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SUPERQUADRA PENTHOUSES

Brasilia

There is an extraordinary amount of left-over space in Brasília. Some spaces can hardly be avoided - such as the huge landscape spaces within the city itself, which resist the urbanity of the city. Others need to be sniffed out, such as roofs of apartment blocks in the superquadras originais, a by-product of the reductivism of Modernism. The roofs form uniform platforms six storeys above ground level, articulated only by lift towers.

This roof landscape seemed not only to be architecturally incomplete, but analogous to another very distant and supposedly natural landscape in England - that of Blakeney Point on the north Norfolk coast. The shifting sand dunes there are propagated and stabilised by rows of wooden stake fences; in other words, the landscape is formed by the architecture. The sand fences form spaces among themselves and between themselves and the landscape, a possibility of architecture I thought appropriate to investigate on the roofs of the superquadras.

To make the roofs inhabitable required only one small addition of architecture to this analogous landscape: a wall placed against each lift tower to define 'front' and 'back'. The only other elements required would be a continuous curtain of light-weight glazing for the external walls and a free-form concrete roof. The sun shines directly overhead, and thus the roofs would cast long shadows down the blocks out of all proportion to their visibility from the ground. These apartments would give their inhabitants the impression of living in a true urban landscape.



Asa Sul in 1964, showing the superquadras originais
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