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WO PROJECTS:  
THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF  
MANFREDO TAFURI

ABSTRACT

Given his wide contributions as an historian, it seems easy to forget that Manfredo Tafuri (1935 - 1994) briefly worked as an architect in the first five years of the sixties. During this period Tafuri, then still a young intellectual, reconciled theory and practice, something that would later become unthinkable, until a series of political conflicts led him to renounce this project along with a whole historical framework. Far from being an auxiliary practice in his studies, the designing of projects was for the young Tafuri both a political front for transformation and a decantation chamber for his studies in history and philosophy, where many still-developing historiographical premises were put to test. We begin with his first publications as a student in Rome, 1960, and move toward *Theories and History of Architecture*, 1968, where the author breaks off from the idea of an architect-historian. This article intends to better understand the theoretical transformations that take place in Tafuri's works in the 1960s, trying to reveal a movement between two political poles and two interpretations regarding the uses of history in architecture, revisiting research and drawings from the young Tafuri and finding echoes of these in his later work.

KEYWORDS

Modern architecture. History of architecture. Theory of architecture. Tafuri, Manfredo, 1935-1994. Italian architecture.

## DOS PROYETOS: LOS AÑOS DE FORMACIÓN DE MANFREDO TAFURI

### RESUMEN

Ante su extensa contribución como historiador, es fácil olvidar que Manfredo Tafuri (1935-1994) tuvo una breve actividad como arquitecto, en el primer quinquenio de los años 60. Durante ese período, el entonces joven intelectual, haciendo algo que posteriormente vendría a ser impensable, concilió teoría y práctica, hasta que una sucesión de conflictos políticos lo llevó a la renuncia, no solo del proyecto, sino de una primera armazón histórica. Lejos de haber sido una actividad auxiliar en sus estudios, la práctica proyectual fue, para el joven Tafuri, un frente político de transformación, cámara de decantación de sus estudios de historia y filosofía, en la que se probaban distintas hipótesis de sus premisas historiográficas aún en constitución. Se parte de sus primeras publicaciones, como estudiante en Roma, en 1960, hasta el libro *Teorías e Historia de la Arquitectura*, de 1968, en lo que el autor rompe definitivamente con la noción de arquitecto historiador. Con este artículo se pretende captar la transformación teórica por la que pasa la obra del autor en los años 60, buscando revelar un movimiento entre dos proyectos políticos y dos interpretaciones de los usos de la historia en la arquitectura, en revisita a los diseños e investigaciones iniciales de la carrera de Tafuri, y cómo ellos resonaron en su trayectoria posterior.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Arquitectura moderna. Historia de la arquitectura. Teoría de la arquitectura. Tafuri, Manfredo 1935-1994. Arquitectura italiana.

## DOIS PROJETOS: OS ANOS DE FORMAÇÃO DE MANFREDO TAFURI

### RESUMO

Diante de sua ampla contribuição como historiador, é fácil esquecer que Manfredo Tafuri (1935-1994) teve uma breve atividade como arquiteto no primeiro quinquênio dos anos 60. Durante o período, o então jovem intelectual conciliou teoria e prática, algo impensável posteriormente, até que uma sucessão de conflitos políticos o levou à renúncia, não só do projeto, mas de um primeiro arcabouço histórico. Longe de ter sido uma atividade auxiliar em seus estudos, a prática projetual foi para o jovem Tafuri uma frente política de transformação, câmara de decantação de seus estudos de história e filosofia, no qual testavam-se diversas hipóteses de suas premissas historiográficas ainda em constituição. Parte-se de suas primeiras publicações como estudante em Roma, em 1960, até o livro *Teorias e História da Arquitetura*, de 1968, em que o autor rompe definitivamente com a noção de arquiteto historiador. Objetiva-se com este artigo captar a transformação teórica pela qual passa a obra do autor nos anos 60, procurando revelar um movimento entre dois projetos políticos e duas interpretações dos usos da história na arquitetura, revisitando os desenhos e pesquisas iniciais da carreira de Tafuri, e como eles ecoaram em sua trajetória posterior.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Arquitetura moderna. História da arquitetura. Teoria da arquitetura. Tafuri, Manfredo, 1935-1994. Arquitetura italiana.

In the sixties, Tafuri established himself as an intellectual. Toward the beginning of the decade, the roman author was still an undergraduate, inside the political debates that were growing in Italian universities, while also beginning to make himself known within architectural circles, having contributed to such publications as *Casabella* and *L'Architettura*. By the end of the decade he was well established, *professor ordinarius* in Venice, collecting admirers and detractors due to his book *Theories and History of Architecture* (1968), meanwhile immersing himself more and more with venetian left-wing intellectuals, culminating in the article "Towards a Critique Of Architectural Ideology" (1969), that would define the terms of his trajectory as an historian.

The choice to become an historian of architecture can be seen as a particular biographical moment, of lesser importance to the study of Tafuri's work. However, this choice is important because around it appear seminal themes that will from then on accompany Tafuri, besides the fact that many architects and movements persistently cited in his texts were equally important to his professional output. Le Corbusier, Louis Kahn, Ludovico Quaroni, among others, appear as reference-points in this short experience as a practicing architect as well as in the long road ahead as an historian.

Furthermore, the character of Tafuri's ruptures with the sixties appear as a provocation toward better understanding his theories from the time when he was still bent over the drawing-board. Books that would later be disavowed, such as *The Architecture of Mannerism in the European Cinquecento* (1966) and *Modern Architecture In Japan* (1962) demonstrate how years of practice appear as tabus in the author's construction of himself in the following years. "I left [the field of architecture] behind in 1962, a long story,"<sup>1</sup> said Tafuri in 1976, in an interview with Françoise Very.

Regardless of this statement, in the following years it would still have been possible to see Tarufi's name in the credits of the office founded with his colleagues in Rome, "Studio AUA", signing directional centers and other programs. Near the end of his life, in 1993, the historian created another version of his decision, dated 1964.

*One tragic night I was miserable because I had to decide between practice and history. I remember I was sweating, walking around, fell ill, had a fever, At the end, in the morning, I had decided, and that was it! I gave up all the tools of architecture and determined to dedicate myself entirely to history. What kind of history I didn't know, but I knew at that moment that it should be history.*<sup>2</sup>

A long night, lasting almost a decade. In this last statement, it seems interesting how the author confesses the *esprit* of the times, according to which his decision were made with more force and less clarity. In saying that he did not know which history he would practice, Tafuri reminds us of the intellectual setting of the time, in which all issues would revolve around a historical reformulation of the Italian peninsula, that had just seen graduate the generation that had spent its childhood suspended in the war and saw itself, suddenly, living in an economic miracle. Tafuri was one more in this period, engaged with various initiatives under way in his native city of Rome. Vieri Quillici, a colleague of Tafuri's around this period, spoke of the euphoria of this period, during which "there was a great fermenting".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Manfredo Tafuri interviewed by Françoise Very. "I mercati della cultura", In: *Casabella*, n. 619, 620, 1995, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Manfredo Tafuri interviewed by Luisa Passerini, "History as Project: An Interview with Manfredo Tafuri", In: *ANY: Being Manfredo Tafuri*, n. 25 and 26, 2000, pp. 30 e ss.

<sup>3</sup> Vieri Quillici interviewed by Frederico Rosa In: ROSA, Federico. *Progetto e critica dell'urbanistica moderna: I primi anni di attività di Manfredo Tafuri*. Venezia: IUAV, Tesi di laurea, 2003, p. 341.

It is safe to say that Tafuri lived these times with this effort in mind. Following the years of reconstruction, he gives himself to a number of activities, practicing sculpture, painting, and making contact with the first translations of foreign writers such as Camus, Sartre and Heidegger, while diving in the theses of his countrymen, such as Croce, Paci and other philosophers. Architecture then was another one of his investigations, with which he first came into contact through Bruno Zevi's *History of Modern Architecture*, which, together with the writings of Giulio Carlo Argan, began to guide the author toward this subject.<sup>4</sup>

The question we wish to answer is not so much that of how architecture came to be Tafuri's central interest (and how this interest became an historical offshoot) since this question was put to rest by the author's activities as historian in the following years of the sixties. The main question is: how did Tafuri's formative years, those in which he reconciled his activities as architect, scholar, historian and politician, cast themes that would "haunt" his mature years?

<sup>4</sup>"History as Project", *Op. cit.* p. 29.

<sup>5</sup>"Associazione studenti e architetti", In. *L'Architettura cronache e storia*, n. 45, 1959, p. 211.

<sup>6</sup>In this sense, Tafuri and his colleagues situated themselves within an Italian current opposed to the immediate discussion between historical continuity and architectural vocabulary, heralded by other architects from the peninsula, as Ernesto Nathan Rogers; Gabetti & d'Isola sustained in the well known controversy between the British and Italian regarding the overlapping of history and architecture.

In 1959, toward the end of the 45th edition of *L'Architettura*, a founding manifesto was published for the "Association of students and architects of Rome", signed by a number of students – including Tafuri – from the Valle Giulia architecture school in the Italian capital. The main intention behind the document was to make clear the wish to "reconnect, in historical terms, to the moral, social and cultural premises that inform the Modern Movement", described in the preceding lines as being responsible for making architectural culture evolve "for more than half a century", "in an effort to adhere to the demands of the modern man in his society"<sup>5</sup>.

There was widespread dissatisfaction of the young students of the college toward their professors, who appear in statements of students as well as Tafuri's as still tied to fascist ideas. A year later the Association stroke a direct attack at the professor that most represented the fascist scenario at the college: Saverio Muratori. Muratori worked along with many names in architecture at the time, promoting modernist housing projects for the "INA Casa" initiative. In his composition course, however, he advised his students to build churches with roofs, markets with cornices and oculae. The pages of *L'Architettura* were illustrated by students, compiled and exhibited at the college with Tafuri and Giorgio Piccinato as "curators". The publication created space for the students, whose generalized apprehension revolved around the lack of "historical adherence" and the anachronic character of the professor's proposals.

Modernist principles were, to these young students, the necessary remedy for inserting architecture within the debates of the time and restoring a social motivation to their profession: there was the strong belief that the recovery of modern architecture could unify pragmatic and historical agendas against the stagnant state of projects in the peninsula. Tafuri came into architecture from this context, as a development from his activities in the student movement, when many members of the Association came together to create "Studio AUA".<sup>6</sup>

The office was more than a simple business project, it was a political apparatus through which so-called unitary action would be formulated. The collective

was established at a time when Italian architects were less restrained with the inheritance of Italian rationalism and had to face new problems, such as rapid post-war urban growth.

There was a will to bring into Italian context large international experiences, like the commercial centers in downtown Philadelphia, by Louis Kahn, Kenzo Tange's megastructures in Tokyo and, to an extent, the technological phantasies of the british *Archigram*. The amplification of the scale of intervention, support found in cutting-edge technology, the so-called megastructures were the common ground that according to Tafuri in 1966, inaugurated a "new utopian internationale."<sup>7</sup>

*"Utopia takes its footing in situations of crisis or of linguistic transition, as the tight effort in the search clearly directed toward burning stages in the difficult path of creating a new language."*<sup>8</sup> In this way, depending upon a concern with the present. These interventions act as statements, collaborating to the establishment of new guidelines for planning large cities.

According to Tafuri, these urban planning designs find support in the concepts of flexibility and mobility: they are not closed solutions for admitting, in a strict sense, the inhabitants of the city. They consider a growth that surpasses the demand they had initially foreseen. In Tange's projects schemes of linear growth for his modules are presented in "quinquennial" periods. The primary structures to which housing units would be connected in *Plug-in City* by the british *Archigram* are ways of making viable, through building, a direct forecast of efficient and rational ways of containing new population in these new cities.

To the downtown-outskirt binome follows a relationship in which larger scale would be involved: nearby cities and the entire region and location must be considered. High-speed routes, blocks, neighborhoods, historical center, mountains and rivers: all of these would have their uses recreated against the absorption of city growth by the new structures, to a point where Carlo Aymonino separates the recent past from the rest of the history of Italian cities:

*Not to ignore the experience that was accumulated through almost two centuries in the capitalist city might mean this: accepting the rupture of urban form as physically recognizable while accomplished within a constant and unitary design (the perimeters the of castle walls, the enormous volume of the Duomo, the town-hall tower, etc.) to elaborate and identification of urban form of a different kind, as organized around a distinct hierarchy of the destined uses of cities and territory.*<sup>9</sup>

The "Studio AUA" entered these questions by articulating proposals of "directional centers" with the modernist-inspired vocabulary characteristic of Tange, Kahn and Le Corbusier. The office achieved some success by winning, right in its first years, a contest for the cultural, commercial and recreational center in Fano, and an honorable mention for the directional center in Torino (fig. 01).

Tafuri, in this team, was occupied with theory, as stated by Quilici, who says "his contribution was more general, involving critical control of the process of decisions"<sup>10</sup>. Giorgio Piccinato, another member of the Studio, also speaks of this role, as "the draftsmen [of the studio] were others, he, in his own right,

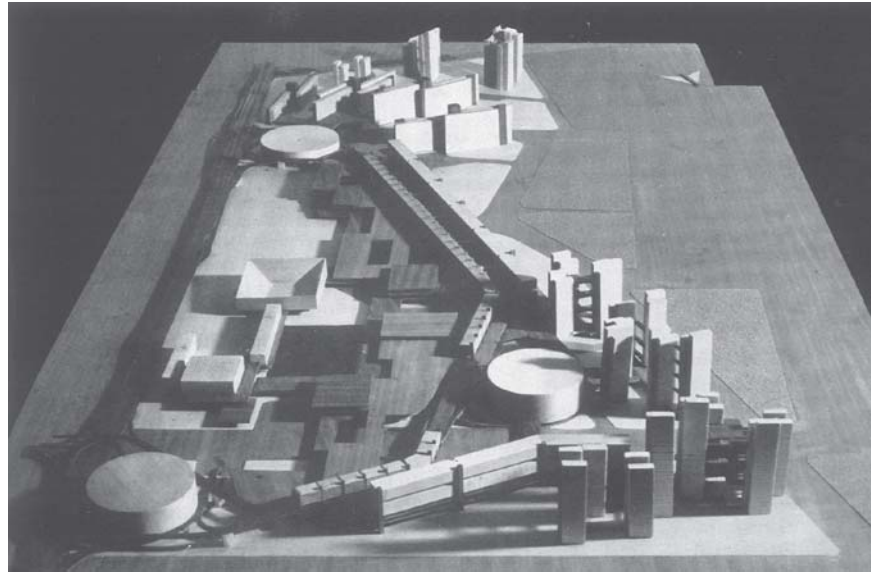
<sup>7</sup> TAFURI, Manfredo. "La nuova dimensione urbana e la funzione dell'utopia", In: *L'Architettura cronache e storia*, vol. 124, 1966, p. 680.

<sup>8</sup> *Idem*, p. 680.

<sup>9</sup> AYMONINO, Carlo. *Origini e sviluppo della città moderna*. Spanish translation: *Orígenes y desarrollo de la ciudad moderna*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1972. p. 89.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Vieri Quilici. Op. cit. p. 347

Fig. 01: Studio AUA, Torino directiona center, 1963. In. *Casabella*, n. 279, 1963.



<sup>11</sup> Statement of Giorgio Piccinato to the author on the 16h of November, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>13</sup> TAFURI, Manfredo. "Il problema dei centri storici all'interno della nuova dimensione cittadina", In. *Città territorio*, Bari: Leonardo da Vinci, 1963. p. 682. The italics are Tafuri's own.

*theorized over what was being said.*<sup>11</sup> Piccinato clearly states Tafuri's peculiar position in the Studio, as a figure whose presence in the collective was tensioned with his private career. "*Manfredo rapidly took an individual path. We would write as a collective, he quickly began to personalize his writing.*"<sup>12</sup>

Even when taking part in publications regarding cities-territory, Tafuri draws individual arguments, less similar to those by other architects of the period. The roman author finds in the history of the avant-garde support for his in-studio practice and by other architects in deepening the rupture through conciliation. Tafuri ponders the affinities of these architects to the urban projects of Bruno Taut, his garden-cities articulated in communication networks: "spatial models" that would be expandable by the city. He considers also the english *New Towns* and other procedures that depend upon the founding of small cities around the capitals.

A negative point, pertaining to all these projects, according to Tafuri is the abandoning of the "procedure of urban phenomenology", where the patina of time would mold the city on every one of its scales. In these interventions there is an "apropriistic" articulation rather than a direct intervention on the existing fabric. Therefore, as a juxtaposition of interventions, we find in its essence a cision between past and future already in place.

*Total exorcism of urban mobility and its prevision through controversial directional structures, decidedly archaic, in the confrontations arising from its own self-insertion as islands, as alien objects in the dynamic of the city (where, if one wishes, references to the compositional mode of pop-art may be found).*<sup>13</sup>

This sort of juxtaposition creates, through time, a competition between urban logics: the growth of the megastructures with their geometric reticules would impose themselves upon the already extant so-called urban phenomena. Mostly, Tafuri means historical centers and neighborhoods, the changes in their use along with changing times, etc. Both the historical city and these new



projects consider development through time: the severance between past and present is made explicit.

Although involved in the office's efforts in this direction, Tafuri's own opinion on the matter is more contradictory. The notion of severance with the past as an urban phenomenon – which dilutes the forms of the older city – led him to write of the fragility of historical centers within this dichotomy, calling to the urgency of giving a new meaning to historical fabric – separating recent from past history.

On the other half of the equation Tafuri considered megastructures as producers of a “city of imagistic tendencies”, whose modules and industrial components create objects that are sealed on the landscape, suggesting and planning its own reproduction, losing strength in becoming distant from the time of urban phenomena. In its constitution through an extraneous process, urban form cannot be determined through the architecture of megastructures. *“It is no accident, therefore, that our ongoing projects still seem like paradoxes reminiscent of a certain nihilism; in reality, with their apparent emphasis on the figurative they destroy the concepts of urban form, architecture, mobility and the availability for territorial organization.”*<sup>14</sup>

Such considerations appear in the logs from a congress regarding cities-territory in 1964, when Tafuri is nearing his final decision of abandoning the project. *“Given the tasks that the constructive effort of the architect faces solely on the basis of hope stemming from his desire to design, ambiguity, to become acceptable, must translate into communicative value, into semantic structure, a figurative index closed within itself.”*<sup>15</sup>

This posture is placed as intermediary to a recovery of the power to interfere in the present, as the conclusion of Tafuri's text indicates:

*Faced with a reality that seems not to admit hope or illusion not-accompanied by the dramatic will for resistance and evasion of the tormentous dream full of symbols, unique to present utopiae, modern architecture might again find its positive route in a pitiless critical act that leads back to the first matrix of a design: that has always been a construction of reality by men of the present, as a contribution in the secular search for the sense of history.*<sup>16</sup>

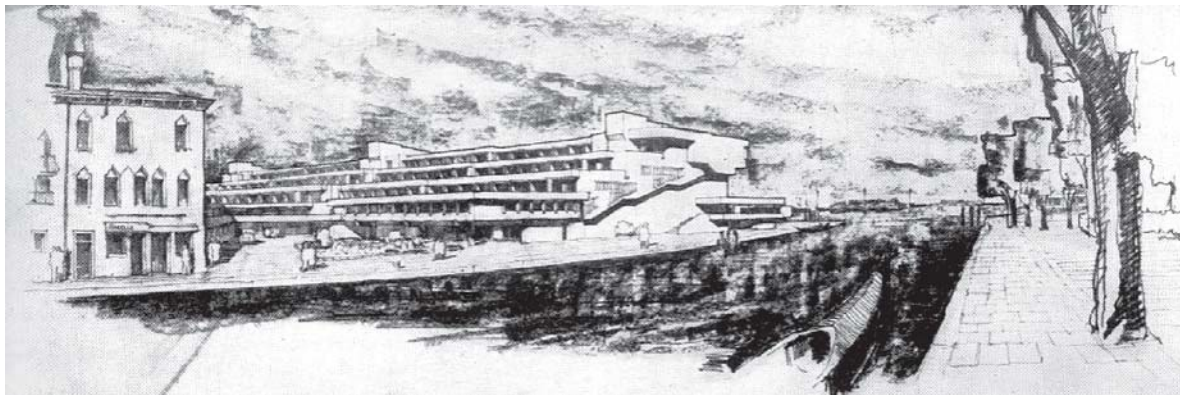


Fig. 02: Studio AUA, draft for a hospital in Venice, 1964. In. Casabella, n. 289, 1964

The anti-historical utopiae offered the necessary resistance to the recovery of modern architecture's positive route. Even as rhetoric, Tafuri sees a way of facing cities able to reach new content, updating the modern impulse for creating new categories for new problems within the city. Tafuri's readings of the designs of Kahn and Tange places them as a renewal of the historical dilemma faced by architects in the beginning of the twentieth century. Going back to the history of the avant-garde, Tafuri attempts to contribute to the debate regarding large cities in the 1960s, where he sees the continuity of the historical problem of utopian architecture in urban planning.

These personal ponderings took effect upon a young Tafuri on the occasion of a contest for the Civil Hospital in Venice, 1963 (fig. 02). Two structures are situated around the turf perimeter, resulting in a central space with two to three-story programs, tracing a large promenade, like a venetian *Campo*, to which follow little indoor patios between the wards.

In this project, extensive and complex in its treatment of the programs, a cross-cut reveals the dynamics of the systems, with stairways accompanying the discrepancies in the verandas, allowing for rapid access to different wards. Sketches show how the construction in five stories – which diverges from the template of the venetian *palazzi* – has its encounter with the city's alleys eased along by the solution for the verandas.

It is possible that this venetian project came before Tafuri's skepticism with regards to the historical force of megastructures. The city of canals as practically unitarian in its urban format and Studio AUA's hospital would certainly have an impact that would literally convert into "imagistic tendency", throwing the parameters of intervention into a crisis, strengthening them through the insoluble contrast that a project of this scope would bring to Venice.

Tafuri has never spoken publicly about this project. According to Giorgio Piccinato, his partner was, as usual, distant from the idiosyncrasies of project-making, having pitched in with the making of drawings in the days preceding the deadline.<sup>17</sup>

In *Theories and History of Architecture*, however, some pages are dedicated to analysing the project pitched by Le Corbusier for the same hospital, two years later, in 1965. The swiss architect goes beyond the limits of the turf, making a building spread across the urban fabric, creating internal patios, emulating in modern vocabulary the typical typologies of the city of Venice. The modular structures rest on pilotis on the canals or are built upon floating platforms. Bridges connect some of the complexes and the spreading-out of sectors mixes the building into the urban fabric.

*The dialogue between the two structures [hospital and city] is taken up on the level of these respective organisms, accentuating, with the new hospital, the continuity and seriality of the various nuclei. Therefore, the specific environment is submitted to a reorganization imposed by the articulated hospital machine. The urban structure, on the other hand, acquires a newfound finish thanks to the critical clarification that Le Corbusier's work achieves, requalifying an unfinished fringe.*<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Statement of Giorgio Piccinato.

<sup>18</sup> TAFURI, Manfredo. *Teorie e storia dell'architettura*, Portuguese translation *Teorias e história da arquitetura*. Lisboa/ São Paulo: Presença/ Martins Fontes, 1979. p. 103. Author's italics.





Fig. 03. Studio AUA, housing building in Latina, 1964. In. Casabella, n. 289, 1964.

<sup>19</sup> The credits for project supervisor do not appear separately from the rest of the team in the credits to "Studio AUA" projects published in *Casabella*. With support from Vieri Quilici's statement: "I remember Tafuri executed a project on his own, or rather, at least two since one was a Regulating Plan [...] One is a building in Latina, it was published and still exists". "Interview with Vieri Quilici", *Op. cit.*, p. 347 and in Giorgio Piccinato's statement: "one of the first projects we signed [Piccinato & Tafuri] was a sort of Unité d'habitation in Latina".

<sup>20</sup> TAFURI, Manfredo et al.  
"Progetti di architetti

The "new meanings" appear on a small scale in the design of this part of the city along the lines of a modern *Fondamenta*. The character of this relationship between distinct times, according to Tafuri's reading, finds support in a technological question that of the industrial modulation required for the construction of the hospital wings. However, contrary to the megastructures, its contrast with the historical fabric is felt more in the very material of the industrial pieces than in a contrast of scale.

These considerations show the young historian's preoccupation with a smaller scale, more detailed and studied than that of the large directional centers that interested and gave coherence to Studio AUA. Coherently, Tafuri's activity as an architect had only one chapter in which he was at the fore of a complete, built project, in the role of general supervisor on a small-scale initiative: a housing building in Latina<sup>19</sup> (fig. 03).

The building has eleven floors, whose units are distributed in *duplex* typology. The typology and constructive vocabulary, like stacked boxes (although without pilotis), with back-driven frames and opaque gables bear a strong resemblance to Le Corbusier's *Unité d'habitation* from the late forties, the first prototype having appeared in Marseille, 1952. Tafuri's project did not count on such free circumstances as those of the swiss architect, such as the absence of a lot or legislative regulations. On a corner lot, Tafuri preferred to dephase the units amongst themselves on the blueprint, creating the impression of a succession of buildings, rather than a continual plane.

When publishing this project in *Casabella*, Tafuri participated in a debate with the "new generation" of roman architects of which he was a part of in Studio AUA. In his statement, Tafuri attempts to adopt a tone of "critical recovery" of the modern movement, concentrating his argument upon two specific points: the first of which was testing the possibility of a total architecture that would unify methods of different scales, such as *design* and urban planning, in a

same *modus* of operation, which, according to him, should be reviewed given the number of new post-avant-garde challenges. The second point is a consideration regarding the political bonds of the masters of the modern movement, mostly those of Gropius and Le Corbusier. According to the roman author “[Gropius and Le Corbusier’s] *political involvement was superfluous in a way, given that their artistic effort assumed the ideological battle*”.<sup>20</sup>

The architect’s work would require, according to the young Tafuri, being made along the terms of a specific stance. His statement is filled with contradiction when he goes on to situate himself as very critical of those who insist on casting themselves beyond the limits of practice:

*The architect’s transgression into fields for which he is not qualified presently takes on a new meaning than the one in use during the 50s: then it was about pushing toward a unity of culture, toward the introduction of the concept of planification; today it is a dangerous illusion that confirms, when not coinciding with, technocracy and superficiality.*<sup>21</sup>

This passage may be read as a past echo of *Theories and History of Architecture*, but the main interest is seeing it published beside the author’s drawings that deliberately cited the *Unité d’habitation*, a project proposing the unification and widening of the scales of architecture. These divisions become deeper when keeping in mind the opinions put forth by Tafuri at the college regarding the *Unité*. As an assistant in Ludovico Quaroni’s composition course, the roman author gave a great lesson on the swiss architect at the end of the semester, stating that “*the lecorbusian oeuvre in fact, along the whole arc it describes, seems to constantly surpass the contradictions and impasses that we found in preceding lessons...*”<sup>22</sup>

However, the *Unité* was not seen as progressive in this “grand arc”. Rather, the building is “*as a total and absolute definition of the city, a step back regarding the pre-war experiments, perhaps because of an act of contingent realism.*”<sup>23</sup>

Tafuri disregarded the *Unité* mostly on the grounds of its position as a ‘model’. He preferred the free monumental structures that the Le Corbusier had planned for Chandigarh and Ronchamp – as he would endorse throughout his trajectory in the following years. If he thought this way, why did he prefer to use the prototypical language of industrial parts and interacting modules, typical of the technological research that Le Corbusier would carry out in the sketches for his city designed by the *Unités*, when designing his housing complex in Latina?

This internal quarrel is a result of the conflicting intellectual filiations that interested the young Tafuri. Given the complexity of the relationship between designed and written work at the time, it is not enough to relate these dilemmas to a preference for history that had always been in place, as the author would like to attest in his last statement: “*All things considered, they wanted to become architects in order to change society honestly. On the other hand, I wasn’t interested in becoming an architect because the practice of architecture was not at the center of my interests.*”<sup>24</sup>

If we keep in mind the following chapters in Tarufi’s career the statement seems valid, but how do we endorse it given the participation, manifestos and

romani”, In. *Casabella*, n. 289, 1964, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> *Idem*, p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> TAFURI, Manfredo. *L’architettura moderna alla luce dei problemi attuali*, Facoltà di Architettura dell’Università di Palermo, Corso di composizione architettonica II: Palermo, 1966-67. Course first taught at Rome in 1964. p. 39.

<sup>23</sup> *Idem*, p.39.

<sup>24</sup> “History as Project”, *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> In a statement, Francesco Dal Co said that in “the formation [of Tafuri, great importance is given to] an historian with a strong interest in the terms of linguistics, with particular attention to a marxist philosopher very well-known in Italy named Galvano Della Volpe.” Statement of Francesco Dal Co. Cf. COHEN, Jean-Louis. “La coupure entre architectes et intellectuels, ou les enseignements de l’italophilie”. In: *In Extenso*, v.1, 1984, p. 187. The statement of Tafuri’s venetian colleague factually corroborates what may already be inferred in the author’s early writings, mostly in *Theories and History* when he admits that “with regards to Italian marxist thought, Galvano Della Volpe obtained a discreet success, recognizing that figurative structures might be attributed a specific logic”. TAFURI, Manfredo. *Teorie e storia dell’architettura*. Op. cit. p. 236.

<sup>26</sup> TAFURI, Manfredo. *Teorie e storia dell’architettura*, Op. Cit., p. 236.

<sup>27</sup> PEREIRA, Wilcon J. “Introdução”. In: *Della Volpe*, São Paulo: Ática, 1979, p. 35.

<sup>28</sup> DELLA VOLPE, Galvano. “Sulla dialettica”. In: *Logica come scienza storica*. Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1969, p. 281. Grifo de Della Volpe.

<sup>29</sup> *Idem*, p. 281.

direct engagements in the questions of city and projects that marked his career? The Italian left-wing at the time, in general, had as a common ground among its parts the will to organize around the effective possibilities for radical transformation in a Europe that had recently renewed its relationship with capitalism following the second world war. There was general dissatisfaction toward the soviet terms of capitalist expansion, at the same time that the teleological relationship seen by Marx between the advance of capital, the strengthening of the proletariat and Revolution had begun to crumble.

Tafuri knew about the great political dilemmas of Italy and Europe at the same time in which he aligned his interest with aesthetic discussions promoted by architectural theory, nourishing himself, since youth, with an intelligence interested in the frictions between art and politics. He had read various authors, but his preference at the time seemed to be with the current most interested in and aesthetic revision supported by Marxist categories, whose leading figure at the time in the roman scene was Galvano Della Volpe, philosopher and professor at the University of Messina.<sup>25</sup>

To Tafuri, Della Volpe safeguarded art’s autonomy given productive processes, with a clear advantage: “He freed marxist thought regarding art from the margins of a vulgar sociology, reinserting it into the advanced debate occurring in international studies about the problem of semantics”<sup>26</sup>.

According to the Italian author, Della Volpe succeeded, in a way, in reconciling history – and art history – and political engagement, subsidizing an artistic practice without regressing into romanticism. Della Volpe fought for the finite aspect of art, related to the present, but recognized the power of sensations, of the meanings that art would acquire over time. The brazilian commentator Wilcon Pereira argues that:

*Della Volpe causes the project of giving marxism an ‘aesthetics of expressive mediums’ to evolve. The central idea resides in the confirmation that the work [of art] is knowledge, but of a very specific and peculiar type, since it throws into motion innumerable technical, material and formal procedures [...] A poem, a film, a ballet or a drawing are modes of knowledge, but of a knowledge achieved through its own signs, therefore irreducible and without substitute.*<sup>27</sup>

This aspect of Della Volpe’s work justifies much of the content found in the analyses of the avant-garde carried out in *Theories and History of Architecture*, even the philology-obsessed research in “Via Giulia” and “Interpreting the Renaissance”. However, in the sixties, it is possible to infer that Della Volpe’s “expressive” realism seemed to the young Tafuri to be an endorsement of his practice as an architect, with support in the force that the present would acquire if the past were used as motor, as he wrote: “the meaning of materialist contemporaneity should be clarified, that is historical practice as production of future history through realizations of instances of a present that takes in and develops in itself the history of the past”.<sup>28</sup>

This amalgamation of times throwing themselves onto the present take footing in the past not through a *priori* judgement, but through the establishment of ‘model-criteria or types’, which would be historical abstractions comparable to the present so that one might actually reach for possibilities of a ‘future history’<sup>29</sup>.

In the debate in which he presents his Latina project, Tafuri ends his speech by stating that *“one of the main tasks of the architect today is the search for expressive structures, capable of reinserting, on a different level from that of the constructivist experiments, the problems between ideology and configuration, stating that either the sheer identification of one term with the other or its absolute distinction are no longer acceptable”*<sup>30</sup>.

The search for structures fits within Della Volpe’s “model-criteria” as much as his historical research was full of this desire for legitimation. Le Corbusier’s typological sources used in the Latina building attempted to give “a different level”, in the young Tafuri’s terms, to the swiss architect’s rationalism. It’s possible that Tafuri had had the intention of uniting the scale of the megastructure from projects like Torino, Fano and Venice, to the scale of the smaller interventions, therefore working in Le Corbusier’s most legible vocabulary: a housing building that expressively articulated different scales. The fact is, given Le Corbusier’s monumental sources, seeing the *Unité* as a “step back” mattered less in the setting of Latina than the interplay of plasticity in question. Philology and research regarding cities and histories appear in the project in a non-literal manner. The references found in Tafuri’s architectural practice were opposite to others that were favorites in the general scheme of his theory.

In the introduction to his 1964 course on the history of architecture in light of recent problems, Tafuri’s discourse revolves around recognition of the historical power in working on projects. *“... It is the necessarily constructive character of architecture that leads it to offering horizons for overcoming the crisis”*<sup>31</sup>.

This perspective comes mostly from the Italian scene, to whom the legacy of the avant-garde was always put up against the vast Italian architectural tradition, to whom the spoils of a relationship between rationalism and right-wing currents still had to be managed. In writing about his professor – and for a few years, his boss – Ludovico Quaroni, Tafuri weaves an eloquent introduction, where he seeks to give Quaroni a central position in the debates of his time. There, he diagnoses the problem of architecture in history:

*The recovery of history, within the complex problems of Italian reality, had to deal with the intention, not that of the indifferent technician that accepts all situations or programs, that models himself as resolver and rationalizer of the problems put forth by society [...] but of giving to the word “reality” a historical meaning, of an unstable situation in which choice is inevitable, if frequently dramatic.*<sup>32</sup>

This meaning of the present had to be sophisticatedly supported in the past and by past Tafuri also considered the legacy of the avant-garde. This nexus of questions inspired the young architect, who, finding himself anguishing over his projects and his generation of colleagues, found solace in theory. Theory in a wider sense than that of only architecture: Tafuri’s apprehension of the term ‘history of architecture’ first appears within a context that considers also the project in question and its possibilities. The search for intellectuals, philosophers and art historians that made an impression on the young Tafuri will be taken up again in later years, but in the sixties they were of more use to him as guidelines for intervening upon the present, and that included designing projects.

<sup>30</sup> TAFURI, Manfredo. “Progetti di architetti romani”, *Op. cit.* p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> TAFURI, Manfredo. *La storia dell’architettura moderna alla luce dei problemi attuali*, *Op. cit.* p. 2.

In his work as an historian, Tafuri maintained an autonomous study of his sources. His studies on humanism, in these first years, were mainly of an academic quality, for the *Quaderni dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Architettura*. In these, Tafuri researches themes that would be dear to the historian in him, such as the Italian baroque and the city of Rome. It might be said that at the time Tafuri had an interest in more distant times than those of the avant-garde. However, his choices of study show an intention of bringing to the present the force of the past.

In the 1966 publication *The Architecture of Mannerism in the European Cinquecento*, there appears a clearer explanation regarding Tafuri's understanding of the past-present relationship. Mannerism, as studied by the author, justifies itself in being an "attempt to select specific values beyond individual poetics and stylistics."

Seen as a moment of crisis, the anxious period that followed the Renaissance is chosen as an object of study through a strategic interest on Tafuri's part, something the author called "historical actuality", based on the will to create "a colloquium with history, finally, based on semantically diverse, linguistically open structures, at the limit of how these terms can be used to refer to the cinquecento culture."<sup>33</sup>

This compacting of distinct historical periods already announces others Tafuri would make in following years, although he still maintains a pragmatism that would later become uncommon. If in *Theories and history* the dilemmas of Brunelleschi and Alberti are taken up amidst research on contemporary architecture, it was less with the intention of placing them as analogous situations than as echoes of a same dilemma. Mannerism and modern architecture do not go together, in the mid-sixties, as do humanism and the contemporary. A change in the mediation between history and architecture had taken place, and one of the steps in Tafuri's transformation is the definite removal of the project as an alternative.

One of the defining chapters in this crisis of Tafuri's comes when Della Volpe decides to respond to an article of his published in 1961 in the review *Argomenti di architettura*, in which he defends that "tending to define the human condition of the architect in the fabric of the relations with the social dimension toward which his making is directed, must, beginning in the present, transform the past to later move from the past again departing from the present, always from the present, to the future."<sup>34</sup>

Although this passage presents some concomitance with Della Volpe, the philosopher decided to write a reply entitled "The central question of modern architecture", in which he contests this passage by contesting a poetics founded in the past that end up contaminating his political involvement with a large dose of romanticism and nostalgia. "It seems permissible", wrote Della Volpe, "to give truly current advice to art theorists (in general) and architects: the advice of taking care not to lose contact with the economic, social and cultural, reality of our time and therefore avoid taking refuge in a reality reflected in forms of a past culture, used, dated."<sup>35</sup> The paragraph ends in a warning: "If not, we will remain aesthetic prisoners of aestheticism, or over-valuing of the image (and therefore ornament of architecture) and evading the concept (therefore

<sup>32</sup> TAFURI, Manfredo. *Ludovico Quaroni e lo sviluppo dell'architettura moderna in Italia*. Milão: Comunità, 1964, pp. 9 e ss.

<sup>33</sup> TAFURI, Manfredo. *L'architettura del Manierismo nel '500 europeo*. Roma: Officina, 1966, pp. 6 e ss.

<sup>34</sup> TAFURI, Manfredo. "L'informale e il 'design' contemporaneo". In: *Argomenti di architettura*, n. 4, 1961, p. 94.

<sup>35</sup> DELLA VOLPE, Galvano. "La questione cruciale dell'Architettura odierna". In: *Critica del gusto*, Milão: Feltrinelli, 1966, p. 162.



useful and humanly functional), that has already been happily challenged by the modern revolutionary movement in architecture".<sup>36</sup>

Della Volpe sees in the present a great focus of operation, in which model-criteria and the historical search for the past would be obstructions for not making philosophy "neglecting the problem of the roots of the present, risking losing oneself in an abstract, unreal and ultimately impotent present"<sup>37</sup>.

Tafuri's reply came in *Theories and History of Architecture*. Beginning with a critical measuring of the philosopher, Tafuri admits that Della Volpe's merit is in the connection between semantic criticism and architecture. The opening of meaning and the organic character of art were, however, relativized by the young author when he found himself looking at "non-organic, unorganized, 'open' artistic phenomena such as Dada, the formless, Pop Art or architecture on an urban scale."<sup>38</sup>

The association between two of the most iconoclastic artistic currents of the 20th century and architecture favors the second term. The urban scale is a constant shifting of meaning, reopened and re-read whenever there are new constructions, regimes, etc. How do we account for this movement?

According to the author, there is a blind spot in this movement from the present to the past, especially in the fact that the past is undergoing constant revision of its meanings and systems of meaning. "The codification of deciphering systems may change and re-involve the whole history of architecture toward the appearance of a work that, alone, clarifies an initially little-evident process [...] or toward the critical evaluation of ignored or still inadequately read works."<sup>39</sup>

This controversy with Della Volpe occupies a central position in *Theories and History of Architecture*. The roman author's argument, in giving as an answer to the question of constantly shifting meaning in the city the study of minor or forgotten works calls for an "individualization of codes of reference". In this procedure, Tafuri alerts us, one must be careful not to be seduced by the present and run into deformations. The sense of this reasoning culminates in the following well-known passage on operative criticism:

*In this sense one may say that any type of criticism directed at casting light exactly upon the relations that bind a work to the code implicit within it is operative. In fact, it modifies the same relations it puts into question.*<sup>40</sup>

Tafuri is speaking with his most specific interlocutors – the previous generation of historians of architecture, overall Zevi, who was a teacher in the "Course of operative criticism in architecture". However, one believes that the real backdrop for his critical considerations regarding architects and historians is his debate with Della Volpe, as well as his with himself and his work as project-maker. This connexion between criticism to operative criticism and his activity as an architect suggest a nodal point in Tafuri's reaction to a criticism such as Della Volpe's: given the impossibility of subscribing to the succession of the past by the present, since this implies an arbitrary judgement of one over the other, the roman author prefers to take sides with a more compact vision of the relationship between times. The individualization of the past's codes of reference serve to bring a "unicomprehensive" meaning to the past-present relationship. In this sense,

<sup>36</sup> *Idem*, p. 162.

<sup>37</sup> DELLAVOLPE, Galvano. "Sulla dialettica" *Op. cit.* p. 282.

<sup>38</sup> *Idem*, p. 237.

<sup>39</sup> *Idem*, p. 237.

<sup>40</sup> *Idem*, p. 238. Tafuri's italics.



Tafuri sees the power of Corbusier's plasticity at Chandigarh in weaving an insertion of times and signs that reach for a "frozen temporality"<sup>41</sup>. Here, more than the recurrence of model-criteria, stands the relation between times more closely related to an athymic notion. The quarrel with Della Volpe helps to liberate Tafuri's *corpus* from conjuncture, giving his political engagement in the present less immediate terms and allowing him to build, over the years, a history of architecture in which the relationship between the modern and contemporary times is built upon the particularities of the past, through the study of which one may reach a the present in a new way. Without this modification it would become hard to think of Tafuri's insertion in Venice in the *Contrapiano* circle, but most of all, to consider that his work as an historian could exist without support in a rigorous philological task.

The price for this theoretical swerve is well known: if past and present were to be compacted together, one would have to adopt a non-successive vision of times. This required the young Tafuri's investigations on the drawing board to come into direct opposition with his writings: *building* means putting in the present something wholly alien to the past, severing the chain that unites them, who can only be captured through written prose. When Tafuri writes, in the beginning of *Theories and History* that "to critique is to apprehend the fragrances of historical phenomena, submitting them to the filter of a rigorous evaluation, revealing their internal mystifications, values, contradictions and dialectics, to make explode their charge of meaning"<sup>42</sup> points toward the maximum decay of the association between project tools and criticism.

In this sense, it makes no sense to speak of a personal "choice" for history. In Tafuri's statement regarding his professional decision, the most consistent part is the one of not knowing what history was being made, since at the time the ways of making it were constantly supplanting each other. Beyond the decline of the project, it was necessary to break off from a generation of Italian architects interested in designing projects informed by history. *Theories and History* has an aspect of discussion of Italian problems, in trying to investigate the "eclipse of history" as during the time of the avant-garde and in seeking to show the harmful link between the architecture manuals written by Zevi in which a point is made in defense of organic architecture. However, Bruno Zevi is only the most significant intellectual in this tendency, in which most of Italy's architectural intelligentsia could be placed. Tafuri's option for a philological history places him beside the art historians of modern and classical art, such as Sergio Bettini, and in a way causes Tafuri's approximation to the other "antifascist" current of a more phenomenological filiation, such as Enzo Paci, whose reading of art in history had great affinity with the possibility of a *frozen time*:

*Positioned between the past and the future, between what was and what shall be, the artist, hearing the voice that calls to him, is as if everything were transformed into a question and an inquiry: it is as if the whole universal process had previously conditioned him to discover and chose a new path. The artist is under the impression of finding himself before infinite possibilities, infinite paths, in infinite time and space.*<sup>43</sup>

*Theories and History* is the final testimony of a change in Tafuri's political orientation in the Italian debates of the time. His decision for a determined type of history that places itself at a distance from the conjuncture, opposed

<sup>41</sup> TAFURI, Manfredo. *L'architettura moderna alla luce dei problemi attuali*, Op. cit. p.58.

<sup>42</sup> TAFURI, Manfredo. *Teorie e storia dell'architettura*, Op. cit. p. 21.

<sup>43</sup> PACI, Enzo. *Tempo e relazione*. Milão: Il Saggiatore, 1965, p. 251.

to contemporary currents, guided by a philological deepening has as substrate a shift in his notion of time or of how architecture and cities participate in what is to come. Architecture participates in the present when coinciding with the dilemmas and themes of the past. This is the true “choice” made by Tafuri during the sixties: the choice for a complex, long-lasting time.

This was not the easier choice. Beside having to abandon a part of his professional activity, Tafuri had to deal with a complete revision of how he was to conduct his historical research – culminating in with the studies of critique of ideology in architecture, as well as another of his seminal works, *Project and utopia* and other negative articles written toward “engagé” architects written in the 1970s.<sup>44</sup>

In the legacy of this brief period as an architect, there is still one loose end: Tafuri, according to his colleague Piccinato, had a “notable drawing skills”<sup>45</sup>. A publication from the *Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura Andrea Palladio* shows some of the author’s drawings made during his research. In the exposition, drawings appear of the diagrams for the façade in the San Giovanni dei Fiorentini church project, in Rome, designed by Antonio Da Sangallo the younger. The architect of the *cinquecento* lost the contest proposed by pope Leo X, and all that remains are his drawing information.

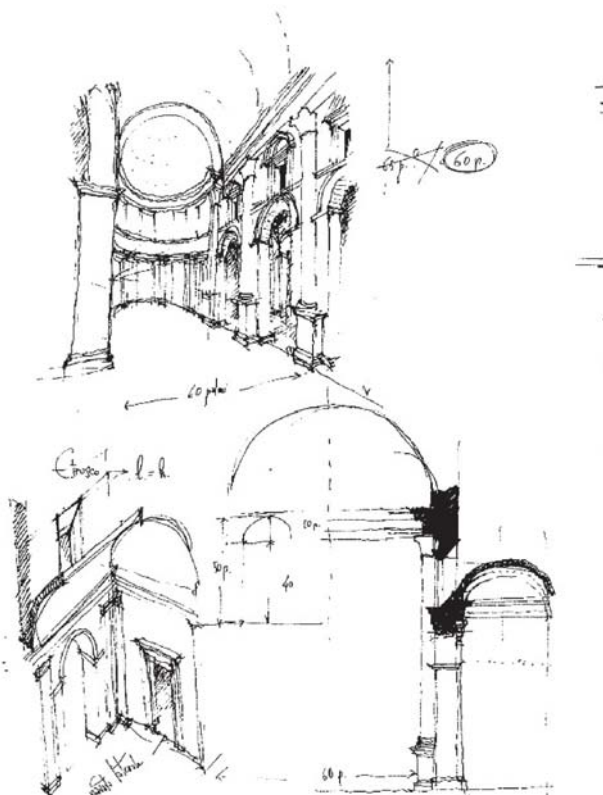
In his text on this project, published in *Interpreting the Renaissance*, Tafuri shows how Sangallo’s original could take two different paths: one basilical blueprint, and one central. “This kind of approach is characteristic of Sangallo and shows symptomatic indifference toward the chosing of principles.”<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> For a wider view of Tafuri’s seminal contributions to the history of architecture, see: COHEN, Jean-Louis. “La coupure entre architectes et intellectuels”, *Op. Cit.* and FRAJNDLICH, Rafael Urano. *Tafuri. Tempo da cidade longínqua*. São Paulo. Doctoral thesis, 2014 e LEACH, Andrew, *Choosing History : A study of Manfredo Tafuri’s theorisation of architectural history and architectural history research*. Ghent. Doctoral thesis, 2005.

<sup>45</sup> Statement by Giorgio Piccinato.

<sup>46</sup> TAFURI, Manfredo. *Ricerca del Rinascimento: principi, città, architetti*, Torino: Einaudi, 1992, p. 164.

Fig. 04: Manfredo Tafuri, research sketches of the church of San Giovanni dei Fiorentini, projetada por Antonio Da Sangallo, o Jovem. In: BEDON, Anna, BELTRAMINI, Guido, BURNS, Howard, “‘Questo’: disegni e studi di Manfredo Tafuri per la ricostruzione di edifici e contesti urbani rinascimentali”, Vicenza: CISA, 1995.



A scheme remade by an illustrator appears in the book, but the CISA exposition shows the preceding sketches, made by the roman author.

"Tafuri took pride in his [...] capacity of assuming the roles of the architects he studied"<sup>47</sup> wrote Howard Burns, a colleague of Tafuri's and one of the curators in the exhibition of his drawings, suggesting that even the handwriting of the author's he researched were objects of his representation. The drawings give, in this manner, support to the author's sober text, at the same time that it takes him toward a reconstitution of Sangallo's creative process (fig. 04). The drawing procedures learned at Valle Giulia were indispensable to the philological pursuit of his themes, becoming not only a fundamental piece of his historical contribution but also a provocative enunciation for understanding his written prose. Excluding more didactic works such as *Modern architecture in Japan* the drawings and photographs don't have a literal explanation throughout the text, but a noisy presence in its content<sup>48</sup> so that other readings may be available for the author's prose, putting his elaborations into critical movement, existing as the remains of his projectural work. The relationship becomes inverted: now, the images, procedures and tools of drawing, exposition of concepts, are auxiliary to philological practice and ideological criticism. In this sense, it would not be enough for the image to complement argumentation in a literal manner, but it should now counterbalance it. The drawing procedures in the works of the Renaissance are a radicalization of this process. In this moment, Tafuri draws near to Le Corbusier, who had an obsession for drawing over photographs landscapes that gave themselves directly to his vision, like someone who attempted to capture the remote sight<sup>49</sup>, the past, necessary to the freezing of time, causing the thread that goes through history to have the least possible girth.

At the CISA exhibition, some drawings are not diagrammatical or technical. There are perspectives done by Tafuri of spaces not-yet built, such as the church by Santagallo. One may infer that there had been moments where he had used the drawing board to "solve" details from projects of other times. "[My persona] works on history as profession, (not as an historian of architecture, but also an historian of architecture)"<sup>50</sup>, said Tafuri once. This avoidance of being labeled a "specialized" professional might have been a way of going back to his polyvalent childhood. Certainly, he was never able to escape his formation as an architect, always present, echoing within his choices and in the time of his approximations.

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<sup>47</sup> BURNS, Howard. "'Questo': disegni e studi di Manfredo Tafuri per la ricostruzione di edifici e contesti urbani rinascimentali", In: BEDON, Anna, BELTRAMINI, Guido and BURNS, Howard, 'Questo': disegni e studi di Manfredo Tafuri per la ricostruzione di edifici e contesti urbani rinascimentali. Vicenza: CISA, 1995, p. 15.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. LIPSTADT, Hélène e MENDELSON, Harvey, "Philosophy, History and Autobiography: Manfredo Tafuri and the unsurpassed lesson of Le Corbusier". In: *Assemblage*, 22, 1994, p. 73.

<sup>49</sup> COLOMINA, Beatriz. "Le Corbusier and Photography", In: *Assemblage*, n. 4, 1987, pp. 6-23.

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