Building versus Bildung. Manfredo Tafuri and the construction of a historical discipline
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Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2005

Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database

Citation for published version (APA):

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Bruno Zevi

Saper vedere l'architettura
CHAPTER 2

ON THE CONVERSION FROM ARCHITECTURE TO HISTORY

Most architectural historians would find it unusual to explain the relationship they have with their object of study. Such matters of personal attachment or preference are not often revealed in architectural historical studies, possibly because of a fear of damaging the academic status of the work. In the same way, interpersonal relationships between one architectural historian and another are very rarely the subject of official architectural historical discourse. The one exception to this unwritten rule occurs with the death of a highly respected architectural historian. On such occasions the texts that are written – the obituaries and tributes – reveal a whole new world of the interaction between architectural historians – meetings at conferences, dining together, planning trips and so on. Suddenly an entirely new vista opens up, which shows us not only a new image of the deceased, but also the rituals that surround a discipline. In the case of Manfredo Tafuri, the existence of such material sheds a whole new light on the man and his work, and is especially important as he remains a central figure in the debate about the discipline of architectural history and its possible directions. A good example of this continuing influence is that, in the year 2000, six years after Tafuri’s death, the American architectural journal *Any* dedicated an entire issue to the legacy of this controversial historian.¹

Within the context of the silence maintained by most architectural historians with respect to their daily lives, Luisa Passerini’s extensive interview with Tafuri was unique. The interview was part of an oral history programme organized by the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, and the UCLA.² What makes this programme

1 *Any: Being Manfredo Tafuri: wickedness, anxiety, disenchantment*, ed. by Cynthia C. Davidson, 25-26, 2000. The goal of this issue was to develop a more critical and distanced view of Tafuri, as a critique of the hagiographic character of the initial studies of him. See also in this respect the title of the issue: ‘Being Manfredo Tafuri’ indicates, in an ironical way, that it is no longer possible ‘to be Tafuri’ mimetically, as a literal continuation of his legacy. This unique personality and his legacy cannot be replicated.

2 ‘The Art History Oral Documentation Project’, undertaken as a collaboration of the Oral History Program of the University of California, Los Angeles and the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, Los Angeles, 1993. The interview originally appeared as an unpublished document called ‘La storia come progetto’, *History as Project* held by Luisa Passerini in 1993, pp.1-145. The interview was published for the first time in the above mentioned issue of *Any* dedicated to Tafuri. See Luisa Passerini, ‘History as a Project, An interview with Manfredo Tafuri’, *Any: Being Manfredo Tafuri: wickedness, anxiety, disenchantment*, ed. by Cynthia C. Davidson, 25-26, 2000. Importantly, however, the published interview is an abridged version of the original transcript. The verbal character of the interview, the sense of a Tafuri speaking about his life, does not survive in the published version.

3 The American Oral History Association describes oral history as a method of gathering and preserving historical information through recorded interviews with participants in past events and ways of life. What is important is that this form of history is not collected through the written word and that it deals with people’s memories – with ‘the living history of everyone’s unique life experiences’. It is thus that in this specific project, Tafuri spoke extensively about his professional life and events during his childhood, as a way ‘to examine the development of art history as a professional discipline’. See the webpage of the American Oral History Association at: www.omega.dinkinson.edu/organizations/oha/, or the British Oral History Society at www.oralhistory.org.uk.
special is that its subject is the historians themselves – they have become the ‘historians of their own history’.³ Oral history, combined with historiography, provides new insights into the development of architectural history as a professional discipline.

The written report of the interview mentions that it took place in the apartment of a friend of Tafuri’s in Venice, on 10 February 1992, and 28 March of the same year. All in all, Passerini spoke with Tafuri about his life for more than three hours.⁴ It was no coincidence that it was Luisa Passerini (1941) who conducted the interview. In an article some years later, Dutch historians characterized Passerini as ‘an alert woman, politically engaged, a radical lefty, with a long career in oral history and the history of social movements.’⁵ Both Tafuri and Passerini were historians who had been through a phase of intense political involvement in the 1960s and 1970s. For both, this period heavily influenced their intellectual work, their ideas being formed within the context of the idiosyncratic Marxist groups that dominated the Italian left-wing debate throughout the 1970s. At the beginning of the 1970s, while Tafuri started to write ‘radical’ essays about the history of architecture, essays that carried names such as ‘La forma come utopia regressiva’ and ‘Dialettica dell’avanguardia’, Passerini assembled a corpus of oral histories.⁶ For example, in the 1970s, she started a project in which she gathered recollections of the fascist era by interviewing workers in Turin.⁷ This was ‘history from below’, unspoilt by bourgeois science. Oral history became a form of direct, unmediated contact with the players in history. Passerini later wrote a remarkable autobiography called Autoritratto di Gruppo (1988) in which she combined a contemporary reassessment of her revolutionary past with a collection of oral histories of the ‘68 generation. It is from the perspective of this book that the assumptions behind the Tafuri interview become clear.⁸

For Passerini, the facts of one’s life are never self-evident and can only be explained in relation to some external framework. An inescapable relationship exists between the micro-history of personal life and the macro-history of society, through which the histories of unique lives transcend the realm of the strictly personal. In the case of Tafuri, the events of his personal life reveal something about the role of the intellectual in modern Italian society. However, for Passerini, to interview someone who shared similar

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⁵ These are respectively, Chapter Two and Four of Tafuri’s book Progetto e Utopia, Architettura e sviluppo capitalisticò, Bari, 1973. To be sure, both Tafuri and Passerini went through a transformation at the beginning of the 1980s, from a history that directly invested questions of politics to a more culturally oriented history. In this sense, they both took part in the Italian version of the discussion ‘What is left of the New Left’.


experiences throughout the 1970s carried an additional relevance. In fact, Passerini states that for the generation of ‘68 the nature of the relationship between the private and the public sphere became particularly acute. This generation faced the challenge of reinventing themselves as subjects: in Autoritratto di Gruppo, Passerini speaks of ‘the ambiguity towards the fathers’ and ‘the choice to become orphans’.  

The greatest virtue of Passerini’s interview with Tafuri is that it provides an alternative way of understanding the work of this controversial historian, an alternative to a close reading and an exegetical interpretation of his capolavori. This is why, in the following biographical introduction to Tafuri, I have cited Passerini’s work. I have interpreted the information Tafuri provides about himself to form my own reading of his life in the light of a specific question. With Tafuri as the ‘historian of his own history’ I have tried to use his account as an analytic tool to answer the question: how does an architect turn to writing? More specifically, how does an architect come to the decision to abandon any engagement with architectural practice and become devoted solely to ‘non-operative’ history?

**CHILDHOOD: THE PROBLEM OF BECOMING UPROOTED**

Three major influences determined the course of Manfredo Tafuri’s life. First, on an existential level, there was the deep sense of solitude and isolation originating from his childhood years, and the attempt to overcome this solitude both in a psychological and a philosophical-political way. Secondly, from his adolescent years onward Tafuri displayed a vivid interest in both philosophy and the visual arts. Finally, the difficult years of post-war reconstruction together with the burden of recent history influenced his decision to focus on those works of art that most faithfully mirrored the controversy and complexity of the post-war Italian society.

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9 These are the titles of a chapter and a paragraph, respectively. See Passerini, *Autoritratto di gruppo*, pp. 37 and 42.

10 For the biographical introduction to Tafuri, I have used two sources. Firstly, the original transcript of Passerini’s 1993 interview with Tafuri mentioned above. Secondly, the abbreviated version published in *Any* magazine, in 2000. I have chosen these two documents, because they give the most information about Tafuri’s life, albeit with the qualification that the information comes from Tafuri himself. To date, Tafuri’s personal archive has not been opened to researchers or the public.

11 For the relationship between the historian and his writing also see the journal *Historein*, which dedicated its third issue to the theme: ‘European Ego-histories, Historiography and the Self, 1970-2000’: *Historein, a review of the past and other stories*, vol.3, Athens, 2001. Importantly, Passerini’s interview with Tafuri also gave rise to criticism. Some of his students asked whether Tafuri, by giving this interview, had not confirmed his mythical image as a left-wing researcher. For some, this is a ‘text to demolish’ given the fact that Tafuri mentions certain things about himself and leaves out others. Remarkably, during a lecture given by Tafuri, students protested against his mythical image by holding up a piece of cardboard in which Tafuri’s head was mounted on the body of Donald Duck’s Uncle Scrooge. The placard said: ‘Tafuron de Tafuroni’, a wordplay on the Italian name of the uncle: paperon de’ paperoni. I thank Roberto Zancan from the I.U.A.V. for this story.

12 Tafuri says in the interview: ‘Two very different personalities. My mother was very active, with some pretensions to intellectual life. My father was just the opposite. He was an engineer employed by the Ministero dei Lavori Pubblici, with no intellectual interests.’ Passerini, *History as a Project*, p. 10.
Manfredo Tafuri was born on 4 November 1935 in Rome. The theme that dominates Tafuri’s recollections of his youth is a twofold sense of solitude, arising from both a sense of isolation within the family, and an external isolation due to the absence of companions and others from whom to draw inspiration. Manfredo was the only surviving child of the Tafuri family. It was a family with a troubled and traumatic history. Two of Tafuri’s brothers did not survive childhood illnesses and a fourth conception resulted in a miscarriage. When Tafuri was born his parents were already relatively old, his mother being over 40 years of age and his father 56. Tafuri recounts that his father and mother were two profoundly different characters: his Jewish mother fostering an active intellectual interest, while his father was a more introverted technician who Tafuri describes as having no intellectual interests whatsoever. In addition, there was considerable tension between his mother and grandmother concerning Tafuri’s Jewish upbringing: his mother preferred a secular upbringing for her son, whilst his grandmother wanted her grandson to be more actively aware of his Jewish identity. Although Tafuri was interested in Jewish religion and customs, loyalty towards his mother prevented him from becoming more deeply involved.

So, as well as a sense of solitude there is also a sense of a lack of unity. There is a superficial oneness which on closer examination turns out to be split by the differences between mother and father, and the frictions between mother and grandmother. Quite apart from the difficult events of the war and the German occupation, Tafuri identifies these differences within the family as being one of the most fundamental reasons for his sense of solitude. This sense of solitude seems to have brought about an almost romantic craving for roots, a need to belong somewhere, yet at the same time there is an awareness of being fated to a life of uprootedness. Tafuri considers this to be the psychological motivation for his lifelong habit of commuting between Rome and Venice. It seems as if

13 In the interview, he says: ‘At that time, the problem was exodus. I never felt at home anywhere. It’s not by chance that even today, I keep vacillating between Rome and Venice. I can vacillate on everything, yet I need a strong sense of roots.’. Passerini, History as a Project, p. 13. By mentioning his commuting between Rome and Venice, Tafuri points to the fact that, while working in Venice, he still lived part of the week in Rome.

14 As an adolescent, Tafuri read Sartre. In L’Être et le Néant (1943), one of Sartre’s major philosophical works, he states that a free human being should acknowledge the constraints of his or her situation, of being in a particular time and place, or of one’s physical or mental characteristics, before being able to transcend these constraints in a set of particular actions. Unless the constraints are acknowledged, we cannot transcend them. What I want to indicate with this theory is that it seems as if Tafuri had to struggle with an already given ‘transcendence’ – what he indicates as being uprooted – which led him to subsequently struggle to be rooted in a specific situation. See Eric Matthews, Twentieth-Century French Philosophy, Oxford, 1996, p. 71.

15 Literally, Tafuri says in the interview: ‘. . . perché la storia è radicante e sradicante per chi la fa’, original transcript, p. 5.

16 ‘Gli mettici’, the spreaders of discord, referring to Italian-Jewish families.

17 ‘The world is in a deplorable state, you should only think of making money, of living well.’ Original transcript, p. 18.

18 ‘A terrible generation, of total idiots’. Tafuri says: ‘So there was solitude in my family, and also isolation on the outside, because mine was a terrible generation of total ignorance. It was extremely difficult to communicate with professors, because even if they listened to you, they always regarded you as an adolescent.’ Passerini, History as a Project, p. 15.
he was caught up in an inescapable oscillation between wishing to be part of a certain community, and the experience of an irrepressible inclination to break all these ties in a movement towards an abstract and almost transcendent freedom.\textsuperscript{14} It is this psychological characteristic that led Tafuri to devote his energies to history: ‘because history is rooting and uprooting for those who practice it.’\textsuperscript{15} History can also be explained as a locus, a community to be a part of. It is a community that both opens and closes a door for the researcher, permitting a glimpse of the past and offering a momentary illusion of having comprehended that past, whilst at the same time making it clear that from the perspective of the present, one is irreversibly estranged from the actuality of the past.

Manfredo Tafuri’s youth was set against the difficult years of the passage from fascism to war and German occupation. He lived in the Via Giovanni Battista De Rossi, near Piazza Bologna and Villa Massimo, the former German Academy, where a German command post was housed. His first encounter with fear and death came when the entire zone between Via De Rossi and Piazza Bologna was bombed. Miraculously his parental home was the only one in the block that survived. This experience also contributed to the lifelong sense of exodus: of being simultaneously rooted and uprooted. After the implementation of the racial laws in 1938 Tafuri was subjected to discrimination, although the degree was lessened by a certain tolerance shown towards those of mixed race: ‘mettici’, or troublemakers as they were called.\textsuperscript{16} The danger increased for the Tafuri family with the German occupation of Rome. The family had to be separated and Tafuri was sent to a safe house where he hid together with a deserter. In the event of danger they were concealed behind a false wall or in the cellar, which was so humid that it caused Tafuri health problems for the rest of his life. He also tells us how a certain ‘political education’ was intertwined with these traumatic experiences: every so often he went home with his father to listen to the illegal ‘radio Londra’ and he would question his father in an attempt to understand the complexities of the war. Perhaps as a result of these experiences, from the time of his high school graduation and later as a university student, Tafuri bitterly reproached his parents for their misplaced ‘agnosticism’: ‘Il mondo sta male, voi pensate solamente a far soldi, a viver bene.’\textsuperscript{17} The origin of Tafuri’s engagement with politics, his desire to take a clear position with respect to suffering in the world – an engagement that in the years of his adolescence still followed a classical, Sartrian pattern – can be found in this time.

FIRST ENCOUNTERS WITH A PHILOSOPHICAL AND ARTISTIC WORLD

Although solitude remained Tafuri’s constant companion, resulting in or perhaps created from a profound introspection, during his youth it seems to have been especially painful and unwanted. Apart from private problems, these grievous experiences also originated from an ‘external solitude’ created by the difficult years after the war. Tafuri speaks of a total absence of intellectual contact during the 1950s, through dreadful years in which he failed to establish any connection with people of his generation. He uses strong words to describe his own generation: ‘una generazione terribile, di cretini totale’\textsuperscript{18} He also mentions the difficulty of communicating with authoritarian teachers and professors, people who in theory at least, might have provided some sort of frame of reference.
Tafuri recalls the 1950s as being particularly oppressive in Italy, as a society marked by a suffocating form of clericalism. However, despite these difficulties Tafuri managed to identify some stimulating events occurring beyond Italy. Like stars in an otherwise blackened sky, these points of contact found rare confirmation in a highly selective group of students at secondary school and university. This leads us to understand the importance of Tafuri’s first encounter with the world of the visual arts and philosophy. He tells us that during his years at secondary school he was a passionate listener to a radio programme in which the Italian philosopher Enzo Paci introduced the Italian public to the new French wave of philosophy. Existentialism, which especially caught his attention, Paci explained from Kierkegaard to Sartre.19

At this time, Tafuri became a voracious reader of philosophy. He recounts a summer spent at the seaside resort of the Forte dei Marmi where he began to read the first Italian translations of Sartre and Camus, published in 1951.20 Significantly, during that summer Tafuri formed a group with other fellow students who similarly fostered certain intellectual aspirations and, as a result, he was introduced to Zevi’s Storia dell’architettura moderna which the students studied on the beach. The book was initially introduced to the group by Paolo Ceccarelli, who later became rector of the I.U.A.V. in Venice and remained in lifelong contact with Tafuri.21 While Tafuri seems to have been a bit of an Adrian Mole during his childhood,22 additionally, from around the age of 12, he also developed a passion for the visual arts. He would spend each spare moment in the Vatican museum reproducing the masters of Medieval and Renaissance painting: Raphael, Titian, Correggio and Rembrandt. It is in the course of these artistic endeavours that Tafuri was assailed by doubts about his own artistic ability. This reflected a certain fear of failure and a craving for perfection that led him to ask: ‘Ma se io non arrivo a dipingere come questi grandi, che dipingo a fare?’23 This childhood anxiety reveals another reason for Tafuri’s devotion to history, seemingly a rather negative motivation,

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19 Enzo Paci (1911-1976) a well-known philosopher in post-war Italy who had studied with Antonio Banfi. Paci was representative of the neo-Marxist developments in post-war Italy: holding on to a certain Marxist orthodoxy while also displaying a keen interest in international developments that were more post-Marxist than neo-Marxist in character. Paci developed a philosophy of history in which events were more important than entities and the process with all its relations was more important than the substance itself. In 1951, he founded the journal Aut Aut together with the philosopher Thomas Kelso, which advocated a return to Husserl, a proclamation that influenced an entire philosophical generation in Italy during the 1960s. Paci discussed many aspects of culture, which included among others architecture. See Encyclopedia of Contemporary Italian Culture, ed. by G. Moliterno, London: Routledge, 2000.

20 Tafuri says in the interview: ‘It was right there. Yes! I remember a summer spent at the beach in Forte dei Marmi. I must have been sixteen. I began to buy a huge number of books by Camus and Sartre in Italian.’ Later on in the interview, he says: ‘I was fascinated by thought, and therefore the history of thought, philosophy – whatever I could understand of it at the time’, Passerini, History as a Project, p. 11.

21 The I.U.A.V.: Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia, where Tafuri would also teach from the late 1960s.

22 I refer to Sue Townsend’s bestseller The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole aged ¾, about the troubles of a young adolescent boy with an intellectual passion for George Elliot. On the other hand, Tafuri’s aspirations were not so unique against the background of the strong humanistic character of secondary school in Italy. At a rather early age, the pupils were introduced to such heavy matters as history, culture, philosophy or the history of literature. At the age of 16, they would have already read Céline, or Proust, as well as having to try to understand Kant and Hegel.
which suggests that an uncertainty about how to act oneself still allows reflection on the action itself.  

During his adolescence, the philosophy of Sartre, Camus and Heidegger remained a constant point of reference. While Tafuri was a pupil at grammar school, he was introduced to Bruno Widmar, a professor of philosophy at the University of Bari. Widmar also became a teacher at the Liceo Tasso in Rome, and through this connection Tafuri became acquainted with yet another aspect of the kaleidoscope of innovative philosophy. Manfredo Tafuri, who came from a petit bourgeois background, was introduced to Marxism and Socialism by way of the alternative lessons organized by Widmar in his garden. Widmar advised his young students to discard the common philosophical handbooks and undertake a reconsideration of the history of philosophy from Kant to Marx. As Tafuri recalls, Widmar did not speak of a revolutionary Marx, but of a philosophical Marx who remained in the shadow of the Master, Hegel. For Widmar, Marx was part of an historical development that started with philosophical icons such as Kant and the philosophers from the time of the French Revolution. Widmar presented a unified body of thought which, to Tafuri’s surprise, was not consistent with the ideas expressed by Paci and the Existentialists.

However, besides this fascination with philosophy and the history of ideas, there were the more realistic experiences of the shocks of post-war life. One of the most powerful confrontations with modern, post-war architecture took place close to Tafuri’s home in 1951. The architect Mario Ridolfi, one of the protagonists of the reconstruction, designed a controversial palazzo close to Tafuri’s parental home, on the ruined grounds of the Via Giovanni Battista De Rossi. Tafuri had difficulty understanding this building, which seemed to have been intentionally designed to portray ugliness. Ridolfi had also been involved in the design of an innovative new residential quarter called il quartiere Tiburtino, close to where Tafuri lived. This quarter was built in an emphatically populist style, influenced by the neorealist tendencies in cinematography. These were to be the new houses for the workers, but in his design of a palazzo for the bourgeoisie, Ridolfi seemed to opt for an intentionally inelegant and unpleasant style. For the adolescent Tafuri, already suffering from solitude and existential crises, who had just read the first Italian translation of Heidegger’s Sein und Zeit, all these experiences hastened a growing sense of the tragic nature of life.

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23 ‘But if I don’t succeed in painting like these great ones, what will I paint?’
24 Literally, Tafuri says: ‘Perhaps that is the reason I became a historian. That is, not knowing what to do, what kind of action to take, I chose to reflect on the actions of others.’, Passerini, History as a Project, p. 12.
25 Bruno Widmar is an Italian philosopher who became known as the founder of the philosophical and cultural review Il Protagora, in 1959. He is still productive and in 1993, he published Introduzione alla filosofia della scienza, Bari, 1993.
26 The architect Mario Ridolfi (1904-1984) was a leading member of the MIAR, the Italian Movement for Rational Architecture in the interwar period. The building that Manfredo speaks of is the Palazzo Zaccardi (1950-51), one of the Roman apartment houses built by Ridolfi after the war. See for an analysis of these apartments Sergio Polano e.a., Guida all’architettura moderna del Novecento, Milano 1991. For an analysis of neorealism in Italian post-war architecture, see Maristella Casciato, ‘Neorealism in Italian Architecture’, in Anxious Modernisms, Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture, ed. S.W. Goldhagen et al., Cambridge, Mass., 2001, pp. 25-55.
The decision to sign up as a student of architecture was determined by an intense desire to become acquainted with a hitherto impervious subject. The young Tafuri, between secondary school and university, was not able to ‘read’ or understand buildings. He had hoped to find the key to a proper understanding of architecture in Zevi’s *Storia dell’architettura moderna*. From this book he learned to ‘read’ buildings by placing them in their proper historical context, set apart from their aesthetic qualities. In the post-war architectural environment the architect and historian Bruno Zevi (1918-2000) was a personality who was hard to overlook. Through his intense involvement in many aspects of the architectural profession, Zevi played a pivotal role in Italian architectural culture. Besides the survey which made up *Storia dell’architettura moderna* (1950), Tafuri may also have been familiar with *Saper vedere l’architettura* which Zevi published two years earlier, in 1948. In this book Zevi showed himself to be every bit the teacher, with a didactic mission to explain the unique characteristics of architecture and urban planning to a broad public. On the back cover of a 1993 reprint of the book this didactic fervour still resonates: ‘Have you ever *thought* about your home, about the office, the school, the cinema . . . Have you ever *seen* the spaces in which you live? Have you reflected on the specific value of architecture, with respect to that of the other figurative arts?’

It was Zevi’s intention to raise architecture from a mere technical discipline to an important element of public life. Architecture had to enter into the public domain and become a topic of debate and thought. It had to take its place beside such things as important films, books and music. Both history and criticism were important instruments needed to reach this goal. As Maguolo confirms, where the ‘pioneers’ of modern architectural historiography avoided using the word ‘storia’ for their accounts, for example, Giedion and Pevsner spoke of movements and not of ‘histories’, Zevi explicitly called his account *The History of Modern Architecture*. Zevi had a conception of ‘history’ which functioned in strict relationship to actuality – the events in the present receive their meaning from history and only history is a guarantee of the existence of actual phenomena. In Zevi’s conception of history the interrelation of the past and present, which is characteristic of the historiography of modern architecture, reaches a peak. Zevi, as well as Leonardo Benevolo as a case in point, was influenced by Benedetto Croce in this attitude and in this proved himself to be a typical Italian intellectual. Besides historicizing architects and their work, Zevi broke new grounds by following a sociological approach in the interpretation of buildings – he saw them as products of a specific time and a specific society and thereby rejected the idea of the autonomy of the arts.

27 After the war, Ridolfi was the editor, together with Cino Calcaprina, of *Il Manuale dell’architetto*, in which the use of cheaper, rougher, traditional materials was advocated and the virtuosity of the crafts was rehabilitated. The ‘intentional ugliness’ about which Tafuri speaks can perhaps be explained by the fact that Ridolfi saw this palazzo as a symbol of the decadence of the middle class, a rejection which is perhaps also connected to a complicated recent past.

28 Passerini, *History as a Project*, p. 16.

During his architectural study, Tafuri would engage in fierce debates with his friends about Zevi’s conception of history. However, because Zevi was a professor in Venice in the middle of the 1950s, Tafuri only knew him at this time through his works. As we have seen, even before this period, Tafuri’s enrolment in architecture at the university of Rome was determined by the desire to ‘understand’ architecture. In November 1953 Tafuri first enrolled at the Sapienza University of Rome and he recounts the shock that he experienced upon entering the world of the academy. Tafuri had a passion for history and was thus inclined towards the courses of **letteratura artistica**, given by Renato Bonelli, an architect influenced by the work of Benedetto Croce. However, much more than the Crocean tendencies within the faculty, Tafuri’s shock was caused by the realization that almost all of the architectural staff had been and still were active supporters of the fascist regime. After the epurazione, many of these architects had been able to return to their positions at the university. In their professional roles, they were heavily traumatized by the events of the 1930s and 1940s. As a consequence, there was a sharp distinction between generations: a young, emerging generation of post-war architects and an older generation carrying the burden of the past. Significantly, Tafuri mentions the conduct of a professor in the history of art and architecture:

Professor of art history and history of architecture was Vincenzo Fasolo, another fascist who, however, never came to class, and when he did come he would shout. He never showed us any architecture, never taught history, would draw big diagrams on the chalk board showing how stupid we all were, and would storm out. This literally, though. That is, he made three scenes, you can’t say they were lessons, in an entire year.

Apart from the historical discipline, all of the professors connected to the core of architectural education – professors of architectural design, drawing and so on – had a fascist past. As Tafuri recounts, they almost never showed up and delegated their didactic

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30 See, for example, Siegfried Giedion for whom the task of the architectural historian was to find in the history of the past the starting point for the future. It was the even more extreme ‘instrumentalization’ of history by Zevi that provoked a strong reaction from Tafuri. Tafuri accused Zevi of viewing history as an apology for the present: when it is the present that ultimately counts, the historian can never show the less desirable, less ‘useable’ sides of history. See S. Georgiadis, *Siegfried Giedion: An Intellectual Biography*, Zürich, 1989.


32 Renato Bonelli (Orvieto, 1911) was an architect who, during the 1930s, when studying architecture at the Faculty of Architecture of the Sapienza University of Rome, opposed the fascist influence upon architectural design. Interested in the renewal of the historical study of architecture, he turned to the aesthetic theory of Benedetto Croce. Letteratura artistica is the name given to courses in aesthetics and the philosophical aspects of architecture. See Giovanni Carbonara, ‘Renato Bonelli, storico dell’architettura e teorico del restauro’, V.F. Pardo, *La Facoltà di architettura dell’università ‘La Sapienza’ dalle origini al duemila, discipline, docenti, studenti*, Roma, 2001, pp. 113-131.

tasks to their assistants.\textsuperscript{35} As a consequence of the fact that many modern Italian architects had collaborated with the regime, a new taboo had been created regarding modern architecture and its history.\textsuperscript{36} Another effect of the fascist contaminated past was that the academic staff tried to influence the architectural students to follow a non-intellectual, artisan approach. In particular, Tafuri remembers a Tuscan instructor called Carlo Domenico Rossi who advised his students to abandon the books and embrace only the pencil. Manfredo fiercely protested against this apolitical and non-intellectual approach and threatened to leave the university if these conditions were maintained.\textsuperscript{37}

**URBAN PROTEST**

It is at this point, when experiences at the university were proving to be extremely disappointing, that an important \textit{Leitmotiv} emerges. Tafuri wanted to organize protest groups and by doing so he sought to unite his fellow students. In the first protest group, organized in the early 1950s, were Giorgio Piccinato, Sergio Bracco and Vieri Quilici, all of whom later became established members of the historical and architectural community and, moreover, were to remain Tafuri’s lifelong companions. The goal of this protest group was to counterbalance the official faculty policy line with respect to its ‘non-educative’ method. Significantly, Tafuri mentions that their political frame of reference was comprised of the kind of partisan social criticism that was propagated by the political journal \textit{il Mondo}. Along with his friends, Tafuri was very interested in the criticism expressed by Antonio Cederna in relation to the practice of post-war urban planning.\textsuperscript{38} That is, contrary to the policy set out by the architectural faculty in Rome, Tafuri and his friends displayed a great interest in contemporary architecture, and understood this topic explicitly within an urban framework. To regard modern architecture as part and parcel of an urban fabric allowed an analysis that focused on what was politically important – on which decisions were taken and on how this affected the city as a living place for the populace.

In fact, Italian urban planning after 1945 could be characterized as a history of continu-
OFFENSIVE DI PACE

La guerra civile con i molti giornalisti americani hanno dovuto adattare il marxismo. Stalin e il mondo possono avere le paure. A tutti è stato riservato il merito di no

DI ANONIMO
ous failure. The challenges of reconstruction and the economic boom that followed were not translated into adequate policies at either the local or national level. Certainly a factor in this is that coherent and drastic political reform never took place after 1945. Furthermore, there was the excrecence of liberal laissez-faire politics, which led to building speculation beyond any proportion, pacts with the Mafia, illegal building practice, and in general the removal of the building industry from public control. In this context, Tafuri was involved in the fight over co-ordinated urban plans, which took place in all the major cities of Italy from the early 1950s until well into the 1960s. Urban planners often designed innovative plans, but tragically had to surrender their creative position when private and often corrupt enterprises almost always won out against public needs. The aggressive and explosive atmosphere – disillusioned but still militant – depicted by Tafuri is also reflected in Francesco Rosi’s film Le mani sulla città (Hands Over the City) about Mafia building practices in Naples. Moreover, this atmosphere pervaded critical journals like il Mondo and l’Espresso and in this context, Antonio Cederna, mentioned above, was an important fighter against these corrupt urban practices. A campaign was launched against the building of a Hilton Hotel at the Monte Mario in Rome, which was a symbol of the power of private business. Significantly, this fight became an emblematic defeat, as the building was approved in 1958 and built in 1962. During this time, the major preoccupation of Tafuri and his friends – who by now had formed a small group of fellow-combatants – mirrored an archetypal way of thinking about the engagement of the intellectual: ‘Does an ethics exist that moves through human observation and participation, and is directly connected with architecture?’ Tafuri began to live through a classical conflict of engagement in this way, reading scholarly books like Pierre Francastel’s Lo spazio figurativo dal Rinascimento al Cubismo, and being fascinated by the type of high-culture that was depicted there, while also spending time visiting the Roman borgate, with its miserable living conditions.

Protest is thus important for the young Tafuri and is expressed through opposition to the authoritarian practice of schooling and education. In fact there was a growing consciousness evident in a certain group of students who believed that in order to become educated, they had to take the initiative and organize their own instruction.

38 Il Mondo (The World) was a political magazine founded in February 1949 by its editor-in-chief Mario Pannunzio and a group of liberal democrats. It was known as one of the best examples of progressive journalism. Throughout the 1950s and the 1960s, Il Mondo became an active advocate of the civil rights movement in Italy, publishing critical analyses of the government and its clientelist practices, the Catholic Church and its influence on society, and other aspects of Italian culture and society. The journal closed in 1966 because of the death of Pannunzio. Antonio Cederna (1921) was one of the collaborators on Il Mondo. He was originally an archaeologist who after the war became one of the most intense critics of the urbanist strategies in large Italian cities, known for his aggressive and polemic writing. For instance, he wrote books with titles such as: I vandali in casa (The Vandals in the House), Laterza, 1956; and La distruzione della natura in Italia (The Destruction of Nature in Italy), Torino, 1975. In 1957 Cederna founded the Italia Nostra Movement, for which Tafuri also worked every now and then. See A. Cederna, Mussolini Urbanista, lo sventramento di Roma negli anni del consenso, Laterza: Bari, 1981. See also Jan Kurz, ‘Il Mondo’, Encyclopedia of Contemporary Italian Culture, p. 374.


40 See Passerini, History as a Project, pp. 17-18.
Still from Le mani sulla città, 1963
They expanded their theoretical horizons using unusual resource material, in the first place the work of the architect Ernesto Nathan Rogers, editor-in-chief of the famous architectural magazine *Casabella Continuità*, which was in large part the mouthpiece of the post-war debate about modern architecture. This magazine reappeared after the war with its first issue in 1953, and its publication almost coincided with Tafuri’s enrolment in the faculty of architecture. In 1951, along with Zevi’s *Storia dell’architettura moderna*, another remarkable book was published. This was *Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus* by Giulio Carlo Argan. Even more than Zevi, Argan had a major influence on Tafuri. In fact Tafuri called himself a pupil of Argan ‘in a direct and indirect way’.

For Giulio Carlo Argan (1909-1992) art was a form of social engagement, integral and necessary to life. Architecture and urban planning were to him areas where the community had a particularly strong interaction with culture. However, while Argan devoted his time chiefly to the history of art, in which he emphasized the social context, Tafuri appreciated Argan’s view of architecture as an integral part of the history of humanity and his conviction that architecture was also a response to the human need for metaphysics, for a world that transcends the mundane realm of the here and now. To accentuate architecture as a human and subjective event meant for Argan that architecture was not understood as an abstract expression of universal truths that existed apart from any human involvement, but as part of the broader range of human cultural history. With *Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus* Argan had written a book that was very different from anything he had published before. It was a book that was highly innovative for Italian architectural culture at the time. Argan constructed a grand synthesis connecting the didactic programmes of the Bauhaus to the intellectual movements that characterized Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century. To relate the austere formalism of Gropius to German Protestantism was so new in Italy in the 1950s that it appeared almost hermetic. At the time, Tafuri felt challenged by Argan’s speculations, being especially fascinated by the way in which Argan connected Gropius’ message to the philosophy of Heidegger. However, as Tafuri recalls, *Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus* was relevant to him most of all because of its

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43 In the original transcript, p. 12, Tafuri says: ‘Quello che riuscivo a capire è un altro contatto, che per me è stato essenziale perché poi sono stato suo allievo diretto e indiretto, e che è proprio Giulio Carlo Argan.’ Note that this part is omitted from the English translation for the *Any* journal.

44 Argan’s major works include studies of Renaissance painters and architects such as Botticelli, Michelangelo, Fra Angelico; occasionally he wrote about modern architecture and modern art. Around 1963 he became involved in the debate about the ‘death of art’ by which Argan meant the end of the creative autonomy of the individual. From an academic career at the University of Rome, Argan later made the switch to politics, first serving as a mayor of Rome between 1976 and 1979 and later becoming a senator for the Communist Party. See Max Staples, ‘Argan’, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Italian Culture*, pp. 27-28.
method. Argan did not speak of this period of modern architectural history in terms of the single architectural genius but as a history consisting of groups of actors. This message was of particular importance, and underwent a political translation by Tafuri and his friends who then suggested that the current abusive practices within the building industry could only be opposed by groups, not at an individual level.

Concerning the issue of method, Argan’s book was important in several ways. Within modern architectural history, he focused on Germany during the Weimar Republic as a significant place and time. It is here, Argan argued, that the event of modern architecture became dramatic, explosive, and of influential and yet deeply contradictory importance. The dramatic dimension of Argan’s *Walter Gropius* consisted in the link between the German architectural culture during the 1920s and the fundamental philosophical issues that characterized the decade. Argan wrote not only of the houses that were designed for an *Existenz minimum*, but also of Heidegger’s *Dasein*. Tafuri recalls that Argan wrote a history with a strongly anachronistic character, in which the decade between 1920 and 1930 is marked by the ‘ultimate’ attempt of reason to escape totalitarian clutches. The European history of reason was depicted as being in its ultimate phase of coming face to face with its collapse and destruction. However, for Argan this was not because of the intervention of the Nazi’s. Even apart from Hitler’s empire, the eventual downfall of reason had been implicit in the history of the Enlightenment from the start. Reason bore the seeds of its own decline within itself, Argan believed, and this thought impressed the young Tafuri. Where Zevi depicted an optimistic ‘way out’ of the dramatic events of the 1940s, pointing to an American way of life and referring to the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright as a model to be followed by European architects, Argan accentuated the dramatically changing state of affairs in the twentieth century.

### THE TECHNIQUES OF POLITICAL RESISTANCE

To become familiar with the world and to become familiar with the modern architectural dimension of that world: this was the challenge for the student Manfredo Tafuri and his friends. Therefore, between 1956 and 1961, they would spend the summer travelling around Europe looking for modern and contemporary works of architecture, that, in Tafuri’s words, ‘spoke’. They went to France to see the chapel at Ronchamp, designed by Le Corbusier, and here Tafuri experienced what he regarded as an almost cosmic drama, an event that he recognized in the works of Karl Barth and Kierkegaard.

There was an inevitable farewell to the optimism of the 1930s amongst the group, to an

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45 See Passerini, *History as a Project*, p. 21, where Tafuri talks about his first reading of Argan.

46 With the decline of reason, Argan referred to the crisis of the ideals of Enlightenment. When Argan spoke of the ‘crisis of the great values of history’, he referred to the degree to which reason could give direction and stability to human life. Rationality is no longer a divine guiding light, but a technique which may or may not be successful. This, according to Argan, was the reason why Gropius made the move from a hopeful rationality to a more sober pragmatism, Argan, *Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus*, p. 12.
optimism that no longer seemed justified. They travelled to Scandinavia, to Germany, to Vienna, not in search of elegant, aesthetical architecture, but in search of architecture that ‘speaks’ with a violent, aggressive tone.\textsuperscript{47} To be sure, this was not an effort of a group of diligent, respectable students deeply committed to their cause, but an act of rebellion and protest against the isolationism in which the academic world had submerged itself vis-à-vis modern architectural culture. Tafuri indicates that it is after these trips around Europe that he arrived at the point where he ‘understood’ architecture.\textsuperscript{48} However, for Tafuri this did not prompt a period of relaxation. The end of the ‘project’ of coming to grips with architecture was followed by the next ‘project’ of gaining further understanding at a political level of what was happening at the university and in Italian society at large, and subsequently translating of this knowledge into resistance and protest.

In this way, when the first student protest at the Faculty of Architecture of the Sapienza University of Rome started, Tafuri played a fair part in it. It was now 1958 and in reaction to the decision of the government to introduce a university entry examination for architects, architectural students occupied the university buildings.\textsuperscript{49} However, Tafuri and his friends were not specifically interested in the reason behind the occupation. What was more important to them was experimenting with a concrete strategy of resistance. Therefore, they looked for an immediately available cause which could be used to create a kind of domino effect. They searched for weak spots in the ‘chain of power’, through which they might be able to awaken the ‘ignorant mass’ of the university population, and also be able to turn the existing system upside down and create complete chaos.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{47} With this ‘violent, aggressive’ architecture, Tafuri refers to the architecture that gave evidence to the disillusionment arising after 1930s modernism. Le Corbusier’s chapel at Ronchamp is an important case in point. In this work, the master goes beyond the rational modernism of his previous work. For critics of architecture, this step was difficult to understand: should Ronchamp be understood as a break with architectural modernism? For Tafuri, what was important was the crisis of rationalism expressed by this building: the collapse of the enlightenment dream of providing people with a better life through the force of reason. The chapel at Ronchamp ‘speaks’ of other dimensions of human being: a ‘space indicible’, giving evidence also of the dark sides of human being, dimensions that can not be traced by the reductive language of logic. See Cesare de Sessa, ‘Le Corbusier e la dissonanza di Ronchamp’, 2002, www.antithesi.info. Giornale di Critica dell’architettura.

\textsuperscript{48} Passerini, \textit{History as a Project}, p. 22.

\textsuperscript{49} Tafuri’s activities during this period should be seen against the background of the development of the university during the years of reconstruction. Traditionally, the university system in Italy had been based on a strong individualism. This was due to an extremely centralized administrative structure on the one hand, and a total freedom for individual professors within local institutes on the other. This situation prompted the widespread expression \textit{baroni delle cattedre} – chair barons. Professors easily felt threatened in their little paradises and so were inclined to react against any introduction of collegiate bodies. In the years of the reconstruction, education was not a priority. Around 1958, the time when Tafuri was studying at the university, things began to change. The number of students rose dramatically and there were no substantial transformations to accompany this expansion. The fight that Tafuri is caught up with in this period, is the confrontation between an archaic academia and a society which is undergoing rapid changes and modernization. When the first post-war centre-left government came to power in 1962-63, a parliamentary committee was formed to initiate substantial reforms in education. See Giunio Luzzato, ‘University’, \textit{Encyclopedia of Contemporary Italian Culture}, pp. 610-612; Mario Diani ‘Student movement’, ibid., pp. 565-566.
In an atmosphere of upheaval and dissatisfaction, Tafuri and his friends were looking for intellectual instruments to achieve an insight, a rational comprehension of the political forces that were actually in power.

The next wave of protest against architectural university politics occurred when Tafuri was a little older. At the start of the 1960s, he had already completed his studies and had one foot inside the university and the other outside. Direct action seemed to be even more essential now and as a result of a bitter fight with Professor Saverio Muratori about his Weltanschauung, the theme was not only ‘liberty of education’, but also ‘liberty of acquisition’, seen as the liberty to decide what subject matter was appropriate.\footnote{It is not relevant to mention what Tafuri says about Muratori, because here the struggle also involves a certain view of history. Tafuri says: ‘And we found that we had in front of us at a certain point Saverio Muratori . . . He was someone unique, someone who had a strong intellectual resonance, someone who could really think . . . Muratori . . . was against everything that was modern. This is the point. He thought that true modernity meant that everything should start all over again. This was fascinating from a certain point of view . . . But Muratori was the person we wanted to confront because he was invulnerable. He refused to talk with us because his way of thinking only functioned if it remained closed to dialogue.’ Passerini, \textit{History as a Project}, pp. 22-23.}

It is now 1963 and what followed was one of the longest university occupations before 1968, lasting for sixty days. Students remained in the university buildings day and night. The atmosphere was violent, as Tafuri recalls, partly because those in charge of the Faculty of Architecture were not used to such extreme forms of protest. This is clear from an anecdote told by Tafuri:

\[\begin{align*}
\cdots & \text{there was the secretary of the faculty who said: ‘Be aware that I will now call the principal.’ I said: ‘Yes, you call the principal and you tell him.’ ‘\ldots I will tell him that you are scoundrels, and that I will now disconnect the electrical power.’ And I: ‘Alright, you take away the electrical power, but then we will restrain you.’ Somebody had brought along ropes, I remember. At the moment I don’t remember the name of that secretary, but he was very amusing. So we all tied him up, no? We tied him up, then we gave him the telephone, we dialled the number of the principal, his name was Vincenzo Vasari, and we told him: ‘Speak please!’ And so you could hear that old fascist on the other end stating his name promptly: ‘Grab the crowd!’ And he said: ‘I can’t, they have tied me up.’} \end{align*}\]

Despite the violent, explosive atmosphere Tafuri also remembers it as an amusing period. What was at stake during this battle was a demand for a change of curriculum – the enforced renewal of the didactic system. The whole enterprise seems to have been effective, for at the end of the sixty days the faculty came up with a peace offering which involved implementing a change in staff. New professors were brought in who were thought to be more progressive and appealing to the younger generation. As a result, Bruno Zevi moved from Venice to Rome, Ludovico Quaroni came from Florence and Luigi Piccinato also made the move from Venice to Rome. However, Tafuri and his group of

\footnote{‘The most important thing is that we were looking for pretexts, weak links in a chain, in order to effect disruption. We used to say that we had a little bit of the whole world concentrated within the department.’ Passerini, \textit{History as a Project}, p. 22.}
friends were not satisfied at all with these staff changes and thought them merely palliative. For while these academics may have adopted a certain innovative stance twenty years before, they were now ancient history.

At this point, the group decided to leave the university and were resigned to taking no further action, because they were convinced that nothing would change. An interesting aspect of this polarized atmosphere of protest was the relationship between Tafuri and those groups within the university that went under an explicitly communist banner. According to Tafuri, the communist groups were very insular, moreover, there was a substantial difference between their intentions and Tafuri’s attempt to renew the existing curricula. For the communist groups, such proposals were irrelevant and, in the end, useless. They had their eyes on something larger, and for this reason considered themselves to be more explicitly political – political in a militant way. Tafuri recalls how these people actually belonged to a certain élite within the teaching staff who always remained at the level of assistants, and never possessing permanent positions within the university. Architects like Carlo Aymonino, Piero Melograni, Michele Valori and Leonardo Benevolo belonged to these groups. Their orientation was also more complex, as they were called ‘left-wing Catholics’ or even ‘cato-communisti’. Tafuri had an ambivalent relationship with the communists: although on the one hand he had a certain esteem for them – they were a fixed part of his frame of reference and constant partners in discussion – he also distrusted them for their insularity and their unquestionable faith in the Soviet Union.

Tafuri and his group of friends were at this time more attracted to a kind of terzoforzismo, an ideology of the third way, as proclaimed by political journals like il Mondo or l’Espresso. One of the positive outcomes of this turbulent period was the fact that Tafuri and his friends began to develop alternative courses to those offered by the university, occurring under the banner of the self-organization of education. The first course meetings consisted of Tafuri and his four friends, who formed a kind of fixed nucleus. Later, this group was expanded by those from the student community who appeared to have a non-conformist attitude and an interest in the programme adopted by Tafuri and his friends. The group was innocently called Gruppo Assistenza Matricole: a group estab-


53 See Passerini, History as a Project, p. 24 where Tafuri mentions that he could not communicate with the Communists.

54 L’espresso, one of Italy’s foremost news magazines, was founded October 1955 by Arrigo Benedetti and Eugenio Scalfari. Like Il Mondo, the journal presented an aggressive, investigative journalism about topics such as corruption by the Christian Democratic Party and clientelism. In the 1950s, it uncovered large scandals in the health and housing
VENEZIA

ABBIAMO OCCUPATO L'UNIVERSITA' PER DEMANIO LA LIBERTA' PROFESSIONALE

ROMA

PROPOSTE DI ORDINAMENTO E DIBATTITO INTERNO
A CURA DEGLI STUDENTI P. BETTINI E R. VITIELLO

L'AGITAZIONE

In questo modo il segretario del Consiglio Studen
tesco di Facoltà (C.S.F.) di Architettura di Roma commenta in un articolo su «La Conquista» (settimana dei giovi
ni socialisti), il 21 febbraio 1964, l'occupazione degli studenti ar
chitetti di Milano:

L'indeterminatezza delle strutture giudiziali dell'Istituto Uni
versitario nelle nostre società ci permette di fare queste richieste pre

cise ed irrinunciabili: passaggio della direzione dell'Istituto della
persona singola di un docente (direttore dell'Istituto) ad una com
missione comprensiva di tutte le forze universitarie (studenti, assi
stenti, docenti) e delle forze r
presentative degli enti di demo

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nisti, anche se avanzati e democ"
lished in order to aid those starting their university studies. However, the real agenda was less innocent: they were committed to the idea of doing a better job than the university; to counterbalance the ‘deformation of education’. They wanted to focus on all those issues which had become anathema to the university hierarchy, principally the history of modern and contemporary architecture. Consequently, in the Tafuri family home, or in the house of a friend, seminars were organized in which certain themes in this field were brought up for discussion. It is in this setting that Tafuri undertook his first efforts to ‘explain’ the history of modern architecture, perhaps as much to himself as to his student audience.55

FIRST ‘PROFESSIONAL’ ACTIVITIES

After Tafuri had received his architectural degree he started to work with the same group of friends with whom he had been studying.56 Tafuri recounts how he and his friends rented a large apartment on the Viale Tiepolo in Rome. It was here that they came up with an official name for their group: Associazione Urbanisti ed Architetti, which was abbreviated to AUA.57 The association was established with the aim of giving an official form to their political activities. As an officially recognized association, they hoped to gain more influence in the political-social environment of Rome. To be more precise, although they knew they were only ‘little monsters’, lingering somewhere in the shadows, they wanted to be able to voice an opinion within the large protest battles that were being fought in Rome and on a national level. On the agenda of the association was the battle for political reform in town and regional planning. At the start of the 1960s, the Tambroni affair had just ended, leaving a delicate political atmosphere in which the first steps were taken towards the possible co-operation, up to and including cabinet level, of centre and left-wing forces.58 In this fragile atmosphere, the architectural profession organized itself into large centre-left associations, that would be the trailblazers of a new future.

industries. Throughout the 1960s and the 1970s, the journal kept its aggressive tone, dealing with controversial and outspoken issues, such as terrorism – of which it was critical – and divorce and abortion. From the mid 1970s, it became engaged in fierce competition with Italy’s other news magazine Il Panorama. See G. Moliterno, ‘L’espresso’, Encyclopedia of Contemporary Italian Culture, p. 203.

55 One of his students was a young Giorgio Ciucci, who later recalled how at six each evening after the university classes were over, he went to the ‘student training centre’ where Tafuri would lecture in the history of the modern movement. Ciucci remembers for example that Tafuri spoke of the Red House designed by Philip Webb for William Morris, Horta’s Maison du Peuple, and the Bauhaus building by Gropius. Tafuri’s tone was not informative or didactic, but polemical; seeking the confrontation with Zevi’s Storia dell’architettura moderna, G. Ciucci, ‘The Formative Years’, Casabella: Il progetto storico di Manfredo Tafuri, 1995, p. 21.

56 For an indication of Tafuri’s study programme as a student of architecture, see Ciucci, The Formative Years, pp. 12-25.

57 See Passerini, History as a Project, p. 25.

58 Fernando Tambroni was a Christian Democrat who briefly became head of government in 1960. This was because the DC experienced an impasse in the formation of centre-based government coalitions. Tambroni offered a way out
The Istituto Nazionale di Architettura is an example of such an organization, however, Tafuri and his friends did not agree with this new institute and accused its founders of lacking integrity. The Istituto Nazionale di Architettura represented all those involved in the different stages of the building process, from the building contractor to the architect. However, the contractors and those in the building industry were the capitalist enemies of the AUA and there inclusion was the reason for the accusations against the institute. In response to the institute, the association of young architects and students of architecture wanted in their small way to give expression to the possibility of architectural integrity in the midst of the heightened political battle.

With regard to housing and town and regional planning, complex issues were on the political agenda of the national government. There was, at the beginning of the 1960s, the formulation of the Legge Sullo, a law concerning town and regional planning, which stated that land should not be privately owned. Private interests could apply to use a area of land but could not become its proprietor. The battle for the implementation of this law was fought by another large organization, the Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica.

Besides the political battle for a more just form of planning, the AUA remained involved in the battles for university reform. At the beginning of the 1960s, the protests within the Faculty of Architecture in Rome had become especially intense after provocation by charging police had led to the death of a student called Paolo Rossi. This dramatic event, which spread like a stain over the Sapienza University, caused a wave of protest with regard to the oppression undertaken by the police and other authorities. What had already been a difficult situation now reached an explosive stage with Tafuri and the AUA continuing to be indirectly involved in the battle. However, in general, the AUA was still a splinter group. Whilst enjoying a certain amount of recognition in the world of architecture and planning politics, the AUA nonetheless remained in the shadow of the big names. One of these was another association, named SAU, the Società di architettura e urbanistica, whose members included Leonardo Benevolo, Arnaldo Bruschi, Mario Manieri Elia, Carlo

by forming an authoritarian populist government supported by the neo-Fascist MSI-party. Tambroni gained a bad reputation when strong police reaction to street demonstrations left several people dead. Tambroni was forced to resign and the lesson for the DC was that right-wing governments were impossible. This opened the door for the political left. See M. Donovan, ‘Fernando Tambroni’, Encyclopedia of Contemporary Italian Culture, p. 572.

59 The Istituto Nazionale di Architettura, abbreviated to l’In/Arch, was founded in 1959 by Bruno Zevi.

60 In the history of Italian urban planning since 1945, the fight for the implementation of the Legge Sullo constitutes an important chapter. The Sullo reforms of 1962 were an attempt to force a ceasura in the dramatic history of urban development to that date. Control of urban growth and planning were an important part of the law. It is telling that the implementation of this law failed because of subversive actions by both the political left and right. Most of all, there was a wave of hysterical propaganda from the right and also, a lack of will from the centre-left government. The events around the Legge Sullo can be held to exemplify many attempts of urban reform in the years to come. See the Mancini laws in 1967, the Bucalossi laws in 1977, and the Galasso law in 1985. See P. Ginsborg, Storia d’Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi, pp. 368-369.

61 This was an older organization, founded in 1930 and known as L’INU.

62 In the history of contemporary, post-war Italy the extraparliamentary Left plays an important role. As a significant political force, the extraparliamentary Left by and large covers the period between 1969 and 1976. Its origins can be
Melograni and Alberto Samonà. This was a more radical group, extreme left-wing and communist in character, and although this organization was important for Tafuri and his friends, they could never quite trust them. The difference between these two left-wing groups was that while the AUA advocated pragmatic reform and the improvement of the existing situation, the SAU seemed to be aiming for a more concerted grab for power – for a revolution and the subsequent acquisition of professional instrumentalities. As has been mentioned, Tafuri felt fundamentally uneasy with respect to such ideas.

The conception of architecture that arose from these and other activities was very specific: architecture was now a relative fact, as a specific dimension of a general political fight. During these years, architectural faculties were lively centres of student politics and most architects regarded their profession as having strong political connotations. This was due to a keen interest in the centre-left experiment, for which planning and building programmes served as standard means of implementing political power. In this context, Tafuri cites the concrete activities of the AUA. For example, throwing stones at the police escort of the Minister of Education, was to Tafuri exactly the same as studying Le Corbusier or Gropius: both activities were part of the same project. However, after the Tambroni affair Tafuri and the AUA became convinced that it was no longer possible to undertake substantial political actions outside a political party. On the one hand, there was the awareness that the problems were indeed huge, while on the other they had hoped and expected that a resolution could be achieved. As such, it was important to be part of a political party with a precise social programme. At the beginning of the 1960s, Tafuri and his friends became members of the PSI, the Partito Socialista d’Italia. Several issues were decisive for their choosing the Socialist rather than the Communist Party. The Communists who Tafuri knew seemed to show little interest in urban planning affairs. Even when they provided opposition in the community council they seemed to do so in a ritualized, clichéd manner. In making his choice, the events of 1956 in Budapest were more significant for Tafuri, especially the way in which they had discredited the Communist Party. Tafuri remembers listening to these shocking events on the radio, and how as a consequence of them he could not identify himself with the Communist Party.

Of great significance to Tafuri’s intellectual development was the appearance in about 1962-1963 of new political journals that indicated the emergence of a new movement among the left-wing intelligentsia. Tafuri specifically refers to the Quaderni Rossi edited by Raniero Panzieri. This journal featured articles by ex-members of the Socialist Party

predated to somewhere around 1945, when a variety of voices around the Communist Party, inspired by Trotsky and Mao Zedong, criticized the tactics of the PCI for a lack of radicality. With the appearance of the Quaderni Rossi (1961) and the Quaderni Piacentini (1962) their influence greatly expanded to become a significant force in Italy’s attempt to modernize its politics and institutions and to formulate an adequate answer to the social consequences of the economic miracle. Importantly, the history of the extraparliamentary Left is closely connected to the atmosphere of 1968. The members of the extraparliamentary Left were very young being for the most part students of secondary schools. See David Moss, ‘Extraparliamentary Left’, Encyclopedia of Contemporary Italian Culture, p. 205.

63 György Lukács, Die Zerstörung der Vernunft, Der Weg des Irrationalismus von Schelling zu Hitler, Berlin 1955. In this book, Lukács claims that certain trends in German tradition are guilty of the destruction of reason and rationality, leading ultimately to Nazism. Nazi ideology now appeared to be derived from such thinkers as Schelling,
such as Panzieri, Lelio Basso and Vittorio Foa. The position taken by the *Quaderni Rossi* was very specific. It argued for renewed working class militancy as a reaction against the reality of a ‘Fordist factory system’. It argued that a re-reading of Marx and a return to the revolutionary and militant character of his politics was the only way to confront the reality of a neo-capitalist society. For Tafuri, this was like a return to his roots and the lessons of the philosopher Bruno Widmar. As Tafuri recalled, what Widmar had taught and what now reappeared, was a non-doctrinal Marxism. To be faithful to Marx necessarily implied a process of reconsidering everything from the start, including Marx’s own works. That is what Marx had done in his time and that was also what the new generation should start to do. So, the study of Marx could never imply blindly following or imitating Marx and his oeuvre. This standpoint had such an impact on Tafuri that he denigrated most of the Marxist literature that was published at the time. Even the most insightful of these were characterized by Tafuri and his friends as ‘scholastic’: an attitude that is itself not devoid of dogmatism.

At the start of the 1960s the publishers Einaudi decided to translate and publish Lukács’ *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft* (1954), as *La Distruzione della ragione*, a book with which Tafuri profoundly disagreed. As Tafuri recalled, in this work Lukács fiercely attacked all that was important to him, including Kafka and the idea of an avant-garde. Tafuri indicates that this rejection of his ideas was more or less the subjective base from which he develops the idea of recommencing from the start, and this time dal punto di vista politico. It is at this point that Tafuri enters into another phase of transition, which always meant undergoing what was practically an existential crisis: ‘Va bene, finora ho fatto questo perché ero uno studente universitario eccetera, ma adesso che faccio? Da grande che faccio?’

**BREAKING THE TIES: TAFURI’S HISTORICAL TURN**

In the introduction to this chapter I asked the question: how did Tafuri turn to history? When and how did he decide to exchange an active-participatory life as an engaged architect for a more reflective-observatory attitude? How did he make the switch from action to thought? In response, I have already mentioned a few key –events leading to this change. I have described, for example, a young Tafuri who spent time in the Vatican Museum copying the masters, already anguishing over his capacity to compete with the high standards of the old masters, yet, wanting to remain part of this world even if he could not produce artistic work. Thus, in his youth, Tafuri had already faced personal doubts concerning the relation of action and theory.

Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Scheler. Notably, the rejection of this book was an important ingredient in the formation of the later School of Venice. The philosopher Massimo Cacciari adopted Lukács’ series of thinkers as the point of departure for an opposite message embodied in the pensiero negativo.

64 ‘Okay, until now I have done this, because I was an university student etc., but now, what do I do? As a grown up, what do I do?’

65 Passerini, *History as a Project*, p. 28.
I will now take up the thread of Tafuri’s life once more and focus upon what perhaps can be called the most radical of Tafuri’s de-cisions: the choice to cut the umbilical cord connecting him to the architectural community and to become an historian instead. This was a difficult decision, for after all, Tafuri had trained as an architect and even though he did not engage in design himself, he had remained close to architects, advising them and writing articles and books especially for this audience. While Tafuri had already for some years pursued his activities within the AUA as a professional ‘architect-politician’ he experienced a growing feeling of not being completely able to identify with the group; of an increasing distance between the ‘I’ and the ‘we’. The group consisted of architects who wanted to change society, whereas Tafuri was not interested in being an architect, or to be more precise, architecture had ceased to occupy a central place in his thoughts at that time.

We are now in the mid 1960s, and it is during this period that Tafuri experienced a profound crisis. As Tafuri describes it himself, for two or three years he loosened the strict control he had maintained over his life, suspending both his thinking and his production. Tafuri describes the problem of these years as that of being somewhere between two identities. The path to becoming an architect had already for some time been closed, but the choice of history was not yet obvious. Although Tafuri was always interested in history, at the same time he was imbued with an almost obsessive sense of concern. Most of all, he was concerned about the architectural history as pursued by ‘unworldly’ art historians. Seen from the perspective of Panziero and the Quaderni Rossi the choice for history could be understood as an escape from the chaos of society into the safe haven of scholarship. The ultimate de-cision by Tafuri to devote himself entirely to history occurred as a result of the encounter with some of the protagonists of post-war architectural culture. Two people were of special importance to him: Ernesto Nathan Rogers and Ludovico Quaroni, both architects with a vivid intellectual and historical interest in the field. Significantly, Tafuri recalls how these architects actually noticed his work as was demonstrated by their visiting him. At that time, Tafuri had started to write his ‘scritti minori’ – his less known articles, which were published in marginal architectural magazines such as Argomenti di Architettura and Superfici. These magazines were positioned on the periphery of architectural culture and attempted to put forward an alternative to the monopolization of information by mainstream architectural magazines such as Casabella Continuità. This situation was important for a young generation who had free access to these magazines and thus found a platform to publish their ideas.

In an article written by Tafuri about Rome’s architectural and urban history from the post-war years until 1961 he problematizes the attitude of the so-called ‘engaged’ architects and sets out to demonstrate the complexity behind their position. The article caught the attention of Quaroni, who had struggled similarly with the pitfalls of an engaged attitude. It shows how the initial contact was established between the architect-theoretician Quaroni and the historian-architect Tafuri. These events occurred in a 1960’s climate of opti-

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66 In Tafuri’s own words: ‘While I was attracted to history, I always had the fear that history was an escape, something to be renounced in favour of action.’ Passerini, History as a Project, p. 29.
mism and belief in progress, as Italy was experiencing a so-called ‘economical miracle’ – one which Tafuri considered to be mainly a ‘mental miracle’, a kind of collective whim. Tafuri was sceptical of the consumer society. In a period dominated by slogans such as ‘super-productivity’ and a belief in the future feasibility of society, Tafuri developed an interest in Quaroni, who was seen as the pessimistic and unproductive architect par excellence. Where, for example, Bruno Zevi had invested all his hopes in the centre-left government, for Tafuri the first cracks in this coalition, heralding its eventual failure, were highly significant.

Whilst in this frame of mind he became acquainted with Ernesto Nathan Rogers. Rogers was a professor at the Milan University of Technology, where he taught two disciplines: a combined course of both the history of art and the history of architecture, and a course in architectural design. As a result of several visits, Tafuri became friends with Rogers and was subsequently given the opportunity to gain his initial teaching experience within the academy. Rogers asked Tafuri to give, on a no-income basis, an extra set of lessons in the history of art. Tafuri recalls how Rogers took care of him: ‘. . . però lui mi faceva mangiare lui, mi faceva dormire lui, e mi voleva molto bene’. In other words, the desire for history had been further nourished by concrete opportunities. Towards the middle of the 1960s, Quaroni asked Tafuri to take on the editing of a book of Quaroni’s own work. Tafuri accepted but, as I will demonstrate in a later chapter, he turned it into something quite different. Thus through the protection and the guidance of some of the main protagonists of Italian modern architecture, Tafuri was given a chance to re-enter the battleground of the university where, not so many years previously, he had fought bitterly against the authorities. In fact, Quaroni soon assigned him another job. Quaroni was one of the new professors of design appointed after the didactical exchange of the early 1960s, as one of the outcomes of student protest. His chair consisted of two duties: one was teaching contemporary architectural history and the other was the more classical task of teaching

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67 Ludovico Quaroni (1911-1987) was an architect, urban planner and a university teacher. In the late 1930s, during the Fascist regime, Quaroni worked amongst others on a design for the Foro Mussolini. After the war he was one of the protagonists behind the design of the exemplary new housing quarters in Rome, the so-called Tiburtino quarter, designed in 1950. He became well known for his self-critical reflection on these engaged topics, especially the article ‘Il paese dei Barocchi’ (The Land of the Baroque) published in 1957 for Casabella. He was also an active urban planner, addressing issues associated with the North-South dichotomy, especially within the framework of the Communità-movement which he joined in 1956. The architect Ernesto Nathan Rogers (1909-1969) was also one of the intellectual protagonists who had a major influence on the direction of post-war architecture. He was the influential editor-in-chief of Casabella and took part in the architectural studio BPR, which before the war was known as BBPR. Rogers was almost an holistic thinker, who recognized a fundamental continuity between past and present and strong associations between architectural traditions, the city, the academy and everyday life. Significantly, he thought that even Italian rationalism could be continued if cleansed of associations with fascism – the fascists had actually taken the life of one of the members of the BBPR firm. The surviving members of the BPR studio restarted their activities after the war by designing a ‘Monument to the Dead in the Concentration Camps in Germany’ in a rationalist style, as both a continuation of rationalism and a memento of fascist and nazi terror. See Gordana Kostich, ‘Ludovico Quaroni’, Encyclopedia of Italian Contemporary Culture, pp. 485-486.


69 ‘however, he made me eat, he made me sleep, and he was very fond of me.’ Passerini, original transcript, p. 39.
architectural design. Quaroni requested that Tafuri give a number of seminars on nineteenth- and twentieth-century architectural history.

Another decisive factor in his final choice of history was the anger caused by the large exhibition about the architect Michelangelo, which was organized by Bruno Zevi and Paolo Portoghesi. It was here that Tafuri’s choice proceeded due to reactive forces, for he was confronted with the way in which he thought history should not be undertaken – with a ‘false history’. Tafuri himself perhaps best explains the culmination of his turn towards history:

> At that time, from a subjective point of view I had settled my future destiny in a night – this often happens to me, also in other sectors – a tragic night, in which I was in bad shape, because I had to decide. I remember I was in a sweat, I walked, I was in bad shape, and I had a fever. In the end, in the morning, I decided and that was it: I will throw away any sort of compass etc., I will now dedicate myself only to history. What kind of history I don’t know, but I know that I . . .

I WILL THROW AWAY THE COMPASS!

“I will now dedicate myself only to history. What kind of history, I don’t know, but I know that I . . .” It is here that Tafuri had reached a crucial point in his life. Reflecting upon his student years and early professional activities, he knew he had to make an absolute choice between one discipline and the other. The model of the engaged historian actively involved in the practice of the architect was no longer viable. Tafuri experienced a growing awareness of the problems underlying any sort of engaged position and this convinced him that his task as an historian must be different. In the interview, Tafuri stresses the importance of the failure of politics in his decision to proceed towards a different sort of architectural history. This can be explained in the following way. The inception of a centre-left government had provided the engaged, left-wing intellectual with an opportunity to

70 In 1964 Zevi organized, together with his Venetian students, a very specific exhibition about Michelangelo in the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome. In the accompanying publication, called ‘Michelangiolo architetto’, Zevi states that this exhibition is about the ‘actuality of Michelangiolo’. Michelangelo is, according to Zevi, ‘the most lively and pertinent artistic personality, also in relationship to the problems of contemporary practice.’ The exhibition was jokingly called: ‘Michelangiolo-pop’. It consisted, among other things, of a series of ‘critical models’ articulated by the students, in which Michelangelo was clearly only used in a very loose way, as a source of inspiration. Some of these ‘models’ looked like hypermodern mobiles, in contrast to the heavy substantiality of Michelangelo’s sculpture. See Bruno Zevi, Zevi su Zevi, architettura come profezia, Venezia, 1993, p. 93. Michelangiolo architetto, ed. by P. Portoghesi et al., Torino, 1964, p. 12.

71 ‘Allora, dal punto di vista soggettivo io ho risolto il mio destino futuro in una notte – questa mi capita spesso, anche in altri settori – una notte tragica, in cui sono stato malissimo, perché dovevo decidere. Proprio ricordo sudavo, camminavo, stavo male, avevo la febbre. Alle fine, la mattina, ho deciso e basta: butto qualsiasi compasso eccetera, io adesso mi dedico unicamente alla storia. Quale tipo di storia non lo so, però so che . . .’, original transcript, p. 42.

72 This paragraph is based on pp. 30-34 of the published interview in Any.
exercise real influence, after years in which the left wing was excluded from participation in government. However, the failure of this government was due to internal pressures, proving to Tafuri that the pact between progressive intellectuals and social change no longer worked. For Tafuri, this proved that the time had come for a different societal role for the intellectual, a position which he specifically envisaged through the creation of a different kind of architectural history. However, as Tafuri mentions in the interview, Bruno Zevi had different thoughts. Zevi was aware of the failure of this government and subsequently, as Tafuri recounts, deliberately politicized his exhibition on Michelangelo. As Zevi argued, faced with a difficult political climate, architects actually had a lot to learn by studying Michelangelo: ‘In the entire panorama of the history of architecture, Michelangelo, against all appearances, is the figure from which the architects of today can learn the most, in the sense that he acts in a sociological, linguistic and professional situation that has an extraordinary analogy with the situation which is experienced by us now.’

In the interview with Passerini, Tafuri describes the exhibition as follows: ‘Michelangelo was presented on a par with the contemporary architect Eric Mendelsohn, as if to say that it is the task of the intellectual – not the masses – to cry out against the pain of the human condition.’ Once again, Tafuri states, it is the enlightened artist-intellectual who has the right to protest and to denounce a situation. For Tafuri, the situation demanded far more radical steps. The failure of the centre-left government indicated that there was a problem which threatened the very heart of the practice of the architect. The modern dream of the architect who constructs and thereby contributes to a better world had been damaged. For Tafuri, a Zevian entanglement of history, politics and creativity was no longer tenable. Additionally, he found that the historian could no longer persevere in his or her role as a proactive contributor to society. As Tafuri stated in the interview: ‘My position was that history is not an instrument of politics. History is history’.

The model of the ‘operative’, engaged architectural historian had been rejected. Yet what was the alternative? At this point, this was something Tafuri did not know. There were no existing architectural-historical traditions in which he could take his place. There was architectural history as practiced by engaged architects and there were a few art historians who were occasionally occupied with architectural history. The first group modelled their history on the concerns of the present; the second group simply extended the methodology of art history to architecture. The model for the historian who was deeply

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73 We should remember here that one of the most difficult endeavours of the centre-left government was actually, at the beginning of the 1960s, the introduction of reforms in town and regional planning. The Legge Sullo, created to stop speculation in real estate, met with fierce resistance from small land owners and the building industry. It further enlarged the differences between the political Right and Left.


75 Passerini, History as a Project, p. 31.

76 Ibid., p. 31.
involved with architecture, yet chose to separate historical practice from actual architectural concerns, did not exist. From this point onwards, Tafuri faced the challenge of building a discipline and a new type of architectural history. The insecurity of this choice is indicated by Tafuri’s words: ‘butto qualsiasi compasso’ – I will throw away any sort of compass. However, there is also a deeper meaning to these words. For Tafuri, the passage from engaged to ‘non-operative’ history also meant a departure from a certain ethical code, which would be followed by the search for something different. The need to do justice to history, to distinguish between ‘false history’ and ‘true’ history, was already clear to Tafuri. In the years following, the elaboration of a different kind of ethics became central to Tafuri’s quest for a different kind of architectural history.