The project and its development

The No-Stop City, developed by the Florentine group Archizoom between 1970 and 71, is along with the Continuous Monument by Superstudio, the best-known and more studied and interpreted project of the Italian Radical Architecture. It should be noted that this is not a single project with defined boundaries, but different variants or stages of a project that can be discussed under the denomination of No-Stop City, quite often its pluralistic nature has not been taken sufficiently into account.

In the “political reference” submitted by Archizoom to the proceedings of the congruous Utopia e/o Rivoluzioni, held in Turin in April 1969, the group tried to define itself in the intense debate about the relations between politics and architecture that was taking place in Italy. Many of the ideas that were later embodied in the project were already featured in this text:

“Today, man is master over infinite space!”

Hans Hollein

Following this publication, Archizoom focused on thinking how life and objects would be like in their new city model. They designed a set of clothes, adapted to life in a micro-conditioned environment, published under the name Nearest Future System. They also put forward the demeuble inhabitable, furniture system containing everything needed to dwell any point of their homogeneous city.

The next stage in the project development was the beginning of 1971 with its publication in the number 78-79 of Design Quarterly in charge of Peter Eisenman and devoted to conceptual architecture, and soon after in March of that year, in Domus. For the first time the name No-Stop City appears. The title in both publications is almost identical: No-Stop City. Residential Park. Climatic Universal System in the American magazine while in Domus the original part was replaced by Parkings. These publications include a new batch of graphic material and an essay in Domus. The study of possible ways of colonization by the inhabitants is further developed including habitats that are unflooded from a. The project shows already most of the items that will make it recognizable: an homogeneous structure of pillars, elevators and floor slabs with undefined facades and number of floors. Sometimes it is depicted as a series of massive prisms in the landscape, while other times it seems that only the geography or the coast may contain its spread. Indoors, the horizontal continuity is interrupted, by landscape elements that occasionally emerge (rivers, rocks), or by straight and curved free standing walls or divisions between rectangular and pedestrian areas. In one of the plans there are even some cogwheel houses of clear Russian filiation even if, in this case, the patio is provocatively moved from one place to another using mechanical forklifts. Forms of sedentary habitats are also proposed through dwellings configured by functional stripes that could be accessible, only, from the elevators. In Domus there are views of interior scenes of the No-Stop City, named Paesaggi Interni and Strutture teatrale, which are a particularly valuable contribution to the image of the project. They are dioramas of sectors of the city colonized by furniture and objects of consumption in which an illusion of infinity is achieved through the use of mirrors.

These publications were the last development of the project. Later on, Archizoom produced urban proposals and furniture, interior and clothing design that followed the wake of the No-Stop City and complemented it, which have been occasionally published as part of it. These includes Attrezzature di stanza (1971), Distrusione e Rappresentazione della Città (1972) and Dressing design (1972).

A city without architecture

This is not, therefore, a conventional project but a generic habitat that has no precise function, location or form. The system is defined by the invariants maintained throughout the evolution: a tectonic and isotropic structure of pillars and elevators holding

yet appeared, probably due to the fact that the scale of the plants is very small.
continuous floor slabs, and air-conditioning, lighting, electrical and information facilities, and honeycomb modular suspended ceilings and (presumably) under a technical floor. Nothing else. Those few elements constitute the minimum common set that allows to house the maximum number of vital functions. Architecture is no longer responsible for the programmatic adaptation and, as it happens in the case of an animal, a system of organs, the production of new organs is the only thing that functionally qualifies the different sectors of the city. The representative character of architecture is reduced to the bare minimum role of neutral and tempered container, a sheer background for objects and life. The entire iconicographic load is transferred to the consumption objects that populate it, causing the almost total semantic emptying and absolute blankness of the built. The system of objects absorbs, therefore, functions that traditionally have been in charge of architecture but escaping from its control and getting rid of its values.

From the point of view of Archizoom’s young members, the anomalous would not be the typologies that take shape, but the almost total disappearance of architecture, the logical consequence of an object that takes on a function independent of both architecture itself and any attribute other than the pure undifferentiated and homogeneous extension.

What is paradoxical about this operation is that architecture grows, occupying everything as its boundless extension over the territory, are in debt with two concepts of Marxist affiliation: the “society as a factory” by Tronti and the “city-territory” by Tafuri and the “city factory” by Le Corbusier. These two concepts occupied a central role in the debate about the city that took place in Italy in the early sixties and inevitably influenced the young radicals that through this concept the members of the group sought to develop a new figurative architecture and move away from figurative utopias and visionary architecture which had been condemned by influential figures of Italian Marxism like Mario Tronti, Manfredo Tafuri or Massimo Cacciari (10). The project concavity can be read as an abstraction of the operaist “against from within” principle of the factory, and the factory is not to destroy it. The project concavity stipulates, precisely, the passage from quantitative to qualitative changes. The operation by which the No-Stop City is generated as an endless and interior city can be seen as a radical application of this principle of the “official” philosophy of Marxism. As we have seen, through the increase of the built depth (a change, in principle, strictly quantitative) a number of radical qualitative changes are triggered: not only the architectural and urban form and the associated figurative load disappear but, ultimately, the architecture is no longer responsible for the system of objects and mobile urban form.

Another even more extreme example of the solvent potential of architecture is the science-fiction film 2001: A Space Odyssey by George Lucas, a speculation about a future society, marked by electronics, strictly contemporary with the No-Stop City (it was filmed in 1968 and released in 1971). The film shows a space, in this case of imprisonment, which is a white, homogenous, infinite and pure background devoid not only of architecture but also of objects.

The No-Stop City, attempting to liberate man from architecture, the city that arises from this operation is, by no means, a conventional one. In the proposal definition, not only the hypotrophy of the built environment is crucial, but also the fact that this happens in a continuous and homogenous way. By pushing out any interior void or ignoring the outside, a concave city is generated. The definition of this model, by Andrea Branzi, as a “city without architecture” is best understood if we consider that it is also an “interior city”. The disappearance of urban fragmentation, of the succession of solids and voids that shapes the traditional city, deepens the crisis of representation pointed at in the interior configuration of the proposal: the vanishing of the limit that was shaping the different elements and the whole city entails the vanishing of the meaning or, at least, of all meaning linked to architectural and urban form. We find ourselves in a city without qualities, devoid of any attribute other than the pure undifferentiated and homogeneous extension.

Marxist roots of concavity

Regarding this, it is essential to understand that we are facing a manifest problem, and that the drawings and images of the proposal are, also, the illustration of its written text. Texts that very explicitly want to reflect the political activism of the members of the group in the field of Marxism. Field in which, on the other hand, were included most of their radical fellows and a good part of the Italian architectural and intellectual environment. The “quantitative” concept appears recurrently in the project, from the time prior to its first formulation (in the group contribution to the congress Utopia e Riforme) until its last publication in which they claim: “beyond the only possible utopia is quantitative”. Through this concept the members of the group sought to develop a “new figurative” architecture and move away from figurative utopias and visionary architecture which had been condemned by influential figures of

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A very important influence in the work of Archizoom was the Operaismo (11), a tendency of the Italian “new left” that had Mario Tronti as its main ideologue. This trend intended to overcome the impasse that the workers’ struggle seemed to have reached with the consignment of the parliamentary left parties and trade unions. For the Operaismo, the labor force is the ultimate capital of mankind, which could be exploited to its limits without the risk of being exploited in return. The task is not to resolve the capitalist system contradictions, but to transform it in a system that would exploit the workers to their limits, without exploiting them, but defecting it. The project concavity can be read as an abstraction of the operaist “against from within” principle of the factory, and the factory is not to destroy it. The project concavity stipulates, precisely, the passage from quantitative to qualitative changes. The operation by which the No-Stop City is generated as an endless and interior city can be seen as a radical application of this principle of the “official” philosophy of Marxism. As we have seen, through the increase of the built depth (a change, in principle, strictly quantitative) a number of radical qualitative changes are triggered: not only the architectural and urban form and the associated figurative load disappear but, ultimately, the architecture is no longer responsible for the system of objects and mobile urban form.

Besides, the No-Stop City functional homogeneity, that merges production, consumption and residence, as well as its boundless extension over the territory, are in debt with two concepts of Marxist affiliation: the “society as a factory” by Tronti and the “city-territory” by Tafuri and the “city factory” by Le Corbusier. These two concepts occupied a central role in the debate about the city that took place in Italy in the early sixties and inevitably influenced the young radicals that through this concept the members of the group sought to develop a new figurative architecture and move away from figurative utopias and visionary architecture which had been condemned by influential figures of Italian Marxism like Mario Tronti, Manfredo Tafuri or Massimo Cacciari (10). The project concavity can be read as an abstraction of the operaist “against from within” principle of the factory, and the factory is not to destroy it. The project concavity stipulates, precisely, the passage from quantitative to qualitative changes. The operation by which the No-Stop City is generated as an endless and interior city can be seen as a radical application of this principle of the “official” philosophy of Marxism. As we have seen, through the increase of the built depth (a change, in principle, strictly quantitative) a number of radical qualitative changes are triggered: not only the architectural and urban form and the associated figurative load disappear but, ultimately, the architecture is no longer responsible for the system of objects and mobile urban form.

At the highest point of capitalist development, social relations become a “naturalization” of production; the entire society becomes an “articulation” of production, which means that all society lives according to the factory, and the factory extends its exclusive dominion over the whole of society (12).

Tronti formulated this analysis in highly metaphorical terms and without pretending that an alternative urban model should derive from it. However, and almost inevitably, if the opposition between the factory and the bourgeois city was taken by many young architects, orphans of alternative models to the bourgeois city, an appealing proposal for a new and genuinely Marxist urbanism in which the difference between the social space and the production space would take place.
At the same time, Manfredo Tafuri and his fellows of the Archizoom (architectura urbanistica) group were developing a concept, the "city territory", that was very close to the thesis of Trotsky. The year in which this term is proposed is in fact, the same in which Léa Fábbrica la società is published. The city territory sought to advance toward a greater territorial integration that would transcend the city-county division and the traditional concentric arrangement of urban space and the anomalies caused by the rapid urban growth. It was an "open" urbanism unconcerned about urban form.

The influence of these concepts in the work of Archizoom is easily traceable already in their student projects of mega-structures such as the 1964 Città Etrusca. The name of the project refers to the extrusion of the city into a previously agricultural land (the Plana of Florence) that would allow its systematic conversion into a "true extrusion of the elements that constitute the current production system"[11]. The presence of these ideas is also evident in the No-Stop City. The text of its first publication in Casabella, in the summer of 1970, is, first and foremost, a political manifesto on the relationship between economic system, society and city, full of explicit references to Marx, Trotsky, Tafuri and other Marxist intellectuals, and significantly entitled "assembly line of social issues.

The city overflow on the territory does not imply, in the case of the No-Stop City, the integration of the rural world but, rather, its exclusion. The introversion of the project highlights the absolute ignorance of its exterior alternative, of the realm that the city has traditionally shunned, the lack of an interest in the countryside. This In this is also ideological. Moving away from its romanesian roots, Marxism sees the countryside and agriculture, rather than as a happy archaic uncontaminated by industrial capitalism, as the lair of reactionary and counter-revolutionary values.

Marxist distrusts the countryside and the rural, and at the same time, the "centrality of labor" is a specific place defined by opposition to another "place", the country side, but is understood as a condition: wherever information and consumption reach, reaches the city: "between economic system, society and city, full of consumer products, but because the environment that houses these is a completely superfluous interior. What makes this house so "different and appealing" is, precisely, everything that is not home: the set of consumer goods ready to meet any need, any desire, in short, the market. A market that, as was felt even then, was beginning to have an unlimited dimension, to occupy everything. While Banham persuaded us that "a house is not a home", Hamilton, by presenting in his collage the commodification of all spheres of life, including leisure and intimacy, shows us a home that, dissolved in the temporary city without boundaries between public space and private space, between exterior and interior. If in Hamilton’s collage, this global village puts into perspective the demographic internalization of urban space and a simultaneous urban externalization of domestic space[12], in the No-Stop City it goes one step further by ending with the domestic as a category. What is in crisis in the project is not the nature of the home, but its own existence as a protective sphere of privacy: everything is a home and nothing is a home. The "ideal urban space" public unconsciousness of the disappearance of the traditional interior space, that of intimacy, something evident in most of the project images that present living as a narrative activity.

Somehow, the relationship that the No-Stop City maintains with the domestic space is parallel to the one maintained with the rural sphere: pure illusion. This interior space, public and urbanized, doesn’t accept competition and extends a panoptic domain over the whole of the existence that leaves no room for rural externality or private interiority. As the market does.

A project without limits for a system without limits

Ultimately, in their contribution to the project, Marxism and consumerism are not so far away. The materialistic and totalizing logic shared by both pursue the destruction of all built reality in an homogeneous continuum that, as these systems, lacks an outside, that is to say, alternative realities that limit and question it.

In this sense, the project reflects a profound change in the very nature of the urban reality that is not alien to the influence of Marshall McLuhan. It does not seem accidental that Branzi has always been the first to publish already macchiavellian reference to the "global village". The megacity is no longer a specific place defined by opposition to another place, the countryside, but is understood as a condition: wherever information and consumption reach, reaches the city: "...now the use of electronic media takes the place of clothing..."

The No-Stop City puts forward an infinite interiority because the urban has ceased to be a place, and has become a virtually ubiquitous condition. If the system occupies everything, everything is interior to the system and nothing is external to it. A project without limits and without outside for a system without limits and without outside. Or, as Branzi recently stated: "a fixed and unchangeable rule", the in the epiphany of a "condition": in fact, it is just this condition which is made to circulate uniformly through all the built reality in an homogeneous continuum that, as these systems, lacks an outside, that is to say, alternative realities that limit and question it.

The metropolis cannot be a ‘place’ to become a ‘condition’: in fact, it is just this condition which is made to circulate uniformly through all the built reality in an homogeneous continuum that, as these systems, lacks an outside, that is to say, alternative realities that limit and question it.

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