

DESIGNING OBJECTLESSNESS

Problems with the negation of objects in the exhibition

Italy: The New Domestic Landscape (1972)

Pedro Alban Calmon



Joe Colombo

⊕ Follow

"Living System Box 1" compact living environment, 1968

Wood, Laminate

71 × 51 1/2 × 101 3/4 in

180.3 × 130.8 × 258.4 cm

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M.S. Thesis presented to the faculty of Architecture of the Pontificia
Universidad Católica de Chile in candidacy for the degree of Master in
Architecture.

Advisors: Max Nunez and Nicholas Stutzin

September 2020



| ARQ-UC |

MARQ

“It’s brutal, you know?, terribly brutal, While the millions of most insignificant species take thousands, sometimes millions of years in disappearing, manufactured products are brought out of earth in a couple of days, no one never grants then a second opportunity.”

Michel Houellebecq: The Map and the Territory

“The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite, perhaps infinite, number of hexagonal galleries.”

Jorge Luís Borges: The Library of Babel

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PROPERTY FROM AN IMPORTANT COLLECTION, MIAMI

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+ Follow

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Polished stainless steel.
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Acknowledgements

This thesis results from a mixture of ready-made conditions and preexisting interests. If the engagement with obsolescence, inhabitation, collections and the cultural implications of materials stem from my involvement with *Mouraria*⁵³, an architecture and arts collective shaped by the process of renovating a house in downtown Salvador, Brazil, the specific focus on Italy: *The New Domestic Landscape*, as well as the critical interpretation of design—where objects and details become carriers of ideology—was developed by the demands of the thesis workshop and the tools provided by it.

This thesis would not have been possible, without the discussions with Max Nunez and Nicholas Stutzin, whose constant dragging allowed the accumulation of content on the following pages to gain form and subject—instead of simply being a collection of insights. On the other edge of the sword, I must thank Pedro Correa and Rayna Razmilic for teaching me some fundamentals of architectural philosophy without which the relevance of *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* would have been impossible to surface.

Beyond the scholars of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de

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Finally, to Juliana Rocha, Paula Cubilhas, Rodrigo Sena and Natalia Moroni, for standing me throughout the many difficult moments of the last couple of years.

Retracting drawer at Mies Van der Rohe Farnsworth Residence.
<https://tinylink.net/rsBYo>



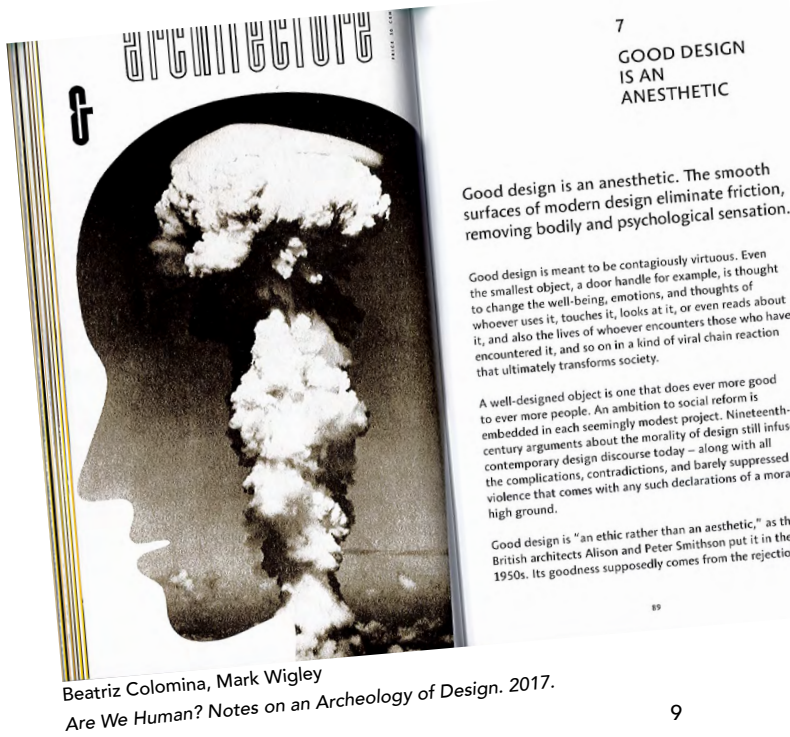
Abstract

Italy: The New Domestic Landscape (ITNDL), the exhibition of Italian Radical Design which took place at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) was an ambitious and highly ambiguous show. At a time when modernism was already being ostensibly criticized but still before Postmodern movement in architecture, after the riots of May 68 but before 1973's oil crisis—which would bring postwar welfare estate to an end—the show curated by the Argentinian architect Emilio Ambasz contained a mixture of the vanishing, but still alive, dreams of the past—mainly a belief in the life-improving and emancipating qualities of technology—and seeds of a coming future—the environmentalist movement, for example. Among its inherent contradictions stood out the fact that the exhibition, sponsored by major Italian manufacturers, would design the “death of design.”

By means of technology, space and material, the architects commissioned for the Environments section of ITNDL sought to eliminate the object: to prevent it from existing, from being visible or from having meaningful attachments with its users/inhabitants. Objectlessness, if not the only approach present in the show, was the one through which it became recognized—especially as Superstudio's *Supersurface: A Life*

Without Objects images became a mandatory architectural canon.

This thesis reviews the *Environments* section of ITNDL through the lens of the *object* in order to understand, in the means used for its repression, how an inhabitant is conveyed. The crisis of object-space, object-commodity and object-time which surface from the analysis become relevant to understand contemporary objectlessness—that of the home-screen as a home-surrogate—and the role of Italian utopias in shaping it, as well as its failures.



Introduction

I.

This investigation was written as a part of Nicholas Stutzin's and Max Nuñez' thesis workshop at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, which took as its subject the exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* (ITNDL¹)—a show of Italian Radical Design² directed by the Argentinian architect Emilio Ambasz at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMa) in 1972. Students were asked to take the show as a departure point for a research in which the implications of its designs became relevant to our contemporary society. This thesis aims at a panoramic review of the show in which environments and objects assemble a bigger narrative—one of historical and contemporary relevance.

This thesis takes as its center the *object*, one of the central elements in the discourse of the Italian avant-garde, and investigates the role given to it throughout six of the *Environments* commissioned (or selected) for the show. Through this analysis, it aims not only to demystify

1 The exhibition was opened to the public on May 26, 1972, and remained on view until September 11. Ambasz, Emilio (curator). *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, achievements and problems of Italian design (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1972)

2 Throughout this thesis, the term Radical Design will Always refer to the Italian production (and not to that of external groups such as Archigram, Ant Farm, Cedric Price, Haus Rucker.co, Hanns Hollein or Utopie).

some notions usually associated with the coherence of radical designers as a group, but also to develop a notion of the object, and its relevance, for contemporary architectural culture and politics.

The digitalization of recent decades, partly predicted by some of the environments presented in the show, namely Superstudio's *Supersurface* and Ugo La Pietra's *Unbalancing System*, came with the possibility of what is often defined as *new-nomadism*, not owning cars or houses, not having workspace (blending it into one's home) not having a city or personal possessions, everything on demand... The emancipation from objects came with its caveats, one that the retrofuturism of 1972 may help us to understand—and later act on, and sometimes against.

This investigation poses questions indirectly related to ITNDL. The first one is about the consequences of objectlessness: How are the aspects and *rituals* of our daily life affected by the absence of them? The second one deals with objects as a tool for resistance: May single objects, collections and accumulations change the way we experience the fragility of our contemporary domestic realm?

With the light shed by the show's environments, interpreted in its form and discourse, this thesis is an attempt to define the meanings of an object and what is an object, now.

II. *The Object (of research): Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*

Italy: The New Domestic Landscape, was one of the most ambitious and at that time the most expensive exhibitions at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMa). In a letter in 1982³ its production supervisor Fred Coxen remembered the "exhibition as being the most difficult of his career (...) It used the entire first floor (...) including the East Wing, the Garden Wing, Sculpture Garden and Upper Terrace. We had to get automobiles, campers, and trailers into the gallery". Funded by a group of blue-chip Italian manufacturers eager to get a hold of the American public, Radical Designers were able to develop their most unmarketable dreams. Emilio Ambasz, its curator would brag about the fact that he

was able to use the institutional support that MoMA provided to get the architects to produce those environments for the simple fact of vanity. The vanity of the manufacturers who were willing to under-write everything so it would be presented at the Museum of Modern Art⁴.

Industrial technologies employed for single-production environments, shipment of large-scale installations from Italy to New

3 Richard Oldenburg. "Letters from Members to the Director". *MoMa*, no.21, (New York, winter 1982), 2

4 Peter Collard. "Italy: The New Domestic Landscape". *Disegno daily* (November 28 2013), <https://www.disegnodaily.com/article/italy-the-new-domestic-landscape> (access in august 3, 2020).



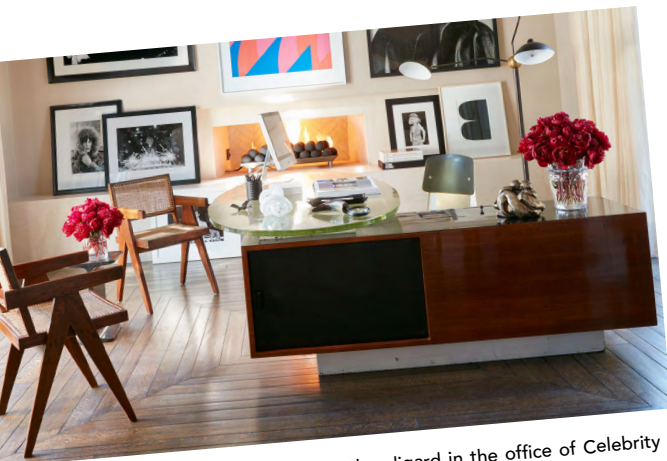
Italy: The New Domestic Landscape, objects section at MoMa's sculpture garden. Photograph by Leonardo LeGrand

York, printing of publications, making of films⁵ and symbolic displays were paid by those willing to sell consumer objects, and yet in the headline of Ada Louise Huxtable's New York Times critic one could read: "Designing the Death of Design—But Stylishly⁶". Ambasz's exhibition

5 "Not only is Supersurface's structure—which was composed of an initial six-minute montage sequence followed by a brief segment with live actors—analogous to Carosello's separation of short film and sponsor's message, the group used the funding from the New Domestic Landscape commission to hire a firm that specialized in such television spots to help shoot, assemble, and sound-synchronize the film". Craig Buckley. *Architecture, Media and the Reinvention of Assembly 1956-1973* (doctorate thesis, Princeton University, 2013) 277.

6 Ada Louise Huxtable, "Designing the Death of Design—But Stylishly", *The New York Times*. June 4, 1972.

was structured in two sections: Objects and Environments. Its catalogue also included a third section, which contained commissioned critical texts.⁷



Pierre Jeanneret chairs designed for Chandigarh in the office of Celebrity
Kim Kardashian

⁷ The historical and critical articles were written by leading architecture and art critics and historians such as Vittorio Gregotti, Manfredo Tafuri, Germano Celant, Leonardo Benevolo and Giulio Carlo Argan. Ambasz, Italy: The New Domestic Landscape, 289-421.

Objects

Taking place at MoMa's sculpture garden the first section of the show contained a selection of 180 objects of Italian design that had been developed throughout the sixties. Displayed in a series of wooden boxes with acrylic lids measuring approximately 1.80 x 1.80 x 5.00 meters, objects like Gaetano Pesce's chair *Up5*, Ettore Sottsass typewriter *Valentina* for Olivetti and Archizoom's *Superwave* were arranged under three categories.

Objects selected by their formal and technical means contained products of all sort whose major contributions seemed to be an exploration with new technologies detached from major political arguments. Polyurethane, molded plywood, aluminum and fiberglass chairs and tables; shelving systems, kitchen utensils, tvs and record players.

The second Category, *Objects Selected by their Sociocultural implications*, contained a more coherent argument, introduced by a series of small and somewhat detached paragraphs⁸. Here were products which, inspired by Pop Art and previewing what would later become postmodernism, took external imagery and forms and transposed them

8 Ambasz, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, 94.

to domesticity—eliminating the modern idea of truth in design⁹. Gruppo Strum's *Pratone*, a polyurethane 'sofa' shaped like an out of scale patch of grass, and Piero Gillardi's *I Sassi* (The Rocks), a series of seating elements in the form and texture of stones, took ironical reference in nature while Paolo Lomazzi's *Joe Sofa*, shaped like a baseball glove, and Archizoom's beds, used in images of popular culture.

Finally, Objects Selected by their Implications of more flexible patterns of use and arrangement contained products that either by being soft, articulate, modular or on wheels seemed to refuse taking a solid place in the home¹⁰. Here were Joe Colombo's Tube Chair and Multichair, Mario Bellini's Chameleon: unlimited cushion system and Bruno Munari's Abitacolo: habitable structure.

Ambasz's structure for the organization of objects was rather unclear as for example it had selected some flexible and modular furniture in *Formal and Technical Means*. His opening text for the

9 "Confronted with the erosion of the simplistic doctrine of functionalism, some designers produce objects whose function is not evident from their form, and whose structural properties, in fact, contradict the behavior one would expect from that form. In such cases, no longer does "form follow function" but, on the contrary, aggressively conceals it". Ambasz, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, 94.

10 "Complementing the psychological mechanisms that the family as an entity employs to maintain its domination over its members, the present spatial layout and hierarchies of the family environment are the primary physical devices to reinforce present family role assignments". Ambasz, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, 144.

catalogue also presented a different set of categories which weren't to be precisely mapped to the following sections. Ambasz claimed the existence of "three prevalent attitudes toward design: the first was conformist, the second is reformist, and the third is, rather, one of contestation, attempting both inquiry and action."¹¹ While the first was non-ideological, understanding design as a "problem solving activity", the description of second outlined what appeared to be an unsolvable (by design) problem¹²:

The second, or reformist, attitude is motivated by a profound concern for the designer's role in a society that fosters consumption as one means of inducing individual happiness, thereby insuring social stability. Torn by the dilemma of having been trained as creators of objects, and yet being incapable of controlling either the significance or the ultimate uses of these objects, they find themselves unable to reconcile the conflicts between their social concerns and their professional practices. They have thus developed a rhetorical mode to cope with these contradictions. Convinced that there can be no renovation of design until structural changes have occurred in society, but not attempting to bring these about themselves, they do not invent substantially new forms; instead, they engage in a rhetorical operation of redesigning conventional objects with new, ironic, and sometimes self-

11 Ambasz, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, 19.

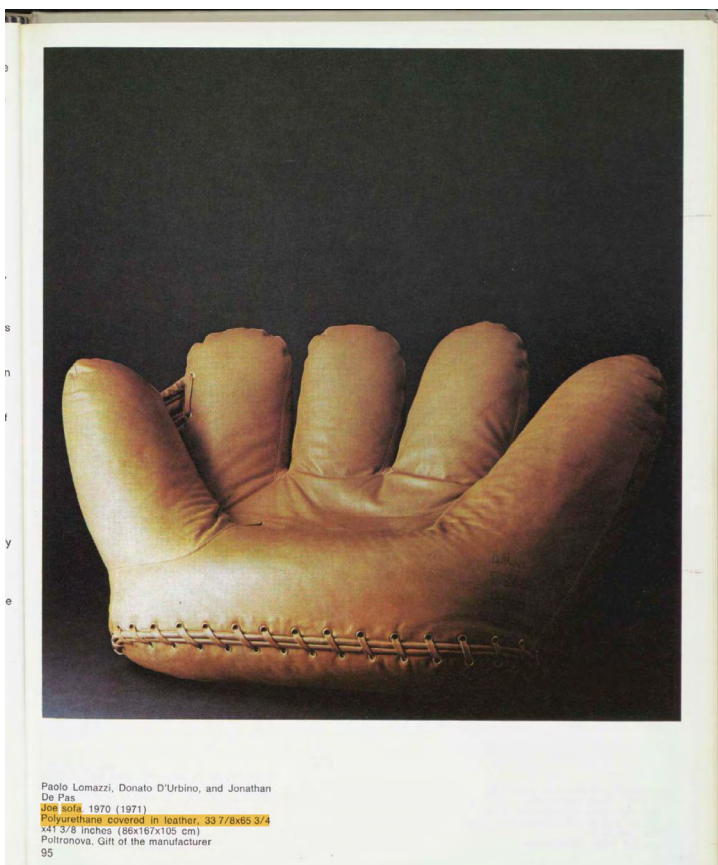
12 The insolubility of the object-making problematic—the role of the designer—would be reinforced by some of the critical texts (final section of the catalogue which to some extent was transposed to video-format in the exhibition itself. See: Manfredo Tafuri. *Design and Technological Utopia*. In: Ambasz, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, 368.



Bruno Munari
Abitacolo ("Cockpit") habitable structure, 1971
 (1971)
 Welded steel, varnished, 7 feet 6 inches x 35 1/2
 x 7 feet 1 inch (200x90x190 cm)
 Robots. Gift of the manufacturer
 131



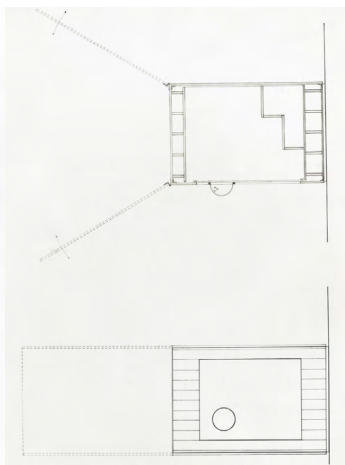
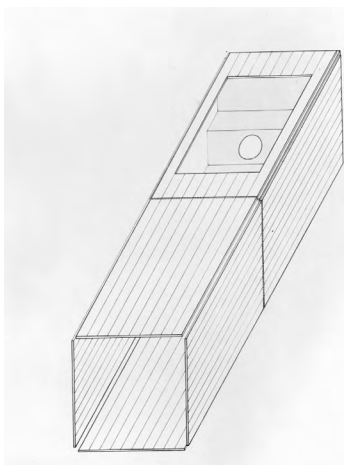
Bruno Munari
Abitacolo (1971)



Paolo Lomazzi, Donato D'Urbino and Jonathan De Pas
Joe Sofa (1971). Manufactured by Poltronova.



Objects Section
Photograph: Leonard Le Grand



Shipping containers/exhibition devices designed for the *Objects Section*.
Archive of the Museum of Modern Art.

deprecatory sociocultural and aesthetic references.¹³

Contestation, the third approach, took the crisis in the impossible role of designers from a less ironical standpoint. This attitude was twofold since it described both designers who chose not to make objects, dedicating themselves to pure political and philosophical activity, and designers which from a “holistic” approach attempted to design objects understood as “environmental ensembles” that would refuse the stable uses of traditional home. Ambasz took clear preference to this active and less ironical approach, seeing the others as being limited by the excessive rhetoric.

Ambasz judgement of discourse seems ironic when observed against the exhibition he had organized. ITNDL was considered by many to be overdosed in discourse. As Felicity Scott points out in a chapter of her book *Architecture or Techno Utopia: Politics after Modernism*:

That discourse—what Natalini referred to as information—was in fact very much part of both the curatorial ambition and the display leading one reviewer to note that the “Supershow” was “uncomfortably didactic.” The exhibition was even structured according to the discursive factions of the Italian scene, and substantial space was dedicated to audiovisual presentations in an attempt to explicate their positions for the visitor. (...)

13 Ambasz, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, 19.

The remarkable presence, even excessiveness, of discourse found both throughout the catalog and in the exhibition itself was an important component of the show. It was almost as if Ambasz were (sic) curating the texts in the extensive audiovisual displays, treating them like objects of exhibition and translating them into fictive, often spectacularized images.¹⁴



Luca Parise, 2014
Cozinha Lagosta (lobster kitchen)

14 Felicity Scott, *Architecture or Techno Utopia* (MIT Press: Chicago, 2009), 117.

Design Program

The second section of the show would only reinforce the relevance given to discourse in design. Here Ambasz commissioned leading Italian designers with the task of designing environments for the New Domestic Landscape. His design program (brief) contained both practical and conceptual constraints. Designers were to restrict themselves to the maximum dimensions of a square measuring twelve feet (4.80m) on its sides and could occupy up to 3.50m in height¹⁵; all environments had to be designed for the possibilities of mass-scale production. Two possible family types were allowed by the program: a heterosexual couple “(M/W)” or a heterosexual couple with a boy or girl “(M/W w or m)”. Environments had to present artifacts able to enact both new rituals demanded by contemporary society as well as more traditional ones. Two dichotomies organized the spaces—private or public, fixed or flexible (and it’s possible intermediaries)¹⁶. A 23 inch television screen was to be inserted in each of the environments and architects were to

15 All environments had to consider a mandatory 40cm plinth, a demand which clearly discouraged more penetrable forms of installation and favored object-like interventions.

16 “Note: Bathroom functions will be assumed to be satisfied outside of the given ‘spatial boundaries’ of the environment. They are, therefore, not to be designed nor included in the general scheme. This rule can be broken only if the designer is convinced that its inclusion is essential to his proposal.” Ambasz, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, 141.

double as film directors making films in which the inhabitation of their proposals would be enacted¹⁷.

Beyond specifications, the brief also contained a series of texts and quotes meant to inspire the propositions¹⁸. Referenced texts were arranged in three topics under the category of General Considerations: *A domestic Landscape as Urban Society*, *The Domestic Landscape as Domestic Environment*, *The Domestic Landscape as Private Domain*. The first of those, containing excerpts from Henri Lefebvre and Albert Moles could be summed up by the literary concept of Synecdoche—where the word which refers to a part of the thing is simultaneously the word that refers to the thing itself. Many of the environments would engage with such illusion of scale, which gave relevance to the design of parts¹⁹. The second was arranged around a quote by David Cooper's *The Death of the Family*:

17 The works of Marshal McLuhan and media theory in general were clear inspirations for Ambasz's curatorial decisions regarding the extensive use of film, Scott however points out that visitors, much like in nowadays exhibitions, struggled with a show which seemed to demand continuous stop-and-watch, instead of liberating the actions of the public. Scott. *Architecture or Techno Utopia*. MIT Press: Chicago. 2009.

18 The brief served as a script for commissioned architects but also as the rules of a competition for young designers—Gianantonio Mari, whose proposal is analyzed in chapter three, was selected by it. Gruppo 9999, the other winner of the Young Designers Competition, became a leading name of Radical Design up until 1976.

19 Synecdoche was also clear in Ambasz's displays for the Objects section which, especially when photographed from above, seemed like an out of scale Manhattan grid.

the modern nuclear family is based on maintaining the incompleteness of its individual members so that 'mother,' 'father' and 'child' have become relatively simple and unyielding roles. A member assigned a role cannot [without revolt] be anything but what that role dictates and what its concomitantly assigned space allows.

The family-as-control argument extracted from Cooper's excerpt, and to which Ambasz had added a possibility of revolt, became of architectural relevance since

Introducing changes into the present psychological structure of the family, although of capital importance, may not be enough. If we do not, at the same time, change the corresponding structure of the physical environment to make it more adaptive, so that each member may educate and learn from the other, assuming and expressing all the roles that his own inventiveness may suggest, little will really change, since family relations, and, by extension, the physical organization of the house provide models for the structure of many non-familial institutions.²⁰

Therefore, it demanded from architects some kind of iconoclasm, or at least a destabilization of its *Firmitas*. Such demand must be understood in the context of *Objects Selected by their Implications of more flexible patterns of use and arrangement*. It gave a political stance to the nature of objects on wheels.

20 Ambasz, Italy: The New Domestic Landscape. 144.

The third category was metaphysical, it was also the first time in the catalogue where objects were described beyond their crisis of status and value. The main critic here was to the modern movement, it proposed that beyond the reductionist concept of function, objects were also beacons for meaning, memory, and symbols—even to the extent of animism. It also presented the concept of objects as intermediaries:

Man assigns values and functions to the objects that constitute the nonhuman environment that surrounds him, endowing them with the properties of intermediaries that may help him to reconcile the confrontation between his fears and desires, and the constraints imposed upon him by the natural, the human, and the nonhuman environments.

The artifacts, spaces, and ceremonies of the private domain can thus be seen, on the one hand, as directly determined by physiological needs (for example, food), but, on the other hand, they can be seen as icons whose symbolic contents are, in part, intrinsic to them and, in part, culturally assigned as layers of semantic change. These assigned levels of meaning proceed from different sources. One of the sources is social and comes from values and meanings extracted from the outside. The other is private and stems from experiences and ideas that we recover from our individual memory.

A radical design operation would, thus, imply not so much returning to the protohistorical and functional reasons for the artifact's existence and stripping it bare of any social and private meanings it may have been assigned, but, rather, becoming conscious of this meaning-accrual process and designing the domestic environment in such an adaptive way that it may satisfy the requirements for the enactment of any play, regardless of its

origin — whether Proustian or Strindbergian.²¹

This demand for ‘conscious objects’ against the modernist proto-historical house-without-traces²² was implicit also in the suggested readings, a series of texts sent along with the design program which were only listed in the catalogue. Worth of notice, among the suggested readings was a project—Martin Pawnley’s *Time House*—which attempted to subvert untraceable modernism by data-gathering. With its plan shaped like a clock, *Time House* consisted of an underground storage, a ground floor living space and a rotating crane with cameras and sensors at ceiling height, so that the inhabitation of the home could be tracked and stored.

The final piece of Ambasz’s content-obsessive design program was *Manhattan: Capital of the Twentieth Century*, a text previously published at *Perspecta*²³ but reproduced in its integrity for program and catalogue. Referencing in its title Benjamin’s Arcades Project (Paris: Capital of the XIX Century) the text understood the Manhattan grid as a network beyond any physical organization of space:

21 Ambasz, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*. 145.

22 Beatriz Colomina, *X-Ray architecture* (Lars Muller Publishers, 2019).

23 Emilio Ambasz, “Manhattan: Capital of the Twentieth Century”. *Perspecta*, 13/14 (1971), 362.



Madelon Vriesendorp, Rem Koolhaas City of the Captive Globe (1972).

Manhattan, unencumbered by permanent memory, and more interested in becoming than in being, can be seen as the city of that second technological revolution brought about by the development of processes for producing and controlling information rather than just energy.

Manhattan is, in essence, a network. If beheld as an infrastructure for the processing and exchange of matter, energy, and information, Manhattan may be seen either as the overwrought roof of a subterranean grid of subway tunnels and train stations, automobile passages, postal tubes, sewage chambers, water and gas pipes, power wires, telephone, telegraph, television, and computer lines; or, conversely, as the datum plane of an aerial lattice of walking paths, automobile routes, flight patterns, wireless impulses, institutional liaisons, and ideological webs. In any of these roles, the points of Manhattan's network have repeatedly been charged, on and off, with different meanings. Entire systems and isolated elements have been connected to, and processed by, these networks, only to be later removed and replaced by new ones.

Were we willing, for the sake of argument, to suspend disbelief, forget coordinates, and imagine that all present constructions had been completely removed, Manhattan's infrastructure would emerge — in all the complexity of its physical organization, the capacity of its input-output mechanism, and the versatility of its control devices — as the most representative urban artifact of our culture.

Once having freed it in this manner from its current limitations, we might, to further this transfer operation, remove Manhattan's infrastructure from its present context and place it, for example, in the center of San Francisco Bay, on the plains of Africa, among the chateaux of the Loire Valley, along the Wall of China....²⁴

The primacy of the network (or grid, or field²⁵) over its objects was not ironic for Ambasz though subsequent paragraphs would indeed consider the need of objects²⁶, architectural icons, it was the pure organization of space which rendered Manhattan free—City of Open Presents. By the non-hierarchical grid, “the fragments rescued from tradition are placed on the same level in ever-changing juxtapositions, in order to yield new meanings and thereby render other modes of access to their recondite qualities”.

The connection between Manhattan: Capital of the Twentieth Century

24 Ambasz, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*. 145.

25 Stan Allen, “Field Conditions: the digital turn in architecture”, *Architectural Design* (1997), 62-79.

26 “But an infrastructure, though necessary, is not sufficient to make a city. The next step, then, is for us all to undertake the postulation of its possible superstructures.” Ambasz, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*. 147.

and what would later become *Delirious New York*²⁷, Rem Koolhaas' own retroactive manifesto is evident. Madelon Vriesendorp's drawings for City of the Captive Globe, which could easily illustrate both texts dates were made in 1972. The differences between texts should also be noticed: while Koolhaas' book considers the possibility of congestion within the objects—the architecture of Downtown Athletic Club becomes a city in synecdoche—for Ambasz's text architecture, and objects, are kept as that to be organized. If there is no hierarchy between them, there is one between them and the hierarchical principle itself.

Collage by Silvia Garcia Camps



27 Rem Koolhaas. *Delirious New York* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1978).

Environments

The influence exerted by the Design Program on the actual environments of ITNDL is obvious. Out of the fourteen environment propositions, seven were engaged with movement either by being cars, trailers, or by the design of rolling furniture on wheels, five were an assemble of parts according to a grid or field of some sort, those which may be understood as ‘firm’ environments seemed to derive its firmness from absence rather than presence. Such influence may also be interpreted backwards—Ambasz had written the design program as a consequence of issues already taking place in previous movements of the avant-garde²⁸. The obsession with fields, assembly and movable constructions was also a sixties tendency in architecture beyond Italy—the Metabolists in Japan for example²⁹. Yet beyond furniture with

28 William Menking evidences such interpretation: “In fact this definition already sounds like a Superstudio project, as if Ambasz is merely providing cover for the group to do a major installation in the museum”. Willam Menking, Peter Lang, *Superstudio: Life Without Objects* (Skira, 2013), 53.

29 Rem Koolhaas, Hans Ulrich Olbrist, *Project Japan: Metabolism Talks* (Taschen, 2011). The narrative assembled in the book claims that Metabolist architecture (megastructures frequently floating above pre-existing cities) derived from the pre-war dream of conquering china, and frustrated by the Japanese defeat. Architects which had graduated on the dream of urbanism, designing new cities, confined to a small-island already filled with buildings. The Italiand Radicals concern with the home may to some extent be an analogue of the frustrated Japanese dream, since both nations lost the war.



Figure 1
Alessandro Mendini,
Monumentino da Casa,
performance, 1974.

Italy: The New Domestic Landscape

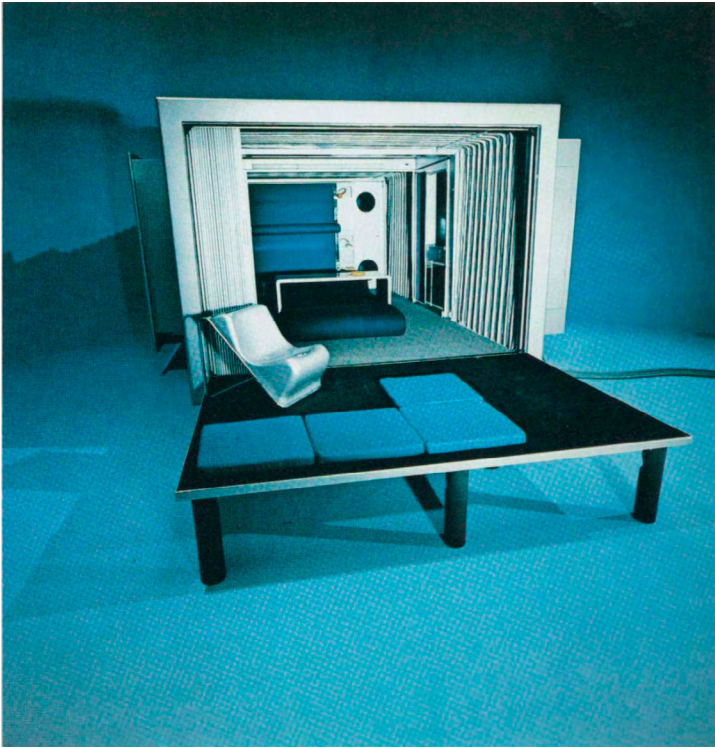
Achievements and Problems of Italian Design

The Museum of Modern Art, New York



Italy: The New Domestic Landscape
catalogue cover (1972)

the objects-cutouts were held by a layer
of tracin paper but remained mobile if you
moved the book—suggesting a relationship
between objects and architecture

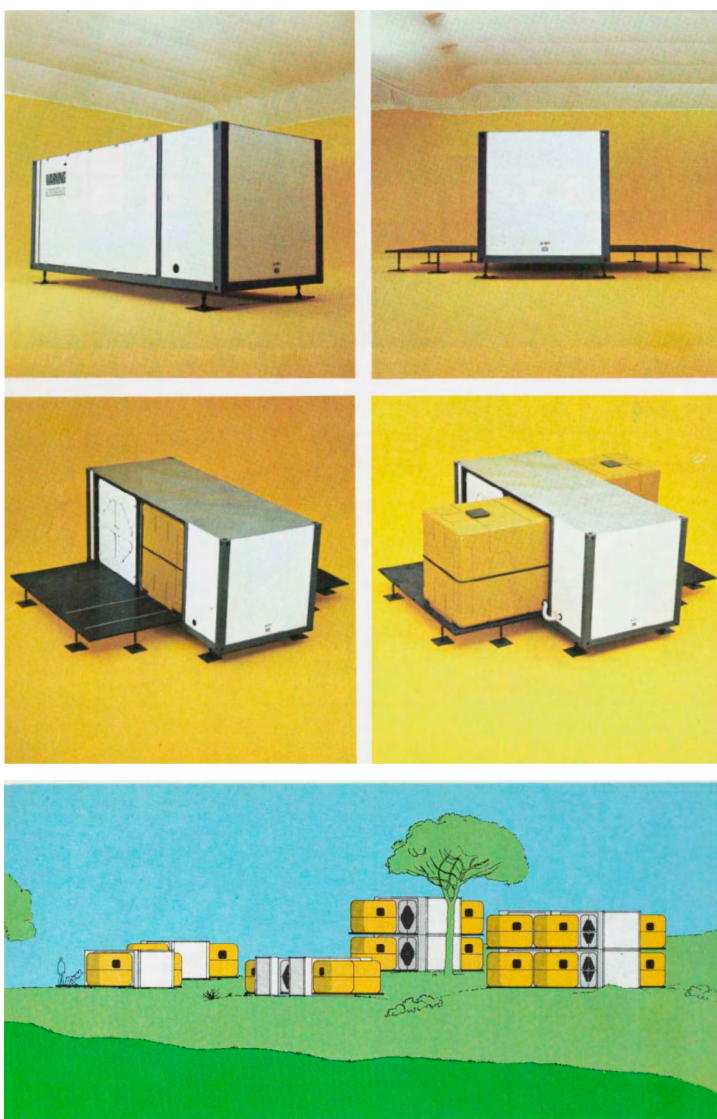


Alberto Rosseli

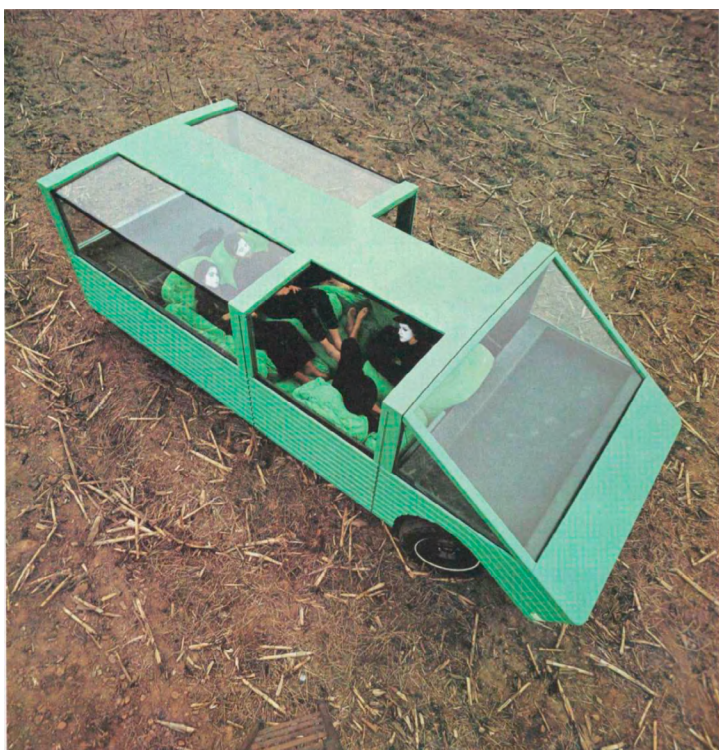
Environment

"The intrinsic mobility of the house-object that is transported from one place to another suggests that the object in fact depends on two conditions, movement and repose, with their differing requirements. Since movement is governed by the circumstances intrinsic to transport, such as road conditions and safety, it demands a small, compact form. Repose means living, and thus a maximum expansion and extension of the potential space available for life and technological requirements."

pp.182



Marco Zanuso and Richard Sapper's Environment



Mario Belini
Kar-a-Sutra

DESIGN AS POSTULATION

Gae Aulenti
Ettore Sottsass
Joe Colombo
Alberto Rosseli
Marco Zanuso and Richard Sapper
Mario Bellini

DESIGN AS
COMMENTARY

Gaetano Pesce

COUNTERDESIGN
AS POSTULATION

Ugo La Pietra
Archizoom
Superstudio
Gruppo Strum
Enzo Mari

YOUNG DESIGNERS

Gianantonio Mari
Gruppo 9999

OBJECTS	FIELD	MOVES	REFUSAL
X	X	X	
X	X	X	
X		X	
X		X	
X		X	
X		X	
	X		
	X		
	X		
			X
			X
X	X	X	

or carried on wheels another design trope became evident on the *environments* section. The object crisis of status and stability, already mentioned throughout the objects section as well as in the design program, was now tackled through dematerialization: the non-object, or that which would allow the object not to exist.

Gaetano Pesce's *Habitat from the Age of Great Contaminations* portrayed a dystopic future where humans lived in the objectlessness in plastic caves. Ettore Sottsass designed living modules which he claimed to be so ugly as to become forgotten, Superstudio presented a surface of provision which would render objects—and any use of three-dimensionality—unnecessary while Ugo La Pietra proposed a system of digital interfaces through which the home would be everywhere (and nowhere). More pragmatic in their developments, Gianantonio Mari presented a series of white closets in which non-used elements were rendered invisible (either as a continuous wall or as a floor) and Joe Colombo a central unit of curved plastic walls to which nothing could be added or subtracted. Archizoom designed an empty square room. Out of the twelve commissioned environments, two had refused the design program completely: Gruppo Strum, who had invested the money into making a series of publications about *Utopia*, *The Struggle for Housing* and *The Mediatory City*, And Enzo Mari, who wrote instead a critical

article for the catalogue³⁰.

The Headline from Ada Louise Huxtable's review illustrates the manner in which ITNDL has mostly been interpreted by architectural media and history. *Designing the Death of design*, though Huxtable was at the time critic of it, is nowadays often the praised definition of a kind of avant-garde which is no longer to be seen—the most hardcore of countercapitalisms.

Yoko Ono: *Half Room* (1967)



30 "Ultimately, the only correct undertaking for 'artists' is that of language research — that is, critical examination of the communications systems now in use, and critical acts affecting the ways in which man's primary needs (rather than ideologies as such) are conveyed — and almost always manipulated." Enzo Mari, untitled chapter, in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1972), 264.

III. *Radicals without Myth*

In June 2014 a debate entitled “Whatever happened to the Avant Garde³¹” took place at the headquarters of Arup associates. As the first of speakers Catharine Rossi, a specialist on sixties and seventies Radical Design, stated her position the crowd majorly composed by architecture students of leading universities worldwide felt nervous. Her answer to the headline question in the case of Italians was for her quite simple:

“They grew up (...) they got old, they got jobs, they built things, taught things, published things, and by today they’ve either forgotten their early radicalism, got forgotten in histories of radicalism, got mythologized or engaged in some self-mythologizing, or all of those things at once”.

Rossi was a profound believer of avant-garde methodologies, she had dedicated a life-time career to it, yet she thought that counterdesigners most relevant contribution for people interested in engaging with utopia and radical thinking of some sort was the raising of

“some difficult questions on the possibilities of what I would very tentatively dare to call an authentic avant-garde, one that doesn’t just, or even at all, experiments

31 “Whatever Happened to the Avant-Garde” was held at the headquarters of Arup Associates as part of a workshop on architectural criticism organized by the Architectural Review and the Future Cities institute. The video of this debate is available at: <https://vimeo.com/105987208>

with new technologies (...) but one that like early twentieth century modernists, like futurists, like the seventies Italians, resists the exploitation and alienation of capitalism, act in opposition to mainstream values, and attempt to bring a positive change not just within this cloistered realm of architecture, but more generally in society too.”

One of the many problems pointed out by Rossi was that of money: Radicals were only able to engage in their non-built projects either because they came from privileged backgrounds or because they indulged in activities that supported them (Superstudio designing banks serves as an example). In other texts³² (which were read for this thesis) she also developed an argument on how the destruction of traditional families was enabled by very much traditional ones (almost no women were part this avant-garde, and the long-duration travels of *Global Tools Collective*³³ often relied on someone taking care of the kids). In her closure, she argued for new utopias which should not hope to be as universalizing as those of seventies Italians—she also hoped for utopias leading toward action.

Radical Design has been ubiquitously, and often uncritically, accepted in contemporary architectural culture. Drawn explicitly for

32 Catharine Rossi, Alex Coles. *The Italian Avant-Garde 1968-1976* (EP Volume 1 MIT Press: Chicago, 2013).

33 An excessively optimistic publication on the works of Global Tools Collective was assembled for Radical Pedagogies, the project led by Beatriz Colomina. Valerio Borghonovo, Silvia Frasca, *Global Tools 1973-1975* (Salt: Istanbul, 2015).

mass circulation and publishing and having media often as its final goal it is hardly shocking that the colorful axonometrics and perspectives of Superstudio, Ettore Sottsass, Archizoom and alike find fertile ground in a world of Pinterest and Instagram³⁴. Beyond images, the ambiguous utopias from the sixties Florentine and Milanese architects became trendy for an academia in the pursue to make arguments without building³⁵ at a moment where the agency of architects for political discourse is diminished.

Though critics to the late Italian avant-garde exist, they are notably few. If modernist utopias have since the sixties gone under a great deal of demystification³⁶, compelling criticism becomes much harder in the face of the Radicals cynicism, which seemed to contain the critic within the project itself—remaining at an ambiguous state. Peter Lang's book *Superstudio: Life Without Objects*, as well as his review exhibition

34 Beatriz Colomina, *Clip Stamp Fold: The Radical Architecture of Small Magazines* (Actar, 2011).

35 Much of the criticism directed towards Alejandro Aravena's Venice Biennale in 2016 had a background complement to paper architecture (its preferable to remove yourself from the system than to report from an increasingly impossible front). See: Francisco Diaz, *Patologías Contemporáneas* (Ediciones ARQ: Santiago, 2019).

36 For *Phantom: Mies as rendered society*, Andrés Jaque developed an exhibition on the underground basement of the Mies Van der Rohe's *Barcelona Pavilion*—the show brought to fore the machinery, maintenance equipment, surrogate parts and networks that were constantly hidden in order to enable the rationalist utopia of transparency above. Andrés Jaque, *Phantom: Mies as Rendered Society* (Barcelona, 2013).

Environments and Counter-environments: Italy the New Domestic Landscape (1972)³⁷ present Counterdesigners as desirable role-models for our current society.

A slightly more critical approach to the avant-garde was presented in the recent exhibition *Home Futures: living in yesterday's tomorrow*, curated by Eszter Steierhoffer at London design's museum in between the years of 2018 and 2019³⁸. The show presented twentieth century's forward-looking utopias of domestic space. Its objective was not only to understand the inexistent futures in which we could be living but also how those dreams had shaped—not always for the best—the future in which we currently are. Its catalogue, whose structure merged Ambasz publication for ITNDL divided into objects and critical articles with Rem Koolhaas' *Elements of Architecture*—dedicating particular sections to the evolution of domestic elements throughout time. A nostalgic section on the Screw for example traced the many futuristic views related to open-sourceness³⁹—it argued that “the screw seems to have fallen out of favor since it disrupts our current images of the object as a coherent

37 Peter Lang, William Menking. *Superstudio: Life Without Objects*. (Skira: Torino, 2003). Peter Lang, Luca Molinari, Mark Wasiuta. *Environments and Counter Environments. "Italy: The New Domestic Landscape," MoMA, 1972* (GSAPP: New York, 2013).

38 Eszter Steierhoffer. *Home Futures: Living in Yesterday's Tomorrow* (Design Museum: London, 2018).

39 Yona Friedman and Ken Isaacs for Example.

CASABELLA



Casabella No 377, May 1973, Cover design by Adolfo Natalini, Archive Casabella



Constraining shoes for stable and obligatory frontal Juxtaposition, Franco Raggi and Ettore Sottsass Jr. Milan, 1975, Archive Casabella

and perfect whole". The computers and phones designed by Jonathan Ive at Apple but also the projects presented for ITNDL by Joe Colombo, Superstudio, Gianantonio Mari and Gaetano Pesce, serve as examples of such desire for unity.

Edwin Heathcote's⁴⁰ review of *Home Futures* for the financial times considered that the failures of the radical project outnumbered greatly its possible contributions for any relevant architecture today. Starting from a chronicle of Archigram's book launch at the AA— "students sat on the floor; a psychedelic slideshow of images played on the screen; and it all ended with crushed expectations as the architects sent people out to buy their new £95 book rather than engaging in conversation or debate"— Heathcote soon arrived at what, for him, was a radical realization.

...for all the playful charm of their visions, they had simply been wrong —off-the scale wrong. For theirs was a toxic utopia. They called for a throwaway architecture, a plastic fantastic, a response to consumerism and planned obsolescence. Why couldn't buildings be made in factories like cars and bought from catalogues? Why couldn't cities walk or houses inflate and move around? When you got bored of your house, why couldn't you just throw it away and buy a new one in a much nicer colour? The cost of such freedoms is painfully apparent now.

40 Edwin Heathcote, "A Wrong Turn on the Way to Tomorrow". *Financial Times*, December 29, 2018. Heathcote also authored an article in *Home Futures* catalogue: Lock, a critical short-story on our lack of control over the smart-house.

The most radical thing to do today would be to begin to forget these seductive images and instead insist on the re-use and adaptation of existing structures. Of course, this is not a solution that sits easily with the profession of architecture and its need to make statements. Perhaps that's exactly why some architects retreat into these technoutopias by designing settlements on Mars rather than concentrating on the far more difficult solutions for a damaged planet.

Heathcote's and Rossi's arguments mustn't be considered as representations of the totality of Radical Design. As the object of this research—the environments of *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*—reveals, radicals, like most movements taking place between the riots of may-68 and the oil-crash of 1973, were not a coherent whole. Beyond plastic utopias and cynicism Radical Italians also engaged with the rise of ecology or ideals related to craft. Nevertheless, they place a rightful atmosphere of caution which a research on seventies Italians must take into account.

IV. *Problems with the Negation of Objects*

The Italian Avant Garde known as Radical-Design (or Counter-Design or Radical-Architecture) existed from the late sixties to the early seventies, among their main and most continuous concerns was the “crisis of the object⁴¹”: an understanding, inspired by Marxist and structuralist theories, of the object as the means by which status-quo was held together (either in terms of wealth-signaling or by reproducing traditional family values)⁴². As McLuhan’s understanding of media, where the medium was considered to be more relevant than the message, the object-crisis claimed that the production of objects, no matter how conscious, could only feed the capitalist cycle of inequality and obsolescence. Beyond radicals, the object-crisis lied at the source of a wide range of new artistic formats and movements which attempted to become uncollectable: minimalism, site-specific, participatory art⁴³, performance...

41 Filiberto Mena. “A Design for new Behaviors”. *The New Domestic Landscape*. 405-414

42 The wealth signaling of objects and architecture is evident in Robert Venturi and Denise Scott brown exhibition *Signs of Life, Symbols of the American City* (Washington: Renwick Gallery, 1976)

43 Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (Verso: New York, 2012).

Radicals engaged with the domestic field (understood as the source of traditional values and status) in order to change it, the manner in which this was managed, changed over the years. As the historian Catherine Rossi points out⁴⁴, between late sixties and early seventies the practice of counterdesigners changed radically—ITNDL, in 1972, lied in such tension. Up until the show, even groups such as Archizoom and Superstudio regularly engaged with known manufacturers of mass-produced objects (Poltronova, Fiat and Olivetti for example); their products sought to criticize the value given to the noble materials of traditional Italian Design, *La dolce Vita*, in the use of, supposedly democratic but also ugly, plastic. They sought to destabilize family values in the appropriation of nature and Pop or by the design of objects which refused to take a stable position. After the show however, Radicals were driven by the refusal to engage in the making of objects, dedicating themselves instead to performance and pedagogy based activities as well as paper-architecture⁴⁵. Through both of its phases and by all formats, Radicals attempted to dissociate objects from their attached

44 Catharine Rossi (2016). Lecture at the Speculative and Critical Design Summer School. Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NsEWfSgLLMU&t=3197s>

45 Present throughout both seasons of the movement was the design and management of Discos. See Catherine Rossi (curator), *Radical Disco: Architecture and Nightlife in Italy, 1965 – 1975* (London, ICA, 2015).

meanings and, at least to some extent, from meaning altogether, in a sense they've managed it. Through their designs, they've helped to shape a generation disconnected from objects.

The relevance for this investigation stems partly from current observations on contemporary role of objects, one which seems to have shifted since the sixties. In her book *The Sum of Small Things: A theory of The Aspirational Class*, Elisabeth Currid-Halkett described the movement of status in our contemporary society, from objects to other issues. The rise of sportswear among CEO's (who dress the same as an average person), the diminishing ownership of cars and the rise of Airbnb's (at least up until the pandemic) sign to a dematerialization of the world. Spotify, Rappi and Mary Kondo tell us that to be rich is being able not to own and to live on the move—the reduction of the house to an ever smaller number of things transformed the home-screen into a home-surrogate⁴⁶— through digital nomadism. Unimpressively, the message behind Halkett's book is not that we live in utopia, but precisely that any kind of social mobility, let alone equality, became virtually impossible. Inconspicuous consumption: education, food, experiences (tourism), and time⁴⁷ are the new means through which we socially group—social

46 Steierhoffer. *Home Futures: Living in Yesterday's Tomorrow*.

47 Understood as the hiring of people to develop chores such as driving, cleaning...

media allowed for us to show them to others just like we would have done with a Rolex.

The rising digital-status mentioned in Curry-Halkett's book, enabled and dreamed in the Italian laboratory, has some by-products. First is the rise of disposable objects in a world where the values before associated to it (including emotional ones) cease to exist; second is blurring of private space (since the public is filled with intimacies), finally digital-nomadism dissolves work into life drowning the latter into a state of total anguish (burnout). That the countercapitalism of ITNDL, by dissolving objects, durability, firmity and boundaries seems to have played an active role in the current manner through which capitalism is experienced is rarely noticed by current reviews of both the avant-garde and the show. This investigation attempts at a detailed description of such role.

ITNDL was an exhibition in tension. Just like Renzo Piano's and Richard Rodger's project for Beaubourg (1969) which conflated modernism, postmodernism, megastructure and brutalism in a single building, the environments of the show were ambiguous and frequently contradictory. By arranging environments from the 'total objectlessness' of *Supersurface* to the domestic collection of Gae Aulenti this thesis aims to portray the differences of degree and quality in the way designers

chose to deal with a similar crisis. The sum of their choices (arranged in a gradient rather than in the pro-counter taxonomy of Ambasz) enable us to construct a framework to understand relationships of object-designer object-inhabitant and object-society, in the show as well as beyond it.

The decision not to analyze, for the scope of this investigation, the trailer-like environments (Belini, Zanuso and Sapper, Rosselli) comes from the focus (on objects) as well as by their diminished contemporary relevance, in my perception. Refusals (Mari and Strum) were also kept out by obvious reasons. Finally, environments with similar approaches (from the sole perspective of this investigation) were kept on the same chapter (Aulenti and 9999, G. Mari and Joe Colombo, Superstudio and Ugo La Pietra), however, chapters always lend focus towards one of the environments.

The process for uncovering 'objects' within the objectlessness of ITNDL's environments proceeds from formal, material and discursive analysis of the proposed spaces: the texts written by authors for the catalogue, as well as the processes of inhabitation portrayed in videos (where those were found) are considered as an integral part of the proposed spaces. Some conclusions will also take place in the images of show being visited (from MoMa's archive) and by the superposition of the environments in the broader context of the architects' careers.

Architectural and societal developments taking place prior and following the show inevitably inform the environments to be analyzed. From the contemporary crisis of garbage, which renders a new meaning for plastic, to the previous feud with objects within the modern movement. Too broad to fit in any of the central chapters, these external perceptions, were kept as a series of objects within the architecture of the thesis, readers are to interpret them in any direction.

The, for the most part, negative review of the ITNDL enables a new manner of perceiving the show and its relevance, one that dwells on objects and their ability to surface identity and memory, to track metabolisms, to develop (by absence) anguish, and to control (as infrastructure); to resist modernist and contemporary asceticism in the form of mess. This thesis aims at developing a toolkit for understanding and operating with contemporary domestic architecture.

Signs of Life: Symbols in the american city
Venturi and Rauch, 1976.







Images presented for *Supersurface*

Superstudio. Italy: The New Domestic Landscape (1972) pp241-251

Infrastructure

Supersurface and the invisible object

The 'environment' presented by the group of Florentine architects Superstudio¹ became undoubtedly the most canonical part of ITNDL. Later reviews, whether on Casabella or on non-Italian magazines, happily turned their spotlights to the beautiful collection of collages whose eye-catching instagramability was evident much before the existence of clicks or Instagram²; moreover, by its use of the network at a moment when the internet was still taking its first steps Supersurface became a sign of a world to come, one driving both academic and practical returns.

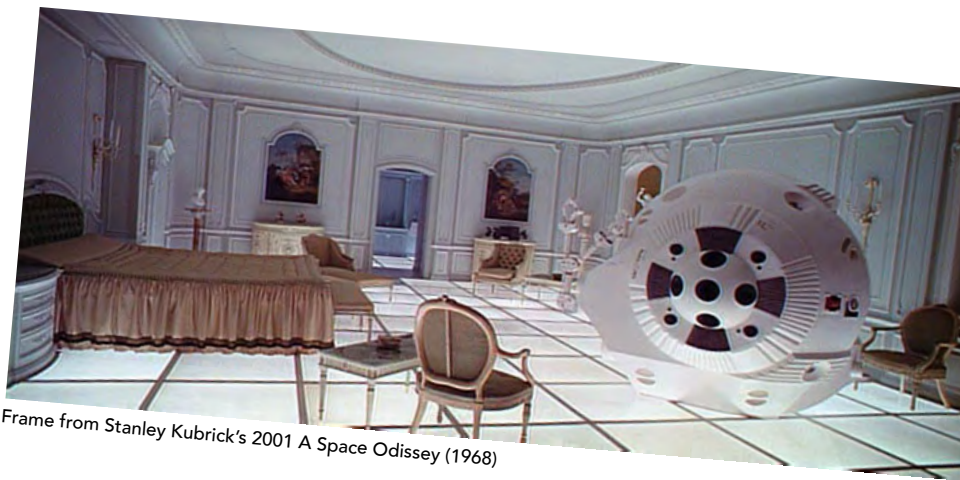
Unlike other environments for the show, which seemed to demand its discursive counterpart³, The images of *Supersurface* were easy to read; the project appears to be straightforward: by means of a technological surface (which is also a grid), humanity is provided with

1 Adolfo Natalini, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, Gian Piero Frassinelli, Alessandro and Roberto Magro and Alessandro Poli

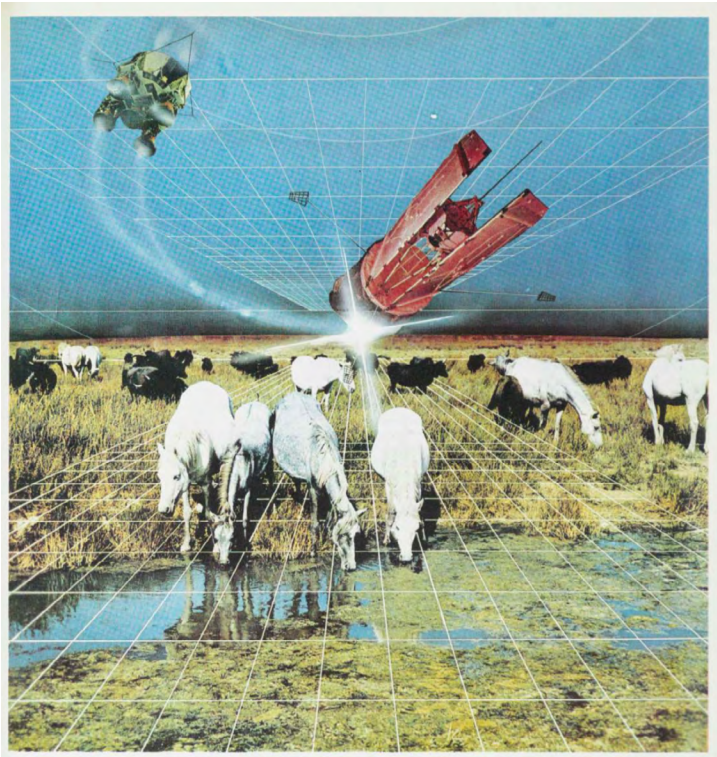
2 The ability to enter the discourse through beautiful minimalism would later, also define the works of Pier Vittorio Aurelli's Dogma.

3 See the chapter on Archizoom (5)

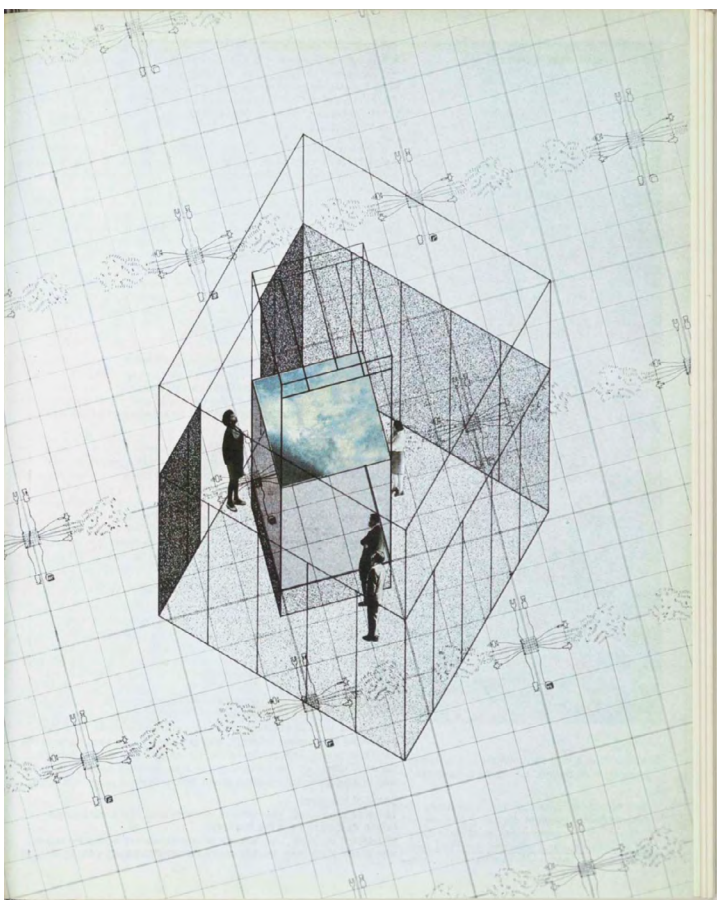
ideal amounts of “air, water, heat, video, audio, nutrition, nature, light, and even memory “... the grid renders three-dimensional expressions of life (architecture and design objects among them) obsolete. Speculation on land-values and the city are also brought to an end (since “every place is like every other place”). Humans in this kind of provisioned Superstate would, by the end of inequality and work, lead more fulfilling lives. Objects and their meanings, at first sight, are eliminated from the project in all its possible forms, Supersurface installs the definitive layer of obsolescence: that in which one ‘object’—the grid— replaces all the others.



Frame from Stanley Kubrick's 2001 A Space Odyssey (1968)



Djinn chairs by Olivier Morgue
Frame from Stanley Kubrick's 2001 A Space Odyssey (1968)



Images presented for *Supersurface*

Superstudio. Italy: The New Domestic Landscape (1972) pp241-251

Grid

The grid of Supersurface must be understood in connection with *Manhattan: Capital of the Twentieth Century*, Ambasz's text for the design program of ITNDL, but also against the background of Superstudio previous works. If at *Superarchitettura* (1966), the founding exhibition for both Superstudio and Italian radical design at large, the interest in being outright ugly—through an obscene use of color and curved forms—was seen at the ideal means to criticize value, already in 1969 at the exhibition *Architektur und Freiheit* (architecture and liberty) we see the first expressions of the canonical Superstudio aesthetic: a gridded totem with archetypal passages (rectangular openings) and electronic devices.

The obsession with grids would mark most of Superstudio's developments up until ITNDL. The grid, an apex of neutrality, provided spaces without the possibility of attachment (between bourgeois, inhabitants and the domestic environment) yet it also allowed to criticize the previous avant-garde—modernism. In the interpretation of Catharine Rossi, Superstudio's turning of everything into a grid undermined the

rationality of the grid itself—as it was used by Mies, for example⁴. Finally, grids were also perfect synecdoche devices, allowing the group to make the same statement throughout scales.

Misura (1972), a series of furnished composed of a plastic laminate grid, and *Continuous Monument*, a proposition for a model of total urbanization, lay at the edges (in scale) of Superstudio's grid-use. At *Continuous Monument*, a glasslike office building of immense proportions (at a scale of natural features like mountains) extends across the planet. The sheer scale serves to eliminate the modern relationship between interior and façade, ventilation, promenade... It also eliminates the symbolic nature as a set of references.⁵ The iconoclasm of its images would still be dwarfed by those of Supersurface. In the most knowledgeable image of *Continuous Monument*, Manhattan island is engulfed, yet respected, by the massive architecture-urbanization: perforations on the structure indicate not only spaces for portuary activities but also the preservation of 'valuable buildings'. The scheme

4 We must of course notice the very clear difference between Superstudio's criticism of the modern movement and the one of Alice and Peter Smithson or Aldo Van Eyck which were focused on agency. The grid remains a useful, even if ironic, resource for preventing agency throughout their work.

5 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Chicago: MIT Press, 1960).

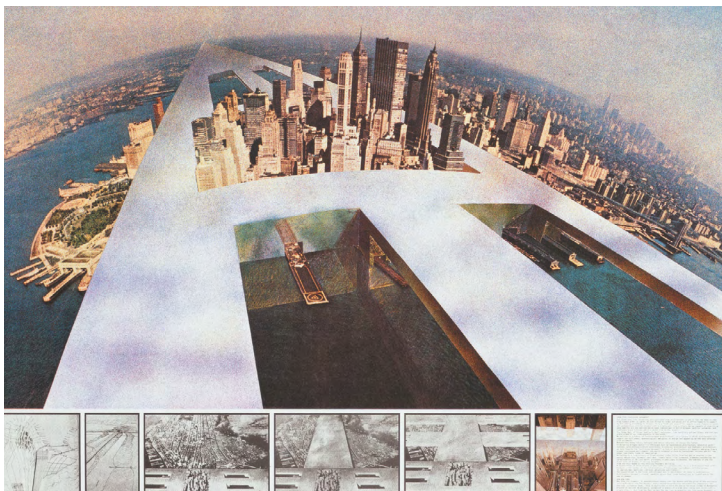
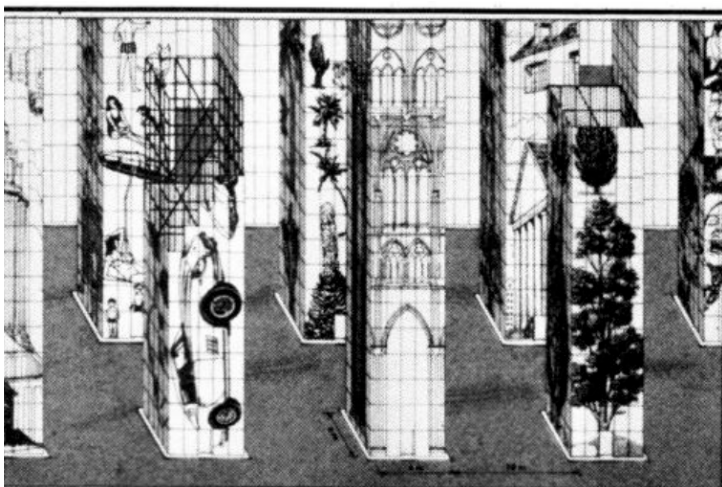
likens that of typical modernist developments of historic centers, where the grid is still flexible enough to keep the existing church or classical townhall. At *Misura*—or *The Tomb of the Architect*—the conversion of all furniture to an “homogeneous and isotropous” grid managed remove both spacial and sensibility problems.

The grid was also a major component of Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christimans: premonitions of the mystical rebirth of urbanism, Superstudio’s Calvino-like depiction of imaginary cities. orthogonal grids were major components of half of the ‘cities’, often implying control—as in 2000-ton city, where rebellious residents were crushed by the ceiling, but also a sort of tabula-rasa of ‘consumerist meritocracies. Such was the case of City of Splendid Houses:

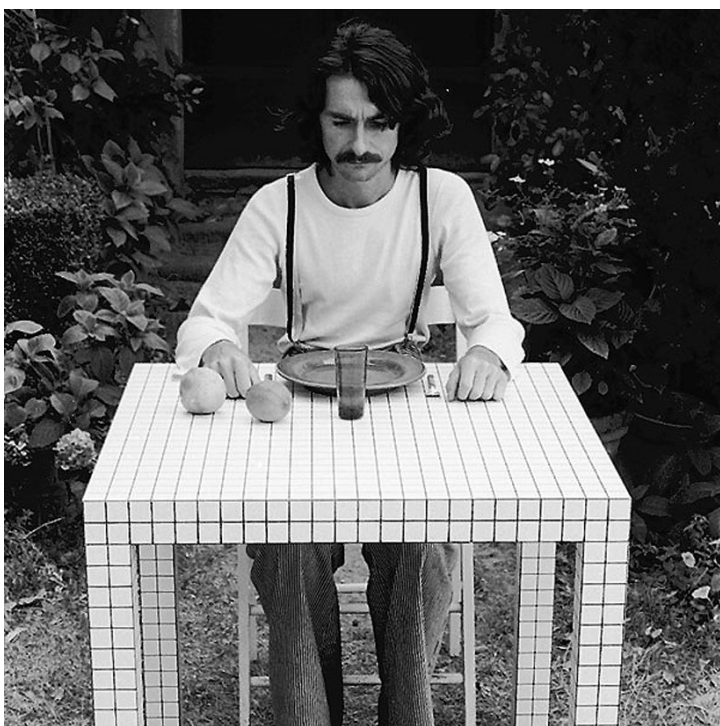
The city gives all its citizens the same starting point; that is, it grants every family nucleus the same amount of space for building a house. In fact, the city consists of a network of parallel roads 10m wide, which forms 6m² (sic) blocks; each of these 36m² is occupied by a single family house.⁶

Constricted to a reduced plan and a rather dismal interior, inhabitants (all of which were factory workers) could only spend their

6 Superstudio: “Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas: Premonitions of the Mystical Rebirth of Urbanism”, *Architectural Design* no.12 (1971) 742.



City of Splendid Houses, Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christimans (1971)
Superstudio, Continuous Monument (1971)



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Superstudio

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Superstudio, images from *Histograms of Architecture* (or *Misura Series*), 1972.

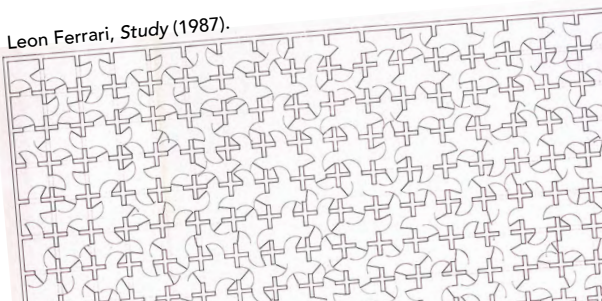
monthly coupon-salary in the ornamentation of progressively vertical facades through the application of silk-screened panels.

It is often hard to differentiate Superstudio's irony from its repressed desires. To accept the grid as a pure criticism of modernist rationale would be foolish. The crisis of unity described in Manfredo Tafuri's interpretation of the modern movement—the capitalist city replaces urbanism by non-stop urbanization, which the movement remediates by the elimination of ornament (projects without state-control would look similar and therefore planned)—appears to remain intact. *Misura*, *Continuous Monument* and *Twelve Ideal cities* obviously criticized the modern obsession with (often pretended) rationalism, yet they remain obsessive with control. Moreover, when it came to objects, the grid reinforced the lack of agency—or the provision of a 'controlled' agency—in the relationship between inhabitant and architect-state.

Symbols and the State-Enterprise

Beyond the self-referential quality of the project, *Supersurface*, was (also) a concerned with symbols. The iconoclast slate which covers

Leon Ferrari, *Study* (1987).



all preexisting architecture echoes the Florence flood of 1966⁷ and other natural disasters—the grid, Ambasz’s interpretation of Manhattan... Paradoxically, some of those symbols were deeply attached to consumer culture.

First was the road. Tough in its film nomadism is more clearly referenced in the images of gipsy families, the persistent use of one point-perspectives throughout the collages of Supersurface may indicate a deeper connection to an Italian context. In her article *The Discourse of Modern Nomadism: The Tent in Italian Art and Architecture of the 1960s and 1970s*, Silvia Botinelli traced the ubiquitous presence of nomadist references throughout Arte-Povera and Radical Design to development road networks and economic accessibility of cars for Italian families:

Why did the interest in nomadism become so pervasive in the mid 1960s and early 1970s? What triggered such enthusiasm for a way of living that previously had been dismissed as impractical and obsolete? I argue that the interest was a response to a shifting cultural and social climate, which depended in part on certain changes in the economy, technology, and infrastructure that after the World War II multiplied opportunities to travel. Focusing specifically on Italy, the country’s material wealth grew exponentially between the mid-1950’s and the early 1970s, giving the population access to goods and lifestyles previously

7 Craig Buckley, *Graphic Apparatuses: Architecture, Media, and the Reinvention of Assembly 1956-1973*. Doctoral Thesis, University of Princeton. New Jersey, 2013.

inaccessible. Home ownership, cars, and tourism, among other things, quickly became widespread. Perceived as synonymous with modernity, these experiences generally brought with them a sense of security and freedom⁸.

The construction of a motorway system, or *autostrada*, began during the fascist period, although it developed more fully in the postwar years. A 1955 law mandated the expansion of two *autostrada* axes; one connected Turin with Trieste while the other, the *Autostrada del Sole*, connected Milan with Naples. The use of the motorways increased significantly in the late 1950s and 1960s, when the country saw a quick recovery from the harshness of World War II. Paul Ginsborg states that “along with the advent of television, increased mobility was probably the greatest innovation in leisure time and activity. The fiat 600 was quickly followed by the smaller and even more economical 500. For the *cetti medi* (middle class) and the upper echelons of the northern working class, Sunday outings by car became a possibility for the first time.” As Karen Pinkus put it, “driving was marketed to the public as freedom”.

Tough the reference to driving, and camping, was less clear in Supersurface than in the explicit trailer and car-like environments for the show⁹ its undeniable presence serves to unite the environment in a more coherent whole with the show and its structure. Moreover, and following Bottinelli’s interpretation, the leisure-like nomadism of Superstudio is much more similar to that of camping than to any kind of gipsy-living

8 Silvia Bottinelli, “The Discourse of Modern Nomadism: The Tent in Italian Art and Architecture of the 1960s”. *Art Journal* vol 74 (summer 2015) 62-80.

9 Namely Alberto Rosselli’s *Mobile House*, Mario Bellini *Kar-a-Sutra* and Marco Zanuso and Richard Sapper’s extendable trailer.

(which is frequently abundant in objects). Through the road-system state-developed infrastructure is entangled with the consumer-oriented production (of cars and tents).

The second consumer-oriented symbol of Superstudio is the post-modern office building. The first and more obvious expression of this reference is the reflective glass façade. Glass was not only present in Supersurface's Collages but also in the physical display presented for ITNDL, where a box of reflective glass containing a 'piece of grid' with some cables and vegetables served as an illusion device for the endless repetition of the project; in *Graphical Apparatuses*, Craig Buckley¹⁰ associates the reflections of the sky in Supersurface with an image of Eero Saarinen *Bell Labs* (1962-1967). Unlike the first-wave of modernist glass buildings, which prized for transparency (linked symbolically to consciousness and truth), the reflective glass of new office buildings, nowadays ubiquitous, would become connected to a world, and a humanity, detached from the ability to comprehend its own movements. To put it simply, in the worlds of Arthur C. Clarke, "Any sufficiently

10 Bridges between Supersurface and consumerism are also traced in Buckley's work by an analysis of precedence in the images used for the environment's collages (frequently coming from life magazine and alike).



advanced technology becomes indistinguishable from magic.” Another piece of ‘tectonics’ would reinforce such reading.

For those predisposed to theory—as an end to architectural thinking—the absence of drawings revealing a thickness to the surface (reinforced by the name chosen for the project) enables an understanding of Supersurface a purely conceptual design—understood as the apex of dematerialization. Yet another approach would be possible. If we take as real the images and display of the proposed environment, whereby cables and carrots magically appear from an opened lid in the visible—



Raised Floor with tile lifter, image extracted from Wikipedia

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tile-lifter-in-use-raised-floor.jpg>

human-oriented¹¹—face the environment, then Supersurface would become magically similar to a piece of technology-hiding equipment: raised floors. At a standard definition from Tecnopedia,

A raised floor is a type of elevated structural floor that is supported by a metal grid and allows cables, mechanical facilities, electrical supplies and wiring to run beneath it. It is generally used in data centers, telecommunication environments, military command centers and modern office buildings.

A raised floor generally consists of evenly spaced metal framework or pedestals on a concrete base that feature adjustable height and removable panels. A raised floor is often found in environments that require cables and mechanical facilities, electrical supplies and wiring. The raised floor system usually has removable panels so

11 Such reading implies polarization between both sides of a surface.

that there is access to the area below¹².

Raised floors technological use was developed during the sixties and seventies in Europe, their previous use was that of regulating climate, also present in Superstudio's rhetoric. They've progressively become ubiquitous in office buildings, allowing greater flexibility in the arrangement of people and spaces, but also as a manner of coping with technological obsolescence. However, so far, they haven't entered domestic architecture.

12 Raised Floor, Technopedia, January 1, 2013. <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/149/raised-floor>



Smart Elements

If modernist pilotis and roof-gardens ‘killed’ *attics and basements*, spaces of storage, memory and irrationality above and underneath the ‘conscious house’, nowadays ceiling and the floor seem to be regaining—informational—depth; at least this was the thesis behind the AMO/GSD research Elements of Architecture¹³ (EoA), conducted by Rem Koolhaas for the 2014 Venice Biennale. Examining the cross section of newly made hospitals, EoA realized that the amount of living-space (between-ceiling and floor) was becoming equal the space (between ceiling and slab/floor and slab) given to infrastructure. Talking about floors, but also of other elements the Koolhaas-led exhibition presented world in which elements got smart, but also authoritarian—with layers of protection against human operation. The thickness of a floor denotes a profound connection with technology, a connection that so far has only arrived in offices and hospitals, but whose domestic moment is to come¹⁴.

Beneath Superstudio’s playground, lied a profound interaction between state and capital as well as a *theater*. The sum of those

13 Rem Koolhaas, Elements of Architecture (Cologne: Taschen, 2019).

14 Bill Gates’ mansion, Xanadu 2.0 (in reference to Citizen Kane’s mansion), also relied on this idea of hiding: a network of service corridors of cables ran between (within) the walls of the house.

was already partly recognized at the time; Colin Rowe pointed the environment could “only operate as some sort of green light for the Disney-like entrepreneurs of the future.” In many senses Disney was quicker than Colin. In 1971 *Magic Kingdom* opened, beyond roller coasters, hotels and a monorail, “an advanced trash removal system that keeps waste out of sight from visitors¹⁵.”

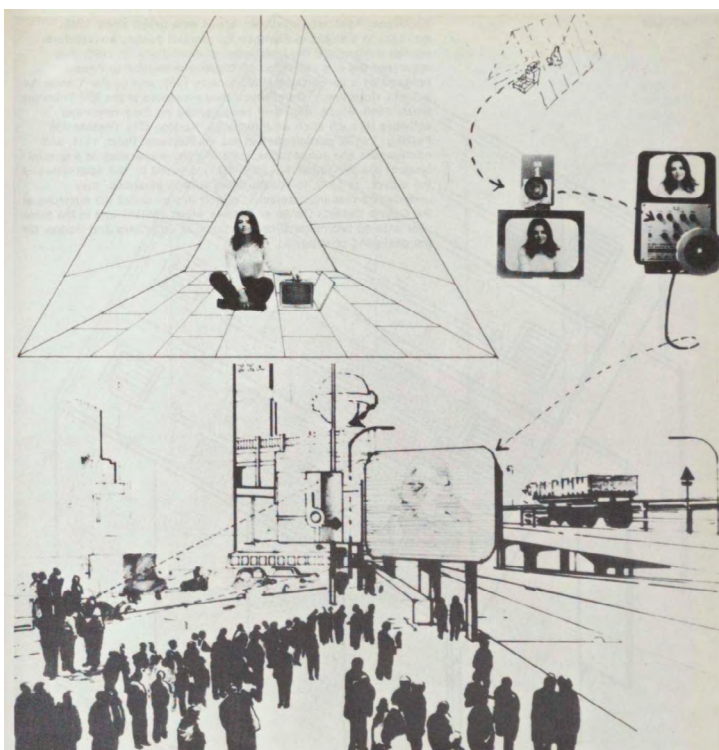
This system is still in use today with 17 collection points around Magic Kingdom and an underground system of vacuum tubes. Every 15 minutes, trash is sucked at a speedy 60 miles per hour to a compactor located behind Splash Mountain. Here it is compressed and then removed from property.

All of this takes place in the utilidors. These underground corridors are actually on the first level of Magic Kingdom (you walk on the second level) and allow Cast Members to quickly move from one land to the next without being seen and for garbage to be magically whisked away out of sight of the guests¹⁶.

Like Disney, Supersurface was not intended to be a world without or objects (or trash), but one in which those were disposable and

15 “A Look at Walt Disney World’s Underground Trash Tubes”. *Waste360*, (April, 2017). <https://www.waste360.com/waste-reduction/look-walt-disney-world-s-underground-trash-tubes>

16 Herb Leibacher, “Disney Performs Magic with Trash—Underground Tubes Whisk it Away”. *World of Walt* April 11, 2017. <https://www.worldofwalt.com/disney-underground-trash-tubes.html>



Ugo La Pietra. Italy: The New Domestic Landscape (1972)

invisible, "so that we still live with objects (reduced to the condition of neutral and disposable elements) and not for objects".

The smart-element or object and the infrastructure of information was also part of Ugo La Pietra's Counterdesign *The Domicile Cell: A Microstructure within the Information and Communications Systems*. Connected to his broader research on unbalancing systems which would

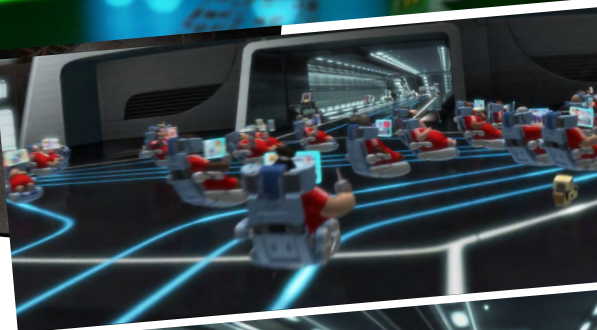
lead to the Telematic House in 1983, his domestic environment, less ironically than Superstudio's, proposed a world deeply connected to technology. By means of recording and transmitting apparatuses, La Pietra sought to invert what he felt was a dictatorship of current media (television, in which information only travels in one direction between producer and receiver). Without the rhetoric of control (the grid), La Pietra honestly portrays the technological element as a device for freedom. Curiously, both La Pietra and Superstudio relied on the raised floor:

My proposal is intended to express: The desire to use the information and communications media, while keeping them 'under control' (that is, never submitting to their presence either as 'objects' or as 'instruments')... In the project, all this is expressed through concealment of the mechanisms (Fig. 6); this concealment is not total (inasmuch as the containers rise out of the floor with inscriptions that indicate the position of the apparatus). Thus, their presence can give a 'sense of security, on one hand, and on the other demonstrate their availability for use (Page 225:Comprehension model C).17

Through infrastructure, Superstudio and Ugo La Pietra sought to liberate objects and architecture from its meanings. As an intentional or collateral effect, they've also managed to eliminate control—of privacy

17. Ugo La Pietra, Italy: The New Domestic Landscape, 228.

but also of technology itself—Superstudio's use of a frame from Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey belies such meaning. Their designs, by negation, reveal the object not as pure status, but as a more humane intermediary.

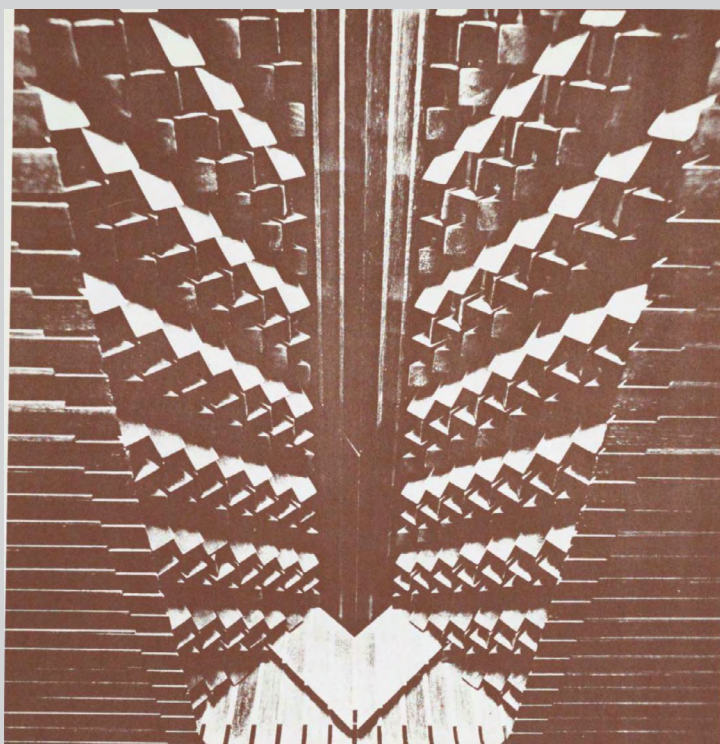


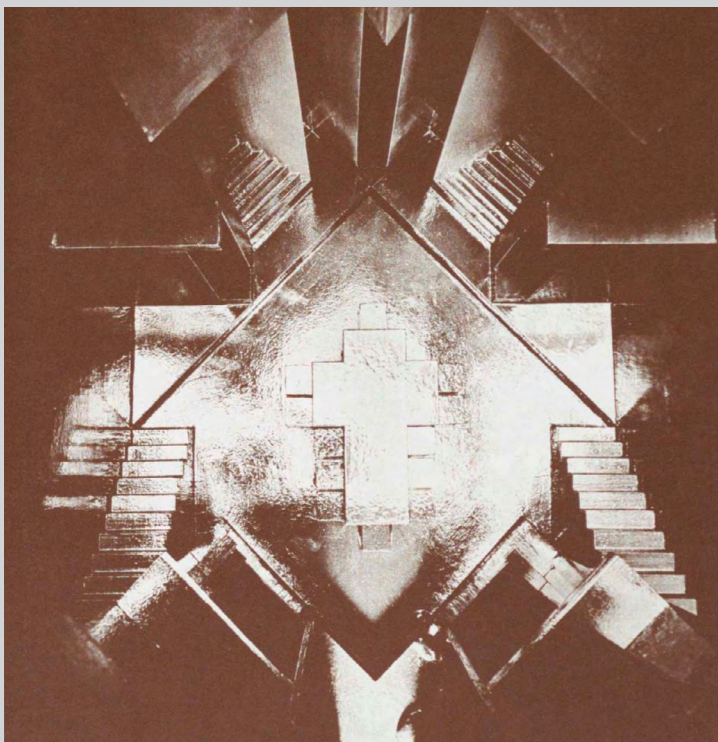
The world of Wall-e

Almost forty years after its raised-park, Disney launched a film in which the most dismal possibilities of their technology-enabled happiness was portrayed. Wall-e (2008), an animation directed by Andrew Stanton, Tells the story of a trash-compactor robot left with the task of cleaning Earth, which after a garbagge overload and an ecological meltdown, became unsafe for humanity. Wall-e lives in the world of obsolete items (he himself one of them), he lives by collecting parts of robots like him—for maintainance purposes—but also (in a rolling shelve) a collection of the world itself, which he hopelessly attempts to organize—in a 'house' which is also an Ark for objects.

Midway through the film, Wall-e unexpectedly leaves earth to find out that humanity (unable to solve the ecological problem) had been left living on a cruise-like ship—theoretically waiting for the return of photosynthesis—. In the ship humans are nomads on floating chairs, they don't work and are constantly supported by a network of robots, which instead of vegetables serve soda, and a trash compacting system through which objects (garbage) becomes invisible. A macro state-enterprise of supply ironically branded like wallmart provides humanity with their needs. Traces of optimism are lacking, however; Infinitely provided, the humans of the film are also infinitely fat, they've forgot the purpose of their cruise and live in "the end of history". Their dictatorial state of consumerism is only realized by the intrusion of an external element.

Wall-e and Supersurface share references. The authoritarian autopilot in Stanton's film is clearly based in HAL 9000 from Kubrick's 2001 Space Odyssey—stills of which were present in the film presented at ITNDL "Supersurface: an alternative model of life on earth". They're both ironical, yet the objects of their ironies are different: while Wall-e places the outmoded robot as a hero—that which can recovers the meaning of things—Supersurface sees meaning as the thing to be criticized itself. As a result, it is only able to reinforce consumerism and its advanced forms of control.





Images presented for *Habitat in The Age of Great Contaminations*
Superstudio. *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* (1972) 241-251.

Anguish

Gaetano Pesce and the tectonics of plastic

Gaetano Pesce's *Habitat in the Period of Great Contaminations* was in many senses *Supersurface's* antithesis. Against the ultimate exteriority of *Superstudio's* collages which emphasized the possibilities of open perspective Pesce's environment presented the ultimate interior: an eternal and unchanging plastic cave where space is always foreground. If the first emphasized the rectangular grid as an apex of rationality the second employed the right-angle as a symbol—an ornament which through repetition became mayhem. Through its extreme differences however, both projects have some common ground where objects are concerned.

Pesce's environment was the only to fall under the category "Design as Commentary" defined by Ambasz, it also served as an entrance point to the environments section of ITNDL. Unlike the postulation categories which, even if ironically, sought to project a better outcome (than current reality), *Habitat in the Period of Great Contaminations* was solely concerned to reveal what Pesce, and to some extent Ambasz, thought to be the consequences of contemporary



The dystopic content of Pesce's commentary is in stark contrast with the actual images of people visiting the show. A Mickey-Mouse-like show (to protect what was to be understood as an archeological artifact) reinforces the humorous tone of most pictures taken by Leonardo LeGrand.

developments in industry, design and politics: a world where by force of a nuclear meltdown, a climate crisis, or a pandemic, humanity would be enforced to leave its comfortable cities for an underground life. Despite its depressive tone, it attracted lines of visitors as it was clearly the most interesting environment one could actually get into¹.

1 Other environments where visiting was allowed were Archizoom's supermarket-like box with pivoting doors and Superstudio's felt room with a model of mirrors. It is worth of notice that, despite Ambasz' design program suggesting that environments could indeed be penetrable, most of the commissioned architects chose to do large-scale models to be observed from the outside.

Habitat in the Age of Great Contaminations portrays a species of primitive futurology. The argument, which tied both past and future together, was enabled by the rhetoric of plastic as an element without traces, but also by the archeological description of the habitat. Written in the style of a scientific article, his text described the finding, in the year 3000, of a domestic 'settlement' dating from the year 2000. From its architecture, but also from a 'film' and a 'text' found within the domestic settlement—matching Ambasz' design program—the culture of this diminished humanity was described.

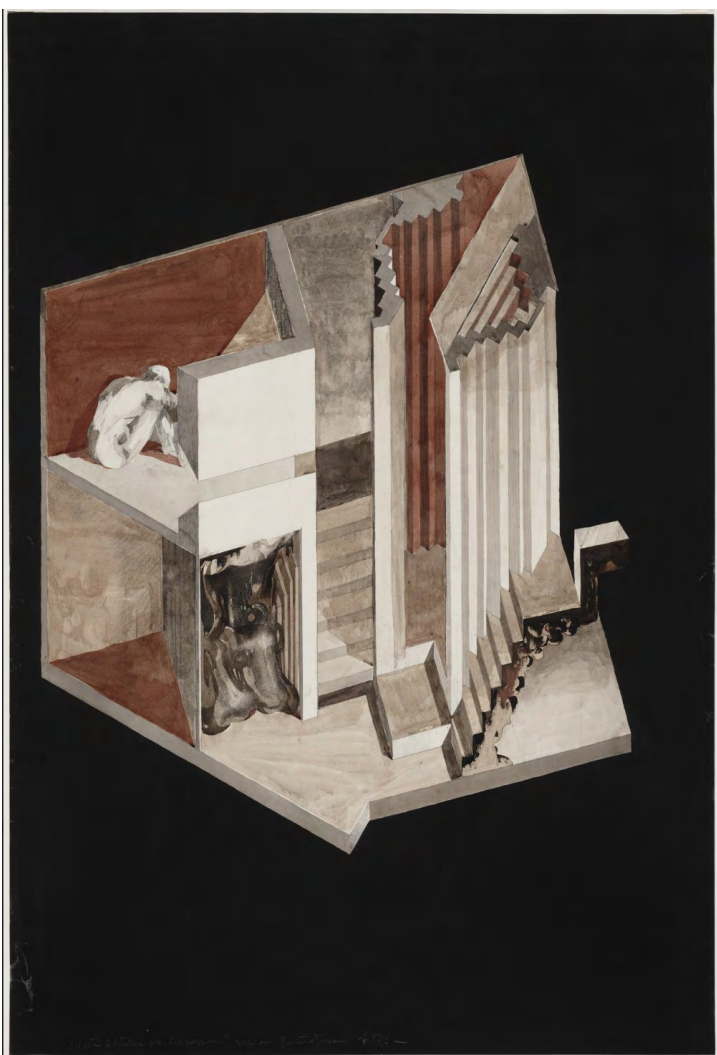
Pesce's environment for two people occupied the maximum volume of Ambasz's design program (3.60 meters in height x 4.80 in width x 4.80 in depth. Concerned with compressing existence "architecture as means for negation (end of collaboration in architecture)", he even managed to insert two floors with individual 'private spaces (resulting in mine-like ceiling heights. At its central area, a cross-shaped table and a corner-entrance were placed on a diagonal—tables as well as doors were inseparable from space; as a carved out cave, all elements in Pesce's proposal were parts of a single polyurethane piece.

Beyond the drawing provided for Ambasz's catalogue, two



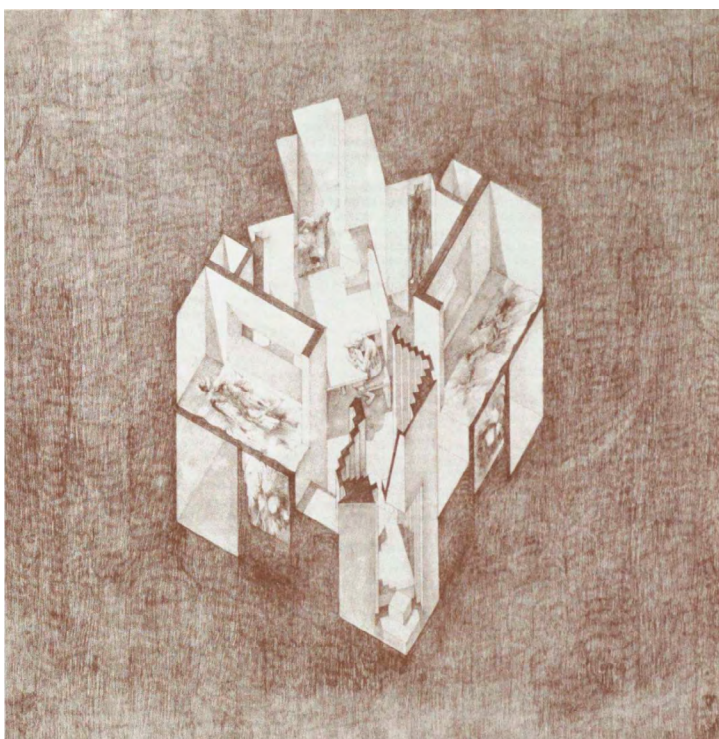
Inhabitation of Habitat in the Age of Great Contaminations.
Image by Klauss Zaugg (director of the film displayed at the environment).

axonometric sections were acquired for MoMa's archive. In the first of those, a rectangular niche where plastic is left without shape (almost as oil) is evidenced; the second is relevant by the state of anguish with which human figures were portrayed. Those drawings clearly served as an inspiration for Klauss Zaugg's images of the environment.

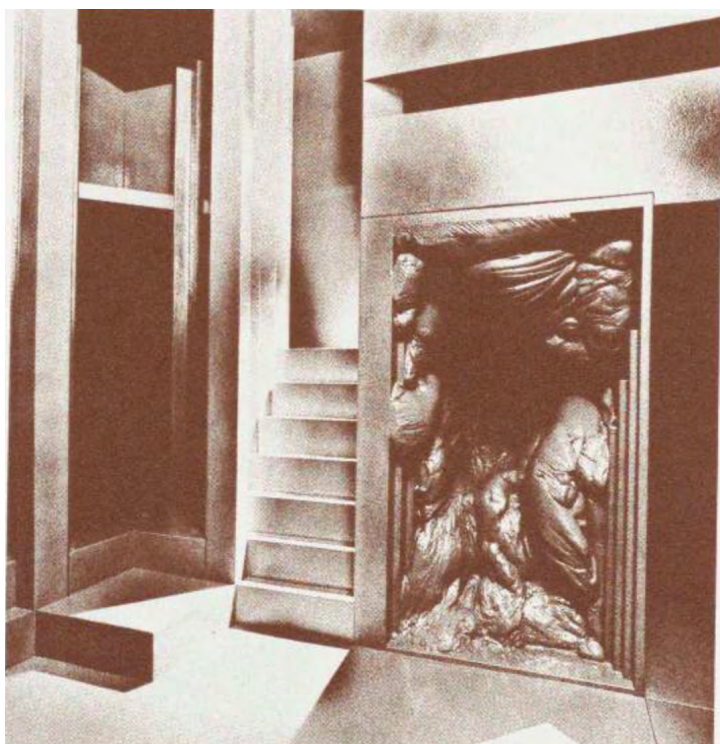




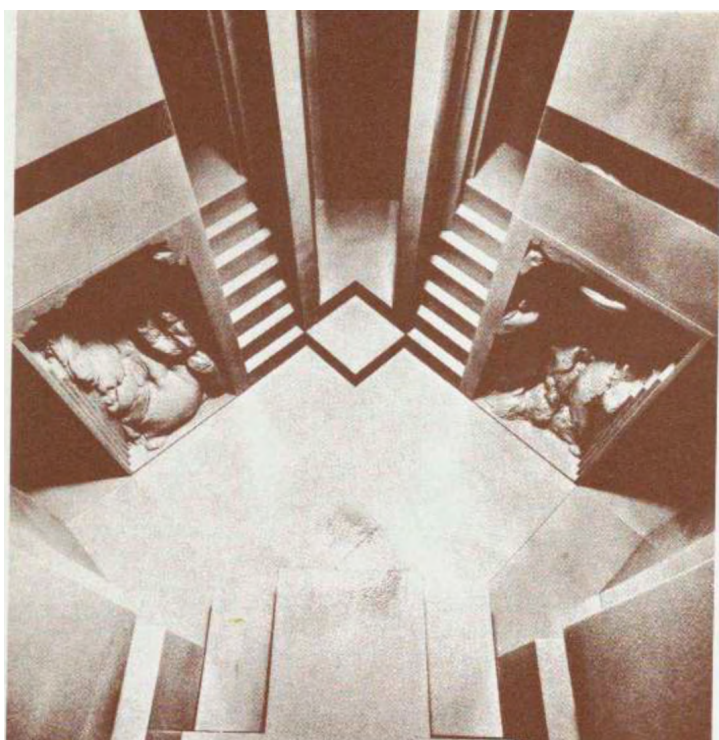
Gaetano Pesce, Axonometrics for *Habitat in The Age of Great Contaminations*
Moma's Archive

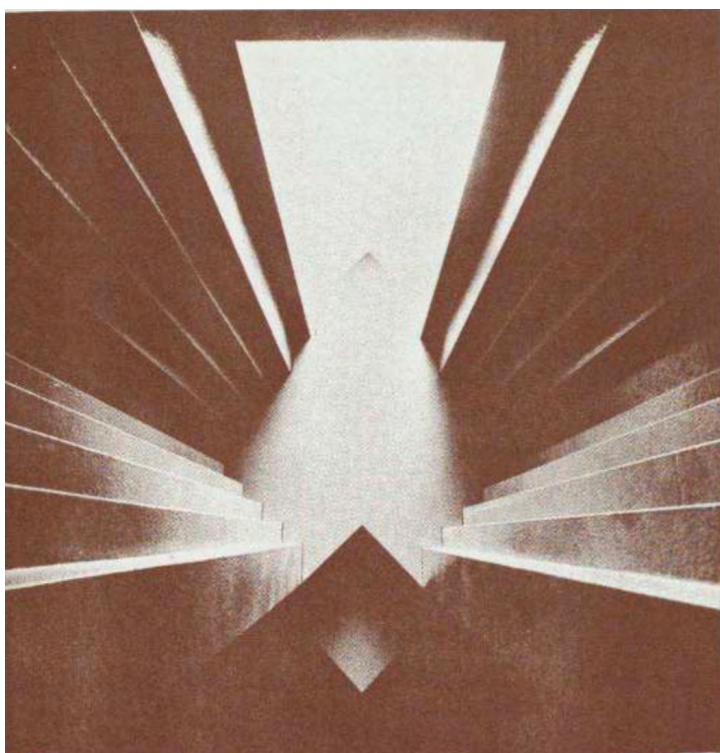


Gaetano Pesce, Axonometric for *Habitat in The Age of Great Contaminations*, 1972.

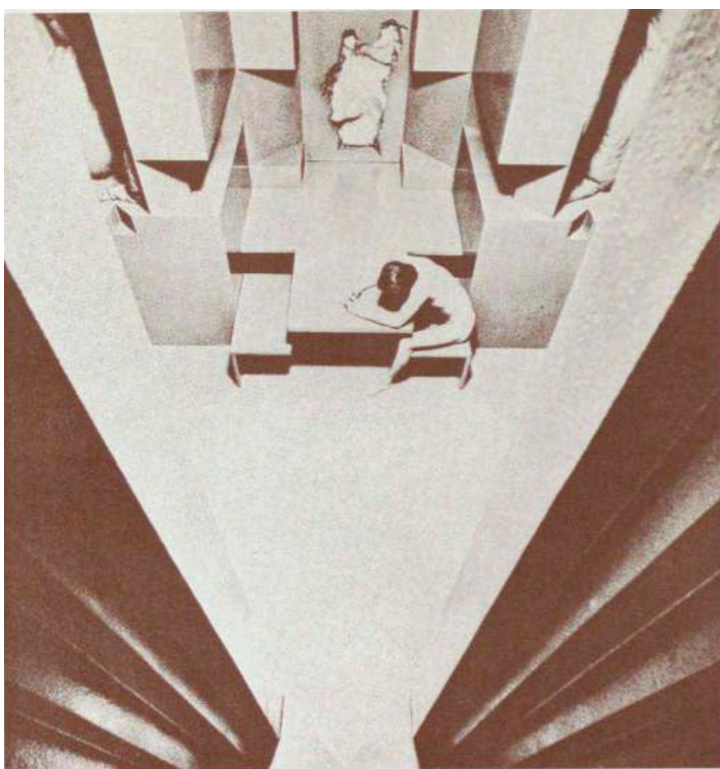


Gaetano Pesce, *Habitat in The Age of Great Contaminations*, 1972.





Gaetano Pesce, *Habitat in The Age of Great Contaminations*, 1972.



Gaetano Pesce, *Habitat in The Age of Great Contaminations*, 1972.

Theater and Anesthesia

Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project critic of the bourgeois interior¹ in the early XX century contained a link between domestic collections to a kind of escapism:

"The former constitutes itself as the interior. Its complement is the office. The private individual, who in the office has to deal with reality, needs the domestic interior to sustain him in his illusions. This necessity is all the more pressing since he has no intention of allowing his commercial considerations to impinge on social ones. In the formation of his private environment, both are kept out. From this arise the phantasmagorias of the interior which, for the private man, represents the universe. In the interior, he brings together the far away and the long ago. His living room is a box in the theater of the world."

In a World where work and home were (for the first time) explicitly separated, objects allowed the bourgeois inhabitant to create an alienated (and individualistic) scenery². Yet, if the resistance to modernity within the domestic could be understood as a sort of resistance, For Benjamin, however, the collection was a methodology for allowing bourgeois to cope (and engage with) the relentless pace of capitalism. Relevant to this thesis the fact that, in Benjamin's interpretation, objects, and not architecture, are the means through which separation becomes possible; separation would be a byproduct of appropriation.

"To him falls the Sisyphean task of divesting things of their commodity character by taking possession of them. But he bestows on them only connoisseur value, rather than use value. The collector dreams his way not only into a distant or bygone world but also into a better one-one in which (...) things are freed from the drudgery of being useful. "

For Benjamin the collector, though deeply inserted in the mechanisms of capitalism also implied a suspension of it.

Walter Benjamin, The Arcades Project (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) 8.

Objectlessness as Anguish

Not unlike Superstudio, Pesce employs a strategy of reduction: in the polyurethane cave of the Period of Great Contaminations, all objects are reduced to a single, and eternal, mass². Yet the means and objectives of reduction are opposite. While for Superstudio the elimination of objects, with their associated meanings and languages, liberates—revealing the preexisting objects as sources of control—for Pesce the elimination of objects, more precisely the conversion of those into space, was supposed to become an ultimate form of control—revealing the preexisting object as a possible liberation, an interface between inhabitant and architecture which led to more freedom. To state that in Pesce's environment the object has a connotation of freedom is not to claim that the object wasn't not criticized, but surely, that its crisis took a different path for him.

The underlying objective of Pesce's design as commentary—

2 Even if the text claims objectlessness and monomateriality are products of time: "Unfortunately, however, only the stone objects have survived; and though the stone outer shells have come down to us more or less intact, all the structures in wood, ABS plastic, melamine, polyurethane, etc., have been irreparably lost or damaged by heat and humidity." Gaetano Pesce, *Italy The New Domestic Landscape*, 215

which didn't seek to 'postulate' a better world—was that of awareness. The underground refuge from a toxic atmosphere is no escapist, as the psychological terror from above becomes persistent and even greater within the plastic bunker. Unlike in the propositions Superstudio or Ugo La Pietra, here there was nothing and nowhere to hide, objects were not smart, space was intentionally stupid. The absence of objects in such context must be understood as a prohibition of alienation. The object and its collection, were revealed as a possibility to escape a given reality—one which was denied.

The proposition outlined above finds ground in his later work. Unlike most radical designers, for which academia became increasingly central, Pesce kept object-design as the core of his production in the years that followed ITNDL. He did however shift his practice from mass the mass production of items to the use of industrial materials (resins, nylon...) in the manner of craft. By doing so he incorporated error and the awareness of process, a quest for revealing the possible tectonics of plastic. Error, one which revealed the 'true nature' of the materials,

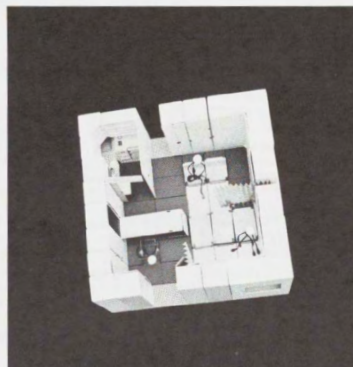
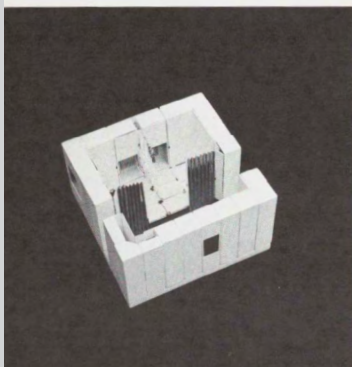
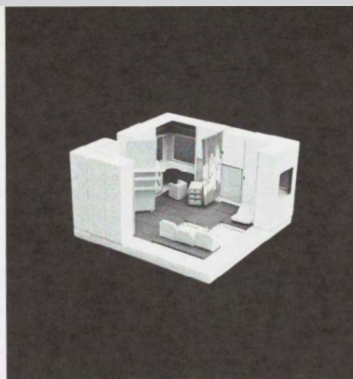
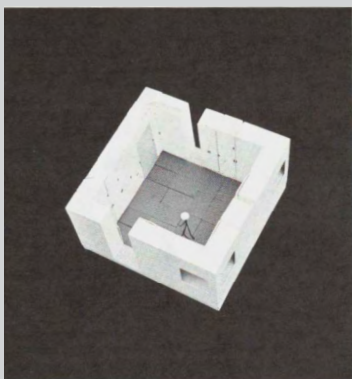
became a subject, but also process: in recent exhibitions³, he has turned the making of his chair into live performance.

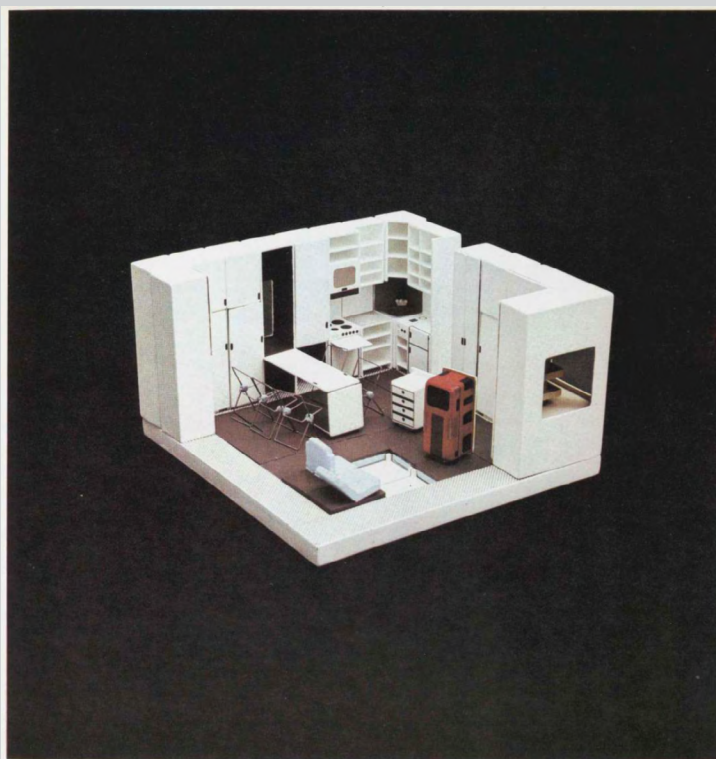
Some evidence of this revelation of process (for both objects and humans) may be seen in one of Pesce's human figures, whose style references the work of Francis Bacon, an artist concerned with bringing an image without illustration but through accident—negating the possibility of rational painting. Yet a material interpretation of his *Habitat* makes the case stronger. If we understood the non-formalized spaces of plastic in the space as oil, Pesce's argumentative project would place its inhabitant in a production site—his habitat may be understood as an oil mine. Such interpretation, initially a bit far off, is nevertheless reinforced by the general objective of his commentary: bringing awareness to consequences of modern life and its processes of making. The domestic without objects, but with privacy, was drawn as a site of awareness, even if an awareness being controlled.

3 Joseph Giovannini, "Gaetano Pesce Adds 'Performance Artist' to His Portfolio", *New York Times*. November, 14, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/14/arts/design/gaetano-pesce-friedman-benda.html>



Francis Bacon, Man Kneeling in Grass, 1954.





Model presented by Gianantonio Mari for
Italy: The New Domestic Landscape's young designers competition (1972)

Identity

Gianantonio Mari and the disappearing object

If Gruppo 9999, the other winner of the competition for young designers which took place at ITNDL, became after the show one a leading name of radical design, the architect Gianantonio Mari, born in Varese and graduated at the Politécnico de Milan has the contribution for the show as the single spotlight of his career. At that time, he had recently opened his office after previously working with Joe Colombo—a leading name of radical design who had passed-away unexpectedly almost a year prior to the show; his commissioned environment was finished by designers of his studio, Mari likely being one of them.

The environments of the young designer's competition remained as unbuilt designs for the show. Ambasz' taxonomy for the catalogue—pro-design, commentary and Counterdesign—wasn't apply to them (though both would likely fit in the pro-design category). If for the original scope of the show the G. Mari's proposition was of minor relevance, his name only being mentioned three times throughout the catalogue, under the perspective of objects and objectlessness it acquires a more relevant position.

The images of G.Mari stand out as being the only scaled model of the environments section¹. The overtly detailed model where pieces of clothes, boxes and door handles are depicted can't help but resembling a dollhouse. A grid of four black and white images were the house unfolded its many possible inhabitations as well as a demounted image of elements reinforced such idea. Whereas Pesce, and to some extent Superstudio sought to eliminate objects by monolithic replacement, here the act of hiding was more complexly developed: every wall is a closet, every ceiling tile a duct, every floor technical, each requiring its own set of highly detailed details. Few things were resolved equally. Unlike the grid of Supersurface—tediously uniform— Mari's raised floor relies on two orientations of tatami-like (rectangular) grids. Though Mari, not unlike the others, is concerned with unity, such concern reveals itself only in the non-inhabited space, the first image of the grid where walls, floor and (unseen) ceiling might be interpreted as inert.

1 Other models for unrealized designs were present in the Objects section, Ettore Sottsass' Superbox (1968) for example.

The obsessive detailing of G. Mari becomes explicit in the use of indicating letters (about eighteen of them) throughout the axonometrics. They're used to describe and differentiate the many types of—externally equal—closets, ceilings and floors. Elements generally serve double function: there are the wall-kitchen, wall-bed, the floor-seating and the ceiling-air conditioning, they're defined as unities. Such use of letters to describe precise unities and its function is also present in Joe Colombo's Total Furnishing Unit.

Mari's adjoining text wasn't radical in any sense of the word. He

remarked that the first consideration should be the poetry of living in and inhabiting a house, namely the combined feelings of warmth, possession, protection, and security that are normally regarded as the attributes of a traditional home. These should not be ignored nor diminished but, on the contrary, should be carefully considered, reevaluated, and if possible, improved by a plan that would emphasize the human factors, eliminating any extreme or Utopian techniques.²

Taking Ambasz Specific Considerations, he separated rituals and ceremonies into the categories of Privacy, Sleeping, Dining, Leisure and Sensory. His modular unities took as reference, in terms of scale,

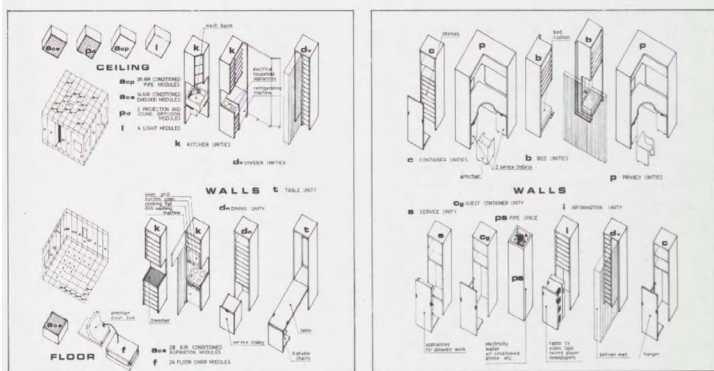
2 Gianantonio Mari, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, 270.

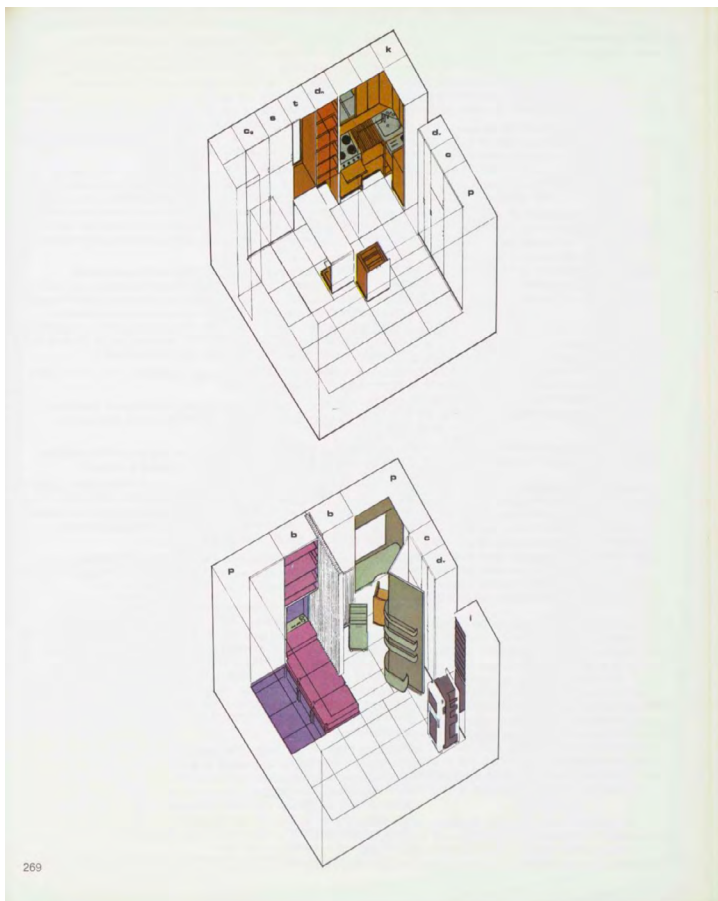
“the primary unit of life (man) and a method for defining possible superposition of rituals:

The catalytic element of this synthesis was the factor of time — namely, the fourth dimension seen in the context of the timing of the rituals, and consequently the use of the environment. The final phenomena that were taken into consideration in determining the method used were:

- a. The existence and almost simultaneous enactment of the rituals Leisure, Living, Privacy, and Dining.
- b. The existence within a well-defined time-span (practically, only at night) of the ritual Sleeping.
- c. The necessity of foreseeing occasional situations or modes of use (rituals) requiring independent action, even in the time shared with others, and therefore studying ways of providing for partial isolation.

Resulting from G. Mari’s methodology, the environment considered sleeping as “the basic activity on which all other environments should be superimposed”. All unities were to be at hand when needed but “not present (therefore not encumbering) when no ritual requires their use”.





Images presented by Gianantonio Mari for
Italy: The New Domestic Landscape's young designers competition (1972)

Domestic on Wheels

A context for the comprehension of Gianantonio Mari's environment, in the absence of any prior or posterior production by the architect, may be found in the oeuvre of Joe Colombo, one of Radical's leading designers up until his death. Unlike what the Marxist intellectual rhetoric of the movement would suggest, Colombo was a Playboy. Born in the 1930's struggle of a recent economic crash and facing a war in his teenage years, he would readily incorporate the bonanza of post-war recovery:

It is therefore not surprising that Cesare, who will later call himself Joe, will develop a taste for good food, fast cars and fine clothing. He spends his free time with friends skiing, playing jazz and visiting jazz clubs. He mixes fantastic cocktails and the tobacco pipe, which in painting is a moralizing symbol of excess or vanity, becomes his trademark. In his lifetime he would have a reputation as a bon vivant and one could no doubt call Joe Colombo a dandy, a virtuoso of the art of living and lifestyle.

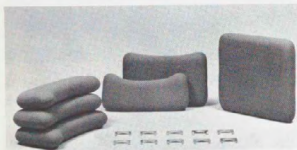
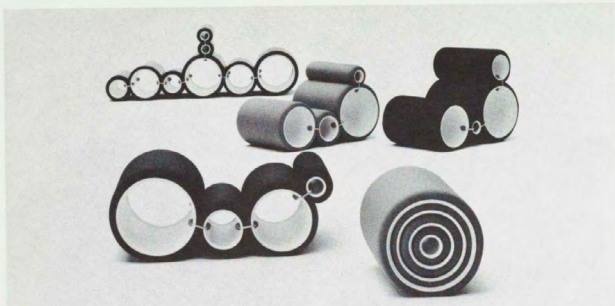
Initially working as a painter and Car-salesman (to make ends-meet), Colombo's shift to design took place when by the death of his father He and his brother were forced to run the family's electrical appliance company—turning the factory into laboratory for experimentation with

new technologies and materials.

Colombo was likely the most futuristic of radicals. Uninterested in the postmodern trope of Objects Selected by their Sociocultural implications, his designs would engage with nomadism an technology: watches, cars and the on board service of Alitalia were among his productions.

For ITNDL, Colombo's objects were arranged in two categories: in Objects Selected for their Formal and Technical Means were a couple of chairs in plastic and Eames-like molded plywood, as well as a poker-table—denoting his personality—While Objects Selected by their Implications of more Flexible Patterns of Use and Arrangement contained his more critical and knowledgeable work. Some of Colombo's objects for this section were in facet ensembles: Tube Chair, A series of velvet-covered tubular sections which could either rolled on the floor as a single piece or assembled in any order with the aid joints made out of steel and wood, Multichair, where two elements could be arranged in a number of forms by use of a similar joint-based system and, most relevant to this thesis, Minikitchen on Castors.

This mobile mini-kitchen includes two burners, a refrigerator,



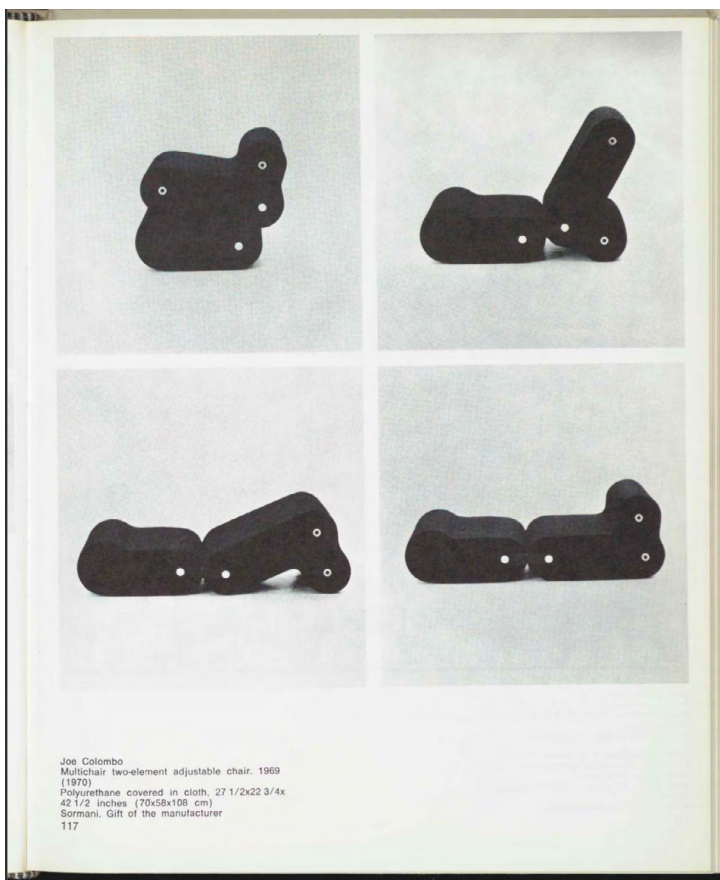
Joe Colombo
Tube Chair of nesting and combinable elements
1969 (1970)
PVC plastic tubes padded with polyurethane,
covered in fabric, 25 1/4x19 3/8 inches diameter
nested (64x50 cm)
Flexform. Gift of the manufacturer

Joe Colombo
Additional System combinable lounge chair and
ottoman, 1968 (1968)
Interchangeable polyurethane blocks covered in
stretch fabric, metal clamps, chair 27 1/2x30 3/4
x30 3/4 inches (70x78x78 cm), ottoman
15 3/4x16 1/2x30 3/4 inches (40x42x78 cm)
Sormani. Gift of the manufacturer

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Joe Colombo
Tube Chair (1970)

Additional System combinable lounge chair and Ottoman (1968)



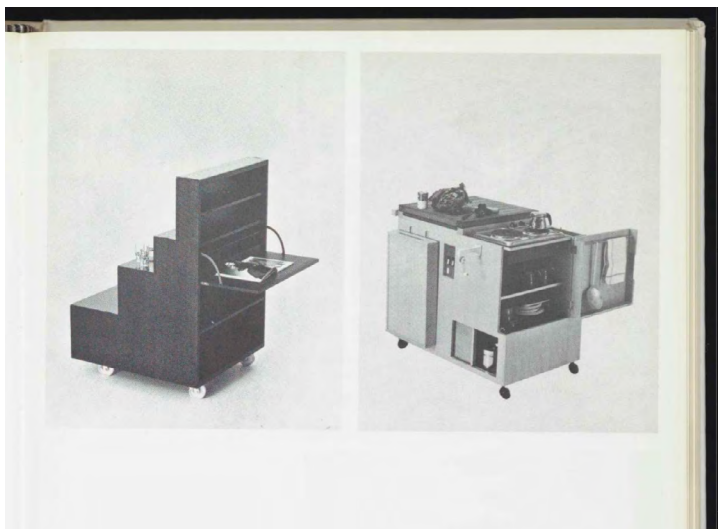
Joe Colombo
 Multichair: two-element adjustable chair. 1969

a cutting board, electrical outlets for small appliances, and multipurpose storage compartments. "Things have to be flexible," said Colombo in 1966. "My kitchen can be moved around or out of a room and when you are finished with it, it closes up like a box." This design represents in microcosm Colombo's signature idea of the modern home: "The problem today is to offer furnishings that are basically autonomous, that are independent of their architectonic housing and so interchangeable and programmable that they can be adapted to every present and future spatial situation."

Two relevant conditions arrive from Colombo's conception of flexibility, for objects at least. The first, from the chairs, is a departure from the concept of free-plan (found in Supersurface) and the whole idea of non-design as the most flexible, and least obsolescent, of actions. The second, from minikitchen, is a renewed concern (also present in Supersurface) with the disappearance of unused items, developing an environment of constant efficiency and presentness. At short biography for his environment we were informed that:

His researches in ecology and ergonomics led him increasingly to view the individual habitat as a microcosm, which should serve as the point of departure for a macrocosm attainable in the future by means of coordinated structures created through programmed systems of production.

Modernist Obsessions



Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni
Rampa ("Ramp") double-faced stair-shaped unit on
castors, containing desk and shelves. 1963 (1963)
Wood. 51 1/4x30 3/4x59 inches (130x78x150 cm)
Bernini. Gift of the manufacturer

Joe Colombo
Minikitchen on castors. 1963 (limited production)
Wood and stainless steel. 37 3/8x23 5/8x43 1/4
inches (95x60x100 cm)
Boffi. Gift of the manufacturer

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Joe Colombo

Minikitchen on castors (1963)

Images from the catalogue of ITNDL and from:

<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/joe-colombo-minikitchen>

In spite of its differences with the propositions of Superstudio and Ugo La Pietra—mainly the concern with privacy—G. Mari's environment may be said to share a desire for hiding; his raised floor reveals a necessity for 'objects' which are always at hand, but also invisible when useless. However more pragmatic, Mari shares with Superstudio the design of a spoon-fed humanity. On the other hand, his recurrence to walls and the 'human-reference'—against Supersurface openly inhumane landscape—finds a match in the developments of the modernist project, where hiding was least intentioned as an elimination of consumerism than as the means for developing a prototypical identity.

Modernist hiding wasn't concealed to objects. Processes of wear and maintenance were equally concealed by an Avant Garde concerned with displaying itself as the future of a non-existing past. The self-referential icon³, in which modernist art and architecture were connected, demanded a greater amount of effort to the latter, more intrinsically connected to the rituals of living⁴. In his paper *Realization of the standard*

3 Peter Eisenmann, "Aspects of Modernism: Maison Dom-ino and the Self-Referential Sign", *Log*, no.30 (2014).

4 Tough it may be argued that art in previous times was equally connected to life (in ritual form). John Dewey, *Art as Experience*. (1934).

cabinet as “equipment” by Le Corbusier: the transformation of the “wall”, Soichiro Sendai reflected on Le Corbusier’s domestic furniture. Initially claimed as a resource of freedom, his cabinets in practice served to develop his concerns with the unity between interior and exterior. By his conversion of object-like cabinets into wall-like ones, Corbusier attempted to remove the possibility of changing inhabitation rituals:

According to Le Corbusier, a standard cabinet replacing a stylized cabinet can be combined in various ways, corresponding to temporal needs, and they can be installed to eliminate any waste of space. The standard cabinet can be moved in any way; in principle, the installation method should be infinite. The cabinet “against the wall” itself is certainly the most normal placement for the “furniture” of the pre-modern “decorative arts,” but the standard cabinet can be floated in the air by the legs as presented in the “Pavillon de l’Esprit Nouveau.”⁵

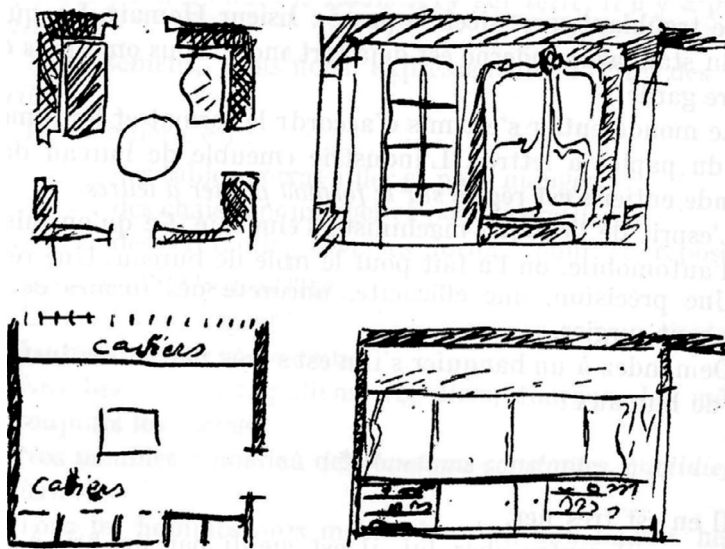
“This house has been designed to present a complete unit of the exterior, interior layout, and furniture should be made to the unity. Please notice that this is a crucial point. I insist very much on this point that we would accept that you arrange the interior according to your wishes, but in the general spirit of the whole. It is truly a kind of necessity” .⁶

5 Soichiro Sendai, “Realization of the standard cabinet as “equipment” by Le Corbusier: the transformation of the “wall””, *Japan Architectural Review*, no. 2 (October 2019) 194-506.

6 Pierre Jeanneret, *Letter from to Madame Bizau*, 1929.

That both Mari's (and Colombo's) proposal has white as its key color denotes a specific relationship to Bauhaus and Corbusian modernism (or at least the first phase of it); its overtly drawn details of 'planned objects', to the work of Ernst Neufert, to the Modulor. The general attempt to incorporate cabinets, as well as other items, as part of a 'firm' architecture beyond the reach of a client of changing perceptions and shifting identities—. Beyond integration, the modernist the modernist cabinet also allowed inhabitants to hide personal belongings from the views of others, as in the closet-core of Mies Van der Rohe's Farnsworth House. In their fusion, the in-situ cabinet with doors aimed at displaying the specific inhabitant as a generic user.

Mari's, and Colombo's, environments were not in complete agreement with the modernist type of objectlessness. Their ability to rearrange, though clearly made for the occupation of a free-plan, were not predicted by the modernist program even if both seem romantically engaged with the technology of planes and cars. If the modernist user was neutral, in Mari we sense a shift towards a flexible, yet still highly planned proposition of life. By connecting objects and elements, even



Plans and sections drawn by Le corbusier displaying differences between a conventional house and a modern home (above and below). Note de transition between the cabinet as an object toward a wall-like condition.

Le Corbusier, *Précision sur un état présent de l'architecture et l'urbanisme* (G. Crès et Cie: Paris, 1930) 110.

if flexible ones, Mari's environment, connected to the broader Italian discourse, attempts to restrict obsolescence, but also change in identity, by preventing the entrance of new, unplanned, furniture. In such attempt, whose possibilities remain at the level of discourse—since the coupling of architecture and technologies has more often led to the faster obsolescence of the first than to the maintenance of the latter—he reveals the connection between objects and identity.

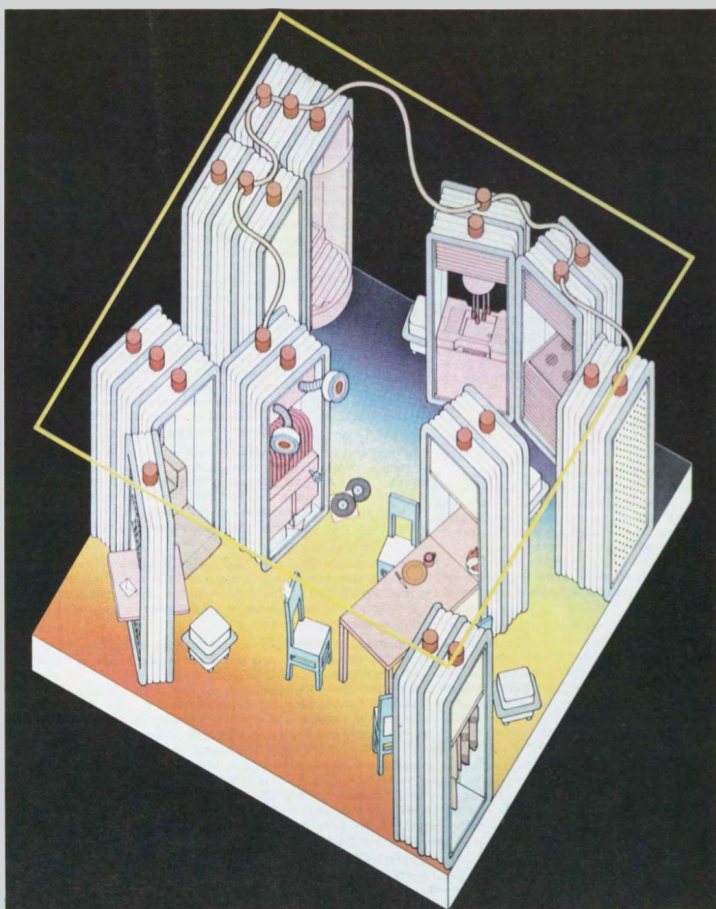
If Ambasz claimed in his design program that flexible furniture would trigger a change in the traditional home, which considering Corbusier might be true, the flexible domesticities of Colombo and Mari reveal themselves as equally resistant to change, setting a boundary for the possibilities of architecture to incorporate metamorphosis—one that the unplanned object might help in achieving.





For Home Show (1988), an exhibition of in-home site-specifics in Santa Barbara, the couple of artists Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler presented *Picture out of Doors*. The intervention consisted in the removal and piling in the Livingroom of all available doors in the house, resulting in 'public' bathrooms, but also in the conversion of cabinets and closets into shelves. The inhabitant's reaction to the intervention was elucidating:

"The removal of a cupboard door in a little used back hall was a heavy assault to our collective ego. The accumulation of unrelated, unneeded, unwanted items revealed on those dusty shelves was staggering. Furthermore, this massive evidence of procrastination hidden from the world, from ourselves, felt disgraceful"





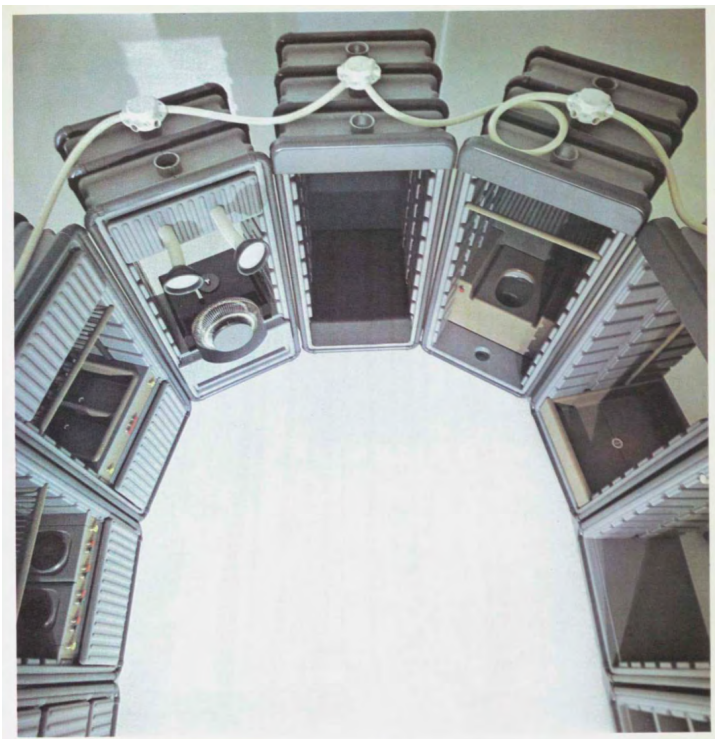
Images presented by Ettore Sottsass
Italy: The New Domestic Landscape (1972)

Memory

Ettore Sottsass and the disposable object

Sottsass environment still relied on basic objects, at the first axonometric presented for the catalogue, where his domestic units were randomly grouped over a 'technicolor' floor-space, one could easily identify at least some basic objects—three chairs, a knife, a dish, a coffee mug, two vinyl records on the floor and a letter—which unlike those of Gianantonio Mari were not designed as an integral part of the architecture. Inside the units (integrated with it) were a kitchen sink and an oven, a record player, a sofa, a closet with some clothes as well as two tables: a home. A projection of Ambasz's plinth as a yellow square was to be read either a grid for energy-supply or a floor-to-slab height (2.09m)—different manners of indicating the units as inhabitations of a preexisting infrastructure.

Ambasz arranging of Sottsass environment under the Design as Postulation category is in this sense understandable, It takes the current society, more or less as it is, as the condition in which his architecture intervenes. Their rituals are common to us: people eat in chairs, hear music from records, cook on ovens and sit on sofas. Nevertheless,



Images presented by Ettore Sottsass
Italy: The New Domestic Landscape (1972)

Sottsass domestic proposed radical change to other dimensions of what we consider to be 'natural life': the stability of architecture and its relationship to time and memory.

What is a Home, drawing by Charles Eames



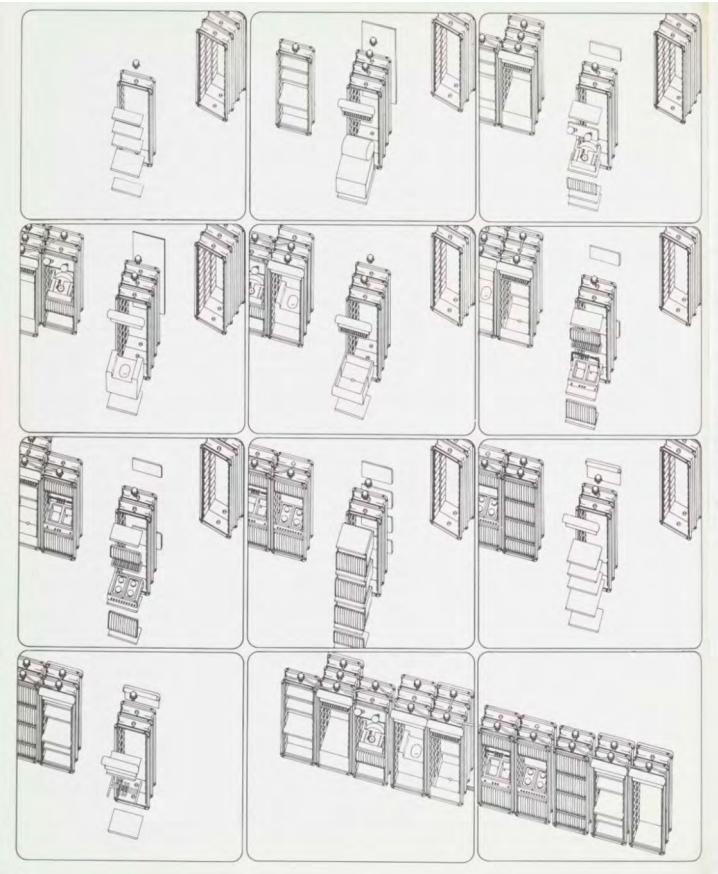
Synecdoche Design

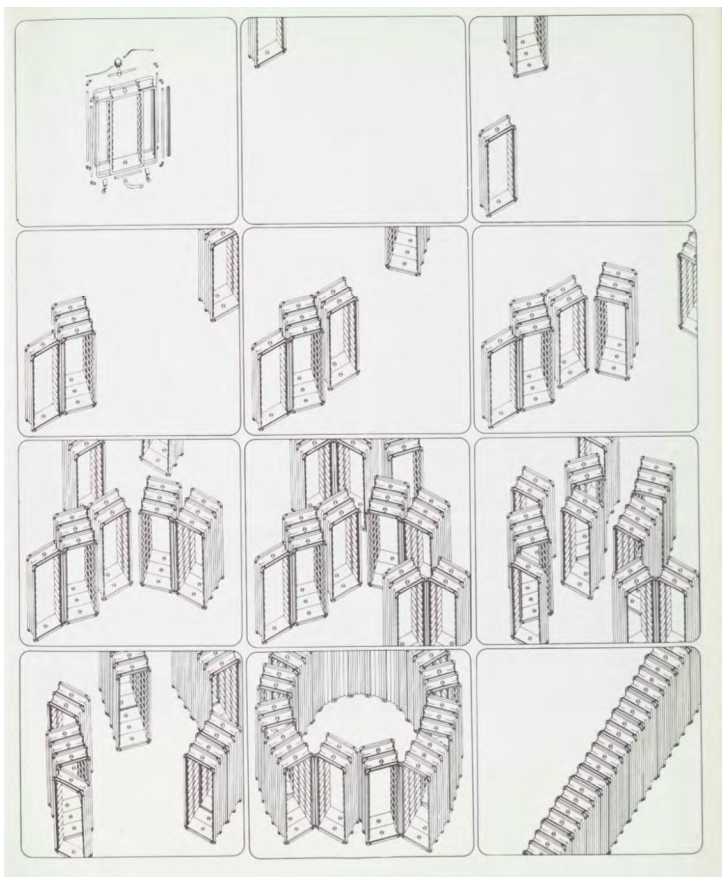
The difference between two kinds of objects—external to and merged with the units—appeared only on the first drawing. Following Sottsass text (to which we will return later) two ‘storyboards’ displayed different aspects of the living modules. The first was concerned with the universality (and density) of the Living supports: shelves, toilets, kitchens and leisure spaces were shown to fit all under the same module. Aesthetically, all design becomes one, aggressively reducing the amount of possible difference between two inhabited spaces; the enacted variability of the frame may also be understood as a temporality : toilet becomes kitchen which then becomes sofa... The final two frames of storyboard one indicate the grouping of cells in its compact form: like in other environments presented for the show (and even in some of the objects) unused parts of the ensemble become invisible, either as walls or as empty frames. Interoperability between supports is allowed in detail: a series of recesses on the interior ‘walls’ of each unit allow for the easy adding of shelves (or any other element).

Storyboard two displaced universality of living unities from design to architecture (as a scale), and to some extent towards urbanism. In it,

following the first frame—an exploded axonometric where basic details were explained (castors, flexible electric inputs, and flexible plumbing)—an ‘arrival’ of empty living modules was developed. Nomad units start to group, initially at random, but then in regular patterns defining a circle, and finally a wall. Storyboard two is curious in its complete absence of inhabitation—empty units appear to be unconnected to human use—; the unlivd (unlivable) space however grants a tone of animism to the units themselves, which through the sequence of frames appear to be performing a choreography of gradual (political) organization. The universality of both storyboards (from detail to world) as well as the tension between the inhabited and empty units was reinforced by the images chosen for the catalogue.

Though the general themes of previously shown environments were thoroughly present in Sottsass environment—the reduction of difference in form and material, flexibility and modularity (present in all but Pesce’s commentary)—some of its meanings were reversed. By shifting the white-reflexive color-pallet of Mari/Superstudio/Colombo, towards the colorless gray of plastic, its modules questioned the pristine (modernist) objectives predecessors environments, refusing the grid





'Storyboards' presented by Ettore Sottsass
Italy: The New Domestic Landscape (1972)

toward more 'messy' possibilities reinforced such questioning. Though the agency of aesthetics is not granted to its inhabitants, agency of arrangement seems somewhat possible.

The miracle of banality

Sottsass' environment takes on the implications of universal equality—one of ITNDL design tropes. If Superstudio's Supersurface provided the equality of land values (all places are the same) Sottsass' units develop equality closer to reality—the neutralization of difference among objects, spaces and scales provided by uniform design. If his initial statements are clear about unviability of the units, "these pieces of furniture, in fact, represent a series of ideas, and not a series of products to be put on the market this evening or tomorrow morning", the project nevertheless is more mundane than that of its radical fellows. It has a 'material reality' of particular relevance to the effectivity of his ideas.

The use of plastic in Sottsass' environment (as well as on the objects of radical design) may be explained in Roland Barthes—it was likely inspired by it. In his 1957 *Mythologies* Barthes described the miraculous-banality of the material:

Despite having names of Greek shepherds (Polystyrene, Polyvinyl,

Polyethylene), plastic, the products of which have just been gathered in an exhibition, is in essence the stuff of alchemy. At the entrance of the stand, the public waits in a long queue in order to witness the accomplishment of the magical operation par excellence: the transmutation of matter. An ideally-shaped machine, tubulated and oblong (a shape well suited to suggest the secret of an itinerary) effortlessly draws, out of a heap of greenish crystals, shiny and fluted dressing-room tidies. At one end, raw, telluric matter, at the other, the finished, human object; and between these two extremes, nothing; nothing but a transit, hardly watched over by an attendant in a cloth cap, half-god, half-robot.

Plastic for Barthes was the ambiguous promise, the perfect sum of utopia and dystopia (fitting Italian radicalisms as a glove); the easy manufacture of everything brought to memory the dream of democratization "more than a substance, plastic is the very idea of its infinite transformation; as its everyday name indicates, it is ubiquity made visible", yet, a democratization of (extremely ugly) shallowness.

But the price to be paid for this success is that plastic, sublimated as movement, hardly exists as substance. Its reality is a negative one: neither hard nor deep, it must be content with a 'substantial' attribute which is neutral in spite of its utilitarian advantages: resistance, a state which merely means an absence of yielding. In the hierarchy of the major poetic substances, it figures as a disgraced material, lost between the effusiveness of rubber and the flat hardness of metal; it embodies none of the genuine produce of the mineral world: foam, fibres, strata. It is a 'shaped' substance: whatever its final state, plastic keeps a flocculent appearance, something opaque, creamy and curdled, something powerless

ever to achieve the triumphant smoothness of Nature. But what best reveals it for what it is is the sound it gives, at once hollow and flat; its noise is its undoing, as are its colours, for it seems capable of retaining only the most chemical-looking ones. Of yellow, red and green, it keeps only the aggressive quality, and uses them as mere names, being able to display only concepts of colours.

The final sentences of Barthes text may even be read as a resume of Sottsass' design: "The hierarchy of substances is abolished: a single one replaces them all: the whole world can be plasticized, and even life itself since, we are told, they are beginning to make plastic aortas".

Sottsass living units are supposed to be ugly. The 'unreality' of plastic allows him to criticize design as value (and specifically the previous current of Italian design La Dolce Vita). By rendering all objects in under the same material he also criticized consumerism and accumulation (which was rendered meaningless). Life on plastic was a critic to consumerism and to objects as means for conveying social status.

perhaps what I really did was the opposite. The form is not cute at all. It is a kind of orgy of the use of plastic, regarded as a material that allows an almost complete process of deconditioning from the interminable chain of psycho-erotic self indulgences about 'possession.' I mean the possession of objects, I mean the pleasure of possessing something that seems to us precious, that seems to us precious because it is made out of a precious material, it has a precious form, or perhaps because it was difficult to make, or may be fragile, etc.



Along with Archizoom and early Superstudio, Sottsass attempted to decouple use from noble aesthetics in his designs previous to ITNDL. Superbox (1996), from *Objects Selected for Their Sociocultural Implications*, took the classical wardrobe made from noble wood and

ornament and deconstructed it by cheapness and color, an antithetic proposition to Corbusier's conversion of furniture into architecture. At the environment however, he chose to negate color, which up until then had been his major deconstruction resource¹.

Sottsass however went beyond the meanings proposed by Barthes. If in 1957, when *Mythologies* was written, plastic was still seen as a material of uncritical promise, the origins of the environmental movement closely linked to counter-culture in the seventies added to the myth of plastic the curse of its persistent durability; plastic became garbage because its existence extended beyond that of humans: it was eternal.

The memory of plastic

Sottsass use of plastic beyond Barthes is curious since, from the image of eternal garbage he took only its concept of durability. His environment therefore became universal not only in its absorption of use—everything under one module—but of time as well.

1 For Catharine Rossi, the film of Sottsass environment, which depicted a hippie life-style, missed such change in methodology—and was likely a director's mistake. The contemporary collection of Sottsass objects denotes the attempt of ugliness as somewhat naïve—since our conceptions of aesthetic quality have changed overtime to embrace plastic and its colors.

because the states of need, tragedy, joy, illness, birth, and death always take place within the given area...memories... can remain as memories, without necessarily solidifying into emblems; rather, they can become a sort of living plasma with which, day after day, we can always start over again from the beginning.

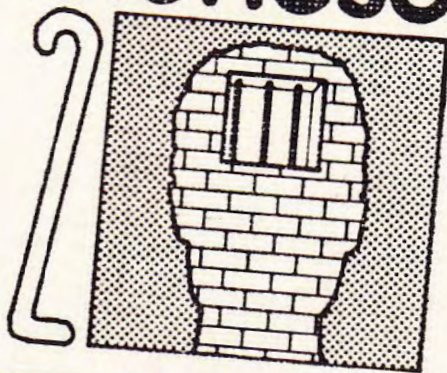
Infinitely durable (and ugly) living units of Sottsass would eventually become meaningless. Under this context, he claimed that (nomadic) life would become more meaningful. Unable to track time or to have a symbolic attachments with its owners, objects would become a simple sum of necessities:

They have no formal link with the owner's ethnic group. He will use more or less containers, own more or less boxes, and will finally resolve the problem in terms of quantity rather than quality (as the current phrase goes).

Sottsass elimination of time and attachment is curious since it resulted not in objectlessness—like Supersurface and Habitat From the Age of Great Contaminations—but in accumulation. The quantitative resolution to the problem of status could result in more objects, it could lead to obsolescence. The meaningful object is revealed not only as a tool of memory, but one that may potentially supersede others in permanence—since any desire from preservation stems from value.

JORGE L. BORGES

Funes el Memorioso



MINIFICCIONES

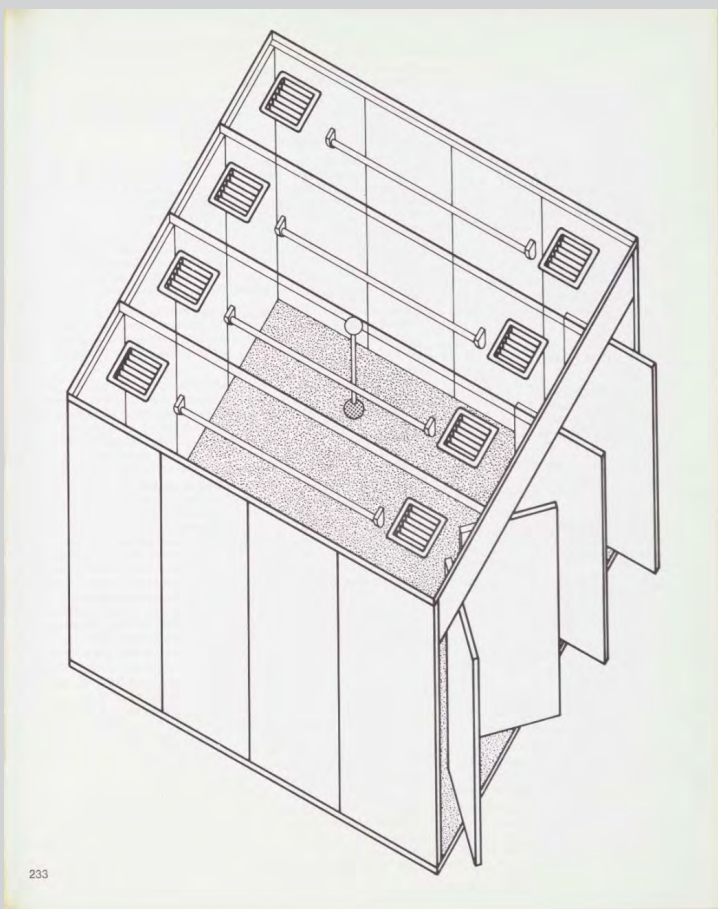
Meaning and memory lie in tension. In Funes the Memorioso, a short story by Jorge Luis Borges, the main character (Funes), is a man with a perfect memory. His gift is in fact a curse, Funes' memory was so perfect that "he could remember an entire day" from the past, but in order to do it, he needed an entire day. Funes had no ability for abstraction, he couldn't understand how the word "dog" could refer to two different dogs, he also couldn't see how it would refer to the same dog, seen in profile at 9:00 pm and seen from the back at 12:00pm. Unable to forget, Funes' memory became a garbaje, an accumulation of unsorted stuff.

At Frank Coraci's Click, the main character receives a remote control with which to skip boring parts of life (family dinners, boring sex and so on), initially pleased with the possibility, the blessing becomes a nightmare when, reaching an auto-pilot, skipings become ever more frequent and durable, leaving Michael Newman (played by Adam Sandler) nostalgic at the end of an incredible fast-paced life. Our perception of space and time relies on our ability not only to remember, but also to forget.

Both tales are scientifically backed—we store more information from new spaces and activities than in repetition, but eternal innovation may also lead to burnout and depression. Does the neutrality of our environments, making places without memory, liberate?

Alan Wrexler
An attempt at folding an Eames Chair (mid 2000's)





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Archizoom's environment axonometric
Italy: *The New Domestic Landscape*, 233



Images from Archizoom's environment installation
Photographs by Leonardo Legrand

Mess

Archizoom and resistance of the non-organized

The 'aesthetic without qualities', one of the design tropes pursued throughout ITNDL, had its most radical presence in Archizoom's environment. The 4.80 x 4.80m plinth of Ambasz's Design Program was enclosed by a series of—probably plastic—partitions, measuring about 1.14 by 2.90m (four on each façade). Partitions would pivot as a set of rotating doors at one of the 'façades'; a set of four fluorescent tube-lights and eight ventilation openings hung at the ceiling above above. Only one axonometric was presented for the catalogue, it didn't reveal much; images from MoMa's archive portray kids, men and women standing in the rather dull and excessively illuminated room. Instead of the excessively detail (and to some extent Sottsass), Here the connections are straightforward, and dull. With the looks of a supermarket, Archizoom's space, for many, suggested an objectlessness like that of Superstudio yet supplied from above. The accompanying texts for both environments however were radically different. If Supersurface was concerned with the representation of space—one of abolition— Archizoom dealt with the imagination of use. Taking the tools of conceptual art, the group refused



Jackson Pollock
One: Number 31, 1950

the teleological connotation of the project.

What we use, then, in creating our environment is the least physical thing in the world, namely, words. Of course, that doesn't at all mean that in postponing the physical realization of this environment, we have avoided picturing it. On the contrary, we have refused to complete a single image, our own, preferring instead that as many should be created as there are people listening to this tale, who will imagine this environment for themselves, quite beyond our control.

Archizoom's environment was to be understood, therefore, between provision and possibility or, more precisely, between generic space and particular use—both of which must be taken into account if we are to understand the role given to the object in it.

Generic Space.

From a spatial standpoint, Archizoom's environment solves the necessary 'comfort'¹ of the home by means of technological provision. If Supersurface relied on the technical floor, Archizoom has as its major architectural element the ceiling². By engaging with it, The group manages to remove not only the city, but also the specificity of the landscape—paramount for Supersurface, but was also implicit in G.Mari's windows and Sottsass field organization. As the text pointed out, Archizoom hoped to eliminate the idea of the city as a natural consequence of nature—in a awareness-seeking attempt analogous to that of Pesce³.

The ideology of the middle-class city derives from the seventeenth-century discovery of the city as a 'natural object,' that is, a reality homogeneous with the surrounding countryside, in that it has been created in accordance with the same rational laws that regulate the entire world of nature; these give the city a universal significance

1 The basic dimension of comfort remains unsolved only in Pesce's proposal, though some resolutions are clearly ironic.

2 It could be said that Mari and Sottsass use the wall (or a vertical partition at least) as technical supply, and that only for Pesce would the 'elements of architecture' as intelligence remain entirely opaque

3 Bringing awareness to the artificial reality of our codes links radical design to the structuralist rhetoric. See for example Roland Barthes deconstruction of the classic novel of Balzac, *Sarrasine*. Roland Barthes. *S/Z* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970).

as a 'naturally' existing reality, rather than as an artificial creation with an autonomous logic of its own. Moreover, since the city is the common product of man's labor, it represents in middle-class ideology, the civilized bridge between man and nature and between man and society. Social balance and ecological balance must be achieved simultaneously. Thus, in the City Plan, what is sought is a not-impossible harmony between the Public, the Private, Nature, and Buildings; these diverse entities are regarded as mutually incompatible elements. The end result, in fact, need not be a 'unity,' but rather a harmonious succession' of different and contrasting logics. Having become a 'citizen,' man enjoys an equilibrium achieved through forms, celebrating his 'natural' integration into society. The city always seems to him something far more complex and more spiritual than any practical use that he can make of it in his daily life; to be a citizen means to adopt a mode of behavior that is fully conscious of the existence of that cultural 'unity' upon which society is based. Thus, the middle-class city becomes an ideological superstructure, a screen between the individual and the hierarchical systems of society.⁴

Making the city entirely artificial would reveal, in Archizoom's (sometimes hermetic) interpretation, its hidden mechanisms. It would bring an awareness to the city as a, created, site of consumption. The shock of the modern city compelled the citizen into coping with consumerism: "Urban chaos is the most common mechanism for accomplishing this process of integration and induction, but it is also the least easy to control; it is still the outcome of a system of

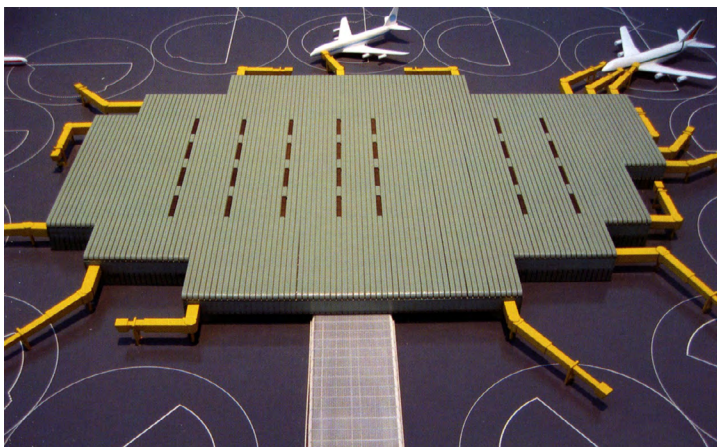
4 Archizoom. *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*. P236

free competition.” Unintuitively, the generic space and urbanity of Archizoom would supplant the power of competition by that of a macro-state (even if one which aesthetically resembles an enterprise). The domestic environment reinforced such project by resembling a site of consumption itself: the supermarket.

The places in which the industrial system has completely realized its own ideology of Planning are the Factory and the Supermarket. Consumption and Production are not, in fact, contrasting logics, for both predicate a social and material reality that is entirely continuous and undifferentiated; both the Factory and the Supermarket are optimal urban systems, potentially unlimited, in which the functions of production and of merchandising information are freely organized according to a continuous plan and are made homogeneous by a system of artificial ventilation and lighting, without any interferences.

(...)

If we were to apply the technological level and functional organization that has already been attained in these sections of the city to housing as well, we should see a complete transformation of the city. In fact, the metropolis today, like the traditional city, still adheres to certain standards of natural lighting and ventilation; no factory may exceed an established depth, in order that light and air may permeate its interior. This has resulted in a continuous ‘formation’ of architectural blocks made up of inner courtyards, facades, and interruptions. If we were to introduce on an urban scale the principle of artificial lighting and ventilation, we should see that it is no longer necessary to follow the procedure of a continual breaking-up into apartments, in the typical fashion of a traditional city; the city would become a continuous residential structure, without empty spaces, and hence without architectural images. Traffic would no longer divide the city into sections but



Archizoom Associati and Superstudio
 Competition entry for airport in Genova (Italy, 1970).

would be arranged in an autonomous, optimal fashion uniformly distributed throughout the land.⁵

The pursue for generality inevitably links Archizoom's and Superstudio's environment, both provide a (grid-like) field of supply which abolishes the city. Though Archizoom doesn't claim its supermarket to extend throughout the world, it also doesn't claim a stopping point—in fact, the environment references their earlier work of *Non-Stop City* (1969). Both works take a modernist desire (the necessity of unity at the scale of the city⁶) while simultaneously criticizing its core language and

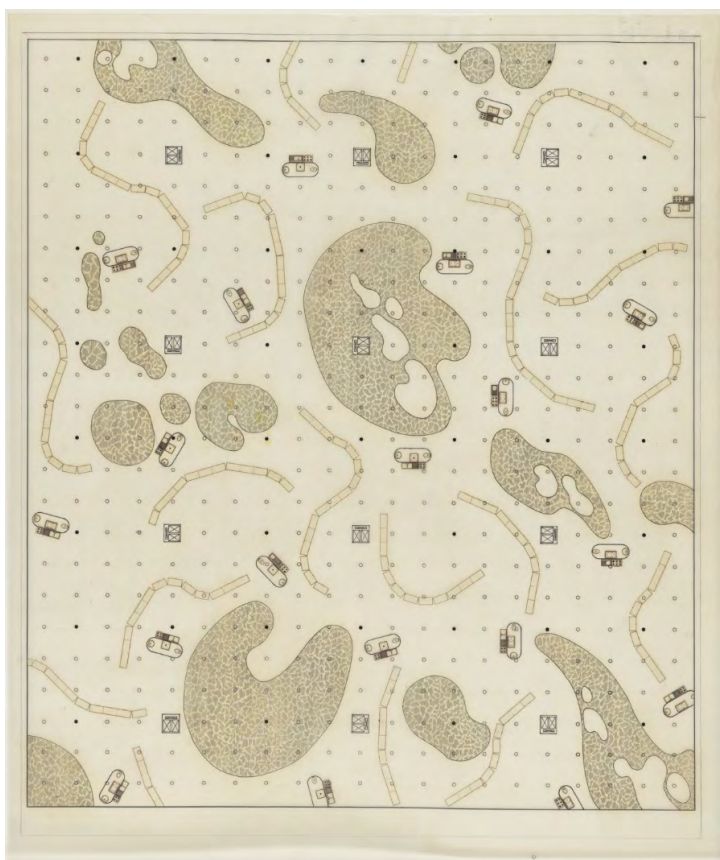
5 Archizoom. *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*. P238

6 Manfredo Tafuri. *Project and Utopia* (Chicago: MIT Press, 1979).

values—as in there comes a point where excessive technology renders language impossible. Efficiency becomes hipermodernism which then becomes antimodernism—the modern faith in technology eventually becomes dissociated from issues of lighting or ventilation, buildings may extend infinitely and unnecessarily (Bigness and Junkspace). The generic, Archizoom’s anticapitalistic take on architectural form curiously gave commercial features to domestic spaces. The generic space of Non-Stop City, which the environment at ITNDL further developed, was also reflected in the group’s less radical actions:

In 1970, in collaboration with Superstudio, they undertook a research project in airport design under the auspices of the Cesare Cassina Center of Studies, Meda (Milan) and in the same year entered two national competitions, at Catanzaro and Genoa, for the designing of airports.

Archizoom provided the domestic as a site of consumption without clear orientation, a non-place, yet in this space the group choose not to portray consumption but the utopic openness of non-architecture—pure possibility. Unlike Pesce’s interior prison, Archizoom provided a space (or non-space) where interface could come to fore; it recovered a, possible, object.



Andrea Branzi
Residential Park, No-Stop City project (1969)

Particular Use

Beyond the emptiness of the environment there was sound. As people passed through the pivoting doors of Archizoom 'domestic space' a voice read what was supposed to be a trigger, words with which visitors would be able to arrange a project in their heads:

'Listen, I really think it's going to be something quite extraordinary. Very spacious, bright, really well arranged, with no hidden corners, you know. There will be fine lighting, really brilliant, that will clearly show up all those disordered objects.

The fact is, everything will be simple, with no mysteries and nothing soul-disturbing, you know. Wonderful! Really very beautiful — very beautiful, and very large. Quite extraordinary! It will be cool there too, with an immense silence.

'My God, how can I describe to you the wonderful colors! You see, many things are really quite hard to describe, especially because they'll be used in such a new way. And then, there'll be glass, wood, linoleum, water, plants, vases, and many of those boxes they used to use, in wood or plastic, and all empty....

'What's really extraordinary about all this is that many of these things will be handmade, especially the largest ones. Of course, others will obviously be machinemade. The household equipment will be just perfect, in wonderful colors, neutral colors, I should say... All the rest will be bright, and there'll be a big swing with room for two.

' You see, there'll be a lot of marvelous things, and yet it will look almost empty, it will be so big and so beautiful... How fine it will be... just spending the whole day doing nothing, without working or anything... You know, just great...' (And so on, starting all over again at the beginning.)

Space, in the case of Archizoom, cannot be analyzed without text because for it the radical content relied in conjunction. By refusing to draw or place actual objects, they bypassed Ambasz curatorial attention (which would inevitably have, like Sottsass, defined them under Design as Postulation) and obtain peer-approval while designing an utopia of accumulation. The inhabited—imagined—space of Archizoom contained manifold materials: “glass, wood, linoleum... and many of those boxes” moreover, it recognized the relevance of craft “What’s really extraordinary about all this is that many of these things will be handmade, especially the largest ones”. In a critic to the rationalism of Mari or Superstudio, it accepted mess—that of people, not enterprises—“ There will be fine lighting, really brilliant, that will clearly show up all those disordered objects.”

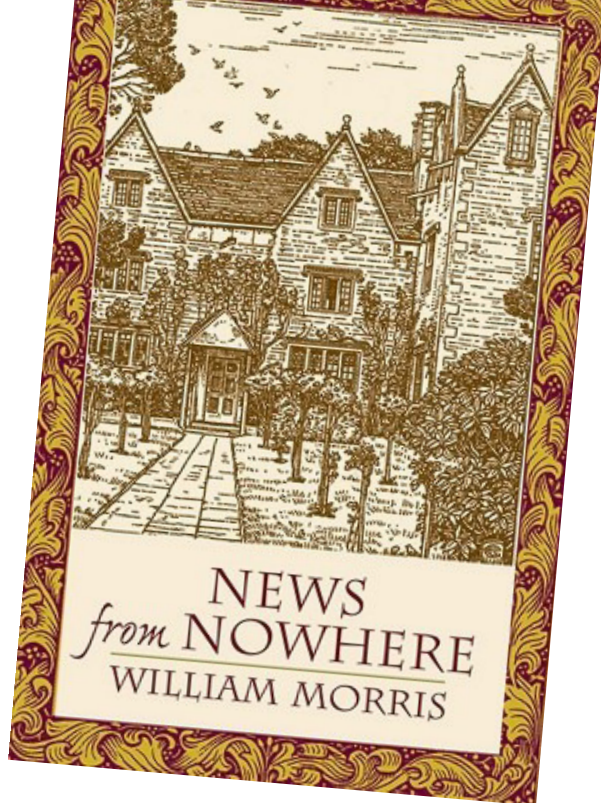
When understood as a sum between modernism on steroids (generic space) and inhabitation (as necessary resistance contained in the environment), Archizoom’s environment presents the first non-negative solution to the crisis of object. One that denied the attempt to hide—present in Supersurface or in Gianantonio Mari’s environment—as

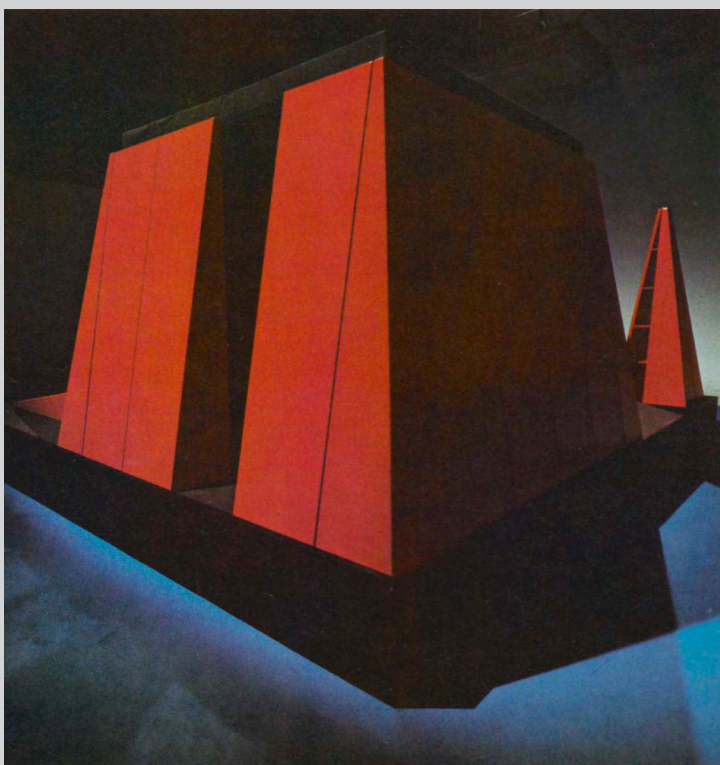


Andrea Branzi
No-Stop City project (1969)

well as the dictatorial unity—of all environments presented thus far. In the artificial landscape where time is negated by the absence of day, night and weather, Archizoom sets the possibility for objects as conveyors of memory.

By designing generic architecture, Archizoom provided a space for unplanned objects: resistance and meaning.







Images from Gae Aulenti's environment
Italy: The New Domestic Landscape (1972)

Metabolism

Gae Aulenti and the collection of objects

"Nothing is built on stone, all is built on sand, but we must build as if the sand were stone". The epigrapher chosen by Gae Aulenti's to introduce her domestic environment for ITNDL intended to question the presupposed—but false—firmitas of architecture (and design). The sentence, taken from of Jorge Luis Borges' Fragments of an apocryphal Gospel, even without further explanation, was an odd-fit among the radical Italians discourse; if Radical Design claimed a necessity to unveil realities in order to change it—awareness—, "but we must build as if sand was stone" relies on the belief in false realities for an operative and meaningful purpose—ideology¹.

Her text², like Borges' sentence, relied on inconclusive and ambiguous statements, it was more or less structured into two sections: a first, where 'reality' was described, and a second, where her environment (responding to the presuppositions of reality) was explained.

1 Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil* (New York: Verso, 2015)

2 Gae Aulenti, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, 152-153.

Excerpts from *reality*:

(1) Architecture is designed beyond the strife of governments, wars, and hunger. Architecture is concrete space, a positive thing that has as its substance the city, in which both private and collective factors join to transform nature through the exercise of reason and memory.

...

(2) None of man's objects, whether monument or den, can escape its relationship to the city, which is the place where the human condition is manifested. It is only possible, therefore, to analyze the object if we can define it as a dialectic form of the whole;

...

The existence of the object is defined by the actual circumstances of its own relationship to the city, that is, by the relations established between economic and social processes, forms of behavior, norms, techniques — characteristics that, even if they are not expressed by or inherent in the object itself, allow it to come into being and discover its relationship to other objects — to find its place.

...

The objects with which we generally deal are extremely numerous; new, for the most part, but also rather unstable and changeable, and at least some of them are doomed to disappear quickly.

...

A domestic environment should be designed in its general form, for its positive qualities can reside only in the sum of the conditions in accordance with which its spatial elements and attribution of meanings approach a synthesis, which is possible only by using and testing all the criteria applied to defining a city.³

3 Aulenti, Italy: *The New Domestic Landscape*, 152.

Some ideas of Aulenti's surface from the ambiguous fragments.

The first is that of substance, and permanence as architectural givens—contradicting Ambasz's *Manhattan: Capital of the Twentieth Century* which, claimed a baseline interpretation of the city as a network of change⁴. Aulenti's use of substance, memory, and beyond, placed an interpretation of reality (or at least desirable reality) directly against the notions of dematerialization being practiced by most architects. Secondly was some kind of relational aesthetics (against self-referential expressions of objects and architecture). If on one end Aulenti criticized the notion of architecture (or the city) as a pure network without presence or memory, she nevertheless emphasized the impossibility of objects having meanings parted from the context in which they were presented—or the context from which they were generated (the city being one of such contexts). Instead of hiding—by technology, aesthetics or imagination—what appears to be claimed in the text is a conversation between existing objects and spaces. Instead of content taking place in a undifferentiated context (grid-like or otherwise), a recognition of

4 "Manhattan, unencumbered by permanent memory, and more interested in becoming than in being, can be seen as the city of that second technological revolution brought about by the development of processes for producing and controlling information rather than just energy". Aulenti, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, 152.



Gae Aulenti: House for a Collector- the strange bathroom, where the plinth dedicated to a statue is equal to that of the sink, also strange is the relevance given to the over-detailed lighting devices. Images taken from (Domus 482).

necessary context. Such 'contextuality' was already present in the projects for which Aulenti was recognized at the time—her showrooms for fiat and Olivetti, and the interior design of House for a Collector. The latter was radical in its exhibition of modern art in associated with the home—sculptures in the bathroom—and the lack of hierarchy between objects of design, architecture, and exhibited art objects (especially seen in the prominence of her lighting devices).

Third was the notion of obsolescence, however one slightly different from the one more generally present in the show—in which obsolescence was a character inflicted by the objects on society. By using the word 'doomed' (4), Aulenti stated a different position: she longed for the disposed object, perceiving its value, and in the perception that valuable objects, with which people could've had meaningful relationships were being abandoned she funded a different critic to consumerism. Her approach to the design crisis—in which (at least the good) objects were victims and not causers of our status society, is more connected to William Morris's Arts and Crafts movement than to Roland Barthes's⁵ structuralism. Sand and Stone were, for Aulenti, expressions

5 Moreover, an approach that wouldn't find a solution in the anti-object utopias proposed by the show.



Alice and Peter Smithson: Put Away House, 1993
George Perec, *Espécies de Espacios*. p 49

*El tiempo que pasa (mi Historia) deposita residuos que van apilándose: fotos, dibujos, carcasas de bolígrafos-rotuladores ya secos desde hace tiempo, carpetas, vasos perdidos y vasos no devueltos, envolturas de puros, cajas, gomas, postales, libros, polvo y chucherías: lo que yo llamo mi fortuna.*⁸³

of Firmitas in time—durability; yet the realization of stone becoming sand was not physical, but social.

Finally, (5), Aulenti's reality considers the necessary complementarity between architecture and inhabitation—one completes the other by giving it meaning.

Environment

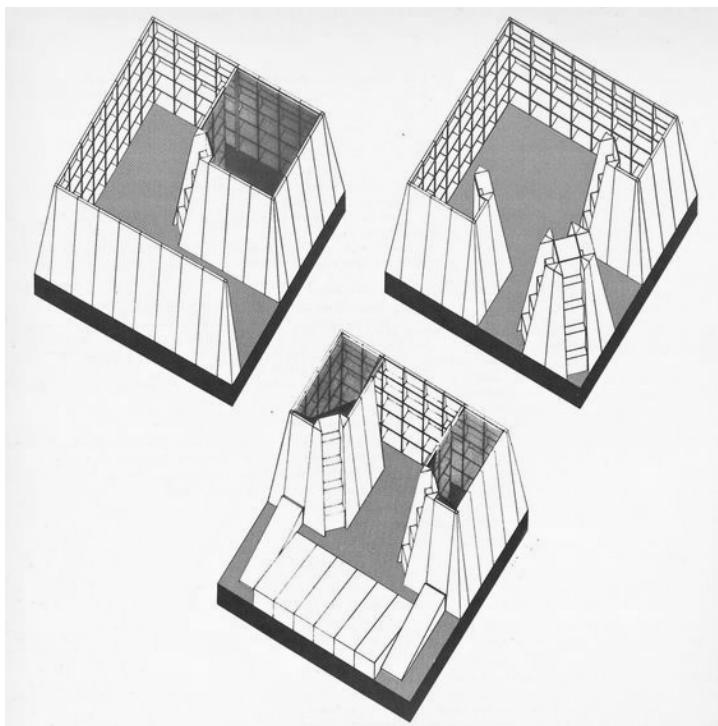
Aulenti's environment followed the ambiguities of her text. Her occupation of Ambasz's twelve by twelve foot plinth had as dominant elements, a series of red fiberglass modules⁶ (a) of three types (one of which could be arranged either lying down or standing). The arrangement of these modules implied variability, and the construction of several possibilities of "concave and convex spaces" enacted at a series of three axonometrics⁷. Beyond the modules, a black pair of polyurethane chairs (c), an expressive yellow luminary (d), and an equally black kitchen-counter (b) (also made by the arrangement of parts) composed her 'domestic settlement'—which for the show also had a television set⁸.

The decisions involving her design, according to the text, were "restricted to recovering the positive significance of man, who finds fulfilment through creating for himself an artificial atmosphere with an

6 By arranging them differently, they can create areas with the following uses: bed, cupboard, bookcase (either longitudinal or free standing), shelves, seats. Aulenti, *The New Domestic Landscape*, 153.

7 This aspect of variability didn't however, imply as much freedom from 'structures' as that of Ettore Sottsass since they follow a subliminal grid. The possible arrangements presented by Aulenti were also less easy to relate as a storyboard.

8 Not being able to access Aulenti's film is probably the biggest information gap in this thesis. Contacts with Peter Lang and Mark Wasiuta were made without success.

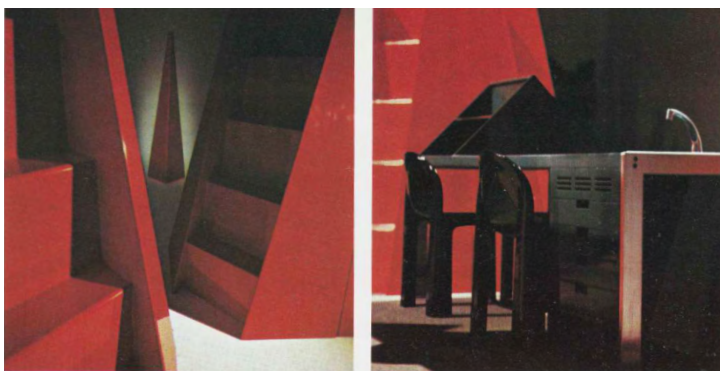
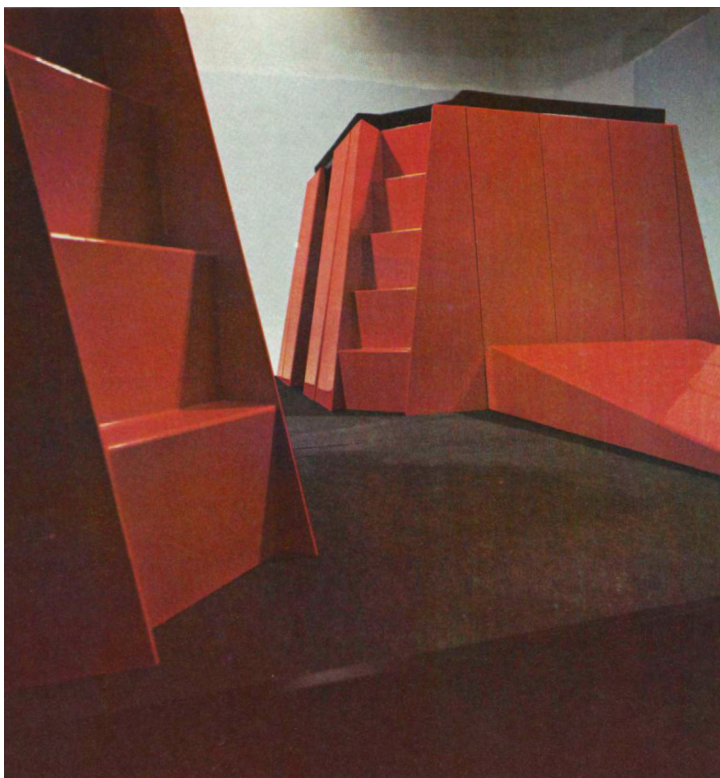


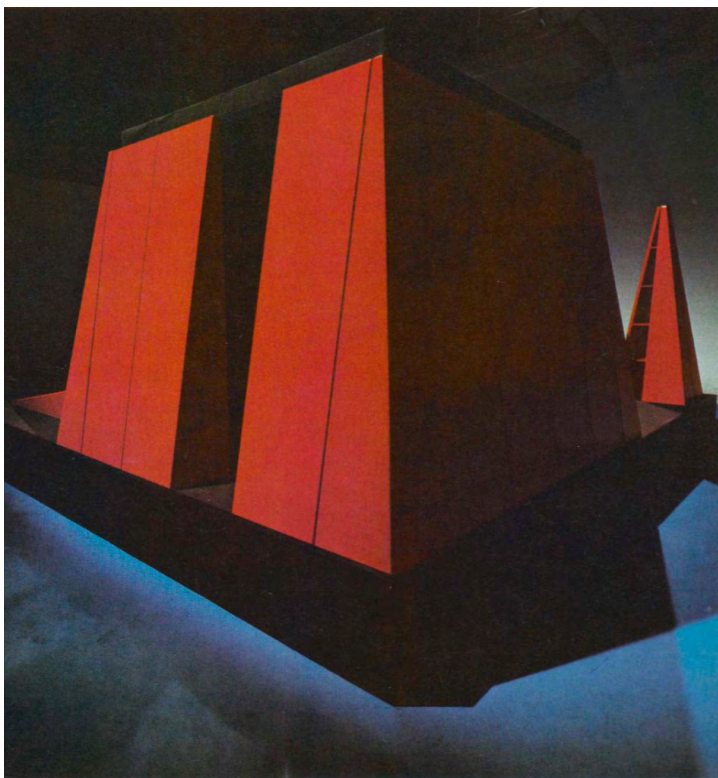
Three possible arrangements presented by Aulenti.

Note the difference (in shading) between public and private spaces.

aesthetic intention.” Following the objective description of each part (synthesized in the paragraph above) each element of the environment was also presented with critical and symbolic descriptions: (a) were symbolic pyramids, (b) a symbolic ruler, (c) symbolic shells and (d) symbolic fire—this was likely inspired by Aldo Rossi⁹— (c) and (d) were

⁹ It must be noticed that Aulenti and Rossi were coworkers at Casabella. Rossi’s engagement with memory was anathema to the more relevant trends of Radical Design.





Images presented for the catalogue—probably taken in Italy, before shipping. Note that, in the absence of the kitchen counter, modules (1.70 in height) appear to be larger, reinforcing its symbolic archetype—pyramid—. Such a perception is also reinforced by the 'black-lid', which reinforces interiority (by casting a shadow) as well as the idea of a roof—despite its actual uninhabitable height.
Italy: The New Domestic Landscape. 157-158.

critically presented as self-sufficient elements while (a) (b) were critically incomplete, symbolizing only 'a will to create experiences'.

The Home as a field of accumulation

The leading element in Aulenti's design (a), referenced some of her early works. Her Showrooms for Olivetti in Buenos Aires and Paris worked, in a similar fashion, using the articulation of inclined, horizontal and vertical planes (sometimes painted in red) to exhibit its glamorous typewriters. By observing both we perceive the constant illusion of scale: symbolic 'pyramids' become visible mainly when the space is unfurnished and uninhabited. The similarities between the showrooms and her designed home allows for an interpretation of Aulenti's domesticity as an environment of shelves—which would provide answers both for its definition as critically incomplete (shelves demand objects) and its relationship with the pyramid (an archetype of storage-space).

Unlike other radical designers, whose pamphleteer work against capitalism was enabled (economically) by the production of 'real' architecture which directly supported the backgrounds being criticized, Aulenti's career as a whole traced a coherent set of questions, not

constrained by scale or use. Showrooms, houses, museums, objects and set-design for exhibitions and theater plays defined her work¹⁰, an obsession with pyramids and ways of keeping or displaying was thoroughly present.

At a moment (after may-68) when museums became a field of battle—structuralism, with the revelation that History was in fact story, triggered a political feud regarding which narrative were museums to portray—she designed the interior exhibition spaces of both Centre George Pompidou and the Museum D’orsay. The archetype of the pyramid, present not only in those but in some of her scenery designs, is recurring. Finally, Table with Wheels, one of her most known designs, may be seen as an object concerned with displaying, and operating, a collection.

At the museum D’Orsay, just as previously in House for a Collector, Aulenti used art objects as ornament—being largely criticized at the

10 The programmatic, and chromatic, similarity between Aulenti and the thirteen years older Lina Bo Bardi is obvious—even if Aulenti’s position shifts towards postmodernism is inexistent in Lina’s brutalist work (and criticized by in her modernist writing). Lina’s scaffolding at Teatro Oficina, implying a notion of mobility and dematerialization, the accumulation of objects throughout her life in *Casa de Vidro* (glasshouse), the superposition of paintings in the glass displays in São Paulo’s Museum of Art (MASP) as well as the many works in theater and exhibition design express similar curatorial concerns in the work of both architects.



Ollivet Showroom in Paris. 1966-67. "Within this multilevel, continuous space, there are three elements, three symbols, three fixed points around which the composition rotates: the stairs, which are an architectonic symbol of continuity; the central pillar, which leads the mind to the idea of the capsule, the form of the future; and Man, represented by the wooden African sculpture ".



Ollivetti Showroom in Buenos Aires which took the ground corner of a building and turned into a landscape. The shop “explodes” at the corner of two streets in the centre of the city. This is the immediate effect of its perspective display “flights of stairs” — which radiate fanwise from the interior corner of the space and are multiplied kaleidoscopically by the mirrors on the walls and ceiling.

time. In her review of the museum from a curatorial perspective, Patricia Mainardi claimed that:

Whatever symbolic effect the ascent toward impressionism-in-the-garret might have is mitigated by the lowered ceiling level and elbow-to-elbow hanging. Not for these outsiders the luxury space enjoyed by their Third Republic salon brethren. At times the installation approaches parody, as when in the Seurat gallery a latticework ceiling and regular rows of black dots—holes in the wall above and below the paintings, supposedly to aid in reducing noise—seem to mimic the postimpressionist technique. Everywhere the architect's presence is intrusive, upstaging the art, conscripting it to an aspect of décor.¹¹

Aulenti's integration of (art) objects into architecture took a different path than Mari's Corbusian transformation of furniture into walls or Sottsass integration into living modules. If a sense of de-hierarchization between architecture and inhabitation (in this case, the collection) remained, what happens now is no longer a neutralization of context but rather a transformation of it by the presence of object. While Mainardi's criticism demands for an Archizoom answer (a neutral environment where objects become stars) Aulenti proposed in a conversation between both, opening a spatial agency of objects.

11 11. Patricia Mainardi, "Postmodern History at the Musée d'Orsay". *October*, no.41 (summer 1987) 30-52.



Aulenti's arrangement of the impressionist collection at D'orsay

Returning to ITNDL's environment, Aulenti seems to have designed the domestic as a field of accumulation, in which architecture grew in order to keep memory of an unstoppable obsolescence. Her Pyramids, red and opaque on its outside (convex), black and neutral on their object-keeping inside (concave). Conceive a difference between private and public domesticities, which radically differed La Pietra's utopic and obsessive connection. Her black-painted interiors were also different from Pesce's anguish inducing underground as—by means of collection—it was conceived as an environment of agency. Instead of the timelessness of other environments. Aulenti's collection seems to link the passage of time to a change in space and objects.

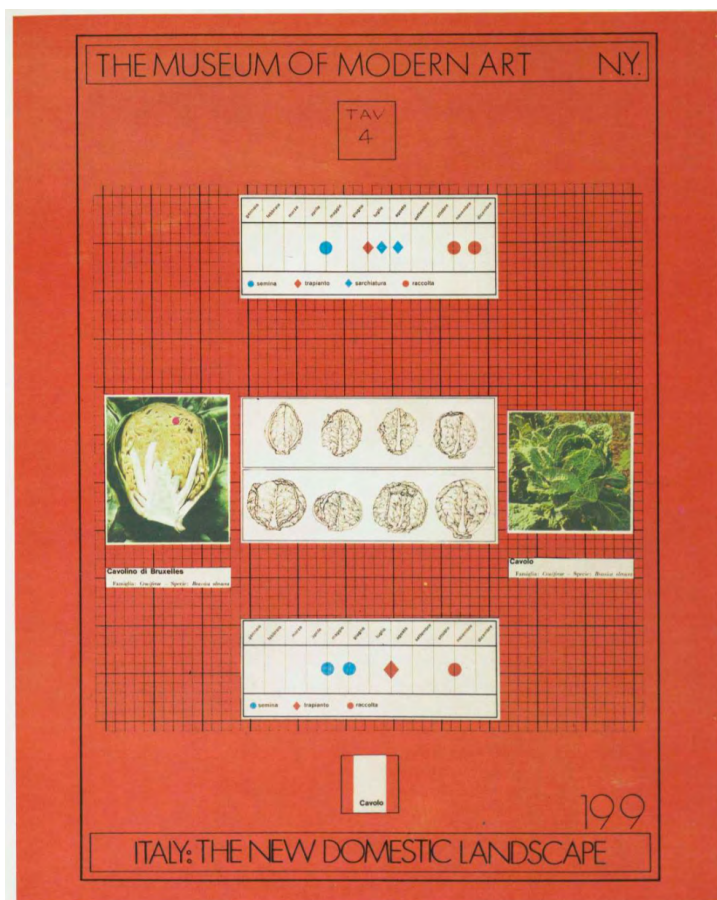
Metabolism

The necessity to understand time found relative in Gruppo's 9999 proposition for the Young Designers Competition. Instead of a collection however, the group proposed an interior garden for growing and living amidst vegetables—quite literally a domestic landscape. One of the collages presented for the competition linked images of vegetables to their growing and planting schedules. The metabolism of plants was to counter the “autonomous” development of technology. Using the early rhetoric of what would become the environmental movement, 9999, argued:

Man is in direct contact with nature; he follows its growth and development; he cultivates and uses its products. He establishes a symbiotic relationship, Man, himself a product of nature, participates in the cycle of seasons, in the variation of stars. If technology keeps on destroying nature, the possibility of having contact with the vegetable kingdom in its integral cycle will assume even greater significance. The vegetable garden will become the sacred place of a new religion.¹²

The antimodern nature of time, or at least the perception of its

12 Gruppo 9999, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, 277.



Gruppo 9999 proposal for the Young Designers Competition.

passage, traces a bridge between Aulenti's and 9999's environment. The link between both becomes explicit in the work of the Eameses. In their film *House: Five Years After Living*¹³, where their inhabitation of Case-Study House n.8—whose design clearly reminds the shelving systems designed by the couple— was portrayed, the analogy between natural developments and the collection of items is constant: shots of growing flowers, grass and waves alternate with those of kites, Chinese toys, and dishes; chairs and the couple's general accumulation of useless stuff. Without a single human-shot, the Eames sought to portray, and design, an inhabitation of agency (even panels of the House's façade were met to change throughout its life. As the Peter Smithson once wrote: "The chairs of the Eames are the first that one can place in any position at an empty inhabitation [...] The chairs belong to its occupants, not to the building. They're not like the chairs of Mies, which were all about the building and not its occupants¹⁴."

The Eameses, along with the Smithsons, recurred to collections, and the act of collecting, as a way to resist a first wave of modernist

13 Charles Eames, Ray Eames, *House: Five Years After Living* (film), 1955.

14 Quote from Peter Smithson

architecture which, for different reasons than those implied in radical design, sought for neutrality, timeless and unity. In her return to the collection Aulenti recovers one its fundamental meanings, that of time, but also resistance.





Conclusion

Meanings for Objects

A narrative interpretation of the environments presented at *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, one which would point into an specific and single direction, is impossible. Just as with most events from the post-may 68 pre-1973 oil-crash era, the show and its environments were marked by its intense contradiction. Ada Louise Huxtable's headline "Designing the Death of Design—But Stylishly"¹, suggested a definitive quest for objectlessness, which this investigation proves to be incomplete. Emilio Ambasz's *Design Program*, itself already contradictory document, fed the development manifold and frequently oppositional answers by the Italian Avant-Garde.

The *crisis of the object*² outlined at the introduction was in fact multiple. It developed the tension between object and architecture, product and production, identity and argument. If a negation of objects, collections and accumulations was undeniably the leading attitude

1 Ada Louise Huxtable, "Designing the End of Design—But Stylishly",

2 Filiberto Mena, "A Design for New Behaviors", *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, 405

through the environments of ITNDL—one which cast a shadow over its dissidents—this thesis also provides evidence for a set of different attitudes which took object as a tool of resistance, and collections as a necessary processes of recovery. Through the sum fragmentary arguments which nevertheless took the object as its center what is managed by this investigation is not a coherent interpretation or concept of the show, but instead a complex definition of the object—one which extends its relevance to present reality.

In his canonical text *Bigness or The Problem of Large*³, Rem Koolhaas claimed the size of a building would alone embody “an ideological program independent of the will of its architects.” Certainly inspired by the implicit arguments of *Supersurface* and *Continuous monument*, yet taking its irrationality to another level (by also denying the grid), Koolhaas was somewhat fascinated by the ability of Big things to extend beyond the control of its producers: no longer could the logic between façade and interior exist. The implicit argument of the statements on *Bigness* allows for an interpretation of *Smallness*: beneath a certain scale, a project would fit into the dreams of its planner—

3 Rem Koolhaas, *S,M,L,XL*, P.496, New York: Monacelli Press. 1995.

smallness under control.

The role given to objects by the architects of ITNDL serve as an opposition to the idea of controlled smallness: movable, exchangeable and deorganizable, they were the ones who escaped the control of planning, which resisted to it. The objects of ITNDL were just as inherently ideological as the big building of dreamt by Koolhaas. Yet, for architects longing radicalness, objects place a problem: as Archizoom's and Aulenti's environments reveal, the ability for an object to resist is linked to its non-planned nature. The planned designs of Mari, Colombo and Sottsass, just as the cabinets of Le Corbusier, served the control of architecture, to some extent they were architecture itself. The planned-unplanned axis may define an object better than its scale or material. Objects are others, things which put architecture in dialogue...

The consideration of the role given to objects within the environments of ITNDL may lead us to a different set of definitions than those outlined by Ambasz. Instead of *Design as Postulation*, as *Commentary* and *Counterdesign as Postulation*, the new lens would define Aulenti and Archizoom as those which took *Objects*

as *Resistance*, Gaetano Pesce's cave reflects on *Objectlessness as Awareness*, Superstudio and Ugo La Pietra (as well as some of the trailer-environments) as *Objectlessness as Freedom* and finally Mari and Sottsass under *Objects as Shame*.

It must be noticed that in all of each of categories above, the relevance given to objects, whether positive or negative, is not a claim to design objects themselves—as in the first section of the show. The agency of the object relies on the border, between planned. In Mari, Superstudio, Aulenti and Sottsass, the relevance of the object is denoted by the design of its storage, while in Pesce and Archizoom by the absence of such type. Plinths, cabinets, closets, lockers and shelves become the relevant designs of an architecture in dialogue with what it can't plan.

The connection of such elements to the work of Gae Aulenti is telling. Moreover, post-1972 Aulenti was one of the only architects from the show to keep in negotiation⁴: designing museums, objects and scenery for which meaning was arrived in organization—a curatorial

4 From 1972-1975 Global Tools Collective, a group containing almost all designers of IT-NDL, worked in performance and grassroots construction—ending almost entirely the collaboration with manufacturers from the pre-72 actions of Radical Design.

architect. Often problematic, she nevertheless managed to develop a coherent work in the context of practice—and not Academia.

Aulenti stood up as prescient, for while radicals, for the most part, were claiming for a necessary destruction of context—as a landscape of structural inequality—she recognized in the phenomena of obsolescence the early signs and caveats of contextlessness already taking place. As Jenny Odell reminds us in *How to do Nothing: Escaping the Attention Economy*⁵, few things are less contextualized than the average twitter feed sequence (world news/ meme/ personal history/ local news/meme). Her collection gave relevance and meaning not only to objects themselves, but to a human becoming less of an easy prey to instant gratification.

Contemporary Objects

Contemporary Architectural culture often fails to see the object in its resisting potential. Beatriz Colomina's and Mark Wigley's texts for Istanbul Design's Biennial reassemble Benjamin's domestic interpretation of the bourgeois house through their criticism of good design. Are we

5 Jenny Odell, *How to do Nothing: Escaping the Attention Economy*,

Human: Notes on an Archeology of design questions the role of object in shaping, and to some extent being humanity; note number seven, Good Design is an Anesthetic, developed the modernist association between smooth surfaces and the moral dimension of design, one of profound consent: "The goal of reducing functional, economic, and social friction is indistinguishable from a frictionless aesthetic". Taking as a motto the word-game ethic-aesthetic, anesthetic, Colomina and Wigley trace a narrative in which good design (which renders its users into good people) becomes uncritically good (it allows people to cope with situations of inequality and crisis. Anesthetic design would be perfectly exemplified by the Eameses Case-Study House:

"...the postwar house is for the Eameses no longer just glass and steel where you cannot leave any traces, as in the post-World War I house. The steel and glass is just the frame to accommodate a galaxy of objects that define a new lifestyle: "The house must make no insistent demands for itself, but rather aid as a background for life in work... and as a reorientator and 'shock absorber. 'The interior becomes a showroom full of objects'"⁶

Tough Colomina and Wigley's interpretation, like Gaetano Pesce's

6 Beatriz Colomina, Mark Wigley, *Are We Human: Notes Towards an Archeology of Design* (Istanbul: Lars Muller Publishers, 2015).

environment which implied objectlessness as awareness, share some amount of truth, they seem to miss other aspects of the object, which this investigation revealed. By negating the object, Ettore Sottsass, Gianantonio Mari, Superstudio, and Gaetano Pesce sought to deny the inherent formation of value by architects—architecture suffering from a Midas-like curse—yet, at each stage, the denial of objects led to a destruction of meaning, agency, memory and other qualities associated with what we consider to be home. The intrinsic link between value and care was evidenced in Ambasz quotation of the Little Prince at the design program:

‘You become responsible, forever, for what you have domesticated.’

‘What does that mean — “domesticated”?’

‘It is an act too often neglected. It means to establish bonds.’⁷

The attempt to refuse value in the Italian environments often resulted in an elimination of bonds. Plastic, the eternal material of Sottsass Modules, became precisely in reason of its durability and dullness, the leading image of garbage. The ability to make meaningless

7 Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, cited in Ambasz, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, 10.

but durable materials is behind disposability. The aesthetic of curves without screws and seamless unions which defined Joe Colombo's habitat lies behind the planned obsolescence of many contemporary items. The digital connectivity sought after by Superstudio and Ugo La Pietra blurred boundaries between office and home. The digital nomad became a reality. Yet more than a person without status symbols, he has become the ideal consumer.

A possible recovery of objects by contemporary architecture will inevitably fall, to some extent, on the benjaminian theater and on the creation of some kind of value, those seem currently necessary⁸. Odell makes a useful comparison between the new-nomad burnout and the dock-workers of the early twentieth century: tasked with loading or unloading ships whose schedules were unknown, they were kept on a constant state of possible demand—their work-shifts could be either two or twelve hours a day. The theater of the Benjamin's bourgeois home, recovered by the Eames and Aulenti, is essential for a removal of endless present, one which La Pietra's, Pesce's, Superstudio's, Mari's

8 Giorgio Amgambem, "What is the Contemporary", *Nudities* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011) 13-15.

and Sottsass's environments would not allow. Architects may renew its radicality by considering the design of those spaces of strike—removals from objectlessness which embrace time and care, instead of the endless consumption of the new. New attics, and modes of circulation need not refuse present technologies. At *Oscar Niemeyer's Copan*, a building-megastructure of 5000 residents, a facebook group allows for the circulation of objects within the megastructure. Beds and chairs which travel through apartments in a digital network which retain a sense of memory and place. The city may exchange its underground garage's for basements, become rebuilders...

The relevance of objects, collections and accumulation which comes to fore in this investigation may be used in the design of, if not a political statement, an architectural politics with its necessary amount of negotiation. Avant-gardes may still be necessary as Catharine Rossi claims, but the new ones—unlike futurists, modernists and to some extent the Radical—must be able to incorporate context, dialogue, past, and identity; An utopia of objects might help us with that.



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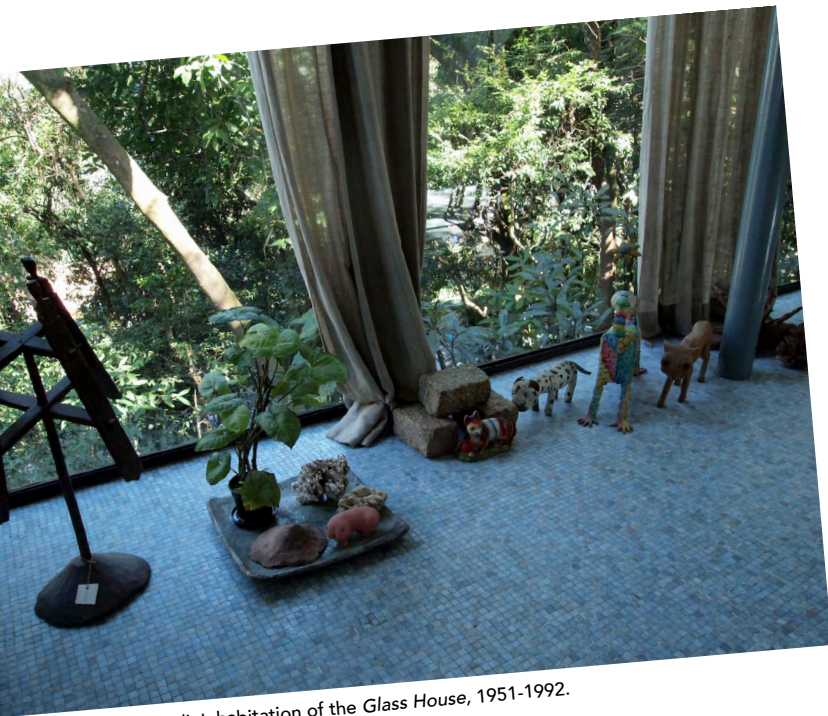
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Joe Colombo

Italian, 1930–1971 • [Follow](#)



Joe Colombo saw himself as a "creator of the environment of the future." During the forward-looking 1960s—against the backdrop of the space race and Pop Art—the Italian industrial designer sought to create design solutions through the use of new materials and curvaceous, functional forms. He used his family's factory to conduct experiments in cutting-edge plastics such as fiberglass, ABS, PVC, and polyethylene, with the goal of creating furniture for mass production. In addition to new materials, he also explored ideas of self-assembly, in pieces such as modular tube furniture that could be arranged according to the users' wishes. His breakthrough piece, the adjustable *Universale* chair, was developed in collaboration with Kartell between 1965 and 1967 and is considered the first chair to be molded from a single material.

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