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# The 'Habsburg Myth', Ornament and Metaphor: Adolf Loos, Karl Kraus and Robert Musil

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## I

Adolf Loos und ich, er wörtlich, ich sprachlich, haben nichts weiter getan als gezeigt, daß zwischen einer Urne und einem Nachtopf ein Unterschied ist und daß in diesem Unterschied erst die Kultur Spielraum hat. Die andern aber, die Positiven, teilen sich in solche, die die Urne als Nachtopf, und die den Nachtopf als Urne gebrauchen.<sup>1</sup>

[Adolf Loos and I, he literally, I linguistically, have done nothing more than to show that there is a difference between an urn and a chamber-pot and that it is only in this difference that culture begins to have any scope to develop. The others, however, all positive men, can be divided into those who use the urn as a chamber-pot and those who use the chamber-pot as an urn.]

This programmatic aphorism by Karl Kraus, which we shall re-examine in a later section, has inclined scholars to construe his caustic satire on the phrase-strewn vacuity of Viennese life as equivalent to Adolf Loos's critique of façade and ornament.<sup>2</sup> While Robert Scheu, in his essay 'Adolf Loos', had differentiated Loos's demarcation between art and utility from his ally's literary campaign against pseudo-discourse (F 283–84, 1909, 25–37 [29]), Theodor W. Adorno saw no mere vague cultural historical analogy but a direct symbiosis between Loos and Kraus.<sup>3</sup> The aphorism may appear simplistic, if not a parody of Loos's aesthetic theory. Yet, metonymically, 'urn versus chamber-pot' encodes both Loos's paradigmatic distinctions between (hitherto stigmatized) use value and (redundant) ornament, and the neglect of analogous

<sup>1</sup> References to *Die Fackel*, ed. by Karl Kraus (Vienna, 1899–1936), are abbreviated thus: (F issue number, year, page number). Here F 389–90, 1913, 37.

<sup>2</sup> Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York, 1973), pp. 89–90.

<sup>3</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Funktionalismus heute', in Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, 20 vols (Frankfurt a. M., 1970–86), x/1, 375–95 (p. 377).

distinctions, which concerned Kraus — in *Die Fackel* [*The Torch*] he often linked the two extremes, of philistinism and aesthetic snobbery, for their respective undermining of true culture (F 48, 1900, 16; see also F 227–28, 1907, 6).

Before we examine this aphorism more closely and explore some particularly concrete satirical transpositions of ‘Loosian’ aesthetics, it is necessary to examine some misconceptions about Loos’s criticism of façade and ornament. On the one hand, it has been deemed erroneous to equate Loos’s cosmopolitan rationality, his synthesis of artisanal sense and classical tradition, with the glass and concrete ‘functionalism’ of subsequent decades.<sup>4</sup> On the other, Edward Timms has taken issue with Kraus’s use of the word ‘ornament’ for verbal mystification, arguing that it blurs important distinctions between language and architecture and that, since language is only ever a representation of this material world, ‘the relation between signified and signifier is abstract and arbitrary’, whereas architecture deals with material objects and can never entirely be reduced to signification. ‘If we take away the pseudo-classical façade from the modern public building, what we are left with is still a building’; even if this may be a ‘better building’, it is ‘not the revelation of some fundamentally different truth’.<sup>5</sup> Timms rightly questions whether any hypothetically austere façade that Loos might have proposed for the War Ministry building in Vienna could have functioned as a critique of the machinations of the military-industrial complex at all comparable to Kraus’s critique of propaganda.<sup>6</sup> Leaving aside ideological differences between Loos and Kraus over the war, we might nevertheless find this assessment of the signifying and therefore critical potential of architecture too dismissive.<sup>7</sup> The difference between the ‘veil’ of mystifying language and the ‘mask’ of non-verbal devices of concealment may be less effective than Timms insists<sup>8</sup> — a sanguine observer might deem verbal and architectural heroics equally diversionary. Even so, masking the nature of war, though unlikely to be in the architect’s explicit brief, might follow from his tacit assumptions about the aesthetics of public buildings.

Loos had no illusions about the public nature of the applied arts or about the critical limitations of architecture in ever matching art’s challenge

<sup>4</sup> On this misconception see Hermann Czech, ‘Loos und Funktionalismus’, in Czech, *Zur Abwechslung. Ausgewählte Schriften zur Architektur*. Wien (Vienna, 1996), pp. 58–60 (p. 58).

<sup>5</sup> Edward Timms, *Karl Kraus. Apocalyptic Satirist*, 2 vols (New Haven, CT and London, 1986 and 2005), 1: *Culture and Catastrophe in Habsburg Vienna*, p. 121.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>7</sup> On their ideological differences see *ibid.*, p. 391.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 117, 121, 135.

to 'comfortable existence'.<sup>9</sup> Detachment from society's demands for pure use value, according to Adorno, was the basis for critique, as in the constructivists' 'functionality without function'.<sup>10</sup> Timms's contrast of material objects and language would seem to concur with Adorno's reservations about Loos's aesthetic of a substance bearing 'within itself its own appropriate form'.<sup>11</sup> Yet architecture is not simply a material object, to be contrasted with the critical power of language. If architecture is itself 'a possibility of thought, which cannot be reduced to the status of a representation of thought', semiotics may not be limited to reading buildings as metaphors, as the material implementation of a conceptual plan and thus a secondary 'embodiment of thinking'.<sup>12</sup> Even to construe architecture, as Fredric Jameson does, in terms of spatial ideologemes in the grammar of built space that carry symbolic connotations of power does not account for its critical potential as an autonomous design process, 'a discipline that has to do with the designing of space'.<sup>13</sup> For Henri Lefebvre, too, architecture is generated by spatial thinking, but it is also experienced in social interaction, not merely decoded.<sup>14</sup> This would give the analogy with a linguistic critique a different basis: if architectural space may signify power, a determined architect may counter ideology by aesthetic means, in making its assumptions transparent in the form of the building.<sup>15</sup> Loos, for example, construed the power of public buildings like the Palace of Justice in their focusing of the public's

<sup>9</sup> Adolf Loos, 'Architektur', in Loos, *Trotzdem. 1900–1930*, ed. by Adolf Opel (Vienna, 1982), pp. 90–104 (p. 101).

<sup>10</sup> On detachment see Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, VII: *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 164; on constructivism, *ibid.*, p. 92. See also Adorno, 'Funktionalismus heute', p. 379.

<sup>11</sup> On 'appropriate form' see Adorno, 'Funktionalismus heute', *ibid.*, p. 379. Nevertheless, Adorno concedes that the distinction between functional object and autonomous work of art is itself arbitrary, or historically determined, *ibid.*, pp. 378–80, and that an artistic synthesis of function and form like Le Corbusier's can awaken or 'innervate' the potential for signification in the materials (*ibid.*, p. 387). Adorno also acknowledges Loos's resistance to the 'cult of materials', and that Loos does not prohibit ornament in art altogether (*ibid.*, pp. 378–79).

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Architecture where the desire may live". Interview with Eva Meyer' (1986), in *Rethinking Architecture. A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. by Neil Leach (London and New York, 1997), pp. 319–23 (p. 319).

<sup>13</sup> On spatial ideologemes and codes of power read by the public see Fredric Jameson, 'Is space political?', in Leach, *Rethinking Architecture*, pp. 255–69 (pp. 267, 257 and 261 respectively). On the autonomous design process, see Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity. A Critique* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1999), p. 198.

<sup>14</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford and Cambridge, MA, 1991), pp. 142–44 and 220–21. On spatial thinking underlying the conception of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* see Alexander Honold, *Die Stadt und der Krieg. Raum- und Zeitkonstruktion in Robert Musils Roman 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften'*, Musil-Studien 25 (Munich, 1995), pp. 118–19.

<sup>15</sup> On space and power see Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp. 142–44.

emotions, thus asserting a social function by less 'arbitrary' means than metaphor.<sup>16</sup>

Loos's campaign against a false conception of the relation of surface aesthetics and structure cannot therefore be reduced to the presumption that a 'flat surface' free of ornament automatically gives a building the status of an 'idea'.<sup>17</sup> The building of Loos's which exemplifies his challenge is the 'Loos House' on the Michaelerplatz, the Goldman & Salatsch outfitters' shop, a commercial counterpart to the neo-Baroque grandeur of the Imperial Palace opposite. In his essay 'Das Haus auf dem Michaelerplatz' [The House on Michaelerplatz], in December 1910, Kraus expressed an acute awareness of the aesthetics of this monument of modernism in the lapidary remark: 'Er hat ihnen dort einen Gedanken hingebaut. Sie aber fühlen sich nur vor den architektonischen Stimmungen wohl' — Loos had built the public 'an idea there', a public that expected to be pandered to with 'architectural atmospherics' (F 313–14, 1910, 5). Kraus's metaphor 'idea' presents the deictic challenge to the public, to bear to think a concept as a palpable presence without atmospheric insubstantiality, and yet verbally Kraus elides concrete presence to stress the coming into being of the concept. As a concrete form, whether to be read in the grammar of space, with all its intrinsic aesthetic and functional codes, or to be experienced in its 'secondary' features embodying inter-connecting practices, the building's cultural critical meaning is its strong response to tradition, to its environment, its epoch: in this sense, too, it is more than a building.<sup>18</sup> Of course, as with aesthetic reception in general, it remained to be seen whether the public could be changed by spatial thinking.

## II

Timms's example of a 'façade' inevitably evokes Vienna's Ringstrasse, identified with the self-representation of Austrian liberalism and often seen as the target of Loos's challenge to hollow pretension.<sup>19</sup> It has been argued that Loos does not primarily target all architectural

<sup>16</sup> Loos, 'Architektur', p. 103.

<sup>17</sup> Hermann Czech, 'Der Loos-Gedanke', in Czech, *Zur Abwechslung*, pp. 69–72 (p. 72).

<sup>18</sup> For an analysis of the differentiated functions and the symbolic interventions of the Loos House, see Benedetto Gravagnuolo, *Adolf Loos. Theory and Works* (Milan, 1982), pp. 125–33.

<sup>19</sup> On liberalism see Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna. Politics and Culture* (New York, 1981), p. 24, who also (*ibid.*, pp. 31–39) persuasively reconstructs the overall planning concept.

monumentalism.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, his image of a 'Potemkin city', consisting of façades that signified the hollow pretence of culture, exerted a critical influence, not least on Hermann Broch's diagnosis of the 'value vacuum' of the eclectic Ringstrasse era.<sup>21</sup> While Claudio Magris only explicitly invokes a vacuum after the collapse of the Habsburg state, the 'Habsburg myth', as defined by him, thrived on nostalgic transfiguration of political and institutional paralysis, and it is this that has remained a reference point for much comment on Austrian satire.<sup>22</sup> While Magris incorporated Kraus's devastating (but nonetheless 'conservative') inversion of Habsburg values as a critical variation of that 'myth', he restricted his sources to the satirist's relentless quotation of public discourse in *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* [*The Last Days of Mankind*].<sup>23</sup> However, a visibly 'Loosian' dimension to Kraus's critique of Vienna's superficial and regressive culture before 1914 may situate the lone language critic closer to the mainstream of satire (such as Robert Musil's) on the prevalent Austrian mentality.

Kraus's known reception of Loos's ideas can be augmented by some evidence of reciprocity.<sup>24</sup> In an early review, Loos had referred to the affixing of lions' heads, for 'stylish' effect, on every piece of exhibited furniture typical of affluent Ringstrasse interiors, as 'der stil mit den gänsefüßchen' [style in quotation marks],<sup>25</sup> echoing a concept of the early Kraus.<sup>26</sup> If Loos linked functional objects and socially formed actions as signifiers of cultural meaning, this had implications not only for a semiotics of the 'ritualized display' of public life in the form of the daily promenade, but also for the civic pomp and circumstance enacted on the Ringstrasse, exemplified by Hans Makart's flamboyant design and choreography of the imperial silver wedding parade of 1879.<sup>27</sup> The

<sup>20</sup> Janet Stewart, *Fashioning Vienna. Adolf Loos's Cultural Criticism* (London and New York, 2000), pp. 76–77, on the 'Potemkin city' of bourgeois interiors.

<sup>21</sup> Adolf Loos, *Die Potemkin'sche Stadt. Verschollene Schriften 1897–1933*, ed. by Adolf Opel (Vienna, 1983), pp. 55–58; Hermann Broch, 'Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit. Eine Studie', in Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe*, ed. by Paul M. Lützeler, 13 vols (Frankfurt a. M., 1976–81), IX/1, 111–284 (especially pp. 111, 135, 145).

<sup>22</sup> Claudio Magris, *Der habsburgische Mythos in der modernen österreichischen Literatur* (Salzburg, 1966), p. 17; *ibid.*, p. 185, on Broch's 'value vacuum'.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 235–38.

<sup>24</sup> Kraus met Loos in 1897 at the latest; see Burkhard Rukschcio and Roland Schachel, *Adolf Loos. Leben und Werk*, Veröffentlichungen der Albertina 17 (Salzburg, 1982), p. 37. See positive references to Loos in F 29, 1900, 18 and F 59, 1900, 20, and Kraus's first major essay on Loos: 'Der Glanzlederfauteuil' (F 161, 1904, 8–13).

<sup>25</sup> Adolf Loos, 'die interieurs in der rotunde', in Loos, *Ins Leere gesprochen*, ed. by Adolf Opel (Vienna, 1987), pp. 75–81 (p. 75).

<sup>26</sup> Karl Kraus, *Frühe Schriften. 1892–1900*, ed. by Johannes J. Braakenburg, 3 vols (Munich and Frankfurt a. M., 1979–88), I, 239–42.

<sup>27</sup> On 'ritualized display' see Stewart, *Fashioning Vienna*, p. 98; on the promenade see

Emperor had in fact been ill-disposed towards 'ephemeral, ostentatious festivities, pious addresses and congratulations [...], stirring expressions of homage', but had finally acquiesced after the municipality undertook to 'support the poor and needy'.<sup>28</sup> This pattern of imperial reluctance and civic ostentation recurred when the Emperor withheld permission for a *Kaiser-Jubiläums-Huldigungsfestzug* [diamond jubilee parade] until March 1908. Others shared the distaste for such spectacle. 'Der Festzugrummel infiziert hier alles' [The brouhaha over the procession is infecting everybody here], wrote Sigmund Freud's erstwhile associate Josef Breuer to Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach.<sup>29</sup> But Breuer was won over by the aesthetic conception, by the regiments, the 'procession of nationalities' and scenes from the 1809 Tyrolean revolt, reserving his criticism for the 'historical', dynastic section, where 'Rudolf von Habsburg and his knights thronged rather sparsely', like stage figures from Grillparzer's *König Ottokars Glück und Ende* [*The Rise and Fall of King Ottokar*], and for the 'historical vacuity and superficiality bordering on utter falsehood'.<sup>30</sup>

The Viennese *fin de siècle* has been explained by a 'generational' model,<sup>31</sup> but in his controversially modernist lecture, 'ornament und verbrechen' [ornament and offence], which proposed that ornament was a form of cultural regression and its consumption pathological, Loos identified among his own contemporaries no such generational mentality, but a diachronic divergence moulded by anachronistic ideologies, and personified by the tableaux of the 1908 Jubilee procession:<sup>32</sup>

Timms, *Karl Kraus*, 1, 22; on the 1879 parade see *Jugend in Wien. Literatur um 1900*, ed. by Ludwig Greve and Werner Volke, Sonderausstellungen des Schiller-Nationalmuseums, Katalog 24 (Marbach a. N. and Munich, 1974), pp. 44–46.

<sup>28</sup> 'Vorwort', in *Wien 1848–1888. Denkschrift zum 2. December 1888*, ed. by Gemeinderath der Stadt Wien, 2 vols (Vienna, 1888), 1, vi.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from Josef Breuer to Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach of 2 June 1908, in Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach – Doktor Josef Breuer, *Ein Briefwechsel, 1889–1916*, ed. by Robert A. Kann (Vienna, 1969), p. 95.

<sup>30</sup> Letter from Breuer to Ebner-Eschenbach of 19 June 1908, *ibid.*, pp. 98–99.

<sup>31</sup> Wolf Wuchterpfennig, 'The "Young Viennese" and their Fathers. Decadence and the Generation Conflict around 1890', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 17/1 (1982), 21–50.

<sup>32</sup> On regression and consumption see Adolf Loos, 'ornament und verbrechen', in Loos, *Trotzdem*, pp. 78–88 (p. 79 and, respectively, p. 82). Loos's model of the divergence of mentalities moulded by anachronistic ideologies anticipates what the art historian Wilhelm Pinder (and, after him, Karl Mannheim and Ernst Bloch) designated as 'Ungleichzeitigkeit der Gleichzeitigen' [lack of contemporaneity among contemporaries]; Wilhelm Pinder, *Das Problem der Generation in der Kunstgeschichte Europas* (Berlin, 1926), quoted in Karl Mannheim, *Wissenssoziologie. Auswahl aus dem Werk*, 2nd edn (Neuwied and Berlin, 1970), p. 517. Jacques Le Rider, *Das Ende der Illusion. Die Wiener Moderne und die Krisen der Identität* (Vienna, 1990), p. 411, makes some use of the concept of anachronism. Walter Benjamin writes of 'Überblendung' [superimposition]

Ich lebe vielleicht im jahre 1908, mein nachbar aber lebt um 1900 und der dort im jahre 1880. Es ist ein unglück für einen staat, wenn sich die kultur seiner einwohner auf einen so großen zeitraum verteilt. Der kalser bauer lebt im zwölften jahrhundert. Und im jubiläumsfestzuge gingen völkerschaften mit, die selbst während der völkerwanderung als rückständig empfunden worden wären. Glückliche das land, das solche nachzügler und marodeure nicht hat.<sup>33</sup>

[I may be living in 1908, but my neighbour is living around 1900 and that person over there is in the year 1880. It is a misfortune for a state when the culture of its inhabitants stretches across such a wide time-span. The peasant from Kals is still living in the twelfth century. And in the Jubilee procession there were whole ethnic groups on the move that would have been regarded as retrogressive even during the migration of the peoples. Fortunate is the land that has none of these stragglers and marauders.]

For Loos, the pageant's representation of past epochs is a metaphor for the participants' general mental regression. Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* [*The Man without Qualities*], too, makes acute 'Loosian' interventions, about incongruities in the *Zeitgeist* and in social habits, but the narrator affects a more ironically conciliatory tone. Ulrich is allowed to enjoy three eclectically superimposed styles in his own house, in defiance of the modernist admonitions of architecture journals, and it is only in a moment of emotional detachment that he becomes aware of the geometrical contradictions in his surroundings.<sup>34</sup> Later, Diotima and Ulrich view a whole range of upper class *châteaux* and modern apartments that have the 'unpersönlichen Prunk eines Ozeandampfers' [impersonal luxury of an ocean liner], and Ulrich and Agathe are struck by the architectural excesses of the neo-Baroque University and the neo-Gothic Votivkirche.<sup>35</sup>

The Jubilee parade of 1908 had also offered scope for Kraus's preferred theme of form and style as elaborate camouflage for mental vacuity. In March 1908, well before 'ornament und verbrechen' was published, he had remarked in his essay 'Der Festzug' [The Procession] (F 248, 1908,

of different epochs in the architectural heritage of Paris; see Honold, *Die Stadt und der Krieg*, p. 113.

<sup>33</sup> Loos, 'ornament und verbrechen', p. 82.

<sup>34</sup> On Ulrich's eclecticism see Robert Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, ed. by Adolf Frisé, 2 vols (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1981), I, 20 (Book 1, Chapter 5); on his geometrical awareness, *ibid.*, I, 128 (Book 1, Chapter 34). The inconsistencies in the various depictions of living space would suggest that the novel's concern with dimensions of 'possibility' rather than a literal 'reality' extends to the narrative's topography; see Elisabeth Albertsen, *Ratio und 'Mystik' im Werk Robert Musils* (Munich, 1968), p. 142; also Honold, *Die Stadt und der Krieg*, p. 134.

<sup>35</sup> On 'impersonal luxury' see Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, I, 278 (Book 1, Chapter 67); on Ringstrasse excesses *ibid.*, II, 1210 ('Wandel unter Menschen'). See Honold, *Die Stadt und der Krieg*, p. 99 on the 'Raum gewordene[r] politische[r] Anachronismus' in Vienna.

14–20): ‘Die meisten Menschen, denen man auf der Straße begegnet, blicken schon zuversichtlich in die glorreiche Vergangenheit, in den Wirtshäusern fühlt sich jeder Speisenträger als Pfalzgraf des Rheins’ [Most of the people one meets in the street are looking confidently into a glorious past, in the public houses every waiter feels he is the Count Palatinate of the Rhine] (S 2, 164).<sup>36</sup> Kraus’s mockery of the masquerade of philistine folly reveals a ‘Loosian’ awareness of ‘ritualized self-display’. Instead, however, of criticizing the ‘lack of contemporaneity’ as a barrier to progress, Kraus mocks the contrivance of archaic class-specific roles ‘uniting’ a nation — the aristocracy as actors in the event, the bourgeoisie as investors, the lower classes as gaping onlookers, and artists who, like the industrious producers of ornament lamented by Loos, anticipate a commission (S 2, 163–64).<sup>37</sup> Yet, writing before the Emperor’s eventual acquiescence, Kraus himself idealizes monarchical aloofness as embodying ethical purism, and his mock-psychoanalysis of the formation of a ‘patriotic committee’ as a repressed urge bursting forth (S 2, 162–63) appears purely rhetorical. More substantial is his diagnosis of the contradictions of a society caught between anachronistic irrelevancy and modernity, consuming simulated ‘history’, encumbered by self-perpetuating organizational structures and driven by ulterior commercial motives (S 2, 164). With the committee’s plan instigating the enthusiasm, as an instant panacea for social ills and national identity crisis, Musil’s ‘Parallelaktion’ in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* becomes visible — through Kraus’s mock-viewpoint.<sup>38</sup> Political events are aestheticized, as if in the voice of a blasé consumer, in a form of what Mikhail Bakhtin termed *heteroglossia*.<sup>39</sup> Even the constitutional crises of 1897/98, to which Kraus had responded with some journalistic pathos, had, he now alleges, bored a public in need of pageantry to fill the void (S 2, 161).<sup>40</sup> This cynical disaffection with politics in Kraus’s so-called ‘aesthetic phase’, nevertheless, conveys a truth about the

<sup>36</sup> Karl Kraus, *Schriften*, ed. by Christian Wagenknecht, 20 vols (Frankfurt a. M., 1986–94), II, 161–66 (p. 164). Quoted as (S volume number, page number). Down to the phrase ‘glorreiche Vergangenheit’ and the decorative waiter, this varies the parodied coffee-house nostalgia of *Die demolirte Literatur* (1896/97) in Kraus, *Frühe Schriften*, I, 254 and II, 277–78 respectively.

<sup>37</sup> See Loos, ‘ornament und verbrechen’, pp. 87–88.

<sup>38</sup> Notwithstanding the commonly held view of Musil’s resistance to Kraus; see Magris, *Der habsburgische Mythos*, p. 236. A closer study is Helmut Arntzen, ‘Robert Musil und Karl Kraus’, *Musil-Forum*, 4 (1978), 204–20. Kraus adamantly disqualified organizations *per se* from representing culture (F 275–76, 1909, 15).

<sup>39</sup> Rainer Gröbel, ‘Zur Ästhetik des Worts bei Michail M. Bachtin’, in Michail M. Bachtin, *Die Ästhetik des Worts*, ed. by Rainer Gröbel (Frankfurt a. M., 1979), pp. 21–78 (pp. 51–52).

<sup>40</sup> On the crises of 1897/98 see Kraus, *Frühe Schriften*, II, 129.

perversion of liberal discourse in the autocratic Habsburg state. In the era of the 'Beamtenministerium' [cabinet of civil servants] after 1900, Prime Minister Koerber's programme of economic and cultural modernization relied on government by decree in the face of daunting political tensions, while giving the press more influence by default, as the parliamentary system remained ineffectual, notwithstanding the 1907 electoral law reform.<sup>41</sup>

Such resignation, albeit tempered with satirical 'indirectness', may be symptomatic of the 'Habsburg myth'.<sup>42</sup> More typical of Kraus's treatment of institutional encumbrances is language critique, as in his laconic gloss on 'Der gebildete Ton' [The educated voice], which reproduces the bureaucratic structures of a state-initiated commission of inquiry in the very hierarchical syntax and stilted jargon of its hearings (F 305–06, 1910, 49). 'Der Festzug' certainly uses characteristic word-play, varying lines from Goethe's *Torquato Tasso* about talent and character, respectively, with a 'committee' now forming 'in der Stille' [quietly] and a line of loyal subjects 'im Strom der Welt' [in life's broad stream] (S 2, 162). However, Kraus intersperses a number of vivid tableaux, such as this mock-allegory of the committee's reactions to the Emperor's initial refusal:

Alle anwesenden starren wie gelähmt vor sich hin. Ein Fanatiker des historischen Kostüms fühlt sich in jene Partie der Geschichte des Herrscherhauses versetzt, die den Einzug Albas in die Niederlande bedeutet. Und sie stehen da, wie die Ochsen am Weißen Berg. Das hatte man nicht erwartet. 'Dank vom Haus — !', bringt endlich der Präsident hervor, aber es verschlägt ihm die Rede. (S 2, 164–65)

[All those present stare in front of them as if paralysed. An historical costume fanatic feels he is being thrust back into that section of dynastic history which signifies the entry of Alba into the Netherlands. And there they stand like the oxen at the White Mountain. No one had expected that. 'That is the thanks of the House of — !', the (committee's) president finally utters, but he is at a loss for words.]

<sup>41</sup> On Kraus's 'aesthetic phase' see Christian Wagenknecht, 'Die ästhetische Wendung der Fackel', in *Karl Kraus — Ästhetik und Kritik. Beiträge des Kraus-Symposiums Poznan*, ed. by Stefan H. Kaszynski and Sigurd P. Scheichl, Sonderband der Kraus-Hefte (Munich, 1989), pp. 103–15; on the 'Beamtenministerium' see Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna*, pp. 236–37. See Karl Renner's critique of antiquated parliamentary structures and national chauvinism in Karl Renner, 'Oesterreich von 1870 bis 1907 und die Wahlreformkämpfe der Arbeiterschaft', in *Der Wiener Hochverratsprozeß. Bericht über die Schwurgerichtsverhandlung gegen Andreas Scheu, Heinrich Oberwinder, Johann Most und Genossen [...]*, ed. by Heinrich Scheu (Vienna, 1911), pp. 834–68 (p. 857).

<sup>42</sup> For the concept of 'indirectness' as 'aesthetically socialized aggression', see Jürgen Brummack, 'Zu Begriff und Theorie der Satire', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 45 (1971), Special issue, 275\*–377\* (pp. 282–83\*).

While Kraus's language satire subversively reattributes the 'literal' meaning of dead clichés to their authors, the more concrete inversion here of a 'Loosian' critique of obsolete costume reinvests the trappings and prescribed roles of the pageant, as metaphorical means of *unmasking* the egoistic organizers, off-guard behind the scenes, with a force of revelation that echoes the ending of Gogol's *Inspector General* (1836).<sup>43</sup>

Comic as the charade may be here, the self-perpetuating social power of delusion behind it is a theme of the more gruesome and grotesque portraits of *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* a few years later, having gathered momentum in 'das techno-romantische Abenteuer' [techno-romantic adventure] (F 474–83, 1918, 41–45), that combination of technological and commercial pragmatism with anachronistic ritual that epitomized a mentality blinded by war fever to its self-contradictions. In 'Die Schönheit im Dienste des Kaufmanns' [Beauty in the service of commerce] (F 413–17, 1915, 99–106), an open letter to Loos, Kraus had employed a trenchant 'Loosian' analysis to argue against Loos's support for 'patriotic' aristocrats who chose to wear the products of an Austrian fashion industry artificially created by wartime embargoes on French imports. Kraus's profound insight here into interconnections between commodity consumption and the war economy varies Loos's earlier ironic concession to the producers of ornaments, to bear ornaments on his own body 'if they provide pleasure for my fellow men':<sup>44</sup> '[W]ir kleiden uns, damit die sich kleiden, die uns kleiden; wir verzichten auf Wolle, um für Wolle zu leben und damit jene Wolle haben, die für Wolle sterben müssen' [We clothe ourselves, in order to clothe those who clothe us; we renounce wool, in order to live for wool and so that wool is provided for those who have to die for wool] (F 413–17, 1915, 104). This incisively dialectical response to Loos's purist campaign against ornament consumption shows Kraus, rather than dwelling on abuses of language, paring language down to metonymies and repetitions, to express more far-reaching paradoxes, but in a way familiar from his programmatic aphorism on the urn and the chamber-pot.

Metaphorical invention in Kraus's writing is often overlooked by critics alert to the satirist's supposed espousal of reactionary ideologies.<sup>45</sup> In

<sup>43</sup> For Kraus's acclaim of Gogol's play see Kraus, *Frühe Schriften*, II, 265.

<sup>44</sup> Loos, 'ornament und verbrechen', pp. 87–88. See Gilbert Carr, 'The "Body Economic" in Contemporary Critiques of First World War Propaganda', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 34 (1998), 366–79.

<sup>45</sup> Le Rider, *Das Ende der Illusion*, p. 364; Sander L. Gilman, 'Karl Kraus, Oscar Wilde and the Hidden Language of the Jews', in *Karl Kraus. Diener der Sprache — Meister des Ethos*, ed. by Joseph P. Strelka, Edition Orpheus 1 (Tübingen, 1990), pp. 125–38; Dietmar Goltschnigg, *Die Fackel ins wunde Herz. Kraus über Heine. Eine 'Erledigung'? Texte, Analysen, Kommentar* (Vienna, 2000).

defiance of his insistent self-differentiation from functional journalism, they lose sight of the fundamental differences between those discourses and the subtler resonances of literary satire. The aphorism on the urn and the chamber-pot displays more than a single 'abstract and arbitrary' relation between signified and signifier, which might exemplify mono-functional discourse. There is irony, instead, in the chain of signification. Even the word '*wörtlich*' [literally], if taken too literally, does not convey that Loos's approach is anything but 'literal' or 'at face value'. Kraus's comment, is, rather, an emphatically understated acknowledgement of Loos's critical challenge to differentiate basic functions rationally. Yet even the word pair '*wörtlich*' / '*sprachlich*' [literally / linguistically] is a play of difference within a vertical hierarchy in linguistics (*Wort* / *Sprache*), instead of the expected contrast 'literally' / 'figuratively'. *Sprachlich* incorporates the sense of 'figuratively', but, as readers of Kraus will recognize, it acts as the meta-linguistic signature of his own creative and reflective practice in the medium of language, *die Sprache*, a critique that addresses the very function of metaphor. 'Urn' and 'chamber-pot' are being both used as signifiers of those objects and referred to as signifying their very significations in culture — and thus within Kraus's scope.

Are we to believe that everyday speakers confuse such words, any more than users confuse the objects? Again, perhaps not 'literally', by committing a 'Freudian slip', although there is a suggestion of one in Kraus's 1911 dialogue satire 'Der Blitz hat sie getroffen, zerschmettert sind sie, nicht gedacht sollen sie werden. Eine Orgie' [Struck by lightning they are, shattered, don't even think of them! An orgy] (S 4, 70). Here the mentality of a Viennese travelling salesman and his wife is recreated as pure pastiche, of received opinion and florid imagery imported into their intimate space, where the wife's exhortation: 'get up now and proceed quietly to the urn!' might almost be a euphemism for using an ornate chamber-pot. But it is election day, and their emphatic reiteration of the cliché 'zur Urne schreiten' [proceeding to the urn] as a metaphor for vote-casting confirms the (classical) urn's 'loss of aura',<sup>46</sup> in that the electoral process is fetishized as monumental rather than utilitarian (English: 'ballot-box'). This confirms that in Kraus's self-referential aphorism of 1913 the cultural critique of euphemism involves another, ideologically tell-tale metonymy, equating the imperviousness to such cultural differences with political modernity itself, with an age, 'wo der Ernst des Lebens zur Urne nicht geht, nicht fährt, nicht läuft, sondern schreitet' [when Life-in-Earnest neither 'goes to the ballot-box',

<sup>46</sup> On the object's irretrievable loss of 'aura' in modernity see Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, pp. 157–58.

nor drives, nor walks there, but 'proceeds to the urn'], as his fiercely anti-liberal satire of 1911 puts it (S 4, 70). By taking public discourse 'at its word', *sprachlich*, Kraus finds 'a different truth', but one which aligns him with the cultural pessimism of what became known as the 'Habsburg myth': the Austrian ballot-box was a superfluous ornament, an irrelevance, in a fundamentally unreformable body politic.

It is not only for architecture, therefore, that the question of whether 'a different truth' can be revealed raises difficulties. The limitations of language as a metaphorical discourse for describing real things were demonstrated by Fritz Mauthner, before Wittgenstein.<sup>47</sup> Some philosophers argue that, despite new metaphors, which may create new connections, 'the objects of our understanding remain the same'.<sup>48</sup> However, metaphor theory no longer envisages a concrete object existing 'out there', which metaphor merely describes differently in a comparison; the primary meaning from one unrelated signifier is 'transported' to a given signified by chains of signification.<sup>49</sup> With 'transport' as the key to metaphor, we can even have 'syntactic metaphors' that lead us to 'new objects'; the concept of a hypothetical object may engender 'new kinds of objects' that had previously not existed until the metaphor projected them as thinkable.<sup>50</sup> By describing the Loos House as a 'Gedanke' [idea], Kraus was 'transporting' the poetics of intrinsic intricacy that legitimized his own literary invention: 'Denn aus dem Wort springt mir der junge Gedanke entgegen und formt rückwirkend die Sprache, die ihn schuf' [the emergent idea leaps up to me and retroactively forms the language that created it] (F 272–73, 1909, 48)<sup>51</sup> — that is, in the 'force-field' of reciprocation between words and idea, the idea remains unarticulated unless (or until) linguistically consolidated.<sup>52</sup>

In Krausian manner, 'Loosian' cultural analysis in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* has linguistic applications, when the narrator reflects on the common retention of metaphors whose signifieds are technically outmoded, such as '[sich] aufs hohe Roß [setzen]' [getting on one's high horse] in an age of skyscrapers, and when — with almost Wittgensteinian

<sup>47</sup> Fritz Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 3 vols (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1901–02).

<sup>48</sup> Hans Julius Schneider, 'Metaphorically created objects: "real" or "only linguistic"?', in *Metaphor and Rational Discourse*, ed. by Bernhard Debatin, Timothy R. Jackson and Daniel Steuer (Tübingen, 1997), pp. 91–100 (p. 92).

<sup>49</sup> *Theorie der Metapher*, ed. by Anselm Haverkamp, Wege der Forschung 389 (Darmstadt, 1988), p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Schneider, 'Metaphorically created objects', p. 97.

<sup>51</sup> See Kraus's aphorism on the writer's obligation to anticipate the associations ('Gedankengänge') of his 'word' (F 256, 1908, 27).

<sup>52</sup> On 'field of force' see Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 145.

profundity — the phrase ‘ein Haus machen’ [set up house] occasions the question whether there is anything behind the façade, with relationships that are ‘nicht mehr fest genug für Häuser’ [no longer stable enough for a house].<sup>53</sup> While brilliant ‘essayistic’ aperçus contribute to the novel’s institutional satire, they often lack that immediate relation to character which Kraus appreciated in Nestroy’s metaphors, such as Titus’ allegorical excursus to Frau von Cypressenburg in *Der Talisman*.<sup>54</sup> The allegory of a ‘life’s quest’ for a watch — not directly introduced by Graf Leinsdorf — ends in fantasies dissolving into interchangeable metaphors, both characterizing ‘Kakanian’ imprecision and indifference and also deconstructing the figurative power of language as such.<sup>55</sup>

There are many instances in Musil’s novel of the capacity of metaphorical language to operate in that ‘in-between’, where double negatives still have a content, to take an associated idea out of and beyond the concrete narrative situation and sustain a new character, circumstance or scene through it.<sup>56</sup> Kraus appreciated Nestroy’s creation of a ‘Wortgestalt’ [word-figure] like ‘Frau von Schimmerglanz’ in *Die verhängnisvolle Faschingsnacht* [*The Fateful Carnival Night*] (F 572–76, 1921, 73), which ‘perspectivally’ incorporates ‘figure, milieu and epoch’, but he also creates such figures himself, with a metaphorical invention that also adapts ‘Loosian’ thinking.<sup>57</sup> Kraus’s essay ‘Von den Sehenswürdigkeiten’ [On the Sights] (F 266, 1908, 5–10; S 2, 182–86), aligns itself with the satirists of *Simplicissimus* in a comic contrast of contradictory German stereotypes (F 266, 1908, 9), but the book version, in *Die chinesische Mauer* [*The Great Wall of China*], embellishes it as a contrast between North German pragmatism and the functionaries who decoratively populated the institutions of the Habsburg state:<sup>58</sup>

<sup>53</sup> On ‘high horse’ see Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 1, 37 (Book 1, Chapter 10); on ‘set up house’, *ibid.*, p. 895 (Book 2, Chapter 24).

<sup>54</sup> Johann Nestroy, *Sämtliche Werke*, hist.-krit. Ausgabe, ed. by Jürgen Hein, Johann Hüttner, Walter Obermaier and W. Edgar Yates (Vienna, 1977– ), *Stücke 17/1: Der Talisman*, ed. by Jürgen Hein and Peter Haida (1993), 49–50; quoted in S 4, 230.

<sup>55</sup> Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 1, 138–39 (Book 1, Chapter 37).

<sup>56</sup> On ‘dazwischen’ [in between] see *ibid.*, p. 254 (Book 1, Chapter 62); on double negatives see Duncan Large, ‘The use of the negative in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*’, *Musil-Forum*, 17/18 (1991/92), 38–66 (p. 50); on the inclusion of a predicate ‘as if it had not been negated’ see also Christian J. Wagenknecht, *Das Wortspiel bei Karl Kraus*, Palaestra 242 (Göttingen, 1965), pp. 56–57.

<sup>57</sup> On ‘figure, milieu and epoch’ see Helmut Rössler, *Karl Kraus und Nestroy. Kritik und Verarbeitung*, Stuttgarter Arbeiten zur Germanistik 90 (Stuttgart, 1981), p. 141.

<sup>58</sup> The essay was originally published in *Simplicissimus*, 13/33 (16 November 1908), 544–45.

Bedenkt man dazu, daß auch die Menschen dieses Landes einem mehr dekorativen als realen Zweck entsprechen, so bekommt man einen Begriff von der Schwierigkeit des hiesigen Lebens. Im deutschen Norden ist der Sinn für das Ornamentale gerade so weit entwickelt, daß kein Käse ohne Salat auf den Tisch kommt. Der Salat, mit dem die Österreicher sich als ganze servieren, ist ein Orden. Und es gibt hier Menschen, die ganz und gar eine Salatexistenz führen. Der Salat zum Selbstzweck erhoben, ist zum Beispiel ein Stationsvorstand, der von Hoheiten angesprochen wird. Er sieht schön aus, wird zu jedem Schnellzug gezeigt, findet jedoch keine praktische Verwendung. Der Vorstand der nächsten Station, der das ganze Jahr zu keiner Hoheit kommt, muß für nüchterne Betriebszwecke erhalten. (S 2, 185)

[If one considers, moreover, that even the people of this country are fitted for a more decorative than real purpose, then one can begin to conceive of the difficulties of life here. In Northern Germany, appreciation of the ornamental has just reached the point where no cheese ever arrives on the table without a salad. The salad with which the Austrians serve themselves whole is a medal. And there are people here who are wholly consumed by their existence as salad. For example, the station master who is addressed by their royal highnesses is a salad advanced to an end in itself. He has a fine appearance, is brought out for each express train, yet no practical use can be found for him. The station master of the next station, who cannot get to a highness all year long, has to be on call for sober maintenance jobs.]

Here Kraus extends a reductive ‘Loosian’ aesthetic into semiotic, rather than language critique, by taking culinary and design analogies *ad absurdum* to feed the visual texture of a surreal cartoon, where method is detected in the state’s institutional eccentricities and decoratively reified subalterns briefly inhabit the scene as embodied metaphors of a suspended state of being that would later epitomize Musil’s ‘Kakanien’ — ‘Salatexistenzen’, absurdly personifying the mentality that perpetuates the system. Musil had this kind of aesthetically conceived yet language-born creation as a precedent when embodying Arnheim’s adoption of the conventions of Vienna’s nobility to good effect — simultaneously self-enacting and self-effacing — in the pricelessly paradoxical sequence:

Arnheim dämpfte seine eigene Vornehmheit ab und beschränkte sich so bescheiden auf Geistesadel, der seine Vorzüge und Grenzen kennt, daß nach einer Weile die Träger hochadeliger Namen neben ihm wirkten, als hätten sie vom Tragen dieser Last einen gekrümmten Arbeiterrücken.<sup>59</sup>

[Arnheim toned down his own gentility and confined himself so modestly to nobility of mind, ever aware of one’s strengths and limitations, that after a while the bearers of elevated aristocratic names appeared, by comparison, to have acquired a labourer’s stoop from bearing such a burden.]

This kind of parenthetical invention, akin to those ‘peripheral characters

<sup>59</sup> Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, I, 194 (Book 1, Chapter 49).

[...] engendered by the subordinate clauses of its various metaphors', which Vladimir Nabokov described in Gogol's *Dead Souls*, 'mere forms of speech directly giving rise to live creatures', reminds us how Austrian satire, beyond its perpetuation of the 'Habsburg myth', can thrive on a metaphorical texture which appears to create, if not 'new objects', then fictions of thinking beyond a single 'abstract and arbitrary' relation to reality.<sup>60</sup> Whereas aesthetics may invoke metaphor to give account of an architect's critical intervention in the 'production of space', literary metaphor can give critique a powerful concreteness. Ever since Schiller's *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* [*On Naïve and Reflective Poetry*], satire theory has recognized in satirical negation a utopian undercurrent, which affirms the ideal in destroying an imperfect reality in effigy. We could extend this inversion of the assumed negativity of satire to include not only the 'word-figures' of Kraus and Musil, but also the conceptualization of a not yet invented, supposedly functional object. Kraus's essay 'Reformen' [Reforms] of May 1909 ironically uses the era of the safety razor to exemplify a (supposedly) Loosian 'reform': As the new gadget privatizes the functional act and divests it of its social trappings, Kraus mock-laments the spiritual void of the customer deprived of the pamperings and chatter of the barber. A mock-resolution is then projected in the surreal, un-Loosian invention of a talking razor, capable, at the press of a button, of all the unsolicited pleasantries of the barber that are still endured by the misanthropic satirist — satire's inverted 'utopia' thus projecting presciently into the mobile phone and voice-mail era as a sarcastic commentary on daily discourse (S 2, 204–08).<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> On Gogol's characters see Vladimir Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol* (Oxford, 1989), p. 81; for a reading of Musil resistant to a monocausal depiction of Habsburg decline, see Honold, *Die Stadt und der Krieg*, p. 99.

<sup>61</sup> Edward Timms, 'Language and the Satirist in the Work of Karl Kraus' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 1967), was the first to emphasize 'misanthropy' as role-play.