

E X O D U S

or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture

REM KOOLHAAS & ELIA ZENGHELIS

with

MADELON VRIESENDORP & ZOE ZENGHELIS

1972

PROLOGUE

Once, a city was divided in two parts.

One part became the Good half, the other part the Bad half.

The inhabitants of the Bad half began to flock to the Good part of the divided city, rapidly swelling into an Urban Exodus.

If this situation would have been allowed to continue for ever, the Good half would have had twice its original number of inhabitants, while the Bad half would have been turned into a ghost town, completely devoid of human life.

After all actions to interrupt this undesirable migration had failed, the authorities of the Bad part made desperate and savage use of Architecture: They built a Wall around the Good part of the City, making it completely inaccessible for their subjects.

The Wall was a masterpiece.

Originally not more than some pathetic strings of barbed wire, abruptly dropped on the imaginary line of the border, its psychological and symbolic effects were infinitely more powerful than its physical appearance.

But the attraction of the Good half, now only glimpsed over the forbidding obstacle from an agonising distance, became only more irresistible.

Those trapped, left behind in the gloomy Bad half, became obsessed with vain plans for escape. Complete hopelessness reigned supreme on the wrong side of the Wall.

As so often before in the history of Mankind, Architecture had been the guilty instrument of this despair.



ARCHITECTURE

It is possible to imagine a mirror image of this terrifying Architecture; a force as intense and devastating but in the service of positive intentions.

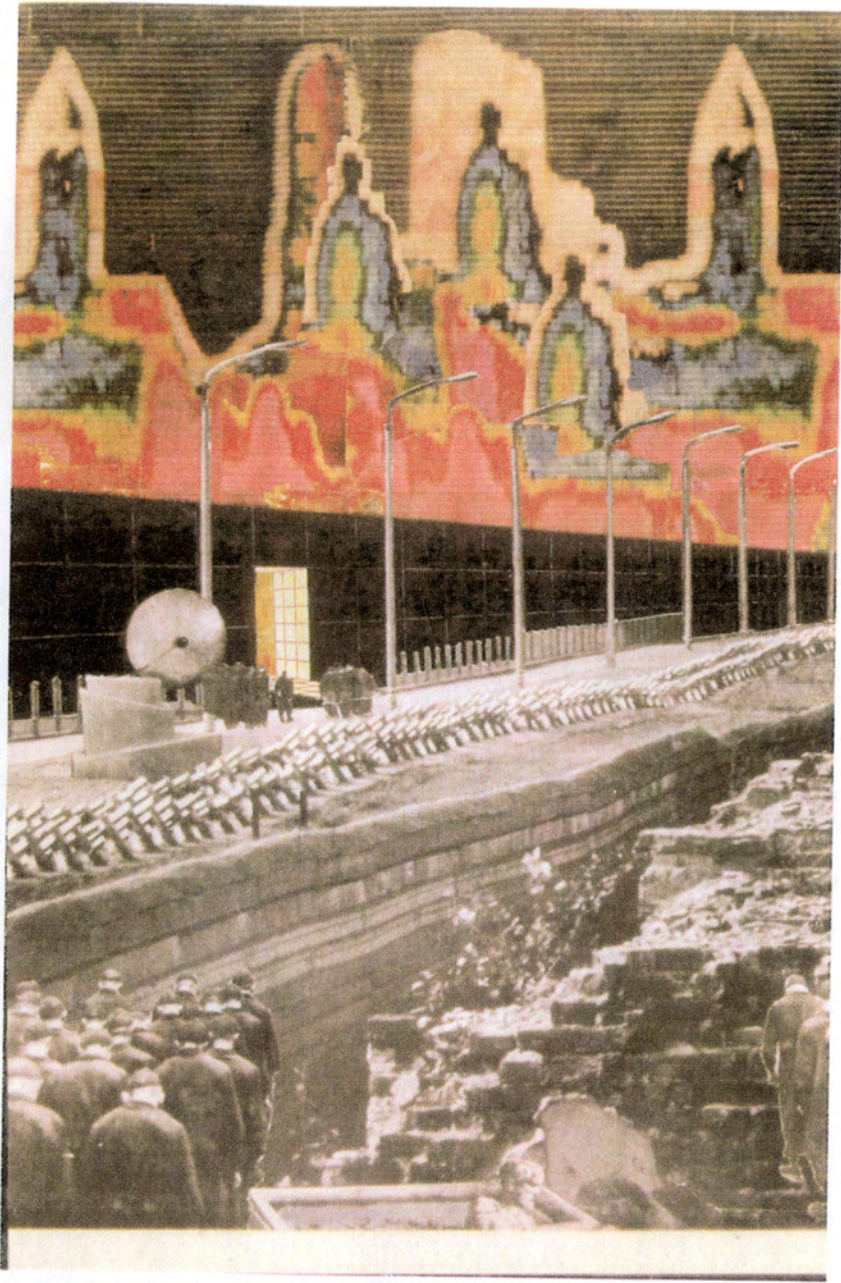
Division isolation, inequality, aggression and destruction, all the negative aspects of this wall, could be the ingredients of a new phenomenon: Architectural warfare against undesirable conditions - in our case against London. This would be an immodest Architecture not committed to timid improvements but to the provision of totally desirable alternatives.

The inhabitants of this architecture, those strong enough to love it, would become its Voluntary prisoners, ecstatic in the freedom of their Architectural confines.

Contrary to the architecture of the modern movement and its desperate afterbirths, this new Architecture is not authoritarian, nor hysterical: It is the hedonistic science of designing collective facilities which fully accommodate individual desires.

From the outside this Architecture is a sequence of serene monuments; the life inside produces a continuous state of ornamental frenzy and decorative delirium, filling it with an overdose of symbols.

This will be the Architecture that generates its own successors, and that will miraculously cure architects from their masochism and self-hatred.



THE VOLUNTARY PRISONERS

This study wages an Architectural War on London. It describes the steps that will have to be taken to establish an Architectural oasis in the behavioural sink of a city like London.

Suddenly, a strip of intense Metropolitan desirability runs through the centre of London. This strip is like a runway, a landing strip for the new Architecture of collective monuments.

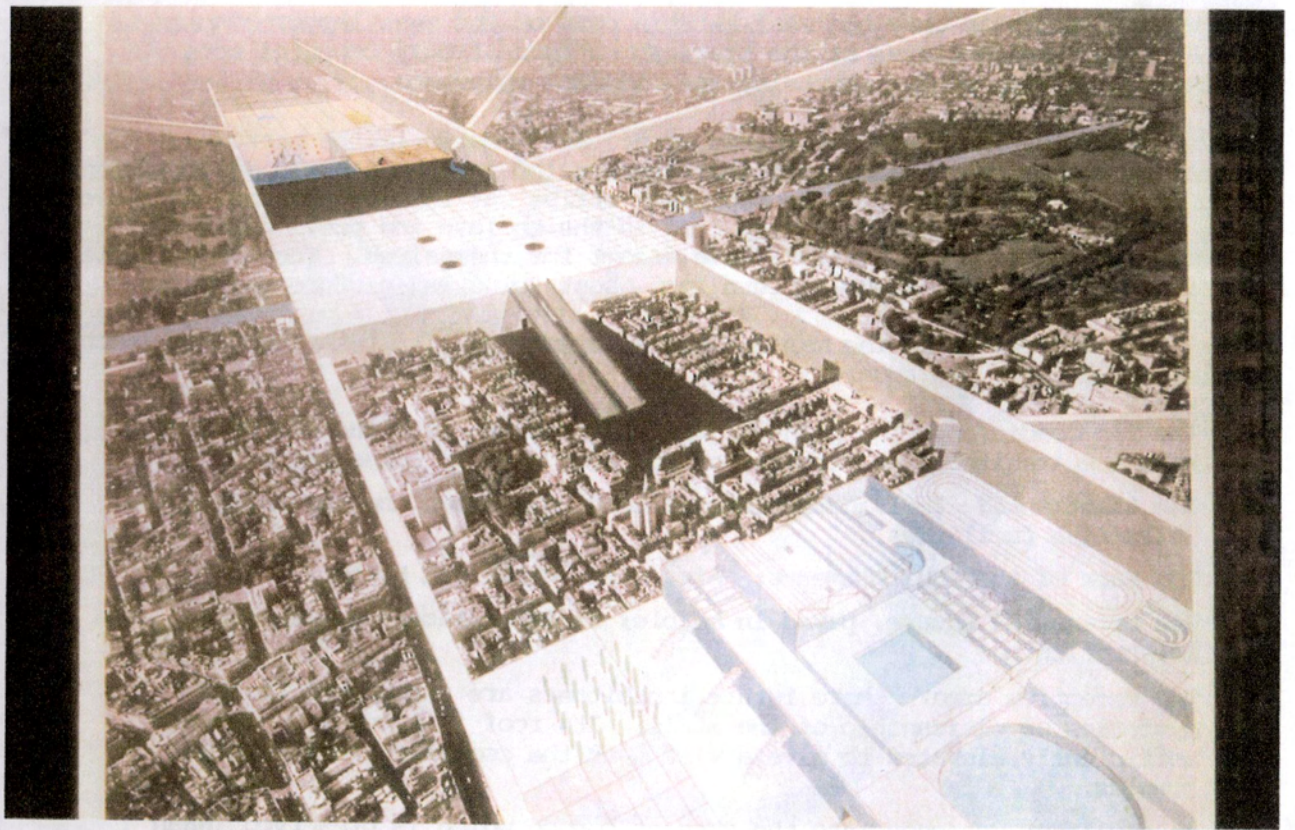
Two walls enclose and protect this zone to retain its integrity, and to prevent any contamination of its surface by the cancerous organism which besieges it.

Soon, the first inmates will beg for admission. Their number rapidly swells into an unstoppable flow.

We witness the Exodus of London.

The existing physical structure of the old town will not be able to stand the continuing competition of this new architectural prescence.

London as we know it will be a pack of ruins.



THE STRIP

The following pictures represent a close-up of a particular moment in the development of the strip.

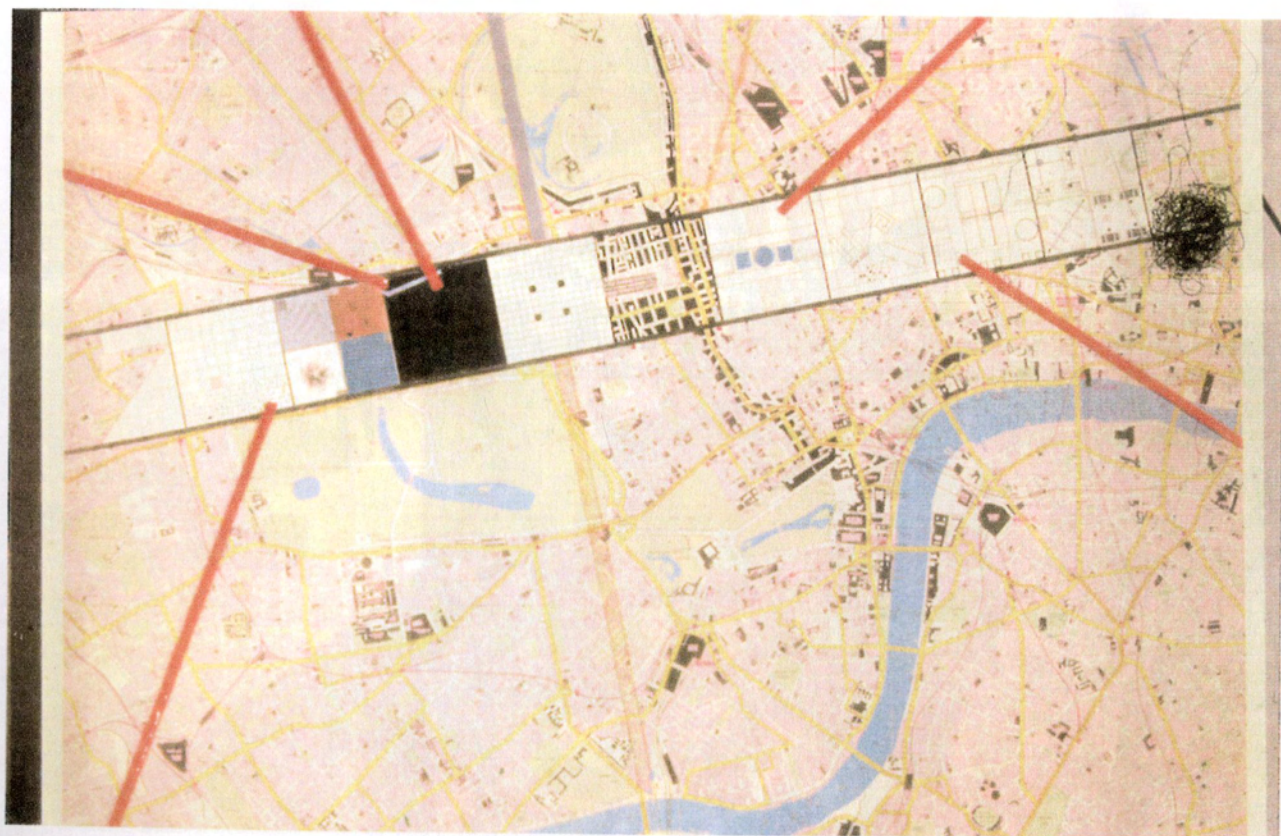
Nine squares are designed in various degrees of detail; together, they do not show all the aspects of the central strip, other equally essential activities and pleasures can, are being, imagined.

The central strip is only the most intense part of the much larger complex of the Architectural enclave; at the stage shown here it only contains some activities of high social intensity and communal relevance.

Those activities which are not shared by all are located in the narrow secondary strips, which each have their particular attachments to and relationship with the central zone. The secondary strips cut through the most depressed slum areas of the old London. They lead to the enclave and provide all the private accommodation the settlers have dreamt for themselves. Their magnificent presence forces these slums to turn into ghost towns and picturesque ruins.

Within the central strip the map and aerial view show, from West to East, (each contained in their own square):

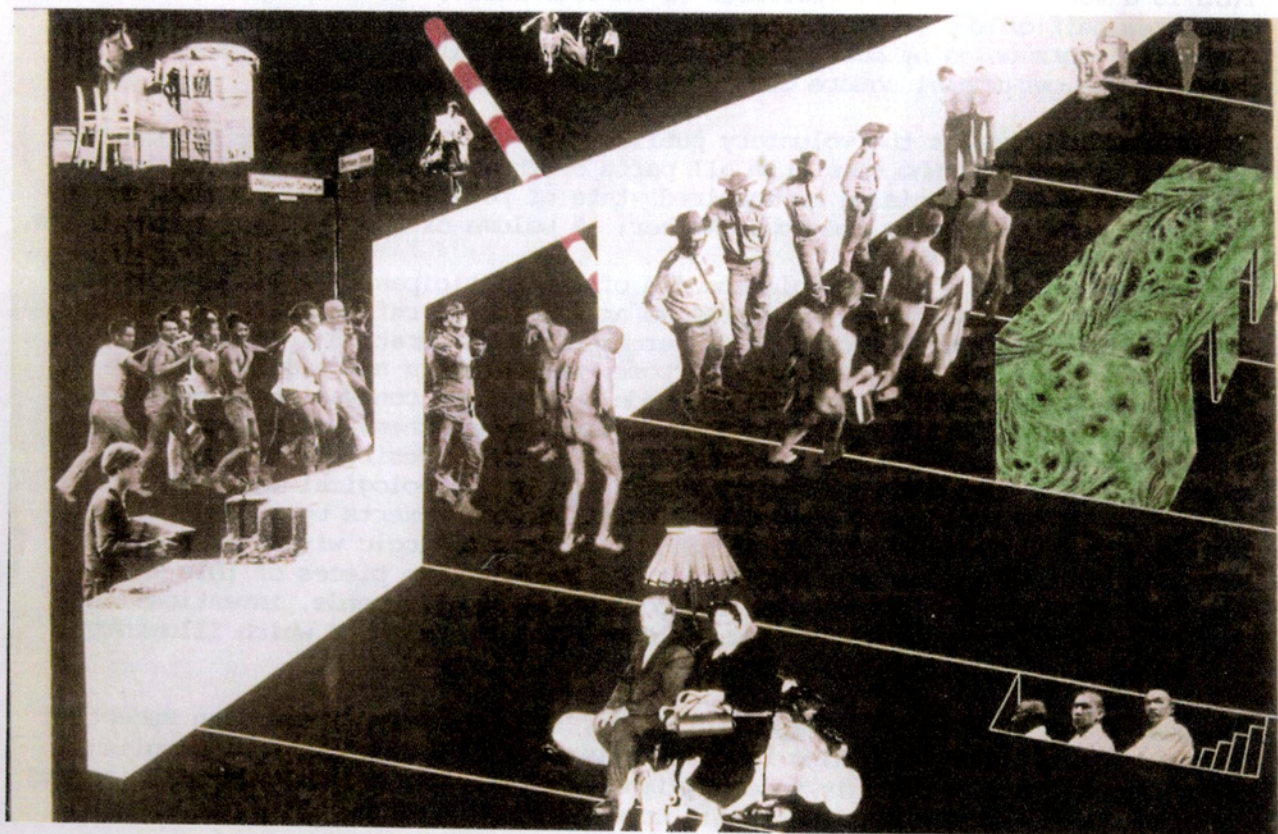
1. The Tip Condition. The point of maximum friction with the old London. Here the Architectural progress of the zone visibly takes place.
2. The Allotments. Individual plots of land to balance the emphasis on the Collective facilities.
3. The Park of the four Elements: Air, Fire, Water and Earth
4. The ceremonial square, paved in marble; it is a place for open-air celebration.
5. The reception area: here future inhabitants are introduced to the mysteries of citizenship of the strip. Its roof is a viewing platform sufficiently elevated to give a view over the complete architectural complex.
6. An escalator descends into the area of London which is preserved (Nash a predecessor of the ruthless plan) as a reminder of the past and as useful housing for migrant visitors and new arrivals (an environmental sluice).
7. The Baths. Institute for the creation and implementation of fantasies.
8. The square of the Arts.
9. The square of the captive globe.
10. The institute of Biological transactions.
11. Invisible is the Park of Aggression.



THE RECEPTION AREA

After crossing the wall, the exhausted fugitives are received by attentive wardens in a long lobby between the reception area and the wall. The consoling atmosphere of this responsive waiting room is an architectural sigh of relief: The first step of the indoctrination programme of the other side of the wall is being realised: The newcomers enter the Reception Area.

On arrival a spectacular welcome is given to all.

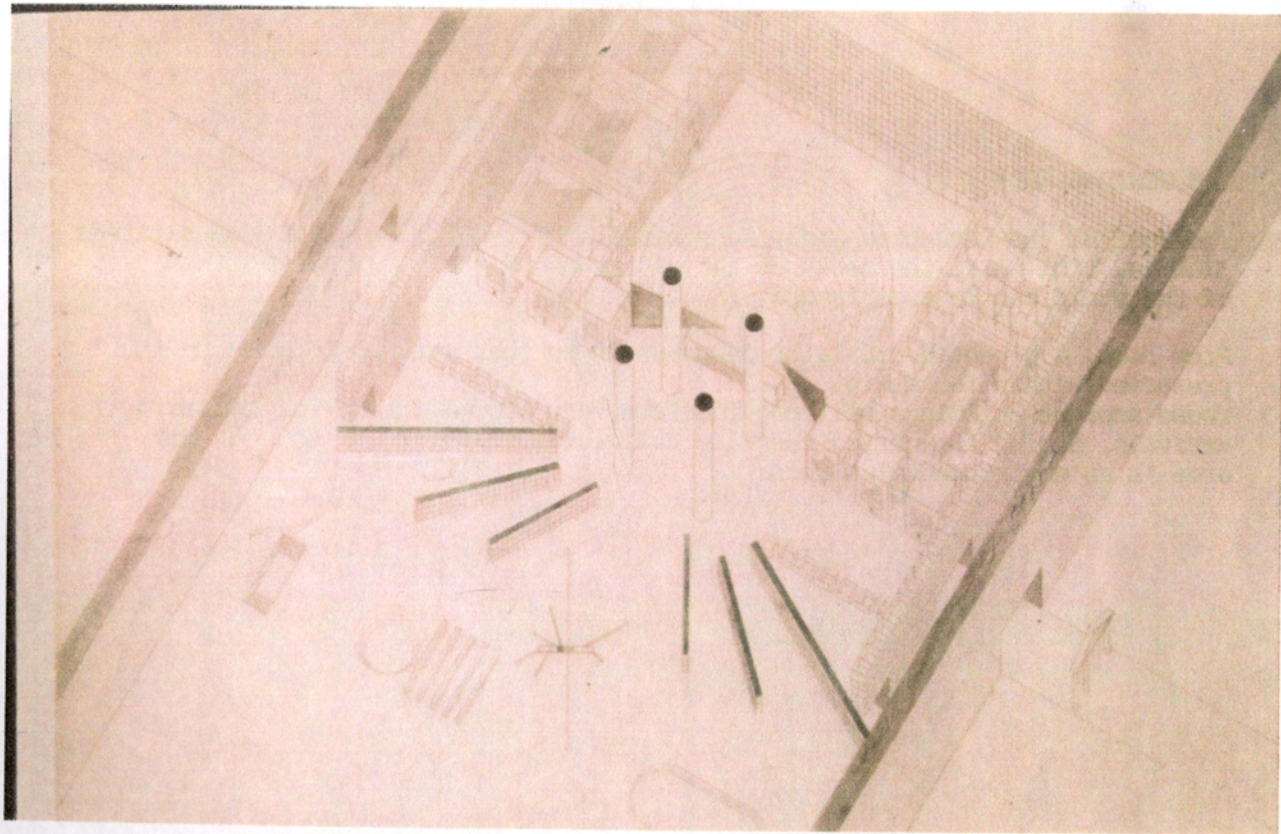


This is a vast interior with edifices of various sizes. To the right an arena dominates half of the volume. The other half contains the most recent model of the strip, surrounded by bookcases in which the past history of the model is stored. The ceremonial square can be glimpsed beyond the model.

The Reception Area is the voluntary public realm of the zone. It is permanently thronged by amateurs who come from all parts of the strip. Through their busy dealings they are exercising an inspired state of political inventiveness, to which the architecture is the echo chamber: A volume of overwhelming sensuousness.

The activities show that the sole concern of the participants is the present and future course of the strip: They propose architectural refinements, extensions, and strategies. Excited groups of different sizes elaborate the proposals in the special rooms built for this purpose, while others are continuously engaged in making modifications to the model. The most contradictory programmes fuse without erosion. The shameless permissiveness of these activities makes this place the receptacle for the complete spectrum of desires: It is a spontaneous planning centre. The perfection of this ideological test-bed is determined by the influence that the identical concern exerts upon the inmates. The debates and the architecture constitute a piece of logic with a life of its own. The administration consists of putting together the pieces of this logic. The facilities are instruments for the collection of all trends, inventions, shifts in social customs which occur in the other squares, and which illuminate all parts of social life inside the strip.

Because of the considerable responsibilities, the activities inside the Reception Area require a minimal training for new arrivals. This can only be accomplished after overwhelming previously undernourished senses. The training is administered under the most hedonistic conditions: Luxury and well being.



THE CENTRAL AREA

The roof of the reception area, accessible from the inside, is a high altitude plateau, from which the decay of the old town and the physical splendour of the strip can be experienced.

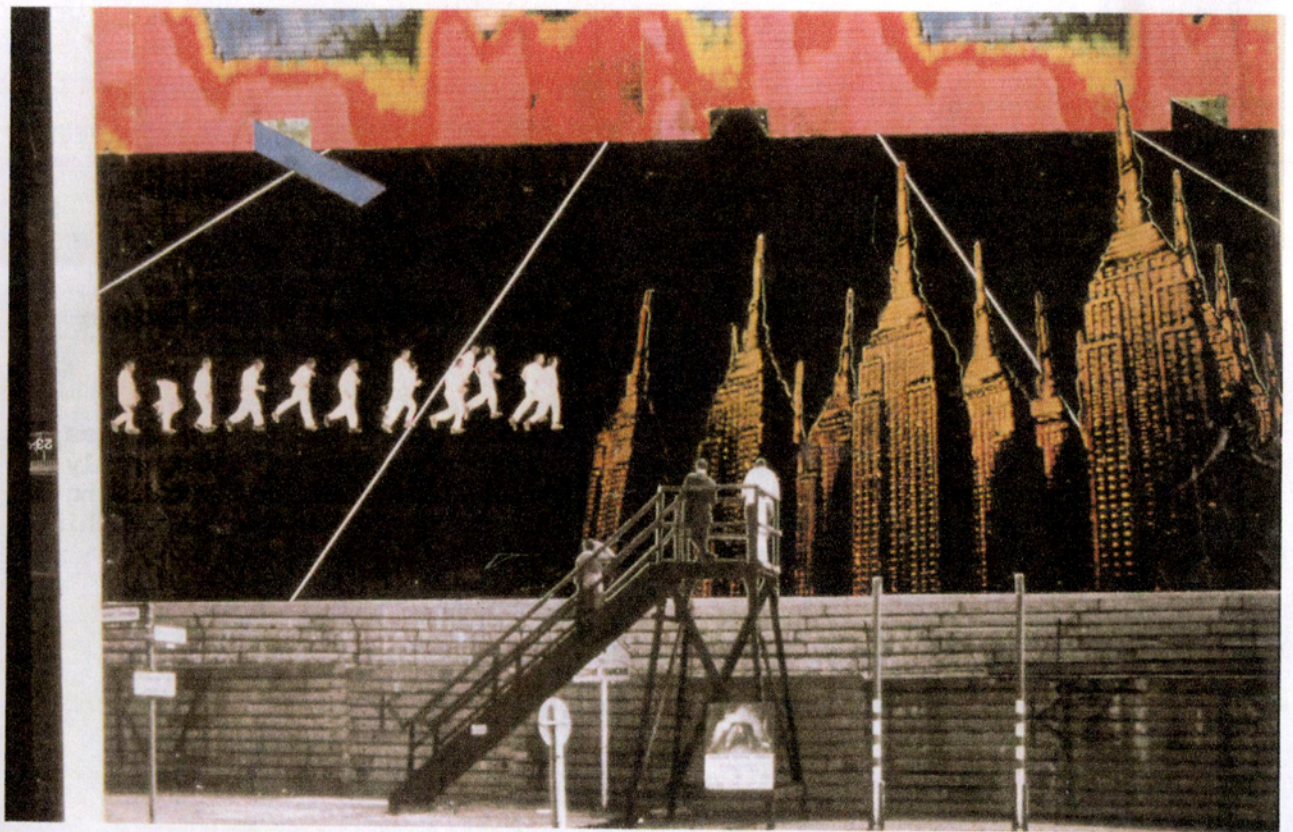
From here, a gigantic escalator descends in to that part of London which is preserved within the strip.

These ancient buildings will provide temporary accommodation for recent arrivals, during the period they are trained as voluntary prisoners: the area is an environmental sluice.



On the other (west) side of the roof is the ceremonial square. It is completely empty, except from the tower of the jamming - station which will protect the inhabitants of the strip against electronic exposure from the rest of the World.

The exact nature of the ceremonies on this black square is not yet known; it is a mixture of physical and mental exercises, conceptual Olympics.

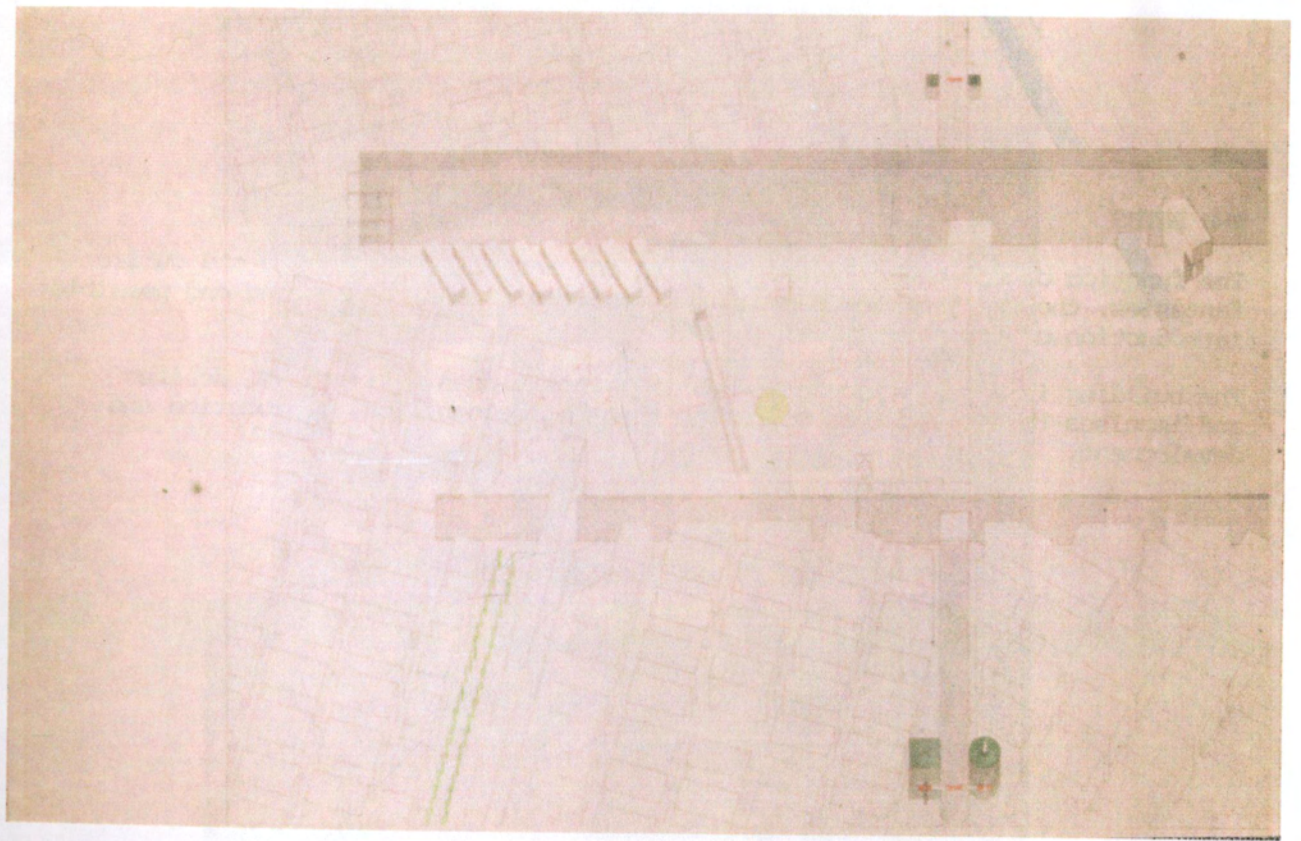


THE TIP OF THE STRIP

The frontline of the Architectural warfare waged on the old London.

Here, the merciless progress of the strip performs a daily miracle. Here, the corrective rage of the Architecture is at its most intense. It is a continuous confrontation with the old city, from the destruction of existing structures by the new Architecture to the more trivial fights between the inmates of the old London and the Voluntary Prisoners of the strip.

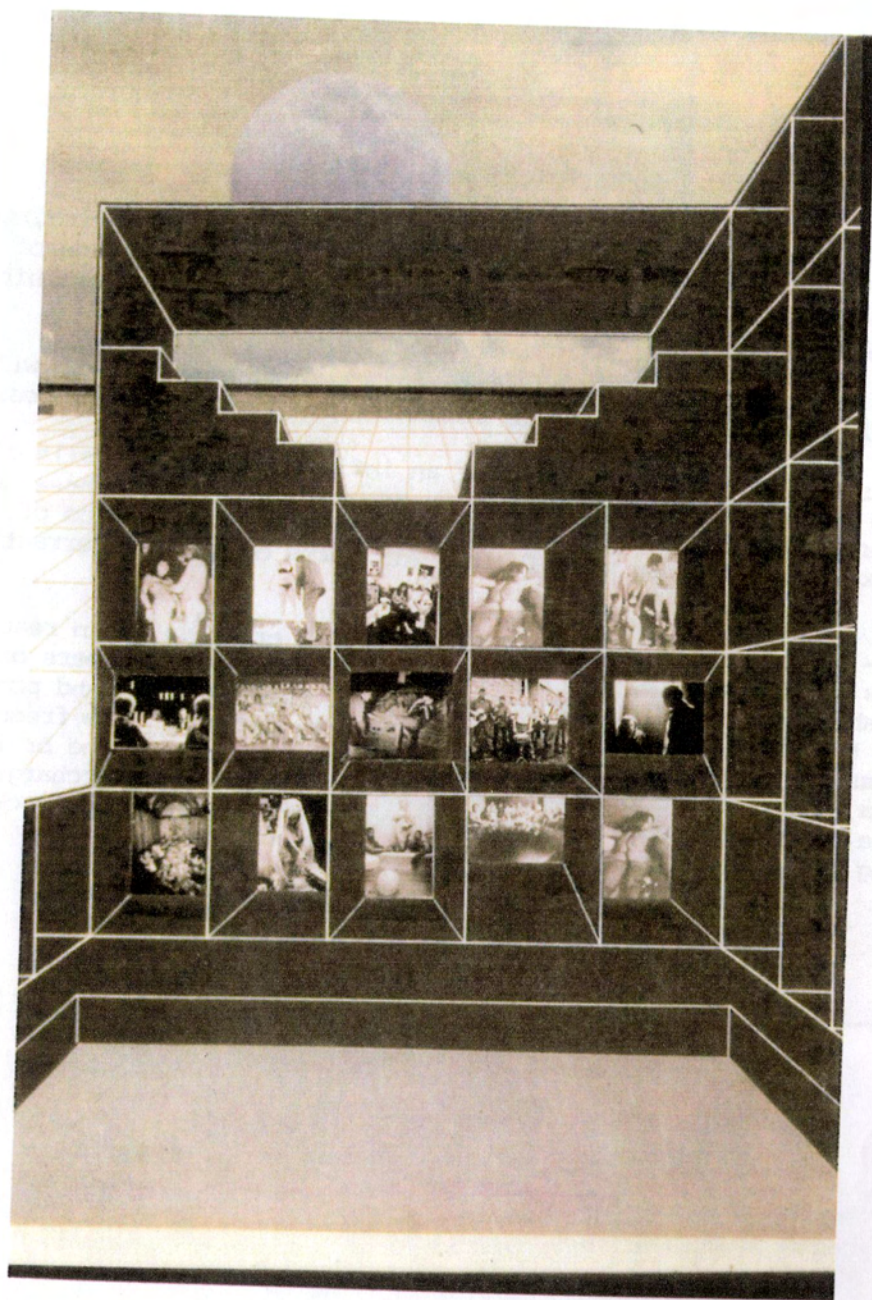
Some monuments from the old civilization are incorporated in the zone only after a rehabilitation of their questionable purposes and programs. Strategies, plans and instructions are conveyed by another model of the strip, continuously modified by information arriving from the reception area. Life in the building barracks at the tip of the strip can be hard, but the permanent creation of this object leaves its builders exhausted from satisfaction.



THE BATHS

The function of the baths is the creation and recycling of private and public fantasies, the transactions between them and the invention, testing and possible introduction of new forms of behaviour.

The building is a social condenser which brings hidden motivations, desires and impulses to the surface, to refine them for recognition, provocation and development.

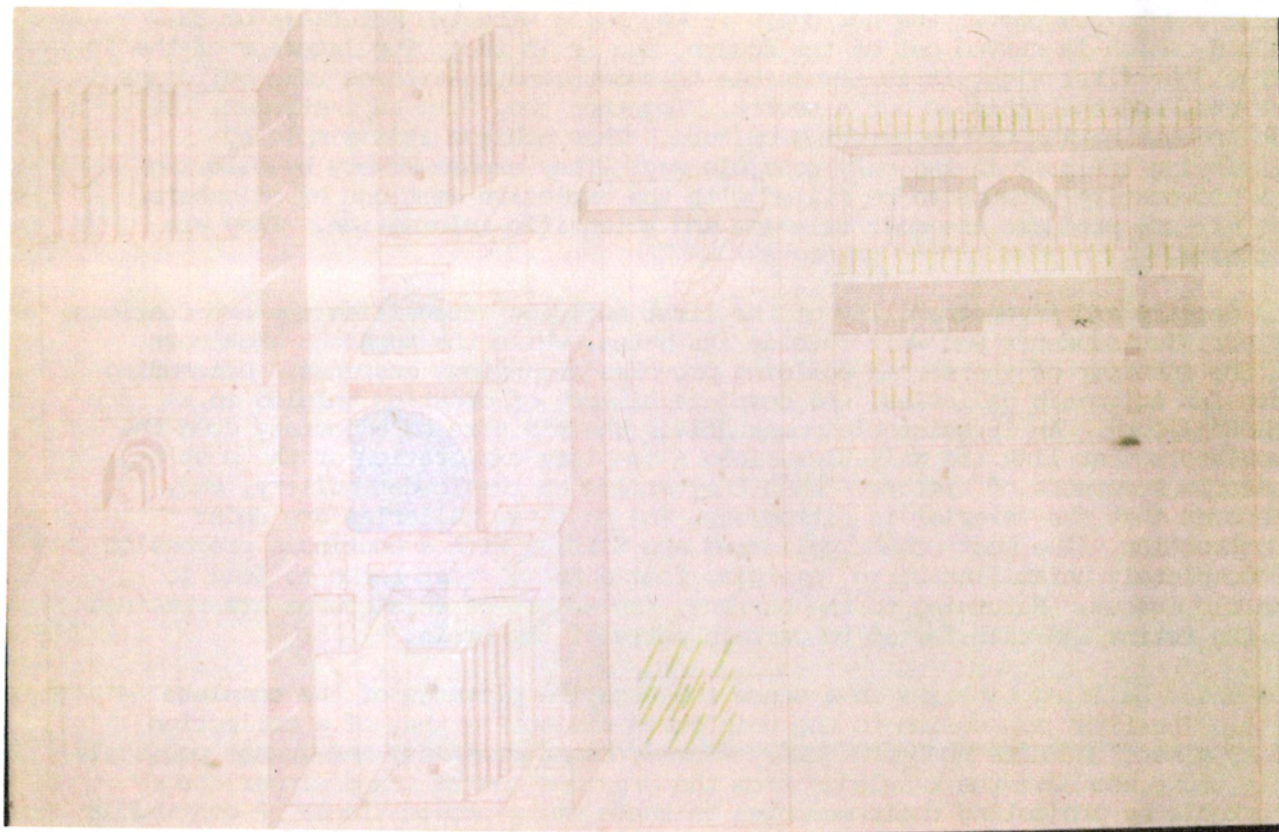


Around the 2 square pools (warm and cold) and the circular main collector, the ground floor is an area of public action and display, a continuous parade of personalities and bodies, a stage where a cyclical dialectic between exhibitionism and spectator ship takes place.

It is an area for the observation and possible seduction of partners who will be invited to actively participate in private fantasies and the pursuit of desires.

The two long walls of the building consist of an infinite number of cells of various sizes, to which individuals, couples or groups can retire. These cells are equipped to encourage indulgence, and to facilitate the realisation of fantasies, and social inventions; they invite all forms of human interactions and exchange

The public area - private cells sequence can generate a creative chain reaction in the two Arenas at both ends of the baths, where successful performers or those confident about the validity and originality of their actions and proposals filter into from the cells. Finally in the Arena, they perform. The freshness and suggestiveness of these performances activate dormant parts of the brain, and trigger off a continuous explosion of ideas in the audience. Overcharged by this spectacle, the Voluntary Prisoners descend to the ground floor looking for those willing and able to work out new elaborations.



THE SQUARE OF THE ARTS

This square is devoted to the accelerated creation evolution and exhibition of objects. It is the Industrial zone of the strip, an Urban open space, paved in a synthetic material which offers a high degree of comfort to its users. Dispersed on this surface are the buildings to which people go to satisfy their love for objects.

There are three major buildings on the square. One is old; it has always been a museum.

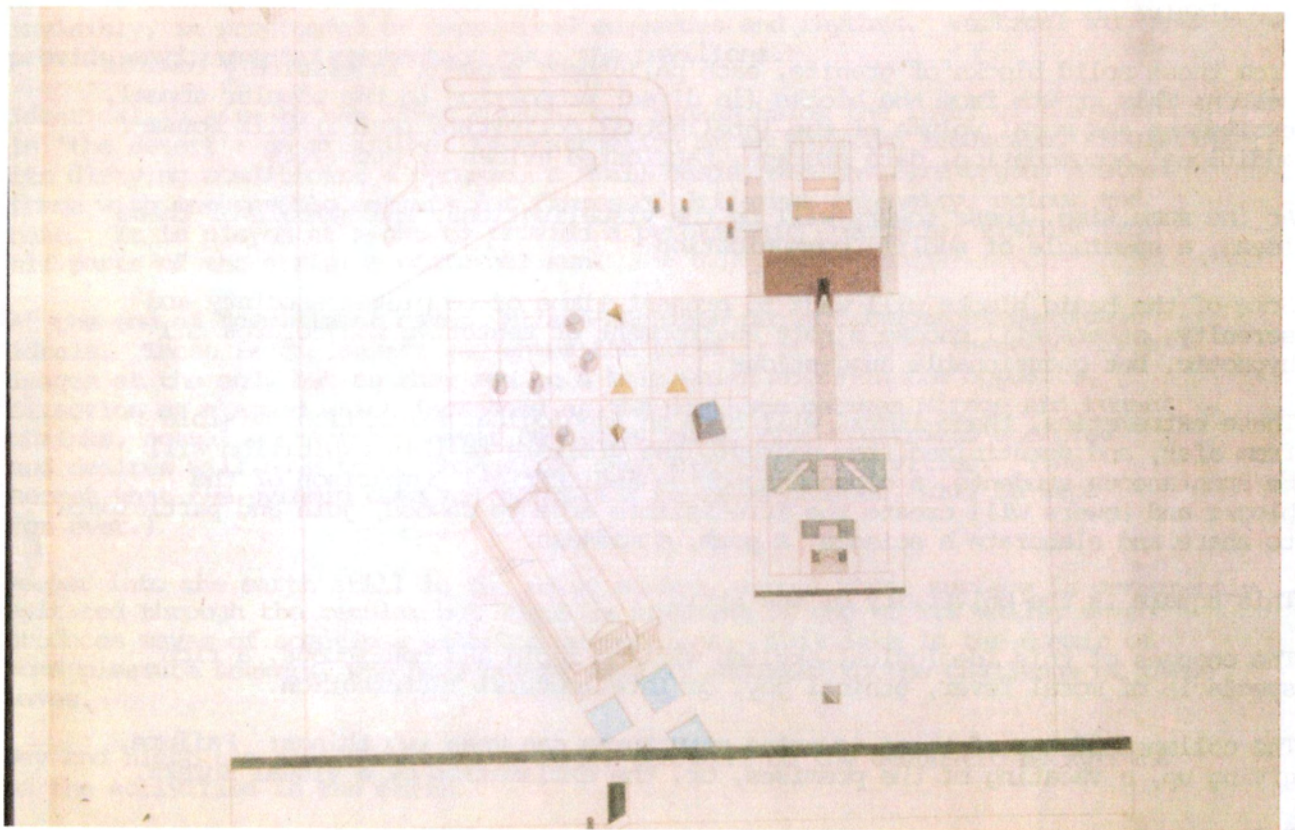
The other two have been built by the Voluntary prisoners. Of these two the first one bulges out of the surface; it was built with the materials of the second, which is carved out of the square, and is in fact, the interior of the first. At first sight it is impossible to understand that these twin buildings are one, and that this is not a secret. Together they form an instrument for the indoctrination of the existing culture. They achieve this simply by displaying the past in the only possible way: They expose memory by allowing its provocative vacuums to be filled with the explosive emotions of onlookers. The mixture produces the most relevant and scientific information. They are a school.

The density and impenetrability of the first building intensifies the expectations of arriving students who wait outside its gates, while the apparent emptiness of the interior of the second building provokes an anxious suspense. Descending into its enigmatic galleries, the complete history of creation unfolds in a spectral form. An irresistible power drives the visitors on a journey down the escalators that link the galleries, into a complete exploration of the most mysterious corners of history. When they arrive at the lowest gallery, they discover that the interior is bottomless, and that new galleries are under construction. The most recent galleries are filling with a continuous procession of completely unfamiliar works, emerging from a tunnel that seems to lead to the old museum. Returning to the surface, the traces of this course are retained on the retina and transferred to certain parts of the brain.

The older building contains in a sense the negative pictures of the complete past. The first impression to the uninformed visitor is that of a collection of an almost infinite number of empty frames, blank canvasses and vacant pedestals. Only those who have the knowledge from the previous course can decipher the spectacle by projecting their memories on these empty provocations: A continuous film of images, improvements, accelerated versions of the history of art automatically produce new works, fill the space with recollections, modifications and inventions.

These new creations immediately disappear through the tunnel to the pit, where they take their place in the last moments of the indoctrination programme.

Apart from these three main buildings, the only tangible exhibits in the square are small buildings that look like pawns on the grid of an ancient game. They are dropped like meteorites of unknown metaphysical meaning, waiting to be moved to the next intersection of the game, each time they are further deciphered.



THE SQUARE OF THE CAPTIVE GLOBE

* This square, is devoted to the artificial conception and accelerated birth of theories, interpretations, mental constructions and proposals, and their infliction on the World.

It is the capital of Ego, where science, art, poetry and certain forms of manias will be allowed to compete under ideal and identical conditions, to invent the answers to metaphysical questions, to propose changes in social organisation, to destroy and restore the World of phenomenal reality.

It will be an incubator of ideologies, which will not be permitted to consume the world, to recognize only certain phenomena and suppress others. Each of these sciences and manias has its own plot. On each plot stands an identical base, built from heavy polished stone. These bases, ideological laboratories, are equipped to temporarily suspend unwelcome laws, undeniable truths, to create non-existent physical and mental conditions, to facilitate and provoke speculative activities.

From these solid blocks of granite, each philosophy expands indefinitely towards heaven; This growth from the blocks (in direct proportion to the popular appeal, excitement and moral volume of the intellectual activities inside) will house additional accomodation, data storage, fabricated evidence, etc.....

At the same time, these towers will be the visualisations, and symbols of these ideas, a spectacle of sublime communication.

Some of the basic blocks will want to present limbs of complete certainty and serenity, others will choose a soft environment of tentative conjectures and hypnotic, but questionable suggestions.

These extremeties, these limbs, will form an ideological exhibition, visible from afar, and scrutinized from nearby; the visitors to this exhibition will be spontaneous students, a close inspection and critical comparison of the blocks and towers will create the irresistible urge to choose, join and participate, to share and elaborate a science, a poem, a madness.

This square is the University of the Strip

The changes of this ideological skyline will be rapid and continuous, a rich spectacle of moral fever, ethical joy, or intellectual masturbation.

The collapse of one of these towering structures can mean two things: Failure, giving up, a vacating of the premises, or, the exclamation of a visual Eureka.

A Theory that works
A mania that sticks
An idea that is
A lie that has become truth
A dream from which there is no waking up

On these moments the purpose of the Captive Glove, suspended in mid-air in the centre of the square, becomes apparent: all these institutes together form an enormous incubator for the World itself. They are breeding on the globe, changing it, adding something to its contents.

These buildings and their passionate investigators have consumed facts objects and phenomena, in order to give more and better in return.

The globe gains weight. - Its temperature rises slowly, - Invisibly it grows, In spite of the most humiliating setbacks, its ageless pregnancy survives,

We all have our ear on the stethoscope of the ideologies. The question is, (and we are not too pessimistic about the answer) who will crack first?

The skin of this impossible egg, or perhaps ourselves?

THE PARK OF THE FOUR ELEMENTS

The park is divided into four square areas, which disappear into the ground like four gigantic steps.

The first square, 'air', consists of a number of sunken pavilions, overgrown with elaborate networks of responsive ducts, which emit various mixtures of gasses to create aromatic and hallucinogenic experiences.

By subtle variations in dosage, density and perhaps even coloration, these volatile clouds of scents can be modified or sustained almost like a musical instrument.

Moods of exhilaration, depression, serenity and receptivity can be evoked invisibly, in programmed or improvised sequences and rhythms. Vertical air-jets provide environmental protection over the pavilions.

Identical in size to the first square, but sunken below the level of the surface, is 'the desert': an artificial reconstruction of an Egyptian landscape, simulating its dizzying conditions: a pyramid, a small oasis, and the fire organ: A steel frame with innumerable outlets for flames of different intensity, colour and heat. It is played at night to provide a pyrotechnic spectacle, visible from all parts of the strip; a nocturnal sun.

At the end of four linear caves, Mirage-machines project images of desirable ideals. Those in the desert who enter the tubes, run to reach these beatific images at the end, but as they run on a belt which moves in the opposite direction at a speed which increases as the distance between Mirage and runner shrinks, actual contact can never be established. The frustrated energies and desires will have to be channelled into sublimated activities. (The secret that the pyramid does not contain a treasure-chamber, will be kept for ever.)

Deeper into the earth still is the water square, a pool whose surface is permanently agitated through the regular but variable movement of one of its walls, which produces waves of sometimes gigantic proportions. This lake is the domain of some pleasure seekers, who have become totally addicted to the challenge of these waves.

Day and night the sounds of this interior sea will be the accoustic background of the activities in the strip.

The fourth square at the bottom of the pit, is devoted to 'earth'; it is occupied by a vaguely familiar mountain, its top exactly level with the surface of the strip. At the top of this mountain, a group of sculptors is involved in a debate, trying to decide whose bust they will carve in the rock, but in the accelerated atmosphere of this prison, no one is important long enough for them to ever reach a conclusion.

The Walls of the cavity reveal the past history of this location like a scar; part of a now deserted Underground line is suspended in this void. Deep in the other walls cave dwellings and cavernous meeting places are carved out to accomodate certain primordial mysteries.

After the spiral movement through the four squares an escalator returns the wanderer to the surface.

THE INSTITUTE OF BIOLOGICAL TRANSACTIONS

This institute sustains the Voluntary Prisoners through biological emergencies, physical and mental crises; it also demonstrates the harmless nature of mortality.

It is divided in four parts by a cruciform building. The first part contains the hospital: it contains the complete arsenal of modern healing, but is devoted to a radical deescalation of the medical process, to the abolition of the compulsive rage to heal.

No forced heartbeats here, no chemical invasions, no sadistic stretchings of life. This new strategy will create a lowering of the average life expectancy, a corresponding decrease in senility, physical decay, nausea and exhaustion, in fact, patients here will be healthy.

The hospital consists of a sequence of pavilions, each devoted to a particular disease.

From the entrance a medical boulevard connects these buildings. The sick pass through them in a continuous procession on a slowly moving belt; in an almost festive atmosphere of operatic melodies: a group of dancing nurses in transparent uniforms; medical equipment disguised as totempoles and rich perfumes which suppress the familiar stench of healing.

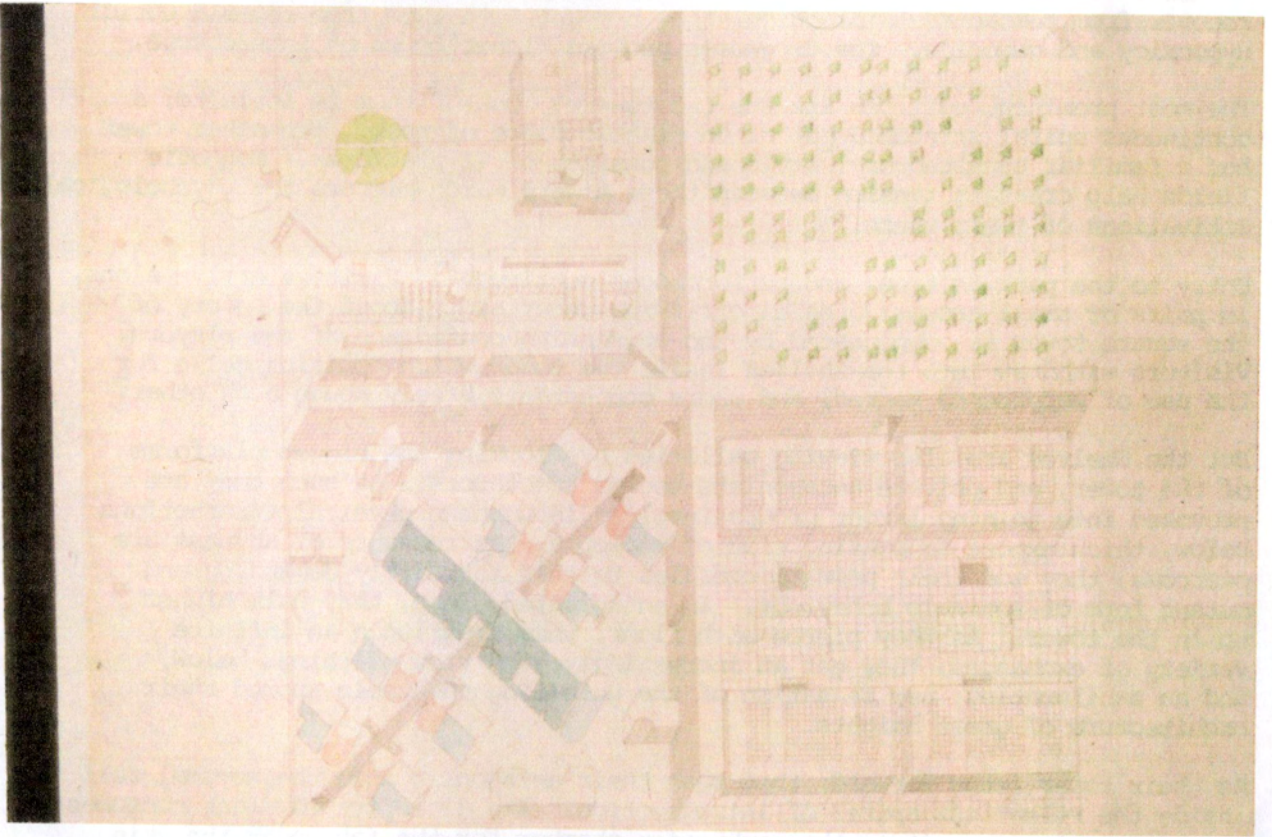
Doctors select their patients from this belt, invite them to their individual pavilions, test their vitality and almost playfully administer their (medical) knowledge. If they fail, the patient is returned to the conveyor; perhaps another doctor tries him, but it now becomes apparent that the belt leads beyond the pavilions, through the cruciform building straight to the cemetery.

There is a continuity of festive mood here, the same smells, the same ethereal dances, made more moving more human still by the contrast of the ruthless formal layout of the plots and the unnaturalness of the dark green shrubbing.

In the third part of the square, in the three palaces of birth there will be a statistical balance between births and deaths. The physical proximity of these events through the architectural arrangement suggests the consolation of a causal relationship between the two, a gentle relay. The lowering of the average life expectancy creates an ambitious urgency; it does not allow the luxuries of underexploited brains, the artificial prolongation of childishness or wasted adolescence. Therefore the 3 palaces of birth will also take care of the babies during their first infancy, school them, turn them into small adults at the earliest possible date, (between 8 and 11) capable of actively taking part in life in the strip.

In the fourth square mental patients will be on display as in former days; not themselves however but in an extremely well produced exhibition of their delusions, sustained by the latest technical equipment: an infinite number of Napoleons, Florence Nightingales, Einsteins, Jesus Christs, and Joans of Arc, each in their custom/made uniforms. These inmates will also stage performances for the accelerated education instead of history classes.

In the cruciform building finally which separates the four compartments reside the Archives which contain all vital facts, developments, life incidents of past and present prisoners. Bureaucracy, so often criticized for its passion for control contempt for privacy (and moral blindness) guarantees the prisoners a new kind of immortality: This statistical treasure coupled to the most imaginative computers, produces instant biographies of the dead in seconds, but also premature biographies of the living, mixtures of facts and ruthless extrapolations which have become the essential instruments for plotting a course and planning the future.



THE PARK OF AGGRESSION

This is the second park in the city. It was laid out at the same time as the square of the captive globe, and is next to it. In this recreational area, rudimentary structures were erected to correct and channel aggressive desires into creative confrontations.

The ego-world dialectic which unfolds in the adjoining square, generates the continuous emergence of conflicting ideologies. Their imposed co-existence invokes childish dreams and the desire to play. This park is a reservoir of sustained tension waiting to be used: A gigantic playground of flexible dimensions to accomodate the only sport played in the strip: Aggression

Here, the conflicts between corresponding antagonisms are re-enacted and fought out: The battles that are staged, dissolve the corrosive hysteria of good manners. In fact on an individual level, this park is a sanatorium where patients recover from remnants of infections they brought with them from the old world: Hypocrisy and genocide. The diagnoses provoke richer forms of intercourse.

The most prominent edifices are the two towers. One of them is infinite; a continuous spiral stretched out of an elastic piece of rock. The other tower has a familiar architectural style and consists of 42 platforms. Magnetic fields help create a tension between these towers which mirrors the psychological motivations of their users.

Entry to the park is free, and performances continuous. Visitors arrive alone, in pairs or small groups; the electrifying uncertainty about the safety of the square tower is compensated by the aggressive confidence of the players. Visitors withdraw into the shelves inside the tower which contains cells for the use of suppressed hatred, and where contestants freely abuse each other.

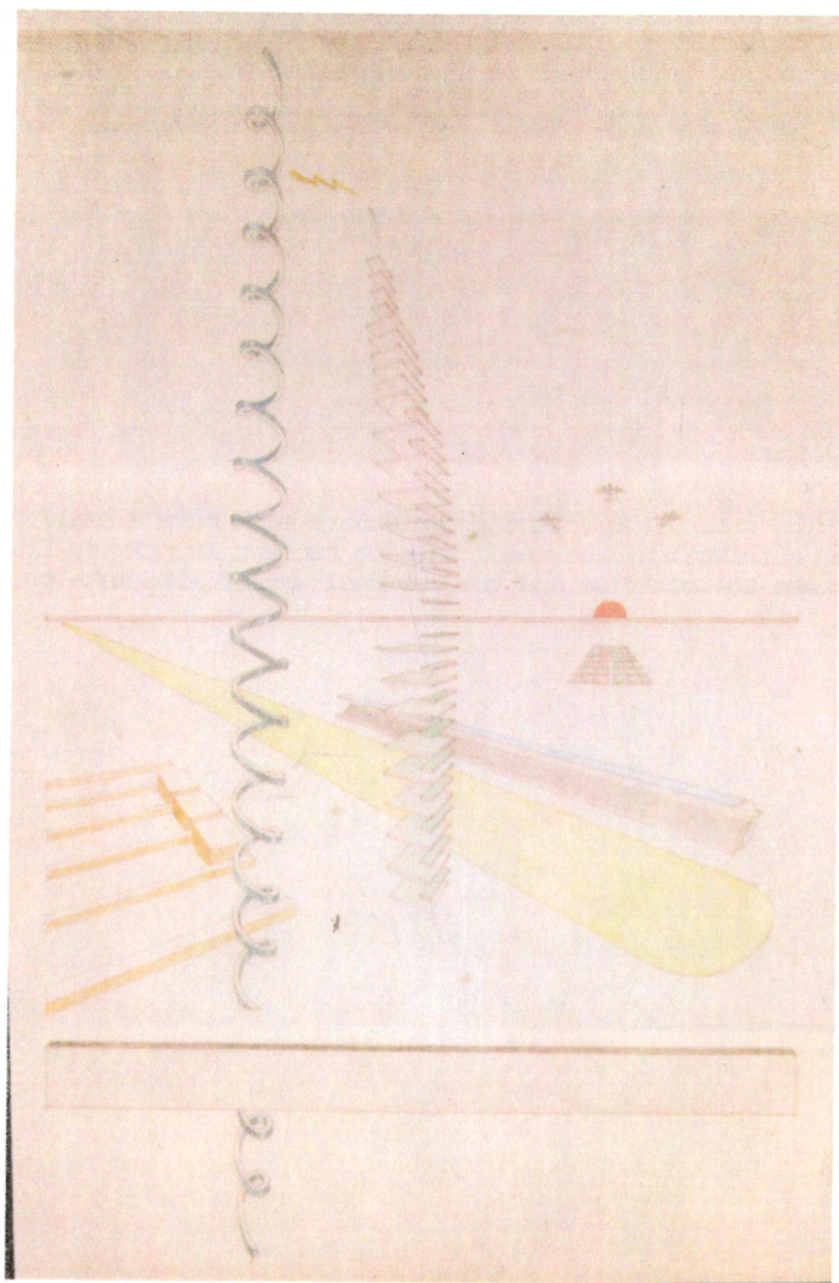
But the Shelves are also viewing galleries overlooking the bigger platforms of the tower, and private antagonists become spectators. As such they are provoked into joining larger groups involved in unknown physical transactions below, thich expose an amazing side of violence. As remnants of shyness are overcome, they add their private energies to this incredibly demanding and mutant form of sociable behaviour. In an agitated sleep, they walk higher up in the tower. As they pierce each floor, they experience an infinite variety of exchanges, they get an increasingly good view of things below, and an exhilarating, new sensation of the unfolding spectacle around their architecture of great heights.

As their tower leans forward, they push their antagonist into the abysmal fall inside the relentless spiral of introspection. Its digestive movement consumes excessive softness: it is the combustion chamber for the fat under the skin. The human missiles, helped by the centrifugal acceleration, escape through a chosen opening in the walls of the sprial, objects of terrifying energy into a trajectory of irresistible temptations.

The entire surface of the park, the air space above and the cavities below it are now a fullscale battlefield. As the operations continue into the night they take the appearance of hallucinatory celebrations, against the backdrop of an abandoned world of calculated extermination, and polite immobility.

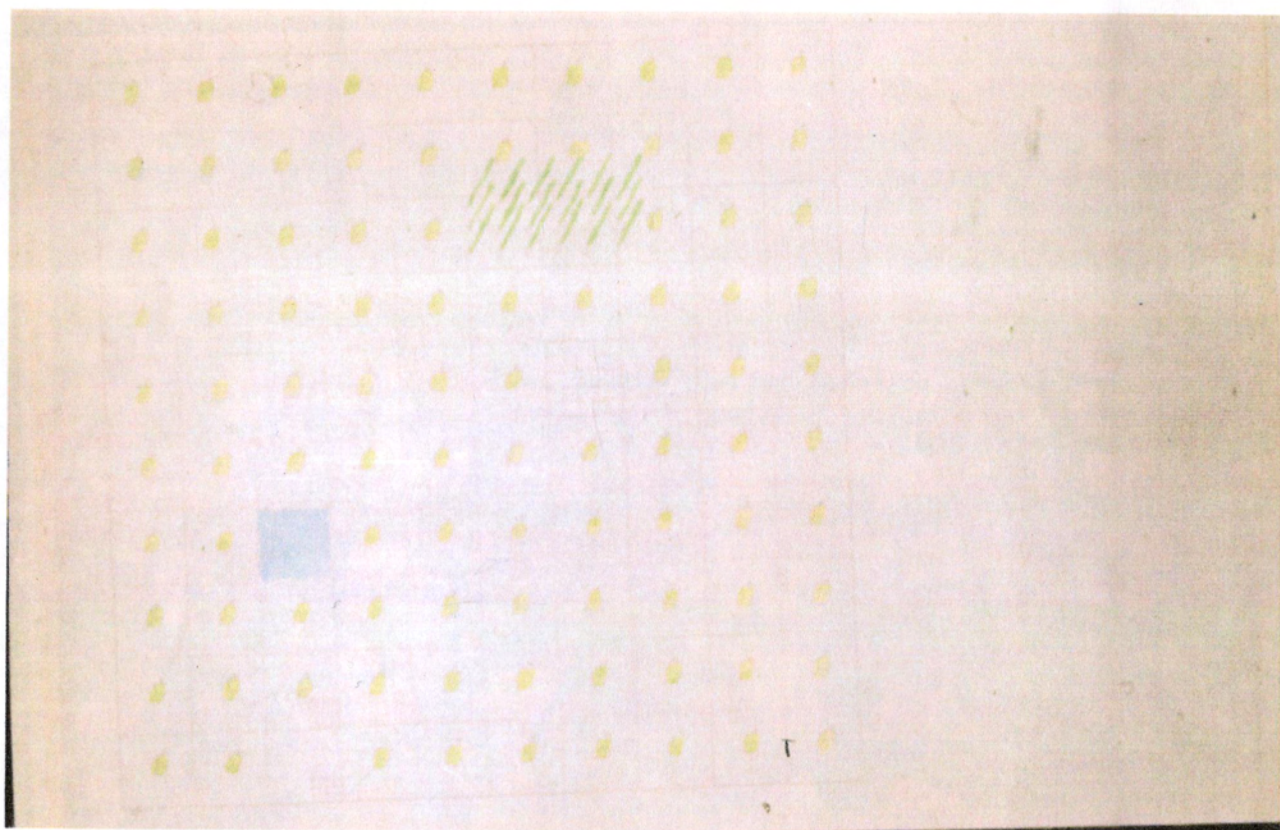
As they return from their nocturnal adventures they celebrate their collective victories in a gigantic arena that crosses the park diagonally.

The small buildings in the corner of the park are old building barracks used for the construction of the towers now used as changing rooms. In the 3 large halls (the old site offices) pacts are signed and new relationships consolidated.



THE ALLOTMENTS

In this part of the strip, the Voluntary Prisoners each have a small piece of land for private cultivation; they need this to recover in privacy from the demands the intense collectivism and the communal way of life make on them.



The allotments are well supervised, so that both external and internal disturbances can be avoided, or at least quickly suppressed.

Media intake in this area is nil.

Papers are banned, radios mysteriously out of order, the whole concept of 'news' is ridiculed by the patient devotion with which the plots are ploughed, the surfaces are scrubbed, polished and embellished.

Time has been suppressed.

Nothing ever happens here, yet the air is heavy with exhilaration



The houses on these allotments are built from the most lush and expensive materials (marble, chromium, steel), - small Palaces for the People.

On this shamelessly subliminal level this simple Architecture succeeds in its secret ambition to instill 'gratitude' and 'contentment'.



THE AVOWAL

To express their everlasting gratitude the voluntary prisoners sing an ode on the Architecture by which they are forever enclosed:

'De ce Terrible paysage
Que jamais oeil mortel ne vit,
Ce matin encore l'image,
Vague et lointaine, me ravit...

'J'avais banni de ces spectacles
Le végétal irrégulier...

Je savourais dans mon tableau
L'enivrante (!) monotonie
Du métal, du marbre et de l'eau.

'Babel d'escaliers et d'arcades
C'était un palais infini,
Plein de bassins et de cascades
Tombant dans l'or mat ou bruni;

'Et des cataractes pesantes,
Comme des rideaux de cristal,
Se suspendaient, éblouissantes,
A des murailles de métal.

'Non d'arbres, mais de colonnades
Les étangs dormants s'entouraient,
Où de gigantesques naïades,
Comme des femmes, se miraient.

'Des nappes d'eau s'épanchaient, bleues,
Entre des quais roses et verts,
Pendant des millions de lieues,
Vers les confins de l'univers;

'C'étaient des pierres innouïes
Et des flots magiques; c'étaient
D'immenses glaces éblouies
Par tout ce qu'elles reflétaient.

'Et tout, même la couleur noire,
Semblait fourbi, clair, irisé...

'Nul astre d'ailleurs, nuls vestiges
De soleil, même au bas du ciel,
Pour illuminer ces prodiges,
Qui brillaient d'un feu personnel (!)'



EPILOGUE

Although at first sight the metaphorical message of these proposals may seem to dominate practical considerations, this is not another Utopian tale.

The zone can be built today (if necessary in segments, perhaps with a modified location, perhaps with the segments dropped like stones, apart from each other, and only connected by the overlapping ripples caused by their impact on the urban pond, i.e. like true social condensers). It requires a fundamental belief in cities as the incubators of social desires, the synthetic materialisations of all dreams. If people were allowed to become acquainted with Architecture they would decide to re-appropriate the physical and ideological decay of our Urban Societies and to rehabilitate their premises with the metropolitan ideal and life style.

Under the threat of doom, the common concern, that is the fulfilment of all private desires within a subliminally collective and deliriously permissive common effort, produces phantom proposals, in the knowledge that phantom reality is the only possible successor to the present reality shortage.

Like the castaways on the raft of the Medusa, the last surviving realists, hanging on the parachute of hope are dropping on the rescue ship THE CITY, which, at the end of cannibalism, will appear in the horizon.

