

The Museum of Modern Art

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FUNCTION WITHOUT FORM: Two Models of an Undesignable City, on view at The Museum of Modern Art from March 1 through 31, demonstrates a visual language that deals with complex city planning questions while preserving the possibility of unforeseeable developments. Designed by Theodore Waddell, an American architect living in Italy, and executed in collaboration with Michael C. Cunningham, the models are made of plexiglas, neon tubes and machinery parts - they represent 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.

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, Arthur Drexler, Director of the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design, observes in the exhibition wall label.

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. The purpose of Mr. Waddell's models is not to represent real building forms, but to suggest the functions that would call them into existence. "The urban entity he is dealing with will be so big and so complex that no one can, or should, predict in detail all the elements it will involve, nor can these elements be 'designed' as part of a planning study."

At the scale of one foot to approximately one mile, the language of three-dimensional representation used by Mr. Waddell 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 brilliance and transparency give a lively sense of variety.

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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" 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.

Additional information, photographs, and biographical information on Theodore Waddell, available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. 245-3200.