OASE 44 is entitled ‘Venetian perspectives’. This issue was put together – by Dirk van den Heuvel and myself – in response to the passing of Manfredo Tafuri in 1994. Alongside Dal Co and Cacciari, Tafuri was the main proponent of the so-called ‘Venetian School’, a group of architecture historians associated with the IUAV. The historical scrutiny of these Venetians derived its impetus from the intellectual sources of neo-Marxist and post-Marxist thought, such as the Frankfurt School, Benjamin, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Foucault. In other words, predominantly philosophical sources, imbuing the historical work with a critical dimension that yielded an extraordinarily rich and profound output of architecture historiography.

For many years, intellectually voracious architecture students at Delft University of Technology found inspiration in the work of Tafuri in particular (translations of Teorie e storia and Progetto e utopia circulated during the 1970s and 1980s). The Venetian philosophy thus constituted standard baggage for many members of the OASE editorial team (the bulk of whom had links with this degree programme).

OASE 44 features articles by Tafuri and Cacciari (including his beautiful oration given at Tafuri’s funeral), and commentaries by the Dutch/Flemish authors Hilde Heyen and Michel J. van Nieuwstadt. The latter’s contribution is reprinted here. Writer and translator Van Nieuwstadt is extremely well-versed in the Venetian School’s intellectual sources, especially Nietzsche’s oeuvre. Van Nieuwstadt reviews the English edition of Cacciari’s 1993 book ‘Architecture and Nihilism’. This book revolves around the Nietzschean concept of ‘complete nihilism’, which Cacciari sums up quite pithily as a critique of the greatest dogma of our time, namely that everything is relative and interchangeable (goods, products, fashions). In short, it is a critique of the eulogy on the ‘death of the ideology’. This dogma symbolises the world of the modern metropolis, the city without qualities. As such, the metropolis serves as the central allegory in Cacciari’s book.

Tafuri’s death seems to have heralded the demise of critical thought in architecture. After all, the closing decade of the twentieth century was characterised by the pragmatism of supermodernism. Likewise, the field of architecture theory seems to have turned into an autonomous, hermetic cultural-philosophical ‘discourse’ that has lost sight of its true object – architecture. Perhaps Nietzsche was too naïve and optimistic in thinking that man may ultimately conquer nihilism.
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: his theoretical insights in English; they are available in the form of 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 interventions are the real surprises in this book. Even beyond that, this exemplary edition, complemented by Lombardo’s introduction, is sure to make its readers wish that the interventions are the real surprises in this book. Even beyond that, this exemplary edition, complemented by Lombardo’s introduction, is sure to make its readers wish that

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 estimations and probabilities in order to create in the long run new ‘things’.

Nietzsche, translated by Walter Kaufmann

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’.

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.

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 explanation 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, Scheffer & 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 that 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 theory3 – ‘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 astounding 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 a very high norm 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 effectively made in the paradoxical form of a dismissed for Cacciari – also referred to by Cacciari with a term he defines much more generally, Entsaugung (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
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 the condition of disintegration: ‘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.’ 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 Archimedean point in 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.

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 which are never still, the moving, stirring veil through which Baudelaire saw – 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 which are never still, the moving, stirring veil through which Baudelaire saw in which his poetry takes place. The jostling, jabbing masses which are never still, the moving, stirring veil through which Baudelaire saw in which his poetry takes place. The jostling, jabbing masses which are never still, the moving, stirring veil through which Baudelaire saw

Walter Benjamin identifies this experience of being jostled by crowds as a decisive one for the poet.


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, salutary 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. 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’. It is part of the peculiar quality of Cacciari’s thinking, in turn, that this 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.

III

After finishing his 1928 work Ursprung des Deutschen Trauer-, 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, 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 Archimedean point in 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.


and 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 this fashion, for instance, belongs to this domain – compellingly combined with an updated interpretation of Goethe's *Urhören*, 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, *Mèlesanges de philosophie rélativiste*, and a first edition of the 1991 collection of essays entitled *Philosophische Kultur*. 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 that 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'. 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.'

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 indi

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.'

Much later still, in an essay on the occasion of Ernst Bloch's eightieth birthday, Adorno characterised Simmel's thinking as 'woodland and heath metaphysics' and dismissed his aesthetics as timidity in aesthetising or – at its worst – as simple, dainty 'teatime witticisms'. But there are other, lesser-known replies by Benjamin to Adorno's comments and recombinations of Benjamin's essay about Baudelaire. These letters have an immediate claim to classicism, with their measured quality mixed with correct interpretation 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?'

The resurgence of interest in Simmel's rediscovered work, see Theodor W. Adorno, 'Hences, Krug und frühe Er- fahrung', in: Siegfried Unseld (ed.), *Ernst Bloch zu Ehren*. Beiträge zu seinem Werk (Frankfurt am Main, 1965), 9-20.

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.

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 Grossstädte 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-
monic (‘aestheticising’) aspects of Simmel’s esprit resurfaces in Italian theorising about the metropolis 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 Grossstadt’ (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)

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.

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 Grossstadt’, 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 Gemeinschaft.’ (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 armour, 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 uncontrollability. 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 reach of apriate conduct in the architecture of divergence from which the news of the hour 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 reach of apriate conduct in the architecture of divergence from which the news of the hour runs the risk – according to the unwavering chronology of ‘negative thinking’ – of falling out of the present.

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

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 iner-ent 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, Schefller and Simmel that are included in Metropolis are responses to an 1898 piece about Rome by Simmel, and they all date from the 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 im-possible, unworlly 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 ration-alization 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 Kleinmottenfabrik 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 ap-pear 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 pre-cisely the signification behind the sequentiality of the facade) 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 monu-ments, 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 multifority 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 Rathenaun 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 & Sozialgeschichte’, which served 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 that excerpt quoted above about the Kleinmottenfabrik. 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 interior organism or the nostalgia for such, are synonymous. . . .

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 the difference in value – in Loos’s interior – makes its presence known once again. And there, in the middle of the problem 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 its interior over the 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 *Okos 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 Mechemel was included in the Dutch-language edition of *Okos* 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.

**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 Angel of 1911 Looshaus on Michaelerplatz*. The ‘Nihilist 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 communism city, the Metropolis where all the social circles of the Gemeinschaft have been shattered. City and style, as communism city, the Metropolis, 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 Mechemel was included in the Dutch-language edition of *Okos* 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.

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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 Person’) in: Franco Rella, *Critica e Storia*. Materiali su Benjamin di: M. Cacciari, F. Benedetti, G. Franck, R. Infelise-Fronza, G. Menichelli, F. Rella, J. Derrida & W. Benjamin (Venice, 1980), 41-71; and ‘Necessità dell’Angelo’, *Anten. Art no. 189-190* (May-August, 1992), 203-214.


19 See Francesco Amendolagine and Massimo Cacciari, *Okos. Da Loos a Wittgenstein*. 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 communism city, the Metropolis, 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 Mechemel was included in the Dutch-language edition of *Okos* 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.

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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 ‘Experi-ence 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 produced 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 locogeneric 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 seen 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 fitted: that 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