

AR-500

Reading Manfredo Tafuri

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Cursus	Sem.	Type
Architecture	MA2, MA4	Opt.

Language of teaching	English
Credits	3
Session	Summer
Semester	Spring
Exam	Oral
Workload	90h
Weeks	12
Hours	2 weekly
Lecture	2 weekly
Number of positions	

Summary

Negative Creep: Reading Manfredo Tafuri, Today. The course offers a systematic introduction of the architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri's body of work to students in order to ease their reading of his often difficult work and discover its contemporary relevance.

Content

Manfredo Tafuri is the most important historian of architecture. The magnitude of his work and impact can be simply measured by his unparalleled scholarship on a wide range of topics that included different periods and themes, from Jacopo Sansovino to architecture in Soviet Russia, from the American Metropolis to Francesco Borromini. The root of his enduring relevance can be traced to the radicality of his questioning the discipline of architecture vis-à-vis political, economic, and cultural history. Yet, to this day, much of his work remains opaque. For example, of his enormous body of written work, very few publications are available in English and even in Italy his books have been, since a long time, out of print. Moreover, Tafuri seems to entertain two audiences: on the one hand, those interested in his critique of modern architecture (mostly activists and theorists), and, on the other hand, those interested in his work on Renaissance architecture (mostly historians and scholars). These audiences are so remote from each other that they split the reading of Tafuri's work in two areas that are perceived as if they were not developed within the same historical project. Indeed, theorists and scholars interested in Tafuri's writings on modern architecture completely ignore his studies on other periods, considering them inconsequential to his more 'political' work - and, vice versa, historians of Renaissance architecture think that Tafuri's critique of ideology is of no relevance to his more philological investigations on 15th and 16th-century architecture.

However, the most important obstacle to understanding Tafuri is that his pedagogy and teaching have been so far completely left out of the picture. Tafuri taught at the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia (IUAV) from 1968 to his untimely death in 1994. He founded the Istituto di Storia dell'architettura, which became one of the most influential research groups on the stage of architectural historiography, producing seminal studies on the history of architecture in United States and Soviet Russia. Tafuri and his collaborators' reflections on the ideological underpinnings of modern architecture and planning did not remain enclosed within academic circles but, through publications such as the Operaist journal *Contropiano*, percolated through political militancy in the 1970s. Above all, Tafuri was a dedicated and influential teacher who cared about the education of his students, expecting them to be rigorous and critical in their learning about architecture.

The course will trace Tafuri's intellectual development from his initial interests in urbanism and planning to his later work on Renaissance architects such as Alberti and Francesco di Giorgio, passing through his renowned critique of architectural ideology in modern architecture. His essays and books will function as milestones as they will be presented to students by situating them in the historical context in which they were produced. Tafuri's work will be discussed alongside the influences on his work - from the political writings of Alberto Asor Rosa, Mario Tronti and Franco Fortini to the historiographic work of the Annales school, Eugenio Garin and Carlo Ginzburg, to the architectural scholarship of historians such as Giulio Carlo Argan and Arnaldo Bruschi. Moreover, students will get acquainted with the architects and architectures that were the focus of Tafuri's studies, from Constructivism to Guarino Guarini, from Le Corbusier to the Rome of Pope Julius II and Leo X, from Francesco Borromini to James Stirling.

The main objective of the course is a systematic introduction of Tafuri to students in order to ease their reading of his difficult work and discover its contemporary relevance.

Course Sessions

Lecture 1, February 23rd

What is architectural history? What is its purpose?

Lecture 2, March 2nd

Becoming Historian

Lecture 3, March 9th

Against Operative Criticism: reading *Histories and Theory of Architecture*

Lecture 4, March 16th

Contropiano: Tafuri and the critique of architectural ideology

Lecture 5, March 23rd

Avant-garde vs. Planning: architecture in Soviet Union

Lecture 6, March 30th

The Disenchanted Mountain: Tafuri and the American Metropolis

Lecture 7, April 6th

Social democracy and its discontents: the critique of 'Red Vienna'

Lecture 8, April 20th

The Problem of the Avant-garde: Reading *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*

Lecture 9, April 27th

The crisis of architectural form: Francesco Borromini, Guarino Guarini, Giovanni Battista Piranesi

Lecture 10, May 4th

Tafuri and Renaissance Architecture: Venice, Rome, Florence

Lecture 11, May 11th

Negative Thinking: Tafuri interpreter of Leon Battista Alberti

Assistants: Marson Korbi, Jolanda Devalle, Theodora Giovanazzi, Constantinos Marcou

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, the student must be able to:

- Interpret in a critical manner the concepts developed during the course
- Demonstrate knowledge of architectural historiography
- Develop a reflection on the relationship between historical conditions and architecture

Expected student activities

Personal work during the semester, reading of texts, personal study of a theme to be concretized into a paper of approximately 3.000 words.

Assessment methods

The main goal of the course is to encourage students to read as much as they can. Therefore, the main factor in the evaluation will be the student's capacity to assemble and read a relevant body of texts.

40% **Specificity** of the theme and **reading** relevant bibliography

40% Writing of the paper, especially referencing and footnoting

20% Clear oral exposition

Supervision

Office hours	No
Assistants	Yes
Others	Korbi, Marson, Assistant scientifique

Resources

Moodle Link

- <https://go.epfl.ch/AR-500>