

SOME NOTES ON THE ARCHIGRAM SYNDROME

By Peter Cook

ARCHIGRAM . . . THE NAME AND THE MAGAZINE

Why Archigram? It comes from the original desire not to put out a regularised and predictable 'magazine' with lots of pages and a cover, but to push out, excrete (almost) a thing that would explode upon the oppressed assistants in London offices and the students in the shape of a large piece of paper, poster, collage of images, or booklet . . . whatever was necessary at the time. Hence the need for a name that was more analogous to a thing like a message or some abstract communication, telegram, aerogramme, etc.

The first *Archigram* was this sheet, with some D. Greene poems. After this utterance, brushed off by the few senior architects who saw it as a student joke, and only selling (at the time) 300 copies, everybody thought it would die a natural death. The next *Archigram* came a year (and three competitions) later. Much more formal, with pages, typesetting and the convenience of stapled ends, it had a project and a statement from several different young architects, not all similar, but presenting an otherwise unheard viewpoint. The AA's 'Christian Weirdies' (a medievalist group), Cedric Price and ourselves were included together.

The beginnings of the instinct towards a consideration of expendability as a serious motive for a way of building came at this point. Half the schemes in the magazine were concerned in some way with throwaway, though there had not been any collusion or discussion. This came later. Certainly by the time of the third *Archigram* it was a central issue.

The fourth *Archigram* had become the mouthpiece of the larger, combined group and the issue was largely the work of Warren Chalk. Like the first *Archigram*, it upset a lot of people who still felt that architecture was somehow a sacred discipline that should not be played with and certainly not placed at the same level as comics or things like that. The fifth *Archigram* was a more widespread document, in that the group had by this time begun to seek out allies in other countries whose work was very often close in spirit and (sometimes) form. The sixth issue took a look back at the neglected 1940s which really contained the breakthrough in prefabrication in England, and at the same time had a 'current scene' section introducing some of the first batch of students taught by Archigram people.

The next stage for the magazine is going to be more complex. The group's ways of demonstrating its ideas are spreading. *Archigram 7* (in the pipeline at the time of writing) is another 'manifesto' issue: in that the time has come to restate some fundamentals of the Archigram point of view that is now, with increased exposure, constantly being misinterpreted. The second stage has arrived. The detail of the technology and methods can now be stated. There is a growing number of younger architects who accept many of the points made in the early stages about expendability, the need to think of architecture not as a tight discipline, the need to regard the city, or whatever replaces it, not necessarily a series of 'buildings' as such, but as an infinitely intermeshed series of happenings, and the

need to look at housing more as an extension of human emancipation and sustenance, rather than the provision of 'houses'.

Archigram 7 is going to be a tough hard, document. But the Archigram Group is too optimistic not to include the latest proposals and some of the work of the 'second' generation that is providing a wider front of investigation into the detail problems involved.

ARCHITECTURE AND THE CHANGING SCENE 1961-66

The first Archigram was an outburst against the crap going up in London, against the attitude of a continuing European tradition of well-mannered but gutless architecture that had absorbed the label 'Modern', but had betrayed most of the philosophies of the earliest 'Modern'. No one wanted to know. The middle period was a 'carry-on-laddie' stage, with Living City as a nutty object to amuse the West End art world. Its message was only heard by a few.

By bashing away at the architectural public in Archigram, but always being as concerned with the object as the idea, we became known by about 1964 as 'that lot'. Many young architects in London don't agree with us. They are often embarrassed by the fruitiness of the objects as much as by the undermining of the continuing story of architects' architecture which is implied. The fruit is really as much a basic necessity to the central idea as a list of priorities. It is easy enough to keep values abstract, to strategise without the battle being fought. Draw the object and you can discuss it: you can then change and develop it. Make it better.

We are often asked about the Pop imagery. We are not really concerned about its connection or lack of connection with the movement in painting, graphics. There must be a connection at a dynamic or historical level between us and the others.

The pre-packaged frozen lunch is more important than Palladio. For one thing it is more basic. It is an expression of human requirement and the symbol of one efficient interpretation of that requirement that optimises the available technology and economy.

Similarly, the dwelling capsule reproduces the question and — technological — answer to a similar degree. The scale and complexity are larger, but the philosophical statement is the same. Does the pre-pack become a preferred object? If it does, this might become merely a regeneration of the tradition of art symbolism in architecture. The Ionic column was a preferred object in its time. Tinfoil could become a preferred symbol now. In our most recent work we have become very aware of the need to jettison some of the parts (image-wise) as soon as they are no longer valid. Only then are we really interpreting the values as well as the symbols of an expendable architecture.

There is now much more talk about 'plug-in' as an idea. Quite mainstream architects can be heard advocating changeable dwellings. We are now able to use television and other people's four-colour photogravure to describe what we are about. Some of our students (and we ourselves, I hope) are going to have to build throwaway capsules. But because we can be quoted or copied we don't want to become the playthings of a poor but sophisticated

culture. We are not politically over-developed as a group, but there is a kind of central emancipatory drive behind most of our schemes. Man is on the precipice of really realising his potential or passing out of existence completely. Especially in England at the moment, we are very aware of the need to live on our wits: man must invent himself out of the terrifying options of his situation and invent himself into a way of life that gives him real consumer choice. We are very interested in seeing our projects as consumer objects. The capsule house is very much a shop-bought object, its parts to be traded in and changed, to be juxtaposed almost infinitely. The nature of the 'place' will be transient in the definition of its parts, but the real personality of the owner will be able to come through much more easily. For 'house', read 'man'.

We sometimes use the techniques of the newspaper, the political rally or the academic. Archigram t-shirts sell very well. We are intensely involved in producing a curriculum in the AA's fifth year that reflects this broader humano-architecture and at the same time gets more work out of sophisticated but indolent students. One thrives on the discipline upon oneself to teach to the best of one's ability a student who is not interested in plug-in but wants to make nice brick houses in the European tradition. One does not attempt to convert him. The architectural tradition is a useful conversation; formal values of a kind that we ourselves do not rate are still discussible.

'IT'S ALL HAPPENING'

Perhaps a slightly passé phrase, but it is still all happening. Architecture is fun, and one isn't being superficial. Just take a few of the things we are involved in at the moment: the harnessing of the electric city as a controllable, clean, interchangeable, handy unit. The old battle between man, the road and the car may not ever be won; simply by-passed.

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Perspecta page 135

The electric car 6ft. x 4ft. 4in. can become not only a service to the front door — even if 30 storeys up — it can become a unit of the house itself. The chair can take off from the rugside and whistle down the path to the country or the drive-in downtown (or whatever takes its place). A home is not a house (Reyner Banham, 'Art in America' and he's dead right). Neither is a room a room, or a wall a wall, if we don't want it to be. The 'cage' dwelling is a recent series of schemes that plug and clip into the plug-in city, or anywhere for that matter; it has only a minimal structure from which can be hung trays, sub-capsules (the pre-pack lunch as opposed to the icebox choice-mixture), cars or hoverchairs. It is a series of 'zones' rather than parts. It suggests certain situation coordinates rather than lines where hard objects have to remain. These coordinates suggest a series of options: hence the need to design series of tracks for screens, points in the floor from which we can get air to inflate

the floor or screen sides. Furniture will disappear, like architecture. It is a categorisation that has become a preventative limit on our thinking, and has prevented people from really being given what they wanted or needed in the interests of some abstract tidiness.

The building can now really become an animal, with inflatables and hydraulics and the cheap, localised electric motor. It can grow: not only larger, but now smaller, different, better. The city is not only a series of incidents but a network of incidence. Christopher Alexander's 'City is not a Tree', in his cool mathematician's logical way, said what we had all been trying to think. Is it a coincidence that Plug-in City, Friedman's scheme and the Japanese helicoidal scheme were all concerned with the potential of the multilayer cage and the diagonal to respond to situations rather than to incarcerate events in flat, defined, boxes?

And now McLuhan . . . cries of 'It's what we've been saying' from the Archigram Group . . . No, Professor, we didn't say it first or anything, but it's more than coincidental. We are subject to the same pressures as the rest, after all.

IT'S ALL HAPPENING

Architecture as a Consumer Product by Warren Chalk

This is probably a good opportunity to clear up some of the misconceptions that have arisen from time to time as to the nature of our work, exactly what we are trying to say and what we are attempting to achieve. These misconceptions have arisen no doubt due to a certain inability to communicate with people outside the group. At the same time, as I pointed out once in a piece in the Living City write-up, "we have no strong desire to communicate with everybody, only with those people whose thoughts and feelings are in some measure related to our own."

One of the most flagrant misconceptions levelled at us, is the notion that we are not ultimately concerned with people. This probably arises directly from the type of imagery we use, that possibly a section through, say, something like City Interchange appears to predict some automated wasteland inhabited only by computers and robots. How much this is justified is difficult to assess, but if our work is studied closely there will be found traces of a very real concern for people and the way in which they might be liberated from the present restrictions imposed on them by the existing chaotic situation, both in the home, at work, and in the total built environment.

I have in mind something I wrote in Archigram 2 which I believe points out my own personal attitude and which I am certain carries through into the attitudes of the other members of the group, I said then. "Our first concern is for the people, the users of our buildings, building is a serious business: we are creating a situation for people, an ever present environment, to live, sleep, work, play, and move about in, and our concern for them should be real. Slogans are not enough, we need humility, a deep sense of responsibility, a capacity for studying

and understanding human needs, association and behaviour and above all an ability to interpret our findings into building."

Again I think the whole of the Living City Exhibition was directed towards a concern for the individual, the group, and for total community. Those of you who are conversant with this exhibition may recall the artificial environment we threw up, and the "Glocops," the various sections it was split up in, demonstrate the concern we have with people as the fundamental reason for acting at all. The sections were concerned with "Man," "Man's Survival," "Crowd," "Communication:" "Movement," "Place," and "Situation," Selecting one of these, I wrote, regarding "Situation" Gloop, "Situation is concerned with environmental changes and activity within the city context, giving characteristics to defined areas.

Important in this is the precept of situation as an ideas generator in creating a truly living city. Cities should generate, reflect and activate life, their structure organised to precipitate life and movement. Situation, the happenings within spaces in the city, the transient throw-away world of people, the passing presence of cars, etc ., are as important as, possibly more important than, the built environment, the built demarcation of space. Situation can be caused by a single individual, by groups or a crowd, their particular purpose, occupation, movement and direction."

This is in fact a follow-on from our thinking related to the South Bank Scheme where the original basic concept was to produce an anonymous pile, subservient to a series of pedestrian walkways, a sort of Mappin Terrace for people instead of goats.

So once again the pedestrian, the gregarious nature of people and their movement, was uppermost in mind, and the built demarcation of space used to channel and direct pedestrian patterns of movement.

In an attempt to get closer to the general public, to study their attitudes and behaviour, we have extended ourselves beyond the narrow boundaries of conventional architectural thought, causing the misconceptions about what we are trying to do. Take the space comic imagery that appeared in Archigram 4. We extended the conventional barriers to find people without any formal architectural training producing concepts showing a marked intuitive grasp of current attitudes related to city images and the rest. In the world of science fiction we dig out prophetic information regarding geodesic nets, pneumatic tubes and plastic domes and bubbles.

If we turn to the back pages of the popular press we find ads for do-it-yourself living room extensions, or instant garage kits. Let's face it, we can no longer turn away from the hard fact that everyone in the community has latent creative instincts and that our role will eventually be to direct these into some tangible and acceptable form. The present gulf between people, between the community and the designer may well be eventually bridged by the do-it-yourself interchangeable kit of parts.

In a technological society more people will play an active part in determining their own individual environment. There will be more and more contributors involved in self-determining a way of life. We can not expect to take this fundamental right out of their hands and go on treating them as cultural and creative morons, We must tackle it from the other

end in a positive way. The inherent qualities of mass production for a consumer-orientated society are those of repetition and standardization, but parts can be changeable or interchangeable dependant on individual needs and preferences and, given a world market, economically feasible.

In the States one can select a car, consisting of a whole series of interchangeable options, as Reyner Banham has pointed out in his article on "Clip-on Architecture," Chevrolet produces a choice of seventeen bodies and five different engines.

The current success of pop-music is to an extent due to the importance of audience participation: the "Frog" and the "Jerk" are self-expressive and free-forming. The pop groups themselves are closer in dress and habits, including musical dexterity, to the audience. Despite pop-music becoming a vast industry its success depends on its ability to keep up with the pace of its consumer taste.

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Perspecta page 137

This brings us to the research done as part of the Plug-in City programme on capsule housing. The fundamental idea, here, is again related by a freely developing system towards personal choice and selection by the consumer, an attitude more closely related to product design than to architecture. The dwelling is treated as an industrial designer's object, each capsule custom selected and built with components, appliances, finishes, sizes, colours etc., selected from a catalogue of parts, in the same way one selects a car or a refrigerator. Of course the idea of mass-produced expendable component dwellings is not new. We are all familiar with Corb's efforts in collaboration with Prouvé, and with Prouvé's own bits and pieces, with Fuller's Dymaxion house, the Phelps Dodge Dymaxion bathroom and the Dymaxion deployment unit, Alison and Peter Smithson's House of the Future at the Ideal Home Exhibition of 1955, Ionel Shine's prefabricated hotel units and the Monsanto Plastic House in Disneyland. There has also been work done by the Metabolist Group in Japan and of course our own Arthur Quarmby. If you look at the latest issue of Archigram you will also find work carried out on prefabricated houses at the close of World War II in my article on the Forties.

My Plug-in Capsule Home is an attempt to sustain the idea in the hope that some brave soul might eventually be persuaded to finance research and development.

The techniques of mass production and automation are a reality: yet we see the research that goes into, and the products that come out of. today's building industry in the field of industrialised building, measuring to the same standard and aping the same appearance as traditionally constructed and designed building, and are dismayed.

The Plug-in Capsule attempts to set new standards and find an appropriate image for an assembly-line-produced product.

The design criteria are in correct order to consumer requirements.

Firstly, a better consumer product should offer something better than, and different from, traditional housing, more closely related to the design of cars and refrigerators, than place itself in direct competition with tradition.

Secondly, units should be capable of quantity production and of absorbing and adapting to the dictates of production and the nature of the material used, in this case plastics. Eventually this hit-and-miss element in our designing will disappear, replaced by a problem-solving method directly related to the plastics industry.

Another important aspect is that of handleability both of component parts and of the total product, for assembling components together in the factory, for transporting the total product to the site and for hoisting and placing into position in the cradle structure.

A further consideration was for planned obsolescence in terms of total life, materials selected and cost, and here I interpret cost as meaning value for money. Planned obsolescence relates to life expectancy and a hierarchy of expendability of the various components of the dwelling, clip-on wall units, removable floor trays, domestic appliances and bathroom and kitchen capsules. This means also expendability related to growth and change in the family unit, change in relation to increased technical know-how and its effect on appliances and materials and, more important, size (witness the growing miniaturisation of everything, pocket transistors, portable TV sets, Mini cars, etc.). Finally obsolescence takes into account change in affluence, living standards and with it an increased expendability rate in terms of fashion.

Finally I would like to assure everyone that we are not monsters. We are not trying to make houses look like cars, cities like oil refineries, and, even if we seem to be, this is certainly not the intention.

Although this analogous imagery is very strong at this moment in time, it will, we contend, eventually be digested into a creative system, so that eventually a positive approach will emerge naturally.

The pop imagery, the hardware of other disciplines so vital to us, must contain vital information that is of use to us in determining the way we employ our creative talents. We are conscious that any analogy between, say, the motor car industry and the building industry is suspect, and a dangerous one, yet it has become necessary to extend ourselves into such disciplines in order to discover an appropriate language pertinent to the present-day situation.

To quote myself again, and for the last time, in writing in the Living City document I said, "In this, the second half of the twentieth century, the old idols are crumbling, the old precepts strangely irrelevant, the old dogmas no longer valid. We are in pursuit of an idea, a new vernacular, something to stand alongside the space capsules, computers, and throw-away packages of an atomic-electronic age."