

5 Fun and Flexibility

Tradition has it that the word 'fun' entered the British megastructure argument as early as September 1962, though not on British soil. As far as can be ascertained, the phrase 'Fun Palace' was coined, and applied to the project Cedric Price was designing for Joan Littlewood, on the sidewalk in 42nd Street during a visit they paid to New York in that year. Once applied, however, the word stuck, and the fun content of British megastructure ideas was one of the factors that guaranteed their worldwide penetration and distribution in the middle sixties, with or without the assistance of the Beatles, Mary Quant, the legend of Swinging London and all the rest of it. But there is another and probably more important reason for this impact: detailing.

Looking back over the first half of the sixties and the characteristic megastructures of the period, it is noticeable – alarming even – how few of them actually offer any nut-and-bolt proposals as to how the transient elements should be secured to the megaform, or what precise devices and services are required for the playful activities of *Homo ludens*. The general level of technical information and precision in the first half of the decade can be typified by Kikutake's proposal about what should happen in 'Marine City' after the main cylinders had been built:

When the cylinder was completed, the factory would then convert itself to the production of prefabricated housing units, which would be lifted by a crane and literally plugged in to the surface of the cylinder.³⁹

Even allowing for the accidents of translation, 'literally plugged in to the surface', in the absence of anything even faintly resembling working drawings, is very low indeed on practical information. All too frequently the Metabolists, Urban Spatialists and Italian megastructuralists seemed deliberately to avoid taking responsibility for any of those minutiae which, in the eyes of the 'Old Masters' of Modern architecture like Mies van der Rohe and Auguste Perret, were the very probity of architecture: 'God is in the Details'!

The reasons why the British alone seemed prone to finnick over detailing are diverse and often personal, but do seem somewhat connected to a national tendency to take refuge from ideology in pragmatics. Even so, it must be recognized that the Fun Palace, for instance, had to be taken to the point of detailed structural calculations and the satisfaction of fire regulations, while Archigram, by contrast, seemed to be motivated by sheer manic pleasure in proliferating drawings (84). In either case, the absence of any explicit ideology was found disturbing, or at least baffling, outside Britain; on the other hand, the presence of detailing was almost universally welcomed, especially in the stunning graphic forms in which Archigram could present it.

Of course, neither Price nor the diverse talents of the Archigram group had sprung rootless from an architectural vacuum. The earliest project for anything



resembling a megastructure that I remember seeing was a student group project produced at the Architectural Association as early as 1952; for some fifteen years after that, comparable schemes were among every summer's final thesis projects, getting more and more like megastructures and more and more elaborately well drawn with each successive year. At the same time, there was a developing body of speculation about the philosophy of endlessness in architecture which was to arrive, nowhere quite independently of the megastructure tendency, at the hospital projects of John Weeks, London-based architect and theorist of an 'indeterminate architecture' of extensibility and adaptability. Throughout the period, too, there were rumours and possibilities of commissions for large and conspicuous projects; some were to result in material landmarks like Cumbernauld Town Centre or the Tricorn shopping centre in Portsmouth, while others were to hang fire seemingly for ever as large and beautifully detailed models, as in the case of Colin St John Wilson's Liverpool civic complex.

Even without this rich and sustaining background, however, it is possible that the Fun Palace might still have turned out much as it did, from the very nature of the original concept. What Joan Littlewood sought from her architect Cedric Price, engineer Frank Newby and systems consultant Gordon Pask was less a building than a 'facility', a 'service', a 'space-mobile', a 'giant toy'. None of this was surprising, since much of Littlewood's theatrical experience was concerned with improvisatory performance, public participation and the like, in a manner which, though it had nineteenth-century roots in traditional popular theatre, also had affinities, easier to see now than they were then, with the ludic situations of Constant and the Situationists as set out in the last chapter. Such affinities could be obscured by Joan Littlewood's tendency to cosily British and traditional phraseology:

... a place intended to be open twenty-four hours a day for every kind of recreation and enjoyment, a permissive place which could be used by some as 'a university of the street', by others as 'a latterday Vauxhall Gardens where one might meet one's Nell Gwynne'.⁴⁰

84 *Walking City* project (Ron Herron and Brian Harvey of Archigram, 1963). Most celebrated of early Archigram projects, largely because of the alarm caused among the older planning Establishment by the thought of 'elements of the capital city' being put on legs and set to roam the world. Their location here in the East River, with the towers of Manhattan in the background, suggests a deliberate challenge to older visions of the future – but it was always dangerous to take Archigram too seriously, or at apparent face value.

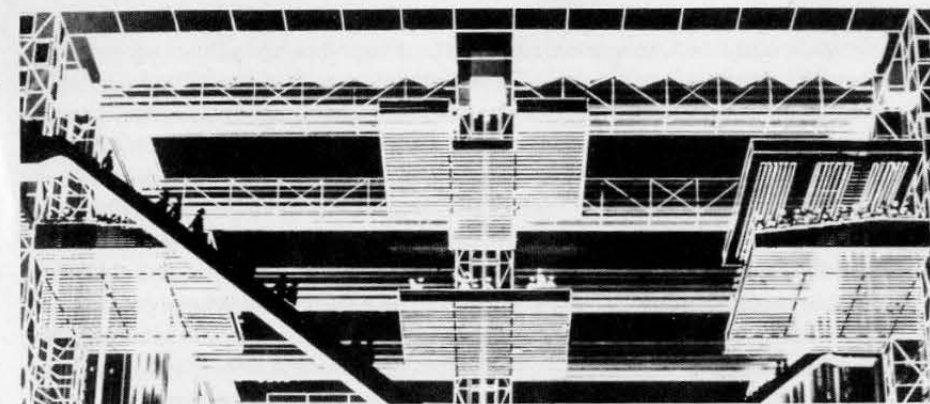
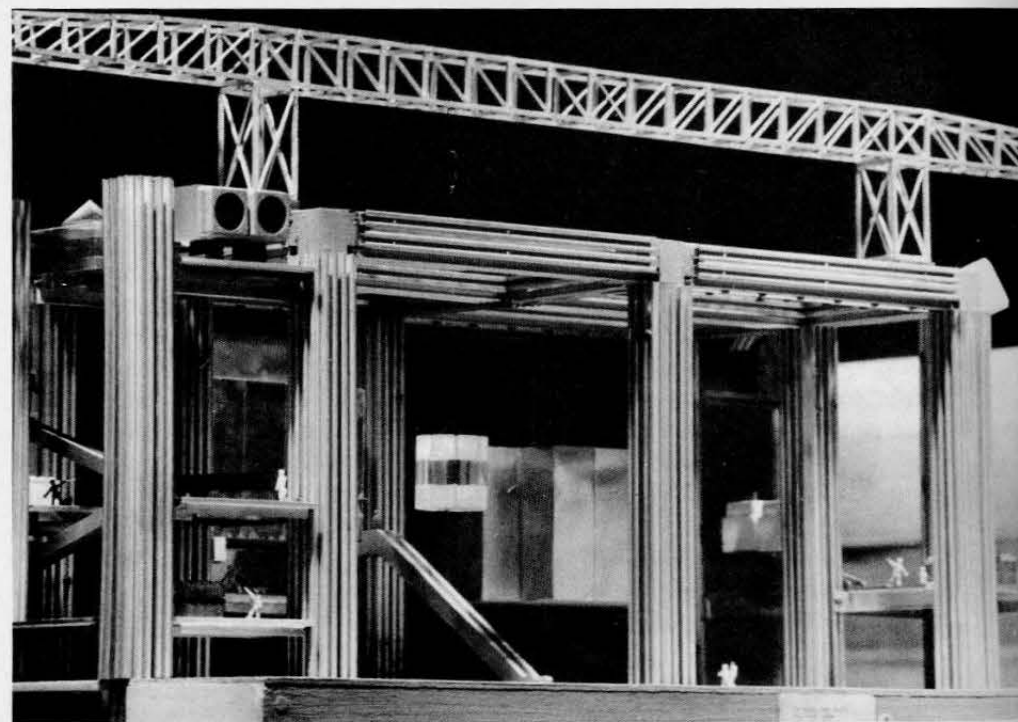
But Price could write the prose of the day, and in his version it sounds nearer to the twentieth century as inhabited by the megastructure generation:

This complex, which enables self-participatory education and entertainment can only work – and then only for a finite time – if it is not only accessible to those living and working in the immediate neighbourhood but also, through its varied communication links, accessible as a regional and national amenity.

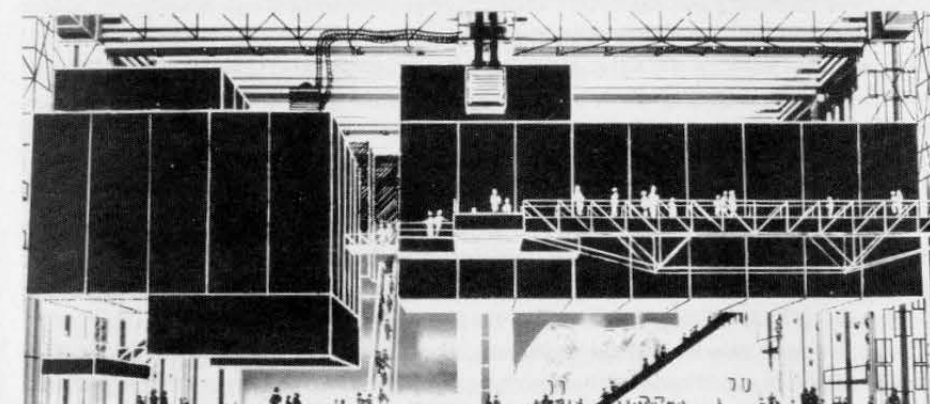
The siting exploits existing communication networks and gives a clue to the potential enrichment of life through increasing mobility at present un-realised in large urban communities. The sense of confinement on the site is reduced by the deliberate extension of the visible limits. The activities designed for the site should be experimental, the place itself expendable and changeable. The organisation of space and the objects occupying it should, on the one hand, challenge the participants' mental and physical dexterity and, on the other, allow for a flow of space and time, in which passive and active pleasure is provoked.⁴¹

The physical realization of this 'educative' environment offered by Price for the particular site under consideration, in the Lea valley north-east of London, involved an open frame of very large dimensions (85), on the scale of a shipyard and not unlike a shipyard to look at: five rows of fifteen latticed steel towers each, connected at their heads by trackways to carry travelling gantry cranes capable of transporting gear and equipment to and from all parts of the site. The whole was to cover a rectangle of some 855 × 375 feet – about twice the size of Place Bonaventure in Montreal. Permanent piped and conduited services were to be supplied vertically through the supporting towers, but all horizontal elements – services, roofs, floors – all walling elements, environmental equipment, escalators etc. were to be impermanent, movable and interchangeable (86–8).

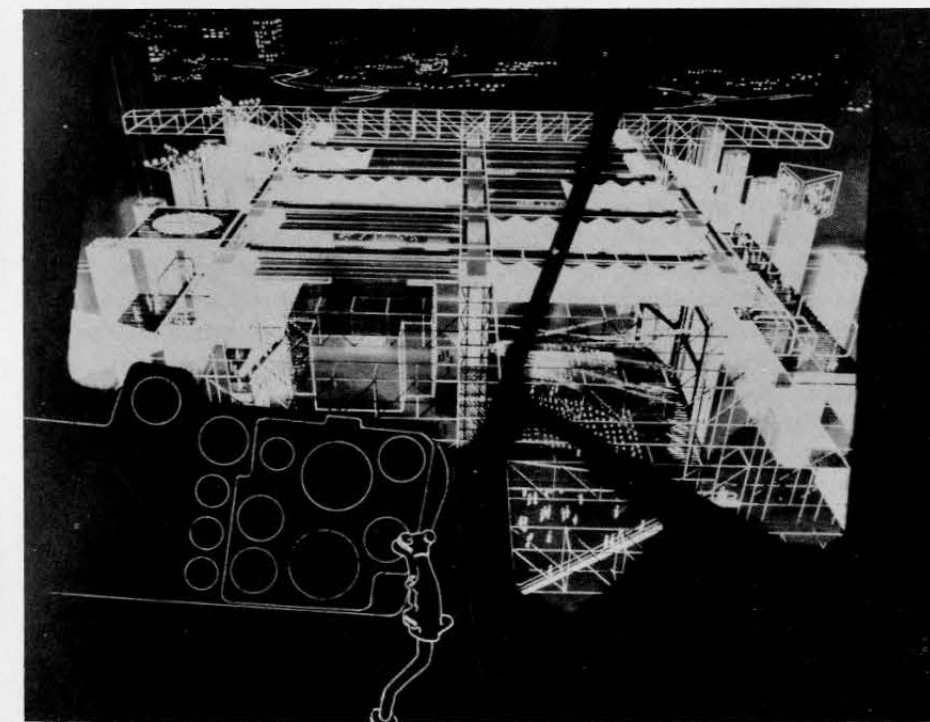
85 Fun Palace project; model (Cedric Price, Frank Newby, Gordon Pask, 1962). One end of a two-bay feasibility model is seen here, with the travelling gantry crane spanning over the system of service towers and horizontal trusses that were to form the carrying frame within which the adaptable accommodations could be hung. Note the absence of fixed floor levels, a 'freedom' which no other megastructuralists permitted themselves.



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86, 87, 88 Fun Palace in various arrangements: (86) open platforms and ramped seating as for a major spectacle; (87) enclosed volumes for activities requiring controlled environments; (88) mandatory 'period' view from approaching helicopter – like most ludique projects of the time, the Fun Palace predicated a far higher degree of mechanical 'mobility-on-demand' than any conventional planner dared contemplate.

The range of variability envisaged by the Fun Palace team went spectacularly beyond what had been proposed by Constant for *Neo-Babylone*, where there were at least fixed floors, even if everything else was provisional. The Fun Palace was seen as an adaptable volume, to be floored, roofed, walled and serviced at will with the minimum of restraints in any of its three dimensions. Whether any strolling *Homo ludens* could have rearranged any but the smallest of Price's proposed units at individual, unaided whim seems extremely doubtful. The rapid creation of a six-hundred-seat auditorium, say, with entrances at the 37' 6" datum, reached by escalators from street level, clearly implies the collaboration of a sizeable force of technical assistants. For this reason, the whole proposition would probably have been unacceptable to Constant, and anathema to the hard-line Situationists – but not unacceptable to someone raised in the tradition of theatre, nor to English progressive professionals of the Left; neither group would see anything wrong with a little professional backstage assistance to the people's participatory pleasures out front.

As in Buckminster Fuller's almost contemporary and also unbuilt 'World Game', public participation would have consisted largely of manipulating the controls of sophisticated technical installations managed by expert staff, massively computerized and connected to national electronic linkages. Hostile critics might dismiss it as 'no more than a glorified slot-machine arcade', but the Fun Palace team, pragmatists to a man, were not minded to wait for the Revolution to make a perfect *palais ludique* possible; they would have a practicable Fun Palace here and now, as a way of raising public consciousness to the level where a Revolution might be found to have happened.

Such reservations accepted, however, there remains one aspect of the Fun Palace which is more radical than is the case in any other proposed megastructure of that vintage: the time-scale of its 'metabolism'. Whereas the Japanese, for example, do not seem to have imagined the transient accommodations lasting for much less than the duration of a fashion in entertainment or the span of a human generation, those in the Fun Palace were envisaged as being assembled and broken up more than once in a day, if necessary. And whereas the supporting megaforms of the Metabolists appear to be intended to endure perhaps for centuries, the life of the basic frame of the Fun Palace was estimated as ten years by Price, only nine by Littlewood!

Such a high rate of changeability was seen as implying a high rate of recoverability. The transient accommodations were to be built from a limited repertoire of recoverable elements, which would be stored when not in use in areas of the structure which were equally and coincidentally not in use (a neat, self-trimming equation: the fewer functional volumes assembled, the more space left over for storing the elements). All this, as has been said, was worked out in great and quantified detail, though only rather generalized drawings were ever published. The complexities of the kit of parts and their supporting systems were formidable, but the design had been pushed to the point of satisfying, for instance, the remarkably tough and outmoded London fire regulations before the project was allowed to drop for lack of ready finance.

Throughout the period 1962–7, however, it represented a challenge and a design-education, a radical exemplar and an unfailing focus of interest for the immediately succeeding generation, including the Archigram group, their friends and connections, and the students only slightly younger than themselves whom they taught in various architecture schools in the London area. For this

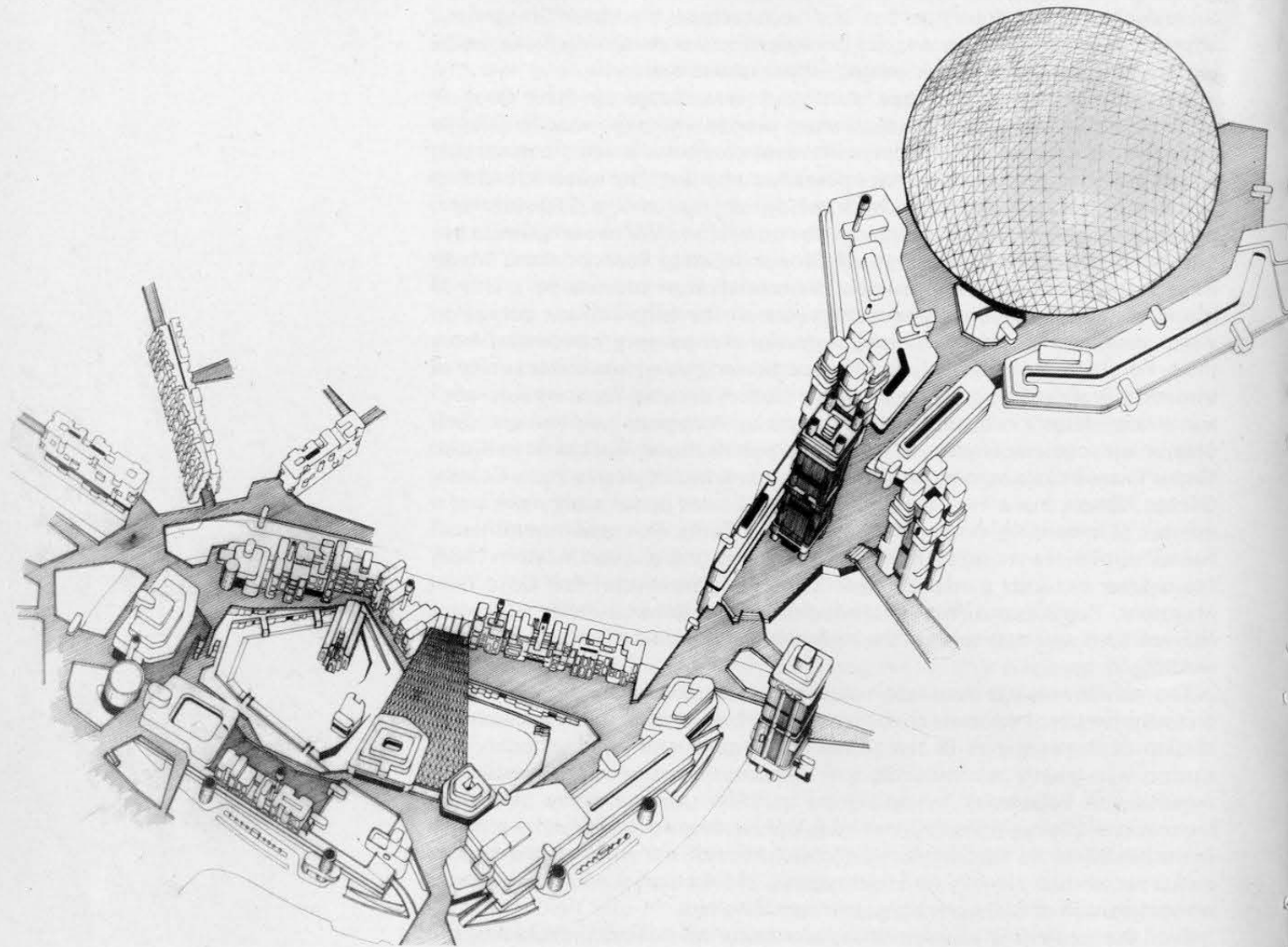
generation Price served locally as an 'instant guru', and was often given a page to himself in *Archigram* itself – the architectural broadsheet/magazine/information-package which was, for the second half of the sixties, the essential organ of the worldwide 'junior' megastructure movement.

Though international in scope, *Archigram* was started by Peter Cook in London in 1961 as an information-sheet whose intention was, largely, to salvage from oblivion certain admired student projects and failed competition entries which would otherwise have passed unrecorded. The reasons for doing so were only partly concerned with taking revenge on the Establishment, though *Archigram* I was ornamented with phrases like: 'We have chosen to bypass the decaying Bauhaus image, which is an insult to Functionalism.' Much more important to the group was the dissemination of information, a way of telling students and young architects about all the extraordinary goings-on which their teachers and the official professional press were 'concealing' from them. For this reason, the early issues in particular give an invaluable survey of the interests of radical young megastructuralists of the time. Thus, while issues I and II were largely concerned with projects by *Archigram's* editors and their friends and contemporaries, issue III onwards featured Buckminster Fuller, Cedric Price, mobile homes, Arthur Quarmby's plastic structures, Ionel Schein, George Nelson, Yona Friedman, under-sea and outer-space equipment and a number of historically disreputable characters: Berlin Expressionists, Russian Fantasists of the twenties, the Futurists. By the time of *Archigram* V, late in 1964, the register included a whole range of megastructuralists – Frei Otto, Paul Maymont, Paolo Soleri, Isozaki, Leopold Gerstel, Schulze-Fielitz, Constant Nieuwenhuis – and even some of the student projects from the Rome round-table of 1961–2.

The intention, as has been said, was to circulate information, but the effect – given the temper of the times and the manner of presentation – was to create the illusion of the existence of some kind of 'Megastructure International'. The illusion was greatly reinforced by the clamorous success of the conference organized at Folkestone by Archigram in 1966 under the title of IDEA – International Dialogues on Experimental Architecture. As the title shows, it was not intended to be specifically megastructural, nor did many of the known megastructuralists actually turn up to speak, but Archigram and their projects were very much in the international eye from then on.

Even the group itself was something of a 'historical illusion' produced by the magazine, at least in its early years. The full membership which produced the classic projects of 1963 onwards did not come together until 1963, when they were gathered together by Theo Crosby (not a member of the group, older than them and already well known) to produce projects for a major British building and developing company. It was under this aegis that the first megastructural designs were evolved: the Fulham Study and the Montreal 'Entertainments Tower'.

The Fulham Study (named after its location in London) is of lesser interest here, though its informal grouping of *Terrassenhäuser* blocks along a wandering pedestrian way (89) probably provided the unfortunate prototype for much sloppily planned pseudo-megastructure housing built in Britain after 1970. The Entertainments Tower (actually the work of Peter Cook alone) was a different matter, the first clear manifestation of Archigram's persuasive strain of megafantasy (90).

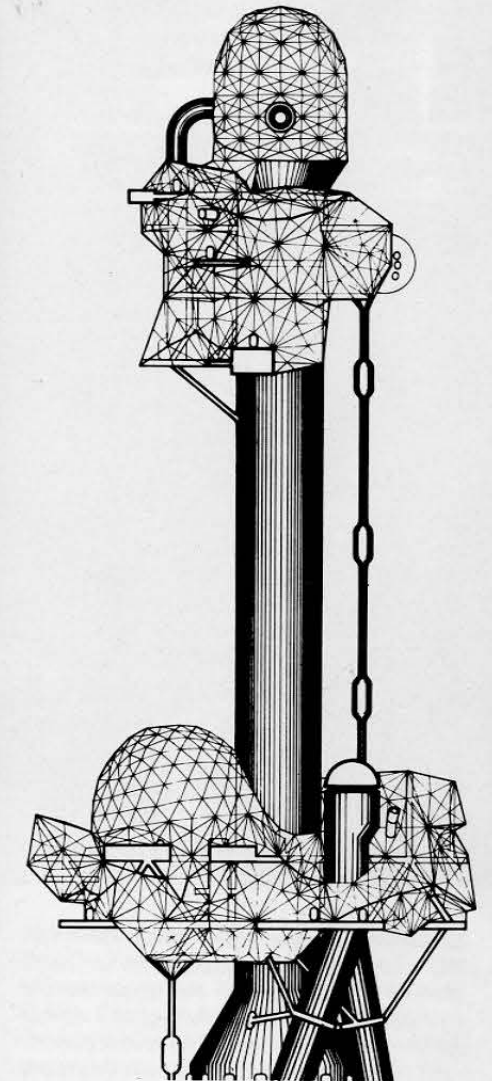


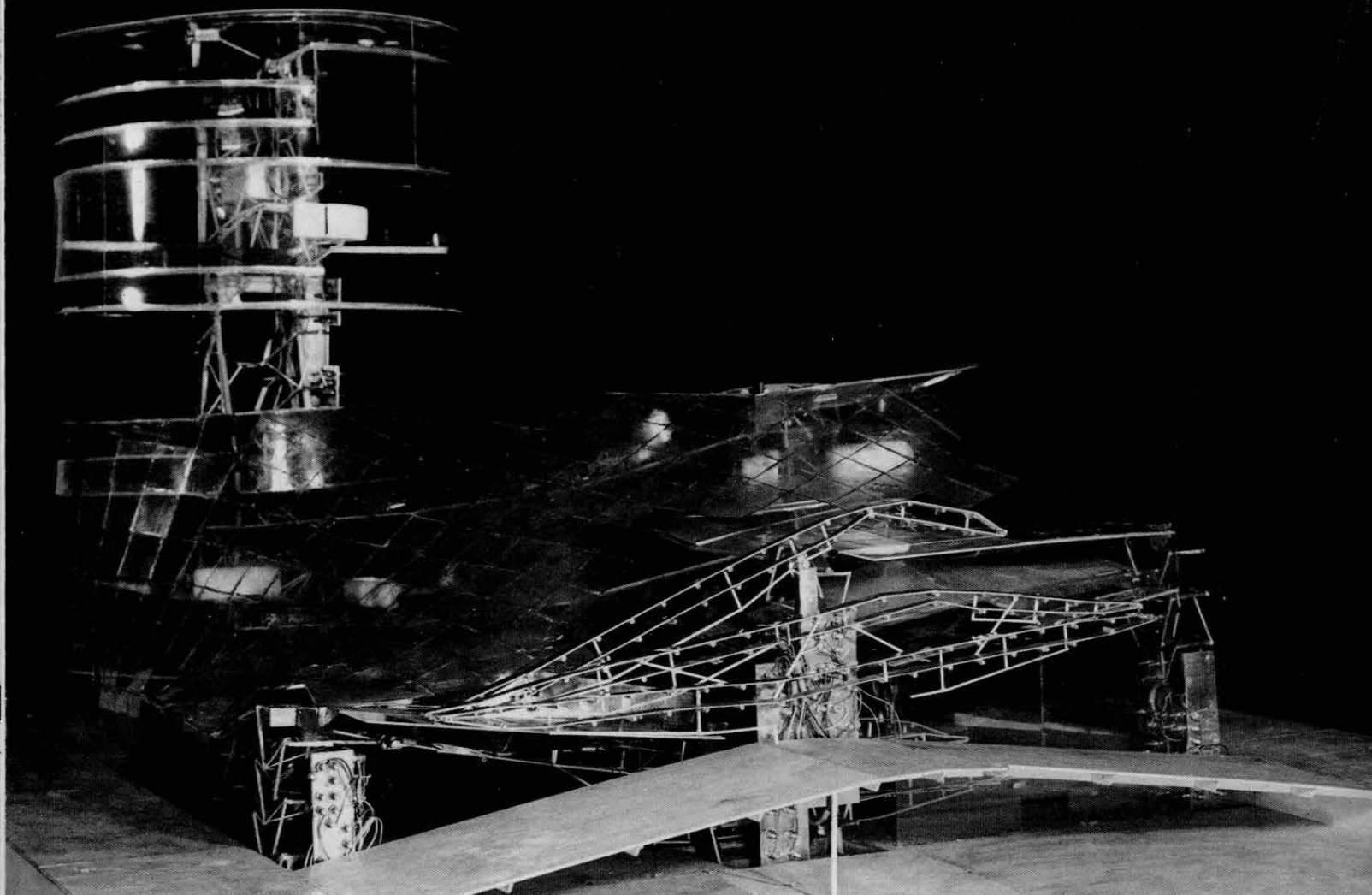
89 Central area, Fulham Study project (Archigram for Taylor Woodrow, 1963). Undertaken for a major builder-developer, this first extended design by Archigram as a group is still close conceptually to admired London student work of the period. The general response of British periodicals was to ignore the central area ('merely fantasmagoria') and concentrate on the spurs of housing which can be seen top left, the least adventurous part of the project and the unwitting ancestor, it seems, of much dull and unlovable pseudo-megastructure housing since.

Its basis was to be a standardized pre-cast tubular concrete television tower — a notable fantasy this, since, at just over six hundred feet high, it would be the largest factory-made component in the history of architecture. Further to this strain of manufacturer's fantasy, the giant cylinder was to be sealed at both ends to make it watertight, and then towed across the Atlantic to be erected as a central feature at Montreal Expo '67. These proposals are worth spelling out in detail, because they give some idea of the kind of 'hard-headed' business propositions on which the megastructuralists' fantasies were supported. In this case, of course, 'support' is to be taken literally; the tower was to carry a considerable weight of entirely buildable etceteras (91) wrapped round it by Peter Cook — 'diagrid' sub-structures, oblique elevator tubes, geodesic domes forming a complex of auditoria, aquaria, shops, offices and other facilities.



90, 91 Montreal Entertainments Tower project (Peter Cook for Taylor Woodrow, 1963). Elaborately modelled and obsessively drawn out in detail (91), this 600-foot fantasy was firmly grounded in a serious proposal to pre-fabricate the central core for use as a TV transmitter tower all over the world. To make the ludique version proposed for the Montreal Expo of 1967, Peter Cook has hung it with the most admired architectural goodies of the time, from lattice domes to diagonal elevator ducts.





92 *Sin Centre project* (Mike Webb, 1958–62). The pioneer English proposal for a palais ludique, anticipating both Neo-Babylone and the Fun Palace, enshrining Archigram's view of the 'living city' as a zone of pleasurable disorder – but concealing in its interstices some hard and original thinking about both structure and mechanical services.

Most of the formal and structural elements were obviously derived from elsewhere, but this would not worry Archigram, who always handled other people's coinages as if they were common currency. More relevant here are the larger concepts employed and their origins. Thus 'entertainment' is a natural enough concept in an exhibition building, but it was particularly apt in the Archigram context, having been preceded by Mike Webb's 'Sin Centre' (92), a much reworked student project of 1958–62 which may have formed part of the inspiration for the Fun Palace as well. But in 1963 Webb, Cook and the rest of the group were also working on the exhibition 'The Living City' which advanced, in the teeth of conventional planning wisdom, a view of cities which celebrated disorder, fun, chance, consumerism and entertainment. This particular understanding of the functions of cities was to inform all the significant projects by the group, was to drive them into megastructure and then to drive them out again.

Beside *entertainment*, another leading concept, though differently expressed, is *jointing*: the Montreal tower, the somewhat related 'Transportation Interchange' by Ron Herron and Warren Chalk (10), the 'Walking City' by Herron and Bryan Harvey (84), the 'Underwater City' by Chalk (94), all exhibit more or less extensively a related set of idioms of jointing and connecting obviously

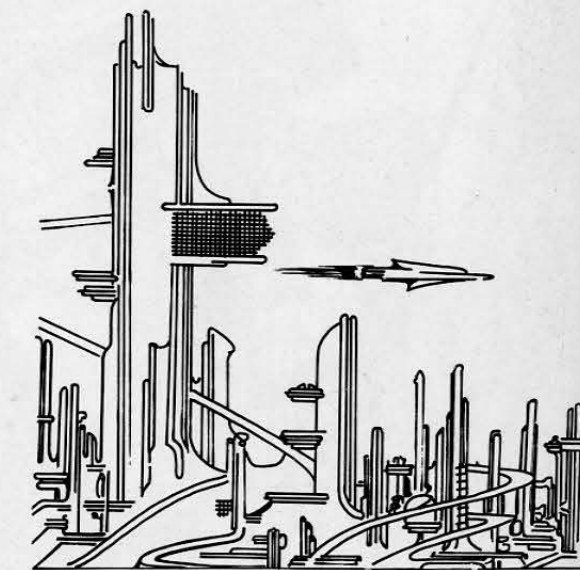
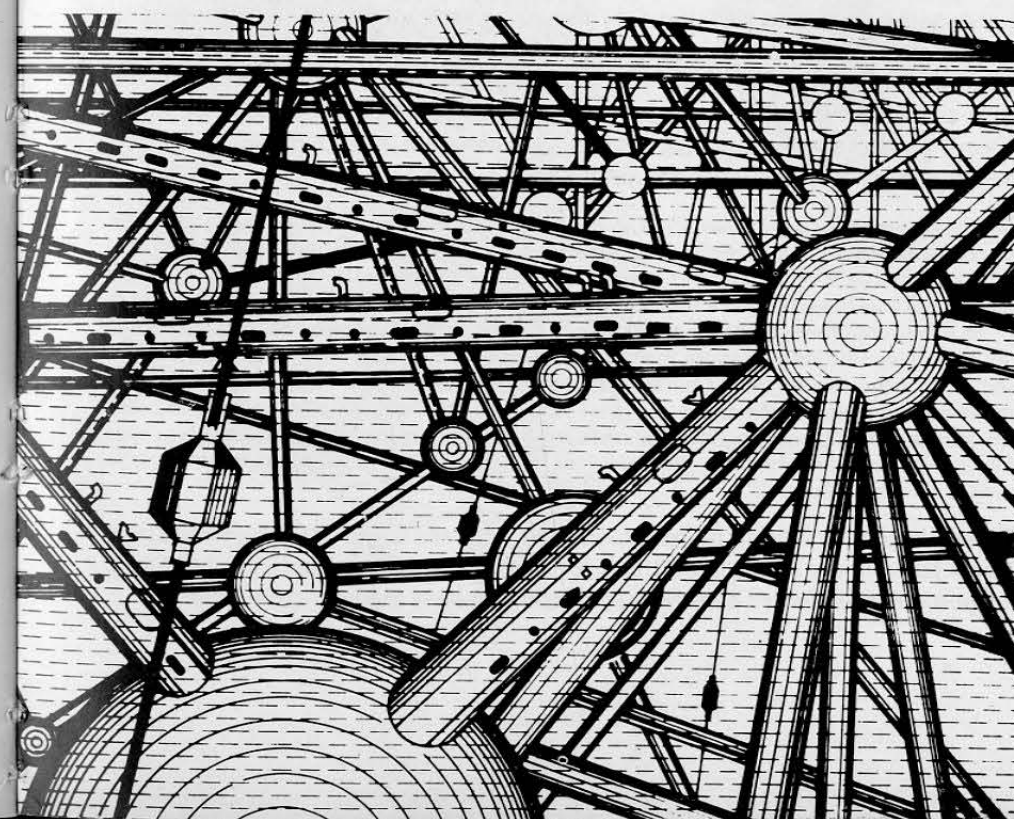
required by an architecture of tubes and capsules. Though this can hardly be called detailing as early as this (1964), it was already far more precisely worked out than anything that had appeared up to that date in the work of the Metabolists or the Urban Spatialists. The reason for this seems to be that Archigram were always at least as interested in the parts (and their sub-parts) as in the whole, and also passionately interested in draughtsmanship, which, for various reasons, they had plenty of time to drive to a high level of elaboration. Both sets of interests were to become even more evident in the project that made Archigram famous: Plug-In City.

The scheme in all its versions and ramifications was, again, entirely Peter Cook's. Its impact derived partly from the spectacular qualities of the project itself, partly from the package in which it was first delivered to the world: *Archigram IV* or, to give the full title on the cover, *Amazing Archigram 4 Zoom issue*. The theme of the whole issue was the relevance of fantasy, specifically science-fiction fantasy, to 'real architecture'; and the message was hammered home by page after collaged page of space-comic imagery (93), Fantasists of the twenties, underwater and deep-space technology (much of that, too, fictional), a sprinkling of contemporary projects including their own, and a central pop-up scene of fantastic towers related to the Montreal scheme.

The message was also punched home by the running text, which was sometimes set out as normal editorial material, sometimes contained in the think-balloons emerging from the heads of space-comic figures as they went, otherwise undisturbed, about their customary extra-galactic ways. Says one character who has just been given the gift of tongues by a 'menticizer':

The search for radical valid images goes on – leads in many directions. The SPACE COMIC universe great in its complexity is just one such direction, can inspire and encourage the emergence of more courageous concepts. . . .

This technique is somewhat related to that used a little earlier by the Situationists in their magazines, but they had preferred to leave the original



93, 94 Archigram as pure fantasy. Blasting off from the 'Futuristic' or even 'Modernistic' cities of science fiction – here (93) redrawn by Warren Chalk for Archigram IV – the group's draughtsmanly obsessions drove them wherever the foot of man had not yet properly trod, whether outer space or under sea: 94 is a Warren Chalk drawing of 1964 for a submarine city, the first of many such to be dreamed up on the fanatic fringes of megastructure-land.

dialogue in its pristine weirdness (always more striking in French translation) and to destroy bourgeois capitalism by way of the captions or the texts alongside. Archigram preferred to mix the two, and were fully aware of what was going into the mixture. An intercalated Marilyn Monroe figure announces:

A respectful salute in the general direction of Roy Lichtenstein and we're off – ZOOM ARCHIGRAM goes into orbit with the SPACE-COMIC/SCIENCE-FICTION BIT. Interesting is the fact that these goodies produced outside the conventional closed architect/aesthete situation show a marked intuitive grasp of principles underlying current in-thinking. Which is great. . . .

If this passage falls below the levels of ponderous literacy and pedantically accurate spelling frequently found in other megaprose, the use of imagery has a knowing exactitude which overleaps conventional architecture-magazine rhetoric of the period, by-passes the reader's normal verbal defence mechanisms, and thus produced a distinct shift in sensibility:

I can't think of any one identifiable event that broadened my own perceptions as drastically as the advent of Archigram. At least in the area of architecture and related matters. Until the day when the first Archigram manifesto appeared on my desk, I had been working and thinking pretty much in the standard establishment manner. . . . Then Archigram struck and the world hasn't been the same since. I took off for Cape Kennedy. . . .⁴²

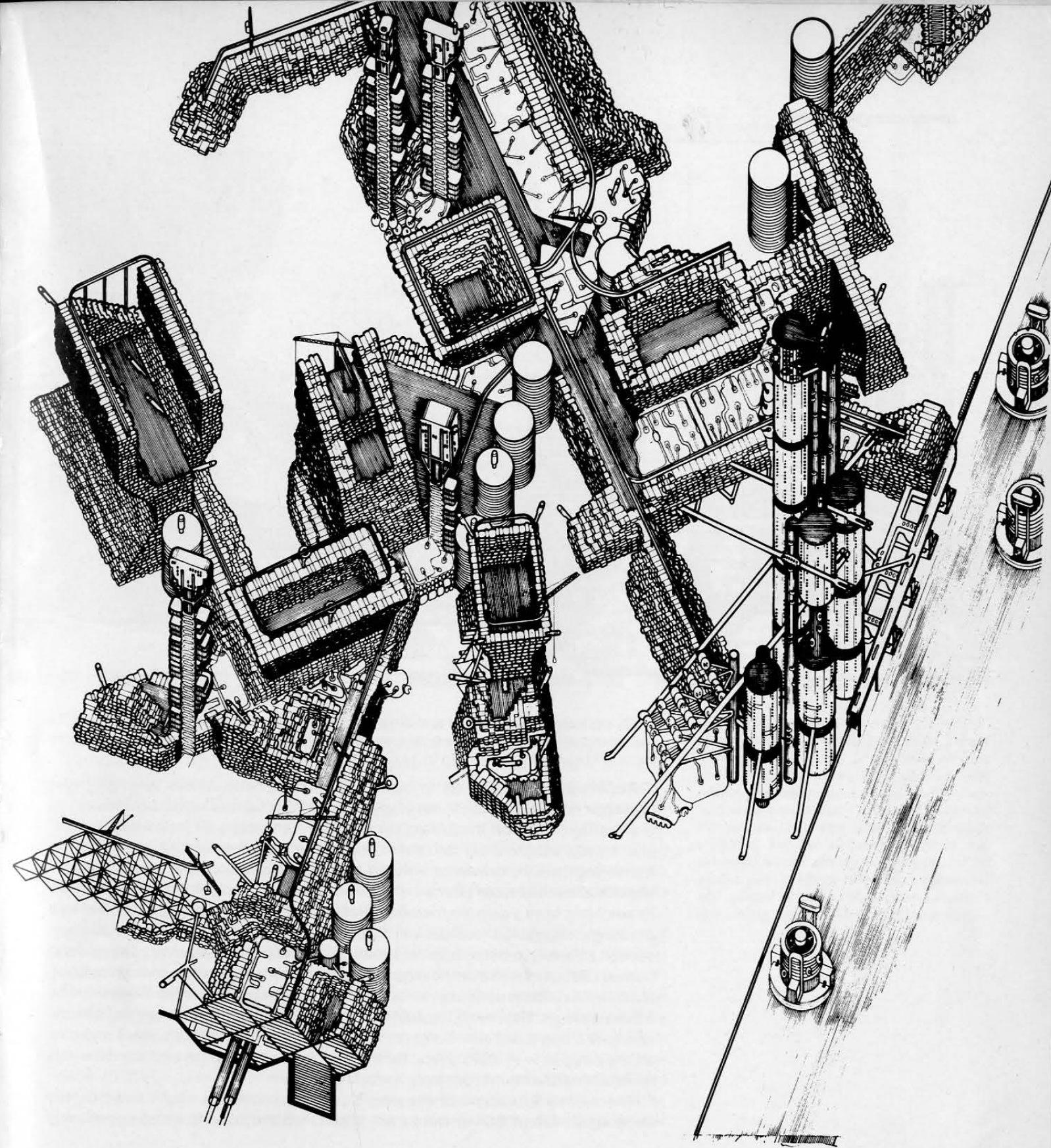
That, admittedly, was the editor of *Architectural Forum* paying formal compliments to Archigram, but having witnessed the expression on Peter Blake's face as he perused that first (*sic*: it was *Archigram IV*) manifesto which I had just placed on his desk, I can vouch for its impact. What is interesting, however, is that in spite of what Blake says about its perception-broadening effect, he began by trying to assimilate it to his 'standard establishment manner', making the comparisons between Urbino and Plug-In City which have already been discussed.

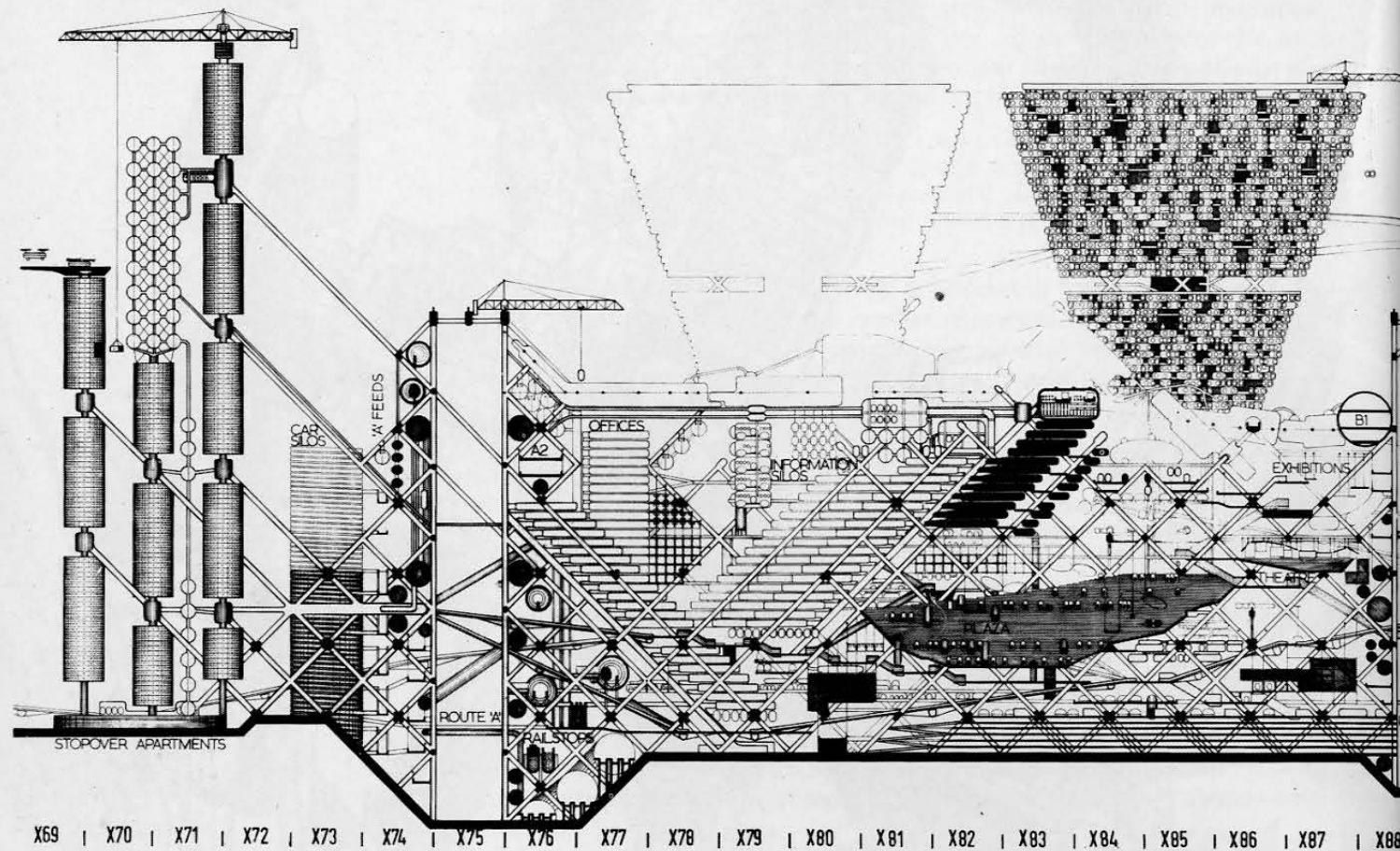
Other reprintings of the Plug-In City drawings were much less compromised; the impact comes through pretty nakedly, without any *post facto* apologia, and this, together with the Walking City drawings which so terrorized the ageing masters of CIAM, became the best-known of all the group's images. The grand axonometric (95) from *Archigram IV* and the systematic section showing all the kit of parts for Plug-In City together presented an unprecedentedly comprehensive view of a megacity taken down to a fairly fine level of detailing. Cook's own commentaries are worth quoting in part:

The axonometric is usually assumed to be the definitive image, for obviously classical reasons. It is 'Heroic', apparently an alternative to known city form, containing 'futurist' but recognisable hierarchies and elements. Craggy but directional. Mechanistic but scaleable. It was based on a drawn plan, which placed a structural grid on a square plan at 45° to a monorail route that was to connect existing cities. Alongside ran a giant route-way for hovercraft (the ultimate mobile buildings), the notion being that some major functions of the several linked parts could travel between them. The essential physical operations are stressed; the crane-ways and the bad-weather balloons; and the lift over-runs are deliberately exaggerated. But overriding all this was the deliberate *variety* of each major building outcrop; whatever else it was to be, it was not going to be a deadly piece of built mathematics. . . .

Of the systematic section he observed that, whereas some other drawings may appear to belie the implication that Plug-In City is open-ended in conception, this particular drawing's achievement is that it makes the implication clear:

95 Plug-In City project (Peter Cook of Archigram, 1963-4). The vision that made Archigram famous, and changed the direction of megastructure thinking, this enormous and much wrought axonometric drawing assembles the whole 'kit of parts' (a favourite Archigram phrase), from diagonal frames (bottom left) to the mobile office towers on the super-highway (right), and the obsessive 'capsule' housing unit which is plugged in to practically every structure in the drawing, and the cranes employed to move the capsules about.

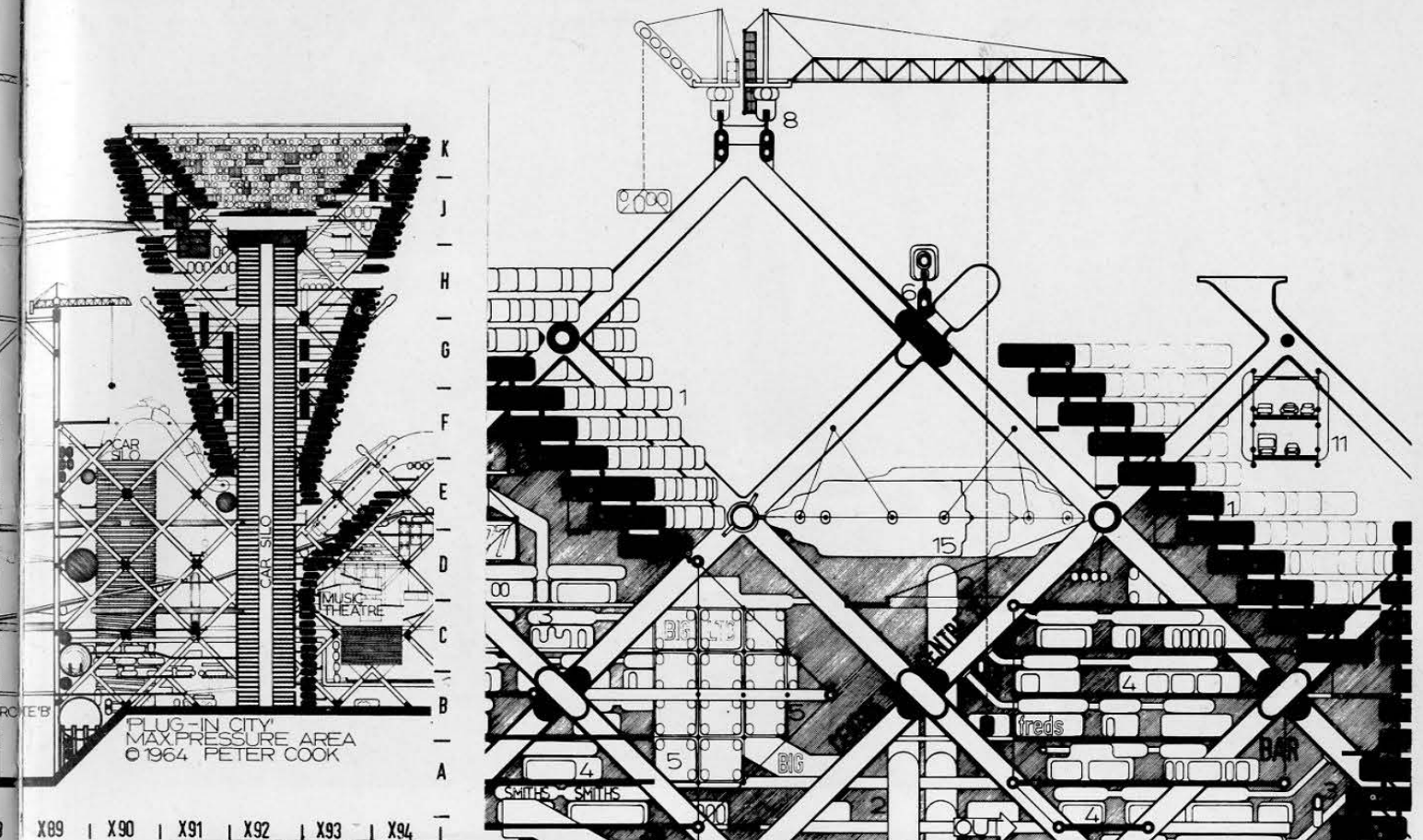




If any occurrence can overlay any other, and the boundaries of taste and use are to be eliminated by individual wishes, then any section must not only be capable of extreme limits of absorption, but should try to illustrate them.⁴³

Resisting the temptation to make a major linguistic detour through these passages (though phrases like 'craggy but directional' are worth pondering), it is important to fix on those two concepts of 'eliminated by individual wishes' and 'try to illustrate them', because they are the essentials of Archigram's vision from Plug-In City onwards, striving for a city structure that would yield to individual desires more pliantly than previous forms of cities, and would derive its aesthetic from a demonstration of that compliance. Everything about the two drawings suggested permissive change and variability, but the systematic section showed in detail how this was to be achieved. Here were giant diagrid frames (96) of inclined service/communication tubes, among which were hung removable roads and railways and public spaces covered, in bad weather, by inflatable roofs. Here were capsules identifiable as shops and homes and offices, and here along the skyline were the mobile cranes to lift and shift, stack and rack all the plug-in units (97). Here, for the first time, were megastructure drawings from which one could construct a *working* model.

The mental landscape of the megastructure movement could never be the same again. From 1964 onwards, any project which hoped to be taken seriously



had to be detailed down to the window corners and the jointing gaskets. Since this was the period when the first 'real' megastructures to be built (e.g. those at Montreal Expo '67) were also in the detailing stage, one could claim that Archigram at this point were only 'marching in step with the mind of the age', and Cook, looking back from 1972, did emphasize the 'conventional' aspects of some versions of Plug-In City, which he said was 'very much of its period'; the classic A-frame with community space in the centre'. But if these echoes of the conventional *Terrassenhäuser* formula did make the design easier to accept, practically everything else about it represented what the period was pleased to call a 'quantum jump' in architectural sensibility.

The rest of the megastructure connection could also make that jump, but Archigram promptly made another, right out of megastructure, leaving a baffled sense of paradox behind. Having produced one of those masterly images which 'immortalize a moment, typify their age' and so on, they spent the rest of the decade doing something else, heading in a different direction from that taken by the very movement to which that master-image was most meaningful. They themselves may not have recognized this situation until later – though they now tend to claim that for them the *structure* part of megastructure was less important than the illustrated promise of permissiveness, it is difficult to see why, in that case, the structure should have been so persistently detailed with the

96, 97 Plug-In City in closer detail. The wide-screen sectional drawing (in brilliant primary colours in the original) of the 'max. pressure area' exemplifies the degree of ingenuity with which the consequences of this kind of planning were worked out. The exact functions of the various parts were often only summarily indicated, but the architectural format was extremely precise, and the fitting together of the various parts of the kit (97) shows a variability and control of three-dimensional complexity rare among 'Utopian' projects of the period.



98 Megastructure model kit (from Archigram VII, 1967). The stabilized megastructure image after Archigram had finished with it – capsules, diagonal frames, cranes, towers, communication ducts, icosahedra, living-pods, platforms – the complete kit of parts for a do-it-yourself megastructure.

same loving attention as the individual capsules or inflatables – but the change of emphasis was certainly becoming visible only a couple of years later.

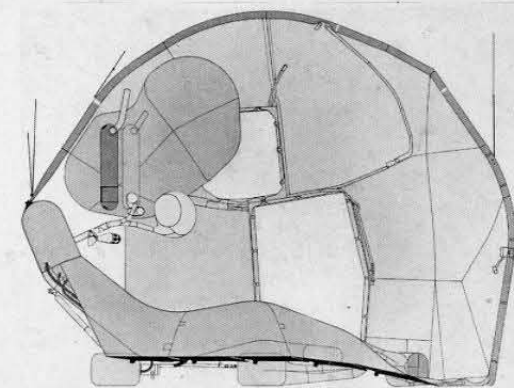
Thus, when they were laying out the graphics for *Archigram VII* in 1966, they included two sheets of a cut-out model megastructure kit (98) as a joke, a self-satire, on the grounds that 'everyone can do megastructures now, make your own'. The design was but little advanced from Plug-In City, and was arabesqued with in-group jokes about Cedric Price and Buckminster Fuller. The joke was to backfire on them, however; any issue of *Archigram* was by now too sacred a text to be cut up or otherwise mutilated. Copies were carefully preserved, were already being kept by architecture school libraries 'in mint condition in original plastic pack', and as far as is known none of the models was made up at the time except where fringe members of the group or other hangers-on had access to spare copies of the sheets. At all events, the message, though missed by the overwhelming bulk of the readership, was that megastructure was now a bore.

The topic they were pursuing instead – and it manifested itself relentlessly, project by project – was some kind of autonomous living unit, of maximum flexibility, adaptability, mobility and non-monumentality, that could exist independently without assistance from megastructure or any other permanent support systems. Development in this direction began, most specifically, with David Greene's totally autonomous 'Living Pod' of 1965–6, and rushed to its logical conclusion as early as 1968 with Greene's 'Suitaloon', shown in

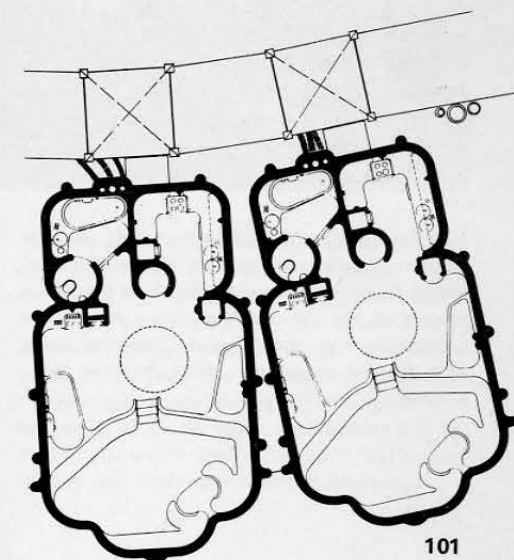
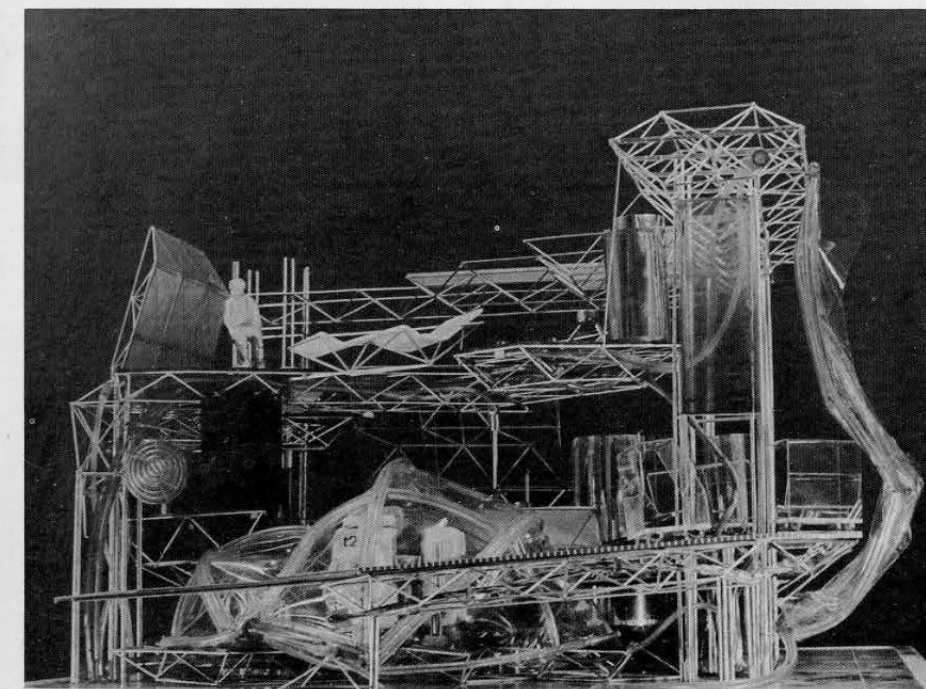
approximate prototype at the *Triennale di Milano* of that year – an all-enveloping garment which could be inflated to form a small pneumatic dome in which the wearer could recline or just about stand up. This very basic unit of instant shelter was to be worn while moving from place to place on a 'Cushicle', a ground effect vehicle the size of a dentist's chair (and looking not unlike one) which would provide all necessary entertainment, information and life-support systems. In the extreme case, the suitalooned cushicleer could recline at ease in his mobile bubble (99), while the associated systems provided him with heat, light, music etc., and papered the inside of the bubble with projected imagery, in total and autonomous insulation from the outside world and the rest of the human race.

This preoccupation of Greene's was clearly nothing to do with megastructure, which by implication at least is social as well as monumental. The other members of the group produced any number of intermediate projects in which the high-technology capsules were patently important, but not at the total expense of support structures and urbanity: Warren Chalk's 'Capsule Homes' tower, Ron Herron's 'Capsule Pier', Chalk and Herron's 'Gasket' housing (101) and Peter Cook's 'Hornsey' capsules, all of 1966; Mike Webb's 'Drive-In' housing of the next year; the 'Control and Choice' project (100) done by the group as a whole for the Paris *Biennale de la jeunesse* of 1967; and Ron Herron's 1968 'Oasis (free time node)' (102).

Elaborately presented projects like these helped to sustain the impression that Archigram was still part of the 'Megastructure International'; in the process they were putting a remarkably unserious face on the movement, because these elaborate perspectives increasingly presented the most compelling imagery of fun and leisure that architecture had ever produced. From Folkestone onwards, it seemed to be nothing but dolly-girls of every race and hue twisting or frugging



99, 100, 101 The liberation of the capsule. By 1967 the structural aspects of megastructure had begun to seem merely obstructive to Archigram; the free capsule, exemplified by devices such as David Greene's Cushicle (99) of 1968 – a mobile reclining couch in a private inflatable dome – had been emerging for some time as their preferred environment. Already in 1967, in the Control and Choice model (100), the capsules could move about the structure, and as early as Chalk and Herron's 1965 Capsule Housing (101) the individual units had been so sophisticated and self-contained that their independence was always possible.





102 Oasis project (Ron Herron, 1968). With its slogans of emancipation and choice, the 'fun' structure invades, liberates, displaces the architecture of the conventional city – but in the process its own substance is dissolving away and the 'leisure people' move into the foreground.

in their modish microskirts or striped mini-dresses, exclaiming their delight at visiphone messages, relaxing in capsules, while smiling families promenaded the deck spaces, children danced ring-a-roses, crowds surged before giant images of pop stars on vast eidophore screens; everywhere were sunglasses, freaky hair, wild clothes. Not for nothing was Roger Vadim's *Barbarella* a cult-movie of this generation, for it presented their imagery of an *urbanisme ludique* in moving colour; indeed, Vadim's sinful city of Sogo (103) reappeared, lightly punned over, as 'Saghor, ville ludique' in a post-Archigram project by Benoit and Valdares published in France in 1970.

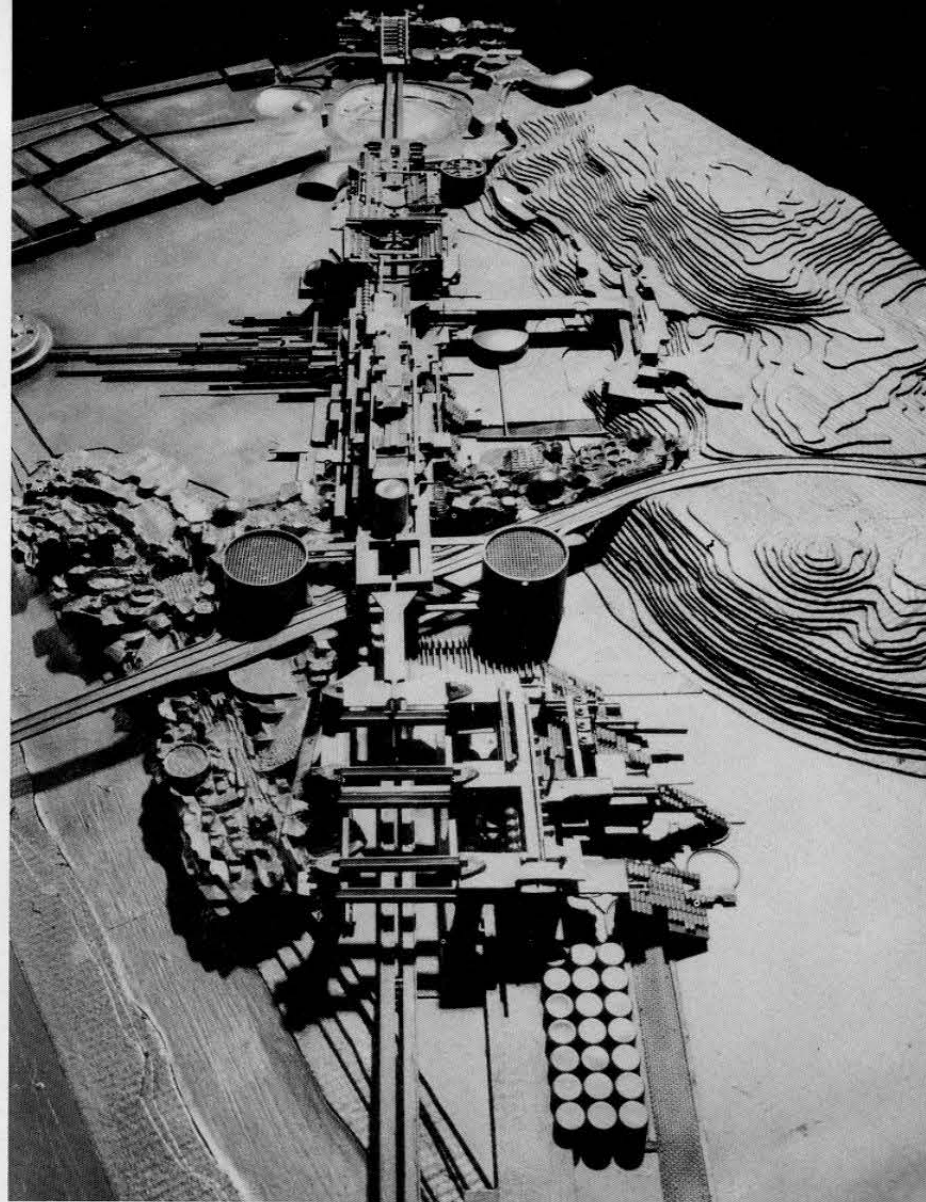
However, as an eye-witness of all this, I must lay down a firm *caveat* against making too much of this fun-imagery. Influential it may have been, but it may also have been rather oblique to the basic intentions of the group's members. These images were only borrowed; they were not of Archigram's own devising. Voracious consumers of collageable material with which to populate and animate their drawings, they raided the illustrations and advertisements in



colour magazines and came up, inevitably, with 'leisure people', because colour magazines in those affluent years contained little else. Nothing could more aptly illustrate the proposition that megastructures were ideal cities containing other people's Utopias, the leisured post-industrial world of the New Utopians. Equally, nothing could more neatly illustrate the dangers of mistaking a piece of British graphic opportunism for an ideological programme. The presence of all these leisure people in Archigram's permissive cities is as much an empirical solution to the problem of finding someone – anyone! – to populate them as it is a theoretical proposal for who *should* populate them.

In practice, however, the latter reading was the customary one outside the Archigram circle. From Mechthild Schumpp (see previous chapter) through worried students in Argentina who asked me 'How are the theoretic propositions of Archigram realized in the daily life?' to the *Utopie* group and other left-wing critics, everyone saw the Archigram vision of the Plug-In City of permissive pleasure as a complete and homogeneous proposal for an ideal future.

103 The city of Sogo (from *Barbarella*, directed by Roger Vadim, production design Mario Garbuglia, 1968). Based on Jean-Claude Forest's intellectual comic-strip, Vadim's sexploitation space-opera knowingly caught the mood of the year. The sinful city of Sogo was convincingly megastructural, both inside and out, rising above the sea of encroaching horrors much as Isozaki's Space City (57) had picked its way over the relics of earlier urbanisms.



104 The Archigram influence: Italy. Urban Structure project (students of Leonardo Savioli, Florence, 1966–7). Although it was for interiors that Savioli's students were specifically directed to look at Archigram designs, it is not difficult to see the influence also in the overall forms and detailed model-making quality of this megastructure.

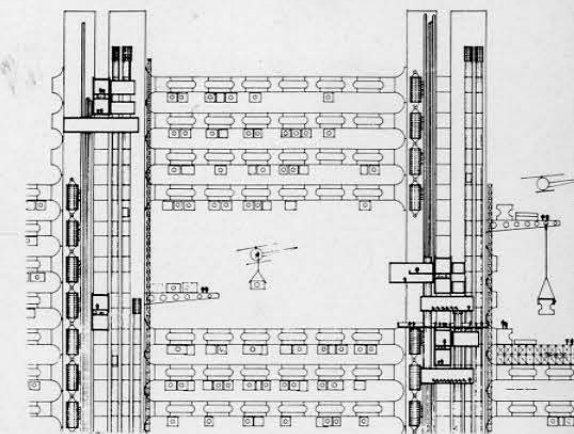
Successive graphic approximations to an evolving view of man and his environment, many of them tentative or composed *ad hoc* out of bits and pieces already to hand, were frozen, academicized as permanent prototypes of the New City. As Archigram phased themselves out of megastructure, their projects began to acquire the status of the 'ancient monuments' to be emulated in the new 'Academy of Utopias'.

The academic phase of megastructure will be discussed later, but the directness of the dependence deserves to be noted here. Not only did Archigram's first Italian successor-group take the name 'Archizoom' in direct emulation, but architecture students in Florence working under Leonardo Savioli in the academic session 1966–7 were specifically directed to study Archigram drawings during the famous design exercises (104) based on the 'psychedelic' Piper-clubs. It was in Japan, however, that the impact of Archigram was most spectacular and most widely noted. In 1966 the Shinken-jiku Residential Competition, organized by *Shinkenjiku* magazine (Japan

Architect) and judged by no less than Kenzo Tange himself, was won by a conspicuously Archigram-influenced project complete with cranes and capsules (105), and similar tendencies were distributed right through the four-hundred-odd entries.⁴⁴ The winner of the next year's competition was closer to the Metabolist tradition, but once again Archigram graphics and many Archigram architectural usages could be found all through the published entries. As a result, the world at large gained the impression that the great and original Japanese megastructure tradition was already exhausted, replaced by academic elaborations of ideas that Archigram had already left behind.

From the publication of these competition results onwards, the world's attitude to Japan was conspicuously changed. No longer were architects 'almost senseless with emotion'. With narrowed eyes, they (or at least their magazines) now chronicled the failure of Metabolism to deliver the goods it had appeared to promise, year by year, down to and including Osaka Expo '70; Osaka ought, at face value, to have been a triumphant tenth anniversary of the Metabolists' bid for world status in 1960, but somehow it was not. The mood had changed about megastructures, and too much seemed to have been plagiarized – notably Isozaki's two entertainment-robots (106) in the Festival Plaza, enlarged in form and function from two domestic robots exhibited by Archigram four years earlier.

More than this, everything about Osaka Expo '70 that smacked of megastructure, such as Tange's vast lattice space-grid over the whole Festival Plaza, was now seen as simply repeating an Expo formula that had peaked out, unrepeatably, at Montreal three years before. If Archigram had permanently changed the imagery of megastructure, Montreal Expo '67 had come close to exhausting all the megastructure imagery that could effectively be built at the time, and thus, like Archigram, had left the whole concept permanently altered.



105, 106 The Archigram influence: Japan. The waning of Japanese hegemony in megastructure seems to date from the publication of the winning design (105) in the 1966 housing competition sponsored by the magazine *Shinkenjiku* (Japan Architect), in which Archigram usages were immediately identifiable – particularly the cranes and capsules. The influence was still evident in the Osaka Expo of 1970 (to which Archigram were invited to contribute); practically everything under Kenzo Tange's Festival Plaza space-frame (106), including Isozaki's entertainment-robots, could be seen as Archigram 'rationalised and strained through the systematic design process of the Japanese' (Charles Jencks).

