"Fare Storia"

GIOVEDÌ 12 DICEMBRE, ORE 10,00

James Ackerman (Harvard University)
Ruminations on Sixty-plus Years as an Architectural Historian in America

Jacques Revel (EHESS, Parigi)
Biographie et histoire sociale

Remo Bodei (Università di Pisa)
Pensare il futuro o come l'utopia si è separata dalla storia

GIOVEDÌ 12 DICEMBRE, ORE 15,30

Sergio Bertelli (Università di Firenze)
Il messaggio iconografico come fonte non verbale

Howard Burns (DSA, IUAV)
Quante storie! Frammentazione e approcci unitari nella storia dell'architettura

Giovanne Levi (Università di Venezia, Ca Foscari)
Gli storici, la psicoanalisi, la verità

VENERDÌ 13 DICEMBRE, ORE 10,00

Adriano Prosperi (Università di Pisa)
Storia del battesimo

Massimo Frigo (Università di Torino)
Pittura ed eresia nell'Italia del Cinquecento: Jacopo Pontormo e Lorenzo Lotto

Manuela Morresi (DSA, IUAV)
Religione e architettura a Venezia nel primo Cinquecento: quali relazioni?

VENERDÌ 13 DICEMBRE, ORE 15,30

Joseph Connors (Villa I Tatti, Firenze)
Lucezza di fare storia

Donatella Calabi (DSA, IUAV)
Circolazione del denaro, circolazione delle idee: casi di storia comparata

Giorgio Chiotolin (Università Statale, Milano)
Ricerche e dibattiti sulla storia politica della società italiana fra XII e XVII secolo

SABATO 14 DICEMBRE, ORE 10,00

Franco Rella (DADI, IUAV)
La storia, le storie

TAVOLA ROTONDA CONCLUSIVA

1212

Aula Manfredo Tafuri
Palazzo Badoer
INTRODUCTION: ABOUT DIFFERENT TAFURI’S.

Nur wer sich wandelt, bleibt mit mir verwandt.
Friedrich Nietzsche, Jenseits von Gut und Böse.

The twelfth of December 2002 was a special date for the history department of the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia. It was the first day of a conference called ‘Fare Storia’ – ‘Doing History’. The first speaker, although not announced on the programme, was the architectural historian Francesco Dal Co. His words were a brief comment on the theme of the conference, and perhaps also on the event itself.

→ Today in the newspapers we read about ‘doing history’. But does one ‘do’ history? What does this actually mean? Is it possible to do history; is it possible to write objective texts about the past? …History is that which enchants because it disenchants. But history can never speak the ultimate words because it never gives any certainties. ‘Doing history’ then means action in the light of this challenge. It means occupying oneself with that which is not ours, with that which we have lost, with what has evaded us. We don’t possess history, we don’t comprehend it. There are no last words in history.

The conference was presented as the first part of a new PhD programme in architectural history but was not an easy introduction to the topic. Usually seminars and conferences in architectural history deal with specific themes, such as ‘The Algiers Project of Le Corbusier’, or ‘City-planning in Nineteenth-century France’. It is already relatively rare in architectural history to find a conference dedicated to the position of the actual historian, to the craft, or the act of ‘doing’. However, what made this conference even more unique was that the first lines of its introduction addressed issues at the highest level of abstraction. As one student remarked rather desperately during the second day of the conference: ‘I have just started this PhD programme and I would like to receive some concrete assistance, a helping hand in how to go about my research. Instead you confront me with very abstract reflections about the writing of architectural history.’

The particular character of this conference had everything to do with the legacy of a very influential architectural historian, one who had spent the greater part of his life teaching at the Department of

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1 A conference under the name ‘Fare Storia’ is organized every year by the staff of the PhD programme ‘Il Dottorato in Storia dell’architettura e della città, Scienze delle arti, Restauro’, at the School for Advanced Studies in Venice Foundation, Venice. Senior architectural historians, art historians and historians speak about their experiences of ‘doing history’. After these lectures, the PhD students are given the chance to ask questions and enter into discussion with the academics.

2 ‘Fare Storia’ conference, Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia, Dipartimento di Storia dell’architettura, 12-14 December 2002, introduction by Francesco Dal Co. Speaking about recent newspaper reports, Dal Co specifically referred to a resolution that was accepted by the Italian Chamber on 12 December 2002, which obliged the Minister of Education to regulate the contents of the history books used in schools. This proposal and its approval by Berlusconi’s government raised a storm of protest among leftist and centre parties. Carlo Giovanardi, from the Udc (Unione Democratico Cristiano di Centro, the former Christian Democrats) said: ‘It is not the task of the executive to control the objectivity of books about history’. La Repubblica, ‘Testi di storia, contrari i centristi’, 12 December 2002.
Tafuri, on the left, speaking with the Spanish architect Rafael Moneo at the Biennale of Venezia, 1991
Architectural History of the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia. This was the historian Manfredo Tafuri, who was born in Rome in 1935 and died in Venice in 1994. On a worldwide scale Tafuri was one of the most influential architectural historians of the twentieth century.

To a certain extent, Dal Co’s comment was symptomatic of the problem that was central to this meeting. In essence, how did the event of this conference reflect the state of the discipline of architectural history after the year 2000? ‘Doing history’ – should Dal Co’s words be interpreted as a sign that the naturalness of this ‘doing’ is no longer present; that it has become necessary to reflect on history? Or should his words be seen as an incentive to not lose oneself in thought about history; that history first and foremost is a question of action? After Dal Co had set the stage, the Italian philosopher Remo Bodei made his appearance. In his speech, Bodei certainly pointed in the direction of the first option. From a philosophical point of view, Bodei spoke of a central problem behind all forms of writing history, including architectural history.

What is drastically declining is the capacity to think about a collective future, to imagine this outside of one’s private expectations. History appears to many to be the orphan of that intrinsic logic that was believed to lead towards a certain objective: progress, the reign of liberty or a society without classes. A culture has faded that, between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, led billions of people to believe that events were taking a certain course, either announced or predicted . . . Fading away, without having been refuted, the idea of a single oriented history, the sense of our living in time seems, today more than ever, to be dispersed in a plurality of histories . . .

History is no longer part of a collective project-for-the-future; a project dominated by the belief in progress and a better world. The direction of history writing in 2002 is once again undecided: it is an open discipline. It is from the perspective of the open and undecided character of the discipline that we may understand the opening lecture of the conference, given by an aging James Ackerman, an American architectural historian. Ackerman (San Francisco, 1918), called his lecture ‘Ruminations on Sixty-Plus Years as an Architectural Historian in America’. Ackerman’s position is indeed unique as his personal career coincides with the development of art and architectural history into an academic discipline. Ackerman spoke of his experiences as a seventeen-year-old boy, when in 1937 he read the first art history book published in America, a book dedicated to Renaissance painting. At that time art history books were – as Ackermann explained in Italian – ‘Un insieme disorganica di varie materie’ (A non-organic whole of diverse disciplins). Special programmes in art history or art historical departments at the American universities did not yet exist. Ackerman also mentioned the influence that Tafuri had on him:

This book contains many translations. All translations are by the author unless otherwise specified.

Remo Bodei, ‘Pensare il futuro, o come l’utopia si è separato dalla storia’.

See also James Ackerman, Distance Points, Essays in Theory and Renaissance Art and Architecture, Massachusetts, 1991. This is a very interesting book in which Ackerman testifies to the development of the discipline through his own professional and occasionally personal experiences.
I was impressed by his ideological capacity and by his integrity of method… He enriched a purely visual approach to architectural history… He made us aware that architecture was a part of the social fabric, a question of individuals, institutions, social structures and so on.

However, for Ackerman there was also the problem of how to approach the discipline after Tafuri. In fact, when a student from the audience asked him how a young architectural historian should deal with the incredible load created by the intellectual explorations of Tafuri, Ackerman could not provide a clear answer. He replied:

I think it is a question of maturing… everyone has to make their own history, everyone has to follow a road of formation. It is impossible to consume everything that is offered, it is too difficult. I see in young people nowadays a certain impatience with regard to the formation of the historian. But history is a craft you learn during an entire life.

The other lectures at this conference also clearly reflected the burden that has been created by the intellectual explorations of a previous century. The American architectural historian Joseph Connors presented research which suggested a new way of considering the picturesque character of the urban tissue of Rome. He connected the characteristics of the urban structures of Rome to the conflicts of power created by the clash between ‘high politics’ and ‘low politics’. He also mentioned the virtues of structuralist methodology for architectural history, the *microstoria* and the influence of feminist research. The conference concluded with lectures by historians who were not directly connected with the field of architectural history. The Italian historian Giovanni Levi spoke on ‘The Historians, Psycho-analysis and the Truth’, while Jacques Revel, a French historian, spoke on the theme ‘Biography and Social History’.

The aim of the ‘Fare Storia’ conference was to reflect on the craft of doing history: its tools, methods and conventions. As such, the conference signalled the entrance of architectural history into our reflective, epistemology-conscious age, that presently dominates many disciplines within the humanities. Its title referred to the book *Faire de l’histoire*, published by the French historians Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora in 1974,....

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6 Giovanni Levi is a professor in modern history at the history department of the Ca’Foscari University of Venice. He is connected with *micro-storia* and his publications include ‘L’eredità immateriale: carriera di un esorcista nel Piemonte del Seicento, Torino’, *Microstorie* 10, 1985. Jacques Revel is a professor in the field of the cultural history of modern Europe. He teaches at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris and is associated with the journal *Annales d’histoire économique et sociale* (founded 1929). Tafuri and his team of architectural historians were influenced by the French historians related to the *Annales* journal. In an interview, Tafuri mentions, for example, Lucien Febvre’s *Le problème de l’incroyance au XVle siècle; la religion de Rabelais* (197442) or his earlier *Un destin, Martin Luther, un destin* (1928). Jacques Le Goff was an important representative of the so-called third generation of *Annales* historians; Tafuri had read his *La naissance du Purgatoire* (1982). As far as I know, Tafuri did not study Nora, who became renowned for his monumental series *Les lieux de mémoire* (1984-1992).
which showed that the awareness of an historical operation within history itself – involving, for example, the personality of the historian and the subjectivity of his or her selection of data – leads to a particular kind of historiographical reflection. However, the conference in Venice also stood out among its disciplinary counterparts. The aim of its organizers was not merely to catch up with the latest in historiographical fashion. In a more fundamental way, the architectural historians saw this conference as part of a larger project to raise architectural history to a more mature level, confirming its status as a true and proper academic discipline. In this respect, most of the speakers were well aware of the moral legacy left by the historian Manfredo Tafuri. As the organizers of the conference saw themselves as working towards the realization of a vision that Tafuri formulated in the late 1960s, most of the speakers could not escape the moral duty of somehow formulating a response to the quest that marked this historian’s career. In 2002, eight years after Tafuri’s death, the well-known ‘confusion after the funeral’ continued to mark the conference. The father had left the scene and the children had to fend for themselves: what are we going to do now?

In a society that fundamentally changed in the second half of the twentieth century, can architectural history continue to derive its meaning from the modernist strategies as elaborated during the first part of the century, or should a new definition of architectural history be developed? This was the question that Tafuri posed during the second part of the 1960s. This question occupied his entire life and motivated him to write a special book called *Teorie e Storia dell’architettura*. Immediately after publication in 1968 this book became a bestseller, first in Italy and later on an international scale. The French would call this a ‘succès du scandale’, as its fame was largely due to its provocative stance. In fact, this was not an ordinary book about architectural history: it was not a ‘decent’ monograph about a modern architect and it certainly was not about the style characteristics of Roman or Gothic architecture, for example. On the first page of *Teorie e Storia* the reader was confronted with a puzzling dialogue between the Marquis de Sade and the French painter Jean-Paul Marat.

> Sade: To sort out the true from the false / we must know ourselves / I/ don’t know myself / When I think I have discovered something / I begin to doubt . . .

> Marat: We must pull ourselves out of the ditch / by our boot-straps / turn inside-out / and see everything with new eyes . . .

So much for conservatism; so much for a book clarifying the essence of modern architecture. *Teorie e Storia* was essentially a collection of essays with curious names, such as ‘Modern Architecture and the Eclipse of History’, ‘Architecture as “Indifferent Object”’ and ‘Crisis of Critical Attention.’ Particularly striking were the last three chapters of the

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The agenda behind *Teorie e Storia* was indeed unique. In the 1960s it was not at all common for an architectural historian to ask such fundamental questions about the status of the discipline. Architectural history only enjoyed a marginal position, either on the periphery of art history or on the periphery of the development of the architect. Architectural history did not have an autonomous disciplinary structure: it did not possess its own professional and scientific instruments. In the 1960s, when Tafuri became productive, modern architectural history had been shaped to a great extent by a group of exceptional art historians and architects. From a deep engagement within the course of the Modern Movement, they had begun to write the history of modern architecture.

Among the arts, architecture has a special position. Paintings or sculptures, for example, are autonomous works of art that can be enjoyed in the isolated atmosphere of the museum, but this is not the case for architecture. Architecture is only partially related to the world of artists. Primarily it produces a technical and social product, as buildings perform a function within society. In architecture there will always be a tension between ethics and aesthetics. At the beginning of the twentieth century, this battle was decided in favour of ethics. For example, Dutch architects related to the movement known as ‘Het Nieuwe Bouwen’ were convinced of their social task: architecture could make an important contribution to the process of cultural and social change. Architects therefore had to let go of their artistic and formal ambitions and focus on the possibilities offered by industry and technology. Architecture was a means to create a community: ‘We have a world to create’, wrote the Dutch architect Mart Stam (1899-1986). Stam became one of the principal modernists in Dutch architectural history. Fuelled by his left-wing engagement, he managed to seduce the members of the CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne) into dedicating their second congress, held in June 1928 in La Sarraz, Switzerland, to the theme of housing for minimum wage earners. Although modern architects had a notoriously difficult relationship with history – due to an allergy to the historical eclecticism of nineteenth-century architects – it was not long before the first books about the history of modern architecture appeared. In 1927 the German architect Gustav Adolf Platz wrote what was possibly the first history of modern architecture, *Die Baukunst der Neuesten Zeit*, published by the Propyläen Verlag in Berlin. In the following years, other architects and art historians continued to write important histories that greatly helped in raising modern architecture to the status of a canon. In 1936 the émigré German art historian Nikolaus Pevsner published his *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from Morris to Gropius*, in London, while the Swiss architect and art historian Siegfried Giedion pub-
lished his famous *Space, Time and Architecture, The Growth of a New Tradition*, in America in 1941. There is one central leitmotiv behind all these books: the historian writing about modern architects and modern buildings also identifies with them. If the architect builds for a better world, then the historian should reflect that ambition in history, through the choice of buildings that are discussed, for example. For an architectural historian in the 1910s or the 1920s the question was: if these are the promises of modern architecture; if these are its capacities, then how can architectural history do justice to that reality?\(^{11}\) This was also a question with an ethical obligation. If modern architecture stood for progress and for a better future, then the historian could not treat the most recent chapter of architectural history as any other chapter. Having arrived at the end of the historical account – the contemporary phase – the historian had to indicate that now something very special was happening, which would forever change the appearance of the world.

> … architecture disposed of a new style. A series of determined and daring architects had created it, men of exceptional imagination and ingenuity. Since the creators of the Renaissance turned away from the Gothic five hundred years ago and put something completely different in its place, there had not been a revolution in European architecture of similar scope; yes, the whole enterprise of these pioneers of modern architecture seems even more audacious than that of Brunelleschi or Alberti …\(^{12}\)

‘Pioneers of modern architecture’ – this was the way in which Nikolaus Pevsner in 1942 optimistically announced the first signs of a new era in architecture. For historians like Pevsner it had become an ethical obligation to write teleological histories. Histories of

\(^{11}\) Siegfried Giedion explained his idea of the task of the architectural historian in the book *Architecture You and Me: The Diary of a Development* (1954). For Giedion, the connection between past, present and future was very important. He wanted to distil out of the historical process those ‘living forces’ and ‘spiritual attitudes’ which still determine our lives today. For Giedion, the concept of *Zeitgeist* allowed him to analyse, in a ‘biological way’, what moves people and what constitutes the spiritual force behind their lives. As a clue to these vague ‘living forces’, Giedion was interested in modern painting, for instance, in the work of Picasso. He considered that this task was so serious and so difficult that the architectural historian should be a professional figure. However, for Giedion it was beyond doubt that the problems of the day should guide our explorations into the future: ‘For this the historian must have an understanding of his own period in its relation to the past and maybe also some inkling of those trends leading into the future.’ *Siegfried Giedion, Architecture You and Me: The Diary of Development*, Cambridge Mass., 1954, p. 110.


\(^{13}\) There is perhaps no greater contrast between Dal Co’s introduction to the conference: ‘history doesn’t provide any certainties’ and the confident, firm style of Nikolaus Pevsner, writing half a century earlier. Pevsner’s *Pioneers of Modern Design* from William Morris to Walter Gropius, originally published as *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* in 1936, particularly illustrates this assuredness. With rapid, confident steps, Pevsner walks us through his history of modern architecture: ‘So our circle is complete. The history of artistic theory between 1890 and the First World War proves the assertion on which the present work is based, namely, that the phase between Morris and Gropius is an historical unit.’ Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design from William Morris to Walter Gropius*, London, 1991, p. 39.

PETER COLLINS
Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture
modern architecture should have a clear plot, with a structure that leads to a clear goal: the buildings of yesterday introduce the achievements of today, which are in turn the overtures to the future final liberation.\textsuperscript{13}

In the early 1950s the first cracks in the stronghold of historiographical modernity became apparent. During this period a generation of architectural historians appeared who tried anew to formulate the relationship between the architectural historian and society. Architect-historians like Jürgen Joedicke from Germany and Peter Collins from England took a critical, more distanced stance towards what now appeared as the canon of modern architecture – the list of buildings that could be called authentically modern.\textsuperscript{14} For example, when Peter Collins published the book \textit{Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture} in 1965, the reputation of historians like Pevsner and Giedion had risen to almost mythical proportions – they were grand names that figured alongside architect-masters like Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier. In his work, Collins introduced what he believed to be an important amendment to their narrative, arguing that the formal aspects of modern buildings had now been extensively discussed by historians such as Hitchcock or Giedion, but that the theories behind the forms had largely remained outside the debate. Taking the ideas behind modern architecture as the starting point for analysis, Collins extensively enlarged the period of architectural modernism. No longer confined to just one age, Collins thought of modernism in architecture as encompassing the nineteenth and part of the eighteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{15} In addition, Collins did not agree with those who saw the architecture of the 1950s as the expression of a deep crisis in modern architecture. He considered that the newly emerging historicism and the revivals of styles – for example, the so-called ‘Neo-liberty Movement’ in Italy – should not be seen as a backlash

\textsuperscript{15} Collins started his history around 1750. For my study of historiography I am greatly indebted to Michela Maguolo of the I.U.A.V. in Venice, who in 1994 gave me the typescript ‘Le Storie dell’architettura moderna’, which was a specific part of the course in the history of modern architecture by Professor Roberto Masiero. I am also indebted to the initiatives taken by Patrizia Bonifazio and Paolo Scrivano from the Politecnico di Torino, Department of Architecture. In particular, I refer to the conference of 1999 which led to the book, P. Bonifazio and R. Palma, eds., \textit{Architettura Spazio Scritto, forme e tecniche delle teorie dell’architettura in Italia dal 1945 ad oggi}, Torino, 2001. See also P. Scrivano, Storia di un’idea di architettura moderna, Henry-Russell Hitchcock e L’International Style, Torino, 2001.

\textsuperscript{16} Collins’ views continue to find a following among architectural historians. For instance, in 1997 the Dutch architectural historian Auke van der Woud published an influential book called \textit{Waarheid en karakter, het debat over de bouwkunst 1840-1900} [Truth and Character, the Debate about the Art of Building 1840-1900] in which he took the ‘ideas, convictions and theories’ about building as the point of departure for an architectural history of the nineteenth century. Similarly to Collins, in the introduction he confesses to viewing modernism as the continuation of a much longer historical development. However, in contrast to Collins, Van der Woud demonstrated a far more critical attitude with respect to styles, regarding them as a ‘deep pitfall into which researchers tumble without ever emerging.’ Auke van der Woud, \textit{Waarheid en Karakter, Het debat over de bouwkunst 1840-1900}, Rotterdam, 1997. This book was translated in English as: The Art of Building, from Classicism to Modernity: the Dutch Architectural Debate 1840-1900, Aldershot, 2001.

\textsuperscript{17} I am referring to the cover photograph of the 1965 paperback edition by Faber and Faber in London. Collins was indeed very critical of the sort of modern architecture that was not in tune with the environment. He considered that architects who isolated their work from the context were ‘narcissists’. See P. Tournikiotis, \textit{The Historiography of Modern Architecture}, Cambridge, Massachusetts , 1999, pp. 167-191.
Tafuri’s death in Italian newspapers

Venezia, il coraggio dell’Architettura

Un artista della critica

di VALENTINO

E’ morto a Venezia il grande storico dell’architettura Manfredo Tafuri.

Tafuri fu un marzo alla morte, un uomo che aveva ripassato le strade e le vie di Venezia, un uomo che aveva compiuto il percorso delle sue opere, un uomo che aveva saputo comprendere il valore dell’architettura e del suo potere di interpretazione.

Un architetto di grande cultura, un uomo che aveva saputo trasformare il suo mondo, un uomo che aveva saputo interpretare la città e la sua storia.

Tafuri è morto a Venezia, ma la sua figura rimarrà sempre presente nella città, nella sua cultura, nella sua storia.

Tafuri è un uomo che ha saputo comprendere l’architettura e il suo potere di interpretazione, un uomo che ha saputo trasformare il suo mondo, un uomo che ha saputo comprendere il valore dell’architettura e del suo potere di interpretazione.

Un uomo che ha saputo comprendere l’architettura e il suo potere di interpretazione, un uomo che ha saputo trasformare il suo mondo, un uomo che ha saputo comprendere il valore dell’architettura e del suo potere di interpretazione.
against modernism, but as the conscious and mature use of the styles and forms with which we are surrounded.\textsuperscript{16}

Peter Collins expounded the ideas of a generation of architectural historians who first developed a sensibility towards the historiographical tradition formed by architectural historians such as Nikolaus Pevsner. Collins felt the weight of this tradition and he tried to place himself vis à vis its legacy. In this respect, the photograph printed on the cover of the book may be seen as a metaphor for the widening gap between two generations of architectural historians. The photograph depicts a painful juxtaposition of a modern building with harsh geometrical lines built directly in front of a Parisian baroque apartment building. The modern building is completely ignorant of its immediate environment and the photograph therefore displays a clash between two ways of thinking about architecture, and perhaps also represents a clash between two generations of modern architectural historians.\textsuperscript{17}

In contrast to Collins, whose primary concern as an architect and an architectural historian remained the quality of the built environment, the work of Tafuri signalled the moment when the rupture with modernist historiography became definitive. Tafuri took a radical position even with respect to the sweeping revisions introduced by such historians as Joedicke, Collins and Banham.\textsuperscript{18} Tafuri’s radicality was determined primarily by the fact that he took his own position as an architect and an historian as the point of departure for a radical reconsideration of the history of modern architecture. Although trained as an architect, Tafuri no longer wanted to work under this title. He found that his devotion to history excluded the possibility of his being called an architect first and foremost. He not only started to reflect upon historiography in a more extensive way than had ever been done before, but also invented the theme of ‘operative history’ as the banner under which its history was being written. In the aforementioned \textit{Teorie e Storia} he wrote the following passage, which has become famous in post-war historiography:

\begin{quote}
What is normally meant by operative criticism is an analysis of architecture (or of the arts in general) that, instead of an abstract survey, has as its objective the planning of a precise poetical tendency, anticipated in its structures and derived from historical analyses programmatically distorted and finalised…\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

What struck architectural historians about the historiographical survey put forward by Tafuri was his fierce attack on this so-called ‘operative history’: ‘Operative criticism is an analysis of architecture . . . that has as its objective the planning of a precise \textit{poetical tendency} ’ (Italics author). What Tafuri noticed in the historical writings of predecessors such as Pevsner and Giedion was that their books were ordered and structured according to a certain \textit{poetica}. The plot of an architectural history could also be called its ‘poetics’: the message that needs to be validated and ‘realized’ between the front and back covers of a book, with the historical material carefully selected in order to match this purpose.


In this sense, as Tafuri noted, the poetics of a modern architectural historian reflected the poetics of the modern architect. The architect communicates by way of building: carefully designing the work so as to make sure the proper message is conveyed. Just as the architect carefully goes about the act of designing, so the historian will also meticulously construct the historical argument. In this way, operative history was for Tafuri a precise reflection of the practice of the architect. For him, the two activities were interchangeable, in so far as both could be seen as attempts at persuasion – in the case of the historian the goal is to secure a particular version of history in response to the architect who is attempting to advocate a particular type of building. The task faced by the modern architectural historian was to make the ‘working’ of a building clear, to analyse and to explain in a precise way what was happening within a building. For an architectural historian, this was the essence of the profession: to communicate and make evident the different layers and intentions of a building. If the architect viewed the design practice as part of a larger ideological strategy to arrive at social betterment or even a liberated world – thus giving testimony to the intimate relationship between modern architecture and social


21 This is still a legitimate way to work for many architectural historians. For instance, a Dutch newspaper recently reported the story of an architectural historian who had dedicated her thesis to a Dutch modern architect. Discussing her motives for writing this monograph, she said: ‘My mainspring was the beauty of the buildings, their magnificence or crushing impertinence, in short: all those aspects which in those days were only written about in an amusing way’, ‘Verpletterend brutaal – Hugh Maaskant bouwde vooral robuust’, book review and interview with Michelle Provoost by Hilde de Haan, de Volkskrant, 14 August 2003, p. 6. See Michelle Provoost, Hugh Maaskant, architect van de vooruitgang, Rotterdam, 2003. Reflecting on Tafuri’s theme of ‘operative’ or ‘poetical’ history, it is striking that modernism in architecture bears the characteristics of structuralism as defined in literary theory. In the 1930s, when modern architecture was in full bloom, a movement called ‘New Criticism’ emerged in literary criticism. It was most conspicuous in that it focused solely upon the structure of the literary object itself, at the expense of ideas, politics, social and historical backgrounds. The practitioners of ‘New Criticism’ eliminated the context because they wanted to study the structure of a book, not the mind of the author or the reactions of the readers. The New Critics were the most modern branch of literary theory and I consider that their ideas are reflected in the practice of the modern architectural historian. Architectural historians practice a sort of ‘thick description’ as analysed by Clifford Geertz: a cultural sign that is interpreted so intensely that all its possible meanings are catalogued. For example, a wink of an eye may be interpreted as a rapid contraction of an eyelid, but could also be the ‘burlesque of a friend faking a wink’. See Clifford Geertz, ‘Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture’, in The Interpretation of Cultures, New York, 1973. I am indebted to Professor Mary McLeod from Columbia University New York, Department of Architecture, for making me aware of the importance of New Criticism for architecture, particularly through her course, ‘Contemporary Theory and Criticism of Architecture: Structuralism/poststructuralism, Postmodernism/ deconstructivism’, Spring-Fall 1995.

progress – then the historian would underline this position through a careful analysis of the building.\textsuperscript{20} In this sense, modern architectural historians are structuralists, a structuralism that becomes clear through this focus on buildings and buildings only.\textsuperscript{21} When Tafuri wrote \textit{Teorie e Storia} in 1968, he was convinced that this approach was no longer legitimate. Tafuri’s plea for an ‘anti-operative history’ may also be called a plea for an ‘anti-poetical history’. With \textit{Teorie e Storia}, the discipline of architectural history entered the age of post-structuralism. In an interview, Tafuri explained the intentions that lay behind this book:

\begin{quote}
Thus I fought against the attitude of the critic who gets inside the work or submits to the work. I fought against those who were trying to bend to the will of the work, to enter into the work as an open construction, because they became so involved that they had no historical detachment – neither from the work itself, nor from the meaning of the work. I used to tell my students that they needed to learn to love and hate the work at the same time.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

Tafuri claimed that architectural historians could no longer speak the language that is spoken by the building and could no longer do what the building wants them to do. This message deeply shocked the world of architectural historians, who felt they had been attacked right at the heart of their intended task. It was an attack on their passion. The Italian architectural historian Bruno Zevi – a colleague of Tafuri’s – wrote a furious review entitled ‘Myths and Resigned Historiography’:

\begin{quote}
The critics who believe in some ideal are accused of distorting history, of forcing it to their purposes in view of an action to be carried out in the culture of today. We must debunk all the masters: this is the magic slogan. But without a guideline, without a method for making choices, history becomes an arbitrary sequence of events, perhaps brilliant and sparkling, but certainly incapable of inspiring and promoting.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

Internationally, the astonishment was even greater. Was this harsh criticism really coming from Italy, the cradle of architectural culture, the country in which architecture had such an important position? The book \textit{Teorie e Storia dell’architettura} prompted many questions, for Tafuri himself as well as others. What preoccupied Tafuri after the publication of \textit{Teorie e Storia} was the question concerning the social position of the non-operative historian. It was now clear to him that architectural history could no longer support the Modern Movement automatically. Connected to this insight was the notion that this movement should no longer be considered to be homogeneous – as the Modern Movement – but rather as a heterogeneous and contradictory ensemble – as being many Modern Movements. Previous historians had been engaged in the elaboration of a construct of their own consciousness when speaking of the Modern Movement as a grand and unified ‘construction’. It was now the task of the critical historian to see the reality of the Modern Movement as a constellation of often diverse ideologies; as a jumble of thoughts and ideas inside the head of the architect. However, did this mean that a direct social engagement on the part of the historian had to be exchanged for the proverbial ivory tower?

\textsuperscript{22} Bruno Zevi, ‘Miti e rassegnazione storica’, editorial of \textit{L’architettura storia e cronache}, 155, September 1968. The quote is derived from the English abstract of the article.
It was not so simple for Tafuri. If the Modern Movement is considered to be a constellation of phenomena that are primarily ideological in character, what should be the position of the historians themselves, considering the fact that their work also belongs to the sphere of ideology? How can they remain critical, while being ideological agents themselves, with respect to the ideological configuration that is studied? For Tafuri, historians have to assume a detached position while recognizing that they are a part of the world they study. After a Pevsner and a Giedion, it was the task of historians not to throw out the baby with the bath water. The challenge for Tafuri was to transform an initially unproblematic engagement into a new sense of responsibility, one that avoided both the clichés of crude indifference and uncritical passion.

What are the consequences of Tafuri’s work for the discipline of architectural history? If architecture with its tangible modern and postmodern appearance plays a symbolical role for the humanities in general, then what are the consequences of Tafuri’s architectural history for history writing in general? These are the central questions behind this book. With my dissertation I hope to provide impetus to the debate concerning how historians of architecture can deal with their intellectual and disciplinary past.

A NEWSPAPER OBITUARY

Manfredo Tafuri died on Wednesday, 23 February 1994 in Venice. Over the following days, almost all Italian newspapers, both local and national, reported his death. Il Gazzettino, the local Venetian newspaper wrote: ‘And here the news hit us like a bolt from the blue, while the institute was preparing for the inauguration of the academic year, planned for Saturday. The principal, Marino Folin, immediately decreed three days of mourning and, also in the light of the mourning, postponed the ceremony of inauguration.’ 24 In the Cultura supplement of the Marxist newspaper l’Unità, the literary critic Alberto Asor Rosa – Tafuri’s former collaborator – wrote a short obituary starting with the following lines:

Manfredo Tafuri has been without doubt one of the most important historians of architecture of this century: for certain periods and for certain authors, certainly the

25 ‘Manfredo Tafuri è stato senza alcun dubbio uno dei più importanti storici dell’architettura di questo secolo: per certi periodi e per certi autori, di certo il più importante. La qualità preziosa inimitabile delle sue ricostruzioni e consistita nella capacità di mettere insieme e unificare la pazientissima, infaticabile, talvolta certosina attività archivistica e documentaria con la genialità e la complessità del progetto interpretativo . . .’ Alberto Asor Rosa, ‘Fu un grande certosino dell’immaginario’, in l’Unità, 24 February 1994, p. 4. L’Unità newspaper dedicated an entire page to the death of the historian. The architectural critic Andrea Branzi wrote the main article while Asor Rosa wrote a short article under the heading ‘Ricordi’.
Most headlines tried to capture what was considered to be the ‘essence’ of Tafuri’s work in a few words. Thus, Gae Aulenti refers to Tafuri in *la Repubblica* as ‘an artist of criticism’ and on that same page Tafuri’s friend, philosopher Massimo Cacciari, was paraphrased as saying: ‘He saw the universe as a philosopher.’ In the comments there is a tension between those who see Tafuri foremost as a theoretician and those who praise Tafuri for his craftsmanship as an historian. For Cacciari, the fact that Tafuri based his analysis of architectural details on a vast horizon of general knowledge made him part of the tradition of the greatest Italian philosophers, from Gentile to Garin. A journalist of the Italian newspaper *la Repubblica* wrote: ‘The historian of architecture who died yesterday in Venice has defied modern nihilism to recover the sense of history and of the city.’ In *l’Unità* the architect and critic Andrea Branzi put Tafuri in yet another perspective:

➤ Manfredo Tafuri represented very well the passage that came about starting at the end of the 1960s in Italian culture; a leap of quality produced by a new generation of architects, who emerged from the student conflicts with new mental instruments and from a new political dimension. They were the carriers of a new, vast and problematic vision of the project that no longer recognized itself in the linear development of an optimistic and rationalist modernity that was already in decline.

Branzi writes that Tafuri’s work began with the insight that an orthodox conception of modernity – linear, optimistic, rational – was no longer convincing. As a consequence of this conviction, Tafuri demonstrated that architectural history could benefit from the new analytic disciplines which arose during the 1970s: literary criticism, semiotics, neo-Marxism, for example. However, from Branzi’s comment we may further deduce that this was not his sole achievement. With his oeuvre and with his intellectual presence, Tafuri proved that architectural history stood at the very centre of these debates. It is in this sense that we should read the following quote by Branzi:

➤ The choice of Tafuri to declare himself – after a short juvenile season as an architect working for Ludovico Quaroni – a theoretician and radical historian, has

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26 Ibid., ‘La scelta di Manfredo Tafuri di dichiararsi (dopo una breve stagione giovanile di progettista presso Ludovico Quaroni) ha coinciso con il superamento definitivo della vecchia critica estetica dell’architettura alla Bruno Zevi... e anche dei grandi e geniali bricolage di Leonardo Benevolo, per fornire negli anni 70 a tutta la cultura internazionale del progetto una ben diversa caratura teorica, e una coscienza di se stessa come protagonista autorevole di un grande dibattito storico e civile.’
In memoriam Manfredo Tafuri

La casa è un回忆 di Cà Cana

L'omaggio di un amico

La notizia di una morte scritta in mezzo a una strada.
coincided with the final overcoming of the old aesthetic architectural criticism in the style of Bruno Zevi... and also with the grand and brilliant bricolage of Leonardo Benevolo, providing to the entire international architectural culture in the 1970s a very different theoretical framework, and a self-consciousness as authoritative protagonist in a grand historical and civil debate.28

Here Branzi refers to Tafuri as ‘a self-consciousness as an authoritative protagonist in a grand historical and civil debate’ defining the extent of Tafuri’s development since he first published his famous Teorie e Storia dell’architettura in 1968. In la Repubblica, Gae Aulenti described the paradigmatic value of this book in the following words:

> In 1968 Teorie e Storia dell’architettura was published, where Tafuri postulates a complete and totally new point of observation for the criticism and history of architecture... Tafuri puts forward for the first time two subjects with precise and necessary responsibilities: the architect who has to courageously regard its actual crisis and the historian and critic who has the task, truly not simple, to make that crisis rational and conscious.29

Both in Italy and further afield, Tafuri became best known for his plea for a non-operative architectural history – the idea of an autonomous discipline not developed to serve the architect. However, Tafuri also wrote some very fine histories, for example, about the Renaissance of Rafael and Giulio Romano; about Alberti and Michelangelo. In 1983 he published, together with A. Foscari, a micro-storia called L’armonia e i conflitti. Two years later, he published the book Venezia e il Rinascimento, which was followed in 1992 by Ricerca del Rinascimento. In this respect, Alberto Asor Rosa praises Tafuri’s craftsmanship as an historian. Asor Rosa characterizes Tafuri’s histories as a series of grand constructions, based upon ‘patient, tireless’ work in archives but also upon the ability to give a clear interpretation of complex material without losing track. The philosopher Massimo Cacciari presented the most insightful analysis of the historiographic qualities of Tafuri claiming that his craftsmanship as an historian was at the same time an illustration of Tafuri’s philosophical position. He suggests that Tafuri became convinced that he could only express a certain theoretical position by using the instruments of the discipline of history. According to Cacciari, the most valuable aspect of Tafuri’s historical practice is present in the simultaneous elaboration of studies about the Renaissance and modernity which offer a continuous oscillating movement between, for instance, studies about the

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architect Jacopo Sansovino and Le Corbusier: ‘Not only because he did not believe in the antithesis modern-antimodern, but also because here a philosophical problem hides itself: that of finding in Humanism the roots of our anxiety.’

As previously stated, most of the newspaper articles are written by colleagues – architects, critics or historians – and take the form of tributes to Tafuri, consequently, an explicit critical tone is lacking. This may be expected from homage paid to a recently deceased historian, however, to some extent the obituaries also continue a tendency to idealize Tafuri. Does this mean that Tafuri’s career was without controversy and without debatable aspects? Tafuri became notorious for his decision in 1980 to leave the field of modern architecture behind and to dedicate his time exclusively to historiography and meticulously elaborated studies of older architecture. As a result, Tafuri’s career is often described as consisting of two phases: that of a younger, more radical Tafuri, and that of an older, more conservative Tafuri.

In fact, Tafuri’s decision puzzled many of his colleagues and followers. Was this a radical shift of focus? Did it mean that Tafuri considered the first part of his career a failure? If this were so, how could it be reconciled with the previously acquired insights; with the value of economic, social and political criticism for architectural history and, of course, with the critique of ideology? What fuels this picture of Tafuri is a one-sided manner of thinking about architectural history in which it is forced into a rigid order of periods and phases and is considered to be the outcome of successive ‘periods’ and ‘decades’. Ideas are conceived of as unities within the cycle that makes up such a unit of time. They are reduced to cultural phenomena that characterize a certain period. Outside such a period, there can be no life for the idea reduced to cultural phenomenon. In the case of Tafuri, this led critics to a kind of pseudo-criticism that was not based on the contents of his work, but only on his presumed being out-of-date; his belonging to a decade that, like a fashion-item, had become ‘old fashioned’. It is equally the case that the confusion about the ‘turn’ in his career stems from this attitude, for the suggestion is that if Tafuri was the figurehead of 1970s architectural criticism, how could he simply move on to another body of thought without being guilty of at least inconsistency and perhaps even moral betrayal? However, the reality is that while Tafuri was preparing his famous studies about the architecture of the Weimar Republic and the artistic avant-gardes in the 1960s, he was equally as engaged in the renewal of studies about the Renaissance that was evolving

31 My contention is that such a way of thinking reveals a Hegelian and linear conception of history where cultural phenomena are instruments used by the Geist to demonstrate its presence. They are not autonomous, rather they are always an expression of something else which lies beyond them. In this way, ideas reduced to cultural phenomena serve to demonstrate the spiritual cohesion of a period. In contrast, I propose thinking of ideas as fragments that are never fulfilled, never finished or completed, but that in different circumstances and conditions undergo different transformations.


during that period. Tafuri not only read Wittkower’s *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (1949; Italian edition 1964) and Ackerman’s *Michelangelo* (1961; Italian edition 1964), but also books by the French art historian André Chastel. As Cohen confirms, in *Teorie e Storia* he introduced the *Nouvelle critique* of Roland Barthes into the field of architecture, at a time when Barthes did not yet have the intellectual status he came to enjoy in the 1970s and 1980s in France, let alone in Italy. These were sources that were less obvious for an architectural historian. In 1980, when he decided to focus mainly on Renaissance themes, he maintained his concern about present society and about the developments in contemporary architecture. In particular, Tafuri was increasingly disillusioned about the marginalization of architecture as a meaningful cultural element in historical accounts. His studies of Renaissance architecture were meant as a kind of counterpoint to this, focusing on a period when architecture formed an integral part of culture – when its language was public and widely understood. Tafuri was not the proverbial ‘child of his time’. He struggled with the period in which he lived: he identified with certain parts of it while rejecting others. Yet the image of Tafuri that remains dominant in his international reception is that of being ‘old hat’: Tafuri as the phantom of a period that, to our great relief, resides for ever in history.

**TAFURI’S RECESSION: THE THIRTY-YEAR ITCH**

▶ Aldo van Eyck: Therefore, if Tafuri is present, I would like to tell him that I detest him, and even more I detest that which he writes; that he is profoundly cynical, up to the degree of horror, of nausea… Humanism has only just begun. And an architect is a humanist or not an architect at all.

▶ Manfredo Tafuri (from the audience): …I think that it is perhaps necessary to make the discourse more precise on the relationship between architecture and institutions… That is to say, what is completely closed off is the way of language as communication of messages, which is the humanist discourse…

This ‘passionate loathing’ exhibited by the Dutch modern architect Aldo van Eyck is an example of the strong reactions that Tafuri evoked among his audience. Tafuri was considered a guru; as the object of repulsion, or as a polemical partner in debate. However, in each scenario, he forced his interlocutors to show their true colours and to identify their position. Tafuri stimulated architects and historians to formulate what they stood for;

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34 This rather unpleasant encounter between Tafuri and the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck occurred during the opening of an exhibition that was organized as a part of the Venice Biennale of 1976. The exhibition was called: ‘Europa-America, Centro storico-suburbio’ (Europe-America, historical centre-suburb). In the Palazzo del Cinema at the Venice Lido a discussion was organized among the architects-participants, concerning the question: Quale Movimento Moderno? (Which Modern Movement). Two years after this event, the discussion was published in a monograph, Franco Raggi ed., *Europa/America: Architetture urbane, alternative suburbane*, Venice: la Biennale di Venezia, 1978, pp. 174-182, p. 179. The American architectural journal *Oppositions* published a commentary by Peter Eisenman on this encounter and in that same issue Oriol Bohigas published an essay on ‘Aldo van Eyck or a New Amsterdam School’, *Oppositions*, 9, 1977, pp. 19-36.
to express the idealistic and ethical presumptions of their profession. This discriminatory effect was largely due to one book: in 1973, Tafuri published *Progetto e Utopia, Architettura e sviluppo capitalistico*, as a ‘saggio tascabile’, a paperback, published by Laterza.\(^{35}\) Although *Progetto e Utopia* became a sort of ‘red bible’ for a community of students in upheaval – see for example the history of the Dutch students in Delft during the 1970s – its precise contents were not so easily digestible for large parts of the architectural world, be they national or international, right or left-wing. On first impression, *Progetto e Utopia* follows on from *Teorie e Storia*, in the sense that it presents a completely different kind of book about architecture and its history. Most histories of modern architecture either provide an explanation of the works of modern architects or a historicization obeying chronological laws, though they are sometimes both, for example, *Tony Garnier and the Industrial City 1899-1918*, or *Adolf Loos and the Crisis of Culture 1896-1931*.\(^{36}\) However, in *Progetto e Utopia* Tafuri presented a series of essays in which architecture did not appear according to a chronological sequence; it was now the exemplification of an ideological démarche. The most salient characteristic of the book was that Tafuri did not offer any explanation of the work of architects. For example, he chose to ‘clarify’ modern architecture by speaking, in a declamatory tone, of ‘the formation of the architect as an ideologist of society’ or ‘the persuasive role of form in regard to the public and the self-critical role of form in regard to its own problems and development’ as the ‘recurrent themes of the “Enlightenment dialectic” on architecture’.\(^{37}\) After a difficult and long sentence, no explanation followed: Tafuri simply stated his message.

Whereas Tafuri, in *Teorie e Storia*, had addressed the architectural historian, partly as a form of self-criticism, in *Progetto e Utopia* he turned his gaze to the architects. He now expressed one of the most radical statements of his career: *Progetto e Utopia* contained the hypothesis that the course of capitalist society would condemn architecture to sublime uselessness. This greatly shocked a national and international public and subsequently has engraved Tafuri upon the collective memory as a ‘negative thinker’ or as a ‘prophet of the death of architecture’.

> Ideology is useless to capitalist development just like it is harmful to the point of view of the worker: after the elaborations of Fortini in *Verifica dei Poteri*, of Tronti, of Asor Rosa, of Cacciari, we think it is superfluous to resort once again to the *Deutsche Ideologie* to demonstrate this.\(^{38}\)

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Progetto e Utopia was created in the context of an outspoken intellectual climate situated on the Italian far Left which was intensely involved in the formulation of a new form of militant Marxism. Its introductory chapter is interlaced with themes important to the people in that environment, for example, Tafuri's reference to the essay Verifica dei poteri by the critic Franco Fortini. However, the 'tragedy' of Progetto e Utopia is that very few people outside Italy understood these references and the precise intellectual climate in which they were formed and as a consequence, Tafuri's intentions became caricatured. 39

The ghost of Aldo van Eyck remains present in the reception of Tafuri. Even today, more than thirty years after the publication of Progetto e Utopia, Tafuri still 'itches'. 40 In the year 2000, the Design Book Review – an American architectural journal – published a special issue on the theme: ‘Humanism and Posthumanism’. 41 The work of Tafuri, alongside that of Massimo Cacciari and Francesco Dal Co, was analysed from the perspective of posthumanism. As Martin Jay, an American professor in history comments:

► How, we might wonder, should we build in this unforgiving environment? How can we live in a present that takes no consolation in restoring the past or creating a different future? 42

39 An exception is the essay by Tomas Llorens, not so much in his discussion of Tafuri and Cacciari where Llorens develops a neo-Kantian critique of the work of Tafuri and then accuses him of solipsism, rather in the description of their intellectual environment, especially in the first pages of the essay. As a motto, Llorens used a poem by Fortini: ‘And in that sound you can’t discern the song / Of flying snow in vanishing ways or winds / From the perennial chatter of the spring / Dark inside you, that vague dark wave of nothingness.’ We may recognize a reproach to solipsism here, but leaving this aside the reference to the work of Fortini in relation to Tafuri is appropriate. Tomas Llorens, ‘Manfredo Tafuri: Neo-Avant-Garde and History’ in D. Porphyrios ed., Architectural Design Profile, On the Methodology of Architectural History, 1981, pp. 83-95.

40 From the perspective of the history of Tafuri-reception there is one study that I want to mention in particular. This is the thesis written by Jean-Louis Cohen, ‘La Coupure entre architects et intellectuels, ou les enseignements de l’italophilie’, In Extenso, recherches à l’école d’Architecture Paris-Villemin, 1, 1984. Apart from the analysis of Tafuri, this is an important book for its methodology. It was the first time that architectural history after 1945 was written as a comparative history between countries – as the history of exchange and of intellectual transfer. In this respect it is indicative that the point of departure for this study is not formed by buildings alone, but by the broader ‘architectural culture’. See also J.L. Cohen, ‘Transalpine Architektur, der französische Italianismus zwischen 1965 und 1980’, Archithese, 4, July-August 1988, pp. 67-73, special issue ‘Viva la France.’


There seems to be an insurmountable difference between those who see the architect-creator as the cornerstone of an anthropocentric world and those who believe that the role of the architect today is more modest. In a humanist vision of architecture, architects build for a better world. Modern architects specifically build for an even better world. To a certain extent, the intention to control and improve the human environment has always been central to an ‘enlightened architecture’. After the War, from the late 1950s onwards, a crucial phase regarding the establishment of a consensus about the potential of architecture began in the Western world. There was an important debate circulating within neo-Marxist circles: what was the heritage of Marx and how should he be understood in a changed world? While the revisionists stated that despite capitalist development, human values such as freedom and individual growth remained central to our Western culture, the revolutionary Marxists believed that capitalist development was in its ultimate consequences directed against humanity. In the dialectical process, the values of humanism were viewed as phenomena that would be overcome. This schism among neo-Marxists had a great influence upon the thinking about architecture. During the 1960s, an influential group of architects and critics appeared who combined a continued belief in the values of modern architecture with an interest in the Frankfurt School; in philosophers such as Horkheimer, Adorno and Habermas. This resulted in the conviction that social reality could benefit from the social sciences, including, in this case, architecture, and that the social sciences ought to be shaped by social reality. From this perspective, Tafuri’s plea for a non-operative historical analysis – for an analysis that does not act upon reality – could only appear blasphemous.

The most recent reception of Tafuri shows an interesting combination of elements. There is, among most authors, an intense awareness of ‘our’ post-structuralist and postmodern age. However, despite this broader intellectual climate, there is a continued belief in the potential of architecture. In fact, most architectural historians have a passion for architecture. In 1999, the Greek historian Panayotis Tournikiotis published The Historiography of Modern Architecture. In the introduction he declared:

➢ Inherent in this approach is an interest in contemporary architecture that I would not repudiate. The architect’s exploration of the territory of the history and theory of architecture cannot be separated from his interest in the creation of new architectural objects – an interest which, in one way or another, lies at the starting point of his thinking.

43 See, for example, the humanism that pervaded the discussion within the team X group, coming from participants such as the architectural couple Peter and Alison Smithson or the Dutch architect Jacob Bakema. See also the theoretical work of the English critic and historian Kenneth Frampton.

44 Where the postmodern condition entails a critical attitude towards the possibility of telling one true story, or developing a single master narrative, post-structuralism can be seen as the theoretical formulation of this condition. Influenced by Nietzsche, post-structuralists are sceptical about the possibility of liberation through reason. Modernity, which intellectually began with the Enlightenment project to describe the world in rational, objective and empirical terms, ended with the arrival of this movement. See J. Dancy and E. Sosa eds., A Companion to Epistemology, Oxford, 1992, pp. 78-79 and p. 140.


Consequently, most architects and architectural historians continue to have an agenda, even in an era in which Lyotard proclaimed the end of grand narratives. The aesthetic passion for a certain kind of architecture cannot be separated from an ethical passion. Also in 1999, Hilde Heynen published the book *Architecture and Modernity, a Critique*, in which she discussed ‘The School of Venice’, consisting of Tafuri, Cacciari, Dal Co and others. In the introduction she confirmed that architecture in our postmodern world is no longer able to solve the problems of society. However, architecture remains a meaningful practice, according to Heynen, as it plays an important role in the articulation of society’s contradictions.\(^{47}\)

What is curious about these examples of late Tafuri-reception is that, despite our age of post-structuralism and the end of grand narratives, Tafuri is today perhaps less digestible than ever. Tafuri might have been considered as the apex of postmodernity, but his reception remains coloured by a certain struggle and by those ‘for’ and ‘against’. This tension can be understood to a certain degree by remembering what Tafuri said about the intentions behind *Teorie e Storia*. Tafuri declared that he was fighting against those critics whose identification with the work that they discussed, and with the ideas and convictions behind the work, led to a lack of historical detachment. In contrast, Tafuri told his students to ‘love and hate the work at the same time’.\(^{48}\)

*The Historiography of Modern Architecture* is one of the most influential surveys of the subject written in the last few years. In this work, Tournikiotis may also be considered to represent the most recent view on Tafuri. He uses a methodology in which the voices of the French post-structuralist climate resonate:

> I wish simply to examine the discourse of the historians of modern architecture, a historical discourse which, paraphrasing Foucault, I take to be a discursive practice that systematically forms the objects of which it speaks.\(^{49}\)

Focusing on the histories written between the 1920s and the 1960s, Tournikiotis questions ‘the relationship of architecture to its history’.\(^{50}\) To answer this question, he employs

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\(^{47}\) Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity, a Critique*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1999, Introduction, p. 7: ‘For if architecture is not able to design a brave new world in which all our problems are solved, neither is it doomed to just give in to impulses stemming from societal developments in which it has no say whatsoever. It is my belief that architecture has the capacity to articulate in a very specific way the contradictions and ambiguities that modern life confronts us with. In this articulation it can generate a sense of involvement with as well as critique of modernity.’ See also the anthology, H. Heynen et al., eds., *Dat is architectuur: Sleutelteksten uit de 20e eeuw*, Rotterdam, 2001, in which Tafuri is again presented in the context of the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory, and not, interestingly, in the context of Foucault or Lyotard. Note also that such thinkers as Derrida and Lacan are excluded from the book.

\(^{48}\) ‘So I fought against the attitude of the critic who gets inside the work or submits to the work. I fought against those who . . . became so involved that they had no historical detachment . . . I used to tell my students that they needed to learn to love and hate the work at the same time.’ Luisa Passerini, *History as a Project: An Interview with Manfredo Tafuri*, Rome, February-March 1992, pp. 38-39. Now published in Any, ‘Being Manfredo Tafuri – Wickedness, Anxiety, Disenchantment’, no. 25-26, 2000. See above p. 16 of this book.

a deconstructivist method derived from the illustrious thinker Jacques Derrida – Tournikiotis aims to ‘deconstruct the concept of modernity by means of its own historiography’. From this choice of analytical method an important consequence follows: that Tournikiotis treats the historical texts as objects, ignoring the biographical backgrounds of the historians in question and, instead, focusing exclusively upon his texts in terms of their ‘dé-marche’ and their ‘discursive formation’. We may actually hear the echoes of Derrida and Foucault in this approach, for example, Foucault’s notion of ‘the death of the author’. However, perhaps there is also something else going on, something which would still mark Tournikiotis as a modernist, despite his flirtations with French intellectuals. At the start of this introduction, I mentioned the typical modernist preoccupation with buildings and texts as objects. For a modernist architect, the ‘message’ of a building is strictly confined to the object itself. The architectural historian may also follow this approach, aiming to mention all the possible materials, forms and messages of a building. Tournikiotis now transfers this method onto texts. Instead of buildings, he aims at a ‘thick description’ of historical texts, trying to catalogue all the aspects that structure their narrative. Tournikiotis appears to be an analyst who, on the one hand, no longer identifies with the grand narrative around modern architecture, while on the other hand holding on to its ideological assumptions. Mart Stam and Jacques Derrida are combined in one method, so to speak. However, this identification only goes so far. To be sure, Tournikiotis does not accept all the consequences of his Derridean reading strategy. There is a point where he actually leaves the Derridean insights to go his own way:

➢ In general terms, the histories of modern architecture are based on the position about the being of architecture, on a theory that takes the more or less clear form of what-ought-to-be and usually projects what-ought-to-be-done.

Tournikiotis takes these histories and what they represent very seriously. He treats the analysed texts as fully transparent objects that, in an unproblematic way, refer to a reality or a truth outside the text. Most histories of modern architecture are logocentric by nature and Tournikiotis seems to accept this logocentricity in order to subsequently define their precise contents.

Tournikiotis is a representative of the architectural historian who is nourished by an

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51 See above, p.8.
52 Ibid., Introduction, p. 2.a
53 We may also note in this context Tournikiotis’s unproblematic combination of both Foucault and Derrida. There was in fact a lot of tension between these two thinkers, which was a result of a debate about the implications of Foucault’s Histoire de la Folie, published at the beginning of the 1960s. The point for Foucault was that, when ‘despotic reason’ occurs at a certain point in history, this also implies that things were different before that date. For Foucault, this was a hopeful message. Derrida did not share this hope. For Derrida, the history of Western thought is governed by only one form of reason. This thought transforms and changes identity throughout time, but we are still in the realm of the one and the same rationality. In a way, Tournikiotis’s use of both Foucault and Derrida reflects the, by now evident, problematic nature of the expectations behind modern architecture: is a different, better world still possible, or do we remain in one and the same world? See R. Boyne, Foucault and Derrida, the Other Side of Reason, London, 1990.
authentic love for the discipline – he is a passionate historian. His interest in French post-structuralism also seems to be authentic. It is just that the two are not compatible. It is in this respect that Tournikiotis’s irritation with the epistemological structure of Tafuri’s *Teorie e Storia* becomes of interest. Tournikiotis has little doubt about the explanatory value of the texts that he analyses. His presumption is that texts fully explain their contents, that they are intentionally didactic. There is, in other words, an unproblematic relationship between the words on paper and the content of an argument. With a sense of shock, Tournikiotis observes of Tafuri’s *Teorie e Storia*:

> Tafuri raises a whole host of questions – but his answers are elliptical, sometimes overlapping, sometimes contradictory, and very often indefinite. No explanation whatever, for example, is given of the three words that make up the title: ‘theory,’ ‘history,’ and ‘architecture’ waver to and fro from chapter to chapter, without ever arriving at a single distinct meaning…

With what seems to be moral disapproval, Tournikiotis points towards the contradictions, the lack of coherence, the non-conclusion, the overall ambiguity and distortion of the book, in obvious tension with a deconstructivist reading method. It is no surprise then, that Tournikiotis perceives *Teorie e Storia* not as the expression of an epistemological choice by Tafuri, but as that of a weakness in thinking, even a problem:

> … *Teorie e Storia dell’architettura,* his first important book and one that was a best-seller despite its ‘labyrinthine’ structure and its more or less complete indifference to the reader. The hermetic nature of the book accentuates the uncertainty and bafflement that prevailed at the end of the cycle of historical approaches to the modern movement which we are examining…

The contradictory nature of the book, its ambiguity and distortions are for Tournikiotis an expression, a manifestation of an underlying problem, which is a problem of Zeitgeist, of the ‘end of a cycle of historical approaches to the modern movement’. However, there is a great difference between viewing Tafuri’s ambiguities and distortions as the expression of an underlying problem and viewing those ambiguities as the content of an intentionally a-logical discourse. They don’t refer to an a-logical discourse, indeed they are the discourse – they constitute the actual content of such a discourse. This is the difference between Tournikiotis and Tafuri.

**ABOUT DIFFERENT TAFURI’S**

> I have received Architecture, *Criticism, Ideology* and I thank you sincerely… However, I have the impression that you have fabricated a Tafuri who is a little too different from the one that I know… I realize that I am not easy to schematize, but if

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54 Ibid., chapter 7, ‘History as the Critique of Architecture’, p.194.
55 Ibid., p.194.
56 Ibid.
American culture wants to understand me, why not make an effort to abandon facile typologies (Marxism, negative thought, etc.)? Another thing that strikes me is that those who write about me in the USA never put things into their historical context: 1973 is not 1980 and not 1985… I hope that these confused clarifications of mine do not offend you: they are written only to demonstrate how distant the personage that you have constructed is different from the one who lives, changes every day, and works as an historian by profession (not an historian of architecture, but also an historian of architecture)…57

After sending Tafuri a copy of *Architecture, Criticism, Ideology*, a book which included a substantial essay about Tafuri called ‘Critical History and the Labors of Sisyphus’, the American architectural historian Joan Ockman received this letter from Tafuri. Ockman wrote her essay on the occasion of a symposium organized by the Manhattan Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, an important platform for American progressive architects and critics in the 1970s and 1980s, and where Tafuri was extensively studied. However, as confirmed in his letter, Tafuri felt that he had been quite lost in translation by his American colleagues – another example perhaps, of what the American literary critic Harold Bloom called *The Anxiety of Influence*. 58

Manfredo Tafuri also received a considerable reception in the Netherlands. In the 1970s, this coincided with the rise of the student movement and their call for didactic reform at the universities. In Delft, at the architectural department of the Technical University, and in Nijmegen, at the art history department of the Faculty of Arts, the work of Tafuri was studied within the context of protest against the authoritarian and superseded methods of research and instruction. The architect was required to become aware of the social context of design; architectural history had to bring itself down from its ivory tower and become a social and socially engaged science. It is within this environment that a reassessment of architectural history in the Netherlands was instigated. At the same time, the progressive architectural historians had to fight several demons. For example, and this was not unique to the Netherlands, there was the conservatism of many art historians, who proved resistant to virtually any innovation, a resistance that has contributed to an increasingly deepening rift between art and architectural history so that nowadays we can speak of ‘two cultures’. Today, more than thirty years later, it has become clear that the attempts to innovate on a methodological and theoretical level have, for a large part, failed, leading the Dutch architectural historian Ed Taverne to state that, as a consequence, architectural history never developed into a critical science.59 As early as 1984, Taverne gave a very critical lecture at the annual meeting of Dutch art historians, held at the


THE NELSONS
Wes Jones

I'VE KEPT THIS FROM YOU... I KNOW I SHOULDN'T HAVE, BUT I COULD NEVER ADMIT IT...

WHO IS IT—FRANK? BOB? OH NO... COULD IT BE...

OH DEAR... I FEEL SO AWFUL

WHAT'S THE MATTER, HONEY?

I... I HAVE A CONFESSION TO MAKE...

HUH?

WHAT'S THIS?—SHE'S HAVING AN AFFAIR!
GOD KNOWS I’VE TRIED, BUT I JUST COULDN’T...

COFFEE, NO-DOZE, HYPNOSIS
BUT, BUT... I JUST CAN’T
MANAGE TAFURI!

THERE, I SAID IT.
I MEAN, I’M SORRY, MAYBE I’M
JUST A SIMPLETON, BUT PRACTICE
AND THEORY ARE JUST NOT
SEPARABLE IN THIS UNIVERSE... 

TAFURI?!
WHO THE HELL IS TAFURI?
I’LL KILL HIM.

HOW COULD SHE...?!
recently renovated Dutch palace Het Loo. Taverne questioned whether the almost servile way in which the art historical styles of the palace had been reproduced was not indicative of the rigidification of the art historical discipline. While on the one hand, Taverne argued, art history in the late 1960s had gone too far in exchanging intrinsic art historical value for societal considerations, during the following decades, art history had largely isolated itself from society. As a consequence, the annual day of art historians was not being held in an exciting new art museum in a Dutch city, but in the rural quiet of a perfectly conserved environment.60 One year earlier, in 1983, the Dutch architectural historians S.U. Barbieri, Hans van Dijk, Jan de Heer, Henk Engel and Roy Bijhouwer published a book called Architectuur en planning. Nederland 1940-1980, in which they tried to revitalize modernism through a careful examination of the planning procedures used during the post-war reconstruction of the country.61 While the humanities experienced, in the passage from structuralism to post-structuralism, the most definitive farewell to modernist arms, architects made the opposite move in a return to the glory of the modernist years. Nowadays, ‘neomodernism’ and ‘supermodernism’ mark Dutch contemporary architecture. This could not but further weaken the already vulnerable position of Dutch architectural history. For while the return to the highpoints of modernism might be a valuable strategy for architects, this was certainly not the case for the historians, who, after a Manfredo Tafuri, or a James Ackerman, or a Jean-Louis Cohen, simply could not consider, nor make such a strategy plausible. Somewhere midway through the 1980s, architectural history in the Netherlands became increasingly isolated, being unable to follow the intellectual changes in the humanities or to live with the design-oriented strategies of architectural formation. While in the 1970s architectural history failed to conquer an autonomous space and to emancipate itself in this way, in the 1980s it equally failed to find accommodation with either one of the associated disciplines. This then amounts to the present worrisome state of a discipline: homeless, and also unable to stand independently on its own feet. In terms of self-reflection and the critical assessment of the discipline, America has performed better than the Netherlands. In March 1982 a group of architects and critics in New York City organized the aforementioned symposium with the name ‘architecture and ideology’, the proceedings of which were later published as Architecture, Criticism, Ideology.62 This conference was the result of a frequent coming together of a group of people to discuss the theme of ‘architecture and politics’. They discussed the meaning

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and social impact of architecture and urbanism, for example, through the revision of the plans for the urban space of Manhattan, a total nouveauté in architectural culture in those days, as the authors in the accompanying publication confirm. It was also within this context that the work of Manfredo Tafuri was discussed. In the quote used to start this section, we saw Tafuri’s reaction after Joan Ockman sent him the publication:

>… I have the impression that you have fabricated a Tafuri who is a little too different from the one that I know…

Tafuri seems to have a point when he warns Ockman to not simply interpret him according to such categorizing labels as ‘Marxism’ or ‘nihilist negative thought’. In asking ‘why not make an effort to abandon facile typologies’, Tafuri seems to be hinting at an approach of a history which is more concerned with categories than with the historical phenomena that hide behind those categories. He continues, stating that ‘Another thing that strikes me is that those who write about me in the USA never put things into their historical context: 1973 is not 1980 and not 1985’. This excerpt from Tafuri’s letter illustrates the complexity of Tafuri’s reception and interpretation.

In this dissertation I will try to present an interpretation of Tafuri that avoids the pitfalls which he highlights: simplistic categorization and the extraction of historically complex phenomena from their proper context. In the background to this remains the question of the identity of a discipline whose future is presently perhaps more at risk than ever. The question this study addresses is how, more than eight years after his death, the historiographical value of Tafuri’s contribution to architectural history can be assessed. The point of departure for this study is the insight that Tafuri’s reception has been inadequate. In contrast to the image that has arisen from the history of Tafuri’s reception so far – a Tafuri different from the one he knew, so to speak – I propose a reading of Tafuri that combines a broadness of vision with a profundity in interpretation. In this book Tafuri is historicized: he is extensively placed in a context, in terms of both the history of architectural history as an academic discipline and in terms of the cultural history of contemporary Italy. Tafuri’s development and crises, his strong and his weak points, his failures and successes, are seen from the point of view of what may be called a ‘contextual intellectual history.’ The spearheads of my study are formed by Tafuri’s books about architectural history and by his job as a professor in architectural history and head of the architectural historical department in Venice. A lifetime of initiatives, a lifetime spent constructing, which began precisely at the moment when Tafuri decided to no longer be an architect.

I have borrowed the concepts ‘community’ and ‘voice’ from my sister Hanneke Hoekstra, who wrote her dissertation about a Frysian female author called Ypk fan der Fear. She based the concept of ‘voice within the community’ on a study undertaken by the American psychologist Carol Gilligan (1982). Gilligan wrote about the different language, or ‘voice’, used by women to express themselves and to speak about their lives. In contrast, my use of these labels is more pragmatic: they summarize the two intentions of this book and they point to the value of contextualizing knowledge about Tafuri. I thank my sister Hanneke for contributing to this insight, especially through the book The Orthodoxy of the Heart, Faith, Fryslân and Feminism, Groningen, (Estrik 74) 1998.
In the first part of this book I will present a biographical introduction to Tafuri, emphasizing his ties with a community of Italian left-wing intellectuals and his place, as an architect, in this community. Drawing on the exceptional oral history interview with the Italian historian Luisa Passerini, I hope to evoke an intimate image of Tafuri’s youth. In Chapter Three I will discuss the context of the rise of architectural history as an academic discipline at the Sapienza University in Rome – the university where Tafuri studied architecture. In Chapter Four I will offer an analysis of Tafuri’s first activities as a young urban professional after his graduation as an architect. In this chapter, I will also pay attention to the intellectual influences which informed his ideas during these initial years.

The second part of this book is devoted to an analysis of Tafuri’s mature work, which started after he had written *Teorie e Storia*, and after he had found his ‘voice’ in architectural history. In Chapter Five I will proceed to place Tafuri’s new career as a professor in architectural history in the context of the Italian protest movement in the 1960s. In addition, I will discuss in this chapter the activities of Tafuri and his team of researchers while forming a new department of architectural history at the architectural university of Venice. Finally, in the epilogue, I will try to provide an – always provisional – answer to the question of the value of Tafuri’s contribution to architectural history.

This study encompasses the period 1936-1994, the life span of Tafuri. By exploring the complex ties between life and history writing; political, cultural and intellectual choices, and community, I want to illustrate how the history of a discipline is determined in the first instance by the social, cultural and intellectual biographies of the historians who give shape to it.