

certainty incompatible with the present, the “rediscovery” of architecture was projected forwards and backwards simultaneously, the future encountered like a long-lost artifact.

A similarly disjointed continuity can be traced in the film’s storyboard, which was first published in 1971.<sup>527</sup> [Fig. 4.18] Rather than follow a single story line or protagonist, the film develops a loose narrative through a series of seven sequences, ranging between 8 to 24 storyboard frames in length. Here the logic of the match cut sets up a larger tension that will be central to the film—on the one hand there is a recurring concern for narrating a historical or teleological development of form—at one point the voice over refers to the film as a “parable of formalization,”—yet such development is continually broken up by a logic of montage, in the form of cuts that interrupt and redirect any narrative progress. A series of narratives concerning the development of form follow one another in rapid succession, from a rapid-fire inventory of systems of order—from models of the cosmos to the proportions of the human body—to the series of monuments featured in “Discorsi per immagini,” from the cubic form of the Kaaba at Mecca to the Vertical Assembly Building in Florida, and from the linearity of Roman aqueduct to a highway cloverleaf in Southern California. This is followed by a pseudo-biblical “genesis” of geometrical solids—in which forms emerge from the desert and transform themselves, hovering in the air like a mirage—a “drive-in museum of architecture,”—in which architectural elements, from the pyramid, to the cube, the arch, and the truss, are displayed—and a sequence entitled “How to Illuminate the Desert,”—in which an enlarged version of one of Superstudio’s own lamps produces “images of dream architecture,” a film within a film, or infra-montage, tracing a history of the “heroic

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<sup>527</sup> While the storyboard was developed in 1969, it was not published until a year later, first in Japan and subsequently in Italy. See: Superstudio, “The Continuous Monument Series,” *Japan Interior Design* 140 (November 1970). Superstudio “Deserti Naturali e Artificiali,” *Casabella* 358 (November 1971) 18-22.

buildings of the age of rationalism,” from Le Corbusier’s “Ville Radieuse” to Joseph Paxton’s Crystal Palace, to Boullée’s Cenotaph for Newton.<sup>528</sup> The concluding frame of the sequence ends on an ambiguous note, a crowd passed beneath a “triumphal arch” composed of glowing neon tubes, less a unified public than an incongruous multitude, which the voice over describes as “nomads, white-collar workers on holiday, and peace demonstrators.” Such shifts produce a temporality that is never secure, an uncertainty reinforced by the following cut, which shows a simple black rectangle on a white ground, suggesting a movement from illumination to mysterious darkness. The accompanying voiceover states: “All we have loved is lost, we are now in the desert. Before us is but a square.” The passage was a citation from Kasimir Malevich, who invoked the metaphor of the desert in his description of the Moscow public’s reaction to the abstraction of his Black Square in 1915, but can also be read in this context as a comment on the squares within the Histogram grid.<sup>529</sup> A series of traveling shots reveal a further set of quasi-architectural “apparitions” within this desert—a door, a corridor, a floating stone, and walls, evoking the floating solids of Suprematist compositions as much as contemporaneous earthworks published during the late 1960s in the pages of *Domus*.<sup>530</sup> The sequence of apparitions concludes with a view through a dark tunnel, at the end of which the Continuous Monument glimmers. The tunnel frames the end of an uncertain passage in space, which can be read allegorically as the culmination of disjointed a

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<sup>528</sup> The passage from Le Corbusier to Ledoux echoes the thesis of Emil Kaufmann’s *Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier* (1933). Kaufmann’s work on the such “revolutionary” Neo-Classical architects had been importantly highlighted by Aldo Rossi, in his landmark *The Architecture of the City* (1966), and earlier, in “Emil Kaufmann e l’architettura dell’illuminismo,” *Casabella Continuità* 222 (November 1958): 42-47.

<sup>529</sup> The quote, taken from Kasimir Malevich’s *Non-Objective World* (1926).

<sup>530</sup> The connection to Land Art has been noted by Frampton, Theres-Stauffer, and Gargiani and Lampariello, op. cit.. De Maria’s work was featured at this moment in Italian journals, including article such as Germano Celant, “Walter De Maria,” *Casabella* 334 (March 1969): 42-43 and Tommaso Trini, “Imagination Takes Command,” *Domus* 471 (February 1969), 43.

movement through moments in history—from models of order, to archaic monuments, to geometry, the rise of modernist architecture and the ruptures of the historical avant-garde. If such moments appear as linear sequence, their temporality is never secure. Throughout there is both a persistent desire for illumination— an association reinforced by the proximity of the Italian terms *illuminare* and *Illuminismo*—present in references to lamps, cinematic projections, glimmers and mirages, and a deep uncertainty about the Enlightenment narrative of progress.

It is at the end of the tunnel sequence that the group positioned the series of photomontages that have been most commonly used to represent the Continuous Monument project. The sequence begins with a cut from the tunnel to a view of Earth from outer space. The cut marks a shift from the grounded perspective of the viewer in the desert sequence to a view that has been thoroughly deterritorialized—the ultimate “view from nowhere,” which establishes the frame of reference for the montage sequence that concluded the film. From an initial pan upwards across the lakeshore photomontage, the sequence’s rhythm accelerates into a rapid, staccato sequence, passing from deserts and alpine landscapes, to ancient monuments and cities. If first three-quarters of the film narrated the development of a range of abstract forms, the final section abandons any narrative progression, the montage places one image after another without connection. It was an effect they described as “random images, disquieting as every postcard bearing ‘greetings from.’”<sup>531</sup> The only feature stabilizing such “random images” was the disjointed continuity of the Continuous Monument itself, a type of universal landmark recurring in each frame, notionally linking them together. The sequence ends with a slow

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<sup>531</sup> “Alcune immagini a caso, inquietanti come tutte le cartoline con “saluti da...”. The phrase appears in the description of the Trigon 69 installation. Superstudio “Deserti Naturali e Artificiali,” *Casabella* 358 (November 1971) 22.

zoom into the Continuous Monument as it recedes into the distance across a large aerial panorama of lower Manhattan, a photomontage the group named “New New York.” [Fig. 4.19]. The sequence of images captured both the global scope of the Continuous Monument and its indifference to its surroundings. The latter aspect was important to Superstudio, who wrote of their search for “a design that when transported remains identical to itself, changing scale or meaning without trauma or incident. This immutability interests us: the search for an image that is ‘impassible and inalterable, whose static perfection moves the world through the love that it creates for itself.’”<sup>532</sup> The project’s ability to celebrate its resistance to movement, its ability to remain immutable and “identical to itself,” a “...closed, immobile object that leads nowhere but to itself and the use of reason,” is paradoxically produced by its relentless transport, its “identity” grasped only as a figure contrasting against a series of grounds, virtually displaced by means of montage into a disparate range of sites.<sup>533</sup>

The extreme wide-angle lens used for the aerial photograph of Manhattan creates a simultaneous impression of proximity and distance, in which the view is close enough

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<sup>532</sup> Superstudio, “Lettera da Graz,” 53. “Un disegno cioè che si trasporta rimanendo uguale a se stesso, cambiando scala o area semantica senza traumi o inconvenienti. Quest’immutabilità c’interessa: la ricerca di un’immagine ‘impassibile e inalterabile la cui statica perfezione muove il mondo attraverso l’amore che fa nascere per sé.’”

<sup>533</sup> Superstudio, “The Continuous Monument,” *Superstudio: Life Without Objects*, p. 122. Superstudio’s praise of rationality and autonomy closely mirrors that used by Natalini in a letter to Aldo Rossi. See, Letter from Adolfo Natalini to Aldo Rossi, December 15, 1970; cited in Gargiani and Lampariello, *Superstudio*, 48.

“Ogni tanto troviamo un tuo progetto più o meno misterioso, un tempo su “Casabella” ora altrove su libretti o libri. Ogni volta è come un miracolo che rafforza la nostra fede in un’architettura serena e immobile la cui immagine è la nostra più lucida speranza. I tuoi enunciati d’architettura ci hanno molto aiutato nella ricerca di una calma ragione, dove gli atti sono misurati e precisi, dove anche l’ambiguità sia priva di sbavature e i grigi siano colore.”

Each time it is like a miracle that strengthens our faith in a serene and immobile architecture whose image is our most lucid hope. Your architectural statements have greatly helped us in the search of a calm reason, where acts are measured and precise, where ambiguity would be free of smudges and even the grays would be colored.

to make out individual, historic skyscrapers, and yet far enough to include the horizon, towards which the linear monument converges as disappears into the image's vanishing point. It is such an elevated vantage point that became the most common framing for the Continuous Monument photomontages—and it is this gaze that describes and surveys from above, rather than any of the physical locations shown within the photographs, which arguably provides the project with its most consistent “site.” The materiality of the montages reveals a tension essential to the entire series—the self-referential, autonomous architecture of closed geometries and gridded surfaces described by Superstudio was fabricated from its opposite, a series of heteronomous views produced by the culture industry, from mass cultural advertisements and article clippings, to travel posters and postcards, material overlaid with heliographic paper, colored pencil, graphite, and airbrush ink. In the case of the *New New York* montage that concluded the film, the aerial view was taken from a large format travel poster produced by Pan-Am airlines.<sup>534</sup> The selection of such oversize material as the ground for constructing the particular photomontage was in part motivated by the desire for images with high-definition—the scale of the poster allowed for images to be reduced rather than enlarged for reproduction. In appropriating this highly specific aerial panorama, the Continuous Monument absorbed an advertising rhetoric of visual immediacy—a bias for high-resolution color photography combined with minimal copy—specific to the advertising culture of the moment.<sup>535</sup> The image both conforms to the compositional norms of the series and subtly breaks with them; seen from an even greater distance and from the

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<sup>534</sup> Copyright is given in the margin in *Casabella*. Confirmed during interview with Frassinelli, June 2011.

<sup>535</sup> Posters from just a few years earlier would not have been suited to the making of a photomontage like that created by Superstudio, being composed not of large scale photographs, but often a combination of commercial illustration and advertising copy.

elevated vantage point of a distance aerial view, “New New York” eschews the gridded flatness of paper found in most of the Continuous Monument images, in favor of a more mirror-like surface. The paper used to create the image was carefully modulated with graphite and colored pencil, the suggestion of shadows and reflections optically binding it to the photographic surrounding. This effort to render the insertion visually seamless actually proceeded through a more aggressive intervention into the materiality of the photographic support. In the foreground, the section of skyscrapers in lower Manhattan—to be “preserved in memory of a time when cities were built with no single plan,”—are safeguarded by literally being cut out, folded up, and tucked through the paper of the monument in a manner that protects and violates, enacting the destruction-preservation through which the Continuous Monument asserted its self-identity.<sup>536</sup>

If the relentless transport effectuated by means of montage was essential to portraying the Continuous Monument as “identical to itself” and resistant to change, the Pan Am poster suggests that the transport in question was not only that of montage, but also of global travel and visual communication. In this sense, the paratactic sequence of photomontages that concludes the film can be seen as part of Superstudio’s ambition to locate their projects within a global architectural network, a network that was itself being catalyzed through an increase in transcontinental travel and the growth of intercontinental telecommunication at this moment.<sup>537</sup> Such a tension internal to the work accompanies a

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<sup>536</sup> From frame 79 of the storyboard for the Continuous Monument. In English in original. See: “Deserti Naturali e Artificiali,” 22. The interior edges were carefully retouched in black to create an optically crisp edge when rephotographed.

<sup>537</sup> See for instance the reflections on the importance of international travel in Beatriz Colomina “Toward a Global Architect,” *Architects’ Journeys: Building Traveling Thinking* (New York: GSAPP Books, 2011) 20-49, and in Irene Sunwoo, “Pedagogy’s Progress: Alvin Boyarsky’s International Institute of Design,” *Grey Room* 34 (Winter, 2009), 28-57. In addition to the exhibition at MoMA, during the early 1970s the group would become visitors at the International Summer Sessions in London, and Natalini would begin teaching at the Rhode Island School of Design.

larger conceptual shift; in contrast to the early preoccupation with the reconfigurable, multimedia interior, the Continuous Monument is strictly described from the outside, appearing in stark contrast with a changing set of conditions, from the flat expanse of the desert to Alpine lakes, and from the historic city to the dense congestion of the metropolis. The disjunctive continuity of montage was the means for constructing such an image of the outside, and marked a turn to a new set of problems, both within the image—a search for greater resolution, the progressive elimination of visual gaps and noise, and the introduction of the atmospheric effects of shading and airbrushing—and between images—the creation of a narrative out of the conflicts and discontinuities in a series of still images. Contrasts and differences were progressively absorbed into a greater visual uniformity, one that no longer sought to emphasize the assembly of disparate parts, but an incongruity internal to an apparently seamless set of images. Superstudio sought to align the Continuous Monument, like the grid of the Histograms, with the exercise of reason, yet the sequence of photomontages, crafted so as to imply the endless repetition of the same grid-figure, implied a form of reason driven to excess, an architecture of aberrant rationalism.

The uncertainty and ambiguity attached to the aberrant aspects of the Continuous Monument was noted by Giovanni Klaus Koenig when he introduced the storyboard in *Casabella* in 1971. Koenig deflected charges that such an approach was “obscure,” “snobbish,” or “a brilliant ploy to disengage oneself from the angst of urbanism,” and compared Superstudio’s storyboard to the work that earlier twentieth-century avant-gardes had similarly carried out in little magazines and other small publications.<sup>538</sup> He

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<sup>538</sup> Superstudio “Deserti Naturali e Artificiali,” 18. Koenig’s position as a senior intellectual figure on the editorial board of Alessandro Mendini’s *Casabella*, together with his broader role as a writer for a wider

notably compared the Continuous Monument to an obscure 1920 pamphlet by Bruno Taut: *Der Weltbaumeister* an “architecture-spectacle for symphonic music.”<sup>539</sup> Both projects consisted of sequences of images linked by continuous narrative captions, and both took on the theme of the architect as world builder. Yet Koenig saw in such a grand theme of world mastery less an expression of confidence, than “a clear and disturbing symptom of the alienated condition of the architect today.”<sup>540</sup>

In other words, the misery and inaction of chaotic Berlin in 1919–1920 caused the same reactions provoked today by our frenetic affluence. The architect feels equally marginalized and deprived of a real decision-making power, so that the anxiety of Gropius and Taut equals the anxiety that gnaws at us today: The two extremes have come to touch each other.<sup>541</sup>

The alienation symptomatized by such graphic production, he asserted, was not simply a compensatory turn toward paper due to a lack of building work—as Taut would himself later suggest—but was a form of “theoretic-graphic activity,” whose influence, retrospectively, appeared considerable.<sup>542</sup> Koenig emphasized the important link between

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gamut of newspapers and cultural magazines, lent a particular importance to his affirmation of Superstudio’s work. The relationship with Koenig had already begun some years before, when, as a professor at the School of Architecture in Florence, Koenig had supported students such as Frassinelli, who were introducing experiments with film into their thesis projects. Not insignificantly, Koenig also wrote film criticism for Italian newspapers. Gian Piero Frassinelli, Interview with author, July 22, 2011.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid., 18. See: Bruno Taut, *Der Weltbaumeister: Architektur-Schauspiel für symphonische Musik*, (Hagen: Folkwang Verlag, 1920).

<sup>540</sup> Ibid.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid. “In altre parole, la miseria e l’inazione della caotica Berlino 1919-1920 causavano le stesse reazioni provocate oggi dal nostro frenetico benessere. L’architetto si sente egualmente emarginato e privo di un vero potere decisionale, cosicché l’angoscia di Gropius e Taut equivale all’angoscia che ci attanaglia oggi: I due estremi sono arrivati a toccarsi.”

<sup>542</sup> Ibid.,

Taut ha in seguito minimizzato le sue fantasie del 1920, quasi che questa architettura concettuale fosse un ripiego temporaneo a causa della mancanza di lavoro, e non una vera e propria attività creativa. Il parere degli storici è però diverso: le recenti revisioni critiche, da Borsi a Tafuri, hanno messo in luce l’importanza di questa attività teorico-grafica, che influenzò certamente il primo Le Corbusier.

Taut subsequently minimized his fantasies of 1920, as if this conceptual architecture was a temporary expedient due to the lack of work, and not a real creative activity. The opinion of historians, however, is different: recent critical revisions, from Borsi to Tafuri, have highlighted the importance of this theoretic-graphical activity that certainly influenced Le Corbusier above all.



such historical moments of crisis and anxiety, pointing to episodes of acute insecurity as those that generated a thorough questioning and reconceptualization of practice.<sup>543</sup> The group's "theoretic-graphic activity" had a similarly conflicted and marginal posture, neither critical nor affirmative, they both spoke of the elimination of architects while enormously amplifying the scale and role in which architecture was envisioned. It was a posture that enunciated a critique of the profession, while not abandoning the discipline altogether. In a 1971 lecture at London's Architectural Association, Natalini formulated the group's position in the following terms: "If design is merely an inducement to consume, then we must reject design; if architecture is merely the codifying of bourgeois models of ownership and society, then we must reject architecture...until all design activities are aimed towards meeting primary needs."<sup>544</sup> Yet, in the same talk Natalini went on to affirm that "[o]ur work involves the continuous production, elaboration, and transmission of ideas."<sup>545</sup> In retrospect, the group's position hinges on a key, if not overtly articulated, distinction regarding the architect's intellectual work. The group's turn toward serial production and an all-encompassing grid system was less a project of formal autonomy than an effort to reduce the labor invested in the creation of form, what

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<sup>543</sup> Anxiety had been central to Koenig's most famous essay—"L'Invecchiamento dell'Architettura Moderna" (The Aging of Modern Architecture)—where he argued that the persistence of anxiety allowed modern architecture to resist the danger of senescence that came with its advanced age. Koenig explicitly took Adorno's 1959 essay "The Aging of the New Music" as a model, transferring the terms of Adorno's oppositional terms—between the rigor of early modernism and its gradual absorption by the expanding culture industry—to the situation of postwar architecture. See Giovanni Klaus Koenig, *L'invecchiamento Dell'architettura Moderna Ed Altre Dodici Note* (Florence: Libreria editrice fiorentina, 1967). Anxiety was an important term more generally for Italian criticism at this moment, it was notably the term Tafuri highlighted in "Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology," whose first line is: "To dispel anxiety by understanding and internalizing its causes: this would seem to be one of the principal ethical imperatives of bourgeois art."

<sup>544</sup> Adolfo Natalini, "Lecture at the AA School of Architecture, London, March 3, 1971," reprinted in *Superstudio: Life Without Objects*, 165-67.

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

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