

Architecture from Radicalism to High Tech

During the 1960s the “Space Race” enjoyed wide popularity, even after the American moon landing in 1969. In this climate of **faith in technology** there was a revival of utopian aspirations and reflections on the forms of urban growth which included **alternative and provocative habitation models**.

Archigram, Peter Cook, *Plug-in-City*

The year 1961 marked a turning point for six young architects: Warren Chalk, Peter Cook, Dennis Crompon, David Greene, Ron Herron, Mike Webb.

Just five years after the exhibition *This is Tomorrow* and contemporaneously with Buckminster Fuller’s proposal to cover midtown Manhattan with an enormous geodesic dome that could control New York City’s micro-climate, the group published a pamphlet titled **Archigram**, a combination of the words “architecture” and “telegram”. Through a word connoting an essential and dynamic attitude, the group meant to design and convey **architecture via immediate and condensed methods**. For this reason the group adopted means of communication borrowed from comic strips and from science-fiction fantasy. Their most renowned works, both drawn up in 1964, are the *Plug-in-City* by Peter Cook and the *Walking City* by Ron Herron. The enormous structure of *Plug-in-City* is composed of tubes measuring almost three metres in diameter which connect habitation units, services, offices, and public space. All of these spaces and functions are interchangeable thanks to large cranes that move on a one-track system. It is like a flexible aggregation of cells and habitation modules which all remain completely indifferent to place and are always adaptable to the inhabitants’ changing needs. Two brightly coloured drawings illustrate the project and highlight the new city model that emerges from it, based on various perishable elements that are constantly being changed. It is like a giant machine whose parts are meant to last only a specified amount of time, proportional to their scale and size. A kind of mechanistic and technocratic city in which man, with his desires and needs, has been incorporated and assimilated as part of the technological system.

Richard Rogers, *Lloyd’s Building*, London

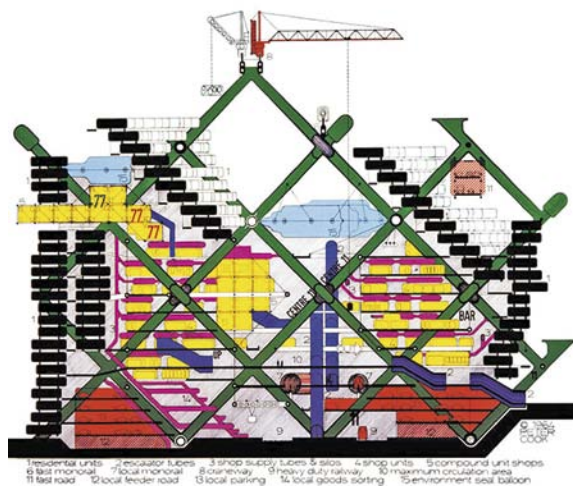
In spite of its unrealisable nature, the *Plug-in-City* survives in fragments recognisable in much of the architecture executed in the following years. Of these the *Centre Pompidou* (1971-77) by Piano and Rogers can be considered its most important offspring. In fact Richard Rogers would become one of the most productive architects of the so-called **High-Tech trend**. Between 1978 and 1986 Rogers’ studio designed the Lloyd’s insurance company headquarters in the heart of London.

Conceived to last fifty years the building’s fundamental requisite was that it be **versatile over time**, able to adapt to measures and needs that might arise in future periods.

The main body of the **Lloyd’s Building** is rectangular, arising from a central plan. It is surrounded by six service towers, differing in height from six to twelve stories, all accessible from the outside and housing indoor elevators, staircases, technological plants and rest rooms. The ground floor is devoted to the public spaces and services that lead off from the atrium, including a restaurant, cafeteria, shops and a library. Just upstairs is the large *Room* for business dealings from which various escalators lead to other floors.

Built in reinforced concrete, the Lloyd’s building has been designed to enable **vertical expansion**.

Its modules of pilasters measuring 10,8x18 metres are faced with an “independent” system composed of three layers of special glass with a ventilated air-space. By contrast the towers are built exclusively from prefabricated elements, faced with stainless steel panels. In this way the core’s structure containing the vaulted central volume – which recalls the great nineteenth century English tradition of pavilions in iron and glass – is seen through the glass walls and all the elevator and plant systems are no longer indoors and hidden from view. Rather they are emphasized by the metallic facing and become the building’s main frontage.



Above Fig. 1 Archigram, Peter Cook, Project for *Plug-in-City*, 1964.

Left Fig. 2 Richard Rogers, *Lloyd's Building*, 1978-1986. London.