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ABSTRACT

Stating the exemplary situation of the city of Paris in regards to architecture, begun with the Beaubourg operation and fully realized with the campaign for new, monumental and strategic buildings in the heart of the city in the 1980s, a group of French architects establish in 1985 an association, "Ville et Projets", with the explicit aim to rekindle the public debate on architecture and the city. The projects themselves were a key part of Mitterrand's urban politics and had the potential to result controversial by virtue of their placement in the center of the historical city and the involvement of internationally acclaimed architects.

While the official communication mission of the French Ministry of Culture worked on involving various media (radio, television), the association aimed to bring the architectural language and its relationship to the city and its history to the forefront of the cultural debate. The architects deem necessary to establish a firsthand narrative of the last chapter of urban transformations in Paris. This paper aims to unravel this narrative, expanding on the association's role and influence, as well as its ambitions and the degree to which they were fulfilled, opening further questions on the role of architecture and its self-representation for the contemporary city.

Metadati in italiano in fondo

Ville, Symbolique, Forme, Projets: Communicating the Grands Projets in Paris During the 1980s

As a relatively recent campaign of architectural and urban works, the *grands projets* undertaken in Paris during the 1980s represent a fertile ground in order to analyse the contemporary city narrative and its authors from different perspectives. The official narrative has been the subject of critical analysis both on the architectural¹ and the cultural policy² aspects, as well as a combination of the two.³ The involvement of the architects tasked with the realisation of the single buildings has been hitherto less explored: the episode of the “Ville et Projets” association sheds light on the ambitions, not entirely fulfilled, of a group of architects aiming to change the perception of the architectural discourse, both at the local and international scale, using the resonance of the Parisian works to bring architecture to the forefront of the cultural debate.

This paper aims to contextualise the architects’ position and their attempt to build both a narrative and a debate in the framework of the whole scheme and in relation to the history of urban interventions in the city of Paris. Often directly compared to Haussmann’s *grands travaux* and despite a fundamentally different approach to the urban structure, the projects have been a substantial part of the international debate on cultural

policy, as well as the role of public patronage of cultural establishments in the contemporary world.

As late as 1978, the idea of a fundamental separation between architectural and urban act had still its importance in France. As art historian and critic, André Fermigier stated on *Le Monde*, architecture is the *fait du prince* while urbanism is “*l’affaire de chacun d’entre nous*”⁴ – and thus participation was invoked as a necessary development to include citizens in the decision-making effort at the urban planning scale. However, the heterogeneous characteristics of the *grands projets* provided a context where architecture, urbanism, and heritage preservation could interact, thus creating a framework in which the *fait du prince* could no longer offer a satisfactory narrative model for contemporary architecture and inherent contradictions.

As it had been the case with the building of new towns in the periphery of the historical centre of Paris, the *Villes Nouvelles*, the intervention on the core of the city seems to be misleading towards a narrative focused on gaining domestic consensus and international notoriety; the cultural character and scope of many buildings, located in symbolic places of the city, also

meant that they could be successfully integrated in the *canon* of Parisian landmarks. By investing on cultural establishments in their most tangible form – the buildings housing them – the Mitterrand government in the 1980s provided an alternative direction to conservative-leaning policies, that elsewhere, for example in the United Kingdom, attempted and largely succeeded in shifting a part of the funding of the arts and culture on private money.⁵ Towards the end of the 1980s, as the *grands projets* neared completion, London closely observed Paris,⁶ and that attention continued in the next decade: the itinerant exhibition documenting the completed projects was presented in London, and Mitterrand had been awarded an honorary fellowship at the RIBA.⁷

Perhaps the most symbolic of the projects composing the ensemble of the *grands projets*, at the very heart of the city, the substantial reform of the Louvre Museum led the institution to its current configuration and scope. Accounts of the museum prior to the last restoration depict a somewhat derelict state, with confusing access and overcrowded rooms; the Louvre palace being shared between the museum and the Ministry of Finance represented a further obstacle towards a more modern spacing of artworks and visitors flow organisation. Renovating an institution that could be considered the symbol of the French democratisation of culture had been suggested before Mitterrand's term and appears to have been the project which he considered most important. Together with the direct appointment of Ieoh Ming Pei as architect, which generated a fair share of polemic, the relocation of the Ministry of Finance to a new and more peripheral building on the Quai de Bercy was subject to strenuous opposition: separating it from the museum meant also to win "the symbolic battle between culture and finance"⁸, in Mitterrand's words. This dichotomy was the core aspect of a narrative founded on the opposition between providing for cultural needs, considered as the welfare state's prerogative, and responding to the more pragmatic necessities of economy and bureaucracy. These two poles are represented as conflicting instances, where economy seeks to stifle culture shifting its costs on private individuals rather than the state and conversely culture generates little financial gain: this view was further popularized through the officials most involved in the scheme, such as Emile Biasini, who was in charge of the Grand Louvre project.⁹ Following in a long tradition, Biasini states that creativity and culture, considered as democratic rights, were restrained by short term economic realism, as much as by the routines of administrative management. Mitterrand, in this official narrative, emerges as an almost heroic champion of culture by way of not only actively investing a considerable part of the national budget in cultural buildings, but also promoting the plan as a coherent effort towards the further goal of democratisation of culture by acting on the very building that symbolized that concept.¹⁰

This strong symbolic value attributed to the Louvre is at the heart of the strength of the opposition to the new pyramid, a quite literal tip of the iceberg of the renovation of the whole Carrousel area; despite the main claim of building a temple to the arts, the new underground facilities for the museum can

read as dangerously similar to a shopping mall or a Metro station.¹¹ Pei is quoted to have intended its intervention as a much-needed reception area, inspired by the square in front of the Beaubourg,¹² whereas the archetypal form of the pyramid, with its evocation both to Napoleon's Egyptian campaigns and to the antiquities exhibited in the Louvre, is tempered by its near-transparency and its relatively small size in comparison to the adjacent buildings.

Another narrative interprets the monarch-like aspect of the *grands projets* as a highly personal initiative on the president's part. This image of the masterplan was broadcasted at that time as a very organic object from its very inception, despite it being a heterogeneous set of projects with very diverse *raisons d'être*. Mitterrand was repeatedly compared to either Louis XIV or a Pharaoh by contemporaries, in particular through Biasini on the political side and François Chaslin, architecture critic and historian, on the more strictly architectural one. The latter published a book on the history of *grands projets* in 1985, when many buildings were yet to be completed, and contributed to the diffusion of the scheme on an international scale.¹³

In 1986, in an article on *The Architectural Review*, Chaslin employs war tactics as a metaphor for the political struggle embodied in some of the projects, with the president himself depicted as the last of the builder-sovereigns, in a time when politics and architecture would be further divided by the budgetary restrictions of the contemporary age.¹⁴ Each project was presented as a battle in itself, particularly those that altered the city in its most symbolic places, such as the Louvre and the Place de la Bastille. The struggle against the tendency to cancel projects made under the patronage of political predecessors is presented in a clear-cut way by Chaslin, who however omits to mention that some of the projects begun by Giscard d'Estaing at the end of the 1970s were integrated, with some alterations, in the *grands projets* scheme; others were however completely discarded.¹⁵ The Tête-Défense project, for example, a relatively low-rise building so conceived as not to be viewed from the city centre, was rejected supposedly for its lack of ambition at such a strategic site, and then substituted by a taller building chosen after an international competition.¹⁶ The Institut du Monde Arabe and the restoration of the Gare d'Orsay were retained, albeit with some substantial modifications.

Other later perspectives from officials involved in the projects show that those were conceived as functional units somewhat disjointed from the actual site, which was discussed and revised many times.¹⁷ Once most of the projects were completed and inaugurated, the public narrative could then afford to shift from the heroic rhetoric of a monumental effort for the state's finances to a more pragmatic one, revealing that the whole scheme had been much more complex and fragmentary.

The organic quality of the *grands projets* has thus since been object of a critical review and re-assessed as a unifying operation of many separate projects and intentions, fundamentally disputing the claim of the presidential will as the sole driving force of the whole operation.¹⁸ Susan Collard argues that the act of packaging together many different architectural projects, individual in their essence, was in fact a narrative act with the



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intention of acquiring greater political relevance. This duplicity intended to bridge a historic gap between the current and previous building campaigns, particularly the Haussmann one and the Villes Nouvelles: while the latter influenced the very structure of the city by operating both on architectures and infrastructures, the *grands projets* risked to remain a string of punctual operations rather than a global vision for the city of the future. This is supported by a strategic note on the communication campaign for the projects:

En effet, il est important de retrouver, a posteriori, une cohérence et une logique à l'existence de ces projets sans doute en les faisant apparaître comme la conséquence du souci gouvernemental d'apporter les outils de développement culturel et technique d'une Nouvelle Société.¹⁹

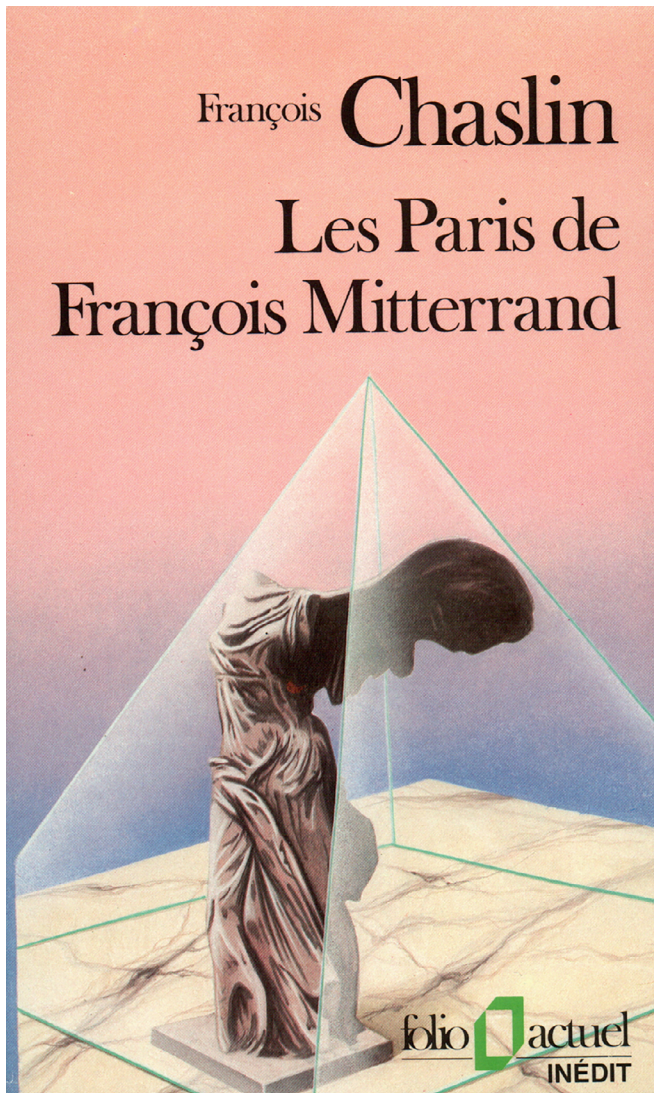
It is interesting to note here that the narrative focuses on rearranging in retrospect a collection of single projects in order to produce the effect of a comprehensive plan, designed to appear as the product of a much more general intention towards cultural and social progress, thus remaining in an essentially modernist, corbuserian approach to the role of architecture and urban planning.

Mitterrand's architecture campaign was in fact interpreted also by contemporaries as a left-wing intention to return to an *old-style* modernity, where a strong synergy with science and technology could lead to a clear and progress-oriented pedagogical meaning, as opposed to the previous "giscardoboffillienne"²⁰ narrative. In fact, work included under the *umbrella* of the *grand projets* were not the only projects being carried out in the historical centre of Paris at that time: the notable exception is the ultimate rebuilding of Les Halles, a complex project for which ideas had been laid on the discussion table

for about twenty years.²¹

The preference accorded in the Mitterrand years to some of the more hi-tech architectural currents produced by the crisis of the modern movement follows in a way the direction of the first *grand projet*, the Beaubourg by Piano and Rogers: the critical success of this building and its international relevance provided a direction for future developments. The theme of monumentality and its meaning for the contemporary city is crucial to the architectural debate of the 1980s as a consequence of the fragmentation of the modern movement and its crisis: while the formal and functional choices of each building are varied, the high value accorded to technology lingers as an implicit undercurrent of optimism towards progress and future in response to the recent economic and energetic crises. In this context, it was argued that the role of the architect was to be both the responsible for a stable image of the State and the figure that ensures the ultimate credibility of social policies.²²

On an architectural as well as a cultural standpoint, the group of buildings would have restored Paris as a focal point for culture worldwide, at the same time altering radically its urban image through intervention on focal points. In November 1983, three years into the scheme and with some of the projects close to the building phase, the official mission in charge of the *grands projets* feels the need to put forward its own narrative through a communication campaign aimed, at the beginning, principally at the provincial areas of France, which were perceived to be potentially more hostile to such an operation by way of the high costs, the sovereign-like act and the Paris-centric focus.²³ To respond to these potential points, the strategy suggested that the projects and their apparent benefits in terms of personal



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leisure, social improvement and international renown were to be communicated in a non-specialist language and through various media, such as television and as an itinerant exhibition in addition to various printed materials.

In May 1985 Yves Dauge commissioned François Chaslin, with a relatively short notice, an account of the building campaign on behalf of French publishing house Gallimard;²⁴ the book was published in 1987 in the popular paperback Folio edition, suggesting a narration accessible for a general public, as well as “an immediate and wide distribution and permanent presence in a large-circulation edition.”²⁵ The exhibition catalogue *Architectures Capitales* wrapped up on its part the whole scheme on the occasion of the bicentenary of the French Revolution and represents a conclusion that is mostly celebratory in tone.²⁶

This was in a markedly different direction from the late-sixties campaign that accompanied the construction of many new peripheral towns (the *villes Nouvelles*): it had then been perceived that there could be strong “psychological restraints” on the population’s part that warranted a possible policy adaptation.²⁷ This was in large part due to the infrastructural

change in the larger metropolitan area: large residential schemes that entailed entirely new cities, linked to the main centre by public transport, were to generate a radical change in the way a significant portion of the population experienced the city on a daily basis; whereas mostly public buildings in the historical city centre had a different potential influence. The lack of citizens’ involvement with the *grand projets* was in fact the subject of protests after the completion of most buildings, when, in concomitance with regional elections, Mitterrand was criticised for the *fait accompli* policy that had driven the scheme.²⁸

There is, however, a perspective that is notably absent from these official narratives: the architects, both the ones in charge of the single projects and, collectively, as professionals. Archival findings²⁹ show that the architects’ involvement in the *grands projets* was not only on a punctual level (i.e. those who were directly tasked with one or more buildings) but rather there was an attempt to form a common ground on the collective level, where the politic focus on architecture was considered an opportunity to rekindle a public debate outside of the confines of the profession. In this sense both

the official commission and the architects address a common concern, widespread in the architectural debate of post-war Europe: the crisis of the modern movement has distanced the general public and architecture, to a point where the rift might seem largely irreparable. And architecture seems to speak in an obscure, incomprehensible language, gradually assuming a marginal position in the cultural debate. Nonetheless, their aims diverge: while officials promote the projects through *mainstream* means in order to build a consensus and to further consolidate a coherent narrative of a sometimes contradictory phenomenon, architects aim to re-establish a prominent place for architecture in the public debate, thus reclaiming a cultural importance (and, arguably, a form of power) that is instrumental in shaping the city.

In the first part of the 1980s a group of architects felt the need to involve the general population of Paris on the various buildings being erected in the historical city centre. They became gradually an organisational force that produced at first a series of conferences on the architecture of the *grands projets* as told by the architect themselves, with an explicitly didactic intention. The conferences were open to the public and attended by many, if not all, of the architects involved.³⁰ The conference cycle offered a complementary point of view to the official narrative by focusing on the single projects and exposing their main objects and challenges, aiming to stimulate debate: the meetings were publicized on the main architecture magazines in France and sometimes abroad, and it can be surmised that a good attendance and a generally favourable reception of the initiative prompted a more organic structure as well as a more ambitious scope.

The "Ville et Projets"³¹ association was officially established at the beginning of March 1985, with the same group of architects who needed in this way a more formal incarnation to further their ambitions.³² The association's founding manifesto notes that the current building politics have had the result of putting Paris back to the forefront of the international architectural scene by ways of their broad scope and international vocation. The exceptionality of such projects in a city already possessing a strong urban image appears to some of the architects as a chance for a rekindling of the debate on the city and architecture, and their relationship and interactions.

The formal and symbolic questions pertaining the city and the architectural language in the post-modern setting involve strongly the conflictual relation with the historical built environment, which was particularly evident in Paris, where many of the *grands projets* were located in symbolically relevant parts of the city and were conceived themselves as modern monuments, thus potentially generating a conflict between historical and modern monumentality. Recognising this aspect as a common ground with other urban contexts and while originating within the framework of the *grands projets*, the debate was conceived universal in scope, open to the experiences of other cities and other professions. The *grands projets* are thus considered as instruments of future evolution in the dialogue between architecture, the city and

contemporary society at large.³³

The invitation to debate mirrored the stance proposed at that time by Yves Dauge³⁴ through a newly implemented official press mailing list: its presentation stated that, given the "segregation which favoured polemics"³⁵ in which the building campaign was perceived to be, the time for debate had come. Conceived as a working tool for the press, it aimed for an interdisciplinary approach to the buildings, considered in their relation to various disciplines: however it embraced a rather propagandistic narrative in which the *grands projets* were a symbol of resistance to the economic crisis and a symbol of faith in the future. On the matter of the debate, the official stance appears unclear: if on the one hand Dauge encouraged public discussion, the official strategy initially advised against provoking much debate and successively, through surveys, assessed that the architectural discussion was perceived by the public as a secondary concern.³⁷

While the president of "Ville et projets", Jean-Eudes Roullier, was not an architect himself, he was the *Inspécteur General des finances* and, more crucially, had been the founder and first general secretary of the *groupe central des villes Nouvelles*, an interface between various public establishments that were involved in the construction of new towns in France during the 1970s. Roullier's role was a communicational one, as it was through the group's work that the new towns were promoted in order to provide cultural resonance, political support and financial means. Roullier had thus experienced first-hand the construction of an urban narrative for the post-war city, and it is likely that his input in the associations' activity could have been informed by that experience.

The other founding members of the association were in turn all architects, mainly belonging to the same generation (all, except for one, born between 1928 and 1938) and Paris-born and residents: Michel Macary, Paul Andreu, Paul Chemetov, Françoise Divorne, Martin Robain. Macary had been the chief urban planner for the new town of Marne-la-Vallée from 1970 to 1980 and was tasked to work with I.M. Pei to the Grand Louvre project, for which he was in charge of the sculptures in the Richelieu wing and the Carrousel shopping mall.

Paul Andreu, engineer and architect, was the director of the architectural division at the Roissy airport, for which he had built the two main terminals. His involvement with the *grand projets* consisted in the completion of Johann Otto von Spreckelsen project for La Défense (at the time designated as *tête-défense* and successively known as *la grande arche*). Martin Robain, one of the founders of Architecture Studio and the youngest member of the association, had worked together with Jean Nouvel on the Institute du Monde Arabe.

Françoise Divorne, the association's secretary,³⁹ was in turn an urban studies scholar, and appears to be a fundamental part of the original nucleus of architects behind the first conferences in Paris concerning the *grands projets*. The brief texts describing each event and distributed to the invitees are penned by her,



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and reveal a substantial number of literary references, almost absent in most of her colleagues' interventions. This inscribes the projects being built at the time in the tradition of the main building campaigns in Paris since the XIX century, which were in their time vastly commented upon in literary works (notable examples could be Emile Zola's *La Curée* or the many references found in Baudelaire's works). Offering a literary counterpoint to the architectural projects means that architects, through their work, are inscribing themselves in the fabric of the city (which in itself narrates its history) not only in the most visual and material sense, but on its immaterial side as well.

Paul Chemetov, together with his associate, the Chilean architect Borja Huidobro, was in charge of the new Ministry of Finance at Bercy and the association's treasurer as well as one of its most active and vocal members. Chemetov had worked towards a more widespread recognition of the many Parisian projects, and in particular their international scope, as of the eight projects simultaneously being built, four had been designed by international architects. In his words, the politics behind the *grand projets* led to the paradoxical situation of Paris being, alongside New York, Venice and Berlin, a city where architecture-wise "things happened"⁴⁰, albeit among a generalised public indifference. According to Chemetov,

acting as a spokesman for the whole group, the reason for the indifference and *blindness* resided in the political shift following 1968, particularly the Young Turks movement: the *grands projets* appear to them, by virtue of the personalities and ideas that they bring together, as a possible starting point of the rebuilding of a cultural and intellectual milieu for architecture.

According to the international conference at that time being prepared, this is a call to action to the architects involved: Paris could represent the ideal case where the already strong urban image is both preserved and challenged by modern monuments. The theme of monumentality and its meaning for the contemporary city is crucial to the architectural debate of the 1980s as consequence of the fragmentation of the modern movement and its crisis: while the formal and functional choices of each building are varied, the high value accorded to technology lingers as an implicit undercurrent of optimism towards progress and future in response to the recent economic and energetic crises.

The somewhat brutalist echoes found in Chemetov and Huidobro's new Ministry of Finance prove a critical point for Nouvel⁴¹ who critiques publicly the building during a televised interview. The media is considered by Chemetov not the best

1

The Louvre Pyramid, viewed from the inside of the museum.

Photo by the Author

2

The cover of *François Chaslin's Les Paris de François Mitterrand* (1985). Unsurprisingly, the cover evokes the abstract and transparent form of Pei's pyramid enclosing one of the Louvre's most iconic artworks, the Nike of Samothrace.

3

The Finance Ministry building on the Quai de Bercy designed by Chemetov and Huidobro.

Photo in the public domain.

instrument for critical discussion as it is subject to cuts and screenplay that could distort the original meanings, whereas conferences benefit from live presence and debate, to which he invites Nouvel. While they stand on different conceptual points of view regarding architecture, they consider the polemic as instrumental to the public debate as up until that point there had been a substantially meaningful discussion on architecture.

As there was a substantial opposition mainly to the Grand Louvre project, both from inside the government (The Ministry of Finance was reluctant to renounce to such a prestigious location in favour to a new building at Bercy) and from the public, which despite recognising the need for a renovation did not approve of a new addition to the building, a press campaign was put in place in order to foil the construction of the Louvre pyramid. Chemetov and Huidobro call to assemble the "Ville et Projets" association in order to present a common front. They appear as the driving force of the group, presenting ideas and communicating with both the public and the officials.

As the main contribution to the cultural milieu surrounding the *grands projets*, the association organised an international conference at Royaumont Abbey. The conceptual core of the conference was first drafted and proposed in the summer of

1984, approximately a year before it took place.⁴² The "Ville et Projets" association also contacted the official coordination mission for the *grands projets*, which was in the meantime organising the exhibition detailing the whole scheme, scheduled for 1985-86,⁴³ in order to evaluate the possibility of integrating the conference in the official programme. The contributions to the conference range from the anthropologist Marc Augé to the architectural critic Joseph Rykwert, and the Parisian experiences were compared to those in Rome, presented by Carlo Aymonino, and Frankfurt am Main, illustrated by Jochem Jurdan; Alberto Samonà and Jean-Louis Cohen figured among the discussants. The aim to produce a truly international narrative ultimately did not reach its full expectations: the architects involved in both the official communication and the "Ville et Projets" associations were all French and mostly Parisians, as were for the main part the contributions to the Royaumont conference.

The device of a conference employed to illustrate the intellectual positions surrounding a building campaign was also used in the case of the *Villes Nouvelles*, in December 1968, in particular focused on the masterplan and the new towns of the Parisian region, whose 16 millions inhabitants represented a third of France's total population at the time.⁴⁴ The fundamental

difference lies in the fact that while the new towns were a priori a coherent masterplan in which individual architectural schemes were coordinated, while the *grands projets* on their part were a collection of individual projects that had to be given coherence *a posteriori* in order for their narrative to succeed. Moreover, the international tendencies in 1968 moved from France to abroad: functionaries were sent on missions in the URSS and USA⁴⁵ in order to analyse their approach to building new towns, as well as the administrative structure supporting them. The tendency is reversed in the 1980s, when international competitions are opened in order to encourage active participation by international architects and firms in the Parisian projects. The fact that some of the members of both “Ville et Projets” and the official governmental mission had been involved in various degrees in the *Villes Nouvelles* scheme resulted in some points of contact between the two building campaigns, even though the image of the city they projected was inevitably affected by the changing historical and social context: while the new towns, with their focus on urban planning, infrastructure and industry appear more of a consequence of the ideas matured in the first part of the XX century, the *grands projets* appear to be one of the first contemporary instances in which a metropolis with a strong urban image and layered with tradition is aware of its symbolic role in an increasingly globalised cultural environment and plans accordingly.

Paul Andreu states in a lecture in London that the projects were the products of a period of energy and vitality for the city that was ultimately good for the community, rather than just a politically shrewd investment for the government.⁴⁶ One can argue that their narrative succeeded in expanding beyond the mere architectural milieu and established itself in the image of the contemporary city: as a symbolic example, after the polemics surrounding I.M.Pei’s pyramid, the Louvre has adopted a stylised version of the pyramid as its logo by virtue of the simplicity of its shape and its unequivocal association to the museum.

Officials and architects respond to a common concern, namely constructing a coherent narrative designed to extrapolate sense (and purpose) from a complex context, in order to establish a role for architecture and urban planning in the development of the contemporary city. The framing from the official side was able to inscribe the building campaign in a long tradition of political power expressed through intervention on the city: the construction of political consensus through extensive public investment on symbolic locations not only intended to leave a tangible legacy but also to be read as a viable and successful model was opposed to the model of private funded development.

The act, on the architects’ side, to form a professional association dedicated to the promotion of the single buildings, still considered part of an organic whole, despite not challenging overtly the official view still provided more in-depth interpretations of the multifaceted aspects of such an extensive and diverse body of works. Their attempts to give a truly international horizon to their activities did not come to

complete fruition as the Royaumont Conference was perceived as a still France-centric event, as was the case of not forming a united front (the Nouvel – Chemetov *querelle*).

Can the *grands projets* be interpreted only as an urban narrative of power or rather a phenomenon that expressed the contradiction and complexity of its times? Both the state investing resources in a cultural action of such large scope and the head of state representing himself as a contemporary version of a sovereign-builder appear to point in the direction of the expression of political power. However, further research could bring to light the full extent of the involvement of other actors such as the architects, that, from the bottom up, could have the power to revitalise the public discourse on the city.

It was as well an instance where Paris, as the long-standing symbol for the centralized state, not only narrates itself through its architecture, rather appears to be a self-conscious interrogation of its history, of the potential conflict of building anew and preserving the heritage (and its inherent curatorial operation). What role may be envisaged for an already fragmented modern architectural language, and for the architectural profession at large, within the contemporary city?

¹ See Annette Fierro, *The Glass State: The Technology of the Spectacle, Paris, 1981-1998* (MIT Press, 2003), for an analysis of the relation to the Haussmann intervention and the technologic aspect of some of the projects, as well as Monique Yaari, *Rethinking the French City: Architecture, Dwelling, and Display After 1968* (Rodopi, 2008), Carlo Maria Olmo, *Progetto e racconto: l'architettura e le sue storie* (Roma: Donzelli 2020), Jean-Louis Cohen and Christian Hubert, *France: Modern Architectures in History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014).

² Andrea Kupfer Schneider, *Creating the Musée d'Orsay: The Politics of Culture in France* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1998) provides a systematic review of the main press about the *grands projets*.

³ Susan Collard, “The Architecture of Power: François Mitterrand’s Grands Travaux Revisited,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 14, no. 2 (2008): 195–208; Sue Collard, “Architectural Gestures and Political Patronage: The Case of the Grands Travaux,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 5, no. 1 (1998): 33–47.

⁴ André Fermigier, “Urbanisme et Libertés” *Le Monde*, 17 November 1978. https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1978/11/17/urbanisme-et-libertes_2998180_1819218.html, last accessed 4 September 2020.

⁵ France had a long-standing tradition of public support for culture, and in the 1980s, in part thanks to the *grands projets*, surpassed the other European nations in terms of public expense for cultural policy. Annette Zimmer, “The Subsidized Muse: Government and the Arts in Western Europe and the United States,” *Journal of Cultural Economics* 23, no. 1-2 (1999): 33–49. Zimmer attributes this trend to the desire of expressing a grandeur that has remained unchanged since the *Ancien Régime*.

⁶ Many contemporary references to the building campaign can be found in the main architecture journals, such as the *Architectural Review*, as the extensive french public investments fueled a wave of debate in Britain on the economic relevance of the cultural sector at large.

⁷ Paul Finch, “How British Architecture Can Learn from French Lessons,” *The Architects’ Journal*, no. 13 July 1994 (1994): 16. This editorial compares the *grands projets* with a then upcoming architectural initiative financed by the National Lottery; the projects would be all cultural in nature and paid with the voluntary contribution of “amateur gamblers”.

⁸ Sue Collard, “Architectural Gestures and Political Patronage: The Case of the Grands Travaux,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 5, no. 1 (1998): 33–47.

⁹ Emile Joseph Biasini, “Les Grands Projets: An Overview,” *RSA Journal* 139, no. 5421 (1991): 573.

¹⁰ Biasini, “Les Grands Projets,” 581. The democratisation of culture is here also considered as a fundamental legacy, both material and conceptual, of the Revolution, further consolidated by the movements of 1968.

¹¹ For a contemporary, in-depth account of that aspect of the Louvre project, as well as its advertisement, see Lianne McTavish, “Shopping in the Museum? Consumer Spaces and the Redefinition of the Louvre,” *Cultural Studies* 12, no. 2 (1998).

¹² Bruno Foucart, “The Victory of the Pyramid,” *Apollo* 129, no. 327 (1989): 304–6.

¹³ François Chaslin, *Les Paris de François Mitterrand: Histoire des grands projets architecturaux* ([Paris]: Gallimard, 1985).

¹⁴ François Chaslin, "Progress on the Grands Projets," *The Architectural Review* 180, no. 1078 (1986): 27–30.

¹⁵ Collard, "Architectural Gestures and Political Patronage."

¹⁶ Paul Andreu and Robert Lion, "L'Arche de La Défense: A Case Study," *The RSA Journal* 139, no. 5421 (1991): 572.

¹⁷ Andreu and Lion, "L'Arche de La Défense," 572.

¹⁸ Sue Collard, "Architectural Gestures and Political Patronage: The Case of the Grands Travaux," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 5, no. 1 (1998): 33–47.

¹⁹ "Indeed, it is important to find, *a posteriori*, logic and coherence for these projects by way of making them appear as the consequence of the governmental will to provide tools for the cultural and technical development of a New Society." Archives Nationales, 20000329/23, France. Mission Interministérielle de Coordination Des Grandes Opérations d'architecture et d'urbanisme (1986-1998).

²⁰ Michel Crépu and Denis Lenglard, "La République Des Architectes" *Esprit* 109, no. 12 (1985): 72–75.

²¹ For a complete analysis of the Les Halles project and of the role of Bofill for Giscard d'Estaing, see Daniele Campobenedetto, *Paris Les Halles: Storie Di Un Futuro Conteso* (Milano: Franco Angeli Edizioni, 2017).

²² Crépu and Lenglard, "La République Des Architectes."

²³ "Archives Nationales, 20000329/23, France. Mission Interministérielle de Coordination Des Grandes Opérations d'architecture et d'urbanisme (1986-1998). Note from the *Architecture et construction agency*, 24 November 1983.

²⁴ Archives Nationales, 20000329/23, France. Mission Interministérielle de Coordination Des Grandes Opérations d'architecture et d'urbanisme (1986-1998). Yves Dauge to François Chaslin, 3 May 1985.

²⁵ Chaslin, *Les Paris de Francois Mitterrand*.

²⁶ *Architectures capitales* (Paris: Electa Moniteur, 1987).

²⁷ "Archives Nationales 19980050/9 Bureau Des Opérations d'intérêt National et Des Villes Nouvelles (Direction de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme)," étude promotionnelle des villes nouvelles, 18 June 1969.

²⁸ "Ire de France," *The Architects' Journal* 195, no. 13 (1992): 6.

²⁹ Part of the governmental mission for the grands projets fonds in the Archives Nationales in Paris.

³⁰ Archives Nationales 20000328/45 Mission Interministérielle de Coordination Des Grandes Opérations d'architecture et d'urbanisme (1986-1998).

³¹ City and projects.

³² Archives Nationales 20000328/45 Mission Interministérielle de Coordination Des Grandes Opérations d'architecture et d'urbanisme (1986-1998). foundation act of the association, 07/03/1985.

³³ Françoise Divorne, ed., "Ville, forme symbolique, pouvoir, projets : premier colloque international organisé par l'Association 'Ville et projets' les 30 novembre et 1er décembre 1985 à l'abbaye de Royaumont" (Bruxelles: Mardaga, 1996).

³⁴ Urbanist and politician, at the time chief of the governmental mission in which the grand projets were inscribed and a key figure for their development.

³⁵ "Archives Nationales 20000328/45 Mission Interministérielle de Coordination Des Grandes Opérations d'architecture et d'urbanisme (1986-1998)." Presentation letter for the first issue of the *Lettre d'Information presse*, Yves Dauge.

³⁶ "Archives Nationales, 20000329/23, France. Mission Interministérielle de Coordination Des Grandes Opérations d'architecture et d'urbanisme (1986-1998)."

³⁷ "Archives Nationales 20000328/45 Mission Interministérielle de Coordination Des Grandes Opérations d'architecture et d'urbanisme (1986-1998)." Note from the *Atelier de développement de la communication*, 27 July 1984.

³⁸ "Archives Nationales 20000328/45 Mission Interministérielle de Coordination Des Grandes Opérations d'architecture et d'urbanisme (1986-1998)." Declaration of the association's main administrators submitted to the prefecture, 04/02/1985.

³⁹ She was also in charge of the scientific committee of the Royaumont Conference and of its organisation.

⁴⁰ Archives Nationales 20000328/45 Mission Interministérielle de Coordination Des Grandes Opérations d'architecture et d'urbanisme (1986-1998). Paul Chemetov, 20 February 1984.

⁴¹ Jean Nouvel was not part of the "Ville et Projets", but the Institute du Monde Arabe had been one of the first projects to be completed and thus one of the first to be presented to the public. He was however involved in the official exhibition.

⁴² "Archives Nationales 20000328/45 Mission Interministérielle de Coordination Des Grandes Opérations d'architecture et d'urbanisme (1986-1998). Various notes, reports and letters by Françoise Divorne between 1984 and 1985.

⁴³ Archives Nationales 20000328/45 Mission Interministérielle de Coordination Des Grandes Opérations d'architecture et d'urbanisme (1986-1998). *Atelier pour le développement de la communication*, 27 July 1984.

⁴⁴ "Archives Nationales 19980050/9 Bureau Des Opérations d'intérêt National et Des Villes Nouvelles (Direction de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme). Reports on URSS and USA, 1968.

⁴⁵ "Archives Nationales 19980050/9 Bureau Des Opérations d'intérêt National et Des Villes Nouvelles (Direction de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme)."

⁴⁶ Andreu and Lion, "L'Arche de La Défense," 579.

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Ville, symbolique, forme, projets: la comunicazione dei Grands Projets a Parigi negli anni '80

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storia dell'architettura; progettazione urbana; Parigi; politiche culturali; dibattito culturale

ABSTRACT

Riconoscendo la situazione esemplare della città di Parigi per quanto riguarda l'architettura, iniziata con i lavori per il Beaubourg e realizzata in maniera più completa con la campagna degli anni ottanta per la costruzione di nuovi edifici monumentali, strategicamente collocati nel cuore della città storica, un gruppo di architetti francesi fonda nel 1985 l'associazione "Ville et Projets", il cui obiettivo dichiarato è quello di riannimare il dibattito pubblico riguardante l'architettura e la città. I progetti, sia come singole entità sia come intervento unitario, rappresentano un elemento chiave delle politiche urbane di Mitterrand e costituiscono, in virtù della loro collocazione e del coinvolgimento di architetti di fama internazionale, una potenziale fonte di dibattito. Se la comunicazione ufficiale da parte del Ministero della Cultura francese è tesa a coinvolgere diversi media (radio, televisione) nella presentazione degli edifici, l'associazione intende lavorare sul fronte del dibattito culturale, restituendo al linguaggio architettonico e alla sua relazione con la città una posizione cruciale. Gli architetti ritengono infatti necessario stabilire una narrazione in prima persona delle più recenti trasformazioni urbane di Parigi. Il presente contributo intende dipanare questa narrazione, esplorando il ruolo dell'associazione nel panorama culturale e la sua influenza, oltre a rilevare il grado in cui le sue ambizioni siano effettivamente state realizzate, aprendo nuovi interrogativi sul ruolo dell'architettura e la sua auto-rappresentazione nel contesto della città contemporanea.

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