

La Défense / Zone B (1953-91): Light and Shadows of the French Welfare State

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The business district of La Défense, with its luxurious office buildings, is a typical example of the French version of welfare state policy¹: centralism, modernism, and confusion between public and private elites.² This district was initially planned in 1958 by the Etablissement Public d'Aménagement de la région de La Défense (EPAD), the first such planning organism controlled by the state. But this district, called Zone A (130 ha), constitutes only a small part of the operational sector of the EPAD; the other part, Zone B (620 ha), coincides with the northern part of the city of Nanterre, capital of the Hauts-de-Seine district. Characterized for a long time by agriculture and market gardening, this city underwent a strong process of industrialization at the turn of the twentieth century, welcoming a great number of workers and immigrants, a population which today still constitutes the demographic core of Nanterre. As a result, Nanterre is the site of huge contrasts: a communist enclave for the past seventy years in a district mainly dominated by the right wing (les Hauts-de-Seine); a municipal territory, but mainly under the sovereignty of the state and planned by the EPAD; an area marked by poverty adjacent to the richest one in France; a forgotten 'back office' in the shadows of the crystalline skyscrapers of La Défense; an urban chaos, but geometrically anchored in the prolongation of the historical Grand Axe of Paris (beginning at the Palais du Louvre and connecting the Place de la Concorde, the Arc de Triomphe and La Grande Arche de Spreckelsen). [fig. 1]

The history of La Défense Zone B during the second half of the twentieth century gives a very clear - and even caricatural - illustration not only of the urban and architectural consequences of the French welfare state - both positive and negative - but also of its crisis, which emerged in the 1970s and influenced the development of other types of urban governance and planning. Therefore, Zone B offers a relevant terrain for analysing relationships between the political and architectural aspects of this history since the end of World War II. Indeed, this case study suggests a rather unexpected double assumption: while French architecture of the 1950s and 1960s is generally considered by architectural history as pompous, authoritarian and subjected to power, here it can appear incredibly free, inventive and experimental. Conversely, architecture, known as 'urban' starting in the late 1970s, was considered to be committed, democratic, even critical, and led to more stereotypical, sometimes rigid and aesthetically impoverished, forms.

La Défense and the state as planner

The urban doctrines of the French welfare state, which were structured and put in place during the war and just into the postwar years, opened a new chapter in the history of French planning, namely the state's take-over of the field of housing and town planning after a period during which municipal approaches balanced its centralizing tendencies. This phenomenon was emphasized by two key moments. It began to gestate under the Vichy government and came to fruition in 1944 through

the creation of the Ministry of Reconstruction and Urbanism (MRU) and its Board of Urbanism (Direction Générale à l'Urbanisme, l'Habitat et la Construction, DGUHC), which was changed in 1949 by Eugène Claudius-Petit to the Board of Planning (Direction à l'Aménagement du Territoire, DAT).

With the same logic, the Service d'Aménagement de la Région Parisienne (SARP), which as of 1941 included the technical services of the Seine District, fell under the supervision of the MRU in 1944. André Prothin, head of the DGUHC and later the DAT until 1958, and Pierre Gibel, head of the SARP, became key actors of state urbanism in general and the planning of the area of La Défense in particular. In response to the first state decision in 1946 to establish a universal exhibition there, numerous studies were conducted and countless plans drawn up for the sector, until an initial master plan was adopted in October 1956, called 'plan-directeur'. The creation of the EPAD in 1958 was mainly the product of the work undertaken during the previous decade under the authority of Gibel and Prothin. The appointment of the latter as the first director of this public office could be viewed as a sign of continuity.

Nevertheless, Prothin's forced departure from the DAT, over which he had reigned for fifteen years, illustrated another step in the process at hand, which historian Isabelle Couzon described as being 'the eclipse of the MRU urbanists to the benefit of the Ponts-et-Chaussées civil engineers, gradually dominating the array of urban issues from the mid-1950s'.³ The nomination of Pierre Sudreau as Minister of Construction at the turn of the Fifth Republic exemplified this renewal not only of the elites but also of the doctrines. The head urbanists of the MRU, stemming for the greater part from the Seine district, aimed for decentralization and Malthusian control of urbanization (especially in the case of the Paris metropolitan area). This ideology was reflected in the general organization and development plan (PADOG) of the Paris region

(1960), itself the outcome of studies conducted by the SARP for the revision of the Paris Regional Plan (Plan d'Aménagement de la Région Parisienne, PARP).

The Ponts-et-Chaussées engineers, strongly represented in the Direction de la Construction of the same ministry, defended a more centralized and technocratic practice of planning and a metropolis model as a system of urban centres, connected and strengthened by infrastructures. This model triumphed over the next Regional Plan of Paris (Schéma d'Aménagement et d'urbanisme de la Région Parisienne, SDAURP) in 1965, driven by Paul Delouvrier. In this respect, the operation of La Défense must be seen as a compromise, a hybrid product of the political and doctrinal evolution of state planning, aimed at decongesting the business district of central Paris without completely decentralizing it, while maintaining a direct relationship with the centre of the capital city by means of the historical axis.

In 1958, after decades of projects, plans and procrastination, the real beginning of the La Défense operation coincided precisely with a change of regime: the advent of the Fifth Republic, which strengthened the executive power in general and presidential power in particular, and defined the institutional conditions of the French welfare state. Even though it had been in gestation since 1956,⁴ the EPAD was only created in late summer of 1958⁵ with the aim of planning the future of the La Défense region - a broad operational area of 750 hectares that annexed some of the territory belonging to three municipalities: Nanterre, Courbevoix and Puteaux. Reconfiguring the governance of this area, the EPAD gave weight to the central state that it previously did not have there. The board of the EPAD, which first met on 2 March 1959, and where the three municipalities accounted for only three out of the sixteen votes, was clearly dominated by the state, in particular its Ministry of Construction, led



Fig. 1

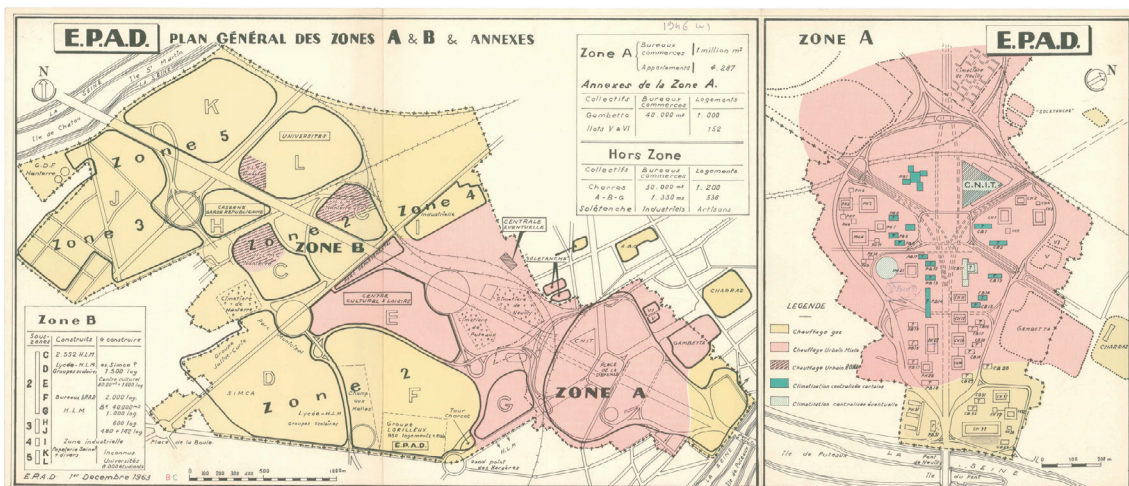


Fig. 2

Fig. 1: Aerial view of the Zone B of La Défense in 1974, looking east (Archives EPAD). The 'Grand Axe' successively crosses the social housing estates built in the mid 1950s, the Zone A with the CNIT and the first skyscrapers of the business district and, in the background, the centre of Paris with the Eiffel Tower to the right.

Fig. 2: EPAD, 'Plan général des zones A & B & annexes', 1 December 1963 (Archives EPAD).

by Pierre Sudreau between 1958 and 1962. The first Zone A master plan was adopted in December 1964. [fig. 2]

Grand Axe: space, time and symbols

The creation of the EPAD coincided with the advent of the Fifth Republic in France and the return of General De Gaulle as head of state. Nicknamed the 'Président bâtisseur'⁶ by Pierre Sudreau, De Gaulle benefited from a period of exceptional economic prosperity, the famous 'Trente Glorieuses' as coined by Jean Fourastié.⁷ Faced with the pressing need to develop French cities and regional areas, De Gaulle himself embodied the triumphant image of the welfare state, as a dominant actor of urban planning, armed with a powerful, voluntarist and technocratic administration, an image that would also cause his political fall after 1968. This regal posture of state power was illustrated, for example, by the mark De Gaulle, as well as others before and after him, left on the historic and symbolic Grand Axe of the capital city. First drawn by André Le Nôtre, Louis XIV's head gardener, for the purpose of organizing the gardens of the Tuileries Palace, this symmetrical axis was projected (in every sense of the term) towards the western horizon of Paris. Both spatial and temporal, this axis followed the chronology of the history of France.⁸ Each political regime, whether monarchical or republican, developed projects that were acts of affirmation or confirmation of the axis, not only as a physical form but also as a symbolic space on a national scale, akin to what Pierre Nora would call a 'place of memory'.⁹

De Gaulle, who marched along this axis as a liberator on 26 August 1944, projected a strong vision for each horizon of this perspective. On the western side, one could cite, for example, the unbuilt Government Palace drawn in 1965 by the architect Henry Bernard on the site of the former Palais des Tuileries (demolished in 1871 after the Paris Commune). On the eastern side, the Grand Axe leads to and crosses the monumental busi-

ness district of La Défense, planned in Zone A of the EPAD.

Evidently, the axis is 'historical', not because of its timelessness or because it conveys the illusion that it has always existed, but, on the contrary, because of its historicity, because it reflects the singularity of each of the eras it passed through, and mirrors what each period of history had projected onto it: simple 'perspective' for the King's approval in the seventeenth century, it became a 'route royale' in the eighteenth century to give him easy access to his hunting grounds at Saint-Germain-en-Laye. At the turn of the twentieth century it was called 'Voie (or Liaison) Paris-Saint-Germain', since it was associated with a proposed road and rail infrastructure, and then 'Voie Triomphale' when it served to commemorate the 1918 victory; it became an 'Axe', first 'Grand' and then 'Historique', when it embodied the tools, ideals and interests of postwar planners.

As for La Défense, the axis - as geometric and urban potentiality - was both the cause and the effect of all projects: the cause because the very possibility of its extension distinguished this site from others and gave it a particular value, from symbolic and real-estate points of view; the effect because the axis was a favoured composition tool of French urbanism - still called 'art urbain' - the first practitioners of which were predominantly architects or landscape architects. Often symmetrical and always strongly axial, the projects for the competition organized by Leonard Rosenthal in 1930 to plan the Porte Maillot¹⁰ and for the 'Concours pour l'aménagement de la voie triomphale allant de la place de l'Étoile au rond-point de La Défense' organized by the City of Paris in 1931,¹¹ reflected a design culture rooted in the Beaux-Arts tradition and transposed from an architectural to an urban scale. Julien Guadet, professor of architectural theory at the ENSBA, reiterated to his students: 'The axis is the key of the drawing and will be that of the composition.' Two of the consultant-architects appointed in



Fig. 3

L'AXE HISTORIQUE DE PARIS



Fig. 4

Fig. 3: 'L'axe historique de Paris', analysis document published in the brief of the last competition for 'Tête-Défense', Novembre 1981 (Archives EPAD).

Fig. 4: Aerial view of the Zone B1 in 1973, looking east. In the foreground, to the right, the Préfecture des Hauts-de-Seine built by André Wogenscky (Archives EPAD).

1950 by Eugène Claudius-Petit to plan La Défense area were former Grand Prix de Rome winners Robert Camelot (second in 1933) and Bernard Zehrfuss (first in 1939). Even if their architectural vocabulary was modernist or even futuristic, their urban planning tools remained in the tradition of the Beaux-Arts composition (perspective, symmetry, hierarchy, balance, counterpoint, etc.). The compositional virtuosity of these architects, often criticized for its formalism, naturally found in this Grand Axe an immensely interesting design challenge.¹² [fig. 3]

Grand Axe: solution or problem? The case of Zone B

However, the axis form raises other problems that allow us to introduce the special case of Nanterre and Zone B. In the collective imagination, the axis is defined as a radial line that begins at the hypercentre of Paris and projects towards the periphery of not only the Paris region, but even of the national territory itself. A geometrical metaphor of a 'top-down' power, the axis postulates a latent, linear hierarchy between what is near to the centre and what is far away, and, in the case of La Défense, between Zone A and Zone B. Mainly located in Nanterre, the latter were often subjected to this radial hierarchy and have been thought of as subordinate, i.e. a land resource in the service of the great design of La Défense.

We could say that in Nanterre the diachronic movement of the Grand Axe's physical inscription on the territory met with problems caused by the axis itself. The Grand Axe has accompanied urban growth and until the first half of the twentieth century it had been a prime vector for urbanizing relatively available areas. From the postwar period onward, things were reversed. Initially a resource, this axial logic became a problem. Caught up and overtaken by urbanization, the axis then encountered areas already heavily populated. The massive and authoritarian expropriations carried out by the state, which took up much of the energy of the EPAD in its begin-

nings, merely pushed the problem further out, into Nanterre, to which the dispossessed people had mainly been relocated. The vast linear land reserve, which the EPAD set aside in Nanterre to build the future A14 western motorway exit from Paris in the extension of the Grand Axe, started to be filled up with heterogeneous urbanizing projects: from huge, insular and underequipped social housing estates to the informal development of large shanty towns inhabited by immigrant populations coming from North Africa or Portugal.¹³

Regardless of the projects planned by the SARP since 1950, among which an area reserved for temporary or permanent exhibitions on the plain of Nanterre, the state, exploiting large land reserves or prospects, implemented a number of operations there without any real coordination. As part of the reconstruction policy, it decided in 1953 to build more than 2,500 social housing units under the direction of Robert Camelot, Jean de Mailly and Bernard Zehrfuss, divided into three estates delivered between 1958 and 1960. In November 1963, the foundation stone of the annex of the Sorbonne was laid, the future University Paris X-Nanterre, extending over an area of thirty hectares of former Air Force land. The first students moved into the premises in the autumn of 1964.

André Malraux, De Gaulle's Minister of Cultural Affairs, obtained the approval to build a large cultural complex in Nanterre along the Grand Axe (and the future A14 motorway then expected to be a viaduct) that would be connected to the future RER station.¹⁴ In January 1964, he commissioned Le Corbusier to design this project, including three art schools (architecture, film and television, and music) and the Museum of the Twentieth Century¹⁵ for which the architect proposed a new version of his 'Musée à croissance illimitée'.¹⁶ In November 1964, after the administrative reform of the Ile-de-France region,¹⁷ the state added to this operation the new administrative centre of the new district of the

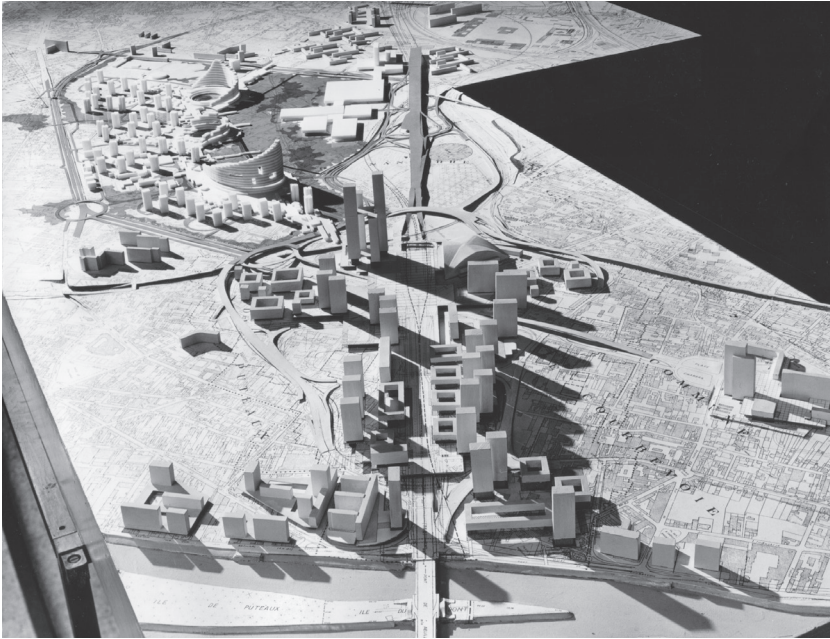


Fig. 5

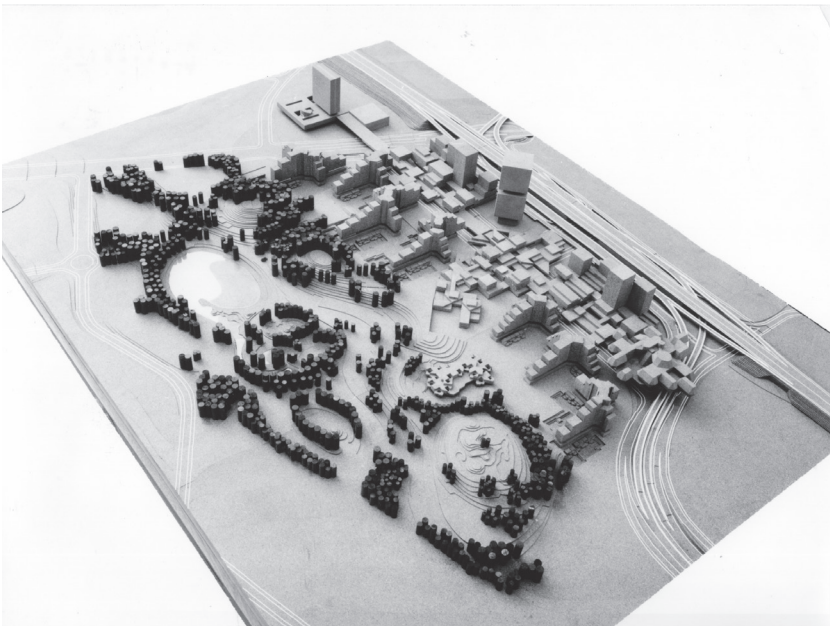


Fig. 6

Fig. 5: Photo of a model showing in the background André Remondet's Zone B1 project (from: 'Aménagement de la région de la Défense 2', *Techniques et architecture*, 29/1, February 1968).

Fig. 6: Photo of a model of the Zone B1 urban centre planned by the Atelier Zone B, June 1972 (Archives EPAD).

Hauts-de-Seine.¹⁸ Dated 29 June 1965 (two months before his accidental death), a sketch signed by Le Corbusier¹⁹ - probably one of his last drawings - showed the principles of his project, subsequently taken up and amended by André Wogenscky, one of his close collaborators: flat volumes extending horizontally, suspended on stilts, and developing along the axis. Its roof would form a pedestrian platform connected to that of La Défense. Suspended at 9.50 m above the denied real ground. Plugged into the abstract highway, the project reflected how little consideration Le Corbusier had for this site, or rather his conviction that it was not good. In fact, he had never stopped trying to convince Malraux to relocate the project elsewhere in central Paris.²⁰ The 'University of the Arts' project, as redesigned by Wogenscky, prevailed until the late 1960s in the master plans of the EPAD, even though the Prefecture building of 1972 would be the only part actually constructed.²¹ [fig. 4]

1964-69: First global visions

In 1968, the Situationists were very critical of what resulted from these erratic public operations: 'Onto "grands ensembles" [housing schemes] and slums that were complementary, urbanism of isolation had grafted a university, as a microcosm of general conditions of oppression, like the spirit of a world without spirit.'²² This statement is paradoxically similar to that made by André Prothin himself in 1964: 'The few fragmented operations that one can find were carried out according to the most pressing needs expressed either by local collectivities or by the government. In short, this vast land, more or less equipped, gradually transformed itself into a large, heterogeneous, underequipped and rather incoherent subdivision.'²³

The architect André Remondet was then commissioned by the EPAD to elaborate a master plan for Zone B, subdivided into three subzones (B1, B2, B3),²⁴ following a laconic 'schéma de structure' conceived in June 1965 by the Institut d'Architecture

et d'Urbanisme de la Région Parisienne (IAURP). The project was first published in 1967,²⁵ at a time when the EPAD had some difficulties to develop Zone A on the basis of the too rigid and overdesigned 1964 master plan.²⁶ [fig. 5]

This chief architect of civil buildings and national palaces, and winner of the Premier Grand Prix de Rome in 1936, projected a bold vision of the neighbourhood, organized into programmatic strips extending from east to west: first, a property dedicated to the famous Tour Lumière-Cybernétique, a monumental and 'spatiodynamic' building, 347 metres high, designed by the architect and artist Nicolas Schöffer;²⁷ second, the motorway as a megastructure (with parking below); third, Wogenscky's project, presented as an 'intellectual Versailles';²⁸ fourth, a large public park of 45 hectares (on the unbuildable zone of the old quarries); fifth, facing the park and in the foothills of Mont Valérien, amazing crater buildings, 10 to 40 storeys high, emerging from a platform extending that of Zone A; and finally behind this colossal inhabited wall, a 'forest' of fifty social housing towers scattered in 'green' spaces.

Envisioning a large homogenous architectural landscape, this first master plan for the entire area was characterized both by optimism, authoritarianism and a kind of generosity. Vigorously making a radical tabula rasa of the existing site, its objectives were only partly achieved. Actually, by the 1970s, the Fifth Republic took on another profile. May 1968 and the political retirement and the death of General de Gaulle were French symptoms of the progressive disengagement of welfare states in Europe. Within the executive staff of the EPAD, André Prothin and Georges Hutin, who respectively directed and chaired the institution from the outset, were succeeded in 1969 by Jean Millier. Representing a new, more pragmatic generation of senior officials, he embodied the deregulation of the business district master plan to adapt it to

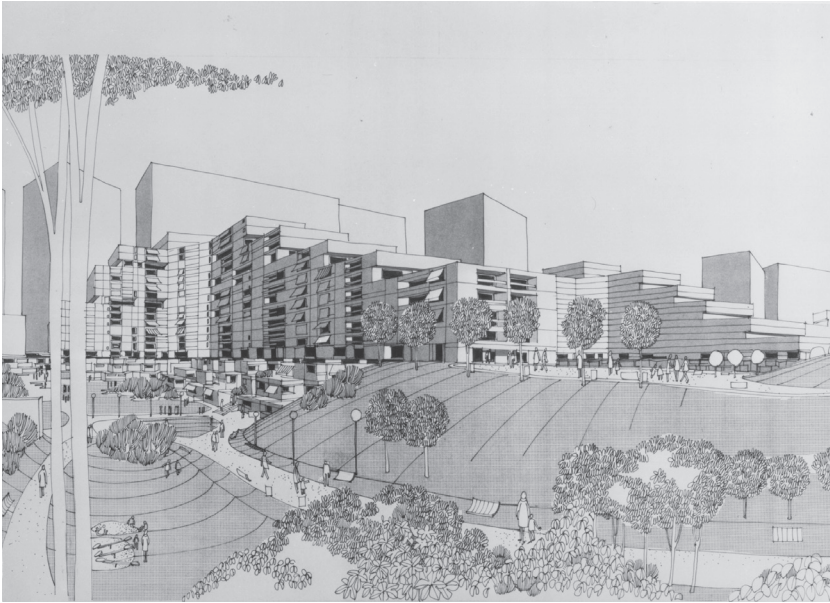


Fig. 7

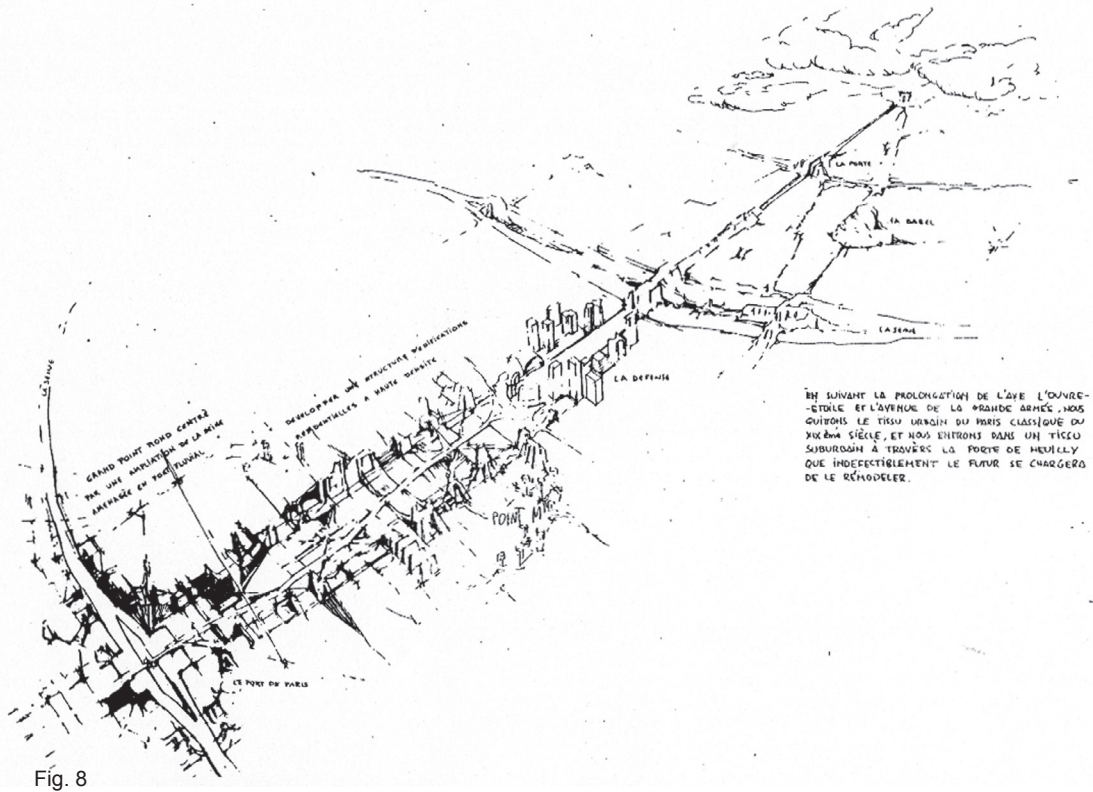


Fig. 8

Fig. 7: Perspective by Rémi Masson, member of the Atelier Zone B, showing Jacques Kalisz's Sphinx buildings facing the Parc André Malraux, winter 1972 (Archives EPAD).

Fig. 8: Ricardo Bofill's unbuilt proposition to the EPAD for developing the Grand Axe in Nanterre, 1974 (Archives EPAD).

the international real-estate market. He first broke with the rigid principles of the original composition of Zone A (identical towers, limited to a height of 100 m). He obtained from the state not only a quantitative revision of building envelopes (the programme increased between 1969 and 1971 from 800,000 to 1,500,000 m² of offices buildings), but also a greater openness to the actions of private developers.²⁹

1969-78: Crisis and the 'architecture urbaine' experiments

However, Jean Millier, who later chaired the French Institute of Architecture (1988-97), also introduced a new generation of architects into the EPAD's operations, at a time when the French architectural milieu experienced a radical doctrinal turn. In 1969, Millier set up the Atelier Zone B. This architectural team was responsible for the revision of the Zone B master plan and included personalities such as Jacques Kalisz and Adrien Fainsilber,³⁰ who were acutely aware of the failure of the state's architectural modernism, and who in the early 1970s explored design alternatives that broke with the normative monotony and the productivist seriality much decried in the postwar mass housing operations. The atelier's research focused either on project methodologies, on purely geometrical experimentations, or even on psycho-sociological analyses of perception. These efforts were brought together under a common label: 'l'architecture urbaine' [urban architecture]. The French magazine *Techniques & Architecture* dedicated two special issues to this matter,³¹ publishing, in particular, texts and projects by Fainsilber and Kalisz, talking about 'an architecture of relationships and communication', as a means of 'taming the excesses'.³²

The Atelier Zone B conserved three elements from the previous master plan: Wogenscky's Prefecture project, begun in 1968 and completed in 1972,³³ the public park (eventually designed in a neo-picturesque manner by Jacques Sgard in 1971 and

inaugurated in 1976), and part of the 'forest' of residential towers (built by Emile Aillaud between 1972 and 1978). But they incorporated them in a totally new master plan, called the 'organic scheme',³⁴ which prefigured the plan (plan d'aménagement de zone, PAZ) for the Zone d'aménagement concertée (ZAC) B1, created in December 1972. [fig. 6]

Adopted in 1973, this plan reflected the doctrines of these architects and defined the new urban centre 'not as a whole building but as a set of functions and activities grouped around small squares or pedestrian streets at different levels'.³⁵ They substituted the abstract geometry of Le Corbusier's 'University of the Arts' with a linear and complex urban centre that proposed a resolutely labyrinthine urban landscape, while retaining the principle of a pedestrian deck platform. Called the 'Axe urbain' (urban axis), this proliferating cluster would unfold from east to west, according to a 45-degree pattern, intended to create the qualities of intricacy, complexity, polycentrality and flexibility of traditional cityscapes. An office complex was planned on the northern side of this axis, whose form was supposed to be revised to adapt to the real-estate market. On the southern side, Jacques Kalisz designed impressive 'Sphinx buildings'³⁶ rising to 17 storeys and housing more than 2,500 units, five of which were actually built between 1974 and 1977. He also designed a School of Architecture. A remnant of André Malraux's programme, this steel-framed architectural environment, organized by a modular and organic pattern, was, along with the Wogenscky's Prefecture, one of the first buildings erected in Zone B1.³⁷ [fig. 7]

The 1973 oil crisis and its repercussions on the real-estate market undermined this optimistic architectural imagery of the 'Trente glorieuses' and launched a new era in the history of La Défense. In the case of Zone B, one sign marking this change was the EPAD's commissioning of Ricardo Bofill and the Taller de Arquitectura with a series of projects for the urban centre of Zone B1. One of them was

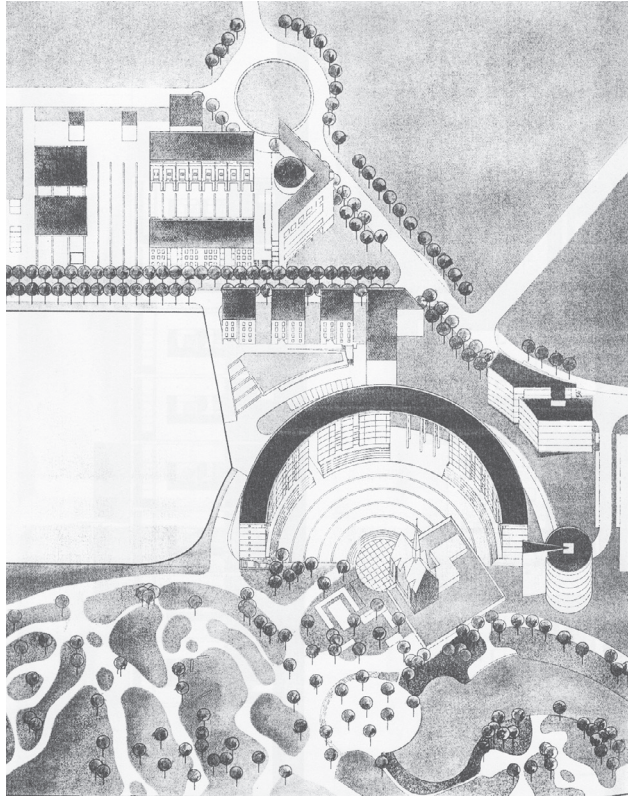


Fig. 9



Fig. 10

Fig. 9: Jean-Paul Viguier and Jean-François Jodry's winning project for the competition 'Îlot Chapelle', October 1986 (Archives EPAD). The purpose of this consultation, organized by the EPAD, was to design the south urban centre of the Zone B1.

Fig. 10: Photo of a model of the Zone B1, showing (in white) new projects for the Point M RER station, not dated [ca. 1987] (Archives EPAD).

the Forum Blanc project (1973), east of the RER station, which proposed a monumental and grandiose office building, inspired by ancient Roman architecture, breaking radically with the projects of the Atelier Zone B. The Point M project (1974) proposed a multifunctional complex to the right of the RER station, inspired, especially in its second version, by the formal rhetoric of French Neoclassicism (colonnades, Platonic geometrical forms, etc.). Transgressing the commission, this unbuilt vision of Bofill emphatically reconfigured the Grand Axe landscape from the Pont de Neuilly to the Seine river banks in Nanterre. It also illustrated the paradox of a politically weak but architecturally strong urbanism. Bofill understood the situation very well: 'The programme was formalized in a weak and unclear way, so it should give the project a "voluntarist" unity of perception.'³⁸ [fig. 8]

1979-91: Postmodernism and the advent of the 'projet urbain'

Despite the strong boost in real estate from the late 1970s, the increased political instability of the state and the gradual decentralization of its powers were illustrated by the EPAD's history, not only by the rapid renewal of its chiefs (six directors and six presidents from 1976 to the late twentieth century), but also by the increasingly difficult negotiations with the city of Nanterre, reinforced in 1981 by the election of the first president from the Left, François Mitterrand. Ultimately, in December 2000, this new shift in the balance of power would lead to the creation of a completely new Etablissement Public d'Aménagement (EPASA), enabling Nanterre to regain its territorial sovereignty. The creation of EPASA, however, was preceded by a series of revisions of the 1973 Zone B1 master plan.³⁹ A first revision took place in February 1982, based on a new site plan designed by Jean Darras (1980-81), which followed a study that was conducted by Claude Vasconi & Radu Vincenz and commissioned by Jean-Paul Lacaze (EPAD Director, 1979-83). In October 1985, a second revision was made on the

basis of a study by Bensimon-Simoni architects (within the framework of the Atelier Zone B, October-November 1984) under the mandate of Jean Deschamps (EPAD Director, 1984-86).

Two common features characterize this rapid and varied succession of plans. First, the return to a composition of urban blocks at street level and traditional public spaces (streets, squares, etc.), in conformity with the 'urban turn' that characterized the post-1968 generation of architects and urban planners.⁴⁰ Second, the re-orientation of the whole area around a transversal north-south axis, perpendicular to the Grand Axe, in order to create a dialogue between the various programmatic layers (offices, homes, services, park, homes), and also to translate Nanterre's greater involvement in the decision-making process into the urban form.

Within the framework of the 1985 master plan, this area took its final form particularly with the double competition in June 1986 for the north and south ends of the transversal axis. The two winners, Jean-Paul Viguier (associated with Jean-François Jodry) and Christian de Portzamparc, respectively, were the perfect representatives of this new notion of the 'projet urbain', which, in opposition to modernist and technocratic postwar urbanism (especially the slab urbanism), revived the urban composition and advocated a somewhat formalistic and typically postmodern architectural eclecticism. [fig. 9]

Observing the urbanization of Zone B actually shows a parallelism between the gradual deconstruction of the French welfare state and a kind of postmodernization of urban and architectural doctrines in France that was characterized not only by a somewhat mannerist persistence of the modernist vocabulary (very clear in Portzamparc's architecture), but also by a radical return to a block urbanism. But most of all, because it was no longer fed by a strong political vision and support, this architecture without ideology was more akin to an

'architecture for architecture's sake', an architecture that Rem Koolhaas would later criticize as having endorsed 'a drastic erosion of its powers, a gradual dismantling of its ambition'.⁴¹ [fig. 10]

Conclusion

Zone B1, which looked like a lunar landscape in the early 1970s, an almost virginal wasteland, was urbanized step-by-step, following the vicissitudes not only of political history but also of the history of architectural and urban doctrines. Each stage of this double history has left traces of never completed designs in the territory. Wogensky's modernist tower and Sgard's neo-picturesque park co-exist along with Emile Aillaud's cloud towers and Kalisz's Sphinxes, but the pedestrian platform was never built to connect them. The urban block composition of the 1980s, intended to repair this urban chaos, finally failed to give it coherence.

There is something paradoxical about the history of La Défense's Zone B: a kind of contradiction (or non-symmetry) between political governance and urban and architectural intentions. In periods characterized by the strong dominance of the EPAD, which is to say of the central state, the projects for the area were ambitious and even authoritarian, but very experimental from a formal point of view (from the organic forms of Remondet to the cybernetic bristling of Schöffers's tower passing by the geometric abstraction of Le Corbusier's cultural complex or Kalisz's proliferating structures). However, from the late 1970s, this territory entered a radically different period of its history. The progressive deconstruction of European welfare states reflects the increasing complexity of modern democratic life: ideological tensions, a new balance between economy and politics, conflicts between local, national and global scales, a strong demand for decentralization, bottom-up processes, etc. While the number of private and public actors in urban planning was increasing, although none of them enjoyed a clear leadership position, the Zone B master plan, while

highly debated and redesigned by several and varied architects, progressively stabilized itself into a fairly rigid urban form, made of regular and often closed blocks, symmetrical public spaces and monuments, a domesticated form organized by axial logics. Indeed, it submitted itself to the Grand Axe, preparing its extension, despite long delays, into the territory of Nanterre. It seemed that the axis, as an expression of central power, became more strongly formalized in the territory as this power grew weaker, relativized by other scales of public governance (municipality, district, region, etc.) and by the predominance of private actors.

Notes

1. For a general history of La Défense operation, see: Bénédicte Lauras, *Genèse et étapes de l'opération urbaine de La Défense*, PhD dissertation, Université Paris X Nanterre, 1973; Danièle Voldman, 'La lente genèse du "Paris de demain"', in *Paris La Défense: Métropole européenne des affaires*, ed. by Félix Torres (Paris: Cofer/Le Moniteur, 1989), pp. 17-26; Danièle Voldman, 'La genèse', in *La Défense: L'Avant-garde en miroir*, ed. by Jean-Claude Béhar (Paris: Autrement, 7, 1992), pp. 22-35; Virginie Picon-Lefebvre, *Paris-Ville Moderne: Maine-Montparnasse et La Défense, 1950-1975* (Paris: Norma, 2003); *La Défense, Un dictionnaire. Architecture / Politique*, ed. by Pierre Chabard and Virginie Picon-Lefebvre (Marseille: Parenthèses, 2012), to be published.
2. The professional trajectory of Albin Chalandon was a good example of this confusion between public and private elites. As De Gaulle's Minister of Building and Housing (1968-72), and Member of Parliament for the Hauts-de-Seine district (1973-76), he was a key actor in the real-estate deregulation of the La Défense area at the end of the 1960s. He then became director of Elf-Aquitaine (1977-83), one of the largest French industrial groups, which occupied one of the highest skyscrapers at La Défense.
3. Isabelle Couzon, 'La place de la ville dans le discours des aménageurs, du début des années 1920 à la fin

- des années 1960', in *Cybergeo. European journal of geography*, document 'aménagement et urbanisme', 37, 20 November 1997, p. 17, < <http://www.cybergeo.eu/index1979.html> > [accessed winter 2011].
4. See Bénédicte Lauras, *Genèse et étapes de l'opération urbaine de La Défense*, p. 370ff.
 5. Décret no. 58-815, 9 September 1958.
 6. Cf. 'Le général de Gaulle, un président bâtisseur (entretien du 2 juillet 1996 avec Pierre Sudreau)', in *Pratiques architecturales et enjeux politiques, France 1945-1995*, ed. by Jean-Yves Andrieux, Frédéric Seitz (Paris: Picard, 2000), p. 46.
 7. Jean Fourastié, *Les Trente Glorieuses, ou la révolution invisible de 1946 à 1975* (Paris: Fayard, 1979).
 8. Cf. Pierre Pinon, 'L'axe majeur d'une capitale', in *Les traversées de Paris: deux siècles de révolutions dans la ville* (Paris: le Moniteur, 1989), pp. 129-99; *La perspective de La Défense dans l'art et l'histoire*, ed. by Georges Weill (Nanterre: Archives départementales des Hauts-de-Seine, 1983).
 9. Cf. Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-92).
 10. Cf. Jean-Louis Cohen, 'La porte Maillot ou le triomphe de la voirie', in Pierre Pinon, *La Traversées de Paris*, pp. 180-2.
 11. Cf. 'Concours pour l'aménagement d'une voie triomphale de l'Étoile au rond-point de La Défense', *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, 4 (1932), pp. 62-72.
 12. For an analysis of these projects, see: Virginie Picon-Lefebvre, *Paris-Ville Moderne*, pp. 161-7 and 184-195.
 13. Serge Santelli, 'Des bidonvilles à Nanterre', in Pierre Pinon, *Les Traversées de Paris*, p. 187.
 14. Réseau Express Régional (RER) is the name for the regional subway system in the Paris region.
 15. The museographical programme of this huge institution (65000 m²) was set up by Jean Cassou, Bernard Dorival and Maurice Besset, then curator of the Musée national d'art moderne. Cf. Dominique Amouroux, 'Le ministre, l'architecture et le musée du XXe siècle', in *André Malraux et l'architecture*, ed. by Dominique Hervier (Paris: Le Moniteur, 2008) p. 145.
 16. Cf. Gilles Ragot and Mathilde Dion, *Le Corbusier en France* (Paris: Le Moniteur, 1997), p. 398.
 17. The Décret of 10 July 1964 subdivided the Île-de-France region into six districts, each administrated by a Prefecture and a Conseil Général. Prefectures of the Hauts-de-Seine, Seine-Saint-Denis and Val-de-Marne districts were built, respectively, in Nanterre (arch.: André Wogenscky), Bobigny (arch.: Michel Folliasson) and Créteil (arch.: Daniel Badani), in the early 1970s.
 18. Letter from Max Querrien to Le Corbusier, 9 November 1964 (Archives Fondation Le Corbusier).
 19. This drawing was published in his *Œuvre complète 1965-69* (Zurich: Boesiger/Artemis, 1970), p. 163.
 20. Cf. B. Hérold, 'L'initiative d'André Malraux: un projet, des hommes, un lieu', in *La Préfecture des Hauts-de-Seine: André Wogenscky, une architecture des années 1970* (Paris: Somogy, 2006), pp. 17-8.
 21. The ultimate absence of financial resources and much criticism against the choice of site finally led to the abandonment of the plan. Later, the programme of the 'Musée du XXe siècle' became a part of the Centre Georges Pompidou project (cf. Dominique Amouroux, 'Le ministre, l'architecture et le musée du XXe siècle' and François Loyer, François, 'L'architecture française au début de la Cinquième République', in *André Malraux et l'architecture*, pp. 131-53 and pp. 14-36, respectively).
 22. René Viénet, Guy Debord, et al., *Enragés et Situationnistes dans le mouvement des occupations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 30.
 23. André Prothin, 'L'intervention de l'établissement public pour l'aménagement de la région de La Défense', *Urbanisme*, 82-83 (1964), p. 101.
 24. Zone B1 corresponded to the area around the RER Station Point M (now Nanterre-Préfecture); Zone B2 to the sector of the Prefecture and the three 1957-58 housing estates; Zone B3 to the extreme part of Zone B, between the Paris-Saint-Germain-en-Laye railway line and the Seine river.
 25. Cf. 'Paris dans 20 ans', *Paris Match*, 952 (8 July 1967), pp. 52-53; 'Zone B', *Techniques & Architecture*, (February 1968), pp. 117-24.
 26. With its 100-metre-high, strictly uniform buildings, this plan hardly convinced private developers and firms seeking greater architectural distinction.

27. This project, to which the EPAD had attributed other locations before (inside Zone A), was a highlight in the famous issue of *Paris Match*, 952, 1967 on 'Paris dans 20 ans', pp. 39 and 50-1).
28. Ibid, p. 53.
29. Cf. Virginie Picon-Lefebvre, *Paris-Ville Moderne*, pp.174-5.
30. Atelier Zone B included architects Claude Schmidlin, Adrien Fainsilber, Jacques Kalisz, Henri Robert-Charue, Xenia Grisogono, Rémi Masson and Guy Riboulet.
31. Cf. *Techniques & Architecture*, 306 (October 1975) and 307 (January 1976).
32. *Techniques & Architecture*, 307, pp. 37 and 43.
33. Cf. 'Préfecture des Hauts-de-Seine', in *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, 135 (December 1967-January 1968).
34. EPAD, *La Défense Zone B. Schéma organique*, (December 1969).
35. Adrien Fainsilber, 'l'Axe urbain du Point "M"', *Neuf*, 40 (November-December 1972), p. 20.
36. The first occurrence of this metaphor was in Marcel Cornu, 'Habiter La Défense', *Urbanisme*, 189 (1982), p. 104.
37. Cf. 'École d'architecture de Nanterre', *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, 160 (March-April 1972), p. 80.
38. Cf. *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, 182 (November-December 1975), p. 88.
39. For an analysis of these successive plans, see: Loïc Josse, Olivier Boissonnet, *ZAC B1, étude historique et architecturale*, (Paris: EPAD report, December 1986).
40. Cf. Jean Castex, Jean-Charles Depaule, Philippe Panerai, *Formes urbaines: de l'îlot à la barre* (Paris: Dunod, 1977).
41. Rem Koolhaas, *S,M,L,XL* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995), p. 47.

Biography

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