Once upon a Time (Zurich, 6–7 Mar 15)

Cabaret Voltaire, Spiegelgasse 1, Zurich, Mar 6–07, 2015

Andri Gerber, zhaw

Once upon a Time:
Manfredo Tafuri and the Crisis of Architectural History

International Conference
Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture, ETH Zurich, in cooperation with the Institute of Art History, University of Zurich and the Center History of Knowledge. Supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

Concept and Organization:
Dr. Andri Gerber, Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture, ETH Zurich
Prof. Dr. Martino Stierli, Institute of Art History, University of Zurich

Against the background of a general revision and critical reflection of the history of architecture in its relation to theory and criticism, this conference aims at opening up a space of discussion on the contemporary nature and condition of architectural history. We propose to do so by referring to the legacy of Italian historian and theoretician Manfredo Tafuri (1935–1994), who may be seen as one of the most influential thinkers of the relationship between the history and theory of architecture of the contemporary period.

Architecture is a shifting and elusive object whose nature remains difficult to define. It relates not only to buildings and projects, but also to written and oral sources, and is deeply embedded in social, economical and political contexts. For this reason, architectural history seems to be predestinated to be interdisciplinary and calls for a multitude of historical narratives. Furthermore, the relatively weak disciplinary condition of architectural history leans on a long tradition of partial and subjective histories that have often been written by architects themselves. This leads to the question whether an "objective" history of architecture is possible, and to what extent architectural history is fundamentally linked to changing architectural trends. But while both "general" history and the history of art have

performed a critical reframing of their claim for objectivity and have underscored the implicit theory and ideology beyond every form of historical narrative, architectural history, by contrast, has widely escaped such a critical reframing. And while in particular art history has reflected upon the history of theories that framed its discourse – the history of style, iconology, phenomenology, to name but a few –, this kind of reflection seems to be yet missing for the history of architecture.

The work of Manfredo Tafuri is an interesting starting point for such a reflection on the nature of the history of architecture. Tafuri's position was mainly based on a questioning of what he called "operational critique", which was put in the service of a particular architectural tendency. By contrast, he defined his own critical take as progetto storico, as a performative and self-reflexive questioning of the history of architecture. His work was strongly influenced by historical materialism, thus highlighting the socio-economic and political conditions in which architecture is embedded. We propose to understand Tafuri as a critical agent, for questioning both his own theory of history and the nature of architectural history today. We propose to do so in reference to cultural models underlying our current position, in particular the resurgence of Marxism and historical materialism in contemporary architecture. By undertaking a critical reevaluation of Tafuri's legacy from a contemporary perspective, we not only aim to point at the inherent aporias in the Italian historian's thinking, but also want to contribute towards a theoretical framing of the discipline of architectural history.

PROGRAM

Friday 6.3.2015 - 13:00-18:00

13:00-13:30
Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani and Philip Ursprung (gta Institute, ETH Zürich)
Welcome

13:30-14:00
Andri Gerber (gta Institute, ETH Zürich)
Introduction

14:00-14:30
Luka Skansi (University in Rijeka, Croatia)
Manfredo Tafuri and Italian contemporary architecture. The Roman years (1959-68)

14:30-15:00
Coffee Break

15:00-15:30
Rikke Lyngsø Christensen (The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts)
Renaissance Representations and their remnants: Wölfflin, Wittkower, Tafuri

15:30-16:00
Timothy Hyde (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)
Catastrophic Architectural Histories

16:00-16:30
Coffee Break

16:30-17:10
Keynote: Andrew Leach (Griffith University, Gold Coast, Australia)
Crisis upon Crisis: Tafuri on Mannerism

17:10-18:00
Discussion
Chair: Anne Kockelhorn, Philip Ursprung (gta Institute, ETH Zürich)

Saturday 7.3.2015 - 10:00-16:00

10:00-10:30
Andri Gerber (gta Institute ETH Zürich)
Recapitulation

10:30-11:10
Keynote: Michael Osman (UCLA Los Angeles)
Tafuri's America

11:10-11:40
André Bideau (Accademia di Architettura, Mendrisio)
Base and superstructure versus the symbolic economy?

11:40-13:00
Lunch break

13:00-13:30
Irina Davidovici (gta Institute, ETH Zürich)
"Contradictions of operative reality": Notes for a revised history of housing

13:30-14:00
Torsten Lange (gta Institute, ETH Zürich)

Other historical projects: Manfredo Tafuri and the historiography of the socialist city in Central and Eastern Europe

14:00-14:20
Coffee Break

14:20-15:00
Keynote: Victor Buchli (University College London)
Utopian Ruins and Social life

15:00-16:00
Final Discussion
Chair: Johannes Binotto (University Zürich), Andri Gerber, Karl Kegler, Ákos Moravánszky (gta Institute, ETH Zürich)

Reference:

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