

ON NON-VALUE AND NON-IDENTITY

Tafuri's adventures in Adorno's Enlightenment

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By unfolding Tafuri's intellectual project and its sources, this text shows how the drainage of values produced by the Enlightenment is but one of the crises through which capitalism reinvents itself to survive. In this way, the crisis of values would be nothing else than the logical result of rationalization and, therefore, of modernity as a process.

I.

The reception of critical theory and the Frankfurt School have been in academia and professional practice, until fairly recently, has been inextricably connected to Tafuri's work. Thus, the fate of such intellectual project has been perhaps too tightly tied to Tafuri, whose influence has been felt widespread around architecture's circles as disheartening – his allegations to the contrary notwithstanding. And even though Adorno's fate in philosophical contexts hasn't been that different, it appears a double bind process has blurred the possibility of establishing concretely the connections between both. On the one hand, Tafuri's criticism towards Adorno's cultural model appears to have prevented any possibility for deep analysis,¹ even though he has a record for criticizing his influences and distancing himself from them (Cacciari et al., 1977).² On the other, shallow associations have

too hastily equated both critiques, relinquishing the need for proper distinction. While comprehensive works like Andrew Leach's *Choosing History* and Carla Keyvanian's "Manfredo Tafuri's Notion of History and its Methodological Sources: From Walter Benjamin to Roland Barthes" hardly mention Adorno's influence, if at all, Fredric Jameson in his 1982 "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology" described Tafuri's *Architecture and Utopia* and Adorno's 1949 *Philosophy of Modern Music* (along Roland Barthes' *Le degré zéro de l'écriture*), both as producing a sense of "the impossibility of the future, which cannot have failed to oppress any reader of this texts" (Jameson, 2000:444). Conversely, Hilde Heynen in her seminal *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique*, deals within the same work with both intellectual traditions, Critical Theory and the Venice School, providing the grounds for significant analysis – one she briefly outlines at the end of her account on Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* (Heynen, 1999). The substantial distinction Heynen's work admits is still essential to an evaluation that allows both to limit and contextualize Tafuri's legacy against a specific historical and intellectual background, and to gauge Adorno's influence in his "critique of architectural ideology." At the same time, it renews the possibility of operating with the cultural tools of Critical Theory within architectural discourse detaching them from Tafuri's well known conclusions. As Tafuri's legacy has stubbornly endured within architectural academia and practice, and Adorno's has mostly been archived within discussions on high art against mass culture, the dependency of "negative dialectics" on the Venice School's disenchanting "negative thought" has to be proven valuable outside those elaborations. By unpacking specific aspects of *Architecture and Utopia's* first chapter "Reason's Adventures" in the light of Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, this essay elaborates on the intricate tissue of relations between of both critiques of modernity.

II.

In the first chapter of *Architecture and Utopia*, Manfredo Tafuri deploys his complete methodological apparatus as well as his political outlook with a succinctness characteristic of the "dense writing" his critics seldom forget to mention.³ Then, outlining the ideological issues determining Enlightenment architecture's relationship with the emergent approach to the city as an object of design, he writes:

The formation of the architect as an ideologist of society; the individualization of the areas of intervention proper to city planning; the persuasive role of form in regard to the public and the self-critical role of form in regard to its own problems and development; the interrelationship and opposition – at the level of formal research – between architectural 'object' and urban organization: these are the constantly recurrent themes of the "Enlightenment dialectic" on architecture (Tafuri, 1975:3).

The quotation marks over “Enlightenment dialectic” might be the only acknowledgment of the concept’s indebtedness to Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s [A&H] *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. Here, Tafuri’s historical narrative on the gradual disappearance of Baroque urbanism and the emergence of the first theories absorbing the city’s need for organization according to capital’s surplus value extraction, elaborates on Enlightenment as a twofold development: as a rationalizing process, and as ideology.⁴ While the former would ensure rational organization of production according to the new schemes of land organization, the latter would provide aesthetic cover for such operations, naturalizing the existence of the city by equating its design with picturesque park design and landscape painting’s management of nature as form. That is, by fashioning the city as a “natural,” a-historical phenomenon, enlightened ideologues would design the city as superstructure in order to allow the economic base to function properly, without raising public alarms. In this context, rational understanding of nature’s order as a principle of organization would function as a replacement of the monarchic authoritarianism of Baroque layouts. The dialectic Tafuri mentions is the product of Enlightenment’s rational organization of the city’s double nature and its conflicted and inevitable encounter with architecture’s also rational organization of form, through newly cast concepts such as ‘type’ and ‘typology.’ Facing theories like Laugier’s and Milizia’s which described the design of the city as the organization of “existing material,” architecture abandoned its symbolism in order to provide buildings as ‘material,’ rationally organized through formal principles. This “struggle between architecture and the city” (Tafuri, 1975:16), the clash between the possibility of organizing the city according to “natural principles,” and the rationalization of building through types, reaches its climax in Tafuri’s narrative, with G. B. Piranesi’s prophetic Campo Marzio. “Here,” Tafuri declares, “the ‘Enlightenment dialectic’ on architecture reached an unsurpassed height” (Tafuri, 1975:16). Piranesi’s drawings of a dystopic city assembled by a collection of autonomous pieces, without any logic except the internal to each type, shows the intractable contradictions of a city whose formal organization is no longer possible. Its attempt to individualize building

design as an organic portion of the totality of the city condemns its pieces to silence – to the impossibility of a ‘whole’ given meaning through the sum of its ‘parts.’ Tafuri discovers in Piranesi a high level of consciousness regarding the contradictory friction of individuality, the necessary premise of the marketplace, democracy, and enlightened values, against the ensuing impossibility of Ferdinand Tönnies’ *Gemeinschaft*, of organic community.

III.

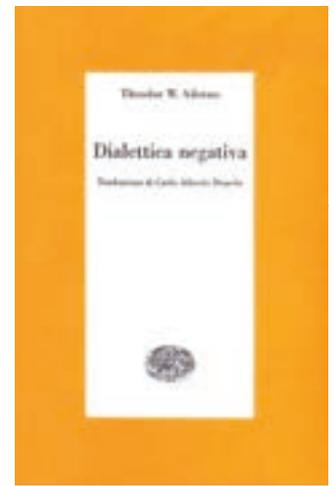
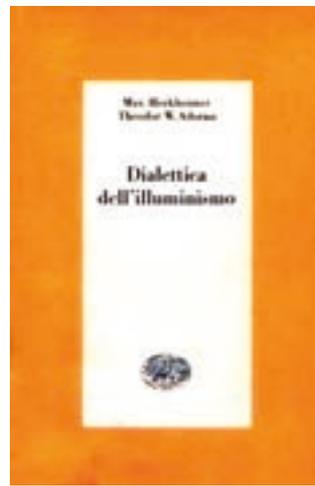
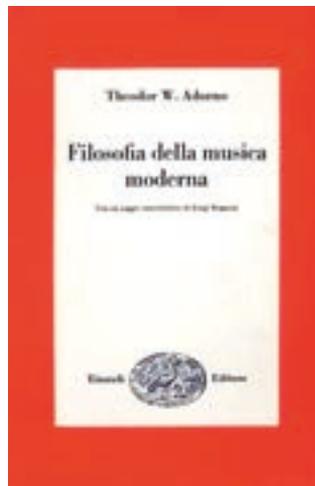
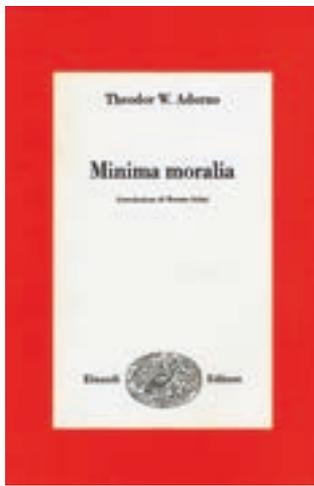
Here, as has been noted, Tafuri’s Piranesi acquires quite literally the qualities of A&H’s Sade (Biraghi, 2013:33; A&H, 2002:63-94). Portrayed as the disenchanted watchdog of Enlightenment’s dialectic underside, Piranesi becomes, for Tafuri, Sade’s architectural *doppelgänger*.⁵ The empty sexual excesses done against Sade’s Juliette and Justine are perpetrated by Piranesi to the possibility of an enlightened city. Nevertheless, while A&H’s Sade bears witness to the debilitation of Reason, as morality gets stripped down from its core, impeding forever the possibility of a conceptual knowledge within which morals and reason may share space; Tafuri’s Piranesi criticizes illuminist dreams by revealing their excess of reason turned nightmare. And, at the same time, it proposes an intellectual program: stripping the values from the enlightened products of the bourgeoisie will show tragedy as their real content. Tafuri follows closely A&H’s intellectual project: by demonstrating it is Reason, and not its lack, the principle which leads to the contradictions in Piranesi’s “useless machine” (Tafuri, 1975:15), he attempts to open up Reason dialectically, showing the extent to which understanding has been inevitably tied with domination, and the extent to which that domination leads back to the myth Enlightenment was set to overcome.⁶ “Reason, the author of this destruction,” Tafuri writes, “a destruction felt by Piranesi to be fatal – is transformed into irrationality” (Tafuri, 1975:18). The essential distinction for critical theory’s critique of reason however, between substantial Reason and instrumental reason [*Vernunft* and *Verstand*] can’t be found in Tafuri’s dialectic. The whole dialectical process through which Reason proper, whose power to enlighten life and thus alleviate suffering, is stripped of its substance, reduced to mere calculation, to become the amoral instrument of factual ends is eschewed by Tafuri altogether. His “Enlightenment dialectic” is one historically determined by the demystification of Reason

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by the 'anti-ideological character of science' on the one hand, and on the other, by the withering of values as obstacles to a bourgeoisie in constant revolution, which drops them as soon as their ideological worth disappears. Following Max Weber's notion of modernity as one of constant disenchantment of the world, Tafuri's Enlightenment is understood as a relentless progress of Reason, whose constant advancement produces an endless of crisis of values, and thus, the endless need for new ones. Piranesi would foretell precisely such a moment of crisis, one that wouldn't be resolved until the late stages of artistic avant-garde and the advent of modern planning, with Hilberseimer and Le Corbusier. At the same time, the dialectic 'struggle' between the city and architecture would make evident the need for architecture to forego its old values in order to adapt to the new mechanisms of production. A&H's dialectic of Enlightenment, on the other hand, is not determined historically as an accumulation of Reason which at the point of excess produces irrationality.⁷ They rather elaborate on the extent to which the freeing potential of Reason is always determined dialectically by a form of domination that leads to barbarism. This entails by no means to abandon reason altogether, but rather to condemn a form of reason whose "redemptive qualities" have been stripped down – as Adorno's mentor Siegfried Kracauer famously put it, it is not that capitalism "rationalizes too much, but rather too little" (Kracauer, 1995:81). Unlike Piranesi's, Sade's debauchery is not the product of the excesses of an overburdened Reason, but evidence to its weakening.

IV.

This dialectical conflict, however, is not absent from Tafuri's account by chance. Elsewhere he declared Adorno's take on Enlightenment "too simplistic,"⁸ for his claim for a substantial Reason is to him symptomatic of an unfinished transformation, in other words, nostalgia for a set of values which has already disappeared from the modern world. He rather draws from Massimo Cacciari's "Dialectic of the Negative and Metropolis," who describes modern rationality as the result of the permanent tension between the ever increasing proliferation of outer stimuli and the impossibility of the nervous life [*Nervenleben*] to absorb them through sensible emotions. Intellectualization and rationalization would, in this context, perform as protection from the continuous shocks, draining qualities and values from things in order to deal with them dispassionately. The "flattening of values" described in Georg Simmel's *The Philosophy of Money* – as the process by which the continuous need to transform 'value' into 'exchange value' produces a rational homogenization of the world (Simmel, 2011:465-483) – is put forward by Cacciari as a confirmation of the extent to which *Verstand* has already permeated the subjectivity of individual life. *Vergeistigung*, the process of realization of the spirit,



is for Cacciari already fully reached in Simmel's Blasé type (Simmel, 1971:324-339) wherein his cold indifference towards the quality of things is paid for with spleen, the emotional void left by the impossibility of genuine satisfaction – thus closing the nervous life- instrumental reason dialectic (Cacciari, 1993:8-9).⁹ Tafuri's whole theory of the avant-garde revolves around this never ending transformation in which an emotional reaction to the anguish followed by the permanent loss of values in modernity is intellectualized into a rational response able to deal and elaborate on that loss.

V.

Furthermore, the flattening of values would not only be considered the destiny of the individual by Tafuri, but also the tragic fate of the intellectual, who now has to choose between nostalgia for values as ideology, or to face modernity "with the task of acquiring a tragic awareness of the given" (Cacciari, 1993:9).¹⁰ It is not by chance Max Weber's dispassionate objectivity occupies such an important space in Tafuri's bibliography. The disenchantment Weber declared essential to a science "free from value," that is, unobstructed by subjective judgement, has been recognized in Tafuri by many readers.¹¹ Against the pervasiveness of operative criticism, and an architectural history he considered "rotten to the core," (Tafuri and Very, 1995[1976]:37) he makes Weber's freedom from value [*Wertfreiheit*] a central topic of his methodological discussions in *Theories and History of Architecture*. This approach is described in *Architecture and Utopia* as follows:

It should not be overlooked that for Weber *Wertfreiheit* has a dramatic significance. The intellectual, not allowing himself value judgment, courageously accepts his own obligation to be. This acceptance is in the first place the recognition of the irrational as the negative part of the system, which, since it is inseparable from the positive, is assumed along with the latter (Tafuri, 1975:51; Weber, 2009:47-48).

Minima Moralia fue publicado en 1951 y traducido al italiano en 1954, *Filosofía de la nueva música* en 1949 y traducida en 1959, *Dialéctica de la Ilustración* en 1944 y traducida en 1966, y *Dialéctica Negativa* en 1966 y traducida en 1970. Fueron publicadas por Einaudi junto con el trabajo de Georg Lukács y Walter Benjamin. *Minima Moralia* was published in 1951 and translated to Italian in 1954, *The Philosophy of Modern Music* in 1949 and translated in 1959, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in 1944 and translated in 1966, and *Negative Dialectics* in 1966 and translated in 1970. They were published by Einaudi along with the work of Georg Lukács and Walter Benjamin.

Tafuri's disenchanted outlook is founded on the impossibility of approaching intellectual production within capitalism other than with the rational mechanisms made available by Capital itself. Any other attempt would fall into sheer illusion. Dealing with the negative means, as in Weber's "virile objectivity," dispelling myths and nostalgia, gazing at the world unshaken by illusory hopes: only by looking into the void can we return a genuine critical gaze to the world that put us in front of it in the first place. Following Cacciari's elaborations on "negative thought," disenchantment allows Tafuri to pursue contradictions: the negative is not avoided nor disentangled, it is precisely its irresolvable character what is pursued. In this context, Tafuri and Cacciari's negative stresses the instability of capitalism, its restlessness, its needs for constant crisis, by refusing to provide it with a stable synthesis and by leaving the "dialectic of the Metropolis" indefinitely open: forcing capitalist civilization to face its own enduring volatility, by means of its own negativity, allowing no soothing ideological covers.¹²

In *Architecture and Utopia* Tafuri relies on Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility" and "Author as a Producer," essential to Cacciari's "negative thought," to assess architectural production since Enlightenment. By equating Benjamin's withering of the 'aura' to the devaluation of art altogether, Tafuri's approach intends to do away with the 'mysticism' around art's inherent values as they increasingly become an obstacle to scientific analysis – an obstacle without which the position works of art occupy within the relations of productions of their time become evident (Tafuri, 1980:171-226). Stripping values from judgment allows Tafuri to elaborate on modernism without appealing to the quality of individual works, or even to architecture as a fixed category, but rather to reconstruct their underlying historical tissue. At the same time, it reveals the tragedy of the modern: no architectural production – building, criticism or otherwise – has ever been produced outside, nor against, the dominion of capital. Architecture either finds its place as ideology or as an instrument to update the means of production. In this context, bad conscience appears to be the only mechanism through which modernism may reflect the unconscious trauma of the ideology it puts forward: "to ward off anguish by absorbing and understanding

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its causes” (Tafuri, 1975:1).¹³ Piranesi’s program proves effective, by removing the mysticism around art, and of course architecture, their conflicts and contradictions spring forth plainly: there’s no such thing as critical art or architecture, only consciousness of the place it occupies within the cycle of renewal of values.

VI.

Nonetheless, it is precisely the confirmation of ‘the given’ what Adorno criticizes of the disenchantment of positivism, which he equates with instrumental reason – he does not see science at all as an alternative to ideology, but rather as ideology itself. The brand of scientific positivism Weber argues for, as an instrument for stripping science from subjective attempts to “give the world meaning,” is interpreted by Adorno as a confirmation of the pervasiveness of reification in a world in which every aspect of life assumes the objective quality of the commodity form.¹⁴ The disenchanting outlook, with which Tafuri and Cacciari seek to expose tragedy, by means of a history deprived of ideology, is for Adorno already tragic. There’s already domination in the logical approach modern science adopts to understand the world – as its rigid structures are designed to extract sameness out of every quality, any possibility of difference is done away with. Adorno’s negativity acquires quite different connotations than Tafuri and Cacciari’s in this context. In his *Negative Dialectics* he deals precisely with the impossibility of what he calls “identical thinking,” namely, the unrecognized fact that there’s always mediation between knowledge and the real (Adorno, 2007). ‘The given’ only ascertains itself by way of recklessly matching the ‘order of things’ with ‘the order of ideas,’ thus solidifying the relation of knowledge with its object matter as ‘self-identical’ (Adorno, 1991:158).¹⁵ The objectivity claimed by organized science, Adorno argues, doesn’t acknowledge the ‘untruth’ of identity, i.e. that there is always a ‘remainder’ between the real and the ability of conceptual thinking to grasp it. The residue that is left out of the objective embrace of the object’s specificity by the subject is, for Adorno, a particle of potential difference and evidence of the limits of enlightened thinking to describe reality as such. The unnamable character of the ‘non-identical’ assumes for him the quality of utopia: a concept whose depiction is impossible without the loss of its redemptive potential. Adorno’s aesthetic theory relies

on the impossible character of utopia, and at the same time, in art's ability to render its existence possible: to reflect the world in 'non-logical' terms, potentially unlocking the indescribability of the 'non-identical,' and thus the hidden untruth of the world. Aesthetic semblance provides the possibility of reflecting the world not by representing it, but through its 'mimetic faculty.'¹⁶ Mimesis is here understood not just as the 'imitation of the world' but a way for the image 'to be nature entire,' instead of just claiming to know it (A&H, 2002:13). Kafka, Beckett, Klee and Schönberg, all perform Adorno's negative reflection as they bring about alienation and reification not by representing it, but by enacting it. Mimetic quality, furthermore, without the need for aesthetic semblance, can be attained by critical writing – precisely by rejecting the stark object-subject opposition and dissolving logic sequences in constellations of ideas Adorno calls "force fields." *Negative Dialectics* is the elucidation of his own writing as a philosophical "anti-system" resisting "identity thinking." In this context, Adorno's Enlightenment's dialectical underside does violence not only to humanity, as it reifies relations between people as though they were relations between things, but also to things themselves, as their specificity is done away with by instrumental reason, along with the utopian potential they carry.

VII.

Weber's dispassionate detachment notwithstanding, Tafuri's early criticism was not without mimetic qualities. In fact, his relation to Weber is evidence of the extent to which subject matter and critic are embroiled in a relationship hard to disentangle. Tafuri adopted the pressing historical issues of modernism as his own, as Anthony Vidler has suggested, he is as much a historian of disenchantment as a disenchanted historian (Vidler, 2008:9-13). Adorno's Enlightenment is here precisely operating dialectically: Tafuri's no-value relationship with his objects of knowledge enacts positivism's mastery over the world with its 'pitiless coherence' (Tafuri, 1980:201) yet at the same time, Enlightenment's dominion is exercised over Tafuri's himself – mastery of reason over nature, Adorno argued, is at the same time the repression of the ego, for reason inflicts violence over nature as much as over inner nature. In repressing values from historical judgment, Tafuri shows us the historical nature of his disenchantment all the more: it is not just a trait of his work as a historian, but also the unmistakable sign his criticism was one of a modernist through and through. To contextualize Tafuri's critique within the development of high modernism is not rendering it innocuous by bracketing it off historically, but quite the opposite, it means doing justice to his fearless project of reading modernity from within, without ever running away from even its most pressing contradictions. "Manfredo taught that our being vicissitude equals the necessity to mask ourselves," wrote Massimo Cacciari

for Tafuri's funeral, "to disguise ourselves, to denature everything" (Cacciari, 1995:169). To unmask Tafuri's intellectual project, to reconstruct the historicity of his "denaturing," to contextualize his relationship with his subject matters, to clarify the nature of his relation with his influences, to read against the grain of his closing narrative possibilities for architectural and historical production; these are the tasks Tafuri's still wide open legacy still demands us to assume today. **ARQ**

Notas / Notes

- 1 The few times he mentions Adorno in his work it's with severe criticism, accusing him of «nostalgic» and «apocalyptic» See for instance Tafuri (1980:88). He has also acknowledged his influence in Tafuri, Daguerre, Lupo, 1985:23.
- 2 See also, «Contra Foucault: Interdisciplinarietà y posición estructural del intelectual en el sistema según Manfredo Tafuri», Undécimo Congreso Internacional sobre Nuevas Tendencias en Humanidades, Universidad de Eötvös Loránd, Budapest, 19 – June 21, 2013.
- 3 The impact of his first paragraphs (the introduction in the 1969 essay form) has been widely analyzed. See for instance, Asor Rosa (1995:27-29).
- 4 Tafuri has declared his use of ideology corresponds to «the strictest Marxist use of the term.» However, his applications vary widely, from the more traditional use Marx himself gave it in his *German Ideology* to the meaning Franco Fortini furnished in his influential «Astuti come colombe,» Mario Tronti in his *Operai e capitale*, and even Roland Barthes' «myth» in his *Mythologies*. Connections with Louis Althusser's *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* have also been made, however the famous essay «Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses» was not published until 1970, a year after Tafuri wrote «Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology.» For now, the traditional Marxist definition of Ideology as «false consciousness» will suffice.
- 5 «Piranesi's excess – as otherwise the excesses of the libertine literature of the era of the *philosophes* – becomes, just through its excessiveness, the revelation of a truth.» (Tafuri, 1975:16).
- 6 Tafuri provides not only grounds for the development of A&H's argument within architectural culture, but also, and perhaps more importantly, historical substantiation to an argument that was developed mostly in philosophical terms. The extent to which A&H rely on enlightened *philosophes* however is not lost on Tafuri; he merely pinpoints historically a concept of Enlightenment the authors extend to the original need to liberate «human beings from fear and installing them as masters» (A&H 2002:21-35).
- 7 Horkheimer's «The End of Reason» and facts like Adorno's serious assessment of Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* have often been interpreted as the authors' lost faith in Reason's redemptive qualities. However, contemporary historiography has recognized the importance they both gave to Reason as a means of liberation. See for instance, Jay, 1973:253-281.

- 8 «Adorno's *Dialectics of Reason* had not furnished f any response to this, it was too simplistic.» (Tafuri and Very, 1995:37).
- 9 Cacciari's interest in Simmel's concepts notwithstanding, he criticizes him for providing this dialectic with synthesis – by ultimately reading the possibility of freedom in metropolitan uprootedness. In Benjamin's writings on Baudelaire however, Cacciari finds a cultural model in which crisis functions as an integral part of the system. See Benjamin, 2007.
- 10 Tafuri explains it in his analysis of the avant-garde thus: «It was necessary to pass from Munch's *Scream* to El Lissitzky's *Story of Two Squares*: from the anguished discovery of the nullification of values, to the use of a language of pure signs, perceptible by a mass that had completely absorbed the universe without quality of the money economy.»
- 11 «Disenchantment» and Tafuri's relation to Weber has been often underscored. See for instance, Vidler, 2000 and Cacciari, 1995:169.
- 12 Negative thought, developed in Cacciari's «Sulla genesi del pensiero negativo» and later in his *Krisis*, quotes (and criticizes) Adorno without making clear the extent of its debt to his thinking. Cacciari, 1969:186-18; Cacciari, 1982.
- 13 Piranesi remains surprisingly exceptional to this respect. This is the topic of a different paper however. See Tafuri, 1987.
- 14 David Frisby has argued that is Georg Simmel, and not Max Weber, who was really influential to Critical Theory. It is precisely his non-scientific method, which opened the possibility of interpreting modernity through its cracks, rather than as totality (Frisby, 1986). Marshall Berman has also criticized Weber's extremely monolithic take on modernity and capitalism which the latter compared to an «iron cage.» An expression Tafuri himself uses repeatedly through *Architecture and Utopia*. See, Marshall Berman, «Introducción. La Modernidad Hoy, Ayer y Mañana» in *Todo lo Sólido se Desvanece en el Aire. La Experiencia de la Modernidad* (Barcelona: Siglo XXI Editores 1992), 1-28
- 15 Aureli (2010) finds similarities between Adorno's «anti-systematic» writing and Tafuri's without emphasizing the glaring differences.
- 16 Hilde Heynen has underscored how much Adorno's «mimesis» is indebted to Benjamin's «On the Mimetic Faculty» in Benjamin (2007:333-337).

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