by
Geoffrey Broadbent

BOFILL AND THE TALLER

It is obvious from the AA exhibition that, since 1976 or so, the Taller di Arquitectura has taken a 'Neo-classical' tack, which seems strange when one thinks of their earlier work, with its tendencies to bright colours, complex geometries and its relationship to the vernacular. Yet obviously there are reasons for these changes which can only be explained in the context of that earlier work (see my articles in the *Architectural Review,* 1973; *Architectural Design,* 1975; and *Progressive Architecture,* 1975).

I first heard about the Taller in 1972 when Charles Jencks published *Architecture 2000*. There was a small grey photograph of a building called Xanadu (Ill.1) and I wondered how that could happen? How could a firm of Spanish architects design a kind of Chinese pagoda for the Spanish coast? I made it my business to find out, and in finding out I got to know the Taller, their work and their ways of thinking.

Three things intrigued me: first of all the philosophy of the Taller, as set up by their founder, Ricardo Bofill; secondly, the structure of the Taller itself, as one of the few firms, worldwide, in which non-architects were generating architectural concepts; and thirdly, the Taller's working methods which, curiously enough, matched things I had described in my *Design in Architecture* (1973), especially my various ways of conceiving three-dimensional forms: pragmatic, typologic, analogic and syntactic.

As far as philosophy is concerned, Bofill had decided to fight that drab, dreary, grey concrete architecture which so many people had been building in the early 1960s, grey concrete social housing and so on (Ill.2). He described such things as 'cemetery suburbs', and he dedicated his career to showing that, for similar, minimum costs, one could have architecture that was interesting and exciting, with a real sense of place and of belonging for the people who lived there.

Housing built with large prefabricated concrete panels was *called* 'social housing' because it had been exported to the Soviet Union in the early 1930s by the Marxist refugees from Germany like Bruno Taut and Ernst May. The latter had experimented with it in (socialist) Frankfurt and eventually, by the early 1950s, it had become *the* style for Soviet housing and, therefore, the sort of housing that *any* state built when it wanted to symbolise the fact that it 'cared' for 'the people'. So how could Bofill, who had indeed described himself as a Marxist and had even gone to prison for his beliefs, set his face against the one particular kind of architecture that Marxism itself had thrown up?

Yet the plain fact was that such building had alienated architects and planners from 'the people' worldwide. So Bofill began to wonder what architects could do to gain the 'people's' confidence again. He wrote a piece for *Zodiac* (1965) in which he said that there was a time, in the 1950s and 60s, when the only important thing was to be 'Modern'. If you were 'Modern' you were a pioneer, and you fought and defended yourself; you had to be original, to be different, and to be risqué. In a literal sense, he was attacking what Robert Hughes recently called 'The Shock of the New'. The curious thing is that already, in 1965, he was articulating for architecture what other people were saying in different fields at the time: in poetry, in film, in fiction, in drama, in music and so on. Literary critics such as Susan Sontag, George Steiner, Ihab Hassan, Leslie Fielder, Richard Poirier and Malcolm Bradbury were suggesting that what we call 'The Modern' actually peaked in the years around World War I. There *was* a first Modern Movement in the years before 1914 which included Symbolism, Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, Futurism, Constructivism, and so on, with an increasing emphasis on non-representational art. There was another after 1918, when artists concentrated on the specific desire to shock: that was the intention of Expressionism, of Dada, of Abstract Expressionism and so on. Art of this kind was a substitute for religion, for which reason the 'new' critics felt that it had to go. For them

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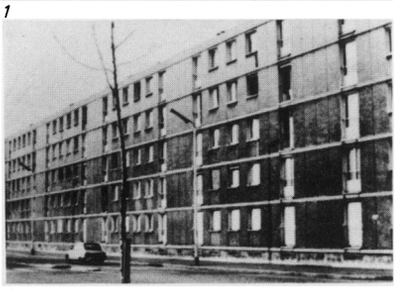

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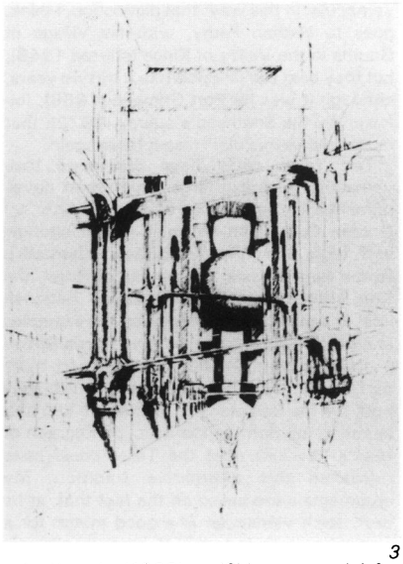

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1. Xanadu (1966), a 'Chinese pagoda' for the Spanish coast at Calpe, designed by visual analogy with a rock across the bay, an early example of 'contextualism'.

2. The precast concrete flats at Le Havre represent the kind of 'cemetery suburb' against which the Taller were reacting.

3. The Maison d'Abraxas (1972) was to have these massive architectural sculptures in the courtyard to symbolise man's progress from 'the nothingness before birth' to 'the nothingness after death'.

there was no *moral* value in making art at all! Art exists for its own sake, so there's no point in analysing it, judging it, interpreting it and certainly no point in making distinctions between High Art and Popular Art. This attitude, of course, has political overtones, and it was first called 'Post-Modern' in literature (see, for instance, Graft, 1973). Only later, as Charles Jencks shows, did the term come into architecture, although he does not make these important literary connections. This first 'Post-Modern' was the literature of 'anything goes', of the youth culture, of expanding consciousness through the use of drugs, of myth versus reality, of subjectivity versus objectivity. It was against the idea of hierarchy, of elites, of competition and of authority: it was the attitude of the 1960s.

Bofill himself understood these things and, in addition to designing buildings — or rather talking them through in design — he was also making films, films that relate very closely to the literature of Modernism such as *Circles* (1966), a surrealist film about people locked up in a totally closed, claustrophobic environment, and *Schizo* (1969), based on an idea which was popular at the time (see Ronald Laing, *The Divided Self*): that to be schizophrenic is somehow more 'human' and more creative than to be 'normal' and 'rational'. Of course there is always a time lag in the progression of ideas from the other arts into architecture, but these literary views began to show in certain architectural projects of the early 1970s, such as Bofill's scheme for the *Fort St Cyr* outside Paris (1972) and the original *Maison Abraxas* (1972), a 'House of Magic' in which man's progression from the nothingness before birth to the nothingness after death was symbolised by, for instance, a white cube, representing 'rationalism', a gold sphere, representing 'irrationality' and so on.

But you don't get through to 'the people' by making surrealist buildings, which was, of course, part of Modernism. The point was to be Post-Modern. The Taller tried various approaches; one was to look at the rogue architects who had been building their own thing *during* the Modern Movement, people like Frank Lloyd Wright, Gaudi and Aalto. The Taller tried various experiments in the manner of those people but found that these weren't quite what they were looking for, and certainly they didn't want to continue copying stylistically what those people had done. The answer was to look at the Modern Movement itself, at what it stood for, and then to react against that! (Ill.3)

The nature of 'the Modern' was prescribed in various places, in the texts of historians like Giedeon and Pevsner, in the writings of the architects themselves, such as Gropius and most particularly Le Corbusier. These literally prescribed what architecture ought to be for the rest of the century. In attempting to define what it *should* be Le Corbusier first described what it should not be! He attacked in particular the Beaux Arts architects who, he said, simply made lines for axes in 'a sort of mosaic ... making graphic representations of star patterns...', extended into the third dimension merely by the use of the Classical orders. They were interested in decorative patterns, but they were not interested in designing three-dimensional space. Le Corbusier also attacked what he called r-e-g-i-o-n-a-l-i-s-m-e — what we would call 'the vernacular'. Curiously enough this particular attack is not in the English edition at all — I think Frederick Etchells must have found it too difficult to translate!

Le Corbusier felt that architects, faced with the problems of reconstruction in northern France after the war in 1918, should have gone for prefabrication. But instead of that, they went to the 'panoply' of available techniques (a 'panoply' is the formal arrangement of one's armour and weapons arranged in neat patterns on the wall) and took down, not their swords, or other effective weapons, but their pan-pipes. And instead of attacking the real problems of architecture — as Le Corbusier saw them — they tootled pretty, rustic tones on the pan-pipes; that is, they built the vernacular.

So, if you're going to symbolise, with your built work, the fact that you reject the Modern Movement, the obvious place to start is with the vernacular.

The Taller did that, in the early 1960s, although curiously enough this vernacular phase is missing entirely from Peter Hodgkinson's otherwise admirable chronology of their work in the exhibition catalogue. It included things like *Plexus*, at La Manzanera, near

Calpe (started in 1964) (Ill.4), where the site agent *still* knows the rules for making, say, a new villa, in terms of its plan, its roof forms, its windows, its terraces, its retaining walls and so on, based on the local vernacular, and bound to 'blend in' with the rest. The Taller were by no means the first to resort to the vernacular in this way: that distinction, I think, goes to Hathan Fathy, with his Village of Gourna in the Valley of Kings (started 1948), but they beat Daniel Spoerri to it by two years, although it was his Port Grimaud (1966), followed by the Smithson's eulogy (1972), that made 'the vernacular' respectable again.

The Taller could have developed their vernacular to make large-scale urban developments in the manner of Camillo Sitte, of Gordon Cullen and so on. I argued strongly with them that they should, as an alternative to the Neo-classical geometries of Rossi, the Krier brothers and other self-styled 'Rationalists'. It seemed to me that given the examples in Barcelona itself, of the original Barrio Gotico — the area around the Cathedral — and, more particularly, of Pueblo Espagnol which was built for the Barcelona Exhibition of 1929 (it appears, top right, in the usual photograph of Mies's Pavilion), that the Taller *could* have refreshed this alternative tradition. My arguments were based on the fact that, at its best, such vernacular *is* a good match for a particular place in terms of context, climate, available materials, life style and so on.

But their work instead has gone in two directions. One is an even more intense use of geometry, tending towards pure abstraction, and this shows in certain projects for the Islamic world, villages for Algeria, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Riyadh in Saudi Arabia and so on. How Le Corbusier would have hated these 'star' patterns!

The other is more clearly the 'Neo-classical' of a kind which was dismissed *by architects* at the AA as megalomaniac, authoritarian, unscholarly and kitsch. The question is why — given so many other possibilities — they should have gone in this particular direction?

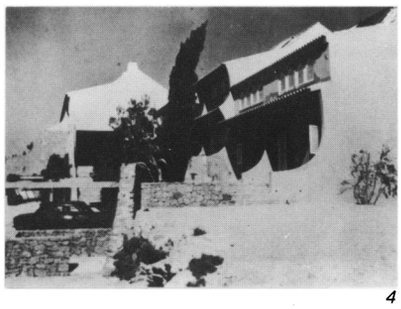
There are, I think, two interrelated reasons. The first stemmed from their personal involvement in Catalan nationalism, whilst the second was a bid for acceptance within the main stream — as they saw it — of European architecture in the 1970s.

As Catalan Nationalists, several of the Taller frequently found themselves visiting the Catalan leader, Tarradellas, then in exile in France. They crossed the Pyrenees, frequently, at Le Perthus and conceived the idea of marking the transition between Spain and France with a monument which, eventually, was built, in somewhat simplified form, as the Pyramid, which supports four sculptured pillars representing the Catalan flag.

Their Catalan interests also brought a commission for another monument (Ill.5) in the only part of Catalonia that had remained independent of France and Spain: the tiny state of Andorra, high in the Pyrenees. The Church of Meritxel, an important Catalan shrine, had been destroyed by fire, and the Taller were asked to rebuild it. Since that commission Catalonia has gained a measure of independence from Madrid, and indeed one of the Taller, Salvator Clotas, has become a (socialist) Deputy for Barcelona. But it seemed important at the time to recreate a Catalan architecture and also to create a symbolic centre for Catalonia.

So they persuaded the clients that, in addition to rebuilding the shrine, they should build a Catalan museum, a Catalan archive, a Catalan conference centre — these would attract large numbers of people which would mean Catalan hotels, Catalan youth hostels, Catalan shops and so on. Now Catalonia has some of the finest Romanesque churches in the world: Cuxa, Canigou, Serrabone and Elne in the French Roussillon; Ripoll and Cardona in Spanish Catalonia itself. Indeed, for my taste, Cardona represents the *purest* piece of architecture ever made anywhere in any style. The Taller studied such things in preparing themselves for Meritxell (1974).

The amazing thing is that the Church of



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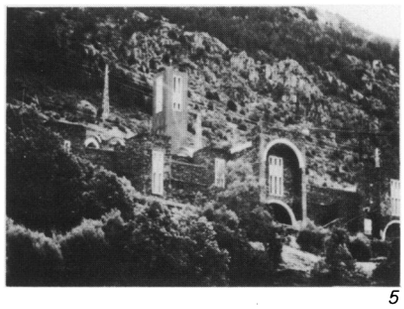

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Meritxell — with its adjacent cloisters — has actually been built. The black, local stone blends perfectly into the hillside, although the white precast concrete arches and window surrounds seem to me somewhat obtrusive. The interior is particularly disappointing, a kind of paper-thin Brunelleschi; how much more dramatic if the solidity of the Romanesque had been carried through consistently!

But the Romanesque spirit imbued much of the Taller's work at this time, including the conversion of an old cement works into offices for the Taller themselves at San Justo d'Esverne in Barcelona (1974). They put floors into the old cement silos and opened them into each other, to form circular rooms, figure-of-eight rooms, clover-leaf rooms and so on, with round-headed Romanesque windows.

The largest project designed in this way undoubtedly is *Les Arcades du Lac* (1975-80), a vast, Versailles-like apartment complex at St. Quentin en Yvellines — a Palace for the People beyond Versailles itself. It is grouped around six four-storey courtyards which satisfy exactly the criteria — for packing the maximum number of habitable rooms onto the ground — established by Sir Leslie Martin and Lionel March as part of their *Land Use and Built Form* studies at Cambridge. There are, it must be said, certain infelicities of internal planning caused largely by the use of the Coignet system, but the courts themselves have an attractive urban scale (Ill.6), whilst the Viaduct (1976), jutting out into the (artificial) lake, gives a Chenonceaux-like relationship between building and water. In the Taller's version of the Coignet-system, superbly cast concrete panels are 'layered' to give depth to the facades — with a wide variety of subtle colours, textures, and modelling in their (Romanesque) surface treatment. The Cambridge-like courts have their cloisters formed — naturally — of round-headed Romanesque arches cast into the concrete panels (Ill.7). Those who see *this* as debased classicism are simply missing the point. It is economic, a practical and an *urban* way of making architecture, and what's more it has its own structural integrity. Bob Maxwell wonders 'whether the grammar of construction and the syntax of conceptual meaning are within touching distance?' But, if you are building with concrete panels, and you want to use round-headed arches, then why not cast your arches into your panels? Jim Stirling is using similar round arches at Rice, but his are *applied* to a light steel frame. If you are going to do this at all — and 20th century arches are no more and no less 'human' in scale than 1st, 10th or 14th century ones as Alexander-like 'Patterns' — then how much more sensible to precast them in concrete!

However, in 1974 the Taller had also flipped over, into what I *would* call the Neo-classical. It started with a vast development for Paris; the Taller had been asked by Giscard to soften the impact of La Défense with its alien cluster of towers right on the main axis from the Louvre, along the Champs Élysées, past the Arc de Triomphe and along Avenue de la Grande-Armée. Having worked out a strategic plan, they designed individual buildings within it, including a complex of shops and offices, with a transport interchange known as Point M (1974). The main building was to be an exceedingly pure, semi-circular slab (Ill.8); all Romanesque connotations disappeared in the purity of its geometry which obviously derived from the work of such 18th century French Rationalists as Boullée, Ledoux and their contemporaries. I have suggested elsewhere (*Architectural Design*, 1979) that this particular phase in architectural history was the coming together of two things: the rediscovery of Greece and, coming out of the philosophy of Descartes, the idea that architecture should be reduced to the purest geometry. Other architects at other times (think of Le Corbusier) have felt that a 'return to order' meant a return to pure geometry, but why the classical connotations?

Other people, having led great revolutions in the other arts, have gone back to the Classical. Picasso, having led the great Cubist revolution in the 1910s, started in the 1920s to draw classical figures, on Mediterranean beaches, in classical drapery. And Stravinsky, having shocked the musical world with the *Rite of Spring* (1911), started re-writing

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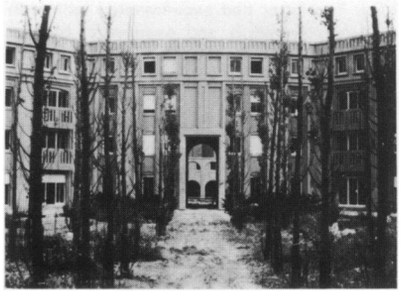

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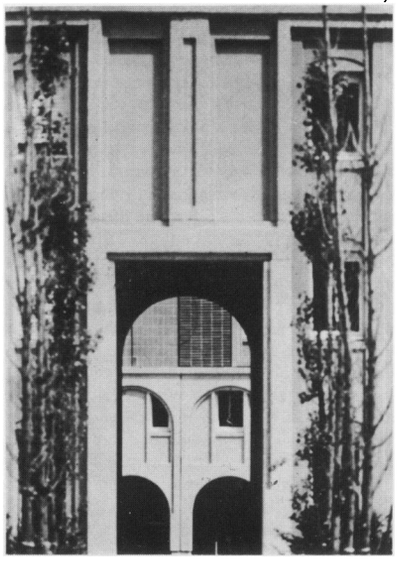

BOFILL AND THE TALLER

Pergolesi and continued to write in *his* Neo-classical manner for another 25 years, up to and including *The Rake's Progress* (1951). The point, of course, is that having shocked people once, if you want to *keep* shocking them the most outrageous thing you can do, as an avant-garde artist, is to go back to the Classical! Diaghilev's instruction to Picasso and Stravinsky had been 'Astonish me!'. And they did, with their Neo-classicism! Yet despite Colin Rowe's rather strained comparison of Le Corbusier with Palladio, you could hardly say that the former actually went 'back' to the Classical! But Bofill did, he had already astonished with much of his earlier work, yet when you look back at the path he chose to take, it was a well-trodden one in architecture. The English Arts and Crafts architects had started by drawing on the vernacular and then moved into the Neo-classical: the obvious example, of course, is Lutyens. And, also in the 1970s, Charles Moore, Bob Stern and Robert Venturi have all made similar 'progressions', whilst you only have to look at the catalogue for last year's Venice Biennale to see how one-third of the architects, including Bofill (that is some 30 out of 90), were working out — in ways which Moore would describe as solemn or serious, wise, witty or silly — their *own* versions of the Neo-classical.

Bofill's reasons, I think, were quite direct. Even by 1973 the Taller had achieved such strange and exciting things as various Barcelona apartment blocks, the Barrio Gaudi at Reus, El Castillo at Sitges, the Plexus development, Xanadu and the Red Wall at Calpe, the City in Space project and Walden 7, the Petite Cathédrale, the first Abraxas and other projects. Yet in 1972 when Aldo Rossi, Massimo Scolari and other organisers of the 15th Triennale in Milan — in trying to represent the architectural avant-garde — put together what they thought a new 'tendency' in architecture, they completely ignored the Taller. Their exhibition included the work of their architectural ancestors, such as Mies, Le Corbusier, Oud, Taut, Leonidov, and even Hilbersheimer, with his dreadful drawings of bleak cemetery-suburb flats. It included the 1920s Italian 'Rationalists' such as Terragni, Figini and Pollini; the work of such architectural 'cousins' as Jim Stirling, the Krier brothers, the New York Five, Mathias Ungers and, curiously, Leslie Martin; but not a single project from Bofill. Obviously it is no coincidence that a year later the Taller started *drawing* things with axes and circles in the manner of Leo Krier's *Echternacht* and Rob Krier's *Leinfelden* which had been at the Biennale. But in addition to drawing, the Taller wanted to *build* such things, and one by one they came to Bath to see how it could be done. They designed a number of schemes, including three for the Basque country: at Vittoria (1976), Santander (1976) and Bilbao (1977); and several also for France at Cergy-Pontoise, Marne la Vallée (1978), Montpellier (1979) and Paris, Montparnasse (1979), not to mention four major schemes for Les Halles also in Paris (1974-77). I need not repeat here the excellent documentation which was given to Les Halles in *Architectural Design* (1.10.1980). Even though the final scheme was started on site, it was abandoned in a trade-off between Giscard d'Estaing and Jaques Chirac: 'You have Paris, I'll have the rest of France!' Cergy Pontoise also was abandoned, but the other French schemes are going on.

Certainly the most spectacular is *Le Palacio d'Abraxas* (sic) at Marne la^Vallée, a wide, U-shaped block up to 18 storeys high, again built in the Coignet system (Ill.9). The building itself is hollow, in other words it contains vast internal malls crossed by bridges which are linked by staircases, thus repeating the idea of an 'urban arena' conceived first of all in a scheme for Monaco, developed in the (abandoned) Cathedral for Cergy Pontoise, and realised, finally, at Walden 7 in Barcelona. Everybody knows that the tiles fell off Walden 7, but that's hardly likely to happen to the Coignet panels, even those cast as column drums in blue, fluted concrete to a radius of two metres for the vast, 12-storey high external 'order'. The architectural 'language' of the Palacio seems close to Michael Graves at Portland, Oregon!

It's *this* kind of 'Neo-classicism' which will be reworked in various further permutations — in the Taller's housing for Montpellier, in Zac-Guilleminot-Vercingétorix near Notre Dame du Travail (Ill.10), in Montparnasse, and so on. This scheme, more than any other, with its combination of a circus and a crescent, shows what the Taller learned from Bath. In the developed scheme, the (large oval) circus and the (semi-circular) crescent are now closed — the latter with a row of apartment towers; whilst the heart-shaped plaza at the top of the original drawing has become an even more Bath-like crescent.

There was an undercurrent of discussion at the exhibition concerning the fascist connotations of such work. Certainly the fascist dictatorships of the 1930s did build Neo-classical monuments such as Troost's Museum of German Art in Munich, Speer's Zeppelin field at Nuremberg and his Reich's Chancellory in Berlin. But Stalin's Russia also turned to the Neo-classical for the Palace of the Soviets, the Intourist Building, the Moscow Metro and the various Moscow wedding cakes. So did Mao's China, for the Great Hall of the People, the Museum of Chinese History and the Chairman's own mausoleum, all in Peking.

So did a whole range of other, totally non-fascist people, from Bernard Maybeck in his Palace of Fine Arts for San Francisco (1925) to Charles Moore in the Piazza d'Italia for New Orleans (1978). These and the 1980 Biennale show that, far from being fascist, the Neo-classical can be fun.

The Biennale too extended a point which Bofill himself made at the opening of the exhibition. Asked why he insisted on using such crude classical detail so ungrammatically, he replied: 'I'm not redesigning classical architecture at all. I'm simply taking classical devices and using those as inspiration for my own architecture'.

Such criticisms, of course, were based largely on the drawings, or at best on photographs. If *Les Arcades du Lac* are anything to go by, they may diminish in the face of built reality. But the 'theatre' for Marne la Vallée and even Les Fonds du Lac all promise to have that skilful blending of efficient land use — in the manner of Martin and March — of nicely scaled urban space — in the manner, obviously, of the Kriers — and that 'Classical' surface modelling which has become the hallmark of the Taller's recent work. They also have the sensible window sizes and the insulation which design for thermal efficiency requires these days and which can be incorporated easily into the Coignet system. For obviously, if you are using concrete slabs, you are building concrete 'sheds', and like Venturi, when the chips

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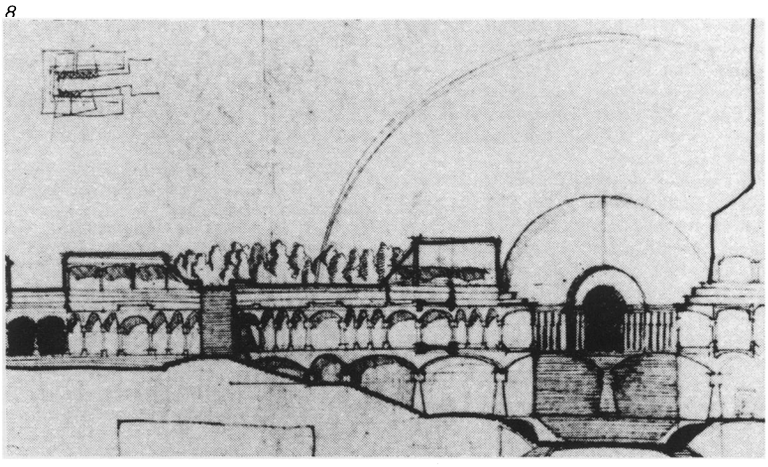

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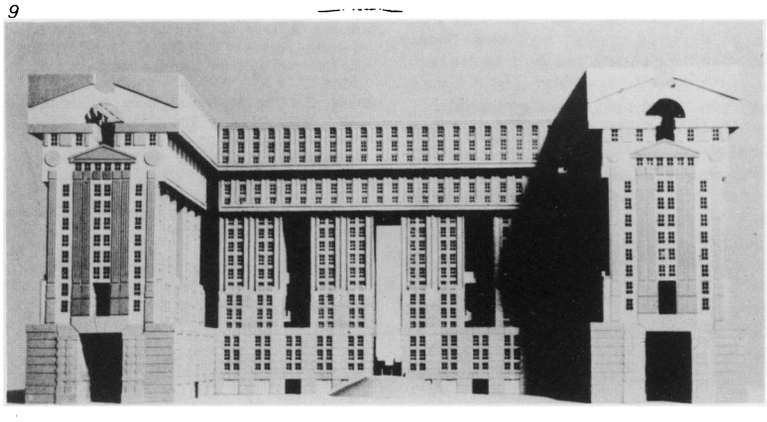


4. Plexus at La Manzanera, near Calpe (1964), represents the Taller's first excursion into the vernacular.

5. The Church and Cloisters of Meritxell in Andorra (1977), the beginnings of a vast Catalan cultural complex.

6. The individual courts of Les Arcades du Lac have the urbanity, the efficient land use and the human scale of Cambridge courts.

7. The precast concrete panels of the Coignet system allow any form of opening to be precast (in this case Romanesque arches) for 'layering' of the facades, for the use of different textures (aggregates, tiles) and for the precasting of appropriate ornament.

8. Point M for La Defense in Paris (1974). The semi-circular slab is derived directly form Boullée and Ledoux.

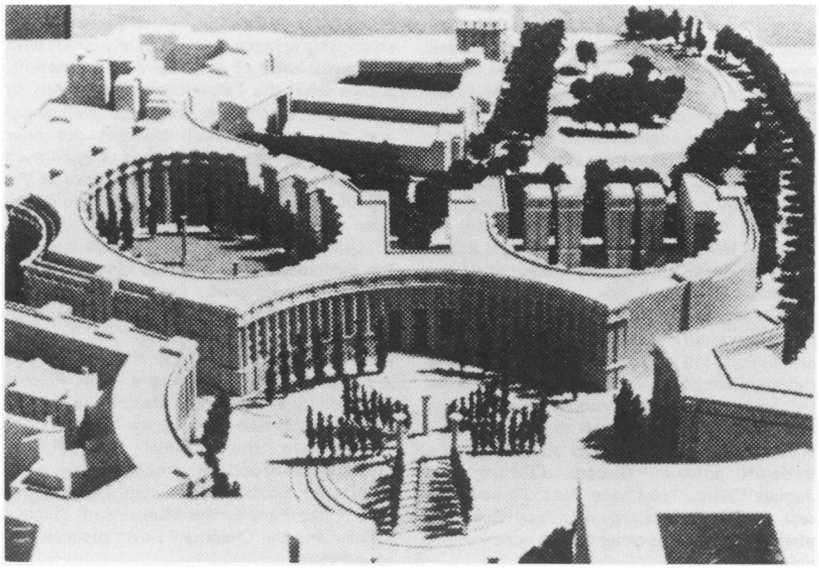
9. Marne la Vallée, view of Le Palais d'Abraxas.

are down, the Taller *are* decorating sheds.

Venturi, at Best — literally — did this by taking the standard, well-planned and serviced brick box that Best Products use for their stores and 'decorating' it with Andy Warhol flowers — the most honest admission in recent architecture that a 'shed' *was* being decorated. Of course the Modern Movement pretended that such decoration was 'immoral', but your Post-Modernist is not worried about morality and nor were 'the Moderns' themselves. Mies cheated by clipping perfectly useless bronze I-sections to the outside of Seagram, making them *look* as if they had some function. Piano and Rogers decorated Beaubourg with pipes. If this meant adding some unnecessary ones and 'bending' some of the necessary ones away from what the engineers wanted to make them *look* good, that was still supposed to be more 'honest' than admitting to decoration! It's supposed to be 'honest' to decorate a shed with shiny aluminium panels. But why, when they leak and weather so badly? So, in this matter of decorating sheds, Venturi's flowers seem to me the most honest of all. They are a frank admission of what one is doing which does not in any way compromise the building's *actual* functioning, as against those solutions which, designed to *look* functional, actually diminish its efficiency!

I would put the Taller's panels next to them as harmless decoration, for literally they can be cast to give any kind of modelling you want. The openings can be Byzantine, Romanesque, Islamic, Gothic, Renaissance, Neoclassical, Vernacular or whatever, whilst the modelling, and the layering, can be as deep or as shallow as you please. You can get whatever sized window openings you need for whatever climatic purposes; you can build in whatever insulation you need for that particular climate; and you can cast whatever thickness of concrete you want for the necessary thermal mass.

So what *looks* like wilful styling proves to be more practical — and more honest — than the alternatives. How silly to dismiss it because you happen not to like the Neo-classical. Obviously the Neo-classical *is* the most potent symbol of the idea that you have rejected the Modern Movement. So, even though the Coignet system is a very Modern Movement system, it was inevitable that, on visual grounds alone, architects still committed to the *appearances* of the Modern Movement still want to reject this latest phase of the Taller's work.



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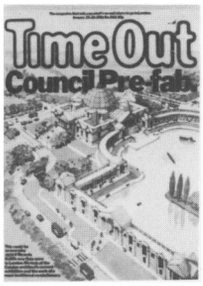
10. Montparnesse Xiverny, Paris. The Taller's scheme for Zac-Gullieminot-Vercingetorix, a Bath-like sequence of circuses and crescents.



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11. Le Fonds du Lac for St Quentin-en-Yvellines (1980) as redrawn for the cover of Time Out. *Like other sections of the lay press,* Time Out *seemed to like it very much, but the Taller would not do 'council pre-fab' any more.*

Yet no exhibition at the AA has quite so enchanted the general public. One of the clearest indications is the way it was treated in the press. Out of some 24 mentions, only one — in *Building Design* — was actively hostile. The *Architects Journal* admitted that whilst architects may think them sinister, the residents actually *like* these buildings, whilst *Building* was most enthusiastic. So was a full spectrum of the lay press, from *Time Out* to *Harpers and Queen*, including those most prestigious dailies *The Guardian* and the *Financial Times*. *Time Out*, in fact, devoted their front cover (Ill.11) to a version redrawn for London of the Taller's latest scheme for St. Quentin, Les Fonds du Lac, an apartment complex in the form of a Palladian villa. But they labelled it 'Council pre-fab', which is precisely what the Taller will not do. They have learned from bitter experience that when they design for public authorities that the chances that their schemes will actually go on are really very slender.

The vast City in Space project for Madrid, the Petite Cathédrale for Cergy Pontoise and, above all, the schemes for Les Halles in Paris were all abandoned after vast amounts of work. But right from their earliest projects most of their work for private developers has in the end been built: various blocks of flats in Barcelona, the Barrio Gaudi, Plexus, Xanadu, the Red Wall at Calpe, Walden 7, Les Arcades du Lac and so on. So the simple pragmatics of getting things done has changed their political views. As Peter Hodgkinson stated several times when they were in London for the exhibition: the Taller now believe that more people are more likely to get what they want through the free market economy. People won't buy flats in, say, Les Arcades de Lac if they don't actually like them, and if nobody buys them, the developer will go broke!

Of course that's not the case with 'cemetery suburb' housing, for once the bureaucrats have built it, people are obliged to move in. And, even in those extreme cases where 'cemetery suburb' housing has been abandoned and blown up, the bureaucrats who built it still keep their bureaucratic jobs. Even participation is a device whereby the bureaucrats can play off one segment of 'the people' against another. No, as far as the Taller are concerned these days, the *only* way of ensuring that people get what *they* want is by offering them choices on the free market. And if people want to live in palaces, why not *let* them?

In other words, the Taller's antennae are as sensitive as they ever were to shifts in consciousness over the whole spectrum of cultural ideas. For, of course, in such social/political matters, 1981 is not 1968. It is no accident that in the years when China has been replacing ideology with pragmatism that such heroes of Nanterre as Andre Glucksman and Bernard-Henri Levy have abandoned their Marxist stance to become anti-ideological *nouveaux philosophes*. It's no accident that since the death of Sartre, the a-political Levi-Strauss and the right-wing Raymond Aron have emerged as the leading French men of letters. It's no accident that, having fostered 'Revolution for the Hell of It' in the 1960s, Jerry Rubin should have declared the 1980s to be the 'money decade' and become a broker on the New York Stock Exchange.

The Taller's conversion to the free market economy obviously is part of this shifting mood, and it does seem to be giving *some* 'people' what they want. And if architects do not like it, this architecture which has so much going for it in terms of structural economy, response to climate, efficient land use, and genuine popularity, then so much the worse for them. It proves yet again the power of symbols — in this case of the visual threat to the Modern Movement — to override all other considerations, including common sense — in architects' assessments of architecture!

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A major exhibition of the work of the Taller de Arquitectura was held at the AA from 16 January to 14 February 1981.