The Unstable Object: *Glifo*, *Blow*, and *Sacco* at MoMA, 1972

Ingrid Halland
Associate Professor
Department of Art and Media Studies
Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)

Original article
Word count: 8895 (including endnotes)

Summary
This article discusses three radical objects— the *Glifo* shelf from 1966, the *Blow* chair from 1967, and the *Sacco* chair from 1968—that were all exhibited at MoMA's ground-breaking architecture and design exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* in 1972. The article proposes that these early postmodern objects should not merely be considered a new stylistic development, a new aesthetics, or as expressing new conceptions of sociopolitical ideologies; rather, they can be considered as instigating a new epistemological status of objects. A close reading reveals how the structural element of *Glifo, Blow,* and *Sacco* is hard to trace and how these objects' physical limits seem to soften or even dissolve. By engaging with the writings of Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, and Manfredo Tafuri, this article claims that the poststructuralist landscape of ideas has a material counterpart in some objects from the late 1960s, and then discusses the political and intellectual implications of such unstable objects.

Keywords
1970s; Postmodernism; Museum of Modern Art, NY; Domestic material culture; Post-structuralism; Neo-Marxism

The Unstable Object: *Glifo*, *Blow*, and *Sacco* at MoMA, 1972

"A chair will never be a chair again" wrote *New York Times* architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable in the introduction to her review of the ground-breaking architecture and design exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* the day after its opening.[1] In fact, she might have been spot on. Conforming to every body type, the *Sacco* bean bag chair is a monument to context. Its synthetic leather shell encloses the little beads of expanded polystyrene that move and turn whenever someone throws themselves into it. Each time, depending on the context, the beads fluctuate; they enter a configuration that dissolves the second the person stretches their back, lift their legs to sit in a cross-legged lotus position, or reach for their phone on a nearby coffee table. "[The *Sacco*] became one of the icons of the Italian anti-design movement. Its complete flexibility and formlessness made it the perfect antidote to the static formalism of mainstream Italian furniture of the period,"[2] Penny Spark notes in *Italian Design – 1870 to the Present*. Yet as with all antidotes, overuse can cause reduction in the effectiveness so that the antidote becomes absorbed by the condition it attacks.

This article discusses the epistemological status of three objects—the *Glifo* shelf from 1966, the *Blow* chair from 1967, and the *Sacco* chair from 1968—that were all on display in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City in 1972. In the first part of the article, a close reading will reveal how these objects' structural element is hard to trace and how their physical limits seem to soften or even dissolve: *Glifo, Blow,* and *Sacco* resist revealing their structure, or rather, they make the *trace* of their structure impossible to locate. By drawing on Jean Baudrillard's renowned criticism of modern interiors (that he partly developed in connection to INDL[3]) this decay of structural elements is identified as a "crisis of the object." I propose that there are conceptual parallels of this crisis to Jacques Derrida's notion of deconstruction and his analysis of the epistemological "crisis of the structure." Through a close engagement with *Glifo, Blow,* and *Sacco*, I aim to show how these two conceptual crises are related: the crises enabled and evoked each other, and the result was the symbiotic decay of the "object" and the "structure" as distinct entities.

In the second part of the article, I turn to the MoMA exhibition where these unstable objects were on display and I argue that their physical and epistemological porosity made them more receptive to a different kind of structure. By drawing on Manfredo Tafuri's criticism of *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, I argue that the unstable objects were absorbed by a free-floating market economy. Accordingly, the article ties conceptual bonds between modular flexibility in furniture design, poststructuralist epistemology, and a total social and political model of unbridled capitalism.

Supershow in retrospect

"Everybody who designed every chair you ever sat in or every house you ever heard of came to the invitational opening Tuesday night" wrote *The Washington Post* after the vernissage on May 26th 1972.[4] Architectural critics all over the world wrote about the opening of the "Supershow": Huxtable called it "one of the most ambitious shows ever mounted at that fashionable institution,"[5] Critic Rita Reif described it as the largest exhibition in MoMA's history and wrote that the "provocative ideas represented in the Italian show at the MoMA, may well make this the most exciting and controversial design and architectural exhibition seen in many decades."[6]

INDL is frequently referenced as a pioneering and controversial exhibition. In previous scholarship, the exhibition has been considered significant in many ways. First, it has been claimed that the MoMA show established what later became known as Italian postmodernism (bold colors, playful idiom, synthetic materials and advanced molding techniques) as a stylistic forerunner, and in doing so, marked a final end to the style of Scandinavian design.[7] Second, the exhibition is recognized for its contribution to the development of the "critical turn" in architecture and design,[8] and last, its complexities and ambiguities have, to some extent, been discussed in relation to the emerging discourse of postmodernism.[9] The exhibition, as a historical document, has received significant interest over the last decade,[10] which to a substantial degree can be ascribed to Felicity D. Scott's scholarship, who discusses how INDL contributed to a critical turn in architecture, and how new conceptions of utopia—both techno-utopias and radical drop-out utopias—were manifested and mediated in the display. Further, both the exhibition and the participating Italian designers figure prominently in design historical research on radical design from the 1960s and 1970s;[11] on Italian design more broadly defined;[12] on the historicity of environmental and participatory design and its critiques;[13] and on the social, cultural, and political contexts of postmodern architecture and design.[14]

Curator Emilio Ambasz (b. 1943) had chosen Italy as a case study for a critical inquiry into the achievements and problems of contemporary design. This relatively small country had reached a high level of design accomplishment within the last decade, and Ambasz found the geographical delineation to be an ideal micromodel to address general possibilities, limitations, and critical issues of contemporary design discourse. Further, in the Italian design discourse, Ambasz located several contradictions and complexities especially regarding the interrelation between, on the one hand, mass production and neo-liberal powers, and on the other hand, radical leftist ideologies and anti-design.[15] These contradictions were, according to Ambasz,

discussed on an advanced level of historical criticism by Italian theorists, practitioners, and philosophers, and the aim of the exhibition was to display an assembly of objects, environments, and critical writings that could make these complexities explicit. Ambasz intended the exhibition to function as a mirror or a micro-model of current discursive conditions and consequently decided to separate the exhibition into two parts, *objects* and *environments*, in agreement with key terminologies and conceptual schemas in the field of design in the late 1960s. The *objects* section contained individual consumer products displayed in the MoMA garden, whereas the *environments* section included specially commissioned, immersive, full-scale environments displayed inside the museum building. The Objects section in the MoMA garden showed 160 commercial products dating from the late 1960s until 1972, by the most daring, successful, or future-oriented contemporary Italian designers. The individual objects were selected by Ambasz and were exhibited in custom-made display cases, which were designed by the curator (fig. 1).

The press seemed quite unanimously to agree that the objects displayed in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* were displaying something that radically diverged from previous design and architecture solutions. As, for instance, articulated by journalist Ernie Wood "[the exhibition] seems to throw out some old ideas of design and architecture as permanent objects."[16] There was a new, holistic approach to design, as identified by Barbara Rose in her review of the exhibition in *Vogue*: "The point made by 'The New Domestic Landscape' is that we can *no longer isolate the object from its context*."[17] This statement open up to consider the exhibition as a design counterpart of a poststructuralist landscape of ideas.

But what if the design counterpart played a part in shaping a poststructuralist landscape of ideas? According to Ambasz, a design approach is the pragmatic equivalent of a philosophical conception of reality. In the early 1970s, he defined his curatorial project as searching for "alternative modes of existence" and he added that "artifacts […] might help bring it about."[18] In accordance with recent methodological developments in material culture studies that recognize the vital agency of materials,[19] Ambasz too considered objects to have vital agency. If taking Ambasz seriously, objects and artifacts have the capacity to bring forth alternative modes of existence. This means that the objects on display in INDL can project epistemological conceptions into the world and help bring forth epistemological theories. Although I do not aim to bring this argument to an extreme—completely detached from cultural-historic context—the designed objects under scrutiny in this article are explored as *material metaphysics*, in accordance with Ambasz' understanding. This does not mean that the objects are representations of philosophical ideas, but that the objects themselves—their formal

qualities, their materiality, their relationship with the environment, the gestures associated with them—materialize their own epistemological status. Throughout the article, I will draw on primary sources such as first-hand descriptions by reviewers who visited the exhibition in 1972; scholars who were directly associated with the exhibition (in particular Jean Baudrillard and Manfredo Tafuri); and archival documents from MoMA.[20] But most importantly, the methodological approach consists of a formal analysis of *Glifo, Blow,* and *Sacco.* These approaches join forces in the attempt of drawing out a critique of post-structuralist epistemology from within the historical material related to INDL, and in doing so, this article accentuates and reinvents INDL's significance as a tool for critique.

Destructuring the structure

One object on display in the MoMA garden was Enzo Mari's storage system, *Glifo*, from 1966 (translated to *Glyph* in the catalogue). The system can perhaps be characterized as an entirely democratic piece of furniture (fig. 2). Produced in ABS plastic by Gavina, *Glifo* was a mid-range priced ready-to-assemble piece of furniture which the user could assemble herself without any need for additional tools. The system consisted of separate quadratic plastic plates with an interlocking system (reminiscent of the guttae attached to the triglyphs in ancient temples) which could easily be joined into cubes. Assembling the structure would leave no traces; the prefabricated plastic fragments were locked together smoothly and efficiently. The structure has no other components than what is needed for it to exist as a structure. "What you see is what you see," as Frank Stella famously said about his own paintings in a 1966 interview.[21] Further, the storage system could answer multiple needs: bookshelves, wardrobe and cabinet, display unit, bar, drawers, and so on. Importantly, the cubes could be attached to each other in many ways, so the user could configure the storage system according to her needs (fig 3). If one needed a larger system of shelves, one could simply buy more plastic plates and expand the structure. The structure could be as small and as large one wanted it to be. The form of the storage system is hence constituted by a break-up of form, it has no permanence.

The storage system *Glifo* had an integrated *adaptability* that addressed the ever-changing "needs" of the consumer. The user became the designer who was to choose for herself how to arrange the modules, which answered—and also reinforced—the requirement that a piece of furniture had to be adaptable to fit into a more drifting, or nomadic, lifestyle. The modules epitomized customization; it was a factory-built, prefabricated mobile structure.

The etymological origin of the name *Glifo* is from the Greek γλύφω [glyfo] which means "to carve," but also to "note down." Further, the word has a root in the Ancient Greek verb γλύφειν

[glyphein] which could be related to the Indo-European *gleubh,* meaning "to cut, slice, or tear apart." The word has since evolved to signify the carved out sign (as in hieroglyphs), hence "glyph" or "glifo" means also "a sculpted symbol."[22] From an etymological viewpoint, the storage system could be understood as a sculptured or built sign: *Glifo* then becomes a structure which refers to its own existence as something intangible, as something outside itself. In its formal qualities the storage system signifies *differences and play*—at least this was the conclusion sociologist Jean Baudrillard proposed in his critique of modular components in *Le Système des Objets* in 1968: "These objects are no longer endowed with a 'soul' […] what such objects embody is no longer the secret of a unique relationship but, rather, differences, and moves in a game."[23] Baudrillard further claimed that in such a structure "everything has to intercommunicate, everything has to be functional—no more secrets, no more mysteries, everything is organized, therefore everything is clear."[24] But will this seemingly clear and organized storage system make it easy to locate its conceptual structure?

Glifo takes its place in a long history of modular flexibility in architecture and design (which had an immense expansion in the 1950s, as shown by Reinhold Martin in his discussion of corporate architecture after WWII.)[25] Baudrillard however claimed that the most recent plastic modular furnishings held a distinct position in this regard, as he assigned all furnishings previous to this development to "a complete mode of life whose basic ordering principle is Nature as the original substance from which value is derived."[26] The pure plastic, multi-combinable single-block components that can be put together in an infinite variety of ways, however, pointed toward something new. Baudrillard explained:

> What we glimpse today in modern interiors is the coming of end of this order of Nature; what is appearing in the horizon, beyond the break-up of form, beyond the dissolution of the formal boundary between inside and outside and of the whole dialectic of being and appearance relating to that boundary, is a qualitatively new relationship […that is] putting the very idea of genesis into question and omitting all the origins, received meanings and 'essences' of which our old pieces of furniture remained concrete symbols; it implies practical computation and conceptualization on the basis of total abstraction, the notion of a world no longer given but instead produced—mastered, manipulated, inventoried, controlled: a world, in short, that has to be constructed.[27]

Around the same time as Mari designed his open-ended storage system, Jacques Derrida developed his notion of deconstruction that indeed aimed at, with Baudrillard's words, "putting the very idea of genesis into question and omitting all […] essences." Derrida's notion of deconstruction is a mode of thinking which aims to bring us closer to how we can approach reality as such. Derrida suggested that there is a *structure* that constitute reality, but the workings of this structure cannot simply be understood. Deconstructive discourse means not to

take apart, or unbuild, a structure, but rather to inhabit structure in order to locate its limits and to make explicit what it conceals. Derrida's notion of deconstruction is to work with the limits, from within, to force them to become evident. When limits are pushed—or forced—evident, it will reveal the *differences* within the limits, and this unveiling of differences is perhaps the closest one can come to grasping the structure. Thus, Derrida turned the "structure" that governed epistemological notions in structuralist thinking upside down, or inside out. Structuralism aimed to uncover the structure that permitted epistemological truths to exist as truths, whereas Derrida rendered the uncovering of the structure itself as impossible. The structure was unstable—even inaccessible. When Derrida formulated this idea in *De la grammatologie* in 1967, it was the meaning of a *text* (as a structure) he declared to be unreachable. Later, deconstruction was discussed and elaborated in a deeper mode, which can be described as a set of conceptual tools to uncover ontological truths (or un-truths). Important to note, however, is that deconstruction was never conceived as a method, but a philosophy, a sort of "anti-structuralism," insofar as deconstruction considers the structure as impossible to grasp as such.[28]

By virtue of *Glifo*'s formal design, it is hard to locate the structure of the system. It can be everything and nothing, a constant play between modules that destruct the ordering principle of Nature, and the structure then remains ambiguous. *Glifo* becomes a sign of a sign, of the pure, seemingly limitless fluidity of potentialities. What then, is *Glifo* a sign of a sign of? Baudrillard's answer is consumption. In the concluding paragraph in his 1968 neo-Marxian critique of objects, Baudrillard claimed that the *traces* of the structure governing the current worldview were found in the the control force that could never itself be controlled. He wrote:

> The systematic and limitless process of consumption arises from the disappointed demand for totality that underlies the project of life. In their ideality sign-objects are all equivalent and may multiply infinitely; indeed, they *must multiply* in order at every moment to make up for a reality that is absent. Consumption is irrepressible, in the last reckoning, because it is founded upon a *lack*.[29]

Glifo, with its analogous plastic plates that could be configured and reconfigured into any size or any shape, had no beginning and no end; the formal qualities and the ideology of consumption which constituted the storage system points towards a horizon of a seemingly ongoing loop of open-endedness. Thinking with Baudrillard, *Glifo* embodies a limitless loop of totality. Yet the difference lies within the contradiction between the controlled and the uncontrolled. In a liberated consumer society, the human being seems to be freer; *Glifo* can be configured any way the consumer wants; that is, the structure has endless possibilities. Or does

the array of possibilities in fact conceal that *Glifo* is a part of something uncontrolled? In his critique of furniture based on modular components, Baudrillard considered these objects as epitomizing consumption as irrepressible. *Glifo* confronted the difference between the controlled and uncontrolled, hence, the object's boundaries became unclear, uncertain.

Softening the boundaries

On display in one of the mini skyscrapers in the MoMA garden was *Blow*—a chair more interested in becoming than in being (fig. 4). The chair was designed in 1967 by the Milan-based design trio Paolo Lomazzi, Donato D'Urbino, and Jonathan De Pas. *Blow* is a soft plastic chair with no other tangible supporting structure. Plastic throughout, its form is made up of two bent plastic tubes placed on top of each other, functioning as armrests, backrest, and legs. The two tubes enclose and support the seat (which also consists of the tube-shaped plastic forms) and in addition, a cylindrical headrest is attached to the upper tube. The chair on display was colourless and transparent, though *Blow* was produced in several bright, but still transparent, colours. Its name refers to the structural element and to the technique which the chair gets its form from, that is, the chair is inflatable. In fact, *Blow* was one of the first inflatable objects to be mass produced and its design was made possible by several technological innovations, most notably by the invention of ultrasonic welding technique patented in 1965.

Materials are sensitive to sound. In brief, waves of any sort will set up vibrations in the materials they impinge upon, and this movement produces heat. In 1965 it was discovered that high-frequency sound (ultrasound) could weld thermoplastic, thus launching the possibility to create soft plastic forms without any other structural components than the plastic itself. Yet, the inflatable *Blow* got its form also from air. The soft plastic chair had a nozzle in the back and was designed to be blown up by the user herself. As air filled up the flat-packed chair, it transformed the object and it became very close to nothing. A radically absent chair. Transparent plastic and enclosed air; these two components brought the object into a new range of possibilities. *Blow* expanded our understanding of what an object could be, both regarding its formal qualities and the epistemological categories objects usually are ascribed to. First, in both these terms the chair challenged stability. It evokes an unstable temporality, as it will never stay the same. It seems like the chair is always moving, always becoming. *Blow* is not a chair until the user blows air into it, and as air gets warm, the molecules have more energy, thus the air expands. Inflatable objects cannot be stable entities; the nozzle needs to breath. The chair would otherwise explode when exposed to external pressure or environmental factors such as a change of temperature. As air slowly seeps out it underlines that this chair is physically and

conceptually governed by the environment, or in other words, by its context. Air is that which makes this object, and it cannot exist as a chair unless the user actively fills it with air. It is a do-it-yourself construction which also allows the user to make her own choices when the chair will exist (that is, when to blow it up), and where to take it. Put it in your bag, and inflate it whenever you want. The existence of *Blow* is constituted by unstable factors such as humans, air, and sound, and this evokes an assembly of dynamics that had never existed in furniture before. *Blow* materialized a presence of intangibility. The material which gives the chair its form is the same, inside and outside the object. The continuum is separated by a layer of soft plastic, made possible by ultrasonic waves. There are no hands involved in producing this chair, it is a piece of furniture that does not relate to any handicraft tradition, and when considering the etymological root, it is not even *manufactured* which literally means "worked by hand." *Blow* has surrendered to a process of industrialization in all its levels of manufacturing. The chair points towards a realm of virtuality, and will hence refuse to belong to categories which formerly made a chair into an object. The softness of the material and its transparency epitomizes that the boundary between the object and its environment has softened.

Blow also pushed the limits in terms of sociocultural categories. The chair belongs to a realm of freedom. It is a lounge chair—it makes the user lean back, enjoy, and relax. It is not confined to the house, but its light weight and its compact form (in the un-inflated state) asks the user to bring the chair out of the house and into the environment. *Blow* can be carried along; outside, to the beach, in the garden, on a camping trip (fig 5). But its soft and thin plastic layer between the inside and outside air made the object weak—even defenceless—to external dangers such as sharp edges or high and low temperatures. Also, the ultrasonic welding technique turned out not to be entirely solid. Zanotta notifies on their webpage that *Blow* was taken out of production because "the thermo-welding-procedure that kept these thin, transparent PVC foil together was not a guaranty for a longevity resistance of the welding points." [30] The chair thus evokes a sense of unstableness, and therefore it comes across as an object without much value, and not just on a conceptual level. *Blow* was indeed very cheap. If the plastic was ripped, or if the welding joints broke, one could buy a new chair.

This ephemeral piece of furniture epitomized not only consumerism. By its detachment from virtues that previously had given objects an economic value—i.e. labor force, the quality of material, or uniqueness or exclusiveness—*Blow* epitomized mass consumerism. Welded by sounds, its material produced by machines, and its structure governed by air, *Blow* can be considered an embodiment of the degeneration of the value of an object. Inside the realm of political economy, one could say that the inflatable chair belongs to a free-floating market

economy. In the realm of sociocultural meanings and interpretations, *Blow* embodied virtues of freedom and flexibility; a chair not confined to a private, interior space; rather, a movable form that invites relaxation and enjoyment, that is cheap and resists rigidity, confronts conformity, and rejects history.

Last, but perhaps most importantly, *Blow* is governed by the notion of play. Its bold colors (or transparency), unrecognizable form, and the unexpected structural element emphasize the playful fun. With its soft structure that never really stabilizes, the chair opens up a play of endless possibilities. The plastic material plays with the limits of what a piece of furniture can be. The air that is blown in, and then seeps out, makes the object not just surrounded by an atmospheric environment—the chair carries the environment inside. It blurs the boundaries between the atmosphere and the object's internal atmosphere. Thus *Blow* has an omnipresent structure; when the structure, that is, the air, plays and flows inside and outside the plastic substance, the chair moves into the ambience of ubiquitous absence. *Blow* is an object removed from itself, it is a disappearing object; apparently free from structure, and behind the windows inside the mini wooden-skyscrapers in the MoMA garden *Blow* joined, and equated, concepts of both mass democracy and mass consumerism.

This equation is especially explicated by the 1968 *Sacco* beanbag lounge chair by designers Piero Gatti, Cesare Paolini, and Franco Teodoro. The chair became an instant design success and was already a cultural symbol of Italian design when it was exhibited in the MoMA garden (fig. 6). Manufactured by Zanotta, the chair was a result of production advancements in automation and of experiments with foamed polystyrene for commercialized use.[31] The outside of the *Sacco* had a synthetic leather shell, whereas the inside was filled with polystyrene pellets, that is, small plastic spheres consisting of 98% air. The beanbag chair is a responsive piece of furniture, a chair that changes according to use. The chair represented a new type of furnishings: objects that pushed the limit of the formal boundary between the inside and the outside. It was an unstable chair almost entirely of air. The *Sacco*, in fact, refused to reveal its structural element, or rather, it made the trace of its structure impossible to locate. The synthetic leather bag is soft, with an almost fluid quality, and when it comes into contact with the human body, it reveals that the chair is not governed by a rigid structure. Its structural element, the polystyrene pellets, are constantly in flux and will henceforth support the human body in an untraceable way. This intractability of structure is in fact similar to what Derrida's notion of deconstruction aims to reveal. But according to Derrida, traces of the structure can come forth if the limits of the structure are forced to be revealed. And, as discussed in this article, the structural limit is revealed to be flexible.

"At the core [of *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*] is nothing more or less than a parade of gleaming, insouciant, objects, announcing that the area of Scandinavian 'good design' is past and the era of the bean bag chair is well upon us."[32] Reviewer Douglas Davis of *Newsweek* recognized that the formal aesthetics of the objects on display had paved the way for a new age of design. INDL showed an aesthetic radically dissimilar to the idiom that had dominated the world of design only a decade earlier: "Imagine the bean bag chair," he wrote, and suggested that "no spartan International School designer would have dreamed of proposing [such form] ten years ago."[33] *Glifo, Blow,* and *Sacco* were new forms of objects that played with the border between being and nothingness. They materialized a new epistemological category that challenged the objective qualities of an object. These objects can perhaps best be described by a quote from Baudrillard: The objectivity of the "truth, functional and beautiful" had now broken down, Baudrillard argued, and inaugurated a conceptual shift in design. Functionalism had been "a metaphysical fable," and now there was *no truth of the object*. He wrote:

> Now, it is just this postulate of denotation that is crumbling today. We are finally beginning to realize (even in semiology) that this postulate is arbitrary, not just a methodological artifact but a metaphysical fable. *There is no* truth of the object, and its denotation is nothing but the best of connotations. This is not theoretical: designers, urbanists, and environmental planners are confronted every day (if they ask themselves a few questions) with the decay of objectivity. The function(ality) of forms, of objects, becomes from day to day, more unattainable, more illegible, more incalculable. Where is the object's centrality […] today?[34]

Just as Roland Barthes killed the notion of an author, Baudrillard killed the notion of an object. When Derrida was arguing for an ontological deconstruction of a centre, Baudrillard asked where the object's centrality was today when the "economic, social, psychophysical and metaphysical"[35] were inextricably mixed. Concepts such as decentralization; breaking down binary oppositions; and complexities situated beyond human intelligibility are concepts discussed in early poststructuralism. Further, poststructuralism destabilized both subjectivity and objectivity as epistemological notions. Arguably, *Glifo, Blow,* and *Sacco* echo this destabilization. These everyday objects materialized epistemological uncertainty; echoing Baudrillard's analysis, these unstable entities challenged notions of origin and essence, in Baudrillard's words, even truth.

In the Objects section of INDL, the ethos of Manhattan continued into the MoMA garden. The display cases echoed the museum's neighboring buildings: vertical, rectangular, and massive cubes with large fronts in Plexiglas resembling store windows. The cases were placed in a systematic grid that also echoed Midtown's orderly organization. Sleek, plastic

objects were placed behind plastic windows in the mini-skyscraper cases. In the midst of Manhattan, in Ambasz's words "the most representative urban artefact of our culture,"[36] the objects in the mini-skyscrapers became a part of a conceptual network; they became a part of the capital of the twentieth century. As reviewer Barbara Rose pointed out in her aforementioned review: after INDL, the object could no longer be isolated from its context. The capital entered the museum and permeated the physical and epistemologically porous plastic objects. Thus the objects on display in the MoMA garden pointed to something outside of themselves, something that several visitors and critics interpreted as being the most powerful structure, namely Capital itself.

Displaying totalizing capitalism

> Chairs which are not chairs—but fine for relaxing. Tables which are just a part of the floor. Shelves easy to rearrange—less good for shelving. Beds—areas for every purpose. And the rooms? No rooms—cubicles, boxes, roll-out instant spaces. And no wood. No glass. No wrought iron, no rugs. [*Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* has] only plastics, plastics, plastics.[37]

Although the objects in the MoMA garden were not exclusively high-end luxury products, but rather mostly mid-range priced mass-produced everyday things,[38] Ambasz's curatorial decision to place them inside shopping windows of the mini-Manhattan demonstrated a deliberate intention to inscribe the Objects section into a discourse of political economy. On display was a manifestation of the material culture of late-capitalism, which made several reviewers comment on the reactionary aspect of this section. In a framework of Marxian critique, it would seem as if the designers presented in the MoMA garden were servile followers of production, and as Huxtable remarked, INDL was displaying "the fine art of *réclame*."[39]

And, indeed, the exhibition was working for the Italian manufacturing industry. At the time, INDL was the most expensive exhibition in MoMA's history. In an interview, Ambasz estimated "the total cost of the show [to be] somewhere between one and one-and-a-half million dollars, only about $55,000 of this was absorbed by the museum—about the cost of a regular show."[40] The real expense, however, was borne by patrons with major financial interests in a market expansion of Italian design: the Italian Ministry for Foreign Trade and ICE (Institute for Foreign Trade), and the oil company ENI. Other major sponsors were manufacturers including Olivetti, Artemide, Fiat, Cassina, Boffi, Kartell, and Gufram. All products shown at the exhibition were donated by their respective manufacturers, which of course was a splendid advertisement opportunity for them: the manufactures got to display their most advanced techniques and to promote their latest materials to a large American clientele. And at the same

time as making money, the companies could be recognized publically as sponsors and supporters of contemporary Italian culture. Finally, Ambasz eloquently solved the transportation challenge by persuading the Italian government to cover all shipping expenses by using Italy's state-owned maritime corporations and airlines to transport all objects and environments. However, many critics and visitors left the exhibition with a bad feeling about this win-win-win situation for MoMA, the Italian government, and the private corporations sponsoring the show.

INDL seemingly accepted—and played along with—capitalist forces. These forces were also directly related to the synthetic materials on display. It was neither a matter of coincidence nor an aesthetic argument that the exhibition was pervaded by, as one aforementioned reviewer phrased it, "plastics, plastics, plastics." Again, it was corporate interests that were in control. Gruppo ENI's condition for sponsoring the show (as one of the world's supermajors, that is, one of the seven biggest oil companies worldwide) had been that it displayed—and hence promoted—plastics, as Ambasz commented in the exhibition catalogue: "sponsors encourage exploration into the potentials of the synthetic materials and fibers."[41] Hence the exhibition became a tool for the marketing industry; it saturated the discourse of design, including its formal, aesthetic, and semantic aspects, in a political economy which was amplified by turning the museum visitors into mass consumers by having them gaze at the plastic products through shopping windows in the mini-Manhattan of the MoMA garden (fig. 7). Or as Adolfo Natalini (one of the founders of Superstudio) noted: this was all a part of Ambasz' ironic twist.[42]

One of the fiercest critics of Ambasz's play with this totalizing capitalism came from the inner circles of the exhibition project itself. Manfredo Tafuri's catalogue essay "Design and Technological Utopia" (which one year later appeared as a re-written chapter in *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*)[43] was a reproachful analysis of the theoretical, aesthetic, and political premise of INDL. Felicity Scott has discussed Tafuri's critique of the exhibition in great detail, especially concerning his rejection (strongly influenced by a neo-Marxist ideology) of radical architecture and, further, how Tafuri dismissed design and architecture as critical utopias. In his INDL catalogue essay, Tafuri stated that

> …in the capitalist system, there is no break between production, distribution, and consumption. All the intellectual anticonsumer utopias that seek to redress the ethical 'distortions' of the technological world by modifying the system of production or the channels of distribution only reveal the complete inadequacy of their theories, in the face of the actual structure of the capitalist economic cycle.[44]

Tafuri interpreted INDL to be such an anti-consumer utopia, which did nothing but strengthen the cycle of production, distribution, and consumption. As noted by Scott, Tafuri considered INDL as an "astute marketing operation."[45]

For Tafuri, the semiotic model formulated by Charles Sanders Pierce—which Ambasz's early writings had drawn heavily on—was a part of the problem. Pierce's philosophy of semiotics was responsible for the decay of the signified, that is, "the object devoid of reference to anything but itself,"[46] and which consequently had turned the human body into a "pure sign-man."[47] Tafuri saw the semiotic influence in design and architecture, that is, the idea that objects and buildings were free-floating players in a constantly moving system of signs, as "indicat[ing] the conditions of manipulability of the pure sign devoid of any symbolic implication, of any semantic reference."[48] As pointed out by Scott, Tafuri argued that semiotic theory had "disarticulated art from politics and led to the only utopia being a technological utopia."[49] Semiological approaches in design and architecture had, according to Tafuri, evoked the decay of the object, and thus contributed to the degeneration of objectivity. For Tafuri, the sign's loss of objectivity (in his words, loss of semantic reference) had made the sign easier to manipulate. And the manipulating system consisted of technologies of late-capitalism. In this system, politics was doomed to fail, Tafuri concluded.

The fact that architecture and design had become a key site for the neo-avant-garde movement also strengthened the system according to Tafuri. Art movements in the 1960s had forcefully blurred the borders between art and life. Pop Art, Nouveau Réalisme, and Fluxus played with the notion of mass culture and democracy in art.[50] In particular, the pop art movement—which played with popular culture and commercialized objects as a critique on modern consumerism and political market economy—was contributing to creating an "object devoid of reference to anything but itself."[51] And when the appropriated art of pop art entered the real consumer market, any trace of symbolic implication and any trace of the signified disappeared. According to Tafuri's analysis, the ironical anti-consumer design that played with mass culture—objects such as Archizoom's *Mies* chair, Cesare Casati and Emanuele Ponzio *Pillola* lamp or Gaetano Pesce's *Moloch* floor lamp (all part of INDL)—emphasized that Pop Art had indeed become consumerism. Tafuri's Marxist analysis claimed that this process was an inevitable consequence of capitalist market forces themselves. The automation of the manufacturing process had caused the designer's role in this process to play a less important role. Tafuri claimed that recent technological developments had created a "necessity for international consolidation of capital,"[52] and a demand for an "ever-increasing concentration of capital,"[53] which again had *limited* the designer's ability to "arbitrarily transforming the product

‘qualitatively.’[sic.]”[54] The designer experienced a major identity crisis that, according to Tafuri, was evoked by computer automation: “Today, the planning of production cycles is being entrusted to managerial systems controlled by computer programming.”[55] Capitalist forces gained a foothold by automation and consequently designers were forced into irony and critical utopias, and thus moved away from politics.

Continuing on Tafuri’s critical path, one could say that the plastic molded mass-produced objects alienated the designer from work and increased the distance between the designer and the object. According to Tafuri, objects were indeed in decay. Objects became “liberated” from work through the automation of manufacturing machinery, and according to Tafuri’s reading, they became part of the free-flowing capitalistic system to which the semantic turn in architecture and design had pointed.

Conclusion

In Derrida’s 1966 lecture “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” he introduces his conception of the word *play*, which became one of Derrida’s most notable ideas. He describes the notion of play as something that emerges before the essential aspects of presence and absence are brought forth. Play is a concept, or rather a non-concept: a tool to think with in order to surpass metaphysical dichotomies which have, according to Derrida, dominated the entire history of metaphysics, namely the dichotomy between presence and absence. Play, argues Derrida, has been *limited* by the organizing principle of the structure. Derrida writes about play: “Besides the tension between play and history, there is also the tension between play and presence. Play is the disruption of presence. […] Play is always play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived before the alternative of presence and absence. Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around.”[56] Derrida argues that play is, in some sense, an origin in a structure which has no origin. Play cannot be identified in itself, play is never only presence and never only absence, and it is not restricted to a dichotomy between those two. Briefly summarized, Derrida’s play is a non-concept which aims at not identifying an origin, and by establishing the non-concept of play, Derrida establishes that there is no origin in the structure: there is only play that never really stabilizes. Derrida’s lecture on the notion of play is widely known to mark the onset of poststructuralism.[57]

Larry Busbea has argueed that the critical debate regarding design and *metadesign* was a discursive site where developments of French poststructuralism took place. Jean Baudrillard, Henri Van Lier, and Henri Lefebvre frequently discussed the concept of design in the early

1970s; a critical debate in which Busbea identifies a shift from "a fascination with the object to the continuity of the network." Busbea claims that this shift must be considered not just inside the dogma of design, but recognized as the design counterpart of a poststructuralist landscape of ideas.[58] This article adds to Busbea's conclusion by detailing how the connections between the postmodern idiom (in formal terms) and discursive poststructuralist critiques (in critical terms) challenged the previously stable structure of an object. As the editors write in the introduction to *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970-1990*: "Postmodernism's territory was meant to be the periphery, not the centre."[59] Arguably, there is a mutual influence between the "crisis of the object" and the "crisis of the structure" where the notion of decentering becomes an epistemological foundation.

Within the last two decades, post-Marxist critiques have increasingly emphasized that capitalism absorbed the critiques that were efficient in the 1970s: the once critical edge of the radical-left advocating a dehierarchization of established social structures has been absorbed by a new stage in capitalism, as notably identified by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.[60] Baudrillard and Tafuri's critique opens up to consider this logic within the material constellations of the objects in INDL. By paying close attention to the formal and material characteristics of *Glifo, Blow,* and *Sacco,* I aimed, first, to disclose the *absorbent logic* of the "new spirit of capitalism," and second, to show how this logic also concerns the epistemological notion of instability. According to Ambasz, designed objects and artifacts have vital agency to shape an understanding of the world, in other words, objects have capacities to make epistemological claims. If Ambasz's claim holds true, it must also mean that the post-structural epistemological critiques—once a perfect antidote to rigidity, stability, and hierarchy—have now lost their critical edge.[61]

Returning to Ada Louise Huxtable's review of INDL, she introduced her essay by announcing: "A chair will never be a chair again."[62] Directing her comment towards the eruption of form and materials which later became known as the postmodern idiom, she claimed that the forms and materials in the exhibition created something that could not be recognized in relation to the previous form of a chair. After INDL, she claimed, a chair would *never again* be a chair. The statement is not to be taken literally; the formal aesthetics of a chair can still look the same today as in the 1920s. Considering the argument of this article, perhaps Huxtable was really trying to say that the nature of the chair has changed in regards to its epistemological status: from stable to unstable entity. *Glifo, Blow,* and *Sacco* were monuments to such destabilization, the objects had undefinable structures, they were never-ending, porous, playful, or soft, becoming exceedingly receptive to the flux of capital.

Declarations

The author has no relevant financial or nonfinancial relationships to disclose.

Figure legends

Figure 1: Installation view of the exhibition 'Italy: The New Domestic Landscape', MoMA, NY, May 26 through September 11, 1972. Photo: Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence.

Figure 2: *Glifo* by Enzo Mari, demountable storage cubes, produced by Gavina, 1966. Photo: Courtesy Knoll, Inc.

Figure 3: *Glifo* by Enzo Mari, demountable storage cubes, produced by Gavina, 1966. Photo: Courtesy Knoll, Inc.

Figure 4: *Blow* by Paolo Lomazzi, Donato D'Urbino, and Jonathan De Pas, inflatable chair produced by Zanotta, 1967. Photo: Courtesy Zanotta s.p.a.

Figure 5: *Blow* by Paolo Lomazzi, Donato D'Urbino, and Jonathan De Pas, inflatable chair produced by Zanotta, 1967. Photo: Photo: Courtesy Zanotta s.p.a.

Figure 6: *Sacco* by Piero Gatti, Cesare Paolini, and Franco Teodoro, beanbag lounge chair produced by Zanotta, 1968. Photo: Courtesy Zanotta s.p.a.

Figure 7: Installation view of the exhibition 'Italy: The New Domestic Landscape'. MoMA, NY, May 26, 1972 through September 11, 1972. Photo: Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence.

Bibliography

Adamson, Glenn, and Jane Pavitt, eds. *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970-1990*. London: V&A Publishing, 2011.
Ambasz, Emilio. *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape: Achievements and Problems of Italian Design.* New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1972.
———, ed. *The Universitas Project: Solutions for a Post-Technological Society*. New York: Museum Of Modern Art, 2006.
———. "Voyeurs of the Technological Dream." *Industrial Design* 21 (1974): 44-47.
Aureli, Pier Vittorio. *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture.* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011.
Banham, Reyner, and Aspen The International Design Conference. *The Aspen Papers: Twenty Years of Design Theory from the International Design Conference in Aspen.* London: Pall Mall, 1974.
Baudrillard, Jean. *The System of Objects*. London: Verso, 1996.
Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things.* Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2010.
Bogost, Ian. *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be a Thing.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.
Boltanski, Luc, and Ève Chiapello. *The New Spirit of Capitalism.* London: Verso, 2005.
Brown, Bill. "Thing Theory." *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 1-22.
Busbea, Larry. "Metadesign: Object and Environment in France, C. 1970." *Design Issues* 25, no. 4 (2009): 103-19.
______. *The Responsive Environment: Design, Aesthetics, and the Human in the 1970s*. University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming 2019.
Coles, Alex, and Catharine Rossi, eds. *The Italian Avant-Garde, 1968-1978*. Berlin: Sternberg, 2013.
Cristina, Finessi Beppe and Miglio, ed. *Il Design Italiano Oltre Le Crisi: Autarchia, Austerità, Autoproduzione*. Milano/Mantova: Triennale Design Museum & Corraini Edizione, 2014.
Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference.* London: Routledge, 2001.
Elfline, Ross K. "Superstudio and the "Refusal to Work"." *Design and Culture* 8, no. 1 (2016): 55-77.
Formia, Elena. "Forms of Human Environment (1970): Italian Design Responds to the Global Crisis." In *The Culture of Nature in the History of Design*, edited by Kjetil Fallan. London: Routledge, 2019.
———. "Mediating an Ecological Awareness in Italy: Shared Visions of Sustainability between the Environmental Movement and Radical Design Cultures (1970–1976)." *Journal of Design History* 30, no. 2 (2017): 192-211.
Fossati, Paolo. *Ii Design in Italia 1945-1972.* Turin: Einaudi, 1972.
Foster, Hal. "What's Neo About the Neo-Avant-Garde?". *October* 70 (1994): 5-32.
Geoghegan, Bernard Dionysius. "From Information Theory to French Theory: Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss, and the Cybernetic Apparatus." *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 1 (2011): 96-126.
Grassi, Alfonso, and Anty Pansera. *Atlante Del Design Italiano, 1940-1980.* Fabbri, 1980.
HIDDEN
Holt, Matthew. "The Black Book: Emilio Ambasz's University of Design." In *Advancements in the Philosophy of Design*, edited by Pieter E. Vermaas and Stéphane Vial, 523-48. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018.
Joseph, Branden W. ""My Mind Split Open": Andy Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable." *Grey Room*, no. 8 (2002): 81-107.
Lang, Peter, and William Menking. *Superstudio: Life without Objects.* Milan: Skira, 2003.

Lees-Maffei, Grace, and Kjetil Fallan. *Made in Italy: Rethinking a Century of Italian Design.* London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.
Menking, William. "Superstudio as Super-Office: The Labour of Radical Design." *Architectural Design* 89, no. 4 (2019): 14-21.
Prina, Daniela. "Il Design Come Strumento Politico E Ideologico, Tra Firenze E Torino (1965-1975)." *Allegoria* 68, no. 2 (2014): 76-86.
Prina, Daniela N. "Superstudio's Dystopian Tales: Textual and Graphic Practice as Operational Method." *Writing Visual Culture* 6 (2015): 1-19.
Rajagopal, Avinash, and Vera Sacchetti. "The Unmaking of Autoprogettazione." In *The Culture of Nature in the History of Design*, edited by Kjetil Fallan. London: Routledge, 2019.
Rocca, Francesca La. *Design on Trial: Critique and Metamorphosis of the Contemporary Object.* Franco Angeli Edizioni, 2017.
Rosenberg, Harold. *The De-Definition of Art.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.
Rossi, Catharine. *Crafting Design in Italy: From Post-War to Postmodernism.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015.
———. "Making Memphis: 'Glue Culture' and Postmodern Production Strategies." In *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970-1990*, edited by Jane Pavitt and Glenn Adamson. London: V&A Publishing 2011.
Ryan, Zoë, ed. *As Seen: Exhibitions That Made Architecture and Design History*. Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2017.
Scott, Felicity D. *Architecture or Techno-Utopia: Politics after Modernism.* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010.
———. "On the "Counter-Design" of Institutions: Emilio Ambasz's Universitas Symposium at Moma." *Grey Room* - (2004/01/01 2004): 46-77.
Sparke, Penny. *Design in Italy: 1870 to the Present.* London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1988.
———. *The Plastics Age: From Bakelite to Beanbags and Beyond.* Overlook Press, 1993.
Szacka, Léa-Cathrine. *Exhibiting the Postmodern: The 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale.* Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 2017.
Tafuri, Manfredo. *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development.* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976.

Endnotes

[1] Ada Louise Huxtable, "Appraising New Design Show—Ambiguous but Beautiful," *New York Times* 26 May 1972. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY. Collection: PI. Series Folder: II. A. 548.
[2] Penny Sparke, *Design in Italy: 1870 to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1988), 167.
[3] Jean Baudrillard was an invited participant to Emilio Ambasz's symposium "The Universitas Project: Institutions for a Post-Technological Society" held at MoMA, 8-9 January 1972. The symposium can be considered the theoretical counterpart of INDL.
[4] Sarah Boot Conroy, "Italian Designs on MoMA's Domestic Landscape. Triumph of Plastic over Wood; of Machine over Man," *The Washington Post* 1972. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY. Collection: PI. Series Folder: II. A. 549.
[5] Huxtable, " Appraising New Design Show—Ambiguous but Beautiful."
[6] Rita Reif, "MOMA Mia—That's Some Show," *New York (U.S.A.)*, 22 May 1972. At the time, INDL was one of the most visited exhibitions ever shown at MoMA, and as noted by the magazine *Print*: "That so many people came back to see this *Supershow* so many times is a fact that the museum is proud of […] an unusually high percentage of the total 266,206 ticket buyers were on their second—or more—time around." Rose DeNeve, "Supershow in Retrospect," *Print* 1972. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY. Collection: PI. Series Folder: II. A. 549.
[7] See Alex Coles and Catharine Rossi, eds., *The Italian Avant-Garde, 1968-1978* (Berlin: Sternberg, 2013).
[8] INDL was founded on an ambitious theoretical premise that had been articulated at the Universitas symposium. The notable list of conference participants includes the most distinguished scholars in European and American intellectual discourse at the time. The theoretical framework permeating the symposium (and also INDL) was cybernetics and systems theories, environmental psychology, and semiotics. See Felicity D. Scott, "On the "Counter-Design" of Institutions: Emilio Ambasz's Universitas Symposium at Moma," *Grey Room* - (2004); Matthew Holt, "The Black Book: Emilio Ambasz's University of Design," in *Advancements in the Philosophy of Design*, ed. Pieter E. Vermaas and Stéphane Vial (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018); HIDDEN
[9] The ongoing research project "Radical Pedagogies" organized by Beatriz Colomina establishes that INDL "had a tremendous impact in the following years in Italian and American academic circles." Besides, they claim that the exhibition catalogue was "the first book which attempted to chart the cultural complexity of an emerging design culture." Luca Molinari, "Emilio Ambasz, The new domestic landscape exhibition at MoMA, *New York NY, USA*, 1972" in *Radical Pedagogies: Architectural Education in a Time of Disciplinary Instability*, available online: http://radical-pedagogies.com/search-cases/a01-new-domestic-landscape-exhibition-moma/ (accessed 2 July 2019).
[10] In 2013, The Graham Foundation organized the exhibition *Environments and Counter Environments. 'Italy: The New Domestic Landscape,' MoMA, 1972,* curated by Luca Molinari, Peter Lang, and Mark Wasiuta, which was first shown in Chicago before travelling to the Swiss Architecture Museum, the Disseny Hub Barcelona, and Arkitekturmuseet in Stockholm. At the 2nd Istanbul Design Biennial 2014, INDL was one out of 13 historical case studies that were considered influential architectural manifestos. The book *As Seen: Exhibitions That Made Architecture and Design History* highlights INDL as one out of eleven exhibitions that made architecture and design history. See Zoë Ryan, ed. *As Seen: Exhibitions That Made Architecture and Design History* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2017).
[11] See Daniela Prina, "Il Design Come Strumento Politico E Ideologico, Tra Firenze E Torino (1965-1975)," *Allegoria* 68, no. 2 (2014); Ross K. Elfline, "Superstudio and the "Refusal to Work"," *Design and Culture* 8, no. 1 (2016); William Menking, "Superstudio as Super-Office: The Labour of Radical Design," *Architectural Design* 89, no. 4 (2019); Peter Lang and William Menking, *Superstudio: Life without Objects* (Milan: Skira, 2003).
[12] See Chapter 5 "Consumerism and Counter-Culture" in Sparke, *Design in Italy: 1870 to the Present*; *The Plastics Age: From Bakelite to Beanbags and Beyond* (Overlook Press, 1993); Grace Lees-Maffei and Kjetil Fallan, *Made in Italy: Rethinking a Century of Italian Design* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Finessi Beppe and Miglio Cristina, ed. *Il Design Italiano Oltre Le Crisi: Autarchia, Austerità, Autoproduzione* (Milano/Mantova: Triennale Design Museum & Corraini Edizione, 2014).
[13] See Elena Formia, "Mediating an Ecological Awareness in Italy: Shared Visions of Sustainability between the Environmental Movement and Radical Design Cultures (1970–1976)," *Journal of Design History* 30, no. 2 (2017); Avinash Rajagopal and Vera Sacchetti, "The Unmaking of Autoprogettazione," in *The Culture of Nature in the History of Design*, ed. Kjetil Fallan (London: Routledge, 2019); Elena Formia, "Forms of Human Environment (1970): Italian Design Responds to the Global Crisis," ibid. For historical context on Italian design, see also Paolo Fossati, *Ii Design in Italia 1945-1972* (Turin: Einaudi, 1972); Alfonso Grassi and Anty Pansera, *Atlante Del Design Italiano, 1940-1980* (Fabbri, 1980).

[14] See Catharine Rossi, "Making Memphis: 'Glue Culture' and Postmodern Production Strategies," in *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970-1990*, ed. Jane Pavitt and Glenn Adamson (London: V&A Publishing 2011). See also *Crafting Design in Italy: From Post-War to Postmodernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015). For details on exhibitions and postmodernism see Léa-Cathrine Szacka, *Exhibiting the Postmodern: The 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale* (Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 2017).
[15] See "Introduction" in Emilio Ambasz, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape: Achievements and Problems of Italian Design* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1972), 19-20.
[16] Ernie Wood, "The Italians Are Designing the Ultimate Pullman Car," *The News and Observer*, 9 July 1972. MoMA Archives. Collection: PI. Series Folder: II. A. 549.
[17] Barbera Rose, "From Italy: Mind-Opening Designs for Living in the Future," *Vogue,* July 1972. Emphasis added. MoMA Archives. Collection: PI. Series Folder: II. A. 549.
[18] Emilio Ambasz, ed. *The Universitas Project: Solutions for a Post-Technological Society* (New York: Museum Of Modern Art, 2006), 13. Moreover, in the INDL exhibition catalogue Ambasz wrote that: "[the] underlying [...] basic premise [is] that man's actions and visions are irrational; only after the word is pronounced and the deed committed can we assign it a possible logical structure to describe its purposes and explain its laws." *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape: Achievements and Problems of Italian Design*, 145.
[19] Within the last decade, certain fields of research within the humanities have objected to the co-called Cartesian dualism and have suggested a corrective that aims to destabilize the ontological hierarchy inherited from Western enlightenment philosophy that privilege the human subject as the superior power in the world. Movements within "the material turn" include new materialism/thing theory, actor-network theory, and object-oriented ontology. See Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2010); Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).
[20] The archival material used for this article (including planning documents, exhibition renderings, and budgets) is located in The Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records 1970–1979, where all folders are categorized under "1004. Italy: The New Domestic Landscape." The newspaper reviews are located at The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY. Collection: PI. Series Folder: II. A.
[21] Stella quoted in Harold Rosenberg, *The De-Definition of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 125.
[22] Online Etymology Dictionary, "Glyph":
http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=glyph (accessed 2 July 2019)
[23] Jean Baudrillard, The System of Objects, (London: Verso, 1996). 21.
[24] Ibid., 29.
[25] Reinhold Martin, *The Organizational Complex: Architecture, Media, and Corporate Space* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).
[26] Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, 28.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend" in David Wood and Robert Bernasconi, eds., *Derrida and Différance* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1985), 4.
[29] Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*. 205.
[30] About *Blow:* https://www.connox.com/zanotta/zanotta-blow-lounger.html (accessed 2 July 2019)
[31] For production details about *Sacco*, see: https://www.zanotta.it/en-us/products/armchairs/sacco (accessed 2 July 2019)
[32] Douglas Davis, "Design for Living," *Newsweek*, 29 May 1972. MoMA Archives. Collection: PI. Series Folder: II. A. 549.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Baudrillard, "Design and Environment: Or, The Inflationary Curve of Political Economy" in Ambasz, *The Universitas Project: Solutions for a Post-Technological Society*, 59. Emphasis in original.
[35] Ibid.
[36] "Manhattan: Capital of the Twentieth Century" in Ambasz, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape: Achievements and Problems of Italian Design*, 147.
[37] Pedro L. Koe-Krompecher, "World Scope: The Italians Are Here! - Again," *Systems Building News* November (1972). MoMA Archives. Collection: PI. Series Folder: II. A. 549.
[38] "Most of the objects are moderately priced. There are a few expensive pieces […] but there are also a good many cheaper things, like the folding aluminum chair with a see-through seat which sells for $15." Conroy, "Triumph of Plastic over Wood; of Machine over Man."
[39] DeNeve, "Supershow in Retrospect."
[40] Ibid. Run through an online inflation calculator, the sum roughly converts to the 2019-value of 5.8 to 8.8 million dollars.
[41] Ambasz, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape: Achievements and Problems of Italian Design*, 141.

[42] In a review of the exhibition Natalini stated: “Italian design, shut up in the wooden towers of a parody of Manhattan […] is shown in these pharaonic chambers through a series of heroic acts, of grand gestures perhaps, bravura pieces that under the spotlights become the last act of a mysterious melodrama.” Adolfo Natalini, "Italy: A Domestic Landscape," *Architectural Design* 42, August (1972).
[43] Felicity Scott has pointed out that Tafuri had “added an entirely new essay to his initial essay [*Architecture and Utopia*], ‘Architecture and its Double: Semiology and Formalism’ […] That the MoMA show perhaps was on his mind is indicated by his citations of Peirce and Meier.” See footnote 95 Felicity D. Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia: Politics after Modernism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010), 308.
[44] Manfredo Tafuri, “Design and Technological Utopia” in Ambasz, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape: Achievements and Problems of Italian Design*, 397.
[45] Tafuri quoted in Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia: Politics after Modernism*, 147.
[46] Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976), 152.
[47] Tafuri, “Design and Technological Utopia” in Ambasz, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape: Achievements and Problems of Italian Design*, 396.
[48] Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, 152.
[49] Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia: Politics after Modernism*, 147.
[50] See for instance Branden W. Joseph, ""My Mind Split Open": Andy Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable," *Grey Room*, no. 8 (2002); Hal Foster, "What's Neo About the Neo-Avant-Garde?," *October* 70 (1994).
[51] Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, 152.
[52] Tafuri, “Design and Technological Utopia” in Ambasz, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape: Achievements and Problems of Italian Design*, 399.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 2001), 369.
[57] Media theorist Bernard Geoghegan shows how systems theory migrated from American research universities to French poststructuralist thought through research fellowships and knowledge exchange provided by the Rockefeller Foundation. The epistemological consequences of systems theory and cybernetics were manifested in poststructuralism’s attack on essentialism. See Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan, "From Information Theory to French Theory: Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss, and the Cybernetic Apparatus," *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 1 (2011).
[58] Larry Busbea, "Metadesign: Object and Environment in France, C. 1970," *Design Issues* 25, no. 4 (2009): 114.
[59] Glenn Adamson and Jane Pavitt, eds., *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970-1990* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), 9.
[60] Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2005).
[61] Following a recent re-invention of essentialism in French continental philosophy (for example in the works of Alain Badiou, Quentin Meillassoux, and Catherine Malabou), architecture and design discourse has started to ask universal questions in a reaction against post-structuralist epistemology. See for instance Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011).
[62] Huxtable, "Appraising New Design Show—Ambiguous but Beautiful."