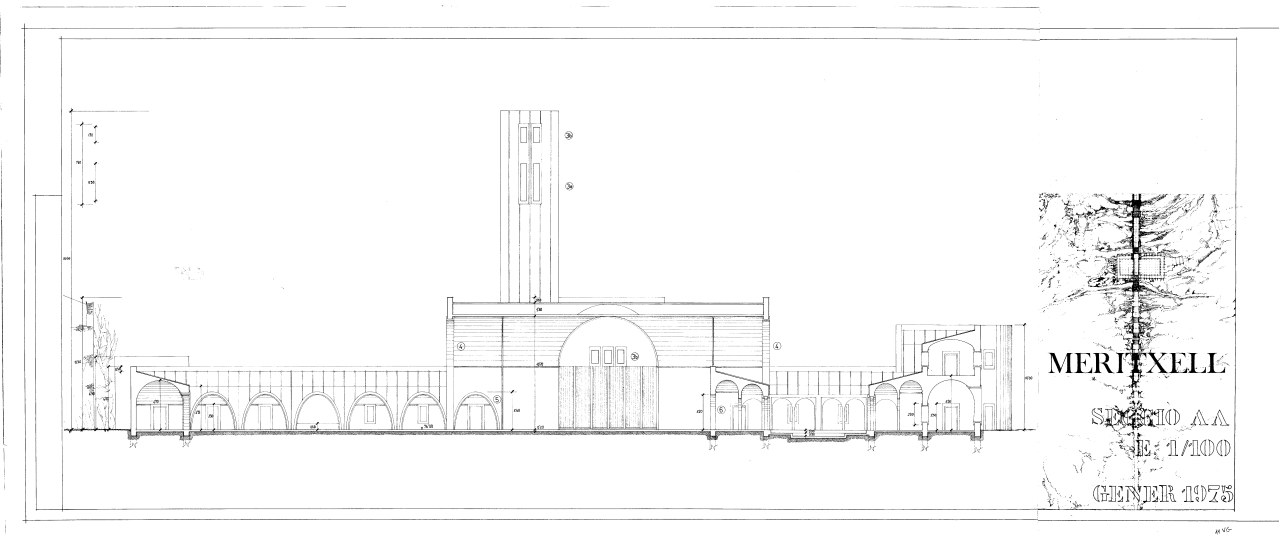


IMG.1: Meritxell Sanctuary, site plan of the entire proposed complex, sketch, ink on cardboard from the project proposal album *El Pont de Meritxell*, Aug. 1973; IMG.2: Meritxell Sanctuary, ground floor plan, esc. 1:100, Jan. 1975; IMG. 3: Meritxell Sanctuary, upper level floor plan, esc. 1:100, Jan. 1975; IMG. 4: Meritxell Sanctuary, roof level plan, esc. 1:100, Jan. 1975, BTA Archive.

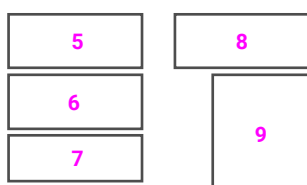
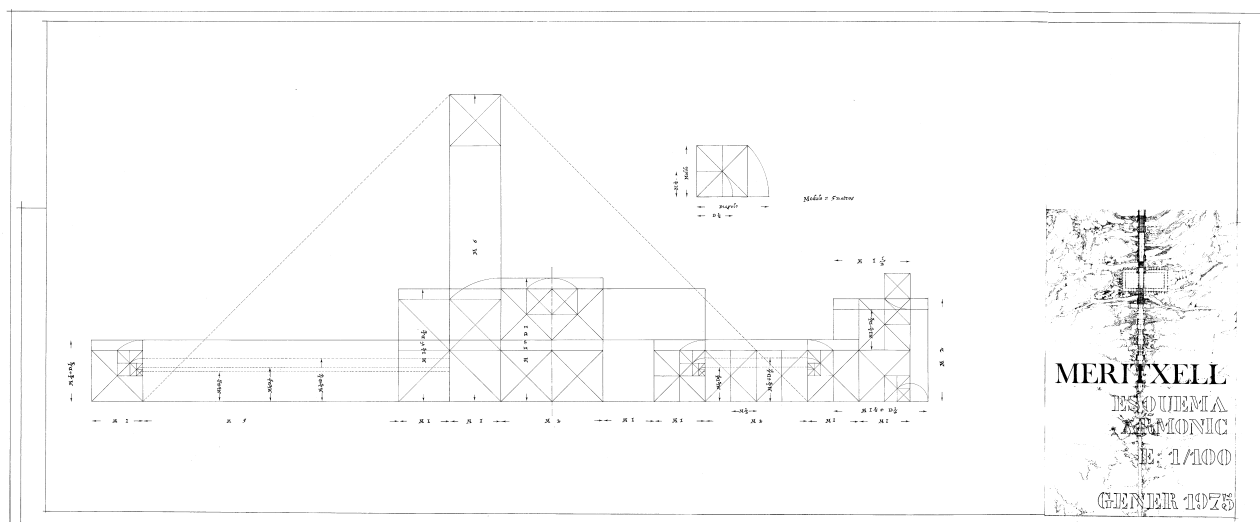


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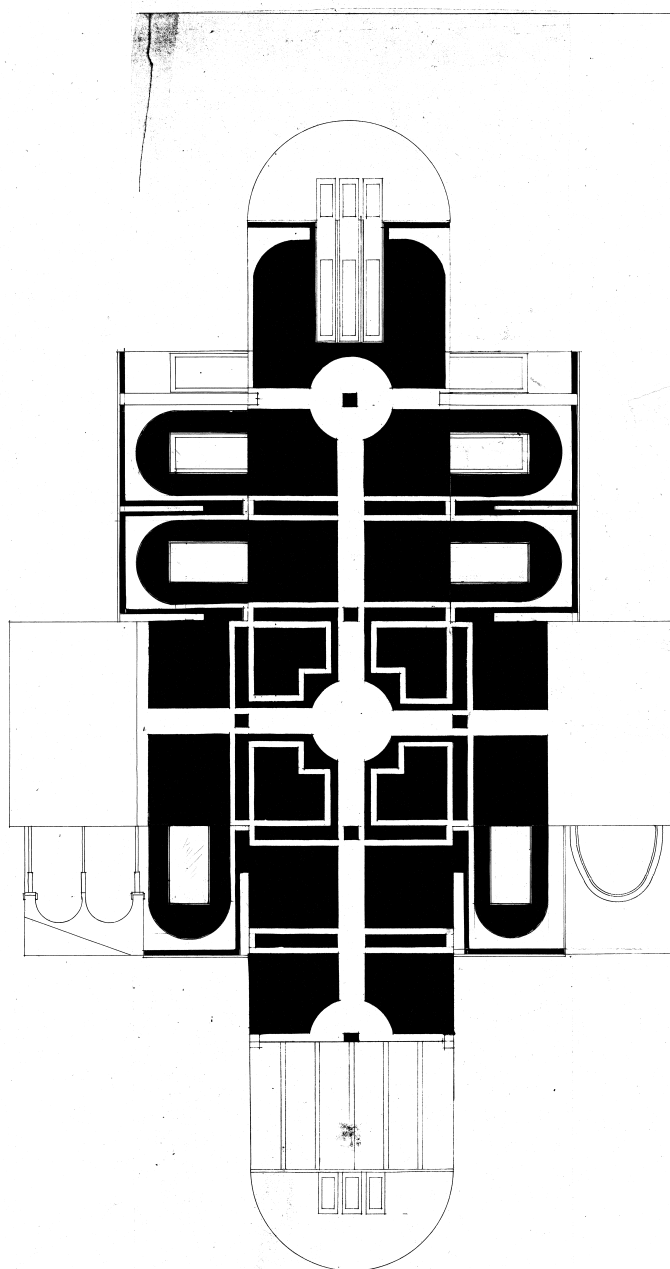


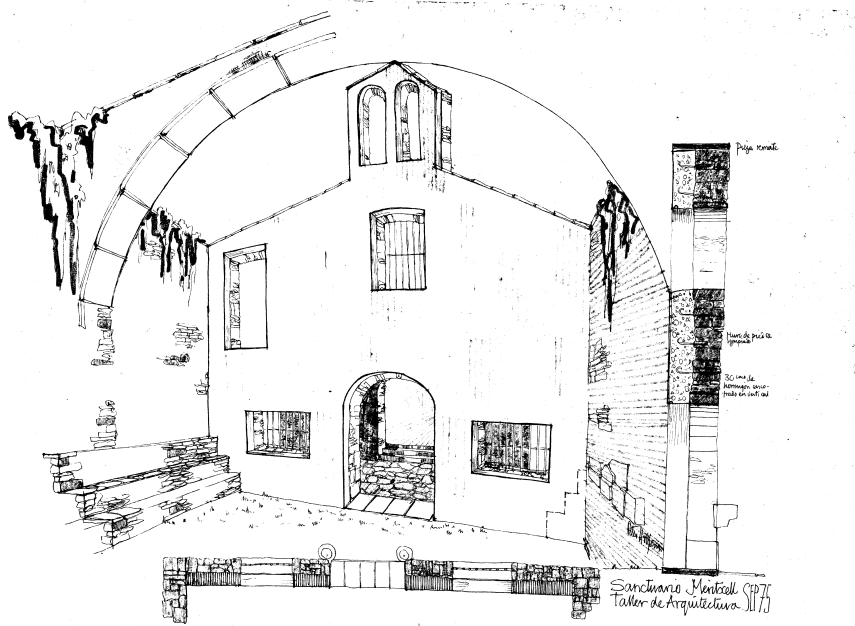
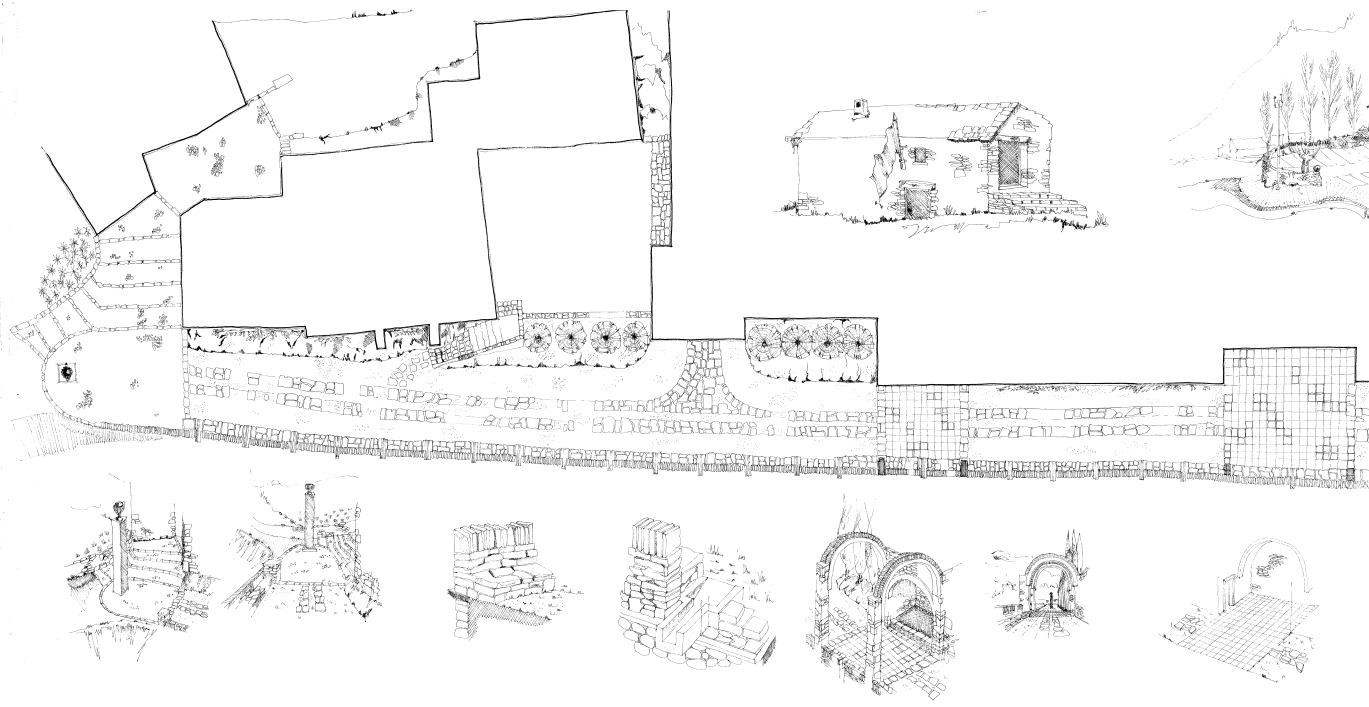






IMG.5: Meritxell Sanctuary, longitudinal section, esc. 1:100, Jan. 1975;  
 IMG. 6: Meritxell Sanctuary, transversal section, esc. 1:100, Jan. 1975;  
 IMG. 7: Meritxell Sanctuary, west facade elevation, esc. 1:100, Jan. 1975;  
 IMG. 8: Meritxell Sanctuary, harmonic scheme study, esc. 1:100, Jan. 1975;  
 IMG. 9: Meritxell Sanctuary, geometric composition study., BTA Archive.



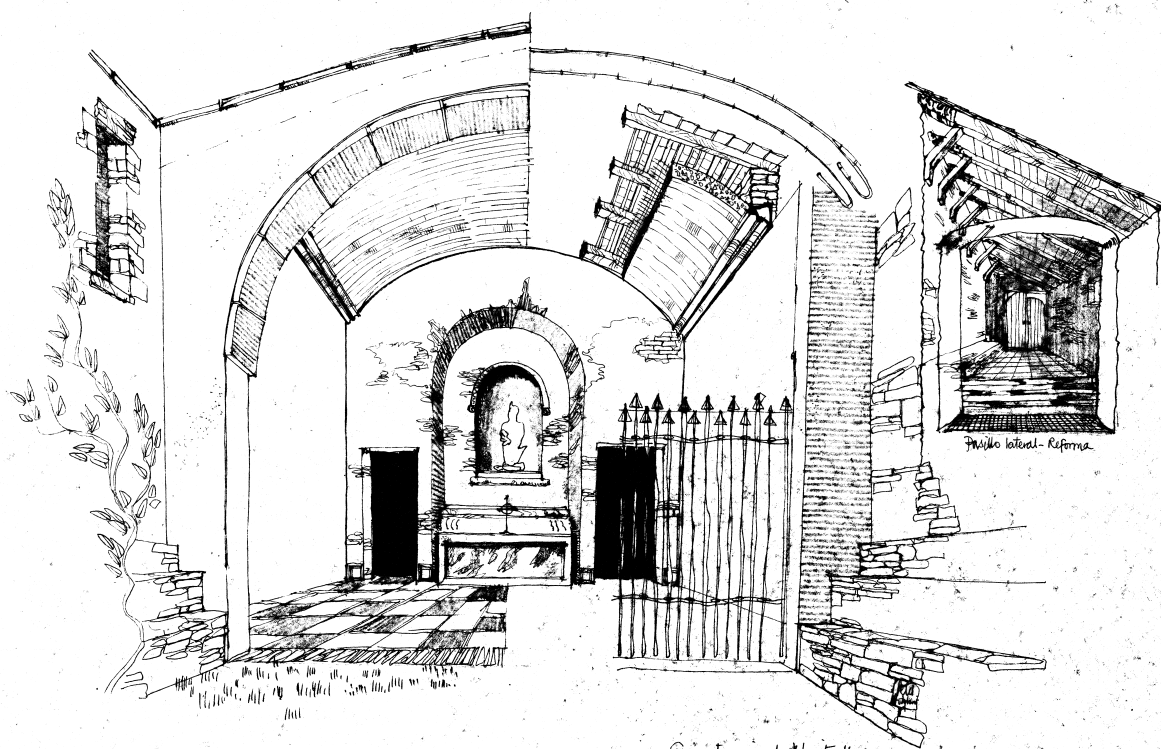
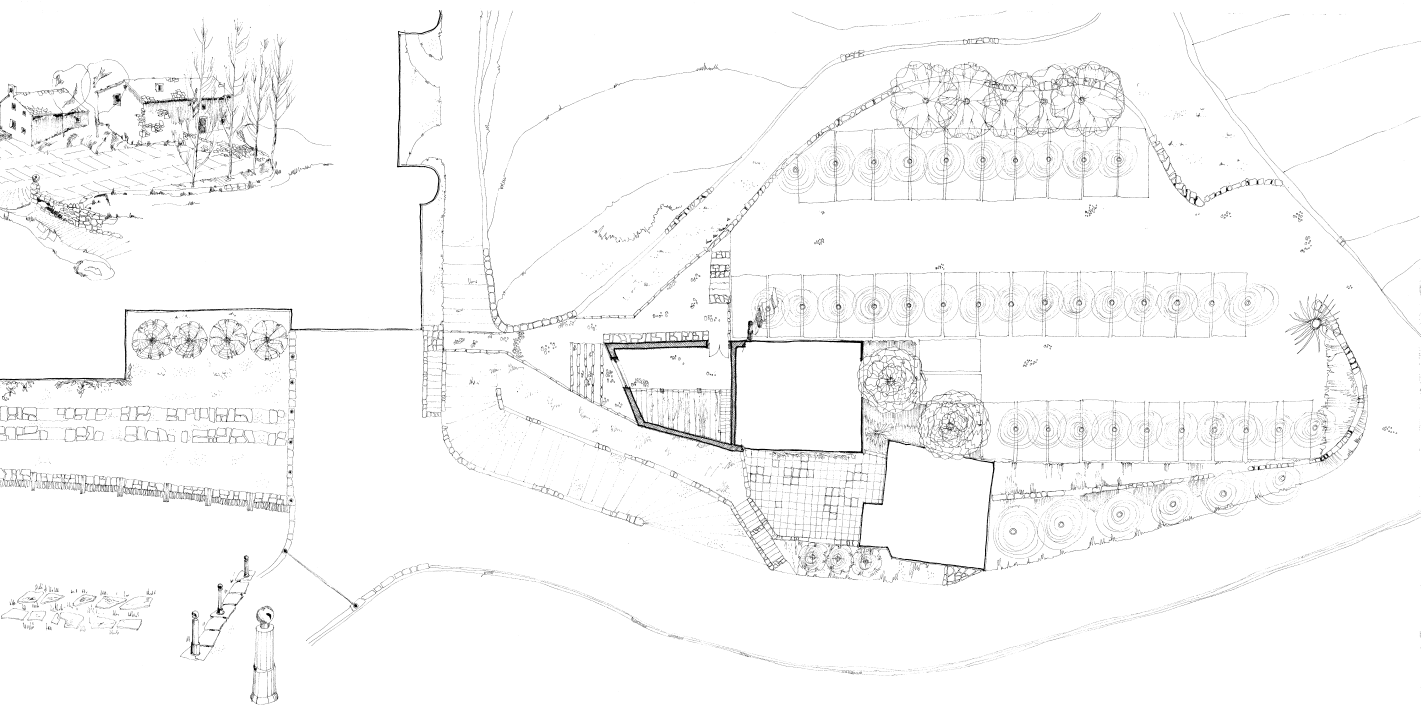


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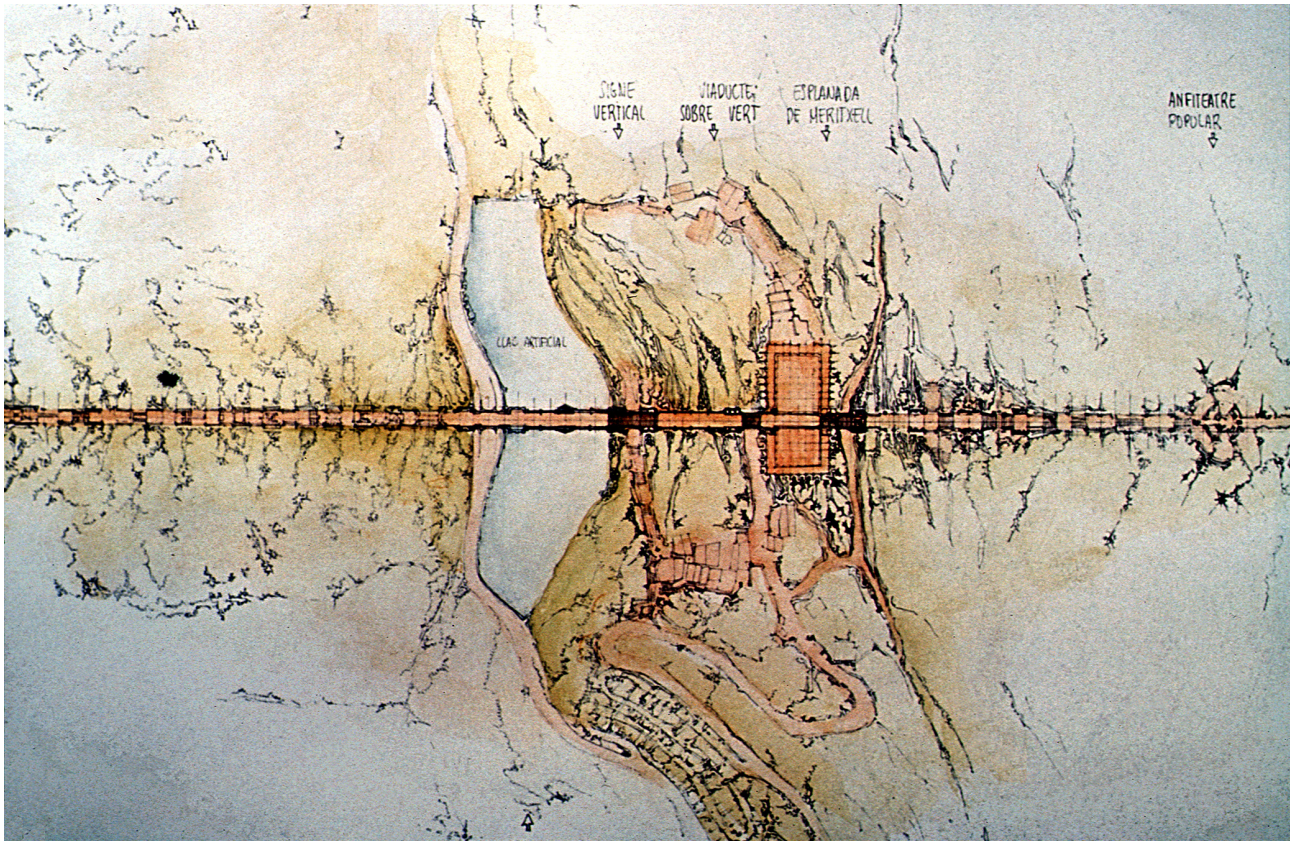
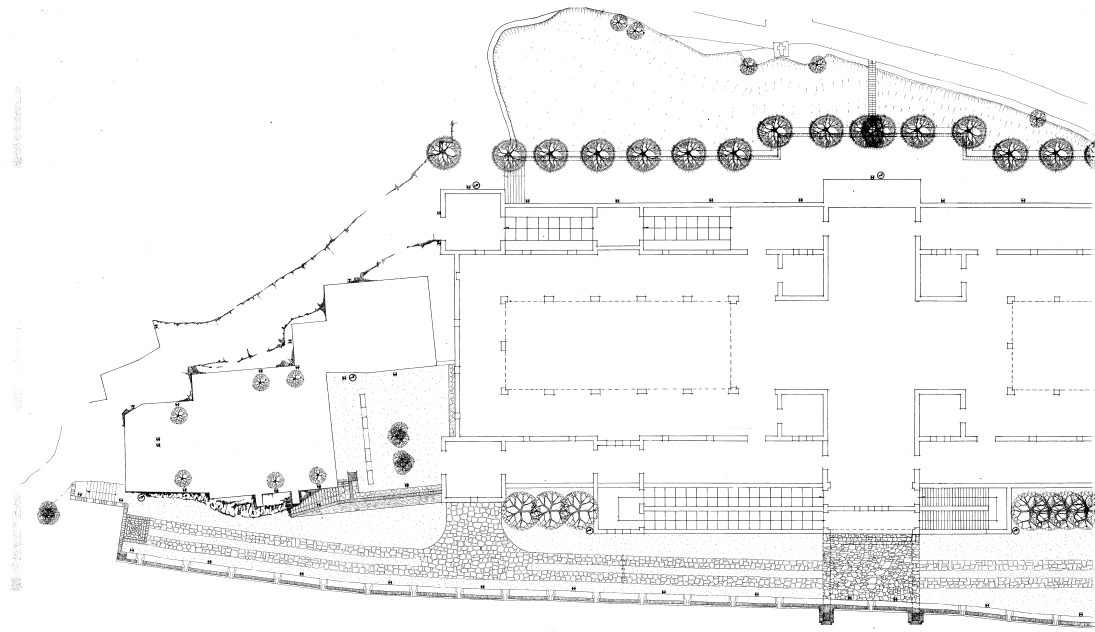
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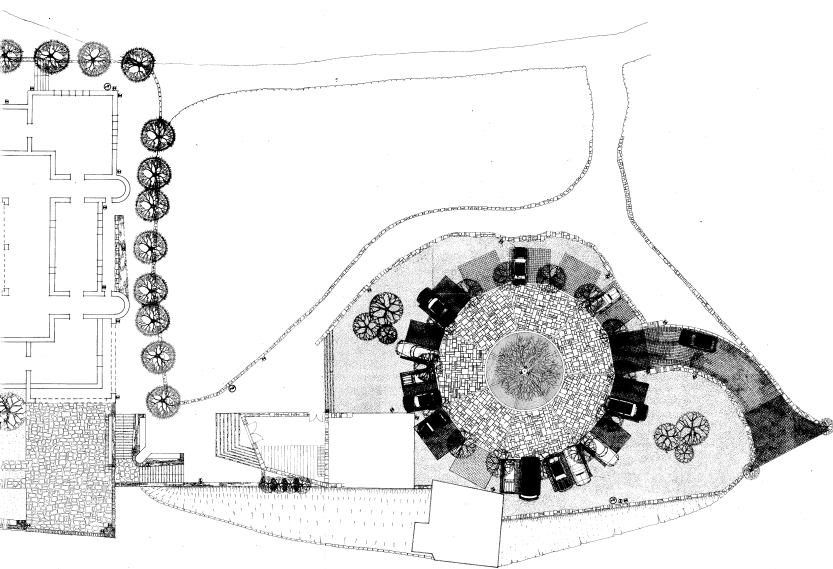
IMG.10: Meritxell Sanctuary, site plan studies, perspectives and constructive technical details sketches; IMG.11: Meritxell Sanctuary, main entrance view with constructive details, sketch, Sept. 1975; IMG. 12: Meritxell Sanctuary, interior view, lateral corridor and roof constructive details, sketches, Sept. 1975, BTA Archive.



Sanchiano de Heriberto  
Taller de Arquitectura SEP 15





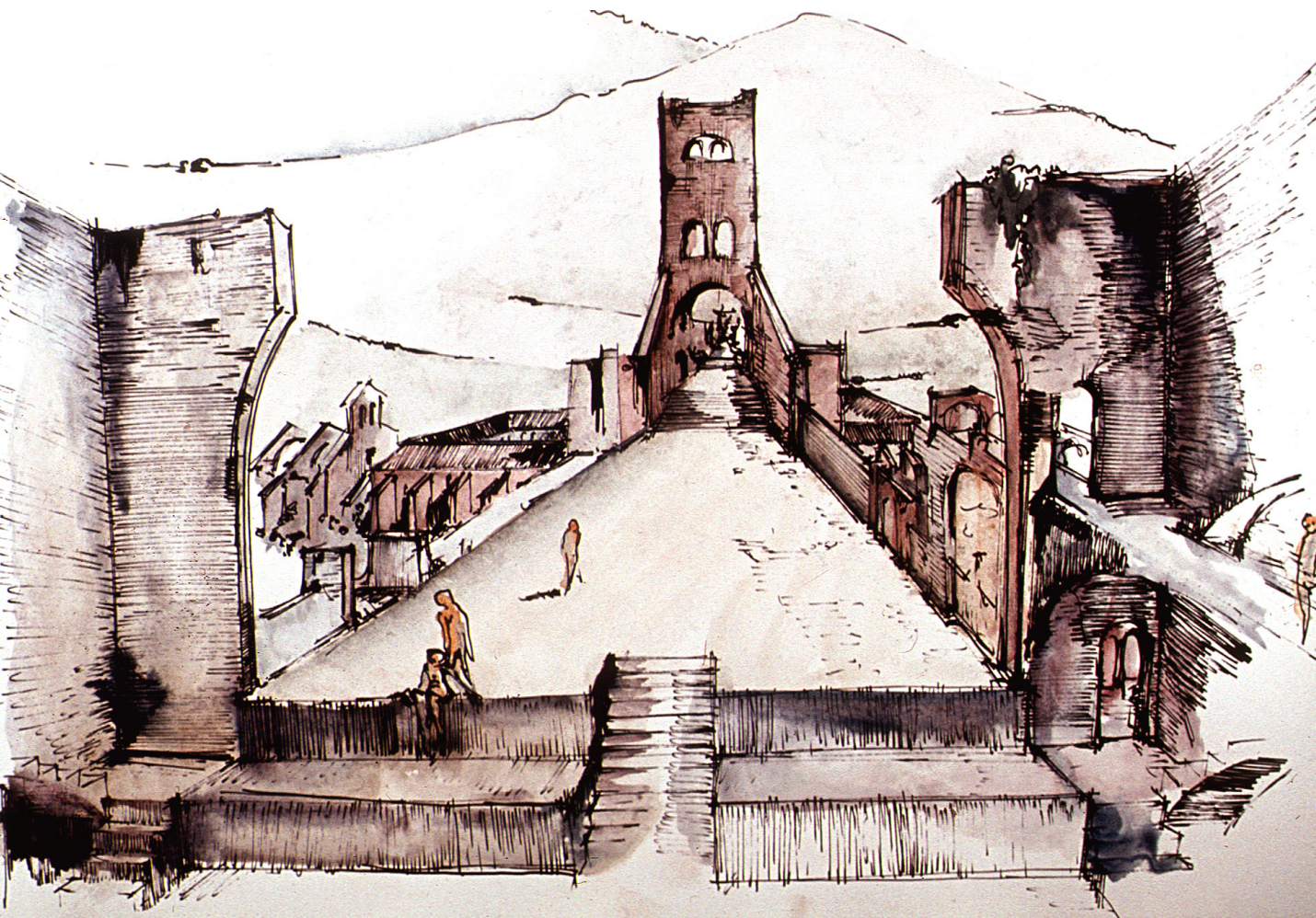


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IMG.13: Meritxell Sanctuary, esplanade level plan;  
 IMG. 14: Meritxell Sanctuary, site plan of the entire proposed complex, sketch (from East to West: the concave amphitheatre, the giant steps, the bridge over the road, the climbing towers, the vaulting arches, the esplanade, the convex theatre, the gushing fountain, the sculpted colonnade, and the ride through the forest), watercolour on heliographic copy, Aug. 1973, BTA Archive..





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IMG.15: Meritxell Sanctuary, 'Viaduct over the green', street-bridge over the valley with towers and arches, perspective sketch, watercolour on heliographic copy, Aug. 1973; IMG. 16: Meritxell Sanctuary, 'Viaduct over the blue', perspective sketch, watercolour on heliographic copy, August 1973, BTA Archive.









## Selected extracts from the RBTA project description

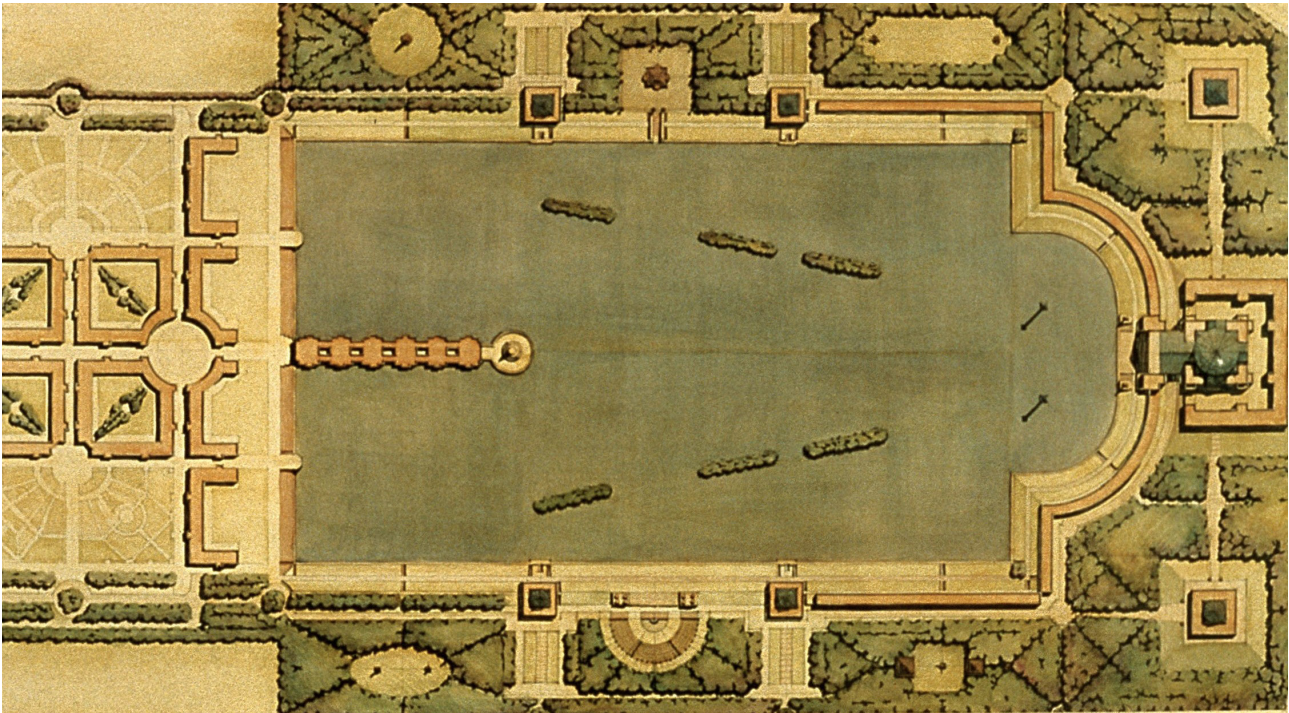
In 1972, on the evening of a popular holiday, the ancient Romanesque Sanctuary of Meritxell caught fire and was destroyed. The building was left in blackened ruins, survived only by the original apse and vaulting over the altar and latter-day bell tower. The task of rebuilding the Sanctuary could not be reduced to an archaeological work simply returning the fallen stones to their original position; nor could the strong influence of the local architectural character and landscape be ignored. The decision to continue along the historical path of Romanesque imagery, in theory, while applying modern building techniques and designs, in practice, was also based on the vision that the project had to go further than its program, acting as a counter-structure to the environmental degradation inherent in unplanned territories, and proposing a way of building in Andorra resulting from its past. The two major elements of this project are the viaduct bridge and the sanctuary, although other elements on the line are as symbolically important such as (from east to west) the concave amphitheatre, the huge steps, the bridge over the road, the climbing towers, the vaulting arches, the esplanade, the convex theatre, the gushing fountain, the sculpted colonnade and the ride through the forest. The Sanctuary is now built with all its dependencies, manifesting a clear hint of projected continuation in the unfinished arches poised over the valley waiting to connect up with the future bridge. Inspiration grew from the original Romanesque sources through the Albertian and Palladian neopythagorean use of square roots and circles, including the additions of certain Catalan-Mudéjar insinuations. The entire surroundings of the Sanctuary were designed in a separate and late project. The design involved all paved surfaces, walkways, balustrades, steps, ramps, parking, etc. All landscaping involved the re-planting of the surrounding countryside and the remodelling and modernization of the old and derelict buildings in the area to be used as support dependencies.

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IMG. 17: Meritxell Sanctuary, perspective view seen from the amphitheatre over the valley, watercolour on heliographic copy, Aug. 1973; IMG. 18: Meritxell Sanctuary, Giant steps, perspective sketch, watercolour on heliographic copy, Aug. 1973, BTA Archive.





# Les Arcades du Lac

ARCHIVAL DATA	
DATE	1974 (design) 1982 (realization)
PLACE/ADDRESS	Saint Quentin en Yvelines (Paris)
COLLABORATORS	Bernard Torchinsky, Patrick Guenard, Peter Hodgkinson, Xavier Listosella, Omar Migliore, Ramón Collado
CUSTOMER	Foyer du Fonctionnaire et de la Famille. Les Arcades du Lac: Société d'HLM- Les 3 F. Le Viaduc: Société de HLM-CNH 2000. Les Templettes: S.C.C/C.N.P.
SOURCES	RBTA Archive

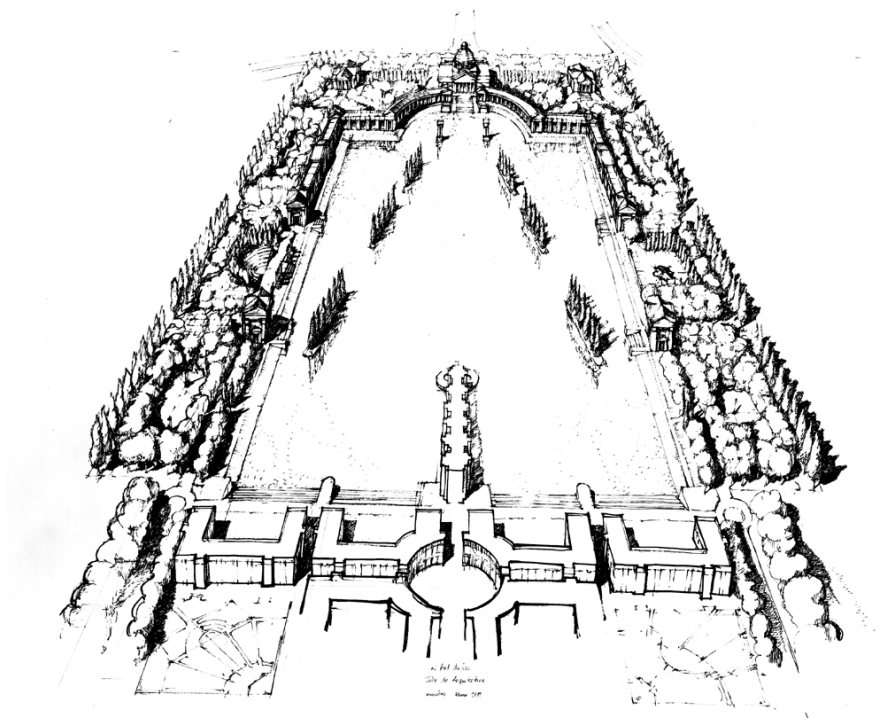
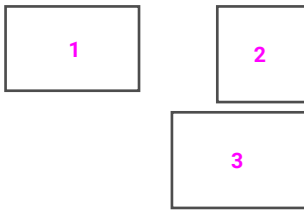
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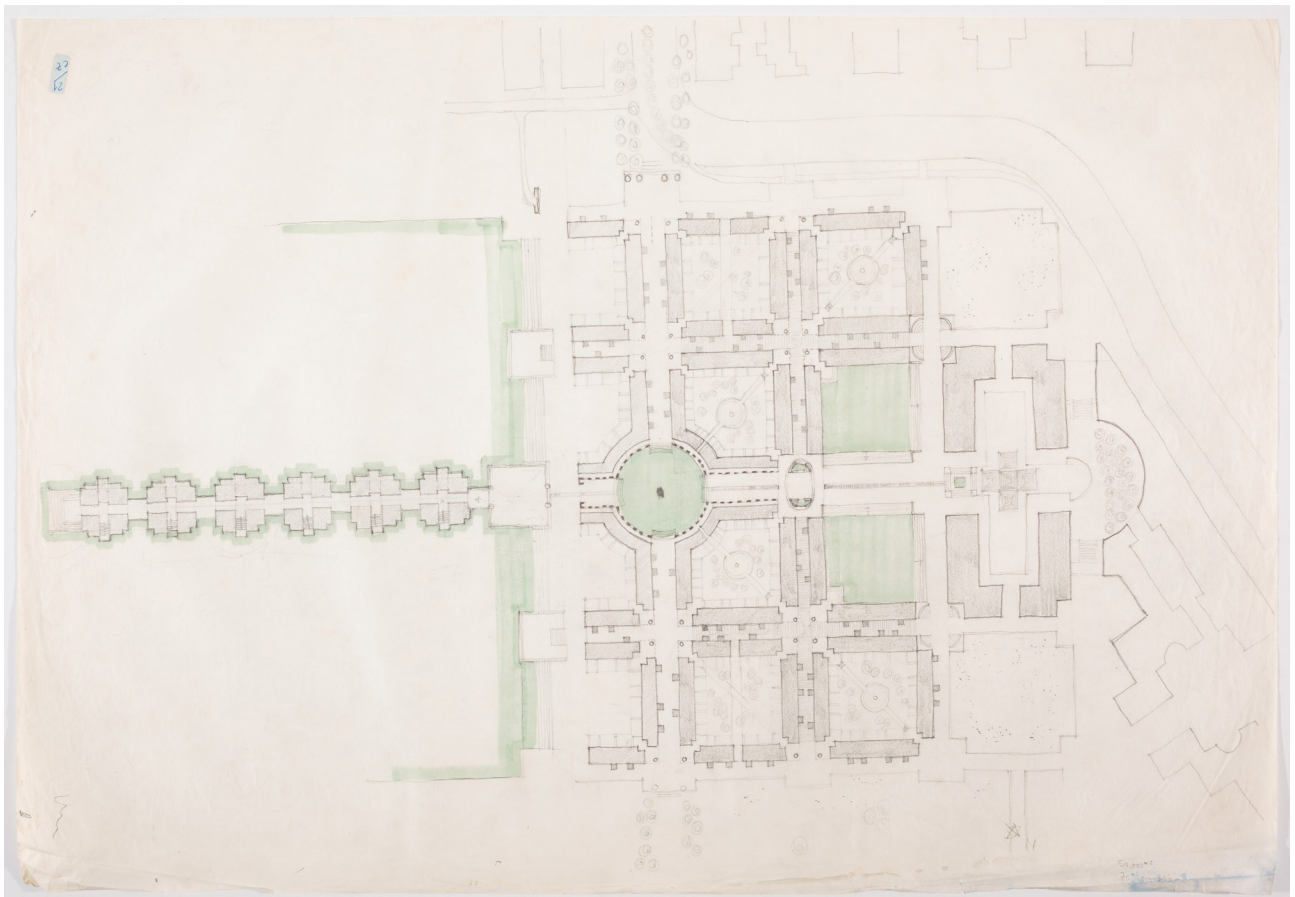


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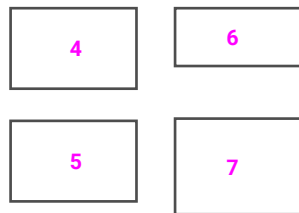
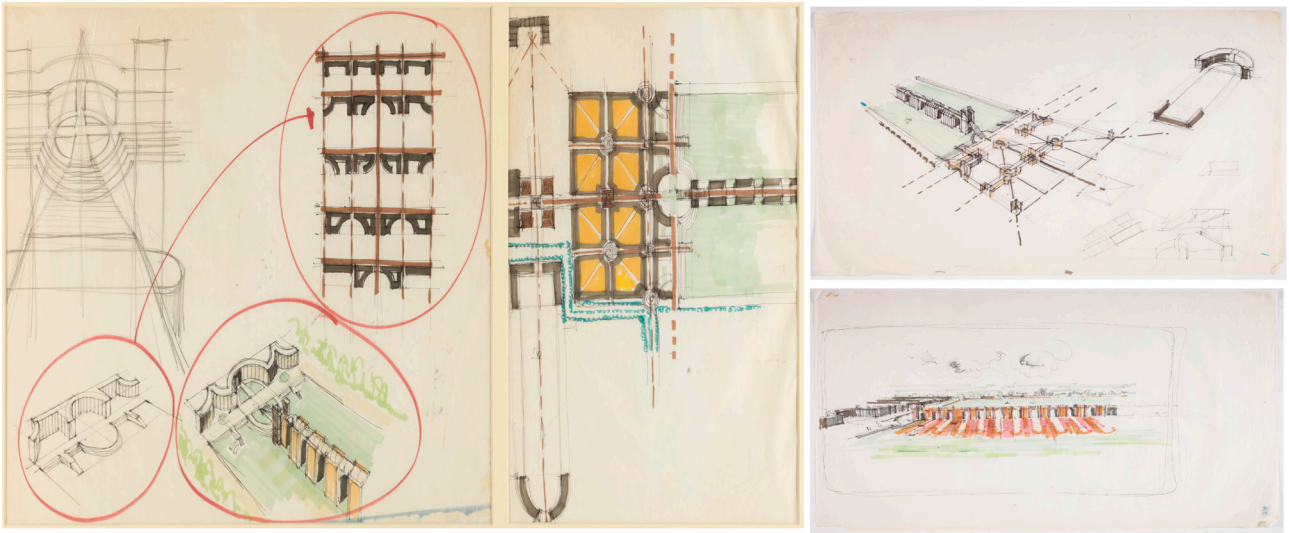


IMG.1: Le Lac (Les Arcades du Lac, Le Viaduc and Les Temples du Lac): master site plan, ink and watercolour on paper. IMG.2: Le Lac: aerial perspective, sketch. IMG.3: Les Arcades du Lac and Le Viaduct: site plan, coloured pencil on paper, BTA Archive.



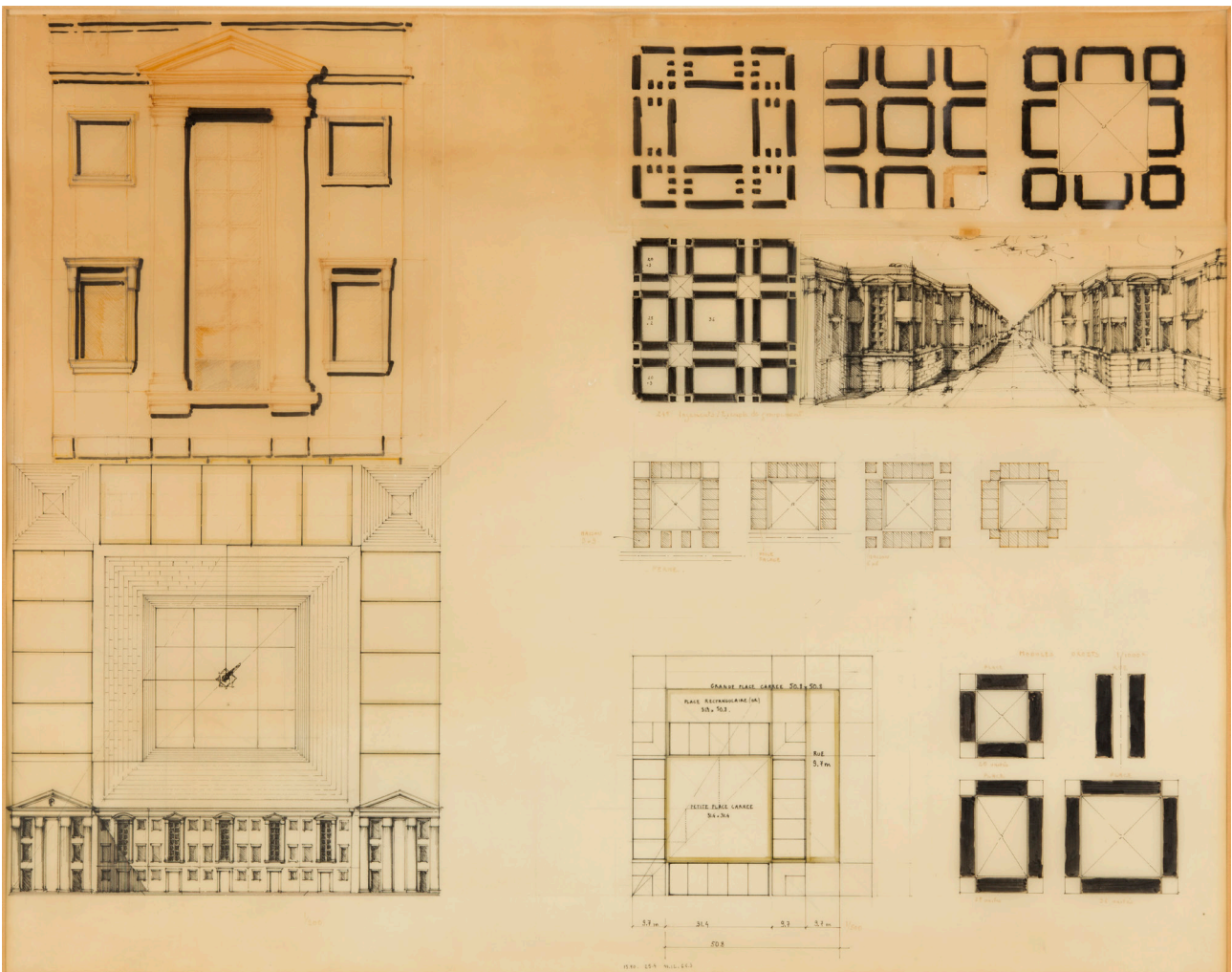




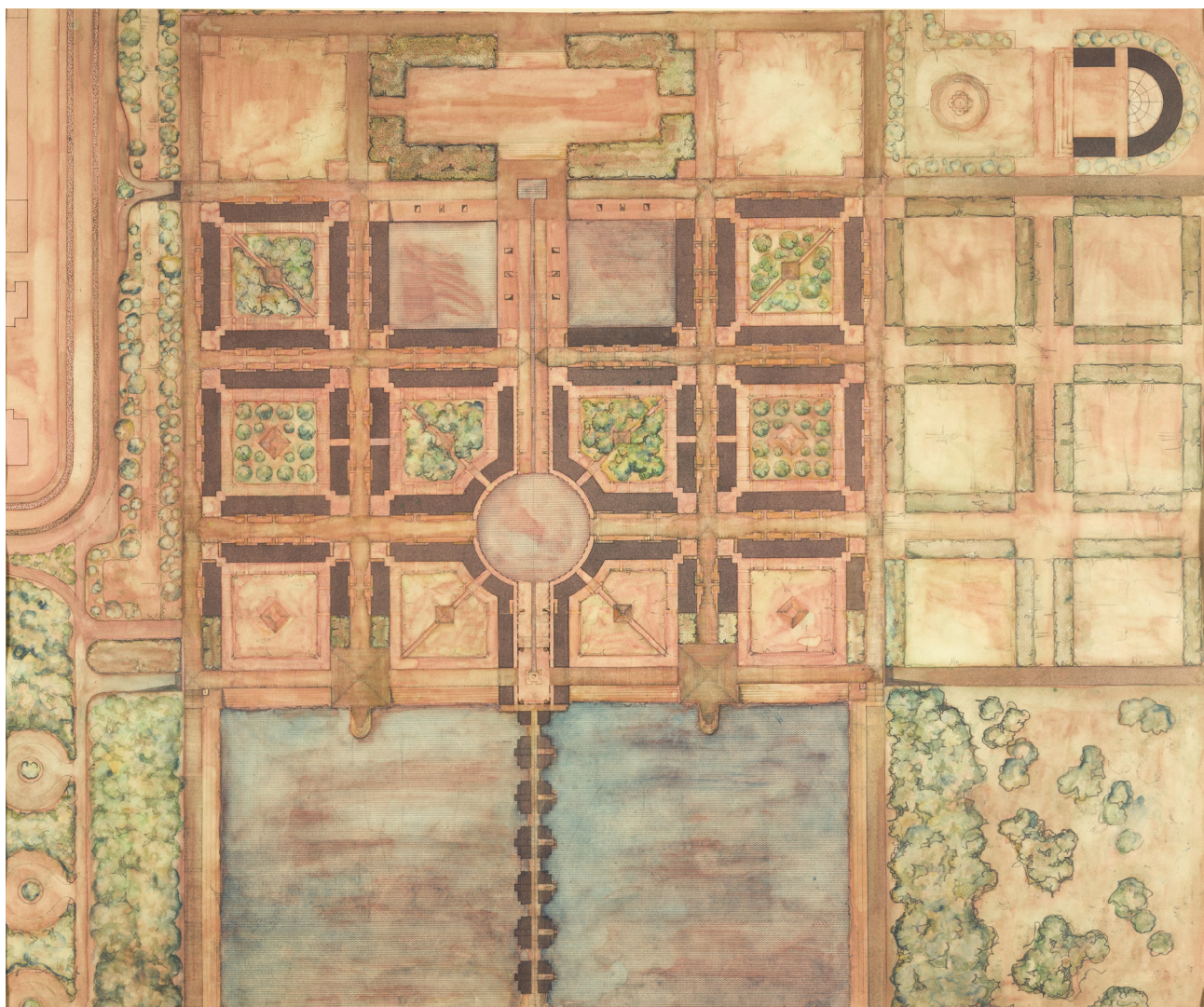


IMG.4: Les Arcades du Lac: partial site plan; IMG.5: Les Arcades du Lac: master plan, Oct. 1978; IMG.6: Les Arcades du Lac and Le Viaduc: study plan and perspective sketches, coloured markers and pencils on paper; IMG.7:

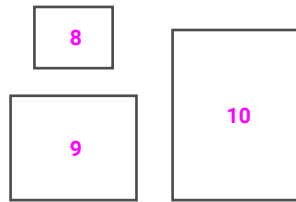
Les Arcades du Lac: typological studies, plan, elevations, and perspective sketches, BTA Archive.





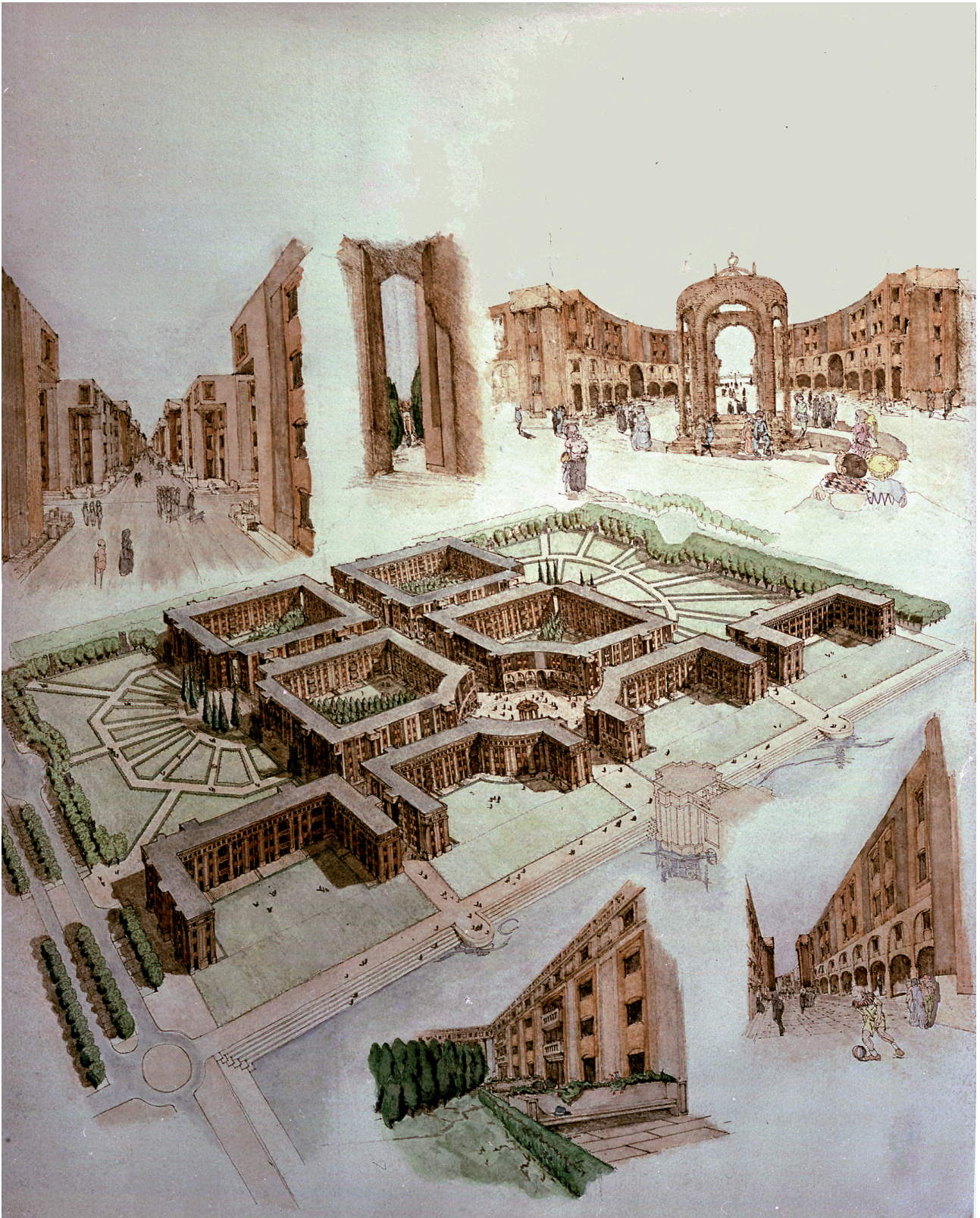




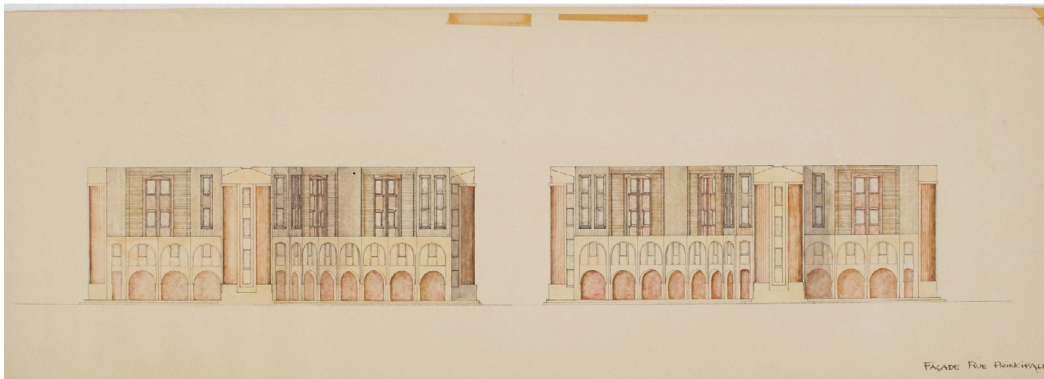
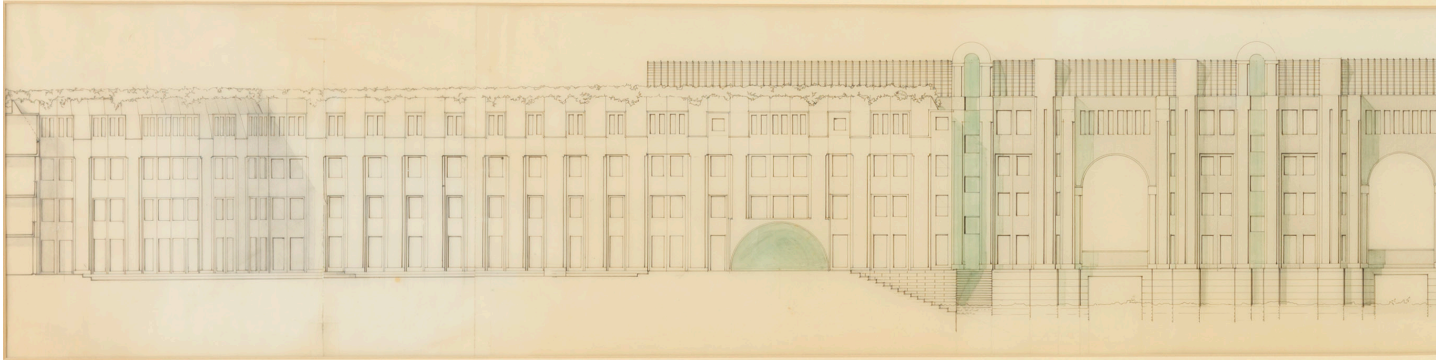
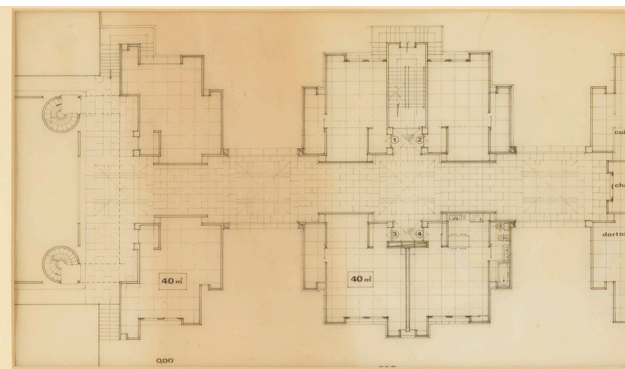
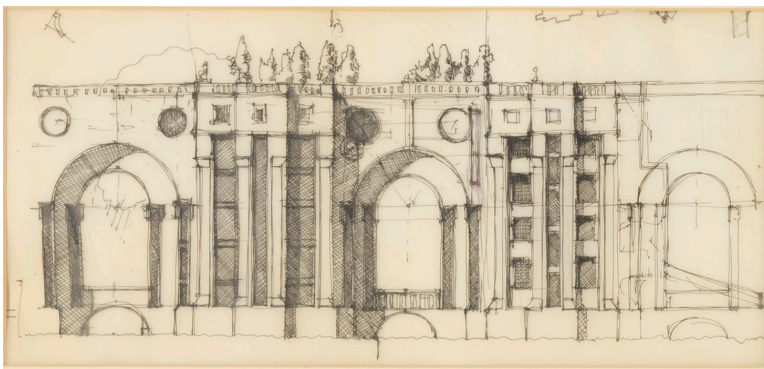


IMG.8: Les Arcades du Lac: partial ground level plan; IMG.9: Les Arcades du Lac: partial site plan, ink and watercolor on paper; IMG.10: Les Arcades du Lac: aerial birds eye perspective, streets view and squares per-

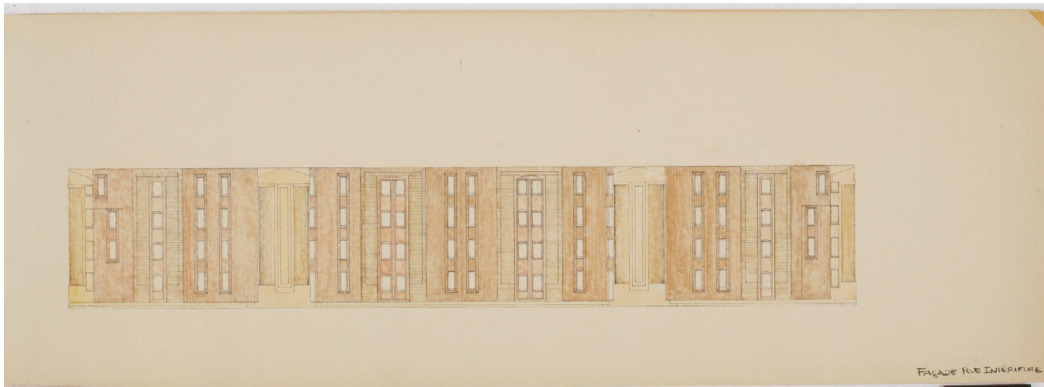
spective sketches, ink and watercolour on paper, BTA Archive.







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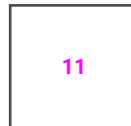
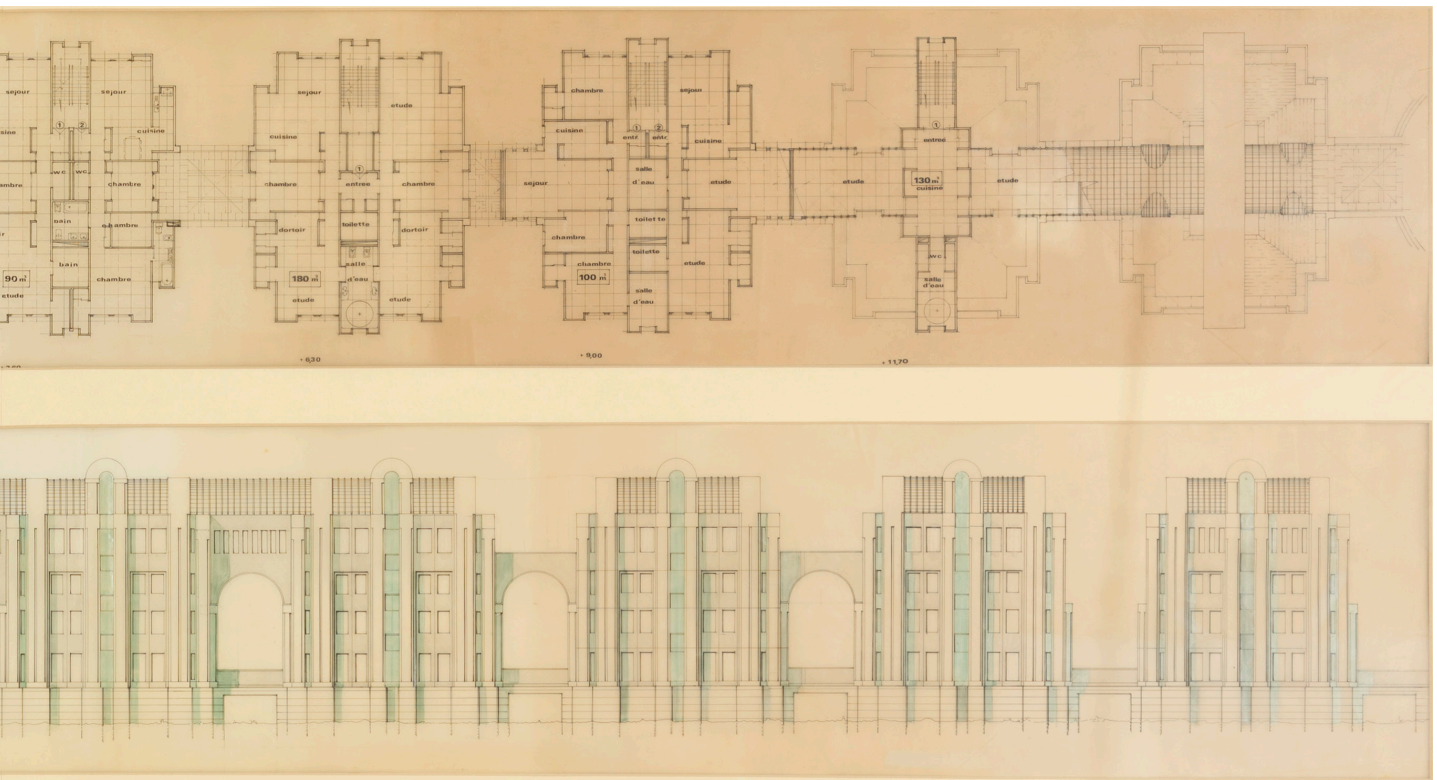


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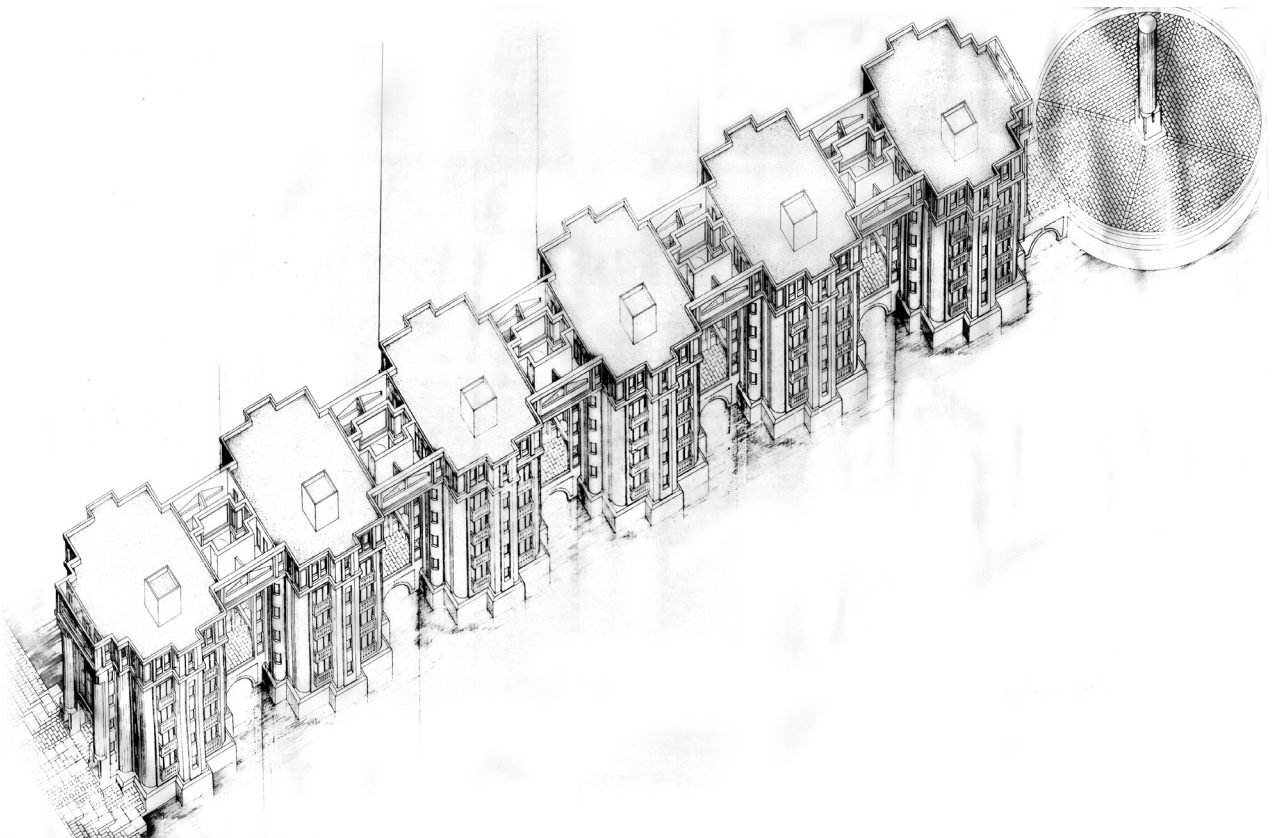


FACADE SUR LAC





IMG.11: Les Arcades du Lac: principal and internal streets elevations and Lake facade section; IMG.12: Le Viaduc: study sketch, typical plan and façade elevations; IMG.13: Le Viaduc: axonometric perspective, BTA Archive.









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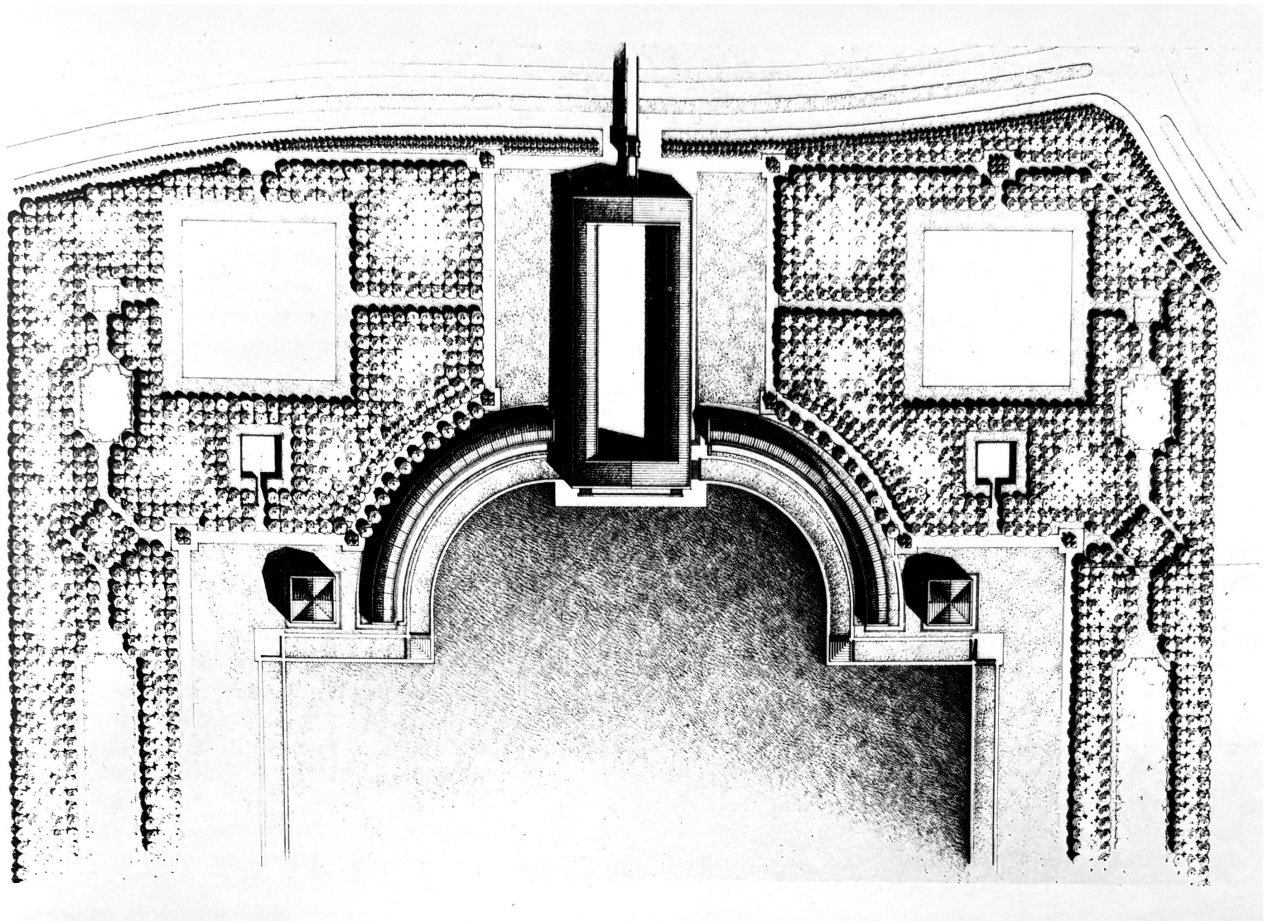
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IMG.14: Les Arcades du Lac, general perspective view, ink and watercolor on paper; IMG.15-16: Les Arcades du Lac, internal and external street perspective sketches, BTA Archive.









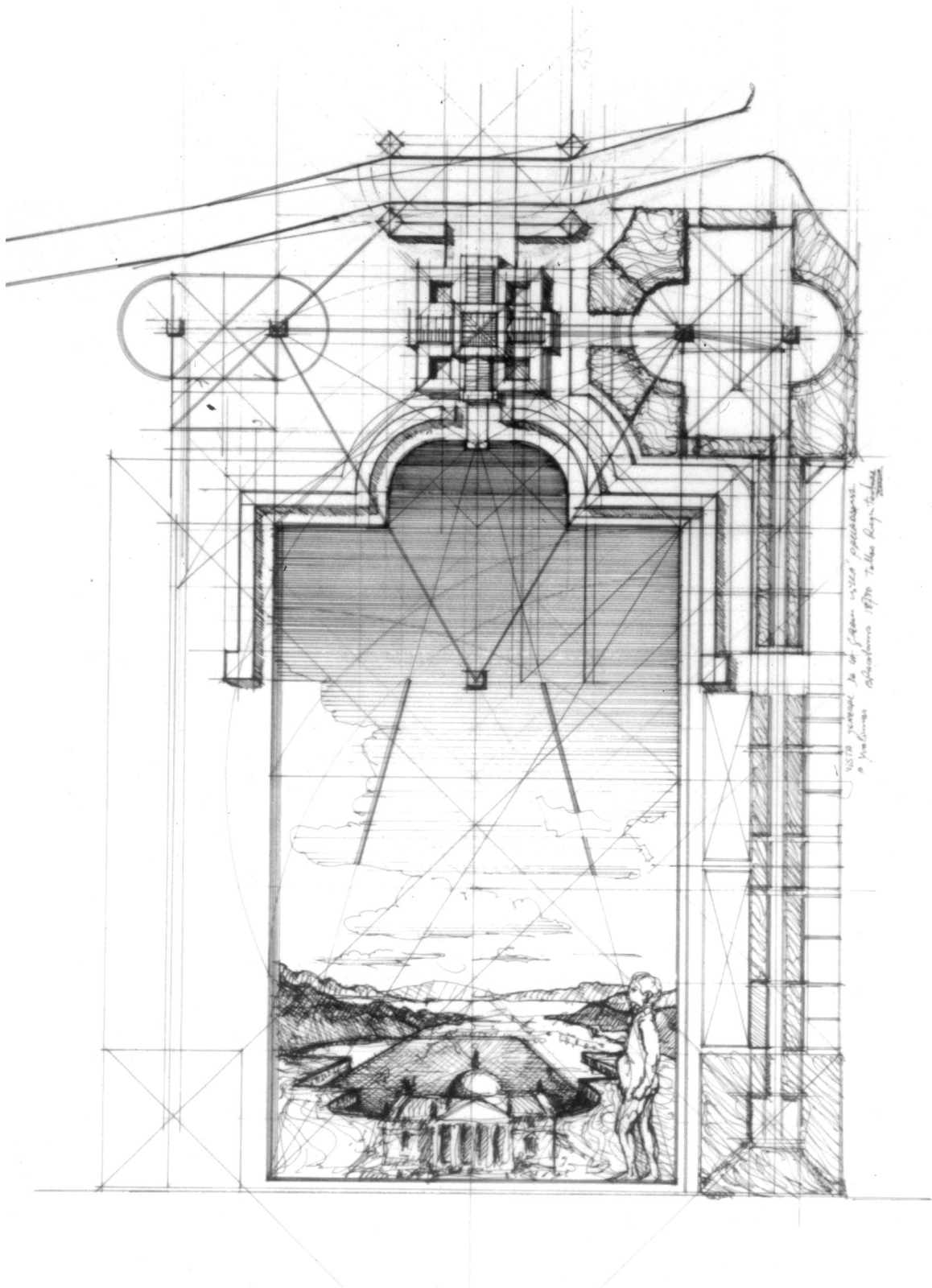
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IMG.17: Le Viaduc: picture of the model;  
 IMG. 18: Les Arcades du Lac, prefabricated elements, layout elevations; IMG. 19: Les Temples du Lac, general plan, BTA Archive.





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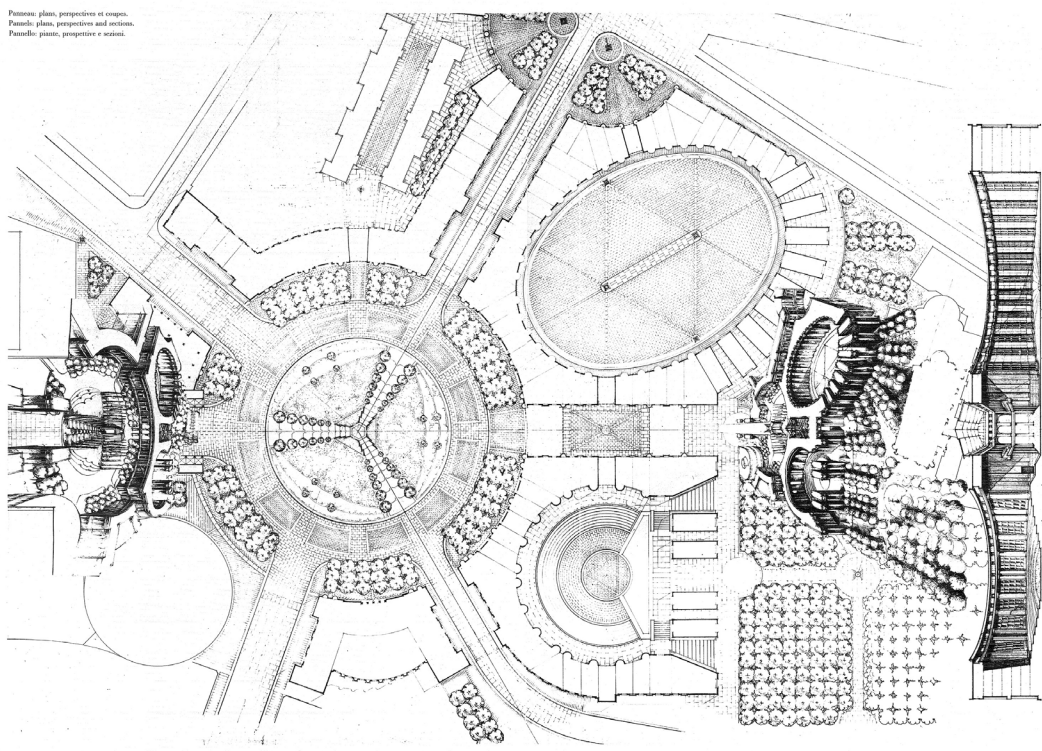
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IMG. 20: Les Temples du Lac, plan geometry and perspective sketch, BTA Archive.

## Selected extracts from the RBTA project description

This, the first major project by the Taller de Arquitectura to be built in France, forms part of the Villes Nouvelles policy which the French government adopted for the outskirts of Paris: whole towns created from scratch in order to ease the congestion in the city centre and promote orderly growth, while avoiding as far as possible the creation of mere suburbs. As well as being the first of Bofill's constructions in France, this scheme constitutes a significant landmark in the history of the Taller de Arquitectura. The point of departure was established as being the relationship between technology and architectural history. The form and distribution of the blocks of apartments is based on the elements of a French Garden, introducing a considerable change of scale and transforming the hedges into buildings. This layout made it possible to generate the public spaces, basic to the formation of the town: the street and the square; the street as the place of circulation, and the square, as the place for meetings and get-togethers. Thanks to the large underground car park which links all the blocks together, all of the streets are exclusively pedestrian, some of them flanked by porticoes. The simplicity of the orthogonal organization is amply justified by the functional efficiency, all the more so in times of crisis such as the period from which the scheme dates. The compositional analysis of the French Garden was not restricted to a reproduction of its forms, but was a genuine attempt at creating a Garden City, in which the vegetation and the lake play a fundamental part. The notable presence of the lake prompted the construction of aqueduct and the form adopted for new blocks of housing built out over the water in a return to the famous French tradition of building castles on bridges, especially in the Loire region. "Les Arcades du Lac" contains 389 subsidised apartments grouped in four square blocks with a spacious interior courtyard, accessible from the street. The buildings consist of a ground floor and three upper floors. All apartments have dual orientation. The stairs are located in pavilions which project out from the façade, providing access to two doors per landing and leading down to the carpark. The program includes public spaces with plazas and gardens on the shores of the artificial lake. "Le Viaduct" a complex of 74 apartments, was actually built out over the artificial lake. Access to the apartments is at ground level, by way of a pedestrian street composed of the little bridges which communicate the ground floors of each of the six blocks. The vertical circulation nuclei occupy the central part of the north façade, and all of the rooms are exterior. Thus we have simply accomplished this exercise as the first model of a complex series of projects to be developed further on. We know that like every primary model, it is easily reproduced, and we know by inheritance, the danger of the divulgation of simple models. This is the reason why the project contains some totally subjective elements, and that, based on this first example, we have developed a series of complex exercises where the technological and cultural requirements have become more complicated.





Plan: plan, perspective et coupe.  
 Plan: plan, perspective and section.  
 Plan: plan, perspective e section.

# Les Echelles du Baroque

## ARCHIVAL DATA

DATE	1979 (design) 1985 (realization)
PLACE/ADDRESS	XIV Arrondissement-Montparnasse, Paris
COLLABORATORS	Peter Hodgkinson, Xavier Listosella, Patrick Dillon, Thierry Recevski
CUSTOMER	S.A.G.I Société d'aménagement et de gestion immobilière
SOURCES	RBTA Archive

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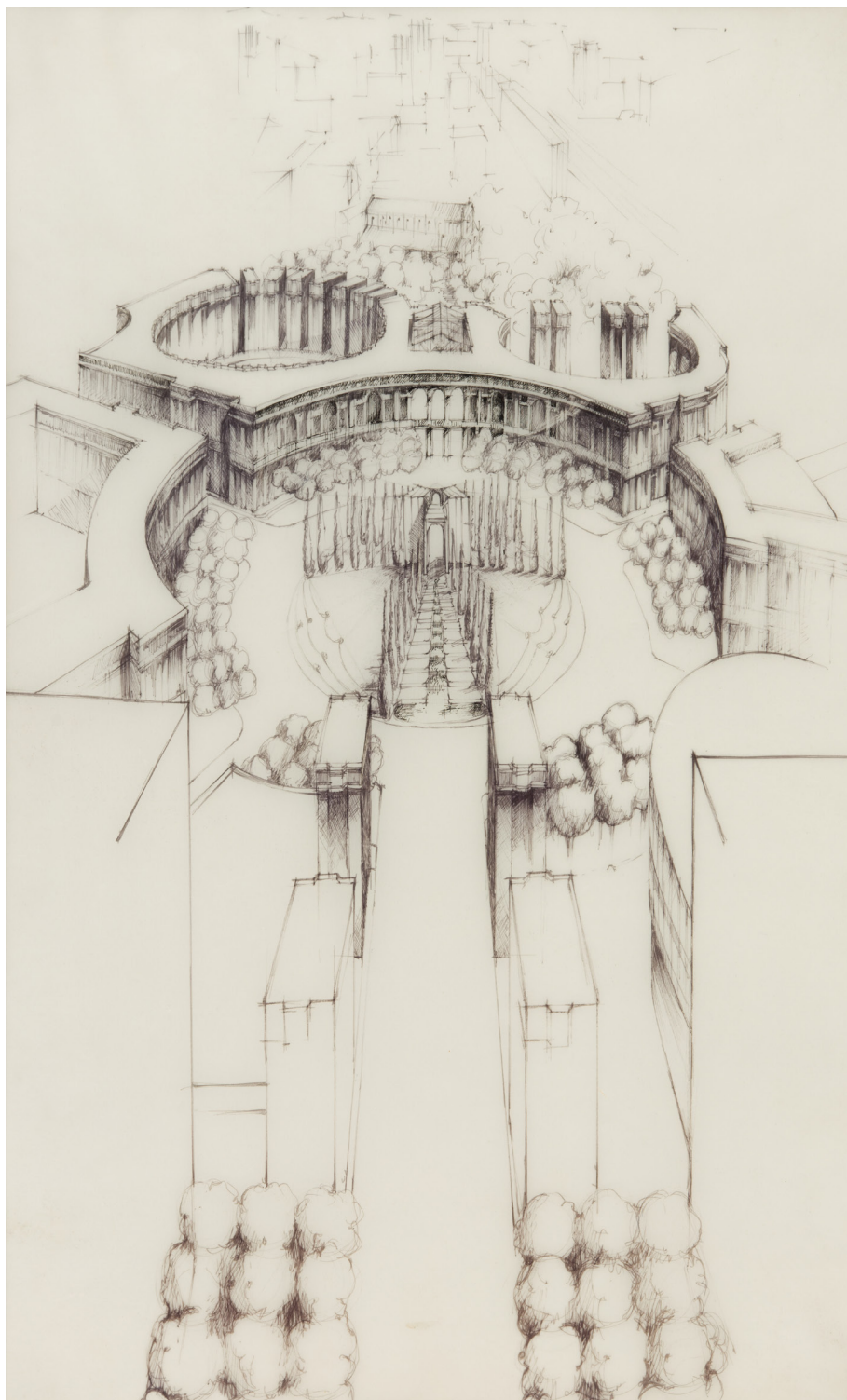


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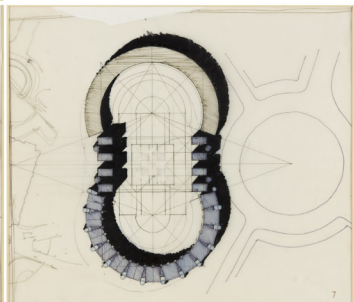
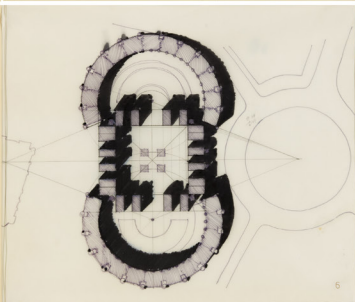
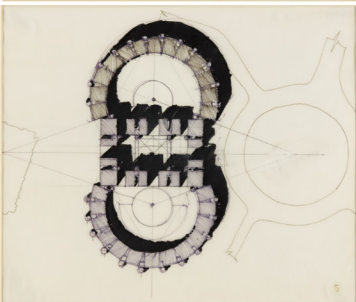
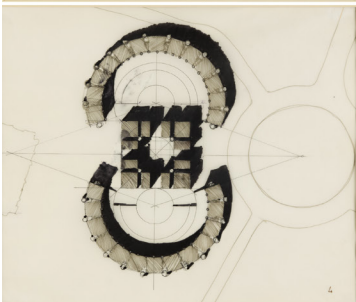
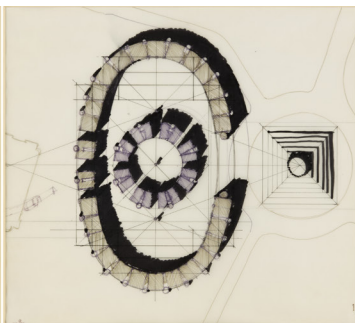
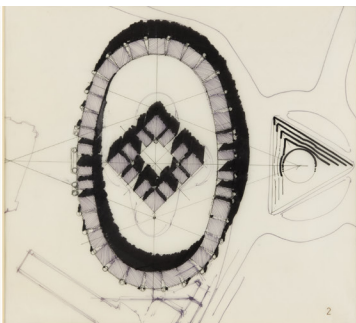
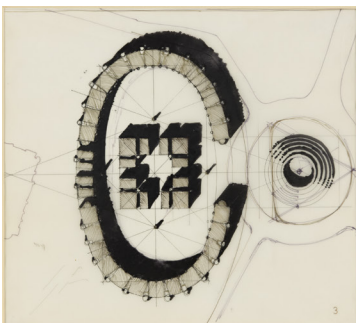
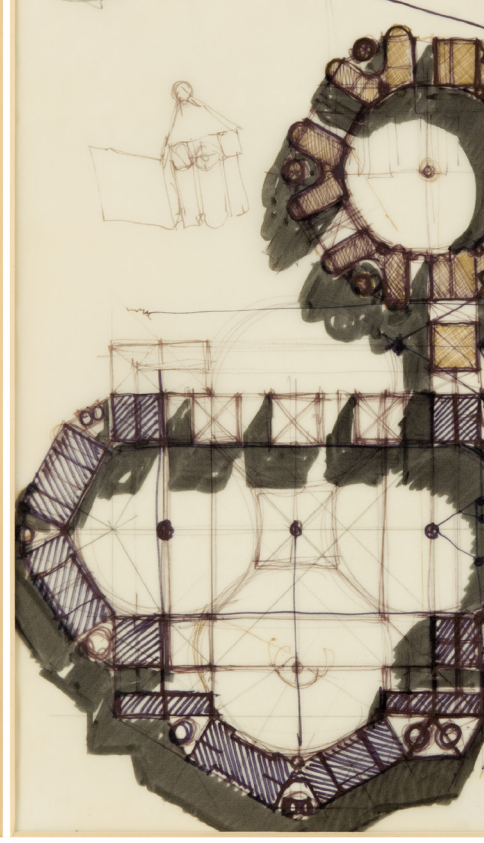
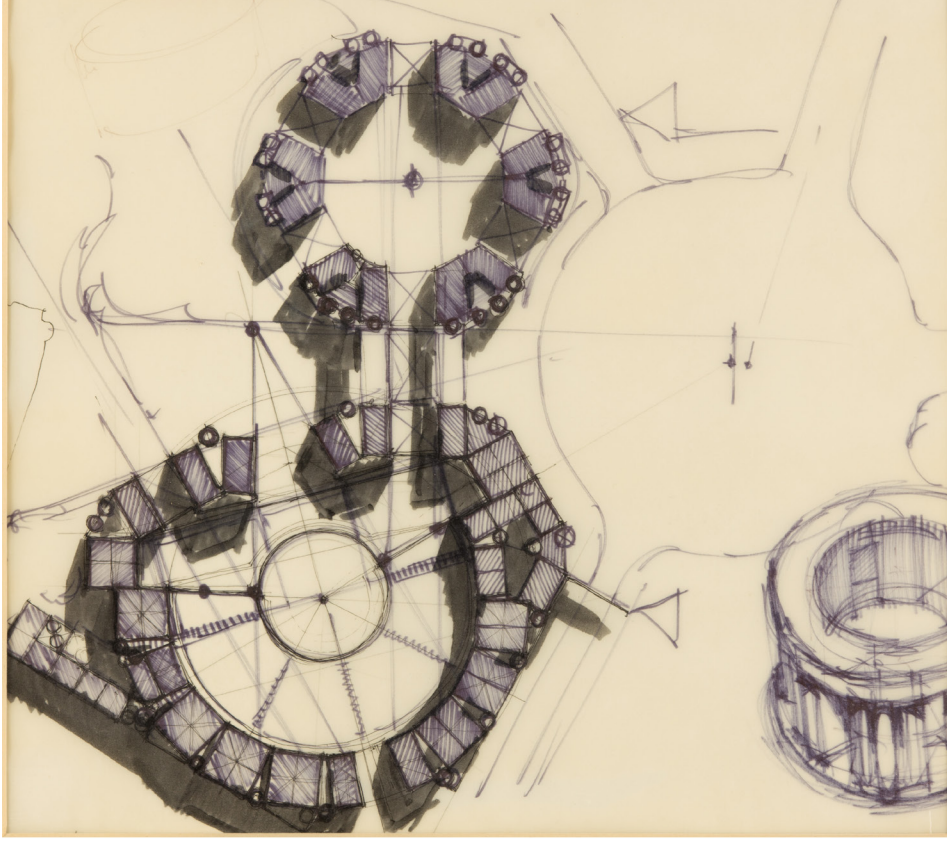
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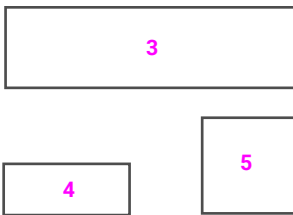
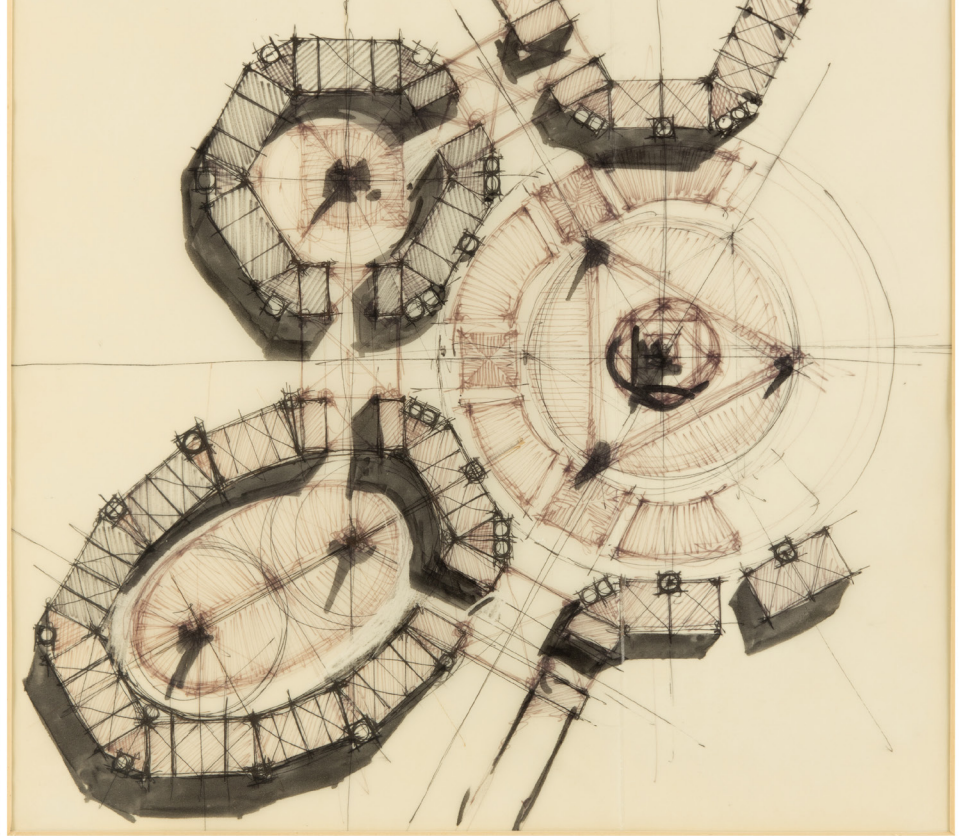
IMG.1: Les Echelles du Baroque, site plan, perspectives and sections sketches.  
 IMG.2: Les Echelles du Baroque, aerial perspective sketch, BTA Archive..



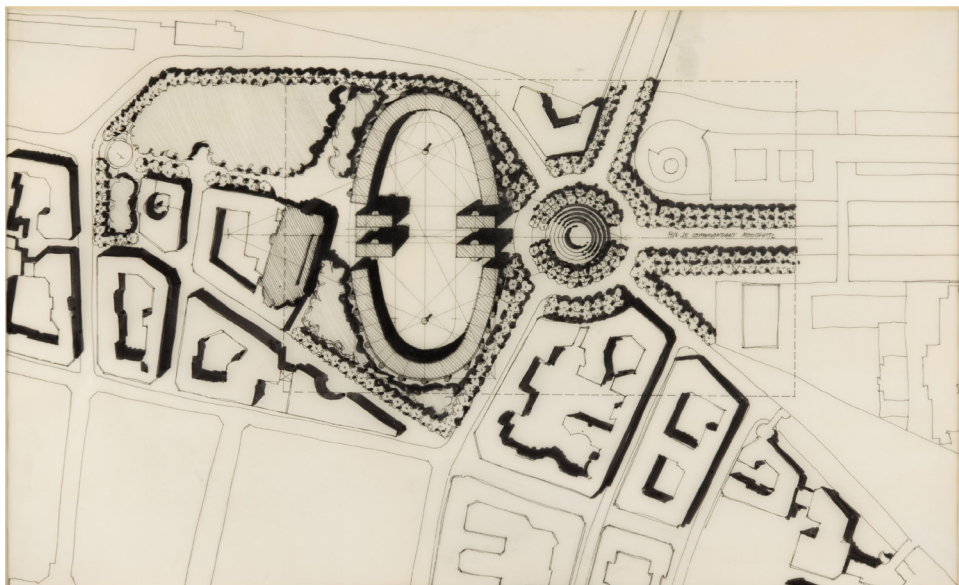




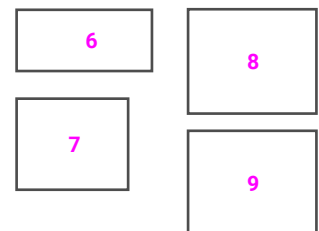
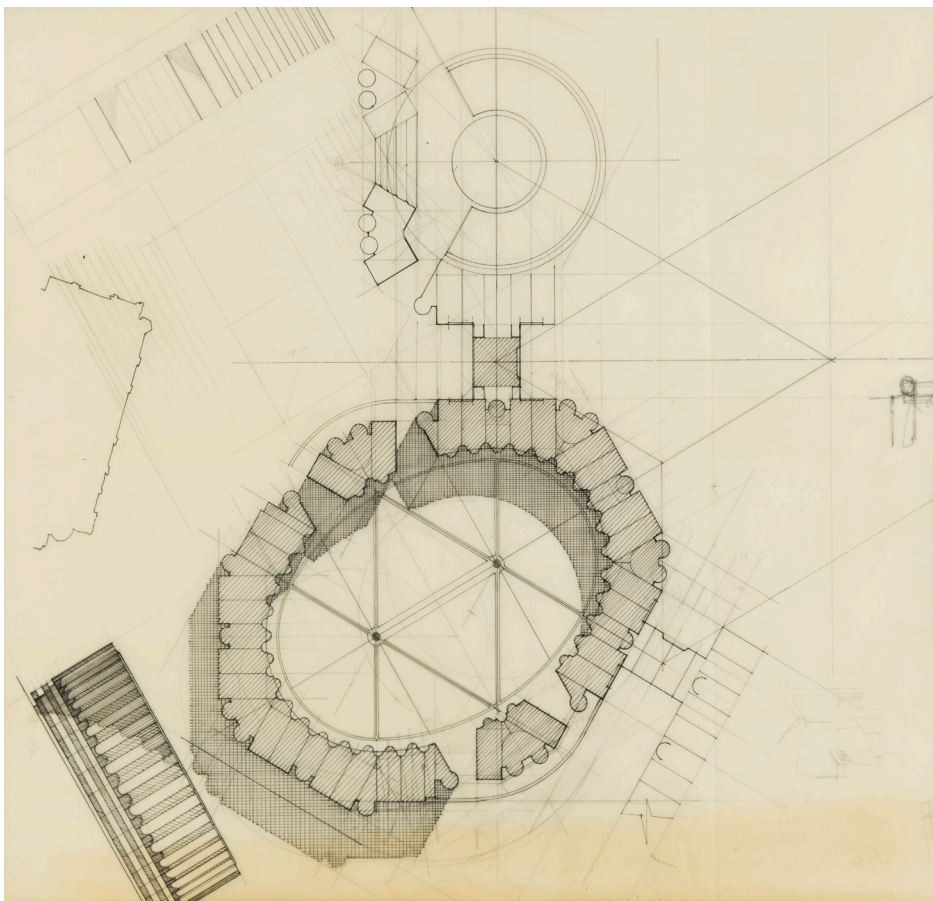
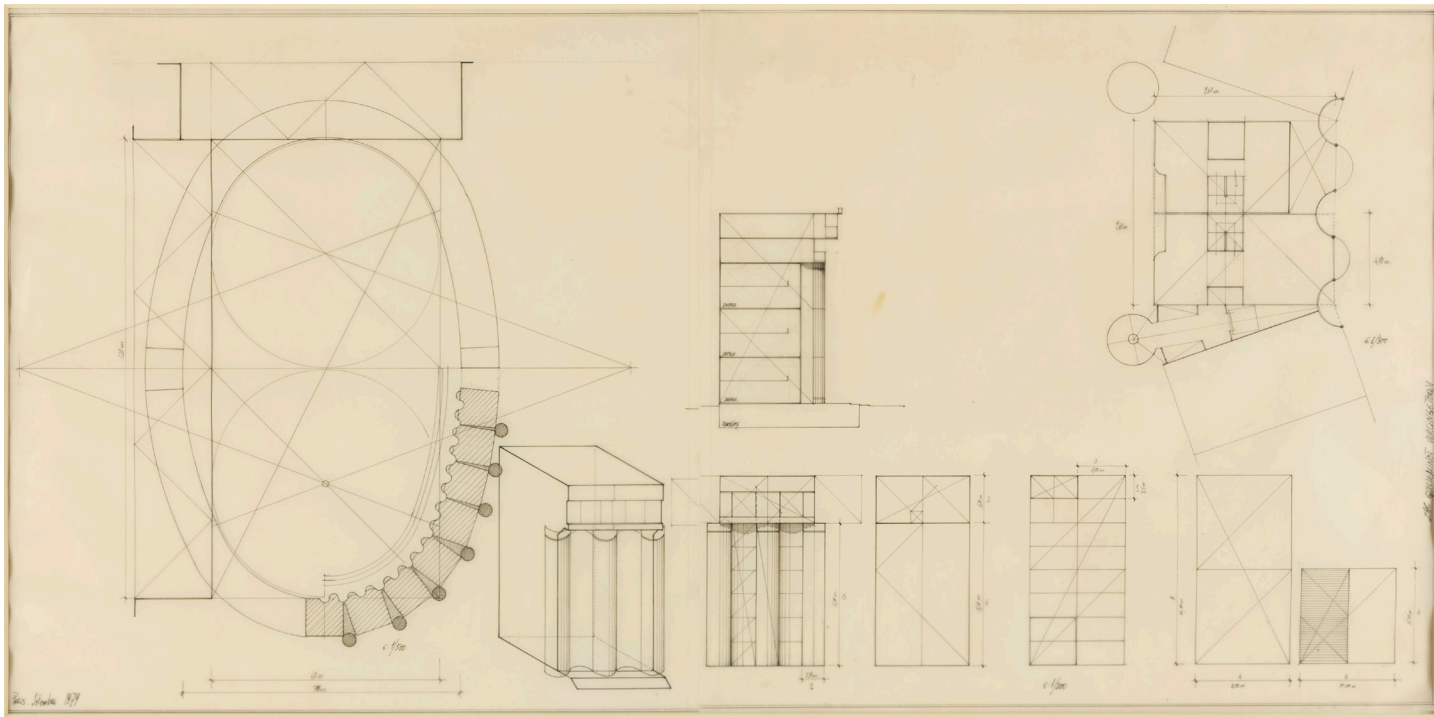




IMG.3: Les Echelles du Baroque, morphological site plan studies, coloured pencil sketches; IMG.4: Les Echelles du Baroque, typological plan studies, coloured pencil on paper; IMG.5: Les Echelle du Baroque, site plan studies, BTA Archive..

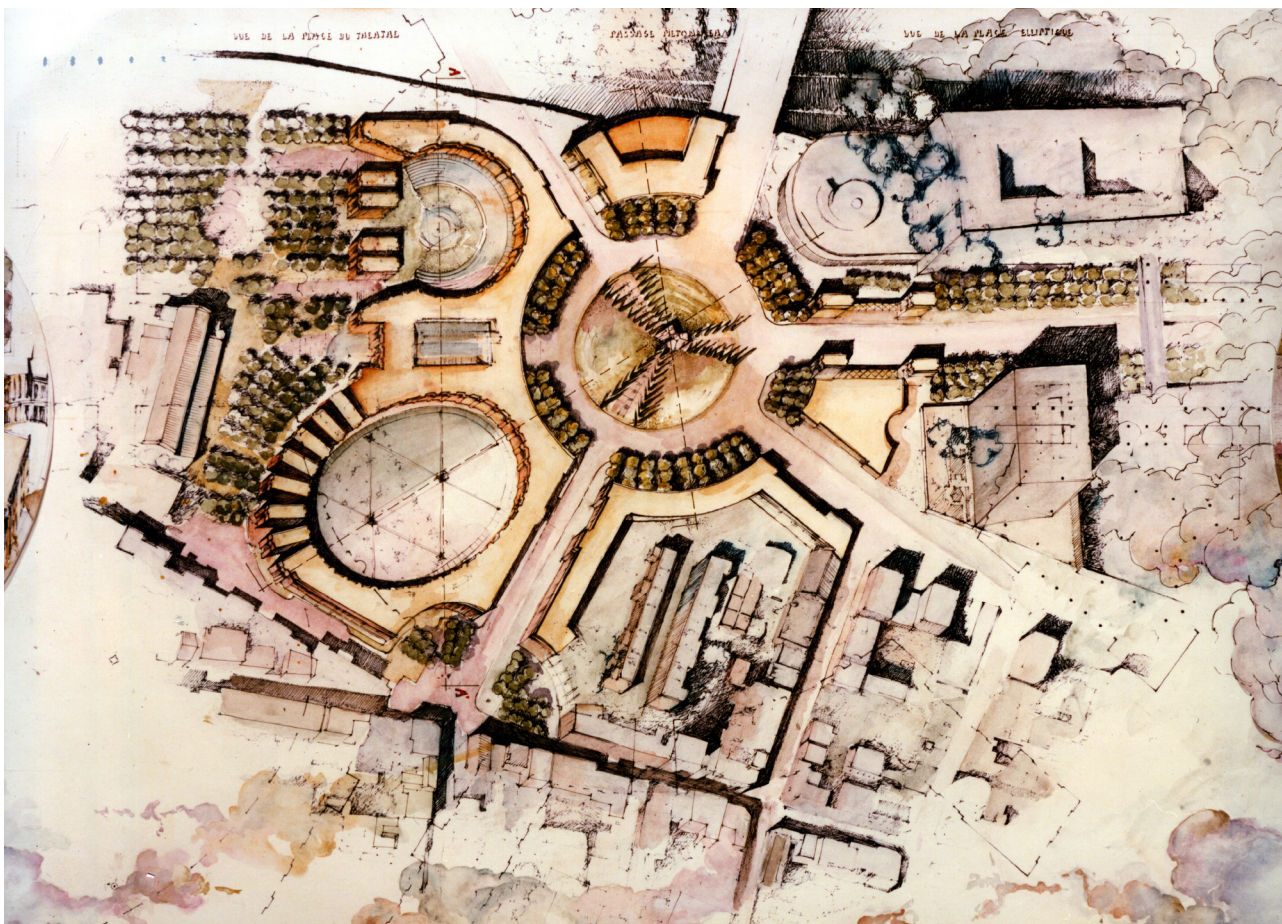
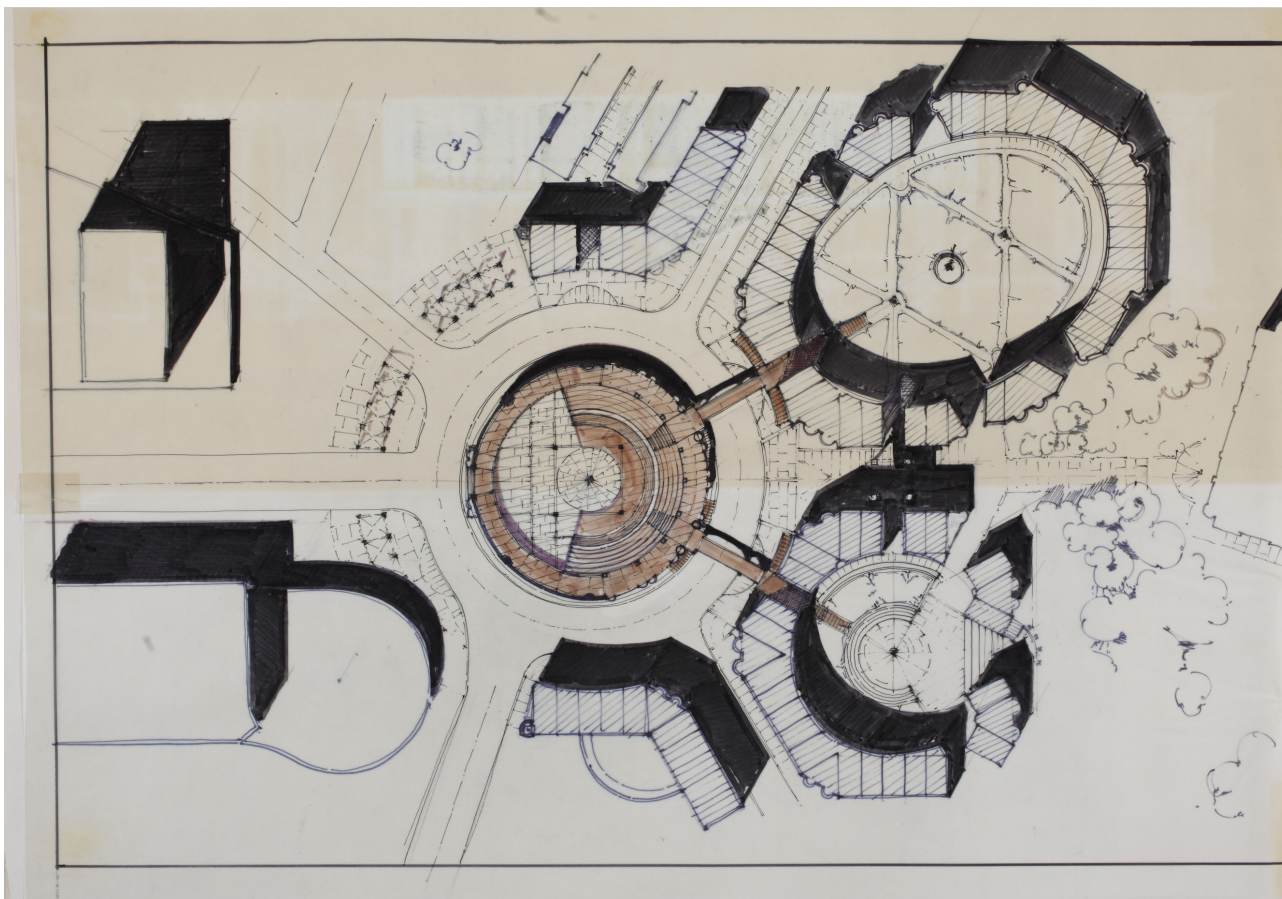




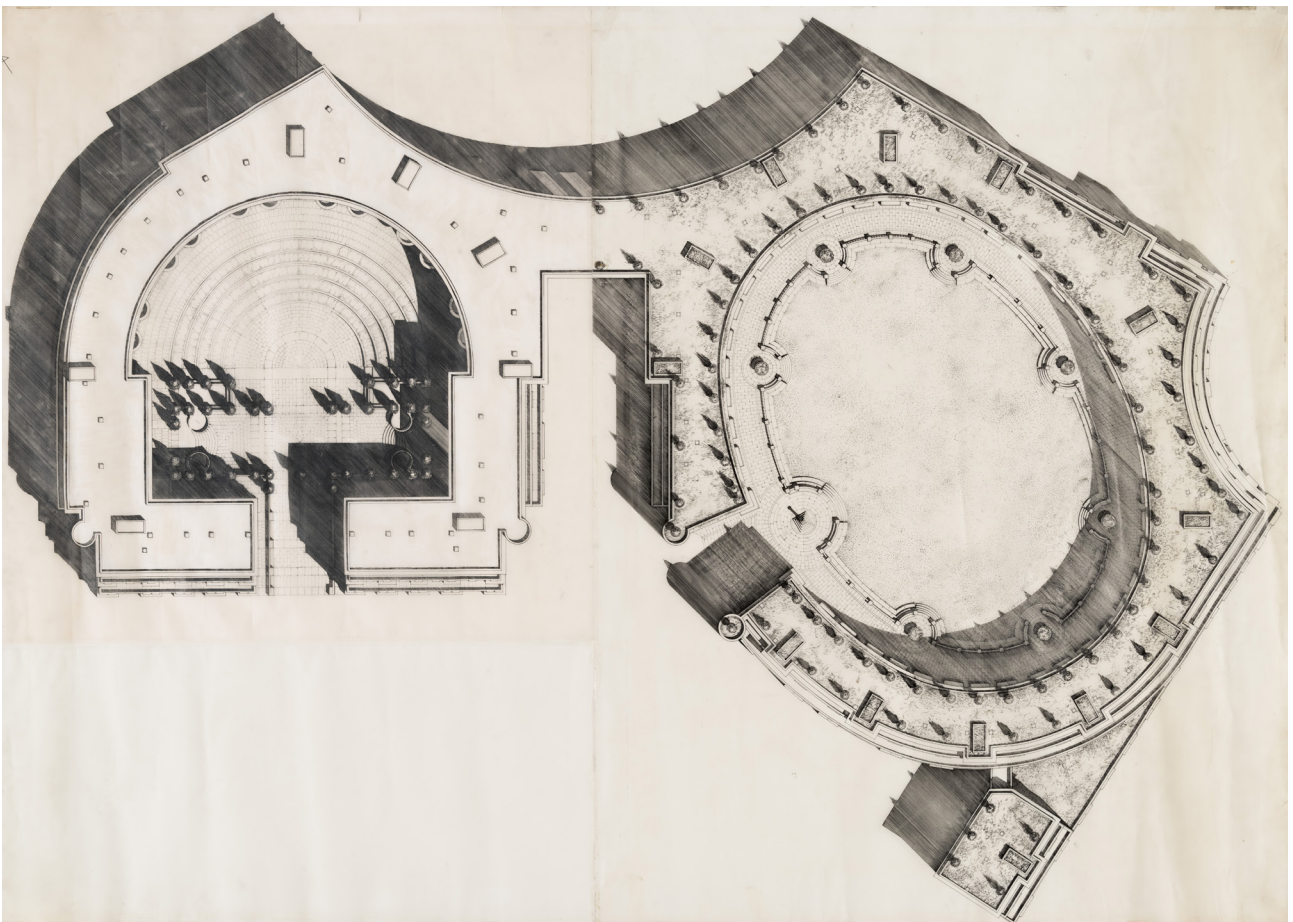
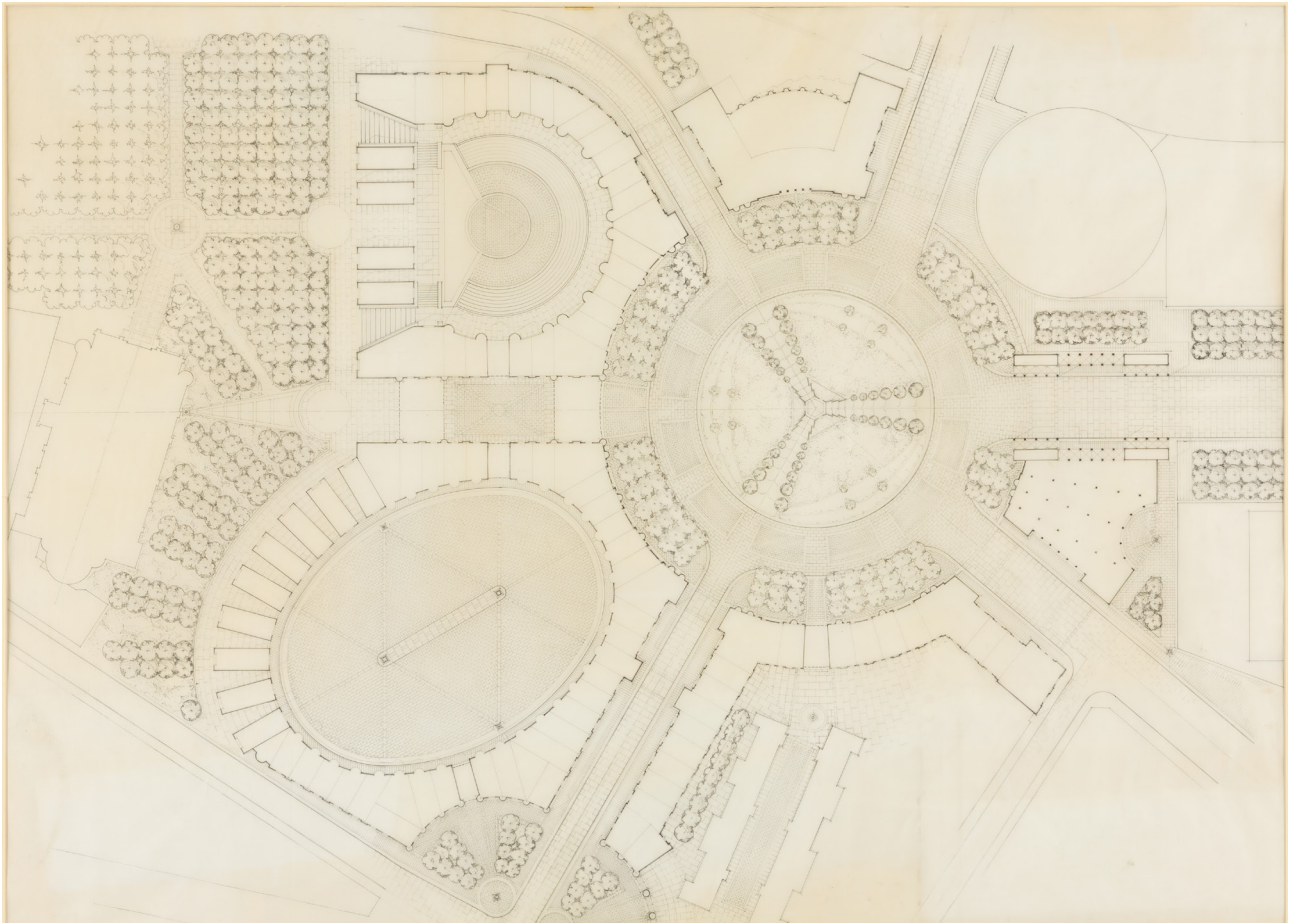


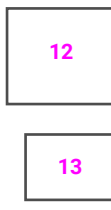
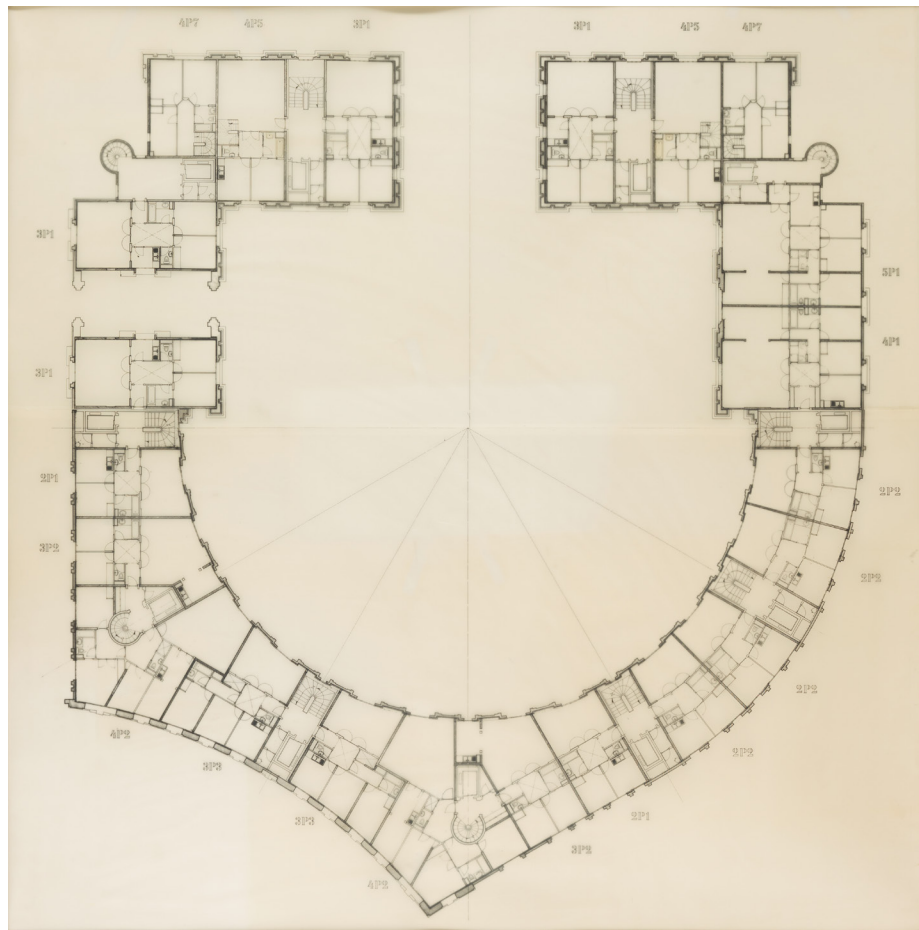
IMG.6-7: Les Echelles du Baroque, master plan studies, geometric layout plan, section and elevation details; IMG.8: Les Echelles du Baroque, master plan study, ink and coloured markers on paper; IMG.9: Les Echelles du Baroque, site perspective study, ink and water-colour on paper, BTA Archive..



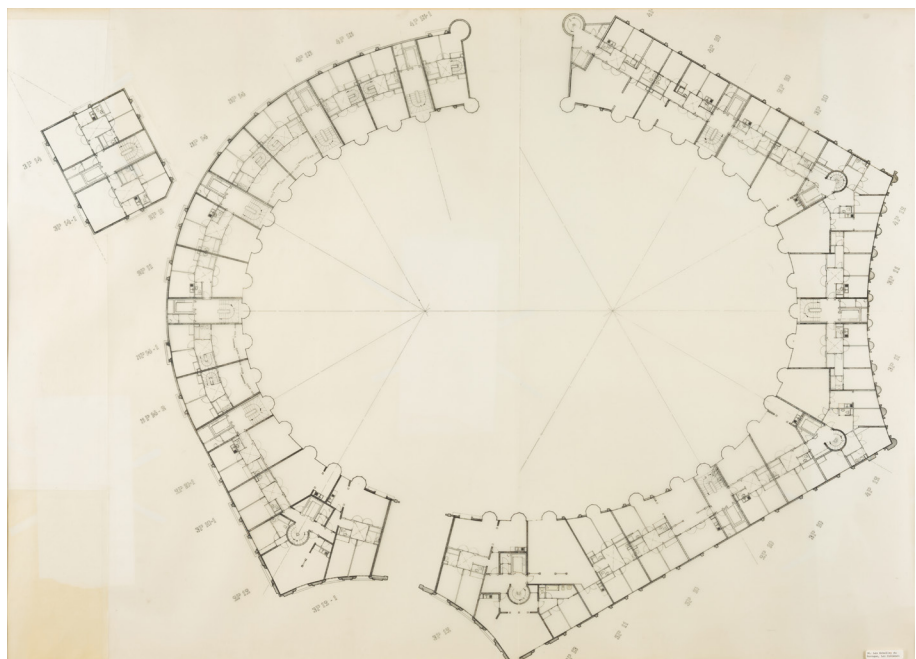








IMG.10: Les Echelles du Baroque, site plan study; IMG.11: Les Echelles du Baroque, final roof lever floor plan; IMG.12: Les Colonnes: typical floor plan; IMG. 13: L'Amphitéâtre: typical floor plan, BTA Archive.

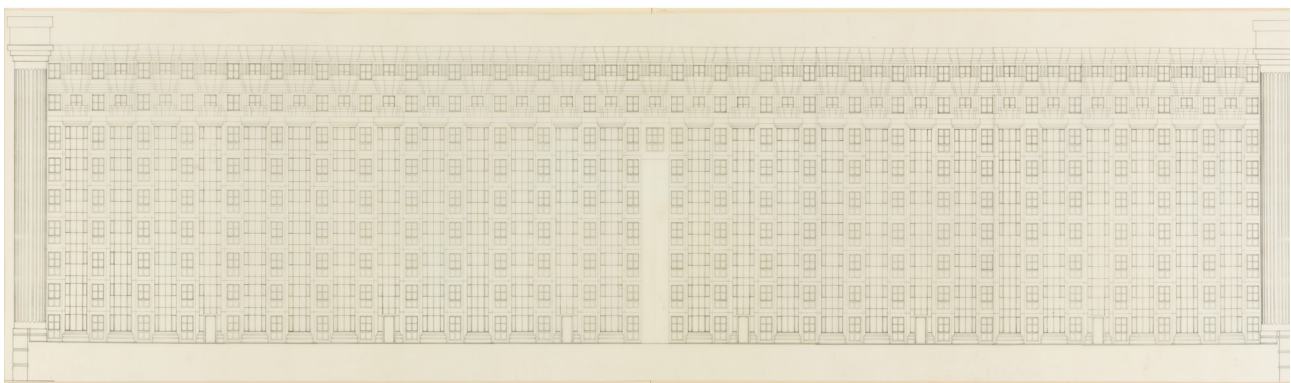
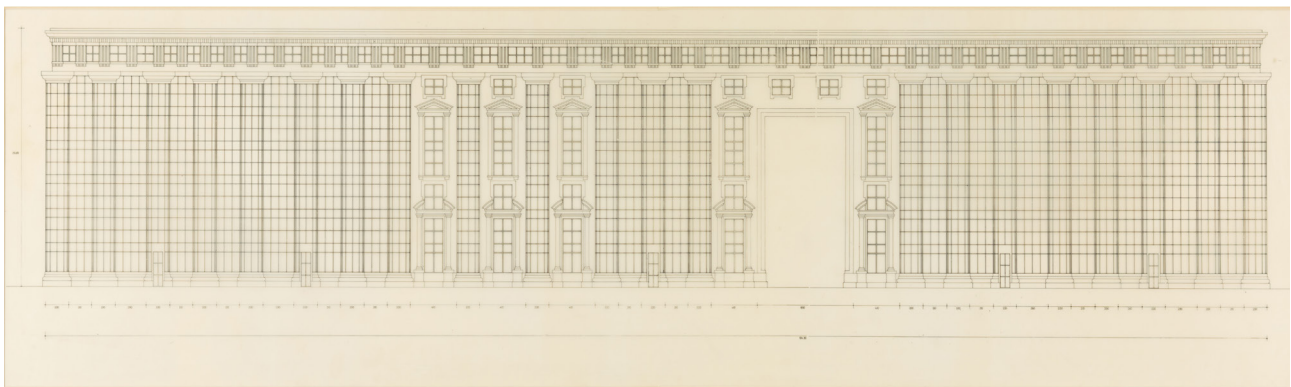
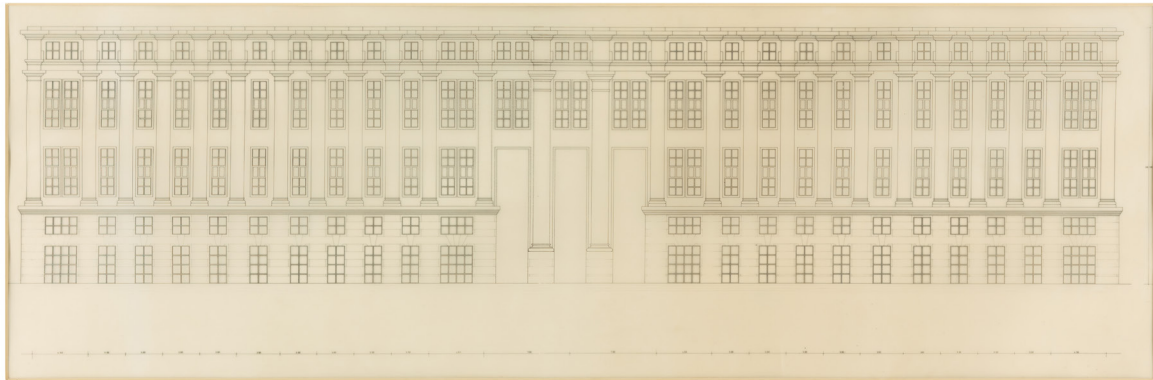


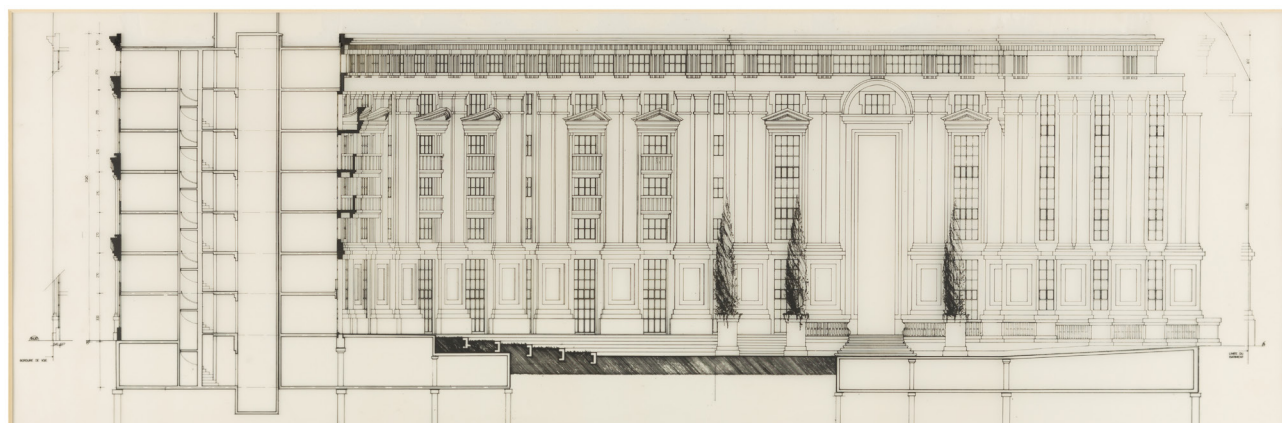
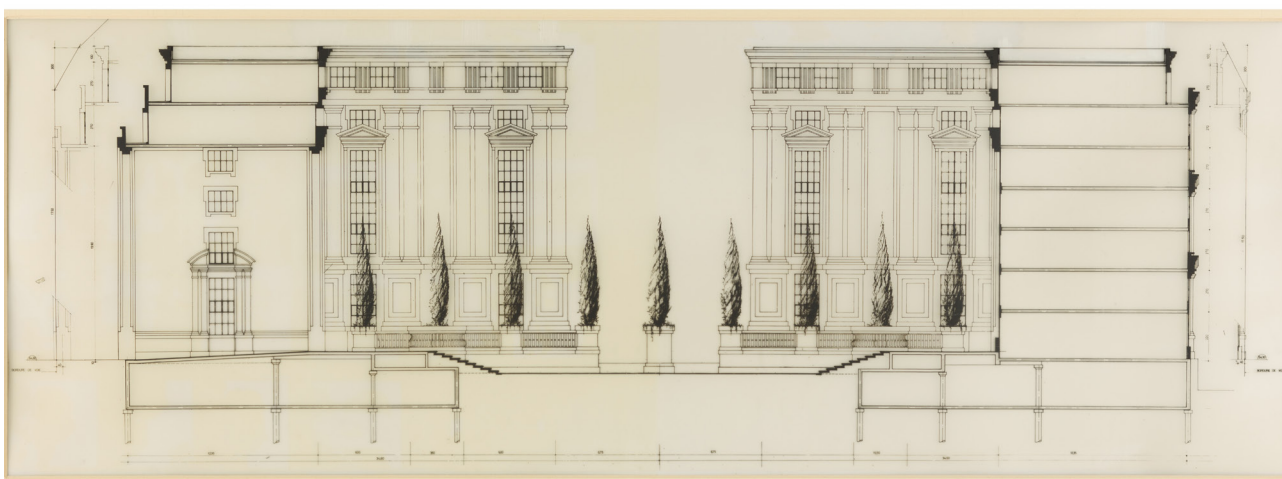
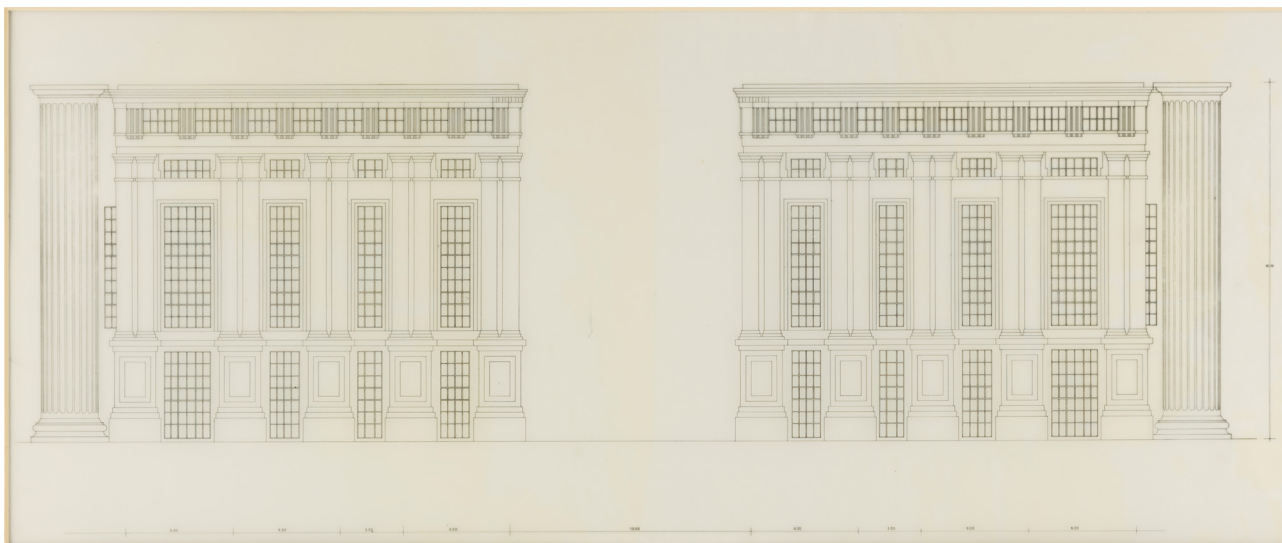


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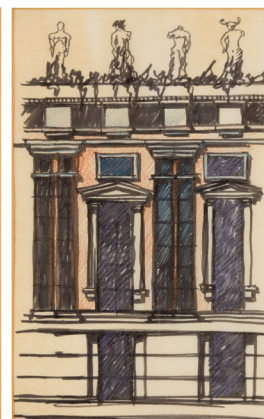
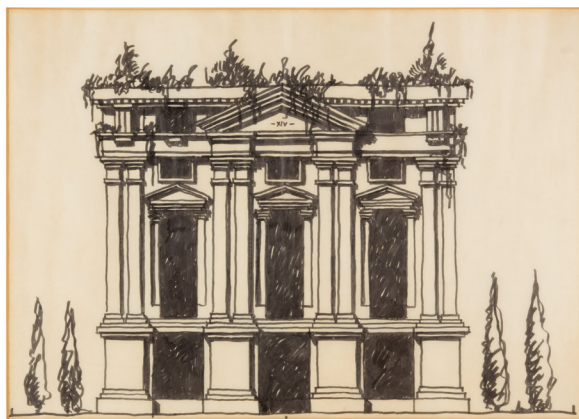
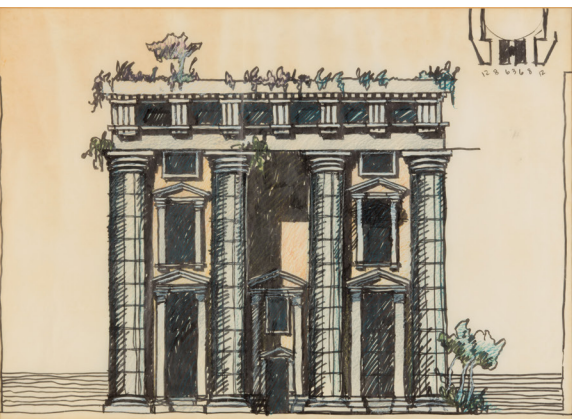
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IMG.14: L'Amphitéâtre: exterior and courtyard facade elevations;  
 IMG.15: Les Colonnes: exterior and courtyard section-façade elevations,  
 BTA Archive.









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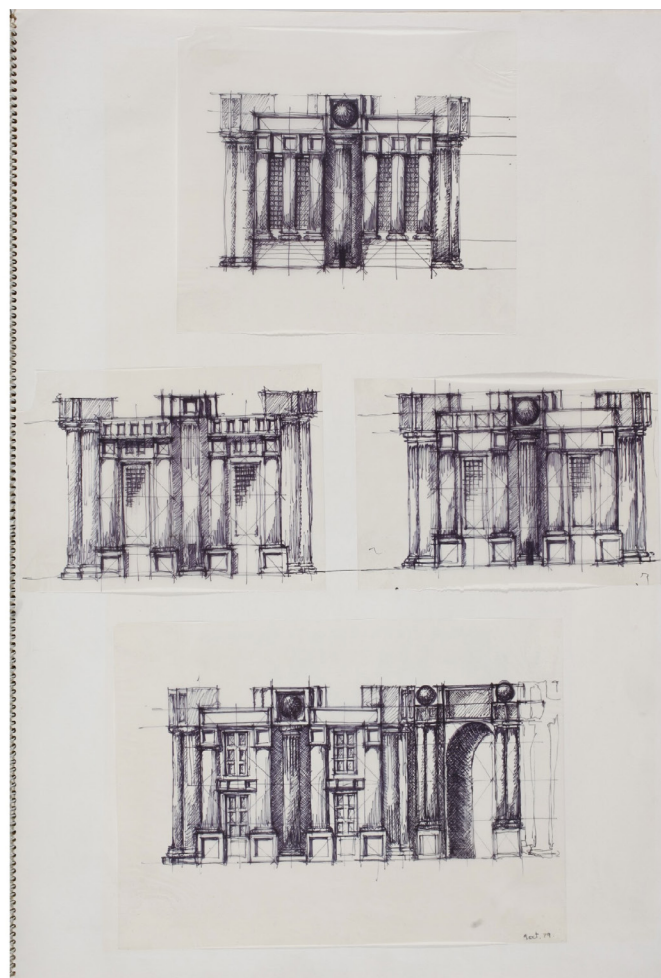
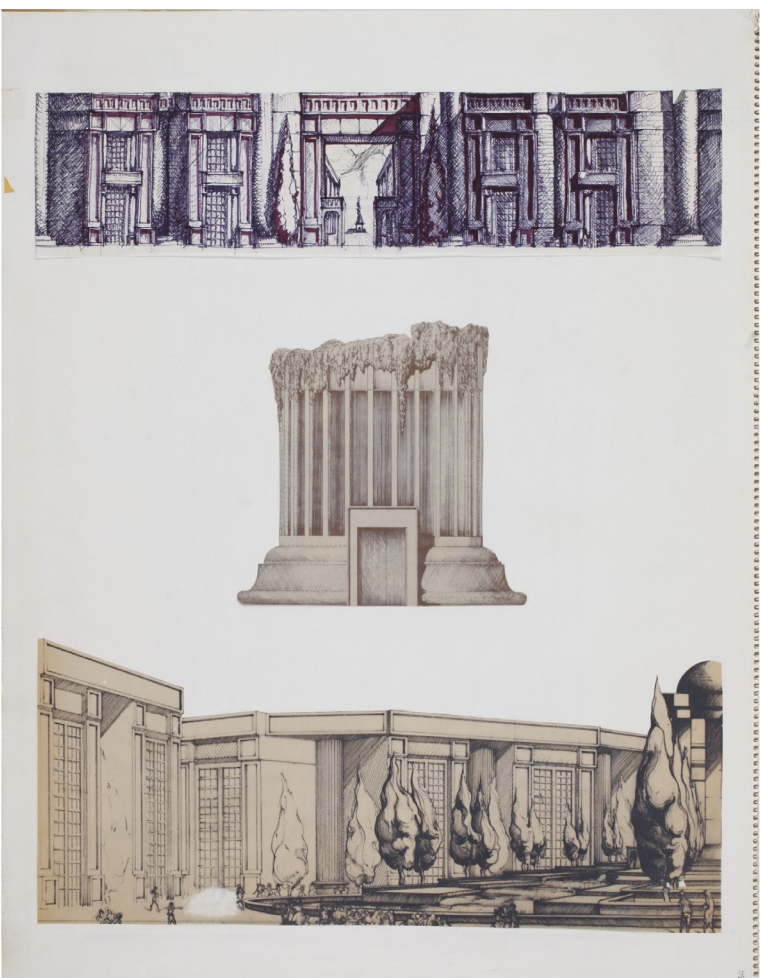
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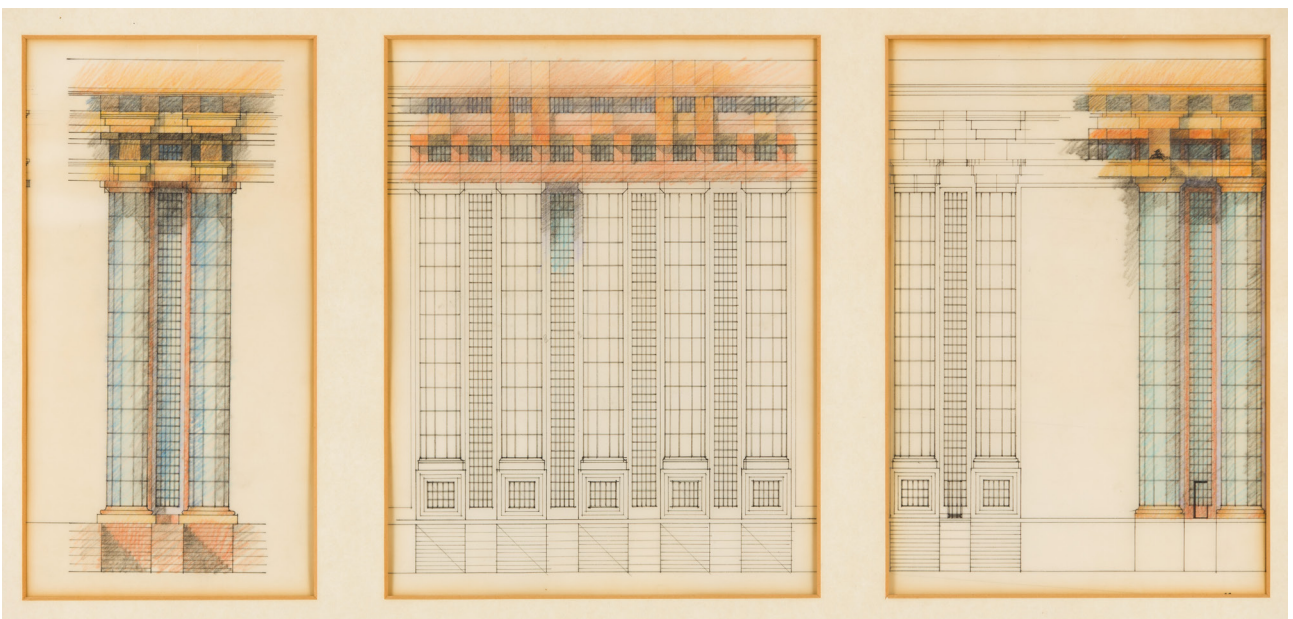
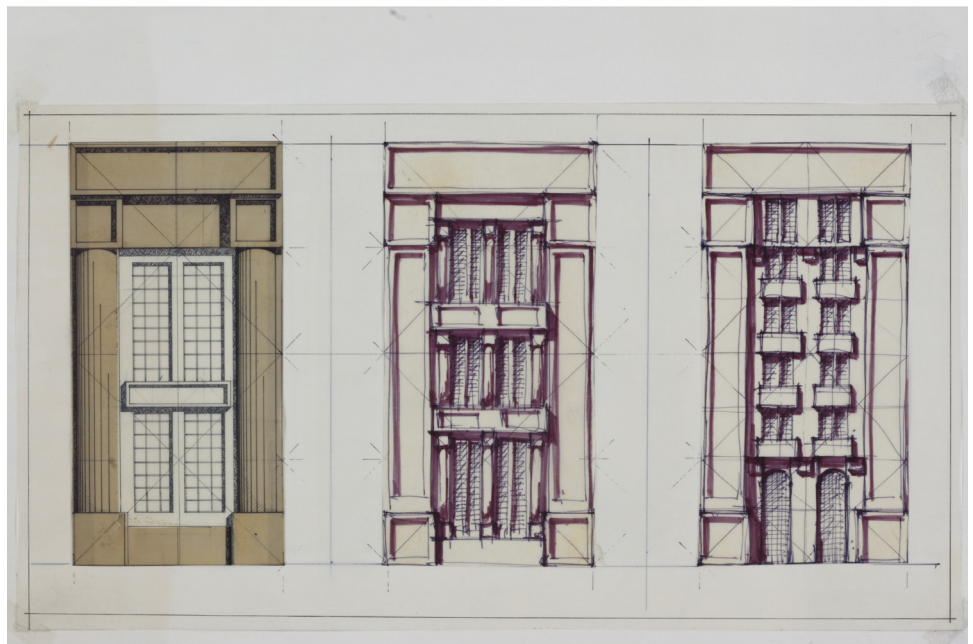
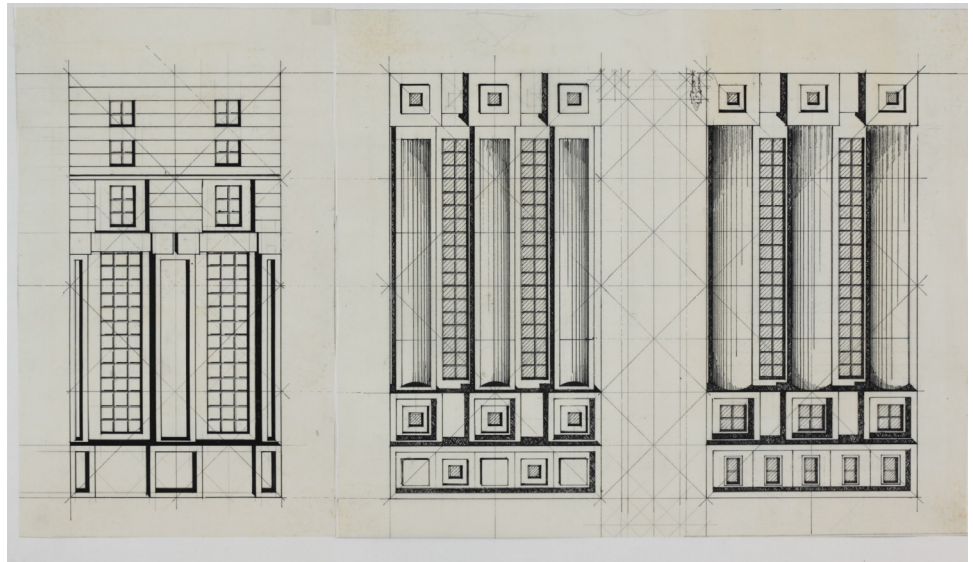
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IMG.16: Les Echelles du Baroque, facade studies, coloured markers and pencils; IMG. 17: Les Echelles du Baroque, facade studies and perspective sketches. Oct. 1979; IMG. 18: Les Echelles du Baroque, facade elevation studies, ink and colour-

ed markers on paper; IMG. 19: Les Echelles du Baroque, facade elevation study, ink and coloured markers on paper, BTA Archive.













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IMG. 20: Les Echelles du Baroque, facade elevation study, ink and coloured markers on paper, BTA Archive; IMG. 21: Les Echelles du Baroque, picture of the model..

## Selected extracts from the RBTA project description

The notable presence of the spectacular baroque monuments to be seen in so many cities asks to be understood in terms of their eminently scenic function, creating a theatrical background which testifies to the power of those who ordered their construction or provides a decoratively splendid setting in which the citizens can exhibit themselves.

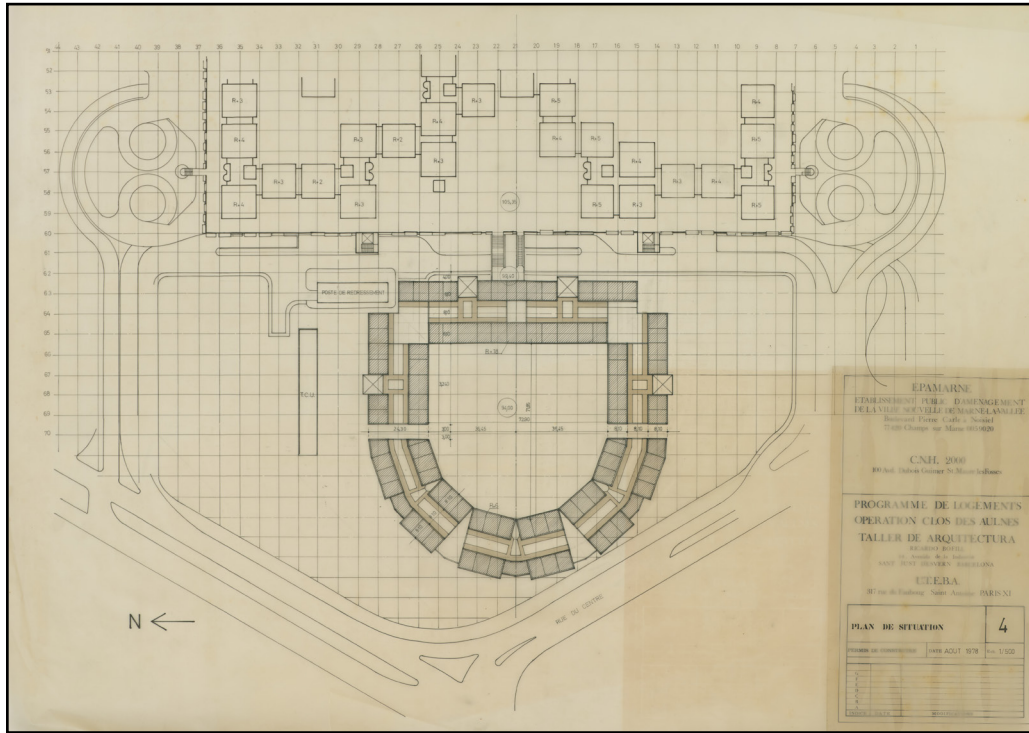
The sense of the thoroughly established city communicated by the great baroque palaces led the Taller de Arquitectura to think of developing the model in order to create a grand urban monument capable of assuming a central role in the run-down Montpamasse district of Paris, in the process of a complete restructuring. Thanks to an adroit manipulation of the change of scale, the "Palace" contains two apartment buildings set around two interior courtyards, one elliptical, and the other in the form of a theatre.

The building's exterior gives no indication of the existence of the interior squares, opting instead to follow the layout of the urban grid, with a little square at each corner and a large circular plaza on the main facade. This plaza is flanked, too, by buildings by other architects who have followed on from the Taller's initial idea. The conversion of an existing street to serve as the main gateway into the complex has resulted in a considerable increase in the pedestrian space in the area.

Les Echelles du Baroque consist of 274 apartments, surrounding a circular plaza, and grouped around two interior courtyards, laid out in separate 7-storey buildings with distinct characteristics: L'Amphithéâtre and Les Colonnes. The ground floor of the two buildings is occupied by shops, and has an underground car park for 300 cars. L'Amphithéâtre was designed as subsidized housing, and Les Colonnes as apartments to be sold on the open market. The geometry of the apartments is based on a combination of modules. The basic module is 65 m<sup>2</sup> (77,7 sq. yards), equivalent to a three-bedroom apartment. All of the houses have dual orientation.

The interior facade of the houses which delimit the elliptical plaza takes the form of a curtain wall, with a rhythmic sequence of glass columns which makes it possible to provide every apartment with a glazed window bay. Some of the apartments are laid out over two levels, and have an interior balcony opposite the curtain wall.

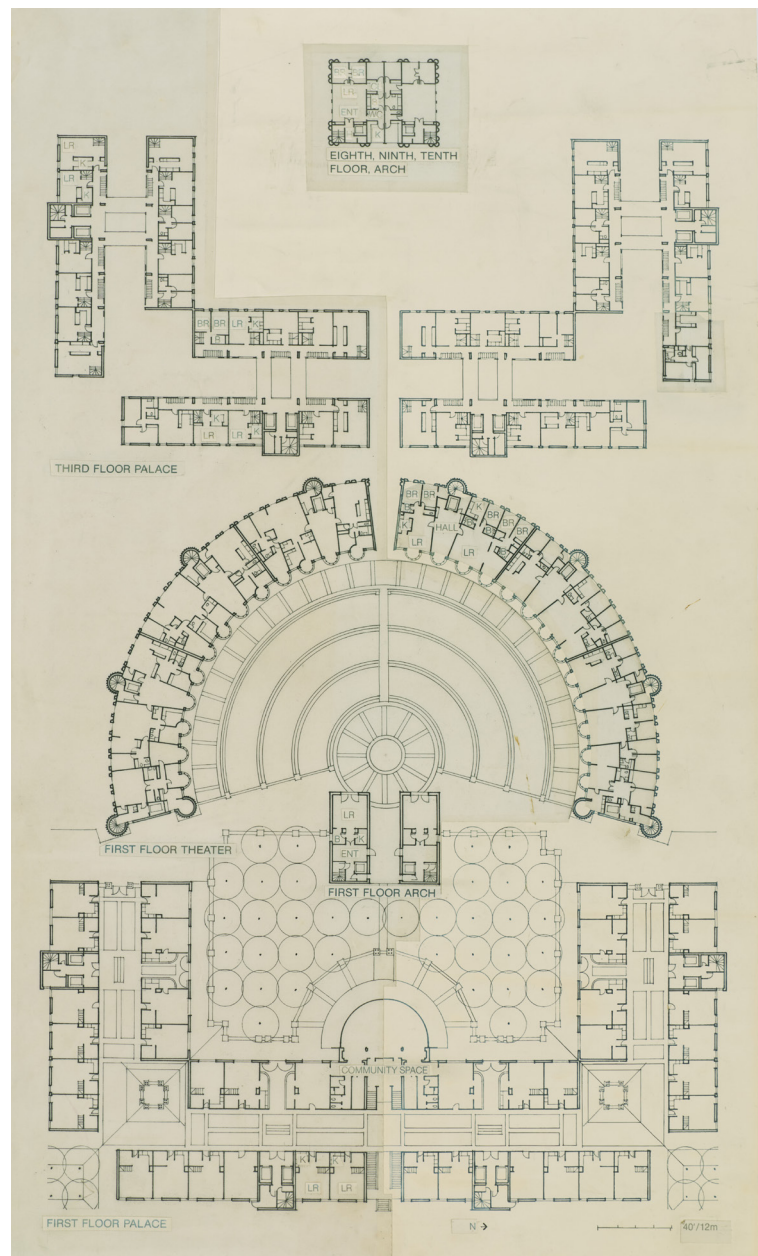
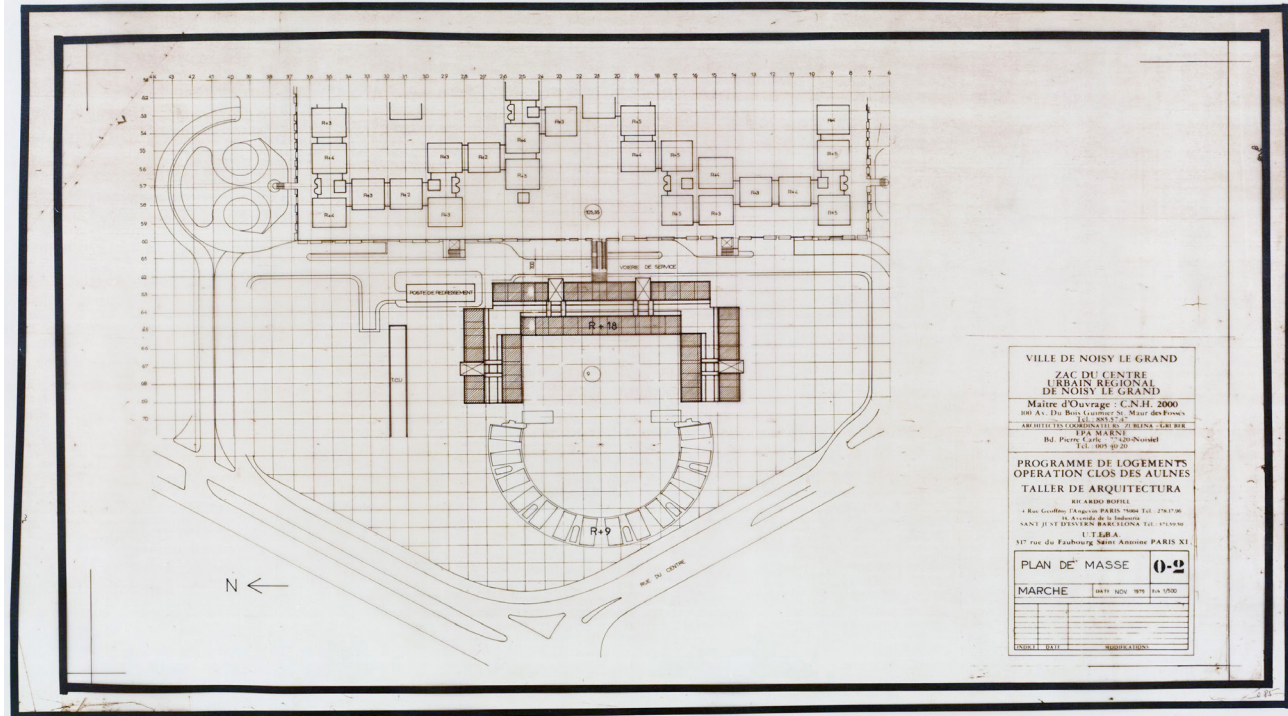
In designing the building we have confronted two imperatives: to respect the urban context and to obtain a formal relationship with the interior spaces of the project. This has obliged us to deform the construction process of the building, but at the same time keep a rational structural system. The baroque allows the articulation of concave spaces, according to a system of composition which takes all points of view in space. Its application breaks the established rigidity of industrial systems.



# Les Espace D'Abraxas

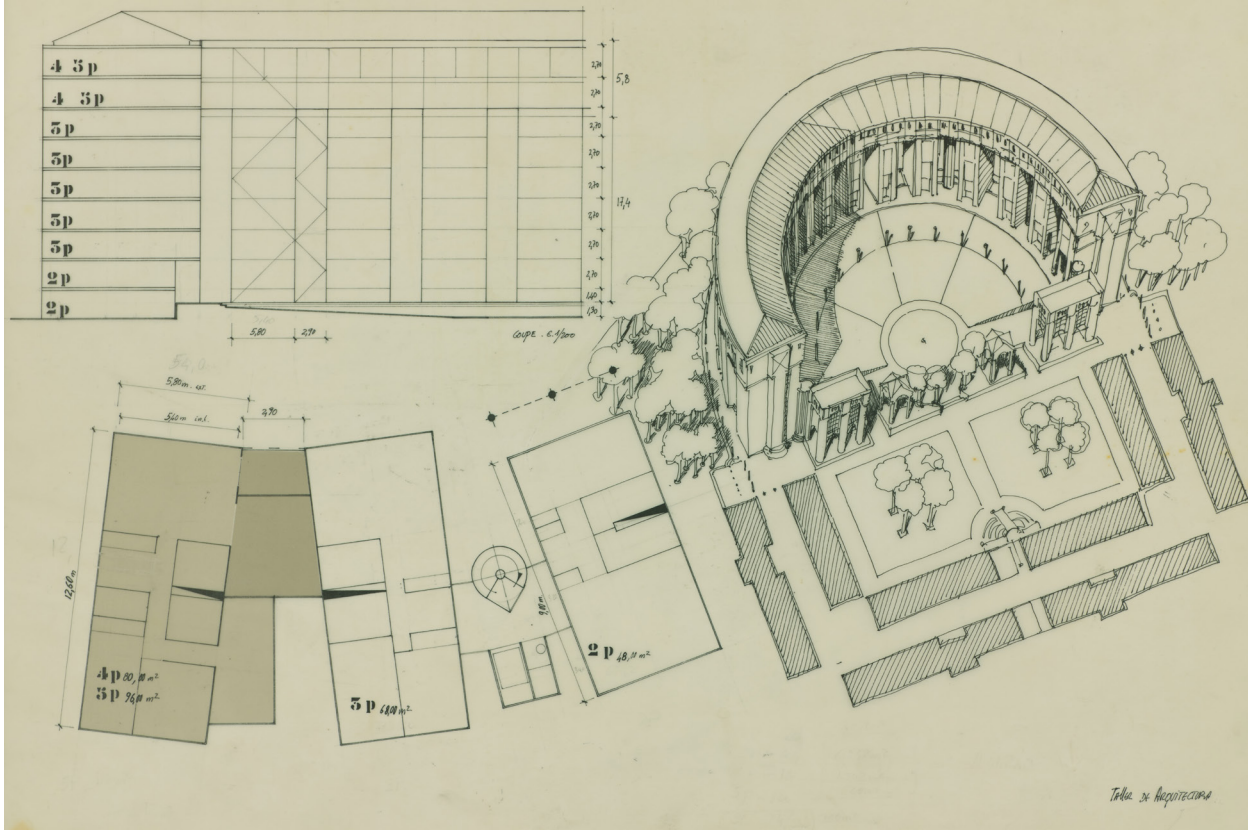
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DATE	1978 (design) 1982-1983 (realization)
PLACE/ADDRESS	Marne-la-Vallée, Region of Paris
COLLABORATORS	Peter Hodgkinson, Ramón Collado, Thierry Revescki, Jean-Pierre Carniaux, Patrick Dillon, Xavier Listosella.
CUSTOMER	Le Théâtre and L'Arc: Société d'H.L.M. Les Trois Vallées, Le Palacio: Soc. d'HLM C.N.H. 2000
SOURCES	RBTA Archive

ESSENTIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY	<p>D. Serrell, Ricardo Bofill: les années françaises/the French years (Paris: Norma, 2023), 241-256; B. Cruells, Ricardo Bofill. Obras y Proyectos/Works and Projects (Barcelona: G. Gili, 1992), 28-29, 225-227; A. d'Huart ed., R. Bofill, Taller de Arquitectura. Los Espacios de Abraxas. El Palacio, El Teatro, El Arco (Milano: Electa, 1981); Ricardo Bofill: visions of architecture, R. Klanten, M.E. Niebius, V. Marinai eds. (Berlin: Gestalten, 2019), 118-131; A. d'Huart ed., Ricardo Bofill: Taller de arquitectura. El dibujo de la ciudad, industria y clasicismo (Barcelona: G. Gili, 1984), 32-43; "Ricardo Bofill, Taller de arquitectura, obra en Francia", ON Diseño, no. 77 (1986); "Ricardo Bofill in conversation with Christopher Pierce and Thomas Weaver", AA files, no. 69 (2014): 128-137; "Palacio de Abraxas: Marne la Vallée", Space Design, no. 12 (1982): 55-66; Architecture d'aujourd'hui, no. 182 (Nov.-Dec. 1975): 57-95; E. Allain-Dupré, "600 logements à Marne-la-Vallée", Techniques et Architecture, no. 343 (Sept. 1982): 95-100; "Classicismo e Tecnologia", Controspazio XII, nos.1-6 (1980): 120-123; T. Mical, "Traces of Ugliness in Bofill's Les Espaces d'Abraxas", in Van Acker, W., Architecture and Ugliness (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 95-106; J.-L. Violeau, "Revisiting the Palacio d'Abraxas by Ricardo Bofill", Architecture d'Aujourd'hui, no. 408 (2015): 116-123; Julián Salas, "Arquitectura y prefabricación: últimas realizaciones en Francia de Ricardo Bofill", Informes de la construcción, vol.34, no. 343 (1982): 13-20; Y. Futagawa, GA Document 8 (Tokyo: ADA Edita, 1983); Y. Futagawa, Housing 1 (Tokyo: ADA Edita, 2015); A. Jonsson, "Hur BostäDer Blir Monument". AT: Arkitekttidningen. No. 7 (1982): 4-6; M. Bedarida, «L'Honneur retrouvé de la préfabrication», Monuments Historiques, no. 140 (Aug. Sept. 1985): 81-86; M. Bedarida, «Prefabricated classicism », Lotus international, no. 36 (Oct.- Nov. 1982): 125-130; M. Cornu, «Bofill en France», Urbanisme, no. 164 (May-Jun. 1978): 34-39; M. Meade, J.-C. Garcias, «Bofill Builds», The Architectural Review, no. 1024 (Jun. 1982): 26-29; "Les Espaces d'Abraxas: le Palacio, le Théâtre, l'Arc", in R. Bofill Taller de Arquitectura, Projets français 1978/81, La cité: histoire et technologie (Paris: L'Esquerre, 1981), 55-86; Ricardo Bofill Taller de arquitectura: buildings and projects, 1960-85, W.A.James ed. (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), 88-93; L. Gruntz, Les traits de Bofill a Paris: Architektur und Identität oder Ricardo Bofill und seine Phalanstères der Postmoderne (Nidau: Verlag Das Archiv, 2019); A. Kockelkorn, The Social Condenser II. Eine Archäologie zu Wohnungsbau und Zentralität in der Pariser Banlieue am Beispiel der Wohnungsbauten von Ricardo Bofill und Taller de Arquitectura, PhD Thesis, ETH Zurich Research Collection, 2017, <a href="https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000245661">https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000245661</a></p>
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IMG.1: Les Espaces d'Abraxas, site plan, Aug. 1978; IMG.2: Les Espaces d'Abraxas, master plan, Nov. 1979; IMG. 3: Les Espaces d'Abraxas, general plan: Le Palacio, first and third level floor plan; Le Théâtre, first level floor plan; L'Arc: first and eighth to tenth level floor plan, BTA Archive.





ZAC DU CENTRE  
URBAIN REGIONAL  
DE NOISY LE GRAND

Maitre d'Ouvrage:  
SA D'HLM "LES TROIS VALLEES"  
88bis - Champs Elyses 88000 Vesoul  
Tel. 03.83.52.12.12

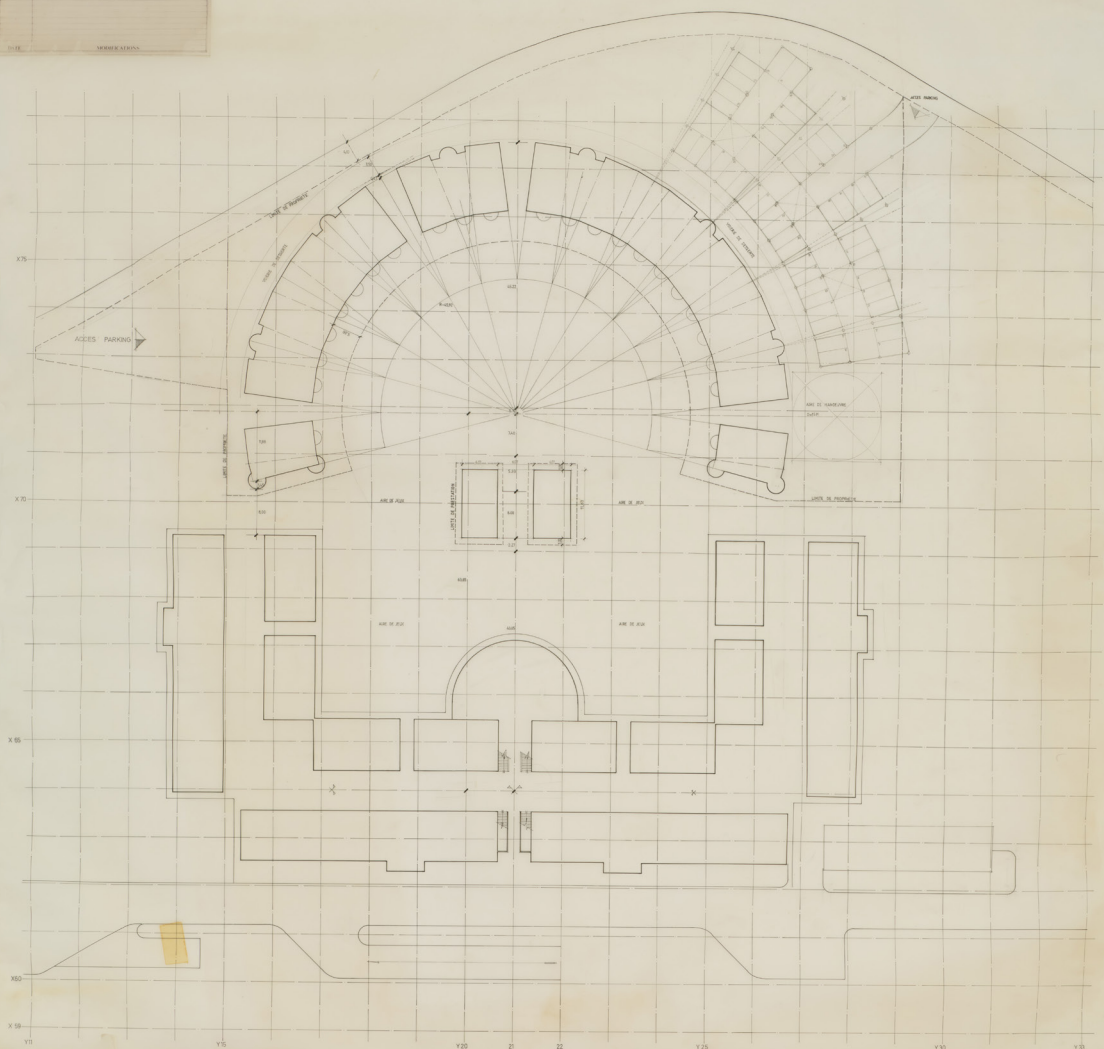
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J.P. MARTEL  
84 - Place de la Liberte - 71400 Saint  
Tel. 03.83.44.20

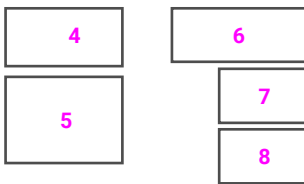
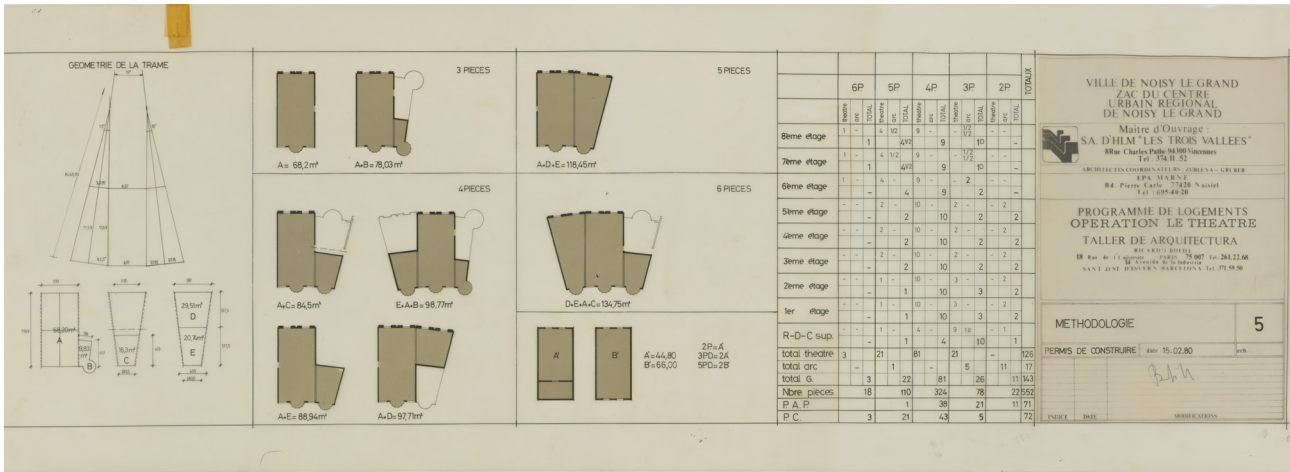
PROGRAMME DE LOGEMENTS  
OPERATION LE THEATRE  
TALLER DE ARCHITECTURE

10 - Rue de la Liberte - 71400 Vesoul  
Tel. 03.83.44.20

PLAN D'IMPLANTATION *Ban* 1

PERMIS DE CONSTRUIRE date: 15.02.80 ech: 1/200

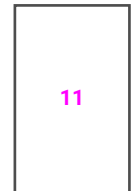
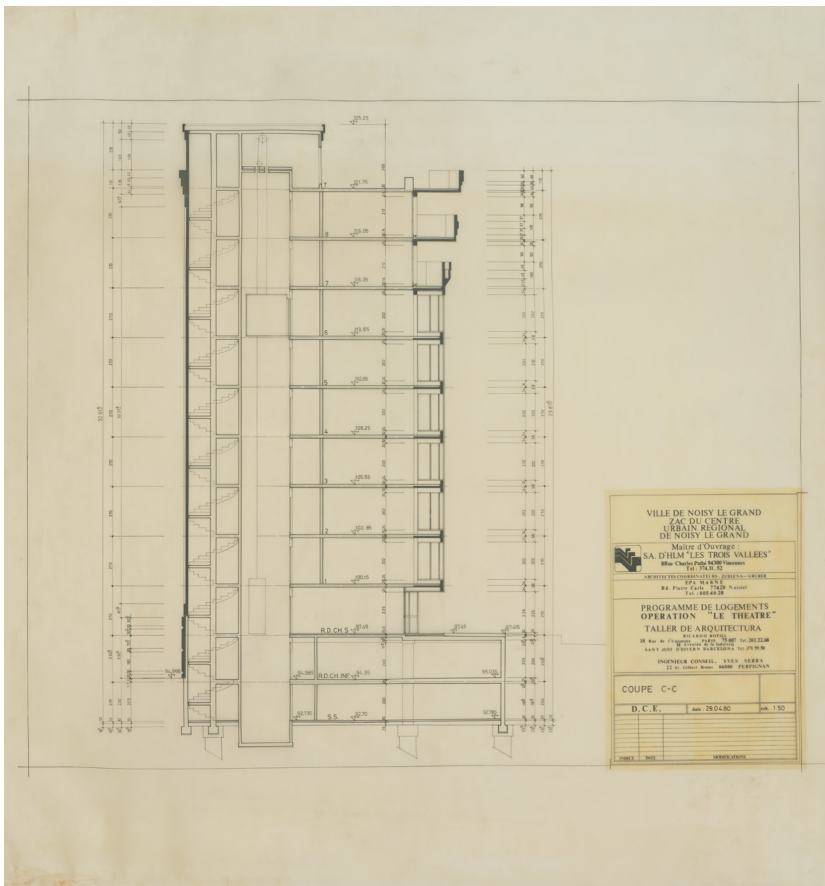




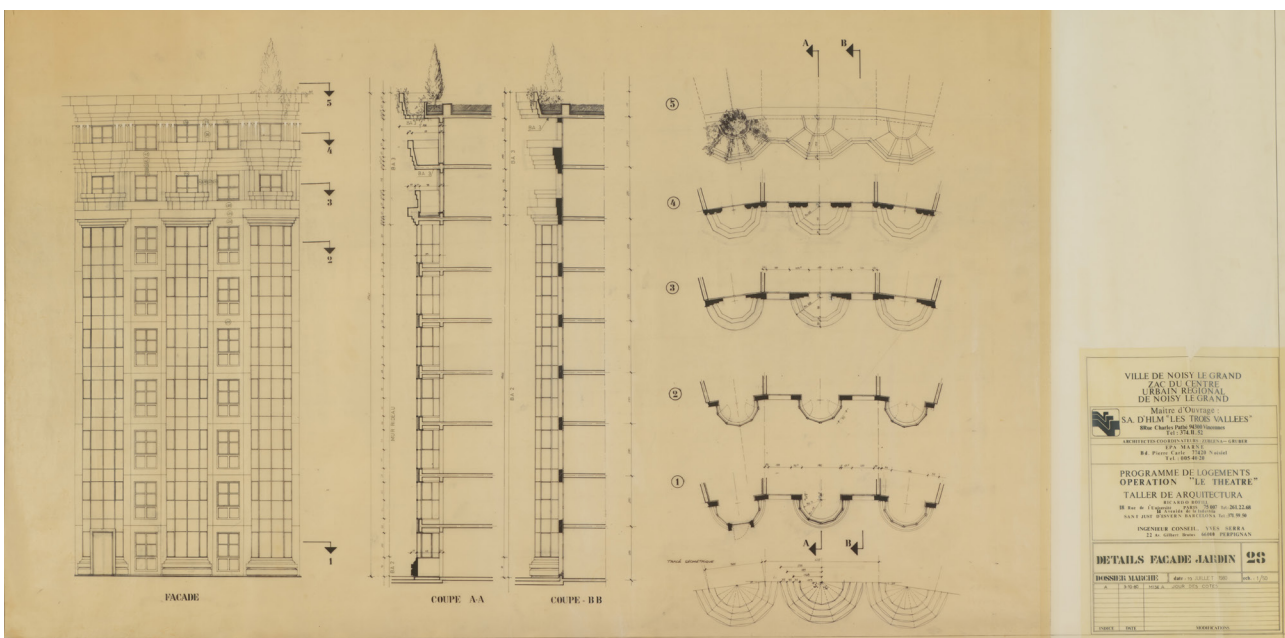
IMG.4: Les Espaces d'Abraxas: Le Théâtre: section and partial layout of 2, 3 and 4 rooms' apartments, and general perspective sketch, June 1979; IMG. 5: Les Espaces d'Abraxas, general site plan, Feb. 1980; IMG. 6: Les Espaces d'Abraxas, Le Theater: methodology, geometry of the plot and layout of apartment typologies, plans and schemes, Feb. 1980; IMG. 7-8: Les Espaces d'Abraxas, Le Théâtre: ground to sixth level floor plans, technical gallery level floor plan and stair-cases plans, BTA Archive.

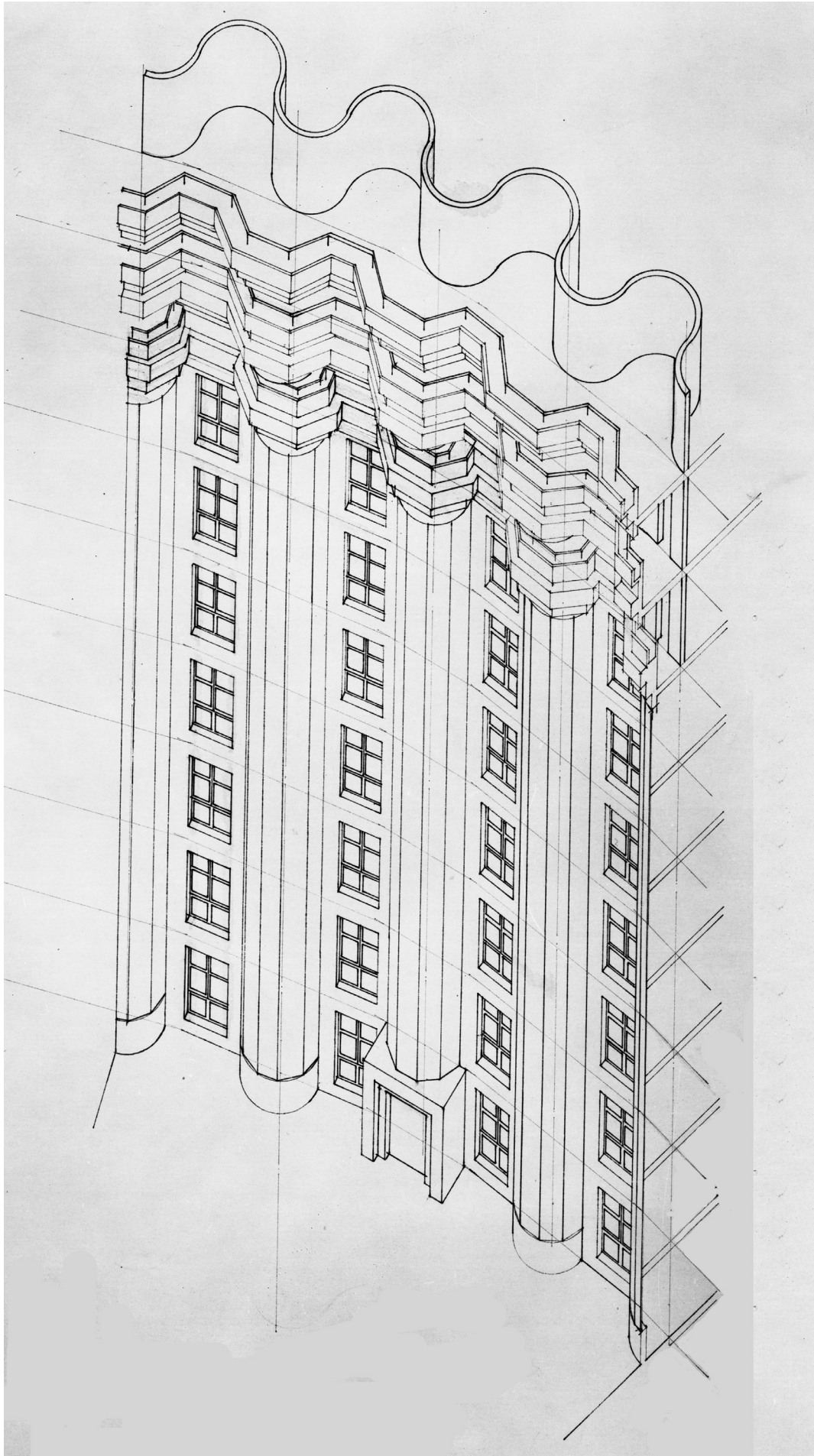




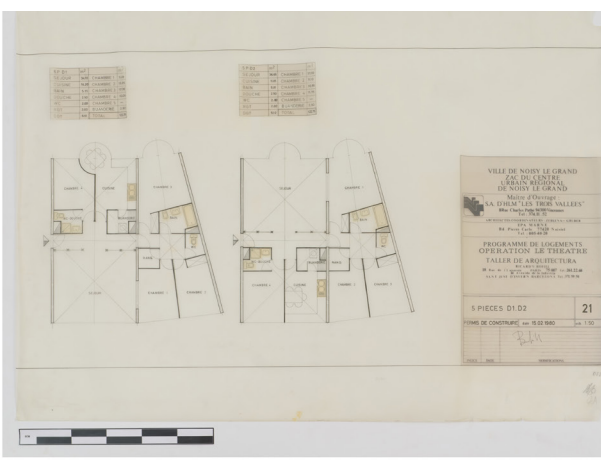
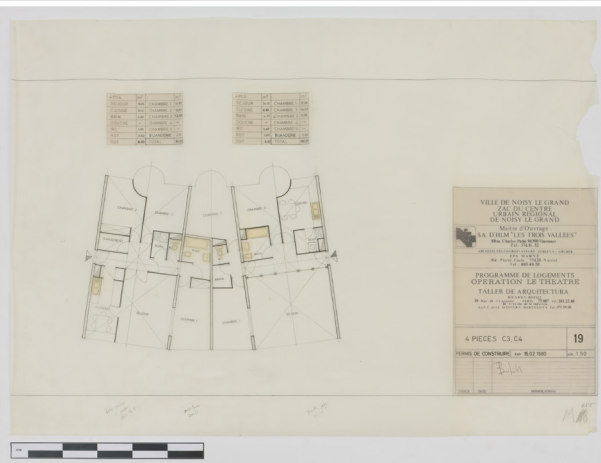
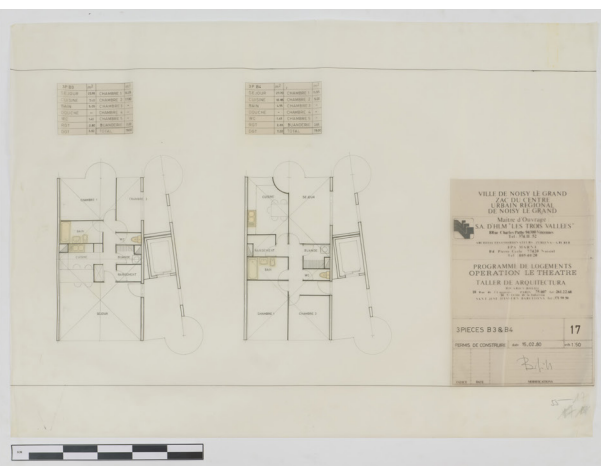


IMG.9: Les Espaces d'Abraxas, Le Théâtre: section CC, Apr. 1980. IMG.10: Les Espaces d'Abraxas, Le Théâtre: Garden façade elevation, section and plan details, Jul. 1980. IMG. 11: Les Espaces d'Abraxas, Le Théâtre: Garden façade, partial axonometric perspective, BTA Archive.













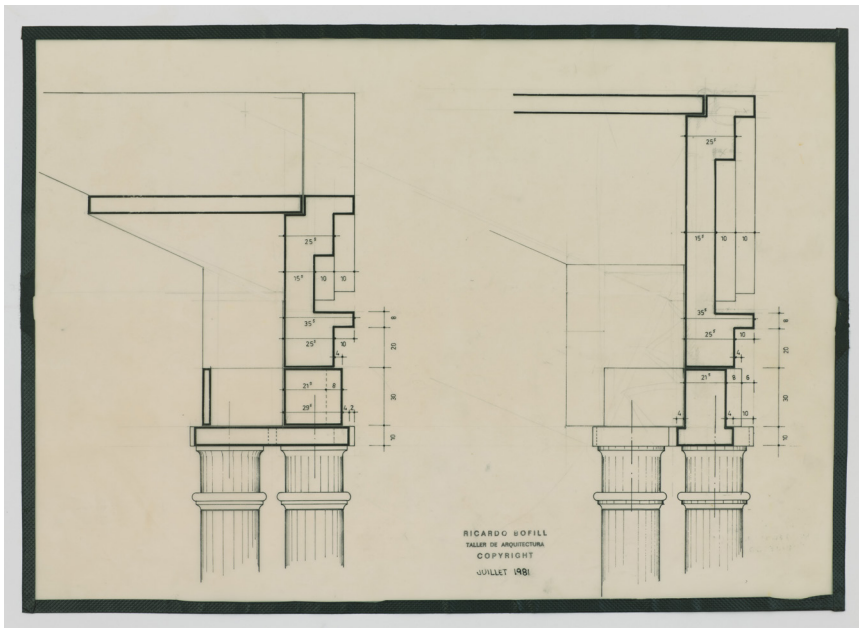
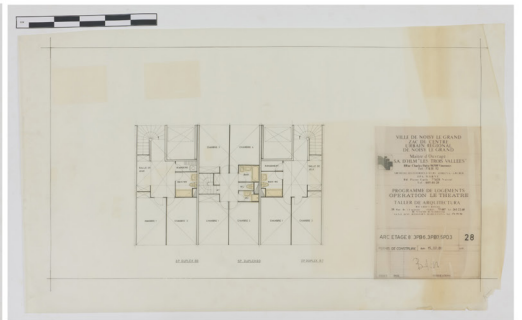
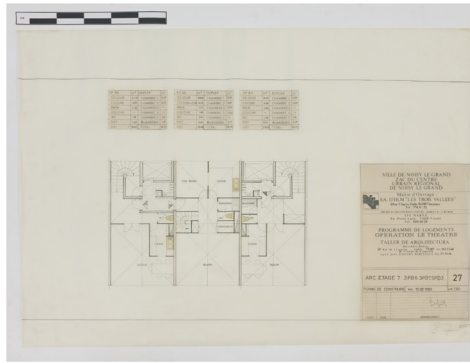
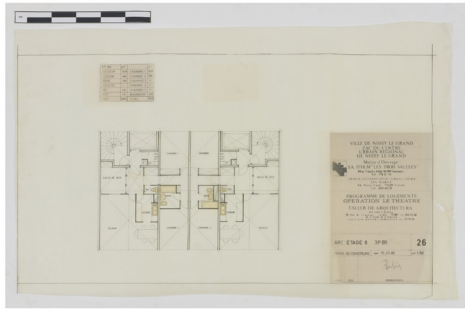
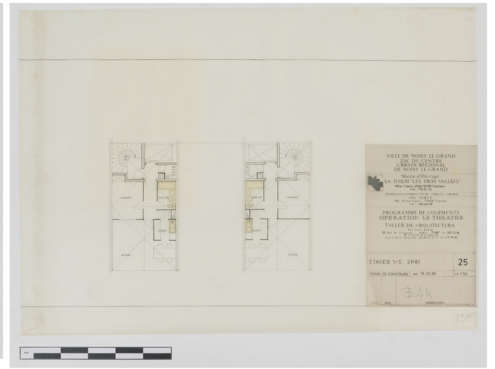
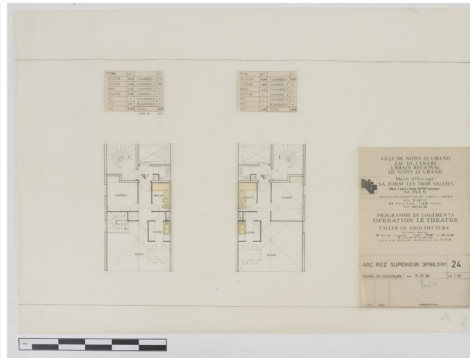
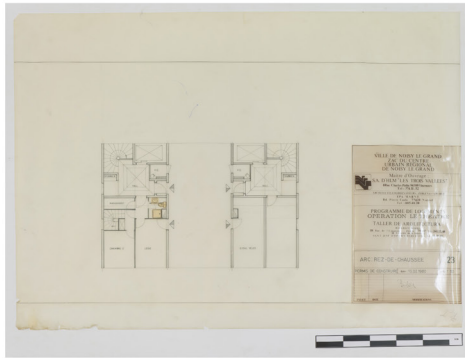


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IMG.17: Les Espaces d'Abraxas, Le Palacio: interior street section through stairs and façade, May 1979; IMG. 18: Les Espaces d'Abraxas, Le Palacio: transversal section-façade and particular plans of the facade, BTA Archive.





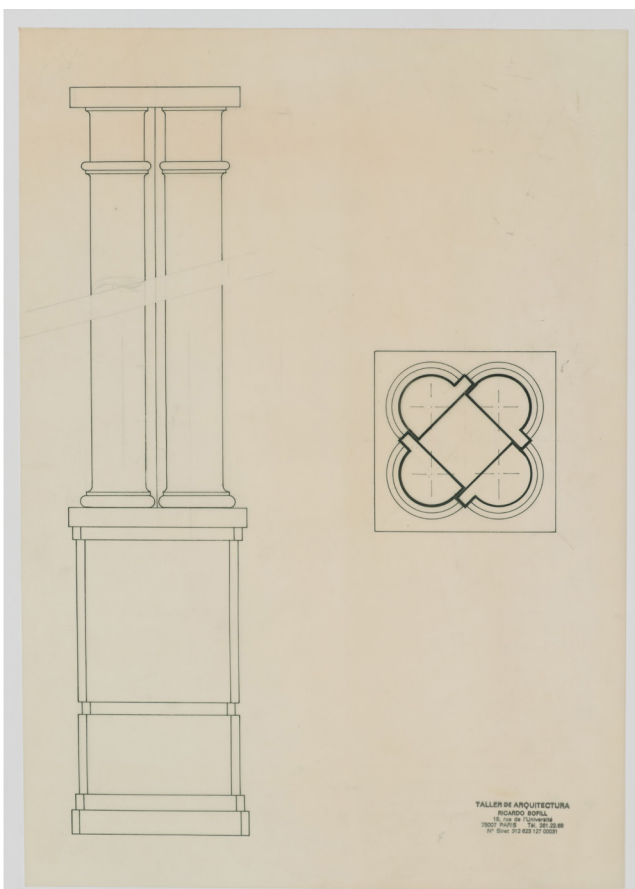
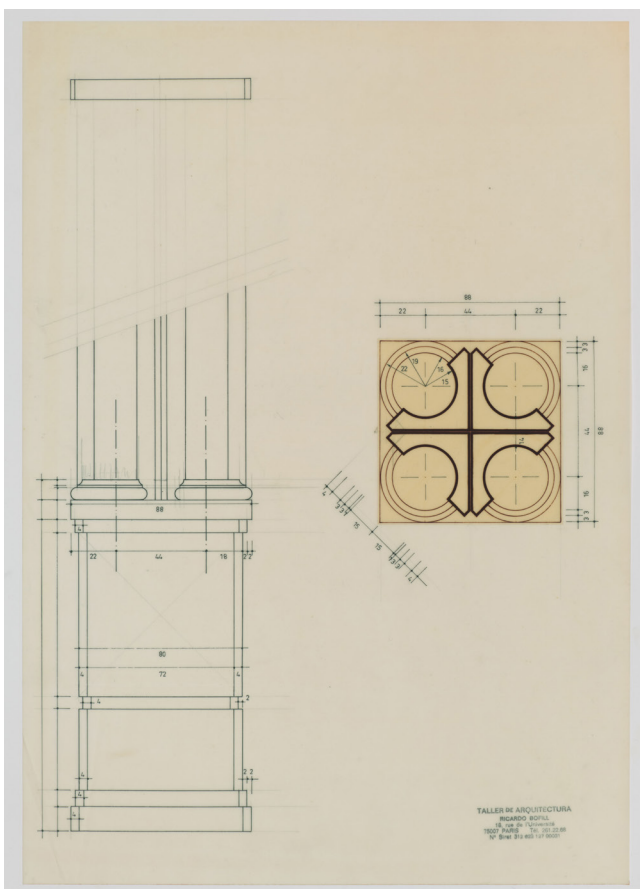


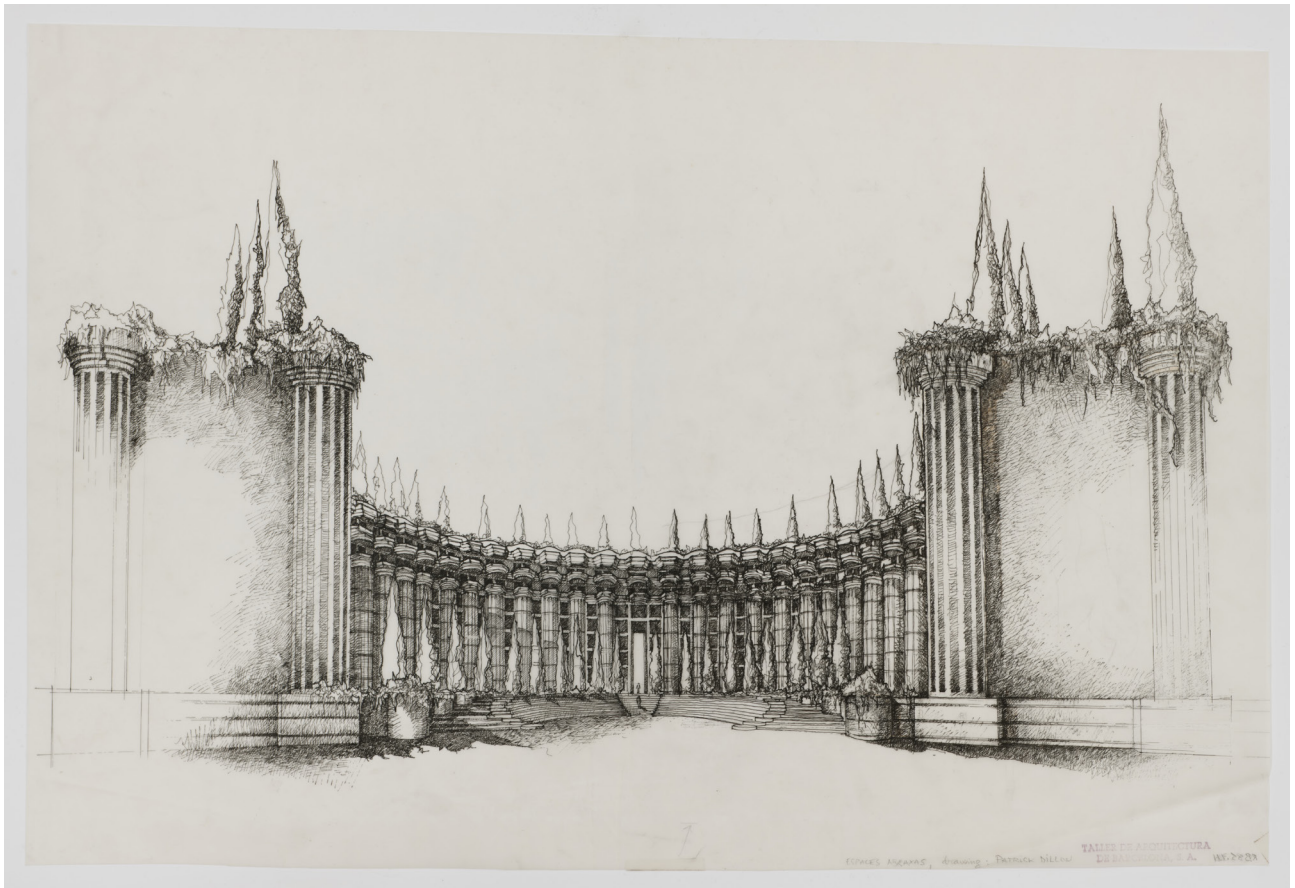
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IMG.19: Les Espaces d'Abraxas, L'Arc: housing units, ground level to upper level floor plans, Feb. 1980; IMG. 20-21: Les Espaces d'Abraxas, architectural details, plan and sections; BTA Archive.





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IMG. 22: Les Espaces d'Abraxas, Le Théâtre: general perspective, sketch, BTA Archive.

## Selected extracts from the RBTA project description

The degradation of cities provokes their disappearance. Suburbs and public housing both evoke an urban cancer and assuage its presence. Marne-la-Vallée, in this context, is sublimated by architecture. It is public housing supported by socialists and communists. As a place of residence which creates a rupture with the working world, it allows for a fresh look at its environment. The complex is composed of three buildings: the Palacio, the Théâtre, and the Arc. Different orders participate in their composition; they articulate sudden changes in scale. Each prefabricated architectural element is used to the limit of disproportion, and the relationship between elements is exalted by the inversion of spatial structures, producing a striking dynamic. Historical references are present throughout the work, both in the configuration of the whole and in the characteristics of certain details. Classical shapes, very much rooted in French culture, are transformed and renewed by the way they are put to use. A careful analysis of the project will demonstrate, for example, how a composition *à la française* (1/4, 2/4, 1/4 vertically) is interrupted by volumetric manipulation, and by a second historical element which contradicts the first: the frieze, inspired by the cornices of the buildings of Étienne-Louis Boullée, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, and Jean-Jacques Lequeu. Thus, a baroque space is created, in the primitive sense of the word, which takes into account all spatial viewpoints and is defined as the introduction of movement into a built volume. Placed at the centre of the interior space, the Arc is designed for habitation. We wanted to render functional a symbol that has been considered functional throughout its long historical use. With its modest dimensions (nine floors), this vital central element was designed with parts leftover from the construction of the other two buildings. It strives for an appearance of age which is elegant but somewhat outdated. Diverted from its usual symbolism, its final appearance is more like a romantic rather than triumphal arch. It serves as a focal point; it's a stage curtain, an open filter between two spaces—the Théâtre and the Palacio. The Arc obstructs a view of the whole, while also framing certain details. The Palacio has a U-shaped plan, with an X-shaped section, and its neoclassical appearance is cancelled by volumes with a "negative" function. The topmost part is a frieze that references a change of orders, emphasising the double order of the general composition. The urban palace stands as a monument against the skies of Marne-la-Vallée, creating an identifiable silhouette on the skyline. It's both monument and palace, place and space. Spatial sensations are never the same after you see the Palacio. The Théâtre is a semicircle, the size of a Greek theatre, and shaped by a system of regular grids, vertically and longitudinally. The theatrical quality of this inhabited temple is produced by the vertical order of a series of glass columns that change with the light, very much like an enormous piece of optical art. A fluid theatricality offering an exploded view of the elements contrasts with the closed convex space which is rigorous, yet changing. The open space is enveloped by the building's circular form, whose convexity gives a sensation of protective shelter. An impression of privacy flows from it, inverting the initial expression of monumentality. The roofs of the Théâtre and the Arc are planted with trees but remain inaccessible. The former can be seen from the Palacio. The ground floor and an underground space are reserved for

parking. A Greek amphitheatre descends gradually like a stairway onto the stage from the first floor on the side of the plaza. The façades are built from prefabricated sections, cut according to their individual shapes and not in framed panels, so the joints are invisible. The goal of using a contemporary material like concrete, which harmonises with the urban centre while remaining discrete, is to rediscover the qualities of stone. It has its appearance and solidity as well as its aesthetic and cultural references. The new formal language being used by architecture is still incoherent and lacks the precision needed to express its ideas and clarify projects which are still in gestation.





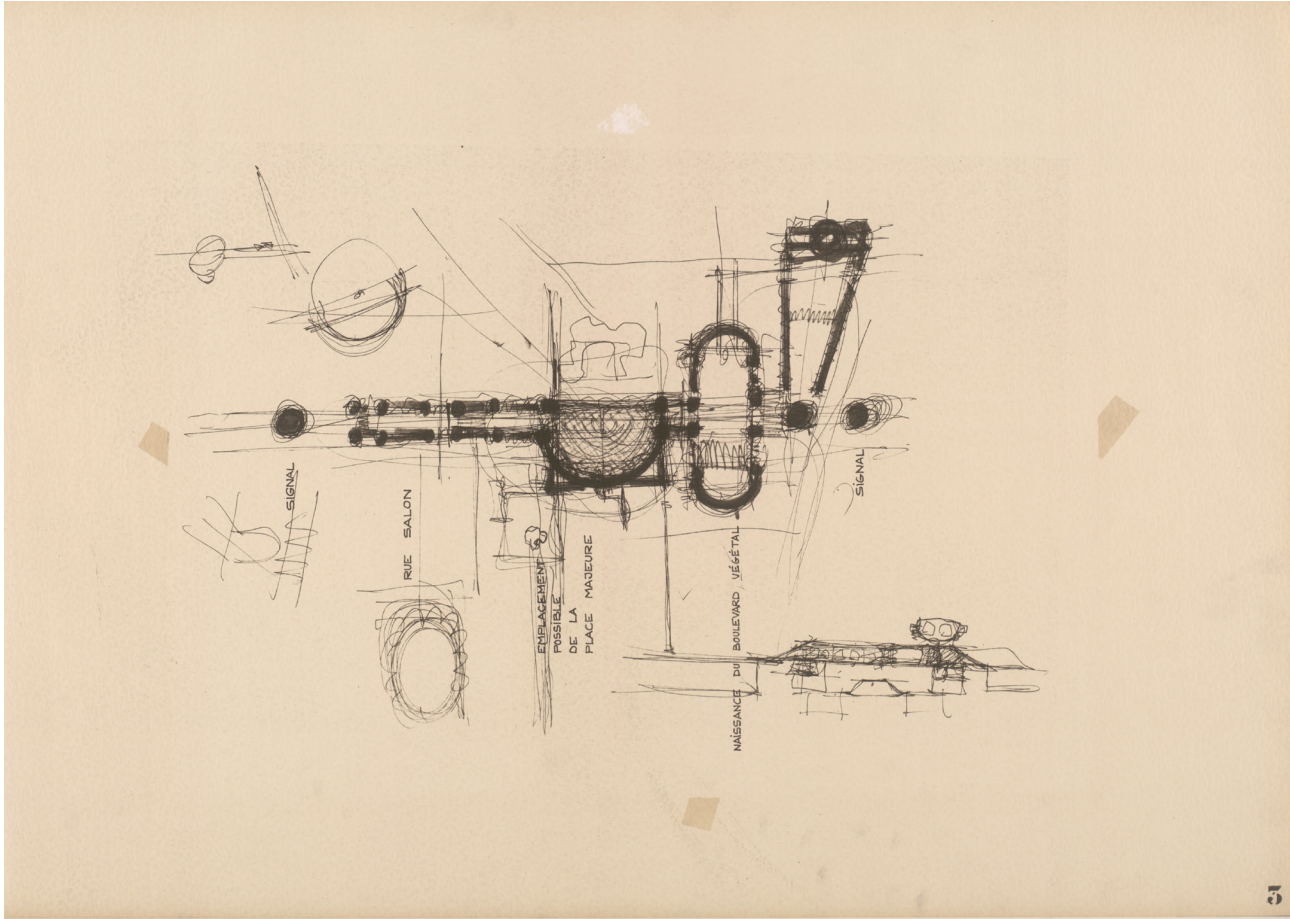
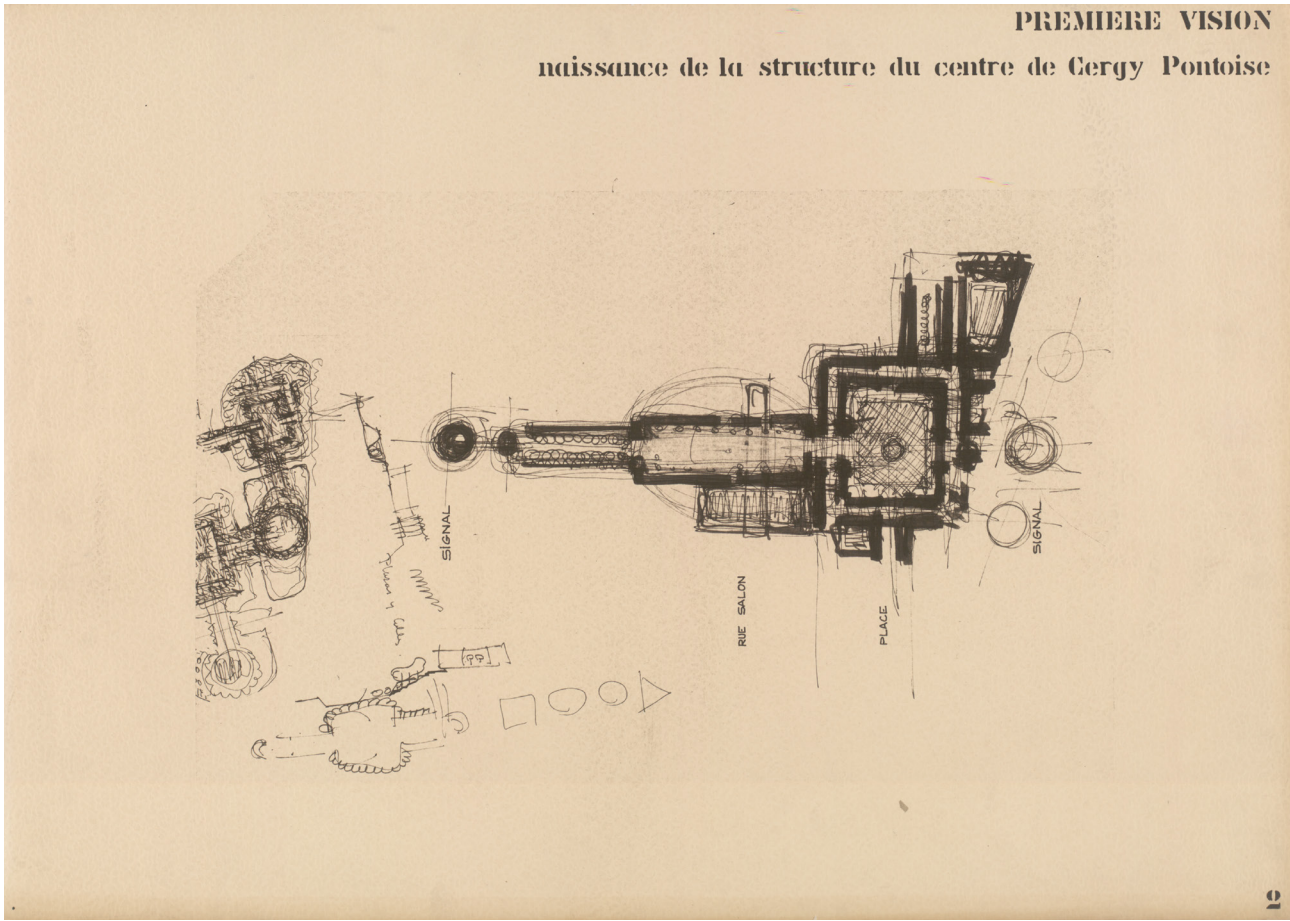
IMG.1: Cover of the album Cergy-Pontoise, proposal urban plan for the new town, Apr. 1976; IMG.2-3: Cergy-Pontoise, first proposal, conceptual plan studies, sketches from the album, BTA Archive.

# Le Crescent Vert

ARCHIVAL DATA	
DATE	1981 (design) 1985 (realization)
PLACE/ADDRESS	Cergy-Pontoise, Puisseaux, Paris
COLLABORATORS	Peter Hodgkinson (design), Dani Karavan, Patrick Genard, Rogelio Jiménez Pons, Ramón Collado, Bernard Torchinsky, José María Rocías
CUSTOMER	Établissement public de la ville nouvelle de Cergy-Pontoise, Housing: Foyer du Fonctionnaire et la Famille, Business: SODES Paris
SOURCES	RBTA Archive

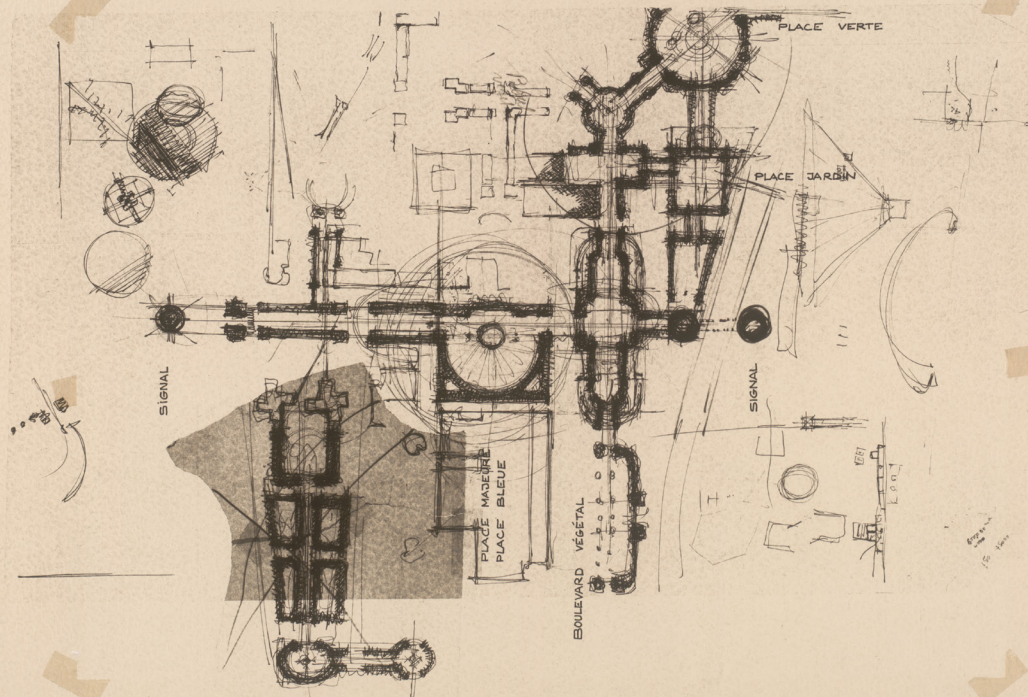
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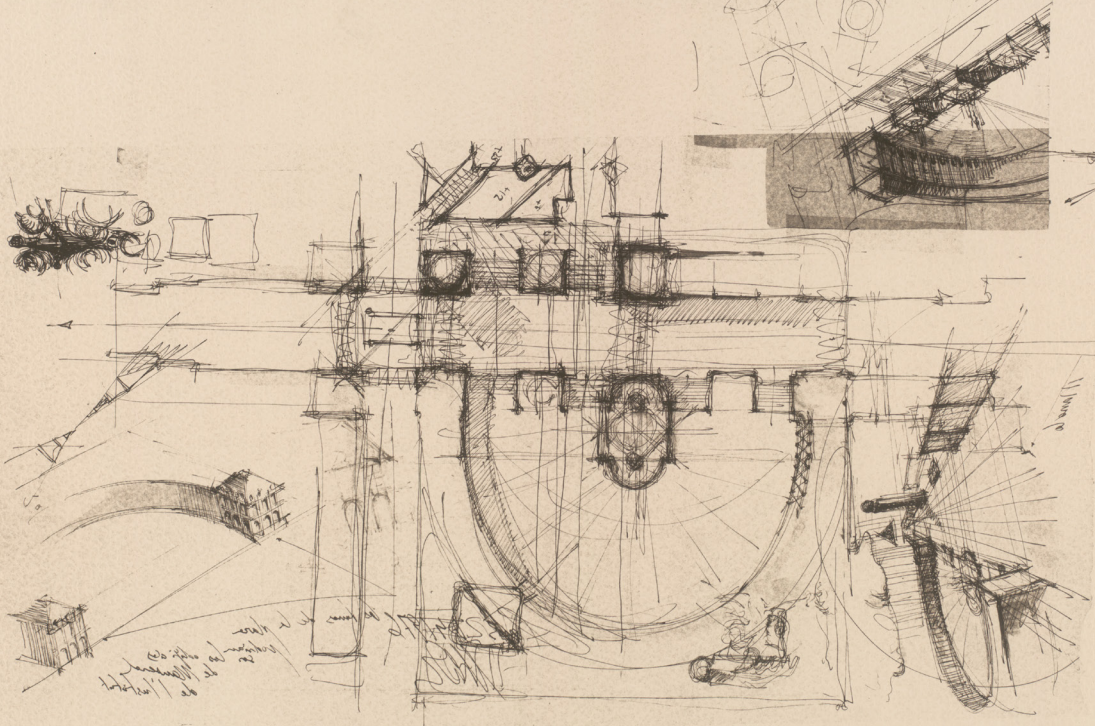


esquisse de la structure architecturale de Cergy Pontoise



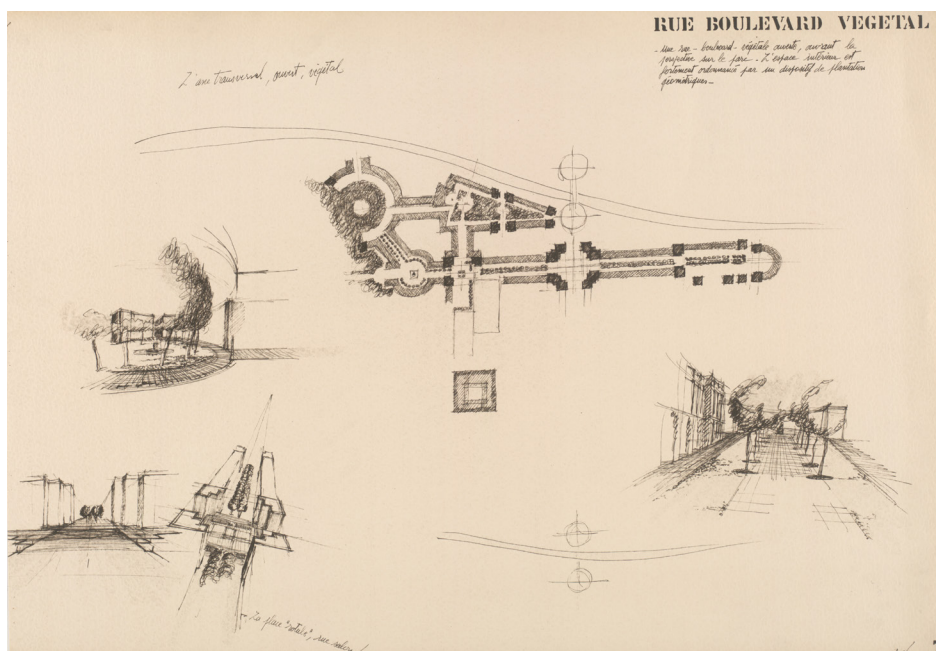
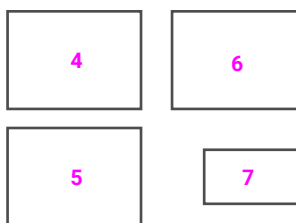
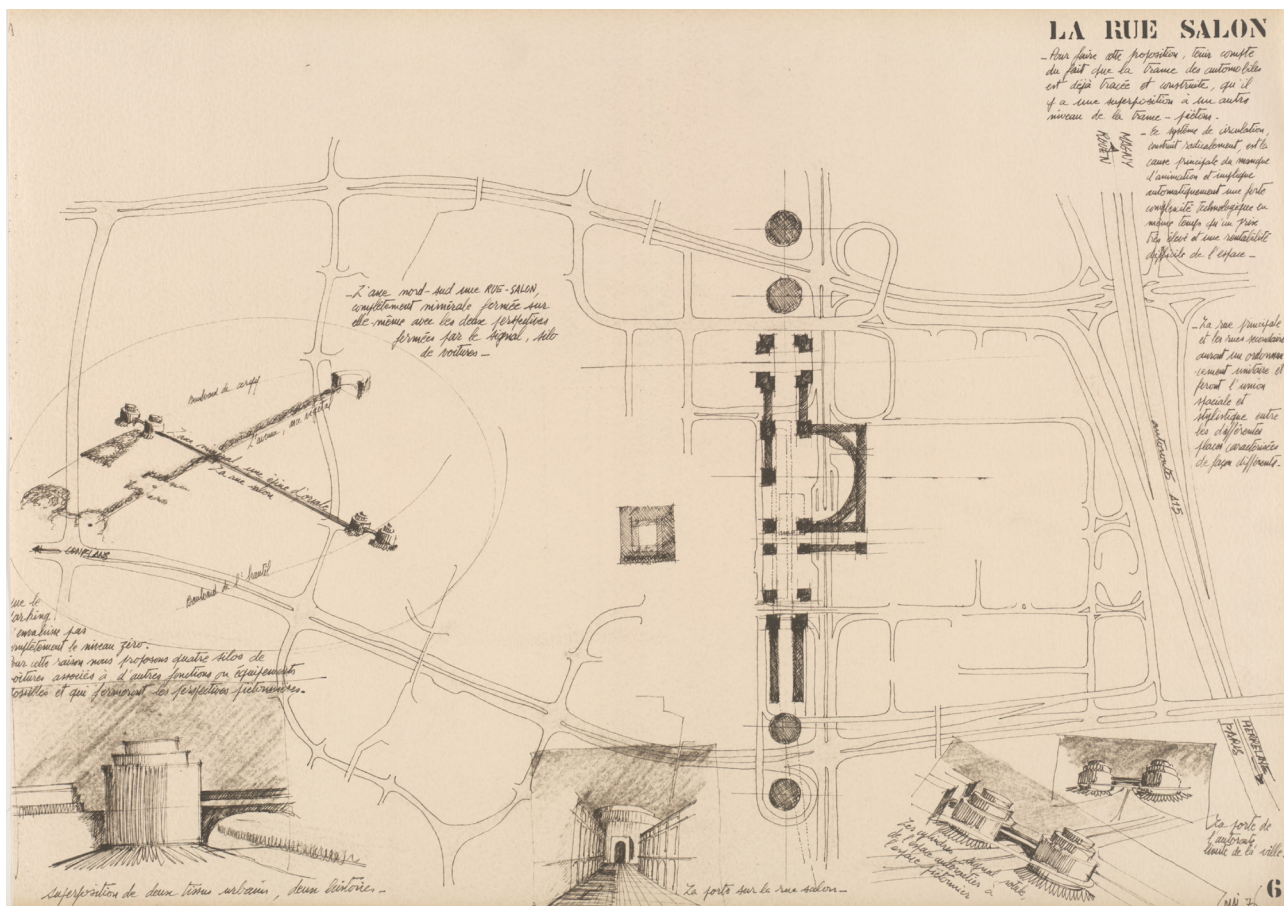
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PREMIERE IDEE POUR LA PLACE MAJEURE

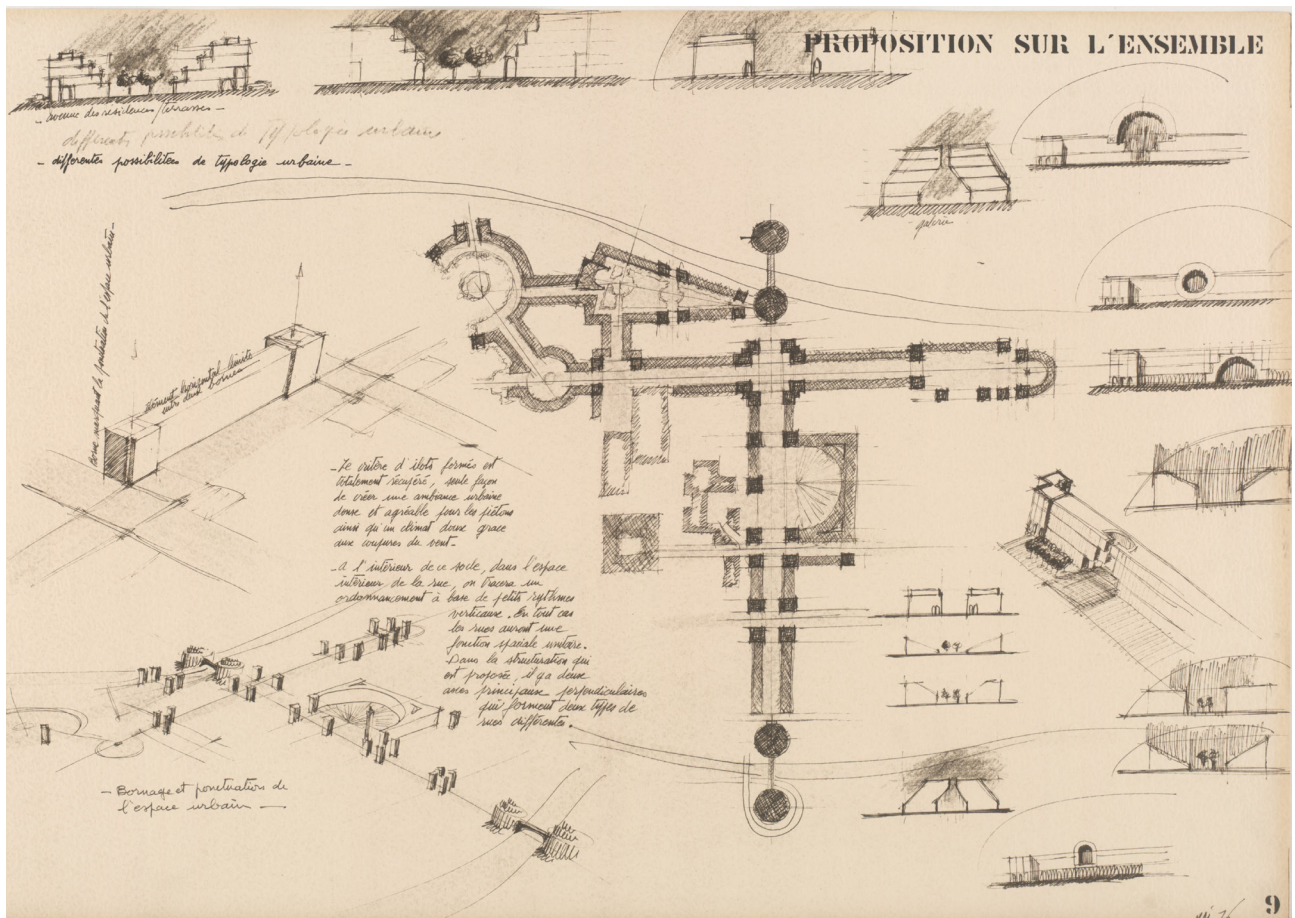
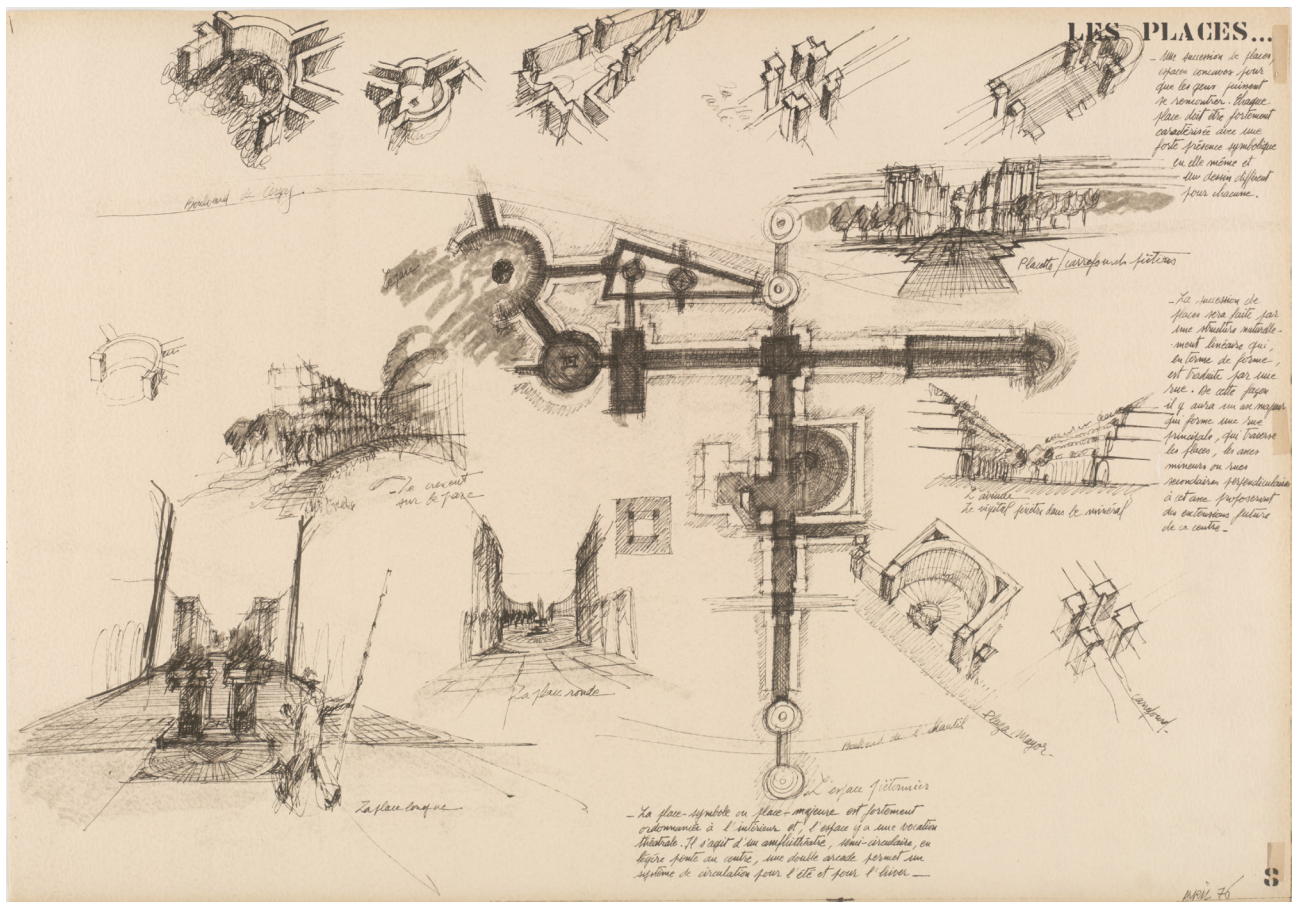


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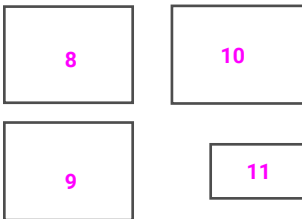
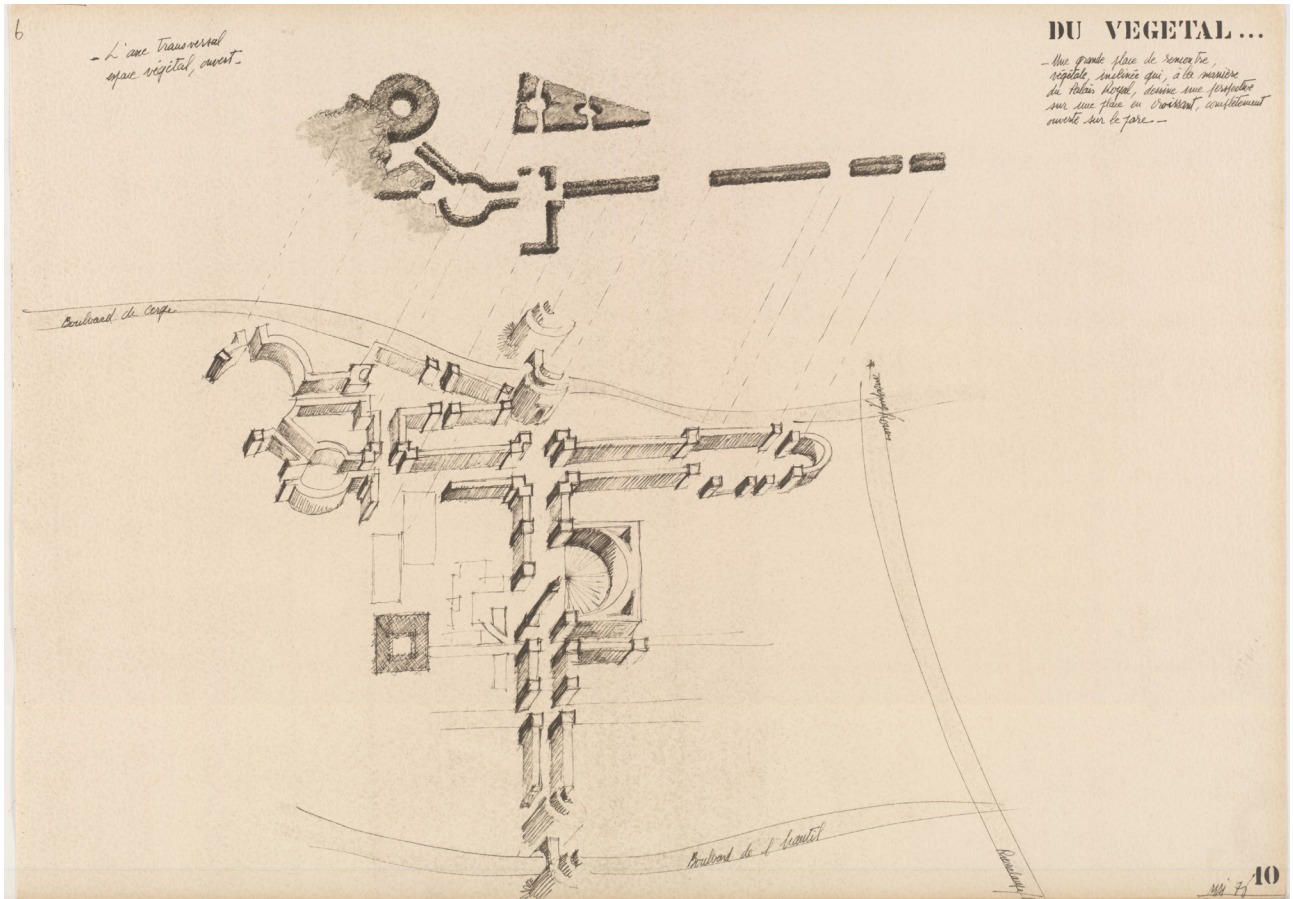




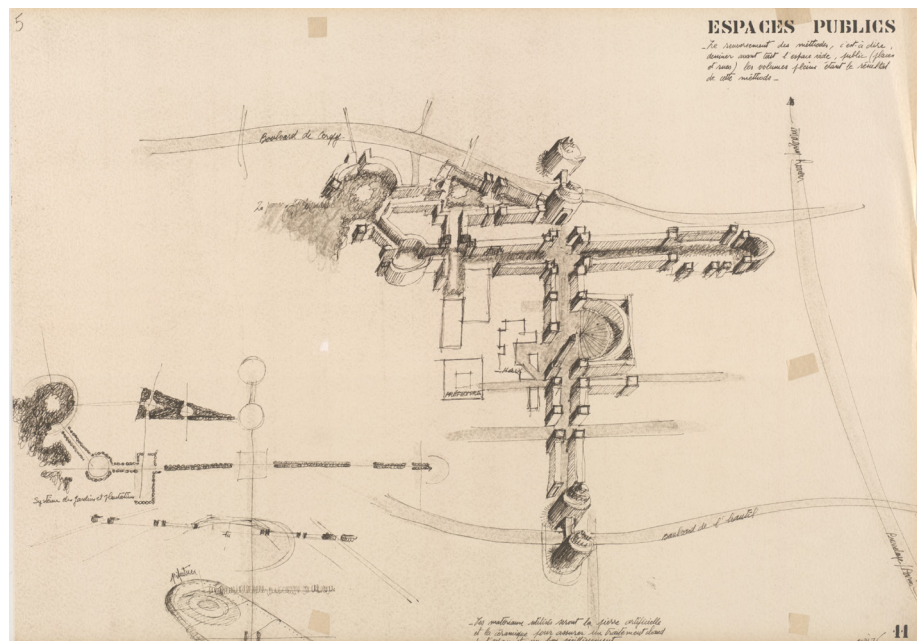




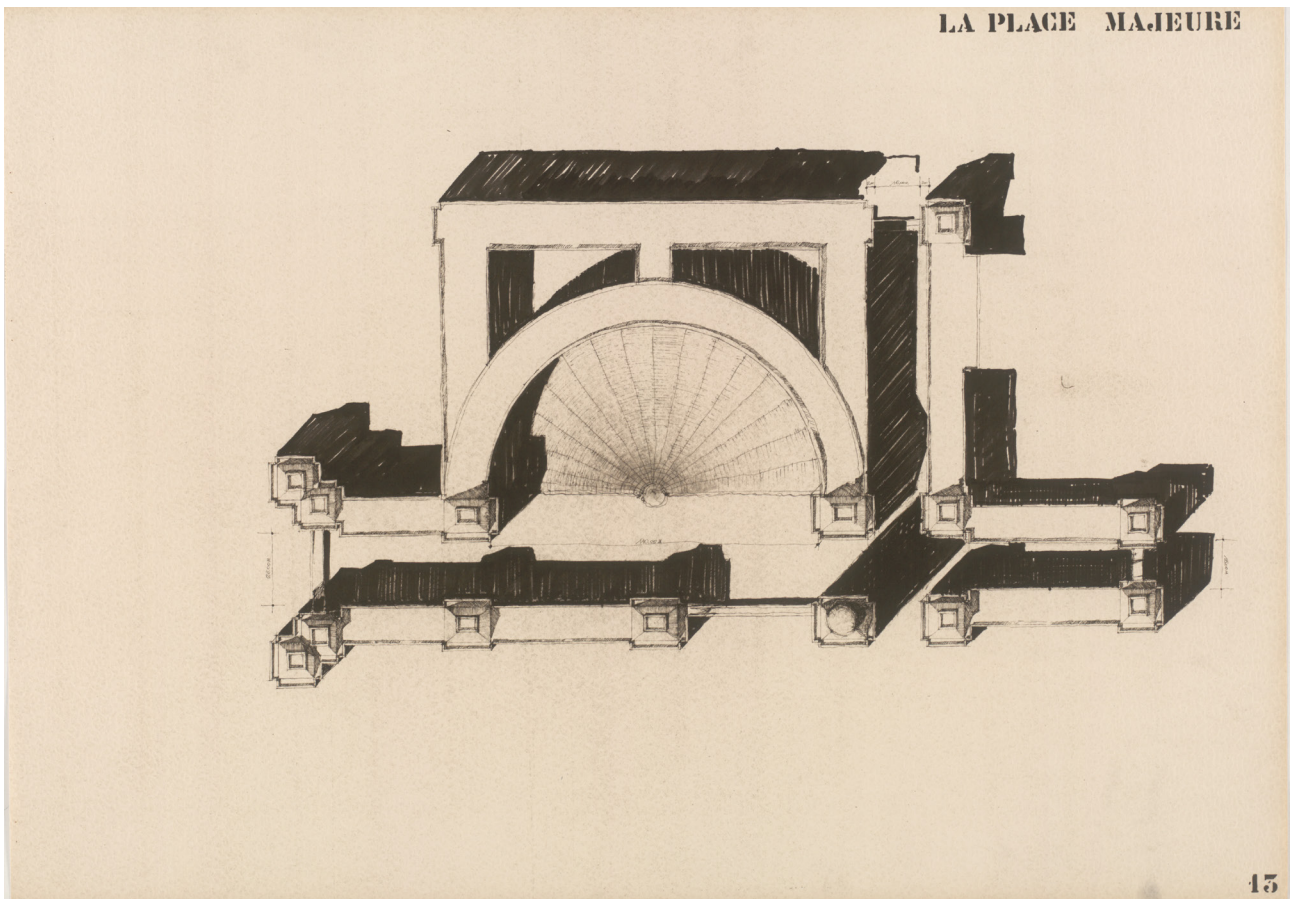
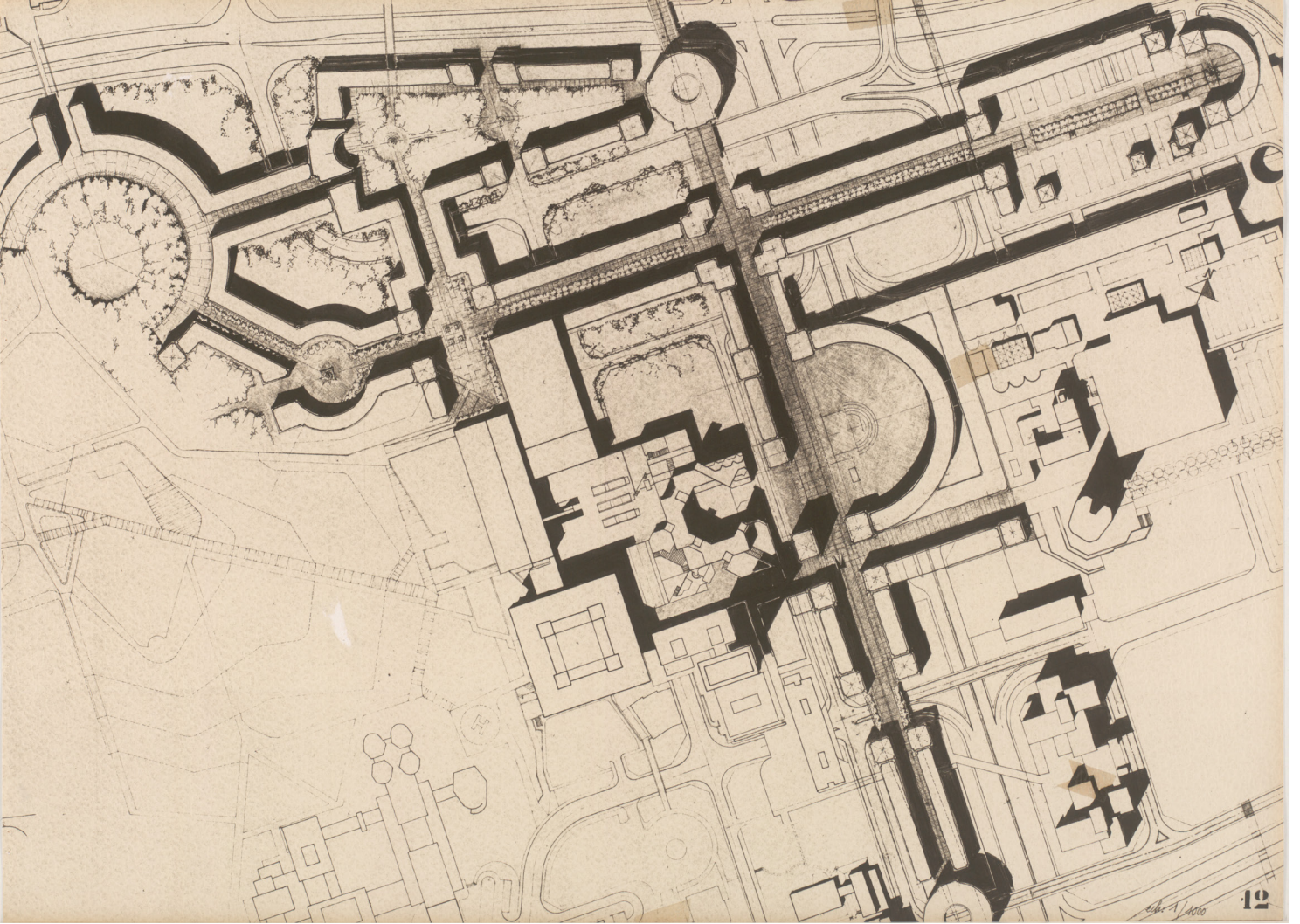




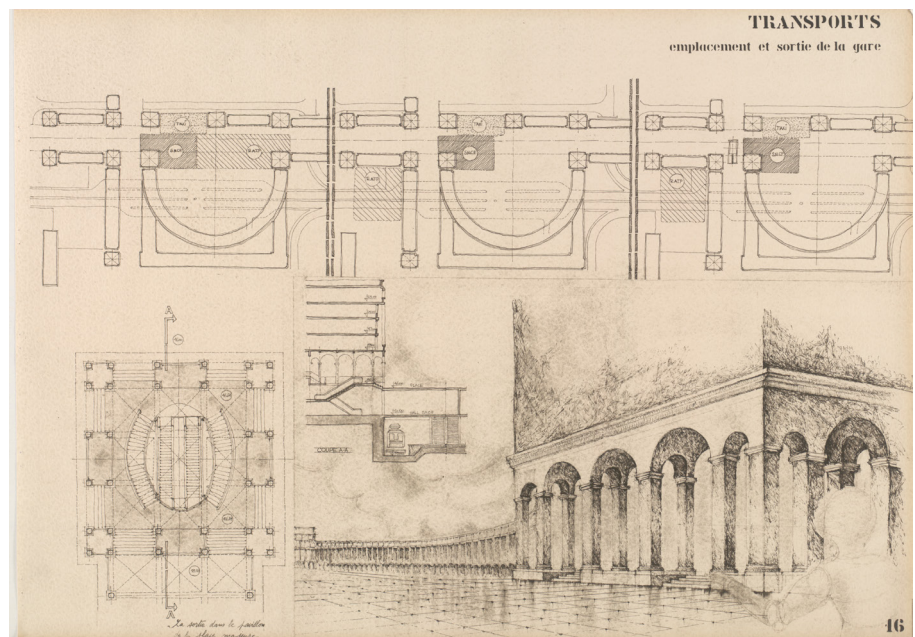
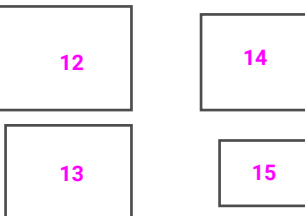
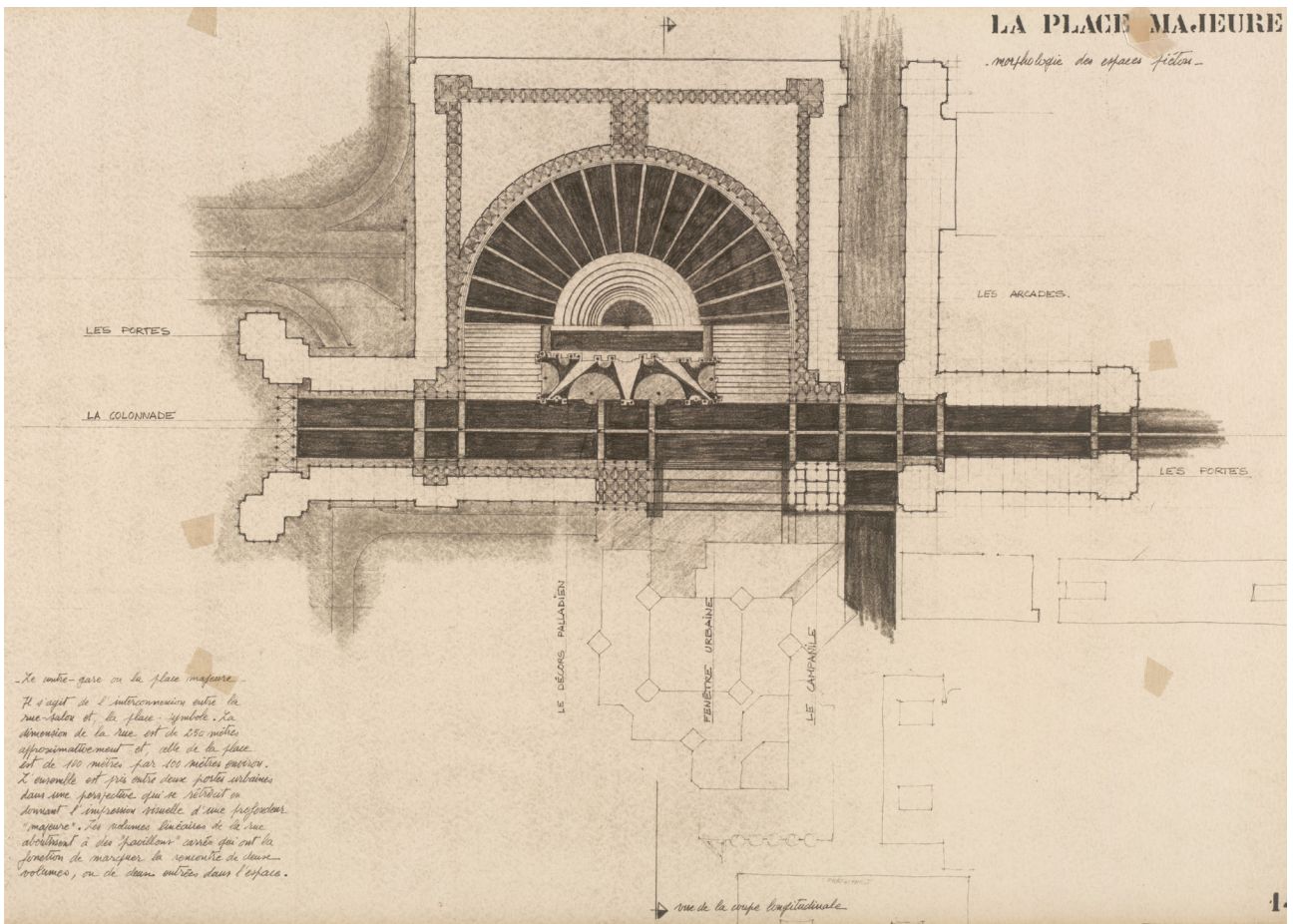
IMG.8: Cergy-Pontoise, "the squares" plan and perspective sketches; IMG.9: Cergy-Pontoise, general master plan and perspective sketches; IMG.10: Cergy-Pontoise, green master plan and perspective sketches; IMG. 11-12: Cergy Pontoise, public spaces plan and perspective sketches, BTA Archive.











IMG.13-14: Cergy-Pontoise, town square, volumetric and general plan; IMG.15-16: Cergy-Pontoise, site plan of transportation facilities, train station esplanade, perspective sketches and plan of parking distribution, BTA Archive.

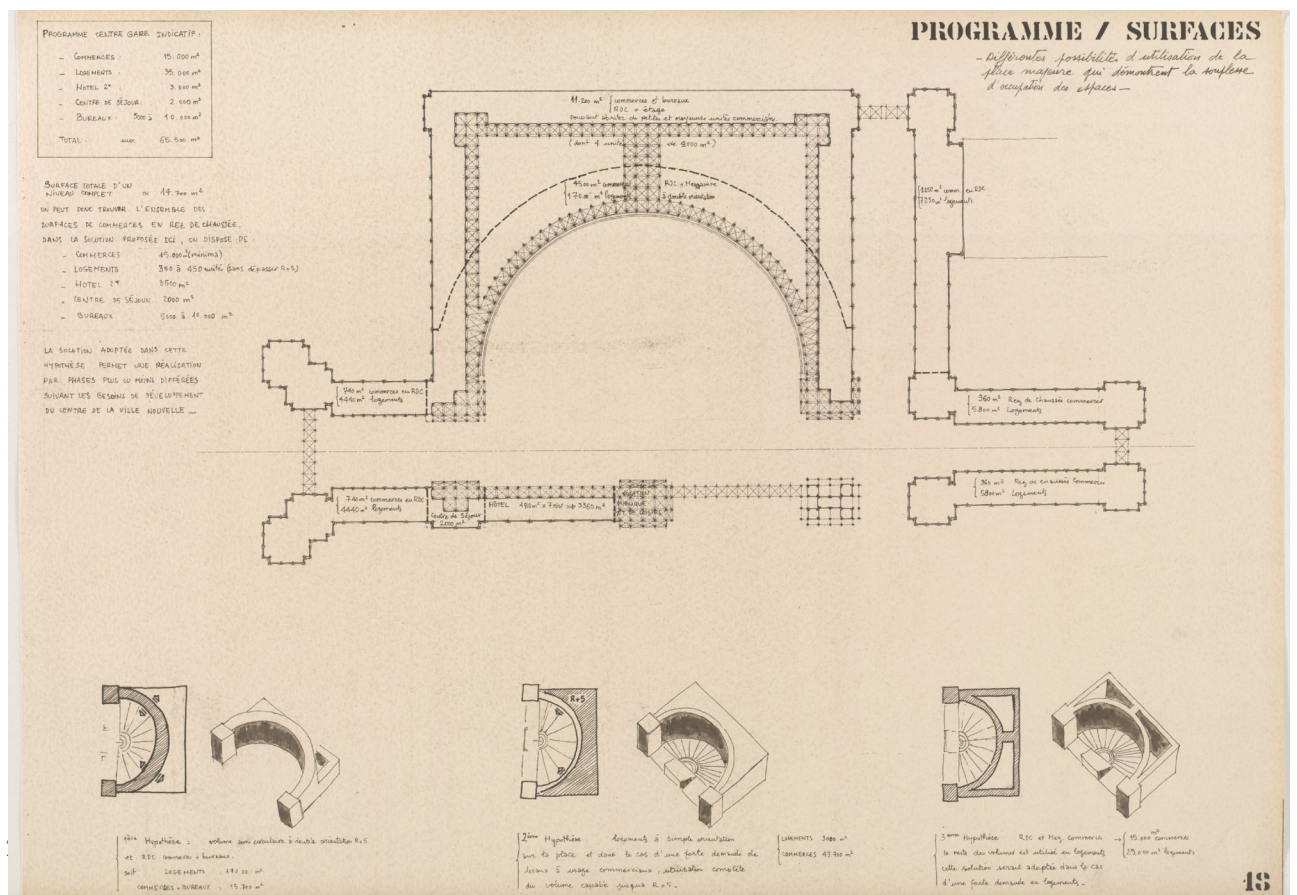
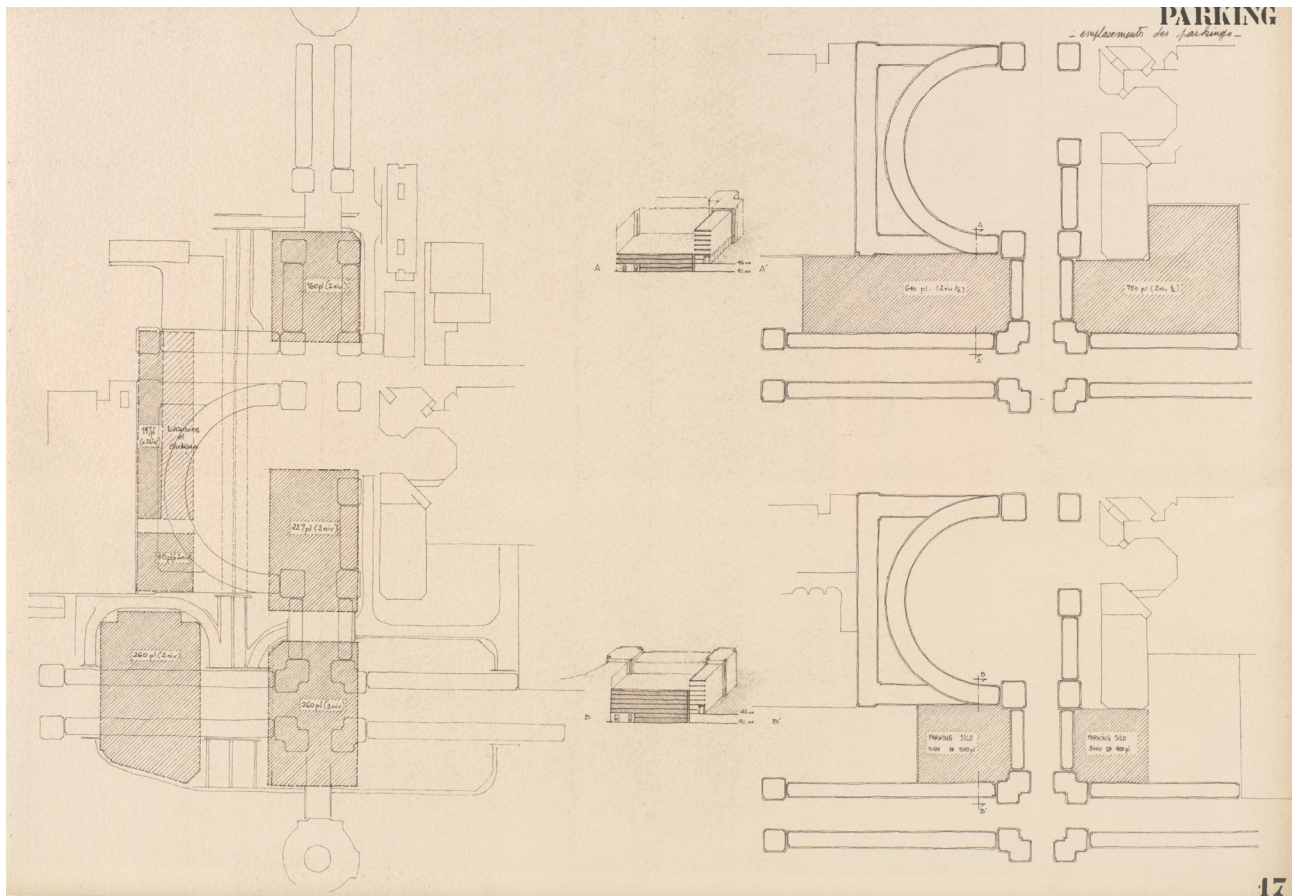


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IMG.17: L'Amphithéâtre: exterior and courtyard facade elevations; IMG.18: Les Colonnes de Sainte-Christophe: site plan and geometry sketches. Jun. 1981, BTA Archive.



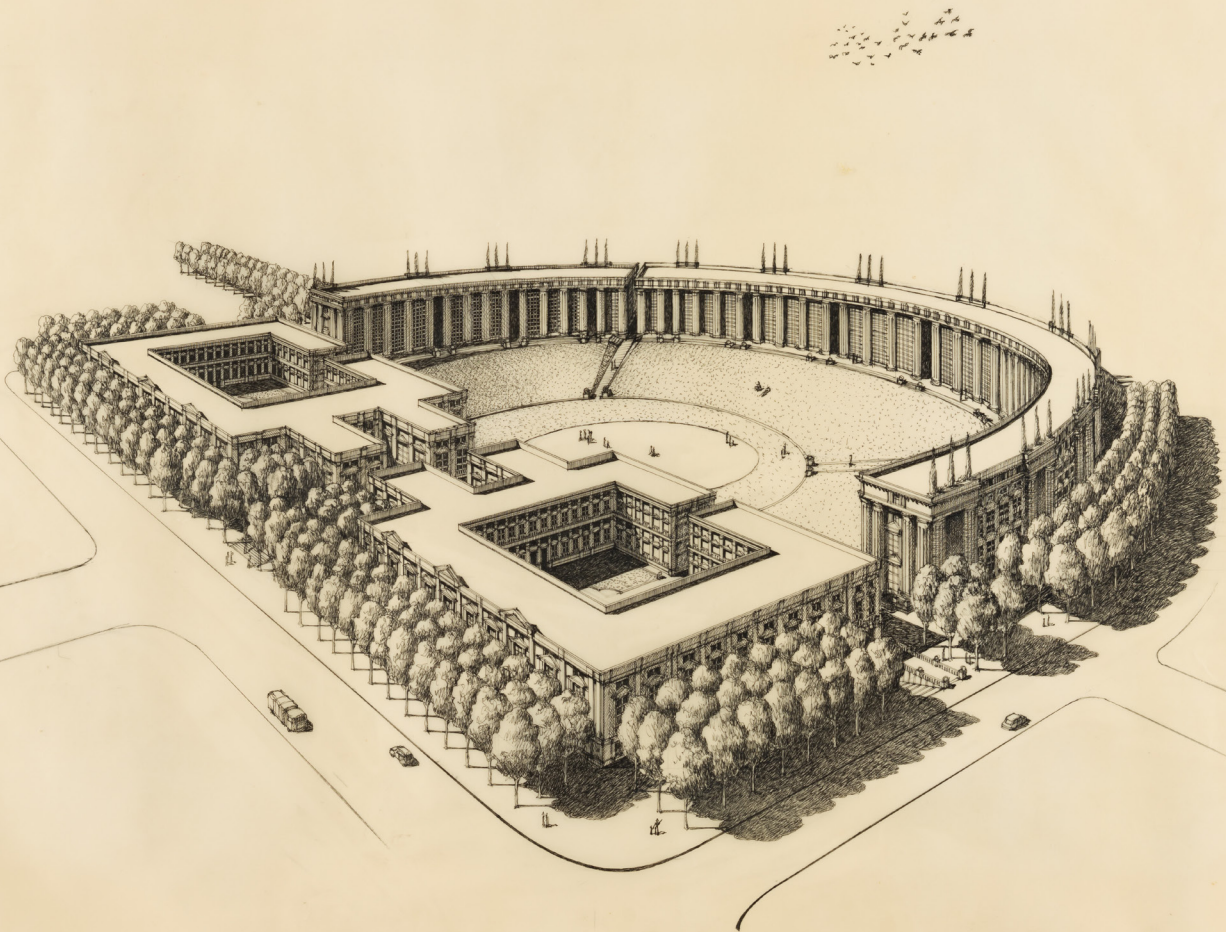


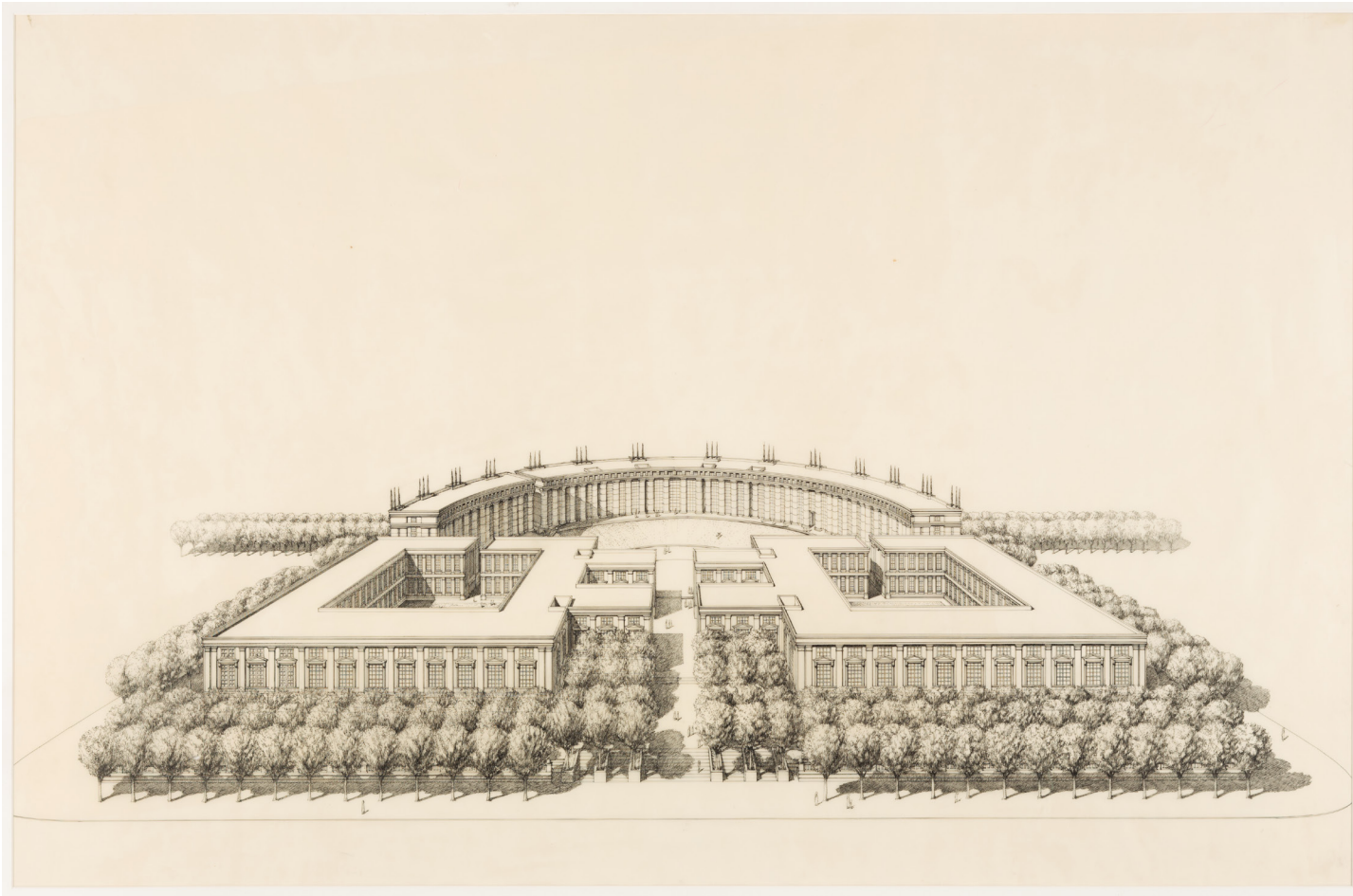


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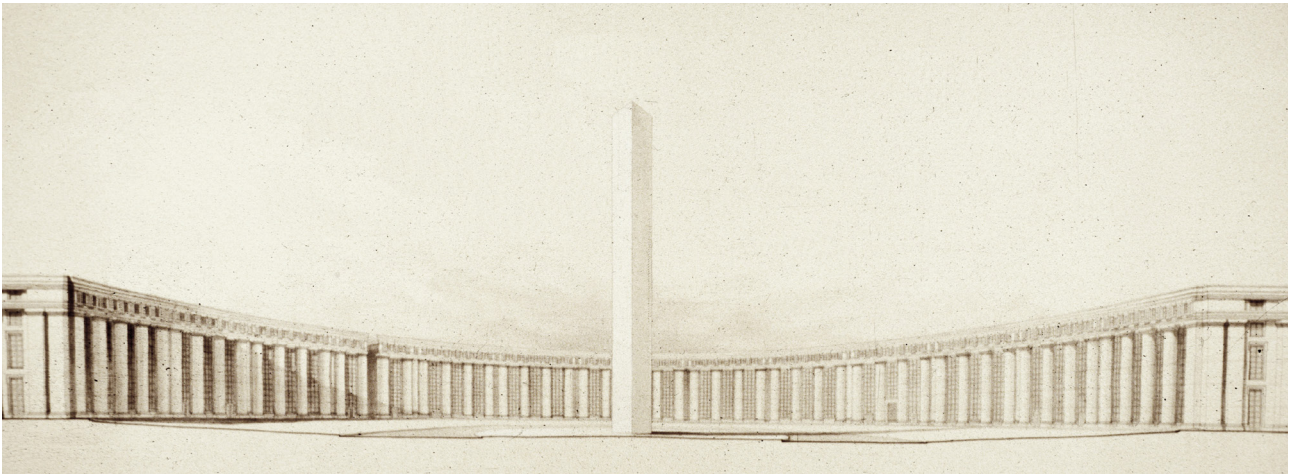
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IMG.19-20: Les Colonnes de Sainte-Christophe: aerial perspectives, BTA Archive.







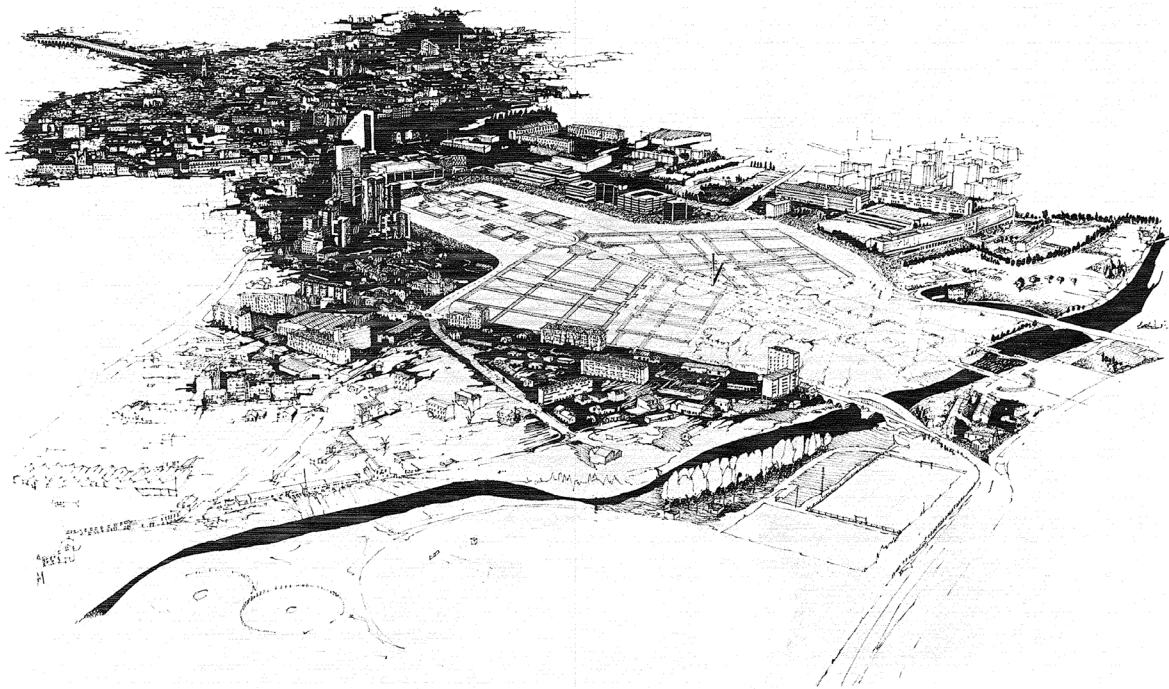


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IMG. 21: Les Colonnes de  
Sainte-Christophe: Crescent  
perspective, BTA Archive.

## Selected extracts from the RBTA project description

The project located in the "Ville Nouvelle" of Cergy-Pointoise sits on the plateau of "Le Puisseau", which dominates the Oise river valley. It is generated from the highest point of the site, the intersection of the main axis of the new neighbourhood, and a linear layout of parks, hanging gardens and terraces over the river. A sculpture by Dani Karavan marks the scheme's central space. The project, consisting mainly of housing and some shops, is composed of two distinctly morphological parts: a six-storey crescent-building to the south, oriented towards the valley, and two buildings framing two symmetrical square plazas to the north, which are connected by a cross-shaped plaza. RBTA designed a new garden-city, opposed to the vernacular and crafted single family housing developed at the beginning of the XX century. The project is structured by a complex geometric system based on the square and centered at point zero. Departing from a classical scheme, the project is composed of strongly related and articulated buildings, with rigorously designed volumes to create perfectly defined interior spaces. The design makes reference to the English Architecture of squares and gardens, of very horizontal proportions, like the famous Circus and Royal Crescent by John Nash in Bath. At the edge of the plateau, in front of the valley, the façade of the crescent is treated like a grand city wall, punctuated by solid towers. The windows and balconies of the apartment blocks overlook the natural landscape. The façade serves as the end of the perspective created by the axis of the gardens and terraces rising from the river. The green lawns of the park penetrate the interior squares to emphasize the residential character of the scheme. Surrounding this green amphitheatre, the wide exposed concrete colonnade of serene proportions further reinforces the unifying horizontal composition, yet avoiding the monumental scale and dimensions. Treated like green courtyards, the two interior squares are framed by doubly ordered façades. The transition between open and built space was carefully studied, generating new solutions for accesses and residential units. The specially studied spatial sequence from the interior plaza to the apartment generates a theater-shape public space. The transparent treatment of the transversal axis clearly reveals the double exposure of the apartment units. This axis opens the foyer to the interior plaza by means of large windows framed by columns, and ends above with balconies over the terraced gardens opening to the landscape.



# Antigone

## ARCHIVAL DATA

DATE	1979 (design) 1981-1999 (realization)
PLACE/ADDRESS	Montpellier
COLLABORATORS	Jean Pierre Carniaux (direction), Patrick Genard, Ramón Collado, Xavier Grau, Rogelio Jiménez Pons, Nathalie Hollevoet, Omar Migliore
CUSTOMER	Antigone: City of Montpellier. Le Nombre d'Or: SERM. Les Echelles de la Ville: City of Montpellier. Hôtel de Région: Conseil régional du Languedoc-Roussillon.
SOURCES	RBTA Archive

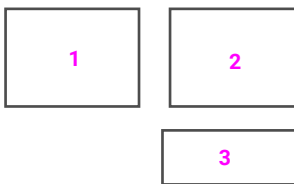
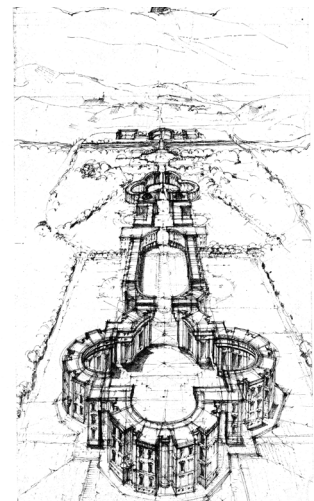
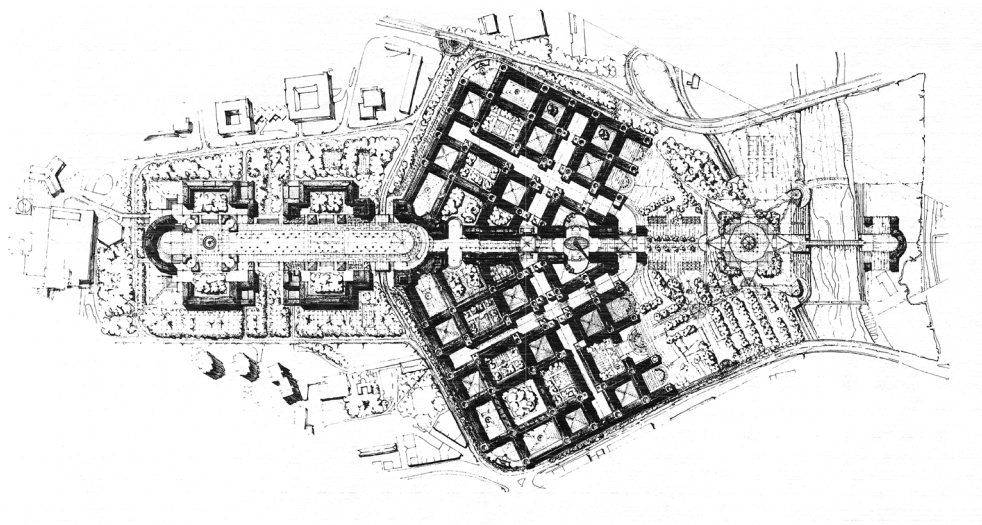
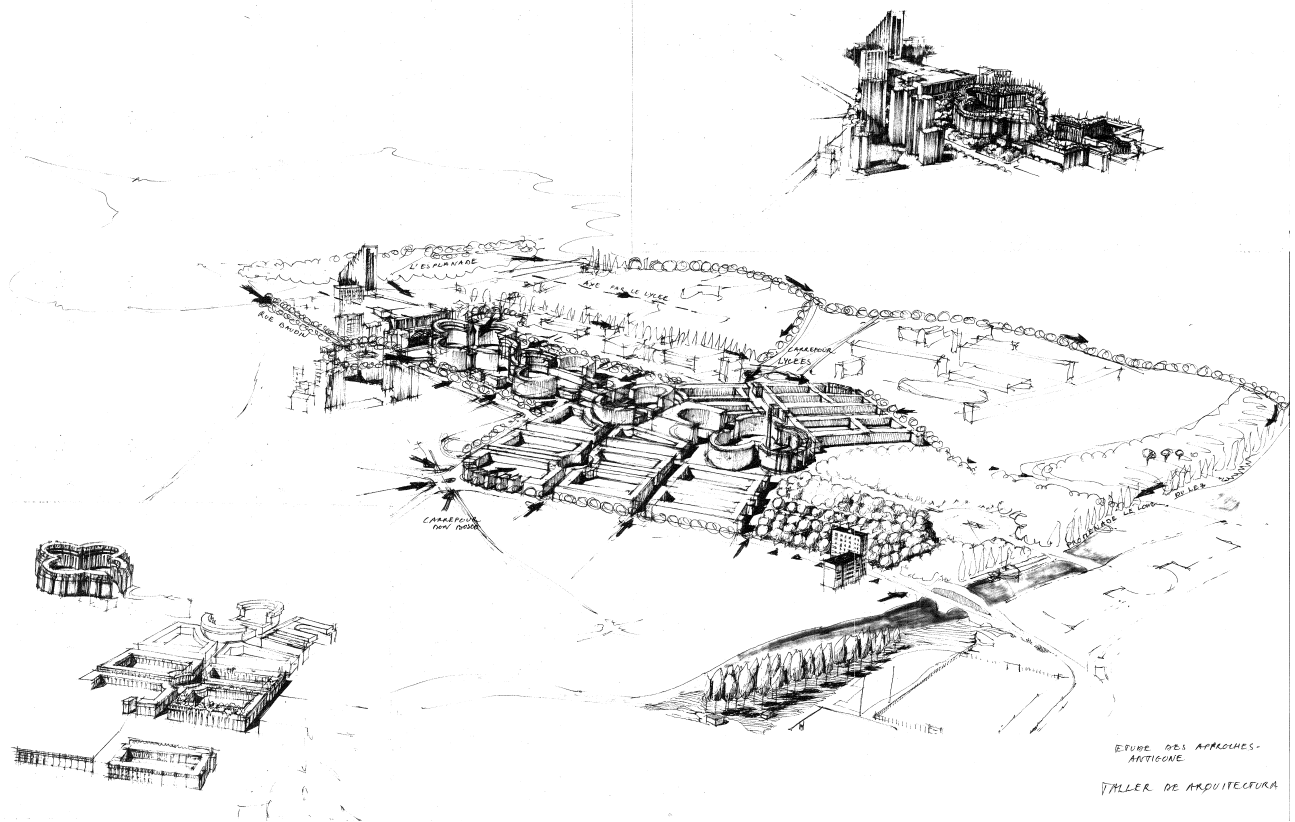
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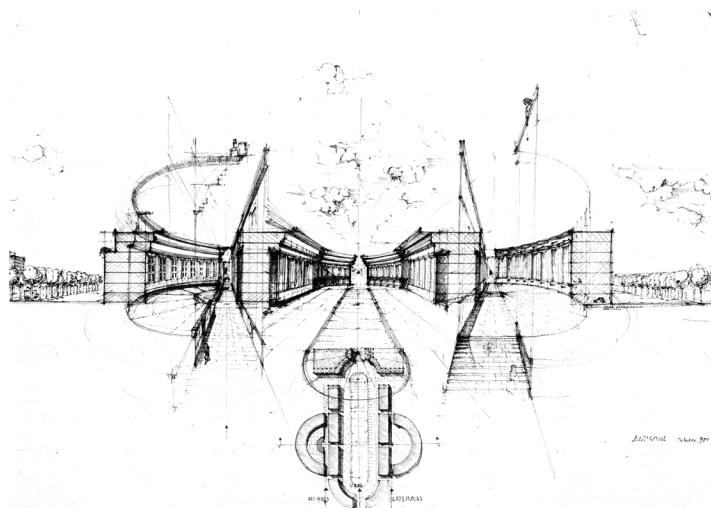
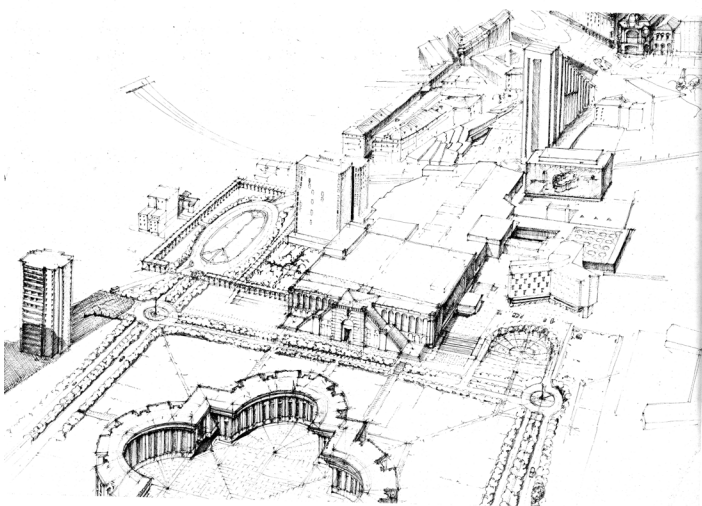
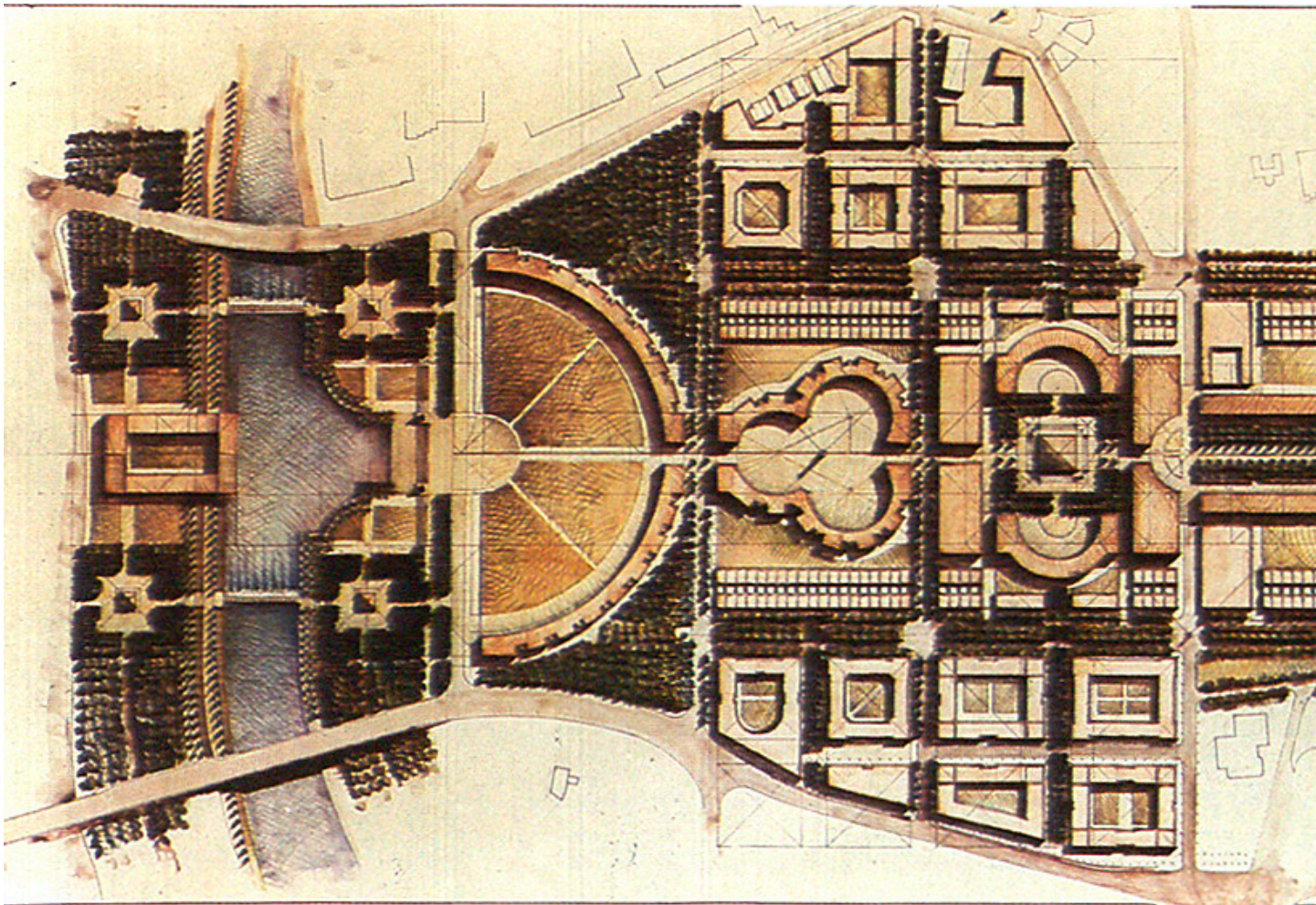
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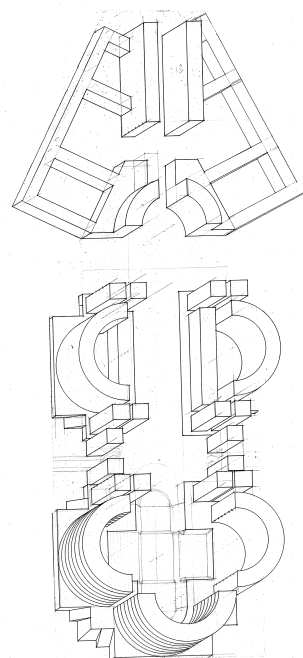
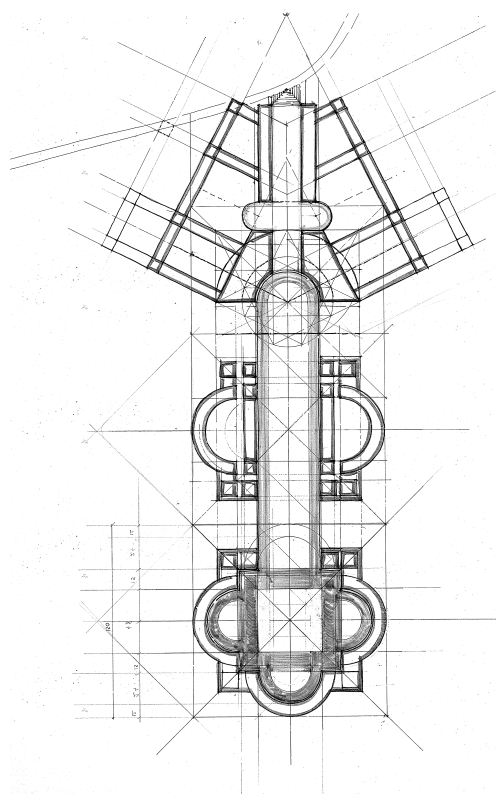
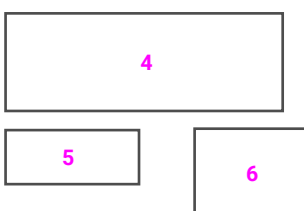
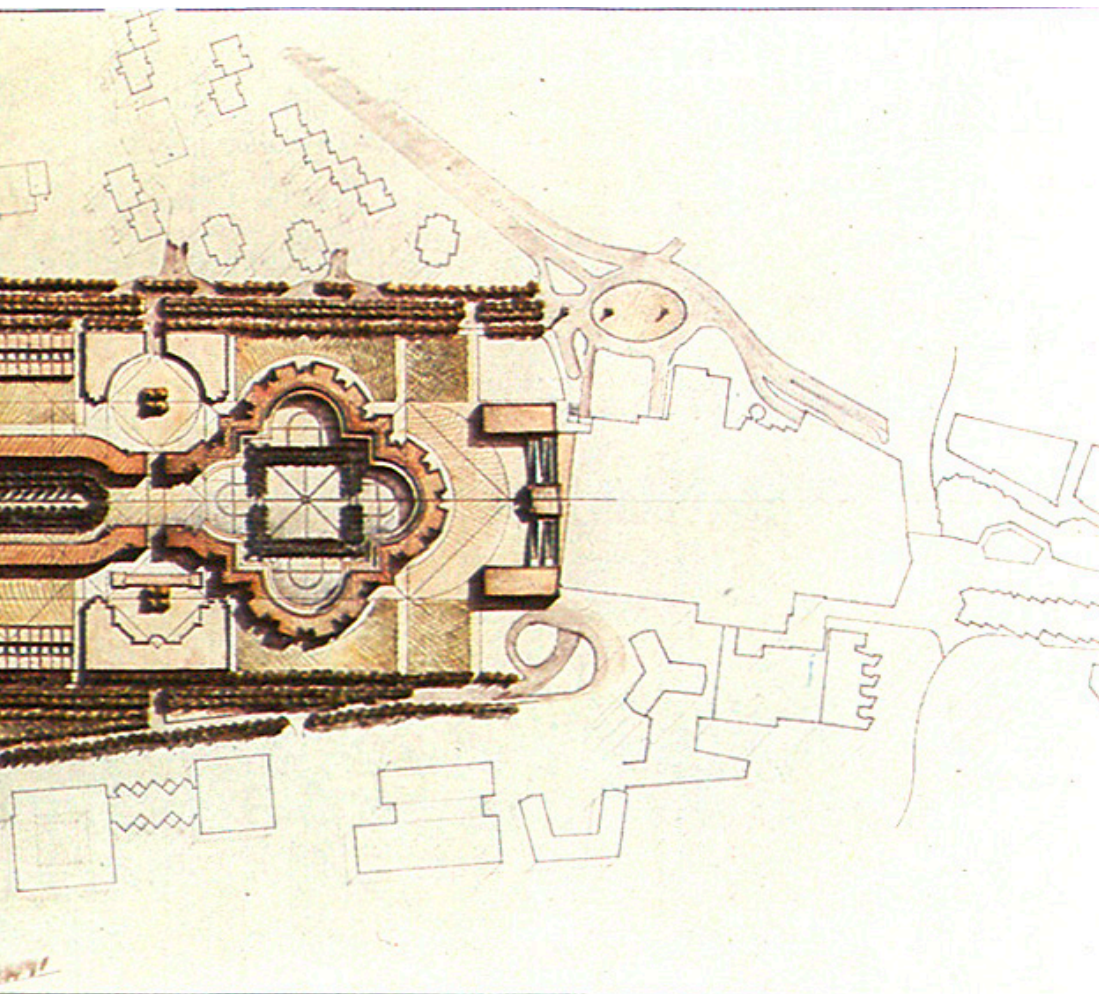


IMG.1: Antigone, situation near Montpellier, aerial birds eye perspective sketch, 1979; IMG.2: Antigone, traffic access study, birds eye perspective sketch; IMG.3: Antigone, site plan and aerial perspective sketches, BTA Archive.



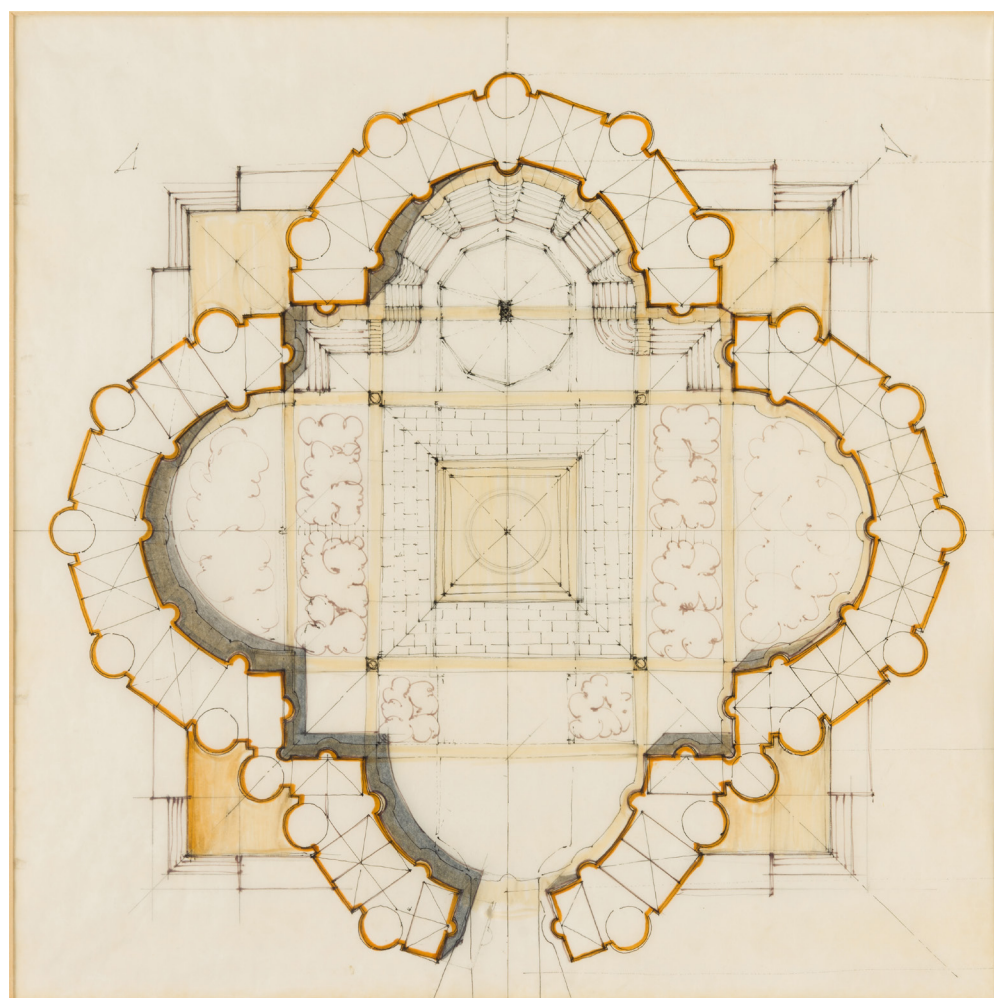
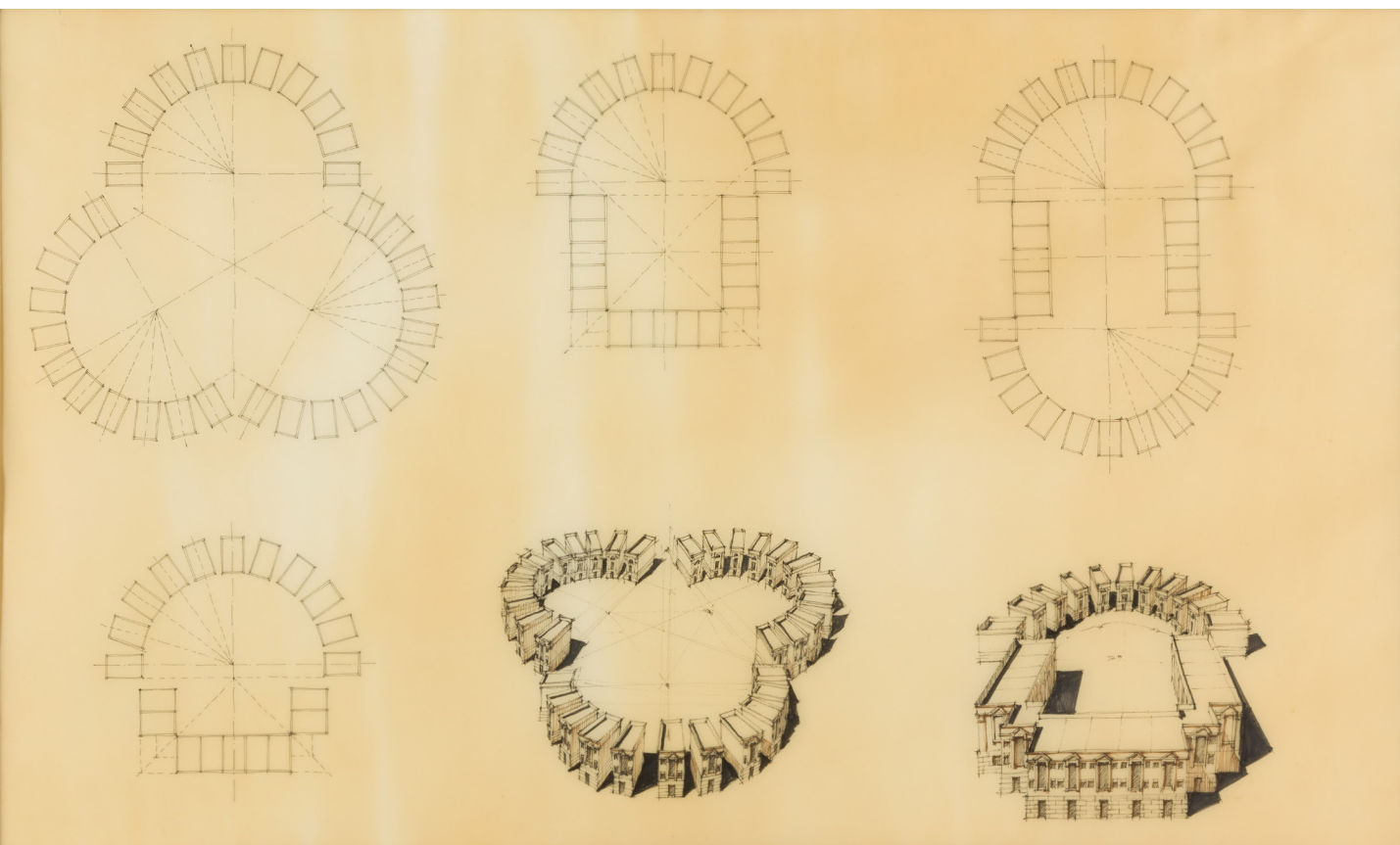


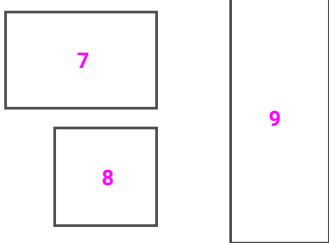




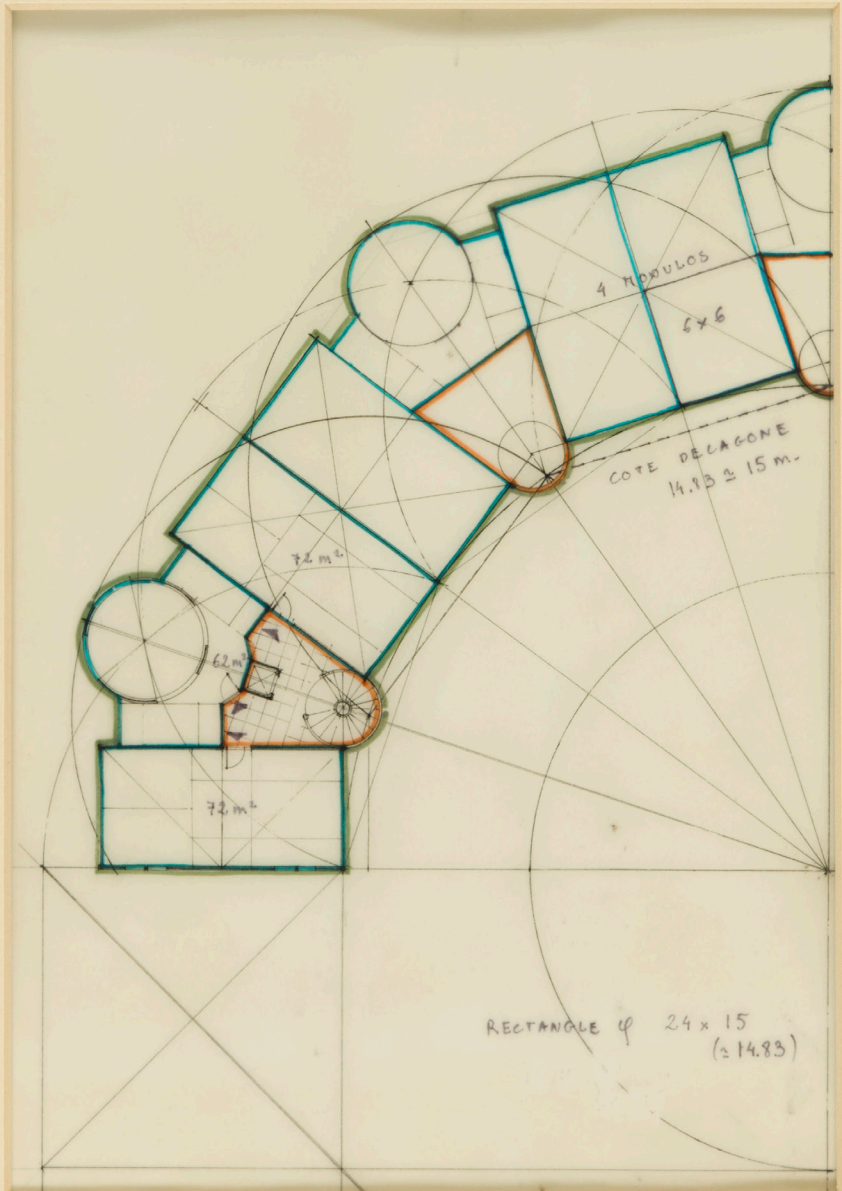
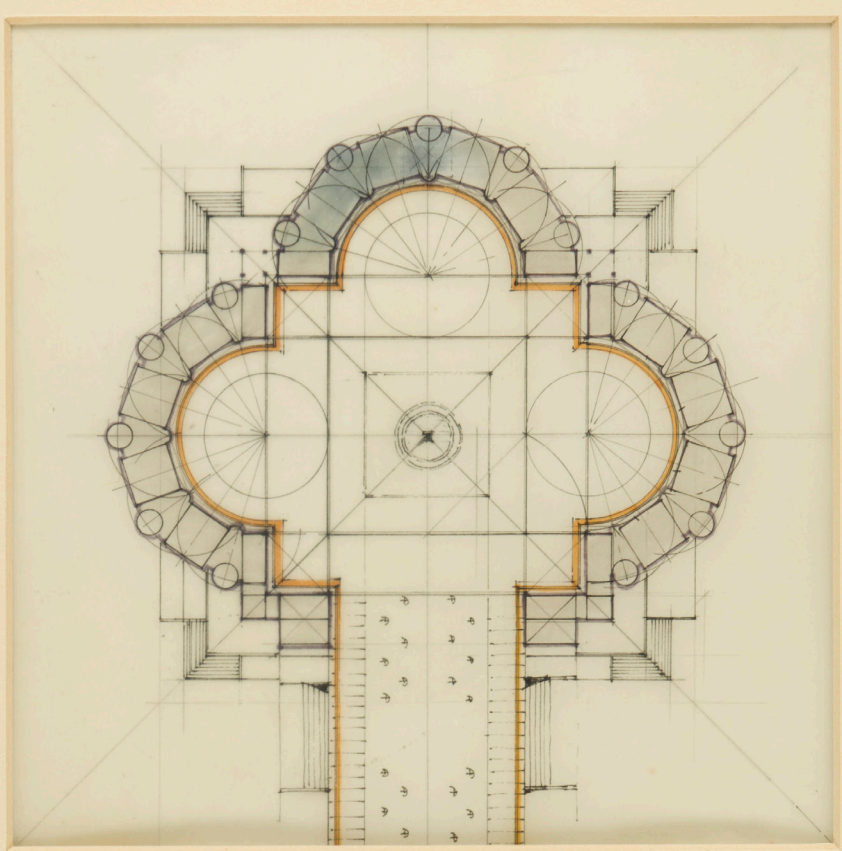
IMG. 4: Antigone, master site plan, coloured pencils on paper, 1979; IMG.5: Antigone, aerial perspective toward Polygone quartier and Place du Nombre d'Or plan and axial perspective sketches, October 1980; IMG.6: Antigone, geometric plan and axonometric studies, BTA Archive.



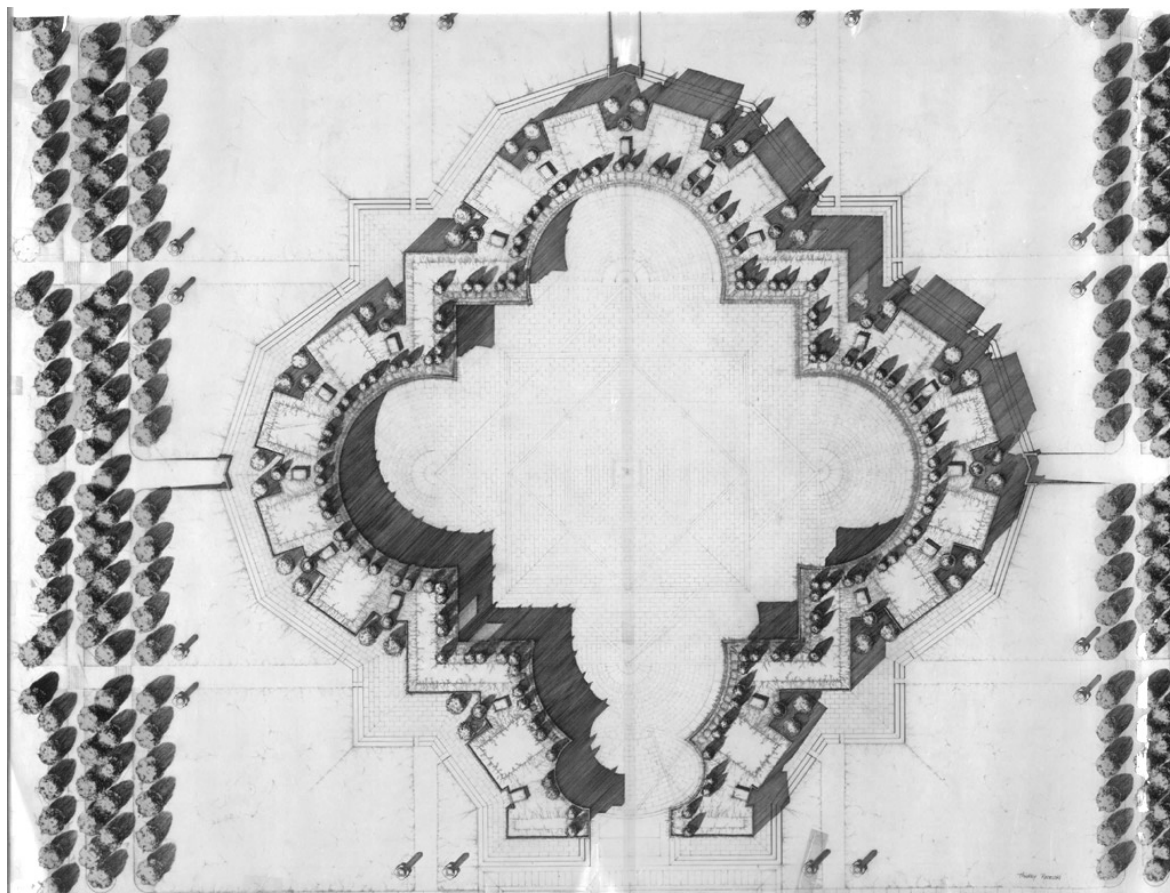
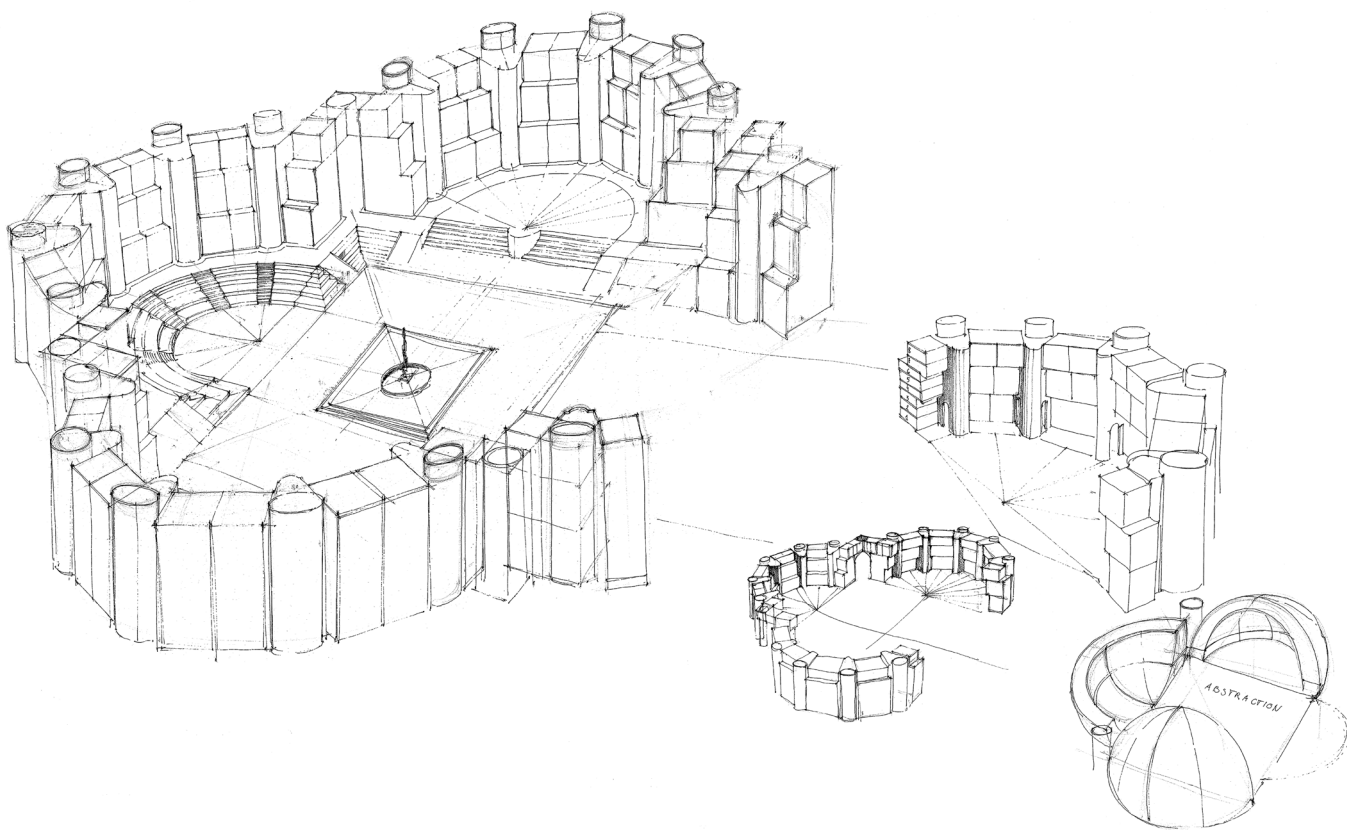




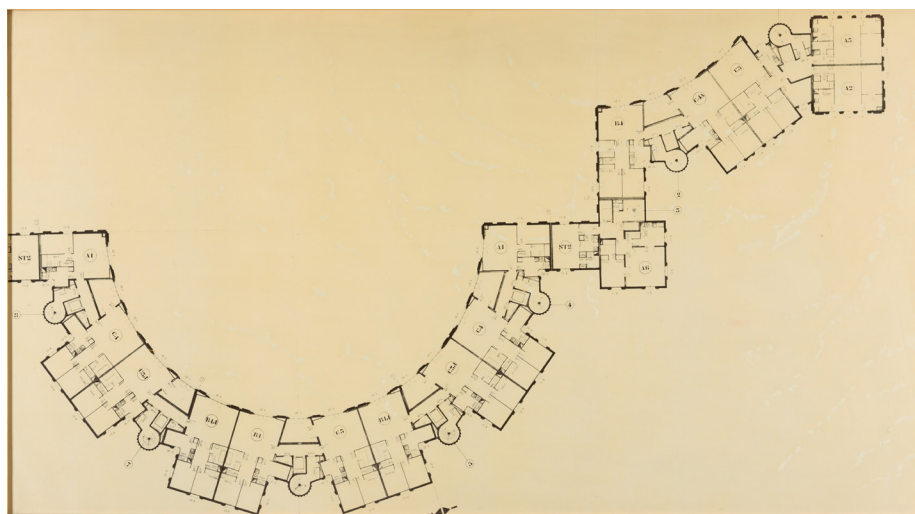
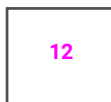
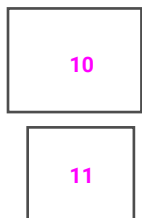
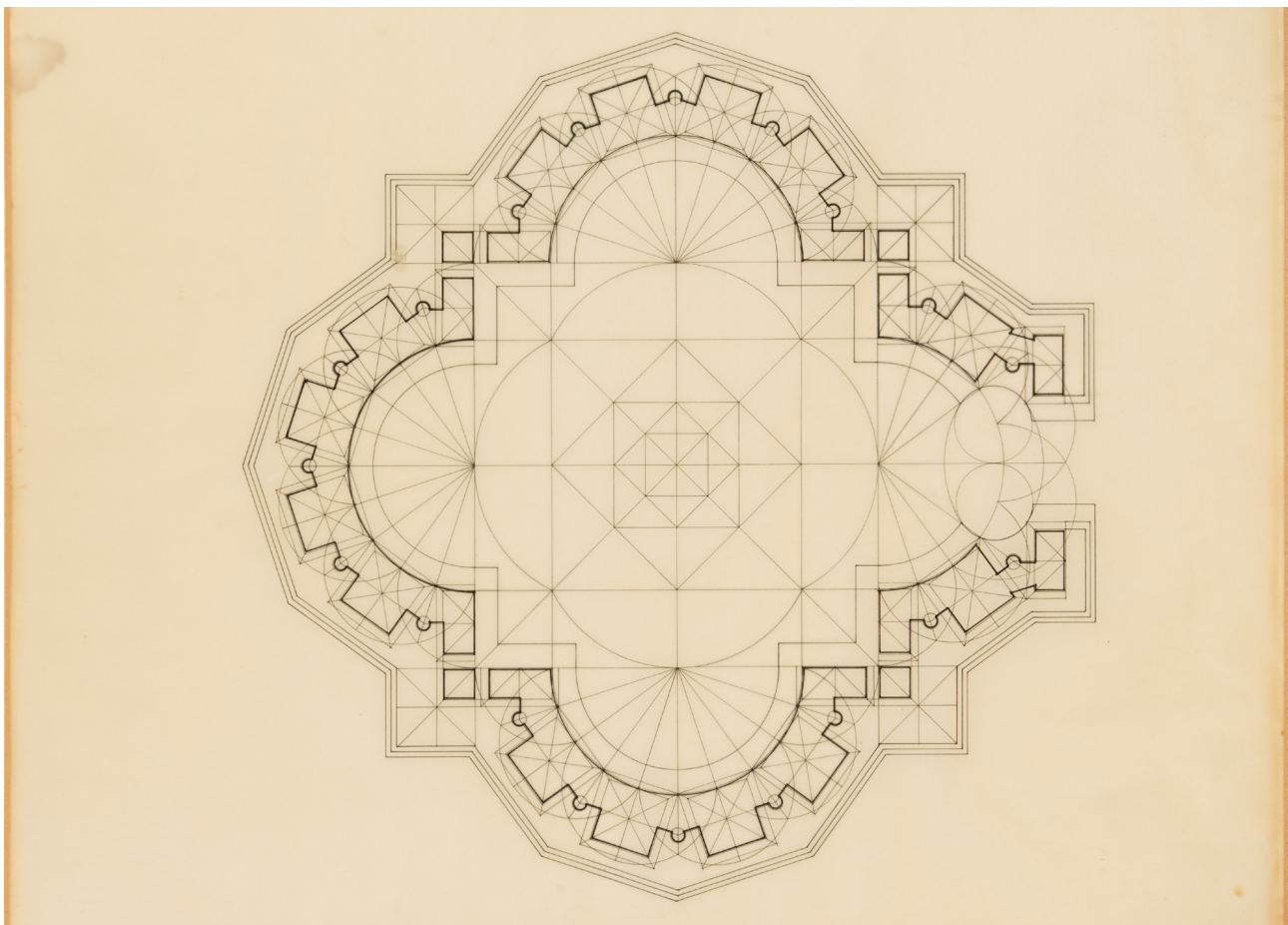
IMG.7: Antigone, Place du Nombre d'Or: geometry plan studies and perspective sketches; IMG.8: Antigone, Place du Nombre d'Or, master plan study, coloured markers and pencils on paper; IMG.9: Antigone, Place du Nombre d'Or: site plan and layout studies, ink and coloured markers on paper, BTA Archive.











IMG.10: Antigone, Place du Nombre d'Or: axonometric studies sketches; IMG.11: Antigone, Place du Nombre d'Or: master site plan; IMG. 12-13: Antigone, Place du Nombre d'Or: general plan and typical floor plan, BTA Archive.







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IMG.14-15: Antigone, Place du Nombre d'Or: façade studies sketches, Oct. 1980; IMG. 16: Antigone, Place du Nombre d'Or: exterior façade elevation, BTA Archive.



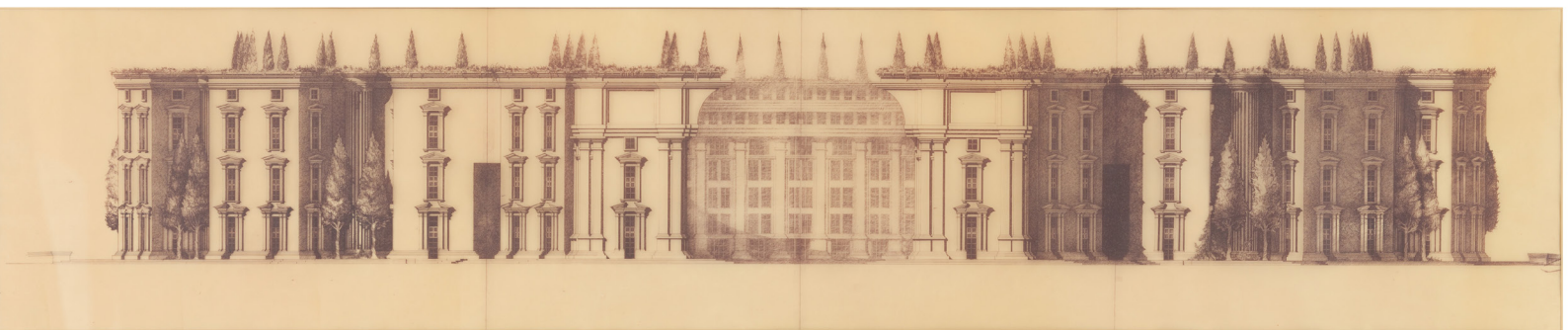


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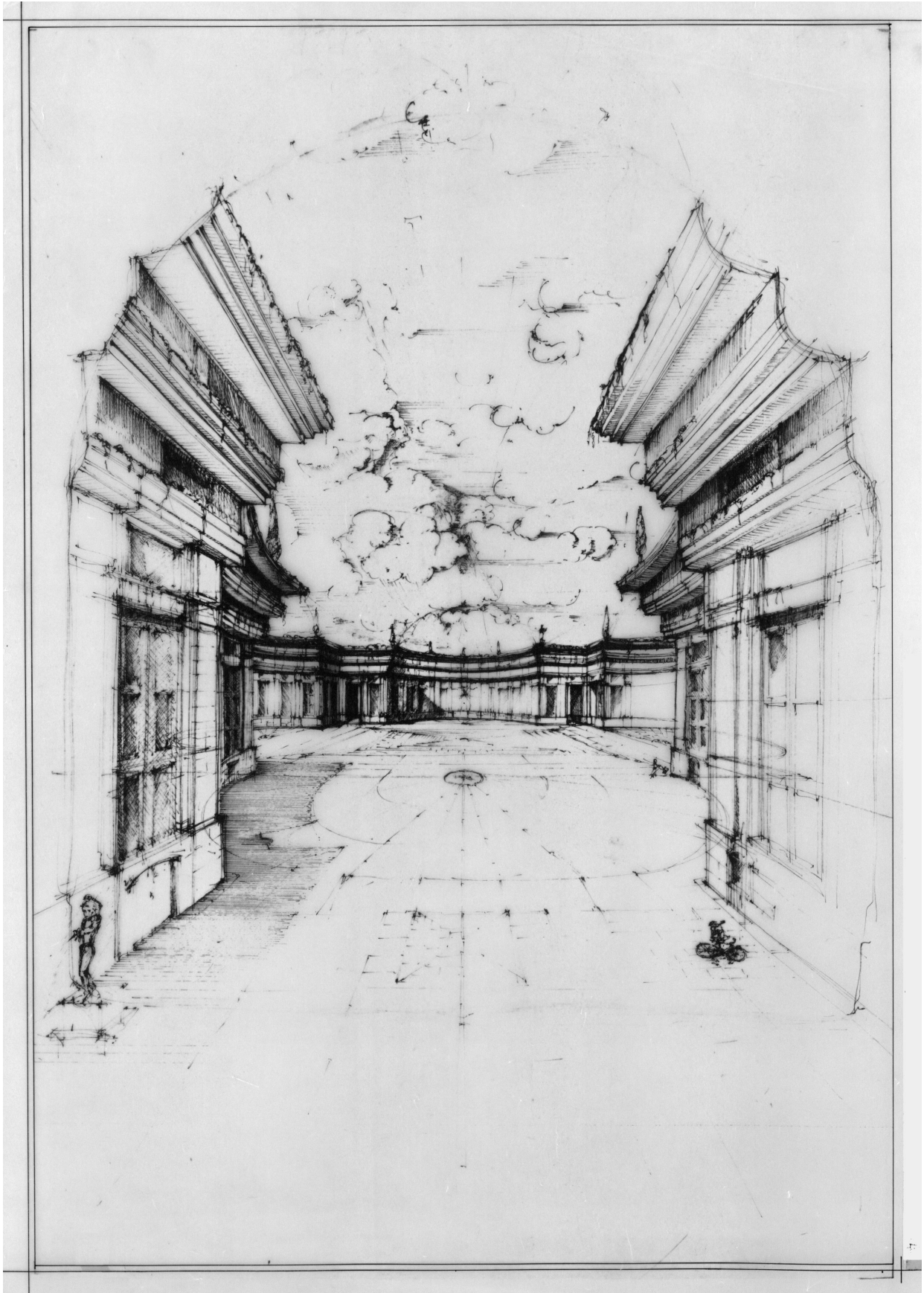
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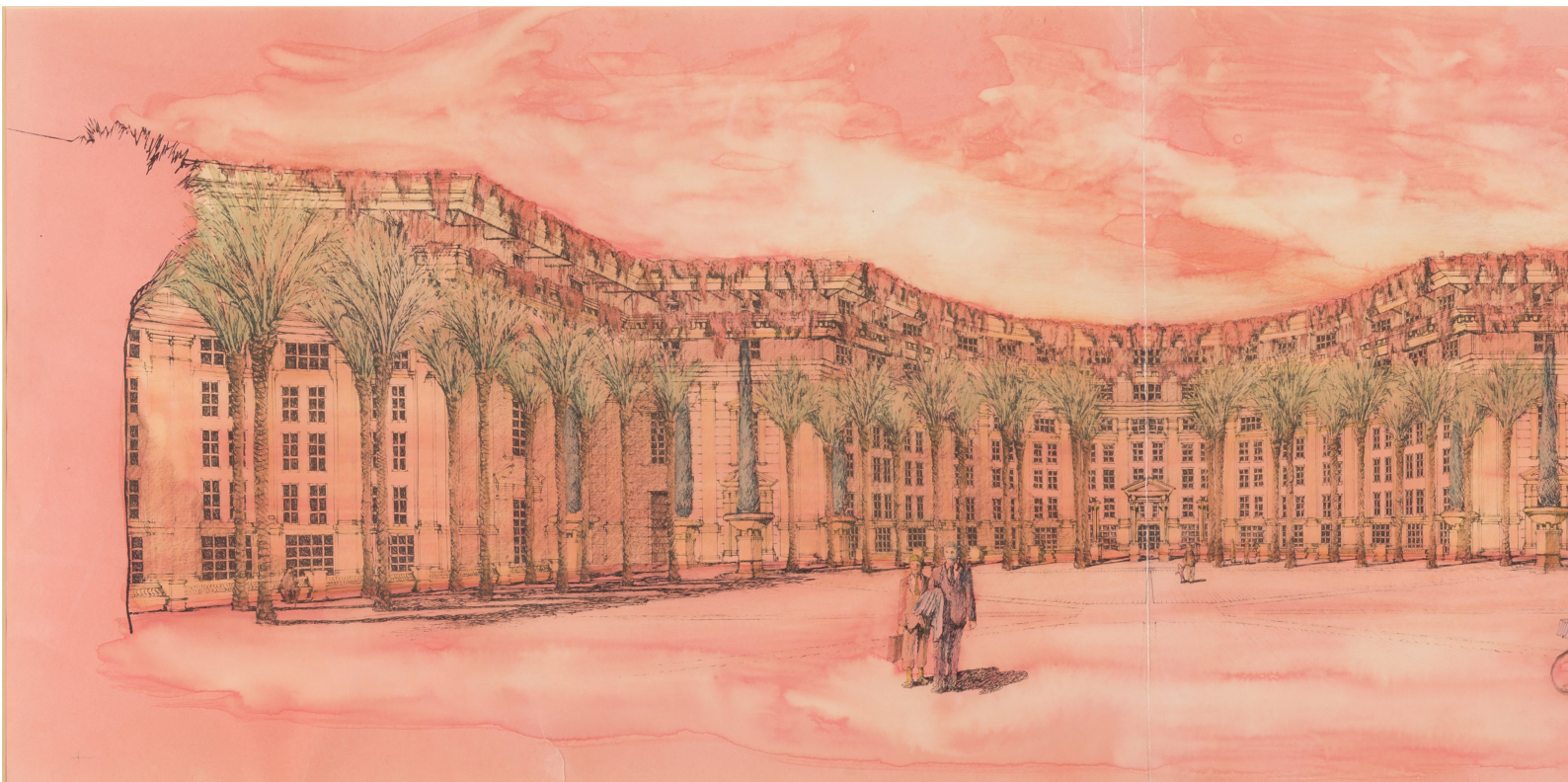
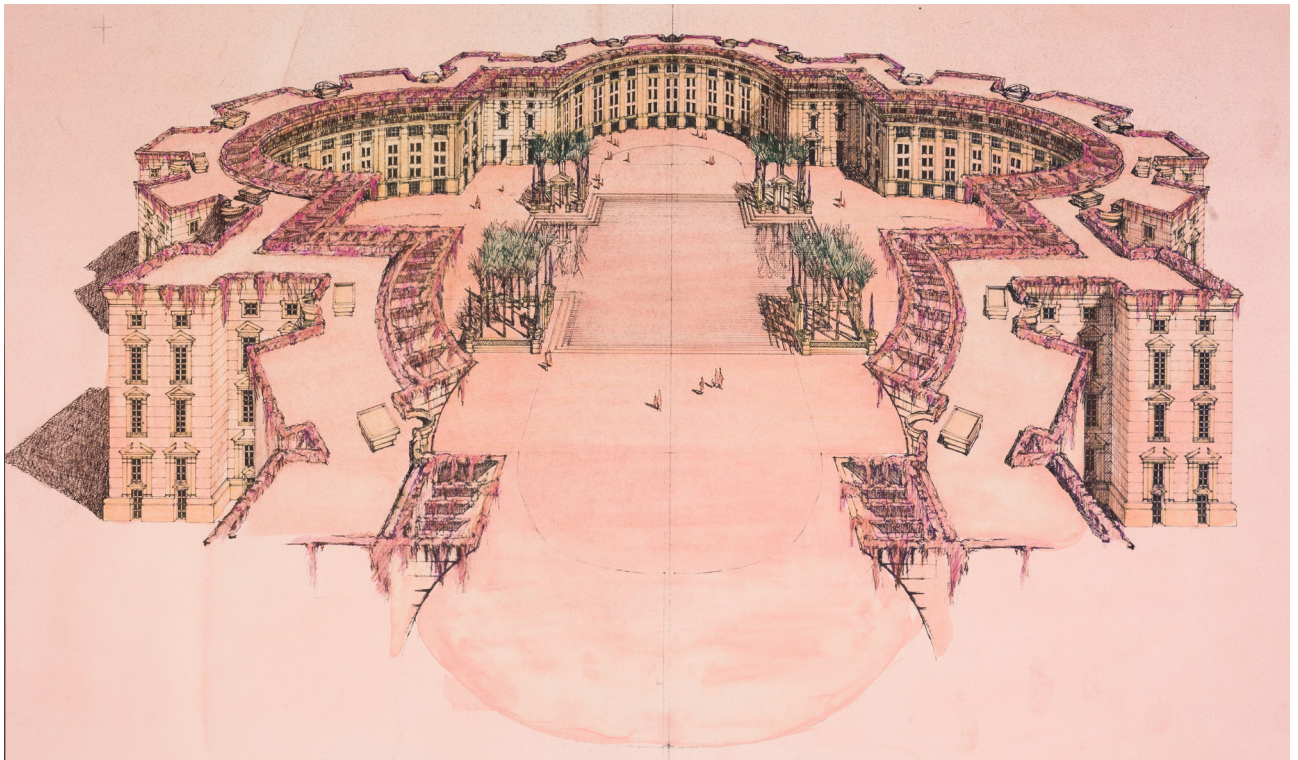
This is a detailed architectural elevation drawing of the front facade of the White House. The drawing is rendered in a sepia or brownish tone on a light background. It shows the full width of the building, including the portico with its columns and the central entrance. The drawing is oriented horizontally, with the building's facade facing left. The architecture features a prominent portico with columns, a central entrance with a pediment, and a series of windows and doors along the facade. The drawing is a technical representation of the building's exterior.













## Selected extracts from the RBTA project description

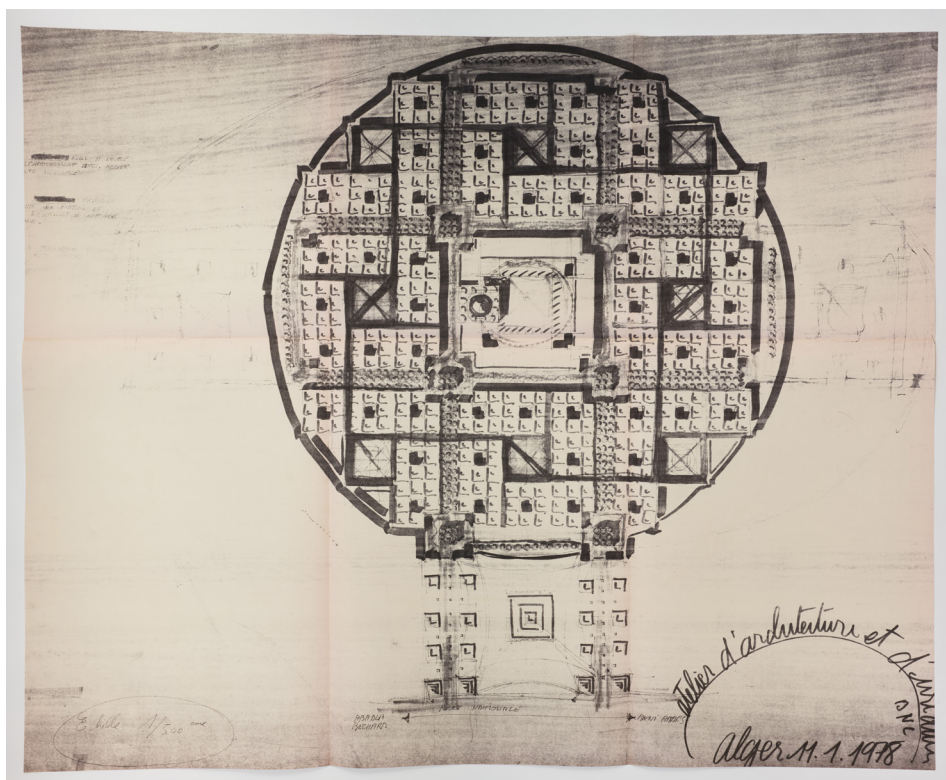
Antigone became the new urban centre of Montpellier, between the Polygone and the Lez, the site of a former military installation, factories, Villodève Park, properties of the Don Bosco Cultural Centre and the Lycée d'Enseignement Technique Marguerite Audoux. Spreading over 36 ha, Antigone district is one of the single largest developments completed by RBTA in France. It dates back to 1979, when Montpellier's newly elected municipal council adopted an urban development scheme and decided to create a new district near the city centre. The purpose of this plan was to develop a new district along a central axis that would provide for the city's balanced eastwards expansion and link the historical centre to the river Lez. Antigone's composition is based on the principles of the golden ratio, a design system applied to both the layout of streets and squares and to the façades and construction details. RBTA designed the master plan and most of the buildings in Antigone, from the design of the plazas to the details of the facades, its urban furniture and landscape features. The constructed elements of Antigone's quarters are arranged on a square grid of 48m on each side. Based on this grid, the volumes are organised so they define square plazas and the spaces deriving from them. The geometry of the master plan creates a succession of spaces along the central axis, as well as the district's urban fabric, which is developed along each side. It's less centralised, quite residential, quiet, calm, and built on four levels—the same scale as a small Mediterranean town. Thus, Antigone is characterised by four basic morphological elements: the axis between the office area and the Nouveau Monde, a continuation of the Polygone, the grid-format residential area, and Villodève Park. The program includes: La Place du Nombre d'Or (288 apartments and shops), Les Echelles de la Ville (retail and office spaces), Les Rives du Lez (landscaped design of the Lez riverbed), the headquarters of the Languedoc-Roussillon regional government, Le Port Juvénal (350 apartments), the Hotel Mercure (a four-star hotel), Le Parnasse (100 apartments), Le Capitole (apartments and shops), La Tour Europe (offices), Les Guinguettes (two restaurants), and Montpellier's Olympic swimming pool. Half the housing is subsidised and half is on the private market, but both share the same typology: a row of doubly oriented residences of varying depths (between 9m and 12m) and heights (between four and seven storeys).

20

21

IMG.20-21: Antigone, Place du Nombre d'Or: aerial perspectives, ink, watercolour and coloured pencils sketch, BTA Archive.





# Houari Boumediène Agricultural Village

## ARCHIVAL DATA

DATE 1978 (design) 1980 (realization)

PLACE/ADDRESS Abadla, Algeria

COLLABORATORS A.A.U. Atelier d'Architecture et Urbanisme

CUSTOMER Government of Algeria.

SOURCES RBTA Archive

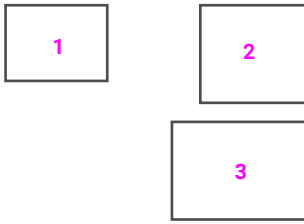
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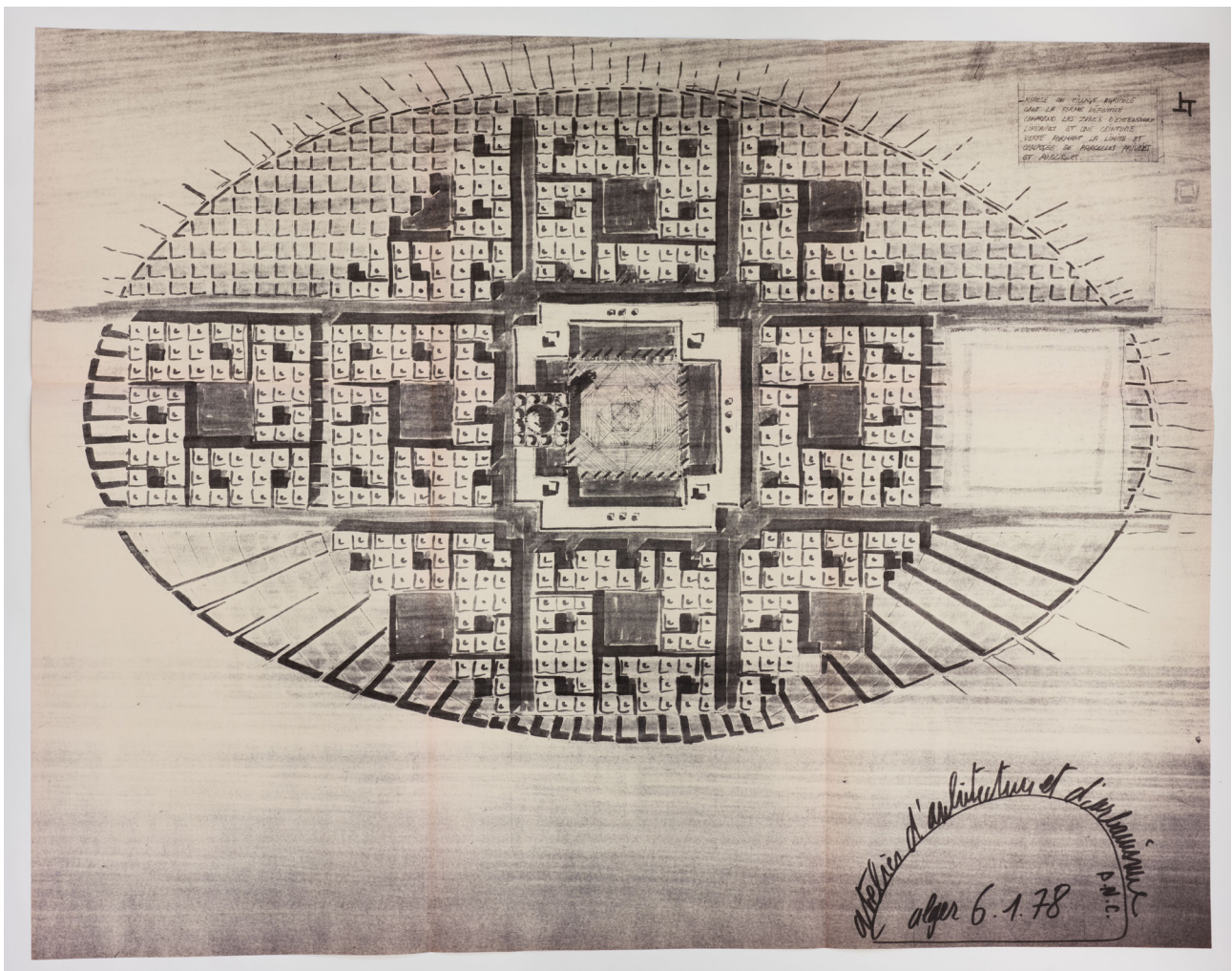
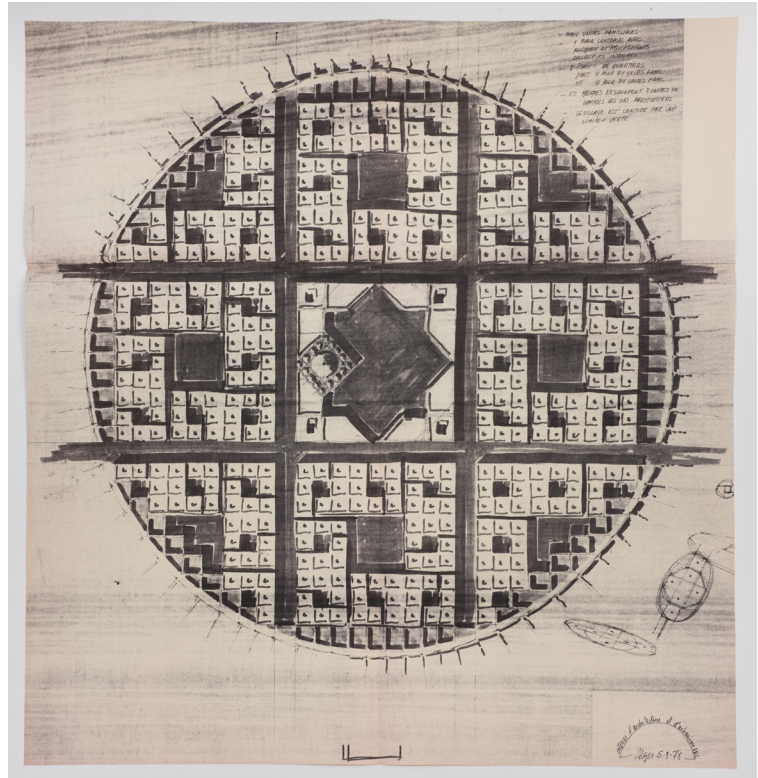


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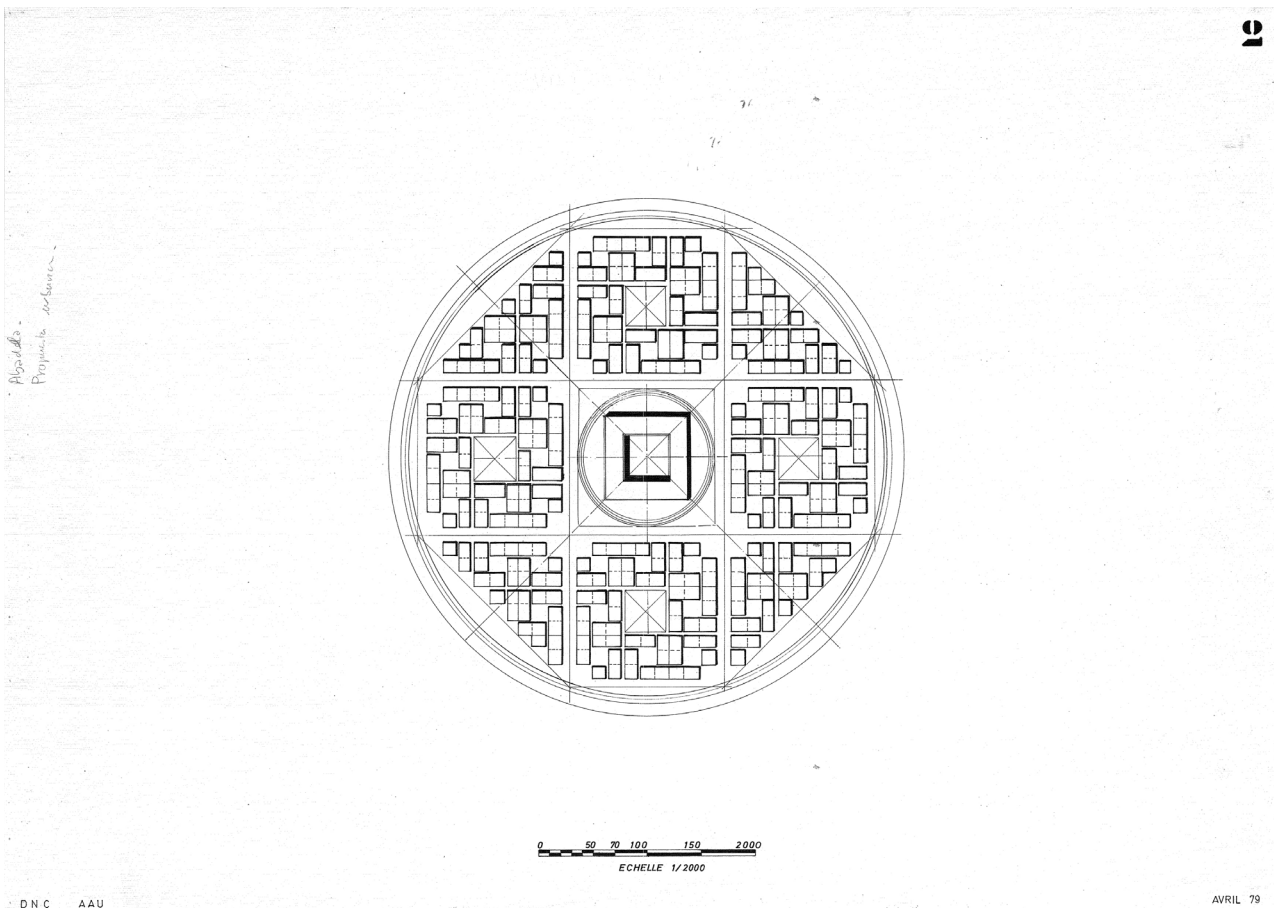
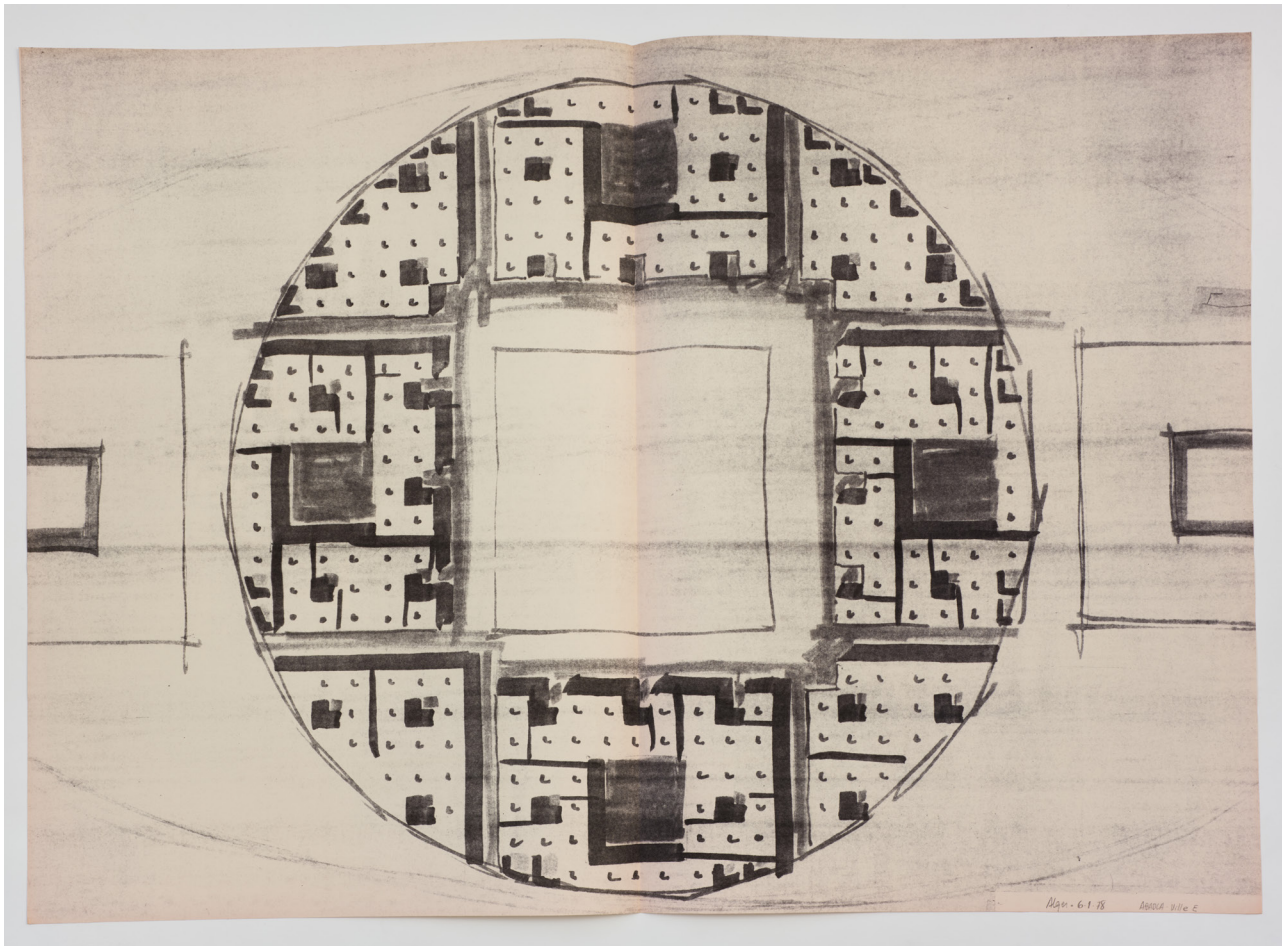


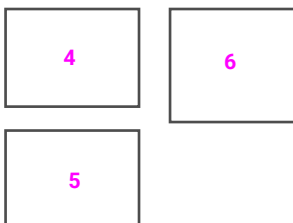
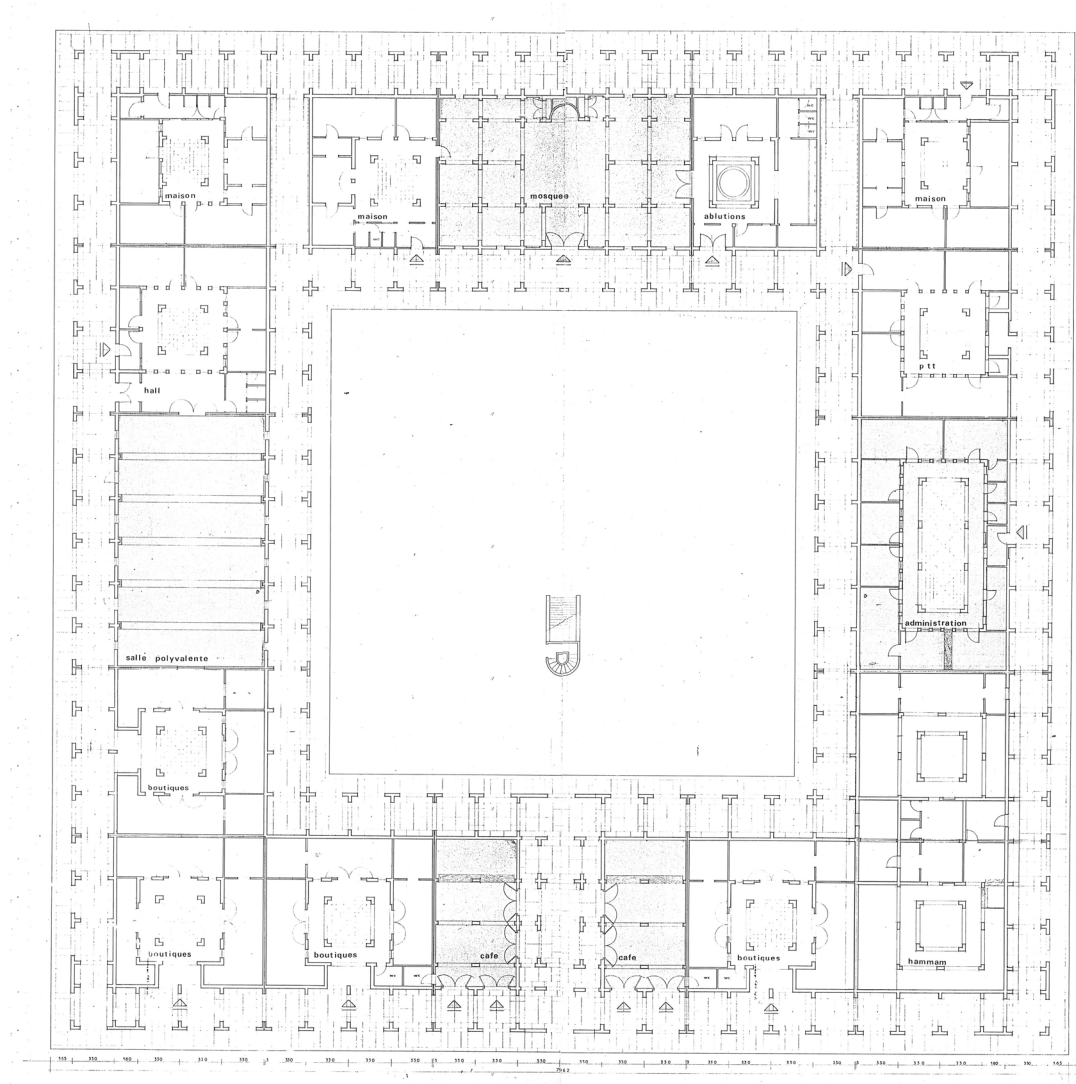


IMG.1-2-3-4: Houari Boumedienne agricultural village, master plan studies, sketches from the book *Algeria, Atelier d'Architecture et d'Urbanisme*, 1978, BTA Archive.



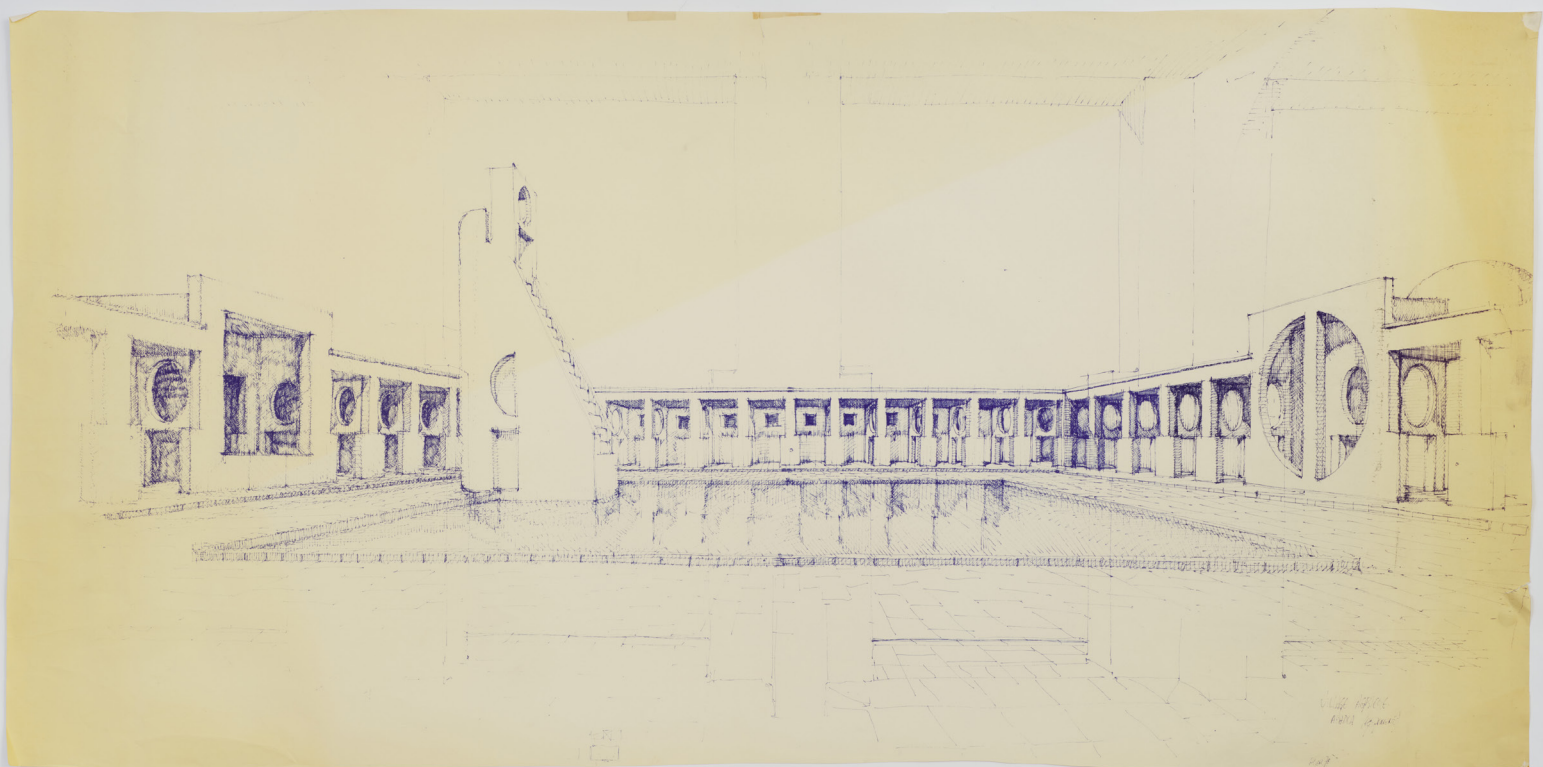
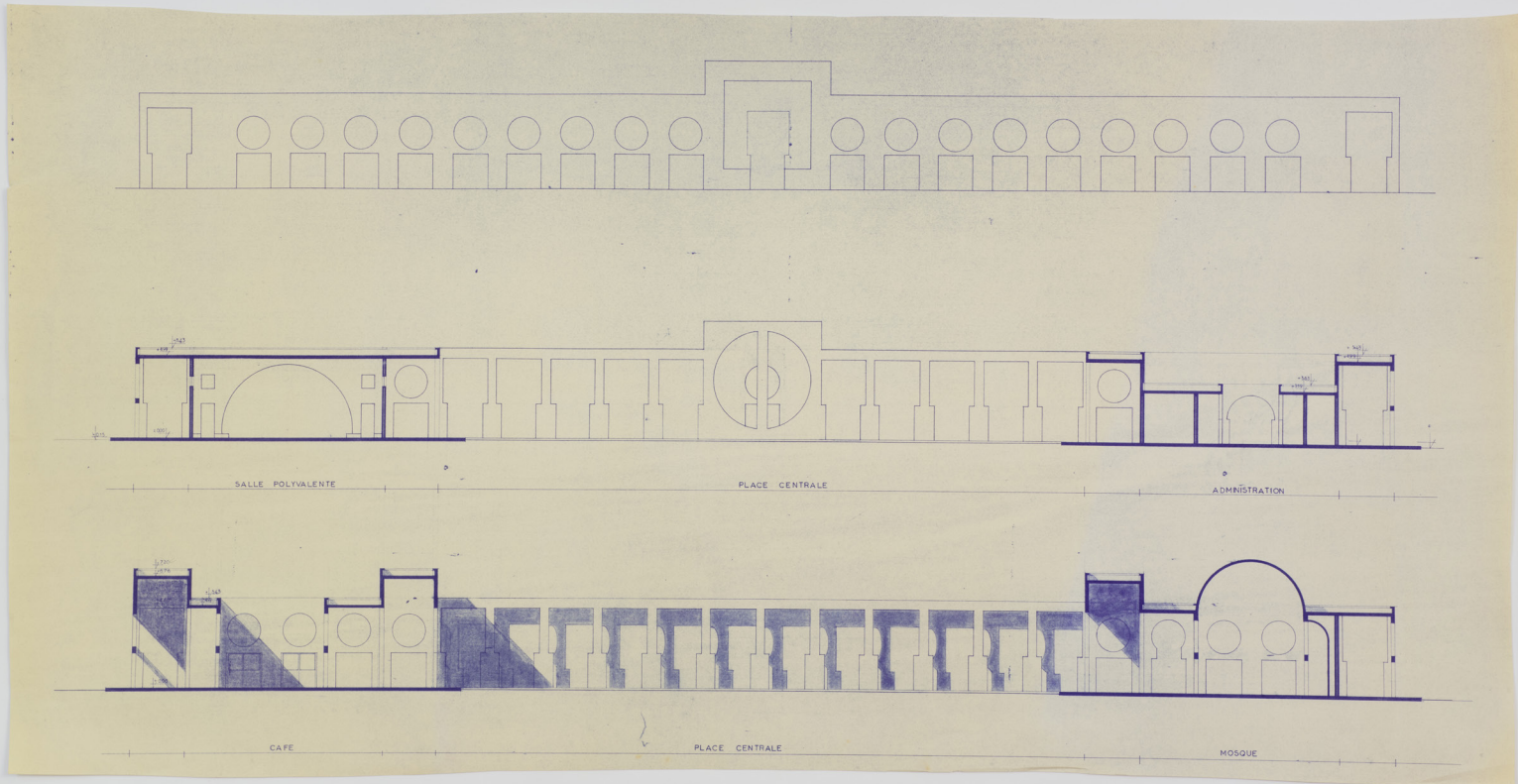




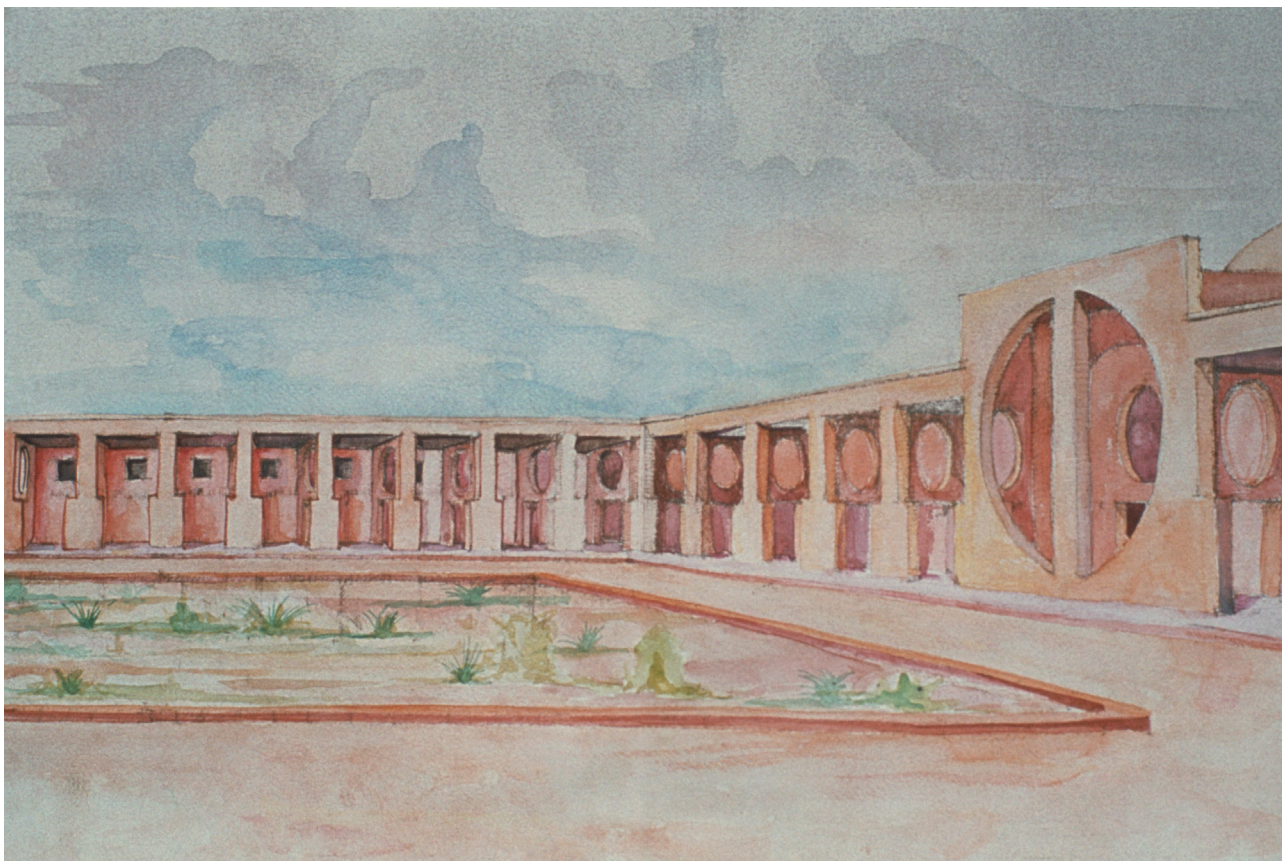


IMG.5: Houari Boumedienne agricultural village, final master plan, Ap. 1979; IMG.6: Houari Boumedienne agricultural village, town square, ground floor plan, BTA Archive.





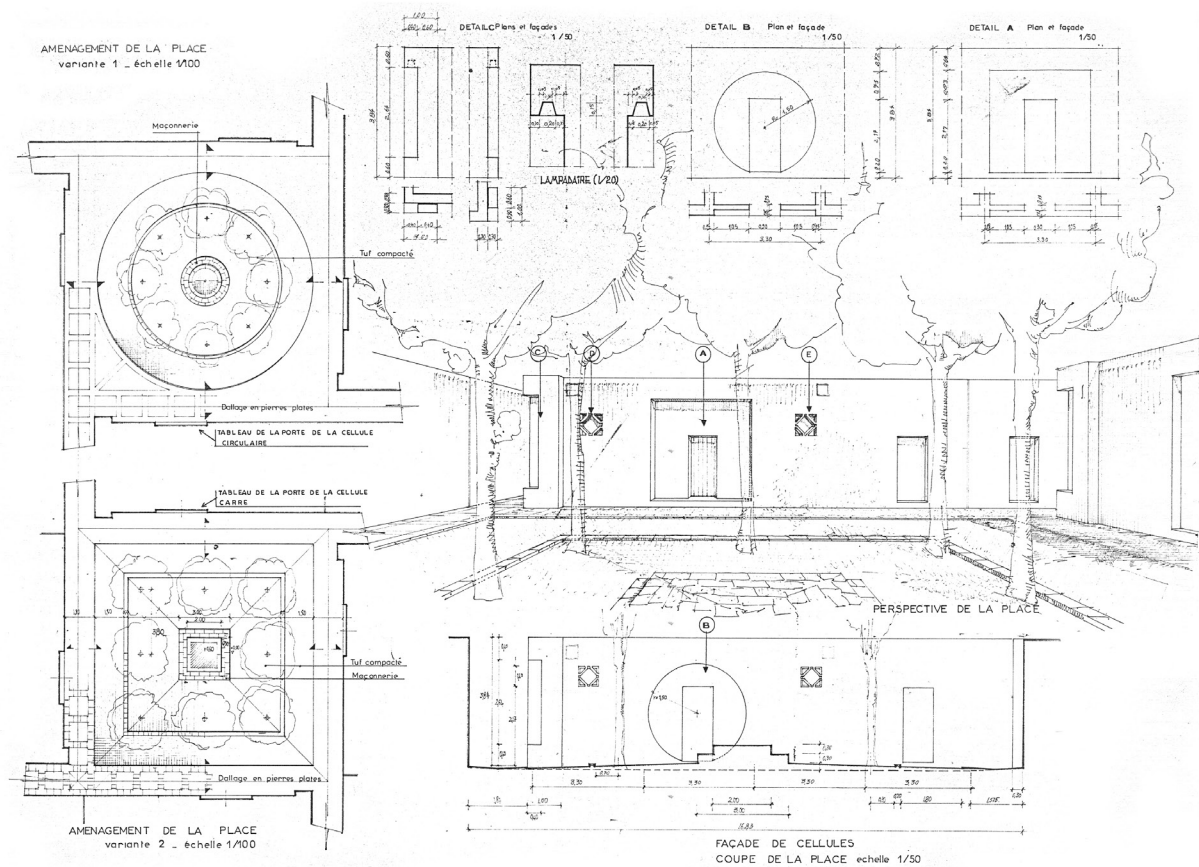
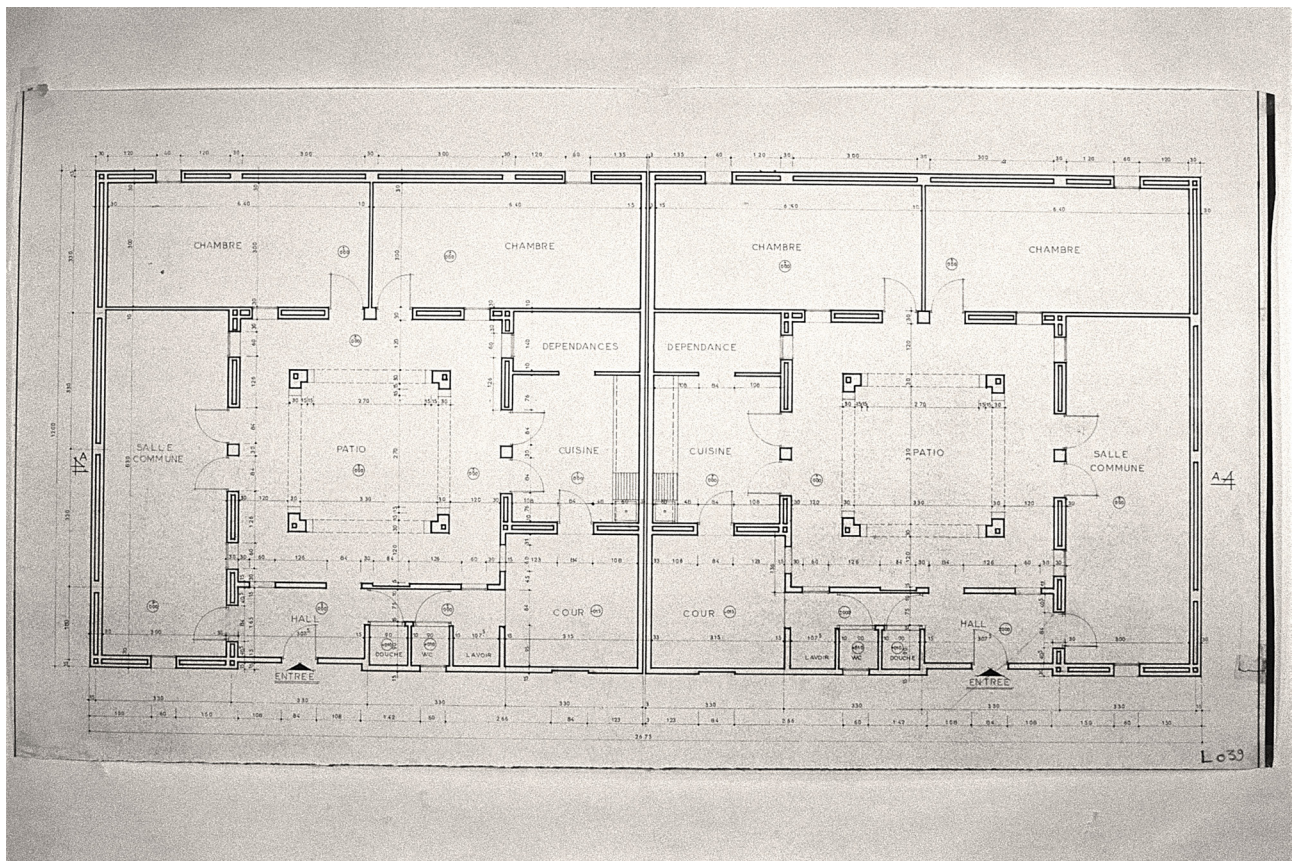




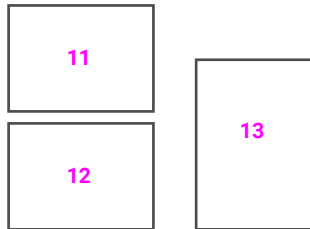
IMG.7: Houari Boumedienne agricultural village, town square, section and façade elevations; IMG.8: Houari Boumedienne agricultural village, town square perspective sketch; IMG. 9: Houari Boumedienne agricultural village, town square perspective view, coloured pencil on paper; IMG. 10: Houari Boumedienne agricultural village, town square aerial perspective with the monument (unrealized), coloured pencil on paper, BTA Archive.



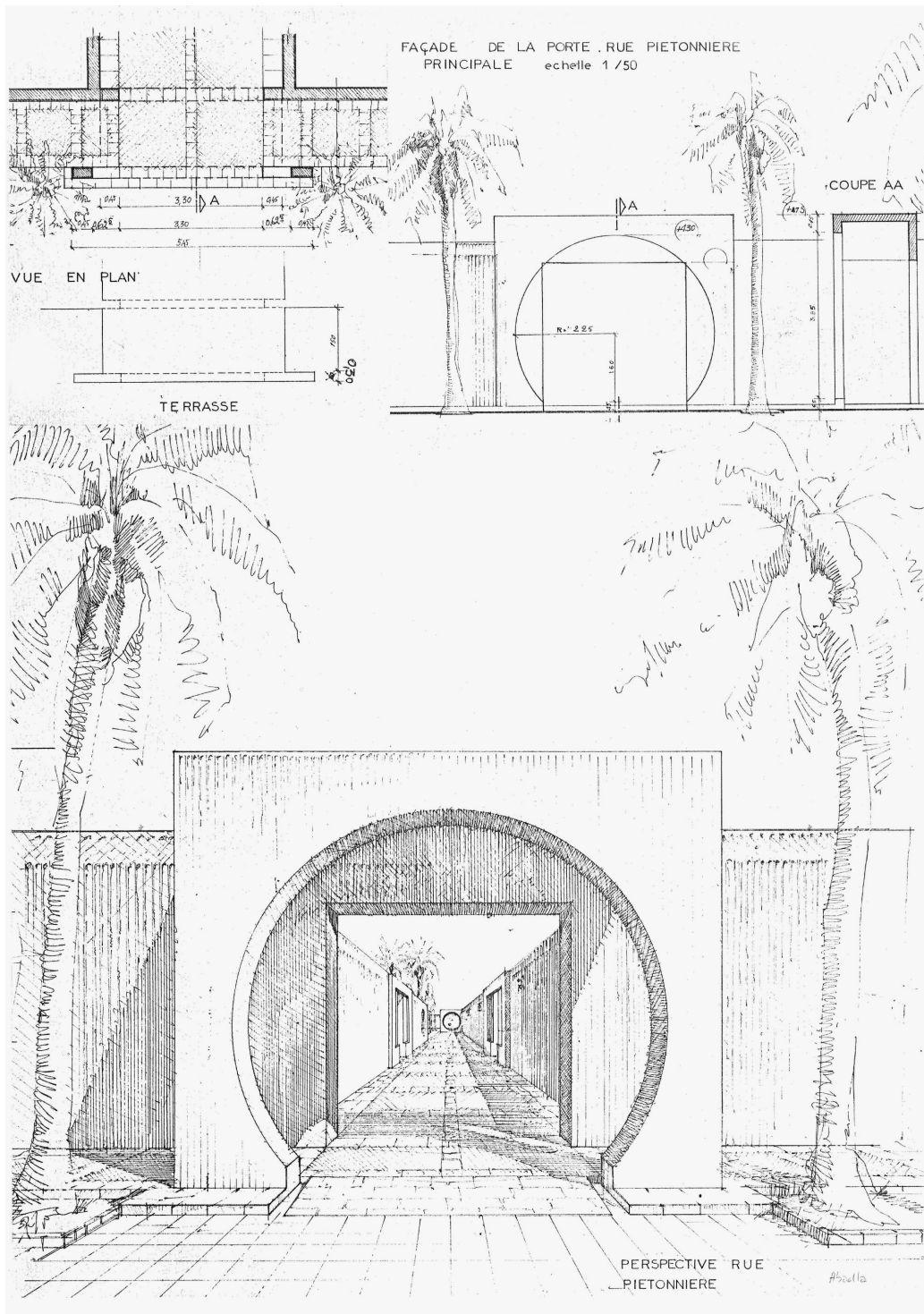




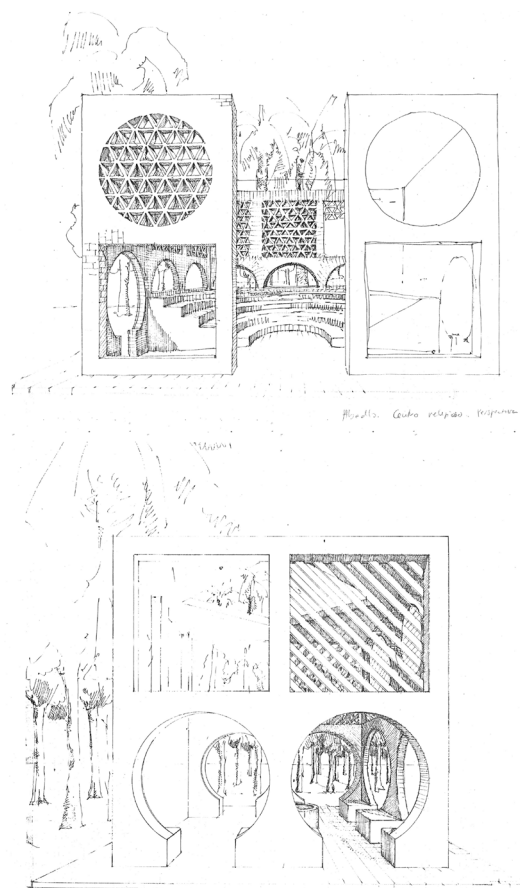
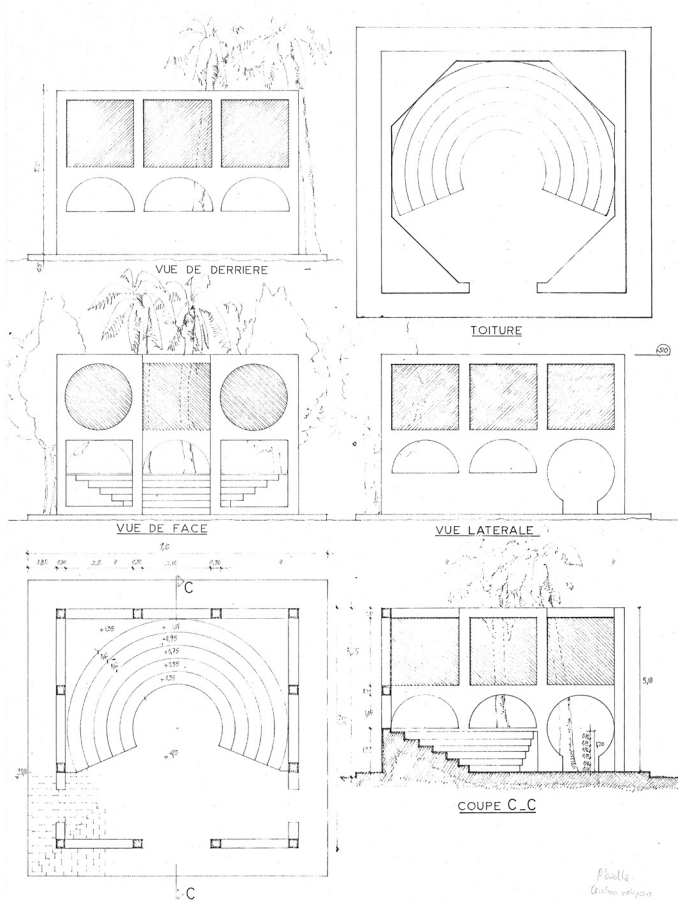




IMG.11: Houari Boumedi-  
enne agricultural village,  
residential units floor plan  
(paired single family houses);  
IMG. 12: Houari Boumedienne  
agricultural village, residential  
nuclei square, plan, section and  
perspective sketches; IMG. 13:  
Hourari Boumedienne agricul-  
tural village, pedestrian street,  
plan, elevation and perspec-  
tive sketches, BTA Archive.

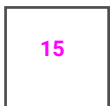
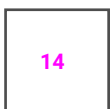




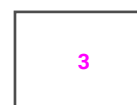
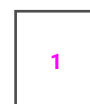
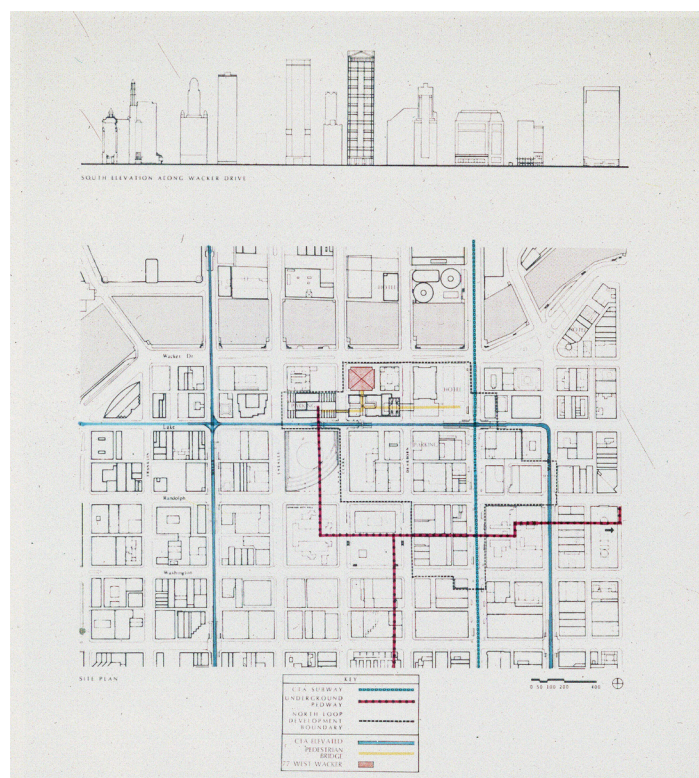


## Selected extracts from the RBTA project description

More than 10 years after Algeria gained independence, President Houari Boumediene launched a project to construct 1000 agricultural socialist villages. The construction of these villages was to improve the precarious living conditions of the fellahs who were still living on the margins of society, disseminated over a vast rural territory and evolving on the edge of national activity. The intention was to foster the emergence of villages throughout the countryside to house and allow those who made a living from the land to produce and remain together. This implied a new, lasting way of life for such populations—and thus, more than just housing, the importation of spaces and activities necessary for agricultural operations, from education to individual healthcare, and community life. While the proposed dwellings were no longer temporary or demountable, the Taller de Arquitectura remained faithful to nomadic tradition and worked to create an architecture intimately linked to the region's vernacular traditions, using its materials and reproducing the unique organisation of living spaces anchored in Algerian culture. In this context, the Taller de Arquitectura constructed an agricultural village in the southeast of the country. The composition of an urban nucleus based on the combination of single-family dwellings offered infinite possibilities, which had to be limited and serialised in order to keep the cost of the operation as low as possible. The geometric forms chosen, drawn from Arabic and Mediterranean traditions, made for a first grouping of two or three dwellings laid out around a courtyard to compose a block. A grouping of several blocks composed a neighbourhood, and several neighbourhoods a town, with the proportion of built space to open public space kept constant. A large central square, as is found in all Arab towns, serves as the marketplace and meeting place, a setting for festivities and spectacles, and is the vital axis articulating the town.



IMG.14-15: Houari Boumedienne agricultural village, religious centre project, plan, section and perspective sketches, BTA Archive.



IMG.1: 77 West Wacker Drive, Site plan and South elevation of the building along Wacker Drive; IMG.2: Plaza Lobby plan; IMG.3: Typical low-rise layout, BTA Archive.

# 77 West Wacker Drive

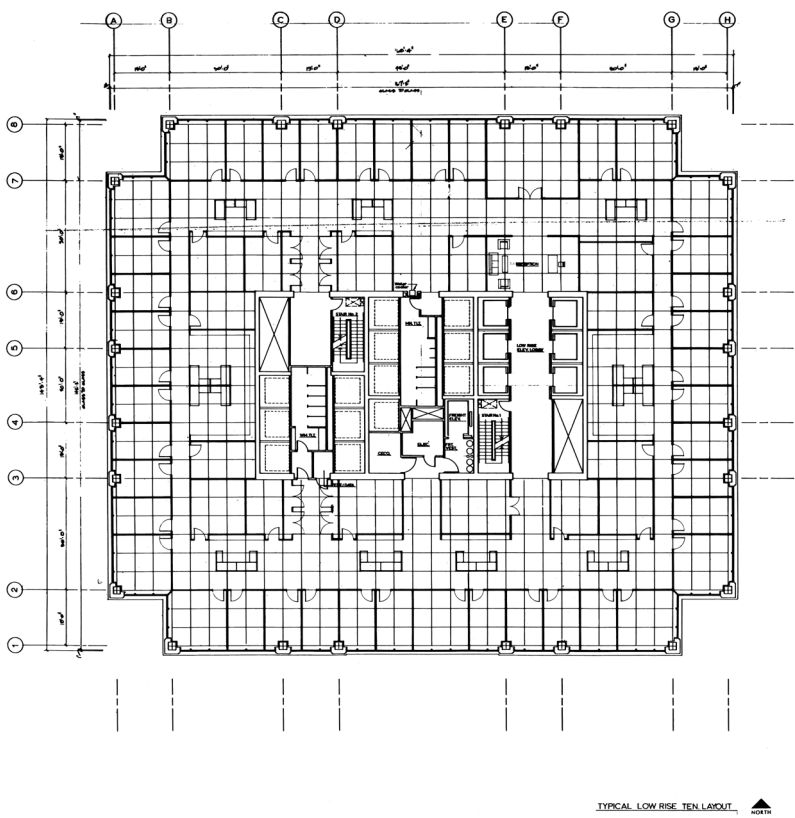
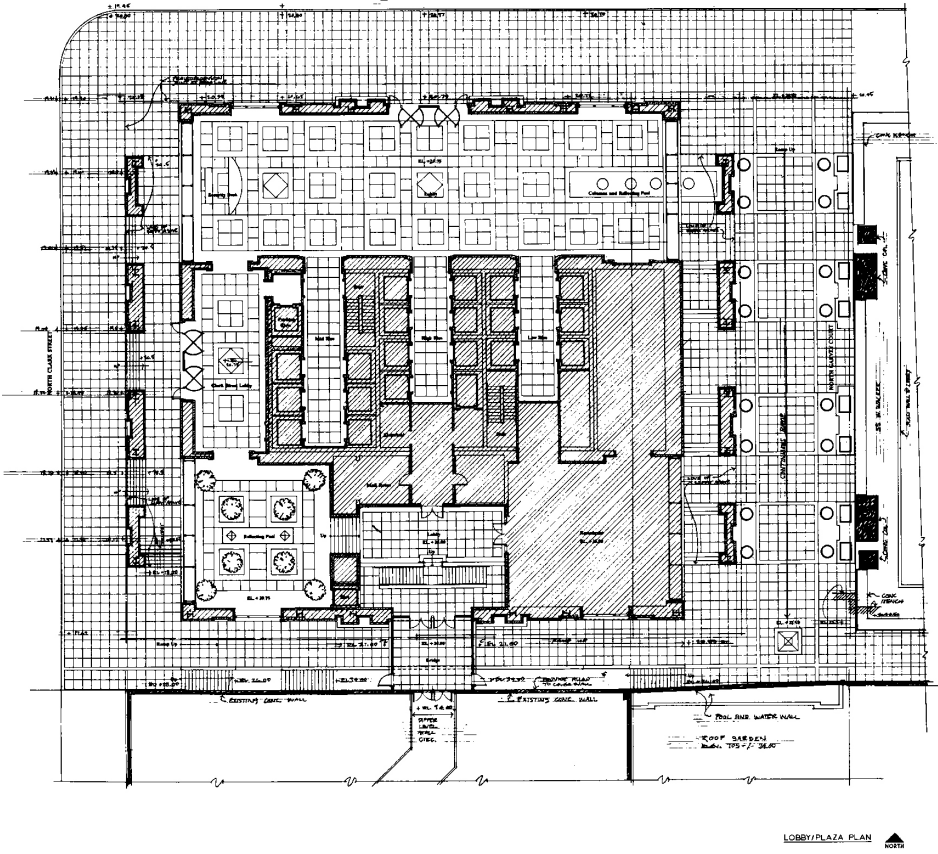
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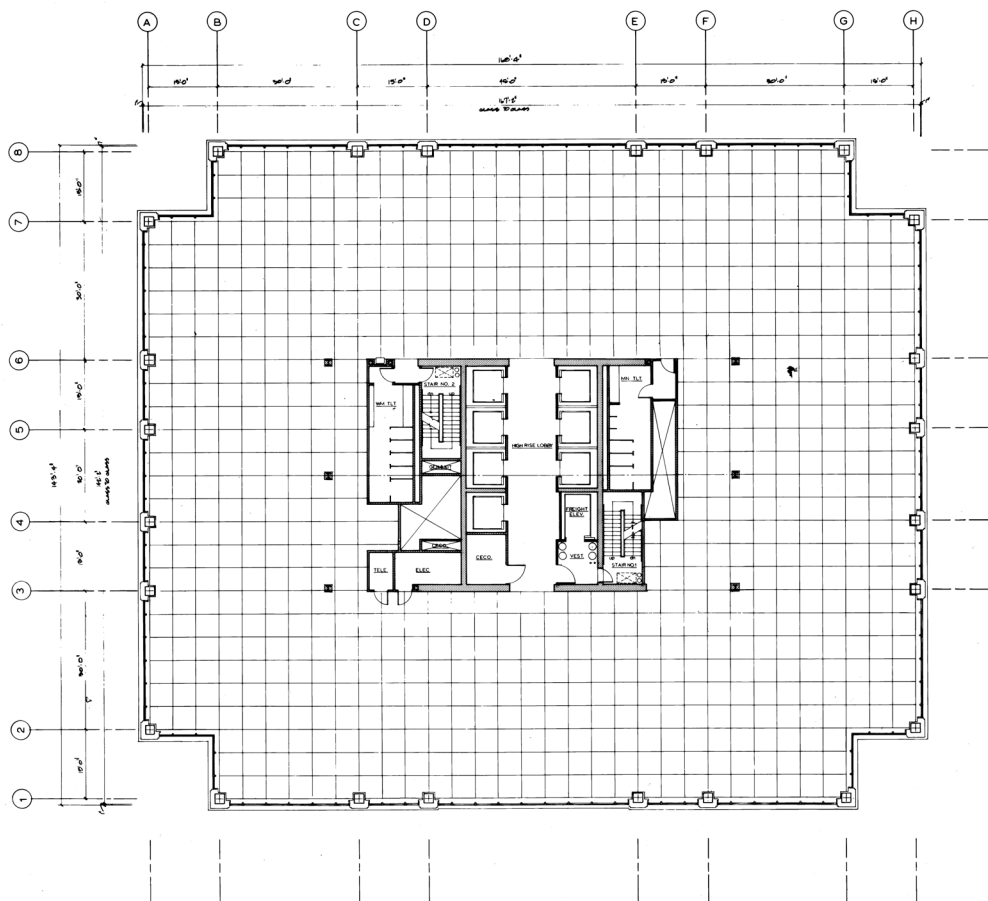
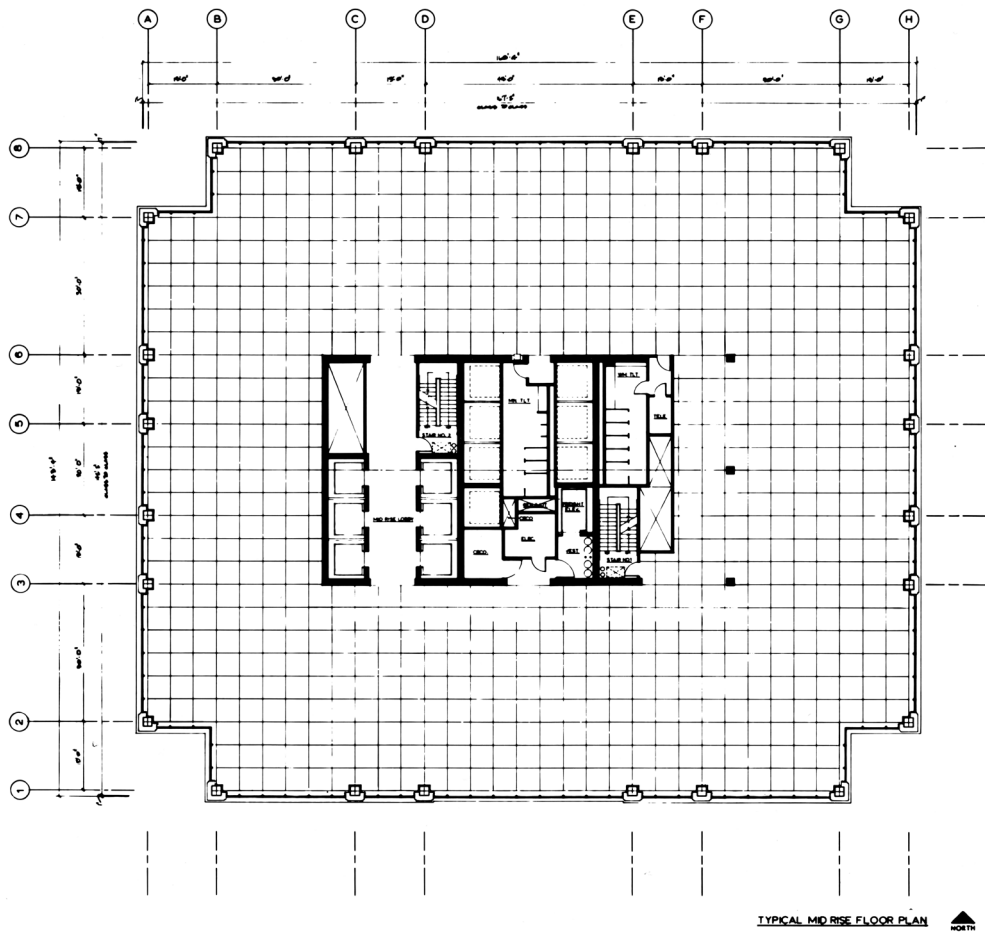
DATE	1988 (design) 1990 (realization)
PLACE/ADDRESS	Chicago, Illinois
COLLABORATORS	James R. DeStefano + Partners
CUSTOMER	The Prime Group Inc. & Kemper
SOURCES	RBTA Archive
ESSENTIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY	B. Cruells, <i>Ricardo Bofill. Obras y Proyectos/Works and Projects</i> (Barcelona: G. Gili, 1992), 142-143; M. Unzeta, E. Butragueño, "Ricardo Bofill. Hacer las Américas", <i>Casa Vogue</i> , no.39 (Nov. 1992): 64-66; R. Bofill, "Il Classico. The Classic", <i>Materia. Rivista d'Architettura</i> , no.12 (1993): 34-39; <i>Design Cost &amp; Data</i> (Jan.-Feb. 1995): 6-7; C. van Uffelen, <i>Skyscrapers</i> (Salenstein: Braun: 2012); R. Klanten, M.E. Niebus, V. Marinai (eds.), <i>Ricardo Bofill: visions of architecture</i> (Berlin: Gestalten, 2019), 90-93.



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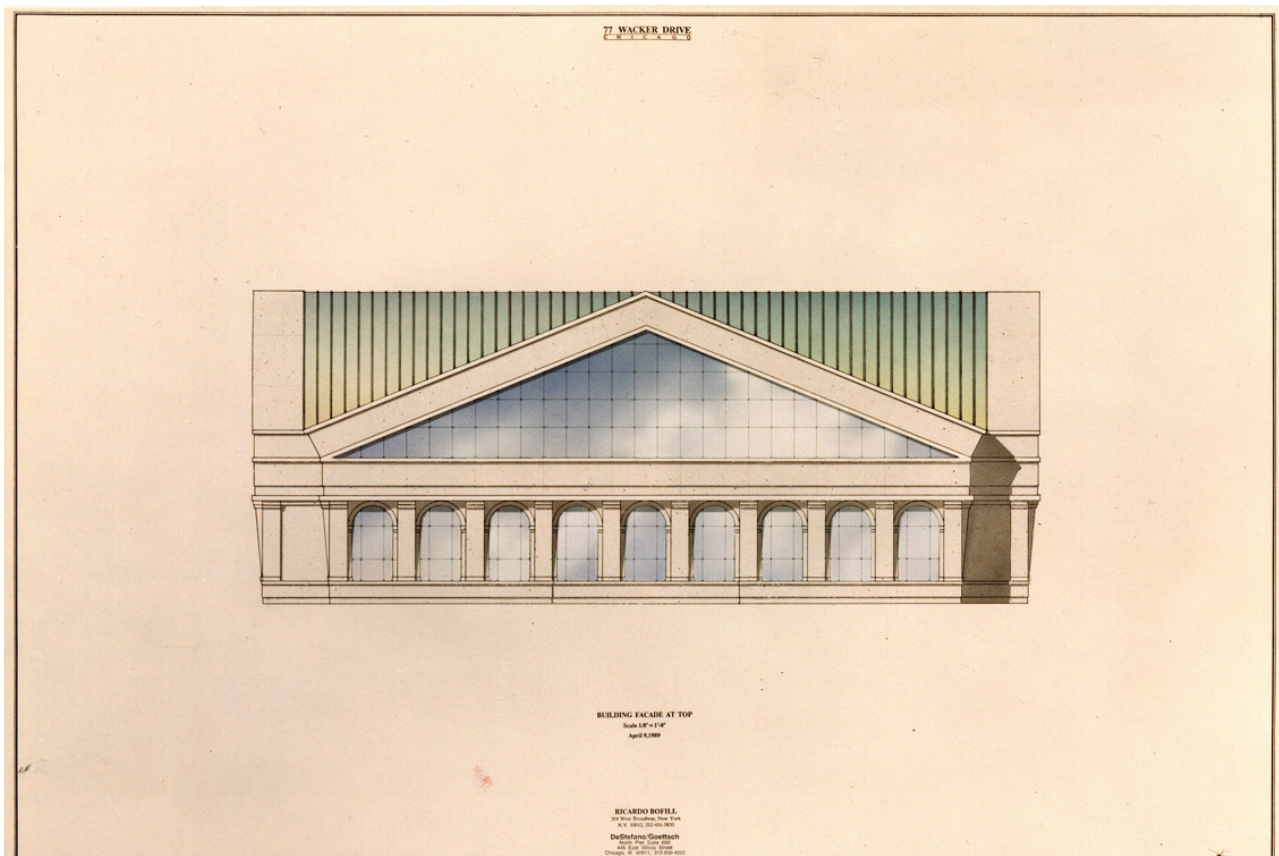




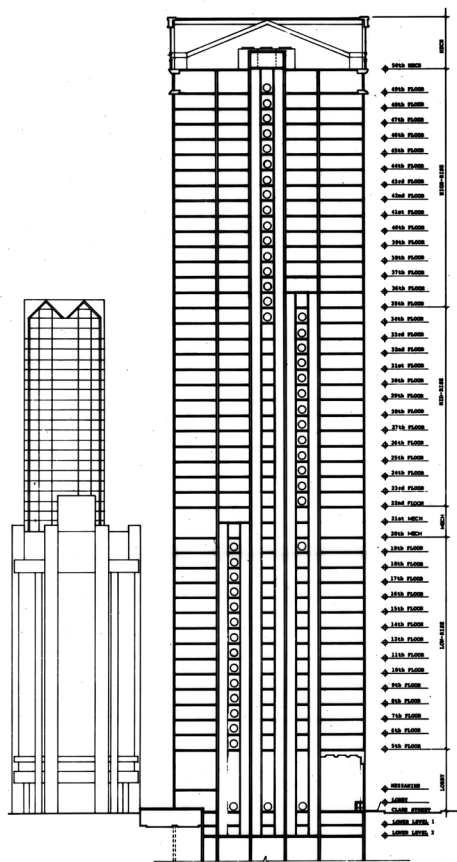




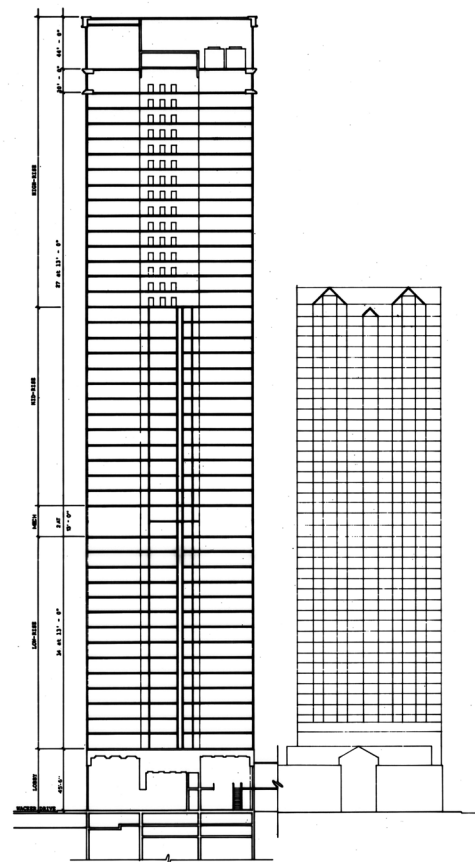
IMG.4: Typical mid-rise floor plan;  
 IMG.5: Typical high-rise floor plan;  
 IMG.6: Plaza façade, picture of  
 the model; IMG.7: Building facade  
 at top elevation, ink and coloured  
 pencil on paper, BTA Archive.







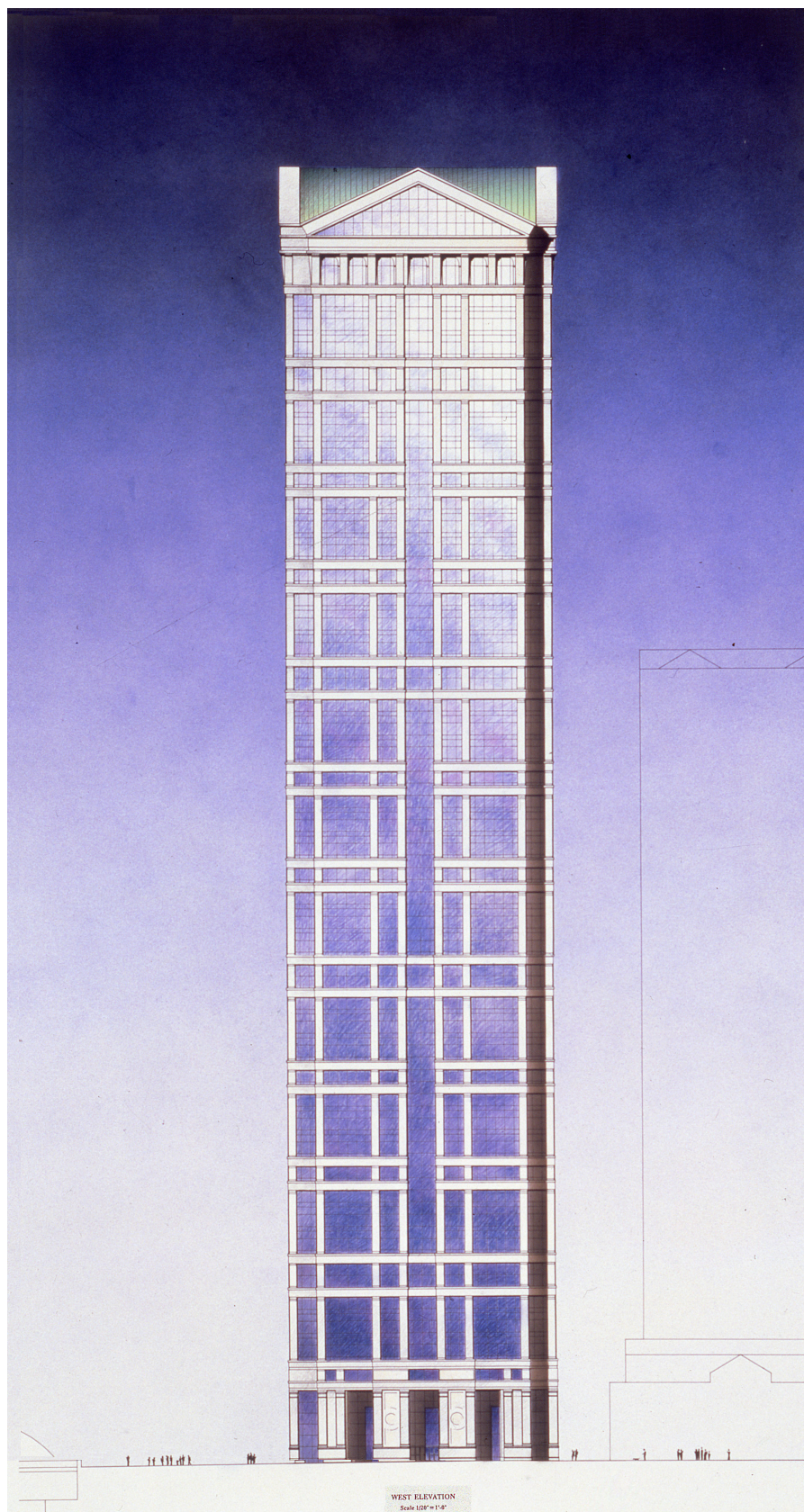
1 SECTION LOOKING SOUTH

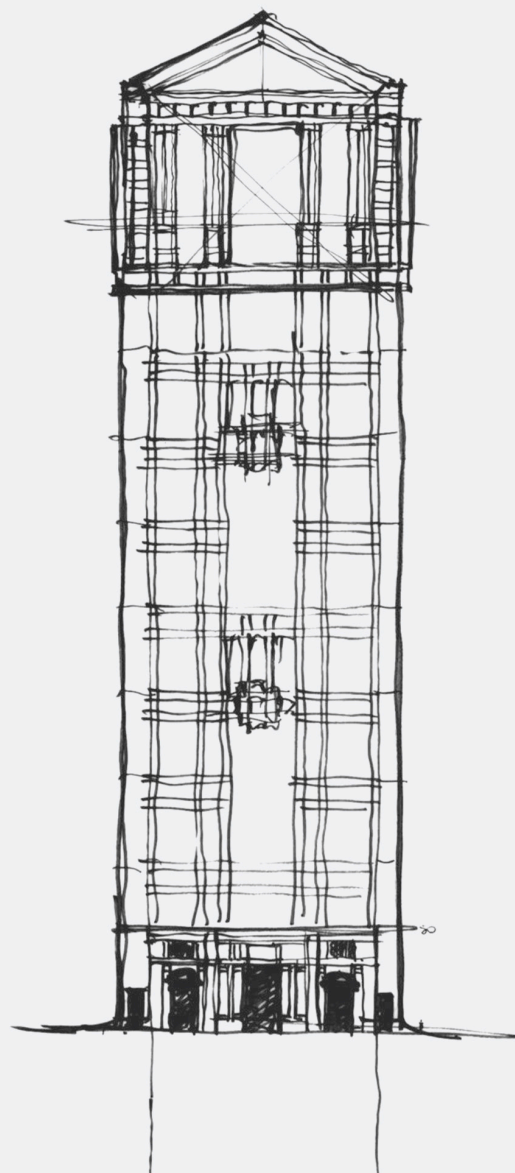
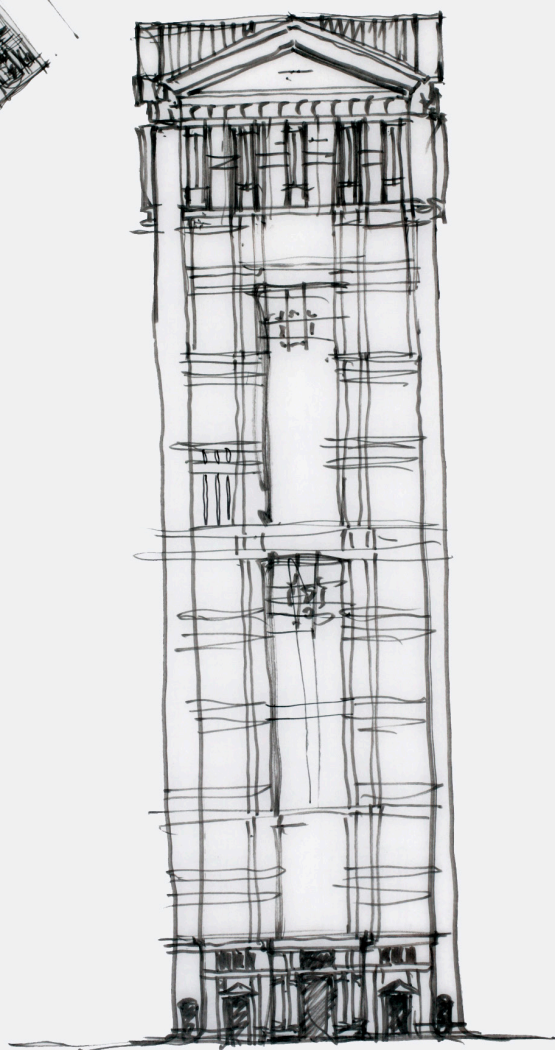
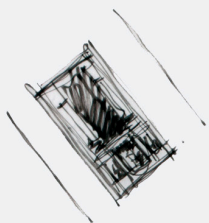


2 SECTION LOOKING EAST



IMG.8: Sections looking South and East; IMG.9: West façade elevation, ink and coloured pencils, BTA Archive.

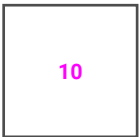




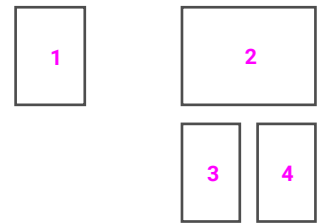
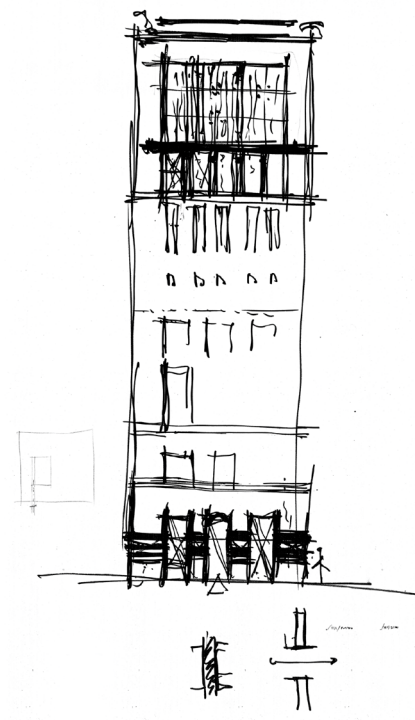


**Selected extracts from the RBTA project description**

The Taller's first skyscraper is the result of numerous studies on different American cities. A few years earlier, in 1985, the works of the Taller de Arquitectura were exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum alongside the work of Léon Krier. On this occasion, the Taller gave itself the task of drawing up plans for a tower that would rise up from New York's urban grid. In 1990, Ricardo Bofill's Taller finally had the opportunity to participate in the challenge presented by the vertical development of American cities and to construct a tower in a context that generated it. It was suggested that the Taller compete to build a skyscraper. By calling on the Taller, the goal was clearly to break with the coldness of the urban fabric, fragmented by steely emanations. It seemed the occupants of these buildings had grown tired of the glassy parallelepipeds that were massively reproduced throughout the 1970s. The Taller de Arquitectura thus moved into action in Chicago, alongside a promoter who could successfully ensure the project's fulfilment. In the first place, the spirit of such vertical architecture had to be expunged. Its main quality is to offer views over the landscape, both near and far. Transparency was therefore preferred over opacity in terms of proportions, so the façades would be made more of glass than stone. The Taller proposed an innovative exchange between classicism and the pragmatism of the United States, and the tower—destined to house the offices of several law firms—needed to reconcile memory with technology, the comfort of its occupants with the outline of the city. The geometry of the tower's proportions recalls the Campanile de Giotto, on the Piazza del Duomo, in Florence. Criteria of height, profitability, and cost were imposed, but urban planning regulations were less of a constraint than in Spain or France. This construction in the heart of a young city and in the abstraction of constraints imposed by the adjoining grid or a heritage building brought about new challenges for the Taller. The tower had to reach a height of 167 meters. The building comprises 50 floors, served by 23 elevators and connected to each other by columns that are visible on the façade. For the most part the tower has glass façades, enhanced by lines from solid elements made of white granite, which occupy a quarter of the façade. The body of the building is divided by four double-horizontals forming three orders. The angles are hollowed out to offer a double orientation to a maximum of offices. The tower's base and summit are especially emphasised. At the bottom, the building is open to the gaze of passers-by: it must be identifiable and fit in at street level. But up top is the signature: the spire that distinguishes the building and individualises it among the city's general outline. The temple pediment clearly stands out against the blue of the sky.



IMG.10: Facade elevation studies sketches; IMG.11: Picture of the model, BTA Archive.



IMG.1: Shiseido Ginza, conceptual study sketch, ink on paper; IMG.2: Shiseido Ginza, conceptual study sketch, ink on paper; IMG.3: Shiseido Ginza, conceptual study and plan sketches, coloured pencil on paper; IMG.4: Shiseido Ginza, main façade and plan scheme sketches, coloured pencils on paper, BTA Archive.

# Shiseido Ginza

## ARCHIVAL DATA

DATE	2001 (realization)
PLACE/ADDRESS	Ghinza, Tokyo
COLLABORATORS	-
CUSTOMER	Shiseido
SOURCES	RBTA Archive

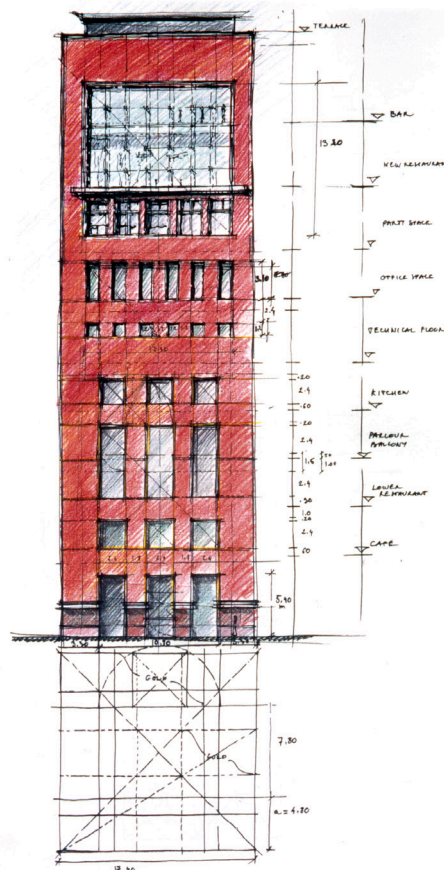
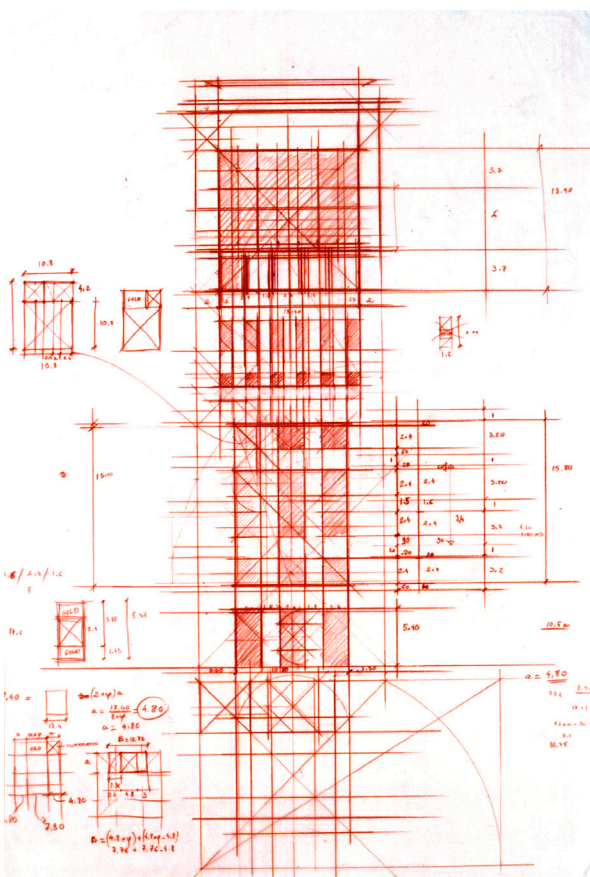
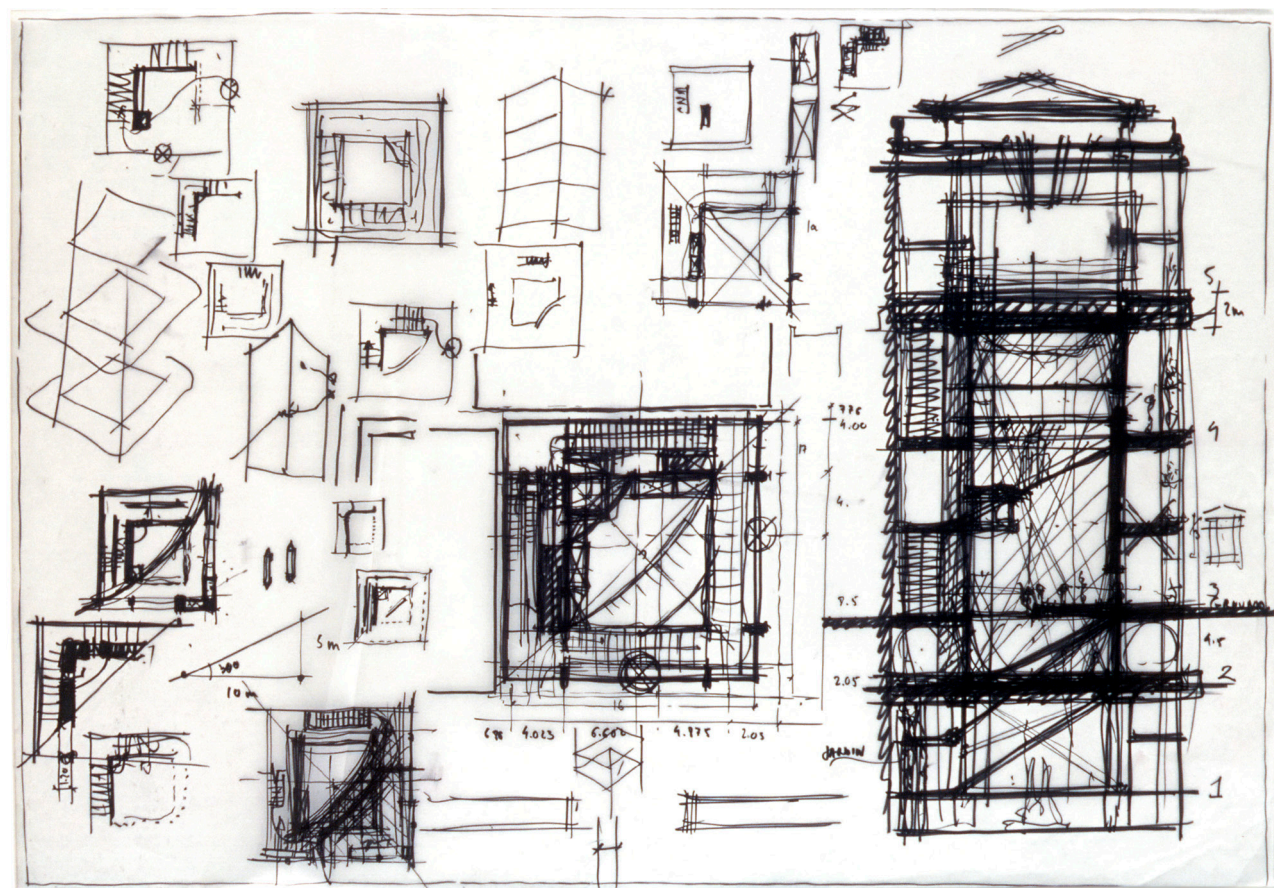
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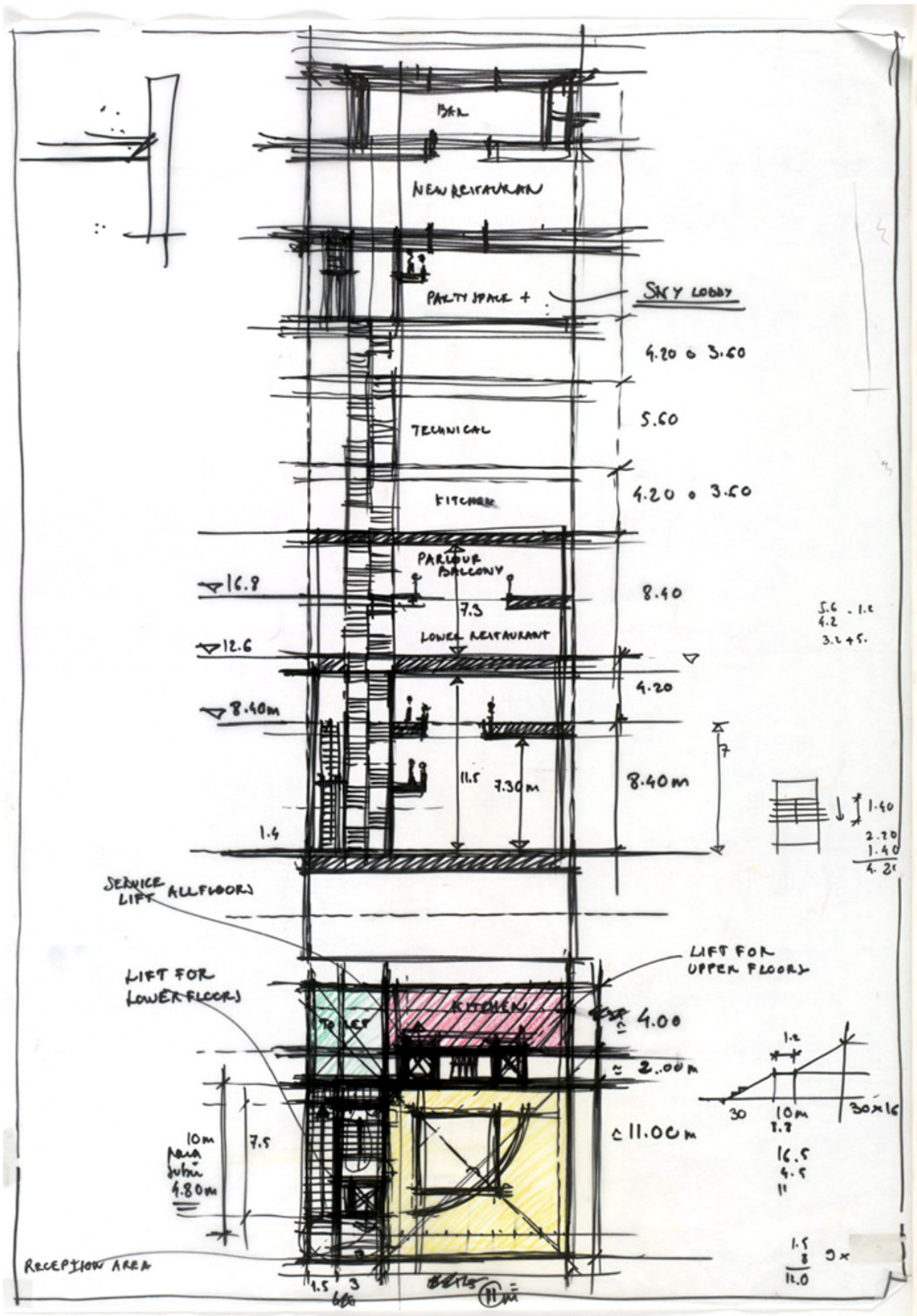


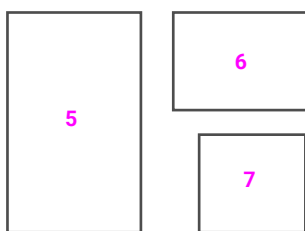
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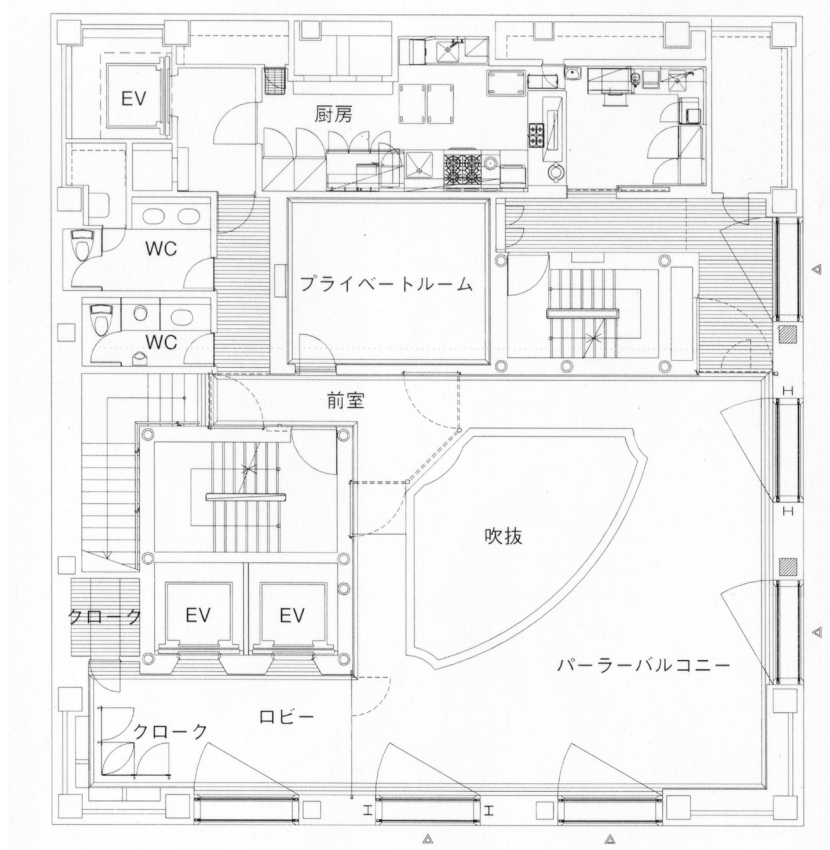
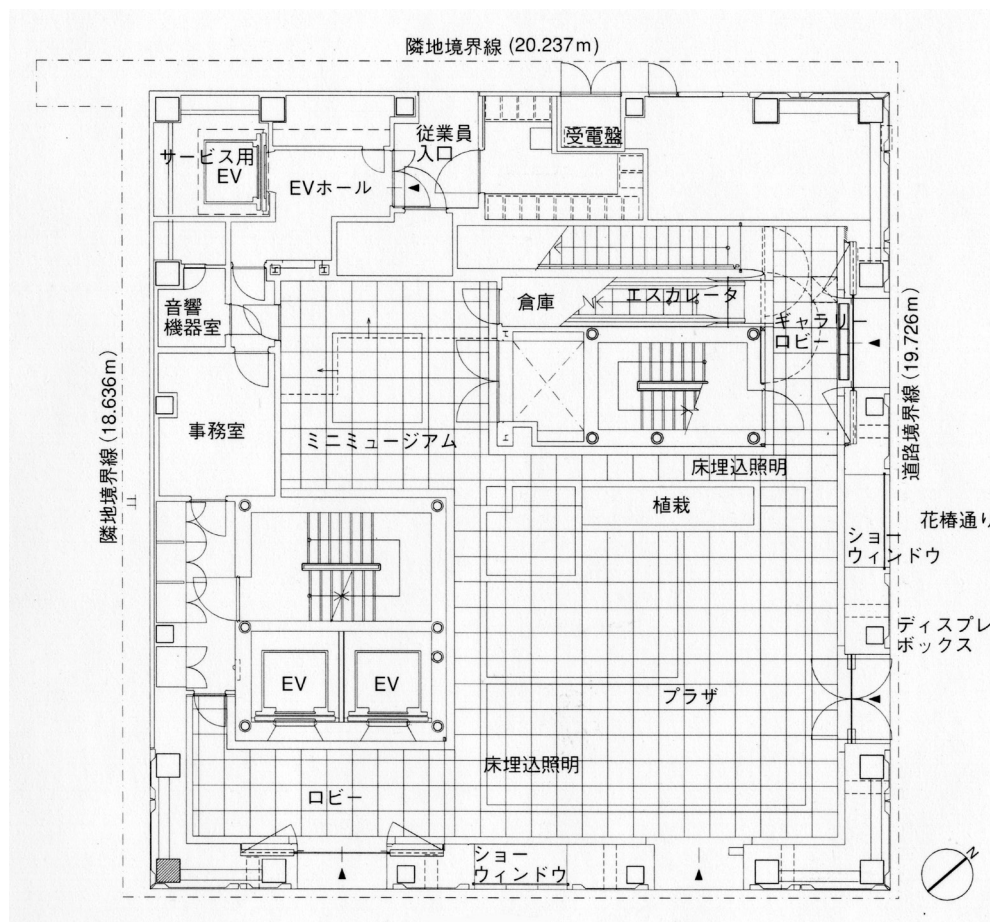


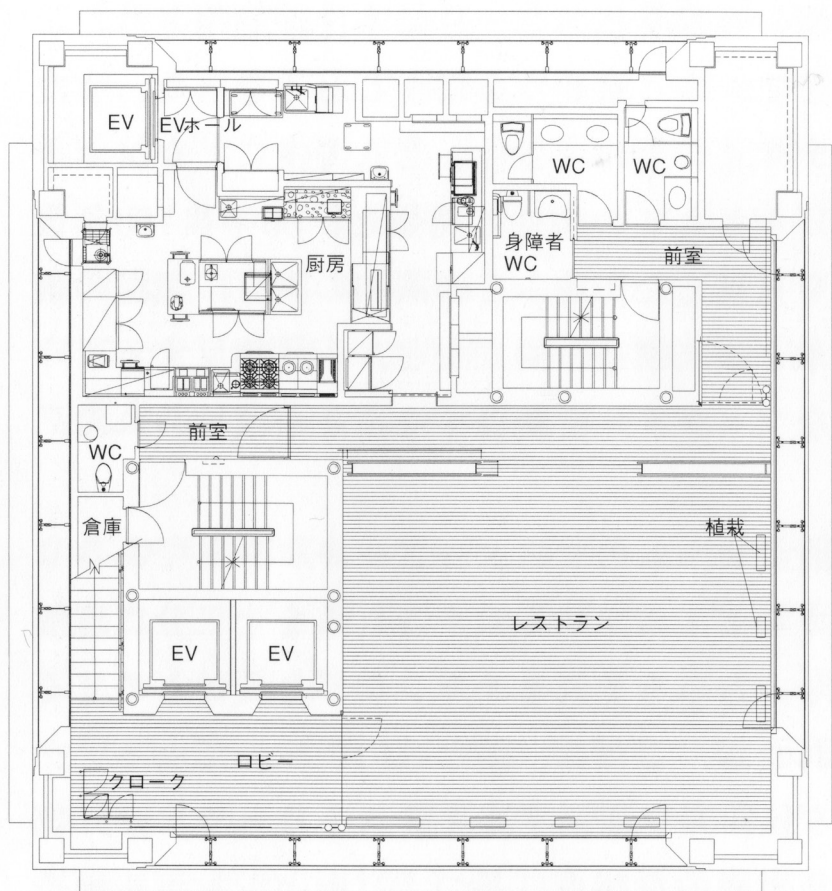
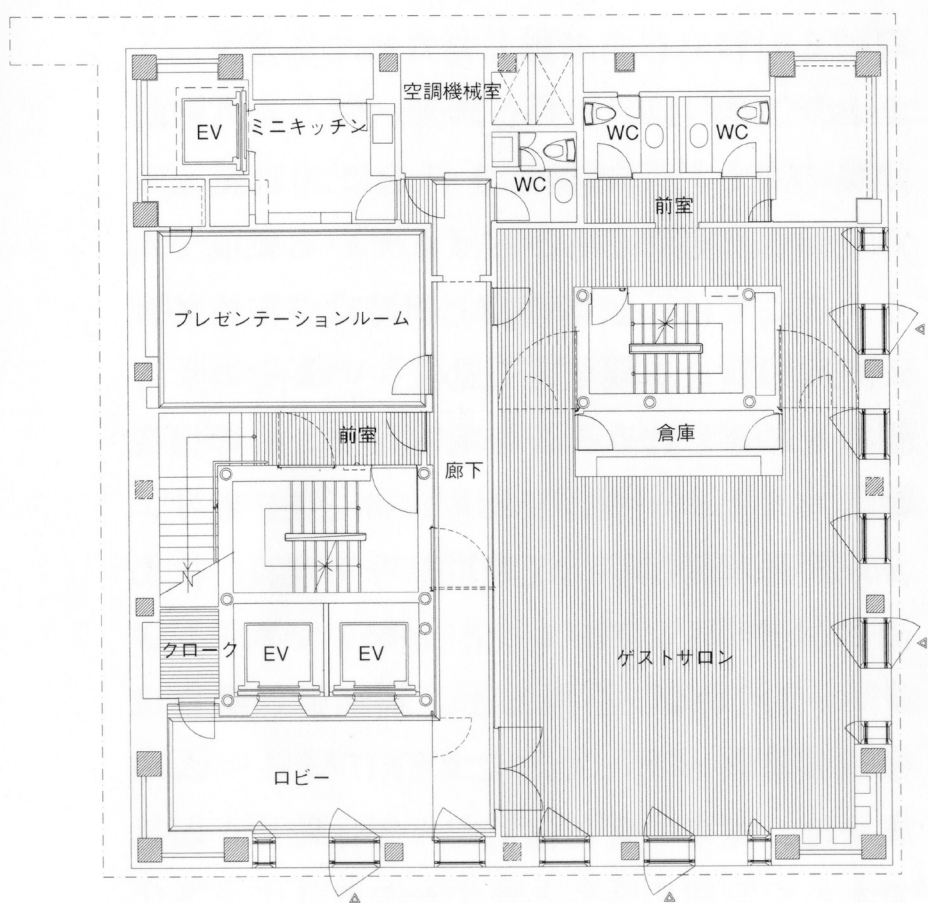




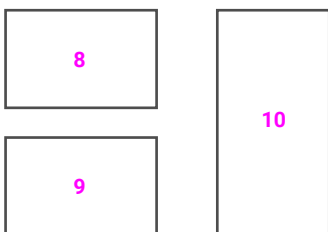


IMG.5: Shiseido Ginza, section and plan studies, ink and coloured pencil on paper; IMG.6: Shiseido Ginza, ground level floor plan; IMG.7: Shiseido Ginza, levels 4th and 5th floor plan, BTA Archive.

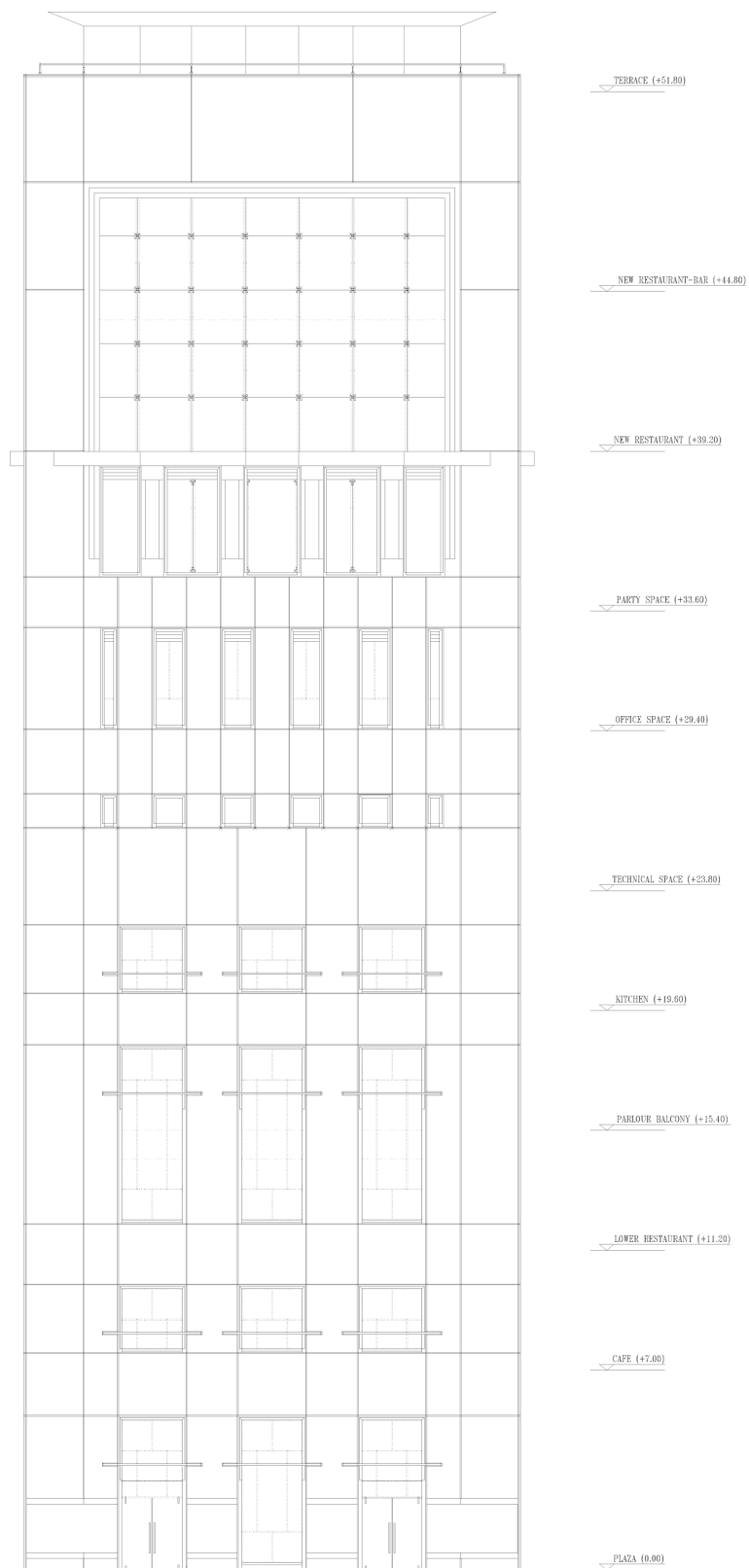


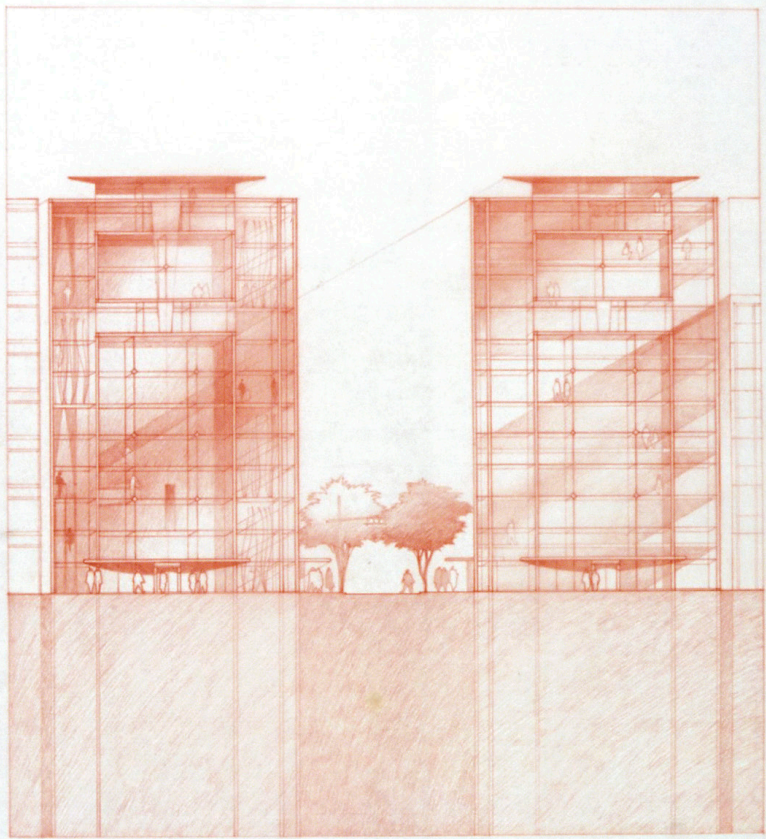
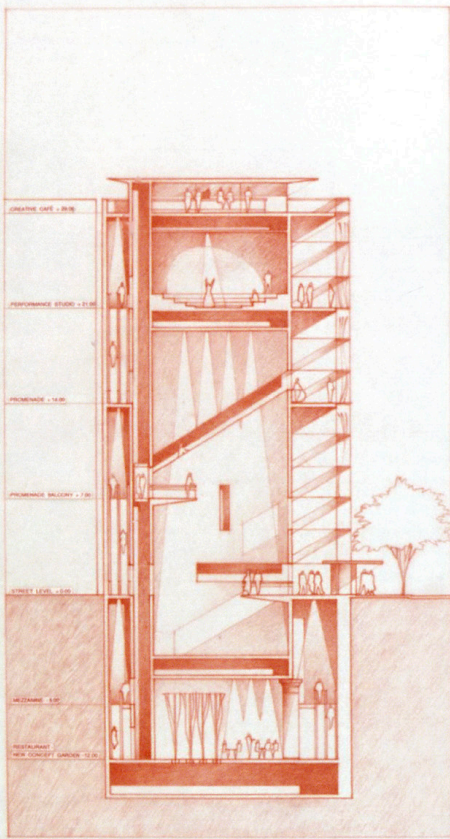




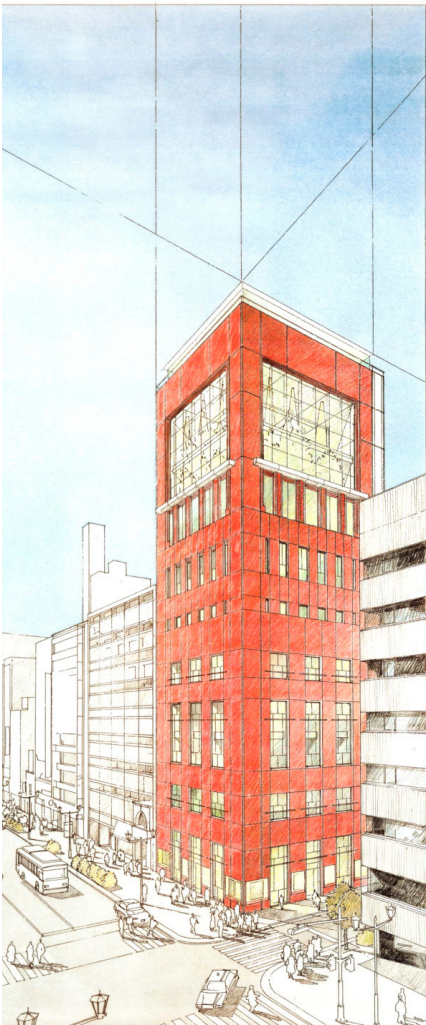


IMG.8: Shiseido Ginza, level 8th floor plan; IMG.9: Shiseido Ginza, level 10th floor plan; IMG.10: Shiseido Ginza, main façade elevation, BTA Archive.

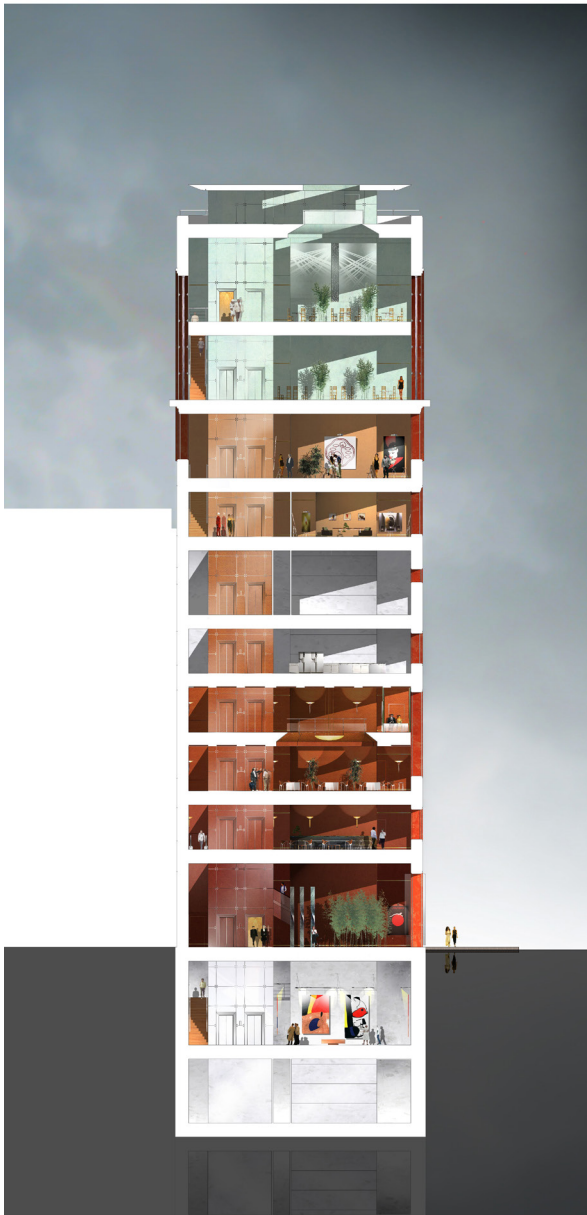




SECTION & ELEVATIONS-SHISEIDO - M3 PROJECT - RICARDO BOFILL TALLER DE ARQUITECTURA - MARCH 1997

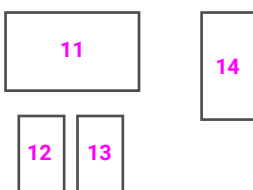






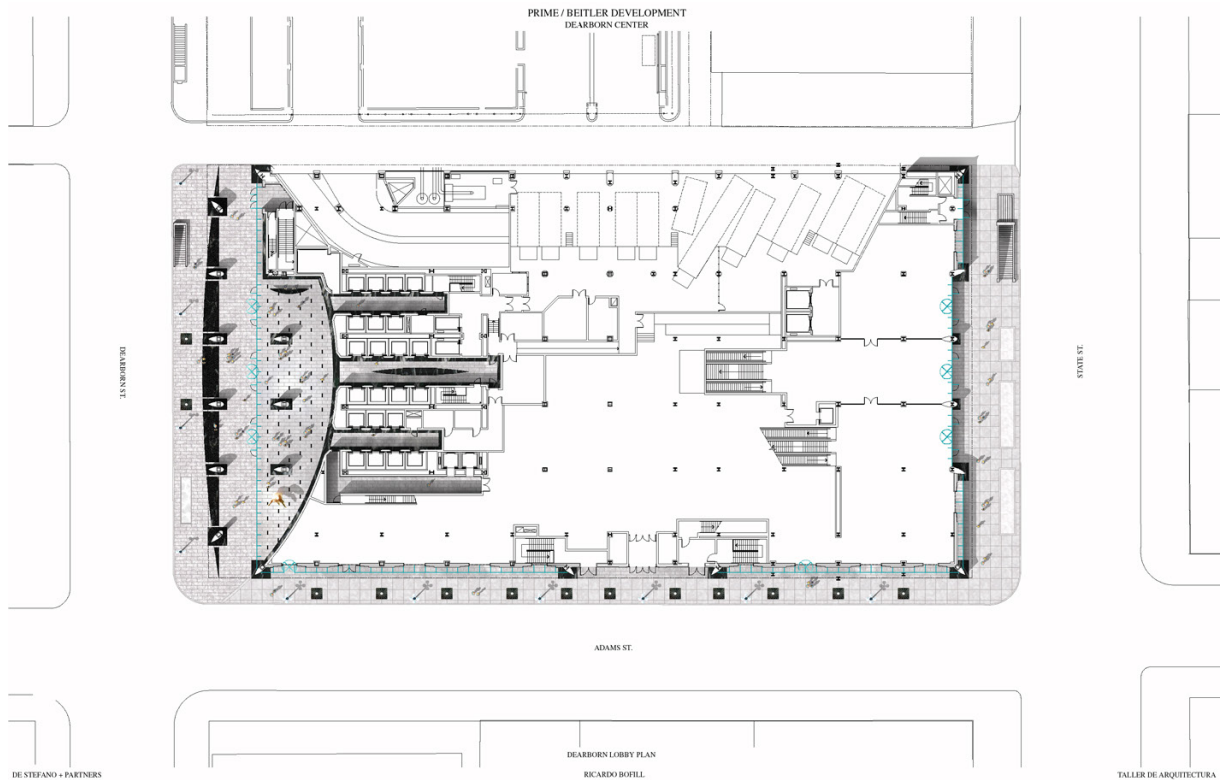
## Selected extracts from the RBTA project description

Rather than merely constructing an updated version of the former Shiseido Parlour Building, the company established the new building as the home of its corporate culture in the 21st Century. The new Ginza Building is the base for disseminating information about the brand around the world. The close relationship between Shiseido and Tokyo's Ginza district goes back many years. In 1872, Shiseido was founded in Ginza as Japan's first Western-style pharmacy. The operation of institutions such as the Shiseido Parlour and Shiseido Gallery strengthened the brand's corporate image in its main field, the cosmetics business. While contributing to Ginza's visual amenity, the building stands as an expression of Shiseido's aesthetic values. Central to the latter role is the parlour and gallery, which are a part of the company's history in Ginza. The Shiseido New Ginza Building has eleven stories above ground and two stories below. It consists of five zones – Gallery Zone, Plaza Zone, Shiseido Parlour Zone, Beauty Salon Zone and a new Restaurant. Each zone is based on a distinct concept, and has been designed in such a way that they create a coherent whole. As in the old Shiseido Parlour Building in the early 1930s, a stairwell is used to create an open, modern and elegant atmosphere. The exterior wall has been clad with Western-style red stucco. Floors nine to 11 provide a 360-degree-view of the district and the surrounding area. The newer building is higher than the old one. This is possible due to a relaxation in the planning regulations. The Japanese government modified them in 1997, in order to promote the revitalization of commercial areas. The Shiseido New Ginza Building was the first development in the city to take advantage of this reform. The project received the "Tokyo Architecture Award 2002" by the Tokyo Association of Architectural Firms.



IMG.11: Shiseido Ginza, section and elevations, March, 1997; IMG.12: Shiseido Ginza, perspective sketch, coloured pencils on paper; IMG.13: Shiseido Ginza, main façade, infographic; IMG.14: Shiseido Ginza, section, infographic, BTA Archive.





# Dearborn Center/Citadel Center

## ARCHIVAL DATA

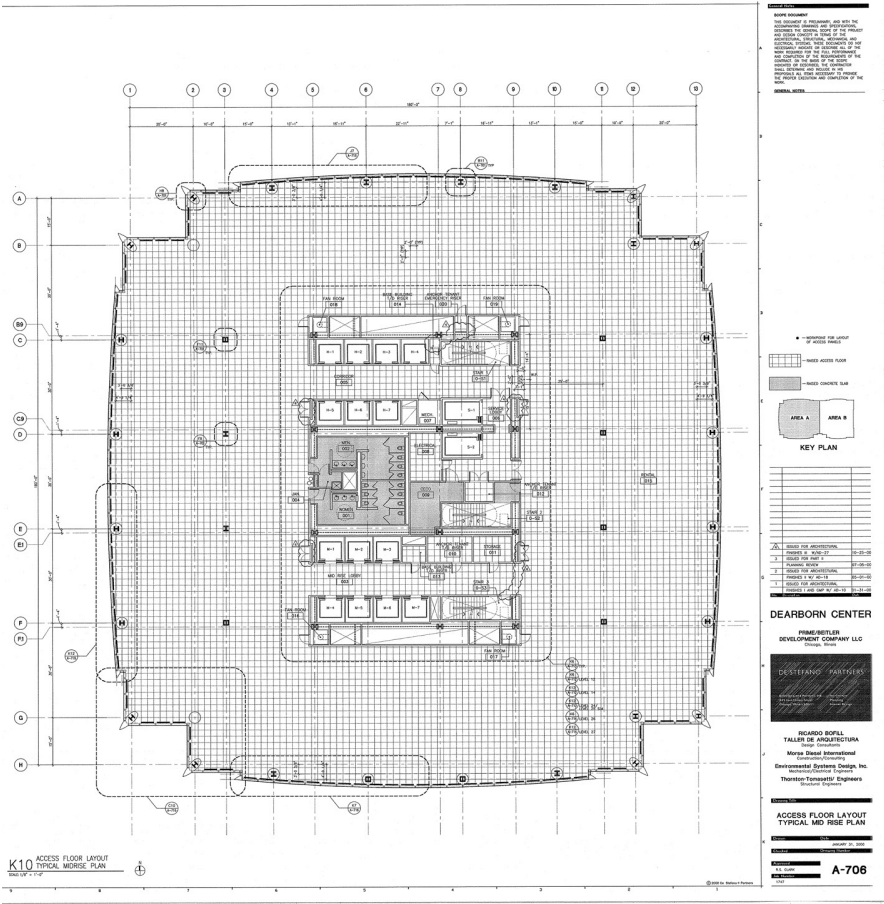
DATE	2000 (design) 2003 (realization)
PLACE/ADDRESS	131 South Dearborn, Chicago, Illinois
COLLABORATORS	James DeStefano + Partners
CUSTOMER	J. Paul Beitler Development Co. and Prime Group Realty Trust
SOURCES	RBTA Archive

## ESSENTIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

R. Klanten, M.E. Niebus, V. Marinai (eds.), *Ricardo Bofill: visions of architecture* (Berlin: Gestalten, 2019); J. Zukowsky, M. Thorne, *Skyscrapers: The New Millennium* (Munich, New York: Prestel, Art Institute of Chicago, 2000); Structurae, "Citadel Center", International Database and Gallery of Structures, <https://structurae.net/en/structures/citadel-center>; Buildings DB, "Citadel Center", <https://buildingsdb.com/IL/chicago/citadel-center/>; J. Zukowsky, M. Thorne, *Skyscrapers: The New Millennium* (Munich, New York: Prestel, Art Institute of Chicago, 2000), 20-21.



<https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2611-0075/22326> | ISSN 2611-0075  
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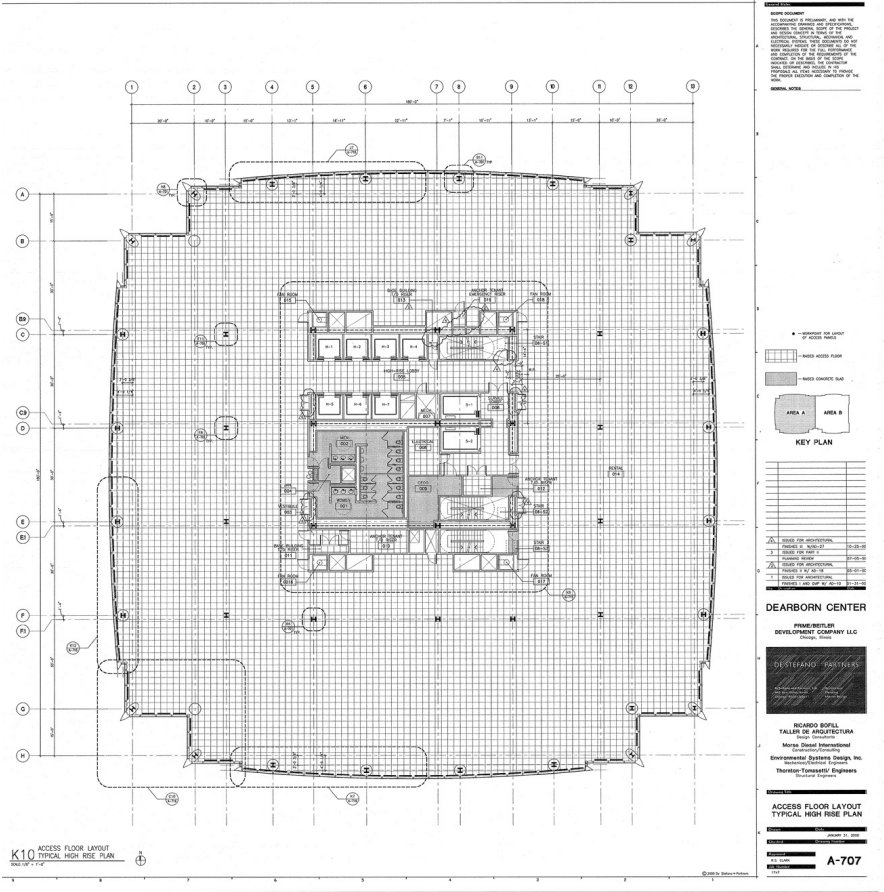


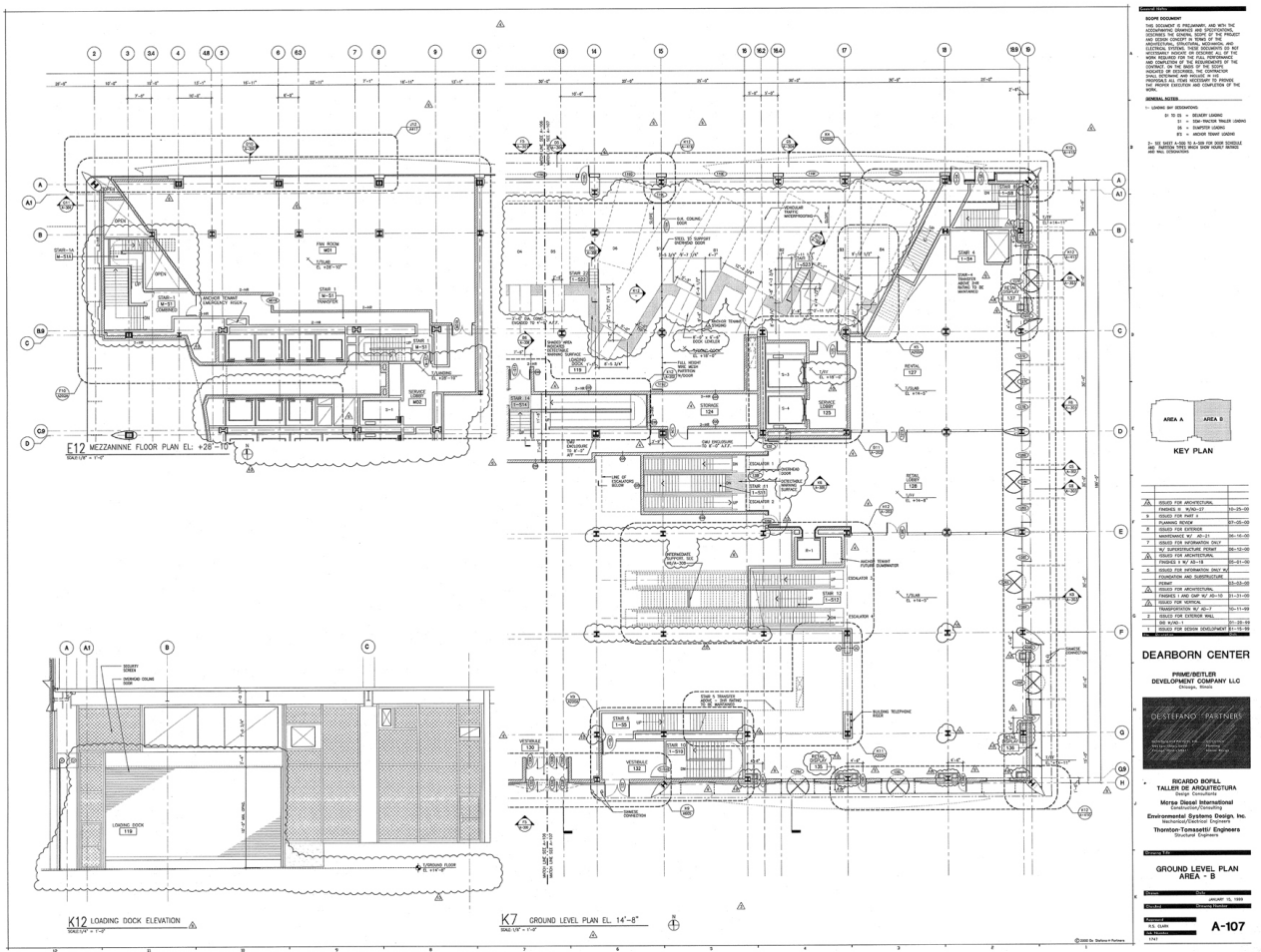
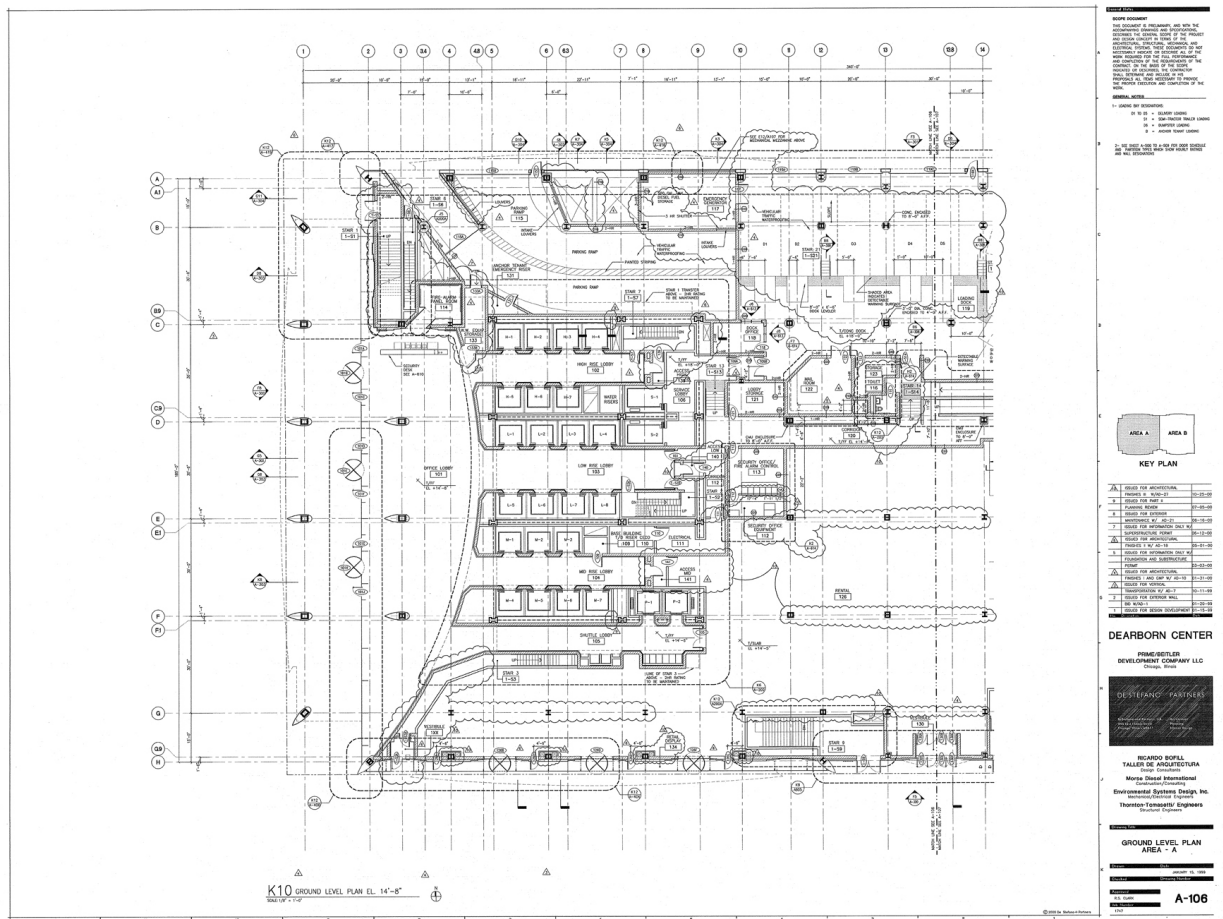
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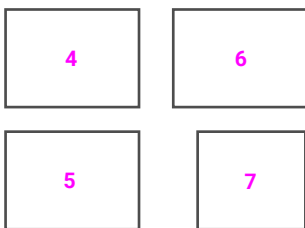
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IMG.1: Dearborn Center, master lobby plan; IMG.2: Dearborn Center, access floor layout, typical mid-rise plan, Jan. 2000; IMG.3: Dearborn Center, access floor layout, typical high-rise plan, Jan. 2000, BTA Archive.

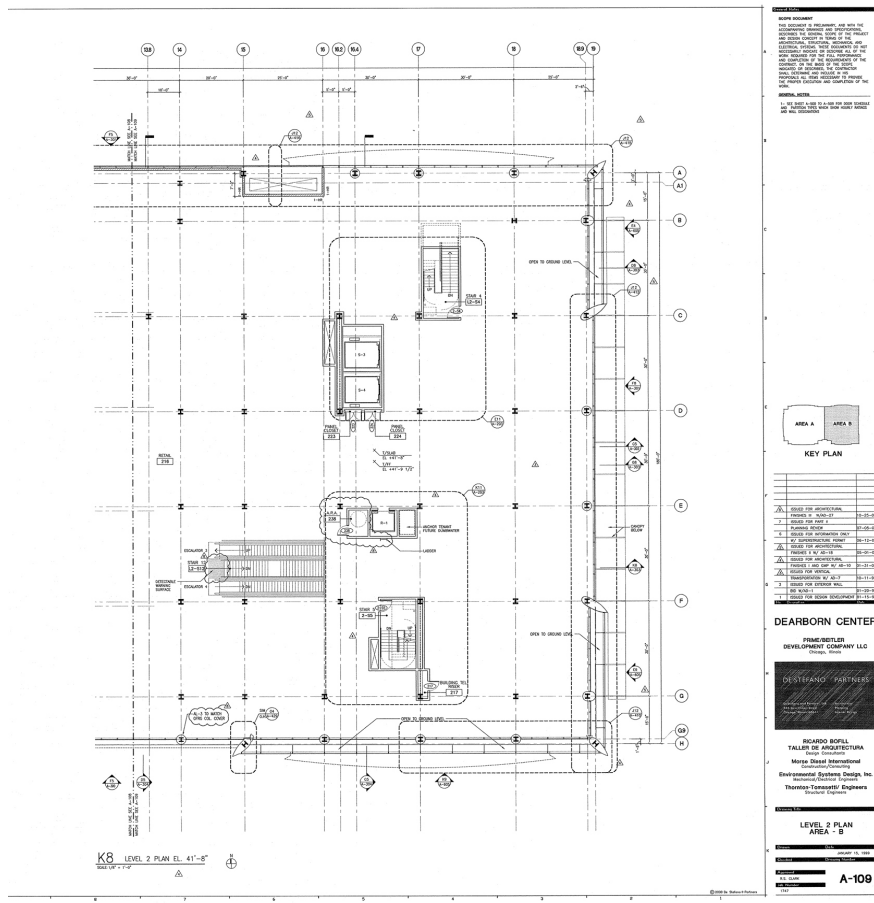
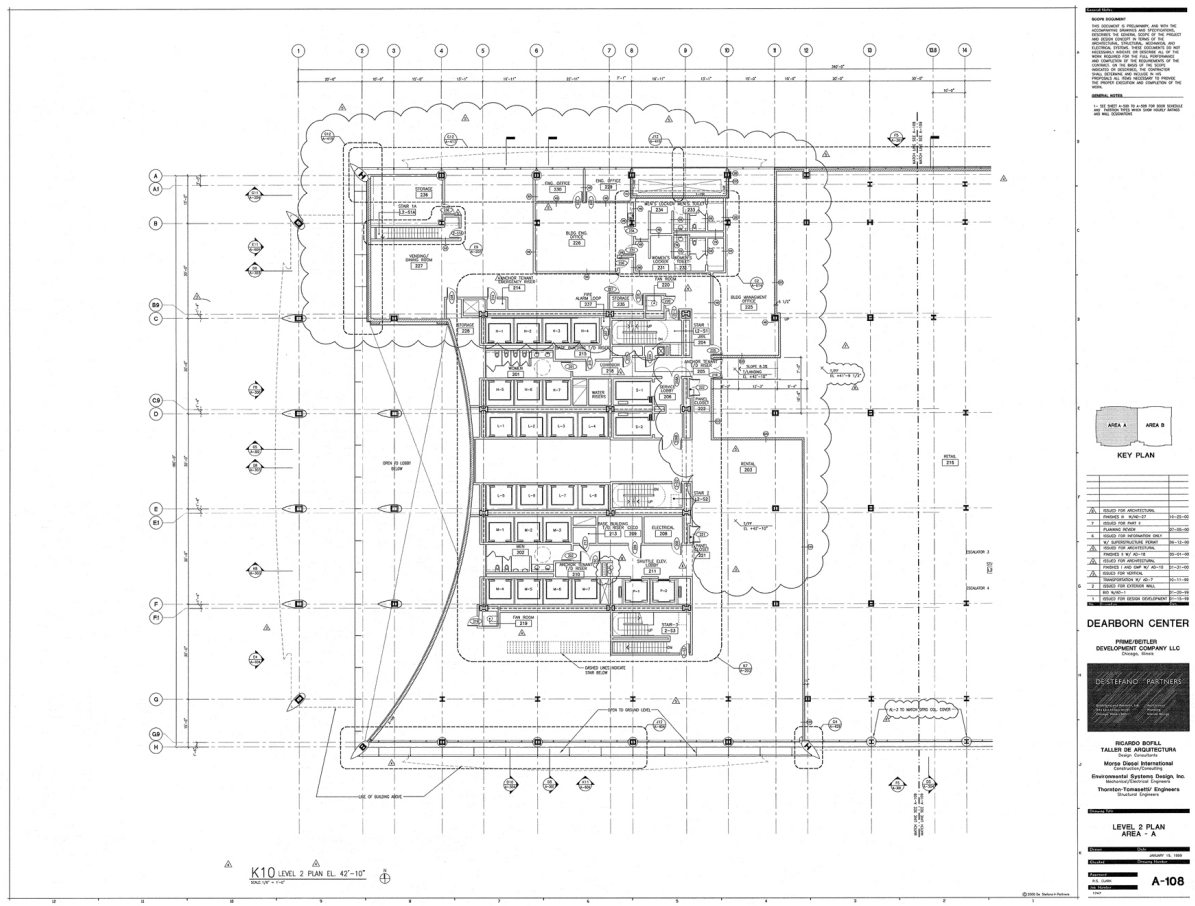


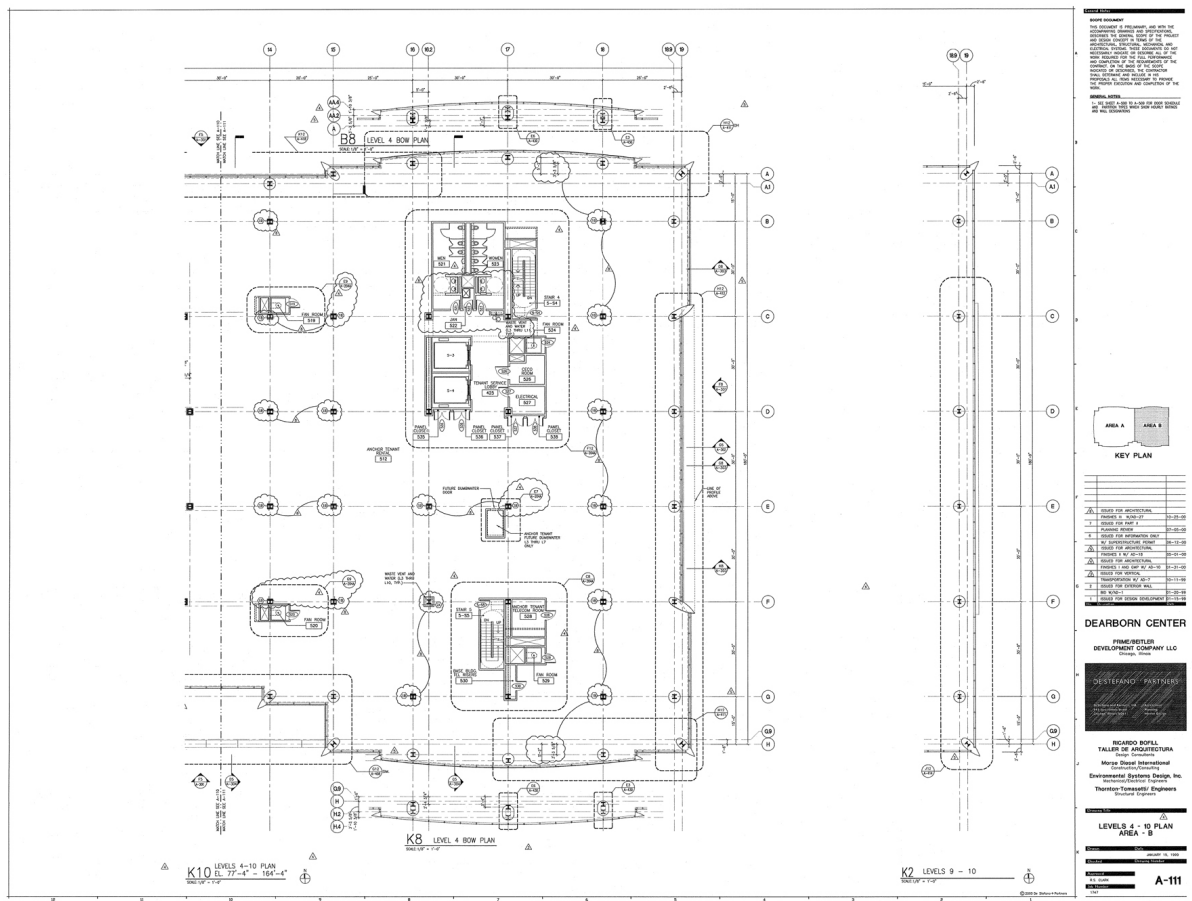
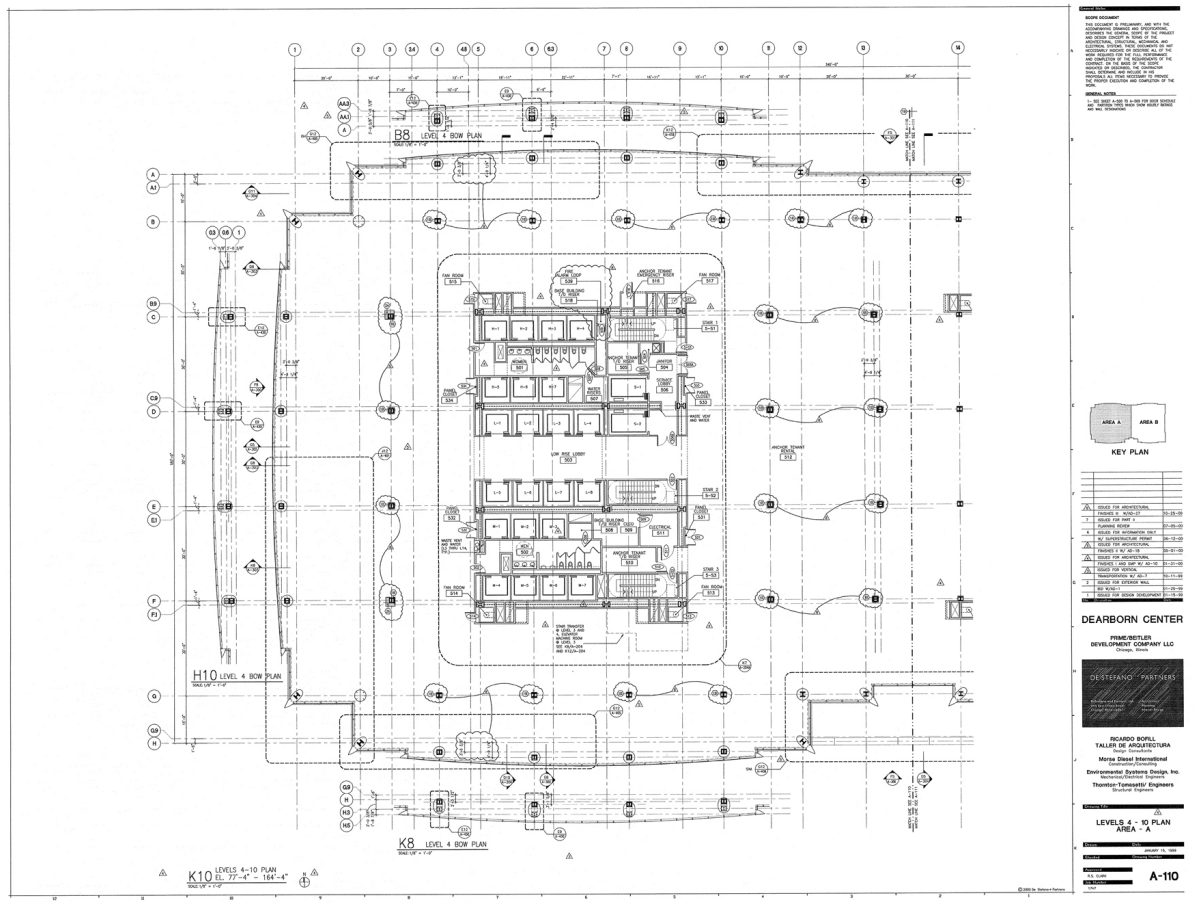






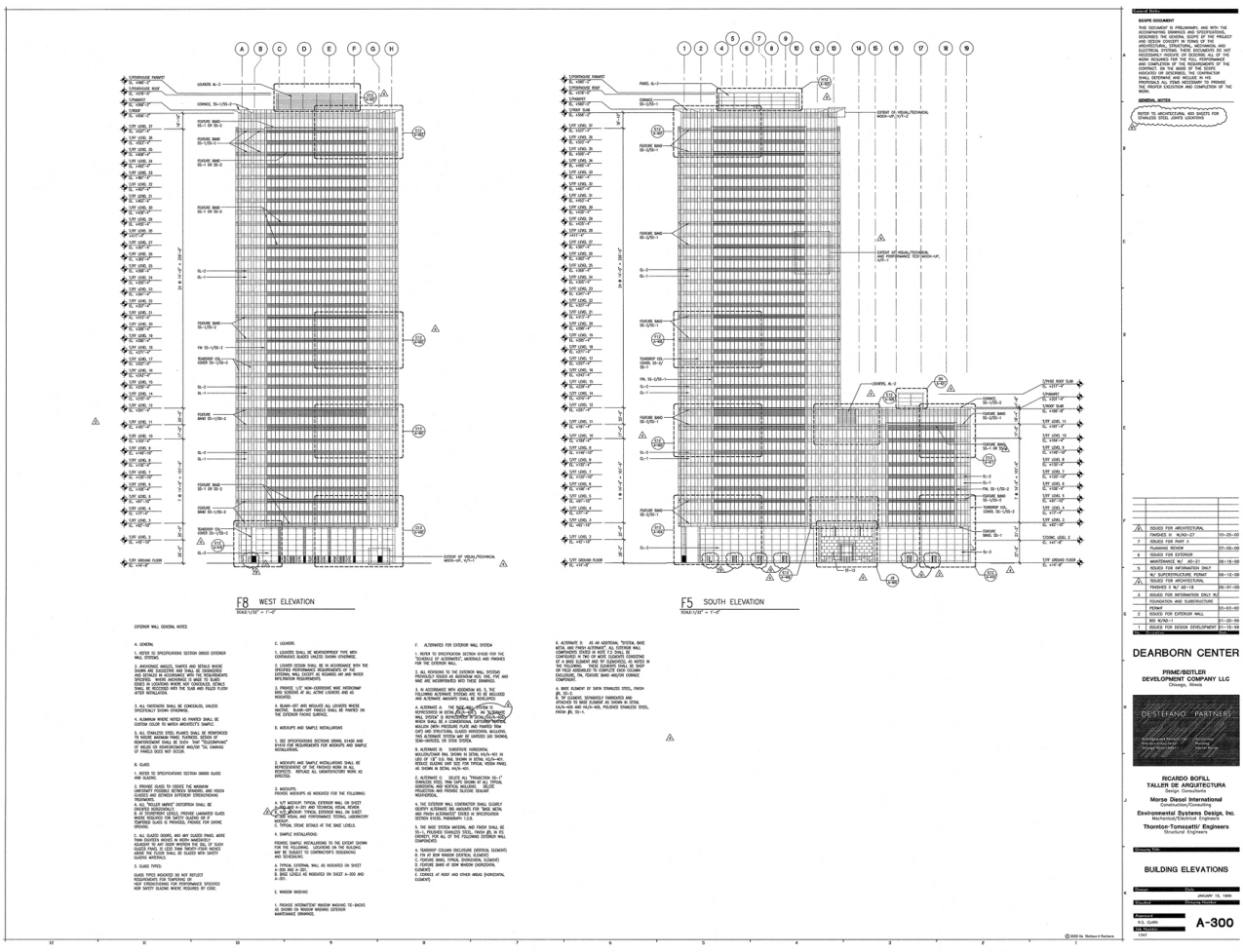
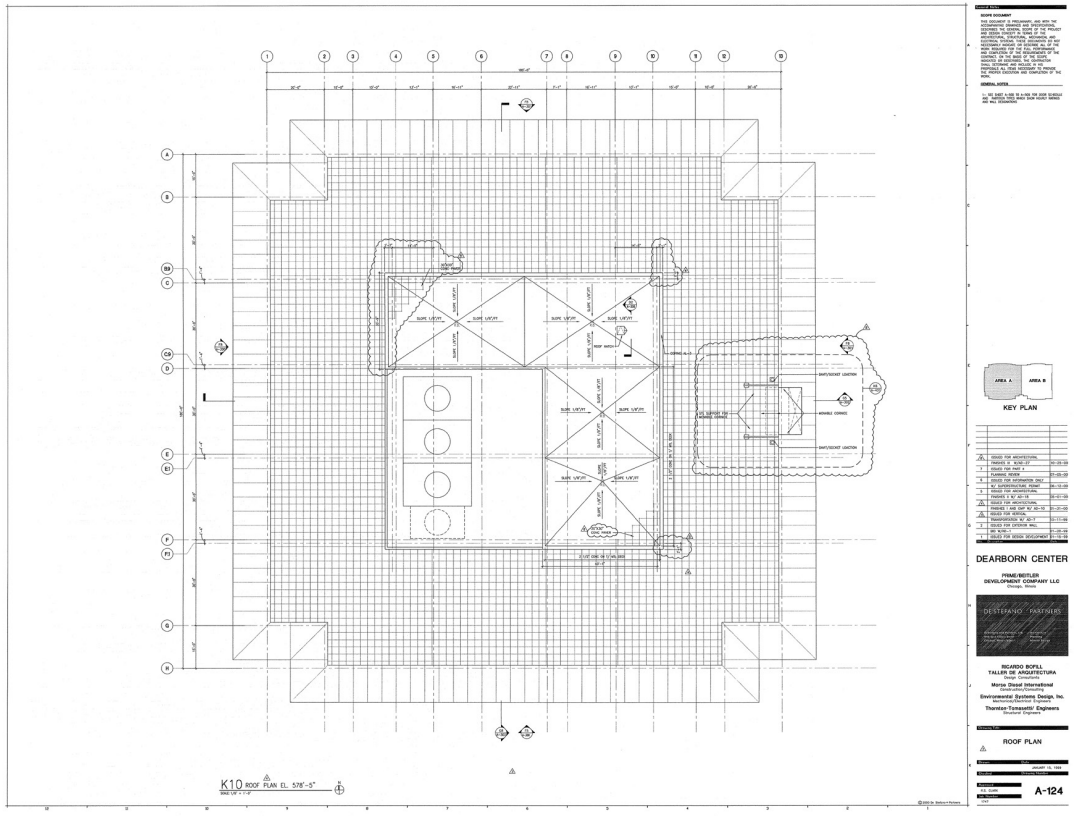
IMG.4: Dearborn Center, ground level plan area A, Jan. 1999; IMG.5: Dearborn Center, ground level plan area B, Jan. 1999; IMG.6: Dearborn Center, second level plan area A, Jan. 1999; IMG.7: Dearborn Center, second level plan area B, Jan. 1999, BTA Archive.





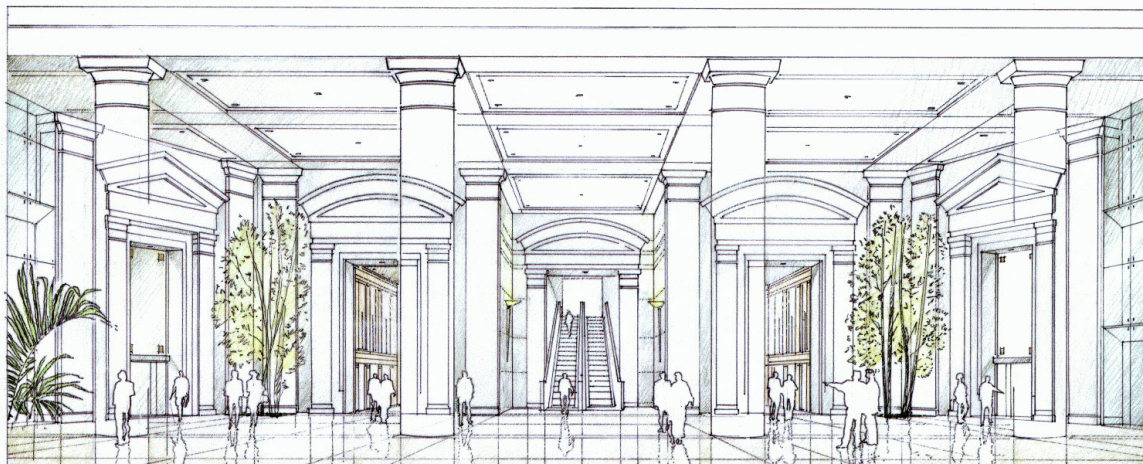








THE PRIME GROUP REALTY TRUST  
DEARBORN CENTER



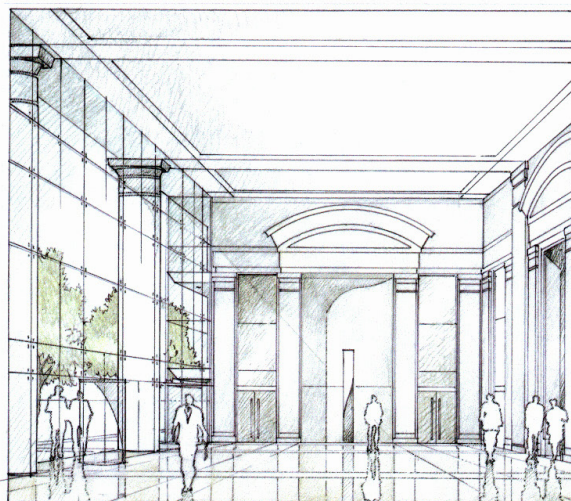
DEARBORN LOBBY VIEW I

DE STEFANO - PARTNERS

RICARDO BOVILL

TALLER DE ARQUITECTURA

THE PRIME GROUP REALTY TRUST  
DEARBORN CENTER



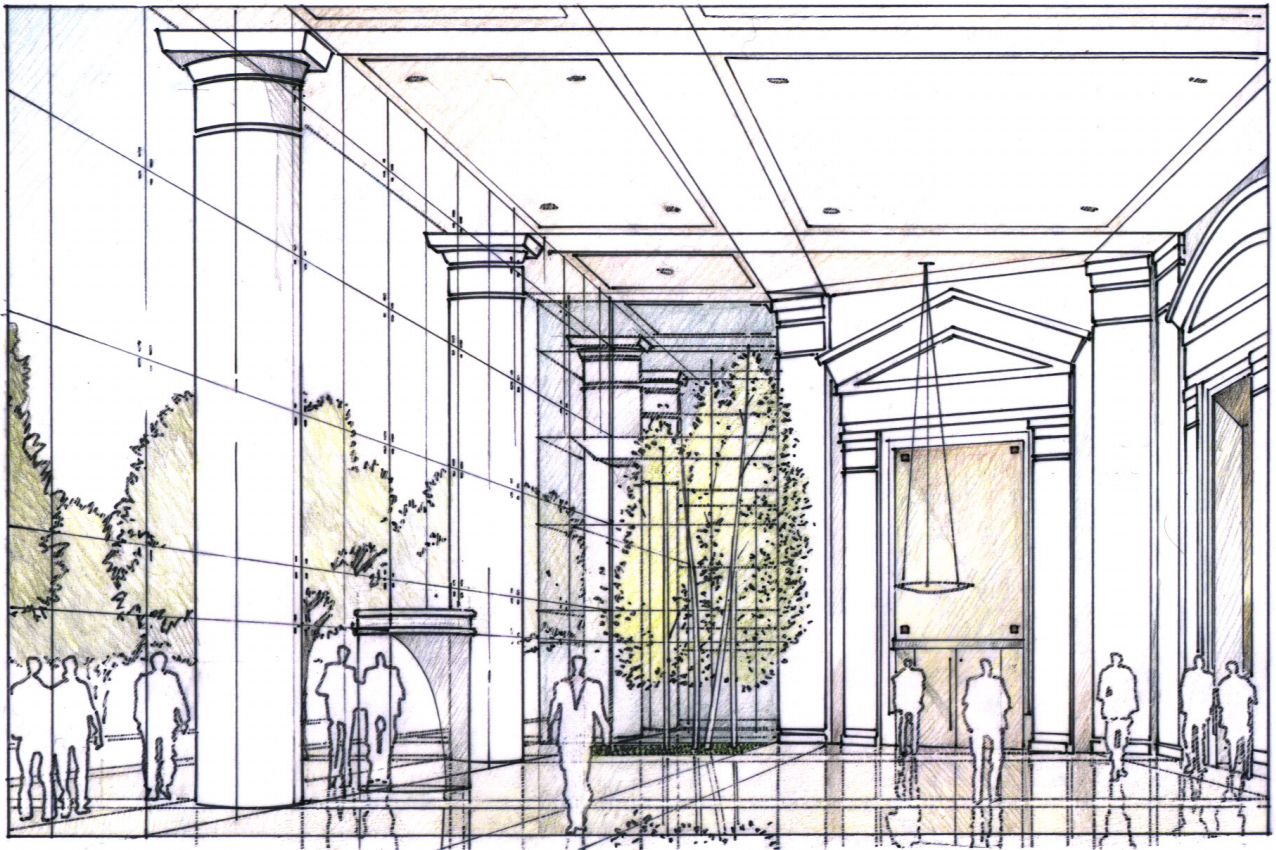
DEARBORN LOBBY VIEW II

DE STEFANO - PARTNERS

RICARDO BOVILL

TALLER DE ARQUITECTURA





15

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IMG.15-16-17: Dearborn Center,  
lobby view perspectives, coloured  
pencil on paper, BTA Archive.

PRIME/BEITLER DEVELOPMENT  
DEARBORN CENTER

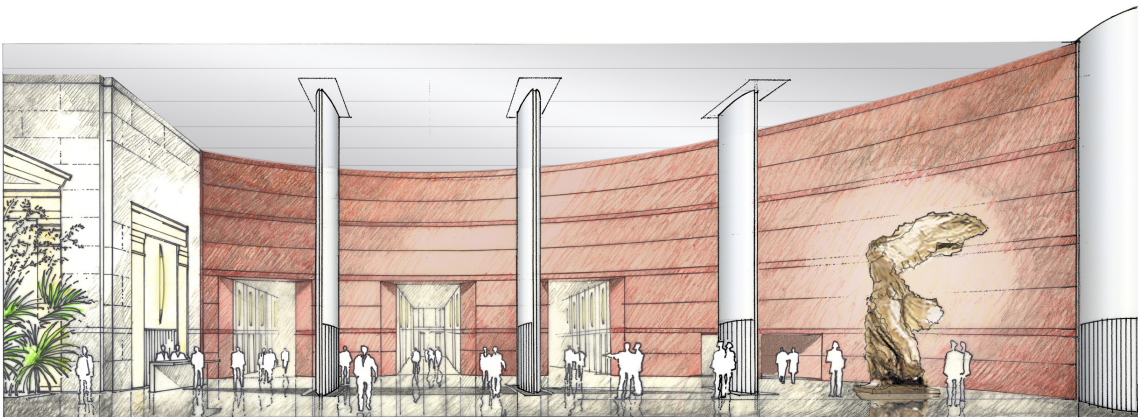


DE STEFANO + PARTNERS

RICARDO BOFILL

TALLER DE ARQUITECTURA

PRIME / BEITLER DEVELOPMENT  
DEARBORN CENTER



MAIN LOBBY

DE STEFANO + PARTNERS

RICARDO BOFILL / TALLER DE ARQUITECTURA  
2002-09/10 / 20

### Selected extracts from the RBTA project description

The building is designed like a classical column with a heavy base, a projecting cornice at the top and curved walls on each side. Its gleaming stainless steel and glass surfaces reflect the vitality of Chicago's business centre, this new landmark across the street from the Mies Van Der Rohe, is now the flagship building of an international company. Consists of two parts, a low rise section on State Street, and a square high-rise tower to the west on Dearborn. Foundation was preserved and used to support the new tower.

18

19

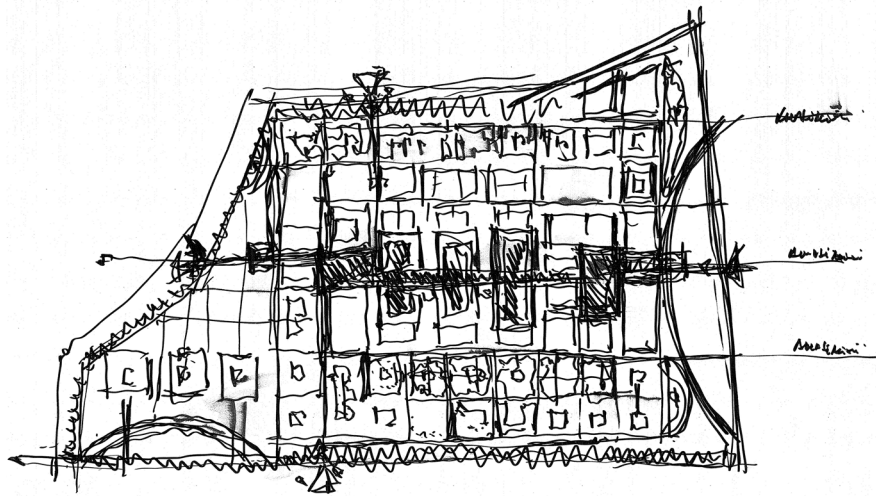
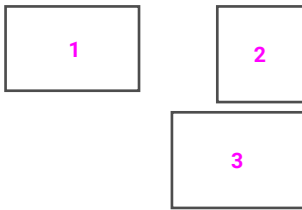
IMG.18: Dearborn Center, lobby view perspective, coloured pencil on paper; IMG.19: Dearborn Center, main lobby perspective, coloured pencil on paper, BTA Archive.



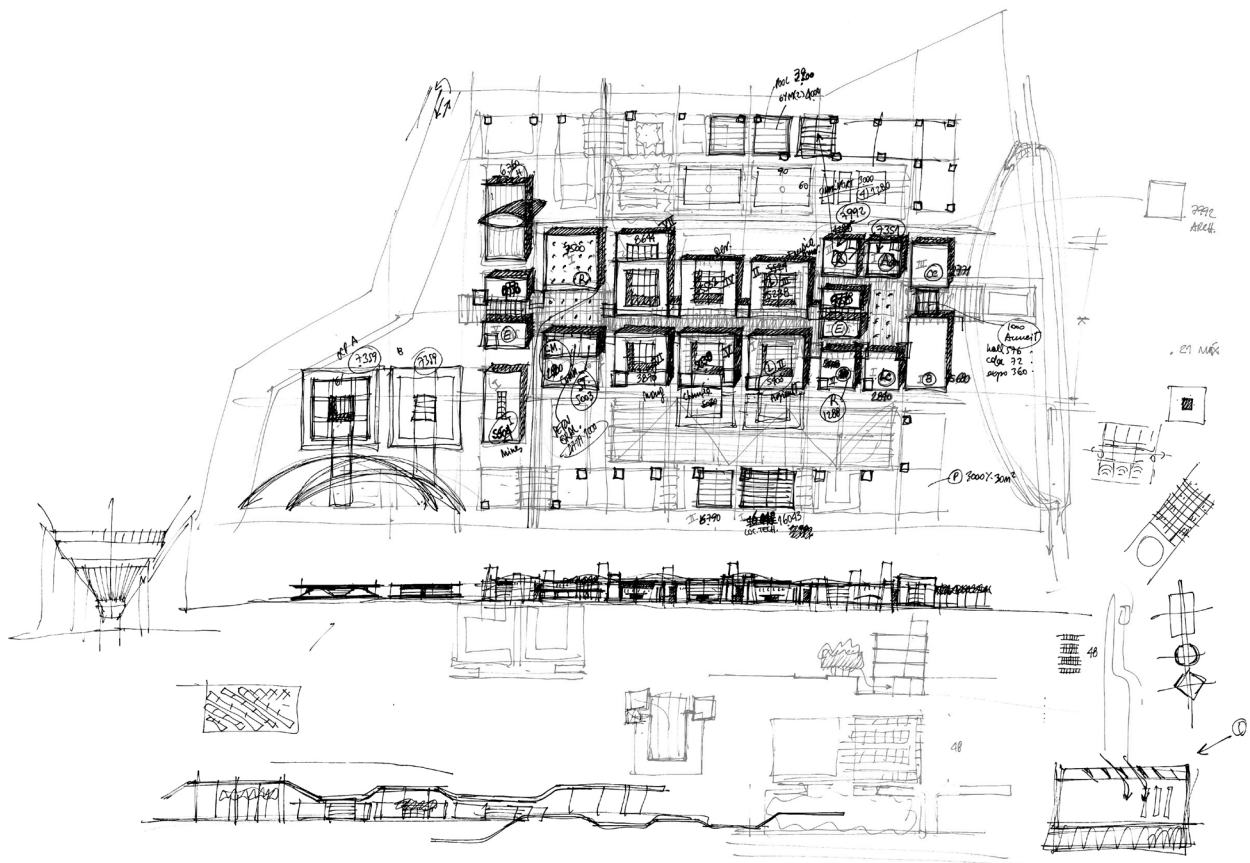


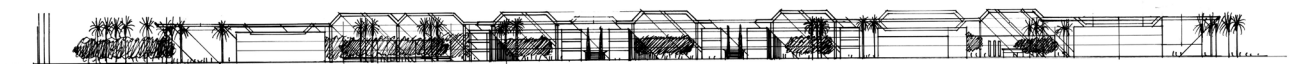
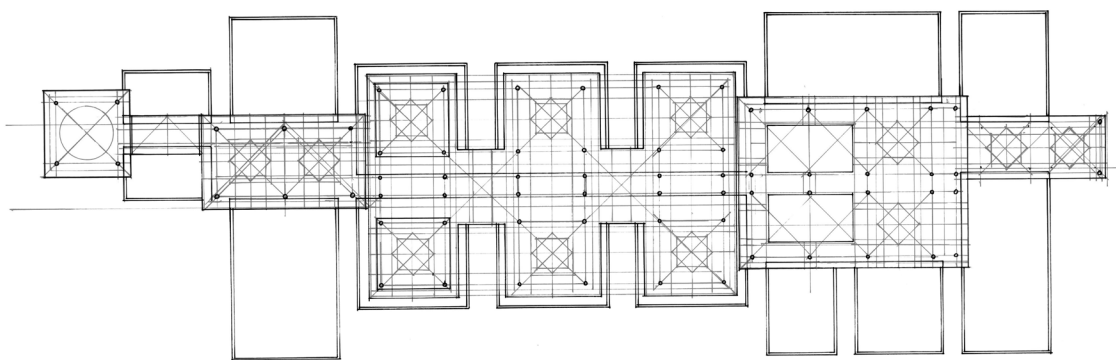
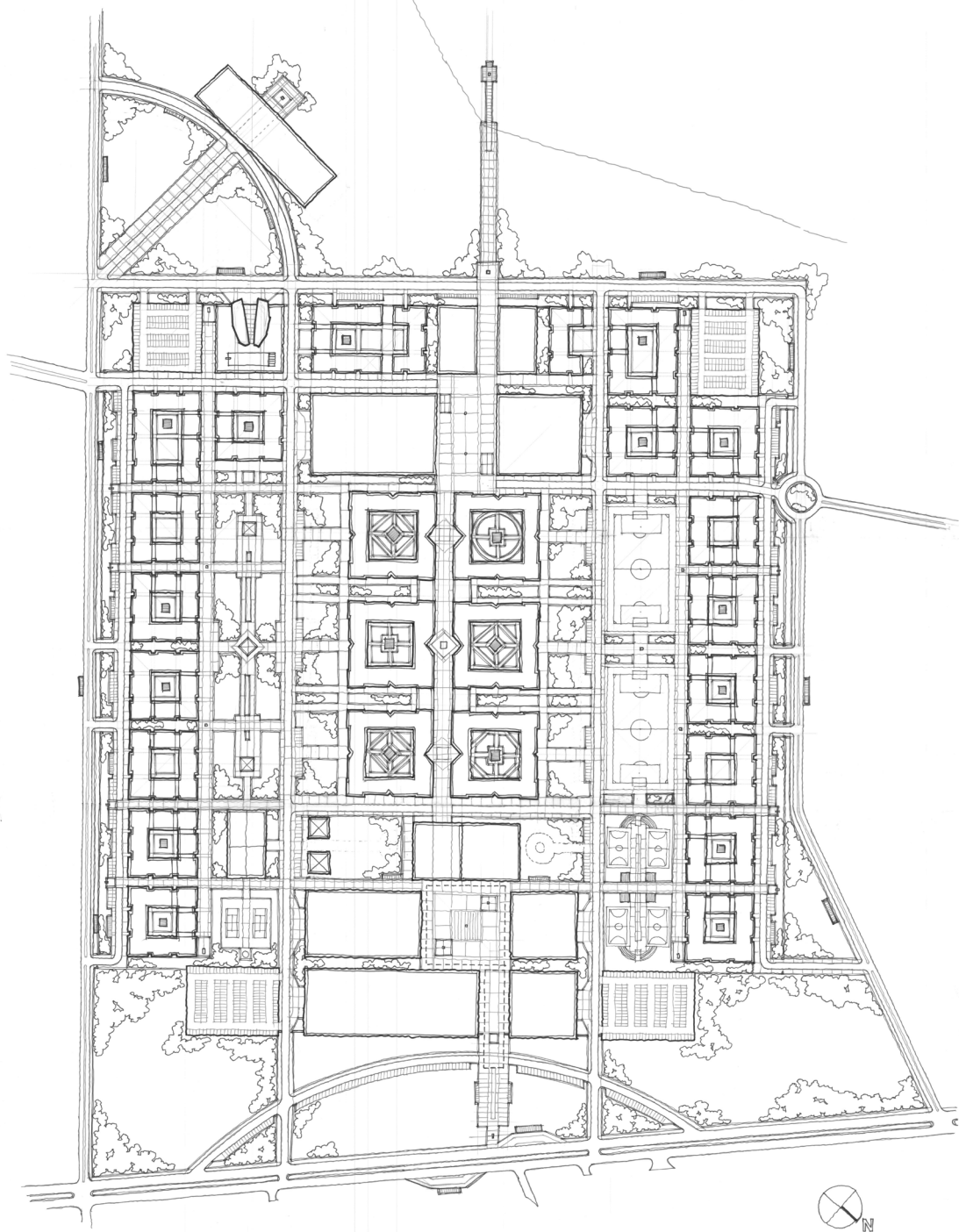
# Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique

ARCHIVAL DATA	
DATE	2010 (design) 2016-2022 (realization)
PLACE/ADDRESS	Benguerir, Morocco
COLLABORATORS	Elie Mouyal
CUSTOMER	OCP Group
SOURCES	RBTA Archive
ESSENTIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY	R. Klanten, M.E. Niebus, V. Marinai (eds.), <i>Ricardo Bofill: visions of architecture</i> (Berlin: Gestalten, 2019), 274-283; D. Stevens, L. El Moumni, <i>Contemporary Morocco: Building a New Vernacular Architecture</i> (Oysterhaven, Kinsale: Gandon Editions, 2024); <i>Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura</i> (London: Artifice Books on Architecture, 2018); L. Côté-Roy, <i>A kingdom of new cities: The national aspirations, urban imaginaries, and politics of contemporary new city building in Morocco</i> (Canada: McGill University, 2021); L. Villardi, "Inner Circle", <i>Architectural Record</i> , vol. 212, no. 8 (Aug 2024): 34-38.

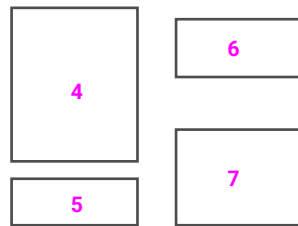
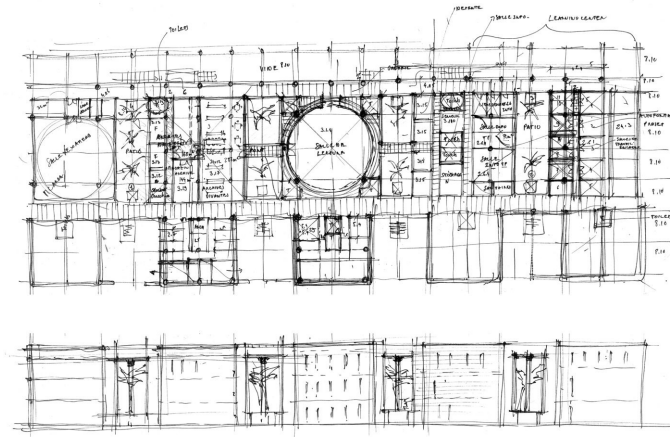


IMG.1: Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique, site plan;  
 IMG.2: Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique, master plan, conceptual study sketch, 2010;  
 IMG.3: Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique, master plan and section studies sketches, 2010, BTA Archive.



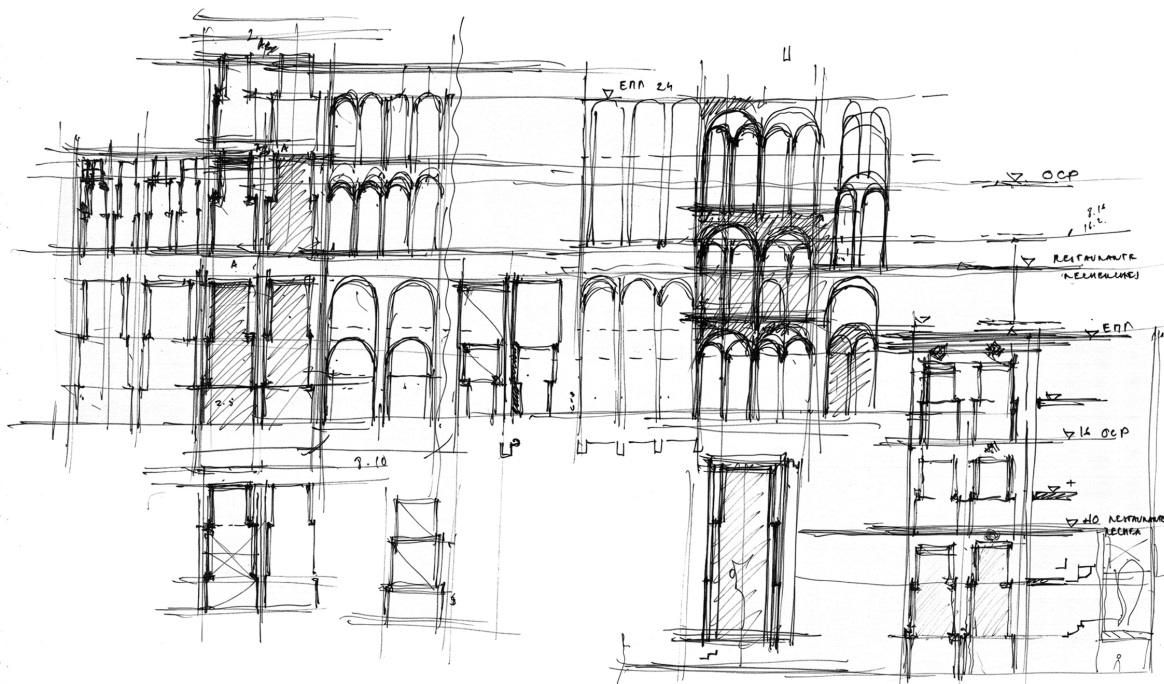




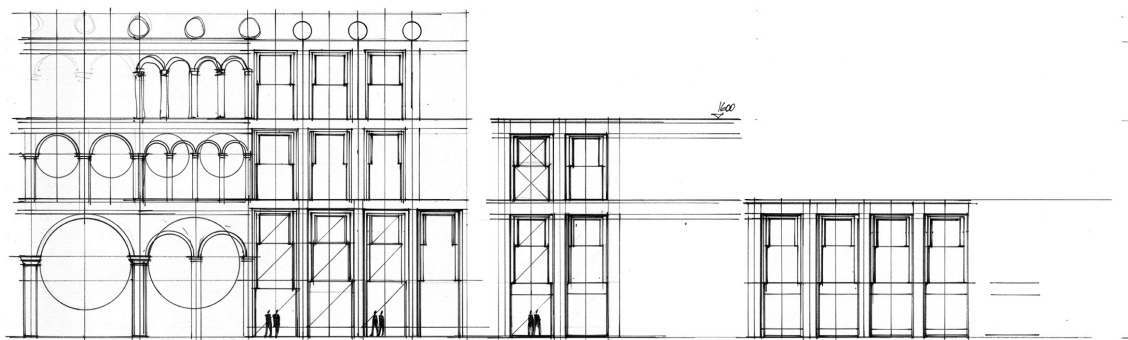
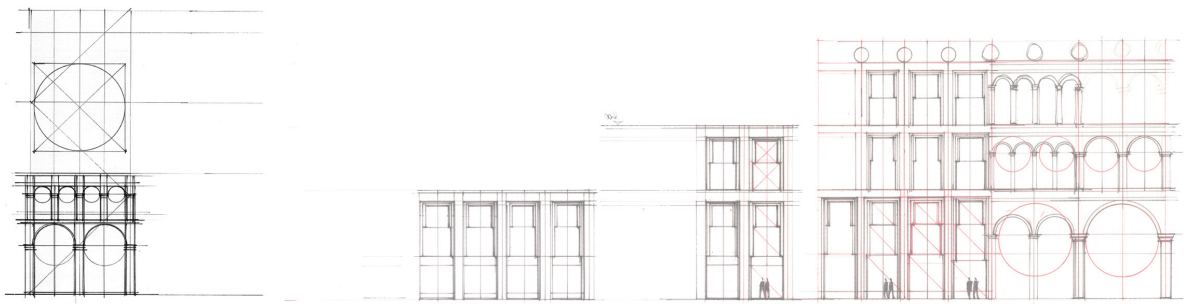


IMG.4: Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique, master plan sketch, 2010; IMG.5: Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique, partial master plan, 2010; IMG.6: Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique, general plan

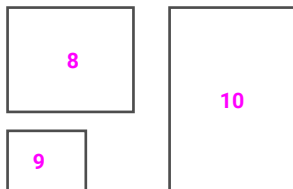
and façade elevation studies, sketches. (Ecole des Mines); IMG.7-8: Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique, Ecole des Mines, façade elevation studies, 2016, BTA Archive.



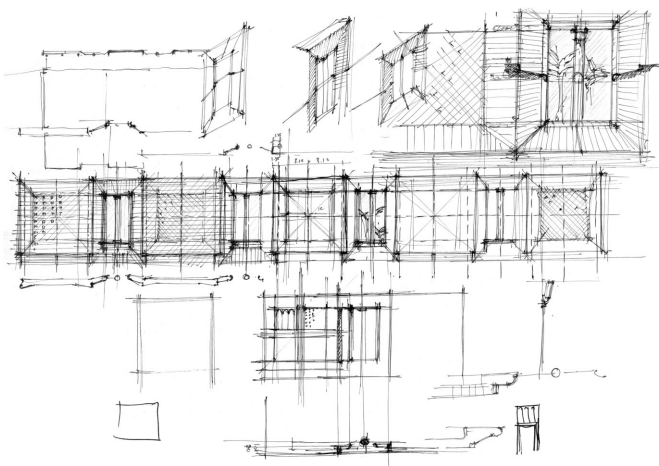
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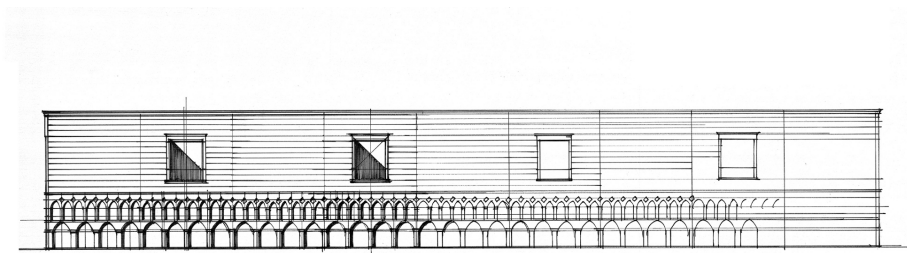


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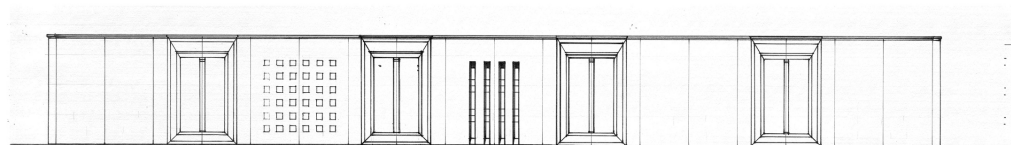


IMG.9: Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique, Ecole des Mines, facade elevation study, sketches; IMG.10: Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique, Ecole des Mines, facade elevations and section, 2016, BTA Archive.

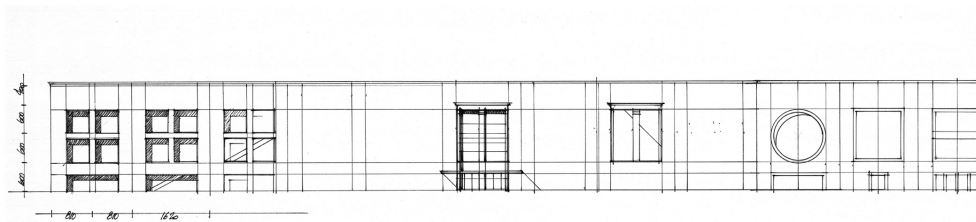




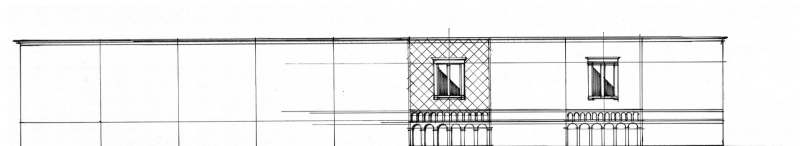
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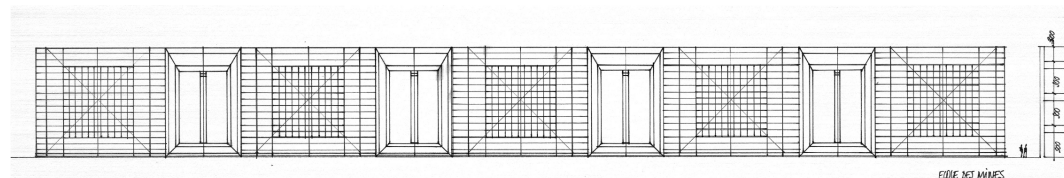
Façade sur l'avenue Mohammed VI



Façade sur la place



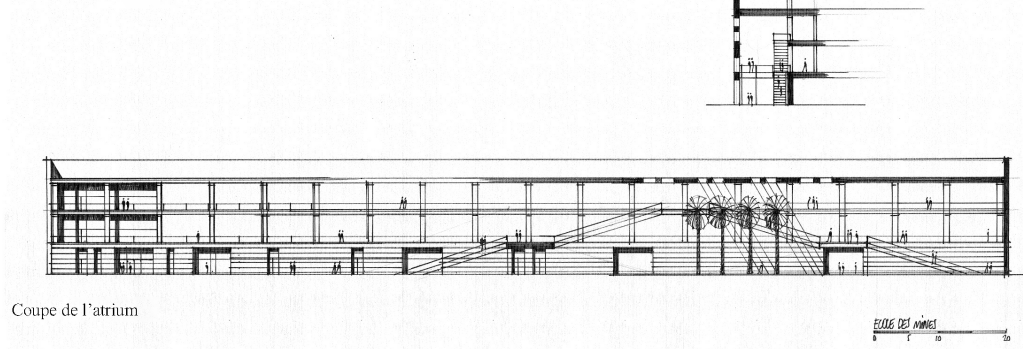
Façade sur l'avenue Mohammed VI



Façade sur l'avenue Mohammed VI

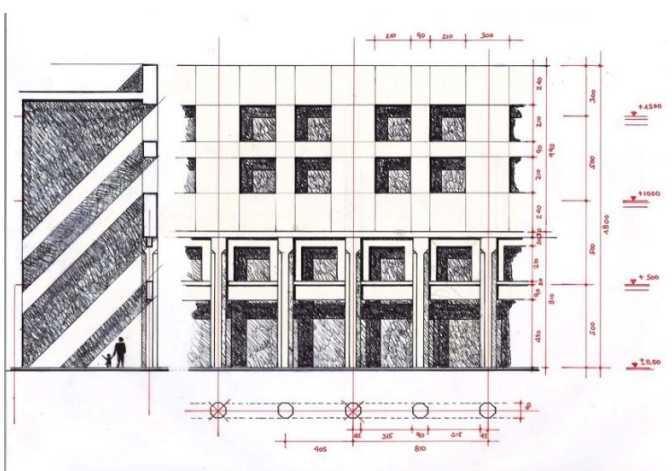
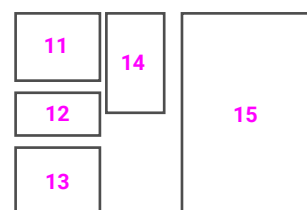
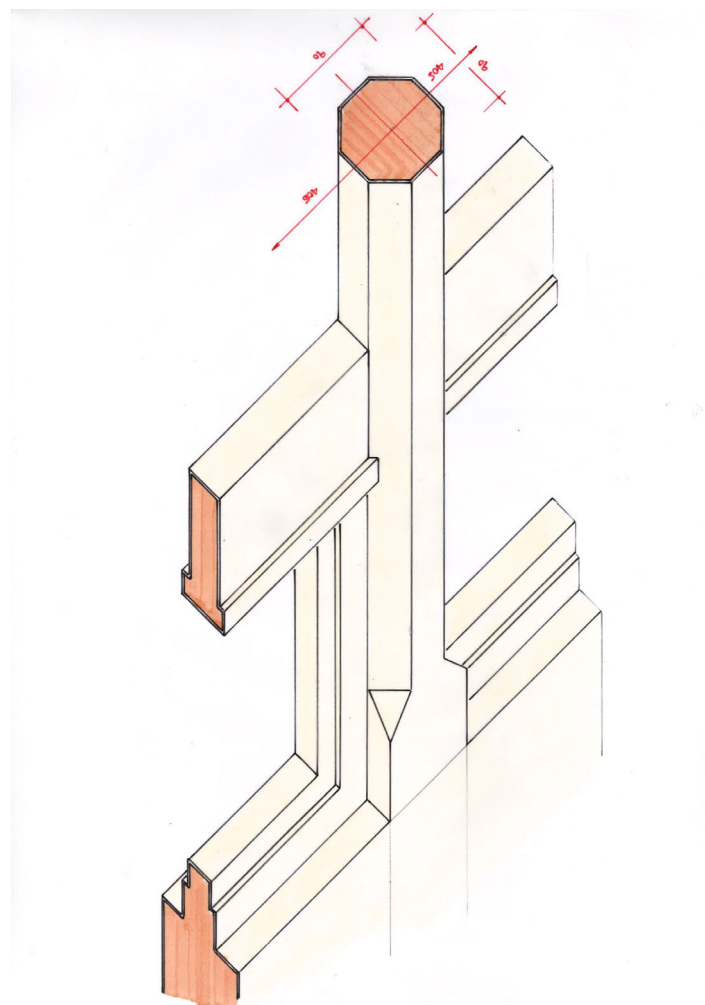
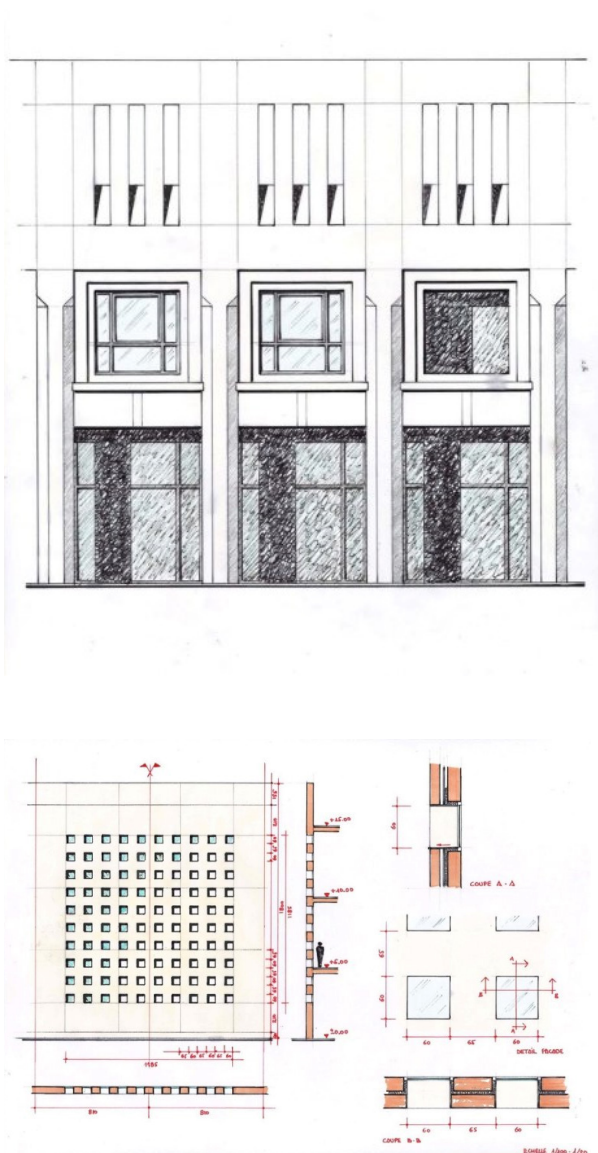


Façade sur la place

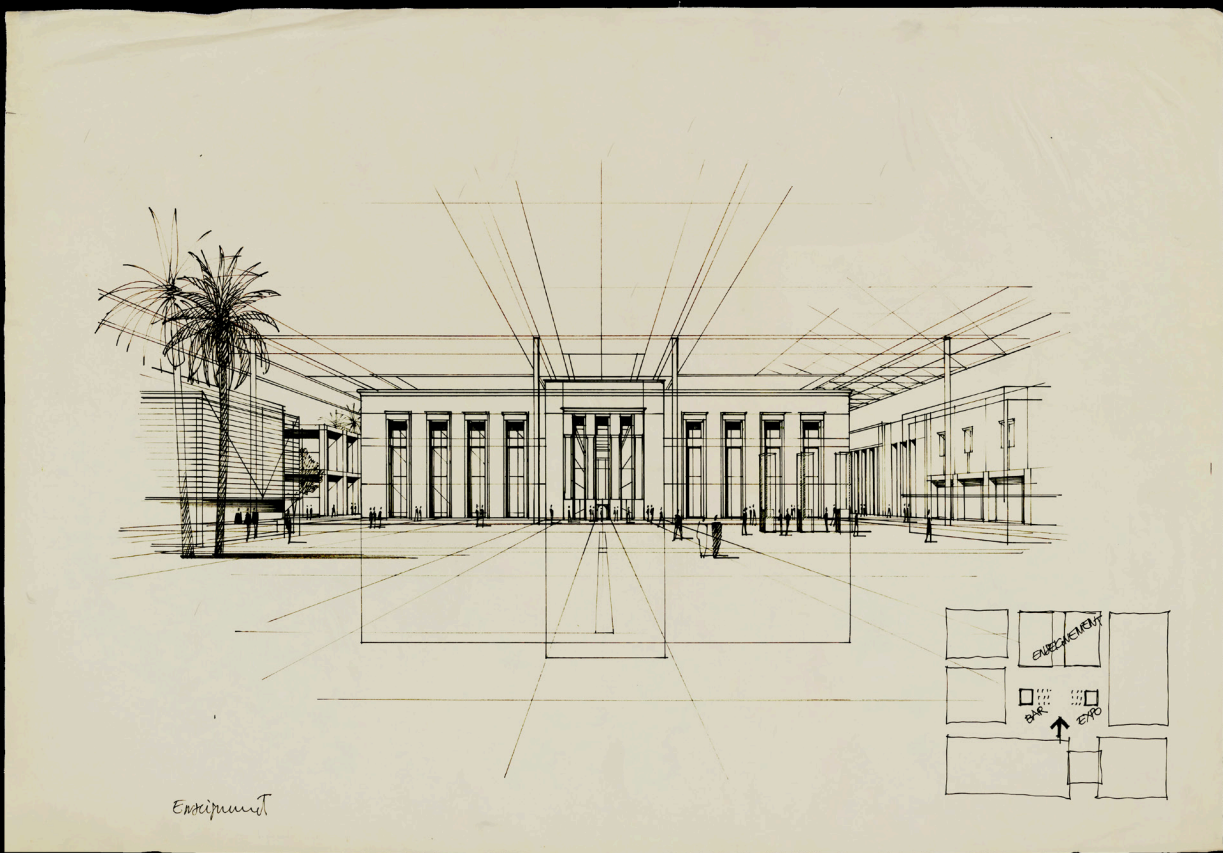
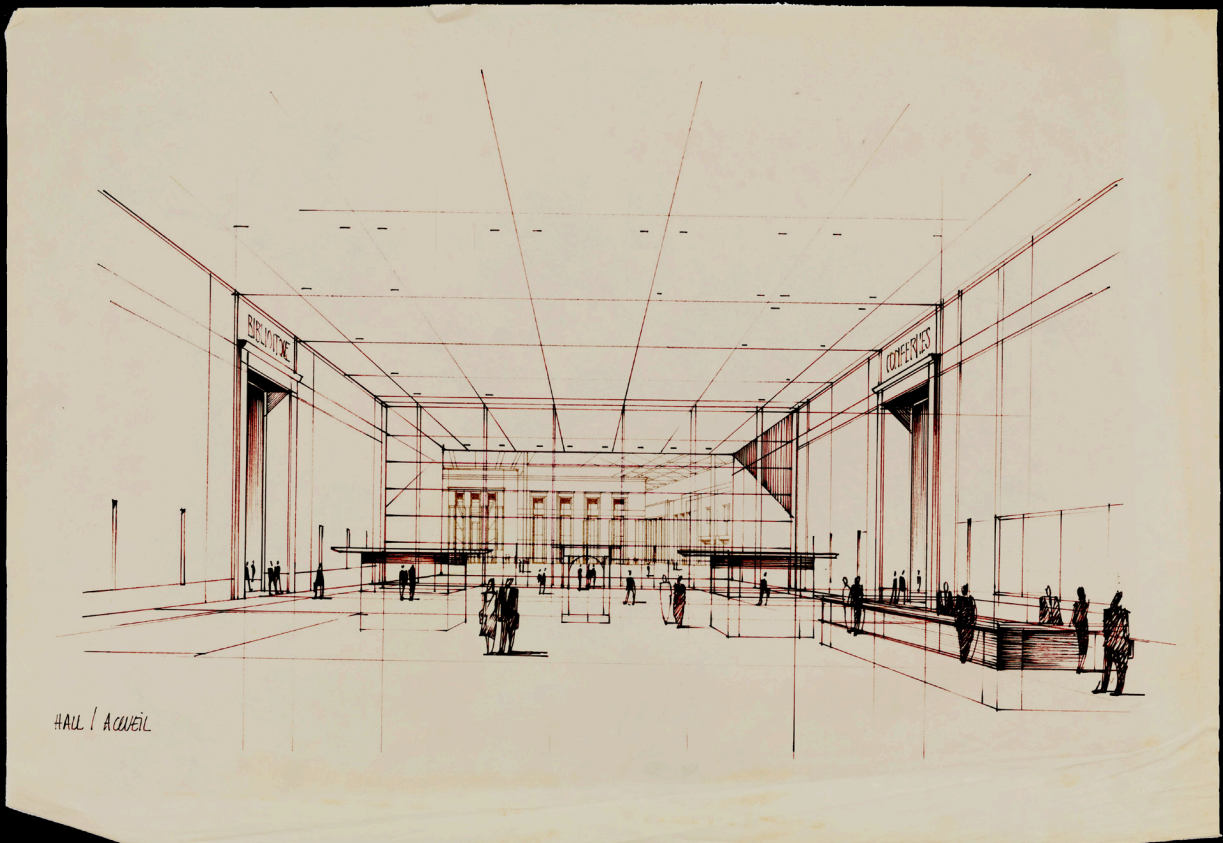


Coupe de l'atrium

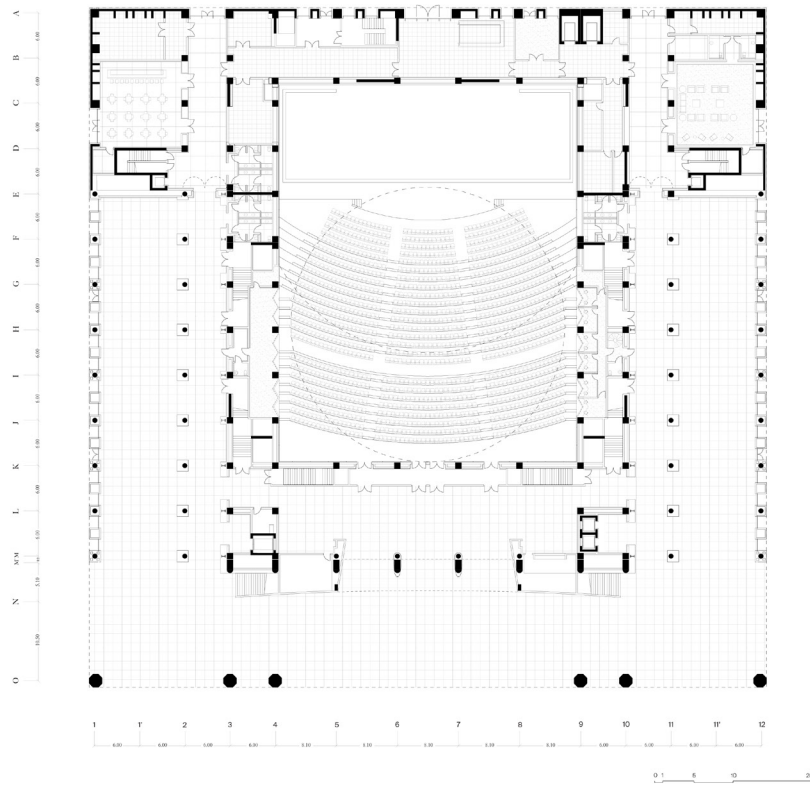




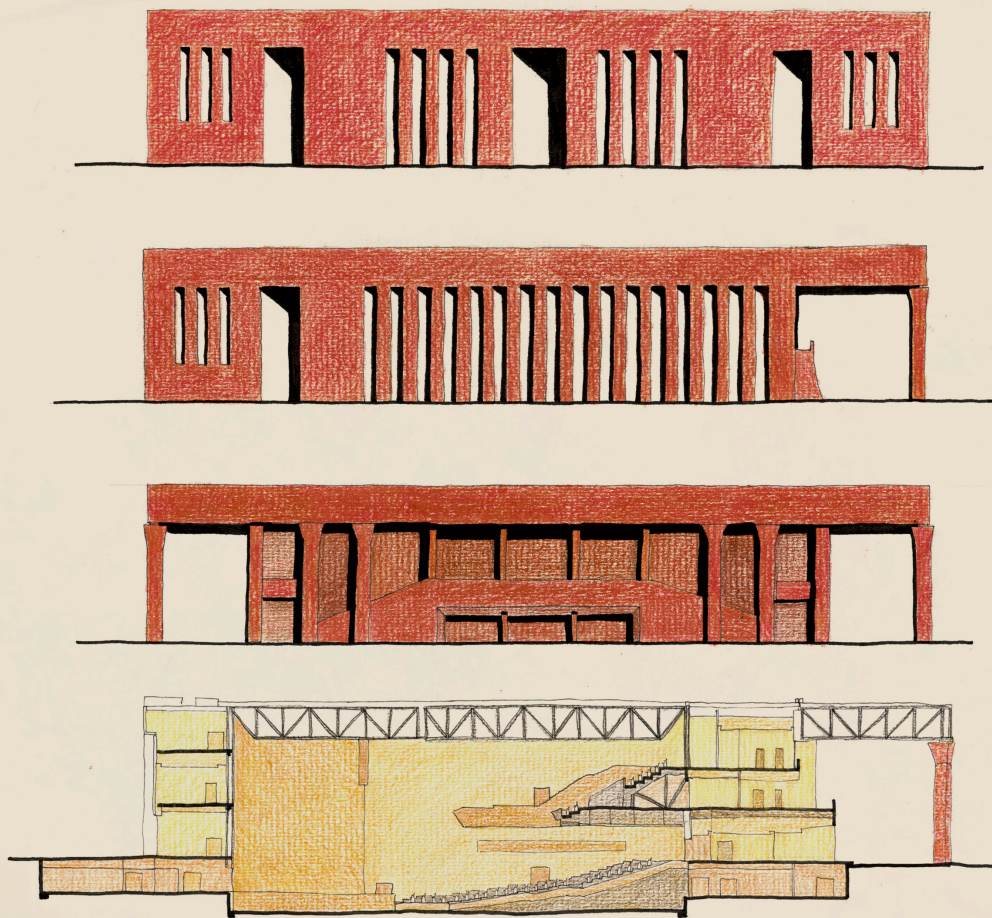
IMG.11: Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique, façade elevation study, coloured pencil on paper; IMG.12: Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique, Ecole des Mines, façade along Av. Mohammed VI, plan, elevation and section study sketches, coloured pencils on paper, 2016; IMG.13-14: Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique, Ecole des Mines, façade along place study, plan, elevation and section and axonometric detail, coloured pencil on paper, 2016; IMG.15: Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique, Ecole des Mines, interior.perspective sketches, 2016, BTA Archive.







Palais des Congrès, Ben Guerir  
Groundfloor





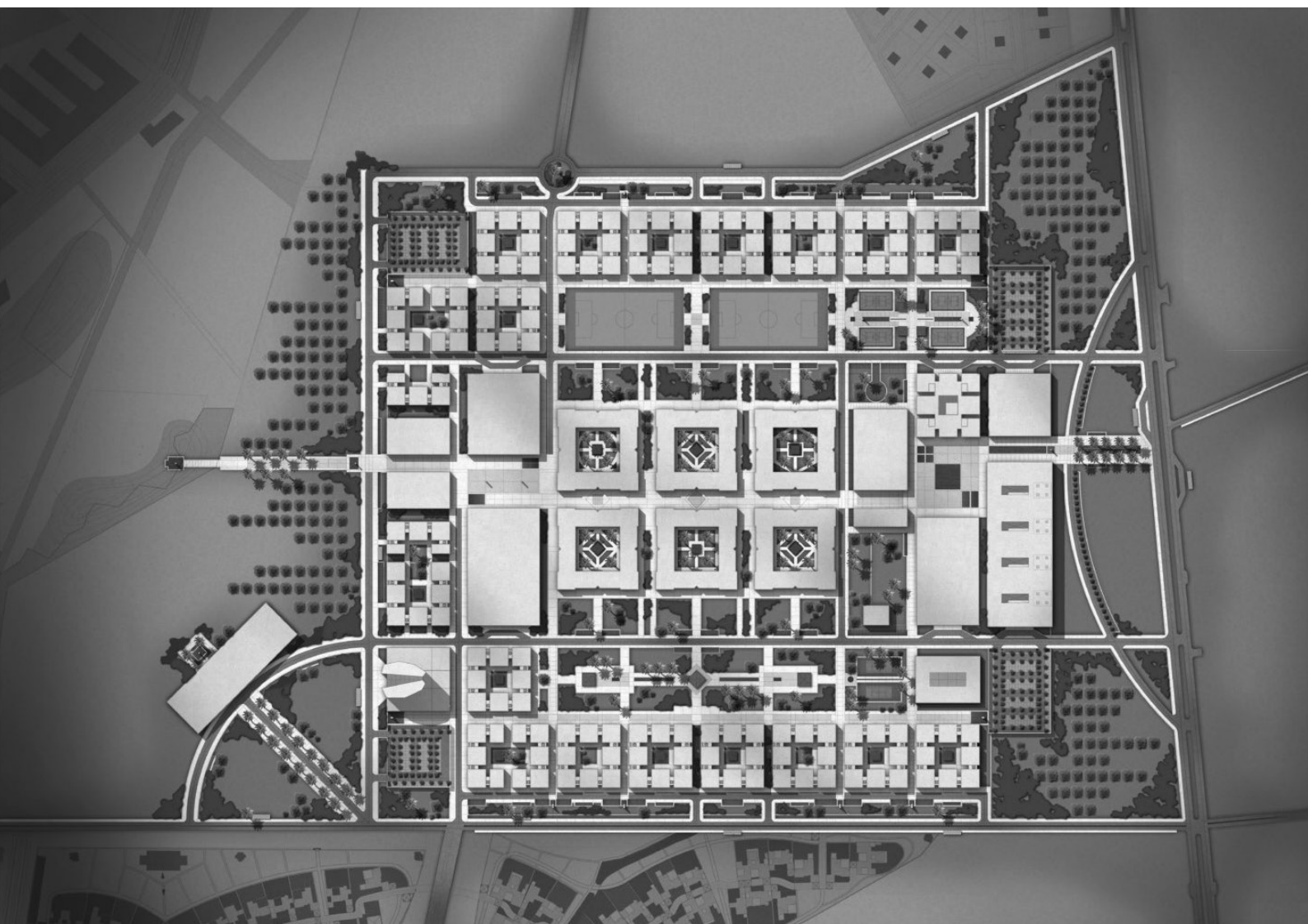
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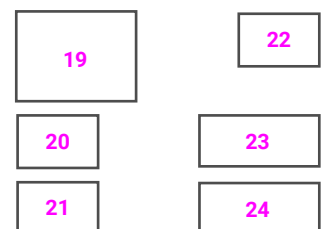
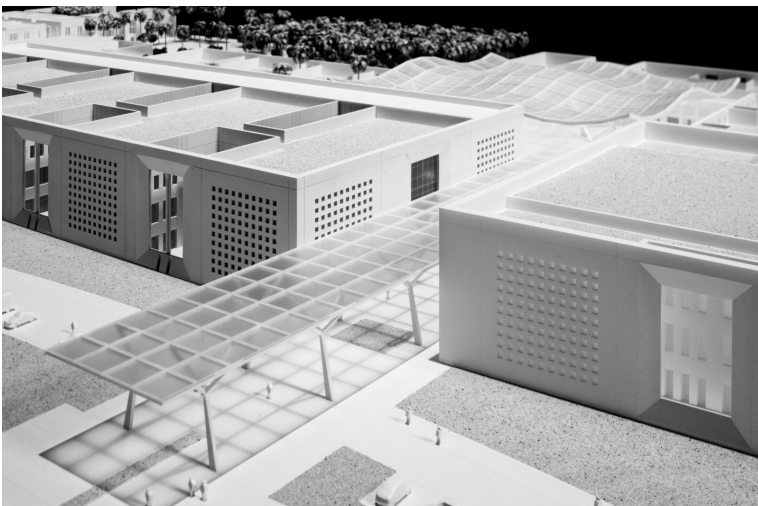
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IMG.16: Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique, Palais des Congrès, ground floor plan, 2022; IMG.17: Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique, Palais des Congrès, facade elevations and section, coloured

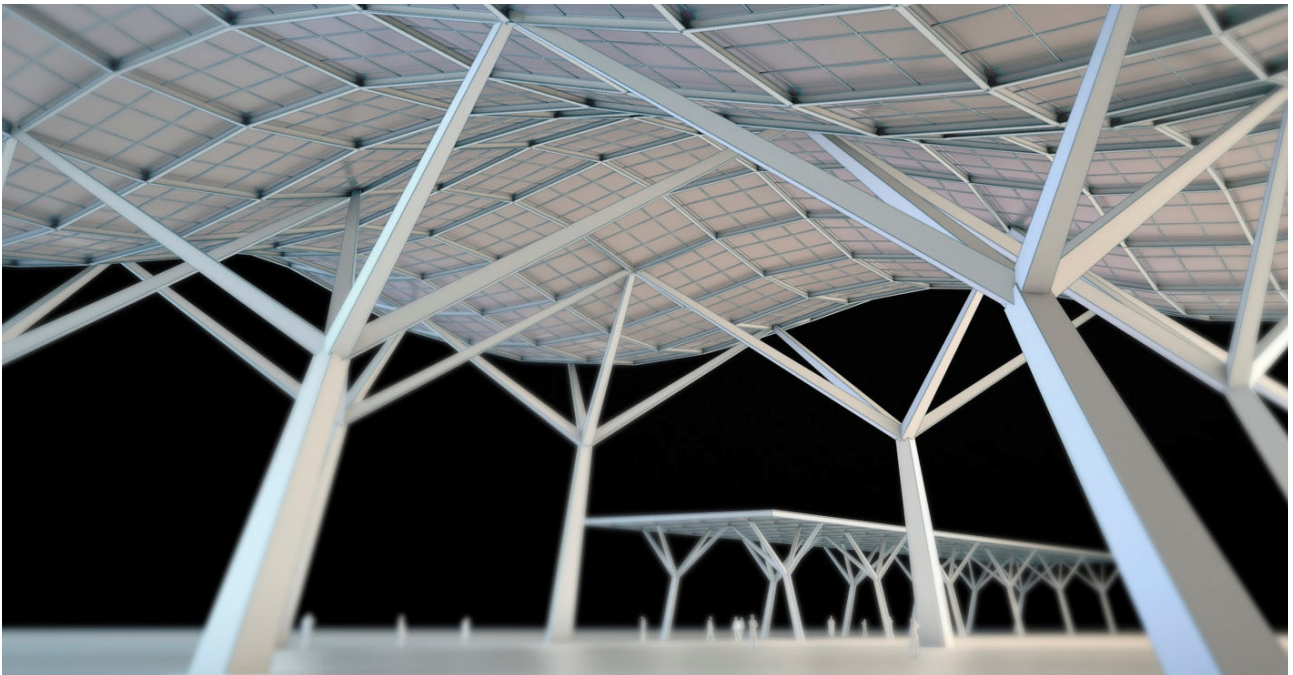
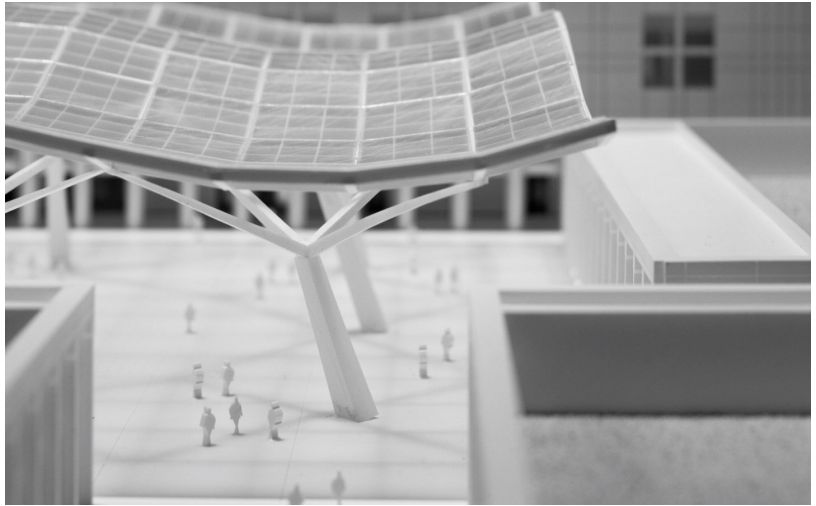
pencils on paper, 2022; IMG.18-19-20-21-22: Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique, pictures of the model, BTA Archive.





IMG.23-24: Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique, steel and glass pergola, infographic, BTA Archive.







## Selected extracts from the RBTA project description

The Benguerir campus of the Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique constitutes a significant part of the king's Green City initiative: an ambitious model for environmentally conscious urban development in Morocco. Aligned with this vision, the university conducts research into key areas of the green sector, such as water systems, agriculture, renewable energy, and biotechnology, while demonstrating the principles of the Green City through its own sustainable design. The brief – an international competition held in 2011 – required a building height limit of 21 metres and a tightly regulated floor area ratio, intended to encourage spatial efficiency without compromising environmental quality. The resulting masterplan is a network of streets and squares, softened by gardens and unified by a central pedestrian axis. A steel-and-glass pergola shades this promenade, which is lined with most of the schools and residential buildings, beyond them, the open green spaces for sports and recreation. The pergola extends to cover large squares at either end of the axis where primarily administrative functions are housed, supporting the daily operations of the university. At one end of the axis, the pergola projects beyond the site boundary to announce the entrance to the campus. Flanking this entrance are the Ecole des Mines and the Centre de Congrès, both of which present a solid façade to the main road. At the opposite end, a 500-metre wall, without support columns, gives the impression of floating – in fact achieved with a massive truss. Beyond this structure, the campus spreads out into a park-like landscape, with buildings such as the Palais de Congrès appearing as stand-alone pavilions. Ecole des Mines. Positioned beside the main campus entrance and facing the road, the Ecole des Mines forms the first architectural impression of the Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique in Benguerir. The building covers 15,000 square metres over three levels and accommodates a variety of academic functions, including classrooms, an amphitheatre, and office spaces for administrative staff and faculty. The plan is structured around a grid of square modules, some of which open up into internal courtyards. These patios serve as intermediaries, bridging the controlled comfort of the interior spaces and the tropical environment outside, offering a brief respite from academic study, with fresh air beneath the shade. Where the courtyards meet the building's exterior, they give way to tall, portallike windows – expressions of the spatial logic in elevation. In contrast to the open, glazed frontage of the adjacent Conference Centre, the building presents a relatively closed, solid elevation to the road – an introversion appropriate to its academic function. Within these solid wall portions, the fenestration is free to incorporate the local vernacular, with details such as circular openings, chamfered doorways, and windows distributed over a fine grid. Access to the building is off a large public square and through a central atrium, which functions as the main circulation route to the various programmed modules. The bulk of the structure is executed in concrete and finished in a warm orange render, an attempt to ground the building in its environment and connect with the broader architectural language of the campus. Palais des Congrès. The period spent waiting before a performance or presentation often rivals the experience of the event itself. Positioned at the far end of the Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique campus in Benguerir, the Palais des Congrès – a

2000-seat public venue – heightens this feeling of anticipation by bringing it out into the open air. A wide porch supported by octagonal columns shelters the exterior lobby – a kind of indoor-outdoor space paved with stones that extend onto the campus and continue around the lake opposite. It first gathers visitors together, then guides them directly into the central auditorium or along circulation routes towards the building's ancillary spaces. On the other three sides, a sequence of tall, narrow windows and porticos articulate the facade, like a peripteral colonnade surrounding a temple. Inside, the main auditorium is lined with wood, chosen for its acoustic performance and for an atmospheric warmth that complements the earthy tones of the building's rendered exterior.

# The Omega Project: Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni's Last Lesson on Architecture and the City

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*Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, Omega Centre, Milan, Commercial Architecture, Socially Responsible Architecture, Urban Project*

## /Abstract

The Omega Centre (1967–1970) represents a remarkable yet largely overlooked achievement by Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni. Situated directly on Milan's Piazza del Duomo, the project distinguished itself amid the contemporary proliferation of shops and showrooms that emerged in the final years of Italy's economic boom, thanks to the originality of its spatial and material solutions. In this sense, the Omega Centre stands as one of the Castiglioni brothers' most refined architectural works—and, notably, the last they completed together.

Despite the attention it initially drew from critics both in Italy and abroad, the Omega Centre has since remained on the margins of scholarly interest, overshadowed by the Castiglioni brothers' celebrated contributions to industrial design. Its commercial nature and eventual dismantling in the 1980s may have further contributed to its neglect, limiting both critical and scholarly engagement with the project. Yet the significance of the Omega Centre lies precisely in its ability to reflect the urban context it inhabits. It embodies a combination of interpretation and innovation, where materials and form engage in an open and synergistic dialogue – becoming, in turn, a lens through which to read the Milan itself.

Drawing on extensive archival research and previously unpublished materials from collections in Italy, Switzerland, and Japan, this paper aims to address that historiographical gap by critically reconstructing both the Castiglioni brothers' design process and the building's relationship with the city. The analysis unfolds across multiple scales – from the urban setting of Piazza del Duomo to the detailed design of interiors and objects, and back again – offering a coherent narrative that links object-scale innovation with urban meaning. Ultimately, the paper delivers a compelling lesson on the responsibility of commercial architecture – and of architecture as a whole – in shaping and interpreting the contemporary city, standing as the final statement to the Castiglioni brothers' enduring legacy.

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chiara.monterumisi2@unibo.it

Ines Tolic  
Università di Bologna  
ines.tolic@unibo.it

Chiara Monterumisi is Fellow at the CFC International Research Centre, collaborating with CSAC Parma. She was Post-Doc Fellow at the EPFL Lausanne, where she carried out *Stockholm: Housing in the Interwar Period* (SFN-funded project, 2016–2018) and *Copenhagen Housing Types* (2018–2020). She got a PhD in Architecture and Design Cultures (2015 University of Bologna; KTH Stockholm). Recasting her PhD thesis, she published *Ragnar Östberg. Villa Gerber: a house in the archipelago* (2017). She has been co-editor of book *Kay Fisker. Copenhagen Housing Types (1936) and Row-house Types (1941)* (2024), special issue journals (*Urban Planning*, 2019; *Planning Perspectives*, 2025), and anthology *Canons and Icons: re-wondering a transcultural contamination* (2025). She co-curated exhibitions: *HOUSING Frankfurt Wien Stockholm* (EPFL, 2018), the Swedish section of *Good News. Women in Architecture* (with MaXXI, Stockholm 2023) and a section at *Landscape Archive* (CSAC, 2024).

Ines Tolic is Associate Professor of History of Architecture at the University of Bologna. She studied Architecture at IUAV University and earned a PhD in History of Architecture and Urban History at the School for Advanced Studies in Venice, where her dissertation on the UN's role in Skopje's post-earthquake reconstruction (1963–1966) received the Gubbio Prize. Since 2021 she has directed Bologna's master's programme in Fashion Studies, where she developed research on commercial spaces, including the project *Dall'abito all'abitare. Progetti, spazi e architetture per il sistema moda*. She has collaborated in numerous international initiatives, such as *Unfinished Modernisations* (EU Culture Programme, 2010–2012), *Built City, Designed City, Virtual City* (Italian Ministry of University and Research, 2008–2011), and *AER – Architettura in Emilia Romagna* (2018–ongoing). She is an elected member of AISU's Steering Committee and contributes to the Urban Representations Interest Group within the European Architectural History Network (EAHN).

Considered an “irreplaceable point of reference for the entire urban fabric,”<sup>1</sup> Piazza del Duomo hosts some of Milan’s most significant commercial buildings. Among the most notable is the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II – an eclectic structure designed by Giuseppe Mengoni (1829–1877) and constructed between 1864 and 1878 as part of the wider redevelopment of the square<sup>2</sup> – as well as the near-contemporary department store *Alle Città d’Italia*, later renamed *La Rinascente*, a label proposed by poet Gabriele D’Annunzio (1879–1882).<sup>3</sup> [Fig. 1]



1

During the interwar period, the porticoes of Piazza del Duomo became a setting for a series of smaller-scale architectural masterpieces, attesting to the area’s enduring vocation for experimentation. Among these was the Motta pastry shop (1933), designed by Melchiorre Bega (1898–1976), which introduced

Fig. 1

Piazza del Duomo and the Mengoni complex comprising the Vittorio Emanuele II gallery (1947). The scaffolding at street number 25 were used to repair damage from the war and to raise the upper floor. The Omega Centre was located on the ground floor of that building (Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la Città Metropolitana di Milano, Ref. 43089 10/11/1947 submitted by Società Quartiere Centrale).

1 Giuseppe De Finetti, *Milano: costruzione di una città*, eds. Giovanni Cislighi, Mara De Benedetti, and Piergiorgio Marabelli (Milan: Hoepli, 2002 [1969]), XXXII. Unless otherwise specified, all translations from Italian are by the authors.

The article was carried out entirely as a collaboration between the authors, who discussed all its aspects and developed the introduction and the conclusions jointly. The chapters “Architecture as profession, the city as project” and “From the Omega Centre to the city” were written by Chiara Monterumisi, while “From the city to the Omega Centre” and “The Art of Advertising” were authored by Ines Tolic.

2 For an overview of the life and works of Giuseppe Mengoni, with particular attention to the design and construction of Piazza del Duomo and the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan, see: Laura Gioeni, *L’Affaire Mengoni. La Piazza Duomo e la Galleria Vittorio Emanuele di Milano: i concorsi, la realizzazione, i restauri* (Milan: Guerini, 1995).

3 Franco Amatori, “La Rinascente. A Brief History,” in *LR100. Rinascente, Stories of Innovation*, eds. Sandrina Bandera and Maria Canella (Milan: Skira, 2017), 69.



modernist principles into the very heart of the city.<sup>4</sup> Another key example is the Lagomarsino mechanical calculator store (1941), the first collaborative project by architects Angelo Bianchetti (1911–1994) and Cesare Pea (1910–1985), whose display window featured a rhythmic sequence of identical objects set on an inclined plane.<sup>5</sup> Also noteworthy is the Galtruccio fabric store (1933–1934), designed by Guglielmo Ulrich (1904–1977), which was praised by contemporary critics for the “practical simplicity of the furnishings” and the “purity expressed in the interplay of its spaces and surfaces.”<sup>6</sup> As is often the case with shops and showrooms, all of these interiors have since been replaced, swept away by a tireless process of *rinnovamento*<sup>7</sup> that would continue into the postwar period.

Italy's so-called economic miracle of the 1950s and 1960s concealed an architectural paradox: while consumer activity was booming and the demand for spaces suited to this new culture of consumption was rapidly growing, retail architecture remained largely excluded from contemporary architectural discourse. A telling example is offered by architect and historian Giovanni Klaus Koenig (1924–1989), a key figure in postwar Italian culture, who wryly observed that he risked “moral lynching [...] if he did not join intellectuals’ universal jeremiad on the mistreated civilisation of consumption.” Instead, he insisted on the need to “make some distinctions” and “create some rankings” to avoid “muddying the waters any further.”<sup>8</sup>

While Koenig was calling on his contemporaries to engage critically with commercial architecture, the Omega Centre – commissioned by the Swiss luxury watch manufacturer<sup>9</sup> – was inaugurated on 11 April 1969 in Piazza del Duomo. The design was entrusted to the Milanese architects Pier Giacomo (1913–1968) and Achille Castiglioni (1918–2002)<sup>10</sup> by the Società Fratelli De Marchi, which, as noted in a 1970 report, “[held] the exclusive right to sell the brand’s watches as general agents” in Italy for an indefinite period.<sup>11</sup> [Fig. 2]

4 See Raffaello Giolli, “L’opera di Melchiorre Bega,” in *L’architettura razionale. Antologia*, ed. Cesare De Seta (Bari: Laterza, 1972), 231–236.

5 Dario Scodeller, *Negozi. L’architetto nello spazio della merce* (Milano: Electa, 2007), 110; Chiara Baglione, “Negozi in serie nell’Italia tra le due guerre. Lagomarsino e l’architettura pubblicitaria,” in *Storia e futuro*, eds. Elena Dellapiana and Roberto Parisini (Bologna: Bologna University Press, 2022), 29–48.

6 “Rinascita dell’arredamento del negozio in Italia,” *Domus*, no. 79 (July 1934): 32–35.

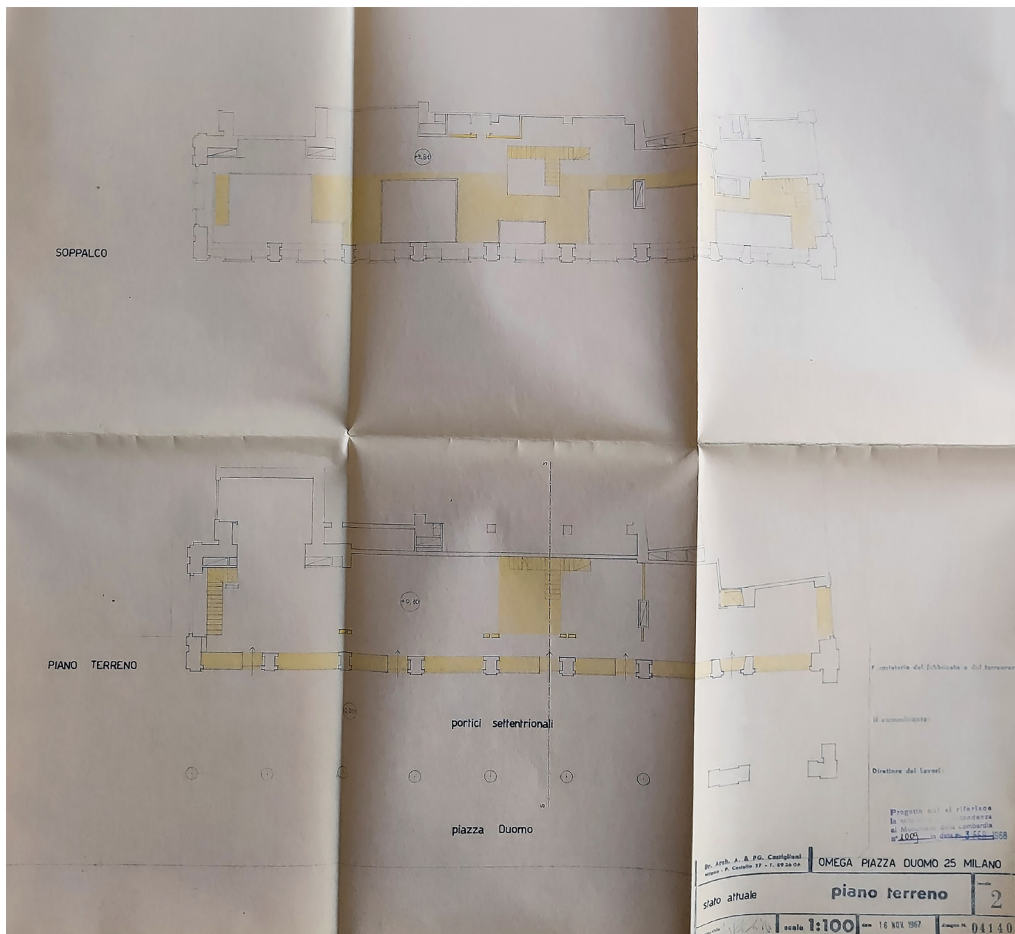
7 “La città che si rinnova” (“The Renewing City”) was the title of a series of articles published by Italian art critic Edoardo Persico (1900–1936) in the magazine *La Casa bella* in the 1930s. The series aimed to draw readers’ attention to the modernisation – more aspirational than actual – of Italian cities, focusing in particular on the transformation of social habits and the emerging architecture of retail spaces.

8 Giovanni Klaus Koenig, “Riviste che nascono,” *Casabella*, no. 338 (June 1969): 4. On Giovanni Klaus Koenig’s critical work, see *Giovanni Klaus Koenig nella cultura progettuale del Novecento*, eds. Lorenzo Ciccarelli, Lorenzo Mingardi, and Isabella Patti (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2024).

9 In 1848 Louis Brandt opened the first atelier in La-Chaux-de-Fond, a renowned centre of watchmaking, and in 1880 his two sons moved the company to Biel. It was only in 1903 that the manufacture would take on the name Omega, after the revolutionary calibre movement it had mass produced. See Nicolas Hayek, *The Omega Chronicle: The Story of Omega* (Biel: Omega Museum, 2012).

10 In 1952, the eldest brother, Livio (1911–1979), ceased to collaborate regularly with the other two, turning his attention instead to sound, light, and the “design of the immaterial”. See Dario Scodeller, “Lo Studio Castiglioni nella cultura italiana del design 1936–2002,” in *Il design dei Castiglioni: ricerca, sperimentazione, metodo* (Mantua: Corraini, 2019), 21.

11 In the official document, the European Economic Community Commission regulated exclusive distribution and maintenance agreements for Omega products, as well as the use of the brand name in advertising with certain European companies: Fratelli De Marchi of Turin, Italy; Maison Brandt Frères of Paris, France; Kinsbergen of Amsterdam, the Netherlands; Uhren-Handelsgesellschaft of Frankfurt, Germany; and Ultimo Watch of Brussels, Belgium and Luxembourg. See “70/488/EEC Decisione della Commissione, del 28 ottobre 1970, relativa a delle procedure ai sensi dell’articolo 85 del trattato CEE”. In *Gazzetta Ufficiale delle Comunità Europee*, no. 13, Law 242, November, 5. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:1970:242:FULL> Accessed March 14, 2024.



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Upon its completion, the Omega Centre was met with enthusiastic acclaim from contemporary critics both in Italy and abroad.<sup>12</sup> The Italian magazine *Domus* particularly appreciated the juxtaposition of new and pre-existing elements that had guided the architects' design choices,<sup>13</sup> while the German journal *Md. Moebel Interior Design* praised the project's spatial quality and coherence, underscoring the effective use of a limited palette of refined materials that enhanced the presentation of the Biel-based company's products.<sup>14</sup> The project was admired for many legitimate reasons – an outcome not uncommon in the Castiglioni brothers' work – but one aspect stood out above all: the relationship with the city, which profoundly shaped the design of both the exterior and the interior spaces. Seen in this light, the Omega Centre remains a project yet to be fully discovered.

Unfortunately – though perhaps not unexpectedly – the Omega Centre was demolished in the 1980s for a new commercial development. Since then, the space undergone continuous modifications to accommodate the evolving

12 In 1971, material was also requested by the magazines *Detail* and *Architects' Journal*. The latter addressed its request to Pier Giacomo (who was already deceased at the time), asking specifically for "working drawings, and not presentation drawings," and expressed a willingness to commission an additional photographic campaign from Fortunati Fototecnica or another Milanese studio. Although the original material was sent, it was never published. Fondazione Achille Castiglioni (Milan), hereafter FAC. Please note that, in accordance with the guidelines of the Achille Castiglioni Foundation, archival materials are cited by mentioning only the institution, without specifying the document's location or inventory number.

13 "In Piazza del Duomo a Milano: mille metri quadrati di Omega," *Domus*, no. 477 (August 1969): 16.

14 "Achille und Pier Giacomo Castiglioni. Omega, Piazza Duomo Milano," *Md. Moebel Interior Design*, no. 12 (1969): 59.

Fig. 2

Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, plans for the ground floor and mezzanine illustrating the state of the site before their intervention, where the yellow highlighting corresponds to demolition required before proceeding with their project, scale 1:100 (Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la Città Metropolitana di Milano, Authorization Ref. 1009 - 3/02/1968).

needs of successive brands. As a result, the building quickly faded from both public consciousness and critical discourse. Today, it is only sporadically mentioned in monographic studies<sup>15</sup> or featured in celebratory exhibitions,<sup>16</sup> and has been largely relegated to the margins of a narrative that, following Pier Giacomo's premature death (27 November 1968) slightly before the inauguration,<sup>17</sup> increasingly centred on Achille's successful career in product design, showrooms' settings, and his influential role as professor of Artistic Design for Industry at the Politecnico di Torino (1969–1977), then Interior and Furniture Design as well as Industrial Design at the Politecnico di Milano (1977–1993).<sup>18</sup> Yet between 1944, the year of Achille's graduation, and 1968, the year of Pier Giacomo's passing, the two brothers developed "a relationship of creative interdependence so strong that the projects produced by the studio [...] are indistinctly attributed to both."<sup>19</sup> Pier Giacomo's death in 1968 "marks a tragic caesura"<sup>20</sup> in the individual carriers and, as noted by Lambertucci, it "makes one feel the peculiarity of his contribution to the couple's spatial attitude."<sup>21</sup>

Pier Giacomo's sensibility had been cultivated since his early experience at Luigi Caccia Dominioni's (1916–2013) studio even before graduating in 1937. He further refined it as assistant to Renato Camus (1891–1971), Piero Portaluppi (1888–1967), Gio Ponti (1891–1979) and Ernesto Nathan Rogers (1909–1969) at the Politecnico di Milano, before becoming professor of Architectural Composition (1958) and chair of Drawing and Surveying (1964–1968).<sup>22</sup> Building on the reflection proposed by Lambertucci, the present paper seeks to foreground the collaborative nature of the Castiglioni brothers' design process, attributing to that very collaboration the semantic richness and urban quality of the Omega Centre. By focusing on the urban dimension of the project, this paper moves

15 Sergio Polano, *Achille Castiglioni. Tutte le opere* (Milano: Electa, 2001); Sergio Polano, *Achille Castiglioni* (London: Pall Mall, 2012); Silvia Cattiodoro, ed., *Pier Giacomo, 100 volte Castiglioni: materiali, progetti, testimonianze di un maestro del design* (Vicenza: Edibus, 2013).

16 Andrea Branzi, "Achille, Pier Giacomo e Livio Castiglioni," in *Ritratti e autoritratti di design* (Venice: Marsilio, 2010), 83–91; Andrea Branzi, "I fratelli Castiglioni," in *Achille e Pier Giacomo Castiglioni*, ed. Matteo Vercelloni (Pero: 24 Ore Cultura, 2011), 4–21; Marco Sironi, *Sul luogo del design. Intorno al lavoro dei fratelli Castiglioni* (PhD diss., University of Sassari, 2012) later developed as book (Milan: Greco & Greco, 2014); Dario Scodeller, "Lo Studio Castiglioni nella cultura italiana del design 1936–2002," in *Il design dei Castiglioni: Ricerca, sperimentazione, metodo*, 2019, 21–50; Filippo Lambertucci, *Lo spazio dei Castiglioni* (Siracusa: LetteraVentidue Edizioni, 2020).

17 Although the Omega Centre was still under development at the Castiglioni studio when Pier Giacomo passed away, references to it are notably absent from the obituary literature. Dino Buzzati, writing in *Il Corriere della Sera*, stands out as the sole voice to acknowledge it, while neither *Domus*, *Casabella*, nor *Ottagono* made any mention of it. Dino Buzzati, "La scomparsa di Pier Giacomo Castiglioni. Un grande designer," *Il Corriere della Sera*, December 3, 1968: 3; Agnoldomenico Pica, "Pier Giacomo Castiglioni," *Domus*, no. 470 (January 1969): 1–2; "Pier Giacomo Castiglioni 1913–1968," *Casabella*, no. 332 (January 1969): 67; Vittorio Gregotti, "Ricordo di Pier Giacomo Castiglioni," *Ottagono*, no. 12 (January 1969): 20–23.

18 Eugenio Bettinelli, *La voce del maestro. Achille Castiglioni. I modi della didattica* (Mantua: Corraini, 2014), 38. For further references on Achille Castiglioni, see also: Paolo Ferrari, ed., *Achille Castiglioni* (Milan: Electa, 1984); Sergio Polano, *Achille Castiglioni. Tutte le opere*; Sergio Polano, *Achille Castiglioni*; Domitilla Dardi, *Achille Castiglioni* (Turin: Testo & Immagine, 2011); *Achille Castiglioni visionario: l'alfabeto allestitivo di un designer regista*, ed. Ico Migliore et al. (Geneva: Skira, 2018); *A Castiglioni*, ed. Patricia Urquiola, in collaboration with Federica Sala (Milan: La Triennale di Milano and Electa, 2018).

19 Giuliana Ricci, "Castiglioni, Pier Giacomo," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 22 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1979): [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pier-giacomo-castiglioni\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pier-giacomo-castiglioni_(Dizionario-Biografico)/). Accessed June 25, 2024.

20 Polano, *Achille Castiglioni. Tutte le opere*, 9.

21 Lambertucci, *Lo spazio dei Castiglioni*, 159.

22 Scodeller, "Lo Studio Castiglioni nella cultura italiana del design 1936–2002," 28; Silvia Cattiodoro, "Affresco di famiglia," 25; Giorgia Castiglioni, "Ricordando Pier Giacomo Castiglioni," in *Il design dei Castiglioni: Ricerca, sperimentazione, metodo*, 183.



away from the recurring emphasis on the “poetic lightness” often associated with the Castiglioni brothers’ achievements in industrial and exhibition design,<sup>23</sup> or their deft handling of the ephemeral vocabulary of exhibition design. This focus on lightness and ephemerality may inadvertently “suggest [that the work of the Castiglioni brothers was] superficial or merely circumstantial.”<sup>24</sup> This is certainly not the case with the Omega Centre, which – on the one hand – offers a remarkably profound reflection on the city, on Piazza del Duomo, and on Milan more broadly, and – on the other – presents Omega’s products through a display language that is both original and architecturally expressive. **[Fig. 3]**

To fully account for the project’s complexity, this study unfolds across multiple scales: from the urban context of Piazza del Duomo to the interior design details and object-level interventions, and back again. This dual movement generates a cohesive narrative that links innovation at the scale of the object with meaning at the scale of the city, inviting a broader reflection on the role of commercial architecture in shaping the modern urban experience. In an era increasingly defined by digital platforms and virtual retail environments – and within the context of Milan’s ongoing urban transformation – revisiting today a project so intrinsically conceived in and for the city appears more necessary than ever. Not only does it reassert the centrality of commercial architecture within the urban discourse, but it also affirms its potential civic role. As this paper ultimately seeks to demonstrate, the Omega Centre was not merely a sophisticated design exercise, but a compelling lesson in the civic responsibility of architecture: a project that actively engaged the public realm, contributing to the making of the city – and to our ability to read and interpret it.

In an effort to restore the Omega project to its rightful place within the histories of architecture, the city, and the Castiglioni oeuvre, this research draws on a wide range of previously unpublished materials sourced from both national and international archives and private collections. These include the Fondazione Achille Castiglioni (Milan); the Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione (CSAC) at the University of Parma; the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Milano; the Sportello Unico per l’Edilizia (Milan); the Giorgio Casali photographic archive at the Archivio Progetti IUAV (Venice); the Max Huber Archive (Novazzano, Switzerland); and the private collection of Masanori Umeda (Tokyo, Japan).

## **Architecture as Profession, the City as Project**

Centred on Piazza del Duomo, Milan’s first metro line – the now-iconic Linea Rossa – was inaugurated in November 1964. Designed by architects Franco Albini (1905–1977) and Franca Helg (1920–1969), in collaboration with graphic

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23 Dardi, *Achille Castiglioni*, 7.

24 Lambertucci, *Lo spazio dei Castiglioni*, 11.



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designer Bob Noorda (1927–2010), this “great work of social design”<sup>25</sup> began to link the city’s north-eastern suburbs with its south-western districts, helping to redefine Milan as an integrated urban system. It was precisely in Piazza del Duomo – directly opposite the northern exit of the newly built underground line – that the Omega company decided to establish a new centre for the display and sale of its products. Notably, the shop integrates seamlessly into city’s multi-level mobility infrastructure, connecting both with the surface level of the piazza and, below the ground with a secondary access entrance from the metro stop. Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni were approached in early 1967 by Fratelli De

Fig. 3

Giorgio Casali, the movable glazed cabinets hung from the shop’s mullions as a visual mediator between the urban scale and the small, precious watches and jewels, 1969 (Università Iuav di Venezia, Archivio Progetti, Fondo Giorgio Casali).

25 Giovanni Luca Minici, *La metropolitana milanese. Evoluzione urbanistica e architettonica* (Milan: Silvana, 2018), 63–89.

Marchi, Omega's general agents for Italy.<sup>26</sup> With a number of commercial interiors already to their credit – including the Gavina furniture showrooms in Milan and Turin (1960), the Gavina headquarters and display space in San Lazzaro di Savena (Bologna), the Splügen Bräubeer house-restaurant (1960), and the Flos showroom in Milan (1968–1969) – the Castiglioni brothers had earned a solid reputation in the field of retail architecture. Already by the early 1960s, they were described as “a good example of comradely understanding and professional teamwork,”<sup>27</sup> exemplifying a model of architectural practice that integrated design culture and commercial commission.

At the same time as the commission from Fratelli De Marchi,<sup>28</sup> in January 1967, the Japanese designer Masanori Umeda (b. 1941) joined the Castiglioni brothers' studio as their first intern. He remained there for nearly three years, until December 1969, closely following the development of the Omega project.<sup>29</sup> Trained at the Kuwasawa Design School in Tokyo, Umeda had arrived in Milan in September 1966 through the intermediation of Swiss graphic designer Max Huber (1918–2022),<sup>30</sup> who often collaborated with the Castiglioni studio as well as in the Omega project.<sup>31</sup>

From the outset, the language barrier between the Italian team and the young Japanese designer<sup>32</sup> was bridged by what Umeda described as “the universal [and well-coded] language of drawing [...]. When something needed to be clarified, especially about details, communication was done through drawing [because it's] an immediate and extremely understandable language.”<sup>33</sup> This reliance on drawing as a medium of communication also helps explain why Achille and Pier Giacomo produced an extraordinary number of sketches during the design process – sometimes starting from blank sheets, at other times working over pre-existing schematics – which Umeda would then copy and translate

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26 In the same years, in Zurich's central Bahnhofstrasse, Omega had commissioned Swiss architect Paul Steger (1925–2020) and J. Flückiger to build an entire city block, the so-called Omega-Haus (1968–1971), which housed the local headquarters as well as four levels of showrooms and sales areas. See: “Omega-Haus, Zürich: Architekt Paul Steger,” *Das Werk* 60, no. 8 (1973): 956–957.

27 Arturo Belloni, “Interview mit Achille und Pier Giacomo Castiglioni,” *Md. Moebel Interior Design*, no. 10 (1963): 59–60.

28 The company requested the involvement of one of their trusted collaborators: architect Andrea Caimi (1926–2012), who joined the Omega project as a consultant for technical and architectural matters. His responsibilities included supporting site supervision as well as coordinating contracts and payments with the numerous companies involved in the construction. After spending three years (1956–1959) in Switzerland with Omega's commercial design department, Caimi began a twenty-year collaboration with Fratelli De Marchi, during which he oversaw and/or designed more than 200 retail spaces. See Alessandro Caimi, *Ricordanze con disegni* (Turin: Genesi, 2011), 30–31; 40–41.

29 The two had met while Umeda was working as an interior designer (1963–1966) at the graphic design agency DESKA (DESigners Kono Associates), founded by the renowned Japanese duo Takashi Kōno (1906–1999) and Shigeo Fukuda (1932–2009); Kōno was also Huber's father-in-law.

30 Written interview with Masanori Umeda conducted through his daughter Nanae on 22 June 2022. Oral interview with Giorgina Castiglioni on 23 July 2022. Oral interview with Aoi Kono Huber and Stefano Galli on September 9, 2024.

31 Max Huber, *Max Huber. Progetti grafici 1936–1981* (Milano: Electa, 1982), 3. With the construction site open for a few months, the Castiglioni brothers and Max Huber were awarded first prize at the 3rd Biennial of Applied Graphic Arts (Brno, 19 June – 22 September 1968) for the exhibition “Le vie d'acqua da Milano al mare” (Palazzo Reale, Milan 1964) and the Montecatini Pavilion entitled “Chimica. Un domani più sicuro” (Fiera di Milano, April 1967).

32 Informal talk with Carlo Castiglioni on 14 March 2022.

33 Written interview with Masanori Umeda conducted through his daughter Nanae on 24 June 2022. Notes of Masanori Umeda on journal page depicting the Omega project on 28 June 2022.



into finalized construction drawings and finished ink plates for magazines' publications.<sup>34</sup> Today, this graphic material – created primarily to visualize the ideas and contemporaneously to overcome linguistic limitations – offers a rare, almost frame-by-frame record of the project's evolution, allowing us to reconstruct the conceptual points around which the design process revolved and to appreciate the collaborative nature of architectural practice in a transnational and highly professionalised context.

Demolition work began in March 1968,<sup>35</sup> and by the end of April the Municipality of Milan (Ripartizione Edilizia Privata) was officially informed that “the position of director of works for the technical, structural, and construction aspects was assumed by engineer Cesare Fermi.”<sup>36</sup> His appointment helped streamline communication with the authorising offices and improve the management of what was already proving to be a highly complex construction process – at a time when Pier Giacomo's involvement had begun to wane due to his declining health. In the final stages of the project, Pier Giacomo continued to follow its development from his hospital room, receiving detailed updates from Umeda,<sup>37</sup> who had by then joined Achille on the building site. As the novelist Dino Buzzati (1906–1972) recalled in a conversation with Achille following his brother's passing, “for several months my brother had significantly slowed down his work, but here [referring to the Omega Centre] his influence is still present.”<sup>38</sup> In every respect, then, the shop in Piazza del Duomo stands as the last project jointly signed by the Castiglioni brothers – even though Pier Giacomo never lived to see its completion.<sup>39</sup>

Construction work on site was not without complications or adaptations. As documented in drawings, photographs, notes, and correspondence with suppliers, the process was shaped both by unforeseen conditions encountered during excavation and by evolving requests from the client. [Fig. 4] Among the most critical technical challenges was the need to reinforce the foundations and retaining walls, which had been partially compromised by earlier work related to the construction of the metro.<sup>40</sup> [Fig. 5]

In addition, the decision to expose the original vaulted arches on the underground level required substantial modifications, further delaying the building's completion. These obstacles did not lead to compromises. On the contrary, they compelled the architects to pursue a highly customised design approach,

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34 Notes of Masanori Umeda on journal page depicting the Omega project on 28 June 2022.

35 Achille Castiglioni, “Negozio Omega di Piazza Duomo,” *Fenarete* 22, no. 127 (1970): 63.

36 Sportello Unico per l'Edilizia (Milan), Ref. 10992 of 24/04/1968. Hereafter, SUE-MI.

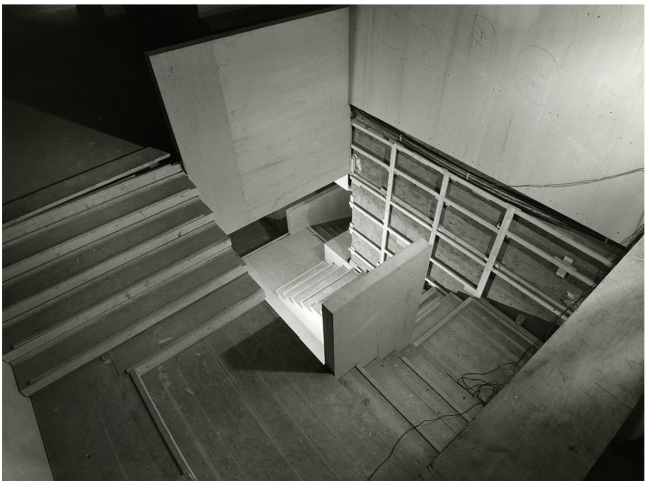
37 Written interview with Masanori Umeda conducted through his daughter Nanae on 22 June 2022. Oral interview with Giorgia Castiglioni on July 23, 2022.

38 Buzzati, “La scomparsa di Pier Giacomo Castiglioni.”

39 Oral interview with Giorgia Castiglioni on July 23, 2022. Informal talk with Carlo Castiglioni on March 14, 2022.

40 See: Castiglioni, “Negozio Omega di Piazza Duomo,” 63.

one acutely responsive to the physical and spatial characteristics of the site.<sup>41</sup> The Castiglioni brothers were acutely aware of the significance of the project and the responsibility it entailed – not only toward their client, but also toward the urban fabric and the Milanese public. In a letter from October 1968, while acknowledging “the difficulties at the building site” and the resulting delays, they clearly stated: “The national and international importance of the Omega, our commitment to the De Marchi organisation, and our responsibility to the Milanese public do not allow us to make hasty decisions, but require us to seek first-rate architectural solutions with an indispensable perfect execution.”<sup>42</sup> This affirmation of responsibility – extending beyond technical success to encompass the civic and cultural implications of building in the historic heart of Milan – reinforces the idea that, for the Castiglioni brothers, architecture was never merely a profession, but always a public act.



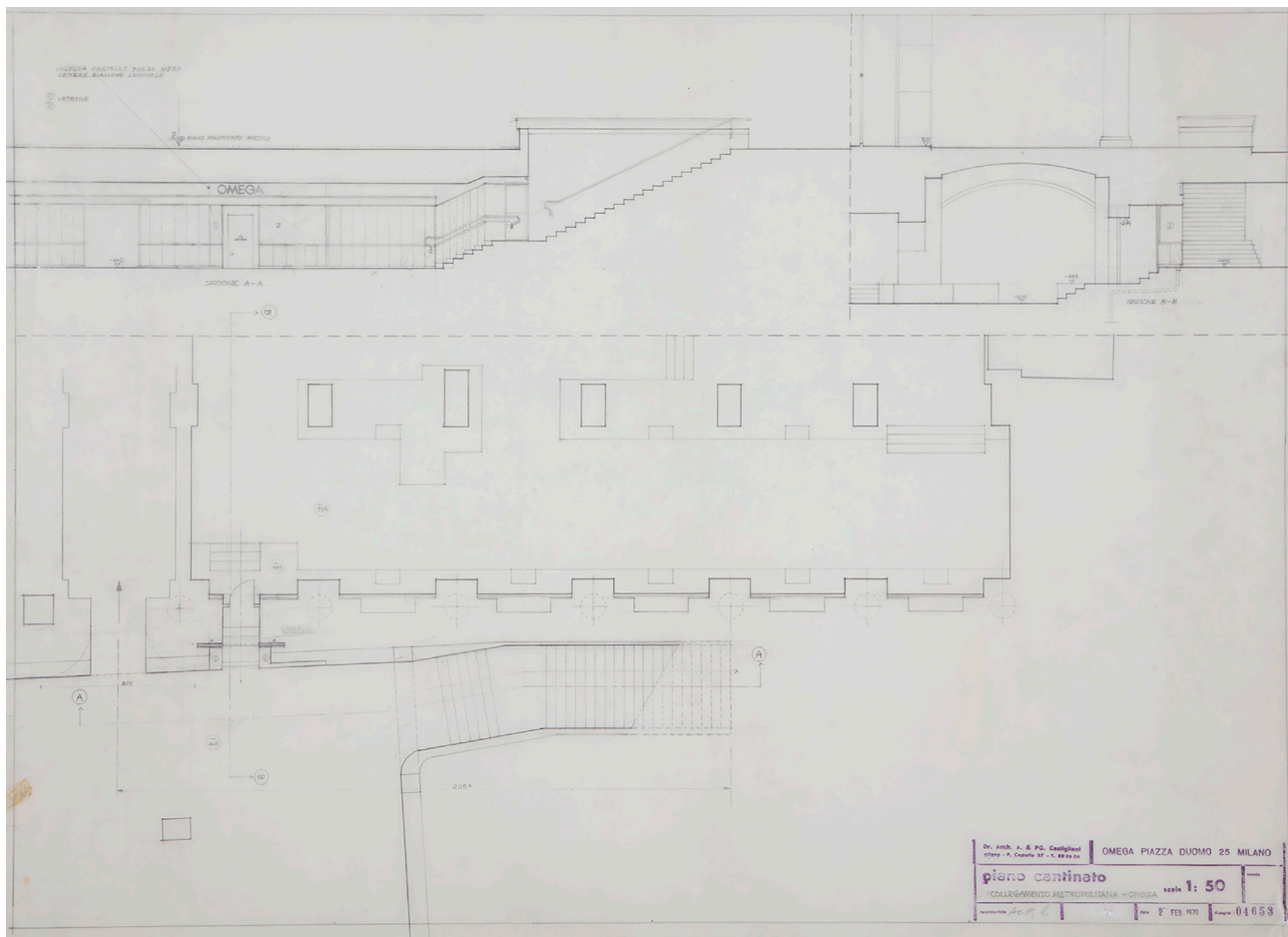
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41 The first detailed schedule prepared by Fratelli De Marchi projected the opening for March 1968. When it became clear that this deadline could not be met, the Castiglioni brothers and the company, between September and October of that year, considered two alternative strategies: either waiting until full completion in March 1969, or organising a temporary opening of the main floor during the Christmas holidays. As a further possibility, they also discussed placing advertising behind the large shop window. FAC.

42 FAC.

Fig. 4

Photographs of the construction site: ground floor (top) and basement (bottom) (Fondazione Achille Castiglioni, Milan).



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The execution of the Omega Centre was further complicated by the involvement of a substantial number of specialised firms, whose names have been identified through the extensive documentation preserved at the Fondazione Achille Castiglioni. This complex network of collaborators sheds light on the national and international relationships that underpinned the project and reveals the multiplicity of expertise, mainly Italian, mobilised in its construction.<sup>43</sup> Each of these companies contributed a distinct area of technical expertise, moving fluidly between industrial precision and artistic experimentation. Their coordinated effort reflects a model of project execution grounded in collaboration and mutual trust, where craftsmanship, innovation, and architectural vision converged. From this perspective, the Omega project emerges as a paradigmatic example of what Capitanucci has described as “cultured professionalism”<sup>44</sup> – a distinctly Milanese approach embraced by certain generations of designers, where to

43 Among the firms involved were Alfredo Redaelli of Lecco, supplier of velvets and carpets; AP–Allestimenti Portanuova s.r.l. (Milan), responsible for masonry, building systems, lighting, and external linoleum flooring; Arredografica (San Lazzaro di Savena, Bologna), which managed the glazing and the fixed and movable glass display units; Cave Marmi Vallestrona (Milan), supplier of the porch pilasters; Conforti (Varese), provider of safes, security boxes, and alarm systems; Flos (Merano), which produced both catalogue and custom-designed lighting fixtures by the architects; Giesse Legni (Bassano del Grappa), responsible for the cladding of the staircase and some interior wall treatments; FIAM – Fabbrica Italiana Ascensori (Milan); Raum Technik System (Filderstadt, Germany), for the laboratory partition walls; Reimsa Italiana (Milan), for the heating and cooling systems; and Zanotta (Milan), which supplied the armchairs. FAC.

44 Maria Vittoria Capitanucci, *Il professionismo colto nel dopoguerra/Cultured Professionalism in the Postwar Period* (Milan: Solferino Edizioni, 2015).

Fig. 5

Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, plate comprising a portion of the basement plan where the shop is connected to the spaces of the metro line, and two sections of the connection system, 2/02/1970, no. 04653, scale 1:50 (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell'Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni, B022287P, Folder 99/3, B058855S).



architectural formal refinement and technical precision go hand in hand with a shared sense of responsibility toward the city, the client, and the public sphere. This sensibility is rooted in the particular historical conditions in which Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni were trained and began their practice: between the Second World War and the immediate post-war period, when architectural work, poised between culture and technique, was shaped by the urgent demands of reconstruction, and professionals were also called upon to reorganised the very structure of their field of action.<sup>45</sup> This formative context profoundly influenced their approach to architecture and their relation with the city. Architecture as a profession is to recognise that the designer, as one of the many operators of the process, commands a distinct expertise, training, and skill – qualities that define vocations which, as noted by Dana Cuff, profess to have a specialized territory of knowledge that is expressed everyday through their own practice as an embodiment of professional ethos bound to circumstance, action, or performance, in other words a very a method of action. “Ideally professions are bound with a social contract with the public: they retain certain privileges and rights in society in return for bearing certain responsibility.”<sup>46</sup> Those generations of Milanese architects truly conceived of architecture as a “social construct”, and thus as cultural operator of the profession, their work is grounded in the critical mediation of form, material, and place.

## From the City to the Omega Centre

The Omega Centre was inaugurated on 11 April 1969. While most architectural magazines promptly praised the result, some failed to recognise the profound and meaningful relationship that the Castiglioni brothers succeeded in establishing with the urban environment.

*Ottagono* classified the project as an example of “interior architecture”,<sup>47</sup> while in *Casabella*, Giovanni Klaus Koenig described it as “a sub-species of urban furnishing.”<sup>48</sup> These assessments appear markedly reductive, especially when considered in light of the Omega Centre’s capacity to transcend conventional architectural categories and operate across multiple scales. Nevertheless, they reflect a broader tendency to dismiss commercial spaces as interchangeable urban accessories – limited in scope, marginal in impact, and often equated with little more than shop windows. In contrast, the full significance of the Omega Centre becomes evident when the project is examined in close relation to its urban context – specifically, in its ability to translate the city into architecture and to engage with the dynamics of Piazza del Duomo. Moreover, the design

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45 See: Augusto Rossari, “L’attività professionale tra cultura e tecnica,” in *Il movimento di studi per l’architettura 1945–1961*, eds. Matilde Baffa, Corinna Morandi, Sara Protasoni, Augusto Rossari (Rome: Laterza, 1995), 27. Pier Giacomo Castiglioni was one of the founding members of the Movimento di Studi per l’Architettura (MSA), led by Rogers since its establishment in 1945.

46 Dana Cuff, *Architecture: The Story of Practice* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), 23.

47 “A Milano in piazza Duomo. Architettura d’interni di Achille e Pier Giacomo Castiglioni,” *Ottagono*, no. 14 (July 1969): 21.

48 Giovanni Klaus Koenig, “La città arredata,” *Casabella*, no. 339–340 (August–September 1969): 70.

development reflects their personal interpretation of, and response to, the client's specific functional and representational requirements. According to the meeting notes of 13 November 1967, these included: 1) ensuring direct access to the shop from *La Rinascente*; 2) magnifying the importance of the basement level by widening the access staircase and potentially introducing further attractions; 3) positioning a portion of the shop window near the flow of foot traffic from *La Rinascente*, intended for particularly prominent displays.<sup>49</sup> Rather than treating these requests as constraints, the architects transformed them into core design themes – challenges that shaped the architectural response through a process of iterative experimentation. The resulting built space is thus not a simple resolution of technical demands, but a refined outcome that synthesizes client needs with conceptual clarity and spatial invention.

In the 1960s-1970s Italian architectural discourse, not all designers appear eager to reinforce the connection between commercial interiors and the urban fabric. Few sought to move beyond the idea of the store as a mere “poster” and instead embrace a three-dimensional form of communication embedded within the city's structure and social habits.<sup>50</sup> The Castiglioni brothers' approach in the Omega Centre remains, in many ways, rooted in their earlier training and experiences, and stands apart from the emerging international experiments of a younger generation (designers such as Gae Aulenti (1927–2012), Hans Hollein (1934–2014), Norman Foster (b. 1935), Shiro Kuramata (1934–1991), and Ugo La Pietra (b. 1938)) who were exploring new relational models and shifts in scale, using retail space as a projection of their broader “urban visions” from a theoretical perspective.<sup>51</sup> What links the Castiglioni duo to these contemporaneous projects, however, is a shared concern with innovation and material experimentation. While the younger generation oscillated between a celebration of the communicative and expressive potential of new technologies and a nostalgic, utopian reading of modernity – often resulting in fragmented, symbolic gestures – the Castiglioni legacy lies in a design strategy based on grafting and juxtaposition: the strategic insertion of new elements into existing architectural, urban, or material frameworks, creating continuity through contrast and layered dialogue with historical context, much like Carlo Scarpa's Olivetti showroom in Venice (1958).<sup>52</sup> The shop integrates itself seamlessly into the spatial and cultural identity of Milan. Through a subtle yet assertive imposition of brand identity, the design negotiates a balance between visibility and discretion. In this context, the display of merchandise participates in and even extends the narrative of the surrounding cityscape.

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49 FAC.

50 See Ines Tolic, *Il negozio all'italiana. Spazi, architettura e città* (Milan-Turin: Bruno Mondadori, 2018), 97.

51 See Scodeller, *Negozi. L'architetto nello spazio della merce*, 149–150.

52 The literature on Carlo Scarpa's Olivetti project is extensive. The following is a selection of the most relevant contributions: Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, “La ‘Crosera de piazza’ di Carlo Scarpa,” *Zodiac*, no. 4 (1959): 128–147; Stefania Portinari, “1957–1958. Negozio Olivetti a Venezia”, in *Carlo Scarpa e la scultura del Novecento*, ed. Guido Beltramini (Venezia: Marsilio, 2008), 187–196; Elena Tinacci, *Mia memore et devota gratitudine: Carlo Scarpa e Olivetti, 1956–1978* (Rome: Edizioni Comunità, 2018), 202–225; *Negozio Olivetti: piazza San Marco, Venezia*, eds. Francesco Dal Co and Lucia Borromeo Dina (Vicenza: Edibus, 2024).

Located at street number 25 within the complex designed by Mengoni, the Omega Centre occupied the stretch between Via Ugo Foscolo and Via San Raffaele. [Fig. 6-7] The project skilfully capitalised on its proximity to *La Rinascente*, establishing an informal alliance articulated through the strategic management of pedestrian flows along the segment of street connecting the two retail destinations. At the same time, the Omega Centre entered into a respectful – yet intentionally distinct – dialogue with the Duomo, distancing itself in both architectural language and material expression. Nestled beneath the eclectic northern porticoes, the shop ran parallel to the cathedral, with its layout supporting the natural movement of pedestrians and vehicles circulating from the square toward Via Vittorio Emanuele II and Piazza San Babila, and vice versa. Adding a further layer of complexity to an already articulated spatial composition, the architects chose to recess the storefront slightly behind the line of

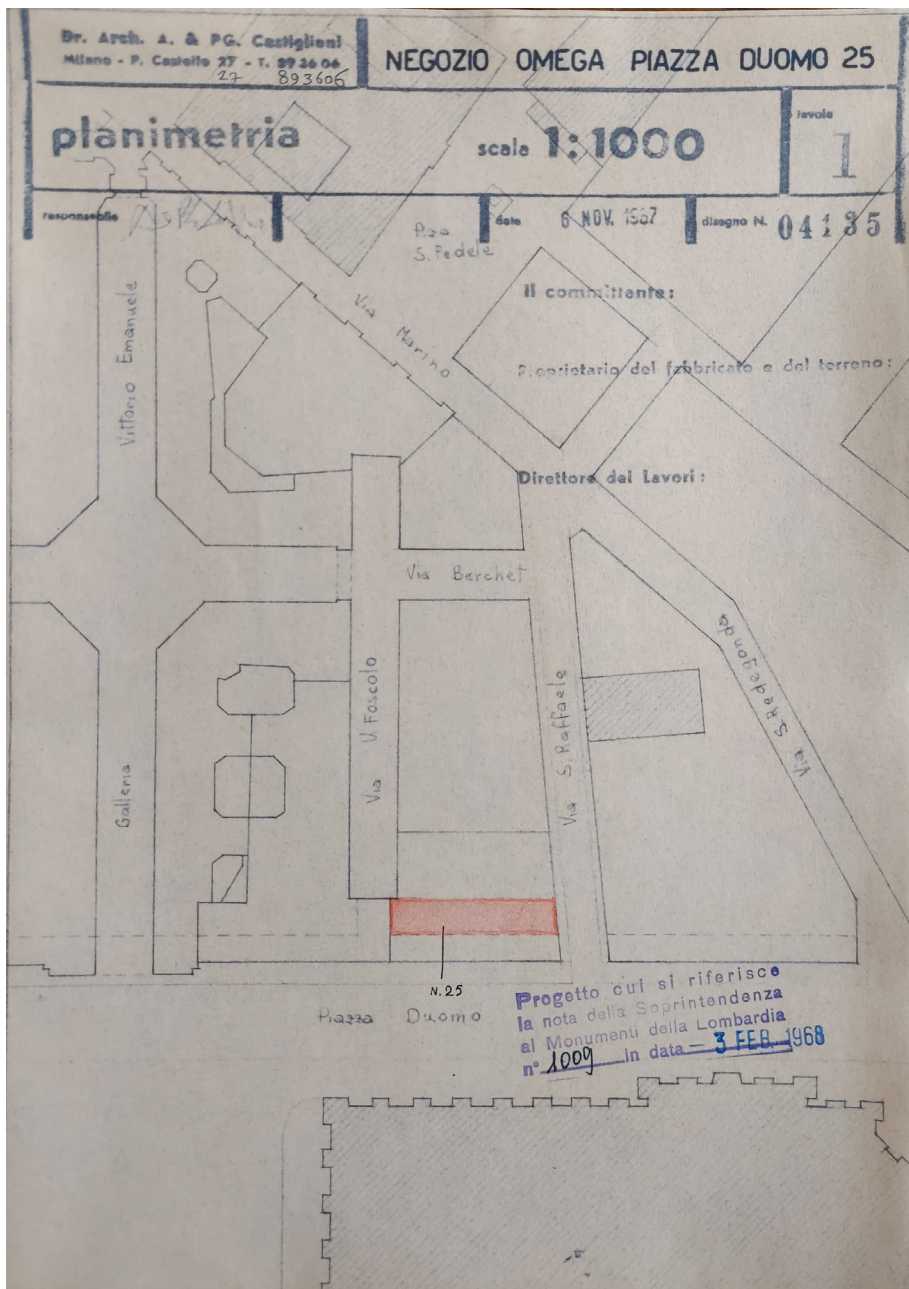
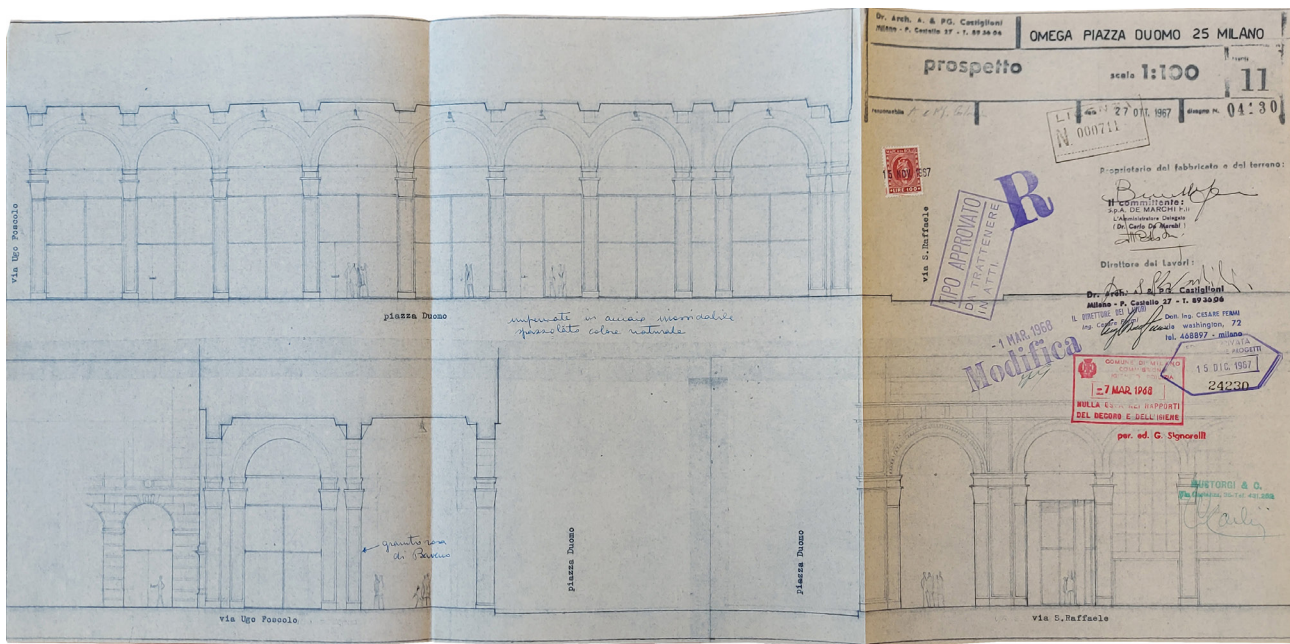


Fig. 6

Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, site plan where the Omega Centre footprint is highlighted in red, scale 1:1000 (Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la Città Metropolitana di Milano, Authorization Ref. 1009 - 3/02/1968).





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the colonnade, creating a continuous walkway along the display windows. This subtle intervention not only reinforced the protective character of the portico but also carved out a threshold space – an architectural pause – where passers-by could step out of the urban flow to engage with the products on display.

This subtle offset was maintained with consistent depth up to the final two bays of the portico at the corner of the building block on Via San Raffaele. Precisely at this junction, the Milanese duo introduced an even more refined solution, taking advantage of the pre-existing oblique orientation of one of the interior walls. At this point, the glazing receded further, aligning with a sloped surface that incorporated a recessed niche – creating a veritable spatial funnel designed to “draw in” pedestrians approaching from *La Rinascente* and guide them onto the newly defined walkway along the display windows. At a time when cars still played a central role in the urban life of Piazza del Duomo, the Castiglioni brothers reorganised the space with remarkable clarity, articulating it into distinct lanes of circulation for different types of movement: the area between the porticoes and the cathedral remained accessible to vehicles; the Mengoni porticoes were reserved for pedestrian flow; and, as Buzzati noted, an “ingenious solution” introduced an “additional route” specifically conceived for prospective Omega customers.<sup>53</sup> [Fig. 8]

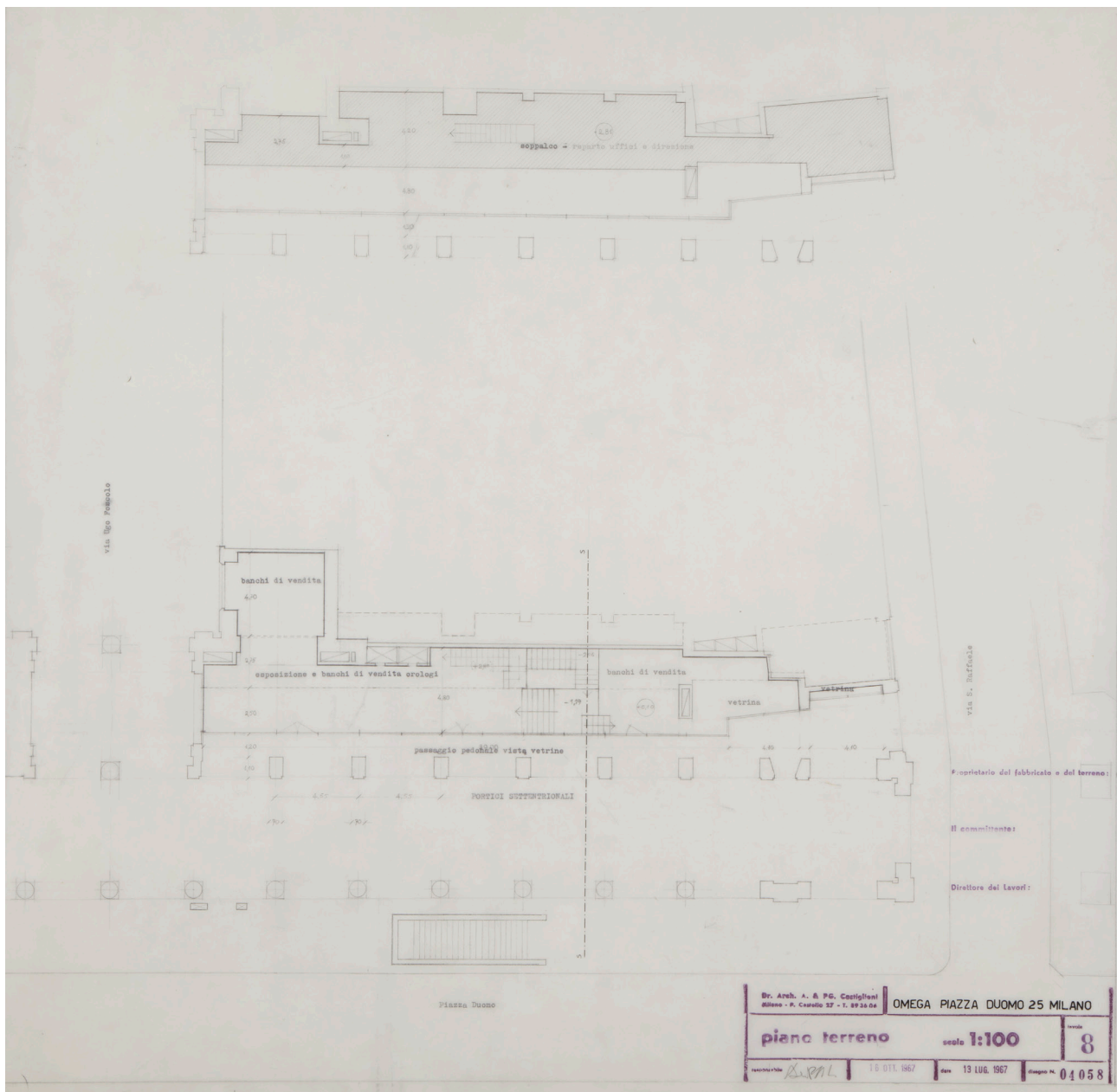
As Achille Castiglioni later recalled, interpolation “constituted the most challenging of problems to be solved.”<sup>54</sup> The solution ultimately adopted not only created a complex spatial articulation, but also ensured “integral [respect], struc-

Fig. 7

Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, plate illustrating the first proposal for the shop's main elevations: Piazza del Duomo façade (top), via Ugo Foscolo façade (bottom left) and via San Raffaele façade (bottom right), scale 1:100 (Sportello Unico per l'Edilizia, Milano, Licence ref. 711 of 25/03/1968, municipal records no. 39137/577/68).

53 Buzzati, “La scomparsa di Pier Giacomo Castiglioni.” The setback of the shop front was authorized in February 1968 by the Soprintendenza alle Belle Arti e ai Monumenti della Lombardia (today Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Milano), Authorization Ref. 1009 3/02/1968. Hereafter SABAP\_MI. It was subsequently approved without reservation by the Commissione Edilizia a month later, SUE-MI, Licence ref. 711 of 25/03/1968, municipal records no. 39137/577/68.

54 Castiglioni, “Negozio Omega di Piazza Duomo,” 64.



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turally and formally,” for Mengoni’s architecture. Moreover, “the setback had made it possible to restore façade elements that had been altered by the previous configuration of the old shop,”<sup>55</sup> thereby reinforcing the legibility of the two distinct architectural languages: Mengoni’s 19th-century eclecticism and the Castiglioni’s modern intervention. The threshold between the two was articulated through the treatment of the portico’s internal pilasters, which – “hollowed out at the back [but clad in slabs of pink granite from Baveno]” – were transformed into fully three-dimensional pillars, enhancing the depth of the portico and intensifying the play of shadow and light within it.<sup>56</sup> [Fig. 9]

55 Castiglioni, “Negozio Omega di Piazza Duomo,” 64.

56 Cesare Blasi and Gabriella Padovano, “Omega Milano,” in *Inox e spazio pubblico* (Milan: Editrice Casabella, 1972), 43.

Fig. 8

Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, plan for the shop’s ground floor contextualised within the building and porticos (top) and the mezzanine plan (top), 13/07/1967 (drawing revised on 16/10/1967), no. 04058, 1:1000. The drawing illustrates the original solution of a traditional advertising display case for the niche occupied later by the watch-sculpture (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell’Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Folder 99/3, B058851S).



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The ceiling of the recessed area was finished with minimalist coffering in brushed steel, supported by folded sheet metal beams positioned at the height of the capitals and set back from the line of the pilasters – now transformed into freestanding pillars – both on the cathedral-facing side and along Via San Raffaele. The flooring, set in deliberate contrast to the inlaid marble of the original portico, combined marble thresholds with vinyl surfaces patterned with small black dots. This latter material subtly echoed the design language of Milan's metro flooring, underscoring the Castiglioni brothers' sensitivity to the urban codes of the city and their ability to translate them into architectural detail within the Omega Centre. [Fig. 10]

The backdrop of the recessed space was composed of glass and steel window frames with a fine satin finish. With the exception of the three glazed access points [Fig. 11] and the span framing the staircase to the basement level, all remaining windows incorporated pairs of movable glass display cabinets. According to the torsional deformation report by engineer Rinaldo Troili (28 March 1968), each cabinet was estimated to weigh approximately 50 kg and was mounted on articulated arms anchored to the two main mullion uprights.<sup>57</sup> Positioned at eye level, these display cases were conceived either as double-sided vitrines, fitted with shaped internal panels, or as transparent optical boxes devoid of internal partitions, framing a dynamic visual dialogue between the

Fig. 9

Fortunati Fototecnica, the state of the arcade shop windows before the renovations for the Omega Centre (left). The offset space liberating the pilasters according to the project (right) (Fondazione Achille Castiglioni, Milan).

57 FAC.



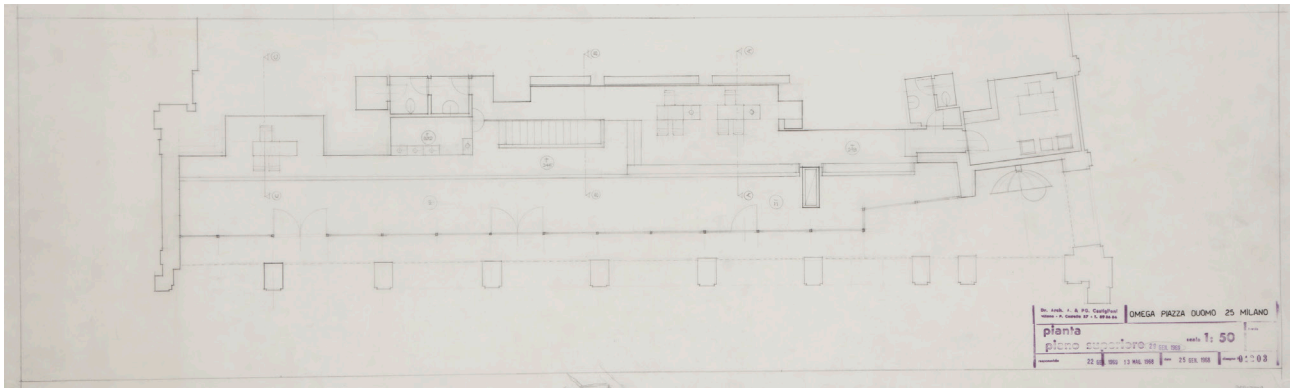
interior of the shop and the surrounding city. Within these carefully orchestrated settings, watches, timepieces, and jewellery assumed a central role in the interplay between the interior and the city. [Figg. 12-13]

A distinctly different solution was adopted for the span running parallel to Via Ugo Foscolo: here, the space between the floor and the extrados of the capitals was configured as a mute diaphragm composed of paired slabs of brushed steel. This rigorously minimal surface was interrupted at just two points: one slab, slightly extruded, displayed the Swiss brand's illuminated white lettering set into a perforated stainless-steel panel; the other housed a framed shop window, visible only from the outside. In the evening, three sliding panels concealed the view into the interior, while a tilting mechanism allowed for the staging of a compact, self-contained display – transforming the façade into an autonomous

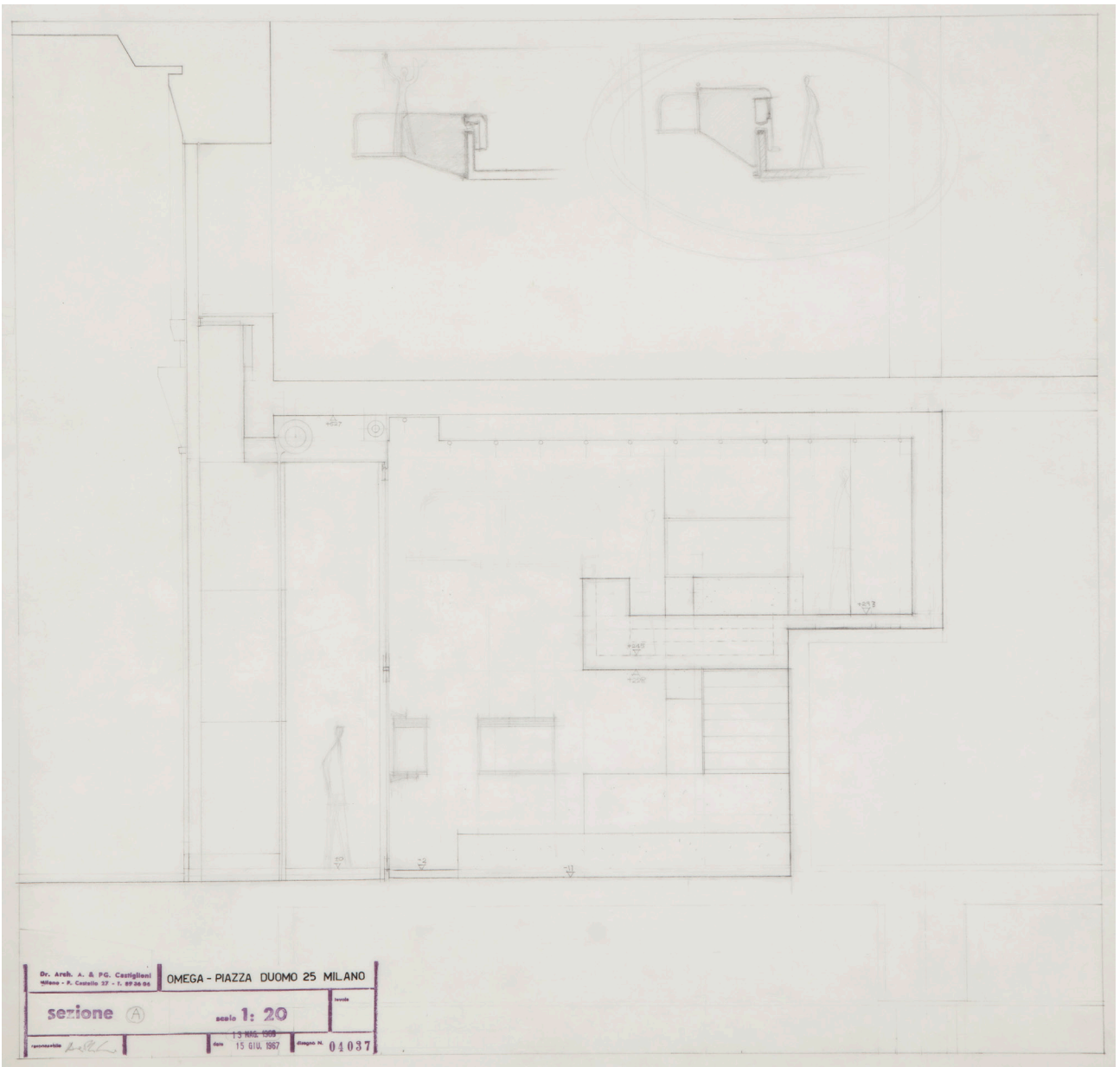
Fig. 10

Giorgio Casali, the additional space between the porticos and shop mullions is a refined juxtaposition of new materials with the historical context (Università Iuav di Venezia, Archivio Progetti, Fondo Giorgio Casali).





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exhibition device even after closing hours. The Omega Centre thus participates in a broader tradition of architectural experimentation in which the shop window is reimagined not as a passive display surface, but as an active threshold – a space of interaction, staging, and urban engagement. In this regard, it can be productively read alongside Carlo Scarpa's Olivetti showroom in Venice, which similarly explores the expressive potential of architectural display.

To grasp the intellectual rigour underpinning the the Omega Centre design, one need only examine the permit applications submitted to the Soprintendenza and the Commissione Edilizia. In addition to a rich array of architectural drawings, the submission included a daytime photomontage and three evocative night-time images: one depicting the elevation facing the Duomo, and the others showing the long side along Via San Raffaele – the narrow street separating the Omega Centre from *La Rinascente*. Particularly remarkable is the architectural model crafted by Masanori Umeda using balsa wood, fine timber, and plexiglass.<sup>58</sup> [Fig. 14] Embedded within urban dioramas-like compositions crafted from photographic cut-outs of Mengoni's building façades, the three-level model emerges against a sort of scenic backdrop. These scenic constructs, populated by silhouetted and animated by internal lighting, blur the line between model and *mise-en-scène*, evoking a theatrical vision of the city, especially in nocturnal compositions. [Fig. 15] The resulting play of artificial light is almost electrifying, anticipating what Michael Neumann would later define as "a potential new material for architecture."<sup>59</sup> Through the transparent diaphragm of the mullioned façade – which appears to dissolve – one can discern a composition of intersecting planes, carefully balanced volumes, and the intricate stair sys-

58 Written interview with Masanori Umeda conducted through his daughter Nanae on June 24, 2022.

59 Dietrich Neumann, *Architecture of the Night: The Illuminated Building* (Munich: Prestel, 2002), 6.

Fig. 11

Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, plan of the mezzanine level superimposing the ground floor level, where the main access from the shop windows is indicated, 25/01/1968 (drawing revised on 13/05/1968, 22/01/1969, 29/01/1969), no. 04203, scale 1:50 (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell'Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Folder 99/5, B055483S).

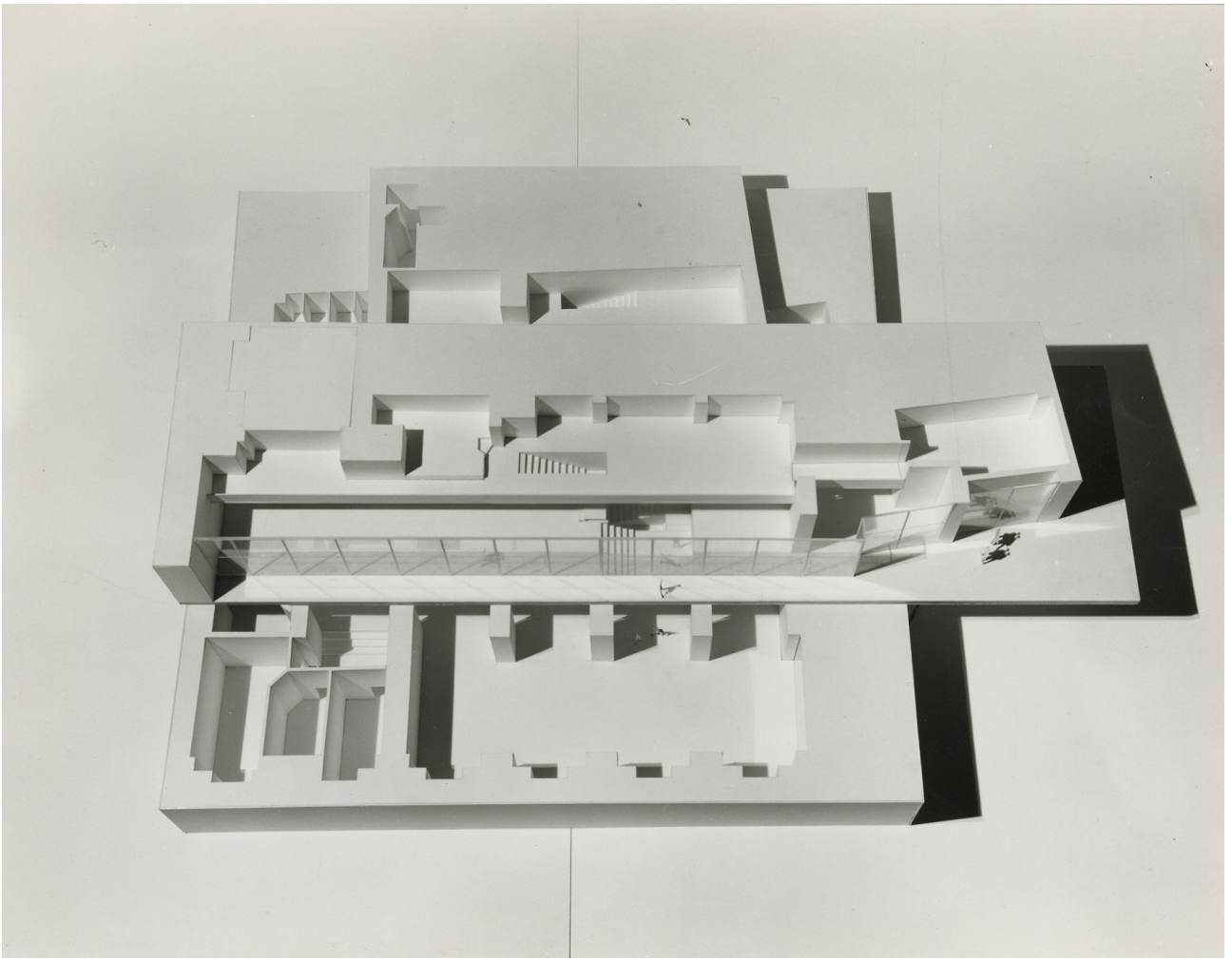
Fig. 12

Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, section A showing the system of connections between the shop window mullions and the movable cabinets positioned at eye level, 15/06/1967 (drawing revised on 13/05/1968), no. 04037, scale 1:20 (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell'Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Folder 99/5, B058879S).

Fig. 13

A couple of glazed cabinets hung from shop mullions using movable supports (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell'Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Folder 99/5, B058813S).





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16a



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16b



tem connecting the shop's three levels. For the Castiglioni brothers, it is worth recalling, "the model precedes the drawing, which is understood as verification, support, and feedback for execution."<sup>60</sup> In this sense, the Omega Centre's relationship with the city owes much to these miniature urban stage sets – laboratories of spatial experimentation, where architectural hypotheses were not only tested but made tangible. [Fig. 16 a-b]

## The Art of Advertising

One of the most striking episodes in the Omega Centre's interplay with the city is the sculptural installation by Max Huber, positioned within a niche carved into the oblique side of the building. Originally conceived as a traditional advertising display case, the space was later reimagined as a backdrop clad in the same Baveno granite slabs used for the portico pillars, ultimately serving as the setting for the sculpture.<sup>61</sup> [Figg. 17-18]

The stainless-steel installation, clearly alluding to the world of watchmaking, was impossible for passers-by to overlook. The final version – reached after several iterations – retained a consistent circular form and fixed diameter. Unafraid to engage with three-dimensionality, as demonstrated in earlier works,<sup>62</sup> Huber conceived a spherical sculpture resembling a stylised, modern reinterpretation of a stereoscopic astrolabe,<sup>63</sup> into which a small semi-sphere was embedded. Huber's interest in this ancient measuring device reflected his boundless curiosity and his receptiveness to diverse and unconventional sources of inspiration – always grounded, however, in graphic clarity, proportional balance, and formal harmony.<sup>64</sup> [Fig. 19] As a symbolic expression of changing times, the sculpture was devoid of traditional hands; instead, it featured a digital display embedded in a horizontal slit within the semi-sphere – an element that seemed to anticipate a future shaped by technological innovation. That future, in fact, was already taking shape, one in which both humanity and the Omega Speedmaster would soon reach the moon.<sup>65</sup>

Reflecting on Huber's watch-sculpture, architect and graphic designer Italo Lupi (1934–2023) observed that not even the most distracted passers-by could "escape the grasp of this occult persuader that forced them to check their watches. Almost everyone fell for it."<sup>66</sup> [Fig. 20] Yet this was only the most con-

Fig. 14

Fortunati Fototecnica, photograph of the architectural model featuring the three levels of the project (basement, ground floor and mezzanine). This is the model used in the previous photomontages (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell'Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Folder 99/5, B058821S).

Fig. 15

Castiglioni Studio, daytime photomontage illustrating the Via San Raffaele façade: the architectural model behind the cropped photographic backdrops (taken by Fortunati Fototecnica) of the state of the site before the Castiglioni's renovation. In the model, the niche occupied later by Huber's watch-sculpture is still conceived as traditional advertising display case (Sportello Unico per l'Edilizia, Milan, Licence ref. 711 of 25/03/1968, municipal records no. 39137/577/68).

Figg. 16 a-b

Castiglioni Studio, photomontages (day and night) illustrating the Piazza del Duomo façades: the architectural model behind the cropped photographic backdrops (taken by Fortunati Fototecnica) of the state of the site before the Castiglioni's renovation. A light source was used to accomplish the night-time effect (Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Milano, Authorization Ref. 1009 del 3/02/1968).

60 Marco Sironi, *Sul luogo del design: intorno al lavoro dei fratelli Castiglioni* (Milan: Greco & Greco, 2014), 94.

61 Only two proposals are still preserved in the archives, though undated: one with steel wedges and another with multiple blue sub-circles. Moreover, there is also a 1:20 scale model of the final version in coloured wood, with no author attribution. FAC; Archivio Max Huber (Novazzano, Switzerland), hereafter AMH.

62 Oral interview with Aoi Kono Huber and Stefano Galli on September 9, 2024.

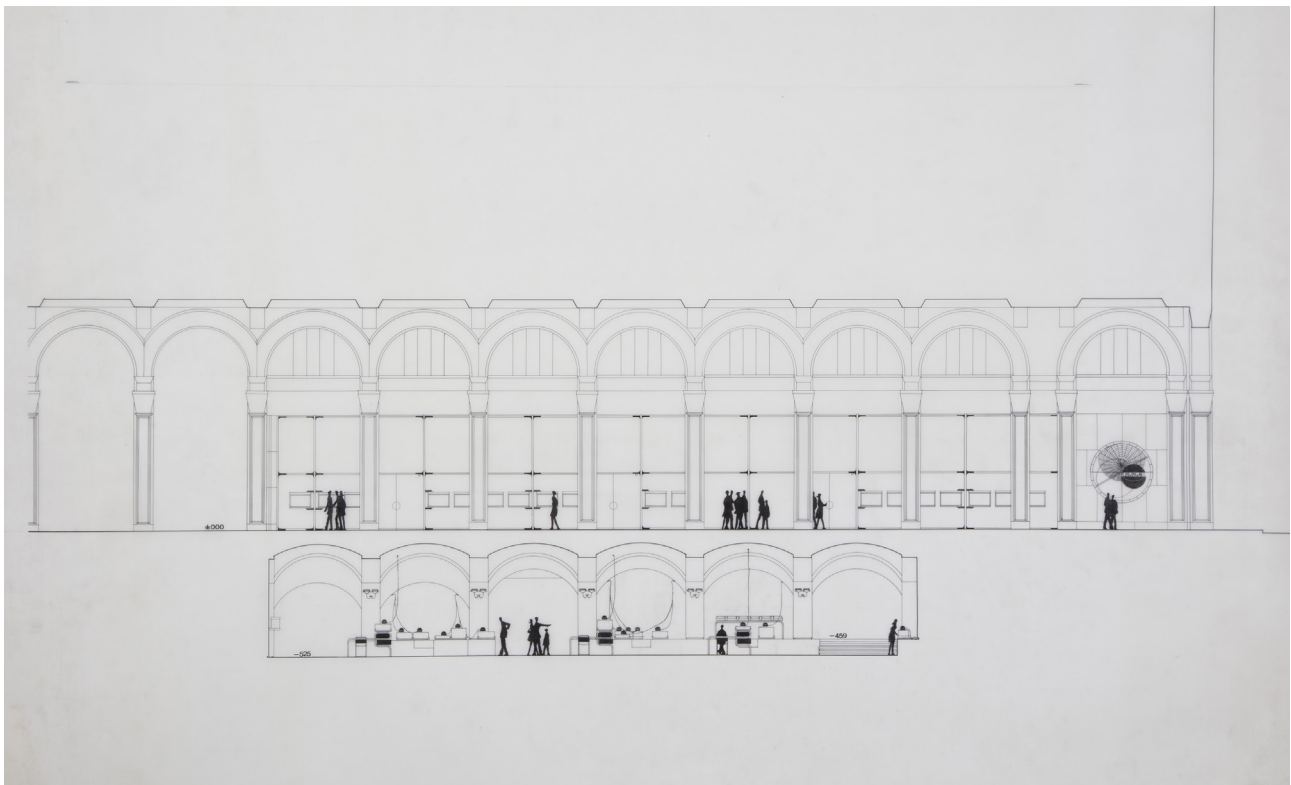
63 This attribution was made possible by the discovery of a photograph of a finely decorated Arabic astrolabe, complete with all the traditional elements, such as the mater, tympan, rete and rule. FAC.

64 Oral interview with Aoi Kono Huber and Stefano Galli on September 9, 2024.

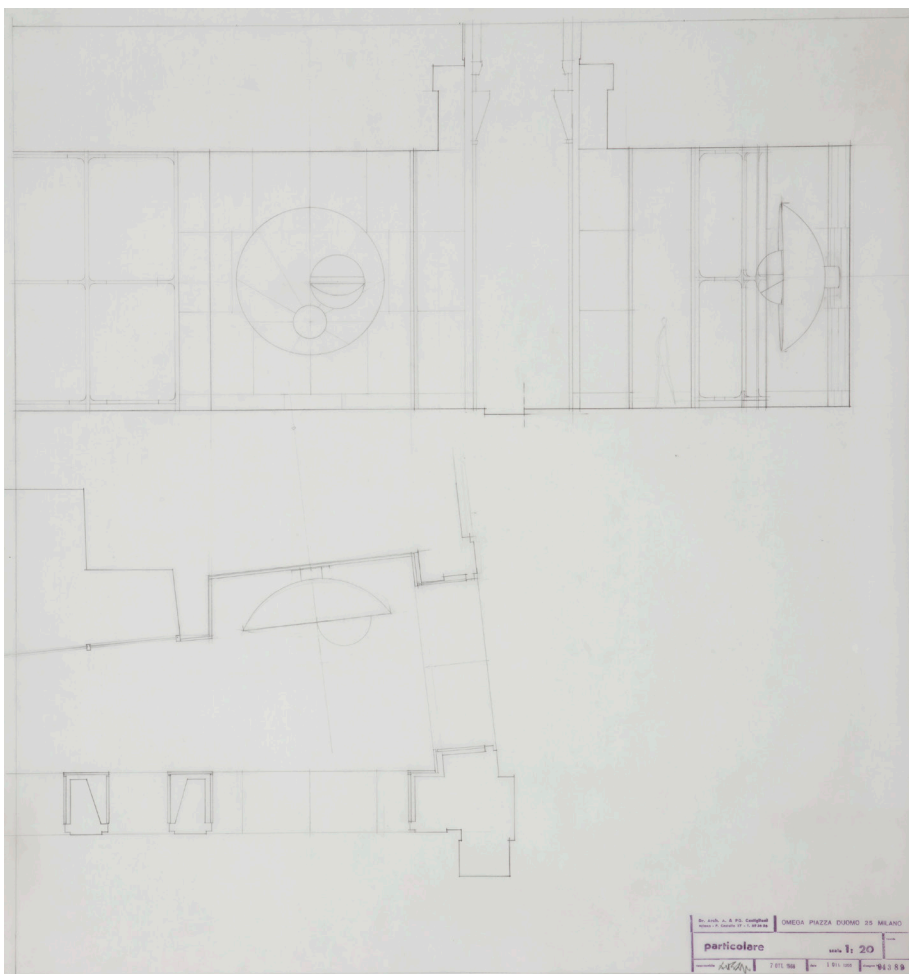
65 Grégoire Rossier, *A Moon Watch Story: The Extraordinary Destiny of the Omega Speedmaster* (La Croix-sur-Lutry: Watchprint.com, 2019).

66 Italo Lupi, "Il Duomo allo specchio/The Duomo in the Mirror," *Casabella*, no. 339–340 (August–September 1969): 85.





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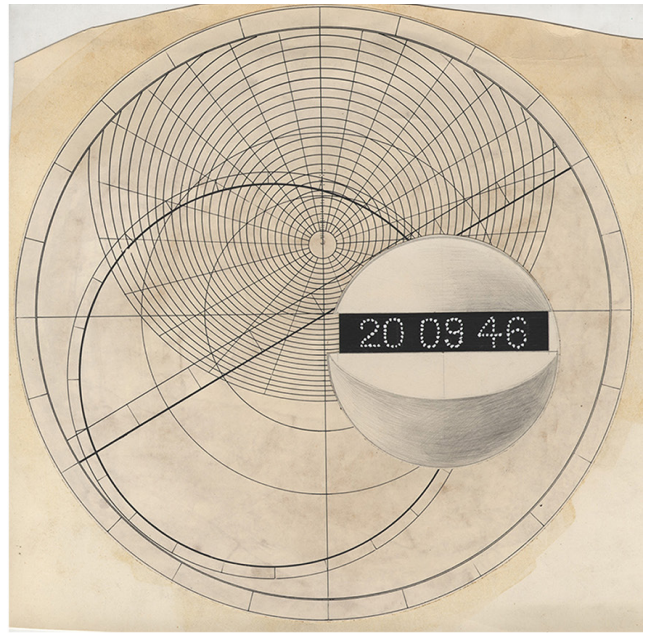
Fig. 17

Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, section B crossing the northern porticos of the completed project. This ink drawing was made to illustrate the project in the papers published in magazines. The Huber watch-sculpture is located in the first arcade near the connection with *La Rinascente* portico, scale 1:50 (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell'Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Folder 99/6, B055464S).

Fig. 18

Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, plate showing the position of the watch-sculpture (plan, section, and elevation) in the niche clad with Baveno granite slabs, 01/10/1968 (drawing revised on 10/10/1968), no. 04389, scale 1:20 (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell'Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Folder 99/5, B058888S).





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spicuous of Huber's contributions to the project. Having succeeded in capturing even the most inattentive glances, he also undertook the more delicate task of rendering the brand visible without resorting to overt or intrusive solutions. This approach was particularly timely: at the time, Piazza del Duomo was at the centre of a heated controversy over commercial signage, which many considered detrimental to the dignity of the city's historic fabric. The issue had become so pressing that, in 1966, the municipal government issued an ordinance calling for a renewed sense of decorum and more restrained advertising strategies. When the Omega Centre was being developed, the debate – especially around the case of Palazzo Carminati – was still fresh in the public memory,<sup>67</sup> offering Huber a valuable opportunity to critically reflect on the relationship between visual communication, advertising, and the urban environment. After all, this was familiar ground for the Swiss designer, whose approach did not merely layer meanings and elements, but constructed them in a foundational way – working in a kind of binary tension: on one side, a deep dive into morphology, artistry, and playfulness; on the other, the shifting flow of real-world, practical situations.<sup>68</sup>

Huber approached the project with a spatial and material sensibility, treating signage not merely as graphic information but as an integral part of the architectural composition. He strategically placed the word Omega in carefully selected locations along the portico, discreetly asserting the brand's presence.



21

67 Giulia Caffaro, "La città delle insegne luminose nella nuova città dei consumi," in *La città altra. Storia e immagini della diversità urbana: luoghi e paesaggi dei privilegi e del benessere, dell'isolamento, del disagio, della multiculturalità*, eds. Francesca Capano, Maria Ines Pascariello, and Massimo Visone (Naples: Federico II University Press, 2018), 1037–1046, <https://doi.org/10.6093/978-88-99930-03-5>.

68 See: Giovanni Anceschi, "L'ideogramma cinestetico di Max Huber," in *Max Huber: Progetti grafici 1936–1981*, 5–8.

Fig. 19

Photograph depicting an astrolabe (left). Drawing showing the Huber final proposal reinterpreting the geometry of the astronomic device in a modern perspective and adding a semi-sphere with a horizontal slit for the digital clock (Fondazione Achille Castiglioni, Milan).

Fig. 20

The flow of people along the Mengoni northern portico and the Castiglioni's additional path in the wide space provided for admiring the watch-sculpture (Archivio Max Huber, Novazzano, Switzerland).

Fig. 21

Fortunati Fototecnica, looking upwards, the unconventional position of the brand's sign as designed by Huber (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell'Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Folder 99/5, B058831S).





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The white lettering on burnished steel, applied to folded sheet metal surfaces, occupied what Lupi described as a “completely heterodox” position, producing a “flipping of planes” that challenged conventional hierarchies of visibility.<sup>69</sup>

This strategy of inversion – or at least calculated ambiguity – was also evident in the decision to position some illuminated signage within the retail space itself, thereby softening the boundary between inside and outside. [Fig. 21] One notable example was the white-lit Omega inscription on the rear wall of the ground floor: as photographic documentation shows, its luminosity was further amplified by the glossy white laminated ceiling of the mezzanine, making the lettering clearly legible even during the day. A final, more monumental gesture could be found at the opposite end of the niche containing the watch-sculpture. There, at the terminus of the narrow passage leading toward Via Ugo Foscolo, a vertical Omega inscription carved directly into Baveno granite asserted a presence that was at once discreet and architecturally integrated. [Figg. 22-23]

Huber’s graphic interventions harmonised seamlessly with the Castiglioni brothers’ architectural vision – particularly at night, when the glass façade seemed

69 Lupi, “Il Duomo allo specchio,” 85.

Fig. 22

Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, perspective of the Via San Raffaele façade with annotation on the brand’s sign and materials, 2/03/1969, no. 04508, scale 1:20 (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell’Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Folder 99/6, B055472S).



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to dissolve and the interplay of interior and exterior signage contributed to a visually fluid, spatially continuous, and unmistakably modern urban experience.

### From the Omega Centre to the City

The large-format photo shoots – primarily conceived for magazine publication<sup>70</sup> – underscore the pivotal role of the display window as a threshold between the interior of the shop and the surrounding city. Extending over thirty metres, this glass diaphragm becomes emblematic of what Jean Baudrillard defines as a “transparency without transition”<sup>71</sup> or, in other words, a surface that simultaneously absorbs and projects space in both directions – from the outside in, and from the inside out.

As a result, much of what unfolds across the Centre’s three levels becomes integrated into the city’s life – “without demeaning the object on display.”<sup>72</sup>

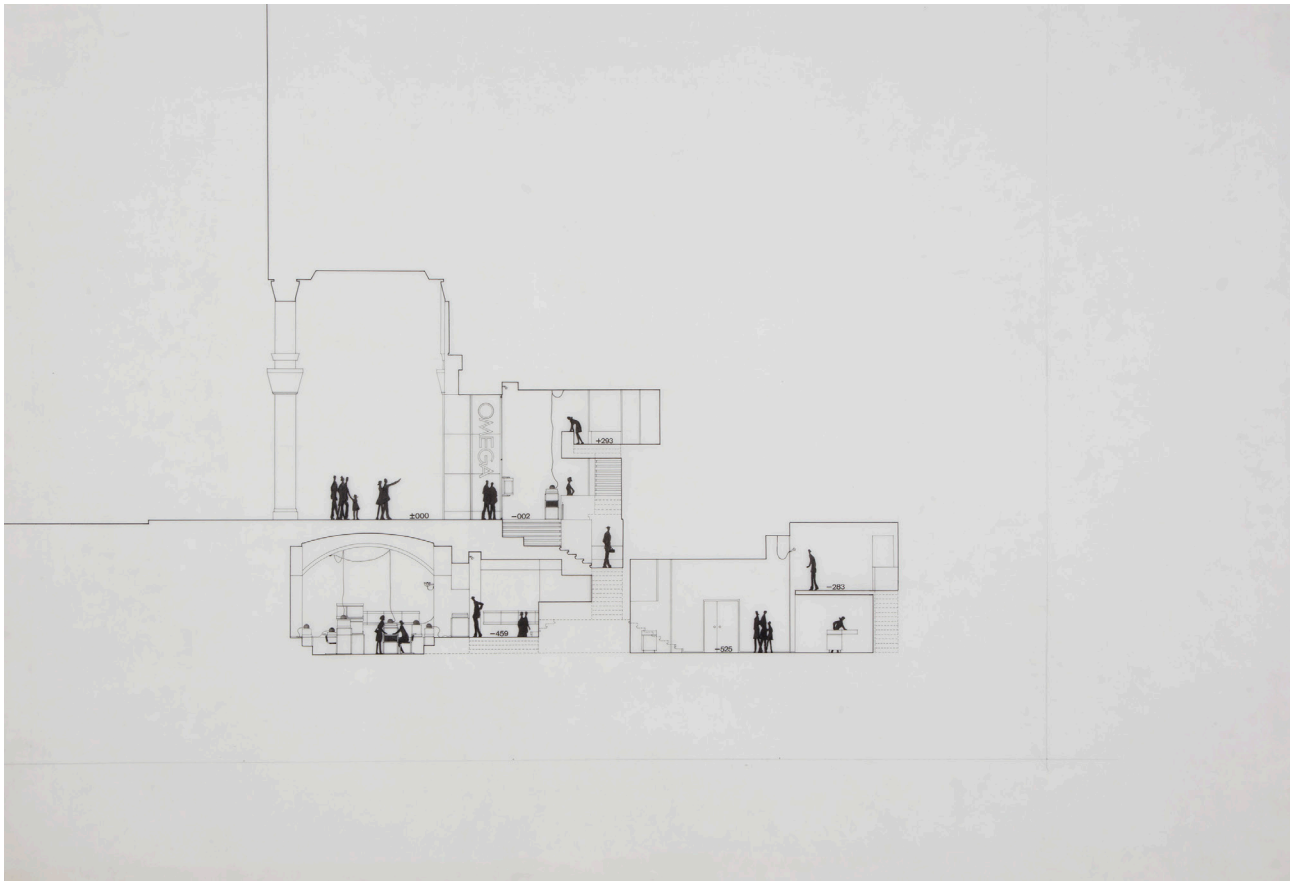
<sup>70</sup> As a contributor to *Domus* magazine for over 30 years, the photographer Giorgio Casali (1913–1995) took most of the pictures after the project was completed. Fototeca Fortunati in Milan was also tasked with taking pictures of the Omega shop.

<sup>71</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (London and New York: Verso, 1996), 42.

<sup>72</sup> Lupi, “Il Duomo allo specchio,” 83.

Fig. 23

Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, perspective of the Piazza del Duomo façade where there are annotations on the brand’s signs positioned on the glass shop windows and the granite cladding, 29/01/1971, no. 04769, scale 1:20 (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell’Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Folder 99/6, B055474S).



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The interior architecture absorbs the shifting patterns of daylight and shadow throughout the day, establishing a dynamic reciprocity with its urban surroundings. During construction, the positioning of the glazing remained faithful to the scheme submitted to the Soprintendenza and the Commissione Edilizia. What evolved in greater detail, however, were the structural components: the design of the mullions, the configuration of the entrances, and the arrangement of display devices tailored to the small scale of the merchandise – watches, jewellery, and silverware – addressed both to pedestrians walking along the adjacent portico and to those approaching from Via Ugo Foscolo. Particular attention was devoted to the junctions between the vertical and horizontal elements of the mullions. Rather than opting for an obvious or purely functional solution, the architects pursued a detail reminiscent of welded joints – refined, expressive, and technically sophisticated – as documented in original sketches.<sup>73</sup> The final solution was proposed by Umeda, who suggested the use of a cross or half-cross in burnished steel, shaped using three distinct radii of curvature to compensate for the inevitable optical distortions of the glass.<sup>74</sup>

Reflecting on the Omega project a few years after its inauguration, the British magazine *The Architectural Review* noted that the pursuit of radical transparency had been achieved through a “strong architectural framework of metropolitan

Fig. 24

Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, section A of the completed proposal. This ink drawing was made to illustrate the project in the papers published in magazines (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell'Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Folder 99/6, B042139S).

73 FAC.

74 Written interview with Masanori Umeda conducted through his daughter Nanae on June 24, 2022; notes of Masanori Umeda on journal page depicting the Omega project on June 28, 2022.



scale," which amplified the dialogue between the interior, the arcaded portico, and the northern profile of the Duomo, producing "a rich if ambiguous effect. In a sense the architects were lucky."<sup>75</sup> Yet when analysing the work of the Castiglioni brothers and their collaborators, attributing the result to luck appears overly reductive. Every design decision was the outcome of thoughtful deliberation – an exercise in calibrating varying degrees of transparency and visual permeability, grounded in a profound reflection on the surrounding urban context. This reflective process is particularly important for accurately situating the Omega Centre within both the historiography of the Castiglioni studio and their broader architectural production. At the same time, it introduces the conceptual framework underpinning the design of the interior – one in which spatial articulation, material expression, and visual continuity all converge in response to the complexities of the city.

The 1,000 square meters dedicated to sales, display, and workshop functions – on the basement level alone – were distributed across three interconnected levels: a spacious lower ground floor [Fig. 25-26], the main ground floor [Fig. 27-28], and a more compact mezzanine gallery overlooking the space below. [Fig. 29-30] From the very first variant of the interior floor plan, it is clear that the designers intended to establish "a real, completely free vertical connection between the ground floor and the underground space [so that] from the large windows facing the northern arcades [it would be] possible to see the sales counters located in the large hall below, even without having to enter the ground floor rooms."<sup>76</sup> [Fig. 31] From the earliest phases of the design process, the Castiglioni brothers prioritised the client's request to activate the basement level by ensuring visual continuity with the exterior. [Fig. 32]

The desired "magnification of space,"<sup>77</sup> requested by the client on the 13th of November 1967, was ultimately achieved by the architects through an iterative design process that yielded several variants. Five different proposals for the basement floor and staircase layout are documented in detail through architectural drawings and sketches produced during building site meetings.<sup>78</sup> These materials offer insight into the dynamic exchange between Mr. De Marchi and the architects, as well as into the parallel dialogue the architects established with the surrounding city.<sup>79</sup> In the earliest design versions, the staircase created a distinct separation within the basement between the sales and exhibition area and the workshop and service spaces, including the vault. Over time, the stair assumed both greater formal autonomy and spatial complexity, eventually taking shape as a sequence of platforms anchored to the bases of existing

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75 S. C., "Watchmakers' Shop Milan. Architects: Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni," *AR: The Architectural Review*, no. 894 (July 1971): 105.

76 SUE-MI. Rejection response "Progetto di riordino dei Negozi in Milano Piazza Duomo 25 in atti 252484/24230/1967."

77 FAC.

78 See Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione of the University of Parma (hereafter CSAC), Fondo Castiglioni: Folder 99/3 - B058854S (16/10/1967); Folder 99/5 - B058885S (25/01/1968); Folder 99/5- B058886S (25/02/1968); Roll 99/5- B058895S (25/03/1968); Folder 99/5- B055496S (29/01/1969).

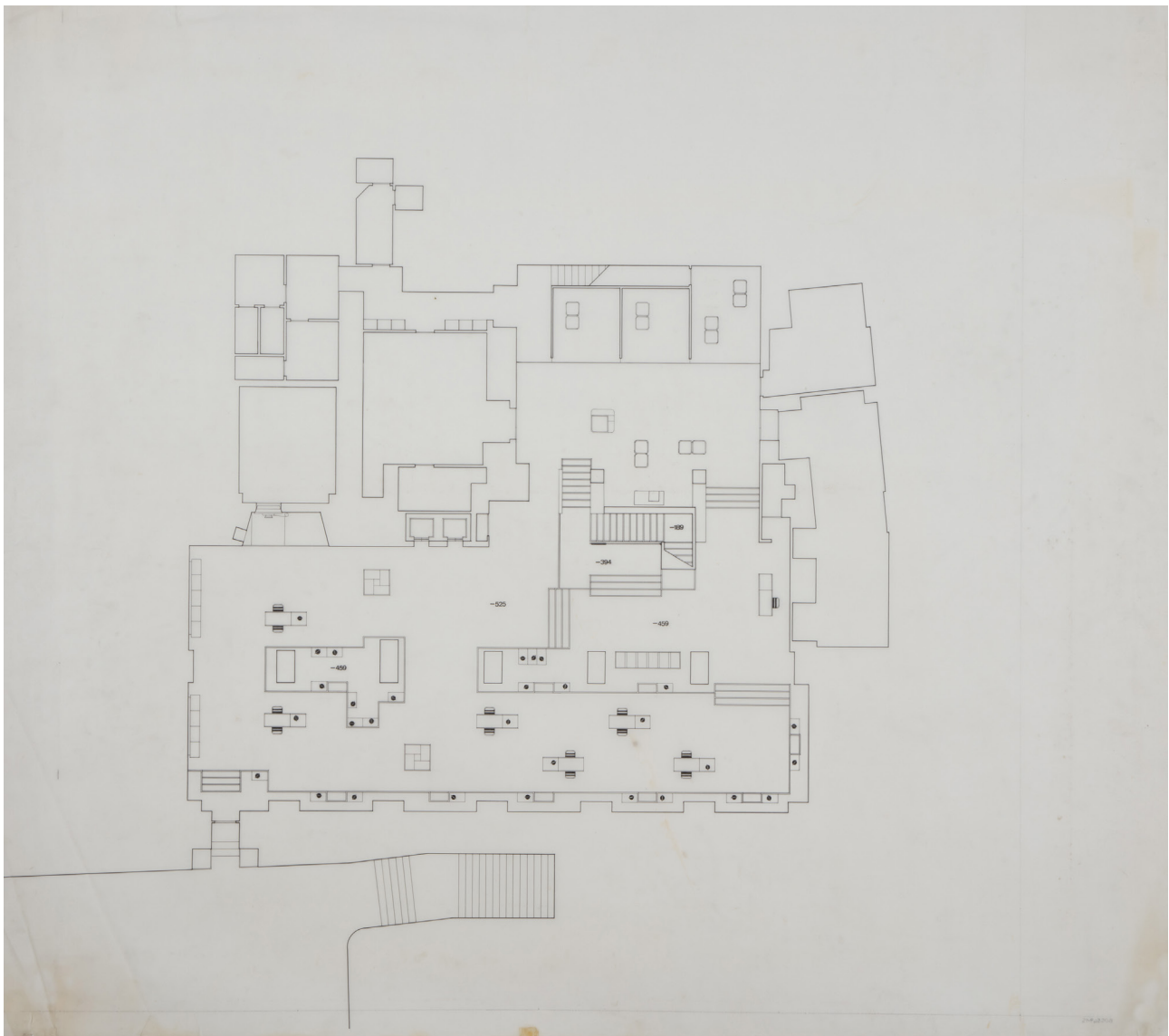
79 FAC.

pilasters and perimeter columns. In the final two variants, all service areas were repositioned behind the staircase, allowing it to serve as the sole architectural threshold to the vaulted gallery. The existing structure – with its characteristic sequence of ribbed vaults and supporting pillars – was deliberately brought into view and incorporated into the project, reinforcing the dialogue between historical architecture and contemporary intervention. Variations in the configuration of landings, ramps, and extruded platform volumes gave rise to multiple strategies for directing customer and employee circulation. To a certain extent, this design strategy stems from a refined evolution of their experimental work in exhibition design, but it is also clearly evident in their earlier project for the Gavina showroom (1960) and, though to a much lesser extent, in their project



Fig. 25

Photograph of the basement and its vaulted gallery separated by a colonnade with a space with flat ceilings (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell'Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Folder 99/5, B058817S).



for the Flos showroom (1968–1969), both in Milan, where the space is carefully orchestrated through compositional tactics.<sup>80</sup> During construction, the client requested the addition of a further, albeit modest, access point to the metro level, which included the insertion of side display windows, as reported in a letter from Fratelli De Marchi to the Castiglioni (1 October 1968).<sup>81</sup> Here too, the Castiglioni brothers addressed the complex articulation of vertical circulation, enabling those navigating the underground microcosm of Milan’s metro to enter the Omega Centre directly. This reconfiguration of the vertical connection inevitably demanded a new spatial arrangement of the lower level. It is clear, then, that the staircase was not conceived as a mere functional link between floors, but as an autonomous spatial device – an architectural fulcrum integral to the identity of the project. Considered as a whole, the spatial complexity of

Fig. 26

Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, plan of the basement as executed. This ink drawing was made to illustrate the project in the papers published in magazines (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell’Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Folder 99/6, B055471S).

<sup>80</sup> For further investigate the project, see: Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, “A Milano, un nuovo negozio di mobili,” *Domus*, no. 392 (1962): 7–14; Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, “Lampade sotto osservazione,” *Domus*, no. 474 (1969): 35–37.

<sup>81</sup> Although the access was already present in several drawings in sketched form, its detailed study and construction (1970–1971) would follow the inauguration of the store. FAC.



the Omega Centre can be seen as an interpretation of the equally layered urban context it faces – particularly the intertwined system composed of the Duomo, the piazza, and the subterranean infrastructure of the metro. Considered as a whole, the Omega Centre's spatial configuration actively interprets the layered complexity of the urban fabric it inhabits. In this sense, the architecture functions as a cognitive tool – a spatial translation of the city itself – guiding visitors almost imperceptibly from the monumental scale of the Duomo to the intimate scale of a timepiece, and back again.

Building on their intent not merely to interpret the city but to make it an integral part of the shop itself, the Castiglioni brothers focused on what, in November 1967, the client had vaguely referred to as "further attractions".<sup>82</sup> Among the possible architectural responses to this, one element proved especially significant

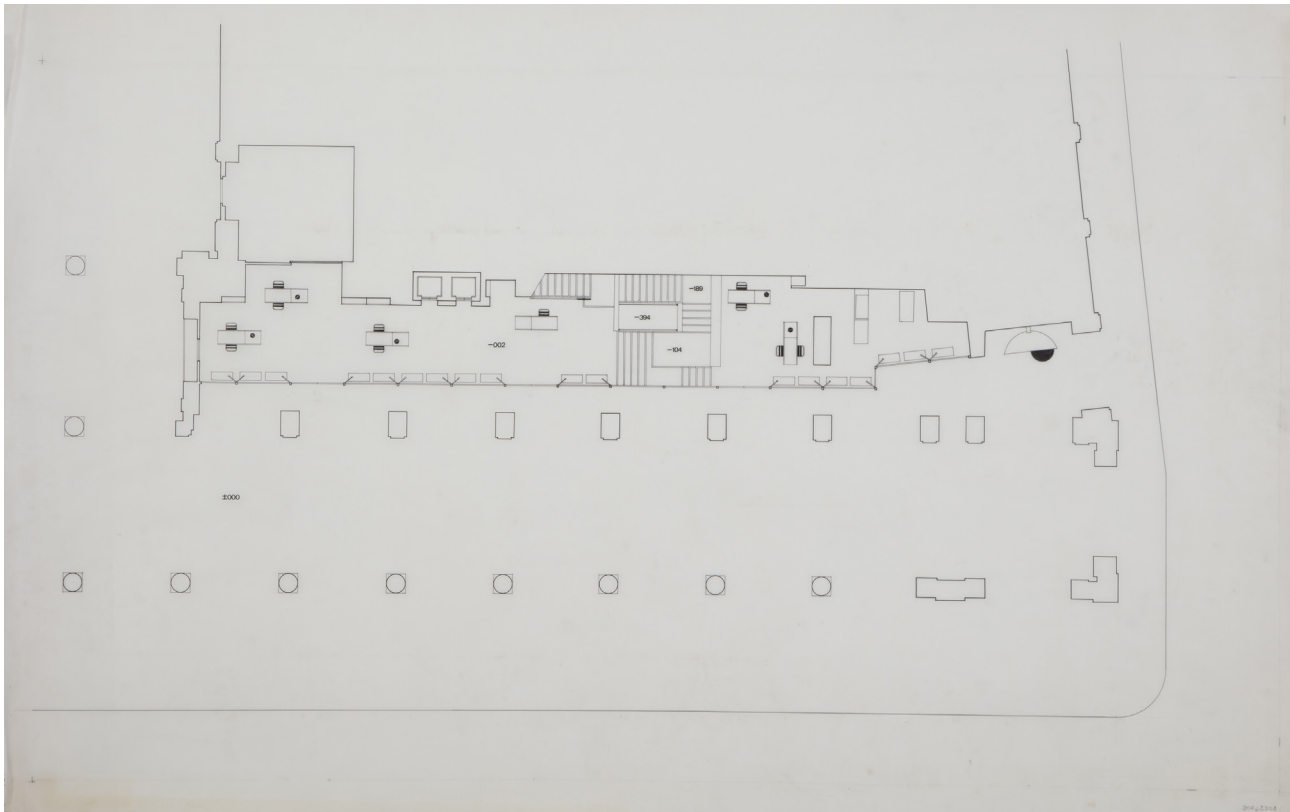


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82 FAC.

Fig. 27

Fortunati Fototecnica, ground floor shopping area under the mezzanine (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell'Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Folder 99/5, B058824S).



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for its role within the overall composition: a mirror placed parallel to the northern arcades, designed to reflect the Duomo and thereby draw it – at least virtually – into the Omega interior.<sup>83</sup> As noted at the time, “this is not a ‘trick’ for an easy optical illusion, or an amusement, no matter how sophisticated or clever, but a rare example of how a difficult material such as the mirror can be used not in terms of decoration, but as an integrated element among the components of architecture.”<sup>84</sup> The integration of the Duomo into the spatial experience of the shop was further reinforced by the use of glass parapets, strategically positioned to amplify the interplay of reflections and urban references – even during the descent to the underground level. The result was a spatially complex and cohesive system, in which “unity between the floors [was] obtained by the uniform and uninterrupted treatment of floor and wall finishes.”<sup>85</sup> [Fig. 32]

The unity of the interior spaces was further reinforced by the deliberate use of a surprisingly restrained palette of materials. Particularly striking was the Castiglioni brothers’ distinctive brand of “sarcastic rationalism”,<sup>86</sup> evident in their juxtaposition of modest materials – such as grey synthetic carpeting applied to both floors and walls, or studded linoleum used for the so-called “additional route” – with more refined elements like stainless steel and glass. The result was the impression of an inhabited organism which, as noted on 10 July 1967,

83 Lupi, “Il Duomo allo specchio,” 79.

84 “A Milano in piazza Duomo,” 21.

85 S. C., “Watchmakers’ Shop Milan,” 106.

86 Branzi, “I fratelli Castiglioni,” 4.

Fig. 28

Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, plan of the completed ground floor. This ink drawing was made to illustrate the project in the papers published in magazines (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell’Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Folder 99/6, B055470S).

embodied “maximum freedom, breadth of movement, and elasticity,”<sup>87</sup> while subtly and gracefully sustaining the fluid dynamics of commerce.

Finally, it is worth highlighting the custom-designed furnishings created by the Castiglioni brothers specifically for the Omega Centre. The sales counters and the near-continuous bent metal tube supporting the leather-covered wooden shelves stand out for the elegance, precision, and coherence of their design solutions. The process culminated in a refined reinterpretation of the uppercase Greek letter *omega* ( $\Omega$ ) – a result of iterative experimentation and formal distillation.<sup>88</sup> This design ethos exemplifies what architect Vittorio Gregotti (1927–2020) defined as “the idea of an integrated project: a project developed in close connection with production structures, one that re-examines the internal order of the technical system, the reciprocal placement of components, explores new possibilities of materials and workmanship, and redefines the



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Fig. 29

Fortunati Fototecnica, the staircase connecting the mezzanine and the ground floor (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell'Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Folder 99/5, B058830S).

Fig. 30

Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, plan of the completed mezzanine. This ink drawing was made to illustrate the project in the papers published in magazines (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell'Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Folder 99/6, B055468S).

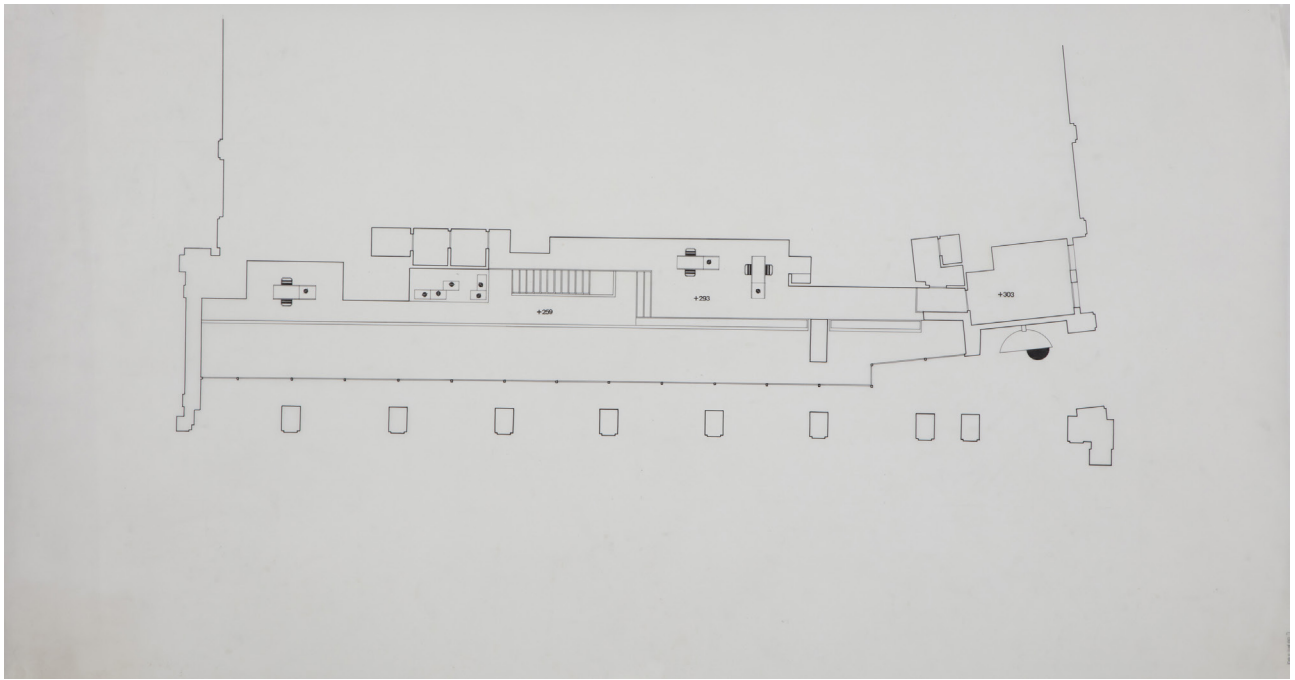
Fig. 31

Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, sections A and B, 25/01/1968 (drawings revised on 20/06/1968 and 01/10/1968), no. 04200, scale 1:50 (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell'Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Folder 99/5, B055493S).

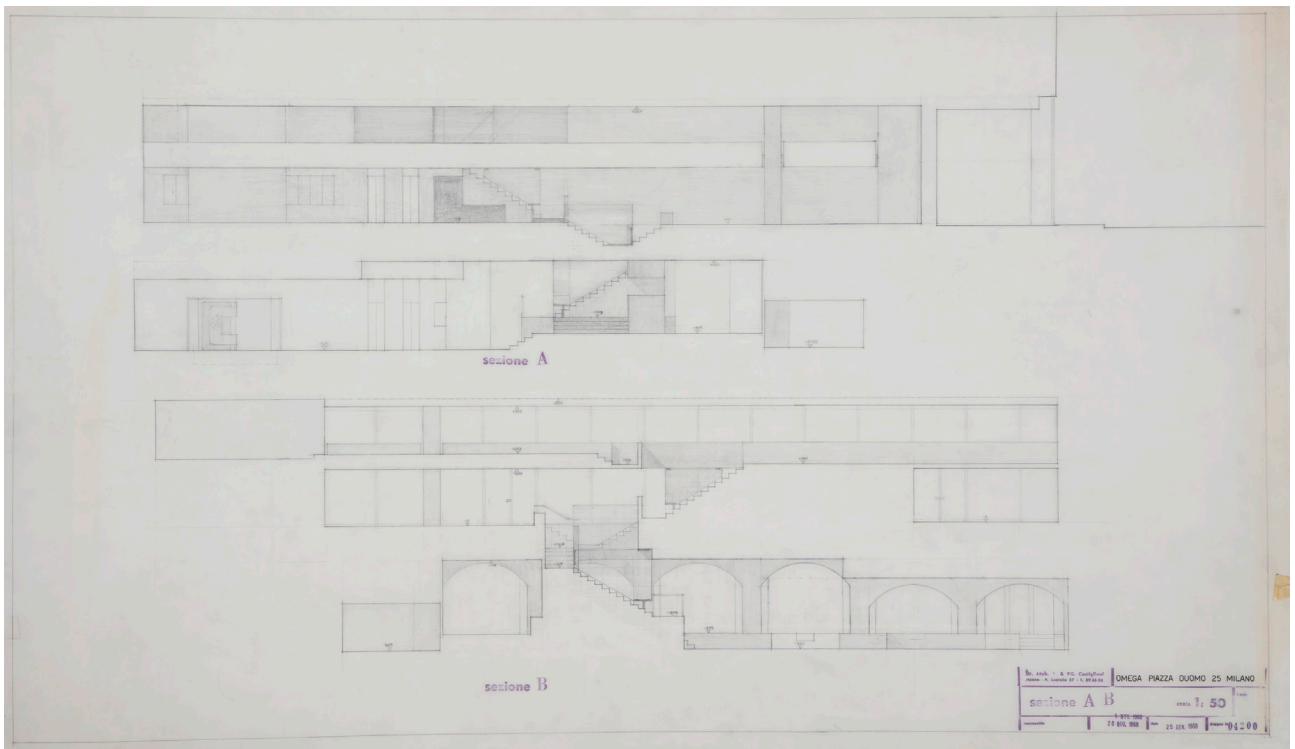
87 FAC.

88 FAC.





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32



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Fig. 32

Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, section B of just the basement floor with custom furniture (e.g. tubular structure of the sales desk with simplified Q symbol) and lighting systems, 29/01/1969, no. 04476, scale 1:20 (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell'Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Roll 99/5, B058868S).

Fig. 33

The Duomo di Milano appears while walking up the staircase from the basement to the ground floor (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione dell'Università di Parma, Fondo Castiglioni B022287P, Folder 99/5, B058819S).

object's qualities of use."<sup>89</sup> In this light, the furnishings – far from being merely functional complements – should be understood as integral elements of a unified architectural organism. Just like the staircase, the sculpture, or the display windows, they contribute to articulating a spatial narrative that links the city to the shop and the object to the urban experience. With this layered approach, the Omega Centre asserts itself not merely as a commercial project, but as a coherent architectural statement – demonstrating the potential of retail space as a vehicle for cultural, spatial, and urban reflection.

## Conclusions

The collaboration between the Castiglioni brothers came to an end in 1968 with the untimely death of Pier Giacomo. Less than two decades later, in April 1986, the relationship between the Omega Centre and the city of Milan was similarly interrupted, when the new tenant – Società Rocca Grandi Magazzini<sup>90</sup> – requested authorisation from the Soprintendenza to carry out substantial alterations. These included the subdivision of the space into two separate units, the removal of the gallery overlooking Piazza del Duomo, and the replacement of the original window mullions.<sup>91</sup> The application – submitted in connection with a redesign by architect Piero Pinto<sup>92</sup> – is accompanied by a set of photographs capturing the Omega Centre shortly before its transformation. These images reveal that what would become the Castiglioni brothers' final joint work was also their most explicitly urban. As Giovanni Klaus Koenig perceptively observed, the project established "a new relationship between shop and city. A relationship [...] whereby the shop is no longer an interchangeable object [...] but has become an integral element of the city."<sup>93</sup> Yet to fully grasp the architectural significance of the Omega Centre, it may be necessary to momentarily set aside its commercial function. To reduce it to the functional category of "shop" is to risk narrowing its interpretive scope and underestimating the cultural and spatial ambition it so clearly embodies.

Turning one's back to the Duomo and focusing on the building itself, one begins to perceive a carefully orchestrated sequence of spatial and visual devices designed to guide both the eye and the body: a progression that moves, almost imperceptibly, from the monumental scale of the city – through arcades, display windows, and circulation paths – to the intimate scale of a watch or a piece of jewellery. Crucially, this sequence also works in reverse. From within the Omega Centre, the gaze is gradually reoriented outward, across a series of thresholds that recalibrate perception and reintroduce the urban scale – culmi-

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89 Vittorio Gregotti, "Traviamenti interpretativi," in *Achille Castiglioni*, 3.

90 The Rocca family began its history in 1794 as a watch manufacturer and soon became one of the first Italian importers of Swiss watches, with a shop in Turin (1872): [https://www.rocca1794.com/en\\_eu/history](https://www.rocca1794.com/en_eu/history). Accessed May 12, 2024.

91 SABAP-MI, Ref. 3420 of 11/04/1986.

92 Silvio San Pietro, *Nuovi negozi a Milano* (Milan: L'Archivolta, 1988), 144–145.

93 Giovanni Klaus Koenig, "[Untitled editorial]," *Casabella*, no. 339-340 (August–September 1969): 78.



nating in the Duomo itself. In this sense, the Castiglioni brothers conceived not merely a space for commerce, but a mechanism for perceiving and experiencing the city: an architectural device that, just as Huber's installation measures time, measured and articulated the spatial and visual rhythms of Milan. Their final collaborative work was not simply architecture *in* the city, but architecture *of* the city and *for* the city – an urban artefact that, while marked by a formal refinement that might suggest lightness or simplicity, in fact posed complex questions about the role of architecture in shaping civic space and to intervene with the heritage. It challenged the disciplinary boundaries of retail architecture, firmly anchoring itself in Milan's historical fabric, while paying tribute – on one side – to Giuseppe Mengoni's Galleria and – on the other – to the Duomo. The demolition of Castiglioni's realisation did more than eliminate a remarkable architectural work employing a meaningful grafting strategy of dialogue with the context; it erased a unique lens through which the city could be observed, understood, and experienced.

The fate of the Omega Centre is far from unique – especially in the retail sector, where spaces are inherently vulnerable to rapid shifts in taste, commercial strategies, and technological change. Nevertheless, turning today the spotlight on this meaningful work invites a broader reflection on the role of retail architecture in shaping the contemporary city. Revisiting Koenig's invitation to "make some distinctions" and "create some rankings," the Omega Centre may be situated among the most successful commercial projects of the Italian postwar period – alongside such exemplary works as the aforementioned Olivetti Showroom in Venice or *La Rinascente* in Rome by Franco Albini and Franca Helg. In all these cases, the projects not only establish a refined design and cultural dialogue with the urban context they inhabit but also bear witness to "a deeply artisanal humanism, one that is intrinsic to their architects and designers."<sup>94</sup> In this regard, the last lesson of Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni remains highly relevant: it prompts us to consider architecture not as a self-contained object, but as an active and responsive part of the urban culture. The Omega Centre becomes then a case study in architectural responsibility and hence in understanding ones' position within the constellation of knowledge and service.<sup>95</sup> Indeed it – demonstrates how design can mediate between private interests and the public realm, and how it can foster a dialogue between commerce and civic life. As this paper has argued, the true legacy of the Omega project – and of the Castiglioni brothers' collaboration – is a powerful lesson in how to see and understand the city in all its formal, spatial, and economic complexity. [Fig. 34]

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94 Lucia Borromeo Dina, ed., *Dimostrazione del prestigio dell'architettura italiana: Intervista a Fulvio Irace*, October 2010, cited in Tinacci, *Mia memore et devota gratitudine*, 225.

95 Cuff, *Architecture: The Story of Practice*, 218.



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Fig. 34

Giorgio Casali, the Omega centre façade along Piazza del Duomo from one of the stairways down to the Linea Rossa station, 1969 (Università Iuav di Venezia, Archivio Progetti, Fondo Giorgio Casali).

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## **Erratum: "Churches by Enzo Fortuna (1921-1979) in Eastern Sicily between 1955 and 1970: Design Processes, Influences and Outcomes"**

This erratum regards the following article: Caruso, R. M. M. (2024). Churches by Enzo Fortuna (1921-1979) in Eastern Sicily between 1955 and 1970: Design Processes, Influences and Outcomes. *Histories of Postwar Architecture*, 7 (14), 470-487. <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2611-0075/18773>.

The correction concerns the deletion of two lines of note n. 37 on page 480. Therefore, the correct text of note n. 37 is the following: "*Benedetti, L'architettura delle chiese contemporanee, il caso italiano*: 34."

The editorial team apologizes with the author and the readers for the inconvenience. The correction was done on December 2, 2025.