

# What Is Twentieth Century Architectural History? Italian Answers from the Netherlands

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## Introduction

As Dutch students in modern architectural history during the 1990s we had two important works of reference at our disposal. The first was “the red book” which was Kenneth Frampton’s *Modern Architecture, a Critical History* (1980) translated, with a red cover, as *Moderne Architectuur, een kritische geschiedenis* in 1988; the second was “the green book” which was Giovanni Fanelli’s *Architettura moderna in Olanda 1900–1940* (1968) translated, with a green cover, as *Moderne Architectuur in Nederland 1900–1940* in 1978.<sup>1</sup> While it made sense to us that an overview of Western modern architecture was written by an English scholar, we were surprised by the fact that a survey of Dutch modern architecture should be written by an Italian historian. As we progressed in our studies, we learned that Fanelli was not an isolated case: there was Maristella Casciato’s book on the School of Amsterdam for example (1991) or Sergio Polano’s book on Berlage (1988).<sup>2</sup> Somehow it became almost a matter of course to regard Dutch architectural history through Italian eyes. In hindsight however, we realized that there was nothing self-evident about it, if only given the fact that many of the Italian authors had a limited grasp of the Dutch language and the wider context of Dutch history and culture. Today we may regard these scholars as part of a group of international historians that initiated, in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, a dialogue with the heritage of Dutch modern architecture. They did so during a crucial phase in the historiography of Dutch modern architecture. In fact, from the 1960s onwards the architecture produced between 1880 and 1940 was in the process of becoming history itself: its history was no longer written by engaged critics or supporters of a particular movement; instead, its study was connected to the emancipation of architecture history as a branch of art history or as a substantial subject in schools of architecture and as such, as a science in its own right. An engaged attitude by the side of the historian was now exchanged for a more detached position in which the recent past became the

<sup>1</sup> Frampton 1980, 1985; Fanelli 1968, 1978.

<sup>2</sup> Casciato 1987, 1991; Polano 1987, 1988.

3 Hoekstra 2020: 14.

focus of an exclusive epistemic concern.<sup>3</sup> However, this process did not occur without controversy. In fact, the question that runs like a leitmotiv through the Italian-Dutch dialogue depicted here, is how to write Dutch modern architecture history from a “scientific” point of view. In this essay I will analyze the Italian-Dutch debate by referring to the German philosopher of history Jorn Rüsen (1938) who saw “doing history” as a complex interplay of a semantic, a cognitive, an aesthetic, a rhetorical and a political dimension. Rüsen states that each act of “doing history” begins, consciously or unconsciously, with a semantic operation in which the words “past” and “history” are defined. It is on this basis, so Rüsen, that the cognitive and aesthetic dimension of “doing history” occurs, corresponding to the need for knowledge about the past and the form in which to narrate its substances.<sup>4</sup>

4 Hoekstra 2020: 14.

In this essay I will use Rüsen’s definition of the historical practice to describe a debate in which the *definition* of the past had consequences for the *form* in which the historical narrative was written. Concretely, I will focus upon two Italian historians who in the 1960s, 70s and 80s wrote extensively about the history of Dutch modern architecture. They did so from an opposite point of view: while Giovanni Fanelli in the book *Architettura Moderna in Olanda 1900–1940* opted for a synthetic, integrated approach of history, as a neo-Marxist Umberto Barbieri opted for a dispersed and scattered form of history in the form of fragments, for example through the reprint of Van Loghem’s *Bouwen Bâtir Building* (1980).<sup>5</sup> Both historians claimed to write a critical history; however, because their definition of the architectonic past was different, the form of their historiography was also different. The first part of this essay will be dedicated to the clarification of this debate. In the second part I will focus on the issue, how from the perspective of today we should evaluate this debate. Among Dutch architectural historians Barbieri’s work was regarded in opposition to that of Fanelli. However, in retrospect it is the question whether their similarities are not more important than their differences. These similarities, I argue, come to the fore when the issue of historical objectivity is regarded, as the historical reality of buildings and urban designs that exists independent of interpretation. Did history, according to these two historians, stand besides or in opposition to a historical reality that is independent of us? Or did they regard historical objects as first constituted by the narratives we tell about them? The answers to these questions, I argue, make them modern architectural historians not only regarding the object of their studies, but also regarding their own subject positions as historians.

5 Barbieri 1980: 5–26.

### Thinking About History

In his introduction to the philosophy of history the Dutch historian Herman Paul points to the distinction between *historia res gestae* and *historia rerum gestarum*. The first notion refers to historical reality, while the second notion refers to the narratives we tell about historical reality, so Paul.<sup>6</sup> Philosophers of history from this second domain reflect upon the question what historical thinking consists of: it is the conceptual analysis of writing history that is at

6 Paul 2014: 16–21.

stake here. In part, this analysis consists of conceptual clarification—for example, the question, what a cause is—but just as important is the analysis of the layers of meaning present in “doing history”.<sup>7</sup> This essay will concern the second domain of the philosophical reflection on historical thought, so the *historia rerum gestarum*. It is in this perspective that I introduce the work of the German philosopher of history Jorn Rüsen (1938). Rüsen belongs to a group of scholars who made the *historia rerum gestarum* the object of their investigation and who from this perspective tried to come to a careful dissection of the layers of meaning that exist in historical thought and the way they interact. For example, a scholar of architecture writing a study of the Notre-Dame in Paris will probably believe that he or she is primarily engaged in the acquisition of knowledge. However, at the same time this scholar may enjoy his or her work of composing a text; while reconstructing the history of a building, there is a chance that the scholar will start to reflect upon his or her own life. Also, the work may have consequences for future political choices made by the scholar. In this way, Rüsen developed a theory according to which “doing history” was a complex interplay of at least five dimensions. According to Rüsen any historical thinking consciously or unconsciously begins with a semantic operation in which words such as “history” or “past” are defined. Then he distinguishes a cognitive dimension, corresponding to the need for knowledge about the past. Once this knowledge is transmitted, for example in the form of a story, there is an aesthetic dimension. The rhetorical dimension refers to the lessons that such a history story seeks to teach its readers while the political dimension refers to a conservative conviction that presents history in such a way that people can do little to change it or a progressive conviction that presents history as a constant process of emancipation.<sup>8</sup>

7 Paul 2014: 18.

Following Rüsen’s thesis we may state that there is no “neutral” history: history is a cultural product that irrevocably bears the marks of its time and

8 Paul 2014: 19–21.

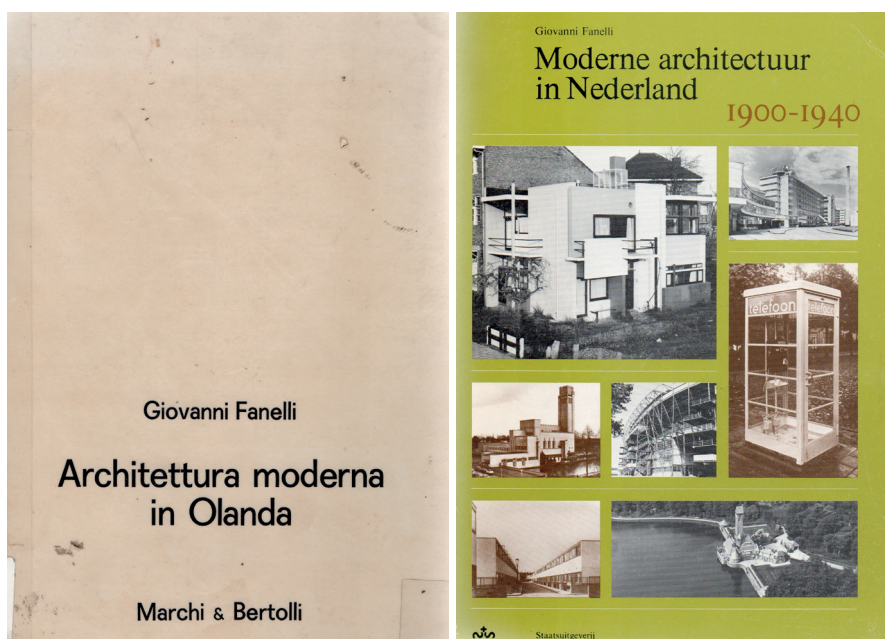


Fig. 1 Front cover of Giovanni Fanelli, *Architettura Moderna in Olanda*, 1968.

Fig. 2 Front cover of Giovanni Fanelli, *Moderne Architectuur in Nederland*, 1978.

9 Paul, 2014: 19–20.

therefore cannot claim to be free of political or aesthetic conventions.<sup>9</sup> The question is then what relationship exists between the different dimensions in “doing history”: in this essay, the question is specifically what the relationship is between the first, semantic dimension and the third, aesthetic dimension distinguished by Rüsen. In other words, the question is how the *definition* of the past had consequences for the *form* in which the historical narrative was written. It is from this perspective that I will discuss the architectural histories of Giovanni Fanelli and Umberto Barbieri.

### Giovanni Fanelli

In the summer of 1968, a remarkable book was published by the Florentine publishing house Marchi e Bertolli. It was called *Architettura moderna in Olanda 1900–1940* and was written by the young architecture student Giovanni Fanelli. Distributed over nine chapters the book narrated the history of Dutch modern architecture going largely from Cuypers, De Bazel and Berlage to the School of Amsterdam and De Stijl. The text was lavishly illustrated with, among others, a collection of photos taken by the author himself. The book concluded with an extensive documentary part, containing a chronological reasoned bibliography dating largely from 1850 to 1967 and a catalogue containing the biography and principal designs of approximately seventy architects. During the 1950s and 60s Fanelli had been a student in architecture at the University of Florence with a particular interest in the history of art and architecture.<sup>10</sup> In 1961, just before graduation, Fanelli decided to make a trip to the Netherlands to study the architecture and urban design in this country. Why was he interested in this country? In an interview I had with him he stated: “I realized that in this physical compact cultural area, all the many different components of twentieth century architectural culture had had a chance to realize themselves and to develop in a remarkable way.”<sup>11</sup> Where in the 1960s in Italy the attention for “rational modernism” prevailed, Fanelli discovered a country in which twentieth century modernism seemed to manifest itself in a more complex, manifold way. On his journey he also discovered that Dutch architects had been particularly active in the field of writing including several specialized periodicals, such as the *Bouwkundig Weekblad* [Construction Weekly] or *De Opmerker* [The Observer]. At the same time, he saw that a summatory history of recent nature was lacking; he then decided to write this history himself.<sup>12</sup> This implied learning the Dutch language by a constant laborious work of translation. *Architettura Moderna in Olanda* was marked by a desire to take a distance from the historiographic tradition of Zevi and Benevolo.<sup>13</sup> In the first lines of the introduction, Fanelli made his revisionist intention clear. He stated that although the historiography of modern architecture had so far recognized the importance of the Dutch contribution it had given an “imbalanced, forced and unilateral” representation of it.<sup>14</sup> Rather than picking up the thread where other stories left it, Fanelli wanted to “partire da zero”—to start from scratch—and write a research-based history. Armed with his photo camera, he travelled to the Netherlands to ob-

10 This information is based on an interview I had with Fanelli in November 2023.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Benevolo 1960; Zevi 1955.

14 Benevolo 1960; Zevi 1955.

serve, document and research. In this way, Fanelli wrote a critical history that, following Rüsen's analysis, gave more weight to the cognitive dimension of architectural history—meaning the conscious intellectual activity corresponding to the need for precise knowledge about the past. According to him, consultation of the sources would give historical knowledge a scientific pretension. It is on this basis that Fanelli wanted to capture the essence of Dutch architecture in this period. According to Fanelli, what most typified the Netherlands in the first decades of the twentieth century was that many architects were active as writers.<sup>15</sup> Fanelli related this to what he believed to be the main challenge of Dutch architects during this period, which was to redefine the relationship between artist and society.<sup>16</sup> Architects now saw their own practice as a cultural and social activity that needed the support of a public. Fanelli also pointed to the rise of fin-de-siècle ideologies as diverse as anarchism, socialism, theosophy or “aesthetic ideologies”—Fanelli referred to notions of beauty employed by Dutch designers, not so much in the domain of the historical narrative in the sense of Rüsen, but in the area of design—as attempts to restore this relationship, which had been in a crisis since the French Revolution, so Fanelli<sup>17</sup>. In other words, despite their differences, Fanelli regarded these ideologies as unified by facing the same challenge and by answering to the same questions. Fanelli mentioned that these ideologies also inspired a wide range of architects: for example the mystical doctrines of theosophy were an inspiration for architects like K. P.C. De Bazel (1869–1923) and J.L.M. Lauweriks, (1864–1932), who adopted theosophy in an attempt to break free from the narrow historicism of their mentor P.J.H. Cuypers (1827–1921). However, so Fanelli, theosophy was equally an inspiration for members of De Stijl, or the architect Michiel Brinkman (1873–1925) and the industrialist C.H. Van der Leeuw (1890–1973), who were involved in the construction of the Van Nelle factory in the late 1920s<sup>18</sup>. It is in this way that Fanelli postulated a unity in multiplicity that underpinned Dutch architecture at the start of the twentieth century. This idea also returns in what may be considered as the most speculative part of his book, where Fanelli identified a “tradizione olandese” [Dutch tradition]. The unity of culture, so argued Fanelli, not only stemmed from facing to the same challenges but was also made possible by a long historical tradition which according to him originated in the Middle Ages. This period was marked, so Fanelli, by the successful attempt to establish an “algemeen geldende cultuur” [a general prevailing culture]; subsequently, it was this culture that formed a continuing unifying force in Dutch culture<sup>19</sup>. Fanelli came to this, for most Dutch readers, surprising conclusion based on his study of Berlage who sometimes pointed to the Middle Ages as an example of, as Fanelli puts it, a “spiritual background that was the same for the whole community and that made the existence of architecture as a culture possible”.<sup>20</sup> Together with a strong bourgeois culture—Fanelli referred to the pivotal role of the Dutch middle class in shaping the economic, artistic and political landscape of the 19th and 20th centuries—it was this communal backdrop which first made architectural innovation at the start of the

15 Fanelli 1968: 14.

16 Fanelli 1968, 1978: 24.

17 Fanelli 1968, 1978: 14.

18 Fanelli 1968, 1978: 14.

19 Fanelli 1968: 18–19.

20 Fanelli 1968: 18 “...quell parametron spirituale commune alla collettività che è alla radice della possibilità dell’ esistenza stessa di una architettura come cultura”. For most Dutch readers Fanelli’s highlighting of the Middle Ages as constitutive for Dutch architectonic culture was slightly alienating; in general, historians point towards later periods as foundational for the identity of the Netherlands as a modern country. See for example the establishment of the Dutch East Indies Company in 1602 or the founding of the modern kingdom in 1815, or also its late industrialization in the 19th century. See: Kennedy, 2017: 9–11; Reinink 1969: 5.

21 This was one of the most criticized passages of the book; Reinink pointed to Fanelli's fallacy to conflate Berlage's thinking with the character of Dutch history *per se*. See Reinink 1969: 5.

22 Fanelli 1968, 1978: 81.

23 De Wit 1983: 9.

24 Fanelli 1968, 1978: 82–83.

25 Fanelli 1968, 1978: 83; Fanelli: 1982.

26 Reinink 1969.

27 Strauven 1979: 26–29.

28 Fanelli: 1978, *Architettura Edilizia Urbanistica Olanda 1917–1940*.

twentieth century possible, so Fanelli.<sup>21</sup> The postulation of a unity of culture in which different artistic expressions despite their mutual differences were still subsumed by one cultural stratum also stood at the basis of the main challenge that Fanelli faced while writing the book. He wanted to write a relational history in which the two major Dutch avant-garde movements of De Stijl and the Amsterdam School were correlated.<sup>22</sup> Historians such as Hitchcock and Banham mentioned De Stijl and the School of Amsterdam but represented the history of Dutch modern architecture as a sequence of distinct and opposing groups.<sup>23</sup> Fanelli now formulated the hypothesis that De Stijl and the School of Amsterdam were in fact two parallel and complementary avant-garde movements. That is, these movements should not be regarded in opposition to each other; rather, so Fanelli, it was De Stijl which manifested itself in opposition to the School of Amsterdam and not vice versa<sup>24</sup>. In contrast the School of Amsterdam was marked by a more liberal attitude, of which El Lissitzky's 1921 cover design of *Wendingen* gives evidence, so Fanelli<sup>25</sup>. At this point, it is time to return to Rüsen's analysis to see how Fanelli's definition of the past resulted in the form of his history. According to Fanelli the history of Dutch modern architecture in this period was not a series of singular instances, but part of a widespread culture of architecture as an underlying map in which each architect and movement had its proper location while being at the same time interrelated. For Fanelli the history of Dutch modern architecture should be written as a relational history by mapping out the transitions and crossings between architects and movements. This now opened the door to a synthetical history, a survey, as the form par excellence in which the integration and interaction of the layers of the past could be addressed.

## Critical Reception

Immediately after its publication Fanelli's book became influential in the Netherlands even though many of its readers did not understand Italian. Initially, the Dutch audience used the book mainly for its extensive bibliography: its list of publications by and about Dutch architects for example, or its biographies of principal protagonists mentioned in the book.<sup>26</sup> In Rüsen's terms, they were interested in the cognitive dimension of Dutch architectural history and used Fanelli's book to gain precise knowledge about sources. Ten years later Fanelli's book was translated in Dutch and developed into a standard work of Dutch modern architectural history. However, with its translation critical voices emerged as well. The most substantial discussion of the book occurred in the professional journals *Plan* and *Wonen TA/BK*. In 1979 Francis Strauven published a review in the journal *Wonen TA/BK*<sup>27</sup>. The occasion for it was the publication of Fanelli's second book on Dutch modern architecture called *Architettura Edilizia Urbanistica Olanda 1917–1940*, published in the year 1978—appeared the same year as the translation of *Architettura Moderna in Olanda*<sup>28</sup>. Strauven criticized this book for being too much a compilation, a “collage of existing Dutch texts”. Such a work could be a precondition

for history but was not history itself, so Strauven, because writing history depended on interpretation, vision and making connections<sup>29</sup>. In contrast, *Architettura moderna in Olanda* was a better book, stated Strauven, because it was a “modest and limited synthesis”. According to Strauven the book was a “classic stylistic overview of movements and figures” in which architecture was treated purely formally without addressing its theoretical or ideological implications. Still, he concluded the book was an excellently documented work of reference<sup>30</sup>. Strauven’s critical review led to a response by Fanelli, which was published in a following issue of the journal<sup>31</sup>. The discussion that unfolded between the two historians touched upon fundamental issues of writing history. Fanelli gave his article the title “Reality is more than an image of it” and described what according to him should be the task of the historian. He wrote that he was against a historical practice pretending to give meaning to the past and that for him “doing history” was a process of verification, of reconstruction and evaluation of data and as such a form of science. The historical practice, so wrote Fanelli, is contrary to any ideological position; it is not the search for an “image of reality” but the search for truth, understood as a deepening of knowledge<sup>32</sup>. For example, Fanelli recounted being fascinated by the “Tolhuisbrug” [Tolhuisbridge] in Utrecht. On the site, he discovered that the work was attributed to municipal public works, but there was no more information. Through research in the topographical archive in Utrecht he discovered that the bridge was a work by the architect Planjer and that he was responsible for many other public works in Utrecht<sup>33</sup>. In this way, Fanelli wanted to write a research-based history: armed with his photo camera, he travelled to the Netherlands to observe, research and document. Fanelli thus emphasized once more the cognitive dimension of “doing history”: architectural history for Fanelli was a quest for knowledge about the past entailing a systematic search based on sources that gives it a scientific claim.

29 Strauven 1979: 27.

30 Strauven 1979: 29.

31 Fanelli 1979: 4–6.

32 Fanelli 1979: 6.

33 Fanelli 1979:6.

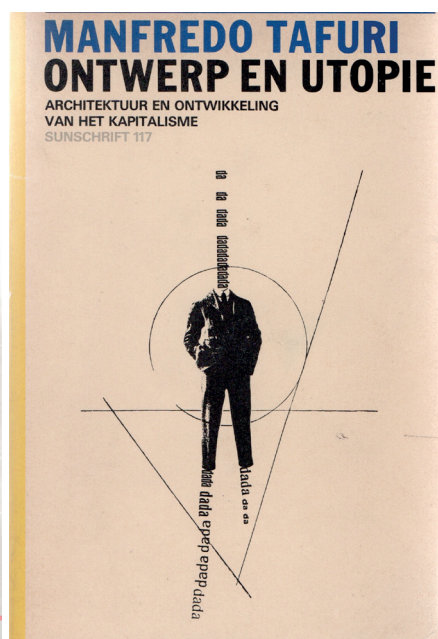


Fig. 3 Front cover of Johannes Van Loghem, *Bouwen, Bauen, Bâtir, Building*, 1980 (1932). Reference: Van Loghem, Ir. J.B. (1932) (1980): *Bouwen/Bauen/Bâtir/Building*—Holland, Nijmegen: Socialistische Uitgeverij (left).

Fig. 4 Front cover of Manfredo Tafuri, *Ontwerp en Utopie, architectuur en ontwikkeling van het kapitalisme*, 1978. Reference: Tafuri, Manfredo, (1978): *Ontwerp en Utopie, architectuur en ontwikkeling van het kapitalisme*, Nijmegen: Socialistische Uitgeverij (right).

## Umberto Barbieri

Fanelli's book was most vehemently criticized by Umberto Barbieri and Cees Boekraad, who were two architecture students from Delft. They published a review in the professional journal *Plan*, equally in the year 1979. Umberto Barbieri was a young Italian architect who had emigrated to the Netherlands; in an earlier stage, he had been involved in the translation of Fanelli's book. In Delft, Barbieri and Boekraad were among the *jeunes turcs* who proposed to renew architectural education among others by introducing architectural history and theory as a relevant subject matter for architects and by embracing a neo-Marxist point of view<sup>34</sup>. Barbieri's and Boekraad's main point of criticism concerning Fanelli's book was the supposed idealism that pervaded it, resulting in, as they formulated it, a rosy, all too positive view of the country. They wrote: "Hallmark [of the book, Hoekstra] is the creation of a lovely, neo-romantic landscape, a balanced conflict-free society, in which the author discovers an immutable ethical and aesthetical quality of architecture."<sup>35</sup> In addition, they criticized Fanelli for using an outdated art historical method, thus reducing architecture, so they claimed, to a pure play of forms.<sup>36</sup> The hypothesis of a series of opposing but complementary avant-garde movements was for them a "dream palace" and nothing but the application of "the rules of classical dialectics" where a series of seemingly opposed movements ultimately reach the synthesis of unity.<sup>37</sup> For Boekraad and Barbieri architectural history should be critical in the sense of it being a "tool for making current issues tangible"<sup>38</sup>. To this end, the historian had to focus not on a set of finished forms, but rather on the work of the architect: on his labour as a designer, as a "technique with cultural implications".<sup>39</sup> In their critique, Barbieri and Boekraad were influenced by Tafuri's *Progetto e Utopia* (1973) which was translated as *Ontwerp en Utopie: architectuur en ontwikkeling van het kapitalisme* by Barbieri, Vollemans, Denissen and Boekraad and published equally in 1978.<sup>40</sup> In this way, they defined the architectural past differently compared to Fanelli: they accentuated the conflicts and hardships of it, as the clashing of opposed movements without the reconciliation of synthesis. For example, they analyzed the articles of the architect Oud in *De Stijl* as being dominated by a tension between his recognition that the modern architect should have most of all technical and social knowledge, and his insight that this process was hindered by the desire of the architect to have individual freedom of expression.<sup>41</sup> In 1980 Boekraad and Barbieri published an example of the kind of history they envisioned. They published a reprint of Van Loghem's *Bouwen/Bâtir/Building Holland* which was originally published in 1932.<sup>42</sup> In the introduction to this almost forgotten fragment of Dutch architectural history, Barbieri made clear that it was not his intention to write a straightforward Marxist history in which economic data are preferred to political or cultural data. Instead, Barbieri proposed an architectural history that was focused on the history of ideology regarded as a complex phenomenon pervading modern society. Barbieri presented the socialist architect van Loghem as one of the protagonists of the Dutch "Nieuwe Bouwen" [New Way of Building, the

34 Hoekstra 2013: 167–183.

35 Boekraad/Barbieri 1979, 1982: 207: "Kenmerk is de creatie van een lieflijk neoromanties landschap, een evenwichtige, konfliktloze maatschappij, waarin de auteur een onveranderlijke ethiese en esthetiese kwaliteit van de architectuur ontdekt".

36 Ibid.

37 Boekraad/Barbieri 1979, 1982: 210.

38 Boekraad/Barbieri 1979, 1982: 211: "... als werktuig om de aktuele problematieken grijpbaar te maken."

39 Boekraad/Barbieri 1979, 1982: 211: "... als techniek met kulturele implicaties."

40 Tafuri 1973, 1978.

41 Boekraad/Barbieri, 1980: 11.

42 Tafuri 1973, 1978.



Dutch indication for the Modern Movement] who in the 1930s in the light of a severe social crisis first saw the meaning of the experiments undertaken in previous years<sup>43</sup>. Van Loghem's book, so stated Barbieri, was written as a reflection upon his own past and from the realization that its lessons gained a new relevance in the light of the challenges of the present. It is in this sense that Barbieri relates Van Loghem's book to the first meetings of the CIAM: Van Loghem realized that its insights could now be used as instruments in the battle against the excesses of capitalism, against the anarchy of building production for example, or the profusion of private land ownership and the miserable state of workers' housing. In this way, so states Barbieri, the experiments of the 1920s were for Van Loghem a way to create a socialist order in the capitalist chaos.<sup>44</sup> However, so he continued, this did not mean the ultimate victory of modern architecture: on the contrary, so wrote Barbieri, the question that Van Loghem indirectly addresses is after the task of the architectural designer in a changing world.<sup>45</sup> Barbieri relates Van Loghem's book not only to the CIAM meetings but equally to the development of the urban expansion plan in Amsterdam that was called the *Algemene Uitbreidings Plan* or AUP. In the 1930s, Van Loghem must have witnessed the creation of this plan, so Barbieri.<sup>46</sup> Following the historian Jan de Heer, Barbieri regarded the essence of this plan as merely a legal instrument for urban development: a technical zoning plan, the purpose of which was to regulate land use and ownership.<sup>47</sup> In the light of this reality, so asks Barbieri, what could be the role of the architect as "old fashioned" producer of objects: did an urban plan such as the AUP not reduce the architect to an obsolete, inadequate figure?<sup>48</sup> It is at this point that Barbieri starts to depict architectural history as a history of ideology. In the modern city, so continued Barbieri, the architect is no longer a draughtsman who makes beautiful plans for buildings that express such values as rationality, harmony, and atonement. Instead, he or she has become, so Barbieri, an abstract producer of elementary signs that are no longer dictated by preconceived codes or political-cultural symbols: the work of the architect is a "moment in the production" of the modern city, always part of the system but far from having a leading role in it. In a certain way, so writes Barbieri, this implies that the promises of the avant-garde are now realized.<sup>49</sup> Van Loghem, so he continues, wrote his book from the full realization of the consequences of the *Nieuwe Bouwen*, yet his book was also the product of a struggle. The question was for Barbieri whether the architect—in casu Van Loghem—could be satisfied with his new role; whether he was fully at peace with the absorption of culture and image into civilization, technology and production. Van Loghem, so Barbieri, now unfolds a cunning strategy in which the acceptance of the loss of the architects' ideological function opens the door to the salvation of a minimal part of it. Van Loghem's book, so argues Barbieri, was an incentive for designers to take on the task of producing forms in addition to technical and economical roles: to make a smart use of the margins left open for design. In this way, so Barbieri, Van Loghem is a modern intellectual who represents the bourgeois division between "sein"

43 Van Loghem 1932, 1980.

44 Barbieri 1980: 5.

45 Barbieri 1980: 6.

46 Ibid.

47 Barbieri 1980: 7–10.

48 Barbieri 1980: 10.

49 Barbieri 1980: 16.

50 Barbieri 1980: 21.

and “sollen”—between the acceptance of how things are and the longing for how they should be. While *Bouwen/Bâtir/Building* clearly refers to the first category, his hope was for second, for the marginal functioning of the architect-intellectual within the capitalist system so concludes Barbieri.<sup>50</sup> In this way, instead of a Fanelli’s panoramic vision, Barbieri proposed a deep drill into the problematic aspects of architectural history. Depicting the history of architecture as a history of the division between *sein* and *sollen* meant a rupture with synthetic historiography, originating in giving up the faith in the unity of the past itself. This gave a new task to the historian: one that goes from integration to dispersion, from coherence to fragment.

### Architectural History: A Question of Foundations

51 Ankersmit 1990: 15.

So far, the conclusion of this essay seems to be that Fanelli and Barbieri occupied two poles of the intellectual matrix of integration versus dispersion. However, this opposition becomes less absolute once we consider the question, how these historians regarded historical objectivity, understood as the reality of buildings and urban designs that exists independent of interpretation. What was for them the “Deutungsmacht” [power of interpretation] of the *historia res gestae* vis à vis the *historia rerum gestarum*? Fanelli’s positivism was in a way the culmination of his historicism: his hypothesis of a coherence between different movements in Dutch architectural history was based on the study of archives and libraries, resulting in facts about the past. The past assumed for Fanelli the status of an object that existed outside and independent of us: his task as a historian was to register its development.<sup>51</sup>

52 Ankersmit 1990: 235.

In contrast Barbieri, who described history as a “tool to make current issues tangible”, was less concerned to regard the past as an objective “Gegenüber” [opposite]. Instead, for him the past was part of the present, as the context from which to think and to act. Yet both historians assumed, although to varying degrees, an objective past that ultimately legitimized their work. This becomes clear from their ambition to now, unlike their predecessors—Zevi and Benevolo for Fanelli, Fanelli for Barbieri—penetrate the most deep and fundamental aspects of the past.<sup>52</sup> However, this also confronts us with a problem. In fact, when both historians rely on historical veracity, who is then telling the truth, whose account is reliable? This question is not so easy to answer. The Dutch philosopher Frank Ankersmit analyzes this problem by pointing to the difference between individual statements and historical texts. Individual statements consist of a subject and a predicate part and can be tested against reality, so he argues. For example, the statement: “the Rietveld-Schröder house has a flat roof” can be tested if I travel to Utrecht to see if this is really the case. However, this is not the case with complex linguistic operations such as historical texts. In this case, so Ankersmit, there is an indeterminacy between historical reality and its representation in the *historia rerum gestarum*. It is this indeterminacy that makes it hard to express judgments about history books. For example, I could state that the best history ever written about the French revolution is Alexis de Tocqueville’s *L’Ancien*

*Régime et la Révolution* (1856) but if someone else claims that Thomas Carlyle's *The French Revolution: A history* (1837) is much better, than who is right?<sup>53</sup> This insight can lead to a frightening question. In fact, how can history, in the light of this indeterminacy, still claim scientific validity? How is science, understood as a systematic attempt to arrive at reliable knowledge, at all possible? In response to these questions Paul and Ankersmit point to the American philosopher Richard J. Bernstein and what he called “cartesian anxiety”.<sup>54</sup> For Bernstein, Descartes' search for an unquestionable starting point for human thought—his cogito ergo sum—was a paradigmatic example of what he called “an either/or thinking”. As Paul writes, either we possess an Archimedean point from which we can erect the edifice of human knowledge, or our edifices are nothing but castles in the air.<sup>55</sup> In contrast, Bernstein advises us to lower our expectations of science and to become less afraid of historical accounts that can't be tested against an absolute truth. The debate of philosophers like Bernstein and Ankersmit is part of a philosophical climate called “postfoundationalism”; for some the intellectual pendant of postmodernism. Where in the first half of the twentieth century, so these philosophers argue, the positivist desire for an unquestionable foundation for scientific statements was still valid, from the 1960s onwards the insight grew that such an ambition is unfeasible. Justification of statements about the past is sufficient: such statements require good reasoning and there are criteria as to why some statements are more plausible than others. However, a foundation in terms of a conclusive evidence is too much to ask for, according to these philosophers<sup>56</sup>. If postfoundationalism thus defines the past almost in a Kantian sense as an unknowable noumenal reality behind our phenomenal world, then how can one reasonably examine it? It is with this fundamental question in mind that we should evaluate the work of Fanelli and Barbieri. I will conclude my essay by pointing at two ways in which their work, also in times of postfoundationalism, continues to have value to us today. First, Fanelli's *Architettura Moderna in Olanda* was a research-based history: his hypothesis was created from the exploration of archives and libraries. At the same time, his inquiry started with a question—what the character of modern architecture in the Netherlands is—to which a direct answer cannot be found in the sources. Fanelli pretended to say something about the past based on the relics—books, drawings, plans—that remain in the present. However, rather than parroting his sources he wanted to add something to what these sources claim. This resulted in a number of statements—about the complementary nature of the Dutch avant-garde and its essential cultural unity—that find support in a certain interpretation of the sources but do not appear in them literally. This makes his book strictly speaking not a proposal for the interpretation of the past “an und für sich” but an interpretation of the source material. Fanelli postulated a state of affairs in Dutch architectural history because he believed that this would best explain the character of Dutch modern architecture to his audience. Whether the postulated statements actually coincide with the past cannot be said with certainty, but

53 Harbers et.al. 2005: 135.

54 Paul 2014: 68–71; Ankersmit 1990: 259.

55 Paul 2014: 69.

56 Paul 2014: 89.

57 Paul 2014: 125.

58 Ankersmit 1990: 233.

59 Hoekstra 2013: 177.

60 Ankersmit 1990: 246.

that in itself is no reason to doubt Fanelli's hypothesis.<sup>57</sup> Second, in comparison to Fanelli, Barbieri's history seems even more analytical. Barbieri's introduction was not a straightforward history in which he contextualized Van Loghem's book. Instead, he analyzed the fortune of a committed architect in a capitalist society by using a vocabulary that was not directly derived from the sources: not from what Van Loghem wrote himself, nor from contemporary events such as the CIAM meetings or the AUP in Amsterdam. Nowhere does Van Loghem describe his own role as that of an "abstract producer" in a capitalist society and nowhere does he mention the work of Walter Benjamin. Even more strongly than Fanelli Barbieri thus imposes upon the past a structure that is not present in the past itself. Therefore, Barbieri's analysis assumes an autonomy with respect to the past.<sup>58</sup> It is important to remember that architectural students in Delft at the time not only studied Tafuri, but also Foucault's *Les mots et les choses* (1966).<sup>59</sup> Where Fanelli's interpretation was, as it were, a thin layer over reality, there Barbieri's history takes on the character of a thing in reality.<sup>60</sup> It is in this way that for him history became "a tool to make current issues tangible". Van Loghem's book was a thing in reality and Barbieri's introduction added another thing to it. In this way, what the contrasting accounts of Fanelli and Barbieri make clear to us today is that our understanding of the past is necessarily interpretative of nature and that differences in interpretation are necessary to recognize its contours.

## Author

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## Figures

*Fig. 1* Front cover of Giovanni Fanelli, *Architettura Moderna in Olanda*. 1968.

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*Fig. 2* Front cover of Giovanni Fanelli, *Moderne Architectuur in Nederland*, 1978.

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*Fig. 3* Front cover of Johannes Van Loghem, *Bouwen, Bauen, Bâtir, Building*, 1980

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