

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

RELEASE NO. 46

ITALY: THE NEW DOMESTIC LANDSCAPE

Counter Design as Postulation

Director: Emilio Ambasz

May 26, 1972 - September 11, 1972

Designer: Superstudio

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Patron: ANIC - Lanerossi, with the participation of Abet Print

Superstudio presents, in a larger dark area, a small cubic space made up of one-way mirrors on four sides. The public, which may walk around this cube, sees through the one-way mirror a space infinitely reflected. The space, symbolizing a benign environment void of any constructions presents, when one looks up, a continuing passage of clouds. Looking down, one sees the earth transformed into a continuous infrastructure of energy systems. Connected to that floor infrastructure emerge a number of tubes purporting to be life-supporting elements: air, heat, water, food, communications.

To the last is connected the only piece of equipment in the space, a television set. The TV presents a series of color images which describe Superstudio's philosophy, its conviction that we cannot arrive at the essence until we have divested ourselves of all elements of our present culture, designed objects included.

Statement by Superstudio

DESCRIPTION OF THE MICROEVENT/MICROENVIRONMENT

The proposed microevent is a critical reappraisal of the possibilities of life without objects. It is the reconsideration of the relations between the process of design and the environment through an alternative model of existence, rendered visible by a series of symbolic images.

The microenvironment is like a room with walls, the floor and ceiling are covered with black felt: thin luminescent lines make the corner angles stand out clearly.

A cube 180 cm. wide is placed in the center on a platform 40 cm. high. All the walls of the cube, except the one facing the entrance, are made of polarized mirror, so that the model inside becomes clearer and clearer as we move to the end of the room.

Such a model, repeated to infinity by the mirrors, is a square plate of checkered laminated plastic, with a little "machine" out of which come various terminals. One of the terminals is connected to a TV screen, which transmits a three-minute movie, a documentary on the model seen in various natural and work situations. The sound track gives information about the original concepts for the model.

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Atmospherical events are projected on the ceiling: sunrise, sun, clouds, storm, sunset, night.

The lighting of the cube is varied according to the phenomena projected.

The rest of the room is permanently plunged in darkness.

Statement by Adolfo Natalini of Superstudio

SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

In this exhibition we present the model of a mental attitude. This is not a three-dimensional model of a reality which can be given concrete form by a mere transposition of scale, but the rendering visible of a critical attitude towards (or hope for) the activity of designing understood as philosophical speculation, as a means to knowledge, as critical existence.

Design should be considered as a "cross-discipline," for it no longer has the function, between man and environment, of rendering our requirements more complex through the creation of a new artificial panorama. By finding a connection between data taken from the various humanistic and scientific disciplines (from the technique of body control to philosophy, the disciplines of logic and medicine, to bionomics, geography...) we can visualize an image-guide: the final attempt of design to act as the "projection" of a society no longer based on work (and on power and violence, which are connected to this), but an unalienated human relationship.

In this exhibition we therefore present an alternative model for life on earth.

We can imagine a network of energy and information extending to every properly inhabitable area.

Life without work and a new "potentialized" humanity are made possible by such a network.

(In the model this network is represented by a Cartesian "squared" surface, which is of course to be understood not only in the physical sense, but as a visual-verbal metaphor for an ordered and rational distribution of resources.)

The network of energy can assume different forms. The first is a linear development.

The others include different planimetric developments with the possibility of covering different and gradually increasing parts of the inhabitable areas. The configuration (typology) of the environment depends solely on the percentage of area covered, analogous to the way in which we distinguish a street from a town and from a metropolis.

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Some types:

10% covered. The network is developed like a continuous ribbon extending over the territory.

50% covered. The network is developed as a chessboard, with squares measuring 1 km. x 1 km., alternating with squares of open land.

100% covered. The network is transformed into a continuous development, the natural confines of which are formed by mountains, coast, rivers.

It is an image of humanity wandering, playing, sleeping, etc., on this platform. Naked humanity, walking along the highway with banners, magic objects, archaeological objects, in fancy dress....

The distances between man and man (modified) which generate the way in which people gather and therefore "the places": if a person is alone the place is a small room; if they are two together it is a larger room; if they are ten it is a school; if a hundred, a theater; if a thousand, an assembly hall; if ten thousand, a city; if a million, a metropolis...

Nomadism becomes the permanent condition: the movements of individuals interact, thereby creating continual currents. The movements and migrations of the individual can be considered as regulated by precise norms, the distances between man and man, attractions/reactions love/hate.

As with fluids, the movement of one part affects the movements of the whole.

The diminished possibility of physical movement results in an increase in conceptual activities (communications). The model constitutes the logical selection of these developing tendencies: the elimination of all formal structures, the transfer of all designing activity to the conceptual sphere. In substance, the rejection of production and consumption, the rejection of work, are visualized as an aphysical metaphor: the whole city as a network of energy and communications.

Places where humanity is concentrated in great numbers have always been based on the city network of energy and information, with three-dimensional structures representing the values of the system.

In their free time, large crowds on the beaches or in the country are in fact a concentrated mass of people "served" by mechanical, mobile miniservices (car, radio, portable refrigerator). Concentrations such as the Isle of Wight or Woodstock indicate the possibility of an "urban" life without the emergence of three-dimensional structures as a basis.

The tendency to the spontaneous gathering and dispersing of large crowds becomes more and more detached from the existence of three-dimensional structures.

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Free gathering and dispersing, permanent nomadism, the choice of interpersonal relationships beyond any pre-established hierarchy are characteristics which become increasingly evident in a society free from work.

These types of movement can be considered as the manifestations of the intellectual processes: the logical structure of thought continually compared (or contrasted) to our unconscious motivations.

Our elementary requirements can be satisfied by highly sophisticated (miniaturized) techniques. A greater ability to think and the integral use of our psychic potential will then be the foundation and the reason for a life free from want.

Bidonvilles, drop-out city, camping sites, slums, tendopoles or geodetic domes are different expressions of an analogous desire to attempt the control of the environment by the most economical means.

The membrane dividing exterior and interior becomes ever less substantial: the next step will be the disappearance of this membrane and the control of the environment through energy (air-cushions, artificial air currents, barriers of hot or cold air, heat-radiating plates, radiation surfaces, etc.).

Through an examination of the statistics of population growth, an analysis of the relationship between population and territory which can be exploited for living purposes, the new techniques for agricultural production, and ecological theories, we can arrive at a formulation of various hypotheses for survival strategies:

- a) hypothesis for the creation and development of servoskin: personal control of the environment through thermoregulation, techniques for breathing, cyborgs... mental expansion, full development of senses, techniques of body control, (and initially chemistry and medicine);
- b) hypothesis for total system of communication, software, central memories, personal terminals, etc.;
- c) hypothesis for network of energy distribution, acclimatization without protective walls....;
- d) mathematical models of cyclic use of territory, shifting of the population, functioning and non-functioning of the networks....

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

If we look closely, we can see how all the changes in society and culture in this century (or since 1920) have been generated by one force only -- the elimination of formal structures as a tendency towards a state of nature free from work.

The destruction of objects, the elimination of the city and the disappearance of work are events closely connected.

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By the destruction of objects, we mean the destruction of their attributes of "status" and the connotations imposed by those in power, so that we live with objects (reduced to the condition of neutral and disposable elements) and not for objects.

By the elimination of the city, we mean the elimination of the accumulation of the formal structures of power, the elimination of the city as hierarchy and social model, in search of a new free egalitarian state in which everyone can reach different grades in the development of his possibilities, beginning from equal starting points.

By the end of work, we mean the end of specialized and repetitive work, seen as an alienating activity, foreign to the nature of man; the logical consequence will be a new, revolutionary society in which everyone should find the full development of his possibilities, and in which the principle of "from everyone according to his capacities, to everyone according to his needs" should be put into practice. The construction of a revolutionary society is passing through the phase of radical, concrete criticism of present society, of its way of producing, consuming, living.

Merchandise, according to Guy Debord, in bourgeois society (which acts and perpetuates itself through its products -- including political parties and trade unions, which are an essential part of the spectacle) becomes the contemplation of itself.

The production machine produces a second poverty (Galbraith), perpetuating itself even after the fulfillment of its goals, or beyond its essential ends (the satisfaction of primary needs), ever inducing new needs.

Once clarified that

a) design is merely an inducement to consume;

b) objects are status symbols, the expression of models proposed by the ruling class. Their progressive accessibility to the proletariat is part of a "leveling" strategy intended to avoid the conflagration of the class struggle;

c) that the possession of objects is the expression of unconscious motivation: through analysis the removal of the motivation underlying their desirability may be reached;

... then it becomes urgent to proceed to destroy them... or does it?

Metamorphoses become frequent when a culture does not have sufficient courage to commit suicide (to eliminate itself) and has no clear alternatives to offer either.

The theory of intermediate states is the book of changes?

Thus, while the merchandise-form continues on towards its absolute realization, we reduce operations to a minimum. Reducing operations to a minimum, in all fields, is part of a general process of "reduction." Only through this reduction process can the field be cleared of false problems and induced needs. Through reduction, we proceed towards a mental state of concentration and know-

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ledge, a condition essential for a truly human existence.

Earlier, we defined

the destruction of the syntactical ties which bind the object to the system, the destruction of its significances, as superimposed by the ruling classes, as destruction of the object. We have formulated a hypothesis of the reduction of objects to neutral, disposable elements.

To this, we can add another hypothesis, and it is that of the construction of the object through its metamorphosis. The present process of the "overloading" of meanings onto an object is part of that strategy of disgust to which we have already referred.

Through the psychological re-thinking of an object, we can try for its "re-construction."

And this through discontinuous and alogical action, refusing guarantees of value (licenses issued by the system), aspiring to identify with life and total reality.

Objects thus cease to be the vehicles of social communication to become a form of reality and the direct experience of reality.

The metamorphoses which the object has to go through are those during which it is re-loaded with the values of myth, of sacredness, of magic, through the re-construction of relationships between production and use, beyond the abolition of the fictitious ties of production-consumption.

When design as an inducement to consume ceases to exist, an empty area is created, in which, slowly, as on the surface of a mirror, such things as the need to act, mold, transform, give, conserve, modify, come to light.

The alternative image (which is, really, the hope of an image) is a more serene, distended world, in which actions can find their complete sense and in which life is possible with few, more or less magical, utensils.

Objects, that is, such as mirrors/reflection and measure.

The objects we will need will be only flags or talismen, signals for an existence which continues, or simple utensils for simple operations. Thus, on the one hand, the utensils will remain (with less chrome and decorations), on the other, such symbolic objects as monuments or badges. Objects perhaps created for eternity from marble and mirrors, or for the present from paper and flowers — objects made to die at their appointed hours, and which even have this sense of death among their characteristics. Objects which can easily be carried about, if we should decide to become nomads, or heavy and immovable if we decide to stay in one place forever.

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A journey from A to B

There will be no further need for cities or castles
 There will be no further reason for roads or squares,
 Every point will be the same as any other
 (excluding a few deserts or mountains which are in no wise inhabitable)
 So, having chosen a random point on the map,
 we'll be able to say my house will be here
 for three days two months or ten years.
 And we'll set off that way (let's call it B)
 without provisions, carrying only objects we're fond of.
 The journey from A to B can be long or short,
 in any case it will be a constant migration,
 with the actions of living at every point along the ideal line
 between A (departure) and B (arrival).
 It won't, you see, be just the transportation of matter.

These are the objects we'll carry with us:
 some strange pressed flowers,
 a few videotapes, some family photos,
 a drawing on crumpled paper,
 an enormous banner of grass and reeds interwoven with
 old pieces of material which once were clothes,
 a fine suit, a bad book...
 These will be the objects.
 Someone will take with him
 only a herd of animals for friends. For instance:
 a quartet of Bremermusikanten,
 or a horse, two dogs and two doves
 or twelve cats, five dogs and a goat.
 Yet others will take with them only memory,
 become so sharp and bright as to be a visible object.
 others will hold one arm raised, fist clenched,
 Someone will have learnt a magic word and will take it with him
 as a suitcase or a standard: CALM, COMPREHENSION, CONFIDENCE,
 COURAGE, ENERGY, ENTHUSIASM, GOODNESS, GRATITUDE, HARMONY, JOY, LOVE,
 PATIENCE, SERENITY, SIMPLICITY, WILL, WISDOM (dark blue)
 (this is the complete set of cards in the "Technique of Evocative
 Words" by Roberto Assagioli, M.D.)
 But almost everybody will take only himself from A to B,
 a single visible object, like a complete catalogue
 as an enormous Mail Order Catalogue

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What we'll do

We'll keep silence to listen to our own bodies,
we'll hear the sound of blood in our ears,
the slight crackings of our joints or teeth
we'll examine the texture of our skins, the patterns made by the hairs
on our bodies and heads.
We'll listen to our hearts and our breathing.

We'll watch ourselves living.
we'll do very complicated muscular acrobatics.
we'll do very complicated mental acrobatics.

The mind will fall back on itself to read its own history.
We'll carry out astonishing mental operations.
Perhaps we'll be able to transmit thoughts and images,
then one happy day our minds will be in communication with
that of the whole world.

That which was called philosophy will be the natural physical activity of
our minds, and will at the same time be philosophy, religion,
love, politics, science....
Perhaps we'll lose the names of these disciplines (and it will be no
great loss)
when everybody will be present in essence in our minds.
We'll be able to create and transmit visions and images,
perhaps even make little objects move for fun.

We'll play wonderful games, games of ability and love.
We'll talk a lot, to ourselves and to everybody
We'll look at the sun, the clouds, the stars,
We'll go to faraway places, just to look at them and hear them.
Some people will become great story-tellers: many will move
to go and listen to them.
Some will sing and play.
Stories, songs, music, dancing will be the words we speak and tell ourselves.
Life will be the only environmental art.

The happy island

A lady of our acquaintance
became hysterical on hearing all this story

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and said: I certainly have no intention of doing without my vacuum-cleaner and the mowing machine, and the electric iron and the washing machine and frige, and the vase full of flowers, the books, my costume jewelry, doll and clothes! whatever you say madam! just take whatever you like, or rather equip a happy island for yourself with all your goods. The only problem is that the sea has receded all round and the island is sticking up in the middle of a plain without any messages in bottles.

The distant mountain

Look at that distant mountain.... what can you see? is that the place to go to? or is it only the limit to the inhabitable? It's the one and the other since contradiction no longer exists, it's only a case of being complementary. Thus thought a fairly adult Alice skipping over her rope, very slowly, though without feeling either heat or effort.

The encampment

You can be where you like, taking with you the tribe or family. There's no need for shelters, since the climatic conditions and the body mechanisms of thermoregulation have been modified to guarantee total comfort. At the most we can play at making a shelter, or rather at the home, at architecture.

The invisible dome

All you have to do is stop and connect a plug: the desired microclimate is immediately created (temperature, humidity, etc.), you plug in to the network of information, you switch on the food and water blenders....

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A short moral tale on design which is disappearing

Design, become perfect and rational, proceeds to synthesize different realities in syccesis and finally transforms itself, not coming out of itself, but rather withdrawing into itself, in its final essence of natural philosophy.

Thus designing coincides more and more with existence: no longer existence under the protection of design objects, but existence as a design.

The times being over when utensils generated ideas, and when ideas generated utensils, now ideas are utensils. It is with these new utensils that life forms freely in a cosmic consciousness.

If the instruments of design have become as sharp as lancets and sensitive as sounding lines we can use them for a delicate lobotomy. Thus beyond the convulsions of over-production a state can be born of calm in which a world takes shape without products and refuse, a zone in which the mind is energy and raw material and is also the final product, the only intangible object for consumption.

The designing of a region free from the pollution of design is very similar to a design for a terrestrial paradise.... This is the definitive product/this is only one of the projects for a marvelous metamorphosis.