

THE NOSTALGIC SUBJECT AND THE REACTIONARY FIGURE:

ITALIAN ARCHITECTURE IN 1972

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

This thesis considers the works of two divergent architectural movements in Italy in 1972, the Neo-Rationalist *Tendenza* and the revolutionary *Architettura Radicale*, and examines their treatment of the human figure as a means of understanding the strikingly different built environments that were created during the period. The rapidly shifting political, cultural, and socio-psychological milieu in Italy during the years following World War II transformed the meaning of the family unit and the significance of the individual and deeply affected the manner in which architects sought to address the needs of those who inhabited their structures. In Florence the group Superstudio envisioned radical environments that eschewed dominant architectural methodologies in favor of a reductive form of architecture that sought to push capitalistic trends toward their logical and inevitable conclusion. In Milan the architects Aldo Rossi and Carlo Aymonino were constructing the *Monte Amiata* housing project in the Gallarate quarter, a series of structures rooted in the architectonic principles of the past, within which the role of the human figure is a more nebulous concept. The architectural projects conceived in Italy in 1972 represent a paradigm shift with regards to the role of the end-user in the urban environment.

The year 1972 was a critical moment in the development of Italian architecture during the 20th century, witnessing the zenith of both the *Radicale* and *Razionalismo* movements. At the Museum of Modern Art Emilio Ambasz Jr. presented a cross-section of the dominant architectural and design trends present during the late 1960s and early 1970s in the exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, introducing progressive and unfamiliar new concepts, such as those proposed by the *Architettura Radicale*, to the world. Concurrently, the architects Aldo Rossi and Carlo Aymonino, members of the Neo-Rationalist *Tendenza* movement, were in the final stages of constructing the Monte Amiata housing project in the Gallaratese quarter in Milan, a series of structures whose influences could be traced directly to the principles set forth by the *Congres Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) decades earlier and which, as a built form, stood in stark contrast to the conceptual notions postulated by the *Architettura Radicale*. The purpose of this paper will be to examine the works of two divergent architectural trends in Italy, the *Tendenza* and *Architettura Radicale*, in order to make the argument that their treatment of the human figure was informed by radically different socio-psychological, cultural, and political views of the contemporary moment which led to remarkably dissimilar manifestations of the built environment. The paradigm shift with regards to the treatment of the human figure that can be seen in the works of the *Radicale* group Superstudio and those of Rossi and Aymonino is indicative of changing attitudes in the field of architecture and city planning in Italy and the way in which the end-user was envisioned in the process of creating new environments.

The changes that took place in Italy during the postwar period were some of the most radical and far-reaching in the history of the nation. The transition from a Fascist

regime to a Republic was abrupt, and the country stumbled economically and politically in the first decade after the war. The ‘economic miracle’ that took place in the late ‘50s and early ‘60s lifted many Italians out of poverty and signaled the return of the manufacturing strength of the north, while simultaneously widening the gap between the rich and poor to a degree that had not existed since feudal times.¹ The ‘economic miracle’ catalyzed a mass exodus from the country to the city, and from southern Italy into the more prosperous north, wreaking profound change upon the contemporary Italian cityscape. Low-income housing blocks appeared on the outskirts of many manufacturing bases, their Brutalist architecture derived directly from the principles of Corbusier and CIAM, and there existed a growing need to moderate the construction of modern housing with the preservation of the existing urban space.² One of the most significant results of the growth of manufacturing and the migration of workers into the cities was a wage gap that enabled striking visualizations of poverty, wherein a family during the late 60s who could afford a television was living at a level of luxury as compared to their working-class counterparts.³ Out of this rampant poverty in the sector of working-class, underemployed, or unemployed Italians grew a deep dissatisfaction with both contemporary politics and society that culminated in the strikes, riots, and student protests that took place during the *Autunno Caldo*, the ‘hot autumn,’ of 1969, a series of events that would directly influence the architectural objectives of the Radicals.

¹ Paul Ginsborg, “Family, Culture, and Politics,” in *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy*, ed. Zygmunt Baranski (London: The Macmillan Press, 1990), 33-4.

² Gianfranco Petrillo, “Milan as a City of Immigration,” in *Italian Cityscapes*, ed. Robert Lumley (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), 44-5.

³ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 300.

As students at the University of Florence during the period of student and worker unrest in the late 1960s, the members of Superstudio concluded that the field of architecture in Italy during this particular epoch was characterized by a distinctly Modern-derived sensibility with regard to aesthetic expression, but that there existed a gulf between the theoretical underpinnings of various practicing architects and existing movements during the period and the manner in which this architecture affected the real world. The conception of the human form and the family unit was a primary concern of contemporary architects, through the manner in which these notions of human existence and the relationships between the inhabitants of the built environment were treated underscored the multifarious and often divergent nature of the field. Through the growth of consumer culture and the spread of technology entirely novel environments were conceived during the post-war years, and from the rapidly changing social milieu that these cultural shifts originated came radical conceptions of both how and why the human form should function in space. The cultural, social, and political conflicts that characterized the Italian landscape during the period from 1967 to 1972 resulted in a re-imagining of the built environment in such a way that the human figure became a central element and an active force once again.

The variety of ways in which Italian architects of the period responded to, and were influenced by, the social and economic struggles of the period are exemplified in the works of Rossi, Aymonino, and Superstudio. While the architecture of Rossi and Aymonino was born from an earlier era, one which embraced the High Modernist traditions of urban planning and monumental architecture, the structures envisioned by the group Superstudio were born from the cultural, political, and social conflicts of the

contemporary moment. That is not to say that Rossi and Aymonino did not respond to contemporary climate and the challenges and influences that it presented, indeed their architectural undertaking in the Gallaratese could not have existed without the economic climate present in Milan at the time, but their physical architecture differed from that of Superstudio in both its reverence for the past as well as its treatment of the present. The environment within which Rossi and Aymonino were working was a city in flux, experiencing expansion and growing opportunities for employment in a manner that had not been present for decades prior to the end of the war. The shift and growth of population that took place in and around the city of Milan during and immediately following the ‘economic miracle,’ a period that covered approximately the years between 1950 through 1970, consisted mainly of Italians immigrating from poor, rural regions in southern Italy and the mountainous regions to the north. Over a period of 15 years nearly 400,000 people moved into Milan, a massive influx that created a need for new models of housing on the periphery of the industrial city.⁴

The Gallaratese quartiere, located approximately 7 kilometers to the north-west of the center of Milan, is a key example of a new urban space that was essentially built from scratch on formerly rural land in order to house factory workers and immigrants. Within this new housing estate entire environments were constructed based upon the perceived needs of both the occupants as well as those of the rapidly growing city. The original plans for the Gallaratese district were conceived by the Rationalist architect Piero Bottoni, the Italian delegate to CIAM and a critical force behind the drafting of the Charter of Athens, whose High Modernist tendencies manifested themselves in not only

⁴ John Foot, *Milan Since the Miracle* (Oxford: Berg Publishing, 2001), 43.

the planning of the area, but also the architectural styles incorporated therein.⁵ Bottoni's original plan for the quartiere resembled his 1955 project for the INA-casa housing block along Via Harrar in Milan. In this project housing blocks dominate a landscape that borrowed equally from Corbusier's *Plan Voisin* for Paris as well as from his theory of *La Ville Radieuse*. While the cruciform towers of the *Voisin* have given way to long, low structures raised up on *pilotis* and whose exterior lines reflected their interior elements in the Via Harrar project, the park-like green space that contributed to the striking reimagining of the Parisian city-center was retained in order to create a more livable and holistic space for potential occupants.⁶ However, while Bottoni's plans for the Gallaratese were based upon the principles of CIAM and the urban planning strategies of the period, which were heavily concerned with the idea of the 'satellite city,' later construction would deviate quite significantly from Bottoni's vision of both the physical space as well as the treatment of the occupant, responding primarily to the architecture of the surrounding urban environment and utilizing architecture as a means to envision an historicized subject.

While the works of Rossi and Aymonino in the Gallaratese quartiere represent a tangible embodiment of architectonic principles and contemporary social and political influences, the theoretical visions of Superstudio are ephemeral manifestations of similar influences, reduced to their most basic structural form and then stretched to their perceived logical extremes. The *Monumento Continuo*, or 'Continuous Monument,' project began in 1970 as an effort to represent the ultimate and seemingly unstoppable

⁵ Giancarlo, Consonni, Ludovico Meneghetti & Graziella Tonon, *Piero Bottoni; Opera Completa* (Fabbri Editori: Milano, 1990), 360.

⁶ Consonni, Meneghetti, and Tonon, *Piero Bottoni*, 130-131.

force that capitalist-driven consumerism had become over the course of the previous two decades. It is from this early project that the *Microevent/ Microenvironment* exhibited at MoMA in 1972 was drawn. However, Superstudio also produced a later series of works in 1972 entitled *Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas* in which dystopian worlds and environments were envisioned as both products of capitalist culture as well as the upheaval of the present Italian political and social landscapes. In the various projects of Superstudio, architecture became a lens through which an exploration of the inevitable could be undertaken, serving not so much as a physical, built form which sought to present solutions to a problem, but as more of a tool for understanding as well as exploring the issues faced by both architects as well as consumers in the contemporary moment.⁷ Through the utilization of this ‘paper architecture’ Superstudio’s purely theoretical models for the future became striking revelations of what was and what could be. A vision of specific inhabitants and the subjects of this new theoretical architecture was central to the effect of Superstudio’s work, and these figures should be considered as the result of an architectural style that is simultaneously reactionary in its treatment of the built environment as well as innovative in its inspection of contemporary culture and politics.

Social historian Paul Ginsborg cites the ‘American model of consumer society’ that began to develop between 1958 and 1963, the major years of the ‘economic miracle,’ as a primary factor in the isolation of the individual and the fracturing of the family unit that took place during the early years of Italy’s development as an industrialized and

⁷ Ross K. Elfine, “Discotheques, Magazines, and Plexiglas: Superstudio and the Architecture of Mass Culture,” *Footprint* (2011): 60-61.

modernized nation.⁸ While modernization led to increased prosperity, both financially and materially, and fostered an increased interest in consumer objects, it also presented opportunities for individualization that had rarely existed in Italy prior to the introduction of western Capitalism. The traditional agrarian culture that dominated Italy in the years before the miracle was centered heavily on the family unit, and it was precisely this unit, which became a symbol for the misplaced loyalties of consumer culture and the materialistic tendencies of the period, that was targeted for destruction by the student movements of the late sixties and early seventies. Ginsborg includes a prescient quote from Luciana Castellina's 1974 essay '*Famiglia e società capitalistica*' in which she writes of "the exasperated dichotomy between collectivity and family, the latter being conceived of as a lair, a refuge, a system of fortresses where solidarity with one's relatives is the other face of a brutal egoism towards the outside world."⁹ The conflicted nature of the family unit in the contemporary moment was directly reflected in the projects of Superstudio, wherein the state of the individual and the family and their relationships with others become fundamental elements of the successful environment. A focus on the relationships between the human and their environment was not a novel proposition in architecture, as most architecture is inherently designed for human use. However, the intense focus on the state of the figure as a reaction to the ideals of the time and the relationship between the subject and both their surroundings and human counterparts defines Superstudio's work as a distinctly dissimilar approach to architecture than that of the seemingly more traditional approach taken in the neo-Rationalist work of Rossi and Aymonino.

⁸ Ginsborg, *History of Contemporary Italy*, 312-313.

⁹ Ginsborg, *History of Contemporary Italy*, 305.

In *The Continuous Monument: An Architectural Model for Total Urbanization* Superstudio envisioned a 'moderate utopia,' a vision of the near future in which all architecture is produced from a single act.¹⁰ Conceived as both a critique of contemporary consumer culture, which had by definition become obsessed with the acquisition of objects, as well as a reaction to the expectations of the architectural establishment and the emergence of new technological tools, the *Continuous Monument* presented an alternative course for environmental development. The *Continuous Monument* embraced the homogeneity of the object-fixated culture that had become so dominant in Italy, resulting in a gridded *Supersurface* that threaded its way through the urban and rural landscape alike, covering and absorbing architectural forms and creating a technologically mediated environment with the primary goal of freeing the inhabitant from not only the object, but also from work. The *Supersurface* provided all of the elements necessary to ensure basic survival, requiring those who roamed its vast expanses to simply 'plug-in' to the grid in order to find shelter and nourishment. Through the act of fulfilling these basic needs, the architecture provides its users with the ability to move beyond the search for primary fulfillment and into higher realms of self-actualization.¹¹ Superstudio sought to free the individual from the surly bonds of their life in the urban environment, one that was occupied primarily by the need to consume and produce, and instead elevate them to a level where the possibility of understanding something more than the 'object' was possible.

¹⁰ Peter Lang and William Menking, *Superstudio: Life Without Objects* (Milan: Skira, 2003), 122.

¹¹ Emilio Ambasz, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape, Achievements and Problems of Italian Design*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1972), 137-8.

The identification of the shifting sites of discourse with regard to the aesthetic of production differentiates the work of Superstudio from that of the Neo-Rationalists in that Superstudio understood the significance of the human subject as a medium through which an architectural vision could be articulated. Alternatively, Rossi and Aymonino postulated an architecture that provided controlling environments that attempted to impose order and rationality upon the human condition as a means for creating an ideal style of living. Where Superstudio sought to eschew the aesthetic modes of the late-capitalist moment, ones that favored mass production of homologous structures, in favor of a design mode that actively resisted and rejected architecture as a tool for the codification of models of ownership and the stratification of society, Rossi and Aymonino played into these tendencies to the extent that their architecture was firmly rooted within the parameters of contemporary architecture. The logical nature of the architecture that resulted from Rossi and Aymonino's role as architects and urban planners posited answers to systematized and ossified questions that related to the fringes of human existence, playing into beliefs and concerns inculcated in the contemporary citizen by a rapidly expanding capitalist society.

Superstudio's 1972 *Microevent/Microenvironment* represented a distillation of the values presented in the *Continuous Monument*, refining both the autonomy and integration of the architectural space. Through the elimination of work and the destruction of the object, the previously induced needs of the inhabitant are restructured into primary needs, which are fulfilled by their interaction with the *Supersurface* that supplies them with nourishment. In this manner the architecture has divested itself of traditional roles, no longer merely providing shelter and directing the actions of those

who interact with it, and instead embraced its role as an active technological environment that is directly linked to the psychological prosperity of its inhabitants. The *Microevent* became a medium through which ‘unalienated human relationships’ could be attained, allowing the nomadic peoples who roamed its expanses the ability to interact with and understand one another at a level that was impossible in the object-fixated and capitalist-driven culture of the period.¹² The unconscious motivations of the individual were allowed to manifest themselves in free association, the elimination of work and the fulfillment of base needs resulted in the destruction of hierarchical chains of interaction and the rejection of the three-dimensional urban environment, with its passageways funneling people to various gathering points, allowing for spontaneous gatherings to occur independent of the environment that surrounds them.¹³ The understanding of the human condition, independent of the rampant consumerism and cultural supremacy of the object and technology in the contemporary moment, became the primary motivation for a focus upon the state of the individual in the works of Superstudio, and the later works of the group placed a heavy emphasis upon the toll that living in the existing Italian society would eventually take upon the psycho-social state of those who remained prisoners of architecture.

While the members of Superstudio were occupied with the creation of environments which sought to free the individual from primary needs and eliminate the veneration of the object, Aldo Rossi and Carlo Aymonino were heading in a distinctly different direction in the planning and construction of their project in the Gallaratese

¹² Peter Lang and William Menking, *Superstudio: Life Without Objects*, 182-183.

¹³ Felicity D Scott, *Architecture or Techno Utopia*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007), 79-80.

quarter. The primary set of buildings, designed by Aymonino, consists of three long structural blocks arranged “along a rhomboid-shaped platform: two lie along adjoining sides, the other along the diagonal.”¹⁴ The design of these blocks reflects Aymonino’s contention that a city should be composed of morphologically defined spaces insofar as the complex is designed to appear outwardly as a unified structure, one which utilizes a compact form and a disconnection with the site combined with a centralized plan in order to create a system of spaces that effectively form an urban environment that exists independently from its surroundings. The aesthetic and compositional complexity of Aymonino’s three buildings reflects an intricate program of architecture and urban planning that is meant to simultaneously highlight the fragmented nature of the urban environment while also presenting the ability of the architecture to provide for those who inhabit it. The complex is intentionally disconnected, both physically and aesthetically, from the surrounding suburban spaces in order to provide both a commentary upon, and a contrast to, the repetitive and autonomous nature of the hastily designed and constructed forms in the Gallarate quarter that encircled it. Aymonino’s vision for the space involved a clever blend of neo-Rationalist principles concerned primarily with the recreation of the spaces and architectural language of the village, centered around the populist notion of a *piazza*, and the more complex and typologically rich nature of the contemporary city in a manner that placed emphasis on the elements that connect both the spaces in the complex as well as the people who inhabit the structure. Aymonino accumulated forms in a manner that resulted in the presentation of a highly developed

¹⁴ Pierluigi Nicolin “Housing Complex at the Gallarate Quarter,” in *Carlo Aymonino, Aldo Rossi: Housing Complex at the Gallarate Quarter, Milan, Italy, 1969-1974*, (Tokyo: A.D.A. Edita, 1977), 2-3.

architectural vocabulary, one which underscored the ability of the architect to unify disparate form and space through both reduction of volume as well as the maintenance of the balance between ‘order and chaos, rule and exception.’¹⁵ The focus in Aymonino’s architecture was not necessarily upon the inhabitant as a catalyst for change, but rather upon a more nostalgic subject who would be more likely to have existed in a *paese*, a rural village, than in the tumultuous urban environments that existed in 1972.¹⁶

Aymonino’s fascination with architectural typologies manifested itself not only in the variety of elements that he incorporated into the structures in the Gallaratese, but also in the seamless manner in which the incorporation of a structure designed by Rossi was executed. This structure, whose nature is somewhat different from that of the red-brown edifices constructed by Aymonino, presented a challenge to the continuity of the aesthetic space while simultaneously complementing the surrounding buildings. While Aymonino’s long multi-story tower blocks appear as imposing agglomerations of Brutalist style meshed with neo-Rationalist historicism, Aldo Rossi’s contribution to the Gallaratese complex is a seemingly more refined approach to the construction of a complex visual environment, blending a manipulation of light and space with a subtlety in its direction of the inhabitants that serves to underscore the various nuances of Aymonino’s structures. The starkly defined elements present in Rossi’s design, from the colonnade and deeply inset windows that evoke versions of perspective, linearity, and lighting reminiscent of a Giorgio de Chirico painting, to the façade and its cellular repetition of form, which is a direct reference to Corbusier’s *Unité d’Habitation*, combine

¹⁵ Aldo Rossi, “Abitazioni nel Quartiere Gallaratese,” *Architecture and Urbanism* (1991), 214.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 218.

to form a structure that exists in a complementary contrast to the forms seen in Aymonino's structures.¹⁷ Manfredo Tafuri describes the Rossi-designed portion of the complex as "standing in silent witness to Aymonino's staging of forms," a description that imbues the Rossi block with a passivity that defines it as a necessary and self-reflective element of the complex.¹⁸ The nature of the structures is deeply reminiscent of the vaguely threatening nature of De Chirico's paintings, wherein the domination of silent architectural modes combined with empty streetscapes and sudden, deep contrasts in light and color to disturb the space of the traditional *Piazza*, mutating the communal gathering point into a space that became a commentary on the dislocation of the space and the figure in the past and present.¹⁹ It is through this reading of the space that Aymonino and Rossi's treatment of the figure may be more accurately articulated as an exploration of the fractured nature of human existence in the contemporary moment. While the neo-Rationalist tendencies of both architects were preoccupied with the nostalgic subject of the historicized Italian villager, both architects were acutely aware of the ability of Modern and post-Modern architecture to alienate the inhabitant and force them into a state of dislocation.

The parallels between the state of the workers and students in the contemporary moment and those of the inhabitants of the Monte Amiata project in the Gallaratese Quarter are easily understood when viewed through the lens of this disjointed, disquieting

¹⁷ Aldo Rossi, "Aldo Rossi: Conception and Reality," *Architecture and Urbanism* 365 (2001): 102-103.

¹⁸ Manfredo Tafuri, *History of Italian Architecture: 1944-1985* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989), 122-123.

¹⁹ Vittorio Gregotti, "Topos," *Casabella* (1984): 2-3.

architecture. Aymonino has consciously conceived of a space that blends public and private life, utilizing cramped, awkward housing units which encourage their inhabitants to spend time in the larger public areas in the same way that Italian villagers gather in the *Piazza* during the day in order to escape the confining and often sweltering quarters of their homes. Aymonino trends toward an engineered sense of community, one that is forced into existence through the medium of architecture and which would otherwise be absent from the suburban landscape that could potentially exist on the site. The self-reflective nature of the project is not more evident than in the central 'theatre' around which the structures are situated. Originally intended to be surrounded by shops and restaurants, today it sits empty and unused, a space that is shunned by the inhabitants of the complex due to its exposed and lifeless character. In this sense, the space has traversed the path of the *Piazza* in a manner that is quite similar to the spaces seen in De Chirico's works. The linear pathways to the central point lay empty and desolate, with perhaps a single figure or shadow of a being to provide a sense of scale and uncertainty, and at the convergence of the lines drawn by the buildings sits a space with no activity taking place, no liveliness to provide it with a use. The Monte Amiata housing project was an ambitious undertaking, originally intended to house the immigrants flooding into the city of Milan and eventually aimed at the growing middle-class of the mid-1970s. Its treatment of space reflects not only the motivations of the architects to create a highly specific environment for the inhabitants of the complex, but also the conflicted nature of the architects and the manner in which they understood those people who would inhabit their project.

Peter Eisenman, in his introduction to Aldo Rossi's *Architettura Della Citta*, argues for the 'latent humanism' of Rossi's theories, a description derived from Eisenman's understanding of Rossi's comparisons between the humanistic subject in the Renaissance city and the psychological, post-industrial subject of the contemporary city.²⁰ This 'latent humanism' is described by Reinhold Martin, in his analysis of both Eisenman and Rossi, as a dependence upon the idea of the 'collective will' in order to understand the 'deep structures' of architecture. Rossi states that the unity of the inhabitants of the city can be restored through the repair of their collective memory, and that architecture is the tool by which this memory may be reconstructed. Alternatively, Eisenman focuses on architecture as a tool for the exploration of post-humanist theory centered around the deconstruction of the architectural form as a tool for the semiotic examination of the built environment. Martin rejects both of these attempts to understand the autonomy of architecture and argues instead that the architects missed the more pressing issue of the 'unfolding architecture' that was forming the basis for environments in the contemporary moment.²¹ In this sense, Superstudio was perhaps more acutely aware of the path of architecture in the moment than Rossi or Aymonino, and their understanding of the interactions between the human subject and the environment, while not necessarily more accurate, take into account a greater dependence upon object culture and the political and social climate of the period, as opposed to the historicizing tendencies seen in the Monte Amiata project. Where Rossi and Aymonino were concerned with the recreation of a sense of place and a collective feeling among the

²⁰ Aldo Rossi, and Peter Eisenman, *The Architecture of the City* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1982), 14-15.

²¹ Reinhold Martin, *Utopia's Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 128-129.

inhabitants of the Gallarate complex, Superstudio seemingly sought to investigate architecture's ability to free the subject to a degree that would allow for the realization of what Jacques Ranciere characterized as a "type of individual who lives in a permanent universe of.. choice, [and] a world of self pacified multiplicity."²² This description of utopia is cited by Martin as evidence of the inherent irreducibility of architecture in the post-modern sense and the impossibility of unmediated environments. However, Superstudio's utopian visions do not reject or seek to mollify the multiplicity of the architectural environment, but instead embrace it in order to underscore the significance of the architectural form as a path toward the inevitable products of capitalist excess.

Superstudio's *Continuous Monument* sought to determine the relationship between architecture and the object, utilizing the endless form of the *Supersurface* to draw out notions of consumerism and capitalism in a manner that explored the inevitable and seemingly unavoidable course upon which architecture was set in the contemporary moment. While the *Microevent/Microenvironment* was being exhibited at MoMA in 1972, Superstudio simultaneously produced *Twelve Cautionary Tales*, a collection of visions of the present and the near future where the city has become a perfect system, free from the incongruities and weakness that humanity insinuates into the urban space, a city that "obliges the subjects to carry out their programme."²³ The twelve cities present hideous, dystopian visions of the present as it could exist when the political and social forces at work in the contemporary moment were allowed to edge out the human element, forcing the subject into a confined, disconnected state that removes all comfort, providing only the basic elements necessary to sustain life and replacing community and social

²² Martin, *Utopia's Ghost*, 128.

²³ Peter Lang and William Menking, *Superstudio: Life Without Objects*, 150-151.

interaction with a totalitarian authority that demands complete submission. Piero Frassinelli, a member of Superstudio who conceived the *Twelve Cautionary Tales*, described them as “city nightmares, perfect mechanisms, like the one the Nazis designed to solve the ‘Jewish Problem.’”²⁴ Through the conception of these urban visions Superstudio rendered the world as a homogeneous space in a far more startling manner than the *Supersurface* could hope to achieve. The incorporation of physical, object-based architecture that aided in the execution of political and ideological goals centered around subverting the human condition created a vision of architecture that explored a different side of human nature than that of the *Continuous Monument*, raising questions and fears of not only how humanity could allow itself to be subjected to such action by the environment, but also how architecture could be an active tool in promoting this subjugation.

While Superstudio’s visions of contemporary and future cities as articulated in the *Twelve Cautionary Tales* were, to a degree, exaggerated, they underscored the radically altered notions of human existence and interaction with the built environment that had come into existence in the years following the atrocities which took place during the Second World War. Students and workers in Italy during the late 1960s viewed the political and social conditions of the nation as similar to, though less distinct than, the oppressive, tyrannical regimes that had dominated the European continent in the prewar years. Where Superstudio explored architecture as a medium through which the overwhelming nature of contemporary trends in capitalism could be more accurately understood, other student groups actively resisted the object-fixated, consumerist

²⁴ Piero Frassinelli, “Journey to the End of Architecture,” in *Superstudio: Life Without Objects*, ed. William Menking and Peter Lang, 80.

tendencies that their parents had so eagerly embraced as a pathway to a modern, industrialized Italy. The cracks in the capitalist notion of an ideal society began to show, and groups such as Superstudio seized the opportunity to explore the depths to which these ruptures in the modern edifice could lead humanity. As such, the human subject in the architectural oeuvre of Superstudio underwent a series of changes that reflected the shifting perceptions of society and the human figure in contemporary Italy, reacting to not only the supremacy of the object and the dominance of homogeneous architecture in the Modern system, but also the homogeneity of the human experience as it existed in the early 1970s. The *Twelve Cautionary Tales* highlight both the totality of late-capitalism in the built environment as well as the complacency of those who inhabit these environments, building upon the notion that in order to break free from the unrelenting, technologically mediated existence it would be necessary for the inhabitant to not only reject architecture and the object, but tradition and the socio-cultural parameters that the architecture embodied.

In the Gallarate project Aymonino and Rossi have turned inward in order to focus upon design as a pathway to the creation of an ideal cityscape, one that exists as a microcosm of ideal society centered, in the traditional manner, upon a *Piazza*. From this central point the spaces of the complex radiate, allowing the inhabitants to exist in constant connection with the center. Design, in the Gallarate, is the medium through which the problems of the urban space, the fragmentation of the city and the family, the harshness of the post-industrial landscape, the forced-consumerism, may be sublimated into a system free from chaos or misunderstanding, one which provides not for the needs

of the individual, but for the needs of the community.²⁵ Alternatively, Superstudio utilized counter-design, the destruction of the object, the rejection of contemporary cultural norms, and the reduction of architecture to a primal and purely technologic form, in order to create mediated environments which sought to free the individual from the clutches of the society and community to which they were bound. Through the envisioning and articulation of dystopian realities Superstudio sought to point out the inconsistencies that dominated society while also presenting questions about the role of the individual as a catalyst for change. While there was no hope for an individual existence through singular revolution in the *Ideal Cities*, Superstudio envisioned the avoidance of such scenarios through the destruction of the architecture of the system and the rejection of the physical forms that constituted the built environment. Counter-design in the manner espoused by Superstudio became a tool for the rejection of Modernity, the breakdown of culture and society, and an understanding of the socio-psychological connections that existed between man, the community, and the spaces in which they existed. However, Superstudio also sought to question the inevitability of the failure of architecture to prevent dystopian scenarios. The rejection of object and architecture and the study of how the form and function of these entities enabled the spread of capitalist realities formed the basis of Superstudio's understanding of the human condition as one that was slowly disintegrating in the era of technology, subsumed into the larger processes that surrounded it and rendered void by the very objects that it had once coveted.

²⁵ Andrew Peckham, "The Dichotomies of Rationalism in 20th Century Italian Architecture." *Architectural Design* 77 (2007): 14.

The production of an environment for a nostalgic subject, one who would be suited equally to an existence in a quaint, medieval village in the Italian countryside, was an underlying goal of the neo-Rationalist theories to which Carlo Aymonino ascribed. The Monte Amiata project in the Gallarate Quarter symbolizes a vision of the human subject that had long been absent from the urban spaces of industrialized Italy, replaced by workers for whom architecture was a controlling, unerring edifice that produced unvaried and banal landscapes. The inhabitants of the Monte Amiata project would have been exposed to a vision of the city whose existence was seemingly impossible amidst the fragmented and hyper-mediated cityscape of contemporary Milan. It is the existence to which the complex was doomed to encounter that most accurately sums up the fate of utopian visions in Italy. Following the completion of the project in 1974 it was inhabited by the homeless and destitute residents of the Milanese periphery, allowed to fall into disrepair and occupied by people of a different sort than it was originally intended to serve. These unexpected residents of the complex were dumbfounded and annoyed by the existence that was forced upon them, from the awkwardly small rooms to the central meeting area that remained almost constantly empty. This first generation of inhabitants, those who were victims of the capitalist society that surrounded them, had no use for a utopian, nostalgic architecture, one which made assumptions about lifestyles and which sought to control the lives of those who inhabited it. In an almost comical twist, these residents of the complex were likely the closest connection to the *paese* that existed in Milan, presumably their poverty was a direct result of their having immigrated to the city to work in low paying industrial jobs. However, the original conception of the ideal inhabitant envisioned by Rossi and Aymonino was novel in terms of both its lack of

foresight as well as its disengagement with contemporary culture, thrusting the project into an architectural purgatory from which it would only be delivered when it was acquired by the City of Milan and used as public housing decades after its construction.

The conceptions of humanity that became the subject of Superstudio's architectural explorations of capitalist inevitabilities and Aymonino and Rossi's historicized complex highlight the disparity that existed in contemporary Italian architecture with regards to the treatment of the subject. Superstudio sought to free humanity from the culture of the present, to destroy the physical bonds that had been created by the architecture of the urban environment in favor of dystopian settings that at once provided for the psychological well-being of the individual but did little to encourage an existence that was productive or conducive to an understanding of one's surroundings. Alternatively, Aymonino and Rossi created an urban environment that was wholly detached from its surroundings in order to strengthen the role of architecture in the creation of lifestyles, utilizing contemporary cultural trends to reaffirm the importance of community and the family unit and downplay the supremacy of the individual. The reactionary figures of Superstudio were individuals freed from the path of late-capitalist consumerism, thrust into an environment devoid of objects and architecture in order to allow for a greater understanding of the self. The nostalgic subjects intended to inhabit Monte Amiata were removed from the shattered industrial city and placed into a space that encouraged communal existence. These two visions of humanity underscore the significance of the architectural dialectic as it pertained not only to the formation of environments in the late-Capitalist moment, but also the manner in which it conformed to the notions of existence in contemporary society.

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