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Siegfried Kracauer and the Operative Feuilleton

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Masters of the Arts  
in Comparative Literature

by

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June 2017

## ABSTRACT

### Siegfried Kracauer and the Operative Feuilleton

by

Dustin Lovett

In 1934 Walter Benjamin gave a peculiar address in Paris that has been preserved for readers as “Der Autor als Produzent.” In this speech, Benjamin outlines the radical political responsibility of an author, particularly a German author, in that era to inculcate a revolutionary ethos in the public. Among the strategies he outlines for achieving this goal, Benjamin highlights the newspaper as the embodiment of that age’s conditions and a means of subverting bourgeois forms and consciousness. Benjamin fails to mention, however, that his friend Siegfried Kracauer had striven for years during his tenure as an editor of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*’s feuilleton section to effect precisely that end through his journalistic writing. Understanding the project Kracauer tried to achieve elucidates an often overlooked front in the struggle for the German conscience and consciousness that played out in the feuilleton sections of both leftist and centrist periodicals during the Weimar Republic. By exploring Kracauer’s journalistic program in its historical context as well as in context of the work of other leftist Weimar feuilletonists, this essay hopes to elucidate how, despite ultimately failing to effect a revolution in the bourgeois worldview that might have prevented the fascists’ rise to power, the work of Kracauer and his contemporaries nevertheless expanded the possibilities for culture writing and redrew the boundaries of political discourse within German journalism.



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## Introduction

On 27 April 1934, the writer, philosopher, and newspaper contributor Walter Benjamin gave a speech to the *Institut zum Studium des Faschismus* (Institute for the Study of Fascism) in Paris, which in its contemporary form, has come down to contemporary readers as “Der Autor als Produzent.” The piece does not so much represent a contribution to the study of fascism as a staunch call to arms to German writers to awaken a Marxist-revolutionary consciousness in Germany and fight alongside the proletariat against their own bourgeois class interests, a eulogizing of the Soviet Union and its literature, and a stinging rebuke to any German writers who seem to compromise or sympathize with the bourgeoisie. In its context, such a speech cannot help but seem too little too late, and a desperate undertone sounds throughout. By 1934, the Nazi seizure of power had already forced those German writers sympathetic to Benjamin’s position into exile, assuming they had not already fled the deteriorating conditions in Germany beforehand like Joseph Roth or Benjamin himself. Likewise, many of the writers Benjamin singles out for criticism, such as Alfred Döblin and Heinrich Mann, had themselves been forced to flee for being too far to the left of the National Socialist party line.

Why then return to this strange work? What does it have to teach contemporary readers? For several reasons to be outlined over the course of this essay, “Der Autor als Produzent” lends itself to a form of creative misreading that makes it an excellent point of departure for exploring the role radical politics had in the German media of the Weimar era outside the realm of explicitly political journalism, for a broader context underlies Benjamin’s polemic. The project Benjamin outlines in the text was not meant to begin in 1934 but had, in fact, already begun, perhaps as early as 1926 when he and Siegfried

Kracauer began discussing their mutual interest in Marx.<sup>1</sup> When read looking backwards instead of forwards, the text can provide a guide to understanding what had been attempted in the media, particularly the critical press as exemplified by Benjamin's friend and sometimes editor, the feuilletonist Siegfried Kracauer. By examining the work of Siegfried Kracauer in the feuilleton in relation to other leftwing feuilletonists, the project Benjamin outlines in "Autor als Produzent" comes into focus, and one can see how the leftwing feuilletonists of the Weimar era attempted, some subtly others more directly, to shape and subvert the political consciousness of the German bourgeoisie by expanding the possibilities of what the feuilleton could be and do.

No grand conspiracy or organized effort existed among Weimar leftwing authors to accomplish this revolution of social consciousness. If anything, Benjamin's polemic against other leftists and leftist movements in his address suggests the contrary. Their individual efforts do, however, lend themselves readily to comparison with the project Benjamin outlines, making it an effective starting point. The nexus around Siegfried Kracauer at the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, which includes Walter Benjamin who was himself a contributor to the newspaper's feuilleton, forms the exception here. In his correspondence, Kracauer outlines how he used his position as the feuilleton editor in Berlin to carry out a revolutionary project similar to what Benjamin outlines in "Autor als Produzent," though more covertly than Benjamin's often combative language seems to suggest.<sup>2</sup>

Benjamin sets the tone for his project with an epigraph from Ramon Fernandez: "Il s'agit de gagner les intellectuels à la classe ouvrière, en leur faisant prendre conscience de

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<sup>1</sup> In a letter from 3 June 1926, Benjamin references a letter Kracauer had written Bloch, which he had seen, and speaks of a "Bestätigung unserer neueren Konvergenzen und hoffe im gleichen Sinne bald wieder direkt von Ihnen zu hören, insbesondere wenn möglich, von Ihren Marxstudien" ("Brief 8" 23).

<sup>2</sup> See the discussion of Kracauer's letters to Gubler and Bloch below.



l'identité de leurs démarches spirituelles et de leurs conditions de producteur" (in "Autor" 228). In truth, though, many prominent German authors of his era had already been won over to the cause of the working class, at least as a matter of sympathy. Nor was this a phenomenon limited to the political left. Right-wing authors such as Ernst Jünger also embraced the cause of the working class, though on very different terms. Nevertheless, Benjamin demands much more than sympathy. He begins by putting in question the right of the author to exist, let alone to maintain that artistic autonomy so long essential to the bourgeois conception of the artist. Speaking for his audience, Benjamin addresses this question of autonomy:

Sie glauben, daß die gegenwärtige gesellschaftliche Lage ihn zur Entscheidung nötigt, in wessen Dienste er seine Aktivität stellen will. [. . .] Ein fortgeschrittener Typus des Schriftstellers erkennt diese Alternative an. Seine Entscheidung erfolgt auf der Grundlage des Klassenkampfes, indem er sich auf die Seite des Proletariats stellt. Da ist's denn nun mit seiner Autonomie aus. Er richtet seine Tätigkeit nach dem, was für das Proletariat im Klassenkampf nützlich ist. ("Autor" 228)

Whether other Weimar writers saw commitment to Marxist politics as constraining, or even precluding, their autonomy or not, the 20s and early 30s evinced no shortage of authors willing to take up the cause, particularly in the press.

For Benjamin, this represents the consequence of the historical-technological process that had challenged fundamental assumptions about the form and function of literature. He explains to his audience that

wir in einem gewaltigen Umschmelzungsprozeß, in dem viele Gegensätze, in welchen wir zu denken gewohnt waren, ihre Schlagkraft verlieren könnten. Lassen

Sie mich für die Unfruchtbarkeit solcher Gegensätze und für den Prozeß ihrer dialektischen Überwindung ein Beispiel geben. [. . .] Dieses Beispiel ist nämlich die Zeitung. (“Autor” 233)

Benjamin clearly was not alone in his assessment of the literary potential of the newspaper as many of the Weimar era’s most celebrated literati contributed both journalistic pieces as well as serialized novels and shorter fiction to newspapers, namely to the pages of the *feuilleton*<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, the *feuilleton* section of the newspaper best embodies the *Umschmelzungsprozeß* Benjamin describes above. Where else but “unter dem Strich,” “under the line,” the pronounced bold stroke that separated the *feuilleton* from the news, would theater, book, and film reviews brush up against descriptions of political rallies, sociological and philosophical observations, and travel reports. Where would all of those share space with short stories and serialized novels?

Siegfried Kracauer recognized the potential of newspapers himself and the *feuilleton* in particular. In that chaotic section whose physical borders were fixed by a bold line but the definition and purview of which were always ill-defined and intellectually sprawling, Kracauer saw the possibility for new forms of epistemology, sociology, and politics. As Helmut Stalder aptly distills it: “Er wollte das *Feuilleton* zu einem Ort philosophischer Auseinandersetzung machen, zu einem Feld gesellschaftlicher Selbstreflexion, zum Instrument gesellschaftlicher Aufklärung und Veränderung, zum Platz auch für den utopischen Entwurf” (Stalder 15). While these may seem lofty goals for the cultural section of a newspaper that appeared three times daily, Kracauer’s vision places him firmly within

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<sup>3</sup> A list of some, but by no means all, still recognizable names would include: Heinrich Mann, Robert Musil, Wolfgang Koeppen, and Alfred Döblin (some of whose work will be discussed below). Others, now remembered for their fictional works, were arguably better known then for their contributions to periodicals, including Joseph Roth, Karl Kraus, and Kurt Tucholsky all of whom will be discussed below.

the German tradition of using the newspaper as a vehicle to shape, even to create, public consciousness<sup>4</sup>. That Kracauer's vision for the feuilleton has clear overlaps with the program outlined by Benjamin should come as no surprise. They often collaborated in the pages of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, and in "Autor als Produzent," Benjamin's discussion of the Soviet author Sergej Tretjakow as a model of the "'operierender' Schriftsteller," or "operative writer"<sup>5</sup> borrows liberally from an earlier feuilleton piece of Kracauer's<sup>6</sup>. With that collaboration in mind, however, the conspicuous absence of overt references to politics in Stalder's summary of Kracauer's plans is striking. Admittedly, though both men embraced radical philosophical projects early on in their careers, their radical politics developed only over the course of the 1920s.

Nevertheless, radical politics had a place in Weimar journalism long before Kracauer and Benjamin embraced them. Periodicals, particularly magazines (*Zeitschriften*) like *Die Weltbühne* under the leadership of Kurt Tucholsky and later Carl von Ossietzky, championed strong leftist positions throughout the Weimar Republic. Magazines could specialize and were often targeted at particular audiences. Newspapers, by virtue of their need for subscribers, had to cast a wider net, making them better suited to projects like that envisioned by Kracauer, which sought to exert an effect on the broader public's consciousness. Yet, authors like Tucholsky and von Ossietzky certainly fit the definition of the "'operierenden' Schriftsteller," of which Benjamin says: "Seine Mission ist nicht zu berichten, sondern zu kämpfen; nicht den Zuschauer zu spielen, sondern aktiv einzugreifen. Er bestimmt sie durch die Angaben, die er über seine Tätigkeit macht" ("Autor" 232). At the same time, journalists

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<sup>4</sup> See Jürgen Habermas's *Struktur Wandel der Öffentlichkeit* and Ch. I of this paper.

<sup>5</sup> A more literal translation might be "operating writer," but such a phrase in English has confusing connotations more medical than political in nature. "Operative," I believe, maintains the political intention of the German.

<sup>6</sup> See the discussion of Kracauer's review of Tretjakow's *Feld-Herren* below.

like Joseph Roth and Egon Erwin Kisch, who certainly did “report” for both newspapers and magazines, also “fought,” and often as subtly as Siegfried Kracauer, in the name of workers, the downtrodden, and leftist politics.

Despite these similarities in cause and content, both Benjamin and Kracauer both singled out the “Neue Sachlichkeit” movement, which Kisch has come to embody for particular criticism. Whether this resulted from the narcissism of small differences or professional jealousy, it demonstrates just how contentious the Weimar Republic was on all levels and particularly on the left. The failure of leading leftwing intellectuals to find common cause and articulate a common project even at that (too) late hour in 1934, may indeed represent just one more symptom of an underlying disease that crippled the political left throughout the Weimar era, preventing it from effectively opposing the rise of the fascist far-right. For, ultimately, this paper addresses a failed project. The radical revolution of German public consciousness never materialized, at least not in the form Kracauer, Benjamin, et alia dreamed it would. National Socialism would instead come to dominate German consciousness as the Weimar Republic reached its catastrophic end.

Still, the project Walter Benjamin articulates in “Autor als Produzent,” that Siegfried Kracauer tried to accomplish, and which united and divided many of Weimar Germany’s journalistic and literary luminaries, remains worthy of study and analysis. Not just because of the grandeur of its vision and the nobility of its attempt, but because that attempt did inform the public consciousness and did shape the public conversation. Indeed, much of the literature that grew out of the Weimar fight over the German soul still finds its way into readers’ hands and remains part of the literary and philosophical conversation today. It also provides a useful means of elucidating one of the most important periods in world history,

the consequences of which still reverberate. Like any world-historical moment, however, older historical moments and movements underlie the conditions that make the journalistic projects of the Weimar era possible, and just as this paper proposes a backwards reading of Benjamin's forward-facing text, it proposes to go backwards itself in order to work its way forward.

## Chapter I. History

### I.1 The *Frankfurter Zeitung*

In order to understand the project outlined by Benjamin, and which Siegfried Kracauer tried to effect in his journalistic career, it helps to begin by examining the paper, to which both men contributed and for which Kracauer served as an editor, the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. In the Weimar era, the *Frankfurter Zeitung*<sup>7</sup> was one of the most respected German dailies, and among those who still know of it, its reputation endures. Peter Gay offers it an ebullient eulogy in his *Weimar Culture*:

The *Frankfurter Zeitung* was democratic, liberal, but free of parties; its tone was reasonable, its coverage wide, its politics intelligent and wholly independent. In its makeup and its stories, it refused to adopt fashionable sensationalism . . . its commitment to the best in modern culture emerged in its championship of modern poets and playwrights, and in the civilized reportage of Siegfried Kracauer. (76)

All of this was true, at least for a time. At the height, and even towards the ebb, of the Weimar Republic, the *FZ* stood as a bastion of the old values of the bourgeois German press, and Siegfried Kracauer played an important part in at once affirming and undermining those values.

The *FZ* did not, however, begin “free of parties.” Like most newspapers established in the second half of the nineteenth century,<sup>8</sup> the *FZ*, founded in 1856 by Leopold Sonnemann as the *Frankfurter Handelszeitung* (Stalder 27), served as a vehicle for its

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<sup>7</sup> Hereafter “*FZ*.”

<sup>8</sup> See discussion of the emergence of the German political press below.

founders in politics. In the case of Sonnemann, this meant the left-liberal “old<sup>9</sup>” Deutsche Volkspartei, or “German People’s Party, for which Sonnemann served as a representative both in Frankfurt and in the Reichstag (Stalder 28). Over time, the *FZ* grew closer ideologically to the Deutsche Demokratische Partei, the “German Democratic Party,” but that party’s disintegration along with the other centrist parties over the course of the 1920s, led the *FZ* to distance itself from any political party while independently maintaining its center-left political stance (Stalder 33). This consistency of political stance made the *FZ* a largely stable voice in unstable times but conversely meant that its role necessarily changed along with those times.

Whereas the paper’s insistence on economic liberalism and democracy had made it an opposition paper in Imperial Germany, those same traits in the Weimar Republic made it a champion of the existing order, of the *status quo post bellum*, so to speak. As Stalder aptly puts it: “Die neue Aufgabe der Zeitung bestand nun darin, die junge Republik gegen die Anhänger des alten Regimes und die Träger der monarchischen Tradition auf der rechten Seite sowie gegen die sozialrevolutionären, räterepublikanischen und kommunistischen Utopien auf der linken Seite zu verteidigen” (Stalder 29). While this description seems to fit Peter Gay’s assessment that the *FZ* was “the voice of reason at all times” (15), it does not sound like the obvious choice for a location from which to plot the overthrow of the bourgeois order. Nor did Kracauer begin his journalistic work with that intent. His first contribution to the *FZ* during the Weimar Republic<sup>10</sup> was the essay “Bekenntnis zur Mitte,” or “Commitment to the Center,” published on 6 June 1920, which encapsulates the *FZ*’s

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<sup>9</sup> As opposed to the nationalistic “new” Deutsche Volkspartei of Stresemann during the Weimar Republic

<sup>10</sup> Inka Mülder-Bach gives his first contribution to the *FZ* as a precocious piece entitled “Ein Abend im Hochgebirge” published in 1906 when Kracauer was only 17 years old (*Werke* 5.1 9).

political position, as well as presumably his own at the time. Kracauer begins his defense of centrism by assuring readers that “was von außen her betrachtet als Lauheit erscheint, ist in Wahrheit oft die Frucht von Erlebnissen, deren nur tiefe und reife Geister fähig sind” (“Bekenntnis” 70) before expounding on such experiences as witnessed by Nietzsche, Tolstoy, and Goethe among others and concluding with the assertion that “Eine Demokratie, die von Erlebnissen wie den geschilderten getragen wird, darf ihrer Anziehungskraft auf die seelisch reifen und politisch durchgebildeten Schichten eines Volkes stets gewiß sein” (“Bekenntnis” 74). Stilted, verbose, and unapologetically bourgeois, this early work bears little resemblance to the confident leftwing feuilletonist of the late 20s and early 30s.

This piece did, however, manage to secure Kracauer a foot in the door. By early 1921 Kracauer was being paid by the line as a correspondent for the *FZ* and by the beginning of September of that year he was already drawing a salary as an editor. Kracauer’s work for the *FZ*’s feuilleton during this time already exhibited a distancing of himself from earlier interests in phenomenology, particularly the economic phenomenology of Georg Simmel, but it would not be until sometime during 1924 or 25 that Kracauer’s work begins to display a more Marxist orientation (Stalder 115). Intriguingly, and probably not coincidentally, this corresponds closely to the time when Benno Reifenberg assumed editorial management of the *FZ*’s feuilleton. Indeed, it would be in collaboration with Reifenberg that Kracauer would formulate his project of using the feuilleton to subvert bourgeois consciousness. Until Reifenberg’s takeover in 1924, the tone of the feuilleton during the Weimar Republic had largely been shaped by its previous manager Rudolf Geck, though also influenced by Josef Roth and Kracauer (Stalder 91). The feuilleton work of Geck, as well as that of the paper’s theater critic Bernhard Diebold, embodied the antebellum conception of the feuilleton as a



politically innocent and innocuous place of aesthetic play and *flânerie* (Stalder 89).

Reifenberg's turn at the helm represented a dramatic programmatic departure from this outmoded concept of the feuilleton.

Under Reifenberg's management, the FZ's feuilleton made an obvious leftward lurch. Near the end of his tenure in charge of the feuilleton, Reifenberg spelled out the program he had pursued for the feuilleton in an editorial titled "Gewissenhaft," or "Conscientious," which reads in part:

In dem journalistischen Bezirk, der nach dem heutigen Aufbau der Zeitung Feuilleton heißt, werden Berichte gegeben: d.h. hier wird ins allgemeine Bewusstsein gebracht, wie die Substanzen unserer Gegenwart gelagert sind, nach welchen Absichten sie sich ändern. Die Berichte zeigen den Raum an, in dem überhaupt Politik gemacht werden kann. Das Feuilleton ist der fortlaufende Kommentar zur Politik.

[. . .] Wer in den Stand gesetzt ist, durch die Konventionen hindurchzusehen, wird mit einigem Staunen wahrnehmen, wie neu, wie durchaus unbekannt unsere eigene Gegenwart sich darbietet [. . .] Dieser gewissenhafte Mann, als welchen wir den Journalisten ansprechen wollen, beschreibt lieber den Arbeitstag eines Postbeamten, ehe er das Kinostück kommentiert, mit dem der Postbeamte seinen Abend ausfüllt.

[. . .] Im Gegensatz zu den allzu vielen Schriftstellern, die ihren Mangel an Sprache durch den kuriosen und seltsamen Gegenstand ihres Schreibens zu überdecken versuchen, muß der echte Journalist mit dem Glanz und der Verlässlichkeit seiner Sprache auch den geringen, den unscheinbaren Gegenstand ausstatten. ("Gewissenhaft" 1)

If Geck and Diebold represented the old-guard feuilleton values that contrasted the high art of writing poems and books to last the ages with the trivial, ephemeral scribbling of journalists (Stalder 93), this article represented a forceful rebuke and the program it outlines a total rejection. However, while Reifenberg's editorial makes the case for the feuilleton as a political space and a focus on the lower strata of society, the Marxism that undergirded this leftward movement remains sub rosa. Fortunately, letters Kracauer exchanged with his friend Ernst Bloch as well as with Reifenberg's successor Friedrich Gubler shed light both on their radical project for the feuilleton and on their reasons for keeping it secret.

In a letter to Kracauer on 16 May 1928, Ernst Bloch opens with a discussion of an essay he had submitted to the *FZ* but is willing to withdraw because Kracauer thinks the writing too difficult for the paper. Bloch offers in its stead to submit a new essay: "Dies letztere ist zwar auch stellenweise nicht leicht, desgleichen kommt Marx vor (wie auch nicht?), freilich zuweilen 'kritisch' . . . darf man in einer bürgerlichen Zeitung überhaupt ein nachdenkliches Wort über Marx schreiben" ("Nr. 19" 304)? In the context of the letter, the question does not appear to be facetious. After signing off the letter by giving "Ihnen [Kracauer] und Reifenberg die Hand," he includes a postscript telling Kracauer that "Ihren Brief, der sehr gefährlich ist wegen des 'geheimen Marxismus' in der Fr[ank]f[ur]t[e]r Z[ei]t[un]g, zerreiße in diesem Augenblick, damit er nicht irgendwie gelesen werden kann. Das würde Hugenberg in der Wahlzeit so passen" (Bloch 305). Bloch seems to be as good as his word because the letter he refers to has not survived. Nevertheless, Bloch's letter provides enough information to piece together the context. Though Kracauer was communicating his and Reifenberg's Marxist project to trusted contributors like Bloch (and presumably Benjamin as well), it had to be kept secret lest the rightwing exploit it to create a red scare by

painting the celebrated feuilleton in the good bourgeois *FZ* as a Marxist front. While it may have been true to an extent, it would have been counterproductive if known.

Similarly, in a letter to Friedrich Gubler on 28 January 1931, Kracauer clarifies why he and Reifenberg had kept from simply baring their ideological leanings in the feuilleton pages. Gubler had complained that the *FZ*'s feuilleton did not contain enough general essays responding to the rising reactionary culture. Kracauer's response deserves quoting at some length:

Reifenberg und ich haben genau gewusst, warum wir gerade das Genre der generellen Aufsätze nicht nur nicht gepflegt, sondern sogar mit Absicht etwas ausgeschaltet haben. Aus dem einfachen Grunde, weil es uns zur Konkretisierung des verblasenen deutschen Denkens als unerlässlich erschien, die allgemeinen Dinge entweder innerhalb einer bestimmten Konkretion [. . .] oder bei Gelegenheit eines aktuellen Falles zu sagen [. . .] Ferner aus dem Grunde, weil im allgemeinen Aufsätzen unsere prinzipielle Radikalität zutage getreten wäre, und zwar mit einer Deutlichkeit, die uns nicht oft als opportun erschien. Das hat uns nicht gehindert, solche grundsätzlichen Gedanken in entscheidenden Augenblicken zu äussern [sic], und so mag es auch weiter gehalten werden. Aber ein Überwiegen des Allgemeinen ist schlecht, unpädagogisch und führt, wie viele Fälle Beweisen, zu Geschwätz. (Letter to Friedrich Gubler)

This letter provides some of the richest information on the feuilleton program that Kracauer and Reifenberg worked out together and shows just how strongly Kracauer worked to carry it forward on his own. It describes a program of concentrating on concrete examples to focus thought and implies a pedagogical motive for this. The letter also makes clear that Kracauer

and Reifenberg had wanted to avoid their true political leanings becoming public as this would be “inopportune.” This can be understood in terms of the earlier letter from Bloch as meaning a revelation of the radical Marxism behind the *FZ* feuilleton could feed into a “red scare.” It would also almost certainly have turned off the *FZ*’s bourgeois readership who would then no longer be receptive to the subtly subversive messages they had unwittingly ingested before. There were, however, political reasons within the newspaper for Kracauer and Reifenberg to avoid bringing their radicalism to light. For one, the less radical editors in the political and business sections of the paper, which dominated the *FZ*’s internal politics, often worked to check the feuilleton’s direction. As Almut Todorow puts it: “es ging um eine Kontrolle der thematischen und ideologischen Bewegung im Feuilleton, um die Aufsicht sozusagen” (Todorow 106). By the end of the twenties, though, the whole tone of the paper had begun to change.

Like other newspapers during the Weimar Republic, by the late 1920s the *FZ* was facing declining circulation and increasing financial difficulties. In order to resolve these difficulties, in February of 1929, the *FZ* entered into a financial partnership with IG Farben, at the time Germany’s largest industrial concern (Stalder 37). The dangers for a far-left feuilleton in a newspaper financed by big industry are obvious, and the apparent consequences materialized quickly. Reifenberg was moved out of the feuilleton and replaced from outside by Gubler while Kracauer, who might have expected to take Reifenberg’s place, was dispatched to head the Berlin branch’s feuilleton division, replacing Bernard von Brentano who was let go (Stalder 42). Kracauer’s correspondence displays an ambivalence toward the move, on the one hand seeing as a semi-banishment in consequence of the new editorial attitude at the paper but on the other looking forward to living and working in Berlin

(Stalder 44–45) where he had previously done his research for *Die Angestellten*. Ultimately, much of Kracauer’s best feuilleton writing would come out of his sojourn, but that sojourn was destined to be brief. Already in early 1931, political differences with the *FZ*’s editorial board<sup>11</sup> and a reduced salary brought on by the paper’s budget cuts, made Kracauer’s life in Berlin difficult, particularly when his salary was cut in half again, and he was forbidden from contributing to other publications<sup>12</sup>. Nevertheless, after Hitler came to power in January 1933, Kracauer was able to negotiate with the *FZ* to be sent to the Paris bureau<sup>13</sup>. He left Berlin on 28 February 1933, just in time to avoid Hitler’s roundup of 4,000 opposition figures that night (Stalder 60). Once Kracauer was safely in Paris, the management of the *FZ* tried to force Kracauer out without it appearing they had given in to outside pressure to fire a Jew (Stalder 63). In the end, the *FZ* was successful and, on the pretext of a piece Kracauer had contributed to the *Neue Tage-Buch*, terminated his employment in the summer of 1933, leaving him to his own devices in exile (Stalder 65).

## **I.2 Newspapers and Bourgeois Consciousness**

In order to understand the role journalism might have in changing bourgeois consciousness in the Weimar era, one must understand the role journalism has played in bourgeois consciousness’s historical development. Newspapers emerge at the origin point of both capitalism and the bourgeoisie, and the postal service for that matter. Starting in the fourteenth century, “handwritten newspapers” (“geschriebene Zeitungen”) arose out of a correspondence system linking mercantile centers, which in turn caused merchant guilds to

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Adorno’s letter to Kracauer on 2 January 1931, and Kracauer’s reply on 12 January 1931.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Kracauer’s letter to Gubler on 23 January 1931 and on 27 October 1931.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Reifenberg’s letter to Kracauer on 8 February 1933

organize regular postal routes (Habermas 25–26). Hand written and directed at a very narrow audience these proto-newspapers most resemble trade publications or newsletters. However, the introduction of the printing press would change everything. “Mit dem Aufstieg der gedruckten Zeitungen im 16. Jahrhundert setzte sich jedoch etwas qualitativ völlig Neues durch: der Beginn der Massenkommunikation” (Geisler 137). This “mass” communication remained limited to a relatively small public. As Habermas notes, one can only have “eine Presse im strengen Sinne erst, seitdem die regelmäßig Berichterstattung öffentlich, wiederum: dem Publikum allgemein zugänglich wird. Das aber geschieht erst Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts” (Habermas 26).

Even before the advent of a true public press, the printing press made it possible for the first newspapers to reach daily circulations. “Die ersten Zeitungen im strengen Sinne, ironischerweise auch ‘politische Zeitungen’ geheißen, erscheinen zuerst wöchentlich, um die Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts schon täglich” (Habermas 31). It is worth pausing on the irony Habermas highlights here. Though these early newspapers did contain reports of diet meetings and wars, since they were based on merchants’ handwritten newspaper correspondence, their focus remained on mercantile matters. It would be another century before newspapers would show their political potential and, in Germany, not until the Weimar Republic that the lifting of censorship laws would allow journalists to freely voice their political opinions publicly.

At the same time that newspapers were reaching larger audiences more frequently and becoming more public, publishers were beginning to supplement them with magazines, less about news and reports and more about learning and culture. This began in France with *Journal des Savants* in 1665 before being followed by major German journals such as the

*Acta Eruditorum* in 1682 and *Monatsgespräche* six years later. These scientifically-minded journals, paired with printed newspapers, helped spread and shape the bourgeois education that would make possible both a bourgeois consciousness and an informed, reasoning public (Habermas 35).

A certain destiny inheres in etymology, and so it is worth pausing a moment to reflect on some of the words entering increasing circulation in this essay. “Press,” in the journalistic sense, emerges in the mid-seventeenth century in English and seems straightforwardly to derive from the device that makes such a thing possible, but the word was borrowed from the French in the eleventh century meaning at once a “pressing device” but in a sense just as old as a “crowd” (“press, n.1.”). While this latter sense may be obsolete today, it was not throughout the period covered by this essay, and the tension embodied in the word between its material production, the printing press, and its audience, or even the object it sometimes claims to represent, the crowd, has important consequences. After all, who controls the printing press and who works it? What constitutes the crowd, or in this case, the public?

This later question possesses particular salience when considering the differences between the English word “public” and its German counterpart “Öffentlichkeit.” The former derives in part from French but ultimately from the Latin *pūblicum*, “public interest” (“public, adj. and n.”). The noun “Öffentlichkeit” ultimately derives from the adjective “öffentlich.” In his *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Jürgen Habermas contextually explains the meaning of the adjective:

‘Öffentlich’ nennen wir Veranstaltungen, wenn sie, im Gegensatz zu geschlossenen Gesellschaften, allen zugänglich sind—so wie wir von öffentlichen Plätzen sprechen oder von öffentlichen Häusern. Aber schon die Rede von ‘öffentlichen Gebäuden’

meint nicht nur deren allgemeine Zugänglichkeit; sie müssen nicht einmal für den öffentlichen Verkehr freigegeben sein; sie beherbergen einfach Einrichtungen des Staates und sind als solche öffentlich. (Habermas 11)

*Öffentlichkeit* thus shows its kinship to *offen* (“open”), but with the key difference that, while a certain universality is implied, it is not always meant. German does also have a noun from the same source as English “public,” *Publikum*, and though its meaning is closer to the English “audience” (or “public” in the sense of “theater-going public”), Habermas sometimes uses *Publikum* in the general sense of English “public.”<sup>14</sup> Taken together, these two German nouns, “*Öffentlichkeit*” and “*Publikum*,” bring to the fore a tension oft elided by the English word “public,” that between whom the word includes as agents and whom the word addresses as an audience. If the masses are meant to take part in a public spectacle, are those same masses meant to take part in public discourse? For Habermas, the answer, at least historically, is no. As he notes, *Öffentlichkeit* first appears as a noun in the eighteenth century, and “Wenn Öffentlichkeit erst in dieser Periode nach ihrem Namen verlangt, dürfen wir annehmen, daß sich diese Sphäre, jedenfalls in Deutschland, erst damals gebildet und ihre Funktion übernommen hat; sie gehört spezifisch zur ‘bürgerlichen Gesellschaft’” (Habermas 12). Indeed, it is no coincidence that the eighteenth century sees the flowering both of bourgeois consciousness into the creation of a “public” and of newspapers into a political and cultural force. The two go hand in hand.

In the course of the eighteenth century, newspapers would begin to branch out, becoming the *Mischform* that makes them recognizable today made them so attractive to Kracauer and Benjamin as both a medium of expression and weapon in the class war. This

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. quote above from Habermas 26.



process began when the sort of learned articles that had featured in *Acta Eruditorum* and *Monatsgespräche* in the previous century began to find their way into daily newspapers along with book reviews, further expanding the educated, informed public. Along with the scientific and philosophical reviews that helped expand bourgeois knowledge, the book and later theater, music, and art reviews that newspapers began to offer helped to create the “literarische Vorform der politisch fungierenden Öffentlichkeit” (Habermas 40), not yet political but coming into consciousness of itself. Habermas describes the process thus: “Indem Kultur Warenform annimmt und sich damit zu ‘Kultur’ [. . .] recht eigentlich erst entfaltet, wird sie als der diskussionsreife Gegenstand beansprucht, über den sich die publikumsbezogene Subjektivität mit sich selbst verständigt” (40). This not only places the roots of bourgeois consciousness in the development of the press but more specifically in newspapers’ cultural offerings.

Bearing this connection between the cultural pages and class consciousness in mind, it does not seem strange that Kracauer should see such political potential in the feuilleton. The feuilleton did not just have its finger on the pulse of contemporary culture but on the root of bourgeois culture itself. If one’s goal is to deracinate bourgeois consciousness, there is no better place to start. Even the mantle of “cultural critic,” which both Kracauer and Benjamin were to wear finds itself anticipated in the eighteenth century “Kunstrichter.” In the figure of the *Kunstrichter*, already the outlines emerge of the modern critic as someone who must speak against artists and institutions in the name of the public and against the public in defense of artists and institutions, for: “Dieser übernimmt eine eigentümlich dialektische Aufgabe: er versteht sich als Mandatar des Publikums und als dessen Pädagoge zugleich” (Habermas 52).

At the same time as the bourgeoisie was awakening to its own culture and consciousness, governments began supplying newspapers with regular information about proceedings deemed relevant to the public, having already discovered their usefulness in regulating commerce (Habermas 32–35). Theoretically, this allowed ruling authorities to address their subjects directly. However, Habermas presents an important caveat here: “Die Obrigkeit adressiert ihre Bekanntmachungen an ‘das’ Publikum, im Prinzip also an alle Untertanen; aber für gewöhnlich erreicht sie auf diesem Wege nicht den ‘gemeinen Mann’, sondern allenfalls die ‘gebildeten Stände’ (Habermas 33). This privileges the *Bildungsbürgertum*, the educated bourgeoisie, in a way, singling them out as a conduit of state power. However, that privilege expresses itself through a medium of public reason and thus exposes state power to public critique. Here newspapers begin to wade into the fraught waters of politics.

As the space of critical confrontation between the press and state grew, the power relationship between the two began to shift dramatically. For example, early in the eighteenth century, Prussia tried merely to regulate the knowledge in the papers by requiring university professors to take turns submitting articles to the paper, but by the end of the century, the king saw the need to explicitly forbid the publishing of public criticism aimed at the state (Habermas 36). In some cases, this growing confrontation between newspapers and the state resulted in the harsh imprisonment of newspaper editors (Habermas 85). These reactions on the part of the state, demonstrate the increasing power of the public, particularly as represented by the press, and its nascent power to disrupt the existing order. While censorship and threat of punishment did have an effect on the early public press, Peter Gay’s assertion that in Germany in the eighteenth and nineteenth century “there were few

newspapers, and the newspapers there were had little political news and no political independence” (71) does not hold up to historical scrutiny. Despite omnipresent censorship, Germany had a diverse and lively political newspaper tradition during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century even compared to England and especially when compared to France (at least before the Revolution and during Napoleon’s rule).

Germany owes the early vibrancy of its newspaper culture in no small part to the peculiar institution that supported it. Throughout German cities, large and small, *Lesegesellschaften*, “reading societies” sprang up by the hundreds during the eighteenth century. Originally these clubs existed to help defray the then rather expensive costs of subscription to newspapers and magazines, but by the end of the eighteenth century, they existed as spaces, often physical spaces in the form of club houses, primarily for the open discussion of what one read in the news. In spite of the authoritarian character of the German states, these reading societies seem to have embodied the democratic spirit of the age (including in the exclusion of women from its embodiment): “Diese Vereine, die ihren Vorstand satzungsgemäß wählen, über die Aufnahme neuer Mitglieder mit Mehrheit beschließen, Streitfragen überhaupt auf parlamentarischem Wege erledigen, die Frauen ausschließen und Spiele verbieten, dienen einzig dem Bedürfnis der bürgerlichen Privatleute, als rasonierendes Publikum Öffentlichkeit zu bilden” (Habermas 85). Nor were these societies content solely to argue art and philosophy. They preferred political newspapers and magazines like the *Hamburger Politische Journal*, the *Journal von und für Deutschland*, or Wieland’s *Teutscher Merkur*. One paper, the *Staatsanzeigen*, had a circulation of about 4,000

subscribers (large by the standards of the time) and August Ludwig Schlözer for an editor, a man with a reputation for making the powerful tremble<sup>15</sup>.

Limited circulation and literacy may have done more to limit the powers of the early press than the threats of princes, no matter how draconian. However important or influential, any given journal in the late eighteenth century only reached a few thousand readers directly, and none outside the educated bourgeoisie. The same spirit agitating the members of the German reading societies, however, was agitating on a much grander scale in neighboring France, and the French Revolution would prove a crucial turning point in the development of newspapers, as so much else.

The French Revolution did not itself precipitate the contemporaneous shifts in German newspaper development, but it did serve as a catalyst, greatly accelerating changes already underway. While newspaper circulation did remain somewhat circumscribed, the reading public was growing at the end of the eighteenth century in Germany. Once the revolution commenced in France, hunger for news of the latest events caused a dramatic surge in the number and circulation of newspapers in Germany. This great demand for news converged with another historically significant trend: more writers were turning to journalism as a means of financial support. As the eighteenth century wore on, the market for books was growing by leaps and bounds while the patronage system, upon which writers had depended for support, was dying. The German public was desperate for information about what was happening in France, and journalism offered writers an independent means of support (Geisler 144–45). It would be hard to overstate the importance these developments represent for both German literature and journalism. In swapping noble for public patronage, writers

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<sup>15</sup> A saying of the time has it that the powerful were afraid “in den Schlözer zu kommen” (quoted in Habermas 85).

gained their independence from the old order, and newspapers gained higher quality writers and correspondents, paving the way for more literary contributions to periodicals.

These shifts further converged with other major developments to revolutionize the potential of the press in the early nineteenth century. One of the most important changes was in the means of production of the newspaper itself. The 1810s saw the introduction of the cylinder press, which greatly increased the rate at which papers could be printed. Whereas at the beginning of the nineteenth century a press could produce about 125 four-page copies an hour, by the end of the Napoleonic Wars it would be nearly 1,000, and by the end of the nineteenth century nearly 100 times that (Ross 21). This allowed printers not only to keep up with demand but to supply an ever larger reading public. Likewise, during the Napoleonic Wars the position of the political press in Germany solidified into the institution of the *Meinungspresse*, or “opinion journalism,” that would endure for over a century. At the core of this form of political journalism was the principle that, while facts and information mattered, they did not represent the end all be all of the press’s *raison d’être*. As Corey Ross reports, Joseph Görres, founder of the *Rheinischer Merkur* put it this way: “In the absence of basic rights and freedoms it was a ‘servile (*kneichtisch*) principle . . . that they [newspapers] should convey mere facts and refrain from making any judgments’” (quoted in Ross 21). The convergence of all these trends led to an explosion in German newspaper readership. By the 1780s, for example, the *Hamburgische Correspondent* had a circulation of more than 21,000 copies, but by 1800, it had reached 30,000, making it the most widely read paper in Europe (Geisler 145). For all their limitations, German newspaper had become a crucial organ of public opinion and consciousness, at least among the bourgeoisie.

Two papers that emerge in this time period exemplify the changes in journalism that would prove crucial to Kracauer's projects more than a century later: the *Allgemeine Zeitung* and the *Kölnische Zeitung*. The former, founded in 1794 under its original name *Neuste Weltkunde*, would come to dominate the German "political" newspaper market of the nineteenth century (Geisler 146). More importantly, however, and perhaps key to that success, the *Allgemeine Zeitung* would employ writers such as Heinrich Heine and Ludwig Börne, not just as contributors but as foreign correspondents. Though hunger for news of revolutionary France had first sparked a greater demand for foreign correspondents, the strict censorship within Germany lent prominence to the institution, for, as Geisler notes, "Über das Ausland durfte etwas freier geredet werden, was die Berichte aus London oder Paris wesentlich lebendiger und interessanter machte, als jene aus Berlin, Hamburg, oder München" (Geisler 148). Unsurprisingly, writers would exploit this lighter censorship to render criticism of the domestic in the guise of critiquing the foreign. Yet, this relative freedom not only allowed correspondents to slip political commentary veiled as criticism of foreign countries past the censors but seems to have opened up a space for experimentation and creativity. It is Heine who exemplifies in his articles and coins the term for that all-important figure in German journalism: the "Flaneur"<sup>16</sup>. Ludwig Börne likewise introduces the letter to the reader as a journalistic form in his "Schilderungen aus Paris" and "Briefe aus Paris" (Geisler 180). These innovations in form, coupled with their correspondingly novel content, fell outside of straightforward political reporting and so needed to find a home as newspapers divided themselves up into various sections. That home arrived in 1838 when the *Kölnische Zeitung* introduced the feuilleton section into German newspapers (Stalder 72).

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<sup>16</sup> Geisler notes, however, that the journalistic form is already somewhat prefigured in the journalistic work of Friedrich Bartuch (151).

The form was adapted from the French *Journal des Débats* in which it had been a fixture since the late eighteenth century. The introduction of the feuilleton into German papers separated, at least physically, the newspaper's culture section from its political and economic coverage, and politics and economics were increasingly becoming the focus of papers. After the revolution of 1848, a spate of new politically-oriented papers emerged, and even established papers like the *Kölnische Zeitung* assumed clear party affiliations (Fulda 15). However, as Kracauer and others would prove, separating culture from politics and economics on the page was not the same thing as extracting the political and economic from the cultural.

While the dramatic changes to newspaper form and content during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, revolutionized and expanded the role of newspapers in the public sphere, newspapers nevertheless remained largely the domain of the educated bourgeoisie. Expanding readerships and institutional reforms, however, would open newspapers up to the masses over the course of the nineteenth century. These reforms began in 1850 when changes to advertising laws open up advertisements as an important source of income for newspapers (Ross 22). While newspapers had always sought large circulations for the subscription fees, the promise of advertising revenue based on circulation presented even greater inducement to seek larger and larger audiences, and the audience, to an extent, was there. Ross reports that "As early as 1830 nearly all Germans had basic reading and writing skills, and by the end of the century illiteracy was all but obliterated in the Reich, tallying a mere 0.05 per cent (compared to 1 per cent in the United Kingdom and 4 per cent in France)" (Ross 12). This represented, then, a huge potential market for newspaper publishers. However, some barriers stood in the way of reaching such a wide audience, particularly with

regards to the establishment and operation of newspapers. Employment reforms of the 1860s addressed the first concern by opening up the establishment of new businesses to *Berufsfremde*, i.e. those outside a particular trade (ibid.). This opened the door to commercial investment in newspapers, and after the unification of Germany into the German Empire, the *Reichspressgesetz*, or “Press Law,” of 1874 would formalize and regulate the liberalization of the press throughout the empire (Ross 22). With all the components in place, the German daily newspaper entered the era of mass media. However, this did not come without tradeoffs. Whereas in 1800 newspapers devoted three quarters of their space to politics, this began to change by midcentury, and by 1900, politics only took up one third of the average newspaper’s real estate (Ross 31). Reaching a wider audience meant casting a wider net, and that, in turn, meant turning away from politics and toward entertainment.

These changes in the second half of the nineteenth century ushered in the modern era of the mass press and set the stage for the creation of a mass public. However, while imperial censorship and voting restriction remained, neither a truly mass public nor a truly free press could yet be attained. Though the Weimar Republic would open the door to both, it could not fully resolve the tensions inherent in the newspaper’s form. The newspaper had emerged in tandem with bourgeois political consciousness, feeding it as well as being nourished by it. In the Weimar era, newspapers would attempt to nourish the political consciousness of the masses, with mixed results. Catering to mass tastes often meant sacrificing political coverage for entertainment. From the conflict of class interests in the newspaper pages, the *Mischform* that Benjamin saw as politically potent emerged, and the *feuilleton*, that space where the desire for entertainment and information blurred together, stood out to Kracauer as the perfect place to lay bare the fissures in bourgeois cultural consciousness. These very tensions



and contradictions in the newspaper, a fundamental bourgeois institution attempting to expand its public, made it a potent target for a project of revolutionizing bourgeois consciousness. However, these contradictions also made it a fickle tool, a double-edged sword that would be thrust through the heart of the Weimar Republic, not in Communist revolution but in National Socialist suicide.

### **I.3 Weimar**

Newspapers played an important role throughout the political turmoil in the Weimar Republic, in explaining it to their readers, in distracting their readers from it, and in encouraging it. The press could take on this prominent new role because, at the moment of the Weimar Republic's birth, the socialist parties that assumed control after the fall of the empire decreed "freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, equitable suffrage, including for women, and amnesty for political prisoners" (Weitz 19). Within the socialist coalition in charge of the fledgling German Republic, however, strong differences of opinion on the direction the country should take had only grown stronger<sup>17</sup>. These differences would come to a violent head in the Spartacist uprising, when the radical Independent Socialists led an open revolt against the government of the moderate Social Democrats. Recognizing the importance of the press for organizing supporters and shaping public perception, the Spartacists first seized the press district in Berlin (Fulda 19). Nevertheless, the Social Democrats eventually triumphed, but the rift among the socialists had dire consequences. Fearing Bolshevism and longing for order, the Social Democrats compromised and made deals with the conservative remainders of the old regime, the

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<sup>17</sup> Even the SPD representative Philipp Scheidemann's declaration of the German Republic from the Reichstag balcony on 9 November 1918, came somewhat impromptu in order to anticipate the radical-socialist Karl Liebknecht's own declaration of a German Soviet Republic instead.

officers' corps, the capitalists, and the civil servants (Weitz 28). Among the civil servants the SPD had left in place were the judges, and they would prove stalwart accomplices of right-wing terrorists, assassins, and putschists. Peter Gay details how "between 1918 and 1922, assassinations traced to left-wing elements numbered twenty-two; of these, seventeen were rigorously punished, ten with the death penalty. Right-wing extremists, on the other hand, found the courts sympathetic: of the 354 murders committed by them, only one was rigorously punished, and not even that by the death penalty" (20). Unsurprisingly the far left would never forgive the center left for its compromises and complicity. If Benjamin seems hostile and untrusting of center leftists in *Autor als Produzent*, the early days of the Weimar Republic provides some context as to why.

The *Reichspresseamt*, or Reich Press Office and *Reichszentral für Heimatdienst*, Reich Center for Secret Service, both blamed the newly liberated left-wing press in part for the Spartacist revolt, but the government had little influence on the press (Ross 225). The press of the early Weimar Republic continued the overt partisan political tradition of the nineteenth century, with publishers even providing their paper's political stance to the directories for advertisers and explicit directions on how to vote in election (Fulda 19). Journalists did more, however, than simply tell readers how to vote. They also stood for office. Thirteen percent of the deputies in the Reichstag of 1924 were professional publicists (Fulda 20). Nevertheless, the various Weimar government never managed to exert much direct control over the press. This occurred in part because the chaos of ever-changing governments meant no newspaper could credibly shift its editorial position to support each successive government (Ross 228), and in part because editors were generally able to

maintain their political stances against the interference of their publishers, at least until the 1930s (Fulda 5).

The government did, nevertheless, use its authority to curb the press and other media where it could. For examples, the Reich president had the power to limit press freedoms in the interest of public order, and a 1922 Law for the Protection of the Republic forbade publications meant to provoke hostility toward the republic, but both applied only in extreme cases and enforcement was uneven (Ross 229). On 3 December 1926, the government passed its infamous censorship law against *Schund und Schmutz*, “trash and filth.” Controversial at the time of its passing and bound up with far-right moral histrionics and anti-Semitism, the law had only a minimal impact, banning a mere 143 works by early 1932 (Weitz 107).

Though these early measures proved largely ineffective, toward the end of the republic, the government adopted a more aggressive stance. Between 28 March and 6 October 1931, the conservative government would rely on the emergency powers of the constitution to issue three press edicts increasingly restricting press rights and suppressing radical publications<sup>18</sup> (Stalder 24). However, the biggest and most successful attack against the media launched by the Weimar government, then under Chancellor Heinrich Brüning, came in the form of the trial of Carl von Ossietzky. Ossietzky was the chief editor of the left-wing *Weltbühne* and was convicted of treason and sentenced to 18 months imprisonment in November 1931 for a 1929 article in the *Weltbühne* uncovering an illegal secret program to rearm the German air force (Fulda 189). This trial had a chilling effect on some elements in the German press, particularly on the *Boulevardzeitungen* (“popular newspapers” aimed at a lower-middle-class and working-class audience, sometimes translated as “tabloids”) of the

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<sup>18</sup> These edicts did not affect the *FZ* or other centrist publications that supported the republic (Stalder 24).

Ullstein firm, then Germany's largest publishing company. Following the trial, Ullstein's management tried to appease the conservative Prime Minister Heinrich Brüning's government by firing the vocally anti-National Socialist editor of one of its best-selling *Boulevardzeitungen*, the *BZ am Mittag*, Franz Höllering, whom it had poached from the Communist *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* only the previous year (ibid). The Ullstein purge did not stop there, however. Though the Ullstein brothers were themselves Jewish, to further accommodate the conservative government, Ullstein House purged itself of Jews and radicals and adopted a more patriotic tone (Gay 138).

While the focus on *Boulevardzeitungen* might seem strange in the present day, it made perfect sense at the time. Over the course of the Weimar Republic, the old political papers, the mainstay of the German press for over a century, saw their star decline as the *Boulevardzeitung*'s star rose ever higher. At the beginning of the Weimar era, the political press still believed in its old didactic function. Now expanded beyond the education of the bourgeois public, the press had a destiny to "lead the masses" (Fulda 19). The masses, however, preferred entertainment to education. Bernhard Fulda illustrates this with comparisons of political papers' circulation to overall circulation starting in 1925: "Until 1930 total circulation grew by over 30 per cent—but this growth was driven almost exclusively by the explosion of *Boulevardzeitungen*<sup>19</sup>, which nearly tripled between 1925 and 1930. In the same period the circulation of elite political newspapers fell by some 20 per cent" (Fulda 22). Even parties that did well at the polls did not necessarily see that reflected

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<sup>19</sup> According to Fulda: "By 1928, all tabloids were composed more or less the same way: ten to sixteen pages in total, about two pages on politics, three with local news, three to four with serialized novels and articles on film, theatre, and other cultural events, up to three pages on sports, two with business and stock market news, the rest carrying advertisements. Every addition was interspersed with many photos, drawings, and some caricatures. They all had a strong emphasis on entertainment, as evident in the space devoted to serialized novels, which would often amount to more than a page" (34).

in the sales of party newspapers. Josef Goebbels's *Der Angriff*, for example, had less than 10,000 subscribers when the Nazis gained 130,000 votes in the Berlin city council elections of 1929, and when the party gained nearly 400,000 votes in the September 1930 Reichstag elections, it would still take until the end of the year for *Angriff* subscriptions to surpass 50,000, and that increase may well have been a result more than a cause of the support at the polls (Fulda 23). Similarly, despite the growing number of KPD voters between 1924 and 1930, and its strong base of support in Berlin's proletariat, the *Rote Fahne*, the Communist Party organ, was hemorrhaging subscribers, and the majority of workers in Berlin were reading the *Berliner Morgenpost*<sup>20</sup> instead (Fulda 26).

In order to determine why party members and voters were rejecting the party's paper, the KPD performed a survey, and the results are telling. Responses ranged from the difficulty of the writing for working-class readers to the incessant polemics, but some of the most detailed answers expressed a desire for the entertainment and variety to be found in the bourgeois papers and mass-circulation dailies, like the *Berliner Morgenpost* (Fulda 26–27). It is difficult to know how far one can extrapolate from a Communist Party survey why readership declined in other party papers, but this point, the desire for variety and entertainment in addition to politics, seems likely to have wide saliency given how well it fits the rise of *Boulevardzeitungen* at the expense of political papers. Indeed, while it may be tempting to interpret the discrepancy between party support and the circulation of party newspapers as meaning no correlation existed between newspapers' role in public opinion and election results in the Weimar Republic, the prominence of *Boulevardzeitungen* means that one has to include them to gain an accurate view of the overall picture.

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<sup>20</sup> A mass circulation daily published by Ullstein and focused on entertainment. Though unconnected to a party, like most Ullstein properties it had a center-left slant.

The rising fortunes of the Communist Party during the middle of the Weimar period can better be understood in light of Willi Münzenberg's contributions to Communist publishing. Münzenberg bought the failing *Welt am Abend* in 1925 and turned it into a successful Communist *Boulevardzeitung* that marketed to a wide, potentially majority non-Communist, public and achieved a circulation of over 200,000 by 1929 (Fulda 33). With a peak circulation of around 300,000 making it the largest leftwing periodical in the Weimar Republic, the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, Münzenberg's other major Communist periodical, also reached a large non-Communist audience<sup>21</sup> (Ross 236). These dramatic numbers help to explain the increased electoral support for the KPD in the middle of the Weimar period. However, as mentioned above, the Communists were not the only party to gain support during this time. In this period of roughly 1925 – 1929, “anti-system” *Boulevardzeitungen* thrived, and their success went hand in hand with the success of anti-republican parties like the KPD, but also the NSDAP, the Nazis (Fulda 38). Without delving into the question of which phenomenon birthed the other or whether they emerged from a shared root cause, it suffices to note that sales of anti-republican *Boulevardzeitungen* and support for anti-republican parties seem to have fed off one another.

While the success of Communist periodicals during this time seemed to confirm Benjamin's assertions of the revolutionary potential of newspapers, the press, as mentioned above, is a double-edged sword, and after 1 May 1929, the KPD would feel how sharp it could be. Distortions in the non-Communist press, including the center-left press, of the Communist demonstrations on 1 May that turned into bloody riots leaving 18 dead turned

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<sup>21</sup> Ross's characterization of these non-Communist readers seems to fit Benjamin's caricature of bourgeois leftist intellectuals in “Autor als Produzent,” although it could also reflect back negatively on Kracauer and himself: “intellectuals whom the party leadership mistrusted and who, for their part, tended to look down their cultivated noses at the rough-and-ready working-class activists whose cause they supported” (236).

public sentiment against the KPD by blaming the bloodshed on them (Fulda 137). In fact, the violence had been caused by over-reactive police force under the leadership of an SPD captain shooting into crowds of demonstrators (Fulda 138), but police cover-ups and a shift in public sentiment meant the rightwing press could use specter of a “communist coup” as a boogey man (Fulda 137). To make matters worse, in an effort to distract the public after the failure on 9 August 1931 of a Communist-backed referendum to dissolve the Prussian parliament, a reporter for the *Rote Fahne*, Erich Mielke, led an ambush on some police officers, which resulted in the storming of the KPD’s headquarters and the banning of the *Rote Fahne* (Fulda 180). The Communist Party never fully recovered during what was left of the Weimar Republic, and with the left divided since the days of the Spartacist uprising, and only more so after 1 May 1929, the radical right, having finally coalesced around the Nazi Party seized the opportunity offered by President Hindenburg in 1933 and brought an end to the republic itself.

The history of the Weimar press and its entanglement with politics, particularly those of the Communist Party, demonstrate just how politically potent the mixed form of the newspaper could be. It was precisely the variety of form and entertainment that the Weimar *Boulevardzeitung* offered that attracted readers, and the politics mixed in with the spectacle proved powerful. While neither Siegfried Kracauer nor Walter Benjamin nor any of the other brilliant leftwing journalists of the Weimar era examined in this essay wrote for the *Boulevardzeitungen*, they understood the power of the political in unexpected places. The feuilleton represented the main culture and entertainment section of the major bourgeois newspapers and so drew the eye of those, like *Boulevardzeitung* readers, looking for diversion and entertainment. For those like Siegfried Kracauer, this made the feuilleton the

perfect place to ambush readers looking for diversion with socio-political criticism hiding within culture writing.



## Chapter II. Feuilleton

While the feuilleton, as the bastion of culture and entertainment in the newspaper, drew the eye of many readers, its reputation for frivolity and vapidness drew the scorn of many intellectuals. In his short piece “Unter dem Strich” (“Below the Line”), Ernst Bloch captures this sentiment viciously. The piece depicts the reader’s journey “stufenweise in den Spaß herab,” beginning in the business section, which “stimmt noch halb,” and continuing through the politics section, gradually losing its connection to fact:

Um unter dem Strich nun ganz und gar Unterhaltung zu werden: Unterhaltung über Vorgänge, die den Geschäftsmann nicht wirklich alterieren, die vor allem möglichst harmlos oder ‘bunt’ dargestellt werden. Hier stehen die gesprochenen Bilderchen unverbunden nebeneinander, ja, noch das Behelrende hat unterhaltsam zu sein.

Ausnahmen gibt es in zwei, drei alten Blättern; sonst ist überall Kunst der Umgehung, Unlust zur Sache. (“Unter” 37)

Of the feuilleton’s place in bourgeois consciousness, Bloch says in reading it: “Das verblasene bürgerliche Bewußtsein verbläst sich noch einmal” (ibid). In “Unter dem Strich,” Bloch is criticizing the traditional entertainment-focused feuilleton represented at the *FZ* by Geck, Diebold, and the other old-guard feuilletonists as described above. The exception he makes for “two or three old papers,” however, likely applies to the *FZ* feuilleton as represented by Benno Reifenberg and Bloch’s friend Siegfried Kracauer. For Reifenberg and Kracauer, as for their fellow *FZ* contributor, and one of the finest feuilletonists of the age,

Joseph Roth, the feuilleton was not a frivolous space but one where the reader came face to face with the truest representation of reality, albeit bit by bit.

Roth makes this point in an opinion survey by the *Literarische Welt* entitled “Die Tagespresse als Erlebnis” (“The Daily Press as an Experience”), in which famous German writers of the day were asked to discuss how they experienced the daily newspaper. In his contribution, Roth argues that artistic portrayal was the only form of representation that approached reality:

Wäre die Zeitung so unmittelbar, so nüchtern, so reich, so leicht kontrollierbar wie die Realität, so könnte sie, wie diese, Erlebnisse wohl vermitteln. Allein sie gibt eine unzuverlässig gesiebte Realität—und eine mangelhaft geformte, das heißt also: eine gefälschte. Denn es gibt keine andere Objektivität als eine künstlerische. Sie allein vermag einen Sachverhalt wahrheitsgemäß darzustellen. (“Tagespresse” 4)

His conclusion to the piece further emphasizes the importance Roth places on artistic writing in the newspaper: “Ich kann nur hier und dort ein bereits geformtes Erlebnis in der Zeitung genießen: ich meine die seltenen Beiträge der seltenen guten Schriftsteller. Und nur dieser Umstand rettet die Zeitung von heute: die Mitarbeit guter Schriftsteller” (ibid). While this may sound like a bit of self-promotion, Roth being a widely celebrated writer who wrote for a major newspaper, more importantly it represents a full-throated argument for the place of the feuilleton in Weimar newspapers. Though Roth never actually uses the word, it would have been widely understood that the feuilleton was the demesne of artistic writing and the section of the paper to which authors generally contributed, when they contributed.

Kracauer, too, saw the importance of the old-fashioned journalist being replaced in the newspaper by the writer, but perhaps unsurprisingly, he saw this as being as much a result

of socio-economic as artistic necessity. In an article for the *Neue Rundschau*, titled “Über den Schriftstellern,” Kracauer expressed his opinion on the matter more candidly than he likely could have in the pages of the bourgeois paper for which he worked:

Journalist und Schriftsteller vertauschen unter dem Druck der ökonomischen und sozialen Verhältnisse beinahe die Rollen. Nicht so, als ob der Journalist mehr als früher vom Ehrgeiz befallen sei, literaturfähige Erzeugnisse hervorzubringen; aber insofern er bürgerlicher Journalist ist, wird er seiner Funktion, verändernd in die Zustände einzugreifen, spürbar enthoben [. . .] jedenfalls ist die Möglichkeit freier journalistischer Meinungsäußerung innerhalb der bürgerlichen Presse heute fast beschränkter als zur Zeit der kaiserlichen Militärmacht [. . .] Im gleichen Masse, in dem der echte Journalist freigesetzt wird, kommt, wie mir scheint, ein neuer Typus von Schriftstellern<sup>22</sup> herauf, dessen Besterben es ist, den verlassenen Platz auszufüllen [. . .] seine Aufgabe darin erblickt, sich (und dem grossen Publikum) Rechenschaft abzulegen über unsere aktuelle Situation. (qtd in Stalder 98–99)

For Kracauer, then, the newspaper needs writers to do what journalists no longer can, that is, to depict things as they are. As economic censorship increasingly mutes the journalist, it falls to the writer, a new type of writer, or an “operative writer, to get around this censorship through literary indirection in the pages of the newspaper, again, by implication in the feuilleton. These invocations of artistic writing, however, raise a question of genre: what distinguishes the feuilleton as a literary genre?

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<sup>22</sup> This expression, “neuer Typus von Schriftstellern,” contains echoes of Tretjakow and his concept of the author. See Kracauer’s reviews of Tretjakow below.

The answer to what exactly constitutes the feuilleton as a genre eludes easy definition<sup>23</sup>, and this essay will not brave those doubtful waters farther than to say that, for its purposes, the term embraces all the works mentioned below published in the feuilleton of a Weimar periodical or written with the intention of such publication. Within those limits, however, myriad styles and perspectives throng for attention. This is by design. The feuilleton was meant, particularly in the view of feuilleton traditionalists, to entertain and so offered a variety of diversions, but it was also meant to edify and educate, and in the view of Reifenberg and Kracauer, champions of the feuilleton as a locus of truth, this aspect required no less variety. As Reifenberg notes of the feuilleton project in his article “Gewissenhaft:” “Natürlich wird einer solchen Reportagearbeit notwendig etwas Fragmentarisches anhaften. Aber die Zusammenstellung dieser Arbeiten, aus denen die Gesamtheit ‘Feuilleton’ sich ergibt, will auf das Vollständige hinaus” (Reifenberg 1). Kracauer takes up this theme in the first installment of perhaps his finest feuilleton series, *Die Angestellten*, which was later collected in book form, wherein he speaks of reality as being only representable by a “mosaic” of observations from which its image can be reconstructed (*Angestellten* 21)<sup>24</sup>. Thus, the feuilleton does not aim, as the invocations of literary writing above might imply, for artistic unity but rather for a plurality of expression.

It is also worth asking what the role of the “operative” writer is in a bourgeois feuilleton is. How does a writer actively engage in the class struggle from within the feuilleton? Kracauer’s introduction to *Die Angestellten* clarifies that, for his project at least, it

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<sup>23</sup> Stalder expresses this difficulty admirably in his *Siegfried Kracauer*: “Diese Unklarheit ist jedoch nicht nur dem Unvermögen der Definierer anzulasten, sondern scheint in Wesen des Feuilletons selbst angelegt zu sei, das zwischen banalem Alltag und hehrer Ewigkeit, zwischen heiterer Erbauung und ernsthafter Belehrung, zwischen formaler Zucht und stilistischer Freiheit changiert” (Stalder 71).

<sup>24</sup> See below for an in-depth discussion of this work and perspective.

does not mean spoon-feeding answers and analysis to his readers on social questions but instead posing the questions and asking them to engage actively in the process of understanding:

Die Arbeit ist eine Diagnose und verzichtet als solche bewußt darauf, Vorschläge für Verbesserungen zu machen. Rezepte sind nicht überall am Platz und am allerwenigsten hier, wo es zunächst darauf ankam, einer noch kaum gesichteten Situation inne zu werden. Die Erkenntnis dieser Situation ist zudem nicht nur notwendige Voraussetzung aller Veränderungen, sondern schließt selber 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. (*Angestellten* 8)

This, then, represents how Kracauer believes the feuilleton can act on the bourgeois consciousness of his readers. By forcing new observations and perspectives into their consciousness, they cannot help but act in a new way on the basis of this new awareness. Thus, by introducing perspectives counter to their political worldview, the feuilleton can hope to subvert its readership's political consciousness. This attempt at such a subversion plays out in a variety of ways within the feuilleton, depending on the type of article in which these new perspectives are offered.

Documenting and analyzing all the different literary styles and techniques represented in the feuilleton, or even just in the feuilleton writings of the authors presented below, would go far beyond the scope of this essay. However, by presenting a small but illustrative sample of feuilleton works pulled from three representative subgenres, this essay means to demonstrate how Kracauer, Benjamin, and other leftist writers attempted to use the feuilleton to attack bourgeois perception and subvert bourgeois consciousness. The literary mosaic of

the feuilleton embraced far more than the three subgenres presented below: the city scape, the film review, and the book review. Nevertheless, each provides a good point of departure for examining various “operative” feuilletonists in context of and relation to each other. They also present three distinct types of reading the feuilletonists called their readers to do, not just of the newspaper itself but of the reality the writer sought to reconstruct for readers in the feuilleton.

## **II.1 Reading Places: the Cityscape**

Siegfried Kracauer not only studied architecture but attained his doctorate in it, so it should come as no surprise that, although he left the architectural field for the journalistic, he did not cease to think architecturally. In fact, once Reifenberg ascended to the top editorial position in the *FZ*, Kracauer became the editor responsible for the architecture beat (Stalder 85). As Frances Mossop highlights in *Mapping Berlin*: “Siegfried Kracauer’s study of modernity is also rooted in the concept of urban spaces as revelatory. He saw in urban spaces physical clues to social reality and change in the modern era” (Mossop 33). In this, however, Kracauer was not alone. He may have possessed a stronger focus on and knowledge of architectural details than his colleagues, but for many Weimar feuilletonists, space, especially urban space, loomed large in the imagination. Perhaps unsurprisingly, politics, in addition to socio-economic conditions (the two were rarely independent), often dominated depictions of urban space in the Weimar Republic.

In “Deutsches, Allzudeutsches,” a feuilleton piece for the *FZ* in 1922, for example, Alfred Döblin color codes the geography of his piece in terms of political support:

Volkfest bei Berlin. Abfahrt von Potsdam ‘zu Schiff’. Auf allen Segel- und

Motorbooten die Fahnen im Lokalkolorit dieser Gegend: schwarz-weiß-rot. Bei

einem Dorf am Schwielowsee der Wald. Das Fest findet in einer Lichtung statt [. . .]  
An einem Baum steht eine mächtige schwarz-rot-goldene Standarte; die Mitglieder  
des veranstaltenden Arbeiterradfahrervereins wiederum tragen große rote Schärpen.  
(Döblin 206)

Using the colors of the different Weimar political factions as he lays the scene, Döblin  
orients his readers not just geographically but politically in the events he describes. Readers  
would instantly recognize the fliers of black-white-red flags, the colors of the old regime, as  
anti-republican conservatives, and the men in red sashes around a black-red-gold standard,  
the colors of the republic, as pro-republican socialists, celebrating behind enemy lines.  
Moreover, wearing red sashes and carrying a republican standard codes the revelers as  
*Reichsbanner*, the militant wing of the Social Democratic Party. All of these cues would have  
been plain to Döblin's audience in the politically savvy *FZ*. Nevertheless, the use of colors  
instead of party names adds a subtle, euphemistic nuance, which resonates with the images of  
flags and standards demarcating political territory, as if the simmering political tensions,  
though known to everyone, were something one could not address directly.

Kurt Tucholsky, on the other hand, shows no such compunction when it comes to  
address the political leanings of Berlin's western suburbs. In a 1927 article for the left-wing  
*Weltbühne* titled "Stahlhelm oder Filzhut?" The article depicts an unsuccessful attempt by a  
troop of *Stahlhelme*, far-right paramilitaries, to take Berlin. Their putsch attempt falters,  
however, on the apathy of Berliners, already inured to the tumult of Weimar politics.  
Tucholsky speaks in no uncertain terms about the citizens who nevertheless support these  
far-right extremists, where those citizens, and what he thinks of them: "Was dem Stahlhelm  
zujubelte, wohnte meistens in den westlichen Vororten Berlins, in Friedenau, in Lichterfelde,

in dem grauslichen Steglitz, wo gelbsüchtige Stadträte, schwarzzahnige Obersekretäre, vermuffte kleine Beamte und ein paar Großverdiener der Inflation mit rosigem Schweinkopf ihre Fähnchen herausgesteckt hatten” (“Stahlhelm” 788). Writing for a far-left periodical like the *Weltbühne* gave Tucholsky the latitude to depict whole sections of Berlin in such a colorful manner. This possibility was foreclosed to writers for good bourgeois periodicals like the *FZ*. There one had to write in a subtler manner, as Döblin above. However, Kracauer’s subversive feuilleton project, demanded even more subtlety in order to reach even deeper into bourgeois consciousness, perhaps into the subconscious, in order to affect change there. In this respect, it is instructive to compare Kracauer’s approach to what is essentially the same issue as Tucholsky tackles above in “Schreie auf der Straße.”

Written for the *FZ* feuilleton in 1930, “Schreie auf der Straße” begins like a horror story: “Die Straßen im Westen Berlin sind freundlich und sauber, sie haben eine gehörige Breite, und oft reihen sich nette grüne Bäumchen vor ihren Häusern. Aber trotz des angenehmen, ja herrschaftlichen Eindrucks, den sie machen, wird man nicht selten ohne jeden Anlaß von einem panischen Schrecken in ihnen erfaßt” (“Schreie” 28). Kracauer unsettles the reader from the beginning by contrasting the perfectly pleasant appearance of western Berlin with an existential dread that lurks underneath the agreeable exterior. After building a strong sense of tension and dread, a shock enters the story when “Ein nationalsozialistischer Trupp—die Leute trugen damals noch Uniform—glaubte sich von den Gästen im Café verhöhnt, stieg über die Brüstung und begann zu toben” (“Schreie” 29). Here the Nazis have replaced the *Stahlhelme* as the far-right extremists in western Berlin, but whereas Tucholsky wanted to make a larger point about Berliners’ political apathy, Kracauer is gesturing toward something else. The tumult with the Nazis was not what Kracauer’s



feuilleton persona had been awaiting: “Doch ich hatte eigentlich nicht diesen Krach erwartet, sondern einen anderen, der gar keine bestimmte Herkunft hätte haben dürfen, und der nun wahrscheinlich nur darum nicht eintraf, weil durch den nationalsozialistischen Radau die Luft bereits wieder gereinigt worden war” (“Schreie” 28 – 29). In other words, the Nazis represent a symptom not the cause of the streets’ disquiet. Kracauer reveals the cause by contrasting the bourgeois streets of western Berlin with the streets of Neukölln and Wedding: “Ihre Straßen sind von Natur aus Aufmarschstraßen, und auch im Einerlei des Alltags bedarf es keines besonderen Ahnungsvermögens, um zu spüren, daß Arbeiterdemonstrationen für sie ein häufiges Schauspiel sind” (“Schreie 29). The streets of western Berlin on the other hand: “Weder werden sie von Proletariern bewohnt, noch sind sie Zeugen des Aufruhrs. Ihre Menschen gehören nicht zusammen, und es fehlt ihnen durchaus das Klima, in dem gemeinsame Aktionen entstehen. Man erhofft hier nichts voneinander. Ungewiß streichen sie hin, ohne Inhalt und leer” (29). Very subtly Kracauer is implying that western Berlin is empty of political conviction, and this emptiness creates a tension, resulting not from apathy, but from an ambivalent desire for political community but an inability to overcome bourgeois individualism and make common cause with each other, let alone the workers, who represent true political community. In this reading of the city, the far-right has a foothold in western Berlin because the political emptiness and ambivalence open the space to them.

Berlin, however, by no means represented the sole focus of explorations of space in the Weimar feuilleton. One of the hallmarks of German journalism since the eighteenth century had been travel reporting and foreign correspondence<sup>25</sup>, and Weimar feuilletonists proudly maintained this tradition, none more so than Joseph Roth, at the time the most

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<sup>25</sup> See above for a discussion of its historical development.

widely read journalist in the German language. After becoming the *FZ*'s Paris correspondent in 1925, Roth made travel writing his specialty. His evocations of cities and towns across Europe are exemplary, but his 1928 reports from Mussolini's Italy deserve special attention for their mordantly ironic political content. Though not explicitly involved in Reifenberg and Kracauer's program for the *FZ* feuilleton, Roth had no problem offering his own political subversion. In the case of his "Das vierte Italien" series, the subversion resulted from the attitudes of the *FZ*'s readership to Mussolini's fascism. As Helmut Nürnberger explains in his notes to *Ich zeichne das Gesicht der Zeit*, Roth had originally expressed ambivalence about Italian fascism before his trip there, but the reports he sent were anything but ambivalent: "Der Zeitung kam dieser Sinneswandel im Hinblick auf ihre überwiegend bürgerliches Publikum, das sich mit dem 'Duce' durchaus eingerichtet hatte, nicht erwünscht. Erschienen sind (anonym und teilweise gekürzt) nur vier Artikel" (Nürnberger 474). Given the stance of Roth's readership in the *FZ*, "Erste Begegnung mit der Diktatur," the first article in the series offers a clear view of why Roth's Italian articles unsettled the editorial board enough to make them remove his name from the byline.

Roth spends most of "Erste Begegnung mit der Diktatur" describing his first impressions of Mussolini's Italy gleaned from the train station where he arrives. Those impressions are not kind. For him: "Italien ist immer noch [. . .] ein Land für Hochzeitsreisende und nicht für Journalisten [. . .] Fremde mit einer Leidenschaft für die italienische Aktualität, mit einem Interesse für die Pressefreiheit, für die Lage des Proletariats und für Finanzgebarung des Staates kann des Fascismus [sic] nicht brauchen" ("Erste" 292). German bourgeois readers anxious to read about the new Italy they had heard so much about would no doubt have been dismayed to have their honeymoon fantasies of Italy evoked only

to be dashed against the political realities of Italian fascism. Nor, given the German bourgeoisie's own infamous penchant for militarism and order, would they expect or want to hear that Italy's omnipresent display of military might left Roth unimpressed. Moreover, he found it infantile:

Es ist überhaupt der erste—und notwendigerweise oberflächliche—Eindruck, den ich nur der Genauigkeit halber verzeichne: infantil ist der Glanz der Ledergamaschen, die kokette Pistole, die bunte Schärpe, die viel zu hohe Mütze, die viel zu lange Säbel. Infantil ist der Gruß mittels erhobener Hand, die halb zu einer Ohrfeige und halb zu einem Segen ausholt. ("Erste" 297)

In defining fascist Italy as place where everything, including the train stations, is militarized to such an absurd degree that it becomes laughable, Roth denies his bourgeois readership the rightwing fantasy already proliferating in an ever more reactionary Germany. Thus, while not exactly subtle in this instance, Roth's writing aims at subverting a rightward lurch in German politics.

Kracauer, though not as prolific a travel writer as Roth, nevertheless, did write many pieces for the feuilleton of the *FZ* about his experiences in foreign cities, particularly in Paris and cities in southern France. These represent some of his best and most experimental work, and one piece that stands out among them is "Analyse eines Stadtplans" from 1926. In this article, Kracauer's exploration of Paris streets combines a sense of political geography, or rather cartography, with another tendency of Kracauer's cityscape writing wherein: "Die Straßen, Häuser, Stadt und der gesamte Raum werden in der regierenden architektonischen Metaphorik zur materialisierten Erinnerung, die Architektur zur sedimentierten Geschichte,

zum lesbaren und deutungsfähigen physiognomischen Profil der Gesellschaft”<sup>26</sup> (Zohlen 341). These elements meet in the very opening of the article:

Einige der Pariser Faubourgs sind die Riesenasye der kleinen Leute, von den Unterbeamten an bis zu den Arbeitern, den Gewerbetreibenden und den Existenzen, die verloren heißen, weil die anderen es sich gewonnen geben. Die Art ihres Zusammenlebens durch die Jahrhunderte hindurch drückt sich in der Gestalt der Asyle aus, die gewiß nicht bürgerlich ist, aber auch nicht proletarisch im Sinne von Schornsteinen, Kasernen, Chausseen. (“Analyse” 16)

As Kracauer’s letter to Gubler above indicates, he did not like to write solely in abstract terms, so the article’s perspective soon becomes more concrete, realizing this socio-economic milieu in a description of the Avenue St. Ouan during the Saturday afternoon market. Here goods to meet any need are piled high and overflowing out of shop windows and into the streets. Nevertheless: “Umfaßt auch der Jahrmarkt den Warenhauskatalog in kosmischer Vollständigkeit, so ist er doch nur die Volkausgabe der großen Welt. Die Vorhandene ist gering und von der Unbestimmtheit schlechter Photographien. Nicht umsonst sind von den Faubourgs die Revolutionen ausgegangen. Das Glück mangelt ihnen, der sinnliche Glanz” (“Analyse” 18). With this invocation of revolution Kracauer not only historicizes the cityscape he describes but politicizes it. The politics of the article emerge subtly, as the avenue expands into the boulevards of central Paris where:

Hinter den Spiegelscheiben mischen sich die notwendigen Dinge mit dem Überfluß, der notwendiger wäre, wenn er nicht grenzenlos sich ergösse. Personen jeden Standes ist erlaubt, sich Nachmittage lang im Anblick der Edelsteine, der Pelze und

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<sup>26</sup> In this passage Gerwin Zohlen is referring specifically to a different Parisian article of Kracauer’s “Erinnerung an eine Pariser Straße,” but the observation applies to Kracauer’s cityscape writing generally.

Abendtoiletten zu verlieren, deren eindeutige Herrlichkeit am Ende der Kolportage-Romane verheißungsvoll winkt. (ibid)

If the faubourgs represents the asylums of laborers and the petit-bourgeois, central Paris represents the bourgeois sanctuary from which they have been driven.

The faubourg's markets pale in comparison to the city's boutiques, but those boutiques do not cater merely to needs but to the superfluous desires and social illusions inculcated by culture and colportage. Kracauer thus traces the historical path of Paris from the early-modern mercantilism of the faubourgs along the roads of revolution to the high capitalism of Paris's bourgeois core. As for that core: "Die weltstädtischen Zentren, die auch die Orte des Glanzes sind, gleichen sich mehr und mehr einander an. Ihre Unterschiede vergehen" ("Anaylse" 18). Though he does not state it outright, Kracauer implies here that bourgeois capitalism is erasing the character, the heart of Paris. Kracauer concludes: "Breite Straßen führen aus den Faubourgs in den Glanz der Mitte. Sie ist die gemeinte Mitte nicht. Das Glück, das der Armseligkeit draußen zgedacht ist, wird von anderen Radian getroffen als den vorhandenen. Doch müssen die Straßen zur Mitte begangen werden, denn ihre Leere ist heute wirklich" (ibid). The ambivalence of the final clause is striking. It is not clear whether the possessive belongs to the center, the streets, or both. This return to the concept of the emptiness of bourgeois space, then, does not imply merely the political and ideological void of bourgeois space but also the historical amnesia and cultural hollowness it creates.

## **II.2 Reading Film: the Film Review**

Just as theater reviews became mainstays of the feuilleton in the nineteenth century, the twentieth century saw film criticism carve out a niche for itself in the Weimar feuilletons. Even though cinemas had originally doubled as venues for vaudeville and popular

entertainment, by the middle of the Weimar period going to a nicer theater had gained some of the prestige, and the cost, of going to the theater (Ross 40). This made films an object of interest to the readership of bourgeois papers like the *FZ*. In addition to the architecture beat, Reifenberg placed Kracauer in charge of film criticism at the *FZ* (Todorow 170). Here, too, Kracauer distinguished himself, incorporating film criticism into his larger program of subversive politics. The bulk of cinema-goers in the Weimar Republic remained, after all, urban laborers and the lower-middle class, the young in particular (Ross 42). The ambivalent class status of films made them ripe targets for political discourse, and this comes through clearly not only in the feuilleton film reviews themselves but also in the analysis of film-going itself presented in the feuilletons.

For a sense of how left-wing journalists politicized film reviews, one can turn to the *Weltbühne* where Kurt Tucholsky and Carl von Ossietzky both used film reviews to attack German conservatism. In a 1930 film review of *Der Blaue Engel* (*The Blue Angel*) entitled “Der Film gegen Heinrich Mann” (“The Film against Heinrich Mann”) for example, Ossietzky begins with an opening salvo against the arch conservative political figure and media baron Alfred Hugenberg: “Wenn Herr Geheimrat Hugenberg zur Zeit auch als Politiker einige Unannehmlichkeiten einstecken muß, so hat er doch als Ufa-Beherrscher einen vollen Sieg errungen. Der ‘Blaue Engel’ ist nicht nur ein Geschäft, sondern auch ein christlich-germanischer Triumph über den Dichter Heinrich Mann” (Ossietzky 178). This opening sets the political stakes of the review, in which Ossietzky trashes the film, not just by evoking Hugenberg and his recent electoral defeats, but by equating the film with a political attack, for Heinrich Mann was not just the author of “Professor Unrat,” the story on which

the film was based, but also a leading left-wing political and intellectual figure<sup>27</sup>. Thus, Ossietzky implies the film is not just bad aesthetically but politically as well.

Tucholsky likewise used his 1927 review of the French film *Pour la Paix du Monde* (*For Peace on Earth*), simply titled “Französischer Kriegsfilm” (“French War Movie”), to attack Hugenberg and his politics. According to Tucholsky, the film accurately depicts the horrors of the First World War in contrast to the films that Hugenberg produces:

Der Film heißt bezeichnenderweise ‘*Pour la Paix du Monde*’ und so wirkt er auch. Denkt man an den unsäglichen Hugenberg-Film, der in Deutschland ungestraft die Leute zu neuen Kriegen aufhetzen darf (für dieses Delikt gibt es keinen Paragraphen im neuen Strafgesetz), dann wird man traurig. Dort gestellter Kitsch und Geschichtslügen—hier [in Paris] die nackte Realität. (“Französischer” 931)

Here again, Hugenberg’s films are not just criticized for their aesthetic value but for their politics. Tucholsky, however, takes his criticism further, impugning the state for crafting laws directed at preventing populists from fomenting rebellion but doing nothing about militarists trying to put the German people on war footing. Tucholsky would also not be the only one to combine film criticism and attacks on government policy. Kracauer would likewise do so in the high profile case of *Kuhle Wampe*, a film by Bertolt Brecht and Ernst Ottwald initially suppressed by the conservative government under Brüning.

Kracauer’s article possesses the eye-catching title “‘Kuhle Wampe’ verboten!” and sits in the middle of feuilleton from 5 April 1932. It begins with an expression of disbelief that the government has banned such a small, independent production before providing a

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<sup>27</sup> Benjamin lumps Mann in with the leftist activist he considers politically feckless in “Autor als Produzent” (235), but Gay notes that Ossietzky and others at the *Weltbühne* tried to convince Mann to run for president against Hindenburg in 1932 (74).

rather detailed description of the plot, which follows the fortunes of a petit-bourgeois family that slides into the unemployed proletariat after the father's means are reduced as an indirect effect of the government's state of emergency declaration. Kracauer then proceeds to review the film, and his review is not kind. He declares that "Was ein Schlag gegen die offizielle Filmproduktion hätte sein können, ist ein Schlag in Wasser geworden" ("Kuhle Wampe" 1). Nevertheless, Kracauer sees no reason the film should be banned. Before exposing its flaws, he offers the government's reason for suppressing it: "Die Filmprüfstelle hat, wenn ich richtig informiert bin, den Film darum verboten, weil er den Reichspräsident als den Schöpfer der Notverordnung, die Justiz und die Kirche verächtlich mache" ("Kuhle Wampe" 2). After analyzing the scenes to which the censors took offense and showing the spuriousness of their reasoning, Kracauer then offers:

Oder sollte sich hinter der Beanstandung der genannten Szenen [ . . . ] ein Generaleinwand gegen das Werk im ganzen verbergen? Dann hätte die Zensur man ihn formulieren müssen, und überdies wüßte ich nicht, was die Zensur dem Werk vorwerfen könnte. Es verschafft noch nicht einen richtigen Begriff der herrschenden Not. Seine Haltung ist, wie ich nachgewiesen zu haben glaube, viel zu verworren, um deutlich erkennbar zu sein. (2)

While opposing the government's politically motivated censorship, particularly of a Marxist film, makes perfect sense for someone of Kracauer's political convictions, the rather harsh critique of the film seems at first at odds with Kracauer's overall project of Marxist subversion.

Ernst Bloch certainly thought so and wrote Kracauer about it in no uncertain terms. Not having actually seen the film himself, Bloch cannot comment on whether it is actually



good or not, but he nevertheless lays the charge on Kracauer that “daß Sie einem blinden, häßlichen Haß gegen Brecht überhaupt *bei diesem Anlaß*, Arm in Arm mit der Zensur, in der immer deutlicher antimarxistischen Zeitung Ausdruck gaben, war bei Ihrer *Vergangenheit* und bei *unserer Freundschaft schwer erträglich* [ . . . ] das macht ein *Verlassen unserer gemeinsamen Sache*” (“Nr.56” 357). It merits noting here how personally Bloch seems to take the suggestion, not that Kracauer has personal animosity toward Brecht, but that Kracauer might endanger their project to indulge that animosity. By 1932, not only had the *FZ* grown more anti-Marxist but German society as a whole, placing their project in an increasingly precarious position. That strain seems to show here. Kracauer, unsurprisingly, refutes all charges, but his explanation of his tactical thinking deserves special attention: “Zuletzt ist sogar im taktischen Interesse mein Vorgehen berechtigt. Wenn ich, der ich unbekümmert um die Person eine Sache angreife, später eine Sache derselben Person lobe, so wird dieses Lob mehr Gewicht haben als jede Äußerung, die einem Verhalten entspringt, das sich mehr von dem angeblichen Ort einer Person als von der Sache bestimmen läßt” (“Nr.57” 360). This form of tactical thinking does align consistently with Kracauer’s feuilleton writing<sup>28</sup>. Considered in this light, Kracauer’s criticism both of Brecht’s film and its censorship works both towards the end of having the ban lifted on *Kuhle Wampe* and toward securing his reputation as a trustworthy journalist and not a Marxist hack. Hack or not, Kracauer’s review of *Kuhle Wampe* cannot help but look a bit colorless next to Tucholsky and Ossietzky’s reviews above. This should not imply that such represents the usual tone of cinema criticism in the *FZ*, far from it. However, the criticism of film culture itself that came of age in the *FZ*’s feuilleton often proved even more colorful still.

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<sup>28</sup> In this connection Kracauer references his treatment of the writer Sergej Tretjakow in the feuilleton (Cf. “Nr.57” 359–360), which is discussed below.

Josef Roth's tongue-in-cheek "Bekehrung eines Sünders im Berliner Ufa-Palast" from 1925 provides an excellent example of this. In the article, Roth mocks the almost religious zeal of movie-goers by making direct comparisons to religion throughout: "Längst hatte ich schon die Gewohnheit abgelegt, in jeder Berliner Moschee ein mohammedanisches Gotteshaus zu sehen. Ich wußte, daß hierzulande die Moscheen Kinos sind und der Orient ein Film" ("Bekehrung" 227). Despite the article's humorous style, it nevertheless carries political undertones throughout that stem from both the theater being described and the film to which Roth obliquely alludes. The Ufa-Palast was a theater constructed by Hugenburg to show off his films, such as those reviewed above. Despite the political leanings of the theater's owner being no secret, Roth observed many other leftists there: "Ringsum saßen, so weit man Konfessionen an Gesichtern sehen kann, Vertreter aller Glaubensarten. Dissidenten und Gottlose auch. Alle waren ergriffen" ("Bekehrung" 228). Roth gently mocks those who, despite their political convictions, cannot resist the lure of the cinema. He even notes that when the film begins: "schließlich entlud sich unsere Andacht in heftigem Klatschen, und am lautesten klatschen die Dissidenten" ("Bekehrung" 229). For his part, however, when the film begins: "Aber wer konnte lachen? Kein Spaß mehr drang zu einem Zwerchfell. Ich dachte an den Tod, an das Grab und an das Jenseits. Und während jener [Harold Lloyd] eine glänzende komische Idee ausführte, beschloß ich, mein Leben Gott zu weihen und Einsiedler zu werden" (ibid). Roth does not explain this sudden shift in tone in the article, but it may have to do with the film alluded to, *Why Worry?*, a film about a spoiled American caught up on vacation in a Central American revolution, which he does not notice until his love interest falls into the clutches of a revolutionary. Unsurprisingly, Kracauer took a major interest in such movie plotlines, and where Roth leaves the politics of the film's plot uncommented,

Kracauer undertakes a thorough but entertaining examination of how film plots like this unthinkingly reinforce bourgeois culture and values at the expense of political consciousness.

Kracauer's critique of Weimar cinema's bourgeois politics appears in a 1928 tour-de-force article in the *FZ* feuilleton titled "Die kleinen Ladenmädchen gehen ins Kino." One of Kracauer's most overtly political articles by far, it nearly eschews subversion in favor of an outright confrontation with bourgeois consciousness. "Die Filme sind der Spiegel der bestehenden Gesellschaft" ("Ladenmädchen" 279), the essay's first sentence declares. Though, perhaps rather than a confrontation with bourgeois consciousness, Kracauer is seeking to deracinate the bourgeois subconscious in this essay, for this is where he famously claims that "Die blödsinnigen und irrealen Filmphantasien sind die *Tagträume der Gesellschaft*, in denen ihre eigentliche Realität zum Vorschein kommt, ihre sonst unterdrückten Wünsche sich gestalten" ("Ladenmädchen" 280). In any case, Kracauer never minces words:

Ja, die Filme für die niedere Bevölkerung sind noch bürgerlicher als die Filme für das bessere Publikum; gerade weil es bei ihnen gilt, gefährliche Perspektiven anzudeuten, ohne sie zu eröffnen, und die achtbare Gesinnung auf den Zehenspitzen einzuschmuggeln. Daß die Filme in ihrer Gesamtheit das herrschende System bestätigen, ward an der Erregung über den *Potemkin*-Film offenbar. Man empfand sein Anderssein, man bejahte ihn ästhetisch, um das mit ihm Gemeinte verdrängen zu können. ("Ladenmädchen" 279)

Though more confrontational than most of Kracauer's feuilleton work, he nevertheless follows his usual tactic of concretizing his thoughts by linking them to specific examples. In this case, he goes through several stereotypical movie plots (most of which are still common

today), such as the “Volk im Waffen,” the “Weltreisenden,” or the “goldene Herz,” and describes in detail how they inculcate a false consciousness in the petit-bourgeois and working classes. Though Kracauer never explicitly avows a Marxist counter-vision in the essay, his anti-bourgeois sentiments come across so clearly that Benjamin comments in a letter:

Diese Folge von Artikeln in der Frankfurter Zeitung ist etwa wie ein Kuriosum in der Geschichte des Journalismus, ein virtuoser Schmuggel größten Stils. Von rechtswegen hätte diese Folge von Analysen Ihnen das Filmreferat bei der Roten Fahne verschaffen müssen (worauf Sie wahrscheinlich nun keinen sehr großen Wert legen). Ist wirklich kein Mensch dahinter gekommen, was der Satz, zeit- und klassenlose Kunstwerke gäbe es nicht, in der Frankfurter Zeitung, besser im bürgerlichen Zeitung überhaupt, für Verwüstungen anrichtet? (“Brief 21” 41)

Benjamin’s astonishment here on the question of how Kracauer’s essay even made it to publication is understandable, particularly considering the internal censorship that often occurred within the *FZ*. Unfortunately, Kracauer’s response has not survived, so one is left to speculate. Perhaps because the essay addressed movies, the politics and business editors did not even look at it, or perhaps they did but did not take it seriously because of its topic. Kracauer may even have counted on such a dismissive attitude in his readership, at once making his confrontational tone permissible (because the subject did not seem serious) and necessary (to raise his readers’ hackles and thus make them focus on something they may consider frivolous. For Kracauer, such frivolous or commonplace-seeming objects represented some of the most promising locations for a philosophical ambush, precisely because that was where others would lower their guard. Whatever the case may be, the essay

undeniably represents one of Kracauer's strongest attacks against the bourgeois consciousness in the Weimar Republic.

### **II.3 Reading Books: Serialized Books and the Book Review**

Since its inception, the feuilleton has always had its fate bound up with books. Even before the feuilleton became a newspaper fixture, the term first found use in a French magazine of 1738 to delineate the section devoted to the discussion of books (Stalder 71). By the twentieth century, the feuilleton no longer simply contained book reviews but books themselves in serialized form. The *FZ* was no exception in this regard, featuring serialized novels, novellas, or short stories in its second morning edition every day in the Weimar period. During Reifenberg's tenure at the head of the feuilleton, even the selection of literary works to serialize and review for the *FZ* often fit into the program he and Kracauer developed for the feuilleton. The controversy surrounding the serialization of Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* in the *FZ*'s feuilleton in 1929 provides an excellent illustration of this.

Breaking from the feuilleton's usual custom of not printing letters to the editor, in "Antwort an einen Anonymus," the editorial board of the *FZ*'s feuilleton decided to print an anonymous letter they had received decrying their choice to serialize *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. The letter complains of Döblin's depiction of Berlin's underworld and its immorality spoiling his breakfast every morning and questions why the *FZ* would print such trash. Kracauer writes a reply in the name of the feuilleton's editorial board, the last lines of which are telling:

Nicht doch, verehrter Anonymus. Es ist keineswegs unsere Absicht, Sie zu kitzeln und zu spannen. Das, was wir wollen, ist vielmehr: Ihnen die Augen zu öffnen über gesellschaftliche Zustände und menschliche Verhältnisse, von denen Sie morgens am

liebsten nichts wissen möchten. An diesen Attentaten gegen Ihre Gemütsruhe ist uns allerdings viel gelegen. (“Antwort” 2)

Though without the proper context they may simply read as a rebuke to a philistine, these lines betray to what a large extent political and programmatic considerations played into the selection of works for the feuilleton with Reifenberg as lead editor and Kracauer as champion. Nor did this subtle politicizing of literature stop with the selection of texts to serialize. As part of his work for the *FZ* Kracauer wrote book reviews and likewise commissioned them from his literary friends, including Benjamin and Bloch. These reviews, like so much in Kracauer’s feuilleton pieces, were often more than they seemed, and in line with Kracauer broader program for the feuilleton, they often served to further its subversive radical undercurrent. In 1932 in fact, Kracauer wrote a review of a book, *Feld-Herren*, by Sergej Tretjakow entitled “Der ‘operierende’ Schriftsteller,” a review which, as this essay’s introduction hinted, would exert a major influence on Benjamin’s “Autor als Produzent”<sup>29</sup>.

Kracauer begins his review of *Feld-Herren* by referring back to a piece he had written not quite a year earlier, “Instruktionsstunde in Literatur,” about a lecture given by Tretjakow on “den neuen Typus des Schriftstellers,” meant to elucidate the “Auffassung einer radikalen russischen Literaturgruppe vom Wesen der Schriftstellerei” (“Instruktionsstunde” 503). Kracauer takes a very strong in refuting Tretjakow against German writers, calling him: “Fetischist einer Weltbetrachtung, die vielleicht für die Verwirklichung des russischen Fünfjahresplanes von Nutzen ist, aber an den Stand des europäischen Bewußtseins nicht heranreicht und mit Marxismus kaum noch etwas zu tun hat” (“Instruktionsstunde” 504). Here Kracauer comes close to openly valorizing Marxism and so takes a step back after the

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<sup>29</sup> In fact, several lines from Kracauer’s review are copied verbatim in *Autor als Produzent*. Cf. “Schriftsteller” 40 and *Autor* 232.

seed has been planted, sanitizing his invocation of Marx with: “Ich meine, daß man Marx, der ja schließlich auch aus der französischen und englischen Aufklärung stammt, in Schutz nehmen sollte vor einer Nachfolge, die den dialektischen Materialismus nicht weniger entstellt wie die gegnerischen Positionen” (ibid). Here the reader finds a breathtaking demonstration of Kracauer’s style. Not only has he rhetorically united his bourgeois readership with Marx, who like his readership “also comes out of the French and English Enlightenment,” but he has placed them on the side of defending dialectic materialism against a soviet author. Nevertheless, having convinced his readers they stand united against Tretjakow, Kracauer then invites them to take some of his literary experiments seriously, particularly the notion of practically employed writers, a point Kracauer will return to in “Der ‘operierende’ Schriftsteller.”

In his review of *Feld-Herren*, Kracauer contextualizes his previous criticism of Tretjakow, noting that he had criticized the soviet author out of fear that Tretjakow’s exaggerated attacks would only stiffen resistance to his good ideas, “Nicht im Interesse des Fortbestands jener schlecht epigonalen, süßlichen und politisch durch und durch fragwürdigen Literatur, die heute in den Zeiten der Kulturreaktion, wieder den deutschen Markt zu beherrschen beginnt, sondern gerade um ihre Änderung willen” (“Schriftsteller” 39). Kracauer now strongly advocates for certain positions of Tretjakow’s that further his own operative program, particularly those that involve the author’s relationship to praxis: “Man beschreibt die Realität, statt ihren Konstruktionsfehlern auf die Spur zu kommen; man weicht ins Ästhetische aus und versäumt dabei, die aufs Handeln gerichteten Kräfte zu mobilisieren; man treibt Metaphysik, wo man in die Ökonomie hineinsteigen sollte usw.” (“Schriftsteller” 41). However, Kracauer also uses Tretjakow to attack German reportage, a

genre he detested for reasons elaborated below: “Ihren Methoden sind die Trejakows dadurch überlegen, daß sie den Stoff nicht von irgendeinem mehr oder weniger subjektiv bedingten Gesichtspunkt aus vorführen, sondern ihn verwandeln, indem sie ihn darbieten” (ibid). Both examples demonstrate Kracauer’s tendency to use others’ words and thoughts as cover to express his own radical or programmatic vision while maintaining enough distance and deniability that he does not have to acknowledge his own radicalism to a bourgeois readership that would likely dismiss an avowed radical.

Two other book reviews, one by Benjamin and one by Bloch also merit special consideration, Bloch’s “Künstliche Mitte” (“Artificial Middle”) and Benjamin’s “Ein Aussenseiter macht sich bemerkbar” (“An Outsider Makes Himself Known”). What makes these reviews of note is that both take as their object Kracauer’s reportage *Die Angestellten: Aus dem neusten Deutschland*<sup>30</sup>, which itself originally appeared in the *FZ*’s feuilleton in a series of installments running from the end of 1929 into early 1930 with the book published shortly thereafter. *Die Angestellten* arguably represents a culmination of Kracauer’s feuilleton writing, putting all his skill at writing subversively radical texts for a bourgeois audience on display, and Benjamin and Bloch’s reviews do not merely represent attempts at marketing their friend’s book. Both writers use their reviews to complement the sub rosa Marxism of Kracauer’s feuilleton writing by making Kracauer’s Marxist subtext explicit in a manner he could not himself in keeping with his position at the *FZ* and his program for its feuilleton. That Kracauer conceived of *Die Angestellten* as an extension of his subversive feuilleton work is plain from the book’s dedication to his chief collaborator at the *FZ*: “für Benno Reifenberg zum Zeichen unserer freundschaftlichen Verbundenheit und unseres

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<sup>30</sup> The title of this has been translated previously as *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*. A more literal translation would be “*Salaried Workers: From the Latest Germany*.”



gemeinsamen Wirkens” (*Angestellten* 5). However, that dedication would almost certainly have seemed innocuous, or at most cryptic, to the uninitiated.

Even without making its Marxism explicit, the *FZ* recognized the explosive potential of Kracauer’s work in *Die Angestellten*, which sought to shed light on the new social class forming between the proletariat and middle class by scrutinizing the desperation of its working conditions and self-conception. Here Kracauer was treading dangerous ground for a newspaper like the *FZ*, and so faced oversight in the editing of the individual *Angestellten* articles from the newspaper’s business section. Given the nature of Kracauer’s material, internal censorship from the business section was likely meant to keep Kracauer from offending the bourgeois and business-friendly sensibilities of its readership. Ultimately, this may actually have helped Kracauer in his programmatic goals, as he outlines in a letter to Bernard von Brentano: “Ich habe sie [*Die Angestellten*] trotz Gegenlektüre des Handelsteils fast ungekürzt ins Blatt nehmen können. Nur einige Invektiven sind ausgefallen, aber ich glaube, das tut der zu erzeugenden Unruhe keinen Abbruch, sondern vertieft den Effekt” (quoted in Todorow 106). Despite this oversight, Kracauer does evoke Marx three times in *Die Angestellten*. Two of these mentions are simply dismissals of “vulgar Marxist” concepts of the worker and ideological dogma (*Angestellten* 117 and 143) that might serve to throw casual readers off the trail since they seem to minimize the importance of then-current Marxist thought. The third, however, represents a true smuggling of Marx into a bourgeois paper under the nose of the “censors:”

Auf das Monatsgehalt, die sogenannte Kopfarbeit und einige andere ähnliche belanglose Merkmale gründen in der Tat gegenwärtig große Teile der Bevölkerung ihre bürgerliche Existenz, die gar nicht mehr bürgerlich ist; durchaus im Einklang mit

der von Marx ausgesprochenen Erfahrung, daß der Ueberbau [sic] sich nur langsam der von den Produktivkräften heraufbeschworenen Entwicklung des Unterbaus anpasse. (*Angestellten* 106)

Here Kracauer makes his invocation of Marx seem relatively harmless. He speaks of Marx's "experience" not of his teaching or philosophy, treating Marx as just one among the many scholars and writers he refers to in the book. This seemingly casual reference, though, provides the theoretical framework for Kracauer's central argument in *Die Angestellten*, that is, that salaried workers in Weimar Germany have a false consciousness of their class identity. As Kracauer puts it shortly after his Marx reference, "Eine verschollene Bürgerlichkeit spukt in ihnen nach" (106).

Throughout *Die Angestellten* Kracauer hammers home the degree to which the salaried workers he describes have fallen out of the bourgeoisie but refuse to acknowledge it. This begins with the two anecdotes that serve the book as epigraphs. In the first, a woman sues the employer who fired her. Her former firm sends a division manager who "Um die Entlassung zu rechtfertigen, erklärt [. . .]: 'Die Angestellte wollte nicht als Angestellte behandelt werden, sondern als Dame.'—Der Der Abteilungsleiter ist im Privatleben sechs Jahre jünger als die Angestellte" (*Angestellten* 11). In the second epigraph, an industrialist enters the lobby of a "weltstädtischen Vergnügungsetablissemments" with his girlfriend, who "im Nebenberuf acht Stunden hinter dem Ladentisch steht" (*ibid*) is indeed treated like a lady, by her coequal working the coat check. In both anecdotes a false sense of class consciousness perverts the women's view of their true economic positions, and in laying bare that perversion, these anecdotes set the tone for Kracauer's journalistic exploration.

As the second epigraph hints, a large part of sustaining a bourgeois consciousness for the salaried workers Kracauer's describes, involves assuming a bourgeois, i.e. consuming the outward signs of bourgeois culture. Kracauer presents data from research, which indicates that

die Angestellten zwar weniger Geld auf ihre Ernährung als ein Durchschnittsarbeiter verwendeten, dafür aber die sogenannten Kulturbedürfnisse höher als dieser veranschlagten [ . . . ] Zu den 'Kulturbedürfnissen' zählen neben der Gesundheit, den Verkehrsmitteln, Geschenken, Unterstützungen usw. unter anderem auch Rauchwaren, Wirtshäuser, geistige und gesellige Veranstaltungen. (*Angestellten* 118 – 119)

These "cultural goods," particularly the restaurants and events, allow workers a reprieve from the drudgery of the workday, but as Kracauer notes, this merely represents a retreat from reality, or as he expresses it: "Die Flucht der Bilder ist die Flucht vor der Revolution und dem Tod" (*Angestellten* 127). With the word "revolution," Kracauer comes close to revealing his true stance. However, he leaves the thought there, declining to state just what sort of revolution salaried workers are fleeing or on which side they belong. In his review of the book, though, Bloch leaves little doubt about the implied message here: "Cafés, Filme, Lunaparks weisen dem Angestellten die Richtung, die er zu gehen hat: [ . . . ] der wahren Richtung auszuweichen, nämlich der zum Proletariat. Mit dem der Angestellte jetzt alles teilt: Not, Sorge und Unsicherheit, nur nicht das klare Bewußtsein dieses seines Zustands" ("künstliche" 33).

Kracauer himself never makes these links explicit. He avoids this in part by using others' words to make some of his strongest points, thus maintaining an apparent distance to

the questions under consideration and making his own points seem less radical in comparison. For example, he lets Emil Lederer call it “eine objektive Tatsache, wenn man behauptet, daß die Angestellten das Schicksal des Proletariats teilen” (quoted in *Angestellten* 17), while he only states himself that “die Proletarisierung der Angestellten ist nicht zu bezweifeln” (*Angestellten* 16). Nor does Kracauer stop at blurring the line between salaried workers and laborers. He presses on to show the vanishing differences between privately employed workers (*Privatangestellten*) and government clerks (*Beamten*). Again, Kracauer makes his point by quoting an expert, in this case a government deputy, who states unequivocally that “Die Beamten sind Arbeitsnehmer wie die Angestellten [. . .] weil sie nichts als ihre Arbeitskraft zu verkaufen haben” (*Angestellten* 107). Though Kracauer does not spell it out, the transitive property implies a link not just between government clerks and salaried employees but to proletariat laborers as well<sup>31</sup>.

As in his feuilleton work, Kracauer also relies on concrete, real-world examples to illustrate his points. For example, to illustrate the proletarianization of the salaried workforce as a consequence of increased mechanization, Kracauer presents a labor dispute case in which a laborer sues for compensation that “er nur als Handlungsgehilfe hätte beanspruchen dürfen [. . .] Die Firma hält ihn für größtenwahnsinnig, während das Arbeitsgericht erklärt, daß seine Tätigkeit so gut kaufmännisch sei wie die zahlloser Kaufleute, die bei der heutigen Rationalisierung mechanische Leistungen vollbringen müssen” (*Angestellten* 77). By offering this example, Kracauer slyly implies that, not only are the differences between salaried employees and laborers academically non-existent, they do not even hold up in a

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<sup>31</sup> Weitz makes this connection in his *Weimar Germany*, noting that “By one calculation, upper-level civil servants had an income in 1922 on average only 1.35 percent higher than unskilled workers” (Weitz 138). The situation does not seem to have improved by the end of the 20s.

court of law<sup>32</sup>. This suggestive and subtly subversive style not only distinguished Kracauer in his feuilleton pieces, as described above, but also set *Die Angestellten* apart as a work of reportage, as Benjamin makes clear in his famous review of the book, “Ein Außenseiter macht sich Bemerkbar.”

In the introduction to *Die Angestellten*, Kracauer himself tries to distance his work from other popular reportages of the time. He does so first by asking: “Ergibt sich diese Wirklichkeit [der Angestellten] der üblichen Reportage? Seit mehreren Jahren genießt in Deutschland die Reportage die Meistbegünstigung, da nur sie, so meint man, sich des ungestellten Lebens bemächtigen könne” (*Angestellten* 20). Kracauer disputes this opinion, and his ultimate answer on the question of reality’s depiction echoes, and not coincidentally, Reifenberg’s assertions about the feuilleton above. For Kracauer:

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 photographiert des Leben; ein solches Mosaik wäre sein Bild. (*Angestellten* 21)

That Kracauer should be trying to distance himself from the genre in which he wrote *Die Angestellten* seems strange, but his critique of reportage is really a veiled attack on *Neue Sachlichkeit*, in which he is suggestively opposing his conception of the feuilleton style to the

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<sup>32</sup> This may seem merely a leftist call to class solidarity, but Ernst Jünger makes the same point in his conservative philosophical opus *Der Arbeiter*: “Wie soll Ahasver unterscheiden [. . .] ob er ein Schlachtfeld oder ein Industriegelände überquert, und inwiefern der Mann, der bei Millioneneingänge einer Bank oder Postscheckamtes unter die Stempelmaschine schiebt, als Beamter, und jener andere, der dieselbe Bewegung an der Stanzmaschine einer Metallfabrik wiederholt, als Arbeiter zu betrachten ist? Und nach welchen Gesichtspunkten unterscheiden die also Tätigen sich selbst“ (99)?

popular style of *Neue Sachlichkeit* reportage. Kracauer does criticize *Neue Sachlichkeit* by name, but in the context of the architectural style that grew out of the movement:

Nicht schlagender könnte sich das Geheimnis der neuen Sachlichkeit enthüllen als hier. Hinter der Pseudostrenge der Hallenarchitektur nämlich grinst Grinzing hervor. Nur einen Schritt in die Tiefe, und man weilt mitten in der üppigsten Sentimentalität. Das aber ist das Kernzeichen der neuen Sachlichkeit überhaupt, daß sie eine Fassade ist, die nichts verbirgt [ . . . ] (*Angestellten* 124)

Implied here seems to be an attack not just on the architecture of *Neue Sachlichkeit* but on the whole movement, reportage included. Benjamin makes this attack explicit in his review, expressing sympathy for Kracauer's rejection of the label "reportage" because "neuberliner Radikalismus und neue Sachlichkeit, diese Paten der Reportage, [sind] ihm in gleichen Maße verhaßt" ("Außenseiter" 220). This hatred, as Benjamin expounds it, results from the movement's failure of political consciousness:

Diese linksradikale Schule mag sich gebärden wie sie will, sie kann niemals die Tatsache aus der Welt schaffen, daß selbst die Proletarisierung des Intellektuellen fast nie einen Proletarier schafft. Warum? Weil ihm die Bürgerklasse in Gestalt der Bildung von Kindheit auf ein Produktionsmittel mitgab, das ihn auf Grund des Bildungsprivilegs mit ihr und sie mit ihm solidarisch macht. ("Außenseiter 225)

Like Bloch, Benjamin uses his review to make Kracauer's Marxist subtext text in a form that would be counterproductive in the pages of the *FZ*, but which might expand Kracauer's audience in a leftist publication like *Die Gesellschaft* where Benjamin published his review.

Though much maligned by both Kracauer in *Die Angestellten* and Benjamin in *Autor als Produzent*, both German reportage and the associated *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement have

an undeniable place in the development of modern German journalism<sup>33</sup>. For Michael Geisler, reportage even represents an “operative” and “subversive” genre of its own (Geisler 5 and 7). As its champion, Geisler offers Egon Kisch: “Mit Kisch beginnt, in ihm kulminiert die Reportage” (Geisler 15). Though Kisch likely had, and perhaps still has, the most prominent name in German reportage and was certainly known to both Benjamin and Kracauer<sup>34</sup>, his name never appears in their criticism of reportage. This may be by design rather than oversight. As Geisler indicates, Kisch represents the best of reportage and does not easily lend himself to caricature, which is not, however, to imply that none of Kracauer or Benjamin’s criticisms apply to his work. Rather, it may be instructive to briefly compare Kisch’s breakthrough 1925 book of reportage *Der rasende Reporter*, which helped popularize both Kisch and reportage.

Where Kracauer’s *Angestellten* maintains the examination of a single subject from multiple perspectives across the work, *Der rasende Reporter* instead consists of a series of vignettes that range from posing as a homeless man in London to getting a tattoo. Juxtaposed, they seem to bear out Kracauer’s comparison, quoted above, of reportage to the photographing of life and his approach to the forming of its image by means of a mosaic. Nevertheless, Kisch’s politics seem to mesh with those of an operative writer. In one of *Der rasende Reporter*’s reportages, “Experiment mit einem hohen Trinkgeld,” Kisch knowingly gives overgenerous tips to bus drivers in Berlin to measure their amusing reactions until he takes his experiment to a working-class neighborhood in the north of Berlin: “[. . .] vielleicht fassen sie mein Experiment als Verhöhnung auf, vielleicht beneiden sie mich, [. . .] vielleicht

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<sup>33</sup> See Geisler, *Die literarische Reportage in Deutschland*.

<sup>34</sup> The *FZ* occasionally published Kisch’s work in the feuilleton. Additionally, Benjamin, at least, knew him socially and even participated with him and Döblin in a meeting of the “Gruppe 1925” (Cf. “Brief 16” 35).

hassen sie mich als einen Reichen, dem das Geld nichts bedeutet, während sie es mühsam erwerben müssen. Und mein Scherz kommt mir hier selber besonders deplaciert und töricht vor” (*Reporter* 54). Passages like this, with their focus on concrete situations that unfold subtly into commentary on the social order, could just as easily fit into Kracauer’s feuilleton program. However, Kisch sometimes wears his radical politics on his sleeve. In the middle of “Die Weltumsegelung der ‘A. Lanna 8,’” a reportage about the long journey of a freshwater tender from the Vlatva to the Danube by way of the North Sea and the Rhine, Kisch launches into a Marxist rhapsody:

Die Wolken und Wälder und Wiesen zu preisen, die (sagt man) die Allmacht Gottes beweisen—nie hab ich’s getan! [. . .] Die Forste der Schlote, erschaffen vom Willen, der Dampfsirene befehlendes Schrillen, die Wolken des Rauches, die Gletscher der Kraft, der Lasten tiefstürzende Lawinen, die Strömung der Räder und der Turbinen: alles das, was der Mensch sich selber erschafft, *das* zeugt von Allmacht! Hierher sollen wir treten, hier sei unsere Andacht, hier laßt uns beten, den Namen des *Menschen* beneiden, hier lasset uns beten, daß mehr er vollbringe, daß ihm auch das Schwerste, das Letzte gelinge: sich selbst zu befreien. (*Reporter* 41–42)

While the politics of this ode may align with theirs, its form smacks of the new radicalism that Kracauer and Benjamin criticize. As illustrated above, Kracauer placed great emphasis on keeping his politics off center stage in order to let readers focus more on his argumentation, which was meant to be as subversive as his arguments themselves. This holds especially true in *Die Angestellten*. Thus it fell to Benjamin in “Ein Außenseiter macht sich bemerkbar” not only to elucidate the latent Marxism in Kracauer’s arguments but also in his argumentation.



As Benjamin notes, in addition to *Neue Sachlichkeit*, Kracauer also attacks the new radicalism associated with it. In *Die Angestellten*, Kracauer criticizes the “junge radikale Intelligenz [. . .] die in Zeitschriften und Büchern ziemlich heftig und gleichförmig gegen den Kapitalismus auftritt” because “Der Radikalismus dieser Radikalen hätte mehr Gewicht, durchdränge er wirklich die Struktur der Realität, statt von der Beletage herab seine Verfügungen zu treffen” (*Angestellten* 140). This criticism of the new radicals may have put Kracauer’s bourgeois readership at ease, but it also serves as an implicit contrast to his own methods, which as Benjamin demonstrates are decidedly Marxist. Benjamin, however, has a delicate dance to execute since he cannot out Kracauer as a Marxist since that would threaten his work at the *FZ*, so Benjamin merely insists on the contrasts between Kracauer and those he criticizes: “Entlarven ist diesem Autor Passion. Und nicht als orthodoxer Marxist, noch weniger als praktischer Agitator, dringt er dialektisch ins Dasein der Angestellten, sondern weil dialektisch eindringen heißt: entlarven” (“Außenseiter” 220). This is, strictly speaking, true. Kracauer was not an orthodox Marxist, and he adopted Marxist techniques as tools for accessing the truth, not as Marxism for its own sake (Stalder 141). Thus, Benjamin manages to obfuscate Kracauer’s personal Marxism while making the case for him as a Marxist visionary. Moreover, Benjamin proceeds to lay out, without expressing it as such, Kracauer’s vision for indirectly subverting bourgeois consciousness:

Darum ist seine Schrift im Gegensatz zu den radikalen Modeprodukten der neuesten Schule ein Markstein auf dem Wege der Politisierung der Intelligenz. Dort der Horror von Theorie und Erkenntnis, der sie der Sensationslust der Snobs empfiehlt, hier eine konstruktive theoretische Schulung, die sich weder an den Snob noch an den Arbeiter wendet, dafür aber etwas Wirkliches, Nachweisbares zu fördern imstande ist: nämlich

die Politisierung der eigenen Klasse. Diese indirekte Wirkung ist die einzige, die ein schreibender Revolutionär aus der Bürgerklasse heute sich vorsetzen kann.

(“Außenseiter” 225)

What makes this passage so remarkable is that it not only highlights Kracauer’s use of indirect methods to affect his bourgeois audience’s consciousness but spells out his ultimate goal, that is, the politicizing of his own class against the existing order. Such an admission by Kracauer himself would be unthinkable, particularly in the feuilleton of the *FZ*, but expressed by Benjamin as a surmise in a book review, it became a call to reject the popular leftwing movement of *Neue Sachlichkeit* and embrace Kracauer’s approach, a call that went unheeded.

## Conclusion

In the afterword to his 1938 social epic about the Weimar period, *Das Reich ohne Mitte* (*The Empire without a Center*), Bernhard Diebold muses on the failure of the Weimar press to prevent Hitler's rise to power. Diebold had worked with Siegfried Kracauer as an editor of the *FZ*'s feuilleton, and while they personally had good relations, they took opposite views of the feuilleton's role in art and politics. Though Diebold's words do not seem directed at Kracauer personally or at this project, his recriminations call into question the limits of what the press can do in the political realm and of the political realm itself:

Zwischen Wort und Tat klaffte ein Abgrund. Beim Blick in diesen Abgrund verlor der Autor den Glauben an die noch heute gepredigte Vorherrschaft der Politik—im geistig-seelischen Gesamtbereiche unseres Lebens. Die Leitartikel und Versammlungsreden bedeuteten in allzu vielen Fällen nur eine Selbstenthemmung; eine eitle Demagogie oder eine Art von politischem Expressionismus des privaten Ichs. Aber sie waren nicht mehr Aufrufe zur Tat. (Diebold 841)

This question of a call to action haunts the subversive politics of the leftwing feuilletonists. Even at their most biting and direct, feuilleton articles in the bourgeois papers and magazines, even the most liberal, did not manage to win over their readerships to an active struggle against rising reactionary culture in the late Weimar era. No matter how “operative” the writers, they did not produce enough “operative” readers.

Benjamin blames the fecklessness of leftwing activism and *Neue Sachlichkeit* for the failure to create a revolutionary consciousness in Germany that could stand up to fascism. However, the project he outlines as an alternative, the project Kracauer had attempted in the

feuilleton of the *FZ*, had not met with any better success by 1934. The question remains: why? It helps to return to Kracauer's assertion in the introduction to *Die Angestellten* that his work would not pose suggestions but instead raise questions and introduce new perspectives. This methodological description seems to apply across Kracauer's feuilleton project and perhaps, with varying degrees of validity, to other feuilletonists' work as well. The faith this method placed in the power of new perspectives to alter bourgeois political consciousness and thus effect political change may seem naïve in hindsight. However, this process also describes how the bourgeois political consciousness that made the Weimar era possible emerged in the first place.

As detailed above, bourgeois political consciousness in Germany developed in tandem with the increasing role of the press in the public sphere. This made the newspaper such a promising location from which to attempt an overthrow of the bourgeois political order. It already lay at the heart of bourgeois political consciousness. The Weimar era's press freedoms and the increasing prominence of the entertainment sections of newspapers likewise seemed propitious for a project like that planned by Siegfried Kracauer and Benno Reifenberg at the *FZ*, but those press freedoms would not last long, eroded by parliamentary acts and capitalist pressures. In fact, the whole Weimar era only lasted from 1919–1933. It took nearly two centuries for the press to bring German bourgeois political consciousness to the point of even half-heartedly accepting a republic. Within the short span of the Weimar Republic, the leftwing feuilletonists simply could not effect a revolution in bourgeois consciousness in the face of an increasingly reactionary German culture, and by 1934 it was already too late. Nevertheless, in attempting to alter the consciousness of a whole class, the work of these writers did revolutionize the possibilities of the feuilleton in the German

bourgeois newspaper, enlarging the importance and political scope of culture writing in the press.

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