

BETWEEN UTOPIA AND HISTORY

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"Any map of the world that does not include Utopia is not even worth glancing at."— Oscar Wilde (1891) [then quoted by Lewis Mumford (1921), Bernardo Secchi (2005)]

Utopia has always been adopted as a critique of coeval societies. Sir Thomas More's "Utopia" (1516) is an artificial island that serves as an imaginary laboratory to reveal the decline of customs and socio-political issues in 16th-century England, while proposing alternative solutions in his non-place (based on Greek "ou 'not' + topos 'place']"). Utopia is not an urban model but a form of critical thinking tool. Two centuries later, Jonathan Swift depicts the utopian floating island of "Laputa" in his "Gulliver's Travels" (1726), which hovers above the surface of the world due to its magnetic, adamantine soil. Its inhabitants have one eye looking outward to the cosmos above, and the other looking inward, resulting in a loss of contact with the earth, the community, and social gatherings. Swift's floating island again serves as an allegorical critique of the widespread decline of scientific knowledge, disconnected from tangible social issues.

In the modern era, Utopia has embodied several ideological persuasions and political acceptances, in a tension between criticism and hope regarding Utopia as a tangible potential tool for transforming reality: from Weber's democratic utopia to Bloch's emphasis on its concrete essence of transformation, to Tafuri's criticism of utopia and the role of architecture, to name a few. The 20th century has exhibited many radical and utopian projects in various geographical and cultural contexts, with similar efforts to showcase their diversity from the past, aiming for a new relationship between individuals, society, and territory (Secchi 2005). Of particular interest is Walter Benjamin's role in the passage, the topic of this conference, which embodies an idealistic and utopian vision of progress for oneiric flâneurs who criticize and attempt to change society as well.

Vis-à-vis these multiple political and philosophical perspectives of Utopia, our primary question as architects, urban designers, and historians is what role Utopia might play in studying the socio-spatial structure of the city and in envisioning future transformation

scenarios. How can we rethink Utopia through the passage as a positive tool for thinking, mapping, and design? How can we reconceptualize historical case studies of Utopia and passage as both critiques in history and imaginative visions of possible futures? How can we rethink Utopia, like the inhabitants of Laputa or modern Janus-faced architects, by looking to the future and the past, while grounding our practice in the present?

According to Bernardo Secchi, we need "extreme efforts of imagination" and also radical projects and utopias to express fundamental changes in society, "exploring possible futures by abandoning commonplaces" (2012, 2018). This session will be devoted to critically abandoning commonplaces while exploring the passage and utopian thinking through a constellation of case studies in different geographies. It features nine contributions where utopia and radical projects related to passages, mobility, and events influence and critically examine local society, sparking new projects or collaborations for future scenarios.

Papers relate to radical spatial-political transformations of society, from traffic circulation changes in Sweden (Eugenio LUX), to high-speed rail line controversy proposals in Switzerland (Marco FELICIONI), to a visionary infrastructural utopia for a circular bridge over the Stretto di Messina in Italy (Cristian SAMMARCO), to integrating active mobility into German riverfront redevelopment projects (Sanja AVRAMOSKA), to early carscapes and car-centric architectural visions (Alberto RONCELLI). Modern radical and utopian projects of circulation and "motopia" are reevaluated in America's postwar future development (Jana CULEK), as suspended structures and patterns in Berlin and Tokyo (Elisa MARUELLI), as well as tabula rasa landscapes from Tange's legacy (Giona CARLOTTA), and case studies of inhabiting dysfunction and spatial allegory (Radu Mihai MĂLDĂRESCU).

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3.9.1967

The day Sweden switched sides of the road

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On the morning of Sunday 3 September 1967, Sweden enacted one of the most ambitious infrastructural and socio-technical transformations in its history: the shift from left- to right-hand traffic, also known as *Dagen H* or *Högertrafikomläggningen* (lit. "the right-hand traffic reorganisation"). The event mobilized an unprecedented range of design, planning, and communication strategies - spanning urban spaces, rural roads, signage systems, vehicle components, and public transport networks, as well as the collective psyche of an entire nation--including the popular song *Håll dej till höger*, Svensson. This proposal considers *Dagen H* as more than a logistical feat; it suggests to read the event as a design experiment at the scale of the nation, a performative reprogramming of public space grounded in the values of the *folkhemmet* (the Social Democratic welfare state policy, 1932-1976). Within this framework, mobility is not treated as a neutral flow but as a spatial, political, and symbolic construct - designed, rehearsed, and performed. This contribution aims at rethinking infrastructures of movement beyond engineering rationality, by framing *Högertrafikomläggningen* as a prototype of spatial transformation where architecture, planning, and communication merged into a coordinated national choreography. Particular attention is given to the often-overlooked design aspects: temporary signage, gloves and decals, public education campaigns, redesigned intersections and bus stops, tramline conversions, bus adaptations, and reconfiguration of road markings and signage. These elements suggest an expanded field of architectural agency -one that inhabits the in-between spaces of infrastructure, design, governance, and daily life. Drawing on archival material, visual culture, and the rhetoric of modernity in mid-20th-century Sweden, the text questions how design mediates large-scale behavioural change and reflects on the temporality and adaptability of infrastructural systems.

swedish-welfare-state, swedish-mobility, swedish-right-day, swedish-traffic, swedish-infrastructures

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ALTERNATIVE URBAN FORMS: THE CHARACTER OF SUPERIMPOSITION IN URBAN CONTEXTS

The Role of Mobility in suspended patterns

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In the context of urban studies of the second half of the twentieth century, several contributions proposed a reflection on alternative urban forms. In particular, various experiments addressed the issue of urban densification through the idea of constructing new settlements suspended above existing parts of cities. The strategy had a dual purpose: to separate levels of use, but even to address the complex relationship between the historical and the new settlement.

This paper aims to investigate the role of infrastructure in the settlement of the suspended pattern. The methodology involves the selection and analysis of case studies considered significant in demonstrating how this issue has been addressed differently in several urban contexts and at various scales. In some cases, mobile infrastructure plays a central role in the relationship with the historical fabric of the city (Berlin Hauptstadt - Alison and Peter Smithson); in others, it represents the main framework on which urban densification interventions are structured (Plan for Tokyo Bay - Kenzo Tange); in others still, it contributes to questioning the traditional separation between public and private spaces to introduce a logic of integration between different urban functions (Factory 798 - Bernard Tschumi).

Today, in the context of the debate on the transformation of the contemporary city, and especially in areas with high levels of population density and severe restrictions on land use, the potential offered by suspended structures could be relevant. This approach isn't just about adding new buildings or functions to an area to be densified, but also rethinking the relationship between the new development and existing resources, to cover the option of creating a new way of interacting between buildings and nature, between history and transformation, between infrastructure and public space.

superimposition, suspended-patterns, superimposed-fabric, urban-transformations, urban-densification

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ALPTRANSIT TICINO

The design of an infrastructure as a vision for a territorial city

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In 1992, a Swiss referendum gave the green light to the *Alptransit* high-speed rail line, a complex infrastructural project destined to redefine travel across the Alpine region. In response to the initial project designed by the engineers of the Federal Railways and upon a specific request by architects Mario Botta, Aurelio Galfetti, Luigi Snozzi, and Livio Vacchini, in 1993, the Council of State granted the Canton of Ticino to come up with its counterproposal, based on a more constructive dialogue with the territory.

Shortly thereafter, architect Galfetti was commissioned to set up and lead an interdisciplinary think tank on the subject: he invited experts from different backgrounds, such as civil engineers Giuseppe Grignoli, planner Pierino Borella, economist Remigio Ratti, and historian Raffaello Ceschi. Each contribution was coordinated by the architect's work. For the first time, spatial design choices seemed to interfere with, and perhaps prevail over, the technical component in identifying the route.

The so-called "Reflection Group" wished to avert the new rail line from becoming a mere transit corridor and grasped the urgent need to plan for its interaction with the territory. They took the chance to design the infrastructure as a guide for the development of the *Ticino City*, a diffuse alpine region taking shape in a hybrid urban sprawl in need of a reconnection.

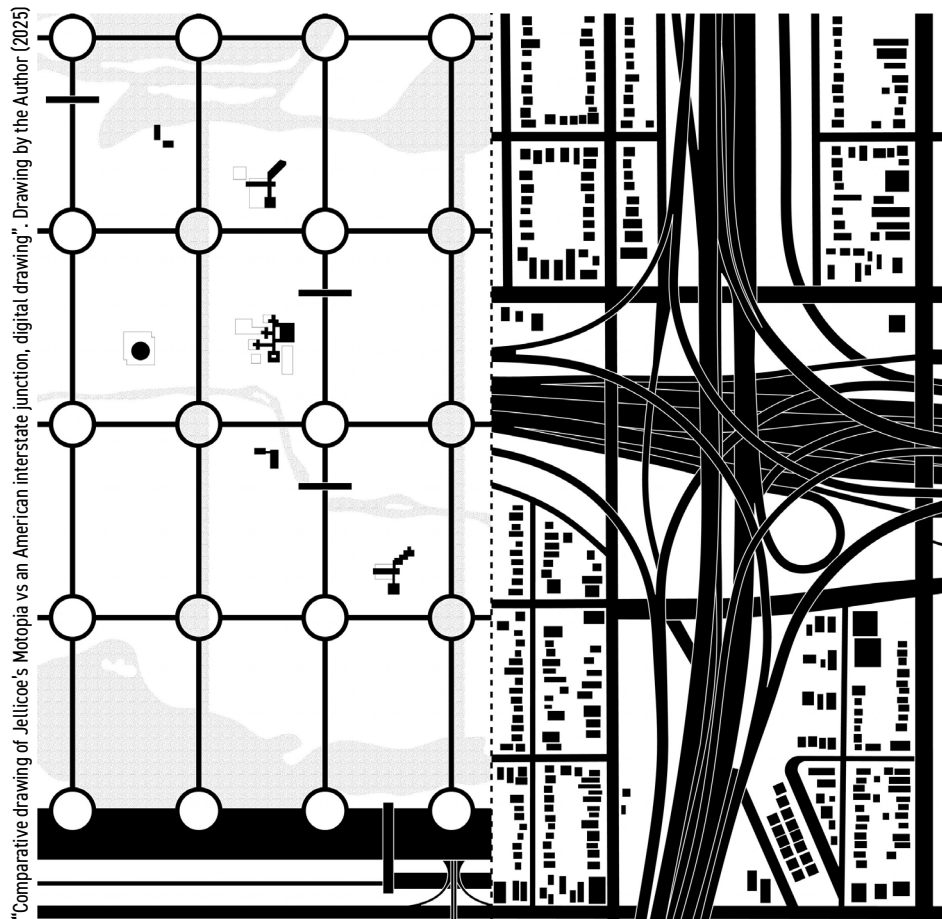
While analysing the design at different scales, the intervention proposal aims to point out how the *Alptransit* project eventually resulted in a unique opportunity to draft a territorial vision. The research also wishes to reconstruct the internal dynamics of the Group's teamwork, its methodology, its interaction with the political authorities, and the real outcomes of its work. Finally, it aims to establish a comparison with present-day infrastructural design, raising questions on the role of architects and planners in their development from today's perspective.

Alptransit, sprawl, Ticino, railway-infrastructure, Alps

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"Comparative drawing of Jellicoe's *Motopia* vs an American interstate junction, digital drawing". Drawing by the Author (2025)

KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE ROAD AHEAD

A Utopian View of Personal Transportation

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Utopian thinking has long functioned as a critical tool for testing possible futures and responding to challenges of its time. In the mid-20th century, a period marked by rapid suburban expansion and the growing dominance of the automobile, utopian narratives became a space for articulating aspirations and anxieties about mobility. The paper examines two contemporaneous yet radically different visions of the future - Disney's *Magic Highway U.S.A.* (1958) and Geoffrey Jellicoe's *Motopia* (1961) - and explores how utopian discourse critically reflected on and tested divergent approaches to transportation, landscape, and the human experience.

While both projects revolve around the increased use of personal vehicles, they differ in underlying values. *Magic Highway U.S.A.* centres around exploring the possibility of global connectedness and the convenience of the personal vehicle, presenting a highly consumerist, techno-optimistic vision of society where automated cars and highways reshape everyday life - echoing American postwar ideals of progress and freedom. In contrast, Jellicoe's *Motopia* offers a more human-centric and ecologically sensitive approach by segregating pedestrian and vehicular flows to preserve the integrity of public space and social interaction.

The narratives illuminate key tensions of the era: the rise of the suburban model and the simultaneous decline of dense, multi-layered urban environments. Their spatial logic suggests, albeit in different ways, that mobility has become the central organizing principle of urban spaces. Both projects embody the hopes and fears of their time: one projecting a seamless future of consumer convenience, the other warning of its dehumanizing effects. Comparing the two cases, the paper argues that utopian mobility imaginaries are not only aimed at mapping technological potential, but also critique the social and spatial consequences of emerging paradigms, remaining vital tools for understanding and reshaping the future of cities.

Utopian-mobility, urban-design, mid-20th-century-visions

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TANGE AS A TOOL FOR TABULA RASA

The relevance of the Plan for Tokyo 1960
through the urban research of Rem Koolhaas

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The advent of the modern metropolis unleashed innovative urban visions developed in the sixties specifically for Tokyo Bay by the architects of the Metabolism Group. Changing definitely the way of thinking about urban design, the group defined a unique and heroic moment in architectural history, working on ideas that may seem utopian today, but which responded to a cultural climate that looked to the future. In fact, looking at that international situation of the hyper-engineering trend, "the inhabitation of Tokyo Bay seems plausible" (Koolhaas, Obrist, 2011: 267).

What was previously a geographical limitation became a free space to be built with the support of modern technology, a sort of tabula rasa found exactly next to the capital.

Among the dozens of plans that have been proposed at the time by Japanese architects, the most relevant is that of Kenzo Tange. The Plan for Tokyo 1960 developed by Tange Lab consisted of a civic axis that had to cross the bay with a linear infrastructure leading to megastructures. As Tange shows, infrastructure has the potential of constructing the site itself. Infrastructure prepares the ground for future buildings as well as creates the conditions for future developments.

The research developed by Rem Koolhaas on Asian cities is visible in many of OMA's projects, of which the 1991 plan for the Mission Grand Axe in Paris is a key example of the revisitation of the tabula rasa approach. Thirty years later, Tange's project is used as a tool for design. Starting from the name of the plan, which with its Grand Axe recalls Tange's Civic Axis, it can be noticed OMA's attempt to create a sort of artificial bay in the center of La Défense through a selective tabula rasa in order to design a new designed territory upon which to construct.

Tabula rasa is a Latin expression used to define the wax tablet used by the Romans for writing. After its use, the tablet was erased to write again, and then to design again, and then to construct again...

Kenzo-Tange, Tokyo, Rem-Koolhaas, Paris, tabula-rasa

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