
Christian Sander

The Towers at the Place Dominique Perrault and (Post-) Contextual Urban Design

Abstract

By the end of the 20th century, a number of architectural and urban design projects had been realized in Paris that are in many ways comparable to Georges Eugène Haussmann's redesign of the city in the 19th century. While President François Mitterrand pursued the realization of the *Grands Projets*, the Mayor of Paris Jacques Chirac embarked on the redevelopment of the east of the city. Dominique Perrault's Bibliothèque nationale de France—Site François Mitterrand was an integral element of both projects: it is the last *Grand Projet* and became the first building to be constructed in the Paris Rive Gauche district, a former industrial area on the left bank of the Seine that is still being converted into a mixed-use district.

The building consists of a monumental base with a pedestrian platform supporting four L-shaped towers grouped around a sunken 'forest'. Should it really be discussed as an example of modernist architecture at a time when urban design, after a period of large-scale demolition, was returning to referencing the framework of the existing city? In 1974, Christian de Portzamparc designed a residential ensemble around a green space inspired by the enclosed garden of the Palais-Royal. This historical model is also discussed in the 1978 book *Collage City* by Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, the standard work of contextual urban design.

In fact, the garden of the Palais-Royal also plays a crucial role in Perrault's library design. This article examines how the architect conceptualizes detached buildings in relation to the surrounding urban space and sheds light on commonalities in his approach and that of Hans Kollhoff, who had studied with Colin Rowe in the 1970s.

Keywords

Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Paris Rive Gauche, Colin Rowe, Collage