

The Museum of Modern Art

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FUNCTION WITHOUT FORM:

Two Models of an Undesignable City

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Wall Label

THEODORE WADDELL

in collaboration with Michael C. Cunningham

Architectural models normally represent what can actually be built. The models exhibited here are quite different: they do not represent real building forms but instead suggest the functions that would call them into existence.

Designed by Theodore Waddell, an American architect living in Italy, these models are part of a city planning study of the transportation network, harbor facilities, and related urban amenities that will be generated by a proposed two mile suspension bridge connecting Sicily to the Italian mainland. The urban entity this will produce is so big and so complex that no one can predict all the elements it will involve, nor can these elements be "designed" as part of a planning study.

In dealing with urban environments the architect should be able to convey information about organization, density, variety, and overall massing, without trying to give precise form to what is still incalculable. Moreover, while large scale planning is necessary and inevitable, it seems to threaten human spontaneity not only in the character of the cities it produces but in the planning process itself.

It therefore seems desirable to invent a visual "language" that can deal with complex questions while preserving the possibility of spontaneous developments. At the scale of one foot to approximately 1 mile, the language of three dimensional representation used here is light; the "vocabulary" is neon tubes and incandescent bulbs of many shapes and sizes. They are arranged in nine circuits to convey information about transport, parking, and existing or proposed construction. The size, shape and brightness of the bulbs indicate differences in use and density—nothing more—while their

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-2-

brilliance and transparency give a lively sense of variety.

The second model shows in greater detail one particular section, the automated port, at a scale of one foot to approximately four tenths of a mile. Here the intention is to convey not the shapes of real machines but rather the spirit of the machine, its complexity and fantasy of form. Only a "people corridor" (red) is for humans: it is a restricted series of connected environments, at human scale, interwound with the mechanical. The vocabulary of this model is tubes and transistors, relays and sprockets and caps—mostly from abandoned television sets and cars.

Photographs of the light model taken close up and at high level produce images at yet another level of information: the lines and dots of light reverse the intention of the model, making dreamlike pictures of what could be real structures.

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