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PREFACE

An understanding of neo-avant-garde architecture requires a critical summary of Archigram's achievement, and in 1994 I started research on the problem at the Open University. As good-quality essays and catalogues on Archigram have appeared over the last decade,¹ the absence of a full-length monograph has only become more noticeable. Given the rapid recent evolution of scholarly research into architectural neo-avant-gardes, we can likely look forward to further publications on more discrete aspects of Archigram's work, or which conversely merge this work with other discourses. But for now, a book-length study presents the opportunity, as far as such a thing is possible, for an excursion into the Archigram moment as a whole.

This permits it to be seen as cultural, and not just narrowly architectural. Because Archigram was a partisan intervention into practice and publishing, the group's drawings and texts are just as rewarding when read iconologically—as arguments about style, society, modernity, technology, and the architectural profession in the sixties—as they are when scrutinized for facts of architectural technique or principle, which often melt into the spectral haze of Archigram's distinctive presentational style.

For more than forty years the provocative material recounted in this book has drawn both critique and apologia. Tempting though it is to write in similar veins, pursuant to the requirements of a credible architectural history this book neither scoffs at Archigram's venture nor presents an "authorized biography" of the group. The latter would have been an exercise in futility even had I wanted to write one, since the careful observation of Archigram reveals subtle distinctions between its members' purposes (despite attempts by the group and subsequent commentary to present the group as univocal). In addition, this book has to allow views of Archigram from outside observers—laudatory and antagonistic—to accompany Archigram's self-perceptions.

Given my lack of accountability to the surviving members of the group which created my subject matter—Peter Cook, Dennis Crompton, David Greene, and Michael Webb—

it is surely a tribute to their magnanimity that they listened to me in symposia, discussed their work with me, authorized its reproduction in my articles and chapters,² and acceded de facto to the publication of this study when Archigram Archives released picture permissions (including those for Warren Chalk, who died in 1987) following complex negotiations in 2003–2004. Permission for the reprinting of work by Ron Herron, who died in 1994, was granted me by the Herron Estate.

The penalty for independent scholarship is that it cannot be privy to all extant records and artifacts, because the group's various archives are not yet in the public realm. The interests of custodians and researchers should soon be reconciled, however, pending a joint funding bid between the University of Westminster, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Archigram Archives, and the Herron Archives which will finally see Archigram's physical effects catalogued, digitized, and transferred from their present confinement "under beds or behind walls."³ It is also likely that additional archival material will be published in the near future.⁴ I remain beholden, in the interim, to Dennis Crompton of the Archigram Archives, and Simon Herron of the Herron Archives, for answering my steady stream of inquiries, retrieving archival material, and preparing it for this book.⁵

Meanwhile the quantity of more readily available information pertaining to Archigram remains formidable. Whereas research for my previous MIT Press publication (on situationist urbanism) had to magnify evidence gleaned from libraries, long walks, conversational hints, fringe publications, and museum basements, reading rooms, and newly accessioned archives (which yielded the book's arcane cover image), it is the task of the present publication somehow to survey and sample a prodigious bounty. An enormous number of Archigram's drawings, models, and documents have become accessible through the big retrospective exhibitions that began with the Centre Pompidou show of 1994. Archigram published copiously, including its run of the legendary *Archigram* magazine, and it was discussed in dozens

of articles and books around the world. There are any number of opinions and memories of the group to be logged and sifted, and the circumstantial record of the pop, technological, and libertarian cultures to which Archigram related is practically infinite.

Mentors, colleagues, and correspondents inestimably assisted with the assignment, though of course they will not necessarily sanction the book's findings. Special mention must be made of the supervisors of the dissertation from which this book originated, Tim Benton and Barry Curtis, and of the further insight gained from examination by Iain Boyd Whyte and Nicholas Bullock. Other encounters—with Mary Banham, Hazel Cook, the late Catherine Cooke, François Dallegret, Paul Davies, Mark Fisher, Yona Friedman, Simon Herron, Malcolm Higgs, Craig Hodgetts, Diana Jowsey, the late Roy Landau, Arthur Marwick, Peter Murray, Brian Nicholls, Martin Pawley, Roy Payne, Monica Pidgeon, the late Cedric Price, Mary Quant, Tony Rickaby, Gordon Sainsbury, Paul Shephard, Alan Stanton, and Peter Taylor—added detail and texture to my work. My hosts while visiting Michael Webb were Diane and Bill Menking.

I have been privileged to work again with the MIT Press and its staff, in particular executive editor Roger Conover, whose resolve is imprinted upon this book. Matthew Abbate and Derek George, production editor and designer respectively, saw the book to press.

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Unexpectedly taxing in itself, this project was one strand of a challenging period in my life, into which Jan Wagstaff entered and thankfully stayed. Suffice it to say there are other people, some now distant from me or who played their parts perhaps unwittingly, whom I would acknowledge less notionally if I knew where to start or what to say to them.