

Review of Manfredo Tafuri, *Ricerca del Rinascimento. Principi, città, architetti*, Turin, 1992, in *L'Indice*, September 1992. no. 8, pp. 37-38.

In 1949 Rudolf Wittkower published a short book called *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*. It was a study of Renaissance architecture and architectural theory from Alberti to Palladio, and in particular of the idea of musical proportions in architecture. It was a deeply Warburgian book, a polemic against the purely aesthetic approach to architecture, which it interpreted instead in terms of the larger issues of religious and cultural history. Full of abstruse footnotes and geometrical diagrams, the publisher thought he would never sell more than 500 copies. Instead it went into many editions in every European language and defined the discipline of architectural history for two generations.

Tafuri's magisterial book is the Wittkower of the '90s. It obliterates the usual boundaries between history, architecture, culture and science, and maps out a new genre of historical writing. In this sense Tafuri is like the humanists that he studies, for whom *litterae* were all one and included theology, literature, art, engineering and the recovery of the classical world. But he is also an architectural historian with a sharp eye for drawings and a passion for up-to-date bibliography. The book has penetrating insights into the architecture of Raphael, Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, Peruzzi, Serlio, Jacopo Sansovino, Palladio, Giulio Romano, and yet it also touches on the work of Borromini and Guarini, Wren and Perrault. Centered on Rome, Florence and Venice, it also ranges as far as Milan, Genoa and Granada.

Wittkower's was a polemical book, and Tafuri's is too, not least against his great predecessor. Tafuri brings the mentality of the contestatore to scholarship. He instinctively looks for undercurrents of rebellion, plots and revolts, opposition to structures of power and especially fundamental critiques of reigning ideologies. He rejects scholars who settle for "tranquillizzanti congruenze" in history, and approves of those who, like himself, search out the "crepe e divaricazioni" and try "di opporre scogli problematici alle visioni unilineari della storia."

As for Wittkower, the personality of Leon Battista Alberti is central to Tafuri's book. But it is a very different Alberti, one more sceptical of absolute rules and of the rhetoric of power, and quite uncomfortable in the service of princes. Tafuri's Alberti is a Hamletian intellectual given to irony and mockery, imbued with the "sofferte ambiguità dell'uomo di cultura." Whereas the reigning view is that Alberti advised the humanist pope, Nicholas V, on his building enterprises in Rome, Tafuri tries to shatter this "mito della consulenza albertiana." Not only does the project for the Vatican borgo not fit Alberti's theories well, but the rhetorical *amplificatio* of the project, as we know it from Manetti's description, is just what Alberti combats as useless magnificence in his dialogue *Momus*. Instead of presenting Nicholas V as a sympathetic humanist pope, Tafuri stresses the papal program of rhetorical magnificence, in which the *Papa-re* sets out to convince the masses of papal *auctoritas* through monumental buildings, so large that they will seem to be the work of God himself. The words *terribilità* and *terrorismo* recur often in Tafuri's discussions of the classical language of architecture. To this papal program Tafuri's Alberti can only react with humanist irony and courtly dissimulation. He is an *esprit fort avant la lettre*, the advocate of a Greek ideal of human limits, of *mediocritas*, *concinntas* and *finitio*, of beauty as the only defence of buildings against the rages of man and time. Tafuri's Alberti is the skeptical intellectual of the *Momus*, and he feels that it is a mistake to treat the great architectural treatise, the *De Re Aedificatoria*, in isolation from "la tormentata opera letteraria di Leon Battista Alberti," who shows a "grandiosa e tragica consapevolezza dei limiti della *téchne* e dell'arbitrarietà delle norme."

From Nicholas V and Alberti in Rome Tafuri proceeds to the Florence of Lorenzo il Magnifico, the Rome of Leo X, and Venice in the early 16th century. It is a book just as much about urban planning as about architecture. Mastering the bibliography and complementing it with archival research for any one of these cities is a formidable task, but Tafuri takes on all three and uses one to illuminate another in a comparatist approach which is an "invito a moltiplicare le analisi comparate, onde evitare, insieme alle generalizzazioni, la chiusura in studi localistici." He sheds new light on some age-old questions: the architectural competence of Lorenzo il Magnifico, his relation to Giuliano da Sangallo (which he compares to the relation between Trissino and Palladio), and the growth of a Medici style in architecture in Florence and its transfer to Leo X's Rome, where a great *urbs medicea* was planned in 1513-1516 around the Palazzo Medici (now Madama), the Sapienza, a huge piazza medicea linking the palace with the Via Ripetta, and grandiose porticoes connecting it with Piazza Navona. The model is the hippodrome-palace complex in Constantinople. Tafuri sees the Via Ripetta as the humanist street, with the pole of charity at one end (the Hospital of S. Giacomo degli Incurabili), and of learning at the other. He traces the basic plan of the Sapienza not to Della Porta or Ligorio but to Bramante, and sees the source in the ancient Tempio di Romolo on the Via Sacra in the Roman forum, attached to the church of SS. Cosma e Damiano (the Medici saints). In his analysis of the straight streets cut through the urban fabric near Piazza del Popolo and the Ponte S. Angelo, the characteristic *bivium* imposed by Julius II, Leo X and Clement VII on the city, he sees the Castiglionian ideal, a kind of "sprezzatura a scala

urbana," which filters down to the middle classes of bankers and artists close to the court (Raphael and Sangallo), who chose to live in classicizing houses within the new system of "cannocchiali viari."

To the visual richness of Medici Florence and papal Rome, Tafuri adds the cold shower of Venice, the great resistor, the city of meaningful silences, able to accept any language except the absolute one of Roman antiquity. The global image of Venice was so strong it dampened individual urban initiatives and especially attempts to expand the city. A cult of continuity prevailed, since in a utopia which was already held to be miraculously perfect could only be changed incrementally, at the edges. Tafuri surveys the late medieval and Renaissance ampliamenti of Venice: the punta di S. Antonio di Castello, where a Bramante type plan for a centralized hospital was introduced and then abandoned; the developments around S. Andrea della Zirada and M. Maria Mazarin; and the unpatrician Fondamenta Nuove, which stand in such sharp contrast to what other cities were doing around their edges, especially Genoa in the Strada Nuova.

Tafuri is very attuned to the rejections of the new architectural language wherever it happens: for instance the critiques and burlesques aimed at the Palazzo Bartolini-Salimbeni in Florence, where Baccio d'Agnolo's classical details were mocked, as Vasari reports: "furono queste cose tanto biasimate dai Fiorentini con parole, con sonetti, ..., dicendosi che aveva piu forma di facciata di tempio che di palazzo..." But as usual the resistance to novelty is stronger in Venice than anywhere else. Tafuri notes the rejection of Fra Giocondo's design for a fòro greco to be built around the Rialto after the fire of 1514; Jacopo Sansovino's unrealized project for the Palace of Vettor Grimani on the Grand Canal; and the rejection of Palladio's polemically un-Venetian project for the Rialto bridge. Many historians are attuned to the language of architecture, but few so well attuned to the significant silences. Tafuri ends his book with the houses of Leonardo Moro a San Girolamo in Venezia, simple buildings where the patron proclaims a patrician modesty and the architect, Sansovino, puts aside the new imported maniera in favor of a disconcerting elementarism, a refusal to speak the new rhetorical language of antiquity, a willful afasia.

Tafuri is best, however, where the architecture is not silent but parlante. Leo X wants to appear as the "vir doctus, integer ac pius," the pope who will put out the fires of war lit by his predecessor Julius II. Hence the motif of the Serliana loggia, which Raphael used in the fresco of the Incendio nel Borgo, where the pope puts out the fire with "una benedizione assoggettante quanto taumaturgica." The same Serliana reappears in most of the drawings for the facade of S. Lorenzo in 1515-16. The projects by Sangallo, Raphael, Giulio Romano, and Sansovino are reconstructed by Tafuri with great philological care, and then interpreted as attempt to preserve the sense of triumph of Leo X's ingresso of 1515, when all Florence was swept by a craze for columns and there was at least a temporary rejection of its gothic heritage. Columnatio becomes a sign of the new monarchical ethos, the ethos of courts and courtiers, both in temporary decoration and in real architecture.

Tafuri can only carry out this analysis after minute and delicate work in the connoisseurship and philology of drawings. Here the long experience in exhibitions, particularly the Raffaello architetto show of 1983 and the Giulio Romano show of 1989, bears fruit. He recognizes Raphael's project for S. Lorenzo in a copy and Sansovino's in an 18th-century print. With a connoisseur's eye he traces the delicate stylistic linkages between Botticelli and Giuliano da Sangallo, between Andrea del Sarto and Sansovino. In his analysis of the competition of 1518-21 for S. Giovanni dei Fiorentini in Rome, he contrasts Sangallo's radical critique of the Pantheon with Peruzzi's mood of breathless experimentalism, and pits Giulio Romano's use of antique motifs against that of Sangallo, the most playful vs. the most Ciceronian of architects. The filone rosso which weaves its way through all the projects is the twinship of Florence and Rome, of the Tiber and the Arno, of S. Giovanni dei Fiorentini on the banks of the river and new S. Pietro across it.

Architectural control was the way to control religious and political sentiment. Antonio da Sangallo's drawings conserve a project for rebuilding the Dominican church of S. Marco in Florence on a Roman centralized model, with a facade of "superba magnificenza" and a huge pagoda-like cupola that anticipates Guarini's domes. Sangallo was working closely with the Medici, who owned the garden next door and whose connections with the convent has been extremely close for three generations. Cosimo had established the Domenicani Osservanti at San Marco in 1436, and Lorenzo was instrumental in having Savonarola transferred there from Ferrara in an attempt to put the convent into the forefront of Florentine spirituality, with all the prestige that that would imply for the Medici. But after their exile and return in 1512, the Medici were intent on rooting out the mito savonaroliano and all the millennial expectations connected with it. Architecture is used in the service of family control. But analysis of power relationships is not enough for Tafuri, and he goes a step beyond. In the intensely intellectual climate of Medici patronage, the centralized plan becomes a plaything, a geometrical game imposed on the contesto cittadino: "la centralità perde il suo carattere terroristico, si fa spettacolo."

The Leonine age, like the building program of the popes in Rome, left behind projects and ruins but not much building. On the one hand there was a "magniloquenze che sfiora l'utopia," and on the other a continual change of program, with constant interruptions and reductions of ambition. The bankruptcy of the Leonine papacy, evident in politics, is mirrored in architecture. The vacillation between France and the Empire produces no consistent foreign policy; the pacific relations with the Popolo Romano turn out to be a delusion; the new urban structures and territorial reforms are not carried out; economic

reforms are completely bankrupt, and the opening to Erasmus will only result in the ferocious polemic of the Ciceronianus, written with venom after the sack of Rome had shattered the idea of Roma communis patria and replaced it with the insult of Roma coda mundi. With the Roman pope Paul III the magnificence of the old days returns, and the city once again begins to be redesigned in the grand theatrical manner. But it is "una magnificenza in gran parte compensativa," much as papal building would remain in the baroque age.

Special mention must be made of Tafuri's footnotes, which testify to an immense erudition not only in art history but also in political and social history, aesthetics, and theology. In these long and endlessly fascinating notes, one can find the relevant literature in six languages on dozens or hundreds of interesting Renaissance topics: the aesthetics of Castiglione, the problem of maniera in architecture, the fortuna critica of the Pantheon, Renaissance ideas on the Etruscan temple, color and surface in Renaissance buildings, world harmony and theory of proportion, Florentine government under and after the Medici, Lorenzo il Magnifico's villas and urban projects, imprese, triumphal entries and ephemeral architecture, Florentine bankers in Rome, the Erasmian critique of the papacy, the Renaissance staircase, the Venetian constitution, the hydraulics of the Venetian lagoon, and many more. Browsing through these crowded, value-charged, polyglot notes is an exciting and life-enhancing experience, like walking through the streets of Naples, but dangerous too, and not without darts and even a few sudden assassinations.

Tafuri is the only philosopher to engage in close philological analysis, one of the few philologists to philosophize, and one of the best architectural historians navigating the deeper waters of religious and social history. The rejection of disciplinary boundaries is what makes the book difficult but also unusually rewarding. The question posed in every chapter is "Quali parametri consentono di ampliare lo spettro delle analisi verificabili?" The last word is important. Tafuri aims not only to stimulate but to convince, not only to interpret but to prove. Hence the sterminata bibliografia in the notes, the patient work in so many archives, and the careful reading of so many architectural drawings. In the place of Wittkower's Renaissance, with its rules of proportion and its cosmic certainties, Tafuri constructs a culture in which the watchwords are dissimulation and sprezzatura in the service of a "cultura del fittizio." His lungo Rinascimento is a "stagione culturale oscillante fra bisogni di certezza e slanci verso l'infondato." But to found this troubling vision on a firm structure of evidence is the triumph of this extraordinary book.

Joseph Connors