Michel J. van Nieuwstadt

ARCHITEC-TURE AS FABLE; OR CACCIARI IN AMERICA

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But let us not forget this either: it is enough to create new names and estimations and probabilities in order to create in the long run new 'things'.
Nietzsche, translated by Walter Kaufmann

With some authors, especially the most prolific – those whose productivity makes a comprehensive view of their work nearly impossible – it can reasonably be called a happy chance when their work is suddenly summarized. It gives us an aerial view, as it were. This type of happy chance may come about when the work is presented to a 'new' public, in a translation that – to promote a basic understanding of what the author has to say – brings together his insights in the most concise possible form. That is what has now taken place with Massimo Cacciari's theoretical insights in English: they are available in a representative reader, which at the same time is a new book.[1]

What we see at once when we attentively leaf through this collection are the interventions that the author has allowed himself in his original texts. In two of three essays that otherwise appear unabridged in this translation, Cacciari interrupts himself and adds lengthy interpolations from a different context. One would like to echo the author in his brief preface and say that 'this edition brings together [his] most significant essays on aspects of modern architecture viewed in the light of aesthetic-philosophical problematics' (page vii). But the inquisitive reader will also want to seek out the assemblage techniques at work in this newly formed mosaic.

The interventions are quite revealing, and may help to uncover a secret principle behind this body of thought. Along with the surprising title – which serves to introduce 'nihilism' as an umbrella term for the modern and postmodern – and the new epilogue 'On the architecture of nihilism', written especially for this edition, which clarifies this term, the interventions are the real surprises in this book. Even beyond that, the fact that this is the first true presentation of Cacciari's architectural philosophy in the English-speaking world makes its publication a major event; it facilitates a basic understanding of Cacciari's thinking about the architectural. Before now, only 'Eupalinos or architecture', which appeared in *Oppositions* no. 21 in 1980, was available to English speakers.

Furthermore, all these surprises are festively wrapped and skilfully tied up with a bow in the form of a highly edifying introduction by Patrizia Lombardo: 'The philosophy of the city'. The only misleading thing about it is its title, with its implicit promise of a 'synthesis', because it is precisely a philosophy of the city that is no longer conceivable for Cacciari. Beyond that, this exemplary edition, complemented by Lombardo's introduction, is sure to make its readers wish that all border traffic between cultural zones could flow so smoothly. The only thing it may be lacking is a bibliographic survey and timeline of Cacciari's theoretical development, which could have brought his selected writings into sharper relief.

1
Massimo Cacciari, *Architecture and Nihilism: On the philosophy of modern architecture* (New Haven, 1993). Throughout the article, the page numbers in parentheses refer to this work. Translator's note: Passages quoted from Cacciari's work have been taken from this 1993 English edition. Likewise, the quote from *Modern Architecture* is from the English edition cited in note 4. The quotes from Benjamin and other German-language authors have been translated into English from Michel Nieuwstadt's Dutch renderings.

I

Aside from Lombardo's introduction and Cacciari's epilogue, the essays presented here are divided into three major parts. Even typographically, they are distinctly separated from one another, and they represent stages in the uninterrupted progress of Cacciari's thought, which seems to possess its own continuously reformulated law of motion in the explication of what the metropolis 'is'. Part I of this collection, entitled 'The dialectics of the negative and the Metropolis', roughly corresponds to the lengthy piece with which Cacciari opened his 1973 book *Metropolis. Saggi sulla grande città di Sombart, Endell, Scheffler e Simmel*, except for one major intervention, the final paragraph, which is drawn from a different context and put to work here.[2] The main point of reference for this 'Metropolis text', as it is usually called, is Simmel's 1903 article 'Die Grossstadte und das Geistesleben', which from the very start has figured as a boundary in Cacciari's work, because what Simmel calls the *Nervenleben* of the big city no longer leads the inhabitant back to the deeper regions of the personality. This *Nervenleben* dissects individuality into a stream of impressions, a process which has the effect of integration into something new. Between the publication of this work in 1903 'and the appearance thirty years later of Walter Benjamin's fragments on Baudelaire and Paris' – as Cacciari writes, juxtaposing the two milestones that had the greatest initial impact on his orientation in architecture theory[3] – 'falls the entire avant-garde and its crisis.' And he immediately follows this up with the question: 'Why is it that the limits of this historical period can be determined by two comprehensive historico-philosophical discussions of the Metropolis? What is meant by Metropolis?' (pages 3-4)

The Metropolis – as one might sum up the still somewhat astonishing insight of Cacciari's approach after 20 years – is the crystallisation point of a generalised process of rationalisation that nevertheless resists generalisation into any 'synthesis'. Cacciari's diagnosis commences with the anatomy of this non-'synthesisable' metropolis. But this diagnosis is also the self-diagnosis of the intellectual, arising from the awareness that his role has been compromised through the normalisation of mass production and mass consumption. From the first appearance, in the mid-nineteenth century, of the contours of the modern city, a place inimical to psychological introspection and experience regulated by individual consciousness, there has been a growing divide between intellectuals and the Metropolis. This divide can only be expressed effectively in the paradoxical form of a disagreement, a rejection – also referred to by Cacciari with a term he defines much more generally, *Entsagung* (roughly, 'renunciation' or 'self-denial') – and it can never be bridged. The fact that the crisis in the relationship between the 'intellectual' and the 'Metropolis' can no longer be patched over lends a new, unique cipher text to many intellectual positions. The philosophers, poets and rare

2
See Massimo Cacciari, *Metropolis. Saggi sulla grande città di Sombart, Endell, Scheffler e Simmel* (Rome, 1973). The first part (7-97) consists of the essay 'Dialettica dei negativo e metropoli'. The second part, entitled 'Città e metropoli', consists of selected writings of Werner Sombart, August Endell, Karl Schemer and Georg Simmel. Cacciari's opening essay is a revised, much longer version of an earlier essay on Simmel, which appeared in *Angelus Novus* 21, 1971, 1-54: 'Note sulla dialettica del negativo nell'epoca della metropoli'.

3
Cacciari's references to Simmel's renowned essay are usually to the following edition: Georg Simmel, *Brücke und Tür. Essays des Philosophen zur Geschichte, Religion, Kunst, und Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart, 1957), 227-242. The phrase 'Walter Benjamin's fragments on Baudelaire and Paris' refers primarily to the texts collected in Dutch translation in: Walter Benjamin, *Baudelaire. Een dichter in het tijdperk van het hoogkapitalisme* (Amsterdam, 1979), translated and with an afterword by Wim Notenboom.

architects who have proclaimed the uninhabitability of the world and city are awarded the rank of commissioning authority. How do architecture theory and the Metropolis look under the patronage of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Baudelaire and perhaps even Rilke? Those who are now without a home will never build themselves one.

In their 1976 tome *Modern Architecture*, Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co (whose work and Cacciari's were often produced in close collaboration) described this condition of disunity: 'The intellectual, in substance, discovered that his own singularity no longer had its place in the massified metropolis dominated by a technical capacity for infinite duplication which, as Nietzsche saw with utter lucidity, had killed off once and forever all sacredness and divinity. But at the same time the metropolis became the very sickness to which the intellectual felt himself condemned; exile in his homeland, he could make one last attempt at dominating the evil that assailed him by deciding to abandon himself of his own free will to a holy prostitution of his soul.'[4] It is no mere coincidence that at this point Tafuri and Dal Co refer to Baudelaire, whose 'poet' literally loses his aureole in the streets and is overjoyed to be able to go about incognito and behave just as crudely as any other mortal. But that is already the Baudelaire of the fragmented intellectual gaze, of the *Trauerspiel* that Walter Benjamin identifies in the French poet's *Fleurs du mal* as a modern counterpart of the baroque German tragedy. Baudelaire describes himself as *coudoyé par les foules*, and Walter Benjamin identifies this experience of being jostled by crowds as a decisive one for the poet.

4
Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, *Architettura contemporanea* (1976). English translation: *Modern architecture*, 2 vols. (London, 1980), 98-99.

II

According to Benjamin's interpretation, Baudelaire made it a point of honour to confront this experience of shock and integrate it into his literary work. He turns this capacity to absorb – in mental and physical terms – this jostling and these experiences of shock into the most basic element of the atmosphere in which his poetry takes place. The jostling, jabbing masses were the moving, stirring veil through which Baudelaire saw Paris. Benjamin arrives at his image of these masses as concealed by a veil primarily because the poems in *Fleurs du mal* do not depict or portray them directly. Likewise, he adds, in the description of their character traits, they cannot be pictured as a 'class', or as a collective that is structured in any way. This is why Benjamin sees the amorphous urban crowd – whose existence Baudelaire never forgets for one moment, but which never serves as a model for his work – as active in that work by means of a 'hidden pattern' and a 'secret constellation'. In 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', he calls it the 'hidden constellation . . . [of the] phantom crowd: the words, the fragments, the beginnings of lines, from which the poet, in the deserted streets, wrests poetic booty.'[5] And it may be important to point out at this juncture to what extent thought itself, in Benjamin's work, feels compelled to make itself equal to this hidden constellation, like writing that is only readable in the light of its banished 'meaning', in the light of a darkened firmament of ideas that no longer casts an a priori, salvatory gleam on the written characters. Those characters do not refer to any possibility of synthesis, any intact mode of experiencing subjectivity, any continuity or any community.

5
The Dutch translation, 'Over enige motieven bij Baudelaire', is found in: Benjamin, *Baudelaire. Een dichter in het tijdperk van het hoogkapitalisme*, op. cit. (note 3), 109. Translator's note: For an English translation, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', see: Walter Benjamin, *Selected Works, Volume 4: 1938-1940*, translated by Edmund Jephcott et al., edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA/London, 2003), 313-355.

At the end of the above-mentioned 1939 Baudelaire essay, Benjamin says that the poet's heroic accomplishment was that 'he named the price for which the sensation of modernity could be had'. Then Benjamin, too, names that price: 'The disintegration of the aura in the immediate shock experience.' He adds – tellingly drawing on Nietzsche – that Baudelaire's consent to this shattering is what lends his poetry the peculiar quality of being a 'constellation without atmosphere'.[6] It is part of the peculiar quality of Cacciari's thinking, in turn, that it takes this atmospherelessness both as its starting point and as its final objective. That is another way of saying that the Archimedean point in Cacciari's thinking is anchored in the other universe of Walter Benjamin's thinking, which it constantly presupposes and in which no consolation is offered for the disintegrated aura. At this point, a brief digression is required, on the 'how' of this anchoring and the question of how to theorize the relationship between Benjamin and Georg Simmel.

6
See the conclusion of 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', 145 in the Dutch edition (343 in the English edition). Just as I prefer not to omit the first word in the translation of Benjamin's title 'Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire', it seems preferable to me to translate 'Gestirn ohne Atmosphare' as 'constellation without atmosphere', rather than 'star without atmosphere'.

III

After finishing his 1928 work *Ursprung des Deutschen Trauerspiels*, at latest, Benjamin must have had various writings of Simmel's within arm's reach. In a number of *Nachträge* (appendices) to the *Trauerspiel* book, Benjamin develops the transition from the terminological framework of that work to his image of an 'ur-history' of the nineteenth century that was of groundbreaking importance for the store of ideas behind his voluminous and unfinished *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project).

These *Nachträge* include notes on Simmel's 1913 Goethe monograph. In those notes, Benjamin says that Goethe's conception of the *Urphämonen*, as explained by Simmel, has once again made it undeniably clear to him 'that my idea of "origin" in the *Trauerspiel* book is a strict and compelling translation [*Übertragung*] of this fundamental concept of Goethe's from the sphere of nature into that of history. . . . "Origin" – this is an ur-phenomenon in the theological sense.'[7]

When Benjamin later incorporates this *Nachträg* almost word for word into what is known as the epistemological convolute of the *Passagen-Werk*, with additional text that includes *Nun habe ich es in der Passagenarbeit auch mit einer Ursprungsergründung zu tun* (Now, I am also dealing with a fathoming of origins in the *Passagen-Werk*),[8] then one is not only on the trail of the fundamental shift in Benjamin's thinking in the sec-

7
See 'Nachtrage zum Trauerspielbuch', in: Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band I, 3 (Frankfurt am Main, 1974), 953-954.

8
See Walter Benjamin, 'Das Passagen-Werk', in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band V, 1 (Frankfurt am Main, 1982), 577.

ond half of the 1920s. In addition, one has an impression of Simmel's emphatic influence on this radical process of transforming theological concepts relating to the comprehension of language and nature into a materialist view of history and modernity.

This influence on Benjamin's own arsenal may have been indirect, but Simmel's interest (often dismissed as 'impressionistic') in objectifications of culture, down to the very smallest details and the most fleeting peripheries – he argues that fashion, for instance, belongs to this domain – compellingly combined with an updated interpretation of Goethe's *Urphänomen*, is in itself almost paradigmatically related to an essential vein of Benjamin's thinking. He did not keep that relationship secret.

IV

Among the 850 books that Benjamin consulted while writing the *Passagen-Werk* is Simmel's *Philosophie des Geldes*, along with a French-language edition of a number of essays, *Mélanges de philosophie rélativiste*, and a first edition of the 1991 collection of essays entitled *Philosophische Kultur*.[9] But at the same time, the similarities between Benjamin's thinking and Simmel's theoretical approach were a bone of contention from an early stage. When those similarities became too great, they even led to a minor parting of the ways. Because the very status of Benjamin's theoretical structure was at issue, this was more than a tempest in a teapot.

In a letter (now lost) to Ernst Bloch in the autumn of 1934, Adorno said that he did not believe he had gone too far when he described it as a 'terrible affront' that Bloch had drawn a link between the anti-systematic impulse in Benjamin's thinking and Simmel's 'impressionism'. Bloch had done so in a review of Benjamin's 1928 book *Einbahnstrasse* and included the essay, in an adapted form, in his masterful 1934 collection of essays *Erbschift dieser Zeit*, under the telling title 'Revueform in der Philosophie'.[10] That same year, in early December, Bloch sent Adorno a long, angry letter. The following passage illustrates the general tenor: 'Your objection regarding Simmel is entirely off-target, in fact, and wildly far-fetched [lit. 'dragged in by the hair he did not have']. Benjamin, as I know, is deeply impressed by Simmel, as an impressionist. Simmel is present at the scene of the crime only as an example, to show that the coherence of the system has been disrupted. If that is a "terrible affront", then you do not know what an "affront" is, and I hope you never receive a more severe one.'[11]

The controversy is much more general than this type of carping might lead one to believe. In 1938, when Benjamin sent review copies of his detailed Baudelaire studies to individuals who served as patrons and prominent early readers – Max Horkheimer and particularly Theodor W. Adorno – the latter raised far-reaching methodological objections to the text.

9
The editions in question are: Georg Simmel, *Mélanges de philosophie rélativiste. Contribution à la culture philosophique* (Paris, 1912); Georg Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes* (Leipzig, 1900, this is the large, hardcover edition published by Verlag von Duncker & Humblot); Georg Simmel, *Philosophische Kultur. Gesammelte Essays* (Leipzig, 1911, published as Band XXVII in the series 'Philosophisch-soziologische Bücherei' by Verlag von Dr. Werner Klinkhardt).

10
Cf. Ernst Bloch, *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*, Gesamtausgabe, Band 4 (Frankfurt am Main, 1962), 368-372. See also: Michel van Nieuwstadt, 'Doortocht', afterword to: Walter Benjamin, *Eenrichtingstraat* (Groningen, 1994), 85-113, esp. 93.

11
See the letter in question and the annotations in: Ernst Bloch, *Briefe 1903-1975*, edited by Karola Bloch et. al. (Frankfurt am Main, 1985), 423-437.

Adorno lamented the drastic forms of expressive specificity that Benjamin had managed to achieve in tracing mid-nineteenth century cultural phenomena back to their social substrate, calling them an impending farewell to a theory that had to maintain its connection to the *Gesamtprozess*. In a now-famous letter dated 10 November 1938, in which he advised Benjamin not to publish this first Baudelaire manuscript – in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* – Adorno again suggested that Benjamin's essay showed too much affinity for Simmel's thinking. According to Adorno, that specificity showed nothing more than short-sighted behaviourist tendencies; in other words, he believed Benjamin was much too quick to label cultural phenomena as consequences of material phenomena. In the second letter, again, Adorno objected to a prominently placed Simmel quote in Benjamin's work: 'I can't help thinking that in the treasure chamber of the *Passagen-Werk*, there must be more sharply honed daggers on this subject than the Simmel quote.'[12]

Much later still, in an essay on the occasion of Ernst Block's eightieth birthday, Adorno characterised Simmel's thinking as 'woodland and heath metaphysics' and dismissed his aesthetics as timidity in aestheticising or – at its worst – as simple, dainty 'teatime witticisms'.[13] But there are other, lesser-known replies by Benjamin to Adorno's original criticisms of Benjamin's essay about Baudelaire. These letters have an immediate claim to classicism, with their measured quality mixed with courteous concealment of the chagrin that Benjamin felt about the rejection. This is not the place to examine the import of Benjamin's two replies for cultural theory, but in the latter, written on 23 February 1939, Benjamin says of Simmel, 'Might it not be time to recognise and respect in him one of the forefathers of cultural bolshevism?' And about the *Philosophie des Geldes*, which he had begun to read, he says, 'I was struck by the criticism of Marx's theory of value.[14] If one is searching for the conditions under which both Simmel and Marx were reread in Italy in the late sixties and after, the keys are hidden here.' In the anti-systematic and anti-philosophical rereading of Marx in Italy lies one of the impulses behind the formation of Cacciari's theory. The resurgence of interest in Simmel is of more than secondary importance in this context.

V

Although in Germany, Simmel's writings have been republished in recent years, it must be said that his re-evaluation is mainly an Italian phenomenon. In Simmel's rediscovered relevance, his essay 'Die Grossstadte und das Geistesleben' is the glorious touchstone for an early concept of modernity. On the other hand, precisely the neo-Kantian, *verstehende*, general background to Simmel's philosophical work must be banished from the idea of modernity to which the text can lay claim. Theodor W. Adorno's oversensitivity to the overly har-

12
Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *Briefwechsel 1928-1940*, edited by Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt am Main, 1994), 392. For the two letters with Adorno's remarks about Benjamin's first major essay on Baudelaire, written for the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, see that same work, 364-376 (letter of 10 November 1938) and 388-402 (letter of 1 February 1939).

13
See Theodor W. Adorno, 'Henkei, Krug und frühe Erfahrung', in: Siegfried Unseld (ed.), *Ernst Bloch zu Ehren. Beiträge zu seinem Werk* (Frankfurt am Main, 1965), 9-20.

14
See the letter from Benjamin to Adorno dated 23 February 1939 in: Adorno and Benjamin, *Briefwechsel*, op. cit. (note 12), 402-407, esp. 405-406.

monic ('aestheticising') aspects of Simmel's *esprit* resurfaces in Italian theorising about the metropolitan as a boundary and a critical dividing line drawn straight through Simmel's philosophical work. This separates the analytical acuity that Simmel achieved in his studies of the depersonalising tendencies at work in culture as objectification from the comforting reservoir of a subjective counterweight, and thus from the particular conditions of *Kultur* in the traditional sense.

Two quotes from Cacciari's perceptive and detailed arguments regarding the Simmel of 'Die Grossstadte' (1903) and the earlier *Philosophie des Geldes* (1900) should clarify this point, illustrating the domains between which this dividing line is drawn.

First of all, there is the blasé personality that Simmel developed as the new ideal psychogram for the metropolis-dweller: *keine seelische Erscheinung, die so unbedingt der Grossstadt vorbehalten wäre* (no mental phenomenon belongs more unconditionally to the big city). Here is Cacciari's summary of this idea and his commentary: 'The blasé attitude exposes the illusoriness of differences. For Simmel, its constant nervous stimulation and quest for pleasure are in the end experiences totally abstracted from the specific individuality of their object . . . The object reveals its historic essence as exchange value, and it is treated as such. The simple act of consumption is in constant relation to the equivalence of all commodities. . . . The blasé type uses money according to its essence, as the universal equivalent of the commodity; he uses it to acquire commodities, perfectly aware that he cannot get close to these goods, he cannot *name* them, he cannot *love* them. He has learned, with a sense of despair, that things and *people* have acquired the status of commodity, and his attitude internalizes this fact. Universal equivalence expresses itself in *spleen* – but this spleen is only the product of the Verstand's omnipotence. The concentration of the life of the nerves, which seems to preside over the blasé experience, thus manifests itself "in the devaluation of the entire objective world", in the futility of the search for the *unicum*, in the desecration of the transcendent aura that once enveloped inter-subjective relations.' (page 8)

Simmel's analysis, in which appropriate conduct in the metropolis hinges on the negative, blasé attitude, is fundamental for Cacciari. This analysis later forms the backbone of the brilliant essay 'Die Grossstadte und das Geistesleben', which, it should be added, is no longer than 15 pages.

But in Simmel's 'geometry' of light and dark sides, objectifying and subjectifying tendencies that partly neutralise or counterbalance each other, the construction of the blasé personality remains an extreme. A Dutch doctoral thesis on 'philosophy and sociology in the work of Georg Simmel', published in 1982, was called *Geometrie van de samenleving* (Geometry of Society).[15] The geometry of synthesis is the whole Simmel. Cacciari engages only with the extreme, isolating and salvaging it from the geometry as a negative axiom.

15
See A.M. Bevers, *Geometrie van de samenleving. Filosofie en sociologie in het werk van Georg Simmel* (Deventer, 1982).

That brings us to the second point. Simmel's extreme view of modes of conduct within the metropolis is literally rectified by Simmel himself in the final pages of 'Die Grossstadte', and Cacciari makes the following remark about this correction: 'Just when negative thought begins to point to the isolation or the perception of a historically specific form of capitalist domination, by presupposing this form as such – and thereby to break away from any nostalgia as well as from any utopia – Simmel immediately reduces this form to a simple expression of individuality in the Metropolis: an individuality that asserts itself, asks for the fulfillment of its rights, and demands freedom. The essay's final synthesis . . . answers this demand. But this synthesis is completely unrelated to the actual discussion of the blasé type and negative thought, and is not at all required by Simmel's concrete development of the material discussed. It is a synthesis that recuperates the value of community, of the *Gemeinschaft*, in order to reaffirm it in society, in the *Gesellschaft*.' (page 12)

It is that dream of 'community' that Cacciari wishes to eliminate as an element antithetical to the essence of Simmel's analysis. He wants to abandon geometry, which in the further development of the disorderly transgressions of Cacciari's 'negative thinking' sees its circles thrown into confusion. In the Metropolis, every regressive or utopian divergence from the news of the hour runs the risk – according to the unwavering chronology of 'negative thinking' – of *falling out* of the present.

What is initially misleading about this is the Marxist register in which this body of thought armours, as it were, its philosophical categories and conditions. Yet the nihilistic élan of these categories derives precisely from the fact that beneath this philosophical armour, as with Dadaist costumes, a wristwatch is tracking the restlessness of a categorical unattainability. The Marxist categories, including their content, are detonated, detuned and deactivated. At the end of the book, in the epilogue 'On the architecture of nihilism', the history of the past century, of the Modern Movement and Rationalism, is summed up as a unique tragedy. This tragedy, Cacciari writes, is the rise . . . of an architecture of effectuated nihilism that perfuses the image of the Metropolis: 'it is the very figure of pro-ducing, of leading-beyond, of continuous and undefinable *overcoming*. The obsession with overcoming is embodied in the work of "radical uprooting" carried out by this architecture: an uprooting from the limits of the *urbs*, from the social circles dominant in it, from its *form* – an uprooting from the place . . . It is as though the city were transformed into a chance of the road, a context of routes, a labyrinth without center, an absurd labyrinth. The great urban sociologists of the early century perfectly understood the uprooting significance of this explosive radiating of the city. In these sociologies, the Metropolis appears as the great metaphor of the calculating intellect devoid of all ends, whose *Nervenleben* (life

of the nerves) is immersed in the succession of equi-valent cases. The architecture "without qualities" of the Metropolis – a conscious image of fulfilled nihilism – excludes the characteristic of the place; in its project, every place is equi-valent in universal circulation, in exchange. Space and time are arithmetically measurable, detachable, and reconstructible.' (pages 199-200)

The writings in this collection do not take us through the entire meltdown that these categories must undergo in order to go on describing this tragedy. In other words, *Architecture and Nihilism* does not offer an unobstructed view into the actual engine rooms of Cacciari's thinking, where the most important process taking place – as expounded in Cacciari's 1976 book *Krisis*, subtitled *Saggio sulla crisi del pensiero negativo da Nietzsche a Wittgenstein* (Essay on the crisis in negative thinking from Nietzsche to Wittgenstein)[16] – is the conversion of Nietzsche's concept of the *Wille zur Macht* into the descriptive category of factual rationalisation. This turns the *Wille zur Macht* into the opposite of subjectivism, the opposite of exaltation and late Romantic glorification of creative genius. In the readings in *Architecture and Nihilism*, we no more than catch glimpses of this meltdown. Is it possible that the purpose of the interventions mentioned in section I was greatly to magnify a couple of these glimpses?

16
Massimo Cacciari, *Krisis. Saggio sulla crisi del pensiero negativo da Nietzsche a Wittgenstein* (Milan, 1976).

VI

The basic postulate is that the Metropolis leaves behind any synthesis into the 'city', including elements of the latter such as 'community' and 'individuality'. The desire to bridge the manifest contradiction between the two quantities of the 'city' and the 'Metropolis' is – in Cacciari's analysis – the inherent limit of the activity of the Deutsche Werkbund and the contemporary sociological work of Grossstadt. This is where the impossibility of synthesis, demonstrated in relation to Simmel, begins to bear fruit. The Werkbund was founded in 1907. The writings by Sombart, Endell, Scheffler and Simmel that are included in *Metropolis* are responses to an 1898 piece about Rome by Simmel, and they all date from the brief period 1906 to 1913. At the 1914 Werkbund conference, the conflict between the absence of any concept whatsoever of capitalist development and the utopia of an all-inclusive 'new style' came to a head. The artistic nature of design is an impossible, unworldly thing. Better to be left with nothing than to elevate the utopia of this impossibility to an a priori artistic truth. That is why Cacciari says the following about the episode in the Werkbund immediately prior to the conflict: 'To give an order to the absence of synthesis – to posit this absence and explore its implications to the end – was the real "mandate" and the real question. . . . This is precisely where the Werkbund failed: it was incapable of planning the Metropolis *of negative thought*, the social relations of alienated labor.

That is, it failed to construe the Metropolis as conflict and as the functionality of conflict . . . The Metropolis as synthesis is not Metropolis, it is city, family, organism and individuality.' (page 37)

One might have identified the weakness of Cacciari's original introduction to Metropolis as the very limited extent to which his concept of 'negative thought', which is not specifically tied to architecture theory, leads to more than . . . negativity, the unachievable. But on the contrary – and in contrast to Adorno's *Negative Dialektik*, to which it is related only through coincidences of terminology – this line of thought is full of functionality within the system that it rejects, because it also rejects all the comforting alternatives to it. It is thought that in its trembling is condemned to signify, an inevitable *tremblé du sens*, as Patrizia Lombardo describes it, drawing on Roland Barthes' understanding of language. One step further and this line of thought, which like Nietzsche's *Wille zur Macht* is situated at the end of philosophy, must anchor itself in existence without illusions in order to conquer that existence in any way other than dialectically. I believe this is the unspecified motivation for the decision – in Part I, the part about the dialectics of the negative and the metropolis – to follow the section on the mystifications and utopias of the Werkbund with a much more political section dealing mainly with Walther Rathenau as a theoretical opponent of the Werkbund and the head of the AEG (*Allgemeine Elektricitäts Gesellschaft*). Given the new monopolist organizational form towards which all the forces of mechanization and rationalization were tending, only a politician, we are told, could head the AEG from then on (page 53). But in this context, Rathenau also stands for everything that is actualized in the designs and buildings of 'his' master architect Peter Behrens.

VII

For Cacciari, the significance of the designs made by Behrens for the AEG culminates in the exemplary tension between interior and exterior, between labour and the Metropolis, that we find at the Kleinmotorenfabrik in Berlin's Voltastrasse: 'Clearly the facade, given rhythm by the monumental pilasters, encloses a space that is set up as separate from the urban context. The activity that goes on behind these walls must appear to be *exceptional* and hence set apart from the anonymous labor of the large city. What takes place within such buildings is labor par excellence, whose very repetitiveness (this is precisely the signification behind the sequentiality of the façade) assumes a ritual, sacred value. Here repetition is much more than a mere symbol of the Metropolis. It actually expresses the stability (*Festigkeit*) and permanence (*Dauer*) of the power that is founded on labor and emanates from labor. Like all monuments, the factory stands out from its urban context, but at the same time it maintains a singular relation with it: and this rela-

tion is one of *dominion*. Behrens's form is supposed to emphasize that the factory governs the hustle and bustle, the kaleidoscopic multiformity of life in the Metropolis.' (pages 54-55)

This is typical of the concretization achieved in Cacciari's analyses. Where 'negative thinking' can express itself in the act of building, the organization of space, it is a moment torn out of the chain that forms the Metropolis, because it coincides with the present of the Metropolis in a unique way. If it is therefore true, as Patrizia Lombardo suggests to us in her introduction, that the name of Metropolis should be interpreted allegorically (and it is written with a capital letter for good reason), then this concretization is comparable to the moments at which, as Benjamin allegorically expressed it, an empty and homogeneous history is frozen mid-flow. Perhaps at some point, the movements of stasis as figures in Benjamin's thinking and in thinking that is opposed to Cacciari's synthesis will become more than comparable.[17] In the limited space available here, however, the most important point is that this section about Rathenau and Behrens has been integrated into Part 1 of *Architecture and Nihilism* from a different original context. In this new context, under the title 'Merchants and heroes', it remains more or less identical to two successive chapters of Cacciari's 1979 study *Walther Rathenau e il suo ambiente* ('Mechanisierung & Seele' and 'Mercanti e eroi'), which served in part as an explanatory introduction to a collection of the later writings and speeches of Rathenau, the businessman/politician/minister.[18]

Here, although they postdate Loos's position, they serve to anticipate and clarify it – specifically, his relationship to the Metropolis on the one hand and the Werkbund and Vienna Secession and their desire for 'style' on the other. Compare the following passage from Part II of *Architecture and Nihilism* with the excerpt quoted above about the Kleinmotorenfabrik. Cacciari makes grateful use of the nickname that the journalist Ludwig Hevesi gave Loos's Café Museum in 1899: Café Nihilismus. It had stark, untattooed outer walls and an almost bare interior. Polemically enough, it was located near Joseph Olbrich's Haus der Sezession, built in 1897-1898. But Cacciari's analysis emphasizes above all the sign value of the famous 1911 Looshaus on Michaelerplatz. The 'Nihilismus House' and the terms of that analysis are analogous to those of his analysis of Behrens' factory. 'The Cafe Nihilismus and the Nihilismus house . . . are necessarily situated in the Nihilismus city, the Metropolis where all the social circles of the Gemeinschaft have been shattered. City and style, as community organism or the nostalgia for such, are synonymous. . . . Loos, on the other hand, isolates with great precision the regressive implications of the communal ideologies that serve as a foundation for the concept of style. Style is not Metropolis, but *hangs over* its structure.' (pages 112-113)

Cacciari then tries to probe further and further into the dynamics of this negation, which begins by positing differences, but above all into the riddle that lies beneath it, where

17
That would necessitate an analysis of the epilogue entitled 'On the architecture of nihilism' with which *Architecture and Nihilism* closes. One of the final allusions in this epilogue is to Benjamin's angel of history, before whose eyes a series of separate catastrophes unfolds. Among Cacciari's many essays that bear comparison to the level and intellectual tendencies of Benjamin's philosophy to an extent unequalled in the reception of Benjamin's work, let me name just two: 'Di alcuni motivi in Walter Benjamin (Da "Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels" a "Der Autor als Produzent")' in: Franco Rella, *Critica e Storia. Materiali su Benjamin di: M. Cacciari, F. Desideri, G. Franck, R. Infelise-Fronza, G. Mensching, F. Rella, J. Derrida & W. Benjamin* (Venice, 1980), 41-71; and 'Necessità dell'Angelo', *Aut Aut* no. 189-190 (May-August, 1982), 203-214.

18
See Massimo Cacciari, *Walther Rathenau e il suo ambiente. Con un antologia di scritti e discorsi politici 1919-1921* (Bari, 1979).

the difference in value – in Loos's interior – makes its presence known once again. And there, in the middle of the problematic of 'nihilism', negative thinking must, as it were, depart from itself and posit itself in a new and different form, not without an analogy to Nietzsche: 'The *negatives Denken* posited as a condition of the analysis of the multiplicity of languages is overturned and transformed into a stylistic condition aimed at the affirmation of its value – no longer a synthesis, of course, but in any case a "superiority" of interior over exterior, of the space of art over that of functions . . .' (page 118)

All the analytical categories in Cacciari's study *Loos-Wien* pave the way for this about-face, this interpretive displacement. Part II of *Architecture and Nihilism* consists entirely of a translation of this study, here entitled 'Loos and his contemporaries'. The original work was published as Cacciari's contribution to *Oikos da Loos a Wittgenstein*, which he co-authored with Francesco Amendolagine in 1975. The pages of Part II are the only ones in which Dutch readers can catch their breath and feel they are on familiar terrain; a translation of *Loos-Wien* by Ineke van der Burg and Marga van Mechelen was included in the Dutch-language edition of *Oikos* published by SUN.[19] But the remainder of *Architecture and Nihilism*, including the epilogue, exposes precisely the ground covered here to the many-sidedness of an interpretation that fans out in the most radical way, which I will not attempt to summarise here. To encapsulate the dynamics of this interpretation in the rather smarmy motto 'Not a home but an adventure', as Lombardo does at the close of her introduction, suggests to me a half-misapprehension, if the phrase is indeed anything more than a slogan – for in Part III, which everyone must read for him or herself, these dynamics lead not only to the swirling void referred to here as *Entortung* and total *Mobilmachung*, but also to something fundamentally different.

19
See Francesco Amendolagine and Massimo Cacciari, *Oikos. Da Loos a Wittgenstein* (Rome: Officina, 1975). The Dutch translation is entitled *Oikos. Van Loos tot Wittgenstein* (Nijmegen, 1982).

VIII

Part III, 'Loos and his angel', is the unabridged translation of Cacciari's introduction to the new edition and complete Italian translation of Loos's curious one-man periodical *Das Andere*, two issues of which appeared in 1903. This new edition, which in itself was nothing less than a typographical and editorial miracle, was published in 1981 by Gruppo Editoriale Electa.[20] Again, in the English edition of Cacciari's text, material from another context was inserted: one section on Lou Salomé's box of buttons and another on Bruno Taut's *Glaserne Kette*. They come from Cacciari's 1980 work *Dallo Steinhof* and are included here to dispel any naive, childish notions about an intact interior and the glorious rebirth of urban architecture.[21]

Of the box of buttons, in other words, because the saved button 'is the opposite of money: it opposes division, circulation, and exchange with the principle of the secret and the hidden. Money exists in a dimension exclusively external

20
Adolf Loos, *Das Andere/L'altro. Festschrift/Per i sessant'anni di Adolf Loos* (Milan, 1981).

21
Massimo Cacciari, Dallo Steinhof. *Prospettive viennesi del primo Novecento* (Milan, 1980).

and public; the button, on the other hand, is the unattainable maternal relic, preserved in the most interior part of a virgin mountain . . . But how does one collect buttons? and where does one collect them? Is there still the possibility of a space of the "collected," a space opposed to the market of things visible? This space is an interior, but not every interior can be the place of the collection of that which resists in unproductivity. The difficulty of defining such a space derives from the fact that it must correspond to the unhappiness of the productive and the sacrifice that this implies. . . . But if the button does not become the margin and remains of the Metropolis, it is transformed into a fetishistically guarded treasure, and ceases to exist as true childhood. It becomes again a possession, though an unproductive one. Unproductivity is not enough to "surpass" the language of the Metropolis – childhood must find its own interior within the relations of the Metropolis.' (pages 179-180) The rest is usually just *Heimatkunst*.

The opposite of the button-box interior is *Glasarchitektur*, which Benjamin also emphatically greeted in his essay 'Experience and poverty' as the appropriate setting for the modern impoverishment of experience. Specifically, it reveals the progressive, barbaric destitution that consists in the little, the little with which one must make do. But 'Glaskultur's critique of possession is conducted exclusively from the perspective of circulation and exchange. In the uninterrupted flow of stimuli-perceptions made possible by the city of steel and glass, in the continual enrichment of the life of the spirit, what is desecrated is not so much the ancient auras, but the very possibility of experience – what is pro-duced is the poverty of experience. In universal transparence every thing is assumed to be of equal value, equivalent. . . . Glaskultur decrees that experience is already dead, and declares itself its only heir. Its glass reflects the present poverty. In spite of its avant-garde pose, which rejects the paternal language and opposes its presumed organicity with the arbitrary and freely constructive, Glaskultur belongs to a perfectly logocentric civilization. Its will to render transparent, to lay bare, to demystify, expresses a utopia that fully and progressively identifies the human with the linguistic: every secret must be spoken aloud, every interior made manifest, every childhood pro-duced. Language, and its power, are here absolute. . . . The very fact of its being a cause of the present poverty is precisely what Glaskultur tends to obscure.' (pages 188-189)

Glasarchitektur or Lou Andreas-Salomé's box of buttons? The past and present cannot stand in a synthesising relationship, any more than the interior and exterior. No salvatory look back at the past is permitted. There is no project that will produce a guarantee for the future, just as there is no language that says everything. The only ones here, in what must be described as an intellectual no-man's land, are the Viennese *Sprachlehrer* Karl Kraus and the Viennese *Baumeister* Adolf Loos, planted firmly between the past and the future, and perhaps most inclined to swear by silence.

Thanks to Cacciari's interpretation, thanks to his reading of their language and their silence, we know that they learned and borrowed their attitude from Benjamin's *Angelus Novus*: 'But though their [Loos's and Kraus's] eyes be turned to the past, never do they seek therein an "eternal image," or a model with which to oppose the ephemeral present. There is no respite in the past that they see, just as there is no flight toward the future: their backs are turned to it. The past is transformed into the vision and hearing of a living, incessant questioning – into a problem par excellence. It is in this relation . . . that we are pulled away towards the future. Indeed, what we call the future occurs in this dialogue. The very language of Kraus and Loos is this dialogue: it is the relation – which is all the more indestructible as it is less nostalgic – not with tradition *tout court*, but with tradition that has preserved in language the "search for a lost image of the primordial" . . .' (page 147)

The final reference here is to Karl Kraus's book of aphorisms *Nachts*, and specifically to an aphorism that deserves to be quoted in full here, at the close of this article: *Die Sprache tastet wie die Liebe im Dunkel der Welt einem verlorenen Urbild nach. Man macht nicht, man ahnt ein Gedicht*.

What we call 'future' carries with it a forgotten prototype of happiness. The ultimate message of these analyses must be summed up as follows: architecture theory is not capable of establishing the possibilities of architecture by proclamation. Instead, the simultaneity of Cacciari's theory with the continuity of the modern lies in the fact that he is silent about this point as well. That silence displays an intensely ambivalent eloquence, in that Cacciari – without doing any violence to his past – is now mayor of the city of Venice. On this topic, it is precisely Simmel whom Patrizia Lombardo – who may not yet have known that Cacciari would soon hold public office – quotes at the end of her introduction. The passage comes from a text which once, in that early collection of texts at the end of *Metropolis*, accompanied Cacciari's entrance into the contemporary architectural debate: 'In Venice one can see realized the duplicity of life: here it becomes flesh and blood. Double is the sense of these squares, which, because of the lack of vehicles and the narrowness of streets, look like rooms. Double is the sense of meeting, pushing, and touching of people in the *calli*, which gives this life an appearance of familiarity, of Gemütlichkeit, precisely where every trace of Gemüt is absent. . . . That Venice has been and will be the classic *city of adventure* is just the most perceptible expression of the fact that it cannot be a home for our soul, cannot be anything but adventure.'

This may be a superior version of the motto *Not a home but an adventure* . . .

Translated by David McKay