

A Journey into the Realms of Domestic Reason: Superstudio from A Catalogue of Villas to the Architectural Histograms *Gabriele Mastrigli*

Translated from the Italian by Jolanda Devalle



Superstudio, *A Catalogue of Villas*, Suburban Villa A6 (Cubic Villa), 1969. Detail of Model. Photograph by Cristiano Toraldo di Francia. Courtesy of the Cristiano Toraldo di Francia Photographic Archive.

Between 1968 and 1969, Superstudio developed a series of projects that formed the most rich and radical core of its theoretical work: *A Catalogue of Villas*, the *Architectural Histograms*, and the *Continuous Monument*. More than a simple chronological sequence, these works trace a conceptual journey, each project preparing the ground for the next. Within this trajectory, *A Catalogue of Villas*—the first of the three and by far the least well-known—occupies a central and decisive position. This *Catalogue* is no longer a mere collection of architectural solutions recast into a contemporary language.¹ Rather, it becomes a critical device through which the group challenged the very idea of the project as *technical apparatus* and a total device.

ARCHITECTURE AND THE MACHINE

Superstudio's understanding of the project as a technical apparatus, was rooted in the architectural education of its members. A particularly important influence was Leonardo Benevolo, who began teaching at the Faculty of Architecture in Florence in 1961, shortly after publishing the two vol-

¹ The primary reference to an architect's work viewed as a catalog of his or her projects is the well-known *Wasmuth Portfolio*, a collection of 100 lithographs of Frank Lloyd Wright's work published in 1911 by the Berlin publisher Ernst Wasmuth, in which numerous single-family home designs stood out. The influence of this volume in Europe during those years is well known: from Le Corbusier, who owned a copy, to the Austrian architects Rudolf Schindler and Richard Neutra, who moved to the United States in the hope of working for Wright, and even to Peter Behrens, who was among the first in Berlin to receive it. It is said that Behrens's firm—where Le Corbusier, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Walter Gropius were working at the time—suspended its activities for an entire day so that they could consult the book.

umes of his *History of Modern Architecture*.² The novelty of a Marxist-inspired critical history—written with the specific aim of reconstructing the genesis of the Modern Movement as a unified phenomenon—offered the future members of Archizoom and Superstudio a perspective markedly different from the then-conventional study of architecture through the formal criteria of art history.

Superstudio adopted Benevolo's conviction that architecture's scope had to be expanded and understood within a broader field of the technical, social, and economic forces unleashed by the Industrial Revolution. The mechanisms governing the production and consumption of objects were themselves apparatuses. The mythology of the machine produced, first and foremost, "images" to which material production was then made to conform. Architecture was therefore itself a machine operating at a symbolic level, and as such, could not bring about any form of social progress external to the mechanism within which it operated.

The idea that automation might free architecture from traditional typological constraints therefore had to be overturned. What was needed instead was an architecture that, as Adolfo Natalini argued in his thesis project, "draws on industrial processes for its methods of composition (assembly, iteration, transposition of scale) and openly displays them. From the machine that produces objects derives an architecture 'in the image of a machine.' Architecture in the image of man (more or less Vitruvian) is replaced by 'technomorphic' architecture."³ A similar hypothesis appears in Cristiano Toraldo di Francia's thesis: a beach resort along the Calabrian coast becomes a highly formalized "Holiday machine" enclosed behind an anonymous *curtain wall and entirely inward-facing*.⁴ Every meaning and function associated with production and consumption is absorbed into what is, in effect, a self-contained, *célibataire machine*.

Within Superstudio's trajectory, Toraldo di Francia's thesis marks a point of no return: from then on, architecture no longer needed to display its machinic character. The internal mechanism and the building envelope belonged to two inseparable yet conceptually autonomous worlds. The former revealed architecture's increasingly abstract and "hidden" nature, understood as a technical and functional device, governed by the forces of modernization. The latter revealed the "dark" side of the machine—albeit seemingly the most evident one—namely, the symbolic potential hidden behind modernity's *grande disegno*. On the one hand, machines possessed an undeniable revolutionary force, freeing humans from manual labor and promoting social progress. At the same time, however, their destiny is inscribed within a coercive and symbolic logic. From this perspective, the "vacation machine" at Tropea was an updated version of Foucault's Panopticon: a device capable of inducing certain behaviors precisely because its mechanisms remained invisible.

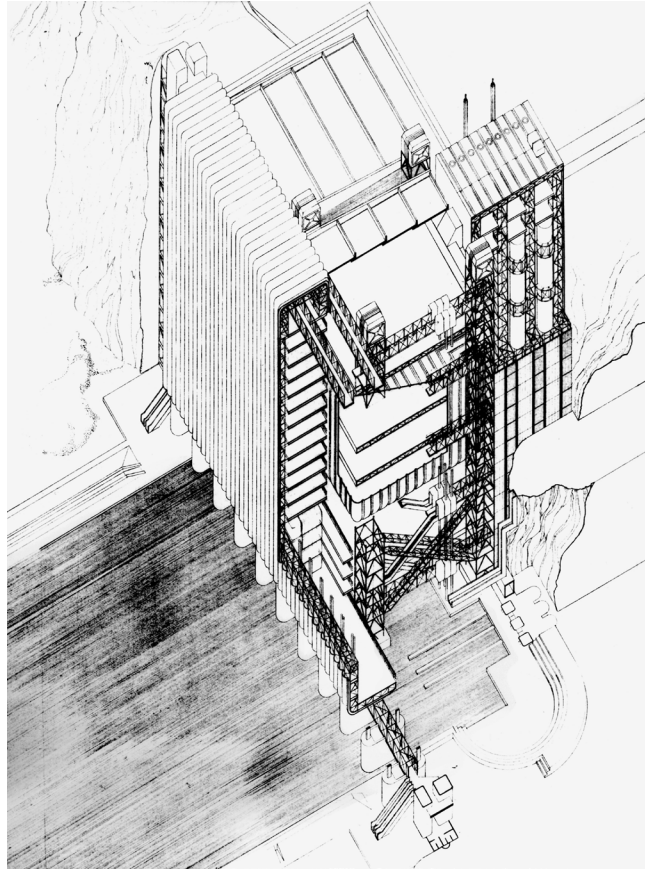
From this point onward, Superstudio's thinking developed into two directions: the first, and better known, projected the *grande disegno* onto a planetary scale. As William Morris had already prophesied and as Benevolo reiterated in his lectures, architecture was "the moulding and altering to human needs of the very face of the earth itself, except in the outermost

2 Leonardo Benevolo, *Storia dell'architettura moderna* (Bari: Laterza, 1960). Translated into English as *History of Modern Architecture*, trans. H. J. Landry, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971).

3 Adolfo Natalini, "Palazzo dell'arte di Firenze" (master's thesis, Faculty of Architecture of Florence, June 1966, advisor Leonardo Savioli), type-script. See also Adolfo Natalini and Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, "Dall'industria al technomorfismo" ["From Industry to Technomorphism"], in Superstudio, *Opere 1966–1978*, ed. Gabriele Mastrigli (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2016), 44–77.

4 Cristiano Toraldo di Francia received his degree on June 28, 1968, from the University of Florence (advisor: Domenico Cardini). The original title of his thesis was "Attrezzatura balneare alla foce della fiumara Arbona" ["Beach Facilities at the Mouth of the Arbona River"]. The project was published by Superstudio as: "Una 'macchina per vacanze' a Tropea" ["A 'Vacation Machine' in Tropea"] in *Domus*, no. 479 (1969), alongside Adolfo Natalini's "Concorso per la Fortezza da Basso" ["Competition for the Fortezza da Basso"], as examples of "technomorphic" architecture.

desert.”⁵ From this definition, Superstudio derived the premise of its own “model of total urbanization,” the *Continuous Monument*, as well as its subsequent developments, from the *Twelve Ideal Cities* to the *Supersurface*.



Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, A “Holiday Machine” in Tropea, (1967). Axonometric section.
Courtesy of the Cristiano Toraldo di Francia Photographic Archive.

The second direction, however, went directly to the heart of the problem. In *A Catalogue of Villas*, Superstudio identified the central issue at the core of modernism’s internal crisis in all its political, social, and cultural implications: the act of dwelling and its accompanying “mythologies” of everyday life that emerged with the postwar economic boom.⁶ The scope of this reflection is broad and echoes the terms with which Guy Debord opened *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), paraphrasing the opening of Marx’s *Capital*: “The whole of life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation.”⁷

Life, society, modernity, production, accumulation, representation: these became the starting points and the conceptual tools through which Superstudio explored the problem of dwelling and its mechanisms. To understand how, we need to take a step back.

- 5 References to William Morris’s well-known definition recur throughout Superstudio’s texts and derives, in part, in fact, from their reading of Benevolo’s *Storia dell’architettura moderna*. See Leonardo Benevolo, *Storia dell’architettura moderna*, 7 and 254. For the original passage, see William Morris “The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization” (1881), in *The Collected Works of William Morris*, vol. 22, *Hopes and Fears for Art: Lectures on Art and Industry* (Cambridge University Press, 2012 [1914]), 119.
- 6 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1957). Translated into Italian as *Miti d’oggi*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1974). Translated into English as *Mythologies: The Complete Edition, in a New Translation*, trans. Richard Howard and Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013).
- 7 As is well known, at the beginning of his book, Debord borrows the opening lines of Marx’s *Capital*, replacing the term “commodity” with “spectacle.” Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1967) Translated into Italian as *La società dello spettacolo* (Milan: Baldini&Castoldi, 1997), 53. Translated into English as *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 12.

SUPER-OBJECTS: TOWARDS A CATALOG

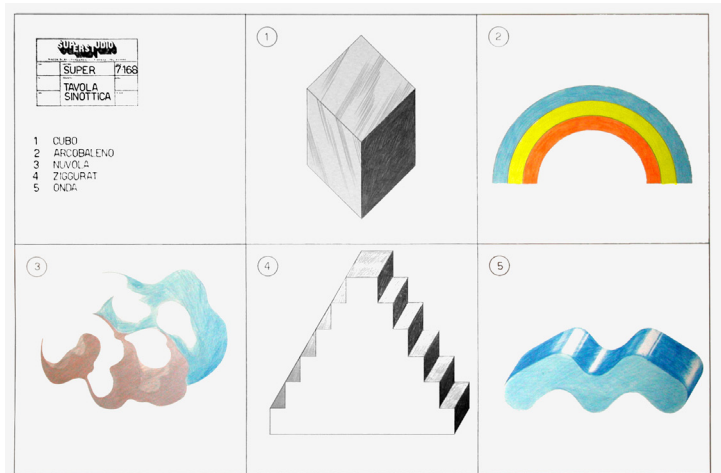
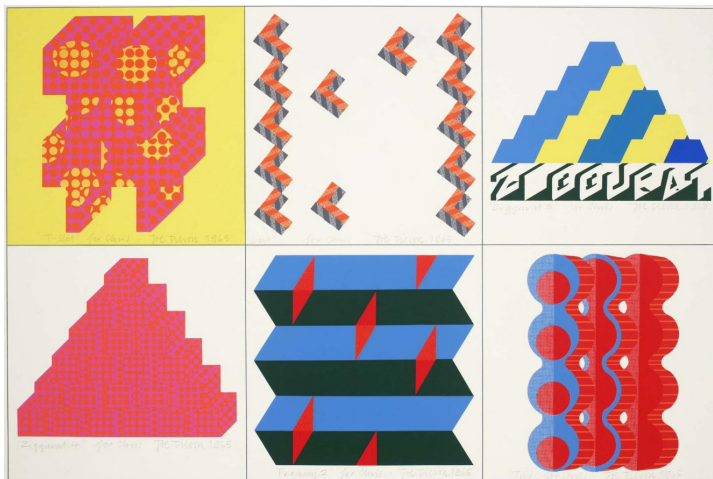
December 1966. Archizoom and Superstudio burst onto the scene with *Superarchitettura*, a self-presentated exhibition at the Jolly 2 gallery in Pistoia. The aim was to highlight the importance of formal research and the message associated with it: *Superarchitettura* was essentially “an architecture of images,” capable of “inspiring behaviors” and thus “inducing its own consumption.”⁸ The emphasis, in other words, was on language itself, deliberately ambiguous and stripped of any functional implications. The groups presented a series of pseudo-furniture prototypes and brightly colored sculptures whose meanings emerged only in the specific moment and context of their use, while nevertheless alluding to a certain domestic character. In stark contrast to the reassuring comfort of 1960s design—which offered users products whose possibilities of use had been largely predetermined in the design process—*Superarchitettura* acknowledged and gave form to a rupture in the relationship between human and object. It was precisely within this void that Archizoom and Superstudio envisioned an active and productive use of the object and space.



Adolfo Natalini at the entrance of the *Superarchitettura* exhibition, Galleria Jolly 2, Pistoia, 1966. Photograph by Cristiano Toraldo di Francia.
Courtesy of the Cristiano Toraldo di Francia Photographic Archive.

From a figurative standpoint, Adolfo Natalini played a leading role; he had already exhibited as a painter at the Jolly 2 gallery in 1964.⁹ Natalini's artistic formation took place within one of the "Italian paths" to Pop Art, as a member of the so-called *Scuola di Pistoia* alongside Roberto Barni, Umberto Boscioni, and Gianni Ruffi.¹⁰ He began painting in 1958 and, from 1961 onward, regularly visited London, where he met Eduardo Paolozzi and became acquainted with the work of several British Pop artists. These influences would inform both his own painting practice and Superstudio's early experiments, which straddled installations, architecture, and design.

Though inspired by the dreamlike worlds of Alan Davie to the sculptures of Phillip King, and on the work of Derek Boshier—one of the explicit figurative references in *Superarchitettura*—Natalini's sources extended all the way to the symbolic universe of Joe Tilson.¹¹ Tilson's abstract, symbolic, and almost archetypal forms (as seen in the *Obelisk* and *Ziggurat* series) powerfully fused Pop figuration with a metaphysical imagery. This would become one of Superstudio's defining narrative traits. Works such as *9 Elements* (1963) and *Six Small Prints* (1965), together with pieces in which Tilson assembled elements from previously created works (including those by other artists, as in *A-Z, a Contributive Picture*) and which he claimed were "non-original prints," demystify the modern visual universe by bringing it back to its conceptual dimension.¹² Natalini would pursue the same approach within Superstudio in works such as the *Synoptic Table* (1966–68), the first step toward an increasingly neutral and anonymous mode of figuration. From this emerged the idea of the *catalog* as an abstraction of forms and meanings: objects were reduced to a grammar and a language that had little to do with their simplified appearance and everything to do with the discourse they embodied.¹³



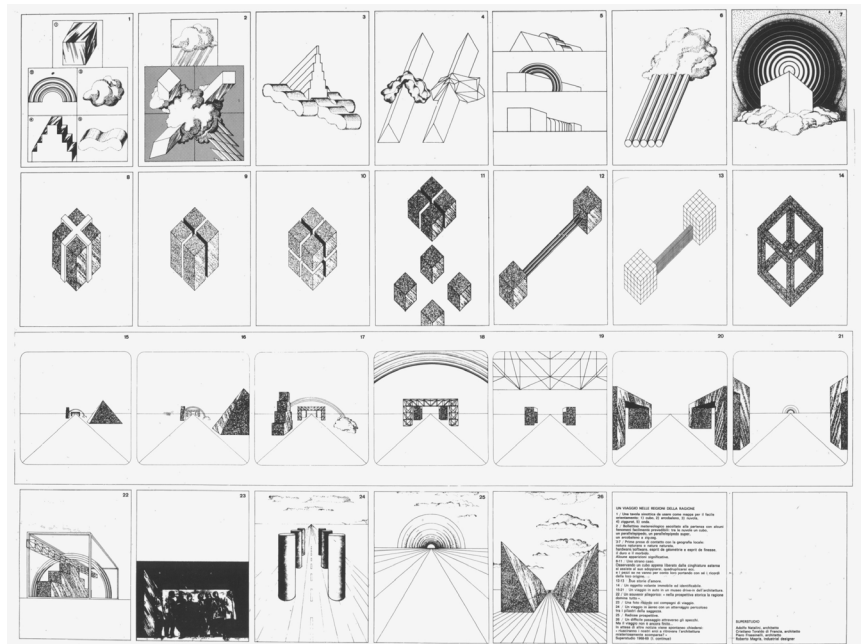
Left: Joe Tilson, *Six Small Prints*, 1965.

Right: Superstudio, *Synoptic Table*, 1966–68. Ink and pastel drawing.
Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.

- 9 In the summer of 1966, after Adolfo Natalini had been invited to exhibit at the Jolly 2 gallery in Pistoia, he received a proposal from the future members of Archizoom to organize an exhibition of student projects and thesis work from the Faculty of Architecture in Florence at the Galleria Comunale in Modena. The Modena exhibition, which was originally scheduled to take place earlier, was postponed until March 1967. In the meantime, Natalini involved the group of recent graduates in the Pistoia exhibition, which opened on December 4, 1966—exactly one month after the devastating flood in Florence—marking the beginning of the two groups. See “Una storia a più finali. Conversazione con Adolfo Natalini” [“A Story with Multiple Endings: A Conversation with Adolfo Natalini.”] in Superstudio, *The Secret Life of the Continuous Monument. Conversations with Gabriele Mastrigli*, (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2015), 69. See also Arata Isozaki, “Superstudio and the Traces of the Flood,” *Toshi Jutaku*, no. 41, (September 1971): 29–36.
- 10 See Lucilla Saccà, ed., *La Scuola di Pistoia. Natura e oggetto* (Municipality of Monsummano Terme: Pacini, 2004).
- 11 Natalini created the posters for the *Superarchitettura* exhibition as a tribute to the artist, whose works he had seen at the exhibition *The New Generation: 1964* at the Whitechapel Gallery in London. Adolfo Natalini, conversation with the author, October 5, 2012.
- 12 See Arturo Carlo Quintavalle, ed., *Joe Tilson*, exhibition catalog (Parma: Istituto di Storia dell'Arte, Università di Parma, 1974).
- 13 On the notion of the catalog in Superstudio, see Emmanuelle Chiappone-Pirou, “Catalogs, Inventories, Myths: Superstudio's Objects of Affections,” in *Superstudio. Migrations*, ed. Emmanuelle Chiappone-Pirou (Brussels: CIVA; Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, 2020).

In the sketches of those years, these forms first become objects and then characters of a now entirely artificial nature, just like the humans who created and inhabit them. It is no coincidence that these same objects would become the protagonists of Superstudio's first catalog, *A Journey into the Realms of Reason*. Developed between 1968 and 1969, the *Journey* amounted to a kind of taking stock of the group's first three years of work. Conceived as an *on-the-road* storyboard, it recapitulated the group's main design ideas, described through iconic figures with simple, abstract geometries. Uprooted from any context and devoid of technical or functional connotations, these figures appeared alongside a route through an imaginary "drive-in museum of architecture."¹⁴

Similarly in the photographs Cristiano Toraldo di Francia that accompany Superstudio's work from these years, one can recognize—almost literally—how the myths of society take shape in the images that society itself produces. "New objects are both things and images of things": the duality between the object and its symbolic value—definable only in the moment of its use and never standardizable—becomes the subject of a narrative that is new and unexpected each time, one that the architect bears witness to firsthand.



Superstudio, *A Journey into the Realms of Reason*, 1971. Lithograph.
Plura Edizioni, Milan. Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.

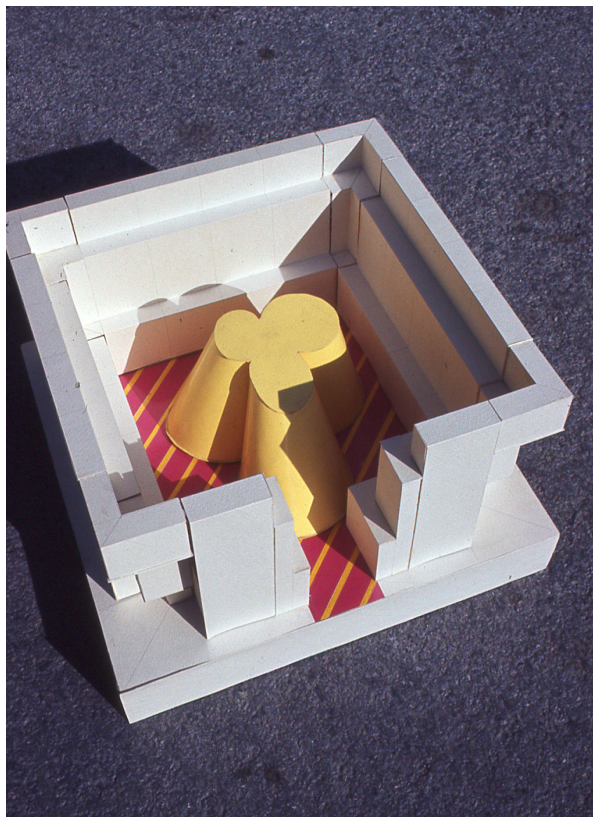
There is nothing emancipatory or libertarian in this process. On the contrary, it turns the creative act into a spectacle, revealing both the pervasiveness and unconsciousness with which it occurs. The presence of Superstudio's members in the images of *Superarchitettura* and, subsequently, in the renderings of all their projects, shows how, within the system, everyone produces—or, more precisely, everyone is compelled to produce. In this way, Superstudio replaces the myth of the demiurgic architect with the figure of the professional—a role to which, despite appearances, the group would remain faithful throughout its entire career—engaged above all on two fronts of the domestic sphere: first through the production of furniture and design objects, later through a series of experiments on one of the great topoi of modern architecture: the villa.

14 The title is inspired by John Bunyan's allegorical novel, *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come* (1678). The work began in early 1968 and concluded in 1970 with the publication of a lithograph by Plura. See Superstudio, "Un viaggio nelle regioni della ragione" ["A Journey in the Realms of Reason," in Superstudio, *Opere 1966–1978*, 96–99.

DWELLING FREELY

Following the *Superarchitettura* exhibition, Superstudio's work began to engage directly with design as an industrial product. In those years, the world of small-scale objects was both the driving force and the emblem of the economic boom. A new "landscape" of household goods was rapidly replacing the ancient agricultural landscape of pre-industrial Italy, substituting the value system of pre-consumer society with the products lining the shelves of household-goods stores. A veritable anthropological transformation, mediated by the behavioral models promoted by cinema and television, fueled the development of Italian industrial design in the 1950s and 1960s under the banner of a carefree and exuberant anarchy.¹⁵ After all, there were over five million homes to furnish—a total of more than twenty million rooms built in the twenty years following the end of the war: a vast "private" territory ready to be furnished and inhabited. For Superstudio, however, the pursuit of "functional" design was a lost cause from the start:

Modern interior design seems like a great race toward what is most beautiful, most recent, and most functional. But it makes no difference whether one arrives first or last if the race itself is misguided. The thing to do, then, is not to take part in the race, but to get out of it as quickly as possible, to withdraw to the sidelines, and slowly gather the pieces of our existence, fashioning for ourselves the tools we need to survive, to satisfy our true needs.¹⁶



Superstudio, model from the *Stanze* series, 1967. Photograph by Cristiano Toraldo di Francia.
Courtesy of the Cristiano Toraldo di Francia Photographic Archive.

15 See Gilberto Corretti, "Il progetto in un paese che cambia," in *Il design italiano. 1964–1990*, ed. Andrea Branzi, exhibition catalog, Palazzo della Triennale, Milan, February–October 1996 (Milan: Electa, 1996), 21–29.

16 Adolfo Natalini, "Abitare con libertà" (1969), in Superstudio, *Opere 1966–1978*, 30. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Italian are by Jolanda Devalle.

Yet in asserting that “it is poetry that makes dwelling possible,” Superstudio was not simply invoking the liberatory potential of pop forms and materials. Rather, it sought to expose the form in which the real surplus value of objects was concealed, carrying this logic to its extreme consequences.

In consumer society, the true commodity is precisely that which exceeds mere functionality. The true product, then, is the image of the object, in the dual sense of what it represents (both literally and metaphorically) and how it is represented (its form): it is its rhetorical image. For this reason, for Superstudio, design is a form of storytelling—a way of conveying a different understanding of objects—before it is design. These are stories of objects, rather than mere objects, in which the narrative takes on an explicit form through vignettes and *storyboards* that produce a linear, perspectival image.

The story is always a journey, and the journey an excursion to the limits of rationality, where the clichés and stereotypes of dwelling are challenged and reimagined. If, on the one hand, these stories describe forms derived from simple geometric operations (or even from straightforward assembly and *bricolage*), then on the other hand, their language sheds light on the critical dimension of these objects, showing just how easy it might be ultimately to dwell freely:

In an age of redundancy and false problems (and interior design is one of them), every act that strives for clarity, every object made with the tools of reason, seems like a black stone fallen from the sky into the desert. The only thing to do is to seek out these black stones and polish them at length, giving them the definitive shape of parallelepipeds and cubes—precious and immobile—and then place them in living rooms, in bedrooms, on the beach, in the grass, and on the asphalt of some “piazza in Italy.”¹⁷

Consistent with the logic “of super-production, super-consumption, and the super-inducement to super-consumption,”¹⁸ Superstudio argued that the architect was not called upon to adopt a moral stance, but simply to pursue the logic of their activity from within this system, pushing its contradictions to their most extreme point of development. And while this process could in no way counteract the production-consumption cycle of commodities, it could nevertheless help expose that cycle in all its mechanical precision. Projects such as the *Stanze* series offer a case in point: deliberately—and paradoxically—they envision occupying the available space entirely, breaking down the final conceptual barrier between industrial design, furniture, and architecture.

THE SINGLE DESIGN: THE VILLA FOR EVERYONE (AND NO ONE)

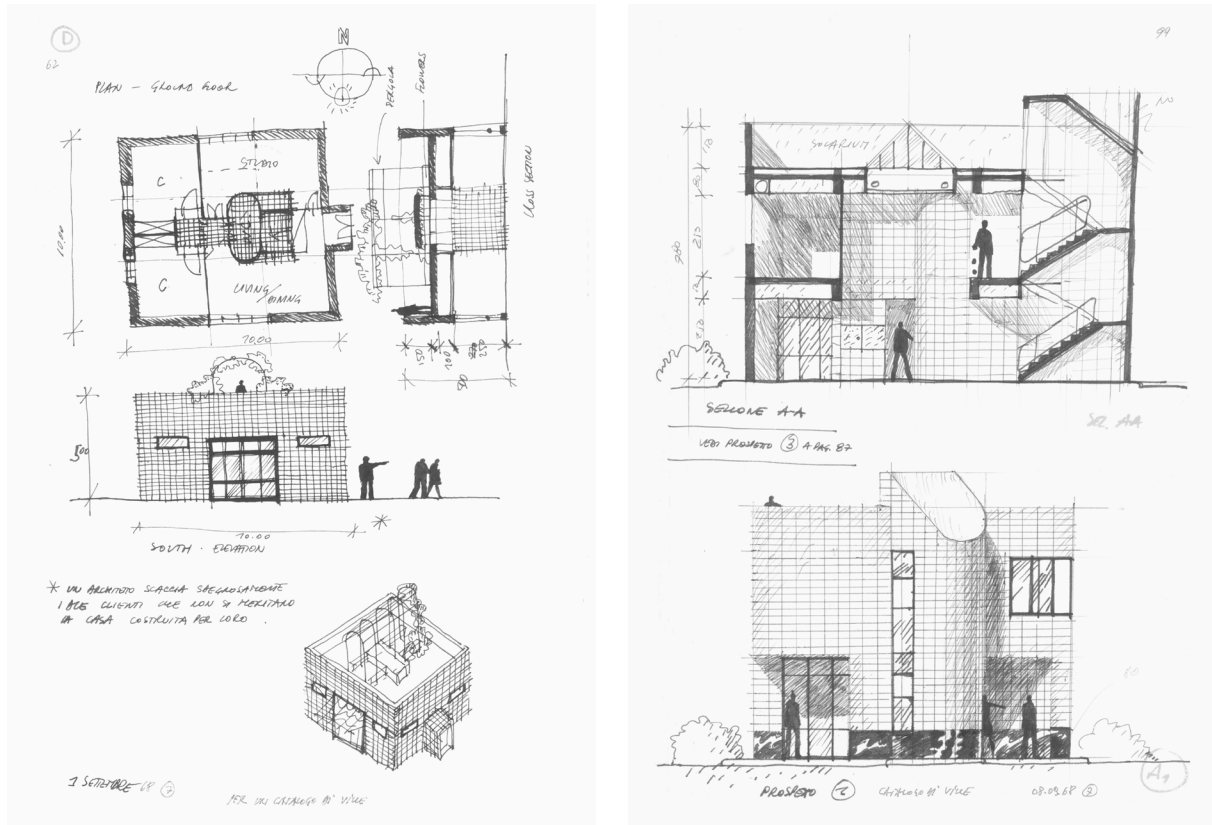
Summer 1968. “On August 23, I went to London. Arabella was due around September 10, but she was born on August 24! I stayed in London, shuttling between the hospital and home, until September 13... and I drew the Catalog of Villas... thinking about how to arrange the house at Le Lame.”¹⁹

17 Ibid., 32. Most of Superstudio’s objects were produced by Poltronova, the company based in Agliana (Pistoia) whose founder and owner, Sergio Cammili, had visited the *Superarchitettura* exhibition and begun producing Archizoom and Superstudio prototypes starting in 1967. With the creative support of Ettore Sottsass, who had been Poltronova’s artistic director since 1957, many of the group’s objects went into mass production. Among these were the Gherpe and Passiflora lamps in colored Plexiglas and the Sofo armchair in polyurethane foam, all of which are still in production today.

18 Archizoom and Superstudio, “Superarchitettura” (1966), in Superstudio, *Opere 1966–1978*, 4.

19 Adolfo Natalini, *Quaderno 7* (1968); the text is a note added to the title page in 2011. Drawing Matter Collection. See also, “Una storia a più finali. Conversazione con Adolfo Natalini,” 51.

Adolfo Natalini's account—one of his many retellings of Superstudio's history, in which art and life, truth, and fiction intertwine²⁰—must be read against the backdrop of the group's early professional commissions on the theme of the residence.²¹

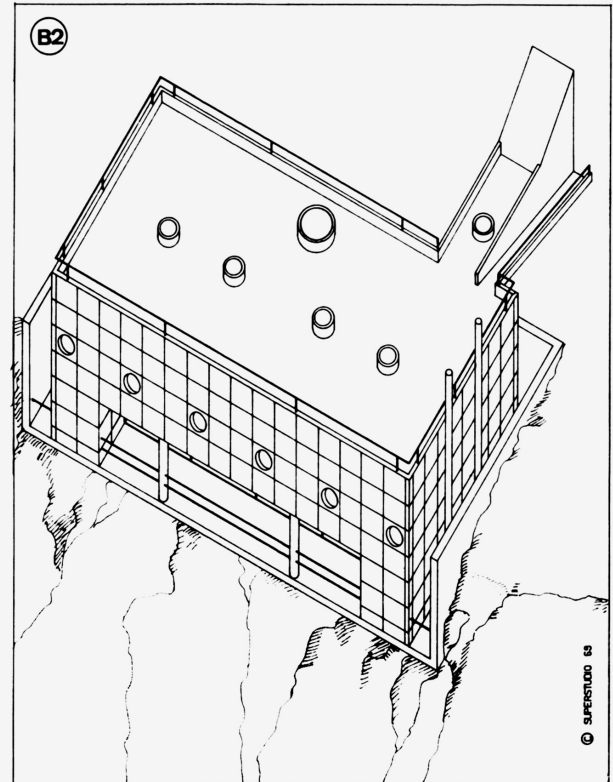
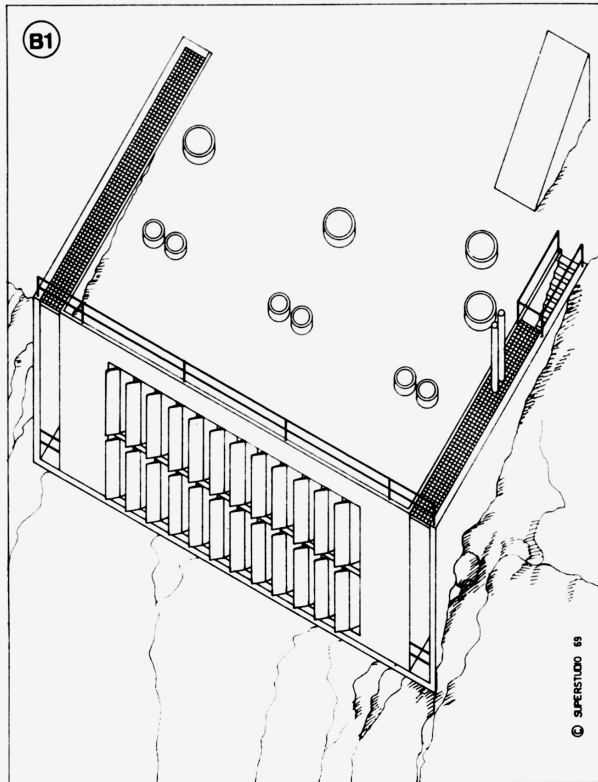


Left: Adolfo Natalini, *A Catalogue of Villas*, Villa A1, 1968. Study sketch. Notebook 7, p. 62. Drawing Matter Collections. DMC 2138.62

Right: Adolfo Natalini, *A Catalogue of Villas*, Villa A3, 1968. Study sketch. Notebook 7, p. 99. Drawing Matter Collections. DMC 2138.99.

As early as 1967, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia came into contact with the writer Giuseppe Berto, who wanted to build a villa on the cliffs of Capo Vaticano in Calabria. The project—a building completely nestled among the rocks overlooking the sea, featuring a mute *brise-soleil* façade in the style of Toraldo's thesis—continued until 1969, including a second version by Natalini, though both were ultimately rejected.²² Meanwhile, in 1968, Superstudio received a series of commissions for several villas in Macia, in the municipality of Calenzano, near Florence. The best known is Casa Paganelli, designed by Toraldo di Francia. After several versions oscillating between 1930s modernism and a Richard Neutra-style minimalism, a final design was arrived at, though it would never be built. On an adjacent plot belonging to Countess Elisabetta Scipione Barbiano di Belgioioso, Superstudio also developed the design of a two-story, square-plan villa, designed by Natalini, which likewise remained on paper.²³

- 20 As Gian Piero Frassinelli always points out, quoting Kurosawa's film *Rashômon*, "when speaking of Superstudio, each of us tells our own truth, and all truths are plausible—indeed, perhaps, all are true!" See Gian Piero Frassinelli, "Viaggio al termine dell'architettura," in Superstudio, *Opere 1966–1978*, 600.
- 21 The following observations draw on new materials from the Superstudio archive, currently being cataloged at the MAXXI in Rome by the author as part of the reorganization of the Superstudio collection.
- 22 The first drawings for the Villa Berto are dated April 20, 1967; the drawings for the second version are from 1969. Taking a similar approach, in 1970 Superstudio proposed a second house along the cliffs of Tropea for Giuliano Toraldo di Francia, Cristiano's cousin, but this project was also never built. All the Calabrian villas would be cataloged as "Villas by the Sea."
- 23 The project, obviously devoid of context, was included in the catalog of "Suburban Villas" as Villa A3, "A two-story house with a dynamic layout." On another lot in the Macia area, characterized by a steep slope, Toraldo di Francia mechanically replicated the Villa Berto design, as if taken straight from a catalog.



Left: Superstudio/Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, *A Catalogue of Villas*, “Villas by the Sea,” *Villa in Tropea (for Giuseppe Berto)*. 1969. Axonometric drawing, first version.
Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.

Right: Superstudio/Adolfo Natalini, *A Catalogue of Villas*, “Villas by the Sea,” *Villa in Tropea (for Giuseppe Berto)*. 1969. Axonometric drawing, second version.
Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.

In 1969, two further villas met a similar fate: one designed in Mugello for their friend Giuliano Mugnai (for whom the group had already renovated the Marzocco bookshop in Florence) and a large villa with a patio near Carimate, outside Como, designed by Piero Frassinelli for family friends, for which Adolfo Natalini would later create a second scheme.²⁴ The sole exception was a residence-office built between 1969 and 1971 in Casalguidi, near Pistoia, for Luigi Giovannetti, owner of the furniture company bearing his name.²⁵ During construction, the building was expanded to accommodate a production space that altered its form, leading it to be subsequently catalogued as the Giovannetti “factory.” It nevertheless, remained the first—and essentially the only—built test of a series of compositional and technological solutions that would characterize the logic of the residential projects from this period. These included the circular staircase, the pergola structure, and the cladding of 30×30 cm white ceramic tiles.²⁶

It was against this background of intense activity and repeated failure that Superstudio began to pursue the idea of rationalizing the design process as much as possible, reducing every problem to a set of predetermined solutions. In establishing what amounted to an economy of means of design production, the group was not simply looking for a workaround

24 The villa for Giuliano Mugnai, with its unique barrel vault, was included in the *Catalogue of Villas* first as a “Country Villa,” then among the “Mountain Villas.” The two versions of the villa in Carimate were included in the “Grand Italian Villas.”

25 For Giovannetti, Superstudio designed the Bazaar sofa (1969), the Onos bed (1971), and the Teso and Lambda tables (1974).

26 Construction was also marred by several errors, such as the misalignment of the staircase itself, clearly visible in a photograph from that period. In addition to the villas, there were also two terraced residential complexes in Piombino designed between 1968 and 1969, which were also never built.

for the difficulties posed by clients and contractors, but rather it sought to expose the terms of the problem in order to overturn them. The design of domestic space repeatedly presented itself in the same terms and could therefore only be subsumed within what Superstudio called *single design*—“a design that can be transposed while remaining true to itself, changing scale or semantic field without disruption or inconvenience.”²⁷ For Superstudio, the single design is not a matter of style, but the last foothold through which architecture might find a place for itself within modernity. The aporias of modern architecture—above all “technology” and “monumentalism”—were not rejected in the name of a new carefree attitude (as with Archigram) or individual exploration (as with Aldo Rossi), but rather radicalized into a “system” capable of absorbing the entire range of demands that architecture and design were expected to address.

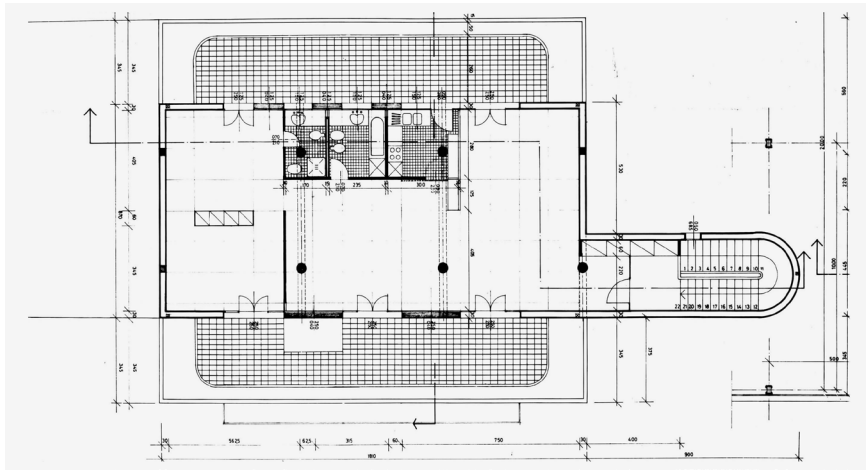


Superstudio/Adolfo Natalini, *Project for a Residence in Macia, Municipality of Calenzano, for Countess Elisabetta Scipione Barbiano di Belgioioso (A Catalogue of Villas, Villa A3), 1968.* Elevations. Courtesy of Fondazione MAXXI.

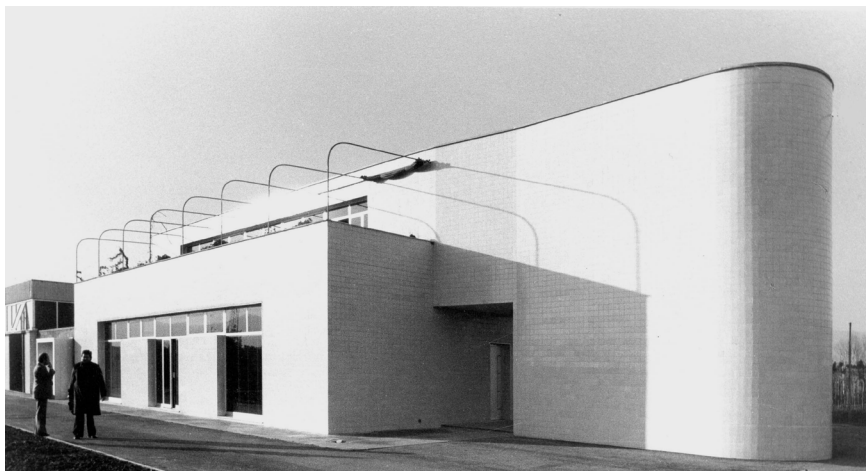


Superstudio/Gian Piero Frassinelli, *Project for a Villa in Carimate (A Catalogue of Villas, Great Italian Villas), 1969.* Perspective view of the patio. Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.

27 Superstudio, “Lettera da Graz” (1969), in Superstudio, *Opere 1966–1978*, 184.



Superstudio, Giovannetti Factory with Residence and Offices, Casalguidi, Pistoia, 1969–71.
Upper-floor plan of the residence. Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.



Superstudio, Giovannetti Factory with Residence and Offices, Casalguidi, Pistoia, 1969–71.
Photograph by Cristiano Toraldo di Francia.
Courtesy of the Cristiano Toraldo di Francia Photographic Archive.

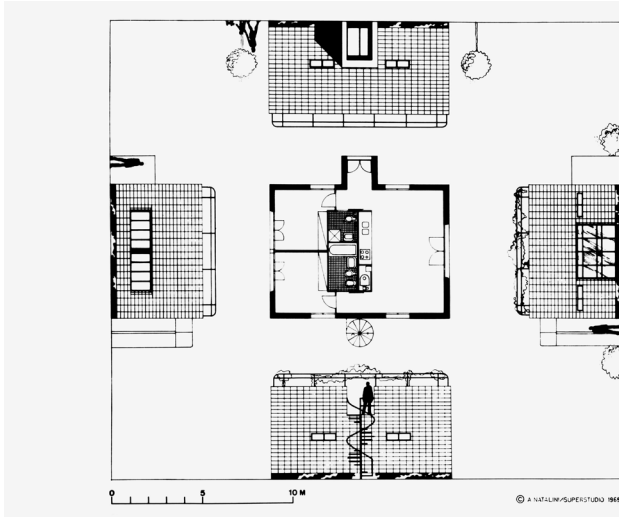
It is precisely this unity that underpins *A Catalogue of Villas*. Superstudio was fully aware that “designing a villa is a nonexistent problem,” since modern architecture had, on the one hand, produced exemplary and seemingly perfect solutions and, on the other, had revealed their “economic, social, and functional absurdity.”²⁸ The design of a villa was therefore a problem that had already been solved and, at the same time, one that could not be solved. There was consequently little point in addressing it in scientifically or ethically correct terms, whether by improving environmental qualities or responding more closely to the desires of clients.

This position stood at the opposite end of end of spectrum from the “ideal” home developed within the Italian tradition of the magazines such as *Domus* and *Stile*, which sought to produce a “home for each individual.”²⁹ For Gio Ponti, founder and editor-in-chief of *Domus* for nearly 50 years, the “ideal” home was not the *machine à habiter*, but one in which every individual could recognize themselves and find “comfort” for the “spirit,” an ideal of dwelling already articulated in the first issue of the magazine in 1928 and one that would remain a distinctive feature of postwar Italian domesticity.³⁰

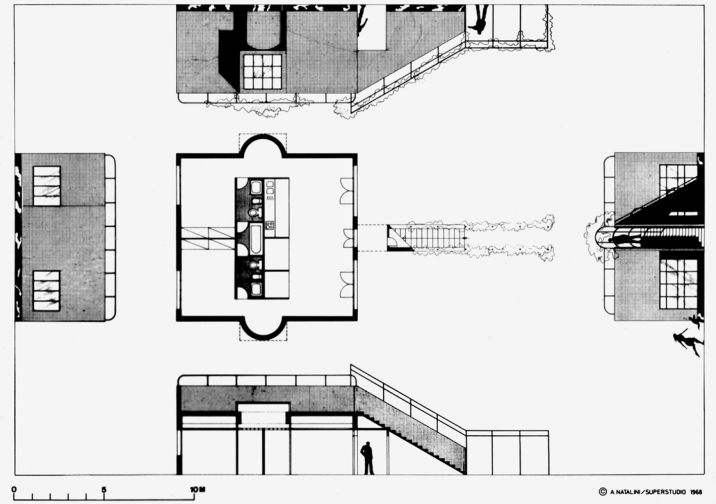
28 Superstudio, “Un catalogo di Ville,” in Superstudio, *Opere 1966–1978*, 115.

29 Adalberto Libera, Gio Ponti, and Giuseppe Vaccaro, “Per la carta della casa” in *Stile* no. 30, (1943): 12.

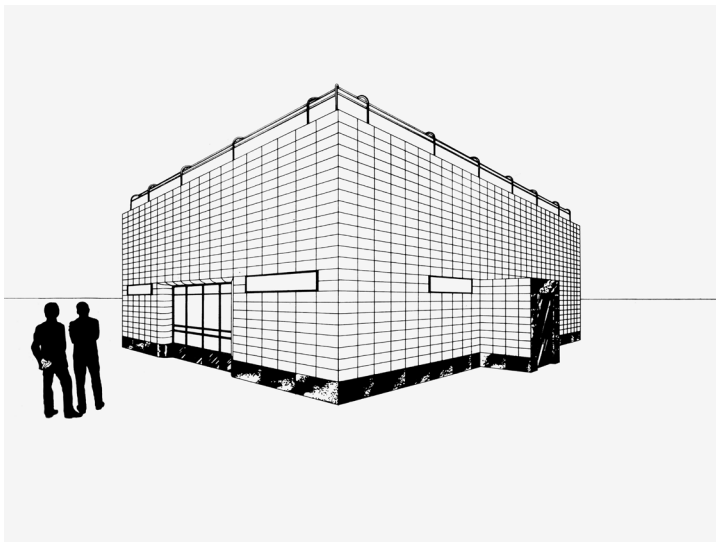
30 Gio Ponti, “La casa all’italiana,” in *Domus*, no. 1, (January 1928): 7.



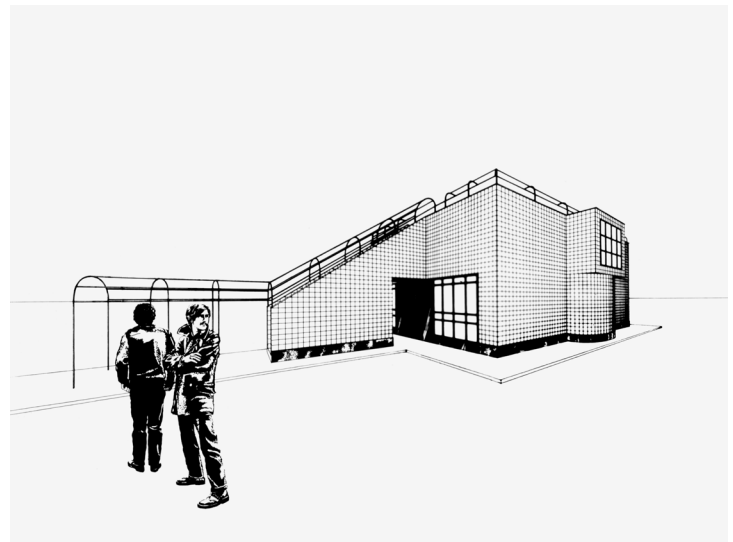
Left: Superstudio, *A Catalogue of Villas, Suburban Villa A1*, 1968. Plan and elevations.
Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.



Right: Superstudio, *A Catalogue of Villas, Suburban Villa A2*, 1968. Plan, section, and elevations.
Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.



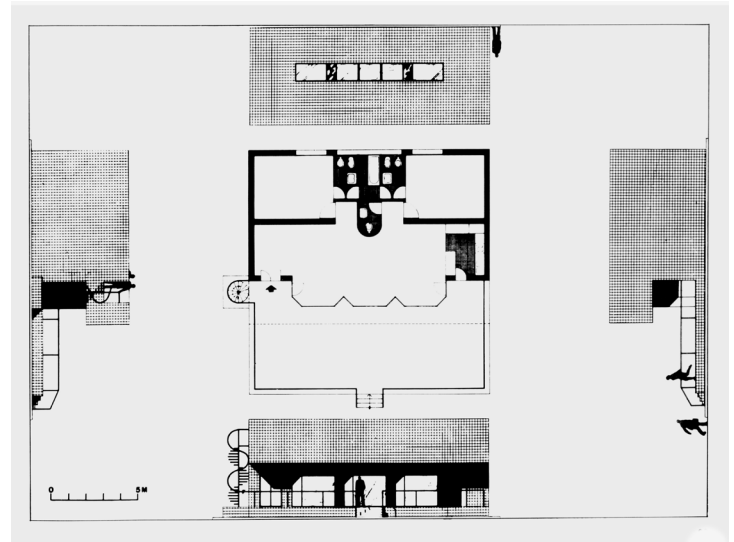
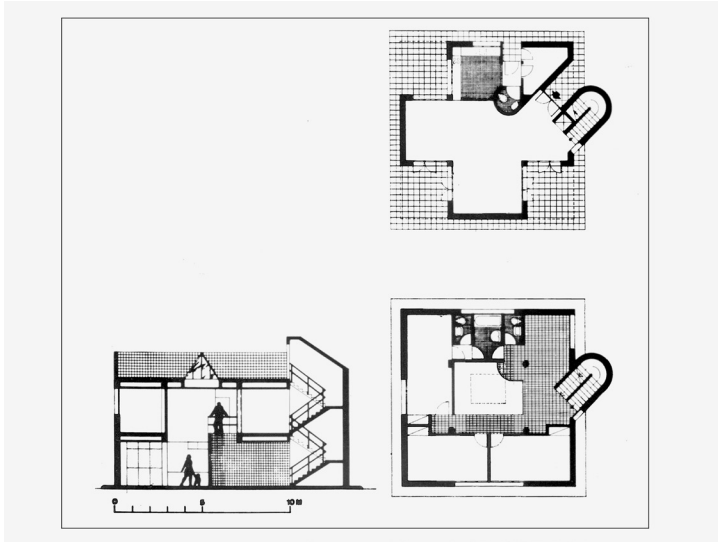
Left: Superstudio, *A Catalogue of Villas, Suburban Villa A1*, 1968. Perspective.
Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.



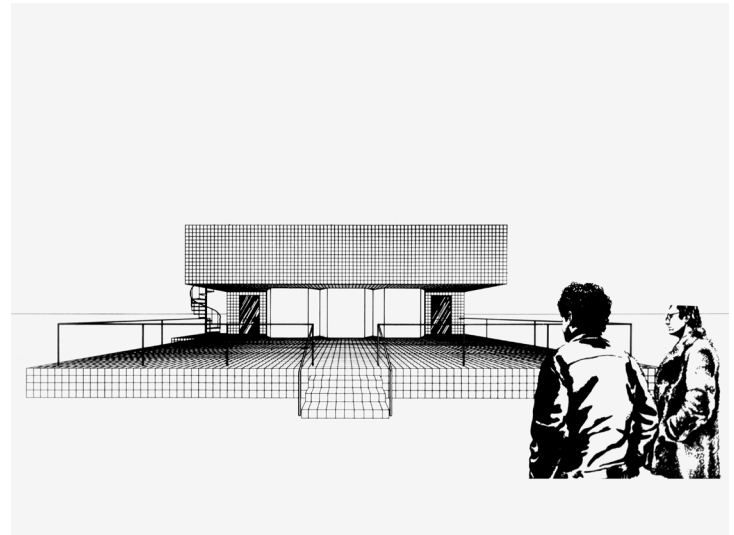
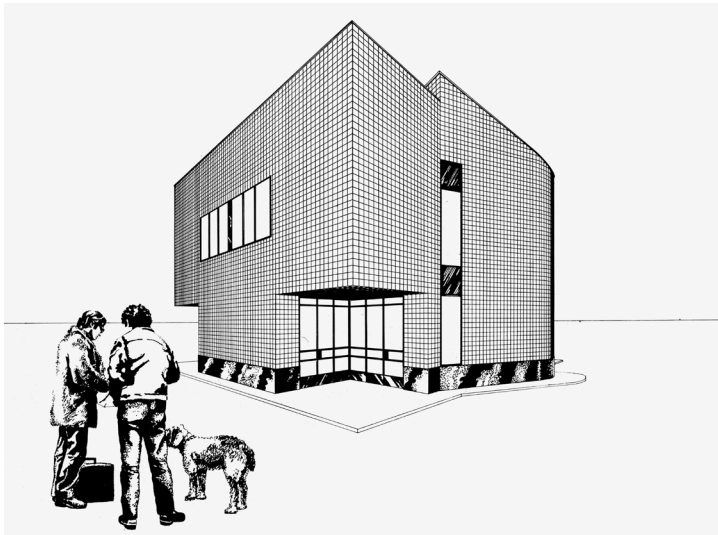
Right: Superstudio, *A Catalogue of Villas, Suburban Villa A2*, 1968. Perspective.
Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.

Superstudio, by contrast, revives precisely the idioms of modernism in order to propose an approach that was at once pragmatic and radical. Stripped of any reference to specific sites or clients, the projects were assembled into a “catalogue” of typologies that were at once abstract and immediately legible: “Villas by the Sea,” “Villas in the Mountains,” “Suburban Villas,” “Great Italian Villas.”³¹ The villas were thereby reduced to a repertoire of simple compositional schemes, treated with the same material, finishes, and constructional logic and represented through a single system of gridded surfaces that gave them the character “variations on a theme.”

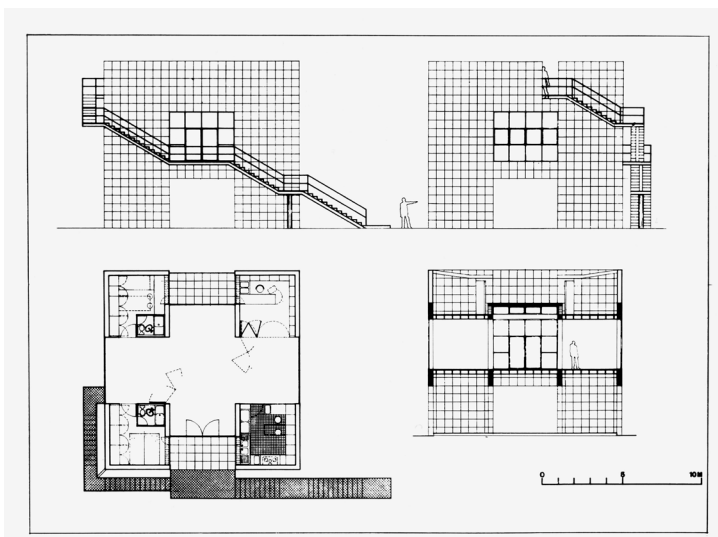
31 Natalini’s architectural designs, drawn in the summer of 1968—some for actual commissions, others “conceptual”—would form the core of the six suburban villas. See Adolfo Natalini, *Quaderno 7* (1968), Drawing Matter Collection.



Superstudio, *A Catalogue of Villas, Suburban Villa A3*, 1968. Plan and section. Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.
 Superstudio, *A Catalogue of Villas, Suburban Villa A4*, 1968. Plan and elevations. Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.

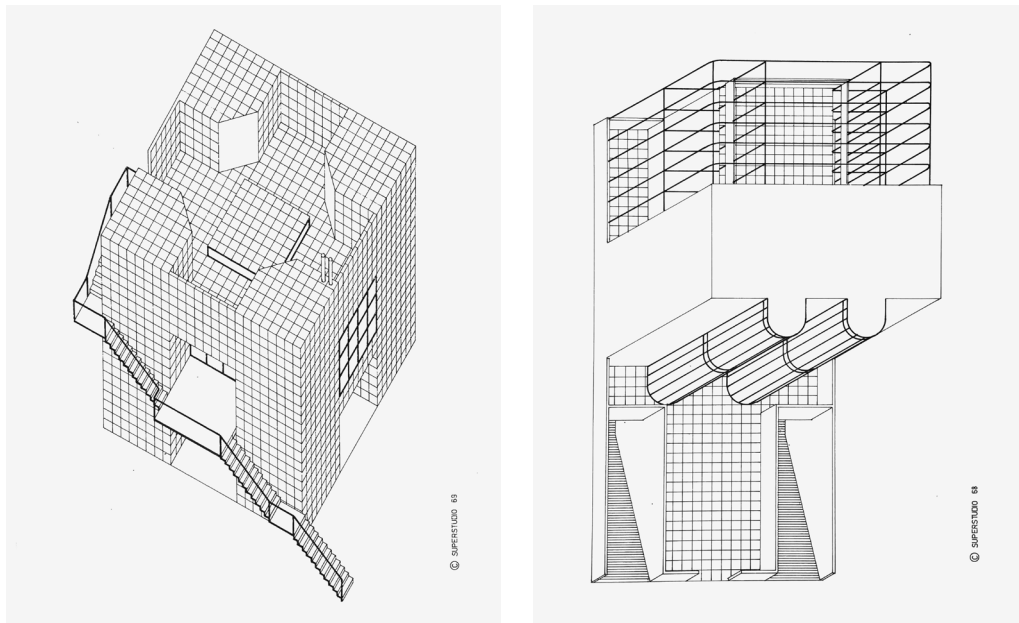


Superstudio, *A Catalogue of Villas, Suburban Villa A3*, 1968. Perspective. Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.
 Superstudio, *A Catalogue of Villas, Suburban Villa A4*, 1968. Perspective. Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.



Left: Superstudio, *A Catalogue of Villas, Suburban Villa A6 (Cubic Villa)*, 1969.
 Plan, elevations, and section. Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.
 Right: Superstudio, *A Catalogue of Villas, Suburban Villa A6 (Cubic Villa)*, 1969. Model.
 Photograph by Cristiano Toraldo di Francia. Courtesy of the Cristiano Toraldo di Francia Photographic Archive.

The descriptions of the buildings invoke ironic and heterogeneous categories reminiscent of Borges's famous Chinese encyclopedia in which animals are arranged into fourteen entirely autonomous, contradictory, and enigmatic classes.³² Just as, for Borges, encyclopedic knowledge cannot exhaust the complexity of reality but can only represent it partially and ironically, so too for Superstudio the catalog represents the problem of the villa in its irresolvability and its fundamental sameness and simplicity. It is at once the villa for everyone and for no one except for its designer (or for whoever embraces its cause).³³ In this way, Superstudio's discourse began to explore the convergence between designing and dwelling—and, more broadly, between designing and living—that the group would later develop during in the Fundamental Acts and, subsequently, in their research on *Extra-Urban Material Culture*.



Left: Superstudio, Cubic Villa from *A Catalogue of Villas, 1968–69, 1969*. Series of heliographic prints, self-published catalogue, Florence. Frontispiece. Collection of Gabriele Mastrigli.

Right: Superstudio, *Villa with Two Almost Independent Apartments*, from *A Catalogue of Villas, 1968–69, 1969*. Series of heliographic prints, self-published catalogue, Florence. Collection of Gabriele Mastrigli.

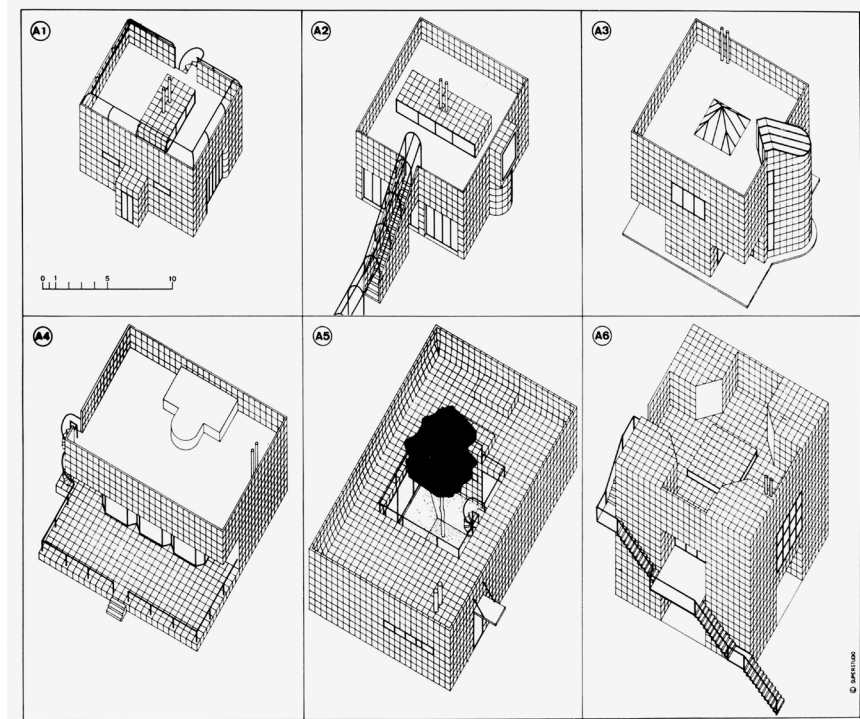
For their part, the villas demonstrate the extent to which Superstudio regarded the entire trajectory of modern architecture as a *fait accompli*, by then fully internalized.³⁴ This was true not so much of its stylistic aspects—though these remained clearly visible in the individual projects—as to modern architecture understood as a “system” in a state of continuous improvement, in which every object was destined to be replaced through ongoing processes of innovation. As Leonardo Benevolo argued,

32 “These ambiguities, redundancies, and deficiencies recall those attributed by Dr. Franz Kuhn to a certain Chinese encyclopedia called the Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge. In its distant pages it is written that animals are divided into: (a) those that belong to the emperor; (b) embalmed ones; (c) those that are trained; (d) suckling pigs; (e) mermaids; (f) fabulous ones; (g) stray dogs; (h) those that are included in this classification; (i) those that tremble as if they were mad; (j) innumerable ones; (k) those drawn with a very fine camel's hair brush; (l) etcetera; (m) those that have just broken the flower vase; (n) those that from a long way off look like flies.” (Jorge Luis Borges, “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins,” in *Other Inquisitions, 1937–1952*, trans. Ruth L. C. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 103. This is the passage that Michel Foucault identifies as the point of departure for his *The Order of Things*. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock, 1970), xv.

33 In one of the early sketches of Villa A1, two figures can be seen sadly leaving the house, as a third points at them. The ironic caption reads: “An architect scornfully drives away the two clients who do not deserve a house built for them.” See Adolfo Natalini, *Quaderno 7* (1968). Drawing Matter Collection.

34 Superstudio makes explicit reference to Arthur Korn's book, *Glass in Modern Architecture of the Bauhaus Period*, featuring images and drawings of decontextualized architectural works displayed in their formal structure, much like Sartoris's axonometric projections. Among Superstudio's homages is the glass facade of the Mostorg Department Store in Moscow (1927), designed by the Vesnin Brothers. See Arthur Korn, *Glass in Modern Architecture of the Bauhaus Period*, ed. Dennis Sharp (New York: George Braziller, 1968)

architectural structures have value in themselves, but only in relation to the life that unfolds within them; they must not “merely represent human aspirations, but contribute to realizing them.”³⁵ If architecture was the inevitable corpse of a modernity that destroys everything in order to regenerate itself—“an empty chrysalis after the butterfly has abandoned it,”³⁶ as Benevolo described the Bauhaus buildings—Superstudio revealed at once both its power and its senselessness.



Superstudio, *A Catalogue of Villas*, “Suburban Villas 1968–1970,” 1970. A1: A small villa for serene places; A2: A small villa with an almost monumental stairway. A3: A very lively 2-floor house; A4: villa with picture windows (homage to the Vesnin brothers and Professor Arthur Korn); A5: villa with small patio; A6: Cubic Villa. Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.

It is no coincidence that, in the next stage of their personal journey in “search of a mysteriously vanished architecture,” the Superstudio villas would shed their residual typological character and become “mental objects”—pure quantities from which every design problem had been expelled.

EPILOGUE: FROM VILLAS TO TOMBS

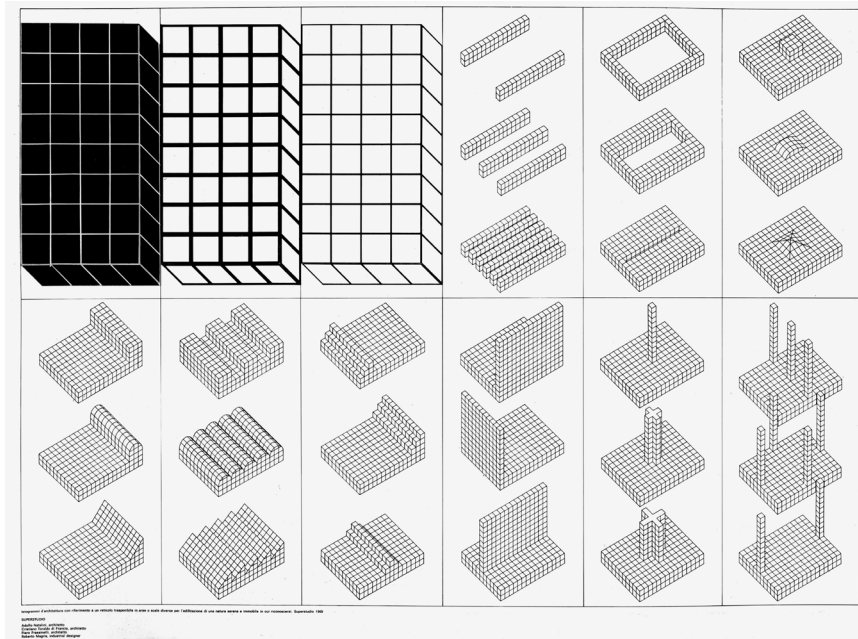
By early 1969 Superstudio was active on several fronts: carrying out projects for buildings and villas, creating design objects with an increasingly solemn and abstract appearance (such as the *Luxor series*), participating in the competition for the Italian pavilion at Expo’70 in Osaka, and submitting a proposal for the consultation organized by the Graz Biennale (*Trigon ’69*) on the theme “Architecture and Freedom,” which would lead to the concept of the *Continuous Monument*.³⁷

³⁵ Leonardo Benevolo, *Storia dell’architettura moderna*, 535.

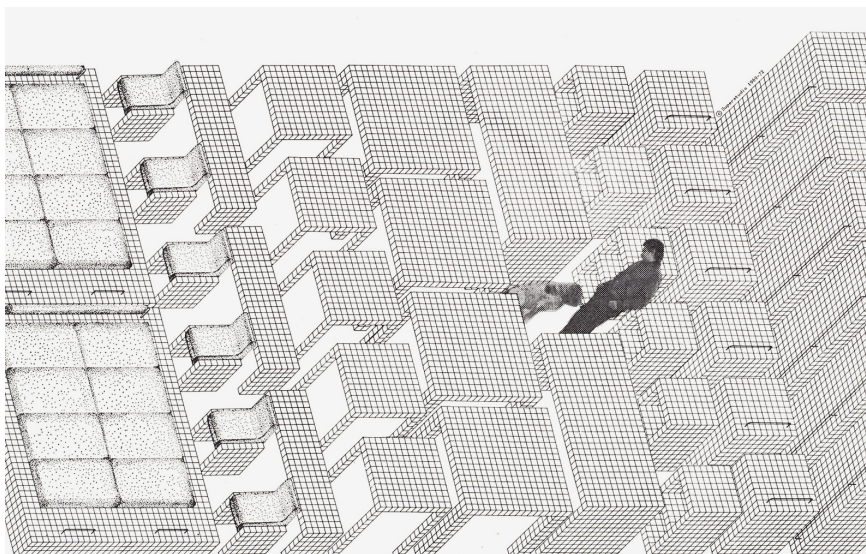
³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ See *Italien, Jugoslawien, Österreich. Dreiländer-Biennale Trigon ’69. Architektur und Freiheit*, exhibition catalog, Künstlerhaus Graz, October 4–November 15, 1969 (Graz: Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, 1969).

Across the many project sketches from this period, the gridded cladding of the villas began to shift toward a varied landscape of ever more neutral objects, eventually forming an atlas of geometric solids stripped of function. The first prototypes were made of wood and clad with sheets of plastic laminate produced by Abet-Print, which, at the urging of Ettore Sottsass, invited Superstudio to submit “design proposals” for possible decorative patterns.³⁸ Superstudio responded with a white laminate called *Misura*, onto which a 3×3 cm grid was screen-printed, drawn out using the precision machines of the Military Geographic Institute in Florence.³⁹



Superstudio, *Histograms of Architecture with Reference to a Grid Transposable to Different Areas or Scales for the Construction of a Serene and Immobile Nature in Which to Recognize Oneself*. Superstudio, 1969, 1970. Lithograph. Plura Edizioni, Milan. Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.



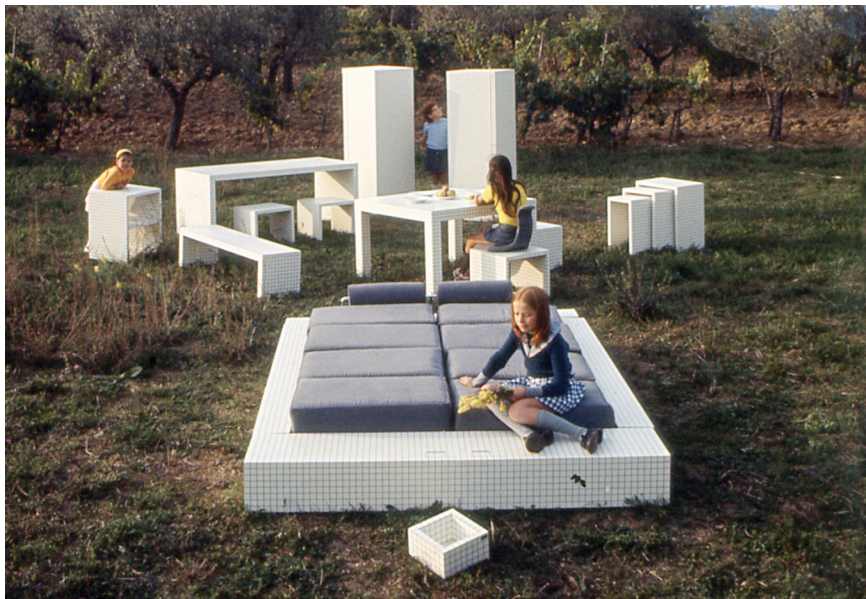
Superstudio, the *Misura* series (1969–72), 1972 Poster. Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.

³⁸ See letter from Abet-Print to Superstudio, May 6, 1969. Superstudio Archive, MAXXI, Rome.

³⁹ “Back then, the main problem with laminate was that, no matter what color it was, the cut edges always turned out black. Our idea was very ambitious: we designed furniture covered with a 3×3 cm grid pattern to camouflage the marks left by the edges.” See “Una storia a più finali” in Superstudio, *The Secret Life of the Continuous Monument*, 51.

Thus were born the *Architectural Histograms*: “dis-continuous three-dimensional diagrams” generated by variations of the grid-patterned surface, which rationally organized the entire body of design operations through a “neutral material in which, ultimately, everything resembles everything else.”⁴⁰ The significance of the project extended well beyond its formal outcomes. By condensing the *Histograms* into a catalog, Superstudio established a genuine “method”: on the one hand, the group’s entire trajectory could be made legible through a “typological” sequence of design ideas, including *A Catalogue of Villas*;⁴¹ on the other, these inventories neutralized every subjective aspect of architecture and design, reducing their purpose—dwelling—to its zero degree.

In this way, Superstudio’s “reductive process” revealed that, in order to reproduce itself, the system needed to instrumentalize creativity in a desperate search for ever-new forms. Any search for definitive objects—the utopia of modernity—was therefore structurally doomed to fail. It is no coincidence that Superstudio calls the *Histograms* the “Tombs of Architects.” Read through the lens of the *Histograms*—which Superstudio imagined interchangeably as furnishings, sculptures, ritual objects, installations, rooms, and non-scalar architectural models—*A Catalogue of Villas* therefore takes on a broader significance. It subverts the entire range of activities associated with domestic space, presenting itself at once as a representation of the system at its most efficient and as a refusal to participate in its further evolution.



Superstudio, *Spring Visit to the Showroom*, workshop of carpenters Angiolino and Gino Lepri, Panzano in Chianti, Florence, 1970. Furniture prototypes from the Misura series.

Photograph by Cristiano Toraldo di Francia.

Courtesy of the Cristiano Toraldo di Francia Photographic Archive.

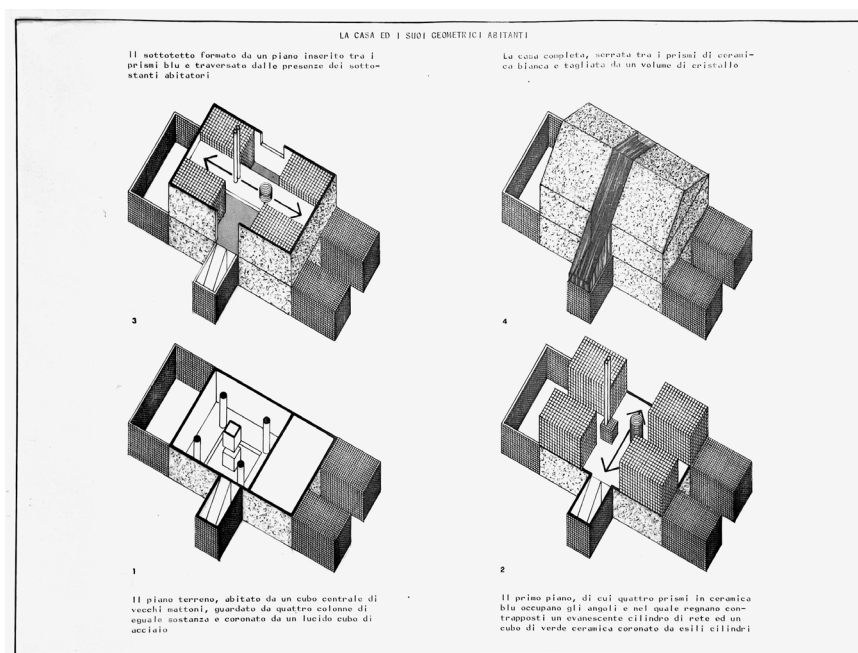
40 Superstudio et al., “L’invenzione della Superficie neutra” (1972), in Superstudio, *Opere 1966–1978*, 130. The term “Architectural Histograms” was suggested to Superstudio by Cristiano Toraldo di Francia’s friend, Edoardo Boncinelli, a well-known biologist, who at that time was completing his degree in physics under the guidance of Cristiano’s father, Giuliano Toraldo di Francia. See Superstudio, “Istogrammi d’architettura,” in Superstudio, *Opere 1966–1978*, 126–142. After creating several *Architectural Histograms*, Superstudio designed a catalog of objects and furnishings, the Misura series, for which they produced prototypes. Initially proposed to Poltronova but rejected, some pieces of furniture from the Misura series were put into production by Zanotta in 1970 under the name Quaderna. As part of the *Trigon ’69* Biennale, Superstudio also designed the installation of a space clad in gridded plastic laminate titled *La stanza di Graz*, as a fragment of the *Continuous Monument*.

41 Beginning in 1969, Superstudio compiled the texts and drawings from *Architectural Histograms* and *A Catalogue of Villas*, each into a self-published series of heliographs measuring 33 × 24 cm. This format, already used for the storyboards of the *Journey into the Realms of Reason* and the *Continuous Monument*, would become the official catalog format for presenting their projects (Superstudio referred to these self-published collections as “printed materials,” later adding series of lithographs and posters to them). *A Catalogue of Villas* was published for the first time as such, together with the *Architectural Histograms*, under the title “The Single Design” by the Japanese magazine *Japan Interior Design*. See Superstudio, “The Single Design,” in *Japan Interior Design*, 144, (March 1971): 22–33. Natalini writes about this “Superstudio method” in some of his notes from 1971. See Adolfo Natalini, *Quaderno 15* (1970–71). Drawing Matter Collection.

Although none of these villas were ever built, and although the *Histograms* (some of which were transformed into furniture and commercially produced such as the famous Misura series) went on to become cult objects of minimalist luxury, their surfaces of white laminate marked by a 3×3 cm grid still evoke the possibility of imagining, and ultimately moving beyond, every possible function and use. Like a kind of manual for the self-design of a new rationality of domestic space, the devices of the *Histograms* and the *Villas* negate the system's need to enter into crisis in order to reproduce itself through new needs and new forms. Their value, ultimately, is *didactic*: no new lamp, no new table, no new room, no new building; in their place, only mental exercises to “teach people to construct less cumbersome fetishes and to keep their home, life, and everything else in a more orderly (free, serene) state by means of an endless mental grid.”⁴²

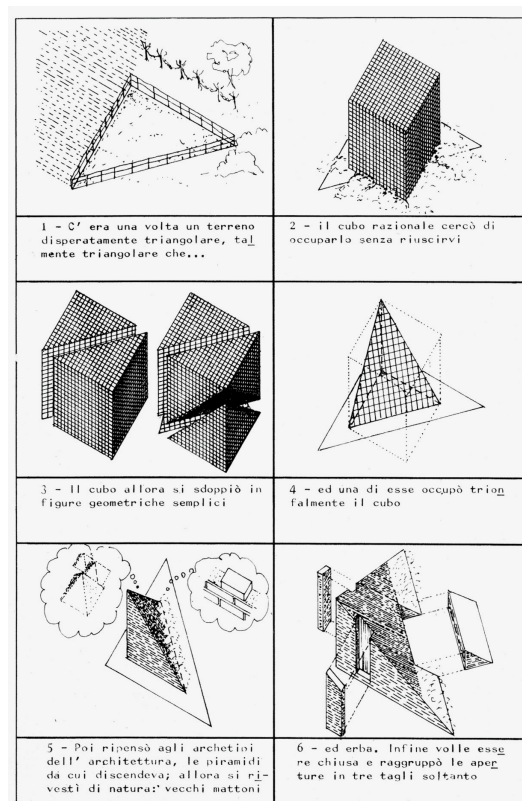
POST SCRIPTUM: THE SUPERSTUDIO VILLAS AFTER THE CATALOGUE OF VILLAS

In retrospect, the significance Superstudio assigned to *A Catalogue of Villas* was essentially didactic, as was the case with many of the group's other works of 1969–70, which straddled the line between professional practice and research. Yet the *Catalogue* also left lasting marks on the group's professional work of the following years. These were years in which, following the anthropological turn of the *Fundamental Acts* and the university-based experience of *Extra-Urban Material Culture*, Superstudio began to take stock of its own trajectory. The gradual separation of the individual paths of its members was already underway, eventually leading them into new professional and personal chapters. Within this contest, several opportunities arose to design villas which, although far removed from the conceptual character of the *Catalogue*, reveal how the group continued to draw from that particular set of tools.



Superstudio/Gian Piero Frassinelli, renovation of Renato Volpini's farmhouse, Urbino, 1972–1973. Project diagrams. Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.

Among Gian Piero Frassinelli's various projects, the home for artist Renato Volpini, built in Urbino in 1975, stands out.⁴³ It is not a new build, but the comprehensive renovation of a farmhouse to which several volumes clad in white gridded ceramic tiles were added: a small patio on one side, an outdoor oven and room on the other, and, at the center, a new staircase topped by a skylight. Yet it is the plan and the axonometric drawing that reveal the greatest similarities with certain examples from the *Catalogue*: the cross-shaped layout of the common spaces, the central stair, and the four rooms clad in blue gridded ceramic tiles at the corners of the upper floor. All these elements are described as the house's new "geometric inhabitants." For Frassinelli, indeed, there should be a fundamental identity between human beings and the "galaxy of objects" they use—including architecture—which could therefore be conceived as an extension of the human organism.⁴⁴ Unlike the villas in the *Catalogue*, however, Frassinelli's design approach is entirely focused on the site understood as a physical entity upon which to act: the house was a shelter, literally a "cave," in which geometry articulated essentially introverted spaces stripped of symbolic connotations.⁴⁵



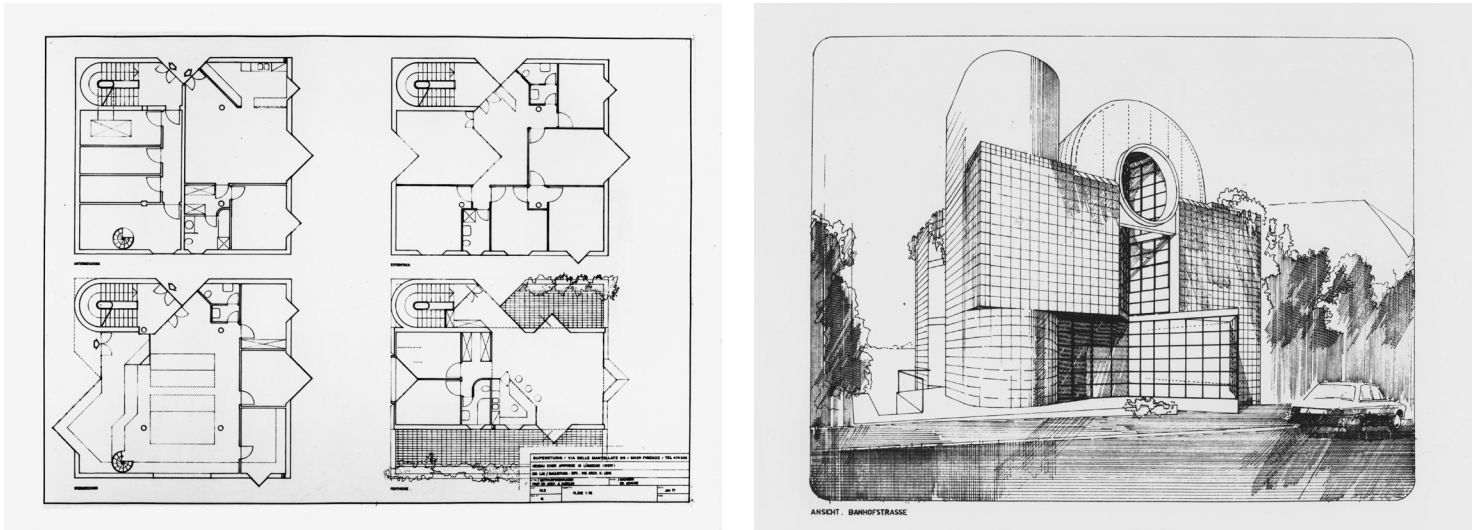
Superstudio/Gian Piero Frassinelli, Villa for Raffaello Taddei, Santa Croce sull'Arno, Pisa, 1973–1974. Project diagrams. Courtesy of Archivio Superstudio.

The same approach is also clearly visible in the villa for Raffaello Taddei, built in Santa Croce sull'Arno, near Pisa, in 1976. Frassinelli presents it with a significant narrative of Euclidean flavor: the building is described, in fact, as the encounter between a "desperately triangular" plot of land and "a rational cube that tried to occupy it without succeeding"; the result was a volume with only two façades, since the third was formed by the slope of the roof itself, partly covered with grass.

43 See Gian Piero Frassinelli/Superstudio, "Tre case. Tre soluzioni" ["Three Houses, Three Solutions"] in *Domus*, no. 569 (April 1977): 37–40.

44 See Gian Piero Frassinelli, "Galassia di oggetti," [Galaxy of Objects], in Superstudio, *Opere 1966–1978*, 546–553.

45 Gian Piero Frassinelli, "Discorsi sull'architettura," in Gian Piero Frassinelli, *Architettura impropria. Before, During, and After Superstudio* (Genoa: Sagep Editori, 2017), 182.



Left: Superstudio/Adolfo Natalini, pharmacy and residence for Rainer Krause, Lübeck, Germany, 1976–78. Project plans. Courtesy of Archivio Adolfo Natalini.

Right: Superstudio/Adolfo Natalini, pharmacy and residence for Rainer Krause, Lübeck, Germany, 1976–78. Project perspective. Courtesy of Archivio Adolfo Natalini.

More complex is the story behind the house for collector Rainer Krause: “a building for a lover of geometry,” as Superstudio would write.⁴⁶ In 1974, the group received a request from an anonymous pharmacist in Lübecke with a passion for radical design, complete with a detailed program, to design a building comprising of a pharmacy, medical office, and residence. For Adolfo Natalini, winner of a sort of internal competition within the studio, this would be an opportunity to move beyond the period of the *Fundamental Acts*, while carrying its lesson forward: life was no longer a problem belonging to the future, but rather the processing of lived experience and the ongoing project of its own recapitulation. “Our work has always proceeded through inventories and catalogs, and perhaps the only possible project is autobiography as a project of life,” Superstudio had written in 1973 on occasion of its first travelling retrospective exhibition, *Fragments from a Personal Museum*.⁴⁷ Drawing precisely on these “fragments from Superstudio’s personal museum,” Natalini designed an “almost cubic house.” On the one hand, he responded to the client’s requests—a sketch on graph paper “so precise and poetic that we decided to transform it into architecture with the least possible intervention”—and on the other, it made explicit reference to certain examples from *A Catalogue of Villas*.⁴⁸

The project, which would mark Natalini’s return to architecture as an experience of building, was celebrated with an installation titled *Memory Instead of Architecture*, staged in a room at the Bahnhof Apotheke Krause. There, four models “remembered and reconstructed” in fired-clay bricks were arranged as an idealized personal history of the architect and his idea of the house: “The first,” Natalini would write, “reproduces a Greek house-shaped urn found in Argos. The second is a house I drew when I was five years old. The third is a house designed when I still believed strongly in practicing architecture. The fourth is a house I built just when I thought I would never practice architecture again.”⁴⁹ The last two houses were, in fact, the Cubic Villa from the *Catalogue* and the Krause House.

46 [Superstudio], *Superstudio*, exhibition catalog, Palazzo Taverna, Rome, 1978 (Florence: Centro Di, 1978), 26.

47 Superstudio, *Fragmente aus einem persönlichen Museum*, exhibition catalog, Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, June 6–July 1, 1973 (Graz: Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, 1973).

48 Adolfo Natalini, *Superstudio: Una casa fatta (anche) di memoria / Ein Haus (Auch) aus Erinnerungen*, (Lübecke: Uhle & Kleimann, 1979) 1.

49 The installation was restaged in one of the three exhibitions curated by Adolfo Natalini at Studio Franca Pisani in Florence in May 1978. See Adolfo Natalini, “La memoria invece dell’architettura,” [“Memory Instead of Architecture”], in Adolfo Natalini, *La memoria invece: Tre mostre allo Studio Franca Pisani*, exhibition catalog (Florence: Tipolitografia G. Capponi, 1978), 62.



Adolfo Natalini, *Memory Instead of Architecture*, 1978. Installation.
Courtesy of Archivio Adolfo Natalini.

A far more literal use of *A Catalogue of Villas* was made in 1981 by Lorenzo Netti, who was then working with Superstudio.⁵⁰ That year, Netti decided to submit a proposal to the Shinkenchiku Residential Design Competition, the renowned ideas competition on the theme of the house organized by the Japanese magazine of the same name, in which both Gian Piero Frassinelli and Adolfo Natalini had participated in previous editions.⁵¹ The theme for 1981 was *An Exhibition House on the Grounds of a Museum of the Twentieth Century*. According to jury president Fumihiko Maki, it called for a reflection on the historical role of the “urban detached house” in the twentieth century, understood not so much as a “machine for living” but as a “machine for thinking.” Competitors were asked to design an ideal urban villa, situated on the edge of the garden of an imaginary Museum of the Twentieth Century, which served as its conceptual backdrop.

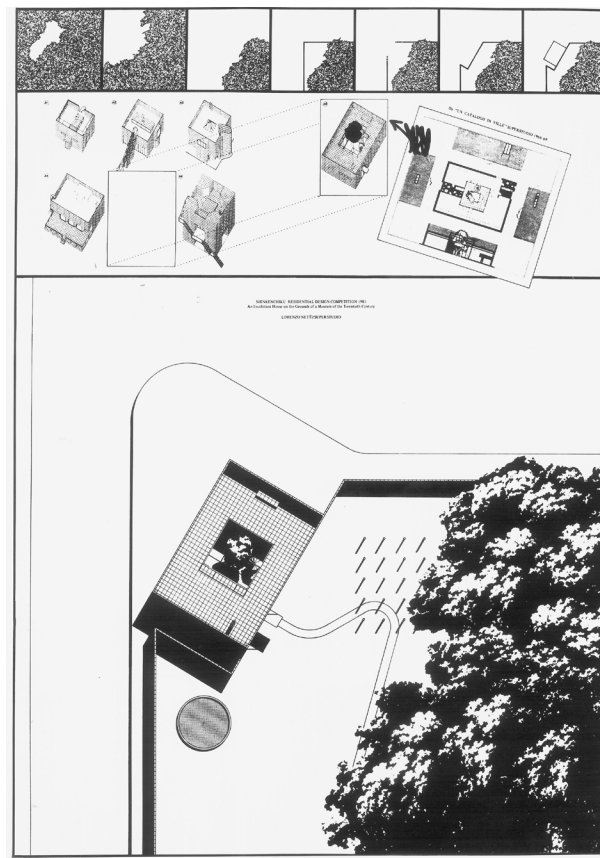
In response to the theme, Netti obtained permission from Superstudio’s partners to deliberately reuse one of the six villas from the “Catalogue of Suburban Villas”: A5, or the Villa with a Small Patio, the simplest and most abstract of them all. To emphasize its “perfect” introversion—a metaphor for the anti-utopian and, ultimately, realist approach that Superstudio had always cultivated—the villa becomes an appendage to a garden, which is the true protagonist of the project. An illustrated

50 Lorenzo Netti met Adolfo Natalini in 1973 while attending the *Plastica ornamentale* course at the Faculty of Architecture in Florence. He collaborated with Superstudio from 1977 to 1983. An expert draftsman (particularly of axonometric projections), he was one of the contributors to the research project *Extra-Urban Material Culture*. See Adolfo Natalini, Lorenzo Netti, Alessandro Poli, and Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, *Cultura materiale extraurbana* (Florence: Alinea, 1983).

51 Gian Piero Frassinelli participated in the 1975 (third place), the 1976 (third place), and the 1977 editions; Adolfo Natalini participated in 1976 (fourth place). See Gian Piero Frassinelli, “House for a Superstar,” *Japan Interior Design*, no. 12 (December 1975): 158; Gian Piero Frassinelli, “House for an Intersection, Third Place Piero Frassinelli,” *Shinkenchiku*, no. 11 (1976): 162–163; Adolfo Natalini, “House for an Intersection: Fourth Place Adolfo Natalini,” *Shinkenchiku*, no. 11 (1976): 174–175.

narrative sequence restages the birth of architecture in the manner of Marc-Antoine Laugier (observed as if under a microscope): a dense and untamed forest gradually reveals a clearing that expands in time through human intervention. Architecture is here the garden itself: it began when the remaining plants were separated and shielded within a gridded, walled enclosure, within which the villa represents little more than a hinge. Yet another stage in Superstudio's journey through the "Realms of Reason," this "house of the garden-keeper" allows the entirety of *A Catalogue of Villas* to be read as a contemporary version of Claude-Nicholas Ledoux's *architectures parlantes*, and, through them, of the entire heroic language of the avant-garde as a whole, now reduced to very few, mute elements.

After all, from Le Corbusier to Superstudio, the twentieth century was drawing to a close, and there wasn't much else left to say...



Lorenzo Netti/Superstudio, *An Exhibition House on the Grounds of a Museum of the Twentieth Century*, 1981. Proposal for the Shinkenchiku Residential Design Competition. Courtesy of Archivio Lorenzo Netti.

AUTHOR

Gabriele Mastrigli is an architect and critic based in Rome. He teaches architectural theory and design at the University of Camerino. He is the author of numerous publications on radical architecture, including the anthology *Superstudio, Opere 1966–1978* (Quodlibet, 2016) and *Superstudio, Écrits sur le design* (Les Presses du Réel, 2026). In 2016, he curated the retrospective Superstudio 50 at the National Museum of 21st Century Arts (MAXXI) in Rome.

COPYRIGHT

©2026 Burning Farm, ©2026 The Authors.
All content can be shared, distributed, and reproduced provided the original author and source are credited.