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## SPATIALIZATION THROUGH THE CONCEPT OF UTOPIA BETWEEN EXPERIMENTAL AND FICTIONAL SPACE

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### Abstract

The experimental and fictional design approach exists at the point where the boundaries of production technology blur, acting in search of a systematic and at the same time measurable architecture by destroying stereotyped and traditional expressions, while producing with the unlimited predictions it adopts. 'Utopia', which creates a definable space for itself between these two disciplines, aims to reach beyond its time by finding its existence within the triangle of subject-space-experience, and always aims forward. The relationship between fictional and experimental space, which hosts many alternatives and various actions, forms a strong structure with its conceptual and utopian infrastructure. In this context, the study will emphasize the importance and necessity of these two design approaches by examining how they have been shaped from past to present and how they shed light on architecture.

**Keywords:** Experimental space, fictional space, utopia

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In some cases, it may be difficult to define the framework of experimental architecture, which goes through the filter of thinking and harbours many alternatives and forms of action. Therefore, the theoretical and intellectual underpinnings it harbours must form a solid structure. Experimental architecture, which creates its own conceptual infrastructure, always acts by thinking ahead. This concept, which was first put forward in 1970 with the book 'Experimental Architecture' written by Peter Cook, takes its place in the history of architecture with the technology-inspired 'Archigram' group, which was put forward with neofuturistic and hypothetical projects, and exhibits a stance that

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breaks the standard in the direction of experimentation and fictionalism. In experimental space projects, the experienceability of the process and the works in which the construction phase can be observed have a great impact on both the project and the individual. Before making explanations about experimental architecture, analysing the concept of 'experiment' will form a basis for understanding experimental architecture. According to John Locke, one of the great proponents of the empiricism approach, the source of knowledge is experiment, the human's ability to know is limited and human knowledge is as much as he can experiment. He argues that there is no innate knowledge and that the knowledge learnt later is based on experience. In cases where the experiment is handled, not only the form of action but also the intellectual process is important. On the other hand, Lebbeus Woods, who is known for his experimental designs, defines experimentation as "An experiment, simply put, is a test of an idea or a hypothesis, a 'what if,' to see if it works in reality. An experiment is NOT the creation of the hypothesis - that belongs to the realm of theory. It is also NOT the application of its results to reality - that belongs to the realm of practice" (Woods, 2010). Woods, who has valuable studies on this subject, founded the Research Institute for Experimental Architecture (RIEA) in 1988 to investigate the use of experimental methods in architectural education and practice. Known for his significant influence on experimental architecture, Lebbeus Woods and his works are built on the principles of heterogeneity and multiplicity. Woods, who took experimentalism to another dimension; 'I am not interested in living in a fantasy world. All my work still evokes real architectural spaces. But what interests me is what the world would be like if we got rid of traditional boundaries. Maybe I can show what can happen if we live by different rules (Yardley, 2012).

The spatial fiction that emerges at the point where experimentation and intellectual endeavour merge, the effort to put the abstract into form is at some point a part of the formation of fictional space. In this regard, İ.Emre KAVUT defines fiction as 'the composition of parts in a way to ensure the integrity of meaning with the simplest definition. Fictional spaces, on the other hand, are defined as 'spaces created by the composition of parts that do not seem possible in the conditions of the period in which all or some of them actually exist (Kavut, 2016). While approaching the existing structures with a questioning and investigative attitude, it should not be forgotten that stereotyped, traditionalised situations are destroyed and the content and purpose of the actions that are open to experience at the end of this destruction should be kept above all else. With its forward-looking approach and solid construction, the goal brings both itself and the individual to the perception of experimentation. The fact that experimental and fictional architecture, which bases itself on the foundations of progressivism in practice and theory, has made the endeavour of existence visible has enabled it to

evolve in a good direction since its inception. It has been thought about how it should be shaped from the moment it came into existence, and the possibilities provided by the space to the individual have been developed at the determined focal point.

In the first stage of this study, which was created using qualitative research method, a comprehensive literature review was conducted and the effect of the subject on current and future studies was investigated with the data obtained. It has been observed that utopian projects that remain on paper are open to the act of experiencing in virtual spaces with today's technology. While evaluating the projects created under the leadership of Archigram and designed in the 'experiment-fiction-utopia' triangle, the logic of conceptual projects was tried to be analysed and an understanding of architecture in which the structures and fictions of the period with different groups were universalised was discussed. Elements such as form, function and material form a solid ground for understanding and experiencing the atmosphere of space, while serving as a means of "space experience" for the experiencing individual. Addressing the space of experience and fiction in all its aspects will help us to understand and better assimilate the act of experiencing. By examining the elements that help the dialogue established with the space together, the design of structures built with both intellectual and physical approaches will open new doors and will be a role model in the field of solid spaces built on a good theoretical basis that stimulates human emotions.

The Archigram group, founded by Peter Cook, David Greene and Mike Webb, who had valuable works on this subject, and later joined by Ron Herron, Dennis Crampton and Warren Chalk, realised the most important utopian activity of the century and influenced many artists after them. Tanyel describes the group as 'a series of provocative utopias with an unprecedented destructiveness and effectiveness, saying that the world of architecture urgently needed to undergo a change, that it had to stand up. Moreover, they were expressing this discourse not with the architectural drawing techniques used until then, but rather with visuals referring to pop culture and comics. Archigram can be said to be the reflection of pop culture in the world of architecture. For this reason, it seems meaningful to understand the group and its product as an integral component of the revolutionary atmosphere of the 1960s, the period in which it flourished (Tanyeli, 2005). At the same time, the projects of the Superstudio organisation, which was founded in 1966, aiming at social changes through radical architecture and design and supporting its experiences with a wide range of different interests, are also very important in this field.

## 2. ARCHITECTURE AND UTOPIA

'Utopia', which is formed between the discipline of fictional and experimental architecture, emphasises that beyond what is imagined, impossibilities are not considered, fictions, concepts, reaching the best for human beings and structures are in an effort to break the memorisation. Nail Bezel approaches the relationship between utopia and architecture as follows; "Architecture is a branch of art that is inevitably emphasised in all utopias and counter utopias, because the environment in which man will either be happy or turn into an object of oppression is the basic and indispensable factor in any social model, whether internal or external. In reality, every utopia is as much an architectural design as it is a social design." (Bezel, 1993) While another view is that "some utopian designs, which often never had any claim to be implemented, were tried to be realised by other architects after the period in which they were produced. Utopias also played an important role at points where architectural production was blocked, when architectural discourses could not solve existing urban and architectural problems, and mobilised architectural production. They have contributed to a renewed faith in architecture " (Arslan, 2006).

The imagined ideal city, ideal life shows that the concept of utopia dates back much further. The depiction of the utopian perspective of the future in architecture shows the endeavour to create a new human and order by utilising the power of industrial production. According to Hasol, utopia is 'Projects that are deemed impossible to realise due to social, economic or technological reasons and that push the limits of reason and logic fall within the scope of utopian architecture. These projects generally aim to change the city and life, to bring an ideal world order. We can also call them dream architecture. Thinking is at the root of dreaming. Utopia is more common in thinking societies (Hasol, 2000). There are certain common facts and concepts in the formation of utopia, which develops with forward-looking dynamic searches. While changing and developing architecture constructs the physical environment, it also constructs a new social order. Utopias that oppose the existing order produce new solutions in architecture with alternative life proposals as a result of the modernisation process.

While discussing the destructive effect of experimental designs in cooperation with technology, the role of architectural practice and the architect has changed over time, and the ease in the design and production process with the use of technology and the decrease in the need for manpower have also changed the balances in architecture. In this context, the study examines how the understanding of experimental architecture has evolved from past to present, while investigating the development process of production and design methods. By emphasising the importance of digital production,

which has radically affected architecture, it also draws attention to the spatial fiction that emerges at the point where experimentation and design merge. The aim is to address the evolutionary process of 'product' and 'space' in this period when design and production processes have changed and developed, and the boundaries of the utopian projects of the past that remained on paper are blurred today.

### 3. ARCHIGRAM

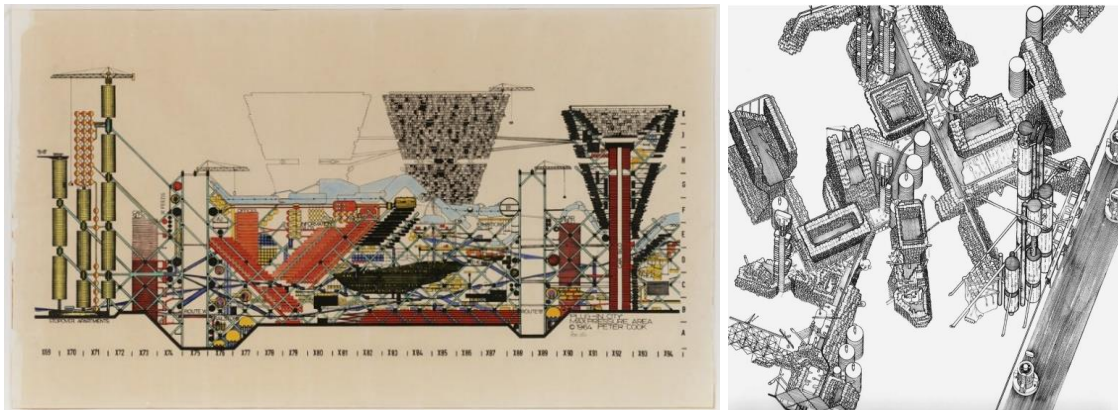
'Experimentalism', which seeks new tools and methods and aims to create change, can be encountered in every field. This concept, which was first introduced in 1970 with the book 'Experimental Architecture' written by Peter Cook, has taken its place in the history of architecture with the technology-inspired 'Archigram' group, which was put forward with neofuturistic and hypothetical projects, and exhibits a stance that breaks the standard in line with experimentation and fictionalism. The Plug-in City project is a mega structure that inspired the first generation of modernisers and is one of the iconic works of the group.

Archigram explains its basic idea as follows: "In the second half of the twentieth century, one by one, the outdated gods are being overthrown. Old dogmas and rotten principles are becoming inadequate and invalid. We are researching a brand new language, a brand new thought, in parallel with space capsules, calculators and devices of the electro-atomic age...." (Gürel, 1968) Peter Cook's 'We are interested in buildings that can be thrown away, buildings that can be moved from place to place, environments that are not filled with built architectural forms...." (Kronenburg, 1997), the concept of 'movement' is present in many locations and volumes and is reduced to the movement of buildings and the environment. From the first to the last project, the projects shaped around the concepts of movement and mobility are identified with the group's unity and belonging to their ideas. Woods argues that the process is more valuable than the result in experimentation and that it is more important to think and its free evolution without any limits. Woods, who put forward many utopian and futuristic projects, expresses the process itself and the thoughts and searches that emerge in the process as the experiment itself. His designs are a criticism against the existing architecture.

In the Archigram utopia, there are certain goals imagined for the future. In Akın Sevinç's book 'Imaginary People's Projects', it is stated that Peter Cook, in his paper 'Eight Alternatives for the Future' presented at the conference on 'Environment and Architecture' in London in October 1960, listed the eight characteristics of the world of the future as follows: Accelerated, Expendable Environments, Comfortable Living, Personalised, Sensitive, Offering Certain Qualities, Softer, Occurring in the Desired Place (Sevinç, 2004).





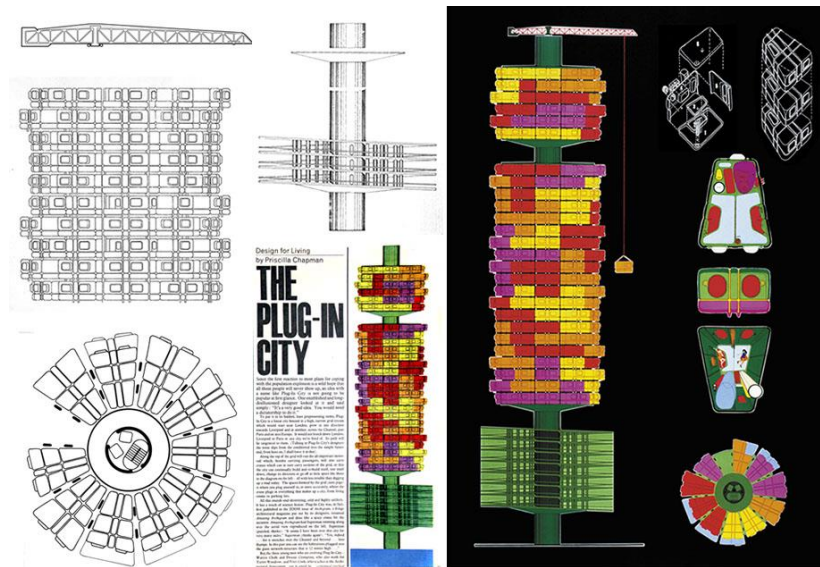


**Figure 2.** Plug-in City Project Drawings, (Cook, 1999)

The iconic urban interpretation Plug-in City is the project that best summarises the ideological pursuits of Archigram's early years (Figure 2). Plug-in City is by no means a finished urban design. These urban experiments take change as the main factor that constitutes the identity of the city and try to formulate the physical construction of the city through change. Although it is a rather radical proposal, Plug-in City does not propose a new urban construction to replace the existing city. Peter Cook treats the city as an environment for experimentation rather than a final product and uses the concept of the city as a plane where spatial ideas can breed (Cook, 1999).

Moving away from large structures, the concept of kit-parts began to blossom with Archigram's quieter proposals that set out to 'dematerialise' or 'uproot' architecture and enclosure. The preferred components were reduced in size, stiffness and resistance, moving from the 'kit' to the 'capsule' model and the use of compressed air (Sadler, 2005).

Plug-in City consists of a network design that covers a large part of Britain on the map and connects the island from end to end. Cook says that in this network, every point of the network can be reached with the necessary means of transport, while units are placed at certain points of the network to meet the needs. With the monorail network, these units can be changed and renewed over time. "The emerging dynamic and variable city brings with it a very new urban understanding. Plug-in City aims to disconnect the urban experience from physical and mental triggers. If urbanism traditionally designs the static and ideal architectural object, Plug-in City treats architecture as an event, and the city can only exist through the active participation of its inhabitants" (Sadler, 2005). Archigram also considers many spaces (housing, workplace, entertainment centre...) as disposable consumer goods and expresses this idea in most of their projects with concepts such as disposable, plug-in, plug-out.



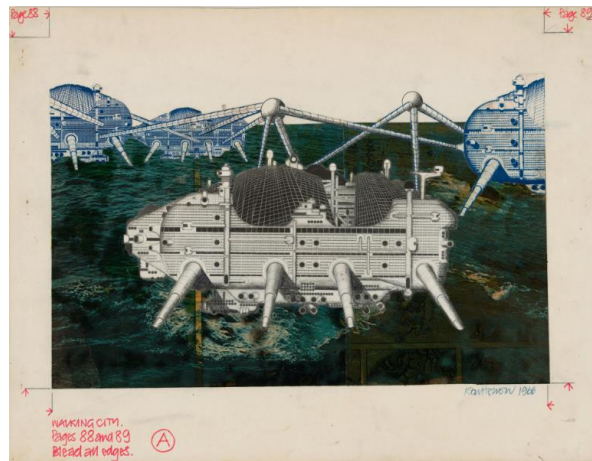
**Figure 3.** Capsule Home Plans and Details, (Archigram, 2023)

In parallel with the 'Plug-in City' project, Warren Chalk developed 'Capsule Homes' and integrated the design into the project (Figure 3). 'Plug-in City' is the first example of Archigram's efforts to make construction technology the main factor of architecture. These designed capsules are attached to the main structure by means of cranes. These units, which produce flexible solutions for people in small volumes, can also be easily personalised and relocated when necessary. Unlike traditional housing, capsules do not include inefficient and unnecessary spaces. It acts as a part of the fiction with the principle of maximum efficiency in minimum space.

### 3.3. Walking City (1964)

'Ron Herron's 'Walking City' project is only a pictorial form, a giant structure with a robot-like character that moves around the world with telescopic legs (Kronenburg, 1997) (Figure 4) "Walking City" is only an image. How it will walk on the earth, how such a giant structure will move is unknown. Such details are not particularly emphasised. Archigram states that responding to such details would contradict the internal logic of utopia. They recognise that what they produce is a simulation and do not attempt to mask it with a pseudo-realism. They realise that utopia loses much of its utopianism when it is extended to a universal project (Tanyeli, 2005). Therefore, everything is presented as fantasies that cannot be realised in the near future.



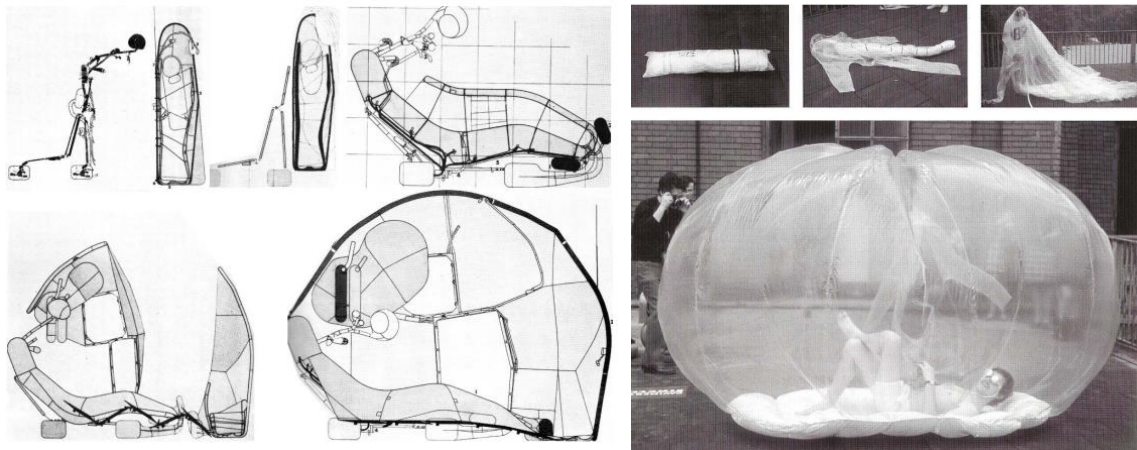


**Figure 4.** Walking City, (MoMA, 1966)

In Walking City, the concepts of human, space, community, movement and communication move together. As the city can change, the users of the city can also change. With its integrated telescopic arms and legs, it appears as a project in which the city, architecture, mechanics and structure move together by pushing the concept of boundary without being bound to an area. This city, where housing, workplaces, public and private services coexist, is a different example of a city design that changes and moves by walking both on land and in water.

### 3.4. Cuchicle (1966) and Suitaloon (1967)

'Cuchicle', designed by Michael Webb in 1966, is a design that allows the unit that meets the shelter and basic needs of the individual to be carried with it. It is a unit that offers all kinds of services and can be installed at any desired location, and later on it was developed and 'suitaloon' project was designed (Figure 5) 'Archigram proposes more personalised shelters as an alternative to standard housing in the city. Housing suitable for the highly mobile people of our age, which can be built anywhere. In Archigram's future vision, the mobility of people will increase. People who constantly change jobs and cities will have to change their residences. Archigram's proposal is housing that can be built anywhere. This approach also shakes the traditional architectural approach that the architecture of each place is unique to that place' (Arslan, 2006).



**Figure 5.** Michael Webb, 'Cushicle', 1966 (Archigram, 2023) and 'Suitaloon', 1967, Milano Trienal, (Sadler, 2005)

The unit is supported by the spine system when it is switched on and off from two main parts. It carries food, water, projection TV and heating equipment. There are compartments that can meet different needs with the addition of service sections and extra devices. Cushicle, which creates a customisable storage area, is the answer to how a dress will respond to the need for shelter.

'The proposal responds to the concept of the housing capsule, one of the main cores of Archigram proposals. As Peter Cook noted in 1967, the pre-packaged frozen lunch was a basic expression of human need and a symbol of its efficient interpretation. In this context, Webb's projects are the maximum expression of this new dogma' (Arslan, 2006). Suitaloon, a wearable design, can be defined as a minimal home. In the Cushicle project, the design created with the logic of a car expresses the environment of the individual, but Suitaloon can fit all the necessary services into a dress.

### 3.5. Experimental Architecture Effects

It is a fact that post-Archigram architecture and architects were influenced by these formations and ideas (Figure 6). After 1970, futuristic and utopian fictions are based on the influences initiated by this group. Tanyeli describes the group's influence on architecture as follows: "Archigram pushed the modernist logic in architecture and the optimistic belief in the endlessness of technological development to the limit. It pushed it so far that later generations would never believe that architecture could build the world in a brand new way starting from scratch with the confidence of its predecessors. In other words, Archigram's collection of non-serious comics is much more profound than the simple stories told in it. The unintended opening that Archigram, whose theoretical imagination was very limited, brought to popular culture, which Adorno and others condemned with their complex theoretical acrobatics, was very effective in terms of its effects on the future. Perhaps it is even

possible to think of 20th century architecture in two phases, before and after Archigram' (Tanyeli, 2005).



**Figure 6.** Today Walking City Visualization by Atkinson+Co(Atkinson+CO, 2017)

Based on the dystopian novel published in 2001 by the British author Philip Reeve, the 'steampunk' style film about people struggling to survive in an uncertain future after a catastrophe is another contemporary example inspired by the Walking City design. The cities that managed to survive after various environmental disasters brought with them the necessity of building on walking pallets and wheels. Thus, cities have become able to relocate to obtain resources and use force when necessary (Figure 7).



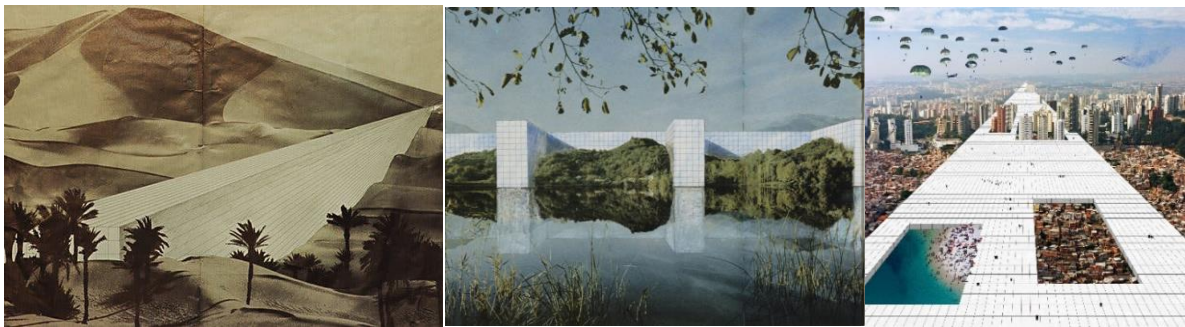
**Figure 7.** Walking Cities in the Mortal Engines Film (Gonzalez, 2018)

Nowadays, portability, flexibility and modularity are the primary features of the structures subject to the projects. Capsule houses, hotels, inflatable, portable shelters... are at the stage of being produced and experienced with the development of production techniques in experimental architecture and offer functional solutions to individuals. In addition, it is envisaged that a 'utopia' universe can be created by blurring the boundaries of possibility with futuristic and progressive designs in virtual spaces.



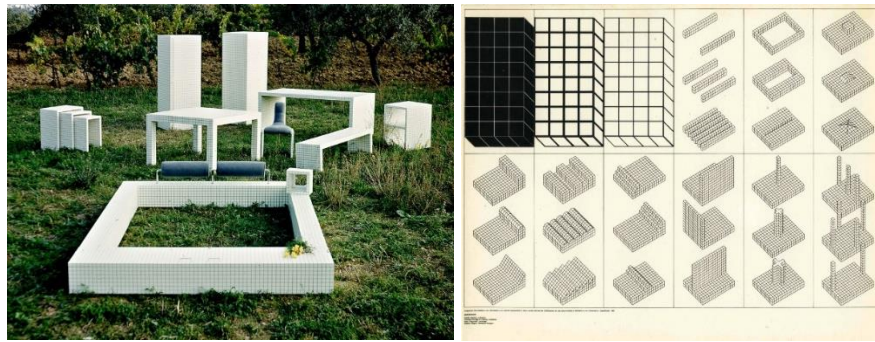
#### 4. SUPERSTUDIO

Superstudio is a conceptual architectural firm founded in Florence, Italy in 1966 by Adolf Natalini and Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, later joined by Roberto Magris, Gian Piero Frassinelli, Alessandro Magris and Alessandro Poli. The group, together with Archizoom, another organisation that continued the same experimental research in different forms, presented itself with the exhibition *Superarchitettura* and is one of the most important formations of the design movement of the radical period of the late 1960s in Italy. Aiming at social changes through architecture and design, they supported their experience with a wide range of interests. Photography, painting, graphics, industrial design, film-making, graphic design, industrial design, film-making and many other forms of into put forward their ideas.



**Figure 8.** Continuous Monument Exhibition (Imam, 2021)

Superstudio found the mediocrity of modern architecture, steel frames and concrete boring, and imagined utopian futures. There is a grid pattern in almost all of their projects, in which old cultures are eliminated, a mega design far from contemporary city plans and physical buildings, and there is a massive structure that surrounds the world. Expressing themselves through imaginary collages, abstract ideas, and gridded visuals, the group has suggested that the role of the designer, the political and social dynamics of the period, and the opposition to consumption should focus on the basic needs of individuals. With an understanding of design that would serve everyone and represent the whole world, they proceeded with basic and natural forms. A series of photographic collages called 'Continuous Monument' depicts a monolithic shape that cuts across deserts, spans the Grand Canyon and floats on the Hudson River to superimpose the grid of Lower Manhattan with its own lattice design (Figure 8). The unstoppable progression of this form across natural and urban landscapes seems to warn against the blinding effect of clean modern lines and the dangers of uncontrolled urban expansion' (Imam, 2021). There are also furniture series where these ideas and the grid system are applied (Figure 9).



**Figure 9.** Misura Furniture Series (Domus, 2011)

## 5. CONCLUSION

Scientific and technological developments have played an active role in designing the construction of the new age. While exploring new design possibilities, past and present design understanding has led to the formation of new alternative lifestyles with a futuristic thinking system. With the expansion of the limits of applicability of projects that remain on paper and whose possibility of implementation is not foreseen, it has affected the design process by creating impulses of thought that do not seem impossible in the future.

Developments in social life and the city as a physical space, new spatial searches, differentiation of daily life practices, the way people comprehend life and the information field of the period have been important factors in changing the content of housing. This change in the spatial organisation of housing can be discussed through utopian propositions. Because the act of housing, which constitutes the most important ground for the discussion of the possibilities of a good life, constitutes the common content of utopian propositions produced through the dissatisfaction with the current situation and the belief that a better future can exist (Özaslan, 2020).

Experimental architecture, which creates its own conceptual infrastructure, always acts by thinking ahead. With the importance that experimental architecture attaches to the act of thought, the end product is not always important. The need for a search, process, foresight, rebellion to be important and the uncertainty of whether the result will always be useful or not emphasises that the act of thinking in experimentalism is completely valuable and useful. Even if the projects that remain on paper seem impossible to be realised in some cases, they become a source of inspiration in some cases by bringing the discussion to the agenda.

The utopian design understanding, which is between fictional and experimental space, also aims to reveal new actions both in the spaces that are sought and desired to be reached for the future and in



the experiences desired to be given to the individual. After industrialisation, it is aimed to reach the ideal life style with the understanding that constructs the city as a living machine. With the possibilities brought by mass and cheap production, the limits of design have been expanded with a forward-looking futuristic perspective. While the search for alternative lifestyles reveals utopian suggestions, it is seen that new possibilities are open to be explored by producing the space virtually. In this way, the diversity of the experiencing action offered by the space to the person also increases. The aim of this study is to show the work of the archigram group, which acts with a futuristic, utopian design approach, the architectural style they adopt and foresee, the inspiration for many projects of modern architecture today, and the blurring of the boundaries in the utopian design approach, which is considered difficult to realise in the future.

### **Acknowledgements and Information Note**

The article complied with national and international research and publication ethics. Ethics Committee approval was not required for the study.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

### **Summary of Investigators' Declaration of Contribution**

The authors declare that they have contributed equally to the article.

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