Which “Humanism”? On the Italian Theory of Architecture, 1951-1969

Amir Djalali*

In 2010 philosopher Roberto Esposito employed the term *Italian Theory*, in English in the original Italian text, to address the recent international academic success of the works of Italian philosophers including Mario Tronti, Antonio Negri and Giorgio Agamben.¹ Italy faced indeed a peculiar situation in postwar Europe. Its industrial development was recent, political institutions were unstable and its bureaucratic apparatus was substantially Fascist, preserved intact despite the war of liberation. In this situation a small but consistent part of the population was frustrated by the broken promise of an unfinished communist revolution. This climate of a latent threat of a civil war, according to Esposito constituted the favourable breeding ground for an original way of thinking, developed outside the safe spaces of academia and institutional knowledge, directed against capitalists and the state, in the actual horizon of an imminent overthrowing of all constituted powers.

However, Esposito traced the singularity of Italian thought since Renaissance philosophy. The political instability that marked the beginning of Italian modernity was mirrored in the work of Renaissance philosophers, who refused the construction of overarching stable metaphysical systems and practised a form of *living thought*, a mode of thinking deeply connected to life and political engagement. In this way,

* An abridged version of this article was published in Teresa Stoppani, Giorgio Ponzio, George Themistokleus (eds.), *This Thing Called Theory* (London: Routledge, 2016).

Esposito was able to reconstruct a lineage of thought linking authors such as Niccolò Machiavelli, Giovanni Battista Vico, Giacomo Leopardi and Antonio Gramsci into an alternative and heretical “tradition” within European philosophy.

The influence of the so-called *Italian theory* upon architectural theory since the 1960s has been already demonstrated in many contributions. In particular, architects such as Superstudio and Archizoom Associati were deeply influenced by their operaist readings, in particular, by Mario Tronti's *Operai e capitale*. Other figures were directly involved within the operaist circles, as in the case of Manfredo Tafuri, who was a regular contributor of *Contropiano*, a journal directed by Massimo Cacciari and, only for its first issue, Antonio Negri. However, it was only with the global circulation of the translations of the texts of Italian architects and historians that an *Italian architectural theory* emerged as such.

Jean-Louis Cohen noted that the post-1968 French architectural discourse in France was shaped after the circulation of Italian architecture and critique in the French press – in particular, Aldo Rossi, Aldo Aymonino and Manfredo Tafuri. Interestingly, it was through Italian literature that French architects discovered French authors such as Roland Barthes, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Maurice Halbwachs and Marcel Poëte.² In the same years, the American translation of Rossi and Tafuri was not as easy as it had been in France, yet their role was central in shaping the debate around the IAUS (Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies) and its journal *Oppositions*.³

The phenomenon described by Cohen was not the first moment in which an intense effort of translation and influence occurred between Italy and Europe. The postwar debate on Italian Renaissance architecture was one of these occasions, in which Italian scholars were exposed to the theories on Italian Renaissance architecture developed by German authors exiled in Britain and the US. Italian architects and architectural historians assimilated and at the same time resisted the interpretations of their international colleagues. In particular, the concepts of proportions and mannerism

were at the centre of an intense exchange. Mapping such a debate allows not only to determine whether an Italian theory of Renaissance architecture can be defined – in opposition to the German or British theories; more interestingly, this encounter testifies the significance of the *Italian difference*, through the anomalous case of the Italian Renaissance, from the perspective of postwar reconstruction. Contextualising the “rediscovery” of Renaissance architecture within the postwar debate on humanism, the problems posed by architectural historiography appear less like technical issues among academics. On the contrary, the Renaissance, seen as the contradictory beginning of European modernity, offered a conceptual toolbox for the redefinition of European institutions after the tragedy of the Second World War.

Divina proportione

In September 1951, the *Primo Convegno Internazionale sulla Proporzione nelle Arti* (the First International Conference on Proportions in Art) was held at the Milan Triennale. The conference, which was curated by the antiquarian and publisher Carla Marzoli and realised under the advice of Rudolf Wittkower featured an all-star line-up of scholars, artists and practising architects, including Sigfried Giedion, James Ackerman, Bruno Zevi, Max Bill, Lucio Fontana, Le Corbusier, Ernesto Nathan Rogers and Pier Luigi Nervi among others.⁴

The conference is the apex of the development of postwar studies on Renaissance proportions, and testifies the great influence of the work of art historians upon practising architects, especially in England, willing to overcome sterile professionalism and in the effort of finding principles and a stable foundation for architectural practice in the years of reconstruction. At the same time, the gathering showed the impossibility to reconcile a wide variety of often incompatible positions and languages. Contributions ranged from very specific historical accounts of the Renaissance to mystical accounts on the immutability of proportional laws, from attempts to adapt the idea of Renaissance proportions to the contemporary non-Euclidean conception of space-time to openly critical contributions laying bare the

impossibility to construct a stable system for contemporary architecture based on proportions.⁵

The conference offered the possibility for the encounter between various international schools and methodologies, and an array of Italian scholars – still struggling with the Idealist prewar tradition and eager to de-provincialise their approach. But not all of them were open for such a confrontation. Art historian Ludovico Carlo Ragghianti, rejecting the invitation to the conference, used harsh words against his foreign colleagues. Ragghianti rejected the ‘anachronism and lack of foundation’ of the conference’s topic, which

brings us back to the time naturalist rationalism and positivism, not only chronologically but ideally far from the present maturity of critical and aesthetic problems, at least in Italy. [...] Italian culture has elaborated yet other problems of methods and history; instead of importing to Italy the mental habits of positivism, still dominant in foreign cultures, it would seem better to use these kind of occasions to bring them to the level of Italian modern and historical culture. [Italy is almost] the only country in which a serious aesthetic and critical thought has emerged, while other countries, besides some rare exceptions, are still stuck with German positivist theories of *Einfühlung* and the like.⁶

While not all the conference participants would share Ragghianti’s tone, the issue of proportions did not find a fertile ground in Italian soil. The enthusiasm of the organisers and the mystical overtones of some of the contributions were met with a certain coldness by the historians, architects and artists invited to the Convegno. Giulio Carlo Argan and Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli declined the invitation. Art historians Giusta Nicco Fasola, Piero Sampaolesi and Gillo Dorfles’s contributions pointed towards a historicisation of the problem of proportions, denying the possibility for them to guide the production of contemporary art and architecture. Similarly, the interventions of Bruno Zevi and architect Carlo Mollino saw that traditional ideas of proportions – either based on integer or irrational ratios – were incompatible with the

contemporary conceptions of the space-time continuum and non-Euclidean geometries. Finally, artist Lucio Fontana hijacked the event for the launch of his manifesto on spatial art, establishing the need to abandon ‘any form of known art’.⁷

While the Milan congress marked the apex and at the same time the crisis in the discourse on proportions in modern architecture, its final demise is usually considered to have happened on 18 June 1957, when the RIBA rejected the motion, proposed by Nikolaus Pevsner, ‘that systems of proportions make good design easier and bad design more difficult.’⁸ Still in 1960, Rudolf Wittkower believed that the contemporary lack of a shared system of proportions was only a temporary historical passage, since every epoch based its aesthetic habits upon collective systems of proportions, the problem of proportions was soon abandoned by architects and historians as an antiquarian curiosity.⁹

Warburg encounters

Wittkower’s *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, the text which mostly inspired the conference’s topic, bore no traces of the mystic naturalism or natural positivism censored by Ragghianti. Wittkower’s book, titled after Geoffrey Scott’s 1914 *The Architecture of Humanism*, is polemical against its predecessor – Scott’s idea of proportion was based on the guaranty of concordance between the human subject and the architectural object, advocating the theory of *Einführung* within the debate of those years within the Deutsches Werkbund. Nor does Wittkower indulge in iconological analyses of the symbolical meaning of architecture and its proportions. On the contrary, Wittkower derives his analysis on the neo-Kantian idea of space as a symbolic form, derived from the philosophy of Ernst Cassirer and the studies of Erwin Panofsky. It is in the structure of Renaissance space itself that humanistic symbolic structures and conceptions of the universe are expressed in a tangible form.¹⁰ Renaissance architecture, in this sense, is an instrument through which we can read the abstract mental structures and the modes through which thinking took place at that time. Alyn Payne has summarised the characters of Wittkower’s Renaissance

architecture, as an echo of the “principles” of the architecture of the Modern movement:

reduction of form to syntactic relationships, the geometric grids, the emphasis on structure, on “white” and “cubic” forms, on the causal relationship between art and science (mathematics) and away from an understanding of architectural form as representational, the rejection of ornament from the core of “principles”, the presentation of an architect actively shaping theoretical directions.¹¹

The prewar relation between Cassirer and Italy was a difficult one. As Cassirer himself noted, *Individual and Cosmos*, published in 1927, was an attempt to integrate Jacob Burckhardt’s seminal *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* with an account on Renaissance philosophy – which Burckhardt purposefully eschewed from his narration as a polemic with Hegelian idealism.¹² However, Cassirer’s centred of the birth of Renaissance philosophy on the German Nicholas of Cusa as an attempt to give a European – and specifically, German – breadth to the phenomenon of the Renaissance in Italy. At the beginning of the book, Cassirer criticises the provincialism of Italian Renaissance scholars, and in particular Gentile for having removed any references to Cusanus in his history of Renaissance philosophy.¹³

On the other side of the Idealist front, in 1943 Benedetto Croce published a review of Cassirer’s *Zur Logic der Kulturwissenschaften*, summarising the points of distance between him and the German philosopher along the past 20 years. While appreciating the German philosopher’s contribution to the history of Renaissance thought, Croce sees Cassirer’s philosophy as an incomplete attempt to go beyond positivism and naturalism. According to Croce, Cassirer’s philosophy was unable to distinguish a “naturalistic” from a “historicistic” thought, reducing the specific logic of thought to the abstract logic of mathematical and natural sciences (and thus, refusing to recognise an intrinsic autonomy to visibility). In this way, the symbolic forms of Cassirer end up becoming abstract “genera and species” of thought, and negating their historical and

dialectical becoming.¹⁴

Yet, during the 1940s Cassirer was a central figure for those young Italian scholars wishing to overcome the provincialism of Italian Idealism and its anti-scientific bias. Italian art and architecture historians were also already in contact with the environments of the Warburg Institute. In particular, Giulio Carlo Argan published in the *Journal of the Warburg Institute* an essay on Filippo Brunelleschi's invention of perspective. The essay was indebted to Panofsky's idea of perspective as a symbolic form, seeing it as a constructive and operative design tool for the construction of the new Renaissance urban space, rather than a painterly, representational device.¹⁵ In general, the studies of the Warburg Institute were an example for an art critique that sought subconscious collective structures as the conditions of existence of perception and artistic experience, overcoming an idealistic art historical practice still centred on the genius of the individual artist and on the refusal of structural categories.

Such a collective basis for artistic experience, however, was not only sought by Italian art historians in abstract categories of thought, but also in the political life of the city. Historians as well as practising architects felt the necessity to verify Wittkower's claims in the light of the actual political situation in which architects were called to operate during the Renaissance. In 1955, Giulio Carlo Argan extended the analysis of his Warburg article by locating Brunelleschi's invention of perspective into the political and economic crisis of the early 1400s in Florence. Perspective became then for Argan not only a mathematical device shaped after the mentality of the time, but also a practical tool for the organisation of the building site and as a tool to guarantee the possibility of the construction of civic public works in a political environment in which the Republican freedoms started to be undermined by the authoritarian tendencies of the Medici family.¹⁶

Also Wittkower's portrait of Palladio as a systematiser of architectural knowledge had a political significance. Palladio was seen as the champion of a rationalistic antidote against the anxieties of the post-1527 German invasion. The canonisation of

architectural principles into an academic discipline, rather than their formal dissolution of the Mannerism in Rome, Florence and Milan, was seen as an integral part of the form of Venice’s resistance to counter-reformation. It is for this reason that the architecture of Palladio could become a base for the construction of the national architecture in the reformed North, in particular in Britain under the influence of Inigo Jones.¹⁷ Yet Wittkower studied Palladio almost exclusively on the *Four Books*, with a careful selection of the examples to be included to produce his argument.¹⁸ On the occasion of the publication of the first issue of the bulletin of the International Centre for Palladian studies in Vicenza in 1959, featuring essays by Wittkower, Roberto Pane, Bruno Zevi and Giulio Carlo Argan, Ernesto Nathan Rogers called against the schematism of the interpretations of a normative and theoretical Palladio, and for a confrontation with Palladio as a professional called to solve concrete design problems. The value of Palladio’s example lies for Rogers not in his construction of a universal theory of architecture, but in the systematic variations and licenses from that same theory, vis-à-vis the practical necessities of the design experience. Contrary to Wittkower’s conceptual Palladio, Rogers sought to discover an anti-formalist reading of the Vicentine master, developed within the phenomenological circle of philosopher Enzo Paci’s and his review *Aut aut*, to which Rogers was a regular collaborator.¹⁹

The San Francesco Controversy

However Ernesto Rogers’s collaborator Manfredo Tafuri was less clear in rejecting Wittkower’s thesis. Throughout his entire career, Tafuri kept an open dialogue with Wittkower on the *Memorandum* by Francesco Giorgi on Sansovino’s design of the Venetian church of San Francesco della Vigna. Tafuri’s insistence on this theme can be traced back to his first book, *L’architettura del Manierismo italiano* of 1966, and lasted until his last book of 1992, *Ricerca del Rinascimento*.²⁰

The *Memorandum* of Francesco Giorgi, published by Wittkower in *Architectural Principles*, was commissioned by the doge Andrea Gritti to evaluate and correct Jacopo Sansovino’s design for the church of San Francesco della Vigna in Venice.

Giorgi, a Franciscan friar, published in 1525 his book *Harmonia Mundi*, an account on the harmony of the world expressed in the harmonic proportions as discovered and formalised by Pythagoras, and then developed by the Hermetic tradition as it was disseminated by Marsilio Ficino and the Renaissance Neoplatonism. In the memorandum, Giorgi corrects the measurements of Sansovino’s design to make the church resonate with the music of the spheres, infusing the design with numerological references to Noah’s Tabernacle and Solomon’s temple.²¹ The fact that the memorandum was approved by Tiziano Vecellio (Titian) and Sebastiano Serlio, allowed Wittkower to conclude that the ideas of Neoplatonism were common knowledge among artists, and that even Palladio might have been familiar with them.²²

In his 1969 monograph on the architecture of Jacopo Sansovino that Tafuri would directly confronted Wittkower’s argument. Tafuri, taking the moves from the researches of Wittkower’s colleagues at the Warburg Institute Frances Yates and D. P. Walker, read Giorgi’s philosophy as a form of negative, or ascetic hermetism, which disregarded any possibility for spiritual redemption within matter and images. The visible world – and architecture as part of it – rather than showing it, conceals the musical harmony of the universe. In this vision, redemption can only come by transcending wordly matters.²³ Such an indifference towards the material world was for Tafuri testified by the fact that Giorgi did not have any problems with Sansovino’s design, as he limited himself to accept it and to slightly correct its measurements. Similarly, the actual consistency of the church as it was built shows only a superficial reception of Giorgi’s prescriptions – namely, the general austerity and simplicity of the spatial configuration. Sansovino did not seem particularly interested in the architecture of the church, as the application of canonical solutions and the sloppy use of the orders testify. Moreover, the more important public works realised later by Gritti and Sansovino no longer employed the harmonic ideal, and were based on an empirical approach to urban problems devoid of any a priori ideal. So why did Gritti ask for Giorgi’s consultancy? And why did Titian and Serlio generally privileging an empirical approach in their art – approve Giorgi’s memorandum?²⁴

Tafuri sought an answer to these questions in the specific political conditions of Venice at that time, looking for the significance of the construction of San Francesco della Vigna among the doge’s program for the reform of the republican institutions.²⁵ According to Tafuri, Gritti would have read Giorgi’s *Harmonia Mundi* not so much for its mysticism, but because of its potential for a syncretic resolution of the various attempts of religious reformation. In harmonic proportion, the doge would have sought the possibility of a *discordia concors*, a political unity among conflicting interests. Rather than the Ficinian legacy, Gritti would have seen the Pichian programme for a *concordia philosophorum* – the idea that all philosophies and theologies are joined by the same inherent problems and purposes. These ideas found particular fortune in Venice, which was religiously tolerant, and wanted to establish itself as the European protagonist for a religious synthesis. This program failed after the enforcement of the counter-reformation orthodoxy: *Harmonia Mundi* was declared heretic and was listed in the Inquisition’s *Index*. Tafuri saw the construction of San Francesco della Vigna – in its marginal position in the city and in Gritti’s programme – as a testing ground for the construction of a syncretic language of architecture to be later applied in more contested sites in the city.²⁶

Which humanism?

Tafuri’s appeal to a Pichian *concordia*, rather than Wittkower’s preference for the systematic Platonism of Ficino, can be paralleled with the rediscovery of Pico by Eugenio Garin, one of the most important philosophers and historians of the Renaissance, whose influence upon Tafuri’s work has not yet sufficiently been evaluated.²⁷ Garin, together with a group of young philosophers including Ernesto Grassi and Delio Cantomori, and in dialogue with European scholars such as Hans Baron and Oskar Kristeller, was responsible in the immediate postwar period, for de-provincialising the study of Renaissance philosophy from the deadlocks of Italian nationalism and idealism..²⁸

Grassi, a collaborator of Martin Heidegger, criticised Cassirer’s view of humanism as

an anticipation of the problem of knowledge in Descartes—granting autonomy to a universal, logical subject as the source of the knowledge of nature and truth. On the contrary, through a reading of Vico's famous critique to Descartes, Grassi showed that Renaissance philosophy does not posit any universal human essence. Rather, it is political action and artistic practices that define the mutable nature of human affairs throughout history. Hence, the use of philology and linguistics instead of logics and metaphysics as the key elements of a philosophical practice. From this point of view, Grassi challenged the common belief that modern philosophy started in France with Descartes, seeing in Italian humanism another possible genealogy through which the recent developments of French and German existentialisms could be read.²⁹

In the same years Garin rediscovered the work of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola as a conceptual and ethical figure within such a programme of revision. Garin saw the neoplatonism of Ficino as a syncretic appropriation of various philosophies in the construction of an all-encompassing system of thought. However, for Garin such an operation ended up in an instrumental appropriation of various philosophies, levelling their differences and intrinsic characters in a rigid metaphysical system. On the contrary, according to Garin, Pico's syncretism was based on a genuine political and oecumenic project of peace at a European scale, at the levels of philosophy – concordancing modern Platonism and Aristotelianism, and of theology – bridging Christian, Islamic and Jewish mysticism. Famously, in 1487, at the age of 23, Pico presented his 900 theses to Pope Innocent VIII, as a discussion platform for an oecumenic debate with Europe's most erudite scholars and prominent religious authorities. The text accompanying the theses, the *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, with its negation of any specific human essence and the subordination of being under existence, was seen by Garin as an anticipation of European existentialism.³⁰

For Garin, the Renaissance is indeed, as Husserl theorised, the beginning of the European crisis. ‘Humanism and Galileian science are a twofold alienation that prevents reconciliation between man and reality and between man and himself.’ Yet, contrary to the interpretations of this crisis in the circle of Paci and Rogers, who

sought to bridge the crisis through a project of historical continuity, Garin seemed to reclaim such a split as the condition for the possibility of the humanistic project and its civic and pedagogical attitude.³¹

It is in this context that we can locate the presence of “two” humanisms. For Wittkower, humanism represented the last historical instance of a conception of man as an integral part of nature and its stable, immutable structures. In this view, harmonic proportions were at the same time the index for the position of man within the universe, and the tool for its knowledge. According to Wittkower, such a conception ended with the Baroque, in which an idea of subjective and customary beauty emerged in the writings and the designs of Claude Perrault, Christopher Wren and Guarino Guarini.³² Despite the different approaches, the writings of Argan, Rogers and Tafuri stressed a different kind of humanism, a “civic” humanism, in which the project of architecture is not that of aligning the earthly city to the celestial city. Rather, civic humanism calls for the construction of the city of men upon starting from the consciousness that human has no other meaning but that which is given to it by human action itself. Hence, the construction of architecture is not based on the imitation of natural laws, but on the construction of a completely artificial order, a linguistic code, either based on the examples of the past (as in the case of Alberti), or on the elaboration of a logical, syntactic system (as in the case of Brunelleschi).³³

Such a conception of humanism was since the beginning haunted by a tragic consciousness on the human condition's unfoundedness, of its lack of origins. The postwar optimism of the will and the faith in human action somehow managed to tame such nihilistic premises. However, at the end of the 1960s, the project of existential humanism was already coming to an end. Already in the two books on Renaissance architecture published by Manfredo Tafuri in this period *L'architettura del manierismo europeo* (1966) and *L'architettura dell'umanesimo* (1969)—humanism appears more like an ideological programme of a group of intellectuals, which had to be however confronted to the actual the state of the political institutions of that time.³⁴ At the same time, the concept of mannerism, first circumscribed to certain artistic manifestations of

the post-1527 German conquest of Rome and their cynical and intellectualistic connotations, started to be applied by Tafuri also to the work of early Renaissance architects such as Giuliano da Sangallo. Progressively mannerism became the norm, rather than the exception within the artistic manifestations of the Renaissance, to the point that the concept will become no longer useful, and it will be later jettisoned by Tafuri.³⁵

In 1968 Eugenio Garin was still writing in defence of an positive existentialist interpretation of the Renaissance, with a passionate yet belated defence of Sartre from Heidegger's famous accusations from his 1947 “Letter on humanism.”³⁶ However, already at the beginning of the 1970s, Garin seemed to abandon his postwar certainties upon the redemptive capacities of human organisation. Ironically, the such a turn was triggered by Garin's studies on the work of an architect—Leon Battista Alberti, who until that time had provided the model for the olympic and harmonic figure of the Renaissance universal man. The discovery of some of his dinner pieces, which were considered lost, presented Alberti as a contradictory and ambiguous intellectual, at times praising moderation and civic virtues, and other times cynically dismissing them, assuming a disenchanted pessimism over the uncontrollable powers of fortune, and the incapacity of human will to conquer them. “Strangely,” Garin wrote in 1975, “noone has noted that a few decade before Giovanni Pico della Mirandola composed his famous hermetic ouverture praising men, Alberti had already written its parody.”³⁷

The work of Argan, Rogers and Tafuri, in dialogue with the work of intellectuals such as Eugenio Garin, does not provide a coherent (Italian) theory of the Renaissance. The Renaissance appear more as a fragmented, contradictory episode in European history which escapes any attempt to describe it with general categories and totalising narratives. Neither the architecture of the Renaissance can be reduced to a logical system, but as a series of interventions conditioned by the vicissitudes of an unstable political system. While Cassirer's wished to correct Burckhardt portrait of the era through the structures of the Neoplatonist philosophical system, Italian scholars accepted the German historian's anti-metaphysical stance. Jacob Burkhardt published

The Civilization of Renaissance in Italy in 1860, one year before the Italian national unification. However, the description of Italy provided by Burckhardt was far from presenting a pacified, united image of the Italian territory. Burckhardt described the Italian Renaissance as a period of turmoil, violence and political uncertainty. The Renaissance Italian state is the parody of the well-ordered apparatus of the modern nation state. The power of the Renaissance princes, be they magnanimous governors or bloody tyrants, is always illegitimate, and their sovereignty is constantly ridiculed by adverse fortunes and political contingencies. In this sense, the Italian Renaissance is at the same time the beginning, but also the limit of the European political order, that needs to be either warded off, or to be embraced as an alternative path for modernity and its institutions.

Bibliography

- Argan, Giulio Carlo. *Brunelleschi*. Milan: Mondadori, 1955.
- Argan, Giulio Carlo and Nesca A. Robb. “The Architecture of Brunelleschi and the Origins of Perspective Theory in the Fifteenth Century.” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 9 (1946): 96–121.
- Banham, Reyner. “The New Brutalism.” *Architectural Review*, 118 (1955): 354–61.
- Benelli, Francesco. “Rudolf Wittkower versus Le Corbusier: A Matter of Proportion.” *Architectural Histories*, vol. 3, no. 1 (May 2015).
- Chiesa, Lorenzo and Toscano, Alberto, eds. *The Italian Difference: Between Nihilism and Biopolitics*. Melbourne: re.press, 2009.
- Ciliberto, Michele. *Eugenio Garin: Un intellettuale del Novecento*. Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2011.
- Cimoli, Anna Chiara. “Il Primo convegno internazionale sulle proporzioni nelle arti: una storia interrotta.” In Cimoli, *La Divina Proporzione. Atti del convegno*, edited by Anna Chiara Cimoli and Fulvio Irace, 200–235. Milan: Electa, 2007.
- Cimoli, Anna Chiara and Fulvio Irace, eds. *La Divina Proporzione. Atti del convegno*. Milan: Electa, 2007.
- Cohen, Jean-Louis. “The Italiophiles at Work.” In *Architecture Theory Since 1968*, edited by K. Michael Hays, 508ff. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000.
- Croce, Benedetto. *Nuovi saggi di estetica*, 2nd expanded edn. Bari: Laterza, 1926.
- Croce, Benedetto. “Recensione a: Cassirer Ernst, Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften.” *La Critica. Rivista di letteratura, storia e filosofia diretta da B. Croce*, vol. 41 (1943): 93–95.
- Roberto Esposito, *Living Thought: Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012.
- Garin, Eugenio. *Italian Humanism: Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance*. New York: Harper & Row, 1965.
- Garin, Eugenio. *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: vita e dottrine*. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2011.
- Garin, Eugenio. “Which ‘Humanism’? (Historical digressions) (1968).” In *The Renaissance from an Italian Perspective: An Anthology of Essays, 1860-1968*

- edited by Rocco Rubini, 201ff. Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2014.
- Grassi, Ernesto. “The Beginning of Modern Thought: On the Passion and the Experience of the Primordial (1940),” in Rubini ed., *The Renaissance from an Italian Perspective: An Anthology of Essays, 1860-1968* edited by Rocco Rubini, 201ff. Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2014.
- Hight, Christopher. *Architectural Principles in the Age of Cybernetics*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Lotringer, Sylvere and Christian Marazzi, eds. *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics*. Cambridge, MA and London: Semiotext(e), 1980.
- Payne, Alina A. “Rudolf Wittkower and Architectural Principles in the Age of Modernism.” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 53, no. 3 (1994): 322–342.
- Rogers, Ernesto Nathan. “Palladio e noi.” In *Bollettino C.I.S.A.*, vol. 1 (1959): 57-60.
- Rubini, Rocco. *The Other Renaissance: Italian Humanism between Hegel and Heidegger*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014.
- Rubini, Rocco. “(Re-)Experiencing the Renaissance.” In *The Renaissance from an Italian Perspective: An Anthology of Essays, 1860-1968* edited by Rocco Rubini. Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2014.
- Rubini, Rocco, ed. *The Renaissance from an Italian Perspective: An Anthology of Essays, 1860-1968*. Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2014.
- Sherer, Daniel. “Tafuri vs. Wittkower: The Harmonic Thesis and the Crisis of Modernity.” In *The Critical Legacies of Manfredo Tafuri: A Conference at Columbia GSAPP and Cooper Union, 21-22 April 2006*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Tafuri, Manfredo. *L’architettura del Manierismo nel Cinquecento europeo*. Rome: Officina Edizioni, 1966.
- Tafuri, Manfredo. *L’architettura dell’umanesimo*. Rome: Officina Edizioni, 1966.
- Tafuri, Manfredo. *Jacopo Sansovino e l’architettura del ’500 a Venezia*. Padua: Marsilio Editori, 1969.
- Tafuri, Manfredo. *Ricerca del Rinascimento. Principi, città, architetti*. Turin: Einaudi, 1992.

- Vidler, Anthony. *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008.
- Virno, Paolo and Hardt, Michael, eds. *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
- Wittkower, Rudolf. “Sviluppo stilistico dell’architettura palladiana.” In *Bollettino C.I.S.A.*, vol. 1 (1959): 61-65.
- Wittkower, Rudolf. “The Changing Concept of Proportion.” *Daedalus*, vol. 89, no. 1 (1960): 199–215.
- Wittkower, Rudolf. *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*. 10th edn. London: Academy Editions, 1977.
- Zevi, Bruno. “I sistemi proporzionali sconfitti a Londra.” *L’architettura*, vol. 26 (1957): 508–509.

- 1 Roberto Esposito, *Living Thought: Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012) originally published in 2010. The specificity of Italian political thought, in particular its close connection with political struggles since the 1960s, had already been pointed out in many English-language publications, such as the anthology originally published in 1980 by Semiotext(e), Sylvere Lotringer and Christian Marazzi eds., *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics* (Cambridge, MA and London: Semiotext, 1980), and in a series of conferences, such as *The Italian Effect* in Sydney, 2004, *Post-Autonomia* in Amsterdam in 2011 and the collective volumes Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt eds., *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, 1st edn. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) and Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano eds., *The Italian Difference: Between Nihilism and Biopolitics* (Melbourne: re.press, 2009).
- 2 Jean-Louis Cohen, “The Italophiles at Work,” in K. Michael Hays ed., *Architecture Theory Since 1968* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 508ff.
- 3 See Joan Ockman, “Venice and New York,” *Casabella* 619-620 (January-February 1995).
- 4 Anna Chiara Cimoli and Fulvio Irace eds., *La Divina Proporzione. Atti del convegno* (Milano: Electa, 2007). For an English account of the conference, see Christopher Hight, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Cybernetics* (New York: Routledge, 2007). An assessment of the results of the conference by Wittkower are contained in Rudolf Wittkower, “The Changing Concept of Proportion,” *Daedalus*, vol. 89, no. 1 (1960): 199–215.
- 5 Anna Chiara Cimoli, “Il Primo convegno internazionale sulle proporzioni nelle arti: una storia interrotta,” eds. Anna Chiara Cimoli and Fulvio Irace, *La Divina Proporzione. Atti del convegno*, (Milan: Electa, 2007), 200.
- 6 Cimoli, “Il Primo convegno internazionale sulle proporzioni nelle arti: una storia interrotta,” 212–3.
- 7 Cimoli, “Il Primo convegno internazionale sulle proporzioni nelle arti: una storia interrotta,” 216.
- 8 Reyner Banham, “The New Brutalism,” *Architectural Review* 118 (1955): 354–61.
- 9 Except, as we will see, for Manfredo Tafuri. For a comment on the RIBA vote, see Bruno Zevi, “I sistemi proporzionali sconfitti a Londra,” *L’architettura*, vol. 26 (1957): 508.
- 10 Alina A. Payne, “Rudolf Wittkower and Architectural Principles in the Age of Modernism,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 53, no. 3 (1994): 322–342. See also Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).
- 11 Payne, “Rudolf Wittkower and Architectural Principles in the Age of Modernism,” 330.
- 12 See Peter Burke, “Introduction” to Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: Penguin, 1990).
- 13 Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2000): 47.
- 14 Benedetto Croce, “Recensione a: Cassirer Ernst, Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften,” *La Critica. Rivista di letteratura, storia e filosofia diretta da B. Croce*, vol. 41 (1943): 93–95. Croce’s aesthetics was in fact based on the idea of

“pure visibility” or pure visibilism, which he developed through an interpretation of Konrad Fiedler’s aesthetics. Pure visibilism is a method which bases the judgement of a work of art exclusively on the visual, internal consistency of the work of art itself, excluding any sociological, economical, psychological or metaphysical causes from its analysis. Visibility is an autonomous form of knowledge separated from intellectual knowledge or empirical experience. Yet, Croce sought to put Fiedler’s pure visibilism in a historical perspective. Art criticism – for Croce a synonym for art history – becomes the history of the modes of visibility, in their contemplative and productive relations with life. See Benedetto Croce, *Nuovi saggi di estetica*, 2nd expanded edn. (Bari: Laterza, 1926). While Wittkower’s method was very much based on a visual analysis of artworks, his “architectural principles” were still dependent on a form of knowledge based on logical or mathematical thought.

15 See Argan’s 1946 seminal essay on Filippo Brunelleschi and the invention of perspective, Giulio Carlo Argan and Nesca A. Robb, “The Architecture of Brunelleschi and the Origins of Perspective Theory in the Fifteenth Century,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 9 (1946): 96–121.

16 Giulio Carlo Argan, *Brunelleschi* (Milan: Mondadori, 1955).

17 See also Colin Rowe’s unpublished master’s thesis, written while he was a student of Wittkower at the Warburg Institute. Colin Rowe, *The Theoretical Drawings of Inigo Jones: Their Source and Scope*, unpublished manuscript (London: 1947). Although Wittkower acknowledged that in his built work even Palladio was not immune from the contamination of the Mannerist language, especially in his late realisations. See Rudolf Wittkower, “Sviluppo stilistico dell’architettura palladiana,” *Bollettino C.I.S.A.*, vol. 1 (1959): 61–65.

18 Francesco Benelli, “Rudolf Wittkower versus Le Corbusier: A Matter of Proportion,” *Architectural Histories*, vol. 3, no. 1 (May 2015).

19 ‘Palladio was useful for the Americans as a great model of life, more than a model for forms: the most beautiful – and, as far as I am concerned, most touching – examples, are those houses and churches where Palladio is copied with wood: it seems that that wood that had become stone – as Choisy had taught us – had turned into wood once again.’ Ernesto Nathan Rogers, “Palladio e noi,” *Bollettino C.I.S.A.*, vol. 1 (1959): 57–60.

20 Tafuri will also dedicate a monographic, microhistorical account to the specific issue of the construction of the Venetian Franciscan church, in his 1984 book significantly entitled *L’armonia e i conflitti*, written with Antonio Foscari. For the relation between Wittkower and Tafuri, see the paper by Daniel Sherer, “Tafuri vs. Wittkower: The Harmonic Thesis and the Crisis of Modernity,” delivered at *The Critical Legacies of Manfredo Tafuri*, a conference at Columbia GSAPP and Cooper Union, 21–22 April 2006.

21 Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, 10th edn. (London: Academy Editions, 1977), 155–7.

22 Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, 102–7.

23 Manfredo Tafuri, *Jacopo Sansovino e l’architettura del ’500 a Venezia* (Padua: Marsilio Editori, 1969), 18–20.

24 Tafuri, *Jacopo Sansovino e l’architettura del ’500 a Venezia*, 25.

25 Tafuri, *Jacopo Sansovino e l’architettura del ’500 a Venezia*, 5–8.

- 26 Tafuri, *Jacopo Sansovino e l'architettura del '500 a Venezia*, 23-5.
- 27 For an intellectual biography of Garin, see Michele Ciliberto, *Eugenio Garin: Un intellettuale del Novecento* (Romea-Bari: Laterza, 2011).
- 28 Rocco Rubini, “(Re-)Experiencing the Renaissance,” in Rubini ed., *The Renaissance from an Italian Perspective: An Anthology of Essays, 1860-1968* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2014).
- 29 Ernesto Grassi, “The Beginning of Modern Thought: On the Passion and the Experience of the Primordial (1940),” in Rubini ed., *The Renaissance from an Italian Perspective*.
- 30 See Eugenio Garin, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: vita e dottrine* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2011), originally published in 1937, and Eugenio Garin, *Italian Humanism: Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).
- 31 Eugenio Garin, “Which ‘Humanism’? (Historical digressions) (1968),” in Rubini ed., *The Renaissance from an Italian Perspective*.
- 32 Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, 154.
- 33 See Manfredo Tafuri, *Teorie e storia dell'architettura* (Bari: Laterza, 1968): 24-28.
- 34 Manfredo Tafuri, *L'architettura dell'umanesimo* (Bari: Laterza, 1969): 317-321.
- 35 While Tafuri had already difficulties in giving a univocal definition of mannerism in his 1966 *L'architettura del manierismo europeo*, in *Teorie e storia* the term is employed not so much as an artistic movement in a specific period of time, but as an attitude towards history which could be traced not only in the Renaissance, but also in the contemporary experiments of postwar architecture. In *Ricerca del Rinascimento*, the concept had already disappeared. See also Luisa Passerini, “History as Project: An Interview with Manfredo Tafuri,” *Any* 25-26 (February 2000): 10-69.
- 36 Garin, “Which ‘Humanism’?”
- 37 Eugenio Garin, *Rinascite e rivoluzioni* (Bari: Laterza): 362.