

**Palabras clave**

Metro
 Infraestructura
 Albini
 Tafuri
 Milán

Keywords

Subway
 Infrastructure
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CIRCULATE!
 Architecture's language in
 circulation and as an instrument for
 circulation¹

FIG 1 Carlo Orsi.
Metropolitana Milanese.
 Milán / Milano, 1964.
 © Carlo Orsi

Although architecture seems to have a minor role in the definition of urban infrastructures, softening its roughness and aiding its functionality, the following contribution argues it can do more than that. The project for the Milano subway by Albini and Helg shows that architecture and design can also ground the role of infrastructures as instruments of cultural coordination and social articulation in the post-Fordist city.

Consider the following image to begin: a policeman (or perhaps a policewoman?), posing in a relaxed position (FIG. 1). She is framed horizontally by a continuous banner announcing a subway station – *Duomo* – and the edge of a platform, positioned at the top and the bottom of the photograph. Dressed in a light elegant white outfit, legs crossed and leaning on the stair rail, she is observed not only by the camera located on the opposite platform, but also, on the left-hand side of the image, by a group of six people turning their heads toward the figure in white. A colored tube rises from the wall turning upward, making a perfect quarter-circle arc to the left and then a full half-circle to the right to find the policewoman's fist, before finally turning around the dark wall behind her back. There, before rising upstairs, the railing tube meets, in an optical coincidence, the tip of a gigantic arrow of an advertising board located on the background wall. On this white and well-illuminated board, the big arrow frames the rather austere logo of the department store *La Rinascente*, pointing to the stair that rises to the exit. Nothing stands out in this 1964 photograph of the then recently inaugurated Milano subway, taken by Carlo Orsi – the policewoman, the railing and the advertisement orchestrate a perfect choreography – together they state: 'Circulate!'

On November 1st, 1964, the first line of the Milanese subway system had been inaugurated, with two trains running together from the Lotto to Sesto Morelli stations (FIGS. 2,3). Required funds for the development of the project were gathered through a bond issue that was open to Milano residents. The Milanese population was thus bound first economically in the hope of eventually being better connected spatially and ultimately becoming a more cohesive social body.

Initial studies had depicted a congested tram system and, given the impossibility of either expanding the infrastructure in the existing width of the streets or broadening them – due to the historical value of the city center – the subway seemed to be the only alternative to private vehicular transportation. The average speed of circulation was, in fact, constantly decreasing due to growing and unsatisfied needs – affecting not only the quality of life in the city but also its economy.² The subway project responded to postwar programs of social welfare as much as to the needs of market development in the booming economy of Northern Italy, an area that in the 1950s and 60s was achieving the level of organization of work and production of other industrialized countries.

FIG 2 Franco Albini, Franca Helg and Bob Noorda.
Diseño de las estaciones.
Milán, 1964 / *Subway design.*
Milano, 1964.
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Milanese architects Franco Albini and Franca Helg were commissioned with the design of the stations, including interior arrangements, furniture and signage, a project they developed with the collaboration of graphic designer Bob Noorda. An article published in *Architectural Forum* celebrated the fact that a group of significant designers had been commissioned for such a project, showing that “subways need not be sewers.”³ Italian design, and particularly that of Milano, had acquired a growing international recognition over the previous decades, and if a circulatory infrastructure was here acknowledged, a plethora of Milanese design objects and interior ensembles had already been widely circulated both in the media and in the market. Milano was a city in circulation.

Albini was a relevant figure within these circulatory logics of Italian design, authoring tables and radio equipment that were very successful in furniture fairs and department stores already in the late 1930s. Also department store *La Rinascente* was not an alien guest in the walls of the subway, as it had become central

to design's circulatory operations. The circulation of objects turned international at the time and bore a non-dismissible impact upon Italy's peaking share of exports (Rey, 1967). Design became key to the Italian economic miracle supporting, and not merely decorating, projects of reform such as that of the subway.

Less enthusiastic was the analysis of the project by the Roman historian Manfredo Tafuri, witness to the crises that followed the period of economic expansion. In his *History of Italian Architecture*, published in English in 1988, Tafuri mentioned this key intervention just in a couple of lines, signaling its "rarified elegance," taken as an example of the "make-shift language" developed contemporaneously by Albini, among other Italian architects, "to protect themselves from the assault of problems they considered skeptically" (Tafuri, 1988:85). Albini and Helg's project could be interpreted, in Tafuri's framework, as a *locus classicus* of the architect's limitations in the face of the establishment of 'planning' as an autonomous discipline (Tafuri, 1988:71-81). For Tafuri, the linguistic efforts of architects within the surfaces of the city remained completely detached from the structures of society, merely their ideological cover. However, beyond the framework offered by the Italian historian, the language of the subway's design was integral to a series of contemporaneous environments, articulated to new urban practices and legal frameworks. And, as this article will discuss, the role of this language could not be reduced to that of representation – inextricable as these environments were to the affirmation of circulation. Even more, they were a main instrument bringing society together around a common statement of circulation as a defining constitutive practice.

The abstractions of language and the city

If the subway was to be instrumental in the development of the city, it seemed it would be so primarily at the level of planning and the constitution of Milanese society, at which Albini and Helg were not invited to participate. The subway was directly connected, if only coincidentally, with some of the key interventions that Albini had developed at an urban scale throughout his career, despite his lack of responsibility for its urban layout: his Quartiere Gabriele D'Annunzio of 1939 was less than a mile away from the Lotto station while his Quartiere Ettore Ponti of the same year was soon to be served by the second line of the subway.⁴

The subway infrastructure was supposed to articulate the relationship of the thriving center of Milano with different residential suburban developments such as those designed by Albini, as well as to connect the different train stations serving the expanding hinterland – all areas in need of being cohesively incorporated into the social and cultural life of the metropolis (Virgili et al, 1970; Buzzi, 1960). The increasing demand for such an articulation was the object of the *Piano Intercomunale Regionale*, a plan coordinating municipal and regional projects published in 1963 (Tintorini, 1963; De Carlo, 1963;1966; Cercelloni,1979). Different analyses had

identified not only the increasing commercial activity in the center, but also the high economic pressure in the area due to the development of the numerous lots still vacant after the war bombings. The subway was the key for a plan that aimed to dispense such pressure in a process of decentralization that could transform the functional disequilibria between center and periphery (Bottoni, 1956).

Although closely related to these urban processes, Albini and Helg's design obliterated rather than acknowledged such disequilibria, carrying through the reformist agenda of the project with a comprehensive design that distilled – or rather abstracted – all differences within a modular system and a clear visual identity. Not only exterior conditions but also interior idiosyncratic elements were unified in a design that, following Vittorio Gregotti's review of the project, was able to absorb “without losing its own identity, all the adjectivations of the successive elements” (Gregotti, 1972:333; 1982: 355).

Both the subway's layout and its design could be read as part of what has been called the modern “unitary city ideal,” one supported by an “integrated infrastructural ideal” – models that Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin (2001:49) have suggested for the understanding of the role of infrastructures in the modern metropolis.⁵ Such an infrastructural model has been traced back in modern urban planning to Haussmann's project for the ‘regularization’ of Paris between 1853 and 1870 or, even before, to the Napoleonic plan for Milano in 1803, similarly designed as infrastructural interventions that fostered circulation within the city, additionally supported by a strong unified image. The 1803 city plan was, in fact, an object of concern for different architects and historians in Italy, including Tafuri, at the time of the subway's inauguration.⁶

The formal abstraction of the subway's design and the abstraction of the city by means of its infrastructure layout might be related to each other, as well as to the capitalist abstraction of and from use value to exchange value, as a result of the eradication of differences equally produced by the diverse levels of abstraction. These were particularly relevant in the new dimensions of the city that were conceptualized in Italian discourse as the “city-territory” throughout the years of the subway design. As Giancarlo De Carlo identified, the unit organized within these new dimensions tended to the homogenization of land value, in a process to which the subway contributed by rendering similar the spaces it connected. That was precisely the very point of Tafuri and others who, writing about the topic, noted how such a homogenization furthered by communication networks gave the same potential level to different situations, and regarded this assimilation as a precondition to practices of land speculation (Piccinato et al, 1962). The concern, derived from the abstraction and commoditization of land, was pressing and motivated a national law enacted in 1962, which advocated for the control of city planning by the State – a law much celebrated at the time though never actually implemented (Astengo, 1962; Ripamonti, 1961).

Several critics and urban theorists, with Tafuri among them, were confronting in this context the possibility of intervening as architects within the new dimensions of the city-territory, interested in these forms of territorial integration resulting from the transformed modes of production and circulation. In an article in *Casabella*, they celebrated the capacity of these new dimensions to articulate the territory beyond hierarchical structures, and the possibility of a new organization of the population.⁷ Interestingly, Tafuri aligned in this article a “conscience of the new great urban dimensions” with “the conscience of a new expressive necessity” (Piccinato et al, 1962). The new structural changes of the city would be faced, these arguments sustained, providing a form of representation. The language of the subway, as designed by Albini and Helg with Noorda’s graphics, would apparently realize this expressive necessity, providing a direct response to the new urban reality.

However, in the arguments deployed by Tafuri some years later in the 1967 article “Toward a Critique of Architecture Ideology,” the effectiveness of language as a response to the new urban reality was demised (Aureli, 2012). This was the conclusion of Tafuri’s well known analysis of modern architecture’s evolution, presented in this article and later elaborated in *Architecture and Utopia* in 1976, which offered a version of modern architecture in relation to its alignment with the development of capitalism. The evolution of this relation after Milano’s Napoleonic plan of 1803 (among other contemporary urban projects of the nineteenth century) completely transformed, from Tafuri’s point of view, architecture’s connection to the structural logics of the city and, by 1964, its language was concerned with changing urban and infrastructural models only at an ideological level.⁸ The identification of the structure of the city with the capitalist organization throughout the nineteenth century city had granted architecture language total freedom, thus turning it arbitrary and eventually ineffective.

In this context, while abstraction as an artistic strategy of the avant-gardes was initially related to the shock experience of modernity – shifting “from the anguished discovery of the nullification of values” in the metropolis, “to the use of a language of pure signs, perceptible by a mass that had completely absorbed the universe without quality of the money economy” – similar formal strategies remained, in modern architecture, merely a representation of capitalist

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logics (Tafuri, 1976:89).⁹ Even more, formal abstraction in modern architecture eventually became a result of those very logics, within the alignment of industrial production and capitalist development (Tafuri, 1976). The “elegant” abstract language of the subway’s design, with its modular wall panels and the repeated ornamental motifs could be interpreted, following Tafuri’s critical framework, as not merely elegant abstract forms, but also elements of industrial capitalism, “reproducible *ad infinitum*.” Such logics extended beyond Albini’s intervention in the subway: the project by architect’s group BBPR for the train’s sheds equally deployed modular elements, understood by the authors as a representation of the “alignment between architecture and the industrialization of construction.”¹⁰

Within this context, architecture’s language assumed “the task of rendering authentic and natural the unnatural universe of technological precision” (Tafuri, 1976:126). For Tafuri, however, this crisis was less grounded in architecture’s evolution than in the advancement of capitalism’s own logic (including industrial development, financial speculation, and the rise of land and property values). Capitalist development constantly left any linguistic or formal experimentation behind, and the city was left as an area of intervention for architects merely at the level of “the sign and its manipulation,” regarded only “in terms of a superstructure” (Tafuri, 1976:137). This might seem, quite literally indeed, Albini and Helg’s realm of action in the design of the subway stations, with their project reduced to little more than producing signage on the surface of the city – or, should we say, in its depth?

Language, organization, production

In the arguments developed by Tafuri, modern architecture’s evolution had ultimately concluded with the identification of its *superficial* operations with any mass media. The historian brought his critique to some contemporaneous Italian discourses and practices, such as those included at the 14th *Milano Triennale* and at MoMA’s retrospective *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* in 1972 – with a catalogue featuring the subway’s project.¹¹

Albini himself was a protagonist of those discourses and practices. He participated, for example, in a related symposium directed by Giulio Carlo Argan in 1968, concerned with the linguistic efforts of



architects within urban surfaces, as these surfaces defined the so-called “environmental structure” of the city. Though Albini’s project for the subway was not directly addressed, it is more than coincidence that photographs of different subway environments populated the publication of the symposium as exemplars of its object of concern.¹² Against Tafuri’s arguments, Argan offered in his introductory remarks to the symposium an understanding of design as an effective tool in the “determination of the human visual environment,” criticizing the scission of urbanism as an independent department in schools of architecture. It was, according to him, at the visual level defined by design practices that the city most directly affected the individual, and that was, for him, the privileged realm for intervention of architecture as an aesthetic practice (Argan, 1968:58). This understanding was legitimized by the notion of the “environment,” understood, as he would put it elsewhere, as “a complex of relations and intersections between the psychological and the physical reality,” (Argan, 1983:219-233) between the articulation of bodies and psyches.

To this regard, Argan considered the relations between a ‘long-term city’ carried out by urban planners and a ‘short-term city,’ defined by the designers. The latter was understood as “the city of the day – composed through occasional equipment, through signs, publicity, cars, shop windows, street lighting” and even “the clothing of people” (Argan, 1968:42). This city, he said, “is not less historical than the city of centuries defined by monuments,” considering such superficial elements as a legitimate area of intervention for a critical design practice. However, following similar arguments to those later developed by Tafuri, the anthropologist Tullio Seppilli cautioned Argan: all the elements of the ‘short-term city’ were merely “expressions of the system, (...) the meeting point of the system with the consumer” (Argan, 1968:58).¹³ Argan anticipated such remarks, arguing for a redefinition of the role of the designer as that of an intellectual in order to develop a critical position against capitalism and the related pervasive effects of technology.¹⁴

Albini had to reply to these still unresolved arguments as the director of the panel on critique at the same symposium. Responding to Argan’s position, he argued criticism to be the verification of “the possibility of the given hypothesis to exist” rather than its questioning, the

FIG 3 Franco Albini, Franca Helg and Bob Noorda. Diseño de las estaciones. Milán, 1964 / *Subway design. Milano, 1964.*
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FIG 4 Postales de época de Milán / *Epoch postcards of Milano.*

confirmation of “the possibility of [these hypotheses] to assume a form” (Argan, 1968:123). Different from Tafuri and Argan also, critique would remain here internal to design, as “one of the instruments for evaluation of one’s own language and of its connections to cultural requirements” (Argan, 1968:135). Any operation on architecture’s language could be, thus, a critical practice. The contribution of the designer was to “anticipat[e] concepts, meanings, and ways of life and behaviors” through the design of the environment, in a quest to be pursued by “the renewal of expressive language” (Argan, 1968:124).¹⁵ This role assigned to architecture in the construction of a new reality assumed the possibility of ‘anticipating’ its effects, establishing a deterministic relationship between new languages and new meanings.

It was precisely architecture’s contemporaneous turn to language that concluded Tafuri’s genealogy in *Architecture and Utopia*.¹⁶ In the chapter preceding the conclusions, he summed the discipline’s limitation considering that, confined to its linguistic definition, architecture was referred “only to the laws of its internal structure.” This, he argued, left “the linguistic material (...) indifferent,” something conducive to what he defined as “the most radical politically agnostic formalism” (Tafuri, 1976:157). Appealing, among others, to Charles Peirce’s theorization of the detachment of sign from its semantic reference, Tafuri understood that any deterministic relationship between language and meaning was undone, thus changes in language remained literally meaningless.

However, while Tafuri’s analysis regarded language as a structure of communication detached from material realities, from the time of his critique, both social and political theories as well as studies on communication have questioned such separation, considering the very materiality of communication and the condition of language as a productive activity. Such understandings complicate the relationship between the surface and the organization of the city that Tafuri’s analysis had disconnected, and more broadly its linguistic definition from structural concerns. While



for the Italian historian the development of capitalism would have separated architectural language from the logics of the city, in the regimes of advanced capitalism in formation at the time of the subway's inauguration, language, economy and society came to form indissoluble arrangements – physically shaped within the city's environments.

The origin of such analysis might be traced back to the radical political scene of the 1960s in Italy, precisely the context of the subway's design, especially to its approach to communication – particularly relevant for the understanding of these environments. Following the recent reconsideration of such movements by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, the theoretical production of that moment allows grasping the instrumentality of architectural language. In fact, these theories considered how communication not only expresses but also produces – overcoming the limitations of representation and meaning. These theories acknowledge the imaginary level at which communicative organization is shaped as an alternative to ideological deceit, arguing that, in the systems of advanced capitalism, “[p]ower, as it produces, organizes; as it organizes, it speaks and expresses itself as authority” and, simultaneously, “[l]anguage, as it communicates, produces commodities but moreover creates subjectivities, puts them in relation, and orders them” (Hardt and Negri, 2000:33).¹⁷ Linguistic and what would in traditional Marxist analysis be regarded as ‘ideological’ expressions of these power regimes, would not be parallel realities representing or concealing the real conditions of production, but part of these conditions (inexistent before them).¹⁸ Thus, Hardt and Negri’s work allows offering an alternative to the Tafurian critique that, however concrete or material the subway design might be, its function is to generate a sort of illusory world of circulation that disguises the material reorganization of territory and its social and economic corollaries. Here one cannot separate the reorganization of bodies in the new urban dimensions of the city from the images that collectively addressed the urban population’s psyches, both of them wrapped by the same environments.¹⁹

Circulation and its environments

We can now return to the subway's design and try to make sense of the perfect circularity of its railing and its geometrically undulating outline, only contorting in the ends to avoid any abrupt rupture of its elegant continuity. A description of the subway should consider also the austere banner announcing the station's name and the constant width and spacing of the font used, just parallel to the abstracted outline of the subway's route, with the stops regularly distributed in a straight thick line. The timely repetition of the trains running in both directions was mirrored by the pattern of fluorescent lights, distributed along parallel lines following the subway tracks. Black metalwork framed the modular wall panels of artificial stone, at distances that repeated the rhythm of the columns in the hallways, also framed in black, dissolving the hierarchy between foreground and background. A continuous dark rubber floor muffled the sound of each individual's movement and transformed them into a continuous collective murmur.

No point was given any significance over another in the design of the stations; their image privileged decentralization and circulation, analogous to the logics that the subway supported for the city. But, if one is to consider the subway's design in relation to the circulation allowed by the infrastructure of the subway, it would be important to overcome the limitations of a direct relation between architectural language and specific ways of life and behaviors, as suggested by Albini. Nor could this relation be reduced to a spatial determinism that would relate the movement of people to the forms of architecture. Nor, finally, could its surfaces be reduced to circulation signage. A new understanding of the role of language in the subway's design is necessary here; one which situates language within an arrangement of elements dependent on the new cultural and economic logics of circulation built by the *Piano Intercomunale Regionale* and the project for the State Law of 1962, among others.

Language becomes in this context a cultural form itself in circulation, distributed around the city and repeatedly experienced by commuters and occasional travelers. Circulation might be understood, as it has recently been suggested by Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma, simultaneously an economic and cultural practice "with its own forms of abstraction, evaluation, and constraint, which are created by the interactions between specific types of circulating forms and the interpretive communities built around them" (Lee and LiPuma, 2002:192).²⁰ This language could be understood to "enable, through making sense of," the very circulatory practices that are shared by those communities (communities in circulation constituted as 'interpretive communities' of this language), following Charles Taylor's conceptualization of modern social imaginaries (Taylor, 2002:91).²¹ As an alternative to a relationship between language and meaning, the logics of the subway, abstracted as a language and circulated in its repeated experience and circulation, generate an

imaginary that is inseparable from the economic and social practices that are contemporaneous to it. The architectural abstractions of the subway – and their circulation as language – allowed society not only to imagine itself, but to construct itself as a community in such a circulatory regime. In the particular case of Albini and Helg's project, in fact, not only does his abstract language partake in the creation of a social imaginary by virtue of its circulation, but its language precisely creates an imaginary of circulation.

The experience of the subway interiors was never singular but collective, characterized by more generalized and lengthened commutes within the new dimensions of a sprawling city that was institutionalized by the *Piano Intercomunale Regionale* (Piccinato et al, 1962:16-25). Moreover, this circulating community was further enhanced by the increasing immigration to Milano coming, fundamentally, from the less developed southern areas of the country. The cheap labor allowing for the international circulation of Italian design was, in fact, offered by these masses of immigrant workers, masses also in circulation. But, more importantly, these same migratory movements, as an interruption of regional culture and traditional bonds and *habitus* for the masses of delocalized workers, allow new forms of reproduction of culture to become effective: it is the contingent encounter of circulating constituencies and designs, also in circulation, that allow for the production of these social imaginaries (of circulation).²²

Albini and Helg's project was not merely an "elegant" language resulting from an abstraction of the logics of the city. This language was real in the subway's walls, it circulated as an imaginary and constituted an environment in which, as Argan suggested, the physical and the psychical intersected. That was the case for thousands of commuters for which (following journalist Enrico Filippini) it was impossible to separate "the organization and the surfaces of [the subway], the graphics selection and color" from their psychological effects upon a user "who lives on the sixth floor, walks down to street level in the morning, covers the distance that separates him from the station, down thirty feet into the underground, and then goes to work on the twentieth floor."²³

The environments constructed with the subway surfaces were assertive and fixating. They avoided the ambiguity of artistic languages in order to immerse the population in an image of development and certainty. In fact, the homogeneity of the subway's language, its lack of cultural specificity – its deterritorialization –

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FIG 5 Postales de época de Milán / *Epoch postcards of Milano.*

was simultaneous to a process of re-territorialization (of fixation and stabilization), seeking to objectify something as a circulatory society. But such a society was incorporated into Milano's imaginary and not detached from it, so as not to destabilize its identity. We could consider in this regard, the series of postcards produced at the time, in which images of the subway were juxtaposed with other references of Milano's imaginary, from the Duomo to the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele (FIG. 4). Urban imaginaries, in fact, helped to conceptualize the processes of stabilization within the logics of circulation of the city (LiPuma and Koelble, 2005:154). The elegance of the subway can only be qualified as "rarified" (and its language as "make-shift") from the point of view of its meaning, not considering its materialization and circulation.

If the infrastructure of the subway articulated the circulation of people to that of capital, facilitating also the speculative practices of the real estate market, they were both indissoluble from the imaginaries built through the "rarified language" building the environments of its stations: the formal abstractions of the subway's design and the abstraction of the city produced by the layout of the infrastructure related to each other as well as to the capitalist abstraction of land from use value to exchange value. If the surfaces that Albini and Helg designed for the subway resulted from an abstraction of the logics of the city, such abstraction was at the same time necessary to the transformation of these very logics.

This instrumental role of architecture in the organization of the city continues to concern, still, its manifestation as language. **ARQ**

- 1 The arguments for this paper originally benefitted from the feedback of Reinhold Martin and the critical context of his course “Philosophies of the City” at Columbia GSAPP in 2012. For the current version of this paper I want to thank the editorial team of ARQ, particularly Francisco Díaz and Lucía Galaretto, as well as the incredibly poignant comments by Pedro Correa and Manuel Corrada.
- 2 In his reflections on Milano’s urban layout in 1956, Piero Bottoni considered the lost opportunity for the broadening of the street section in the reconstruction following the city bombings during the Second World War. (Piero Bottoni, 1956:149).
- 3 “Subways need not be sewers.” *The Architectural Forum*, January-February (1966), 68.
- 4 The modernist abstract language of his multiple projects of collective housing had shaped the image of the outskirts of Milano in the 1930s and 40s. Moreover, he had collaborated in different planning projects such as the four satellite cities on Milano’s periphery of 1940 and the first urban plan for the city just after the war, developed within the group *Architetti Reuniti*. See Piva, 1998; Albini, Bucci, Irace, 2006.
- 5 They have related such models to Lefebvre’s equation of modernity with the production of “abstract space,” appealing to the definition by the French intellectual of “the simple, regulated and methodical principle of coherent stability” to be applied to the contradictions and complexities of the city (Lefebvre, 1991:238).
- 6 In an article for the magazine *Società* in 1962, Aldo Rossi focused on the articulation of this plan’s architectural language with hegemonic bourgeois ideology while, writing in 1967, Tafuri remarked the way in which the regime’s ideology was alternatively inserted in the city fabric itself (beyond architectural expression) and the negotiation of this fabric’s history. (Aldo Rossi, 1956; Tafuri, 2000 [1969]:12).
- 7 Quoting from Giuseppe Samonà, they illustrated the way in which in the Parisian region it had been possible to organize “the great masses that each day move from one place to another for work, socially interested as they are in a city like Paris, to liberate themselves from the tyranny of the links between the place of labor and that of residence.” Samonà, 1959:190-191, quoted in Piccinato et al, 1962.
- 8 Tafuri considered that the Napoleonic plan for Milano developed Marc-Antoine Laugier’s project on the city and the consequent one by Francesco Milizia, which he presented as a breaking point of architecture’s relation to the city as a mechanism of capitalist production. From then on, “order and disorder” in architectural expression would only come to enhance the “experience” of the urban as a natural phenomenon rather than explaining its increasing fragmentation after the liberalization of bourgeois market economy or offering an alternative to it. Following those theories, the Napoleonic plan of 1803 left aside the possibility of “constructing ex novo new realities, new values, and new public symbols” (Tafuri, 1976: 24).
- 9 Tafuri explained the cultural and social function of the avant-garde as an ideological one, building on the work of the Frankfurt School in considering the importance of new forms of cultural production to adapt society’s sensorium to the violence of metropolitan stimuli: “to ward off anguish by understanding and absorbing its causes would seem to be one of the principal ethical exigencies of bourgeois art.” (Tafuri, 1976:1)
- 10 “Studi Per Un Deposito Vetture Della Metropolitana Milanese (BBPR),” *Casabella Continuità* 272 (Feb. 1963), 32-50.
- 11 For Tafuri’s critique of these types of projects, see Tafuri, 1976:137. For his contribution to the catalogue of the MoMA exhibition see Tafuri, 1972:388. Tafuri’s contribution to the catalogue started precisely by pointing to Albini’s designs for the Triennial of the 30s, which he described as a “useless machine.” This term was ambiguously borrowed from Bruno Munari.
- 12 Significantly, this venue was singled out by Tafuri to represent the target of his criticism in a footnote to *Architecture and Utopia* (Tafuri, 1976:139), fn. 82.
- 13 Tafuri similarly considered that, at this superstructural level, architectural or design practices could never escape the logics of “production and publicity,” but merely train a new subjectivity within the logics of consumerism (Tafuri, 1976:156).
- 14 In this role, a critical design practice should not only address the analysis of the problem that was offered as the object of a project, but also the very hypothesis that set that problem in the first place, since “the hypothesis is susceptible to variation and, as such, it might contradict the system in its totality.” For Argan, “the factor that contradicts the system is the same one that produces the hypothesis,

- that is, imagination" (Argan, 1968:40; Crosby and Van Onck, 1970:31-42). Imagination affirmed the possibility that difference is possible, subverting the logics of Herbert Marcuse's "one dimensional man" (Argan, 1968:38; Marcuse, 1991).
- 15 Albin appealed to the possibilities that technological or material frameworks might offer for a transformation of language, but it was the designer's responsibility to interpret such possibilities in "a new rule of art."
- 16 Though I am taking Tafuri's argument in response to Albin, the historian was referring to a more specific international phenomenon that was pervasive in Italy at the time, traceable from the work of Umberto Eco to that of Gillo Dorfles. See for example, Eco, 1980; 1962.
- 17 They support their recent arguments in the materialist critique of traditional Marxist division of structural and superstructural levels as performed in the work of Michael Foucault. In his work, modern regimes of power are thought to work within reality and not in the parallel sphere as the law ("the law imagines the negative") or in the sphere "of prescriptions and obligations" as in disciplinary regimes. In contrast to them, these regimes work "by getting the components of reality to work in relation to each other, thanks to and through a series of analyses and specific arrangements." See Foucault, 2007:58. More generally, Foucault understands power not as a set of imaginary relations independent from the material structures in which it is actualized, but is created through them. See Foucault, 2007:16-17.
- 18 As Hardt and Negri have recently argued, Foucault's work considers the elements of the superstructure within the material structures of society, which are not reducible to economic terms but are defined also "in cultural, corporeal and subjective ones." (Hardt and Negri, 2000:27)
- 19 Some passages of Tafuri's work open up the possibility of language to become an instrument of critical analysis. For example: "There is but one contribution a consistent structuralism can offer to present-day architecture and art: the exact dimension of its own functionality in the universe of capitalist development, in the universe of integration" (Tafuri, 1976:165). Acknowledging the place of language within the system, these arguments seem to advance Negri and Hardt analyses.
- 20 Though the work of Lee and LiPuma is based on other conceptualizations of social imaginaries ranging from Charles Taylor to Arjun Appadurai, I appeal here to their work for the relevance they grant to circulation.
- 21 Contemporary mobilization of the concept of social imaginaries is indebted on Benedict Anderson's foundational work on nationalism (Anderson, 1991).
- 22 For an analysis of these relationships between cultural forms in circulation and population mobility see, for example, Appadurai, 1996
- 23 "La Metropolitana Di Milano." *Domus*, 438 (1966), 46.

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