

Archigram. Experimental architecture. Synthesis from primitive to technologically advanced.

by Annabel Frascella

Tutor: Micaela Viglino

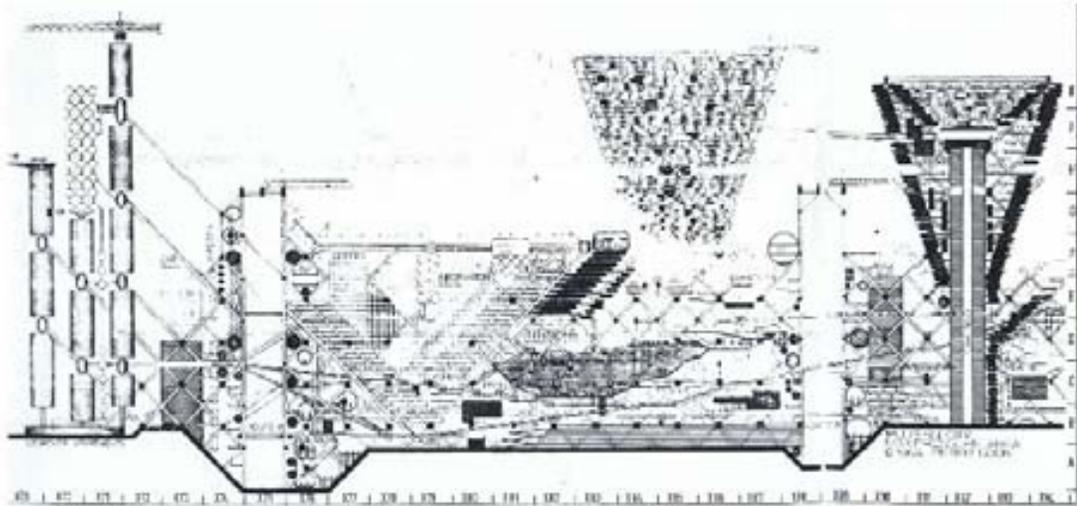
This work has attempted to review – beyond the well known historiography – the works of Archigram, a team of six architects (Warren Chalk, Peter Cook, Dennis Crompton, David Greene, Ron Herron e Mike Webb) which was characterised by a great creativity and subversive temperament and was active in England during the 1960-1970 decade, creating an international case of innovative proposals. The Archigram Group was allocated in the frame of the huge crossroads of movements created by the economic boom in the 50s and led to stylise the social usage (the pop culture); the Group's attitude was characterised by experimental architecture, as a need to emancipate itself from the heritage of the "Modern Movement", pursuing a review of architecture.

In the beginning, Archigram was a magazine and afterwards it became a design team. "*Archigram*" magazine (since 1961) was intended to be a brochure, a quick and immediate message (the acronym comes from *ARCHItectural teleGRAM*) to stir up the young students of the architecture schools and react to the dictates of the Rationalism.

The design group was created in 1963 and was composed of various people, who had the common need to express new hypotheses of cities and housing, "teasing" the traditional architecture.

Their arguments concern the will of going beyond the known borders of architecture, accomplishing a conceptual and style renewal – by means of the magazine and the exhibitions, where ideas and designs were shown and revealed, aimed at a new design consciousness – which generated the idea of city as movement and flow (the environment was described by man's movement rather than architecture and landscape).

Other themes are expendability and flexibility of housing and cities and the concept of urban metamorphosis (environment as a living and continuously evolving entity) which identifies architecture as consumable object (*throwaway architecture*), highlighting the man's freedom of selection, by his product consuming capacity. The mega structure ("Plug-in City", "Unit Capsule Tower", "Walking City") becomes the ideal reference model to symbolize the concept of "throwaway city", made of a main structure on which pre-made housing units are added or removed.



Plug-in City (Peter Cook, 1964)

A borderline theme of the Archigram Group was the vanishing of the city and architecture itself to allow the individual freedom and the satisfaction of the man's nomad instinct: this concept comes clearly from the "Living Pod", "Cushicle" e "Suitaloon" designs, as flexible, self-governing and support system independent housing units. The concepts expressed in "Moment Village" and "Instant City" assert the Archigram' research is drawing to dissolve the city, e.g. toward the anarchical city, continuously evolving and able to self-organize.



Instant City (Peter Cook, Dennis Crompton, Ron Herron, 1968)

Subsequently, the selflessness for the mega structure led to abstract designs ("Control and Choice", "L.A.W.U.N." and "Manzak") as an attempt to highlight the use of electronics to realize the dream of an architecture satisfying the human needs.

Last but not least, the Archigram's theme of fun in architecture, is often recurrent (particularly in "Monaco Underground") and is seen as a synthesis of flexibility and technologically assisted environment.



Monaco Underground (Archigram, 1969-1971)

This work, carried out through the original documents, has resulted in re-proposing the Archigram's work as experimentation, rather than pure utopia, considering the Group as a pioneer of the Radical Architecture, in the attempt of re-defining architecture enslaved to the new technological and consumer society. As a consequence, a new profile of this group of architects came out, characterizing them as a crossing point toward a new modernity, and anticipating themes which would have been object of the high-tech movement (and others), later on, and nowadays are still being debated.

For further information: Annabel Frascella, e-mail: angiabel@tiscalinet.it