

Siegfried Kracauer: Documentary Realist and Critic of Ideological 'Homelessness'

Ansgar Martins
Translated by Lars Fischer

Siegfried Kracauer (1889–1966) was born into a Jewish family in Frankfurt.¹ Following his parents' wishes, he studied architecture, yet even then his true interests lay elsewhere, as his early engagement with Georg Simmel and phenomenology indicates. Already as a student, Kracauer wrote substantial philosophical texts, yet these would be published only in 2004. Viewed as a maverick by most established academics throughout his professional life, Kracauer enjoyed broad acclaim in the 1920s as a journalist working for Germany's then foremost (liberal) daily, the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. In this prestigious capacity, he developed meaningful intellectual relationships with Benjamin, Bloch, and Adorno, and it is principally as their associate that he is still cited.² His relationship with Adorno, whom he had mentored in his early years, though often conflicted, would remain particularly fond. Having encountered the turmoil of the disintegrating Weimar Republic in the early 1930s in Berlin, he and his wife Elisabeth left Germany immediately

after the Reichstag fire. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* dropped him soon after. It was during his years of extreme disillusionment and poverty in Paris that Kracauer, hoping for a position in the United States, developed the broad outline of the film theory that he would later publish to considerable acclaim. Only in 1941, at the eleventh hour, were Kracauer and his wife able to leave Europe via Marseille and Lisbon for New York. Though their financial situation remained precarious for another decade, Kracauer soon felt at home in the United States. He decided henceforth to publish only in English and devoted all his energy to enemy reconnaissance. Keeping himself afloat with precarious fellowships, he was initially affiliated with the MoMA Film Library. Later, he regularly served as a consultant for empirical social-science research projects and evaluated research proposals for various foundations. Kracauer gradually found new interlocutors in the likes of Erwin Panofsky, Paul Lazarsfeld, Hans Blumenberg, and the 'Poetics and Hermeneutics' circle.³

His more substantive works include a discussion of the transcendental foundations of sociology (1922); metaphysical reflections on the 'trivial' genre of the detective novel (1922–5); a sociological and literary study of the salaried employees in Weimar Germany under the spell of the early culture industry (1929–30); two autobiographical novels, of which only the first, *Ginster* (1928), was published during his lifetime; a generally underrated 'social biography' of the composer Jacques Offenbach and the Second Empire (1938), in which he paid precious little attention to Offenbach's compositions; studies on the functioning of 'totalitarian propaganda' in Germany and Italy (around 1940); group-psychological accounts of the German character, drawing on Weimar cinema as a case study (1947), and people's 'satellite mentality' in countries in the Soviet sphere of influence (1956); a work of film theory focusing on the possibilities of representing 'physical reality' from the 'perspective of the camera' (1960); and an unfinished epistemology of history.

The biographical caesura of his emigration is imprinted on the evolution of his theory. Kracauer scholarship tends to distinguish between his earlier, more political works published in Germany and his later, more strongly empirical and aesthetic works that came out in the United States.⁴ His politics, however, do not lend themselves to any straightforward characterization. One might say that he began as a cultural critic influenced by vitalism, subsequently became a Marxist, and then a liberal humanist – and yet none of these labels truly seem to fit. Not least, one can identify numerous continuities that cut across these outward distinctions. Overall, his texts from the later Weimar years, written between 1926 and 1933, are the ones that connect him most intimately with the development of critical theory. Kracauer was, for many years, categorized unquestioningly as a proponent of critical theory.⁵ In the 1960s, it was his association with Adorno and Benjamin (as well as Bloch) that secured him

a readership. Especially in the eyes of the 'younger critics', Kracauer noted in 1964, the four of them formed 'a group that stands out. I would have thought that we can only welcome this state of affairs'.⁶ Yet this all too neat association with critical theory has detracted from a fuller understanding of his entirely idiosyncratic approach and its transformations over the years.

'THE FIGURE OF THE COLLECTOR': CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY IN KRACAUER'S WORK

Throughout all his texts, Kracauer insisted on the need to argue in a concrete phenomenological manner and maintain a strict focus on the object at hand. His 'empathic method'⁷ fundamentally challenged the validity of systematic conceptual dispositions and instead focused on the heterogeneity of empirical experience and the world of objects ('According to his theory, Columbus had to land in India').⁸ His critical contribution, then, lies in his micrological insistence on the logic of the slightest object or phenomenon. As an empathic observer, he directed his gaze towards the usually overlooked pathologies, promises of happiness, and demands of everyday life and the 'lifeworld' [*Lebenswelt*],⁹ which for him formed the blind spot of the grand theories. 'How is everyday life supposed to change if even those qualified to put the cat among the pigeons ignore it?'¹⁰

It is a reflection of Kracauer's *realism* and *pluralism* that he deployed a range of media and modes of expression in approaching the motley assortment of coexisting objects. Their philosophical sophistication notwithstanding, his acclaimed texts from the 1920s were recognizably journalistic in character; indeed, they decisively helped shape the genre of the political feuilleton.¹¹ Kracauer's writings also reflect the gaze of the trained architect. He frequently presented systematic

problems in the form of geometrical allegories and 'topographical' images, not to mention those texts which dealt explicitly with street maps, streets, buildings, and interiors.¹² Writing articles from the vantage point of a monocle or the apparently doomed umbrella, or offering an account of his all too human and crisis-ridden relationship with his typewriter,¹³ he transcended the conventional realms of journalism, literature, and theory. With enormous plasticity he demonstrated what, on his reading, the period after the First World War had itself confirmed with enormous plasticity – namely, that the objects humans had created were turning into independent beings with a life of their own that interacted with one another and with the humans. In the meantime, Kracauer also wrote two autobiographical novels in which he developed the same critical diagnosis of his time and portrayed the abandonment and insecurity of the contingent subject in the 'Age of the Masses'. The principal protagonists, Ginster and Georg, frequently seem to be only passive participants who merely respond to an environment that cajoles them into taking on certain roles.¹⁴ This speculative literary social philosophy stands in marked contrast to Kracauer's focus on empirical social research following his emigration. In his late film theory, the cinema screen eventually emerged as a far more reliable means of conveying the experience of physical-sensory reality.

What united these differing methodological and stylistic approaches was their phenomenological focus on the objects at hand. Against this backdrop, Kracauer was consistently concerned with the *indirect* juxtaposition of phenomena: 'To focus directly upon ideas is at any rate a sure means never to grasp them... Ideas manifest themselves rather in by-ways, in unobtrusive facts'.¹⁵ Consequently, general problems too could be approached only circuitously, by sounding out contingent phenomena and their *surface appearance*. Like the notion of the anteroom, the term 'surface appearance'

was among Kracauer's central theoretical concepts. It points to the transitory and relative nature of human knowledge and insight. Yet Kracauer went further and argued that the most profound and substantial problems actually revealed themselves in the surface appearance of *the object at hand*. To give one example, Kracauer rejected the notion that National Socialism was a masked bourgeois-capitalist counter-revolution. If fascism masked anything it was the goals and interests of the concrete gang of rulers. Yet this should not detract from the need to take its ideology seriously on its own terms. Instead of tearing off the 'mask', 'as though one obviously knows already who has deigned to hide behind it',¹⁶ one needed to dissect the mask itself. 'Only the character of the mask may, at best, reveal the nature of the monster wearing it, provided, that it is actually possible to tear off its mask'.¹⁷

One of the results of Kracauer's vigilance in this regard was his immediate insistence, in 1933 – when many on the left still considered it a propagandistic red herring – on the centrality to National Socialism of anti-semitism and the 'force of the annihilatory intent' it reflected.¹⁸ Yet Kracauer's approach pertained not only to major ideologies such as National Socialism. For him, the symptoms allowing for a valid diagnosis articulated themselves, as a matter of principle, in 'inconspicuous surface appearances'. It was 'precisely because of their nescience' that they offered 'direct access to the basic content of social reality'.¹⁹ The streamlining character of the capitalist mode of production, for instance, was, to his mind, revealed paradigmatically by the Tiller Girls. This dance troupe presented not individual human beings but 'indivisible clusters of girls' as 'ornaments'.²⁰ Similarly, the displacement of umbrellas by light waterproof raincoats with hoods bore testimony to the dwindling of the bourgeois generosity of spirit.²¹

In his unfinished and posthumously published study on the writing of history, Kracauer took stock of the continuity of his

work, which he saw precisely in the recording of *discontinuities*. The book, he wrote, was

another attempt of mine to bring out the significance of areas whose claim to be acknowledged in their own right has not yet been recognized. ... So at long last all my main efforts, so incoherent on the surface, fall into line – they all have served, and continue to serve, a single purpose: the rehabilitation of objectives and modes of being which still lack a name and hence are overlooked or misjudged.²²

He owed this focus on symptomatic details and novel phenomena to his first teacher, Georg Simmel. In the course of the 1920s, against the backdrop of his exchange with Bloch, Benjamin, and Adorno, Kracauer developed his mode of essayistic narration into an entirely new and stringent method of socio-philosophical critique.²³ In 1930, Benjamin famously praised his friend Kracauer as

a rag collector... recovering rags of speech and linguistic snippets with his stick. Mumbling cantankerously and a little boozily, he tosses them into his cart, not without, on occasion, derisively letting one of these faded calico rags... flutter in the morning breeze. A rag collector out at the crack of dawn on the day of revolution.²⁴

Yet the revolutionary political perspective Kracauer still shared with Benjamin in 1930 gradually receded after 1933 and no longer featured in his later work (although he did continue to acknowledge Marx's qualities as a historian). In the late monographs on film and historiography, he is 'merely' concerned with adequate ways of approaching concrete individual phenomena in their diversity, without any revolutionary backdrop. As he noted in 1966 in a letter to Rolf Tiedemann, he still valued Benjamin's messianic plea 'that nothing should ever be lost'.²⁵ In *History*, he drew on this demand to ground his insistence on the viability of forms of historiography that stay close to the sources, but he now viewed this not as a political but as a 'theological argument': '[T]he "complete assemblage of the smallest facts" is required for the reason

that nothing should go lost. It is as if the fact-oriented accounts breathed pity with the dead. This vindicates the figure of the *collector*'.²⁶ How far removed this sorrowful collector was from the Marxist Kracauer of the 1920s is illustrated by a letter to Bloch. Back in 1926, when he first conceived of the plan to write a philosophy of history, Kracauer had complemented the notion 'that nothing should ever be forgotten' with the claim that 'nothing that is unforgotten will remain untransformed'.²⁷ This 'motif of transformation',²⁸ located in the utopian abyss between theology and revolution, was not lost without trace, though. His experience as a refugee and his encounter with US democracy formed the counterpoint to its disappearance from Kracauer's horizon.

DIALECTICS AND THE PARTICULAR: KRACAUER'S CONTROVERSY WITH CRITICAL THEORY

Philosophers have frequently found Kracauer's realism, pluralism, and documentary approach too imprecise.²⁹ In his reckoning with his former mentor, Adorno noted in 1964 that Kracauer felt no 'desire for the rigorous mediation within the object itself, no urge to evince the essential at the heart of individuation processes'.³⁰ Yet paradoxically, Adorno added, this was precisely the source of Kracauer's strength: 'The greater the blindness and abandon with which he devoted himself to the subject matter... the more fecund was the result'.³¹ Since Kracauer did in fact draw out the 'essential' – by which Adorno meant the social relations refracted in the slightest detail – in his texts well into the 1930s, this was a tendentious claim on Adorno's part. The phenomena he sought out with abandon were characterized precisely by the fact that they revealed the state of society at large.

There can be no doubt that Kracauer's Weimar-era texts directly prefigured Adorno's

mode of philosophizing, be it in terms of the critique of language,³² the predilection for the essayistic form,³³ or – as an (anti-) methodology – the ‘construction’ of systematic problems in the form of a ‘mosaic’³⁴ of characteristic individual features in which the logic of the whole shines through. Both methodologically and in terms of its content, Adorno’s own *Habilitation* (postdoctoral thesis), *Kierkegaard*, which he dedicated to his mentor Kracauer, still reflected this micrological montage technique and the ‘motif of transformation’. Yet the impulse that for Kracauer was a way out of conceptual philosophy Adorno directed back into philosophy, albeit a philosophy intensely critical of concepts. This move resulted not least from his engagement with Hegel, which Horkheimer initiated in the context of their dialectics project. For Adorno, it was the further differentiation of his dialectics that led him away from the bifurcated dialectical and social perspective of the 1920s; for Kracauer, it was his continued questioning of dialectics on behalf of dispersed and overlooked phenomena. The counterpart to Adorno’s critique of Kracauer’s neglect of ‘mediation’, then, was Kracauer’s critique of Adorno’s universalization of dialectics. The latter, on Kracauer’s reading, was no longer connected to individual sensate objects, yet they alone could provide the point of departure for critical judgements. Adorno’s ‘rejection of any ontological stipulation in favour of an infinite dialectics which penetrates all concrete things and entities’, Kracauer wrote, ‘seems inseparable from a certain arbitrariness, an absence of content and direction’.³⁵ Kracauer reproached the sort of universally mediating dialectics he attributed to Adorno for creating precisely the night in which, as Hegel had warned, all cows were black.

For Kracauer, then, respect for the boundary set by real objects was indispensable if one was to avoid being trapped by the tautological immanence of dialectical logic and stand a chance of explaining why sensory experience exceeds abstract generalizing

judgements. Adorno’s critique of the identity principle came up against the same boundary, but he responded to it negatively. Rather than resorting to ontology, he developed the relational category of the ‘non-identical’.³⁶ Adorno acknowledged the problematic nature of an all-encompassing form of dialectics yet recognized in it a real problem of capital (as a social relation), a problem that genuinely pervaded ‘all concrete things and entities’ or produced them in the first place. In his historiographical monograph, Kracauer, by contrast, in order to establish a connection to the object and the viability of the writing of history, resorted to material and thus to ‘positive’ solutions. It is in this dispute between Kracauer and Adorno over the unbounded character of dialectics, the significance of the damaged individual phenomenon, and the claims of immediate experience that Kracauer’s role in the context of critical theory ultimately lies. Do the individual phenomena reveal the non-material and yet pernicious nature [(Un-)Wesen] of society that reproduces itself within them, or does the crucial task lie in defending that which is irredeemably atomized against the reductionist social ascription of meaning? In fact, if one understands the essence of society as a pernicious, non-sensuous essence that disregards concrete objects and individuals, Kracauer’s and Adorno’s perspectives converge.³⁷ Both sought to defend the concrete objects against this being. Their disagreement concerned the extent to which the latter pervaded the former. For all that Kracauer subjected the Horkheimer circle to polemical criticism, especially in the 1930s, and they, in turn, viewed him with derision, their approaches continued to intersect in terms of their micrological focus. The enthusiasm Kracauer showed in 1964 for Karl Heinz Haag’s essay ‘Das Unwiederholbare’ [The Non-repeatable] is a case in point.³⁸ Nor did Kracauer ever lose sight in his late works of the fact that he was dealing with ‘constructions’ of reality. Both the camera and the work of the historian obviously represent

mediated forms of access to physical and historical reality. What truly set his German and US writings apart was the more pronounced social criticism in his earlier accounts of reality.

Kracauer's stance regarding the relative significance of dialectics and the individual case found its paradigmatic expression in the works he wrote during the Second World War. In *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947),³⁹ like Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, he developed a historiographical scheme that culminated in National Socialism. Its frame of reference, however, was not the history of civilization; instead, he sought to portray the authoritarian disposition of the specifically German unconscious, an undertaking for which he has drawn considerable flak. Ultimately, then, he was a theoretician not of the dialectic of enlightenment but of the German *Sonderweg*. The pessimism of his focus on Germany stood in marked contrast to his much more positive assessment of Hollywood, indicating considerable optimism regarding the course of the enlightenment in the democratic West.

Already in his essay 'Das Ornament der Masse' [The Mass Ornament], of 1927, long before his orientation shifted from the critique of capitalism to democratic concerns, he categorized capitalist rationalization as a form of 'turbid' reason, implying that the latter could be distinguished from a positive, enlightened impulse, no matter how precarious. '[A]nd as history proceeds, nature, subject to ever more disenchantment, may become increasingly permeable to reason', he suggested.⁴⁰ For Kracauer, then, it was an increase in rationality that would effect the disintegration of the 'turbid nature' of society. Almost 20 years later, Horkheimer and Adorno's take on this demythologization process was much more skeptical and the domination of nature one of the main butts of their critique. From this perspective, it would be misleading to suggest that Kracauer was a proponent of the Frankfurt School's critical theory. Yet the controversies concerning

dialectics and micrology and the mediation and immediacy of experience were of fundamental significance to the Frankfurt School, and Kracauer was party to them, both directly and indirectly. From the vantage point of critical theory, Kracauer's gaze – like Benjamin's – stood for the 'obligation to think dialectically and undialectically at the same time'.⁴¹

While much can be gained from drawing out the controversy concerning dialectics and micrology so sharply, the concrete historical process was altogether less heroic. The dispute between Kracauer and the protagonists of critical theory sprang primarily from personal disagreements during his exile in Paris. He was commissioned to write a study on propaganda, which Adorno rejected and then rewrote, effectively creating an entirely new text (though this was actually an indication of professional rather than personal disdain). The Institute provided him neither with a living nor with an opportunity to flee Europe, and Kracauer eventually viewed it with bitter disappointment. Although 'this Institute is the only one... that... might have seemed an obvious choice all this time', he wrote to Richard Krautheimer in 1936, it was also 'the only institution in the whole world with which we neither can nor want to be involved'.⁴²

SENSUOUS AND SOCIAL REALITY AS KRACAUER'S PRINCIPAL THEME

Kracauer's sustained attention to individual sensuous data, to surface phenomena, and to objectification took on distinct guises during his respective ideological phases. In his first published monograph, *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* [*Sociology as a Science*], he illustrated his critique of scientific conceptual abstraction with the image of a cone that represented the ideal scientific order.⁴³ The contingent empirical world formed its base and pure consciousness its tip. In between lay the various levels of conceptual

abstraction in hierarchical order. Ideally, one should be able to move from any given individual phenomenon to the general laws and vice versa. At the very end of the book, Kracauer rejected this construction. Such a correspondence between thought and empirical reality had existed only in a lost 'era of sense' in which thought and world, subject and object had not yet been separated.⁴⁴ The harmony and order on which a 'scientific' – which in the spirit of the nineteenth century meant 'objectivistic' – form of sociology was predicated in fact no longer existed. All one could do was describe the fluid physical and social reality while maintaining a critical awareness of how things 'really' ought to be.

Together with Adorno, Kracauer intensified his focus on the contingent world of appearances by engaging Kierkegaard's apology of the 'individual'. In Kracauer's posthumously published monograph, *Der Detektiv-Roman* [*The Detective Novel*], the cone was replaced by a recasting of Kierkegaard's theory of stages as a theory of spheres. The ethical and religious spheres had become inaccessible and the theoretician – indeed, humanity in general – had been banished to the shady sphere of aesthetics. In the highest sphere, the religious sphere, the 'names' were still accessible in the form of metaphysical entities. Down below, this divine substance remained 'inexorably in force', but here it was scattered: 'all names are distorted to the point where they are unrecognizable'. Given its contemporary popularity, the genre of the detective novel permitted a precarious analysis of this distorted truth.⁴⁵ The extent and character of the distortion corresponded to the rules of the 'thoroughly rationalized society'.⁴⁶ Here, too, as he had done in the sociology monograph, Kracauer constructed a collapsed metaphysical-philosophical order with a hierarchy of planes, only to conclude that the sphere of individual sensuous and social phenomena was the only one still epistemically accessible.

As far as Marx was concerned, Kracauer argued in the mid 1920s that one needed to

dig a tunnel beneath the 'mountain massif Hegel' towards the naturalistic and sensualist materialism of the French Enlightenment.⁴⁷ While he had admired Georg Lukács's *Theorie des Romans* [*The Theory of the Novel*], Kracauer felt that *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* [*History and Class Consciousness*], in which Lukács had brought Hegel back into Marxism, remained unduly caught up in idealistic concepts.⁴⁸ For Kracauer, the experience of physical, sensuous reality was a crucial corrective to the 'abstract' character of the capitalist world of commodities. In his essay 'Die Photographie' ['Photography'], of 1927, he explained his approach. He contrasted two photographs, one of a world-famous diva whom one could see everywhere in magazines and on billboards, the other of somebody's grandmother, portrayed when she was the same age as the diva was now. The second photograph was totally inaccessible to her grandchildren and, from their vantage point, could just as well show any other person in traditional costume. They had to take their parents' word for it that the photograph really showed their grandmother as a young woman. It was the 'memory image' of the grandmother, bequeathed to them by their parents or other contemporaries, that lent meaning to the photo. Yet, inevitably, what the camera had caught was in various respects at odds with this 'memory image', much more (noticeably) so than was the case with photos whose meaning seemed instantly self-evident. In the discrepancy between the 'mere surface cohesion' of the photograph and the 'memory image' (or its ostensibly self-evident meaning), seemingly meaningless 'remnants of nature' – in other words, sensuous physical reality – became visible, rendering this discrepancy the (potential) locus of emancipation. Reality only became visible in the photographs once the status of the diva and the 'memory image' of the grandmother were forgotten. The emancipatory potential of photography lay precisely in this ability to expose the

'mere surface cohesion', because, in contrast to the hermetic ideological meanings produced by society, reason could reassemble the uncovered remnants of nature and give them a new order.⁴⁹

In his monograph on salaried employees, *Die Angestellten*, Kracauer collated tableaux, as the book's subtitle indicated, 'from contemporary Germany'. Here, physical reality featured predominantly as the locus of floundering sociation, as the surface appearance of the corporeal *lifeworld* of the Weimar-era cult of sport, the body, and youth. To his mind, this idealization of the corporeal represented a form of false concretism, a fetishization of 'mere vitality'.⁵⁰ Here, too, the implication would seem to be that reason had to destroy this fetishization. The praise of the youthful body and debasement of age (not least on the job market) demonstrated 'indirectly that under the current economic and social conditions humans are not living life'.⁵¹

For Kracauer, the conformist 'cult of diversion' that he saw at work in Berlin's Weimar-era cinemas diverted attention away from social reality and colonized sensuous reality.⁵² In his relevant studies from the late 1930s onwards, he argued that National Socialist propaganda went one step further: 'The Nazis utilized totalitarian propaganda as a tool to destroy the disturbing independence of reality'.⁵³ The power of the fascist images emerges as the diametrical opposite of the emancipatory capacity for sensuous experience in which Kracauer placed his trust. In 'totalitarian propaganda', decontextualized elements of reality were instrumentalized, and reality was 'put to work faking itself'.⁵⁴ Real bodies of knowledge and traditions were transformed into malleable narratives that could be randomly deployed. Goebbels's understanding of propaganda as a 'creative art' had to be taken literally in the sense 'that a world shaped by the art of propaganda becomes as modelling clay – amorphous material lacking any initiative of its own'.⁵⁵ This form of propaganda was creative in the worst possible sense and lent a new meaning

to existing orders, a form of meaning that was capable of violently asserting itself against the previous reality.

Kracauer addressed the manipulation and deletion of reality in Nazi films with his own *Theory of Film*, which, as the subtitle indicated, promised *The Redemption of Physical Reality*. This redemption was facilitated by the perspective of the camera that records physical life in motion. The camera's documentary capacity, he argued, reached beyond the human apparatus of perception and abstract thought. Successful films therefore provided people with 'a chance of finding something we did not look for, something tremendously important in its own right – the world that is ours'.⁵⁶ At its best, film could effect in the viewer – who was half in a dream-like state, half awakening to actual reality – an awareness of the logic and language inherent in the objects that surrounded him, of 'the murmur of existence'.⁵⁷

On Kracauer's account, the epistemology underlying the writing of history was like the redeeming eye of the camera. In *History*, it was the 'micro' and 'macro dimensions' in the 'structure of the historical universe' that corresponded to the different layers of the cone of abstraction and the collapsed Kierkegaardian spheres.⁵⁸ Kracauer primarily argued the case for microhistory. Only the inherent logic of the slightest objects could be recorded and represented responsibly. To be sure, to do so one also needed cautiously to extend one's scope and venture into broader contexts. Yet the emphasis always needed to lie on allowing the idiosyncrasies and specific temporality of the sources and objects to emerge. Kracauer thus clarified the meaning of his focus on the 'figure of the collector': like the camera, the historian salvages the hopeless fragments of physical reality and in so doing gains a form of contemplative access to that reality and to the conditions of his or her own human existence.

Physical reality was not yet the ultimate point of reference, though. Films, Kracauer suggested, 'penetrate ephemeral physical

reality and burn through it'. Yet where that took them, 'their destination', he hastened to add, his study could not determine.⁵⁹ Kracauer's relativism, then, did not precipitate a critique of all epistemic claims that detract from the heterogeneous world of objects. Rather, it led him to bracket this world of objects as the 'anteroom'.⁶⁰ Hence the subtitle of *History: The Last Things before the Last*. Kracauer wanted to refer to the 'last things', the objects of metaphysics and eschatology, only *ex negativo*. This negation nevertheless indicates a theological dimension in the deep structure of Kracauer's thought that runs through all his writings from the Weimar era onwards. It was both as constant and mutable as his concept of sensuous reality.

'TRANSCENDENTAL HOMELESSNESS': THE SHOCK OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE RELIGIOUS REVIVAL MOVEMENTS OF THE WEIMAR ERA

In much of the secondary literature, Kracauer's religious early works (roughly up to 1926) are distinguished from his irreligious later work. Yet initially, religion was in fact of no great interest to Kracauer. It only became a substantive concern after the First World War. The form of liberal Judaism he encountered in his parental home evidently instilled no pious sentiments in him. As he noted in one of the few early diaries that have survived, in 1907 he demonstratively read a biography of Nietzsche on Yom Kippur (though he did not take to Nietzsche, either).⁶¹

The isolated modern subject and its attempts to come to some form of accommodation with its environment formed a central focus in his early writings (which, as mentioned, were not published during his lifetime). Here, too, he was already grappling with the problem posed by the 'manifoldness' of reality. However, he still saw a way from the Spirit to the world. 'The relativist',

he wrote in 1916, 'is a relativist only because he wants to be a dogmatist'.⁶² From the fact that there is no one all-encompassing truth, the relativist concluded that there was no point in even trying to attain the manifold truths that could be determined on the basis of experience. The dogmatist, by contrast, failed to comprehend the manifoldness of reality and assumed that truth could be found only where basic human experience clustered around extant concepts. For Kracauer, the goal was a sense of rootedness in the world and of 'community' [*Gemeinschaft*] attained by the subject by arranging its experiences in the radiant light of 'concepts'. This forging of ideational links between the subject and the environment and community within which the isolated individual found itself was Kracauer's concern, *inter alia*, in 'Über das Wesen der Persönlichkeit' [On the Essence of Personality], written in 1913–14. He characterized the human personality as a cosmos of concepts gravitating around one core concept.⁶³ In the only text of this corpus of largely neglected early philosophical works published (in part) at the time, 'Vom Erleben des Krieges' [On Experiencing the War], which came out in the *Preußische Jahrbücher* in 1915, Kracauer applied this scheme to patriotism [*Vaterlandsliebe*] and argued that the latter was only genuine and durable if it formed the core of the personality.⁶⁴

In the event, patriotism did not offer a successful path towards either the Spirit or the community. Instead, the First World War turned out to be a catastrophe. Consequently, *Ginster*, in stark contrast to this early text, became an anti-war novel. Against this backdrop and the sense of crisis it generated, Kracauer's categories became more reflexive. One of the thematic implications of this development was his 'departure from inwardness'.⁶⁵ In the early writings, he had lamented the loneliness of the modern subject, sought a sense of belonging through the attachment to grand ideas and ideals, and experienced the manifoldness of external reality as dolorous. In his subsequent works he identified

'objectless inwardness' as a form of idealistic ideological deception: 'The fact that the artistry with which the book elucidated mental states was praised', he wrote in *Georg*, 'led Georg to suspect that it obscured the external circumstances all the more intensely'.⁶⁶

Kracauer focused on the question of why the extant forms of human sociation were so deficient, resorting to a new discipline and an old promise: sociology as the quest for the logic of sociation, on the one hand, and the quest for a religious community that would transcend the mundanities of earthly existence, on the other. In the early 1920s, like Erich Fromm and Leo Löwenthal, Kracauer was drawn to the charismatic Frankfurt Rabbi Nehemias Anton Nobel and subsequently, for a short while, to the *Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus* [Free Jewish Academy], established, also in Frankfurt, by Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber. In his features, he reported critically on other neoreligious movements and prophetic figures such as Hermann Keyserling, Eugen Diederichs, Rudolf Steiner, and their esoteric 'circles'. Kracauer's novel *Georg* also bears eloquent testimony to the Weimar smorgasbord of worldviews. Its principal protagonist jauntily moves through various religious and political sects before finally blurting out, mid-conversation, the tenets of a social critique tinged with Marxism.

In the end, Kracauer viewed all religious attempts to lend meaning to human life with skepticism. Yet in the early 1920s, he was convinced that only religion could provide a solution to the crisis of modernity. As he wrote in 1922, philosophy could only point to the chaotic and lawless present in self-critical terms and thus 'help prepare, within narrow limits, the transformation, which can already be sensed faintly on occasion and will lead an expelled humanity back into the new-old realms suffused with divinity'.⁶⁷ For life that still *had* meaning, this had not been a concern. Kracauer's point of reference for this idea was a neoromantic notion Lukács had developed in *Die Theorie des Romans*. It concerned periods in which the deity had melded

the world into a meaningful totality and in which subject and object, content and form were still coextensive. Lukács called these 'blissful times' [*selige Zeiten*],⁶⁸ Kracauer referred to them as 'meaningful eras' [*sinnerfüllte Epochen*].⁶⁹ Yet this holistic unity of a mythical golden antiquity had fractured. This notion implied a pessimistic theory of modernization as a process of anomic differentiation. For the implications of this development, Lukács had coined the term 'transcendental homelessness';⁷⁰ Kracauer's utopian notions in these years were authoritarian and reactionary to match. Given his desire for an objective and irrefutable footing and his yearning for meaning anchored in attempts at religious restoration and revival, he in fact had more in common with the modern prophets he criticized than he would have cared to admit.⁷¹

Kracauer's quest for a meaningful footing in the absolute ultimately clashed with the insight that the religious revivalist movements never delivered what they promised. He remained an agnostic who, despite wanting to, could not believe. Every spiritual proposition seemed to short-circuit the issues it claimed to address.⁷² In Ernst Bloch's 1918 theosophical narrative of illumination, *Geist der Utopie* [*Spirit of Utopia*], for example, he saw 'God running amok',⁷³ and he soon concluded that new religious formations were 'illusory and romantic' and that 'the positive word' was therefore 'not ours'. Instead, one needed to be 'a thorn' in others' sides; it was better 'to drive them, with us, to desperation than to give them hope'.⁷⁴ The only contribution one could make to redemption lay in the forthright denunciation of false promises of redemption. Kracauer thus initiated the *Bilderverbot* [prohibition of the image] that would later feature prominently in critical theory. As Kracauer put it in 1926 in his critique of Buber and Rosenzweig's 'Germanization' [*Verdeutschung*], i.e., their German translation, of the Tanakh, the religious revivalist movements merely immobilized the vexing heterogeneity of the world, substituting

a false harmony for the totality of meaning that had been lost. Precisely because of their conceit that the translation should make the word of God audible in a new way, Buber and Rosenzweig resorted to neoromantic phraseology.⁷⁵ Kracauer directed the same critique at the *völkisch* religious publisher Eugen Diederichs, who claimed that the germanicizing ‘word agglomerations’ with which he advertised his ‘religious propaganda weeks’ originated organically in the very essence of the German people [*Volk*].⁷⁶

In order to uncover the original meaning of the religions, one needed to take a detour that entailed secular criticism. Kracauer’s critique of Buber and Rosenzweig hinged on a theoretical assumption he shared with Adorno and Benjamin – namely, that of the ‘migration’ of theological ‘truth’ into the ‘profane’. ‘Economics instead of explicit theology!’ he demanded in ‘Zwei Arten der Mitteilung’ [Two Types of Communication]. ‘First the outrage in the material realm, then the contemplation which, for heaven’s sake, must not detract from that realm’.⁷⁷ Those categories in the religions and myths in which truth had once inhered now had to be demythologized, and the content of theological categories had to change in tandem with social transformations until it could ‘hold its ground... in the face of the lowliest needs... One would need to come across theology in the profane and point to the holes and fissures of the profane into which the truth has sunk’.⁷⁸ Only on rare occasions did Kracauer clarify that the ‘indirect path’ of profanity implied not only a critique but also a practical attempt to establish this-worldly truth. Thus Kracauer argued that the ‘concept... of the classless society’, for instance, ‘represents not least a contemporary transformation of theological fixations’.⁷⁹ Drawing on Kafka, Kracauer described the structure of capitalist society as a ‘burrow’ and a self-created prison of humanity. For the time being, only its critique was indirectly preparing the way for its destruction, which would amount to the uncovering of the obscured reality.

The articulation of social criticism was thus equated with the Kafkaian ‘theological’ perspective: ‘The true law is thrown into relief only by the untruth that surrounds it’.⁸⁰

If one takes the theological discourse between Benjamin, Kracauer, Adorno, and Bloch into account, the conventional account that has Kracauer swap his religious for a political stance in the mid 1920s turns out to be imprecise. Both phases were in fact political and religious at once. The conservative-authoritarian episode, with its historico-metaphysical notion of the shattered absolute and the yearning for community, was superseded by a vision of utopia that drew on both Marxism and messianism. As he wrote to an author whose book he reviewed in 1929: ‘But theology exists and, like you, I acknowledge the reality of the term eternal’.⁸¹

‘HOMELESS SHELTER’: THE MASSES OF SALARIED EMPLOYEES AND THE CULT OF DIVERSION

Like the implicit theology, the concept of ‘homelessness’ he had appropriated from Lukács’s *Theorie des Romans* also ran through Kracauer’s subsequent work. The way in which his utilization of this concept changed over time allows us to chart the development of his philosophy overall. In the early 1920s, he still used the concept as a means of expressing the metaphysical pessimism with which he viewed his own situation. By the end of the decade, the concept had gone from being an expression of his vantage point to forming the object of his investigation. Kracauer now pointed to the authoritarian potential that lay in the desire for a definitive footing and used the concept to characterize the socially unaware and historically hopeless salaried employees of the Weimar Republic.⁸² As Kracauer added later, it was precisely the middle-class salaried employees in their state of homelessness who formed the first and principal target audience

of 'totalitarian propaganda'. Their quest for an absolutely secure shelter was a precursor of the conformist rebellion of the Nazis.⁸³

In the essays on the salaried employees he wrote in 1929 and 1930, Kracauer's philosophy reached its initial apex, both in terms of style and acuity. In the introduction to the book version, he juxtaposed his account both to merely descriptive reportage and to merely deductive 'idealism', and emphasized its constructed, mosaic-like structure.⁸⁴ He had condensed, once again indirectly, ethnographic observation of the relevant milieux, advertisements and death notices, leisure opportunities, the self-promotion of certain associations, and the content of personal conversations to arrive at a comprehensive cultural diagnosis. Kracauer portrayed a new class, which, in the eyes of both the right and the left, should never have emerged and which no longer trusted in the utopian promises of either left-wing or bourgeois-liberal politics. The number of salaried employees had grown exponentially after the First World War, and they formed a 'new middle class': the 'white-collar proletarians' and petty bourgeoisie of the Weimar Republic. They were in fact proletarianized but superficially aspired to bourgeois cultural values. It was the task of the emerging culture industry to meet these aspirations. Kracauer illustrated this by pointing to Berlin's nightlife. In the popular entertainment venue 'Haus Vaterland' he saw a 'homeless shelter'. 'Nothing is more characteristic of this life, which can only be called life to a limited extent', he wrote, 'than the way in which it perceives of higher things. In them it sees not substance but glamour. It grasps them with the means not of concentration but of diversion'.⁸⁵ The 'geography of the homeless shelters' was shaped by dance-hall music, enthusiasm for sport, cinemas, and the allure of fairground booths: in short, by the 'cult of diversion'.⁸⁶ As the erosion of traditional modes of sociation gathered pace, the salaried employees epitomized the transformation of human beings into appendages of capital. They became more and more

streamlined and atomized at the same time. Where the repressive authority of tradition had died away, images from films and magazines came to define culture.⁸⁷ From its analysis of the pseudo-authenticity required at job interviews ('virtuous pink complexion') to its focus on the integration of leisure activities as workplace amenities, *Die Angestellten* is Kracauer's most topical book.

For Kracauer, the concurrence of conformism and atomization was closely connected to the – at the time much discussed – sociological concept of the masses. The First World War and the rapidly rising number of salaried employees in the cities were widely seen as the dawn of an age of the masses. Unwittingly, the atomized individuals – for whom the ideologically malleable salaried employees stood paradigmatically – lined themselves up as a 'mass ornament'.⁸⁸ The organic solidarity of the pre-capitalist eras had been shattered by the capitalist mode of production. What remained were subjects who were like dots clustered into pseudo-geometrical structures that matched the functions of economic rationality. The Tiller Girls or the assembly-line workers laboring in perfect synchronicity were cases in point.

As Kracauer noted elsewhere, the largest mass was the proletariat. Its emancipation had to consist precisely in the shedding of its state as an amorphous agglomerate of 'mass particles'.⁸⁹ Fascist propaganda intentionally treated human beings as masses within which the individual was interchangeable and which, in their entireties, were easily manipulable.⁹⁰ From Kracauer's point of view, the transition from the capitalist 'cult of diversion' to reactionary propaganda, then, was a fluid one. The atomized individuals were diverted so they did not congregate, the masses so they did not rally. In the first part of *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* [*Heritage of Our Times*], published in 1935, Ernst Bloch discussed Kracauer's *Die Angestellten* and the 'cult of diversion' in detail. 'Cinema or race', he concluded succinctly, were apparently two homologous modes of that cult.⁹¹

Kracauer's notion of the ornament formed by the masses was underpinned by a description of the ways in which socially produced economic forms became second nature, placing human beings at the mercy of its laws and the structures it stipulated. To be sure, compared to pre-modern organic forms of association the geometry of the mass ornament amounted to a form of rationalization. Yet given that people were unaware of its functioning and it was not instituted by reason, it still belonged to the realm of nature; indeed, from the perspective of reason it represented a 'relapse into mythology so massive that a greater one seems inconceivable'.⁹² His strong concept of reason notwithstanding, then, in *Das Ornament der Masse* Kracauer observed elements of the dialectic of enlightenment: phenomena and relations that have developed historically, specifically economic ones, gain a momentum of their own that determines human existence no less comprehensively and mercilessly than did fate in the mythical mindset.

In keeping with the theological concept of the migration of truth into the profane, which could not simply be leapfrogged but needed to be subjected to critique, Kracauer warned against a premature quest for an alternative praxis in the existing order or in the context of escapist forms of community. This would amount to 'disrespect for our historical locus'. The only viable way led 'right through the mass ornament, not backwards from it'.⁹³ Against the bourgeois critique of the thoroughly capitalized mass culture Kracauer consequently insisted that 'aesthetic enjoyment of the ornamental mass movements is *legitimate*'.⁹⁴ At least this form of mass entertainment was in touch with the current state of reality, which was more than could be said for the elitist enjoyment of high culture.

This also helps explain Kracauer's focus on film as a modern, mechanized art form. The screen was the paradigmatic surface on which the logic of society – from the Tiller Girls to totalitarian mass rallies – could quite

literally be watched. Traces of this ideology-critical understanding of the cinema were still present in his later film theory; for instance, when he wrote: 'The film screen is Athena's polished shield'.⁹⁵ By watching her reflection in this shield instead of looking at her directly, Perseus was able to approach Medusa without turning into stone. For Kracauer, this allegory implied that, even where the human apparatus of perception and conceptualization had shut itself off ideologically, say, in the face of the unimaginable horror of National Socialism, that horror could still be confronted with the gaze of cinematic realism.

AHASVER, CHARLIE CHAPLIN, AND JACQUES OFFENBACH AND THE EPISTEMIC SUBJECT IN KRACAUER'S THEORY

Whether Adorno was right in assuming that Kracauer had derived his idiosyncratic 'gaze', which viewed even the familiar as 'an object of amazement', from the sublimation of a 'childhood trauma of dubitable belonging' is a moot point.⁹⁶ Certainly, it was not only his contemporaries and subsequent scholars who described him as a loner and a maverick. As his early self-identification as 'transcendentally homeless' indicates, he too saw himself in these terms. Later, he would describe his existence as 'exterritorial'. This sense of alienation was owed not least to the antisemitic animosity he encountered at school.

This outsider perspective has repeatedly been interpreted as a specifically Jewish form of subjectivity. It should be borne in mind, though, that the characterization of 'the Jew' as an alien and outsider resonates profoundly with fundamental antisemitic tropes. Kracauer grappled with this problem in an intensely reflective manner.⁹⁷ His references to the anti-Judaic Christian myth of the 'eternal Jew' Ahasver are a case in point. An early unpublished note bore the title 'Die ewigen

Juden' [The Eternal Jews]. Here, Kracauer described the Jews as isolated and displaced, as 'vagrant souls'. They ought to find their 'realm' [*Reich*] among their fellow human beings yet are not granted access to them.⁹⁸ Ahasver repeatedly turned up again at crucial junctures. In the theses on antisemitism Kracauer published anonymously in 1933, he cited the eternal Jew as the exemplary cosmopolitan who transcends humanity's natural separation into races and classes. He characterized this 'explosion of an existence beholden entirely to nature' and reorganization of nature with the means of reason (which he had also outlined in 'Die Photographie' and 'Das Ornament der Masse') as a 'Jewish trait directed towards redemption'.⁹⁹ In *From Caligari to Hitler*, Kracauer interpreted Paul Wegener's second *Golem* film (1920) as one of the few attempts in the history of Weimar film to leverage reason and liberate the oppressed. In the film, Ahasver is among those whom the legendary Rabbi Löw invokes in defense of Prague Jewry. For Kracauer, both the eternal Jew and the Golem symbolized reason.¹⁰⁰ In *History*, finally, Ahasver represented the dialectic of time and historical nonsimultaneity.¹⁰¹ Condemned for all eternity and wandering through all ages, he embodies the paradoxical unity of continuity and discontinuity in history.¹⁰² Ahasver was just one of the allegorical figures with which Kracauer illustrated systematic problems in his late work. Uniquely, though, he can also be interpreted in autobiographical terms. The way in which Kracauer's Ahasver changed over time perfectly encapsulates the development of his theoretical and political point of view, from his early lament about the rootlessness of modernity via the 'explosion' of social relations beholden to nature to the involuntary witness of the involute course of history that leads to no redemption.

Within the context of Kracauer's changeable theory, the empathic outsider was the epistemic subject and, in turn, inseparable from the empirical subject. As opposed to the deluded people who aligned themselves

with the mass ornament, the gaze of the outsider focused on the essential surface appearances and recognized their patterns. The principal protagonists of his two novels, Georg and Ginster, also embody this vantage point. There is one caveat, though. Elsewhere, Kracauer portrayed the objects of his investigation as clear-sighted outsiders of this kind. In 1919, Kracauer credited his first teacher, Georg Simmel, with the gaze of the rootless stranger, who, for that very reason, can observe the state of the world with the requisite distance.¹⁰³ In 1926, he ascribed this estranging gaze to 'the Jew Kafka', whose writings brought 'dread into a world' from which 'the countenance of truth is withdrawing'.¹⁰⁴ This is exactly the position of Adorno's later 'inverse theology', which can reveal no divine secrets but only the utter negativity of the existing order.¹⁰⁵

For Kracauer, nobody represented this figure of the outsider more incisively than (the non-Jew) Charlie Chaplin. Kracauer's take was in some ways similar to Hannah Arendt's claim on Chaplin for her hidden tradition of the Jew as pariah.¹⁰⁶ To Kracauer's mind, Chaplin demonstrated that the experience of one's hostile environment could be processed aesthetically and reflected upon in an emancipatory manner. As the (ostensible) preacher in *The Pilgrim*, Kracauer wrote in 1929, Chaplin discredited sectarianism by outwardly imitating it.

Finally, he walks off, one foot in the USA, the other in Mexico. Religion is no more his home than any fatherland. Nor do his fellow humans offer him a genuine home... One has to fear and outwit them like the things... for him, organic and inorganic nature are one and the same thing... He simply does not know his way around life; he has no religion and no fatherland.¹⁰⁷ And yet, for all that, he does still have a home, one that seems palpable to anyone who sees him.¹⁰⁸

Kracauer's construction of Chaplin reflected his assumption of a form of human impotence that was experienced involuntarily by Jews and that everybody could grasp on the screen.¹⁰⁹ In film, he found the

epistemological reliability he had sought in vain elsewhere. Through Chaplin's performance, a trace of rootless rootedness could be experienced in a tangible manner all over the world, or at least wherever the film was shown.

In his second-most controversial book, after *From Caligari to Hitler*, his monograph *Jacques Offenbach und das Paris seiner Zeit* [*Jacques Offenbach and the Paris of His Time*], written while in exile in Paris, Kracauer took a similar approach. His major concerns throughout his work converged in this 'social biography' [*Gesellschaftsbiographie*]. It too was a product as much of construction as of reconstruction. It comprised historiosophy, assemblages of single frames, sociology, and indirect-allegorical contemporary analysis. Given that the book focused on a Jewish immigrant in Paris and Kracauer portrayed Napoleon III as a tyrannical dictator, one can even discern an autobiographical dimension to the project.¹¹⁰ Written when he was in great financial difficulties, it was pitched at a broad readership. This, and the fact that Offenbach's music barely featured in his account, precipitated profoundly polemical responses from both Adorno and Benjamin.¹¹¹

Like Kafka, Chaplin, and Ginster, Kracauer's Offenbach achieved a satirical estrangement from the society that surrounded him, whose contours he threw all the more sharply into relief for it: 'He is a mockingbird'.¹¹² As such, he did not destroy or profane the lofty and sacred, but he did discredit that which unjustly donned the mantle of sanctity. From the perspective of the mockingbird, one saw an inversion 'of the customary image of the world. Many things that seem to be at the bottom are in fact on top; many things generally considered great turn out to be small'.¹¹³ Later on in the book, Kracauer described Offenbach's qualities in terms of the confluence of two Jewish backgrounds: emancipation in the spirit of the tolerance that Offenbach's father represented, on the one hand, and an inclination Kracauer ascribed to Jewish bandmen

and occasional and wandering musicians [*Spielleute*], on the other – namely, that 'they played and engaged in tomfoolery at worldly festivities with the same dedication they displayed when performing their duties in the synagogue'.¹¹⁴ Kracauer also invoked the problematic Jewish motif of peregrination [*Wanderschaft*]¹¹⁵ and a form of homesickness with metaphysical connotations for which the boulevards of Paris – as a 'home for the homeless'¹¹⁶ akin to the 'homeless shelter' – offered poor compensation. Kracauer attributed Offenbach's operettas to a society that had itself become operetta-like under the dictatorship of Napoleon III. They offered 'intoxicating illusions' to the citizens who, having been expelled from politics, were now confined to the private sphere.¹¹⁷

Here, then, all the characteristic tenets of Kracauer's early theory – emancipation, sensuousness, homelessness, and ideological diversion that serves authoritarian domination – were assembled. Kracauer's mockingbirds – the principal protagonists of his novels and Chaplin, Kafka, Simmel, Offenbach, and Ahasver – had (at least) three functions: the first was epistemological, the second directed towards the critique of society, and the third existential. Their status gave rise to social criticism and as excluded figures they were credited with a gaze well suited to that criticism. At the same time, their quest for a 'home for the homeless' reflected Kracauer's grappling with his own existence.

Today, Kracauer is discussed predominantly as a pioneer of film and media studies. A second line of reception takes the perspective of intellectual history and reads him as a critical social philosopher akin to Benjamin and the proponents of critical theory. In both cases, he is considered a classic. Yet this generally leads to his no longer being engaged as a thinker who has a genuine contribution to make to current debates. He continues to be discussed in university seminars and doctoral dissertations, and a first biography was published to mark the fiftieth anniversary of his death. Whether he really could be used to

initiate broader debates seems a moot point, though. On the one hand, his fundamental critique of theoretical endeavors on behalf of the individual objects has lost nothing of its topicality. The ignorance of academic and ideology-critical analyses regarding inconspicuous everyday phenomena remains a constant challenge. Taking up Kracauer's legacy means learning to engage in exacting observation rather than simply allowing explanatory patterns and concepts to click into place. On the other hand, the work of this 'collector' radiates a sense of cultural anti-quarianism. One encounters typewriters, tatty umbrellas, silent movies, forgotten micro-historical events, and missed opportunities. Where Kracauer offered thick phenomenological descriptions rather than engaging in theoretical argument, his texts appear irrecoverably historical. The question, then, is not whether they can be short-circuited with the current state of academic thinking but what current readers can learn from them about their own conditions.

Notes

- 1 For good general surveys, see Gertrud Koch, *Kracauer zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 1996); Graeme Gilloch, *Siegfried Kracauer* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015); Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke (eds.), *Culture in the Anteroom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2012); Jörn Ahrens et al. (eds.), *Doch ist das Wirkliche auch vergessen, so ist es darum noch nicht getilgt* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2016).
- 2 His lifelong friendship with Leo Löwenthal has received rather less attention.
- 3 See Jörg Später, *Siegfried Kracauer* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016).
- 4 See Inka Müller, *Siegfried Kracauer* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1985); Johannes von Moltke, *The Curious Humanist* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).
- 5 See Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), xi.
- 6 Theodor W. Adorno, Siegfried Kracauer, *Briefwechsel 1923–1966* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2008), 658–9. On relations between the four men, see Später, *Siegfried Kracauer*, chapters 15, 21, 38.
- 7 Später, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 605.
- 8 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Ginster', in *Werke* vol. 7 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004), 1–256, here 37.
- 9 See Später, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 532–3.
- 10 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Die Angestellten', in *Werke* vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2006), 211–310, here 304.
- 11 See Helmut Stalder, *Siegfried Kracauer* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003).
- 12 See Henrik Reeh, *Ornaments of the Metropolis* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).
- 13 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Das Monokel', 'Falscher Untergang der Regenschirme', 'Das Scheibmaschinchen', in *Werke* vol. 5.2 (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), 495–7, 364–5, 585–9.
- 14 See Sven Kramer, 'Vergesellschaftung durch Sprache', in *Doch ist das Wirkliche auch vergessen*, 59–80.
- 15 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Notes on the Planned History of the German Film', in Volker Breidecker (ed.), *Siegfried Kracauer – Erwin Panofsky: Briefwechsel, 1941–1966* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1996), 15–18, here 16.
- 16 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Totalitäre Propaganda', in *Werke* vol. 2.2 (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012), 17–173, here 20.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Conclusions', in *Werke* vol. 5.4 (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), 467–73, here 470.
- 19 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Das Ornament der Masse', in *Werke* vol. 5.2, 612–24, here 612.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 See Kracauer, 'Falscher Untergang der Regenschirme', 364.
- 22 Siegfried Kracauer, *History* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1995), 4.
- 23 See David Frisby, *Fragmente der Moderne* (Rheda-Wiedenbrück: Daedalus, 1989); Müller, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 103–15.
- 24 Walter Benjamin, 'Ein Außenseiter macht sich bemerkbar', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 3 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 219–25, here 225.
- 25 Quoted in Später, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 551.
- 26 Kracauer, *History*, 136.
- 27 Ernst Bloch, *Briefe 1903–1975* vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985), 281.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 See, for example, Axel Honneth, *Vivisektionen eines Zeitalters* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014), 141.
- 30 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Der wunderliche Realist', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 11 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 388–408, here 394.
- 31 Ibid., 397.
- 32 See Max Beck and Nicholas Coomann, 'Adorno, Kracauer und die Ursprünge der Jargonkritik', in *Sprachkritik als Ideologiekritik* (Würzburg:

- Königshausen & Neumann, 2015), 7–27. See also Kramer, 'Vergesellschaftung durch Sprache'.
- 33 See Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 103–15.
- 34 Kracauer, 'Die Angestellten', 222.
- 35 Kracauer, *History*, 201.
- 36 See the contribution by Nico Bobka and Dirk Braunstein (Chapter 11) to this *Handbook*.
- 37 See also Karl Marx, 'Ökonomisch-Philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844', in *Marx Engels Werke* vol. 40 (Berlin: Dietz, 2012), 465–588, here 578–9. The usage of the term *Unwesen* here plays on the double meaning of the term. In common parlance it denotes unruly, mischievous and pernicious behavior. At the same time, it denotes the logical opposite of (though possibly also dialectical counterpart to) *Wesen* (meaning being, nature or essence).
- 38 Karl-Heinz Haag, 'Das Unwiederholbare' [1963], in *Kritische Philosophie* (Munich: etk, 2012), 97–107. See also Später, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 552.
- 39 Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* [1947] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).
- 40 Kracauer, 'Das Ornament der Masse', 617.
- 41 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Minima Moralia', in *Werke* vol. 4 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 173.
- 42 Quoted in Momme Brodersen, *Siegfried Kracauer* (Rowohlt: Reinbek, 2001), 117.
- 43 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Soziologie als Wissenschaft', in *Werke* vol. 1, 9–101, here 39.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 95.
- 45 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Der Detektiv-Roman', in *Werke* vol. 1, 103–209, here 109.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 143.
- 47 Bloch, *Briefe*, 282.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 283.
- 49 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Die Photographie', in *Werke* vol. 5.2, 682–98.
- 50 Kracauer, 'Die Angestellten', 211–54, here 248.
- 51 *Ibid.*
- 52 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Kult der Zerstreuung', in *Werke* vol. 6.1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004), 208–13.
- 53 Kracauer, *From Caligari To Hitler*, 295.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 299.
- 55 *Ibid.*
- 56 Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 296.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 165.
- 58 Kracauer, *History*, 105–6 and *passim*.
- 59 Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 311.
- 60 Kracauer, *History*, 191–217.
- 61 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Aus dem Tagebuch des Studenten (1907)', in *Marbacher Magazin* 47 (1988), 9–13, here 10.
- 62 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Von der Erkenntnismöglichkeit seelischen Lebens', in *Werke* vol. 9.1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004), 121–68, here 157.
- 63 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Über das Wesen der Persönlichkeit', in *Werke* vol. 9.1, 7–120, here 41 and *passim*.
- 64 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Vom Erleben des Krieges', in *Werke* vol. 5.1 (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), 11–24.
- 65 See Dirk Oschmann, *Auszug aus der Innerlichkeit* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1999).
- 66 Kracauer, 'Georg', in *Werke* vol. 7, 257–516, here 488.
- 67 Kracauer, 'Soziologie als Wissenschaft', 11.
- 68 Georg Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans* [1920] (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2009), 21. On the context, see Gerhard Scheit, 'Der Gelehrte im Zeitalter der "vollendeten Sündhaftigkeit"', in Nicolas Berg and Dieter Burdorf (eds.), *Textgelehrte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 39–64.
- 69 Kracauer, 'Soziologie als Wissenschaft', 12.
- 70 Lukács, *Theorie*, 30.
- 71 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Georg von Lukács' Romantheorie', in *Werke* vol. 5.1, 282–8.
- 72 See Siegfried Kracauer, 'Die Wartenden', in *Werke* vol. 5.1, 383–94.
- 73 Siegfried Kracauer and Leo Löwenthal, *In steter Freundschaft...* (Münster: Zu Klampen, 2003), 31.
- 74 *Ibid.*, 54.
- 75 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Die Bibel auf deutsch', in *Werke* vol. 5.2, 374–86.
- 76 See Siegfried Kracauer, 'Volkheit! Goethe! Mythos!', in *Werke* vol. 5.2, 371–2.
- 77 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Zwei Arten der Mitteilung', in *Werke* vol. 5.3 (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), 180–7, here 180–1.
- 78 Kracauer, Letter to Bloch, in Bloch, *Briefe*, 274.
- 79 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Theologie gegen Nationalismus', in *Werke* vol. 5.4, 344–9, here 347–8.
- 80 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Franz Kafka', in *Werke* vol. 5.3, 65–7, here 67.
- 81 Kracauer, 'Zwei Arten der Mitteilung', 181.
- 82 See Kracauer, 'Die Angestellten', 288.
- 83 See Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 107, 132, 288; 'Notes on the Planned History of the German Film', 17.
- 84 Kracauer, 'Die Angestellten', 222.
- 85 *Ibid.*, 288.
- 86 *Ibid.*, 293; 'Kult der Zerstreuung'.
- 87 See Henri Band, *Mittelschichten und Massenkultur* (Berlin: Lukas, 1999).
- 88 See Kracauer, 'Das Ornament der Masse'.
- 89 Kracauer, 'Totalitäre Propaganda', 91–2.
- 90 *Ibid.*, *passim*.
- 91 Ernst Bloch, 'Erbschaft dieser Zeit', in *Gesamtausgabe* vol. 4 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985), 31.
- 92 Kracauer, 'Das Ornament der Masse', 621.
- 93 *Ibid.*, 623.
- 94 *Ibid.*, 615.
- 95 Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 305.

- 96 Adorno, 'Der wunderliche Realist', 399.
- 97 See Matthew Handelman, 'The Dialectics of Otherness', in *Yearbook for European Jewish Literature Studies* vol. 2.1 (2015), 90–111.
- 98 *Ibid.*, 96–7.
- 99 Kracauer, 'Conclusions', 471–2.
- 100 Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 112–13.
- 101 Kracauer, *History*, 148. It is worth noting that Kracauer's explicit point of reference for this concept, even in this late work, was Karl Marx.
- 102 *Ibid.*, 163.
- 103 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Georg Simmel', in *Werke* vol. 9.2, 139–280, here 270–1.
- 104 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Das Schloß', in *Werke* vol. 5.2, 491–4, here 494.
- 105 See the contribution by Julia Jopp and Ansgar Martins (Chapter 41) to this *Handbook*.
- 106 Hannah Arendt, 'The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition', in *Jewish Social Studies* 6, 2 (1944), 99–122, here 110–13. For a similar approach, see also Leo Löwenthal, 'Judentum und deutscher Geist', in *Schriften* vol. 4 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), 9–56. Löwenthal did not discuss Chaplin, though.
- 107 Kracauer referred to Chaplin as 'ein religions- und vaterlandsloser Geselle', playing on the pejorative term 'vaterlandslose Gesellen', which was historically used to denounce the Social Democrats, especially in imperial Germany.
- 108 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Chaplin als Prediger', in *Werke* vol. 6.2, 312–14, here 314.
- 109 See Siegfried Kracauer, 'Chaplins Triumph', in *Werke* vol. 6.2, 492–5, here 492.
- 110 See Harald Reil, *Siegfried Kracauers Jacques Offenbach* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003).
- 111 See Später, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 330–3.
- 112 Siegfried Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach und das Paris seiner Zeit* [1937] (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994), 11.
- 113 *Ibid.*
- 114 *Ibid.*, 50–1.
- 115 *Ibid.*, 22.
- 116 *Ibid.*, 67.
- 117 *Ibid.*, 187.