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(Re)working the Past, (Dis)playing the Future. Italy: The New Domestic Landscape at MoMA, 1972

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Abstract: Would a work—a painting, a building, a chair or a display—always operate within the framework of human intention? To bring thinking into the future, there is a need for future-focused methodologies. In this paper I will re-work the past by addressing the agency beyond human intention. By using the 1972 MoMA exhibition "Italy: The New Domestic Landscape" as the empirical case, the paper will show how not only humans conceptualize reality, but things themselves have the capacity to display the future.

Keywords: nonhuman agency; ontology; display; climate change

In July 1972 journalist Bill Marvel of *The National Observer* visited the most talked about NYC event of the summer, the groundbreaking exhibition at the MoMA, "Italy: The New Domestic Landscape" (INDL).[1] The exhibition displayed both the achievements and the problems of Italian design, it displayed objects and environments, it displayed utopia and dystopia, it displayed both the past and the future, and, it displayed the making and unmaking of—in the words of *The New York Times*—"…our ultimate environment, the planet earth" (Skurka, 1972). In Bill Marvel's review, this uncertainty and ambiguity of what exactly

[1] As described in the press, INDL was hitherto the largest and most expensive exhibition at the museum: "On the morning of May 26, 1972, anyone passing the New York's Museum of Modern Art in West 53rd St., would have seen a great many people excitedly awaiting the opening of the biggest and most expensive exhibition ever given at the Museum. The exited wait for this colossal event was not at all dampened by the news spread by the press" (Natalini, 1972). "There is no doubt that 'Italy: The New Domestic Landscape' is a dazzling show, perhaps the most complex and ambitious that the Museum of Modern Art has mounted so far" (Degener, 1972).

was on display permeated the text. In the ingress of the review Marvel captured not only an uncertainty of the role of designers, but also an ontological uncertainty of the role of things:

> "Are designers the solution, or are they part of the problem? Can designers bring on the millennium by creating objects that are rational humane, or have designers already cluttered our lives with too many things we don't need, things that waste resources and space and that end up *owning us*?" (Marvel, 1972, my emphasis)

Design is not simply a series of stylistic operations, but conveys a more fundamental, a more encompassing understanding of the relations and interactions between humans and the world. Design mediates a play between human and nonhuman objects. Also, a temporal notion is at work. Design is working with the past and playing with the future. Yet, this definition must be followed by a political one. Design is always in conflict between moral, political and even ontological disputes. Is it so, then, that designers make things that end up *owning us*?

The world in which we now live is different than before. This arguably banal statement is not, however, meant in a metaphorical and general sense but rather in literal one referring to the geological era of the Anthropocene in which human presence and impact into the world is now an irreversible matter of fact.[2] Furthermore, an indisputable fact is that this geological change will have vast ontological implications. In the Anthropocene, the long-held barriers between *nature* and *culture* are breaking down. The subject/object dualism inherited from the Enlightenment, subtly but radically shifted thought about reality from questions of ontology (being) to questions about epistemology (knowing). Knowing was placed before being, epistemology before ontology, and this privileged humans over all other objects, which were defined in terms of their relationship to human subjects. Put briefly, objects existed only by the virtue of how they were known and signified by human subjects. Within recent years, however, certain fields of research within the humanities have objected to this Cartesian dualism, and movements within 'the material turn' such as new materialism/thing theory, ANT and object-oriented ontology have suggested a corrective.

Humans have exploited natural resources to the point of catastrophe. Scholars such as Timothy Morton, Jane Bennett and Manuel DeLanda have suggested that in order to confront the catastrophe there is a need to destabilize the ontological hierarchy inherited from Western Enlightenment philosophy that established humans as the superior power in the world. Global warming is inflicting every aspect of the world, also within academic research. How do we establish a posthumanist approach to design history?

In design research ANT has received severe resonance, and within the last two decades many scholars have contributed to show how designed objects is constituted by both human and nonhuman actants—with the special issue of *CoDesign* "Designing Things Together: Intersections of Co-Design and Actor-Network Theory" as the most recent example. In ANT,

[2] "The Anthropocene" were coined as both concept and term in the year 2000, by the Nobel Prize-winning Dutch chemist Paul J. Crutzen.

the world exists of both humans and nonhumans who in turn are connected through a network of relations—a dynamic immaterial structure where nothing starts and nothing ends: only connections and relations in motion. The actors in actor-network theory can be compared to knots in this complex *rhizome* and can be either human or nonhuman. In ANT all entities (human and nonhuman) are seen as active contributors that possess agency to act the same way humans do. Action is thus an effect by the relations in the network and all action must be considered relational and intertwined in social practices. As such, entities are a *relational effect* of its association with other entities, as John Law explains: "…entities have no inherent qualities: essentialist divisions are thrown out on the bonfire of dualisms… there are no divisions" (Law & Hassard, 1999, p. 3). Echoing Law, this approach is utilized to connect ANT and participatory design in the special issue of *CoDesign*: "In ANT, things do not have essential or absolute qualities. On the contrary, they are formed in collectives of other things, of actor-networks and are always intimately entangled in practices" (Andersen, Danholt, Halskov, Hansen, & Lauritsen, 2015). However, as suggested by Bill Brown in the anthology *Things*, things exist independently of—or adjacent to—human perception of the things (Brown, 2004). This argument is also the kernel of a recent development in philosophy, object-oriented ontology. Things are not dependent on how they appear to *us*, they are not constructed by human behavior or are a result of social relations. Things are entities which exist in their own right, and are not confined by human intention. By the act of emphasizing *being*—and not *knowing*—theorists within object-oriented ontology argues that nonhumans will then exist in their own right and not as mere backgrounds for human representations. This theoretical approach evokes a posthumanist reality where humans become one thing among all other things. However, this does not necessarily imply ontological equality. Different objects in different contexts can assume greater or lesser importance, but essentially, this philosophical approach decenters humans. In the Anthropocene, the relationship between design and nature needs to be reworked. We need a deeper understanding how both human and nonhuman agents is working and playing in different situations. For no object exists merely as a representation for some other object. No object exists by virtue of its correlation to some subject. Objects are agents, existing and acting in their own right, and if we want to explore and understand an event, for instance, a display, we must give an empirical account for the agency of both humans and nonhumans. In this paper, Brown's approach will form the outset of the inquiry which in turn aims to explore how design historical research can advance towards a destabilization of human hierarchy.

Research conducted in the theoretical framework of a posthumanist reality, is often criticized for not have much to offer except to *say* that nonhumans have as much agency as humans do. In humanistic research over the last decade there have been many attempts to locate nonhuman agency, and many attempts have been made to move beyond what Quentin Meillassoux calls *correlationism* (Meillassoux, 2008).[3] Do things; a mug, my

[3] See also (Barad, 2007; Bogost, 2012; Olsen, 2010).

computer, a house, waste, the ozone layer, a display, Harry Potter, and absence, have as much agency as humans do? If this rule holds true, it must be somehow possible to locate it, even also prove it historically. My claim is that it is not enough to *emphasize* being over knowing, and it is not sufficient to merely establish the ontological fact. This article will claim that the display at MoMA brought a new ontology into the world, and that this *bringing into the world* happened beyond human conception. To give a persuasive account of *agency* and how it is displayed through materials there is a need to go back in time. In this paper I will attempt to locate the nonhuman agency in INDL on two different levels. First, in one of the works on display: Gaetano Pesce's environment *The Period of the Great Contaminations* and then, in the exhibition itself. In this paper I will go back to the future, or at least, where the future was displayed, back to an elevator shaft at the MoMA in 1972, where the nonhuman agency of the material evoked both climate change and a posthumanist reality.

1. Human agency

"Everybody who designed every chair you ever sat in or every house you ever heard of came to the invitational opening Tuesday night" (Conroy, 1972). The vernissage of "Italy: The New Domestic Landscape" was, according to the press, the event of the summer. The designer Marcel Breuer was cited in *The Washington Post* describing the display "clever, imaginative and playful." Charles Eames, I.M. Pei and Philip Johnson were quoted by the same newspaper as impressed by the exhibition's bold theoretical postulations (Conroy, 1972). *The New York Times* described the exhibition as the largest in MoMA's history: "… the provocative ideas represented in the Italian show at the MoMA, may well make this the most exciting and controversial design and architectural exhibition seen in many decades" (Reif, 1972). The exhibition was *hitherto* one of the most visited shows at MoMA: "That so many people came back to see this *Supershow* so many times is a fact that the museum is proud of […] an unusually high percentage of the total 266,206 ticket buyers were on their second—or more—time around" (DeNeve, 1972).

Curator of Design at MoMA, the young Argentinian architect Emilio Ambasz—who had planned the exhibition for several years—used Italy as a micro-model where a wide range of possibilities, limitations and critical issues of design were brought into sharp focus. As stated in the exhibition catalogue: "The purpose of this exhibition, therefore, is not only to report on the current developments in Italian design, but to use these as a concrete frame of reference for a number of issues of concern to designers all over the world" (Ambasz, 1972a, p. 19). The exhibition addressed the ever more pressing global challenges concerning consumption, poverty and pollution. One reviewer even criticized INDL for being too concerned with the problems of the world: "But the whole works—exhibit, catalog, items on display—is also an example of the hubris that reigns these days in the design profession, both conservative and radical wings. Anyone who has attended one of the big design

confabs at Aspen has been caught up in the sweaty atmosphere of save-the-world evangelism" (Marvel, 1972).

In both design and architecture history INDL is often referred to as a pioneering and controversial exhibition.[4] The exhibition marked a final end to the sleek Scandinavian design idiom and introduced and established Italian design—with its bold colors, playful idiom, synthetic materials and advanced molding techniques—as the most significant design discourse (Coles & Rossi, 2013). The exhibition title led one to expect a display of objects and pragmatic design solutions for the domestic, everyday environment. However, the press described the objects as futuristic solutions that nobody would want in their home. There were many reasons why the display was considered controversial. First, the exhibition had a clear political agenda. The design groups Superstudio, Archizoom and Gruppo Strum opposed the act of design: the world did not need more objects, and all three design groups participated in the exhibition with radical anti-design. Second, curator Emilio Ambasz had turned MoMA into a 'cybertopia' where TV screens, projectors, movies, sound installations, music, and digital texts invited audience into an encompassing multimedia experience. And finally, the exhibition was founded on an ambitious theoretical premise that had been articulated at Ambasz' symposium "Institutions for a Post-Technological Society" at MoMA 8-9 January 1972. The notable list of conference participants included the most distinguished scholars in European and American intellectual discourse at the time.[5] The theoretical framework that suffused the exhibition was cybernetics, theories of networks, social psychology, semiotics, and as stated in the catalogue "the metaphysics of the nonhuman environment."[6]

1.1 Dark is the atmosphere. The finality of history

The exhibition was divided into two sections, the exhibition started in the MoMA Garden with the section entitled "Objects" and ended inside the museum with the "Environments" section. The "Objects" section in the Garden displayed 180 commercial products of the most acclaimed Italian designers of the late 1960s until 1972 (Figure 1). The objects were mounted in tall mini-skyscraper wood cases, behind glass windows. Several reviewers questioned the meaning of the evident commodity fetishism of luxury products in an exhibition that problematized consumer society. Although reviewers almost unanimously gave critical acclaim to the innovative, creative, elegant and irresistible Italian products, the

[4] For research on the exhibition see: chapter 5 "Italian Design and the New Political Landscape" in (Scott, 2010, pp. 116-149).

[5] As described by Scott: The Advisory Board for the conference, who also functioned as the peer-review committee, included Stanford Anderson, Rosalind Krauss, Carl Schorske, Peter Eisenman, Joseph Rykwert, Abraham Moles, Suzanne Keller and Emilio Ambasz. Conference participants were Henri Lefebvre, Alain Touraine, Michel Foucault, Martin Pawley, Octavio Paz, Tomás Maldonado, Umberto Eco, Hannah Arendt, Jean Baudrillard, Christopher Alexander, Gyorgy Kepes, Manuel Castells, Gillo Dorfles, Ronald Dworkin, Meyer Schapiro, Sheldon Wolin, Anatol Rapoport, Richard L. Meier. Those who reluctantly declined the invitation on account of other commitments included Louis Althusser, Roman Jakobsen, and Roland Barthes.

[6] See (Scott, 2010).

display in the Garden was interpreted as an *ironic* comment on the present-day consumer society.

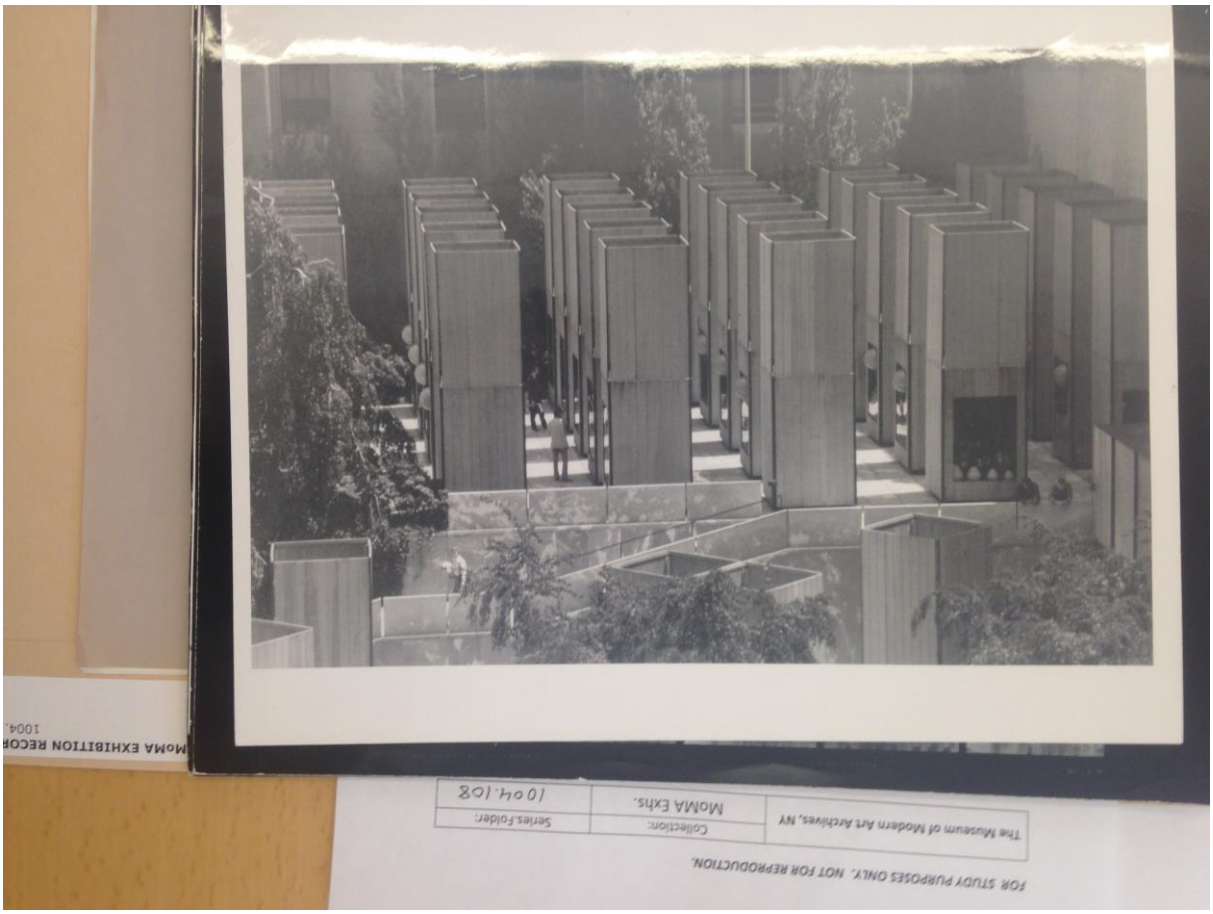

Figure 1: Installation view of the exhibition "Italy: The New Domestic Landscape", MoMA, New York, 26 May to 11 September 1972. Photo: Ingrid Halland Rashidi/MoMA Archive.

As Adolfo Natalini, one of the founders of Superstudio, noted: "Italian design, shut up in the wooden towers of a parody of Manhattan […] is shown in these pharaonic chambers through a series of heroic acts, of grand gestures perhaps, bravura pieces that under the spotlights become the last act of a mysterious melodrama" (Natalini, 1972, p. 469). Ambasz was, together with his assistant Thomas Czarnowski, responsible for the design of the wooden skyscraper cases that according to critic Rose DeNeve was "to symbolize the transitory yet beautiful nature of the Objects, and created the illusion of a giant and grotesque Fifth Avenue of Italian design" (DeNeve, 1972). Although the individual commercial objects were admired by both visitors and the press, there was a general impression amongst the reviewers that the objects were too avant-garde. The objects on display were not relatable to ordinary people, as one visitor uttered: the objects "dehumanized the furnishings."[7]

[7] Textile designer Jack Lenor Larsen quoted in (Huxtable, 1972).

The second part of the exhibition was 11 specially commissioned full-scale environments displayed in the entire East Wing of the museum. Ambasz had put together a 'Call for participation' which had been sent out to invited designers such as Ettore Sottsass, Joe Colombo, Gae Aluenti, Mario Bellini and Marco Zanuso. The design process commenced with the designers elaborating their designs in drawings and texts. Then Ambasz responded to almost all of the propositions with a request of moving further into the unknown.[8] He demanded more radical solutions and more futuristic thinking. The final 11 environments presented in the museum answered Ambasz' directions in a highly diverse and multifaceted way, but although environments were uttermost diverse and multifaceted design solutions, they all seemed to have references to a futuristic dystopia. One upset visitor wrote to the museum: "The exhibition is cleverly installed […], but it seems to me horrible and repulsive. I would not been caught dead in any of those 'environments', and I would certainly not live in any of them."[9] A journalist reported that the display "tends to recall astronauts' descriptions of the Moon as a lonely and dangerous place" ("Letter from America," 1972). The reviewers' references to outer space and to Sci-Fi movies, such as Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *A Clockwork's Orange,* were frequent. *The Building Design* described the exhibition as a stunning spectacle, however "'Clockwork Orange' is its parallel. Dark is the atmosphere; chill the air. Cool, plastic and flashing" (Kay, 1972). Likewise, in another review the exhibition "resemble[d] nothing [more] as a lunar landscape—or furnishings out of some futuristic spaceship" (DeNeve, 1972). Furthermore, one reviewer commented that humans apparently didn't belong in this environment: "[The display] is admirably efficient. But, like so many of the immaculate living spaces on display and the sterile little plastic things meant to furnish them, it leaves very little room for human cussedness" (Marvel, 1972). And finally, *Vogue* recommended the exhibition to their readers: "For a glimpse of, in H.G. Wells's words, 'Things to come', see *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*. It's a shocker, an eye-opener, and an informative, beautifully conceived show that defines the esthetic of the space age for the first time" (Rose, 1972).

The "Environments" section was considered ambiguous, intriguing and complex. As written in *Casabella*: "[…] the environments functioned as an instrument of criticism to reinforce doubts of the finality or relativity of history. The projection into the future goes beyond predictable future goals and utopia itself" ("Radical Design," 1972). The projection into the future was emphasized by a pervasive techno-utopia that seemed to cause a somewhat disturbing effect: "The very layout of the show is a sign of the problem, for it is itself grossly overdesigned. Visitors are not invited in to take a look around and form some ideas; they are firmly directed through a program" (Marvel, 1972). The program in question was a brand-new multimedia system by the manufacturer Olivetti. *The Implicor System* was

[8] Ambasz' response to Joe Colombo initial design was as follows: "The Review Committee has met to consider the proposals submitted to it. Although they liked the approach that yours represents, they are aware that it belongs to an already known family of solutions." Letter from Ambasz to Colombo, 06.13.1971. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY. MoMA Exhs. 1004.10.

[9] Letter signed 'Your cantankerous Member'. The Museums of Modern Art Archives, NY. MoMA Exhs. 1004.147

present in several parts of the "Environment" section and was put together by the artist Umberto Bignardi, who had selected photographs of varied architectural, anthropological and political content—refined them into line drawings, and converted them into 2500 slides. The slides were programmed onto 32 slide projectors and rear projected on numerous special mirrors, which both served as viewing screens and reflected light from the opposite walls. The projections were synchronized by a studio tape unit, one track regulated the slide feed, and the other carried the audio portion to the amplifier and the speakers.[10]

Finally, in the review entitled "Home Was Never Like This" the journalist Norma Skurka concluded with the following postulate: "[The environments on display] are meant to shock us into changing outmode ideas about the way we live. Their message? Our very lives depend on curbing consumption and limiting expansion in order to preserve our ultimate environment, the planet earth" (Skurka, 1972).

1.2 The Period of the Great Contaminations

One of the environments on display was a two-level room cast in brown polyurethane designed by Gaetano Pesce (Figure 2). The structure was isolated from the other environments and mounted at the bottom of an elevator shaft on the ground floor in the East Wing. Audience could enter the claustrophobic square bunker, and apart from two video screens that showed two naked people walking around in the bunker, the environment didn't contain any objects or furniture. The work played with the notion of temporality. The bunker was discovered underground in northern Italy in an archaeological excavation in the year AD 3000 and the archeologist was Pesce himself. After researching the underground shelter, the archaeologist assigned the structure to the year 2000 and the room was then completely excavated and moved to MoMA. The reason why humans had to seek shelter underground in the year 2000 was not quite clear—but the archeologist concluded that an immense cataclysm must have been a factor. The archeologist stated that it somehow had become impossible for humans to breathe, and they had to withdraw from the surface of the earth. *The New York Times* quoted the wife of the Italian ambassador, Mrs. Egidio Ortona, who described her feeling when experiencing the environment: "…an extreme point of view—a warning of what might happen if we are not careful"(Huxtable, 1972).

[10] All information on Olivetti's Implicor System, see MoMA Exhs, 1004.15.

Figure 2 : Reproduction of Gaetano Pesce's environment, scale 1:10. Photo: Centre Pompidou.

2. Nonhuman agency

Would a work—a painting, a building, a chair or a display—always operate within the framework of human intention? To bring *thinking* into the future, there is a need for future-focused methodologies. In this section I will re-work the past by addressing the agency beyond human intention. By using "Italy: The New Domestic Landscape" as the empirical case, I will show how not only humans conceptualize reality, but that things themselves have the capacity to display the future. As it happens, the environments in INDL are allowing this approach *through their design*. In the previously mentioned "Design Program" Emilio Ambasz wrote the following beneath the subtitle "The metaphysics of the nonhuman environment":

> "[…] the environment[s] should be so designed as to permit us to improvise ceremonies and gestures, the meaning of which we need not to be conscious of at the time of their spontaneous performance, but of which we may become aware afterward, when we reinterpret them. Underlying the proposal of such a feasible, nonrepressive environmental arrangement is the basic premise that *man's actions and visions are irrational*; only after the word is pronounced and the *deed committed can we assign it a possible logical structure to describe its purposes and explain its laws."* (Ambasz, 1972b, p. 145, my emphasis)

In the INDL exhibition the metaphysics of the nonhuman environment takes its departure from this statement. Inscribed in the design, then, is the basic premise that man's actions and visions are irrational. This premise allows for an inquiry of the nonhuman agency of Gaetano Pesce's environment and in the exhibition itself. According to Ambasz, both his own and Pesce's actions are thus irrational, and only when the deed of designing the environment (and the exhibition) is *committed*, it becomes possible to "describe its purposes and explain its laws". To depend solely on human agency when scrutinizing the purposes of the INDL exhibition, would therefore lead to an irrational conclusion. In the following, I will advance towards describing and explaining the metaphysics of the nonhuman environment, in respectively, Pesce's environment and in INDL itself. My claim will be that the nonhuman agency is not necessarily confined by human intention, and that the material did something on its own that both Pesce and Ambasz did not anticipate.

2.1 To evoke a situation

In Gaetano Pesce's dystopian environment humans had to withdraw from the surface of the earth by the year 2000. Pesce's *intention* of the exact reason to why humans had to withdraw from the earth's surface was unclear. The archeologist from the year 3000 could only speculate on why it was impossible to breath and humans had to isolate themselves in a plastic bunker. In the catalogue Pesce (or is it the archeologist from AD 3000?) is listing possible, but vague, situations. Amongst many situations, we can read: "Incompatibility between human environment and the atmosphere", "Need for isolation", "Rejection of human contact", "Non-communication as a characteristic of life", "Decline of the technological dream", "Insecurity as the prospect of the future", "Tendency to overcome fear through inflating the idea of death" (Ambasz, 1972a, p. 216). However, the brown polyurethane bunker, unintendedly, confirmed that the situation in question was in fact *global warming*. Humans had to withdraw from the surface of the earth, and isolate themselves in the plastic bunker because human beings had destroyed our ultimate environment—planet earth. Moreover, Pesce himself confirmed this in a talk, recorded on video, with Peter Lang at The Architecture Foundation in 2013:

> "When I presented this project, I presented it as an archaeologist. Not as a designer, not as an architect. I am an archaeologist from the year 3000 discovering in north of Italy, underground, in a huge cavern, an empty cavern. Supposedly from oil. This cavern is empty. Three years later in Europe, there was the crisis of oil. [...] I said 'people had decided to go and live inside earth.' Why? Maybe because outside [it] is impossible to breath. Interesting, later, it came out, the story of the pollution—it was interesting. Because with a project you are able to evoke a situation that was coming two or three years later."[11]

At a first glance, this statement might not seem very controversial. Pesce is saying that pollution was not one of his (the archeologist) situations of why people needed to withdraw

[11] Gaetano Pesce in conversation with Peter Lang. "Architecture on Film: Italy – The New Domestic Landscape, MoMA, 1972 + Q&A with Gaetano Pesce and Peter Lang." The Architecture Foundation 28.11.2013.

from the surface of the earth. He had suggested that one of the possible situations was an *"incompatibility* between human environment and the atmosphere", but at the time, pollution was not thought of as one of the reasons for the incompatibility. However, the crisis of oil emerged, and the story of pollution became more pervasive, and the work itself came to display its own intentions. Yet, in this quote, Pesce is not only adding and confirming something unintended, he is re-working causality. Pesce is saying that the project "evoked a situation that was coming two or three years later". Evoke, meaning to draw forth, or produce, or to summon—that is to request to appear.[12] Did the environment cause global warming? Did the agency of the polyurethane bunker at MoMA itself evoke the oil crisis, pollution and global warming? Then, the causality would be reversed. The effect then causes the cause. In that situation, *The Period of the Great Contaminations* evoked the period of the great contaminations. This conclusion would not be that far-fetched if we take the design of Pesce's environment into consideration. The environment was, in fact, designed so that actions *at the time* would be irrational, but when the deed was committed, it became possible to describe its purposes and to explain its laws. Through design, then, through Pesce's dystopian environment, the environmental future was evoked.

2.2 People pollution

In August 1972 journalist Fred Steckhahn wrote a review of INDL in the journal *After Dark* entitled "Art, Ecology and the Future". After describing the outset and the premise of the exhibition, the criticism became harsh: "It's not the subject matter, the different approaches [to] design concept[s] or the effective display I critize [sic.], but the purpose. If this exhibition is to illustrate the design concepts, the entire show is spurious and a complete waste of time. It's obvious that these Italian designers are ignorant of the basic laws of ecology, since practically every object is made from a synthetic or plastic" (Steckhahn, 1972). Steckhahn then refers to two articles in *The New York Times*, (Sept 25th and October 2nd 1971) by the ecologist Barry Commoner, who had warned the public that all of earth's ecosystems were threatened. Echoing Commoner, Steckhahn wrote that man-made materials, such as plastics "require tremendous amount of energy to produce […] and this energy will never re-enter the eco-system". Therefore, argues Steckhahn, plastics are indestructible and cannot be recycled: "Whatever the future brings us, we can only hope it won't be more plastic" (Steckhahn, 1972). Steckhahn ended the review with a most gloomy conclusion: "I'm pessimistic as to whether man's drive to procreate will abate in ensuing decades. I hope so. More people, of course, mean more 'people pollution' and more polluting products. It's not funny, but *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* is a killer" (Steckhahn, 1972).

INDL was a killer. Like the reviewers had pointed out: this was no place for humans. Nobody would want to live in those environments. The use of synthetics and plastics dehumanized the objects. The furniture—modular systems of latex foam, steel frames, molded plastics

[12] http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=evoke&searchmode=none

shells, stacking plastic chairs and molded plastic tables—were polluting the world. 'Domestic pollution', as one of the newspaper reviews was titled. However, humans were not only polluting the world with things, but in Steckhahn's words, *with our selves*. The exhibition removed humans from the environment. Journalist Meredith Palmer, titled her review "Environmental Future Shock at MoMA", and suggested that *through design*, humans had degenerated the ontological status of ourselves: "Emilio Ambasz has put together an exhibition that changes our ideas of design, and in this prophetic implications of life in the 21st century *further reduces man's feeling of importance on this planet*, by design solutions focused on encapsulated living spaces" (Palmer, 1972, my emphasis). The intended theoretical framework of INDL was semiotics, cybernetics and communication theories, in this paper I'm re-working the past, and claim that the display, unintendedly—had a posthumanist theoretical framework and hence—evoked such a reality in itself.

The posthumanist theoretical framework manifested itself through the exhibition layout. The museum display offered a micro-model of the environment, or rather; it displayed the future of the environment ontology. First, in the Garden, it displayed the state-of-the-art situation. How things were at the time. Sleek, plastic objects were literally encapsulated into the man-made wood mini-skyscraper cases. Just as the 'Objects' section of the exhibition was an ironic postulate of the present-day consumer society, the micro-model of the environment ontology projected an ironic postulate of the present-day Cartesian dualism where humans dominate the Garden, conceptualize the objects—and thus *make* the environment. Humans moved around in the man-made Garden where objects existed only by the virtue of how they were known and signified by human subjects, and this privileged humans over all other objects. Then the audience entered the museum. The walls and ceiling were painted black, and the floor was covered with black felt. A dark atmosphere; a chill 'cybertopia' of the future. As a journalist in *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* pointed out: "Inside the Museum in a dark labyrinth—where the visitor is educated by virtual messages in movies or in television screens" (Degener, 1972). Adolfo Natalini noted: "The environments appear to us under strong and unreal lighting as funeral presences. Each is presented as a definitive testimonial on a contradictory and fluid situation. […] And each one of the eleven episodes is quite alone, with muddled history behind it, and an uncertain future" (Natalini, 1972). Not only was the design future on display, additionally, the ontological future was displayed. In the "Environments" section, the audience became immersed and overpowered by nonhumans. Olivetti's Implicor System, the isolated dark environments that floated in space, "voices from the TV films; confusing cacophony from all sides" (Scott, 2010, p. 127), the technologies and the machines evoked a posthumanist reality where humans became o*ne thing among all other things*. By exiting the man-made Garden, and entering the 'cybertopia', the future became real: the future was displayed as a result of nonhuman agency of INDL.

"Italy: The New Domestic Landscape" problematized what humans were doing to the planet and the answer was rather dystopian. Humans polluted the planet with both things and ourselves, and as a result objects ended up owning humans. Would it be irrational, then, to

suggest that these two situations are connected? That the posthumanist reality in humanistic research was evoked because of *climate change*?

2.3 Things to Come

Humans had such an immense effect on the earth that we are now considered not only a biological agent, but also a geological one.[13] *Nature* does not exist anymore (Morton, 2007). Humans are now entangled with nature. There is no return; we have polluted the world with our presence. As a result, there is no other way then to withdraw ourselves into the ontological plastic bunker, beneath the surface of the earth where humans are one thing among all other things. Gaetano Pesce's *The Period of the Great Contaminations* showed us a vision of the reality in year 2000. It seemed irrational at the time, but years later, in 2013, Pesce confirmed that the environment had evoked climate change. The environment's structure and laws became evident after the deed was committed: *The Period of the Great Contaminations* is not just the period of pollution, but the period of 'people pollution'. Pesce's environment *did* indeed evoke the future; something happened when we approached the millennium. The term *Anthropocene* was coined, and as a consequence of 'people pollution', humans had to withdraw from the earth's surface—namely; the ontological reality. Thinking within the humanities took a different direction and resulted in a paradigm shift with vast ontological implications. 'The material turn'[14] removed human agency as the essential force, and scholars such as Bruno Latour, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari and Donna Haraway laid the foundations for a new understanding of *being* that is further elaborated by authors such as Annemarie Mol, Karen Barad, Jane Bennett, Benjamin Bratton, Graham Harman, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Timothy Morton. They have all contributed to evoke a posthumanist reality, where the agency of human beings have the same ontological status as the agency of a chair, an exhibition, climate change or nothingness.

An exhibition doesn't conclude anything. The fixed relations it displays are only temporarily fixed. When the material manifestation of the temporarily fixed relations were broken—that is, when the exhibition closed and the environments were destroyed, and when MoMA's concluding press release were filed in archive box 1004.166—it wasn't finished. As I have shown in this paper, the exhibition continued to work. With Ambasz' own words: only when the deed is committed can we assign it a possible logical structure to describe its purposes and explain its laws. Things themselves; machines, chairs, plastic environments, Gaetano Pesce's environment, Gaetano Pesce himself, Olivetti's Implicor system, "Italy: The New Domestic Landscape", evoked themselves. My claim is that *design* conveys a more fundamental, a more encompassing understanding of the relations and interactions between humans and the world. And yes, *Vogue* was spot on: "For 'things to come', [go and

[13] See e.g. Catherine Malabou, "Anthropocene, a new history?" European Graduate School, 2015.
[14] As explained by Jane Bennett, the paradigm shift draws on philosophical concepts by amongst others Spinoza, Bergson, Heidegger and Latour. See (Bennett, 2010, pp. 1-10).

see] 'Italy: The New Domestic Landscape''(Rose, 1972), and as it happened—the *things did come*. The future was evoked through the display. Environmental future shock at MoMA[15]: Triumph of plastic over wood, of machine over man.[16]

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[15] Referring to the title of the review "Environmental future shock at MoMA" (Palmer, 1972).
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