

Entre la permanencia
y la temporalidad.
Campos, urbanidad
y tiempo

In Between Permanence
and Temporariness.
On Camps, Urbanity and
Time

MARINA OTERO VERZIER

Lightness and Depth.
The case of Renzo Piano's
itinerant architectures

Ligereza y Profundidad.
El caso de las arquitecturas
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Marina Otero Verzier "Lightness and depth. The case of Renzo Piano's itinerant architectures / Ligereza y profundidad. El caso de las arquitecturas itinerantes de Renzo Piano", *ZARCH* 22 (junio 2024): 12-23. ISSN versión impresa: 2341-0531 / ISSN versión digital: 2387-0346. https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_zarch/zarch.20242210342

Abstract

This essay examines the legacy of itinerant architecture through Renzo Piano's early architectural endeavors, notably the Laboratorio di Quartiere in Otranto (1979) and the IBM Traveling Pavilion (1982-86), focusing on their strategies for spatial occupation. Piano's projects are situated within a historical and cultural narrative that spans from post-war Italy's architectural challenges to global corporate strategies in the late 20th century. The text navigates the complexities of conceiving structures that are both rooted and rootless, local and global, permanent and ephemeral. It highlights the tension between the democratizing aspirations of mobile architecture and its appropriation by corporate and market forces. This analysis instigates a reconsideration of the relationship between architecture and land by unveiling how the apparent lightness of temporary architecture is nevertheless dependent on the extractive practices fueling global economies.

Keywords

Itinerant architecture, mobile structures, community engagement, traveling pavilion, sustainability.

The most easterly town in southern Italy, Otranto, where the country's heel touches the Adriatic, hosted the first—and last—UNESCO Urban Travelling Regeneration Workshop, originally named the Laboratorio di Quartiere. It was June 1979. After a period of prolonged expansion, often referred to as the Italian 'economic miracle,' the country faced a gradual decline in its growth rates, which never again reached the levels seen after the Second World War. Between 1955 and 1971, approximately nine million people were involved in interregional migration, with a significant number relocating to the Italian industrial triangle in the north, comprising Milan, Turin, and Genoa.¹ In addition, the transport and energy infrastructure policies developed by Italy between 1950 and 1960 led to stronger connections between cities, fostering their growth. However, these policies also resulted in

* This text is based on the author's doctoral thesis titled *Instituciones Evanescentes: Consideraciones Políticas sobre la Arquitectura Itinerante* (ETS Arquitectura UPM, 2016).

1 Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 219.

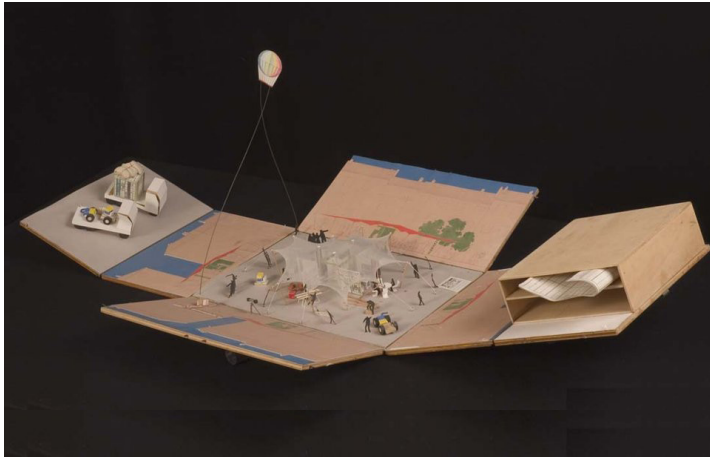


Figure 1. RPBW - Renzo Piano Building Workshop Architects, “Traveling workshop – Magic Box” UNESCO Laboratorio di quartiere, 1:50 model, 1979.



Figure 2. Gianni Berengo Gardin, “Installation of the mobile unit in the centre of the city’s historic district”, 1979, Otranto Urban Regeneration Workshop, Otranto, Italy.

the isolation, degradation, and abandonment of historical centres in rural areas. The Laboratorio di Quartiere was created “to bring town centres back to life.”²

“It has been calculated that in Italy’s historic city centers there are about eight million rooms either under-used or completely abandoned because they are in such poor condition,” reported the Italian magazine *Abitare* in October 1979.³ “In addition,” the article continued, “there are millions of houses which are occupied, but urgently need extraordinary maintenance, if not real renovation.”⁴ In response to this sociocultural and economic context, the Italian architect Renzo Piano and professor Gianfranco Dioguardi, commissioned by Wolf Tochtermann, Co-President of the UNESCO-UIA Validation Council, developed the concept of a mobile laboratory. This laboratory was to be set up in the centre of each village to assist the population in recovering and preserving their built environment. Instead of relying on conventional techniques of renovation and conservation, which often require “the occupants to move out while work is underway.” Piano and Dioguardi devised a system that aimed to “keep down costs, avoid even temporary evacuation of the occupants by working gradually over time, thus spreading the economic burden, and teach the population and local building workers the latest technologies.”⁵ This approach also focused on preserving specific methods and skills drawn from local memory and culture.

The role of the group of experts participating in this itinerant Laboratorio di Quartiere was, therefore, to assist in assessing, designing, and overseeing the works developed by an empowered population.

2 “Per il recupero dei centri storici. Una proposta: il laboratorio di quartiere,” *Abitare* 178 (October, 1979), 87.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*



Figure 3. “The mobile unit”, 1979, Otranto Urban Regeneration Workshop, Otranto, Italy.



Figure 4. RPBW - Renzo Piano Building Workshop Architects, “Traveling workshop,” UNESCO Laboratorio di quartiere, general model 1:20, 1979.

A poster displayed in Otranto, then an old historical centre with nearly 500 residents, conveyed the essence of this experiment through the words of Mayor Salvatore Miggiano:

During the week of June 12 to 18, the Laboratorio di Quartiere will be assembled in the Piazza del Popolo at Otranto, to make minor interventions in the historical city center. (Figure 1) The proposal has the support of UNESCO and the CNR. The presence of the laboratory in our historic center is predominantly an experiment. The possibility of giving the experiment an unlimited value and translating it into effective conservation and renewal of housing, with the help of the necessary social services that could be housed in old buildings like the Castle, depend in large measure on our direct participation and the interest of regional and central administrations. (...) During the week in which the Laboratory stays in Otranto, a movie will be filmed for UNESCO and RAI television.⁶

On June 12, 1979, a truck carrying a cube-shaped mobile container entered the historical centre of Otranto (Figure 2). Once it was unloaded in Piazza del Popolo, the container’s parts unfolded to create a temporary work and exhibition space that would last for a week, after which it could travel to a new location. By looking at the sequence of images documenting the laboratory’s assembly, “we could not escape”—as Archigram would write about their *Instant City* project—“the loveliness of the idea” of an itinerant structure “appearing out of nowhere, and after the ‘event’ stage, lifting up its skirts and vanishing.”⁷ For Archigram, as for Piano and Dioguardi, the primary interest in deploying a mobile, temporary structure was its flexibility and ability to occupy any site as effectively as possible. In a single day, and with the collaboration of the local population, a textile roof, reminiscent of a circus tent (Figure 3), was stretched over the cubic container. Inside, the space was organized into four sections: analysis and diagnostics, information and education, open project,

6 “Per il recupero dei centri storici. Una proposta: il laboratorio di quartiere,” 87.

7 “Instant City,” Archigram, edited by Peter Cook, Warren Chalk, Dennis Crompton, David Greene, Ron Herron & Mike Webb, 1972 [reprinted New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999] p. 96.

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and construction work.⁸ Otranto's Piazza del Popolo was transformed not only into a classroom but also into a congregation of bodies, a newly formed political space (Figure 4).

With its aim of becoming a medium by which education and culture would land into existing and disconnected villages, the Laboratorio di Quartiere inserted itself in a genealogy of itinerant architectures. The 1960s and 1970s saw a proliferation of projects that understood mobility as a critical project. In response to modern European architecture and postwar urbanism, proposals for temporary and mobile structures imagined a world in circulation. They prioritized notions of belonging that were not tied to the land but to a society in transit often modelled around the practice of nomadism. The easily assembled metal structures that Jean Prouvé designed after 1938 responded to the processes of postwar reconstruction and the need for the mass production of affordable housing, and projects such as Constant Nieuwenhuys's *New Babylon* (1956-1974), Cedric Price's *Potteries Thinkbelt* (1964-66), Archigram's *Ideas Circus* (1968) and *Instant City* (1969), or Kisho Kurokawa's *Capsule Declaration* (1969) proposed the dissolution of existing structures to make room for new ones and subvert traditional models of work, family and institutions. Street markets, circuses and travelling theatres would also become architectural references with the capacity to alter the everyday urban order or, in the words of philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, "the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption."⁹ The article "Momentary Community for a Mobile Era," part of Cedric Price's archive at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), colourfully captures the ambitions of that particular moment:

Whiz Bang Quick City will be a new way of urban life –designed by you– on the spot- spontaneously. Picture 500 people building a city in one day. Zoning, codes, rules, morals will be dictated by your own values and needs. No elaborate preplanning –no linear city, no radical city– that's for the real estate developer. Something new, that would evolve itself!¹⁰

In conceiving the Laboratorio di Quartiere, Piano and Dioguardi mobilized this DIY (Do it Yourself) approach and coopted the increasing conflict between local, culturally isolated centres and the well-serviced facilities of metropolitan regions. Whereas thirty years earlier, the arrival of media technologies such as the cinema had carried the hopes for a more egalitarian relation between villages and the metropolis, the 1960s and 1970s mitigated these disparities through mobile architectural projects, envisioned as new forms of media technology. The architecture group Archigram was perhaps the group that most prominently managed to capture this ethos in its ephemeral, mobile, and hypertechnological architecture. For them, architecture was a mechanism designed to redistribute existing resources and knowledge, thereby resulting in the creation of an information network. Writing in Archigram magazine 8 (1968), architect and founder Peter Cook described one of their projects, the educational facility *Ideas Circus*, as "a standard package of five or six vehicles" that would circulate between "provincial centers, tapping local universities, bleeding-off from them personalities, documentation and such things as film of laboratory experiments; then carrying on to the next town."¹¹

Similar aspirations for a home-delivered travelling architecture manifested in Archigram's *Instant City* project: "The City arrives, (...) the city stays for a limited period, (...) it then moves on to the next location."¹² Published right after *Ideas Circus*, *Instant City* is the result of an investigation of the impact and feasibility of introducing the metropolitan condition into these areas via a mobile

8 Otranto Urban Regeneration Workshop, Fondazione Renzo Piano website. Accessed May 1, 2012: <http://rpf.ice.spill.net/project/98/ottranto-urban-regeneration-workshop/genesis/>

9 Henri Lefebvre, 'The Bureaucratic Society of Controlled Consumption', *Everyday Life in the Modern World* [1968], London and New York: Continuum, 2002. p. 68.

10 "Momentary community for a mobile era - Whiz Bang Quick City, "in Life magazine, 1971, included as a reference inside Cedric Price's 'Air Structures Research' (1966-1971), today part of the architects' archive at the CCA. This research project was developed by Cedric Price in collaboration with Frank Newby and Robert H. Suan of Felix J. Samuely and Partners, Consulting Engineers; it was commissioned by the UK's Ministry of Public Buildings and Works and resulted in a survey and final report titled 'Air Structures: A Survey,' completed in 1969 and published in 1971 by HMSO (Her Majesty's Stationery Office). This comprehensive survey on the state of the art of air structures at the time constitutes an essential source of information to understand the origins and unfolding of the so-called 'Inflatable Moment.' The author studied at the archive during a research fellowship at the CCA in the summer of 2022.

11 Peter Cook, "Ideas Circus", *Archigram Magazine* 8 (1968).

12 "Instant City," *Archigram*, 1972 [reprinted New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999] p. 89.



Figure 5. Gianni Berengo Gardin, “Inside the mobile unit”, 1979, Otranto Urban Regeneration Workshop, Otranto, Italy.

facility equipped with the city’s information and entertainment services.¹³ Its twelve-step protocol artfully challenges not only the traditional concept of the city but also the architecture itself. With these projects, and in what might be understood as a response to Marshall McLuhan’s theories on the global village, Archigram disputed the expected role of new communication technologies, such as television, and the instantaneous movement of information in enhancing the democratization of culture. “People still feel frustrated,” they argued, referring to how rural communities are often undernourished and sometimes resentful of the privileged position of metropolitan regions.¹⁴ “If only,” Archigram writes about the metropolis, “we could enjoy it but stay where we are.”¹⁵

In Otranto, Piano and Dioguardi were able to build on a 1:1 scale the unrealized aspirations of the previous generation of architects, including those of Archigram. The Laboratorio di Quartiere was not just a vehicle. It was designed as an itinerant institution that travelled and unfolded in rural and disconnected areas; an architecture for the circulation of people, ideas, technologies and materials with the capacity to transform both the built environment and its inhabitants. The courses, meetings, and talks delivered inside the laboratory would not only have educational purposes but also very specific architectural ones, by articulating the techniques that would be applied in the rehabilitation of the historic fabric and the conservation and renewal of buildings (Figure 5).

As with Archigram’s projects, the Laboratorio di Quartiere stayed for only a limited period. On June 18, 1979, a truck again entered Otranto’s historical centre to set the architecture in motion again. Once folded, the textile roof and the cubic unit left no traces on site, except for the knowledge and skills acquired by the population in the workshops. The ephemeral architecture of the Laboratorio di Quartiere generated a lasting common space for assembling around shared concerns, as well as permanent redevelopment of the town. In Otranto, “the city” did not leave; rather, it was preserved and revalorized. Although the laboratory would not be Renzo Piano’s last project involving the reconstruction of historical centres, the itinerant workshop did not continue its itinerary. It did not unfold in any town other than Otranto. Intended to provoke a significant transformation using a minimum of matter, time, and energy, the mobile laboratory was ultimately more ephemeral than expected. As the mayor of Otranto foresaw, the possibility of transforming a temporary experiment

13 “Instant City,” *Archigram*, p. 86.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*

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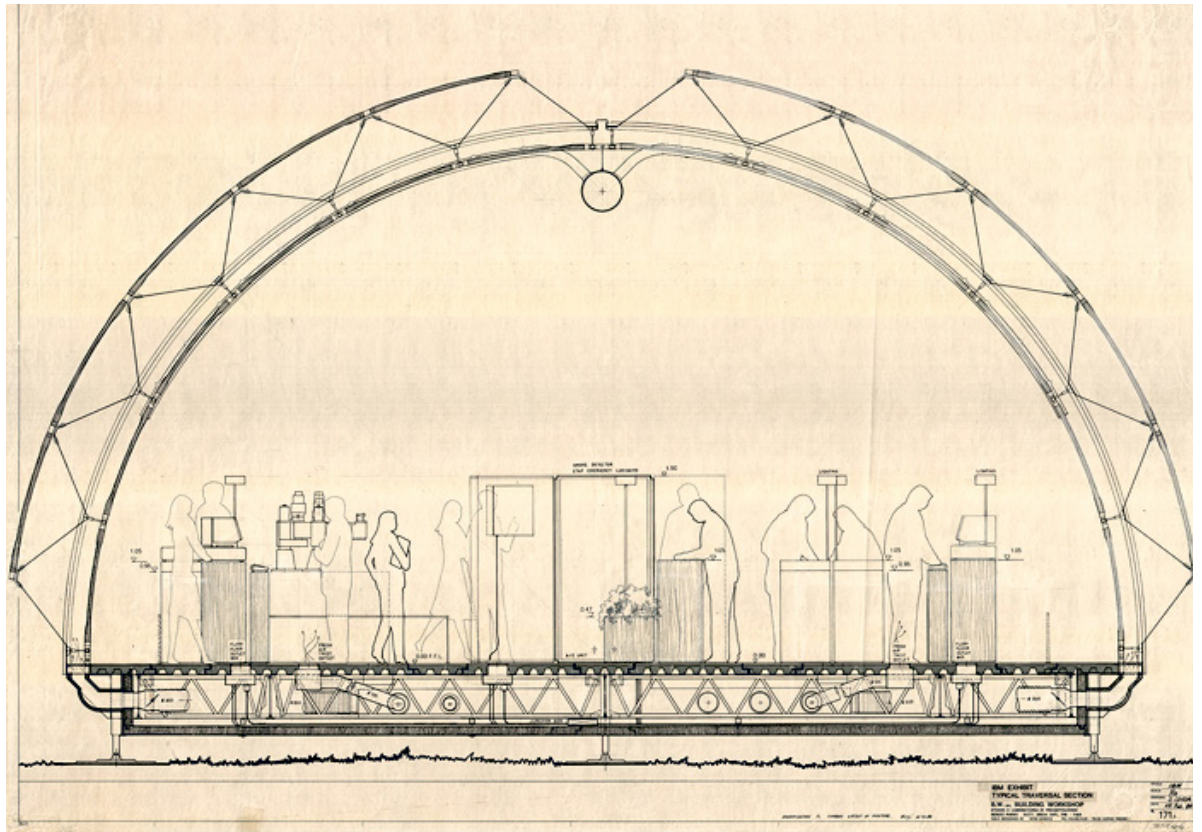


Figure 6. Shunji Ishida / Renzo Piano architetto, “IBM exhibit typical transversal section, scale 1/10” 21/02/1984, Drawing number: 171 a, Archive Code: IBM_E_006, B.W. srl Building Workshop.

into a lasting process “depends in large measure on our direct participation and the interest of regional and central administrations.”¹⁶

However, the spirit of Otranto did persist. Somewhat paradoxically, these temporary projects activate lasting processes with a permanent legacy. They participate in the transformation of cities in ways that are less visible but as influential as the processes of urban development. Their capacity to instigate alternative forms of living together makes them a blueprint for the city’s future. The experience in Otranto, created from both Piano and Dioguardi’s mobile laboratory and the urban fabric it served, enables an understanding of architecture as an imminent construction that changes over time and is subject to continuous material transformations, care and maintenance practices and circulatory processes that ultimately transform and actualize it.

The experience in Otranto would also inform Piano’s practice, having its most celebrated expression in the Centre Pompidou (1977), a project coauthored with Richard Rogers. The Pompidou brought back Piano’s early experiments in his most ambitious project to date, marking an era of technological mass culture, public participation and transformable environments. In its quest for temporality and “against traditional mentality or monumentality,” as Jean Baudrillard described the building, the Pompidou represented not an age of duration but one in which ‘the only temporal mode is that of the accelerated cycle and of recycling: the time of transistors and fluid flow.’¹⁷

Despite rejecting the idea of architecture as fixed material, the Pompidou, unlike the Laboratorio di Quartiere, did not travel. At least, it would not move until decades later, with the unveiling of the Centre Pompidou Mobile in 2011, designed by Patrick Bouchain. The Pompidou Mobile claimed to be the “first mobile museum in the world... lightweight, removable and transportable, in the spirit of the circus or carnival,” and it was designed to “go anywhere in France to the wider public.”¹⁸ At its opening, to recall again the tensions between the metropolis and rural areas, the museum’s

16 “Per il recupero dei centri storici. Una proposta: il laboratorio di quartiere,” 87.

17 Jean Baudrillard, Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson, ‘The Beaubourg effect: Implosion and Deterrence’, *October*, Vol. 20 (Spring, 1982), 3-13.

18 Centre Pompidou, website. Link no longer accessible.

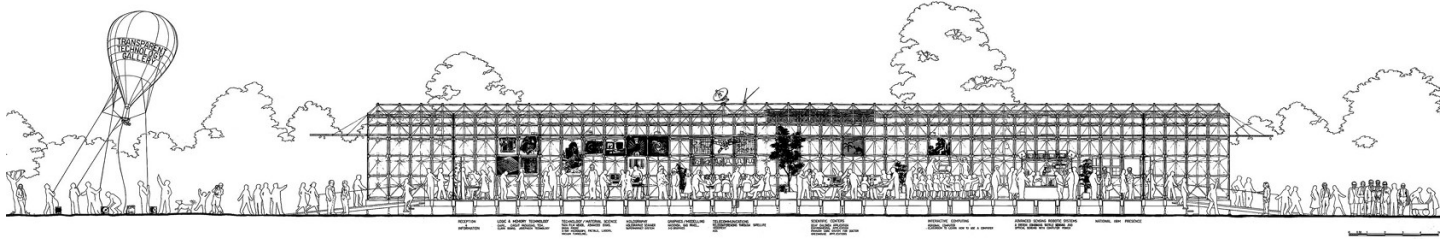


Figure 7. Renzo Piano Building Workshop, “IBM travelling pavilion, section”, 1983-1986, Italy.

president, Alain Seban, spoke of the redistribution of resources across the French Republic: “the works of the Centre Pompidou belong to the nation and we should bring them to all French citizens.”¹⁹ To this end, Bouchain designed three easily foldable and transportable lightweight plastic tents that represented, as Seban put it: “...all the values of the Centre (...). Do not forget that the Centre Pompidou is the heir of the Crystal Palace, Archigram, leisure architecture, [and] utopian architecture.”²⁰

Emphasizing its inspiration in earlier temporary architectural designs, Bouchain described Renzo Piano as “an example.” “He was 34 years old when he won the competition for the Pompidou and designed a ‘building open to all uses, transformable,’” Bouchain said. “It is surprising,” he concluded, that we had to “wait for forty years to see a part of the Pompidou on the road.”²¹ Yet, by the time he designed the Pompidou with Rogers, Piano had already fulfilled his quest for mobile and temporary architectures interwoven with educational opportunities and urban transformation. In fact, the Laboratorio di Quartiere was not the last mobile structure designed by the architect. In 1982, three years after his experience in Otranto, Piano worked on what would be his first architecture that actually toured different locations: the IBM Travelling Pavilion (Figure 6). Though he once again had the opportunity to experiment with concepts of itinerancy and education, Piano developed a project that served new ambitions. A mobile structure that would take a step forwards into the entanglement between architecture and technology that had defined his practice since the initial mobile laboratory.

The pavilion for the International Business Machines (IBM) Corporation was aimed at hosting a travelling exhibition that promoted computer technology products, especially among young people.²² It was designed to reach twenty European cities. Rather than installing the exhibition in preexisting local buildings, IBM sought to be represented by an architecture “like a circus” that could be easily assembled, disassembled, and transported.²³ At the same time, as an exhibition mechanism, the pavilion’s advanced technology served to communicate the qualities and capacities of IBM’s products, or in other words, its global corporate identity.

As scholar Reinhold Martin pointed out in his research on the IBM facility in Minnesota, designed in 1958 by Eero Saarinen, the company had long sought to expand its corporate presence to new territories.²⁴ This strategy developed through various projects illustrating their “systematic effort to solicit the approval of the local community.”²⁵ Perhaps the design by Piano most directly translated these aspirations. Between 1982 and 1986, the IBM Travelling Pavilion landed in major European

19 “Le Centre Pompidou Mobile: another innovative artistic concept by the Centre Pompidou,” Consulate General of France in Atlanta, website. Link no longer accessible.

20 Alain Seban, president of the Centre Pompidou, in an interview with architect Patrick Bouchain: “Architecture. Un Pari Architectural,” Ville-Libourne Blog (translation by author). Accessed April 5, 2013: <http://blog.ville-libourne.fr/architecture/>

21 Transcript from Pauline Cathala and Nicolas Valode (Directors), Pompidou mobile: Un projet architectural, muséographique et culturel, video min 02:13-04:20. Musée national d’art moderne/Centre de création industrielle, Service audiovisuel du Centre Pompidou, Centre Pompidou/SCEREN/CNDP/CRDP, 2012. Translated by author.

22 “IBM Travelling Pavilion,” Fondazione Renzo Piano website: <https://www.fondazionerenzopiano.org/en/project/ibm-pa-diglione-itinerante/#section-documents>.

23 Renzo Piano, *Renzo Piano and Building Workshop: Buildings and Projects, 1971-1989* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 68.

24 See Reinhold Martin, “Computer Architectures,” *The Organizational Complex: Architecture, Media, and Corporate Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 160

25 Ibid.

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Figure 8. Gianni Berengo Gardin, “IBM travelling pavilion, interior”, 1983-1986.

cities, including Milan, London, Oslo, Berlin, Rome and Paris, and occupied prominent public spaces for no more than a month at a time. A collection of postcards showing the structure in front of some of Europe’s most famous local monuments attests to the pavilion’s ambitions. Each city in this collection would become a node in a network of potential operations and relationships, allowing the temporary condition of the event to have a lasting and profitable effect: the production of future IBM consumers.

While UNESCO’s Laboratorio di Quartiere was conceived as a platform to provide access to knowledge for local and isolated communities, the IBM Travelling Pavilion was designed to create a corporate presence in an increasingly globalized market. Both designs destabilize the traditional relation between architecture and its site—locus—generally conceived of as a particular portion of land, defined by geometric boundaries, associated with sociopolitical, cultural, economic and environmental conditions, and regulated by legal provisions. Travelling architectures, in their assemblages and re-assemblages, are subject to a constant renegotiation of their position and their capacity to articulate affect and construct communities around them. They propose an expanded understanding of the canonical architectural expression of the building by materializing not only as standing structures but also as a temporary constellation of bodies, spaces, ideas, and technologies at multiple scales.

Piano’s role was to transfer these conceptual operations into material realities. He skilfully negotiated the local and the global context or, as Hal Foster contends, “the tension between the local craft of buildings and the global enterprise of business.”²⁶ According to Foster, the architect did so “through a refined use of materials” that “helps to ground his buildings in particular sites and, on the other hand, through a suave display,” which serves “to associate his designs with the contemporary world of advanced technology.”²⁷

Assembled in a factory located in Paris, the IBM Travelling Pavilion was constructed from four modules, each consisting of three pyramids (Figure 7). These were juxtaposed thirty-four times to create an extruded arched space that was 157 feet wide and 23 feet high and made of polycarbonate

26 Hal Foster, *The Art-Architecture Complex*, (London and New York: Verso, 2011), 55.

27 Ibid.

and plywood on an aluminium frame.²⁸ The system allowed for “maximizing performance and minimizing material cost and erection time, all to maximum aesthetic effect.”²⁹ Inside, IBM devices, such as personal computers, were presented alongside the building itself, embodying ambitions of mobility, with the architecture leading the way towards a portable nature for the first time (Figure 8). “It was such a light building,” Piano argued, “that it could fit anywhere and adapt itself to any of the cities in which it was erected.”³⁰

The IBM Travelling Pavilion had a particular relationship with the context and with the land based on its temporary occupation of space, which was feasible, in part, due to its capacity to be quickly assembled and disassembled. However, the erection of the pavilion was not without intensive labour demands. Twenty-three trucks were needed to transport the components of the pavilion from one city to another, as well as to its unknown final destination. In each new location, this temporary architectural construction occupied public space while sitting outside the regulations that would govern it or any concern for responding to local socioeconomic and political conditions. In fact, the legislation and expectations that those buildings attached to the ground have to meet generally do not apply to itinerant construction. Their festive character makes us lose sight of their capacity to challenge conventional norms and generate new ones through a seemingly ephemeral occupation of space. Indeed, this is why Lefebvre and the Situationists saw in festivals the potential to become spontaneous reactions that transgress the control and order that burden our monotonous everyday life.³¹

The difference between the IBM Travelling Pavilion and most of these itinerant architectures through which communities reappropriate the street—such as travelling theatres, fairs, and urban festivals—is that the latter are condemned to be just aestival romances. In the hands of global corporations, what otherwise would be seasonal structures are implemented through complex systems that ensure their performance across seasons and regions. Climatic control allowed the pavilion to operate in various locations and sites of opportunity while protecting the company’s electronic equipment.³² By taking architecture beyond the confines of the company’s headquarters, the IBM Travelling Pavilion helped reach new audiences.

Despite being dismantled following the close of the exhibition in 1986 and never reassembled, the pavilion was, in the words of Piano, a great success. The exhibition was seen by a million and a half people.³³ In addition, IBM’s strategy to invest in travelling architecture that integrated technology, design, and flexibility resulted in a customer turnout four times above expectations.³⁴ Since then, IBM’s formula has been replicated many times in the form of transportable pavilions associated with companies such as Puma, H&M, and Chanel and used in global campaigns targeting new consumers. These structures are designed to convey a distinct image, visible symbol, and propaganda tool for their brands, as well as a sense of the ubiquity and technical supremacy of their global empires.³⁵

The IBM Travelling Pavilion marked a paradigm shift by which itinerant architecture, once carrying subversive potential, presents a direct relationship with the established structures of power. In its pursuit of the dream of immateriality, temporary architecture aligned with postindustrial capital and media technologies, areas where IBM was prominent.³⁶ Whereas temporary, itinerant architecture came with the promise of a society liberated from the foundations of normative life, its successful delivery of this promise has often come while supporting market forces, urban redevelopment processes and extractive industries. Temporality and mobility are, in this context, not preconditions for a nomadic lifestyle but rather symbols of the dynamic condition of capital.

28 Renzo Piano, *Renzo Piano and Building Workshop: Buildings and Projects, 1971-1989*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 68.

29 Reinhold Martin, “Computer Architectures,” 161-163.

30 Renzo Piano, *The Renzo Piano Logbook*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 84.

31 Henri Lefebvre, “The Bureaucratic Society of Controlled Consumption,” *Everyday in the Modern World*, (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 68.

32 Fondazione Renzo Piano website: <https://www.fondazionerenzopiano.org/en/project/ibm-padiglione-itinerante/#section-documents>

33 Renzo Piano, *The Renzo Piano Logbook*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 84

34 Robert Kronenburg, *Portable Architecture: Design and Technology* (Basel, Berlin and Boston: Birkhauser, 2008), 24.

35 Hal Foster, *The Art-Architecture Complex* (New York: Verso, 2011), 52-67

36 Reinhold Martin, “Computer Architectures,” 163.

Mobilizing the dreams of “pipeless, wireless, trackless” architecture, these architectures are meant to achieve a global impact through impermanent interventions.³⁷ They provide a glimpse of the advent of transnational territories, corporate identities, and sponsored urban spaces. In their movement, portable structures circulate not only ideas or practices but also people, capital and goods. From their technical, logistical, and information systems, new sociocultural and spatial arrangements emerge.

Temporary architecture also embodies other important paradoxes. Often praised for its environmental advantages compared to concrete, steel and brick constructions, lightweight structures, such as those used in the IBM Travelling Pavilion or tensile membranes similar to the one use as the Laboratorio di Quartiere’s roof, are often dependent on plastic-based components. This relation between the experimental architecture of the 1960s and 1970s, the environmental movement and the fossil fuel industry, was made evident during the oil crises of the 1970s, which affected the use of plastics, including those intended for prefabricated, inflatable and pneumatic ephemeral architectures. Previously, Piano repeatedly experimented with construction materials, such as polyester, that enabled a light, flexible, and easily assembled architecture. Others, such as Cedric Price, had strong connections with plastics and oil companies such as Shell and BP, as shown in his “Air Structures Research” (1966-1971). In their apparent liberation from the ground they occupy, ephemeral architectures nevertheless depend on the violent destruction of that ground’s core. Lightness is achieved through depth, that is, through the extraction and destruction of layers of the ground, of past and present forms of life that time has transformed into fossil fuels.

Renzo Piano’s travelling architectures echo our dreams and uncertainties. They offer an opportunity to reassess the relations between architecture and land, transience and permanence, situatedness and disjuncture, community and place making, and lightness and depth. These constructions ask us to consider if architecture could ever be other than a result of the product of greed for what lies below (land, materials, energy, water) and the destruction of the deepest layers of the ground and living beings that exist above and around.

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Figure 8. ©Gianni Berengo Gardin, www.rpbw.com.

37 Buckminster R. Fuller, “World Design Initiative. Mexico Lecture/1963,” *Your Private Sky: The Art of Design Science* (Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 1999),10-11.

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Marina Otero Verzier. Architect and researcher. She studied at TU Delft, ETSA Madrid, and Columbia GSAPP. In 2016, she received her doctorate from ETSA Madrid. Her doctoral thesis, “Evanescient Institutions” (2016), examines the emergence of new paradigms for institutions and, in particular, the political implications inherent in mobile and transient structures. She has curated exhibitions such as ‘Compulsive Desires: On Lithium Extraction and Rebellious Mountains’ at the Galería Municipal do Porto in 2023, ‘Work, Body, Leisure’ at the Dutch Pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2018, and ‘After Belonging’ at the Oslo Architecture Triennale in 2016. She has co-edited publications including *Automated Landscapes* (2023), *Lithium: States of Exhaustion* (2021), *A Matter of Data* (2021), *More-than-Human* (2020), *Architecture of Appropriation* (2019), *Work, Body, Leisure* (2018), and *After Belonging* (2016), among others. Since 2020, Otero has been the Director of the Master in Social Design at the Design Academy Eindhoven. The program focuses on design practices oriented towards ecological and social challenges. From 2015 to 2022, she was the Director of Research at Het Nieuwe Instituut, where she led initiatives focused on labor, extraction, and mental health from an architectural and post-anthropocentric perspective, including “Automated Landscapes,” “BURN-OUT,” and “Lithium: States of Exhaustion.” Previously, she was the Director of Global Network Programming at Studio-X, Columbia GSAPP. In 2022, she received Harvard’s Wheelwright Prize for a project on the future of data storage. Her winning proposal, *Future Storage: Architectures to Host the Metaverse*, examines new architectural paradigms for storing data and how the reimagining of digital infrastructures could meet the unprecedented demands facing the world today.