



Adolfo Natalini, Cristiano Toraldo Di Francia, Gian Piero Frassinelli at MAXXI sul Divano Bazaar

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Superstudio – (left to right) Adolfo Natalini, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia and Gian Piero Frassinelli, at MAXXI, Rome, 2016 for “Superstudio 50”

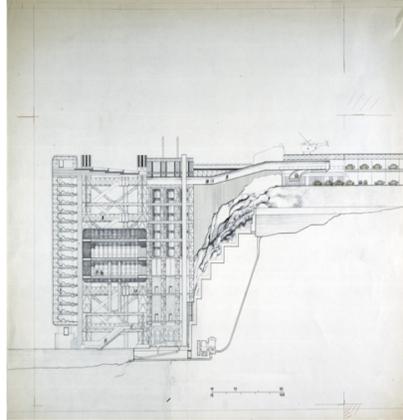
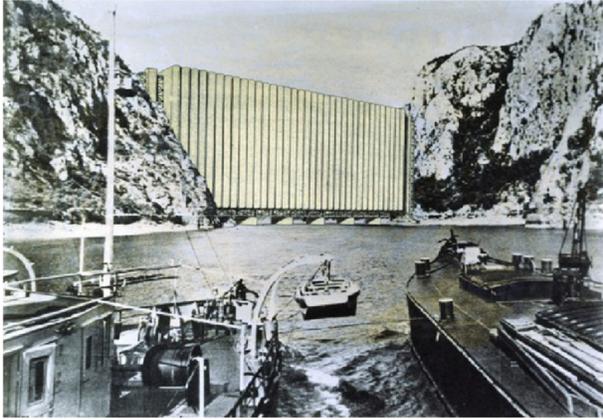
Cristiano Toraldo di Francia , Radical Architect, Cofounder of Superstudio, dies at 78.

By Matthew Bialecki, AIA

Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, the Florentine architect who cofounded the renowned avant-garde architectural group, Superstudio, died July 30th at his home near Ascoli Piceno, Italy. He was 78 years old.

Born in Florence in 1941, Toraldo di Francia’s influence on contemporary architecture, design, and urbanism was profound. He came of age in the 1960’s during the social and political upheavals that challenged political, cultural and artistic norms the world over. In architecture, post-war modernism was in crisis, lost in a corporatized system devoted to formal concerns. For Toraldo di Francia, professional architectural practice disregarded the profound changes occurring in politics, technology and mass production.

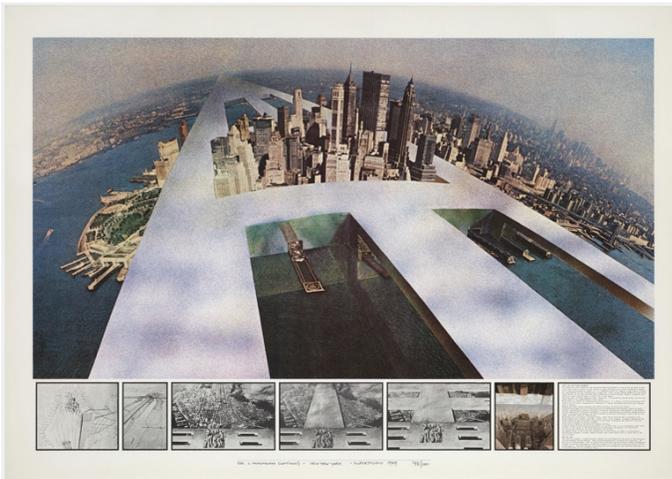
His response was his graduate thesis project entitled, “Holiday Machine in Tropea,” which combined a comprehensive environmental solution with a monumental work of architecture and was immediately recognized as a masterwork. It was published by Domus in 1967 and its startling drawings and photomontages, now part of Centre Pompidou and MAXXI permanent collections, foreshadowed work to come.



Cristiano Toraldo di Francia – “Holiday Machine in Tropea “- 1966

In 1966 while still attending the University of Florence, he founded Superstudio with his classmate Adolfo Natalini. They were joined in 1971 by Alessandro and Roberto Magris and by Gian Piero Frasanelli. In 1966, Superstudio also held their first and groundbreaking architectural exhibition “Superarchitettura” with Archizoom (Andrea Branzi). There the two groups exhibited theoretical projects and domestic objects that proposed alternative models for living with architecture, technology and nature. The show’s manifesto called on humanity to embrace a future no longer possible to ignore:

“Superarchitecture is the architecture of Superproduction, of Superconsumption, of Superpersuasion to consume, of the Supermarket, the Superman, of Superoctane gasoline. Superarchitecture accepts the logic of production and consumption, and works for its demystification.

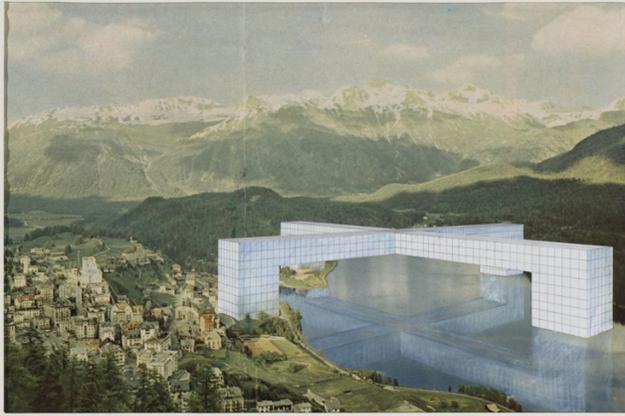


Superstudio- Continuous Monument -New York -1967

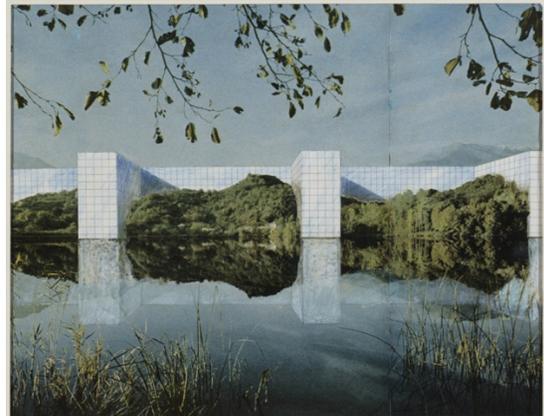


Superstudio –“Continuous Monument - Alpine Lake” 1967

The heart of the exhibit was Superstudio’s transcendent “Continuous Monument”, which imagined mega-structures of cool gridded glass enveloping the world in a euphoric dystopia. From Monument Valley to Midtown Manhattan, Paris to the Taj Mahal, with every world landscape in between, the “Continuous Monument”_showed an endless, monumental architecture coexisting with urban and natural environments.



Superstudio – “Continuous Monument - St. Moritz Revisited” – 1967.

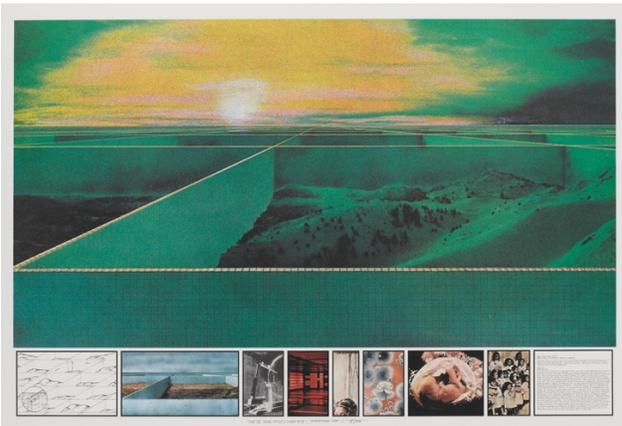


Superstudio – “Continuous Monument -Along the River” – 1967

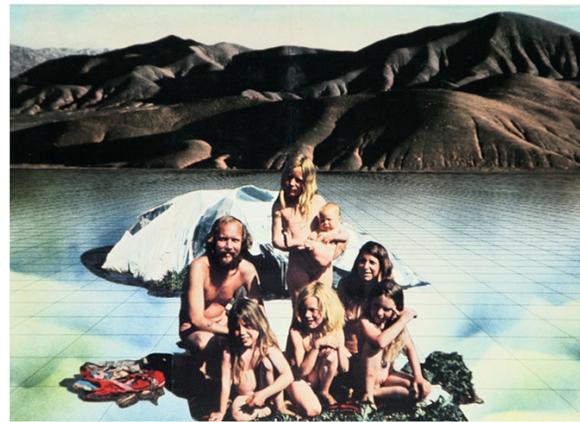
Easily at home with Sant’Elia’s Futurist “Citta Nuova”, Kubrick’s “2001” and Thoreau’s “Walden”, it was a devastating critique and a singular celebration of architectural utopias, urbanism, mass production, and science fiction that still resonates today. As Toraldo di Francia wrote:

*“...we produced a model of total urbanization called **The Continuous Monument**. This project, through the images of a negative (critical) Utopia, pushed to extremes the classical conception of the relationship between nature and architecture, city and country. The rhetorical figure of the demonstration by absurdity, laid bare, through photomontages, the public image of a new relationship, no longer of opposition, but of hybridization and alliance”.*

These projects, and later, others, such as, “Twelve Ideal Cities” and “Supersurface” (1971), used their seductively beautiful photomontages to propose an architectural and environmental future never seen before.



Superstudio-Twelve Ideal Cities - #1 The 2,000 Ton City - 1971

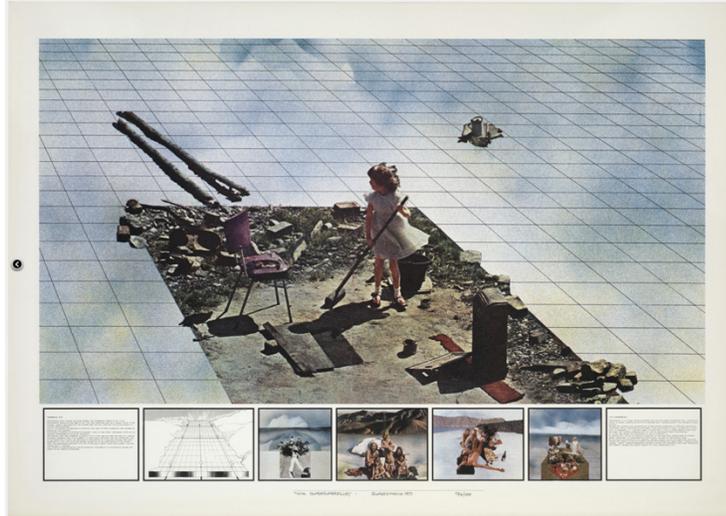


Superstudio - Supersurface – Camping – 1971

For Superstudio, design was a form of social and political critique; a vehicle for embodying that critique, and hypothesizing alternative scenarios for human life on earth. “Supersurface”, imagined the earth as one, great, borderless plane, an infinite surface that would replace all objects, all buildings, with a grid of energy, which people could access by simply plugging in. The concept, 40 years before the internet, feels eerily prophetic today.



Supersurface. 1971



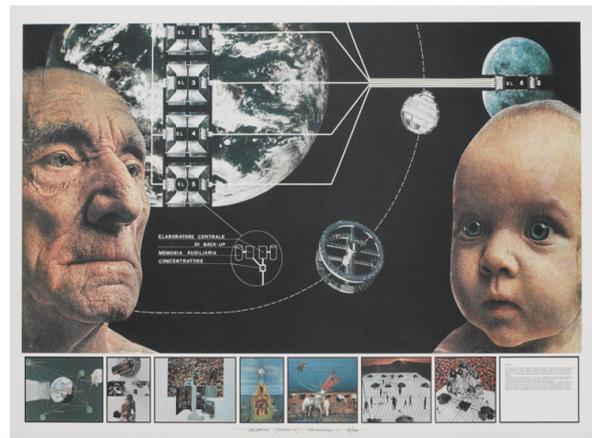
Life – Pulizie di Primavera (Spring Cleaning) – Supersurface- 1971

From the 1970's through the 2000's, Superstudio's work was widely exhibited to broad acclaim; it was shown at the Milan Triennale (1973), Metropolitan Museum in New York (1976), Venice Biennale (1978, 1996, 2014) and the Walker Art Center (1973). Invited by curator/architect Emilio Ambasz to the 1972 MOMA exhibit, "*Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*", Superstudio presented a built "environment" to show their film "*Supersuperficie: A Life Without Objects*". In 2003, the Design Museum in London recreated the exhibit with the title: "*Superstudio, a World Without Objects*". Today, Superstudio's drawings and objects are in the permanent collections of major museums of art and design around the world.

The work of Superstudio influenced leading theorists and practitioners of the 20th and 21st centuries including Rem Koolhaas (who did his AA thesis on Superstudio), Zaha Hadid, Peter Cook/Archigram, Coop Himmelblau, Steve Holl, Gaetano Pesce, Michele di Lucci and the Italian firms ZZigurat and UFO.

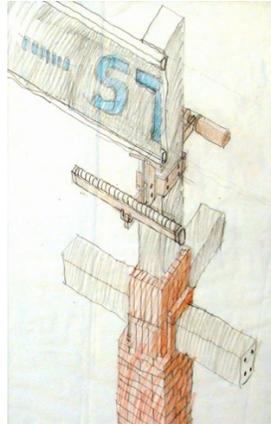


Supersurface detail of plug in, interactive grid - 1971.



Supersurface – Education - Superstudio series - 1971

In 1980 the Superstudio collective dissolved, and Toraldo di Francia focused on his architectural practice, first in Florence with Andrea Noferi, and later in 1994, teaming with Lorena Luccioni and relocating his office to the Marche region of Italy. During a career that spanned over 40 years, Toraldo completed a significant body of architectural, planning and urban design work throughout Italy. He designed public spaces and transportation facilities in Rome, Florence, Ancona, Pesaro, Prato, Montepulciano, and many other cities. For the Italian State Railway and the Florentine Transportation Authority, he designed the regional train stations in Statuto, Rignano, and Peretola.



Train Station, Statuto, Firenze, 1987

Arguably one of his best and most controversial designs was the La Pensilina di Santa Maria Novella, a bus and taxi terminal in central Florence. The almost impossible site was adjacent to two masterpieces of architecture, Michelucci's Rationalist 1935 train station, the Stazione Centrale, and the Basilica of Santa Maria Novella, with its 15th century façade by Leon Battista Alberti. Toraldo di Francia deftly designed his elongated transportation center to engage both these iconic neighbors by cladding the neo-rationalist structure of steel and glass with green and white striped marble referencing the Romanesque Florentine tradition of Alberti's façade. It was a master work worthy of its place, but, sadly, it was removed in a much-lamented reconstruction of the piazza in the 1990's.

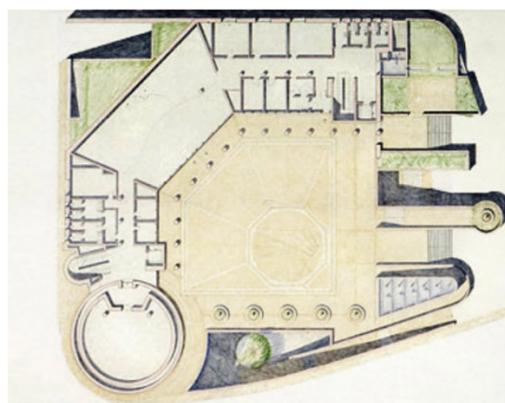


La Pensilina - Bus and Taxi Terminal, Firenze, 1990

Toraldo di Francia was also a prolific furniture and furnishings designer who worked for Castelli, Zanotta, Poltronova, Flos, Calzolari, and others. The Quadrata series of tables and chairs is still in production at Zanotta. Based on the Superstudio "Histograms of Architecture" series, the project postulated the removal of the design process to create a catalogue of three dimensional diagrams, a neutral utopia of quantity.



He completed major interiors for Banca Toscana, Istituto Bancario San Paolo di Torino (now Intesa Sanpaolo) and recently, the headquarters for Banca del Chianti, San Casciano, Val di Pesa



Banca del Chianti, San Casciano, Val di Pesa – 1984-1992

Throughout his life, Toraldo was active in writing and publishing with several books on architecture and landscape design to his name, including the series "Signs and Designs" (Alinea) and his treatise on landscapes "Trees /Alberi" (2007). The definitive publication of Superstudio's work, "Superstudio 1966-1982" by Italian architect/writer Gianni Pettena, (Electa) was published on the occasion of the retrospective exhibition at the Accademia Gallery in Florence. This was followed by, "Superstudio and the Radicals" (Moryama,1982) which Toraldo di Francia personally edited and supervised.

In addition to his landmark work with Superstudio, and his substantial built work, Toraldo di Francia is also remembered for his contributions to architectural education. He loved teaching

and was indefatigable in his support and encouragement of his students and their careers. He lectured at architectural schools throughout the world including the Architectural Association in London, Paris La Villette, Nihon University, Rietveld Akademie, Cornell University, Syracuse University, Rhode Island School of Design, and California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo & California Polytechnic State University Pomona, among many others.

From 1975-2006, Toraldo di Francia was a professor of architecture at the California State University International Study Center (CSUIC) where he directed the architecture program. It was through his many years at CSUISC that he introduced Italian architecture, urbanism, landscape and design to an entire generation of American architectural students.

His studio pedagogy often imposed a confrontation between students' design preconceptions of contemporary Italy by assigning projects on historical sites and national architectural competitions. His teaching methodology prodded students to understand the components ("gli elementi") of their proposed designs and the consequences and impacts they would have in a broader cultural and political context. In this way, the discourse begun with Superstudio, continued through his teaching; encouraging his students to develop an architecture that was a political, social, and cultural commentary about their life and their place in society.

In 2003 Toraldo di Francia was invited to join the faculty of a new the School of Architecture and Industrial Design at the University of Camerino, Ascoli Piceno. He was a Professor of Architecture in addition to teaching Industrial Design and Landscape Architecture. As part of his teachings he organized the annual international workshop "Coast2Coast" at the School of Architecture of Ascoli which brought together students and teachers from around the world to conduct research on coastal urbanization issues present along the Adriatic coastline

Over the course of his teaching career, he taught thousands of students. His studios and lectures were widely revered and his domestic and international influence, including on American contemporary architects and their work, is significant to this day.

Cristiano Toraldo di Francia is survived by his wife Lorena Luccioni, and their son Tommaso Toraldo di Francia, and daughter Giulia Toraldo di Francia, by his former wife, Frances Lansing and son Yates Buckley, his sisters Monica and Isabella Toraldo di Francia, and grandchildren Carla and Yates Antonio Toraldo di Francia.

