

# **An Italian Querelle: Radical vs. Tendenza**

Pablo Martínez Capdevila

## **Abstract**

In the late 1960s two groundbreaking architectural movements arose in Italy: the Radical movement and the Tendenza. Over time the rivalry and antagonism between them developed into an outright hostility that reached its peak in the 1973 Milan Triennale, where the latter established itself as the hegemonic trend of Italian architecture. In his manifesto-like text for the exhibition catalogue, Massimo Scolari tried to systematize the foundations of the Tendenza by calling for a reestablishment of architecture based on its autonomy and its internal logic and laws. In doing so, he attacked orthodox modernity and, especially, the Radical movement. The response from the Radicals came from Archizoom's leader Andrea Branzi who, through a series of columns in *Casabella*, depicted the Tendenza as a reactionary movement unable to take advantage of the brand new start opened by the crisis of the discipline. The controversy between Scolari and Branzi shows how opposed and incompatible Tendenza and Radical were, not only for their informal spokesmen, but for most of the Italian architectural milieu.

However, a closer look, backed on Manfredo Tafuri's insights, shows some very telling similarities – as well as some unexpected differences- that question not only Scolari and Branzi's claims, but also most of the later readings of these movements. In order to further nuance the dialectical opposition between Tendenza and Radical, two paradigmatic works of both movements are analyzed (Arduino Cantàfora's *città analoga* and Archizoom Associati's *No-Stop City*) and compared with canonic representations of Renaissance ideal cities.

*On several occasions we have tried to demonstrate that throughout the adventures of the historical avant-gardes the alternatives that appear as opposites – order and disorder, law and chance, structure and formlessness – are in reality completely complementary.* – Manfredo Tafuri, “L’Architecture dans le Boudoir” (1974)

In the late 1960s two groundbreaking architectural movements arose in Italy:

L’architettura radicale, also called the Radical movement, and Neorazionalismo, later

known as La Tendenza (“the tendency”).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, they began almost simultaneously: the exhibition “Superarchitettura,” which featured the work of Superstudio and Archizoom and is generally considered to have inaugurated the Radical movement, was held at the Jolly2 gallery in Pistoia in December 1966, the same year that saw the publication of Aldo Rossi’s *L’architettura della città*, which became the seminal text of the Tendenza.

Despite its rapid rise and dazzling success, the Radical movement was rather short-lived. After gaining international recognition, it reached its peak with the 1972 Museum of Modern Art exhibition “Italy: The New Domestic Landscape,” curated by

---

<sup>1</sup> The Radical movement was made up of groups like Archizoom, Superstudio, UFO, 9999, and Zziggurat, and individuals such as Gianni Pettena, Ugo La Pietra, and Ettore Sottsass. The Tendenza counted Aldo Rossi, Giorgio Grassi, Carlo Aymonino, Massimo Scolari, Vittorio Gregotti, and Franco Purini among its members.

Emilio Ambasz. This event brought further exposure to a collective mostly composed of very young architects, but it was nevertheless to be the swan song of the movement, which began to wane soon after.<sup>2</sup> The maturation of the Tendenza into a recognizable movement was slower, but it would ultimately become Italy's most influential architectural movement of the 1970s and play a leading role well into the '80s.

At first, the Tendenza, based primarily in Milan and Venice, and the Radical movement, based mostly in Florence, were not necessarily incompatible or opposed. In fact, while the Tendenza cohered around Rossi, he was also a major influence on Radical groups like Superstudio and Archizoom, who were particularly taken with the *razionalismo esaltato* (exalted rationalism) he had identified in 1967 in the work of Étienne-Louis Boullée.<sup>3</sup> This rationalism involved not only a cold, scientific attitude but

---

<sup>2</sup> In January 1973, a cooperative of radical architects calling themselves the Global Tools was founded to recoup the Radical movement's lost momentum, overcome the growing rift between its members, and counter the Tendenza's increasing influence in academia and the media. This short-lived initiative ultimately failed, signaling the definitive end of the Radical movement.

<sup>3</sup> Rossi developed this concept in his introduction to the Italian edition of Boullée's *Architecture: Essai sur l'art*. See Aldo Rossi, introduction to *Architettura: Saggio sull'arte*, by Etienne-Louis Boullée, trans. C. Casonato (Padova: Marsilio, 1967), 4–14. For Boullée's influence on Rossi, see Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011). For more on Rossi's influence on Superstudio and Archizoom, see Roberto Gargiani, *Archizoom Associati, 1966–1974:*

also the relentless and rigorous application of certain principles and the primacy of elementary and absolute forms. As Roberto Gargiani has pointed out, for a period of time the ideas of *razionalismo esaltato* brought together sectors of the Tendenza and the Radical movement in a shared will “to recover a mythical absolute rationality that would destroy any act of arbitrary creation.”<sup>4</sup> At the same time, Rossi’s reading of Boullée also encouraged the simple, blank, and often huge shapes of projects such as Superstudio’s Continuous Monument and Architettura Riflessa and Archizoom’s proposal for the Fortezza da Basso. Furthermore, most members of both movements shared strong Marxist convictions and a highly political approach to architecture. But over time the rivalry and antagonism between the two movements developed into outright hostility.

In 1973, at the 15th Milan Triennale,<sup>5</sup> the Tendenza established itself as the hegemonic movement of Italian architecture. While Rossi curated the international architecture section of the Triennale, Radicals Andrea Branzi and Ettore Sottsass curated the design section, foretelling the fate that awaited the many Radicals who would thereafter focus primarily on furniture and product design. A particularly heavy blow for the Radicals was the perceived defection of Superstudio – who, together with Archizoom, had been its leading figures – suggested by their acceptance of Rossi’s invitation to

---

*Dall’onda pop alla superficie neutra* (Milan: Electa, 2007), and Roberto Gargiani and Beatrice Lampariello, *Superstudio* (Bari: Laterza, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Roberto Gargiani, *Archizoom Associati, 1966–1974: Dall’onda pop alla superficie neutra* (Milan: Electa, 2007), 110. My translation.

<sup>5</sup> The exhibition ran from September 20 to November 20, 1973.

exhibit several projects, including Continuous Monument, in his architecture section. For Rossi's catalogue, titled *Architettura razionale*, Superstudio contributed a text published in *Domus* four years prior as part of their "Discorsi per immagini." Read in the context of Rossi's exhibition, it seemed to suggest their abandonment of the Radical movement's commitment to undermining the discipline: "Architecture is one of the few means to make the cosmic order visible on earth, to put order among things and, above all, to affirm the human capacity to act according to reason. . . . We believe in a future of 'rediscovered architecture,' in a future where architecture will take its full powers back, abandoning any ambiguous designation and posing itself as the only alternative to nature."<sup>6</sup> Even if Superstudio were gradually abandoning their adversarial attitude toward the discipline and shifting their interests to anthropology and vernacular architecture, their leader Adolfo Natalini, for one, did not feel that this was represented in the work they exhibited at the Triennale. In a 1974 letter to Takefumi Aida, Natalini expressed surprise at Rossi's selection of their work while also acknowledging their evolution: "In fact, the exhibition was extremely heterogeneous, and actually I really don't know exactly what Stirling, Gisel, you and Superstudio (for example) have in

---

<sup>6</sup> Superstudio, "Discorsi per immagini," *Domus* 481 (December 1969): 44. My translation. Later published in *Architettura razionale: XV Triennale di Milano* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1973). Superstudio's piece in *Domus* included the first images of Continuous Monument. In the same issue Archizoom published their own "Discorsi per Immagini," a series of photo collages that included one of the earliest prefigurations of No-Stop City.

common with Aldo Rossi and his School. Our participation was rather strange: the work we presented had been done in 1968–70, and had an ironic, de-mystifying sense. The celebration to exasperation of architecture, at least in our intentions, was to bring it to [a] crisis point. This strategy did not turn out to be altogether correct: our work lately has been following quite different directives.”<sup>7</sup> Such nuances, however, were lost on other members of the Radical movement.

The controversy sparked by the Triennale made clear how incompatible the Tendenza and the Radical movement were, at least for their informal spokesmen. In his catalogue text, “Avanguardia e nuova architettura,” Massimo Scolari tried to systematize the foundations of Neorazionalismo and also gave it a new name: “Like every truly scientific attitude, this position, which for the sake of brevity we shall call the ‘Tendenza,’ does not discover new truths, but aims at the elimination of errors in a process of knowledge centered on historical and formal analysis, on the study of the city as a product, and on the characteristics that lead a certain kind of architecture to be projected onto a certain part of society.”<sup>8</sup> His manifesto-like text calls for a

---

<sup>7</sup> Adolfo Natalini, letter to Takefumi Aida, June 21, 1974. Quoted in Roberto Gargiani and Beatrice Lampariello, *Superstudio* (Bari: Laterza, 2010), 109.

<sup>8</sup> Massimo Scolari, “The New Architecture and the Avant-Garde,” trans. Stephen Sartarelli, in *Architecture Theory since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 131. Originally published in *Architettura razionale: XV Triennale di Milano* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1973). Scolari borrowed this name from the title of Rossi’s 1969 article “L’architettura della ragione come architettura di tendenza.” In a May 7, 2017

reestablishment of architecture based on its autonomy and its internal logic and laws: “For the Tendenza, architecture is a cognitive process that in and of itself, in the acknowledgment of its own autonomy, is today necessitating a refounding of the discipline; that refuses interdisciplinary solutions to its own crisis; that does not pursue and immerse itself in political, economic, social, and technological events only to mask its own creative and formal sterility.”<sup>9</sup> Scolari advocates for a rational, scientific architecture that would generate clarity. His defense of a self-referential discipline is structured by three concepts: history, type, and monument. Significantly, he defines the Tendenza primarily in opposition to two other trends, both of which he finds useless and essentially reactionary: modern dogmatism, exemplified by Bruno Zevi, and the radical avant-garde, exemplified by the “Florentine groups.”

Zevi had asserted in 1967 that “the alternative to the harsh responsibility of remaining faithful to the modern tradition lies not in pluralism, but in the open, courageous suicide proposed by Pop architecture. . . . Whoever decides to abandon the modern movement can choose between Versailles and Las Vegas, between sclerosis and drugs.”<sup>10</sup> Scolari dismisses this approach and denies that the only feasible alternatives to

---

email to Cynthia Davidson, Scolari clarified that “The New Architecture and the Avant-Garde” was originally written at the request of Joseph Rykwert for a special issue of *Studio International* on the situation in Italy in 1973 that was never published. Scolari and Rossi then agreed to include it in *Architettura razionale*.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted *ibid.*, 126

modernity are pure regression and “Pop architecture” – positions that, in the Italian context, clearly referred to the *Tendenza* and the Radical movement. “We cannot accept these ‘operative instructions’ as the only alternatives to the dogma of the modern movement,” he writes. “The modern movement’s legacy is still rife with unexplored possibilities, deep strata to be investigated, and the potential heresies that may arise from it will have to be grounded in the recognition of that doctrinaire legacy, or at least in its utilization.”<sup>11</sup> Scolari does not openly criticize architectural modernity – actually, he deems its legacy indispensable. He instead attacks positions such as Zevi’s, which would preclude a refounding of the discipline based on its irreducible specificity and autonomy and which, in any case, predated its modern exemplars.

Scolari dedicates much more space and energy to criticizing the Florentine Radicals, although he partially exempts Superstudio from this critique, “given their special attention to disciplinary debates.”<sup>12</sup> The first issue he addresses is the movement’s weak disciplinary character: if the Radical movement were any sort of avant-garde, it would be at best a *design* avant-garde unrelated to architecture: “The recent promotion of Italian design at the clamorous fair of the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1972) certainly provided positive and useful publicity to Italian industrial crafts; it did not, however, produce clarity.”<sup>13</sup> He singles out Archizoom, pointing to their “urbanistic propositions” (namely, No-Stop City) as evidence of the dubiousness of

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 127.

their architectural character: “Even if the pronouncement of new truths involves an area typical of the discipline, in asking itself the question of what the new city will be like and how it should be inhabited – and thus in advancing hypotheses of formal or purely cultural prefiguration – this avant-garde aspires to architecture without managing to be structured by it.”<sup>14</sup>

Scolari also warns of the dire consequences implicit in proposals whose “figurative potential” is based on a rejection of the past, which causes them to lose touch with reality. For him, the Radical movement was a reactionary one insofar as its “self-exclusion” ultimately strengthened the system it supposedly sought to subvert. He saw movement’s interest in technology as an alibi for “the production of graceful, disruptive objects. . . . The stylistic seal, as presupposition of commodification, reduces these formal prefigurations to the world of objects, consumption, and obsolescence.”<sup>15</sup>

Scolari’s attack on the Radical movement was far more aggressive than the one he launched against Zevi. He argues that the movement displayed a “cultured infantilism,” that their interest in foreign experiences was a symptom of “the provincialism of Italian culture, and of Florentine culture in particular,” that their designs were “different from the rest, perhaps more costly, but equally petulant and banal,” that their focus on the cultural aspect of consumerism was a “strategy of confusion.” In short, “in this colossal intellectual waste the avant-garde manages not even to be harmful, but simply to be

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 129.

useless.”<sup>16</sup> The virulence of Scolari’s attack on the Radical movement seems to suggest that he considered it the Tendenza’s true competitor. For, unlike Zevi, who belonged to another generation and represented orthodox modernity, both movements claimed to be the innovators of Italian architecture.

The Radical movement’s response to Scolari came from Archizoom’s Andrea Branzi, who, through his regular “Radical Notes” column in *Casabella*, had become its main ideologue and advocate. In his November 1973 column, titled “Unsealing the Shrine,” Branzi describes the growing disagreement between the Radical architects as the result of “a slow process of involution.”<sup>17</sup> He depicts Rossi’s international section of the Triennale as the “summit of disciplinary restoration. The sentence against the dissident groups has been noteworthy, blind and intransigent.” Branzi draws an analogy to Stalin’s purges, labeling Scolari the “Suslov of the situation” who had delivered “the official reproof of the unorthodox.” He accuses Scolari of oversimplification and of homogenizing a group that was actually a heterogeneous collective, one so diverse that Superstudio “actually move[s] within the ‘Aldo Rossi school’: they even exhibit in his section at the Triennale (and the text accompanying their project of two houses and a condominium is perhaps the most reactionary and punitive of the entire catalogue.”<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Andrea Branzi, “Radical Notes 12: Si scopron le tombe/Unsealing the Shrine,” *Casabella* 383 (November 1973): 10.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Branzi obscures the fact that Continuous Monument was also exhibited, and that Superstudio’s text had already been published in December 1969.

Branzi also expresses surprise that Archizoom's own No-Stop City, "which stands at this date as the most radical application of the very concept of rational architecture," could be criticized in a publication that advocates rational architecture.

Scolari's and Branzi's texts share certain telling similarities. Both authors present their stance as a revolt against the establishment: while for Scolari the *Tendenza* was a "heresy" opposed to modern dogmatism, for Branzi the Radical movement was a band of "dissidents" confronted by the *Tendenza*'s restoration of the discipline. Many of Branzi's arguments are symmetrical to Scolari's. "I do not see," Branzi writes, "how an accusation of rejection of history (is that a crime?) can be brought by one who considers history only a series of samples of architectonic forms to be used in various ways. . . . I do not see how an accusation of utopianism (is that a crime?) can be brought by those who propose a tautological architectonic world, abstracted from the present, useless to society since it is behind with respect to the degree of development of any of its sectors."<sup>19</sup>

Beyond this reflective attitude, which could be due to their common ideological background and desire to be the innovators of Italian architecture, more telling are the accusations Branzi does not dispute, no doubt seeing them as justifiable positions: indifference toward history ("is that a crime?") and insufficient disciplinarity. Branzi hardly bothers to refute Scolari's arguments about the negative consequences of the Radical movement's interdisciplinary leanings or its abandonment of architectural tradition. Actually, the allegation that the Radical movement was not a genuine architectural avant-garde but rather a design avant-garde is not even addressed.

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 11

Ultimately, this was precisely what distinguished much of the Radical movement, and certainly Archizoom and Branzi, from the Tendenza: its lack of interest in a disciplinary autonomy that distinguishes architecture from other fields of knowledge.

In his April 1974 “Radical Notes” column, Branzi reaffirms the Radical movement against the other two poles of the debate, orthodox modernism and the Tendenza: “The paradox is that while the Democratic-Socialists offer us an old model, the pseudo-Stalinists have offered an even older one. . . . The clash is between two possible revivals.”<sup>20</sup> In his May column, Branzi establishes some differences between Rossi – whom he acknowledges as having proposed in the early 1960s a “logical foundation of architecture . . . to transfer it inside a scientific and autonomous system”<sup>21</sup> – and his followers, who forgo the revolutionary potential of “neo-monumentalism” by limiting themselves to the pursuit of an aesthetic quality that is, in the end, no more than a bourgeois myth. For Branzi, Rossi’s followers were “only little reactionaries frightened by the disciplinary vacuum.” In sharp contrast with the postulates of the Tendenza – which were based on the intensification of the architectural object, its typological character, and its communicative potential – Branzi poses a vision of the city where “today ‘architecture’ no longer exists: in the qualification of an enclosed space much greater importance is attributed to air-conditioning, and to the quality of the light

---

<sup>20</sup> Andrea Branzi, “Radical Notes 14: Alpinismo e existenz maximum/Mountain Climbing and Existenz Maximum,” *Casabella* 388 (April 1974): 10.

<sup>21</sup> Andrea Branzi, “Radical Notes 15: Avanguardie e fascismo/Fascism and the Avant-Garde,” *Casabella* 389 (May 1974): 8.

and colors, than to the secret logical harmony governing the growth of the whole organism.” In this vision, the city becomes just a “usable structure,” and architecture, just a “theatrical impediment, an old and neurotic system of control.”<sup>22</sup>

In his November column, “Apollo e Dioniso a Gallarate,” Branzi refers to a parallel controversy between Zevi and Rossi and sets himself apart from both “the orthodox tradition of the Modern Movement and the involitional phenomenon of neo-monumentalism.”<sup>23</sup> For him, the difference between these positions was more superficial than real, given that both shared a vision of architecture privileging the formal, the compositional, and the visual and that both were based on the cataloguing and use of outdated formal repertoires. These positions, therefore, were “both moving in a field of neo-eclecticism.” Branzi was convinced that modern architecture was exhausted and that the discipline was going through a deep crisis, themes that he had addressed his previous columns. The only way out was to focus on discovering the possibilities of the new situation: “The crisis in architecture cannot be resolved by choosing between two formal qualities, but by getting to the bottom of this crisis until we discover its roots in new mechanisms of production and in the end of the cultural role of the city, which has become a ‘service’ and no longer a ‘representative’ structure, ‘urban identity’ having been transferred to other media.”<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Andrea Branzi, “Radical Notes 19: Apollo e Dioniso a Gallarate,” *Casabella* 395 (November 1974).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Branzi uses the well-known apartment complex by Carlo Aymonino and Rossi in Milan's Gallarate quarter to illustrate his argument. Despite the different appearance of the four buildings by Aymonino and the one by Rossi – which, as the article's title implies, are respectively Dionysian and Apollonian – they do not embody alternative visions of architecture. Their differences are limited to their architects' formal repertoires, or rather quotations: "Actually, the comparison is carried out on the basis of simulation: one comes forward with Terragni and Muzio, the other replies with a kind of Japanese Le Corbusier."<sup>25</sup>

Branzi's analysis of Gallarate has interesting similarities with Manfredo Tafuri's critique of the same complex in his article "L'Architecture dans le Boudoir," published earlier that year in *Oppositions*. For Tafuri, while Aymonino's carefully articulated volumes offer specific responses to specific situations, Rossi's hieratic block is the pinnacle of abstraction. While the former are based on a proliferation of signs, the latter is the absolute sign. For Tafuri, however, Aymonino's noise and Rossi's silence speak of the same thing: the collapse of architectural language. "The coexistence of objects, heaped together in constructivist fashion and obstinately forced to communicate impossible meanings, and a mute object, closed within its equally obstinate timidity, recapitulates in an exemplary fashion the entire 'drama' of modern architecture. Architecture, once again, has fashioned a discourse on itself. But, this time, in an unusual

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

way: as a dialogue, that is, between two different modes of architectural writing that arrive at the same result.”<sup>26</sup>

Tafuri’s analysis of Gallarate is part of his more general idea that architects could only count on a set of elements from the modern tradition that were the fragments of a failed utopia – mute signs that had lost their organic relationship with the world that gave them meaning – and at the same time the only possible repertoire. Architecture, therefore, had become a self-referential universe expressed through a hermetic and esoteric language. Tafuri detects in Rossi’s work the inability to reestablish an architectural language and attributes the silence of its signs to the fact that the connection to their origin has been lost, not because that source cannot be traced but rather because “that ‘center’ has been historically destroyed, because that ‘source’ has been dispersed into multiple streams.”<sup>27</sup> What is present in Rossi’s work is not the “order of discourse,” an order irremediably lost, but rather its ghost: “This research loses itself in one last endeavor to save a humanistic ordinance for architecture. The thread of Ariadne with which Rossi weaves his typological research does not lead to the ‘reestablishment of the discipline,’ but rather to its dissolution.”<sup>28</sup> Tafuri’s critique of the unavoidable silence of the Tendenza’s attempted operation and, more generally, of the futility of any withdrawal

---

<sup>26</sup> Manfredo Tafuri, “L’Architecture dans le Boudoir: The Language of Criticism and the Criticism of Language,” in *Architecture Theory since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 157. Originally published in *Oppositions* 3 (May 1974).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

to architectural language in many ways resembles Branzi's arguments. But it also points to similarities underlying the Tendenza and the Radical movement.

Commenting on a "dissolution" in the world of merchandise in the work of artists such as László Moholy-Nagy, Kurt Schwitters, and Sol LeWitt, Tafuri writes, "The desecrating immersion into chaos permits these artists to reemerge with instruments that, by having absorbed the logic of that chaos, are prepared to dominate it from within. Thus we have the *form of formlessness* as both conquest and project. On the one side, the manipulation of pure signs as the foundations of an architectural constructivism; on the other, the acceptance of the indefinite, of dissolution."<sup>29</sup> He also detects this approach in the work of Robert Rauschenberg, Jean Tinguely, and John Cage, where "language can speak of the indeterminate, the casual, the transient, since in them it greets the advent of the Whole. Yet this is but an endeavor to give a form of expression to the phenomenon of *mass consumption*. It is not by chance that a great many of such celebrations of formlessness take place under the banner of a technological utopia."<sup>30</sup> It is through the technological myth that Tafuri establishes a connection between this attitude and "the ironic and irritating metaphors of the Archigram and Archizoom groups," among others architects. But his depiction of the "form of formlessness" can be extended to apply to most Radical architects, since they shared a fascination with mass consumption and an acceptance of the dissolution of both discourse and architecture itself.

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

The Tendenza and the Radical movement both inevitably led, willingly or not, to architecture's dissolution, because in terms that are already clearly postmodern, they shared a context of increasing fragmentation, of a "loss of the center." Contrary to what the debate between Scolari and Branzi may suggest, both movements involved the death of architecture, a death that came from within in the case of the Tendenza and from outside in the case of the Radical movement. In a 2014 interview Branzi stressed this similarity: "While we saw the death of architecture as a liberation that was already underway, they [the Tendenza] instead experienced the death of architecture, accompanying it to its grave. However, they also, unknowingly, worked on the death of architecture!"<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Tafuri's description of the "form of formlessness" suggests that, paradoxically, it is easier to achieve some order by accepting chaos than by denying it and that the indeterminate, the casual, the transient, can give rise to "the advent of the Whole."

From this perspective, while the Tendenza's pursuit of a recovered order and totality would be hopelessly in vain, the Radical architects of "formlessness," through their celebration of contingency and their acceptance of the dissolution of architecture, paradoxically came much closer to some new order: an order derived from mass

---

<sup>31</sup> Pablo Martínez Capdevila, "Estamos dentro: En conversación con Andrea Branzi," *PLOT 29* (February/March 2016): 179. My translation. The interview took place in March 11, 2014, in Milan.

consumption's "totality of disorder."<sup>32</sup> This de facto situation was, then, already present, verifiable, and inescapable. In other words, there was more order and more certainty – and incidentally more of the clarity Scolari repeatedly demanded – in the work of Radicals such as Archizoom than in that of the Tendenza.

From Tafuri's standpoint, the rational architecture promoted by the Tendenza was a quest for a chimerical new disciplinary foundation capable of producing order and clarity in a world where they were no longer possible. In this light, Rossi's followers seemed to be afflicted with what Friedrich Nietzsche called the "historical fever," a disorientation that inhibits the ability to formulate genuine novelty.<sup>33</sup> In the second of his *Untimely Meditations*, "On the Use and Disadvantages of History for Life" (1874), Nietzsche describes the problem of "epigonism," of an excess of historical consciousness that inhibits the formulation of true novelty. As the philosopher Gianni Vattimo writes, this excess also "prevents nineteenth-century European civilization from developing a specific style of its own, and consequently requires it to derive the forms of its art,

---

<sup>32</sup> Tafuri uses this expression in his analysis of Piranesi's *Carceri*, albeit in reference to the aftermath of the collapse of ancient values and order. See Manfredo Tafuri, *Progetto e utopia* (Bari: Laterza, 1973).

<sup>33</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Use and Disadvantages of History for Life" (1874), in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 57–123.

architecture, fashion, and so on from the vast warehouse of theatrical masks and costumes that the past has become for it.”<sup>34</sup>

A clear symptom of this historical fever is Arduino Cantàfora’s painting, *La città analoga*, exhibited at the 1973 Triennale. The painting depicts a variety of “rational architectures” from the past assembled into an ideal city that, following Rossi’s postulates, was paradoxically meant to be a socialist one – that is to say, a future one. A search of the past for the foundation of the future is not as evident in the painting as the impossibility of formulating the future as something different from the past or at least from a certain idealized and selected past. Ultimately, the painting shows the Tendenza’s inability to break free from a utopian, goal-oriented concept of time that, according to Jean-François Lyotard, characterizes all metanarratives. This teleological conception strains modern temporality between past and future – so much so that, with the exception of Rossi’s Monument to the Partisans at Segrate and his Gallarate block, the present is entirely absent from the mural. This is emphasized by the absence of people, plants, vehicles, and objects, which imparts a timelessness and metaphysical transcendence also found in many of Rossi’s drawings. The absence of life makes the buildings the only inhabitants of the urban scene, the sole protagonists of the city theater.

In comparison, Archizoom’s No-Stop City (1969) was a clear rejection not only of nostalgia but also, unlike most projects of the 1960s and ’70s neo-avant-gardes, of any

---

<sup>34</sup> Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture*, trans. Jon R. Snyder (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 165. Originally published as *La fine della modernità* (Milan: Garzanti, 1985).

futuristic or visionary attitude. The project, relying on technology that was already available and commonly deployed in offices and supermarkets, invented nothing new: “The resultant building is a first elementary implementation of the current technological level of facts such as the elevator, air conditioning, and electric lighting applied on an urban scale.”<sup>35</sup> In fact, neither the air-conditioned container nor its content were truly new. This is made particularly clear in Archizoom’s dioramas, where an indoor environment, which differs from a generic office landscape only in its endlessness, is colonized by familiar furniture and products, including Ritz crackers and a Norton Manx motorbike. Contemporary time manifests itself bluntly through these many objects, which locate the images in a perpetually renewing “now.” Signs of life can also be seen, not only in the human figures that occasionally appear but also in the objects (pans, food packages, tents, sleeping bags) that constitute their living environments.

*La città analoga* and No-Stop City both reflect the “eternal return” caused by the exhaustion of modernity, but in different ways. In the Archizoom project an ahistorical present prevails, marked by the constant expiration and renewal induced by consumption – where everything, in the words of Vattimo, “tends to flatten out at the level of contemporaneity and simultaneity, thus producing a de-historicization of experience.”<sup>36</sup> In Cantàfora’s painting another kind of historical immobility prevails, one

---

<sup>35</sup> Archizoom Associati, “Archizoom: Progetto di concorso per l’università di Firenze,” *Domus* 509 (April 1972): 12. My translation.

<sup>36</sup> Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 10.

in which past and future converge in a static, idealized view devoid of the present and consistent with the epigonism observed by Nietzsche.

But there is a more obvious and striking similarity between these urban scenes. Although the *Tendenza* aspired to order, clarity, and transcendence, Cantàfora's mural, consciously or unconsciously, strays from these values, displaying a fragmentary and motley city assembled from heterogeneous parts. In this sense, the buildings of this fictional city are analogous to the objects and furniture of *No-Stop City*, despite the differences in scale and degree of permanence. Both are the main actors in their respective cities: while in the former everything is architecture, in the latter everything is objects – objects that assume many of the essential roles traditionally assigned to architecture. In fact, returning to Tafuri's description, it is not so much that *Archizoom* attempted to “give a form of expression to mass consumption” through architecture but rather that architecture had disappeared and been almost completely replaced by mass consumption itself.

Ultimately, the primary difference between the *Tendenza* and the Radical movement was strictly disciplinary. While the former wanted to recover architecture's specificity and autonomy, the latter acknowledged and celebrated its loss. While the refounding put forward by the *Tendenza* resulted in a nostalgic and defensive withdrawal, the Radical movement sought to explore another sort of refounding: the fresh start opened up by architecture's dissolution. *Archizoom* consciously pursued this dissolution, stating, “The ultimate goal of modern Architecture is the ‘elimination’ of architecture

itself.”<sup>37</sup> But architecture did not disappear altogether in No-Stop City; it instead assumed a subsidiary role as a pure and neutral background for objects and life. One of the most remarkable features of this project is its radicalization of the figure-ground dialectic. The objects shape a habitat that is fragmented, heterogeneous, disordered, hyperexpressive, and dynamic, while the background is unitary, homogeneous, ordered, inexpressive, and stable.

The unrelenting centralized perspectives and proportions of both the No-Stop City dioramas and *La città analoga* recall some of the most iconic depictions of Renaissance ideal cities: three paintings from the late 15th century, all titled *La città ideale*.<sup>38</sup> The similarities between them and *La città analoga* are more obvious, insofar as they also depict lifeless, exterior cities where architecture is the principal protagonist. It could even be argued that Cantàfora’s painting further emphasizes architecture’s centrality through a higher point of view, as if the viewer herself were another building. Yet in the three versions of *La città ideale* the visible grid of the pavement articulates and orders the scene, effectively mediating the parts and the whole, whereas in *La città analoga* the

---

<sup>37</sup> Archizoom Associati, “City, Assembly Line of Social Issues: Ideology and Theory of the Metropolis,” in *No-Stop City*, Archizoom Associati, ed. Andrea Branzi (Orleans: HYX, 2006), 170. Originally published in *Casabella* 350/51 (July/August 1970).

<sup>38</sup> The author of these paintings is still unclear. They have been attributed to a number of artists including Piero della Francesca, Fra Carnevale, Giuliano da Sangallo, and Leon Battista Alberti. The individual paintings are usually referred to by the name of the city in which they are held today: Berlin, Urbino, and Baltimore.

buildings seem to hover over an unstructured and fluid pavement, as if the underlying order and harmonious totality of the Renaissance has hopelessly liquefied. In fact, a plan of this city would be far from that of an ideal Renaissance city and very close to Piranesi's *Iconographia campi martii*, the late Baroque engraving that, for Tafuri, prophetically announced the definitive loss of organic form and the crisis of the ideal of the whole and the universal: "These fragments, in the city, were pitilessly absorbed and deprived of all autonomy, despite their obstinate wish to assume articulated, composite configurations. In the *Iconographia Campi Martii* we witness an epic representation of the battle waged by architecture against itself."<sup>39</sup> This reading also suits Cantàfora's painting remarkably well.

The three ideal cities seem, at first, further removed from No-Stop City, but they relate precisely to that neutral and mute background that architecture becomes in Archizoom's proposal: an interior container that is neither fluid nor chaotic but instead strictly ruled by a relentless grid of pillars and lifts, a Cartesian order emphasized by its modular ceilings. So while in Cantàfora's painting (and later in Rossi's own *Città analoga*) the perspectival order of the Renaissance, as well as its underlying, all-encompassing grid, has vanished, in Archizoom's urban speculations it is present and visible, even if its ability to integrate the different scalar realms into a harmonious, articulated whole has been lost. The figure-ground tension of No-Stop City makes sense in light of Archizoom's description: "The city no longer 'represents' the city but becomes

---

<sup>39</sup> Manfredo Tafuri, "Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology," in *Architecture Theory since 1968*, 10. Originally published in *Contropiano* 1 (January–April 1969).

the system itself, programmed and isotropic.”<sup>40</sup> Thus the project seems an accurate manifestation of the emerging post-Fordist regime: while the background can be seen as a conceptual representation of global capitalism devoid of obstacles, restraints, and alternatives, the figures are a concrete representation of the plurality, temporality, and contingency through which that very capitalism tangibly manifests itself.

Both the nostalgic refounding sought by the *Tendenza* and the untroubled dissolution celebrated by the Radical movement reflected the same world. And although from different stances, both were reacting to a schizophrenic and contradictory postmodern regime in which a growing fragmentation of the “micro” hid the inevitability, stability, and totality of the “macro.” Although decades later this claustrophobic and oppressive prophecy seems fatally fulfilled, the question of whether architecture should retreat into itself or dissolve into its outside remains open.

---

<sup>40</sup> Archizoom Associati, “No-Stop City. Residential Parkings. Climatic Universal Sistem,” *Domus* 496 (March 1971): 53.

*Author’s note:* This piece is a revised excerpt from my PhD dissertation “Andrea Branzi y la città senza architettura” (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, 2014). I would like to thank my supervisors María Teresa Muñoz and Fernando Quesada, whose insight and ideas were key in shaping this text.