education

Visual, spatial, and textual devices deployed by Architettura Radicale from the 1960s and 1970s, as developed through research-led teaching in collaboration with architect and artist Gianni Pettena.
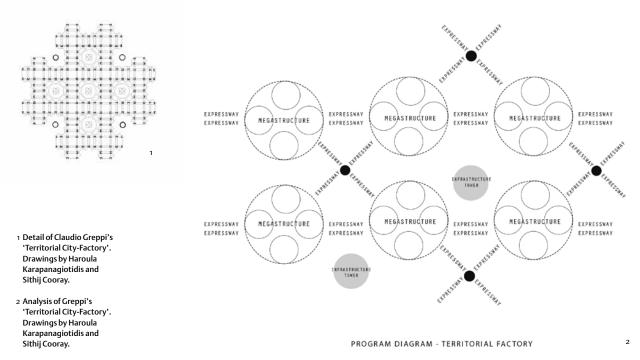
Radical practices, radical pedagogies: intercultural explorations in language and meaning

Jacqui Alexander, Samuele Grassi and George Mellos

In 1965, Claudio Greppi – an architecture student at the University of Florence, Italy and a contemporary of soon-to-be members of the group Archizoom – developed an architectural proposal titled 'Territorial City-Factory' [1, 2]. This envisioned the geographical area between Florence and the neighbouring city, Prato, as a single, totalising factory building in which all aspects of life would take place.[1] Prato has a history of textile production dating back to the Middle Ages. At the time of Greppi's project, it was undergoing dramatic transformation as a result of 'the Italian economic miracle'[2] and the rapid expansion of consumer culture. Located between Florence, where the countercultural movement was incubating at the University of Florence, and Pistoia – home to experimental manufacturers Poltronova, and the site of the first major Radical exhibition 'Superarchitettura'[3] – Prato can be seen as a fitting locus for re-examining the intersection of politics and architecture in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s, and more specifically revisiting the rich back catalogue of work produced by the group Architettura Radicale in Tuscany.

Connections ensuing from the sociocultural, economic, and political context of the area inform the approach to radical architecture in this article. The group of Florentine Radicals, of which Greppi was a part, sought to integrate experimentation and utopian sensibilities through which to critique, and move beyond, the conundrums of what was then an ascendant capitalist and modernist rationality.

Greppi's recasting of Prato and its surroundings as a site for 'political and architectural experimentation'[4] became the catalyst for a pedagogical project developed for contemporary undergraduate architecture students from Monash University, Australia,[5] who visited the city as part of a five-week course called a 'travel intensive'. In collaboration with architect and artist Gianni Pettena[6] – a key figure within the original nucleus of Florentine Radicals – the course aimed to draw out visual and affective[7] techniques embedded within the critical and ironic work developed by Greppi, Archizoom, and Superstudio, as well as the 'embodied experiences',[8] temporary works, and

1 Detail of Claudio Greppi's 'Territorial City-Factory'. Drawings by Haroula Karapanagiotidis and Sithij Cooray.

2 Analysis of Greppi's 'Territorial City-Factory'. Drawings by Haroula Karapanagiotidis and Sithij Cooray.

PROGRAM DIAGRAM - TERRITORIAL FACTORY

artefacts of UFO, 9999, and of Pettena himself.[9] By first dissecting and then redeploying these experimental design approaches in response to a site-specific design brief, the ultimate pedagogical aim was to expose the students to the unprecedented expansion of architectural methods[10] that emerged in that period – in part owing to the teachings of Umberto Eco[11] – and to re-evaluate their role and utility (or futility)[12] within what can be characterised as the contemporary neoliberal context.

The first part of this article will introduce the general pedagogical approach for the intensive, Eco's concept of the 'open work',[13] and the ways this manifested in a new visual, spatial, and material language in the work of the Florentine Radicals through key examples. Next, it will discuss the project brief, and present a selection of creative outcomes by the students that explore techniques, tensions, and tropes implicit in the work of the Architettura Radicale within evolving architectural conservation debates unfolding in present-day Italy.

In the second part of the article, the narrative is interspersed with the personal reflections of a former student, George Mellos, who took part in the travel intensive and who is now an educator himself. Autoethnography[14] as a research method deals with the ways in which individual personal experiences navigate culture. As such, these insights prove useful in bridging the gap between the intentions of the pedagogical approach and the actual experiences and practices it has fostered. Beatriz Colomina noted that radical pedagogies are experimental, and that with all genuine experimentation comes the risk of failure. The history of radical pedagogies that she highlights is littered with case studies that have been short-lived for a variety of reasons and yet which create lasting ripples: circles of influence that change the institutional platforms and communities of practice that surround them.[15] The project of radicality has always been associated with, and born out of, the student body. Like Greppi, it is the next generation who, facing their own unique set of politico-economic challenges, and armed with new tools, must ultimately define for themselves what shape contemporary radicality might take.

Contexts
Greppi's 'Territorial City-Factory' project was influenced by his personal relationship with the militant Operaist Mario Tronti, who was highly critical of the new form of 'integrative'[16] capitalism sweeping Italy, and its impacts on the city and labour force. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, following the economic boom of that time, the local economy in Prato relied on subcontracting work to the surrounding countryside, mostly to women.[17] For Tronti, these new labour practices 'engendered the disappearance of the proletariat clustered around productive centres, and had the effect of proletarianising the entirety of society.'[18] Where the centre and periphery once performed distinct roles – with the periphery mobilised to support the commodity consumption of the urban centres – the new capitalism 'superseded'[19] this model,

decentralising the 'geography of work',[20] and eliminating the capacity for workers to unionise. According to Pier Vittorio Aureli, Greppi's 'city-factory' was a counter-project. It proposed restoring the possibility of solidarity through a series of dispersed factory nodes[21] connected by a network of highways – which are indeed characteristic of the Piana di Firenze, the area between Florence and Prato. The surrounding landscape was to become subsumed within the apparatus of the factory, reducing the concept of the city to an infrastructure of logistics.
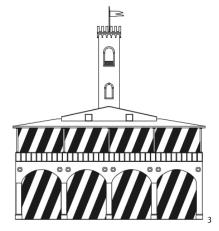
Urban planner Giulio Giovannoni has written about the myth of an immaculate Tuscan landscape, developed historically and further implemented through postwar urban planning policies as the instantiation of a 'spatial injustice', namely, the idea of a utopian Tuscany. This utopian Tuscany was constituted by the city centre and countryside, seen fundamentally in opposition to a dystopian Tuscany of the peripheries, that is the area between Florence and Prato (which was the subject of Greppi's architectural proposal). This metaphor explains aptly the social, historical, and economic roots of the current fetishisation of the landscape and region, as Giovannoni writes, as 'the binary valuation of the peripheries, seen as dystopian landscapes when not completely ignored, in contrast to the utopian and idealized view of historic centers and of the countryside'.[22] Giovannoni goes on to frame this binary conceptualisation of the city-country and the peri-urban fringe within the context of urban planning policies that have been introduced in the area since the 1960s, and their implementation, paving the way for the extensive urbanisation of the plains located to the northwest of Florence.[23] Giovannoni locates the beginning of this process well before the timeframe discussed here. What is important to note, however, is how these conflicting and contrasting notions of utopia and dystopia, with regards to Tuscany in general and the Florence area in particular, have developed alongside radical interventions in different fields from literature and the arts to architecture. Architettura Radicale could thus be considered part of a much broader, interdisciplinary conversation that had been the subject of debate for some time which placed Florence and its surroundings within the flows of tourism, heritage, (de)politicisation, and capitalism.
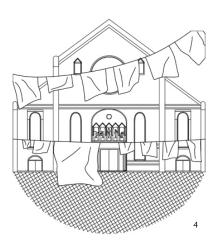
In the mid-to-late 1960s, the University of Florence became an incubator for rethinking the role, languages, and mediums of architecture.[24] Along with the political influence of Workerists like Tronti, whose input is most palpable in the work of Greppi and Archizoom, many within the Florentine branch of the Architettura Radicale, including members of Superstudio, acknowledged the influence of Umberto Eco. Eco was their teacher at the school and his interest in semiotics contributed to their development of new cultural forms and signification.[25] Pettena also credits Leonardo Savioli and Leonardo Ricci, young professors and former students of Giovanni Michelucci, for affording students the space and time to experiment, adding

that, during this time, he and his peers were 'always on the move'.[26] For him, the radical production that emerged was not affected most by what was being taught, but precisely the opposite. It was the absence of a critical position in relation to the functionalist legacy that called for a deeper interrogation of both the 'political and cultural establishment'.[27] That drove the Radicals to look further afield, both disciplinarily and geographically, beyond what was accepted and endorsed. These aspects of the *milieu* – an engagement with the broader culture of the city outside the classroom – yielded new agencies wherein architecture could shift away from a discourse centred on the design and making of buildings, to one understood as a situated and embedded *praxis* conscious of, and working within, its social, economic, and political context.[28] Architecture was here redefined as a practice that does not necessarily result in objects of 'functional and constructional necessity'.[29] This represented a radical intellectual leap, the likes of which have been neglected for many years since, as Colomina and others have highlighted.[30] Picking up on these threads, the Monash Art Design and Architecture travelling intensive sought to facilitate opportunities for Australian students to explore the 'intercultural space', as both an actual environment and an 'expanded field' of creative practice.[31]
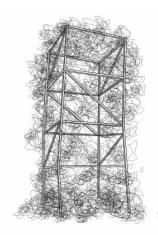
For Pettena, an 'abstention' from designing buildings was primarily required for ecological reasons, as curator Luca Cerizza has noted: 'turn[ing] architecture into a mental practice, keeping its impact on the urban fabric and natural environment to a minimum'.[32] Pettena was invested in the conditions of urbanised and natural environments as sites for direct, relational, and rhetorical intervention, as demonstrated by the temporary transformation of the loggia and portico at Palazzo D'Arnolfo (1968), into a 'compact billboard' *[3]*, and an 'object of visual experience'; the *Untitled (Laundry)* (1969), intervention at Como *[4]* – which disrupted that town's central square through the repressed act of hanging out the washing – as well as the many

works produced in the United States, exploring nature as an inhabitable space *[5]*.[33]

For others like Superstudio and Archizoom, rethinking the modes and mediums for communicating architectural ideas was an inherently political act. By 'refusing to work'[34] as building professionals, these architects found a way to decouple architecture from its capitalist and functionalist imperatives to facilitate programmes supporting and amplifying consumption practices.[35] Superstudio's exploration of semiotics resulted in a new, and often ironic, visual language of photomontage, drawings, and critical narratives aimed at 'reterriorialising' the discipline through popular formats, catalysing internal and external discourse around 'new politico-economic configurations'.[36] It also manifested in radical furniture pieces like *Sofo* (1968), and *Quaderna* (1970), developed for Poltronova and Zanotta, respectively. Through their scalar and formal ambiguity, these pieces invited any number of different embodied experiences, challenging the role of design as pure commodity. Archizoom's designed objects, such as the deliberately vulgar *Safari* Sofa (1968), and *Dream* Beds (1967), were conceptualised as a means to sabotage polite 'good design' introduced to Italy from Scandinavia and marketed to the workers, whose consumption practices were essential to the expansion of productivity and labour.[37]

Along with Greppi, Archizoom are acknowledged as the group who were most aligned with the sentiments of the Operaisti. In fact, Greppi's 'Territorial City-Factory', went on to influence the now iconic Archizoom work 'No-Stop City' *(*1968–70), which extended their architectural and political agendas, building on the spatial concept of the society-as-factory, and its Workerist critique.[38] In reality, the labour practices of the sixties would persist throughout the following decades until the economic crisis of the 1980s, which paved the way for the entrance of Chinese migrants into local manufacturing and the city's eventual 'entangle[ment] in the hegemony of global supply
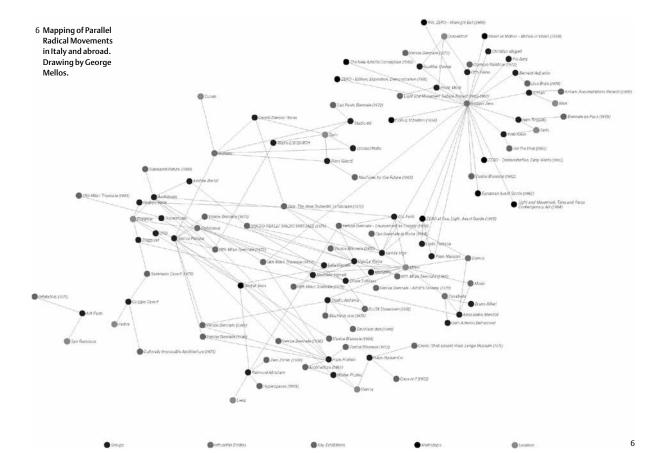

3 Gianni Pettena, *Dialogo Pettena Arnolfo*, 1968. Drawing by George Mellos.

4 Gianni Pettena, *Untitled (Laundry)*, 1969. Drawing by George Mellos.

5 Gianni Pettena, *Tumbleweed Catcher*, 1972. Drawing by George Mellos.

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chains'.[39] Today, Tuscany's second largest city can be fittingly seen to represent 'the persistence of heterogeneity within global capitalism',[40] where globalisation has fuelled the development of fast fashion also resulting from waves of migration, especially from China.[41]

The travel intensive project in Prato began by understanding how the visual and affective techniques at play in the work of the Florentine Radicals helped to recast architecture as a political project. Students explored tropes and techniques embedded in a series of selected case studies, redeploying and reinterpreting these modes and methods in response to a new design brief and the contemporary social context. This involved an implicit reworking of their role as 'practitioners' within the neoliberal university, and its increasing emphasis on the production of technically proficient 'industry-ready' graduates. Challenging the assumption that building is the solution to all spatial problems,[42] students were encouraged to confront their own ethics and values through projects that aimed at affecting broader cultural transformations. What would the transgressions of the Florentine Radicals offer, and how?

Methods
Umberto Eco wrote that 'an "open text" cannot be described as a communicative strategy if the role of its addressee (the reader, in the case of verbal texts) has not been envisaged at the moment of its generation.'[43] The travel intensive began with an architectural tour of northern Italy – entitled *From Rational to Radical: Exploring the Intersection of*

Architecture and Politics in 20th Century Italy – contextualising the emergence of the Italian neo avant garde[44] of the 1960s and 1970s within broader theoretical and design lineages and ruptures *[6]*.[45] As Pettena points out, 'the work of Sottsass Jr [and the Radical Movement that followed] represented a contemporary re-reading of the richness of colours, the use of new materials and a high degree of freedom', which can be read against the 'rationalist architecture [which] entail[ed...] a refusal of matter, colour and ornament [...] a necessary detox from the excesses (of) the Beaux Arts and Art Deco.'[46] A lecture and design workshop in collaboration with Pettena followed in Prato. This was scaffolded by key texts from Tafuri,[47] Mendini,[48] and Zevi as well as site visits to the Centro Studi Poltronova, where the students were exposed to prototypes and archival material from Archizoom, Superstudio, Sottsass, as well as works by Colombo, De Pas, D'Urbino, and Lomazzi.[49] As part of the two-week workshop, students were provided a series of case study projects by Florentine Radicals to critically dissect in development of a framework of rhetorical methods that would form an operative toolkit for their own design work. Examples included Greppi's 'Territorial Factory' (1964–5), Superstudio's 'Italia Vostra: Rescue of Historical Italian Centres' (1972), Archizoom's 'No-Stop City' (1969), as well as temporary works and artefacts like Pettena's 'Laundry' (1969), and UFO's 'Urboeffimeri' (1968). Students were thus introduced to the overarching themes of the travel intensive:
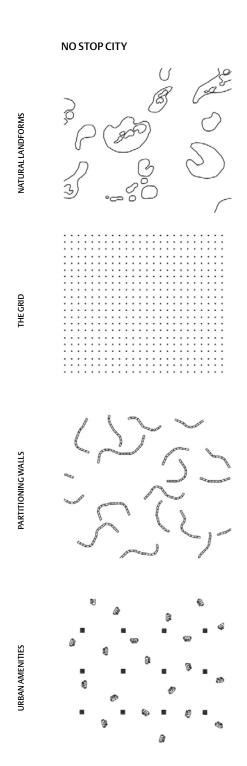
The architectural tour of northern Italy allowed us to retrace the steps and activism of the Radicals, and contextualise their interventions within contemporary

6 Mapping of Parallel Radical Movements in Italy and abroad. Drawing by George Mellos.
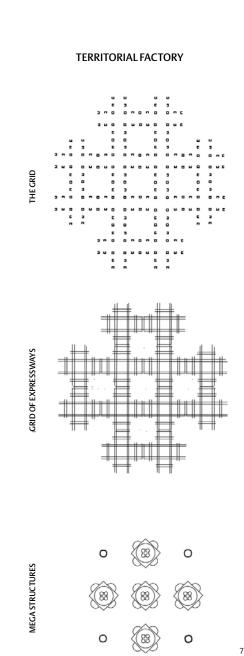
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21st century practice. Pre-arrival readings introduced us to rhetorical devices – tools which would form a critical role in our reading of the cities we were to visit. In researching and analysing these works, a framework of rhetorical devices was collectively identified including, but not limited to: irony, metaphor, *reductio ad absurdum*,[50] hyperbole, defamiliarisation,[51] juxtaposition, and allegory [table 1]. These categories were developed discursively through a process of visual analysis whereby signs and significations were interpreted through a close 'reading' of the work as 'open texts'. In other words, students discussed the messaging implicit in the works and sought to categorise the techniques through which their meaning was transmitted. During this process, it was established that Greppi's 'Territorial City-Factory' and Archizoom's 'No-Stop City' operated through metaphor. In the former, the

Method	Definition	Case study	Example
Irony	A situation which has the opposite result to what one expects, or the use of language to convey the opposite meaning (as in sarcasm).		**'No-Stop City', Archizoom (1968–70)** City-Factory metaphor employed through an appropriation of an architectural vocabulary of Taylorism. *Drawings courtesy Haroula Karapanagiotidis, Sithij Cooray and George Mellos.*
Metaphor	An object or symbol that is representative of something else.		
Reductio ad Absurdum	An attempt to show that an oppositional argument would lead to absurdity or contradiction.		**'Italia Vostra', Superstudio (1972)** Italian historical cities must be 'destroyed to be saved' - ie the preservation of historical centres for tourism has rendered them unliveable (see also: defamiliarisation).
Defamiliarisation	Everyday objects rendered strange to reveal a new reading.		Postcard images of Italian towns are disrupted with photo collage edits which 'liberate' them from their own iconicity. Eg Venice's grand canal is drained and paved for vehicular access. *Drawings courtesy MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Roma. MAXXI Architettura Collection Superstudio Archive.*
Hyperbole	Exaggeration, not meant to be taken literally.		**'Continuous Monument', Superstudio (1969)** A shiny gridded volume expands infinitely across a series of natural landscapes and iconic global cities. The grid enables derivations for site specific conditions – it splits, hovers, permeates. *Drawings courtesy George Mellos.*
Juxtaposition	Two things placed together to contrasting effect or to produce a relationship of conflict.		**'City of Hemispheres', Superstudio (1971)** Mirrored surfaces and hovering vehicles disrupt an idyllic agricultural landscape.
Allegory	A story, poem or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning.		**'Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas', Superstudio (1971)** A collection of artefacts including text, images and construction details that operate outside of the real as part of a fictional genre which can be interpreted as a critique of contemporary forms and political structures. *Drawings courtesy MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Roma. MAXXI Architettura Collection Superstudio Archive.*

Table 1. Framework of rhetorical devices in the work of the Italian Radicals. 'City of Hemispheres' and 'Italia Vostra: Rescuing Italian Historical Centres' (1972) courtesy Courtesy MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Roma. MAXXI Architettura Collection Superstudio Archive.

NO STOP CITY

TERRITORIAL FACTORY

NATURAL LANDFORMS

THE GRID

THE GRID

GRID OF EXPRESSWAYS

PARTITIONING WALLS
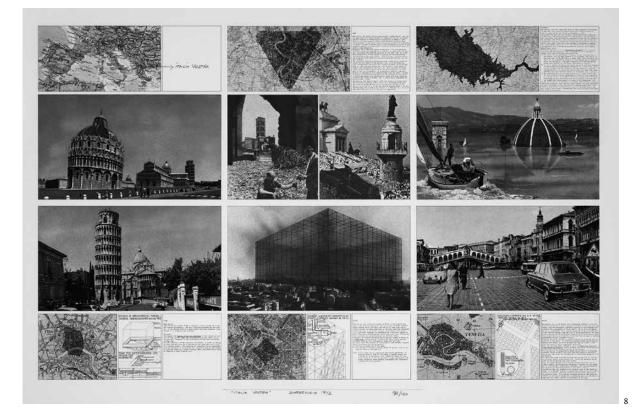
URBAN AMENITIES

MEGA STRUCTURES

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concept of the society-factory was expressed as a sprawling factory-as-city/city-as-factory through an architectural vocabulary of grids, megastructures, and expressways, which form a horizontal network. In the latter, the Taylorist office plan, the factory floor, and supermarket typology were all conjured through an 'open' language of grids, partitions, and cubicles, which were superimposed onto the natural landscape, offering a critique of modernity [7].[52] In both cases, the plans extend beyond the picture plane – the architectural elements repeated *ad absurdum*, describing a space without limits. These visual devices were observed by the students and engaged within their own work to varying degrees and effects:

Collective discussion and deconstruction of spatial outcomes from the radical movement encouraged us to view the city as an archive of symbols, forms, events – a living 'material library'.

Having decoded the visual and linguistic devices at work in these precedent projects, students were introduced to Superstudio's 'Italia Vostra: Rescuing Italian Historical Centres' (1972) [8] upon which their design brief was largely based. Comprising a series of photomontages, maps, and construction details, 'Italia Vostra' was a response to local preservation debates, which were then dominant in the wake of the 1966 flood in different parts of Italy – notably Venice and Florence – which had killed hundreds

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and caused widespread damage to artistic and cultural resources.[53] In the aftermath of that devastation, local and international conservation groups helped fund studies and restoration works, including the United Nations who set up international UNESCO offices in Italy for the first time.[54] The title of Superstudio's work, 'Italia Vostra' or 'Your Italy', was an ironic reference to 'Italia Nostra', 'Our Italy': one such conservation group who, in 1972 – the same year that the Superstudio work was created – published their manifesto entitled, 'Art and Landscape of Italy: Too Late to be Saved?', with the subtitle: 'Visit Italy now before the Italians Destroy it!'[55]

> The catalogue's introduction began:
> *Because of the interdependence and overlap of the world's political and financial structure, the increased demand for tourist services, and strong pressure from foreign investors, there has been increased economic exploitation of Italian cultural and environmental resources […] as part of this process, Italians have been assisted by several other 'barbarians' who have reaped benefits at the cost of the Italian environment. Actions taken in the name of socio-economic reconstruction and progress of the country […] have often been absurd and ruinous. How can a nation's heritage be saved, when her own people fail to recognise it as their own irreplaceable culture?*[56]

While Superstudio shared many of Italia Nostra's concerns about the commodification and privatisation of Italian cultural assets, historians like Tafuri have argued that the perverse interplay between conservation activists and urban developers in fact enabled 'the museumification of Italian cities […] by showing developers how built form could be monetised'.[57] Picking up on this irony, Superstudio's

'Italia Vostra' developed a kind of salvation for Italian towns via their own site-specific mode of destruction. For example, in Superstudio's plan to save Pisa, the entire town was tilted so that the leaning tower is no longer an object of touristic desire. Venice's canals were drained, and Rome was once again buried under rubble. In this way, Superstudio proposed an ironic form of preservation in which the iconicity of Italian towns was destroyed in order to preserve its cultural assets. The design problem developed for the students drew on these persistent debates concerning conservation and commodification. It focused on contemporary Venice as a site for experimentation: a city that embodies these tensions in extremis as the 'Italia Nostra' catalogue elucidates:

> *While these problems have generally affected all Italian Historic Urban Settlements, Venice is also threatened by a far more dramatic phenomenon: the city has been sinking at a rate of 5 inches per century. Moreover, some urban areas have sunk more than 10 inches during the last 50 years alone […] these specific problems, together with the causes mentioned earlier with regard to the general problems of the historic urban centres, accentuate the economic, social and physical crisis of Venice.*[58]

Forty years after 'Italia Nostra', Sara Marini and Alberto Betagna describe Venice today as existing between reality and logo: 'Venezia is there but it is disappearing. It should be saved, but perhaps it is no longer a city.'[59] The authors of *Venice: A Document*,

depict a city overrun with speculation and straightjacketed by tourism. Along with the privatisation of cultural assets, foreign investment in housing has exacerbated the cost of living for residents. The price of maintaining private dwellings in a city that regularly floods, coupled with the exploitation of short-term rental platforms that have contributed to escalating house prices,[60] has led many residents to abandon their homes in favour of mainland life. As more residents are displaced, the public services and amenities that supported everyday life also disappear, while even more of the city becomes cannibalised by spectacle. Against this backdrop of 'urban absurdity',[61] students were required to respond to Marini and Betagna's call to save Venice – as a contemporary rereading of Superstudio's earlier provocation – by deploying the rhetorical tactics that they had apprehended in the earlier exercise.
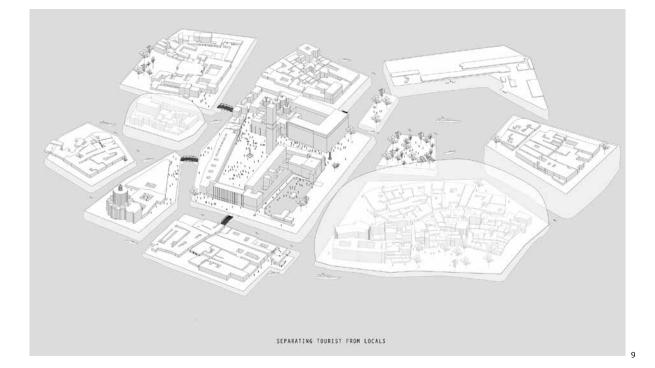
Results

Student projects varied in approach. Some built upon the ephemeral urban interventions of Pettena, UFO, 9999, and American counterculturalists like Ant Farm, while others elected to explore the ironic photomontage approaches of Zziggurat, Superstudio, and Archizoom.[62] George Mellos and Andy Nguy's project [9–17] combined the discursive drawing techniques of Archizoom's 'No-Stop City', the ironic conceptual strategies of Superstudio's 'Italia Vostra', as well as the material language of UFO and Ant Farm to propose 'Five Inflatable Solutions for Venice'. As the title suggests, the pair's proposal to save the island city is to engage inflatables in versatile and site-specific ways to alleviate the pressures of tourism. First of all, Venice Island is exploded and flotation devices become adopted as a means to discombobulate its six *sestrieri* (districts) [9]. These floating mobile neighbourhoods now have the scope to permit or limit tourist access through their
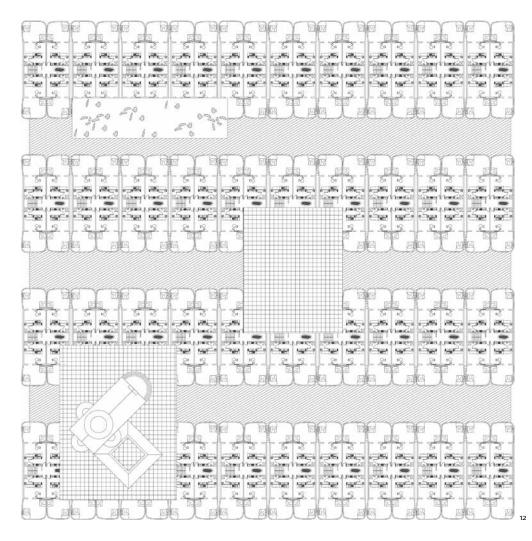
proximity and detachment, and through the provision of new pontoon connections, which build relationships between popular cultural sites [10, 11]. Inflatables are also adopted as parasitic housing solutions, which plug into traditional Venetian dwellings, increasing the supply of available rooms in the city, and providing residents with a means to finance housing maintenance through short-term letting. These temporary structures afford new agency for Venetians wanting to modify their 'protected' dwellings, and reverse the subordination of locals to foreign visitors [12]. Inflatables also become a means to preserve cultural assets from contaminants and foot traffic – in effect becoming 'bubble buildings' [13] – and provide a strategy for denying access to certain parts of the city by filling in its void spaces, drawing inspiration from UFO's 'happenings' in Florence [14].

The fictional cartographies that accompany 'Five Inflatable Solutions for Venice' redeploy appropriated techniques of defamiliarisation, whereby the dismantled and reorganised Venice is captured in new masterplan comprising a patchwork of recognisable cultural assets and transport infrastructure, such as Piazza San Marco and il Tronchetto, as well as cruise ships and gondolas, interspersed with augmented artificial landscapes and adapted vernacular housing typologies at scale [15]. The repetition of the dwelling unit *ad absurdum* in elevation and plan [16], and into infinity beyond picture plane, references 'Territorial City-Factory' and 'No-Stop City' – only the factory and office, which were the subject of these earlier
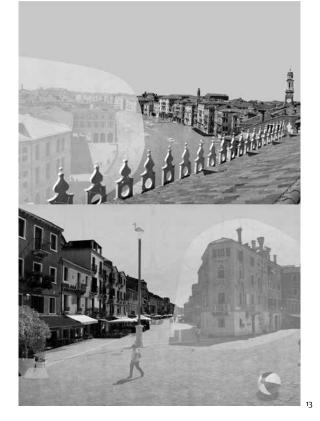
9 **'Five Inflatable Solutions for Venice'. Isometric: Separating Tourists from locals. Drawings by George Mellos and Andy Nguy, 2018.**

SEPARATING TOURIST FROM LOCALS

9

FLOATING INTERVENTIONS AND BLOCKING

10

10 **'Five Inflatable Solutions for Venice'. Isometric: An expanding and contracting landscape. George Mellos and Andy Nguy, 2018.**

11 **'Five Inflatable Solutions for Venice'. Fictional Cartographies. George Mellos and Andy Nguy, 2018.**

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESIDENTIAL AND NON-RESIDENTIAL NEIGH-BOURHOODS - INVESTIGAT-ED THROUGH EXPANSION AND CONTRACTION OF BLOCKS (LEFT).

INTEGRATION OF NEW IN-TERVENTIONS INTO THE 'EXPLODED' FABRIC OF VENICE (BELOW).

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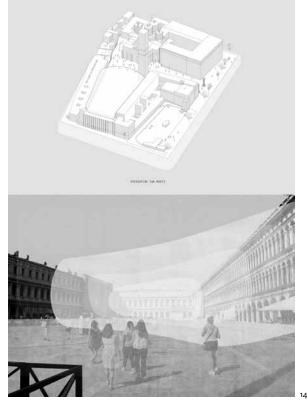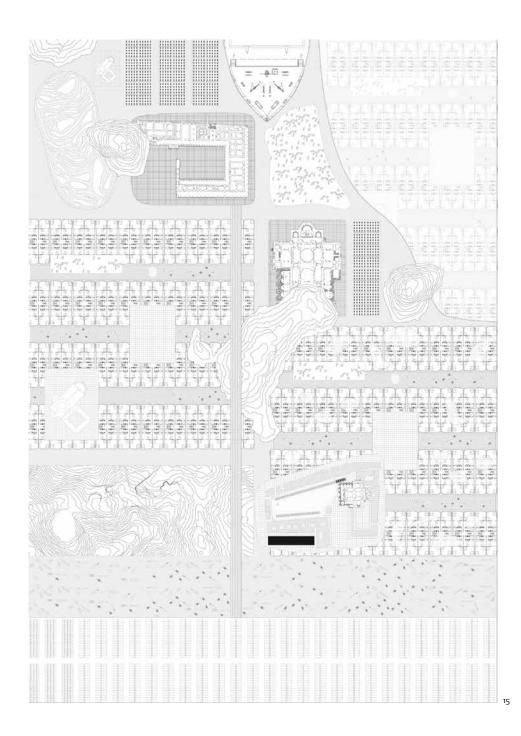**Radical practices, radical pedagogies** | Alexander, Grassi & Mellos

12 'Five Inflatable
Solutions for Venice'.
Residential
Densification.
George Mellos and
Andy Nguy, 2018.

13 'Five Inflatable
Solutions for Venice'.
Preservation
techniques. George
Mellos and Andy
Nguy, 2018.

14 'Five Inflatable
Solutions for Venice'.
Piazza San Marco:
Tourist exclusion
strategy. George
Mellos and Andy
Nguy, 2018.

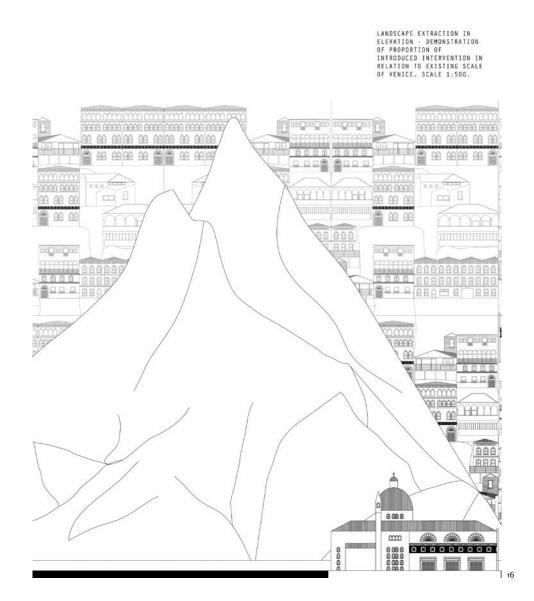Alexander, Grassi & Mellos | **Radical practices, radical pedagogies**

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schemes, are replaced with the home as the new space of productivity under neoliberalism.

As artefacts, these measured drawings are detailed and laborious, while at the same time completely futile in a technical sense. They demonstrate a form of architectural practice that operates outside the service of industry, which eschews the professionalisation that schools are increasingly in favour of.[63] In fact, the line drawings [12, 15 and 16 refer] appear to have more in common with montage or assemblage [17], re-presenting the city in Mellos's words, as 'archives of symbols, forms, and events [...] living material libraries [...]'. In this way, architectural documentation transcends its typical instructional role and instead, through dialectic juxtaposition, allows for a 'subjectively-driven reading of cultural forms';[64] a technique explored by experimental theatre exponent, and friend of

Pettena, Carmelo Bene.[65] In other words, the drawings become open texts. It is interesting to note how this educational approach filtered through the classroom as a sort of utopian practice embedded in the study of and work on architecture.

Throughout my remaining studies, I continued to employ photomontage as a device for critical thinking and iteration, and furthered an abstract approach to mapping, seeking to identify how a 'map' could reflect future conditions. Drawings became catalogues, tools to present a range of physical scales and time scales concurrently.

According to Tafuri, montage is the 'cultural technique commensurate with the economic conditions under capitalism.'[66] That is, it is the product of an age of technological reproducibility that has arguably only accelerated in the digital era with the saturation of image content that exists

LANDSCAPE EXTRACTION IN
ELEVATION - DEMONSTRATION
OF PROPORTION OF
INTRODUCED INTERVENTION IN
RELATION TO EXISTING SCALE
OF VENICE. SCALE 1:500.

16

16 'Five Inflatable
Solutions for Venice'.
Artificial Landscapes.
George Mellos and
Andy Nguy, 2018.

17 'Five Inflatable
Solutions for Venice'.
Montage. George
Mellos and Andy
Nguy, 2018.

17

online today, and with the accessibility of post-production software.

Praew Wongsanganan and Timothy Yue's project centred on this concept of the 'reproducibility' of Venice [18, 19]. Engaging photomontage as an operative design method, Wongsanganan and Yue develop an ironic urban strategy for corralling tourists within the San Marco district in the centre of the island. Adopting the view that if tourists cannot get enough of the heritage fabric of Venice, perhaps it should be replicated for their enjoyment, the students propose redeveloping San Marco as a high-density haven for visitors where the existing architecture is 'exaggerated' and extended upwards as short-term holiday accommodation. After all, many of Venice's historical treasures are

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reproductions, including the twentieth-century recreation of the Campanile.[67] By rezoning Venice so that hotel infrastructure is restricted to the San Marco district, locals can reclaim districts like Dorsoduro and Cannaregio, and everyday life can carry on behind the scenes of the tourist spectacle, unfettered by the 'politics of preservation'.[68] Through the seamless grafting of truth and fiction – a contemporary departure from the manual, 'cut and paste' assemblages of 'Italia Vostra' – Wongsanganan and Yue save Venice by embracing its hyper-reality. The uncanny images that result are agit-props, with the intention of affecting a condition of shock in the viewer, and facilitating a critical reflection of what is presented to them.[69]

Experiments in language and method

The proposals included within this article are just a small sample of the work produced as part of a two-week 'design-sprint' in Prato, concluding with a dialogue with Gianni Pettena. At this event, he asserted that it was 'the students' *right and their duty* to transform the architecture school',[70] and argued that the university must be a place for research, as well as teaching, so that young graduates entering the 'world of employment [...] struggle to affirm their own views, rather than simply adjusting to the demands of production and consumption'.[71] Pettena advocated for design experimentation that goes beyond pragmatic problem solving, encouraging students to pursue 'architecture as a medium through which to understand [...] cultural changes'.[72] In other words, students should transform the

18, 19 'Reproducing Venice'. Untitled. Praew Wongsanganan and Timothy Yue, 2018.

discipline from within by challenging its own conventions, tools, and techniques. This has implications for a critical engagement with the neoliberal university as an educational institution where an increasing policing of disciplines takes place, as also summoned by the imperatives and markers of specialisation, professionalisation, and employability. As Pettena discusses in the interview, the underlying creative, educational, and political agenda of his and his colleagues' explorations was fundamentally characterised by the absence of 'boundaries separating the visual arts, music, and experimental theatre – [and] research in architecture was no exception'.[73] From a student's perspective,

working and experimenting across disciplines seemed to create a rippling effect that was very much part of the learning process itself.

> *The Radical movement inspired me to further engage with cross-disciplinary methods and material possibilities. It has translated to my teaching approaches where it has recently motivated a series of workshops that explore the deconstruction of mapping and collage as tools for first year architecture students.*

Exploring the intercultural space – in terms of the broader creative *milieu* as well as the study abroad experience – prompted a revisiting of questions around architectural production and its spaces of labour. As a pedagogical model, the travelling studio was valuable insofar as it offered an immersive cultural experience of the world beyond the classroom, encouraging students to step out of their comfort zones and explore new design contexts while also exposing them to other languages on multiple levels – linguistic, visual, cultural, educational, and emotional. By focusing on experimental methods, the studio sought to rework the outcome-focused neoliberal educational model in which creative risk-taking is too often 'suffocated'[74] by potential consequences of failure. Against a backdrop of rising tertiary education fees, the price of failure is high for students and staff, who face ever-more competition for employment. These aspects might help to explain the recent decline in radical pedagogies in architectural education that Colomina has identified,[74] stifling a more forward-oriented conceptualisation of education as open-ended learning, something that takes place in-process.

> *The dialogue with Gianni Pettena, a key protagonist of the movement that we were studying, encouraged us to critically engage with our drawings as objects and tools, and consider how they responded to, and intervened in the physical spaces in which they were created and presented.*

The student work developed during the course of this elective was constrained by the two-week time frame. It was therefore necessary that the project parameters were clearly defined – including the site, research context, and the general methodological approach – in order to enable students to focus on experimenting with the visual and affective techniques identified in their earlier analysis.

However, the time pressures also proved liberating: encouraging students to commit ideas to paper early, and to rapidly develop a set of strategies through drawing and image-making. This commitment was also a transformative experience aimed at communication.

> *Photomontage was a preferred mode of project communication as it allowed us to respond almost immediately to a range of conditions, adapt and test our proposal across different sites and scales, forming an important part of the iterative process.*

The resulting projects can therefore be understood as sacrificial experiments in language and method, laying the foundations for future explorations into the creative potentials of emerging tools, technologies, and media, as well as the political agency of architecture. In their essay 'Beyond Radical Design', Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby propose that the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 also collapsed the possibility of design aligning itself with anything other than market capitalism.[75] In a world where 'all conduct is economic conduct' following the mandate of neoliberal rationality, market parameters are the only available and 'reliable' tools to determine both economic and non-economic processes.[76] Yet the need for political and cultural transformation has never been more urgent. The enduring legacy of Architettura Radicale provides a model for how architecture can be recast as an emancipatory project. This ambition holds renewed significance in an era defined by many of the problems that its protagonists foreshadowed: hyper-capitalism, environmental crises, global wealth inequality, data surveillance, and disruptive technology. It is hoped that – through intimate encounters with key figures and artefacts of the prolific period of the Florentine Radicals – a new generation of young architects are inspired to pursue what it means to be radical in the contemporary context. Ultimately, this involves a rethinking of the critical role of the university as a space to engage with a seemingly necessary degree of scepticism. It offers an opportunity to problematise one's contribution to, and complicity with, the institution. It moves beyond the norms imposed by disciplines and the forced role acquisitions that are instrumental to the upholding of neoliberal agendas.

Notes

1. Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy: Politics and Architecture within and against Capitalism* (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008).
2. Amit Wolf, *Superarchitecture: Experimental Architectural Practices in Italy, 1963–1973* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2012).
3. Poltronova commissioned designs by Archizoom, Superstudio, and Ettore Sottsass among others, as discussed in Francesca Balena Arista, *Poltronova Backstage* (Florence: Fortino Editions Inc., 2016).
4. Amit Wolf, '*Discorsi per Immagini*: Of Political and Architectural Experimentation', *California Italian Studies*, 3:2 (2012) <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8dg29oqj> [accessed 17 March 2022].
5. This pedagogical project builds on the collective scholarship and creative-practice research examining Italian Radical Design at Monash Art Design and Architecture, including: Dr Alexandra Brown, 'Radical Restructuring: Autonomies in Italian Architecture and Design, 1968–73' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 2014); Dr Tom Morgan, 'An Engine of Cities' (unpublished PhD thesis, Monash University, 2015); Warren Taylor, 'Sono una Spia?', Monash Art Design and Architecture workshop in Milan in collaboration with AUT, GISTO <https://98800.org/project/sono-una-spia>; <https://gisto.net/

workshop/Sono-una-spia> [accessed 17 March 2022]; and Damiano Bertoli (1969–2021), Artist in Residence at the Prato Centre 2018, whose works including *Continuous Moment* (2002–), *Superpositions* (2019), and *Associates* (2014) were inspired by the Italian Avant Garde.

6. See also: Jacqui Alexander and Samuele Grassi, 'Interview with Gianni Pettena'.

7. Wolf, '*Discorsi per Immagini*'.

8. Olivier Vallerand, 'Italy's Rogue Utopians', *The Canadian Architect*, 63:7 (2018), 26–8.

9. Jacqui Alexander and Samuele Grassi, 'Interview with Gianni Pettena'.

10. Wolf, '*Discorsi per Immagini*'.

11. For a more detailed account of the influence of Eco on the Florentine Radicals, see Ibid.

12. Andrea Branzi of Archizoom discusses the value of uselessness and paradoxical utility in creative production; see David Catherine and Leanne Sacramone, 'Interview with Andrea Branzi', in *Andrea Branzi: Open Enclosures*, ed. by Fondation Cartier pour l'arte contemporain (Paris: Thames and Hudson, 2008), n.p.

13. Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 47–67. See also Monash Architecture's teaching-led research by Maria Fullaondo and Joe Gaucci-Seddon, 'Garden of Earthly Delights: A Social Condenser of Contemporary Pleasures in Pedagogical Design Strategies', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 72:1 (2018), 105–19.

14. Albena Yaneva, 'Editorial. New Voices in Architectural Ethnography', *Ardeth*, 2 (2018), 17–24; Rebecca McLaughlan and Cristina Garduño Freeman, '"You Can't Say that at SAHANZ": Critical Nearness and the Role of Autoethnography in Architectural History', in *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand 36, Distance Looks Back*, ed. by Victoria Jackson Wyatt, Andrew Leach, Lee Stickells (Sydney: SAHANZ, 2020), pp. 258–72.

15. Beatriz Colomina, Esther Choi, Ignacio Gonzalez Galan, Anna-Maria Meister, 'Radical Pedagogies', *The Architectural Review*, Oct (2012), 79–82.

16. Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy*.

17. Laura De Pretto, 'Adherence to Asian Values amongst Wenzhouese in Wenzhou and First-Generation Wenzhouese Migrants in Prato', in *Chinese Migration to Europe: Prato, Italy, and Beyond*, ed. by Loretta Baldassar, Graeme Johanson, Narelle McAuliffe, Massimo Bressan (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015), pp. 195–213 (pp. 196–7).

18. Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy*.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Giulio Giovannoni, *Tuscany beyond Tuscany: Rethinking the City from the Periphery* (Florence: Didapress, 2018), pp. 18–19.

23. Giovannoni, *Tuscany beyond Tuscany*, p. 43.

24. Sarah Hucal, 'The Radical Renaissance: learning from the Italian Radical Design Movement of the 1960s', *Curbed* (2016) <https://www.curbed.com/2016/12/21/14009200/florence-italy-radical-design-history> [accessed 17 March 2022].

25. Wolf, *Superarchitecture*.

26. Hans Ulrich Obrist, 'Interview with Gianni Pettena', in *Gianni Pettena 1966–2021*, ed. by Luca Cerizza (Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2021), pp. 155–8.

27. Ibid.

28. Jeremy Till and Tatiana Schneider, 'Beyond Discourse: Notes on Spatial Agency', *Footprint*, 4 (2009), 97–111.

29. Luca Cerizza, 'For a Sustainable Degrowth: Gianni Pettena's Critical Architecture', in *Gianni Pettena 1966–2021*, p. 169.

30. Colomina and others, 'Radical Pedagogies', p. 79.

31. Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October*, 8 (1979), pp. 30–44.

32. Cerizza, 'For a Sustainable Degrowth', p. 169.

33. Ibid., p. 178.

34. Ross K. Elfline, 'Superstudio and the "Refusal to Work"', *Design and Culture*, 8:1 (2016), 55–77. See also: Mario Tronti, *Workers and Capital*, trans. by D. Broder (London: Verso, 2019), pp. 241–62.

35. Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), p. 69.

36. Reinhold Martin, *Utopia's Ghost: Architecture and Post Modernism, Again* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. 1–25.

37. For a more detailed exploration of the politics of Archizoom's furniture, see: Pier Vittorio Aureli, 'More Money/Less Work: Archizoom', in *The Italian Avant Garde 1968–76*, ed. by Alex Coles and Catherine Rossi (London: Sternberg Press, 2013), p. 155.

38. Wolf questions whether it is possible to separate out the architectural and political dimensions of such a critique in Wolf, *Discorsi per Immagini*.

39. Elizabeth L. Krause, *Tight Knit: Global Families and the Social Life of Fast Fashion* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018), p. 7.

40. Ibid.

41. Elizabeth Krause's ethnographic research offers a useful picture of the city's changed urban landscape and the expansion of industries upon returning to Prato in the early 2000s after the mid-1990s.

42. Cedric Price famously declared that 'The best solution to an architectural problem may not necessarily be a building'; quoted in Rory Hyde, 'Introduction', in *Future Practice: Conversations from the Edge of Architecture* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 16–25 (p. 23).

43. Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 3.

44. Including the various regional manifestations of the Radical & Critical Design groups, contemporaneous art groups like Gruppo Zero (Nanda Vigo), as well as parallel Neo-Rationalist work by Rossi and others.

45. Penny Sparke, 'Ettore Sottsass and Critical Design in Italy: 1965–1985', in *Made In Italy: Rethinking a Century of Italian Design*, ed. by Grace Lees-Maffei and Kjetil Fallan (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 59–72.

46. Jacqui Alexander and Samuele Grassi, 'Interview with Gianni Pettena'.

47. Manfredo Tafuri, 'Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology', in *Architecture Theory Since 1968*, ed. by K. Michael Hays (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), pp. 2–36.

48. Joseph Grima, Alessandro Mendini, Vera Sacchetti, 'The Role of Radical Magazines', in *EP V. 1 The Italian Avant Garde 1968–1976*, ed. by Alex Coles and Catherine Rossi (London: Sternberg Press, 2013), pp. 8–22.

49. See also: Poltronova, *Joe: De Pas, D'Urbino Lomazzi* (Florence: Centro Studi Poltronova, 2018).

50. See also: Lucia Allias, 'Disaster as Experiment: Superstudio's Radical Preservation', *Log*, 22 (2011), 125–9.

51. See also: Jacqui Alexander and Tom Morgan, 'Quoting the Familiar: Critical Image Making in the Age of Digital Reproduction', in *QUOTATION: What Does History Have in Store for Architecture Today? Proceedings of the 34th Annual*

Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand, ed. by G. Hartoonian and J. Ting (Canberra: SAHANZ, 2017), pp. 1–11.

52. For a more detailed analysis of the political content in Archizoom's 'No-Stop City', see: Pier Vittorio Aureli, 'More Money/Less Work: Archizoom', in *The Italian Avant-Garde, 1968–1978*, ed. by Alex Coles and Catharine Rossi (Berlin: Sternberg Press), pp. 147–64.

53. *Radical Utopias: Florence 1966–1976*, ed. by Pino Brugellis, Gianni Pettena, Alberto Salvadori (Florence: Quadlibet, 2017), p. 10.

54. Calogero Muscarà, 'The Right to Adapt and the Weight of History: Venice and the Venetians', *International Political Science Review*, 5:2 (1984), 181–8.

55. Allias, 'Disaster as Experiment'.

56. Giorgio Bassani and Roberto Brambilla, 'Introduction', in *Art and Landscape of Italy, Too Late to be Saved?* (Florence: Centro Di, 1972), pp. 7–8.

57. Allias, 'Disaster as Experiment'.

58. Roberto Brambilla, *Art and Landscape of Italy, Too Late to be Saved?* (Florence: Centro Di, 1972).

59. Sara Marini and Alberto Betagna, 'Tra: The City Beyond Itself', in *Venice: A Document* (Venice: Bruno, 2015), p. 26.

60. Robert Good, 'Tourist Commodification of Residential Vernacular Architecture in Venice: Livability and Conservation in an Historic District', *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, 17:1 (2005), 65–74.

61. Marini and Betagna, 'Tra: The City Beyond Itself', p. 27.

62. Manfredo di Robilant, 'The Legacy of the Radicals, or the Two Meanings of an Adjective', in *Radical Utopias: Florence 1966–1976*, ed. by Pino Brugellis, Gianni Pettena, Alberto Salvadori (Florence: Quadlibet, 2017), pp. 87–97 (p. 89).

63. Colomina and others, 'Radical Pedagogies', p. 82.

64. Damiano Bertoli, *Superpositions* (Melbourne: Neon Park, 2019), p. 3. In the Introduction to his catalogue, Bertoli discusses Carmelo Bene's criticisms of the hegemonic narratives dominating Western civilisation, which exist as '"super-impositions" of culture(s) advocating instead for a

subjectively-driven experience of cultural forms.'

65. Obrist, 'Interview with Gianni Pettena', pp. 155–6.

66. Martino Stierli, *Montage and the Metropolis: Architecture, Modernity and the Representation of Space* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

67. Margaret Plant, *Venice: Fragile City 1797–1997* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 1.

68. Allias, 'Disaster as Experiment'.

69. Stierli, *Montage and the Metropolis*, p. 217.

70. Jacqui Alexander and Samuele Grassi, 'Interview with Gianni Pettena'.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid.

73. Colomina and others, 'Radical Pedagogies', p. 82.

74. Ibid., p. 81

75. Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction and Social Dreaming* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

76. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York, NY: Zone Books), p. 10.

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Authors' biographies
Jacqui Alexander is Senior Lecturer in Architectural Design and Architectural History at Monash University. She is Co-Director of Alexander & Sheridan Architecture and a founding editor of *POST Magazine*, an award-winning independent Melbourne- and Paris-based journal exploring the lived experience of buildings and cities. Jacqui's current research investigates the interplay of platform technologies, global real estate capital, and architectural production. In 2021, she was the recipient of the Australian Institute of Architects' Emerging Architect Prize (VIC).

Samuele Grassi is a part-time Lecturer at Monash University Prato Centre and Adjunct Lecturer at University of Florence. His research interests focus on the connections of queer gender theories and postanarchism, interdisciplinary critical pedagogies, and sexualities and citizenship education, including cultural and educational exchanges.

George Mellos is a graduate of architecture engaging in urban and design research at Relative Projects. He is an educator at Monash University where he has taught into the Foundation Studio programme and has co-taught a design studio focused on urban infrastructure, amenity, and modes of production in the middle rings of cities. George currently teaches a unit titled Architectural Communications, which dissects different approaches to documenting and representing spatial ideas.

Authors' affiliations
Jacqui Alexander, Monash University, Australia.
Samuele Grassi, Monash University, Australia.
George Mellos, Monash University, Australia.

Authors' addresses
Jacqui Alexander
jacqui.alexander@monash.edu

Samuele Grassi
samuele.grassi@monash.edu

George Mellos
george.mellos@monash.edu