

Superstudio 1966-73.

From the World without Objects to the Universal Grid

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According to Giulio Carlo Argan, mass production of objects brings about a crucial phenomenon. It separates the object from any contextual consideration, i.e. from its position in space. In other words, mass production cuts off the object from its spatial medium and therefore excludes its relation not only to space and to other objects, but also to the user. Argan gives two examples from the Italian historical avant-garde. The first one is the insertion and assimilation of the object into the dynamic spatial system. The object itself is decomposed in dynamic vectors: futurism. The second is the denial of any a priori spatial system and the complete isolation of the object. The object does not communicate with its surrounding space in any scenographic or sculptural fashion: *pittura metafisica*. Argan finally suggests that, in spite of these two poles, Italian designers produced a third way out. In this third way, it is the very object that defines its context - instead of considering a pre-existing deductive space through which the design object would define its surrounding space¹ - and turns its correct use into a sort of 'ceremony' with purifying powers. This phenomenon explains, according to Argan, the rigid character of Italian design, in which the designer does not play an artistic or technical role with respect to the production market, but rather a linguistic function. This third form of design would generate healing effects: a design of exorcism.

The Superarchitecture exhibition was held in the Italian city of Pistoia from 4 through 17 December 1966, organized by two groups of architects:

Archizoom (Andrea Branzi, Gilberto Corretti, Paolo Deganello, and Massimo Morozzi) and Superstudio (Adolfo Natalini and Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, later joined by Roberto Magris, Gian Piero Frassinelli, Alessandro Magris, and Alessandro Poli).² The authors wrote the following polemic manifesto: 'Superarchitecture is the architecture of superproduction, of superconsumption, of superinduction to superconsumption, of the supermarket, of the superman, of the super gasoline.'³

This manifesto departs from a provocative borrowing of ideas from Pop Art. It implies that the figurative or formal data of images have a revolutionary potential *per se*. Hidden behind an intention to demythologize, the Pop myth of the image as an almighty tool is paradoxically revealed. Images are assigned a critical role, assumed to induce in the observer-consumer a precise critical response, capable of conveying pedagogy or inducing a state of conscientiousness.

The student occupations at the architecture schools of Milan, Turin, and Rome had taken place three years earlier, in 1963. This was a period of extreme politicization among students and some faculty members, which led to the partial renewal of the teaching staff and to changes in study curricula and workshops.⁴ Object design, building and town planning were progressively abandoned in study programmes, and replaced with 'Integrated Town Planning', 'Visual Design', 'Town Planning Theory', or 'Spaces of Implication'.⁵ These changes in the

curricula were symptoms of the end of cornucopia, even though the architect was still considered a demiurgic figure, whose mission was to introduce a new social apparatus instead of objects, buildings, or neighbourhoods.

Indeed, as a result of the political radicalization, and in spite of the fact that the role of the architect as a *designer* still prevailed, the awareness of the limits of the architect's performance in the realm of object production increased considerably. This *crisis of the object* led to the immediate supposition that the designer-architect could be responsible for the superconsumption society. In this state of affairs, the new groups of architects involved in the area of design had to pursue different avenues of concrete action: some of them decided to completely abandon practice in order to concentrate exclusively on political action, while others turned to irony and to the sublimation of the current socio-economical conditions, namely the narrowing of the role of the designer within the production of objects.⁶

However, as in Argan's third way, other designers tended to re-examine their role in the *socius*, i.e. reconsidering the production-consumption cycle and the designer's capacity to involve a greater number of actors in the cycle of object production, namely by including the spectator-consumer as an actor in the construction of the meaning of the object. This form of design conception - indebted to Umberto Eco's *opera aperta* - considered object production in negative terms: it was not a matter of designing and producing objects any more, but of designing and producing the environments, behaviours, and affects generated by objects. Indeed, it was rather a matter of designing the relations between objects and users, in an ingenious correspondence between semantic or communicative value, and form or production value. The goal was to re-establish a cultural relationship and not only an economic one between objects and users. This meant the complete elimination of the modern

tradition of the object as a rational extension of the human body, aiming to improve the material conditions of life and the balance between humans and the artificial human environment.

At the School of Architecture in Florence, young students and teachers conscientiously followed a disparate amalgam of influences, both foreign and local. The Viennese Walter Pichler and Hans Hollein reclaimed in their 1962 'Manifesto of Absolute Architecture' a total anti-functionalism along with a recovery of the values of symbolic communication, which they considered obliterated by the modern movement.⁷ In Austria, the reference function of the modern movement was thus replaced with a prompt interest in another Austrian, Friedrich Kiesler. Britain's Archigram had a huge influence by introducing a new iconography linked to mass consumerism and technological rhetoric. In Italy, the recovery of the architectural syntax of French revolutionary architecture was charged with political commentary and perpetrated by, among others, the young teacher Aldo Rossi, based on his teaching position in Florence and his editorial activity, together with Ernesto Nathan Rogers.

Pop Art, visual communication and system theories, revolutionary French architecture, or technological iconography, to mention just a few, were the different and irreconcilable points of departure for this generation, which, moreover, matured within a climate of political agitation of utopian tendency and ironic celebration that crossed over into the events of May 68. It is necessary to add to this all the growing American influences that flourished in universities and in the world of plastic arts during the accelerated period of five years (1963-1968): the studies of the city as a figurative or visual system - rather than a utilitarian system - by Kevin Lynch and Gyorgy Kepes; body art and the *happening* as the restoration of corporeal existence against the corporate and disembodied spirit of the American lifestyle; conceptual art and its reduction of the

disciplinary boundaries to a *cul-de-sac*, or land art and the ritualism of natural and artificial archetypes.

The activity of Superstudio encompassed all of these references and encapsulated them in drawings, photo-montages, storyboards, manifestos, pamphlets, furniture, exhibitions, and installations, navigating with surprising ease through an overwhelming diversity of media and formats and with highly affective results of great visual impact. In a clear dystopian fashion, they claimed a new form of material culture in the oxymoron of information society: a techno-utopia emptied of objects.

After the exhibition in Pistoia, which later travelled to Modena in March of the following year, Superstudio launched the manifesto 'Invention Design and Evasion Design'.⁸ In this manifesto, they were ironic about the secularization of design objects, and highly critical of the loss of the symbolic, as well as of the shift to mere fast consumption devoid of any communicative value whatsoever beyond its indicative market and status value. Instead, Superstudio advocated the irrational and the poetic as working tools for the designer. This manifesto defines Superstudio's disciplinary terms: counter-design, and their explicit refusal to work within the traditional limits of the discipline. Since, as Filiberto Menna had argued in 1972, a shift from production to consumption had taken place,⁹ and the corresponding move from the mass worker to the socialized worker had already happened, Superstudio decided to limit their field of action to the areas of consumption, perception, reception, and subjective construction of meaning. This implied renouncing the production of useful objects, the construction of buildings, or city planning, and entering the precarious grounds of Utopia after cornucopia.¹⁰ Given these conditions, this Utopia could only be considered in negative terms: as dystopia.

Dystopia does not aim at finalization as a model or as a didactic realization in a social laboratory,

nor does it aim at the negation of history and the complete refoundation of the environment. Rather, Superstudio proved to be sceptical when they presented their own town-planning projects regarding the foundation of ideal cities as 'admonitory tales'.¹¹

Their plan for a total environment without architecture, a world without objects, without labour, without architects, and without merchandise was initiated with the Superarchitecture exhibition of 1966, an ironic celebration of cornucopia, and closed with the extended project of five films, *Life, Education, Ceremony, Love, Death* in 1972-73.¹² In the meantime, a number of monumental and galactic projects were published, along with some concrete realizations: furniture series, installations, and 'micro-environments'.

After the 1967 manifesto, Superstudio published 'Projects and Thoughts: Journey into the Realm of Reason' in 1969,¹³ showing their figurative and symbolic repertory and two motifs that reappeared obsessively in their later work. First, the concept of suspended time, and second the call for subjective and individual reason. The temporal dimension (suspended time) implies an ideal and impossible future, which paradoxically alludes to a similarly idealized remote past, recovered in a journey through a drive-in museum of architecture reduced to archetypal forms: pyramids, prisms, cubes, and cones. This formal basis clearly advocates the absolute recovery of the symbolism of elementary forms and their historical meaning, as well as the visual and communicative potential of the archetype. This strategy shows certain resonances with land art, which were to be accentuated at a later stage of their work. The social and ethical dimension (subjective reason) appears in the allusion to the powers of reason. However, it is not about civic or political reason, but an apocryphal allusion to the powers of individual, subjective, or even mystical reason: 'The architecture of reason elevates itself

as a product of human history, placing itself as a testimony of creative capacity and representing a period and a society.¹⁴ It is therefore the impossible historical subjective reason of a-historical suspended time. In this journey through the regions of reason, we see petrified clouds and rainbows, affective attractions between two cubes, cubes in volumetric decomposition - not due to the analysis or desire to understand their structure, but as the liberation of the forces which keep them together - and an infinite road lined with archetypal shapes on the flat landscape. It is an allegory of the 'rediscovery of a mysteriously missing architecture'.

The first urban metaphor appeared in 1969 in a cinematographic work-in-progress called *The Continuous Monument*.¹⁵ With *The Continuous Monument* the architect becomes, through 'the absolute reduction of the object, an image-maker'.¹⁶ The monument is an act of total geographic order, a terrestrial parallel and a crystalline grid that circulates the entire globe. It should give shelter to the whole earthly population. This 'moderate Utopia' is a dystopian heir of the human desire to build and of the great human works of antiquity, such as the Great Wall of China, the dolmens, the pyramids, the aqueducts, the great religious monuments such as the Kaaba, or modern constructions such as motorways, great cities and urban sprawl. The rest of the environment, built before this foundational act of mystical and regressive order, would remain as a material base reabsorbed by nature as a landscape. For the authors, the monument is the definitive expression of human reason - the constructional reason and the symbolic reason - the 'recovery' of communicative architectural values, the loss of which produced a state of irony and disdain. It is a clear sign of the *sprezzatura* of the Machiavellian prince: irony as one of the main historical negative categories in bourgeois thinking. It is a demonstration of 'the human capacity to act according to reason', an exorcism of the diseases that affect the object and, by extension, the whole

man-built environment.

The *Continuous Monument* presents a major ambiguity: Is it an exacerbated paroxysm of Le Corbusier's project for Algiers and other exemplary modern paradigms? Is it a mere criticism of the implicit totalitarian aspect of Utopia and of grand gestures? What is the relation of this project with the multiple examples of utopian architecture of the remote or immediate modern past?

In *The Continuous Monument*, we can identify all the strategies used by Superstudio in their oeuvre: the recovery of the symbolic, monumentality, and gigantism as operative tools, the use of elementary, universally recognized shapes and masses, the permanence of the given as an almost post-nuclear backdrop in which they refuse to interfere, and finally the flight to Utopia, a particular Utopia as a squared mesh or grid suspended in time without history and alien to the idea of becoming.

The Graz architectural biennial, *Architecture and Freedom*, was staged in October and November 1969 at the Künstlerhaus. Superstudio presented *The Continuous Monument* and built a small prismatic pavilion (the *Grazerzimmer*, i.e. the Graz Room) [Fig. 1 and 2] covered with plastic laminated 5x5cm tiles. A surface, inclined at 12 degrees from the pavement, was covered with 'extremely fresh, green coconut' and located in the far extreme of the room where the projects of the participating architects were exhibited. The Graz Room consisted of this raised prism above the inclined surface, open on two sides, with the inclined surface as a bridge, and leaving the inside of the chamber as a cavity covered with the same laminated sheets, a space designed for meditation on measure.

With this installation, Superstudio opened a process of intellectualization of the all-encompassing use of the grid, which they began to use systematically, as much in geographical projects



Fig. 1

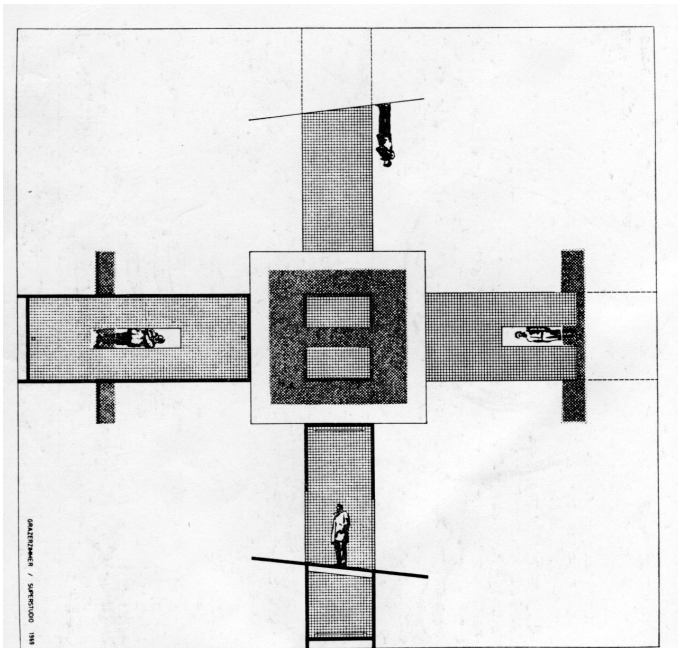


Fig. 2

Fig. 1: Grazerzimmer, the empty space by Superstudio. Photograph by Herbert Missoni, published by his permission.

Fig. 2: Grazerzimmer, drawing by Superstudio. Courtesy of Gian Piero Frassinelli.

such as The Continuous Monument as in objects of domestic use, furniture series, or lamps. For them, 'The Continuous Monument is the culmination of a series of coherent project operations which we carry forward, from design to town-planning, as a demonstration of a theory stated a priori: that of the single gesture design. A transportable design that remains identical to itself, changing its scale or semantic area without trauma or inconvenience'.¹⁷

The increased use of the of the scale of the projects, allows Superstudio to define their evolution in narrative terms, from an initial position in which the architects are active actors in production, to a dilettante and intellectualized position, in which the architects are forced to reinvent their role as artists in order to regain part of the market closed to young architects by the building industry, productive agents, and politicians. It is not by chance that the political explosion and the birth of the Italian neo-avant-garde movement coincide, between 1965 and 1969, with an important recession in the building industry, both in the public and private sectors. However, as Manfredo Tafuri stated, the crisis of the object during the 1960s was not a completely new phenomenon. For Tafuri, there is a sense of continuity in the architects' work between the early post-war period and the 1960s in Italy: architects as mere designers of good taste.

Tafuri's critical assessment of these groups is altogether devastating: 'This sense of loss, this forced withdrawal of the object into itself, was the result of the fragmentation of building trade and the consequent autonomy of its several sectors, which influenced and was reflected in the cruel elegance of avant-garde Italian design before the (Second World) war.'¹⁸ For Tafuri, this represents the mere projection of a situation of panic and anxiety that would eventually result in their reinsertion into the market, namely in an uncritical alignment with the starting conditions against which they protested: '[...] in a capitalistic system there is no split between

production, distribution and consumption. All the intellectual anti-consumption utopias that seek to redress the ethical "distortions" of the technological world by modifying the system of production or the channels of distribution only reveal the complete inadequacy of their theories, in the face of the actual structure of the capitalist economic cycle.'¹⁹

During 1969 and 1970, Superstudio developed the so-called Histograms of Architecture - a series of drawings and furniture (the series Misura and Quaderna, to be precise) - by strictly using the squared grid in a variety of scales, from the simplest object of furniture, such as the table, to urban landscapes.²⁰ Thus, in parallel to the first urban metaphors, Superstudio proposed these reductive diagrams, illustrating a working principle: the reduction of labour to a single gesture. The authors define this series as 'the architect's tomb', since the goal is to eliminate, in the practical process from the diagram to the actual realization, any problem of space or aesthetic sensibility. Superstudio stated: 'At that time it was obvious that to continue designing furniture, objects and similar household decorations was no solution to the problems of living, nor to those of life; even less was it serving to save the soul.'²¹ This mimesis between the artists' behaviour and their activity presupposes the identification of the art market with the commercial environment of architecture and design, which would drive Superstudio to redirect their renouncement activity to the strict limits of the production of images.

IN, a journal linked to the Italian neo-avant-garde groups, devoted its second issue to the 'Destruction of the Object', with articles by the protagonists of counter-design. All contributions pointed to the explicit declaration of the impotence of designers and architects, as much in opposing the development of late capitalism as in foreseeing its results, thus renouncing any positive utopia understood as future planning, and advocating global intellectualization as the only route to salvation: the elimination

of objects, productive activity, and labour. Superstudio in particular called again for the re-sacralization of the object, the recovery of values such as the myth and the magic, in the belief that such recovery would lead to the purification of the relations between production and use.²² Purification, exorcism, and re-establishment of the aura are the impossible missions they embrace, to be carried out by means of discursive images and narration. The object of the cure was in the end nothing else than the city as the final destination within the negative path of environmental clearing.

The project of the Twelve Ideal Cities (for Christmas) was an exercise on the 'premonitions of the mystical rebirth of urbanism',²³ a sour reflection on utopian thought from the Enlightenment to the techno-scientific fantasies of the society of cornucopia in the 1960s. Each of the twelve cities referred, more or less explicitly, to a well-known model of city organization: 'Conical Terraced City' refers to the city of corporate work and office buildings, where the goal of its inhabitants is to reach the highest level; 'Temporal Cochlea-City' refers to the proposals of town planning in clusters, with the corridors serving as places of social interaction; 'Ville-Machine Habitée' refers to the techno-monumental cities and their emancipating vision of technology; 'Barnum City' refers to the city museum of mass tourism and the media: Disneyland and Las Vegas, but also Venice or Paris; 'Spaceship' refers to the spatial city separated from geography; '2000 Ton City' refers to the residential city of super blocks, superimposed on an immaculate countryside; 'New York of Brains' refers to the university or cultural city; 'City of Hemispheres' refers to the city camouflaged by landscape and the new counter-cultural archetypes; 'City of Order' refers to the city planned by lazy politicians; 'Continuous Production Conveyor Belt City' refers to the city of accelerated property speculation; 'City of Splendid Houses' refers to suburbia and sign architecture; 'City of the Book' refers to the city of Enlightenment with a

clear distinction between the zones of light, ethics, and obedience on the one hand, and the zones of shadows, absence of morals, and disobedience on the other.

It is a collection of exquisitely drawn architectural aberrations, which allows a glimpse into a criticism of utopian thought in modernity by means of the super-elaboration of the premises, and an exploration of the grotesque. With the second publication of the project, a thirteenth city without name or image was added, which could only be understood by means of literary resources, going back to a pre-modern utopia exclusively defined in narrative terms.

There is, on a figurative and formal level, a constant element among the twelve ideal cities: the use of the square or rectangular grid in cells, sarcophagi, urns, or living units. The grid points to the association between geometry of compartmentalization and the ideas of confinement, enclosure, or isolation. Likewise, in the explanatory texts, each city is equipped with a power centre, designed in a twofold way. It is either an inaccessible physical space in the city centre or an apex - if cities have a closed and recognizable form; or an invisible and immaterial centre - in cases in which cities do not have an enclosed form - that can be portrayed as a network of control and distribution of knowledge and information, in either intellectual or sensorial form. In short, these cities are illustrations of the Foucauldian progressive shift from the disciplinary society to the society of control, showing their overlapping areas.

For Tafuri, the grid of the American corporate curtain wall after WWII, including the Twin Towers and the a-semantic silence of the Seagram building, led to the complete globalization of an inescapable world order. In his critique, the formal order of the curtain wall is comparable to a faithful reflection of power and capital in the new order of the flow of

information regardless of its content, namely architecture as a mere package of information. This architectural formalization of the flow in the grid would then be capable of reintegrating the contradictions of capital in a Foucauldian *dispositif* of total rationalization.²⁴

From the odd combination of the exercises with the grid as a tool of liberation for the designer from the agents of production (the histograms), and the grid as a repressive device (the ideal cities), arises the 'supersurface' in the cinematographic series Life, Education, Ceremony, Love, Death.

The members of Superstudio proceeded in their usual fashion: departing from the analysis of a given situation and the affirmation of an ironically lived situation of deep crisis, they carried out an exercise of mystification and sublimation. The 'supersurface' is an invisible grid; an energetic mesh that performs similarly to The Continuous Monument. Yet it was even more radicalized, divested of any figurative or referential components, including depth, physical entity, or any kind of materiality. The 'supersurface' is an infrastructural system of zero density, a sublimation of counter-design put forward in the histograms that defines a global territory without objects or hierarchies. The cinematographic project depicted the metaphoric description of the 'supersurface' performance and the events happening on it.

Life, Education, Ceremony, Love, Death is a story in instalments, namely the story of the recovery of the symbolism of everyday life in architecture; a swan song captured in fine storyboards and drawings with an impressive visual impact. Tafuri called this project 'nostalgia of the future'.²⁵ In an earlier project, Interplanetary Architecture, Superstudio had put forward the hypothesis of the liberation of human beings from the repressive rational system that the ideal cities had wilfully illustrated. It was presented as 'the increasing awareness of the frustration of

terrestrial architecture and the last possibility of labour in an area delivered from the rational logic of architecture as production of goods'.²⁶ It is a cinematographic project in six phases: 1. The formation of the earth and the moon; 2. The arrival of the human being on the moon; 3. The first exchanges and a channel of physical communication between the moon and the earth; 4. The capture of meteorites; 5. The habitation system; 6. The extension of territory, including other interconnected planets. The soundtrack consisted of Pygmy hunting songs and Buddhist funeral rituals. Once more, the escape to the future was accompanied by deep temporal regression.

One month after the publication of Interplanetary Architecture, the huge exhibition 'Italy: The New Domestic Landscape' was inaugurated in May 1972 at the MoMA in New York, curated by Emilio Ambasz. It was a gigantic promotional campaign financed almost exclusively with Italian capital.²⁷ The aim was twofold: first, the conquest of a wide market for the objects of design and counter-design by Italian young architects and, second, the direct confrontation and clash between Italian Radical Architecture and its American counterpart.²⁸ To be sure, 1972 was the year of the publication of *Five Architects* and *Learning from Las Vegas*. For many, the exhibition meant the death of *Architettura radicale*, a withdrawal to marginal forms of power.

The exhibition was organized in two large sections: objects and environments. The object section was divided into three categories. The first one consisted of objects selected for their formal and technical characteristics (conformist design); it showcased technically refined everyday objects whose conventional use was not questioned, such as tables, chairs, typewriters, and other household goods. The second category of objects displayed were selected for their socio-cultural implications (reformist design) and included totem objects in the sense given by Ettore Sottsass Jr., that is, symbolic

and sign objects whose function is more linguistic than ergonomic.²⁹ As for the third category, it contained objects selected for their flexible ways of use and assembly (contestatory design), such as modular components. The environment section was divided into the groups: design, design as commentary, and counter-design. The object section was presented as an installation at the MoMA garden, with 40 crates designed by Emilio Ambasz and Thomas Czarnowsky. The crates were transportation boxes when positioned horizontally, and exhibition towers in a vertical position. For Natalini, this installation was itself a parody of a parody: a parody of Superstudio's *City of Splendid Houses*, itself a parody of Manhattan.³⁰

In the object section, Superstudio presented the *Passiflora* floor lamp, a luminous, crafted cloud made of white plastic, and, in the environment section, their cinematographic project *Life on the Supersurface* - exhibited in an installation named *Microevent/Microenvironment*: a small turret built of polarized glass slightly raised off the floor, producing the illusion of infinite space inside a small cube with a 'supersurface' in a plastic grid, populated by technological devices as life supports and abstract-vegetal creatures.

The cinematographic project was presented as an animated storyboard with exemplary images on a TV monitor inside the small cube. The film described the formation of the 'supersurface' and the birth of various forms of life, always nomadic.³¹ It proposed the anthropological re-establishment of architecture according to the five 'fundamental acts' that are at the basis of their ambitious cinematographic project of five stories. The 'supersurface' is, for the authors, an intellectual model, and a counter-model of the economic and physical reality which the contemporary project *No-Stop City*, by Archizoom, described with exquisite precision: an infinite city extension that mimicked the propositions of the late capitalist economy and translated

them, in stylized form, into an urban plan.³² The 'supersurface' can be considered as its magic antidote, as a vaccine that takes the same physical form, the same market infrastructure, yet emptied of poison. The authors indicate a series of hypotheses for the inoculation of this therapeutic vaccine, which acquire a greater credibility in the drawings, despite remaining at a purely discursive level. The hypotheses assume the complete elimination of alienation as the starting point, so much so that the first hypothesis states: 'the mind and the body as the only tools'; the second: 'the control of the environment by way of energies'.

Little then - outside of polarized discursive assumptions - seems to differentiate the 'supersurface' from the *No-Stop City*: the first assumes that everybody is an artist, whilst the second assumes that everybody is a worker. The only 'object' in both dystopian visions is the universal grid as immaterial and technological life support. 'Life' on the 'supersurface' does not propose a definitive setting for the future, but an exercise in momentary liberation, an ephemeral act of freedom; and therein lies its value and its enormous and paradoxical limitation: everydayness appears only in the interstices of the grid lines. However, the indifference of the architectural support - the grid - in both projects, is exactly what enables the dissolution of any hierarchy, including the dissolution of the power of capital, namely by rejecting both labour and objects. The rejection of labour takes place in the disappearance of the grid's productive forces.

Beyond the ideological project, the drawings possess a great degree of efficacy and visual impact, and show the possibility of testing alternative uses of the artificial environment, the possibility to formulate and represent the poetic dimension of the most insignificant everyday acts; to award meaning to the most apparently trivial human actions, and the possibility of spontaneity and individual agency within primary structures of monumental character,

which are profoundly repressive and regressive. In the world evoked by the 'supersurface', location and movement are submitted to the geometrical control of the two-dimensional grid, which is the only architectural, information, and power structure. Still, the fundamental act of place appropriation is possible: the happy island, the distant mountain, the encampment, and the invisible dome are examples of artificial paradises which, in spite of their lack of resonance in architectural practice, show an undeniable value as exercises of cultural compensation.

Argan's first and second 'ways' of Italian design - the design object absorbed by the futuristic system and the solipsistic and *resistant* metaphysical object - produced then and now an obvious *cul-de-sac*. The third way of Italian design, as defined by Argan, responds, on the one hand, to the strict *morale* of the hypercritical Tafuri, while, on the other hand, it suggests a possible overcoming of Tafuri's criticism, since it convincingly contextualizes Superstudio's oeuvre in broader terms: 'Since, in the long run, mass production must be considered an information system, research no longer concentrates on the object itself, but rather in [*sic*] its role as a kind of sign.'³³ This implies that the goal of design is not the object, but the link connecting someone with the environment. In this framework, the architect unavoidably becomes the designer of the consumer's behaviour through mass-produced object design and correct ceremonial use. Superstudio's production of images aimed, by contrast, at a world without design objects, intended to increase the consumers' ability to *design* their own behaviours in an anti-ceremonial relationship with the environment through their resilient and transparent supersurface.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

1. Giulio Carlo Argan, 'Ideological development in the thought and imagery of Italian design', in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Emilio Ambasz (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1972), pp. 360-61.
2. Recent publications and critical studies on Superstudio include: Peter Lang and William Menking, *Superstudio: Life Without Objects* (Turin/Milan: Skira, 2003), Frédéric Migayrou (ed.), *Architecture 'radicale'*, exh. cat., Institut d'Art Contemporain - IAC Villeurbanne, 12 January - 27 May, 2001, and Hilde Heynen, 'The Antinomies of Utopia. Superstudio in Context', invited lecture for an international symposium on Superstudio, organized by the Zeeuws Museum, Middelburg (Netherlands), 18 September 2004. In Valentijn, B. (ed.) *Superstudio - The Middelburg Lectures*. (Middelburg, 2005), pp. 61-74.
3. Manifesto of the Second Exhibition of 'Superarchitettura', Modena 1967.
4. See *Casabella-continuità*, 287 (May 1964), in which the student protests, the students' demands, and the partially introduced reforms are meticulously documented.
5. Paola Navone and Bruno Orlandoni, *Architettura 'radicale'*, prologue by Andrea Branzi (Milan: Documenti di Casabella, 1975), p. 20.
6. Filiberto Menna, 'A Design for New Behaviours', in Emilio Ambasz (ed.) *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1972), p. 405.
7. Ulrich Conrads, *Manifesti e programmi per l'architettura del XX secolo* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1970).
8. 'Design d'invenzione, Design d'evasione', *Domus*, 465, (June 1969). English version in Joan Ockman *Architecture Culture 1943-1968. A Documentary Anthology* (New York: Columbia Books of Architecture/Rizzoli, 1993), pp. 437-41.
9. *Marcatré*, 26/29, (December 1966), and *Ulm* 19/20 (August 1967), pp. 35-37.
10. The first issue of the monographic magazine *IN* (January-February 1971), had Utopia as a theme. Contributions by Archizoom, Superstudio, 9999, Ugo La Pietra, Sottsass Jr., Buti, Preti, Galli, Sani, and Raggi

- (Italy), Archigram, Street Farmer, Sowden (United Kingdom), Burns and Ant Farm (USA), Abraham, Hollein, Peintner, Franck, Salz der Erde, Coop Himmelblau, and Haus-Rucker-Co (Austria), emphasized the international character of the movement.
11. 'Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas', first published in English in *Architectural Design*, 12 (December 1971).
 12. 'Life' was published in *Casabella*, 367 (July 1972). It was a reworking of the material presented at the MoMA exhibition on Italian design in May 1972; 'Education' was published in two parts, the first in *Casabella*, 368-369 (August-September 1972); the second in *Casabella*, 372 (December 1972); 'Ceremony' was published in *Casabella*, 374 (February 1973); 'Love' was published in *Casabella*, 377 (May 1973); 'Death' was published in *Casabella*, 380-381 (August-September 1973).
 13. 'Progetti e Pensieri: un viaggio nelle regioni della ragione', *Domus*, 479 (October 1969).
 14. Ibid.
 15. 'Discorsi per Immagini', *Domus*, 481 (December 1969). See also the catalogue of the biennial 'Trigon 1969', *Architektonisches Modell einer totalen Urbanisation*, Graz, 1969. And 'Il monumento continuo, storyboard per un film', in *Casabella*, 358 (November 1971).
 16. Paola Navone and Bruno Orlandoni, *Architettura 'radicale'*, p. 37.
 17. 'Lettera da Graz', in *Domus*, 481 (December 1969).
 18. Manfredo Tafuri, 'Design and Technological Utopia', in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, p. 388.
 19. Ibid., p. 397.
 20. 'Dai cataloghi del Superstudio', in *Domus*, 497 (April 1971).
 21. 'Dal catalogo degli Istogrammi, la serie Misura', *Domus*, 517 (December 1972).
 22. 'Argomenti per immagini', *IN*, 2 (March-June 1971).
 23. *Architectural Design*, 12 (December 1971), and *Casabella*, 361 (January 1972). Although both publications have been consulted, the names of the cities were taken from the English edition. The thirteenth city only appears in the Italian edition.
 24. Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, *Architettura contemporanea*, pp. 395-97, with concrete references to Superstudio, such as: 'liberation of irony', 'deserts inhabited by metaphysical objects', and 'exercises on self-propaganda'.
 25. Ibid.
 26. 'Architettura interplanetaria', *Casabella*, 364 (April 1972).
 27. The exhibition ran from 26 May to 11 September 1972. It was financed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ICE (Institute of Foreign Trade), the ENI Group, Abet Print, Alitalia, Anonima Castelli, Fiat, and Olivetti, among others. The catalogue was printed in Italy, distributed internationally, produced by the Centro Di in Florence, and completely manufactured in Italy.
 28. Felicity Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia. Politics after Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007). Scott traces the relation between Italian Radical Architecture, American counter-cultural architectural practices, and the postmodern academic debate.
 29. Ettore Sottsass Jr.: 'Mobili 1965', *Domus*, 433 (December 1965). Sottsass was certainly the first Italian architect to introduce Pop iconography to furniture design. In this article he mentions that his intention was to transpose the decorated surface to the surface of the furniture, in an attempt to project the idea of dressing onto the design object. In 1966 he created a series of furniture which was clearly totemic: prisms covered with laminated surfaces in brilliant colours that were hung in the centre of the room without any predetermined use. See Tommaso Trini, 'Ettore Sottsass Jr. Catalogo mobili 1966', *Domus*, 449 (April 1967).
 30. Adolfo Natalini, 'Italy: The New Domestic Landscape', in *Architectural Design*, 42 (August 1972), pp. 469-73.
 31. See *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, pp. 240-51.
 32. Archizoom had previously published 'Città, catena di montaggio del sociale: Ideologia e teoria della metropoli' *Casabella*, 350-51 (July-August 1970). No-Stop City was published in *Domus*, 496 (March 1971). See also, Michael Hays (ed.) *Architecture Theory since 1968* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), and Pier Vittorio Aurelli, *The Project of Autonomy. Politics and Architecture Within and Against Capitalism* (New York: The Buell Center and Princeton Architectural Press,

2008).

33. Giulio Carlo Argan, 'Ideological development in the thought and imagery of Italian design', in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, p. 367.

Biography

Fernando Quesada, architect ETSAM Madrid 1995, post-graduate studies at Columbia University 1998-2000, PhD in Architecture 2002. He is the author of *La Caja Mágica, Cuerpo y Escena (The Magic Box, Body and Scene, Barcelona 2004)*, and was director of the journal *O-Monografías* between 2000 and 2010. He has been teaching architectural design at Alcala School of Architecture, Madrid, since 2001.