

LA APUESTA POR LA GRAN ESCALA

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El proyecto Whitehall de 1963 debe destacarse como reflexión singular dentro de la rica trayectoria del profesor Sir Leslie Martin, porque en la múltiple aportación del arquitecto este trabajo puede significar un punto de condensación de sus facetas propositivas y analíticas, de sus contribuciones al campo teórico y al de la ejecución profesional, tanto desde la esfera privada como desde las oficinas públicas.

Whitehall es un proyecto de *gran escala* en un escenario complejo y con implicaciones históricas y simbólicas importantes: la reconstrucción del fragmento más representativo de la ciudad de Londres en el "embankment" norte donde la ciudad se asentó antaño, precisamente en el momento en que se estaba produciendo el salto institucional a la orilla del Támesis.

El proyecto se expresa conscientemente a partir de estas condiciones y nos superpone su propuesta respecto a las anteriores –de Inigo Jones (1630-40), de Christopher Wren (1669-85), de Charles Barry (1857)– para tan notable emplazamiento.

Sin embargo, Sir Leslie Martin apuesta por una construcción grande, que aún participando del optimismo de la época, del que da muestras la propia envergadura de la operación, pasa a proyectarla como una obra que se ejecutará por unidades o por partes, con un sistema de espacios suficientemente abiertos para ser capaces de incorporar los edificios de valor que deben permanecer sometidos ahora a esta nueva estructura general.

Y en realidad, esta capacidad de proyectar la arquitectura grande a partir de ideas de orden de una escala superior a la del propio edificio debe entenderse como un mérito inherente a la arquitectura de S.L.M. Una revisión de sus proyectos nos acerca siempre –con independencia incluso de su tamaño– a la voluntad de someterse a una *estructura latente* o manifiesta que ordena y regula cada proyecto.

Las diferentes ideas de estructura edificada se convierten en fértils generadores de arquitectura a la vez que establecen pautas de ordenación urbana de gran interés. Nadie puede

de ahí el verdadero contenido teórico del trabajo de Sir Leslie Martin. Sus proyectos tienden a reflejar en cada momento su preocupación por el rol del proyecto arquitectónico en la formalización urbana. Actitud que le ha llevado a ser eje pionero en la Escuela de Cambridge, fundador del Land Use and Built Studies y líder en la investigación de la forma arquitectónica y el espacio urbano en el marco universitario de los años setenta. La reflexión sobre la generación de la forma y el espacio construido ha significado la apertura de una línea de discusión permanente: Lionel March y Marcial Echenique serán en cada campo auténticos seguidores de aquella avanzadilla.

Esta preocupación por abordar las cuestiones fundamentales de la arquitectura se presenta a lo largo de su obra en esta actitud teórica y comprometida que se transfiere a un itinerario discursivo siempre abierto a la innovación, pero que quiere mantener puentes de enlace con la historia y las maneras en que la arquitectura ha ido produciéndose. En este sentido, la observación de sus obras no amaga la identificación de ciertos principios básicos del hecho construido: el sentido de la gravedad, la preocupación de la luz en el espacio cerrado, la autenticidad de los materiales.... Quien se acerque a sus proyectos no construidos, a sus artículos escritos, puede encontrar la búsqueda de las raíces de generación de la forma construida, de la medida y orden de los espacios urbanos, etc., como indicadores de esta actitud seminal hacia una nueva interpretación de la arquitectura

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The 1963 Whitehall plan must stand out as a singular reflection within Sir Leslie Martin's rich trajectory, for among the architect's manyfold contributions, this work can represent a point of condensation of his proposing and analytical facets, of his contributions to the theoretical field and to professional execution, both from the private sector and public offices.

Whitehall is a *large scale plan in a complex setting* carrying important historical and symbolic implications: the development of the most representative fragment of the city of London in the north Embankment were the city was originally founded, precisely at a time when the institutional leap to the south bank of the river Thames was taking place.

The plan expresses itself consciously from these conditions and superimposes its own proposals regarding previous schemes: Inigo Jones's (1630-40), Christopher Wren's (1669-85), Charles Barry's (1857), for such an outstanding setting.

And yet Sir Leslie Martin lays his stakes on a large scale development which, although entering the optimistic spirit of the period which is shown by the very scope of the operation, he moves on to design as a plan to be developed in units or parts, as a system of spaces sufficiently open to be able to incorporate the important buildings that must remain submitted to this new general structure.

And, in actual fact, this capacity to design large scale architecture from massing ideas on a higher scale than that of the building itself, must be understood as a merit inherent to Sir Leslie Martin's architecture. If we go over his projects we are always drawn –independently from their size even– to a will of submission to a manifest or *latent structure* that masses and regulates every scheme.

The different ideas for developed structure turn into fertile generators or architecture, while at the same time establishing urban *massing patterns* of great interest. No body can doubt this method of elaboration in such well-known and brilliant works as Harvey Court, Cambridge (1958). The recurrence of the block unit becomes absolutely enriched by the very contents the architect confers to every "unit" within certain "structural" ideas of wider scope. This would, without a doubt, be Sir Leslie Martin's richest lesson in urbanistics, obliging a careful assessment of his proposals.

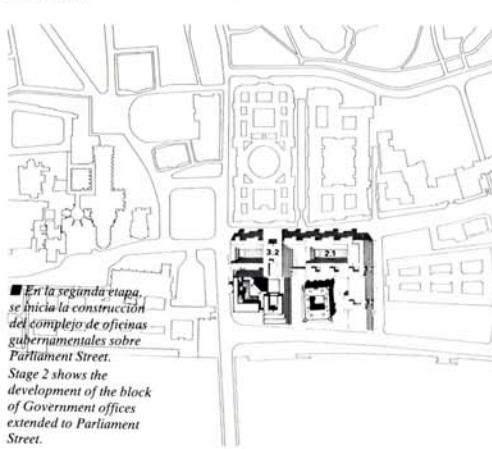
For this idea of structure represents for Martin a capacity to establish order in buildings, to point out compositional rhythms over and above the scale of the usual compositional elements, and, especially, to seek a massing order from the unbuilt spaces although well defined by the very architectures he constructs.



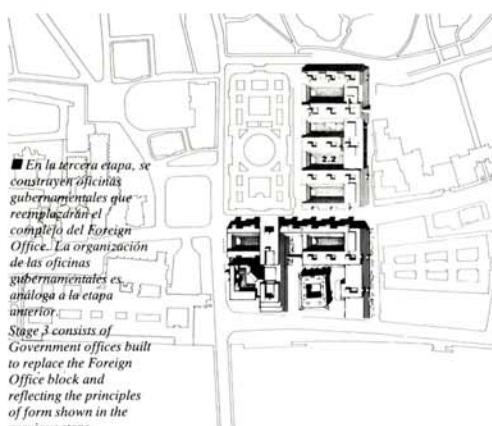
■ En la primera etapa, se establece el nuevo edificio parlamentario, junto a Bridge Street, y un complejo comercial que unirá Parliament Street al Embankment.
Stage 1 provides a new building of Parliamentary offices on the Bridge Street site and a new shopping concourse which links Parliament Street to the Embankment.

■ Los siguientes esquemas ilustran las secuencias en las que se descomponen el conjunto del proyecto. Cada edificio es un paso hacia la forma total. El "timing" de la secuencia es flexible, incluso el orden de cada pieza podría variar.

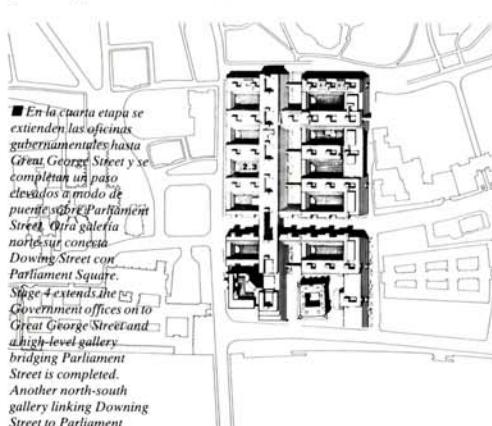
During the following stages, Tunnel and Embankment, through traffic is removed from the Parliament Square precinct to a riverside tunnel along the River Thames, thus creating a more adequate environment for the historical buildings.



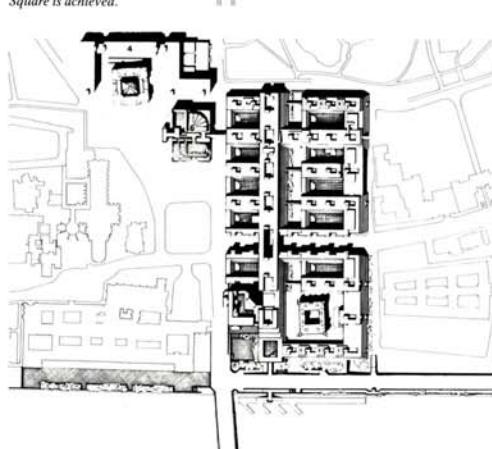
■ En la segunda etapa, se inicia la construcción del complejo de oficinas gubernamentales sobre Parliament Street.
Stage 2 shows the development of the block of Government offices extended to Parliament Street.



■ En la tercera etapa, se construyen oficinas gubernamentales que reemplazan el complejo del Foreign Office. La organización de las oficinas gubernamentales es análoga a la etapa anterior.
Stage 3 consists of Government offices built to replace the Foreign Office block and reflecting the principles of form shown in the previous stage.



■ En la cuarta etapa se extienden las oficinas gubernamentales hasta Great George Street y se completa un paso elevado a modo de puente sobre Parliament Street. Otra galería norte-sur conecta Downing Street con Parliament Square.
Stage 4 extends the Government offices on to Great George Street and a high-level gallery bridging Parliament Street is completed. Another north-south gallery linking Downing Street to Parliament Square is achieved.



■ En las siguientes etapas, Tunnel y Embankment, se traslada el tráfico fuera del recinto de Parliament Square hacia las riberas del Támesis, de modo que se crea un entorno más adecuado para los edificios históricos.
The following illustrations show the stages by which the plan as a whole is achieved,

with each building as a step towards the total form. The timing of the sequence is flexible and even its order of development could vary.

It is an attitude towards design some authors would have assimilated to the concepts of "Megastructure" as defined by Reyner Banham, or of "Math-Architecture" as qualified by Alison Smithson, referring to large scale architecture, and which could polemically be defined over and beyond those contents.

Because for Sir Leslie Martin the idea of *large structure* incorporates and defines its own parts. The relationship between main and secondary is clearly defined: it is not a question of putting forward a general massing law on which to "stick" secondary elements –as a specific form to a megastuctural vision; but rather to integrate them with an appropriate cadence. For it escapes no-one that his schemes include certain fundamental pieces and orders, and others that are accessory or mutable; and this condition is consubstantial to a large-size work which must be definable as the programme becomes explicit, and as time turns it into a reality.

This is perhaps the most attractive contents of the Whitehall Plan, making it appear so interesting a quarter of a century after it was carefully elaborated and published by HMSO. Even knowing that it was never carried out, it offers the original stimulus of having been one of the first large scale urban plans to incorporate the discussion of traffic and public transports, following the schemes by Colin Buchanan who intervenes actively in the rationalisation of the project and in making its implementation in parts possible.

Hence, the true theoretical contents of Sir Leslie Martin's work. His schemes tend to reflect at every stage his concern for the role played by the architectural project in urban formalisation. An attitude which has led him to become a pioneering axis in the Cambridge School, founded of the Land Use and Built Studies, and a leader in the research into architectural form and urban space in the universities of the sixties: the reflection on the generation of form and developed space has opened up a permanent line of discussion: Lionel March and Marcial Echenique will each be, in their own fields, true followers of those first steps.

This concern for approaching the fundamental questions of architecture is shown throughout his work in this theoretical and committed attitude which is transferred to a discursive itinerary, always open to innovation, but which wishes to retain links with history and with the way in which architecture has occurred. In this sense, a study of his works does not hide the *identification of certain basic principles* for the built event: the sense of gravity, a concern for light in enclosed spaces, the authenticity of the materials...; whoever approaches his unbuilt schemes, his written articles, will find a search for the generative roots of the built form, of measure and massing arrangement of urban spaces... as indicators of this seminal attitude towards a new interpretation of architecture.

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