Abstract
The present study deals with changes in the architectural imaginary between the late 1950s and early 1970s, especially with regard to the promises of unrestricted mobility (architecture and technology in favor of a society that would know no frontiers) and the subsequent representations, in which architecture not only continues to perpetuate exclusion and regimes of segregation, but also assigns a desirable status to this process.

Keywords: history of architecture, 1960s, utopia, Superstudio, Koolhaas, Sottsass, Constant, Archigram

Resumen
El presente estudio trata sobre los cambios en el imaginario arquitectónico entre finales de la década de 1950 e inicios de la de 1970, especialmente al respecto de las promesas de movilidad ilimitada (arquitectura y tecnología a favor de una sociedad que no conocería fronteras) y las representaciones subsecuentes en las que la arquitectura no sólo continúa perpetuando los regímenes de exclusión y segregación, sino que asigna a este proceso un estatus deseable.

Palabras clave: historia de la arquitectura, Europa, década de 1960, utopía, Superstudio, Koolhaas, Sottsass, Constant, Archigram

Resumo
O presente estudo trata das mudanças do imaginário arquitetónico entre o final dos anos 1950 e início dos anos 1970, sobretudo com relação às promessas de mobilidade ilimitada (arquitetura e tecnologia a favor de uma sociedade que não conheceria fronteiras) e as representações subseqüentes, nas quais a arquitetura não só segue perpetuando regimes de exclusão e segregação, como atribuem a este processo um status desejável.

Palavras-chave: história da arquitetura, Europa, Década de 60, Utopia, Superstudio, Koolhaas, Sottsass, Constant, Archigram
Let us take some of the experimental and discursive projects in the field of architecture and urbanism of the late 1950s and 1960s as a starting point: Ville Spatiale (1958) by Yona Friedman, New Babylon (1959) by Constant Nieuwenhuys and Archigram’s Walking City (1964). The context here was the unmeasured optimism of post-industrial society that seemed to demand new designs for the new global citizen, who is able to move freely around the world. At the end of the 1960s, however, progress and the conviction of the transformative potential of architecture started to be seen as producers of dystopian visions. Such is the case with The Twelve Ideal Cities (1971) by Superstudio and Rem Koolhaas’ Exodüs (1972).

This text explores the transformation of the imaginary that first conceived nomadic societies and ended up prefiguring societies voluntarily cloistered by architecture: nomadism was transformed into a limitation reinforced by architecture. We will examine three different perspectives:

1. Megastructures as a support for a society detached from the ground, in response to the new possibilities created by the welfare state.

- Overcoming the need for three-dimensional supports, such as megastructures, would result in a society in which one could live anywhere, indiscriminately. The nomadic imagery of the previous moment is reworked here in an ironic sense.

2. The oppressive, conditioning aspects of architecture emerge, the very definitions of positive and negative, desirable and undesirable become scrambled.

Betting on Nomadism

In 1953, the activist and poet Gilles Ivain (the pseudonym of Ivan Chetcheglov, 1933-1998), a member of the Lettrist International, wrote the astonishing “Formulary for a New Urbanism,” which would be republished in the first issue of the journal of the Situationist International, Internationale Situationniste1 (1958). Ivain conceived of an experimental city whose main activity would be continuous drift: “Architectural complexes will be modifiable. Their appearance will change totally or partially in accordance with the will of their inhabitants.” Ivain evoked the ideas of Chinese and Japanese gardens and the labyrinth, images compatible with a “mobile civilization.”

Ivain conceived of districts that correspond “to the whole spectrum of diverse feelings that one encounters by chance in everyday life.” Instead of the canonized functions of the Athens Charter (1933) – dwelling, recreation, work and transportation – we have a sort of parody of modern zoning, in benefit of leisure: the Happy Quarter is formed mainly of residences, the Historical Quarter contains museums and schools, the Useful Quarter concentrates hospitals and tool shops. Other neighborhoods are

3. the Death Quarter (for people to “live in peace”) and the Sinister Quarter, which concentrates representations of the “evil forces of life;” but is devoid of lethal risks.

The Dutch Situationist artist Constant Nieuwenhuys (1920-2005) reworked some of the central points of Ivain’s experimental city, such as continuous drift and the idea of a mobile civilization, to formulate his New Babylon. Constant’s revolutionary subject finds his references in Johan Huizinga’s Homo Ludens, in the gypsy way of life (which neither recognizes borders nor accumulates objects and properties) and in the increasing free time of citizens from developed countries during that period, which led to the idea that work would soon be dispensable. Overcoming work frees man from sedentariness and he can finally devote himself to pure creation. The abolition of deprivation, labor and private property would lead man back to the nomadic condition of the Neolithic.

Suspended above the ground, New Babylon interferes with the pre-existing only through its pillars and its own shadow, reserving the ground for the circulation of vehicles. Inside New Babylon, an intricately changing labyrinth would be incessantly built and rebuilt by its residents.

In addition to New Babylon, Yona Friedman’s Ville Spatiale may be considered a precursor of megastructures. Friedman founded the Groupe d’Etude d’Architecture Mobile (GEAM) in 1957, partly because of his disagreement with the CIAM of Dubrovnik (1956) on points he considered too vague regarding “mobility,” “growth and change” and “development.”

According to the GEAM manifesto, “Programme for a Mobile Architecture” (1960), all institutions, framed by norms constituted over the centuries, should be periodically renewed: marriage every five years and property rights every ten years. The obstacle to the realization of the “general theory of mobility” was, however, the very rigidity of the built environment, which could not be adapted to life as it has been lived.

The GEAM proposed the reform of property rights in order to allow residents to occupy the air space themselves; variable and changeable constructions, largely employing prefabrication, would adapt the city and urban planning to traffic developments; and “residential and work places, as well as areas for physical and spiritual culture, must be intermingled throughout sections of the city.”

Although Constant agreed with Friedman’s criticism of the modern city, he felt that Ville Spatiale was not a response to the problem; it was still a functional resolution. For Constant, “the future city should not be accentuating dwelling (which is nothing but the opposition between inside and outside) nor displacement (search for needs), but a new use for social space (ecology).” Friedman, for his part, argued that his proposal aimed at making
mobility possible for those who wished it, but that New Babylon, on the other hand, required mobility for all.10 New Babylon presupposed the Marxist and Situationist revolution and the advent of new ways of life: “Homo Ludens himself will seek to transform, to recreate, those surroundings, that world, according to his new needs.”11 Friedman’s proposition, in turn, was aimed at existing cities.

The Archigram group announced the transition from the idea of nomadism to the ironic critique of nomadism. Constant’s New Babylon was published in 1964 in Archigram 5, the same year as Archigram’s Walking City. This project, literally a walking megastructure, passes over land and sea, reflecting an uprooted welfare society, that would soon know no boundaries or limits.

It should be noted that nomadism is not intrinsically a revolutionary or positive attitude. In The Urban Revolution (1970), Henri Lefebvre warns that the very development of capitalism demands the mobility of citizens across the globe. From the point of view of capital, “it is inadmissible that ‘sources of labor’ remain unexplored because they are rooted in the ground.”12 Lefebvre accuses Friedman’s proposals of being aligned with this demand by proposing undifferentiated units or boxes which, in combination, would make up an "ephemeral grouping" capable of settling wherever its megastructure may be. From the social perspective, Lefebvre questions whether residential nomadism would not mean “an extreme, utopian way of individualism, in its own way.”13

The Ironic Critique of Nomadism

By the middle of the 1960s, the social commitment of architecture, as determined by the Modern Movement – to revolutionize society and to shape the built environment for the coming of the New Man – began to show symptoms of collapse, and architecture perceived itself as contributing to the consolidation of the new demands of capital, rather than challenging them. This profound reflection on the role of architecture primarily occurred on a discursive and narrative level, and several architectural designsturned to materiality and feasibility to reassert the discipline’s course.

The Italian critic Germano Celant (1940) coined the term “radical architecture” in his essay “Senza Titolo” (1970) as a way of understanding a series of neo-avant garde groups that sprouted up in Italy in the mid-1960s. Just after the first public appearances of Superstudio14 and Archizoom in 1966, there emerged 9999 (1967), UFO (1967), Ziggurat, all composed of students from the Florence School of Architecture. Gruppo Strum (Turin), Gianni Pettena (1940), Ettore Sottsass (1917-2007) and Ugo La Pietra (1938) are other names connected to this movement. Such groups would not be committed to meeting client demands, but to “function as a destructive philosophical-behavioral action in relation to current architecture.” The most diverse media – photographs, photomontages, illustrations, writings, films and the projecting corpus of the architect himself – are also considered to be architecture. Radical architecture frees itself from doing to consider “architecture in a pure state”: conceptual architecture.15

Although Superstudio members were inspired by Archigram magazine, Superstudio considered Archigram to be uncritical, a continuation of the excessive optimism of the Italian futurists. Archigram’s stance was “full of confidence in the ‘magnificent and progressive’ destiny of neo-technological civilization,” as derived from historical avant-garde movements. With its “concepts of growth, change, metamorphosis, indetermination, anti-zoning, consumption” and software, Archigram ended up reinforcing the myth of technology being able to solve everything, which would correspond to the mythology of reason that explains and organizes everything.16

These issues were addressed in two idyllic designs by Superstudio and Ettore Sottsass, in which nomadism is approached in an ironic way: it is as if these scenarios were no longer utopias but mirages.

Vita (Life) or Supersurface: An Alternative Model of Life on Earth was presented by Superstudio at the MoMA (New York) show Italy: The New Domestic Landscape: Achievements and Problems of Italian Design (1972). Superstudio’s environment for this show consisted of a half-darkened space with a cube on a platform above a plastic laminate floor overlaid with a plaid design representing the infrastructure network of energy and communication systems. The mirrored walls of the cube infinitely extended this plaid pattern, constituting a continuous grid from which there emerged a series of life support terminals – air, heat, water, food and communication – including a display featuring Life.

The architect’s role was defined as necessarily cosmetic: “Architecture presents no alternative proposal, since it uses those instruments which are accurately predisposed to avoid any deviation.”17 This led Superstudio to investigate the relationship between architecture and its fundamental acts through a reductive process in all dimensions of life, in a search for the “redenition of primordial acts.” Superstudio envisioned an urban way of life developing anywhere, anytime, using networks that progressively connect different parts of the world. If megastructures once seemed to be the indispensable support for the modernization of life, the evolution of non-physical means allows us to see the Earth itself as this ideal support. In Life, we have no spatial configuration, only alternative models of behavior.

New forms of agglomeration – especially temporary ones, such as crowds on beaches and hippie gatherings (Woodstock) – put the very definitions of the city and the urban into question. This absence of three-dimensional structures would enable a “tendency toward spontaneous gathering and dispersion.” Life addresses the transition from “hardware to software.”18 Environmental programming ceases to occur by physical means and instead occurs on the supersurface: energy and information networks, as well as miniaturized technologies, control the environment.

Wherever there are power and information transmission grids, it is possible to install the universal plug, from which one can attach the most
varied tools. The targeted use of technology would supply the primordial needs of human beings, who would be freed from work. As habitable zones are extended to practically any part of the globe and once all the barriers that restrain the free flow of individuals (such as the accumulation of goods) have been overcome, the behavior of humans, thus modified, approaches that of migratory birds. With nomadism, one returns to a state of romanticized nature, in which nature is absolutely benevolent.

Those same points are approached in Sottsass’ alternative society The Planet as Festival (1972). Sottsass predicts a situation in which one would neither know what it means to work – the power structures have been completely abolished – nor to produce, but one continues to understand the meaning of consumption. All become artists and craftsman. Consumer products arrive at distribution points through an underground network, making them available even in the remotest places. Once we have solved the problems of production – through total automation – of the distribution of goods – through universal consumption – and of communication – thanks to the “super-possibilities of communication” – the result is the disappearance of cities.

Sottsass designed equipment and models for distributors of goods: mass distributors of waltz, tango, rock and cha-cha-cha music; distributors of pens, paintbrushes, pencils and paper pads for watercolors; distributors of milk, candy, chocolate and soft drinks; distributors of incense, LSD, marijuana, opium and laughing gas.

Sottsass also conceived a destroyed Walking City in the midst of ruined skyscrapers swallowed by sand (The Planet as Festival: Design of a Roof to Discuss Under, project, Perspective 1972-73) as a kind of symbolic burial of the megastructure era.

Both Life and The Planet as Festival epitomize three great points that we could treat as the quintessence of the Marxist utopia: the destruction of the object – understood as the elimination of the commodity fetish and the status embedded in objects – the elimination of the city – which crystallized relationships of exploitation and domination – and the end of all alienated labor. The elimination of these three nodal points in which the capitalist order operates and reinforces itself would also be discussed in 1971 in the magazine IN: Argomenti and immagini di design, which featured contributions from Superstudio, Sottsass and many others.
Life and The Planet as Festival also reveal an irony even with regard to the three goals shown above. After incorporating the critiques of utopian thought as totalizing and totalitarian, one dare not propose the best model for the future; it could only be one among many. The future is seen as merely a speculation and no longer as promise, much less a promise of bliss.

The Power of Architecture

In a general way, Superstudio assumes the utopian repertory to question if this thought should not give up its feasibility in order to preserve its critical power. It results in techniques such as negative utopia by extrapolating ad absurdum the processes unfolding in the present, producing images that confront us with the nefarious side of progress, of functionalism and of the search for perfection.

In the case of Continuous Monument (1969), a certain ambiguity prevails: the cold beauty of its images does not allow us to identify if we are confronted with criticism or praise of modernist movements. The Continuous Monument would be the logical and definitive heir to all monuments, a representation of a "world rendered uniform by technology, culture and all the other inevitable forms of imperialism."20 Faced with the "progressive impoverishment" and overcrowding of the Earth, the Continuous Monument stands as a "single architectual construction with which to occupy the optimal living zones, leaving the others free."21

There was a disagreement among Superstudio members concerning what was happening inside the Continuous Monument. In a sequence of the storyboard, the external surfaces of the Continuous Monument are portrayed as smooth and shiny, and although its interior is unknown, it is available for any use. It was mainly Frassinelli who produced the few images where one can glimpse the interior of the Continuous Monument and developed Le dodici Città Ideali (The Twelve Ideal Cities, 1971) in order to show how life in the Continuous Monument would be necessarily dystopian. The Twelve Ideal Cities therefore put an end to the ambivalence of the Continuous Monument.
The Twelve Ideal Cities turn the notion of ideal form inside out by revealing their inherent conditioning. They consist of a series of small texts followed by images, always presenting the cities from the point of view of the established order. Subversive thoughts are already violently repressed in the first city, 2000-ton City. The orthogonal mesh, indifferent to the topography, leaves no doubt that it is the necessarily oppressive but unportrayed life in the Continuous Monument.

The 2000-ton City consists of a continuous web of perpendicularly-crossed vertical blades, with the whole city built at the same altitude. These blades are composed of a single row of stacked cells with no entrance or exit. Each cell is intended for an individual, whose brain impulses are constantly transmitted and monitored. An electronic analyzer “selects, compares, and interprets the desire of each individual, programming the life of the entire city moment by moment.” Any subversive thinking is tolerated only once. At the first recurrence, “the ceiling panel descends with a force of two thousand tons until it reaches the floor.”

Since death has been overcome, this is the only condition in which the city begins a new life. Maintaining order becomes an end in itself, since there would be no reason to eliminate someone who is a prisoner of his own cell.

In August 1970, Rem Koolhaas went to Florence to meet and talk about Superstudio’s work. It was because of Koolhaas that Superstudio received an invitation to speak at a conference at the Architectural Association (where Koolhaas was studying at the time) in March 1971 and then at the Summer Session, between July and August. Other invitations were made in subsequent years.

In turn, Exodus, The Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture (1972) was featured on the cover of Casabella 378 (June 1973) largely because Superstudio members put Koolhaas in contact with this magazine.

Exodus – the final student work of Rem Koolhaas, later developed with Madelon Vreisendorp, Elia Zenghelis and Zoe Zenghelis – takes over and perfects the ambiguity of the Continuous Monument, forming an epigraph on the construction of the Berlin Wall. Since architecture in Berlin was used to contain the incessant exodus from the “bad” part to the “good” part of this city, the hypothesis is to conceive a “mirror-image of this terrifying architecture,” but now transposed to “positive intentions.”

As the city becomes repulsive, Exodus becomes attractive by opposition: architecture designed for control becomes a refuge from London. Hence, architecture need not to be authoritarian; it is the “hedonistic science of designing facilities that completely accommodate individual desires,” and those who choose to live there are prisoners, but voluntary prisoners.

As Koolhaas observed in his essay “The Berlin Wall as Architecture” (1971, published in 1993), the wall encircled West Berlin, defining a desirable territory embedded in the heart of Soviet territory. But instead of one part of the city being the pole of attraction over another, the Strip, an “architectural oasis” in central London is born, protected in order to preserve its positive attributes. The first candidates for residency begin to arrive in...
an ever-increasing flow. This new and desirable part is continually expanded, concomitantly leading to the collapse an already-ruined Lon-
don. The image of the megastructure reappears here: from the survival of architecture to the col-
lapse of the city.

The linear megastructure coated with a mir-
rored square that traverses London is a direct
reference to the Continuous Monument. From

Final Words
In a short period of time – from the designs of
the late 1950s to Exodus (1972) – we see a dis-
pute over what was intended to be positive or
negative. In some of these cases, it does not
even make sense to determine which is the pre-
dominant sign. Exodus is particularly exemplary
because its design effectively plays with
-
and/or +. Not only the very idea of utopia but the
promise of a life freed from barriers is cornered. It
becomes more difficult to neglect the nefarious
consequences of architecture if we take it in its
broadest sense.

We witness the multiplication of pieces of a
city voluntarily cloistered in closed condomini-
ums, which are sold as promises of well-being
and security. The “Formulary for a New Urban-
ism” (1953) once imagined by Iain did not come,
but in its place, New Urbanism (1993) produced
isolated and exclusive paradises such as Celebra-
tion and Seaside. Likewise, anti-immigration walls
have multiplied and barriers accompany the very
promise of the mobility offered by airports, as
witnessed in the United States and Europe. In
short, the greater the possibilities of mobility, the
more sophisticated are the controls implemented.
Where there is deprivation, there is a wall, even if
it is subtle or invisible. And architecture needs to
discuss these other forms of walls, not forgetting
the more concrete ones.

This part still contains a preserved area of the
old city. The Ceremonial Square is where refu-
gees are submitted to physical and mental exer-
cises. In the Square of the Arts, baths have the
function of “recycling public and private fantasies,
of testing and possibly introducing new forms of
behavior.” Similar to some of The Twelve Ideal
Cities, the parallel walls of this part are composed
of cells of various sizes, from which people go out
into public spaces. The last part, The Allotments,
is a suburb where each voluntary prisoner has
their own house, nothing happens and time has
ceded to pass.

Exodus makes it clear that what is expected
from architecture is fulfilled by the Berlin Wall:
“We were not division, enclosure (i.e., imprison-
ment), and exclusion – which defined the wall’s
performance and explained its efficiency – the
essential stratagems of any architecture?”

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Rem Koolhaas and Elia Zenghelis, “Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture,” Casabella 378 (June, 1973), 42
Endnotes

1. The Lettrist International (LI) was an "extremist tendency" of the Lettrists, a movement founded by Isidore Isou. Disagreements between Guy Debord – at the time one of the Lettrists – and Isou resulted in the founding of the LI in 1952 by Debord. The Situationist International (SI), in turn, was officially formed in 1957 by a merger of members of the LI, the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (MIBI) and the Psychogeographic Association of London. Some of the main figures of the SI were Debord, the Danish artist Asger Jorn, the Belgian writer Raoul Vaneigem and the Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuys.


6. According to the Japanese architect Fumihiko Maki, "The megastrucure is a large frame in which all the functions of a city are housed. It has been made possible by present day technology. In a sense, it is a man-made feature of the landscape. It is like the great hill on which Italian towns were built," Fumi hiko Maki, Investigations in Collective Form (Saint Louis: Washington University, 1964), 8.


10. Mark Wigley, Constant's New Babylon, 41.


13. Heri Lefebvre, A Revolução Urbana, 90.


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Diego Mauro Muniz Ribeiro
Master in Architecture and Urbanism
Universidade de São Paulo (USP), Brazil.
diegomrib@gmail.com