
SUPERSTUDIO

"Superstudio : Progetti E Pensieri." *Domus* 479 (1969): 38-[43].

In a 1969 article written for *Domus*, the Italian radical architecture group first expand on their principles

A more in-depth examination of the Florentine group Superstudio is entrusted to an article they wrote for *Domus* in 1969. Contrary to popular belief, it was not Mendini, but Gio Ponti, who first gave space to the radicals, confirming that the great architect-director was open to new trends. This inclination was later pursued by Mendini in *Casabella* and *Domus* where he provided a platform for proponents of the Italian radical neo-avant-garde to express and communicate their research. Only through ambiguity and the non-solution can architecture become an open work, according to Superstudio, referring to the definition that Umberto Eco gave in 1962 in a text bearing the same name - a work "[...] based on the theoretical, mental collaboration of the consumer, who must freely interpret an artistic datum, a product which has already been organized[...]" (Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, Harvard University Press, 1989, – originally published in Italy by Bompiano, 1962)

In the article, Superstudio addresses issues and ideas that would later be developed in their projects, such as the importance of monumentality in the work of Louis Kahn, a lesson subsequently applied in the Continuous Monument that was built in 1969. And again, *the indictment against*

architecture in crisis with itself, that can no longer influence decision-making processes, for which the only possible solution is an Architecture of Reason – an architecture that exalts itself as a product of human history. The insistence on monumentality and megastructure is the big issue that was explored during the 1950s and 60s, from Yona Friedman's Mobile Architecture to the cities imagined, and partly built, by the Japanese metabolists to the visionary projects by Paolo Soleri, Archigram and Cedric Price; examples in which the out-of-scale is the norm, clearly pointing to Koolhaas' inspiration for bigness. This illustrates how all of "radical" architecture (and not just the Italian version) was able to anticipate scenarios and theories – applied by generations of architects – that still demonstrate their validity. *Emanuele Piccardo*

Superstudio: projects and thoughts

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So this is how the young architects from the Florentine office, Superstudio, – Adolfo Natalini, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, Piero Frassinelli and Roberto Magris – express their projects and thoughts (we published their interiors and objects in [Domus 473](#) and [475](#)).

"...The end of architecture is neither to be found in "architecture on architecture" nor in the possible evasions of meta-projects or spiritual retreats. The end of architecture is only a dawn, which we know to be possible by now, with an enormous luminous mushroom.

Its hibernation in the towers of intellectual pride (the Greek *hubris*) is not an operative alternative; standing above the fray means accepting the existence of the fray without doing anything to change it.

"Architecture on leave" recalls faith in better days in which to work and above all faith in an unchanging "career" of sprints and advances towards power (or

retirement)...

The lucid description of a field of multi-directional and sometimes regressive experience leads to ambiguous and unstable results, but ambiguity remains one of the few fixed points in contemporary culture. The tension required to maintain a work open and "in progress" can be born only from ambiguity, the non-solution, the plurality of possible readings...

Cultural conditions change incessantly: contribution to this change comes about only by conferring the highest degree of objectivity and clarity on every act. The important thing, as usual, is to save one's soul, which now means feeling in balance due to the clarity of our actions...

A story like "Pilgrim's Progress" for the salvation of a young architect's soul. First there was agnostic architecture without masters. Frightened by academia, genius, intelligence... A school outside history, based on empiricism and probabilism. A school based on successive deductions where truth was always a fragment seen through the celestial lens of misunderstood originality... A school where they spoke of many things but never of architecture, as if architecture, history, insights and masters were all legacies of the Twentieth Century-Fascism, Cold Rationalism, Masters-Academies and other similar pseudo-equalities. A school of erroneous equations... *In principium...* **architecture of monuments** was the only way to create order, to lay a foundation. The only way to operate was to accept all conscious and unconscious components and consider architecture as a problem with infinite unknowns, assuming a number of them as constants... Constants were assumed to be axes of symmetry, the golden section, elementary forms, archetypes of experience. Through Kahn's lesson, "order" became the method for recovering history in the action of making architecture. Generating ideas, Neoplatonism were safe ground, a basis for every action.

Then there was the **architecture of images** which proposed the use of news

and current events through the mechanism of the invention. The architecture of images was charged with figurative content that could thus induce behaviors.

Then came **technomorphic architecture** proposed not only as technical architecture and not only as architecture of the image of technique but as architecture that was able to consciously use technique and its image.

The architecture of monuments – architecture as the magical image of man – was an exorcism against the architecture of detail and the picturesque. The architecture of History. The architecture of images – the architecture of chronicles and the manifesto – was an exorcism against history as crystallization of experience. Architecture was an object of use.

Technomorphic architecture moved attention to hypothesis and the future exorcising doubts and fears introduced by the machine in the work of the sorcerers' apprentices. Architecture was a machine that functioned symbolically...

And so the past-present-future circle was closed like a magic pentacle. Every demonstration "*per absurdum*" had been made. And reason had found a field cleared of misunderstandings and a series of "materials" upon which to act. At a time when architecture undermines itself by delegating its decision-making acts and working methods to other disciplines, it becomes important to reaffirm its dignity through the only technique possible, that of "acting according to reason."

The **architecture of reason** exalts itself as a product of human history, bearing witness to the creative and representative abilities of a period and of a society.

The increase in the speed of reading (transport as a factor in spatial velocity, consumerism as a factor in temporal velocity) and the increase in social mobility call for architecture that can take stock of the situation moment by moment... To bear witness becomes working in history, with history and for history.

Today we are all "intellectuals" or cultivated. Everything seems charged with reference and recall. The primitives of modern architecture – the Bauhaus, the 1920s – are the first models for the operation, initiators of the key cultural position that we are interested in continuing. Not "revival" but "survival" – permanence, that is, of vital reason.

We begin anew from the art of building, from the economy of materials, from the reasons for construction and from the meanings of a building.

Reason has reaffirmed its place, accounting for itself. And for the first time perhaps, above and beyond all contradictions, we feel strangely serene...

". *Superstudio 1968-69*