

# EXHIBIT DESIGN

## THE EXAMPLE OF THE TRIENNALE



### A report from Milan by David Hirsch, followed by an interview with Hardy, Holzman & Pfeiffer, designers of a major Triennale exhibit.

The (14th) Quattordicesima Triennale di Milano (Subject: The Greater Number Problem) is closed. Several published documents, many newspaper articles, and a considerable number of confused and confusing rumors remain. One fact to be observed is that the group of dissenters who occupied the Triennale for the first 15 days were artists who objected to their omission from the exhibition. In Italy, there is an historic relationship between the arts and architecture. One cannot forget here that the greatest works were the accomplishment of the super artist-architect. Thus, to categorically deny the artist exhibition privileges had to be a provocation to them. And, of course, the most successful contemporary technique to express their anger was to take over the exhibition and prevent its opening until the last handful of dissenters was dragged out by the police.

The action of the artists also caused the

resignation of prime mover Giancarlo di Carlo from the Triennale committee. He found himself disagreeing in principle with the artists and despising the police action. As an attempt to mediate the grievances of the artists, he had suggested that they ought to create some very temporary works to be exhibited in several cities. In effect, he was saying that, in order to be accepted in an exhibition with such contemporary subject matter, it was necessary that the artists themselves be made aware of their role in the "Greater Number." The artists could, in turn, ask the architect to build transient dwellings of discardable materials. To some exhibitors (the Archigram Group), this is not an absurd suggestion. If "The Greater Number Problem" is at all definable, a layman visitor to this Triennale would hardly be able to express it. The Triennale committee had hoped for one message: that while man is capable of making objects with great technological sophistication, he is not really able to put this technological capability to use in solving the environmental problems for the "Greater Number." To present such a point of view requires a happy coincidence of cooperation among those special exhibitors invited to participate. From the reputations

of the groups selected, one really could have expected a better showing.

Archigram's super-pill, a huge transparent tube that advertises the "Milanogram," sardonically alludes to this kind of future environment. Most of the best exhibitors, however, were less concerned with the potentials of technology than they were with more immediate humanistic and sociological implications of "The Greater Number Problem." And, of course, some of the exhibits were far more effective representations than others. — D. HIRSCH

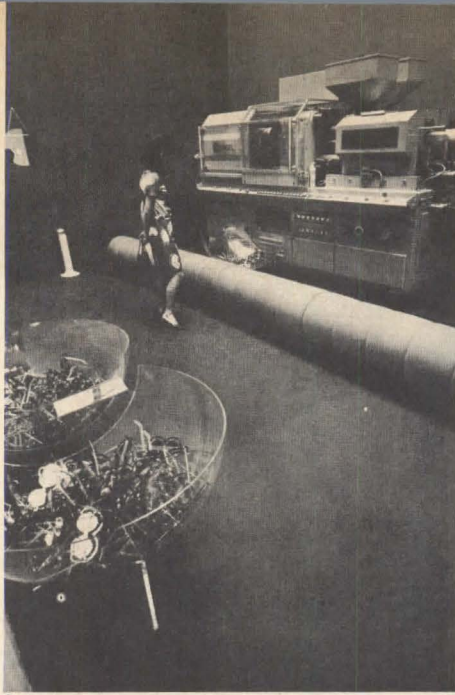
P/A talked with three American architects — Hugh Hardy, Malcolm Holzman, and Norman Pfeiffer — whose exhibit in the International Section was ideally placed (and perhaps designed) to be a focal point for demonstrators. Hardy said that the aggrieved artists were quite gentle and content with carrying placards and writing graffiti on an occasional white wall, with the exception of the exhibition by Alison and Peter Smithson, where they defaced surfaces and ripped down hangings. Why just this one? "The Smithsons were trying symbolically to represent Florence as a grand time and place in Italy, I think, whereas it represents a tyranny of authority and academia that young artists want to get away from," according to Hardy. In addition, the presentation, though no doubt sincerely intended, came across as a parody or put-on, a camp version of Florence, and as such was resented.

What were the reasons for the "riot"? Evidently, there was little student participation or interest. Reportedly, word was sent up to Milan from the activists at the University of Rome to ignore the Triennale because it did not represent a major policy involvement for students. But as a major "professional taste-making machine," in Hardy's words, it was of great importance to artists, who objected strenuously to their exclusion. "The artists were really saying, 'We want in,'" says Hardy. "They weren't saying there should be no Triennale. They were saying we would like to change it so we will be a part of it." How this will be accomplished while simultaneously continuing the participation and exchange of ideas with designers from all over the world that was instituted this year by Giancarlo di Carlo remains for the future to divulge.

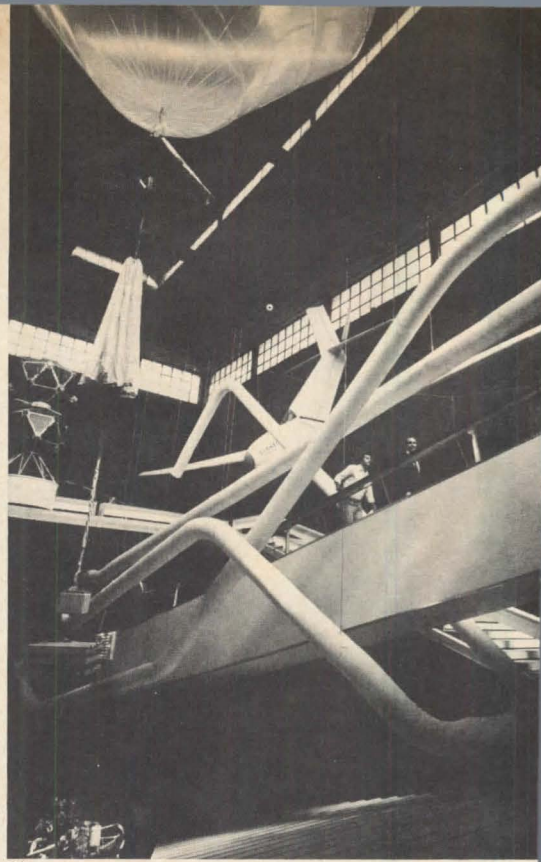
What did the Triennale indicate about the state of exhibition design? There were represented the two extremes of exhibit design, Holzman believes. "There were guys who figured out how every little screw and nut and bolt fit together and there were guys who assembled a lot of



seemingly chaotic material, threw it together, and then asked people how it should be pushed around. Giancarlo di Carlo's 'riot scene' was an example of this." The gamut was run between "a sort of pristine technical sensitivity" such as the Swiss exhibition, and a kind of "happenings" exhibit where the designers sought to introduce the street or the real environment with all its accidents into the Triennale palazzo. Of their own exhibit, Hardy says, "We were trying to make visual images out of the hardware of the street, trying to show that there is as much fun — and beauty, too, but mostly fun — in that as there is in the gewgaws and carvings and block upon block of 'design' that there is in older architecture." The future direction of exhibitions might be just this. In order to attract people, their involvement and participation in the exhibitions will become just as necessary as the involvement and participation with their real environments is becoming. "I think the people who are designing art and exhibit 'environments' and that sort of thing are closer to something meaningful than those who are still designing the perfect joint for exhibitions," says Hardy. "They are beginning to make people aware of things. I'm put off by seeing ranks of products with labels attached. It's a book technique used in the wrong place. If you're showing a toaster,



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- 9. Hans Hollein: Supermarket, Plastic-Extruded Goggled Bureaucracies.
- 10. Great staircase: Technology for transforming environment.
- 11. Archigram: Vision of the city encapsulated in "Milanogram."
- 12. Introduction: The Greater Number.
- 13. Furniture from Finland.

you should feel heat and be aware of bread."

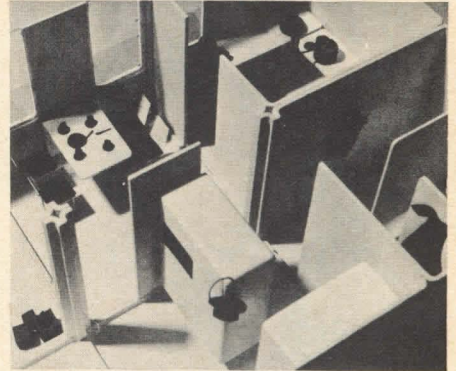
Is such a show as the Triennale a valid activity for today? "Maybe it is just a product show like the U.S. auto show," Holzman answers, "but perhaps Giancarlo was right, and it can also be used as a forum for the exchange of ideas. It's not so different in intent than a world's fair, only a whole lot smaller." The problem is getting people to come, and not turning into a purely "in" show for professionals. "Hasn't a design exhibition become a thing that people who design exhibitions go to?" asks Hardy. There has never, in the United States, he thinks, been an intellectually oriented exhibition, unless you count some of the earlier world's fairs (certainly not the last New York fair). "But we have going for us here and now really wild exhibitions such as the auto show that have the potential for being turned, in part, into an exploration of ideas and possibilities as well as just a straight products show. It would be good to inoculate something like the home furnishings show with some of this creative idea juice. It would be even more relevant to this society than the one in Milan."

To accomplish exchange of viable ideas, structured institutions such as the Triennale must be open to change, as people learned this summer in Milan. "The Triennale in the past has been merely a showcase for the wares of established designers," according to Norman Pfeiffer. "With the acceptance of new problems brought about by rapid change, this will no longer do. It is unfortunate that such a meaningful contemporary thought as the 'Greater Number Problem' should be forced to express itself in such a traditional manner—each exhibit confined to its own boundaries within the walls of the Palazzo; each with its own front door. It will no longer do to have exhibits of this kind for two months, then send its participants home and write a book to tell what happened. To have value, the Triennale of the future must provide an opportunity for a continuing dialog, a continuing means of communication. It must deal with other designers in other countries and other institutions in different areas. If the outcome, information, or results of future Triennales are to be of any value, they must be put into the hands of political and financial institutions, must reach the awareness of the people who can instigate needed changes."

## USED CUBE LOT

A constant housing complaint has been that building technology has not been capable of duplicating the mass production advantages of the automobile. Two Berlin architects, Bernd and Myra Ruccius, have devised a cube system with which they propose to remedy this complaint. Their cube contraption will not only incorporate the virtues of the mass-produced automobile, but will also provide the glories of the used-car lot in the remarketing of used cubes.

The architects report their cube system is available at \$800 per cube, f.o.b. Berlin. It allows the prospective homeowner to accumulate cube components gradually. They recommend an initial eight-cube apartment that can be added to as the family



grows, and disassembled and sold as used cubes when the grown children leave the cubehold to begin collecting cubes of their own.

Cubes are roughly 8'-4" on a side and can be attached horizontally and vertically. They incorporate furniture, plumbing, and stairways for vertical access. Weight per cube is about 1000 lbs. The cubes are attached to each other with neoprene gaskets and "plastic screws." The architects advise that a cube catalog is available and that custom cubes will be manufactured upon request.

The convertible cubes also accommodate exterior walls, skylights, bathroom fixtures, door, windows, and empty space. The architects propose that cooperative cubes be contemplated for communal cohabitation. — FW

