

EARLY YEARS. MANFREDO TAFURI AND REM KOOLHAAS'S FIRST REFLECTIONS ON THE METROPOLIS

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Abstract

The end of World War II and the cultural transformations of the 1960s define a disenchanted age marked by the awareness that architecture cannot meet the challenges of that time after the younger members of the CIAM rejected the doctrine of the Athens Charter.

This sense of 'crisis', also shared by other disciplines beyond architecture, is not new; it integrates modernity as a critical trend of resistance. However, the pessimism associated with the revelation of the Holocaust and the advent of the nuclear threat accelerates the criticism of the rationalist approaches of the Modern Movement that dominated the previous decades.

In these years, which in retrospect define the interregnum between modernism and postmodernism, it is urgent to rethink the theoretical foundations of modernity, seeking a more effective political, social and economic project capable of recovering the potential for the emancipation of humanity. In this context, it is argued that the discipline of architecture has to be reformulated from its base.

It is in this revisionist milieu that Manfredo Tafuri and Rem Koolhaas begin to act. Tafuri will resort to Adorno and Horkheimer's 'negative dialectics' to diagnose the 'crisis' of contemporary architecture and begin a critical reading of the ideological foundations of the discipline since the Enlightenment. Koolhaas, in the midst of the aftermath of the 1968 riots, finds in the city of New York the seeds of a new culture that promises to overcome the 'crisis' by using a 'superlative modernity' and is, therefore, more true in his view.

*Based on readings of Manfredo Tafuri's *Progetto e Utopia* and Rem Koolhaas's *Delirious New York*, this paper provides a comparative perspective of the thinking of two of the most influential authors of our time in the early years of their affirmation in the context of contemporary architectural culture.*

Keywords: Tafuri, Koolhaas, Metropolis, Modernity, Postmodernism

The 1960s are marked by protest movements in United States and European universities, most notably Berlin, Frankfurt, Milan, as well as the events of the Prague Spring and the May revolt in Paris. The new generations protest against the Cold War, the Vietnam War, colonial and imperial power, class, race and gender inequalities in a climate of nonconformity that extends to all areas of culture. In the United States, the hippie movement appeals to open communities without repression. In Europe, the critique of culture, known as 'new left', is structured from the theoretical works of authors related to the Frankfurt School: Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, among others.

In the disciplinary field of architecture and urbanism, protest and political action seek to dismantle the repressive character of architecture, denouncing relations of power with capitalism. Groups of architects and designers, trained in Italy and England, recover the critical spirit of the historical vanguards and scrutinize a discipline depleted by the heritage of Functionalism, laying the foundations of postmodernism of the 1970s and 1980s.

Manfredo Tafuri (1935-1994) and Rem Koolhaas (born 1944) live in different ways these times. In Amsterdam, Koolhaas begins a career as a journalist in 1963, working for the weekly *De Haagse Post* and studies film at the *Nederlandse Film en Televisie Academie*. Covering the excesses of the European counterculture of the 1960s leads him to write about cinema, literature, music, politics, sport, sexuality, art and architecture, about which he is increasingly interested. In 1968, he follows the protests and repression of students in Paris and Prague and moves to London, where he joins the Architectural Association of Architecture (AA), dominated, as he claims, by anti-conformism and counterculture movements like Flower Power. The events of May 1968 and the contact with the radical experiences of the neo-avant-gardes, observed with distance and realism, influence his career in architecture, which begins in the following decade, coinciding with the affirmation of postmodernism.

After receiving his degree in architecture from the University of Rome in 1960, Tafuri works in architectural and urban planning projects. Although this activity is in tune with his political action, the discipline of architectural history attracts

him ever more. In 1964, he begins a university career which in the following years affirms him as an academic in the fields of history and criticism. He starts to question the role of history in the 'crisis' of post-war architecture and warns against the dangers of an 'operative' use of history, defending historical discourse as a critical instrument. He radicalizes the Marxist dimension of his thinking and approaches personalities like Antonio (Toni) Negri and Mario Tronti. At the end of the decade, he delves into the problems that dominate the discourses of his contemporaries and deepens his reflections related to rationalism and the Enlightenment. Under the influence of Walter Benjamin and his 'tragic' vision of modernity, he deepens the critique of modernism, denouncing and clarifying the contours of the complicity of modern architecture with capitalism. He is concerned with the 'fate' of architecture in Italy and in Europe which, in his view, 'walks in the direction of emptiness,' alternating between the 'empty form' and the 'emptiness of form.'

These reflections are gathered in *Teorie e storia dell'architettura*, published in 1968, in the year of the protests that shook universities and cities around the world. The immediate recognition of this work allows his appointment as a professor at the IUAV in Venice, where he founded the *Istituto di Storia dell'Architettura* (ISA), dedicated to historical research, whose early years are marked by great ideological debates. In that year, Tafuri meets Massimo Cacciari, with whom he creates a deep friendship and takes the direction of the magazine *Contropiano: Materiali marxisti* (1968-1972). Published in Rome, it focuses on the reflection of the historical contradictions of the birth and development of capitalism, in line with the notion of 'negative dialectics' developed by the Frankfurt School.

Tafuri's essays published in *Contropiano*, in particular the analyses of the historical vanguards, are decisive for the changes that, at the end of the decade, alter the methods and practices of architecture historiography. This exerts a profound influence on the debates that, in the following years, unfold in both Europe and the United States, and in which Koolhaas has an active voice.

His four essays published between 1969 and 1971 - *Per una critica dell'ideologia architettonica* (1969); *Lavoro intellettuale e sviluppo capitalistico* (1970); *Social-democrazia e città nella Repubblica di Weimer* (1971); *Austromarxismo e città. "Das rote Wien"* (1971) - depart, both in form and content, from *Teorie e storia*, introducing an original syncretism that crosses political, historiographical and architectural ideologies, extending the historical analysis to the systems of thought. Its focus becomes the theory of contemporary architecture, understood now as an ideological system built on a false historical consciousness.

The first two articles give rise to the book *Progetto e utopia. Architettura e sviluppo capitalistico* (Bari, Laterza), which arrives in bookstores in 1973 and is an immediate bestseller, determining the ideological and editorial agenda of the ISA, which at that moment begins to assert itself in the field of historical research. Tafuri and the group of historians and theorists who meet at ISA are now designated as the 'Venice School', claiming to be a Think Tank dedicated to the publication of critical-historical research. The most publicized result of his collaboration is the study *La Città americana dalla Guerra civile al New Deal* (Bari, Laterza, 1973), a work dedicated to the North American city. This work marks not only the beginning of the Venice-New York axis,¹ which in the following years makes an impression on the cultural exchanges between America and Europe, but above all the 'improbable' meeting of Tafuri and Koolhaas in the same territory. This meeting is symbolized by a passage from Nietzsche's *Aurora*, cited by both authors, in which New York is presented as an allegory of Venice of modern times and an image for the future:

But, in truth, New York is - at least from the 1890s onward - an allegory of the Venice of modern times. It may prove useful to recall the words of Nietzsche: 'One hundred profound solitudes form the whole of the city of Venice - this is its spell. An image for the man of the future'. (Tafuri, 1984, p. 291)

¹ Peter Eisenman sponsored the Venice-New York axis through the Institute for Architectural and Urban Studies (IAUS), one of the most important centres of American architectural culture created by him in 1967 in New York.

A hundred profound solitudes together constitute the city of Venice; that is its charm. A model for the men of the future. (Nietzsche in Koolhaas, 1994, p. 120) (...) Each skyscraper [of Manhattan] is an island of the 'very modernized Venice' - a system of 2028 solitudes. (p. 125)

The New Domestic Landscape

Koolhaas lives in fascination with the mythical power of New York and Manhattan. In the autumn of 1972, after completing *Exodus, or the voluntary prisoners of architecture*, his end-of-course thesis in AA, he moves to the United States and joins Cornell University in Ithaca to pursue his studies. There, he meets Oswald Mathias Ungers and Colin Rowe, professors who reject the 'traumatic authoritarianism' of modern planning and who are among the first to assume postmodern positions. Rowe, close to the contextualist currents, develops a pragmatic and anti-doctrinal urban design method, based on the collage technique and aimed at reconciling modern architecture with the traditional city. His ideas are synthesized in *Collage City*, a book that, like *Delirious New York*, is published in 1978. While agreeing with Rowe's diagnosis and accepting criticism of postmodernism, Ungers investigates an alternative to *Collage City*, based on the concepts of 'Cities within the City' and 'Green-Archipelago', also rejecting Aldo Rossi's 'analogical city' and the reconstruction of the European city matrix proposed by Léon Krier (Gorelik, 2008, p. 23).

In the search for a truly metropolitan architecture Koolhaas adopts Ungers' conceptions in order to define the doctrine of Manhatanism. In studying the case of New York, he notes that the imposition of a grid in Manhattan has not determined a cohesive urban structure, as in so many European cities, but has made each building, each skyscraper, in its singularity, become a form of urbanism itself, a miniature of the city itself.

Although the intellectual exchanges between Ungers and Koolhaas have not yet been sufficiently scrutinized, the analyzes of Peter Eisenmann (2004), Adrián Gorelik (2008) and Pier Vittorio Aureli (2011) show how this relation is the origin

of one of the most relevant lines of research on the city in the 1970s. This affinity is mainly based on their interest in the development of an alternative city project, capable of going beyond the impasse of modernist urban planning and the 'incipient' postmodernist proposals (Aureli, 2011, p. 180) advanced in these years.

The issue, which underlies the subject of disciplinary autonomy, which becomes dominant in the context of postmodernism and 1970s America (against which Koolhaas and Tafuri react), is part of a comprehensive ongoing discussion in the United States about the qualities of the American metropolis, in particular of New York.

In this context, the exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape, Achievements and Problems of Italian Design*, dedicated to the 'radicals' of Italian architecture and design, was inaugurated at MoMA in May 1972. Koolhaas visits the exhibition, which brings together works of his choice from *Superstudio* and *Archizoom*.

The catalog of the exhibition contains two relevant texts. The first is Emilio Ambasz's² essay *Manhattan: Capital of the Twentieth Century*, in tune with Koolhaas's interests by emphasizing that 'Manhattan may reveal an unforeseen potential for conceiving of a quite different notion of city' (Ambasz, 1972, p. 147). The second, the 'powerful' and 'inconvenient' (Lang; Menking, 2003) *Design and Technological Utopia* (Tafuri, 1972, p. 388-404), is one of the first texts from Tafuri to be published in America.

Tafuri states that the orientation of the transdisciplinary image of the Superstudio project is an appeal to a 'Life Without Objects', a political critique of the practice of industrial design, since objects are status symbols, i.e. the expression of models proposed by the ruling classes. However, despite this apparent convergence with Superstudio's ideas, he disapproves of the neo-avant-garde strategies of Superstudio's and Archizoom's anti-utopias, by seeking

² Emilio Ambasz, curator of the exhibition and then director of the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS).

liberation through irony that regains the same ground covered by the utopias of the early vanguards [of the twentieth century]. (p. 398)

In his view, the images produced by these groups are a 'monstrous marriage' between populist anarchism and libertarian events influenced by May 1968, which attempt to drag the proletariat to the stage of psychedelic action. At the center of the vanguard, Tafuri concluded, we find regressive nostalgia for a return to childhood. (p.388)

The 'private leap into the sublimated universe of "artificial paradises" does not prove to be foreseeable.' 'Superstudio's anti-utopian regression is doomed to give birth to new utopias.' 'They appeal to a world "without cities, buildings or roads" but this is only an anti-utopian critique of modernism in the spirit of historical counter-utopias.' (p.394)

Tafuri retakes these criticisms in *Progetto e utopia*, relating the 'futile appeals to self-destruction' launched by the 'negative' design, with the contradictions of the structures of the contemporary metropolis:

In the exhibition 'Italy-New Domestic Landscape' (...) there is a proliferation of underground design, of 'contestation'. Which, however, unlike the films of a Warhol or a Pascali, is made institutional and propagandized by international organizations and integrated into an elite circuit. Through the design of the microenvironment, the blatant contradictions of metropolitan structures, sublimated and subjected to cathartic irony, enter into the environment of private life, the Archizoom's 'games', which are also skillful, (...) propose (albeit contrary to verbal statements to the contrary) a 'self-liberation' through the private use of the imagination. The symbols, still threatening, of an Oldenburg or Fahlström thus find use in a pacified Domestic Landscape (...). (Tafuri, 1985, p. 95-96)

But is there really something new about the proposals of the historical avant-gardes? Apart from the ideological attitude, the margins of novelty

are extremely small. With respect to the coherence of historical vanguards there is, quite simply, anything less (p. 100).

Faced with these criticisms, members of Superstudio react with distance and reservation. The awareness that they are in a different ideological field leads Piero Frassinelli to exclaim 'oh yes, the enemy!' After, on one occasion, hearing the name of Tafuri (Lang; Menking, 2003, p. 56).

In addition to the Pop culture of the avant-garde of Italian design, Tafuri also refuses the surrealistic techniques with which Koolhaas begins to prepare the writing of *Delirious New York*, developing a series of theoretical works in collaboration with Elia Zenghelis, his professor in AA, and his wife Madelon Vriesendorp, with whom he had begun to analyze the metropolitan culture of New York. For the Italian historian, both are examples of the 'withdrawal of the object for itself,' symptoms of the 'crisis of the object' diagnosed by Walter Benjamin. (Tafuri, 1972, p. 388)

The City of the Captive Globe

The projects *The City of the Captive Globe* (1972), *The Egg of Columbus* (1973), *Hotel Sphinx* (1975-1976), *Welfare Palace Hotel* (1976) and *The Story of the Pool* (1977), presented as a 'fictional' conclusion in the last chapter of *Delirious New York*, are the first examples of a truly metropolitan architecture developed from the study of Manhattan's urbanism. From this group stand out *The City of The Captive Globe*, the first and decisive incursion into the 'essence of Manhattan', an anticipation of *Manhattanism* and of the *Culture of Congestion*. This project, influenced by Surrealist and Pop strategies, like *Exodus*, is rejected by Tafuri, who associates it with the 'regressive fugues' of the neovanguards of the late 1960s and early 1970s. (Tafuri, 1984, p. 445, 533)

However, this work would not be possible without the investigation of the relationship between architecture and ideology initiated by Tafuri. In fact, by exploring the tension between the generic city, the product of the use of a modular grid, and the extreme specificity of the structures that occupy the lots

defined by that grid, Koolhaas reiterates Tafuri's conclusions regarding the processes of development of the bourgeois metropolis.

In the essay *Per una critica dell'ideologia architettonica*, published in *Contropiano*, the Italian historian already points out how, in the processes of development of the bourgeois metropolis, the 'awareness of the indissoluble dialectic between uniformity and diversity is transmuted into a tension between exception and rule' (Tafuri, 2000, cf. 1985, p. 57-58) and how chaos and order were sanctioned by the historical vanguards as the 'values' of the new capitalist city (Tafuri, 2000, cf. 1985, p. 66). In this sense, *The City of the Captive Globe* is no more than a metaphor for the plurality and heterogeneity of the liberal city.

La montagna disincantata

The 'discovery' of America by Tafuri and his ISA colleagues occurs in the late 1960s when they realize that the history of the American city 'was to be written,' and that it is urgent to fill that gap (Ciucci et al., 1973, p. IX). With this mission in mind they organize, during the academic year of 1969-70, a course focused on architecture and urbanism of the United States of America (p. XX-XXII). The course, taught in 1972-73, during the same period in which Koolhaas, Zenghelis and Vriesendorp developed the first works based in Manhattan, originated four long essays by Giorgio Ciucci, Francesco Dal Co, Mario Manieri Elia and Tafuri, collected in the book *La città americana dalla guerra civile al New Deal*, published in 1973.

The first three analyse the North American urban trends³, with emphasis on anti-urban positions that oppose the modern metropolis, and become current around 1900, whose history goes back to the naturalist ideologies that emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century (p. XX). The last chapter, by Tafuri,

³ Mario Manieri-Elia writes *Per una città 'imperiale'. Daniel H. Burnham and the City Beautiful movement* (For an 'imperial' city, Daniel H. Burnham and the City Beautiful Movement); Francesco Dal Co writes *Dai parchi alla regione. L'ideologia progressista e la riforma della città americana* (From the parks to the region, Progressive ideology and reform of the American city); Giorgio Ciucci writes *La città nell'ideologia agraria e Frank Lloyd Wright. Origini e sviluppo di Broadacre* (The city in agrarian ideology and Frank Lloyd Wright, origins and development of Broadacre).

entitled *La montagna disincantata. Il grattacielo e la City* addresses this phenomenon from the skyscraper and its privileged territory - the Manhattan of the 1920s and 30s.

With this essay and *Progetto e utopia*, published in the same year, Tafuri is 'suggestively' close to Koolhaas (Gorelik, 2008, p. 20). This happens not only because these works are published just as Koolhaas begins to investigate Manhattan's urbanism, but mainly because the critical itinerary established by Tafuri addresses the main themes that give shape to *Delirious New York* - the grid and, above all, the skyscraper.

Moreover, *La montagna disincantata* follows closely the itinerary of the book of Koolhaas, capturing - as Giorgio Ciucci writes in his introduction to *La città americana* - the 'city of disordered alphabets' in its historical development, in relation to which the skyscraper appears as an instrument of inadequate and contradictory formal control (Ciucci et al., 1973, p. XXI).

Tafuri portrays the skyscraper as an artificial or even anti-urban organism that attempts to dominate the 'artificial forest of the metropolis.' More than a contradictory attitude, it is a deeply desperate act. If the process of modernity has emptied architectural thought of all powers, any attempt to control anarchic and speculative forces in the context of the American metropolis is hopelessly doomed to failure.

In this sense, in trying to 'govern' the metropolitan space, architecture becomes the phantom of itself. It is as if an original sin has been atoned for, which is no more than its pretension to define the primary structures of the city only with its disciplinary instruments.

In Tafuri's view, this is one of the most coherent experiences of the 'crisis' established by modernity. Architecture is condemned to the 'dead silence of the sign' in this 'war' between architecture and metropolis. The skyscraper, when affirming itself as 'isolated and indifferent entity, on the edge of the city', reduces the exceptional typology to pure form, to pure sign, in a voluntary

mutism that witnesses the progressive annulment of the symbolic and communicative capacities of architecture.

OMA, Office for Metropolitan Architecture

In 1975, upon returning to Europe, Rem Koolhaas founds the *Office for Metropolitan Architecture* (OMA) in London, with the aim of continuing the work carried out in the early 1970s. He does so in tune with the trend towards the dissolution of the architectural object in the dimension of the metropolis, theorized by the radical groups of Italian architecture and design and by the members of the Venice School, especially Tafuri. He also returns to the AA - School of Architecture, as a visiting professor. Together with Zenghelis, he replaces León Krier in the direction of the *Diploma Unit 9*, the last year of studies in the architecture course. He starts a pedagogical program that, for more than a decade, will explore the density of population concentrations in the metropolis, reflecting the stated objectives of OMA. The 1974-1975 Academic Year Discipline Report explains the Culture of Congestion formula: 'a long-term worldview that runs counter to many of the precepts of contemporary history and criticism:'

The aim of Diploma Unit 9 has been to rediscover and develop a form of urbanism appropriate to the final part of the 20th century: new types of architectural scenarios that exploit the unique cultural possibilities of high densities and that will result in a critique and eventual rehabilitation of the Metropolitan lifestyle. Unit 9 is after an architecture that accommodates, provokes and supports the particular forms of social intercourse, which realize the full potential of urban density, an architecture that houses in the most positive way the 'Culture of Congestion' in formally sophisticated structures. (Gargiani, 2008, p. 48, 49)

While Koolhaas tests the Culture of Congestion, Krier proposes the recovery of the traditional urban morphology: 'Quarters or reconstruction of the European city' is the theme he develops with his students in Diploma Unit 2, based on

opposed principles (cities versus megalopolis) (Gargiani, p. 53). Thus, in the mid-1970s, there are two orientations relating to the theme of the city and the metropolis project, derived from the same critique of modernist urbanism, but proposing radically different solutions.

The choice of the New York skyscraper as a paradigm of the Culture of Congestion and the deepening of the creative process partly based on the Ungers' model of 'Cities within the City' and the radical proposals of *Superstudio* and *Archizoom*, confirms Koolhaas distance from the postmodernist critiques of CIAM urban planning.

In 1977, Koolhaas publishes in the magazine *Architectural Design* the essay *Life in the Metropolis or The Culture of Congestion* (*Architectural Design* 47, no. 5, August 1977) an exploratory summary of what becomes *Delirious New York's* 'retroactive manifesto,' announced just a few years earlier.

The intentionally controversial goal is to replace the CIAM doctrines with the playful, fantastic, and surreal qualities discovered in Manhattan. In addition to enunciating the founding principles of Manhattanism and the Culture of Congestion, *Life in the Metropolis* affirms Koolhaas's unique position in the context of the architectural culture of the late 1970s by reiterating his simultaneous detachment from post-functionalism and postmodernism.

Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan, edited in 1978, undoubtedly feeds on the topics of this essay, particularly the notion of Culture of Congestion, now assumed to be the fundamental value of contemporary architecture. The book makes Rem Koolhaas famous and immediately becomes the OMA's 'instruction manual', which opens a new headquarters in Rotterdam the same year. For the new generations of architects it is a book of 'worship', marking indelibly the architectural production of the next three decades.

Venice-New York

In the late 1970s, Tafuri's interest in America declines significantly. With the book *La sfera e il labirinto. Avanguardie e architettura da Piranesi agli anni '70* (Einaudi, 1980), published seven years after *La montagna disincantata*, he returns for the last time to the themes of the 1920s American city, in a darker, disenchanted tone, without hope.

In 1973, despite all the 'negativity' that marks his work, there is a certain enthusiasm for the American phenomenon, in tune with Koolhaas's research. In 1980 this fascination disappears. In the chapter *La Nuova Babilonia: il 'giganti giallo' e Il mito dell'americanismo*, his vision changes, not in the sense of a radicalization of the political dimension, but above all in emphasizing the 'negative' and 'un-American' character of the European proposals, with emphasis on Expressionists.

With *La Nuova Babilonia*, he stands at the opposite side of *Delirious New York*, whose reading, though never quoted, is detectable in certain passages of the book.

The entire metropolis calls for the ceaseless acceleration of movement, of velocity, of exchange. Within the metropolis, it must be made impossible 'to stop,' impossible to perceive the laws of its own productive order. Therefore, 'The New Babylon' must present itself as a variety theatre, through which eccentricity becomes an institution, a mode of collective behaviour. (Tafuri, 1984, p. 221)

In the 'New Venice' – an allegory of the human condition that echoes throughout *Le Ceneri di Jefferson*, the last chapter of *La Sfera e il labirinto*, and the culmination of the writing of Tafuri on America – 'it is necessary to wear a mask to save our own soul' (Tafuri, 1984, p. 232). The condensed energies in New York, 'signs' of a general malaise, are no more than a parable of this 'mutant form of human coexistence' which is, in the expression of Koolhaas, the Culture of Congestion.

In truth, New York is – at least from the 1890's onward – an allegory of the Venice of modern times. It may prove useful to recall the words of Nietzsche: 'One hundred profound solitudes form the whole of the city of Venice – this is its spell. An image for the man of the future.' It is not the history, not the images pregnant with meanings, not the peace of a refound 'community' – nor the slow decay of values – that constitute for Nietzsche the fascination of Venice. This resides instead in the prophecy that the city of lagoons launches to the future: the city as a system of solitudes, as a place wherein the loss of identity is made an institution, wherein the maximum formalism of its structures gives rise to a code of behaviour dominated by 'vanity' and 'comedy.' From such a viewpoint, New York is already a 'New Venice.' The fragments of the future contained in the *Serenissima* of Nietzsche have already exploded into metropolis of total indifference and therefore of the anguished consumption of multiplied signs. (Tafuri, 1984, 523)

In the same way, the last cycle of the American vanguard, which Tafuri repeatedly calls neo-avant-garde, reaches a dead end the bottom of its dissolution, of its objective weakness, of its estrangement from collective reality. Thus closing a process of fracture between the architectural production – increasingly developed as a private, solitary, and subjective act –, and the real world 'in which the facts are responsible for pointing out this detachment on a daily basis.'

In his view, there is no longer any hope of architecture influencing structures or relations of production (Tafuri, 1984, p. 525). The formalism that characterizes the vanguard production of these years is once again a futile effort to counter the fate of architecture as a 'negligible object,' evidence of 'a Worringerian fear of facing reality' (p. 534).

In order to remove this anguish, architecture surrenders itself to the 'exaltation of its own isolation', in a 'diffuse tendency to experiment with private languages, devoid of any function, paradoxically removed from the linguistic realm' (p.535).

The 'war is over' (p.535), and with its end emerges the 'fairy tale' of postmodernism:

Pirouetting on only one foot, the Post Modern tightrope walkers endeavour to play their game with a history whose meaning and limits they skilfully keep hidden from themselves. With respect to the tragedy experienced at Weimar, the multiplication of winks and high signs made by these manipulators of the imaginary appears as an attempt to make a text of impotence. (...) For them, the only preoccupation is to remain on the stage agitating themselves in an ever more grotesque manner, in an effort to entertain an audience in the pit both bored and in need of sedatives (Tafuri, 1980, p. 535).

Tafuri is extremely sarcastic in condemning postmodern architecture and its apologists (a term he rejected, preferring, instead, the term "hyper-modern", cf. *Storia dell'architettura italiana, 1944-1985*. Turin, 1986.), devaluing it as a reduction of architecture to fashion, a form of merchandising. This judgment is aimed at the work of the 'Whites' and the 'Grays', but also of the 'exiles' like Koolhaas, although he rarely refers to the work of the Dutch architect.

In the last pages of *La Sfera e il labirinto*, he leaves an epitaphic recommendation to all proponents of postmodernism: 'If we are resolved to eliminate anxiety then we would realize that history serves to dispel nostalgia, not inspire it' (Tafuri in Ackerman, 1995, p. 165). In the light of this conclusion, Joan Ockman writes:

It should not be surprising that the thematics of distancing, alienation, withdrawal, silence, and masquerade that figure so obsessively in Tafuri's reading of the American skyscraper, and also mark his interpretation of the compensatory evasions of the New York avant-gards, are the same as those that permeate his work as a whole. Like his reading of the European tradition, Tafuri's reading of American architecture is driven by a teleological view of history as a tragedy, by a global theory of the fate of the modern metropolis. Within this perspective, differences in context are variations on the theme. (Ockman, 1995, p. 63)

After *La Sfera e il labirinto* (and of *Storia dell'architettura italiana 1944-1985*), Tafuri closes his work on contemporaneity and returns to the hitherto less visible subjects of his research program, in particular to the studies on the early modern era. This return to the Renaissance is not, as he himself puts it, a 'hedonistic journey to the *piazze* and to the palaces of the past.' It is mainly linked to the judgment he makes of the present. The 'irrelevant', 'grotesque' or 'comic' character, which in his view marks much of contemporary architecture, encourages him to explore a period when architecture was an integral part of culture, his languages were public and vastly understood, capable of transmitting clear and complex messages simultaneously.

As Howard Burns states (1995, p. 117), his return to the Renaissance, a period of history in which he had many of his favorite interlocutors, is, above all, a research on 'what the present is not', and 'can no longer be'.

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