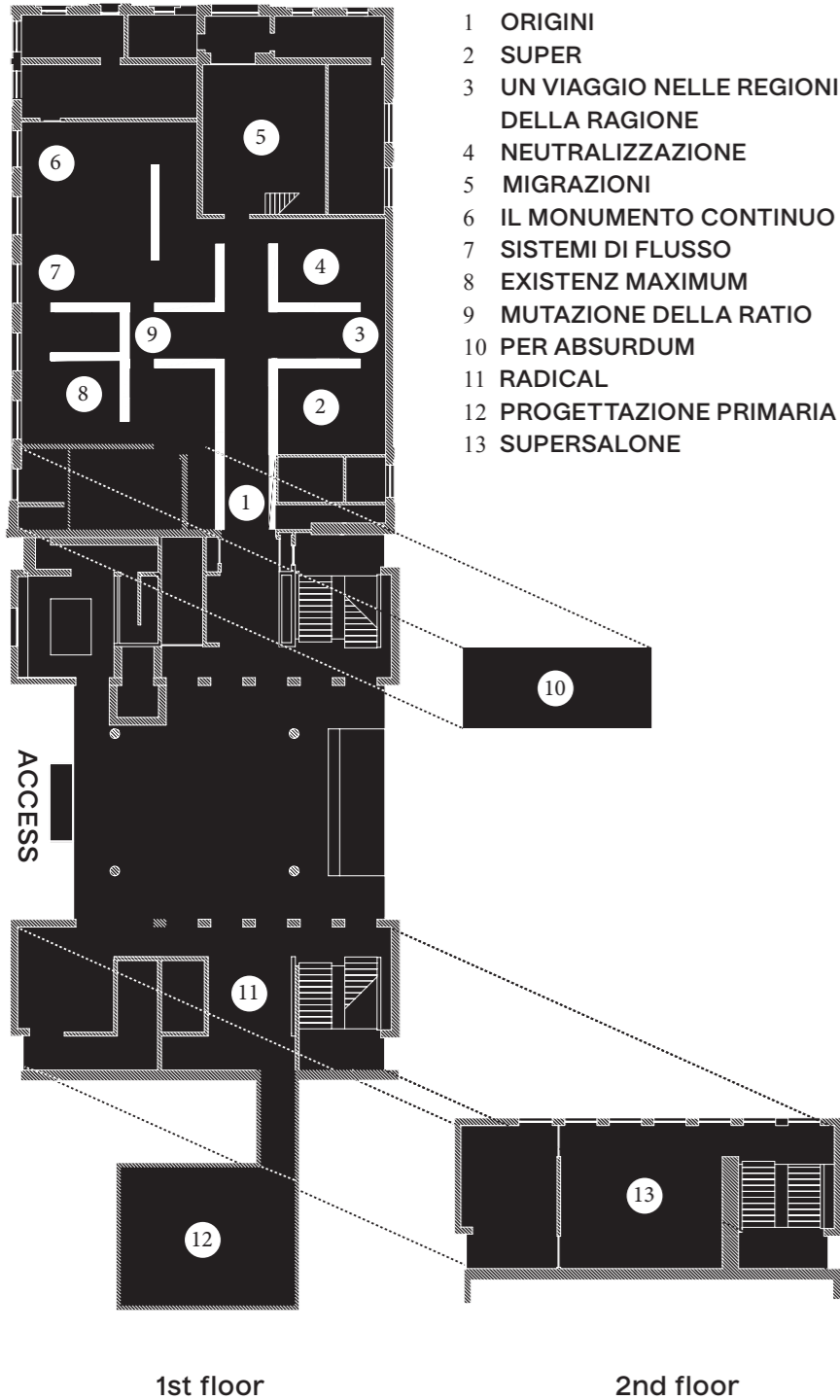


C I.II.III.IV. A

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SUPERSTUDIO MIGRAZIONI

(30.10.2020 – 24.01.2021)

SUPERSTUDIO
Adolfo Natalini
Cristiano Toraldo Di Francia
Roberto Magris
Gian Piero Frassinelli
Alessandro Magris
Alessandro Poli

CURATOR
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In dialogue with Cédric Libert

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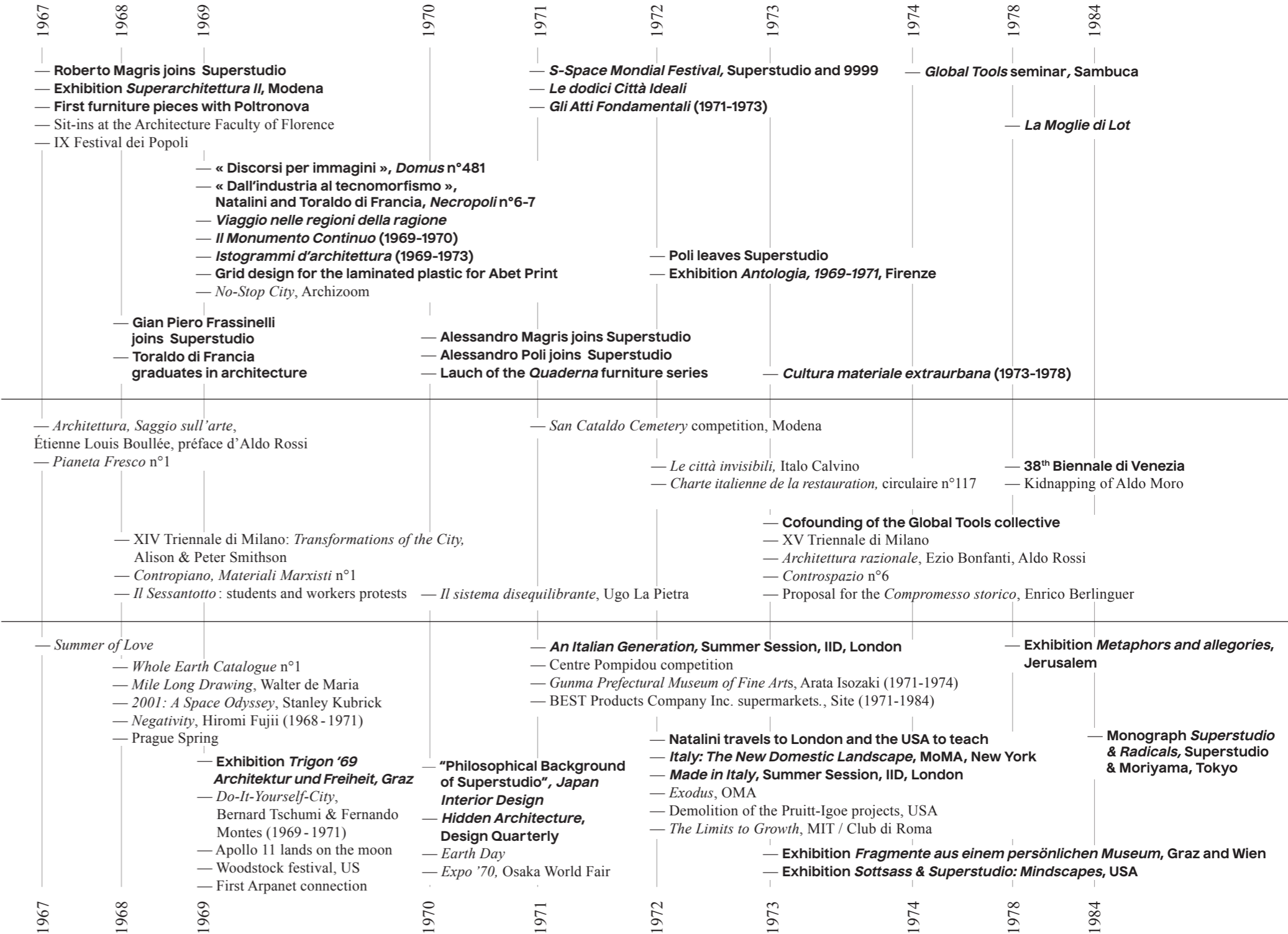
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C I.II.III.IV. A

SUPERSTUDIO
MIGRAZIONI

30.10.20 — 24.01.21

SPECIAL THANKS

*This exhibition is dedicated
to the memory of Adolfo Natalini
and Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, founders
of Superstudio, and to their travel companions,
Roberto Magris and Alessandro Magris.*

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SUPERSTUDIO

Adolfo Natalini

(1941 – 2020)

Cristiano Toraldo di Francia

(1941 – 2019)

Roberto Magris

(1935 – 2003)

Gian Piero Frassinelli

(1939)

Alessandro Magris

(1941 – 2010)

Alessandro Poli

(1941)

*Superstudio collaborated with Frances Brunton,
Marianne Burkhalter, Carlo Chiappi, Frances Lansing,
and Ali Navai, among others.*



SUL FATTO CHE
IL MONDO SIA
TONDO E CHE
ROTOLI PARE CHE
NON CI SIA PIÙ
DA DISCUTERE.
DA DISCUTERE
INVECE C'È
ANCORA SUL
COME VIVERCI
SOPRA.

*It seems that the fact that the world is round and that it rolls is not up for debate anymore.
What is up for debate, instead, is how to live on it.*

INTRODUCTION	ORIGINI
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UN VIAGGIO NELLE REGIONI DELLA RAGIONE	NEUTRALIZZAZIONE
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AGITAZIONE
SIMBOLI
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INTRODUCTION

Beginning in 1966, the adventure of the avant-garde group Superstudio led its members to speculate on ways of inhabiting this 'round and rolling' world. In an era of profound cultural and political change, the generation of radical Florentine architects (Archizoom, 9999, UFO, etc.) to which the group belonged pushed architecture to its limits. Progressively freeing itself from constructive imperatives, the architecture of Superstudio became an environment, expanding to a global and then interplanetary level while remaining concentrated in the design object, film, narrative and image.

The exhibition takes its title from a drawing of a flock of birds made in 1969. Reduced to an abstract punctuation, this flight sheds light on the search for a 'unique design' with which Superstudio is generally associated. Behind the theoretical coherence, *Superstudio Migrazioni* explores the many paths the group takes in inventing an architecture – one that is profoundly attuned to a world increasingly driven by capitalist forces and technological change. To question this work through the prism of migration adheres to Superstudio's own definition of its architecture: an activity of continuous production, development and transmission of ideas – an activity both cerebral and symbolic. Like these birds, it appears caught in perpetual motion, organising on wind rather than land, open to imagination rather than confined by walls.

The exhibition is an invitation to follow the migrations of Superstudio until its progressive dissolution at the turn of the 1980s. This trajectory, which escapes the established

disciplines, is presented chronologically and thematically through an exceptional collection of original works lent by the Pompidou Centre in particular. In it, conceptual production, continuous design, and construction activity appear inextricably linked. The works and documents taken from the group's archives present the sources of this collective production process, revealing the intertwining of the individual journeys of its members.

From Florence, the Superstudio projects travelled around the increasingly globalized world that they portray in a critical and excessive manner. Their visions of a continuous monument architectural model, of a nomadic humanity, and of dark ideal cities earned recognition on the international architectural stage, which in turn allowed them to establish a dialogue between its protagonists, from London to Tokyo. Today, they continue to fuel the architectural and artistic imagination, and 50 years later, strike surprising resonances with the contemporary world.

*The exhibition is dedicated
to the memory of Adolfo Natalini
and Cristiano Toraldo di Francia,
founders of Superstudio,
and to that of their travel companions
Roberto Magris and Alessandro Magris.*

KEY DATES

- NOVEMBER 1966 Flooding of Florence.
- DECEMBER 1966 Adolfo Natalini, architect, and Cristiano Toraldo di Francia found Superstudio, Piazza di Bellosguardo.
..... *Superarchitettura* exhibition with the Archizoom group.
- 1967 Roberto Magris, industrial designer, joins Superstudio.
..... Collaboration with the furniture company Poltronova begins.
..... *Superarchitettura II* exhibition.
- 1968 Gian Piero Frassinelli, architect, joins Superstudio.
..... Toraldo di Francia qualifies as an architect.
- 1969 *Un viaggio nelle regioni della ragione*, is the first storyboard produced by the group.
..... Production of the first plastic laminate with the grid motif, by the Abet Print company.
..... Design of the *Monumento Continuo*, for the trinational exhibition *Trigon '69* in Graz.
- 1970 Architecture graduates Alessandro Magris, brother of Roberto Magris, and Alessandro Poli join Superstudio.
..... Marketing of the *Quaderna* furniture series.
- 1972 Natalini spends a year in London and the United States, teaching and lecturing.
..... Superstudio moves Via delle Mantellate.
..... Superstudio is exhibited at *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* at the MoMA (New York).
..... Poli leaves the group.
- 1973 Natalini begins teaching at the Faculty of Architecture in Florence, for 5 years, in collaboration with Toraldo di Francia, Frassinelli and Poli.
..... Toraldo di Francia begins teaching in the United States.
..... First monographic exhibition *Fragmente aus einem persönlichen Museum*, in Graz and Vienna.
..... Reorganisation and strengthening of the professional activity and individual projects.
- 1978 Exhibition at the 38th Venice Biennale.
- 1982 Publication of the first monograph dedicated to the group, *Superstudio & Radicals*, in Japan.

ORIGINI

1

Adolfo Natalini and Cristiano Toraldo di Francia meet at the Florence Faculty of Architecture. Their training years are marked by artistic experiences and activism, fuelled by a desire to reinvent society and the architectural discipline – a desire shared by the generation of students who later form the Florentine avant-garde. Influenced by counterculture, art and pop, Natalini and Toraldo di Francia together create Superstudio, initially as a collective (1966). As with music groups, they dissolve their individualities behind a name with international connotations, as Archizoom, UFO and 9999 will also do. Superstudio retains this attitude throughout its existence, systematically putting a collective signature to its activities – the interests, references and know-how of each member are hybridized within a rich and complex work.

ANTE-SUPERSTUDIO

During his studies (1959-1966), Natalini pursues a career as a painter within the *Scuola di Pistoia* that brings together representatives of Italian Pop art. Influenced by British artists, he copies large format photographs in bright colours.

Until obtaining his diploma (1968), Toraldo di Francia works as a professional photographer making advertising campaigns. He becomes particularly interested in the portrait, for which he adopts a cinematographic approach, utilizing a process of cropping and framing. He becomes the Superstudio photographer.

Natalini and Toraldo di Francia found Superstudio in 1966; the following year they are joined by Roberto Magris. An industrial designer, graphic artist and author of numerous patents, Magris begins his architecture studies after joining Superstudio. Gian Piero Frassinelli, whom they met at university and who joins the group in 1968, develops an interest in cultural anthropology that he explores in his final year project.

CITTÀ ESTRUSA

“It is the hippogriff, large and strange bird”: taken from the epic poem *L’Orlando Furioso*, the motto of this project reflects its hybrid nature. At a faculty in turmoil, thriving with activity, Toraldo di Francia and three future members of Archizoom (A. Branzi, G. Corretti, M. Morozzi) present a multidisciplinary project combining technical drawings, comic strips, models and music. While it shakes up disciplinary conformism, above all it expresses the political positions of these militant students who are close to Operaismo, an Italian dissident current of Marxist thought. In this project, the city is seen as an assembly and production line, as an expression of the rational logic of capitalism that organizes the territory and life as a whole. Seeking to give material form to these underlying ideologies, the group proposes ‘research temples’ and ‘projecting machines’ as monumental and quasi-mythological mechanisms of this allegorical project.

SOURCES

AGITAZIONE

SIMBOLI

RATIO

MONDO

AGITAZIONE

In the 1960s, Italy is a theatre of political and cultural unrest. In 1963 the Florence Faculty of Architecture is occupied by the student movement of which Toraldo di Francia and future members of the Archizoom group are part. This movement is close to Operaismo, a current propagated in the journals of the extra-parliamentary left (Contropiano, Quaderni Rossi) which advocates an approach to workers' struggles based on a rereading of Marxism. Students call for the academy to be opened up to reflect the social changes and artistic experimentations of the time. Professors in Florence, the architects Leonardo Ricci and Leonardo Savioli, and the semiologist Umberto Eco support a critical approach to contemporary subjects like factories and night clubs, pushing for the inclusion of cultural and media strategies in the project. In November 1966, Florence is devastated by a flood that transforms the city into a liquid surface from which the domes and steeples of the classical monuments emerge. The future members of Superstudio, who participate in actions to save the patrimony, interpret this episode metaphorically as the terminal crisis of modern reason. A month later, Natalini and Toraldo di Francia found Superstudio.

SOURCES

SIMBOLI

Superstudio's members study history under the guidance of Leonardo Benevolo. Taking modern architecture as the point of departure, Benevolo places the discipline in the wider context of social and technological change since the Industrial Revolution. Marked by this approach, Superstudio considers history without inhibitions, as a source of "definitive antiquities" that can be drawn upon to rethink contemporary architecture (the Pyramids alongside the Platonic volumes of the Enlightenment; the Crystal Palace next to launching pads for space shuttles). These buildings share a formal and symbolic complexity that surpasses technical and economic constraints. In common with other designers of the time (Hans Hollein, Ettore Sottsass Jr.), Superstudio seeks to go beyond functionalism by connecting past and present, monument and technology. For Superstudio, architecture must retain its ability to invent symbols, to find expression, and to survive the forces of the contemporary world (urban and constructive development, mechanisation, and development of information technologies).

SOURCES

RATIO

“The recourse to reason is a revolutionary act” wrote Superstudio in 1969. This revolution must serve to liberate human life from the economic rationalism that permeates society. Opposed to an architecture that reinforces the system, Superstudio explores the discipline’s potential to rediscover its dignity by inventing an alternative relationship to life. The pursuit of this unconstrained reason proceeds along paths of metaphysics and fiction (Jorge Luis Borges, Fictions [Ficciones], 1944), navigating between artistic abstraction and the abstraction of a technological world, and seeks clarity in the study of oriental mantras and the Platonic volumes of the Enlightenment. While the nonphysical architecture of Superstudio finds the model of “calm reason, in which acts are measured and precise” in the architecture of Aldo Rossi, it is also in dialogue with the ‘imaginary architecture’ of the Viennese architects (Hans Hollein, Friedrich St. Florian, Raimund Abraham).

SOURCES

MONDO

*From astronomy to the social sciences, Superstudio fuels its vision of the world with the fruits of the latest scientific research. Natalini and Toraldo di Francia's command of English, and the latter's family connections with American academic circles, gives them access to Anglosaxon publications. In addition to events that inspire science fiction, Superstudio takes interest in the changes brought by communication technologies. The group considers these changes from an anthropological perspective, informed by the debates on structuralism that mark the Italy of the 1960s as much as by the personal interest of Frassinelli in non-European 'culture models' (Ruth Benedict, *Modelli di cultura*, 1960). Superstudio expresses criticism of consumer society amidst growing ecological concerns. The group looks in particular to the hypotheses of exponential growth in the first studies of the environmental crisis (*Club of Rome*, 1972). Opposed to an ideal of continuous progress, Superstudio proposes use of the only infinitely available resource: our mental capacities.*

SOURCES

SUPER 2



Superstudio, *Superarchitettura, Pistoia, 1966, Exhibition poster*. Print on paper. Centre Pompidou, Mnam-CCI

Beneath a joyful exterior, the first Superstudio projects (1966-1969) forge a fierce criticism of the lifestyles of the time. In Florence, the 1960s are marked by intellectual and creative emulation, fuelled in particular by the camaraderie between Superstudio and the Archizoom group. Together they invent a *Superarchitettura*, named after their first exhibition-manifesto. The colourful and voluminous design objects (*Passiflora*, 1966-1967 or *Sofa*, 1967-1968), interior designs (*Stanze*, 1966) and competition projects (*Fortezza da Basso*, 1967-1968) respond with tragic irony to the urban reality constructed by capitalist production

and consumption. Deeply ambiguous, this architectural language plays with the signs inherent to it, lying somewhere between the realism of Pop Art and Marxist culture. Superstudio nevertheless quickly distances itself from the revolutionary posture of the other protagonists of the Florentine scene to adopt “poetry and the irrational as method.”

SUPERARCHITETTURA

After graduation, the members of Superstudio and Archizoom organise two successive exhibitions *Superarchitettura*. A genuine programme – both ironic and ambiguous – the *Superarchitettura* is concerned with the production of behaviour: targeting ‘superinduction’ and ‘superconsumption’. In Pistoia (1966), the gallery is transformed into a colourful and spectacular pop environment made of images, for a world of images. In Modena (1967), the exhibition presents study ‘counter-projects’ that translate political and militant positions close to the extra-parliamentary far-left. ‘City-factories’ and megastructures for leisure time explore the extension of the socio-economic model of production and consumption to all areas of life – to the point of absurdity.

NATURA SUPER

The *Superarchitettura* is an architecture for a world in which the objects exist principally in terms of their exchange value. For Superstudio, they are both ‘things and images of things’, and can be transposed across different fields – from furniture to monument, from the natural to the artificial. The design objects that the group develops with the Poltronova company beginning in 1967 possess a strong figurative charge; in a form of ‘Super Nature’, sofas (*Sofa*) and lamps assume the form of waves (*Onda Italiana*), flowers (*Passiflora*) and rainbows. With their bright colours and innovative materials, these objects are like foreign bodies introduced in opposition to bourgeois conventions and forms of progressive modernism.

DESIGN D’EVASIONE

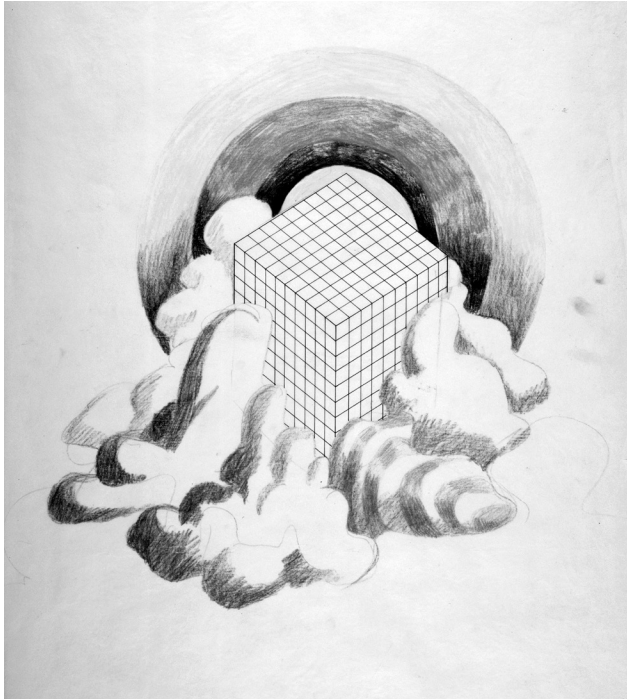
‘Evasion design’ marks a change in direction from the critical approach of their beginnings. In approaching the “problem of living to the fullest” and reintroducing poetry into “horrible everyday life,” Superstudio restores a link between the past (the monument), the present (the image) and the future (the machine). The group borrows its design methods from industrial processes; having become almost mythological symbols of reason, the images (rainbow, cloud) are repeated, assembled and transposed from the domestic space to the scale of the monument (*Fortezza da Basso*, 1967-1968). The historical, ritualistic and rational dimension of these projects aims to generate the creative participation of its users and reaffirm the ‘dignity’ of architecture.

**MA IL VIAGGIO
NON È ANCORA
FINITO...
RIUSCIRANNO
I NOSTRI EROI
A RITROVARE
L'ARCHITETTURA
MISTERIOSAMENTE
SCOMPARSA?**

*But the journey is not yet at an end... will our heroes succeed in rediscovering
the architecture that has mysteriously disappeared?*

UN VIAGGIO NELLE REGIONI DELLA RAGIONE

3



Superstudio, *Untitled*, 1968. Oil pastels and China ink on tracing paper. Centre Pompidou, Mnam-CCI

With *Un viaggio nelle regioni della ragione* (Journey to the Realm of Reason, 1969), Superstudio embarks on a regeneration of architecture, including its previous experiences in a narrative that combines drawings and text for the first time. The cube, rainbow, cloud, ziggurat and wave already feature in the *Tavola sinottica* (Synoptic table, 1968) as primary elements in the periodic table. Here they are articulated and put in motion on a journey through the “drive-in architecture museum,” followed by an acceleration, a “voyage by plane with a dangerous landing.” This allegorical voyage represents that of architecture, a discipline that the

group wishes to free from everyday reality and resituate in conceptual territory. It is also the personal voyage of Superstudio, whose members are represented in a photomontage en route to the ‘radiant perspectives’ of invention.

NEUTRALIZZAZIONE

4



Superstudio, *Un catalogo di ville, 1968–1970, Villa suburbana A3, Casa a due piani assai movimentata, 1968.* Collage, black and white photography, print on paper. Centre Pompidou, Mnam-CCI

Roberto Magris' involvement in conjunction with Gian Piero Frassinelli's arrival enable Superstudio to formalise in structure and take on more projects. Public buildings (Competition for the Italian pavilion at 1970 Osaka World Exhibition, Expo '70, 1968), town planning, villas, collective housing and factories become opportunities to develop an original language that intersects with their theoretical research. "Reason has reaffirmed its position and is giving us news": for Superstudio, architecture must free itself from history through its own rationality, one that lies somewhere between an avant-garde technology and archaic order. Rejecting

the unshakeable faith in the machine that characterised modernity, the group seeks a symbolic dimension of technology in networks, systems and programmes. In this, Superstudio projects a powerful mythology that it embodies in a series of neutral and absolute figures that are controllable and measurable – and freed from all functionality.

LA SUPERFICIE NEUTRA

In 1969, the company Abet Print consults Superstudio (as well as Archizoom and Ettore Sottsass Jr.) for a study of bicoloured motifs for screen printing on laminated plastic that is used to cover furniture. At the same time, the group reflects on the neutralisation of all plastic expression as a means of lending a timeless dimension to architecture. Among other geometric motifs, Superstudio proposes a grid, to be expressed in several colours – a reference to conceptual art just as much as to the ceramic tiles that the group employs for certain facades. As a counterpoint, a motif taken from the flight of birds (*Migrazione*, 1969) seems to set this fixed order in motion, highlighting its fluid and universal nature.

TECNOMORFISMO

In the text *Dall'industria al tecnomorfismo* (From industry to technomorphism, 1969), Superstudio develops the notion of *technomorphic architecture* “in the image of the machine.” This architecture affirms the primacy of technology, recognising both its functional dimension as a tool, and its symbolic power as a contemporary myth. Information technology, still in its infancy, promises a total reorganisation of the environment. For Superstudio, life would then be lived in ‘artificial paradises’ (*Una macchina per vacanze*, 1967) within hermetic, immobile and shiny volumes. This notion guides the competition projects and takes shape in a study of the building shell (Factory Giovannetti, 1969-1971), the homogeneity of which is obtained through the use of ceramic or black granite tiles.

ARCHITETTURE NASCOSTE

The search for an architecture of rigour does not mean that ‘evasion design’ must be abandoned. These two opposing modes are equally valid, as demonstrated by the ‘hidden architectures’, a series of interior designs created inside historical buildings. Black ceramics, pink plastic (*Domitilla* shop, 1968), red vinyl, neon, moquette and mirrors create sensual environments with a poetic function. While Superstudio makes the interior a space for stimulation and liberty (night club *Mach 2*, 1968), it also contains a hidden field for experimenting with the reality of the profession. These projects, the work of Roberto Magris in particular, bring financial security for the studio.

UN CATALOGO DI VILLE

Beginning in 1968, Superstudio receives a series of orders to build villas. Drawing on modern references, the group applies rational principles to each of the projects. However, it seeks to go beyond functionalism through an abstract and free treatment of simple volumes, consisting of an architecture of rigour (ceramic tiles) and a core of services. Announcing that “the design of a villa is a non-existent problem” already resolved by modern architecture, Superstudio brings together its projects in the form of a catalogue of typologies (villa by the sea, in the mountains, large Italian villas, etc.). Each project is treated as part of an ‘architecture system’ which leads to serial rather than individualised design.

MIGRAZIONI

5



Superstudio, *Adolfo Natalini presents Superstudio : The Last Supper*, 1971. Poster, print on paper. Centre Pompidou, Mnam-CCI

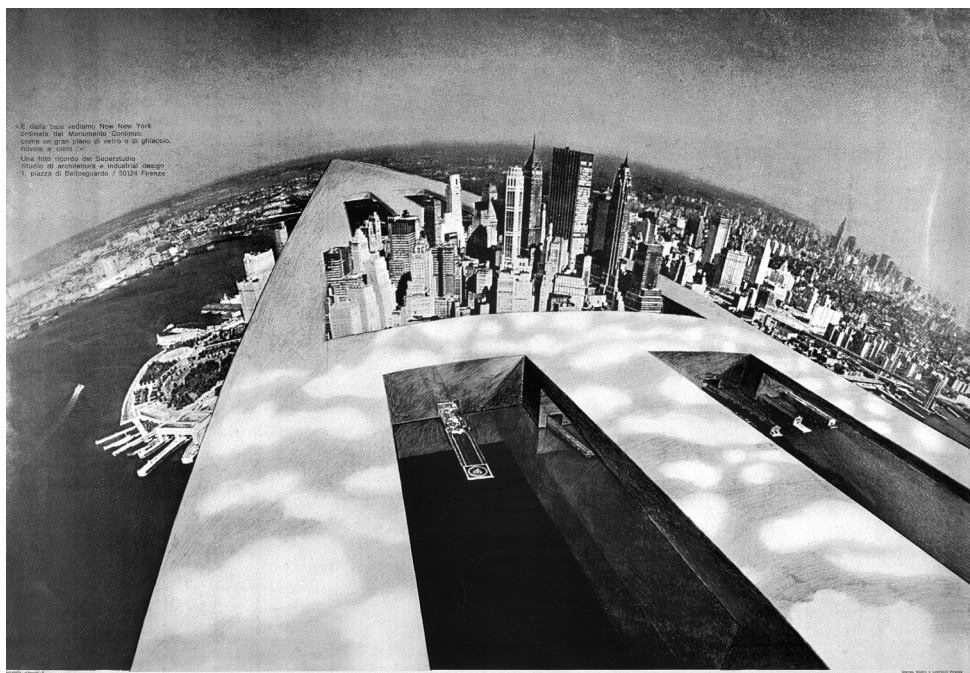
During the 20th century, the architectural debate progressively opened up beyond national borders. The post-WWII world saw a sharp increase in exhibitions, journals, congresses and educational initiatives that facilitated the mobility of people and the dissemination of ideas. The so-called experimental or visionary architects and groups, who emerged as a reaction against the generalized Postwar functionalism, participated extensively in international exchanges and the mediatisation of their thought and research. In addition to its ability to conceptualise cultural and anthropological changes at the global level, the group participates fully in this global sphere of exchange.

One year after their first photomontage (*Superstudio vi augura un anno di saggezza e di pace*, 1968), Superstudio publishes the perspectives of the *Monumento Continuo* (1969-1970). More than a reflection on representation, the ‘discourse in images’ that the group proposes is indissociable from the conceptual dimension of their work. Superstudio adopts a mode of emblematic representation of the modern movement that is in vogue within the visionary architectural circles of the 1960s: photocollage. Rejecting the generally-sought realism, it plays on ambiguity by developing a ‘disegno dal falso’ (a wordplay that could be translated as ‘design against nature’). For these montages, the group plays with the naturalist perspective, which implies a perceiving subject, to present projects that are nevertheless abstract (*Piazza Navona*, 1969). The artistic sensibility of Natalini and Toraldo di Francia and Frassinelli’s knowledge of prospective design enables them to perfect their techniques – such as incrustation, the line drawn on the photograph itself, reflections or the inclusion of figures – in response to the concepts explored in the projects. The images will progressively lose their autonomy to be conceived in relation to the texts. The fruit of a patient collecting of photographs in the press, the photomontages are designed to be printed in magazines and then in lithographs and on posters. The images circulate widely and bring Superstudio international recognition. Their visual plastic force, comparable to that of advertising, gained the group critical acceptance but also partially concealed the complexity of their work in the subsequent decades.

The visionary aspect of the plastic beauty of Superstudio projects results in them being shared beyond the borders of Italy: they are exhibited in Austria in 1969 and published in Japan in 1970. The group gives conferences and teaches in the United Kingdom and the United States, where Natalini spends a year (1971-1972), later joined by Toraldo di Francia. The participation at the Summer School of the International Institute of Design (London, 1971 and 1972) is the occasion for numerous meetings; the exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* at the MoMA (1972) also helps disseminate the group’s work. These migrations create opportunities for historic debates and forge new friendships.

IL MONUMENTO CONTINUO

6



Superstudio, *Il Monumento Continuo*, 1969–1970, *New New York*. Collages, print, pen and coloured pencils on paper. Centre Pompidou, Mnam-CCI

The Monumento Continuo-project that Superstudio developed in the space of a few months for the *Trigon 69, Architektur und Freiheit* (Architecture and Freedom) trinational biennial in Graz (1969) embodies perfectly the search for pure architectural reason. On an Earth unified by prevailing technology, the group proposes extending the previously studied motif of the grid to the territory as a whole. For Superstudio, this project embodies a *natura naturata*, a world in which the different fields are unified by this ‘unique design’, the image of reason. From the Sahara Desert to Monument Valley, from Florence to New York, across highways and meridians, the Monument

confronts the city and its geography, the built and the geological. The initial hypotheses on interior functioning give way to photomontages, revealing the “logical beauty” of the Monument. These perspectives depict a monolithic and impenetrable architecture that sits between technology, the sacred and utilitarianism.

DISEGNO TRASCENDENTALE

Seeking a refounding of the symbolic functions of architecture, Superstudio makes of its *Monumento Continuo* the definitive embodiment of the 'cosmic order' on earth. Images of historic precedents that possess the same sacred dimension accompany the project's first photomontages; Stonehenge and the Kaaba feature alongside the Vertical Assembly Building. The Monument surpasses them through the symbolic power of its 'unique design' that, immobile, orders the whole world. For Superstudio, the ultimate manifestation of life guided by reason consists of tracing a white line in the desert; it is therefore here that we see the emergence of the Monument (*Nel deserto del Sahara*).

URBANIZZAZIONE TOTALE

Postwar Italy saw mass industrialisation and urbanisation, giving rise to debates on the planning of the 'city-territory'. To counter the proliferation of the diffuse and 'amorphous urban fabric', Superstudio imagines the 'wall of Florence' enclosing the city, again becoming a virgin plain from which only the classical monuments emerge. In addition to modern references of linear cities, the group cites road networks as models of its 'viaduct architecture'. The *Monumento Continuo* proposes a new kind of agglomeration; it opposes the historical anchoring of the city by extending its grid to the entire globe, and condenses the productive functions of the territory within its compact mass.

METAFORA

Beyond the plain of Florence, the *Monumento Continuo* operates a series of other 'restorations', prolonging the Palazzo Pitti or replacing the Athens Erechtheion. The confrontation with exceptional buildings is a test to the logical rigour of the Monument, culminating in the scenario that Superstudio imagines for New York, the paragon of the modern metropolis. The Monument conquers the city, covering the American territorial grid with its own grid, to the point where Manhattan is totally swallowed up by *New New York*. Its initial linearity gives way to a grand plan, an extensive surface at the heart of which all that remains is a 'pile of skyscrapers' as the vestiges of a chaotic age.

MEDITAZIONE SULLA MISURA

At the *Trigon 69* exhibition, Superstudio presents the *Grazerzimmer*. This *Graz Room* is a prismatic white volume situated at the top of a green inclined surface designated for the display of other works. In a series of studies for the installation, the group initially envisages producing an illusion of a continuous development of the Monument with mirrors. The final object, with all its faces covered with plastic-laminated tiles and a grid motif, does not, in fact, represent the project. It is instead an invitation to contemplate the essence, the 'unique design' that is transposed while remaining true to itself. This room is the place for the intimate and spiritual experience of a 'meditation on measure'.

SISTEMI DI FLUSSO

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Superstudio, *Istogrammi d'architettura*, 1969–1973, axonometry, 1969. Collage and print on cardboard. Centre Pompidou, Mnam-CCI

At the beginning of the 1970s, Superstudio continues its criticism of superproduction and superconsumption far from the pop tonalities of its beginnings. The resistance to this system that embraces the whole of life now involves the destruction of the object. The group now seeks to neutralise the significations that determine use: the ‘cold beauty’ of their objects must not impose any message but open up a plurality of creative manipulations for the user. This motif becomes the means for a refounding: from the monument to furniture (*Misura* series, 1969-1972), the grid becomes a “network transposable to different zones,

to different scales for the construction of a serene and immobile nature with which one can identify.” For this unified world, the group develops an architecture that is progressively less physical, described as a ‘flux system’ generated by a number of quantitative operations (*Istogrammi d'architettura*, 1969-1973). Without foundations, the different components must accompany a life free of formal structures.

The *Catalogo degli Istogrammi d'Architettura* (Catalogue of Architecture Histograms, 1970) brings together a series of squat volumes, covered in the grid motif at intervals of 3 cm, centre to centre. These elements must be generated effortlessly by a logical and automated process of multiplication, increase and filling that Superstudio would subsequently describe as the action of 'knitting space'. Presented as three-dimensional diagrams, the *Histograms* are also known as *Le Tombe degli Architetti* (Architects' Tombs); they replace the creator's individual expression by purely quantitative processing. Neutral and without foundation, they are meant to be used, as in the case of *A Place to Sleep* (1969).

LA DISTRUZIONE DELL'OGGETTO

While a single *Histogram* was being realised, the process of automated generation from the grid is extended to the design of tablecloths, jewellery and furniture, including the self-issued *Misura* (1969) series that was subsequently produced by the company Zanotta (*Quaderna*, 1970-1971). In consideration of design as limited to perpetuating the dominant culture, and being unable to resolve the problem of living, Superstudio adopts a reductive strategy that incorporates a metamorphosis and then reconstruction of the object. The simple forms of tables, consoles and benches are offset by the Platonic volumes as lamps (*Misura L* series, 1971). Cubes, pyramids and spheres connect these commonplace objects to the rationality of the Enlightenment, conferring upon them a sacred and magical dimension.

For the issue on conceptual architecture in the US journal *Design Quarterly*, Superstudio imagines a 'hidden architecture'. The group publishes a series of photographs of an operation carried out at their office under the control of a bailiff. They make copies of the project documents, place the copies in a sealed box, destroy the originals, and then undertake to never reveal the content. This gesture resonates as a rejection of the system of architectural promotion; it also resonates as an affirmation of a nonphysical architecture which is 'solely an image of itself', and whose mutism resists all rehabilitation.

ORNAMENTUM MUNDI

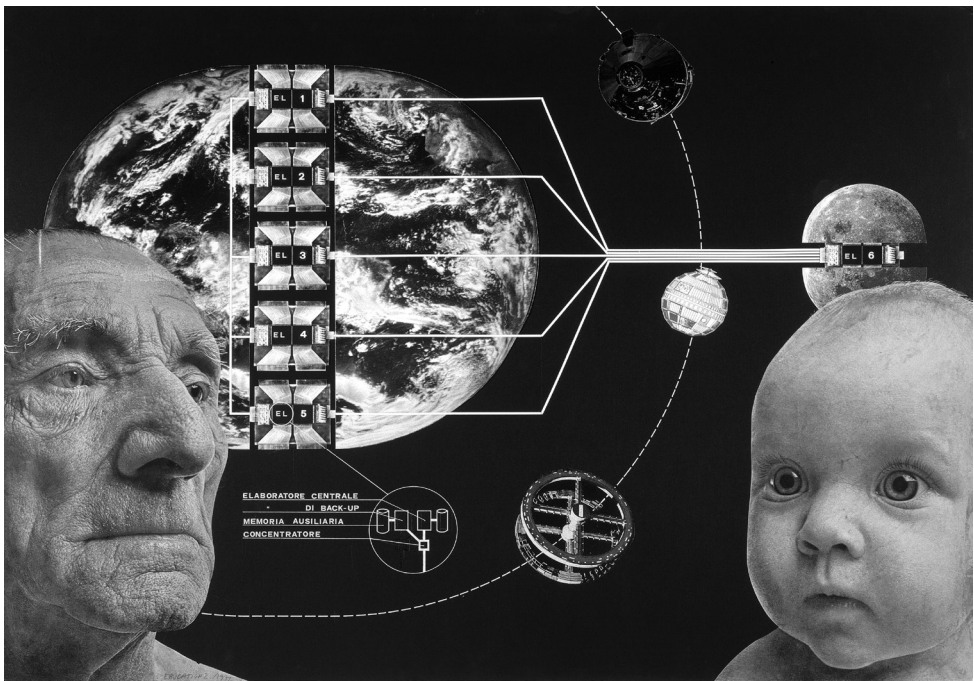
Combining its political criticism with Eastern philosophy, Superstudio imagines a world free of formal structures: the natural and the built, the geographical and historical elements converge in a 'serene nature'. In such a world, the grid would extend virtually to all living creatures and things to provide man with a means for measure and meditative confrontation with this fluid world (*Prototipi per oggetti misuratori*, 1970). Having become nonphysical, architecture is then built with reflections: 'vertical waters' and clouds (*Architettura riflessa*, 1970-1971) 'decorate the earth'. Superstudio imagines mirror-prisms able to reproduce images of a world of artificial beauty, from the fields of Tuscany to Graz to Niagara.

**... UN'
ARCHITETTURA
CHE EVITA GLI
SPRECHI DELLA
RAGIONE.
E A OGNI FINE
PROVVISORIA
C'È ANCORA UN
ARCOBALENO.**

*... An architecture that avoids the wastes of reason.
And at each provisional end one finds once again a rainbow.*

EXISTENZ MAXIMUM

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Superstudio, *Gli Atti Fondamentali, Educazione, 1971–1972, Progetto 1, 1971*. Collages and white gouache on black cardboard. Centre Pompidou, Mnam-CCI

Synchronous with its construction activity, Superstudio pursues its exploration of architecture as the production of alternative lifestyles. Noting that the sole force for the transformation of the world during the 20th century was the progressive elimination of formal structures, the group imagines the emergence of a new ‘natural state’ freed from work in which elementary needs would be met. Superstudio aims at the anthropological and philosophical refounding of architecture that must now concern itself with ‘fundamental acts’: life, education, ceremony, love and death (*Atti fondamentali, 1971-1973*). In opposition to the modernist idea

of a vital minimum, or *Existenzminimum*, the group proposes an ‘Existenzmaximum’ within which life and architecture would fully coincide. Drawing inspiration from the latest scientific, technical and environmental research, Superstudio imagines controlling the environment without three-dimensional means (*Supersuperficie, 1971-1972*): the grid becomes an energy and information network in which a continuously migrating humanity evolves, reconnected to rites and myths.

SUPERSUPERFICIE

The Superstudio grid continues its territorial extension. From the simple motif, it becomes a means for total control of the environment. The group imagines its *Supersuperficie* as an invisible and continuous network, its intersections operating as thermal regulators and universal sockets (*Microenvironment*, 1972), distributing what is essential to satisfy primary needs (air, water, food, light, information) through simple connections. They must also permit new symbioses by means of the connection of individuals amongst them and to central memories. In this synthetic nature, the city abandons its built form: it is now defined purely by spontaneous and temporary groupings of a nomadic humanity, free in its movements and relations.

ATTI FONDAMENTALI

The *Supersuperficie* (Supersurface) becomes the vital support for the fundamental acts to which Superstudio dedicates five stories. Collages, tales, storyboards and films portray the renewed relations with the intellect, love, the body, and the spiritual. The group sees architecture as being concerned with the way knowledge regulates and liberates life. The total and objective transmission of experiences by means of a universal system of information exchange (*Educazione*, 1971-1972) opens the door to a conscious life – conscious of the futility of design, of our codified relations with authority (*Cerimonia*, 1972), of the permanence of memory beyond biological existence (*Morte*, 1971-1973). This project reveals a more intimate questioning by the group members. “Our architecture alone will be our life,” they proclaim, dedicating these stories to the children of Natalini, Frassinelli and Magris, and to “all those who will inherit the earth with them.”

PER ABSURDUM

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Superstudio, *Le dodici Città Ideali*, 1971, *La Prima città: Città 2000t*. Print, collages, China ink, graphite and gouache on paper. Centre Pompidou, Mnam-CCI

Excessive and aberrant images run throughout Superstudio's work, from the pop exuberance of its beginnings to the rigour of the grid and visions of anti-naturalist futures. This projection by the absurd (*Per absurdum*) is tinged with a certain ambiguity between the positive celebration of absolute reason and a ferocious criticism of power systems. At the beginning of the 1970s, Superstudio lays claim to the absurd as a means of nonviolent action, a 'guerilla method', able to throw the dominant culture and the world images it projects into crisis. The group pushes existing reasonings and conditions to the point of excess – urban, scientific (*L'architettura*

interplanetaria, 1970-1971), technological, political and anthropological – to reveal 'falsity and immorality'. Combining text and image, the group describes the visions produced as anti-utopian. Horror and the absurd must produce an awakening for the reader (*Le dodici Città Ideali*, 1972), and ultimately their salvation.

LE DODICI CITTÀ IDEALI

Initiated by Gian Piero Frassinelli, the *Twelve Ideal Cities* project operates as an internal criticism. Adopting a prophetic tone, it seeks to clarify the ambiguity of the *Monumento Continuo* by announcing the arrival of a time free from doubt and contradiction. They present the function of cities in horrific ‘Cautionary tales for Christmas’ with their mix of detailed descriptions and poetic, technical images. In these cities, life in its entirety is regulated according to continuous production mechanisms, the exponential consumption of resources and even the hormonal control of the inhabitants who are reduced to biochemical processes. Superstudio draws up a final test that reveals the project’s true intentions. In it, the reader is described as a ‘zombie’ or ‘idiot’, depending on whether they are for or against the creation of such cities, thereby failing to understand that what they describe is the world as it actually exists. Widely published, this project contributed to the group’s international critical recognition.

SALVATAGGI

“Save to destroy, destroy to save”: Superstudio’s proposed visions of radical transformation of the environment function as metaphoric acts of salvation. With supporting scientific and technical studies, these projects propose reducing the world to earlier urban (*Salvataggi dei centri storici*, 1972) and cosmological (*L’architettura interplanetaria*, 1970-1971) states. Putting into perspective the founding principles of the dominant discourse, these ‘restitutions’ would open up the ironic or fantastic possibility of new life forms.

QUANDO
SI PRODUCEVANO
I PROGETTI E LE
IMMAGINI, GLI SCRITTI
E GLI OGGETTI
DELL' "ARCHITETTURA
RADICALE",
L'ARCHITETTURA
RADICALE NON
ESISTEVA. ORA CHE
QUESTA ETICHETTA
STORICAMENTE
ESISTE,
L'ARCHITETTURA
RADICALE
NON ESISTE PIÙ.

*When we produced projects and images, the writings and objects of "radical architecture",
radical architecture did not exist. Now that this label exists,
radical architecture no longer exists.*

RADICAL

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Superstudio, *Gli Atti Fondamentali, Vita (Supersuperficie)*, 1971–1972, *Frutta e vino*, 1971. Photocollage. Centre Pompidou, Mnam-CCI

Following the exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* (MoMA, 1972), the protagonists of the Florentine avant-garde are grouped under the label of ‘Radical architecture’. The 15th Milan Triennale (1973) is the theatre for the ideological confrontation between this young generation and the *Tendenza* (Tendency) which, centred around Aldo Rossi, celebrates the return of “rational architecture” to a disciplinary order. Superstudio is attacked violently in these debates after its decision to exhibit simultaneously in the international section headed by Rossi and in the section dedicated to industrial design headed by Ettore Sottsass Jr. and Andrea Branzi of the Archizoom group. Revealing the fundamental ambiguity

of Superstudio’s work, this episode marks the point when its members begin to assume their autonomy as they embark on different intellectual journeys.

PROGETTAZIONE PRIMARIA

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Global Tools first workshop, Sambuca, 1974, Angiolino Lepri, Adolfo Natalini, Fabrizio Natalini, Roberto Magris, Gino Lepri and Cristiano Toraldo di Francia. Photography Cristiano Toraldo di Francia. Archivio Adolfo Natalini

In the 1970s, Superstudio continues its criticism of the object and the inability of design to propose alternative models to the existing system. Design 'by the absurd' gives way to a form of realism; it is through the analysis of precapitalist lifestyles, based on the value of labour and objects, that the group tries for the last time to refound architecture. The reinvention of the design activity involves a distancing from the professional system; university teaching (1973-1978) and the self-managed laboratory Global Tools (1973-1975) enable Superstudio to develop their reflections on 'primary design'. The group sees continuous education as a

means for understanding the environment and for reappropriating individual creativity. The study of simple objects, popular and 'extra-urban material cultures' (*La coscienza di Zeno*, 1978), and inspirations from anthropology make it possible to rethink architecture as a part of existence and not as an autonomous discipline.

COSE, CORPO, TERRA

The idea that the refounding of architecture must be based on a global and nonspecialised knowledge of reality is shared by the protagonists of the radical avant-garde behind Global Tools. This ‘antidisciplinary’ group functions as a continuous education laboratory and comes together in seminars at the home of the Magris in Sambuca (1974). At these gatherings, Superstudio engages in a reflection on ‘survival techniques’ that are based on the encyclopaedic study of peasant lifestyles in zones in the process of metropolisation (*Cultura materiale extraurbana*, 1973-1978). Direct experimentation, drawing, and photography make it possible to re-evaluate the relationship “to things, to the body, to the earth,” and to rethink the coincidence between project, construction, use and recycling.

DISSOLUZIONE

At the 1978 Venice Biennale, Superstudio confronts an optimistic attempt at a refounding of the architectural conception (*La coscienza di Zeno*) with a “pessimistic criticism of the architecture destinies.” In the installation *La Moglie di Lot*, a series of salt models are dissolved by a dripping action. This slow process reveals small concealed objects, representing the permanency of the symbolic dimension and the precariousness architectural stereotypes. Pyramid, amphitheatre, cathedral, castle and modernist villa stand exposed in the face of time, like the salt in the water. The last object to appear bears an engraved inscription: “The only architecture will be our life.”

The Superstudio adventure has no precise end. The trajectories begin to diverge

between the 1978 Venice Biennale and the first monography published in 1982, but the collaborations continue beyond these dates. Subsequently, Natalini returns to building architecture by producing a major series of constructions in the Netherlands. In addition to various projects with a focus on interior design, Toraldo di Francia concentrates on teaching. Frassinelli builds, writes and teaches cultural anthropology. Roberto Magris continues his career as architect and industrial designer, with his brother Alessandro. Poli embraces an artistic career. Separated professionally, the members of Superstudio remained in contact after the death of Roberto Magris (2003), of Sandro Magris (2010), and until the recent loss of the two founding members, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia (2019) and Adolfo Natalini (2020).

SUPERSALONE

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This salon invites you to sit for a moment on some of the furniture designed by Superstudio during the first two years of its activity (1966-68). The group designed this furniture for the inhabitant of the modern, capitalist metropolis, a place rooted in images and forged for consumption. The fluid forms, bright colours and innovative materials lend it, ironically, a power of attraction comparable to that of advertising. At the same time, they introduce a poetic dimension to everyday life.

This reissue according to the original designs was achieved in cooperation with Poltronova, whose founder, Sergio Camilli, had taken the risk back in 1966 to produce the experimental objects designed by young Italian architects (Superstudio, Archizoom, etc.).

CIVA

Today Poltronova produces and distributes some of the most experimental objects from its historical catalogue, published from 1957 thanks in particular to the involvement of Ettore Sottsass Jr.

The Superstudio objects such as the Gherpe (1968) and Passiflora (1967) lamps and the Sofo (1968) sofa are key examples of these iconic designs. To quote Adolfo Natalini, Sofo "is a seat to be aligned like a train, to superpose to construct solid coloured mountains (...) it transmits a joy of living as if things arrived from another world." The table T02 (1968), produced briefly at the time of its design, is being relaunched today on the occasion of Superstudio Migrazioni.

Poltronova



