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Continuous Spaces:
Object and Imagination in *Superarchitettura*

In a series of collages from 1969 made by the Florentine architectural group Superstudio, a white, elongated structure is imposed onto various settings, such as the Austrian city Graz, the Arizona desert or a super-highway.

The so-called monument appears at odds with the environments into which it is placed. Not only is it over-dimensional in comparison to its surroundings, but it represents the juxtaposition between the real and imagined. That is, the gigantic, white block slabs look like a foreign drawn object inserted into photographic scenes. The imagined oversized form is Superstudio's defining project *Il Monumento Continuo* [*The Continuous Monument*]. The white "monument" resembles a modernist aqueduct. Rectangular pylons support the cubic body, which continues infinitely. The surface of the white monument is incised with a grid pattern.

A similarly fantastic vision of an endless architectural structure was produced by Archizoom, another Florentine architectural collective, in their contemporaneous series *No-Stop City*. A 1971 cross-section [**fig. 1**] of this project shows a massive serial construction. Slender vertical supports contrast with the seemingly continuous horizontal movement. Atop are set half-spheres and there appear to be trees on the roof as well.

Both projects reflect some basic principles of modernist architecture including the use of pylons and a flat roof. All non-essentials have been reduced and the constructions reflect a stringent right-angled design. These imagined constructions, however, were never to be realized. *Il Monumento Continuo* and *No-Stop City* exist as montages, models, installations, films and, above all, as magazine contributions. Superstudio and Archizoom present living space as a representation. The forms used in modernist architecture are taken and given as a fantastic vision. Representation is understood here as an image loaded with associations, or meanings. As Annette Geiger writes in "Imaginäre Architekturen – Räume, Medien und Fiktionen. Zur Einführung" ["Imaginary Architectures – Spaces, Media and Fictions: An Introduction"]: "Spaces and architecture, squares and cities don't only come about in concrete building materials that are needed for their construction. They also exist as images, quotes, and as narratives and films in the viewer's imagination".[1] Object and representation for Geiger are dynamic in the sense that the built material exists within a field of images. Its construction is informed by various media and it in turn becomes a holder for the projection of visual and textual meanings.

The constructed environment may be seen as both material and imagined. In the case of the works of Superstudio and Archizoom, space is a movement of thought via texts and imagined constructions as if the viewer has entered into a fantasy of urbanism. I suggest thinking of their undertakings in object relational terms. A central idea in object relations theory, a direction in psychoanalysis, is the concept of potential space, or the movement between the real and imagined in which material objects are experienced in a state of play.[2] That is, relationships between the physical and the imaginary are particularly dynamic. Christopher Bollas applies object relations and potential space to architecture and urbanism: "Indeed we might say that just as perspective in fine art was achieved through the architectural effects of Renaissance architecture (the extraordinary influence of Brunelleschi), our dream life is influenced by the perspectives accomplished in the architectural imagination".[3] Buildings as well as cities are considered in this direction of object relations as receptacles for ideas and fantasies as well as constructions that give structure to fantasy or a type of free thinking. Evocative buildings can set off a series of associations in the recipient in an act similar to dreaming and allow for a creative rethinking of the given environment and its architectural objects.[4]

In the development of modernist architecture, text and image played an important role in introducing new forms to the public. Le Corbusier's 1923 *Vers une architecture* [*Towards a New Architecture*] presents images of modern architecture together with stylized photographs of grain elevators, cruise ships, airplanes as well as the Pantheon.[5] New architecture, which in itself may have been difficult to be comprehend by the contemporary public, could thus be placed in an arrangement of associations. The ordering of image and text in works like *Vers une architecture* or Sigfried Giedion's 1929 *Befreites Wohnen* [*Freed Living*], however, supported buildings and environments that were meant to realized materially. While appearing (ironically) modernist, Superstudio and Archizoom's projects open up the possibilities of architecture past its material limits, re-imagining rationalist-functionalist constructions and heightening and freeing up the play of associations set off by modernist structures. It is this radical element of the works of Superstudio and Archizoom that I will analyze in this paper in relation to concepts of space, image and the expanded notion of architecture in the 1960s.

Begun at the end of the 1960s, Superstudio's *Il Monumento Continuo* and Archizoom's *No-Stop-City* realize the critical possibilities of the complex and intermedial space of architecture. The potentiality of imagined objects moves past the built form and challenges the recipient to rethink his/her position in regards to the constructed environment. Art Historian Thomas Crow reads this interventionist nature as characteristic of the art of the 1960s: "The means

employed in those arguments were the antithesis of dry verbal debate: artists condensed concepts into dense visual icons, non-linear arrays of objects in space, unrepeatable events, and activist interventions within the museums and galleries now seen as outposts of established power".[6] Crow is referring here to the tendency of artists of the 1960s to reflect upon the framework in which art had become established. A critique of the institutional situations in the case of Superstudio and Archizoom entails representations of extreme mega-structures. Emphasizing repeatable homogeneous forms and continuous built worlds, both groups dialectically give space to unplanned activities.

The two architectural groups Archizoom and Superstudio formed in 1966 through the interaction of architectural students in various classes in the Department of Architecture at the University of Florence, Italy. Archizoom originally consisted of Andrea Branzi, Gilberto Corretti, Paolo Deganello and Massimo Morozzi. Dario and Lucia Bartolini entered in 1968. Superstudio was founded by Adolfo Natalini and Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, with Gian Piero Frassinelli, Alessandro and Roberto Magris and Alessandro Poli later joining.[7] Group identity entails a certain anonymity amongst the individual members, yet Adolfo Natalini and Andrea Branzi are the two figures most associated with Superstudio and Archizoom respectively and both were proficient writers who continued to develop and articulate the ideas began in the collectives after the breakup of the groups at the end of the 1970s. In operating as collectives, Superstudio and Archizoom demonstrated the socially-orientated spirit of the 1960s and the move away from the autonomous individual. They benefited from and were encouraged by the particular experimental approach to architectural presentations and the understanding of architecture and semiotics at the University of Florence.[8]

Presentation and text were central to the largely imaginary architectural production of Superstudio and Archizoom. They initially worked closely together in formulating *Superarchitettura* which was introduced in the form of a text. In the same year as their founding in 1966, the two groups organized an exhibition of their work together under the title *Superarchitettura* at the Jolly 2 gallery in Pistoia. *Superarchitettura II* followed in 1967 at the Galleria Comunale in Modena.[9] A short statement attributed to both groups was printed on a poster for the first exhibition and was developed into a manifesto written by Superstudio and Archizoom for the second exhibition. It begins with the statement "the Superarchitettura is the architecture of superproduction, of superconsume, of the superinundation to consume, of superman and super benzine", and it concludes with: "the SUPERARCHITETTURA accepts the logic of production and of consumption and exerts a demystifying activity upon it. It is an architecture of images

loaded with a strong evocativeness and is therefore able to induce the same in the consumer. It is an architecture with the evasive drive of advertising, but more efficient, because it inserts images loaded with intentionality in a grand design and in the reality of the city with its permanence and history".[10]

The closing declaration reveals the central role of the image in Superstudio and Archizoom's architectural concepts. Rather than affirming the transformation of society through technology and industry, they revel in the omnipresence of the advertising image and the charge of associations it possesses.

I interpret the *super* presented here as referring to the strong evocative nature present not only in advertising images, but in popular culture as a whole and its dense aggregation of visual juxtapositions. The text both rings of irony in a strategy of subversion through appropriation, but also realizes the radical value of media representations in their ability to destabilize the fixedness of total design and the material urban space. The exhibitions presented eccentric objects appearing as hybrids between furniture and architectural elements. Brightly and multiply colored forms, such as a series of steps with handles attached seem to have no function, but elicit multiple associations and playfully appeal to the recipient.

Beginning their respective architectural programs with a joint manifesto, the groups make clear the theoretical nature of their undertaking as well as the relationship between text, space and the constructed. The manifesto begins with the word "SUPERARCHITETTURA" in block letters. From the bottom center SUPERARCHITETTURA descends a type of column or path, which bends midway and closes in a pool shape. It is in this form that the manifest is contained. In consideration of the groups' later projects, the shape calls up associations of an endless flow upwards. In the manifesto, consumption is greeted along with the objects, images and spaces associated with it. The text doesn't only sound ironic, but is reminiscent of Pop Art and the turn to the objects and images of popular culture, especially those present in the urban sphere. It calls for both a subversion of advertising and an embrace of the images used by it, which form the visual experience of urban space.

In another text from 1972, Archizoom further develops these ideas writing: "The factory and the supermarket are becoming in fact the true standard models of the future city: optimal urban structures, potentially infinite, where the functions spontaneously have a free plan at their disposal, rendered homogenous by a system of micro-climatization and optimum information".[11]

Whereas the 1967 manifesto addressed the *super* quality of images, Archizoom here gives a textual clarification of the *super* quality of the constructed space. Like the images spoken of in 1967, the buildings addressed here belong to the world of manufacturing and consumption. Rather than

being *super* by nature of a strong emotive visual character, these structure rather are so due to their immenseness in which homogeneity ironically produces a freedom of movement.

The cross-section of Archizoom's *No-Stop City* [**fig. 1**] corresponds to such a homogeneity called for here. Like supermarkets and factories, the cross-section portrays a seemingly self-contained environment. Energy is supplied from below the ground surface through technical chambers. Motor vehicles are seen on the open ground level and nature in the form of plants is present above on the roof top. Like industrial and commercial buildings, the *No-Stop City* could continue on infinitely either vertically or horizontally. There is no hierarchy of parts, but rather a repeatable grid form. Rather than creating a unique environment, Archizoom culls from the functionalist structures found in industrial construction.

No-Stop City's cross section was included in the introduction of the project in the Italian architectural magazine *Domus* in 1971. The full title reads "No-Stop City - Residential Parkings: Climatic Universal Sistem"[12] and the title page [**fig. 2**] depicts right-angled modules superimposed into various landscapes. While the realization of such mega-constructions could turn menacing, the artificiality of these montages entail a playful aspect. Their sheer improbability stimulate the imagination and pose the idea of wandering the globe in continuous modules. Representations of *No-Stop City*'s interior are given in the magazine contribution as well. Images of three-dimensional models show endless spaces filled with objects. All three models depict spaces with low-hanging white ceiling modules held up by shiny metal columns. The spaces are open and seem to go on endlessly, but the openness and geometric purity of the interiors is countered by the array of constructed objects placed throughout. One model [**fig. 3**] contains tents and rock formations. There sporadically occur slab formations. In the foreground lie oversized boxes of grocery items, such as Ritz crackers. In another model, toy-like nude male and female figures are surrounded by fake animals, and placed in a landscape of cartoon-like shrubs and man-made ventilation systems. Natural, human and industrial objects are all clearly artistic constructions, which stresses their artificiality. Nature appears rather as a department store decoration than as a believable natural setting.

Re-creating consumer objects and environments call up productions in Pop Art, including Andy Warhol's 1964 *Brillo Boxes* and Claes Oldenburg's *The Store* from 1961. Archizoom's environments are similarly concerned with the fascination of the commercial. The inspiration for *No-Stop City* is the world of artificiality in which nature is present only as representation, yet still remains a source of inspiration. As Lucy Lippard writes: "Already separated from life by the cellophane barrier of commercialism, Pop Art can function with

detachment and still retain a hold on the emotional or sensorial reactions of the viewer".[13] Lippard defines here the critical nature of the consumer world alluded to by Superstudio and Archizoom in their 1967 manifesto. Consumer objects are characterized by Lippard as being both detached and emotive, qualities Pop artists take up in their work. In thematizing the fabricated, the unreal character of popular images can be emphasized. Fantasies of the artificial and their emotive impact may further offer creative material for rethinking the medial environments in which we live. Taken to an extreme by Archizoom, commercial spaces would seem to offer freedom of movement and thought both through the concept of the infinite, and through the abundance of evocative objects with which endless space may be filled.

In the work of Superstudio we can see a fascination with artificial environments as well. For instance, *Il Monumento Continuo* [**fig. 6**] is a clearly fantastic construction towering over various settings, such as Manhattan, the dessert, a housing settlement, etc. On one hand it reflects Archizoom's interest in homogeneous and seemingly infinite commercial-industrial spaces. The monument consists of an endlessly repeatable rectangular form which also recalls totalizing fantasies of megastructural living spaces like Le Corbusier's 1933 *Obus A Project for Algiers.* But *Il Monumento Continuo* is in fact termed a monument and so connotes ideas of religion and spirituality as well as memory and history. Superstudio at times juxtapose collages of their monument in magazine spreads across from photographs of aqueducts, pyramids and the Kaaba directly underlining these associated ideas.

In the June 1969 issue of *Domus* titled "Design d'invenzione e design d'evasione" ["Design of invention and design of evasion"], Superstudio write of their ideas regarding the convergence of the spiritual and the banal: "But remember that it is poetry which makes us live and that life does not occur in hermetic boxes for little parallel lives, but also in the city and in the car, in supermarkets, in movie theaters and on the high-way [...] and an object can be a spatial adventure, an object of cult and veneration, and can become a luminous nodal point of relations".[14]

Like the modules of Archizoom's *No-Stop City,* Superstudio's projected objects offer little visual information. In contrast, however, *Il Monumento Continuo,* activates the situation into which it is placed, while *No-Stop City* offers endless constructed space for the accumulation of goods and the unfolding of activities. Superstudio present a monument and Archizoom a city. The city is enclosed and draws attention to what can take place inside, while the monument is a nodal point relating back to situations around it and acting as instigator for other situations by virtue of its cryptic presence.

In this way, *Il Monumento Continuo* is reminiscent of the monolith in Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey.* It is a strange, massive and

autonomous form inserted into the world that activates the fields around it.

For their participation to *Trigon 69* (1969) in Graz, Superstudio intervened in their exhibition room with an object [**fig. 4**] turning it into the *Stanza di Graz*.[15] The white monolith resembles a section of *Il Monumento Continuo*, but in the exhibition context it takes on a kind of mythic nature, as if invested with transcendental power. The object achieves a special status through its singular presentation and recalls the works of Minimal Art and the discussions surrounding them in the 1960s. It was the art critic Michael Fried who in his dismissal of the experimental art of the 1960s – above all of Minimal Art or Primary Structures – in fact succinctly expressed the strength of contemporary artistic experiments: the activation of the viewer-object space, or what he refers to as theatricality in his 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood". Fried writes: "*Art degenerates as it approaches the conditions of theater. Theater is the common denominator that binds together a large and seemingly disparate variety of activities, and that distinguishes those activities from the radically different enterprises of the modernist arts*".[16]

In a manner similar to a theater production, that which Fried calls "literal art" directly involves the viewer as a type of participant, rather than refer to the qualities essential to its medium. Instead of confronting issues of opticality, objects of Minimal Art make the participant conscious of his/her own relation to them through their presence as real objects. Central to this effect is the feeling of endlessness in the objects of Minimal Art that place the subject in a reflective position regarding his/her experience of them. Superstudio speaks of objects like the *Stanza di Graz* as luminous points of relations, adopting all that Fried despised about Minimal Art as a positive attribute. It isn't the object itself that is of significance, but the spatial relationships it makes possible. Yet, Superstudio's relationships are often mental-visual ones. Their monument is a proposal for possible associations. The spatial aspect of their work calls for a rethinking of given situations.

In 1972, Superstudio introduced a film project as a storyboard, *La Vita/Supersuperficie* [*Life/Supersurface*] in the Italian architecture magazine *Casabella*. Superstudio speak here of movements of individuals and groups reacting to each other and so creating continuous flows. A migratory movement is described as a attraction-reaction in which the movement of a part acts upon the movement as a whole.[17] The magazine presentation includes text in which the project is introduced in a manifesto fashion. Issues of image, architecture, life and space are discussed. Below the text are montage images, which all include grid surfaces flowing orthogonally into space. Occasionally, the grids' flow is disrupted by natural elements such as mountainous cliffs, or water. Human figures are placed on the grids, often with various objects. One scene [**fig. 5**] pictures a group of bohemian youths

sitting and lying on the surface of the grid as if in a natural setting. They are drinking wine and have a basket of fruit with them. A female and shirtless male figure lie stretched out and in an embrace in the foreground. A body of water appears along the left side of the grid and in the background there appear cliffs. The scene recalls something of the artificiality of nature present in Manet's 1863 *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. Just as there is something of an awkwardness and staged quality in Manet's Arcadian scene, the picnic of the mannered Superstudio figures seems at odds with the minimalism of their setting. Ambiguous is the grid surface itself. It strongly resembles the surface of *Il Monumento Continuo* and could be the roof of the monument, or simply a flat surface flowing out into space.

The scene which takes place on Superstudio's plane is a fantasized one. Space is potentialized as a mental action. Evocative forms – continuous grids and monuments – invite the recipient to playfully think about engaging with them. Such worlds without limits are unrealizable propositions to re-order material environments. In one of the five films Superstudio made, *Ceremony* from 1973, the film's protagonists emerge from below a surface through well-like formations embedded on a planar concrete ground. It's insinuated that the surface has an interior, from which the inhabitants also carry out objects. Once on the surface, they carry out symbolic acts to monotonic music which lends the atmosphere a surreal tone. A female voice-over in the film gives statements on architecture, such as "the inhabitants of the invisible house say that what we are doing is architecture, because it occupies space and time and relationships between us and others".[18] The idea of an invisible house is in keeping with the negative character of Superstudio's structures. Architecture is negated as a hermetic construction and is posited instead as proposed arrangements of objects and inhabitants and as movements of thought.

The tendencies towards purity and openness in modernist design are taken to such an extreme by Superstudio and Archizoom that inherent fantasies come to the forefront. Modernist visions include a sense of endless movement, the dissolution between inner and outer and the construction of ideal societies. In *Vers une architecture*, Le Corbusier writes, "ARCHITECTURE is the art above all others which achieves a state of platonic grandeur, mathematical order, speculation, the perception of harmony which lies in emotional relationships. This is the AIM of architecture".[19] Le Corbusier's visions, like his and Pierre Jeanneret's 1930 *Ville Radieuse* remained a conceptual ideal for the most part. They project utopian environments onto society in order to change it. The idea of creating a perfect urban sphere based on theoretical discourses and harmonious principles draws upon the Renaissance phenomenon of the *città ideale,* or ideal city. Pienza, for example, was transformed under Pope Pius II through the architect Bernardo Rossellino from 1459-1464 to reflect the

principles of Leon Battista Alberti, laid out in his 1452 *De Re Aedificatoria.*[20] Ideal cities materialize utopian ideas of society through harmonious compositions of buildings, streets, urban squares and gardens. But like Pienza, most failed to operate successfully after the passing of their initiators and many, such as Filarete's fantastic *Sforzinda* (1460-64), remained fictional.

The notion of creating as a representation of an idea or utopian program is simultaneously fascinating and threatening. Superstudio reflect the double nature of the city as the realization of ideal worlds in their own *Twelve Ideal Cities*. Published as a spread in the December 1971 issue of *AD* with drawings and descriptions of the cities, the series reveals Superstudio's attitude towards the theme in the article's title: "Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas: Premonitions of the Mystical Rebirth of Urbanism".[21] Shown in *AD* as black and white drawings, the resulting color collages of the cities initially appear to convey idyllic settings. In *The City of Hemispheres,* a green, hilly landscape with grazing sheep is pictured with what appears to be a square body of water and with small globes both floating in the air and resting on the ground. Superstudio explains in their text, however, that the apparent body of water is a mass – 10,044,900 to be exact – of crystalline sarcophagi with live humans contained within. The small globes act as the outer sense organs of the entombed individuals.[22] Each city is revealed in the article to be a strange science-fictional, post-apocalyptic construction. Presented as a magazine spread, Superstudio's ideal cities play with the tradition of architectural treatises and their ability to give a narrative to an imagined space. Through the narratives, architectural proposals can take on unrealistic dimensions and that which may seem as an ideal of a perfect society may in fact be a dystopia.

The development of rationalist architecture and urban planning have not only produced practical solutions to urban challenges, but have evoked incredible narratives and fantastic visions. Superstudio and Archizoom playfully engage with the visual and narrative possibilities of the simplified and repeatable architectural forms in modernist design. Their incredible propositions realize the loaded nature of a monumental trend in post-World War II modernism. In 1943 Sigfried Giedion formulated texts on monumentality perceiving a need for civic centres, which were not only to be functional, but were to represent the community as well.[23] By 1964 the term megastructural form was in use to refer to a large structure housing all urban functions.[24] The visionary and implausible aspect of megastructural architecture were addressed in the 1960s and early 1970s by the British architectural collaborative Archigram (1961-1975). Their 1964 *Walking City* imagines a mobile city composed out of units that resemble giant beetles with bodies composed of grid forms. Other works, such as *Plug-in City* (1962-1964) – made up of metal units plugged into a framework – don't seem far removed from realizable environments. In

contrast to the works of Superstudio and Archizoom, Archigram's images concentrate less on the activities to occur in the spaces and give more emphasis to intricate mechanical drawings of their proposals.

While Archigram were inspired by the extreme quality of megastructures, the subversive urbanists of the Situationist International (1957-1972) experimented with alternative ways of experiencing the city. Led by Guy Debord, the Situationists engaged in *psychogéographie* as a non-determinist exploration of the city's ambiences and their relation to social arrangements.[25] Urban geography is perceived here as a non-cartesian space of points of attraction beyond those of commercial culture. A method for discovering these points is the *dérive*, or drift, a non-intentional wandering through the city.[26] Collages resulted in which the metropolis was rearranged through the placing of cut-out map bits onto paper with multiple arrows pointing in various directions. These collages express the labyrinthine quality of the city as experienced through walking and the feeling of the possibilities of disorientation in the metropolis. Situationist participant Constant (Anton Nieuwenhuys) worked on a fictional labyrinthine city, *New Babylon*, from 1956-1969, which consisted of models, collages and writings.[27] In a watercolor on collage from 1959 (Gemeentemuseum, The Hague) the city is seen from an aerial view and appears as a jumble of container elements attached to each other and moving about in an intricate web. Like Superstudio's *Il Monumento Continuo*, *New Babylon* is comprised of units suspended over the ground on pilotis. The skeletal framework, however, bears more in common with Archizoom's *No-Stop City*. In contrast to both, its form is characterized by seemingly random angular turns which give it a chaotic feeling. Constant sought a sense of creative freedom and energy in *New Babylon*.[28] All three projects share an interest in the continuous and infinite in constructed living spaces. Along with the inventions of Archigram, they all play with the possibilities inherent in modernist architecture and urbanism, specifically thematizing freedom of movement through open plans as well as the extreme size enabled through industrial building materials and engineering methods and the important role of image and text in the creation of architectural meaning. The Italian groups in particular stress the importance of images in their idea of *Superarchitettura*. In contrast to other architectural inventions dealing with megastructures, the models of *Superarchitettura* are more evasive in that the actual built objects draw attention to the visual and social possibilities lying beyond the autonomous structure. I assert that they abrogate the finitely built form in favor of an open expanses of a free play of thought, fueled by the overload of stimuli of the metropolis and the possibilities offered by a subversion of consumer culture. Although architecture and urban planning are means for controlling or marking out a

territory, they are absurdly reversed in *Superarchitettura* to encompass an expanded comprehension of the constructed. Archizoom's and Superstudio's monumental proposals present a world without borders. Both groups look to the dream-like side of consumer objects for inspiration.

In contrast to the earlier modernists who had formulated space as a sense of movement and expression through built forms, architects of the 1960s began to investigate the implications of the mundane, commercial and of the over-saturation of visual information in establishing movement. One of the most notable investigations and analyses of found urban architecture and commercial spaces carried out at the end of the 1960s is Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour's *Learning From Las Vegas*.[29] In an answer to Le Corbusier's *Vers un architecture* and the emphasis on a pure expression of form, they sought after contradiction and the manifold in the city's commercial field. The research was carried out in 1968 with a preliminary article, "A Significance for A&P Parking Lots, or Learning from Las Vegas", published in *Architectural Forum* in 1968.[30] The book itself was first published in 1972. Parking lots play an important role in the investigations, as does the Las Vegas Strip and "boring" architecture. An initially blasphemous sounding comparison, super market parking lots are here contrasted with Versailles. In an automobile-orientated age, it is the vast spaces of parking lots and expressways that give shape to our surroundings.[31]

Learning from Las Vegas calls for an opening up of the understanding of architecture to include the structures characteristic of a society shaped by mass consumption and fast transportation. Venturi, Brown and Izenour emphasize the ordinary, vulgar and symbolic in their treatise on architecture rather than expressively built forms. It is the advertising signs in Las Vegas that interest them more than the actual architecture and they celebrate an open space given texture through images. *Superarchitettura* goes further in entering into a critical architectural dialogue with the superlative objects of mass culture. The individual interior models of *No-Stop City* discussed earlier are referred to as *Paesaggio interno*, meaning interior landscape. Supporting columns and ceiling grids give direction, while the objects within arrange the mega-texture that in this case is always variable. Infinite, free space is, however, given measure by means of the objects that fill the rooms. Living space is treated as found commercial megastructural architecture in which popular items act as points of orientation and fantasy. Superstudio too show figures in their 1972 *La Vita/Supersuperficie* placed upon the grid surface on a carpet, surrounded by household products. Both *Superarchitettura* groups present a type of communal living without individual borders. The open dimensions of consumer architecture are transformed into new ways not of consuming, but of living together.

Well after the dissolution of Archizoom in 1974, founding member Andrea Branzi wrote a small book in 1988 whose English title sounds like an Italian response to Venturi et al.: *Learning From Milan: Design and the Second Modernity.*[32] While Las Vegas is defined through the spectacle in its role as tourist centre, Milan was a centre of immigration from the South in the period of the *Miracolo economico italiano* and so a place of expansion and growth, as well as an imagined space of possibilities. It represented *la nuova dimensione,* the new dimension, a term referring to the change of scale and interdisciplinary character of the Italian cities in the 1960s. Milan's dimensions were in fact drastically changing in the postwar years though the implementation of the General Building Plan of 1953. Roadways were being widened or created at the expense of points of aggregation and existing neighborhoods, whose inhabitants were pushed out into the periphery.[33] In an act of reinstating the social, a group of beat youths occupied an area at the southern edge of the Milan on via Ripamonti creating a tent city at the end of April 1967. Their city came to be called Barbonia City in the press, meaning tramp city and was defined by critics as an immoral place of free love.[34] On June 12 1967 it was torn down by the police. Another occupation in Milan soon followed. After three hundred students were denied housing, a group of them squatted an the abandoned Hotel Commercio in Piazza Fontana on November 28, 1968.[35] These events reflect the city as an open space to be occupied for communal living. Milan in the 1960s was the stage for the implementation of modernist planning, the unfolding of subversive political activities as well as centre of design. Italy's two leading design magazines *Casabella* and *Domus* in which Archizoom and Superstudio introduced their projects, are based in the city as is the Triennale di Milano, Milan's design triennial held in the historic Palazzo dell'Arte, constructed by Giovanni Muzio in 1932-33. Both Superstudio and Archizoom were included in the triennials and Branzi was later to work and teach in Milan.[36]

Branzi doesn't address the student protests in his book, but he reflects the city as an open space of choice and imagination. *Learning from Milan* reflects on design and the logic of consumption. Branzi finds a move away from industrial egalitarianism towards a consumption specialization in the 1960s: "Design had to shift its attention from mass products to those intended for limited semantic groups. From objects that set out to please everyone, to objects that picked their own consumers. From the languages of reason to those of emotion. From the certainties of science to the perversities of fashion. From the object to the effect".[37] In a chapter titled "Territories of the Imagination," Branzi expresses his belief that design has overtaken architecture.[38] He means that the production of design products has so quantitatively exceeded that of architecture that spaces are more readily

defined by objects of design charged with emotion than by the built structures as complete and unified environments. In calling this chapter "Territories of the Imagination," Branzi draws upon the work of Archizoom.

The *Interior Landscapes* of *No-Stop City* are dominated by manufactured objects, including artificial human figures, animals and vegetation. They play with the evocativeness of consumption and recall the atmosphere of department store displays. These are a different kind than those spoken of by Walter Benjamin in the *Arcades Project*. The Arcades – of which Milan possesses a unique example with Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II – stand out by means of their architecture. *No-Stop City*'s architecture does not stand out except by means of it sheer size and impossibility. Emotive amalgamations arise through the idea of such an endlessness and through the abundance of objects contained within. An abundance of designed objects is what gives rise to the territories of the imagination of which Branzi speaks. Designed objects, in contrast to architectural spaces, can be easily re-arranged and allow for individual choice. Branzi and Archizoom's attitude towards design is dialectical. At times they seem to negate it. In an article from 1971, Archizoom writes of the destruction of objects ("La distruzione degli oggetti"). In ironic tones, the group speaks of the dissolution of the object through the designer. Design questions the role of industry and challenges it to be self-reflexive to the point of the homogenization of consumption.[39] The designer negates an active position in order to allow for hyper-realization of the logic of commerce to the point of the dissolution of difference and the fulfillment of a utopia.[40]

Italian architect and theorist Pier Vittorio Aureli points out the autonomous and critical position of Archizoom through their dissolution of objects. However, what is meant here is the suspension of the city as a collection of individual architectural objects: "Foreshadowing later theories of media and immaterial production, Branzi emphasized that if the city was integrated into the cycle of production, then producing it was only a matter of programming, not of designing, its built structures".[41] Aureli positions *No-Stop City* in line with the work of to the modernist architect and city planner Ludwig Hilberseimer (1885-1967). Hilberseimer's projects reflected his socialist leanings and were largely theoretical and like those Archizoom and Superstudio were not often realized. *The New City* from 1944 anticipates the dissolution of traditional urban space and the radical visions of Archizoom. Italian groups recall the tradition of socially-oriented modernism in the use of the term "L'existenz-minimum" in their appeal for the destruction of objects. This is a reference to the 1929 meeting of CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) in Frankfurt am Main hosted by the German architect and Frankfurt city planner Ernst May. May is best-known for his Frankfurt housing projects, or *Siedlungen,* and the concept of *Die Wohnung für das Existenzminimum,* which

literally means the apartment for the minimum of existence. Although the term has a dystopian sound to it, the idea was based on an egalitarian vision to be realized through the standardization of living units.[42] "La distruzione degli oggetti" again gives examples of the interior of *No-Stop City*. One image depicts a long room filled with beds arranged in rows and set on the floor. To the side is set a bust of a figure that clearly resembles Karl Marx. Another drawing shows a unit of the same dimensions in the center of which a skeletal structure constructed out of twigs precariously supports a hammock.

I suggest that these interior spaces, deal with the fantasy of the functionalist-rationalist city, as does the work of Superstudio. The interdisciplinary nature of their work – the use of image and text to approach architecture – allows for the projective involvement of the recipient. An Archizoom montage from 1971 [fig. 6] sets a spoon-shaped "skyscraper" across from the Chrysler Building in Manhattan. Another sets a sleek high-rise like structure in the dessert. Objects appear in *No-Stop City* as well as in *Il Monumento continuo*, but it is the city as a given set of individual material objects that are destroyed. Branzi, Archizoom and Superstudio take the logic of functionalist-rationalist architecture to its extreme imagining endless grid structures to such an extent that the subject is invited to reflect on living without limits, while also called to freely think about the urban spaces he/she engages with. They deal with what art historian and theorist Rosalind Krauss describes as "the infrastructure of vision".[43] While the perspective system is a means of mapping reality onto a surface, the grid is self-referential. It does not map reality, but addresses the materiality of the plane.[44] The three-dimensional grid is a "theoretical model of architectural space in general".[45] Krauss approaches the grid from a structural perspective, so that although it does not directly represent reality, it is a structure for its analysis.[46] The nomadic kind of existence propagated by Superstudio and Archizoom in their imagined structures transforms modernist structures into spaces of the analysis of universal acts. Superstudio's films, such as *Ceremony*, concentrate on minimal and somewhat esoteric-like activities. Archizoom's reference to "l'existenz-minimum" brings to consciousness the structures of living. Both groups also emanate a sense of universal freedom of movement in their work. The non-hierarchical grid opens up movement in all directions. Rather than solidifying an image of place, it abstracts the constructive elements of space.

It is this concept of space that the *Momumento Continuo* and *No-Stop City* propose through their targeted uses of the grid. Archizoom and Superstudio contrast images of existing places with objects of their imagination in order to heighten the viewer's sense of the constructedness of the grid. In an iconic image of *Il Monumento Continuo* from 1967, the monument moves across the Upper New York Bay from Brooklyn and over lower Manhattan. It appears as

three separate horizontal slabs held up by supports. They join together through a bisecting rectangular volume and continue on as two outer planes which wrap round Lower Manhattan and frame it through a another opposing volume and resume their tripartite division only to unify into a single surface, which flows over New Jersey and seems to go on endlessly across America. On the surface of the monument the blue sky and white clouds are subtly reflected. New York City is an archetypical American grid patterned city. Yet it is a city marked by overlays of history and eclectic stone facades. Superstudio's construction locks in the metropolis's endlessness.[47] Like Archizoom's spoon high-rise set in Manhattan, Superstudio's monument is out of place and surreal. The grid of New York City becomes striated through the smoothness of the imaginative monument.

Superstudio and Archizoom's space is at odds with the material urban place. Their montages show their various architectural images in disjunction with the bound spaces into which they are placed. Existing largely as magazine presentations with abundant text concerning theoretical issues, *Il Monumento Continuo* and *No-Stop City* are free of the danger of becoming solidified in concrete and steel. Modern forms, materials and related social processes are pictured, re-arranged and reflected upon. The contribution of Superstudio and their *Il Monumento Continuo* and Archizoom and their *No-Stop City* to the discipline of architecture is to situate the architectural object between objecthood and imagination. While the particular works of Superstudio and Archizoom discussed here rarely deal with realized objects, they play with the city as object and in doing so destroy its materiality. Supersizing modernist forms, they create urban representations of endless possibilities which are both a critique of the consumerist city and a method for playfully engaging with it. The visions they give are somewhere between the existent, that which is taken as inspiration, and fantasy and call for imaginary interventions in the lived environment. *Superarchitettura* utilizes that intermedial nature of architecture as a discipline within a matrix of the built, of the planned, of images and texts. It expands the field as a theoretical model for creatively rethinking space as representation.

PLATES

1 Archizoom, *No-Stop City*, 1971. Cross-section. From *Domus*, March 1971.

2 Archizoom, *No-Stop City. Residential Parkings Climatic Universal Sistem*, 1971. Titlepage from *Domus*, March 1971.

3 Archizoom, *No-Stop City. Paesaggio interno-interior landscape*, 1972. Wood, metal, paper, board, glass and mirror glass, with tempera and acrylic, each 183 x 70 x 43 cm. Pictured for *Domus*, March 1971.

4 Superstudio, *Stanza di Graz, per Trigon 69*, 1969. Photograph of the display, Kunsthalle Joanneum, Graz. From *Domus*, December 1969.

5 Superstudio, *La vita/Supersuperficie: La frutta e il vino*, 1971. Photo-montage and collage. From the storyboard published in: *Casabella*, July 1972.

6 Superstudio, *Il Monumento Continuo, New New York*, 1969. Print Serigraphy, 70,3 x 100 cm. From *Domus*, December 1969.

1   Annette Geiger, "Imaginäre Architekturen - Räume, Medien und Fiktionen. Zur Einführung", in *Imaginäre Architekturen. Raum und Stadt als Vorstellung,* edited by Annette Geiger, Stefanie Hennecke and Christin Kemp (Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 2006), 10. Translation by the author.

2   Donald Winnicott, "The Concept of a Healthy Individual", in *Home is Where We Start From: Essays by a Psychoanalyst*, edited by Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepard and Madeline Davis (New York: Norton, 1986), 21-38. Originally given as a talk to the Royal Medico-Psychological Association, Psychotherapy and Social Psychiatry Section, March 8, 1967.

3   Christopher Bollas, *The Evocative Object World* (London: Routledge, 2009), 64.

4   Ibid., 63.

5   Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture,* (New York: Dover, 1986). Originally published as *Vers une architecture* (Paris, Crès, 1923).

6   Thomas Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent* (1996; repr., New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 11-12.

7   *Megastructure Reloaded: Visionary Architecture and Urban Design of the Sixties Reflected by Contemporary Artists*, edited by Sabrina van der Ley and Markus Richter (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2008), 278-279.

8   Marie Therese Stauffer, "Critique of Pure Structure: The Utopias of Archizoom and Superstudio", in ibid., 211-216.

9   Marie Theres Stauffer, *Figurationen des Utopischen: Theoretische Projekte von Archizoom und Superstudio* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2008), 18.

10 The Manifesto was published for the second exhibition of Superarchitettura (Modena: Galleria Comunale, 1967). Reprinted in Stauffer, *Figurationen des Utopischen*, 260: "La superarchitettura é l'architettura della superproduzione, del superconsumo, della superinduzione al consumo, del supermarket, del superman e della benzina super". "La SUPERARCHITETTURA accetta la logica della produzione e del consumo e vi esercita un'azione demistificante. È un'architettura di immagini con una forte carica di figurabilità, capace cioè di indurre il suo stesso consumo. È un'architettura con la carica eversiva della pubblicità, ma ancor più efficace poiché inserisce immagini cariche di intenzionalità in un 'grande disegno' e nella realtà della città con tutte le sue permanenze e la suo storia". Translation by the author.

11 Archizoom, "Archizoom Associati", *IN*, May - June 1972, 15-23. "La Fabbrica e il Supermarket diventano di fatto i veri modelli campione della città futura: strutture urbane ottimali, potenzialmente infinite, dove le funzioni si dispongono spontaneamente su di un piano libero, reso omogeneo da un sistema di microclimatizzazione e informazione ottimale" (ibid., 23). Translation by the author.

12 Spelling of system as given by Archizoom.

13 Lucy Lippard, *Pop Art* (1966; repr., London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 90.

14 Superstudio, "Design d'invenzione e design d'evasione", *Domus*, June 1969, 56: "Si ricordi però che *è la poesia che fa abitare,* e che la vita si svolge non solo in scatole ermetiche per piccole vite parallele, ma anche nella città e nelle auto, nei supermarkets, nei cinematografi, sulle autostrade... E un oggetto può essere un'avventura dello spazio, o un oggetto di culto e venerazione, e diventare un nodo luminoso di relazioni...". Translation by the author.

15 Stauffer, *Figurationen des Utopischen*, 54-55.

16 Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood", in *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 164. Originally published in *Artforum,* June 1967, 12-23.

17 Superstudio, "La Vita/Supersuperficie," *Casabella*, July 1972, 20.

18 Superstudio, *Ceremony* (1973), film.

19 Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture,* 110-111.

20 Hanno-Walter Kruft, *Städte in Utopia: Die Idealstadt vom 15. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*

(Munich: Beck, 1989).

21 Superstudio, "Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas: Premonitions of the Mystical Rebirth of Urbansim", *AD*, no.12 (1971), 737-742.

22 Ibid., 739.

23 Alan Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 213.

24 Ibid.

25 Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 92-93.

26 Ibid.

27 Van der Ley and Richter, *Megastructure Reloaded,* 277.

28 David Pinder, *Visions of the City: Utopianism, Power and Politics in Twentieth-Century Ubanism* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 197-198: "Constant argued that New Babylon was the '*experimental thought and play model* for the establishment of principles for a new and different culture'. He described it as 'the object of a mass creativity' that was based on 'the activation of the enormous creative potential which, now unused, is present in the masses'".

29 Martino Stierli, "Das verdrängte Gedächtnis der Postmoderne", *Neue Züricher Zeitung,* December 13, 2003.

30 Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, "Preface to The First Edition", in Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (1972; repr., Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1977), xi-xiv.

31 Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas,*13: "The A&P parking lot is a current phase in the evolution of vast space since Versailles. The space that divides high-speed highway and low, sparse buildings produces no enclosure and little direction. To move through a piazza is to move between high enclosing forms. To move through this landscape is to move over vast expansive texture: the mega texture of the commercial landscape. The parking lot is the parterre of the asphalt landscape. The patterns of parking lines give direction much as the paving patterns, curbs, borders, and *tapis vert* give direction in Versailles; grids of lamp posts substitute for obelisks, rows of urns and statues as points of identity and continuity in the vast space. But it is the highway signs, through their sculptural forms or pictorial silhouettes, their particular positions in space, their inflected shapes and their graphic meanings, that identify and unify the mega texture. They make verbal and symbolic connections through space, communicating a complexity of meanings through hundreds of associations in few seconds from far away. Symbol dominates space. Architecture is not enough. Because the spatial relationships are made by symbols more than by forms, architecture in this landscape becomes symbol in space rather than form in space. Architecture defines very little: The big sign and the little building is the rule of Route 66".

32 Andrea Branzi, *Learning from Milan: Design and the Second Modernity,* trans. Huw Evans (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988), 11. Originally published as *Pomeriggi alla media industria: Design e Seconda Modernità* (Milan: Idea Books Edizioni, 1988).

33 John N. Martin and Primo Moroni, *La Luna Sotto Casa: Milano tra rivolta esistenziale e movimenti politici* (Milan: ShaKe, 2007), 11-14.

34 Ibid., 122-123.

35 Ibid., 124.

36 Mary Louise Lobsinger, "Architectural Utopias and *La Nuova Dimensione*. Turin in the 1960s", in *Italian Cityscapes: Culture and Urban Change in Contemporary Italy,* edited by Robert Lumley and John Foot (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), 77-89. "The terms 'city' and 'architecture' were no longer sufficient to describe the complex consequences of recent urbanisation, that is, the tension between the *centripetal* forces of the traditional city and the *centrifugal* dispersement of mobile populations. A new reality was unfolding in metropolitan areas that seemed to be overturning all established modles in its 'unbridled course'. Italian architects saw this

dynamic environment as offering an opportunity to rethink their role" (ibid., 79-80).

37 Branzi, *Learning from Milan*.
38 Ibid., 14.
39 Archizoom, "La distruzione degli oggetti," *IN,* Mach -June 1971, 4-13.
40 Ibid.
41 Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy: Politics within and against Capitalism* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 77.
42 Ernst May, "Die Wohnung für das Existenzminimum", in *Neues Bauen - Neues Gestalten. Das Neue Frankfurt/Die neue Stadt. Eine Zeitschrift zwischen 1926 und 1933,* edited by Heinz Hirdina (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1984), 222-225. Originally published in *Das Neue Frankfurt*, no. 11 (1929).
43 Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1986), 15.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., 21.
46 Ibid., 13.
47 Such a stance is reminiscent of Le Corbusier's perceptions of the city during his 1935 visit. The architect was impressed with the sight of the high-rises and the American love of technology, but in contrast to his 1925 *Plan Voisin*, New York remained too disorderly. Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (1990; repr. New York: Norton, 1992), 170: "Le Corbusier set himself against the ways in which time is usually felt in urban space. The facades of old buildings and worn paving stones offer evidence that our own lives are no more and no less than an addition to the past. Le Corbusier rejected this evidence; he wanted modern architecture, which seeks for freedom of movement in a perfectly coordinated form, to expunge historical time from the city".