Realism Under Construction

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IF THERE IS SUCH A THING AS A SENSE OF REALITY, THERE MUST ALSO BE A SENSE OF POSSIBILITY.
— Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities*

The ubiquity of the term "realism" renders difficult any attempt to construct it critically. Primarily an epistemological construct, since the mid-nineteenth century, realist movements in art and literature have aimed to represent ordinary, everyday reality as a means to resist idealization.[1] In its more reactionary guise, the descriptive mode of realist aesthetics is seen as working to support the status quo.[2] At its most progressive, realism is seen as bringing awareness of the "true" state of things. This awareness can, in turn, trigger a renewed "sense of possibility," as Musil has it, and bring about social and political change.[3] Here, I would like to offer a construction of realism along these lines, as a theoretical and critical paradigm, and from the stance of architecture understood "after text."

From the outset, this seems an unlikely project. Realism is intrinsically linked with linguistic art forms *par excellence*, like literature, film and painting. But the terms of a discussion on realism in architecture are indeed substantially different from those of other art forms. Although concerns for figuration, communication, and meaning pervade architectural rhetoric — the more so the closer architectural theorists embrace the linguistic paradigm, with architecture one enters the non-representational realm. In its mainly utilitarian and material condition, architecture is not primarily figurative and is rarely mimetic. Arguably, architecture is not a language, and its descriptive basis is hardly immediate. Unsurprisingly, the solid and matured nature of the realism debates in disciplines like art history and literary studies remain unpaired in architectural scholarship. And yet claims of truth and projects aimed at reaching out to, learning from, giving service to, being, penetrating, understanding, paying tribute to, and sometimes transforming a given "real" run the gamut of modern architectural history. For recent evidence, see the latest issue of *Perspecta,* aptly titled "The Real," where the editors claim the "pursuit of the real" as the intrinsic mission of architecture.[4] In proposing the "real" as an undefined term, and not as a specific historical condition, in stating and extending, rather than questioning, the pervasiveness of concerns for the "real" in architecture, and in holding back a statement on what the stakes are *vis-à-vis* this "real," they fail to propose a clear project for contemporary architecture though. Indeed, accounts of what the differences between claiming the "real" and consciously speaking of "realism" might be, and of the significance of such a project, are harder to come by in architectural discourse. Unlike with structuralism, functionalism, historicism, rationalism, regionalism, and modernism, exegesis of the implications of this pervasive "ideology of the real" in architecture are at best episodic, and rarely systematic.[5] The "real" remains largely an uncontested and unexplored belief — a myth — that architects and architectural scholars have found hard to crack.

In addition, reactions to the stupor that pervades architectural discourse with regard to articulating the social or political engagement of architecture (an engagement that, if taken for progressive purposes, amounts to criticism) are at best scattered.[6] Arguably immersed in post-utopian thought, architects

vaguely suspicious of the social and political effect of their work are either at pains to articulate a solid discourse of engagement, resigned to the market force, or launched in hands-on, advocacy-like practices largely devoid of a theoretical counterpart.[7] If anything, realism today may evoke either phenomenology or the projective and pragmatic overtones of the so-called "post-critical" stance. But if reviews of the former focused precisely on the disengagement from cultural and historical processes it implied, the "real" here being the body and its relationship to the materiality of architecture, the latter quite literally took criticism as its opponent.[8]

So what are the bases for staging this unlikely couple, the "critical" and "realism" in architecture and "after text"? Here I borrow from a recent argument by cultural critic Tomas Lloréns, for whom what makes a work of art realist in a critical sense is not so much the intention to represent reality as its forwarding of formal strategies aimed at an intellectual connection with the social reality of the time, a reality that remains otherwise unarticulated.[9] This is, he sets the contemporary debate on realism in post-linguistic terms, where a construction of critical realism overcomes the predominance of issues of representation, communication, senses and content, and moves towards questions of ideological, material, and formal experimentation. These are questions architecture should be at ease dealing with.

Interestingly enough, phenomenologists and "post-critics" alike positioned their projects against the figures that best represented the pro-linguistic campaign in the 1970s, the so-called Grays and Whites respectively. Specifically, the post-critical trajectory was founded on the assumption that there was a "critical" architecture that meant, following the "negative thought" of Italian critic Manfredo Tafuri, retreating into empty form as the only means of resistance to an all-engulfing late capitalism.[10] But the reaction was less based on questioning the specifics of this resistance of retreat, than on attacking the proliferation of theory that came with it. Put simply, "criticality" implied a denial of actual social and political engagement, a denial that "post-critics" only came to reinforce.[11] In his account of this trajectory, George Baird pertinently notes that the whole thing was the product of a partial, and specifically North American, reading of Tafuri, for whom another form of being critical in architecture seemed plausible, if hardly immediate.[12] Tafuri's *other* road to criticism was precisely a theory of architectural realism, one he worked through precisely on the basis of his assumption of the linguistic nature of architecture. In what follows I offer Tafuri's realism as a way to revisit the linguistic-based critical/post-critical aporia, to question it at its basis, and to set theoretical bases for an architectural criticism less in terms of refusal and form and more in terms of engagement and reform. This will place Tafuri in a less pessimistic position than the one his critics have traditionally granted him, as he pointed to an architecture that was as projective and committed as it was critical and realist.

MANFREDO TAFURI'S CONSTRUCTION OF ARCHITECTURAL REALISM

Tafuri's historical writings on the vicissitudes of modern architecture, which he developed from the 1960s to the mid-1980s, are a gradual construction of realism in architecture.[13] To reveal Tafuri's realism implies reading him less in terms of the "negative thought" of his contemporary Massimo Cacciari than of cultural theories of Marxist interwar thinkers. More specifically, and in order to bring Tafuri's architectural criticism beyond the linguistic paradigm in which he operated, I here read him alongside Bertolt Brecht's theater and theories, at the core of which is a practice of realism. Brecht was not only quoted by Tafuri, but was also fundamental to the work of Walter Benjamin that so much influenced him. From his seminal *Architecture and Utopia* onwards, Tafuri's palimpsest-like ongoing definition of and criticism of the architectural avant-gardes invariably unfolds in relation to two concepts: "utopia" and "the real." It is within this dialectic, within this conceptual framework, that his proposal for a critical realism gradually emerges, if admittedly obliquely. Tafuri initially sets utopian and realist artistic practices in confrontation, seeing realist as being somewhat content with coming to grasps with the given real, and utopians as forming a vanguard outside of it:

> It is, in fact, the inherent opposition within all modern art: those who search into the very bowels of reality in order to know and assimilate its values and wretchedness; and those who desire to go beyond reality, who want to construct ex novo new realities, new values, and new public symbols.[14]

For Tafuri, if realists refer to the here and now and demand a pragmatic stand, utopians project the artwork into a timeless space of thought, the space

of the avant-gardes where there is no need for ratification. If realism tends to entail formal stasis, utopia allows for progressive thought. If realism demands participation, bound as it is to the processes of production, the scope of the avant-gardes is the individual and speculative creation of form, form without constraints. If the realist attitude implies consensus, a utopian attitude implies rejection — of history, of participation, of life, a rejection that bears the sin of self-destruction, which is paradoxically its mode of survival. In relation to history, the realist works in continuity, the avant-gardist through rupture. Through utopian thought avant-gardists offer a reconstruction of the totality lost to the forces of capitalist development. Realists, on the other hand, work within the fragmentary and inherently contradictory condition of modern life. This opposition, Tafuri argues, forms the core and ultimate malaise of the modern project.

But in taking the notion of utopia from Mannheim, and his distinction of various types of utopia as they relate to different ideologies or socio-political systems of order, Tafuri actually admits to a form of utopia closely related to reality; one ultimately destined to become "capable of breaking the confines of existing reality."[15] In Tafuri's characteristic dialectical style — which resists Hegelian *Aufhebung* — the initial opposition in the arts between bound reality and escapist utopia only sets the framework for a struggle that defines the development of modern architecture.[16] It is *in* this struggle that Tafuri's architectural realism, a realism of reform, or a utopia of the real, operates (needless to say, he never put it this bluntly).

Figure 1: G. Piranesi, *Il Campo Marzio dell'antica Roma*, from Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth.*

For starters, Tafuri sees the prehistory of the "modern movement" in experiments on "realistic utopianism and utopian realism" in the 1840s work of Charles Fourier, Robert Owen, and Étienne Cabet, who tested their projects on "realized facts, constructed and verifiable."[17] Echoing Marx and Engels's critique of utopian socialists, Tafuri sees these as conciliatory experiments, oblivious of the new fragmentary condition of the city, and thus not fully aware of the power of capital and incapable of affecting the real. The legacy of these failures was that early twentieth century artistic avant-gardes — De Stijl, Cubism, Russian Futurism, and Constructivism — distanced themselves from the real and restricted their work to a criticality of a negative bent. This was the "drama of utopia" prefigured in Piranesi.[18]

It was left to design and architecture, specifically through the Bauhaus, to act as the "decantation chamber" of the vanguards of the arts and to turn it into "productive reality."[19] The story of modern architecture as a "mediat(or of) realism and utopia" continued with the *Siedlungen* planning projects of the 1920s and 1930s.[20] These were de facto political utopias, and yet they also failed, as, once realized, they became ineffective islands at the edge of the urban realities. A similar critique applies to postwar Italian neo-realist quarters, among others urbanisms likewise nostalgic and ultimately regressive utopias.[21] For Le Corbusier in Algiers this relationship appears in reverse, as an apparent utopian project turns out to be a pretty realist one. For Tafuri Le Corbusier was an acute observer of class conflicts and proposed an urbanism aimed at refurbishing the given conditions of capitalist society.[22] But the misunderstanding of Le Corbusier as a utopian proves to be the swan song for a realism of critical potential. Ultimately, Tafuri's infamous crisis of modern architecture, the tragic ending for architecture as criticism, is likewise tied to this struggle. This end came when reality, in the form of industrial capitalism, superseded utopia, when the balance between reality and utopia was lost to the predominance of the former.[23] The historical process of modern architecture's loosing battle to position itself between real and utopia renders futile the potential criticality of architecture. The battle lost and the "hopes in design" gone, lost also is the battleground that allowed for a criticism in practice. [24]

The dissolution of the space for the realist struggle in the realm of architectural practice only opens up

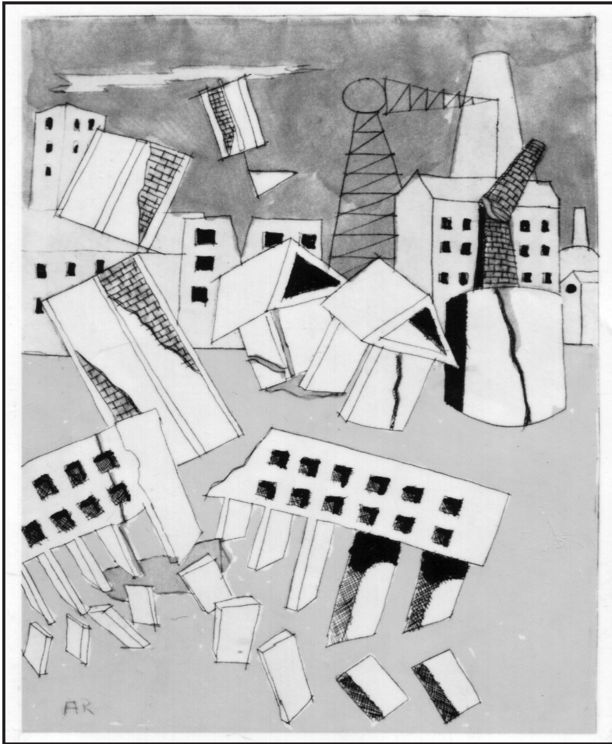

Figure 2: Aldo Rossi, *L'architecture assassinée*, from Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia.*

a new project, a realist one as well, in the realm of architectural criticism. In *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, a collection of historical essays on architectural avant-gardes written during the 1970s and first compiled in 1980, Tafuri stresses a Marxist project to place the "real," which for him means the conditions of capitalist production, "into crisis," at this point specifically through historiography.[25] If architectural practice cannot escape ideology (following Mannheim, Tafuri here already identifies different types of ideology available for the architect though, and thus he opens up to options for resistance in the possibility of a choice), then only architectural criticism can disclose it and thus forward the historical processes of the "real."[26] Following his own conclusion in *Architecture and Utopia*, Tafuri's running argument concerns the exposure of the moment of rupture in architecture between ideology and material production, between art and life; this "gap" stands for the ever-unresolved dialectic between the ideal sphere of utopian ideology and the labyrinthine nature of the real that architecture is bound to. It is up to the architectural historian to look into and disclose this gap, in an argumentative loop that will ultimately disclose the real.[27] At this point Tafuri is putting forth a theory of architecture in terms of history, and not of practice.

Of course, not any type of history will do the job, and here we encounter Tafuri limiting the linguistic model he otherwise embraces. For he claims that language-based interpretations, which for him means stylistic or formal readings of the architectural avant-gardes, imply not testing the relationship between ideology and the real. In a metaphorical play between his method, his objects, and his ultimate critical project, for Tafuri the architectural practices analysis of which would best showcase the ideology-real "gap" are those already directed "outward towards the real."[28] These are the architects who are less concerned with the formal plays of architecture than involved *within* the relations of bureaucratic, political, and technological production. Architects like Friedrich Naumann, Henry Ford, Martin Wagner, Walter Rathenau, and Ernst May not only accepted "the new role which the difficult present-day reality proposes," but they also "aimed at finding new roles for the work of a technician."[29] In short, they worked less with form than towards reform, or as he put it, "from *form* to *reform*."[30]

The realist should be aware of operative celebratory analysis, even of reformist figures. Precisely, the task is to reveal the intricacies of their practices, to "cruelly reveal their deficiencies and ambiguities, thereby making it readily known that those unanswered problems are the only ones worthy of 'political' action."[31] This is what directs the architectural historian, and possibly the architect reader of history, "towards a greater knowledge of reality."[32] Still, for Tafuri architecture cannot be critical, but its analysis may be. In this way, he recoups the Marxist tradition of realism, with its claims for the withering of capitalist ideology, from the artist to the historian (Tafuri himself). History writing, and not form making, is the form of the critique of ideology.[33]

Tafuri definitely moves away from the traditional Marxist belief in the existence of a "real," of ideology as false consciousness, and of realism as the project of unveiling of ideology.[34] In his 1985 essay "Réalisme et architecture," he acknowledges the need to actively construct ideology, and proposes "realism" less as a method than a fully constructed theoretical concept, or, as he put it, a "historical construction."[35] In doing so he extends realism to allowing for criticality in practice as well. At this

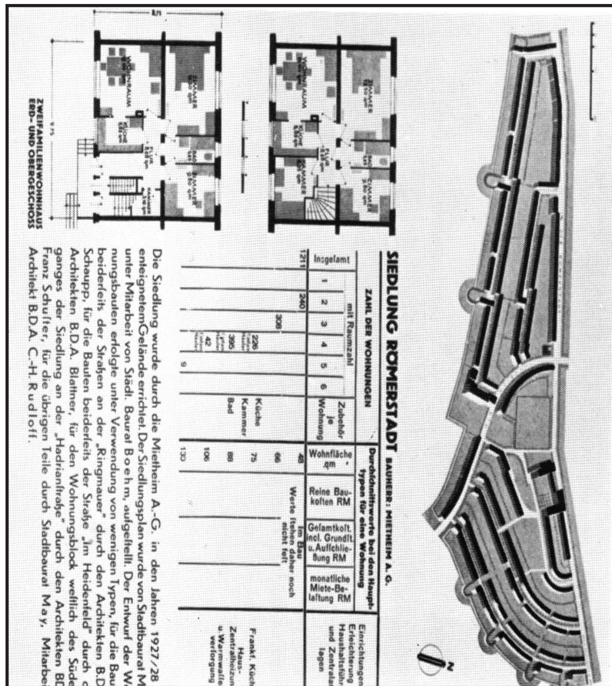

Figure 3: Ernst May et al. Siedlung Römerstadt, Frankfurt, 1926-28, from Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth.*

point, for Tafuri realism is an "attitude" that ought to be identified from the principles "consciously placed" in the production of the architectural object. [36] An assessment of realist architecture demands a close analysis of the built form, and calls for considering the extent to which the architectural object embodies aspects of vernacular culture. The general parameters of study for the realist work of architecture are "construction" and "habitation" — the primary, almost anthropological conditions of architecture — and the extent to which these relate to "the traditions of spontaneous anonymity, almost always with a rural origin."[37] This relationship favors architecture with a populist allure, one that attempts to address the masses, and to inscribe the work of architecture within a "totalité chorale."[38] The goal of realist architecture is to build up collective identity, for "(it) speaks in everybody's name."[39] This collectivism and communicative power imply that realist architecture is explicitly engaged with a political project; and so is the reading of it.

Here Tafuri refers back to the linguistic model at its most basic, and arguably faces his cul-de-sac. Despite earlier calls for analysis of the processes of production and of the position of the architect within these processes, for Tafuri architecture's key role is its will to communicate. In fact, the level of legibility the architectural object may have for the collective (although whatever this homogeneous collective is Tafuri never discloses) holds the clue for how "critical" a particular realist architecture might be: too much legibility and one falls into propaganda and populism, too little and one has given up reality for the comforts of the "golden gable."[40] Tafuri disregards probable critical realisms for their "excess of communication" or their conservative (sometimes dangerously so) political ideologies. These include the various populisms of Paul Mebes, Heinrich Tessenow, and Charles Moore, among others.[41] One of Tafuri's main examples of realist architecture, with just enough legibility and thus just enough criticality, is post-revolutionary Soviet rearealism, where the young Melnikov, among others, acquires appropriate "communication power."[42] Tafuri finds here the right relationship with, which includes a distancing from, popular referents and local materials. Through geometric distortions Melnikov disfigures the found structures and popular themes and reinvents his sources. It in this way that architecture offers a legible, but also projective interpretation of the given real; that is what makes it critical.

With the examples of the realist architects of post-revolution Russia, like Melnikov, of the 1920s in Red Vienna, of the United States New Deal, and of post war Italy, Tafuri calls for a synthesis, for an attitude somehow in-between total isolation from the real and abstraction on the one hand, and excessive adhesion to the real on the other.[43] The "hermetic realism" of the young Melnikov shows a "relative permeability in the frontier between realism and avant-garde."[44] Tafuri argues for an engagement with reality that includes a distancing from it, providing what could be thought of as relative autonomy for the work of architecture. This implies considering architecture from a material and formal stance, not a primarily linguistic one, a move Tafuri himself was not quite ready to take. When, at one point, he asks, "of what ultimately must the architectural sign speak of again?" the issue as to whether architecture actually speaks of anything is not even addressed.[45] In the end Tafuri's own linguistic-based understanding of architecture only cuts short his project of realism in architecture. For Tafuri architecture is but a "language,"

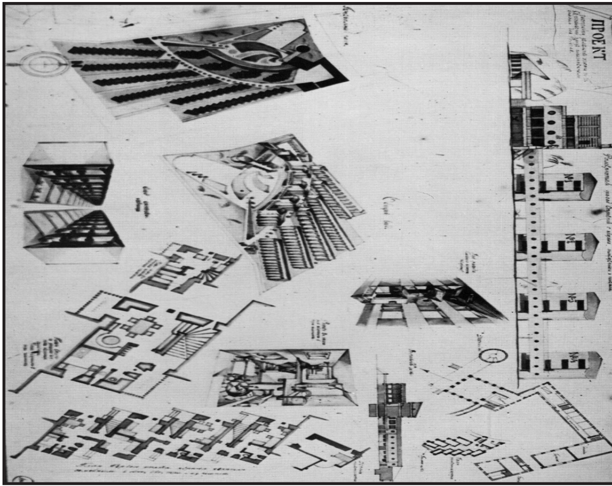

Figure 4: Konstantin Melnikov, competition project for the Serouchovskaya Ulitsa district, Moscow, 1922-23, from Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*

a set of symbols, references, and metaphors with the potential to reach various audiences: whether the elite architect, the critic, or the public. Victor Hugo's declaration of the death of architecture as a communicative object came prematurely for Tafuri.

In arguing for relative autonomy and choosing Melnikov over Mebes, abstraction of the popular and vernacular forms over mimesis of them, and experimentation with local materials over historical representation, Tafuri's came closer to Bertolt Brecht's model of realism than to that of György Lukács, who was a favorite of calls for architectural realism in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[46] Brechtian realism implied a move away from linguistics that Tafuri couldn't quite come to terms with; for if Lukács's realism was historicist and linguistic, Brecht's was material, experimental, and formalist. With the task at hand of looking into the implications of a post-linguistic architecture (not non-linguistic, but specifically post-) one can venture into what Tafuri's critic of architectural criticism would look like had he clearly chosen Brecht over Lukács. Here, a closer look at Brecht's model of realism seems in order, as he articulated it during the 1930s and in relation to the prevailing model of Lukács, who described realism as follows:

> [The realist's] goal is to penetrate the laws governing objective reality and to uncover the deeper, hidden, mediated, not immediately perceptible network of relationships that go to make up society . . . the labor of the realist is extraordinarily arduous, since it has both an artistic and an intellectual dimension. Firstly, he has to discover these relationships intellectually and give them artistic shape. Secondly, although in practice the two processes are indivisible, he must artistically conceal the relationship he has just discovered through the process of abstraction — i.e., he has to transcend the process of abstraction.[47]

This statement could relatively be applied to Brecht as well, as both Lukács's and Brecht's models of realism shared the objective of revealing the "true" condition of culture and society through cultural production. This process of revelation would eventually rouse consciousness and lead to social and political change. At the core of both projects was the belief, shared by Tafuri to some extent, in the capacity of aesthetic practices to dissolve the ideology that conceals the truth, which was for them the conditions and relationships of society developed under the processes of production and exchange of capitalism. What sets them apart is Lukács second step of the realist working process, the closing sentence. That is, his choice of mimesis over abstraction and of historical references over material ones at the level of representation. For Lukács the realist work of art — as best represented in the novel — ought ultimately to hide the process of abstraction through which it came into being and propose a somewhat harmonious, unitary whole. This is a necessary step for it to be legible to and gain the appeal of the so-called "masses." For this purpose Lukács advocated continuity through the use of the forms already present in popular culture and tested through history. These help best to reflect life. The fragmentation brought about by the processes of modernization is for him nothing but appearance, the veil of capitalist ideology. *Unity* is the *real* condition of a capitalist society in times of revolutionary crisis.

Brecht's alternative model is based on a different take on the "real." As for Benjamin and Kracauer after him, for Brecht *fragmentation* was, at least on the level of surface or appearance, the corollary of capitalism. But this is not perceived in everyday life since fragmentation has been naturalized. Thus an artist ought to represent "the causal complexities of society," as a way to unmask "the prevailing view of things as the view of those who are in power."[48] Along these lines, Brecht's epic theater aimed at bringing about the alienation of the audience from the action on stage rather than generating a merging or identification with it. Through this distancing, it aimed at intellectual awakening rather than sensory and legible experience.[49] In Brecht's words,

"instead of sharing an experience the spectator must come to grasp with things."[50]

Figure 5: Curtain and screens sidestage for *The Three Penny Opera*, 1928-29, from Bertolt Brecht, *On Theater. The Development of an Aesthetic.*

For Brecht no less than Lukács, to be a realist was to seek the truth. But, as Tafuri claimed for Melnikov, Brecht's truth was not teleological or historical; it was material truth. The most significant means for unveiling material truth was through formal exploration; no transparent form would ever render truth unmediated: "Anyone who saw me at work would think I was only interested in questions of form. I make these models because I wish to represent reality."[51] Epic theater was not only a new artistic form, but was itself based on formal experimentation, such as the introduction of technology and music on stage, the quotation of the lines or the de-playing of the character.[52] Brecht's theater likewise claimed connection to popular culture, but not in a mimetic manner. His attempt was not to *learn from* popular referents or continue their traditions as a means to better communicate with the masses. Rather, he proposed to build upon the popular, to "adopt and enrich the forms of expression of the masses," to "confirm and correct" their standpoint.[53] As Fredric Jameson has noted, epic theater was uncompromisingly advanced in form, yet intransigently popular in intention."[54]

The forward-looking notion of the popular allowed Brecht to reconcile realism and abstraction, a reconciliation that was ultimately impossible for Lukács. Whereas Lukács' final step was to overcome intellectual distance, in the sense of including but overcoming abstraction in the service of effectively reaching the masses, Brecht's epic theater ultimately relied on showcasing abstraction, on revealing the very distance between art and life. Although Brecht brought theater into the factory, and industrial modes and apparatus onto the stage — arguably ultimately moves that dismantle what Benjamin called aura — epic theater relies on autonomy for its critical power. After all, it is emotional, formal, and physical distance from the action that encourages a critical approach to it, and by extension to life.[55] Here lies the nuance in Brecht's realism that makes it all the more attractive for architecture: a relative autonomy is the necessary condition for Brecht's desired alienation to become effective, a distancing specifically intellectual but that is best achieved through formal and material experimentation, not through content.

REALISM TODAY

Should one consider fragmentation and estrangement over harmony, abstraction over mimesis, appeals to reason over sensation, and formalism and reworkings of popular motifs as indices of the search for architectural realisms? Maybe. But in thinking about realism today, one can never totally loose sight of the historical conditions that sustain realisms such as Brecht's, Luckas's, and, if less clearly self-conscious, Tafuri's. The fragmentation and alienation of the viewer sought by Brecht was meant to parallel the alienation of the worker within industrial processes of production, an awareness of which was necessary as a step toward moving beyond capitalism. From Lukács's perspective the surface of the "real" was less relevant than the essence, which was for him a totality that should be regained in a post-capitalist society. In the 1930s they were writing from opposite sides of the world and at different stages of the historical process they expected would ultimately lead to socialism. While Brecht in the Weimar Republic was looking for revolution, for a way to arrive at the moment of crisis and change, Lukács in Hungary was writing in the context of an already-achieved socialist order, positioning himself within but critical of Stalinism. Consequently, Brecht pursued social awakening from the real, while Lukács looked to lead the existing order into a new humanism.

As for Tafuri, his gradual articulation of realism was founded on the pessimistic standpoint of the Eu-

ropean aftermath of 1968, at a moment when the revolutionary projects of the avant-gardes and the student movements of the 1960s appeared to have been in vain. Tafuri's work reflects a deep disenchantment with his cultural milieu; when, as his contemporary Peter Bürger admits, the "hopes of those who believed in the possibility of 'more democracy' in all spheres of social life went unfulfilled."[56] Bürger and Tafuri declared the death of the idea of art and architecture as revolutionary or critical practices. But, as with Bürger, Tafuri's much-discussed pessimism is not merely nihilist. In place of the critical lineage of the historical avant-gardes, which by then appeared less critical of than complicit with the status quo, and thus confronted with the impossibility of neo-avant-garde practices, certain realism appeared as the sole possibility of engagement.

Brecht's factory workers taking the stage, or expecting "shock" to actually trigger a reaction, seem as irrelevant in Tafuri's context of the 1970s as today, at least in the Western world, embedded as we are in a renewed liberal, post-industrial capitalism of global proportions, and an exhausted society of spectacle where, if Baudrillard has it right, the real is all but "deterred" in the "hyperreal."[57] This seems most distressing for the realist. For how can one rehistoricize, say Brecht, without first pinning down the conditions of the current "real," a precondition to give form to the realist project?

The re-reading of Tafuri alongside Brecht does not quite lead to a definition of architectural realism, or to a set of contemporary practices that meet the mark. This is an attempt to establish theoretical foundations of a project that pretends to articulate engagement and put it back on the architect's table.[58] Under the banner of realism, I can at this point only propose a laundry list, and not quite yet a categorical agenda. To be able to propose, and discuss, a viable realism in architecture would mean, first, to understand history. This amount to saying that the first task is to identify what the "real" is, or ought to be, and to understand the processes that render it malleable, and constitute its historical contingency and its potential to change. The realist readily answers, with an awareness of the naïveté and ephemeral nature of any given response: what is your working real/s? And, what do you do (or what ought you to do) with it?[59] She thinks of architecture with the real in mind, in a critical mind, and because of that is able to sense possibilities.

Tafuri's discernment regarding these questions was his strength and ultimately his limitation. He understood his "real" (the city as the stage for the enactment of capitalist relations of production) and his project (to put this real into crisis), and read architecture in relation to it. But Tafuri's city/real seemed already anachronistic, blind to capitalist processes beyond production, such as consumption, spectacle, colonialism, and feminism, to name but a few surfacing at his time. Starting with Tafuri, it becomes necessary to understand realism in architecture historically, and to articulate the historiographic framework of architectural realisms. This operation, long overdue in architectural scholarship, would help identify the terms, traps and potential critical instrumentality of architectural realisms, many of which prove to be as reality-bounded as projective of new realities, even more so than some good old utopian modernists ever dreamed of.

The second point is to change the terms of the discussion. When talking about architectural realisms, one is forced to leave aside issues of representation and communication, and to move from content towards formal and material experimentation. Although limited by the linguistic basis of his own method, Tafuri invites us to consider the political and material infrastructure in which architecture operates, to look at the architects embedded in the institutions and processes of power, and to test the extent to which they proposed not only form but also reform: by redefining the role of the architect, the relative distance taken with the institutions, and the alliances with and valuing of the political order at work. Precisely by virtue of its prominence in market and urban forces, and of it being close to material reality and everyday life, and less able to bear content, architecture may occupy a privileged position with regard to the more representational arts. This means it is important to question less *what* do architects do than *from where* do they do what they do.

Third, to question authority/autonomy. A core point of Brecht's was to point to the collective work of art as an avenue for criticality. Likewise, Tafuri struggled to account for the work of architecture as embedded in the matrix of capitalist production, and thus in the "real." Architecture is indeed always a collective endeavor: a product of many subjects, and always bound to the cultural, economic, and

technological conditions of the time, a point that linguistic-based discourse is at pains to repress through the very particular activation of the notion of autonomy. With regard to this much-debated notion, Brecht's call for an art practice that is critical from *within* the institution of art points to the need to move beyond the autonomy/heteronomy dichotomy — being inside or being outside — and start defining relative distancing and nuances in the condition of autonomy that are often forgotten in architecture. Autonomy as a process and not a disciplinary category, and the levels of semi-autonomy become new objects of investigation.[60] Nourished in part by Tafuri's more "negative" side, the image of the architect musing his empty architecture from his *boudoir* has actually worked to protect the myth of individuality and, consequently, the illusion that artistic practice can, at some point, retreat from the real. Whether through criticism or through practice, negating the category of individual creation, and unveiling the work of architecture as a collective praxis — the product of a collectivity that does not deny avant-gardist or utopian episodes, and does not claim the myth of anonymity — might be the way out of the post-critical linguistic trap.

ENDNOTES

1 For this rather traditional account of realism, see Erich Auerbach, Mi*mesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* [1953] (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

2 Jean-François Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodern?," in The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 74. Lyotard attacks realism as non-experimental, a position of slackening for the support and supply of the "system," a way to "preserve various consciousnesses from doubt." In fact, he claims, realism is the way to "avoid the question of reality," its effect being "therapeutic." For Lyotard, realism is an apology for capitalism.

3 This is the tradition in Marxist aesthetics, with Siegfried Kracauer, Bertolt Brecht, György Lukács, and Theodor Adorno being its major figures. These figures developed different models of realism, though, and I discuss below the differences and similarities of Brecht's and Lukács's models. The latter's has predominated in the imagination of twentieth century critiques of realism, both for Marxists and non-Marxists alike.

4 Matthew Roman and Tal Schori, "Editors' Preface," in "The Real," special issue of *Perspecta* 42 (2010): 9. The editor's ambiguity regarding a definition of and a project on the "real" allows for the various authors to take different realist positions, but that often remain unarticulated. The essay closer to my position here for its attempt to weave in social and political processes with artistic practices and the built environment is Jiang Jun, "Ten Architectural Stories in the Real: From Reality to Surreality and Back," in "The Real," 90-99.

5 At most, certain self-confessed architectural realisms have been studied in historically specific and style-bounded terms, but without much effort being made to address the subject comprehensively. As is the case with the Soviet architecture of the Stalinist period, Italian neorealist architecture in the aftermath of World War II, and, following it, the theories of the Italian *Tendenza*. These being moments of self-conscious articulation of realism and thus stated constructions or aesthetic projections of the "real," they only partially aid an understanding of the implications of appealing to the "real" through architecture.

6 See, for instance, Andres Lepik, *Small Scale, Big Change: New Architectures of Social Engagement* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2010). Published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, currently shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. An earlier and subtle attempt to establish the terms for discussion of architecture's potential for "social amelioration" is Joan Ockman, ed., T*he Pragmatist Imagination. Thinking About Things in the Making* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000), 17. See also Joan Ockman, "Toward a Theory of Normative Architecture," in Architecture of the Everyday, ed. Steven Harris and Deborah Berke (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997).

7 For a recent call to revisit "utopia" as a project to counter the current lack of critical and actually projective discourse in architecture, see Reinhold Martin, *Utopia's Ghost. Architecture and Postmodernism, Again (*Minneapolis, MN: University of Minessota Press, 2010*)* Martin earlier advocated a utopian realism as a reaction to the critical/post-critical tradition in Reinhold Martin, "Critical of What? Toward a Utopian Realism.," *Harvard Design Magazine* 22 (2005): 104-09.

8 A call for architectural realism in terms akin to phenomenology is Michael Benedikt, *For an Architecture of Reality* (New York: Lumen Books, 1987), 64. A seminal architectural theory that brings phenomenology into a position of social and political resistance is Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," in Hal Foster The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture, Michael Hays, ed. (Port Townsend, Va: Bay Press), 16-30. Albena Yeneva proposes a realism based on phenomenological and biopolitical interpretation of buildings in "The Architectural as a Type of Connector: A Realist Approach to Architecture," in "The Real," 141-46. The key piece in the post-critical project is Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting, "Notes Around the Dopler Effect and Other Moods on Modernism," in *Perspecta* 33 "Mining Autonomy" (2002): 72-77. Various stances of the post-critical position are summarized and criticized respectively in George Baird, "Criticality and Its Discontents," in "Rising Ambitions, Expanding Terrain: Realism and Utopianism," special issue of *Harvard Design Magazine* 21 (Fall 2004/Winter 2005): 16-21; and Reinhold Martin, "Critical of What?"

9 Tomás Lloréns, *Mimesis : realismos modernos, 1918-45* (Madrid : Fundación Caja Madrid, 2005), 260.

10 For a sharp analysis of Tafuri's critique of modern architecture along these terms, specifically as an extension of philosopher Massimo Cacciari, see

Hilde Heynen, "The Venice School, or the Diagnosis of Negative Thought," in *Architecture and Modernity* (Cambridge, Ma: The MIT Press, 1999), 129-147.
11 The critical/post-critical lineage as one of gradual depolitization of architecture, based on the failed premise of equating "aesthetic critique" with "political critique" in the first place, is Martin's main argument in "Critical of What?," 2.
12 Baird, "Criticality and Its Discontents," 20.
13 Tafuri's references to his own project in terms of realism explicitly are rare, but it is worth noting his first and last texts on modern architecture, to my knowledge, deal with practices he refers to as Architectural Realisms. Manfredo Tafuri, *Ludovico Quaroni e lo sviluppo dell'architettura moderna in Italia* (Milan: Edizioni di Comunita, 1964) and "Realismé et Architecture" [1985] *Critique* 476-477 (1987): 23-42. Thanks to Joan Ockman for pointing to me existence of this essay.
14 Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development* (Cambridge, Ma: The MIT Press, 1990), 24.
15 *Ibíd.,* 52. See also Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* [1929] (New York: Harcourt, 1959).
16 For an attack of Tafuri's historiography method as anything but dialectical and rather more "confused" precisely for his rejection of synthesis, see Tomas Lloréns, "Manfredo Tafuri: Neo-Avant-Garde and History," in *Architectural Design* 6-7 (1981): 83-95.
17 Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia,* 44.
18 *Ibíd.,* 90.
19 *Ibíd.,* 98.
20 *Ibíd.,* 100.
21 *Ibíd.,* 115,122. Tafuri stresses this critique in Manfredo Tafuri, *History of Italian Architecture, 1944-1985* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989).
22 Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia,* 134.
23 *Ibíd.,* 135.
24 *Ibíd.,* 182.
25 Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s* (Cambridge, Ma: The MIT Press, 1987), 9.
26 *Ibíd.,* 17.
27 *Ibíd.,* 21.
28 *Ibíd.,* 287.
29 *Ibíd.,* 21.
30 *Ibíd.,* 287.
31 Tafuri, "L'Architecture dans le Boudoir: The language of criticism and the criticism of language." In *Oppositions Reader*, edited by Michael Hays, 292-313. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998. 312.
32 *Ibíd.*
33 Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity*, 144.
34 This shift on Tafuri has been largely unaccounted for, as in Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity*, 146-47. The point was been made by Ockman, "Toward a Theory of Normative Architecture," 147. She has also noted that in this move one could explore the influence on Tafuri of theorists like Althusser and Cassirer, who considered the construction of ideology as inevitable, necessary in society, and eventually the means for reacting against capitalist ideology, an idea already in Mannheim.
35 Tafuri, "Realismé et architecture," 23.
36 *Ibíd.*
37 *Ibíd.,* 24.
38 *Ibíd.*
39 *Ibíd.*
40 Manfredo Tafuri, "European Grafitti: Five x Five= Twenty-five," *Oppositions* (1976): 70.
41 Tafuri, "Realismé et architecture," 25.
42 *Ibíd*., 26.
43 A point made by Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity*, 132.
44 Tafuri, "Realismé et architecture," 27.
45 Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth,* 298.
46 See, for instance, Bernard Huet, "Formalism-Realism" in *Architecture Theory since 1968*, ed. Michael Hays (New York: Columbia Books of Architecture, 1977), 257.
47 György Lukács, "Realism in the Balance (1938)," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Fredric Jameson (London, New York: Verso, 1977), 39.
48 Brecht, "Popularity and Realism," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, 82.
49 John Willet, *Art and Politics in the Weimar Period* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 189.
50 Bertolt Brecht, *On Theater: The development of an Aesthetic* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 23.
51 Bertolt Brecht, "On the Formalistic Character of the Theory of Realism," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, 271.
52 Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London ; New York: Verso, 1998).
53 Brecht, "Popularity and Realism," 82.
54 Fredric Jameson, *Aesthetics and Politics*, (New York: Verso, 1977), 66.
55 Jameson has noted that the success of Brecht's model of autonomy remains a moot point for its problematic resonance with the working-class.
56 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 95.
57 Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" (1976), in *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 22.
58 Baird is one to have noted the need for a "supporting body of projective theory," as I attempt to start building here. Baird, "Criticality and Its Discontents," 21.
59 Another way of putting Martin's question to the post-critics, "what's your project?" Martin, 'Critical of What?"
60 For a recent attempt to recuperate the ideas of autonomy and the political for architecture, by bringing autonomy closer to the way the Italian *Tendenza* originally proposed it, see Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008).