

Open Mic A Conversation with Adolfo Natalini

Jonathan Bonezzi
Patrick Hickey
Timothy Jockers
Trisha Kreydt
Justin Meikle
Keyarash Montazeri
Reis Petrovich
Michael Randza
Abdullah Samarin
Caitlyn Welford


KENT STATE[®]
UNIVERSITY
FLORENCE PROGRAM

Made by students enrolled in the “Video, Media, and Architecture” class taught by professor Marco Brizzi at Kent State University in Florence in Spring 2019.

Contents

3 Biography

5 Interview

Biography

Adolfo Natalini (Pistoia, 1941). After his experience as a painter,² Natalini graduated in architecture in Florence in 1966 and founded Superstudio. The group was the initiator of the so-called Radical Architecture, one of the most important avant-garde movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Superstudio projects appeared in publications and international exhibitions and works are included in Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, the Deutsches Architekturmuseum in Frankfurt am Main, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and the Maxxi in Rome. In 1979, Natalini set up his own practice, focussing on projects for historical city centres in Italy and Europe, researching the traces of time on objects and places, and proposing a reconciliation between collective and personal memory. His works include: projects for Römerberg in Frankfurt and for the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, bank headquarters in Alzate Brianza, a computer centre in Zola Predosa, a house in Saalgasse, Frankfurt, and the Teatro della Compagnia in Florence. His published works include: *Figures of stone* (Electa, Milan 1984), *Adolfo Natalini - Architetture raccontate* (Electa, Milan 1989), *Il Teatro della Compagnia* (Anfione Zeto 1989). In 1991, with Fabrizio Natalini, he opened his firm, Natalini Architetti, in via del Salviatino.

Fabrizio Natalini, (Florence 1953) graduated in architecture in 1980, and worked with Superstudio from 1971 and with Adolfo Natalini from 1980 on projects and competitions for historic cities in Italy and abroad. In 1994, they began collaboration with Architectenburo Corinne Schrauwen (Amsterdam) and from 2008, with Abken Schrauwen Architecten (Ijsselstein). Their work includes: the Waagstraat area in Groningen, the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence, the Dorotheenhof on Manetstrasse in Leipzig, the Muzenplein in The Hague, Campi Bisenzio, the University Campus in Novoli, Florence, the Boscotondo in Helmond, the University Campus in Porta Tufi, Siena, the Het Eiland in Zwolle, Haverleij in Den Bosch, the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo and the Nuovi Uffizi Museum in Florence. Adolfo Natalini was full professor of architectural design at the Florence Faculty of Architecture. He is a member of the Order of Architects of Florence, and an honorary member of the Bund Deutscher Architekten, an Honorary Fellow American Institute of Architects, an academic of the Accademia delle Arti del Disegno of Florence,



INTERVIEW WITH

ADOLFO
NATALINI

FLORENCE 2019

The contents of this interview focused initially on Adolfo Natalini's current work and his personal experiences as a designer. These are topics that relate very much to the student's semester abroad in Florence, therefore they formed the starting positions that the students took to formulate questions. What follows is the interview between Adolfo and the students with the key intention to leave the interview as proceeded. enjoy.

VMA/ What initially inspired you to pursue a career in architecture?

Natalini | “When I was a very young guy, around 17, I wanted to be a painter, so I started producing paintings. When I was 23, I had a solo exhibition. I sold the paintings, and with that money I bought a car. Well now with the fee of the project, I was not able to buy car for myself. So I wanted to be a painter which means expressing yourself, using only your own media. But I took the paintings that were not socially relevant, and so I decided to become an architect in order to serve the people. In the years 1959 to 1962, I enrolled in the School of Architecture in Florence. I moved to Florence [for school], but I did continue to work as a painter in

Pistoia (my home town). When I was near to the end of my diploma, my tutor, Professor Leonardo Savioli asked me to see my paintings. He saw the paintings and told me, “I refuse to give you a diploma in architecture because I don't want to spoil a good painter in order to produce a very bad architect.” For me, [architecture] was a challenge, so I started studying architecture using only two reference books: the complete works of Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn. That's all. Through Le Corbusier I was able to understand something about modern architecture. Through Louis Kahn I did understand that architecture isn't limited to short periods, but it has a very long history. So architecture that has something to do with the centuries; nothing to do with the fashion. I did graduate in architecture and I had nothing to do as an architect; I was not prepared to be a professional architect. I had some [painting] exhibitions in Pistoia, and an art gallery asked me to make another exhibition. I want to make an exhibition about architecture, but I had very little to show, so I asked some of my colleagues to join myself, and we did an exhibition which was called Super Architectura. This was



Abdullah Samarin.Trisha Kreydt. Timothy Jockers. Jonathan Bonezzi.Caitlyn Wolford. Justin Meikle. Reis Petrovich.Patrick Hickey.Adolfo Natalini.Keyarash Montazeri.
Not Pictured | Michael Randza.Marco Brizzi



December 4th, 1966. This is the beginning of the so called “Radical Architecture”. The Super Architettura exhibition was showing something between art and architecture. We were showing prototypes, which I supposed to be of furniture, but they had things done with cardboard, chipboard, and lot of colors and so on. And so I started to work with Superstudio; a group made by 5 individuals, each one of us with a different background. Cristiano Toraldo Di Francia was good in photography, Gian Piero Frassinelli was interested in anthropology, the two other guys were mainly interested in technology, and I was interested in art. So we started to produce something in between art and architecture, and this is the work of Superstudio, which has been so widely published. We found the only way to communicate our ideas was exhibition teaching, but mainly publishing. We started publishing things in some very good magazines. Domus magazine, which was a very influential magazine, asked us to publish something. They wanted us to send them some projects, some photos, and they will say, ‘This is yes and This is no.’ And so we say, ‘No, we refuse your

anything.’ So we stopped publishing with Domus, which was very arrogant, because Domus was the best magazine at the moment in Italy. We went to another magazine (which was not so interesting) called Casabella, and told the Vice Director, Alessandro Mendini, “We are going to give you all our work and all of the works of our friends in the architecture technicalities (Archigram, Archizoom, et cetera, and many more people), but you have to promise us that you will publish us what we sent to you, exactly in the way in which we send to you. Sometimes we even send them the layout because the computer was not in existence and so the layout was something very rough. But Mendini was very courteous. He said, “I will publish everything what you want.” So, Casabella became a sort of house organ of the “Architettura Radicale.” This was the first implant with the publishing, and for many years our work was only spread around using this media: publication, teaching, a few exhibition. There was another part of our work that was, of course, survival. We had to find some money, because we were spending money to publish things, making photos, photo collages, et cetera,

and we were raising up some money with a professional activity doing photography, graphic, interior design, shop design, and many different things. I found myself involved in a very dangerous situation, for the certain moment: I found myself as art director of a very famous company producing furniture. And this thing with Superstudio went on from '66 to, let's say, '78, and after that period we started to be a lot more involved with teaching. So we produced a different kind of research: something between anthropology and architecture. I was teaching at the University of Architecture, and some of my friends were my assistants there. With our students we were making research: architecture without architects, daily life production and agricultural tools, and that sort of things, which were published as well. Not so brilliant like the first products of Superstudio, which lets say from '66 to '72, we did produce literally the wall of products store, which we consider to be Superstudio, say the Continuous Monument, the Histogram, the Median Cities, the Life Education Ceremony of Love. In 1972, there was a huge exhibition in New York,



at the MoMA New York, where we showed in the Italy: The New Domestic Landscape exhibition, which Emilio Ambasz, was showing to the world, the excellence of Italian design. After Swedish and American design, Italian design, during those years, was suppose to be the best in the world. And what we were showing there was not only product design (cars, furniture, lamps), but also researches by these so called “Radical Architects”. So this was the best phase of production of Superstudio. Between ‘73 and ‘78 was this thing involving of anthropology, and after ‘78, after the exhibition where had in the Biennale, in Venice, which we presented a strange work, “a moglie di Lot e la Coscienza di Zeno. This thing has been reproduced by Rem Koolhaas in his last Biennale. After that moment, each one of us went our own way. Some of us were interested in design, some of us, architecture. And I finally decided to become an architect, and so I started to make architectural projects for competitions and so on. So in ‘78, I started “the second part of my life” as an architect. So the first part was something between art, research, and architecture and the second was [architectural work].

But what I tell you is exactly what is in books and so on. For example, some years ago, I decide to make a sort of biography, which is this one. This is in Italian and English. And so this thing is divided in 4 sketchbooks. So the first sketchbook is called “The School Sketchbook”. So it is about painting. And this is myself, 23 years old. This is a painting I sold. I was doing things like this *motions to book*. I was a sort of Italian pop artist. And afterward, after we start the Superstudio, so this is the first sketchbook. The second sketchbook is called “The Italian Sketchbook”. And this is about Italian projects. There is also another sketchbook, it’s called “The German Sketchbook”. And the fourth one called “The Dutch Sketchbook”. This is only because during my activity as artist I have been working in Italy and in Germany and in Netherlands. This book was, for me, the most difficult effort because I had to select 23 projects out of 300. So it was quite difficult, even for me. But I decide to publish mainly things which were built, and not only drawings and so on. And so we started with my very first building, which by the way is my best building. I have been ruined by

***“So we produced
a different kind of
research: something
between anthropology
and architecture.
I was teaching at
the University of
Architecture...making
research...architecture
without architects...”***



Collages by SUPERSTUDIO

this one because everyone was publishing this and afterward everyone published this they say, “well it was much better. And everyone (Frampton, et cetera) was pointing out that, “oh, this is the best Natalini building.” And also they were very surprised because before this thing they know my name only as a Superstudio so, Peter Cook of Archigram wrote a very nice saying. He say, “Natalini builds”, which is like “Garbo laughs”. And so here are some projects which were built in Italy. Some of them, few of them which were built in Florence, like the University of the Novoli, or the part of the Uffizi, and the Museo dell’Opera del Duomo. Which you are going to see later. And, so the third part is about the German project. The fourth part is about Dutch projects. In ’91, I start working in Netherland. I start an exhibition there. And so I started making several things. Many of my things have been built in Netherlands. And the point is (and this is the point of this book also), I was trying to produce architecture which was applicable to the different places. So doing something in Italy was not the same as doing the same project in the Netherlands. For example, this

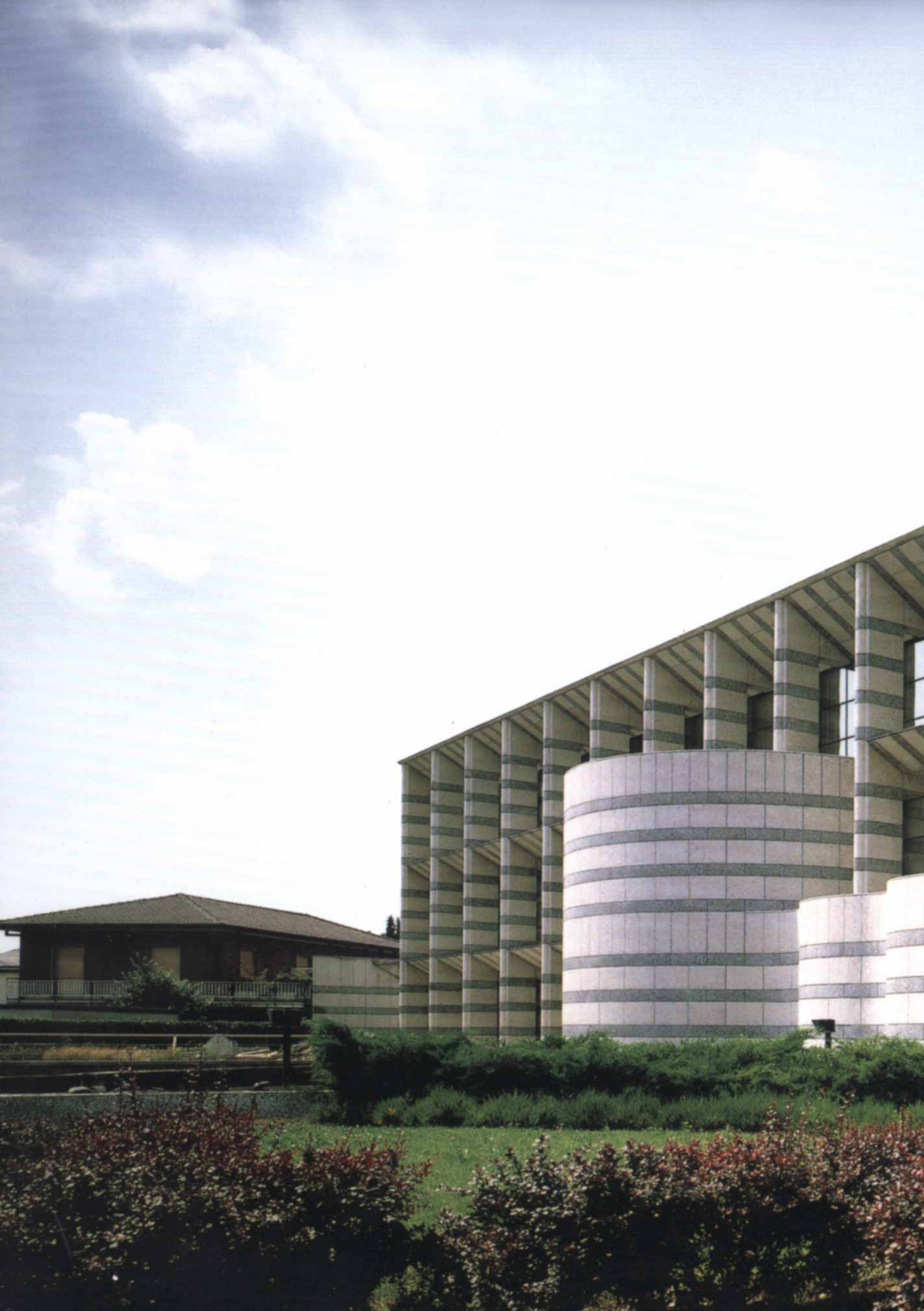
thing here is a housing complex – it has 150 apartments, which has been built in Netherland. And there is this one. In the same year, I was doing a very similar commission, which was a 150 apartments in the San Casciano, which was in Florence and Siena. So if you see this one and the other, they are completely different. Because I thought that architecture has more to do with agriculture than with the design. So you know the place, you must know everything around, and you have to plant the kind of vegetables which can grow up in that place. Which means I tried to learn as much as possible from history, tradition, and so on. Something very funny happened to me in Netherlands because the first time they invited me to enter a competition in the north, I was invited by somebody which was working in the city office, but he was working with Libeskind. So through Liebeskind, they knew Superstudio, so they said “oh, we must invite Natalini, so we are going to have a very avant garde-ish architecture.” Natalini was growing up, was passing from 30 to 50 and 60 and so on, and my ideas about architecture had changed completely. And what I did there

was something like a Neo-Traditionalist Dutch architecture. Which is not really Dutch, but is trying to lend as much as possible from people like Berlage. And after that I made many other similar projects in The Netherlands. And at the same point in the year 2000, the Superstudio was rediscovered, like the "Architettura Radicale". And we start the exhibition in many different place in Europe. So we decide to have a travelling exhibition of our work called "The Life without Objects", which was organized by 2 american guys, William Menking and Peter Lang. this exhibition was held in London, New York, California, and at the end was in a city in the south of Netherland. And there they made this sort of befuddling discussion. The topic was "how is it possible that Natalini, which was a founder of Superstudio, and was a teacher of Rem Koolhaas at the AA London, is now doing this sort of Neo-Traditional architecture?" And the discussion went on 2 days long. They asked me "what is your opinion?" and I told them, "well, it took you 40 years in order to understand Superstudio, so you need another 40 years in order to understand what I am doing now.

But a Dutch architectural historian called Hans Ibelings, he wrote a book called "Supermodernism" and after that one he wrote another book which is called "Unmodern Architecture: Contemporary Traditionalism In The Netherlands". And in the second book, myself, Rob Krier, and the third guy from Belgium who were supposed to be the initiator of this new trend in architecture in Netherland. So after that I was totally ruined because this sort of thing was so successful that a lot of young guys started making fake antique architecture and so I lost all my clients because these young guys got cheaper and faster than myself. And so the story went on, and so I started work as architect in '78 and it went on. I started working in Netherlands in '91. Then in 2012 we closed the office in Netherlands, and in a certain way we did stop producing architecture because the architecture market was nearly closed. We had only a few commissions that were not really relevant. So my very last relevant project was the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo and maybe is going to be the final one because I don't see many new opportunities around. So I had a long history, a had a lot of



Original Group of SUPERSTUDIO





CASSA RURALE ED ARTIGIANA DELL'ALTA BRIANZA



BUILDING FOR OFFICES IN ALZATE BRIANZA
1983

things in the past and not a lot of things in the future, so I'm not the right person to speak to young guys like you because you need somebody who is going to give you hope. Not somebody to say I was a good guy but now I am lame and I am sick and old. There is a very important collector in Netherlands who has an organization called Drawing Matter. They were trying to organize a public lecture for myself, which was supposed to be the very last time I was going to speak about Superstudio. Peter Cook was invited to interview me, but at the very last moment I said no. And maybe for the same reason I had to speak to your people and say I don't want to speak here about an old story. I have such a longer lecture for your school and don't want to be that guy, so I had to say yes."

VMA / So I actually want to go further back, when you were in university, how would you say the world of design was aesthetically? Did it fit with your views, or did you have a clash with school because you didn't like what was being taught?

Natalini | "When I was in school all the biggest architects existed and were still producing things. For example, I would buy a volume, or magazine, and see, let's say, La Tourette and say 'Ah this is beautiful'. Then after a few years I found Rochon which is something completely different. Also, Le Corbusier was alive, Mies was alive, Louis Khan was alive, all the best architects were still working and producing an enormous amount of work. So we were exposed to many different schools in a certain way. Florence University was not a very good school. The school was dominated by a sort of middle ground between expressive and organic architecture. The best teachers we had were two guys named Leonardo Savioli and Leonardo Ito. If you go to the only modern housing complex in Florence which was created in the 60's, you can see some of the things by them. And if you go to the Chiesa dell' Autostrada you can see the master who is Giovanni Michelucci. So the main trade in this school was that one, and also the sort of really flat expressionism which isn't very interesting. In our school we had a very good professor

***"...I was more and more
interested in architecture
which is appropriated
to the different places.
And this is the reason
why when I was working
in Germany, I was sort
of German architect...
in Florence I was doing
something which is not
the same for what I did in
Siena."***



in the history of architecture, who wrote a book that showed the first time architecture had been looked at from a Marxist point of view. He was sort of a socialist of architecture. We had a very good professor in town planning, but all the other professor we had were not so interesting to me. The other students works were very different, they were sort of following this Neo-expressionism. And some were doing little square and rectangular box buildings. But I'm not the best judge of that school because it just was not very interesting being an architecture student. On Friday

afternoons I took a bus and went to Pistoia, my hometown, and I was working there in this little studio which I was living in with two other guys. We were trying to make paintings, talking a lot, and trying to see some exhibitions, and drinking a lot of wine. So I was there Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and on Monday afternoon I went back to Florence completely out of mind. On Tuesday I was doing nothing. On Wednesday I was studying in the school, and then the next day I would just say to myself 'Tomorrow is Friday so I get to go back to Pistoia. So I had some

difficulties in being a student. Also I did like a few subjects, let's say, drawing, history, and architectural design. But, I was a disaster in all the others like Mathematics. I'd flunk all my exams. But, in the end, in the last two years, I tried to recover and learn as much as possible of what I was not able to learn before. You see, I had been in school between '59 and '66. In that period, we had in Italy I think seven schools for architecture. Some of the best were Venice and Florence. Some others were much more technical, such as Milan and Torino. In the school of architecture in Florence during those years there were 500 students. After the student's revolution in '68-'70, the school of architecture in Florence increased from 500 to 12,000 and became some sort of mass school completely out of control. The political issue was that everyone has the right to get a diploma in architecture. So there were more normalized classes, the exams were very simple, the classrooms were divided into group studies, and the subject was divided individually not by the professors but by the students. It was something pretty hard for the professors to handle. I was a professor during those years

and I continued doing my own things so it was sort of reactionary because I was giving lectures and I was asking my students to produce independent work so I had a very difficult time. But I was very courageous. And after many years, things started to change. Some of my students came to me and say ' You are one of the few ones which were a real professor in this sort of mess,' which was the school for architecture. And slowly all this evolution was fading away. And the school started being more and more organized, but what has been destroyed was let's say the architecture. Architecture was not anymore the main subject. But other things were the main subject. Let's say sociology, history, and so on. Well now the situation with the school of architecture in Italy is incredible. We have now twenty seven or six, and Italy has the same, well now things are decreasing, but a few years ago we had in Italy; 60,000 students in architecture. Which is 50% of the whole students in architecture in all of Europe. And we had 165 practicing architects which is 50 percent of the practicing architects in all of Europe. In Rome they have the same amounts of architects in all of



France. I am a member of the board of architects in Florence. Which are 5,000 architects and in Italy 165 in a population of 52 million. I am also an honorary fellow of American institute of Architects which are 100,000. But the population of the states is not like the population of Italy. And also in Italy you are entitled to build not only if you are an architect but also if you are an engineer, a surveyor. Officially a cultural surveyor does not have a diploma, did not go to university. And they are able to make small buildings. The small buildings maybe three story high and maybe

very long. In Bologna there is a very huge building for the trade fair which is one kilometer long, three stories and has been designed by the cultural surveyor. And so in this country the architects are responsible for twenty five percent of the world built for you which is very little. If you go around in Florence you don't see any cranes. So architects in Florence are surviving, looking for jobs abroad, making very little jobs or making restorations.

VMA / I just have one more question. Which jumps to

***“ ...the elevator...
it resulted with
the skyscraper
which is the most
incredible mistake
of architecture.
How can you say
it's sustainable?
When you are in a
skyscraper you are
not a human being.”***



you work with super studio, but it's more of a technical question which was how you constructed your photo montages in a time without photoshop which now makes it very easy. What was the process?

Natalini | “The process was based on the theory of perspective, you must know very well the way in which a perspective is constructed. There are a lot of rules, it is not easy. You must know them. So some of us especially... We are very expert in it. So they say ‘Ok,

we want or we found a nice image which is on this lake.’ We say we want to do something which is going on the lake. So we found the horizontal line, the perspective point, and we constructed the new things according to these things. Usually these things are made of a piece of paper which was cut and glued and colored. Some time with paints and some time with airbrush. We bought the first air brush in florence. And so with the airbrush we were able to do something not quite realistic because of the difference between the photo montage of super studio and what

we do now with computer is exactly this thing. You see photo montage like this one [indicates image] is not realistic at all. It's like a collage which we take different images and paste them together. By the way this was the illustration for a competition for the new cemetery in modena which was won by Aldo Rossi with the beautiful building and we made something which was the electronic cemetery. The idea was everything was the flat plane. There was a small building here [indicating photo]. In the building there was a sort of huge well so the dead body was thrown there. But the memory was stored in computer. And this thing in the seventies was brand new because the first computer was developed in the sixties. So you see this was a computer which was like a room, filled up with the wills and we say the memories will be stored in this thing and the body will be recycled. And for example, [indicates another picture] this is a nice montage. This has been done in this way. We bought a poster of the rockefeller center and we made this simple thing. We did cut this thing and glue it together and we made a sort of mirror. This thing has been done with the rubber since, yes it

is funny, because two images can be generated by the poster. One is this one [indicates image in text] and with the leftover of the poster another one has been generated which now is in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. And a nice guy in the office with a computer, he took a photograph of these, the photo of the other one, he put them together so the monuments were disappearing and the reality was going backwards. [flips to another page] This one is one of the very best because its using a fisheye perspective so it's quite difficult to do it. Some would say, "Oh you have destroyed the Twin Towers." No, no this one was a pen on poster which has been done before the 70s. So the Twin Towers were not existing. But the point is, in this sort of collage there are two level of reality. One of them is the good world and the other is something which is completely alien and they don't try to match together. You can always see the cuttings, the mistakes, and so what we did in that period was a surrealist painting in which different objects are placed on the same table. There is a contrast between them and the poetry springing out from this. A nice

book has been published recently about collage in architecture and its a very funny book in which some of our things have been analysed (book by director of architecture department at MOMA New York). We have some photo montage that are now in different museums, but the majority have disappeared because sometimes we recycle the same materials. We take away the glue and then we are gluing back. And also, usually, the magazine were asking for good photographs. We had no money to produce the good photographs. We send in the original and the original never came back. So many of them have been dispersed. Some of the best are, for example, the MOMA have a very nice one that was bought around '72, '73. The Pompidou has some very good ones. But now very few famous exist. I think we have five or so. And also they are fading away because the materials were not very good and usually the bases were not nice poster, just pages coming out from popular magazines. And so the quality of the print was very bad. We were using very bad glue which made stains. The idea was not making things realistic, but making things on the edge. Because when you have something which is ultra

realistic there is no wonder.

VMA / You say “ok, this is the way it is.”

And also another funny thing is, if you compare an old architectural drawing or perspective or maybe a collage and a present rendering. If in the rendering, you scan the area which is covered by architecture, it is very little, maybe thirty percent. All the rest is made by clouds, people, cars, reality. So architecture is no longer the main thing, but is just one element in the reality. On the other side, if you take a drawing by Wagner or Wright you see a very nice piece of architecture and maybe you see some ivy leaves.

VMA / Your work with Superstudio and then your later work in the second half of your life are nearly polar opposites. Can you talk about how your early work with Superstudio influenced your later work?

Natalini | Its like your life. You start as a child, you become a teenager and you grow up so everything is included in that. I must say that my work as a painter has been included

in the first work of Superstudio, and the first work of Superstudio has been included in the other research in anthropology in which we tried to understand the sources of creativity. How tools are created by people who are not designer or architects. Through this, I became very interested in the different places. For example if you look in the peasant house, the peasant house in tuscany is very different from the peasant house in sicily. Let's say the program is the same. A house for your family, tools, cows and so on. But, they are different by using different stones. The sun is different. So in the mountain, the roof is [different] in this way (hand gesture to angled), in sicily its flat. So through this work of anthropology research I become more and more interested in the work that has been called later but nobody should forget this logic. That means I was more and more interested in architecture which is appropriated to the different places. And this is the reason why when I was working in Germany, I was sort of German architect and in Netherland a sort of such as Dutch architects. And in Florence I was doing something which is not the same for what I did in Siena. For

"He saw the paintings and told me, 'I refuse to give you a diploma in architecture because I don't want to spoil a good painter in order to produce a very bad architect.'"

example, (shows image from book) this is the architecture on campus in Novoli in Florence and is a school for political science and law. And the same thing is in Siena, but as you can see this building, which has been done in nearly the same years is not the same than the other, because one of them was trying to learn as much as possible from the Cenese's architecture and the other from Florentine architecture. So I think there is a sort of continuity in which things are incorporated, but it is difficult to understand because there are so many years between '66 and now. So it is not easy to follow. For example, when I started producing architecture, all my avant garde friends said, "Oh, you're a traitor of the avant garde." They said, "It must be a joke; this isn't real architecture." When I was invited to the Netherlands as an avant garde architect, I won a competition mainly through a people's referendum. The guy who invited me, a friend of Liebeskind, was very scandalized by this sort of thing. He said, "We expected something very different from you as a former member of Superstudio." And I said, "Wait, it's very easy. You take this building, and you build everything as it is using only one

material (which is red marble), and they say, "No, no, this is too much."

But it's not easy to understand. Now, I'm getting older and I try to write some sort of memories. The funny thing is, the way in which I describe things now are completely different from the way I was describing them 20 years ago. **This is the reason I don't like interviews; because usually I am lying.** Last year somebody organized a public interview with Oberist and Rem Koolhaas. They were interviewing the last three surviving members of Superstudio in a public interview in Assisi (a very beautiful place). Oberist is very professional; he's making debuts everywhere. We had been asked to be there three hours before. We were sitting in a nice room, and Oberist was trying to organize this interview, saying, "Well, if I ask you this, what are you going to answer?" So there was this sort of organization of questions and answers. In fact, when we were on the stage, Oberist and Rem Koolhaas are asking us these questions, and we are giving them completely different answers. One of my tricks is "That is very nice question, but I'm not interested

in that question. The question I'm interested in is this one, and here is my answer." This is a part of this avant garde way of doing, which is controlling by yourself the communication process.

VMA / Knowing how architecture is moving today, how it is becoming more contemporary in some aspects, how would this affect your attitude toward the architecture profession as a young student?

Architecture now is going a completely different way from what I was prepared for. I can not identify myself anymore in the current architecture, which is totally different from what I took. At the moment I am trying to write a very small booklet (my last one), which is subdivided into different chapters. One chapter is about "normal" architecture - the usual architecture. The other [chapter] is about "disturbing" architecture. My point is, I have been brought up to think that architecture is something solid - something which stays for many years. Something which is able to give people a safe place to live, and a place where you

can search for happiness at least. But what I see now is something which is very disturbing. All the new buildings are no longer straight; they are trying to fight against the gravity load. They have strange shapes which has nothing to do with architecture which is surrounding yourself and some. We are in a city like this one, and we feel comfortable because we know how the streets work, we know how there is a building and a façade and the windows that are protecting you from the rain and so on. But when I look on the architecture that is on the books or magazines, I say well what is this. I have been teaching for forever, let's say. I did enter into the school for architecture in '59 as a student and I came out last year. I did retire when I was seventy in 2011, but I have been asked to continue teaching with a contract. So in the first year of my teaching, I felt myself being very similar to my students. We were looking for the same thing. There was a sort of competition. After some years, I was growing up and the students were always twenty three so I was always asking the same question. I was very unknowing. When I became very old, the students were like grandsons so I became

very, 'Oh yes that's nice,' even when it was horrible. The distance between myself and my students became so huge that it was better to stop because I had nothing to teach to them. Our references are so different. For many many years, let's say centuries architecture had a language and there was some sort of treaties, let's think of Palladio and the Palladian architecture in Italy, in England, and in the United States or Russia. Recently, this sort of common language does not exist anymore. We have so many different languages so each one is making research in a different direction and when you make a statement there is a huge risk of failure for these statements. Let's think of the architecture of the Bauhaus because really it was a failure with the flat roof, the stucco, the big glass windows, and so on. In the 60s everyone thought that petrol was cheap and so everyone was making very bad buildings with very thin walls and a lot of glass because like here we have twenty two degrees [celsius] which is too much, but you have the big walls. So, when the oil prices started [to increase] we found that nearly all of that architecture was a mistake. Now we are trying to

go backwards with sustainability and you have an introduction to that in the lecture. That is only an introduction. What I am trying to show is how the architecture of the past was sustainable, but the architecture we produce now is not really sustainable or is sustainable at a very high price. For example, you make a glass wall and after you have a sunscreen and you have something that is moving the sun screen and so on. So instead of paying for one wall with one window you're paying for three different walls. And also using very different shapes means cost. When Gehry made the Guggenheim in Bilbao, the cost per square meter was nearly ten times more than the cost per square meter for a museum in Portugal. And he did use something like the Italian, but why it is not a rocket? When I was teaching in the states I was giving a lecture and I was going to see some lectures, once I was in a lecture by [Vonberg?] and his question was 'My dear lady, do you know how much your house weighs?' It was nonsense because what does that mean? I don't have to bring my house on your shoulder. But her book...[] I learned a very good thing. There was an agent organizing a lecture for me. They



Haverleij Residential Complex | Holland
Residential 2001

offered me something like five hundred dollars for a lecture. It cost a lot of money. I asked them ‘How much is the fee of...?’ they said ‘Five thousand.’ I said, ‘Okay, the same for me.’ So I gave only three lectures, for fifteen thousand. If you ask for more money, they say, ‘Oh he must be a good guy.’ It’s just like playing poker with a bluff, but this is not something to tell to young people because you should be honest and so on [Laughter].”

VMA / Well I have one question and it’s not on this sheet and it’s more not even

related to architecture, but more to your being here in Italy. Where’s your happiest place in the city where you feel most at home or the most calm?

Natalini | “I feel that there is some problem because I never feel at home. I have been travelling a lot, but I wanted to go back home. However, even when I’m at home I don’t feel very comfortable. I must have some problem with myself. I am not really organized for this world. Maybe I’m coming from another world. So now

I'm moving very little and not travelling anymore and I spend a lot of time at home, but even at home I don't feel very much at home. Nevertheless, I feel very comfortable in cities like Florence, Bristol, or Siena. For example in Florence, I feel very comfortable in Sant Ambrogio market only because I have been teaching in the school for architecture in Santa Verdiana which is there. I was shopping in the market. I was having the cafe in the segredo, I was going for the cappuccino and the pasta with many of my friends who were living around. When someone is asking me which city is the one you like the most or the city in which you like to live, I'm always pointing out the same places like Lucca, Ferrara, or Mantua which are walled cities. Maybe I'm very agoraphobic, I don't know. [Laughter] The walls have been saving the cities, not from the enemies, but from the horrors of contemporary architecture because usually historical centers are preserved. Which isn't a bad thing. Sometimes it's avoiding some of the horrors which the contemporary architecture is producing."

VMA / With the way you said architecture is almost blown

out of proportion recently with the internet age and the ability to see hundreds or different projects just one your phone, do you think that the word radical has been desensitized? Or is it even achievable now to become a radical architect or do you think that since everybody is doing everything so quickly for attention or pushing boundaries that that's even a way of design anymore?

Natalini | "Radical architecture is a very strange term. It is a term which has been used for the first time by an arch historian. When he did mention this thing 'radical', he meant a way of behaving and doing. Trying to go backwards to the original or the roots. So 'radic' or roots is going backward to the essence of the things. There are millions or different images surrounding us these days and there is no judgement there. In the old old days, what was published in books and magazines was supposed to be good because it was something that was picked by someone making a selection, so you were able to see something selected by someone else. Now that selection

doesn't exist and also things that are most popular are most strange and very new. Sometimes I think it's like a horrible movie *Freaks*. *Freaks* was a horrible movie in the '30s by Tod Browning about the circus. And the actors were "real freaks": Siamese twins, bearded lady, someone without arms and legs, and so on. And the "freaks" are gentle people and the "normal" people are very cruel to them. So now the situation is quite different, the gentle architecture is something that is never published on magazines, and only freaks are published because the main thing is the only value is novelty, which is not true. In art this problem does not exist. This culture of the 14th century is not better than the culture of the 13th century. If you go to the museum of the duomo you see facade that has been taken from more modern (not better, just different) buildings. This is not progress; technology is making new things. 30 years ago someone wrote that the only important architectural invention of the 20th century was the water closet and the elevator, I agree with the water closet but not with the elevator because it resulted with the skyscraper which is the most incredible mistake of architecture.

How can you say it's a sustainable? When you are in a skyscraper you are not a human being, you are someone in the hospital with all these tubes and electric wires. If you're staying on a very high floor, you are not able to escape. If the air conditioning doesn't work, you will suffocate because you can not open the windows. The skyscraper causes a logic that is a purely economic. People think being on a high floor is a power thing, which is not true. So I think the water closet was a good invention, but the elevator was not. Same with new materials that are supposed to the future but in a few days they will be proved to be toxic. Like in the '60s when Asbestos was discovered from what we thought was the future of building. The same thing will come in the near future with the solar panels: someone will discover they are toxic."

VMA | So that actually kinda makes me think of something else. It's interesting to hear you say so much against the skyscraper because your earlier works with Superstudio deal so much with megastructures. Along the lines of Le Corbusier's work and his writings and city

planning, do you agree with his work or do you find it better for a more natural and comfortable architecture to exist?

Natalini | “Sometimes this is seen as a utopia but if we continue producing this sort of architecture, what you achieve is a sort of disaster. For example, the continuous monument was a combination of ideas: monuments representing society and technology being able to produce bigger things like highways and bridges. Let’s combine these two things together, in a way creating a fantasy city. The very last thing about Le Corbusier is, we thought this sort of architecture the expression of capitalism, and so we were against the tradition. Nowadays an architect can produce the same thing as before, which I think is not appropriate. Like if you design a Ferrari car, it can be sold all over without changing. But an engineer designing a highway, it must change based on location. This should be the same for architecture. So while we have been very fond of this architecture, we need to find different ways of being architects. So focusing on more social things benefits us. Things such as social activities, politics, and religion.

More than technology. Someone once wrote about Superstudio saying we are religious terrorists.”

Questions produced by the students, answered in situ throughout the interview.

Are there other influences you would consider important to your work?

Has your past experience as a painter influenced your work and was that experience beneficial to your craft?

What were the main goals of the work of Superstudio, and how did you communicate your ideas?

Do you think sustainability in design and integrating buildings with their landscapes is as important as form and function in modern architecture?

Along the lines of Le Corbusier’s work and his writings and city planning, do you agree with his work or do you find it better for a more natural and comfortable architecture to exist?



This interview with Adolfo Natalini was focused upon his early work with painting and education, his work with superstudio, and his relationship with architecture today. It was a collaborative effort among students of the Video, Media, and Architecture course at Kent State University Florence. Guest lecturers were brought in from all over Europe for a Spring lecture series and students were tasked to create an interview before each of these lectures. After analyzing numerous interviews with other architects, students researched and explored the work of the visiting lecturers. Questions were then devised by each student, and these questions were analyzed based upon their thematic similarity and their relevance to the work of each lecturer. The most appropriate questions were chosen for each interview, and the specific students who created these questions then were charged with interviewing our guests, using the chosen questions as a base and posing any other questions that flowed with the interview.