Massimo Cacciari

Metropolis
Saggi sulla grande città di Sombart,
Endell, Scheffler e Simmel
When Tafuri arrived in Venice in 1968, he did not find a ‘serene city’.\(^1\) An occupation of university buildings and protests in the streets of Venice by students, joined by workers from the chemical factories in Marghera, were signs that the daily scholastic routine had been suspended. In Italy, the Movimento Studentesco had started well before 1968, being already active at the end of the 1950s, and from this time until late in the 1970s the universities were central to the fight for social change. In Venice it was certainly a phenomenon to be taken seriously, as in the years preceding 1968 the students’ movement had left a profound mark.

In 1968 the situation was such that the authorities had lost control over the events taking place; this was the case within educational institutes such as the I.U.A.V. or the Accademia delle Belle Arti, as well as within important cultural institutions such as the Biennale. This created an atmosphere of hope: students wondered whether it was the first sign of the dawning of a new era after the difficult years of post-war reconstruction and the impasse that the Italian Communist Party had arrived at due to the endless compromises made under Togliatti’s leadership. The student movement seemed a powerful demonstration of the capacity of the so-called ‘New Left’ to intervene and take control of social institutions after years of the marginalization of the left wing in Italy. Perhaps the long awaited revolution would finally come about.

In Venice the students’ protests became even more dramatic as a result of an initiative by the art students of the Accademia delle Belle Arti which involved occupying the grounds of the Biennale. The role played by the art trade and the fraudulent attitude of the committees created to select the artists led to the accusation that the Biennale was part of the discreditable system of the capitalist establishment. Daniel Cohn-Bendit arrived to support the boycott of the Biennale, now perceived as an ‘expensive plaything destined for the pleasures of the dominant class’.\(^2\) From 12 June onwards, the newspapers of Venice reported almost obsessively on the threat of a possible occupation by a group of rebellious students and intellectuals. On 18 June, the police reacted drastically to stop the growing tension by intervening in a protest at the Piazza San Marco, with the main result being that numerous tourists were badly mistreated. However, the opening of the Biennale was ensured, as the police were now guarding its grounds.

---

\(^1\) I refer to the epithet naming Venice ‘La Serenissima’ meaning the noblest, most illustrious. This name was given to the Republic of Venice, as it had existed for more than a millennium. Venice lost its independence as a city-state in 1759, when it was conquered by the armies of Napoleon. In this context, I refer to ‘La Serenissima’ to stress its serene and tranquil character.

The protests surrounding the 34th Biennale of 1968 are indicative of the chaotic but also incredibly dynamic climate of these years. Foreign art journals report a kind of poster war going on in the city. The Committee for the Boycott of the Biennale spread posters with messages such as ‘The Biennale is Capitalist’ and ‘No to the Biennale of the Bosses’. The Committee of Students, Workers and Revolutionary Intellectuals for the Boycott of the Biennale was even more outspoken, seeing the boycott as an important phase in the struggle against the capitalist system. The immediate surroundings of the Biennale itself were like a military stronghold, crowded with police and soldiers. In the residential area of the Giardini a member of the carabinieri, rifle at the ready, stood guard at every corner. In response to this situation, the Argentinian painter Uriburu threw thirty kilos of green dye into the Canal Grande as a homage to Venice and its Biennale. The water remained intensely green all day.³

TAFURI IN VENICE

Until 1966, Tafuri’s prospects for an academic career looked quite bleak. Although he was already a very productive historian writing on architectural themes from the Renaissance to the present, his outspoken left-wing position made it impossible for him to rise above the rank of teaching assistant. However, in 1966 his name was put on the list of possible candidates for the chair in the history of architecture at the I.U.A.V. in Venice. The head of the committee was Bruno Zevi, who at that time, prior to the publication of Teorie e Storia dell’architettura, still had a favourable opinion of Tafuri, not least because Zevi was engaged in the fight to prevent professors with a fascist past from being appointed to important positions.

Tafuri’s name had been suggested for positions in Rome and Milan, but it was no coincidence that he was finally accepted in Venice.⁴ The director of the I.U.A.V., Giuseppe Samonà, had made the university a safe haven for ‘heretical’ intellectuals – those who had difficulty finding employment elsewhere – and among the illustrious architects who taught in Venice were Carlo Scarpa, Luigi Piccinato and Franco Albini. At a time when there was an outspoken political-cultural climate inside the institute, and while outside, the campi of Venice became platforms for debate, Tafuri faced the most important challenge of his career. In Venice, he began the ambitious project of rewriting the subject matter of architectural history, as well as working on its institutionalization. A school had to be founded

---

⁴ Despite the resentment of architectural faculties, Tafuri was a kind of protégé of important participants within architectural culture: Rogers, for instance, and Quaroni. In the interview with Passerini, Tafuri recalls the opportunity of a teaching position in Milan: ‘At that point, that crazy Rogers, poverino, called me from Milan, saying: ‘Look, we have a position in art history here.’ I was nobody; well, I was just a teaching assistant. He said: ‘I’ll give you one and a half years to prepare. ‘How do I prepare myself?’ I asked. ‘Should I write about important things?’ He replied: ‘Well, look. I’ll try to get on the committee, but you absolutely must win; you are the new voice!’, Passerini, History as a Project, p. 33.
dedicated solely to the study of the history of architecture. Tafuri’s aim was to create a proper institute for the history of architecture within the Istituto Universitario d’Architettura di Venezia.

‘1968’ AND THE STUDENTS OF ARCHITECTURE

Trento: Istituto Universitario di Scienze Sociali; Torino: Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico; Milano: Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico; Venezia: I.U.A.V.; Torino: Facoltà di Lettere, Legge, Magistero; Firenze: Facoltà di Lettere, Magistero; Firenze: Facoltà di Architettura. This is a list of the ‘sedi’, the universities that participated in the students’ movement. Notably, there is strong participation by faculties of architecture, while in Venice the I.U.A.V. was also one of the occupied ‘sedi’.

In Italy, the student movement started earlier than in any other European country – well before the famous month of May in France. The situation at the I.U.A.V. in Venice may be seen as representative of the way in which the student movement in Italy originated. When on 19 April 1967, the buildings of the Venetian architectural institute were occupied by students for the first time, the immediate cause was a rise in the level of tuition; however, this was only used as a pretext for the students to demonstrate. In fact, it is characteristic of the Italian student movement that protests against the poor state of the university were only the point of departure for a more far-reaching criticism which was aimed at capitalist society at large. This criticism arose from a feeling of disappointment concerning the results of the first centre-left government. People had great expectations when the first left-wing government was installed at the end of the 1950s. These expectations turned into disillusionment when it became clear that this government was equally unable to respond adequately to the shockwaves created by the rapid transformation of Italy. The conviction arose that at a fundamental level modernization in Italy had failed, or at least had proved itself to be a process that was extremely difficult to realize.

Architecture faculties were strongly politicized during the 1960s because of their keen interest in the centre-left government, for whom planning and building programmes were essential means of modernization. At the Polytechnic University of Milan, for instance, there were study groups that analysed the political functions of architecture. In Milan and elsewhere, the plea for coherent programmes of study, or the integration of research and teaching, went hand in hand with the denunciation of existing planning politics. It is clear that the clash between a conservative and static university system and an extremely dynamic urban reality was particularly severe for architecture students.

5 Documenti della rivolta universitaria, a cura del movimento studentesco, Bari, 1968.
6 After a series of weak and inadequate centre-right governments, Fanfani declared in 1957 that the time had come for an ‘aprire a sinistra’, an opening towards the Left. Although it would take a couple of years before this government was actually realized, it opened a hopeful scenario of a more explicit social programme, moderate reforms and public interventions in the economy of the country.
Traditionally, the Italian education system is idealist in character, with a sharp division between a humanist education and technical training. The universities were training centres for a minority destined to work in the liberal professions, therefore, they mainly taught subjects such as history, the classics, and literature. New disciplines such as economics and sociology did not appear on the curriculum and the sciences were also not very popular. However, at the same time, both modernization and the impact of the aggressive forces of capitalism had their effects in urban centres. Cities became the battlegrounds of conflicting forces, for example between factory workers and management; the youth and the older generations; and students and professors. While they were not prepared for it through their training, architects were required to intervene in this conflict ridden urban reality.

We have seen that the I.U.A.V. appears in the list of universities that participated in the students’ movement. A source of information concerning the demands of the Venetian students is the pamphlet Documenti della rivolta universitaria which contains a summary of the demands of the students at the different universities. Concerning Venice, Marco de Michelis writes:

- The occupation of the faculty is the method of radical protest chosen by the students of architecture in Venice, to denounce not only the internal situation at their faculty, but also and once again the general structure of the university in Italy, with its undeniable authoritarian character and oppressive nature with respect to the constitutional rights of liberal access to study of all the civilians, and with respect to the liberal expression and decisional power of the students in their work.

---

8 Lumley, *States of Emergency*, p. 52. Lumley also states that this sharp division was useful to society: on the one hand, there was a need for cheap, unskilled labour and on the other, society asked for a small minority of educated people, preferably in the humanities.

9 In the Einaudi series *La Crisi Italiana* Sidney Tarrow states that the reason for this continuing crisis is a coming together of two processes: rapid urbanization and secularization. In Italy the process of industrial development and quick commercial expansion coincided with a process of civil modernization that could not keep up with the pace of industrialization. This caused a lack of balance between a quickly evolving industrialization and a bourgeoisie that lacked the force to accompany these processes with an introduction of liberal values. During the 1960s, Italian society was caught up in an equally rapid process of secularization: a going together of industrial and cultural modernization where this last element assumed the form of a mass culture with a specific uprooting and transgressive character. This situation is unique for Italy. For instance, in England and France the two processes of industrial modernization and secularization occurred in different historical periods. Luigi Graziano, Sidney Tarrow (eds.), *La Crisi Italiana, Volume primo: Formazione del regime repubblicano e societa civile*, Torino, 1979, Sidney Tarrow, ‘Aspetti della crisi italiana: note introduttive’, pp. 3-30. See also Section 2, ‘La crisi nella societa civile’, pp. 11-26.


11 Michelis, *Venezia*, p. 171: ‘L’occupazione della facolta e il metodo di lotta radicale scelto dagli studenti di Architettura di Venezia per constestare non solo la situazione interna della loro facolta, ma bensì e ancora una volta la struttura generale dell’ universita in Italia, di inequivocabile impostazione autoritaria, oppressiva, perciò dei diritti costituzionali di liberta di accesso agli studi di tutti i cittadini e della libera espressione e potere decisionale nel loro lavoro di studenti.’
In fact, as Ginzborg suggests, the essence of the Italian students’ movement, as expressed in this quote, was the refusal to become subordinated to any form of authority. In addition, it was a principal objective of the Venetian students to create space for free intellectual activity which was not conditioned by capitalist society or by the oppressive mechanisms of a modern ‘factory of knowledge’. The occupied university was considered to be a laboratory for producing new didactic forms with far-reaching implications at both a personal and a political level – consider, for example, the relationship between teacher and student, or that between theory and practice.

For the students of the ‘68 movement, the university was a fortress-like institution governed by barriers and divisions; such as those between the university and the outside world, or between different ‘classes’ within the university. A crucial point was the rejection of rigid, hierarchical forms of education in favour of an education that was fluid, flexible and without rigid divisions, for example, between one type of faculty and another. It was thought that flexible forms of education should be instituted, which were adaptable to different circumstances and demands, including the personal demands of the student. Radical new forms of learning were now proposed: equal, non-authoritarian, open to critical questioning. Written exams would be replaced by oral exams to break the traditional dominance of the written word, which was seen as another form of the exercise of authority. Seminars were proposed as a valid didactic form, considered to provide a momentary halt in a continuous process of research and the acquisition of knowledge. Poter sperimentare was the demand coming from the students at the I.U.A.V. It involved having the possibility to experiment without any sort of pre-existing conditions:

→ . . . an adequate experimentation should be possible and an elasticity that permits and provokes the development of the diverse perspectives of science and the new social demands.

---


13 Michelis, Venezia, p. 172: ‘L’esigenza di non subordinare lo sviluppo dell’università alle necessità e alla logica del potere politico e dello sviluppo del sistema produttivo, viene in concreto non rispettata’.

14 Antonio Negri defines the essence of the ‘68 movement as the bringing about of a new cohesion between thinking and acting and so ultimately a new way of giving form to life: ‘the intellectual is no longer a person that can be divorced from life, from passions.’ The result was that in the classroom, professors were now questioned with respect to their personal performance: the personality of the teacher could no longer be divorced from the content that was being taught. See Antonio Negri, Terugkeer, een biopolitiek ABC, Amsterdam, 2002, p. 28.

15 Under the directorship of Carlo Aymonino in 1976, the I.U.A.V. didactical structure was effectively reformed. The institutes were now considered to be too closed, while the faculties were too large to permit real contact between disciplines. The professors connected to the Partito Communista Italiana in particular proposed a university organized into departments. The Institute for the History of Architecture, founded by Zevi in 1960, was now replaced by the Department for Critical and Historical Analysis. See Jean-Louis Cohen, ‘La coupure entre architectes et intellectuels, ou les enseignements de l’italophiie’, In extenso, recherches à l’ École d’Architecture Paris-Villemian, no. 1, 1984, p. 196.

16 Michelis, Venezia, p. 175: ‘una adeguata sperimentazione dovrebbe essere possibile nonché una elasticità che permetta di seguire e provocare lo sviluppo dei diversi rami della scienza e dei nuovi bisogni sociali.’
The creation of spaces for ‘free’ intellectual activity also meant the right to discard the pre-existing corpus of theory – to refuse a patrimony of intellectual traditions and conventions. *Partire da se*, the students demanded: to start from oneself; to refuse ‘blind obedience’ to any person, any existing body of work, or any series of traditions or conventions. In this way, in Venice, the *contracorsi* – literally ‘countercourses’, meaning an alternative, countercultural series of lectures - were one of the most concrete forms that the plea for autonomy would assume. Importantly, the refusal of authority also meant the right to refuse the past. It is in the light of this refusal that the Venetian students proposed an alternative course in modern architectural history.

- Re-elaboration and analysis of some moments in history, which are particularly important and meaningful in the development, in general, of the various disciplines of culture, especially, of modern architecture.\(^{17}\)

The existing histories of modern architecture were denounced for two reasons. Firstly, the Venetian students claimed that a formal analysis based on styles – simply on the visible – had too many shortcomings. Furthermore, the students also denounced the existing social histories of art, for example, that of Arnold Hauser.\(^{18}\) The students argued that, according to this exhaustive historiographic model, the only way to consider the relationship between artistic work and socio-economic structures is historicist in character. In such a historicist account architectural history becomes the outcome of a simple formula: change in the substructure equals change in the superstructure. In other words, changes in the economic and social situation of a country cause crises in the development of the arts, yet at the same time, these crises can only be relative, as the arts possess an essential autonomy – their own ability to produce knowledge independently of the tribulations of society. According to the Venetian students this historicist paradigm must be replaced by a history that perceives the notion of *crisis* differently:

---

\(^{17}\) Ibid., pp. 208-209: ‘Rielaborazione ed analisi di alcuni momenti storici particolarmente pregnanti e ricchi di significati nello sviluppo, in generale, delle varie discipline della cultura, ed in particolare dell’architettura moderna.’

\(^{18}\) In the pamphlet, the students do not mention the lectures of either Bruno Zevi or Leonardo Benevolo. Zevi, who had been a professor in architectural history in Venice since 1948, had combined the introduction of modern architecture as a topic for historical study with a moral engagement and thus produced the stereotype of what Tafuri called ‘operative history’. For example, in his autobiography *Zevi su Zevi*, Zevi proudly shows photographs of himself and Frank Lloyd Wright visiting the Palazzo Ducale in Venice; Wright came to Venice at his invitation. Leonardo Benevolo, who was the professor in architectural history when the students wrote their pamphlet, combined a classical Marxist outlook with support for the Modern Movement. What may be postulated is that in the eyes of the students, Zevi’s moral concern might have been too bourgeois, while Benevolo’s view might haven been seen as deterministic. Bruno Zevi, *Zevi su Zevi*, architettura come profezia, Venezia, 1993, p. 65.

\(^{19}\) Michelis, *Venezia*, p. 209: ‘Nemmeno lontanamente si accenna ad uscire dal circolo vizioso della perenne attestazione del ‘valore’ di quelle manifestazioni, per studiare, secondo una precisa prospettiva storico-teorica, se, ad un certo grado dello sviluppo capitalista, non si giunga alla loro reale e radicale ‘crisi’ – o meglio al loro reale e radicale rivelerarsi come funzioni interne della società capitalistica stessa e delle sue necessità.’
Not even from a distance do they [the historicist accounts, author] indicate a way out of the vicious circle of the eternal declaration of the ‘value’ of those manifestations, so as to study, according to a precise historical-theoretical perspective, whether, at a certain stage of capitalist development, one does not arrive at their real and radical ‘crisis’ [of the arts, author]– or better, at their real and radical revelation as internal functions of capitalist society and of its necessities.\textsuperscript{19}

There were two points of departure for the Venetian critique of ideology. As Antonino Saggio states, rather than regarding the superstructural realm as being inevitably influenced by the substructure, the Venetian students proposed a history and a critical point of view which was based in the exact opposite – a superstructure ‘desperately’ trying to insert itself in the substructure. As part of the ‘useless’ superstructure, Modernist architects had tried to position themselves within the essential economic and ideological aspects of the world, within its conflicts and hopes.\textsuperscript{20} It was here, with a new way of looking at the place of the arts in capitalist society, which went beyond the naïveté of existing interpretative models, that the history of modern architecture began for the Venetian students. In addition, as the quote above suggests, crises actually fulfil a function within the capitalist system. The ‘crisis’ is no longer a revolution in the classical Marxist sense of a radical overthrow leading to a better world, but is an essential function or stage in the development of capitalism itself.

While Venice participated in the larger student movement in Italy, at the same time it possessed unique characteristics. As De Michelis argues in the pamphlet:

\begin{quote}
\textbullet \ The students of Venice, having observed the impossibility of essential modifications within their faculty without profound general modifications of the university and of the faculty, have decided to take up the vicious battle for the reform of structures. They renounce, however, political protest within the faculty that is outside of any sort of organization: a situation which in an illusionary way puts them [the students, author] in a different position from that subordinated one which is attributed to them by the present organization of university power.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

The Venetian students did not submerge themselves in ‘foolish’, fanciful protests or in the manifestation of a counter-culture. They knew that for real changes to come about, it was necessary to become involved in the unpleasant, tiresome, and boring work of the institution itself. This awareness was unique to the Venetian students – at least this is how it appears in the document. To arrive at real changes they decided it was necessary to become involved and to participate in the existing power structures of the university.

\textsuperscript{21} Michielis, \textit{Venezia}, p. 171: ‘Gli studenti di Venezia, constatata l’impossibilità di modificazioni essenziali all'interno della loro facoltà senza profonde modifiche generali dell'università e della facoltà, decisa la battaglia rivendicativa er la riforma delle strutture, rinunciano però all’azione politica contestativa in facoltà, al di fuori di qualsiasi organo che illusoriamente li ponga in una posizione diversa da quella, subordinata, che attribuisce loro la vigente organizzazione del potere universitario.’
It is here perhaps that we can hear the first echoes of a group of young Venetian intellectuals, who would make themselves heard clearly during the coming years. Massimo Cacciari, the young philosopher from Venice, Marco and Cesare de Michielis, and others, took a more critical and distanced position with respect to the 1968 movement, yet at the same time were perhaps even more involved in the fate of students, workers, and society at large.

REVOLUTION WITHOUT A CONTENT

Let us respect the lectures; let us respect the proper timetable and the exams. We will try to be, at the same time, revolutionary and institutional.22

Revolutionary and institutional – as a former student of Tafuri recalls this was the way in which Tafuri began his teaching in Venice. Tafuri non andava in piazza – the comment suggests that Tafuri did not join the students in their protests in the streets and squares of Venice. While the students organized themselves in assemblea, discussing such issues as direct democracy and Cuba, Tafuri and a small group of collaborators had their own ideas about effective social protest. For Tafuri the question was whether the revolution extramuros by the students in the streets of Venice should be followed by a revolution intramuros within the history department of the I.U.A.V.

Tafuri began his professorship in Venice with an extensive didactical programme dedicated to the history of modern architecture, one that involved putting together a combination of research and teaching as well as requiring the active involvement of students and assistants. In a course given during the academic year of 1976-77, together with his assistant Alessandro Fonti, Tafuri analysed ‘The Dissolution of the Classic as “Universal Order”’ and ‘Piranesi: Architecture as “Negative Utopia”’. Tafuri spoke of Le Corbusier, but also of Nietzsche, and of Nietzsche in combination with Simmel, as well as speaking of the Marquis de Sade and the ‘repudiated eros’.23 He did not consider that architectural history was about architects triumphantly marching at the forefront of modernity, nor did

---

22 See Professor Alessandro Fonti, interview held by author, 24 May 2002, recorded by written notes during the interview.

23 I thank Luca Scappin for having assembled Tafuri’s university lectures. Together with Professor Alessandro Fonti, both from the I.U.A.V. in Venice, he has been involved in the construction of a so-called ‘Archivio sonoro di Manfredo Tafuri’: an attempt to collect Tafuri’s different lectures, taken down by his students, and make them available to be heard by transferring them onto audio CD. See ‘Progetto di ricerca, di riordino e di inventariazione analitica del fondo Manfredo Tafuri’ typescript Luca Scappin, Venice, 2001. Quoted are some of the lessons of the ‘corso di storia dell’architettura 2A, 1976-1977’ dedicated to ‘Avanguardia e architettura: le avventure del linguaggio nell’arte contemporanea’. [Avant-garde and architecture: the adventures of language in contemporary art] Tafuri gave the course together with his assistant Alessandro Fonti. The first lesson of the course, dated 25 November 1976, was dedicated to ‘(Problemi di metodologia storiografica) Il dissolversi del classico come “ordo universale”’. Other lessons were: ‘L’eros negato: Il marchese De Sade’ and ‘Intelluetuali e Metropoli’, ‘F. Nietzsche’, (given 3 February 1977 during the morning) and ‘Da Nietzsche a Simmel’ (given the same day during the afternoon).
he consider that the historian was part of a cultural vanguard – the historian did not show the people the way. From this perspective Tafuri wanted to rewrite architectural history, providing the discipline with new content.

As a result of the interaction with the students in Venice, Tafuri added a foreword to the second edition of *Teorie e Storia dell’architettura*, in which he made his point totally clear:

➛ I re-emphasize this conceptual element in order to avoid misunderstanding: I am speaking of Architecture, of all architecture, as an institution. With the following consequence (carefully ignored by the sugary official ‘Marxism’: – from Fisher to Goldmann and Della Volpe, by the Marcusian school – from Mitscherlich to his followers, by the ‘vulgar’ sociologism of Hauser, and by the recent groping in the dark of America’s ‘progressive’ architects): just as it is not possible to found a Political Economy based on class, so one cannot ‘anticipate’ a class architecture (an architecture ‘for a liberated society’); what is possible is the introduction of class criticism into architecture.\(^\text{24}\)

Tafuri’s scathing criticism of Marxist intellectuals – ‘the sugary official “Marxism”’ – reflects a tendency among Italian thinkers at the time to attack the orthodoxies of the Communist Party and the Left.\(^\text{25}\) However, in the quote Tafuri also points out the exact consequences of his non-avant-garde position. As an institution, architecture is fully part of society, Tafuri claims, and society was for him a totalizing concept, in the sense that nothing could be thought outside it. The social reality was both inevitable and all-embracing; alternatives were not possible, not even in such cases as an elaborate plan for a future brave new world, or an ‘architecture for a liberated society’. Each form of criticism

---


\(^{25}\) After the war, the political hegemony of the Christian Democrats dominated Italy. While the Communist Party reached a membership of two million people in the 1950s, and so became the largest Communist Party in Western Europe, it was systematically denied government participation. In the 1960s this led to a climate in which intellectuals began to question their elite roles and the structures of political and cultural representation in general. Also in the student movement one of the dominant themes was the attack on all forms of establishment, including the parties of the Left. Notably, the frivolous character of the movement with its exploration of irrationalism and ‘childlike’ behaviour, was threatening for the orthodoxies of both Catholicism and Communism. According to Ginsborg, the essence of the Italian students’ movement lay in its disruptive character. He declares that ‘68 was: ‘much more than a protest against the misery of the students’ condition, [it was] an ethical revolt, a relevant attempt to ruin the dominant values of an epoch.’ See Alberto Asor Rosa, ‘La Cultura’, *Storia d’Italia- tomo secondo: dall’Unità a oggi*, Torino, 1975, p. 1592, Paul Ginsborg, *Storia d’Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi, Società e politica 1943-1988*, Torino, 1989, pp. 260-275.

\(^{26}\) This issue should be seen in the context of the existence, in Italy, of a so-called ‘extra-parliamentary Left’. Immediately after the war, various left-wing groups started to attack the Italian Communist Party from the left. In the 1960s, when Italy experienced a period of unprecedented economic growth, these groups became more important. They started to organize themselves around journals such as *Quaderi Rossi* (1961) and *Quaderni Piacentini* (1962); together with the rejection of the ‘old’ left-wing structures, they wanted to formulate a renovated Marxist theory that responded directly to the social and political reality of the country. See *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Italian Culture*, pp. 205-207.
and each architectural history that begins with these revolutionary expectations can only fall into disillusionment. As a consequence, the essence of Tafuri’s statement is that architecture-as-an-institution only allows for critique, however, this critique can never become an ingredient of ‘revolution’ or ‘emancipation’. The critic should remain within the system, and should accept that system while all the time looking for a marginal position from which to formulate a productive critique.

This did not mean that Tafuri had lost his sympathy for the students’ movement and for their radical and ambitious goals. Rather, what happened is that amidst the intense events of ’68 Tafuri started to reflect on the very notion of engagement itself. He was aware of the fact that the Communist Party, as an alternative to the right wing, had itself become part of the establishment. While Tafuri expressed the need not to ignore existing structures, he made a plea for a revolution from within.26 In this way, Tafuri and his assistants developed their own notion of militancy, which was implicitly critical of the kind of militancy occurring on the streets of Venice. To remain within the system – this was militancy for Tafuri in his early Venetian years.

I would say that our approach was cold, indifferent. We affected this great indifference in order to discover where we could be useful. In general, the problem was that if we carried the critique of ideology to its logical conclusion, the Democrazia Cristiana and the Partito Communista came to be the same thing. Although a particular group might have something to propose for the contemporary moment, or a sweeping revision of everything that has happened in the past, if it comes from the working class, it’s more efficient, more efficacious. Therefore, one night we even considered joining the Democrazia Cristiana. That was the furthest extent of our Marxism. Absolute indifference.27

Tafuri’s attempt to establish an architectural historical institute within the Architectural University Institute of Venice should also be understood as an almost cynical attempt to use the system to gain power by localizing his militant attitude within the existing order. Volontà di potere, a will-to-power, was Tafuri’s motivation in those years. We want to take over the control in the university, he suggests, we want to gain power and become recognized as being in authority. At this point, the plan to join either the Christian Democrat Party or the Communist Party was no more than Machiavellian.28 ‘Let us be, at the same time, revolutionary and institutional’, he states. In fact Tafuri and his colleagues were convinced that effective change could only come about within the existing structures, such as those of the political parties, the syndicates, and the university.

---

27 Passerini, History as Project, pp. 41-42.
28 See here also the different character of Tafuri and his Venetian colleagues with respect to the 1968 generation, who were reluctant to identify themselves openly with power and authority. For Tafuri, it was a matter of Realpolitik to openly admit this struggle for power. Tafuri and his Venetian team thus avoided an important contradiction in the attitude of the ’68 generation. As Passerini and Geppert confirm, the members of the ’68 generation were not satisfied with professional success and academic recognition: they wanted to change the academic establishment and to produce lasting transformations. See Luisa Passerini, Alexander C.T. Geppert, ‘Historians in Flux: The Concept, Task and Challenge of Ego-histoire’, Historein, vol. 3, 2001, p. 14.
While Tafuri and his colleagues certainly shared a critical view of the doctrines of communism, and while they were certainly motivated by an urge to revise ‘official’ communism, they were still convinced of the necessity to maintain an open dialogue with the existing structures of the Left. They wanted to use their organizational force. A ‘revolution’ would be more efficient within the context of an existing structure, of any existing structure.

On an intellectual level, this was the consequence of the critique of ideology engaged in by Tafuri and his colleagues, all of whom considered the critique of ideology to be a subversive process within the establishment. Tafuri and his colleagues wanted to rewrite the history of modern architecture and so they attempted to seize power within the Department of Architectural History in a revolution that remained within the institution. They were no longer prepared to fulfil the role of an intellectual avant-garde who saw themselves as mobilizing the people towards a better world. They proposed a revolution-in-negativo: a revolution without content. This was not an admission of weakness by their side, as the expression of confusion about the possible shape of revolution, but instead a deliberate choice to conceive of revolution as that which first makes analysis possible. Not the construction of a brave new world, but the destruction of the existing one: this was the fundamental choice made by Tafuri and his comrades.

However, Tafuri was aware of the contradiction present in this position, and it was a contradiction that preoccupied him. Tafuri did not see himself in the role of a patronizing, belittling intellectual, however, at the same time, his ambition to rewrite architectural history could be understood as being based in a desire to revolutionize the discipline by overturning the present practices within architectural history. This could imply that Tafuri still maintained an avant-garde position in the sense of setting an example for other historians to follow.

Viewed from a certain perspective, Tafuri’s rupture with respect to the preceding historiography appears almost inevitable: after a Pevsner or a Giedion – after years of ‘operative’ engagement with modern architecture – it was necessary that a complete antithesis, in the form of Tafuri’s non-operative history, would follow. Notably, the historiographers preceding Tafuri had followed the modernist paradigm by starting their histories specifically in the twentieth century and by declaring the previous centuries irrelevant. They were the avant-garde historians whose starting point was a total rupture with the past. Tafuri, however, did not see himself as a neo-avant-garde historian – he did not want to superimpose his vision of architectural history upon that of Pevsner or Giedion. He did not see his history as being part of a progressive trajectory in which previous stages are constantly overcome. Thus, during the 1970s Tafuri took up the challenge to overcome the Hegelian-progressive legacy and to position the historiographical rupture in a different way. While, for example, a book such as Progetto e Utopia, architettura e sviluppo capitalistico further deepened the rupture with previous historiographical practices, Tafuri would not simply exchange an outmoded avant-garde position for a new one and become the new Pevsner or Giedion of his time. It was this struggle to avoid dogmatism that would ultimately be decisive for Tafuri’s thinking about architectural history, as well as its relationship with other disciplines, and its role in society.
A STRUGGLE FOR POWER

As a consequence of remaining *intramuros* – of being revolutionary and institutional – immediately after his arrival Tafuri engaged in a struggle for power. However, Tafuri was not a new intellectual who engaged in a *captatio benevolentia* – offering his students promising new prospects. It was not so much a matter of gaining a voice, but rather of claiming a voice. Tafuri and his assistants declared themselves to be the authorities to reckon with: from now on, they would decide the shape and content of architectural history.

It is important to stress that Tafuri’s actions would have been unthinkable at any Italian university other than the I.U.A.V.\(^{29}\) In contrast with the classical university, the architectural institute in Venice had an independent academic structure and functioned without the intervention of other universities. In this context, since its foundation in 1926, the I.U.A.V. had developed as a laboratory for the redefinition of the discipline of architecture.\(^{30}\) In the early 1970s, when Giuseppe Samonà retired and Carlo Aymonino became his successor, the I.U.A.V. was dominated by a strong left-wing consensus in which the professors and the students were to a great extent united in their left-wing, communist political orientation. This provided an important condition for the experiments conducted by Tafuri and his team. As Tafuri recalls in an interview, the ‘68 revolt had actually started much earlier in Venice, as the democratization of university structures was already been accomplished there.\(^{31}\)

In fact, even before Tafuri’s arrival, some professors had started to radically question the traditional contents of their discipline. For example, in 1966 Professor Levi, who taught the science of construction, started to ‘radically criticize from within the contents of a discipline’. Instead of dealing with the traditional theories of construction, Levi discussed what he called the ‘philosophy of security’.\(^{32}\) Another important initiative was taken by Giovanni Astengo, a specialist in urban planning. Breaking with the traditional unity of architecture and urbanism as had been proclaimed by, among others, Giuseppe Samonà, in 1970 Astengo initiated a completely separate Master’s degree in ‘urbanistica’. The enforced autonomy of the discipline of ‘urbanism’ was a consequence of the radically modified content of this field. No longer confined to the artistic and constructive


\(^{30}\) For a short history of the I.U.A.V see their internet site at: http://www.iuav.it/ateneo1/presentazi/storia/index.htm


\(^{32}\) I base this information on Tafuri’s account, ibid., p. 8.
imperative of architecture, urbanism developed into a scientific discipline focusing on the management of large areas called ‘territories’ or regions.

Inspired by Astengo, Tafuri became convinced that the ‘destruction of the existing world’ meant first of all that a new institute had to be created.\textsuperscript{33} In addition, Tafuri assembled an ‘army of researchers’. Such people as Francesco Dal Co and Marco de Michelis, while trained as architects, now devoted themselves exclusively to the history of architecture. This marked a unique moment in the disciplinary history of architectural history: a completely different architectural history was created, no longer written by art historians, nor by engaged architects, but by a group of architects who made the non-operative paradigm into a personal and normative standpoint. It is here that the discipline of architectural history, conceived as an \textit{autonomous} discipline with \textit{professional} architectural historians, was created.

**CRITIQUE AS THE HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE**

In the first years after his arrival Tafuri faced the task of assembling a team of researchers in order to realize his ambitions.\textsuperscript{34} Rejecting the individualist ethos that dominated scholarly and artistic production, Tafuri established his new institute for architectural history as a laboratory for team research: he introduced a collective research programme, which produced books co-written by groups of researchers.\textsuperscript{35} Together with the philosopher Massimo Cacciari, Tafuri now started to publish a series of articles which were of fundamental importance in determining the direction of the new institute and the nature of Tafuri’s architectural history. In Contropiano’s first 1969 issue, Cacciari published the essay ‘Sulla genesi del pensiero negativo’, while Tafuri published ‘Per una critica dell’ideologia architettonica’.\textsuperscript{36} The latter was given a more definitive form in the book \textit{Progetto e Utopia, architettura e sviluppo capitalistico} (1973).\textsuperscript{37} In this book, Tafuri further defined the consequences of the rupture with operative architectural history that he had initiated with \textit{Teorie e Storia} (1968).

\textsuperscript{33} In Daguerre and Lupo’s interview, Tafuri mentions that at first he and his group of researchers did not support Astengo’s action. Later Tafuri looked back upon Astengo’s decision with more approval: in the 1985 interview, Tafuri appreciated Astengo’s strategy for its implied rupture with a unitary architecture ‘ad perennis’ and Astengo’s plea for the urgency of autonomy for certain disciplines. See note 28 above. For more on Astengo’s centre for urban studies see, P. di Biagi and P. Gabellini, (eds.), \textit{Urbanisti Italiani, Piccinato, Marconi, Samonà, Quaroni, De Carlo, Astengo, Campos Venuti}, Bari, 1992.

\textsuperscript{34} Tafuri himself said the following about those first years: ‘I realized that the profession of the architectural historian could be completely autonomous in relation to architecture because its objective was to start from the discipline and embrace history itself. For this reason we decided to form a group of historians, to take as our starting point a deep knowledge of the subject and its characteristics . . . to go on to develop specifically historiographical problems. I turned to the young students who were thinking and calling everything into question. I reflected on the situation and came to the realization that there wasn’t anyone senior to me, I had the academic power, so I could start to eliminate the older ones. I began to recruit faculty who were almost my age, and we started a small group, including Francesco Dal Co and Marco de Michelis’, Passerini, \textit{History as Project}, p. 44.
All of these books and articles were the result of Tafuri’s principle task in Venice – to create an academic institute dedicated to architectural history considered as an autonomous, and thus critical activity. Tafuri created an institute in which the research into the history of modern architecture took central place, something that was totally unheard of in Italy. In fact, transforming architectural history into a critical discipline meant that Tafuri’s discourse became interrogatory, almost Socratic, ‘basing itself on the uncertainty generated by radical questioning first of declining modern architecture and then of architecture in general.’ In order to activate the critical potential of the discipline a plan had to be made, in the sense of a programme of research activities. Tafuri designed a scientific programme that centred around the meaning of architectural ideology in different societies. With his colleagues he found the focal point to be the rise and consolidation of the three grand ideological systems of the twentieth century: the Soviet Union, the Weimar Republic and the United States.

The Soviet Union represented a state system in which socialism was believed to have reached its final form as ‘realized socialism’. However, the Germany of the Weimar Republic was also found to have been created on the basis of a belief in a ‘realized social-democracy’, as was the case for the United States with its ‘realized capitalism’. These were three grand ideologies, all apparently successfully put into practice in specific societies, yet all of which were followed by disaster. Their failure according to Tafuri was precisely that in all three political-ideological systems the project was considered to have been completed and any further development or approach to perfection was considered unnecessary. According to Tafuri, this was ideology in its most malicious form: ideology that in being labelled complete is then raised to the level of being sacrosanct. Tafuri argued that, without doubt, in all three cases, it is the closure of ideology to further development that leads to a totalitarian state.

The programme of ideological critique resulted in a series of collective studies which appeared as books such as, *Socialismo, città, architettura. URSS 1917-1937; Il contributo degli architetti europei (1971)*’ or *La Città Americana dalla guerra civile al New Deal (1973).* However, in order to understand the effect of the Venetian critique of ideology on Tafuri’s architectural history, two elements need to be taken into consideration: firstly, Tafuri’s participation in the journal *Contropiano-Materiali Marxisti*, and secondly, the specific contribution made by Massimo Cacciari, the ‘in-house’ philosopher at the architectural historical department and the theoretician of the so-called *pensiero negativo*.

---

38 As Jean Louis Cohen confirms, at the same time Tafuri kept on working on more ancient periods in the history of architecture. Individually, Tafuri studied the architects Palladio, Sansovino and Borromini. On a collective level, there was research about the Via Giulia in Rome, with Luigi Salerno and Luigi Spezzaferro, published in 1973. Modern and ancient: these were thus the two parallel roads of research that Tafuri followed . See Jean-Louis Cohen, ‘La coupure entre architectes et intellectuels, ou les enseignements de l’italophilie’, *In extenso*, 1984, p. 193.
SAGGI

257
Manfredo Tafuri
Austromarxismo e città « Das rote Wien »

313
Enzo Schiavuta
Scienza, innovazione, ciclo: problemi di prospettiva storica

MATERIALI

343
Stefania Potenza
Massimo Cacciari
Ciclo chimico e lotte operaie

NOTE

401
Giorgio Ciucci
Mario Manieri-Elia
Il dibattito sulle cooperative di abitazione

Massimo Cacciari
Entsagung

2/1971
maggio-agosto

Responsabile:
Silvestro Amore

Segretari di redazione:
Matilde Palladini
Ernesto Longobardi

Redazione: La Nuova Italia
Viale Carso 46
00195 Roma

Ammunistrazione: La Nuova Italia
Piazza Indipendenza 29
50129 Firenze

Autorizzazione del Tribunale di Roma n. 12118 del 10/4/1968
Quadernale
Abbonamento 1971:
Lire 4000-Estero Lire 4500
Un fascicolo ordinario: Lire 1400
I fascicoli arretrati si vendono a prezzo maggiorato
Versamenti:
c.c.p. 5/6261 Firenze
Spedizione in abbonamento postale gruppo IV

Stabilimento Tipo grafico
Editoriale,
Città di Castello
The journal *Contropiano-Materiali* Marxisti was registered by the Court of Justice in Rome on 10 April 1968, one month before the student protests began in France. The first preparatory meetings had already been held and the ideological programme of the journal was already defined, when news of the May revolts in Paris reached the *Contropiano* circles. From that moment onwards, the dual character of the journal was decided. Its general goal and programme, related to the critique of ideology, would be fundamental, while its specific content would be determined by actual events.41

In the first issue of 1968, there were three leading ‘saggi’: Antonio Negri wrote on the theme of ‘Capitalist Theory in 1929: John M. Keynes’; Mario Tronti wrote ‘Extremism and Reformism’; and Alberto Asor Rosa wrote an essay with the title, ‘The Young Lúkacs – Theorist of Bourgeois Art’.42 In the same issue, under the heading of ‘Materiali’, Francesco Dal Co wrote the article, ‘Note on the Critique of the Ideology of Modern Architecture: from Weimar to Dessau’, and Massimo Cacciari wrote about ‘Dialectics and Tradition’.43 One year later, in 1969, Tafuri published his first article in *Contropiano*: ‘For a Critique of Architectonic Ideology’ – note the subtle difference between Dal Co’s ‘critique of the ideology of modern architecture’ and Tafuri’s ‘critique of architectonic ideology’.44

The title of the journal, *Contropiano*, was derived from a Russian film from the 1930s with the same title. The title was indicative of the specific tension that lay at the basis of the journal. ‘*Contropiano*’ was in fact written backwards as onaipornoC, to indicate the subversive power of analysis – the specific project of slowly eating away at the ‘secure’ foundations of bourgeois capitalism. Where, for instance, a journal such as *Quaderni Rossi* focused on sociological themes, the contributors to *Contropiano* wanted to concentrate on the difficult fields of culture and ideology. The goal of the members of *Contropiano* was

---


41 The information about the precise functioning of *Contropiano* derives from an interview that I undertook with one of its editors, Alberto Asor Rosa, on Wednesday, 8 March 1995, in Rome. During February and March 1995 I held a series of interviews with friends and colleagues of Tafuri who live in Rome: with Vieri Quilici at his architectural studio in Rome on 1 February 1995; with Mario Manieri Elia on 15 February 1995, at the Centro Storico of the Villa Borghese; with Giorgio Ciucci at his home in Rome on 20 February 1995; and the already mentioned interview with Asor Rosa at his home in Rome. All interviews were recorded by way of written notes.

42 The philosopher and political activist Antonio Negri left the group of editors after the first issue appeared in 1968. This was because of an incompatibility of vision that was directly related to the student protests of ‘68. Asor Rosa describes this conflict in the following way: ‘Negri explicitly considered these [the student protests] to be the beginnings of a pre-revolutionary process. We, on the other hand, while accepting their importance, thought that the fortresses of bourgeois and capitalistic defence demanded a much longer and more articulated process, to be built by means of theoretical arguments [plus of course militant organization].’ Asor Rosa, *Critique of Ideology and Historical Practice*, p. 29.
to define a very precise and very outspoken position within the world of left-wing thinkers: ‘To deconstruct the attitude of the enemy’, and to do so by way of critical analysis, by way of exposing falsehood. However, just who was the enemy identified by Contropiano?

The ‘enemy’ was the archetypical left-wing thinker who was convinced that the world could be changed through the implementation of ideas. This is why the concept of ‘utopia’ was so important to the to Contropiano’s contributors: the left-wing pathos, which arose through imagining better worlds beyond one’s own, was considered to be nothing other than the summum of myth and illusion. It was not only a matter of rejecting such utopian visions, or of making them culpable, but of seeing them for what they were: an intrinsic part of capitalism itself that uses its ideological powers to maintain and reinforce its own position. For capitalism, even the alternative views have their function.

The contributors to Contropiano rejected the idea of revolution as a radical leap from one system to another. However, this in no way meant a plea for evolution or reform. What they were aiming for was particularly violent in intellectual terms involving destruction, shattering, and blowing to pieces. This was thought to be the only way of exposing the myths and systematically undermining all existing systems of value; all security and ‘foundations’ – by means of critical analysis. However, in reality this entailed taking a deep breath and having a lot of patience, as it was considered that it is the ‘long phase’ that is proper to the historian. The existing order had to be undermined and fragmented, so that its parts could be reassembled in accordance with a new order. It was thought that this was the only true way to substantial change: it was a long term process in which the analytical and theoretical work of the historian took a primary place.

CRITIQUE OF IDEOLOGY IN VENICE

Contropiano was preceded by a journal called Angelus Novus, also filled with long, intense pages dedicated to the analysis of literature, music, philosophy and visual arts. Angelus Novus, Trimestrale di estetica e critica was founded in 1964 by the school friends Massimo Cacciari and Cesare de Michelis, who were at the time still in their teens. The authors aimed to broaden the focus created by the ‘operaïsta’ movement so that its consequences would also be drawn in the cultural field. Journals such as Angelus Novus and Contropiano all started from a central assumption: the orthodoxies of the political left wing needed to be re-examined. This re-examination was accompanied by a great seriousness in the application of a new, more effective critique of ideology. The architectural historians working and studying in Tafuri’s department were especially interested in this


theme. In their *operaista* world view, these historians pictured a recently formed, ‘mature’ capitalism that was aggressive, dynamic and very cunning. At the same time, this ripe capitalism was counterbalanced by the workers, who had also matured and who had developed their own ‘consciousness’, independent of capitalism. Cacciari, Asor Rosa and Negri saw their work for Contropiano as a *scienza operaia*, as a workers’ science. They were convinced that they should position their cultural work outside the realm of the bourgeoisie and inside that of the workers, who were the estranged, alienated group within society. However, this all had to occur on a basis of equality with the working class, as the idea of an avant-garde intellectual leadership would be insulting.

The Venetian critics of ideology regarded art and architecture as ideological constructions aimed at fulfilling a function in capitalist society. As stated before in this chapter, they regarded bourgeois culture as a phenomenon whose survival was dependent on the degree to which it was ‘useful’ to society. For the authors of *Contropiano*, cultural phenomena were marked by a precise structure: they had a precise agenda created by the connection between the form of a cultural object and the ideological and political concepts of society. In order to bring this bond to light, cultural theorists had to become analysts, as such, they could demonstrate the ‘objective function’ of a book, a film, or a work of art. As Cacciari put it, they should reveal ‘their identity as ideological instruments and their service to a general context of social and economic development.’ This analytical method was all the more necessary since culture would by definition disguise its political function – cultural objects suggested a neutrality that was not there in reality. Therefore, the critique of ideology was an operation of unmasking and exposure.

It is in the light of these premisses that Francesco Dal Co published a ‘heretical’ interpretation of the work of Le Corbusier in 1973. In the article *La Cultura di Le Corbusier*, Dal Co acts as an analytical architectural historian who conceives of the task of establishing the connection between Le Corbusier, as a ‘specific cultural phenomenon’, and the demands made upon him by a general social context. Le Corbusier is regarded as being a

45 For example, in the first issue, Cacciari published an article called ‘Comment on Hegelian Aesthetics. 1. History of the System.’; De Michelis published ‘The Courage to Speak about the Roses, or the Astuteness of the Dove.’ The title of the journal referred to the failed experiment by Walter Benjamin to found a cultural journal in the 1930s. Walter Benjamin was that other Marxist intellectual, who served as a source of inspiration for the dissident intelligentsia of the 1960s. Parallel to the 1930s, in the 1960s there was a need for a ‘new angel’: a new epistemological project, hence *Angelus Novus, Trimestrale di estetica e critica*, edited by Massimo Cacciari and Cesare de Michels. The first issue appeared in the autumn of 1964 and the journal continued until 1966. M. Cacciari, ‘Note di estetica hegeliana, nr. 1: Storia del sistema’, *Angelus Novus*, no. 1, 1964; Cesare de Michels ‘Il coraggio di parlare delle rose, ovvero l’astuzia dell’alombe’, *Angelus Novus*, no. 1, 1964. See also Mario Valente, *Ideeologia e potere, da ’Il Politecnico’ a ’Contropiano’, 1946-72*, Torino, 1978.

46 In an interview held with Massimo Cacciari in 1985, he stresses the original character of the Venetian critique of ideology: with respect to traditional Marxism, ‘culture’ and ‘ideology’ now matured into a much more conscious and more substantial form, according to Cacciari. He also confirmed, in that same interview, that architectural historians were mainly responsible for the elaboration of this critique. Giulio Lupo, Mercedes Daguerrre, ‘Entrevista con Massimo Cacciari’, *Materiales 5, PECH-CESCA*, Buenos Aires, March 1985. This interview can be found at: http://www.bazaramericano.com/arquitectura/materiales/entrevista_cacciari.asp
on the left: the journal Angelus Novus, on the right notes made by Giuseppe Samonà about the Asor Rosa's theory of the avant-garde. From the Fondo Samonà, I.U.A.V., Archivio Progetti.
Avanguardia Asor Rosa

E' una sorta di lavoro o di comportamento intellettuale, strettamente collegato a caratteri specifici e alla genesi e sviluppo di una società capitalista industriale di massa. E' stato anche usato per definire fenomeni artistici apolitici da altre età che ne sono estensioni analogiche.

L'avanguardia come concetto nasce dall'attuale tipo di società e precisamente da un diverso rapporto rispetto al passato fra lavoro intellettuale e divisione sociale del lavoro.

Accettando che il lavoro intellettuale compreso quello artistico è una forma di lavoro, esso lo è in una forma speciale collegata alle altre presenti allo interno della società capitalistica, sia per rapporti di organizzazione complessiva della produzione per rapporti di natura finalità e qualità di lavoro compiuto.

In regime capitalismo si stabilisce una distinzione più netta che in passato tra lavoro produttivo e improduttivo, intendendo che il lavoro produttivo è un processo di valorizzazione sia come valore di uso che come valore di scambio, mentre l'improduttivo non lo è, il primo infatti, quello che producendo merce produce e riproduce capitale; l'altro si sottrae al processo di valorizzazione. La società capitalista si muove verso una estensione crescente del lavoro produttivo. Ciò porta enorme aumento del numero dei salariati, tra i quali sono da annoverare gli intellettuali e quindi una proletarizzazione dell'intellettuale
HANNES MEYER
collana Polis / Marsilio Editori
ARCHITETTURA O RIVOLUZIONE
SCRITTI 1921-1942
a cura di Francesco Dal Co
witness to one of the key moments in contemporary history. The significance of Le Corbusier, Dal Co stated, can only be understood in the light of the ‘historical and comprehensive’ rending and fragmentation of ‘the entire bourgeois organization of work’ as it occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century. This event was followed by a deep crisis in bourgeois institutional organizations affecting the channels through which they exerted real power. Le Corbusier was one of the rare intellectuals who understood that the traditional notion of engagement had been exhausted and that the model of progressive intellectual engagement could no longer work. Far from being a ‘master’ of the Modern Movement, Le Corbusier did not engender a period of victorious modernism, but instead stood at the end of a long tradition. Dal Co claimed that his insight into this situation made Le Corbusier a different architect, one who went beyond the limits of a ‘bourgeois radical architecture’.

Another important premiss was the openly confessed ‘politicità’ of their point of view. The authors of Contropiano elaborated their studies from an explicit punta di vista. They claimed that only studies executed from the point of view of the rejection of the underlying system could reveal the true ideological function of culture. Ideology would only show its disenchanted, ‘true’ face, once the capitalist system was no longer taken as having a natural, self-explanatory cause. This declared partiality; this clear starting position from which analysis meant rejection, also meant a rupture with a previous generation of architectural historians who had combined their support for modern architecture with a claim to objectivity and to the value-free status of science. Participating in the critique of ideology persuaded architectural historians to leave this artificial neutrality behind and instead to take the clear stance of criticizing the objects under investigation.

In the previous chapters, we have seen how Tafuri tried to study the history of modern

47 I have based my account of the Venetian critique of ideology on two sources: firstly, Alberto Asor Rosa’s Scrittori e Popolo, il populismo nella letteratura italiana contemporanea, Torino, 1965, which may be considered as the first study produced with the insights of the new critique of ideology in mind; a literary history focusing on the representation of common people by novelists. Also important is the short commentary written by Asor Rosa when the book was republished in 1988: Alberto Asor Rosa, ‘Vent’anni dopo’, Scrittori e Popolo, new edition, Torino, 1988, pp. 7-18. Secondly, there is the review published by Cacciari about the book, ‘Saggio su “Scrittori e popolo”, problemi generali dell’indagine sul populismo’, Angelus Novus, no. 5, 1965, pp. 31-79. In this essay, Cacciari explains exactly how Asor Rosa’s book should be seen as a product of the critique of ideology.


50 Dal Co argues: ‘and it is from this fragmentation that our argument starts, to show how architecture — most of all architecture — results definitively consumed, unable not only to express an innovation that is radical enough to adapt itself as a discipline to the intimate progressive values of crisis, but also incapable of reaching a comprehensive level of self-awareness and ‘culture’ that permits it to position itself at a height comparable to that attained at the most advanced points of the great bourgeois culture.’ (my translation), Dal Co, La cultura di Le Corbusier, p. 46.

51 ‘Le Corbusier . . . chiude e non apre un’epoca’, Dal Co, La cultura di Le Corbusier, p. 50.
architecture from a point of view that was not based on the accounts of the architects themselves. The partiality of their point of view now enabled the Venetian architectural historians to take an important step in this process. For the critics of ideology, the ‘language’ of analysis and criticism could not be identical with the ‘language’ spoken by the object itself. This would have implied an obedience to the ideological content of the object and ultimately an obedience to bourgeois society. Instead, it was important for them to place themselves radically outside the bourgeois ‘system’ they studied. It was only from this punto di vista that the analyst could grasp the precise ideological function of culture, without being contaminated by its traditions and language.53 It was from this external perspective, radically outside the system and employing a non-identical language of analysis, that we can understand why Dal Co spoke of Le Corbusier as an intellectual first rather than as an architect. This point of view precisely explains the confronting and innovative character of Dal Co’s account.

Finally, for the Venetian critics it was crucial that the critica dell’ideologia should not be seen as a critique of a specific, ‘false’ ideology, for example, of the ‘false’ idea that exploitation contributes to the well-being of the labourer. It is not the goal, so they said, to replace a ‘false’ ideology with a more correct one; instead their critique was aimed at ideology as a phenomenon in general.54 The Venetian ‘ideological’ critics were nourished by a special conviction: they believed that in the twentieth century, ideology was ‘objectively’ losing its role as an element of social reality, that culture-as-ideology found itself in a process of decline.55 The Venetian critics of ideology believed they could accelerate this end-process by studying it and by analysing the terminal agony of ideology in all its specific appearances. Therefore, the authors of Contropiano specifically focused on the most recent phase of capitalist development, starting largely from the 1920s, a period coinciding with the rise of modern architecture. It was during this phase that culture-as-ideology experienced its death throws. One of the postulations of the Venetian critics was that ideology became increasingly ingenious in order to secure its survival. The recent history of ideology was therefore marked by increased complexity, however, ultimately this complexity covered over a failure. Again the Venetian thesis on ideology arises here: that the superstructure is not so much determined by the substructure, but rather tries to secure its own ‘necessary’ place within this realm. It was considered that while trying to prove its absolute indispensability for the capitalist system, ideology was at the same time failing in the execution of its most essential task – that of the representation of a certain

---


53 In the essay ‘Vent’anni dopo’, Alberto Asor Rosa says about this position: ‘We, years ago . . . chose a low point of observation: that is, we tried to look at the world as we thought those who knew they had to spend a great part of their lives on the assembly line in a factory would look at it . . . This point of view is . . . not a mimetic attitude, but a level and a way of observation: . . . to look at the world . . . (but) also at the cultural tradition, that is, to be outside of it, as were . . . those whose side we had chosen.’ Alberto Asor Rosa, ‘Venti anni dopo’, Scrittori e Popolo, Torino, 1988 (1965), p. 9.
ideal, a certain content. It is in this light that we may understand the condemnation of
the Modern Movement by the Venetian architectural historians. Dal Co stated in his article
that, in contrast to Le Corbusier, the Modern Movement did not apprehend the crucial
contradictions of its time and thus condemned itself to backwardness. This was a shock-
ing hypothesis for those familiar with the Modernist accounts of Pevsner or Giedion.

MASSIMO CACCIARI

Today, Massimo Cacciari is a productive Italian philosopher whose importance reaches
beyond national borders, with books translated into such languages as French, German,
Dutch, Spanish and English, amongst others. However, when Tafuri met him in 1968 he
was a young man whose political and activist horizon had been determined by the
emergence of a new type of chemical industry in nearby Porto Marghera. As a fifteen year
old boy Cacciari had visited these factories and met members of the traditional working
class, both workers of the older generation who had experienced the Resistance and had
been engaged in the Reconstruction, as well as a new generation of very young workers,
who had been born and raised in the 1950s, the years of the economic miracle. It was
in response to the new generation of workers, who were unencumbered by the past yet
very eager to engage in battle, that Cacciari formulated his first theoretical and
philosophical insights. His early work arose from within a ‘liberated’ and fresh intellectual
climate in which a new generation of young intellectuals had disengaged themselves
from the burden of traditional Marxism. Cacciari was looking for an unorthodox, unofficial
reading of Marx, distinct from the historicist-idealist Marx of Croce and Gramsci. He saw
a rupture between Hegel and Marx, rather than a continuity, and on this basis attempted

54 See in this light also the somewhat cryptic phrase in the introduction of Teorie e Storia dell’architettura: ‘just as it
is not possible to found a Political Economy based on class, so one cannot ‘anticipate’ a class architecture (an archi-
tecture ‘for a liberated society’); what is possible, is the introduction of class criticism into architecture.’ Manfredo

55 For instance, Cacciari says in his essay: ‘Alberto Asor Rosa non nega alcuna idea ma, in effetti, ne analizza una già
storicamente “defunta”’, Cacciari, Saggio su ‘Scrittori e Popolo’, p. 32.

56 For Nikolaus Pevsner, it was of great importance that the Modern Movement captured the very essence of the
Zeitgeist; protagonists such as Gropius or William Morris were ‘revolutionary’ because they indicated a new place for
the arts in a society dominated by the Industrial Revolution. Therefore, for Pevsner, only architecture and design mat-
tered in modern society because they alone had to exist in a social context and were therefore ‘truthful’. Pevsner even
went as far as to link the Geist of modern architecture to the Geist of the Nazi Regime, as both indicating the power,
purpose and unity that was to lead the Volk into the future. See Stephen Games, Pevsner on Art and Architecture,

57 Cacciari wrote, among others works: Metropolis. Saggi sulla grande città di Sombart, Endell, Scheffler e Simmel,
Amendolagine, Oikos: da Loos a Wittgenstein, Roma, 1975; Dallo Steinhof, Milano 1980; Icone della legge, Milano,
1985; Dell’Inizio, Milano, 1990. Of particular interest is the ‘postmodern translation’ and summary of his work in
English: Architecture and Nihilism: On the Philosophy of Modern Architecture, Mark Rakatansky, [ed.], New Haven,
1993.
to provide an anti-historicist, materialist interpretation of Marx.\footnote{See an interview with Cacciari published as Ricardo Calimani, La Polenta e la Mercanzia, Rimini, 1984, pp. 60-64.}

Cacciari developed a vision that was of great importance to the later development of architectural history in Venice. At the basis of this vision was the conviction that at a certain time in the modern period a crucial change had taken place in the way that modernity was perceived. He believed that there must have been a fracture, which he spoke of in terms of a ‘crisis of foundations’, and which was ultimately responsible for our contemporary culture. For example, the essay ‘Sulla genesi del pensiero negativo’ (1969) and the book *Krisis. Saggio sulla crisi del pensiero negativo da Nietzsche a Wittgenstein* (1976), were the products of the same enterprise of tracing an alternative history and looking for a different epistemology, one which was able to bring to light the notion of Krisis as it dominated modern, contemporary life. While undertaking this project Cacciari caused an outrage by introducing Nietzsche – the philosopher besmirched with nazism – to an Italian left-wing audience. In his *pensiero negativo*, Cacciari connected Nietzsche to Ludwig Wittgenstein as well as to the crisis of classical physics at the beginning of the twentieth century. All these references signalled the ‘end of classical rationality and dialectics and the full emergence, in a constructive, rephrasing and non-destructive way, of the *pensiero negativo*.’\footnote{Under influence of Italy’s intellectual hero’s Croce and Gramsci, Marxism was placed in an idealist rather then a materialist tradition, postulating a connection with Hegel rather then a rupture. Cacciari tried to break with this tradition. See ‘Intervista a Mario Tronti sull’operaismo’, by Maurizio, August 2000, at: http://indymedia.org/news/2003/02/166647.php}

For Cacciari, the *pensiero negativo* was implicit in the crisis of classical reason, which for him implied a liberation from a totalitarian notion of knowledge. An order no longer existed that was ‘natural, unchangeable and fixed’ and, in confrontation with which, reason has to discover the laws, rules and patterns.\footnote{See Carlo Sini, ‘I dialoghi terreni di “aut aut” in 50 anni di filosofia’ at: Sito Web Italiano per la Filosofia-Il manifesto, 29 Novembre 2001. http://lgxserver.uniba.it/lei/rassegna/sini.html} For Cacciari, instead of a law-seeking reason, knowledge should intervene in a creative way, giving a provisional order to things while maintaining a multiplicity of ‘wisdoms’. In fact, in books such as *Pensiero negativo e razionalizzazione* (1977) or *Icone della Legge* (1985), the reader will search in vain for theoretical propositions or value judgements. Instead, Cacciari explains his insights through a series of historical analyses which, with great interpretative ability, review a great variety of topics from architecture to literature, mathematics and sociology. It is a multidisciplinary approach, in which Cacciari set out to discover the conceptual constants that mark all of these expressive disciplines. All of these investigations centred around one idea which stood at the basis of the *pensiero negativo*: the notion of the antinomical constitution of our world, its character as a non-synthesis, as a pendulum swinging incessantly from thesis to antithesis.

To understand the radical and ‘offensively’ new framework of evaluation for modern

\footnote{This is based on a quote by Catapano, referring to F. Restaino, ‘Il dibattito filosofico in Italia (1925-1990)’, in N. Abbagnano, Storia della filosofia, Torino, 1994, p. 739.}
poster announcing a conference on Nietzsche and politics, held in Venice at the I.U.A.V., 1996
architecture which Tafuri introduced, it is necessary to give further attention to Cacciari's *pensiero negativo*, lingering as a backdrop to every page of Tafuri's books and articles.\(^{62}\)

In his thinking, Cacciari's point of departure was Marx's notion of development and historical change. According to Marx, development is fuelled by a constant discrepancy between the objective course of events and our subjective wishes. The driving force of history is formed by our longing for an ideal situation, motivating us to constantly seek to progress beyond, and to improve the existing situation. The heart of Marx's dialectical vision of history thus consists in a constant surpassing of the existing status quo. For Marx the reality of capitalist society merely defines the present horizon and is not an absolute historical point. However, the ideal socialist state also only defines the limits of current wishful thinking. It is neither the ultimate destination of history nor its end phase.

In his *pensiero negativo*, Cacciari adopts this aspect of Marx's dialectics, conceiving of history as an ongoing process which constantly surpasses the status quo. Cacciari combines this reading of Marx with his own interpretation of Nietzsche's *Wille zur Macht* – contrary to subjectivist interpretations and the late-Romantic exaltation of creativity, this concept now becomes a de facto descriptive category of the process of 'objective', ongoing, irreversible rationalization.\(^{63}\) Cacciari does not agree with the messianic character of Marx's thought, with the notion that an ideal society will now be realized through the intervention of man rather than God.

In essence Cacciari's *pensiero negativo* is an attack on the Hegelian notion of dialectics as formed by the tripartite system of thesis-antithesis and synthesis. It was also this tripartite system that Cacciari recognised in Marx's thinking, leading him to speak of an ideal society for example, or of final harmony. The element of synthesis especially caught Cacciari's attention. Between the elements A and B a relationship is forged by an element C which is essentially of another order, outside the existing system. In religious messianic thinking, 'God' is the metaphysical element, from another sphere, that will bring about a synthesis, occurring as a final harmony within this world. Cacciari's *pensiero negativo* rejects the notion of a metaphysical, 'falsely harmonious' synthesis. Instead, as mentioned above, it postulates an incessant oscillation between thesis and antithesis. For Cacciari, if reality is entirely ruled by the harsh laws of capitalism, then 'values' such as humanity, unity and harmony should be regarded as falsely synthetic elements. In this way, the *pensiero negativo* rejects the harmonious model in favour of a polarizing and contrasting model.\(^{64}\)

In his criticism of Marx, Cacciari was influenced by Nietzsche and thus, at the basis of the *pensiero negativo* one finds the philosopher with the hammer wanting to crush all

\(^{62}\) Notice here the parallel with the criticism of the Modern Movement as practiced by Tafuri and other architectural critics; the attack on its unifying, rationalist planning procedures. It is on the basis of this background that we can understand how Tafuri and Cacciari came together in Venice.

\(^{63}\) This paragraph is based on my Master's thesis, Rixt Hoekstra, 'Improbus Labor, Manfredo Tafuri en de onmogelijkheid van een architectuurhistorische theorie', Vakgroep Kunst-en Architectuurgeschiedenis, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 1994.
false ideology, every synthesis. The choice of Nietzsche’s nihilism was one of the most fundamental decisions made by Tafuri and Cacciari during their careers. In 1973, simultaneously with Tafuri’s Progetto e Utopia, Cacciari published the book *Metropolis, saggi sulla grande città di Sombart, Endell, Scheffler e Simmel*, in which he further defined his negative thought.65 *Metropolis* was the outcome of a joint project, the result of an intellectual experiment in the laboratory founded by both Cacciari and Tafuri. At the start of his book, Cacciari mentions how its contents had been discussed at length in Tafuri’s course on the ‘urban and architectural history of Germany and the German sociology of the city’, held during the academic year 1970-1971. These discussions had led Cacciari to write the article ‘Note sulla dialettica del negativo nell’epoca della metropoli (saggio su Georg Simmel)’, published in the review *Angelus Novus* in 1971, which formed the basis of the opening essay of *Metropolis*.66

Not without reason, from the very beginning Cacciari had been a member of Tafuri’s scientific faculty. As a professor of aesthetics Cacciari provided a crucial impulse in the elaboration of a new historiography of architectural history. While Tafuri focused upon the key moments of German architecture and urban planning in the early twentieth century in his courses, Cacciari, in a series of parallel seminars, explained the contribution of the sociologists and politicians living in that period. In this way, it was Cacciari’s goal to substantially enrich and sharpen the thinking of architectural historians.67 At the same time, for Cacciari, architecture provided an epistemological opportunity; a medium with which to gain access to a view of reality that would not have been accepted in a traditional philosophical faculty.

As part of Tafuri’s team, Cacciari was in a position to question the orthodoxies of the intellectual and political left wing. In *Metropolis*, this resulted, among other things, in renewed attention being paid to the ‘contaminated’ philosopher Nietzsche, who at that time was still anathema for most left-wing philosophers. Equally, the book *Metropolis* played a crucial role in the introduction of the German sociologist Georg Simmel (1858-1918) to an Italian audience. In *Metropolis*, Cacciari pointed to the renewed significance of Simmel’s *Philosophie des Geldes* (1900) and especially to the importance of the essay

---

65 In the essay *Sulla genesi del pensiero negativo* Cacciari defines the pensiero negativo as the anti-dialectical way of thinking that came into being in the period after the death of Hegel, with writers such as Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811) and Wilhelm Hoffman (1776-1822). The pensiero negativo becomes clear in their rejection of history as a synthesizing master narrative, Cacciari argued, followed by a new awareness that putting oneself in the perspective of tradition automatically implies being absorbed by Hegelian dialectics. The pensiero negativo opposes this absorption, as Cacciari explains: ‘Dialectics synthesizes in a general logical-temporal order also that which appears foreign to that order . . . it is to underline the contrast with this form of ‘positivity’, that we call ’negative’ . . . the thought that does not accept the Hegelian dialectical synthesis . . . that proposes as substantially authentic exactly that which is ’eccentric’ and ’subjective’. Massimo Cacciari, ‘Sulla genesi del pensiero negativo’, *Contropiano*, 1, 1969, p. 138, (my translation).
These were highly significant moments in the intellectual ambience of 1960s Italy. Cacciari’s rereading of Marx in an anti-philosophical and anti-systematical manner – see, for example, his attack on ‘classical rationality’ – inspired him to focus on Simmel, and in the wake of this study, to focus on similar authors such as Werner Sombart and August Endell.\(^68\) As well as the ‘impressionistic’ writings of Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin also played a key role in this process. Instead of developing a coherent theory of the big city, instead of developing a ‘system’, Cacciari engages in a dialogue with all of these authors, offering an exploratory analysis of the different voices of the city.

Cacciari’s \textit{Metropolis} consists of two, clearly demarcated parts. In the first part he presents an elaborate essay called ‘Dialettica del negativo e metropoli’, which unfolds over sections bearing such names as ‘Sulla sociologia tedesca della città tra ‘800 e ‘900’ (On the Sociology of the City between 1800 and 1900) – and ‘La città come saggio’ (The City as an Essay). This part contains Cacciari’s effort to come to terms with the meaning of the \textit{Metropolis}, which bears fruit in the second part of the book. In this part he provides an Italian translation of four key texts on the \textit{Metropolis}, written by the German sociologists Sombart, Endell, Scheffler and Simmel, all between 1898 and 1913.\(^69\) Instead of a philosophy of the city, he provides an analysis of the \textit{Metropolis} as a mode of being. This is Cacciari’s key message. His book is not a theory of the city; it is about the thinking one produces whilst being in the city.

Thus, in \textit{Metropolis}, Cacciari positions thinking as a product of the city while at the same time discussing a number of authors who described and analysed life in the big city. He does not provide a synthetic philosophy of the city, but describes urban reality as a necessary condition for modern intellectual activity. What is the \textit{Metropolis} according to Cacciari? It is at one and the same time a mental category and a physical reality, as Cacciari explains in the first pages of \textit{Metropolis}. It is that critical phase where the rationalization of the relations of production is followed by the rationalization of all social relations. The city is the theatre, the necessary backdrop for every social construction and every form of social change, for its economic patterns are reproduced in all possible aspects and dimensions, not least within each subject.

\(^{67}\) M. Cacciari, ‘Note sulla dialettica del negativo nell’epoca della metropoli’, \textit{Angelus Novus}, no. 21, 1971.

\(^{68}\) This method of parallel philosophical and historical courses was often used in Tafuri’s history department during the 1970s. For example, in the 1970s Franco Rella, another philosopher working at the department, worked on an interpretation of the work of Freud as a literary text. This resulted in a book called \textit{La Critica Freudiana}, which was one of the key publications of Tafuri’s Dipartimento di Analisi Critica e Storica. As Rella recalls in an interview, the teaching schedule was made in such a way that his courses preceded those of Tafuri, with seminars held in common, thus permitting the students to combine Rella’s analysis of theoretical and philosophical work with Tafuri’s lessons dedicated to modern architecture. See \textit{La Critica Freudiana-Scritti di R. Gaschê}, Franco Rella (ed.), Milano, 1977. Giulio Lupo, Mercedes Daguerre, ‘Entrevista con Franco Rella’, \textit{Materiales 5, PEHCH-CESCA}, Buenos Aires, March 1985, now at: http://www.bazaramericano.com

The form of the *Metropolis* is that of Vergeistigung, and this is why Simmel’s essay *Die Grossstädte und das Geistesleben* (1903) plays such a crucial role in the book. For Cacciari, the challenge was to define the relationship between the *Metropolis*, as the focal point of rational capitalism, and the role played in this world by the ideology of, for example, *Kultur and Gemeinschaft*. The laws of the ratio demanded a vision that was totally transparent and bereft of all myths:

> In a metropolitan situation, the revolutionary process itself is totally *intellectual*. The ‘geometric clarity’ with which, in the final analysis, class interest is posited, eliminates all possible teleological or ethico-sentimental synthesis. 70

The metropolitan world consists of abstractions, Cacciari claims, in which the process of rationalization and intellectualization is totally dominant, from economics to politics to everyday life. In *Die Grossstädte und das Geistesleben*, Simmel points to the consequences of this reality. He claims that the monetary market economy of the modern *Metropolis* is not only decisive for the exchange of goods, but also defines the norms of human interaction. This is the ultimate consequence of total rationalization. Just as in the monetary system, where the value of products is decided by their monetary exchange value and not by their intrinsic quality, so also in the interaction between people, the unique character of each psychological experience is disregarded in favour of a notion that measures a human being according to their place within the system. However, for Cacciari it was of fundamental importance that the process of *Vergeistigung*, or the interiorization of money circulation, was counteracted by an opposing movement. Der Mensch ist ein Trostsuchendes Wesen: it is suggested that in order to function in the modern, anonymous reality of the big city, it was necessary to let one’s *Gemüt*, or heart, come forward every now and then. In the *Metropolis*, we find a constant oscillation between the anonymous non-individual life of the collective and the archaic wish to experience uniquely personal events. This process is characterized by Cacciari as follows: *‘the Metropolis has its basis in the antithesis between Nervenleben and Verstand’*. Cacciari translated Simmel’s findings into a paradoxical way of thinking, which suggests that white can only exist because of black; in which thesis and antithesis hold each other in balance and are in constant tension. This is the essence of the rationalist-capitalist system, which is comprehensive and all embracing: its ‘chiarezza geometrica’ of total intellectualization brings about a transparency in which every element is consciously organized and is thus a function of the system.

With the rise of the modern city in the middle of the nineteenth century a fundamental problem comes to light: the erosion of both psychological introspection, seen as the contemplation of one’s unique psyche, and the authentic experience of the individual, inevitably leads to a gap opening between the intellectual and the metropolis. The intellectual, which is to say, the writer, poet or architect, becomes compromised by the *Verdinglichung* of society – by its mechanisms of mass production and mass consumption. According to Cacciari, this gap cannot be bridged – the crisis between the

---

70 These texts are: Werner Sombart, ‘La metropoli’ (1912); August Endell, ‘Bellezza della metropoli’ (1908); Karl Scheffler, ‘La metropoli’ (1913); Georg Simmel, ‘Roma, Firenze e Venezia’ (1898, 1906, 1907).
intellectual and the metropolis can only lead architects, poets and philosophers to express their relationship with the city in terms of discord and rejection. This view of the schism between the intellectual and the *Metropolis* affected Tafuri and his collaborators to a great extent. It led them to conceive of twentieth-century architecture in terms of the history of the confrontation between the intellectual and the metropolis. In *Architettura Contemporanea* (1976), Tafuri and Dal Co wrote:

> The intellectual, in substance, discovered that his own singularity no longer had its place in the massified metropolis dominated by a technical capacity for infinite duplication which, as Nietzsche saw with utter lucidity, had killed off once and forever all sacredness and divinity. But at the same time the metropolis became the very sickness to which the intellectual felt himself condemned: exiled in his homeland, he could make one last attempt at dominating the evil that assailed him by deciding to abandon himself of his own free will to a holy prostitution of the soul.\(^{71}\)

Both Tafuri and Cacciari saw the rise of the Modern Movement in the century of rationalization as an essentially tragic event; as a ‘unique drama’, as Cacciari wrote in *Metropolis*.

> The drama is the emergence . . . of an architecture of *nihilism fulfilled* as this architecture comes to pervade the image of the Metropolis: it is the very figure of pro-ducing, of leading-beyond, of continuous and indefinable *overcoming*. The obsession with overcoming is embodied in the work of ‘radical uprooting’ carried out by this architecture: an uprooting from the limits of the *urbs*, from the social circles dominant in it. . . . It is as though the city were transformed into a chance of the road, a context of routes, a labyrinth without center, an absurd labyrinth.\(^{72}\)

As Tafuri wrote in *Progetto e Utopia*, ‘the experience of the tragic is the experience of the Metropolis’.\(^{73}\) In *Metropolis*, Cacciari depicted the German Werkbund, founded in 1907, as a part of the struggle to come to terms with this reality.\(^{74}\) While it was the aim of the Werkbund to overcome the difference between ‘Stadt’ and ‘*Metropolis*’, at the Werkbund conference of 1914 it became painfully clear that the frantic search for a new style was accompanied by a complete absence of any notion of capitalist development. The Werkbund thus demonstrated its own impotence in the light of the new urban reality. However, the metropolitan framework also led to a focus on new protagonists in the history of modern architecture. Cacciari points to the example of the industrialist, politician and writer Walter Rathenau (1867-1922), who, as the metropolitan, calculating decision-maker par excellence, head of the AEG company, epitomized the opposite of the idealist Werkbund. From that point in time, Cacciari claims, a company such as AEG could

---


Architecture and Utopia
Design and Capitalist Development

Manfredo Tafuri
only be directed by a politician. At the same time, the architect Peter Behrens was working for Rathenau. During a time in which Benjamin’s aura had already declined, Behrens designed the AEG factory as a symbolic, almost sacred temple of mechanization and rationalization.\textsuperscript{75}

Cacciari concluded that the Metropolis annihilates all synthetic attempts to reach Stadt – to found a Gemeinschaft as a dwelling for the individual. The Metropolis is governed by the pensiero negativo, which does not make ‘positive’ propositions but questions and casts doubt on the dominant patterns of thinking. The aim of both Simmel and Benjamin was to ‘test the dialectical form, to make it explode’. However, in the end the pensiero negativo is very much a function of the system, as it demonstrates the shortcomings of dialectical thought – the synthetic ideology of a bourgeoisie that finds itself in a process of increasing rationalization. It was this formulation of the pensiero negativo that was of great importance for Tafuri’s view on the artistic avant-garde movements as elaborated in the book Progetto e Utopia and elsewhere.

**PROGETTO E UTOPIA**

The experiences with Contropiano led Tafuri to publish the book Progetto e Utopia, architettura e sviluppo capitalistico in 1973. From an alienated point of view – an ‘operaista’ point of view – an ‘alienated’ architectural history was conceived. Architectural history was to be studied by historians who placed themselves outside the landscape they observed. This position led Tafuri to write one of the most scandalous and shocking introductions to modern architecture produced thus far. The first chapter of Progetto e Utopia, architettura e sviluppo capitalistico began with the following lines:

> To ward off anguish by understanding and absorbing its causes would seem to be one of the principal exigencies of bourgeois art. It matters little if the conflicts, contradictions and lacerations that generate this anguish are temporarily reconciled by means of a complex mechanism, or if, through contemplative sublimation, catharsis is achieved.\textsuperscript{76}

For engaged architect-historians, for architectural historians with a background in art


\textsuperscript{75} The German Werkbund was an association of artists, artisans and architects founded in 1907 in München with the aim of promoting good design and craftsmanship for mass produced goods and architecture. The history of the Werkbund was one of the topoi relevant for the Venetian researchers see, for example, Francesco Dal Co, *Teorie del Moderno, architettura Germania 1880-1920*, Bari, 1982. An important figure was Walter Rathenau, see Massimo Cacciari, *Walter Rathenau e il suo ambiente; con un antologia di scritti e discorsi politici*, 1919-1921, Bari, 1979.
Manfredo Tafuri
Kapitalismus und Architektur
Von Corbusiers „Utopia“ zur Trabantenstadt
history, or even for those familiar with Hauser’s *Social History of Art*, this introduction was as astonishing as it was incomprehensible. In the 1970s, most historians had already exchanged Pevsner’s description of the architect as a ‘courageous and daring man’ for a much more problematic notion of the profession, but most of them were still far from considering the architect in terms of the ‘bourgeois intellectual’s obligation to exist’. In *Progetto e Utopia*, the nature of Tafuri’s architectural history further crystallized. From the point of view of this book, an architectural history as a history of styles – the Baroque, Rococo, Classicism and so on – was no longer possible. However, Hauser’s *The Social History of Art* (1951) became equally objectionable, since this book remained highly classificatory, using traditional historical categories to depict a universal history extending from the Stone Age to the present ‘Film Age’. Instead of the descriptive and enumerative tone of Hauser, Tafuri’s history was interrogatory, starting from the friction between different parties, from which arose what he called the ‘historiographical problem’.

As Tournikiotis suggests, in the 1950s and 1960s books appeared that reassessed, but also confirmed the legacy of the Modern Movement. Moreover, the books by Giedion and Pevsner continued to be read by a generation of architects and critics who considered the Modern Movement an absolute, incontrovertible fact. When Leonardo Benevolo wrote his *Storia dell’architettura moderna* in the 1950s, he wanted to confirm the cohesion and unity of the Modern Movement by verifying the universal status of its rational method. It was in this context that Tafuri wrote what may be called a blueprint for a totally new way of approaching architectural history. Surrounded by historicizing accounts that linked the Modern Movement to experiences in the past and pointed to possible horizons of growth, Tafuri broke with all illusions of continuity by composing his book as an explosion of aphoristic essays, carrying disturbing titles such as ‘Form as Regressive Utopia’, ‘The Dialectic of the Avant-Garde’ and ‘“Radical” Architecture and the City’.

Tafuri put forward a framework for the evaluation of modern architects that was shocking for those used to the supportive accounts of Zevi or Benevolo. Instead of writing about architectural styles, or about modern architects as ‘heroes’, Tafuri created a metropolitan world in which thinkers such as Baudelaire and Benjamin appeared alongside erudite architects, architect-philosophers, or, in the case of Thomas Jefferson, architect-statesmen. Tafuri pointed to the singular and heretical messages of architects such as Le Corbusier and Piranesi, whose thinking was far from a triumphant affirmation of modernity. He also discussed skyscrapers as part of a specific ‘urban ideology’, something which hitherto had been totally unheard of.

*Progetto e Utopia* was an elaboration of the essays Tafuri had written for *Contropiano*.

---

76 I refer to Walter Benjamin’s famous theorem of the decline of the aura, as the destruction of the traditional uniqueness of a work of art, and with this the decline of its unassailable character, its authority as a cult, a form of worship almost. See L. De Cauter, *De dwerg in de schaakautomaat, Benjamins verborgen leer*, Nijmegen 1999.


The first essay of the book, entitled ‘Reason’s Adventures: Naturalism and the City in the Century of the Enlightenment’, reflected the fundamental ideas of ‘Per una critica dell’ideologia architettonica’, published by Tafuri in *Contropiano* in 1969, while the essay ‘Ideology and Utopia’ was a recapitulation of the article ‘Lavoro intellettuale e sviluppo capitalistico’, published in *Contropiano* in 1970. All of the essays in the book reflected the fundamental insights of the article ‘Sulla genesi del pensiero negativo’, written by Massimo Cacciari for *Contropiano* in 1969, while the ideas of Dal Co’s ‘Note per la critica dell’ideologia dell’architettura moderna: da Weimar a Dessau’ (*Contropiano*, 1968) are also present.\(^81\)

The book is composed of eight essays which, under provocative titles, all deal with the problematic position of the twentieth-century avant-garde movements in a world dominated by the workforce and the market place. In *Progetto e Utopia*, Tafuri drew the consequences of Cacciari’s *pensiero negativo* for the history of modern architecture. He saw that the category of the eccentric and irrational, which only apparently did not function within the system, could now be applied to the artistic avant-garde movements of the twentieth century, for example, to the Dada movement. In other words, these avant-garde movements were the latest manifestation of the *pensiero negativo* – they expressed a complex, advanced form of ideology that used a relentless critique of society in order to secure their functional position within the system. Only in this way could the intelligentsia secure its own survival within the maelstrom of rationalization. In *Progetto e Utopia*, Tafuri proceeds to trace the history of such intellectuals as Weber and Mannheim, of Gropius and Sklovskij, suggesting that ‘at the beginning of the twentieth century, the unmasking of idols that obstructed the way to a global rationalization of the productive universe and its social dominion, became the new historical task of the intellectual’.\(^82\)

However, Tafuri also observed an additional element. At the start of the twentieth century, it no longer sufficed for ‘irrational’ intellectuals to undertake the critique of ideology. As Tafuri analyzed, they now had to convert ‘negativity’ into ‘positivity’ and throw

---


\(^{81}\) Manfredo Tafuri, *Progetto e Utopia, Architettura e sviluppo capitalistico*, Bari, 1973. This book was translated into English as *Architecture and Utopia, Design and Capitalist Development*, Cambridge, Mass., 1976 It was the first book by Tafuri to be published in English, followed two years later by *Theories and Histories of Architecture*, published in 1979. The original chronology of publication was thus reversed. Tafuri’s *Progetto e Utopia* was widely translated: in Germany, it was published as *Kapitalismus und Architektur. von Corbusiers ’Utopia’ zur Trabantenstadt*, Hamburg, 1977; while in French it was published as *Projet et Utopie, de l’avant-garde à la Metropole*, Paris, 1977. This publication was probably based upon a further elaboration of Progetto e Utopia, which appeared in Spanish in 1972: M. Tafuri, M. Cacciari, F. Dal Co, *De la vanguardia a la metropoli: critica radical a la arquitectura*, Barcelona, 1972. *Progetto e Utopia* received a more direct translation into Portuguese, where it was translated as *Projecto e Utopia: arquitectura e desenvolvimento do capitalismo*, Lisboa, 1985. Finally, in Dutch the book was translated as *Ontwerp en Utopie: architektuur en ontwikkeling van het kapitalisme*, Nijmegen, (Marxisme en Kultuur, Sumschrift 117), 1978.
TAFURI
Progetto e utopia
themselves entirely behind the ‘construction of the future’. In Tafuri’s view, urban planning became the most conspicuous part of avant-garde ideology, as the concretization of utopia, a positive ‘construction of the future’ – as a form of ‘realized ideology’ – aiming at the domination of the future to secure its own survival in the present.

In the blueprint for the future that Progetto e Utopia offered, the identity of the new architectural history fully came to light. The book was part of a new critical programme of questioning the place of architectural ideologies within a capitalist system dominated by rationality. Tafuri’s divorce from the normative practices of operative criticism, realized in Teorie e Storia, enabled him to regard architecture in terms of its complex relationship with society. From this distance, Tafuri formulated the principal thesis of Progetto e Utopia suggesting that the decisive event in the history of twentieth-century architecture was the failure of the artistic avant-garde. This failure was due to the fact that, despite all the relentless attempts to ‘unmask idols’ and ‘break into pieces its own crystallized forms’, people like Mannheim and Schumpeter, Gropius and Malevitsj went beyond a mere critique of society, and so made a switch from the negative to the positive.

The history of modern architecture, Tafuri explained in Progetto e Utopia, was the history of Scheler and of Gropius, of Mannheim and of Viktor Sklovskij. Certainly, all these intellectuals had undertaken a critique of ideology, as they had all followed the method described by Tafuri in Teorie e Storia: ‘We must pull ourselves out of the ditch / by our bootstraps / turn inside-out / and see everything with new eyes’. However, this was not sufficient for them. They had to turn this ‘negativity’ into a positive construction, into an act of false consciousness resulting in what Tafuri had defined in the preface of Teorie e Storia as a ‘class architecture’ – an architecture for a liberated society:

Why is it that all the ‘tragedy’ of the great nineteenth-century Kultur, and all the utopia of Weimar, could not survive except by seeking complete dominion over the future?83

The utopia that resulted from these ‘positive’ operations was doomed to fail, because it could not fulfil its revolutionary promises. At the very most it could be adapted into a different, moderate form by a rational state system, in an act which only underlined the impotence of any ‘positive’ attempt to change the system. Once more, the reality of the all-embracing rational-capitalist system that does not leave space for alternatives to it is revealed.84 It was the Norwegian painter Munch, who in his painting Scream, expressed

the total angst of the avant-garde intellectual confronting the cruel reality of the *Metropolis*, and conveying a feeling of shock. While facing the possibility of their own redundancy, of no longer having an ideological use within the system, progressive intellectuals discovered a new role for themselves precisely by letting the system explode first, and then proceeding with the construction of new vistas.

► This was also the main objective of the historical avant-garde movements . . .
For Ball, as for Tzara, the destruction and the rendering ridiculous of the entire historicist heritage of the Western bourgeoisie were conditions for the liberation of potential, but inhibited, energies of that bourgeoisie itself.85

In the end, as Cacciari had already confirmed, it was the philosopher Nietzsche who provided the key to understanding the position of the avant-garde. Their ‘relentless critique’ should be viewed as *fröhliche Wissenschaft*. After the death of God, implying the endless destruction of all security, the capitalist system could only obtain complete dominion over reality if it was willing to say ‘Yes!’ to life; if it recognized all its powers, both the positive and the negative, as essential to its own survival.

*Progetto e Utopia* marks a crucial phase in Tafuri’s development. To be sure, the avant-garde’s demonstration of the impossibility to conceive of a better world also had its consequences for the way in which Tafuri envisioned the historiography of modern architecture. Because of the failure of the twentieth-century avant-garde, Tafuri looked for a new framework from which to assess architectural history. Friedrich Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin, Freud and Foucault became important sources of inspiration in the search for a different, non-linear architectural history. It was precisely in this assessment of the avant-garde that Tafuri broke most radically with the historiography of the Modern Movement. While Pevsner and Giedion, as well as Zevi and Benevolo, had welcomed the ‘cheerful alienation’ of the avant-garde as the forerunners of a new era, Tafuri engaged in a completely different intellectual operation.86 While Benevolo had pointed to the ‘European elementarist tradition’ and to the ‘flowery socialism’ of William Morris as the precursors of modernism and as such as a desirable cultural policy, and while Zevi saw in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright the incarnation of an ethical doctrine, Tafuri depicted the tormented passages of ‘architectural ideology’ as it developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the technique of controlling the physical environment.

Tafuri looked for instruments to analyse the multiplication and fragmentation of these techniques at the start of the twentieth century, an event that, according to him, had been conveniently overlooked by the historiographers of the Modern Movement. *Der Mensch ist ein Trostsuchendes Wesen*: the urgency and appealing character of the work of

---

84 Ibid., p. 50.
85 As Tafuri wrote in *Teorie e Storia*: ‘Any attempt to overthrow the institution, the discipline, with the most exasperated rejections or the most paradoxical ironies – let us learn from Dada and Surrealism – is bound to see itself turned into a positive contribution, into a ‘constructive’ avant-garde, into an ideology all the more positive as it is dramatically critical and self-critical.’ Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and Histories of Architecture*, p. 15.
Siegfried Giedion was, according to Tafuri, due to the fact that Giedion salvaged an already shattered conceptual unity. In the same way, Nikolaus Pevsner was a ‘positive’ intellectual who offered a consoling notion of a unified Modern Movement to an architectural culture already brought into crisis by the Great Depression, the complex techniques of planning in New Deal America, the reality of Fascist Italy and the Russia of the Five Year Plans.

HISTORY BEYOND THE MODERN MOVEMENT

In the 1970s, after the grand perspectives portrayed in Teorie e Storia and Progetto e Utopia, Tafuri and his colleagues in the history department devoted their time to the writing of a series of case studies. La Città Americana dalla guerra civile al New Deal (1973) was one of the results of this strategy.\textsuperscript{87} The book contains four essays, all of which are impressive for their analytical depth and historical precision.\textsuperscript{88} For example, in the essay ‘Toward an “Imperial City”: Daniel H. Burnham and the City Beautiful Movement’, we find the concrete results of the archaeological excavation of the modern. Its author, Mario Manieri Elia, pointed to the importance of the figure of the ‘boss’ for the social and architectural development of Chicago, viewed as the American laissez-faire Metropolis par excellence. While Chicago’s growth was secured by, among others things, the stream of immigrant workers from Eastern Europe, the figure of the ‘boss’ became crucial as a mediator between different social groups, securing a fragile balance between the exploited European immigrant workers and the American-born ‘Yankee’ workers. However, Manieri Elia claimed that the ‘boss’ was not only important for the capitalist production process. The archetypal architectural client was a ‘boss’, albeit this time an American-born boss. It was the boss who commissioned parks, skyscrapers and so on, just as it was this figure who provided the incentive for the development of a uniquely American building type and later a ‘City Beautiful’.

Excavating the modern also meant that research into archives and other sources now took a prominent place. In fact, in the introduction to La Città Americana the authors expressed their ambition to write ‘the architectural history of another America’. They focused on the problem of American architectural history and thus traced ‘America’s radical divergence from the great apocalypse of European bourgeois culture’.\textsuperscript{89} As the

\textsuperscript{86} Manfredo Tafuri, Architecture and Utopia, Design and Capitalist Development, pp. 55-56.
Ciucci Dal Co Manieri—Elia Tafuri

La città americana
dalla guerra civile al «New Deal»

Editori Laterza
authors explained in their introduction, what makes America special in relation to European cultural patterns, is the rapidity with which ‘the idea becomes technical’. What becomes clear in the large cities of America is that creativity is not only a matter of ‘divine’ inspiration or esoteric vocation. In order to survive, culture had to be useful to society and therefore it should develop techniques in order to exist. According to the authors, ‘The American city is thus revealed as an enormous, form-defying product of technique’.  

While the insights proclaimed in La Città Americana may seem speculative, what made this book hard to ignore was that its innovative views were combined with very precise, philological research. In fact, as Cohen argues, the authors of La Città Americana displayed a concern for a direct contact with sources that had never been demonstrated by such architectural historians as Zevi or Benevolo. In their introduction, they mention an impressive list of research activities: from visits to libraries and archives in various countries, to contacts with American universities and research institutes. What was also important was the opening up of archive material that thus far had not been accessible to study: for La Città Americana, the authors managed to use the personal archives of the American architect Clarence S. Stein (1882-1975). La Città Americana provided one of the first examples of a modern architectural history that was not only based on the study of literature, but on primary sources and the study of original documents.

Though a member of the Communist Party, Tafuri twice managed to organize trips to the United States. Firstly, in 1970, invited by Rudolf Wittkower, Tafuri organized a study tour to Washington with his students; secondly, Tafuri was invited by Diana Agrest to give a lecture as part of the series ‘Practice, Theory and Politics in Architecture’, held at Princeton University in 1974. The research leading to La Città Americana becomes even

---

89 This book should be viewed in the context of a fascination for America that was shared by researchers such as Francesco Dal Co and Marco and Cesare de Michelis in the years before Tafuri came to Venice. They contacted the radical philosopher Antoni Negri in Padua, who was then engaged in research leading to the writing of an alternative history of Roosevelt’s New Deal, seen through the prism of workers’ revolt. Negri suggested that the history of capitalist America could be written as a reaction to the development of the workers. From the Wall Street Crash of 1929 onwards, capitalism had to redefine itself. It had to develop new effective instruments if it wanted to maintain its hegemony. Roosevelt’s New Deal was, for Negri, an example non plus ultra of the installation of such new techniques. See Jon Beasley Murray, ‘Lenin in America’: www.art.man.ac.uk/spanish/writings/empire.html

90 Tafuri and his colleagues were not exceptional in pointing to the importance of American experiences. For example, in the History of Modern Architecture (1960), Leonardo Benevolo had dedicated a crucial chapter to what he called the ‘American Tradition’. However, Benevolo still thought of modern architecture in terms of a unified Modern Movement: starting from a notion of modern architecture as being united across continents, Benevolo saw America’s diverging character with respect to Europe as a sign that America was more advanced, forming an avant-garde in the development of a universal-modern language. L. Benevolo, History of Modern Architecture, vol. 2: The Modern Movement, Bari, 1960, see Chapter Seven: ‘The American Tradition’, p. 191ff.

91 As the authors state, the creative process has become imbued with an almost scientific efficiency; architecture and city planning have become ‘agents of the ponderous process of transformation set in motion by the American capitalist system in determining the urban structure.’ Ciucci, The American City, Introduction, pp. 6-7.
Monadnock Building Chicago, Daniel Burnham and John Root, 1889-1892. From Tafuri and Dal Co’s Architettura Contemporanea.
more impressive when realizing that these trips never took more than a few days – considered a Communist, Tafuri was not allowed into the country for a longer period.

Breaking with the ‘false’ homogeneity of the Modern Movement also had its consequences for the form of architectural history. As is the case for Teorie e Storia and Progetto e Utopia, the book La Città Americana dalla guerra civile al New Deal assembled a number of essays based around a central historiographical ‘problem’. In fact, as a consequence of his pensiero negativo, Cacciari had already defined a peculiar kind of discourse in which the author did not simply write down ideas, but entered into a dialogue with a variety of authors, from Sombart to Simmel, to Benjamin and Weber. The radical nature of negative thinking excluded a real ‘theory’, in the sense of a homogeneous, unified argument. An essence was no longer possible, according to Cacciari, leaving the plurality of many voices and opinions.

In Teorie e Storia, Tafuri pointed to the Quattrocento as the period in which a long process of the desecration of values had started. The first ‘institution’ to be desecrated was history considered as the provider of a narrative carrying a meta-human ‘truth’. In the Quattrocento, Tafuri argued, the classical concept of aesthetic organicism comes to an end, leading to the downfall of both figurative unity and historical continuity. An explosion takes place, so to speak, causing a ‘primordial’ unity to burst into a series of separate fragments that, although originating from a historical context, no longer possess an absolute value based on their place within a continuous, systematic discourse. In this world of fragments, both the architect and the historian are obliged to establish a construction, a bricolage, consisting of an autonomous summation of historical quotes. For Tafuri, this was the final consequence of the desecration of history: a universal and uniform account, carrying the same meaning for all people, was exchanged for a notion of history that was more personal and less absolute and in which the content depended on the composition that was created in the present; on the way history was represented by a specific author in a specific time and place. The form of Tafuri’s books; the way in which he presented knowledge through a series of aphoristic essays, reflects this process.

---

93 Ciucci, The American City, Introduction, p. 14. Another example of the research practices developed at the beginning of the 1970s by these historians is the book Socialismo, città, architettura URSS 1917-1937, Manfredo Tafuri (ed.), Roma, 1972. This book is a compilation of papers from a conference that was organized by Tafuri and his colleagues in the summer of 1970. The goal was to compare their research results with foreign specialists from different research traditions. Thus, we see the participation, among others, of Kurt Junghans from Germany and Gerrit Oorthuys from the Netherlands. This is one of the first examples, as far as I know, of a conference dedicated exclusively to the research methods of modern architectural history. What is also remarkable is the participation in this conference of the German architect Hans Schmidt, who was one of the protagonists in their research. Notably, this book was published as part of a series, directed by Tafuri, dedicated to the ‘re-examination of the episode of modern architecture and the techniques of planning in the light of the Marxist critique of ideology.’
While the students were protesting in the streets of Venice, Tafuri remained at the university working on the creation of an institute, a ‘school’ dedicated exclusively to the history of architecture. Revolution! For the first time in Italian history, architectural history was no longer an activity for the architect-dilettante, but a serious profession. Even today, courses such as *Avant-garde, city and ‘the plan’ in the Soviet Union, 1917-1937* (1971-72); or *Avant-garde, architecture and city in Germany, 1905-1933* (1970-71), are impressive for their innovative approach and their analytic depth. In 1976, Tafuri and his team made the new identity of architectural history totally manifest by changing the name of Zevi’s *Istituto di Storia dell’Architettura into Istituto di Analisi Critica e Storica* (Institute for Critical and Historical Analysis). The words ‘architecture’ and ‘architectural history’ were absent from this name in order to emphasize that, as a matter of historical critique, architecture had become a category of analysis with which to confront the complex strata of social reality. As Franco Rella states, it is the task of the critic to ‘do violence to the object of analysis’, while Walter Benjamin spoke of ‘intervening destructively into the material’.95 Attacking the idol-like status of architecture – fragmenting it – first opened the way to a critical outlook on reality.

The institute became the *locus* for Tafuri’s travels through the landscape of the avant-garde movements, the planning procedures in the USSR, the adventures of the skyscrapers in the USA, and the event of *Sozialpolitik* in Weimar Germany. In 1976 all these different analytical lines were assembled and woven together in *Architettura Contemporanea*, a survey of the ‘modern’ in architecture, which defied all attempts at historical categorization and portrayed instead a complex fresco containing several narrative axes, which ranged from ‘the origins of town planning’, to architecture and town planning in the USA, to ‘Northerly Romanticism’ in Scandinavia and Catalanian Modernism, and from classicist ‘architecture without avant-garde’ to the contribution of the Bauhaus.96 *Architettura Contemporanea*, written by Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, can be seen as the Venetian historians’ answer to Pevsner’s *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* (1936), or to Giedion’s *Space Time and Architecture, The Growth of a New Tradition* (1941), and equally as an answer to Zevi’s and Benevolo’s histories of modern architecture.

The survey of the history of modern architecture was no longer considered a technician’s manual, providing the rules designed to govern architectural developments. As Tafuri stated in an article, he saw the books by his predecessors as ‘salvage operations’, mere products of ideology made to ‘dis-alienate habitable space’.97 As an


95 The classical concept of aesthetic organicism departed from the organic unity of a work of art and claimed that a work of art may be compared to a living organism: the relationship between its parts is not arbitrary, but functional and logic as are the organs of a living body. See, on this theme, Caroline van Eck, *Organicism in Nineteenth-Century Architecture: an Enquiry into its Theoretical and Philosophical Background*, Amsterdam, 1994.
alternative to the utopian visions of the Modern Movement, Cacciari put forward a negative variation of a phrase from a poem by Hölderlin – one which, not by chance, had been extensively commented on by Martin Heidegger in its original form. *Dichterisch wohnt der Mensch* (poetically man dwells) now became *Undichterisch wohnt der Mensch* (man dwells unpoetically).\(^98\) In other words, in attacking the monumental historiographical construction of the Modern Movement, Tafuri and Cacciari, with a critical reference to Heidegger, put forward the motto *Undichterisch wohnt der Mensch* as an answer to Pevsner’s ‘movement of collective consciousness’.\(^99\) This is important: the attack on the historiographical tradition by means of philosophy and theory had its consequences for the sort of architectural history they envisaged. While the production of a new type of housing had always been an important programmatic point for modern architects, Cacciari now raised this issue to an existential level and addressed the issue of ‘dwelling’, of living in the modern world, suggesting that just as Heideggers’ *Sein zum Tode* entails the acceptance of mortality and finitude as the condition for our being human, so it is the acceptance of the fact that existence is a fathomless enigma without stable core that forms the condition for our dwelling. It is a dwelling while knowing that there is no foundation, no final explanatory cause, beyond the provisional foundations we create in daily life in order to survive. As Cacciari argued, the uprooted spirit of the metropolis is not ‘sterile’ but *productive* par excellence: it is in the *gaia scienza*, in the absence of a *heim* or an absolute belonging, that we produce dwellings.

In a historiographical sense, dwelling without a foundation means that there is no longer a hegemonic discourse, a privileged point of view according to which the contributions of many different architects can be brought together. Instead of the unity of a desirable modern strategy, there is the plurality of many histories as they penetrate, organize and re-organize, and finally disperse into the world. For Tafuri and his Venetian researchers this kind of *Realpolitik* – this disenchanted expectation – provided the answer to the normative, ‘operative’ criticism of a previous generation of architectural historians.\(^100\)

**ARCHITECTURE: A USEFUL CATEGORY OF ANALYSIS**

Our history might end here, with Tafuri’s introduction of a new canon. However, the historiographic rupture enforced by Tafuri was not thematic by nature: it did not imply shifting the attention from ‘modern’ to ‘non-modern’, nor exchanging one century for another. Instead of a change in historical content, Tafuri’s rupture entailed a fundamental change of attitude on the part of the historians themselves. In other words, it entailed a methodological change that implied the proposal of a new programme for architectural history.

---

\(^96\) Franco Rella, *Miti e Figure del Moderno*, Parma, 1981, p. 115.


As demonstrated in this book, Tafuri’s rupture with a previous historiographical tradition unfolded along two axes. Firstly, for Tafuri, the history of modern architecture was no longer conceivable as an aesthetic-normative account. Breaking with the notion of operative history thus meant leaving the liberal-humanist perspective on historical development – leaving history as ‘Bildung’. However, what makes this rupture so interesting is that it had its consequences for the narrative of architecture and for the representation of its historical development- and this is the second axis. The theoretical and in part philosophical questioning of the historiographical tradition was brought to its final conclusion by elaborating a different historical analysis and, above all, a different phrasing of the research question.

As demonstrated in this chapter, the Venetian researchers thus explored archives before writing their history of American architecture and they came to consider the importance of philological precision for architectural history. The history of architecture was no longer the representation of the ‘Good, True and Beautiful’, rather, beyond good and evil, architecture was primarily part of social reality. Instead of a ‘theology of history’ that envisioned the historical process as a series of progressive stages leading to the final truth about history, for Tafuri ‘plurality’ and ‘complexity’ became key words to describe the social presence of architecture. For Tafuri the architectural historian was no longer a guide. Instead, he envisioned architectural history as being one of many specializations studying the past: architectural history was now positioned alongside cultural history, the history of religion, political history and so on. Instead of being a guiding light, architectural history became a useful category of historical analysis.

The study of architecture as a socio-historical artefact, as a complex presence in a political, cultural and economic setting, required a more complex notion of time than the ‘linear histories’ used by previous historians. While rejecting a triumphalist conception of history and its concomitant notion of progress, the Venetian historians discovered Walter Benjamin’s essay *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (1940). In this essay Benjamin described progressive history as the ‘time of the clock’, as an empty space that was filled in a mechanical way with an accumulation of data. Benjamin contrasted this homogeneous and indifferent notion of time with the ‘time of the calendar’, which differentiates between more and less important moments and points at discontinuities, at moments in which the flow of time is stopped to give way to an event that for us is of special value.  

Focusing on the discontinuities of history was essential for Tafuri in the development of a non-narrative, problem-oriented history. These discontinuities could also be found in the different tempi used by Ferdinand Braudel in his key publication *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II* (1949). To study the complexities of the past, a variety of sources had to be consulted that surpassed all traditional disciplinary

---

boundaries. As Braudel demonstrated, geography placed alongside human history and economic theory could be used in combination with psychological and sociological analysis. Together with the different tempi of history, these sources constituted the refined set of instruments required by the historian in order to define, in each historical episode, the problem or *das Fragwürdige*.

The French *nouvelle* histoire became exemplary for a ‘nouvelle architectural history’. For example, Tafuri’s colleague Donatella Calabi took Braudel’s *Les jeux de l’echange* (1979) as the point of departure for a history of European ports. In the book *Il Mercato e la città; piazze, strade, architettura d’Europa in età moderna* (1993), Calabi explained the successive hegemonic positions of Venice, Antwerp, Genoa, Seville and Amsterdam in terms of their place in a global system of commerce and trade.\(^{102}\) She adopted Braudel’s notion that the market economy was not suddenly introduced into the modern world but that, instead, a slow transition from one system to another had taken place. Urban history could now be depicted as a gradual replacement of what Walter Christaller had described as the medieval *central place theory* by the modernity of Immanuel Wallerstein’s *world system theory*. As Wallerstein claimed, the fate of the cities was now decided by their place in a network of commerce and commercial traffic and by an intricate logic of the centre and the periphery. Calabi’s ‘mercato’ (market) pointed to both the material reality of a city and to the socio-political mechanisms that underlay its appearance.

Emphasizing the social significance of architecture also cleared the way towards that other French innovator who was hard to overlook for a historian working in the 1970s: Michel Foucault. Tafuri and his collaborators came to regard architecture and the built environment as part of a system of power, as instruments in the exercise of that power. Architecture now became a *technique of power*, a mechanism of control and manipulation. While trying to draw the consequences of Foucault’s insights for architecture, Tafuri’s collaborator Georges Teyssot formulated a sub-programme within Tafuri’s main research programme, together with other Venetian researchers such as Renzo Dubbini, who studied prison architecture, and Donatella Calabi who studied domestic architecture in Great Britain and France in the nineteenth century.

The challenge was to derive the instruments for a historical and non-linear approach to the history of architecture and urbanism from the study of Foucault. As the philosopher Franco Rella wrote on the occasion of a seminar dedicated to Foucault: ‘Foucault has once and for all broken with a linear conception of history and has forced us to confront those complex formations that can not be analysed in terms of progress, but only in terms of conflict and the entanglement of relations of power.’\(^{103}\) It was within this context that Teyssot became interested in the concept of the heterotopia. He was fascinated by the

---


La nuova dimensione di Foucault si apre con "Sorvegliare e punire": La figura disciplinare (cinemopedagogica o filosofica) 

termina in una nuova concezione del potere.

"Il potere "produce" produce il reale. Le discipline che è nata in modo sorta "naturalmente" diviene una forma di governo tecnica in senso etimologico.

La produzione non deriva da un legame del potere. Non è in sua costruzione transcontinentale del potere o legge alla quale soggetti umani sarebbero naturalmente coesistono e regolati.

Il potere produce veramente come esistere attorno all'interno di una moltitudine di altri organismi, nozioni, fondamenti. Il potere è un movimento libero, diretto, compito disciplinare in cui si è 

diverso in modo "radicale", congetture, reazioni transcontinentali. Non vi è un "potere" come lenzuola del potere non è riducibile, ma logico, localizzato.

Le leggi, fondamentali, chiaramente localizzate e chiamata "proprietà" di determinati classi, informazioni, nella concezione dialettica dell'intero sistema, nella moltitudine degli esseri individuali. Questo, moltitudine libera, sono soltanto come opere costruite all'uno.

Vic una critica della sintesi dialettica poiché di questa sintesi è stata una critica che ha seguito storicamente tutta una storia di sviluppo e dello stato contemporaneo.

Nel termini che ho usato alternative: "in determinato" e complessi, vi è una critica che lo sviluppo e
case study elaborated by the French historian Jean-Claude Perrot, who discovered that between 1740 and 1750 the ‘sanitarian organization’ of the city of Caen in Normandy had been executed according to a certain logic. A grid-like pattern could be found, Perrot claimed, dividing institutions such as hospitals, prisons and charitable organizations according to a logic that suggested variations from total imprisonment to semi-confinement, from being locked away as a criminal to the sheltering of the ‘unruly’ – orphans, the elderly, or the insane, for example.

For Teyssot, Caen was important because it constituted what Foucault called a heterotopia. As Teyssot emphasizes, the case of Caen does not correspond to modern regimes of confinement: a gap exists between Caen’s ‘sanitarian organization’ and assistance practices as we know them today. A discontinuity lies at the basis of the heterotopia, however, this does not only exist in a historical perspective. Already in its own time, Caen constituted an exception, a strange anomaly among other cities, so to speak. The example of Caen was discontinuous both in terms of geography, compared to other cities, and in terms of chronology, in the progressive development of the modern hospital. As Teyssot confirms, these discontinuities demonstrate once more that the history of the hospital cannot be described as a smooth progression from one stage to another – from its mythical birth to its equally mythical final stage.

The example of the city of Caen, as a concrete heterotopia, can be seen as an example of what Heidegger calls a Holzwege: the discontinuous tracks in the forest that do not lead to a particular goal, but that stop as abruptly as they start. History is discontinuity, and Teyssot and other researchers at Tafuri’s department now concentrated on the functioning of a so-called ‘dominant urban strategy’ as it fragments and penetrates into every aspect of urban life. An urban strategy defines our way of dwelling, working and the collective facilities at our disposal: in sum, it defines our life in the city. While this is the reality of a ‘powerful space’, its counterpart of opposition and reaction should also not be overlooked: ‘Yet because of the programmes’ excess of logic and theoretical absoluteness, they inevitably meet with resistance. In fact, the people who they are applied to, who are too often regarded as malleable masses to be educated, slum-cleared

---

104 See M. Cacciari, F. Rella, M. Tafuri, G. Teyssot, *Il dispositivo Foucault*, Venezia, 1977, Introduction by Franco Rella, p. 17: ‘Foucault ha rotto definitivamente con una concezione lineare della storia e ci ha costretto a misurarci con delle formazioni complessi analizzabili non in termini di progressi, ma di scontro e intreccio di relazioni di potere.’ Besides such thinkers as Freud and Nietzsche, Foucault was another intellectual discussed in the seminars and courses of the historical department. The Venetian architectural historians did not simply adopt Foucault’s view; their ambition was to enter into a critical dialogue with him. For people such as Rella and Cacciari, Foucault did not answer the question concerning the transformation of societal ‘institutions’ in a satisfactory way, and as regards its ‘languages’, such as those of the hospital, sexuality or the episteme, Foucault’s thinking was still too static for them.
and put in order, appear positively intractable in face of them.108

Discontinuity is now the plane of fracture between the success of a strategy and those places where its exercise of power fails. This plane of fracture forms a crisis, a clash, which however, is a necessary ingredient in the complexity of urban space, in its mosaic, consisting of active and counter-active forces. Urban reality is now an infinite complex of strategies with different interests, of successful and failed attempts, of inarticulate, subversive and even unconscious tendencies, but also of ‘normal’, explicit influences.

More than forty years after Pevsner’s Pioneers of the Modern Movement, the field of historiography under Tafuri resembled Heidegger’s Holzwege. Instead of the exchange of master narratives resulting in another triumphalist history of modernity, Tafuri’s programme was based on the recognition that history consists of the complex, labyrinthine structure of Heidegger’s Holzwege – the constellation of small trails in the forest that lead nowhere. This form of architectural history was Tafuri’s answer to the unified and teleological histories that gave rise to the Modern Movement.

107 Ibid., p. 25.
108 This is how Heidegger described the Holzwege: ‘In the wood there are paths, mostly overgrown, that come to an abrupt stop where the wood is untrodden. They are called Holzwege. Each goes its separate way, though within the same forest. It often appears as if one is identical to the other. But it only appears so. Woodcutters and forest keepers know these paths. They know what it means to be on a Holzweg.’ Martin Heidegger, Off The Beaten Track, J. Young, K. Haynes (ed.,), Cambridge, 2002 (originally published as Holzwege 1950).