Architecture
and Dystopia

edited by
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cated." [45] In seeing Archigram as a return to a modernist past (and he might equally well ave been referring to the Italian variants) Rowe was thus consigning it to the dust-heap of ailed architectural ideals, or rather, of what he considered the failed architectural responses b the ideological pretensions of the 1930s, Marxist or otherwise; a consignment that was at east opportunistic with reference to his own program of the "return to classicism" and the ssumedly palliative of a "mannerist" modernism and a "piecemeal" urban collage that was taged in *Collage City* as an over-literal illustration of Popper's "piecemeal engineering." [46]

or many (more often than not Marxist) critics, this seemed to doom the megastructures f *Living City* and the barren perspectives of Continuous Monument and *No Stop City* to a utile repetition of the same—images competing in the market place with all the positive rograms of modern megastructures and concrete plans for urban redevelopment. Man-redo Tafuri, caustically dismissed the spate of utopian images produced by Archizoom and uperstudio after 1968 as a "destructive and cathartic orgy," the intention of which was "to aul a mythical proletariat onto the stage of psychedelic action," with the aid of dream mate-ial transcribed with an irony "that made nobody laugh." "In the vignettes that illustrated *No top City*," Tafuri concluded, "neoprimitives living in an absolutely barren environment use mall air conditioners, expressing a monstrous marriage between populous anarchism and berating events influenced by those of France in May 1968.'" [47]

t was at this point that the image of utopia joined the program of total design imagined by hose who, like Tomas Maldonado at Ulm, believed that an entirely new version of the tra-litional *Gesamtkunstwerk* was demanded by the complex environmental, social, and tech-iological conditions of mass global society. Here it was that the "psychedelic" aspirations of he utopian left met, however uncomfortably, the systematic cybernetics of the rational cen-er. As Tafuri noted, they were in fact soon to come together literally in public presentation: Their designs conquered a market that had remained closed to the products of neoliberty; heir desecrations, justified by appeals to Duchamp, finally gained international recognition it an exhibition organized by Emilio Ambasz at the Museum of Modern Art in 1972: 'Italy. The New Domestic Landscape'" (fig. 7). [48]

This exhibition had been preceded some three years earlier by Ambasz's essay, with the overtly Benjaminian title, "Manhattan: Capital of the Twentieth Century." [49] Here he proposed a new site for the architecture of the information age; if Paris had established the metropol-tan form for consumer culture, epitomized in the arcades, and had become, by the 1930s of Benjamin's research, the site of a pre-history of modernity, New York was already, by 1969, the consummate network city, exhibiting all the characteristics of an architecture of infra-structure. New York was, so to speak, only "delirious" in the sense that its nineteenth-century nstitutions—as Rem Koolhaas had already intimated—from Coney Island to the Racquet

Club—acted as cultural cover for what Ambasz discerned as the far more serious, and not at all delirious, "White Collar Culture." Each of these formulations, Benjamin's "Paris," Koolhaas's New York and Ambasz's "New York," were developed out of their own intellectual prehis-tories. Thus Benjamin's "Arcades Project" displays its "origins" in hundreds of citations and notes, but its principle epistemological source has to be seen as Surrealism: not the pure and single-issue Surrealism of a Dalí or even of a Breton, but the critical, almost scientific Surre-alism of an Aragon. In his *Le paysan de Paris*, Aragon took on the environments of Paris—The Buttes Chaumont, the Passage de l'Opéra—as an exercise in modern urban pathology. [50] The "modern myth" he thus outlined, was a myth based on an arcade about to be demolished, which, through imaginary projection Aragon cast as living only in memory, and a park, con-structed by Haussmann, that "resembled" nature only through the most extreme artifice. The "Paris" of Aragon's "peasant" was, in this sense, no more than a phantom, but a phantom that lived on in the traces of its materiality in order to obscure a present hidden from all but the future. Benjamin, taking up Aragon's wager to the extreme—"I am a limit, a line" Aragon wrote— worked in the Bibliothèque Nationale, itself a storehouse for the first consumer age, to identify and concretize the myth in material terms.

If there is a parallel prehistory for the "Fables" of Ambasz, it will not be found in the New York Public Library, however, but rather in those paradigmatic architectural visions of information and its networks drawn up by the so-called utopian visionaries of the mid-Twentieth Cen-tury—Archigram, Archizoom, Superstudio and the rest: those who responded in different ways to the call, initiated by the Situationists, to find, beneath the cobblestones of Paris, the sand of a new beach, a tabula rasa for a new urban future. Urban futures, as George Orwell indicated in the title of his dystopian novel *1984*, which of course stood for the year of its publication, reversed, 1948, are inevitably rooted in their urban present. In the same way the counter-architecture "utopias" of these 1960s groups, while ostensibly drawing their imag-ery from science fiction, were firmly based in a present that was, from the space program to IBM, always already there. And it was precisely in the MoMA exhibition of 1972, that included among the displays of contemporary Italian domestic design, that these "utopian" messages from the 1960s past found their domesticated present (fig. 8).

Subtitled "Achievements and Problems of Italian Design," Ambasz's exhibition at MoMA might have seemed at first glance to be no more nor less than a trade show, a luxury shop-window for Italian imports. [51] But a closer look revealed that these "functionalist" and tech-nologically savvy products, arrayed under the umbrella of a "new domesticity" and worthy of installation in the museum's modernist-oriented design collection were presented in en-vironments and side by side with images that, produced by Superstudio and Archizoom were the very same images of utopia/dystopia that would in any other context have seemed antithetical or totally oppositional to any "Bauhaus" like tradition. Further inspection would

reveal that this very utopianism—ironical, and witty in the extreme—was equally deeply embedded in the character of these "home designs," with their own apparently utopian visions of technologically progressive objects, themselves icons of the new domestic design. This invasion of functionalism by utopianism, and vice versa, simply confirmed the fundamental commonalty of the two: indeed the identity of both as "hyperfunctional."

The catalogue to the exhibition, introduced by Ambasz, was divided strategically into four major sections: "Objects," "Environments," "Historical Articles," and "Critical Articles." In this way the singular design objects displayed—selected according to their "formal and technical means," their "sociological implications," and their "implications of more flexible patterns of use"—were viewed as a preliminary to the more theoretically current theme of "environments," which signaled the expanded realm of design contexts into the kinds of questions then being opened up by theoreticians like Henri Lefebvre (to figure as a distinguished guest at Ambasz's symposium *The Universitas Project*, later in the year) around questions of "everyday life." In this way the work of Gae Aulenti, Ettore Sottsass, the recently deceased Joe Colombo, Alberto Rosselli, Mario Zanuso, Richard Sapper and Mario Bellini were "situated" in designed boxes, like Joseph Cornell's peepshows.

Thus naturalized, the new designs, clothed in the mantle of environmentalism, were, in Ambasz layout, "opposed" by a series of "counterdesigns" set up in similar black boxes, as "postulated" critiques. Thus, Ugo La Pietra, Archizoom, Superstudio, Gruppo Strum, and Enzo Mari (with Gaetano Pesce as an outlier "commentator") were entered into the orthodox canon of the Museum of Modern Art, as integral to the conversation that the exhibition proposed was the very essence and font of Italian design excellence. This sleight of hand, that absorbed radical critique as simply another version of good "design," seemingly passed unnoticed, save for the last entry in the "Critical Articles" section, Manfredo Tafuri's "Design and Technological Utopia."[52]

Here, in a trenchant history of design exhibitions, from the VI Triennale of 1936 to the XIII Triennale of 1964, and thence by implication to the MoMA exhibition, Tafuri analyzes the continuous complicity between design and capitalist development, and the relentless tendency for all "counter" design, however radical to be absorbed within and productively exploited by the technology of production. Hence his conclusion that

> Marcuse+Fourier+Dada: the designer absorbs all the ingredients for a systematic reconnoitering of techniques whereby the spectator can be reconciled with the future—since the present is condemned. Utopian space, often constructed without any irony whatsoever, leads directly back to the urban environment, sublimating its chaos, its multiplicity of dimensions, the constant

mutability of its structures. These new *Merzbauten* offer the promise of a nonwork continuum, guaranteed by the most advanced forms of technology and, consequently, by the world of development.[53]

A conclusion that extended the thesis of his earlier manifesto of 1969, "Per una critica dell'ideologia architettonica,"[54] where he had revealed the final exhaustion of the modernist urban utopia in Le Corbusier's project for Algiers, to include the new "utopians" of the 1960s:

> The nostalgic longing for magic, for the golden age of the bourgeois mystique, still continues to be cherished, even at the most highly developed levels of capitalistic integration, as a typical method of compensation. And this will be the case, as long as the magicians, already transformed into acrobats (as Le Corbusier himself finally realized), agree to the ultimate transformation of themselves into clowns, completely absorbed in their 'artful game' of tightrope walking.[55]

In the *present* moment of utopian revivalism, one equally as unexpected as that signaled by Jameson in the 1970s, it is perhaps necessary to revisit, not only the extraordinary *Merzbauten* of "Superarchitettura," but also its critical reception, as we attempt to evaluate the instrumental relations of such counter-architectural images to the production neo-liberal global architecture today.