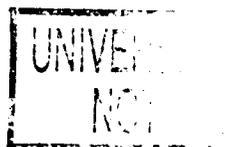


# Siegfried Kracauer and Weimar Culture: Modernity, Flânerie, and Literature

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# Abstract

This thesis is concerned with Siegfried Kracauer's response to the challenges of modernity as exemplified by the Weimar Republic and its culture. A consideration of the literary dimension of Kracauer's work is a central aspect of my approach. Beginning with a brief examination of Kracauer's early, epistemological writings, which adopt an anti-modern tone, my thesis then examines his shift towards a materialist critique of modernity. Using his essay 'Das Ornament der Masse' as a key example, I argue that Kracauer assumes the stance of a *flâneur* vis-à-vis the culture he examines. While this is consistent with his role as a *Feuilleton* journalist, the *flâneur*'s detachment compromises Kracauer's political position. Here, and throughout the thesis, Kracauer's narrative approach and its effects are drawn out through comparisons with contemporary literary texts. In the remaining three chapters of my thesis, I analyse the novels *Ginster* and *Georg*, as well as the sociological study *Die Angestellten*. Here, I suggest, Kracauer attempts to transcend the limitations imposed by the *flâneur*'s detachment. In *Ginster* he critically reflects on his own personal and political development while *Die Angestellten* is an attempt at social intervention. In *Georg*, finally, Kracauer returns to exploring crucial factors of Weimar (political) culture and considers his own role, as a journalist, within them.

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**Die Menschen verraten ihre  
Absichten nie leichter und  
stärker, als wenn sie sie  
verfehlen. (*Jean Paul*)**

# Introduction

For a few months in the years 1930/31, Siegfried Kracauer, together with Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Bernard von Brentano, Ernst Bloch and Georg Lukács, participated in the project of a left-wing intellectual magazine which was to be called *Krise und Kritik*. In an essay on the project, Erdmut Wizisla argues that, despite its eventual failure, this collective effort promised a way out of an impasse between political commitment and artistic ambition.

According to Wizisla, the participants

strebten eine Synthese aus technisch-konstruktiver und gesellschaftlicher Dimension der Kunst an, die hohe artistische mit politisch fortgeschrittenen Maßstäben unauflöslich zu verbinden trachtete. Der Versuch, Kunst und Politik in einer Weise zu verknüpfen, die beiden Seiten Gerechtigkeit widerfahren läßt, rückt, selbst wenn er künstlerisch nur eingeschränkt und in der Zeitschrift überhaupt nicht erreicht wurde, das Vorhaben geistespolitisch in eine höchst bedeutsame Leerstelle des intellektuellen Lebens der Weimarer Republik.<sup>1</sup>

How such a synthesis was to be achieved was a yet more difficult question, however, which in the end scuppered the project. Nevertheless, the view that social and aesthetic issues were inextricably interlinked and had to be addressed together played a central role in Kracauer's Weimar writings. How this view developed, and found changing expressions in his work, is the subject matter of this thesis.

For Wizisla, a defining characteristic of the *Krise und Kritik* project was its ambition 'sich mit der eigenen Arbeit in die Belange [der] Umgebung einzumischen, ohne dabei Maß und Urteilsfähigkeit zu verlieren'.<sup>2</sup> Left-wing

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<sup>1</sup> Erdmut Wizisla, "'Krise und Kritik' (1930/31): Walter Benjamin und das Zeitschriftenprojekt', in *Aber ein Sturm weht vom Paradiese her: Texte zu Walter Benjamin*, Michael Opitz and Erdmut Wizisla, eds, Leipzig: Reclam 1992, pp.270-302, 292/3.

<sup>2</sup> Wizisla, p.294/5.

intellectuals were prepared to put their individual expertise at the service of a common cause but without submitting to any leadership other than their own, attempting to strike a delicate balance between their commitment to social change (which presupposes some degree of identification with the masses) and personal conviction (which requires resistance to external pressure). For Kracauer, too, this was a problem. His essay 'Das Ornament der Masse', for instance, expresses on the one hand a desire for radical change to modern forms of social organisation, but on the other hand illustrates, through its narrative structure, Kracauer's idiosyncratic position within the left which, at least in this instance, isolates him from the very society he wants to see changed. Surrendering his own boundaries and submerging his own judgment in a collective body would, indeed, have been anathema to Kracauer. While his early writings, for example the 1922 study *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, demonstrate a profound unhappiness at the separation of the individual from the world, Kracauer never considered joining any of the available collectivities a viable option.<sup>3</sup> Instead, in *Der Detektiv-Roman*, completed in 1925, Kracauer turned to an existentialism inspired by Kierkegaard for guidance on how to live a meaningful life within a rationalised and spiritually emptied modern world.<sup>4</sup>

His profound suspicion of collectives never left him, as indicated in his review of Sergei Tretjakov's highly influential public lectures in 1931.<sup>5</sup> Drawing on a common experience of World War One, a period he had treated in his novel *Ginster*, Kracauer initially likens Tretjakov to an *Unteroffizier* who

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<sup>3</sup> *Soziologie als Wissenschaft, Eine erkenntnistheoretische Untersuchung* (1922), in *Schriften*, vol. 1, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1971, pp.7-101.

<sup>4</sup> *Der Detektiv-Roman: Ein philosophischer Traktat*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1979

<sup>5</sup> 'Instruktionsstunde in Literatur: Zu einem Vortrag des Russen Tretjakow' in *Schriften* 5.2, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990, pp.308-311; and 'Über den Schriftsteller', *ibid.*, pp.343-346.

abuses professional writers for their unmilitary behaviour in the same way in which new recruits were routinely humiliated.<sup>6</sup> As Kracauer presents it, Tretjakov condemns individuality, and the creativity and particular talents associated with a writer's individuality, as fetishes. But Kracauer turns this accusation of fetishism back on Tretjakov, whose undialectical dogmatism, according to Kracauer, misrepresents Marx, 'der ja schließlich auch aus der französischen und englischen Aufklärung stammt'.<sup>7</sup> Kracauer argues that Tretjakov advocates driving individualism out of writers by making them work for newspapers, or, even more radically, sending them to factories and villages to join production collectives. Only then would they be able to not just describe the situation, but to contribute to its improvement. In the wake of such a 'Proletarisierung der Literaten', a 'Literarisierung der Proletarier' will follow.<sup>8</sup> While Kracauer the *Feuilletonist* is gratified by Tretjakov's enthusiasm for journalism, he rejects Tretjakov's belief that competent use of language in the service of officially sanctioned political aims is a sufficient achievement for an intellectual. For Kracauer, a writer who deserves the title must have 'die fortgeschrittenste Erkenntnis' to guide him, 'und er kämpft für sie mit der Spezialwaffe der Sprache, deren Gebrauch nicht jedermanns Sache ist, sondern eben die seine'.<sup>9</sup> Those two key elements, insight and literary skill, are central aspirations in Kracauer's work, and he has them playing off each other most successfully in the 1930 study *Die Angestellten*.<sup>10</sup> Yet, as Kracauer's demand

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<sup>6</sup> *Ginster: Von ihm selbst geschrieben* (1928), in *Schriften*, vol. 7, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1973, pp. 7-242.

<sup>7</sup> 'Instruktionsstunde', p. 309.

<sup>8</sup> 'Instruktionsstunde', p. 310.

<sup>9</sup> 'Instruktionsstunde', p. 311.

<sup>10</sup> *Die Angestellten: Aus dem neuesten Deutschland* (1930), Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1971.

indicates, any radicalism is limited to the spheres of insight and of literary style.

Kracauer's reluctance to submit to a collective discipline might have been overcome within a format such as that of *Krise und Kritik*, but on another level even that would not have been an answer to the more fundamental problem which affects Kracauer's position as an intellectual. In contrast to his friends and acquaintances from the Frankfurt *Institut für Sozialforschung*, Kracauer chose for much of his Weimar career the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, a daily newspaper, as his medium, rather than scholarly publications or the lecture theatre. His 1931 article 'Über den Schriftsteller' suggests his motivation for this choice when he talks about the journalist's 'Funktion, verändernd in die Zustände einzugreifen'.<sup>11</sup> This might seem to be in line with Tretjakov's view of journalism as an appropriate method for the translation of intellectual efforts into collective action. Indeed, David Frisby points to similarities between *Die Angestellten* and Tretjakov's 'notion of "operative literature"'.<sup>12</sup> Yet the terms in which Kracauer describes or refers to journalistic interventions show that he stays, in fact, closer to his more academically inclined associates than to any politically revolutionary forces. In 'Die Bibel auf Deutsch', his 1926 materialist polemic, he attacks religious revivalism for retreating into the private sphere and for their failure to capture a reality which is now thoroughly profane. He does not, however, make it clear what precisely those who look to religion for guidance retreat from, nor does he suggest any responses to reality once it is recognised, although he is clear that it must be changed. Even in

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<sup>11</sup> 'Über den Schriftsteller', p.344

<sup>12</sup> David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986, p.163.

1931, in an article 'Über Erfolgsbücher und ihr Publikum', Kracauer concludes his analysis of popular fiction with the statement: 'Wer verändern will, muß Bescheid um das zu Verändernde wissen. Der Nutzwert der von uns veranstalteten Serie besteht eben darin, das Eingreifen in die gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit zu erleichtern.'<sup>13</sup> This is on the one hand a somewhat Brechtian take on the Marxist nostrum of the relationship between theory and praxis: understanding is a necessary precondition for interventions in social reality. Knowledge is not an end in itself, as the again very Brechtian term *Nutzwert* indicates. On the other hand, Kracauer identifies himself with those who possess the important knowledge, 'uns', but not with his implied readership whom he wants to encourage to intervene. This also applies to *Die Angestellten*, his study of the social conditions and political consciousness (or lack thereof) of Berlin's white-collar workers, even though his own position at the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, which was getting increasingly precarious, meant that he had more in common with the objects of his study than his detached, sometimes even condescending, tone suggests.

In his observations 'Über den Schriftsteller' Kracauer admits that 'die Möglichkeit freier journalistischer Meinungsäußerung innerhalb der bürgerlichen Presse [ist] heute fast beschränkter als zur Zeit der bürgerlichen Militärmacht'.<sup>14</sup> Kracauer argues that the journalist's political mission is now taken up by a certain type of writer, but he still sees *Aufklärung* as the most important task for such a writer. He maintains that 'nur als einzelner (oder bestenfalls im Zusammenschluß mit Gleichgesinnten) kann er [...] das falsche

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<sup>13</sup> 'Über Erfolgsbücher und ihr Publikum' in *Schriften* 5.2, pp.334-342, 342.

<sup>14</sup> 'Über den Schriftsteller', p.344.

Bewußtsein zerstören [und] ein richtiges vorbereiten.<sup>15</sup> The scepticism vis-à-vis the ability of intellectuals to effect social or political change which Kracauer here shows was already developing in his 1929 review of Karl Mannheim's *Ideologie und Utopie*.<sup>16</sup> Mannheim had put his faith in the 'freischwebenden Intellektuellen', a group 'die darum sozial verhältnismäßig ungebunden ist, weil sich alle sozialen Strömungen in ihr vereinigen' and whom he expects to maintain 'die 'Spannung zur Utopie'.<sup>17</sup> Kracauer is not unimpressed by Mannheim's arguments, but he sees two important hurdles that cannot be overcome on the strength of those arguments alone: firstly, and faintly echoing the case he had earlier made against the desirability of *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, Kracauer accuses Mannheim's 'freigesetztes Bewußtsein' of 'Formalität', 'Inhaltslosigkeit' and 'Nähe zum alten idealistischen Bewußtsein'.<sup>18</sup> The liberation from ideological ties has dragged along with it the loss of direction. Secondly Kracauer questions Mannheim's belief in the classlessness of intellectuals. He warns of their close links to the bourgeoisie, lest 'die Avantgarde der Intelligenz sich nicht in Synthesen verflüchtigt, die zuletzt doch der bestehenden Gesellschaft zugutekommen'.<sup>19</sup> This entanglement of the intellectual in political struggle, which he had already recognised as a difficulty not to be underestimated in his review of Mannheim, becomes the central issue of his novel *Georg*, published posthumously but finished in 1934 when Kracauer was already exiled in France.<sup>20</sup> By then Kracauer knew that the efforts of left-wing intellectuals, including his own,

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<sup>15</sup> 'Über Erfolgsbücher', p.346.

<sup>16</sup> 'Ideologie und Utopie', in *Schriften* 5.2, pp.148-151.

<sup>17</sup> 'Ideologie und Utopie', p.150.

<sup>18</sup> 'Ideologie und Utopie', p.150/i.

<sup>19</sup> 'Ideologie und Utopie', p.151.

<sup>20</sup> *Georg*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1973

had fallen short of the mark on a scale for which even his scepticism had not prepared him. Thus *Georg* constitutes Kracauer's reckoning with the Weimar Republic and with his own part in the cultural and social developments of that period. The self-reflexive meditation which Kracauer had begun in *Ginster* is resumed, if not exactly concluded, as both Georg and Kracauer himself face an uncertain future as the novel finishes.

Kracauer's fraught journey from a private longing for meaning, which all but ignores the historic events unfolding all around, to an engagement with Weimar society that - notwithstanding its limitation to observation - is politically motivated, is an aspect of Kracauer's Weimar work which has been somewhat neglected in the mostly very enthusiastic reception Kracauer has received since the rediscovery of his work after his death in 1966. In Germany, Hans G. Helms called upon Kracauer's German publisher, Suhrkamp, to extend the planned collected works by also including, amongst other things, Kracauer's novels.<sup>21</sup> He also tried from the late 1960s on to reclaim Kracauer for the left, most notably with 'Der wunderliche Kracauer', which appeared in four instalments in 1971/72.<sup>22</sup> Helms argues that Kracauer 'täuscht nicht Marxismus vor, mit dem er theoretisch zwar vertraut gewesen, der ihm aber subjektiv stets ein wenig fremd geblieben ist', but claims that nevertheless Kracauer 'engagiert sich für die Arbeiterklasse als Bourgeois'.<sup>23</sup> But Helms's

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<sup>21</sup> 'Der wunderliche Kracauer', published in four instalments in *Neues Forum*, vol. 1, June/July 1971, pp.27-29; vol.2, Oct./Nov. 1971, pp.48-51; vol.3, Dec.1971, pp.27-30; vol.4, Sept/Oct 1972, pp.55-58; vol.2, p.48. Suhrkamp expanded the planned *Schriften* from 5 to 8 volumes, but of those vol.6 is yet to appear.

<sup>22</sup> Helms republished this article under the title 'Plüsch und deutsches Mittelgebirge: Zu den Schriften Siegfried Kracauers' in *Soziographie*, vol.7, no.1/2 (8/9), 1994, pp. 237-272.

<sup>23</sup> 'Der wunderliche Kracauer', vol. 1, p.28.

rather tendentious article did not initiate a further discussion of Kracauer's politics.<sup>24</sup> Instead, in 1985 Inka Mülder published her still unsurpassed study of Kracauer's theoretical work until his flight into exile, *Siegfried Kracauer, Grenzgänger zwischen Theorie und Literatur*.<sup>25</sup> Mülder approaches Kracauer's work from a philosophical perspective, charting for instance the influence of Husserl on *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* or Kracauer's use of Kierkegaard for his study *Der Detektiv-Roman*. To be sure, Mülder also examines from what point onwards and to what extent Kracauer draws on Marxist theory, but she does not investigate whether or how Kracauer's practice as an intellectual changes as a result. Neither does Mülder pay much attention to the formal or stylistic aspects of Kracauer's work, beyond commenting on his use of montage, especially in *Die Angestellten*.

Mülder's brief discussion of *Ginster* notwithstanding, Kracauer's novels have been largely neglected. Where they have been examined this has taken place in philosophical terms, as is the case in Mülder's study. Eckhardt Köhn's article 'Die Konkretionen des Intellekts', which focused on Kracauer's two novels, had also located them within Kracauer's philosophical framework.<sup>26</sup> A recent German study of Kracauer's literary work, Dirk Oschmann's *Auszug aus der Innerlichkeit*, similarly focuses on philosophical influences at the expense of an engagement with the formal aspects of the

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Martin Jay, 'The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer', in *Salmagundi*, vol. 31-32, Fall 1975-Winter 1976, pp.49-106, p.65.

<sup>25</sup> Inka Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer, Grenzgänger zwischen Theorie und Literatur: seine frühen Schriften 1913-1933*, Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1985.

<sup>26</sup> Eckhardt Köhn 'Die Konkretionen des Intellekts' in Heinz Ludwig Arnold, ed., text und kritik: *Siegfried Kracauer*, vol.68, München: Edition text und kritik, 1980, pp.41-54.

texts.<sup>27</sup> The Anglo-American reception of Kracauer's work, too, largely omits his literary texts, which have not yet been translated into English. Martin Jay's 'The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer' briefly discusses *Ginster*, but treats it mainly as a reflection of Kracauer's 'continuing personal estrangement' and is far more interested in Kracauer as an exile.<sup>28</sup> David Frisby, whose *Fragments of Modernity* introduced Kracauer's Weimar writings to a wider English-speaking audience, also has little to say about the novels. *Fragments of Modernity* compared Walter Benjamin, Georg Simmel and Kracauer as theorists of modernity. But partly because only a third of the study is devoted to Kracauer, and partly because of Frisby's sociological focus, important aspects of Kracauer's work are not discussed at all or not in depth. Thus Frisby points out that 'by the end of the 1920s, Kracauer was no longer the person waiting or even merely the *flâneur* in Paris [...] and elsewhere. It is true that he remained an outsider in his lack of attachment to the social and intellectual status quo, as he so graphically describes in his autobiographical *Ginster*.'<sup>29</sup> While I agree with Frisby's description of the change in Kracauer's attitude, by simply tagging the novel with the label 'autobiography' Frisby misses the opportunity to examine Kracauer's own reflections on his change in attitude.

Even fifteen years later, and despite increasing academic interest in Kracauer's work, the amount of English-language material available on his Weimar work is still limited. Predictably, much of what has been written deals

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<sup>27</sup> Dirk Oschmann, *Auszug aus der Innerlichkeit: Das literarische Werk Siegfried Kracauers*, Heidelberg: Winter, 1999; unlike Mülder, who had used the year 1933 as the cut-off point of her study, Oschmann also considers Kracauer's second novel *Georg*, which was finished in 1934 but remained unpublished until 1973.

<sup>28</sup> Jay, 'Extraterritorial Life', p.59.

<sup>29</sup> Frisby, *Fragments*, p.158

with Kracauer's later work, written in English, or, more recently, with the essays collected in the volume *Das Ornament der Masse*, translated by Thomas Levin as *The Mass Ornament*.<sup>30</sup> In the 1991 *New German Critique* special issue on Siegfried Kracauer, the main areas of interest in Kracauer, especially on the part of American academics, emerge quite clearly. Out of twelve contributions, three deal with Kracauer's copious work from the Weimar period, one each on his sociology of modernity, his film criticism and his literary criticism, while four essays focus on just two of his post-war writings, his last book on *History: The Last Things Before the Last*, and his *Theory of Film*. Out of the remaining five, four are biographical, with an emphasis on Kracauer's life in exile and/or his connections with members of the Frankfurt School. Thus Kracauer's Weimar writings are clearly marginalized in relation to his American works, and Kracauer's German origin tends to be summarised under the label 'Critical Theory' or relegated to the biographical sphere.

Those disparate components of Kracauer-scholarship can nevertheless be combined into a coherent account of Kracauer's development, but such accounts tend to read backwards, interpreting Kracauer's pre-exile writings in the light of his American work. Patrice Petro's observations on 'Kracauer's Epistemological Shift' may serve as an example of the questions typically asked of Kracauer and his work in this Anglo-American context, although her answers are only one part of a discourse.<sup>31</sup> Like many of Kracauer's more recent critics, Petro is primarily interested in his contribution to film theory,

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<sup>30</sup> *The Mass Ornament, Weimar Essays*, translated, edited and with an introduction by Thomas Y. Levin, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1995

<sup>31</sup> Patrice Petro, 'Kracauer's Epistemological Shift' in *New German Critique*, v. 54, Fall 1991, pp. 127-138

and she wants to challenge some of the more dismissive views Kracauer's work has attracted in the past. Such criticism sets the French film theorist André Bazin up against Kracauer, who emerges out of the comparison 'as the stereotypical German pedant, shut off from the world of practical criticism and obsessed with the future of his own ideas'.<sup>32</sup> Such an undifferentiated view, Petro suggests, can be corrected by considering the film criticism Kracauer produced for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in the 1920s and early 1930s. Rather than seeing the differences between Kracauer's early and his later writings as an indication of a dramatic epistemological shift from a proto-poststructuralist 'emphasis on the impossibility of separating high art and mass culture' to an anti-communist embracing of American sociology, however, Petro argues that a knowledge of Kracauer's earlier views adds depth to an appreciation of his later work.<sup>33</sup> In her view, Kracauer's Weimar work demonstrates his proximity to critical theory and gives rise to comparisons with 'such poststructuralist thinkers as Baudrillard and Foucault'.<sup>34</sup> Petro invokes Edward Said's concept of 'travelling theory' to legitimise her reading of Kracauer's early work as an explanation for his later writings.<sup>35</sup> Said considers 'the movement of ideas and theories from one place to another [as] both a fact of life and a useful enabling condition of intellectual activity'.<sup>36</sup> Said suggests that the effects of such spatial and temporal shifts upon the theory in question also need to be analysed. For Petro, transposing Kracauer's Weimar film criticism to an American context makes it possible also to 'rescue' the 'materialist phenomenology' of *Theory of*

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<sup>32</sup> Petro, p. 128.

<sup>33</sup> Petro, p. 134.

<sup>34</sup> Petro, p. 135.

<sup>35</sup> Petro, p. 136.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Petro, p. 136.

*Film and History – the Last Things before the Last* as ‘a timely alternative to outmoded forms of conceptual thinking and an early historical precedent for what is now called “cultural studies”’.<sup>37</sup>

In the process of Petro’s retrospective categorisation of Kracauer’s Weimar work as ‘proto-poststructuralist’, Kracauer’s increasing and idiosyncratic engagement with Marxist thought from the mid-1920s onwards is consigned to a footnote. Thus the most immediate context for an evaluation of Kracauer’s achievements and shortcomings disappears from view. Inka Mülder’s comparison of *Die Angestellten* with Clifford Geertz’s ethnographic work ‘Cinematic Ethnology: Siegfried Kracauer’s *The White Collar Masses*’ follows a similar pattern.<sup>38</sup> Yet the shifts in Kracauer’s views, his concerns and his responses to what was going on around him reflect both the drama and the significance of the Weimar period. This significance lies not only in the rise of National Socialism, for, as Detlev Peukert has observed, ‘“Weimar” is more than a beginning and an end.’<sup>39</sup> In the Weimar Republic, according to Peukert, ‘the process of modernization took a more brutal, uncompromising form in Germany in the twenties than it did in other countries’.<sup>40</sup> And yet modernity was in crisis elsewhere too; ‘the German crisis’, Peukert argues, ‘was, in that sense, a representative one’.<sup>41</sup> Thus one ought to consider the period as ‘a brief,

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<sup>37</sup> Petro, p.136.

<sup>38</sup> Inka Mülder-Bach, ‘Cinematic Ethnology: Siegfried Kracauer’s *The White Collar Masses*’, in *New Left Review*, v. 226, Nov/Dec 1997, pp.41-56.

<sup>39</sup> Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, translated by Richard Deveson, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993, p.xii.

<sup>40</sup> Peukert, p.280.

<sup>41</sup> Peukert, p.280.

headlong tour of the fascinating, and fateful, choices made possible by the modern world.<sup>42</sup>

In his work Kracauer explores an enormous range of such choices, often by analysing the causes and effects of the choices made by others. But his studies of modern (popular) culture, of films, books, architecture etc, which attract scholars like Frisby and Petro, only tell half the story. Kracauer was not simply a detached observer of the responses of others to the manifold challenges of modernity, he also reacted to those challenges himself. Furthermore, as the events around him became more and more ominous, Kracauer increasingly reflected upon his own reactions and their wider consequences. This is most obvious in his two novels, *Ginster* and *Georg*, where the protagonists are given recognisably autobiographical traits while the narrator critically reflects upon their conduct and their motives. Fascinating as Kracauer's insights into the quality of modern life are, his reflections on the possibilities, the responsibilities and also the failures experienced, especially by Kracauer as an intellectual, add another dimension to an appreciation of those insights.

This thesis aims to re-examine Kracauer's intellectual and political development in the context of Weimar culture and society. Rather than reviving the question as to whether there is a clear break in Kracauer's work in 1926 (as, among others, Mülder and Frisby argue) or whether there is, instead, an underlying philosophical continuity (the position taken by Oschmann and, arguably, implied by Petro), I want to focus on Kracauer's specific responses to

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<sup>42</sup> Peukert, p. xiv.

specific challenges to the intellectual by Weimar society. These responses do not only present themselves directly in Kracauer's theoretical work. Equally important, but thus far neglected, are the more subtle and evocative explorations that can be carried out through literary forms. This thesis will thus focus on the literary dimension of Kracauer's work, by analysing in detail Kracauer's two novels, by drawing out the literary aspects of his theoretical texts, and by using other literary texts to contextualise Kracauer's writings. A detailed as well as contextual approach such as this will allow for a more differentiated assessment of Kracauer's achievements and also of his shortcomings than has been presented so far. Neither limiting myself to an examination of the various influences from Nietzsche to Marx and beyond that can be traced in Kracauer's Weimar writings, nor trying to claim him retrospectively for one contemporary school of thought or another, I aim to throw some light on Kracauer's intellectual and political development against the backdrop of Weimar culture and society. For any assessment of Kracauer's contribution to the many fields he has worked in, such an historically and culturally specific understanding of his intellectual and political development must surely be useful.

Central to my argument will be Kracauer's reluctance to submerge himself into any group, and an examination of how his hesitation is reflected and reflected upon in his work. The combination of insight and literary skill which, as mentioned above, Kracauer himself valued so highly, is crucial to this examination. Therefore, taking my lead from Kracauer's own aspirations, my approach will be to read him as a 'man of letters', applying literary criticism to his texts while positioning them within a context of cultural

studies. Through a critical exploration of his claim to insight and literary skill in the texts I have chosen I aim to overcome the limiting division of Kracauer's work into 'sociological' and 'literary' texts. Furthermore, Kracauer's concern with putting his intellectual and stylistic skills in the service of public awareness is a reminder that it would be just as appropriate to consider most of his Weimar work under the heading of journalism, as, with the exception of *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* and *Der Detektiv-Roman*, the texts under discussion in this thesis were all at least partially published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* first.

The generic differences between an essay such as 'Das Ornament der Masse', the novels *Ginster* and *Georg*, and study like *Die Angestellten* will not be ignored. Indeed, the relevant chapters will address questions to do with genre. Nevertheless, and highlighting those features which Kracauer's Weimar writings have in common, this thesis will focus on his vision of and response to modernity, calling upon Peukert's description, cited above, of the Weimar republic as a 'tour of [...] fascinating and fateful choices'. Thus a broader historical and cultural context is evoked, in which Kracauer's views can be related to those of a variety of contemporaries who were confronted with the same choices but approached them in quite different ways.

Other, mostly literary, texts are used to contextualise Kracauer's work right from the first chapter. Once his early reluctance to engage at all with the modern world is established through an examination of *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, chapter one then goes on to show his hesitant and not entirely successful opening up to the material realities of modern life in *Der Detektiv-Roman*. Kracauer's reluctance to quite grasp the extent of the uncertainty

associated with modernity is brought out in a comparison with a book which Kracauer mentions in his study, Leo Perutz's novel *Der Meister des jüngsten Tages*.<sup>43</sup> In Chapter Two I discuss two short texts, written for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*'s *Feuilleton*, and thus complete my account of Kracauer's initial discovery of the importance of those material realities. 'Die Bibel auf Deutsch' advertises Kracauer's changed outlook in a rather polemical fashion, while 'Das Ornament der Masse' provides a more complex but also more ambiguous interpretation of contemporary popular culture as a reflection of social realities.<sup>44</sup> A peculiar but revealing gendered subtext of this essay is teased out with reference to a short text by Robert Walser, 'Ovation', and to Franz Kafka's 'Auf der Galerie'.<sup>45</sup> Kracauer's output at the *Frankfurter Zeitung* was far too prolific to be considered in full, so only a few of his texts can be discussed in this thesis. Apart from the two essays discussed in Chapter Two, a small selection of Kracauer's abundant short journalistic works is referred to where they are relevant to the text under discussion.

As they provide the greatest scope for self-reflection, I give particular weight to Kracauer's two novels *Ginster* and *Georg*. *Ginster* is dealt with in Chapter Three, and, after an initial reading of the novel as a social critique, in the second part it is set against a World War One novel with which it shares certain characteristics, Ernst Glaeser's *Jahrgang 1902*.<sup>46</sup> The third part focuses

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<sup>43</sup> Leo Perutz, *Der Meister des jüngsten Tages* (1923), edited and with a postscript by Hans-Harald Müller, Munich: Knauer, 1995.

<sup>44</sup> 'Die Bibel auf Deutsch: Zur Übersetzung von Martin Buber und Franz Rosenzweig' (1926), and 'Das Ornament der Masse' (1927), in *Das Ornament der Masse*, (1963) Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1977, pp. 173-186 and pp. 50-63.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Walser, 'Ovation' (1912), in *Gesamtwerk*, vol. 1, Jochen Greven, ed., Geneva and Hamburg: H. Kossodo, 1972, p. 284-5; Franz Kafka, 'Auf der Galerie', in *Sämtliche Erzählungen*, Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1987, p. 129.

<sup>46</sup> Ernst Glaeser, *Jahrgang 1902*, (1928), Potsdam: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1929

on the narrator's reflections upon himself and the way in which he relates to his surroundings. Proceeding chronologically in order of completion, Chapter Four is devoted to *Die Angestellten*. Although this text is quite clearly rooted in sociology, I have chosen to compare it with two novels, Irmgard Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* and Marieluise Fleißer's *Mehltreisende Frieda Geyer*, in line with the purpose of this thesis to investigate Kracauer's own choices and his views on the choices of others.<sup>47</sup> The two novels explore such choices from very different perspectives and thus serve both to add to an appreciation of the cultural context of Kracauer's work, and to highlight his particular position within it. Chapter Five concludes the thesis with an analysis of Kracauer's second novel, *Georg*. I have included this text even though *Georg* was not completed until 1934. It not only deals with Kracauer's Weimar experiences (that is also true of *From Caligari to Hitler*, which I am not discussing) but was also begun during the Weimar period and still shows an involvement with those experiences which is absent from *Caligari*.<sup>48</sup> Although it lacks the complex structure which effectively intertwined the personal with the political in *Ginster*, *Georg* similarly explores two aspects of its protagonist's life which are connected. A brief excursus sketches in the background for Georg's experiment with a homosexual relationship. Georg's sexuality provides a running commentary on his failure to understand and to intervene in the social and political developments which increasingly threatened the Weimar Republic.

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<sup>47</sup> Irmgard Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932) München: dtv, 1989; Marieluise Fleißer, *Mehltreisende Frieda Geier: Roman vom Rauchen, Sporteln, Lieben und Verkaufen*, Berlin: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1931.

<sup>48</sup> *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (1947), Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974

The uneasy relationship between a theory of social relations and social change on the one hand, and an artistic or journalistic practice which ultimately remains detached from those it intends to affect on the other, was not limited to Kracauer's experience, although his reflections on the struggle to find a solution and on his ultimate failure are perhaps particularly instructive. Another attempt to mobilise the masses through literature took place in the late 1960s and 1970s, and it is no coincidence that I have found writers who were active in those years particularly useful. I have taken an eclectic approach to theory, using whatever was most useful to tackle the rather diverse topics raised by Kracauer's work. Thus I have applied Laura Mulvey's thoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', especially on the fetishisation of female performers, to Kracauer's representation of the dancers in 'Das Ornament der Masse'.<sup>49</sup> Mulvey's analysis of the mechanisms and the purpose of such fetishisation backs up my reading of the gendered subtext of Kracauer's essay. Alexander Kluge's writings on realism are used in the chapter on *Ginster*.<sup>50</sup> Kluge, a writer, filmmaker and theorist, describes a kind of realism that stems from an anti-realist attitude, i.e. from a rejection of reality as it is experienced. Like Kracauer, Kluge is concerned with making the social and historical origins of reality visible, thus demonstrating that reality is subject to change. This idea also implies that the individual is both subject to and an agent of such historical development. The question which concerns me

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<sup>49</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Screen*, 16:3, (Autumn 1976), pp. 6-18.

<sup>50</sup> Alexander Kluge, 'Die schärfste Ideologie: daß die Realität sich auf ihren realistischen Charakter beruft', in Kluge, *Gelegenheitsarbeiten einer Sklavin: Zur realistischen Methode*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1975, pp.215-222; and 'Das Politische als Intensität alltäglicher Gefühle (Rede bei der Verleihung des Fontane-Preises für Literatur)', in Thomas Böhm-Christl, ed., *Alexander Kluge*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1983, pp. 310-319.

is to what extent Kracauer realises in his texts the possibility (which is of course also a responsibility) inherent in this view. Clifford Geertz's work on ethnography and on the interpretative nature of social science helped me in my reading of *Die Angestellten*.<sup>51</sup> Lastly, Guy Hocquenghem's contribution to queer theory provided some useful concepts for my analysis of *Georg*.<sup>52</sup> The work of each theorist is introduced in the relevant chapter.

Finally a note on the bibliography: in the selection of the editions I have used I have sacrificed consistency for availability. Thus I have not quoted from the *Schriften*, which are all either already out of print or, in the case of volume 6, have never appeared in the first place, where other editions were in print. For the shorter texts I have used the still easily available *Das Ornament der Masse* wherever possible, and only relied on Volume 5 of the *Schriften*, then Andreas Volk's two collections, and finally the *Klebmappen* in Kracauer's estate (in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach/Neckar) as necessary.<sup>53</sup> *Das Ornament der Masse* has the added advantage that it is also available in an English translation by Thomas Levin, and it was, of course, Kracauer's own selection of texts. For the same reasons I have preferred the Suhrkamp Taschenbuch edition of *Georg* over the now out-of-print volume 7 of the *Schriften*, which includes both novels, even though I have had to fall back on this latter edition of *Ginster*, which, sadly, is currently not available at all. The 1963 edition of *Ginster* by Bibliothek Suhrkamp omits the crucial final

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<sup>51</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, London: Fontana Press, 1993.

<sup>52</sup> Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire* (1972), with a new introduction by Michael Moon, preface by Jeffrey Weeks, Durham: Duke UP, 1993.

<sup>53</sup> *Schriften*, vols. 5.1-5.3, *Aufsätze* ed. by Inka Müller-Bach, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1990; *Berliner Nebeneinander: Ausgewählte Feuilletons 1930-33*, Andreas Volk, ed., Zürich: Edition Epoca, 1996; *Frankfurter Turmhäuser: Ausgewählte Feuilletons 1906-30*, Andreas Volk, ed., Zürich: Edition Epoca, 1997.

chapter. For *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* I have also used the *Schriften*, volume 1, but thankfully both *Der Detektiv-Roman* and *Die Angestellten* have been published separately. My bibliography lists the editions I have actually used; for a full bibliography of Kracauer's work see Thomas Y. Levin, *Siegfried Kracauer: Eine Bibliographie seiner Schriften*, Marbach/Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1989.

# Chapter 1

## Post-war Adjustments: *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* and *Der Detektiv-Roman*

Judging from his publications it seems that the events of November 1918, which ended both the war and the German Empire and inaugurated the Weimar Republic, had little impact on Kracauer. Even his diary only contains the laconic entry 'Revolution!' for 8 November.<sup>1</sup> In an unpublished entry for a competition dating from 1919 he demands a 'Revolutionsjahr' at regular intervals, but this must be seen in the context of his vitalistic view, adopted from his teacher Georg Simmel, that life means continuous change but is under the constant threat of ossification.<sup>2</sup> Kracauer's response to the outcome of the revolution of 1918 is summed up in his statement 'Die demokratische Republik ist die Erfindung der selbstherrlich gewordenen Vernunft'.<sup>3</sup> Although he was to become one of the most powerful journalists, a well known film critic and cultural theorist of the inter-war years, whose work is inextricably linked with the unique culture that developed in Weimar Germany, it took Kracauer some time to turn towards this culture with interest and concern.<sup>4</sup> His

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<sup>1</sup> Unpublished diary, Literaturarchiv Marbach; Ginster later says: 'Revolutionär waren die meisten Leute nur während der Revolution. Ich war es damals noch nicht.' (*Ginster*, p.239) Gerwin Zohlen is wrong when he claims that in an 'emphatische Geste' Kracauer wrote the word 'Revolution' with three exclamation marks. In Kracauer's diary the entry (with one exclamation mark) is followed by two entries about visits to friends, complete with details of his route; Gerwin Zohlen, 'Schmugglerpfad: Siegfried Kracauer, Architekt und Schriftsteller' in Michael Kessler and Thomas Y. Levin, eds, *Siegfried Kracauer: Neue Interpretationen*, Tübingen: Stauffenberg, 1990, pp.325-344, here 327.

<sup>2</sup> 'Sind Menschenliebe, Gerechtigkeit und Duldsamkeit an eine bestimmte Staatsform geknüpft, und welche Staatsform gibt die beste Gewähr ihrer Durchführung'. Entry to a competition by the Moritz-Mannheimer-Stiftung 1919; unpublished typescript, 61 pages, Literaturarchiv Marbach; but cf. Ingrid Belke, who finds this Kracauer's most revolutionary piece of work, 'Siegfried Kracauer als Beobachter der jungen Sowjetunion' in Kessler and Levin, pp.17-38, 21. On the influence of vitalism on Kracauer's early work, see Oschmann.

<sup>3</sup> 'Sind Menschenliebe...', p.17.

<sup>4</sup> Other writers, including Walter Benjamin and Ernst Bloch, relied on Kracauer's help to get their work published at the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, where Kracauer was *Feuilletonredakteur* from

only publication from the year 1918, the poem 'Im Dom zu Osnabrück', provides a glimpse of what preoccupied the then 29-year-old.<sup>5</sup> The poem, which appeared in September of that year, that is to say during the final phase of the war and only weeks before the revolution, describes how the poet, oppressed by the claustrophobia and monotony of everyday small-town life, retreats into the dark cathedral where he suddenly finds himself immersed in a flood of coloured light. The experience, which is given a religious dimension not only by the setting in the church but also through the image of an unseen hand holding the light and the likening of the colours to blood and wine, revives the poet's spirits and enables him to return to the outside world. The world, however, is still perceived as hostile and only becomes bearable because of the cocoon-like, protective afterglow of the experience. 'Im Dom zu Osnabrück' brings together the sense of futility which modern life evokes for Kracauer, religious faith, especially (and curiously, given that he was Jewish) that of medieval Catholicism, as the longed-for sanctuary, and the power of visual perceptions for the trained architect and film theorist-to-be.

This chapter aims to set out the intellectual position from which Kracauer started his journey of discovery through the Weimar Republic, and his attempts to adapt to what Detlev Peukert has called 'a brief, headlong tour of the fascinating, and fateful choices made possible by the modern world'.<sup>6</sup> The texts at the centre of this chapter are *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* and *Der Detektiv-Roman*, although some of the shorter texts, which Kracauer was

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1921 until 1930, when he was moved to the Berlin office of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. To what extent a journalist has any *political* power is a different, but important issue, and will be addressed in Chapter Five.

<sup>5</sup> 'Im Dom zu Osnabrück', in *Osnabrück und seine Berge*, Jahrgang 12 (1918), No. 2, Sept. 1918, (Kriegsnummer 11), p.1; 'Über die Freundschaft' appeared in *Logos*, vol.7 (2), 1917/8, pp.182-208.

<sup>6</sup> Peukert, p.xiv.

increasingly able to publish after he joined the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1921, will also be considered.<sup>7</sup> In his first major publication, *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, which originally appeared in 1922, Kracauer's rejection of modernity as a period where true meaning has been lost finds its most fully elaborated expression. His first published book apart from his dissertation on the art of wrought-iron work, it could be considered as a sequel to the monograph *Georg Simmel*, written in 1919, although to date only one chapter has appeared in print.<sup>8</sup> *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* continues the engagement with the relativism inherent in Simmel's vitalism which Kracauer had begun in *Georg Simmel*. Together with the essay 'Die Wissenschaftskrisis' these texts constitute Kracauer's intervention in a debate about the proper status and methodology of sociology.<sup>9</sup> During a period of profound and wide-reaching transformation, not just in the sciences, but in society at large, this debate exemplifies the struggle over the best ways of dealing with such developments which, as the title 'Die Wissenschaftskrisis' indicates, were perceived as threatening. In Kracauer's *œuvre* those texts represent his early attempts to capture modernity in metaphysical terms, and even to propose a way out of the crisis on that basis. In *Der Detektiv-Roman*, completed in 1925 although not published until 1971, Kracauer demonstrates an interest in existentialist philosophy as an answer to the question that still nags him, namely how to live in a world which has lost the centre that had given it meaning. In this text, however, it already becomes apparent that Kracauer's focus is shifting away

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<sup>7</sup> References in the text are to these editions.

<sup>8</sup> *Die Entwicklung der Schmiedekunst in Berlin, Potsdam und einigen Städten der Mark vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zum Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Worms: Wormser Verlags- und Druckerei GmbH, 1915; 'Georg Simmel' (1920/21), in *Das Ornament der Masse*, pp 209-248

<sup>9</sup> 'Die Wissenschaftskrisis', in *Das Ornament der Masse*, pp 197-208

from the quest for an, if not comfortable, at least bearable place in the world,  
towards a more detached interest in how this modern world functions.

## Epistemological Problems and *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*

Despite his apparent lack of interest in Germany's defeat in the war and the subsequent revolution, Kracauer was immediately affected by them. Like so many *Bildungsbürger*, Kracauer found it increasingly difficult to survive financially and he suffered several periods of unemployment.<sup>10</sup> However, he did not at first tackle the economic or sociological aspects of the crisis. Instead, the collapse of the old order and of the security it had promised, at least to the privileged, appeared to him first and foremost as a spiritual crisis, a loss of meaning. Modernity was, for Kracauer, marked by a fracturing of the unity of the world under one principle, which Kracauer interprets theologically, as God. The sciences played a crucial part in the destruction of the medieval totality which Kracauer frequently invokes; now the same sciences are charged with finding alternative ways of making sense of the world. This section will therefore start with a brief outline of how the crisis in the sciences developed to the point where Kracauer steps in with *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*. Only then will this text itself be presented, together with the flaws in its argumentation. While, as Inka Mülder has elaborated, *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* is rich in internal contradictions, its main shortcoming is that in its 'transcendent' formal sociology it merely sets up a straw science to be knocked down with Kracauer's metaphysics.<sup>11</sup> After this, the realisation that, in spite of his experience of modernity as a tragic loss, Kracauer is actually trying

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<sup>10</sup> See Ingrid Belke and Irina Renz, *Siegfried Kracauer 1889-1966, Marbacher Magazin*, vol. 47/1988, Marbach/Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1989, p. 31 ff for biographical information, diary excerpts etc. Kracauer used his experience of this time for his novel *Ginster*, which will be discussed below.

<sup>11</sup> Mülder, *Grenzgänger*, esp. p. 29.

to defend the diversity of phenomena in the modern world comes as something of an anticlimax.

Both intellectual and material uncertainty were only part of a far more profound crisis of modernity, as Kracauer acknowledged in his 1930 remark 'ist durch Einstein unser Raum-Zeit-System zum Grenzbegriff geworden, so durch den Anschauungsunterricht der Geschichte das selbstherrliche Subjekt.'<sup>12</sup> Richard Sheppard (quoting Hugo Ball, who, in turn, drew on Nietzsche) describes this crisis more fully as a

'transvaluation of all values' [that] involved three major aspects: (1) a change in the concept of what constituted reality; (2) a change in the concept of what constituted human nature; and (3) a change in the sense of the relationship between Man and reality.<sup>13</sup>

The first of these shifts resulted from discoveries in the natural sciences which called into question the stability and predictability associated with Newtonian physics. These discoveries revealed a "metaworld" [where] the principle of causality seemed not to apply, and classical space and time changed from independent and absolutely valid grids of reference into concepts which were relative to the velocity of the object observed and the location of the observer'.<sup>14</sup> This loss of a secure foundation of knowledge for the natural sciences has a direct bearing on 'Die Wissenschaftskrisis', as Kracauer entitled his review of works by Ernst Troeltsch and Max Weber in 1923. This crisis was concerned with the foundations of knowledge in the social sciences, and Kracauer identifies the horns of the dilemma on which these sciences are

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<sup>12</sup> 'Die Biographie als neubürgerliche Kunstform', *Ornament*, pp. 75-80, 76

<sup>13</sup> Richard Sheppard, "The Problematics of European Modernism", in *Theorizing Modernism*, Steve Giles, ed., London: Routledge 1993, pp. 1-51, 13-4

<sup>14</sup> Sheppard, p. 14.

caught as 'sinnlos[...] Stoffanhäufung und unausweichliche[r] Relativismus' respectively.<sup>15</sup>

Secondly, Freudian psychoanalytic theory, especially the concept of an unconscious with the power to control human actions, had a 'corrosive impact [on] nineteenth-century assumptions about the inherent rationality and morality of human nature'.<sup>16</sup> Out of these two instances of loss of security follows, thirdly, a drastic shift in the experience of being in the world; 'a sense of dispossession, of not being at home, is central to the modernist experience.'<sup>17</sup> This experience of what Sheppard calls 'radical alienation' sums up the impression of Kracauer's early writings well, and it also informs, although now in a reflected way, his novels, in particular *Ginster*.<sup>18</sup>

Kracauer repeatedly argues that the structures of modern life which cause such immense discontent among his generation had grown out of the Enlightenment, which he sees as a kind of second, self-inflicted expulsion from the paradise of meaning. *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* begins with a characteristic lament for the lost era of meaning where

alle Dinge auf den göttlichen Sinn bezogen [sind]. Es gibt in [...] einer 'sinnerfüllten Epoche' [...] weder einen leeren Raum noch eine leere Zeit, wie sie beide von der Wissenschaft vorausgesetzt werden; Raum und Zeit bilden vielmehr die unentbehrliche Hülle von Gehalten, die in irgendeiner bestimmten Beziehung zum Sinn stehen. Die ganze Welt wird durch den Sinn überdeckt; das Ich, das Du, sämtliche Gegenstände und Ereignisse empfangen von ihm ihre Bedeutung und ordnen sich zu einem Kosmos von Gestalten. Dem Leben fehlt die schlechte Unendlichkeit und die ganze Fragwürdigkeit einer des Sinnes ermangelnden Epoche; soweit es sich dehnt, es ist überall Gottes voll, selbst der Stein noch zeugt vom göttlichen Wesen. (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.13)

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<sup>15</sup> 'Die Wissenschaftskrisis', p.197.

<sup>16</sup> Sheppard, p.20.

<sup>17</sup> Sheppard, p.26

<sup>18</sup> Sheppard, p.26.

Kracauer bases the notion of an era of meaning in a somewhat romanticised view of the Middle Ages, where an unchallenged religious faith lends order to the world and imbues everything within it with meaning by relating it to God. Thus everything and everyone has their place and can feel secure in it. For Kracauer this concept of an era full of meaning functions as a utopia, it is an ideal which has never been quite real and which recedes ever further from the lives of modern people.<sup>19</sup> It is also - and the quotation above makes that explicit - a stark contrast to the way modern science approaches the world. Kracauer's wish to see science validated by metaphysics sets him against the sciences which attack predetermined meaning in order to replace it with their empirical (and for him therefore inferior) truths.

Thus, even though Kracauer dates the loss of meaning back to the decline of Catholicism, his description actually points directly at the Enlightenment extolment of reason and the development of the sciences as the root of the problem:

[W]enn der bestimmt geformte Glaube mehr und mehr als beengendes Dogma, als lästige Fessel der Vernunft empfunden wird, bricht der durch den Sinn zusammengehaltene Kosmos auseinander und die Welt spaltet sich in die Mannigfaltigkeit des Seienden und das der Mannigfaltigkeit gegenüber tretende Subjekt. (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.13)<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> With reference to the unpublished 'Über das Wesen der Persönlichkeit' Michael Schröter observes: 'Wie die glühenden Farben verraten, handelt es sich um eine Projektion, das positive Gegenbild einer erfahrenen Not, das in eine imaginierte Ära Dantes und Homers zurückgespiegelt wird, im Grunde aber nur die Züge des Mangels trägt, der es erzeugte.' Michael Schröter: 'Weltzerfall und Rekonstruktion: Zur Physiognomik Siegfried Kracauers' in: *text und kritik: Siegfried Kracauer*, vol.68, Heinz Ludwig Arnold, ed., München: Edition text und kritik, 1980, pp.18-40, 21.

<sup>20</sup> For Kracauer's interest in Catholicism see 'Katholizismus und Relativismus: Zu Max Schelers *Vom Ewigen im Menschen*', where Kracauer's criticism of Scheler's ambivalence suggests as much sympathy with Catholicism as impatience with Scheler's relativism; in *Ornament*, pp.187-196. In Kracauer's work Jewish influences were never as powerful as, for instance, in the work of Walter Benjamin. Arguably, Kracauer's fascination with images is positively un-Jewish and put him in opposition to the Frankfurt School's, especially Adorno's, prioritising of the word over the image. Kracauer's brief involvement with the *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus* will be discussed briefly in Chapter Two.

Kracauer is attacking the Cartesian dualism which is the basis of modern science: the split between the diversity of phenomena in the world on the one hand, and the subject which studies it on the other. For the sciences, this creates the problem of how those spheres connect, how knowledge is possible. In Kantian Idealism absolute knowledge can be argued to be unattainable. Human beings receive sensory information from the phenomena surrounding them and bring this information into some coherent order with the help of *a priori* categories such as time and space. Thus science is possible, and although it has to content itself with ultimately limited and provisional knowledge, it can push its limits ever further.<sup>21</sup>

Kantian Idealism had already been challenged, in philosophy most notably by Hegel. For Hegel, consciousness and object are manifestations of the same *Geist*, which is, however, alienated from itself by the (now only apparent) split between the two. The self-reflection of the individual consciousness anticipates the eventual overcoming of the alienation of *Geist* when it, too, recognises itself. But if Hegel thus abolishes the split in the world, he does so by *fiat*, not through an immanent logical progression acceptable in epistemological terms. Although Kracauer devoted many hours to studying Hegel (as well as Kant) with his friend Theodor Adorno, he did not have recourse to Hegelian phenomenology in his work.<sup>22</sup> Even though Kracauer, like Adorno, Lukács, Bloch, Benjamin and other contemporaries, eventually developed an interest in Marxism, where the alienation of *Geist* is replaced

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<sup>21</sup> That the concepts of time and space had become unstable by the turn of the 20th century was part of this process of critical enquiry sparked off by the Enlightenment. Kracauer, who attacked Enlightenment thinking *per se*, paid no special attention to this particular twist in the evolution of modernity at this point.

<sup>22</sup> See Belke and Renz, p.35.

with the alienation of the human being as the central motif, he retained an aversion against Hegel.<sup>23</sup>

In the social sciences, another reaction against the split between subject and object took the form of naturalism. This school of thought 'extends nature to include man. Mind and nature form a single system with those features of nature which make it a subject for science.'<sup>24</sup> The status of sociology as a science is justified by analogy to the natural sciences, which are thus taken to be normative. At the same time man's scope for free action is reduced, human actions become predictable reflexes to external influences.<sup>25</sup> Naturalism - and behaviourism, its practical corollary - by extending the empiricist and positivist foundation of the natural sciences to the social sciences, removes the gap between humans and the rest of the world as objects of enquiry. It does not, however, reflect on the relationship between these objects and the enquiring subject, and thus it slips into the trap later described by Jürgen Habermas as the equation of science as a category of knowledge with the 'faktischen Forschungsbetrieb[...]'.<sup>26</sup>

Despite such challenges to Kantian philosophy, a strong neo-Kantian tradition stood its ground in the social sciences. One representative of this school of thought was Max Weber, whom Kracauer specifically targets in *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*. While he was keen to keep scientific observation free from the intrusions of value judgments, Weber was convinced that

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<sup>23</sup> See Karola Bloch et al., eds, *Ernst Bloch Briefe 1903-1975*, 2 vols, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1985, vol. 1, p.282/3 for Kracauer's criticism of Lukács's Hegelian Idealism.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Hollis, *Models of Man, Philosophical Thoughts on Social Action*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977, p.9.

<sup>25</sup> See Hollis, p.4.

<sup>26</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1973, p.12.

absolute knowledge is unattainable.<sup>27</sup> Arguably - and certainly in Kracauer's opinion - Weber was thus a relativist, who acknowledged that social facts always depend on choices and interpretations made by social scientists.<sup>28</sup> This does not, for Weber, invalidate the findings of those scientists, but it raises the question of the reasons or purposes behind such choices. In his methodology, Weber explicitly gave special consideration to that issue. Firstly, he advocated the use of 'ideal-types', on the understanding that these were useful only in conjunction with a specific approach to a specific problem, rather than necessarily constituting faithful representations. The element of individual choice was thus built into the method. Secondly, Weber argued that choices inform all human action. Consequently, in his view actions could only be understood if those choices and their motives were analysed. This approach to human actions is not merely a matter of intellectual analysis, it also requires empathy, and therefore a certain degree of identification or, in Weber's term, *Verstehen*. Here, too, the scientist's own beliefs must be taken into consideration. But where Weber attempts to negotiate a path between unavoidable subjectivity and desirable neutrality, Kracauer sees only failure and backsliding into relativism. In 'Die Wissenschaftskrisis' Kracauer claims that Weber's 'negativ-religiöse Haltung in ihrer ganzen Dämonie' causes Weber to abandon the search for absolute knowledge altogether by relegating it to the religious sphere, while the sciences are thus thrown open to subjectivity which Weber cannot keep in check.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See Frank Parkin, *Max Weber*, Chichester: Ellis Horwood Ltd., and London: Tavistock Publications Ltd., 1982, p. 32.

<sup>28</sup> See Parkin, p. 31.

<sup>29</sup> 'Die Wissenschaftskrisis', p. 204.

A similar problem is posed by Georg Simmel's approach to sociology.<sup>30</sup> Simmel, Kracauer argues, attempts 'die Welt [...] durch ein allseitiges Ausschweifen vom Einzelphänomen aus zu erobern'.<sup>31</sup> This allows Simmel to inhabit the 'Schicht von Allgemeinheiten, die zwischen den höchsten Abstraktionen und den rein individuellen Begriffen etwa die Mitte einhält', and so to avoid the excessive reduction of the diversity of phenomena to a small number of very general principles.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand Simmel, like Weber, ends up surrendering the 'allüberwölbende Einheit'.<sup>33</sup> Kracauer's attempt to fault Simmel and Weber is, however, flawed itself because of his inconsistent use of the concept of 'Sinn', as Inka Mülder argues:

Einerseits meint der 'Sinn' einen – nach den Prämissen – 'erloschenen' transzendenten Horizont 'göttlichen Sinns', von dem es in der Tat zweifelhaft ist, ob sich wissenschaftlich etwas über ihn aussagen läßt. Andererseits aber spricht Kracauer von der Sinnhaftigkeit historisch-sozialen Geschehens. Hier meint 'Sinn' die Bedeutung, die den intentionalen Äußerungen der Menschen innewohnt. Ob sich diese Bedeutung den Wissenschaften in gleicher Weise entzieht wie der metaphysische Sinn, ist eine ganz andere Frage.<sup>34</sup>

The problem is that for Kracauer those two kinds of 'Sinn' are connected. The first, metaphysical kind of meaning once subsumed the other in his world view, as it encompassed simply everything. But while from the perspective of metaphysical meaning everything was accessible, the reverse is not true:

Die Welt der vergesellschafteten Menschen, die die Soziologie gemäß dem sie konstituierenden Prinzip zu erfassen strebt, gehört einer Sphäre an, die in einem besonderen Sinne als Sphäre der *Wirklichkeit*

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<sup>30</sup> For more comprehensive accounts of the relationship between Simmel and Kracauer see Leo Haenlein, *Der Denkgestus des aktiven Wartens im Sinn-Vakuum der Moderne: Zur Konstitution und Tragweite des Realitätskonzeptes Siegfried Kracauers in spezieller Rücksicht auf Walter Benjamin*, Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1984, esp. pp.74-83; and Johannes Riedner, "Der Begriff der Philosophie im Frühwerk Siegfried Kracauers 1915-1920", Berlin, 1987 (unpublished dissertation), esp. pp.107-167.

<sup>31</sup> 'Georg Simmel', p.227.

<sup>32</sup> 'Georg Simmel', p.229.

<sup>33</sup> 'Georg Simmel', p.230.

<sup>34</sup> Mülder, *Grenzgänger*, p.29.

bezeichnet werden kann und der den Naturwissenschaften zugänglichen Realität jedenfalls übergeordnet ist [...] Soziologie strebt nun danach, diese Sphäre der Wirklichkeit auf Grund einer Erkenntnisabsicht zu durchpflügen, die in einer ganz anderen Sphäre Heimatrecht hat. (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.9/10)

The 'Sphäre der *Wirklichkeit*', as distinct from 'Realität' is familiar from Kracauer's other writings of this period, it is 'von Gesamtmenschen durchwaltet', and can only be grasped by 'vollgehaltigen, durch einen höchsten transzendenten "Sinn" gebannten und geeinten Menschen'. Sociology, however, inasmuch as it is a science, has to be value-neutral, and can only be guided by an 'immanentes Wahrheitskriterium', which does not refer back to metaphysical meaning (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.10). This dilemma is symptomatic for the modern condition where metaphysical meaning, which alone unifies and justifies everything, has been lost and cannot be reconstituted by science.

Nevertheless, the loss of unity and meaning was a precondition for the coming into being of sociology, as far as Kracauer is concerned:

Erst wenn sich die Welt in eine sinnentleerte Realität und das Subjekt spaltet, fällt es diesem anheim, die Realität zu werten oder ihre Seinszusammenhänge zu erforschen, die allgemeinen Gesetzmäßigkeiten des Geschehens herauszuarbeiten oder die als Individualitäten erlebten Geschehnisse in irgendeiner Weise aufzufassen, zu beschreiben und miteinander zu verknüpfen. (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.14)

Sociology is not the only answer to the challenge of restituting at least some meaning to the world. Kracauer distinguishes between two profoundly different perspectives, the 'philosophische Betrachtung [...], die nach dem Sinn und Werte des Geschehens fragt,' and the 'Wissenschaften [...], die sich um reine Seinserkenntnisse bemühen' (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.15). Sociology belongs to the second group and

*hat das Leben der sozial miteinander verbundenen Menschen insoweit zu durchforschen, als das Verhalten der Menschen wie überhaupt alle intentionalen Äußerungen dieses Lebens Regelhaftigkeiten und Wesenszüge aufweisen, die mit der Tatsache und Art der Vergesellschaftung irgendwie einsichtig zusammenhängen. (Soziologie als Wissenschaft, p.16/7, Kracauer's emphasis)*

Together with history, as well as the natural sciences, it therefore has 'mit einer Wertung und Sinngebung ihres Gegenstandsbereichs nichts zu tun' (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.17). That a social science (or indeed any intellectual activity) can be conducted without having recourse to values or to structures which lend meaning to its findings can, however, be seen as a contentious view.

Given that Kracauer sees the sciences, including sociology, as the outcome of an historical shift from a spiritual to a secular world view, he could have taken a different position. As Alan Dawe argues in his essay 'The Two Sociologies', two diametrically opposed approaches to the relationship between individual and society emerged in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup> He calls these 'the problem of order' and 'the problem of control'.

Dawe suggests that the problem of order can be explained in terms of a

conservative reaction to the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. In opposition to what was seen as the subversive rationalism of the first, the traumatic disorder of the second and the destructive egoism of the third, the conservative reaction sought the restoration of a supra-individual hegemony.<sup>36</sup>

Such an approach leads to a 'sociology of social systems' which emphasises 'authority, the group, the sacred and, above all, the organic community', and

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<sup>35</sup> Alan Dawe, 'The Two Sociologies', In K. Thompson and J. Tunstall, eds. *Sociological Perspectives, Selected Readings*, Harmondsworth: Penguin and Open University, 1971, pp 542-554.

<sup>36</sup> Dawe, p. 542.

sees these concepts as determining the individual's actions and the meanings with which he or she loads them.<sup>37</sup>

The 'sociology of social action', by contrast, which addresses the problem of control, springs directly from the Enlightenment itself. In particular it draws on the Enlightenment belief in human perfectibility and on its liberatory impulse: 'the Enlightenment postulated the human, as opposed to a divine construction of the ideal. It fashioned the logical gap between the "is" and the "ought" into a weapon of social criticism.'<sup>38</sup> Here, the individual is perceived as endowed with reason and bound only by reason. External influences such as the church or tradition are seen as constraints which must be overcome if they are in conflict with reason. The individual can, indeed must, 'exert control over existing situations, relationships and institutions in such a way as to bring them into line with human constructions of their ideal meanings.'<sup>39</sup>

Although this second approach to sociology has much in common with Kracauer's work from about 1926 onwards, one might have expected the early Kracauer to adopt the sociology of social systems, given his concern at this point in his career with finding an ordering system to fill the gap left by the demise of religion. But instead Kracauer denies that concerns such as this have any effect at all on properly scientific sociology. Dawe, by contrast, historicises both approaches, as his central argument is that

sociology is ultimately defined by its historical contexts. It is from those contexts that the problems of order and control, and so the concepts and propositions to which they lead, derive their meaning.

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<sup>37</sup> Dawe, p.542.

<sup>38</sup> Dawe, p.547.

<sup>39</sup> Dawe, p.547.

They are generalized expressions of the human, social and moral concerns of their time and place.<sup>40</sup>

Sociology, its claims to scientific methodology notwithstanding, is arguably relative, the meanings of its findings depend on the values against which they are read. This relationship of dependence between the meaning of sociological findings and the scientist's pre-existing values against which they are read is, in fact, exemplified in Kracauer's own reading of Simmel, and in the changes which those readings undergo during the twenties. Thus Kracauer will eventually abandon the notion of sociology as a value-neutral, 'pure' science, which is nevertheless still fundamental to *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*.

If Kracauer sees sociology as different from philosophy in its approach, it is distinguished from the natural sciences in terms of its field of enquiry, namely human affairs. This subject matter itself poses the main problem for sociology, because it represents a 'schlechte Unendlichkeit'. According to Kracauer, 'erschöpfende und zugleich allgemeingültige Bewältigung der materialen Totalität ist lediglich in einer sinnerfüllten Epoche denkbar; freilich handelt es sich in ihr um eine Erfassung des Kosmos durch den Gesamtmenschen' (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.29). In the modern world sociology has to face the stark choice of either aiming for an 'in sich ruhende Systematik von (annähernd) objektiver Gültigkeit' at the price of abstraction to the 'dem "reinen Ich" zugeordneten Sphäre äußerster Formalität', or it pursues the totality, thereby surrendering general validity to the 'historischen Situation und den Wesensbeschaffenheiten der sie [i.e. Weltanschauungen] entwerfenden Individuen' (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.29). In a passage which echoes Kracauer's description of Simmel's world view in 'Georg

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<sup>40</sup> Dawe, p.552.

Simmel', he portrays an 'abschluß- und uferlose Realität' where 'jede Absteckung irgendeines Bereiches erweist sich als vorläufig, jede Einsicht trägt andere Einsichten und wird von wiederum anderen getragen in einem allseitig unendlichen Fortgang' (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.30). In Kracauer's reading, sociology tackles this modern nightmare of chaos by the means of pure phenomenology.

Phenomenology answers, according to Kracauer, the need which sociology has to defend itself - and the sciences in general - against the problem that any merely empirical findings are subject to being disproved by other empirical findings. One could argue that this process of development through hypotheses based on empirical findings, new findings disproving them, and new hypotheses integrating the new findings is how the natural sciences usually progress and account for change in the external world. Inasmuch as the social sciences adopt the methodology of the natural sciences as a model which has proved successful, they may legitimately also adopt their empiricism. Especially when studying a subject as dynamic as human society, a methodology which can accommodate change and development, and historicises its findings accordingly, would appear to have its advantages. While there are grounds for attacking positivism in the sciences, the basis for such a critique is likely to be that positivism claims too much, not too little.<sup>41</sup> It seems that with his dismissal of empiricism Kracauer is really aiming to shore up a link between sociology and Idealist philosophy. As he sets it up, however, this comparison does violence both to sociology and to Idealism. After all, Idealism problematises the subject/object split so resented by Kracauer.

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<sup>41</sup> See for example Jürgen Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse*

Furthermore, Kracauer's insistence on an ahistorical perspective on society again indicates that the specific circumstances of his time are subsumed for him in a rather abstract concept of modernity.

In the second chapter of *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* Kracauer returns to his claim that sociology must find the necessity behind its empirical findings. In yet another passage which reveals more about him than about the subject under discussion Kracauer explains the significance of necessity in terms of the loss of meaning. In a very Weberian phrase he speaks about 'die entzauberte Dingwelt', where 'die Wege des Heils sind verschüttet, und nur die Ideen noch, leuchtende Spuren des einst in der Welt einwohnenden Sinnes haben sich erhalten' (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.35). In the midst of this desolation, the knowing subject attempts to reinstate 'festen, absoluten Grund' through establishing necessities wherever possible: 'Notwendigkeit bannt das Chaos.' (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.35) The cohesion achieved by tracing the necessities which bind together the diverse phenomena confronting the subject is the closest thing to the unity of meaning which can be achieved in the modern world. In order to reveal the necessities relevant to sociology, Kracauer first invokes Weber's ideas of social action, as the proper realm of sociological inquiry. It is social when it is 'oriented', i.e. it has an intention which is connected with others, for instance with their desired or anticipated reaction. It is action - as opposed to other forms of behaviour - when it has a meaning for the subject and is not, for example, carried out merely out of habit. This meaning with which the individual endows her or his actions is a central concept for Weber, it is the basis for his model of human beings as active and (self-) creative. For Kracauer, however, the most significant thing is

not the individual's capacity for creating meaning, but, on the contrary, the possibility of tracing back all social action to the 'notwendigen Beschaffenheiten menschlichen Geistes, in dessen ganzem Wesen, in seiner ein für allemal gegebenen Struktur' (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.36).

Kracauer believes that 'wenn man tatsächlich eine solche Struktur, d.h. einen Inbegriff gesetzmäßiger Äußerungsweisen des Bewußtseins, bzw. des Geistes, entdecken kann, ist damit auch der Unterbau für die Soziologie seiner Verborgtheit entrückt' (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.36). He thus lays the foundation for adopting Husserl's pure phenomenology, which aims at an understanding of the processes and structures of consciousness.<sup>42</sup> Husserl's phenomenology can be said to be 'pure' because it eliminates the distracting and distorting effects of the world of phenomena by 'bracketing' them off. It then focuses on the effects phenomena have on the subject's consciousness. For Kracauer, this reflexive movement is, however, not sufficient:

Damit aber, daß das Ich sich der Mannigfaltigkeit seiner Bewußtseinsgehalte zukehrt, erschaut es immer noch nicht die unabänderliche Struktur des Geistes, sondern bleibt weiterhin in der Erfahrungswelt befangen, wenn auch jetzt in der seines eigenen Innern. Es hebt die mannigfachen intentionalen Äußerungen, die sich ihm entronnen haben und entringen, in einem rein empirischen Verfahren hervor, das je nach dem Standpunkt, den es gerade einnimmt, andere Ergebnisse zeitigt. (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.39)

Thus the necessary next step is to abstract from individual acts of consciousness and to arrive at the categories of the activities of consciousness such as 'Wahrnehmung überhaupt' or 'Urteil überhaupt' (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.40). By applying such a process of abstraction to all manner of experiences, the sociologist will establish the hierarchy of 'Wesenheiten. [die sich] gleichsam zu einem abgestumpften Kegel an[schichten], dessen Basis die

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<sup>42</sup> For an account of Kracauer's use of Husserl see Müller, *Grenzgänger*, pp 26-7.

individuelle Wirklichkeit intentionalen Bewußtseins ihrer ganzen Breite nach bedeckt und sich dicht über ihr erhebt, und dessen oberes Ende die Region der völlig entindividualisierten Wesensgestaltungen bezeichnet' (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.40). The subject which makes these observations mirrors the degree of abstraction of his or her statements: any description of a low level of generalisation involves a profusion of decisions and value judgments about what is or is not relevant to the particular phenomenon at issue. By the same token, the subject who discusses phenomena in the most general terms, at the highest level of abstraction, approximates most closely to the 'pure I':

Der an dem Objekt durchgeführte Entindividualisierungsprozeß vollzieht sich so gleichzeitig auch an dem Erkenntnissubjekt; d.h. in der Region der kategorialen Wesenheiten bewegt sich ein Ich, das, da es keinem einzelnen Menschen mehr gehört und frei von jeglichen Eigentümlichkeiten ist, Einsichten zu gewinnen vermag, die Allgemeinheitscharakter besitzen. Es hat sich gleichsam zum Punkte reduziert und ist bloß noch der Quell reiner objektiver Schauungen, die jetzt auf dem denkbar schmalsten Fundament ruhen, da ihnen der alle anderen Erlebnisschauungen tragende Unterbau der Wertungen, Gefühle, Willensregungen usw. fehlt. (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.42)

The possibility of such a de-individualisation is, for Kracauer, again symptomatic of the loss of meaning in the world. The abstraction represented by ideas is a feeble afterglow of the 'Truth' to which the subject had access in the era of meaning. But despite the loss which is palpable in so much of Kracauer's writings of this period, out of it comes the possibility of knowledge, in this case the knowledge of the relations between people and the world, and amongst themselves. This irony is even more poignant in the case of pure phenomenology, which makes the 'Geist' the subject of knowledge. For Kracauer, it represents

den seither größten Triumph des teuflischen Prinzips über das gottentfremdete Denken im leeren Raum. [Die Phänomenologie] ist ein

Ende, weil mit ihr der bei Descartes anhebende Zersetzungsprozeß des Ichs zum Abschluß gelangt, und sie weist zugleich wie jede Verdammung auf einen Neubeginn hin, weil sie in dem Geist, der nicht mehr weiter sich verlieren kann, wieder die Ahnung von dem allein wesentlichen Sinn wachruft. (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.44)

Above all, at this highest level of abstraction Kracauer believes to have found the necessity he demands of science. In fact, he compares phenomenology to mathematics with respect to the general validity of both their findings. A crucial difference, however, lies in the hierarchical structure of phenomenology as Kracauer presents it. Unlike mathematics, which has unambiguous rules governing all processes at all levels, phenomenology cannot develop the concrete out of the general, i.e. move downwards between levels, without resorting again to empiricism. The 'schlechte Unendlichkeit' which resists, or exceeds, the reconstruction out of abstractions again sets the modern period apart from the era of meaning, where everything could be developed from the central meaning (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.53).

The situation is very similar for sociology, as for Kracauer the 'Topographie des soziologische Raumes' corresponds to that of phenomenology (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.64). Here, too, the cone-like shape can be found, of which only the top, devoid of individuality, has general validity. This level of sociology Kracauer refers to as 'formale' or 'allgemeine Soziologie' (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.67). It is also at this level only that it is possible to make the transition from sociology, which is based in the concrete and individual and progresses upward through generalisation, to phenomenology, which represents the final step in abstraction and 'purity'. Where this connection between a sociological category of the highest order and a phenomenological *Schauung* can be established, the sociological finding is

validated as a 'necessity', beyond the vagaries of empiricism. It is obvious, then, that this connection cannot be made empirically, but - analogous to mathematics - only in a thought experiment.

Kracauer believes that he has been able to show conclusively that pure phenomenology supports the claim, at least of formal sociology, to the status of science. The concern he is left with is the relationship between this unproblematic formal sociology, and material sociology. The conical structure which he imputes to sociology means that any upward movement, i.e. towards generalisation, must follow the only available route. If, however, one wants to move in the opposite direction, towards the specific, there is at every step more than one possible option. This, for Kracauer so troubling, issue is at the centre of his third and last section.

Essentially, Kracauer reiterates his previously mentioned misgivings about the possibility of grasping the diversity, or 'schlechte Unendlichkeit' of the modern world with the kind of rigorous necessity attainable at the highest level of abstraction. Kracauer suggests that the work of most sociologists, not just Simmel who was previously singled out for criticism, remains at too low a level of generalisation for it to reach truly scientific status. Weber's ideal types, for instance, are in Kracauer's opinion inadmissible. Although they are based on abstraction, they are not a pure deduction, but the imposition of a more or less arbitrary scheme onto empirical findings. At any rate, Kracauer writes, 'die materiale Soziologie will tatsächlich das Unmögliche für wahr haben: umfassend erlebte Wirklichkeit abzuleiten aus den Beschaffenheiten der ihres Gehalts entleerten Realität, empirische Erfahrung durchweg zu gründen auf apriorische Erkenntnisse' (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.90). For

Kracauer, the empty sphere of pure phenomenology is simply incompatible with the messiness of the real, modern world and its diversity. Furthermore, at the material level sociology also blurs into both history and psychology, both of which deal with the individual and specific. This, of course, corrupts sociology as a science with a claim to absolute validity. The most devastating blow against sociology for Kracauer is, however, that in pure phenomenology it relies on 'idealistische, beim reinen Subjekt anhebende Philosophie', which is 'gänzlich ungeeignet [...] zur Bewältigung jener konkreten Wirklichkeit [...] die ihre Bändigung durch den Sinn verlangt und auch nur durch ihn empfangen kann' (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.97). Sociology cannot grasp the world because the knowing subject of sociology is radically split off from the world.

Kracauer's demand for a foundation of sociology in philosophy is first and foremost a ploy to demonstrate philosophy's inadequacy for the purpose. Kracauer's criticism of the sciences in general as only being capable of producing results 'die in ganz inadäquater Weise die Sphäre der Wirklichkeit abdecken' (*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.11) might be argued to contain the seeds of a healthy scepticism towards positivism. Thus Jürgen Habermas also complains that in the sciences 'ein Begriff des Erkennens, der die geltende Wissenschaft transzendiert, überhaupt fehlt'.<sup>43</sup> Habermas, writing in the late 1960s, believes that it would be anachronistic to try and return 'unvermittelt in die Dimension der erkenntnistheoretischen Untersuchung', since positivism has so successfully established itself. Kracauer, of course, has a different perspective. He is not concerned with defending Idealist philosophy against positivism but with exposing what he perceives to be its inadequacy. The

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<sup>43</sup> Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse*, p.12.

length to which Kracauer goes in order to prove his point surely militates against the 'emphatische Hoffnung' Michael Schröter sees in Kracauer's 'Beiseiteräumen der unangemessenen Ansprüche des idealistischen Denkens'.<sup>44</sup> Inka Mülder takes the more critical view that

hinter der umständlichen Begründung der 'reinen' Soziologie und ihrer Konfrontation mit der Empirie ist kaum noch zu erkennen, worum es Kracauer auch in dieser Schrift letztlich geht: um die Problematik abstrakter theoretischer Ordnungssysteme, die das Denken von den Phänomenen entfremden, insofern sie auf keine bestimmte Wirklichkeit beziehbar sind.<sup>45</sup>

This view understates Kracauer's fundamental doubt in the ability of any ordering system to grasp 'Wirklichkeit' (which is not divisible into 'bestimmte' and 'unbestimmte'), but Mülder, too, hints at the opening for a concern with the phenomena themselves, even if, for the time being, they are still only a means to approach 'Wirklichkeit'. Such a concern is expressed in *Der Detektiv-Roman*.

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<sup>44</sup> Schroter, p 24

<sup>45</sup> Mülder, *Grenzgänger*, p.29.

## Living in the Real World: *Der Detektiv-Roman*

In 1922, when he began working on *Der Detektiv-Roman*, Kracauer returned to the theme of tension between individualism and submission to a collective, a theme he had already discussed in an essay on 'Nietzsche und Dostojewski'.<sup>46</sup> Kracauer had been fascinated with Nietzsche since 1907, before his encounter with Kant.<sup>47</sup> Nietzsche and Dostoevsky embody two (conflicting) desires which Kracauer clearly felt keenly. In Nietzsche the figure of the man who can rise above his circumstances and who controls his own destiny has great appeal for him, while Dostoevsky teaches the exact opposite: a mystical unity of humanity in God, and a willingness to humble oneself before God. In this 1921 essay Kracauer advocates a kind of dialectic between the two positions as a way out of the misery of modern life: 'Die Seele, die derart an dem einen Ideal sich emporrankt, weil sie an dem andern allzu viel gelitten hat, findet ihre Heimat, denn sie vollendet sich zur Welt.'<sup>48</sup> In his essay 'Die Wartenden', he returns to those extreme positions but with his optimism now suspended.<sup>49</sup> The piece begins with the customary reference to the loss of meaning in the world, or, as Kracauer has it here, the 'Vertriebensein aus der religiösen Sphäre'.<sup>50</sup> This results in lack of orientation, a fragmentation of society into individuals, and relativism. Kracauer sees two obvious escape routes from this spiritual wasteland. One is a principled scepticism, a 'Nichtglauben-Wollen', a lonely existence in the 'schlechte Unendlichkeit des leeren Raumes', which is here personified by Max Weber. Kracauer emphasises the intellectual honesty and the heroism of this position, but he criticises the rather unappealing (and un-

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<sup>46</sup> 'Nietzsche und Dostojewski' (1921), in *Schriften 5.1*, pp.95-109.

<sup>47</sup> See Beike and Renz, p.8.

<sup>48</sup> 'Nietzsche und Dostojewski', p.109.

<sup>49</sup> 'Die Wartenden' (1922), in *Das Ornament der Masse*, pp 106-119.

<sup>50</sup> 'Die Wartenden', p.107

Nietzschean) self-righteousness. This accounts for a turn to hatred and destructiveness, as Kracauer sees it, in Weber's 'Kampf für die Entzauberung der Welt'.<sup>51</sup> The outright refusal to consider a metaphysical dimension of the world condemns this position for Kracauer and attracts his sarcasm:

Die [...] auf dem Gebiete der Geisteswissenschaften und der Menschenkunde gewonnenen Erkenntnisse jedoch, die gerade weil sie reine Erkenntnisse sein wollen, in bestimmter Hinsicht fragwürdig, ja oberflächlich sind, wurzeln in dem Verzicht, und vielleicht schenkt erst der sie durchklingende Unterton der Entsagung ihnen letzte Bedeutung und verleiht ihnen den Glanz der Tiefe.<sup>52</sup>

This is, one might say, the position arrived at by those who would be *Übermenschen* but do not quite have what it takes.

As Kracauer tries to demonstrate in *Der Detektiv-Roman*, the fictional detective often shares that hubris. According to Kracauer the detective embodies the 'emanzipierte[...] ratio' (*Der Detektiv-Roman*, p.11), and 'der Anspruch der ratio auf Autonomie macht den Detektiv zum Widerspiel Gottes selber' (*Der Detektiv-Roman*, p.53). Kracauer sees the thoroughly rational figure exemplified by the detective as ambiguous. On the one hand he is ideal for explaining and dealing with the problems of the modern world – both within the plot of the novel, and by way of an allegory for Kracauer.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, however, this high degree of competence has something blasphemous about it. It allows humankind to forget that a higher, religious sphere exists, that the human self can become 'ganz existent', and that 'das Gelebte ist wirklich', only in relation to this higher sphere (*Der Detektiv-*

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<sup>51</sup> 'Die Wartenden', p.113.

<sup>52</sup> 'Die Wartenden', p.114.

<sup>53</sup> According to David Frisby 'diese kritische Perspektive, die ausdrücklich nicht dem Detektiv im Detektivroman zugeschrieben wird, ist von Kracauer bewußt angenommen worden, eine positivere und aktivere Auffassung des Detektivs, die mit der des kritischen Journalisten und des kritischen Intellektuellen verschmilzt.' David Frisby 'Zwischen den Sphären: Siegfried Kracauer und der Detektivroman' in Kessler and Levin, pp.39-58, here p 51. On the use of allegory in Kracauer and Benjamin, see Frisby, 'Zwischen den Sphären', p.55/6.

*Roman*, p.11). In this theory of meaning, which diverges from the helpless searching for such meaning as it still characterises *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, Kracauer draws on the writings of Søren Kierkegaard; he moves from questions of epistemology to the existential one of how to live after the exit of god-given meaning from everyday life.<sup>54</sup>

In 'Die Wartenden', he had presented a second response to the emptiness of the modern world as a sub-Dostoevskyan religiosity. Kracauer calls those who choose it '*Kurzschluß-Menschen*'.<sup>55</sup> Theirs is a headlong flight into religious revivalism or contemporary spiritualism such as Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy. This search for comfort in faith, however, lacks both the redeeming intellectual honesty of the sceptic and any basis in a 'wirklich errungener Gesamtüberzeugung'.<sup>56</sup> Kracauer argues for a third position, that of 'waiting', as the only possible response. This refusal to choose – which is also a choice – is still motivated by the desire for meaning in the world. Kracauer holds out for a life as a *Gesamtmensch*, which, its nostalgia for a *Bildungsbürgertum* in the style of the era before the industrial revolution aside, entails a religious, spiritual or otherwise metaphysical orientation.<sup>57</sup> The tension between the sphere of everyday life and the high religious sphere Kracauer describes in *Der Detektiv-Roman* comes out of Kracauer's attitude of waiting, transposing the temporal 'waiting' into a spatial reaching.

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<sup>54</sup> For a comprehensive account of Kracauer's use of Kierkegaard, see Mulder, *Grenzgänger*, pp 39-44.

<sup>55</sup> 'Die Wartenden', p. 114

<sup>56</sup> 'Die Wartenden', p. 115.

<sup>57</sup> One of Kracauer's favourite books at the time, his 'Heiligtum', was Adalbert Stifter's *Der Nachsommer*, a belated *Bildungsroman*, which extols at great length the virtues of a comprehensive, classical education. Written in the mid-nineteenth century, it is intensely nostalgic (see Belke and Renz, p.33).

*Der Detektiv-Roman* is also a step forward from *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* in that it explains the philosophical background of the split in the world rather than just postulating it. On this basis Kracauer then proceeds to read the detective novel as an allegory of the working of *ratio* in the modern world, tracing its influence in a series of genre elements. Unlike *Soziologie*, *Der Detektiv-Roman* thus delivers a detailed account of Kracauer's understanding of modernity. In every aspect the detective novel demonstrates for Kracauer that *ratio* rules the modern world, but it also reveals that this rule is a usurpation. *Der Detektiv-Roman* attempts to deliver more than an analysis, though. The careful and detailed analysis of mundane reality is accompanied by an acceptance that the banality of modern life is also part of 'Wirklichkeit', but an incomplete one that has to be oriented towards the higher sphere in order to make it meaningful. Thus in *Der Detektiv-Roman* Kracauer begins to turn his attention towards the surrounding world, rather than just summarily rejecting it. He is still guided by the desire for a whole life as well as by theological principles, but he now thematises the tension between the aspiration towards something supra-individual and the individual's grounding in the base sphere of *ratio*. The shift from the temporal to the spatial metaphor implies a less pessimistic outlook: whereas the era of meaning always carried a sense of tragic loss, because it had irrevocably passed, Kracauer now uses the high sphere as a goal to which man can choose to aspire, to stretch toward.

The other striking characteristic of *Der Detektiv-Roman*, which makes it a bridge between Kracauer's anti-modern work and his later critique of modernity, is that Kracauer uses aesthetics as a medium for his argument. Reading texts, images and other kinds of cultural phenomena, trying to

decipher the philosophical or social structures which they in some way illustrate, becomes a central strategy in Kracauer's work. His theological framework in *Der Detektiv-Roman*, however, prevents Kracauer from reading those texts with an open mind. Below, Kracauer's account of the workings of the detective novel will be outlined and discussed in relation to one of the examples he cites, *Der Meister des jüngsten Tages* by Leo Perutz. Kracauer had also reviewed this book in 1923, during the period when he wrote his study, applying some of his general points from *Der Detektiv-Roman* to this particular example.<sup>58</sup> *Der Meister des jüngsten Tages* confronts precisely the problem which troubles Kracauer, too: the crisis of meaning in the modern world. A comparison of this text with Kracauer's reading of the genre will demonstrate the shortcomings of Kracauer's approach in *Der Detektiv-Roman*. Reversing the order of Kracauer's *philosophische[m] Traktat*, however, the following section will first try to relate Kracauer's reading of Kantian epistemology back to *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* and examine it as the basis of the argument of *Der Detektiv-Roman*.

By the time *Der Detektiv-Roman* appeared, Kracauer's metaphysics had changed somewhat since *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*. Whereas in *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* Kracauer focussed on the impossibility of replacing faith with science, *Der Detektiv-Roman* aims to show how the tension already sketched in 'Die Wartenden' can become the basis of an authentic life. The detective novel exemplifies the modern, intellectual shortcut to 'der emanzipierten ratio', the product of the victory of the 'bindungslose Intellekt' which dispenses with metaphysics and instead deals in empiricism (*Der Detektiv-*

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<sup>58</sup> 'Der Meister des jüngsten Tages', *Frankfurter Zeitung*, vol.68, No.736, 4.10.1923, *Abendblatt, Feuilleton*, p.1

*Roman*, p. 10/11). This seemingly easy option deprives those who take it from experiencing 'Wirklichkeit', and it can and must be avoided. While Kracauer traces the distortion of 'Wirklichkeit' by *ratio* through a whole list of genre elements, it is only in the penultimate chapter that he tries to explain the philosophical basis of his argument. At the centre is the relationship between the individual and the world, between subject and object. In the modern world, dominated as it is by *ratio*, the connection between the two is severely disrupted. Drawing on Kantian epistemology, Kracauer claims that now 'das Objekt erleidet eine radikale Destruktion, damit das Transzendental-Subjekt als Gesetzgeber sich bewährt. Ihm werden denn auch in der ästhetischen Stilisierung die Kategorien zugeschoben, durch die es den Gegenstand erzeugt' (*Der Detektiv-Roman*, p.105). Kracauer means that the abstractions, the stereotypes, which constitute the plot and the characters of the detective novel can be seen as pertaining to objects of perception, as describing or indicating characteristics. Because of the abstractness of such stereotypical characters and plots, though, their relation to actual objects is lost. As a consequence, abstractions in the text can also be (mis-)understood as 'Repräsentanten der dem Subjekt inhärierenden Kategorien' (*Der Detektiv-Roman*, p.105/6). If this becomes the dominant mode of conceiving the relationship between world and individual, as is the case in the modern world dominated by *ratio*, then the world of objects loses its realness. Much of what makes objects what they are is arrogated to the perceiving subject, which thus seemingly gains in power and status. Yet the subject actually loses its proper place within the whole and the capacity for experiencing 'Wirklichkeit' in all its idiosyncratic detail.

This explanation is on the one hand a comment on Kracauer's use of Husserl's phenomenology in *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*. Husserl, too, focuses exclusively on the subject's perceptions, bracketing off the real objects (and the question whether there are indeed real objects) which give rise to those perceptions. Kracauer had already argued in *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* that if it is followed through to the highest level of abstraction, not only from phenomena, but also from the perceiving subject to a transcendental subject, this method is incapable of sustaining a science which addresses the diversity of phenomena. In *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, however, the focus had been on the inability of science to provide a global system of knowledge that could lend meaning to the multitude of phenomena. Here, by contrast, Kracauer shows the effects of this way of thinking on the individual. Real people are fobbed off with *ratio* as a poor substitute for meaning, which becomes ever more elusive, and they furthermore lose their connection with the world, the richness of experience which this entails. The detective novel both exemplifies and, as best it can, responds to this problem.

Attempts at transcendence frequently take the shape of transgressions of the genre conventions. The structural role of the criminal is a key area of such transgressions. In *Der Meister des jüngsten Tages* the narrator, Yosch, comes under suspicion of being responsible for one of the deaths himself. Together with the engineer Solgrub, who later on dies himself, and Dr Gorski, Yosch discovers that the main victims, who had artistic ambitions, took a hallucinogenic drug in the hope of having revelations that would enhance their performance. Instead they find themselves confronted with their greatest fears and flee, in horror, into their death. Perutz thus turns the violation of law,

which is usually the starting point of a detective novel, into a confrontation with existential fear and guilt. According to Kracauer, this attempt 'metaphysische Gehalte in dem Stoff des Kriminalromans auszudrücken' fails because 'man muß schon Dostojewski sein' to bring this off.<sup>59</sup>

The failure lies not in the idea but in the execution. For Kracauer the criminal is the secular equivalent of the heretic, and as such is vital as a reminder that all earthly law is incomplete and needs the orientation towards the divine. In the detective novel, however, the criminal is usually misunderstood. Rather than being allowed to deliver his challenge, he is equipped with all manner of motives, which reduce his metaphysical function to one that remains immanent to the plot, allowing the detective to demonstrate once again the invincibility of *ratio*. Perutz overturns this pattern, in his novel the crime does hold a message about the contingency of human existence, and he even lets the detective, engineer Solgrub, fall victim to it, too – rather than killing himself, though, Solgrub suffers a heart attack when he has his visions. Kracauer's problem with *Der Meister des jüngsten Tages* is that Perutz solves the mystery of the deaths by means of a document which tells the story of an Italian renaissance painter who is the first victim of the drug. In this case there is a real murder, of which the painter is guilty. The victim's brother offers him the drug in order to establish his guilt and to punish him. Kracauer finds this part of the novel 'infolge des Mangels an hier zudem unnötig beanspruchtem dichterischem Vermögen [...] allzu abgeblaßt'.<sup>60</sup> Yet a point which Kracauer does not make, but which is perhaps more pertinent than Perutz's lack of skill, is that the painter's story re-introduces the conventions of a crime with a

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<sup>59</sup> 'Der Meister des jüngsten Tages'.

<sup>60</sup> 'Der Meister des jüngsten Tages'.

motive. The principle of legality, which had been irrelevant in the case of the deaths by suicide, thus suddenly becomes relevant. The rule of the law, in detective novels usually represented by the police, is to Kracauer another aspect of the

Einebnung der Paradoxie durch die abgelöste ratio. Diese vernichtet, wenn sie Weltprinzip ist, alle Mächte, die in der Spannung bestehen und – nicht bestehen, die überhaupt menschliche Existentialität zur Voraussetzung haben: das Recht und seine Durchbrechung, Gesetzliches und Widergesetzliches, und wie die Kräftepaare nun heißen, die sich gegenseitig ausschließen und doch miteinander sind. (*Der Detektiv-Roman*, p.67)

Although the original murder in *Der Meister des jüngsten Tages*, from which the other deaths result, is not subject to an investigation comparable to that of a detective novel, the same principle of legality applies. The murder is a breach of law and of worldly morality and it is uncovered, punished and atoned for. Because the focus is on this quasi-legal process, rather than, for instance, on the existential question of guilt before god, the murder and its solution merely confirm the rule of law instead of reconnecting those who are involved with the higher sphere.

Dostoevsky, whom Kracauer cites as the only writer who has managed to transcend the genre, succeeds because he writes crime fiction rather than detective novels; he eliminates the law and its representatives from his stories.

Statt daß die ratio [den Verbrecher] entlarvt, ohne ihn zu finden, enthüllt er sich selber, um gefunden zu werden. In den 'Kriminalromanen' Dostojewskis ist er der Unglückliche, der die Liebe auf sich herniederzieht, die Frage, die einer Antwort bedarf, wenn die Ordnung erstehen soll – immer aber der Belastete und Verschlussene, an dessen Lösung und Verknüpfung die Rechtfertigung des Geschaffenen hängt. (*Der Detektiv-Roman*, p.96)

In his review of *Der Meister des jüngsten Tages*, Kracauer compares Perutz's work unfavourably with Dostoevsky's. The comparison, however, is

inappropriate; Perutz is no Dostoevsky, but neither does he try to be. He has a different strategy for undercutting the conventions of the genre.<sup>61</sup> Firstly, the origin of the drug is never conclusively established. The doctor, who plays the detective's sidekick, believes it to have come from the Orient and even suspects it might have been the drug used by the Assassins, 'oder eines der Mittel, durch die der Alte vom Berge über die Seelen der Menschen geherrscht hat'.<sup>62</sup> Thus some degree of mystery remains, and it is enhanced by the references to mythology and the Orient. In terms of Kracauer's theory, Perutz represents the tension between the mundane and the high sphere spatially through references to the Orient as that which is radically different from the ordinary world of 1909 Vienna. But Kracauer notes 'so auch ist mit dem Exotischen ein Existentielles gemeint, das in dieser Sphäre räumlich nur aufzeigbar wird' (*Der Detektiv-Roman*, p.83). The strangeness of the Orient is only a representation of that tension, which cannot itself survive under the rule of ratio.

Perutz goes further than such a mere reference to otherness, though. Solgrub, the detective, who is actually an engineer from the Baltic states, is himself marked as different by his strong Slavonic accent; the other characters also gently mock his 'russische Seele'.<sup>63</sup> What really sets Solgrub apart, even from the narrator, Rittmeister Yosch, however, is the fact that he has killed. Yosch will volunteer and be killed in 1914, but at the time of the main events of the novel he has not been involved in any fighting (apart from duels, which,

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<sup>61</sup> The genre of *Der Meister des jüngsten Tages* is, perhaps not surprisingly, a matter of controversy. Like Kracauer, Walter Benjamin reviewed it as crime fiction to which Perutz replied that he had never written a crime novel. Nevertheless in 1946 Jorge Luis Borges included it in an edition of the world's best crime fiction. (See Hans-Harald Müller, 'Nachwort', in Perutz, *Der Meister des jüngsten Tages*, p.242 and p.212 )

<sup>62</sup> Perutz, p.199/200.

<sup>63</sup> Perutz, p.79 and p.25

as a matter of honour, are in a different category altogether). Solgrub, however, has taken part in the Russo-Japanese war where he killed five hundred Japanese soldiers by means of a high-voltage wire. Still haunted by the image of the dead men, he has become an alcoholic.<sup>64</sup> It is presumably a vision of his victims which causes his fatal heart attack. Furthermore, the person who possesses the book containing the story of the Italian painter and the recipe for the drug is the *Spaniole* Albachary, a Sephardic Jew who is both an art dealer and a money lender. Although he, too, is a victim of the book's spell – his son has tried the drug and lost his mind – he is, by virtue of having the book and making it available to the victims, also an agent of the disaster. It could thus be argued that Perutz lets the Oriental, the Other, haunt and even take its revenge for exclusion and exploitation upon the apparently civilised, rational, well ordered world inhabited by Yosch. In *Der Meister des jüngsten Tages* the world of *ratio*, which in Kracauer's view is the real topic of the detective novel, is permanently disrupted and undermined by the intrusion of the irrational or mystical. Furthermore the disruption is also coded in terms of the excluded, repressed or massacred other, which gives the novel an additional, social-critical dimension.

The main device Perutz uses for unsettling the apparent stability of a rational world, a device to which Kracauer pays no attention, is the narration of the novel. Its twenty-two chapters are narrated by Rittmeister Gottfried Adalbert Freiherr von Yosch und Klettenfeld. Yosch, however, is an extremely unreliable narrator. Not only is his account riddled with gaps and contradictions, he himself is also the prime suspect for the first of the deaths.

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<sup>64</sup> Perutz, p. 115.

This is already a complication in the pattern of the detective novel. While Kracauer considers Solgrub as the detective, Yosch himself also tries to prove his innocence. Furthermore Solgrub dies in an experiment, and the solution of the mystery is left to his sidekick, Dr Gorski. The role of the detective is thus split up, and, as Yosch is jealous of Solgrub and feels superior to the cripple Gorski, the representation of the detective(s) is also open to questions. Yosch's version of the events is followed by 'Schlußbemerkungen des Herausgebers', who claims that from chapter nine onwards Yosch's story is the invention of a guilty mind, the result of 'Auflehnung gegen das Geschehene und nicht mehr zu Ändernde'.<sup>65</sup> Significantly, the anonymous editor also asks '[a]ber ist dies nicht - von einem höheren Standpunkt aus gesehen - seit jeher der Ursprung aller Kunst gewesen?'.<sup>66</sup> Since the editor's involvement with the events of the story as well as the relationship between him and the now dead Yosch are left completely unclear there is no reason for the reader to privilege the editor's account over that of Yosch. He, too, may be rebelling against something inevitable or irreversible. The setting of the story is that of a society already in decline, personified by the first victim, a once highly esteemed actor whose career is coming to an end and who has lost his fortune. Both his cultural achievements and his social status are thus disappearing. Yosch's death in the war, which the editor sees as the result of his need to re-establish his honour as an officer and aristocrat, completes the futile end of a doomed civilisation. When the editor prefers to blame Yosch for the death of the actor, and to dismiss the invasion of irrational forces into an ordered society as his feeble

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<sup>65</sup> Perutz, p.206.

<sup>66</sup> Perutz, p.206.

excuse, he perhaps also tries to disavow the extent of the rupture caused by the war.

In his attempt to use the detective novel as a tool to reveal the unnoticed effects of modernisation on society, Kracauer is held back by his preoccupation with establishing a source of meaning. Kracauer focuses on some specific aesthetic phenomena, but here, too, he is limited by his theological approach. This is least damaging in the case of his analysis of the hotel lobby, and Kracauer included it in *Das Ornament der Masse*, as if to rescue this part of the study which was most closely based on a concrete phenomenon.<sup>67</sup> The comparison of the hotel lobby with the church emphasises the meaninglessness of the former, which, especially if one considers the many visual representations of hotel lobbies in films made after *Der Detektiv-Roman* appeared, is plausible also without the theological perspective which Kracauer suggests. Furthermore, the chapter also supports its critique of rationalisation with philosophical arguments. Here Kracauer focuses on an aesthetics that, in the sublime, still had an ethical dimension for Kant, but which has since split off from ethics and degenerated into an empty 'Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck' (*Der Detektiv-Roman*, p.40), represented by the hotel lobby.

In his reflections on irony, however, Kracauer's theological model is more problematic. Kracauer makes a distinction between irony and humour: 'demaskiert und tilgt die Ironie jede Sicherheit des Seienden, die sich als unbedingt gebärdet, so gibt der Humor dem Seienden die Sicherheit, die in seiner Bedingtheit ihm zusteht' (*Der Detektiv-Roman*, p.123). Irony appears as an analytic device, resembling an unleashed *ratio* in its separating and isolating

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<sup>67</sup> 'Die Hotelhalle', in *Das Ornament der Masse*, pp.157-170

effect upon the individual. Humour, by contrast, has a healing quality, reminiscent of Hesse's *Der Steppenwolf*, where laughter signifies an acceptance and transcendence of the limitations of human existence. Humour provides a 'Bekräftigung des Seienden diesseits der Grenze' (*Der Detektiv-Roman*, p.123). This kind of romantic irony, which dissolves (false) certainties, to which Kracauer refers, can also be found in *Der Meister des jüngsten Tages*. As the police do not figure in the novel, but the detective is rather split up into several persons, they relativise each other's claim to have (sole) access to the truth. Solgrub, the engineer and foremost representative of *ratio*, is presented as a guilt-ridden alcoholic, who, moreover, overestimates his own strength and succumbs to the drug himself. Dr Gorski, who provides the final, scientific explanation for the suicides, is also a rather foolish figure: 'Er bot einen Anblick zum Lachen, wie er, klein und ein wenig verwachsen, ein schwärmerischer Gnom, in der Mitte des Zimmers stand und sang und dazu die Saiten einer imaginären Laute schlug'.<sup>68</sup> Both these characterisations are, made by the narrator, who, according to the editor, is lying. But Yosch's unreliability is a further ironic twist which unsettles the claim of *ratio* to the possession of the truth – in the end not one of the four figures is a credible representative of *ratio*.

The unreliable narrator and his juxtaposition to a no more reliable editor foreground the questionability of human efforts to impose meaning on the modern world. Perutz presents the reader with two possible explanations for the events, but they are incompatible with each other. Furthermore, their respective proponents are also shown to be caught up in various historical and

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<sup>68</sup> *Der Meister des jüngsten Tages*, p 38

social constellations which prevent them from accessing an objective, ultimate truth. In the end their failure calls the very possibility of such an enterprise into question. Kracauer does not recognise this twist in his review of Perutz's novel. Indeed, Kracauer's concept of the detective novel as the aesthetic reflection of modern, rationalised society rules out the use of irony as a medium of insight. Instead Kracauer goes on to claim that the effect of the domination of *ratio* is to distort the meaning of irony and of humour.<sup>69</sup> Thus irony, instead of targeting the detective and his pretension to possessing truth, is instead used by the detective, who directs it at the police in order to support his claim. In this use, of course, irony loses its critical edge and becomes a mere gesture.

Eine Geste nur, denn Ironie setzt die letzte Unsicherheit des Überführenden voraus, sonst führt sie nicht, sondern täuscht. Die zur Unbedingtheit emporgesteigerte *ratio* befindet sich aber von vornherein in einer Position, die ihr nicht mehr als die leere Form der Ironie vergönnt; die Anmaßung des Legalen prallt an ihr zurück, statt mit ihr sich in die Beziehung zu fügen. Wenn der Kriminalinspektor zu Anfang in dem Glauben seiner Unfehlbarkeit sich wiegt und am Ende gestehen muß, daß er das Spiel verloren hat, so verdankt er diese Erkenntnis einer Belehrung, die dann nur mit wirklicher Ironie erteilt wäre, wenn sie den Belehrteten zurückzwänge in die Bedingtheit des Lehrers. Da jedoch der Detektiv Unbedingtheit für sich in Anspruch nimmt, ist seine erheuchelte Ignoranz ein billiger Spaß, der nicht dazu dient, auf die gemeinsame Abhängigkeit hinzuweisen, sondern der eigenen Sicherheit das nötige Relief verleihen soll. (*Der Detektiv-Roman*, p.89)

The irony would have to be turned against the detective, too, if the detective novel were to reflect the contingency of human existence, but according to Kracauer this is not possible in a world ruled by *ratio*.

It is, nevertheless, exactly what happens in *Der Meister des jüngsten Tages*. The undecidability between the story told by Yosch and the editor's

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<sup>69</sup> This important point is missed by Eckhardt Kohn in his discussion of Kracauer's use of irony. Cf. Eckhardt Kohn, 'Die Konkretionen des Intellekts', p.47

claim that Yosch is lying is, especially before the horizon of the First World War, a confrontation with the contingency of human attempts to find meaning and even of human life itself. To this extent Perutz transcends the detective novel as a mere aesthetic reflection of a social and historical situation. Thus Perutz is more radical in his undermining of certainty than Kracauer asks for or is able to recognise.

For Kracauer the purpose of either the transcendence of the detective novel (as exemplified by Dostojewski) or of his own interpretation of the genre is to show that *ratio* is the dominant force in the modern world, but also that this *ratio* is only a feeble stand-in for the power, God, which governs the high sphere. Transcendence, as in Dostojewski's work, or interpretation, as carried out by himself, points to this higher truth, which is hidden in the debased sphere of everyday life, but nevertheless has the power to give meaning and purpose to this life. Perutz has no higher truth to offer, he calls all certainty into doubt by pointing to the vulnerability of human life, to the need people have to deny this vulnerability, and to the power thus given to irrational forces. Consequently Perutz already provides a critical analysis of modern society that goes beyond Kracauer's interpretive scheme at this point. Kracauer's fixation on 'revealing' a meaning above the mundane material world prevents him from recognising and engaging with Perutz's view on the possibility of meaning within this world, even when specifically dealing with Perutz's novel.

On the one hand, in the context of Kracauer's later work, *Der Detektiv-Roman* shows the beginnings of an engagement with the real world that had only been abstractly called for in *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*. Kracauer here makes the attempt, as David Frisby puts it, to 'commence with the unreality of

reality and to go beyond the level of appearance', or, in Gertrud Koch's words, he shows that 'die sichtbare Welt wird als Denkfigur analysierbar'.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, he cannot carry out such an analysis while he still claims to know what the answer has to be. It is only when he contemplates the possibility that there is no such answer 'out there', that he can really turn to the material world before him.

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<sup>70</sup> David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity*, p.134; Gertrud Koch, *Kracauer zur Einführung*, Hamburg: Junius, 1996, p.38.

## Chapter 2

### Kracauer as a Materialist Cultural Critic: 'Die Bibel auf Deutsch' and 'Das Ornament der Masse'

Although the presence of Marxist concepts on Kracauer's work from about 1925 onwards is undeniable, precisely how Kracauer encountered Marxist thought and what use he made of it for his own brand of materialist cultural criticism is a more complicated matter.<sup>1</sup> Kracauer did not explicitly discuss Marx's writings in his published work, and a book about Marx and his image of man, which he announces in a letter to Ernst Bloch in June 1926, has never been found.<sup>2</sup> The exceptions to Kracauer's reticence in the matter are two reviews in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*: in June 1926 on the 'Marx-Engels-Archiv', and in October 1927 on the 'Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe. Erste Abteilung, Bd.1/1'.<sup>3</sup> The *Marx-Engels Archiv* was a joint publication of the Moscow Marx-Engels Institute and the Frankfurt *Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung*, the 'financial and administrative body' of the *Institut für Sozialforschung*, to which Kracauer was linked through his friend Theodor W. Adorno.<sup>4</sup> The first volume, which Kracauer reviewed in the latter article, contained amongst others the Feuerbach section of *Die Deutsche Ideologie*, which did not appear in full until 1932.

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<sup>1</sup> See Mülder, *Grenzgänger*, pp. 57-60; Johanna Rosenberg, 'Nachwort', in *Der verbotene Blick*, Leipzig 1992, pp. 356-365; Jay 'The Extraterritorial Life', pp.62-65.

<sup>2</sup> Bloch, *Ernst Bloch Briefe*, p.284; also see Frisby, *Fragments*, p.126, and Jay, 'The Extraterritorial Life', p.62

<sup>3</sup> 'Marx-Engels-Archiv', in *Frankfurter Zeitung* 20.6.1926, 2. Morgenblatt, Literaturblatt, p.7, 'Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe. Erste Abteilung, Band 1, erster Halbband', in *Frankfurter Zeitung* 23.10.1927, 2. Morgenblatt, Literaturblatt, p.5.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, p.9.

Kracauer characterises the piece as ‘ein bedeutender Fundort der Motive, denen die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung entspringt’. He also comments on an article by A. Deborin, who at that time was the ‘offizielle Moskauer Staatsphilosoph’, in the same volume. Deborin disapproved of Kant’s “‘Subjektivismus” [der] die Kluft zwischen der Erscheinung und dem Ding an sich verabsolutiere’, a criticism which Kracauer shares only up to a point. As he had demonstrated in *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, Kracauer too felt deeply affected by the split Kant had postulated, and Deborin’s confidence that the dialectic would eventually overcome this split clearly seemed silly to him. Yet he finds Deborin’s ‘Radikalismus’ more relevant than ‘die meisten unserer epigonenhaften Philosophiesysteme, die reine Ideologien sind’, a view which is also consistent with the disillusionment with idealist philosophy Kracauer had expressed in *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*.<sup>5</sup>

In April 1926, a few months before his review of the *Marx-Engels Archiv*, Kracauer published ‘Die Bibel auf Deutsch’, his attack on Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig’s translation of the Old Testament into German.<sup>6</sup> He used what was ostensibly a review of Buber and Rosenzweig’s work as an opportunity to establish himself as henceforth a materialist cultural critic. As Inka Mülder points out, the hypothesis that Kracauer was introduced to Marxism by Ernst Bloch, as proposed for example by Eckhardt Köhn and Karsten Witte,<sup>7</sup> is not supported by the evidence of Bloch and Kracauer’s

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Marx-Engels-Archiv’.

<sup>6</sup> References to this will be made in brackets in the text.

<sup>7</sup> cf. Köhn, ‘Die Konkretionen des Intellekts’, p. 48; and Karsten Witte, ‘Nachwort’, in *Das Ornament der Masse*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1963, pp. 333-347, 338. This erroneous assertion is also taken up by Stefan Oswald, ‘Die gebrochenen Farben des Übergangs. Zum Essay-Band *Das Ornament der Masse*’, in *text und kritik*, pp. 76-81, 77.

correspondence.<sup>8</sup> It is quite clear that their friendship only began when Bloch complimented Kracauer on ‘Die Bibel auf Deutsch’.<sup>9</sup> The letters the two men exchanged do not mention the Marx-Engels Archiv, so this discovery, too, was not due to Bloch. What the letters do reveal, however, is that Kracauer had followed the intellectual development of Georg Lukács, whose *Theorie des Romans* he had reviewed admiringly in 1921, and who in the meantime had shaken orthodox Marxism with *History and Class Consciousness*.<sup>10</sup> Kracauer also takes up a passing remark of Bloch’s about Karl Korsch, whose *Marxismus und Philosophie* had had a similar impact to *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, and reports a conversation he had had with Korsch.<sup>11</sup>

If Bloch cannot himself be considered to have had any influence on Kracauer’s initial interest in Marxism, their correspondence still provides insights into the nature and the limits of this interest, as do Kracauer’s two main attempts to outline his materialist theory, ‘Die Bibel auf Deutsch’ and ‘Das Ornament der Masse’.<sup>12</sup> Both essays will be discussed in this chapter, and will be related to the works by Lukács and Korsch which appear to have played a role in the development of Kracauer’s materialism. As a further step, there will be an analysis of the narrative strategies employed in ‘Das Ornament der Masse’, examining how Kracauer positions himself in relation to the social phenomena he studies. Introducing two other short texts which use similar scenarios to ‘Das Ornament der Masse’, Robert Walser’s ‘Ovation’ and Franz Kafka’s ‘Auf der Galerie’, the chapter will conclude by suggesting that the

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<sup>8</sup> cf. Mülder, *Grenzgänger*, p. 56/7

<sup>9</sup> cf. Bloch, *Ernst Bloch Briefe*, p. 269ff.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Georg von Lukács’ Romantheorie’, in *Schriften 5.1*, pp. 17-23, Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* (1923), Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1983.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Korsch, *Marxismus und Philosophie* (1923), edited and introduced by Erich Gerlach, Frankfurt/Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1971.

<sup>12</sup> References to this will be made in brackets in the text.

commitment to social change which underlies Kracauer's materialism is compromised by his detachment from the masses through his pose of the *flâneur*.

## A Demonstrative Break: 'Die Bibel auf Deutsch'

Although Kracauer did not review *Marxismus und Philosophie*, some of its main concepts seem to have made an impact on him. Korsch maintains that culture, or that what is all-too-easily dismissed as a society's 'ideology', is connected to the relations of production of that society in ways which are rather more complex than orthodox Marxism assumes. As 'Die Bibel auf Deutsch' is Kracauer's first public pledge to a materialist approach to culture, the question of what culture means in relation to social and material conditions is obviously of great importance. The thrust of his argument and the topics he pursues subsequently indicate quite clearly that Kracauer makes assumptions about the role of culture in society which echo Korsch's views, rather than orthodox Marxism. It therefore makes sense to consider the main points of *Marxismus und Philosophie*. 'Die Bibel auf Deutsch' is, however, a text with a fair amount of personal and political baggage attached to it, which has its own momentum. The main element here is the religious revivalism around which the text revolves. On the one hand Kracauer's own previous sympathies for this type of world-view appear to make him all the more harshly critical of it now that he has outgrown it. On the other hand, the fact that it is specifically a Jewish revivalism that is being attacked here had its own resonance then as it does today. The context of Kracauer's relationship to Jewish culture therefore merits some attention first. Finally, the text itself will be considered, in particular with reference to those inconsistencies and ambiguities which reappear in 'Das Ornament der Masse' and therefore would seem to be particularly important in Kracauer's thinking.

By 1926 Kracauer's determination to make a public break with metaphysics of a kind he himself had still embraced in *Der Detektiv-Roman* expressed itself in a forceful, even polemical rejection of Buber and Rosenzweig's beliefs. Kracauer had actually known Franz Rosenzweig since 1921, when he had followed Rosenzweig's invitation to lecture at the *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt, where Buber was also active.<sup>13</sup> Because of Kracauer's stammer the lectures were not entirely successful. There were also personal differences between Kracauer and Rosenzweig even then, when Kracauer was still basically in sympathy with the aims of the *Lehrhaus*. Thus Rosenzweig caricatured Kracauer's search for 'jene[] große[] schöne[] runde[] Einheitstorte, die im "Mittelalter" ein gütiger Konditor einer "gottnahen" Menschheit fertig ins Haus lieferte, zum Weltanschauungsnachtisch'.<sup>14</sup> Kracauer, on the other hand, mocked Rosenzweig who 'schwätzt von Gott und der Erschaffung der Welt, als ob er bei allem dabei gewesen wäre und auch Buber ist Gnostiker und Mystiker'.<sup>15</sup>

Although Kracauer, like Buber and Rosenzweig, was Jewish, it seems that this fact with all its social and even political implications plays hardly any role at all for Kracauer. His early, metaphysically or religiously motivated work invokes, as Rosenzweig's gloss suggests, a medieval idyll of harmony and security in one faith. Although Kracauer does not specify this, the image implies Catholicism as the dominating faith of medieval Europe. The 1918 poem 'Im Dom zu Osnabrück' further adds to the impression that Kracauer did not feel strongly about his Jewish identity and had no qualms about seeking

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<sup>13</sup> Belke and Renz, p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in: Lesch, Martina and Lesch, Walter, 'Verbindungen zu einer anderen Frankfurter Schule: Zu Kracauers Auseinandersetzung mit Bubers und Rosenzweigs Bibelübersetzung' in Kessler and Levin, pp. 171-193, 177.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Belke and Renz, p. 37.

religious reassurance in a Christian setting. Even his series of lectures for the Jewish *Lehrhaus* dealt with 'religiöse Strömungen der Gegenwart', again reinforcing the impression that Kracauer's religious interests were eclectic rather than particularly Jewish.<sup>16</sup> His choice of the word 'Bibel' for his review, as opposed to Buber and Rosenzweig's own choice 'Die Schrift', even suggests a deliberate distancing from the tradition which he shares with the two translators.<sup>17</sup>

Buber, whose *Ich und Du* Kracauer had reviewed with sympathy and with respect in 1923, had found his answer to the challenge of modernity in the 'ideal of a close-knit, actively religious community best represented by the Eastern Jews'.<sup>18</sup> This involved a rejection of assimilation, which, since the Enlightenment, had been the Jews' part of a bargain that in return promised them tolerance and equality. The deal had not been kept, anti-semitism was on the increase, and the ideal of the assimilated Jew had descended into the stereotype of the over-rational, morbidly introspective, hopelessly impractical Jewish intellectual. For Buber, salvation lay in a return to the roots of 'Blut', 'Schicksal', and 'kulturschöpferische Kraft - soweit sie durch die aus dem Blut entstandene Eigenart bedingt wird.'<sup>19</sup> However, as Ritchie Robertson

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<sup>16</sup> Belke and Renz, p.35.

<sup>17</sup> Whatever choices Kracauer made with regard to religious faith, being Jewish was part of his identity. In the Wilhelmine Germany of his childhood he experienced discrimination, adding to his sense of isolation, as Adorno suggested in 'Der wunderliche Realist' (in *Noten zur Literatur III*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/Main 1965, pp. 83-108) and as others have argued since, see e.g. Jay, 'The Extraterritorial Life', p.51/2, Ingrid Belke, 'Identitätsprobleme Siegfried Kracauers (1989-1966)', Wolfgang Benz and Marion Neiss, eds, *Deutsch-jüdisches Exil: Das Ende der Assimilation? Identitätsprobleme deutscher Juden in der Emigration*, Berlin: Metropol, 1964 pp.45-65, 47.

<sup>18</sup> 'Martin Buber', in *Schriften 5.1*, pp 236-242; Ritchie Robertson, *Kafka: Judaism, Politics and Literature*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1985, p.143

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Robertson, p.144.

emphasises, Buber did not have biological concepts of race in mind, but a 'mystical sense of union', a nuance which Kracauer rather ignores.<sup>20</sup>

For the translation of the Bible their rejection of rationality meant that Buber and Rosenzweig understood the Old Testament as 'a Voice in an existential, dialogic relationship between a divine I and a mundane Thou'.<sup>21</sup> This belief that the Bible can and must address the faithful directly in their own time is the real starting point of Kracauer's critique. He argues that Rosenzweig and Buber's translation fails to live up to this claim to truth which the Bible makes:

Das durch seinen Wahrheitsanspruch legitimierte Verlangen, unmittelbar in die Gegenwart zu wirken, stellt das rein ästhetisch Gebotene hinter die Erkenntnispflichten des Übersetzers zurück, da es vorab den Punkt ihn finden heißt, an dem die von dem Wort gefaßte Wahrheit in die Zeit eindringen könne, auf die sie als Wahrheit Bezug haben muß. ('Die Bibel auf Deutsch', p.175)

In order to allow the Bible to make its mark on their time, Buber and Rosenzweig would have had to establish first in what way it is relevant to this time. According to Kracauer, this was easy enough for Luther, whose translation of the Bible into German had a revolutionising effect on a society which was marked by class division, but where 'das weltliche Denken die Emanzipation vom theologischen noch kaum begonnen hat' ('Die Bibel auf Deutsch', p.176). The point in history, however, at which Buber and Rosenzweig try to intervene with their translation is marked by the domination of the profane, particularly by economics. Religion quite simply does not matter anymore, in fact it becomes a distraction.

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<sup>20</sup> Robertson, p. 152.

<sup>21</sup> Martin Jay, 'The Politics of Translation. Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin on the Buber-Rosenzweig Bible', *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute* 21, 1976, pp 3-24, 10

His condemnation of religion as irrelevant does not necessarily mean that Kracauer had completely abandoned any religious convictions, but it does banish them from the social sphere. Some Kracauer scholars maintain, often with his late work in mind, that religious and specifically Jewish motives retain an influence on Kracauer's thinking. Miriam Hansen for instance locates Kracauer in 'a larger tradition [of] Jewish intellectuals [...] who direct reading skills developed in the interpretation of sacred and canonical texts to the spaces and artefacts of modern urban life, trying to decipher a hidden subtext that is referred to as redemption'.<sup>22</sup> While it may be legitimate to trace such influences in some of Kracauer's work, in 'Die Bibel auf Deutsch', the essay which in effect establishes Kracauer as a serious, materialist cultural critic, he explicitly makes the point that religion has no role to play in the analysis of contemporary culture; he clearly presents religious revivalism as standing in the way of economic, political and social change.

Kracauer's most savage comments are reserved for the language that Buber and Rosenzweig choose for their translation. Kracauer mocks with great relish phrases like

"Braus Gottes brütend allüber den Wassern". Welcher Zeitgeist den Braus ausgebrütet hat, wird aus der Tatsache deutlich, das sie Hochgaben höhen, Wolken wölken und Schlachtvieh schlachten [...] Nicht der Bibel entsteigt der Ruch dieser Alliterationen, eher den Runen schon, wie sie Richard Wagner begriff. ('Die Bibel auf Deutsch', p.180)

Kracauer targets such archaisms for their reactionary connotations. Thus the language used by Buber and Rosenzweig harks back to the 'altertümelnden Neuromantik des ausgehenden 19. Jahrhunderts' ('Die Bibel auf Deutsch',

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<sup>22</sup> Miriam Hansen, 'Mass Culture as Hieroglyphic Writing: Adorno, Kracauer, Derrida' in *New German Critique*, vol.56, Spring/Summer 1992, pp.43-73, 63

p.180/1). It certainly contrasts sharply with a modern German language (including Kracauer's journalistic style of the time),

deren Form und Kategorienmaterial das Bewußtsein ausdrückt, daß die wesentlichen Ereignisse heute auf profanem Boden sich abspielen. Wie enthaltsam und negativ diese Sprache auch sei, sie allein hat die Notwendigkeit für sich, denn sie allein bildet sich an dem Punkt, an dem die Not gewendet werden kann. ('Die Bibel auf Deutsch', p.179)

'Die Bibel auf Deutsch' inevitably sparked off an acrimonious row between the *Lehrhaus* and the *Frankfurter Zeitung* which centred on Kracauer's attacks on the language of the translation. Much was made of the fact that Kracauer did not, in fact, speak Hebrew, and was therefore not considered to be a competent judge of the translation on its own terms. Some scholars have more recently echoed this view, repeating a criticism, which, however accurate it may be, misses the political point Kracauer is making.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps more to the point has been Martin Jay's insistence that Buber's Zionism is hardly equivalent to a Wagnerian nationalism, as Kracauer seems to suggest.<sup>24</sup> In Buber and Rosenzweig's defence, Jay points out that 'Zionism, [an] idealist socialism[...], and various brands of Marxism were among the most hotly contested alternatives'.<sup>25</sup> Jay outlines the disenchantment many Jewish intellectuals felt in the 1920s with a liberal tradition which was increasingly failing even to protect them from mounting anti-Semitism, and which had proved unable to achieve true equality. In his all-round attack on anti-modern nostalgia Kracauer fails to acknowledge this very real basis for

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<sup>23</sup> Lesch and Lesch, p. 187; Jay, 'Politics', p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Jay, 'Politics', p. 16; similar points are made by Robertson and Mulder

<sup>25</sup> Jay, 'Politics', p. 5.

Buber and Roscnzweig's rejection of 'liberalism and its intellectual underpinnings in universalist, formalist rationality'.<sup>26</sup>

His warning against nostalgia ties in with Kracauer's suspicion of the cult of the community. Drawing on a set of opposite terms with great resonance at a time when modernity was frequently experienced as a threat to a more wholesome, traditional way of life, Kracauer adopts Ferdinand Tönnies's terms *Gemeinschaft*, meaning a 'primary, small, traditional, integrated' community, and *Gesellschaft*, which refers to 'impersonal, secondary, large, socially differentiated' society.<sup>27</sup> In 'Die Bibel auf Deutsch' they appear as religiously motivated and outdated *Gemeinschaften* versus modern *Gesellschaft*:

[D]en Gemeinschaften der positiven Religionen steht die Gesellschaft als zu sich selbst gekommene Größe mit eigenen Begriffen und Zielsetzungen gegenüber. Bei ihr, nicht bei jenen, ist in der Gegenwart die Aktualität. Sie ist genau dort stets, wo das Zusammenleben der Menschen in der Wahrheit entscheidend gefährdet wird. Als faktisches Hindernis des rechten Miteinanders aber sind die wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Machtverhältnisse erkannt, die bis in die letzte Verzweigung hinein die geistige Struktur der heutigen Gesellschaft bedingen. ('Die Bibel auf Deutsch', p.177)

Kracauer rejects the *Gemeinschaften* as anachronistic, and declares that *Gesellschaft* is the category appropriate to modern life. This does not imply that his stance towards *Gesellschaft* is positive. On the contrary, *Gesellschaft* is relevant precisely because it is flawed; the flaw is its lack of truth, the same concept which Kracauer used earlier to characterise the Bible's fundamental claim. Thus despite his recognition of his own previous, anti-modern stance of nostalgia for a community as anachronistic, the motivating force behind it,

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<sup>26</sup> Jay, 'Politics', p.7.

<sup>27</sup> Seymour M. Lipset, 'Value Patterns, Class and the Democratic Polity: The United States and Great Britain' in *Sociological Perspectives: Selected Readings*, K. Thompson and J. Tunstall, eds., Harmondsworth: Penguin and Open University, 1971, pp.316-330, 316.

Kracauer's longing for a life in truth, is retained and now fuels his Marxist-materialist critique of modernity. This becomes even clearer in his letter to Bloch from 29 June 1926, where he explains:

Der Begriff der Gemeinschaft ist von dem Gegenbegriff der 'Gesellschaft' her konstruiert, der zwar die natürlichen Bindungen der Gemeinschaft auflöst, aber nicht den realen Menschen einsetzt, sondern den verdinglichten. Der Traum, die äußerste Bestimmung des echten Anarchismus ist der: 'Verein freier Menschen' (Marx). Belastet man diese Worte so schwer, wie sie es verdienen, so hat man an ihnen eine Norm, von der aus die Begriffe der Gemeinschaft und der Gesellschaft der Kritik unterliegen.<sup>28</sup>

Kracauer aligns himself with an anarchist and utopian aspect of Marx's thought, which allows him to retain his negative position vis-a-vis modernity. The specifically Marxist focus on the economic now also allows him to sharpen it up into a much more specific, critical interpretation of modernity: 'der Ort der Wahrheit selber ist darum gegenwärtig inmitten des "gemeinen" öffentlichen Lebens; nicht weil das Wirtschaftliche und Soziale für sich allein etwas wäre, sondern weil es das Bedingende ist.' ('Die Bibel auf Deutsch', p.178)

In the case of the Bible translation, this means that Buber and Rosenzweig crucially miss the real danger to the 'Zusammenleben der Menschen in der Wahrheit,' which consists in the 'wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Machtverhältnisse [...], die bis in die letzten Verzweigungen hinein die geistige Struktur der heutigen Gesellschaft bedingen' ('Die Bibel auf Deutsch', p.177). This statement is Kracauer's most explicit statement of the materialist basis for his social theory, and here he moves closer to a form of determinism than in any of his other writings. Kracauer's invocation of the dialectic even sounds almost Hegelian: the increasing domination of the

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<sup>28</sup> Bloch, *Briefe*, p.281.

economic over the cultural is necessary in what appears to be an orthodox Marxist belief in 'logischer Zwang im Geschichtsprozeß' ('Die Bibel auf Deutsch', p.177). Kracauer's position, which he will elaborate in 'Das Ornament der Masse', is that the increasingly crude obviousness of economic domination is the precondition for social change:

Denn sind an der Eigenmacht der materiellen Faktoren die mit ihnen verkoppelten kulturellen Gebilde zuschanden geworden, so kann nicht anders eine Ordnung erzielt werden als durch die Veränderung dieser Faktoren, die wiederum ihr nacktes Hervortreten aus allen sie bergenden und verbergenden Hüllen zur Voraussetzung hat. ('Die Bibel auf Deutsch', p.177/8)

Again, Kracauer is clear that the material factors are what matters: not only do they have to be changed if a new, better order is to be achieved, culture is also contingent upon them. However, certain contradictions in this account mean that it cannot quite be reduced to a vulgar-Marxist position. On the one hand, Kracauer here paraphrases the Communist Manifesto, which describes the overthrow of feudal by bourgeois society in similar terms: 'Sie [die Bourgeoisie] hat, mit einem Wort, an die Stelle der mit religiösen und politischen Illusionen verhüllten Ausbeutung die offenen, unverschämte, direkte, dürre Ausbeutung gesetzt.'<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, and especially in the light of Kracauer's readings of cultural manifestations, the image of culture as simply a sheltering and concealing cover for economic factors is at odds with the idea that culture is wrecked by economics as a matter of course. This latter view implies the presence of conflict between the two spheres, which is only possible if culture has at least some residual autonomy.

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<sup>29</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifest der kommunistischen Partei* (1848), in: *Werke*, vol.4, Berlin: Dietz, 1969, p.465.

Furthermore, the oppositional potential of cultural phenomena is implied in Kracauer's insistence that they be paid attention. The idea that breakdowns in culture reveal economic domination is at the same time a call for vigilance, so that such cracks can be put to revolutionary use: 'Je mehr Löcher und Spalten, desto unverstellter der Blick.'<sup>30</sup> Kracauer's own work aims to do just that, beginning with his critique of the Bible translation. His objection to Buber and Rosenzweig is precisely that their contribution to contemporary culture not only fails to reveal the dominance of the profane, but positively obscures it by perpetuating the illusion of the private individual. This is implicit in Buber and Rosenzweig's understanding of the Bible as a dialogue between God and the faithful, whereas for Kracauer, in a world dominated by capital, the 'real' human being is impossible.

Kracauer effectively has to battle on two fronts in his 'manifesto': the most pressing opponent is the religious or philosophical tendency to deny the importance of everyday material phenomena for an understanding of the current situation and as an indicator for the need for change. In order to see off this pernicious and paralysing influence, though, Kracauer also has to guard against vulgar Marxist determinism, which dismisses culture as part of the superstructure determined by the economic base, and thus incapable of having any effect upon that base and consequently unworthy of attention. It is this double focus which links Kracauer to Korsch. As the title already suggests, in *Marxismus und Philosophie* Korsch addresses the relationship between revolutionary praxis and theory. He wants to define 'true' Marxist theory in opposition not only to bourgeois philosophy but also to revisionist socialism

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<sup>30</sup> Bloch, *Briefe*, p.381.

and the orthodox, or as he calls it, vulgar Marxism of the Second International, which still dominated organised Marxism in the 1920s. Quoting Hegel, Korsch argues that ideas and social practice are dialectically interlinked: 'jede Philosophie [kann] weiter nichts sein [...] als "ihre Zeit in Gedanken erfaßt"'<sup>31</sup> This is true for the past, where Hegel's own ideas, even after they had waned from academic philosophical discourse, had survived in the bourgeois revolutionary movements of the 1840s.<sup>32</sup> After these movements faltered,

[tritt] an die Stelle des Ausgangs der klassischen deutschen Philosophie [...] der Übergang dieser Philosophie, die den ideologischen Ausdruck der revolutionären Bewegung der bürgerlichen Klasse gebildet hatte, in jene neue Wissenschaft, die nunmehr als der allgemeine Ausdruck der revolutionären Bewegung der proletarischen Klasse auf der Bühne der ideengeschichtlichen Entwicklung auftritt, das heißt ihr Übergang in die Theorie des 'wissenschaftlichen Sozialismus' in der Gestalt, in der diese Theorie von Marx und Engels in jenen Vierziger Jahren zuerst formuliert und begründet worden ist.<sup>33</sup>

Following a similar pattern, Korsch traces the degeneration of Marxist thought into 'vulgar-Marxism': in the period leading up to the First World War, socialist practice increasingly limited itself to reformism; the reformists 'hatten längst theoretisch wie praktisch die politischen, sozialen und kulturellen Reformen im bürgerlichen Staat an die Stelle der ihn erobernden, zerschlagenden und an seiner Stelle die Diktatur des Proletariats errichtenden sozialen Revolutionen gesetzt.'<sup>34</sup> In reaction to this, an 'orthodox' Marxism evolved:

die Orthodoxen aber hatten sich damit begnügt, diese Lösungen der Fragen der Übergangsepoche als Frevel an den Grundsätzen des Marxismus zurückzuweisen. Sie hatten aber mit all ihrem orthodoxen Festhalten am abstrakten Buchstaben der marxistischen Theorie deren

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<sup>31</sup> Korsch, p.85.

<sup>32</sup> Korsch, p.81-3

<sup>33</sup> Korsch, p.86/7.

<sup>34</sup> Korsch, p.106.

ursprünglich revolutionären Charakter doch nicht wirklich festhalten können.<sup>35</sup>

Having thus applied the dialectical method to Marxism itself, Korsch argues that

auch die wissenschaftliche Theorie des Marxismus wieder, und zwar nicht im Wege einfacher Rückkehr, sondern in einer *dialektischen Weiterentwicklung*, das werden [muß], was sie für die Verfasser des Kommunistischen Manifestes gewesen ist: eine alle Gebiete des gesellschaftlichen Lebens als Totalität erfassende Theorie der sozialen Revolution.<sup>36</sup>

This has the for orthodox Marxists disturbing implication for ‘Marxist doctrine [...] that its own substantive theses have only restricted validity and must therefore be subjected to periodic revision’.<sup>37</sup>

Ideology must, according to Korsch, also be seen as a ‘materieller (das heißt hier: ein theoretisch-materialistisch in seiner Wirklichkeit umzuwäzender) Bestandteil der geschichtlich-gesellschaftlichen Gesamtwirklichkeit’.<sup>38</sup>

With this statement Korsch reacts against what he perceives to be a vulgar-Marxist tendency to merely dismiss ‘ideology’. Instead, Korsch argues, ‘für den modernen dialektischen Materialismus ist es wesentlich, daß er solche geistigen Gebilde, wie die Philosophie und jede andere Ideologie, vor allem aber einmal als Wirklichkeiten theoretisch auffaßt und praktisch behandelt’.<sup>39</sup>

In other words, philosophies and other ideological systems, high art for example, are part of the social totality, but not in any simple way determined by it: ‘Korsch insists [...] that the relationship between, say, bourgeois philosophy and class interest is complex and highly mediated, and he contends

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<sup>35</sup> Korsch, p.106.

<sup>36</sup> Korsch, p.110.

<sup>37</sup> Steve Giles, *Bertolt Brecht and Critical Theory: Marxism, Modernity and the ‘Threepenny’ Lawsuit*, Berne: Peter Lang, 1997, p.90.

<sup>38</sup> Korsch, p.117.

<sup>39</sup> Korsch, p.112.

that the more abstract ideologies generally stand in a relatively tenuous relationship to the economic base.<sup>40</sup> Thus, ideologies must be considered to be realities in their own right, and as such they need to be understood and theorised in their own specificity in order that they can be changed.

Unlike Lukács, whom Kracauer discusses repeatedly and at great length, both in his published work and in his letters, Korsch is only mentioned once in Kracauer's letter dated 29 June 1926, in reply to a remark by Bloch:

Sie erwähnen Korsch in einem positiven Sinne. Ich habe mich im Januar mit ihm im Reichstag über [Lukács] unterhalten.<sup>41</sup> Er hat meine Argumente gegen L[ukács] sämtlich gebilligt und erklärt, daß er nur aus, freilich sehr gewichtigen, taktischen Gründen zu schweigen beabsichtigt, was ich, zunächst, auch für das Richtige halte. Vor allem wird abzuwarten sein, was Lukács in seiner neuen, noch nicht erschienenen Schrift gegen seine Widersacher zu Felde führt.<sup>42</sup>

Even though Lukács is really at the centre here, Kracauer's account of the conversation indicates a certain degree of familiarity and agreement between himself and Korsch.<sup>43</sup> Given that Korsch's work 'aroused a yet greater furore than Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*' at the Fifth World Congress of the Comintern in 1924, it seems likely that Kracauer familiarised himself with Korsch's book at some point during what was a period of readjustment for him.<sup>44</sup> Kracauer's insistence on the importance of an understanding of cultural, philosophical, that is to say, 'ideological' phenomena in order to mobilise their revolutionary potential is very much reminiscent of Korsch. This is emphasised in the language of Kracauer's letter to Bloch from 27 May 1926, where he

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<sup>40</sup> Giles, *Bertolt Brecht*, p.89.

<sup>41</sup> Korsch was a Communist member of the Reichstag; cf. Halliday, 'Karl Korsch: An Introduction', in Karl, Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, New York: MR, 1970, pp.7-26, 18.

<sup>42</sup> Bloch, *Briefe*, p.282

<sup>43</sup> Whereas Jay argues that Kracauer's reaction to both Lukács and Korsch was hostile (Jay, 'The Extraterritorial Life', p.62), the letter actually indicates that Kracauer's response was rather more differentiated.

<sup>44</sup> Halliday, p.17

agrees with Bloch on the need to (re)present ‘die *materialen geistigen Bestände*, die der heutige theoretische Marxismus nur verdrängt, nicht aufnimmt, in ihrer aktuellen Form, gesättigt mit den ihnen innewohnenden revolutionären Energien.’<sup>45</sup> A major part of Kracauer’s own contribution to this project were his writings about film and the cinema, as Kracauer realised early on that this was a medium of extraordinary power. The essay which constitutes Kracauer’s best known attempt to tap into the revolutionary energy inherent in mass culture, ‘Das Ornament der Masse’, is also the result of one of Kracauer’s encounters with the cinema. Yet this cinematic context is not immediately obvious from the perspective Kracauer takes, and the strategy he employs to turn a mass phenomenon into a revolutionary one is similarly perplexing.

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<sup>45</sup> Bloch, *Briefe*, p 273. Kracauer’s emphasis

## The Intellectual as Flâneur: 'Das Ornament der Masse'

'Das Ornament der Masse' essentially pursues a critique of capitalism, using the visual analogy of a performance by the Tiller Girls. The essay's central concept is rationalisation, and Kracauer aims to show how it affects people within the contemporary capitalist system, but also how it might be turned into a liberatory force. This twist springs from the view Kracauer had taken in 'Die Bibel auf Deutsch' that culture is not determined in a simple way by the economic base, but that it can, in turn, influence that base. How Kracauer develops this idea out of the account of a dance performance will be the subject of the first part of this section. Kracauer's double view of rationalisation as both a curse and a promise links him to Lukács and his theory of alienation or reification as it is set out in *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, even though Kracauer had grave reservations about Lukács.<sup>46</sup> A comparison of how the two thinkers view the process of modernisation and the opportunities for political change will then help to draw out some of the main difficulties with Kracauer's materialism. The rest of this section will deal with an aspect of Kracauer's cultural criticism which plays a major role in the texts discussed in subsequent chapters. In the manner of the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, Kracauer observes both dancers and audience seemingly without being involved in or responsible for the events. What 'Das Ornament der Masse' also shows with great clarity is that in the role of the *flâneur*, Kracauer assumes a particularly gendered position vis-à-vis the dancers and the audience.

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<sup>46</sup> On Kracauer's relationship to Lukács cf. Jay, 'The Extraterritorial Life', pp. 62-64; Frisby, *Fragments*, esp. pp. 123-126; and Mulder, *Grenzgänger*, esp. pp. 57-60.

Although the Tiller girls were actually British (and famously counted among them the former Speaker of Parliament, now Lady Betty Boothroyd) Kracauer mistakenly identifies them as American because they seem to symbolise so neatly the effects of 'Americanism', of Fordist production methods and Taylorist rationalisation, on modern people. The women's machine-like performance is taken to illustrate the ever-increasing rationalisation of humankind itself. In Kracauer's view such dehumanisation is not all bad; it is an aberration on the path towards true reason, but it also opens up possibilities for real progress, as he is keen to demonstrate. The features of the performance which he takes to be relevant are the uniformity of the girls' appearance and of their movements, and the emphasis on their limbs which interferes with the unity of the individual bodies. As Kracauer puts it: 'Diese Produkte der amerikanischen Zerstreungsfabriken sind keine einzelnen Mädchen mehr, sondern unauflösliche Mädchenkomplexe, deren Bewegungen mathematische Demonstrationen sind.' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.50)

Although he initially describes the dancers as *products* of the 'Taylor-System,' Kracauer then goes on to discuss them in terms of their participation in a process of production ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.54). While they are engaged in producing ornaments on stage, they not only cease to be distinguishable, they even lose their physical integrity: 'Die Tillergirls lassen sich nachträglich nicht mehr zu Menschen zusammensetzen.[...] Arme, Schenkel und andere Teilstrecken sind die kleinsten Bestandstücke der Komposition.' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.53) The women as individual human beings are insignificant, and they disappear behind their limbs, those parts of them which are necessary for forming the required patterns.

Kracauer argues that this loss of identity and of integrity mirrors precisely the conditions of the working masses in modern Germany: 'Den Beinen der Tiller girls entsprechen die Hände in der Fabrik.' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.54) Rationalised production processes utilise only specific body parts of workers. This is, to use Lukács's term, reification taken to its logical conclusion. And just as the individual Tiller girl is an oxymoron, so an individual worker is meaningless for the process of production. Similarly, in terms of the performance the dancer is reducible to her legs and arms, just as the worker is only 'a pair of hands'.<sup>47</sup> But Kracauer does not just mean production workers in the narrow sense. Anticipating the argument of his 1930 study *Die Angestellten*, Kracauer proposes that everyone who serves the process of production becomes 'rationalised' by it: 'Über das Manuelle hinaus werden auch seelische Dispositionen durch die psychotechnischen Eignungsprüfungen zu errechnen gesucht. Das Massenornament ist der ästhetische Reflex der von dem herrschenden Wirtschaftssystem erstrebten Rationalität.' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.54) Thus Kracauer's graphic description of the fragmented bodies of the dancers becomes a statement about the dissolution of (bourgeois) identity itself, for once it is possible to reduce people to their 'useful' parts, the integrity of the human being is shattered. Far from being presented as a threat, though, such a fragmentation of the dancers' bodies, and especially the resulting loss of individuality, clears a space for positive change. The human figure, abstracted from the person marked by natural and cultural individualisation, seems to promise the chance for a new, different humanity, shaped not by base nature but by reason. Thus Kracauer,

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<sup>47</sup> cf. Mulder, p.63

having dispensed with his earlier admiration for a Nietzschean individualism (and, perhaps, for a Nietzschean respect for the body and its needs) turns to an Enlightenment belief in the power of reason and in human perfectibility. His hope is that the very depth of human degradation constituted by the alienation of human beings from their true destiny through their instrumentalisation by capitalist ratio will spawn a new kind of humanity in tune with both its needs and its potential. It lies perhaps in the essence of such a utopian perspective that the precise nature of such a true and reasonable humanity remains unclear.

Georg Lukács had begun to reformulate his own sense of alienation during the war (i.e. several years earlier than Kracauer), casting it in Marxist terms, but still informed by a pronounced Hegelianism. This found its expression in the 1923 collection of essays *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*. Lukács, like Korsch, had set out to bring back a revolutionary edge to Marxism. Also like Korsch, Lukács was severely criticised by the leadership of the Communist Party for his ‘revisionism,’ since, as Paul Breines points out, both their works ‘appeared on the eve of the “Bolshevization” of the Communist International’.<sup>48</sup> As the title of the central essay in his book, ‘Die Verdinglichung und das Bewußtsein des Proletariats’, indicates, reification is the key to Lukács’s theory.<sup>49</sup>

Reification denotes the commodification of the worker as the processes of production become increasingly rationalised. The ubiquity of such reification means that the proletariat becomes representative of humankind: ‘Das Schicksal des Arbeiters wird zum allgemeinen Schicksal der ganzen

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<sup>48</sup> Breines, p. 78; cf. Breines, esp. pp. 78-86 for a detailed account of the ‘Bolshevization’ which provided the historical background to the debate between Lukács and Kracauer

<sup>49</sup> Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, pp. 170-355.

Gesellschaft; ist ja die Allgemeinheit dieses Schicksals die Voraussetzung dafür, daß der Arbeitsprozeß der Betriebe sich in dieser Richtung gestalte.<sup>50</sup> In a twist which follows Hegel's master-slave dialectic, however, the complete alienation of the worker puts him in a unique position to comprehend the situation not only he himself, but mankind as a whole is trapped in. Unlike the bourgeois, who can contemplate the world objectively from the position of a subject, the worker is himself objectified. Thus he knows himself to be not just implicated in but actually shaped by the process of production, and therefore subject to change. The worker's experience of the production process from the inside also allows him to appreciate that everything is interrelated in one totality. As a result, the division of the world into subjects and objects will be transcended.<sup>51</sup>

Although both had followed a similar trajectory from metaphysical longing for wholeness to a distinctly Marxist oriented materialism, Kracauer had by 1926 distanced himself very clearly from Lukács, as is evident from his correspondence with Bloch. By the time Lukács had published *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* in 1923, Kracauer, who had also carried out his shift towards the left, had renounced precisely the metaphysical, Hegelian tendencies which had previously united him with Lukács, and which had led Lukács to his particular revision of Marxism. As a result, Kracauer concludes that Lukács has turned into a 'philosophisch[en...] Reaktionär.'<sup>52</sup>

Kracauer had taken a keen interest in the writings of Georg Lukács when both were looking to metaphysics for a solution to what they perceived to

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<sup>50</sup> Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, p. 181

<sup>51</sup> For a discussion of Lukács's theory of reification see Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form. Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971

<sup>52</sup> Bloch, *Briefe*, p. 273

be a general crisis of ‘transzendentaler Obdachlosigkeit’ in society.<sup>53</sup> Both had studied under Simmel, and Kracauer shared what Eugene Lunn describes as Lukács’s ‘perspective of an aesthetic and ethical humanism and idealism,’ which motivated both their initial anti-capitalist and anti-modern stance.<sup>54</sup> In 1921, in his review of Lukács’s *Theorie des Romans*, Kracauer praised his grasp of spiritual homelessness, a concept he would recycle in his later studies of white-collar workers, while Lukács recast it into his theory of alienation or, to use Lukács’s own term, reification. In the opening paragraph of the review Kracauer explicitly rejected the ‘sozialistische Bewegung,’ because ‘den durch sie erstrebten ökonomischen Bindungen vermag sie von sich aus die religiösen nicht hinzuzufügen, und so überläßt sie uns letzten Endes weiter der Einsamkeit und Heimatlosigkeit.’<sup>55</sup> Instead of such base materialism, Kracauer prefers Lukács’s metaphysics ‘in der sich das inbrünstige Verlangen der Gegenwart nach dem Wiedererscheinen Gottes in der Welt zusammenballt.’<sup>56</sup>

By the mid-1920s, however, one of the main criticisms Kracauer levels against Lukács is that his kind of dialectic, whereby the reified proletariat becomes the agent not only of a revolution but of the attainment of the totality is still fundamentally idealist. In a letter to Bloch, Kracauer describes Lukács’s concept of the totality as ‘ob der eigenen Formalität verzweifelt’, and continues: ‘Statt den Marxismus mit Realien zu durchdringen, führt er ihm Geist und Metaphysik des ausgelaugten Idealismus zu.’<sup>57</sup> Lukács, according to Kracauer, has not performed a radical enough shift to materialism. The

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<sup>53</sup> See ‘Georg von Lukács’ Romantheorie’, p.118.

<sup>54</sup> Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism; an Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982, p.110.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Georg von Lukács’ Romantheorie’, p.117.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Georg von Lukács’ Romantheorie’, p.118.

<sup>57</sup> Bloch, *Briefe*, p.273

theoretical system which Lukács develops in *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* eliminates the possibility of a 'richtigen Materialismus [...]' Es bleibt ja kein Raum in den Gängen dieser formalen Dialektik, die so glatt zur leeren Totalität fortschreitet.'<sup>58</sup> What Kracauer has in mind with 'richtige[m] Materialismus' becomes evident in his analysis of 'Das Ornament der Masse'. Before returning to this essay, however, another crucial disagreement Kracauer has with Lukács needs to be looked at: it centres on the concept of subjectivity.

Kracauer had already introduced this issue in 'Die Bibel auf Deutsch', where he mentions - almost in passing - the 'nicht mehr existente private Einzelperson' ('Die Bibel auf Deutsch', p.178), a theme he develops in more detail in 'Das Ornament der Masse'. In his letter to Bloch, he cites Lukács's 'Persönlichkeitsbegriff' as an example when he describes the latter as 'philosophisch ein Reaktionär,'<sup>59</sup> without, however, expanding on this accusation. What he seems to have in mind are passages in *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* such as the following, which claims that 'der Verdinglichungsprozeß, das Zur-Ware-Werden des Arbeiters ihn, solange er sich nicht bewußtseinsmäßig dagegen auflehnt – zwar annulliert, seine "Seele" verkümmert und verkrüppelt, jedoch gerade sein menschlich-seelisches Wesen nicht zur Ware verwandelt'.<sup>60</sup> Another example has an argument not dissimilar to Kracauer's 'Ornament der Masse':

Mit der modernen Zerlegung des Arbeitsprozesses (Taylor-System) ragt diese rationelle Mechanisierung bis in die 'Seele' des Arbeiters hinein: selbst seine psychologischen Eigenschaften werden von seiner Gesamtpersönlichkeit abgetrennt, ihr gegenüber objektiviert, um in

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<sup>58</sup> Bloch, *Briefe*, p.283.

<sup>59</sup> Bloch, *Briefe*, p.273

<sup>60</sup> Lukacs, *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, p.300.

rationelle Spezialexsysteme eingefügt und hier auf den kalkulatorischen Begriff gebracht werden zu können.<sup>61</sup>

These statements are obviously based on the assumption of some kind of core or 'soul' of the worker's personality which is a site of resistance. The second quotation goes even further in postulating a rather more inclusive 'Gesamtpersönlichkeit', which, even though rationalisation has a fragmenting effect on it, persists, at least as a potential, in opposition. In Kracauer's view, on the other hand, rationalisation has a much more radically fragmenting effect on the subject, in that the 'private Einzelperson' ceases to exist altogether. Such fragmentation is the (visual) motif of 'Das Ornament der Masse.' The image of large sections of the population having their personalities fragmented en masse is clearly in conflict with Lukács's invocation of the worker's 'soul' as an irreducible core and a site of resistance. Although he does not explicitly - and not only - direct his criticism against Lukács, as he did in his letter to Bloch, Kracauer attacks attempts to return to a 'Gesamtpersönlichkeit' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.59) several times in this essay.

Kracauer seems rather more sceptical than Lukács with regard to the inherent potential of the proletariat to resist the 'dehumanising' effects of capitalism. On the other hand, Kracauer takes encouragement from the cultural manifestations of the capitalist ratio. For him, the potential for change already resides in the mass ornament. This is because the mass ornament is as ambiguous as capitalist ratio itself, and it therefore has the capacity to make both the potential and the error of capitalist ratio visible - at least to those who, like Kracauer himself, know how to read it. This requirement, unfortunately, tends to disqualify precisely those who have the greatest interest in change.

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<sup>61</sup> Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, p.177

Thus Gertrud Koch accurately observes, 'die Masse schaut sich im Ornament der Masse zu, ohne sich selbst darin ganz durchschauen zu können.'<sup>62</sup>

Casting himself as a kind of intellectual guide to human liberation, Kracauer presents an Enlightenment account of human development, where reason is instrumental in overcoming nature and introducing justice and truth into the world. In a term borrowed from Weber he describes this as a '*Prozeß der Entmythologisierung*' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.56, Kracauer's emphasis). Capitalism is a step along this path; its rationality has brought about a 'Beherrschung und Benutzung der in sich geschlossenen Natur [...], wie sie keiner früheren Zeit noch beschieden war' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.56). Kracauer likens the liberation from such oppressive powers as the church, monarchy and feudalism to the realisation of a fairytale, because in the fairytale 'die bloße Natur [ist] um des Sieges der Wahrheit willen aufgehoben' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p. 56). Nevertheless, Kracauer argues, capitalist ratio fails in one crucial respect: '*Sie begreift den Menschen nicht ein.*' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.57, Kracauer's emphasis) In an again very Weberian argument, Kracauer explains that capitalist ratio is in no way linked to human needs. He describes it as marked instead by its abstraction. Abstraction, as exemplified by the natural sciences, appears as an increase in rationality. In fact, Kracauer argues, it only provides a cover for nature to run rampant in the details of content. This content can be used to fill its empty structures to serve any purpose. This abstraction never cuts through to true reason, which would question the economic system that gave rise to such abstraction in the first

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<sup>62</sup> Gertrud Koch, 'Die monströse Figur: Das Ornament der Masse. Zu Siegfried Kracaueers Konzeption der Selbstrepräsentanz', in: *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift*, vol 68, 1994, pp.61-70, 65

place. Thus the growth of abstract thinking leads to a situation where 'die dunkle Natur drohender stets aufbegehrt und die Ankunft des Menschen verhindert, der aus der Vernunft ist' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.59).

The mass ornament, Kracauer argues, reflects this ambiguity precisely. It, too, appears to be entirely rational. The figures which contribute to it are anonymous, they have shed any false and anachronistic individuality which otherwise obscures the 'aus dem menschlichen Grund herausstrahlenden Erkenntnisse' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.59). However, this is only an appearance:

Gewiß, der Mensch als organisches Wesen ist aus dem Ornament geschwunden; aber darum tritt nicht der menschliche Grund hervor, sondern das verbleibende Massenteilchen schließt sich gegen ihn ab wie nur irgendein formaler Allgemeinbegriff. Gewiß, die Beine der Tillergirls schwingen parallel, nicht die natürlichen Einheiten der Leiber, und gewiß auch sind die Tausende im Stadion ein einziger Stern; aber der Stern leuchtet nicht und die Beine der Tillergirls sind die abstrakte Bezeichnung der Leiber. Wo die Vernunft den organischen Zusammenhang zerfällt und die wie immer kultivierte natürliche Oberfläche aufreißt, dort redet sie, dort zerlegt sie nur die menschliche Gestalt, damit die unverstellte Wahrheit von sich aus den Menschen neu modelliere. In dem Massenornament ist sie nicht durchgedrungen, seine Muster sind *stumm*. ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.60/1)

While the brutal honesty of the mass ornament repels some strata of society, especially the 'geistig Gutsituierten' ('Das Ornament der Masse' p.61) who disavow its truth, Kracauer argues, the masses who have adopted the spectacle at least accept the facts. This acceptance is preferable to the hypocrisy of the educated middle classes, but at the same time Kracauer worries that 'gedankenloser Konsum der ornamentalen Figuren lenk[t] von der Veränderung der geltenden Ordnung ab' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.62), a concern that would be repeated in his later film criticism and his book reviews,

for instance 'Film 1928' or 'Über Erfolgsbücher und ihr Publikum'.<sup>63</sup> While this line of argumentation aligns Kracauer with the critique of mass culture pursued by his friends in the Institute for Social Research, his methodology, especially in the form in which he himself outlines it in the opening passages of 'Das Ornament der Masse', suggests Kracauer as a forerunner of Cultural Studies.<sup>64</sup>

The premise on which virtually all of Kracauer's post-1925 writings are built is that 'unscheinbare Oberflächenäußerungen [...] gewähren ihrer Unbewußtheit wegen einen unmittelbaren Zugang zu dem Grundgehalt des Bestehenden' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.50). This assertion echoes Kracauer's earlier observation about Georg Simmel's approach: 'Von der Oberfläche der Dinge dringt er allenthalben mit Hilfe eines Netzes von Beziehungen der Analogie und der Wesenszusammengehörigkeit zu ihren geistigen Untergründen vor und zeigt, daß jene Oberfläche Symbolcharakter besitzt.'<sup>65</sup> At the time of writing this Kracauer was troubled by Simmel's 'relativism.' Now he apparently feels that Marxism provides an adequate framework for ordering the diversity of phenomena he himself studies, e.g. in 'Die Bibel auf Deutsch' and 'Das Ornament der Masse'. However, in comparison with the original phrase from Marx's *Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, which it paraphrases, Kracauer's declaration that he intends to unlock the 'Grundgehalt des Bestehenden' from 'unscheinbare[n] Oberflächenäußerungen' becomes problematic. Marx had claimed that

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<sup>63</sup> 'Film 1928', in *Das Ornament der Masse*, pp.295-310.

<sup>64</sup> For a critique of the often simplistic appropriation of Kracauer's work by Cultural Studies see Steve Giles, 'Cracking the cultural code: methodological reflections on Kracauer's "The Mass Ornament"', in *Radical Philosophy*, vol. 99, January/February 2000, pp 31-39

<sup>65</sup> 'Georg Simmel', p.242.

Sowenig man das, was ein Individuum ist, nach dem beurteilt, was es sich selbst dünkt, ebensowenig kann man eine solche Umwälzungsepoche aus ihrem Bewußtsein beurteilen, sondern muß vielmehr dies Bewußtsein aus den Widersprüchen des materiellen Lebens, aus dem vorhandenen Konflikt zwischen gesellschaftlichen Produktivkräften und Produktionsverhältnissen erklären.<sup>66</sup>

This approach subordinates conscious, ‘superstructural’ constructs of meaning to an explanation in terms of the clear-cut divergence between the technologically possible and the socially given. Kracauer, on the other hand, slips from Marx’s materialist model into a far less clear, and certainly far less materialist psychologising approach by invoking the concept of a cultural unconscious. But here, too, Kracauer abandons the conventional Freudian procedure of uncovering unconscious contents through an interpretation of manifest but encoded ones, following established rules and patterns. Instead, as Steve Giles points out, ‘Kracauer [...] indicates that inconsequential surface phenomena are *themselves unconscious* [...], and he even proposes that they provide *direct* access to the basic content of what is.’ As a result of Kracauer’s modifications, ‘it is also unclear whether the interpretative linkage between surface phenomena and the fundamentals of existence presupposes a causal relationship between these different layers of reality, as is the case in Marx and Freud’.<sup>67</sup> With its various Freudian, Weberian and early Lukácsian elements, Kracauer’s interpretation of the mass ornament cannot be reduced to a vulgar Marxist base-superstructure model. This point is made, for instance, by Thomas Levin in the introduction to his translation of *Das Ornament der Masse*. As Giles demonstrates, however, instead of providing a blueprint for a

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<sup>66</sup> Karl Marx, *Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*, ‘Vorwort’, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, vol.13, Berlin: Dietz, 1969, pp.7-11, p.9.

<sup>67</sup> Giles, ‘Cracking the Cultural Code’, p.33, Giles’s emphasis.

critical yet non-deterministic Cultural Studies, his eclecticism makes Kracauer's materialist approach to modernity rather problematic.

If he eschews vulgar Marxism, Kracauer also denies the optimistic view of the power of working class consciousness which Lukács proposes. For Kracauer, society divides into two groups: those who are still tied to hopelessly anachronistic modes of being either as a private individual or in a community, and those who are part of a truly modern society, and therefore fragmented through modern processes of production. Neither of these is in any position to bring about a revolution. Kracauer himself, however, appears to be placed in a unique position to analyse the situation, and to retain a utopian vision. The question with whom revolutionary agency, in Kracauer's opinion, resides is the most vexing, not only of 'Das Ornament der Masse', but of Kracauer's social theory as a whole. The answer depends on two factors. Firstly, given that Kracauer adopts a Marxist position, his stance on the matter of economic determinism is crucial. What emerges from 'Die Bibel auf Deutsch' and 'Das Ornament der Masse' is Kracauer's rejection of the kind of orthodox Marxism which reduces cultural and social phenomena to the transparently ideological by-products of the relations of production. In these two, and in many other essays of the Weimar years, Kracauer analyses, theorises and discusses a wealth of such phenomena because he believes that they are much more than mere 'ideology', that, on the one hand, they give a unique access to the truth of capitalist modernity, and on the other, they have the potential to dialectically further human progress. This fundamental seriousness about cultural and social phenomena stands, despite Kracauer's difficulties in reconciling it with the 'wirtschaftlichen and sozialen Machtverhältnisse' ('Die Bibel auf Deutsch',

p.177). To some extent, such contradictions seem to stem from Kracauer's attempt to define his own position in opposition to others, mainly Lukács, who now embodies Idealism, and Kracauer's own, previous convictions.<sup>68</sup> This kind of tension emerges, for instance, in Kracauer's attacks on Lukács's Hegelianism, despite the fact that he himself, e.g. in 'Das Ornament der Masse' heavily relies on an account of progress in history which simply cannot deny its basis in Hegel.

The other important factor in Kracauer's social theory is his concept of subjectivity. Here, there is more continuity in his thinking, probably also a strong personal element, as especially Jay's description of Kracauer's 'extraterritoriality' suggests. Although the (social) explanations change, the fundamental experience of alienation already characterised his earliest writings.<sup>69</sup> The question is, however, whether the radical alienation he describes, to the point of the dissolution of the subject, admits of resistance or even revolutionary action. Here, Kracauer's position is even more problematic. In 'Das Ornament der Masse' in particular, Kracauer is very clear that the masses cannot be relied upon for such action, and he mocks Lukács for his naive trust in them. Nevertheless, Kracauer believes that the ornament has liberatory potential. This can only be explained in terms of his positioning of himself outside the mass, as precisely the kind of 'Einzelpersönlichkeit[...] mit einer eigenen Seele' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.51) which he has just declared to be doomed. Since this step outside is not acknowledged in 'Das

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<sup>68</sup> David Frisby suggests, more simply, that a 'theoretical reconstruction of Marxism is not a task to which Kracauer himself devoted much attention. Rather his "theoretical" work is firmly rooted in the substantive "surface" of the everyday world.' *Fragments of Modernity*, p 125.

<sup>69</sup> It can also be found in his diaries. See Belke and Renz, p 5

Ornament der Masse', but only implicit, the tension is not resolved within the text.

Another, closely related, question which the text raises is the status of the women's bodies in this, at least according to Kracauer, desexualised spectacle. Kracauer dwells on the fragmentation of the women's bodies in such a way as to suggest a cinematic close-up. But the spectacle at the centre of the essay is cinematic in more ways than one, and, when analysed as such, reveals a subtext which bears directly on its Weimar Germany background. The situation from which the essay takes its departure is that of a *Wochenschau* shown in a cinema ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.51). The dancers on a stage and the audience extending the ornament into the stalls and circles of the stadium are one image, unfolding on a screen before the essayist in the cinema, separated from any other spectators by the darkness around them. Women in 'Das Ornament der Masse' are not so much marginalized or belittled as fetishised, and this should not be dismissed as merely another instance of sexism in mass culture criticism, but taken seriously as revealing the anxieties of a particular social group in a particular historical situation.

Unlike the members of the Frankfurt School, who as scholars produced their work primarily for other scholars, Kracauer chose journalism as a vehicle to reach as wide a readership as possible. Thus 'Das Ornament der Masse' is here considered specifically as a piece of politically motivated *feuilleton* journalism. The *feuilleton* draws on the practice of *flânerie* for its material, and it is a literary genre, drawing on literary conventions. Kracauer's use of a Hölderlin poem is an acknowledgement, if, arguably, an ironic one, of such literary pretensions. After considering Kracauer as a *flâneur*, therefore, the

remainder of this chapter will examine how the peculiar practice of *flânerie* can be traced in the structure of the text. In order to highlight Kracauer's treatment of the relationship between (male) observer and (female) spectacle, 'Das Ornament der Masse' will be briefly compared to two other, very short texts, namely 'Ovation' by Robert Walser and 'Auf der Galerie' by Franz Kafka.

Kracauer's detached observation of the 'Ornament der Masse' focuses on the masses in the audience as much as on the spectacle on stage, while the essayist/observer himself stays out of sight as he ponders the meaning of the scene before him. This way of proceeding seems like a typical example of the activity of the feuilleton journalist as *flâneur*, whose pleasure in spending hours amidst throngs of people, watching, speculating about their stories, wandering off mentally, if not physically, on all manner of tangents, is always justified in terms of his work. Much of the recent interest in the figure of the *flâneur* centres on Kracauer's friend, Walter Benjamin. Benjamin's work on 'Charles Baudelaire: Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus' contains a chapter on the *flâneur*, and Benjamin's own writings, most notably the *Passagenwerk*, have themselves been read as the products of, as well as reflections on, *flânerie*.<sup>70</sup> Although Benjamin and Kracauer were late incarnations of this figure, the *flâneur* is usually taken to embody a peculiarly modern subjectivity. Keith Tester, for instance, argues that

*flânerie* can, after Baudelaire, be understood as the activity of the sovereign spectator going about the city in order to find the things which will occupy his gaze and thus complete his otherwise incomplete

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<sup>70</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Charles Baudelaire: Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus' in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1.2, Rolf Tiedemann und Hermann Schweppenhäuser, eds. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1974, pp.509-690; Susan Buck-Morss, 'The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering' in *New German Critique*, vol 39, 1986, pp.99-140.

identity; satisfy his otherwise dissatisfied existence; replace the sense of bereavement with a sense of life.<sup>71</sup>

This observation applies equally to Kracauer, in particular in 'Das Ornament der Masse'.

Crucially, the *flâneur* always sets himself apart from the anonymous masses he observes. He is, however, already separated from them by factors such as class and gender. By definition, working class men and women who populate the streets in the course of their employment can only be the objects of the *flâneur*'s gaze, they cannot share it. Janet Wolff has gone so far as to argue that 'there is no question of inventing the *flâneuse*: the essential point is that such a character was rendered impossible by the sexual divisions in the nineteenth century'.<sup>72</sup> Other critics argue spaces such as department stores or cinemas function as feminine public spheres where (bourgeois) women can be subjects, rather than objects, of the gaze.<sup>73</sup> Whether on the streets or in a department store, *flânerie* is primarily an aesthetic response to modernity; Benjamin mentions, for example, a fad for walking tortoises in the arcades, a symbolic rejection of the increasing speed of life, and a demonstration not only of the proud owner's exclusive taste, but also of the fact that he is not bound by any practical considerations.<sup>74</sup> This attitude can express discontent: when the

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<sup>71</sup> 'Introduction', in *The Flâneur*, Keith Tester, ed., London: Routledge, 1994, pp.1-21, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Janet Wolff 'The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity', in *The Problems of Modernity, Adorno and Benjamin*, Andrew Benjamin, ed., London: Routledge, 1989, pp.141-156, 154.

<sup>73</sup> See for instance Elizabeth Wilson: *The Sphinx in the City, Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women*, London: Virago, 1991; also Schlüpmann, 'Kinosucht', in *Frauen und Film*, vol 33, October 1982, pp. 45-52; and Miriam Hansen 'Early Cinema - Whose Public Sphere?' in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, Thomas Elsaesser, ed., London: bfi, 1990, pp.228-246.

<sup>74</sup> Benjamin, 'Charles Baudelaire', p.556.

*flâneur*, for instance ‘[m]üßig geht [...] als eine Persönlichkeit, so protestiert er gegen die Arbeitsteilung, die die Leute zu Spezialisten macht’.<sup>75</sup>

Nevertheless, the *flâneur*'s disaffection is prevented from becoming political by his aesthetic and aestheticising mode of perception. Benjamin describes the masses as a veil, covering over the ‘schreckliche gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit’. But far from merely hiding it, the effect of the ‘veil’ is actually ‘daß das Grauenhafte auf ihn [den Flaneur] bezaubernd wirkt’.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, *flânerie* is a ‘Rauschgift,’ and ‘der Rausch, dem sich der Flanierende überläßt, ist der der vom Strom der Kunden umbrausten Ware’.<sup>77</sup> Thus *flânerie* is inextricably linked, not just to the modern phenomenon of the urban mass, but also to the fact of commodification. Benjamin's account of the relationship between commodification and *flânerie* centres not on Marxian economic theory, however, but on desire. It hints at ways in which repressed sexual desires emerge in public activities.<sup>78</sup> Thus Benjamin claims that ‘die Massierung der Kunden, die den Markt, der die Ware zur Ware macht, eigentlich bildet, steigert deren Charme für den Durchschnittskäufer’.<sup>79</sup> Prostitution is the embodiment of this tendency, and it adds a further twist: ‘Erst die Masse macht es dem Sexualobjekt möglich, sich an den hundert Reizwirkungen zu berauschen, die es zugleich ausübt.’<sup>80</sup> The pleasure of the *flâneur* is first and foremost a scopophilic one of watching others. Even for the prostitute, the only ‘female *flâneur*’ Benjamin can imagine, the supposed payoff lies in seeing the excitement they cause in others. The erotic thrill of

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<sup>75</sup> Benjamin, ‘Charles Baudelaire’, p.556.

<sup>76</sup> Benjamin, ‘Charles Baudelaire’, p.562.

<sup>77</sup> Benjamin, ‘Charles Baudelaire’, p.558.

<sup>78</sup> See Eckhardt Köhn, *Straßenrausch, Flânerie und kleine Form - Versuch zur Literaturgeschichte des Flaneurs von 1830-1933*, Berlin: Das Arsenal, 1989, p.42.

<sup>79</sup> Benjamin, ‘Charles Baudelaire’, p.559.

<sup>80</sup> Benjamin, ‘Charles Baudelaire’, p.559.

moving among the masses, and of seeing without ever touching is summed up in Baudelaire's sonnet 'A une passante', where the *flâneur* is excited precisely by the ephemeral nature of his encounter with an unknown beauty.

But *flânerie* is also a way of negotiating certain tensions. For example, the separation of public and private, so prized by the bourgeoisie as a guarantee of essential liberties, and at the same time often so oppressive, especially for respectable bourgeois women, is simply and nonchalantly ignored by the *flâneur*. He moves around in public among the masses, but he uses what Benjamin calls the 'Kunstgriff [...] des Feuilletons: nämlich den Boulevard zum Interieur zu machen. Die Straße wird zur Wohnung für den Flaneur, der zwischen Häuserfronten so wie der Bürger in seinen vier Wänden zuhause ist.'<sup>81</sup> In Benjamin and Kracauer's time this trick already had to be reversed. The increased speed and volume of traffic ensured that the boulevards were no longer suited to *flânerie*, instead, the *flâneur* let the world parade past him in the cinema.<sup>82</sup> Wherever he is, the *flâneur* derives pleasure from being immersed in the crowds, while his perception of his own superiority protects him from losing his individuality. Such tensions between the pleasure in observing public spectacles and a self-perception of being fundamentally separate from the masses are clearly evident in 'Das Ornament der Masse'. And although it is not acknowledged, there is also a sexual dimension to Kracauer's essay, already hinted at in Benjamin's account of the *flâneur* and the sensual and sexual quality of the pleasure brought by *flânerie*.

Considering Kracauer's 'Das Ornament der Masse' as such an aesthetic *flânerie* means focusing on the act of observation out of which Kracauer's

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<sup>81</sup> Benjamin, 'Charles Baudelaire', p. 539.

<sup>82</sup> See Tester, p. 13, and Buck-Morss, p. 102.

utopian vision, such as it is, emerges, and on the way in which it is relayed. These two elements of observation and narration are also particularly interesting in two fictional texts, Robert Walser's 'Ovation' and Franz Kafka's 'Auf der Galerie'. While writing a story about a female spectacle and writing an essay centring on one are not the same thing, there are some crucial similarities. 'Ovation' or 'Auf der Galerie', like 'Das Ornament der Masse' involve the mediation, even manipulation of the image of the female performer by their authors, who, in all three cases, are male. In this act of mediation the meaning of the image is created, which the spectator or reader can adopt, question or reject. In Kracauer's 'Das Ornament der Masse', female spectacle itself is obscured by the author's insistence that it actually represents something else, the muddled ratio of capitalism. Trying to decode the female spectacle thus requires resistance to the author's declared intention. In 'Ovation', a narrator whose voice is ironic and unreliable introduces ambiguity into the text and beckons the reader to find meaning between the lines. In Kafka's 'Auf der Galerie' the complex negotiation of meaning which the narrator unfolds across the two paragraphs and the resultant (in-)action is itself the topic of the text. Rather than being fundamentally different, these texts are thus located at different points on the same spectrum of constructing meaning out of an image of femininity.

If Kracauer's Tiller Girls are declared symbols of modernity, Walser's 'Schauspielerin, Sängerin oder Tänzerin', the stage performer in 'Ovation' is also a modern figure. Unlike her nineteenth-century predecessors (Dumas' Lady of the Camellias, for instance, or the singers in Kracauer's *Offenbach*

study)<sup>83</sup> she rather indignantly rejects the thousand marks offered her by a wealthy, aristocratic patron. The incident disturbs the sense of harmony, of collective euphoria, even community, which the ovation evokes. Yet this mystical unity is already ironised by the exaggerated enthusiasm of the description: As well as a 'göttlicher Nebelhauch' there is a 'goldene, wenn nicht diamantene Jubelstimmung,' and 'Seelen' which 'fliegen in süßer Freiheit, als Duft, im Zuschauerraum umher'.<sup>84</sup> Instead, the end suggests the relentlessness of the demands of theatre as a commercial enterprise like any other: a technician raises and drops the curtain repeatedly, 'immer wieder muß sie hervortreten' until finally the authority of the play is reasserted and assigned roles are resumed.<sup>85</sup>

In 'Auf der Galerie' the contrast between an appearance of collective happiness and the reality of economic necessity, which Walser sets up, is undermined. Contrasting what appears to be the fantasy of a victimised and exploited equestrienne with the reality of a polished performance by a happy, confident young woman, the text is focalised through the young man 'auf der Galerie', who appears distraught at this image of happiness. The reader is lured into identifying with the young man, possibly even to the point of (mis)reading the story as a melodrama where the first version is true, and the second an ideological construct which serves to prevent any intervention. The ineluctable contradiction between the two versions of the truth finally leads to the suspicion that neither is an accurate representation of reality. Instead, the narration itself becomes suspect. Both views of the artiste now appear as

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<sup>83</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach und das Paris seiner Zeit, Schriften 8*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1976.

<sup>84</sup> Walser, p. 284.

<sup>85</sup> Walser, p. 285.

projections of the young man's fears or desires, and the attention moves to his actions, or, more accurately, to his failure to act. It is this breakdown of agency that links 'Auf der Galerie' so usefully to 'Ovation' and 'Das Ornament der Masse', beyond the similar topic of a female spectacle.

In the earliest text, Walser's 'Ovation', first published in 1912, the intervening individual is quite unambiguously presented as ridiculous because his action is anachronistic. The narrator's irony undercuts the (premodern and thus also anachronistic) sense of community, and the promise of female independence is also relativised by references to the pressures of capitalism. None of this, however, detracts from the judgment on the Baron as an 'Einfaltspinsel'. In Kafka's 'Auf der Galerie', action is not attempted, but only fantasised about. If Walser's Baron misreads the situation and makes a fool of himself, Kafka's young man is paralysed by uncertainty. In a shambling, exploitative farce of a performance an individual's intervention would seem possible. In a smoothly running operation where everyone knows their place and every place is filled competently, the young man knows that any attempt to intervene would be absurd. In turn, his inactivity, the absence of any place where his presence might be useful, casts doubt on his identity. Who is he, given that he fails to assert his identity either through action, or in relation to the woman, since she shifts according to his needs and fears?<sup>86</sup>

'Das Ornament der Masse' is a *feuilleton* essay, not a short story.<sup>87</sup>

Although the essay has no narrator distinct from the essayist, he or she is not necessarily any more reliable than a fictitious narrator would be. This is not

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<sup>86</sup> For a fuller discussion of the gender politics in these texts see Elizabeth Boa, *Kafka: Gender, Class and Race in the Letters and Fictions*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1996, pp.2-20.

<sup>87</sup> 'Das Ornament der Masse' was published both in the *Feuilleton* section of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (in three instalments), and in the volume of collected 'essays' to which it gave its name. It therefore lays claim to both categories.

only because Kracauer, like any other author, was caught up in the general conditions of his time and place. As the introduction has already proposed, within this historical context Kracauer also had a political agenda within which 'Das Ornament der Masse' had its function, and there were personal factors that also influenced his politics. The complexity of his position, and its inevitable limitations are acknowledged, however obliquely, in the Hölderlin poem 'An Zimmern' with which Kracauer prefaces his essay:

Die Linien des Lebens sind verschieden,  
Wie Wege sind und wie der Berge Grenzen,  
Was hier wir sind kann dort ein Gott ergänzen  
Mit Harmonien und ewigem Lohn und Frieden.

The opening line of the poem is a reference to the different circumstances of Hölderlin, the poet or philosopher, who contemplates the world, and Zimmer, the carpenter whose work gives him a part in building it.<sup>88</sup> This division has a parallel in the split between Kracauer's status as the intellectual observer and the masses determined by capitalist modes of production. The division also returns in Kracauer's position in 'Das Ornament der Masse', where he is watching from the outside a spectacle of dancing women who turn into a metaphor for capitalist ratio. Like the narrators of 'Ovation' and 'Auf der Galerie', the 'narrator' of 'Das Ornament der Masse' does not himself appear in the text. But whereas in those two stories another single observer, who separates out from the mass audience, embodies the act of observation, and thus turns it into an object for reflection, in 'Das Ornament der Masse' observation is only associated with the passively consuming masses, who

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<sup>88</sup> Zimmer wrote to Hölderlin's mother: 'Er [sah] bei mir eine Zeichnung von einem Tempel. Er sagte mir ich sollte einen von Holz machen, ich versetzte ihm drauf daß ich um Brot arbeiten müßte, ich sei nicht so glücklich so in philosophischer Ruhe zu leben wie Er, gleich versetzte er, Ach ich bin doch ein armer Mensch, und in der nämlichen Minute schrieb er mir folgenden Vers mit Bleistift auf ein Brett [...]' Friedrich Hölderlin: *Sämtliche Gedichte*, Detlev Lüders, ed., second edn., vol. 2 (Kommentar), Wiesbaden: Aula, 1989, p.402.

themselves quickly become part of the ornament which is, in turn, 'der ästhetische Reflex der von dem herrschenden Wirtschaftssystem erstrebten Rationalität' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.54). Their turning into an extension of the performance implies the presence of yet another observer, watching them. But while the mass audience's 'ästhetische[s] Wohlgefallen an den ornamentalen Massenbewegungen' is expressly declared 'legitim,' in spite of the disapproval of the 'Gebildeten' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.54), this observer's pleasure is not acknowledged. His observation is merely implicitly justified because it is analytical and interpretive. The intellectual as an observer only appears in an obscure reference, the Hölderlin poem.

This poem, however, already signals and justifies the retreat of the intellectual from the sphere of social activity. It points to the utopian dimension of Kracauer's essay in the desire for completion, and for 'Harmonien und ewige[n] Lohn und Frieden' which it expresses. In the poem the achievement of the utopian vision, however, is referred to as a divine act in the beyond. In 'Das Ornament der Masse', faith in the divinity is replaced with an appeal to an abstract 'das Denken,' which, hopefully, 'die Natur einschränkt und den Menschen so herstellt, wie er aus der Vernunft ist' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.63). The classicist allusions to completeness and harmony provide clues to how humankind 'aus der Vernunft' might shape up. 'Das Denken,' however, while it is not quite a Hegelian resignation to the process of history, does not exactly constitute a call for action, either. 'Der Prozeß,' which, in one of the most quoted phrases in 'Das Ornament der Masse', 'führt durch das Ornament der Masse mitten hindurch' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.63), seems to take place all by itself. The impersonal language in these

concluding sentences of the essay echoes its opening section, which is similarly devoid of any subject to carry out the 'Analyse [...] unscheinbare[r] Oberflächenäußerungen' and their 'Deutung' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.50).

Analysis and interpretation are, of course, then carried out by Kracauer, the detached essayist, himself. Similarly, the readers he implicitly addresses, i.e. those sections of the bourgeois, educated readership of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* with a genuine interest in social issues, are called upon to abandon their disapproval of mass entertainments, which they usually dismiss as 'Zerstreuung der Menge' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.54). While the masses, caught up, as they are, in the pattern of the ornament, are prevented from seeing its significance, they nevertheless instinctively opt for what is real and relevant, as opposed to those 'künstlerischen Produktionen, die abgelegte höhere Gefühle in vergangenen Formen nachzüchten' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.55) which were so beloved by the bourgeoisie. Kracauer warns his readers against any 'Rückzug auf mythologische Sinngehalte' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.63), instead he wants them to recognise the reality shown forth in the mass ornament. Such an understanding of contemporary social reality does, however, at this point seem to be an end in itself, both for the reader and for the essayist.

Another term for the *flâneur*'s 'Lust an der Beobachtung' is, of course, voyeurism, which links *flânerie* to the cinema. Kracauer's reputation in the English-speaking world has rested on his writings on film and cinema long before his Weimar writings became available. Yet his work for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, too, contains film reviews as well as studies of the German film

industry.<sup>89</sup> Even in 'Das Ornament der Masse', which is usually read as a response to a live performance, the second paragraph informs the reader that '[d]as kleinste Örtchen, in das [solche Darbietungen] noch gar nicht gedrungen sind, wird durch die Filmwochenschau über sie unterrichtet. Ein Blick auf die Leinwand belehrt, daß die Ornamente aus Tausenden von Körpern bestehen' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.51). It is, in fact, likely that Kracauer, who did not move to Berlin until 1930, did not, on this occasion, witness the mass ornament in person, but that he saw it on a newsreel.<sup>90</sup> Thus the original audience in the theatre became part of the spectacle on screen, observed by Kracauer in the cinema. Furthermore, Kracauer's descriptions of the girls' fragmented bodies have a cinematic quality, as they evoke similar effects achieved in the cinema by framing or by extreme close-ups. This twofold connection of 'Das Ornament der Masse' with the cinema invites a reading of the spectacle, and of Kracauer as its audience, informed by film theory. I shall draw in particular on Laura Mulvey's essay on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'.

Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, Mulvey argues that the cinematic spectacle, structured by the (male) gaze, has a paradox at its centre, which is crystallised in the image of the woman on the screen.<sup>91</sup> On the one hand, looking is itself pleasurable, either as an act of scopophilia or as one of identification. On the other hand, the image of woman is a constant reminder

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<sup>89</sup> Examples are 'Kaliko-Welt' and 'Film 1928', both in *Das Ornament der Masse*, pp. 271-278 and pp.295-310.

<sup>90</sup> Kracauer had reviewed a performance in Frankfurt in 1925 ('Die Revue im Schumann-Theater', in *Frankfurter Turmhäuser: Ausgewählte Feuilletons 1906-1930*, Andreas Volk, ed., Zürich: Edition Epoca, pp.95-98, esp.96f). He spent some time in Berlin in 1929, to research *Die Angestellten*, before moving to the Berlin Feuilleton office of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1930. When 'Das Ornament der Masse' appeared, Kracauer was still working in Frankfurt

<sup>91</sup> Mulvey, p.6f

of the threat of castration. There are two ways of responding to this threat: one is obsessive re-enactment of the trauma; the other is its disavowal. The first usually manifests itself as voyeurism, whereby the woman is not merely observed, but also seen as hiding a guilty secret for which she must be punished or from which she needs to be saved. In the cinema this tendency is represented by the *film noir*. The second leads to fetishism, the substitution of an object for the threatening female body. Such objects can be parts of the female body or even an actress who is herself fetishised by being turned into an icon, a star. As Mulvey points out, both strategies can be used alongside one another, as is, for example, the case with many of Alfred Hitchcock's films.

In 'Das Ornament der Masse', too, both voyeurism and fetishism can be argued to be at work. Thus the constellation of the essayist's active, controlling gaze, directed, perhaps from a balcony, in the dark, not just at the performance but also at its audience is itself voyeuristic. At a stretch, the scrutiny to which Kracauer subjects dancers and audience in his attempt to unveil their secret meaning even echoes the investigations of women central to the *film noir*. More conspicuous, however, is the way in which Kracauer fetishises the Tiller Girls. The young female performers in 'Das Ornament der Masse', unlike characters in a film or in fiction, are real and not products of an author's imagination. Nevertheless, it is Kracauer's imagination that transforms them into symbols of modernity. For Kracauer this hinges on the functional analogy between the Girls' limbs and those of production workers, both of which appear to have become independent of the rest of their bodies. The Girls make visible the effects of capitalist rationalisation upon human beings, with both its liberatory potential and the evidence of its failure. But through his use of the

image of those young women as a metaphor for the modern predicament Kracauer also seems to rationalise his own disavowal of the sexual dimension of both the performance and his own reaction to it. Kracauer here picked up on a theme current in Weimar culture. Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, premiered earlier in the same year in which 'Das Ornament der Masse' appeared, is possibly the best known and the most graphic example of the working through of sexual anxieties in response to modernity in the guise of woman as machine.<sup>92</sup>

The point of the mass ornament for Kracauer is its utter abstraction and the absence of any intent to communicate: 'niemand erblickte [die Figur], säße da nicht die Zuschauermenge vor dem Ornament, die sich ästhetisch zu ihm verhält und niemanden vertritt' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.52/3). The ornament on stage repeats for the audience the regulation and rationalisation of their everyday existence and the audience appreciates the performance for its familiarity. It does not represent anyone, instead it simply and directly reacts with pleasure. The audience's pleasure in the recognition of familiar patterns, however, removes the impulse to question what the familiarity consists in, and whether that which has been recognised is itself pleasurable. In this case, what has been recognised, namely the pervasive rationalisation of life, is not pleasurable. Pointing this out is the job of the intellectual 'analyst', Kracauer. Thus the audience becomes part of the spectacle, while the intellectual's own pleasure - or anxiety - is removed from view, turned by his expert status into a seemingly entirely rational discourse.

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<sup>92</sup> See Andreas Huyssen 'The Vamp and the Machine: Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*', in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988, pp 65-81.

Mulvey's argument about how certain male anxieties translate into cinematic representations of women is a general one, her examples including Sternberg's films starring Marlene Dietrich as well as Hitchcock's *Vertigo* and *Marnie*. It is therefore important also to recall briefly the specific historical context of Kracauer's essay, in particular the changing circumstances and perceptions of young women. The First World War had demonstrated most graphically the destructive potential of mechanisation and rationalisation on the battlefields. The fragmentation of bodies, which Kracauer describes as typical of capitalist production practices, was as nothing compared to the real threat to physical integrity posed by bullets and mortars. This physical attack on male identity had been compounded after the war by the humiliation of the Versailles Treaty, and the economic disaster that befell so many families and frequently disempowered the male heads of those families, if, indeed, they had survived the war. At the same time, apparently sexually liberated, independent young women, represented in 'Das Ornament der Masse' by the Tiller Girls, had become, at least in popular perception, a more common, and certainly more publicly visible occurrence after the war. While the percentage of women in employment had risen only slightly (from 31.2% in 1907 to 35.6% in 1925), those women who did work were leaving farm work behind in favour of employment in the cities, and they were abandoning domestic work for jobs in shops, offices and factories.<sup>93</sup> These changes in the nature of many women's work meant that they were both more visible and less easily controlled by their employers. Nevertheless the 'New Woman's' independence was still contingent upon social and economic factors. Many young working women's

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<sup>93</sup> See Peukert, p.96; Katharina von Ankum, 'Introduction', in von Ankum, ed., *Women in the Metropolis, Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, Berkeley, 1997, pp.1-11. 4

wages were not sufficient to raise them above the poverty line, thus forcing many to carry on living at home, often sharing rooms or even beds.<sup>94</sup>

While this curtailed the liberty actually enjoyed by the 'New Woman', her image was sufficiently prominent - and simplified - to serve as the object upon which the anxieties of men, whom 'the war experience [had] confronted [...] with societal displacement and cultural "castration",' and who 'experienced the post-war years as a time of chaos and loss of individual boundaries', might be focussed.<sup>95</sup> The Tiller Girls captured the dynamics of anxiety and its defusing in the choreography of their performances, as Nancy Nenno explains:

by deemphasizing the individual sexuality of each Girl, [the troupe] presented female sexuality as a product and fringe benefit of modernity. As a fetish of modernization, the desexualised female body no longer threatened to produce anxiety, but instead desire and pleasure. In this way, the female body became a screen on which fears regarding modernization could be projected and subsequently fetishized into a pleasurable experience.<sup>96</sup>

Kracauer's response to the performance further emphasises the fragmentation of the girls' bodies. Whereas in 'Ovation' the performer's foot, a classic example of a fetish, was isolated as an object of fascination, Kracauer here picks up on the desexualised appearance of the dancers in his reference to their 'Körpern in Badehosen ohne Geschlecht'. In the same year in which 'Das Ornament der Masse' appeared, Sigmund Freud wrote in his essay on 'Fetishism' about a man

dessen Fetisch in einem Schamgürtel bestand, wie er auch als Schwimmhose getragen werden kann. Dieses Gewandstück verdeckte überhaupt die Genitalien und den Unterschied der Genitalien. Nach

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<sup>94</sup> Ute Frevert, *Women in German History. From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation*, Oxford: Berg, 1990, p.182.

<sup>95</sup> von Ankum, 'Introduction', p.6.

<sup>96</sup> Nancy Nenno, 'Femininity, the Primitive, and Modern Urban Space: Josephine Baker in Berlin', in von Ankum, pp.145-161, 149.

dem Ausweis der Analyse bedeutete er sowohl, daß das Weib kastriert sei, als auch, daß es nicht kastriert sei, und ließ überdies die Annahme der Kastration des Mannes zu, denn alle diese Möglichkeiten konnten sich hinter dem Gürtel, dessen erster Ansatz in der Kindheit das Feigenblatt einer Statue gewesen war, gleich gut verbergen.<sup>97</sup>

One is almost tempted to think that Freud, when he wrote this, might have had Kracauer's reference to bathing suits in mind. Despite valid feminist criticisms of the Freudian concept of castration anxiety, and especially of its corollary, penis envy, in this particular historical context and because of Kracauer's language and imagery, Freudian theory has great descriptive force here. Freud also suggests in the same essay that an alternative response to castration anxiety is homosexuality, a theme that appears repeatedly in Kracauer's work, most notably in his second novel, *Georg*, which will be discussed in Chapter Five.

In 'Das Ornament der Masse', however, another aspect becomes prominent: the transformation of women into a machine involves a process of fragmentation, which is described with an evident dislike for whole bodies:

Verworfen bleiben die Wucherungen organischer Formen [...]. Die Tillergirls lassen sich nachträglich nicht mehr zu Menschen zusammensetzen, die Massenfreiübungen werden niemals von den ganzen Körpern vorgenommen, deren Krümmungen sich dem rationalen Verständnis verweigern. Arme, Schenkel und andere Teilstrecken sind die kleinsten Bestandstücke der Komposition. ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.53)

Kracauer's concern is the reconstruction of humanity as a whole, and its prior deconstruction is part of progress. Nevertheless what he actually describes is the breaking up of *women's* bodies with their 'Wucherungen organischer Formen' ('Das Ornament der Masse', p.53). As Freud reminds us, 'als *stigma indelebile* der stattgehabten Verdrängung bleibt auch die Entfremdung gegen

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<sup>97</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Fetischismus' (1927), in *Psychologie des Unbewußten*, *Freud-Studienausgabe* vol.3, Frankfurt/Main: S.Fischer, 1975, pp.379-388, 387.

das wirkliche weibliche Genitale, die man bei keinem Fetischisten vermißt'.<sup>98</sup>

Kracauer's desire for human reconstruction appears to be accompanied by a complex of defences against anxieties both personal and cultural.

The curious absence of an opening for action, individual or collective, in 'Das Ornament der Masse' becomes less puzzling if one considers it as the product of a *flânerie*, rather than as a contribution to a political debate. This does not deny Kracauer his political principles. As Eckhardt Köhn has pointed out, the *flâneurs* of the nineteenth century, too, often had leftist political sympathies.<sup>99</sup> The text, however, reveals anxieties about masculine identity, which may or may not have had a personal dimension, but were certainly historically conditioned. On the one hand Kracauer responds to such anxieties with a readiness to abandon rigid boundaries of identity. The recurrent theme of fragmentation as a precondition for change, and the positive view of mass audiences are aspects of this. On the other hand Kracauer stops at *watching* the masses, and the fragmentation of (female) others, in a way that suggests a limited awareness of just how pervasive those cultural as well as personal anxieties are. The stance of the *flâneur*, who is forever the observer, sensitive and perceptive, but always approaching things aesthetically so as to keep a safe distance captures this ambivalence well. As the era of what Peukert has called 'deceptive stability' from 1924 to 1929 drew to a close, Kracauer appears to have become increasingly aware of the tension between his impulse to remain detached and a growing need for engagement with social reality.<sup>100</sup> In his novel *Ginster*, Kracauer depicts the struggle of the eponymous protagonist to

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<sup>98</sup> Freud, 'Fetischismus', p.385.

<sup>99</sup> Köhn, *Straßenrausch*, p.40.

<sup>100</sup> Peukert, p.191.

overcome the effects of early conditioning which placed him in a position not dissimilar to that of the narrator of 'Das Ornament der Masse'.

## Chapter 3

### Reflections on Society and Self: *Ginster, von ihm selbst geschrieben*

In *Ginster* the figure of the detached observer who lurks almost invisibly in the background of 'Das Ornament der Masse' becomes himself the focus of attention. Kracauer's first published work of fiction shows some clearly autobiographical elements in the details of its main character's circumstances, but, more importantly, it is a reflection upon the social and personal roots of Ginster's solipsism and upon his frustration with this condition.<sup>1</sup> *Ginster*, therefore, lends itself to two types of readings. Firstly, it is an absurd, at times even grotesque satire of Wilhelmine society. By exposing the selfishness, foolishness and vainglory ingrained not only in individuals but also in social structures and institutions before and during the war, Kracauer also implies that post-war society is unlikely to be radically different. This suggestion is confirmed in the final chapter by Ginster's assessment 'revolutionär waren die meisten Leute nur während der Revolution' (*Ginster*, p.239).

The novel's second level is its reflexivity. This hinges on the final chapter, which was omitted from the 1963 edition, but reinserted in the Suhrkamp edition of Kracauer's *Schriften*.<sup>2</sup> The final chapter is set in 1923, five years after the revolution (*Ginster*, p.232), and confronts the reader with a

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<sup>1</sup> Two earlier unpublished novellas, *Das Fest im Frühling* and *Die Gnade* are preserved as manuscripts at the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach. They are discussed in Oschmann's *Auszug aus der Innerlichkeit*.

<sup>2</sup> Mülder claims that Kracauer himself requested that the chapter be omitted, although she concedes that he would have been influenced by Adorno, who did not approve of the 'positive' nature of the chapter (see Mülder, *Grenzgänger*, p.206). A letter Kracauer wrote to Wolfgang Weyrauch calls Mülder's account into question, however. According to this letter Kracauer agreed to the distorting cut 'schweren Herzens, [...] weil alle Lektoren und auch einige Autoren des Suhrkamp Verlags der Ansicht waren, es [das letzte Kapitel] könne den Erfolg des Buchs beeinträchtigen' (Quoted in Belke und Renz, p.121). This seems more plausible not least because, while he was still working on the novel, Kracauer explained to Bloch how carefully he had balanced the final chapter and the beginning of the text (See Bloch, *Briefe*, p.294).

changed protagonist. Through a chance encounter Ginster has become able to connect with other people and with his environment in a way that had previously been impossible. The final chapter opens up a perspective for a future in which Ginster might play an active part, but, more importantly, it also gives a different perspective to the narration up to this point. As Kracauer emphasised in the full title of the book that '*Ginster*' was 'von ihm selbst geschrieben', the reader now has to re-evaluate his or her view of both narrator and protagonist. The detached, often critical tone which the narrator assumes towards the protagonist – his younger self – can now be re-interpreted as the product of a personal development.

If one reads *Ginster* autobiographically then, it becomes not only a document of Kracauer's unhappy youth (as which many critics have seen it)<sup>3</sup> but more importantly an attempt to re-write himself, to free himself from the personal limitations which, as is evident from *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, paralysed his powers of cultural critique. In *Ginster* Kracauer examines the causes and the effects of the ambiguous sense of identity which had manifested itself in 'Das Ornament der Masse'. In that essay, Kracauer had on the one hand claimed that loss of identity was a step on the road towards a new humanity constituted by reason, while on the other hand his *flâneur*-like narrator had assumed the very identity of a bourgeois subject which he wanted to see abolished. In *Ginster*, Kracauer attempts to extend the abandonment of the bourgeois self to his own persona, Ginster. As was the case in 'Das Ornament der Masse', however, the sexual politics of the text interfere with the effectiveness of Kracauer's strategy. Whereas in the essay it was the

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<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Belke and Renz, p.5ff., Schröter, p38/9; Frisby, *Fragments*, p.158; Belke, 'Identitätsprobleme', p.48.

fetishisation of the dancers which compromised Kracauer's critique of modernity, here the figure of the prostitute illustrates the rather problematic role female characters play in the narrator's process of self-recognition.

This chapter will pursue both the social-critical and the reflexive aspects of the novel. The first section, after some introductory comments on its narrative structure and reception, will provide a preliminary reading of *Ginster* as a critical, sometimes satirical analysis of Wilhelmine society and of an alienated intellectual observer. The First World War is the central event of the novel which provides a focus for Ginster's problems. Yet, as will be discussed below, *Ginster* is not a conventional war novel that uses the war as a source of meaning. Instead in *Ginster* the war becomes an instance of the modern dilemma that confronts the protagonist of having to live in the absence of any given meaning. The first part of this chapter will follow the critique of modern, rationalised German society in the novel. It will then show how, from the perspective opened up by the final chapter, this critique can also be seen to be turned against the protagonist himself. The novel shows that, until the final chapter, Ginster fails to develop a politically or morally adequate response to Wilhelmine society. As already mentioned, however, the protagonist's transformation requires the intervention of a female character who is drawn in a rather reductive fashion. Kracauer's critique of modern German society and of the bourgeois subject here falls back behind the materialism he had already begun to develop.

Section two will examine a series of motifs which Kracauer uses in his portrayal of Weimar society. These were common signifiers in the discourse of the time, and a comparison with the use Ernst Glaeser makes of them in his

novel *Jahrgang 1902* will highlight the more radical aspects of *Ginster*. In particular, the sexual theme which is so prominent in the final chapter will be explored further. Through a series of childhood memories Kracauer shows *Ginster*'s development to be affected by a family structure which, much more recently, has been at the centre of Klaus Theweleit's study *Männerphantasien*.<sup>4</sup> Especially in the context of World War One novels, the complex of problems with both sexuality and authority can usefully be approached with the help of Theweleit's ideas. Glaeser's *Jahrgang 1902* pursues a similar strategy of critiquing Wilhelmine society by showing the effects of the war on a protagonist who, although younger than *Ginster*, has similar preoccupations, most notably sexual frustration and conflict with authority. Yet despite its broadly progressive agenda, *Jahrgang 1902* in the end slips back into very conventional, if not reactionary patterns, which, again, will provide an instructive contrast to *Ginster*.

The third part of this chapter will focus on the reflexivity inherent in the structure of the text, which has the mature narrator reflect upon his own reactions to a repressive environment in the past. Kracauer's method will be explored using the concept of realism as an expression of an 'antirealistische Haltung' developed by Alexander Kluge in the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> *Ginster*'s often strange behaviour will in this context be interpreted as a form of protest against a hostile reality. Despite the forty-year gap between the two writers, there are important continuities in their thought. Both operate with a concept of realism that is far removed from the novel of the nineteenth century and instead draws

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<sup>4</sup> Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien*, vol. 1, *Frauen, Fluten, Körper, Geschichte*, vol. 2 *Männerkörper - zur Psychoanalyse des Weißen Terrors*, Basel, Frankfurt/Main Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1986.

<sup>5</sup> Kluge, 'Das Politische', p.312

on ideas one could broadly describe as Brechtian.<sup>6</sup> Kluge, who has made a name for himself as a filmmaker and a writer as well as in his capacity as a theorist, not only, like Kracauer, takes an interest in montage, he also draws specifically on the conventions of the silent cinema in his work. Kluge's elaborations of the aims and the techniques of anti-realist realism will therefore be most useful for an exploration of the specific form of realism Kracauer develops in *Ginster*.

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<sup>6</sup> This is notwithstanding the hostility between Brecht and Kracauer. That Kracauer's dislike of Brecht springs in some measure from a sense of rivalry, rather than disagreement, can be seen in Kracauer's review of Brecht's *Der Dreigroschenprozeß*. There Kracauer accuses Brecht of misquoting and in effect plagiarising him: 'Ein soziologisches Experiment?', in *Schriften* 5.3, pp.33-39.

## War and wilhelmine Germany

The novel opens with Ginster working as an architect in M.<sup>7</sup> When war breaks out his mother asks him to return home. She also mentions Ginster's friend Otto, to whom he is connected by a distinctly homoerotic friendship. Otto has already volunteered as a soldier, and, emulating his friend, Ginster too tries to volunteer but is rejected. Ginster becomes engulfed in reminiscences about his childhood and adolescence, and, following his mother's invitation, he returns to F. Back home, Ginster is alienated by the claustrophobic world of the uncle's antiquarian obsession and the aunt's and mother's ignorant speculations about the war. So as not to have to find a job, Ginster volunteers as an orderly at the local hospital, but, at the mother's urging, he finally finds a position as an architect. Although he is recalled for military examinations, Ginster's work initially protects him from being called up for active service. He designs a war cemetery for a competition and wins, but his employer takes the credit. Finally Ginster has to report for service. He is stationed in Cologne and struggles with the absurdities of military life and training. Ginster stops eating and is soon too weak for his duties and discharged. He takes up a position as an architect in Q., has an unsuccessful liaison, is uprooted again by the revolution and travels back to his family once more.<sup>8</sup>

The 1963 version, published by Suhrkamp, ends here, with Ginster's despair at the cycle of repetitions in which he and all of humanity seem to be caught: 'Was kommt jetzt für ein Krieg, grübelte er im Bett. Er weinte vor Müdigkeit über den toten Onkel, über sich, über die Länder und Menschen.'

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<sup>7</sup> Kracauer was born and brought up in Frankfurt. He studied in Berlin from 1907 until 1909, when he moved to Munich; see Belke and Renz, pp. 14-16.

<sup>8</sup> Kracauer started working as an architect for the *Stadtbauamt* in Osnabrück on 23 January 1918. There he experienced the end of the war and the revolution; see Belke and Renz, pp. 28-

(*Ginster*, p.230) The final chapter of the original version is set in Marseille, in 1923. As he watches the masses on the Canebière, Ginster recognises Julia van C., whom he had met twice before, and to whom he feels connected. They spend the day together and Ginster reveals to her that a visit to a prostitute has changed his whole outlook on life, because he learned there ‘was ich während des ganzen Krieges nicht erfahren habe: daß ich sterben muß, daß ich allein bin.’ (*Ginster*, p.237) This realisation of his mortality and of his existential loneliness has freed him to engage with reality, and to become critical of its injustices, although the novel leaves open how or even if Ginster will act upon his insight.

*Ginster* is, as the subtitle/by-line states, ‘von ihm selbst geschrieben’. This has confused readers for several reasons. To start with, it does not seem entirely clear whether Kracauer intended the name ‘Ginster’ to function as a genuine disguise, perhaps for economic reasons, or whether, as Niefanger claims, it was ‘mehr oder weniger bekannt, wer sich hinter dem Pseudonym Ginster verbarg’.<sup>9</sup> The name ‘Ginster’ is itself mysterious as it usually refers to a plant, not a person, and it is indeed revealed to be a nickname. Most striking, however, is that, despite the assertion in the subtitle, Ginster’s story does not seem to be told by himself at all; instead, it has a third person narrator. Moreover, this narrator does not even appear particularly sympathetic towards the protagonist, even though he has access to the latter’s thoughts and feelings. This curious distance between a narrator and a protagonist who are supposedly identical starts to make sense when one considers the novel from the

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<sup>9</sup> See Mülder, p.137; Dirk Niefanger, ‘Transparenz und Maske: Außenseiterkonzeptionen in Siegfried Kracauers erzählender Prosa’, in *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, vol.38, 1994, pp.253-282, 261f.

perspective of its final chapter.<sup>10</sup> This last part of the text, which has been almost universally criticised (most famously by Adorno, who felt that it ‘mit [...] Positivität kokettierte’)<sup>11</sup>, shows Ginster as a changed man, reconciled with his own mortality and no longer entirely self-centred, but ‘hellsichtig’ (*Ginster*, p.240) and interested in his environment. The perspective of the older, more mature Ginster lends an ironic detachment to the narration of the first ten chapters of the novel, an irony which is directed at the younger Ginster as much as at the other characters. As the distance between Ginster, the protagonist, and Ginster, the narrator, is much smaller in the final chapter, the ironic tone, too, is absent from it, which might account for judgments such as Mülder’s, who argues that Chapter Eleven ‘gegenüber den vorangegangenen literarisch abfällt’.<sup>12</sup>

Kracauer’s first novel appeared in 1928, ten years after the end of the war and well within ‘Die Wiederkehr des Weltkrieges’ in German literature cited by Erhardt Schütz.<sup>13</sup> As is documented in Kracauer’s collection of contemporary reviews, *Ginster* was received very favourably, although some critics complained about its ‘Subjektivität’, ‘Nihilismus’ or ‘Mittelmäßigkeit’, generally accepting the novel’s by-line ‘von ihm selbst geschrieben’ somewhat too uncritically and simply identifying author and protagonist. Several reviews pointed to parallels between *Ginster* and other war novels which had recently

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<sup>10</sup> Oschmann, too, points out ‘daß man dem Text nur unter Berücksichtigung des anscheinend schwächeren Schlußkapitels gerecht zu werden vermag’ (Oschmann, p.236).

<sup>11</sup> Adorno, ‘Der wunderliche Realist’, p.99.

<sup>12</sup> Mülder, p.142. Oschmann has a different explanation for the lack of irony in the final chapter. According to him Ginster’s irony, “die in dem Leidensgang der Innerlichkeit die eine ihr angemessene Welt sucht und nicht finden kann,” verliert notwendig ihre Gültigkeit im Angesicht der Tatsache, daß Ginster seine Welt und damit teilweise sich selbst im Hafen von Marseille gefunden hat. Aus diesem Grund bedeutet der geglückte Auszug aus der Innerlichkeit zugleich die Verabschiedung der Ironie sowohl als Darstellungsmittel wie auch als Lebensform.’ (Oschmann, p.225).

<sup>13</sup> Erhardt Schütz, *Romane der Weimarer Republik*, München: Wilhelm Fink 1986, p.184

appeared, such as Ludwig Renn's *Krieg* and Glaeser's *Jahrgang 1902*.<sup>14</sup> A little later, when Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* came out, this, too, was compared with *Ginster*.<sup>15</sup> Other critics, for example Hermann Kesten, emphasise the peripheral role of the war in the novel:

Man hat Ginsters Buch [...] neben die Kriegsbücher gestellt. Man tut ihm Unrecht. Dies ist kein Buch gegen den Krieg. Dies ist ein Buch gegen den Menschen, gegen die niederträchtige Verfälschung, die eine sogenannte Kultur gegen uns alle anwendet. Der Krieg ist in diesem Buch nur eine etwas stupide Landschaft, ist eine günstige Okkasion, die der Autor im Trödeladen der Zeit erworben hat.<sup>16</sup>

Joseph Roth, Kracauer's colleague at the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, similarly stresses the difference between *Ginster* and other war novels:

In den Kriegsbüchern, die bis jetzt in deutscher Sprache erschienen sind, ist der Krieg immer etwas "Außergewöhnliches". Zum ersten Male, in *Ginster*, ist er etwas ungeheuerlich Gewöhnliches! Außergewöhnlich ist nur *Ginster*. Der Krieg ist aber die Fortsetzung des Friedens. Nichts anderes! Das hebt dieses Buch aus der Reihe aller Kriegsbücher! Der Krieg ist nicht der Gegensatz zum Frieden, sondern eine natürliche Folge jenes Friedens, den wir gelebt haben und in dem wir immer noch leben.<sup>17</sup>

Roth had himself written a novel which used the war to reflect upon peace-time society, *Die Flucht ohne Ende*.<sup>18</sup> But among those novels which conformed more easily to the tag 'war novel', too, Glaeser's *Jahrgang 1902*, for instance, is set away from the battlefields, at the 'home front,' and is fuelled by a social critique as much as an attack on militarism and war. Even that definitive war novel *Im Westen nichts Neues* has moments which point beyond the experience of war itself, to social factors which contributed to it

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Harry Kahn in *Die Weltbühne*, vol. 24, no. 51, 3. Dezemberwoche 1928.

<sup>15</sup> Erich Maria Remarque, *Im Westen nichts Neues*, Berlin: Propyläen, 1929; in his review in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* from 3. 2. 29, Eugen Korrodi calls these four novels 'eine erstaunliche Tetralogie des Krieges.'

<sup>16</sup> 'Stilisten', Hermann Kesten, *Weltbühne*, vol. 26, no. 11, 11 March 1930; also Werner Thorman, 'Ginster verrät sein Geheimnis' in *Rhein-Mainische Volkszeitung*, 30. 11. 1928.

<sup>17</sup> 'Wer ist Ginster?' in: Renz and Belke, p. 53

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Roth, *Flucht ohne Ende* (1927), Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994

(the *Honoratioren* and teachers' rabid militarism from a safe distance back home) and to its legacy to post-war society (disillusionment and bitterness among the young). What distinguishes *Ginster* from those books is that it does not use the war as a source of meaning. Whereas the protagonists in the other texts define themselves either through or against their experience of the war, and thus confer a certain legitimacy on it, *Ginster* treats the war with the same suspicion and hostility as everything else that threatens his well being.

By the time all these novels appeared the war was in any case no longer an immediate experience but a reconstructed memory. Kesten's phrase about the war as a 'günstige Okkasion [...] im Trödeladen der Zeit' captures this distance, and it applies equally to a novel like *Im Westen nichts Neues*, despite the text's apparent immediacy. However, Kesten does not speculate why the war was - at this particular time - such a 'günstige Okkasion,' not just for Kracauer but also for all those who gave it more central positions in their work. Schütz suggests that, although the war as a topic had never entirely disappeared, the increasing economic problems give it a renewed relevance:

Mit dem Ausbruch einer neuerlichen gesellschaftlichen Krise aber, der massenhaften Arbeitslosigkeit, wird die Sinnkrise auf neue Weise akut. Zugespitzt könnte man sagen, daß die Arbeitslosigkeit als Verschärfung des Bewußtseins von Sinnlosigkeit den Krieg aktualisiert: als (gehabte und verlorene) Arbeit mit Sinn.<sup>19</sup>

For Kracauer the crisis of meaning had never really ceased to be painfully acute, as his writings, especially from the early 1920s, show. If anything, by 1928 his position at the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and his adoption of a materialist approach to reality had supplied him with the means, both economical and theoretical, to manage. Kracauer, therefore, was able in his novel to address the

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<sup>19</sup> Schütz, p.187

fears, rational and irrational, which led so many of his contemporaries to fall back into militarism. As Schütz puts it:

Fast zwangsläufig verwandeln sich in der gesellschaftlichen Reimagination Kriegsverlust und Arbeitslosigkeit in Wieder-Arbeit-Haben als Wiederkehr des Krieges. Und das ist keineswegs ein Projekt einzelner, sondern ein kollektives Unternehmen, an dem noch diejenigen mitarbeiten, die den Krieg negativ zu erinnern unternehmen.<sup>20</sup>

What Schütz describes is an obsessive repetition which results from an inability to overcome past trauma. Kracauer, however, attempts in *Ginster* to work through the experience of the war as well as the paralysing feelings of meaninglessness which, according to Schütz, are such an explosive combination and for which a (largely imagined) war serves as a safety valve.

Although *Ginster* opens with the beginning of the war, the relative unimportance of the event is already indicated by the fact that the news is contained in a subordinate clause: 'Als der Krieg ausbrach, befand sich Ginster, ein fünfundzwanzigjähriger Mann, in der Landeshauptstadt M.' (*Ginster*, p.9) What is far more important is Ginster's own subjectivity and how he relates to the world around him. The opening sentence, with its slightly curious emphasis on Ginster's age and gender, suggests uncertainty, as though even those basic characteristics have to be asserted in case the reader does mistake him for a plant. Ginster himself cultivates uncertainty about his identity, for example with regard to his doctor title, which 'wäre überflüssig gewesen, aber Ginster [...] wollte im Bewußtsein, den Titel rechtlich erworben zu haben, später gleichsam inkognito ohne ihn leben' (*Ginster*, p.9). As his nickname indicates, Ginster does not fit in with his fellow humans. There is clearly a voluntary element to this: Ginster identifies more with his nickname

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<sup>20</sup> Schütz, p.188

than with his real one (which the reader never learns) and he takes pleasure in keeping his title a secret. But his liking of things which do not or even cannot serve any purpose can also be read as a projection of Ginster's own feelings of uselessness. There are many similar examples of Ginster deriving pleasure from pointlessness which reveal his ambivalence toward any kind of purpose or meaning. During his time as a soldier, for example, he develops a real tenderness for his broken and therefore useless wristwatch:

Was sollte er mit dem Uhrchen jetzt anfangen, es störte am Arm und war doch so zierlich, daß er es nicht einfach fortwerfen mochte. Nachdenklich öffnete er sein Holzkistchen, griff hinein und fühlte in der Tiefe etwas Weiches. Die Fußlappen. Er hatte sie ihrer Unverwendbarkeit wegen halb vergessen gehabt und war auch viel zu beschäftigt gewesen, um seinem ursprünglichen Vorsatz gemäß ab und zu über sie hinzufahren. Nun erhielten sie ihre Bestimmung. In einem unbewachten Augenblick bettete er den erloschenen Mechanismus sorgfältig in die Tücher, versenkte die Last auf dem Grund des Kistchens und schüttete die anderen Sachen darüber. Obwohl das Lederriemchen noch unverbraucht war, hatte er es doch an der Uhr gelassen. Daß sie sich mit den Fußlappen zusammenfand, befriedigte ihn, denn beide waren nicht für einander vorgesehen. (*Ginster*, p.159)

The mixed imagery of a soft bed as for a child or a lover and a burial echoes Ginster's thoughts on the matter of making his bed: 'Ihre Einrichtung erforderte besonders im Oberbett eine gewisse Geschicklichkeit, über die Ginster zum Glück noch vom Ehrenfriedhof her verfügte.' (*Ginster*, p.148) The connection between the life of a soldier and death is an obvious one to make, but the apparently casual manner in which Ginster recalls it suggests that a (justified) fear has been preying on him. The affinity Ginster feels with his broken watch results in a somewhat defiant tenderness towards an object which a more rational person with little space at their disposal would throw away. On the other hand Ginster is not only aware of the uselessness of the watch, he is also irritated by the discomfort it causes him when he wears it.

Similarly, he has forgotten his foot rags because they are of no use. They only find their destiny in their final relegation. Ginster's demonstrative affection for useless objects does not in the end redeem them – they end up dead and buried, allowing Ginster to carry on unburdened by them.

Kracauer extends Ginster's ambivalent attitude towards the use-value of things to the social sphere and satirises the class system which has conditioned Ginster without him realising it. On the one hand Ginster has no sense of solidarity with his fellow recruits; when they have to move a heavy cannon

wunderte sich Ginster, daß die Kanone sich überhaupt von der Stelle bewegte, denn er zog sie nicht eigentlich, sondern ließ sich von ihr schleifen. Bei dem Frost hatte er Bedenken, die Metallteile zu fest zu berühren, und überdies machte ja auch die vereinigte Anstrengung der ganzen Gruppe die Tätigkeit des Einzelnen überflüssig, die in jener Anstrengung schon enthalten war. (*Ginster*, p.172)

This absurd logic, which nevertheless works to Ginster's advantage, is matched in Ginster's attempt to report sick:

Die Tatsache, daß er nach den Anstrengungen [...] auf dem Kasernenhof heute seine Mattigkeit nicht einmal selbst verschuldet hatte, raubte ihm noch den letzten Halt; denn der Unterarzt erkannte ja gerade die Echtheit der Leiden nicht an. Vielleicht wäre er zu überzeugen gewesen, wenn Ginster die Mattigkeit simuliert hätte; aber dazu fehlte ihm eben die Kraft. So blieb kein anderer Ausweg, als sich gesund zu stellen. (*Ginster*, p.188)

Ginster's absurd logic, which nevertheless proves successful, has caused many critics - as well as Kracauer himself - to compare Ginster to Charlie Chaplin's little tramp.<sup>21</sup> Yet Ginster does not quite share Charlie's charming innocence. Where Charlie only ever gets the better of those who try to harm him – and

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<sup>21</sup> E.g. Franziska Herzfeld, who also mentions Schwejk, in 'Ginster', *Das Blaue Heft*, xi Jahrgang, No.3, 2. Feb.29, Joseph Roth, who compares Ginster to 'Chaplin im Warenhaus' (Belke and Renz, p.52); also Eckhardt Köhn, 'Die Konkretionen des Intellekts' in *Text und Kritik*, p.48, and Inka Mulder, *Siegfried Kracauer*, p.140f

even there he does not always succeed – Ginster takes advantage of whatever or whoever comes along, his ‘innocence’ lies in his lack of awareness that he is actually harming others.

Another comparison may be more revealing than the one with Chaplin. The medical examination in *Ginster* has an obvious parallel in Thomas Mann’s *Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull*, as has been noted.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Kracauer reviewed a reading by Mann from *Felix Krull* and from *Der Zauberberg* in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, and so may have used the scene consciously.<sup>23</sup> At any rate, Kracauer introduces a telling twist: unlike Felix Krull, Ginster succeeds not because of his pitiful attempt to pass as healthy - in fact he barely gets a chance to make his case - but because he is an ‘Akademiker’ and this ‘schien den Familiensinn des Unterarztes anzurühren’ (*Ginster*, p.188). Even though he once attended a lecture on the subject ‘erfuhr Ginster [niemals], was das zusammengesetzte Wort Sozialpolitik selbst bedeutete’. As these scenes bear out, however, Ginster not only passively benefits from such politics, he also plays an active role in them, whether he knows (or wants) it or not. Although Ginster plays at being oblivious of the concept of usefulness, his actions show him to be quite capable of making use of things, people and situations. Moreover, the narrator, by exposing Ginster’s self-serving ignorance, encourages the reader to judge Ginster rather than to empathise with him.

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<sup>22</sup> See Müller, p.130.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Vortrag Thomas Mann’, *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 1.11.1922; Kracauer talks here about the ‘verspielt-liebkosende[] und abschiednehmende[] Ironie, die aus dem Bericht des Hochstaplers Felix Krull über seinen gelungenen Versuch, sich durch einen geschickt eingefädelten epileptischen Anfall den Fängen der gestrengen Untersuchungskommission zu entwinden, allenthalben hervorleuchtet.’

The development in Ginster's understanding of his own identity is also reflected in the formal aspects of the novel, in particular in its use of genre conventions. Kracauer very obviously uses themes of the war novel for his own ends, but he does not stop at this one genre. As well as subverting the conventions of the war novel, the text borrows from, alludes to or ironises other genres, too. Most obvious without the final chapter, the novel is structured like a *Schelmenroman*, with Ginster being taken, seemingly without his having a hand in the matter, all over the country in his 'adventures'. Those adventures, too, are incidents where Ginster gets caught up in or even causes, apparently inadvertently, (minor) catastrophes, from which he usually emerges unscathed. This picaresque quality of the novel is especially evident in Chapter Five, which covers a period of two years. This time span is neither structured by a coherent plot, nor is it simply omitted because it lacks such a plot. Instead, Kracauer picks out, seemingly at random, individual events in paragraphs beginning 'im Verlauf der zwei Jahre empfing Frau Biehl die endgültige Bestätigung vom Tode ihres Sohnes' (*Ginster*, p.91) or 'eines Tages in den zwei Jahren[...]' (*Ginster*, p.94). Here Kracauer does not need to subvert genre conventions, because the disconnected quality of the episodes in the chapter accurately reflects Ginster's own feeling of drifting without control or even an indication of the route. The pointlessness of things and the (apparent) lack of purpose in Ginster himself also contribute to the picaresque effect of the novel. Indeed, Kracauer himself described it as an 'intellektuellen Schwejk', as reported by Adorno.<sup>24</sup> Both Bloch and Benjamin also commented upon the

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<sup>24</sup> Adorno, 'Der wunderliche Realist', p.99.

similarity.<sup>25</sup> However, *Ginster* does not share the anarchic humour of Hašek's *Švejk*. If *Ginster* is the intellectual *Švejk*, he is, by the same token, inhibited by the pretensions and the decorum of the bourgeois intellectual, particularly at a time when pretensions and decorum are increasingly becoming the only things which distinguish the bourgeois from the masses. Instead, the way in which the novel undercuts bourgeois values and follows the protagonist as he attempts to divest himself of his bourgeois identity makes it a kind of anti-*Bildungsroman*.<sup>26</sup>

Especially in its first and its most recent editions, i.e. those that include the final chapter, *Ginster* follows the pattern of a *Bildungsroman*. Yet Kracauer turns a genre which conventionally portrays a successful socialisation into a revelation of the failure of this process and even of its undesirability. Though the protagonist is a young man who must find his place in the world around him, the place he eventually finds is an oppositional one. Other elements, such as the intervention of a spiritual mentor, or the experience of nature, are also subverted. The earliest 'mentor' figure, the sculptor Ruster, takes *Ginster* on a drinking spree in order to make him fail his *Tauglichkeitsuntersuchung*, and his main experience of nature is as the setting of a failed seduction. Above all, Inka Mülder rightly insists, against Eckhardt Köhn's emphasis on *Ginster*'s individualism, that 'die Besonderheit *Ginsters* besteht gerade darin, daß er, in Umkehrung des Schemas des traditionellen

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<sup>25</sup> Bloch Briefe, p.290, Walter Benjamin, *Briefe an Siegfried Kracauer, mit vier Briefen von Siegfried Kracauer an Walter Benjamin*, Theodor W. Adorno Archiv, eds. Marbach/Neckar Marbacher Schriften, 1987, p.49.

<sup>26</sup> In 1920 Kracauer had written in a letter to Margarete Susman: 'Bald wird es Zeit, daß ich mir wieder den "Nachsommer" von Stifter vornehme, mein Heiligtum, mein Wunschbuch, das ich alle Jahre verschlinge.' (Belke and Renz, pp. 33/4) While there are faint echoes of Stifter's novel in *Ginster* – for instance the paternal mentor who is also an artist, Julia van C as the maternal friend, the romance blossoming in beautiful gardens – the vehemence with which all these elements are subverted demonstrates Kracauer's rejection of his own former taste.

Bildungsromans, der Einmaligkeit seines Daseins zu entkommen, die besonderen Merkmale seiner Existenz abzustreifen sucht'.<sup>27</sup> Mulder's view is supported by Kracauer's own assertion that 'eine Absicht des Buchs ist das Verschwinden des Privaten im Helden'.<sup>28</sup> This is most obvious in the final chapter, where Ginster replies to Frau van C.'s question about his childhood with 'ich weiß nichts. Ich erinnere mich nicht.' (*Ginster*, p.240) His response to her plan to learn Russian and travel to Russia is 'ich möchte um keinen Preis länger Architekt bleiben' (*Ginster*, p.239). Ginster wants to leave behind anything that marks him as an individual, be it the past that had previously inhibited him so much, or a professional identification. He does not even tie himself down with a positive plan for the future. Yet the closing image of the little tin bird in its 'cage' is an ambiguous comment on Ginster's desire for freedom: while the cage is in fact only a rotating ring, and thus an illusion, there nevertheless seems to be no escape for the bird as Ginster keeps spinning the ring (*Ginster*, p.242).

In Kracauer's inverted *Bildungsroman* the protagonist, like the essayist/narrator of 'Das Ornament der Masse', tries to enact his own disappearance from the scene. Ginster quite literally tries to vanish by refusing to eat. As he feels more and more threatened by the draft, Ginster seeks refuge in starvation. He finds that 'wurden von [der Allgemeinheit] auch die meisten Tätigkeiten überwacht, so konnte sie doch nicht das Hungern verwehren. Durch einen begrenzten Nahrungsentzug wollte Ginster sich allmählich verringern aus Unlust am Krieg'. (*Ginster*, p.115) Ginster defies encroaching social control by giving up his right to physical integrity which is precisely

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<sup>27</sup> Mulder, p. 139.

<sup>28</sup> Bloch *Briefe*, p.293.

what the war is putting at risk anyway. Ginster's attempt to starve himself in order to be passed over by the draft can be compared to the kind of mimicry practised by certain animals to deceive their predators. Paraphrasing Adorno, Miriam Hansen explains how "in an unreflected form, mimesis as mimicry converges with the regime of instrumental reason, its reduction of life to self-preservation and the reproduction of domination by the very means designed to abolish it [...] "Das Leben lebt nicht.""<sup>29</sup> This summarises Ginster's state well; for most of the novel his attempts to merge into the background, to disappear from view, reduce his life to a mere surviving. Of course, while there is a war going on even mere survival is an achievement, but the fact remains that Ginster not only decides to sacrifice his individuality for his survival but in effect affirms the very society which causes his misery and threatens his life.

Hansen goes on to claim that

in the context of aesthetic theory, however, this mimesis onto the reified and alienated [...], the world of living death, is a crucial means of negation available to modern art – as an 'admixture of poison', a pharmakon that allegorises the symptoms though it necessarily fails as a remedy.<sup>30</sup>

As the final section of this chapter will show, Kracauer's way of structuring the text exploits both those aspects: the protagonist's behaviour is self-defeating (even when it seems to succeed this is an illusion: it is not his physical weakness but his academic background which secures his release from the army), but the aesthetic mediation of the narrator turns the same behaviour into a protest.

Where Adorno denies the possibility that the mimesis of a state of alienation could have a 'therapeutic' effect, Kracauer does seem to hope for

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<sup>29</sup> Hansen, 'Mass Culture', p.53

<sup>30</sup> Hansen, 'Mass Culture', pp 53/4

just that: that Ginster's protest is heard and understood, and that it might bring about some change. Yet as was the case in 'Das Ornament der Masse', here too it is hard to determine how this might happen, or even, what precisely Kracauer wants to change. The social critique - of a society that fosters domination, exploitation, and selfishness - which is implicit in the main part of the novel is, in the final chapter, turned into a sweeping feeling of hatred:

[Dieser Haß] galt der Herrscherei der Menschen, die sich zu solchen Schlössern versteigt, und allen den Ordnungen, die das Elend verleugnen. Es gibt übrigens auch Schlösser der Liebe. Abreißen sollte man die Bauten, die schlechte Schönheit, den Glanz, herunter damit. (*Ginster*, p.238)

Ginster still abhors the domination of people over people, in society as in love, but his protest is aesthetic, not political. Like the narrator in 'Das Ornament der Masse', it is not political change which he demands, but an end to pretence. He rejects not human misery itself, but the covering up of such misery by beautiful appearances.

Ginster's fascination with Marseilles, a city that accommodates his new-found concern with the less salubrious aspect of human life, is an indication of Kracauer's aestheticising approach. Insisting on giving Frau van C. a guided tour of his favourite spots, Ginster leads her to the slums above the port. 'Ginster empfand weder ihre noch die eigene Gegenwart, so berauscht war er von den Schätzen, die ihn umgaben. Sie bestanden aus Abfällen, Wäschestücken und Dreck. Sonne erfüllte die Höhlen und Schläuche, eine Richtung zu finden, war unmöglich.' (*Ginster*, p.234) His pleasure in this scene is the flipside of Ginster's rejection of bourgeois hypocrisy, but at the same time it is the pleasure of the *flâneur*, who only watches but does not get involved.

There is a similar detachment when Ginster tells Frau van C. of his encounter with a prostitute, which had awakened him to the certainty of his death and to the realisation that the loneliness of death bestows its own kind of individuality. In his description the figure of the prostitute remains shadowy, in striking contradiction to the lesson he claims to have learned from her. Kracauer here seems to follow a pattern common in Weimar representations of prostitutes, as Marsha Meskimmon argues:

The ubiquity of the female prostitute as a cipher in modern art, literature, social and critical theory attests to an implicit gender bias within modernism itself. The prostitute was used as a symbol of sexual freedom, the condition of commodity capitalism, the terrifying urban masses, the harbinger of social decline and the natural result of female emancipation.<sup>31</sup>

In Ginster's account the prostitute is a positive, not a threatening figure. She appears as a casualty of the forces of modernity and Ginster's view of her as a fellow victim sets free his capacity to empathise. He refers to her by her first name and he even admits 'ich hätte mich gern mit Emmi nur unterhalten' (*Ginster*, p.237). That he does not manage to convey any sense of her as a person is due not to his lack of interest, but to her refusal to let him share any more of her life than he has paid for, as becomes clear to him when she pulls him away from her Christmas presents: 'sie zog mich mit einer Bewegung vom Fenster weg, die mir das beschämende Gefühl einflößte, beim Horchen durchs Schlüsselloch ertappt worden zu sein. Ich begriff: sie wollte mich nicht in ihre Weihnachten einweihen, das Zimmer war ihr Büro.' (*Ginster*, p.237) But if Kracauer confers some degree of dignity upon the woman with this assertion of her right to privacy, he takes it away again with the description of what she is so protective about. An embroidered sampler above her bed proclaims 'Streut

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<sup>31</sup> Meskimmon, p.28/9.

ihr die Blumen der Liebe bei Lebenszeit / Bleibt ihr bewahret vor Herzeleid'. This typical product of respectable bourgeois maidenhood contrasts so sharply with Emmi's actual circumstances as to explode any illusions Ginster might still have harboured of the possibility of a respectable bourgeois existence in a modern, rationalised world where human beings have become commodities. Kracauer eschews the often misogynistic representation of the prostitute as a personification of the threats of modernity in the vein of Otto Dix or George Grosz, but he does not escape reducing her to a cipher in a different way. Emmi's pathetic attempt either to cling to an earlier life or to aspire to a long-defunct social ideal – it is not clear which - is not itself considered to be interesting, it is only useful insofar as it triggers the protagonist's realisation that such efforts are futile. For Ginster both Marseilles and Emmi matter only insofar as they reflect his own state of mind: 'Warum ich das eben erzähle – weil ich in diesem armseligen Hafenviertel endlich auf eine Welt stoße, die dem Zustand entspricht, in dem ich mich nach dem Mädchen befand.' (*Ginster*, p.237/8)

His sudden insight of the limits of his life arouse in Ginster the desire to experience life within those limits as fully as he can. It is as if, now that he has torn down his previous defences against the risks and challenges of life and of reality, he feels a compulsion to throw himself into what he had previously avoided. Yet while gaining in insight, he seems to have lost the desire for change that had been fuelled by his introspective misery; he relishes the sights, sounds, and smells of misery he finds in Marseille instead of wanting to tackle the misery itself. Frau van C., by contrast, really is politically motivated. She is clearly fired up by her belief that the revolution has failed and must be

completed. Her commitment (and her political naïvety) is demonstrated by her declaration that she is learning Russian because she wants to go to Russia. Ginster's reply is 'ich möchte um keinen Preis länger Architekt bleiben' (*Ginster*, p.239). This remark is, in the context of his longstanding unhappiness in his profession, a return to private concerns in the face of a need for political action. Inasmuch as it expresses Ginster's refusal to continue to produce more false beauty when he knows that such facades need to be torn down, it is an aesthetic, rather than a political protest. Like the observer/narrator of 'Das Ornament der Masse', Ginster refuses to participate in the production of bourgeois 'good taste,' and demands a serious engagement with social reality in all its misery, but he also does so from a similarly detached position.

The political stance of *Ginster* then does not seem so different from 'Das Ornament der Masse', but there is a major difference in the presentation of the figure of the narrator between the two texts. The essayist in 'Das Ornament der Masse' had been alert to his surrounding culture and society in a way even the Ginster of the final chapter can only aspire to, but he had been entirely unselfconscious in the presentation of his insights, to the point of effacing himself from the text. Ginster, on the other hand, is present in the text two, if not three times: as the younger and the older protagonist, and as the narrator who orders, explains and supplements the story. Thus even though the novel, like the essay, ends on a note of aesthetic rather than political commitment, appropriate to the *flâneur*, Ginster reflects upon his own role and upon his identity in a thoroughly un-*flâneur*-like fashion. The novel shows how fragile the sense of self of the protagonist actually is, and it suggests that there

can and must be a third option: neither miserably under-developed nor calcified in an outdated bourgeois existence.

## Sex and Politics on the Home Front

Kracauer's complex critique of social inequality and snobbery contrasts with Ernst Glaeser's much simpler approach in *Jahrgang 1902*. Where Kracauer constantly destabilizes the idea of innocence, Glaeser tells the story of a young boy - born in 1902 - who loses his innocence, both politically and sexually, through his experience of the home front. Glaeser's protagonist thus appears to model a steady progress towards personal maturity and political engagement. Ginster, on the other hand, demonstrates that such a development is fraught with social and psychological difficulties. In their respective accounts of the bourgeois subject's relationship to the modern world both Kracauer and Glaeser use certain key motifs of modernity to convey their ideas; most notable, next to the major themes of war and sexuality, are images of railways and stations. This particularly interesting example of a signifier of central modern issues will be examined first. The main body of this section then addresses the complex of war and sexuality with the help of Klaus Theweleit's *Männerphantasien*. It explores how Kracauer employs this complex as a transmission point of his response to modernity. Again Glaeser's use of the war/sexuality complex will provide a comparison.

In his novel *Jahrgang 1902*, the story of a boy born in that year and experiencing his adolescence during the war years, Glaeser uses first person narration, frequently in the present tense, to involve his readers and to allow them to share in the awakening of a political consciousness experienced by the boy. The novel begins with an incident which combines anti-Semitism with militarism in the ritual humiliation of a Jewish classmate. The narrator sympathises with the other boy whose 'Augen und besonders sein Haar waren

schön. Es war schwarz und glänzte wie dunkler Achat.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, when his best friend, Ferd v. K., suggests that they should protect Leo Silberstein, he does not understand Ferd's ethical reasons. To him it simply seems like a good deal to help out a classmate who can in return help him with his French homework. Ferd, who in his maturity is really an extension of his father, is, for the first two thirds or so of the novel, the main influence on the narrator. The father, Major v. K., has travelled extensively and scandalises the town with his liberal politics. The fact that Ferd's (now dead) mother was English, and that the 'Rote Major', as he is known, also had a liaison with a Frenchwoman further damages his reputation in their narrow-minded, jingoistic provincial town. Outgrowing his childhood friendship, the narrator eventually develops a friendship with August Kremmelbein, whose father is being persecuted for his socialist politics by the friends and colleagues of the narrator's father. Although still very naïve (he is twelve years old at this point) the narrator exposes himself to a very different worldview to the one he is used to, when, for instance, August's father explains the war to the boys in terms of class struggle.

Such political lessons are not commented upon by the narrator, but their positioning in relation to the rather satirical exposures of bourgeois pomp and sheer greed suggests that the mature narrator (as distinct from his younger self) agrees with them. Ginster, by contrast, extends his scepticism and distrust to all political creeds he encounters, leading him to a resolute refusal to engage in politics at all. His family discusses the war in terms of the stylistic features of the bulletins (*Ginster*, p.53), his employer thinks of the profit to be made

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<sup>32</sup> Glaeser, p.9.

from the soldiers' cemetery (*Ginster*, p.102), and his friends Müller and Hay limit themselves to jibes about the bad manners of 'Proleten' (*Ginster*, p.93). A lecture about the causes of the war, where Ginster meets Frau van C. for the second time, does not prompt him to debate with her and the others present about the war or any related matters, instead he pours out his private misery to her, his fear of being killed, but also his loneliness and the lack of meaning in his life. Only in the final chapter does his attitude change; for most of the time Ginster is prevented by his inability to see himself as part of society from engaging with matters outside his immediate surroundings. Even the revolution in 1918 cannot change this:

Ohne etwas geahnt zu haben, befand sich Ginster mitten in einer echten Revolution. Vor Jahren hatte er in Genua nicht glauben wollen, daß er in Genua war. An sich zu denken wäre jetzt kleinlich gewesen.  
'Nun muß ich auch übermorgen nicht aufs Bezirkskommando. Oder...'  
(*Ginster*, p.225)

The differences between the two novels and their protagonists are also illustrated by the different uses Kracauer and Glaeser make of the railway as a symbol. The railway in general, and stations in particular, are peculiarly modern phenomena, not least in that they resemble the hotel lobby which Kracauer had analysed in this vein in *Der Detektiv-Roman*. Stations are not only associated with a modern form of transport, but they are spaces which provide refuge from everyday life and (up to a point) smooth over social difference. In these two novels which are set largely in provincial towns the railway can either be a lifeline to the big city or, on the other hand, the bond with the front from which there is no escape. Thus Ginster first volunteers to be a railroad worker, then becomes an orderly, transporting injured soldiers from stations to hospitals, and finally finds himself on a station, being

transported to his quarters. As institutions closely associated with nineteenth-century technological progress, stations stand in for the experience of city life and for modernity itself. Both visually and aurally they provide in concentrated form the kind of stimuli otherwise found on the busy squares and boulevards of big cities. They entice with business opportunities, encounters with all kinds of people and all manner of news and information. The mobility they offer also promises chances of social progress. On the other hand, stations bring with them what is often felt to be the downside of modernity, too: anonymity, unpredictability as well as the rationalisation and regimentation imposed by timetables, and the impossibility of controlling the environment by keeping out dirt, disorder and undesirable people.<sup>33</sup> In both *Ginster* and *Jahrgang 1902* the railway is used to convey certain key aspects of modernity.

For *Ginster* the railroad often appears as a means of salvation. First of all, as mentioned above, volunteering to lay tracks promises the not very athletic *Ginster* a chance to stay at home by being rejected for this heavy work, while allowing him to keep his self-love intact – at least he has tried! Furthermore, if he should be called up after all, the railroad will keep him safely behind the frontlines. *Ginster* likes travelling in general, he enjoys not being anywhere in particular. He likes trains as well as ships, stations as much as ports: ‘Nichts wurzelte hier außer den Kranen.’ (*Ginster*, p.47) For *Ginster*,

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<sup>33</sup> The photographs taken by Friedrich Seidenstücker in the Berlin of the 1920s and 30s convey an impression of this. In his studies of ‘Berliner Leben’ scenes from in and around the railway stations of Berlin feature prominently. Pictures of porters gossiping or yawning as they are waiting for a job, of people waiting underneath the clock at Bahnhof Zoo for business partners, lovers or relatives, of trains arriving or departing, station masters and drivers comparing timetables, or of food being loaded onto a train for the restaurant car are vivid images of the bustle at these stations, but also demonstrate the possibility for *flânerie* there and the enjoyment to be had from it. (Friedrich Seidenstücker, *Von Weimar bis zum Ende, Fotografien aus bewegter Zeit*, Ann und Jürgen Wilde, eds, Dortmund: Harenberg Edition, Die bibliophilen Taschenbücher, 1980)

the idea of not belonging, of not being rooted or tied down is very appealing, as it also means being free from other people's expectations. Thus one of the things the railways signify in *Ginster* is the freedom associated with travelling and the utopian desire to find a happier place elsewhere.

In *Jahrgang 1902*, by contrast, the railroad is used as a metaphor for anonymous authority. When the narrator and his mother travel to Switzerland just before the war, the father accompanies them to the station, impressing upon everyone the need to be on time.

Der Fahrplan war das Gesetz. Der Fahrplan hatte Gewalt über alles, was in den nächsten Minuten geschah. Ich, meine Mutter, auch mein mächtiger Vater, überhaupt jeder, der einen Namen hatte - alle, die wir hier standen, waren dem Fahrplan ausgeliefert, sogar der Mann in der roten Mütze - zum ersten Mal erlebte ich die Gewalt anonymer Organisationen. In diesen qualvollen Sekunden, die ich nie vergessen werde, weil sich in ihnen zwar noch unbewußt und deshalb voller Angst der Zusammenbruch meines Glaubens an die Macht der Persönlichkeit vollzog - hätte mein Vater, ja sogar der Rote Major den Fahrplan ändern können?! - in diesen Sekunden habe ich wohl den Grund für meine spätere Skepsis vor jeder Art persönlich freier Willensentscheidungen zu suchen.<sup>34</sup>

Here the meaning of the incident is already explained, little is left to the imagination, even the Oedipal tension of the situation is made clear. Although the themes are similar to *Ginster* - scepticism towards the concept of 'personality' and towards the possibility of individual action - their abrupt introduction and didactic presentation contrast with the complexity and subtlety of *Ginster*. Furthermore, the narrator does not actually seem to have any difficulties in identifying himself as an individual, after all the novel is told in the first person and the narrator's actions, feelings and reflections are generally coherent and suggest a sound ego. If he develops scepticism towards

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<sup>34</sup> Glaeser, p 165

any kind of personal free will than this is not evident in the novel, where he manages to make important decisions quite rationally. Ginster, by contrast, is paralysed by complicated sequences of justifications and rationalisations which really do reflect a belief in the impossibility of the free will of the rational individual: 'Das Handeln von [Gründen] abhängig zu machen, war verkehrt, denn jeder Grund hatte wieder seinen Gegen Grund, wie eine Wand starrten sie ihm alle entgegen, unmöglich, nach außen zu schlüpfen.' (*Ginster*, p.50)

Ginster's personality is revealed in a more complex and subtle way in another scene which uses the motif of the railway again. One of the most quoted passages of the novel occurs when Ginster goes for a walk with Elfriede, the woman he had hoped to seduce:

Sie kreuzten die Schienenstränge. "Hier blüht bald der Ginster", sagte Elfriede und wies auf die Böschung. An seinen eigenen Namen hätte Ginster niemals gedacht. Es freute ihn, daß der Ginster die Schienen begleitete, die sich geradeaus entfernten. Am liebsten hätte auch er zu beiden Seiten des Bahndammes geblüht. (*Ginster*, p.208)

Ginster, brought face to face with his emblem, recognises and readily identifies with it. The apparently nonsensical idea of wanting to flower along the railway tracks draws together several ideas. The railway signifies movement from an unsatisfactory present into a possibly better future. Whereas the straight line in which the tracks point into the distance suggest determination and dynamism, the broom shrubs merely provide worthless, if pretty, ornaments. While they change with the seasons, this is an endless and predetermined cycle, not a development. Their existence is insignificant and passive, but also free from the needs, threats, and upheavals which characterise human life. Ginster recognises the promise the tracks seem to make; yet he identifies with the useless vegetation, which apparently 'accompanies' them but is always left

behind. The railway is a physical manifestation of the changing significance of time and space in the modern world, whereas the broom seems eternal, immobile and undifferentiated. In this scene, Ginster spontaneously dismisses the promise, but also the challenge, of modernity in favour of an unproductive, unchanging form of existence.

In contrast to the single, clear message conveyed by Glaeser's use of the railway as a symbol of modernity, Kracauer takes a more complex approach. Although the incident discussed above reveals Ginster's fantasy of a life unaffected by modernity, Kracauer also uses positive images of a station to illustrate how Ginster responds to the modern world he lives in. In a particularly revealing childhood memory Ginster remembers an incident where, deeply hurt by some long forgotten injustice, he ran off to the station and spent hours on the platform, knitting:

Nach und nach, auch das wußte er noch, waren Kummer und Trotz gewichen, und in dem Gefühl der Seligkeit, so verloren in einem Gewimmel zu sein, das unaufhörlich neu entstand und sich selbst verschlang, hatte er über die gewölbten Glasdächer herrliche Glanznetze gestreut, die sich mit dem Rauch der Lokomotiven vermischten, der im Dunkel entschwand. Zuletzt war die ganze Glashalle ein Gefunkel geworden und aus den Menschen eine Helle wie aus bunten Papierhüllen gedrungen, in denen Stearinkerzen brennen. Vom Licht berauscht, hatte er selbst am heißesten geglüht, das kleine Wolläppchen in der Hand, das vergessen zwischen den Nadeln hing. (*Ginster*, p.142)

Ginster finds pleasure and even consolation in the sensual touch of soft fabrics, a substitute for missing parental/maternal warmth. This then gives way to the visual pleasure in the kaleidoscopic, shifting patterns of light and colour in the glass-roofed station building. The surrogate intimacy of touching soft, warm material, a mere comfort, is replaced by the visual pleasure and the exuberance of being seemingly at the hub of the swirling patterns around him, almost close

enough to reach out and touch it, yet perfectly still and safe in the dead centre. Unlike in his fantasy of a vegetative existence, Ginster here does not turn his back on modernity, instead he actively seeks out the quintessentially modern space of the station. Yet he does not participate in the activity around him, he keeps himself apart and merely watches. Essentially, this is an early experience of *flânerie* for Ginster, and he derives great pleasure from being lost amongst a throng of people who pay no attention to the little boy in their midst. This, then, is another form of refusing the challenges of modernity: instead of turning away from them, Ginster here turns them into a spectacle for his aesthetic pleasure. Where Glaeser reduces the railroad to a metaphor for the imposition of anonymous authority on the individual in modern societies, Kracauer succeeds in capturing both the ambiguity of modernisation and the shifting responses to it by the individual caught up in the process.

As the memory of this incident clearly demonstrates, Ginster's response to his environment is closely connected with his experience of childhood. At the same time, his early impressions are located in a larger social context. There is a link between Ginster's development into a withdrawn, even anti-social individual and Wilhelmine family life which can be pursued with reference to the theory of proto-fascist personality development presented by Klaus Theweleit, even though Ginster does not, in the end, take that direction. His family life, however, as it is presented in the narrator's childhood memories, shows characteristic Wilhelmine structures. Thus on Ginster's first return to his hometown the memory of his - now dead - father descends upon him like 'ein grauer etwas abgeschabter Havelock, der ihm die Aussicht versperrte' (*Ginster*, p.41). Ginster remembers the father as a partly

frightening, partly pathetic figure. The mother is utterly submissive to him and his thunderstorm-like moods outweigh the tokens of care and gratitude he occasionally shows her. Yet his evident - and doomed - desire to see his family in better circumstances cause the young Ginster to sympathise with him. Thus his feelings towards the father veer from wishing him away - “Ich wollte, du wärest wieder fort” (*Ginster*, p.41) - to an unfulfilled desire for closeness - ‘Ginster [hätte] zu ihm schlüpfen mögen und ihn streicheln’ (*Ginster*, p.42).

Ginster’s relationship with the mother is affected by the father’s oppressive presence, and the effects linger even after the father’s death, as she appears depressed, passive and withdrawn. Ginster worries about the possibility of losing her, too: ‘Feucht und starr beobachtete er in der Nacht, wie die Mutter zerrann, sie wurde abgetragen wie ein Bauwerk, ohne daß die Hände sich zeigten. Dann war nur er noch vorhanden, für drei Jahrzehnte vielleicht, ein abgetrenntes Teilchen.’ (*Ginster*, p.42) Both the mother’s withdrawal and Ginster’s nightmare indicate that Ginster never had the kind of relationship with his mother which would have enabled him to eventually become a mature individual, at home within the boundaries of his separate self. This kind of selfhood would have been thoroughly utopian. The behaviour of the parents evokes a specific socio-historical context which relegated the mother to the position of otherwise passive home maker and left the father feeling inferior to his higher-class customers. In their daily struggle to keep up with an upwardly mobile society which defines people in terms of what they can afford to consume neither parent seems to have been capable of attending to the child Ginster’s emotional needs. Instead he is pushed into a hated but reputable ‘Broterwerb’, and left to seek intimacy in hopeless relationships.

Although the older Ginster of the final chapter decides to leave his childhood behind, the narration of these memories demonstrates that they have to be understood in their impact on Ginster's development before they can be jettisoned successfully.<sup>35</sup>

That Ginster's anxious and obsessive reflections on his mother's mortality take the shape of a wet dream ('feucht und starr [...] in der Nacht) suggests that oedipal desire is mingled with a longing for unity which goes back rather further, and even with a latent hostility towards the mother who has satisfied neither of them. This constellation, in, admittedly, rather more virulent manifestations, is at the centre of Theweleit's study of German veterans of World War One and their writings. Since *Ginster* is actually set during and after the war it coincides precisely with the period covered by Theweleit's study. Theweleit's point is that these men, if they have not already done so during the First World War, will act such fantasies out in fascist murders. Clearly, therefore, his theories can only be applied with great caution to Kracauer, who not only had to flee into exile himself, but whose mother and aunt became the victims of such murder. However, Theweleit's conclusions about the influence of Wilhelmine family structures on the ability of male children to develop into healthy individuals is strikingly convincing in the case of Kracauer's *alter ego*, Ginster.

Theweleit begins by rejecting psychoanalytical theories of fascism based on the Freudian model of the Oedipus complex. Following Michael Balint he argues that symptoms like 'die Angst vor Lust an der Verschmelzung,

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<sup>35</sup> Cf Schröter who reads the same scene in a similar psychoanalytic mode but goes on to equate Ginster with Kracauer, thus missing the reflexive dimension of the text (Schröter, p 39)

Zerstückelungsvorstellungen, Auflösung der Grenzen des Ich, verschwimmende Objektbeziehungen` are symptomatic of a `basic fault` in the formation of the self/I, caused by a failed resolution of the symbiotic/dyadic relationship between mother and infant.<sup>36</sup> Such patients have underdeveloped egos, and consequently lack the mechanism to repress incestuous desires or castration fears, which, as a result, are displayed quite openly in the literature studied by Theweleit. Ginster's reactions to fantasies of fusion of fragmentation are not always fearful. Ginster remembers and regrets the loss of the freedom he had as a child to withdraw into a state which harks back to an even earlier time where self and world are not experienced as separate, where in fact there is no clearly delineated self. The kaleidoscopic images which are abundant in the novel have such positive associations for Ginster. The stained glass roof in the porch of the house where Ginster lives, for instance, is one of the reasons why he stays there, despite a chestnut tree which combines with the songs wafting up from the beer garden below to an image of bourgeois cosiness which he finds repulsive (*Ginster*, p.11). Ginster's design of a swimming pool with a large kaleidoscope set into the ceiling, too, uses the image of light and colour as a positive one. The idea is inspired by a memory of Ginster's swimming lessons:

Mein Lehrer hieß Treiber. Er hängte mich an eine Angelrute und ließ mich ins Wasser herunter. Lauter Knaben, die schon Schwimmen konnten, schossen um mich herum. Dann wurde ich frei. Ich schwamm gern auf dem Rücken und sah ins Glasoberlicht. (*Ginster*, p.15)

Contrasted with the restrictions imposed by the harness and the teacher - who `drives` the children on, until Ginster becomes free to `drift` - the ceiling

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<sup>36</sup> Theweleit, vol. 1, p.256.

window is associated with freedom. Furthermore the idea of swimming on his back, looking up into the sky at once disconnects Ginster from his companions darting about around him and it suggests that he is abandoning himself to a quasi-prenatal bliss. The fragmented and fracturing nature of the view through a kaleidoscope contains both these possibilities, the cutting off from surrounding reality and the evocation of a non-verbal and non-significatory state of fulfilment, like a fantasy of early infantile bliss. Ginster's longing for such (proto-incestuous) bliss is, as it were, the psychological version of Kracauer's earlier philosophical anti-modernism, which was also based on a longing for unity of self and world in a pre-Kantian world of religious meaning. Thus the imagery Kracauer uses here echoes that from his 1918 poem 'Im Dom zu Osnabrück'.

Incest is, however, according to Theweleit, not the original desire children have, it is already the result of a much more profound form of repression. Drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, he argues that, to begin with, the infant's desires are directed immediately at the social arena. It is the patriarchal family structure which positions the mother as the main target for the child's desires.

Es darf also nicht heißen: weil er die Mutter nicht bekommen konnte, hat er sich die Erde untertan gemacht (wie bei Freud) sondern: weil er die Erde nicht benutzen und produzieren durfte, ging er zur Mutter zurück. Der 'Inzestwunsch' wäre demnach keineswegs ein primärer Wunsch, sondern eine Form, die der Wunsch auf Grund der Repression annimmt, die er durch die Gesellschaft erfährt.<sup>37</sup>

Combined with the weakness of the ego in these men, such a fixation on the mother as the sole provider (or, in the case of the basic fault, failure to provide) leads to defensiveness or even open hostility:

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<sup>37</sup> Theweleit, vol 1, p.266

Besonders die lebendige Bewegung von Frauen zwingt sie sogleich in eine Abwehr/Angriffsstellung. Sie schirmt sich entweder gegen ihre Existenz ab (wie bei den Ehefrauen und den 'weißen' Müttern und Schwestern) oder sie vernichtet sie (wie die proletarischen Frauen, die 'Flintenweiber' und die erotischen Schwestern und Mütter). Die Emotionalität, die sexuelle Intensität, die von Frauen ausgeht, scheint prinzipiell unerträglich [...] zu sein.<sup>38</sup>

Theweleit focusses on texts at the extreme end of such defensive/aggressive writing, but even novels with broadly liberal messages are not immune from these tendencies. Glaeser's *Jahrgang 1902*, for instance, arguably shows a similar splitting up of women into 'white' and 'erotic' mothers and sisters. Although this is used quite deliberately and already questioned by the narrator, the excessively violent destruction of Anna, with which the book ends, does suggest the existence, still, of a barely repressed rage against this 'lebendige' young woman. Indeed, Theweleit's failure to account for the presence of 'fascist' instances in texts which are otherwise more or less clearly anti-fascist has been criticised.<sup>39</sup>

The two novels, *Ginster* and *Jahrgang 1902*, use the theme of sexuality in general and female characters in particular in quite different ways. In *Jahrgang 1902* the open-minded young protagonist is set up against a repressive environment, and for much of the time the conflict between the two sides is played out in the sexual arena. In *Ginster* the situation is more complex. The protagonist is himself implicated in social repression and exploitation, and this, too is reflected in his sexual relationships. Thus in *Jahrgang 1902* sudden outbursts of misogyny seem to clash with a generally liberal tone, whereas in *Ginster* sexually charged relationships reveal from the

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<sup>38</sup> Theweleit, vol. 1, p. 269.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Martin Lindner, *Leben in der Krise. Zeitromane der neuen Sachlichkeit und die intellektuelle Mentalität der klassischen Moderne*, Stuttgart Metzler 1994, p. 383

beginning that Ginster is both suffering social wrongs and perpetuating them. The remainder of this section will compare and analyse how the two authors tackle political issues through the sexual activities of their protagonists.

*Jahrgang 1902* is especially graphic in its intermingling of politics and sex, and here, unlike in the proletarian novels which Schütz finds most typical of this phenomenon, it is the narrator's small-town, middleclass background which is characterised as stuffy and repressed. The strong influence Ferd v. K. has on the narrator is evident not only in the narrator's increasing awareness of injustices around him, but also in a strong physical attraction. Initially this is expressed vicariously:

Einmal ist ein kleiner Junge, dem es verboten war, sich abends beim Schlafengehen bei Licht auszuziehen, an Ferd herangesprungen, als er aus dem Trog herausstieg und ich ihm mit zitternden Händen und abgewandtem Kopf das Frottiertuch hielt, und hat ihn in den Rücken gebissen. Ferd, der stark blutete, hat ihn mächtig verhauen, der Junge - es war der Sohn des Pfarrers S. - rieb dauernd seinen Kopf an Ferd's Beinen und küßte unter Ohrfeigen mit sonderbar beglücktem Gesicht dessen Hüfte.<sup>40</sup>

Here the narrator only has a passive, observing role (and even this only with his face turned away), but soon he confesses to his mother 'Ich könnt ihn [Ferd] küssen,' and not much later this wish is realised.<sup>41</sup> Ferd, to be sure, does not reciprocate the passion, on the contrary, he is repulsed by human sexuality (although the beating he gives his admirer could be read as an indication of repressed sexual desire) and barely tolerates the narrator's sexual curiosity: 'Er war ein Held. Er war ein Ideal. Aber ohne Geheimnis...'<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Glaeser, p. 25

<sup>41</sup> Glaeser, p. 31.

<sup>42</sup> Glaeser, p. 53

The narrator's pursuit of the 'Geheimnis,' sexuality, increasingly drives him and Ferd apart. When the war breaks out, v.K. is called up and eventually killed. Although they never fall out, Ferd is eventually replaced in the narrator's affection by August Kremmelbein. Their relationship is a more equal one, and it is cemented by the narrator's complicity when August has an affair with the wife of a farmer whom they are helping with the harvest. Through August the narrator is also first exposed to the harsh conditions in which the small town's working class exists. August's father is a socialist worker, and persecuted for his politics by the 'Obrigkeit'. The narrator also frequently witnesses political discussions in which socialism usually appears as well-intentioned but unrealistic and ineffectual, whereas the Major's freedom from illusions tends to prevail. Eventually the friendship with August ends, too, as the father is called up and the mother moves to her parents in the South, where food is less scarce, with the children.

When his own father is drafted and his mother begins to spoil him and showers him with affection, the narrator begins to distance himself from his family. He finally manages to break free from the mother when the father insists that he moves to the *Gymnasium* in the neighbouring town, where he is to learn about 'den Geist der Antike'.<sup>43</sup>

Wir erschrecken. Das war die Stimme der Front. Das war die Stimme jener Männer, die früher einmal unsere Väter waren, jetzt aber, seit Jahren von uns entfernt, fremd vor uns standen, beängstigend, groß übermächtig, mit schweren Schatten, erdrückend wie ein Denkmal.<sup>44</sup>

As the father reasserts his authority, the son separates from the mother, but he also rebels against the father. At school he and his classmates protest against a

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<sup>43</sup> Ginster, p.322

<sup>44</sup> Ginster, p.322

'humanist' education whose values of heroism and patriotism no longer bear any relationship to the reality of hunger, cold, and fear they daily face because of the war. More than that, he fails to do any work, instead spending his time with Anna, the conductor on the train he daily takes to school. Significantly, this is the only positive representation of a female figure in the whole book. If the narrator has so far failed to have a sexually and emotionally fulfilling relationship, this is not due to his lack of determination but to his ignorance and the respective women's deviousness, for instance the pharmacist's daughter Hilde, who ridicules him for his inexperience. This deviousness might reflect the repressive nature of Wilhelmine society, or it might be imagined by a young boy who has been influenced by his best friend's disdain of sexuality, particularly female sexuality, but, as no explanation is suggested in the text, it is just as likely that this is an instance of the misogyny analysed by Theweleit.

What is, however, obvious is the young narrator's still close link with his mother, a link which has not been successfully broken by the father who has already been shown to be fallible. Anna is a somewhat stereotypical 'New Woman', confident, flirtatious and independent, but also caring enough to give her share of food to her younger siblings. The ultimate proof of the narrator's devotion to Anna is his theft of some roast goose from his mother. This betrayal of his mother is an indication that he has finally broken free from the dyadic relationship with her. However, before Anna's and his relationship can be consummated, they are interrupted by an air raid. The novel ends with Anna's violent death. Once Anna has thus served her purpose, however, she is blown up in a bombing raid: "Das ist Anna?!" fragte ich leise und schüttelte den Kopf. "Volltreffer," antwortete der Landsturmmann, "was von ihr übrig

blieb, haben wir zugedeckt...”<sup>45</sup> In *Jahrgang 1902* a clear political progression is identification, which is facilitated by a succession of male heroes and father figures, and for which women must be sacrificed. Anna’s violent elimination leaves the narrator free to pursue his political development.

There are a number of incidents in the first ten chapters of *Ginster* which in their content are not very different from scenes in *Jahrgang 1902* or *Im Westen nichts Neues*, although they are presented with a critical distance towards the protagonist lacking in those other texts. The moment where *Ginster* for the first time feels part of the group of soldiers because the others laugh at his joke about an officer is quite similar to scenes in *Im Westen nichts Neues* where the friends’ companionship is affirmed by their shared contempt for figures like Himmelstoß or Kantorek. Similarly, *Ginster*’s determination to seduce Elfriede because he feels obliged to prove that he can is not so different from the urge to have sex with Hilde on the part of the narrator of *Jahrgang 1902*. *Ginster*’s attempts to seduce Elfriede are obviously calculated. Yet his urge to pass what he sees as an essential stage of his development as a man does not cancel the fact that he is attracted by her plant-like qualities. *Ginster* identifies her with a wrap she always wears ‘auf dem Gräser zerflossen’ (*Ginster*, p.204) and his plan to seduce her becomes the plea ‘lassen Sie sich bitte [...] von mir pflücken’ (*Ginster*, p.206), which, however, remains unsaid. The association with plants makes her appear passive, and her flowery cuteness turns her into a walking cliché which allows *Ginster* to behave as if he was just play-acting with her:

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<sup>45</sup> Glaeser, p.330

‘Ich wünschte, ich hätte ein Schneckenhäuschen in der Heide’, fing Elfriede auf den Rückweg an, ‘ganz klein müßte es sein, und niemand außer meinem Mütterchen dürfte darin wohnen.’

‘Soll ich es bauen?’

Ein Heimatpastell. (*Ginster*, p.208)

Predictably, as soon as Elfriede takes the initiative and tries to seduce Ginster, he immediately bolts.

Ginster treats women as objects, partly because he has little experience of relationships based on mutual respect, but to some extent his treatment of women is also a display of his utopian desire. Theweleit sketches how some non-fascist men managed to hang on to their ‘desire to desire’ by projecting it upon women. Such men

haben das Flüssige, die größere Formbarkeit, das noch nicht vertane utopische Versprechen der Weiblichkeit, ihre noch nicht gesellschaftlich definierte ungerichtete, brachliegende Wunschproduktion und die damit gegebene größere Nähe zum Unbewußten, ihr Leben in der Emotion statt im Intellekt, der ein grausames grenzziehendes Produkt der Eingrenzung ist, die den männlichen Körpern widerfuhr, dazu benutzt, den Wunsch, die Utopien, ihre Entgrenzungssehnsucht mit der Vorstellung ‘unendlich fließendes Weib’ zu codieren.<sup>46</sup>

While these men are not, according to Theweleit, misogynists, they treat every woman they encounter as another promise to find their Utopia. Such relationships may be happy for a time, but as they are not based on a real understanding of the woman as a person in her own right, they are bound to end in disappointment. ‘All die vorübergehenden Frauenbeziehungen, meist abrupt begonnen und nach intensivem Verlauf auch ebenso abrupt beendet, von denen die Lebensgeschichte produktiver nicht-Faschisten voll ist (und die Literatur) sind ein Ausdruck dieser Codierung.’<sup>47</sup> Ginster’s first relationship with Mimi is quite clearly and from the beginning not based on genuine

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<sup>46</sup> Theweleit, vol. 1, p. 485.

<sup>47</sup> Theweleit names Tucholsky and Brecht as examples, vol. 1, p. 487.

affection but on Ginster's longing for community. Whereas Theweleit assumes that the man will eventually leave the woman when she fails to fulfil his (unrealistic) expectations, it is here Mimi who leaves Ginster. Although the separation is never explained, the fact that she evidently prefers the less complicated, more directly physically expressed attentions of Schilling indicates that she is just not interested in taking on the role of a 'Versprechen der Weiblichkeit'.

The complicated relationship between sexuality and politics in *Ginster* undergoes a further twist in the final chapter of the novel. Ginster is considerably older than the narrator of *Jahrgang 1902*. There is no suggestion that Ginster is particularly ignorant in sexual matters, his failure thus far to establish a successful relationship with a woman has other reasons. First of all, there is his homoerotic attachment to his friend Otto. In terms of homoerotic encounters, *Jahrgang 1902* is far more explicit than *Ginster*, but when the narrator kisses Ferd, he actually imagines a girl in front of him. Ginster, however, really means Otto, when their wrestling turns to an embrace: 'Otto war kräftiger als Ginster, der sich nicht ungern in seine Gewalt begab. Ein Stuhl fiel um. Die ungewohnte Körpennähe steigerte ihre Erregung.' (*Ginster*, p.35) Nevertheless, the encounter is quickly redirected to the safer matter of the correct form of address between them. The relationship with Otto, although it remains platonic until Otto's death, is the only one which means anything to Ginster until the last chapter. Ginster's encounter with Mimi is more typical of Ginster's passive attitude as he only gets involved out of a sense of duty:

"Kommt, ihr beide", drängte Mimi. Ginster hätte gerne noch mit der Dame [Frau van C.] gesprochen, schloß sich aber der Fledermaus [Mimi] an. Das Glück, jung zu sein, war ihm von älteren Leuten häufig

genug angepriesen worden. Sie hatten die erste Liebe so innig verklärt, daß Ginster sie als eine ihm auferlegte Notwendigkeit empfand. (*Ginster*, p.28)

Ginster's feelings are characterised by a desire to belong which seems largely non-sexual. When Mimi and Schilling leave him, the loss of their companionship weighs much more heavily than that of her love, even both were more imagined than real. The liaison he has with Elfriede in Q., too, is a calculated effort to fit in rather than being based on desire or affection for her. Ginster decides to seduce her because 'daß er bisher noch niemals verführt hatte war fast ein Schande' (*Ginster*, p.206). The younger Ginster's pursuits of sexual relationships are thus further evidence for his egotism: they illustrate his willingness to instrumentalise people for strategic ends. Ginster's sexual behaviour for most of the text may not have any overtly political implications, but, from the perspective of the final chapter, they make a point about the distortions of human relationships which does have a political dimension. Thus it is consistent with his political awakening in the final chapter that Ginster, now that he finally feels confident that in Frau van C. he has found someone with whom he could have a fulfilling (sexual) relationship, he forgoes the opportunity because he does not want to reproduce domination and exploitation in his relationships.

Where Mimi and Elfriede remain almost caricatures of the sexually liberated, urban 'New Woman' and the provincial *faux-naïve* husband-hunter respectively, Julia van C. is depicted as a much more complex character. At their first meeting Ginster is in awe of the 'Großartigkeit der Dame' (*Ginster*, p.27/8) who appears so confident, well established in her bourgeois existence and, above all, older than anyone else present at the party. In this first scene

she is not given a name, as Ginster does not catch it at their introduction. Instead she is identified with her *lorgnon*, an instrument which emphasises her perceptiveness, but also her critical distance from the objects of her gaze, including Ginster. This, however, is just what Ginster wants; he, who always tries to be invisible, now feels affirmed by her attention and ‘hätte gerne noch mit der Dame gesprochen’ (*Ginster*, p. 28). His second encounter is already much more personal, but also more complicated. This time Julia van C. approaches Ginster, who does not immediately recognise her, at a public lecture and asks him to join her afterwards for a chat.

Unerreichbar für ihn stand die Dame in einem kleinen Menschenknäuel dicht beim Rednerpult, Bekannte vermutlich, denen sie zunickte wie ihm, dasselbe fertige Lächeln, meilenweit fort. Nach dem Vortrag würde er sofort nach Hause gehen; es hatte doch keinen Zweck.  
(*Ginster*, p.118)

The more remote she appears, the more anxious to renew their acquaintance he becomes, and he is clearly jealous of all the others with whom he has to share her attention. Despite his earlier despair over the hopelessness of his desire for her he stands and waits, even though she is among the last to emerge. In the course of the evening the tension between them increases, as Ginster feels neglected. Her apparent lack of concern over his call up for the army finally provokes an outburst in which he confides his misery and loneliness to her. Ginster looks to her for recognition and for the kind of comfort usually expected from a mother. There is, however, also a clearly sexual dimension to their attraction, as she unbuttons her glove and he then kisses her hand: ‘Weiß lag der Handballen im linken Handschuh. Ginster – er war es nicht – küßte die Stelle. Er hatte einen Handballen geküßt. Vergessen der Krieg: nur glücklich.’ (*Ginster*, p.125)

Their relationship is not exactly oedipal as there is no castrating father. Instead, it draws on the pre-oedipal dyadic relationship which, in Ginster's case, appears not to have been successfully resolved. Julia van C., unlike Ginster's mother, who never leaves the father's shadow, is an individual with an identity of her own; she is 'eine Dame', part of bourgeois society, someone who lives in comfort and can devote her time to mixing with politicians and 'öffentliche[n] Denker[n]' (*Ginster*, p.121). In her, Ginster recognises what he lacks, individuality as a 'normal' state of being. He himself cannot be such a person, he is not one of those of whom Theweleit speculates 'daß im Wilhelminischen Deutschland nur sehr wenige Menschen das Glück hatten, einigermaßen zuende geboren zu werden'.<sup>48</sup> Theweleit sums up the completion of 'extra-uterine' birth as a state where

das Kind sich aus der unumgänglichen Symbiose, die sein erstes Lebensjahr bestimmt, durch eine lustvolle Besetzung seiner Peripherie bis zum sicheren Gefühl, ein von der Mutter und von allen anderen unterschiedenes Selbst zu sein, herausdifferenziert hat (was ihm nur gelingt durch durch liebevolle Zuwendung von außen).<sup>49</sup>

This process appears not have been completed successfully in Ginster's case, as not only his dream about his mother but also his behaviour in general indicates. In his childhood memory of spending an afternoon at the station the sensual pleasure he gains from knitting is as nothing against the absorption he experiences in the mass of people contained within the luminous station structure. Theweleit describes how the child that is

nicht zuende geboren [...] sucht die Verbindung mit Mütterleibern, in denen es 'ganz' ist [...] - es kann sich auf Grund seiner fehlenden Grenzen überhaupt mit jeder, auch der größten Größe direkt in phantastische Verbindung setzen. Der größere Leib muß es nähren und

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<sup>48</sup> Theweleit, vol.2, p.248.

<sup>49</sup> Theweleit, vol.2, p.246.

beherbergen – daher ist er eine Art ‘Mutterleib’, nicht weil er sich von der realen Mutter herleiten würde.<sup>50</sup>

The crowds in the station building have this nurturing and sheltering effect on Ginster, he experiences ‘ein Gefühl der Seligkeit’ as he feels ‘verloren i[m] Gewimmel’ (*Ginster*, p.142), and his unhappiness vanishes as he feels included and whole among the masses.

Theweleit also emphasises the absence of the Oedipus complex in the life of the ‘nicht zuende geborenen’:

Ödipus entsteht durch Verzicht und durch die ‘Vaterüberwindung’[...] Den nicht zuende geborenen Menschen schert der Vater dagegen wenig. Es gibt ihn als gesellschaftlich definierte Instanz, als den Machthaber der Familie und als solcher spielt er eine Rolle die im selben Maß abnimmt, wie das Kind dessen reale Machtlosigkeit entdeckt. Aber für das psychische Bedürfnis des nicht zuende geborenen Kindes existiert er kaum.<sup>51</sup>

Ginster’s father indeed only has a vaguely oppressive presence, represented in a characteristic trope by his grey, threadbare coat: ‘Der Havelock hatte das ganze Elternhaus eingehüllt.’ (*Ginster*, p.41) At most, Ginster feels a certain affection for his father which he dare not express. At no point is there any sense of rivalry or oedipal tension between father and son, even when Ginster wishes his father away this seems to be prompted by the joylessness the father spreads (*Ginster*, p.41).

Yet what distinguishes Ginster primarily from Theweleit’s *Freikorps* soldiers is his awareness of his lack. It is this awareness, not the lack itself, which sets Ginster apart, in line with Theweleit’s argument that Wilhelmine society frequently produced men with no or weak egos. Ginster, although his attempts to compensate for his lack show little empathy or even respect for

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<sup>50</sup> Theweleit, vol.2, p 248.

<sup>51</sup> Theweleit, vol.2, p 248.

others, does not resort to violence, real or imagined, unlike the protagonists and narrators in the texts analysed by Theweleit.

The final difference from Theweleit's *Freikorps* soldiers is that in the closing chapter Ginster rejects the 'private' personality he never had. The experience which changes Ginster's attitude in this way is described in existentialist terms, reminiscent of *Der Detektiv-Roman*, as a confrontation with the inevitability of death and with the resulting fundamental loneliness.<sup>52</sup> Yet what Emmi, the prostitute who teaches Ginster this lesson, actually does is to pull Ginster away from her Christmas presents lying on the window sill, that is to say she refuses him access to her own private existence. Whereas Ginster presents the scene to Frau van C. as a spiritual experience, the scene can also be read as exposing the fundamentally insecure nature of privacy, its contingency on economic factors as Emmi cannot afford separate rooms for business and private life. To try and maintain a form of personality based on privacy is absurd in conditions where the foundations of bourgeois selfhood, economic independence and respectability have been eroded. When Ginster tells her this story, Julia van C. herself also seems to have lost her financial security (Ginster notices her scuffed handbag), respectability and identity – or rather she gave them up when she divorced her husband. Whereas the prostitute's anonymity is presumably involuntary, Julia van C. has acted according to her political principles. Like Ginster, she has chosen to reject an identity as a private individual and her plan to travel to the Soviet Union is the logical conclusion. Thus at this encounter in Marseilles, Ginster and Julia van

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<sup>52</sup> Both Mülder and Oschmann read the scene in such an existential vein, both seem influenced in this reading by Kracauer's earlier novella, *Die Gnade*.

C. finally meet as equals, which allows Ginster to show his feelings for her. Yet even though it would now be possible, they do not have a sexual relationship. Ginster's insight 'daß sie sich ihm gar nicht geben wollte – jetzt nicht, nicht so' (*Ginster*, p.240) contrasts sharply with his earlier determination to seduce first Mimi, then Elfriede. On the part of Ginster it is a rejection of the misogyny he himself had indulged in earlier, but it also demonstrates that Kracauer was at this point capable of greater discrimination than Glaeser was in *Jahrgang 1902*.

With the final chapter of *Ginster* Kracauer completed his project of re-writing himself - although he would have to make some revisions in *Georg*. The final chapter provides the key to Kracauer's re-assessment of his own position and to the social criticism he makes in the novel, but it goes further than that. As he made clear in 'Das Ornament der Masse', Kracauer's protest goes beyond criticisms of the specific social circumstances he had experienced, it goes right to the underlying causes he perceives, capitalism and modern rationality. The third part of this chapter will examine this more profound critique in Kracauer's first novel.

## The Politics of Realism in *Ginster*

In this final section of the discussion of *Ginster* a novel by Kracauer's friend and colleague at the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Joseph Roth, *Die Flucht ohne Ende*, will serve to illuminate Kracauer's anti-realist stance and his use of an almost autistic central figure as critical devices. Kracauer's response to this text, as well as Roth's and Kracauer's conversation about the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, will also help to locate Kracauer's position within Marxist debates about realism, before Kracauer's anti-realism will be analysed with the help of some of Alexander Kluge's work.

Kracauer had reviewed Roth's book very positively, describing its hero Franz Tunda in terms which reminded later critics of his own *Ginster*.<sup>53</sup> Roth makes a claim for his story's authenticity, which is, however, quite quickly called into question, much as the authenticity of *Ginster* and his story, asserted in its by-line, is undermined by the third-person narration and ironic distance of the text. For both Roth and Kracauer the issue goes far beyond a mere mocking of the conventions of *Neue Sachlichkeit* with its claims to objectivity and veracity. Both play on the authenticity of the voice, thus reflecting the difficulty the modern subject has in asserting a certain, reliable identity. At the same time they aim to develop a form of realism which exposes reality as something which is not simply a given but has been produced. His profound suspicion of appearances and of a realism which limits itself to their reproduction is clearly formulated in *Die Angestellten*, where Kracauer asserts that

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<sup>53</sup> Müller, *Grenzgänger*, p. 131

hundert Berichte aus einer Fabrik lassen sich nicht zur Wirklichkeit der Fabrik addieren, sondern bleiben bis in alle Ewigkeit hundert Fabrikansichten. Die Wirklichkeit ist eine Konstruktion. Gewiß muß das Leben beobachtet werden, damit sie erstehe. Keineswegs jedoch ist sie in der mehr oder minder zufälligen Beobachtungsfolge der Reportage enthalten, vielmehr steckt sie einzig und allein in dem Mosaik, das aus den einzelnen Beobachtungen auf Grund der Erkenntnis ihres Gehalts zusammengestiftet wird. Die Reportage fotografiert das Leben; ein solches Mosaik wäre sein Bild.<sup>54</sup>

Roth, too, was critical of the lack of artistic merit in such reports in his 'Schluß mit der Neuen Sachlichkeit', where he names *Ginster* alongside Arnold Zweig's *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* as exceptions in a genre that elevates 'das private Argument der Zeugenaussage: "So ist es eben gewesen" zu einem literarischen Prinzip.'<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, he prefaced *Flucht ohne Ende* with the claim

Im folgenden erzähle ich die Geschichte meines Freundes, Kameraden und Gesinnungsgenossen Franz Tunda. Ich folge zum Teil seinen Aufzeichnungen, zum Teil seinen Erzählungen. Ich habe nichts erfunden, nichts komponiert. Es handelt sich nicht mehr darum zu 'dichten'. Das wichtigste ist das Beobachtete.<sup>56</sup>

The preface is dated and signed, firmly identifying Roth as the narrator. Only four paragraphs into the novel, however, the text already goes well beyond the mere observation Roth had announced: 'Der Pole zählte seine Worte wie Perlen, ein schwarzer Bart verpflichtete ihn zur Schweigsamkeit.'<sup>57</sup> This use of figurative language and grotesque comedy is the first indication that Roth is not as *sachlich* as he has promised.<sup>58</sup> The narrator anticipates information which Tunda does not find out until much later, he presents the thoughts and

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<sup>54</sup> *Die Angestellten*, p. 16.

<sup>55</sup> Joseph Roth, 'Schluß mit der Neuen Sachlichkeit', in *Werke*, Hermann Kesten, ed., vol. 4. Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1976, pp. 246-258, 256.

<sup>56</sup> Roth, *Flucht ohne Ende*, p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> Roth, *Flucht ohne Ende*, p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> Wolfgang Jehmüller also makes this point in his essay 'Zum Problem des "zweifachen Zeugnisses" bei Joseph Roth' in: *Text und Kritik, Sonderband Joseph Roth*, Ludwig Arnold, ed., Munich: Edition Text und Kritik 1974, pp. 67-75, 70.

feelings of characters other than Tunda, events which take place in Tunda's absence, and even comments upon the story. Such interventions provide context to Tunda's actions only to highlight how cut off he is from these contexts. In his review of the book, 'Sibirien-Paris mit Zwischenstationen', Kracauer comments

Der Roman ist ein *Bericht*. Bestimmend für seine Form: daß in ihm darauf verzichtet wird, die Ereignisse in ein geschlossenes Schema hineinzupressen. Die europäische Welt, in der wir leben, hat ihre Geschlossenheit eingebüßt; es wäre unehrlich, sie im Abbild zu behaupten.<sup>59</sup>

The observation that the world has lost its coherence harks back to Kracauer's initially quite reactionary rejection of modernity. As his work from *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* onwards shows, however, Kracauer managed to use his disillusionment more constructively. This passage demonstrates how far Kracauer has come since then. Where Roth judges the *Neue Sachlichkeit* primarily on artistic criteria and bemoans its confusion of the authentic and the real, Kracauer stresses the value of Roth's realism because it is relevant to the time. It is its historical, philosophical, and above all its social relevance that Kracauer appreciates in Roth's novel.

Yet Kracauer's agreement with Roth that this relevance is due to the report-like nature of the text seems disingenuous, since Roth's achievement 'die Ereignisse [nicht] in ein geschlossenes Schema hineinzupressen' does not mean that he has not shaped them at all. As demonstrated above, the narrator's intervention is already obvious in the opening pages. However, Kracauer then emphasises not the absence of the author's intervention, i.e. the text's authenticity, but the accuracy with which it reflects reality, its realism. That

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<sup>59</sup> 'Sibirien-Paris mit Zwischenstationen', in *Schriften* 5.2, pp.100-103, 101

those two characteristics are not the same is evident from the many other war novels whose authors had first hand experience of their subject matter and frequently presented it in the first person singular to emphasise the point. The appearance of so many of these novels at ten years remove from the events they depict suggests in itself that they are about something more than only the war. *Jahrgang 1902*, for example, has a political message, which is quite clearly aimed at a Weimar audience. It is at once a reminder of the disastrous effects of Wilhelmine authoritarianism and militarism, and a call for class solidarity that is particularly relevant at a time of economic strife and mass unemployment. But also earlier books such as Ernst Jünger's 1920 account of his experiences *In Stahlgewittern* (which, in any case, underwent numerous revisions in its many editions) or Walter Flex's *Der Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten* (1916), which appeared during or in the immediate aftermath of the war do not content themselves with depicting the war 'realistically,' whether one takes this to mean an objective description or, in a Marxist mode, 'die getreue Wiedergabe typischer Charaktere unter typischen Umständen'.<sup>60</sup> Natural, religious or other mystical imagery frequently serves to lend some kind of meaning, if not justification, to the war.<sup>61</sup> In the case of Flex this can be regarded as merely a 'großangelegter Versuch einer verharmlosenden Ästhetisierung und Fiktionalisierung des Krieges'.<sup>62</sup> In later war novels, as

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<sup>60</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Brief an Miss Harkness', in *Marxismus und Literatur. Eine Dokumentation in drei Bänden*, vol. 1, Fritz Raddatz, ed., Hamburg: Rowohlt 1969, pp.157-159, p.157.

<sup>61</sup> See Roger Woods, *The Conservative Revolution in the Weimar Republic*, Basingstoke: Macmillan 1996, esp. pp. 14-28. Woods goes on to say that 'the term "heroic realism" - used by the Conservative Revolutionaries themselves [ ] - is inappropriate to describe their stance in war. For it implies a greater willingness to confront reality than is actually demonstrated in their work.' (p.26).

<sup>62</sup> Raimund Neuß, *Anmerkungen zu Walter Flex, Die 'Ideen von 1914' in der Literatur: Ein Fallbeispiel*, Schernfeld: SH-Verlag, 1992, p.111.

Martin Travers argues, an outright political motivation takes over with a resulting 'displacement of the real' into the 'spiritual "reality" of the Third Reich'.<sup>63</sup>

The effect of authenticity, in anti-war literature frequently achieved with the 'Froschperspektive' of, say, Paul Bäumer in *Im Westen nichts Neues* or the narrator in *Jahrgang 1902*, based on experience rather than analysis and also associated with the literature of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, is clearly not what writers and critics like Roth and Kracauer aim for. Again, Kracauer's comments on *Flucht ohne Ende* are illuminating:

Der Ton, in dem das Buch liegt, ist der einer hellen Trauer. Kein Protest, der sich gegen die Zeit richtete, sondern eine Trauer, die feststellt. Sie ist - gewiß nicht immer, aber doch in dem hier abgesteckten Formbereich - tiefer als der Protest. Während er an vielen Stellen blind sein muß, hat die Trauer Augen, sie sieht. Und so hilft sie, gewaltlos wie sie ist, dem Protest. In dem Roman bezieht sie sich vielleicht nicht einmal so sehr auf gegenwärtige Zustände, die zu verändern wären, als auf die Welt, weil sie Welt ist. Könnte sich irgendeiner dieser Welt entziehen? Er kann es nicht. Darum geht die Trauer leicht und hell wie über Schnee.<sup>64</sup>

Compared to, say, the social protest of *Jahrgang 1902*, Kracauer favours insight, however passive. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, in Kracauer's view the insight that comes from grief actually enhances the power of protest. The connection between private emotion and political action is illustrated by an example from Kracauer's own experience, reflected in *Ginster*. The entries in Kracauer's own diary from his school years reveal feelings of loneliness and inadequacy. In the novel, the schoolboy Ginster kept records of the wrongs he

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<sup>63</sup> Martin Patrick Anthony Travers, *German Novels of the First World War and their Ideological Implications, 1918 - 1933*, Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1982, p.200.

<sup>64</sup> 'Sibirien-Paris mit Zwischenstationen', p.102/3

suffered at the hands of his classmates.<sup>65</sup> This is, on the one hand, a documentation of resentment, and as such eventually abandoned. On the other hand, Ginster learns from the precise observation of his peers not to rely on friendship and loyalty. This lesson would have caused the child much grief, but it also steels him, the outsider, against future disappointments. The 'helle Trauer' Kracauer perceives in Roth's novel is a similar combination of grief over injustice and deprivation on the one hand and an absence of any illusions which would get in the way of effective protest on the other. Secondly, grief as an absolute reaction is more appropriate to the absolute wrongness of the world than the kind of protest found, for instance, in *Jahrgang 1902*, which is not only specific, but also promises answers. Grief knows that its cause is too fundamental to be removed so simply, but, as Kracauer suggests, it can also make one more sensitive to those wrongs which can be put right, and free up energy for meaningful protest which might otherwise be wasted in the pursuit of illusions. Kracauer implies in his comments that a text written in this spirit of grief is more likely to affect a readership which feels fundamentally alienated in modern society than any call for (useless) protest could.

What Roth and Kracauer call a 'Bericht', what they understand as realism, must therefore see beyond apparent social wrongs. They thus enter a debate that had been going on in Marxist criticism since the 1880s, and which the *Neue Sachlichkeit* had revived. Georg Lukács's 1932 essay 'Reportage oder Gestaltung' for instance, addresses just this issue. Lukács rejects the 'Reportageroman' as an undialectical and therefore unsatisfactory opposition to the subjectivism of the bourgeois novel. Drawing on the journalistic

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<sup>65</sup> *Ginster*, p.21, cf. *Belke and Renz*, p.4/5.

conventions of reportage, the *Reportageroman* relies upon authenticity and verifiability. This, however, is not sufficient for a novel, which has the task ‘den Gesamtprozeß [...] bei Aufdeckung seiner wirklichen und wesentlichen Kräfte zu reproduzieren’.<sup>66</sup> At this point in history, this is only possible for the ‘proletarisch-revolutionären Dichter, [der,] indem er den dialektischen Materialismus zur Grundlage seiner schöpferischen Methode macht, stets die treibenden Kräfte des Gesamtprozesses vor Augen hat.’<sup>67</sup> The author who stands ‘in kleinbürgerlicher Opposition zur kapitalistischen Gesellschaft’, on the other hand, is barred from the totality of the historical process and the mechanisms in which it works itself out, and inevitably gets lost in journalistic detail. In its attempt to overcome the subjectivism of the bourgeois novel, the *Reportageroman* loses sight altogether of the representative potential which the individual character can - and must - have.

Within this scheme, Kracauer can quite clearly not claim to be among the ‘proletarisch-revolutionäre Dichter’, either by background or by inclination. Nevertheless, in *Ginster* he aims at, if not a totality in Lukács’s sense, a comprehensive critique of the historical processes that not only led to the war but also still shape society after the revolution. Yet Kracauer’s highly self-reflexive attempt to approach this whole issue through the almost autistic *Ginster* is too idiosyncratic to be accounted for by a standard Marxist take on realism, and it is certainly at odds with Lukács’s demands. Instead, the work of a student of Adorno’s (i.e. two ‘generations’ down from Kracauer himself),

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<sup>66</sup> Georg Lukács, ‘Reportage oder Gestaltung? Kritische Bemerkungen anlässlich eines Romans von Ottwalt’ in *Marxismus und Literatur. Eine Dokumentation in drei Bänden*, vol. 2, Fritz Raddatz, ed., Hamburg: Rowohlt 1969, pp.150-158, 157.

<sup>67</sup> Lukács, ‘Reportage oder Gestaltung?’, p.157.

Alexander Kluge, is more helpful in describing Kracauer's perspective.<sup>68</sup> One of Kluge's main concerns has been the creation and use of oppositional public spheres; he not only co-authored a study on the subject of *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* with Oskar Negt, but he has used the media of literature, cinema and television to reach the widest possible audiences. The similarities with the journalist and writer Kracauer are obvious. Furthermore, Kluge, like Kracauer, focuses on the paradox of realism in the modern world:

Die Wurzel einer realistischen Haltung, ihr Motiv: das ist eine Haltung gegen das, was an Unglück in den realen Verhältnissen ist; es ist also ein Antirealismus des Motivs, eine Leugnung des reinen Realitätsprinzips, eine *antirealistische Haltung*. Sie erst befähigt, realistisch und aufmerksam hinzusehen.<sup>69</sup>

The theme remains the rejection of reality simply as it appears, because this effectively masks the misery of much human existence and its causes. It is this twin focus on the 'Verhältnisse' as well as on the subjective misery caused by them that constitutes the affinity between Kluge's work and Kracauer's, since it permits a broadly Marxist, critical realism to be developed out of the intensely subjective perspective of *Ginster*.

The double focus on the production of realistic texts (and films etc.) and on the resultant changes in the audience is clearly evident in Kluge's 1975 essay 'Die schärfste Ideologie: daß die Realität sich auf ihren realistischen Charakter beruft'. In the first paragraph the reason for this double focus is

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<sup>68</sup> Kluge and Kracauer are not only indirectly connected via Adorno, they also met in the 1960s and corresponded briefly. Kracauer and Kluge in particular shared an interest in the cinema as a medium for political intervention, whereas Adorno on the whole mistrusted the affirmative effect of images, see Miriam Hansen 'Introduction to Adorno, "Transparencies on Film" (1966)' and T.W. Adorno, 'Transparencies on Film', transl. by Thomas Y. Levin, both in *New German Critique*, v. 24-24, Fall/Winter 81/2, pp.186-199 and pp.200-205; the Kluge-Kracauer correspondence is held in the *Deutsches Literaturarchiv* in Marbach; see also Jay, 'The Extraterritorial Life', p.58, note 36.

<sup>69</sup> Kluge, 'Das Politische', p.312.

suggested: 'Realität' is produced 'durch die Arbeit von Generationen von Menschen.'<sup>70</sup> Kluge wants to mobilise the productive energies of the masses - and productive is here meant in the widest possible sense - by engaging their imagination, by getting them to fantasise a different, not alienated or repressed mode of being and, ultimately, society. Artists have a facilitating role in this process.

A realist attitude, for Kluge, is always protest against reality, not its affirmation.<sup>71</sup> Such protest can take many forms, ranging from 'radikale Nachahmung' over 'Ausweichen vor dem Druck der Realität' to 'Angriff'.<sup>72</sup> Such behaviours are displayed by people who refuse, or are unable, to accept the misery imposed by things as they are; these are precisely the responses displayed by Ginster. As is the case with Kracauer's protagonist, the cause of the protest is usually obscured by the form this protest takes, because there is never a clear, direct confrontation. In Kluge's view it is the artist's job to make obscure forms of protest comprehensible by relating them back to their original cause. It should by now be clear that the kind of protest behaviour Kluge is describing has little in common with the kind of protest rejected by Kracauer above. Instead, the way in which in his own novel Kracauer uses Ginster, the narrator, to critically reflect upon the behaviour of Ginster, the protagonist, and to make this behaviour understandable as a form of protest seems to follow in a striking way a method of anti-realist realism outlined by Kluge.

Kluge identifies five steps that lead to a potential change in the horizon of expectation of an audience (or, in this case, readership), and will ultimately

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<sup>70</sup> Kluge, 'Die schärfste Ideologie', p.215.

<sup>71</sup> Kluge, 'Die schärfste Ideologie', p.216.

<sup>72</sup> Kluge, 'Die schärfste Ideologie', p.216f.

radicalise them. First comes the ‘Unterscheidung des Realismus des Motivs,’ that is to say the identification of behaviour that expresses protest against reality, and the understanding of what the protest is about.<sup>73</sup> Since the concrete results of such protest immediately again become part of the reality they are rejecting, this is not exactly easy. Identifying the motivation for any protest is therefore bound up with a recognition of the ‘Realismus der Arbeitsweise des menschlichen Wahrnehmungsapparates,’ which has been shaped by generations of protest against alienation through all manner of distortion in the perceptions and interpretations people form of reality.<sup>74</sup> These distortions are crucial, Kluge claims, quoting Adorno: “‘Denn wahr ist nur, was nicht in diese Welt paßt.’”<sup>75</sup> The third step is, according to Kluge, a shift from the subjective to the objective situation, which is, however, not ‘naturally’ given. Instead, it is produced even in the moment of being ‘found’: ‘Dieses Vorfinden setzt ja bereits analytische und synthetische Arbeit voraus, sonst findet man gar nichts. Dieses Finden ist aktiv, weil es durch das Weglassen des Übrigen bestimmt ist.’<sup>76</sup> The understanding of these aspects of protest against reality must, in a fourth step, be matched by the production of appropriate forms of expression. Such forms of production must, again, be based on a divergence, a ‘grundlegende Disharmonie zwischen Einzelprodukt und Realität’.<sup>77</sup> Finally, ‘die Umproduktion der Öffentlichkeit ist [...] Bedingung und zugleich der wichtigste Gegenstand, an dem sich die realistische Methode abarbeitet’.<sup>78</sup> It depends on the transformation of horizons of expectation, for instance through

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<sup>73</sup> Kluge, ‘Die schärfste Ideologie’, p.217.

<sup>74</sup> Kluge, ‘Die schärfste Ideologie’, p.218.

<sup>75</sup> Kluge, ‘Die schärfste Ideologie’, p.218.

<sup>76</sup> Kluge, ‘Die schärfste Ideologie’, p.218.

<sup>77</sup> Kluge, ‘Die schärfste Ideologie’, p.219.

<sup>78</sup> Kluge, ‘Die schärfste Ideologie’, p.219.

the reconnection of experiences that have been artificially divided by the conventions of bourgeois public sphere into those which are private and that which is 'properly' public. Kluge emphasises that the production of horizons of expectation must be a collective endeavour, it then constitutes a true public sphere.

How does this scheme, which Kluge himself describes as 'grundsätzlich imperfekt', as a building site, work in *Ginster*?<sup>79</sup> Many of the protagonist Ginster's actions and decisions are apparently irrational and inconsistent. One way of explaining such erratic behaviour is to interpret them as protest in Kluge's sense of the word. The first example Kluge gives is 'radikale Nachahmung,' which includes 'Imitation, Clownerie, Insistieren, Nachäffen, Oberflächenzusammenhang, absurder Sinn, Mimesis.'<sup>80</sup> This list already suggests figures like Till Eulenspiegel or indeed Hašek's Švejk. Ginster, too, frequently imitates others, and thereby usually exposes particular absurdities or, more generally, the conformism rife in Wilhelmine German society. At the beginning of the war, for instance, Ginster starts to participate in conversations on the streets:

'Durch unseren Einmarsch in Belgien werden wir mit den Franzosen leichtes Spiel haben' - ohne Zögern behauptet. Genau genommen, wollte er nur beobachten, ob ihm solche Dinge überhaupt zu sagen gelängen, man mußte sich üben. In der letzten Zeit war er mehrmals zugegen gewesen, wie andere Personen unter Beifall ähnliche Urteile abgegeben hatten. Kaum äußerte *er* seine Meinung - eine Meinung von der er voraussetzen durfte, daß sie dem Bedürfnis der Leute entsprach -, so wurde ihm mit Mißtrauen begegnet. Das Publikum sah ihn erstaunt an, und einer bemerkte, daß die Franzosen auch nicht so ohne wären. Allgemeine Zustimmung ward ihm zuteil. Hätte Ginster die gleiche Ansicht vertreten, er wäre vermutlich der Polizei ausgeliefert worden. (*Ginster*, p.17/8)

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<sup>79</sup> Kluge, 'Die schärfste Ideologie', p.220

<sup>80</sup> Kluge, 'Die schärfste Ideologie', p.216f.

The inane, repetitive chatter, which Ginster nevertheless frequently feels compelled to echo, is captured in the image of the parrot screaming 'Joko' which recurs several times in the novel. While such scenes expose and ironise society, they also raise the issue of Ginster's motivation for wanting to join in. The story Ginster tells Julia van C. in the final chapter sheds some light on this. Ginster had gone to the prostitute Emmi, mainly because he 'mochte nicht immer beiseite stehen, wenn die anderen vom Leben sprachen' (*Ginster*, p.236). This is Ginster's most drastic act of copycat behaviour. Although Ginster's sexual desires are no secret, and he joins in the salacious conversations of his companions Hay and Müller, this is due to his fear 'sonst selbst erörtert zu werden' (*Ginster*, p.94). What Ginster wants is an intimate relationship with another human being, what he does is pay for sex. While this act is a caricature of human, not just sexual, relations in an alienated world, it also reveals to him this chasm between what he wants and needs, and what is on offer in the real world. Visiting the prostitute brings into Ginster's consciousness what had been unconscious up to then: that his 'odd' behaviour is, and always was, a protest against a reality which does not fulfil his needs.

Examples of the second of Kluge's models of protest are equally easily found in *Ginster*. In fact, 'Ausweichen vor dem Druck der Realität' is even more characteristic of Ginster than imitation, since he is notoriously contrary and a dreamer.<sup>81</sup> The nickname Ginster, which replaces his real name to such an extent that he himself does not recognise it during roll call is typical. The alias is an escape from his official (bourgeois) identity; it denotes a fantasised

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<sup>81</sup> Kluge. 'Die schärfste Ideologie', p.217.

*alter ego* which is not subject to the pressures of 'real' life, like the shrubs along the railway tracks which nobody even notices. His foible for useless things, too, can be read in this way. Uselessness is also an escape from the pressures of reality, and at the same time a protest against them, like the tortoises in the Paris arcades.<sup>82</sup> The metaphors, extended to the point of absurdity, are also part of his attempts to evade reality by transforming it, at least in language.

When this transformation into images is applied to people, it turns into the third mode of protest identified by Kluge, 'Angriff,' especially through 'Vernichtung des Gegenstandes [or] Klischierung des Gegners.'<sup>83</sup> Thus Ginster's landlady in Munich, whose moralising gossip is actually quite oppressive, is turned by Ginster into 'drei übereinander angeordnete Kugeln [...], die sich in einen Kegel einbeschreiben ließen. [...] Sie war statisch unmöglich, der Kegel mußte nach vorne überkippen.' (*Ginster*, p.11) This turns the woman into a harmless piece of geometry and denies her her humanity. Similarly, when Ginster volunteers for the army (as a railway engineer, in the hope of escaping the front), the officer he has to speak to is reduced to his uniform tunic. His employer Valentin, who takes the credit for Ginster's successful design of a soldiers' cemetery, becomes a fat fly, buzzing around in the office.

Thus Ginster's younger self displays a variety of forms of protest against a reality which denies him love and intimacy and tries to make him conform to norms he does not share. These norms are most rigidly enforced in

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<sup>82</sup> See Chapter Two, above

<sup>83</sup> Kluge, 'Die schärfste Ideologie', p.217.

the world of work and in the military. Ginster the protagonist makes no attempt to analyse what is wrong with these norms, he never criticises the alienation inherent in capitalist modes of production, which is taken to its life-despising extreme in militarism. Ginster the narrator, however, adds a slightly different perspective. Valentin's theft of Ginster's prize-winning design, for instance, is an extreme case of the exploitation of employees, which is the foundation of capitalism. While this is never stated explicitly, Valentin is exposed and caricatured in the description of the presentation of the award. As the narrator, Ginster describes the scene with sarcasm and in detail, although Ginster as a protagonist is loath to draw any attention to the incident and even feels a 'Befriedigung, die [...] durch eine Spur von Bitterkeit nur noch versüßt [wurde]' (*Ginster*, p.112). When it comes to the war, too, the narrator's reflections exceed the protagonist's thoughts and feelings in their political awareness. After his friend Otto's death Ginster feels predominantly relieved that he himself is still alive. His uncle, however, seems quite badly shaken by the news. He has interrupted his work and muses that 'Der Krieg wird noch mehr Opfer fordern' (*Ginster*, p.77). The narrator observes that the uncle's work - an unspecified historical project<sup>84</sup> - leads him to make comparisons: 'Manchmal schien es in der letzten Zeit, als wende er seine Erkenntnisse über das sechzehnte Jahrhundert auf die Gegenwart an; auch dieser Krieg ein Raubzug und Mache. Aber dann wieder wollte er seine Erkenntnisse nicht für wahr haben.' (*Ginster*, p.77) The protagonist's unconscious acts of protest, his flights of fantasy and denial of conflicts is reflected upon by his more mature and aware self in the narration. This brings out both the justification for

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<sup>84</sup> Kracauer's uncle Isidor compiled a history of the Jews of Frankfurt.

Ginster's protest against the objective injustices of the situations in which he finds himself, and the inadequacy of the actual manifestations of this protest.

The gap between narrator and protagonist accounts for what Kluge calls 'die subjektive Seite' of realism.<sup>85</sup> Kracauer shows Ginster's actions and relates them to his unhappiness in the world as it is. The narrator comments, more or less directly, upon Ginster's perception of this world, and points out how distorted it often is, reflecting the 'irrealen gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhang'.<sup>86</sup> The narrator's ironic tone also frequently turns against the protagonist himself, and against his resigned attitude. He thereby undermines the impression given by the protagonist Ginster that the world can at best be avoided but not changed.

Apart from such a 'realistic' understanding and representation of society, Kluge also makes demands on the way in which artists use their technical skills. They must avoid the creation of 'Harmonie des individuellen Materials mit sich selbst', instead they should use 'die grundlegende Disharmonie zwischen Einzelprodukt und Realität [als] Ausdrucksmittel'.<sup>87</sup> The concepts of disrupted harmony and of contrast suggest that Kluge has forms of montage in mind. Indeed, he talks explicitly about the medium of film in this essay, and his own work is characterised by the use of montage. Kracauer, too, was a great believer in montage, as many of his film reviews bear out, and, as he indicated in his review of *Die Flucht ohne Ende*, he, like Kluge, had rejected 'Geschlossenheit' as a representational principle because it did not relate to the fragmented modern world. Unlike Kluge, Kracauer does

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<sup>85</sup> Kluge, 'Die schärfste Ideologie', p.218.

<sup>86</sup> Kluge, 'Die schärfste Ideologie', p.218.

<sup>87</sup> Kluge, 'Die schärfste Ideologie', p.219.

not deliberately puzzle his readers in an attempt to liberate their imagination. Yet Kracauer, too, refuses to represent reality as coherent and instead requires them to (re-)construct it from separate glimpses. *Die Angestellten* is the most sustained example of this kind of 'montage' in Kracauer's work, with its 'jump cuts' and integration of excerpts from interviews, newspaper articles or letters into the narrative. But even in *Ginster*, unlike *Die Angestellten* a 'straight' novel, linear narrative is frequently interrupted, usually by Ginster's memories or daydreams. Otto's letter, too, abruptly takes over from another narrative strand and is itself followed by the news of Otto's death. As in an Eisenstein film, the juxtaposition of different elements adds meaning to all of them, as the positioning of the letter in relation to the scenes preceding and following it shows.

The letter abruptly starts just after a scene at Valentin's office, where Ginster has been talking to the apprentice Willi. Ginster takes a prurient interest in Willi's love life and has even managed to hypnotise him with humiliating results for the boy. At this point Otto's letter opens with the address 'Mein geliebter Freund!' (*Ginster*, p.74). This is a reminder of the homoerotic aspect of the friendship and contrasts with Ginster's exploitation of Willi's sexual inexperience. While Ginster's sexual attraction for Otto is an extension of his affection for Otto, his interaction with Willi is the result partly of boredom and partly of Ginster's refusal to act in accordance with his seniority and even responsibility towards the immature apprentice. Ginster is being exploited and resists this by 'wasting' time on reading or fooling around with Willi. Yet despite his attempts to quietly sabotage the hierarchy, Ginster's relationship with Willi is determined by their respective positions within the

sphere of work. Willi's position is inferior to Ginster's own, so that Ginster's friendliness towards Willi is regarded with suspicion by the Valentins. Willi himself feels and acts in a subservient manner towards Ginster. Ginster craves a relationship like that with Otto, based on mutual affection and on equality. He is frustrated in this because Otto has succumbed to the values of those around him and joined the army, and furthermore because all the relationships he has with others are in some form distorted through exploitation and power imbalances. Ginster finds that the kind of friendship he seeks is impossible, and his relationship with Willi is a particularly drastic example for the corruption that affects human relations in a rationalised modern society.

Otto's letter evokes again the utopian promise of their friendship, not just in their own relationship, but also for their futures in the outside world. The realisation that he may well not survive the next few days has caused Otto to re-examine his reasons for fighting in the war and to reject them. He comes to the conclusion: 'Der Ort, zu dem sie [die Straßen, die vorgezeichnet sind] nicht führen, er genau ist der Ort, an den wir gelangen müssen.' (*Ginster*, p.75) This echoes Ginster's earlier pronouncement: 'Eine Hypothese ist nur unter der Bedingung tauglich, daß sie das beabsichtigte Ziel verfehlt, um ein anderes, unbekanntes zu erreichen.' (*Ginster*, p.34) Otto also expresses frustration about the very problem that dogs Ginster: 'Der Widerspruch zwischen Wollen und Können, Streben und Gelingen, Sehnen und Wirklichkeit, die ganze Tragik halbbegabter Naturen hat mich immer schon aufgerieben.' (*Ginster*, p.75) This remark sums up the dilemma they both suffer, their unhappiness in their world and their inability to change it.

Without any transition the letter is followed by the news of Otto's death 'auf dem Feld der Ehre' (*Ginster*, p.75). Otto had expressed premonitions of death in his letter, but the anodyne euphemism shocks the reader who has just been witnessing an individual's contemplation of his own life and imminent death. As the next scene progresses, however, such shock is subverted by Ginster's reaction of relief rather than grief. Ginster is affected by Otto's candour in his letter, which contrasts not only with his own reticence but also with Otto's previous shyness. Otto, who is removed from his normal social context and already anticipating his death, can transcend the limitations normally imposed by society. This in turn emphasises all the more how much Ginster is bound by them. Ginster's pleasure to still be alive, however callous it appears, is, on the other hand, far more 'realistic' than Otto's sentiments, as it addresses his immediate situation.

As well as using montage techniques in this way, Kracauer also reflects upon their effect in the novel. The potential of different elements to illuminate each other and reveal hidden meanings is contrasted with the uncle's work. Although the uncle compiles his history with scissors and glue, thereby suggesting a form of collage, he actually proceeds in strictly chronological order without realising the possibilities of his material. Even when his findings shed a critical light on the present he prefers to ignore this and retreats into the past again. This is very different from the way Kracauer proceeds in his novel. He breaks out of the chronology of events by moving back into Ginster's past or by skipping whole months, even years, and by assembling the pieces in such a way as to suggest critical interpretations of the material, rather than drowning them in an apparently pre-given, teleological meaning. In the closing chapter

the image of the kaleidoscope, which appears several times in the novel, is finally explained in a way which also sums up Kracauer's use of montage in this text:

Die Arme eines Mulatten schlenkerten, als ob sie nicht zu seinem Körper gehörten, überhaupt streiften lauter einzelne Teile umher, Strohhut, Zähne und Taschentuchzipfel ergaben einen fertigen Neger, der Mohammedaner dort bestand aus Vollbart und Gummimantel. Ein Busen, der rote Fez eines Kolonialsoldaten, Aufschriften, die Weste, der Turban, das Steuerrad, Blumen - Ginster hatte den Eindruck, daß die Teile ununterbrochen durcheinander geschüttelt wurden und neue Verbindungen eingingen, die wieder zerfielen. Wie die Vokabeln in einer Schulgrammatik, fiel ihm ein, so stellten sie sich zu lehrreichen Sätzen zusammen. (*Ginster*, p.231/2)

In the last chapter the montage of images comes together with a montage of thoughts and memories in a 'Baustelle' in Kluge's sense. The last chapter juggles with images of poverty, snatches of political speeches, declarations of love and hate which add up to a programme of action, of breaking out of subjective experience into interaction with the world. Montages of this kind convey the complexity and contradictoriness of reality, as it confronts the individual and as the individual adds to it through his or her protest.

As Kluge points out, only when these contradictions and this complexity are made visible rather than being smoothed over by narration does intervention become a possibility, even though the individual, for example Ginster in his story, might not find a way of realising this possibility. Both Kracauer's determination to engage critically with an intolerable reality, dramatised in *Ginster*, and his experiment with the form of montage are pursued in his next major publication, *Die Angestellten*.

## Chapter 4

### Insight as Change: *Die Angestellten*

In his return to sociology some years after his 1922 monograph on *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, Kracauer presents a study of Berlin white-collar workers which dispenses with some of the most fundamental assumptions of that earlier text, but at the same time exemplifies an approach to the science of sociology he had demanded even then. As in all his work, Kracauer is greatly concerned with the details of the social reality he observes all around him. What has changed since his earlier engagement with sociology is the wider perspective which allows Kracauer to give meaning to his observations. Whereas in *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* his concern had been the difficulty, indeed the impossibility, of reconciling the wealth of empirical reality with the abstraction of an Idealist ordering system, he now considers the details of reality to provide access to underlying structures. In this he follows the pattern already announced in 'Die Bibel auf Deutsch' and established in 'Das Ornament der Masse'. Thus *Die Angestellten* combines meticulous research of the lives of white-collar workers in the Berlin of 1929/30 with Kracauer's peculiar version of Marxist economic analysis.

The first section of this chapter will deal with Kracauer's sociological methodology, initially in the context of his own views on the discipline, but then also in relation to more recent developments in the field of ethnology/ethnography, following Inka Mülder-Bach's suggestion that some of the American ethnographer Clifford Geertz's ideas bear a striking resemblance to Kracauer's own practice. One of the implications of comparing Kracauer's

book to Geertz's narrative 'thick description' is to raise the issue of genre: what (if any) is the difference between a literary (or, as has been argued for *Die Angestellten*, a cinematic) and a sociological interpretation of cultural and social phenomena?<sup>1</sup> Bearing in mind any important differences, but also drawing on the continuities between the two modes, the second part of this chapter will focus on *Die Angestellten* as such a literary interpretation and examine how some of its central conclusions are confirmed or contested by other, fictional, contemporary accounts, in particular Irmgard Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, Marieluise Fleißer's *Mehltreisende Frieda Geyer*, und Bertolt Brecht's *Kuhle Wampe*.<sup>2</sup> These texts address the situation of (mainly female) white-collar workers and focus on the two areas of concern for Kracauer: their desire for distraction, and the relationship between sports and political awareness, but they do so from different perspectives and with different intentions. The focus on female employees is important as Kracauer's treatment of their actions and (presumed) desires is part of a pattern in his work which can thus be brought out. Kracauer's detached, even condescending perspective is most obvious when applied to female white collar workers, but it has wider, political implications. These become evident in a confrontation of Kracauer's understanding of the situation of (female) employees with the very different views of this situation presented in the three other texts.

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Band has pointed to a shift in Kracauer's work from the 'plausiblen, aber fragwürdig analogisierenden Interpretationskunst' of, for instance, 'Das Ornament der Masse' to the 'ethnologischen Erkundung der Alltagswelt' in *Die Angestellten*, but without further pursuing the question of genre; Henri Band, *Mittelschichten und Massenkultur: Siegfried Kracauers publizistische Auseinandersetzung mit der populären Kultur und der Kultur der Mittelschichten in der Weimarer Republik*, Berlin: Lukas, 1999, p.125.

<sup>2</sup> Bertolt Brecht, Ernst Ottwald, Slatan Dudow, Hanns Eisler, *Kuhle Wampe oder wem gehört die Welt?*, Berlin: Präsenz-Film, 1932.

## Sociology revisited

*Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, Kracauer's first book-length publication apart from his doctoral dissertation, was the product of a profound disillusionment with modernity which Kracauer shared with many of his generation. While the war had certainly brought this disillusionment to a head and had left the bourgeoisie especially in an economic as well as a spiritual plight, the perceived crisis went deeper than this and had started well before the war. The Enlightenment, in particular Kantian Idealism, had, in Kracauer's view, launched an erosion of old, religious certainties by postulating a split in the world between the 'Mannigfaltigkeit des Seienden' and, as Kracauer puts it,

[dem] der Mannigfaltigkeit gegenüberstehende[n] Subjekt. [...] Hinausgeschleudert in die kalte Unendlichkeit des leeren Raumes und der leeren Zeit, befindet es sich angesichts eines jeglicher Bedeutung entblößten Stoffes, den es gemäß der ihm, dem Subjekt, innewohnenden (und aus der Epoche des Sinnes herübergeretteten) Ideen verarbeiten und formen muß.<sup>3</sup>

Modern science has resulted as an attempt to bridge this void, investigating tangible reality and trying to discover the laws of nature. In the end, however, the sciences were incapable of offering a remedy to the loss of meaning which had enabled the growth of the sciences in the first place. Kracauer's study demonstrates this inability of modern science to advance a transcendent truth, using sociology as an example.

Whereas some other sciences at least have a clearly delimited field of enquiry, sociology deals with human affairs, a hugely varied and expansive subject matter, or, as Kracauer puts it, a 'schlechte Unendlichkeit', which in

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<sup>3</sup> *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.13.

his view sociologists like his teacher Georg Simmel never managed to rein in.<sup>4</sup>

The task of sociology is to penetrate this abundance and to isolate from it the rules and principles which structure it:

Soziologie hat also nicht die Erscheinungen ihrem individuellen Sein nach aufzufassen, sie geht vielmehr zurück auf das, was an diesen Erscheinungen gesetzmäßig ist, und entschleiert derart lauter Zusammenhänge, die prinzipiell an sich gelten, statt, wie die geschichtlichen Zusammenhänge, hinsichtlich ihrer Verwebung mit bestimmt zu werden durch die Gesinnung und Wertüberzeugungen des erkennenden Subjekts.<sup>5</sup>

This passage is a particularly striking example of the shift in Kracauer's thinking on the importance of 'Gesinnung und Wertüberzeugungen', which, by 1929, have moved to the centre of *Die Angestellten*. Although in 'Die Wissenschaftskrisis' Kracauer criticised Max Weber for succumbing to value judgements, in *Soziologie* he draws on Weberian concepts. Thus the application of sociological methods to 'intentionale[n] Lebensäußerungen des vergesellschafteten Menschen'<sup>6</sup> constitutes the 'materiale' Soziologie – as practised by Weber - which, while it is distinct from the kind of 'formale Soziologie' exemplified by Kracauer's own book, nevertheless relies on it:

Soll die *materiale* Soziologie, die es mit der empirisch erfahrenen, individuell bestimmten Wirklichkeit zu tun hat, zu Erkenntnissen gelangen, die der Leitidee der Soziologie gemäß sind, so müssen sich diese Erkenntnisse sicherlich irgendwie auf die Ergebnisse der oben postulierten formalen Soziologie zurückführen lassen.<sup>7</sup>

This, however, is also sociology's great weakness. Since Kracauer argues that empirical reality is boundless, it follows that it cannot be reduced to the limited number of a-priori concepts established by formal sociology through progressive abstraction from just that reality. The path can only lead upwards,

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<sup>4</sup> *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.29, 'Georg Simmel', p.227.

<sup>5</sup> *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.20

<sup>6</sup> *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.68

<sup>7</sup> *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.81

in Kracauer's image of a cone, where the base represents the plenitude of phenomena, and the tip the entirely abstract principle which encompasses all of that reality. To retrace the path back down the cone is impossible as the concrete details of any given phenomenon cannot be reconstructed from its abstract summary. Thus Kracauer concludes that 'die materiale Soziologie will tatsächlich das Unmögliche für wahr haben: umfassend erlebte Wirklichkeit abzuleiten aus den Beschaffenheiten der ihres Gehalts entleerten Realität, empirische Erfahrung durchweg zu gründen auf apriorische Erkenntnisse'.<sup>8</sup>

*Soziologie als Wissenschaft* is, on the whole, a rather dispiriting work, leaving the reader wondering why so much effort is being spent on a project – sociology – that is forever doomed. The only hope Kracauer can offer is his comment that 'Skepsis der Soziologie gegenüber ist also hiernach lediglich dann angebracht, wenn man Ansprüche an sie stellt, die sie prinzipiell nicht befriedigen kann.'<sup>9</sup> As Kracauer has himself made just such immoderate demands, his apparent generosity is not really much comfort. By the time he embarked on *Die Angestellten*, however, he had evidently revised his expectations of the role of sociology. To be sure, Kracauer himself does not classify his study of Berlin white-collar workers as sociology. Instead he calls it a 'Diagnose' and readily admits that 'man [wird] in der Arbeit ohne Mühe eine Reihe von Bemerkungen finden können, die über die Analyse hinausführen'.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, even on his own terms there are good reasons for treating *Die Angestellten* as an exemplary case of sociological writing.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.90.

<sup>9</sup> *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.101.

<sup>10</sup> *Die Angestellten*, p.8; future references will be made in the text.

<sup>11</sup> This question of classification is controversial; cf. Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity*, p. 161, where he argues that 'although it is based on interviews with white collar workers, it does not

Kracauer had already moved on from hankering after a world filled with metaphysical meaning to trying to change his own society into a more just and humane one. His concern in *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* with approximating as closely as possible the comprehensive and ‘true’ view which is only possible in a world that is unified and full of meaning has thus become defunct.

Instead, his journalistic work reveals, on the one hand, his concern with the details of the ‘intentionale[n] Lebensäußerungen des vergesellschafteten Menschen’ in the Weimar Republic, for instance in his reviews of films and books and the accompanying observations on their audiences.<sup>12</sup> ‘Die kleinen Ladenmädchen gehen ins Kino’, for example, is just such a study of the – largely female – audience of popular films, which Kracauer uses to draw conclusions not only about the desires of the audience which drive them to the cinema, but also about the values and anxieties of the ruling class which make their way, with more or less calculation, into mainstream films.<sup>13</sup> ‘Die kleinen Ladenmädchen gehen ins Kino’, however, draws merely on Kracauer’s own observations and intuitions, it is not backed by any systematic research into the actual composition of cinema audiences or even on their actual reactions to the films.<sup>14</sup> *Die Angestellten* provides the scope for a more sustained and systematic analysis of a whole, clearly defined section of the German population.

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possess that degree of orthodoxy which would enable us to subsume it under sociology’. Mülder, on the other hand sees *Die Angestellten* as Kracauer’s ‘Entwurf einer materialen Soziologie’, *Grenzgänger*, p.125.

<sup>12</sup> *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.68.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Die kleinen Ladenmädchen gehen ins Kino’, in *Das Ornament der Masse*, p.279-294.

<sup>14</sup> See also Schlüpmann, ‘Kinosucht’ and ‘Der Gang ins Kino – ein Ausgang aus selbverschuldeter Unmündigkeit: Zum Begriff des Publikums in Kracauers Essayistik der Zwanziger Jahre’, in Kessler and Levin, pp.267-284, esp. p.286.

On the other hand, and this is evident from his novel *Ginster* as much as from a programmatic feuilleton essay such as ‘Die Bibel auf Deutsch’, ‘truth’ is no longer associated with transcendence but with material reality, and here ‘realism’ is not merely a question of factual accuracy. On the contrary, it is crucial that the explorer of a culture has the ability to connect up distinct impressions to (re)construct the reality behind them and attain a critical perspective on this reality. In *Die Angestellten*, Kracauer is quite clear from the outset that both these points are, again, central. In a much quoted passage from the book’s introductory chapter Kracauer posits that

Hundert Berichte aus einer Fabrik lassen sich nicht zur Wirklichkeit der Fabrik addieren, sondern bleiben bis in alle Ewigkeit hundert Fabrikansichten. Die Wirklichkeit ist eine Konstruktion. Gewiß muß das Leben beobachtet werden, damit sie erstehe. Keineswegs jedoch ist sie in der mehr oder minder zufälligen Beobachtungsfolge der Reportage enthalten, vielmehr steckt sie einzig und allein in dem Mosaik, das aus den einzelnen Beobachtungen auf Grund der Erkenntnis ihres Gehalts zusammengestiftet wird. (*Die Angestellten*, p.16)

In comparison to *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* it is relevant that Kracauer here uses the example of a factory to discuss where reality resides and how it may be represented. Not only does it already hint at his thesis of the proletarianisation of white-collar-workers, but in the earlier text he had distinguished between ‘Realität’ as the realm of the sciences and ‘Wirklichkeit’, which can only be grasped from a position of being ‘gebannt[...] und geeint[...]’ by the ‘höchsten transzendenten “Sinn”’.<sup>15</sup> It is this split that, according to Kracauer in 1922, makes it impossible for sociology to attain its goal and to capture ‘Wirklichkeit’. His example of the ‘Wirklichkeit’ of the factory demonstrates that in his understanding now there is just one

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<sup>15</sup> *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.10.

reality, which resides in material culture and can be captured by anyone so long as they use the appropriate means.

Using appropriate means depends on an ability to measure appearance against some kind of knowledge of the issue at hand. If one wants to represent the reality of a factory in a mosaic of images, then one needs some kind of guiding principle for the construction of that montage. As Inka Mülder has pointed out, in this attack on the *Neue Sachlichkeit* Kracauer is neither very accurate, nor does he acknowledge his own debt to this movement which provided ‘Anstöße zur Wiederentdeckung des Alltags und der Arbeitswelt als “literaturwürdiger” Themen, zur Politisierung der Literatur im Dienste gesellschaftskritischer Aufklärung, nicht zuletzt zur Ausweitung des Literaturbegriffs auf nicht-fiktionale Gebrauchstexte’.<sup>16</sup> But for Kracauer, objectivity recedes behind the necessity of an informed intelligence which can recognise what is significant in an impression and relate this to other such impressions, forming a coherent whole. Although it may not be strictly necessary, for Kracauer such a composite perspective is always also a critical one. Already the preface states that trade and industry are in ‘einer besonders schwierigen Situation’ and that Kracauer is more interested in the ‘Nöte’ of the employees than those of the employers (*Die Angestellten*, p.7). Furthermore, Kracauer devotes a whole chapter to the lack of class-consciousness among white-collar workers, which he recognises as a danger to German democracy.

True to his principle, Kracauer’s study of *Die Angestellten* itself takes the shape of a mosaic, a composite of individual, different observations which add up to a coherent picture, informed by Kracauer’s ‘Erkenntnis ihres

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<sup>16</sup> Mülder, *Grenzgänger*, p.117.

Gehalts'. Kracauer compares the reportage in the style of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* with a still photograph, suggesting that his mosaic is the literary equivalent of a movie.<sup>17</sup> The twelve chapters address different aspects of the lives of white-collar workers, all circling around the issue of class consciousness and illuminating it from their various perspectives. Within themselves, too, the chapters are structured by (to use the more familiar cinematic term) montage. The first chapter is perhaps the best example. It begins with the brief account of a conversation Kracauer has with a secretary he meets on a train. The random nature of the event is emphasised, the young woman is on the train because she is returning from a wedding celebration, and the fact that she has not yet sobered up accounts for her unusual openness towards a stranger.

The secretary's individual case is then set in relation to statistics, numbers and proportions of white-collar workers within the labour force, recent trends and some conjecture about the reasons for the various developments. A significant proportion of the chapter, reflecting the importance of the issue, is devoted to a description of the main unions and associations representing Germany's white-collar workers. Out of a total of 3.5 million white-collar workers 400,000 are organised in the *Afa-Bund* (*Allgemeiner Freier Angestelltenbund*) which is broadly aligned with the Social Democratic Party. Of roughly equal size is the *Gedag* (*Gesamtverband Deutscher Angestelltegewerkschaften*), which, although 'radikal' in matters of salary negotiations is otherwise 'christlich-national', anti-socialist and antisemitic. The third major force is the *G.d.A.* (*Gewerkschaftsbund der*

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<sup>17</sup> Similar attempts to apply cinematic montage to literary texts, also with an 'aufklärerische', critical agenda, have been made by Alexander Kluge, for instance in 'Luftangriff auf Halberstadt', in *Neue Geschichten, Hefte 1-18*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1977, pp 33-106, and by Kluge and Oskar Negt in *Geschichte und Eigensinn*, 3 vols, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1993.

*Angestellten*) with 376,000 members whose position Kracauer classifies as ‘in ihren Grundzügen demokratisch’ (*Die Angestellten*, p.14). Kracauer does not comment on these figures, except to say that the rate of union membership, which he puts at 30%, indicates that their low wages (ranging from 150 to 500 Marks) drive white collar workers ‘sich mindestens in ökonomischer Hinsicht als Arbeitnehmer zu fühlen’ (*Die Angestellten*, p.13). Striking – and surprising – is Kracauer’s reluctance to locate the unions and associations more clearly politically. In contrast to Kracauer’s restraint, Hans Speier found, among others, the GdA, ‘anfällig[...] für den Nationalsozialismus’.<sup>18</sup> Speier’s more detailed breakdown of union membership elucidates what Kracauer leaves to the (contemporary and presumably informed) reader to infer. Speier comments on the membership figures for the year 1931:

Zunächst ist zu bemerken daß die Organisationsquote der Angestellten höher war als die der Arbeiter [...] Etwa jeder dritte Arbeiter [war] gewerkschaftlich organisiert [...], aber immerhin etwa 37% der Angestellten [...] Der zweite Haupteindruck ist die überaus starke Stellung der sozialistischen Gewerkschaften bei den Arbeitern und die gegensätzliche Bevorzugung von nicht- und antisozialistischen Verbänden durch die Angestellten [...] Rund Dreiviertel aller organisierten Angestellten [standen] im ‘bürgerlichen’ Lager [...] Die Organisationsverhältnisse der Angestellten zeigten also in großen Zügen das umgekehrte Bild der Verhältnisse bei den Arbeitern; nur eine Minderheit der Angestellten bekannte sich durch Zugehörigkeit zu der sozialistischen Auffassung der eigenen Lage und der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft [...] Unter den kaufmännischen und Büroangestellten [...] dominierten [...] die antisozialistischen Verbände mit insgesamt 80%. Insbesondere der DHV und seine Schwesterorganisation für weibliche Angestellte, der VwA, übten eine klare Vorherrschaft aus.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Hans Speier, *Die Angestellten vor dem Nationalsozialismus: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der deutschen Sozialstruktur 1918-1933*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977, p 12. Speier had already completed a first version of his book by 1933 when the Nazis prevented its publication.

<sup>19</sup> Speier, pp.145-148; on the socio-history of German white-collar workers also see Band, esp. pp. 126-135.

Speier's assessment dates from the year 1933 and his outspokenness might simply reflect the dramatic worsening of the political situation since Kracauer wrote *Die Angestellten* in 1929. On the other hand the fact that *Die Angestellten* was first serialised in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, a paper with a generally bourgeois readership, might have caused Kracauer to exercise some restraint.

At any rate, the frivolity of the young woman on the train only takes on its full significance in the context of this information about the political position of a whole section of the German population. The combination of individual hunger for diversion and political indifference already prepares Kracauer's argument that Germany's white-collar workers lack a sense of social belonging which is in any way rooted in their actual situation (or they would be organised in socialist unions, rather than 'gelbe' associations, and show far greater solidarity with each other and with the working class), and that they try to fill the gap with a number of leisure activities which, however, frequently ensnare them into mental dependence, on top of their economic one.<sup>20</sup> The first chapter also illustrates the individual optimism of a (female) white-collar worker hoping for (a return to) petty-bourgeois independence with her fiancé (whom she has already cuckolded) and combines it with evidence of widespread resentment of the present economic situation, already leading to collective, although not socialist, action. As Kracauer points out, the politically right-wing *Gedag* displays a 'radikales gewerkschaftliches Vorgehen in Tarifverhandlungen[, das] sich mit seiner bürgerlich-ständischen Ideologie nur

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<sup>20</sup> The spiritual homelessness Kracauer describes here is arguably the same 'transzendente Obdachlosigkeit' Kracauer had adopted from Lukács's *Theorie des Romans* (see 'Georg von Lukács' Romantheorie'), but now seen from a materialist perspective.

schwer auf einen gemeinsamen Nenner bringen [läßt]' (*Die Angestellten*, p.149). What Kracauer might have added, but left to his readers to consider, is that the National Socialists promised to solve this contradiction by subsuming class differences into *Volksgemeinschaft*.

The whole of the text, like its first chapter, consists of combinations and juxtapositions of different materials, including interviews both with employees and employers, excerpts from references, questionnaires, regulations and newsletters, and Kracauer's own observations and comments. The first chapter is followed by a description of the many hurdles the aspiring clerk or shop-assistant has to overcome before he or she can join the ranks of those whose delusions and/or misery have been exposed only a few pages ago. The chapter deals with the demands made of the personality of the prospective employee, extending also to physical attributes such as the 'moralisch-rosa Hautfarbe', which adds a dimension of Lavaterian physiognomy to the employers' otherwise transparent ageism and sexism. Kracauer already voices doubts about the relevance of 'personality' for at least some of the work, but these doubts only develop their full force when the reader reaches the third chapter which graphically illustrates the degree of mechanisation of workplaces and the ensuing interchangeability and mechanisation of the workers. In the face of the evident disillusionment among the employees – 'ein kleines Tippmädel [...] schleuderte mir dreist ins Gesicht, daß weder sie noch ihre Kolleginnen ein Interesse an dem mechanischen Geklapper hätten' – Kracauer revises the hopes he had expressed in 'Das Ornament der Masse', too: "Die Maschine", meint ein Betriebsrat zu mir, "soll ein Instrument der Befreiung sein." Er hat die Wendung wahrscheinlich oft in den

Versammlungen gehört. Das sie abgegriffen ist, macht sie erst recht rührend.'

(*Die Angestellten*, p.34) The pattern continues, chapters on different aspects of the lives of employees throw each other into relief, while Kracauer picks out noteworthy examples of hypocrisy, delusion, or cynicism with his own comments. One more, particularly important example will suffice. Chapter Ten, entitled 'Asyl für Obdachlose', deals with the central issue of this book, the problem that

Die Masse der Angestellten unterscheidet sich vom Arbeiter-Proletariat darin, daß sie geistig obdachlos ist. Zu den Genossen kann sie vorläufig nicht hinfinden, und das Haus der bürgerlichen Begriffe und Gefühle, das sie bewohnt hat, ist eingestürzt, weil ihm durch die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung die Fundamente entzogen worden sind. Sie lebt gegenwärtig ohne eine Lehre, zu der sie aufblicken, ohne ein Ziel, das sie erfragen könnte. Also lebt sie in Furcht davor, aufzublicken und sich bis zum Ende durchzufragen. (*Die Angestellten*, p.91)

The preceding chapter had described the various institutional ways in which employees distance themselves from workers: apart from their separate unions, they are frequently prevented (if, indeed, they want to in the first place) from socialising during or even out of working hours, 'intermarriage', too, is a matter of debate. This snobbishness assumes a deeper meaning through Kracauer's close analysis of the entertainments sought by white-collar workers as their 'Asyl'. Because they have lost the values and aims which had once been integral to bourgeois existence, and because they still feel the need to aspire to something in their lives, white-collar workers use their leisure time to flock to the 'Pläsierkasernen' that offer "für billiges Geld den Hauch der großen Welt" (*Die Angestellten*, p.95). Kracauer illustrates the employees' daily existence, from which they escape into the glamour of clubs and bars, with a catalogue of problems and products which appear in the advertisements

of professional publications: 'Federn; Kohinoor-Bleistifte; Hämorrhoiden; Haarausfall; Betten; Kreppsohlen; weiße Zähne; Verjüngungsmittel; Verkauf von Kaffee in Bekanntenkreisen; Sprechmaschinen; Schreibkrampf; Zittern, besonders in Gegenwart anderer; Qualitätspianos gegen wöchentliche Abzahlung usw.' (*Die Angestellten*, p.91). Of course the grotesque combination of items (a miniature mosaic one can also easily imagine as a montage sequence in a film) in itself already reveals much about the misery, the anxieties and the pretensions of the target group for the advertisements. The list also goes some way to explaining the almost desperate devotion to distraction among female office workers which Kracauer describes in the paragraph. Only in the light of this abject, craven hunger for distraction from petty, miserable everyday life does the following description of the ways in which this desire is encouraged from above fully assume its sinister quality. 'Society', by which Kracauer presumably means that minority of the bourgeoisie that has managed to hold on to its money and status, sets the example with its own life-style, employers promote similar aspirations in their communications with their employees, and magazines publish articles demonstrating 'daß sich auch bei einem geringen Einkommen der Schein wahren lasse, zur bürgerlichen Gesellschaft zu gehören, und man darum alle Ursache habe, als Mittelstand zufrieden zu sein' (*Die Angestellten*, p.94). Kracauer's fortuitous expression of the 'Pläsierkasernen', which describes the refuges of the masses hungry for distraction as well as for leadership, while revealing their purpose of disciplining those masses, has often be admired, first of all by Walter Benjamin.<sup>21</sup> Kracauer uses the image to develop from it his

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<sup>21</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Politisierung der Intelligenz. Zu S. Kracauer's *Die Angestellten*', in *Die*

own reading of white-collar society as being on the run from historical and political challenges and from existential truth: 'Die Flucht der Bilder ist die Flucht vor der Revolution und dem Tod' (*Die Angestellten*, p.99).

Kracauer does not pretend to be a detached observer, an important change from his earlier views on sociology as a science. Thus Band says of *Die Angestellten*: 'unübersehbar ist doch gerade in diesem Text die Präsenz des Kritikers Kracauer, der immer wieder unmißverständlich zu erkennen gibt, wie er die Phänomene sieht und bewertet, bzw. zu sehen und zu werten wünscht.'<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, and in marked contrast to other of his works (for example the 'kleine Ladenmädchen' series, see above, or 'Das Ornament der Masse', see Chapter Two, above) where Kracauer goes to some lengths to keep out of the reader's view at all times, he here not only appears in person but quite overtly intervenes in the situation. Inka Mülder nevertheless claims that 'Kracauer bleibt, und das unterscheidet ihn grundlegend vom "operierenden Schriftsteller", Zuschauer, der sich weder einem Betrieb aktiv eingliedert, noch über die Möglichkeiten verfügt, mit seiner Schrift direkt in gesellschaftliche Prozesse einzugreifen.'<sup>23</sup> But Mülder, who refers here to Sergej Tretjakow, whose demands for writers to adopt a collectivist practice Kracauer rejected in 1931, conflates Kracauer's lack of active political involvement with his research methodology. This, however, is anything but disengaged. When the secretary in the first chapter confides that her boss admires her beautiful dark eyes, Kracauer encourages her with a little flirtation: "'Ihre Augen sind wirklich wunderschön", sagte ich' (*Die Angestellten*, p.10). A little later he

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*Angestellten*, pp 116-123, p.121.

<sup>22</sup> Band, p.146.

<sup>23</sup> Mülder, *Grenzgänger*, p.120.

contrasts the young woman's rudimentary education with his own familiarity with world affairs:

Es stellte sich heraus, daß ihr Bräutigam zur Zeit in Sevilla die Filiale eines Wäschegeschäftes leitet. Ich riet ihr, ihn zu besuchen. 'In Barcelona ist eben die Weltausstellung...'  
'Wasser hat keine Balken', entgegnete sie.  
Trotz meiner ernsthaften Versicherung glaubte sie mir nicht, daß Spanien auf dem Landweg zu erreichen sei. (*Die Angestellten*, p.10)

The little interchange serves to establish what he takes to be part of the problem with white-collar workers: their lack of even the basic intellectual tools to contextualise their individual situations, as well as a complete lack of any self-awareness, but it also demonstrates Kracauer's own qualifications as a knowledgeable guide through the 'Exotik des Alltags' (*Die Angestellten*, p.11).

There is, however, also another aspect to Kracauer's self-representation in the text. Twelve years after her first publication on Kracauer, Inka Mülder-Bach calls it his 'ethnological metaphor'<sup>24</sup> when, in this exploration 'aus dem neuesten Deutschland', he entitles the first chapter 'unbekanntes Gebiet', likens Berlin's white-collar workers to 'primitive[...] Völkerstämme' and refers to the 'Exotik des Alltags' (*Die Angestellten*, p.11). According to Mülder-Bach, 'Kracauer's approach is characterized by a highly self-conscious individualism which resists methodological generalization and crucially involves the mise en scène of foreignness and distance as a condition of attention and a medium of knowledge.'<sup>25</sup> Kracauer's self-consciousness as one who actively re-constructs a particular culture for the benefit of his readers leads Mülder-Bach to liken his approach to the ethnography developed by Clifford Geertz, albeit with some reservations:

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<sup>24</sup> Mülder-Bach, 'Cinematic Ethnology', p.43.

<sup>25</sup> Mülder-Bach, 'Cinematic Ethnology', p.43.

A ‘thick description’ avant la lettre, Kracauer brings us ‘into touch with the lives’ of Berlin employees, and convinces us that ‘he has truly “been there”.’ Measured against the present state of ethnographical discussion, he undoubtedly underestimates the precariousness of his own position and the problematic nature of delimitation and distancing as means of constituting the object of his observation and description. There are relations of power and oppression, however, not just between the ethnological researcher and the other culture he seeks to explore, but also within this other culture’s socio-political and symbolic structure. By making transparent these power-structures in a skilful combination of documentation and construction, Kracauer’s study transcends the ethnographic hermeneutics of ‘thick description’ and becomes a socio-political diagnosis pressing for reorganisation and change.<sup>26</sup>

Mülner-Bach’s claim – as well as her caveat – needs further examination.

What is the meaning of ‘thick description’, and how and to what extent does it apply to *Die Angestellten*? What kind of an ‘ethnographer’ is Kracauer, and how does he manage the power imbalance between him and his objects of enquiry? In what way does he, as Mülner-Bach claims, ‘transcend the ethnographic hermeneutics of “thick description”’?

In his opening chapter on ‘Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture’, Clifford Geertz starts from the premise that culture consists of the ‘webs of significance [man] himself has spun’, so that ‘the analysis of it [i.e. culture, is] not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.’<sup>27</sup> This view is clearly incompatible with Kracauer’s position in *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* where he repudiates such a Weberian view with the demand that ‘formal’ sociology must, indeed, strive ‘wie jede echte Wissenschaft [...] ihre Ergebnisse in Notwendigkeit zu fundieren’, that is to say it must look for laws, not just meanings.<sup>28</sup> But even in

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<sup>26</sup> Mülner-Bach, ‘Cinematic Ethnology’, p. 56.

<sup>27</sup> Geertz, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p. 17.

this early text Kracauer already knows that it is the ambition to model sociology on the natural sciences (an ambition he himself is only beginning to shed at this point) itself which is the real problem. 'Alle Phänomene der soziologischen Mannigfaltigkeit', on the other hand, 'sind geistiger Art. [...] Immer handelt es sich um Vorgänge, die, wie sie aus dem Bewußtsein hervorbrechen, so auch auf Bewußtsein hinzielen, um Vorgänge, in denen sich eine Bedeutung ausdrückt, die aufgefaßt und verstanden sein will.'<sup>29</sup> This formulation allows, even if it does not exactly imply, what Geertz calls his 'essentially [...] semiotic' interpretation of culture as a web of meanings made by human beings themselves, an interpretation which aims at 'construing social expressions on their surface enigmatical'.<sup>30</sup> There is, therefore, a continuity between Kracauer's understanding of material sociology and the basis of Geertz's ethnography even though ethnography traditionally, although not necessarily, extends to cultures that are at least geographically more remote for the ethnographer than Berlin white-collar workers were for Kracauer.

For Geertz

ethnography is thick description. What the ethnographer is in fact faced with – except when (as, of course, he must do) he is pursuing the more automatized routines of data collection – is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render. And this is true at the most down-to-earth, jungle field work levels of his activity: interviewing informants, observing rituals, eliciting kin terms, tracing property lines, censusing households... writing his journal. Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of 'construct a reading of') a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries,

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<sup>29</sup> *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, p.35

<sup>30</sup> Geertz, p.5

but written not in conventionalised graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour.<sup>31</sup>

This passage makes it very clear why Geertz talks about *ethnography*: first and foremost because ethnologists themselves write, they keep journals of their field work and write up their findings for publication, but also because Geertz sees the whole project of ethnology as a textual practice. Kracauer reverses the metaphor, not only his own text is a ‘kleine Expedition [...], die vielleicht abenteuerlicher als eine Filmreise nach Afrika ist’ (*Die Angestellten*, p.15); a graphologist who tests prospective employees even becomes ‘ein Regierungsspion in feindliche[n] Ländern’ (*Die Angestellten*, p.23). Either way, both Kracauer and Geertz treat texts (including their own) as well as cultural phenomena as part of a continuum in which societies (especially in Kracauer’s case including himself) negotiate meanings.

There are two issues, however, which are crucial for Kracauer but are not accounted for by Geertz. Firstly, in Geertz’s approach, as his reading of the Balinese cockfight demonstrates, there is little interest in social change, in genuine, as opposed to dramatised, struggle. For Geertz this has its reason simply in the nature of the phenomenon:

Like any art form – for that, finally, is what we are dealing with – the cockfight renders ordinary, everyday experience comprehensible by presenting it in terms of acts and objects which have had their practical consequences removed and been reduced (or, if you prefer, raised) to the level of sheer appearances, where their meaning can be more powerfully articulated and more exactly perceived. The cockfight is ‘really real’ only to the cocks – it does not kill anyone, castrate anyone, reduce anyone to animal status, alter the hierarchical relations among people, or refashion the hierarchy; it does not even redistribute income in any significant way.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Geertz, p.9/10.

<sup>32</sup> Geertz, p.443.

In 'Das Ornament der Masse' Kracauer's argument was based on the similar belief that 'die Struktur des Massenornaments spiegelt die der gegenwärtigen Gesamtorganisation wieder'.<sup>33</sup> Unlike Geertz, for whom art is a public system 'of significant symbols', Kracauer never explicitly states what the relationship between cultural phenomena and society is; is it to be understood, for instance, in Marxist terms as superstructure and base, or, in a more Freudian vein, as a manifestation of unconscious but collective processes?<sup>34</sup> Instead, Kracauer goes on to focus on the need for social change and on arguing that the mass ornament can show the way towards this end.<sup>35</sup> In *Die Angestellten* Kracauer relies on the same model of culture dramatising social reality, but he is now concerned that the culture of the white-collar workers also effectively functions to maintain the status quo. Yet he does not see this as inevitable, simply 'structural', but as partly a deliberate strategy on the part of the employers, and partly an escape mechanism on behalf of the workers; nor is he prepared to just accept it. Indeed, the whole point of his book seems to be to alert his readership to the grave danger he perceives. In this respect, then, Geertz and Kracauer have a similar understanding of how culture works within a society, but they take very different positions towards this. While Geertz is quite clear from the very beginning of the essay that he is also personally affected by Balinese culture, any personal opinions are limited to contributions to his interpretation of Balinese culture. He remains detached inasmuch as he, as an outsider, feels neither right nor obligation to suggest any change in Balinese culture or society. Kracauer, on the other hand, is analysing his own

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<sup>33</sup> 'Das Ornament der Masse', p 53

<sup>34</sup> Geertz, p.48.

<sup>35</sup> See also Chapter Two, above.

society, and the whole purpose of his work is to make a difference to this society. Thus, even though he claims that his work is only 'eine Diagnose und verzichtet als solche bewußt darauf, Vorschläge für Verbesserungen zu machen' (*Die Angestellten*, p.7), he also makes it clear that he is not detached, and that he does want to see, and to contribute to, change. This is implied in his explanation that

Rezepte sind nicht überall am Platz und am allerwenigsten hier, wo es zunächst darauf ankam, einer noch kaum gesichteten Situation innezuwerden. Die Erkenntnis dieser Situation ist zudem nicht nur die notwendige Voraussetzung aller Veränderungen, sondern schließt selbst schon eine Veränderung mit ein. Denn ist die gemeinte Situation von Grund auf erkannt, so muß auf Grund des neuen Bewußtseins von ihr gehandelt werden. (*Die Angestellten*, p.7/8)

Kracauer thus explicitly places the text in the context of his own political agenda, possibly also in the expectation that many of his readers would be more or less familiar with his politics.

Secondly, and this point has become a wider concern within ethnography, while Geertz's readings of culture as text justify the interpretation, as opposed to a mere, 'thin' description of culture, and furthermore enable him to represent foreign societies in a lively and comprehensible way, Geertz does not reflect on the fact that ethnographic writings, too, have an aesthetic dimension: yet "fictio" meint nicht – wie von Geertz behauptet – lediglich "etwas Gemachtes" oder etwas ["Hergestelltes"], sondern in ihm schwingt auch die Bedeutung mit, daß es auf künstlerische Art und Weise gestaltet wurde.<sup>36</sup> In fact, despite his own evident competence as a

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<sup>36</sup> Gerd Schäfer, 'Suggestiven Bildern sich mit kollegialer Hilfe der Herren Herder und Lessing annähernd...', in Thomas Hauschild, ed., *Ethnologie und Literatur*, Sonderband 1, *kea, Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften*, 1995, pp. 29-42, 34.

writer, Geertz, for whom art is crucially a public practice, is rather sceptical about the possible drawbacks of a polished style:

A good interpretation of anything – a poem, a person, a history, a ritual, an institution, a society – takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation. When it does not do that, but leads us instead somewhere else – into an admiration of its own elegance, of its author's cleverness, or of the beauties of Euclidean order – it may have its intrinsic charms; but it is something else than what the task at hand [...] calls for.<sup>37</sup>

Of course, Kracauer, too, is highly critical of authors who allow style to get in the way of substance – for example Walter Ruttmann in his 1927 film *Berlin: die Sinfonie der Großstadt* – but Kracauer, who after all juggled genres ranging from reportage via the novel to sociology with all their conventions and devices, also reflects upon the ways in which form is part of meaning, notably at the end of the first chapter of *Die Angestellten*.

But even if Geertz is, despite his insistence that ethnology is really ethnography, perhaps less given to aesthetic considerations than one might wish or expect, others have started to examine the conditions of ethnological writing. A key moment for ethnology was the same *Wissenschaftskrise* which had prompted Kracauer to contemplate the proper role of sociology. From the conflict between a humanist, exoticising tradition in the anthropology of the turn of the last century and the scientific approach modelled on the natural sciences (which Kracauer had already declared doomed as far as sociology was concerned),<sup>38</sup> Kracauer's Cracow-born British contemporary, Bronislaw Malinowski, emerges as a model who successfully refuses 'zwischen Kunst und Wissenschaft eine Wahl zu treffen'.<sup>39</sup> Malinowski is considered to be the

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<sup>37</sup> Geertz, p. 18.

<sup>38</sup> In his opening gambit in *Die Angestellten* Kracauer, of course, draws on this exoticising tradition, albeit in an ironic mode.

<sup>39</sup> Schäfer, p. 31

founder of British Social Anthropology, and to have introduced the term 'Functionalism'. Malinowski took, in Geertz's words, a 'social-psychological approach [which] emphasizes what [for example] religion does for the individual.'<sup>40</sup> In Malinowski's way of thinking, again according to Geertz, 'the forms of social organisation are regarded as behavioral embodiments of cultural patterns', whereas in Kracauer's view, culture and social organisation appear to be mutually constitutive. Nevertheless, Malinowski, or at least his reception in contemporary ethnology, is instructive. In *Das Geschlechtsleben der Wilden* (which was available in German by 1930) Malinowski asserts

Die von mir gemachten Beobachtungen sind nicht von irgendeinem mechanischen Apparat aufgezeichnet worden, sondern ich habe sie mit meinen eigenen Augen und Ohren gemacht und mit meinem eigenen Gehirn kontrolliert. Durch diese Kontrolle gewinnt nämlich erst die Beobachtung ihren Wert.<sup>41</sup>

In this insistence the criteria for such a control are left entirely open, but the position resembles Kracauer's in *Die Angestellten* in so far as the meaning of whatever has been observed is not immediately evident but will only emerge from a careful processing. Malinowski, like Kracauer, also uses the idea of photography to convey lack of intellectual reflection and control. Gerd Schäfer claims of Malinowski's books:

sie erklären, indem sie beschreiben. Ihr Ziel ist nicht so sehr die Analyse, sondern zuerst die Vergegenwärtigung der Forschungsergebnisse. [...] Jede über die bloße Beschreibung hinausgehende Erklärung wird von Malinowski [...] zu vermeiden gesucht – vielmehr entwirft er durch eine reine, jedoch literarisch versierte Beschreibung Bilder, die beim Leser die in ihnen dargestellte

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<sup>40</sup> Geertz, p. 142.

<sup>41</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Das Geschlechtsleben der Wilden in Nordwest-Melanesien. Liebe Ehe und Familienleben bei den Eingeborenen der Trobriand-Inseln Britisch-Neu-Guinea*, deutsch von Dr. Eva Schumann, Leipzig und Zürich: Grethlein & Co., 1929 or 1930, p. 274.

Welt hervorrufen. Ferner erfüllen diese Bilder selbst schon die Aufgabe von Hypothesen.<sup>42</sup>

With his simplistic distinction between ‘Analyse’ or ‘Erklärung’ on one side, and ‘reine Beschreibung’ on the other, Schäfer overshoots the mark somewhat. Malinowski’s work rather illustrates Geertz’s point that ‘right down at the factual base, the hard rock, insofar as there is any, of the whole enterprise, we are already explicating’.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, Schäfer’s comments suggest a striking similarity between Malinowski’s and Kracauer’s strategies. Both use very visual descriptions to advance their arguments (or, to use Schäfer’s term, hypotheses), relying on the capacity of those images themselves to convey meaning, with little need for explicit explanations.

There is no evidence to suggest that Kracauer was familiar with Malinowski’s work, but the fact that Müller’s comparison of Kracauer’s with Geertz’s work is paralleled by a rediscovery by modern ethnologists of a contemporary of Kracauer’s, precisely for the aesthetic qualities of his work, is in itself worth noting.<sup>44</sup> What then are the aesthetic features of Kracauer’s work? How does his own ‘thick description’ work? These two questions already suggest a divergence between Müller-Bach’s and Kracauer’s own view of his work. While Kracauer himself appears to be more concerned with suggesting an interpretation through structuring the text in a particular way, Müller focuses on Kracauer’s mode of description/interpretation.

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<sup>42</sup> Schäfer, p.32.

<sup>43</sup> Geertz, p.9.

<sup>44</sup> Before *Das Geschlechtsleben der Wilden* two other of Malinowski’s books had been translated into German: *Mutterrechtliche Familie und Oedipus-Komplex* appeared in Vienna in the Internationale Psychoanalytische Verlag in 1924, and *Sitte und Verbrechen bei den Naturvölkern* in 1926, no details of publication.

In his 'Notes on a Balinese Cockfight' Geertz first describes his and his wife's situation, difficulties, and conduct as outside observers. He then describes, in great detail, the facts of the cockfight, its importance as a ritual in Bali, the setting of the fight and how it proceeds, and the associated betting among participants and spectators. Only then does he complete his 'thick description' with a reading, an interpretation of the events, an attempt to explain, although crucially not to its participants, what it means as a reflection of Balinese culture.

Drawing on almost every level of Balinese experience, [the cockfight] brings together themes – animal savagery, male narcissism, opponent gambling, status rivalry, mass excitement, blood sacrifice – whose main connection is their involvement with rage and the fear of rage, and binding them into a set of rules which at once contains them and allows them play, builds a symbolic structure in which, over and over again, the reality of their inner affiliation can be intelligibly felt.<sup>45</sup>

Kracauer proceeds somewhat differently in *Die Angestellten*, although he, too, begins with his own role in the study. His reflections on methodology are, due to the different situation, less involved than Geertz's. Kracauer was certainly not the visually immediately recognisable outsider Geertz was in Bali, if people were reluctant to talk to him the reasons are more likely to have been a specifically political or economically motivated distrust. Employers or their representatives might have been aware that Kracauer was unlikely to be very sympathetic to their position, while employees may have feared losing their jobs if they revealed too much to the researcher. These considerations differ from the initial reluctance of the Balinese to even acknowledge Geertz and his wife in that they are to do with the object of Kracauer's research itself, whereas Geertz was being ignored simply because he was an outsider. What is

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<sup>45</sup> Geertz, p.450.

perhaps more to the point is that Kracauer, in one sense, was no outsider at all: as a journalist working for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* he, too, was a white-collar worker, and not only did his relatively elevated position offer no real protection against the paper's political manoeuvres, Kracauer himself had only managed after some struggle to reject certain bourgeois values and traditions as no longer relevant. Hardly any of this, however, finds an expression in Kracauer's 'Vorwort'. Instead Kracauer comments upon his criteria for selecting Berlin as the location for his study, and large firms as its focus. Merely the short final paragraph deals with the acquiring of information, but even here Kracauer only lists the 'zahlreiche Unternehmer, Personaldezernenten großer Betriebe, Abgeordnete, Betriebsräte und Vertreter der verschiedenen Angestelltenorganisationen [die] mir bereitwillig Gelegenheit zur Aussprache gegeben [haben]' (*Die Angestellten*, p.8).

Once he has established his own position in relation to his subject – in the 'Vorwort' and through his conversation with the secretary – Kracauer presents a comprehensive account of the different aspects of the lives of white-collar workers. *Die Angestellten* is, however, more complex in its montage of different elements which illuminate each other or subtly change one another's meaning than 'Notes on the Balinese Cockfight'. Put another way, Geertz first builds up thematic strands which he then arranges into a meaningful web, whereas Kracauer's interpretations already emerge as a pattern in the mosaic of his work.<sup>46</sup> Whereas Geertz thus closes with his interpretation of the meaning of the cockfight within Balinese culture, Kracauer uses the final two

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<sup>46</sup> Contradicting Adorno, Mülder asserts that Kracauer also generates his theory through the mosaic: 'In diesen Konstellationen verliert das Material die starre Positivität, die isolierten Beispielen eignet. Es wird bewegt und erzeugt in dieser Bewegung, in der Inhalt zu Form und Form zu Inhalt wird, seine eigene Theorie' (*Grenzgänger*, p.125).

chapters for a critique of the situation of Germany's white-collar workers. This critique is directed first of all at the employers, who try to justify the capitalist system with their faith in

eine prästabilisierte Harmonie. Nach ihnen erzeugt die freie Konkurrenz von sich aus eine Ordnung, die durch Einsicht nicht beschworen werden kann, sichern Gewinnstreben, Initiative und Selbstverantwortung der Unternehmer von sich aus das Gedeihen der Massen besser als der auf dieses Gedeihen gerichtete Wille. (*Die Angestellten*, p.104)

This is, at best, wishful thinking, at worst, Kracauer suggests, it is outright hypocrisy, pretending concern for the workers in order to exonerate capitalist greed; but mostly it is simply confusion. In any case, the employed masses have little chance of working out their own position within and towards a hierarchy which may, or may not, have their interest at heart, and may, or may not, be able to act accordingly. But Kracauer also turns on the employees' associations, which, in his opinion, are still stuck in nineteenth-century preconceptions and are thus prevented from properly representing the interests of their members. Ultimately, however, Kracauer turns back to the individual. The problem with the policies of the organisations which attempt to represent the employed masses is that they promote a form of collectivism which, in Kracauer's view, is a doomed undertaking. He returns at the end of this text to the experience he had used as the turning point in *Ginster*, and which will return again in *Georg*, namely the realisation that death must be faced alone and that therefore collectives can never be successfully imposed upon human beings. Picking up the comments he had earlier made about the craze for distraction, he argues that what is needed is just what is most fervently avoided by the masses, and that is *Erkenntnis*. Kracauer does not clarify at this point

what it is that the masses must recognise, but he has repeatedly made his point about the avoidance of death before, and the whole of this book, as well as much of his more recent work had been directed against capitalism. It seems therefore that in his view the realisation of the ultimate human individuality provides both the limits of the possibility of collective action but also a basis for a genuine community which takes charge of the design of its temporal existence. This also explains Kracauer's closing demand: 'Es kommt nicht darauf an, daß die Institutionen geändert werden, es kommt darauf an, daß Menschen die Institutionen ändern' (*Die Angestellten*, p.115).

*Die Angestellten*, written, as it is, from within the same society it examines, is a far more judgmental text than 'Notes on The Balinese Cockfight', which is ultimately disinterested towards its object. This fundamental difference has consequences for the ways in which the texts are structured. Kracauer's willingness, in this text, to put his own position on the line results in a far more complex structure than that displayed by Geertz's essay, which aims to separate out different levels of interpretation and to stop short of opinion altogether. Despite these differences, both texts employ social-scientific methodologies towards cultures which are represented as strange, even exotic, with the aim of rendering those cultures more easily understandable for their audiences. Both authors assume, apparently with complete confidence, that they are fully qualified to undertake this task of mediation, which, in other words, means that they are speaking – or writing – for others, with the authority invested in them through their scientific approach. Thus Kracauer acknowledges the input the white-collar workers had: 'Um keinen Preis missen möchte ich die vielen Gespräche mit Angestellten

selber, und mein Wunsch wäre, daß dieses kleine Buch wirklich von ihnen spräche, die nur schwer von sich sprechen können' (*Die Angestellten*, p.8).

Neither Kracauer nor Geertz feels any need to explain, even less to justify why they are speaking of and for others and why, indeed if, those others cannot or do not speak for themselves. Kracauer claims that white-collar workers find it difficult to speak for and of themselves, even though proportionally more of them are organised than workers. In a more 'literate' mode of speaking of oneself, novels about white-collar workers, often written by people with personal experience, were appearing around the same time as Kracauer's study.<sup>47</sup> Such self-representations, be it by indigenous peoples or office clerks may not conform to the standards of academic ethno- or sociological writings, but in terms of making sense of the experience of their lives, of a Weberian *Verstehen*, there can be no reason to marginalise the utterings of the objects of such discourses as Kracauer is doing here (in a rather paternalistic way). The authority Kracauer assumes is by no means unproblematic, and the second part of this chapter will examine other interpretations of some key issues in *Die Angestellten*, which contest Kracauer's interpretations and, by extension, his authority.

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<sup>47</sup> Examples include Christa Anita Brück, *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*, Berlin: Sieben-Stäbe-Verlag, 1930, Rudolf Braune, *Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat*, Frankfurt/Main Societäts-Verlag, 1930. In his 1932 article 'Mädchen im Beruf' (*Schriften* 5.3, pp.69-65) Kracauer also mentions Joseph Breitbach, *Rot gegen Rot*, Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1929 and Otto Roeld, *Malenski (i. Fa. Fassland & Sohn) auf der Tour*, Berlin: E. Reiss, 1930 Slightly later appeared Hans Fallada, *Kleiner Mann, was nun?* Berlin: Rowohlt, 1932, Erich Kästner, *Fabian: Die Geschichte eines Moralisten* (1931), München: dtv, 1989, Irmgard Keun, *Gilgi, eine von uns*, Berlin: Universitas 1931, and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, and Fleißer, *Mehltreisende Frieda Geier*.

## Other Voices

The two, in Kracauer's view particularly pernicious, aspects of white-collar culture on which *Die Angestellten* focuses have already been named: the distraction provided by mass culture and by sports. The first chapter opens with an allusion to popular culture, as the secretary Kracauer meets on the train refers him to 'the novels' when he asks about her 'Büroleben' (*Die Angestellten*, p.10). She also talks about the cafés where she goes dancing, ruining a pair of shoes every few months, and Kracauer adds the 'Kulturfilme' which were popular at the time and allowed the employed masses to escape to exotic locations, if only for a short time. The first two pages thus already map the world of distractions which had opened up for white-collar workers, especially in the big cities. Curiously, Kracauer here dismisses 'the novels' even more completely than the films or 'Pläsiertkasernen'. The latter are at least analysed, critically, but in great detail, while the former do not seem, to Kracauer, to offer anything of even informative value at all. Only in 1931 did Kracauer extend his research into middle-class mentality with an essay 'Über Erfolgsbücher und ihr Publikum', followed in 1932 by 'Mädchen im Beruf'.<sup>48</sup>

In such contributions for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* Kracauer discussed novels with office-settings as well as films with similar topics, and although he was frequently highly critical of both, he nevertheless found them useful as documents. Since Kracauer, like Geertz, reads culture as a text, his refusal to consider such literary texts as part of the larger cultural text in *Die Angestellten* is therefore surprising. Just as he constructs a (further) text out of his reading of culture, so such novels about office or sales girls are both readings of culture

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<sup>48</sup> 'Mädchen im Beruf', in *Das Ornament der Masse*, pp 64-74

and new contributions to the text of that culture. The ease with which this view allows one to move between genres is captured by Geertz's reference, without any further comment, to Aristotle's Poetics: 'The poet's job is not to tell you what happened, but what happens: not what did take place but the kind of thing that always does take place.'<sup>49</sup> For Geertz the poet and the ethnographer (and the sociologist) all do essentially the same thing, they isolate from their experiences and observations (what did take place) some kind of pattern (that always takes place). Of course they look for different kinds of patterns (psychological, economic, functional) and narrate them in different ways. These differences are only partly accounted for by disciplines and genres, for as both Geertz and Kracauer demonstrate in their respective fields, there are different approaches within the disciplines, too. Some of those differences within and between disciplines have been at the centre of the first part of this chapter, but this second part will start from Geertz's proposal that they are all engaged in the same kind of process, and it will focus on the differences that emerge in their interpretations of 'what is'. Thus Irmgard Keun's short novel *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* will be examined primarily with regard to the view it presents of the distractions offered to young women in the metropolis, and the role such distractions played in their lives. Similarly, Marieluise Fleißer's *Mehltreisende Frieda Geier* presents an interpretation of the sports and body cult which is no less critical than Kracauer's, but has a very different perspective. Both these writers give views of the existence of female white-collar workers which are more sympathetic than Kracauer's. They not only credit these women with critical faculties which seem to have been absent

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<sup>49</sup> Geertz, p 450.

from the offices where Kracauer carried out his research, but they also suggest reasons why it was particularly difficult for female employees to extricate themselves from the situation Kracauer described; they add depth to the understanding of the pattern.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, Bertolt Brecht, Ernst Ottwald, Slatan Dudow and Hans Eisler present in their film *Kuhle Wampe* a much more optimistic view of sports, which they want to use for a purpose that is similar to Kracauer's: to change society. Their work, though, is embedded in a whole array of proletarian (counter)cultural practices and institutions which are outside of Kracauer's experience.

Kracauer describes two variations of female white-collar worker in *Die Angestellten*. One is rather hungry for life, at least until an opportunity for a comfortable existence as a respectable housewife comes along. She is represented by the secretary on the train in the first chapter. The other type is the working-class girl with rather simple tastes:

Man trifft sie in den Warenhäusern, in den Rechtsanwaltsbüros und in allen möglichen Firmen – anspruchslose Geschöpfe, die bei ihren Eltern im Norden oder Osten [i.e. in the working class parts of Berlin] hausen und noch kaum ahnen, wohin die Fahrt in Wirklichkeit geht. Es ist leicht, mit ihnen fertig zu werden. Jedenfalls haben mehrere Mädchen dieser Art, Lehrlinge und Ausgelernte, einen ganz zufriedenen Eindruck auf mich gemacht. Von einer rührenden Winzigkeit sind ihre Erlebnisse im Geschäft. Eine erzählt mir, daß sie nicht addieren könne, wenn draußen eine Drehorgel spiele. Ihre Gefährtin ist darüber beglückt, daß sie neulich im Auftrag der Firma hat Taxi fahren dürfen, und eine dritte erhält mitunter Freikarten für den Lunapark und ein Varieté. Natürlich wissen sie, daß sie bei dem geringen Einkommen einen Freund haben müßten, wenn sie keine Angehörigen besäßen. Aber vorerst haben sie Angehörige, und der Freund ist meist ein Verlobter, mit dem sie sonntags draußen im Zelt lagern. In Lokale gehen sie aus Geldmangel fast nie, und überhaupt sind sie ziemlich solide. (*Die Angestellten*, p.68f)

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<sup>50</sup> Keun's work, like Kracauer's, was based on conversations with office girls, in this case the employees in the office of Keun's father. See "'Woanders hin! Mich hält nichts fest!'" Irmgard Keun im Gespräch mit Klaus Antes', *die horen*, vol. 1, Spring 1982, vol. 27, no. 125, pp. 61-73, 71.

Kracauer's observation that the 'golden twenties' did not happen for young women from poor or impoverished backgrounds who simply could not afford to take part in the hedonistic world of clubs and theatres is an important one.

The historian Peukert, too, makes the point that

the worlds conjured up by the illustrated magazines, serials and hospital romances, by romantic films and musical comedies and by advertising and the new consumerism made their mark on the attitudes and daydreams of many young women in the white-collar class. In reality, unfortunately, their incomes were so low that the most they could hope for was to make an occasional hard-earned outing into this brave new world on a night off or at the weekend.<sup>51</sup>

Kracauer had already satirised these women in 'Die kleinen Ladenmädchen gehen ins Kino'. But though there as in *Die Angestellten* Kracauer's view cuts through the cliché peddled in the cinemas, advertisements and magazines, he substitutes another stereotype, that of the passive young woman whose ambitions are determined by the movies. The girls he describes not only have very narrow horizons, their desires are also entirely unoriginal. Kracauer calls their ideal 'spießbürgerlich: ein Zukünftiger, der Familiensinn entwickelt und so viel verdient, daß sie nicht mehr zu arbeiten brauchen' (*Die Angestellten*, p.69). Although Doris's experiences largely bear out the findings of the sociologists and historians, Irmgard Keun presents a more differentiated picture. Doris sees herself as 'ein ungewöhnlicher Mensch', but the novel shows that she is, in many ways, like all the others. She has no qualifications to lift her above the masses of girls trying to make a living in Berlin, she cannot extricate herself from patriarchal oppression and almost descends into outright

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<sup>51</sup> Peukert, p.99-100, also see Band, p.135/6; for a more detailed description of the lives of female white-collar workers see Ute Frevert, 'Kunstseidener Glanz: Weibliche Angestellte' in Kristine von Soden, Maruta Schmidt, eds, *Neue Frauen: Die zwanziger Jahre*, Berlin: Elefanten Press, 1988, pp.25-31.

prostitution, and in the end she, too, craves some kind of domestic bliss. Yet Doris, trapped though she is in her situation, is, as Katharina von Ankum argues, also a young woman ‘whose perspective is both active and critical’, and who thus comes to her own conclusions about the position of young, working women in Weimar society.<sup>52</sup>

At the start of the novel Doris works for a solicitor, and it is immediately clear that she is having to juggle different demands and desires.

Und für jedes Komma, was fehlt, muß ich der Hopfenstange von Rechtsanwalt – Pickel hat er auch und Haut wie meine alte gelbe Ledertasche ohne Reißverschluß – ich schäme mich, sie noch in anständiger Gesellschaft zu tragen – solche Haut hat er im Gesicht. Und überhaupt halte ich von Rechtsanwälten nichts – immer happig aufs Geld und reden wie’n Entenpopo und nichts dahinter. Ich laß mir nichts anmerken, denn mein Vater ist sowieso arbeitslos, und meine Mutter ist am Theater, was auch unsicher ist durch die Zeit. Aber ich war bei der Hopfenstange von Rechtsanwalt. Also – ich lege ihm die Briefe vor, und bei jedem Komma, was fehlt, schmeiß ich ihm einen sinnlichen Blick. Und den Krach sehe ich kommen, denn ich habe keine Lust zu mehr. Aber vier Wochen kann ich sicher noch hinziehn, ich sag einfach immer, mein Vater wär so streng, und ich müßte abends gleich nach Haus. Aber wenn ein Mann wild wird, dann gibt es keine Entschuldigung - man kennt das. Und er wird wild mit der Zeit wegen meinen sinnlichen Blicken bei fehlenden Kommas. Dabei hat richtige Bildung mit Kommas gar nichts zu tun. Aber mir fällt nicht ein mit ihm und so weiter. Denn ich sage auch gestern zu Therese, die auch auf dem Büro und meine Freundin ist: ‘Etwas Liebe muß dabei sein, wo blieben sonst die Ideale?’<sup>53</sup>

This (correctly punctuated) passage from Doris’s diary reveals a great deal about her. Not only does it reflect the economic dependence in which Doris is caught up – her parents obviously rely on her income – it also demonstrates, without the sentimentality of Christa Anita Brück’s *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*, that the opportunity of earning a living is often paid for

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<sup>52</sup> Katharina von Ankum, ‘Gendered Urban Spaces in Irmgard Keun’s *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*’ in von Ankum, ed., *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp.162-184, 171.

<sup>53</sup> Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, p.6f.

with sexual harassment. These factors confirm Kracauer's views. On the other hand Doris repudiates the myth of the office girls who dream of nothing more than getting married to her boss. Doris has no such illusions, she knows that her employer is married and is simply disgusted by both his behaviour and his appearance. She plays on his lecherousness and vanity to her own advantage for as long as possible, but she also knows that he is in the more powerful position and that she will eventually have to give in to him or lose her job.

The secretary Kracauer meets on the train resembles Doris more than the little shopgirls who go to the movies or the contented office girls with their touching delight in tiny pleasures (*Die Angestellten*, p.69). Yet even here, where Kracauer does give a voice to one of the objects of his study, he emphasises her ignorance and the small-mindedness of her dreams. Doris also appears ignorant, she herself admits her problems with punctuation and later her lack of general knowledge is exposed in her descriptions of the *Romanisches Café*. Her expectations of the future are initially both superficial and unrealistic, they circle mainly around her appearance and the social status and recognition she craves, but Keun not only motivates them through Doris's own humdrum existence (which would, again, conform to Kracauer's views of simple escapism) but also through Doris's awareness of her mother's fate. Doris sees her mother as a once strong and independent woman who has been ground down and reduced to the boring and often humiliating existence as the wife of a boorish and tyrannical man.<sup>54</sup> Mindful of her mother's wasted opportunities, Doris is determined to enjoy her life to the full and not to become a victim. But even though she has no scruples about manipulating

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<sup>54</sup> Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, p. 18.

those who would use her, and even though she steals a fur coat, she does not deceive herself about what she wants and why she wants it, and she is compassionate toward others who are in need, for example the friend of her friend Therese, whom she helps with giving birth, and her blind neighbour Brenner. This sense of honesty and of solidarity is lacking from Kracauer's description. His secretary has petty-bourgeois ambitions, is dishonest, betraying her fiancé with her boss, and her colleagues interest her only inasmuch as they are envious of her. Both examples are arguably equally (in)authentic, but Keun's more sympathetic and more complex representation of working women is an important corrective to Kracauer's rather jaundiced view.

This is not to say, however, that Keun presents Doris as an ideal or a heroine. Doris's insistence that 'etwas Liebe muß dabeisein, wo blieben sonst die Ideale' implies that she has already compromised her ideals. But even so, her desire for love contrasts with the desire of the secretary in *Die Angestellten* for a middle-class existence, to which her fiancé seems to be little more than a vehicle. Furthermore, Keun reinforces the impression of Doris's sense of integrity later on in the novel. Doris loses her first position in Berlin because she sleeps with a friend of her employers. Her reason for the affair is that 'das ist so furchtbar viel, wenn einem einer gefällt – Liebe ist noch so ungeheuer viel mehr, daß es sie wohl gar nicht, vielleicht kaum gibt'.<sup>55</sup> These are not the thoughts of a young woman whose capacity for evaluating her own situation has been eroded by the influence of romantic movies. On the contrary, Doris is aware of the limitations placed on women, but she tries to realise her desires

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<sup>55</sup> Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, p.56.

even against social conventions. That she has to pay heavily for her insistence on getting what she wants and needs is due to the hypocrisy around her:

Wenn eine junge Frau mit Geld einen alten Mann heiratet wegen Geld und nichts sonst und schläft mit ihm stundenlang und guckt fromm, dann ist sie eine deutsche Mutter von Kindern und eine anständige Frau. Wenn eine junge Frau ohne Geld mit einem schläft ohne Geld, weil er glatte Haut hat und ihr gefällt, dann ist sie eine Hure und ein Schwein.<sup>56</sup>

In fact, the movies play a rather limited role in Doris's diary. Although she seems to be up to date with them she is thoroughly irreverent towards them. She describes herself as looking like Colleen Moore, only better, she also calls a hopeful suitor Conrad Veidt – although this does not endear the man any more to her.<sup>57</sup> She makes references to Marlene Dietrich, Lilian Harvey, and *Mädchen in Uniform* only in passing, but most revealing is her comment that she tried to get into the film industry, but, unlike her friend Tilli, Doris quickly realised 'aber das bietet wenig Aussicht'.<sup>58</sup> Only at a particularly low point in her life, when poverty drives her to prostitution, does she for once long for the easy escape offered by the entertainment industry: 'Bitte, ich werde mich einmal ansprechen lassen mit allem was zugehört [sic] und bezahlen. Einmal und nicht wieder. Und möchte auch mal wieder so furchtbar gern ins Kino.'<sup>59</sup> Doris's conversational language leads to an ambiguity: it seems that she is the one who will be paying, as indeed she does pay, not, at first, with her body, but with her labour. In contrast to Kracauer's awestruck office girls, Doris treats the movies not as a dream world to aspire to, but as simply one more form of entertainment available to her when she can afford it.

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<sup>56</sup> Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, p.55.

<sup>57</sup> Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, p.6 and p.10.

<sup>58</sup> Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, p. 15, p.82, p.122 and p.50.

<sup>59</sup> Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, p.98

and as part of a discourse of modern life in the city on which she can draw when it is useful. This is most obvious in her descriptions of Berlin, particularly when she tries to evoke it for her blind neighbour, Herr Brenner. Her breathless enumeration of visual impressions is like a montage which is exciting in its speed and colourfulness, but also reveals social injustice, through the juxtaposition of images of glamour and those of extreme poverty, and especially the objectification of women, including herself.

Ich sehe mich in Spiegeln von Fenstern, und dann finde ich mich hübsch, und dann gucke ich die Männer an, und die gucken auch – und schwarze Mäntel und dunkelblau und im Gesicht viel Verachtung – das ist so bedeutend – und sehe - <sup>60</sup>

This potential for self-reflection with which Keun credits the young woman is crucial, and it is missing from Kracauer's office girls. Doris sees herself as though in a movie, but she knows that this implies not only that she is 'ein Glanz', but also that she is the object of both the desire and the contempt of men. Brenner, who is blind, is an exception, but her first lover Hubert is more typical. Hubert leaves Doris for a rich woman but he tells Doris that he would not marry a woman who has already slept with him.<sup>61</sup> Doris wants to escape from the exploitation of the normal working life she has had, and she tries instead to capitalise on her good looks, to exploit the sexual greed and vanity of men. Yet she finds that she cannot escape from the double standards of her patriarchal society, which condemns her for trying to take control over her own life.

Kracauer's tactfully worded assertion that office girls 'wissen [natürlich], daß sie bei dem geringen Einkommen einen Freund haben müßten,

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<sup>60</sup> Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, p.66.

<sup>61</sup> Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, p.14.

wenn sie keine Angehörigen besäßen' (*Die Angestellten*, p.69) is interpreted rather more forcefully by Keun. Initially, Doris's greatest fear is prostitution, which is represented by Hulla, who is beaten up and disfigured by her pimp and eventually commits suicide by throwing herself out of a window. Yet Doris realises that her own attempts to move up in the world, or even just to survive, through acquiring rich and powerful lovers is not so very different, as she acknowledges in her diary:

Liebe Mutter, du hast ein schönes Gesicht gehabt, du hast Augen, die gucken, wie sie Lust haben, du bist arm gewesen, wie ich arm bin, du hast mit Männern geschlafen, weil du sie mochtest, oder weil du Geld brauchtest – das tue ich auch. Wenn man mich schimpft, schimpft man dich...<sup>62</sup>

Doris knows that women who sleep with men for money are called names, but she makes no excuses for doing it.

Keun's representation of prostitution here seems rather more realistic than Kracauer's is in *Ginster*. There the young woman's private life is effaced and turned into a depersonalised mystery, which serves to remind *Ginster* of his own mortality. More often prostitutes turned up in Weimar art as symbols of the threat of modernity to the male psyche. In paintings by Otto Dix or drawings by George Grosz the prostitute – or other women in the streets, who become indistinguishable from prostitutes – 'acts as a symbol of the masculine subject's simultaneous longing and loathing in the face of urban commodity capitalism,' as Marsha Meskimmon argues.<sup>63</sup> In Weimar literature, too, there

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<sup>62</sup> Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, p.55

<sup>63</sup> Marsha Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism*, London: I B. Tauris, 1999, p.39.

are examples both of the tendency to see ‘woman-as-prostitute’ and of turning her into a screen for the projection of fear and desire.<sup>64</sup>

In Erich Kästner’s *Fabian: Die Geschichte eines Moralisten*, virtually all female characters – with the notable exception of the protagonist’s mother – prostitute themselves, if not by way of a ‘career’, then at least when the situation calls for it. Fabian is pursued by Irene Moll, a married woman whose husband cannot oblige her immense libido and has therefore consented to her having affairs, provided the men in question are first approved by him. Fabian makes his escape from Irene Moll’s attacks, but runs into her again on several occasions. From nymphomaniac she soon advances to being the madam of a male brothel, offering the unemployed Fabian a job as her secretary. At their final encounter both are on the run, she is fleeing from the police and he wants to hide at his mother’s and lick the wounds inflicted on him in the city. Again Irene Moll offers to help him out with money, but Fabian is too disgusted even to talk to her. The utterly depraved Irene Moll has an antagonist in Cornelia, a young lawyer Fabian falls in love with. In spite of their feelings for each other, however, Cornelia decides to take up the opportunity to become a film star, even though this involves becoming the producer’s mistress.

While Irene Moll is given no background outside the city, Berlin, both Fabian and Cornelia have come from the provinces. Fabian eventually returns to his home town, and while it is presented as far from idyllic, it is the place where his beloved mother belongs, a simple, upright woman, who suggests to him ‘hier sind auch die Mädchen netter und nicht so verrückt’.<sup>65</sup> The mother’s

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<sup>64</sup> Meskimmon, p.39.

<sup>65</sup> Kästner, p.223

assessment is confirmed by Fabian's experience – in Berlin, the women are selfish and do not behave according to traditional feminine roles, whether they have apparently always been that way, like Irene Moll, or succumb to the city's corrupting power like Cornelia. The women embody Fabian's experience of the city: greed (both sexual and financial) and shamelessness, the denial of human (emotional) needs in the name of capitalist rationality, and a confusion of values. Significantly, both Fabian himself and his friend Labude, whose fiancée in Hamburg (the other great hotbed of vice in Weimar Germany) has not only betrayed him but also aborted his child, seek solace with (amateur) prostitutes, but it is always only the women whose behaviour is seen as immoral. Only once, in a confrontation with Cornelia, does Fabian connect her 'unfaithfulness' with 'wo er in der vergangenen Nacht gewesen war'.<sup>66</sup> Yet this reflection does not stop him:

Aber der bloße Gedanke an sein eigenes Zimmer, an die Neugier der Witwe Hohlfeld, an Cornelias leere Stube, an die ganze einsame Nacht, die ihn erwartete, während ihn Cornelia zum zweitenmal betrog, trieb ihn durch die Straßen, dem Norden zu, in die Müllerstraße hinein, in jenes Haus und zu der Frau, die er nicht wiedersehen wollte.<sup>67</sup>

Thus Fabian's behaviour is not merely justified by the injustice he has suffered. Cornelia is actually responsible for his own slipping moral standards, just as Leda is responsible for Labude's involvement with a lesbian artist's model and even, in part, for his death, which, in turn, wounds Fabian deeply. In *Fabian*, Kästner addresses some of the same points which Kracauer raises in *Die Angestellten*, especially the dehumanising effects of rationalisation and the lure of urban distractions. Yet Kästner, by using prostitution as the central symbol

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<sup>66</sup> Kästner, p. 180.

<sup>67</sup> Kästner, p. 180.

for the social ills he identifies, ends up gendering his representation of metropolitan modernity in a rather crude way.

While Kästner thus dramatises certain (male) anxieties which may also play a role in Kracauer's stance in *Die Angestellten*, Keun's more differentiated portrayal of prostitution as a (sometimes not so) liminal case of the experience of young women in the city is more useful as a corrective to the deficiencies in Kracauer's *verstehendem* approach to white-collar workers. In *Fabian*, both Irene Moll and Cornelia have a bourgeois background, which, in Kästner's view, seems to make their behaviour particularly disgraceful. Doris's circumstances are different. In Doris's view, making a living in this way gives her, as it gave her mother, a degree of freedom. Doris knows, as Kracauer also points out, that the kind of work available to her does not pay enough even to live independently. While Keun's other working-girl protagonist, Gilgi, tries to improve her situation by studying languages and with a second job, this is not Doris's way. In her view, this kind of work makes it impossible to have a fulfilling life, because the demands of the job as well as the worries about money destroy the possibility of a loving relationship.

Und man ist über zwanzig und das Gesicht geht ganz kaputt zwischen Arbeit und Liebe, denn der Mensch braucht ja Schlaf. Natürlich ist er verheiratet. [...Man] weint viel wegen der Nerven, und das kriegt ein Mann über – "mein liebes Kind, wir müssen uns trennen, ich zerstöre dein Leben, du hast andere Chancen, mich frißt ein Leid, aber ich muß von dir fort, denn du findest einen zum Heiraten vielleicht, du bist ja noch hübsch." Man krepirt an dem Noch.<sup>68</sup>

Doris has seen this not only in her mother but also in her friend Therese, and she wants a better life than theirs. For Doris, prostitution is no worse: 'da hat

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<sup>68</sup> Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, p.117.

eine Hure denn doch mehr Spannung, ist ja ihr eignes Geschäft immerhin.’<sup>69</sup>

Doris rejects work not out of laziness but on principle, as she explains to her temporary ‘husband’, Ernst.

Soll ich etwa sonst gehen als Köchin, als Mädchen [...] gnädige Frau, es ist angerichtet – gnädige Frau – Gottogott, man könnte entlassen werden, man muß hinter ihr her kriechen, darum muß man sie hassen – alle, die einen entlassen können, muß man hassen, und wenn sie auch gut sind und weil man ja für sie arbeitet und nicht mit ihnen zusammen.<sup>70</sup>

Doris’s rejection of the alienation caused by paid work as something which warps relationships and even the self unites her with Kracauer’s *Ginster*. Her relationship with Ernst becomes for Doris an ideal, even though it starts with her desperate attempt to proposition him. Ernst, however, is still pining for his wife, who has left him, and he just wants company. The two can thus settle into a relationship which gives her a home, a degree of ‘Glanz’ and a purpose, and him someone to take care of, but which does not actually involve prostitution of any kind. She does the housework, as she says, ‘weil ich einen Spaß dazu habe und weil ich nicht arbeite aus einer Angst um Verlieren meiner Existenz.’<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, Ernst does not seem interested in a sexual relationship. Ironically, however, Doris does in the end lose her ‘Existenz’, not because she does not give enough in return, but because she does. After some time Doris falls in love with Ernst and he eventually responds, but only to call Doris, by mistake, by his wife’s name. Doris, who knows where to find his wife decides to try and bring them back together. ‘Konnte ich ihm mich nicht zu Liebe tun, mußte ich ihm eben eine andere zu Liebe tun.’<sup>72</sup> What made her

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<sup>69</sup> Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, p.117.

<sup>70</sup> Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, p.118.

<sup>71</sup> Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, p.118

<sup>72</sup> Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, p.134

relationship with Ernst so appealing, that they were not married and had no obligations towards one another, also brings about its end, because her independent kind of love cannot compete with the legally sanctioned relationship he is used to.

After she leaves Ernst, Doris is once again on her own, poor, and homeless. She has now realised that trying to make it on her own is tantamount to prostitution of a more or less obvious sort, and she has experienced a quasi-married domestic life. While this relationship was non-exploitative and she largely felt an equal partner, this only applies within their home. The peace and freedom she had with Ernst was bought at the price of retreating from the excitement, the glamour and the opportunities open to her only in the outside world. This is not entirely clear to Doris, who relishes the status it gives her to shop with or just for him. To her, the frustrations of her suddenly rather bourgeois existence appear in the guise of a threat to her beloved, stolen fur coat, which Ernst insists she should return. Thus Doris, unlike Kracauer's girls, does not want respectability, at least not at the price of her freedom. Relinquishing her coat would symbolise giving up her desire for a life without deprivation but also her sexual freedom, for Doris always insists on the right to sleep with men for pleasure as well as for material advantage. In this situation Doris is faced with the choice of prostitution, which she now knows is the real meaning of being 'ein Glanz', or finding another retreat, this time with Karl, an unemployed worker who now lives in a garden colony, selling homegrown vegetables and homemade toys, who had previously invited her to move in with him.

As von Ankum argues, this ‘is obviously not a satisfying choice and points to the limitations of the parameters for emancipation’.<sup>73</sup> Von Ankum emphasises the regressive aspect of Doris’s decision to follow Karl, if he will still have her, and the politically reactionary implications of leaving the city for the orderly garden plot.<sup>74</sup> But even though, as von Ankum points out, Bert Brecht, Ernst Ottwald and Slatan Dudow’s film ‘*Kuhle Wampe* distances itself from the revisionist older generation in the garden colony,’ this has as much to do with age as with location.<sup>75</sup> In Hans Fallada’s *Kleiner Mann, was nun?* Pinneberg gets caught up in the rivalries between Nazis and Communists in the garden colony where his family ends up.<sup>76</sup> Keun, too, does not simply use the garden colony as an image of reactionary escape for Doris. Karl is a socialist and, significantly, invites Doris ‘komm mit mir, helf mir’n bißchen, arbeete [sic] mit mir,’ using the same words Doris later turns against employers, *for*, and not *with* whom one works.<sup>77</sup> When Doris decides to go looking for Karl, she has not given up her search for a free life in favour of having a comfortable existence. Instead, she wants to help Karl just as she hopes for some help from him. Perhaps her experiences of poverty, misery and exploitation have also made her receptive for Karl’s hope for a better world:

Und erzählt mir vom Sozialismus. ‘Schön haben wir’s dann wohl auch nich, aber richtige Luft für zum atmen haben wir dann vielleicht, und en Anfang haben wir vielleicht – jetzt haben wir ja doch nur en Schlamassel mit em dicken Ende.’<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Von Ankum, ‘Gendered Urban Spaces’, p. 180.

<sup>74</sup> See von Ankum, ‘Gendered Urban Spaces’, p. 184, note 69.

<sup>75</sup> Von Ankum, ‘Gendered Urban Spaces’, p. 184, note 69.

<sup>76</sup> Fallada, *Kleiner Mann, was nun?*, p. 334.

<sup>77</sup> Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, p. 95.

<sup>78</sup> Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, p. 96.

Doris is certainly far from being a socialist herself, but Karl's simple explanation what Socialism means can be shared by her. Doris starts out as an office girl and tries to live her fantasy. According to Kracauer this should lead her into a petty bourgeois existence and make her vulnerable to the seductive powers of fascism. Instead, Doris maintains throughout a strong sense of solidarity. She loses many of her illusions while others are channelled into a utopian desire which Kracauer would probably recognise. Yet there is no guarantee that any of her hopes will work out, and that she may not, after all, end up another Hulla.

Most of Doris's experiences can be explained in terms of Kracauer's *Die Angestellten* and similar studies, the exploitation at work, the move to the metropolis, the poverty and the lure of distraction. Doris also displays the lack of political awareness which troubles Kracauer so much. Doris is neither educated nor politically aware, and her decision in the end leads her away from the public sphere (even her diary runs out).<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, her desires and her persistence in trying to fulfil them are equal in their subversiveness to those of Kracauer's *Ginster*, and Keun succeeds in showing why it was so much harder for a Doris to break into the public sphere than it would be for *Ginster* to become the journalist Georg.

Kracauer also has great reservations about the sports and body-culture craze of the Weimar years.<sup>80</sup> Inasmuch as fitness implies youthfulness, Kracauer sees it as an understandable response to mass-unemployment, which frequently put

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<sup>79</sup> A point also noted by von Ankum, who reads it as a sign of the 'dubiousness of the lifestyle idealized by the novel's protagonist', 'Gendered Urban Spaces', p. 180.

<sup>80</sup> See also 'Sie sporten', in *Schriften* 5.2, pp. 14-18.

older employees at a disadvantage. As Kracauer demonstrates, 'older' here can start at the age of twenty five (*Die Angestellten*, p.44). As a result, Kracauer explains, evidently shocked, 'färben sich Damen *und* Herren die Haare, und Vierziger treiben Sport, um sich schlank zu erhalten' (*Die Angestellten*, p.25). Several reasons for Kracauer's objection to sports come together here. Firstly, it is an activity which employees are pushed into, more or less directly, by their employers. Employers use company sports associations, for example, for a variety of purposes:

Was die bewußten Motive betrifft, die den Unternehmer zur Pflege sportlicher Tätigkeit treiben, so gesellen sich dem interesselosen Wohlgefallen an durchtrainierten Angestellten mitunter gewisse praktische Erwägungen zu, die unschwer zu deuten sind. Einer ist besonders erfreut darüber, daß der Sport das Kameradschaftsgefühl neu belebe. Ein anderer kalkuliert, daß das Geld, das man für die Gesundheit des Personals verwende, vielleicht wieder hereinströme. 'Wir wollen auch', fährt er offenherzig fort, 'daß die Leute einen geeigneten Umgang haben, und der mit Kollegen ist immer der beste.' Eine fragwürdige Behauptung. Der Drang zur Inzucht wird, wenn nicht alles täuscht, durch gewisse Gewerkschaften verschuldet, die ein unpassender Umgang wären. (*Die Angestellten*, p.78)

The other aspect of the struggle for fitness which Kracauer finds disturbing links sports with distraction. Both are, in Kracauer's view, 'Zeichen der Flucht vor dem Tod' (*Die Angestellten*, p.51), or 'Grauen vor der Konfrontation mit dem Tod' (*Die Angestellten*, p.96). This headlong flight into distraction and sporting activity (which frequently converge) has a metaphysical dimension, but it is also political, as Kracauer suggests when he calls it 'Flucht vor der Revolution und dem Tod' (*Die Angestellten*, p.99). On the one hand Kracauer believes that a meaningful life is only possible before the horizon of death.

Das Anwachsen des Todes um die Menschen eröffnet ihnen aber erst den Gehalt des Lebens, und das 'Schön ist die Jugend, sie kommt nicht mehr' meint in Wirklichkeit, daß die Jugend schön ist, weil sie nicht mehr kommt. So innig sind Tod und Leben ineinander verschränkt, daß

man dieses ohne jenen nicht haben kann. Wird also das Alter entthront, so hat zwar die Jugend gewonnen, aber das Leben verspielt. (*Die Angestellten*, p.51/2)

Thus workers and employees, by being driven into the cult of the fit and youthful body, are deprived of their opportunity to live a full life even beyond the alienation already inflicted on them by their work. This is true even though, according to Kracauer, 'in der Übersteigerung des Sports sich auch die revolutionäre Massensehnsucht nach einem Naturrecht kundgibt, das wider die Schäden der Zivilisation aufgerichtet werden könnte' (*Die Angestellten*, p.100). The problem is that the actual effect of the sports craze is not to revolutionise the masses, but to diffuse their discontent, it is 'eine Verdrängungserscheinung großen Stils; [er] fördert nicht die Umgestaltung der sozialen Verhältnisse, sondern ist insgesamt ein Hauptmittel der Entpolitisierung' (*Die Angestellten*, p.100).

Marieluise Fleißer's novel *Mehltreisende Frieda Geier* goes even further. Subtitled *Roman vom Rauchen, Sporteln, Lieben und Verkaufen*, it tells the story of the relationship of independent Frieda Geier, a 'New Woman' stuck in the Bavarian *Hinterland*, and Gustl Amricht, a shop owner who is being challenged on all sides, as a sportsman, a businessman and as a man. As the novel opens Gustl's new shop is struggling, partly because of the high unemployment rate and partly because Frieda refuses to give up her job and work for him for free. His powerful mother disapproves of the relationship and questions his business acumen. Furthermore, his achievements, and, perhaps more seriously, his reputation as a swimmer are also in decline since he has devoted his time to Frieda rather than his training. Rather than a mere distraction from either politics or life made meaningful by the horizon of

death, sport is here a productive process. Fleißer analyses sports as a constitutive factor in (sexual) identity politics where Kracauer dismisses sports as the twentieth century equivalent of circuses (in the absence of bread). For Gustl in all three areas of his life, love, business and sports, it is ultimately his masculinity which is at stake, and sports provide the paradigm for the others in that only victory over an 'opponent' allows Gustl to assert his masculinity towards others and to feel secure in it himself. When his neighbour refuses to buy even a few cigarettes from him, Gustl 'wird richtiggehend schwach von der Schmach', and his initial failure to seduce Frieda seems to announce the end of the world:

Hat sie nicht einen gottverlassenen Stolz an sich, als sage sie, wann ich verführt werde, bestimme ich allein? Dazu muß sie sich aber dann einen anderen suchen! Die Welt wird nicht länger bestehn, wenn solche selbständige Gesinnung sich unter den Frauen verbreitet.<sup>81</sup>

Frieda, who has spent some time away in the city, is now considered an outsider in the small town, set apart by her insistence to stand on her own feet, ironically commented on by the men's shoes she wears. Fleißer suggests that Gustl is initially drawn to Frieda because he feels obliged to break her resistance, and that Frieda succumbs to his sexual attraction. In contrast to Kracauer's female employees Frieda does not act from simple class snobbery or for economic advantage, she is a more complex and contradictory character. Although her relationship with Gustl is sexually satisfying for both, Frieda finds it increasingly oppressive and eventually breaks off their engagement. Like Keun's Doris, Frieda wants an equal relationship, while Gustl, the

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<sup>81</sup> Fleißer, p. 13 and p. 35.

patriarchal 'Spießer', expects her to bring not only her labour, but also her younger sister's inheritance into his business.

Der Spießer bricht durch und will sich sein Opfer auf Schleichwegen versüßen. Er ist verliebt wie noch nie, aber keine Ausnahme unter den Menschen.

Der harmlose Gustl in seiner Instinkt gewordenen Unsauberkeit; er ist ja nicht hermetisch abgeschlossen von jenen, die dem Vorrecht des Mannes frönen, er hat seine Erfahrungen darin, wie andere ihre Ehe aufbauen. Die Stimme der Gewohnheit sagt ihm, daß Hochzeiterei ein ewiger Kuhhandel ist. Er hat die Geschichte der Geschlechter nicht bis in die Urzeit verfolgt. Auch ihm ist die Aneignung zur zweiten Natur geworden.<sup>82</sup>

Frieda's insistence on her independence drives Gustl into increasingly violent fantasies. When Frieda breaks off their engagement he imagines murdering and burying her in the forest, although in the end he contents himself with frightening her by pretending to drown himself.

Although Gustl never actually hurts Frieda and abandons his plan to seduce her little sister, Linchen, in favour of preventing a bomb attack on a train, Fleißer makes it quite clear that he is more dangerous than Frieda imagines. Not only is the reader privy to Gustl's violent fantasies, but Fleißer also provides Gustl with an alter ego, Raimund Scharrer. Scharrer lacks the social networks of family and sports comrades, and especially the social and financial standing which, for the time being, help contain Gustl's rage and frustration. Scharrer, who has failed the exams at university which would have given him a claim to bourgeois respectability similar to Gustl's as a shop owner, has been disowned by his family, forced to do menial work and finally dismissed for trying to blackmail his employer. As he is on his way to Linchen, Gustl realises that Scharrer plans to blow up the train on which his former

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<sup>82</sup> Fleißer, p.208.

employer and his family are travelling and prevents the attack. Nevertheless, many of Scharrer's actions have a parallel in Gustl's fantasies, such as Scharrer's attempt to rape a young woman, in order to humiliate her rather than for his sexual gratification. Gustl plans to seduce or rape Linchen in order to make her pregnant and thus hurt and humiliate Frieda, who pays for her sister to be educated in a convent and takes pride in her innocence. Scharrer also intimidates another young woman by holding her over the river from a bridge, threatening to drop her into the water. On another occasion he promises a boy money for crossing the dangerous, frozen river on foot. These actions are the counterparts to Gustl's spectacular rescue of two drowning men, which, although apparently the exact opposite to Scharrer's actions, has the very similar effect of demonstrating Gustl's power over others and thus to boost his self-confidence. Gustl himself recognises their similarity when they meet on the train, on the way to their respective crimes, and observes that 'immer wenn er auf dieses Gesicht stieß, hat es sich um eine Lumperei gehandelt. Aber der Lump war der andere, und Gustl war der Mann, der durch den Kontrast gewann.' (*Die Angestellten*, 166)

Fleißer's portrayal of Gustl's obsession with swimming and with his body must be seen in this context of more or less successfully contained resentments and anxieties, and the always present threat of violence. Towards the end of the novel Frieda is attacked by some sports comrades of Gustl's, but rescued by another sportsman from a rival club. The novel ends with a mass fight which nevertheless ultimately brings all the men together, while Frieda is forgotten. The sports club is a refuge for the men (except for Scharrer, who promptly turns into a criminal) from the challenges they are faced with by the

effects of modernity which are encroaching upon their lives, through unemployment, rationalisation and independent women. Their sporting activities, like the Balinese cockfight, dramatise competition, victory and defeat as masculine rituals, and they thus contain (for the time being) energies which would otherwise be destructive. The club allows the men to feel secure in a masculinity which is, if anything, enhanced by the vaguely homoerotic nature of this *Männliche Gesellschaft*.<sup>83</sup> In these plot complications Fleißer presents a view of (petty)bourgeois existence which is more complex and ambiguous than Kracauer presents it. Bourgeois values are here not simply anachronistic but also provide important standards of behaviour for society as a whole. Where Kracauer sees (petty) bourgeois values as false consciousness, Fleißer, without idealising them, also shows that as well as their oppressiveness, their breakdown, too, can be a danger, not least for women.

As Fleißer tried to emphasise in her 1972 reworking of the novel, this kind of society was already recognisably on its way to fascism.<sup>84</sup> The details of her analysis of the connections between resentments, a predisposition for violence, and sports make it, on the one hand, fairly specific to the small town setting which Kracauer dismissed for his study 'weil Berlin zum Unterschied von allen anderen deutschen Städten und Landschaften der Ort ist, an dem sich die Lage der Angestelltenschaft am extremsten darstellt' (*Die Angestellten*, p.7). But Fleißer demonstrates that the situation of provincial employees like Frieda and of small businessmen like Gustl 'die bereits im halben Angestelltenverhältnis zu den Konzernen stehen mit vorgeschriebenen Preisen'

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<sup>83</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the *Männliche Gesellschaft* in the work of Hans Blüher see the *Excursus* in Chapter Five, below

<sup>84</sup> Marieluise Fleißer, *Eine Zierde für den Verein: Roman vom Rauchen, Sporteln, Lieben und Verkaufen*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1972.

is, in its own way, just as extreme. On the other hand, *Mehltreisende Frieda Geier* goes beyond Kracauer's prediction that the sports craze weakened the resistance to fascism, by showing that sports and (proto)fascism can be excellent bedfellows.

A very different vision of the role of sports is developed in Bertolt Brecht and Slatan Dudow's film *Kuhle Wampe oder wem gehört die Welt*.<sup>85</sup> This film on the whole focuses on the hardship inflicted on industrial workers during the world economic crisis. White-collar workers only play a rather marginal role in the film's last section, where they are shown to be either ignorant about the economic context of the crisis in Germany, or indifferent so long as they are not personally affected. Nevertheless, some of the issues Kracauer identifies as typical for white-collar workers are shown to be equally relevant to sections of the working class. The Bönike family, which is badly affected by the unemployment of both father and son, nevertheless insists on certain social graces. The son is criticised by his parents not only for not finding a job, but also for not being polite enough towards the landlord, and even when they are evicted and have to move to the tent colony 'Kuhle Wampe', they take along their embroidered homily 'Beklage nicht den Morgen, der Müh und Arbeit gibt, es ist so schön zu sorgen, für Menschen, die man liebt'. Indeed, 'Kuhle Wampe' quickly emerges as a breeding ground for petty-bourgeois customs. Daughter Anni and her boyfriend Fritz, who are expecting a baby, get engaged under the pressure of Anni's father and of convention. The engagement party reveals that the working-class friends and

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<sup>85</sup> Berlin: Praesens Film GmbH, 1932. See also Bertolt Brecht, *Kuhle Wampe: Protokoll des Films und Materialien*, Wolfgang Gersch and Werner Hecht, eds, Frankfurt/Main Suhrkamp, 1969.

family are as given to distractions as Kracauer's white-collar workers. The consumption of large amounts of food and drink is at the centre of the sequence, there are several scenes of greed and excess. As a form of entertainment more familiar from Kracauer's study, Anni winds up the gramophone at the beginning of the evening, and as the party progresses everyone joins in singing along to popular songs. The petty-bourgeois idyll cannot paper over the crisis between Anni and Fritz, however. They do not want a child, but they cannot afford a safe abortion either, and so Fritz feels he has been trapped. Anni, realising that she is being trapped, too, and, much like Doris and Frieda, valuing her independence, breaks off the engagement. Anni returns to a circle of friends she had begun to neglect because of Fritz, and these friends not only help her out but also show Fritz as well as the audience the value of working-class solidarity through an enormous sports event. At this point the film shifts from a narrative and interpretive mode comparable to the three texts discussed above to a clearly agitational tone. The individual stories recede into the background, while montages of young sportsmen and women become dominant. At the same time the 'Solidaritätslied' and the 'Sportlied' explain the political significance of the event, which lies in strengthening the sense of solidarity among the working class and in teaching them to fight and to win. A subsequent performance returns to the Bönikes' fate of eviction, but in an estranged manner, again encouraging the audience – both at the sports day and in the cinema – to fight such injustices with solidarity. The film ends on an upbeat note; on their journey back the sportspeople get involved in an argument with some apparently middle-class passengers on the train, and

affirm their determination to change the world because they do not like it as it is. Everyone goes home to the sounds of the 'Solidaritätslied'.

Brecht's opinion on sports appears to diverge sharply from both Kracauer's and Fleißer's. Where Kracauer fears the distracting effect the sports craze has on the ability of white-collar workers to recognise their situation and to take action, and while Fleißer already sees proto-fascist characteristics expressing themselves in the obsession with competition and the perfectly controlled body, for Brecht sports are quite simply a means in class struggle. But the different meanings are not just to do with different views, but also with different purposes. Both Kracauer and Fleißer are presenting interpretations of a social reality, which, in turn, become part of a larger cultural text. Brecht, on the other hand, only starts off with such an interpretation, in his story of the Bönikes. His presentation of the sports day is already part of his answer to the problem just described. *Kuhle Wampe* is not meant just to contribute to the larger picture and in this rather limited way to make a difference, but it is an attempt to change it actively. This also affects the structure of the text. The first part of the film uses montage sequences, alongside more conventional narrative passages, in ways that are comparable to Kracauer's technique in *Die Angestellten*. Thus the opening sequence combines images of factories and working-class tenement houses with newspaper headlines of political events, which then lead to a visual representation of the rapidly rising unemployment figures. The following sequence combines images of unemployed men searching for vacancies in the papers and at factory gates with repeated close-ups of whirring bicycle wheels and pedalling legs. The montage not only shows unemployment in the context of national as well as international politics, but it

also 'zeigt die Suche nach Arbeit als – Arbeit'.<sup>86</sup> In the later parts of the film, by contrast, Brecht et al. do not present details of the sports event so as to let them illuminate each other and add up to an interpretation. Instead, the sports day illustrates a few ideas, which are furthermore explained in the accompanying songs, and repeats them. Rather than offering an analysis, as Kracauer does, in the confidence that 'Erkenntnis [...] schließt selber schon eine Veränderung mit ein' (*Die Angestellten*, p.7), Brecht now makes clear demands of his audience; they must show solidarity, they must fight for the rights of the exploited working class, and, and this is where Brecht differs most significantly from Kracauer, they themselves must analyse their situation. The historical context of *Kuhle Wampe* had had a radicalising effect that had not yet been present at the beginning of the economic crisis in 1929, when *Die Angestellten* was written. Nevertheless it is characteristic that Kracauer wants to speak 'von ihnen [...] die nur schwer von sich sprechen können' (*Die Angestellten*, p.8, my emphasis), furthermore in a medium not particularly likely to reach them, where Brecht aims to speak *to* the masses, in the most popular medium - unless, of course, he is prevented from doing so by the censors.

The censors did, of course prevent the film from being shown, and together with many others Kracauer protested against this decision. Also like others, Kracauer subjected the film to some criticisms, and his objections are instructive. Apart from some stylistic problems, e.g. the overlong scenes at the sports day, Kracauer mainly objects to the stark contrast with the decadence of

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<sup>86</sup> Brecht, *Kuhle Wampe: Protokolle*, p. 90.

the older generation and the power and optimism of the young, which he finds unconvincing. In Kracauer's opinion

widerspr[icht ...] die Behandlung, die der Film ihrer [i.e. the older generation's] Ausschweifung angedeihen läßt, seinen im Schlußteil sich durchsetzenden Absichten. Er traktiert die Völlerei nicht zornig oder bekümmert, sondern schlechthin gehässig und verhöhnt obendrein wie irgendein mondäner Gesellschaftsfilm die kleinbürgerlichen Eßmanieren. Das ist unberechtigt angesichts der Lage, in der sich die Erwerbslosen befinden, und verstößt auch wider das Interesse der Solidarität; um von der geringen Glaubwürdigkeit zu schweigen, die der ganzen Schilderung anhaftet.

Der älteren Generation, die im Morast verkommt, wird später die junge gegenübergestellt, die ein Vortrupp der Freiheit sein soll. Woraus geht hervor, daß sie es ist? Am Ende daraus, daß sie der Freikörperbewegung huldigt, Motorrad fährt und sich zu Kampfliedern vagen Inhalts vereinigt? Enthielten die Texte dieser Gesänge sogar spezifischere Aussagen, sie klängen doch nur rhetorisch.<sup>87</sup>

Kracauer's accusation that the film in effect undermines the sense of solidarity which it ostensibly demands is of course a serious one, but it also raises the question whether Kracauer does more for the solidarity of the white-collar workers with each other and with the working class in *Die Angestellten*. Is his portrayal of the secretary on the train less 'gehässig' than Brecht's *Spießbürger* having a good time?

Although Kracauer does not say it in his review, the concluding passage of *Die Angestellten* reveals the underlying reason for his scepticism towards Brecht's faith in the young generation as the 'Vortrupp der Freiheit'. *Kuhle Wampe* shows the political power but also the emotional comfort from which the individual can benefit when he or she joins the collective. This is precisely what Kracauer rejects; for him the collective is entirely artificial and can only offer a semblance of 'Gemeinschaft'. Encouraging young people to join the 'Fichte-Sportler' to find an ideological home is to put the cart before the horse.

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<sup>87</sup> 'Kuhle Wampe Verboten!', *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 5.4.1932.

‘Der Mensch, der allein dem Tod gegenübersteht, geht in das Kollektiv nicht ein, das sich zum Endzweck übersteigern möchte. Ihn bildet nicht die Gemeinschaft als solche, sondern die Erkenntnis, durch die auch Gemeinschaft entstehen mag.’ (*Die Angestellten*, p.115) Unlike Brecht, Kracauer is not interested in the power that is necessary to effect social, as opposed to individual change; for him, one simply flows naturally from the other.

The most significant flaw in Kracauer’s review, however, is his failure to realise that the songs and the sports festival as a whole have, indeed, a rhetorical function in the film; they are not intended to give access to an existing reality, but to intervene in it. Kracauer reads *Kuhle Wampe* in the same way in which one can read *Die Angestellten*, but the two texts are not of the same kind. The comparison between *Die Angestellten* on the one hand, and *Das Kunstseidene Mädchen* and *Mehltreisende Frieda Geier* on the other, highlights Kracauer’s very specific perspective, but it also reveals a number of blind spots and preconceptions in Kracauer’s views on white-collar workers and their lives. Such a comparison is possible and meaningful because there are overlaps between Kracauer’s sociological methodology and the fictional interpretation of contemporary culture, which Mulder has summarised with the ethnological term ‘thick description’. The comparison with an agitational text such as Brecht, Ottwald, Dudow and Eisler’s *Kuhle Wampe*, however, breaks down because the emphasis here is not on sociological ‘Verstehen’ and interpretation, but on intervention. Yet this breakdown of the comparison is in itself significant, as it calls into question Kracauer’s explicit hope that his approach, too, will contribute to social change. Kracauer himself comes to ask

such questions about the actual impact of his work at the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, where *Die Angestellten* was initially serialised, in his second novel *Georg*.

## Chapter 5

### *Georg: the Public and the Private Sphere*

Completed in 1934 but not published until several years after Kracauer's death, *Georg* was Kracauer's farewell from Weimar Germany.<sup>1</sup> By the time he finished the novel, Kracauer was already living in exile in Paris. The mental detachment from Weimar society that had characterised his earlier writings had been replaced by a geographical distance, but at the same time it seems to have given way to a more emotionally engaged reflexiveness. In *Ginster*, Kracauer had used autobiographical elements in order to overcome the restrictive effect of his early life, but this had been done with great detachment, reflected in the narrative structure of the text. In *Georg* childhood memories are replaced with incidents from Kracauer's journalistic career, laying Kracauer's adjustments of his political and ideological positions open to public scrutiny and, furthermore, revealing in these adjustments a considerable amount of anger and (self-)reproach. Similarly, in *Georg* the theme of sexual desire is pursued in a far more troubling way than had been the case in *Ginster*. Again the controlled portrayal of an individual's progress towards more openness gives way to the exploration of a failed search for fulfilment, doomed by the oppressive power of society, but also by Georg's own shortcomings. With *Georg* Kracauer carried out his personal reckoning with Weimar society and with the part the intellectuals - of whom he was one - had played in the downfall of the Republic.

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<sup>1</sup> Page numbers referring to *Georg* will be given in parentheses in the main text

Kracauer uses two themes to illustrate what had gone wrong, and he draws those two themes from two apparently opposed spheres, the public and the private. In *Ginster* he had used the form of the novel, focussing on an individual and his personal development. Kracauer had then shifted to a very different form, the reportage, with *Die Angestellten*, to address issues to do with German society at large. *Georg* brings the two spheres together again, but now from a changed perspective. Georg proclaims his desire to enter the public sphere early on and he succeeds, at least for a while, in doing so by working as a journalist. In this function Georg is increasingly exposed to the political conflicts that tore the Weimar Republic apart, and his helplessness and confusion reflect that of many Weimar intellectuals. This aspect of the novel will be discussed in the first section of this chapter. Kracauer's view of the public sphere as the arena appropriate to the intellectual's effort to contribute to social change will be explored in comparison to Alfred Döblin's open letter *Wissen und Verändern*, which Kracauer had reviewed in 1931.<sup>2</sup> In *Georg*, Kracauer dramatises the dilemma both he and Döblin had tried to grapple with earlier. Kracauer's analysis of the public sphere through the workings of the *Morgenbote* newspaper also makes Georg an instance of the genre of the newspaper novel. As he had done before with *Ginster* and the war novel, however, Kracauer again subverts the genre, not merely responding to a perceived crisis of the public sphere but critically reflecting upon it. The main character to challenge Georg's initial faith in the public sphere is the

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<sup>2</sup> Alfred Döblin, *Wissen und Verändern! Offene Briefe an einen Jungen Menschen* (1931), in *Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelbänden*, Walter Muschg and Heinz Graber, eds *Der Deutsche Maskenball* von Linke Poot; *Wissen und Verändern!*, Olten and Freiburg im Breisgau: Walter-Verlag, 1972

communist Neubert, and in the conflict between Neubert's unconditional commitment to collectivism and Georg's defence of the rights of the individual. Kracauer's despair at the failure on all sides to halt the collapse of the Weimar Republic comes to a head.

As had been the case in *Ginster*, though, Kracauer tries again to imagine another, utopian mode of being. This time he uses the theme of homosexual love and its ultimate failure as a vehicle for his exploration of a private form of protest against a hostile society. This reading of the significance of Georg's gay relationship is aided by recent queer theory, in particular by the work of Guy Hocquenghem. However, given that the novel was conceptualised during a period where a lively gay subculture emerged and thrived, especially in Kracauer's then home of Berlin, this specific socio-historical background for the novel is first outlined in a brief excursus. The second part of the chapter then focuses on Georg's relationship with his young student Fred, read through some of Hocquenghem's ideas. This affair, which, to Georg's distress, soon breaks up, is juxtaposed in the novel to heterosexual relationships which appear even more painful and destructive. It is at this point that the novel's main weakness emerges in the narrator's anger which frequently tips over into misogyny.

## Journalism as Action

Although *Georg* is less obviously autobiographical than *Ginster* had been, this book too relies heavily on Kracauer's own experience.<sup>3</sup> The protagonist resembles *Ginster* inasmuch as both are university-educated men who refuse to follow the careers they appear to be predestined for. Unlike *Ginster*, however, *Georg* has an aim: he wants to participate in the public sphere and becomes a journalist, the same profession Kracauer chose. *Georg's* decision to become a journalist picks up where *Ginster* left off, with the protagonist's decision to abandon the isolation in which he had lived until then. Indeed *Georg* was published, if only in extracts, as such a sequel. The first chapter appeared in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and an excerpt was anthologised by Hermann Kesten in 1929.<sup>4</sup> In both cases the author was named as *Ginster*. There is also continuity with *Die Angestellten*, which was also first published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Unlike both *Ginster* and *Georg*, *Die Angestellten* was not a serialised novel but a series of reportages. Where in *Ginster* Kracauer had fictionalised his efforts to escape from private preoccupations, *Die Angestellten* was an attempt at social intervention and, like his other journalistic work, the result of the process depicted in *Ginster*. *Georg* completes this 'trilogy' by exploring the meeting of individual and collective, private and public. What distinguishes *Georg* from the two earlier books is its disillusioned tone as well as its narrative structure which reflects Kracauer's profound disappointment.

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<sup>3</sup> For an account of Kracauer's position within the *Frankfurter Zeitung* see Band, pp 106-112

<sup>4</sup> In: *24 Neue deutsche Erzähler*, Herman Kesten, ed., Berlin: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1929, cf. Belke and Renz, p.50f.

Unlike *Ginster*, Georg is a mathematician; thus author and protagonist are more clearly separated here than in the earlier novel. The third-person narrator is now identified neither with the author nor with the protagonist, whereas this had been the case in *Ginster*. The narrator is not implicated in the protagonist's personal development but rather charts it from a distance. This distance from the protagonist is also different from the stance Kracauer had assumed in *Die Angestellten*. In his Berlin reportages Kracauer had commented in the first person on the observations he presented to his readers. Thus in both the earlier texts Kracauer's relationship to the events he described became itself an issue in the texts, but one which was not entirely successfully resolved. In *Georg*, with the complete separation of narrator and protagonist, Kracauer employs a simpler and more conventional narrative structure. Whereas both *Ginster* and *Die Angestellten* had been part of an ongoing process of engagement with society, by the time *Georg* was completed any hope of making a difference had evaporated for Kracauer. The separation of narrator and protagonist thus appears to reflect the dramatic historical break between the events taking place in the novel and the situation in which Kracauer, the author, found himself. Nevertheless the novel is frequently focalised through Georg, inviting the reader to identify with him. But whenever he uses this device, Kracauer also plays upon the fact that the reader knows where the political situation is heading, but Georg does not. Kracauer thus entices the reader into Georg's world only to then bring him or her up against the consequences of Georg's actions (or lack thereof). The narrator's reminders of the Nazis' subsequent rise to power demand a critical stance towards Georg's naivety (and, among other targets, Neubert's vulgar Marxism) from

the reader. In previous texts Kracauer had not managed to break through the barrier he had erected between himself as the intellectual and the masses as the object of his analysis. Now he distances himself from the intellectual figure, too.

Georg's adventures in the public sphere begin right at the start of the novel as he is introduced to the *Salon* of Frau Heinisch. This half social, half political meeting is a Weimar version of one of the main arenas of the classic public sphere.<sup>5</sup> The guests include professional people, intellectuals, and even a politician who uses an alias as he is 'wegen [seiner] Teilnahme an der Münchner Räterevolution steckbrieflich gesucht' (*Georg*, p.7). The experience prompts Georg to want to get involved himself: 'Es ist Revolution, und ich habe in einem Winkel geträumt.[...] Das fährt über mich hinweg, wenn ich nicht danach greife. Ich will an die Öffentlichkeit.' (*Georg*, p.11) Georg does indeed join the *Morgenbote* newspaper but his experiences there cause him to question the role of intellectuals such as himself in society. As Kracauer had done himself, Georg toys with various social and political movements, and just as he begins to work out his own political position he, again like Kracauer, finds himself expelled from the public sphere.

The importance of the question of the intellectual's role in society for Kracauer is evident from the numerous essays he wrote for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* on the subject. His review of Alfred Döblin's *Wissen und Verändern* is particularly interesting, as Kracauer here also addresses the question of subjectivity. In 'Was soll Herr Hocke tun?' Kracauer takes the side of the

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<sup>5</sup> The standard work on the public sphere is: Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Darmstadt and Neuwied: Hermann Luchterhand, 1962

student Gustav Hocke, who had written to Döblin asking for advice.<sup>6</sup> Just as the narrator in *Georg* does not stop short of ridiculing the protagonist occasionally, so Kracauer mocks Hocke as

wahrhaftig eine Lücke, in die alles hineingestopft werden kann. Parteirichtungen, Weltanschauungen, politische Willensbildung sind ihm nicht mehr als äußere Erscheinungen, die er ohnehin aufzählt. ohne eine von ihnen völlig zu verabscheuen oder sie an sich zu pressen, oder sie gar zu verstehen.<sup>7</sup>

These remarks apply equally well to Georg, and it could be argued that Kracauer in effect dramatises Hocke's problem in his novel. Georg displays both Hocke's own lack of political sophistication and the practical difficulties facing one who wants to make his voice heard in the public sphere. *Georg*, however, ends up demonstrating that neither Döblin's suggestions nor those Kracauer had made in his review would work.

In 'Was soll Herr Hocke tun?' Kracauer first comments on Hocke's neutrality, which Kracauer sees as a sign of the 'Ohnmacht, die bei uns fast alle öffentlichen Manifestationen durchdringt und entmannt, und die einander widerstrebenden Kräfte nicht etwa ins Gleichgewicht zu bringen sucht, sondern sich der dialektischen Auseinandersetzungen mit ihnen einfach entzieht'.<sup>8</sup> This is why Hocke's problem is so important; the widespread lack of political commitment amounts to a paralysis that, in 1931, seemed to Kracauer like an impediment to progress, but in 1934 had become an all-out disaster. In his review, then, Kracauer agrees with Döblin's rejection of capitalism and his call for Hocke to join 'die Seite der Unterdrückten, der Niedergehaltenen. der

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<sup>6</sup> 'Was soll Herr Hocke tun?', in *Schriften* 5.2. pp.301-308.

<sup>7</sup> 'Was soll Herr Hocke tun?', p.302.

<sup>8</sup> 'Was soll Herr Hocke tun?', p.302.

Arbeiterschaft'.<sup>9</sup> Kracauer also largely goes along with the particular version of socialism Döblin outlines in his book. He summarises this in his review as 'die vollendete Befreiung des Menschen,' but notes that it must always be in conflict with Communism.<sup>10</sup> This conflict is inevitable because, even though Marx and Lenin, too, wanted the creation of a new man, "es kann aus keinem Ding etwas hervorgehen, was nicht schon in ihm steckt, - es kann aus dem mörderisch geschärften Klassenkampf Gerechtigkeit, aber kein Sozialismus hervorgehen", as Döblin argues.<sup>11</sup>

There is a similar agreement between the two men on the conflict between collective and individual. Kracauer shares Döblin's doubts vis-à-vis the "ökonomistische[]" Verengung' in orthodox Marxism, especially its 'überspitzten Kollektivismus, der sich weit über das gebotene Maß hinaus antiindividualistisch gebärdet. Wie sollte ihm der Menschen entwachsen können, den er vorher ausgetilgt hat?'<sup>12</sup> In 'Das Ornament der Masse' and in *Ginster* Kracauer seemed to have argued for an erasure of identity against the anachronism of the bourgeois subject. In both texts, however, the sovereign subject was preserved in the figure of the narrator/essayist. Now the homogenising pressure of collectivism causes Kracauer to concede the need to retain some form of individuality. This difficult position between two opposing forces will be echoed in Georg's arguments with the communist Neubert, who accuses Georg of 'kleinbürgerliche[m] Individualismus' (*Georg*, p.205), but,

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<sup>9</sup> 'Was soll Herr Hocke tun?', p.303.

<sup>10</sup> 'Was soll Herr Hocke tun?', p.304.

<sup>11</sup> 'Was soll Herr Hocke tun?', p.304.

<sup>12</sup> 'Was soll Herr Hocke tun?', p.305.

on the other hand, inspires him to take a stand against his smug, bourgeois acquaintances in the name of justice.

Georg enacts the dilemma Kracauer tries to tackle in his review: how to promote socialism without being subsumed into a proletarian mass to which he does not belong. From the point of view of the journalist and writer Kracauer the public sphere is a central concern here. Döblin addresses this issue, but in his view the public sphere is incompatible with socialism. In a Weberian mode, Döblin accuses the public sphere of being implicated in the rise of institutions, rationalisation gone mad and mass society. For him the public sphere has displaced 'den Ort der natürlichen Gruppe und der wirklichen Gesellschaft'.<sup>13</sup>

Öffentliches Leben ist Quantitätssache. In bestimmten Grenzen kann öffentliches Leben wahr und real sein, da nämlich, wo es von den privaten Personen, Gruppen und Familien direkt kontrolliert werden kann. Erweitert sich die Öffentlichkeit, wird sie unübersichtlich, greift sie zu Büro und Papier, so entwickelt sie sich rasch zum Boden für Machtinstinkte und Gewalthaber, welche die Organisation der Öffentlichkeit mißbrauchen mit materiellen und ideellen Mitteln für ihre privaten Zwecke. Zu den ideellen Mitteln gehört auch die Verfälschung der öffentlichen Meinung und die Überschätzung der öffentlichen Meinung in dem Sinne, daß nur das Öffentliche wahr und wichtig, das Nichtöffentliche aber privat und unbedeutend sei.<sup>14</sup>

Although Döblin's observation about the devaluation of the 'private' is perceptive, his faith in the beneficial effects of private control of the media is perhaps over-optimistic. At any rate, Kracauer is horrified at the thought of a retreat into a 'recht "private[s]" Leben[...] – wir haben bei Kriegsausbruch erfahren, was aus der von allen guten Geistern verlassenen deutschen Öffentlichkeit geworden ist'.<sup>15</sup> For Kracauer the public sphere is a means for promoting political awareness (as well as providing his income). But above all,

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<sup>13</sup> Döblin, p.263.

<sup>14</sup> Döblin, p.264

<sup>15</sup> 'Was soll Herr Hocke tun?', p.306.

at least in 1931, Kracauer regards the public sphere as the best chance the intellectual has for making a difference:

Kurzum, ich kann mit dem besten Willen nicht erkennen, wie durch die Maßnahmen, die Döblin vorschlägt, dem Sozialismus auf die Beine zu helfen ist. So sehr ich begreife, daß er dem Studenten abrät, sich einfach und unnachdenklich mit den blankradikalen Intellektuellen zu vermischen (die er an einer Stelle nicht unzutreffend als 'rachsüchtige Bürger' bezeichnet), so wenig verstehe ich, daß er den umgeschaffenen Hocke ganz aus der Öffentlichkeit herauslotsen und vor den fruchtbaren Schwierigkeiten bewahren möchte, die das problematische Verhältnis zwischen ihm und den Arbeitertheoretikern zweifellos mit sich brächte.<sup>16</sup>

Kracauer sees it as essential not to abandon the public sphere for some illusory private haven. He wants to maintain the chance for improved insight (on the part of Hocke) and, more importantly, for a wider 'dialektische[...] Auseinandersetzung', and that can only take place within a public sphere of some sort.<sup>17</sup>

Kracauer's response to Döblin's rejection of the public sphere also reveals another concern that reappears in *Georg*. Kracauer obviously has great reservations about what he calls 'blankradikale Intellektuelle', embodied by the scholar Rosin in his novel. He shared these misgivings with his friend Walter Benjamin, who had slated the 'Linke Melancholie' of a certain type of bourgeois intellectuals in an attack on Erich Kästner.<sup>18</sup> Benjamin accuses them - and Kracauer's use of the phrase 'rachsüchtige Bürger' suggests that he agrees - of lacking a plausible political agenda, in his view they strive for nothing more than 'in negativistischer Ruhe sich selbst zu genießen.'<sup>19</sup> Thus Kracauer agrees with Döblin's advice to Hocke to avoid these people. Instead

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<sup>16</sup> 'Was soll Herr Hocke tun?', p.306

<sup>17</sup> 'Was soll Herr Hocke tun?', p.302.

<sup>18</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Linke Melancholie: Zu Erich Kästners neuem Gedichtbuch' (1931), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol 3, pp. 279-283.

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin, 'Linke Melancholie', p.281.

in his 1931 review Kracauer wants Hocke to face up to the fertile conflict with the 'Arbeitertheoretiker', who are represented by Neubert in the novel. Like Döblin, Kracauer does not advocate that the intellectual join the proletariat, but in contrast to Döblin he does not content himself with mere declarations of solidarity, which is what Döblin's concept of a position beside the proletariat amounts to in Kracauer's view. Arguably Döblin had slightly more in mind for the intellectuals than just declarations of solidarity, he also envisaged that they 'help the masses from a passive to an active relationship to technical change by supplying them with a vision of human self-realization'.<sup>20</sup> Yet Kracauer's point is well taken, Döblin's vision is undialectical, it does not envisage a critical engagement with the vulgar Marxism which both Döblin and Kracauer had identified as stifling true progress. This advancement of the theoretical debate by means of a dialectical process carried out in the public sphere is the task of the intellectual for Kracauer.

The issue he addresses in *Georg* is how much such a critical engagement could actually achieve. In the novel, the protagonist's political development is, indeed, facilitated by his exposure to a range of groups, and as Kracauer had suggested in his reaction to Döblin, the uneasy relationship with the 'Arbeitertheoretiker' Neubert is particularly productive for Georg. Yet, as Kracauer had experienced first hand by the time *Georg* was completed, the public sphere could not be relied on either to spread political insight beyond the circles of intellectuals or to lead to effective action. Thus the *Morgenbote* newspaper eventually gets rid of Georg. It is left unclear whether this is due to

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<sup>20</sup> John H. Zammito, *The Great Debate: Bolshevism and the Literary Left in Germany, 1917-1930*, New York: Peter Lang, 1984, p.125f.

the pressure of new investors (as Neubert suggests) or in order to fend off such loss of independence, by, in effect, pre-empting it (as Petri claims). In any case, Georg ends up in Berlin, the centre of Weimar political life, with a heightened awareness, as Eckhardt Köhn argues:

Georg begreift, daß jede Aufklärungsstrategie sich der Bedingungen ihrer Realisierung versichern muß, wenn sie nicht zwangsläufig scheitern soll, und der kritische Intellektuelle, solange er seine Meinung öffentlich äußern kann, nicht vergessen darf, welchen gesellschaftlichen Konstellationen er diese Möglichkeit verdankt.<sup>21</sup>

But Georg is now unemployed and with scant resources, in other words, powerless in the face of the 'Heulen des Sturms' (*Georg*, p.252). With this scene Kracauer dramatises in 1934 something that he had not considered fully three years earlier in his rebuttal of Döblin's critique of the public sphere, namely that, in Brecht's words, 'die Apparate heute noch nicht die der Allgemeinheit sind, daß die Produktionsmittel nicht den Produzierenden gehören und daß so die Arbeit Warencharakter bekommt und den allgemeinen Gesetzen einer Ware unterliegt'.<sup>22</sup> Indeed Georg suddenly becomes conscious of the commodity character of intellectual and artistic achievements as he catches himself whistling the tune of a violinist busking on the street: 'wurde ihm doch bewußt, daß er, streng genommen, einen Diebstahl beging. Da er dem Mann nichts gegeben hatte, durfte er seine Melodie nicht verwenden.' (*Georg*, p.251) If Georg, as he tells himself after losing his position, 'heute zum mindesten wußte, wohin er gehörte' (*Georg*, p.248), it is people like the violinist and the blind veteran selling matches in the final chapter whom he feels connected with, people who have lost, or have never had, a stake in the

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<sup>21</sup> Köhn, 'Die Konkretionen des Intellekts', p. 52

<sup>22</sup> Bertolt Brecht, 'Anmerkungen zur Oper "Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny"', in *Schriften zum Theater*, vol. 2, 1918-1933, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1963, pp. 109-126, 112.

means of production or in the public sphere and the democratic decision-making process.<sup>23</sup>

*Georg* was only one of a series of books illustrating the uses and abuses of the public sphere, represented by the newspaper. The period in which it was written, from about 1928 to 1934, coincides with the culmination of a small wave of newspaper novels. In 1924 Egon Erwin Kisch had published *Der rasende Reporter*, the book whose title became its author's epithet.<sup>24</sup> This earliest manifestation of the fascination the *Neue Sachlichkeit* had with journalism already thematises the issue of veracity in reportage which the subsequent novels explore from different perspective. Although economic pressures on the media feature in novels such as Gabriele Tergit's *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm*, Hans Fallada's *Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben* and Erich Kästner's *Fabian*, the focus is on the integrity of individual journalists, which Kisch had programmatically demanded in his collection of reportages.<sup>25</sup> Yet to a greater or lesser extent those novels short-circuit an exploration of the relationship between social, economic and political conditions on the one hand and individual integrity on the other by lapsing into moralising and sentimentality. Eckhard Schütz describes this tendency thus:

in dem distanzierenden Blick auf die eigene Profession [werden] deren Ambivalenzen nicht ausgehalten [...], sondern projektiv zerlegt in die guten, das sind die geistreichen und gebildeten, daher selbstkritischen und skrupulösen, eher bescheidenen und der Sache verpflichteten, und die schlimmen, das sind die wendigen, dummdreisten bis barbarischen, opportunistischen und überheblichen, nur am Erfolg und Profit orientierten Journalisten.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See Köhn, 'Die Konkretionen des Intellekts', p. 52/3

<sup>24</sup> Egon Erwin Kisch, *Der Rasende Reporter* (1924). Berlin: Aufbau, 1995.

<sup>25</sup> Gabriele Tergit, *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm* (1931), Berlin: Arani 1997, Hans Fallada, *Bauern Bonzen und Bomben* (1931), Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1997.

<sup>26</sup> Schütz, p. 159

For Schütz this is part of a covert holding on to desires for order and simple morality, which the authors, on a more rational level, would reject as politically dangerous.<sup>27</sup> This paradoxical co-existence of an avowedly left-wing agenda with suppressed reactionary desires is particularly well developed in *Fabian*, as one might expect in the light of Benjamin's observations on 'Linke Melancholie'.

Like Georg, Kästner's Fabian is not a professional journalist, in fact he twice escapes working for a paper. He is employed in advertising until he loses his position, but he spends a lot of time with journalists and in newspaper offices. He is a detached commentator on the conditions of truthfulness in journalism and, more broadly, on the position of the intellectual in Weimar society. More overtly satirical than the journalist Kracauer, Kästner exposes how easily the truth is pushed aside by other concerns in the day-to-day struggle for financial backing, or simply the pressure of deadlines. Thus Kästner has an editor invent a brief news item to fill a gap at short notice.

Er setzte sich hin, schrieb rasch, ohne nachzudenken, ein paar Zeilen und gab das Blatt dem jungen Mann. 'So, nun fort, Sie Spaltenfüller. Wenn's nicht reicht, ein Viertel Durchschuß.' Herr Irrgang las, was Münzer geschrieben hatte, sagte ganz leise: 'Allmächtiger Vater' und setzte sich, als sei ihm plötzlich schlecht geworden, auf die Chaiselongue, mitten in einen knisternden Berg ausländischer Zeitungen. Fabian bückte sich über das Blatt Papier, das in Irrgangs Hand zitterte, und las: 'In Kalkutta fanden Straßenkämpfe zwischen Mohammedanern und Hindus statt. Es gab, obwohl die Polizei der Situation bald Herr wurde, vierzehn Tote und zweiundzwanzig Verletzte. Die Ruhe ist vollkommen wiederhergestellt.' [...] 'Sie bringen ohne weiteres vierzehn Inder um und zweiundzwanzig andere ins Städtische Krankenhaus von Kalkutta?' fragte Fabian.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See Schütz, p 150

<sup>28</sup> Kästner, p. 29/30.

The scene has a very clear message, conveyed in the shock and outrage displayed by the young and somewhat implausibly innocent Irrgang. Fabian is less surprised by Münzer's cavalier attitude to truth, but he nevertheless disapproves of it, as his question demonstrates. The pretence that Münzer's lie has actually harmed real people makes the point forcefully, but, while it fails to have any effect on the callous Münzer, it encourages the reader to respond emotionally, like Irrgang, so foreclosing any analysis. A subsequent conversation among Münzer and some colleagues shifts the focus on the paper's function as a public sphere. Yet this fails to provide a more constructive perspective, too: the journalists all agree that they are not doing the right thing, but feel that it would be both pointless and too risky to try and tell an apathetic and selfish public the unpalatable truth: 'Wegen solcher Idioten soll man den Kopf hinhalten? Ich denke nicht daran. Es wird weitergelogen. Es ist richtig, das Falsche zu tun.'<sup>29</sup> The public sphere has not only ceased to function, it has also lost its purpose as the public no longer deserves its services. Fabian has no answer to this and eventually leaves, but not without shaking the journalists' hands. The novel, subtitled *Die Geschichte eines Moralisten*, ends with Fabian's futile but noble death, suggesting that resistance to social ills is useless and that cynicism is the only chance for survival. Instead of an analysis of the situation and an exploration of the 'echte Menschlichkeit, [die] – unter den heutigen Verhältnissen – nur aus der Spannung zwischen [...] Berufs- und Privatleben [...] hervorgehen kann' *Fabian* escapes into melodrama.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Kastner, p 39

<sup>30</sup> Benjamin, 'Linke Melancholie', p 283.

Kracauer handles the issue of integrity very differently. His protagonist displays a very naïve form of integrity which the reader is constantly forced to question. Kracauer thus removes the potential for a sentimentalising identification with the journalist as a hero/victim. Furthermore, a reader familiar with Kracauer's journalistic work would recognise a number of the stories Georg has to report on. The fictional journalist Georg's naivety then reflects back on the real journalist Kracauer's past achievements. For example, Georg, rather than lying for his own advantage, seems to lack an interest in factual truth. When reporting on a fire in a theatre he remembers only after visiting the scene 'daß er nach der ziffermäßigen Höhe des Schadens zu fragen vergaß' (*Georg*, p.53). In March 1923 Kracauer had reported on a fire in the Wiesbaden theatre, which had started after a performance of Wagner's *Rienzi*.<sup>31</sup> There, Kracauer claimed that the damage was estimated as about three thousand million Marks. The descriptions in *Georg* of the musical score sheets still in place, of the stage room as a chimney opening up into a blue sky, of bent metal structures as children's toys and of costumes and stage decorations drying on the lawn like harmless monsters, are all lifted from that original reportage.<sup>32</sup> It is these insignificant details which are given great attention by Georg, rather than facts and figures, undermining Georg's credibility as a journalist.

There are also changes to certain details in the original report in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. The real director of the theatre, Dr. Hagemann, i.e. an intellectual, becomes the aristocratic Herr v. Hagen; and the helpful French

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<sup>31</sup> 'Der Wiesbadener Theaterbrand', in *Frankfurter Turmhäuser*, pp.176-180.

<sup>32</sup> See 'Der Wiesbadener Theaterbrand', pp.178, 177and 179.

occupation troops turn into exotic ‘Senegalneger,’ but the main difference lies in the reporter’s attitude towards the events. In his reportage Kracauer emphasised the ‘ideelle[n] Schaden, den [...] der Brand in kritischer Zeit dem deutschen Geistesleben im besetzten Gebiet zugefügt hat.’ Culture, as represented by the theatre, is seen as a refuge and a source of ‘seelische Widerstandskraft’ in this period of defeat and occupation.<sup>33</sup> Georg, on the other hand, is glad about the destruction of the theatre and only wishes it had been more extensive:

Alle Heimlichkeiten hätten hervorgezerrt werden sollen, und dann hätte der blaue Himmel schrecklich über den Trümmern gestrahlt. Wir hungern, wir frieren, wir haben kein Licht. Nie wird der Krieg aufhören, und nie wieder werde ich selig in einem Theater sitzen können, denn es gibt keine Feen mehr, die uns trösten, die Feen [der Kindermärchen] in ihren weißen Gewändern sind auch unter dem Schutthaufen begraben. (*Georg*, p.51)

In an insight already familiar from *Ginster*, where the protagonist’s destructive fantasies are directed at the Würzburg *Residenz*, Georg’s disenchantment with the post-war world leads him, too, to a rejection of the facades of past glories, which, at any rate, only hide the misery of the masses on which they were built. The anxiety over the threat to culture is now projected entirely onto the theatre director. When Georg expresses his doubts about the usefulness of theatre, the theatre director ignores the tenor of Georg’s questions and instead expresses views along the lines of those Kracauer had voiced in his report, calling the theatre ‘ein geistiges Bollwerk [...] gegen den Feind, der uns noch das letzte, unser Deutschtum entreißen will’ (*Georg*, p.52). Kracauer’s rejection of such views is emphasised by the director’s aristocratic title and the implied racism of his words as he passes through a group of black French soldiers. Doubts as

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<sup>33</sup> ‘Der Wiesbadener Theaterbrand’, p.177.

to the relevance of factual accuracy are conveyed through Georg's own lack of interest in, for instance, the amount of the damage compared to the significance of the demise of the social institution. At the same time, Kracauer continuously undermines the reader's ability to trust either Georg as a journalist – after all, Kracauer makes the point that Georg forgets to find out something as basic as the amount of the damage – or the press as an institution.

Georg's initial progress at the *Morgenbote* is due to the fact that the rather naïve political assessments behind his work happen to fit in with the editor's strategic siding with different political powers at certain times. According to the narrator, Georg's first piece, written as a reaction against the pacifist rhetoric he had encountered at Frau Heinisch's dinner party, had not even been a properly considered article, but a mere exercise in noting down some thoughts (*Georg*, p.29). Nevertheless, it provided the *Morgenbote* with an opportunity to distance itself from pacifism, thus refuting accusations of lacking patriotism. This process is repeated twice more, a positive article about the catholic youth movement and a report on the congress on community ethics are similarly used for tactical reasons. In those later cases, as with his first article, Georg is initially unaware that he is going against the paper's usual politics, but this is then pointed out to him, so that the publisher's, Dr Petri's, praise completely surprises him each time anew. Thus Kracauer succeeds not only in revealing Georg's naivety, but also the paper's and its publisher's lack of integrity.

With his first contribution Georg had not actually intended to reject pacifism as such, but meant to voice 'sein Mißtrauen gegen die besondere Friedensliebe von Menschen, die nicht mit Bleisoldaten gespielt haben; seinen

Unglauben an die damals vernommenen revolutionären Verheißungen. Die Menschen sind nicht so leicht wandelbar.' (*Georg*, p.29) Nevertheless he is not only offered a position at the *Morgenbote* on the strength of his article, he is also ecstatic about this opportunity, even in the knowledge that his convictions have been completely ignored. What is more, when he arrives at Fred's home to tell him the good news, Georg's excitement is not dampened by anything:

So schön erglänzte im Laternenlicht das alte Barockportal, es war heute abend wie durch ein Wunder zum erstenmal aufgetaucht, mit seinen Akanthuskapitälern, seinen Oberlichtschnörkeln und den beiden Engelknaben, die über der dunklen Straße schwebten und in einem fort lächelten. So schön wehte der Wind, er hatte an Heftigkeit nachgelassen und umfuhr leicht die Glieder. So schön waren die verblichenen Soldatenmonturen, viele Männer trugen noch ihre Monturen in den Frieden hinein, lauter gleiche graue Mäntel, die auch Engel hätten sein können, verkleidete Straßenengel. (*Georg*, p.35)

An ornate and luxurious façade – rejected by Ginster because it obscures the real suffering going on behind it, and by Georg himself on the site of the theatre fire – is here simply enjoyed for its serenity. Rather more disturbing is Georg's perverse pleasure at the sight of World War One veterans whose poverty forces them to carry on wearing their faded uniforms, reminders of mass slaughter and mass misery. The *Morgenbote's* cynical use of Georg's naïve criticism of pacifism is thus juxtaposed with the concrete results of such a policy.

In his excitement Georg seems to have forgotten the reasons why he had wanted to join a newspaper in the first place. 'die Politik und die vielen Ideen, die heute verkündet werden. Jeder Mensch darf sich aussprechen, und es ist ganz schlecht, so abseits zu stehen wie ich.' (*Georg*, p.25) The vagueness of Georg's words reflects the uncertainty of his politics. Among the many ideas he has encountered he is unable to decide which to support. His work at the

*Morgenbote* consists initially on local reportage and does not call for political analysis. Yet the narrator makes it perfectly clear that Georg lacks not only political awareness, but also conviction. While he attends a local council meeting the general consensus between the parties is disrupted by the communist delegate Fritz. His intervention causes general amusement:

‘Ich warne Sie, meine Herren! Sie haben nichts aus dem Krieg gelernt, Sie haben schon lange, viel zu lange, die Arbeiter ausgebeutet. Bald wird sich das Blättchen wenden, und dann werden die unterdrückten Massen gegen ihre Ausbeuter marschieren...’ Gelächter und Schlußrufe. Auch Georg muß lachen, weil das rötliche Männchen so aufgereggt an seinem Bindfaden schwingt und stets wieder an der Zahlenwand der Trambahntarife abprallt. Unter den Blicken der glänzenden Fürstlichkeiten im Versailler Spiegelsaal wird Stadtverordneter Fritz für den Rest der Sitzung ausgeschlossen, ein Vorfall, den Georg sachlich notiert. (*Georg*, p.44)

The narrator juxtaposes the helpless anger of the communist delegate with the immutability of the profit interest. Furthermore, Kracauer contextualises the incident by first letting Fritz refer to the war, and then confirming his accusation that the lessons of the war have not been learned. The decoration of the assembly room shows not just some members of the aristocracy in their glory, but also the Versailles hall of mirrors. This backdrop would have been chosen to celebrate German unification in 1871, marked by the crowning of Emperor Wilhelm in Versailles. In 1919, however, Versailles had become a byword for Germany’s crisis and humiliation. Kracauer exploits the ironic potential of the historic situation, but also lays the communist, whose powerless threats are a somewhat extreme response to the rather trivial matter of tram fares, open to ridicule. While the other reporters dismiss Fritz’s histrionics with apparent cynicism, Georg is amused like a child by the spectacle, and blankly records Fritz’s exclusion from the proceedings.

Georg succeeds not only at the *Morgenbote* with articles whose usefulness bears no relation to his original intention. When he is introduced to Herr Neubert, a communist, Neubert congratulates him on his report about the community ethics congress. Georg had been too distracted by a disagreement with Fred to take in any of the speeches other than the minister's. Since all the other speakers kept referring to the minister, Georg had simply used the minister's speech itself as his report. Neubert, however, had read this manoeuvre as a clever bit of satire:

‘Ich erinnere mich’ sagte Neubert, ‘vor Monaten einen von Ihnen gezeichneten Kongreßbericht gelesen zu haben, der dadurch, daß er sich absichtlich auf die Wiedergabe einer stupiden ministeriellen Begrüßungsansprache beschränkte, den Unfug der bürgerlichen Kongresse nicht ungeschickt verhöhnte. Ist Ihnen der Artikel damals von der Redaktion sehr verübelt worden?’ (*Georg*, p.187)

The misunderstanding says as much about Neubert's stereotypical views of bourgeois intellectuals as it does about Georg's political (and journalistic) ineptitude. Neubert, who is suspicious of everyone and everything bourgeois, fails to recognise straightforward naivety and helplessness. Instead, Neubert takes Georg to be one of the ‘zahlreichen sympathisierenden Intellektuellen [...] die sich einbilden, sie könnten das bürgerliche Gewissen wecken und derart die Bourgeoisie sozusagen von innen zerstören’ (*Georg*, p.187). From the point of view of the reader, Neubert's simplistic view of Georg undermines the certainty he projects, a certainty which, in turn, impresses Georg. Neubert's lack of judgement inevitably reflects back on the vulgar Marxist faction he represents.

Georg's main difficulty with communism, and a recurrent theme in the novel, is his difficulty of reconciling communist demands for submission to the

collective with his belief in the (potential) value of the individual. Like *Ginster* in the earlier novel, Georg is frequently repelled by the narrowness and egotism that seems to be implicit in bourgeois subjectivity. His reservations about individuality as he finds it manifested in society – and about the possibility of collectivity – initially have a personal source. His break-up with Fred first prompts his doubts:

Er begriff nicht die Leichtgläubigkeit, mit der alle diese Leute blindlings dem Gemeinschaftsglück zutaumelten, ohne sich im geringsten um die Beschaffenheit des der Menschen zu kümmern, aus denen doch jede Gemeinschaft bestand. [...] Und wäre ich bettelarm gewesen, dachte Georg, so hätte ich doch alle Not über meiner Freundschaft vergessen. Was lag schon viel an den äußeren Verhältnissen. Es kam auf die Menschen an, und keine Nacht ließ sich mit der Nacht zwischen ihnen vergleichen. (*Georg*, p.107)

This private grievance is eventually developed into the basis of Georg's belief system. At Frau Heinisch's dinner party Georg declares that 'die Menschen müssen sich selbst entwerfen [...] Erst kommt der Mensch an die Reihe und dann das System ... Seine Umwälzung hat vorher gar keinen Sinn' (*Georg*, p.120). Georg is attacked as a reactionary for these views by the other guests whose righteous indignation at his lack of concern for the 'Not des Proletariats' is, however, belied by their well-fed voices. (*Georg*, p.122/3) Kracauer uses Georg's humanism to throw into relief both the mechanistic approach of vulgar Marxism and the hypocrisy of many left-wing bourgeois intellectuals. The shortcomings of bourgeois ideologies had already been Kracauer's target in *Ginster*, but from the perspective of the death-throes of the Republic the rigidity and in-fighting of the far left were clearly a topic Kracauer felt he had to address.

Georg seeks out Neubert in order to pursue this issue further. The role of the intellectual is a concern particularly close to his heart. Echoing Kracauer's own comments in feuilletons such as 'Über Erfolgsbücher und ihr Publikum', Georg complains about the obsession among the educated with their souls and with their personal freedom, which, in Georg's view, is 'doch nur ein elender Rest von Freiheit' (Georg, p.201). While Neubert agrees with this last statement, he is more concerned with the middle classes' inability to recognise their true economic situation. As Kracauer himself had observed in *Die Angestellten*, Neubert too argues that

gerade weil [der Mittelstand] sich unaufhaltsam proletarisiert, klammern sich seine Angehörigen – Studenten, Beamte, Vertreter der freien Berufe – um so zäher an die ausgelaugten reaktionären Ideologien; in der unbewußten Hoffnung, dadurch das System zu stützen, dem sie ihre soziale Position verdanken. (Georg, p.202)

Neubert, however, has a confidence both Georg and Kracauer lack, namely 'daß mit dem Sprung aus der Anarchie der kapitalistischen Privatwirtschaft in die sozialistische Kollektivwirtschaft die echte Freiheit für ihren Schein eingetauscht wird' (Georg, p.203). Echoing Georg's bourgeois intellectual acquaintance, Neubert asserts that the change in the mode of production will do away with the 'Einzelmensch' and produce a new human being. Georg, on the other hand, returns to a view Kracauer had already taken in 'Das Ornament der Masse': 'Ich möchte, daß der Mensch auf seinen Grund dringt.' (Georg, p.207) Georg's faith that there is potential for a new way of being buried somewhere inside, and the view he had expressed earlier that 'die Menschen müssen sich selbst entwerfen' (Georg, p.120) appears to be one Kracauer shares. Nevertheless, and with the benefit of hindsight from

Kracauer's exile, at this particular historical juncture Georg's optimism seems shockingly misplaced, as his isolation at the end of the novel suggests.

Kracauer distances the reader from both Neubert's and Georg's visions. Neubert's credibility is undermined by his errors of judgment in regard to Georg, but also by the narrator's irony. Neubert appears irritatingly didactic as he keeps explaining things in his replies to Georg's questions, especially since the strength of his convictions is not matched by the depth of his insights. Furthermore, Neubert's remarks about the reconstruction of human beings in the Soviet Union are made 'mit der Bestimmtheit des erfahrenen Technikers, der eine unbrauchbar gewordene Maschine neu instand setzt' (*Georg*, p.203). The narrator's simile suggests that his worldview is mechanical and traditionalist, preoccupied with the old rather than building anew. Neubert takes the orthodox Marxist line that the conditions of existence determine consciousness, and that attempts by bourgeois intellectuals to join the proletariat by arguing their case with the bourgeoisie are therefore doomed to failure. They are also unnecessary, as the middle classes will join the proletariat anyway as soon as this proves victorious. Neubert and his comrades believe unconditionally in the collective: 'Nicht der Einzelmensch, sondern die Gemeinschaft ist das höchste Prinzip.' (*Georg*, p.203) Georg sympathises up to a point:

Ich könnte mir gut denken, daß manch einer durch den Zwang, im Kollektiv zu arbeiten, auf eine nützliche Weise abgeschabt würde. Das Kollektiv hebt seinen Eigensinn auf, zwingt ihn zur Preisgabe des falschen Überflusses und macht ihn so kahl, daß nur die wirklich notwendigen Dinge durch ihn hindurchscheinen. (*Georg*, p.203)

Georg is not quite ready, however, to completely surrender all individuality. He finds it difficult to imagine artistic or intellectual achievements coming out of

collective modes of production. In a sense, Neubert's assessment is accurate, Georg is tied to bourgeois notions of individual consciousness and his work for the *Morgenbote* with an increasingly articulated political motivation confirms this, as it is based upon trust in the bourgeois public sphere. Yet Georg ultimately learns that his trust had been misplaced, and Neubert's position is even more clearly shown to be flawed. Neubert develops a vision of the economic situation leading by necessity to a world war and, finally, world revolution. Georg marvels (silently) at these events unfolding, seemingly without any human action being needed. The apparent compulsion of the forces described by Neubert makes him uneasy.

Georg nevertheless learns from Neubert. During a third soiree the host, Herr Heydenreich, defends capitalism and particularly wage labour on the basis that his own secretary manages to live and support two siblings on 150 marks (*Georg*, p.231). Georg attacks this argument, albeit not from a political standpoint. When Heydenreich claims to have managed with less as a student another guest points out that prices were lower then, but without taking the point any further.

Georg, der sich seiner eigenen Studienzeit erinnerte, war über diese Gleichgültigkeit erbittert. Es kam ja nicht so sehr auf die Billigkeit als auf die andern Zustände an. '[Die Sekretärin] lebt in einer Abhängigkeit, die ziemlich ausweglos ist, während das Studium nach oben führt... Der Hauptunterschied wird durch den Grad der Hoffnung bedingt.' (*Georg*, p.231/2)

The wealthy bourgeois in the circle hypocritically insist that the secretary has no reason to complain, even after a brief calculation demonstrates that it is impossible to live on her income. The sexual politics implicit in this discussion among wealthy men about dependent women is brought out when Georg

remembers Elli, a former girlfriend who had shared the life of an underpaid secretary, and whom Georg, too, had exploited. The memory causes him shame and provokes an outburst demanding justice: 'Die Gerechtigkeit verlangt, daß einmal diejenigen nach oben kommen, die bisher unten waren. Dieses Theater muß aufhören, der ganze Stall muß von oben bis unten ausgefegt werden' (*Georg*, p.234). The other guests conclude that Georg must have become a communist – a description which Neubert would find hard to agree with. Nevertheless, the next scene of the novel brings Georg's dismissal from the *Morgenbote*.

The loss of his post at the paper at this point is both a great misfortune and entirely predictable. At this last dinner party Georg manages to assimilate some of Neubert's insights into his own experience, leaving behind much of the ideological baggage that would be of no use to him and that, ultimately, played into the hands of the Nazis by splitting the opposition. By focusing on the (apparently) simple issue of justice and dismissing all questions of political expediency, Georg makes an intervention which is, in a way, extremely powerful. His simple statement exposes the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie that claims to be politically radical but is in fact fighting to retain its privileges. Georg's position cannot be argued with, it is beyond what the other guests might consider a reasonable debate and therefore ends the party immediately. It is clear that there is no room for his new outlook in a public sphere which has been co-opted by political powers. Georg's attempt to become involved in effecting the social changes promised by the revolution fails miserably. This failure is, as already indicated, a reworking of Kracauer's own experiences. As Eckhardt Köhn puts it,

rückblickend wird [Kracauer] sowohl der zufällige Charakter der Bedingungen seiner journalistischen Aufklärung während der Weimarer Zeit als auch der illusionäre Gehalt der Theorie von 1931 deutlich, die ihn veranlaßt hatte, den Intellektuellen zu raten, es genüge, ihren Intellekt in den Dienst der Aufklärung zu stellen. Mit dem Schluß seines Romans formuliert Kracauer eine literarisch vorgetragene Korrektur an der eigenen Position vor 1933.<sup>34</sup>

But the novel does not conclude with Georg's realisation that his faith in the public sphere had been naive, this insight is embedded in Georg's final meeting with his former friend and lover, Fred. This relationship, and the comment on Weimar modernity it provides, will be at the centre of the next section of this chapter. Before such a discussion can take place, however, the socio-historical background Kracauer drew on will have to be outlined in a brief excursus.

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<sup>34</sup> Köhn, 'Die Konkretionen des Intellekts', p.53.

## Excursus: Gay Culture and Politics in the Weimar Republic

In *Georg* Kracauer presents a protagonist whose most important personal relationship in the period covered by the novel is a homoerotic one. Yet Kracauer does not at any point discuss homosexuality, either with relation to his characters or in relation to the political issues which appear in the novel. As already outlined above, most reviewers, too, have failed to identify this important theme in *Georg*, and none of them has related Kracauer's portrayal of a homoerotic relationship to the thriving gay subculture that existed, especially in Berlin, during the years in which the novel takes place. The second part of this analysis of Kracauer's reckoning with Weimar Germany is concerned with the way in which Georg's relationship with Fred functions as another layer of critique of modern society. In order to carry out an analysis of this aspect of the novel effectively, it became necessary to sketch those social and political reference points for the text which are anchored in the gay culture and history and which were ignored by the critics and are only implicitly referred to by Kracauer. This excursus aims to provide the social and historical background for the next section of chapter five. In particular, it will focus on the two extremes between which a gay subculture established itself from the turn of the twentieth century onwards: Magnus Hirschfeld and the *Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee (WhK)* on the one side and Hans Blüher and the *Wandervogel* on the other. Hirschfeld was the most important advocate of this first wave of gay liberation and developed the most influential theory of homosexuality in his time. Hirschfeld's efforts contributed to an increasing social acceptance of homosexuality as well as legitimising more general

experimentation with sexual identities and relationships. The destabilisation of traditional patterns of relationships is an important aspect of Georg's experiences in Kracauer's novel. The *Wandervogel*, on the other hand, provided a haven for a very different form of homoeroticism, theorized most notably by Hans Blüher. The *Wandervogel* was also the most prominent representative of the youth movement which Kracauer had reported on previously, and it appears again in *Georg*.

The debates over gay liberation, for men and for women, which were extinguished by the deadly persecution of the Nazis and only recovered by the gay liberation movement from 1969 onwards, experienced a first flourishing during the years of Weimar Republic. Especially the *Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee*, led by the prominent sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, was very much politically motivated and sought the repeal of the infamous § 175. There were, however, also other factions with a much more traditional, even reactionary agenda. Thus the *Wandervogel* youth movement had from its beginnings accommodated homoerotic and homosexual relationships and facilitated the misogynistic and authoritarian anti-modernism embodied by Hans Blüher. Somewhere in between Hirschfeld's politically progressive, if scientifically contentious, activism and the anti-modern followers of 'Greek love' in Blüher's vein existed those who sought to enjoy their newly found freedom and were interested in social rather than in political or ideological gatherings.

The cause of gay rights championed by Hirschfeld focused on homosexual men, even though in everyday life lesbian women were often more visible than gays. The fashion for masculine attire and haircuts mocked in

cartoons such as ‘Lotte am Scheideweg’ – Lotte has to decide whether to use the men’s or the women’s toilet - spiced up mainstream culture with elements of lesbian subculture.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the image of the *Garçonne*, for instance in Jeanne Mammen’s eponymous picture, became, as Marsha Meskimmon suggests, a ‘current visual trope for the Third Sex’.<sup>36</sup> Yet lesbianism was not covered by §175, which specifically outlawed ‘die widernatürliche Unzucht, welche zwischen Personen männlichen Geschlechts [...] begangen wird’.<sup>37</sup> A change, proposed in 1909, to include female homosexuality in the law threatened not only individual lesbian women, but also the women’s movement, which counted a number of lesbians among its leaders. Lesbians, who were doubly oppressed and struggling for emancipation both as homosexuals and as women, tended to be grounded in the women’s movement rather than in the *WhK*.<sup>38</sup> Thus there were concerns that politically active straight women, too, would be put under pressure by the threat of being slandered. In the event, §175 remained unchanged until the National Socialists made it more restrictive in 1935. Since it constituted the main focus for the gay rights movement of the Weimar Republic, this was in consequence predominantly a gay men’s movement. Thus despite the iconic status of androgynous women for various aspects of Weimar culture, when homosexuality itself was the topic, lesbian women tended to be marginalised

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<sup>35</sup> Karl Arnold, ‘Lotte am Scheideweg’, *Simplicissimus*, Nr. 5, 1925, p.79; again in Christiane v. Lengerke, ‘“Homosexuelle Frauen” Tribaden, Freundinnen, Urninden’, in *Eldorado, Homosexuelle Frauen und Männer in Berlin 1890-1950, Geschichte, Alltag und Kultur*, Verein der Freunde eines Schwulen Museums in Berlin e.V. (ed.), Berlin: Verlag Rosa Winkel, 1992, pp.125-148, p.135.

<sup>36</sup> Meskimmon, p.201.

<sup>37</sup> Hans-Georg Stümke, *Homosexuelle in Deutschland. Eine politische Geschichte*, Munich C.H. Beck, 1989, p.21.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Mecki Pieper, ‘Die Frauenbewegung und ihre Bedeutung für lesbische Frauen (1850-1920)’, in *Eldorado*, pp.116-124, 122.

while the spotlight was on gay men.<sup>39</sup> One of the classics of Weimar cinema, for instance, Leontine Sagan's *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931), used the lesbian attraction between a young girl and her teacher as a vehicle for an attack on (Prussian) militarism, especially in the education of the young.<sup>40</sup> By contrast, Richard Oswald's 1919 film *Anders als die Anderen*, which campaigned for the abolition of §175, concentrated on male homosexuality. Kracauer, too, although he uses female figures to symbolise a threatening modernity in 'Das Ornament der Masse', depicts homosexuality only in male relationships. This is the case in both his novels, *Ginster* and *Georg*.

Before homosexuality became a topic for open debate in the 1920s, however, a serious obstacle had to be overcome. The Wilhelmine Empire had seen a series of scandals involving men who were personal friends of the Emperor. In 1902 the industrialist Friedrich Krupp got into trouble with the Italian authorities because of his homosexual activities on the island of Capri. The case was used by the SPD to expose the hypocrisy of the ruling classes, who clung to § 175, but indulged their own desires in (relative) safety. Krupp died the same year and was swiftly presented as a martyr to the 'perfiden roten Verleumdern' by Wilhelm II.<sup>41</sup> In 1908 a court case between Fürst Philipp zu Eulenburg und Hertefeld and the journalist Maximilian von Harden again raised public awareness of, and widespread outrage at the homosexual goings-

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<sup>39</sup> On the marginalisation of lesbianism as well as its role in changing notions of female identity in the Weimar Republic, see Meskimmon, pp. 199-208.

<sup>40</sup> Rosi Kreische notes that the film, while it is now considered a 'Kultfilm der Lesbenbewegung', was not identified as a 'lesbian' film at the time of its release. The ending had been changed and drew attention away from the homosexual dimension. Even the title of the film, which was based on Christa Winsloe's play *Gestern und Heute*, was chosen by the Carl Froelich, its artistic director, because "'da denken sie (die Zuschauer), da hampeln Mädchen in Uniform rum und zeigen Beine.'" In 'Lesbische Liebe im Film bis 1950', in *Eldorado*, pp. 187-196, p. 193f.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Stümke, p. 40f.

on at court. Hirschfeld, who had testified in the Eulenburg-von Harden case, feared that any previous achievements might be lost in the wake of the trial.<sup>42</sup>

The Emperor's gay friends sought privacy for their pursuits and amongst themselves occasionally engaged in cross-dressing, one of the more flamboyant aspects of gay culture.<sup>43</sup> While the frivolity, even decadence, as the press presented it, of these circles alienated the public, there also existed a more low-key and 'cultured' homoerotic tradition in a classicising mode.<sup>44</sup> The world of antiquity seemed to offer a model of a society that was 'homosocial' and entailed 'male-to-male interaction and love represented by more than just sexual activity and desire'.<sup>45</sup> Often, especially in more widely acceptable evocations of 'Greek love', the emphasis is on 'platonic' relationships between 'mentor' and 'student'. *Männliche Gesellschaft* might, therefore, appear to be not about more than sexual love, but rather about less or even about something entirely different, as Hans Blüher would later try to argue.<sup>46</sup> But even in the eighteenth and nineteenth century the admiration of the German bourgeoisie for the Greek ideal of male beauty was beset with ambiguity. As George Mosse points out: 'There is some irony in the fact that Winckelmann, the homosexual, made Greek art fit for the middle classes and supplied the model for the male national stereotype.'<sup>47</sup> Certainly, Winckelmann was keen to emphasise the virtues of self-restraint and harmony, and to remove sensuousness and passion

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Stümke, pp.42-4.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Stümke, p.42.

<sup>44</sup> Stümke cites the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, which, although previously sympathetic towards the campaign for the abolition of § 175, changed its tune in the wake of the Eulenburg trial and started referring to homosexuality as a 'Rückfall in die Barbarei' and 'Hundemoral', p.44

<sup>45</sup> Meskimmon, p.210.

<sup>46</sup> See Hans Blüher, *Die Rolle der Erotik in der männlichen Gesellschaft, 1.Band: Der Typus Inversus*, Jena: Diederichs, 1921.

<sup>47</sup> George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality, Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe*, Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, p.14

from the Greek art he promoted. Nevertheless, he evidently did not always succeed. Andreas Sternweiler quotes Winckelmann's excitement at an image of the youth Ganymede, being kissed by Zeus in what Sternweiler describes as an 'eindeutig homosexuelle Darstellung':<sup>48</sup>

Der Liebling des Jupiters ist ohne Zweifel eine der allerschönsten Figuren, die aus dem Alterthume übrig sind, und mit dem Gesichte desselben finde ich nichts zu vergleichen; es blühet so viel Wollust auf demselben, daß dessen ganzes Leben nichts, als ein Kuß, zu sein scheint.<sup>49</sup>

It took until the second half of the nineteenth century before the first call for homosexuals to unite and fight for their rights was published by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs.<sup>50</sup> Ulrichs drew on Greek mythology when he introduced the terminology 'Urnlinge' and 'Urninden' for gay men and lesbians respectively. Nevertheless he failed in his attempt to start a gay protest movement, since the draconic punishments for homosexuality among men were an effective deterrent.<sup>51</sup> Ulrichs' theory of an innate homosexuality, 'Uranismus', nevertheless strongly influenced Magnus Hirschfeld, the most notable sexologist of the Weimar years. For Hirschfeld, this theory was of great practical value in that it helped him in his fight against the persecution of homosexuals as criminals. With the designation of gays and lesbians as a 'drittes Geschlecht' Hirschfeld opted for a biologism which, although now

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<sup>48</sup> The Ganymede theme also appears in Kracauer's description of the first impression Georg has of Fred.

<sup>49</sup> Sternweiler also notes that the images Winckelmann here enthused about was actually a fake, painted around 1758 and passed off as an antique by two of Winckelmann's friends. See Andreas Sternweiler, 'Gegenbilder', in *Goodbye to Berlin? 100 Jahre Schwulenbewegung* Schwules Museum und Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Berlin: Verlag rosa Winkel, 1997, pp. 22-26, p. 24f.

<sup>50</sup> Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, *Vindex: Social-juristische Studien über mann-männliche Geschlechtsliebe*, Leipzig: [n.pub.], 1864.

<sup>51</sup> See Stümke, pp. 16-20; Manfred Herzer, 'Opposition im 19. Jahrhundert', in *Goodbye to Berlin*, pp. 27-30; and Martin Dannecker, *Theories of Homosexuality*, transl. by David Fernbach, London: Gay Men's Press, 1981, pp. 33-38.

much disputed, was then a useful tool to back up his claim that homosexuality was 'weder Krankheit noch Verbrechen'.<sup>52</sup> Since its inception in 1897, the *WhK* had been Hirschfeld's main vehicle for gay liberation. The *WhK* wanted to increase awareness of homosexuality among the public as well as political institutions, with the ultimate aim of the abolition of § 175, which had outlawed homosexuality in 1851.<sup>53</sup> The very term 'homosexuality', which only became common at the beginning of the twentieth century, was meant to move the debate from the moral to the scientific sphere and thus fitted in with the *WhK*'s intentions.<sup>54</sup>

In 1922 the *WhK* was joined by the *Bund für Menschenrechte (BfM)*, a less scientific organisation attracting larger numbers of gay men and women who, however, were on the whole more interested in socialising with their equals than in any political action.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, the existence of this body and the success of the various newspapers and journals published either in the name of the *BfM* or by its president, the publisher Friedrich Radszuweit,<sup>56</sup> indicate the growing confidence of gay men and women and increasing public acceptance— even though this was still far from universal and not reflected in the law.<sup>57</sup> Thus it was possible in 1919 to produce and show Oswald's

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<sup>52</sup> Stümke, p.48.

<sup>53</sup> See Stümke, p.35; in 1871, §175 succeeded the old §143 of the Prussian Civil Code in the *StGB* of the German Reich.

<sup>54</sup> See Ulfried Geuter, *Homosexualität in der Deutschen Jugendbewegung. Jugendfreundschaft und Sexualität im Diskurs von Jugendbewegung, Psychoanalyse und Jugendpsychologie am Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1994, p.223.

<sup>55</sup> See Stümke, p.53ff.

<sup>56</sup> See Stümke, p.53f.

<sup>57</sup> Hirschfeld's campaign showed some degree of success in that in 1929 the *Reichstag*'s committee on criminal law voted with a small majority to decriminalise 'simple' homosexuality among adults. However, this achievement was not only marred by some other amendments, it also never made it into the plenum and therefore never became law. (See Stümke, p.82. Manfred Herzer, 'Das Wissenschaftlich-humanitäre Komitee - vom Institut für Sexualwissenschaft bis zur Selbstauflösung' in: *Goodbye to Berlin*, p.86f)

*Aufklärungsfilm Anders als die Anderen*, only for it to be banned first from being shown to the general public, and eventually for good.<sup>58</sup> Hirschfeld's *Berlins Drittes Geschlecht* also documents the growth of a lively gay subculture, although prostitution, cottaging and the rather more glamorous *Urningsbälle* had been going on since Wilhelminian times.<sup>59</sup>

While such activities either took place at the limits of legality, or, like Hirschfeld's campaign, directly challenged existing law, there was also a tendency in Weimar culture for gender and sexual orientation to become visibly unstable and/or ambiguous – at least in Berlin. Mammen's *Garçonne*, originally an illustration in Hirschfeld's 1931 publication *Sittengeschichte der Nachkriegszeit*, is an example of this.<sup>60</sup> In mainstream culture, too, homoeroticism and transvestitism became popular themes, although here commercial considerations demanded compromises. Wolfgang Theis names Wilhelm 'Lieschen' Bendow in *Die göttliche Jette* (1937) and Curt Bois in *Der Fürst von Pappenheim* (1927) as examples of popular male-female cross dressers.<sup>61</sup> Female-male cross dressers were perhaps even more common. Asta Nielsen, for instance, played *Hamlet* in 1920.<sup>62</sup> In Reinhold Schünzel's 1933 musical comedy *Viktor und Viktoria* such sexual ambiguity reached a climax, with the end of all this frivolity already imminent. In *Viktor und Viktoria*, a young singer struggling in the misery of the economic crisis is convinced by an aging thespian to help him out of a tight spot. He has for some time had to

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<sup>58</sup> Wolfgang Theis, 'Anders als die Andern, Geschichte eines Filmskandals' in: *Eldorado*, pp. 28-30; Theis also mentions Kracauer's harsh judgment of the film in *From Caligari to Hitler*

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Wolfgang Theis, Andreas Sternweiler, 'Alltag im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik', in *Eldorado*, pp. 48-73.

<sup>60</sup> Meskimmon, p. 199.

<sup>61</sup> Wolfgang Theis, 'Verdrängung und Travestie: Das vage Bild der Homosexualität im deutschen Film (1917- 1957)', in *Eldorado*, pp. 102-113, 109/10.

<sup>62</sup> Kreische, p. 187.

resort to appearing as a female impersonator in a somewhat dubious bar, but cannot honour his commitment because of a sore throat. Thus Renate Müller, who plays the young singer, ends up dressing up as a man who dresses up as a woman, managing to attract both male and female attention. While the film ends with heterosexual bliss, the nature of the attraction between 'Viktor' and one of 'his' most glamorous and cynical female admirers is, to say the least, uncertain.<sup>63</sup>

The integration of gay themes into mass culture is indicative of an increasing liberalisation of social, if not legal, attitudes towards homosexuality, and of a growing confidence of gay men and women. Both are based on a view of homosexuality as a condition which is different from the majority, yet neither a crime nor an illness, a conception consistent with Hirschfeld's theory of homosexuals as the 'Third Sex.' While Hirschfeld had a liberal agenda of making homosexuality acceptable, another theorist of 'inversion' aimed rather higher. Hans Blüher, an early member of the *Wandervogel* movement, was convinced that sexual attraction between men was the basis for social structures far superior to the family. Blüher was strongly influenced by the classic, humanistic education he had received at the Steglitz grammar school, the cradle of the *Wandervogel*. He refers to the homoerotic currents in this movement as the *Eros paidikos*, a force which pulls the young men into a strong community, held together by faith in and love for the 'regal' leader.<sup>64</sup> Only such exclusively male societies can nurture 'Geist', the force which

Urgestein von der Gesetzlichkeit der Natur befreit und Dome baut, das [...], was aus Tönen Symphonien schafft [...] und - erstaunlich genug!

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<sup>63</sup> See Theis, p. 111; Kreische, p. 189.

<sup>64</sup> Hans Blüher, *Werke und Tage*, vol. 1, Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1920, esp. pp. 8f and 101f.

– vorüberfliehende Dinge, von denen jedes bedingungslos anders ist als das andere, zur Einheit des Begriffs bringt und aus ihm Wissenschaft macht.<sup>65</sup>

This type of *männliche Gesellschaft* is in eternal conflict with the family, and its opposition to the supremacy of procreation is what makes the state as a higher form of community possible. Thus Blüher distinguishes between different types of men, those who live, often unhappily, by the common, bourgeois rules as family men, the *Mucker*, and the *Typus Inversus*, men who love other men, whether this love is expressed physically or not. Blüher rejects both *Zwischenstufentheorien* along the lines of Hirschfeld's third sex and Freudian explanations for homosexuality. The former he finds objectionable because they demean the men in question by attributing feminine characteristics to them. The latter always involve neurotic personality traits, which are equally unacceptable to Blüher. For him, the *Typus Inversus* or pederast finds his highest form, the male ideal, in the *Männerheld* who is thoroughly masculine, healthy and strong of will and body, and devoted entirely to young men. Nevertheless Blüher has some use for Freud, whose theory of repression provides an explanation for the hostility of some men towards Blüher: clearly they, too, are repressed pederasts who persecute in Blüher that which they cannot accept in themselves. The *Wandervogel* was, for Blüher, an ideal environment for the *Typus Inversus* to develop into a *Männerheld*, while many others, who did not quite measure up to this, eventually dropped out and turned to women. This became pertinent after the war, when the first generation of *Wandervogel* members had reached

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<sup>65</sup> Blüher, *Die Rolle der Erotik*, p.233

adulthood.<sup>66</sup> In this situation, exacerbated by an increasing liberation of women, both socially and legally, the *Geschlechterfrage* became entangled with the *Inversionsfrage*, as Ulfried Geuter shows:

Wollte man sich als reifer Jüngling und Mann der Beziehung zu den Frauen stellen, wollte man erwachsen werden, wollte man die mit der zunehmenden Emanzipation der Frauen verbundenen Herausforderungen annehmen, und war man bereit, sich auf die schwierige Auseinandersetzung um neue Beziehungsmuster zwischen Mann und Frau einzulassen – oder wollte man lieber verweilen im Jungenreich, ausweichen in die Beziehung zum Mann, in der alle diese Probleme ausgespart schienen?<sup>67</sup>

Geuter concludes that the type of relationship which Blüher had exalted as the ultimate ideal was in reality ‘Ausdruck einer Unfähigkeit, in einer sich verändernden Welt der Geschlechterbeziehungen die geschlechtliche Identität als Mann zu wahren.’<sup>68</sup>

In this hothouse of freshly discovered and newly developing sexual identities, conflict and defensiveness abounded. Although not all of the people involved realised this, the different positions within the struggle for sexual identity were associated with political positions in the equally heated political clashes of the Weimar Republic. These connections led to some paradoxes: while Hirschfeld identified himself as a Social Democrat and the political agenda of his *WhK* reflected this, the tool which he used in his struggle to make homosexuality respectable, biologism, became the very instrument with which the National Socialists justified their persecution of gays as well as their other victims. Blüher’s work, on the other hand, speaks of authoritarianism as well as misogyny and anti-Semitism, traits that can also be found in the Nazi

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<sup>66</sup> Geuter, p. 185

<sup>67</sup> Geuter, p. 191

<sup>68</sup> Geuter, p. 195

movement. Nevertheless, the Nazis not only persecuted ordinary citizens for their homosexuality, they also used allegations of homosexuality in their political in-fights, while on the left homosexuality was being equated with fascism.<sup>69</sup> Looking back at the Weimar Republic from his Paris exile, Kracauer documented the fateful entanglement of private desires with political ideologies in *Georg*. Furthermore, through the protagonist, Georg, he pursues a dream of a different way of life, a dream that had been inspired, it seems, at least in part by Kracauer's exposure to a thriving gay culture in Berlin.

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<sup>69</sup> Stümke, p. 100 and p. 104.

## Homosexuality and Politics

Georg's desire to make his mark in the public sphere and his ultimate failure to achieve this are the main subject of the novel. The issue of Georg's sexuality, despite being consistently relegated to the private realm, is another important aspect of the political argument the novel advances. While the depiction of Georg's journalistic career provides a savage critique of Weimar intellectual and political circles, the homoerotic subplot of the novel introduces a less historically specific, utopian element. The homosexual dimension of Kracauer's character Georg and the role homosexuality plays in the novel have been largely ignored by the few critics who have commented upon the text. Eckhard Köhn concentrates on the book's analysis of the role played by the leftwing intellectual within society, Hans G. Helms similarly focuses on Georg's flirtation with communism, and Michael Winkler sees in *Georg* only a continuation of the retreat into the outsider position he already identifies in *Ginster*.<sup>70</sup> Even Karsten Witte, who is elsewhere very sensitive to sexual subtexts, limits himself to quoting Kracauer's own (somewhat disingenuous) blurb, composed in the hope of finding a publisher for the novel in 1934: 'Er [Georg] ist dumpf und ahnungslos und unterhält eine unmögliche, *leicht erotisch betonte Freundschaftsbeziehung* zu einem jungen Menschen namens Fred.'<sup>71</sup> Only Dirk Niefanger devotes some space to a discussion of

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<sup>70</sup> Michael Winkler, 'Über Siegfried Kracauer's Roman *Ginster*, mit einer Coda zu *Georg*', in Kessler and Levin, pp.297-306.

<sup>71</sup> Karsten Witte, 'Nachwort', in *Schriften 7, Ginster, Georg*, Suhrkamp, 1973, pp 493-506, p.506, my emphasis; cf. Karsten Witte, 'How Fascist is *The Punch Bowl?*', in: *New German Critique*, 74, Spring/Summer 1998, pp 31-36, 34. Eric Rentschler also comments that Witte 'not one to hide his homosexuality, [...] often wrote about gay films and filmmakers', 'The Passenger and the Critical Critic', in *New German Critique*, 74, Spring/Summer 1998, pp 15-22.

‘homoerotische Konstellationen’ in *Georg*.<sup>72</sup> Yet he then does no more than decode the ‘signals’ in the text, which supposedly alert the initiated reader to a homosexual subtext. For Niefanger, Georg’s homosexuality is merely another aspect of his being an ‘Außenseiter.’<sup>73</sup>

There are important reasons, though, for examining the ways in which homosexuality figures in Kracauer’s novel more closely. As shown in the excursus, homosexuality and its status in law as well as in society were widely debated issues in the Weimar Republic, especially in Berlin during the years Kracauer spent there, immediately preceding the writing of this novel. Furthermore, the political implications of various theories of homosexuality were also controversial. The attachment Georg feels to Fred – and his attempts at heterosexual relationships – reveals complex desires, which bring Georg into conflict with the expectations of the society in which he lives.<sup>74</sup> Within a Freudian framework some such desires are blocked by (not always successful) repression, and may thus never be consciously experienced. Georg channels his desires into his homoerotic relationship with Fred. This connection between often diffuse desire and homosexuality can be read as not just a personal choice, but as a radical rejection of heterosexuality as a major organising principle of modern society. Such a hypothesis is explored by the French queer theorist Guy Hocquenghem in his book *Homosexual Desire*. *Homosexual Desire* is an often polemical contribution to debates around homosexuality in the 1960s and 1970s, and therefore much of the book is not relevant here.

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<sup>72</sup> Niefanger, p.274

<sup>73</sup> Niefanger, pp 275-8

<sup>74</sup> Martin Jay has suggested that Kracauer himself seems to have had ‘a platonically erotic bond’ to Adorno in his younger years. See Jay, ‘The Extraterritorial Life’, p 58

However, Hocquenghem's argument for homosexuality as a basis for an alternative way of life usefully theorises a theme of Kracauer's book that has been largely overlooked, the exploration of a homosexual relationship in direct opposition to heterosexuality, which is seen as causing only misery and disaster. A close examination of the Ackermann murder case, based on the Angerstein case on which Kracauer had reported in 1925, is a particularly graphic example of the destructiveness that springs from social structures based on heterosexuality. Yet Kracauer's exploration of alternative, even subversive forms of sexuality is made problematic by his idealisation of a relationship with a young boy, set up against Oedipal patriarchy, represented by powerful, phallic mothers. There are sociological reasons for an absence of fathers from a novel set in post World War One Germany, and, as already indicated, Georg's opinions on and feelings towards these women are not represented uncritically. Nevertheless, Kracauer's use of female characters, in effect as hate figures, to stand in for a system that arguably victimises women more than men is questionable.

In *Georg*, Kracauer explores the oppositional potential of homosexual identity through the protagonist. Georg falls in love with his young student Fred, but despite such similarities with relationship patterns in the *Wandervogel*, Kracauer seeks to distance himself from the youth movement, a body which not only accommodated gay people but also nurtured a certain gay sensibility, through Georg's rift with Sommer, his colleague at the paper. This aspect of the novel is significant as Kracauer himself had been quite close to the German youth movement for a while and had reported on it during his time at the

*Frankfurter Zeitung*. In his early, anti-modern phase Kracauer expressed a longing for (religious) meaning in life, and for a community that could provide a structure for such a meaningful existence in many of his writings. As Michael Schröter points out, he actually names the *Wandervogel* as such a community in his unpublished essay 'Über das Wesen der Persönlichkeit'.<sup>75</sup> In 1921 he reported on 'Eine Woche der Jugendbewegung' and briefly discussed contributions from the protestant and the catholic youth movements, the *Jungdeutschen*, and the *Arbeiterjugend*.<sup>76</sup> Kracauer comments upon these divisions within a movement that, according to him, used to be united in a 'Drängen und Wollen [...] das lediglich die Jugend als Jugend betrifft'. In his view, the very fact that the splitting into political factions in German society at large is now shared by the young people indicates that they are no longer solely concerned with creating 'eine kleine romantische Oase der Freiheit,' and that they have therefore reached a certain degree of maturity. Paradoxically the increasing disunity within the youth movement gives Kracauer hope that Germany's youth is ready to contribute to the *Volksgemeinschaft*, a task which presupposes agreement. Kracauer indeed closes with a call for an 'Überbrückung der Gegensätze,' claiming that youth is essentially oriented towards the future and that this in itself provides a basis for unity. Indeed, his response to the various contributions echoes this concern with the 'Sehnsucht des deutschen Geistes nach Gestaltwerdung und Bändigung' and a rejection of individualism and philosophical idealism, which he rejects because of its

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<sup>75</sup> See Schröter, pp. 18-21.

<sup>76</sup> 'Eine Woche der Jugendbewegung', in *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 13 November 1921, (no. 847, 2. Morgenblatt, Politik, no page.)

abstraction and its postulate of a radically split between the subject and the world of objects.<sup>77</sup>

Kracauer agrees, on the whole, with Wilhelm Stählin's speech on behalf of the protestant youth, but it is the catholic youth movement he ultimately prefers: 'Was der Protestant vom Subjekt her sucht und etwa im Bekenntnis zum völkischen Ideal zu finden glaubt, ist dem Katholiken als objektive Heilswahrheit gegeben.' Kracauer finds similarities even in the socialist youth:

Diese Jungsozialisten sind *keine Marxisten* mehr. In ihrem jugendlichen Idealismus lehnen sie sich [...] gegen die selber dem kapitalistischen Geist entwachsene Formel von der 'Vergesellschaftung der Produktionsmittel' auf und bekämpfen die materialistische Weltanschauung. Sozialismus ist ihnen eine Angelegenheit des Herzens, er muß im Menscheninneren heranreifen, damit er äußere Wirklichkeit werde.<sup>78</sup>

Kracauer quite clearly still identifies with the longing for community and for the emergence of the 'volle deutsche Mensch,' an expression in which he combines nationalism with the classicist ideal in a vision of recovered wholeness.

Although Kracauer omits this connection in his portrayal of the youth movement, in some classic texts the *Wandervogel* in particular is closely linked to homosexuality or homoeroticism. This is true for Hans Blüher's writings as well as for Walter Flex's novella *Der Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten*.<sup>79</sup> Flex's novella, as Ulfried Geuter has argued in his study on *Homosexualität in der deutschen Jugendbewegung*, anticipates Blüher's

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<sup>77</sup> 'Eine Woche der Jugendbewegung'

<sup>78</sup> 'Eine Woche der Jugendbewegung', Kracauer's emphasis.

<sup>79</sup> Walter Flex, *Der Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten* (1916), Kiel: Orion-Heimreiter, 1986.

*Männerheld*.<sup>80</sup> The book is dedicated to ‘dem Gedächtnis meines lieben Freundes Ernst Wurche, Kriegsfreiwillig im 3. Niederschlesischen Inf.-Reg.50, Leutnant d.R. im 3. Unterelsässischen Inf.-Reg. 138’. According to Geuter, the book depicts the war as a ‘Verlängerung [des] Wandervogellebens, als eine Möglichkeit, wie auf einer Wanderfahrt mit Kameraden zusammenzusein’.<sup>81</sup> Wurche uses every possible opportunity to invoke the spirit of the *Wandervogel*. After a long, dusty march, a group of soldiers including the narrator and Wurche bathe in the river. As Wurche steps out of the water, he stands, the embodiment of the popular image of the ‘Lichtgebet’, by Fidus.<sup>82</sup> Quoting from Goethe’s poem ‘Ganymed’ and ‘[f]eucht von den Wassern und von Sonne und Jugend über und über glänzend stand der Zwanzigjährige in seiner schlanken Reinheit da.’<sup>83</sup> The purity and chastity of a figure like Wurche is the highest ideal of Blüher’s *Männerheld*. *Der Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten* is set in a world of men, where women, if at all, only appear as distant mothers or the depersonalised objects of crude jokes, whereas *Georg* takes place in a world peopled by men and women alike. In *Der Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten* the homoerotic tone of the descriptions of Ernst Wurche, either nude or ‘im grauen Waffenrock, der die hohe Gestalt knapp und kleidsam einschloß’<sup>84</sup> evokes the kind of *Männergesellschaft* subsequently celebrated in Blüher’s work, where men are sufficient unto themselves and, moreover, more truly themselves and capable of higher achievements without the presence of

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<sup>80</sup> Geuter, p.157.

<sup>81</sup> Geuter, p.158.

<sup>82</sup> The artist’s real name was Hugo Höppener, and he produced images like the ‘Lichtgebet’ for the journal *Jugend*. Geuter comments on the fact that, although these images usually showed nudes, they were remarkably prudish (see Geuter, p.25).

<sup>83</sup> Flex, p.32.

<sup>84</sup> Flex, p.32.

women. As Geuter points out, this connects it to nationalist ideology: 'Die Männerfreundschaft durfte nicht sinnlich werden, sondern sollte der Nation gehören.'<sup>85</sup>

In *Georg*, his novel written not only some time after he revoked the rejection of the 'materialistische Weltanschauung,' but also with hindsight on where this combination of nationalism and classicism was going to take Germany, Kracauer returns to and comments on his report. Significantly, in his reworking the homoerotic aspects are omitted from his account of the youth movement. It seems that Kracauer wants to keep what appears as a positive force in his novel untainted by any association with such a dubious group. Indeed, homoeroticism and youth movement come into conflict in the novel when Georg produces an article similar to Kracauer's on the German youth movement, where he, too, comes down on the side of the catholic youth. Before writing the piece Georg visits Pater Quirin, who gives public lectures 'über den katholischen Gedanken' (*Georg*, p.60). The visit is described in great detail, and introduces the theme of homoeroticism in such a way as to demonstrate that in the form it assumes in Georg's life it is incompatible with the catholic youth movement. Georg opens the conversation by admitting that he has come out of uncertainty. This seems to be primarily an uncertainty of faith, as Georg confesses 'daß er sich danach sehne, einen Glauben zu haben' (*Georg*, p.69). The subsequent description of Georg's conversation with the priest is, however, repeatedly interrupted by Georg's thoughts about matters apparently unrelated to the issue of religion and the spiritual poverty of Weimar society. From the memory of the Pater's lecture, where Georg had

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<sup>85</sup> Geuter, p.49; Geuter is referring here to Georg Mosse's study *Nationalismus und Sexualität*

been accompanied by Fred, Georg's thoughts drift to his relationship with the boy:<sup>86</sup>

Vorhin hatte er dem Pater seine Beziehung zu Fred andeuten wollen und sie dann doch nicht erwähnt. Auch anderen Menschen verheimlichte er diese Freundschaft, die schon nicht mehr Freundschaft zu nennen war, ja, er vermied den Geliebten an der Oberfläche zu zeigen. Bald würde Fred die Schule verlassen. Georg brannte vor Heimweh nach dem Indianerzelt, nach Gruß, Gesicht, Lachen, nach der ganzen endlosen Quälerei. (*Georg*, p.70)

While Georg is frustrated at Fred's lack of interest in the spiritual questions that matter so much to him, his thoughts of their relationship nevertheless prove more engaging than the priest's explications. Indeed, the reader learns very little about what Pater Quirin has to say, as little, presumably, as Georg takes in of his words. Georg ostensibly looks for a spiritual home, here in Catholicism, later in Communism, but his thoughts reveal that, without admitting it to himself, he has already found such a home in his relationship with Fred, for which he feels 'Heimweh'. Their love affair, conducted in secret, tied up with escapist fantasies of exotic places, and full of intense emotions even in the torment Fred and Georg cause each other, is preferable as a refuge from mundane everyday life to the religious vision the priest seems to offer:

Die Worte des Paters hatten ihm andere, neue Räume eröffnet, aber [Georg] schwankte, ob er sich weiter hineinwagen solle. Gerade als seine Lähmung zu weichen begann, vernahm er '... das heilige Abendmahl...' Fremd richtete sich das Wort auf, es kam aus einer Welt, die er nicht kannte, schob sich vor ihn und wuchs und wuchs. Das heilige Abendmahl – der Glaube war schwer. Man mußte an seinem Ort

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<sup>86</sup> Fred is fourteen when Georg meets him for the first time and by today's standards the relationship between such a young boy and his tutor would be considered to be sexual child abuse. However, I propose to treat this aspect of the novel as the story of a relationship that is clearly and expressly troubling in the power imbalance and the emotional blackmailing it involves, but which is predominantly concerned with describing desires that find this particular form of expression in their particular historical and social context.

bleiben – der Eisenbahnerstreik war immer noch nicht zu Ende.  
(*Georg*, p.71)

The last sentence might be a reference to *Ginster*, where railroads are symbolic of utopian hope for progress to a better life. Here, however, any such progress is halted by the strike, by the material realities of 1920s Weimar. Although Georg's response to what Pater Quirin has to offer him remains ambivalent – faith is difficult, but other avenues for change seem blocked – the article he submits to the newspaper seems to back the priest wholeheartedly. This stance does not fit in with the paper's usual political position, but the article is nevertheless published. What is significant here is that Georg's article not only fails to reflect his true concerns and displays a certainty that Georg himself does not actually possess, but also that it only appears because it is useful in the paper's internal politics. The article lacks sincerity at every stage: it is written as an act of pretence rather than genuine conviction, and its publication is a vindictive gesture, not a contribution to public debate.

The episode sums up Kracauer's perception of the denial of homoeroticism as an expression of the loss of the intellectual honesty of the journalist and of the loss of integrity within the newspaper. As a reflection on Kracauer's original report in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* it is a complete rejection of the hopes and expectations of the younger journalist (Kracauer was thirty two when the article appeared). Kracauer's hostility towards his own earlier idealism extends to the institutions in which his hopes had been placed. But even without reference to his earlier writings, it is clear that the author of *Georg* is increasingly suspicious of the youth movement. This is evident, for instance, in the introduction of a new member of staff, Herr Sommer. 'Dieser

schrieb über die neue Jugend, sie war ganz neu nach der Revolution, Herr Sommer glaubte an sie. Er trug einen Schillerkragen, rauchte nicht, grüßte auf besondere Art und war froh.' (*Georg*, p.47) Again Sommer shows no interest in the homoerotic side of the youth movement; instead he illustrates how easily it could be seduced by National Socialist rhetoric and symbolism.

'After the revolution' also meant 'after the war,' and in the German youth movements this was understood not simply as a time of opportunity, a new beginning, but also at least as much as a time of crisis.<sup>87</sup> While Kracauer had been aware of this, even in his relatively enthusiastic 1921 article, Sommer appears to be oblivious of the difficulties post-war youth had to face. These were the material deprivations brought on by the economic struggles of the republic and, connected to this, high rates of unemployment among all social classes. Many young people were also affected by instability in their home lives, because they had grown up without their fathers, many of whom did not survive the war (Fred seems to be an example of this). While some took this as a chance to challenge ossified, authoritarian structures at home, at school, and elsewhere, as illustrated in Ernst Glaeser's *Jahrgang 1902*, for others it also created uncertainty, confusion, and a lack of purpose.<sup>88</sup> Movements like the *Wandervogel*, which had already generated a number of offshoots before the war, now broke up into factions along party lines and gave way to the *Bünde*.

Walter Laqueur summarises the shift thus:

Generally the lyric romanticism of the *Wandervogel* had been replaced by something tougher – a romanticism that had been decisively affected by the First World War. Freedom and unrestraint had been sacrificed to duty and service in voluntary subjection to a greater whole. Whereas the

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<sup>87</sup> See Peukert, esp. pp.89-95.

<sup>88</sup> See Peukert, p.92

ideal figure of the *Wandervogel* had been the itinerant scholar, an anarchist if not a democrat, the aristocratic tendencies of the *Bünde* were reflected, not only in the exemplary image of the knight who sets himself a rule of conduct in deliberate contrast to that of the multitude, but also in a strict hierarchy within the *Bund*.<sup>89</sup>

From Kracauer's perspective in 1934 it was already clear that for many the next step from here led directly to National Socialism. His portrait of the naïve Sommer is consequently harsh, even though this is mainly conveyed through apparently harmless comments. In a short conversation Sommer tries to recruit Georg for the *Wandervogel*. Sommer, who resembles 'einem jener Feuerbrände, über die er selber am Sonnenwendfest sprang,' (*Georg*, p.128) enthuses about the

innige[...] Verbundenheit des jungen Geschlechts mit dem Kosmos [...] Zuletzt verdichtete sich die wogende Seele zu einem Dunstschleier, aus dem nur noch der Schillerkragen Sommers hervorsah. Wie ein Wegweiser glänzte er im Nebel, der Zukunft entgegen. 'Heil', sagte Georg, der sich verabschieden wollte; ein anderer Gruß kam hier nicht in Betracht. (*Georg*, p.140)

'Heil' was initially simply the greeting adopted by the *Wandervogel*, but by the time *Georg* was written it had, of course, assumed far more sinister connotations.<sup>90</sup> The narrator's reference to Sommer's outstretched arm as a signpost to the future, and his comment that no other greeting would have been appropriate, clearly plays upon this knowledge. Thus, in the immediate context of the onslaught of Sommer's enthusiasm the reader can sympathise with the slightly helpless Georg, and appreciate his acerbic remark as a defence against it. But the narrator also relates both Sommer's zeal and Georg's ingenuousness

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<sup>89</sup> Walter Z. Laqueur, *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement*, London Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962, 134f

<sup>90</sup> Laqueur, p.16

to the wider historical context and thus prompts the reader to judge Georg's response on those terms.

In *Georg*, homoeroticism is shown to work differently to the *Männergesellschaft* that could thrive in the *Wandervogel* and remains unacknowledged by Kracauer. Attempting to subvert the pseudo-classical idyll dreamt up foremost by Blüher, Kracauer shows a desire for a new, fulfilling type of relationship which falters under the pressure of social reality. Initially, the similarities between Georg's perceptions and the *Wandervogel's* rhetoric are obvious. The Ganymede image used by Flex, for instance, is also invoked in Georg's description of Fred. Georg, who is trying to avoid selling his knowledge of mathematics in the insurance sector, has just found a position as a private tutor to fourteen-year-old Fred:

Einen Augenblick zögerte Fred im Türrahmen, um die fremde Erscheinung zu prüfen. Ein schlanker, blonder Junge, in einer Art von Sportkostüm, der so leicht dastand, als habe ihn die Luft hergetragen. 'Dein Gürtel ist verrutscht', sagte Frau Anders. Fred schnallte den Gürtel fester und gab Georg die Hand. Er trug eine grüne Jacke aus Lodenstoff, die mit dem roten Schlips zusammen eine rauhe Hülle bildete, in der er wie ein verkleideter Prinzensohn aussah. An den Stuhl seiner Mutter gelehnt, beantwortete er die ihm gestellten Fragen in einem matten Ton, der den großen Augen widersprach, die unter den langen Wimpern hervorblickten. Ihr Ausdruck ließ auf ein Geheimnis schließen, das in dem Jungen so steckte wie er selbst in den groben Stoffen. [Georg] war noch vom Krieg her erfroren gewesen, und nun strömte zu seiner eigenen Überraschung eine wunderbare Wärme in ihn ein, die Knabenfigur war eine Verlockung, in den Augen die Traurigkeit kam aus einem fernen Ort, der zu erreichen sein mußte. (*Georg*, p.18)

The description of the young boy alludes to the Greek myth of the youth borne aloft, as well as to the fairytale motif of the enchanted prince in a coarse disguise. The first is a common motif in homoerotic art, while the fairytales as a promise of justice and happiness already appear in 'Das Ornament der

Masse'.<sup>91</sup> Despite the unmistakable irony with which the mother's interruptions of the budding romance are described, Georg's reaction to Fred is shown as genuine and designed to elicit the reader's sympathy. The relationship quickly progresses to the exchange of kisses and other caresses, and the appearance of Fred's cousin Margot causes jealousy, only to reinforce the desire between the two young men:

Die Hüftengegend Freds dehnte sich vor Georg, und er heftete seinen Blick auf den schlanken Knabenumriß, auf das Schwellen, das ihn erregte. Wie vorm Einschlafen schoß ihm durch den Kopf, daß man doch eigentlich von Gesicht zu Gesicht liebe, und nicht nur die Hüften. Eine heiße Hand streichelte ihn, und auch seine Hand tastete sich blindlings vor, um zu spüren, um zu greifen, aber zuletzt ebten sie, von der Scheu aufgehalten, wieder zurück. (*Georg*, p.40)

This mixture of an unfocussed desire, vacillating between the genital and a more general wish for intimacy, and shyness is characteristic of the emotional attachments fostered by the youth movement of the *Wandervogel*. Indeed, the scene, which takes place in Fred's room, is described, through the medium of Georg's imagination, as if it were set in a tent on the steppes. Yet this picturesque fantasy is then completely demolished by the reality of their fortnight in Sulzbach. This small town in the Black Forest is 'landschaftlich sehr empfohlen' (*Georg*, p.92). But the rather unromantic name of the place (chosen over, for instance, Triberg, Schönwald or Donaueschingen, which Kracauer had reported on in 1924) already alerts the reader to the fact that its remoteness is no protection against the mundane and unpleasant reality of the inflation, represented by a blackboard in the restaurant that announces the daily

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<sup>91</sup> See Sternweiler

price increases to the guests.<sup>92</sup> Whereas *Wandervögel* would sleep in tents or haystacks, Fred and Georg have booked not one, but two rooms in a pension. The holiday is an unmitigated disaster. When Georg finally hopes to resume the intimacy he used to share with Fred, the latter instead insists on telling him about his affair with Margot, which had gone on at the same time as his relationship with Georg. Georg is disappointed at the definitive failure of their relationship but also resentful that Fred has been so much more successful at finding new partners. Fred, by contrast, is blissfully unaware of the misery he causes. The expectations of Fred's environment interfere with his commitment to the older friend; a commitment which, it seems, has never quite matched Georg's. Fred's affection for Georg evidently does not outweigh his desire to be accepted by his family and friends.

While his relationship with Fred is painfully unsuccessful, Georg is also drawn to a girl. Beate, who attracts Georg's desire only to betray him with one of his colleagues, is at her most seductive for Georg when she dresses up for a masked ball: 'Was ihn besonders an der Figur reizte, war aber dies: daß sie ein Gemisch aus Junge und Mädchen darstellte, das von einer unbeschreiblichen Süße war.' (*Georg*, p.160) This realisation throws into sharper relief what Georg is looking for. He is evidently attracted by androgyny: in Fred it is the boy's youth and not yet developed masculinity, in Beate the boyishness that appeal to him.<sup>93</sup> Georg's desire for androgynous rather than womanly figures, his promiscuousness, and his use of prostitutes (see *Georg*, p.196f) suggest his

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<sup>92</sup> 'Schwarzwaldreise. Triberg -- Schönwald - Donaueschingen' in *Frankfurter Turmhäuser*, pp.225-30.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Hermann and Hermine in Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf* (1927), Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974, and Clawdia Chauchat and Přibislav Hippe in Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (1924), Frankfurt: Fischer, 1991.

unhappiness with the role of husband and father which society assigns to men. It is also, albeit in a rather vague manner, an expression of Georg's discontent with this society at large. Guy Hocquenghem's theory of homosexual desire can help to bring this discontent into sharper focus. Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, Hocquenghem sees society as organised around the phallus as a "despotic signifier," which 'determines the position of the three elements of the [Oedipal] triangle' as well as 'the quantity of possible pleasure'.<sup>94</sup> The phallus causes penis envy in girls and castration-anxiety in boys, and, perhaps most importantly, it forces all relations into a scheme where one is either the subject by virtue of having the phallus, or an object, forever desiring it. In this 'phallic' society homosexuality is oppressed (as is femininity): 'the homosexual is an artificial woman, the image of an image, since the woman herself is constituted as the sole sexual object only through the play of the imaginary'.<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, homosexuality is a reminder of the possibility of a different kind of society. Homosexual desire, as Hocquenghem describes it, is not desire directed at a particular object or person, but desire itself, 'a universally distributed set of diverse and non-exclusive drives, of erotisms based on the plugging in of organs according to the "and/and" rather than the "either/or" mode'.<sup>96</sup> He therefore argues that 'homosexual love is immensely superior, precisely because everything is possible at any moment. Organs look for each other and plug in, unaware of the law of exclusive disjunction.'<sup>97</sup> This may sound as though Hocquenghem merely confirms the cliché, presumably

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<sup>94</sup> Hocquenghem, p.95

<sup>95</sup> Hocquenghem, p.120

<sup>96</sup> Hocquenghem, p.117

<sup>97</sup> Hocquenghem, p.131

familiar to Georg's rather cruelly exploited lover Elli, that 'Männer wollen immer nur das Eine'. However, Hocquenghem's point is that *all* people want above all to feel and to fulfil desire, that we all desire desire, but that homosexual sex is the only practice in existence which allows its fulfilment. For most - heterosexual - people pleasure is bought at the price of the fear and pain imposed by the Oedipus complex and the rule of the phallus. Gays can evade this particular, Oedipal, form of oppression and live in an entirely different 'social relation which is not vertical but horizontal', even though they are still frequently subjected to heterosexist oppression.<sup>98</sup>

While Hocquenghem projects a utopian vision for the gay movement of the 1970s that sheds some light on Georg's dream, Ulfried Geuter provides an explanation for why that dream turned sour. Geuter analyses the historical diaries and letters of many young *Wandervögel* who found themselves in relationships occupying an area somewhere between friendship and homosexuality. Shyness of girls and/or fear of their intrusion into such apparently perfect relationships are typical. The motivations of the older and the younger partner are not, however, necessarily the same. According to Geuter, adolescents may pass through a stage of narcissistic choices of partners:

Bei dieser [Wahl] richtet sich nicht nur die Sehnsucht, sondern auch die Sinnlichkeit auf den gleichgeschlechtlichen Freund, nicht allerdings, um in einer gleichgeschlechtlichen Beziehung die erwachsene Form der Objektwahl zu finden, vielmehr um sich in dieser Beziehung selbst zu entdecken, auch die eigene Geschlechtlichkeit. Entsprechend wird, psychoanalytisch gesprochen, die Energie der libidinösen Besetzung des Freundes abgezogen, wenn sich das Ich stabilisiert hat.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Hocquenghem, p. 100

<sup>99</sup> Geuter, p. 154

This indeed seems to be what happens to Fred. It takes him some time to complete the transferral of his sexual feelings from a member of the same sex – Georg – to a member of the opposite sex, and his affair with Margot goes on while he still continues the increasingly strained relationship with Georg. Nevertheless he finally makes the break, spends some time in the United States and returns with a broken engagement already behind him, no shortage of girlfriends, and confident that he will surely get married.

Beyond Fred's individual failure to live up to Georg's needs, family life, which Fred chooses over the relationship with Georg, is in itself shown to be utterly destructive. This is most drastically demonstrated in the Ackermann murder trial, on which Georg reports for his newspaper. Like most other of Georg's articles specified in the novel, the Ackermann case is based on a real story, the trial of Fritz Angerstein, for which Kracauer was *Sonderberichterstatter* of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in July 1925.<sup>100</sup> Angerstein had killed five people, using a hatchet and a hunting knife. In his report 'Die Tat ohne Täter', Kracauer focuses on the 'Mißverhältnis zwischen der Person und der Tat,' the fact that Angerstein is an inconspicuous, meek and rather dull petty bourgeois who cannot comprehend his own crime.<sup>101</sup> Kracauer devotes considerable space to psychological speculations about the motive, including a psychologist's expert statement. Angerstein apparently suffered from repressed fears and feelings of anger since his childhood. At the centre of the crime, however, is the Angersteins' marriage. Kracauer reports that Angerstein loved his wife and that the neighbours believed the marriage to have been happy. Yet

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<sup>100</sup> See Kracauer, 'Die Tat ohne Täter', in: *Schriften 5.1*, pp.318-22

<sup>101</sup> 'Die Tat ohne Täter', p.318.

he describes the wife as sick, feeble, and excitable, even calling her a hysteric.<sup>102</sup> He also suggests that her religious beliefs interfered with the couple's sex life. The murders are triggered by a burnt gruel, but the real cause lies in the family circumstances, past and present:

die Frau, an die er fixiert ist, reißt ihn mit sich in die Sehnsucht des Sterbens, des Endens. Er mag an Selbstmord gedacht haben, als er sie erstach - aber woher der Amoklauf mit Hirschfänger und Beil, das sinnlose Zerschlagen der unbeteiligten Schädeldecken? [...] Die bestialischen Instinkte, finstere Wünsche, schon von Kindheit an genährt, nicht gewußter Haß: der ganze Sprengstoff in den Kellerverließen wird an die Oberfläche geschleudert und entlädt sich vulkanisch.<sup>103</sup>

Kracauer does not explore the oedipal features of the situation: Angerstein's childhood desires, frustrated then and frustrated again now by his allegedly sickly and bigoted wife, the repressed fury, originally most likely directed against the father, and now against family, neighbours, perhaps colleagues, who represent the forces which keep him down and stop him from fulfilling his desires. Instead, in his 1925 report Kracauer takes the crime and its roots in the unconscious as a warning to a society 'in der die Gegenstände und ihre Gesetze die Herrschaft sich anmaßen über die Seele'.<sup>104</sup> It is absorbed into the anti-modern agenda Kracauer has at this point in his career.

Georg is less high-minded. He is completely engrossed by the case, and seems in awe of a colleague who claims to find the murder boring, but then writes a fascinating reportage about it in which Georg hardly recognises the trial he himself has witnessed.<sup>105</sup> In the novel, even though Kracauer lifts some

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<sup>102</sup> 'Die Tat ohne Täter', p.319/20.

<sup>103</sup> 'Die Tat ohne Täter', p.319.

<sup>104</sup> 'Die Tat ohne Täter', p.321.

<sup>105</sup> This colleague, Benario, could be a slightly ironised version of Kracauer himself. He signs himself with the last letters of his name 'Rio', whereas Kracauer often, as in the Angerstein case, uses the first letters, 'Kr'. The title of Benario's article, 'Ein langweiliger Morder' sums up the

phrases almost verbatim from his article, the story assumes a different meaning. There are only two victims, Ackermann's wife and his mother-in-law, focusing more closely on the family as an institution that fails the individual and becomes a breeding ground of violence. However, Georg does not mention Ackermann's childhood, and two psychiatrists are only mentioned in passing. Interestingly, in this version, the wife is no longer a hysteric, and any sexual frustration is blamed entirely on her illness. Instead, Georg stresses Ackermann's love for his wife, and the murder is even described as 'eine rote Liebesblüte' (Georg, p.58). The emphasis is on the family's material circumstances, their inability to pay for treatment for the wife's sickness and on Ackermann's thefts at work. The whole family is caught up in appalling misery; even a small mistake, such as burning the gruel, is a catastrophe, the sick wife having to go without food as a result. The members of this family clearly care for one another, unlike the couples and mothers with sons Georg meets socially, and yet they not only cannot make each other happy, but everything they do seems to propel them further along a path which ends in violent deaths, including Ackermann's inevitable execution. In Georg's perception the Ackermanns' marriage reveals that 'normal', heterosexual relationships are only a fragile cover over a potential hell. Marriage is meant to fulfil the promise of deferred gratification with which the little boy is helped to overcome the trauma of renunciation and the threat of castration. In Ackermann's case, this promise has been broken. His wife cannot respond to

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impression Kracauer tried to give of Angerstein in his piece for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, and, as Kracauer used Angerstein's deed to pursue his own, philosophical agenda, Benario uses the ostensibly boring Ackermann as material for a display of his brilliance. In this respect Benario might be a way for Kracauer to mock his self-confidence as a successful and powerful journalist until his career was curtailed by the political developments in Germany

his sexual desires, and the achievement of possible compensations, such as power or status, is thwarted by Ackermann's miserable social and economic circumstances. Marriage is a trap; some people manage to escape from it, for others, perhaps the more caring ones like Ackermann, it becomes murderous.

While Kracauer's fictionalised version of the case treats the dead woman much more sympathetically, it is worth noting that he also turns the murdering husband into a victim, a more tragic victim even than the slaughtered wife. This reversal of responsibility connects *Georg* to a trend for images of sexual murders in German post-war art.<sup>106</sup> Here the motive of the killings appears to be hatred rather than lust, but as Maria Tatar has pointed out, the two are frequently linked in depictions of *Lustmord*.<sup>107</sup> She claims that in sexual murders the womb is often attacked as well as the genitals, suggesting that there is at least an element of matricide to those killings.<sup>108</sup> This can be explained, according to Tatar, by 'the psychic fall-out of the war years: the sense of resentment directed against victors, non-combatants, and military chiefs alike; the crisis of male subjectivity occasioned by a sense of military defeat; and a painfully acute sense of the body's vulnerability to fragmentation, mutilation and dismemberment,' adding up to the awareness of the 'ambivalence that the mother's gift of life is also the gift of death.'<sup>109</sup> Tatar notes that in *Lustmord* paintings the victims become eclipsed by the perpetrators, and this is certainly also the case in Kracauer's fictionalisation of

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<sup>106</sup> Most notable are the paintings of Otto Dix, e.g. two pictures entitled 'Lustmord' and one entitled 'Mord', all from 1922, George Grosz's drawings, and films such as Fritz Lang's *M* and Robert Wiene's *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari*.

<sup>107</sup> Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany*, Princeton: Princeton UP,

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<sup>108</sup> Tatar, p. 10.

<sup>109</sup> Tatar, p. 12 and p. 34

the Angerstein case. The nevertheless relatively sympathetic portrayal of Ackermann's murdered wife gives way to overt misogyny in the cases of the arch-rivals Frau Heinisch and Frau Heydenreich. At the dinner party with which the novel opens Frau Heydenreich had inflicted a painful defeat on Frau Heinisch by monopolising the star guest of the evening, a revolutionary wanted by the police. The war continues as Frau Heydenreich's late arrival for the next party again causes tension:

“Meine Liebe, ich komme doch nicht zu spät –“

Alle Gesichter führen hoch. Frau Heydenreich ging siegreich auf Frau Heinisch zu, die ebenfalls Meine Liebe sagte, und entschuldigte nochmals ihren Mann, der heute früh habe verreisen müssen. Als sich die beiden Meine Lieben kreuzten, klirrte es leicht. Vielleicht wurde das Klirren auch durch Frau Heydenreichs Toilette verursacht, deren Eleganz gerade soweit abgeblendet war, als es die Inflation und die Teilnahme am Umsturz der Gesellschaft erforderlich machte. Beate hob einem fremden Tier gleich den Kopf und zog die Luft ein. (*Georg*, p.114)

Frau Heydenreich greets Georg rather condescendingly, leaving him feeling quite wounded. While those two women compete on the bourgeois woman's traditional ground of fashion, cookery and childcare, others try to outdo each other intellectually and politically. One of these is Fräulein Samuel, ‘eine abgewetzte Person mit schwach gekrümmtem Rücken und stahlharten Brillengläsern, die ihr auf der Nase saßen, wie Paragraphen vor einem Text’ (*Georg*, p.9). Fräulein Samuel identifies herself not in terms of the role of wife and mother, but through her fervour as a member of a political organisation: “Wir werden vom Bund aus eine geharnischte Solidaritätserklärung erlassen”, schrie Fräulein Samuel. Sie [...] schwenkte das Messer wie eine Fahne.’ (*Georg*, p.117) Thus the women Georg meets tend to terrify him by more or less drastically threatening (symbolic) castration. The older, married women,

including Frau Anders, Fred's mother, are so involved in their own private affairs that they either fail to notice altogether what goes on around them. or, when they do notice, cynically use it for their own ends.

Georg is also conscious of the roles played by the males in all this. They, too, are caught up in the courtship and status games the women play. More than the women, they assert their status through political debate: of course this is mainly true for Georg's colleagues, but also for men like Dr. Rosin, who is present at the dinner party. Some, however, also compete in the sexual arena. Dr. Wolff, for instance, is a notorious adulterer, and on this occasion he pursues Beate, which Georg finds particularly upsetting (see *Georg*, p.223 and p.119). Herr Bonnet, whose wife combines political and domestic ambitions, first has affairs and then leaves his wife altogether. 'Georg sah: die weiße Landstraße schleicht durch die Mittagshitze zum Häuschen, Frau Bonnet quirlt den Schnee in der Küche, und im Gras am Waldrand liegt, halb verdorrt schon, der Mann. So hatte er sich zu guter Letzt in die Verkommenheit geflüchtet?' (*Georg*, p.223) Georg picks up the expression used by the women to condemn Bonnet's actions, indicating the price to be paid for what is otherwise clearly described as an escape. As if this was not enough, Kracauer also shows the product of this society:

Georg sah ihn zum erstenmal und war ganz betroffen von seinem Anblick. Denn da Frau Heinisch bei jeder Gelegenheit stolz versicherte, daß sie Willi im Interesse des Weltfriedens nicht mit Bleisoldaten zu spielen erlaubte, hatte er sich den Jungen immer als ein besonders inniges Musterbübchen vorgestellt. Statt dessen entpuppte sich Willi als ein rötlicher, fatter Brocken, der so wenig an die Verwirklichung des Weltfriedens dachte, daß er seine Fäuste gegen seine Mutter erhob. Durch die Art der Erziehung schien dieser mit Konditorsachen überfütterte Kriegsbengel nicht gebändigt, sondern eher noch streitbarer geworden zu sein. (*Georg*, p.112)

Georg clearly holds Frau Heinisch's brand of competitive pacifism responsible for Willi's unappealing personality. Although the description of Willi as a 'Kriegsbengel' suggests wider social reasons for his behaviour, Georg does not pursue this line of thought – that is left to the reader. Georg's experiences of heterosexual family life with all it implies thus seems not only unappealing, but also responsible for considerable misery and even evil

Yet Georg's search for an alternative way of life is not successful, either. The narrator exposes Georg's feelings of inadequacy and resentment at Fred's successes, and this reflects rather badly on Georg. He convinces himself, for example, that Margot is really interested in him, not in Fred, a much more flattering explanation for the tensions her presence causes than the truth – Margot takes Fred away from Georg, having realised what the nature of Fred and Georg's relationship is. While the narrator provides hints of this to the reader all along, a curious smile on Fred's face, for instance, when Georg brags that Margot seems to fancy him, Georg is devastated when he finds out (*Georg*, p.39). Yet because he has to a large extent fooled himself he is an object of ridicule rather than pity for the reader. All this does not mean, however, that the narrator takes Fred's side in any way. On the contrary, his development depicts – even satirizes - the normal development of a sensitive boy into an average, successful bourgeois. Stefan Oswald sees this 'erfolgreiche Integration in die Gesellschaft, [die] allerdings mit der völligen Übernahme der herrschenden Wertmaßstäbe und Verhaltensweisen erkaufte [wird]' as the foil for Georg's, however naïve, integrity:

Vor diesem Hintergrund gewinnt die Entwicklung Georgs gerade im Scheitern seiner Integrationsversuche ihre positive Qualität: persönlicher, beruflicher und gesellschaftlicher Erfolg wird – so stellt

es der Roman dar – notwendigerweise mit dem Verlust der Persönlichkeit und der Korrumpierung eigener Überzeugung bezahlt. Georgs Position scheint dagegen den Anspruch auf Subjektivität und auf Nicht-Anpassung, auch um den Preis der Isolation und des Entzugs der Existenzgrundlage, konsequent durchzuhalten.<sup>110</sup>

While this can be argued in the case of Georg's social and political conduct (although the first section of this chapter has already argued that in this respect, too, Georg is a much more ambiguous figure), in his sexual life Georg is anything but principled. The very real and quite touching affection he feels for Fred at the beginning (the 'wunderbare Wärme' flowing into one who was 'noch vom Krieg her erfroren') quickly turns into petty jealousy (*Georg*, p.18). Presumably as a reaction to the intrusion of Margot, and even though Georg maintains that she is interested in him, not Fred, Georg begins an affair with Elli, and he even tells Fred about this. The narrator makes it obvious that Georg has hardly any feelings for Elli at all: 'Während der Teestunde, die der Liebe regelmäßig voranzugehen pflegte, empfand er eine Langeweile, als ob er in einem Wartesaal auf das Eintreffen des Zuges warte, der sich beträchtlich verspätete.' (*Georg*, p.55) The train station as a symbol for something desired is already familiar from *Ginster*, but here the symbolism is so crude that it turns against Georg.

Kracauer's rejection of heterosexuality is somewhat tempered by the attraction he has Georg feel for Beate. While she is most appealing when she is at her most androgynous, it is initially just the fact that she seems different from the phallic wives and man-chasers that attracts Georg. This suggests that, despite the often misogynistic representations of women, Georg is not repelled

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<sup>110</sup> Stefan Oswald, 'Georg oder die Exotik des Alltags. Zu einem Roman Siegfried Kracauers' in *Protokolle*, 1978, vol 2, pp.1-39, 8.

by 'Woman' as a category, but by a structure in which both men and women play socially prescribed roles, and which grants neither of them fulfilment. Fred and Beate, on the other hand, seem to promise Georg a different kind of relationship, even though both ultimately let him down. As this has been played down in the secondary literature, it is important to emphasise that Georg's relationships both with Beate and with Fred are clearly sexual ones. Georg desires Beate because she appears to be free from the domination of heterosexual structures. Georg hopes that he will be able to have a relationship based on mutual desire, uncomplicated by thoughts of marriage, with Beate. In Hocquenghem's terms, he thinks she is someone with whom both their 'organs [could] look for each other and plug in, unaware of the law of exclusive disjunction'.<sup>111</sup> Beate, however, not only cheats Georg out of the fulfilment of his desires, she calculatingly uses him to meet his more established colleagues. When Georg's dream of an equal and unrepressed relationship with Beate shatters, the power games of the heterosexual world return with a vengeance. In his encounter with the costume the release of his long pent-up desires and the revenge for Beate's humiliating behaviour run into one another.

His relationship with Fred, while it lasts, comes closest to fulfilling both Georg's diffuse longing for intimacy and his sexual desire. A scene between Fred and Georg that is brought about by Margot's appearance shows how both aspects of desire are intertwined. Georg first provokes an outburst of jealousy in Fred, who fears that Georg's other acquaintances will come between them. Georg then reassures Fred 'Ich bin ja bei dir' (*Georg*, p.40). This moment of emotional closeness is immediately succeeded by Georg being

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<sup>111</sup> Hocquenghem, p.131

aroused by the sight of Fred's body. An exchange of fumbled caresses leads, in turn, back to an intimacy based on shared confidences: 'Sie gossen die letzten Tage aus und schütteten ihre Inhalte solange durcheinander, bis aus den zwei Leben ein einziges wurde, das nicht aufhören wollte zu rieseln.' (*Georg*, p.40)

For Georg the relationship with Fred provides a glimpse of a different way of being. Hocquenghem describes his utopia as a place where 'the opposition between the collective and the individual is transcended,' and where relationships are 'circular and horizontal, annular and with no signifier'.<sup>112</sup>

There are clear differences between Georg's relationship with Fred, which is threatened by any desire from or towards a third person, and Hocquenghem's celebration of 'circular' promiscuity, and these differences have much to do with the fact that Hocquenghem writes about the (pre-AIDS) late 1970s whereas *Georg* is set in the 1920s. Georg's delight in losing himself in the relationship, in the absence of any hierarchy imposed upon them by a 'signifier,' and in the endlessness of their union (even if the image is not a circular one) attempts to evoke a different way of living which, arguably, returns in Hocquenghem's vision. Yet the way in which Kracauer uses brief glimpses of an idealised homoerotic relationship between Georg and Fred to project his utopia stays closer to Blüher's *Wandervogel* mythology with its celebration of pederasty and its misogyny than Kracauer could have wished.

In *Georg*, Kracauer presents his final reckoning with the Weimar Republic, its failed revolution, corrupt public sphere, self-obsessed bourgeoisie and deluded proletarian political activists. He offers instead, as a kind of refuge from the endless conflicts of public political life, a utopian vision of a

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<sup>112</sup> Hocquenghem, p.147

completely different kind of existence. Georg's hopes for such a life based on desire and intimacy are, however, also dashed when his potential partners turn out to prefer the very society from which Georg wants to escape. Georg does not manage to set up a homoerotic counterculture as a challenge to the hierarchical, authoritarian and dishonest Weimar society which defeats him at every turn. What also becomes clear, however, is that Georg's, and, to a lesser extent, Kracauer's, homoerotic utopia is built on a profound mistrust, even hatred of certain 'feminine' roles which frequently slips into misogyny. At the end of his Weimar experience Kracauer had shed many illusions. He emerged 'hellsichtig', like his alter ego Ginster, but, like his other incarnation Georg, he had also lost much. More was yet to follow.

## Conclusion

This thesis has followed Kracauer's work from the beginning to the end of the Weimar Republic. Kracauer set out on this 'brief, headlong tour of the fascinating, and fateful, choices made possible by the modern world' with considerable misgivings about what modernity would mean for him and for his contemporaries. While he gradually opened up to the possibilities inherent in a changing society, German politics took a turn to the right which scuppered Kracauer's hopes, such as they were. In his work this development is reflected in a shift of tone from initial disdain for the modern world, first to a growing excitement over the opportunities for change and then to the disillusionment and bitterness of the last text considered here, *Georg*.

This study has tracked those changes in Kracauer's work, and it has done so with far more attention to the details of imagery and language in which Kracauer expressed his response to the events unfolding around him than has been attempted before. A recurrent dilemma for Kracauer is his position as an intellectual and his relation to the social struggles he witnesses. What has emerged is the central function in Kracauer's work of a certain attitude, personified by the *flâneur*, of detached observation. The *flâneur* is a paradigm that Kracauer first adopts and subsequently attempts to struggle free from. From the anti-modern nostalgia of *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*, via the hesitant opening to mundane reality – still in tension with a religious orientation – of *Der Detektiv-Roman*, to the materialism of 'Die Bibel auf Deutsch' and 'Das Ornament der Masse', Kracauer slowly but thoroughly develops a fascination with the social world around him. And yet there is a barrier between the bourgeois intellectual Kracauer and the masses who constitute that social

reality that becomes increasingly burdensome. Kracauer was aware of this barrier and understood that, while it had some protective value, it ultimately interfered too much with his political effectiveness. In *Ginster*, Kracauer set about exploring the historical as well as more personal influences which contributed to the inability of a certain type of bourgeois intellectual to fully engage with wider society. However, despite the complex and skilful reflection on the intellectual's condition of disengagement Kracauer presents in *Ginster*, a subtext that was already present in 'Das Ornament der Masse' returns in *Die Angestellten* and, this time with a vengeance, in *Georg*.

The exploration of Kracauer's representations of women and of the assumptions he makes about gender has turned out to be one of the most revealing parts of this study. It is not a matter of exposing Kracauer's misogyny – there are some moments of hostility in *Georg*, but on the whole Kracauer's work demonstrates considerable interest in the lives of women. Rather, the intellectual's defensive barrier against the challenges of modernity, which had given rise to Kracauer's fetishisation of the Tiller Girls, survives despite Kracauer's attempt to pull it down by working through its causes. As *Die Angestellten* shows, despite his declared intention and best efforts, Kracauer ultimately fails – or, to be more accurate, refuses – to engage with the subjects of his study. This is, to be sure, true for both the men and the women involved, but it is Kracauer's preconceptions of women's lives and of the meanings women seek (and sometimes find) in their lives which make Kracauer's failure most visible. In *Georg*, the matter becomes more troublesome. Here, Kracauer projects a utopian, fulfilling way of life, although this vision necessarily collapses, as any historical opportunity for realising it has catastrophically been

destroyed. Kracauer grounds his utopia in homoeroticism, and while this might not necessarily lead to misogyny, Kracauer does take just that step. The oppressive and exploitative character of 'normal', heterosexual society is embodied largely through female characters and, moreover, Kracauer's utopia draws on the avowedly misogynistic ideas current in the youth movement. Again, Kracauer's this time quite hostile representation of women reveals a distorting defensiveness against the more challenging aspects of modern society.

Despite his genuine interest in the social world and his undoubted desire to contribute to improving it, Kracauer clearly has blind spots in his perception of how others experience modern society and what they fear, need, or desire from modernity. Kracauer's perspective is not limited simply by gender, much of his specific approach is clearly linked to his bourgeois, intellectual background. Nevertheless, his gender bias – as well being problematic in itself, of course - is also a particularly clear instance of how Kracauer's skewed perception compromises his political vision. Most obviously in *Georg*, the utopia Kracauer projects runs the risk of excluding too many of those whose interests he purports to defend.

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