

The Museum of Modern Art

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RELEASE NO. 45

ITALY: THE NEW DOMESTIC LANDSCAPE

Counter Design as Postulation

Director: Emilio Ambasz

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Patron: Gufram

The Gruppo Strum, rather than presenting a physical design of a domestic environment, chooses rather to go out into the street. Its "stand" represents any corner, where they freely distribute three different pamphlets -- red, white, green -- drawn in the form of photo-cartoons.

The first pamphlet (white) depicts the present conditions of urban decay. The red pamphlet describes the methods which may be adopted to change the present situation. The green pamphlet catalogues all forms of urban utopias presently envisioned by designers the world over.

FOR AN INTERMEDIATE CITY

Statement by Gruppo Strum (Giorgio Ceretti, Pietro Derossi, Carlo Gianmarco, Riccardo Rosso)

We should have liked to have replied with simplicity to the commission by The Museum of Modern Art of New York for the exhibition of Italian design, by "designing" the space entrusted to us. But, after discussing the guideline to our argument and examining the possible "reference groups" to aim it at (the good people that will come to the MOMA on Sundays to get informed on Italian design, the American manufacturers frightened by foreign competition, the Italian manufacturers needing to boost their exports, designer friends or enemies who want to understand and label us the critics that have to pass judgment, or all these people together, etc.), we did not succeed in inventing any "physical forms" capable of communicating our thought -- or even part of our thought -- on the problems of the Italian New Domestic Landscape: not the softest of armchairs, not the descending flights of long-piled moquette carpet, not the colored "perspex," not the gleaming stainless steel surfaces, not the complex and multi-purpose devices, not the plain, functional furniture; and not even empty space as a negation, mirrors with their magic, disturbing psychophysical sensations or globalizing displays.

And yet we had plenty of things to say. We wanted this important exhibition at the MOMA to be an opportunity to say them, and to say them directly, so as really to inform with precise data and records.

As an instrument for developing our approach we chose a sort of newspaper, or rather, "illustrated stories with documents" -- an odd kind of symbiosis between illustrated adventure and an informative catalogue in a department store. A stratagem that allowed us to tackle big topics in a sufficiently synthetic way.

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The area assigned to us by the Museum becomes a simply equipped space for distributing free of charge to the public three series of "illustrated stories;" each series illustrates an aspect of design which we believe to be of particular importance. If someone has doubts about how to decorate his house, or wants to know if design is art, or more exactly, if Italian design is good, he will certainly find an answer in the information that we will give him, though the answer will be indirect and will deal with broader and more involved topics than normally expected.

The problems we have examined are:

The struggle for a home (white papers) - Many people in Italy do not have a decent home to live in, and some have no home at all. If they are not given one - and for the time being no one is likely to give it to them, they must get homes for themselves by organizing themselves into a political movement capable of overturning the trend of the current system in which their fringe existence and exploitation are functional.

And not only must they get hold of any home in order to have a place to sleep after hours of alienating work, but they must get themselves homes that are really comfortable for their individual lives and that will form the initial element of a different collective life.

What they must procure, therefore, is not merely a home to live in, but a city, so as to ensure for themselves a freer social life and one more in keeping with the needs.

There have been many struggles for these goals in Italy. The white papers recount and illustrate these facts, showing also how these struggles for homes continually reshape cities, by attacking and defeating the capitalist organization of territory together with the symbolic values of its formalization.

UTOPIA (green papers) - It is not possible not to consider a world organized in a different way, where people are happier and where all the current faults would be gotten rid of. Imagining a heavy development of technology or a return to country life, one can predict flexible, adaptable, mobile, provisional urban settlements controlled by computers with extremely high levels of communication, information, etc....

Refusing to attribute autonomous values (fruits of a neutral conception of science) to these alternative models, we are concerned with rediscovering UTOPIA as an act of provocation and as a negation of the objectivity of the contemporary productive cycle; in short, we want to try to use UTOPIA as a means of intervention directly linked with the organization of the struggles against the programmed reorganization of capital.

The green papers show diagrammatically the present moment of development of

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the UTOPIA to demonstrate any possible connection with the themes emerging from the organization of political vanguards, and to counter, by unveiling their objectives, the ideological use which the owners of the territory are trying to make of UTOPIA. Each design of the city, or of a situation within the city, can accept or reject the UTOPIA; or it can implement this alternative to intervene directly in the political contemporary situation by taking sound intermediate action.

The intermediate city (red papers) - The workers, students, technicians and soldiers fighting against the capitalist system and its bosses are organizing themselves into groups to discuss policy, co-ordinate action, inform militants and defend themselves against repression. Taking part in this work means changing individual and community behavior from the patterns which the bourgeois city tries to impose. With their directed rigidities, the traditional urban settlements in their physical pattern, become obstacles to the expansion of destructive activities.

Economic blackmail, repressive laws, police controls, blanket lies and the bait of illusory reforms are the constant enemies.

The development of the revolutionary organization depends also on the capacity of groups to procure the physical spaces required for their work, and to find new tools that can be used for the struggle without being undermined by the bosses. This objective requires a reconsideration of the city, so as to counter the ideological interpretations made by the bosses' "watchdogs" and also to single out the priorities and modes of action best suited to an overall strategy; moreover, they entail learning to use the physical reality made available consistently with the possibility of rendering the action feasible.

The city becomes a complex set of old and new tools for use, places to be conquered and objects to be altered; a department store available to the proletarian creativity to permit those who have rejected the city of capital and who are struggling to destroy it, to survive. These are intermediate actions taking place in a continuous process, and they form an intermediate city every day.

THE STRUGGLE FOR A HOME

PHOTO STORY

Contents

- 1) The Board Room at a large company. The Chairman makes a speech on the need to raise production at any cost. He illustrates the means at his disposal to control the functioning of the city.
- 2) Four realistic examples of the living standards of the Italian proletariat, from the standpoint of the relation between homes and factory labor, with particular reference to immigration problems.

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- 3) At a general meeting of workers and students a politically conscious worker explains the workings (and the shortcomings) of public building in Italy.
- 4) Four realistic examples of struggles that end up with an equal number of occupied houses. The police defend the landlords.
- 5) The struggle for a home induces the proletariat to organize self-managed collective services, thereby producing red nursery schools, red health clinics, red markets, people's housing estates, etc., etc.
- 6) The position of the political vanguards on the housing issue is debated during the general meeting. The district struggles become general and link up with the factory struggles, affecting the whole city.

UTOPIA

PHOTO STORY

Contents

- 1) Theoretic writings on the values and limits of utopian city proposals. Diagrammatic view of the institutions, agencies, persons, texts and journals concerned with Utopia in Italy.
- 2) Description with theoretic explanations and visualizations of the principal Utopias (the Utopia of the social-democratic or comfort city, the Utopia of the communication city, the Utopia of the flexible city, the Utopia of the mobile city, the Utopia of the continuous city, etc., etc.).
- 3) Diagrams for counter-positions of possible ways through which the indications within the Utopias described are manipulated and deformed by the bosses and are present in the attitudes of the fighting political vanguards.
- 4) Theoretic discourse on the enactment of the Utopia. Utopia as a means of intervention. List of most significant positions.
- 5) Catalogue of conditions and situations in which the Utopia can play an immediate positive role in backing up the organization of political vanguards.
- 6) The intermediate city as a means of overtaking the Utopias.

THE INTERMEDIATE CITY

PHOTO STORY

Contents

- 1) Five realistic examples of precarious living conditions and of struggles on the boundaries of ruling class legitimacy. The common matrix is the rejection of the established order as a limit to creativity.

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2) General meetings of workers and students on the theme "Extend the struggle from the factories to social life as a whole." Catalogue of political papers in the relation between factory and city.

A resolution is passed to start specific activities designed as organizational phases in the cause.

3) Catalogue of actions and objects usable for the organization of proposed activities. The specialists supply the requisite technical and economic data.

4) The construction of red bases must become a mass action. All the workers in the factories and city districts must be informed by means of appropriate campaigns, and their active participation must be requested.

5) The reformists try to guide the needs born out of the workers' struggles back into the framework of institutional enterprises. They propose projects for functional and modern social centers, alternative cities and programs for serious cultural activities.

6) The mass action rejects the compromise and carries on with the organization of the cause. Red bases spring up throughout the city; the proletariat defends them from police attacks.

The organization of the cause redefines the functions and form of the capitalist city.