

PECULIAR THEORY:
THE PROBLEM OF PHILOSOPHY IN
SIEGFRIED KRACAUER'S THEORY OF FILM

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ABSTRACT

The republication of *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* by Siegfried Kracauer (1889 – 1966) in 1997 marked not just the highpoint of a period of renewed interest in his work, a period initiated by a series of events organized to mark the centenary of his birth, but also the limit of his scholarly influence. Though enthusiasm for his early sociological and cultural criticism written in Frankfurt and Berlin during the 1920s and 1930s continues to permeate research in numerous other disciplines within the humanities, his film theory continues to have little or no impact on the debates that currently define film studies. The reason for this, I argue, relates to the problematic role of philosophy in his film theory. Focusing primarily on *Theory of Film*, I examine in detail what makes Kracauer's theory peculiar; peculiar in the sense that it belongs specifically to the film medium and peculiar in regard to the ambiguous philosophical claims that distinguish it from subsequent methods of film analysis. The contemporary image of Kracauer as a cultural philosopher, I argue, restricts how we read the relationship between film and philosophy in his work. I propose that from the perspective of the contemporary film-philosophy debate a critical notion of the cinematic can be restored to all facets of his work enabling a clearer understanding of how Kracauer comprehends the relationship between the filmmaker, spectator and film theorist. In turn, I conclude, this review of Kracauer's cinematic approach as a democratised form of critical agency will benefit the understanding of philosophy and film theory as related forms of social practice.

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CHAPTER 1:

FROM FILM THEORY TO CINEMATIC PHILOSOPHY

1.1 Introduction: *The Problem of Philosophy in Kracauer's Theory*

Perhaps film is a gate rather than a dead end or a mere diversion?

Siegfried Kracauer (1889 – 1966).¹

This thesis examines the philosophical aspects of Siegfried Kracauer's film theory. More precisely it looks at the problem of philosophy in Kracauer's film theory. Seen by philosophers as too much about film to be philosophy and by film scholars as too philosophical to be an analytical tool for film studies, Kracauer's work on film has suffered as a result of its academic indeterminacy. However, as I shall demonstrate, considered from the perspective of recent developments in the hybrid discipline of film-philosophy such ambiguity can now be viewed not as an obstacle but as a catalyst for a reappraisal of his "cinematic approach" to critical theory.²

Throughout his writings on film, Kracauer maintained that cinema "has a definite bearing on the era into which it is born".³ The reason for this social and historical significance, he argues, relates to the antinomic nature of the medium's peculiar recording and revealing capabilities. In the first instance this concerns film's versatility as ideological apparatus but also its capacity to record phenomena that resist such hegemony. In the second, the cinematic reveals a historically peculiar mode of subjectivity, the experience of which complicates (through the interplay of reason and sensation) conventional notions of individual and collective agency. As the above quotation from *Theory of Film* suggests (and as I will establish in this study) Kracauer's work presents film not as a novelty to be intellectually scrutinized but as an opportunity through which an unorthodox philosophical engagement with our technological environment can be imagined and rehearsed.

¹ Kracauer, Siegfried, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality* [1960] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 287.

² Kracauer, 1997, p. 37.

³ Kracauer, 1997, p. li.

The literary critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin once called Kracauer “an enemy of philosophy”.⁴ Another, more recent film critic, I.C. Jarvie, has asserted that his film theory is “no sort of tool for film analysis”.⁵ This thesis will examine these claims and argue that “the cinematic approach” that Kracauer explicates in *Theory of Film* (1960) does indeed frustrate the academic demarcation of philosophy and film aesthetics but does so with a view towards their mutual transformation.⁶ Any provisional taxonomy of cinematic phenomena, Kracauer contends, exposes the limits of extant philosophy’s conceptual frameworks. In contrast, a theory peculiar to film presents the possibility of an alternative critical perspective that complements rather than supersedes the aggregated insights of film studies and philosophy. This thesis examines how Kracauer’s experience of the cinema influenced his development as a writer, critic and philosopher of modern culture. It argues that rather than simply being used by Kracauer to illustrate or corroborate a predetermined philosophical position, film spectatorship affected a fundamental revision of how he conceptualised the relationship between thought, perception and experience. The perspective of Kracauer’s cinematic approach, I conclude, maintains its relevance today as it still poses questions of our relationship with the moving image that persist in contemporary debate about the role of theory in the cinema experience as well as in its technical and social evolution.

Before proceeding with an exposition of Kracauer’s cinematic approach I will introduce in the following two chapters the various interpretations of his writings that have contributed to the contemporary image of Kracauer both as a film theorist and as a philosopher of modern culture. As I shall demonstrate, the relationship between these two approaches to Kracauer’s work has until very recently been almost entirely antagonistic with the contested merit of his work in either discipline being at the expense of his standing in the other. For example, as a consequence of Kracauer’s re-establishment as an important critic of pre-War Weimar society in university Cultural Studies and European Language departments attention has moved away from him as a

⁴ Adorno, Theodor W., “The Curious Realist: On Siegfried Kracauer”, *New German Critique*, No. 54 (1991), pp. 160 – 161.

⁵ Jarvie, I. C., *Towards a sociology of the cinema: a comparative essay on the structure and functioning of a major entertainment industry* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1970), p. 134.

⁶ Kracauer, 1997, p. 37.

film theorist. This shift in the pattern of reception has meant that many misconceptions and partisan readings of his film theory from previous decades have remain unchallenged, rendering the idea of revisiting Kracauer's approach an unattractive proposition for many contemporary film scholars. Though the renewed interest in his early non-film writings (for example, his architectural and design criticism) is testament to Kracauer's inclusive and broad critical approach, his unfashionable English language work on film, with its chequered reception history, has been in turn implicitly or explicitly sidelined.⁷ In this new critical paradigm, where Kracauer's problematic insistence on the "cinematic approach" is either historically quarantined or made a periphery concern, there is a danger of its philosophical significance in relation to his other work being lost, in other words (to use an old German proverb), of the baby being thrown out with the bathwater.

1.2 *Re-Opening the Cabinet of Dr. Kracauer: Why Return to Kracauer Now?*

With Siegfried Kracauer, the relationship of cinema to philosophy is peculiar. From his reviews and essays on modern culture to his books written in America, Kracauer's cinema theory is not primarily about films, filmmakers, cultures or media technologies. Rather, cinema is itself something comparable to philosophy.

Drehli Robnik, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 2009⁸

To advocate the author of *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (1947), a book the film historian Barry Salt calls "the worst piece of film history" ever written, as primarily a philosopher could be interpreted as either defensive or misinformed revisionism.⁹ To go further and recognize Kracauer's 1960 book, *Theory of Film* as essentially a work of philosophy that, as Kracauer himself suggests, uses film as "a means to make certain sociological and philosophical

⁷ Reeh, Henrik, *Ornaments of the Metropolis: Siegfried Kracauer and Modern Urban Culture*, translated by John Irons (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006).

⁸ Robnik, Drehli, 'Siegfried Kracauer', in Felicity Colman (ed.), *Film, Theory and Philosophy. The Key Thinkers* (Durham: Acumen, 2009), p.40.

⁹ Salt, Barry, "From Caligari to Who?", *Sight and Sound*, No. 48 (1979), p. 122.

statements” could also seem an unnecessary counter to established scholarship.¹⁰ However, Kracauer’s inclusion in the 2009 anthology, *Film, Theory and Philosophy: The Key Thinkers*, in which the above quoted Robnik essay appears, marks a twofold moment of transition in the reception of his work. On the one hand, it seeks to establish him as a pioneer of “film-philosophy”, a recent initiative in aesthetic theory and the philosophy of art that seeks to collapse the academic distinction between philosophy and film theory.¹¹ And on the other, it marks the end of a posthumous process of critical rehabilitation that slowly saw the image of Kracauer transformed from that of an intellectual anachronism to politically engaged cultural critic whose work resonates with the concerns of new media theorists today.

The transitional nature of the current phase in the critical reception of Kracauer’s work affords its reader the opportunity to reassess its merit in a variety of ways. It presents to the historian an opportunity to evaluate the contributions made by, what Leonardo Quaresima deems, the “flurry of scholarly activity” that followed the centenary of the writer’s birth and resulted in the republication of both *Theory of Film* and *From Caligari to Hitler*.¹² It also offers to those interested in the interdisciplinary potential of a synthesis of film theory and philosophy an alternative to the Franco-centric tendency that has to date determined the scope of many available studies on the subject. More significantly, in shifting what is designated by the term “film” from an object of study to what Havi Carel and Greg Tuck have recently suggested is “a more troubling site of thought and experience”, the film-philosophy perspective addresses in an innovative way the problem that has increasingly come to delimit much recent Kracauer scholarship: what is the relevance of an historical film theory to media studies in the digital age?¹³

¹⁰ “Was den Film betrifft, so war er mir immer nur ein Hobby, ein Mittel, um gewisse soziologische und philosophische Aussagen zu machen”, Letter quoted in Belke, Ingrid and Irina Renz, (eds.), “Siegfried Kracauer 1889-1966”, *Marbacher Magazin* (Deutsche Schillergesellschaft), No. 47 (1988), pp. 118 – 119.

¹¹ See Carel, Havi and Greg Tuck (eds.), *New Takes in Film-Philosophy* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 1 – 3.

¹² Quaresima, Leonardo, “Introduction to the 2004 edition: Rereading Kracauer”, in Kracauer, Siegfried, *From Caligari to Hitler. A psychological history of the German film [1947]*, revised edition edited by Leonardo Quaresima (New York: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. xv.

¹³ Carel & Tuck, 2011, p. 2.

1.3 *An Enemy of Philosophy?*

The proposition of Kracauer as primarily a philosopher does not remove in a single stroke the “sum of errors” that film theorist Gertrud Koch argues lies at the root of his “unsteady” reputation as a film theorist.¹⁴ The problem, for Koch, in ascertaining Kracauer’s contemporary intellectual standing is due not to a lack of alternative perspectives on his work but the inverse. Kracauer exists, she explains, simultaneously as film theorist, journalist, essay writer, novelist and poet. As a consequence, interpreting any of the myriad elements of Kracauer’s oeuvre through the filter of any one these activities inhibits the appreciation of their integrated “structural identity”. When “[s]een from a distance”, she writes, “we can discern a pattern in the various maps readers have made of the author’s work and the divergent interpretations they have come up with”.¹⁵ In fact, Koch states, it is an ignorance of this pattern’s “constitutive” function that explains why “some theorists of film” are driven to “punish the name Kracauer”.¹⁶ Kracauer was not a film theorist with philosophical aspirations, argues Koch, but a philosopher that used film to articulate certain aspects of his cultural theory. The methodological flaws identified in his film theory by film specialists, she concludes, are faults only from their singular perspective and should in fact be understood as indicative of his film texts’ true constituent function within a larger scheme.

Though Koch’s interpretative model of Kracauer’s disparate corpus has proved influential in his establishment as a cultural theorist, not all of his advocates have been as keen to interpret his peripatetic approach as indicative of an immanent philosophy or sustained reasoning. “In a way that is difficult to articulate”, suggests the German philosopher Theodor Adorno, Kracauer’s “thinking was always more contemplation than thought, singularly intent on not letting anything that solid things had impressed upon him be wrangled away through explanation”.¹⁷ It is this motivation, Adorno argues, that accounts for the primacy of the immediate experience over the philosophical concept in Kracauer’s thinking. As a result of this, Adorno

¹⁴ Koch, Gertrud, *Siegfried Kracauer: An Introduction*, translated by Jeremy Gaines (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), p.3.

¹⁵ Koch, 2000, p.3.

¹⁶ Koch, 2000, p.3.

¹⁷ Adorno, 1991, p. 163.

suggests, “incommensurability”, a resistance to any common standard of measurement, should be considered the “central theme” of his work.¹⁸ It is Kracauer’s intellectual fidelity to the philosophically anomalous, Adorno concludes, that stops his thinking from being philosophy. It is this reluctance to judge the incommensurable, the weighting of “the expressive moment in philosophy” over the objective “moment of rigor” that prompted their mutual friend, the literary critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin to call Kracauer “an enemy of philosophy”.¹⁹ However, Adorno adds, in “all his works, Kracauer reminds us that thought, looking back, should not forget what it divested itself of in order to become idea”.²⁰

1.4 *Hybrid Perspectives and Research Questions*

The idea of a true synthesis of film theory and philosophy revealing new intellectual “terrain” is one explored more recently by Havi Carel and Greg Tuck in their introduction to *New Takes in Film-Philosophy*.²¹ “While there are studies that describe themselves, perfectly legitimately”, explain Carel and Tuck, “as exercises in the philosophy of film, in these cases film is clearly positioned as the junior partner”.²² In such instances, when “placed under a pre-existing and fully-developed philosophical gaze”, films are reduced to the status of illustrations.²³ Another approach, they identify, is one that seeks a greater equality between the terms “film and philosophy” but maintains “a pre-existing demarcation between the fields”.²⁴ This approach, they conclude, is prone to consider film as a formal exercise devoid of social, historical and commercial context. By ignoring the contribution of Film Studies, suggest Carel and Tuck, philosophy can also run the risk of reducing a film to a “set of notions or concerns that could have been identified from the script, rather than issues that arise from an engagement with the visual, aural and kinetic experience of moving images”.²⁵ However, argue Carel and Tuck, there is an alternative to “this particular binary of a successful or failed assimilation” which is a:

¹⁸ Adorno, 1991, p. 163.

¹⁹ Adorno, 1991, pp. 160 – 161.

²⁰ Adorno, 1991, p. 164.

²¹ Carel & Tuck, 2011, p. 2.

²² Carel & Tuck, 2011, p. 2.

²³ Carel & Tuck, 2011, p. 2.

²⁴ Carel & Tuck, 2011, p. 2.

²⁵ Carel & Tuck, 2011, p. 2.

revitalising hybridity that aims at a more truly synthesising outcome. Here the conjunction is less a boundary, traversed from one side to the other more or less successfully, but a moment of expansion in which a field of thought becomes mapped and nourished by both traditions. The boundary is not so much crossed, as expanded, broadened so as to become a terrain of its own. To keep open the possibility of mutual transformation while offering a coherent yet non-excluding notion of what this new terrain may yield, we describe this domain as film-philosophy.²⁶

In light of this present interest in defining “film-philosophy”, this study will examine the ways in which Kracauer uses the film experience as the impetus for a critical approach designed to challenge conventional modes of philosophical practice. In doing so, it will explore how Kracauer develops his idea of the film camera’s scrutiny of our physical surroundings as the basis of a set of questions and responses that were novel to established political, social and cultural theories. It argues that Kracauer’s cinematic approach to theory is not a prescriptive model of filmmaking and film interpretation but the mapping out of what he defines in *Theory of Film* as “an approach to the world” that is not peculiar to the medium but articulated by it in an exemplary fashion.²⁷ Questions addressed by this study include: what is it about film that for Kracauer identified it above other forms of modern culture (such as theatre) as a facilitator for critical thinking? For Kracauer, what are the potential social and political ramifications of his critical re-evaluation of this form of mass media? How does Kracauer’s philosophy of the cinematic inform his literary work and sociological research? Does the cinematic approach that Kracauer describes in *Theory of Film* suggest a mode of critical agency distinct from that of established forms of philosophical and artistic practice? Is Kracauer’s theory of film a mode of film-philosophy *avant la lettre*? Is his film theory better understood as cinematic philosophy?

²⁶ Carel & Tuck, 2011, p. 2.

²⁷ Kracauer, 1997, p. li.

1.5 Chapter Structure and Content

“Anyone who thinks that *Theory of Film* contains everything that Siegfried Kracauer had to say about film”, writes Heide Schlüpmann, “is quite mistaken”. “In fact”, she concludes, “the opposite is true”.²⁸ Though Schlüpmann’s remark is made in reference to the hundreds of film reviews that Kracauer wrote whilst a journalist during the 1930s, the point she is making can also be extended, I argue, to include his work on other subjects. In this thesis I will demonstrate how Kracauer’s explication of the cinematic approach is not restricted to his books on film or to his numerous film reviews but permeates and informs almost all of his work. Examining how the designation cinematic for Kracauer refers not to a fixed set of properties that are inherent to a particular object (be that defined technologically, culturally or socially) but a process, what he calls in *Theory of Film*, “a mode of human existence”, is a key factor in understanding its philosophical function.²⁹ In the introduction of his last, and unfinished book, *History: the last things before the last* (1966), Kracauer describes, *Theory of Film*, as not just “an aesthetics of the photographic media” but also an attempt “to bring out the significance of areas whose claim to be acknowledged in their own right has not yet been recognized”.³⁰

PART ONE: FROM THEORIST TO PHILOSOPHER [Chapters 2 – 4]

Through a survey of secondary literature, Chapters 2 and 3 will chart the decline and resurgence of interest in Kracauer’s work over the past five decades. It will examine in detail how his name became associated with a regressive dilettantism by film historians and critics during Film Studies’ formative academic period and how archival materials helped in the re-invention of Kracauer as a cultural philosopher. It will focus specifically on how film went from being the defining factor in Kracauer’s critical reception to a peripheral component in later considerations of his cultural philosophy as a whole. In conjunction with issues raised in chapters 2 and 3, chapter 4 will propose an alternative context for the study of Kracauer’s work in which a

²⁸ Schlüpmann, Heide, “Phenomenology of Film: On Siegfried Kracauer's Writings of the 1920s”, *New German Critique*, No. 40 (1987), p. 97.

²⁹ Kracauer, 1997, p. li.

³⁰ Kracauer, Siegfried, *History. The Last Things Before the Last*, completed after the death of the author by Paul Oskar Kristeller (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1995), p.4.

critical notion of the cinematic presents itself again as a central concern in the development of his intellectual project.

Chapter 2: Peculiar Anachronism: The Issue of Relevance

This chapter will look at the critical response to Kracauer's film theory, firstly by a post-War generation of film scholars trying to establish film studies as a legitimate academic discipline and then by those arguing for a revision of his contribution from the perspective of Cultural Studies and Feminism. It will examine how all of these interpretative strategies, to some degree narrativise Kracauer's work and his intellectual biography in order to synchronise an image of him with a particular aspect of their own intellectual agendas. Though antithetical, I argue, a common element in all of these approaches to Kracauer is a critical notion of obsolescence. In other words, from a relatively early stage Kracauer's English language film theory is identified by various critics as being technologically and methodologically outmoded.

Rather than refute the anachronistic nature of Kracauer's American publications, subsequent defences of his work confirm it by reading them as damaged remnants of an intellectual project whose radical potential was negated by the trauma of exile. It is in his pre-War German language work (completed whilst a journalist in Frankfurt and Berlin) and not in his more famous American books, argues exponents of this psychological and existential reading of his work that his true intellectual contribution can be found. Subsequently interest has shifted from his post-War work to his Weimar texts and though the former are still widely known they are considered more of an historical curiosity than his earlier articles and essays. As a consequence, I argue, many criticisms about them from previous decades have remained unchallenged. This chapter argues that the outmoded character of his post-War book, *Theory of Film* is the product of a conscious and deliberate strategy adopted by its author as part of a larger critique of teleological models of historical change. Understanding the anachronistic nature of Kracauer's later work, I argue, provides not just an alternative perspective on his work but also the critical means with which to challenge the prevailing interpretive models of his work as a whole.

Chapter 3: *Exile and Repatriation. Kracauer's Redemption Cycle*

Developing themes introduced in the previous section, this chapter will examine in detail the origins of what has been referred to as the “Kracauer renaissance”, a period of renewed interest in his work in the 1990s that resulted in the translation and republication of many of his texts.³¹ In this chapter, I argue that rather than the outcome of serendipitous archival discoveries or the inevitable result of the circularity of intellectual fashion, Kracauer’s reinvention, as a Weimar cultural philosopher is a product of a concerted and deliberate group effort. This group, initially formed around the German film historian and critic Karsten Witte and later the U.S. journal *New German Critique*, propagated an image of Kracauer as primarily a German author and philosopher. The reason for doing so, I demonstrate, relates to their desire to re-establish a German cultural tradition in film aesthetics that had been truncated by the rise of National Socialism. Using psychological and philosophical concepts such as trauma and exile, Kracauer became the personification of Germany’s violently fractured intellectual history. With the focus entirely on his early Weimar texts, critics such as Witte, Hansen and Koch worked to transform Kracauer’s work into an intellectual bridge that would connect the work of a generation of post-War German filmmakers (New German Cinema) with a politically progressive Weimar theoretical tradition untainted by fascism.

Looking at the work of film historians such as Eric Rentschler and Thomas Elsaesser, I shall show how the changes in the image of Kracauer, from staid academician to politically engaged cultural critic, reflects the role played by Weimar cinema and mass culture in the relationship between Film Studies and Cultural Studies and in turn in the development of Cinema Studies. This chapter will review the legacy of this period of critical activity in Kracauer’s work and analyse how certain aspects of this conflation of Kracauer’s personal biography and his intellectual project have both improved Kracauer’s academic profile in both Europe and America but also restricted how his work is viewed, particularly in the context of Film Studies.

³¹ Koch, 2000, Back cover.

Chapter 4: The Context of Film-Philosophy

In this chapter I will introduce the idea of film-philosophy as an alternative context in which to interpret Kracauer's work. It will focus in particular on the work of film scholars that argue for a more fluid and interactive relationship between film theory and philosophy. I argue that from the perspective of this debate certain elements of Kracauer's work, in particular those relating to his "cinematic approach" which are currently sidelined by the prevailing interpretive approaches, present themselves as significant and integral to his work as a whole.

Using Thomas Wartenberg's provisional typology of cinematic philosophies as a framework, this chapter will examine the various contrasting positions espoused by film theorists and philosophers on the intellectual capacity of filmmaking and the film viewing experience. As I shall demonstrate, though the views on this subject range from extreme evangelism to absolute repudiation, commonalities can be identified, specifically in relation to how the immediate experience of film spectatorship simultaneously courts and resists philosophical interpretation. Focusing on the work of Wartenberg, Robert Sinnerbrink and John Mullarkey, this chapter explores how film paradoxically makes philosophy more comprehensible through narrative and visual exposition but also demonstrates its inadequacies as a vehicle for thought. The purpose of this contextualisation is not to identify the conceptual origins of film-philosophy in Kracauer's work but to use its peculiar destabilisation of the film / theory relationship as a catalyst with which to reinterpret particular aspects of Kracauer's work on film outside of the existential narrative constructed for it by previous studies.

PART TWO: A CINEMATIC APPROACH TO PHILOSOPHY

[Chapters 5 – 9]

In the second part of this study I will examine in detail how Kracauer understood and articulated the relationship between film and philosophy and how that relates to contemporary notions of film-philosophy. In the following chapter breakdown I will show how I intend to demonstrate that the cinematic approach the Kracauer explicates in *Theory of Film* is not the medium specific application of a predetermined

philosophy of culture (as discussed in chapter 3) but a proposal for a mutual transformation of film aesthetics and philosophy. This transformation, I argue, is not as a result of their dialectical synthesis of theory and its object into a hybrid mode of reasoning but through a consideration of their relationship as performative; that is they remain distinct but intertwined in a way where changes in one effect the constitution of the other.

Chapter 5: Cinematic Subject Relations: How Film Affects Its Theory

In this chapter I examine how Kracauer developed his understanding of film's intellectual capacity especially in relation to the established arts. It describes how a Marxist model of social and cultural relations initially informs Kracauer's approach to film as a vehicle for ideological critique. It also shows how Kracauer allows the corporeal cinema experience to transform his philosophical understanding of material and social phenomena and in turn the relationship between theory and praxis.

Through a detailed examination of his analysis of the films of French filmmaker Jean Vigo I demonstrate how Kracauer uses film to articulate his proposed revision of Marx's dialectic materialism. I also argue that as well as using film to illustrate his theory Kracauer's writings on film operate as exemplar incidences of his peculiarly cinematic approach to the philosophical object. This peculiarity, I explain, manifests itself in his work as an overt recognition of the role of the object in determining the relative position of the philosophical subject. The film experience for Kracauer, I conclude, does not just provide a novel means for the audio and visual enunciation of a philosophical position but through its peculiar relativisation of the viewer's subject position questions the legitimacy of maintaining Idealism's teleological perspective.

Chapter 6: Feedback Loops: Defining Cinematic Agency

For Kracauer, film and thinking about film exists in a dynamic conceptual feedback loop, in other words, how we conceptualise the film experience shapes how we comprehend it and subsequently how we produce it. It is an understanding of this peculiar self-reflectivity that philosophy brings to film theory and with it the potential to emancipate it from the teleological models that dominate contemporary notions of

its development. Considered philosophically, the cinematic experience can be seen to provide a context in which not just the film object or the viewing subject is destabilized but also thought's relationship to its object. In this regard Kracauer's cinematic approach can be seen as proposing a paradigm shift comparable to that of quantum physics and its challenge to the Newtonian belief in the absolute autonomy of theory and reality. Kracauer's film theory, I argue, is as much about the nature of theory as it is about the nature of film.³²

In this chapter I will examine how Kracauer envisaged his film theory as belonging (as Mullarkey suggests) "both to the theorist and, in part, to the film" through an analogy he makes between film spectatorship and the dreaming process.³³ This comparison, I argue, is done not to facilitate a psychoanalytical deciphering of film's overt and covert symbolic meaning (in relation to the filmmaker's and / or the spectators conscious and unconscious desires) but in order to help explain the peculiar nature of cinematic agency as a mutually modifying process between subject and object (a feedback loop). Using Kracauer's recourse to the work of Walter Benjamin and then to the post-Newtonian physics of Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg as reference points, this chapter demonstrates how Kracauer incorporates the idea of the spectator / observer influencing (co-creating) the object of study into his notion of the cinematic. This chapter concludes with a comparison between Kracauer's dynamic concept of spectatorship and contemporary philosopher Jacques Rancière's notion of the emancipated spectator. Both critical positions, I argue, work to collapse the antithetical dialectic of passive and active modes of behaviour that is immanent to philosophy's notion of agency.

Chapter 7: The Cinematic As Social Practice

Following on from the conclusions of the previous chapter, this section will explore further how Kracauer perceives the way film mediates in the relationship between the individual and the collective social body. In particular it will assess how Kracauer

³² For its publication in England the London publisher, Denis Dobson changed the title of the book to "Nature of Film", see Kracauer, Siegfried, *Nature of film: the redemption of physical reality* (London: Denis Dobson), 1961.

³³ Mullarkey, John, "Film Can't Philosophise (and Neither Can Philosophy): Introduction to a Non-Philosophy of Cinema, in Havi, Carel and Greg Tuck (eds.), *New Takes in Film Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 94.

understood the nature of the connection between the culturally constructed idea of individual subjectivity and the image of the collective social body as a mutually defining and dynamic process. Kracauer's readings of the Czech writer Franz Kafka and the slapstick comedy of Charlie Chaplin, I argue, informs his understanding of the relationship between the private and the social self. The peculiar modes of subjectivity that he associates with their work, I suggest, not only blurs the boundaries of what is conventionally seen to delimit the concept of the cinematic but also work to corroborate his image of the relationship between people and things as a reciprocal performance.

In establishing what Kracauer understood as individual and collective agency, this chapter demonstrates the immanent performative component of Kracauer's film theory. By drawing parallels between Kracauer's critical notion of community and the work of Georg Lukács, Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Rancière I will demonstrate how their corresponding endeavours work to collapse the distinction between active and passive modes of intellectual and physical activity and in turn conflate the conceptual antagonism of theory and practice. Kracauer's ontological concerns regarding the nature of the cinematic community, I conclude, distinguish his work from abstract hermeneutics and give his cinematic approach a distinct social function.

Chapter 8: Theory and Its Cinematic Illustration

The following two chapters look in detail at the ways the immediate sensory experience of the cinema is evident in how Kracauer devises and presents his theory. Using his theory of time and historical change as an example, I argue that Kracauer uses film to both illustrate his ideas as well as actively encouraging the reader to experience how film resists being entirely subservient to philosophy. I conclude that, for Kracauer, the cinematic experience operates alongside philosophy as a repository of knowledge (brought about by the exercise of the cinematic approach) and as such possesses a potential to circumvent the limitations of readymade theoretical frameworks.

In Chapter 8, using comparisons with the work of Walter Benjamin, the philosopher Michel Serres, the anthropologist and art historian George Kubler and the Marxist

philosopher (and friend of Kracauer's) Ernst Bloch, I demonstrate how Kracauer's various statements on temporal relations in *Theory of Film* and *History* can be considered as constituting a philosophy of time. By examining how ideas such as Bloch's concept of "non-simultaneity" and Kubler's notion of "shaped time" inform his work I argue that Kracauer identifies a notion of temporal extraterritoriality, which though comprehensible in relation to film narratives can not be directly represented by them. This chapter analyses how Kracauer, using the films of D.W. Griffith as a model, develops a "non-solution" to this problem of narrative representation by initiating a critical notion of ambiguity. The subsequent ambiguous cinematic motifs that recur throughout *Theory of Film*, I argue, are not expressions of their author's inappropriate poetic aspirations, cryptic symbols of a hidden deeper meaning or expressions of Kracauer's pseudo-mystical insight into the cinematic process. These motifs, I suggest, are the record of incidences where film has demonstrated its epistemological potential by correlating narrative and extra-narrative elements in a way peculiar to the medium. For Kracauer, I conclude, the key to understanding film's peculiar intellectual capacity relates to its immediate physiological appeal being understood as integral to and not distinct from its philosophical potential.

Chapter 9: The Critical Experience of Cinematic Analogies

In this penultimate chapter I analyse the concept of the thought-image [*Denkbild*] as a strategy devised by exponents of Critical Theory to expose the conceptual limitations of philosophical language. The abstruse thought-image, I argue, provides an alternative perspective for interpreting the evanescent cinematic motifs that recur in Kracauer's *Theory of Film*, one that preserves their kinetic nature from the stasis of symbolic interpretation. With reference to the work of Kracauer's one time mentor, the German sociologist Georg Simmel I demonstrate the various critical functions that Kracauer's illustrations and film references in *Theory of Film* fulfill with a particular emphasis on their kinesthetic effect. Kracauer's exposition of the physiological experience of film, I argue, is immanent to his understanding of its critical capacity and is also fundamental to his identification of the cinematic approach with a democratization of philosophical and artistic practice. This chapter concludes with an examination of how Kracauer's notion of film's photographic mediation of everyday experience acts as a catalyst for this pluralisation of critical activity.

Chapter 10: Conclusion: Utopia of the In-between

In this final chapter, before offering a summary of and proposing some possible future applications for Kracauer's peculiar philosophical mediation between film theory and its object, I look at the utopian character of the cinematic approach in relation to his critical project as a whole. Mapping out the utopian aspect of Kracauer's oeuvre, I argue, particularly in relation to the work of his peers Adorno and Bloch, assists the contemporary reader to better comprehend *Theory of Film* not as the (successful or failed) application of an esoteric philosophy of culture but as an attempt by an individual to relinquish sovereignty of their philosophy. The cinematic approach is not a prescriptive set of principles aimed at the film-makers in order to better facilitate the teleological advancement of a medium specific aesthetic nor is it an instructional programme designed to replicate Kracauer's advanced appreciation of the medium. Kracauer's *Theory of Film*, I conclude, is a record of what happens when film is allowed to act alongside theory, to be its companion rather than servant, like the peculiar relationship that Kafka describes between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

Finally returning to the questions posed in the introduction of this study I assess the relationship between Kracauer's film theory and contemporary notions of film-philosophy. Kracauer's approach, I suggest has much in common with certain elements of the cinematic philosophy debate but too close an identification negates the historical character of Kracauer's critical intervention into the film experience. However, film-philosophy does demonstrate how the peculiar intellectual potential that Kracauer sought to describe through his convolution of film, theory and philosophy still exists regardless of how the individual terms are currently defined.

CHAPTER 2:

PECULIAR ANACHRONISM: THE ISSUE OF RELEVANCE

2.1 Introduction

In the context of Film Studies today the “classic” film theory of Siegfried Kracauer is often presented as a museum piece, an approach to a medium that has been superseded both theoretically and technologically.¹ This, however, has not always been the case. This chapter will look at how Kracauer’s theory has been critically received historically, initially by those advocating film studies as an autonomous academic discipline in the 1960s / 70s and then by those arguing for a revision of his beleaguered reputation in light of developments in Cultural Studies, Feminism and archival research. It will examine how these psychological and philosophical approaches to Kracauer’s work on film address the issue of relevance in a contemporary film studies context. It argues that far from being an obstacle to be overcome in order to appreciate the true nature of Kracauer’s legacy in relation to Film Studies, the outmoded character of his post-War film theory is indicative of its author’s complex and non-laminar notion of historical change. Intentionally conceived as an anachronism, it concludes, Kracauer’s *Theory of Film* works to situate the cinematic approach it advocates in a critical tradition of aesthetic theory and art practice that resists assimilation into (or affirmation of) a reductive model of technological and social progress.

2.2 Pioneer or Obstacle: The Problem of Kracauer in Film Studies

In 1980 the film historian Eric Rentschler, an influential figure in the recent English language reception of German cinema, wrote that the problem with teaching film at University level was that “the ghost of Dr. Kracauer still haunts American scholars”.² For those, such as Rentschler, wishing to establish film studies as a distinct academic

¹ For example, Noel Carroll’s “Introducing Film Evaluation” in Gledhill, Christine and Linda Williams (eds.), *Reinventing Film Studies* (London: Arnold, 2002), p. 273 clearly identifies the designation “classic” with being defunct, what the editors of the volume label as not really “useful for the future”, p. 1.

² Rentschler, Eric, “Reopening the Cabinet of Dr. Kracauer: Teaching German Film as Film.” *Modern Language Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 3. (1980), p. 320.

discipline, Kracauer's continued presence in debate was proving a stubborn distraction. Kracauer's work represented the outmoded, his approach was considered crude and his influence regressive. Though recognised as an important contributor to the development of academic film analysis Kracauer was now proving more problem than precedent. For a post-War generation of film scholars, such as Rentschler, Kracauer's approach was a methodological dead end, a curious museum piece, something to be appreciated rather than actually used.

In England, philosophers, theorists and film critics also keen to distinguish the novelty of their own approaches to film analysis were equally forthright in castigating the mistakes of their predecessors. For example, V.F. Perkins, in *Film as Film* (1972) introduces his exposition of a logical "synthetic theory" of film with a chapter titled "The Sins of the Pioneers".³ Alongside essays by the French critic André Bazin (1918 – 1958), Kracauer's *Theory of Film* (1960) is presented by Perkins in his study as a prime example of how personal preference is fashioned into prescriptive dogma. For Perkins, their shared proclivity for the supposed objectiveness of a naturalistic approach to filmmaking is a subterfuge for a predominately subjective and fundamentally undisciplined and amateurish approach to the subject. Kracauer's "at time impenetrable, line of reasoning"⁴, he argues, is evidence of how he has confused, like Bazin, his "own critical vocation" for the "true vocation of cinema".⁵ In contrast, his own professional approach to film analysis, declares Perkins, will assist "the critical spectator" to "master" the "raw experience" of the cinema.⁶

In parallel to Perkin's work, I.C. Jarvie in *Towards A Sociology of the Cinema* (1970) attributes Kracauer's work a more insidious character. Kracauer's dilettante method, argues Jarvie, is an obstacle to be overcome if Film Studies is to be taken seriously like Sociology as a scholarly discipline. In contrast to Perkins' measured rebuttal of Kracauer's theoretical naivety, Jarvie opts for a more direct approach and ridicules

³ Perkins, V.F., *Film as Film. Understanding and Judging Movies* (London: Penguin, 1974), p.9.

⁴ Perkins, 1974, p. 29.

⁵ Perkins, 1974, p. 39.

⁶ Perkins, 1974, p. 193.

Kracauer's theory of film as "an absurd edifice".⁷ For Jarvie, Kracauer's film theory with its "tendency to mystical utterances" is an embarrassing anachronism and "no sort of tool for film analysis".⁸ Considered as a whole, he concludes, Kracauer's work is "poorly argued and incredibly overrated".⁹ A precursor to (and possible model for) Jarvie's assessment of Kracauer's method as a form of neurosis is the New York critic Pauline Kael's 1962 review of *Theory of Film*.¹⁰

In this text, provocatively titled "Is there a cure for Film Criticism", Kael (like Perkins) criticises Kracauer's theory for confusing a subjective approach for an objective method. "Kracauer", writes Kael, "doesn't mean to spoil movies for us":

it's obvious that he really loves certain movies – and he does his best to justify this affection by bending and twisting his theory to include, or at least excuse, the movies he likes. This is made possible by our confusion about what the theory is.¹¹

However, unlike Perkin's subsequent critique of Kracauer's covert subjectivity, Kael's criticism of Kracauer's *Theory of Film* is overtly anti-intellectual. Theories such as Kracauer's, argues Kael, are obstacles to honest criticism, the basis of which is personal judgement and freedom of choice. Film theory, for Kael, is something "imposed on motion pictures" an unnecessary mediation that looks not to develop what she refers to as "a critical attitude" but to regulate it.¹² There is, writes Kael:

in any art, a tendency to turn one's own preferences into a monomaniac theory; in film criticism, the more confused and single minded and dedicated (to untenable propositions) the theorist is, the more likely he is to be regarded as serious and important and 'deep'".¹³

⁷ Jarvie, I. C., *Towards a sociology of the cinema: a comparative essay on the structure and functioning of a major entertainment industry* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1970), p. 134 .

⁸ Jarvie, 1970, p. 134.

⁹ Jarvie, 1970, p. 134.

¹⁰ Jarvie, 1970, p. 132. For reference to Kael's "devastation" of Kracauer see Jarvie, 1970, p. 299.

¹¹ Kael, Pauline, "'Is There a Cure for Film Criticism?' Or, Some Unhappy Thoughts on Siegfried Kracauer's Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality", in *I Lost it at The Movies* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1965), p. 269.

¹² Kael, 1965, p. 270.

¹³ Kael, 1965, p. 271.

Citing as evidence of this ruse *Theory of Film*'s grandiloquent "dust-jacket blurbs", Kael takes it upon herself to call Kracauer's intellectual bluff.¹⁴ Her subsequent denunciation of Kracauer revolves around an identification of his Germanic heritage and an intellectual approach to film that is foreign to the medium. For example, Kael writes:

Obviously English is not Kracauer's native language, and it seems cruel and unfair to protest his usage of it. But how can we judge what he's saying when he sets up terms and classifications (like 'mental reality') that seem to mean something for him that they could hardly mean to anyone else? Are we perhaps being more generous to his ideas than we would be if we could decipher them? What good are Kracauer's terms if no one else can apply them? How can anyone tell what fits his scheme? It's so arbitrary; it's like a catechism to which he owns the only set of correct answers.¹⁵

For Kael, this "game of arbitrary definitions" is a "dull game" which we don't have to play.¹⁶ "In all art", she concludes:

we look and listen for what we have not experienced quite that way before. We want to see, to feel, to understand, to respond a new way. Why should pedants be allowed to spoil the game?¹⁷

Kael's negative effect upon *Theory of Film*'s critical reception was immediate and long lasting. As Miriam Hansen notes in her introduction to its 1997 re-publication, *Theory of Film* "did not have to wait for the digital revolution to be laid in ruins" as the influence of Kael's "smug polemics" can be traced in various guises throughout the following decades.¹⁸ For instance, in his 1968 essay, "What, Indeed, Is Cinema?", Peter Harcourt, sets about extrapolating Kael's notion of *Theory of Film*'s conceptual

¹⁴ Kael (1965), pp. 270 -271. Kael is here referring to the texts contributed by the British filmmaker, historian and critic Paul Rotha (1907 – 1984) and Richard Griffith (1912 – 1969), then curator of the Museum of Modern Art (New York) Film Library for the first edition of *Theory of Film*, printed in 1960 by the Oxford University Press.

¹⁵ Kael, 1965, p. 288.

¹⁶ Kael, 1965, p. 275.

¹⁷ Kael, 1965, p. 292.

¹⁸ Hansen, Miriam, "Introduction" in Kracauer, Siegfried, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality* [1960] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. ix.

foreignness as cultural detachment and personal neurosis. Confessing no knowledge of his background, Harcourt suggest that “Kracauer's problem” is ultimately with himself.¹⁹ *Theory of Film*, argues Harcourt, is the product of “ a man alone in a museum” and though the reasons for embarking on such an enterprise may have been “noble” it resulted in “something a little sad”. It is, Harcourt concludes:

as if his chosen society encouraged him to be "merely" an academic. He was not writing in Hollywood, close to the film-making scene; nor would anything he wrote ever affect anything that Hollywood might do. His academic pedantry-if that is what we have to call the tautological insistences of his book-must have been aggravated by the isolation he must have felt, working so far away from the active film scene.²⁰

In contrast to Harcourt’s sympathetic reading, J. Dudley Andrew in his 1976 book, *The Major Film Theories: An Introduction*, cared little for Kracauer the individual and set about attacking the subject of Kracauer as one would an oppressive social institution. As well as mimicking Kael’s condescending tone, J. Dudley Andrew (like Jarvie a sociologist) embellishes Harcourt’s image of Kracauer as socially detached. Where as Harcourt was openly ignorant of Kracauer’s background, Andrew informs his readers of Kracauer’s pre-War career as a journalist as well as his other “equally serious” non-film publications.²¹ However, this contextual information has little bearing on Andrew’s approach which takes as its main motivation a desire to deride those who esteem Kracauer’s work as “a landmark in film scholarship”.²²

For Andrew, following Kael’s lead, Kracauer’s *Theory of Film* established itself (along with its author) as an authority on film in the absence of the genuine thing by opportunistically presenting itself as such at a time when film scholarship was eager to prove itself academically. “While little known in Europe”, argues Andrew:

¹⁹ Harcourt, Peter, “What, Indeed, Is Cinema?”, *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 1. (1968), p. 25.

²⁰ Harcourt, 1968, p. 25.

²¹ Andrew, J. Dudley, *The Major Film Theories: an introduction* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 107.

²² Kael, 1965, p. 270.

Kracauer's book has had incredible impact in England and America, in part because its appearance coincided with the advent of widespread film study in both countries. More telling than this, however, is the book's solid structure and broad scholarship. *Theory of Film* appears authoritative in its very format, especially when compared to its rivals. It is a big book, replete with references to a vast range of films, film theorists, and scholars from all fields, and written with incomparable self-confidence and an imposing Germanic seriousness.²³

What Andrew subsequently sets out to do is to demonstrate, like Kael, Perkins and Jarvie before him, that though *Theory of Film* bares all the hallmarks of a standard text for a then fledgling intellectual discipline, the superficiality of its method and conclusions render its true influence counterproductive in relation to the subject's academic development.

2.3 *Theory of Film as Philosophical Ruin: Kracauer's Relevancy in the Digital Age*

As I will describe in detail in the next chapter, by the beginning of the 1990s (following the republication of some of his pre-War writings) attitudes to Kracauer's work began to change. However, the problem (that Kael identified) of distilling a reproducible and coherent method from Kracauer's idiosyncratic approach remained. This issue is acknowledged by the film historian Miriam Hansen in her introduction to the 1997 republication of *Theory of Film*. "[M]uch as *Theory of Film* strives toward transparency and systematicity", writes Hansen, "the text remains uneven, slippery, and occasionally inconsistent, defying an attempt to deduce from it a coherent, clear-cut, and univocal position". However, for Hansen it is this opacity that assures rather than negates Kracauer's continued relevance. Perhaps, she writes, "the insights that the work still yields are to be found in this unevenness and do not depend upon its status as logically consistent [...] nor, for that matter, upon claims to trans-historical and trans-cultural validity".²⁴

²³ Andrew, 1976, p. 106.

²⁴ Hansen, 1997, p. x.

One possible reason for this change in approach to Kracauer's text, suggest Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener in *Film Theory: an introduction through the senses*, is the "historicity of theory itself".²⁵ For Elsaesser and Hagener, any "new" theory "implicitly or explicitly" defines itself as such by addressing certain problems that though possibly explicated beforehand are shown to have not yet been resolved or at least explained "in a satisfactory manner".²⁶ However, in the process of doing so (within a singular field of research) there is a considerable likelihood that certain issues, ones previously considered resolved, might also be revived. An example of this, suggest Elsaesser and Hagener, is the recent revival in interest in Andre Bazin's work. The reason for this, argue Elsaesser and Hagener, is due to a physical change in the medium rather than a shift in social conditions. The technological evolution of film from analogue to digital media, they assert, raises ("albeit in a new form") Bazin's primary concern regarding the ontology of the photographic image. They conclude that:

The revival of Bazin (but also that of Kracauer [...]) proves that the history of film theory is not a teleological story of progress to ever-more comprehensive or elegantly reductive models.²⁷

The cyclical historical model proposed by Elsaesser and Hagener here is also used by Hansen in her re-contextualization of Kracauer's film texts. For Hansen, Kracauer's peculiar attempts to define the essential elements of the medium in *Theory of Film* resonate with contemporary debates concerning the "digital revolution" and its challenge to traditional concepts of the cinema as a cultural and social phenomenon. Kracauer's self-frustrating and "slippery" taxonomy, suggest Hansen, has belatedly found a more receptive historical context in the digital age.²⁸ The hostility towards Kracauer's work exhibited by the likes of Andrew and Kael, Hansen argues, stems from their consideration of his work as instantly outmoded. For a post-war generation of critics, it was not just the formal and stylistic character of *Theory of Film's* that marked it out as decidedly old fashioned, its concerns about the nature of the medium

²⁵ Elsaesser, Thomas and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory. An introduction through the senses* (New York & London: Routledge, 2010), p. 6.

²⁶ Elsaesser and Hagener, 2010, p. 6.

²⁷ Elsaesser and Hagener, 2010, p. 6.

²⁸ Hansen, 1997, p. viii.

also seemed to distance it from contemporary debate. Too new to be considered as part of the establishment, too nostalgic in its examples to be relevant, the resultant historical indeterminacy, argues Hansen, not only accounts for the rapid labelling of *Theory of Film* as a classic text in the film studies canon (by those eager to establish one) but also accounts for its equally speedy rejection by those wishing to take the next critical step and undermine the orthodoxy of their predecessors. It is, nevertheless, Hansen argues, the peculiar anachronistic character of *Theory of Film* that is the key to understanding its relevance today.

The key concept in Hansen's critical revision of *Theory of Film's* historical displacement is that of exile. Instead of refuting Kael's derisory image of the author as a foreigner Hansen appropriates it and reverses its critical function. For Hansen, in order to effectively evaluate the merit of Kracauer's contribution to film theory the reader must factor in the psychological implications of his enforced migration from Europe in 1941 (described in the next chapter). The harrowing experience of escaping National Socialism, argues Hansen, "violently fractured" Kracauer's "intellectual biography" causing a hiatus in his intellectual development (the first draft of *Theory of Film* is dated 1940/41).²⁹ The reticent tone Kracauer adopts in *Theory of Film*, argues Hansen, the "detached, Olympian vision" that so riled Kael and Andrew, can be explained as the deferred expression of this trauma. Had it been completed at a time closer to the stage of its conception, she proposes, Kracauer's book on film aesthetics would have adopted a more overtly radical approach to its subject.

Theodor Adorno wrote in 1944: "Every intellectual in emigration is without exception, mutilated".³⁰ A keen student of Adorno, Hansen's approach seeks to restore Kracauer's mutilated text by tracing its "hidden lineages" with a view to reviving its "history" – its correct historical context - and in turn "reactualize the argument of the book".³¹ Through the use of archival sources, Hansen sets about proving that the book we know today is in fact a damaged remnant of a larger more progressively political project started by Kracauer in pre-War Weimar Germany.

²⁹ Hansen, 1997, p. xvi.

³⁰ Adorno, Theodor, W., *Minima Moralia. Reflections from Damaged Life*, translated by E.F.N. Jephcott, [1951], (London and New York: Verso, 1996). p. 33.

³¹ Hansen, 1997, p. xvi.

By demonstrating *Theory of Film*'s radical pedigree Hansen looks to relocate Kracauer's theory of cinema both temporally and geographically. It is this contextual shift that allows Hansen to draw parallels between the ontological theories that accompanied cinema's juvenile form with those that have developed alongside the latest phase of its digital evolution.

However, in this revised comparative model, with its focus on Kracauer's Weimar period, *Theory of Film* stands not as the culmination of Kracauer's critical project but evidence of its untimely truncation. Kracauer's book, argues Hansen, is a document of historical trauma, an oblique manifestation of the irreversible damage done to a generation of European Jewish intellectuals by the tyranny of National Socialism. It is not "technological progress", argues Hansen, that has reduced *Theory of Film* and Kracauer's other post-War texts to what the German critic Norbert Bolz has called "ruins in the philosophical landscape" - it was debris from the start.³² If it can contribute anything to current ontological debate about the nature of cinema, concludes Hansen, then "*Theory of Film* may help us understand the experience that cinema once was and could have been, whatever may become of it."³³ For Hansen and Koch, "the elided historical object of the book is not film as a phenomenon of late capitalism but, more specifically, the question of film after Auschwitz".³⁴ Hansen's approach is not to defend *Theory of Film* against the criticism leveled against it by the likes of Andrew and Perkins on an analytical level but to (like Koch) redefine the meaning of the errors they detect. Echoing Peter Harcourt's pity for Kracauer the old recluse, Hansen paints a picture of Kracauer as a victim of circumstance. For Hansen, the faults and inconsistencies evident in the methodology and tone of his English language work should be understood as symptoms of a psychological coping strategy. As such they should be resolved psychoanalytically by understanding their function in relation to a personal and national narrative of trauma and exile.

³² Quoted in Hansen, 1997, p. viii.

³³ Hansen, 1997, p. xxxv.

³⁴ Hansen, 1997, p. xiv. Koch discusses this issue in Koch, Gertrud. "Not Yet Accepted Anywhere": Exile, Memory, and Image in Kracauer's Conception of History", translated by Jeremy Gaines, *New German Critique*, No. 54 (1991), pp. 95 – 109. The psychological impact of the holocaust on Kracauer's post-War work is also examined in Schlüpmann, Heide, "The Subject of Survival: On Kracauer's Theory of Film", *New German Critique*, No. 54 (1991), pp. 111-126.

With its combination of a psychological reading of Kracauer's work and a comparison between his early writings and current concerns about the future of film in the context of digital media technology, Hansen's introduction fuses together the two major tendencies in the brief resurgence of interest in his work. The first, the psychological approach, with its reading of Kracauer's work on the mass media as a fragmented narrative of personal alienation during a period of "mass destruction", is intricately bound up with a period in the 1980s in which German film theory along with German New Wave cinema was seeking to establish itself against the dominant Francophile tendency of English language film studies (especially in America). Understanding how this period of critical activity was crucial in developing how scholars view Kracauer today, and how it was instrumental in redeeming his name from historical obscurity, is essential to any project that seeks to reassign to his work a contemporary relevance. In the following chapter I will map out in detail how the image of Kracauer as an extraterritorial intellectual and existential exile, one that currently persists in Cultural Studies, stems from a debate about German cinema history and theory.

As well as advocating Kracauer's significance in relation to a psychological history of a traumatised German film culture Hansen's comparison of his pre-War ontological concerns with those of contemporary media theorists also strives to situate his work in the debate about the nature of film's technological development.³⁵ Though both of Hansen's temporal models – the psychological and the technological - share (to a degree) a similar cyclic dynamic, how they construct a notion of Kracauer's relevance is quite distinct.³⁶ In the next section I will look at how criticism of the identification of historical debates about the nature of film also raises questions about the relevance of Kracauer in terms of the history of philosophy.

³⁵ Harbord, Janet, "Contingency's Work: Kracauer's Theory of Film and the Trope of the Accidental", *New Formations*, No. 61 (2007), pp. 90 – 103.

³⁶ For a critique of psychoanalysis' narrativisation of history and the cyclic relationship between memory and trauma in relation to film see, Hebard, Andrew, "Disruptive Histories: Toward a Radical Politics of Remembrance in Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog*", *New German Critique*, No. 71 (1997), pp. 87 – 113.

2.4 Historicising the Ontological Debate About Film

In the recent “return to Kracauer’s work in contemporary film theory” argues Janet Harbord, there is “a predilection for continuities”.³⁷ These “continuities”, she explains, are “threads that link an earlier project seeking to identify medium specificity, and a present fascination with the changing ontology of film in the wake of digitalisation”.³⁸ This return, explains Harbord, “historicizes and legitimates” this ontological debate about the nature of film and its appropriateness as a designation in media studies.³⁹ In her own ontological study of the medium, *The Evolution of Film* (2007), Harbord, following the approach set out by Friedrich Kittler in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1986), examines how our present relationship with technology influences “how we think about the media of the past” and imagine how it will change in the future.⁴⁰ “Film historiography”, writes Harbord, “provides not so much a reconstruction of events as a reflection of our current fascinations and intellectual concerns” and the questions it asks of the medium, “are questions very much of our time”.⁴¹ For Harbord, questions relating to film’s technological development and standardization, and studies focused on its transformation from sideshow novelty to industrial institution are “fuelled, albeit implicitly, by a desire to comprehend and model change”:

That change rebounds from the past as a messy, arbitrary and inconsistent process, in equal measure to moments of consolidation and discovery, reflects the complex ways in which transformation is currently thought [...] Just as film has been detached from a logic of objective observation, film theory as historical enterprise has come to be seen as a double framing of the past from the present.⁴²

Within such a critical context, suggests Harbord in an earlier essay on Kracauer, “to return to *Theory of Film* only to map a landmark in the ongoing elaboration of film’s

³⁷ Harbord, 2007, p. 99.

³⁸ Harbord, 2007, p. 99.

³⁹ Harbord, 2007, p. 99.

⁴⁰ Harbord, 2007, p. 99.

⁴¹ Harbord, Janet, *The Evolution of Film. Rethinking Film Studies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007b), p. 5.

⁴² Harbord, 2007b, p. 5.

ontology misses the mark, twice over”.⁴³ Firstly, and fundamental to Harbord’s reading, is the recognition of Kracauer’s project to “define film’s ‘nature’” as a failure. Instead of revealing the essential components of the cinematic, argues Harbord, the apparent methodological rigour demonstrated by *Theory of Film* upon the medium shows little more than film’s ability to elude such a formal taxonomy:

Indeed, if *Theory of Film* is revelatory at all in relation to medium specificity, it is in the illustration that whilst the word ‘film’ evokes a stable referent, what it refers to is in a state of constant flux. The failure of *Theory of Film* to properly designate the specificity of the medium, however, is arguably more generative in its production of concepts than a decisive taxonomy could ever be.⁴⁴

The failings of Kracauer’s attempt to formulate the nature of film, concludes Harbord, should therefore not be considered as evidence of a more significant error in his philosophical approach as a whole. In the attempt to make film “relate to pre-existing aesthetic criteria”, argues Harbord, Kracauer succeeds in “tracing and coaxing” from it “a set of contingent sensory relations that has otherwise eluded film theory”.⁴⁵

The other way in which such a focus on “historical continuity” in *Theory of Film* is “counterproductive”, argues Harbord, is “in the oversight of the distance, and difference in between ‘then’ and ‘now’”.⁴⁶ For Harbord, careful consideration of the historical context of Kracauer’s conceptualisation of film provides an important insight into contemporary thought’s relationship with an indeterminate film object and in turn this relationship’s own relation to historical contingency. Reading *Theory of Film* now, argues Harbord, presents to the reader “usefully, stark differences between what might be stated for both film and contingency in the present, against which Kracauer’s investment in indeterminacy appears retrospectively optimistic”.⁴⁷ In fact, she adds, “as much as *Theory of Film* resonates with the present, it simultaneously haunts a past irretrievably lost”.⁴⁸

⁴³ Harbord, 2007, p. 99.

⁴⁴ Harbord, 2007, p. 99.

⁴⁵ Harbord, 2007, p. 99.

⁴⁶ Harbord, 2007, p. 99.

⁴⁷ Harbord, 2007, p. 99.

⁴⁸ Harbord, 2007, p. 99.

2.5 *The Parallel and Alternative Histories of Film and Philosophy*

Appropriating Adorno's notion (introduced in the previous chapter) that something significant is lost, or more precisely absent in the consideration of Kracauer's thought as philosophy, film historian Heide Schlüpmann has in turn argued that cinema does not provide a surrogate conceptual space for Kracauer's failure to philosophise but a critically valid alternative to it. In Kracauer's "own eyes", explains Schlüpmann, "as in the eyes of philosophers, it was his love of cinema that separated the film theorist and historian from philosophy":

And yet it was precisely this love of cinema that was to form the basis of a theoretical concept, which shatters the mould of philosophy's monopoly on the truth. This is, expressly, not another 'philosophy' intended to supersede systematic philosophy [...] Such a distinction is to be seen instead as a call to examine the significance of cinema for the formation of theory and it is only in this respect that it rejects the claims of philosophy.⁴⁹

For Schlüpmann, what Kracauer discovers in cinema and subsequently documents in his writing on film is "a lost process of theorizing", one in which aesthetic phenomena exist in parallel to abstract reason as agents of thought rather than being subservient to it.⁵⁰ Key to understanding this, argues Schlüpmann, is what she refers to as "aesthetic enlightenment": a mode of inquiry into the natural world introduced by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) and later developed by Theodor Adorno that seeks through the interplay of aesthetic form and philosophical content a degree of "self-reflectivity" in art comparable but not identical to that of conventional philosophy.⁵¹ "By valuing our aesthetic experience of the world above all", explains Morton Schoolman in his examination of Adorno's and Max Horkheimer's seminal critique of modernity, *Dialectic of Enlightenment (Dialektik der Aufklärung, 1944)*, "such an enlightenment would protect the ways in which the world is different from

⁴⁹ Schlüpmann, Heide, "Re-reading Nietzsche through Kracauer: towards a feminist perspective on film history." *Film History*, Vol. 6, No.1 (1994), p. 80.

⁵⁰ Schlüpmann, 1994, p. 85.

⁵¹ Schlüpmann, 1994, p. 81.

our every thought of it, the world as it appears in its diversity of differences, thus ending the domination of formal reason”.⁵²

It is as a vehicle for the return of “aesthetic enlightenment”, argues Schlüpmann that gives film and in-turn its theory the potential to be “equal to philosophy”.⁵³ However, Schlüpmann concludes, that the consideration of film as such a vehicle is reliant on the medium’s resistance to being culturally assimilated as Art – “an area which philosophy successfully co-constituted”.⁵⁴ The concept of Art (with a capital A), for Schlüpmann, is the product of the subordination of the aesthetic experience to philosophy. “The history of film”, she asserts, “is not to be subsumed under any philosophy”.⁵⁵ For Schlüpmann, writing the history of film “philosophically” means “portraying the return of a lost history of philosophy”; in other words, documenting the elements of the cinema experience that either fall below the eye line of philosophical inquiry or are suppressed by it.⁵⁶ As Kracauer explains in *Theory of Film*, works of art “consume the raw material from which they are drawn, whereas films as an outgrowth of camera work are bound to exhibit it”.⁵⁷ Therefore, no matter how purposefully directed the film camera retains the potential to record phenomena of which its operator is unaware. “If film is an art”, states Kracauer, “it is art with a difference”.⁵⁸

It is into this debate concerning film and the “issue of art” that film-philosophy has also recently intervened.⁵⁹ As Robert Sinnerbrink has explained in his own more recent exposition of aesthetic enlightenment and “cinematic thinking”, what distinguishes the “path-breaking” approach of the “founding figures” of film-philosophy is that their:

works treated film as an artform capable of engaging in a distinctly cinematic exploration of philosophically important themes, and one

⁵² Schoolman, Morton, *Reason and Horror: Critical Theory, Democracy and Aesthetic Individuality* (New York & London: Routledge, 2001), p.11. Adorno, Theodor, W. and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1986).

⁵³ Schlüpmann, 1994, p. 83.

⁵⁴ Schlüpmann, 1994, p. 92.

⁵⁵ Schlüpmann, 1994, p. 92.

⁵⁶ Schlüpmann, 1994, p. 92.

⁵⁷ Kracauer, 1997, p. 1.

⁵⁸ Kracauer, 1997, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Kracauer, 1997, pp. 22-23.

that could provoke philosophy to respond in its own way to what film allows us to experience.⁶⁰

For Sinnerbrink, in “highlighting the significance of affect, pleasure and thought in our experience of film”, film-philosophy calls into question a prevailing trait in Anglo-American film theory, what the American philosopher of art, Arthur Danto has called, the “philosophical disenfranchisement of art”.⁶¹ Rather than looking to “subsume” cinematic works of art “into a philosophical discourse that enables us to master, comprehend and subordinate the work to theoretical or moral concerns”, film-philosophy defends the notion that a film is a vehicle of “a distinctive kind of ‘cinematic thinking’ that resists reduction to philosophical theory”.⁶² If we conceive of film in terms of art, Kracauer argues, then we are doing a disservice to a medium that can potentially represent the world and our relationship to it in a manner that does not codify our experience according to existing philosophical systems but in a way that tests the certitude of its parameters. As a statement of intent, Kracauer begins the first chapter of *Theory of Film* with a quote from the philosopher Susanne Langer: “the medium in which we naturally conceive our ideas may restrict them not only to certain form but to certain fields”.⁶³

Though the “issue of art” is a central concern for Kracauer in his 1960 text, for Schlüpmann, his approach to cataloguing the unique potential of the medium is in fact detrimental to the perpetuation of aesthetic enlightenment.⁶⁴ For Schlüpmann the problem with *Theory of Film* is that it is too philosophical. In defending the film object against cultural (and philosophical) assimilation as Art, Kracauer has omitted to safeguard his theory from becoming philosophical. Only in his earlier German period, argues Schlüpmann, with its emphasis on the immediate experience over abstract conceptualisation does Kracauer demonstrate film’s potential resistance to philosophy.

⁶⁰ Sinnerbrink, Robert, “Re-enfranchising Film: Towards a Romantic Film-Philosophy”, in Havi, Carel and Greg Tuck (eds.), *New Takes in Film Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 4

⁶¹ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 4.

⁶² Sinnerbrink, 2011, pp. 4-5.

⁶³ Kracauer, 1997, p. 3.

⁶⁴ Kracauer, 1997, p. 22.

It is the early texts, those written before his enforced emigration from Germany in 1933, that Schlüpmann identifies as containing Kracauer's most significant and lasting contribution to film studies, what Kracauer himself refers to in *History* as the "possibilities which history did not see fit to explore".⁶⁵ With their journalistic focus on everyday experience, the ideas about cinema expressed in Kracauer's Weimar texts are for Schlüpmann saturated with a peculiar social and political potential that is absent from his English language texts. As Schlüpmann states in an essay about Kracauer's writing of the 1920s:

In *From Caligari to Hitler* and *Theory of Film*, Kracauer's tendency to generalize, to subsume particulars within conceptual constructs, presents an obstacle to the expression of his ideas. The strength of the essays of the 1920s lies in their phenomenological procedure, their taking up of individual manifestations of daily life and dwelling upon them reflectively.⁶⁶

In direct contrast to the immediacy exhibited by his early writings, the experience of cinema presented in *Theory of Film*, Schlüpmann argues, is one mediated by abstract theoretical concerns. As the artwork, argues Kracauer, consumes its raw material, so for Schlüpmann does Kracauer's *Theory of Film* assimilate the aesthetic experience of film for its own perpetuation. If Kracauer's early reviews and articles document for Schlüpmann, "a lost process of theorizing", then *Theory of Film* is a testament to its historical transience.

As Patrice Petro has suggested in her essay on the critical reception of Kracauer's early and late work, for Schlüpmann "Kracauer's work evidences a significant theoretical division, with the later work marking a lapse into a fundamentally flawed or one-dimensional reasoning".⁶⁷ Prefiguring Koch's psychological assessment of the contradictory nature of Kracauer's oeuvre, Schlüpmann concludes: "All that remains of the 'art with a difference' in late Kracauer is the subjectivity which constitutes".⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Kracauer, Siegfried, *History. The Last Things Before the Last*, completed after the death of the author by Paul Oskar Kristeller (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1995), p. 6.

⁶⁶ Schlüpmann, Heide, "Phenomenology of Film: On Siegfried Kracauer's Writings of the 1920s", *New German Critique*, No. 40 (1987), p. 98.

⁶⁷ Petro, Patrice, "Kracauer's Epistemological Shift", *New German Critique*, No. 54 (1991), p. 132.

⁶⁸ Schlüpmann, 1987, p. 107.

For Robnik, Schlüpmann's work on Kracauer "sketches a reversal in the relationship of cinema and philosophy" and in doing so provides an invaluable guide to how to approach philosophically the historical document that is *Theory of Film*. Taking as a starting point Schlüpmann's idea that cinema history preserves the moral and political questions now "abandoned" by philosophy, Robnik proceeds to argue that what distinguishes her approach from her contemporaries (such as Koch and Hansen) is how she works to construct a history for cinema in parallel to and fundamentally discrete from the computer based visual culture of today.⁶⁹

Schlüpmann writes from the perspective of what she refers to as "a feminist film historiography".⁷⁰ Key to this approach is the linking of the feminist concept of "patriarchal cinema", which she identifies with the "feminist-historical film analysis" of the British film theorist and filmmaker Laura Mulvey and the "historicity" of Kracauer's early film criticism and Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.⁷¹ For Schlüpmann (following Mulvey's psychoanalytic approach), the Hollywood model of commercial film production is patriarchal. It is patriarchal because the pleasure it elicits from the spectator (which in turn assures its continuance as a form) is reliant on the suppression of a female subject position in favour of one that objectifies women. What Schlüpmann sees in Weimar cinema and film theory is the expression of an alternative subject position. The "lost process" to which she refers is therefore identified as the development of female subjectivity not just in film production but also in film theory. By referring back to such historical models, argues Schlüpmann, feminist film history "creates a philosophical tradition for itself":

However, this also means that it does not develop its film history on the basis of a philosophy, but that it acquires a philosophy derived from film history.⁷²

For Schlüpmann, the experience of cinema offers the possibility of an alternative approach to that of the individual subject established by the male orientated subject /

⁶⁹ Robnik, Drehli, "Siegfried Kracauer", in Felicity Colman (ed.), *Film, Theory and Philosophy. The Key Thinkers* (Durham: Acumen, 2009), p. 45.

⁷⁰ Schlüpmann, 1994, p. 84.

⁷¹ Schlüpmann, 1994, p. 83. Mulvey's feminist approach is set out in the series of essays published as Mulvey, Laura, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

⁷² Schlüpmann, 1994, p. 86.

object relations of conventional (that is pre-feminist) philosophy. However, “the perspective of that which has been lost”, Schlüpmann concludes, “is not the perspective of the female historian alone”.⁷³ Adorno and Horkheimer’s sociological approach to philosophy (which they named Critical Theory) and Feminism’s negative evaluation of popular (American) film, explains Schlüpmann, are both informed by an equally hostile assessment of what philosophically constitutes historical progress. For them, modernity does not represent a “success story” but is an historical process of repression and exclusion that substantiates a single ideological viewpoint.⁷⁴ Therefore, ideas of what is modern or what constitutes the present are not ideologically neutral but the canalisation of many competing, parallel and contradictory histories.

What connects the feminist cinema historian’s project with Kracauer’s early work, argues Schlüpmann, is the idea of the object of critical inquiry (in Schlüpmann’s case archive silent film footage) providing the form as well as the content of that inquiry. It does this by initiating a perception of “selfness”, an awareness of the body that comes from cinema’s peculiar disjunction of the corporal form from its relative subject position on screen (hence the ability for a particular gender to become dominant in cinema’s industrial form) and then positing it as a “philosophical force that has always been subjugated and destroyed in modernity”.⁷⁵ It is this subjectivity, this perception of “selfness”, argues Schlüpmann that philosophy represses in order to perpetuate its supposed objectivity and its claims of universalism. Only cinema as a shared and public experience, Schlüpmann concludes, can really have the right for such a claim:

For the aesthetic enlightenment which philosophy represses is one in which all participate; in the age of the expert, the philosopher might well be reminded by the cinema that his enlightenment depended, not on theory and knowledge, but on the capacity to generate self-enlightenment.⁷⁶

⁷³ Schlüpmann, 1994, p. 86.

⁷⁴ Schlüpmann, 1994, p. 86.

⁷⁵ Schlüpmann, 1994, p. 92.

⁷⁶ Schlüpmann, 1994, p. 92.

As Petro has argued, Schlüpmann's identification of aesthetic enlightenment with an historical experience of cinema, rather than with an abstract concept of the moving image, certainly shapes how she approaches Kracauer's later writings on film. However, in subjecting Kracauer's corpus, in particular his post-War work, to a predetermined developmental model, be that immanent (psychological) or extraneous (cultural), she is far from alone. What connects Schlüpmann, Hansen, Koch, Kael, Andrew (and the others mentioned above) is the idea that in some way or other Kracauer's *Theory of Film* is out of sync with its contemporary context. How and why it is, as we have seen above, is open to debate. Whether it is the product of some misanthropic megalomania (Kael), a profound social disjunction (Harcourt) or a manifestation of a psychological trauma (Hansen) the image Kracauer as a refugee from another time persists.⁷⁷

In the next section I will look at how Kracauer articulates in the introduction to *Theory of Film* a resistance to engaging with certain formal developments in cinema and in turn the ontological debates they prompt. As I have shown above, Kracauer's refusal to be *à la mode* has been interpreted in various ways, from Andrew's interpretation of *Theory of Film* as a vainglorious attempt at universalism to Hansen's image of the book as evidence of a psychological defence strategy. Alternatively, I will argue that the temporal model that Kracauer identifies with the cinematic approach is not one that has been expurgated by factors extraneous to the experience of watching films but one that has developed from a personal and social involvement with it. In the following section I will demonstrate how Kracauer uses a notion of the outmoded to suggest a more complex rather than a reductive historical model for the relationship between film and theory.

2.6 *The New and the Outmoded – The forgotten lesson of the Lumières*

Though concerned with bringing our attention to objects and occurrences which currently fall below the eye line of philosophical inquiry, Kracauer's cinematic

⁷⁷ A good example of the debate about Kracauer's relevance contemporary to the publication of *Theory of Film* in 1960 see, Callenbach, Ernest, "Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality by Siegfried Kracauer", *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 2. (1960), p. 57 and Hughes, Robert and Ernest Callenbach, "Film: Book 1 vs. Film Quarterly (Round Two)", *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 4. (1959), p. 62.

reclamation of physical reality does not promote itself as the basis for a radical new mode of thought designed to supersede conventional philosophy. In this respect, Kracauer's explication of the cinematic approach bears little resemblance to the more progressive variants of film-philosophy, such as Daniel Frampton's "Filmosophy".⁷⁸ For Frampton, what "is significant about film is that it shows us a new reality, and thus engenders new thinking, new experiences, new emotions" and rather than help us understand and engage with this new reality the established forms of film theory and philosophy hinder our access to its potential.⁷⁹ In order for it not to become just a "translation" of philosophy, argues Frampton, film must seek "its own philosophicalness – that of revealing a new thinking, a new point of view about the world".⁸⁰ In such a scheme, according to Frampton, the designation cinematic relates to "a model for a new kind of non-philosophical investigation: a post-metaphysical post-phenomenology".⁸¹ As will be come clear in the following text, though Kracauer's consideration of the cinematic approach includes notions of social and political reform it stands in sharp contrast to Frampton's evangelical faith in the teleological advancement of philosophy (through its dialectical synthesis with film theory).⁸²

In the introduction to *Theory of Film*, Kracauer articulates this distrust in what purports to be new (formerly, stylistically or philosophically) and in turn presents a more complex and non-linear idea of what constitutes the contemporary. "It would be fair to advise the reader at the outset", writes Kracauer at start of the introduction, "that this book does not include all the things he may be looking for".⁸³ As well as neglecting the animated cartoon, he continues, there are other "recent developments and extensions of the medium" that are also left undiscussed.⁸⁴ To this he adds:

⁷⁸ Frampton, Daniel, *Filmosophy* (London & New York: Wallflower Press, 2006).

⁷⁹ Frampton, 2006, p. 155.

⁸⁰ Frampton, 2006, p. 212.

⁸¹ Frampton, 2006, p. 203.

⁸² A recent critique of film theory's teleological advance "toward perfection" is presented in Elsaesser & Hagener, 2010, pp. 1- 12.

⁸³ Kracauer, 1997, p. xlvii.

⁸⁴ Kracauer, 1997, p. xlvii. The first text in English by Kracauer was about animated cartoons, see Kracauer, Siegfried. "Dumbo." *The Nation*, No. 153 (8 Nov. 1941), p. 463.

There are doubtless still other omissions; indeed, some of the topics, which loom large in most writings on film, have either been relegated to the background or completely dropped.⁸⁵

The examples, he gives include: colour film, widescreen cinema and television. “Evidently”, Kracauer concedes, “I am caught in a dilemma” about what to include, “[o]r rather I would be caught in it did I not feel strongly against rushing through places which ought to be dwelt in”.⁸⁶ Here Kracauer anticipates another possible objection to the scope of his study:

Perhaps the reader will wonder why, in substantiating my views, I do not limit myself to the testimony of current films which stand out in his memory, but refer him so often to movies he has long since forgotten or never heard of. This old stuff, he may maintain, is very difficult to check not to mention that it is probably outmoded in various ways. In consequence, he is likely to question the validity, or the range of validity, of many of my arguments and conclusions. Would they not offer greater interest, I hear him ask, if they mainly derived from contemporary achievements.⁸⁷

Such a line of reasoning, states Kracauer, is “fallacious” as within a few years these too will also be considered out-dated. “Frequently the seeming new”, he concludes, “is nothing but a variation of old models”.⁸⁸ As Miriam Hansen demonstrates in her introduction to *Theory of Film*, such a disinterest in technical innovation makes it difficult to communicate the merits of Kracauer’s asceticism to an audience raised “in the age of video and digital”.⁸⁹ In order to make Kracauer’s apparent curmudgeonliness a bit more palatable for today’s reader she suggests that:

it might be productive to think of *Theory of Film* as contemporaneous with the magazine *Film Culture* [1954 – 1996] and the developments in independent film production and

⁸⁵ Kracauer, 1997, p. xlvii.

⁸⁶ Kracauer, 1997, p. xlvii.

⁸⁷ Kracauer, 1997, p. xlviii.

⁸⁸ Kracauer, 1997, p. xlviii.

⁸⁹ Kracauer, 1997, p. viii.

distribution; with existentialism in philosophy and lifestyle, minimalism in art and music; with Susan Sontag's essay 'Against Interpretation,' [1964] Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue* [1959], Lawrence Ferlinghetti's *A Coney Island of the Mind* [1958], and movies such as *Shadows* [Cassavetes, 1959] and *The Hustler* [Rossen, 1961]. Likewise, on a more international scale, Kracauer's book, like Bazin's writings, has to be seen as part of the cineaste environment that spawned and supported New Wave movements in France, Germany, Eastern Europe, India, and other parts of the world.⁹⁰

Though chronologically accurate, Hansen's attempt to identify what she sees as conceptual unevenness of Kracauer's text with the formal innovations of what Theodore Roszak termed "counter-culture" or its proto-forms does little more than emphasize its disjunction with contemporary developments in the medium.⁹¹ Kracauer himself does little to support Hansen's historicizing defence of *Theory of Film*. Lamenting the lack of "movie houses" showing "old pictures", Kracauer states in his preface that "were there more such opportunities, people would be less inclined to mistake for a 'new wave' what is actually an old story".⁹²

However, though not working in the way that she intends, Hansen's reference to the Mekas brothers' *Film Culture* journal does provide an important corrective to Harcourt's image of Kracauer as "a man alone in a museum".⁹³ As Scott McDonald's documentation of the seminal New York film society *Cinema 16* attests, Kracauer was an important and active figure in the development of independent American film culture.⁹⁴ What is interesting in the current context about this involvement with experimental film makers like Amos Vogel, Gregory Markopoulos, Kenneth Anger etc. is how it is underplayed in *Theory of Film*. Compared to his earlier articles and interviews on the New York alternative cinema scene, the chapter on "Experimental

⁹⁰ Kracauer, 1997, p. ix.

⁹¹ Roszak, Theodore, *The making of a counter culture: reflections on the technocratic society and its youthful opposition* [1968] (London : Faber and Faber, 1970).

⁹² Kracauer, 1997, p. xlix.

⁹³ Harcourt, 1968, p. 25. For an introduction to the work of the Mekas Brothers see James, David E., "Introduction" in James, David E., (ed.), *Free the Cinema: Jonas Mekas and the New York Underground* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), pp. 3 – 16.

⁹⁴ MacDonald, Scott, *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), p. 24, p. 67 and p. 130.

Film” in *Theory of Film* is far from an enthusiastic endorsement of their practices.⁹⁵ The “salient point here” about experimental film, writes Kracauer in *Theory of Film*, “is that, all in all, the current output sticks to patterns developed in the ‘twenties; that, except for minor adjustments to the contemporary scene [...] not much has changed in terms of motivations, preferences, and objectives”.⁹⁶ Though Kracauer notes in his introduction to *Theory of Film* that he prefers “to stick to the prototypes which, more vividly than all that follows, still vibrate with the intentions engendering them”, his subsequent choice of examples suggests a pattern of concerns that does not wholly obey the linear chronology of a teleological (goal orientated) narrative.⁹⁷ In his last, unfinished book *History*, Kracauer writes:

Every idea is coarsened, flattened, and distorted on its way through the world [...] Once a vision becomes an institution, clouds of dust gather about it, blurring its contours and contents. [...] Otherwise expressed, an idea preserves its integrity and fullness only as long as it lacks the firmness of a widely sanctioned belief. Perhaps the period of its inception is most transparent to the truths at which it aims in the midst of doubts.⁹⁸

In light of *History*’s decidedly un-Hegelian (non-teleological) conception of progress and enlightenment (that I will examine in greater detail in the subsequent text) *Theory of Film*’s focus on the narrative aspects of contemporary experimental film and its historical antecedents can be read as performing a specific function in the explication of the cinematic approach. For Kracauer, the common trait in experimental cinema practice is a “conviction that the story as the main element of feature films is something alien to the medium”.⁹⁹ In rehearsing the motivations, preferences, and objectives or their prototypes, contemporary experimental film makers demonstrate a predilection for discontinuity that mirrors Kracauer’s own non-laminar idea of historical change and development.

⁹⁵ For example see, Kracauer, Siegfried, “Filming the Subconscious.” *Theatre Arts*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Feb 1948), pp. 37 – 44.

⁹⁶ Kracauer, 1997, p. 178 . This was not always the case. In 1950 Kracauer wrote a very enthusiastic letter to Amos Vogel about the work of Cinema 16, see MacDonald, 2002, p. 24.

⁹⁷ Kracauer, 1997, p. xlviii.

⁹⁸ Kracauer, 1995, p. 7.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Kracauer, 1997, p. 178.

For Kracauer, experimental film practice enacts - to borrow the title of a Maya Deren film - a “ritual in transfigured time” in that its formal preference for visual and narrative indeterminacy looks to mimic their historical predecessors rather than supersede their achievements. Instead of looking to perfect a synthesis of visual and narrative technique, these experiments are concerned with inducing in the spectator a novelty of effect comparable to that of the pre-industrial forms of the medium.¹⁰⁰ In experimental film making chronology is immanently (in its form) and extraneously (in its historical development) deemphasised. In *Theory of Film*, Kracauer quotes from Germaine Dulac, “one of the leading avant-garde artists” of the 1920s, on the “sad fact that the lessons of [Lumière’s] *Arrival of a Train* had not been heeded”.¹⁰¹ “Instead of recognizing the new aesthetics inherent in the Lumière brothers’ camera”, writes Kracauer, Dulac argues that subsequent film makers became “content with subordinating it to traditional aesthetic”.¹⁰² “In conclusion”, writes Kracauer, “Mme Dulac accuses those who imprison cinematic action in a narrative of a ‘criminal error’”.¹⁰³ Equally, as I will argue in the following study, those that strive to arrange and define the components of the cinematic approach in accordance to a philosophical narrative are for Kracauer also dissipating the critical potential of the medium.

It is important to remember here (and as I will demonstrate throughout this text) that for Kracauer, the glimpses afforded by the film experience of its philosophical potential are not limited to avant-garde or experimental modes of film production. This potential to remind the film spectator of a lost process of theorising is immanent to film and is therefore possible in all of its myriad forms. What experimental film does by repeating the formal and stylistic investigations of its chronological predecessors is to challenge (knowingly or not) the film historian’s and theorist’s proclivity for narrative. However, it is not alone in performing this critical task. What the artist’s film does overtly is also detectable, argues Kracauer, in even the most cynically conceived commercial forms of cinema once their immediate capitalist function has been fulfilled and their shelf life expired. “Many a commercial film or television production”, writes Kracauer in *Theory of Film*, “is a genuine achievement

¹⁰⁰ Kracauer discusses Deren’s work in, Kracauer (1948), pp.37 – 44.

¹⁰¹ Kracauer, 1997, pp. 178 – 179. *L’arrivée d’un train en gare de La Ciotat* [The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station], directed by Auguste and Louis Lumière (France: Lumière, 1895).

¹⁰² Kracauer, 1997, pp. 178 – 179.

¹⁰³ Kracauer, 1997, p. 179.

besides being a commodity. Germs of new beginnings may develop within a thoroughly alienated environment”.¹⁰⁴

In an introductory essay about his work, Kracauer’s long time acquaintance and sometime friend, the German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno writes that “Kracauer once mockingly called himself the *derrière-garde* of the *avant-garde*. It came neither to a break with the latter nor to an agreement”.¹⁰⁵ Though made in jest, Kracauer’s description of his approach is instructive for two reasons. Firstly it helps understand his reticence in fully supporting a successful culture of experimental filmmaking in New York in the 1950s. Secondly it allows us to locate and thus comprehend Kracauer’s peculiar relationship with contemporary cinema within a particular critical tradition.

The idea of critically re-appropriating objects of the recent past, the “outmoded”, the “old-fashioned” played an important role in the work of Surrealist artists and writers, in particular the French poet Andre Breton.¹⁰⁶ In his 1929 essay *Surrealism, the last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia*, Walter Benjamin writes that Surrealism “can boast an extraordinary discovery”:

it was the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the ‘outmoded’, in the first iron constructions, the first factory building, the earliest photos, the objects that have begun to be extinct, grand pianos, the dresses of five years ago, fashionable restaurants when the vogue has begun to ebb from them. The relation of these things to revolution – no one can have a more exact concept of it than these authors. No one before these visionaries and augurs perceived how destitution – not only social but architectonic, the poverty of interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects – can suddenly turn over [*umschlagen*] into revolutionary nihilism.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Kracauer, 1997, pp. 217 – 218.

¹⁰⁵ Adorno, Theodor W., “The Curious Realist: On Siegfried Kracauer”, *New German Critique*, No. 54 (1991), p. 164.

¹⁰⁶ See Breton, André, *Nadja*, translated by Richard Howard (London: Penguin, 1999).

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Cohen, Margaret, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of the Surrealist Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), p. 190. In French, Breton uses the word “démodé” – which is usually translated as “old-fashioned”. In German, Benjamin uses the word “veraltet” – which means obsolete and has more Marxist connotations. Surrealism’s use of the

“Only retrospectively”, writes Graeme Gilloch, “through the lens of an object’s gradual demise, does its true character emerge”.¹⁰⁸ In his interpretation of Surrealism, Jonathan Crary stresses that the Surrealist’s asceticism towards the visceral pleasures of the modern spectacle was not a rejection of the present but a rescue plan. “The strategy incarnated a refusal of the imposed present”, argues Crary, “and in reclaiming fragments of a demolished past it was implicitly figuring an alternative future”.¹⁰⁹ As Gilloch suggests (in relation to Benjamin):

the modern is the already old. The old dressed up as the new is the essence of both fashion and the concept of progress. This insight is the possibility of the realization (the making real) of the actually new.¹¹⁰

Benjamin concentrated his studies on the architectural phenomena of the shopping arcade. The covered passageways lined with shops, that came to prominence in the 1830s but then quickly became regarded as antiquated and fell into disrepair. What fascinated Benjamin was the speed at which these often huge undertakings became outmoded. It was a shared interest in the liminal existence of the outmoded and the peculiar freedom (from cultural and social norms) that it entails that not only drew Kracauer to the semi-derelict arcades of Berlin and Paris but also to the cinemas that superseded them as the locations for certain vicarious entertainments.¹¹¹

As I will illustrate in the later chapters of this text, the fate and value of the outmoded is an integral concern of Kracauer’s cinematic approach. To try and explain away (psychologically) or simply castigate (methodologically) *Theory of Film’s* démodé character is to sideline the issue of how the object of Kracauer’s study affects and influences the manner in which it is comprehended. The “vanishing point of

concept of the “outmoded” is discussed in detail in Foster, Hal, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1993), pp. 157 – 192.

¹⁰⁸ Gilloch, Graeme, *Myth and Metropolis. Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), pp. 110 – 111.

¹⁰⁹ Crary, Jonathan, “Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory”, *October*, No. 50 (1989), p. 107.

¹¹⁰ Gilloch, 1996, p. 111.

¹¹¹ Kracauer, Siegfried, “Farewell to the Linden Arcade” [1930], in Kracauer, Siegfried, *The Mass Ornament. Weimar essays*, translated and edited by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard U.P., 1995b), pp. 337 - 342.

Kracauer's thinking", suggest Elsaesser and Hagener, "is a theory of history that attempts to redeem the vanished material existence of history through the permanent ephemerality of the moving image."¹¹² It is the critical potential of this temporal paradox, the arrest of historical progress effected by this "permanent ephemerality" that the cinematic approach looks to explore.

2.7 Conclusion

The tendency to narrativise a context for Kracauer's contribution to film and cultural studies (whether in relation to a teleological model of film studies or a psychological model of social and personal transformation) has influenced how Kracauer's explanation and use of the "cinematic approach" has been interpreted. If the "cinematic approach" is a challenge to philosophical narratives then interpreting Kracauer's practice of it according to either an implicit or explicit narrative model reduces the complexity of temporal model to which it relates.

As I shall argue in the following text, though it derives its name from the experience of the cinema, the "cinematic" represents for Kracauer a dynamic approach to an individual phenomenon that recognises the importance of the immediate experience in constituting how we perceive it and subsequently how the experience is abstracted in relation to a philosophical or theoretical scheme. Film, I shall argue, enables Kracauer to name an historical "mode of being" that is not exclusive to the dark cinema auditorium but is given a comprehensible public form by it as a paradoxically shared private experience. As Kracauer writes in *History*, his work on film and other forms of popular culture, his novels and sociological research, "have all served, and continue to serve, a single purpose: the rehabilitation of objectives and modes of being which still lack a name and hence are overlooked or misjudged".¹¹³ To Kracauer, they all mark to some degree "a bent of the mind and defines a region of reality which despite all that has been written about them are still largely *terra incognita*".¹¹⁴

¹¹² Elsaesser & Hagener, 2010, p. 127.

¹¹³ Kracauer, 1995, p.4.

¹¹⁴ Kracauer, 1995, p.4.

Before discussing how film-philosophy looks to explore the terrain opened up by the interaction of film theory and philosophy and how this debate offers an alternative perspective on Kracauer's work, in the following chapter I will examine in detail how one particular narrative has come to dominate Kracauer studies. As well as contextualizing the approaches of Rentschler, Hansen, Koch and Schlüpmann it will demonstrate how the resurgence of interest in Kracauer in the 1990s served a specific critical function in relation to the development of German Cultural Studies in America and later Cinema Studies in the U.K. Now that Kracauer's usefulness in this regard has passed and interest in his work has again started to recede I will look at the critical legacy of these interpretative strategies and assess how they still influence the way we read Kracauer today.

CHAPTER 3:

EXILE & REPATRIATION: KRACAUER'S REDEMPTION CYCLE

3.1 *Introduction*

This chapter consists of two parts. The first provides an overview of Kracauer's life. My intention in this part is to explain to those unfamiliar with Kracauer's biography some of the key events and relationships (personal and institution) that occurred during his career and how they relate to his writing. The second part of this chapter comprises a detailed review of secondary literature on Kracauer. Through a rigorous study of these texts I will demonstrate how the image of Kracauer has changed since his death from that of an outmoded academician to a politically and socially engaged cultural philosopher. I argue that this transformation undertook several distinct phases and that the image of Kracauer that persists today is a composite of ideas that originate from the historical interaction between Film Studies and Cultural Theory. I conclude that though this reinvention of Kracauer has had a significant impact on raising his academic profile it has also affected how his film work is evaluated and interpreted.

3.2 *Biographical Sketch*

Siegfried Kracauer was born February 8th, 1889 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, the only child of Adolf and Rosette Kracauer. As a boy Siegfried attended the Philanthropin, a school founded by the Frankfurt Jewish community to promote education in the humanities. His uncle Isidor K. Kracauer taught at the school. Isidor was a renowned historian of the Frankfurt Jewish community, and exerted a strong influence on Siegfried's early intellectual development. Though the Kracauers were an observant religious family (Isidor had trained in Poland to be a Rabbi), the young Siegfried was encouraged to pursue his secular academic and literary interests. Kracauer graduated from high school in 1907 and then went to the Polytechnic in Darmstadt to study architecture. Alongside his technical courses Kracauer also maintained a keen interest in philosophy and the arts, producing many poems,

drawings, articles and reviews, the first of which he had published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in August 1906.¹

After Darmstadt, Kracauer continued his architectural training at the Polytechnics in Berlin and Munich graduating in 1911. After working briefly as an apprentice in an architect's office in Munich, Kracauer travelled around Europe before returning to Berlin to study for a PhD. in engineering. His thesis on architectural ironwork of the Berlin / Potsdam area from the 17th to the 19th century was passed in 1914 and published the following year.² With the outbreak of war, Kracauer returned to Frankfurt where he found work at another architect's office. In 1916 Kracauer won his first and only major commission as an architect for a soldiers' memorial cemetery in Frankfurt.³ In 1917, after a relatively uneventful period of military service, Kracauer found employment as an architect in Osnabruck.

Upon hearing of the death of his father Kracauer returned again to Frankfurt where he subsidised his income as an architect with work as a private tutor. It was in this capacity that he first met Theodor Adorno with whom he was to have a close but "troubled" relationship for the rest of his life.⁴ Encouraged by the philosopher Max Scheler and the sociologist Georg Simmel, whom he'd met and befriended whilst a student in Berlin, Kracauer dedicated more of his time to writing and soon after

¹ An account of Kracauer's early life as well as illustrations of his drawings, poems and photographs can be found in Belke, Ingrid and Irina Renz, (eds.), "Siegfried Kracauer 1889-1966", *Marbacher Magazin* (Deutsche Schillergesellschaft), no. 47 (1988). A chronological list of all known published work by Kracauer is available in Levin, Thomas Y., *Siegfried Kracauer: Eine Bibliographie seiner Schriften* (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1989). See also, Kracauer, Siegfried, *Zum Werk des Romanciers, Feuilletonisten, Architekten, Filmwissenschaftlers und Soziologen*, edited by Andreas Volk (Zurich: Seismo Verlag, 1996). The first English language biography of Kracauer was published in 1976 see, Jay, Martin, "The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer", in Jay, Martin, *Permanent Exiles. Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 152 – 197.

² Kracauer, Siegfried, *Die Entwicklung der Schmiedekunst in Berlin, Potsdam und einigen Städten der Mark vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zum Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Worms, 1915). For a discussion of Kracauer's dissertation see Reeh, Henrik, *Ornaments of the metropolis: Siegfried Kracauer and modern urban culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press), 2004, pp. 63 -70. Also, Staubmann, Helmut Michael, "The Ornamental Form of the Iron Cage: An Aesthetic Representation of Modern Society?", *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, vol. 10, no. 4 (1997), pp. 591 – 607. Staubmann's study contains reproductions of some of Kracauer's original photographs and drawings.

³ Kracauer's design for the memorial can be seen in Belke & Renz, 1988, p. 25.

⁴ For accounts of Kracauer's and Adorno's "troubled" relationship see, Jay, Martin, "Adorno and Kracauer: Notes on a Troubled Friendship" in Jay (1985), pp. 217 – 236 and Moltke, Johannes, von "Teddie and Friedel: Theodor W. Adorno, Siegfried Kracauer, and the Erotics of Friendship", *Criticism*, vol. 51, no. 4 (2010), pp. 683-694.

completing a book length study on Simmel in 1919 he gave up architecture as a career. In 1921 Kracauer obtained a permanent position at the *Frankfurter Zeitung* newspaper as a staff writer achieving the position of editor three years later.⁵ As well as producing numerous film, book and theatre reviews during this period Kracauer also published a book length sociological study, *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* [Sociology as Science].⁶ He also completed an unpublished monograph on the detective novel.⁷

In the following years Kracauer's reputation and influence as a critic in Frankfurt's intellectual circles continued to grow and his position at the *Frankfurter Zeitung* enabled him to facilitate the publication of his friends' work, in particular that of Walter Benjamin and Ernst Bloch, whom he had met whilst a student.⁸ However, Kracauer's time at the newspaper was not without difficulties and many of his editorial decisions led to friction between him and his peers.⁹ As the political situation in Germany became more factional so Kracauer's friendship and allegiances were tested, often to breaking point. Whilst many of his friends joined the Communist party in Germany, Kracauer resisted any direct affiliation with political organizations. Kracauer was not apolitical though and the journalism he produced during this period is vehemently critical of both National Socialism and the far left.¹⁰

⁵ For details of Kracauer's time as a journalist see, Levin, Thomas Y., "Introduction", in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 1 – 30.

⁶ Kracauer, Siegfried, *Soziologie als Wissenschaft. Eine erkenntnistheoretische Untersuchung* (Dresden: Sibyllen-Verlag, 1922).

⁷ Kracauer's book on the detective fiction was published in 1979, see Kracauer, Siegfried, *Der Detektiv-Roman. Ein philosophischer Traktat* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979). Kracauer's work on the detective novel is discussed in Frisby, David, "Between the Spheres - Siegfried Kracauer and The Detective Novel", *Theory Culture Society*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1993), pp. 495-511 and Mack, Michael, "Literature and Theory: Siegfried Kracauer's Law, Walter Benjamin's Allegory and G.K. Chesterton's The Innocence of Father Brown", *Orbis Litterarum*, No. 54 (1999), pp. 399 – 423.

⁸ For the crucial role played by the concept of friendship in Kracauer's intellectual development see, Richter Gerhard, "Siegfried Kracauer and the Folds of Friendship", *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 70, no. 3 (1997), pp. 233-246. For Kracauer's friendship with Benjamin see, Jay, Martin, "Politics of Translation: Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin on the Buber-Rosenzweig Bible" in Jay (1985), pp. 198 – 216.

⁹ For an account of tensions between Kracauer and his friends during this period, in particular his strained relationship with Bloch see, Barnouw, Dagmar, *Critical Realism: History, Photography, and the work of Siegfried Kracauer* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 33 – 52.

¹⁰ The idea of Kracauer's film criticism as ideological critique is explored in Hake, Sabine, *The Cinema's 3rd Machine: Writing on film in Germany 1907 – 1933* (Lincoln, Nb. & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), pp. 247 – 270.

In parallel to his extensive reportage, Kracauer also wrote fictional work. In 1928 his first novel *Ginster* was published having first been serialized in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. This novel, a loosely autobiographical satire of the trials and tribulations of a young man growing up around the time of the First World War, was published anonymously and was generally well received.¹¹ However, the high watermark of Kracauer's success came two years later with the publication of his sociological study of Germany's young white collar workers, *Die Angestellten: Aus dem neuesten Deutschland* [The Salaried Masses: from the newest Germany]¹². Like *Ginster*, *Die Angestellten* was initially serialized in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and quickly earned a noteworthy reputation for its innovative stylistic approach and novel subject matter. In a contemporary review, the economist Hans Spier placed Kracauer's work in the tradition "of the great French and English novelists of the last century", as he not only "measures out the place in which employees live" but also renders "the air they breathe".¹³ Looking to build upon on this success, Kracauer married his partner, Lili Ehrenreich, whom he'd met at the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research and moved to Berlin to join the local editorial team of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.

The Institute for Social Research [*Institut für Sozialforschung*] was, alongside the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, an important supporter of Kracauer's intellectual circle. Founded in 1923 by the political scientists Felix Weil and Friedrich Pollock it is a research organization affiliated primarily with the University of Frankfurt am Main.¹⁴ From 1930, under the directorship of the philosopher and sociologist Max Horkheimer, the Institute quickly established itself as an influential disseminator of a Marxist / Freudian approach to social psychology. Key figures in its development were the social psychologist, Erich Fromm, the philosopher Herbert Marcuse, political theorist Franz Neumann and the sociologist Leo Löwenthal. Löwenthal, like Adorno (who had become a lecturer at Frankfurt University in 1931) was a student of

¹¹ Anonymous [Siegfried Kracauer], *Ginster. Von ihm selbst geschrieben* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1928). For its republication details see, Levin (1989), p. 51.

¹² Published in English as Kracauer, Siegfried, *The Salaried Masses. Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, translated by Quintin Hoare (London and New York: Verso, 1998).

¹³ Mulder-Bach, Inka, "Cinematic Ethnology: Siegfried Kracauer's The White Collar Masses", *New Left Review*, No. 226 (1997), p. 56.

¹⁴ For a comprehensive history of the Institute see Wiggershaus, Rolf, *The Frankfurt School. Its History, Theories and Political Significance*, translated by Michael Robertson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

Kracauer's and enabled him to maintain a close, though never entirely congenial, relationship with the Institute and its director.¹⁵

The complex social dynamic of pre-War Berlin proved a rich source of inspiration for Kracauer who alongside his usual book and film reviews produced a series of literary portraits of Berlin street life.¹⁶ However, as Hitler and the National Socialists consolidated their grip upon German life, Kracauer experienced a marked breakdown in staff relations at the newspaper. Anti-Semitism became rife and by the end of 1932, after a series of mass pay cuts and constructive dismissals, maintaining a professional position in Germany for anybody of Jewish origin was becoming near impossible. Soon after the burning of the Reichstag parliament building in February 1933, an event that led to Hitler being sworn in as Chancellor, the Kracaues relocated to Paris.

In Paris, the mass influx of refugees from Germany made finding work extremely difficult. Promised employment as a foreign correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* failed to materialise and Kracauer had to scrape a living as a freelance journalist. In 1934 Kracauer finished writing his second novel *Georg* but its planned publication in Germany was cancelled. Unable to find an alternative publisher (it was eventually published posthumously) Kracauer embarked on another project; a history of the German-born French composer Jacques Offenbach. *Jacques Offenbach und das Paris Seiner Zeit* [Jacques Offenbach and the Paris of His Time] was published simultaneously in German, French and English editions in 1937 the book was not a success. Although the style and the subject matter were chosen by Kracauer to increase its popular appeal, the only attention it found was the negative criticism of his peers.¹⁷

¹⁵ Jay (1985), p. 167. See also, Lowenthal, Leo, "As I Remember Friedel", *New German Critique*, No. 54 (1991), pp. 7 – 10.

¹⁶ Selections of these short prose pieces are published in Kracauer, Siegfried, *Strassen in Berlin und anderswo* (Berlin: Das Arsenal, 1987). English translations of a some of these texts can be found in Kracauer, Siegfried, "Loitering: Four Encounters in Berlin", translated by Courtney Federle and Thomas Y. Levin, *Qui Parle*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1992), pp. 51 - 60. For an overview of these texts see, Gilloch, Graeme, "Impromptus of a Great City. Siegfried Kracauer's Strassen in Berlin und Anderswo" in Mari Hvattum and Christain Hermansen (eds.), *Tracing Modernity. Manifestations of the Modern in Architecture and the City* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 307 – 324.

¹⁷ For an introduction to Kracauer's Offenbach book and the reaction of his peers see, Koch, Gertrud, "Foreword" in Kracauer, Siegfried, *Jacques Offenbach and the Paris of His Time*, translated by Gwenda David and Eric Mosbacher (New York: Zone Books, 2002). Kracauer also prepared a

In parallel to his Offenbach project and journalistic work, Kracauer spent his time in Paris trying to secure work abroad, in particular in the United States of America, where the Institute of Social Research had relocated in 1934. Though he never received direct employment from the Institute its members, in particular Löwenthal, were instrumental in arranging for him to receive the necessary paperwork that allowed him to apply for emigration to the U.S. Another key figure in this respect was the Art historian Meyer Schapiro, who facilitated a commission for Kracauer from the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) Film Library in New York to write a social history of the German film.¹⁸ With the outbreak of war in 1939, the Kracauers' precarious status as Parisians deteriorated further. Their plans for emigration collapsed and as German nationals they were held and released from various internment camps around France for most of the following year. Escaping from one such camp the Kracauers made their way to Marseilles where they met up with many of their old acquaintances from Frankfurt, including Benjamin. Marseilles was the last refuge for many wishing to escape France but sea passage from the Mediterranean port proved practically impossible. The overland route across the Pyrenees to Spain was also becoming increasingly dangerous. Shortly after Benjamin had died in his attempt to cross the border in September 1940, the Kracauers' managed to find a way across the mountains and down into the Portuguese port of Lisbon. After an arduous 10-day sea voyage the Kracauers finally reached New York in April 1941.

After a short period of readjustment Kracauer started work at the MOMA Film Library.¹⁹ The project he worked on, eventually published as *From Caligari to Hitler: a Psychological History of the German Film (1947)*, was overseen by the

"motion picture treatment" based on his Offenbach book see, Gilloch, Graeme, "Orpheus in Hollywood: Siegfried Kracauer's Offenbach film", in Hvattum & Hermansen (2004), pp. 307 – 324.

¹⁸ Kracauer's and Schapiro's friendship is detailed in Anderson, Mark M. "Siegfried Kracauer and Meyer Schapiro: A Friendship", *New German Critique*, No. 54 (Autumn 1991), pp. 18-29. See also, Thompson, James, Susan Raines, and Meyer Schapiro, "A Vermont Visit with Meyer Schapiro (August 1991)", *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1994), pp. 3-12.

¹⁹ Details of Kracauer's appointment are discussed in Culbert, David, "The Rockefeller Foundation, The Museum of Modern Art Film Library and Siegfried Kracauer 1941", *Historical Journal of Film Radio and Television*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (1993), pp. 495 - 511.

library's curator, the English film critic and pioneer of film preservation, Iris Barry.²⁰ As well as his position at MOMA, Kracauer was also employed (along with others from the Institute of Social Research) by the U.S. Government to analyse German propaganda.²¹ Though initially confidential, the reports Kracauer produced during the war were later published.²²

In 1946 Kracauer became a U.S. citizen and although he visited Germany in the late 1950s he never showed any desire, like Adorno, Pollock and Horkheimer, to return permanently.²³ After the publication of *From Caligari to Hitler*, Kracauer was employed as a consultant for the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation (who had helped fund his work at MOMA). In this role he supported the work of many influential film historians and critics, including: Arthur Knight, Robert Warshow and Parker Tyler.²⁴ As a consultant for the Guggenheim and other foundations Kracauer also helped secure funding for the work of many up-and-coming independent film makers such as Gregory Markopoulos and Shirley Clarke, as well as helping to re-establish old friends from Berlin like the dada filmmaker Hans Richter. Kracauer also played a significant role in helping Amos Vogel to establish the film society, *Cinema 16* in New York in 1947. This society quickly became an important and popular promoter of American and European underground and avant-garde film and helped establish the careers of many influential filmmakers,

²⁰ Kracauer, Siegfried, *From Caligari to Hitler. A psychological history of the German film* [1947], revised edition edited by Leonardo Quaresima (New York: Princeton University Press, 2004).

²¹ The working relationship between the Institute of Social Research and the U.S. Government's Intelligence Agencies is examined in Kätz Barry M., "The Criticism of Arms: The Frankfurt School Goes to War", *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (1987), pp. 439-478.

²² Kracauer, Siegfried, "Propaganda and the Nazi War Film" in Kracauer (2004), pp. 275 – 307. Kracauer, Siegfried, "The Conquest of Europe on Screen – The Nazi Newsreel, 1939 – 1940", *Social Research*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1943), pp. 337 – 357. Some details of the historical context and the support he received from various foundations is mentioned by Kracauer in the prefaces included in *From Caligari to Hitler* and *Propaganda and the Nazi War Film*, see Kracauer (2004) p. li 7 and p. 274. The complex relationship between the U.S. government and the academic community in the development of mass communication research is examined in Simpson, Christopher, *Science of Coercion. Communication Research and Psychological Warfare 1945 -1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

²³ Jay (1985), pp. 171 - 172

²⁴ Jay (1985), p. 171. Warshow's application to the Guggenheim foundation (which specifically mentions Kracauer's work) is included as a preface to Warshow, Robert, *The Immediate Experience. Movies, Comics, Theatre and Other Aspects of Popular Culture* [1962], revised edition (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. xxxvii – xliii. Tyler includes a brief but insightful portrait of his relationship to Kracauer in the preface of Tyler, Parker, *Magic and Myth of the Movies* [1947] (London: Secker & Warburg, 1971), pp. 13 – 14.

such as Andy Warhol and Kenneth Anger.²⁵ During this period Kracauer also regularly contributed articles and reviews for journals such as *Harpers, Commentary, New Republic* and *Partisan Review*.²⁶

In 1949 Kracauer obtained funding to finish a project on film aesthetics that he had started in Marseilles during the war. The book took ten years to complete and was published in 1960 as *Theory of Film: the Redemption of Physical Reality*.²⁷ Whilst working on *Theory of Film*, Lowenthal arranged a short-term position for Kracauer as a research analyst at the Voice of America, the broadcast institution of the U.S. Government. From there Kracauer went on to work with influential American sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld at the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University. During his period at Columbia, Kracauer established himself as an active member of the American social sciences community and published various studies on empirical social research and content analysis.²⁸ In 1956, with the assistance of further grants from the Bollingen and Chapelbrook Foundations and later the American Philosophical Society, Kracauer was able to turn his attention to completing *Theory of Film*.²⁹ Though basing himself once again primarily at the MOMA New York film library, Kracauer also travelled to Paris, where he was assisted by Henri Langlois at the recently established Cinématèque Française (Kracauer knew Langlois from his previous stay in France), and London where he studied at the British Film Institute.

²⁵ MacDonald, Scott, *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).

²⁶ For bibliographical details of Kracauer's U.S. articles see Levin, Thomas Y. "Kracauer in English: A Bibliography," *New German Critique*, No. 40 (1987), pp. 140 – 150.

²⁷ For details of Kracauer's Marseilles manuscript see Hansen, Miriam, "'With Skin and Hair': Kracauer's Theory of Film, Marseille 1940", *Critical Inquiry*, No. 19 (1993), pp. 437 – 469.

²⁸ Kracauer's time at the Bureau and Voice of America is discussed in Lowenthal, Leo, "As I Remember Friedel", *New German Critique*, No. 54 (1991), pp. 7 – 10. Two key publications produced by Kracauer during this period that demonstrate the nature of his work for the bureau are: Kracauer, Siegfried. "The Challenge of Qualitative Content Analysis." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (winter 1952-3), pp.631- 42 and Kracauer, Siegfried and Paul L. Berkman. *Satellite Mentality. Political Attitudes and propaganda Susceptibilities of Non-Communists in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1956). See also Kracauer, Siegfried, *On the Relation of Analysis to the Situational Factors in Case Studies* [unpublished discussion paper], Bureau of Applied Social Research. Columbia University (April 1958).

²⁹ Kracauer's close involvement with these foundations is evident in an open letter he co-wrote in 1949 defending their work; see Kracauer, Siegfried, Herman. Broch and Erich Kahler. "Letter to the Editor." *Saturday Review of Literature*, Vol. 32, No. 36 (3rd Sept. 1949), p.26.

After *Theory of Film*'s completion and publication, Kracauer started to travel more extensively around Europe, visiting old friends, attending colloquia and preparing drafts for a book on historiography. In 1963, *Ginster* was republished in Germany (with Kracauer's name now attached) and he oversaw the publication of *Das Ornament der Masse* (The Mass Ornament), a collection of some of his pre-War Weimar essays.³⁰ With his sudden death from pneumonia in November 1966 Kracauer's book on history was left unfinished. However, through the persistence of his wife and help from various friends and colleagues at Columbia University, an amended version of the manuscript for *History: the Last things before the Last* was published by Oxford University Press in 1966.³¹

The critical reaction to Kracauer's work during his long career has reflected the variety of its subject matter and ranged from unconditional praise to complete rejection. In order to comprehend how the philosophical aspects of Kracauer's work affects the status of him as a film theorist it is necessary to chart the changes that have occurred in the reception of his work; in particular during the period between the negative appraisals of the early 1970s (as discussed in the previous Chapter) and the republication of *Theory of Film* in 1997.

3.3 Literature Review: Introduction

In the following review of secondary literature I shall demonstrate how changes in the reception of Kracauer's work reflect the growing influence of German philosophy and cultural theory in English language Film Studies. Initially focusing on the debate in the late 1970s and early 1980s surrounding the reception of New German Cinema, I shall describe how and why critics trying to inaugurate an alternative to a predominately French approach to film analysis adopted the then discredited figure of Kracauer as a vehicle for their challenge to the established

³⁰ Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995). For details of this book's origins and publication see Levin, Thomas Y., "Introduction" in Kracauer (1995), pp. 1 – 34.

³¹ The publication history of Kracauer's posthumous work is examined in Paul Oskar Kristeller's preface, foreword and introduction to Kracauer, Siegfried, *History. The Last Things Before the Last*, completed after the death of the author by Paul Oskar Kristeller (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1995), pp. v – xviii.

paradigm.³² An important contributor in the transformation of Kracauer's image is the German critic and film historian Karsten Witte (1944 – 1995). Charting Witte's work and its influence of his peers, I argue, is essential in order to understand how contemporary advocates of Kracauer's work, such as Miriam Hansen, can successfully promote an image of the author as a cultural philosopher. Charting the developmental phases of the subsequent resurgence of interest in Kracauer's work, I explain how the psychological readings of his corpus that begin to prevail in the early 1990s relate to the influence of Cultural Studies on the development of cinema theory. Looking in detail at the work of historians and theorists such as Martin Jay, Thomas Elsaesser, Gertrud Koch and Inka Mülder-Bach, I demonstrate how the contemporary image of Kracauer is a composite of often disparate approaches that nevertheless share a determination to correlate the fractured trauma narratives of Kracauer's personal biography and that of Germany's intellectual traditions. Kracauer's philosophical repatriation by a post-War generation of cultural theorists and historians, I argue, plays an integral part in the academic rehabilitation of German theory in the second half of the twentieth century. However, I conclude, many of the critical approaches that initially worked to raise awareness of Kracauer's work outside of the specialism of film historiography are now proving counterproductive to the further dissemination of his ideas.

3.4 *Karsten Witte and New German Critique*

In 1981 the American film critic Andre Sarris wrote that, "American critics are largely to blame for predetermining the categories within which foreign films are permitted to enrich our cultural diet".³³ For the film historian Eric Rentschler, the history of New German Cinema is an exemplar of such acculturation.³⁴ Lacking an enthusiastic domestic audience for their idiosyncratic formal experiments, a

³² One notable anomaly in the otherwise almost entirely negative English language assessments of *Theory of Film* during the 1970s is the work of the Kantian philosopher of art, Jerome Stolnitz. Stolnitz's analysis of Kracauer's film studies revolved around the identification and examination of certain Kantian concepts within Kracauer's text. See Stolnitz, Jerome, "Kracauer: Thing, Word, and Interiority in the Movies", *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (1974), pp. 350-367 and Stolnitz, Jerome, "The Boatman of Kaizu: A Study in Movie Fantasy", *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring 1977) p. 222-237.

³³ Quoted in Rentschler, Eric, "American Friends and New German Cinema: Patterns of Reception", *New German Critique*, Nos. 24/25 (Autumn, 1981 – Winter, 1982), p. 7.

³⁴ For a history of New German Cinema see, Elsaesser, Thomas, *New German Cinema: A History* (Basingstoke: Macmillan and Rutgers University Press, 1994).

generation of post-War filmmakers such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog and Wim Wenders found and nurtured an alternative one in America. First shown in the late 1960s at the New York film festival, *Junger Deutscher Film* [Young German Film] was considered by its organizers, suggests Rentschler, as “an esoteric bit of exotica, a ripple amidst the ebbing tides of Czech and French new waves”.³⁵ However, by the end of the 1970s, New German Cinema as a brand had established a considerable market abroad, with the American audience alone proving larger than that of their native Germany. Such success, notes Rentschler, was not without its costs as “a product of the 1960s ferment, the revolt of a generation disenchanted with its elders’ abuse of the cinematic medium, became transformed into an art-house commodity”.³⁶

For Rentschler, the adulation heaped upon individual directors such as Fassbinder and Herzog by American cineastes stood in sharp contrast to the “the moderate, often sceptical, indeed more than occasionally harsh appraisals” they received from the German public. The reason for this discrepancy, argues Rentschler, relates to “the problematic nature of Germany’s broken film history”.³⁷ As Rentschler explains:

Unlike their French nouvelle vague counterparts, the Young Germans initially had no film culture out of which to work, no widespread network of film clubs, no *Cahiers du Cinema*. The major film periodical of the late 1950s and 1960s, *Filmkritik*, concentrated more on foreign productions and rarely spoke of domestic activity. The new generation had no critical identification figure like Andre Bazin, no dedicated protector of its film heritage like Henri Langlois, no accepted master like Jean Renoir. Siegfried Kracauer had fled to New York, Lotte Eisner to Paris, both many years before.³⁸

In contrast to their German counterparts, argues Rentschler, American critics appreciated “the important and continuing contribution German filmmakers have made toward universal notions of the possibilities of filmic expression, in terms of

³⁵ Rentschler, 1981/2, p. 9.

³⁶ Rentschler, 1981/2, p. 7.

³⁷ Rentschler, 1981/2, p. 7.

³⁸ Rentschler, 1981/2, p. 10.

form and style”.³⁹ In turn, they quickly recognised New German Cinema “as the heir of Lang, Murnau, and Pabst”.⁴⁰ In promoting this reading, suggests Rentschler, American critics were following the example of Lotte Eisner’s *L’Ecran Démoniaque* [The Haunted Screen, 1952], with its emphasis on stylistic continuity in Expressionist art, theatre and film.⁴¹ By adopting an opposing stance that was critical of the filmmaker’s “failure to mirror” contemporary social problems, Rentschler argues, West German critics demonstrated that they were still “very much under the influence of Siegfried Kracauer - or at least a watered-down version of the premier German film historian and theoretician”.⁴² However, Rentschler adds a significant qualification to this cultural antagonism:

Kracauer for all his often-noted stress on the primacy of content nevertheless demonstrated in his own film criticism considerable understanding for cinematic form and style. Not all West German critics have reduced his lessons down to such monolithic terms.⁴³

The idea of Kracauer representing an obstacle to overcome, an opinion Rentschler clearly articulates in his previous work (as discussed in Chapter 2), is gone. Instead Kracauer is here introduced as a casualty of misinterpretation. Rentschler’s model for this more enlightened perspective is a 1978 essay by Karsten Witte on the German Revue films of the Third Reich.⁴⁴ In this essay, Witte discusses Kracauer’s *Frankfurter Zeitung* articles written in the late 1920s / early 1930s, in particular *Das Ornament der Masse* (1927), an English translation of which is included in the same issue of *New German Critique* as Rentschler’s text. The Kracauer Witte describes is an engaged “critic of cultural intermediate zones”, whose forgotten German language texts provide not only a prompt for the revision of Kracauer’s intellectual

³⁹ Rentschler, 1981/2, p. 13.

⁴⁰ Rentschler, 1981/2, p. 14.

⁴¹ Eisner, Lotte, *The Haunted Screen: expressionism in the German cinema and the influence of Max Reinhardt*, translated by Roger Greaves (Berkeley & Oxford: University of California Press, 1973).

⁴² Rentschler, 1981/2, p. 11. Since 1945 Eisner had worked alongside Henri Langlois at Cinémathèque Française in Paris where she became along with Langlois a mentor for the younger generation of critics that worked for *Cahiers du Cinema*.

⁴³ Rentschler, 1981/2, p. 11.

⁴⁴ Witte, Karsten, “Visual Pleasure Inhibited: Aspects of the German Revue Film”, translated by J. D. Steakley and Gabriele Hoover, *New German Critique*, No. 24/25 (Autumn, 1981 - Winter, 1982), pp. 238 – 263.

contribution but also an alternative critical perspective from which to view contemporary German film production.⁴⁵

In post-war Germany, explains Leonardo Quaresima, knowledge of Kracauer's other writings was extremely limited and, like their English-speaking counterparts during the 1970s, many supposedly definitive statements were made about his approach from the singular perspective of either *From Caligari to Hitler* or *Theory of Film*. This problem was compounded in West Germany, where the only version of *From Caligari to Hitler* was a "bowdlerized" translation that, as Quaresima suggests "tried to mitigate or even alter the original approach".⁴⁶

It was Witte's work, as editor of Suhrkamp Verlag's complete edition of Kracauer's work as well as the translator of the 1979 unabridged version of *From Caligari to Hitler* that for Quaresima "reopened on new ground" the discussion about Kracauer in Germany.⁴⁷ In America, Witte's restoration of Kracauer's reputation was carried out ostensibly through the journal *New German Critique* (NGC), a journal first published by the University of Chicago in 1974 with a "mission to retrieve Critical Theory and Western Marxism" and promote the work of the Frankfurt School (Institute for Social Research, Frankfurt) and its associates (Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse *et al.*).⁴⁸ As one time editors of the journal, Andreas Huyssen and Anson Rabinbach explain, by initially concentrating on translations and republications of "the classics" of Critical Theory, the journal sought to break German Marxism out from the "Ghetto existence of German departments" with a view to replicating the influence that their French counterparts (such as Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser) were exercising over American and English cultural studies.⁴⁹ NGC's motivation to establish the significance of Critical Theory in contemporary political and sociological debate was in turn duplicated in the context of film studies by Witte in his introduction to the first English language translation of Kracauer's

⁴⁵ Witte, 1981 – 1982, p. 240.

⁴⁶ Quaresima, Leonardo, "Introduction to the 2004 edition: Rereading Kracauer", in Kracauer, Siegfried, *From Caligari to Hitler: a psychological history of the German film* [1947], revised edition edited by Leonardo Quaresima (New York: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. xvii.

⁴⁷ Quaresima, 2004, p. xvii.

⁴⁸ Huyssen, Andreas and Anson Rabinbach, "New German Critique: The First Decade", *New German Critique*, No. 95 (Spring-Summer 2005), p. 13.

⁴⁹ Huyssen and Rabinbach, 2005, p. 22.

“The Mass Ornament” [1927] by Barbara Correll and Jack Zipes that had been commissioned by NGC and published in 1975. In this text Witte argues that:

From Caligari to Hitler and Theory of Film made Siegfried Kracauer so well known in his American exile that his important work before his emigration to New York in 1941 has escaped our attention. Although the theoretical premises of the early Kracauer are present even in his posthumously published meditation on historiography, *History* his early writings in Germany aroused no interest in New York during his lifetime. [...] The link between his early and late work lies in his intention to decipher social tendencies revealed in ephemeral cultural phenomena.⁵⁰

Though at the time Witte’s work was an isolated example of NGC’s limited interest in film history and film theory by the early 1980s New German Cinema “the other nge” became a central theme of the journal.⁵¹ The catalyst for this shift in focus was the inclusion on the editorial board of Miriam Hansen who, by the time NGC published a special issue dedicated to New German Cinema in 1981/1982, had become a close friend of Witte.⁵² Hansen, along with Gertrud Koch (who at the time worked alongside Witte as a film critic at the *Frankfurter Rundschau* newspaper), had been students of Adorno at Frankfurt University. “Contrary to much film theory at the time which employed semiotic and psychoanalytic models derived from structuralism and post-structuralism”, explain Huyssen and Rabinbach, Hansen “embedded issues such as spectatorship and reception, gender representation and auteurism, genre analysis and exhibition practice in specific historical and social formations” as the central themes of the special issue.⁵³

⁵⁰ Witte, Karsten, “Introduction to Siegfried Kracauer’s ‘The Mass Ornament’”, translated by Barbara Correll and Jack Zipes, *New German Critique*, No. 5 (Spring, 1975), p. 59.

⁵¹ Huyssen and Rabinbach, 2005, p. 25.

⁵² See Rentschler, Eric, “Karsten Witte: The Passenger and the Critical Critic”, *New German Critique*, No. 74 (Spring – Summer 1998), pp. 15 – 22 and Hansen, Miriam, “For Karsten Witte”, *New German Critique*, No. 74 (Spring – Summer 1998), pp. 5 – 7.

⁵³ Huyssen and Rabinbach, 2005, p. 25.

If the French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard provided the British journal *Screen* with an Althusserian / Brechtian model for ideologically critical praxis during the 1970s then it was the work of Alexander Kluge (another student of Adorno) that provided NGC with theirs.⁵⁴ In particular, it was Kluge's essay, "On Film and the Public Sphere" (translated by Thomas Levin in NGC) and Adorno's essay on Kluge "Transparencies on Film" (translated by Hansen and Levin) that introduced the concept of the "counter-public sphere" that was to become the leitmotif of NGC's questioning of *Screen*'s Marxist orthodoxies and their locating of the New German Cinema as part of a "larger social and cultural formation in post-War West Germany."⁵⁵ As Bathrick states in his introduction to the NGC special issue on New German Cinema:

For the most part, treatments of New German Cinema in this country [America] have misread, ignored or distorted its place within the long-range history and present context of the German Federal Republic. The few studies which have gone beyond immediate responses to individual films [...] fail to connect the aesthetics of contemporary filmmaking to the political and social traditions emerging from the Weimar and fascist periods, or to the production of culture in general within the post-war public sphere.⁵⁶

Though intended to expand the application of Critical Theory into a contemporary context the limitations of, what Bathrick describes, as the Adorno-Kluge "framework" were clearly evident to those already familiar with Adorno's work.⁵⁷ From the 1930s onwards, Adorno time and again absolutely rejected the possibility of any aspect of popular culture having a genuine critical or socially emancipatory function. Favouring the avant-garde elitism of Arnold Schoenberg and Samuel Beckett over Jazz records and Orson Welles' films, Adorno's assessment of any form

⁵⁴ For examples of regular contributors to *Screen* articulating support for Godard's work see, Heath, Stephen, "Film/Cinetext/Text", *Screen*, Vol. 14, Nos. 1 – 2 (1973), pp. 102-128 and MacCabe, Colin, "Slow Motion", *Screen*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1980), pp. 111-114.

⁵⁵ Huyssen and Rabinbach, 2005, p. 25.

⁵⁶ Bathrick, David, "Introduction", *New German Critique*, No. 24/25 (Autumn, 1981 - Winter, 1982), p. 3.

⁵⁷ Bathrick, 1981/2, p. 6.

of commercial art was categorically negative.⁵⁸ Though Adorno does allude to a possible future form of critical film practice in his text on Kluge his statements about the medium are abstruse and carefully qualified through references to Kluges work as a writer. As Dagmar Barnouw has argued, Hansen’s championing of Critical Theory leads to her over-extending Adorno’s consideration of the alternative film practice beyond its original intentions. “Adorno’s position on mass culture”, writes Barnouw, “is really untenable in the late twentieth century: reading him in this situation requires rewriting him”.⁵⁹

As Hansen suggests in her obituary for Witte, the problem of rendering Adorno and Horkheimer’s version of Critical Theory pertinent to contemporary society was one that taxed them both and indeed brought them together as friends. In this respect, she concludes, Witte’s legacy was in demonstrating how “transforming” Critical Theory could maintain its relevance.⁶⁰ For Witte, the catalyst for this transformation was Kracauer’s early work. In the introduction to Kracauer’s “The Mass Ornament”, he writes:

If they were to be re-examined in a new and productive manner, they could well lead to a differentiated assessment of Critical Theory's formative period. Most important about Kracauer's early work is that his critical gaze looked to the marginal areas of high culture and to the media of popular culture: film, the streets, sports, operetta, revues, advertisements and the circus.⁶¹

Following Witte’s proposal, the subsequent shift in NGC’s approach to cinema and Kracauer after the special issue on New German Cinema was to have a decisive effect on the reception of Kracauer’s work in England and America and the reinvention of him as a philosopher of Weimar culture. However, Witte, Hansen and

⁵⁸ For Adorno’s critique of jazz, see Adorno, Theodor W., “On The Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening”, in Andrew Arato & Eike Gebhardt (eds.), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1998), pp. 270- 299. For Adorno’s preference for Beckett and Schoenberg see, Adorno, Theodor W., ‘Commitment’, translated by Francis McDonagh, *New Left Review*, Nos. 87-88 (September-December 1974), pp. 75 – 89. For Adorno’s criticism of Orson Welles see, Adorno, Theodor W., and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1986), p. 129.

⁵⁹ Barnouw, Dagmar, *Critical Realism: History, Photography, and the work of Siegfried Kracauer* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 320 n. 13.

⁶⁰ Hansen, 1998, p. 7.

⁶¹ Witte, 1975, p. 59.

the other contributors to NGC were not the only ones with a “mission to retrieve Critical Theory and Western Marxism” and promote the work of the Frankfurt School and its associates.⁶² Another key figure in this respect is the historian Martin Jay, whose biographical essay on Kracauer was not only the first in English but was to prove seminal in initiating a critical correlation between his personal experience of exile and the fate of progressive German philosophy after the war.

3.5 *The Permanent Exile of Siegfried Kracauer*

In 1974 Jay published *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950*.⁶³ This text charted the work of Marcuse, Fromm, Horkheimer, Neumann, Adorno, and Lowenthal during the Institute’s early years in Germany and later in exile in the United States and was the first full-length study of the subject in English. Jay’s scholarship was on the whole well received and proved instrumental in introducing a wider audience to the intellectual and biographic background behind the work of the Institute.⁶⁴ Revealing the complex personal and philosophical history behind established figures such as Adorno and Horkheimer, the book stirred new interest for their work in a post-War generation of critics who had until then considered their approach obsolete. It was whilst conducting research for the book that Jay became interested in the work of some of the Institute’s more periphery associates, the names of which recurred in documents and interviews. Out of this group, which included Benjamin and Hannah Arendt, it was Kracauer that intrigued Jay the most and in 1975 Jay published the essay “The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer” in the liberal arts journal, *Salmagundi*.⁶⁵

⁶² Huyssen and Rabinbach, 2005, p. 13.

⁶³ Jay, Martin, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* [1973](Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1996).

⁶⁴ For NGC’s criticism of Jay’s book see Kellner, Douglas, “The Frankfurt School Revisited: A Critique of Martin Jay’s *The Dialectical Imagination*”, *New German Critique*, No. 4 (Winter 1975), pp. 131 – 152.

⁶⁵ See Jay, Martin, “The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer”, in Jay, Martin, *Permanent Exiles. Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 152 – 197.

As the title of the essay suggests, for Jay, the key to understanding Kracauer's diverse corpus as a coherent whole was a formative concept of liminality. Though "alienation and outsidership", writes Jay, "have been among the stock obsessions of intellectuals ever since the time of Rousseau" few have "focused as consistently on the manifestations of the malaise throughout their entire careers as did Kracauer".⁶⁶ Marginality, Jay argues, was Kracauer's philosophical *modus operandi* and though fashioned into "a positive good" by the Frankfurt writer it was done so out of the necessity of his own personal circumstances. All of Kracauer's work, explains Jay:

can be read as a series of seemingly disparate projects almost all with the common goal of redeeming contingency from oblivion. In important if not fully transparent ways, this effort paralleled Kracauer's personal struggle with the extraterritorial nature of his own life.⁶⁷

Jay's dedication to the legacy of the Frankfurt School and its associates was in part a reaction to what was referred to at the time by American political historian, Theodor Draper as "the specter of Weimar".⁶⁸ At a conference on Weimar culture held at The New School for Social Research in New York in 1972, Draper presented a paper that analysed characteristics of the Weimar Republic in Germany which had heralded the decline of the democratic state and compared these to trends in the United States which he (and many others) felt indicated a similarly disastrous political outcome. With growing social unrest spreading across America in the 1960s (following the American intervention in the Vietnam War) parallels began to be made by historians such as Draper and the Marxist sociologist Göran Therborn between the student movement's re-adoption of Herbert Marcuse's work and the role of the Institute in frustrating a united Communist response to fascism in the Weimar republic.⁶⁹ Though the "specter of Weimar" was a relatively short lived paradigm in political and social theory the response of those associated with the Frankfurt School to its allegations, in particular those who had appointed themselves guardians of its legacy,

⁶⁶ Jay, 1985, p. 153.

⁶⁷ Jay, 1985, p. 153.

⁶⁸ Draper, Theodor, "The Specter of Weimar", *Social Research*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Summer 1972), pp. 322 – 340.

⁶⁹ Therborn, Göran, "The Frankfurt School", *New Left Review*, No. 63 (1970), pp. 66 – 96.

had a significant impact on how we perceive Critical Theory today and in turn (through Jay's work) how we perceive Kracauer's relation to it.

The most active guardian of the Institute's legacy was the German philosopher and sociologist Leo Lowenthal. From his appointment as "*Hauptassistent*" [first-assistant] in 1930, Lowenthal maintained an archive of personal correspondence and unpublished manuscripts relating to the running of the Institute.⁷⁰ In 1968, prompted by concerns about how their work was being misconstrued and appropriated by the political activists of the New Left in America, Lowenthal approached Jay to examine his collection with a view to writing a history of the Frankfurt School.⁷¹ One of the problems that faced Jay was the Institute's identification of American capitalism as another form of totalitarianism. The Frankfurt School's critique of American society, explains Jay:

sometimes appeared to suggest no real distinction existed between Nazi coercion and the 'culture industry' [of Hollywood]. In fact, so some of its critics would charge, the Nazi experience had been so traumatic for the Institute's members that they could judge American society only in terms of its fascist potential [Therborn]. By insulating themselves from American life to the extent that they did, the unique historical factors that made American advanced capitalism and mass society different from their European counterparts were lost to view.⁷²

Jay's approach to this problem in *The Dialectical Imagination* is to restrict his focus to the early history of the Institute. Though several of the Frankfurt School's chief protagonists were still alive and writing at the time of his research, Jay adopted an "elegiac" tone, stating in the book's introduction that though undeniably radical in their time the Institute's "historical moment has now irrevocably passed".⁷³ Though keenly aware of the historically conditioned nature [*Zeitbedingtheit*] of their critical

⁷⁰ Jay, 1996, p. 21.

⁷¹ Jay, 1996, p. xi.

⁷² Jay, 1996, p. 297.

⁷³ Jay, 1996, p. xxxi.

intervention into Weimar culture, what puzzled Jay was why the core members of the School actively refused to review their position now those conditions had changed.⁷⁴ The answer, suggests Jay, is that from the moment of their enforced emigration from Germany, Horkheimer, Adorno, Lowenthal and the others considered the Institute as an Ark, a receptacle for the safekeeping of the ideas that National Socialism (or monopoly Capitalism) wanted to eradicate. In a letter written shortly before the outbreak of war, Horkheimer stated:

In view of what is now threatening to engulf Europe [...] our present work is essentially destined to pass things down through the night that is approaching: a kind of message in a bottle.⁷⁵

Jay's history of the Institute ends with its return to Frankfurt in 1951 and his epilogue (written in 1973) considers Horkheimer's mission to safeguard their remarkable achievements a success:

whereas dispersion usually accompanied exile, the Institute managed to remain together. It was furthermore the only collective representative of Weimar culture to survive exile and return to serve as a bridge between Germany's cultural past and its post-Nazi present. When it re-established itself in Frankfurt, it was able not only to teach methodological techniques acquired in America, but also to restore continuity with the rich heritage Hitler had done so much to obliterate. Having helped to bring German culture to America, it then proceeded to help bring it back to Germany.⁷⁶

Through the process of writing the history of the Frankfurt School, Jay became close friends with Lowenthal and his influence on the author's above conclusions are evident both in the finished text's continued reference to Lowenthal's personal correspondence but also in how Jay conceptualizes and foregrounds the idea of exile in relation to their work.⁷⁷ Though Jay recognizes in *The Dialectical Imagination* and in later essays such as "The Frankfurt School in Exile" (1972) that the Institute was

⁷⁴ Jay, 1996, p. 231.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Müller-Doohm, Stefan, *Adorno: a biography* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), p. 262.

⁷⁶ Jay, 1996, p. 298.

⁷⁷ Jay, 1996, p. xxxiv.

an “interdisciplinary aggregation of scholars” his approach works to consolidate an image of it as a fundamentally unified and harmonious collective project.⁷⁸ The model for this approach, argues Barnouw, was provided by Lowenthal and revolved around what she has identified as his persistent “equation of intellectual integrity and exile”.⁷⁹ Lowenthal’s “highly selective” and “harmonizing” approach, suggests Barnouw, “emphasizes the intellectual’s act of distancing himself from his sociocultural environment” (self-imposed exile), as a demonstration of their intellectual “integrity”.⁸⁰ Evidence of Jay’s “harmonizing” and his paradigmatic use of exile are both apparent in his introduction to the collection of his essays on the Frankfurt School written during the 1970s and published in 1986 as *Permanent Exiles*. On the subject of the title Jay writes:

The phrase “permanent exiles” seemed an accurate and evocative term to describe the Frankfurt School as a whole and so I considered it as a possible title for the book I was writing on their history [*The Dialectical Imagination*]. Herbert Marcuse and Leo Lowenthal, two members of the School who remained in America, agreed that it rang true and encouraged me to use it. But much to my surprise, Max Horkheimer and Felix Weil, both now living in Europe [...] were vehemently opposed. Horkheimer, who had graciously consented to write a preface to the book, even hinted at its withdrawal were I to insist on the title [...] But it has always been my conviction that the homecoming of certain Frankfurt School members to Germany did not really end the exile of Critical Theory.⁸¹

Jay’s interpretation of Kracauer’s corpus as the expression of a deliberate and self-perpetuated outsidership certainly conforms to this notion. With its conflation of geographical, socio-political and psychological factors, Jay’s 1975 existential biography of Kracauer has the Frankfurt author emerge from the shadows of its more illustrious members and operate as both irritant to and influential associate of the

⁷⁸ Jay, 1996, p. 298.

⁷⁹ Barnouw, Dagmar, “Marxist Creationism: Walter Benjamin and the Authority of the Critic” in Barnouw, Dagmar, *Weimar Intellectuals and the Threat of Modernity* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 153.

⁸⁰ Barnouw, 1988, p. 153.

⁸¹ Jay, 1985, pp. xii - xiii.

sacrosanct group identity of Adorno, Horkheimer *et al.* In such a role, Kracauer's marginality does not question the intellectual probity of the Institute but affirms, by rehearsing on a personal level, the identification of integrity and exile, a quality that Lowenthal (and Adorno) had initially also attributed to Benjamin. "Benjamin", writes Barnouw, "shares with many Weimar intellectuals the view of the intellectual's identity as defined by his experience of disconnection, distance, and exile".⁸² If Benjamin, as Lowenthal argues, provides the standard for the Institute's intellectual probity in the first half of the century, then Jay's work on Kracauer (in parallel to Witte's) can be understood as proposing a different equation of exile and integrity for the second half.⁸³

However, the chief obstacle with such an equation is the fact that no other associate of the Institute (bar maybe Erich Fromm)⁸⁴ was so publicly excluded from it. For example, Adorno interpreted Kracauer's compulsion to write solely in English after relocating to America as evidence of his friend having succumbed to the "burden of conformity".⁸⁵ As Kracauer himself complained, in the process of constructing its intellectual legacy, the Institute was happy to leave him "among the forgotten men".⁸⁶ Jay directly addresses Adorno's allegations in his last essay on Kracauer, "Adorno and Kracauer: Notes on a Troubled Friendship" (1978).⁸⁷ Jay's approach in this text is significant because not only does it look to problematize the conclusions of *The Dialectical Imagination* (that the historical moment of Critical Theory has irrevocably passed) but it does so using the antagonistic relationship between the American Kracauer (he became an American citizen in 1946) and the resolutely German Adorno. In order to write this essay Jay travelled to Germany to visit the *Deutsches Literaturarchiv* in Marbach where the Kracauer's *Nachlaß* (his manuscripts, notes and correspondence etc.) had been deposited after his death in

⁸² Barnouw, 1988, p. 155.

⁸³ For Benjamin's relationship with Horkheimer and the Institute see Wiggershaus, Rolf, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance*, translated by Michael Robertson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), pp. 191 – 218.

⁸⁴ For the Institute's break with Fromm see Wiggershaus, 1995, pp. 265-272.

⁸⁵ Adorno, Theodor W., "The Curious Realist: On Siegfried Kracauer", *New German Critique*, No. 54 (1991), p. 174.

⁸⁶ Jay, 1996, p. 235.

⁸⁷ Jay, 1985, pp. 217 – 236.

1966. It was whilst there that he met Witte and his influence of the finished text goes beyond the factual assistance that is acknowledged by Jay in its notes.⁸⁸

For Jay, a historian, Kracauer was primarily a historian and a critic of Marxism. His reading of Kracauer's work on film, though apparently thorough in his 1975/6 essay, relies almost entirely on the work of V.F. Perkins and Andrew Tudor.⁸⁹ What Witte contributes to Jay's account is not only a better understanding of Adorno's criticism of Kracauer's film theory but also a decided reemphasis of Kracauer's Weimar work. Here Kracauer is less the aloof extraterritorial historian and more the politically engaged cultural critic, someone who was prepared to take a provisional critical stance in light of contemporary concerns as opposed to Adorno's more ahistorical assertions regarding the preservation of truth content. The problems Kracauer highlights in Adorno's work, Jay concludes, "must be acknowledged as serious obstacles for anyone anxious to defend the Frankfurt School's legacy".⁹⁰ However, by presenting Kracauer as Witte's "critic of cultural intermediate zones" Jay does not propose Kracauer's theory as a corrective to Adorno's philosophical obstinacy but as component in the dialectical transformation of Critical Theory as a whole. For Jay, Kracauer's "own solutions" to the problems of the Frankfurt School "were by no means superior to Adorno's" but it "must be acknowledged that he asked many tough questions that Adorno's version of Critical Theory must struggle to answer".⁹¹ In the end, argues Jay, the "troubled" and ultimately irreconcilable relationship between Kracauer's position and Adorno's does not invalidate Critical Theory but in fact confirms its fundamental conviction that something's "true value" is only realised through "the relentless exposure" of the social contradictions that define it.⁹²

Also, significant in the present context, is how Jay's central concept of exile undertakes a marked transformation. In his first essay on Kracauer, Jay argues that the determining factor in Kracauer's approach is the idea of chronological anonymity. "Chronological anonymity", argues Jay, was something that Kracauer

⁸⁸ For example see Jay, 1985, p. 311 n. 42 and p. 312 n. 60.

⁸⁹ Jay admits this reliance in Jay, 1985, p. 298, n. 106.

⁹⁰ Jay, 1985, p. 235.

⁹¹ Jay, 1985, p. 236.

⁹² Jay, 1985, p. 236.

“insistently guarded” because it fulfilled a very specific philosophical function. As Jay explains:

[i]t helped discourage efforts to place Kracauer in the context of any one period, such as those that would define him as a “Weimar intellectual” with all the resonances that label has acquired over the years. By avoiding such a placement, he hoped to thwart the compartmentalization of his own work that he had sought to resist in the work of those he studied.⁹³

The shift in critical focus towards Kracauer’s Weimar work in both Witte’s and Jay’s work marked not the abandonment of this notion of “chronological anonymity” but a broadening of its scope from the personal to the public sphere. The initial reference text for this adjustment was Peter Gay’s *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (1968).⁹⁴ In Gay’s text, the culture of the Weimar Republic is presented as an historical epiphenomenon, a product of the temporal confluence of myriad fringe cultural and political forces that flourished in the social and political ruins of a defeated imperial Germany. As West Berlin had become an island in post-War German Democratic Republic so too was the Weimar Republic conceptualised by Gay as an anomaly in the narrative history of the nation; a moment when the social forces that usually operated on the peripheries of mainstream culture began instead to constitute it (the outsiders became insiders). In such a context, not only Kracauer’s extraterritoriality but also Critical Theory’s persistent marginality could be inverted and read as a committed engagement with the prevailing cultural forces rather than intellectualised misanthropy.

For those, such as the contributors to NGC, arguing for a different critical framework with which to comprehend and interpret the cultural products of post-War Germany (such as the extraterritorial cinema of New German Cinema) the theoretical consolidation of the Weimar Republic as a manifestation of an alternative mode of German culture (as opposed to an aberration of it) was to prove a significant development. It allowed a relationship to be drawn between the historical and

⁹³ Jay, 1985, p. 152.

⁹⁴ Gay, Peter, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* [1968] (New York: Norton, 2001).

contemporary that did not fall into the problem of the historical analogy, such as the “specter of Weimar” where essential differences are sidelined for the sake of critical expediency. Instead of “measuring early German film theory against some imaginary notion of epistemological progress”, what Bathrick, Hansen and Thomas Elsaesser (as the editors of NGC’s special issue on Weimar film theory) propose as the journal’s aim is to reexamine Weimar film culture “as much for the questions” it raises “as for the answers they supply”.⁹⁵ This drive for methodological revitalization is combined with the conceptualization of Weimar as representing not a past evolutionary stage in a linear chronological or narrative sense but an alternative tradition that exists alongside contemporary modes of criticism. To this effect NGC’s “Introduction to Weimar Film Theory” concludes with the following statement:

It is our hope that this issue will not only reopen a discussion of particular historical concepts, but also encourage a more experiential and a more speculative dimension in current paradigms of textual analysis and historiography. The textual and historical specificity that characterizes German film theory in effect lends it a high degree of openness, reminding us of a time when one could think about the cinema in a political horizon which was not exclusively defined by institutional security and constraints.⁹⁶

Published in 1987, this issue of NGC marks an important moment in the English language reception of Kracauer’s pre-War work for two reasons. Firstly, centred on a new translation of Kracauer’s 1926 essay “*Kult der Zerstreung: Über die Berliner Lichtspielhäuser*” [Cult of Distraction: On Berlin’s Picture Palaces] (the first since Correll’s and Zipes’ version of “The Mass Ornament” in 1975), all the contributions not only work to reaffirm the progressive pedigree of German film theory but also Kracauer’s key role in its development. For example, Hansen and Koch contribute essays that demonstrate the influence of Kracauer on more celebrated Weimar critics whilst texts by Schlüpmann, Petro and Hake use Kracauer’s journalism as the basis for their feminist critiques of the prevailing scholarly interpretations of early

⁹⁵ Bathrick, David, Thomas Elsaesser and Miriam Hansen, “Introduction”, *New German Critique*, No. 40 (Winter, 1987), p. 5.

⁹⁶ Bathrick, Elsaesser and Hansen, 1987, p. 5.

twentieth century visual culture.⁹⁷ Secondly, it represents, with the inclusion of Thomas Elsaesser on the editorial team, an amalgamation of two approaches to German national cinema that had until this point developed in parallel on different sides of the Atlantic.

As Quaresima has commented, the work of Elsaesser in the early 1980s “played a special role” in renewing interest in Kracauer’s work.⁹⁸ What distinguishes Elsaesser’s approach, argues Quaresima, is his sustained focus on *From Caligari to Hitler*, the work “most closely associated with Kracauer’s name” but the one that has received “the least critical attention and reinterpretation during this latest phase” of scholarship.⁹⁹ Written in 2004, Quaresima’s essay does not offer a solution to this puzzle. However the absence of Kracauer’s book on Weimar cinema in NGC’s reconfiguration of Kracauer as a Weimar cultural critic is indicative of the journal’s strategy. In order to understand how NGC’s editorial approach effectively devalued Kracauer’s exile texts (*From Caligari to Hitler* and *Theory of Film*) it is necessary to look in some detail at how Elsaesser’s interpretation of these American publications changed in his contributions to NGC and other film journals.

3.6 *From Film Theory to Cinema Theory.*

Elsaesser’s first text on Kracauer’s work was a conference paper called “Cinema Histories, Cinema Practices” that he gave at the “Milwaukee Conference” in Asilomar, California in 1982. The paper was later published in 1984 as “Film History and Visual Pleasure: Weimar Cinema”.¹⁰⁰ In this text, Elsaesser argues for replacing

⁹⁷ Hansen, Miriam. “Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: ‘The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology’”, *New German Critique*, No. 40 (1987), pp. 179 – 224. Koch, Gertrud, “Bela Balazs: The Physiognomy of Things”, *New German Critique*, No. 40 (1987), pp. 167 – 177. Schlüpmann, Heide, “Phenomenology of Film: On Siegfried Kracauer’s Writings of the 1920’s”, *New German Critique*, No. 40, 1987, pp. 97 – 114. Petro, Patrice. “Modernity and Mass Culture in Weimar: Contours of a Discourse on Sexuality in Early Theories of Perception and Representation”, *New German Critique*, No. 40 (1987), pp. 115-146 and Hake, Sabine, “Girls and Crisis - The Other Side of Diversion.” *New German Critique*, No. 40 (1987), pp. 147-166.

⁹⁸ Quaresima, 2004, p. xvii.

⁹⁹ Quaresima, 2004, p. xvii.

¹⁰⁰ For a report on the conference see, Doane, Mary Ann and Philip Rosen, “Conference Report: Cinema Histories, Cinema Practices Asilomer Conference”, *Camera Obscura* Vol. 3, No. 4 (Spring/Summer 1982), pp. 223 – 233. Elsaesser, Thomas, "Film History and Visual Pleasure: Weimar History," in Patricia Mellencamp and Philip Rosen (eds.), *Cinema Histories, Cinema Practices* (Frederick, MD.: University Publications of America, 1984), pp. 47 – 85.

the label “expressionist cinema” with the term “Weimar cinema”. The former, he argues, propagates a notion of stylistic conformity, which is contradicted by the heterogeneous character of the films from that period.¹⁰¹ Though deliberately intended as a counter to the prevailing trends in film studies at the time; namely the linguistic and psychoanalytical trends that focused on questions of authorship and genre, Elsaesser was not proposing a reinstatement of a traditional concept of national cinema. As he later explains in an essay on the history of national cinema studies:

from an historical perspective, the classic analyses of national cinemas were on the whole ‘essentialist’, meaning that they looked to the cinema, its narrative, iconology or recurring motifs with the expectation that they could reveal something unique or specific about a country’s values and beliefs at once more authentic and more symptomatic than in other art forms or aspects of (popular) culture.¹⁰²

The “founding text” for such studies, suggests Elsaesser, was Kracauer’s *From Caligari to Hitler* whose “blend of sociology, group psychology, and metropolitan-modernist fieldwork ethnography” influenced many investigations into the “national character” of a country’s cinema.¹⁰³ Though recognizing that cultural difference was an important factor in determining the nature of a film audience, for Elsaesser, the “danger” of such an approach “was not only essentialism regarding the concept of national identity: it also risked being tautological, insofar as only those films tended to be selected as typical of a national cinema which confirmed the pre-established profile”.¹⁰⁴ As Philip Rosen states in his 1984 study into the problems of writing about national cinema, “History, Textuality, Nation”, it is the “question of

¹⁰¹ Elsaesser, Thomas, “Impersonations: National Cinema, Historical Imaginaries” in Thomas Elsaesser (ed.), *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), p. 81.

¹⁰² Elsaesser, 2005, p. 63.

¹⁰³ Elsaesser, 2005, p. 64.

¹⁰⁴ Elsaesser, 2005, p. 64.

coherence” that is of fundamental significance for such studies “on a theoretical as well as methodological” level.¹⁰⁵ But, adds Rosen, it does not end here:

The discussion of a national cinema assumes not only that there is a principle or principles of coherence among a large number of films; it also involves an assumption that those principles have something to do with the production and / or reception of those films within the legal borders of (or benefiting capital controlled from within) a given nation-state.¹⁰⁶

Like Elsaesser, Rosen focuses on the example of *From Caligari to Hitler* (Rosen’s essay was also initially presented at the 1982 Milwaukee Conference) but he does so not to place Kracauer alongside other “straw men” but to “highlight his methodology for textual analysis”.¹⁰⁷ “As a historian of a national cinema”, states Rosen:

Kracauer is exemplary in his construction of two coherencies – a block of filmic (inter)textuality and the social formation of a specified period. These are related in such a way as to enable Kracauer to investigate the kind of middle-class social-psychological patterns he treats as crucial for the appeal of Hitlerism”.¹⁰⁸

The way Kracauer chooses to explore these “patterns”, explains Rosen, is to focus on what he argues are “generally and compulsively repeated motifs” that appear “throughout all levels of a nation’s films”.¹⁰⁹ These motifs are not only “diegetic objects and actions” but “also components of form and style”.¹¹⁰ For Kracauer, Rosen argues:

These motifs inform individual film narratives with a historically pregnant intertextuality. In them, Kracauer can trace a great theme

¹⁰⁵ Reprinted as Rosen, Philip, “History, Textuality, Nation: Kracauer, Burch and Some Problems in the Study of National Cinemas” in Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen (eds.), *Theorising National Cinema* (London: BFI publishing, 2006), pp. 17 – 28.

¹⁰⁶ Rosen, 2006, p. 18.

¹⁰⁷ Rosen, 2006, p. 18.

¹⁰⁸ Rosen, 2006, p. 21.

¹⁰⁹ Rosen, 2006, p. 19.

¹¹⁰ Rosen, 2006, p. 19.

at the heart of the inter-war German collective mentality: that of the rejection of the multivalent, undecidable concrete real, and the resulting fascination with an authoritarianism whose alternative is figured as chaos.¹¹¹

Kracauer's "method of pulling together diverse texts in a national cinema", concludes Rosen, "can be likened to interpreting the discourse of a psychoanalytic patient".¹¹²

In his 1982 essay, "Social Mobility and the Fantastic", Elsaesser develops the notion of Weimar cinema as an historically discrete manifestation of an alternative tradition in German culture: The German silent cinema, argues Elsaesser:

however influential it has been on certain aspects of Hollywood filmmaking (the film noir, for instance, and the horror film), nonetheless constitutes a body of films whose textual construction did not impose itself on the commercial cinema, and it has thus remained an "alternative cinema," so different, in fact, that it has almost become incomprehensible, in much the same way as certain Romantic narrative genres became obsolete once the novel [...] had appropriated the codes of representation and conflict whereby a society recognized its moral or psychological reality.¹¹³

For Elsaesser, Kracauer's reading of the German silent cinema is an exemplar of the inappropriate application of an historical critical method. As with Rosen, Elsaesser reads Kracauer's method as operating a double reduction on its material. In order to establish "homology" (coherence) between a national cinema and the country's history, argues Elsaesser, Kracauer first has to "narrativize" German history and then "personalize" it.¹¹⁴ In other words, Kracauer conceptualizes (in psychological terms) the nation as an individual character (that he refers to as "the German Soul"), rejecting any "forces or determinants" that resist such a consolidation.¹¹⁵ Kracauer

¹¹¹ Rosen, 2006, p. 19.

¹¹² Rosen, 2006, p. 24.

¹¹³ Elsaesser, Thomas, "Social Mobility and the Fantastic", *Wide Angle*, Vol. 6 No. 2 (1982), p. 15.

¹¹⁴ Elsaesser, 1982, p. 16.

¹¹⁵ Elsaesser, 1982, p. 16.

then reads the films of the period either as the expression or repression of the inner conflicts that contribute to the behaviour of this collective identity. The history of Weimar cinema that Kracauer subsequently presents, concludes Elsaesser:

is itself an expressionist drama, and while he makes it clear that the categories he employs are those that the films themselves suggest, the tautologous nature of the reasoning seems inescapable: the films reflect German history, because this history has been narrated in terms and categories derived from the films.¹¹⁶

Kracauer's emphasis on story, Elsaesser argues, does "considerable violence" to the films' historically peculiar "visual and narrative organization".¹¹⁷ Only the examination of "concrete examples", suggests Elsaesser, can break the "hermeneutic circle" of Kracauer's method.¹¹⁸

Elsaesser next article was such an examination of a concrete example. "Lulu and the Meter Man", published in 1983, uses Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* and *Die Angestellten* [The Salaried Masses, 1930]. as reference points for a detailed reading of G.W. Pabst's *Die Büchse der Pandora* [Pandora's Box] (1928-9) starring Louise Brooks.¹¹⁹ For Elsaesser, what Pabst and Brooks' film silently articulates through its imagery is a disposition in popular Weimar visual culture (cabaret, variety theatre, photography, commercial art) for ambiguity (specifically sexual ambiguity) that is "rarely" evident "in either the avant-garde or the 'serious literature' of the time" and has subsequently been labelled a minority concern.¹²⁰ The reason why this theme of ambiguity was common in certain mediums and absent from others, argues Elsaesser, is that visual media works on an audience in a different physiological way to literary media and therefore can communicate certain ideas more effectively than others. For example, explains Elsaesser, compared with the theatre (Pabst's film was based on a

¹¹⁶ Elsaesser, 1982, p. 16.

¹¹⁷ Elsaesser, 1982, p. 16.

¹¹⁸ Elsaesser, 1982, p. 16.

¹¹⁹ *Pandora's Box* [German: *Die Büchse der Pandora*], directed by G. W. Pabst (Germany: Süd-Film, 1929).

¹²⁰ Elsaesser, Thomas, "Lulu and the Meter Man: Louise Brooks, Pabst and 'Pandora's Box', *Screen* Vol. 24, Nos. 4-5 (July-October 1983), pp. 4 – 36.

stage play) the “expressivity” of silent cinema, “the way it speaks to the mind and senses is different”.¹²¹ Therefore, he concludes:

different affective values attach themselves to gesture, décor or face. With it, the relation of expression to repression changes; conflict and contrast, antinomies and argument are suggested, and perceived by an audience, in forms specific to the cinema.¹²²

For Elsaesser, the “visual pleasure” associated with the reception of these medium specific forms, the “curiosity and emotion” they induce in the audience and the way that they in turn “might bind an audience to the cinema” also highlights a “sociological difference between theatre and cinema audiences”.¹²³ This difference manifests itself in the nature of the cinema audience. It is therefore logical to deduce, argues Elsaesser, that silent cinema affects different social groups in ways distinct from that of the theatre experience. The theatre and the cinema audience are therefore not interchangeable but fundamentally different and assumptions made about them derived from a literary standpoint are not necessarily valid, especially in regards to their gender or class.

In this text, Elsaesser portrays Kracauer as the personification of a rigid literary approach that misses out (or chooses to ignore) the multitude of ambiguous messages transmitted by the film’s peculiar patterning of its images. Elsaesser as a result turns Kracauer’s identification of the “German soul” as a “male, paranoiac” back at its author and presents him as a man of narrow cultural experience and repressed emotional responses.¹²⁴ This derogatory image of Kracauer as an academician more accustomed to the library than to the cabaret stands in complete contrast to that subsequently presented by Elsaesser five years later in another essay on Weimar culture’s relation to the development of cinema theory, “Cinema – The Irresponsible Signifier or ‘The Gamble with History’: Film Theory or Cinema Theory”.¹²⁵ This text, Elsaesser’s contribution to NGC’s special issue on Weimar Cinema (that he co-

¹²¹ Elsaesser, 1983, p. 12.

¹²² Elsaesser, 1983, p. 12.

¹²³ Elsaesser, 1983, p. 12.

¹²⁴ Elsaesser, 1983, p. 17.

¹²⁵ Elsaesser Thomas, “Cinema - The Irresponsible Signifier or ‘The Gamble with History’: Film Theory or Cinema Theory”, *New German Critique*, No. 40 (1987), pp. 65 – 89.

edited with Bathrick and Hansen in 1987), is significant in the current context because it not only marks a distinct shift in Elsaesser's idea of Kracauer's relationship to Weimar culture, but also Kracauer's relationship to film theory. It also helps situate the critical reconstruction of Kracauer as primarily a German critic in the context of *New German Critique's* remonstrations about the hegemony of French Structuralism in Film Studies.¹²⁶

“Film theory”, argues Elsaesser, “has attained the degree of self-reflexivity appropriate to cognitive endeavour by constantly rearticulating a seemingly ineluctable dualism: that between realist tendencies of cinema and formalist ones”.¹²⁷ No matter what form this immanent antagonism has adopted over the past century (e.g. long take vs. montage, phenomenology vs. semiology etc.), explains Elsaesser, “crucial” to each manifestation of it “is the importance given to the basic discontinuity of the filmic process when set against the perceptual continuity of the viewing process”.¹²⁸ For Elsaesser, deliberations on the effect of specific social or economic processes on film production and the viewing process have until the mid 1980s been the preserve of film historians. Their recent proclivity for defining historically, geographically, and sociologically distinct audiences has produced a model of reception that is as discontinuous as the medium's multifarious modes of production. As a result of this shift in emphasis from the film object to the cinema experience, argues Elsaesser, film history has moved towards becoming cinema history. “The question is”, adds Elsaesser, “whether film theory can remain film theory or whether it ought to move towards an historicizing self-reflexivity which would mark the transition from classic film theory to cinema theory?”¹²⁹ The main obstacle to this transformation, suggests Elsaesser, is that (as they currently define themselves), film theory and theories of the cinema “stand in a certain unresolved tension to each other”.¹³⁰ However, he suggests, a precedent for their dialectic synthesis is available in a neglected area of film scholarship that he identifies as German theory.

¹²⁶ Elsaesser, 1987, p. 67.

¹²⁷ Elsaesser, 1987, p. 65.

¹²⁸ Elsaesser, 1987, p. 65.

¹²⁹ Elsaesser, 1987, p. 66.

¹³⁰ Elsaesser, 1987, p. 66.

The neglect of German theory in recent discussions of the cinema is, explains Elsaesser, to “some extent justified” when you consider how film studies has framed the two critical traditions that define it in relation to film. The most prominent and (relatively) influential of these traditions is the cultural theory of the Frankfurt School’s critical sociology. The tendency of this form of theory is “to marginalize the cinema, depriving it of any historically significant specificity within the overall context of the mass-media and the culture industry”.¹³¹ In comparison, the variety of German theorists that attribute some significance to film (Balázs, Arnheim and Kracauer) has exerted comparably little influence in the development of film scholarship. The reason for this, Elsaesser explains, is that their individual approaches all fall “uneasily between the formalist and the realist tendencies, between the film-as-art debate and arguments of ontology”.¹³² However, suggests Elsaesser:

In the light of recent shifts in film theory, towards considerations of subjectivity and signification, visual fascination and gender-specific forms of spectatorship, German film theory can be re-centred and opened up for reinspection: firstly, in recalling, as Miriam Hansen and Gertrud Koch have done in previous issues of *New German Critique*, the crucial interest in spectatorship and visual pleasure among early writers on the cinema; and secondly, in the way that writers in the tradition of Western Marxism, such as Lukács and Benjamin, can be read as offering a theory of the cinema (again, in contrast to film theory) which makes the discontinuity of the filmic process and its subject-effects central to aesthetic as well as historical considerations, thereby sketching a cinema theory rather than a film theory.¹³³

For Elsaesser, though the efforts of critics and philosophers such as Lukács, Benjamin, Balázs and Bloch were all extremely important in endowing Weimar cultural theory (and in turn cinema theory) with an “emancipatory potential”,

¹³¹ Elsaesser, 1987, p. 66.

¹³² Elsaesser, 1987, p. 66.

¹³³ Elsaesser, 1987, pp. 66-67.

Kracauer has “a certain exceptional status within this tradition”.¹³⁴ What affords him this status, argues Elsaesser, is the “inner logic and theoretical perspective” of his body of work up until and including his enforced move to Paris in 1933.¹³⁵ Though all of his writings are not about film, Elsaesser enthuses:

All of them bear re-reading today: they make Kracauer a very contemporary writer indeed, more so, perhaps, than Adorno, whose mentor he once was, but whose Hegelian Marxism he did not share; consequently, Kracauer's own immanent thinking tends to be more responsive to the feel and texture of experience than Adorno's often rather formalist dialectical machinery.¹³⁶

For Elsaesser, key amongst his disparate corpus are the essays he produced between 1922 and 1933 and later collected under the title *Das Ornament der Masse* [The Mass Ornament] in 1963. This “revelation” of a publication, suggests Elsaesser, is a “worthy companion”¹³⁷ to the more celebrated texts of his contemporaries (for example, Bloch's *Heritage of Our Times*, Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Benjamin's *Illuminations*) and:

might have been as much a key text in the rediscovery of Critical Theory as these proved to be, had there been commentaries (and a translation) in English to do it justice. In West Germany, the influence of early Kracauer (the “sensibilist” of *Das Ornament der Masse*, in contrast to the sociologist of *From Caligari to Hitler*) is clearly in evidence among filmmakers and critics of the New German Cinema.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Elsaesser, 1987, p. 89.

¹³⁵ Elsaesser, 1987, p. 69.

¹³⁶ Elsaesser, 1987, p. 69.

¹³⁷ Elsaesser, 1987, p. 68.

¹³⁸ Elsaesser, 1987, p. 69. Bloch, Ernst, *Heritage of Our Times*, translated by Neville and Stephen Plaice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), Adorno and Horkheimer, 1986 and Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn [1968] (London: Fontana Press, 1992).

Elsaesser's guide to the critical antecedents of *From Caligari to Hitler* is Witte, whose introduction to NGC's translation of Kracauer's "Mass Ornament" essay and editorial commentaries to Suhrkamp's Kracauer *Gesammelte Schriften* provide a sustained point of critical reference in Elsaesser's text.

With the influence of Witte, Hansen and Koch clearly evident (and overtly acknowledged) in this article it is interesting in the current context to examine how Elsaesser reconfigures the relationship between Kracauer's previous work and *From Caligari to Hitler* and his subsequent interpretation of it. Though Elsaesser recognises in his essay on Pabst that Kracauer's work on Weimar culture extended beyond *From Caligari to Hitler*, the 1947 text remains the exemplar for a narrative model of history that he sought to discredit.¹³⁹ As is evident in the above quotation, in order to maintain the validity of his negative interpretation of *From Caligari to Hitler*, whilst promoting Kracauer as a model for a hybrid cinema theory, Elsaesser splits Kracauer's oeuvre into two distinct phases. As he previously condemned Kracauer for shaping his history of the German nation in the terms and categories derived from the films he examined so too does Elsaesser now appropriate a trope from Weimar film to interpret Kracauer's intellectual biography; that of the *doppelgänger* or double.¹⁴⁰ There is the radical Kracauer, the Weimar sensiblist beloved of contemporary German cinema and film critics and his antithetical other, the conservative Kracauer, the sociologist whose antipathy towards German visual culture sought to render it subservient to the narratives of literary theory.

In light of the republication and translation of works such as *The Mass Ornament*, argues Elsaesser, the usefulness of *From Caligari to Hitler* as a "critical sounding board" is a thing of the past.¹⁴¹ Following Witte's example, Elsaesser goes on to explain that the "post-War ideological suspicion which fell on émigré intellectuals in the United States" made Kracauer "play down" and in the end sever the connection between *From Caligari to Hitler* and the radical Weimar critical tradition from which it came.¹⁴² For Elsaesser, as Hitler and National Socialism had damaged

¹³⁹ Elsaesser, 1983, p. 18.

¹⁴⁰ Elsaesser, 1982, p. 16. Elsaesser discusses in detail the theme of "the double" in Elsaesser, 1982, pp. 17-19.

¹⁴¹ Elsaesser, 1987, p. 67.

¹⁴² Elsaesser, 1987, p. 67.

Kracauer's life by forcing him to leave his native country, so too had Kracauer in turn afflicted a comparable fate on his work and condemned it to suffer its own exile from its original intellectual context. This is not to say, stresses Elsaesser, that *From Caligari to Hitler* is not a "remarkable" book.¹⁴³ However, he argues, what makes it remarkable, the impact that it has had over the past decades on those "theorizing the relation of cinema to social history", is traceable to the remnants in the book of Kracauer's Weimar theory (which the American Kracauer tried his best to conceal). For example, explains Elsaesser:

[if] one were to replace 'Hitler' as the constantly implied referent of the argument in *From Caligari to Hitler*, one would find a very incisive analysis of bourgeois conceptions of narrative and subject-positions. This, I think, is one of the main reasons why the book has remained so convincing and almost unanswerable despite the manifest inadequacy if not absurdity of its apparent central thesis.¹⁴⁴

Elsaesser is not alone in reading Kracauer's American work as not just deliberately concealing its Weimar antecedents but also actively working to frustrate any possible theoretical coherency between his German and English texts. Inka Mülder-Bach in *Siegfried Kracauer—Grenzgänger zwischen Theorie and Literatur. Seine frühen Schriften 1913-1933* [Siegfried Kracauer – Crossing Borders Between Theory and Literature. His Early Work 1912 – 1933] also makes a key contribution to this idea of a critical schism in the narrative of Kracauer's work.¹⁴⁵

3.7 *Exile and the Broken Subject*

Mülder-Bach was a research student at Tübingen University, and had worked alongside Witte on Kracauer's *Nachlaß* at the *Deutschen Literaturarchiv* in Marbach. Her book, a revised version of her PhD, was published in 1985 and was the first book length study devoted solely to Kracauer. As indicated by its title, Mülder-

¹⁴³ Elsaesser, 1987, p. 67.

¹⁴⁴ Elsaesser, 1987, p. 84.

¹⁴⁵ Mülder-Bach, Inka, *Siegfried Kracauer, Grenzgänger zwischen Theorie and Literatur: seine frühen Schriften 1913-1933* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1985).

Bach's examination of Kracauer's work focuses entirely on his Weimar texts and provided at the time the fullest account of his work during this period. Mülder-Bach's text is accompanied by a lengthy catalogue of the Weimar period writings from the *Nachlaß*, and represents the first extensive bibliography of his work written in German. Whereas Witte focused on Kracauer's film work, for Mülder-Bach the pivotal work in this key period was Kracauer's investigation of Germany's new salaried employees, *Die Angestellten*.

This emphasis on Kracauer's sociology is distinctive to her work (like Jay her background was not in film studies) and her influence in this regard is different from that exerted by Koch and Hansen in our appreciation of Kracauer today. For example, David Frisby's pioneering English language work on the German sociologist, Georg Simmel uses her work on Kracauer as a guide to examining the relationship between his work and his followers (including Benjamin and Kracauer).¹⁴⁶ However, the greatest influence Mülder-Bach's work exerts on subsequent studies comes not from her foregrounding of Kracauer's sociology but in how she relates his Weimar period work to his English texts. Prefiguring Elsaesser's idea of there being two Kracauers (distinguished by geographical and social context), Mülder-Bach proposes a more profound division in Kracauer's intellectual biography. Unlike Elsaesser, who seems to suggest (like Witte) that Kracauer, the pragmatist, simply concealed his radical Weimar past so as to avoid making waves in the testy and paranoid political climate of post-War America, Mülder-Bach reads his change in stylistic register as indicative of a more personal psychological and existential crisis.

Though Mülder-Bach shares Witte's desire to demonstrate the radical nature of Kracauer's early work she does not attempt, like Witte, to read his later English language texts as a transformation of their critical concerns but interprets them as representing something completely different. For Mülder-Bach, Weimar Kracauer and New York Kracauer are two geographically, historically and philosophically distinct entities. As with Jay, Mülder-Bach utilizes Adorno's narrative of Kracauer's intellectual development, but instead of reading the trauma of exile as exasperating a

¹⁴⁶ Frisby, David, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT press, 1988), p. 285, n. 7.

pre-existing (but sublimated) desire for social acceptance (his persistent outsidership) she posits his enforced migration firmly as the decisive moment of its truncation. For Mülder-Bach, the work produced after his departure from Germany represents a negative counter to the potential of the work produced prior to his exile. There is, she argues, mirror symmetry to his corpus: the Weimar republic Kracauer's work is imbued with "a magic gaze" that is only present as a negative form (an absence) in New York.¹⁴⁷ For Mülder-Bach, the heterogeneous nature of the Weimar Republic makes it historically extraordinary, it represents a "realm of a life that has freed itself from its own time".¹⁴⁸

Somewhat more prosaically Adorno suggests that the mature Kracauer's ascetic disregard towards his own "verbal art" was prompted by his "revulsion over what had happened" in Germany during the war.¹⁴⁹ Both interpretations, argues Barnouw, deprive Kracauer of any meaningful agency and both imply that English is an inferior vehicle for philosophy. Kracauer, she suggests, prompted by Adorno's repeated exhortations to him that "*das Eigenste*" [the intellectually most intimate and authentic] could only be communicated in German, was well aware of the different set of challenges that a critical thinker working in any particular language faced.¹⁵⁰ He was also well aware, Barnouw demonstrates, of the practical necessity of removing language as a barrier in any given social or cultural context.¹⁵¹ To postulate, as Mülder-Bach does, "a profound break in Kracauer's work connected with the irreversible absence of his 'magic gaze' in exile", argues Barnouw, is possible "only because in her discussion of his Weimar texts she selects those which enable her to claim its presence".¹⁵²

Barnouw's criticism of Mülder-Bach echoes Elsaesser's criticism of *From Caligari to Hitler* and certainly in order to establish "homology" in the polarised divisions of Kracauer's work she narrativizes German history then personalizes it through

¹⁴⁷ Mülder-Bach, Inka, "Schlupflöcher. Die Diskontinuität des Kontinuierlichen im Werk Siegfried Kracauer", in Michael Kessler and Thomas Y. Levin (eds.), *Siegfried Kracauer. Neue Interpretationen* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 1990), pp. 249-266.

¹⁴⁸ Mülder-Bach, Inka, "History as Autobiography: The Last Things Before the Last." *New German Critique*, No. 54 (1991), p. 155.

¹⁴⁹ Adorno, 1991, p. 172.

¹⁵⁰ Barnouw, 1994, p. 93.

¹⁵¹ Barnouw, 1994, pp. 156 -157 and pp. 322-323 n. 41.

¹⁵² Barnouw, 1994, p. 330, n. 4.

Kracauer. As the forces and determinants that conspire to confound the “German Soul” are reflected (for Elsaesser) in Kracauer’s model of expressionist cinema, so for Mülder-Bach does Kracauer become the personification of a collective social and cultural trauma. For Mülder-Bach, all of Kracauer’s work is autobiographical, the conceptual changes and variation in terminology his texts exhibit over time are indicators of personal trauma and its recurrence, which in turn are extrapolated and mapped upon the tragic narrative of German-Jewish culture. The motifs that Mülder-Bach identifies with Kracauer’s visionary approach are, as Rosen argues in relation to *From Caligari to Hitler*, pregnant with historical intertextuality. Through an interpretation of these motifs Mülder-Bach traces not the failings of a German collective mentality vis-à-vis authoritarianism (as Kracauer supposedly does in *From Caligari to Hitler*) but modernity’s immanent dialectic of progress and destruction. As Elsaesser had accused Kracauer of personifying the German nation as a character from Weimar fantasy cinema only to return to that source for his own critique of the author so does Mülder-Bach’s Freudian interpretation of Kracauer start to resemble one of its doomed protagonists. As Mülder-Bach succeeded Witte in 1990 as editor of Suhrkamp’s *Kracauer Gesammelte Schriften*, so too did this image of Kracauer as the embodiment of what Hansen describes as a “violently fractured intellectual biography” supersede Witte’s more pragmatic portrayal of the author.¹⁵³ However, it did not do so without some modification. As demonstrated by Elsaesser’s NGC text, Mülder-Bach’s image of Kracauer as the (psychologically) broken subject was quickly appropriated and identified with the destabilized subject of cinema theory’s model of spectatorship.

Building upon the inroads made by the literary theory of the 1970s into the inadequacies of more prescriptive critical approaches (such as Psychoanalysis and Orthodox Marxism) to account for contemporary patterns of media consumption, the Cultural Studies approach of Stuart Hall, David Morley *et al.* advocated an idea of agency that increasingly foregrounded the idiosyncratic over any predetermined collective disposition.¹⁵⁴ From such a perspective, “[t]ext, apparatus, discourse, and

¹⁵³ Hansen, Miriam, “Introduction”, in Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality* [1960] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. xvi. Kracauer, Siegfried, *Schriften*, No. 5, Vols. 1 - 3, edited by Inka Mülder-Bach (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990).

¹⁵⁴ For example see: Hall, Stuart, “Encoding/decoding”, in Hall, Stuart, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis (eds.), *Culture, Media, Language. Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*

history, in sum”, explains Robert Stam, “are all in play and in motion. Neither text nor spectator is a static, pre-constituted entity; spectators shape and are shaped by the cinematic experience within an endless dialogical process”.¹⁵⁵ In this respect Kracauer’s image becomes a totem for what Elsaesser describes as “a specifically modern form of self-estrangement, which signalled not only the end of bourgeois notions of the individual, but also of its critiques in the name of the authentic self”.¹⁵⁶ In order to understand how these apparently antinomic approaches (the psychoanalytical and the Cultural Studies approach) became combined into a single image of Kracauer as the “exceptional”¹⁵⁷ subject of cinema theory and how this image subsequently became the conceptual epicentre of the Kracauer renaissance it is necessary (as Elsaesser suggests) to return to concrete examples.¹⁵⁸

1989 marked the 100th anniversary of Kracauer’s birth and to mark the occasion the *Deutschen Literaturarchivs* and the *Das Schiller-Nationalmuseum* (Marbach am Neckar) arranged an exhibition of Kracauer’s manuscripts. Organised and curated by Ingrid Belke and Irina Renz this display also included many photographs, which in turn were collated and published in a special edition of the archive’s journal.¹⁵⁹ The prize exhibit in this display, the image used for the front cover of the journal, was an official portrait photograph of Kracauer taken in 1930 [**Figure 1**] for inclusion in the social and professional directory, *Reichshandbuch der Deutschen Gesellschaft* [Empire Manual For German Society, the English equivalent would be A & C Black’s *Who’s Who* (1849 -)]. It shows the cultural editor of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, perched on the edge of his desk, gazing to the left of the camera.

The reason for its proliferation throughout the short lived Kracauer renaissance, is not that it shows a young optimistic, engaged, version of the dusty old academician or that there are no other images of him from that time but because it is damaged. The glass plate upon which the image appears has been shattered. A large crack

[1980] (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 128 – 138 and Morley, David, “Texts, readers, subjects”, in Hall, Hobson, Lowe and Willis (eds.), 1996, pp. 163 – 176.

¹⁵⁵ Stam, Robert, *Film Theory: an Introduction* (Oxford & Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2000), p. 231.

¹⁵⁶ Elsaesser, 1987, p. 89.

¹⁵⁷ Elsaesser, 1987, p. 89.

¹⁵⁸ Elsaesser, 1982, p. 16.

¹⁵⁹ Belke, Ingrid and Irina Renz, (eds.), “Siegfried Kracauer 1889-1966”, *Marbacher Magazin* (Deutsche Schillergesellschaft), No. 47 (1988).

radiates from bottom to top, forking its way across the picture plane. Like Alexander Gardner's defective portrait of Abraham Lincoln taken shortly before his assassination, this accidental damage has subsequently garnered symbolic significance.¹⁶⁰ There is a fissure that slices through the image of Kracauer's eye like Buñuel's razor in *Un Chien Andalou* (Kracauer's "primacy of the optic" - *sous rature* [under erasure])¹⁶¹ There is also a missing fragment that forms an ominous black

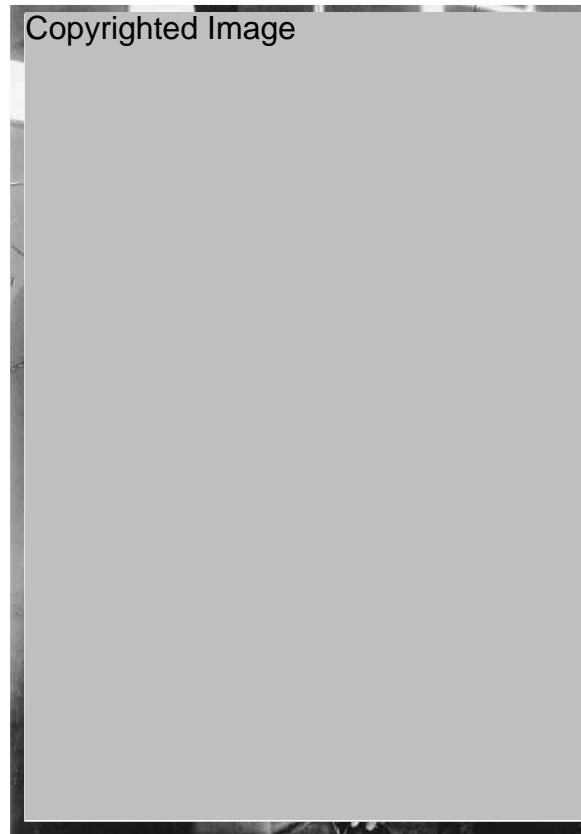


Figure 1. *Siegfried Kracauer* (1930)

shape above his head. Like the shadow of some diabolic contraption - a cross between Edgar Allan Poe's pendulum and the axe yielded by the homicidal Ivan the Terrible (Conrad Veidt) in Paul Leni's *Waxworks* [*Das Wachsfigurenkabinett*, 1924],

¹⁶⁰ For Gardner's portraits of Lincoln see, Katz, D. Mark, *Witness to an Era: the life and photographs of Alexander Gardner: the civil war, Lincoln, and the West* (New York: Viking, 1991), pp. 105 - 140

¹⁶¹ *An Andalusian Dog* [French: *Un Chien Andalou*], directed by Luis Buñuel (France: Buñuel, 1929). The "primacy of the optic" is from Adorno, 1991, p.163. For an introduction to Martin Heidegger's idea of "sous rature" and its subsequent development by Jacques Derrida see, Spivak's "Translator's Preface" in Jacques Derrida, *On Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. ix – lxxxix.

it is a portent of a fate to come.¹⁶² Whether as a visual metaphor for Kracauer's or Germany's "violently fractured intellectual biography",¹⁶³ as an ideogram for what David Bordwell has deemed cinema theory's "modernity thesis",¹⁶⁴ or as an icon for Weimar visual culture –this image has become a common addition to many recent publications on Kracauer.¹⁶⁵ Key to understanding why is to look at how it was initially contextualized and disseminated.

After its installation in Marbach, the exhibition of items from Kracauer's *Nachlaß* travelled to Frankfurt and then to Berlin. Before it was dismantled and returned to the archive, Andreas Huyssen (then editor of *New German Critique*) and Mark M. Anderson (like Huyssen based at Columbia University) arranged for the exhibition to make a "symbolic journey" to New York "where Kracauer had found refuge from National Socialism in 1941".¹⁶⁶ To accompany the exhibition, which was installed in the library of the Goethe-Institut New York in 1990, Huyssen and Anderson organized an academic symposium at New York University's Deutsches Haus in Greenwich Village. This event was called "Siegfried Kracauer: The Critic in Exile" and the keynote address was provided by a ninety year old Lowenthal whose personal reminiscences were edited together and included in a special edition of *New German Critique* (NGC) dedicated to the proceedings of the symposium. This edition, published in the Autumn of 1991, was considered by its editors (Huyssen and Anderson) as "the first comprehensive view in English of Kracauer's work" and "when "taken as a whole", they explain, it covers "virtually all periods and subjects in Kracauer's wide-ranging career".¹⁶⁷ Though the publication does exhibit a definite

¹⁶² See Kracauer, Siegfried, *From Caligari to Hitler: a psychological history of the German film* [1947], revised edition edited by Leonardo Quaresima (New York: Princeton University Press, 2004), Illustration No. 8. *Waxworks* [German: Das Wachsfigurenkabinett], directed by Paul Leni (Leo Birinsk) (Germany: Universum Film (UFA), 1924).

¹⁶³ Hansen, 1997, p. xvi.

¹⁶⁴ Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 139 – 148. For a critique of Bordwell's criticism of Cinema Theory see, Singer, Ben, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 101 – 130.

¹⁶⁵ For examples of the use of the "cracked portrait" of Kracauer see: Richter, Gerhard, *Thought-images: Frankfurt School Writers' Reflections from Damaged Life* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2007); Traverso, Enzo, *Siegfried Kracauer: Itinéraire d'un intellectuel nomade* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2006) ; *New Formations* (Special issue on Siegfried Kracauer), edited by Jan Campbell, No. 61 (2007).

¹⁶⁶ Anderson, Mark M. and Andreas Huyssen, "Introduction", *New German Critique*, No. 54 (1991), p. 3.

¹⁶⁷ Anderson and Huyssen, 1991, p. 4.

variety in relation to the subjects discussed such variation is not evident in the critical approaches exercised by its contributors. With the possible exception of Karsten Witte's paper on Kracauer's career as a literary critic for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, (which had been presented previously at a symposium at Tübingen University) which depicts the Frankfurter as a sober political agent, all of the texts included work to cultivate the notion of, what Patrice Petro terms, an "epistemological shift" in Kracauer's work caused by the trauma of exile.¹⁶⁸

In her symposium article Hansen (now a permanent member of NGC's editorial board) makes the identification of exile and Kracauer's "self-definition as an intellectual" the explicit intent of her overview of Kracauer's early writings.¹⁶⁹ The idea of a "double homelessness" that she espouses in her study, a combination of psychological and social outsidership first intimated by Jay as "extraterritoriality", is proposed as being emblematic of Kracauer's work as a whole.¹⁷⁰ As well as "restoring Kracauer's complexity as an intellectual figure", argues Hansen, an historical idea of exile also elucidates:

the relevance of Kracauer's early writings for current debates. For in their very historicity, their contradictions and ambivalences, they raise questions that touch on the dilemmas of mass culture in a postmodern age.¹⁷¹

For Hansen, the cracked photograph of Kracauer pervades this edition of NGC operates as a "*Denkbild*" – a thought-image. This concept, one she adopts from Adorno and Benjamin, is a form of philosophical snapshot, a visual encoding of thought that operates as a form of critical epigram. Such a "condensed" and "poetic" visual form of philosophy, suggests Gerhard Richter, should be understood as, "conceptual engagements with the aesthetic and as aesthetic engagements with the conceptual, hovering between philosophical critique and aesthetic production".¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Petro, Patrice, "Kracauer's Epistemological Shift", *New German Critique*, No. 54 (1991), pp. 127 – 138.

¹⁶⁹ Hansen, Miriam, "Decentric Perspectives: Kracauer's Early Writings on Film and Mass Culture", *New German Critique*, No. 54 (1991), p. 47.

¹⁷⁰ Hansen, 1991, p. 48.

¹⁷¹ Hansen, 1991, p. 48.

¹⁷² Richter, 2007, p. 2. I discuss the concept of *Denkbild* in more detail in Chapter 9 of this study.

Denkbild of Kracauer's photograph, proposes Hansen, "implies the vision of a modernity whose spell as progress is broken, whose disintegrated elements have become available for an emancipatory practice."¹⁷³

In conjunction with Hansen's text, Koch contributes an essay on Kracauer's conception of history that emphasises the role of exile and memory on his philosophical practice. Koch portrays Kracauer as an intellectual who never knew the "delights of ordinariness" and promotes a reading of his English language texts as a "historicophilosophical attempt to redeem historiography from the philosophy of history", in which paradoxically history plays "only a marginal role".¹⁷⁴ In Koch's view, referencing Adorno's adage that "to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric",¹⁷⁵ Kracauer's theory for a redemption of physical reality (the subtitle of *Theory of Film*) represents a work of theory that has reached its "intrinsic limits".¹⁷⁶ How can film (or any art form) redeem a reality that is beyond any form of aesthetic representation? Any attempt to do so would render the absolutely abhorrent into an object of bourgeois consumption.¹⁷⁷ "Kracauer's writings only address the experiences of mass annihilation marginally", writes Koch, "but one cannot conclude from this that the isolated remarks and considerations should be treated as negligible".¹⁷⁸ For Koch, the strategy adopted by Kracauer in *Theory of Film* and his other American works, is one of survival, not just in relation to the practical concerns of writing in a politically charged social context (Witte) but also of personal psychological and emotional survival of someone who has experienced at first hand the horrors of National Socialism and exile.

Heide Schlüpmann also addresses and develops this idea of Kracauer's intellectual trajectory being informed by the contradictory forces at work in his theory of film. "His theory of film has two bases", writes Schlüpmann, "one apparent, the other concealed: it reflects on film, and it reflects (on) the horror of National Socialism

¹⁷³ Hansen, 1991, p. 76.

¹⁷⁴ Koch, Gertrud. "Not Yet Accepted Anywhere": Exile, Memory, and Image in Kracauer's Conception of History", translated by Jeremy Gaines, *New German Critique*, No. 54 (1991), p. 96.

¹⁷⁵ Adorno, Theodor, "An Essay on Cultural Criticism and Society" in *Prisms* (Cambridge, Mas. & London: MIT Press, 1967), p. 34.

¹⁷⁶ Koch, 1991, p. 109.

¹⁷⁷ For a critique of cinema's unwitting anesthetisation of the abhorrent see, Daney, Serge, "Le travelling de Kapo", *Trafic*, No. 4, (Autumn 1992), p. 15.

¹⁷⁸ Koch, 1991, p. 109.

mirrored in film”.¹⁷⁹ His survival instinct, his “hope” for the continuation of life, she argues, competes with a cultural theory that seeks to negate social hierarchies founded on bourgeois notions of subjectivity that uses film to collapse the difference between people and things.¹⁸⁰ For Schlüpmann, Weimar Kracauer’s emancipatory vision for film as an active social agent, its ability to circumscribe social hierarchies through the reproduction of nature as a mosaic of interchangeable phenomena, is rendered impotent when faced with its dialectical other, the dehumanisation of Nazi social engineering. It is Kracauer’s survival instinct, she concludes, that “prevents *Theory of Film* from reaching a conclusion that would confirm film as the mirror of a world devoid of people”.¹⁸¹

If Koch’s and Schlüpmann’s contributions address the immanent dialectic of Kracauer’s early work on film (the “contradictions and ambivalences” proposed by Hansen in her essay), then Inka Mülder-Bach and Patrice Petro in their texts focus on the “historicity” of his late and unfinished theory of historiography in order to explore how Kracauer’s historical texts can be utilized as guides for what Hansen deems, “the dilemmas of mass culture in a postmodern age”.¹⁸² What is interesting about Mülder-Bach’s article, “History as Autobiography”, in this context, is not (as its title indicates) her repeated conflation on the theoretical and biographical but how she incorporates Kracauer’s late work, *History: the last thing before the last*, into the antagonistic symmetry of her previous studies of his corpus.¹⁸³ For Mülder-Bach, Kracauer’s theory of history is the philosophical transformation of a sociological concept of “extraterritoriality” into a temporal one. Extraterritoriality, argues Mülder-Bach, “means not only a geographic no-mans-land but also and above all a historical one”.¹⁸⁴ As a consequence, explains Mülder-Bach, “Kracauer’s historian proves by example” that the “‘inescapability’ of one’s own time is only ‘seeming’”,

¹⁷⁹ Schlüpmann, Heide, “The Subject of Survival: On Kracauer’s Theory of Film”, *New German Critique*, No. 54 (1991), p. 112.

¹⁸⁰ Schlüpmann, 1991, p. 114.

¹⁸¹ Schlüpmann, 1991, p. 125.

¹⁸² Hansen, 1991, p. 48.

¹⁸³ Mülder-Bach, Inka. “History as Autobiography: The Last Things Before the Last.” *New German Critique*, No. 54 (Autumn 1991), pp. 139-158.

¹⁸⁴ Mülder-Bach, 1991, p. 155.

that people do not entirely “belong” to their period.¹⁸⁵ The “nonhomogeneous structure” of Weimar culture that Kracauer mapped in *Die Angestellten*, for Mülder-Bach, becomes the model for understanding our historical reality. Whereas Weimar society was presented by Kracauer as the product of the cultural transposition of the “middle” and “periphery” classes, so (urges Mülder-Bach), does postmodernity’s destabilization of concepts such as “synchronicity” and “linearity” rehearse a comparable dialectical sublation of conventional notions of past and present.¹⁸⁶ “On his [Kracauer’s] journey’s through the discontinuous times and heterogeneous spaces of the historical universe”, concludes Mülder-Bach, “there are always smugglers’ paths that lead into the open, coincidences that point to an exit, doors through which the improbable enters”.¹⁸⁷ Such a path allows Mülder-Bach to connect the work of early Kracauer with that of late Kracauer and thus circumvent (and therefore leave intact) her negative interpretation of Kracauer’s English language work on film.

3.8 *The Two Kracauers Problem*

This idea of Kracauer’s late work being the dialectical sublation of the previous positive and negative phases of his work is reiterated and developed from an English language perspective by Patrice Petro in her exposition of the previously mentioned idea of an epistemological shift in his work. For Petro, despite the existence of counter arguments (such as Witte’s, who defends the position that “Kracauer’s writings exhibit a continuity of concerns”), there is a prevailing consensus in contemporary film studies around the notion that there are “two Kracauers”, “two successive and autonomous theories of cinema in the corpus of his film theory”.¹⁸⁸ This view, she explains:

assumes that the inconsistencies in Kracauer’s writings constitute overwhelming evidence of a schism or epistemological shift in his thinking about film – a shift that separates the early,

¹⁸⁵ Mülder-Bach, 1991, p. 155. Mülder-Bach’s quotation is from, Kracauer, Siegfried, *History. The Last Things Before the Last*, completed after the death of the author by Paul Oskar Kristeller (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1995), p. 65.

¹⁸⁶ Mülder-Bach, 1991, p. 152.

¹⁸⁷ Mülder-Bach, 1991, p. 155.

¹⁸⁸ Petro, 1991, p. 131.

improvisational essays of the 1920s from the later, academically imposing, studies of the post-War period.¹⁸⁹

In the context of English language film studies, argues Petro, the concept of an “epistemological shift” has an established pedigree. For example, David Bordwell’s 1974 essay in *Screen*, “Eisenstein’s Epistemological Shift”, argues that Eisenstein’s writings on film aesthetics demonstrate a clear change in theoretical influences and concerns.¹⁹⁰ “In Bordwell’s view,” states Petro; “Eisenstein’s later writings evidence a shift toward political conformity as well as a move from a practical engagement with film to a stance of isolated self-absorption”.¹⁹¹ For Petro, Elsaesser’s critical assessment of Kracauer’s late work operates in a “remarkably similar” way to Bordwell’s, in that it is reliant on “assumptions about intellectual responses to Stalinism and to communism in the cold war era”.¹⁹² The key to understanding the critical sustainability of such an assumption, suggests Petro, is to look at the “wider theoretical lineage” of the concept of the epistemological shift.¹⁹³

The concept (in this context), argues Petro, has a dual origin. Firstly it can be traced to Althusser’s structuralist rereading of Marx, *Pour Marx* [For Marx, 1965] with its bifurcation of Marx’s work into a young, humanist phase and a mature, scientific phase.¹⁹⁴ For Petro, Althusser’s concept of an epistemological shift in Marx, while “clearly an intellectual response to Stalinism and its cult of personality also finds parallels in assessments of other Marxist thinkers”.¹⁹⁵ A notable precursor in this respect is the critical convention of splitting the intellectual development of the Hungarian philosopher and literary historian Georg Lukács into romantic anti-capitalist and orthodox Marxist stages.¹⁹⁶ Secondly, argues Petro, the idea of a biographical / intellectual schism is apparent in early manifestations of “auteur

¹⁸⁹ Petro, 1991, p. 131.

¹⁹⁰ Bordwell, David, “Eisenstein’s Epistemological Shift”, *Screen*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (1974-5), pp. 32-46.

¹⁹¹ Petro, 1991, p. 132.

¹⁹² Petro, 1991, p. 133.

¹⁹³ Petro, 1991, p. 133.

¹⁹⁴ Althusser, Louis, *For Marx*, translated by Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1977). It is interesting to note that Brewster was the editor of *Screen* at the time of Bordwell’s Eisenstein essay.

¹⁹⁵ Petro, 1991, p. 133.

¹⁹⁶ For example, Arato, Andrew and Paul Breines, *The Young Lukács and the Origins of Western Marxism* (New York: Seabury, 1979). See also, Petro, Patrice. “From Lukács to Kracauer and beyond: Social Film Histories and the German Cinema”, *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 22. No. 3. (Spring 1983), pp. 47-70.

criticism”, “which stresses the negative impact of American culture on various European directors’ careers”, for example the German filmmaker Fritz Lang.¹⁹⁷ Considered as “both a critical response to Stalinism and an uncritical embrace of American culture”, the idea of a shift in Kracauer's work, she suggests, can therefore be read as a composite of “both the Marxist critique and the *auteurist* legacy” in the academic discipline of Film Studies.¹⁹⁸ With this shift of emphasis from Kracauer’s personal narrative on to that of narrative development of film studies as an academic discipline Petro does not deny that there is a definite change in Kracauer’s approach after 1941, just that the idea of a schism is equally a product of third party interpretation as it is of individual psychological reaction. There is, she states, “some question of whether we must speak of Kracauer’s epistemological shift, or rather, of an epistemological shift in Kracauer criticism”.¹⁹⁹

What makes Petro’s perspective significant in the context of this review is how it appropriates the idea of the “two Kracaues”. For Petro, the “two Kracaues” trope is a product of Film Studies’ response to the appearance of English translations of his early work and is evidence, through its recourse to Althusser and auteur theory, of the “Francophile” character of the discipline.²⁰⁰ Further proof of this epistemological bias, she argues, is apparent in how the “revelation” (Elsaesser) of his Weimar texts, with their “critique of totality and concern for history” are framed in the context of “Baudrillard and Foucault”.²⁰¹ It is ironic, Petro states:

that the re-evaluation of Kracauer’s career has involved elaborate appeals to the authority of French traditions in criticism and theory, and that Kracauer’s later work continues to be criticized when it seems most overtly or most resolutely ‘German’.²⁰²

Petro’s point of reference here is Andrew’s (and in turn Harcourt’s and Kael’s) interpretation of “the formidable and formidably closed system represented by

¹⁹⁷ Petro, 1991, p. 133.

¹⁹⁸ Petro, 1991, p. 134.

¹⁹⁹ Petro, 1991, p. 132.

²⁰⁰ Petro, 1991, p. 128.

²⁰¹ Petro, 1991, p. 135.

²⁰² Petro, 1991, pp. 135 -1 36.

Kracauer's ponderously Teutonic thought".²⁰³ Paradoxically, she argues, in functioning as a caricature, American Kracauer represents Film Studies' cultural resistance to German theory. The proliferation in Film Studies' of the "two Kracauers" trope, concludes Petro, with its retention of Andrew's "pejorative assessment" of Kracauer,²⁰⁴ is therefore not just the individual "reflection of a Francophile sentiment", but indicative of the specific cultural dynamic that informs the "intellectual and historical origins of contemporary film theory".²⁰⁵ No "attentive" reader of film theory since the 1960s, states Petro:

would fail to miss its distinctly French orientation. From auteurism to post-structuralism, French traditions of thought have had the most significant influence on the development of Film Studies as an academic discipline, both in the United States and in Britain. To be sure, German theory has been enlisted along the way to expand the domain of a critical film theory. But it is Freud as read through Lacan, or Marx through Althusser, that has set the terms for the reception of German film theory. Even initial attempts to restore a phenomenological dimension to film study appealed to existential phenomenology rather than to critical theory, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre rather than Kracauer or Benjamin, in order to challenge the analytic and overtly scientific approach of early film structuralism and semiotics.²⁰⁶

For Petro, with no comprehension of German theoretical traditions, it is of no surprise that those involved with the development and dissemination of Anglo-American film theory have difficulty in understanding the connection between Kracauer's final work and Benjamin's seminal collection of essays on art, history and culture, *Illuminations*.²⁰⁷ It is also of no surprise, she adds, that those who

²⁰³ Petro, 1991, p. 128.

²⁰⁴ Petro, 1991, p. 131.

²⁰⁵ Petro, 1991, p. 128.

²⁰⁶ Petro, 1991, p. 128. Kracauer critiques Sartre's work in, Kracauer, Siegfried, "Consciousness, Free and Spontaneous. The Psychology of Imagination, by J-P. Sartre", *Saturday Review of Literature*, Vol. 31, No. 26 (26th June 1948), pp. 22 – 23. The French approach to phenomenology that Petro refers to in relation to film studies is demonstrated in, Andrew, J. Dudley, "The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory", Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press, 1985), pp. 625-632.

²⁰⁷ Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn [1968] (London: Fontana Press, 1992).

promote the idea of Kracauer's writings exhibiting a turn away from dialectic thinking towards political conservatism cannot see "any relationship" between *From Caligari to Hitler* and Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.²⁰⁸

As previously stated, exile plays a significant role in the majority of texts in this special edition of NGC and though Petro looks to de-emphasise the narrative aspects of enforced emigration through a criticism of approaches (such as Adorno's) that view Kracauer's "ideas as mere reflections of his time", it still also plays a pivotal conceptual role in her analysis.²⁰⁹ Unlike Mülder-Bach's Freudian interpretation that renders Kracauer a passive victim that sublimates his "fear of inescapability"²¹⁰ into a drive to conform, Petro utilizes the work of the Palestinian–American literary theorist Edward Said (who was at Columbia at the time of the symposium) to reconfigure Kracauer's experience of exile into a more "enabling" process.²¹¹

Petro looks to Said's work on the German Jewish literary historian Erich Auerbach, a friend of Kracauer's who spent the war in Istanbul where he wrote his most influential work, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946).²¹² Auerbach's exile in the "Orient", argues Said, allowed him to "convert his sense of pain and alienation into a work of literary criticism whose insights derive not simply from the culture it describes [European] but also and more crucially, from a necessary and agonizing distance from it".²¹³ The same, suggests Petro, can be said for Kracauer whose own exile texts (*From Caligari to Hitler* and *Theory of Film*) share not only Auerbach's "commitment to a realist aesthetic" but also exhibit "the similar effects" of their places of refuge.²¹⁴ "If Istanbul was a particularly intense form of exile for a literary critic like Auerbach", comments Petro, "so too, was the United States a deeply resonant experience for a film theorist like Kracauer".²¹⁵ American cinema, explains Petro, represented "not merely an alternative to European

²⁰⁸ Petro, 1991, p. 129.

²⁰⁹ Petro, 1991, p. 137.

²¹⁰ Mülder-Bach, 1991, p. 155.

²¹¹ Petro, 1991, p. 130.

²¹² See Auerbach, Erich and Siegfried Kracauer, "Neun Briefe 1951 – 1957", in Barck, Karlheinz and Martin Tremml (eds.), *Erich Auerbach: Geschichte und Aktualität eines europäischen Philologen* (Berlin: Kadmos, 2007), pp. 483 – 488.

²¹³ Quoted in Petro, 1991, p. 130.

²¹⁴ Petro, 1991, p. 130.

²¹⁵ Petro, 1991, p. 131.

filmmaking but also the very ethos of consumer capitalism that threatened to overtake and subsume other national traditions”.²¹⁶

In the context of NGC’s previous Kracauer publications and its work on Weimar cinema theory, Petro’s espousal of a mode of exile that is not passive but active (“enabling”) marks a significant development. As well as working to accentuate the machinations of cultural and philosophical homogeneity from a position that “transcends national boundaries”, this enabled mode of exile explicated by Petro clearly asserts itself as a model for the reconfiguration of German theory and Film Studies that goes beyond Elsaesser’s more modest claims for a renewed approach to national cinema. “When read separately”, suggests Petro, *From Caligari to Hitler* and *Theory of Film* “tend to suggest a one-dimensional, one-sided and impoverished account of the relationship between institutional constraints and perceptual possibilities in the cinema and in history”.²¹⁷ However, “[t]aken together”, she argues, they “constitute a complex dialectical view of the cinema such as one finds theorised in his early writings”.²¹⁸ Kracauer’s late work, *History*, as Mülder-Bach has argued, forces us to reconsider their relationship, not just to each but also in relation to the early and mature phases of his work. For Petro, *History* is the dialectical synthesis of immanent antagonisms that inform Kracauer’s early radicalism. Kracauer distilled these antithetic tendencies in his exile work with a view to their dialectical subsumption in *History*. This personal intellectual strategy, argues Petro, is analogous to film theory’s division of its French and German (aesthetic and social) traditions (what Elsaesser identifies as the bifurcation of film and cultural theory). As with Kracauer’s approach, concludes Petro, so can these currently antagonistic (national) tendencies be dialectically synthesised in the concept an extraterritorial cinema theory.

3.9 *Revealing the Hidden Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer*

Kracauer’s *History: the last things before the last*, edited by the Renaissance scholar (Kracauer’s friend and colleague) Paul Oskar Kristeller, was originally published in

²¹⁶ Petro, 1991, p. 131.

²¹⁷ Petro, 1991, p. 138.

²¹⁸ Petro, 1991, p. 138.

1969, three years after Kracauer's death. It was published in Germany (translated by Witte) in 1971 as part of the first instalment of Suhrkamp's Kracauer *Schriften*. With the renewed interest in his work initiated by the events organized to commemorate his centenary a paperback edition was printed in 1994 with a new preface by Kristeller. In this text, Kristeller applauds the work of the archive in Marbach for arranging the touring exhibition of Kracauer's *Nachlaß* and the initiative of Anderson and Huyssen to bring it to Columbia (where Kristeller was based). He also mentions the bibliography of Kracauer's work by Thomas Levin, the full version of which was published by the Schiller Museum in Marbach in 1989, and the special issue of NGC (1991).²¹⁹ To this overview of recent activity Kristeller adds the following qualification:

While I am pleased with the rediscovery of Kracauer by a new generation of scholars, I see a series of problems in their attempts to adjust the thinking, writing, and character of Kracauer to their own theories. Especially dismaying to this new generation of scholars is the notion that Kracauer adopted some of his ideas from outside the Frankfurt School. His last work showed a particularly clear divergence from the sociological approach of the Frankfurt School.²²⁰

The two texts that Kristeller picks out as indicative of this adjustment are Koch's article of exile and memory in Kracauer's late work and Mülder-Bach's autobiographical interpretation of *History*. Neither of these texts, complains Kristeller:

summarize the book nor indicate that its content fundamentally differs from his earlier writings. Their footnotes cite only books and articles unknown to Kracauer and refer to Kracauer's earlier books as if the book on history were in complete agreement with them. They also fail to indicate that Kracauer, in the footnotes and bibliography of this book, cites for the most part historical,

²¹⁹ Levin, Thomas. Y. *Siegfried Kracauer: Eine Bibliographie seiner Schriften* (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1989)

²²⁰ Kristeller, Paul Oskar, "Preface" in Kracauer, 1995, p. viii.

philological, and philosophical sources, never mentions his earlier writings, and very seldom refers to the sociologists that predominate in his earlier work. And worst of all, they imply and even state that history was not his major concern.²²¹

Koch addresses the relationship between exile and memory and why Kracauer sought to break with his past in her monograph on Kracauer published in 1996. In *Kracauer zur Einführung* [*Kracauer: an Introduction*, 2000],²²² Koch fashions the idea of an epistemological shift into a notion of a “dual structure of knowledge” (contemplation / interpretation, passive / active) that from childhood informed his interest in “reading the world of objects contemplated as a picture”.²²³ Koch (like Adorno) traces this notion back to his childhood experiences of living simultaneously in two households, that of his father and that of his uncle (his father’s brother). For Koch, this domestic duplication formulated in Kracauer a sense of belonging to two realities that in turn affected how he intellectually approached the adult world. This idea of a duality in Kracauer’s critical consciousness, though affording Kracauer an element of agency, leaves intact an image of Kracauer being fundamentally estranged from any form of reality (physical, social etc.) and again codifies his notion of extraterritoriality existentially.

Hansen also explores the concept of a duality in Kracauer’s work in different but equally significant ways in her introduction to *Theory of Film* that examines the early manuscript drafts for his study of the cinematic. In Hansen’s text, initially an article published in 1993, the idea of a trauma induced epistemological shift and Koch’s reading of Kracauer’s work as a “constitutive surface [...] which itself has no center” is combined in the concept of the “palimpsest”.²²⁴ A palimpsest is a manuscript on which the original writing has been effaced to make room for new writing but of which traces of the previous script remain.²²⁵ In her introduction, Hansen presents reproductions of pages of various manuscripts from different phases of Kracauer’s

²²¹ Kracauer, 1995, p. ix.

²²² Koch, Gertrud, *Kracauer zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 1996).

²²³ Koch, Gertrud, *Siegfried Kracauer: An Introduction*, translated by Jeremy Gaines (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 6.

²²⁴ Hansen, 1997, p. xxxv.

²²⁵ For an overview of the adoption of the palimpsest as a critical trope see, Dillon, Sarah, *The Palimpsest: literature, criticism, theory* (London: Continuum, 2007).

development of his “book on film aesthetics”, ranging from 1940 to 1949.²²⁶ From the earliest notes and drafts she highlights critical themes and motifs that are prominent concerns in his earlier Weimar reviews and then charts their erasure from the subsequent versions of the manuscript.

Recently in cultural anthropology, in particular post-colonial studies, the idea of the palimpsest has become a key concept for understanding how the past relates to contemporary social relations.²²⁷ As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin explain:

The concept of the palimpsest is a useful way of understanding the developing complexity of culture, as previous 'inscriptions' are erased and overwritten, yet remain as traces within present consciousness. This confirms the dynamic, contestatory and dialogic nature of linguistic, geographic, and cultural space as it emerges in post-colonial experience.²²⁸

Though traceable back to Baudelaire and the Romantic prose of the 19th century, this particular model of dynamic exchange between memory and perception is one that to an extent is derived from Freud’s development of the palimpsest in an essay from 1925, “The Mystic Writing Pad”.²²⁹ This short text came to the attention of a wider scholarly audience through the work of French Algerian philosopher Jacques Derrida who argued that Freud’s work provided a model for a fluid conception of intertextuality in which the axiom of authorial autonomy is called into question. For Derrida, Freud’s version of the palimpsest, as an interplay between potentially infinite layers of discourse, was itself discursive proof of the significant role of language, and in particular writing, in shaping how we experience the world. From here, Derrida went on to argue that our consideration of being is itself one mediated

²²⁶ Hansen, 1997, p. xiv.

²²⁷ For a critique of the current vogue for memory studies in anthropology see, Berliner, David C., “The Abuses of Memory: Reflections on the Memory Boom in Anthropology”, *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 1 (Winter 2005), pp. 197-211.

²²⁸ Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, ‘Palimpsest’, in *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 176.

²²⁹ For a detailed analysis of Freud’s metaphor see, Draaisma, Douwe, *Metaphors of Memory. A history of ideas about the mind*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 7 – 23.

through the act of writing.²³⁰ Before her article on *Theory of Film*, Hansen had already argued for a correlation between Derrida's and Kracauer's reading of the social environment²³¹ and through the presentation of *Theory of Film* as a palimpsest she promotes a reading of the text as damaged surface (like the cracked photograph of Kracauer) through whose fractures and gaps "earlier layers" are now partially visible.²³² As it appears today, argues Hansen, *Theory of Film* is still "fully worth reading and fully relevant to a material aesthetics of cinema today", however it is the "virtual"²³³ first version that "furnishes a bridge" to his Weimar writings.²³⁴ Hansen's preference for this "virtual" version of the text is clear and her introduction works like an archaeological guide that seeks to shift the reader's focus past the "post-apocalyptic landscape" of the text's surface towards the remnants of its radical precursor hidden below.²³⁵ Hansen presents this first *Theory of Film*, this European version as the swan song of Weimar culture, its late work in which (what Schlüpmann calls) his "radical love of cinema"²³⁶ coexists with the ominous shadow of the impending Holocaust. "The eschatological urgency of his early essays", writes Hansen, "gives way to a different temporality: film is no longer the medium of self reflecting, self-sublating, self-destructing modernity as the vanishing point of history but rather figures as the episteme of a postmodern, post metaphysical, post anthropocentric universe of death".²³⁷

Karsten Witte died in 1995, the same year that Thomas Levin published his English language translation of Kracauer's collection of Weimar essays, *The Mass Ornament*.²³⁸ NGC's special issue on "Nazi Cinema", published in 1998 acts as a commemorative issue for the critic and included an article by him as well as a series of obituaries by among others Rentschler and Hansen. NGC continued to explore issues related to New German Cinema and Weimar visual culture in the period after

²³⁰ Derrida, Jacques. "Freud and the Scene of Writing," translated by Alan Bass, in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 196-231.

²³¹ Hansen, Miriam, "Mass Culture as Hieroglyphic Writing: Adorno, Derrida, Kracauer", *New German Critique*, No. 56 (1992), pp. 43-71.

²³² Hansen, 1997, p. xxi.

²³³ Hansen, 1997, p. xvi.

²³⁴ Hansen, 1997, p. xxiv.

²³⁵ Hansen, 1997, p. xxiv.

²³⁶ Quoted in Hansen, 1997, p. xiii.

²³⁷ Hansen, 1997, p. xvi.

²³⁸ Kracauer, Siegfried, *The Mass Ornament. Weimar essays*, translated and edited by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard U.P., 1995b).

Witte's death, though contributions on Kracauer are on the whole absent. This is not to say that interest in his work in English language studies was starting to wane. The second half of the decade marks a period in which work on Kracauer starts to be produced by critics unconnected with Witte and his associates and outside of the American English – German critical dichotomy articulated in the pages of NGC.²³⁹ However, regardless of their approach, all of these texts during this period focused exclusively on Kracauer's Weimar period, presenting the German critic as a distinct historical entity set apart from the American author of the same name. An English translation by Quintin Hoare of *Die Angestellten* was published in 1997 as *The Salaried Masses* (with an introduction by Müllder-Bach),²⁴⁰ and the entry on Kracauer in the British Film Institutes' *Companion to German Film* (1999), written by Elsaesser, mentions the "frequently criticised" English language texts only briefly and focuses instead on Kracauer as "one of Weimar Germany's major film critics".²⁴¹

As the influence of cultural studies was broadening the remit of film theory into cinema theory, so by 2000 was Kracauer's reputation as a film theorist becoming augmented into that of a more comprehensive cultural critic. In books such as Janet Ward's, *Weimar Surfaces* (2001) and in articles by Courtney Federle and Jerry Zaslove, his film theory, when mentioned, is interpreted as being part of a larger cultural philosophy with the cinema afforded no exceptional status amidst the myriad

²³⁹ For example: Aitken, Ian, "Distraction and Redemption: Kracauer, Surrealism and Phenomenology", *Screen*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (1998), pp. 124 – 140; Mack, Michael, "Literature and Theory: Siegfried Kracauer's Law, Walter Benjamin's Allegory and G.K. Chesterton's The Innocence of Father Brown", *Orbis Litterarum*, No. 54 (1999), pp. 399-423; Richter, Gerhard. "Siegfried Kracauer and the Folds of Friendship", *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (1997), pp. 233 – 241; Staubmann, Helmut M., "The Ornament Form of the Iron Cage: An Aesthetic Representation of Modern Society?" *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 10, No.4 (1997), pp. 591 – 607; Dolgenos, Peter, "The Star on C. A. Ratwang's door", *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1997). pp. 68 – 75; Wigoder, Meir, "A Family Album: Photography versus Memory in Siegfried Kracauer's Writings on Photography", *Assaph*, No. 3 (1998), pp. 179 – 195. Examples of non-English/German studies: Reeh, Henrik, *Storbyens Ornamenter. Siegfried Kracauer Og Den Moderne Bykultur* (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 1991) and Traverso, Enzo, *Siegfried Kracauer: itinerario de un intelectual nómada* (Paris: Ed. La Découverte, 1994)

²⁴⁰ Kracauer, Siegfried, *The Salaried Masses. Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, translated by Quintin Hoare (London and New York: Verso, 1998).

²⁴¹ Elsaesser, Thomas and Michael Wedel, *The BFI Companion to German Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), p. 153.

other forms of Weimar visual culture.²⁴² During this period national distinctions in English language Kracauer scholarship also started to become apparent.

In 2002, a conference on Kracauer was organised by the School of Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. The school was founded by the pioneer of British cultural studies, Richard Hoggart as The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964. Four years later, the cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall became the centre's director. Hall's 1973 text, *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* initiated a new critical paradigm in reception theory, and helped to secure the Centre's international reputation as being at the forefront of British scholarship. However, by 2002 financial problems prompted the University to restructure its academic departments and the school was shut down in June of that year.²⁴³ After its closure, Jan Campbell, the conference's organiser, was relocated to the English department where the conference finally took place on the 13th and 14th September, 2002. As Esther Leslie notes in her conference report, this administrative instability influenced the character of the event with Miriam Hansen, Gertrud Koch and Thomas Levin all withdrawing from proceedings.²⁴⁴ Though adversely affecting the impact and visibility of the conference at the time, another consequence of the absence of the scholars associated with NGC's approach to Kracauer, is the distillation of the German / American perspective from a larger English language approach to his work.

Though the majority of contributions, later printed as articles in a special issue of the British based journal *New Formations* (2007), focus primarily on Kracauer's Weimar period with only a contextualizing nod to the later work, there are a few exceptions that look to American Kracauer from a perspective distinct from that associated with

²⁴² Ward, Janet, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2001). Federle, Courtney, "Picture Postcard: Kracauer Writes from Berlin", in Kenneth S. Calhoun (ed.), *Peripheral Visions: the hidden stages of Weimar cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), pp. 39 – 55. Zaslove, Jerry. "Siegfried Kracauer's Cosmopolitan Homelessness - the Lost Cause of an Idea in the Film Age." *Cosmopolitans in the Modern World. Studies on a Theme in German and Austrian Literary Culture* edited by Suzanne Kirkbright (München: Iudicium Verlag, 2000), pp. 127 – 146.

²⁴³ For a contemporary report on the closure see Cutis, Polly, "Birmingham's cultural studies department given the chop", *The Guardian*, 27th June 2002. Article available online at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2002/jun/27/highereducation.socialsciences> (accessed 29/11/12)

²⁴⁴ Leslie, Esther, "Conference Report: Letdown. 'Siegfried Kracauer.' University of Birmingham 13-14 September 2002", *Radical Philosophy*, No. 116. (2002), p. 55.

NGC.²⁴⁵ What sets these texts apart is that, although the work of Hansen and Koch provide definite points of reference in all the published studies, they examine their source material (to a varying degree) from outside of the dialectic of extraterritoriality. For example, in texts such as Campbell’s psychoanalytical analysis of *From Caligari to Hitler*, Elsaesser’s flattening of theoretical ambitions of Kracauer’s 1947 book into a transitional marker is challenged through a reading of the text as a critical cipher of Kracauer’s Weimar studies into what she denotes as the “hysterical estrangement” and “bodily contingency” of distraction.²⁴⁶ Graeme Gilloch and Jaeho Kang’s analysis of the Institute for Social Research’s abandoned “test film project” also questions the image of Kracauer’s time in New York as one of existential and cultural dislocation. For Gilloch and Kang, *From Caligari to Hitler* is representative of a period of production in which Kracauer was in constant dialogue with the Horkheimer and Pollock about the social and critical function of film and the need for “urgent political intervention”.²⁴⁷ Where Kracauer’s work in German is examined, as with articles by Esther Leslie and Steve Giles, it is done so from the perspective of a European modernist tradition that looks to Lukács and Brecht before Marcuse and Lowenthal.²⁴⁸

The reverse perspective that *New Formation*’s special issue represents (its interpretation of Kracauer’s Weimar work from the viewpoint of his American books) is most clearly presented in Janet Harbord’s text on the critical role of contingency in Kracauer’s *Theory of Film*.²⁴⁹ Sharing Witte’s contention that Kracauer’s work demonstrates a continuance of critical concerns, Harbord reads his sustained emphasis on “indeterminacy”, “the fortuitous and the accidental” as a questioning of “intentionality and individual agency”.²⁵⁰ Like Schlüpmann’s early texts, Harbord’s approach is primarily philosophical; initially framing her reading of Kracauer’s film theory in the context of the work of Nietzsche she later develops her

²⁴⁵ Campbell, Jan (ed.), *New Formations*, No. 61 (Summer 2007).

²⁴⁶ Campbell, Jan, “Are Your Dreams Wishes or Desires? Hysteria as Distraction and Character in the Work of Siegfried Kracauer”, *New Formations*, No. 61 (2007), pp. 132 – 148.

²⁴⁷ Gilloch, Graeme and Jaeho Kang, “Below the Surface: Siegfried Kracauer’s ‘Test-film’ Project”, *New Formations*, No. 61 (2007), p. 160.

²⁴⁸ Leslie, Esther, “Kracauer’s Weimar Geometry and Geomancy”, *New Formations*, No. 61 (2007), pp. 34- 48. Giles, Steve, “Making Visible, Making Strange: Photography and Representation in Kracauer, Brecht and Benjamin”, *New Formations*, No. 61 (2007), pp. 64 – 75.

²⁴⁹ Harbord, Janet, “Contingency’s Work: Kracauer’s Theory of Film and the Trope of the Accidental”, *New Formations*, No. 61 (2007), pp. 90 – 103.

²⁵⁰ Harbord, 2007, p. 90.

analysis in relation to the work on photography and film by Roland Barthes and Paul Virilio. Though these critical models are French, Harbord is not (as Petro has argued) looking for academic legitimacy for Kracauer's work through its acculturation into a well established theoretical tradition foreign to it, but looks to present his work on film as the expression of an alternative and parallel mode of thought that exists alongside but apart from the received narratives of modern philosophy and film studies.

What is also significant about the Birmingham conference is that it marks the end of the Kracauer renaissance. By 2002, Leslie reports, "news from Germany [...] is not good":

Kracauer's work is mainly out of print, the future of the selected works uncertain (the volumes that have already been published are remaindered), and the many unpublished manuscripts and letters – are likely to remain there and there alone.²⁵¹

Although the belated publication in 2007 of the Birmingham conference does not mark the complete cessation of interest in Kracauer it does mark a period of consolidation in the image of him as an extraterritorial cultural theorist. Aside from Quaresima's attempt to give the debate about the reception of *From Caligari to Hitler* a definite temporal and geographical perspective (by looking at its impact on post-War Italian scholars and critics), NGC's image of Kracauer as existentially exiled continues to influence the majority of published studies of the writer.²⁵² For example, Tara Forrest's 2007 *The Politics of Imagination*, an examination of Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge, though including a much-needed English language introduction to Kluge's television work, is more exposition than critique of Hansen's texts from the 1980s.²⁵³

²⁵¹ Leslie, 2002, p. 55.

²⁵² Quaresima, 2004, p. xviii.

²⁵³ Forrest, Tara, *The Politics of Imagination: Benjamin, Kracauer, Kluge* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2007).

One notable exception to this pattern is Edward Dimenberg's examination of Kracauer's work in relation to film noir.²⁵⁴ Though a friend and colleague of Jay, Frisby, Rentschler and Hansen, his cultural studies approach to urban history as represented in Hollywood crime movies of the 1940s demonstrates a critical perspective distinct from his peers, not just in content (it looks to Kracauer's English language reviews of the 1940s) but in relation to his spatial (as opposed to temporal) concerns and their relationship to the work of the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre.²⁵⁵ In a similar way to Harbord, Dimendberg expands the frame of reference for Kracauer scholarship beyond the usual Frankfurt school / exile structure and in turn presents to those approaching his work for the first time (and not necessarily from a film studies perspective) the image of his thought as open and dynamic critical process rather than a closed philosophical system. In the 2006 collection, *Philosophy and Film Noir*, Paul A. Cantor adopts a comparable strategy by reading Edgar Ulmer's film *Detour* (1945) from the perspective of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.²⁵⁶ Though Dimendberg's and Cantor's interpretation of Kracauer and the Frankfurt School may not be as original or radical as Hansen's or Schlüppmann's (particularly in relation to the German language texts), what their work demonstrates (and in this respect I include Harbord's) is that once again Kracauer has become a figure around which a process of intellectual cross fertilization is attempting to take place. Where it was film studies and cultural studies in the 1980s / 90s now the focus is on a hybridisation of film studies and philosophy.

Hansen acknowledges this latest phase in the reinvention of Kracauer (though somewhat obliquely) in her last book, *Cinema and Experience* (2012). This book, a summary of her work on cinema and the Frankfurt School, re-articulates the arguments presented previously in NGC. However, towards the end of her chapter on Kracauer (in which she restates her idea of *Theory of Film* as a palimpsest) she writes:

²⁵⁴ Dimendberg, Edward, "Down these Streets a man must go: Siegfried Kracauer, 'Hollywood's Terror Films', and the spatiality of film noir." *New German Critique*, No. 89 (2003), pp. 113-143.

²⁵⁵ Dimendberg, Edward. *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2004.

²⁵⁶ Cantor, Paul A., "Film Noir and the Frankfurt School: America as Wasteland in Edgar G. Ulmer's *Detour*," in *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, ed. Mark T. Conard (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), pp. 139 – 162.

What *Theory of Film* offers us today, I contend, is not a theory of cinematic realism, but a theory of film experience and, more generally, of cinema as a sensory-perceptual matrix of experience – a project that links Kracauer on this side of the Atlantic with Robert Warshow and Stanley Cavell. His concept of experience, though, is still inflected with the debate surrounding the category in the German context, in particular in the writings of Benjamin and Adorno. It may not be as radically ambivalent as Benjamin’s, yet it is just as deeply bound up with the history – and barely overcome crisis – of modernity. What is more, the book seeks to theorize film as a paradigmatic mode of experiencing, of encountering and discovering, the world in the wake of and beyond that historical crisis.²⁵⁷

As has been examined in a recent text by Johannes von Moltke, Kracauer was a close friend of the American critic Robert Warshow in the early 1950s so a comparison between his work on the “immediate experience” of the film spectator and Kracauer’s project by Hansen here is not surprising.²⁵⁸ However, what is more revealing in this context is the comparison between Kracauer and Cavell. As I will examine later in this study, Cavell is often cited as a pioneer of film-philosophy and Hansen’s reference here can be read as an acknowledgement of Kracauer’s tentative inclusion into a provisional film-philosophy canon. Despite the fact that Hansen’s shares an identification of the cinematic as a mode of experience with (certain versions) of film-philosophy her assertion of the “German context” of Kracauer’s critical (traumatic) experience demonstrates the same fear of acculturation that Petro describes in her essay on Kracauer’s epistemological shift. Hansen’s own late work in this respect is intellectually defensive, as it looks to protect the advances in the relationship between German theory and film theory that she and others associated with Karsten Witte worked hard to promote in the previous decades. Such a fear of subsumption into an alien critical tradition paradoxically renders her dialectical interpretation of Kracauer’s extraterritorial subjectivity into a closed system

²⁵⁷ Hansen, Miriam, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 2012), p. 255.

²⁵⁸ Moltke, Johannes Von, “Manhattan Crossroads: Theory of Film between the Frankfurt School and the New York Intellectuals”, in *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer* edited by Johannes von Moltke and Gerd Gemunden (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), pp. 42-61.

impervious to external forces, as Adorno said of Kracauer: “The man who had no skin grew himself a coat of mail”.²⁵⁹

Evidence of this mixed approach to Kracauer’s work is even more apparent in a recent collection of essays *Culture in the Anteroom: The legacies of Siegfried Kracauer* edited by Gerd Gemunden and Johannes von Moltke (2012).²⁶⁰ As the title of the publication suggests, its approach (following that of the 2008 conference to which it relates) is an evaluation of the multifarious nature of Kracauer’s corpus with the “case for both the canonicity and the contemporaneity of Kracauer’s cultural critique” being made in relation to each of its many manifestations.²⁶¹ Though the volume includes many interesting examinations into Kracauer’s personal relationships and the less well documented aspects of his work (for example his art criticism), it maintains a philosophised notion of exile as an axiom. The reason for this (and despite the inclusion of a revised version of Robnik’s Kracauer essay) is the inclusion of texts by Rentschler, Schlüpmann, Huyssen, Mülder-Bach and Hansen. Though admittedly giving the conference and publication a level of authority that is lacking from its earlier British counterpart (the Birmingham conference), what the inclusion of these Kracauer experts also does is promote the (cinema theory) idea of Kracauer as an exceptional subject. What is interesting about aspects of the *New Formations* publication in comparison (and what is also exhibited in Robnik’s approach) is how Kracauer, specifically Kracauer’s theory, becomes less extraordinary, is less about the power of (to use Mülder-Bach’s phrase) his “magic gaze” and how it exists as a theory amongst other theories.²⁶² What is missing in this volume is a consciousness of its own reflexivity, that is recognition of the role of Hansen *et al.* in their construction of the contemporary image of Kracauer. As I shall discuss in more detail in subsequent chapters, what the film-philosophy approach brings to the subject of Kracauer is recognition of the role of the philosopher in constructing the object of their study.

²⁵⁹ Adorno, 1991, p. 172.

²⁶⁰ Moltke Johannes von and Gerd Gemunden (eds.), *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012)

²⁶¹ von Moltke and Gemunden, 2012, pp. ix –x. The conference held in 2008 at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, USA was called, “Looking after Siegfried Kracauer”.

²⁶² Mülder-Bach, 1990, p. 249.

3.10 Conclusion

The motivation for this study is not to argue against Hansen for Kracauer's place in the canon of film-philosophy but to re-examine her interpretation of Kracauer's cinematic approach (as a "paradigmatic mode of experiencing, of encountering and discovering") using the alternative perspective of film-philosophy as a critical framework. In this respect, I am not aiming to refashion Kracauer's peculiar Weimar sociological reportage or his late historiography into a post-Deleuzian hybrid of film theory and cinema theory - cinematic-philosophy - but to use the questions that film-philosophy poses of the cinema experience to look again at his cinematic approach in a way that avoids the limitations of an exile narrative.

As previously noted, Elsaesser and Hagener state that any "new" theory "implicitly or explicitly" defines itself as such by addressing certain problems that though possibly explicated beforehand are shown to have not yet been resolved or at least explained "in a satisfactory manner".²⁶³ As Kracauer's work becomes of interest to those promoting film-philosophy it is imperative that the erroneous conclusions that to some degree still exist in film studies in relation to Kracauer's film theory, and which Witte, Hansen, Koch, and Elsaesser (to name a few) have worked to nullify, are not repeated and reanimated as another new critical tradition looks to gauge the peculiar relationship between Critical Theory and Film Studies.

²⁶³ Elsaesser, Thomas and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory. An introduction through the senses* (New York & London: Routledge, 2010), p. 6.

CHAPTER 4:

THE CONTEXT OF FILM-PHILOSOPHY

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will introduce and examine the idea of film-philosophy and the various perspectives on the critical relationship between film theory and philosophy that currently constitute it. I will focus in particular on the work of those that argue for a more fluid and interactive correlation between the two traditionally discrete modes of critical practice. It is my contention that by reviewing the dialogical process that currently informs what Thomas Wartenberg has labelled the “cinematic philosophy” debate - the debate about film’s capacity to be “the original site at, on, in, or through which philosophy is done” - that the reflexive character of Kracauer’s cinematic approach can be potentially reactivated.¹ The function of this examination is therefore not to identify film-philosophy’s conceptual origins in the work of Kracauer but to use its peculiar destabilisation of the film / theory relationship as the impetus with which to review certain aspects of Kracauer’s work outside of the existential narratives fashioned and consolidated by previous studies.

4.2 The Provisional Nature of the Term Film-Philosophy

The differences between philosophy and film theory as scholarly disciplines are many and various. If or how they can be combined in order to synthesise a new and distinct academic field of film-philosophy is a contentious issue for both those who accept or reject it as a possibility. The conflicted nature of film-philosophy’s “double inheritance”, suggests Felicity Colman, is evident in the awkwardness of its name:

The qualification of how the discipline of film-philosophy has been constituted and in its academic usage is to be found in the hyphen: the conjoining ‘and’ of film and philosophy. The hyphen represents

¹ Wartenberg, Thomas E., “On the Possibility of Cinematic Philosophy”, in Havi Carel and Greg Tuck (eds.), *New Takes in Film Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 11.

different meaning in different applications: it can be a proposition or a conjunction; it might argue for multiplicity or for singularity; or it might be posed as a presumption for or argument against various aspects of the two disciplines. How that conjunctive hyphen is practised becomes indicative of a particular aesthetic and politic of film-philosophy.²

For Colman, the hyphen in film philosophy acts as a form of ellipsis, a neutral graphic marker that indicates a relationship without defining it. It is a necessity, she argues, that allows the debate to progress beyond the well-rehearsed interdisciplinary antagonisms that currently restrict it to a repetitive ontological dispute. In this sense, the awkwardness of the term “film-philosophy”- for those who adopt it - acts as a reminder of the work still to be done in understanding the relationship between film theory and philosophy. Of course, not everybody active in the debate is happy to adopt such a provisional term. In this chapter, using Wartenberg’s taxonomy of the numerous positions currently active in the film-philosophy debate as a guide, I will explore how various philosophers and film theorists have conceptualised the relationship between film and philosophy and in turn the critical use of the cinema experience.

4.3 *Wartenberg’s Tentative Typology of Cinematic Philosophy*

The “flourishing of philosophical attention” to film and the cinema since the 1990s, argue Murray Smith and Thomas Wartenberg, obscures the debate’s “long germination” and previous incarnations.³ “A great deal of philosophical writing on film”, they suggest, “has been pursued under the guise of ‘film theory’”.⁴ As Smith and Wartenberg explain, starting with Hugo Münsterberg’s psychological study of *The Photoplay* in 1916, philosophical reflections on the “intellectual capacities” of film were initially inseparable from concerns relating to the legitimization of film as a “distinct art form”.⁵ Though Münsterberg’s study does not directly address the

² Colman, Felicity, “Introduction: What is Film-Philosophy?” in Felicity Colman (ed.), *Film, Theory and Philosophy. The Key Thinkers* (Durham: Acumen, 2009), p. 3.

³ Smith, Murray and Thomas E. Wartenberg, “Introduction: Thinking through Cinema: Film as Philosophy”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Winter, 2006), p. 1.

⁴ Smith & Wartenberg, 2006, p. 1.

⁵ Smith & Wartenberg, 2006, p. 1.

issue of “film as philosophy”, for Smith and Wartenberg, the historical debate over film as an art form (that Münsterberg helped initiate) “gave rise to a question, or cluster of questions, which bear a strong resemblance to the debate over film as philosophy”.⁶ For Münsterberg and subsequent film theorists such as Sergei Eisenstein who maintained that “art required a strong conceptual component”:

the ability of film to render ideas – and not merely to record a moving image of the world – was the key to the claim that film was indeed a medium of art.⁷

Though Eisenstein was not alone in his enthusiasm for demonstrating the intellectual capacity of film, argue Smith and Wartenberg, the issue became considerably less significant for critics after the development of synchronised sound. By the 1940s, when the French critics Andre Bazin and Alexandre Astruc were publishing their influential essays on the nature of film and critical film practice, the “battle” over film as art, “had been – or had been perceived to have been won” and with it, conclude Smith and Wartenberg, any pressing need to tackle overtly the problem of identifying film as the site for philosophical inquiry.⁸

The legacy of Bazin’s critical approach to the medium, suggest Smith and Wartenberg, is clear in the development of the work of both Stanley Cavell and Gilles Deleuze, the two philosophers whom they identify as initiating the more recent phase of the film-philosophy debate.⁹ However, explain Smith and Wartenberg, though they share Bazin as an influence, their distinct perspectives (and those who

⁶ Smith & Wartenberg, 2006, p. 1.

⁷ Smith & Wartenberg, 2006, p. 1.

⁸ Smith & Wartenberg, 2006, p. 2. For an example of Bazin’s philosophical film criticism see, Bazin, André, *Bazin at Work: Major Essays and Reviews From the Forties and Fifties*, translated by Alain Piette and Bert Cardullo (New York & London: Routledge, 1997). Astruc’s most notable essay in this context is, Astruc Alexandre, “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Camera-Style” in Peter Graham (ed.), *The New Wave: Critical landmarks* (London: Secker & Warburg and The British Film Institute, 1968), pp. 17 – 24.

⁹ Smith & Wartenberg (2006), p. 2. For evidence of Bazin’s influence of Cavell see: Cavell, Stanley, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Enlarged Edition), (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. xxiii. For an account of Deleuze’s debt to Bazin, see, Beasley-Murray, Jon, “Whatever Happened to Neorealism? Bazin, Deleuze, and Tarkovsky’s Long Take”, *Iris*, No. 23 (Spring 1997), pp. 37-52 also Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 1: the movement image*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone Press, 1992), p. 24 & p. 153.

adopted and developed their approaches) are mutually exclusive and on the whole incompatible. For example, write Smith and Wartenberg:

Where the emphasis in the Cavellian tradition lies on the ability of film to embody philosophical thought, albeit in distinctive ways, on recognised philosophical problems – scepticism and personal identity, for example – for Deleuze, the philosophical interest of film lies in its purported capacity to generate new philosophical concepts and problems. Moreover, while Deleuze does discuss individual films [like Cavell], his emphasis is often on the way these individual films are said to realize features and implications of the technology of film itself.¹⁰

With such bifurcation at its conceptual origin it is heterogeneity that is the defining characteristic of contemporary film-philosophy.¹¹ This is not to say that there is some commonality amidst its myriad and often antagonistic constituents. For example, what connects the work of Wartenberg to that of Robert Sinnerbrink and John Mullarkey (and what makes their approaches relevant in relation to Kracauer) is not a shared philosophical model or a common methodology but recognition of the destabilising effect film spectatorship has on existing conceptual frameworks. As I will demonstrate, for Wartenberg, Sinnerbrink and Mullarkey, none of whom adopt the term film-philosophy in their work, the hyphen that connects film-philosophy could be extended (~~film-philosophy~~) in order to put both terms *sous rature* [under erasure – to use Heidegger’s term], and therefore highlight their mutual inadequacies as signifiers in relation to the cinema experience.¹²

“[T]ruly successful criticism”, notes the American cultural critic Robert Warshow, starts with the critic acknowledging their “own relation to the object”¹³ that they criticize and Wartenberg’s “anything but disinterested” typology of film-philosophy

¹⁰ Smith & Wartenberg, 2006, p. 2.

¹¹ Wartenberg, 2011, p. 9.

¹² For an introduction to Derrida’s usage of Heidegger’s concept in relation to post-structuralism and deconstruction see, Sarup, Madan, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism* [1988] (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1993), pp. 32 – 56.

¹³ Warshow, Robert, *The Immediate Experience. Movies, Comics, Theatre and Other Aspects of Popular Culture* [1962], revised edition (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. xl.

is certainly testament to this approach.¹⁴ What Wartenberg seeks to establish in his “cinematic philosophy thesis” is the possibility that films are “capable of actually doing or being philosophy”.¹⁵ However, there are some critics, he concedes, who “have objected to this claim on the grounds that films cannot do philosophy, for only people can do philosophy”.¹⁶ This objection, suggests Wartenberg, “misses the point”:

When I or others support the possibility of cinematic philosophy by claiming that some films actually do philosophy, that is a shorthand way of saying that some filmmakers have philosophized by means of their films, so that philosophy has been done in, on, or through film, just as it can be done, of course, has been done by having a conversation, by presenting a paper, or by writing a book or an article.¹⁷

In formulating the problem this way Wartenberg’s approach reveals itself as being a development of Cavell’s in that he avoids “adopting a contested view of philosophy.”¹⁸ However, as he goes on to explain, his notion of film’s conceptual ability is not as “extreme” as his predecessor’s.¹⁹ In his 2007 *Thinking on Screen*, Wartenberg characterizes his more “moderate” approach to the possibility of cinematic philosophy as a “local – that is, particular and empirical” procedure whose main objective is not the systematic presentation of a cinematic philosophy but to simply “stake a claim” for its existence.²⁰ “The metaphor of staking a claim”, he later concludes, “is, I think, an apt one, for I saw myself then as one of the first explorers of a nearly virgin territory whose outlines were vague at best”.²¹

For Wartenberg, the self appointed cartographer of this *terra nova*, there are four distinct positions that have been adopted on the issue of the existence of film-

¹⁴ Wartenberg, 2011, p. 9.

¹⁵ Wartenberg, 2011, p. 9.

¹⁶ Wartenberg, 2011, p. 9.

¹⁷ Wartenberg, 2011, p. 10.

¹⁸ Wartenberg, 2011, p. 22.

¹⁹ Wartenberg, 2011, p. 13.

²⁰ Wartenberg, Thomas E., *Thinking on Screen: Film as Philosophy* (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 28.

²¹ Wartenberg, 2011, p. 22.

philosophy. Firstly, the one promoted by Cavell and his followers such as Stephen Mulhall, which he calls “the extreme pro-cinematic philosophy” position.²² According to this approach, explains Wartenberg, there is no discernable difference between film and “the more traditional linguistic media of conversation and writing”.²³ For instance, writes Wartenberg, Mulhall asserts that “films embody philosophical thinking” in two ways. As well as being able to “deal” with the same philosophical issues as more conventional modes of philosophy, films also exist “in the state of philosophy”, that is “film exhibits the same self-reflexive concern about its own possibility as a cultural form” which, Mulhall argues, is a defining characteristic of philosophy as an intellectual discipline.²⁴ As Mulhall states in *On Film* (2002):

films are not philosophy’s raw material, nor a source for its ornamentation; they are philosophical exercises, philosophy in action – film as philosophizing.²⁵

To Wartenberg’s “extreme pro-cinematic philosophy” position can also be added the work of the previously mentioned Daniel Frampton, whose concept of “filmosophy” offers a complete synthesis of film and philosophy (negating the provisional character of film-philosophy by developing Deleuze’s analogy between the technologically mediated processes of filming and thinking).²⁶ Also that of Simon Critchley, whose assertion that to “read from cinematic language to some philosophical metalanguage” is to “miss what is specific to the medium of film” clearly echoes Mulhall’s identification of filmmaking and philosophical practice.²⁷

At the opposite end of the spectrum, advocating (for Wartenberg) the “extreme anti-cinematic philosophy” position is the work of Murray Smith and Paisley Livingston. In his 2006 article, “Film Art, Argument and Ambiguity”, Smith, though not denying a relationship between film and philosophy, takes issue with Mulhall’s bold thesis

²² Mulhall, Stephen, *On Film* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2008).

²³ Wartenberg, 2011, p. 13.

²⁴ Wartenberg, 2011, p. 13.

²⁵ Mulhall, 2008, p. 2.

²⁶ Frampton, Daniel, *Filmosophy* (London & New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), p. 7.

²⁷ Critchley, Simon, “Calm – On Terrence Malick’s *The Thin Red Line*”, in Read, R. and J. Goodenough (eds.), *Film as Philosophy: Essays on Cinema After Wittgenstein and Cavell*, edited (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 139.

that “films can inhabit the territory of human self-reflection in the same way as philosophy”.²⁸ For Smith, film is an artform and as such has a very different character to philosophy. He agrees with Mulhall that film and philosophy can share the same issues and themes but argues this similarity is superficial as even if an identical trope is adopted by both they would have entirely different functions and results. While it can be imagined that philosophy can exhibit the same abstract properties as an artwork (for example: complexity, ingenuity, inventiveness, density, ambiguity and profundity), Smith questions whether “we would value them in just the same way”.²⁹ As he explains in his article on the intellectual capacity of film art, the key concept in this regard is ambiguity:

The meaning and experience that works of art typically create is one characterized by sufficient complexity and indirection that it resists restatement or "paraphrase" in clear and unequivocal terms. In other words, no matter how "philosophical" the theme of a narrative, to the extent that it is designed as an artwork, it is apt to put a spanner in the philosophical works [...] Few criticisms are more apt to strike terror into the heart of the philosopher than the assertion that such-and-such a proposition is "ambiguous," while in the world of art the term is more apt to be used as a term of praise.³⁰

In parallel to Smith, Paisley Livingston develops a comparable criticism of Mulhall’s expansion on Cavell’s approach to film by arguing that the medium has no unique ability to present philosophical ideas beyond conventional literary modes and that it should only be considered of heuristic interest to philosophers. “Films”, he asserts, “can provide vivid and emotionally engaging illustrations of philosophical issues, and when sufficient background knowledge is in place, reflections about films can contribute to the exploration of specific theses and arguments, sometimes yielding enhanced philosophical understanding”.³¹ For Livingston, the notion that “film’s

²⁸ Smith, Murray, “Film Art, Argument, and Ambiguity”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Winter, 2006), p. 33.

²⁹ Smith, 2006, p. 40.

³⁰ Smith, 2006, p. 40.

³¹ Livingston, Paisley, “Theses on Cinema as Philosophy”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Winter, 2006), p. 11.

philosophically innovative contribution can be made by exclusively cinematic devices” is erroneous because it avoids addressing the simple but fundamental paradox that underlies the idea of the incommensurability of cinematic philosophy.³² This “dilemma”, as Livingston presents it, is as follows:

If it is contended that the exclusively cinematic insight cannot be paraphrased, reasonable doubt arises with regard to its very existence. If it is granted, on the other hand, that the cinematic contribution can and must be paraphrased, this contention is incompatible with arguments for a significantly independent, innovative, and purely "filmic" philosophical achievement, as linguistic mediation turns out to be constitutive of (our knowledge of) the epistemic contribution a film can make.³³

The doubt that Livingston casts on the existence of such a pure form of cinematic philosophy therefore relates not just to its supposed transcendence of linguistic media but also to the subjective nature of its critical reception. “If the ‘properly cinematic’ contribution to philosophy can be referred to but not stated with words”, he concludes, “proponents of a bold epistemic thesis have to fall back on appeals to an indescribable cinematic *je ne sais quoi* that they believe they have experienced, in the hope that others may have a similar experience and come to agree that philosophical insight or understanding has been manifested in a film”.³⁴

Between these two extreme classifications of what constitutes film-philosophy, argues Wartenberg, there exist more moderate variants. For example, he suggests, Bruce Russell’s work on the “philosophical limits of film” presents a “moderate anti-cinematic philosophy” position.³⁵ For Russell, film can operate philosophically but its contribution to philosophy as an intellectual discipline is limited. In the context of philosophy, argues Russell, films are essentially facilitators. Cinema supports philosophy, he explains, by presenting “counterexamples to putative necessary truths”, re-familiarising philosophers with pre-existing approaches, and motivating

³² Livingston, 2006, p. 11.

³³ Livingston, 2006, p. 12.

³⁴ Livingston, 2006, p. 13.

³⁵ Wartenberg, 2011, p. 15.

“us to find out what we don’t know, or reconsider what we think we know”.³⁶ For Russell, filmmaking is not philosophizing (in Mulhall’s sense of the word) but a tool that assists its development. In this regard, the film camera is analogous to that of the microscope or telescope in that it not only broadens our experience of the world (“philosophy’s raw material” – Mulhall) but also opens up new areas into which the intellect can grow.

Wartenberg’s own cinematic philosophy adopts a similarly moderate position but from a more pro-cinematic philosophy perspective. Taking elements from the three positions previously introduced he argues that though disparate in nature, philosophically they all exhibit a curiously narrow understanding of the film medium itself. In the first instance, argues Wartenberg, when a film illustrates an existent philosophy through a combination of narrative and cinematic techniques it is potentially doing philosophy. “Virtually everyone writing on the possibility of cinematic philosophy”, states Wartenberg, “no matter what theoretical position they endorse, has admitted that films have this capacity while denigrating films that ‘merely’ illustrate a philosophical theory as not being genuine instances of cinematic philosophy”.³⁷ Though this maybe true of films that try only to articulate a theory in an objective and dispassionate way, he contests, it is not correct for those examples that strive to cinematically interpret and re-contextualize certain aspects of a philosophical text. Such films, argues Wartenberg, “should be credited with doing philosophy, just as we credit the historian of philosophy with doing philosophy when she comes up with a new interpretation of an important philosopher’s views.”³⁸

Another way in which Wartenberg argues that film is “being the original site at, on, in, or through which philosophy is done” is in relation to the philosophical thought experiment.³⁹ The thought experiment in philosophy is a long established literary device in the Western philosophical tradition. “To perform a thought experiment”, explains Tamar Szabó Gendler, “is to reason about an imaginary scenario with the

³⁶ Russell, Bruce, “Film’s Limits: The Sequel”, *Film and Philosophy*, No. 12 (2008), p. 1.

³⁷ Wartenberg, 2011, p. 17.

³⁸ Wartenberg, 2011, p. 17. The examples that Wartenberg gives in this context are *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, USA, 2004) and *Alien* (Ridley Scott, USA, 1979). Wartenberg develops his argument about interpretive illustrations in Chapter 3 of Wartenberg, 2007, pp. 32 – 54.

³⁹ Wartenberg, 2011, p. 11.

aim of confirming or disconfirming some hypothesis or theory”.⁴⁰ “The idea here”, suggests Wartenberg, is that the “imaginary worlds” presented to us by some fiction films can be understood as playing “the same role” as those “conjured” by the narratives of philosophical thought experiments.⁴¹ An early example of a thought experiment is the “Allegory of the Cave” from Plato’s *The Republic* (380 BCE). During the explication of his metaphysics of form, Plato makes an analogy between our belief in the reality of physical objects and that of prisoners in a cave who, restrained in a peculiar fashion with their backs to a concealed fire, mistake the shadows that fall on the opposite wall (cast by others entering and leaving the prison) to be wholly substantial and autonomous entities. Plato’s elaborate description of this unsettling shadow theatre is an attempt to articulate (amongst other things) his claim that the ordinary objects of everyday experience, from a metaphysical point of view, are as insubstantial as the shadows perceived by the fictitious prisoners.⁴²

Wartenberg’s appropriation of the thought experiment looks not only to endow the narrative of a film with a critical philosophical function (for example, he argues that Woody Allen’s *Crimes and Misdemeanours* (USA, 1989) presents a counterexample to the Socratic thesis “that evildoers cannot attain happiness”⁴³) but also to remind philosophers of the important function they have played in the articulation of abstract theory. For Wartenberg, a film-philosophical thought image does not question the nature of the relationship between images and thought (as Plato’s does) but renders a humdrum narrative device cinematic; in other words, it enhances the thought experiment’s impact by making it more vivacious. Those that argue against a cinematic conception of the thought image (such as Murray Smith), proposes Wartenberg, are doing a disservice to the multifarious nature of it as it exists in traditional philosophy and the subsequent richness it gives to philosophy’s literary form. Wartenberg’s criticism of those who deny the potential merit of interpreting films as philosophical thought images focuses on their limited formulation of the device as it currently occurs in the written or spoken form.

⁴⁰ Gendler, Tamar Szabó, “Thought Experiments” in *The Encyclopaedia of Cognitive Science* (London: Wiley, 2002), p. 388.

⁴¹ Wartenberg, 2011, p. 18.

⁴² For an examination of Plato’s analogy see Watt, Stephen “Introduction: The Theory of Forms (Books 5-7)” in Plato, *Republic*, translated by Desmond Lee (London: Wordsworth, 1997), pp. xiv-xvi.

⁴³ Wartenberg, 2011, p. 19.

The third mode of cinematic philosophy that he presents directs a similar criticism towards its detractors, this time in relation to their understanding of what constitutes the cinematic object. Following the example of Noël Carroll's 1979 article, "Avant-Garde Film and Film Theory", Wartenberg shifts focus from commercial feature films onto experimental and artist's film making. Whereas Carroll concludes that avant-garde films "are more involved in making references to theories than in making theories", Wartenberg adopts the opposite perspective.⁴⁴ According to this view, writes Wartenberg, certain experimental films (particularly those from the "structural" tradition):

are doing philosophy by performing real cinematic experiments. These experiments are designed to confirm a thesis about the nature of film, normally what the minimum characteristics a work must have in order to qualify as a film. By creating works that lack many or even most of the features that traditional films have, these experimental films [...] seek to establish the minimum criteria that a work has to have in order to be a film.⁴⁵

For Wartenberg, a key example in this regard is Andy Warhol's film *Empire*. Filmed in the summer of 1964 from the 44th floor of the Time-Life building, Warhol's eight hour five minute long film consists of a static shot (photographed by Jonas Mekas) of the Empire State building as night falls on Manhattan.⁴⁶ "What I take the film to establish", argues Wartenberg, "is that films, which are often called moving pictures, do not have to".⁴⁷ Put another way, he explains, a movie's "ability to depict motion" also affords it the "possibility of depicting stasis, something that surprisingly is not possible in static medium such as painting".⁴⁸ In *Thinking On Screen*, Wartenberg puts this claim into a more conventional philosophical context. In the *Critique of*

⁴⁴ Carroll, Noël, "Avant-Garde Film and Film Theory" in Noël Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 168.

⁴⁵ Wartenberg, 2011, p. 21. Wartenberg's definition of Structural Experimental Film is derived from Adams Sitney, P. *Visionary Film. The American Avant-Garde 1943 – 1978* [2nd ed.] (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 369 – 397.

⁴⁶ Koch, Stephen, *Stargazer: Andy Warhol's World and His Films* [1974], second revised edition (New York and London: Marion Boyars, 1985), p. 145.

⁴⁷ Wartenberg, 2011, p. 21.

⁴⁸ Wartenberg, 2011, p. 21.

Pure Reason, Wartenberg explains, Immanuel Kant argued for an innate structure of the human mind that both defines its nature and that of the objects it perceives. In other words, the human mind can only become aware of objects that correspond to the features of this structure, what Kant referred to as *categories*. For Kant, unless these categories were universally valid it would be impossible for us to experience an object as such. Kant's *transcendental* philosophy, as Wartenberg perceives it, was concerned with attempting to explain "the possibility of our experience of objects" and therefore what is presupposed and necessary to experience.⁴⁹ Warhol's *Empire*, claims Wartenberg:

is a philosophically significant film because Warhol has discovered an analogue to Kant's transcendental philosophy. That is, Warhol's film presents an answer to the following question: What are the cinematic structures that are necessary in order for an object to appear on screen? In virtue of this, we can appropriate Kant's terminology and call *Empire* a work of transcendental cinema, for its concern is establishing the necessary conditions for objects appearing to us on a film screen. *Empire* presents duration, celluloid projection, and the ability to present static persistence, as well as change, as elements of the categorical structure necessary for objects to be depicted on film.⁵⁰

How experimental films can transcendently evaluate other (non-cinematic) aspects of experience Wartenberg does not say, but his formulation of his own categories for cinematic philosophy does reveal the innate structure of his conception of it and in turn its limitations. Wartenberg's reading / viewing of *Empire* is informed by his reading of Arthur Danto's 1999 analysis of the film.⁵¹ Though Wartenberg has issues with Danto's ultimate conclusions (Danto's emphasis on the film object as opposed to the filming / viewing process), what he does fully endorse is Danto's use of film as a way to question what he calls the "philosophical disenfranchisement" of art in general.⁵² Stemming from Plato's denigration of transient and local physical reality

⁴⁹ Wartenberg, 2007, p. 127.

⁵⁰ Wartenberg, 2007, p. 127.

⁵¹ Danto, Arthur, "The Philosopher as Andy Warhol", in Arthur Danto, *Philosophizing Art: Selected Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 61 – 83.

⁵² Wartenberg, 2007, pp. 122 – 125.

and its visual representation (through surrogate images – the shadows in the cave) as suitable vehicles for philosophical truths, this disenfranchisement has “in contemporary hands”, argues Wartenberg, “become the notion that art-forms that traffic in images cannot produce knowledge”.⁵³

Robert Sinnerbrink develops this questioning of film as an “inferior form of knowing” in a more radical way in his exposition of what he terms, “romantic film-philosophy”.⁵⁴ Whereas Wartenberg argues for the conceptual / intellectual competence of film (the cinematic) in relation to philosophy, Sinnerbrink’s position is distinguished by its “questioning of the assumption that conceptual theorisation should be privileged over cinema aesthetics”.⁵⁵ Though, as demonstrated above, Wartenberg does address the notion of medium specificity and relational aesthetics in his notion of the thought experiment, what Sinnerbrink’s approach works to emphasise is how such acts of philosophical rendering (that “translate cinematic presentation into recognizable forms of philosophical argumentation”⁵⁶) do not “overcome this disenfranchisement”.⁵⁷

4.4 *Philosophy’s Intellectual Disenfranchisement of Film*

In a manner similar to that expressed by Schlüpmann in her reading of Nietzsche’s “aesthetic enlightenment”,⁵⁸ Sinnerbrink states that the aim of his “romantic” approach is one that asserts the “film is capable of the aesthetic disclosure of novel aspects of our experience” in a way that is both “philosophically self-reflective” and opens up the “possibility that philosophy might be transformed through its encounter”.⁵⁹ As Sinnerbrink explains:

It is striking that amidst the enormous surge of interest in the film-philosophy relationship most debate has focused on whether film

⁵³ Wartenberg, 2007, p. 15.

⁵⁴ Sinnerbrink, Robert, “Re-enfranchising Film: Towards a Romantic Film-Philosophy”, in Havi Carel and Greg Tuck (eds.), *New Takes in Film Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 26.

⁵⁵ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 26.

⁵⁶ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 25.

⁵⁷ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 26.

⁵⁸ Schlüpmann, Heide, “Re-reading Nietzsche through Kracauer: towards a feminist perspective on film history.” *Film History*, Vol. 6, No.1 (1994), p.81, also Chapter 2.5 of this study.

⁵⁹ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 26.

can be understood philosophically or even as a kind of philosophising in its own right. Little attention, however, has been given to the question of whether philosophy itself is transformed through its encounter with film. Does philosophy remain ‘philosophy’ once it begins to engage seriously with film? Does the cinema provide its own forms of experience, of thinking, which might transform philosophy in distinctive ways? If we can speak of the becoming-philosophical of film, then perhaps we can also speak about the becoming-cinematic’ of philosophy.⁶⁰

Whereas Wartenberg’s modest claims for cinematic philosophy avoids questioning the conceptual nature of philosophy as an academic discipline, Sinnerbrink’s more provocative approach looks to “kill” philosophy – to “leave the academy” and “forego conceptual mastery”.⁶¹ This does not mean that Sinnerbrink promotes the idea of the cinematic as the antithesis of the philosophical – opposing forces that cancel each other out – but a corrective to philosophy’s intellectual disenfranchisement of the arts and humanities (in comparison to its attitude to the sciences). “[R]omantic film-philosophy”, states Sinnerbrink, “points the way out of the labyrinth that philosophy has constructed to keep film in its place”.⁶² It does so, he argues, by conceiving film and philosophy as partners in a “thinking dialogue”, a “transformative engagement” that assists in the articulation of the philosophy “immanent” within particular films whilst also inducing a creative response in philosophy to the cognitive results of the cinematic experience.⁶³ Following the example of both Cavell and Deleuze, Sinnerbrink states that it is only “in the strange and novel encounters” between “aesthetic and philosophical forms that new thought – creative philosophical thought – can emerge”.⁶⁴ For Sinnerbrink, the programme of philosophical romanticism (in relation to the arts and cinema in particular) is therefore comprehensible as the “(reflective) disclosure of alternative possibilities of thought and action” that circumvents the restrictions of readymade theoretical

⁶⁰ Sinnerbrink, 2011, pp. 28 – 29.

⁶¹ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 28.

⁶² Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 36.

⁶³ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 36.

⁶⁴ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 29.

frameworks.⁶⁵ Key to this, he argues, is a “sustained receptiveness to what film aesthetically discloses”, which “resists immediate translation into theoretical argument”.⁶⁶ Significantly, this openness involves not just an appreciation of certain narrative aspects or hermeneutic ambiguities but also what Sinnerbrink refers to as film’s “audio-visual rhythms”.⁶⁷ In this mode, concludes Sinnerbrink, where philosophical claims are developed immanently from the particularities of the film, the medium is “allowed to show rather than tell; to reveal rather than be reduced; to think rather than be analysed”⁶⁸ and in doing so presents an alternative way of relating “theory and practice, concept and artwork, philosophy and film”.⁶⁹

Unlike Wartenberg (through his notion of experimental film), Sinnerbrink does not present his understanding of the philosophy immanent to film solely in the context of the medium’s aptitude for self-reflective practice. Film art, he states, alongside philosophy is a form of “world-disclosure (and indeed of world-making)”.⁷⁰ For Sinnerbrink, film’s “vocation” therefore:

lies in its capacity to vividly disclose forgotten or obliterated aspects of experience, making us receptive to difference and sensitive to possibility, thereby expanding the distinctive aspects of the world that we experience and to which we can thoughtfully respond.⁷¹

The transformative potential of the aesthetic disclosure of the cinematic experience, as Sinnerbrink conceives of it, also has an ethical / political dimension, it reveals not only “what modern experience is but also how it might be transfigured and reinvented” through the construction of virtual cinematic worlds.⁷² The role of the “romantic” film-philosopher, concludes Sinnerbrink, can therefore be seen as a

⁶⁵ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 37.

⁶⁶ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 37.

⁶⁷ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 38.

⁶⁸ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 40.

⁶⁹ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 41. Sinnerbrink provides numerous examples of his approach in Sinnerbrink, Robert, *New Philosophies of Film: Thinking Images* (London & New York: Continuum, 2011b).

⁷⁰ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 41.

⁷¹ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 41.

⁷² Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 43.

“translator” between different “media of thought: cinematic and philosophical, aesthetic and conceptual, poetic and political”.⁷³

4.5 *The Non-philosophy of Cinema*

Working in parallel to Sinnerbrink’s proposal for a romantic film-philosophy is the approach outlined by John Mullarkey in his theory of a “non-philosophy of cinema”.⁷⁴ Though sharing Wartenberg’s rejection of approaches that reduce film to a “mere handmaiden to philosophy” and Sinnerbrink’s belief in film’s immanent critical potential, Mullarkey’s argument for a non-philosophical approach to the medium is equally critical of philosophers who promote the idea that films can philosophise. “If film thinks”, states Mullarkey, “it is not in its own way but in philosophy’s way”.⁷⁵ Even the theories that “purport to be less textual and illustrative” [Cavell, Frampton], he argues, “cannot avoid reducing it to illustrations of extant philosophy”.⁷⁶

The problem facing even the most “open” readings of film as philosophy is twofold, proposes Mullarkey: firstly, it involves the limited choice of films identified as being philosophy / philosophising; secondly, who (and in what capacity) determines the “newness” – the innovative nature - of this medium specific mode of thought. As with Wartenberg, Mullarkey reads film-philosophy’s continued predilection for *auteur* cinema as weakening rather than supporting the case for film’s immanent capability to philosophise. However, whereas Wartenberg suggests incorporating avant-garde and experimental films into film-philosophy’s area of interest, Mullarkey argues for a more radical democratisation of what constitutes an appropriate instance of film philosophising. “Wouldn’t it prove one’s case better”, asks Mullarkey, “to use less obvious examples?” Surely, he adds, “if one claims that film can think, then all films can think: one doesn’t prove the claim that all humans

⁷³ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 43.

⁷⁴ Mullarkey, John, “Film Can’t Philosophise (and Neither Can Philosophy): Introduction to a Non-Philosophy of Cinema, in Havi, Carel and Greg Tuck (eds.), *New Takes in Film Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 86- 99.

⁷⁵ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 88.

⁷⁶ Mullarkey, 2011, pp. 87-88.

can do mathematics just by studying the minds of Fermat and Poincaré”.⁷⁷ There is, suggests Mullarkey, what he refers to as the “transcendent choice of film”:

By this I mean the selection of particular films to establish a theoretical paradigm of what film is and how it works. Such approaches make their selections of these particular films (or film elements – of plot over sound, or framing over genre, and so on) in the light of an outside: a theory of film that transcends the corpus of different films and film elements as a whole. The transcendent choice already forms the filmic materials so as to legitimate the theory *ab initio* [from the beginning], and therefore is circular. Such pre-emptiveness is double edged, moreover. On the one hand, theory must be selective in how it makes film illustrate itself (and its theory of film), but, precisely on that account, it always leaves remainders – other films or filmic properties that it must marginalise in order to save its own integrity.⁷⁸

Sinnerbrink’s reply to this criticism of his transcendental approach is to argue that Mullarkey has conflated (and thereby confused what denotes) the genuinely new with the merely novel. “The new”, states Sinnerbrink, “is what can often barely be recognised or made intelligible or sensible with reference to existing frameworks or representation or interpretation”.⁷⁹ For Sinnerbrink, un-philosophical films are those devoid of any real artistic merit and provide – principally at a sensational (corporeal) level – only the semblance of newness (novelty) and difference. This tendency towards connoisseurship, suggests Mullarkey, undermines Sinnerbrink’s idea of the film-philosopher as neutral translator and reveals it to be a more expert and judgemental role. At the heart of Sinnerbrink’s radical approach, argues Mullarkey, is therefore a defensive philosophical conservatism. The only thing that the film-philosophy can recognise as new to philosophy, explains Mullarkey, is done so in the context of extant philosophy and is therefore (logically) already philosophy and therefore not genuinely new. Like the old joke about the drunk looking for his keys

⁷⁷ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 88. Pierre de Fermat (1601-1665) French mathematician. Jules Henri Poincaré (1854-1912) French mathematician and theoretical physicist.

⁷⁸ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 89.

⁷⁹ Sinnerbrink, Robert, “Fabulations of Reality: John Mullarkey’s Non-Philosophy of Film”, paper delivered at the University of Dundee, 6 October 2009, quoted in Mullarkey (2011), p. 97.

under a streetlamp at night (because it is the only place he can see), looking for a new mode of thought in artforms already considered to be philosophical (the auteur / art house film) is (from Mullarkey's perspective) an equally futile activity. "To de-philosophise or un-philosophise", proclaims Mullarkey, "to embrace the insult of being 'unphilosophical' is warranted because the alternative of being recognised as 'proper' comes at the cost of also being a cliché".⁸⁰ It is only "in that moment when we fail to see film as orthodox 'philosophy'", he explains, when "philosophy becomes something unrecognizable to itself", that film's transformation of thought will actually occur.⁸¹

Mullarkey's use of "we" here is significant and distinct, in fact antithetical to that used by Sinnerbrink to denote who experiences the new transformed film-philosophy. If Sinnerbrink's use of the subjective pronoun is exclusive to the academy then Mullarkey's conception of a critical collective is ostensibly inclusive. As long as we "remain philosophers" argues Mullarkey, the circularity evident in the transcendental approach to film-philosophy is inevitable.⁸² For Mullarkey, as there is no "proper" example of a philosophical film, there is also "no single form of proper thought ('philosophical' or otherwise), but many kinds of thinking, such as that shown by film when it resists a certain kind of thinking".⁸³

The model for Mullarkey's approach is the "non-philosophy" of the French non-philosopher Francois Laruelle.⁸⁴ According to Laruelle, philosophy is "intrinsically anti-democratic", whereas non-philosophy is non-judgmental and promotes a "democracy between philosophies, and between philosophy and the sciences, arts, ethics, etc."⁸⁵ Laruelle's prefix "non-", explains Mullarkey:

is neither a dialectical negation, nor even something contrary to philosophy: it is an enlargement of the set of things that can count

⁸⁰ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 93.

⁸¹ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 93. My emphasis.

⁸² Mullarkey, 2011, p. 89.

⁸³ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 91.

⁸⁴ For Mullarkey's introduction to the work of Laruelle see, Mullarkey, John, *Post-Continental Philosophy: An Outline* (London & New York: Continuum, 2006), pp. 125 – 156.

⁸⁵ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 91. See also, Laruelle, Francois, "Is Thinking Democratic? Or, How to Introduce Theory into Democracy", in Mullarkey, John and Anthony Paul Smith (eds.), *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp 227 – 237.

as thought, a set which includes extant philosophy, but also a host of what are often presently deemed (by philosophers) to be non-philosophies. Just as the non-Euclidian geometries do not negate Euclid's geometry but incorporate it alongside other types of geometry, so Laruelle's non-philosophy integrates extant examples of philosophy with example of what those same philosophies regard as their opposite.⁸⁶

A non-philosophy of film is therefore not exclusive to the medium like film theory nor does it argue for film's inclusion into the realm of philosophy because of some special ontological factor. For Mullarkey, non-philosophy does not try to think *of*, *on* or *about* film, nor does it (as Sinnerbrink argues) think *with* film, rather it is an inclusive "performative practice" that thinks *alongside* film.⁸⁷ In a "non-philosophy of cinematic thought", states Mullarkey, "nothing is being said about film (its ontology)", instead its "raw –material" is "what is said about film by 'theory'".⁸⁸ In this respect, non-philosophy is "metaphilosophical" in that its focus is on the processes (practical and theoretical) that constitute the cinematic rather than on the film object as autonomous phenomenon.⁸⁹ Every theory about film, explains Mullarkey, "is also part of and immanent to film, rather than an outside, static image representing film as a static whole".⁹⁰

In the context of non-philosophy, the only certainty about the relationship between subject and object, between audience and film, between theory and practice is that it is dynamic. A film's meaning, its philosophical content, its intellectual and critical capacity should therefore be understood as a "relational event".⁹¹ As Mullarkey concludes:

The relationship of an audience to a film is mobile: hence, sometimes it will be open to the radical impact of any film [...] but at other times the audience can be jaded with and inured to the

⁸⁶ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 91.

⁸⁷ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 90.

⁸⁸ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 90.

⁸⁹ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 90.

⁹⁰ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 91.

⁹¹ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 98.

effects of both commercial and avant-garde film [...] To be more precise, the impact of film is not located solely in the film, but in the film viewing event, which is inherently relational. What is heterogeneous to one spectator, may be formulaic for another. Any film can fulfil either role (in the right context for the right viewer), but most film viewings only fulfil the latter, routine role, if only by sheer dint of the fact that our attention is elsewhere.⁹²

The new – the telos of Sinnerbrink’s transformed future philosophy – does not, argues Mullarkey, come from either a transformed notion of film (Wartenberg) nor in the hypostatised viewer (be they philosopher, translator, mediator etc.) but is apparent only through a consideration of their dynamic and intertwined relation. For Mullarkey, the meaning of a film “cannot be *our* product alone” as every theory of film is a “co-production” with the film process.⁹³ In this respect (from the perspective of non-philosophy) film (as the locus of a destabilized notion of agency) renders Sinnerbrink’s programmatic argument that philosophy is a form of “world-disclosure (and indeed of world-making)” epistemologically untenable.⁹⁴ For Laruelle, explains Mullarkey:

What philosophy calls ‘reality’ is first and foremost a concept of the world. Every philosophy is a ‘mixte’ of reality with a pre-decided interpretative schema [...] A philosopher’s reality can never capture and exhaust what Laruelle calls the “real” itself.⁹⁵

The “Real”, states Mullarkey, is “that which undoes any attempt to define the Real”.⁹⁶ The “Real of film” is “the inexhaustible reserve that thwarts every attempt to say ‘what film is’”, and for Mullarkey, is the “one absolute that resists relativism”.⁹⁷ Any reading / philosophy of a film which intends to exhaust its object (to state what it *really* is about) is therefore doomed to failure because being “co-generated” by the film/ viewer process “each new reading” is immanently part of the process that

⁹² Mullarkey, 2011, p. 98.

⁹³ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 95.

⁹⁴ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 41.

⁹⁵ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 89.

⁹⁶ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 96.

⁹⁷ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 91.

defines the “Real” of film (that which it cannot define).⁹⁸ However, explains Andrew McGettigan, in comparison to the philosophical approaches to film it criticises, the inclusive mixed approach of non-philosophy regards the failure of its critical counterparts as being only “partial” as they still contribute to the communal project involving theory and its object.⁹⁹ Any “new aspect a theorist brings to film”, Mullarkey explains, “belongs both to the theorist and, in part, to the film: the theory is only possible in virtue of, or rather just is, the mereological relation [the relation of part and whole] between the two”.¹⁰⁰

With a focus resolutely on what theory says about film rather than an essential idea of the film object, the proposed function of the non-philosopher of film becomes less that of the expert examiner and more the diligent curator. For Mullarkey, the result of this egalitarian assemblage of ideas pertaining to the cinematic can be understood as “montage thinking” :

Such a montage must be understood simply at the level of the Kuleshov effect whereby subsequent images change the meaning of the antecedent ones when cut together. Such emergent effects are differential, as is a comparative thought such as non-philosophy: that is, it builds its effects by mixing the partial representational failures of theories together as material forms.¹⁰¹

This mode of “associational thought”, admits Mullarkey, has garnered derision from those who have “a clear idea of what philosophy should look like”.¹⁰² For example, McGettigan asks how Mullarkey’s “meta-theory” is distinct from “the rather less grand notion of the literature survey”.¹⁰³ Mullarkey’s response is to suggest that the “montage thinking” presented by non-philosophy “need not be called a thinking at all”:

⁹⁸ Mullarkey, 2011, pp. 95-96.

⁹⁹ McGettigan, Andrew, “Molls: Review of John Mullarkey, *Refractions of Reality: Philosophy and the Moving Image*”, *Radical Philosophy*, No. 158 (November – December, 2009), p. 67.

¹⁰⁰ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 94.

¹⁰¹ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 94.

¹⁰² Mullarkey, 2011, p. 97.

¹⁰³ McGettigan, 2009, p. 66.

In as much as a non-philosophy of film tries to emulate cinema's philosophising through its own method of montage (of theories), it should be called montage *simpliciter* – there is no need to append 'thinking' to it to make it philosophical, for philosophy itself can be seen as a kind of montage (or mixte, as Laruelle puts it). This montage is not one more essence of philosophy, however, but a recipe for a pluralism of philosophies.¹⁰⁴

Certainly Mullarkey's recipe for pluralism makes space for Kracauer's film theory to be considered as philosophy but would such a wholesale subsumption of all critical (and non critical) practice simultaneously eradicate the specific nature of Kracauer's cinematic approach to philosophy? Is philosophical difference celebrated and sustained by Mullarkey's and Laruelle's interdisciplinary openness or is it, as Sinnerbrink argues, negated by a covert theoretical paradigm that is as equally totalizing as the one that it looks to replace?¹⁰⁵ Mullarkey, in his defence, has argued that Sinnerbrink's idea of non-philosophy project attributes it a teleological character that is fundamentally alien to its mixed approach.¹⁰⁶

As significant as Laruelle's (and Mullarkey's) non-philosophical assemblage of philosophies is in testing the boundaries of what is culturally acceptable as constituting thought there is, as Sinnerbrink identifies, a certain arbitrariness in how its montage of thinking is constructed (regardless of their insistence that the two activities - montage and thinking - are identical). In this respect, Mullarkey's statements defending the non-philosophy project from Sinnerbrink's accusation of conceptual circularity reminds me of the Spanish film director Luis Buñuel's famous paradox: "*Je suis toujours athée, grâce à Dieu*" [I'm still an atheist, thank God].¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 97.

¹⁰⁵ For an example of Sinnerbrink's criticism of Mullarkey's approach: Martin-Jones David, "What is Film-Philosophy? Round Table" [Audio Recording], *Film Philosophy*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2010): <http://www.film-philosophy.com/index.php/f-p/article/view/260/217> (Accessed 2/2013)

¹⁰⁶ Mullarkey, 2011, pp. 93 – 94.

¹⁰⁷ The original quotation appears in Manceaux, Michèle, "Luis Buñuel: athée grâce à Dieu", *L'Express* (May 12, 1960), p. 41.

4.6 Conclusion: Kracauer in the context of film-philosophy

As Kracauer demonstrates in *Theory of Film*, editing and montage is only one aspect of what constitutes the cinematic approach to film. In fact, like Mullarkey, Kracauer also makes various references to Kuleshov's montage experiments in *Theory of Film*, and the "side-by-side" approach he advocates in *History* certainly bears a resemblance to Mullarkey's / Laruelle's notion of philosophical montage.¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless, to draw too direct a comparison between Kracauer's theory of film and the non-philosophy of film (or in fact any current variant of film-philosophy) would not only work to devalue the specific historical context of the texts (the conclusions of *Theory of Film* are presented under the heading of "Film in Our Time") but would also act to codify their intentional ambiguities according to an extraneous philosophical system, be it by affixing meaning (Cavell) or purpose (Deleuze, Laruelle). This is not to say that an association between Kracauer's work and that of Wartenberg, Sinnerbrink and Mullarkey would be entirely fruitless. Though the benefit of trying to argue for Kracauer's posthumous inclusion into the contemporary film-philosophy debate or for his establishment as a progenitor of it is dubious what I shall do in the following text, is to use the context of film-philosophy to activate (by association – in a Kuleshov sense) certain elements of Kracauer's thinking about the film experience.

What connects the disparate work of the writers that Wartenberg would group together as being "pro" the idea of a form of cinematic philosophy is the conviction that immanent to the cinematic experience are certain elements that are resolutely indeterminate and that any attempt to interpret them philosophically has a destabilizing effect on the particular mode of thought employed. Identifying the nature of this instability is where the diversification in approaches arises. Whether it manifests itself as a mapping of Wittgenstein's sceptical language games onto cinematic texts (Mulhall), a phenomenological catalyst for cognitive mutation (Frampton & Sinnerbrink) or as an indication of the arbitrary nature of thinking as a

¹⁰⁸ For Kracauer's references to Kuleshov in *Theory of Film*, see Kracauer, Siegfried, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality* [1960] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 48, 69 & 162. Kracauer introduces his notion of a "side-by-side" approach to historiography in chapter 8 of Kracauer, Siegfried, *History. The Last Things Before the Last*, completed after the death of the author by Paul Oskar Kristeller (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1995), pp. 200 – 202.

cultural process (Mullarkey) what becomes clear from this group's critical activity is that the moving image has the ability to estrange subject / object relations and that the resultant indeterminacy is significant. Significant as a new raw material / resource for the continuation of philosophical endeavour or as evidence of philosophy's other – its replacement or nemesis, that is the question? Or is it? What Mullarkey argues (articulating Laruelle's position) is that the theoretical act of defining the cinematic is a process that affects its object and is therefore as much part of what constitutes the cinematic as the material / technical and social means of film production. The film, the cinema, the philosopher, the critic, the filmmaker, the fan, the indifferent viewer all work to constitute the cinematic. Identifying the "Real of film" ("the inexhaustible reserve that thwarts every attempt to say 'what film is'")¹⁰⁹ is a communal on-going process and when considered as such the cinematic becomes paradoxically both inherent and acquired by the medium – it is that which reminds the philosophising subject that their autonomy (like a movie) is a co-production. It is this desire to retain the indeterminacy of the cinematic, the motivation to sustain multiple and conflicting narratives and strategies instead of distilling or subsuming competing approaches into a universal future philosophy that connects Kracauer's and Mullarkey's (Laruelle's) intellectual projects. To return one last time to Kuleshov, Kracauer writes in the section of *Theory of Film* titled "The Indeterminate", that any "filmmaker evolving a narrative is faced with the task of simultaneously living up to two obligations which seem difficult to reconcile":

On the one hand, he will have to advance the action by assigning to each shot a meaning relevant to the plot [...] In terms of the Kuleshov experiment, the filmmaker must therefore insert Mosjukhin's [the actor depicted in Kuleshov's film] face in such a way that it assumes the significance required by the story at this particular place [...] On the other hand, the filmmaker will wish to exhibit and penetrate physical reality for its own sake. And this calls for shots not yet stripped of their multiple meanings, shots still able to release their psychological correspondences.

¹⁰⁹ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 91.

Accordingly, he must see to it that Mosjukhin's face retains, somehow, its virgin indeterminacy.¹¹⁰

The use of the masculine pronoun here makes it easy for the reader to replace the term "film maker" with the name Kracauer – as the task he sets for the former is (as I shall subsequently demonstrate) also the one he sets for himself as author of *Theory of Film*. *Theory of Film*, I will argue, with its attempts to define the nature and significance of the cinematic, is as much about theory's relationship with its object as it is to do with the aesthetics of the film medium and as such works to constitute a critical idea of the cinematic that resists essentialism by presenting it as a perpetual but inconsistent process. In this respect, what the film-philosophy context enables me to do in this dissertation is to rehabilitate (to use a term favoured by Kracauer) indeterminacy in Kracauer's cinematic approach.¹¹¹ I say rehabilitate, because, as I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, though previous interpreters of Kracauer's work have identified the significance of the cinematic as a concept in his critical practice in doing so they attribute a definite use value to it and in turn assign it a specific meaning. The indeterminate is reduced to the not yet defined as opposed to that, which resists definition – it is the raw material of philosophy rather than a challenge to its totalising impulse.

In the following sections I will examine in detail specific aspects of Kracauer's cinematic approach and explore how it is realised in both his film texts and in his non-film writings. At the beginning of each chapter I will introduce how the subsequent text relates to a certain aspect of the film-philosophy debate (as discussed above) and how the two projects (Kracauer's and Film-Philosophy's) can be seen to potentially correspond. In the final concluding chapter I will again summarise these correspondences and formulate a response to the questions asked in the introduction to this study.

¹¹⁰ Kracauer, 1997, p. 69.

¹¹¹ Kracauer, 1995, p.4.

CHAPTER 5:

CINEMATIC SUBJECT RELATIONS: HOW FILM AFFECTS ITS THEORY

5.1 *Introduction.*

In their introduction to *New Takes in Film-Philosophy* (2011), Havi Carel and Greg Tuck suggest that:

When considering film and philosophy, the philosopher's first question is: 'are such mass cultural products philosophically productive?' And if so, what is it about films rather than other aspects of culture [...] that makes it a worthy site of attention?¹

In this chapter I am going to examine how Kracauer understood film to be philosophically productive. In order to do this I will focus on Kracauer's criticism of Georg Lukács, the Marxist philosopher whose early work was instrumental in the formation and development of Critical Theory. It will examine how Kracauer envisaged film's intellectual potential in relation to Lukács' Marxist critical interpretation of social processes and their associated cultural forms. In doing so, it will demonstrate how Kracauer used the corporeal experience of the cinema to develop his understanding of Marxism in a way that resisted and in turn questioned the philosophical orthodoxy of Lukács' approach. Focusing on his analysis of the films of French filmmaker Jean Vigo it describes how Kracauer strove to develop an understanding of the philosophical relationship between the philosophical subject and object (theory and praxis) not as a dialectical antagonism but as an intertwined and relative process.

5.1 *Film and Material Dialectics*

In a letter written in 1930 to Theodor Adorno, Siegfried Kracauer suggested that the critical method that he had developed over the previous decade could be called

¹ Carel, Havi and Greg Tuck (eds.), *New Takes in Film-Philosophy* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 1- 2.

“material dialectics”². It was not, he argued, simply a satirical inversion of the dialectical materialism of orthodox Marxism but something more meaningful. It denoted his frustration with Marxism’s furtive philosophical conservatism. Dialectic materialism, Kracauer argued, especially as it had recently been espoused in the work of Georg Lukács³, had revealed itself as “the last offshoot of total philosophy”, in other words, it was no different from the 19th century German Idealism it supposedly superseded. In contrast, claimed Kracauer, what he sought in his approach was a reality divested of Idealism’s metaphysical “guarantee”.⁴ Even their mutual friend Walter Benjamin, Kracauer contended, demonstrated a certain lack of “élan” for this reality.⁵ “Criticism”, wrote Benjamin in *One Way Street* (1928), “is a matter of correct distance”.⁶ For Kracauer, there was no such thing as a correct distance.

The problem with Benjamin’s method, argued Kracauer, was qualitative not quantitative.⁷ It was not simply a case of Benjamin miscalculating relative spatial or temporal positions but how his idea of critical distance worked to construct the ontological exclusivity of the subject and object. “Benjamin”, Kracauer noted in his review of *One-Way Street*, “would only breakthrough to reality in its fullness only if he were to unravel the real dialectic between the elements of things and their figures, between concretions and the abstract, between the meaning of form and the form itself”.⁸

² Letter from Kracauer to Adorno, May 25th, 1930, quoted in Jay, Martin, ‘Adorno and Kracauer: Notes on a troubled Friendship’, in Martin Jay, *Permanent Exiles. Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 221.

³ Georg Lukács (1885–1971), Hungarian literary critic and philosopher. Kracauer is here referring to Lukács’ 1923 publication, *History and Class Consciousness*, see Lukács, Georg, *History and Class Consciousness: studies in Marxist dialectics*, translated by Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971). For Kracauer’s critical relation to the text see Barnouw, Dagmar, *Critical Realism: History, Photography, and the work of Siegfried Kracauer* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 37–47.

⁴ Jay, 1985, p. 221.

⁵ Jay, 1985, p. 221. For Benjamin’s review of Kracauer’s *Die Angestellten* see, Benjamin, Walter, ‘An Outsider Makes His Mark’, in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927–1934*, edited by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, translated by Rodney Livingstone, et al. (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press, 1999), pp. 305–311. A second, shorter review is also reproduced in the same volume, see, pp. 355–357.

⁶ Benjamin, Walter, ‘One-Way Street’, in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 1: 1913–1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 4th ed. (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press, 2000), pp. 444–488.

⁷ The concept of critical “distance” is addressed by Kracauer throughout *History*, for example see Kracauer, Siegfried, *History. The Last Things Before the Last*, completed after the death of the author by Paul Oskar Kristeller (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1995), pp. 104–105.

⁸ Kracauer, Siegfried, ‘On the Writings of Walter Benjamin’, in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament. Weimar essays*, translated and edited by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard U.P., 1995b), p. 264.

As Miriam Hansen demonstrates, by 1940 the problem of articulating the critical function of the film experience in relation to his anti-Idealist “process of materialization” had become Kracauer’s central intellectual concern.⁹ In a series of notebooks written whilst awaiting passage from war-torn Marseilles, Kracauer attempted to formulate his ideas on this matter for a prospective “book on film aesthetics”.¹⁰ Throughout the multiple drafts of this project, Kracauer maintained that, considered alongside other cultural forms, film enacted a peculiar way of articulating material relations. It did so, he reasoned, because it could manipulate our perception of supposedly fixed spatial and temporal relations at a basic physiological level. “The material elements that present themselves in film directly”, suggests Kracauer, “stimulate the material layers of the human being: his nerves, his senses, his entire physiological substance”.¹¹ By primarily addressing its viewer as a corporeal entity, a human being “with skin and hair [*mit Haut und Haar*],” the distance between spectator and performance, the conceptual space of theatrical dramaturgy, collapses and with it (potentially) theatre’s referential subject.¹² In other words, explains Hansen, unlike in the theatre, where the fixed perspective of the audience has been developed in order to maintain the integrity of a sovereign sense of self, the cinema experience, with its “assaults” on the spectator at “the level of sensory, bodily perception” disrupts the construction of such a coherent reference point.¹³ “The ‘ego’ [*Ich*] of the human being assigned to film”, proposes Kracauer, “is subject to permanent dissolution, and is incessantly exploded by material phenomena”.¹⁴ This idea that, integral to the cinema experience is a potential state where the “self, as the mainspring of thoughts and decisions, relinquishes control,” is readdressed by Kracauer in his final published version of *Theory of Film* (1960). “In the theatre I am always I,” writes Kracauer, quoting a “perceptive” cinema goer, “but

⁹ Hansen, Miriam, “‘With Skin and Hair’: Kracauer’s Theory of Film, Marseilles 1940”, *Critical Inquiry*, no. 19 (1993), p. 453.

¹⁰ Hansen, Miriam, ‘Introduction’, in Kracauer, Siegfried, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality* [1960] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. xiv.

¹¹ Hansen, 1997, p. xviv.

¹² Hansen, 1997, p. xvii.

¹³ Hansen, 1997, p. xxi.

¹⁴ Hansen, 1997, p. xxi. An overview of more recent debates concerning the ideological implication of maintaining an essentialist concept of self are discussed in Battaglia, Debora, ‘Problematizing the Self: A Thematic Introduction’, in Debora Bataglia (ed.), *Rhetorics of Self-Making* (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 1 – 15.

in the cinema I dissolve into all things and beings””.¹⁵ As French author and critic René Barjavel claimed in his own wartime reflections on the nature of cinema, *Cinéma total: Essai sur les formes futures du cinéma* [Total Cinema: An essay on the future forms of cinema] (1944):

In the theatre the spectator attends the spectacle. In the cinema he incorporates himself into it.¹⁶

As Hansen notes, what Kracauer makes explicit in the Marseilles notebooks is the fundamental change in status attributed to the material dimension that occurs as a result of its cinematic representation.¹⁷ On screen, agency (an action or intervention that produces a particular effect) is no longer a human preserve. As Kracauer later qualified in *Theory of Film*, the medium has the potential to include the subject in a fundamentally non-hierarchical manner. If objects are “assigned the role due to them”, argued the French filmmaker Louis Delluc, the actor too “is no more than a detail, a fragment of the matter of the world”.¹⁸ In a film, remarks Kracauer, the theatrical subject is rendered an object “amongst objects”.¹⁹ In other words, explains Kracauer, cinema’s “subject matter is the infinite flux of visible phenomena - those ever changing patterns of physical existence whose flow may include human manifestations but need not climax in them”.²⁰ As Kracauer suggests in *Theory of Film*:

From the malicious escalators, the unruly Murphy beds, and the mad automobiles in silent comedy to the cruiser *Potemkin*, the oil derrick in *Louisiana Story* [Figure 2] and the dilapidated kitchen in *Umberto D.*, a long procession of unforgettable objects has passed

¹⁵ Kracauer, 1997, p. 159

¹⁶ Quoted in Kracauer, 1997, p. 326 n.7.

¹⁷ Hansen, 1993, p. 452

¹⁸ Quoted in Kracauer, 1997, p. 45. Louis Delluc (1890 – 1924) French film director, screenwriter, journalist, theorist and film-club founder. For an introduction to and examples of Delluc’s work see, Abel, Richard, *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology, Volume I: 1907-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 95 - 124 (1988);

¹⁹ Kracauer, 1997, p. 97.

²⁰ Kracauer, 1997, p. 97.

across the screen – objects which stand out as protagonists and all but overshadow the rest of the cast.²¹

In contrast, as Kracauer states in the *Marseilles notebooks*, the “subject to which the theatre refers [*das Bezugssubjekt des Theaters*]”, remains “the human being in long shot [*den Menschen der Totale*]”.²² As a film scene’s initial framing often seeks to establish the subject’s relation to their physical environment so too can formal theatrical convention be read as affirming a particular subject position relative to predetermined and culturally mediated social context.



Figure 2. *The oil derrick in Louisiana Story* (1948)

Film’s disjunction of subject / object relations is played out in *Theory of Film*, through a comparison of stage and screen acting. “From the viewpoint of cinema”,

²¹ Kracauer, 1997, p. 45. The films referred to by Kracauer here are: *The Floorwalker*, directed by Charlie Chaplin (USA: Mutual, 1916); *One A.M.* directed by Charlie Chaplin (USA: Mutual, 1916); *Battleship Potemkin* [Russian: *Броненосец «Потёмкин»*, (*Bronyenosyets Potyomkin*)], directed by Sergei M. Eisenstein (USSR: Goskino, 1925); *Louisiana Story*, directed by Robert Flaherty (USA: Flaherty / Standard Oil, 1948); *Umberto D.*, directed by Vittorio De Sica (Italy: Rizzoli-De Sica-Amato, 1952).

²² Hansen, 1997, p. xvii.

writes Kracauer, “the functions of the stage actor are determined by the fact that the theatre exhausts itself in representing inter-human relations”.²³ However naturalistic, for Kracauer, stage imagery always “serves as a foil for stage acting” and does not represent an authentic interplay of environmental influences, “unattainable anyway on the stage”.²⁴ In the theatre, the human is the absolute measure of a universe whose existence is reliant upon them. The theatrical subject asserts itself through theatrical form as an “insoluble entity”, the “smallest unit” from which all meaning is derived.²⁵

For Kracauer, film’s irreverence towards such an anthropocentric worldview was nowhere more vigorously expressed than in silent film comedy. The “inanimate objects” that “held important positions and developed preferences of their own”, in these comedies, notes Kracauer, were “[m]ore often than not filled with a certain malice towards anything human”.²⁶ “Instead of serving man”, he suggests, these “scheming objects” turned out to be “on the best terms with the very elements they were supposed to harness; instead of making us independent of the whims of matter, they actually were the shock troops of unconquered nature and inflicted upon us defeat after defeat”.²⁷ Any cinematic action, Kracauer subsequently explains in *Theory of Film*, “is always likely to pass through regions which, should they contain human beings at all, [...] involve them only in an accessory, unspecified way”.²⁸ For example, suggests Kracauer:

Many a film summons the weird presence of furniture in an abandoned apartment; whenever we see or hear someone enter, it is for a transient moment the sensation of human interference in general that strikes you most. In such cases the actor represents the species rather than a well-defined individual.²⁹

However, in film, even the ontological stability of a base mode of taxonomic identification such as species is rendered problematic. Parts of the body, argues

²³ Kracauer, 1997, p. 96.

²⁴ Kracauer, 1997, p. 96.

²⁵ Kracauer, 1997, p. 97.

²⁶ Kracauer, Siegfried, ‘Silent Film Comedy’, *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (August–September 1951), p. 32.

²⁷ Kracauer, 1951, p. 31.

²⁸ Kracauer, 1997, p. 97.

²⁹ Kracauer, 1997, p. 97.

Kracauer, “may fuse” with parts of the environment to produce a “significant configuration, which suddenly stands out among the passing images of physical life”.³⁰ “This decomposition of the actor’s wholeness”, Kracauer explains, “corresponds to the piecemeal manner in which he supplies the elements from which eventually his role is built”.³¹ For corroboration Kracauer turns to the writings of Russian filmmaker Vsevolod Pudovkin. “The film actor”, writes Pudovkin in *Film Acting* (1933), is deprived of the “organic connection between the consecutive parts of his work [...] The whole image of the actor is only to be conceived as a future appearance on the screen, subsequent to the editing of the director”.³² For Pudovkin, Kracauer concludes, in film the human being is subject to the “same disintegration” as everything else.³³ However, warns Kracauer, film’s ability to collapse the distinction between subject and object does mean that it cannot be reconfigured by it as before. Therefore, he states, if films are to resist reconstructing the relative ontological hierarchies of the theatre they must:

set out to explore physical data and, taking their cue from them, work their way up to some problem or belief. The cinema is materialistically minded; it proceeds from ‘below’ to ‘above.’ The importance of its natural bent for moving in this direction can hardly be overestimated.³⁴

In defence of this medium specific dynamic that conceives of the human individual (as defined by Idealist philosophy and its associate artforms) as a hindrance to film’s critical potential, Kracauer quotes from Erwin Panofsky’s 1937 essay, “*Style and Medium in the Moving Pictures*”:

The processes of all the earlier representational arts conform in a higher or lesser degree, to an idealistic conception of the world. These arts operate from top to bottom, so to speak, and not from bottom to top; they start with an idea to be projected into shapeless matter and not with the objects that constitute the physical world....

³⁰ Kracauer, 1997, p. 97.

³¹ Kracauer, 1997, p. 97.

³² Quoted in Kracauer, 1997, p. 97.

³³ Kracauer, 1997, p. 97.

³⁴ Kracauer. 1997, p. 309.

It is the movies, and only the movies, that do justice to that materialistic interpretation of the universe which, whether we like it or not, pervades contemporary civilization.³⁵

Though clearly not as committed as Kracauer to film's process of materialisation, what Panofsky's art historical approach to the medium also acknowledges is the peculiar nature of film's mediation between ideas (thought) and the physical world. For Kracauer, film's materialistic interpretation of the universe is not a replacement for traditional art's idealistic conception of the world but a counter to its teleological dynamic. In the next two sections of this chapter I will demonstrate how Kracauer, through his analysis of the films of Jean Vigo, argued that the film experience has the immanent potential to suspend and reconfigure the way philosophy and art constitutes our relation to the physical world.

5.2 *Relativised Subject Positions: Jean Vigo's L'Atalante*

At the same time Kracauer was in Marseilles drafting what Benjamin referred to as "his encyclopaedia of film",³⁶ Kracauer wrote several short pieces on film that were later published by Swiss based German language newspapers. As well as reviews of recently released French films and film books; Kracauer completed a series of articles that focused on more historical examples. Titled, "*Wiedersehen mit alten Filmen*" [Reunion with old films], the series appeared in the *Basler National-Zeitung* between 13/9/1938 and 1/2/1940. As well as focusing on the work of specific filmmakers such as Pudovkin, Max Linder, Maurice Stiller and Abel Gance, the series also included examinations of what had been labelled expressionist and vamp films.³⁷ The last of

³⁵ Quoted in Kracauer, 1997, p. 309. Panofsky's essay is reprinted in Panofsky, Erwin, *Three Essays in Style*, edited by Irving Lavin (Cambridge, Mass. & London: The MIT Press, 1995), pp. 91 – 126. For details of the personal and critical relationship between Panofsky and Kracauer see, Levin, T. Y., 'Iconology at the Movies. Panofsky's Film Theory', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1996), pp. 27 – 55.

³⁶ Quoted in Hansen, 1997, p. xiv.

³⁷ For bibliographical details see, Levin, Thomas. Y., *Siegfried Kracauer: Eine Bibliographie seiner Schriften* (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1989), pp. 302 – 305. A "vamp" is a woman who uses sexual attraction in order to exploit others, see Murray, Bruce, 'The role of the Vamp in Weimar Cinema: An analysis of Karl Grune's *The Street*', in Sandra Frieden, Richard W. McCormick, Vibeke R. Petersen, Laurie Melissa Vogelsang (eds.), *Gender and German Cinema: Feminist Interventions, Volume 1* (Providence, RI: Berg, 1993), pp. 33 – 41.

the series focused on the French director Jean Vigo, and was the very first of Kracauer's works on film to be translated into English.³⁸

For Kracauer, two things distinguish Vigo as a filmmaker. Firstly, he argues, Vigo's "camera does not discriminate between human beings and objects, animate and inanimate nature".³⁹ Secondly, and more importantly, Vigo resists the temptation to exploit film's temporary suspension of material relations. In other words, for Kracauer, Vigo's films are as much a product of what the camera reveals as they are illustrations of its maker's predetermined narrative. Vigo's sensitivity to the peculiar revealing function of the film camera, argues Kracauer, and his subsequent willingness to accommodate its fortuitous and indeterminate discoveries in the finished work gives his films a peculiar critical potential. In *L'Atalante* (1934), writes Kracauer:

we experience with all our senses how strongly the fogs of the river, the avenues of trees, and the isolated farms affect the mind, and how the sailor's relationship to the city is determined by the fact that he looks at the lodgings perched on the quay from sea level. Other film directors, too, have identified objects as silent accomplices of our thoughts and feelings. But Vigo goes still further. Instead of simply revealing the role objects may play in conditioning the mind, he dwells upon situations in which their influence predominates, thus exploring camera possibilities to the full. And since increasing intellectual awareness tends to reduce the power of objects over the mind, he logically chooses people, who are deeply rooted in the material world as leading characters of his two full-length films.⁴⁰

Kracauer's identification of objective distance with social class is doubly revealing. In the first instance it demonstrates his background knowledge of Vigo's radical political convictions. As Vladimir Pozner, the Franco-Russian writer and political agitator commented, "Vigo was a rebel, on two counts: against screen formulas and, even more intensely, against the established order of things. He used the camera as a

³⁸ Kracauer, Siegfried, 'Jean Vigo', translated by William Melnitz, *Hollywood Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (April 1947), pp.261 – 263. For an introduction to Vigo see, Salles Gomes, P.E., *Jean Vigo* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971).

³⁹ Kracauer, 1947, p. 262.

⁴⁰ Kracauer, 1947, p. 262. *L'Atalante*, directed by Jean Vigo (France: Jean-Louis Nunez, 1934)

weapon, not as an anaesthetic”.⁴¹ In the second instance, it is indicative of how Kracauer assimilated certain elements of Marxism into his cinematic approach. In their 1844 attack on German Idealism, *The Holy Family*, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels observed that the “property-owning class and the class of the proletariat represent the same human self-alienation.” However, “the former feels at home in this self-alienation and feels itself confirmed by it”.⁴² The property-owning class, they conclude, therefore:

recognises alienation as its own instrument and in it possesses the semblance of a human existence. The latter feels itself destroyed by this alienation and sees in it its own impotence and the reality of an inhuman existence.⁴³

As the Marxist subject is identical to the processes that define its social function, so for Pudovkin, the cinematic subject is indistinguishable from the formal techniques that define it (e.g. montage, soundtrack, variable framing, lighting, etc.).⁴⁴ The materialism that Kracauer equates with the perspective adopted by Vigo’s camera demonstrates a deliberate conflation of these two models. “The poor,” states Kracauer in one of the Marseilles notebooks, “are forced to break down the long-shot perspective” as they cannot distance themselves from the material realities of the realm they inhabit.⁴⁵

Though the identification between film technique and class-consciousness is made overtly in his Marseilles drafts, in his Vigo text there is an indication that Kracauer was uneasy about maintaining such a direct analogy. “Responding to the overwhelming appeal of material phenomena,” notes Kracauer, Vigo “more and more withdrew from social criticism” and in *L’Atalante* it appears “as if he actually had wanted to affirm an attitude hostile to intellectual awareness.”⁴⁶ “Could it be then”,

⁴¹ Quoted by William Melnitz in the “Introductory Note” of the English translation of Kracauer’s “Jean Vigo,” see, Kracauer, 1947, p. 261.

⁴² Quoted in Lukács, Georg, *History and Class Consciousness: studies in Marxist dialectics*, translated by Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press), 1971, p. 149.

⁴³ Lukács, 1971, p. 149.

⁴⁴ For Kracauer’s espousal of Marxist social / economic determinates see, Frisby, David, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT press, 1988), pp. 121 – 123.

⁴⁵ Hansen, 1993, p. 450.

⁴⁶ Kracauer, 1947, p. 263.

asks Kracauer, “that Vigo’s career had taken a retrogressive course?”⁴⁷ Perhaps, he answers:

[Vigo] indulged in the magic of mute objects and dark instincts only in order, some day, to pursue more thoroughly and knowingly the task of disenchantment.⁴⁸

Vigo’s impulse to disenchant was at its’ most explicit in his first film *À propos de Nice*. Released in May 1930, Vigo intended his film to show “a way of life is put on trial”.⁴⁹ As soon as “the atmosphere of Nice and the kind of life lived there” has been documented on screen, explains Vigo:

the film develops into a generalized view of the vulgar pleasures that come under the sign of the grotesque, of the flesh, and of death [...] These pleasures are the last glimpse of a society so lost in its escapism that it sickens you and makes you sympathetic to a revolutionary solution.⁵⁰

Vigo was not alone in wanting to expose the perniciousness of this desire to escape the cataclysmic economic and political reality of inter-war Europe. A few weeks after *À propos de Nice* was shown in Paris, Kracauer published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* an equally scathing attack on Weimar’s “*neubürgerliche*” [new bourgeoisie].⁵¹ In an essay titled, “*Die Biographie als Neubürgerliche Kunstform*” [The Biography as an Art Form of the New Bourgeoisie] he writes:

Just as, thanks to Einstein, our spatio-temporal system has become a limit concept, the self-satisfied subject has become a limit concept thanks to the object lesson of history. In the most recent past, people have been forced to experience their own insignificance – as well as that of others – all too persistently for them to still believe in the sovereign power of any one individual.⁵²

⁴⁷ Kracauer, 1947, p. 263.

⁴⁸ Kracauer, 1947, p. 263.

⁴⁹ Vigo quoted in Salles Gomes, 1971, p. 68. *About Nice* [French: *À Propos de Nice*], directed by Jean Vigo (France: Vigo, 1930).

⁵⁰ Salles Gomes, 1971, p. 68.

⁵¹ Kracauer, Siegfried, “The Biography as an Art Form of the New Bourgeoisie”, in Kracauer, 1995b, pp. 101 – 106.

⁵² Kracauer, 1995b, p. 102.

As physicist Albert Einstein had questioned the validity of the Newtonian model of the universe in his 1915 paper on “General Relativity”⁵³, so too for Kracauer had recent historical events called into the question the belief structures that governed social reality. By 1930, those who had survived the mechanized slaughter of the Great War and the subsequent hyper-inflation caused by the payment of war reparations, were in the grips of yet another devaluation of their existence; the Great Depression. After the Wall Street Crash in October 1929 America stopped the financial aid it provided to the republic. The subsequent collapse of the German economy resulted in unemployment levels increased to unprecedented levels.⁵⁴ In response to the catastrophic homogenization of the widespread poverty, Kracauer noted a reactionary trend in the literature favoured by the German middle-class. As international social and economic forces dissipated the sovereign power of the individual so the middle-class turned to the literary genre of the biography as a refuge for their notions of the autonomous human subject. Those wishing to address the reality character of the historical situation, Kracauer explained, would have to dispense with such an ersatz idea of subjectivity. In his essay on the middle classes’ appetite for biographies, Kracauer argues that:

Today the creative artist has once and for all lost faith in the objective meaning of any one individual system of reference. But when this fixed coordinate grid disappears, all the curves plotted on it lose their pictorial form as well. The writer can no more appeal to his self than he can depend on the world for support, because these two structures determine each other. The former is *relativized*, and the contents and figures of the latter have been thrown into an opaque orbit.⁵⁵

Vigo, in Kracauer’s view, was such an artist. His work demonstrated an understanding of this relative nature of the self-satisfied subject. For the spectator,

⁵³ In 1916 Einstein wrote an introductory guide to his theory, the success of which accounts for his subsequent popular appeal, see, Einstein, Albert, *Relativity. The Special and General Theory* [1916], translated by Robert W. Lawson (New York: Pi Press, 2005).

⁵⁴ For an introduction to the events of this period see, Mann, Golo, *The History of Germany since 1789* [1958], translated by Marian Jackson (London: Pimlico, 1996), pp. 342 – 419. A more detailed examination of the period of hyperinflation in the Weimar republic is available in Fergusson, Adam, *When money dies: the nightmare of the Weimar collapse* (London: Kimber, 1975).

⁵⁵ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 102. My emphasis.

nestled amidst the flotsam and jetsam of *L'Atalante*'s fog-cloaked canals, a different form of subjectivity gradually makes itself apparent. "Instead of using the objects at his disposal", writes Kracauer about Michel Simon's character Père Jules, "he has become their property."⁵⁶ "To evoke this impression", Kracauer explains, Vigo depicts the "piled-up treasures which crowd his cabin" from "various sides and on many levels without ever clarifying their spatial inter-relationship – using nothing but the medium shots and close-ups made necessary by the narrowness of the cabin".⁵⁷ In contrast to the ontological stability of theatrical space (the actor and spectator know where they are in relation to the stage and the auditorium), the disorientation experienced by the audience during the scenes filmed below deck on the *L'Atalante* suggests a less coherent relationship [Figure 3].

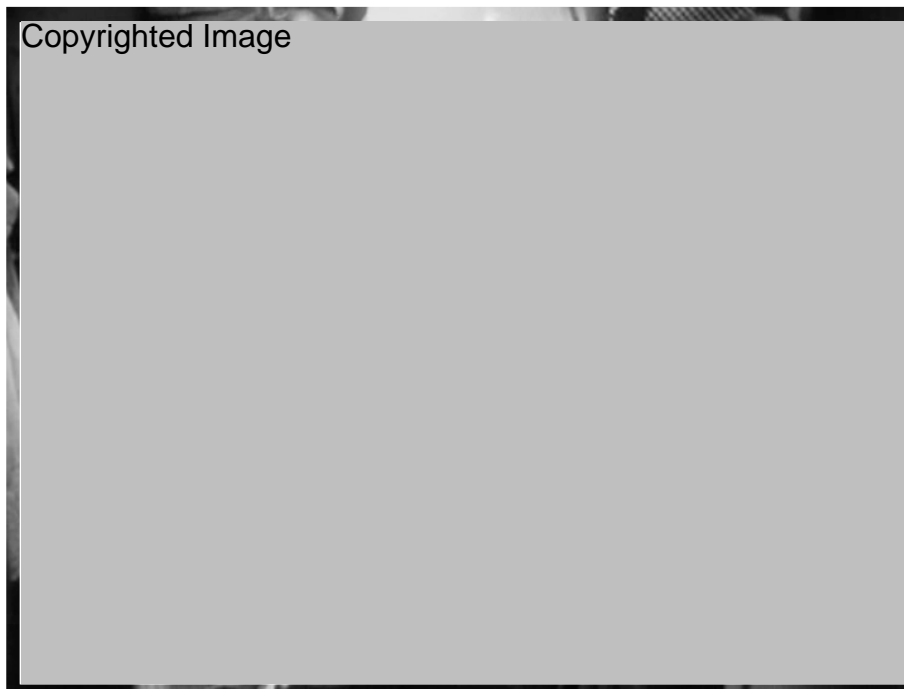


Figure 3. Below deck of *L'Atalante* (1934)

No longer definable as a fixed reference point in time and space, the observer position in Vigo's film is (as Kracauer describes in his critique of the art forms of the *neubürgerliche*) "relativized".⁵⁸ In other words, we are observing the events of the film from a simultaneously human and non-human perspective. In the next section I will explain how Kracauer uses film as a means to question the objectivity of the

⁵⁶ Kracauer, 1947, p. 263.

⁵⁷ Kracauer, 1947, p. 263.

⁵⁸ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 102.

philosophical viewpoint. Focusing this time on Vigo's earlier film *Zéro de conduite* (1933), it will show how Kracauer developed Lukács' Marxist critique of bourgeois philosophy into a theory of film that questioned theory's role in the production of the reality it tries to comprehend.

5.3 *The Peculiar Reality of Jean Vigo's Zéro de Conduite.*

For Kracauer, the "process of materialization" was not identical with film's ability to consolidate an illusion of objective reality. For example, he read the coming of synchronized sound to film comedy as a regressive step.⁵⁹ Instead, Kracauer related it to the medium's ability to demonstrate the arbitrary nature of fixed object and subject relations. Using the precariousness of the subject position to expose the historical nature of this relationship, Kracauer's work demonstrates another point of correspondence with Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*.

In a letter to a mutual friend, the philosopher Ernst Bloch, written in June 1926, Kracauer concludes a tirade against Lukács' Communist Party orthodoxy with a positive appraisal of Lukács' essay on "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" in *History and Class Consciousness*.⁶⁰ In the essay Lukács states that the "irrational chasm between the subject and object of knowledge" is grounded "in a theoretical approach based upon unmediated contemplation".⁶¹ "When nature becomes landscape – e.g. in contrast to the peasant's unconscious living within nature", argues Lukács, "the artist's unmediated experience of the landscape (which has of course only achieved this immediacy after undergoing a whole series of mediations) presupposes a distance (spatial in this case) between the observer and the landscape".⁶² As Lukács explains:

The observer stands outside the landscape, for were this not the case it would not be possible for nature to become a landscape at all. If he were to attempt to integrate himself and the nature immediately surrounding him in space within 'nature-seen-as-landscape', without modifying his aesthetic contemplative immediacy, it would

⁵⁹ Kracauer, 1951, p. 32.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Jay, Martin, "The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer", in Jay, 1985, p. 163.

⁶¹ Lukács, 1971, p. 157.

⁶² Lukács, 1971, p. 157.

then at once become apparent that landscape only starts to become landscape at a definite (though of course variable) distance from the observer and that only as an observer set apart in space can he relate to nature in terms of landscape at all.⁶³

Though this idea of an arbitrary partition between the observer and the observed proffers a moment of concord between Kracauer's and Lukács work, their own disparity becomes equally apparent in their subsequent attitudes towards art's ability to resolve this disjunction. For Lukács, art's relationship to the "pernicious chasm", between the man and unmediated nature, subject and material context, was superficial.⁶⁴ "Art can do no more," concluded Lukács, "than shape this problematic without however finding a real solution to it."⁶⁵ Kracauer, however, considered film an "art with a difference."⁶⁶

For Kracauer, what coloured Lukács consideration of agency was related to the fact that instead of "penetrating Marx with realities," his concept of a totality, a reconciliation of subject and object, "returns" to the "metaphysics of exhausted idealism", which in turn "allows the materialist categories to fall on the way".⁶⁷ As Susan Buck-Morss notes, when Lukács "analysed the structure of bourgeois theory and found within it the commodity structure of the social totality", he demonstrated not just a model for critical theory but also his own "impatience with details and his unmistakable preference for totalistic visions".⁶⁸ As Bloch himself commented, what Lukács "so frightfully lacked," was an eye "for the unusual, the disruptive, the individual being (*Einzelsein*) which doesn't fit into the mold".⁶⁹ However, it would be a mistake to read the top down perspective adopted by Lukács as the expression of an indifference to the lessons of experience, it was more a distrust of the allure of its immediacy, a distrust that was to shape Adorno's consideration of cinema and in turn affect how Kracauer argued his own position.

⁶³ Lukács, 1971, pp. 157 – 158. In the text Lukács states that Bloch supplied the illustration of the "landscape" to him.

⁶⁴ Lukács, 1971, p. 158.

⁶⁵ Lukács, 1971, p. 158.

⁶⁶ Kracauer, 1997, p. 1.

⁶⁷ Kracauer letter to Bloch, May 27th 1926. Quoted in Jay, 1985, p.162.

⁶⁸ Buck-Morss, Susan, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics. Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), p. 242 n.83.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Buck-Morss, 1977, p.74.

The “antinomies”, writes Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness*, between “subject and object, freedom and necessity, individual and society, form and content, etc.” exist as the result of “the systematic limitations” of bourgeois thought.⁷⁰ Though “bourgeois thought only landed in these antinomies after the very greatest mental exertions”, it “accepted their existential basis as self-evident, as a simply unquestionable reality”.⁷¹ In other words, “bourgeois thought entered into an unmediated relationship with reality as it was given”.⁷² “Seen methodologically”, explains Lukács, this approach to reality “makes of every historical object a variable monad which is denied any interaction with other – similarly viewed – monads and which possess characteristics that appear to be absolutely immutable essences”.⁷³ An object, in this respect, “does indeed retain an individual uniqueness but this is only the uniqueness of mere *facticity*”.⁷⁴ But, Lukács adds, this “facticity” is “an illusion which is itself the product of the habits of thought and feeling of mere immediacy where the immediately given form of the objects, the fact of their existing here and now and in this particular way appears to be primary, real and objective, whereas their “relations seem to be secondary and subjective”.⁷⁵ If a change in this situation is to be comprehensible, Lukács argues, then “it is necessary to abandon the view that objects are rigidly opposed to each other, it is necessary to elevate their interrelatedness and the interaction between these ‘relations’ and the objects to the same plane of reality”.⁷⁶ Lukács concludes that:

Immediacy and mediation are therefore not only related and mutually complementary ways of dealing with objects of reality. But corresponding to the dialectical nature of reality and the dialectical character of our efforts to come to terms with it, they are related dialectically. That is to say that every mediation must necessarily yield a standpoint from which the objectivity it creates assumes the form of immediacy.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Lukács, 1971, p. 156.

⁷¹ Lukács, 1971, p. 156.

⁷² Lukács, 1971, p. 156.

⁷³ Lukács, 1971, p. 153.

⁷⁴ Lukács, 1971, p. 153.

⁷⁵ Lukács, 1971, p. 154.

⁷⁶ Lukács, 1971, p. 154.

⁷⁷ Lukács, 1971, p. 155 – 156.

As Kracauer notes, Lukács' route out of this *mise-en-abyme* of false consciousness, demonstrated a regression from the materialism of Marx to the idealism of Hegel. For Lukács, the "essence of history" lies precisely in the structural changes that occur at "the focal points of man's interaction with environment at any given moment, and which determine the objective nature of both his inner and his outer life".⁷⁸ "But this only becomes objectively possible (and hence can only be adequately comprehended)", states Lukács, "when the individuality, the uniqueness of an epoch or an historical figure, when it is discovered and exhibited in them and through them".⁷⁹ Here, at this moment of paradox, is the point at which Lukács and Kracauer's critiques converge. However, this convergence marks only a brief intersection, as Lukács' approach takes a diametrically different route from the diligent receptiveness towards phenomena espoused by Kracauer. "[N]either the people who experience it", concludes Lukács, "nor the historian has direct access to the immediate reality" of these "true structural forms". Therefore, it "is first necessary to search for them and to find them – as the path to their discovery is the path to a knowledge of the historical process in its totality".⁸⁰ For Lukács, when it came to determining the genuine constituents of social change the evidence of immediate experience was not to be trusted. The only certainty in this respect was Marx's model for historical change.

How Kracauer's notion of the materialization of the cinematic subject intervenes in the dialectic of immediacy and mediation (with which Lukács delimits the objects of bourgeois reality) is demonstrated in his interpretation of the opening scene of Vigo's 1933 film *Zéro de conduite*.⁸¹ Here, through moments of diegetic (plot) indeterminacy, Vigo presents a subjective standpoint from which objects and their "relations" can be seen to interact, as Lukács' proposed, on "the same plane of reality".⁸² The scene [Figure 4] involves two schoolboys travelling at night in a third class train compartment. It is, suggests Kracauer:

⁷⁸ Lukács, 1971, p. 153.

⁷⁹ Lukács, 1971, p. 153.

⁸⁰ Lukács, 1971, p. 153.

⁸¹ *Zero for Conduct* [French: *Zéro de conduite*], directed by Jean Vigo (France: Franfilmdis / Argui-Film, 1933)

⁸² Lukács, 1971, p. 156.

as if they were left to themselves in a wigwam that imperceptibly fuses with their dreams. We see a man's legs on one of the benches, and then, on the other bench, we see the upper half of a sleeping traveller. This halving of the sleeper, marking him as an inanimate being, increases the impression of isolation from the world, an impression already aroused by the smoke, which shuts out the world behind the car window. The partition of the compartment lies somewhat obliquely in the picture, an angle which points to the fact that this entire sequence cannot be located within real space and time. Their adventurous ride stimulates the two boys to pranks. From unfathomable pockets they produce alternately a spiral with a little ball springing out of it, a flute, shrivelled toy balloons blown up by the younger boy, a bunch of goose quills with which the older one adorns himself, and finally cigars a yard long. Photographed from below, they squat exaltedly as the smoke of the locomotive mingles with the smoke of the cigars, and in the haze the round balloons float to and fro, in front of their pale faces. It is exactly as if the two in their magic wigwam were riding through the air.⁸³

As with the cramped environment of Père Jules' cabin in *L'Atalante*, the various unconventional camera positions adopted by Boris Kaufman (Vigo's director of photography) combine to confuse the location of any singular spatial or temporal



Figure 4. The train compartment in *Zéro de conduite* (1933)

⁸³ Kracauer, 1947, p. 262.

viewpoint. It is not from the perspective of a person that we see the events in the carriage but from the perspectives of the things around them. Even the paradoxical observer position of the sleeping passenger is, as Kracauer suggests, frustrated by an oblique truncation that transmogrifies him from man to object. It is only from the multiple positions of such objects that an observer position can be assumed to exist at all. This is a standpoint that exists as an epiphenomenon rather than an Archimedean point from which the objectivity of the camera “assumes the form of immediacy”.⁸⁴ As Vigo’s biographer, P.E. Salles Gomes notes: “If one had to select a single sequence from Vigo’s work representative of his style for an anthology, one ought to choose this opening of *Zéro de conduite*”. This is because, argues Salles Gomes:

Three key elements of his method can be seen in it. First, everyday reality full of carefully selected details (a third class compartment, school-boys with skinny legs in frayed uniforms); then it moves through the bizarre (the children’s objects and toys), to develop into fantasy (the hazy atmosphere of the compartment).⁸⁵

It is the immediacy of Vigo’s materialism, the spatial and temporal pattern it weaves that suggests the dialectical form of its reality, not vice-versa. For Salles Gomes, what this scene on the train and the later sequence in the school dormitory show is “Vigo in a moment of complete control over the cinema, which bends obediently to his desire to re-create the sense of delicious intimacy he had dragged out of his childhood memories”. In this scene, he argues:

editing, the camera movements, the composition and inner rhythm of the images, the dialogue, the lighting, all fused into a harmonious whole which was probably one of Vigo’s most ambitious dreams.⁸⁶

However, this is not an exclusively private experience. As the smoke of the train mingles with the smoke of the cigars, blurring the boundary between the boy’s private world and that outside the carriage, so the demarcation between Vigo’s dreams and memories and our own becomes indistinct. Vigo’s technique is as intent on frustrating

⁸⁴ Lukács, 1971, p. 155 – 156.

⁸⁵ Salles Gomes, 1971, p. 111.

⁸⁶ Salles Gomes, 1971, p. 113.

temporal relations, as it is keen to disrupt conventional spatial ones. Past experience is denied the finitude of recollected memory by imbuing its reproduction with some of the same puzzling indeterminacy of the initial event. “Films may try to direct our attention more forcefully than a play or a novel”, suggests Hansen, “but they may also afford us an opportunity to meander across and away from it, into labyrinths of our own imagination, memories, and dreams”.⁸⁷

In a review of the film that appeared in *Paris-Cinéma* to mark the film’s re-release in 1945, Jacques Loew remarked that, “Jean Vigo has given his scenes from life an authenticity which is at times hallucinatory; we are faced by the ghosts and shadows of our own childhood”.⁸⁸ P.F. Lacombe echoes the same sentiment in a slightly later review. “These images from childhood which have wandered into film from our memories”, writes Lacombe, “are unforgettable”.⁸⁹ This is not to say that, for Kracauer, the effectiveness of this scene from Vigo’s film relates to its ability to induce a sense of nostalgia. What Kracauer is suggesting in his article on Vigo, and what he later elucidates in *Theory of Film*, is that somehow Vigo’s attempt to translate his own experience into film produces a peculiar resonance between the subject position on screen and that occupied by the spectator in the auditorium. The overall effect of Vigo’s and Kaufman’s strange composite of slanted and tilted camera angles, argues Kracauer, is both comic and emancipatory. In this cinematic space, objects emerge (like the balloons in the smoke) from what Kracauer calls “the abyss of nearness.”⁹⁰ As their “boasts and pranks”, transforms the school boys’ train carriage into “a magic wigwam [...] floating through the air”, so too do the tricks that the cinema pulls from its own “unfathomable pockets” transform, for the spectator, the ordinary into the fantastic.⁹¹

5.4 Conclusion

The film experience for Kracauer does not just provide a novel means for the audio and visual enunciation of a philosophical position but through its peculiar relativisation of the viewer’s subject position questions the legitimacy of maintaining

⁸⁷ Hansen, 1997, p. xxxiv.

⁸⁸ *Paris-Cinéma* review dated November 28th, 1945, quoted in Salles Gomes, 1971, p. 223.

⁸⁹ *Gavroche* review dated December 6th, 1945, quoted in Salles Gomes, 1971, p. 223.

⁹⁰ Kracauer, 1997, p. 55.

⁹¹ Kracauer, 1997, p. 55.

(like Lukács) Idealism's teleological perspective. What is interesting about Kracauer's initially Marxist reading of Vigo's work is how the object of his study (the film) starts to undermine and destabilise the conceptual framework of his interpretation. The film object performs this subversion not by a rational process of analysis, explication and exposition (like conventional literary modes of critique) but by blurring the boundaries between subject and object through its facilitation of the cinematic process. This process though initiated by the formal compositional decisions of filmmakers is not entirely immanent to the film but exists epiphenomenally between its intention and effect. As I shall demonstrate in the subsequent chapters of this study, the ontological indeterminacy of the cinematic effect increasingly informs Kracauer's critical practice.

"Despite Kracauer's intentions," writes Temenuga Trifonova, "his materialist aesthetic is actually an aesthetic of the fantastic in as much as it is precisely in the fantastic object that the desire for an absolutely autonomous, self-signifying object is fulfilled."⁹² Trifonova is correct in suggesting that, for Kracauer, the cinematic object (the components of what he refers to in *Theory of Film* as "camera reality"⁹³) have paradoxically a closer relationship to actuality than phenomena not mediated by the film process. However, as I will show in the next chapter, the question as to what (for Kracauer) constitutes a cinematic object and its relationship to materiality is a complex and dynamic process and one not easily divided into the subsets of fantasy and reality. As Kracauer states in his 1930 book *Die Angestellten*, "[r]eality is a construction", a "mosaic" whose observable patterns and forms are the creations of those who observe them.⁹⁴ Anyone wishing to understand the interactive nature of this process, suggests Kracauer nearly forty years later in his last book *History* (1969), should heed the philosopher Schopenhauer's "advice to the art student" and:

⁹² Trifonova, Temenuga, 'The Fantastic Redemption of Reality', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, no. 23 (2006), p. 58.

⁹³ Kracauer, 1997, p. 28.

⁹⁴ Kracauer, Siegfried, *The Salaried Masses. Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, translated by Quintin Hoare (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 32.

behave as if he were in the presence of a prince and respectfully wait [...] for were he to talk first he would only be listening to himself.⁹⁵

In order to avoid such circularity, explains Kracauer, the student of reality must therefore maintain an idea of themselves as “both passive and active, a recorder and a creator”.⁹⁶ In the next chapter I shall explore how Kracauer uses the idea of dreaming as a way of understanding our relationship to camera reality and in particular how we as film spectators are simultaneously both active and passive in the construction of its meaning.

⁹⁵ Kracauer, Siegfried, *History. The Last Things Before the Last*, completed after the death of the author by Paul Oskar Kristeller (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1995), p. 84. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 – 1860), German philosopher.

⁹⁶ Kracauer, 1995, p. 47.

CHAPTER 6:

FEEDBACK LOOPS: DEFINING CINEMATIC AGENCY

6.1 *Introduction.*

In this chapter I will examine how Kracauer envisaged his film theory as belonging (as Mullarkey suggests) “both to the theorist and, in part, to the film”.¹ It will focus on how he developed a critical correspondence between film spectatorship and dreaming not as a means of decrypting a film’s latent meaning (as in psychoanalysis) but in order to investigate the peculiar nature of cinematic agency as a mutually modifying process between subject and object (a feedback loop). Through a comparison of his film analysis and his literary prose I will examine how Kracauer defines spectatorship as consisting of two antinomic processes. With reference to his and Benjamin’s work on childhood imagination and mimesis, I argue that Kracauer conceives of the cinematic approach not as a synthesis of this antinomy but as a complementarity. Using Kracauer’s own recourse to post-Newtonian physics as a starting point, this chapter will then demonstrate how Kracauer incorporates the idea of how the spectator / observer influences (co-generates) the object of study. The last section of this chapter proposes a comparison between Kracauer’s dynamic and interactive concept of spectatorship and Jacques Rancière’s notion of the emancipated spectator in order to demonstrate how both work to collapse the antithetical dialectic of passive and active modes of behaviour that is immanent to philosophy’s notion of agency.

6.2 *A Dream That Makes You Dream*

Though much has been made of Kracauer’s identification of film spectatorship and dreaming, on the whole this has been done in order to align his thought with the more psychoanalytical models adopted by his Weimar associates, Adorno and Benjamin.²

¹ Mullarkey, John, “Film Can’t Philosophise (and Neither Can Philosophy): Introduction to a Non-Philosophy of Cinema, in Havi, Carel and Greg Tuck (eds.), *New Takes in Film Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 94.

² For a psychoanalytical interpretation of Kracauer’s ideas of spectatorship see, Campbell, Jan, ‘Are Your Dreams Wishes or Desires?: Hysteria as Distraction and Character in the Work of Siegfried Kracauer’, *New Formations*, No. 61 (2007), pp. 132 – 148. Campbell also argues for the consideration of a common Freudian critical model in Kracauer and Benjamin in Campbell, Jan, *Film and Cinema Spectatorship. Melodrama and Mimesis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005). For a detailed account of

However, such an alignment with Freudian theory obscures important and fundamental differences between his usage of the term and that espoused by Benjamin in particular. In a letter to Adorno in 1930, Kracauer refutes Adorno's assertion that he has accepted Benjamin's "formula of buildings as the dreams of the collective". "This is not the case at all", proclaims Kracauer:

I referred to certain spatial images as society's dreams because they represent a level of this society's existence which has been concealed from its consciousness. That is, I meet Benjamin – who, by the way, is of the same opinion – only in the word dream. It is like meeting at a street crossing and then continuing in a different direction.³

What is interesting here about Kracauer's protest is that as well as stating definitively the disjunction between Benjamin's and his own understanding of dreaming, the analogy employed by Kracauer gives the concept a decidedly dynamic character. The word dream acts as a junction, the incidence of contradictory processes that would thwart the application of a predetermined symbolic cipher. It is this idea of dreaming as a mutable complex that forms the conceptual basis for his 1959 essay "The Spectator" and its subsequent revision as a chapter in *Theory of Film*.

"Film is a dream", states Kracauer (quoting the French psychoanalyst Serge Lebovici), "which makes (one) dream."⁴ However, though it is "fairly evident", writes Kracauer, "that the spectator's condition has something to do with the kind of spectacle he watches", insights such as Lebovici's raise "the question as to what elements of film may be sufficiently dream-like to launch the audience into reveries and perhaps even influence their course".⁵ For Kracauer, cinema's dream quality has little to do with its Hollywood portrayal of itself as a "dream factory," its capability to

how Freud's psychoanalytical theory influenced those associated with the Frankfurt school see, Wiggershaus, Rolf, *The Frankfurt School. Its History, Theories and Political Significance*, translated by Michael Robertson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), in particular pp. 52 – 60 & pp. 265 – 273.

³ Barnouw, Dagmar, *Critical Realism: History, Photography, and the work of Siegfried Kracauer* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 293 n.33. Barnouw's monograph is the only English language text to systematically attempt to discredit what she refers to as the "fictitious intellectual closeness to Adorno, Bloch, and especially Benjamin", p. 308.

⁴ Kracauer, Siegfried, 'The Spectator', in Robert Hughes (ed.), *Film: Book 1. The Audience and the Filmmaker* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 10.

⁵ Kracauer, 1959, p. 10.

satisfy “the alleged desires and daydreams of the public at large,” but rather its role in the technological mediation between the spectator and the “stark reality” of their predominantly metropolitan environment.⁶ If film has the ability to “resemble dreams at intervals”, it is, Kracauer asserts, “a quality so completely independent of their recurrent excursions into the realms of fantasy and mental imagery that it shows most distinctly in places where they concentrate on real-life phenomena”.⁷

The film Kracauer cites as demonstrating the analogous relationship between dreaming and film spectatorship is Sidney Meyer’s 1949 documentary film *The Quiet One* [Figure 5]; a film that chronicles the contemporary plight of an emotionally disturbed African American boy in and around the Harlem neighbourhood of New York.⁸



Figure 5. The stark reality of *The Quiet One* (1949)

Here, as in his description of Vigo’s *Zéro de Conduite*, Kracauer suggests a relationship between the experience of the film spectator and the subjectivity of the juvenile protagonist. However, this should not be understood as an identification of subject positions but a far more elusive resonance between particular indeterminate manifestations of subject / object relations. Note Kracauer’s use of the possessive

⁶ Kracauer, 1959, p. 11.

⁷ Kracauer, 1959, p. 12.

⁸ *The Quiet One*, directed by Sidney Meyers (USA: Film Documents, 1948).

adjective “our” in the following account of a sequence from Meyer’s film, as it works to confuse the attribution of cause and effect in the cinema experience:

Women are standing, all but motionless, in house doorways and nondescript characters are seen loitering about. Along with the dingy facades, they might as well be products of our imagination, as kindled by the narrative. To be sure, this is an intended effect, but it is brought about by a clear-cut recording of stark reality. Perhaps films look most like dreams when they overwhelm us with the crude and un-negotiated presence of natural objects so that it is as if the camera had just now extricated them from the womb of physical existence and as if the umbilical cord between image and actuality had not yet been severed. There is something in the abrupt immediacy and shocking veracity of such pictures that justifies their identification as dream images.⁹

This description of Meyer’s film is reminiscent in its mood of two prose poems, “*Zwei Flächen*” [Two Planes] and “*Analyse eines Stadtplans*” [Analysis of a City Map], that Kracauer wrote in 1926 as he travelled around France (often with Benjamin). However, the relationship between these texts goes beyond a superficial similarity between their desolate tone and urban subject matter. In conjunction with “*Knabe und Stier*” [Lad and Bull], also written in 1926, their importance as an indicator of Kracauer’s dialectical understanding of subject / object relations is affirmed by their use as an introduction to *The Mass Ornament*, the collection of Kracauer’s Weimar essays that he edited and published in 1963.¹⁰ In these pieces, as well as in the Vigo text and “The Spectator”, Kracauer introduces into his work the notion of observation’s complex and active engagement with its object. In other words, as stressed in the subtitle of “*Knabe und Stier*”, “*Bewegungsstudie*” (A Study in Movement), what Kracauer attempts to articulate is a dynamic interchange. These are not descriptions of static scenes, photographic snapshots in prose, nor are they

⁹ Kracauer, 1959, p. 12.

¹⁰ Kracauer, Siegfried, *The Mass Ornament. Weimar essays*, translated and edited by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard U.P., 1995b), pp. 33 – 39. Kracauer edited the first edition of this collection himself in 1963 see, Levin, T, ‘Translator’s Note’, in Kracauer, 1995b, p. x. For details of Benjamin’s and Kracauer’s European travels in 1926 see, Benjamin, Walter, *Briefe an Siegfried Kracauer*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1987), p. 36.

simply convoluted reportage of past events.¹¹ They are about the process of observation itself, and in particular the complexes of material relations that facilitates a peculiar dream-like consciousness of the dissolution of what demarcates the subject and the object. “Two planes,” concludes with a description of a “deserted square,” chanced upon by Kracauer and Benjamin, as they explored the small backstreets of Marseilles. Here, though not explicit, the analogy Kracauer makes between this and the experience of going to the cinema is clear. Kracauer writes:

In this tangle of pictorial alleys no one seeks the quadrangle. But once its observers have settled into their chairs, it expands toward the four sides of the world, overpowering the pitiful, soft, private parts of the dream.¹²

Though the last image of “Two planes” is one in which the observer is overwhelmed by the experience of the expanding horizontal plane of the deserted town square in his examination of the vertical plane of the cinema screen Kracauer is careful to describe the process as a two way process. In the following section I will look at how Kracauer uses the notion of dreaming to explore how the cinematic object is (to use Mullarkey’s term) “co-generated”.¹³

6.3 *Film Spectatorship and the Two Directions of Dreaming*

In an attempt to articulate this idea of the object as an active agent in experience Kracauer in “The Spectator”, breaks down the “dream character” of film into two discrete processes that proceed “in two all but opposite directions.”¹⁴ Paraphrasing the French Marxist philosopher, Lucien Sève, Kracauer introduces the first category of dreaming “[t]oward the object” by suggesting that on a basic phenomenological level the film image disturbs rather than affirms our preconceptions of objects. Film images “arouse disquiet rather than certainty in the spectator, and thus prompt him to embark on an inquiry into the being of the objects they record – an inquiry which

¹¹ For a consideration of Kracauer’s texts as “snapshots” of urban experience see, Federle, Courtney, ‘Picture Postcard: Kracauer Writes from Berlin’, in Kenneth S. Calhoon (ed.), *Peripheral Visions: the hidden stages of Weimar cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), pp. 39 – 55.

¹² Kracauer, 1995b, p. 39.

¹³ Mullarkey, 2011, pp. 95.

¹⁴ Kracauer, 1959, p. 12.

does not aim at explaining them but tries to elucidate their secrets”.¹⁵ The spectator, suggests Kracauer:

drifts toward and into the objects - much like the legendary Chinese painter who, longing for the peace of the landscape he had created, moved into it, walked toward the faraway mountains suggested by his brush strokes, and disappeared in them never to be seen again. Yet the spectator cannot hope to apprehend, however incompletely, the being of any object that draws him into its orbit unless he meanders, dreamingly, through the maze of its multiple meanings and psychological correspondences. Material existence, as it manifests itself in film, launches the moviegoer into unending pursuits.¹⁶

Here, the illustration provided by Kracauer of the Chinese artist moving into the landscape stands in contrast to that used by Bloch and Lukács to explain the “irrational chasm between the subject and object of knowledge”.¹⁷ The bourgeois consciousness, as Lukács comprehended it, is challenged on a physiological level by the experience of watching a film in the cinema. For evidence of the public nature of this “diffuse, unorganized, and self-unconscious” sensibility as a “genuine first hand experience” Kracauer quotes a 1928 essay by French novelist Michel Dard, “*Valeur humaine du cinéma*” [The human value of the cinema]. Dard, explains Kracauer, was one of the first to remark upon the historical peculiarity of the sensibility of “the young people haunting movie houses, which he described as being ‘like an amoeba; deprived of an object, or rather attached to all of them, like fog; penetrant, like rain; heavy to bear, easy to satisfy, impossible to restrain; displaying everywhere, like a roused dream, that contemplation of which Dostoyevsky speaks and which incessantly hoards without rendering anything’”.¹⁸ It is however not to Dostoyevsky that Kracauer looks for a model of a peculiar cinematic awareness, but to the work of avid moviegoer, Franz Kafka.¹⁹

¹⁵ Kracauer, 1959, p. 12.

¹⁶ Kracauer, 1959, p. 13.

¹⁷ Lukács, Georg, *History and Class Consciousness: studies in Marxist dialectics*, translated by Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), p. 158.

¹⁸ Kracauer, 1959, p.13.

¹⁹ For Kafka’s movie going activity see, Zischler, Hanns, *Kafka goes to the Movies*, translated by Susan H. Gillespie (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

In his 1927 essay “Photography”, Kracauer develops the idea that once inducted in the “process of materialization” it becomes “incumbent on consciousness to establish the provisional status of all given configurations, and perhaps even to awaken an inkling of the right order of the inventory of nature”.²⁰ For example, explains Kracauer:

In the works of Franz Kafka, a liberated consciousness absolves itself of this responsibility by destroying natural reality and scrambling the fragments. [...] The capacity to stir up the elements of nature is one of the possibilities of film. This possibility is realized whenever film combines parts and segments to create strange constructs [...] the game that film plays with the pieces of disjointed nature is reminiscent of dreams in which the fragments of daily life become jumbled. This game shows that the valid organization of things remains unknown.²¹

It is after the “spectator’s organized self has surrendered”, to the “game” and immersed themselves in the stirred up elements of nature that the dream processes identified by Kracauer in “The Spectator”, as operating away from the object come to the fore. “Owing to their indeterminacy”, suggests Kracauer, “film shots are particularly fit to function as an ignition spark”, that prompts the spectator’s “subconscious or unconscious experiences, apprehensions and hopes” to impose an alternative organization of the film elements. Any film sequence, argues Kracauer:

may touch off chain reactions in the moviegoer a flight of associations which no longer centre around their incidental source but arise from his agitated inner environment. This movement leads the spectator away from the given image into subjective reveries; the image itself recedes after having mobilized his previously repressed fears or induced him to revel in a prospective wish fulfilment.²²

²⁰ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 62.

²¹ Kracauer, 1995b, pp. 62 – 63.

²² Kracauer, 1959, p. 14.

To illustrate this process as a product of psychological influences, Kracauer looks to the Swiss poet Blaise Cendrars.²³ Cendrars recalled in interview held in 1925 how when watching a film some years previous a relatively innocuous scene provoked in him a peculiar response:

The screen showed a crowd, and in this crowd there was a lad with his cap under his arm: suddenly this cap which was like all other caps began, without moving, to assume intense life; you felt it was all set to jump, like a leopard! Why? I don't know.²⁴

“Perhaps”, suggests Kracauer, “the cap transformed itself into a leopard because the sight of it stirred involuntary memories in the narrator [...] sense memories of inarticulate childhood days when the little cap under his arm was the carrier of tremendous emotions which in a mysterious way involved the spotted beast of prey in his picture book”.²⁵ Again, as demonstrated by his focus on Vigo’s *Zéro de conduite* and Meyer’s *The Quiet One*, Kracauer seems drawn to examples of the cinema spectatorship that evoke this “sense memory” of childhood.²⁶ The French poet, Charles Baudelaire in “The Painter of Modern Life,” (1863) states that artistic “genius is nothing more nor less than childhood recovered at will – a childhood now equipped for self-expression with manhood’s capacities and a power of analysis which enables it to order the mass of raw material which it has involuntarily accumulated”.²⁷ It is such a mode of reception, “the deep and joyful curiosity that we may explain the fixed and animally ecstatic gaze of a child confronted with something new,” that Cendrars, an empathic advocate of Baudelaire, attempted to encapsulate in his work.²⁸

Kracauer’s tentative invocation of Proust in this context brings into relief the importance of his distinctly fluid conception of the temporal relationship between

²³ Blaise Cendrars (born, Frédéric Louis Sauser), (1887 – 1961).

²⁴ Kracauer, 1959, p. 14.

²⁵ Kracauer, 1959, p. 14.

²⁶ In this regard, see also Kracauer’s references to the film, *Little Fugitive*, directed by Ray Ashley, Morris Engel and Ruth Orkin (USA: Little Fugitive Production Company, 1953) in Kracauer, Siegfried, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality* [1960] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 45, p. 252 & illus. 51

²⁷ Baudelaire, Charles, ‘The Painter of Modern Life’, in Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, translated and edited by Jonathon Mayne (London: Phaidon, 2001), p. 8.

²⁸ Baudelaire, 2001, p. 8. Cendrars provided the preface for the first post-war edition of Baudelaire’s poems, *The Flowers of Evil* [1857] see, Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*, with preface by Blaise Cendrars (Paris: Union Bibliophile de France, 1946).

“inarticulate” formative experiences, the process of materialization and the cinematic dreaming processes he later describes in *Theory of Film*. “Proust’s work”, writes Kracauer, “rests throughout upon the conviction that no man is a whole and that it is impossible to know a man because he himself changes while we try to clarify our original impressions of him”.²⁹ It is this mutability, this formal indeterminacy that characterises Kracauer’s conception of dream phenomena as incompatible with symbolic interpretation.³⁰ On a fundamental level, it is the recognition of the influence of observation on the mental phenomenon being recorded which distinguishes it from the hermeneutics (textual interpretation) of orthodox psychoanalytical models. As he wrote in a letter to Bloch in 1926, “nothing remembered may remain unchanged [...] transformation plays a decisive role for me”.³¹ In *Theory of Film* Kracauer makes this distinction more overtly:

Indeed, no sooner do we try to get in touch with mental entities than they tend to evaporate. In reaching out for them, we reduce them to abstractions as colourless as the noise to which radio music is commonly being reduced. [...] Freud and depth psychology in general, voids all kinds of mental phenomena of their substance by passing them off as derivatives of psychological dispositions [...] Thus the specific content of the values surrounding us is psychologized away and the realm to which they belong sinks into limbo.³²

As Trifonova states in her reading of *Theory of Film*, Kracauer’s approach should not be read as an “attack on signification”, a call for its “terminal neutralization [...] for the sake of a purely indexical relation to phenomena”, but a “warning against over signification.” For Kracauer, the “task of cinema,” she concludes, “is not to strip phenomena from signification but rather to render their signification indeterminate.”³³

²⁹ Kracauer, 1997, p. 298. Kracauer develops his reading of Proust in Kracauer, Siegfried, ‘Time and History’, *History and Theory*, Beiheft 6, 1966, p. 65-78.

³⁰ See the section “Problematic Symbolism” in Kracauer, 1997, pp. 189 – 191.

³¹ Quoted in Barnouw, 1994, pp. 42 – 43.

³² Kracauer, 1997, p. 293.

³³ Trifonova, Temenuga, “The Fantastic Redemption of Reality”, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, no. 23 (2006), p. 77.

In order to articulate more clearly his thoughts on the dreaming spectator's ability to redeem the potential of the material environment from the constraint of symbolic abstraction, Kracauer identifies it with the mimetic immersion that characterizes children's play. In this regard, Kracauer's persistent recourse to the formative stages of childhood, rather than affirm it as a Freudian axiom, provides an interesting intersection with a non-Freudian element of Walter Benjamin's work. In the following section I will examine how Benjamin's and Kracauer's ideas of how children's imagination and memories of childhood suggest a more interactive relationship with physical reality (compared to adults) and how Kracauer subsequently develops these ideas to question the role of the spectator in the generation of the industrial film object.

6.4 *On the Mimetic Faculty of the Spectator*

In a small article titled, "Old Toys" published in 1928 (in the section of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* of which Kracauer was editor), Benjamin writes that when "the urge to play overcomes an adult, this is not simply a regression to childhood".³⁴ "To be sure", he concludes, "play is always liberating".³⁵ In *On the Mimetic Faculty*, an unpublished text written in 1933, Benjamin describes how children have better utilization of the whole of their innate mimetic faculty, and such a relationship enables them to transcend the usual anthropocentric conception of semblance. For example, he writes:

Children's play is everywhere permeated by mimetic modes of behavior, and its realm is by no means limited to what one person can imitate in another. The child plays at being not only a shopkeeper or teacher, but also a windmill and a train.³⁶

Central to Benjamin's idea of mimesis is the concept of non-sensuous similarity. "This concept", explains Benjamin, "is obviously enough, a relative one: it indicates

³⁴ Benjamin, Walter, 'Old Toys', in Benjamin, Walter, *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927 – 1934*, edited by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, Mass. & London: The Belknap Press, 1999), p. 100. For Kracauer's involvement with the publication of the text see, Benjamin, 1999, p. 829.

³⁵ Benjamin, 1999, p. 829.

³⁶ Benjamin, 1999, p. 720.

that we no longer possess in our perception whatever once made it possible to speak of a similarity which might exist between a constellation of stars and a human”.³⁷

Though the specifically historical dynamic that Benjamin attributes to the mimetic faculty in his *Doctrine of the Similar* (1933), is not directly corroborated by Kracauer in *Theory of Film*, Tara Forrest sees affirmation of it in a five page “thematic sketch (*Ideen-Entwurf*) for a short film,” called *Dimanche* that Kracauer wrote sometime between 1933 and 1936.³⁸ *Dimanche* is what Dagmar Barnouw terms, “a study of visual perspective and knowledge”.³⁹ It consists of two visual accounts of an unexceptional Sunday outing, the first from a child’s perspective, Bébé (a three or four year old boy) and the second from his parents’. When seen from the perspective of the child the outing is transformed into what Kracauer describes as a “magnificent adventure”.⁴⁰ The space beneath the tables and chairs of a café becomes a “primeval forest”, and a ride on a merry-go-round becomes a magical journey through “the landscapes of coloured children’s books”. “The joke”, Kracauer notes, “lies in the correction of the imaginings of the child”.⁴¹ In other words, the juxtaposition of the two accounts would together formulate a picture puzzle and its solution. The phenomena that constitute the fantastic disorientation of the child’s journey would be qualified and explained by its subsequent conventional representation. The point of this “film-specific exploration of the interpretive character of perception”, suggests Barnouw, was to “shed light on the epistemologically interesting discrepancies between the child’s verbal and visual acculturation”.⁴² For Forrest, the significance of *Dimanche* is that “its exploration of the child’s capacity for perception and imagination” is a model for the “promise” of cinema to “rejuvenate the way in which we both perceive, and conceive of the possibilities and limitations of the world around

³⁷ Benjamin, 1999, p. 696.

³⁸ Forrest, Tara, *The Politics of Imagination: Benjamin, Kracauer, Kluge*. (Biefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2007), p. 104. Kracauer, Siegfried, “Dimanche” in *Zum Werk des Romanciers, Feuilletonisten, Architekten, Filmwissenschaftlers und Soziologen*, edited by Andreas Volk (Zurich: Seismo Verlag, 1996), pp. 209 - 212. For an account of Kracauer’s attempts at film making see, Gilloch, Graeme, ‘Orpheus in Hollywood: Siegfried Kracauer’s Offenbach film’, in Mari Hvattum and Christain Hermansen (eds.), *Tracing Modernity. Manifestations of the Modern in Architecture and the City* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 307 – 324. Also, Gilloch, Graeme and Jaeho Kang, ‘Below the Surface: Siegfried Kracauer’s ‘Test-film’ Project’, *New Formations*, no. 61 (2007), pp. 149 – 160.

³⁹ Barnouw, 1994, p. 335 n. 43.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Forrest, 2007, p. 105.

⁴¹ Quoted in Forrest, 2007, p. 105.

⁴² Barnouw, 1994, p. 335 n. 43.

us and, in doing so, fundamentally transform our conception of the possibilities of the future”.⁴³

Informed by her reading of the relationship between child and adult perspective in Kracauer’s sketch for a film, Forrest’s critical rejuvenation of the mimetic faculty presents itself as the dialectical resolution of antithetical passive and active spectator positions. The passive acceptance of bourgeois material relations characterized by the socialized adult perspective, through an exposure to alternative film making practice, becomes sublated into a progressive synthesis with its diametrically opposed counterpart, the autonomous subject of the child’s imagination. However, as even Forrest tentatively admits, her decidedly Benjamin influenced perspective sits awkwardly with what, she believes, is prescribed by Kracauer in *Theory of Film*.

Though she quotes the Cendrars’s passage in its entirety, the focus of her critique rests entirely on her identification of Kracauer’s foregrounding of “memories of childhood,” with that of another cinephile poet, Hugo von Hofmannsthal.⁴⁴ Both Cendrars and Hofmannsthal, states Forrest, “argue that film is at its best when it aids the spectator in reviving memories of ‘childhood days, which have sunk into his unconscious’”.⁴⁵ The quotation is from Hofmannsthal’s 1921 article *Der Ersatz fuer Traeume* (The Substitute for Dreams), and it is this text, suggests Forrest, which provides the model for Kracauer’s subsequent approach. This text, argues Forrest, claims “not only that film has the capacity to revive childhood memories, but that – in doing so – it provides the spectator with a taste of that ‘fuller life’ which he had dreamed of in his childhood, but which has been denied to him by society”.⁴⁶

Hofmannsthal was born in 1874, twenty-one years before Auguste and Louis Lumière publicly presented their first films in Paris. Hofmannsthal’s childhood preceded the invention of cinema. Kracauer, on the other hand, was almost its contemporary and their childhoods (so to speak) concurred.⁴⁷ Kracauer even introduces *Theory of Film*

⁴³ Forrest, 2007, p. 106.

⁴⁴ Forrest, 2001, p. 103. Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874 – 1929).

⁴⁵ Forrest, 2001, p. 104.

⁴⁶ Forrest, 2001, p. 104.

⁴⁷ Kracauer gives an account of the early days of cinema in Germany in Kracauer, Siegfried, *From Caligari to Hitler. A psychological history of the German film* [1947], revised edition edited by Leonardo Quaresima (New York: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 15 – 27.

with a “personal reminiscence” of when he was “young boy” when he saw his first film and the “intoxicating” effect it had on him.⁴⁸ Significantly, Hofmannsthal is referencing a perceived state of grace before cinema, before the mediation of the apparatus that characterizes, for him, the experience of modernity. For Kracauer, there is no such prelapsarian moment, no time of genuine unmediated experience.

Kracauer’s dreams of childhood include the movies. As Lebovici declared, “film is a dream which makes (one) dream”.⁴⁹ This leaves Forrest’s idea of a substitute for childhood dreams of a “fuller life” somewhat devoid of content. In the section of “The Spectator” that focuses on the spectator’s sense of “child-like omnipotence”, Kracauer adopts a negative stance towards any consideration of film as the vicarious fulfilment of childhood fantasies. For Kracauer, films where “the moviegoer again becomes a child in the sense that he magically rules the world through dreams which replace stubborn reality” do no more than affirm their passivity in relation to the intrigue presented.⁵⁰

Understanding this feedback loop is essential and Kracauer goes to some length in explaining how, as with the cinematic subject / object dialectic, the cinematic dream is not just a distorted reflection of a genuine, real dream but an active component in the process of dreaming. Since almost all commercial films are “produced for mass consumption”, explains Kracauer, it would be justifiable to “assume that there exists a certain relationship between their intrigues” and the “daydreams” of their patrons.⁵¹ In other words, “the events on the screen can be assumed to bear, somehow, on actual dream patterns, thereby encouraging identifications”.⁵² However, Kracauer proclaims:

this relationship is necessarily elusive. Because of their vagueness mass dispositions usually admit of diverse interpretations. People are quick to reject things that they do not agree with, while they feel much less sure about the true objects of their leanings and longings. There is, accordingly, a margin left for film producers who aim at satisfying existing mass desires. Pent-up escapist needs, for instance, may be relieved in many different ways. Hence the

⁴⁸ Kracauer, 1997, p. li.

⁴⁹ Kracauer, 1959, p. 10.

⁵⁰ Kracauer, 1959, p. 20.

⁵¹ Kracauer, 1959, p. 11.

⁵² Kracauer, 1959, p. 11.

permanent interaction between mass dreams and film content. Each popular film conforms to popular wants; yet in conforming to them it inevitably does away with their inherent ambiguity. Any such film evolves these wants in a specific direction, confronts them with one among several meanings. Through their very definiteness films thus define the nature of the inarticulate from which they emerge.⁵³

It is this analogy between the immanent dynamics of ideology and film production and reception, with the latter acting as a cipher for the former, that Adorno came to regard as Kracauer's "un-stated hypothesis."⁵⁴ For Kracauer, wrote Adorno, "when a medium desired and consumed by the masses transmits an ideology that is internally consistent and cohesive, this ideology is presumably adapting to the needs of the consumers as much as, conversely, it is progressively shaping them".⁵⁵ In *Philosophy and the Moving Image: Refractions of Reality*, John Mullarkey adopts and develops this notion of a self-perpetuating feedback loop in an attempt (like Adorno) to try and describe philosophy's (thinking's) relationship to commercial film practice. Quoting the Hollywood screenwriter William Goldman, Mullarkey suggests:

that the secret behind Hollywood's commercial success could be reduced to one golden rule: 'Nobody Knows Anything'. When it comes to the reason why one film succeeds at the box office and another fails, there is no secret knowledge at all (other than Hollywood's own ignorance of why it works when it does).⁵⁶

The same, argues Mullarkey, is true for the philosophy of film:

When it comes to what film fundamentally is, and also thereby what any one film essentially means, Nobody Knows Anything, or rather Nobody Knows Everything. This might sound like simply another form of (nihilistic) relativism, but it is actually a claim for something positive, for its corollary is not that everybody knows

⁵³ Kracauer, 1959, p. 11.

⁵⁴ Adorno, Theodor W., 'The Curious Realist: On Siegfried Kracauer', *New German Critique*, no. 54 (1991), pp. 167 – 168.

⁵⁵ Adorno, 1991, p. 167.

⁵⁶ Mullarkey, John, *Philosophy and the Moving Image: Refractions of Reality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), p. 3.

nothing (an obviously self-contradictory position), but that there is more to film than any one transcendent theory (one telling us what film is) can exhaust. This not-knowing is not only an epistemic stance but also an aspect of the ontology of film, perhaps the only thing about it that we can know for sure.⁵⁷

It is this consideration of “not-knowing” as a positive epistemic stance that also informs (as Trifonova suggests) *Theory of Film’s* “warning against over signification”.⁵⁸ In this respect Mullarkey’s and Laruelle’s idea of a “mixte” interpretive scheme like Kracauer’s cinematic approach works to render signification indeterminate not as an act of nihilistic relativism but in order to emphasize the active role of theory in constructing reality. In the next section I will look at how Kracauer expands his cinematic model of dynamic subject / object relations and its questioning of the role of the spectator in the generation of the cinematic object into a broader examination of philosophical objectivity. It will argue that Kracauer’s cinematic approach, like Mullarkey’s critique of transcendent theory, is characterised by a “side-by-side” assemblage of antinomic theories rather than a synthesis of fundamental principles. It will also demonstrate how Kracauer sought analogies between the experiences of the film spectator and other forms of intellectual endeavour.

6.5 *Complementarity and the Challenge of Content Analysis*

“In this treatise”, wrote Kracauer in *History: The Last Things before the Last*, “I consider it my task to do for history what I have done for the photographic media in my *Theory of Film* - to bring out and characterize the peculiar nature of an intermediary area which has not yet been fully recognized and valued as such”.⁵⁹ This parallel is particularly evident in the final chapter, where he addresses the problem of how to reconcile the relativity of knowledge with the quest of reason for significant truths of general validity. As with the psychological aspect of film spectatorship, Kracauer suggests a reconsideration of the relationship between the two opposing theoretical models (the “transcendental” and the “immanentist”) that create the

⁵⁷ Mullarkey, 2009, p. 3.

⁵⁸ Trifonova, 2006, p. 77.

⁵⁹ Kracauer, Siegfried, *History. The Last Things Before the Last*, completed after the death of the author by Paul Oskar Kristeller (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1995), p.192.

“dilemma confronting contemporary thought”.⁶⁰ Significantly (as with his reference to Einstein in his 1930 article on autobiographies) for the sake of clarification Kracauer again draws an analogy between his approach and that advanced in post-Newtonian physics, this time the quantum theory of physicist Niels Bohr. “From the angle of my proposition”, states Kracauer, “philosophical truths have a double aspect [...] relating to each other in ways which I believe to be theoretically *undefinable*”.⁶¹ Therefore, suggests Kracauer:

we are forced to assume that the two aspects of truths exist side by side [...] Something like an analogy may be found in the "complementarity principle" of the quantum physicists.⁶²

Bohr devised the idea of the “complementarity principle,” around 1927 in order to negotiate a particular theoretical stalemate. The problem of whether the fundamental nature of matter could be described better as a wave or a particle. According to the dictates of classical physics, as the two descriptions were mutually exclusive then one of them must be wrong. Bohr’s resolution of this antimony involved a consideration of wave / particle duality as complementary rather than antithetical paradigms. Though maintaining their absolute autonomy from each other Bohr contested that both were necessary for a full understanding of an object’s properties. Whether an object behaved as a particle or a wave, he concluded, depends on the choice of apparatus for observing it.⁶³ As Werner Heisenberg, a close colleague of Bohr’s, explained: “In classical physics science started from the belief – or should one say the illusion? – that we could describe the world or at least parts of the world without any reference to ourselves”.⁶⁴ To an extent this is actually possible, for example “we know that London exists whether we see it or not”. “It may be said”, suggests Heisenberg, that classical physics is just the “idealization” of that mode of thought that eliminates the observer from the observed. “Its success”, he adds, “has led to the general ideal of an objective description of the world”, where objectivity has become “the first

⁶⁰ Kracauer, 1995, p. 200.

⁶¹ Kracauer, 1995, p. 200.

⁶² Kracauer, 1995, p. 200.

⁶³ For Bohr’s explanation of complementarity see, Bohr, Niels. ‘Causality and Complementarity’. *Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (July 1937), pp. 289-298. For a concise explanation of Bohr’s complex theory see Gribbin, John, *In Search of Schrödinger’s Cat. Quantum Physics and Reality* [1984] (London: Black Swann. 1996), pp. 81 – 88.

⁶⁴ Heisenberg, Werner, *Physics and Philosophy. The Revolution in Modern Science* [1958], new edition (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p. 22.

criterion for the value of any scientific result”.⁶⁵ “We have to remember”, concludes Heisenberg, “that what we observe is not nature in itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning”.⁶⁶ For example, explains Heisenberg:

Our scientific work in physics consists in asking questions about nature in the language that we possess and trying to get an answer from experiment by the means that are at our disposal. In this way quantum theory reminds us, as Bohr has put it, of the old wisdom that when searching for harmony in life one must never forget that in the drama of existence we are ourselves both players and spectators. It is understandable that in our scientific relation to nature our own activity becomes very important when we have to deal with parts of nature into which we can penetrate only by using the most elaborate tools.⁶⁷

For Kracauer, the cinema was one such tool. In *Theory of Film*, Kracauer describes how the various technical devices available to film, such as the “close-up” enable the film camera to reveal “material phenomena which elude observation under normal circumstances”.⁶⁸ Paraphrasing Benjamin, Kracauer writes:

huge close-up reveals new and unsuspected formations of matter; skin textures are reminiscent of aerial photographs, eyes turn into lakes or volcanic craters. Such images blow up our environment in a double sense: they enlarge it literally; and in doing so, they blast the prison of conventional reality.⁶⁹

“How”, asks Kracauer in the final section of *History*, can we “take cognizance of these hidden possibilities?”⁷⁰ Certainly not, he asserts, by trying to deduce them from extant doctrines of high generality. Any such action, he explains, would compromise

⁶⁵ Heisenberg, 2000, p. 22.

⁶⁶ Heisenberg, 2000, p. 25.

⁶⁷ Heisenberg, 2000, p. 25.

⁶⁸ Kracauer, 1997, p. 48.

⁶⁹ Kracauer, 1997, p. 48. Compare Kracauer’s text to Benjamin, Walter, “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit” [The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction Reproducibility] in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 4. 1938 – 1940*, edited by Howard Eiland, and Michael W. Jennings, translated by Edmund Jephcott, et al. (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press, 2003), pp. 265 – 6.

⁷⁰ Kracauer, 1995, p. 214.

their integrity and allow them to be “disparaged as eclectic syncretism”.⁷¹ “Yet if the truths in the interstices cannot be won by way of deduction from an established conception or principle”, states Kracauer, “they may well arise out of absorption in configurations of particulars”.⁷² An example, he suggests, can be found in the writings of Marx:

who, in his *Pariser Commune*, does not confine himself to a general definition of petty bourgeoisie on which he then bases his whole analysis, but tries to characterize the petit bourgeois of the period independently of, and beyond, the general theoretical concept.⁷³

Objections to Marx’s dialectic conception of history, writes Kracauer, rightly concentrate on “the rather high-handed manner” in which it deals “with the given data”.⁷⁴ In his eagerness to apply his theory to all of the past, writes Kracauer, Marx actually overstretches his concepts of class and class conflict. As a result of this disjunction in the formalism of his theory and the “configurations of particulars”, Marx has been “proved abysmally wrong in predicting that under industrial capitalism pauperism is bound to grow and that its growth will increasingly revolutionize the proletariat”.⁷⁵ However, argues Kracauer:

The very economic and technological evolution he foresaw gave rise, in advanced capitalistic countries, to political changes, which effectively altered its predicted course. Most certainly, these changes - strong labour unions, democratization of governments, etc.-also owed something to the widespread apprehensions called forth by Marxist augury itself. It was "self-frustrating".⁷⁶

It is clear from the above that in *History*, Kracauer had deviated little from the position he had adopted towards dialectic materialism in the late 1920’s. As demonstrated by his allusion to Bohr’s and Heisenberg’s criticism of classical science, his identification of the failings of Marxism stemmed from his rejection of it

⁷¹ Kracauer, 1995, p. 214.

⁷² Kracauer, 1995, pp. 214 – 215.

⁷³ Kracauer, 1995, pp. 215 – 216.

⁷⁴ Kracauer, 1995, p. 37.

⁷⁵ Kracauer, 1995, p. 38.

⁷⁶ Kracauer, 1995, p. 38.

as an interpretative strategy that maintained its immanent dynamic without recognizing its effect on the material in question. The same applies to his denouncement of Freudian depth psychology, which “voids all kinds of mental phenomena of their substance by passing them off as derivatives of psychological dispositions”.⁷⁷ The proliferation of pseudo-scientific approaches that focused on objective assessments of data, argued Kracauer, risked negating the “elusive” way in which reception and practice are intertwined. “Accuracy in the approximate,” Kracauer writes in *History*, “is apt to exceed statistical elaborations in precision”.⁷⁸

The “concern with shades and approximations” that Kracauer exhibits throughout *History* is prefigured in an earlier article *The Challenge of Qualitative Content Analysis*.⁷⁹ In this text, published in the winter of 1952, Kracauer criticises the “pseudo-scientific methodological strictness” of the quantitative content analysis techniques that were prevalent in American social science at the time. Its then doyen, Harold Lasswell rigorously promoted this approach.⁸⁰ Kracauer argues that, rather than being evidence of a lack of discipline, qualitative elements are necessary for an accurate analysis of the complexity of materials under investigation, especially in the field of international communications research on which his article focused. As in physics, where the notion of complementarity has enabled researchers to increase the predictive accuracy of their theoretical models, so too the social sciences could benefit from adopting such a “side by side” approach. However, adopting such an approach would call into question the discipline’s maintenance of an objective reality distinct from the influence of any deductive method. “Documents which are not simply agglomerations of facts”, asserts Kracauer, “participate in the process of living, and every word in them vibrates with the intentions in which they originate and simultaneously foreshadows the indefinite effects they may produce”.⁸¹ Their content, explains Kracauer:

⁷⁷ Kracauer, 1995, p. 293.

⁷⁸ Kracauer, 1995, p. 214.

⁷⁹ Kracauer, Siegfried, ‘The Challenge of Qualitative Content Analysis’, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Winter 1952-3), pp. 631 – 642.

⁸⁰ Harold Lasswell (1902 - 1978), American political scientist and communications theorist. For an introduction to his approach see, Lasswell, Harold. D., ‘Why be Quantitative’, in Bernard Berelson and Morris Janowitz (eds.), *Reader in Public Opinion and Communication* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press. 1953), pp. 265 -277.

⁸¹ Kracauer, 1952 – 3, p. 641.

is no longer their content if it is detached from the texture of intimations and implications to which it belongs and taken literally; it exists only with and within this texture a still fragmentary manifestation of life, which depends upon response to evolve its properties. Most communications are not so much fixed entities as ambivalent challenges. They challenge the reader or the analyst to absorb them and react to them. Only in approaching these wholes with his own whole being will the analyst be able both to discover and determine their meaning-or one of their meanings-and thus help them to fulfil themselves.⁸²

“Far from being an obstacle”, suggests Kracauer, “subjectivity is in effect indispensable for the analysis of materials which vanish before our eyes when subjected to a treatment confounding them with dead matter”.⁸³ However, he adds, any quantitative analysis of material culture “is not free of such nihilistic influence”.⁸⁴ In fact, explains Kracauer, such critical procedures “mark the spot where a misplaced desire for objectivity has failed to reveal the inner dynamics of an atomized content”.⁸⁵ What is relevant, he concludes:

are the patterns, the wholes, which can be made manifest by qualitative exegesis and which can throw light upon a textual characteristic which is allergic to quantitative breakdowns.⁸⁶

It is important to remember that Kracauer (like Laruelle) does not construct his conception of mixed qualitative analysis as an exclusive method. Throughout the text he asserts that in “small scale” or pilot communication studies the quantitative approach does provide important insight into the configuration of the document under analysis. What he does argue against is the “basic assumption that, due to its quantifications and counts, quantitative analysis is the only possible objective systematic and reliable analysis of content.”⁸⁷ It is this axiomatic consideration of the apparent objectivity of its conclusions, Kracauer complains, that have enabled the

⁸² Kracauer, 1952 – 3, p. 641.

⁸³ Kracauer, 1952 – 3, p. 642.

⁸⁴ Kracauer, 1952 – 3, p. 642.

⁸⁵ Kracauer, 1952 – 3, p. 642.

⁸⁶ Kracauer, 1952 – 3, p. 640.

⁸⁷ Kracauer, 1952 – 3, p. 634.

erroneous extrapolation of its method in larger scale projects designed to inform social policy. In this regard, social science's supposed objectivity is entirely an ideological construct reliant on (paraphrasing Heisenberg,) its arbitrary disjunction of nature from the method of questioning. The "emancipation" of the spectator, states the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, begins, "when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection".⁸⁸ Though not an advocate of Rancière's philosophical approach, Mullarkey's insistence that "one can't privilege any one form of thinking other than by sheer fiat" demonstrates a productive correlation between their two approaches and in turn Kracauer's.⁸⁹ In the final section I shall close the conceptual loop introduced at the beginning of this chapter and explore how Kracauer's philosophical "side-by-side" approach feeds back into a critical notion of film spectatorship. This time using Rancière's idea of the "emancipated spectator" as a model I shall look at how a theoretical collapse in the distinction between the philosophical subject and object can be developed into an alternative notion of agency in which conventional notions of active and passive are themselves suspended. Also, using Rancière as a perspective, argues Robnik, "we can frame" Kracauer's thinking "politically", in other words conceive of this suspension of philosophical certainty as the basis for social reconfiguration.⁹⁰ "Read politically", suggests Robnik, "Kracauer's philosophy of non-solution offers a concept of cinema as a mode of theorizing through self-thwarting and waiting that diagnoses how power emerges where no one expected it".⁹¹

6.6 *The Emancipated Spectator*

In their critique of the culture industry in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that ideological supremacy is reliant on cultural institutions cultivating particular reward and punishment strategies. The purpose of these strategies, they assert, is to negate the individual's consciousness of a genuine

⁸⁸ Rancière, Jacques, *The Emancipated Spectator*, translated by Gregory Elliott (London: Verso. 2009), p. 13.

⁸⁹ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 92.

⁹⁰ Robnik, Drehli, 'Siegfried Kracauer', in Felicity Colman (ed.), *Film, Theory and Philosophy. The Key Thinkers* (Durham: Acumen, 2009), p. 50.

⁹¹ Robnik, 2009, p. 50.

alternative to devalued collective forms of Capitalist society. In other words, by constantly being presented with an image of themselves as atomistic components of a homogenous crowd individuals start to behave as “monads” (an indivisible and hence ultimately simple entity) thus negating the potential of any meaningful communal action.⁹² As Adorno and Horkheimer state:

The culture industry has sardonically realized man’s species being. Everyone amounts only to those qualities by which he or she can replace everyone else: all are fungible, mere specimens. As individuals they are absolutely replaceable, pure nothingness.⁹³

For Adorno and Horkheimer this process followed an orthodox Marxist dynamic, which rendered the mass passive to the ideological factors that determined their existence as such. However, as I have shown, through his exegesis of the material dialectics of film, Kracauer argued for a more intertwined conception of the individual’s relationship to their material / social environment, one that blurred the ontological distinction between active and passive components. In his essay “The Spectator”, Kracauer articulates this relationship in a manner reminiscent of Bohr’s summation of the principle of complementarity. Kracauer suggests that:

What redeems the film addict from his isolation is not so much the spectacle of an individual, which might again isolate him, as it is the sight of people mingling and communing with each other according to ever-changing patterns. He seeks the opportunity of drama rather than drama itself.⁹⁴

Here, Kracauer (partially) inverts Adorno and Horkheimer’s negative assessment of the atomized subject by defining individuality not entirely as an antagonism to an abstract mass group but also as a relative and dynamic process. Also, significantly, Kracauer attributes to the camera reality of the cinematic community (as it is co-generated by the image and spectator) a value equal to that filmed and that projected. However, if the spectator position is neither exclusively passive nor active, how does

⁹² Adorno, Theodor, W. and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1986), p. 112.

⁹³ Adorno & Horkheimer, 1986, pp. 116 – 117.

⁹⁴ Kracauer, 1959, p. 20.

this effect a practical consideration of the cinematic subject as a social agent both on screen and in the auditorium? As Jacques Rancière has recently argued, it is the immediate experience of subject / object relations rendered obscure that provides an alternative to the eternal problem of overcoming “the gulf separating activity from passivity”.⁹⁵

The “oppositions - viewing / knowing, appearance / reality, activity / passivity,” states Rancière, “are quite different from logical oppositions between clearly defined terms”.⁹⁶ What they “specifically define”, he suggests, is a “distribution of the sensible, an *a priori* distribution of the positions and capacities and incapacities attached to these positions”.⁹⁷ As “embodied allegories of inequality”, he concludes, attempts to collapse the “distance” between this antagonism merely reaffirms its existence.⁹⁸ For Rancière, the “emancipation” of the spectator begins:

when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions. The spectator also acts, like the pupil or scholar. She observes, selects, compares, and interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of place. She composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her. She participates in the performance by refashioning it in her own way by drawing back, for example, from the vital energy that it is supposed to transmit in order to make it a pure image and associate this image with a story which she has read or dreamt, experienced or invented. They are thus both distant spectators and active interpreters of the spectacle offered to them.⁹⁹

For Rancière emancipation does not just mean a collapse in the distinction between “those who look and those who act” but also (as with Kracauer’s notion of cinematic community) between individuals and members of a collective body distinct from that defined by an orthodox Marxist taxonomy.¹⁰⁰ “The collective power shared by

⁹⁵ Rancière, 2009, p. 12.

⁹⁶ Rancière, 2009, p. 13.

⁹⁷ Rancière, 2009, p. 13.

⁹⁸ Rancière, 2009, p. 13.

⁹⁹ Rancière, 2009, p. 13.

¹⁰⁰ Rancière, 2009, p. 19.

spectators”, explains Rancière, “does not stem from the fact that they are members of a collective body or from some specific form of interactivity”.¹⁰¹ It is, he argues:

the power each of them has to translate what she perceives in her own way, to link it to the unique intellectual adventure that makes her similar to all the rest in as much as this adventure is not like any other. This shared power of the equality of intelligence links individuals, makes them exchange their intellectual adventures, in so far as it keeps them separate from one another, equally capable of using the power everyone has to plot her own path. What our performances - be they teaching or playing, speaking, writing, making art or looking at it - verify is not our participation in a power embodied in the community. It is the capacity of anonymous people, the capacity that makes everyone equal to everyone else. This capacity is exercised through irreducible distances; it is exercised by an unpredictable interplay of associations and dissociations.¹⁰²

The anonymous people that constitute Rancière’s spectating collective are the same corporeal entities, the same dreaming human beings “with skin and hair [*mit Haut und Haar*]”, that occupy the seats of the cinema auditorium in Kracauer’s *Marseilles* notebooks.¹⁰³ As with Kracauer’s identification of the peculiar nature of cinematic spectatorship with a complementarity between the “two-directions of dreaming”, the movement towards and away from the object, Rancière also postulates a “power of associating and dissociating” as the basis of “emancipation”.¹⁰⁴ “Being a spectator is not some passive condition”, Rancière states, “that we should transform into activity”. “It is”, he declares, “our normal situation”¹⁰⁵, or as Kracauer states in *Theory of Film*, its immanent dynamic “parallels the ‘flow of life’”.¹⁰⁶ All of us, argues Rancière:

learn and teach, act and know, as spectators who all the time link what we see to what we have seen and said, done and dreamed.

¹⁰¹ Rancière, 2009, p. 16.

¹⁰² Rancière, 2009, p. 17.

¹⁰³ Hansen, Miriam, “‘With Skin and Hair’: Kracauer’s Theory of Film, *Marseilles 1940*”, *Critical Inquiry*, No. 19 (1993), p. 453.

¹⁰⁴ Rancière, 2009, p. 17.

¹⁰⁵ Rancière, 2009, p. 17.

¹⁰⁶ Kracauer, 1997, p. 166.

There is no more a privileged form than there is a privileged starting point. Everywhere there are starting points, intersections and junctions that enable us to learn something new if we refuse, firstly, radical distance, secondly the distribution of roles, and thirdly the boundaries between territories [...] We do not have to transform spectators into actors, we have to recognize the knowledge at work in the activity peculiar to the spectator. Every spectator is already an actor in her story; every actor, every man of action, is the spectator of the same story.¹⁰⁷

Reminiscent in both style and intent to Bohr's summation of quantum theory (quoted in the previous section) Rancière's idea of agency is also as much about how we denote difference as we codify notions of transformation and progress. This renders Rancière's radicalism somewhat paradoxical. In other words, what Sinnerbrink's approach to film-philosophy would recognise as philosophically new (as opposed to being merely theoretically novel) about Rancière's notion of emancipation is that the new (as it is defined as different from what already exists) is relative, pluralistic and inclusive and therefore as a term philosophically devalued. What Rancière's spectator is emancipated from is the social devaluation of what is considered un-philosophical activity. For some, notes John Mullarkey, the idea that thinking (and therefore philosophy) is everywhere "will be unacceptable", for others, he continues:

The true philosophical horror is not that we are not (yet) thinking [Heidegger], but that we have always been thinking. Given the view that philosophy must have an essence and so an exclusivity, then what is (philosophically) unthinkable is that thinking might be found all about us.¹⁰⁸

What, in the end, connects the disparate projects of Kracauer, Rancière and Laruelle is a questioning of what constitutes a philosophically emancipated critical practice or put slightly less prosaically, is a belief in the potential of a liberated consciousness to conceive of a genuinely different relationship between people and things. However, the way Kracauer conceives of this utopian function of the cinematic approach is

¹⁰⁷ Rancière, 2009, p. 17.

¹⁰⁸ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 92.

distinct from his French counterpart's rejection of Idealism and will be dealt with in greater detail in a later chapter.

6.7 Conclusion.

In the context of Rancière's idea of the emancipated spectator and Laruelle's non-philosophy, the cinematic approach proposed by Kracauer in *Theory of Film* can be seen less of a defeated and defensive withdrawal from an earlier more radical philosophical position (as Hansen and Koch argue) and more of a questioning of how the simultaneously mundane and extraordinary experience of film spectatorship has effectively undermined (on an epistemological level) the merit of maintaining such a singular perspective. In this respect, *Theory of Film's* redemption of physical reality, with its identification of agency with the cinematic object (as it exists in a co-generated camera reality), seems a logical progression from Rancière's emancipation of the philosophical subject. It also seems equally fitting that such a development should paradoxically precede its critical antecedents. If, as Kracauer states in his 1927 essay "Photography" (quoted above), film's "capacity to stir up the elements of nature" facilitates a consciousness of the "provisional status of all given configurations" then essentialist notions of medium specificity or the exclusivity of philosophical practice (or indeed a relationship between the two) become entirely arbitrary.¹⁰⁹ In turn, the cinematic approach though conceived through the experience of film spectatorship cannot be identified solely with the medium that fostered its inception. To reiterate the assertion with which Kracauer introduces his *Theory of Film*, the cinematic approach denotes "a mode of human existence".¹¹⁰

In the following chapter I will analyse how Kracauer develops the notion of communal agency that he alludes to in his essay on the spectator and how he works to define it in both his film and non-film texts. It will explore in greater detail the critical influence of Kafka's work on the development of his cinematic approach and how it helps facilitate for Kracauer a re-imagining of communal practice separate from that of orthodox Marxism.

¹⁰⁹ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 62.

¹¹⁰ Kracauer, 1997, p. li.

CHAPTER 7:

THE CINEMATIC AS SOCIAL PRACTICE

7.1 Introduction

Prompted by the paradigm shift that occurred in twentieth century physics, Kracauer's consideration of the role of the observer in relation to reality sought to challenge preconceived ideas about theory's relationship to praxis and in turn the individual's capacity to "generate self-enlightenment" through established social and cultural forms.¹ This chapter will develop a consideration of how this shift in perspective affects an understanding of how the individual relates to the collective social body through its image. In particular, it will examine how Kracauer read contemporary incidences of massed social participation as the aesthetic reflex of a presiding ideological complex and how the experience of cinema relates to such activity. As Adorno and Horkheimer argue in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the instrumental reasoning of modernity strives to affirm the dichotomy of individual and group action with a view to dissipating (through a process of abstraction) the effectiveness of the latter to affect actual social change. This chapter will also focus on how Kracauer read the peculiar modes of subjectivity presented in the work of Franz Kafka and Charlie Chaplin as alternative models of human and material relations. In doing so it will re-examine Kracauer's critical use of the idea of the "outmoded" and how he understood the practical relationship between his theory and the patterns of social activity to which it referred.

"Film," suggests Robert Sinnerbrink, "is essential to promoting new forms of meaning-making; of aesthetic world-disclosure that shift and expand our horizons of meaning, generating forms of aesthetic experience that both reflect and transform our subjective orientation in the world".² By establishing parallels between Kracauer's critical notion of community and the work of Georg Lukács, Giorgio Agamben and

¹ Schlüppmann, Heide, "Re-reading Nietzsche through Kracauer: towards a feminist perspective on film history." *Film History*, Vol. 6, No.1 (1994), p. 92.

² Sinnerbrink, Robert, "Re-enfranchising Film: Towards a Romantic Film-Philosophy", in Havi Carel and Greg Tuck (eds.), *New Takes in Film Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), (2011), p. 42.

Jacques Rancière I will demonstrate how Kracauer’s cinematic approach exhibits the “ethico-political possibilities” that Sinnerbrink identifies with the “meaning-disclosing potential of film”.³

7.2 *Emancipated Communities*

“Plato”, writes Rancière, “wanted to replace the democratic, ignorant community of the theatre with a different community, encapsulated in a different performance of bodies.”⁴ For Rancière, twentieth century reformers of the theatre (such as Bertolt Brecht, Vsevolod Meyerhold or Luigi Pirandello) instead of replacing Plato’s idea have only reformulated it. For them, argues Rancière, the theatre remains the place where the passive audience must be transformed into an active community.

Regardless of modernism’s formal reconfiguration of its constituent parts, argues Rancière, theatre remains “a mediation striving for its own abolition”.⁵ As Rancière explains:

Theatre accuses itself of rendering spectators passive and thereby betraying its essence as community action. It consequently assigns itself the mission of reversing its effects and expiating its sins by restoring to spectators ownership of their consciousness and their activity. The theatrical stage and performance thus become a vanishing mediation between the evil of spectacle and the virtue of true theatre. They intend to teach their spectators ways of ceasing to be spectators and becoming agents of a collective practice.⁶

For Rancière, the reason for this philosophical circularity is the historical persistence of the notion that theatre is “an exemplary community form”.⁷ Since German Romanticism, he suggests, the concept of theatre has been identified “with this idea of the living community”.⁸ It is this specific notion of community that has in turn

³ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 43.

⁴ Rancière, Jacques, *The Emancipated Spectator*, translated by Gregory Elliott (London: Verso. 2009), p. 5.

⁵ Rancière, 2009, p. 8.

⁶ Rancière, 2009, pp. 8 – 9.

⁷ Rancière, 2009, p. 6.

⁸ Rancière, 2009, p. 6.

predicated the aesthetic and “sensible constitution” of its form.⁹ This is why, for Rancière, it is historically the theatre, rather than any other art form, that identifies itself as the vanguard of an “aesthetic revolution”, intent on “changing not the mechanics of the state and laws, but the sensible forms of human experience.”¹⁰ But why is the theatre regarded as such a privileged site? What, asks Rancière:

occurs among theatre spectators that cannot happen elsewhere?
What is more interactive, more communitarian, about these
spectators than a mass of individuals watching the same television
shows at the same hour?¹¹

For Rancière, the answer relates to the erroneous identification of community with a notion of a physical assembly of people. A genuine alternative to theatre’s hierarchical model of active and passive participants, he argues, is one in which all activity (including that previously defined as passive) is considered as equal in terms of performance. The resultant community is therefore not defined in relation to a specific performance (as in theatre) or with a particular mode of activity (as in Plato’s concept of the living community) but with a notion of performance as a non-localized process. The “emancipated community”, argues Rancière, is therefore to be understood, as one liberated from a notion of objective status whose attributes can be reconfigured at will.¹² In such a community there is no stupefying antagonism between active and passive constituents (that need to be dialectically resolved), only the dynamic interaction of heterogeneous modes of narration and translation. In all these performances, explains Rancière:

what is involved is linking what one knows with what one does not know; being at once a performer deploying her skills and a spectator observing what these skills might produce in a new context among other spectators.¹³

⁹ Rancière, 2009, p. 6.

¹⁰ Rancière, 2009, p. 6.

¹¹ Rancière, 2009, p. 16.

¹² Rancière, 2009, p. 22.

¹³ Rancière, 2009, p. 22.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, what Rancière's idea of the emancipated spectator shares with Kracauer's cinematic approach is a multifarious notion of participation that does not define itself solely in opposition to a passive and devalued mode of reception. What I will explore in the following text is how Kracauer uses the cinema experience in order to define this complementarity and how its meaning-disclosing function affects the objective status of the social activity that it observes and depicts.

7.3 *The Individual Spectator and the Mass Ornament*

In 1803, an English scientist, Thomas Young, observed that when light passes around an obstacle or through an aperture in a barrier the resultant pattern of shadow and light was indicative of its behaviour as wave type phenomenon.¹⁴ However, subsequent experimentation revealed that the addition of a second aperture in the barrier facilitated results that confirmed light to behaviour as if it were composed of discrete particles. It was the coexistence of these paradoxical interference patterns that Bohr and Heisenberg used a century later to demonstrate how the mode of observation must be taken into account when trying to work out what “happens” in an atomic event.¹⁵

For Kracauer, understanding the role of the observer as co-generating social patterns is equally important; especially as it helps establish alternative outlets for creative self-affirmation in an increasingly administrated public sphere. This ontological perspective that Kracauer gives to the “process materialization” is confirmed in the epilogue of *Theory of Film*. The motion picture camera, Kracauer writes:

renders visible what we did not, or perhaps even could not see
before its advent. It effectively assists us in discovering the material
world with its psychophysical correspondences. We literally redeem
this world from its dormant state, its state of virtual non-existence,

¹⁴ Thomas Young (1773 –1829), English scientist and polymath. For explanation of the double slit experiment see, Gribbin, John, *In Search of Schrödinger's Cat. Quantum Physics and Reality* [1984] (London: Black Swann. 1996), pp. 7 – 18.

¹⁵ Heisenberg, Werner, *Physics and Philosophy. The Revolution in Modern Science* [1958], New Edition (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p. 22.

by endeavouring to experience it through the camera [...] Its imagery permits us, for the first time, to take away with us the objects and occurrences that comprise the flow of material life.¹⁶

Kracauer's use of the first person plural pronouns in this context is significant. As the double slit experiment demonstrated that what was previously considered as autonomous particles of matter behaved as waves, so too the film camera can show how the atomized human subject (of Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*) also exists as complex interrelating processes. What defines the human individual can be shown to behave as either a discrete entity (a particle) or as a non-localized process of change (a wave). This communal aspect of the process of materialization is one derived from an understanding of it as a complementarity rather than a progenitive dialectic of antithetical elements. In other words, the "us" and "we" that Kracauer employs do not exist as conceptually exclusive to the "I" – an apparent antagonism that is neither dialectically resolved through the totality of communist praxis or forever irreconcilable as in Adorno's work.¹⁷ As a complementary duality the communal group is not a limiting concept that devalues individuality but affirms it as a necessary component in the understanding of what constitutes the individual subject on a fundamental level.

A proposed synthesis of the essence and appearance of a genuine form of human community is demonstrated in what Steve Giles has called Kracauer's "methodological manifesto"; his 1927 essay, *Das Ornament der Masse* [The Mass Ornament].¹⁸ As well as formulating some of his previous reflections on the theoretical foundations of a materialist cultural analysis, what Kracauer does in this text is show how the modern collective subject understands its objective reality through how it appears to itself.

¹⁶ Kracauer, Siegfried, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality* [1960] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 300.

¹⁷ For example see, Adorno, Theodor, *Negative Dialectics*, translated by E.B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973).

¹⁸ Giles, Steve, 'Cracking the Cultural code - Methodological reflections on Kracauer's "The Mass Ornament"', *Radical Philosophy*, No. 99 (2000), p. 33.

Kracauer's essay focuses on the "extravagant spectacles" created by and for large groups of people, ranging from well-drilled lines of high kicking chorus girls [Figure 6] to the gigantic living mosaic formed by a choreographed stadium crowd [Figure 7]. Though collective actions, argued Kracauer, the bearers of the ornamental

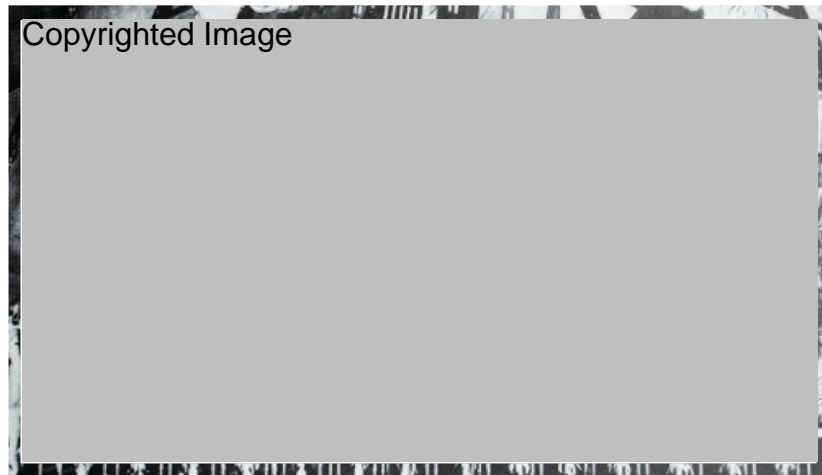


Figure 6. The Tiller Girls in Berlin (1926)

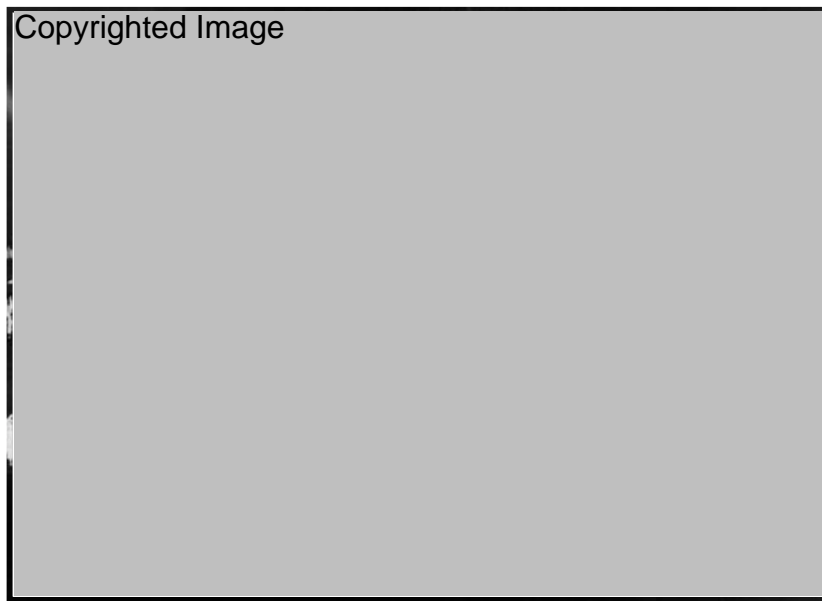


Figure 7. The Opening Ceremony of the 1936 Berlin Olympics

appearance of these performances, are essentially distinct from the spontaneous patterns that occur as a result of genuine communal interaction. "A current of organic life", asserts Kracauer, "surges from these communal groups - which share a common destiny - to their ornaments, endowing these ornaments with a magic force and

burdening them with meaning to such an extent that they cannot be reduced to a pure assemblage of lines”.¹⁹ In contrast, argues Kracauer, the “patterns seen in the stadiums and cabarets betray no such origins”.²⁰ These manifestations, suggests Kracauer:

are composed of elements that are mere building blocks and nothing more. The construction of the edifice depends on the size of the stones and their number. It is the mass that is employed here. Only as parts of a mass, not as individuals who believe themselves to be formed from within, do people become fractions of a figure.²¹

However, though “community and personality perish” under the demands of “calculability”, those who have “withdrawn from the community and consider themselves to be unique personalities with their own individual souls” fail to learn from the example of mass ornaments.²² By castigating it as a base cultural form, those who “judge anything that entertains the crowd to be a distraction of that crowd”, are not defending legitimate cultural practice from a pernicious influence but denying its essential recourse to an actual historical and material context.²³ The “aesthetic pleasure gained from ornamental mass movements is legitimate”, declares Kracauer, as such “movements are in fact among the rare creations of the age that bestow form upon a given material”.²⁴ As Kracauer explains:

When significant components of reality become invisible in our world, art must make do with what is left, for an aesthetic presentation is all the more real the less it dispenses with the reality outside the aesthetic sphere. No matter how low one gauges the value of the mass ornament, its degree of reality is still higher than that of artistic productions which cultivate outdated noble

¹⁹ Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament. Weimar essays*, translated and edited by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard U.P., 1995b), p. 76.

²⁰ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 76.

²¹ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 76.

²² Kracauer, 1995b, p. 78 & p. 76.

²³ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 79.

²⁴ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 79.

sentiments in obsolete forms—even if it means nothing more than that.²⁵

The “fate” of such “hopeless attempts to reach a higher life from out of mass existence” is a perpetual “*irreality*”.²⁶ “In their desire to once again give man a link to nature that is more solid than the one he has today”, Kracauer goes on to explain, “they discover the connection to the higher sphere, not by appealing to a still unrealized reason in this world but by retreating into mythological structures of meaning”.²⁷ Here the reason to which Kracauer refers, as in his later recourse to the complementary relationship between qualitative and quantitative research (discussed in the previous chapter), is one that does not abstract man from its computations, but encompasses a definite historical and social human in its analysis. However, founding a system of thought on “the basis of man” does not mean the cultivation of “man as a historically produced form such that it ought to allow him to go unchallenged as a personality and should satisfy the demands made by his nature”.²⁸ Adherents of such an existential position, argues Kracauer, “reproach capitalism’s rationalism for raping man,” and in turn “yearn for the return of a community that would be capable of preserving the allegedly human element much better than capitalism”.²⁹ “Leaving aside the stultifying effect of such regressive stances,” he concludes, “they fail to grasp capitalism’s core defect: it rationalizes not too much but rather too little”.³⁰

Though Kracauer concedes that a phenomenological approach does effectively identify the limits of capitalist thinking’s abstractness (“that it is incapable of grasping the actual substance of life and therefore must give way to concrete observation of phenomena”), its objection must be qualified.³¹ “As an objection”, writes Kracauer, “it is premature” when it is “raised in favour of that false mythological concreteness whose aim is organism and form”.³² “A return to this sort of concreteness would sacrifice the already acquired capacity for abstraction, but without overcoming

²⁵ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 79.

²⁶ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 81.

²⁷ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 81.

²⁸ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 81.

²⁹ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 81.

³⁰ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 81.

³¹ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 81.

³² Kracauer, 1995b, p. 81.

abstractness”.³³ The “Capitalist epoch” is not a thing, a phenomenon that can be extensively defined by a matrix of binary oppositions, argues Kracauer, but a “stage in the process of demystification”.³⁴ This process, he explains:

leads directly through the centre of the mass ornament, not away from it. It can move forward only when thinking circumscribes nature and produces man as he is constituted by reason. Then society will change. Then, too, the mass ornament will fade away and human life itself will adopt the traits of that ornament into which it develops, through its confrontation with truth, in fairy tales.³⁵

Kracauer’s critique of existentialism’s regressive conception of communal activity is to an equal extent a reconsideration of communism and socialism’s calls for a functional transformation [*Umfunktionierung*] of mass culture.³⁶ In this respect, his argument against orthodox notions of collective praxis can be understood as a systematic appropriation of Marxism against itself. In the introduction of *History*, Kracauer declared his interest in the subject was limited to “the nascent state of great ideological movements, that period when they were not yet institutionalized”.³⁷ As a consequence, suggests Kracauer, his work centres “not so much on the course followed by triumphant ideologies,” but primarily “on the issues in dispute at the time of their emergence”. “This interest”, he concludes, “is intimately connected with an experience which Marx once pithily epitomized when he declared that he himself was no Marxist”.³⁸

As David Frisby has demonstrated, Kracauer’s critique of the ontological basis of phenomenology (an approach that concentrates on the study of consciousness and the objects of direct experience) derives much of its impetus from his developing

³³ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 81.

³⁴ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 80.

³⁵ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 86.

³⁶ See Benjamin, Walter, ‘The Author as Producer’, in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927 – 1934*, edited by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, translated by Rodney Livingstone, et al. (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press, 1999), p. 774.

³⁷ Kracauer, Siegfried, *History. The Last Things Before the Last*, completed after the death of the author by Paul Oskar Kristeller (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1995), p. 6.

³⁸ Kracauer, 1995, p. 7.

understanding of Marxism's relation to social action.³⁹ Marxism, Kracauer writes to Bloch, "especially in the hands of official Soviet philosophers", has become "no longer actual," and can only be rejuvenated through a confrontation with its "genuine truth contents".⁴⁰ For example, Kracauer suggests:

Its concepts of the human being and of nature, its elimination of ethics, its fleeting dream-like glance at the anarchism of the fairy-tale – these are all signs which point to the truth in still uninhabited cellars and attics,⁴¹

"I am", concludes Kracauer in response to Bloch's call for left wing solidarity, "in the last instance, an anarchist, though of course sceptical enough to hold anarchism as it exists to be a distortion of its intentions".⁴² Significantly, Kracauer ultimately defines this ideal "dream" a form of "genuine anarchism," using Marx's phrase, "the association of free human beings".⁴³ However, the "question is", Kracauer continues, "whether and how the approach to reality intended by anarchism is possible?"⁴⁴ "Here what inspires me", he writes. "is an unbelief that is Kafka's too and it seems to me as if the truth in its reality always rests precisely on the spot over which we have just stepped".⁴⁵

7.4 *Kafka's Model of a Non-Human Community*

Kracauer expands upon this qualification of the utopian impulse inherent in Marx's conception of "genuine anarchism" in his 1931 essay on Kafka. As in the later *History*, Kracauer uses Kafka in his argument against the belief in the incremental historical progress of humanity towards salvation, or a return to a prelapsarian state of grace. "The light of olden times", writes Kracauer, streams "into the present era, not in order to direct us back to its shimmer, but rather in order to illuminate our utter

³⁹ Frisby, David, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT press, 1988), pp. 120 - 123

⁴⁰ Kracauer letter to Bloch, 27th May 1926 quoted in Frisby, 1988, p. 124.

⁴¹ Frisby, 1988, pp. 124 – 125.

⁴² Frisby, 1988, p. 125.

⁴³ The phrase appears in various forms throughout Marx's work, for example, Marx, Karl, *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* [Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy, 1858] (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 158.

⁴⁴ Frisby, 1988, p. 125.

⁴⁵ Frisby, 1988, p. 125.

darkness just enough so that we can take the next step”.⁴⁶ In Kafka’s short story “Investigations of a Dog”, notes Kracauer, “one reads that ‘our generation may be lost’” but “this weak ‘may be’ leaves a trace of hope”.⁴⁷ However, Kracauer adds, when Kafka “gets more specific on the subject of this hope”, he betrays an “uncertainty” that “corresponds precisely to the immeasurable distance” we are from it.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Kracauer continues, “this uncertainty is juxtaposed to the certainty with which the reflections of diabolical reason appear and lose their footing”.⁴⁹ For example, suggests Kracauer:

Just as Kafka neither acknowledges nor entirely rejects progress, he links together the far and the near in a similarly ambiguous fashion. "The true way goes over a rope which is stretched out not at any great height but just above the ground. It seems designed more to make people stumble than to be walked upon."⁵⁰

Kafka’s view that “the sought-after solution is unattainable, yet at the same time attainable here and now” is also apparent, for Kracauer, in his only reference to “the events of the [October] revolution” in Russia. Though Kafka’s maintenance of a “state of suspension” between hope and despair, belief and unbelief deters him from “attributing revolution to this true path outright”, Kafka does, “clarify his inkling at various points”.⁵¹ One such occasion, claims Kracauer, occurs in “Investigations of a Dog”, where Kafka proposes the idea that “only the community possesses the explosive power capable of lifting the roof off the low life”. The canine protagonist of the story, writes Kracauer:

recognises that what he shares with his fellow dogs is not only blood but also knowledge, and not only knowledge but also the key to knowledge. "Bones hard as iron, containing the richest marrow, can be gotten at only by a united crunching of all the teeth of all dogs".⁵²

⁴⁶ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 276.

⁴⁷ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 276.

⁴⁸ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 276.

⁴⁹ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 276.

⁵⁰ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 277.

⁵¹ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 276.

⁵² Kracauer, 1995b, p. 277.

The fact that Kafka's utopian epistemology here paradoxically manifests itself through animal behaviour is revealing because, as with Kracauer's (and to a degree Benjamin's), it affirms a corporeal and pre-conscious relationship to the material environment. This is the knowledge separate from a metaphysical "guarantee".⁵³ "Here and there" in Kafka's work, writes Kracauer, "the individual who is lost together with the community is advised to save himself along with that community, but without any guarantee of redemption".⁵⁴ Kracauer concludes:

There is no safeguard, and the fact that alongside the belief in a redemption to come in this world there is another belief that the confusion of the world is ineradicable.⁵⁵

As Kafka's ambiguous linkages between the temporally near and far work to thwart any affirmation of the idea of historical progress (or in turn its negative inversion), so too do the links he makes between the human and the non-human agency succeed in frustrating the autonomy of the subject from its material context. Comprehending how Kracauer sought to transpose Kafka's epistemological model into the public sphere is key to understanding how he envisaged his work on cinema engaging with social phenomena and in turn influencing contemporary forms of social being.

7.5 *The Objective Status of Communal Appearance*

An identification of a historically peculiar epistemological mode as a contributing factor in the practical process of materialization offers up another mutually illuminating critical resonance between the material dialectics of Kracauer's project and the dialectical materialism of Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*.

"When the worker knows himself as a commodity his knowledge is practical", states Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness*, "**this knowledge brings about an**

⁵³ Jay, Martin, 'Adorno and Kracauer: Notes on a troubled Friendship', in Martin Jay, *Permanent Exiles. Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 221, also see chapter 5.1 of this study.

⁵⁴ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 277.

⁵⁵ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 277.

objective structural change in the object of knowledge”.⁵⁶ As Slavoj Žižek has argued, for Lukács “consciousness (ideological appearance) is also an “objective” social fact with an effectivity of its own”, and the bourgeois consciousness “is not simply an ‘illusion’ masking actual social processes but a mode of organisation of the very social being”, that is “crucial to the actual process of social (re)production”.⁵⁷ “Lukács here”, Žižek continues, “can be said to participate in the great ‘paradigm shift’ at work also in quantum physics, and whose main feature is not the dissolution of ‘objective reality’, its reduction to a ‘subjective construction’, but, on the contrary, the unheard-of assertion of the ‘objective’ status of the appearance itself”.⁵⁸ It is not enough, argues Žižek:

to oppose the way things ‘objectively are’ to the way they ‘merely appear to us’: the way they appear (to the observer) affects their very ‘objective being’. This is what is so path breaking in quantum physics: the notion that the limited horizon of the observer (or of the mechanism that registers what goes on) determines what effectively goes on. We cannot say that self-awareness (or colour or material density or ...) designates merely the way we experience reality, while ‘objectively’ there are only subatomic particles and their fluctuations: these ‘appearances’ have to be taken into account if we are to explain what ‘effectively is going on’. In a homologous way, the crux of Lukács notion of class-consciousness is that the way the working class ‘appears to itself’ determines its ‘objective’ being.⁵⁹

Though Lukács’ communist stratification of society held no sway over Kracauer in his own investigation into the ‘false consciousness’ that prevailed amongst the new salaried employees of Berlin, Žižek’s defence of it does provide an interesting way to rethink Kracauer’s idea of community.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Lukács, Georg, *History and Class Consciousness: studies in Marxist dialectics*, translated by Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), p. 169

⁵⁷ Žižek, Slavoj, ‘Postface: Georg Lukács as the philosopher of Leninism’, in Georg Lukács, *A defence of History and Class Consciousness. Tailism and the dialectic*, translated by Esther Leslie (London: Verso, 2000), p. 173.

⁵⁸ Žižek, 2000, p. 173.

⁵⁹ Žižek, 2000, p. 173.

⁶⁰ Kracauer, Siegfried, *The Salaried Masses. Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, translated by Quintin Hoare (London and New York: Verso, 1998), pp. 81 – 82.

“[C]ommunity”, writes Kracauer in *The Salaried Masses*, “is never formed as a substitute for the collapse of psychic energies – it consists of human individuals whose existence is crucially defined by true knowledge”.⁶¹ For Kracauer, close observation of the social activities of employee unions suggested that they “tend to regard the collectivism in itself as a source of their energy”.⁶² To this effect, Kracauer offers the following example:

I once attended the performance of a free trade union's speech-and-movement chorus. The young people, girls and boys, with drooping arms and shoulders bemoaned their lot as slaves to the machine, then drew themselves upright and rejoiced in a kind of triumphal procession towards the realm of freedom. A spectacle whose good intention was no less moving than its aesthetic clumsiness. It was supposed to represent the community of like-minded people, but in reality expressed not so much collectivity as the will to it. This will is based on the belief that collectivity can embody, or even generate, a meaning - whereas, in reality, knowledge founds collectivity.⁶³

This somewhat poignant observation acts as the conclusion of Kracauer's *The Salaried Masses*. In accordance with Kafka, hopelessness becomes the locus of hope and the knowledge to which Kracauer here refers is the knowledge that Kafka attributes to the investigating dog. As Kafka's dog “recognizes that what he shares with his fellow dogs is not only blood but also knowledge”, so too does Kracauer, (and subsequently Rancière), identify genuine community as extant on an epistemological level.

It is from here that the binary opposition between individual and the group becomes increasingly untenable. As Kracauer later qualifies in his refutation of objective quantitative analysis, it is the patterns made by the interaction of complex processes that enables particular elements to function as distinct wholes. As a consequence, when considered as analogous to interference patterns, the difference between individual and the mass cannot be maintained as exclusive and therefore cannot be

⁶¹ Kracauer, 1998, p. 105.

⁶² Kracauer, 1998, pp. 105 – 106.

⁶³ Kracauer, 1998, p. 106.

dialectically resolved in a totality. The actuality of individual and the mass, like the particle and the wave, are observed incidents of interaction in a common process of materialization. “If we want to describe what happens in an atomic event”, explains Heisenberg, “we have to realize that the word ‘happens’ can only apply to the observation, not to the state of affairs between two observations”.⁶⁴ Therefore, Heisenberg concludes, the “transition from the ‘possible’ to the actual takes place during the act of observation”.⁶⁵ “Reality is a construction,” wrote Kracauer in *The Salaried Masses*, one that must be “observed for it to appear.”⁶⁶

As Žižek realised in his reading of *History and Class Consciousness*, what is proposed here at the end of *The Salaried Masses* is not the dissolution of “objective reality”, its reduction to a “subjective construction”, but the “objective” status of appearance itself. In other words, what Kracauer is arguing here, as in *The Mass Ornament*, is that the way the society appears to itself determines its objective being. “The human individual”, explains Kracauer:

who confronts death alone, is not submerged in the collectivity striving to elevate itself into a final purpose. He is formed not by community as such but by knowledge, from which community too may arise. The doctrinaire attitude with which the employee unions frequently fail to meet human reality indirectly confirms that collectivity as such is a false construction. What matters is not that institutions are changed, what matters is that human individuals change institutions.⁶⁷

Kracauer reiterates this conclusion in an unpublished text entitled, *Zwei Arten der Mitteilung* [Two Types of Communication], where he contrasts the relationship between theology and Marxism in a way that pre-empt's Benjamin's famous exegesis of materialist theology in his *On the Concept of History* (1940).⁶⁸ In this more

⁶⁴ Heisenberg, 2000, p. 22.

⁶⁵ Heisenberg, 2000, p. 22.

⁶⁶ Kracauer, 1998, p. 32.

⁶⁷ Kracauer, 1998, p.106.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Frisby, 1988, p.122. Benjamin, Walter, ‘On the Concept of History’, in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 4. 1938 – 1940*, edited by Howard Eiland, and Michael W. Jennings, translated by Edmund Jephcott, et al. (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press, 2003), pp. 389 – 400.

biographical text, written in parallel to *The Salaried Masses* in 1929, Kracauer explains how during the years of inflation after the First World War he advanced in his work the thesis that “change of circumstances is unavoidably dependent upon human beings”.⁶⁹ “‘The way to salvation’, I said, ‘leads only through the narrow gateway of inwardness.’”⁷⁰ This he did in deliberate contrast to the “thoroughly Marxist characterization” of revolution that dictated, “first the circumstances must be changed and only then can human beings themselves change”.⁷¹ However, admits Kracauer, experience has made him reconsider. “Over the years”, he suggests, “I have increasingly come round to the view that at least nowadays the form of our economy determines the form of our existence”.⁷² As Kracauer explains:

Politics, law, art and morality are as they are because capitalism is there. It is not from within that the outside world derives its character but rather the circumstances of society condition those of the individuals. For this reason, for precisely those who are concerned with the reintroduction of the contents intended by theology into reality there is only one way: to work for the transformation of the dominant social order. This is the small gateway through which they must pass.⁷³

In the following section, with reference to the work of Italian philosopher and Benjamin scholar Giorgio Agamben⁷⁴, I will explore how Kracauer worked to develop his notion of a positive function of the mass ornament in relation to film spectatorship and how this informed his critical appropriation of Charlie Chaplin’s character of the little tramp as an example of the embodiment of an emancipated mode of being.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Frisby, 1988, p. 122.

⁷⁰ Frisby, 1988, p. 122.

⁷¹ Frisby, 1988, p. 122.

⁷² Frisby, 1988, p. 122.

⁷³ Frisby, 1988, p. 122.

⁷⁴ For Agamben’s role in the academic rediscovery of Benjamin in Europe see, Durantaye, Leland, de la, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 148 – 149.

7.6 Charlie Chaplin and The Coming Community

Though instrumental reason (“ratio”) has “made possible the domination and use of nature as a self-contained entity”, Kracauer argues in *The Mass Ornament*, that it has also fostered an “ever greater independence from natural conditions”. As a result it has created “a space for the intervention of reason”.⁷⁵ “Ratio”, he goes on to explain “is cut off from reason and bypasses man as it vanishes into the void of the abstract”. Whereas, reason “speaks wherever it disintegrates the organic unity and rips open the natural surface (no matter how cultivated the latter may be); it dissects the human form here only so that the undistorted truth can fashion man anew”.⁷⁶

In his 1990 collection of essays titled *La comunità che viene* [The Coming Community, 1990], Giorgio Agamben uses Kracauer’s refunctioning of Capitalism’s dehumanisation of the bourgeois subject as the basis of his own concept of the post-commodified body, the “whatever being” [*quodlibet ens*].⁷⁷ “In the 1920s”, writes Agamben, “when the process of capitalist commodification began to invest the human body, observers who were by no means favourable to the phenomenon could not help but notice a positive aspect to it”.⁷⁸ “Siegfried Kracauer’s observations”, argues Agamben, demonstrated how the “commodification of the human body, while subjecting it to the iron laws of massification and exchange value, seemed at the same time to redeem the body from the stigma of ineffability that had marked it for millennia”.⁷⁹ For Agamben, freed from the dual restraints of “biological destiny and individual biography” the bodies that formed Kracauer’s mass ornament were emancipated from their “theological foundations” and thus “appeared for the first time perfectly communicable”.⁸⁰ Taking stock of Kracauer’s critical insight Agamben concludes:

⁷⁵ Kracauer. 1995b, p. 80.

⁷⁶ Kracauer. 1995b, p. 84.

⁷⁷ “The *Whatever* in question here relates to singularity not in its indifference with respect to a common property (to a concept, for example: being red, being French, being Muslim), but only in its being such as it is. Singularity is thus freed from the false dilemma that obliges knowledge to choose between the ineffability of the individual and the intelligibility of the universal”. Agamben, Giorgio, *The Coming Community*, translated by Michael Hardt (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 1.

⁷⁸ Agamben, 2007, p. 46.

⁷⁹ Agamben, 2007, pp. 46 -47.

⁸⁰ Agamben, 2007, p. 47.

To appropriate the historic transformations of human nature that capitalism wants to limit to the spectacle, to link together image and body in a space where they can no longer be separated, and thus to forge the whatever body, whose *physis* [nature] is resemblance - this is the good that humanity must learn how to wrest from commodities in their decline. Advertising and pornography, which escort the commodity to the grave like hired mourners, are the unknowing midwives of this new body of humanity.⁸¹

As previously discussed in Chapter Two, realising the “revolutionary energies that appear in the ‘outmoded’” (to use Benjamin’s phrase) was integral to Kracauer’s explication of the cinematic approach.⁸² For example, in *Theory of Film* Kracauer notes “the peculiar, often traumatic effect” of films that confront us with “objects, which are familiar to us for having been part and parcel of our early life”.⁸³ A common source of these “peculiar” encounters, suggests Kracauer, is the old newsreel compilation films (such as *The Golden Twenties* (1950), *50 Years Before Your Eyes* (1950), and *Paris 1900* (1947) [Figure 8]). Designed primarily as entertainment, these films often lampoon the “patterns of custom and fashion which we once accepted unquestioningly”. In these incidences, reports Kracauer, the spectator “cannot not help laughing at the ridiculous hats, overstuffed rooms, and obtrusive gestures”. However, Kracauer continues:

As he laughs at them, however, he is bound to realize, shudderingly, that he has been spirited away into the lumber-room of his private self. He himself has dwelt, without knowing it, in those interiors; he himself has blindly adopted conventions, which now seem naïve or cramped to him. In a flash the camera exposes the paraphernalia of our former existence, stripping them of the significance, which originally transfigured them so they changed from things in their own right into invisible conduits.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Agamben, 2007, p. 49.

⁸² Quoted in Cohen, Margaret, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of the Surrealist Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), p. 190, also see chapter 2.6 of this study.

⁸³ Kracauer, 1997, p. 56.

⁸⁴ Kracauer, 1997, p. 56.

Switching from the singular to the plural personal pronoun Kracauer offers the following conclusion. “The thrill of these old films”, he writes “is that they bring us



Figure 8. “Ridiculous hats, overstuffed rooms”, *Paris 1900* (1947)

face to face with the inchoate, cocoon-like world whence we come – all the objects, or rather sediments of objects, that were our companions in a pupa state.” “The most familiar”, he concludes, “that which continues to condition our involuntary reactions and spontaneous impulses is thus made to appear as the most alien”.⁸⁵ In his 1927 essay “Photography”, Kracauer writes of the alien “ghost-like reality” of an antique photograph whose image:

consists of elements in space whose configuration is so far from necessary that one could just as well imagine a different organization of these elements. Those things once clung to us like our skin, and this is how our property still clings to us today. Nothing of these contains us, and the photograph gathers fragments around a nothing [*Fragmente um ein Nichts*].⁸⁶

The “outmoded object”, argues Graeme Gilloch, “defetishizes and demythifies the commodity and the processes of its production, exchange and consumption”, its “truth

⁸⁵ Kracauer, 1997, pp. 56 – 57.

⁸⁶ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 56.

content” is therefore revealed “at the moment of its extinction”.⁸⁷ The same is true, argues Agamben, for the human subject when rendered photographically distinct from its biographical and biological destiny and its existence as a theological conceived entity is extinguished.⁸⁸ It is from this “nothing” described by the photographic image’s disintegration of “organic unity” that a new embodiment of the human form can be fashioned anew.⁸⁹ As Kracauer states in his 1926 review of Chaplin’s *The Gold Rush* (1925):

Out of the hole the purely human emanates disconnectedly. It is always disconnected, in fragments only, scattered in the organism - the human that otherwise suffocates below the surface, that cannot shine through the layers of ego consciousness.⁹⁰

Kracauer’s recourse to Chaplin’s character of the little tramp [Figure 9] in order to elucidate his idea of an alternative mode of human existence is one that persists throughout his work.⁹¹ As Adorno notes: “Kracauer projected his self-understanding



Figure 9. Chaplin’s little tramp in *The Gold Rush* (1925)

⁸⁷ Gilloch, Graeme, *Myth and Metropolis. Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 111.

⁸⁸ Agamben, 2007, pp. 47 – 48.

⁸⁹ Kracauer. 1995b, p. 84.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Hake, Sabine. “Chaplin Reception in Weimar Germany.” *New German Critique*, no. 51, (1990), p. 93. *The Gold Rush*, directed by Charlie Chaplin (USA: United Artists, 1925).

⁹¹ For example see, Kracauer, Siegfried, “A Portrait in Film”, *The New Republic* (July 26, 1948), pp. 24 – 26 and Kracauer, 1997, p54 and pp. 107 – 8.

of the individual onto Chaplin”.⁹² This identification for Adorno was the product of Kracauer’s image of himself as a non-conformist, as “an irritant by the criteria of the prevailing universal”.⁹³ “In evading philosophy”, Adorno suggests, “the existential becomes clowning”.⁹⁴ However, Kracauer’s identification of Chaplin’s comic portrayal of a social anomaly as the manifestation of (what Agamben refers to as) the “new body of humanity” further illustrates the critical function of the outmoded in “the age of the complete domination of the commodity form over all aspects of social life”.⁹⁵ Obsolescence, Gilloch explains:

is the pitiful fate, or comic final condition, of the commodity. The outmoded thing is an object of scorn and ridicule. No longer the stimulator of sexual desire, the old-fashioned is nothing other than, as Benjamin astutely points out, the ultimate anti-aphrodisiac. The obsolete object reveals the truth of the fetishized commodity; the old-fashioned discloses the reality of the fashionable.⁹⁶

Chaplin’s tramp in this respect is the embodiment of what Benjamin referred to in his essay on Surrealism as “the revolutionary energies that appear in the ‘outmoded’”.⁹⁷ In Agamben’s terms, Chaplin’s clowning not only redeems “the body from the stigma of ineffability”⁹⁸ but also (as Gilloch suggests) “defetishizes and demythifies” the human subject.⁹⁹ For Kracauer, in Chaplin’s acrobatic, mimetic, redundant fool that is constantly spurned and never desired is the possibility of making real the actually new. His “pantomimic language”, argues Kracauer, is “difficult to describe in words” but “comprehensible to children and adults of every country” because it stems “from an exemplary, human foundation”.¹⁰⁰

⁹² Adorno, Theodor W., “The Curious Realist: On Siegfried Kracauer”, *New German Critique*, No. 54 (1991), p. 164.

⁹³ Adorno, 1991, p. 164.

⁹⁴ Adorno, 1991, p. 164.

⁹⁵ Agamben, 2007, pp. 48 - 49.

⁹⁶ Gilloch, 1996, pp. 122 – 123.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Cohen, 1995, p. 190.

⁹⁸ Agamben, 2007, p. 47.

⁹⁹ Gilloch, 1996, p. 111.

¹⁰⁰ Kracauer, Siegfried, “Two Chaplin Sketches”, translated by John MacKay, *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1997b), p. 115.

In a 1931 article about Chaplin's triumphant return to "his home city of London", Kracauer asks: "Who is this man, who can become such common property without getting worn out?" He is, Kracauer answers, "a tramp, a have-not; his homeland is everywhere and nowhere." The "fact that he lacks what others have", suggests Kracauer, is "one of the mysteries of his power". As Kracauer clarifies:

Denomination, nationality, wealth and class affiliations erect barriers between people, and only the outcast, the person on the outside, lives untrammelled by restriction. Wherever he can he forces himself through pores and cracks and settles, like dust off the street.¹⁰¹

"But what remains behind", Kracauer asks, "when the characteristics, through whose adoption persons in general convert into specific individuals, cease to exist?" In the case of Chaplin's little tramp, argues Kracauer, what remains "is the person as such" or rather:

and herein lies the special truth of his representations – the person as he/she is to be realized, everywhere. Only by the removal of those attributes which are the property of some but not of others can the person as such, the person who is a possibility for all people, become manifest. Perhaps Chaplin's triumph rests in conclusively demonstrating, for the first time in recent memory, that this "person as such" is not an abstraction but walks among us, in the flesh. Through him the pariah-figure familiar from fairy tales achieves existence. Lacking a survival instinct, a craving for power, or even a proper sense of self, he stumbles through an illegible world; he is entirely helpless, and wherever he goes gets caught in the hunter's net. Yet we repeatedly see in him that which makes people, people. The Chaplin of the films is kind and gentle and has respect for every creature; he smiles at children, and thanks the chicken who lays eggs for him with a tip of his hat. In so many ways he resembles that hero of the fairy tales, who is able to fight his way through a hostile world precisely because he is powerless. He is in truth the

¹⁰¹ Kracauer, 1997b, p. 118.

king of this world, of course, and fairy tales wouldn't be fairy tales if they failed to reveal this splendid truth at the end.¹⁰²

“One kind of word domination imposes itself on the world from above”, states Kracauer, “concentrating all power within itself”, as one who “represents nothing, Chaplin rules the world from below”.¹⁰³ With an equal emphasis on the notion of “Chaplin’s body” as a process, Tom Gunning, comes to a comparable conclusion:

Chaplin’s physical nature also exceeds his human identity and transforms itself into the mechanical, the animal and even the vegetable. His body seems at points to disaggregate itself, with limbs operating independently of each other, or to merge with other bodies and create new creatures. Chaplin slides up and down the great chain of being, achieving a plastic ontology in which inanimate objects become bodily appendages, and the body itself suddenly seems inert.¹⁰⁴

“Neither generic nor individual”, writes Agamben, “neither an image of the divinity nor an animal form, the body now became something truly whatever.”¹⁰⁵ The “whatever” in this context, explains Agamben:

is the figure of pure singularity. Whatever singularity has no identity, it is not determinate with respect to a concept, but neither is it simply indeterminate; rather it is determined only through its relation to an idea, that is, to the totality of its possibilities.¹⁰⁶

Kracauer’s Chaplin is the idea of a plastic ontology manifested by film’s ability to realise the emancipatory potential of the mass ornament as an absolutely communicable (and therefore entirely translatable) form distinct from any metaphysical considerations. “Using Ranciere as a perspective”, suggests Robnik, “we can frame Kracauer’s hole-thinking politically”:

¹⁰² Kracauer, 1997b, p. 119.

¹⁰³ Kracauer, 1997b, p. 118.

¹⁰⁴ Gunning, Tom, “Chaplin and the Body of Modernity”, *Early Popular Visual Culture*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2010), p. 238.

¹⁰⁵ Agamben, 2007, p. 47.

¹⁰⁶ Agamben, 2007, p. 66.

Rather than last things – Utopia to achieve, a world to regain – politics presupposes only equality, which designates the fact that every social order is contingent, every power relation can be changed: subordination can at any time dissolve into the side-by-side relation that gives it no secure foundation. The holy is a hole: miracles can always happen.¹⁰⁷

For Kracauer, suggests Robnik, the “mass ornament’s promise might be to make Chaplins of all of us”.¹⁰⁸ However, as Kracauer’s interpretation of Kafka’s work demonstrates, “the sought-after solution is unattainable, yet at the same time attainable here and now”.¹⁰⁹ In other words, if Chaplin is a manifestation of the human as he/she is realized everywhere then we are all already this emancipated mode of being. However, if Chaplin is that which resists commodification (the “real” of the human – to use Laruelle’s non-philosophical term) or as Kracauer describes him - “a hole” - then there is no content to this emancipated form. Emancipation is unattainable as it is identical to nothing. Nevertheless, as Agamben concludes:

instead of continuing to search for a proper identity in the already improper and senseless form of individuality, humans were to succeed in belonging to this impropriety as such, in making of the proper being-thus not an identity and an individual property but a singularity without identity, a common and absolutely exposed singularity-if humans could, that is, not be-thus in this or that particular biography, but be only the thus, their singular exteriority and their face, then they would for the first time enter into a community without presuppositions and without subjects, into a communication without the incommunicable.¹¹⁰

For Agamben, in order to act upon this knowledge (the knowledge imparted by the mass ornament) we must forget about ourselves (as we are culturally constructed) and

¹⁰⁷ Robnik, Drehli, “Siegfried Kracauer”, in Felicity Colman (ed.), *Film, Theory and Philosophy. The Key Thinkers* (Durham: Acumen, 2009), p. 50.

¹⁰⁸ Robnik, 2009, p. 49.

¹⁰⁹ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 276.

¹¹⁰ Agamben, 2007, p. 64.

let the images of our fungible (commodified) being affect the objective status our physical individuality.

7.7 Conclusion

What is important to remember, and what Kracauer emphasises in the texts discussed above, is that what he is proposing when he draws a parallel between the cinematic approach and Chaplin's little tramp or Kafka's inquisitive dog is not a straightforward illustration of his ideas. In his 1921 essay on Georg Simmel, Kracauer wrote that, a reader can come to "a far reaching conclusion about the essence of thinkers who live either primarily in analogies or predominantly in metaphors".¹¹¹ Kracauer explains:

The analogy person never gives an explanation of the world, since he is not driven by a preconceived idea; he is content to identify the laws of the event and, by observing the many facets of the event itself, to pair together those things that have the same form. He restrains his self at all times. The metaphor person has a much less objective attitude. He allows the world to affect him; it has a meaning for him that he wants to convey. His soul is filled with the absolute, toward which his self yearns to emanate.¹¹²

Kracauer's writings, like Simmel's, are full of analogies and understanding their function (in relation to his work) is a significant aspect not just of comprehending the philosophical nature of his project as a whole but also the role of film in that project. In this regard, the previously discussed relationship that film-philosophy attempts to demarcate between film and philosophy (Chapter 4) is particularly informative. Kracauer's philosophical use of Chaplin's films demonstrates that his cinematic approach is not a philosophy *of*, *on* or *about* film, nor does it attempt to think *with* film as Sinnerbrink's philosophically re-enfranchised film theory does. Kracauer's approach (with its commitment to propagating rather than eliminating the indeterminate) is in this respect closer to non-philosophy's "performative practice"

¹¹¹ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 238.

¹¹² Kracauer, 1995b, p. 238.

that thinks *alongside* film.¹¹³ No meaning is being sought or attributed to the narratives of Chaplin's films by Kracauer nor is any metaphorical role being assigned to its images. With their critical emphasis on the heterogeneous and intertwined processes (of narration and translation) that occur between Chaplin and the spectator (with the little tramp existing as a form of co-generated epiphenomenon) the “raw – material” of Kracauer's thought (to paraphrase Mullarkey) is not essentially film but the mediation of the film experience by philosophy.¹¹⁴ As a consequence of this approach, the “ethico-political” dimension of Kracauer's work is different from that envisaged by Sinnerbrink in his version of film-philosophy. Whereas Sinnerbrink looks to specific films to provoke (either through the unsettling nature of their images or through stylistic experimentation) a full or partial re-engagement with established political philosophies or ethical considerations, Kracauer's texts work to avoid (or at least confuse) such an instrumental approach.¹¹⁵ As Rancière states in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, the idea of politics should not be “tied to a determined historical project, as it is declared to be by those who identify its end with the end of the project of emancipation begun by the French Revolution”. “Politics”, argues Rancière, “exists when the figure of a specific subject is constituted, a supernumerary subject in relation to the calculated number of groups, place, and functions in a society”.¹¹⁶ As a co-generated entity (existing between Chaplin and Kracauer) the little tramp is such a political subject.

As this chapter examined how Kracauer critically explored social constructs (through the work of Chaplin and Kafka) the next will look to how Kracauer's idea of temporal relations is formulated in correspondence to his experience of films.

¹¹³ Mullarkey, John, “Film Can't Philosophise (and Neither Can Philosophy): Introduction to a Non-Philosophy of Cinema, in Havi, Carel and Greg Tuck (eds.), *New Takes in Film Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 90.

¹¹⁴ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 90.

¹¹⁵ Sinnerbrink, Robert, “Re-enfranchising Film: Towards a Romantic Film-Philosophy”, in Havi, Carel and Greg Tuck (eds.), *New Takes in Film Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 43.

¹¹⁶ Rancière, Jacques, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, translated by Gabriel Rockhill (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), p. 51.

CHAPTER 8:

THEORY AND ITS CINEMATIC ILLUSTRATION

8.1 Introduction

“No sooner do we try to get in touch with mental entities”, writes Kracauer in the conclusion of *Theory of Film*, “than they tend to evaporate”:

In reaching out for them, we reduce them to abstractions as colourless as the noise to which radio music is commonly being reduced.¹

In this chapter I will examine further how Kracauer articulates the relationship between thought and cinema. In particular it will investigate how Kracauer suggests in *Theory of Film* a correspondence between cinematic film narratives and the “constitution of the historical universe”.² I will argue that, like Wartenberg, Kracauer comprehends film’s capacity to illustrate existent philosophy as compatible with (as opposed to antithetical to) an idea of genuine cinematic philosophy.³ However, as I will demonstrate, unlike Wartenberg who also argues for their synthesis in the concept of the cinematic “thought experiment”, Kracauer comprehends the relationship between the cinematic approach and philosophy as a complementarity. In parallel to examining Kracauer’s appraisal of film’s theoretical capabilities this chapter will also look at how he criticises the notion of films being “philosophical exercises” and the identification of auteur directors as film philosophers (as Stephen Mulhall argues).⁴ Its central focus will be on how, through the cinematic “disclosure of novel aspects of our experience” (to use Sinnerbrink’s phrase), Kracauer introduces

¹ Kracauer, Siegfried, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality* [1960] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 293.

² Kracauer, Siegfried, *History. The Last Things Before the Last*, completed after the death of the author by Paul Oskar Kristeller (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1995), p. 48.

³ Wartenberg, Thomas E., “On the Possibility of Cinematic Philosophy”, in Havi Carel and Greg Tuck (eds.), *New Takes in Film Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 17.

⁴ Mulhall, Stephen, *On Film* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 2.

in *Theory of Film* the “possibility that philosophy might be transformed through its encounter with film”.⁵

Using comparisons with the work of Walter Benjamin, the French philosopher Michel Serres, the anthropologist and art historian George Kubler and the Marxist philosopher (and friend of Kracauer’s) Ernst Bloch, I will demonstrate how Kracauer’s historiography can be considered as a philosophy of time. By arguing how ideas such as Bloch’s concept of “non-simultaneity” and Kubler’s notion of “shaped time” correspond to aspects of Kracauer’s thought I will establish how Kracauer develops a theory of temporal extraterritoriality distinct from that proposed by the psychological readings of his work that dominated the previous phase of his critical reception (see Chapter 3). It will also show how Kracauer uses film to illustrate his ideas as well as how film resists such intellectual subordination. It will conclude by arguing that, for Kracauer, the cinematic experience operates alongside philosophy as a repository of knowledge and as such exercises a potential to circumvent the limitations of readymade theoretical frameworks.

8.2 *The Manifold Shapes of Now: Kracauer’s Philosophy of Time.*

Though occasionally it is useful to think of time as operating in a linear fashion, suggests the French philosopher of science Michel Serres, it is fundamentally wrong to consider it as constantly uniform or laminar (without turbulence). “Time”, he argues, “is paradoxical; it folds or twists; its as various as the dance of flames in a brazier – here interrupted, there vertical, mobile, and unexpected”.⁶ For Serres, all of our “difficulties with the theory of history” come from the fact that we think of time in an “inadequate way”.⁷ Serres writes:

The French language in its wisdom uses the same word for weather and time, *le temps*. At a profound level they are the same thing. Meteorological weather, predictable and unpredictable, will no

⁵ Sinnerbrink, Robert, “Re-enfranchising Film: Towards a Romantic Film-Philosophy”, in Havi Carel and Greg Tuck (eds.), *New Takes in Film Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 26.

⁶ Serres, Michel and Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture and Time*, translated by Roxanne Lapidus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), pp. 58 – 59.

⁷ Serres & Latour, 1998, p. 49.

doubt some day be explainable by complicated notions of fluctuations, strange attractors... Someday we will perhaps understand that historical time is even more complicated.⁸

An image of the historical process as “a crumpling, a multiple, foldable diversity”, argues Serres, explains more “than one that imposes a constant distance between moving objects”. For example, he suggests:

Everyone is amazed that after 1935 the Nazis, in the most scientifically and culturally advanced country, adopted the most archaic behaviour. But we are always simultaneously making gestures that are archaic, modern, and futuristic [...] An object, a circumstance, is thus polychromic, multi-temporal, and reveals a time that is gathered together, with multiple pleats.⁹

There is a notable similarity between the language Serres uses to describe his polychromic conception of time and that chosen by Kracauer to articulate the form of the temporal continuum in *Theory of Film and History*. For example, in *History* Kracauer suggests that the historical process “is no process at all but a hodgepodge of kaleidoscopic changes-something like clouds that gather and disperse at random”.¹⁰ However, the similarity between their two approaches is not just stylistic. As I will demonstrate in the following text, like Serres, Kracauer proposes a temporal model for the cinematic approach that consists of a complementarity of two antithetical interpretative schemes. Time, argues Kracauer in *History*, is an “antinomy” between an “incoherent series of shaped times,” and “chronological time as a homogeneous flow.”¹¹

The American art historian and anthropologist George Kubler introduced the idea of shaped time in his 1962 book, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*.¹² The historical manifestation of an artwork, argues Kubler, should be

⁸ Serres & Latour, 1998, p. 58.

⁹ Serres & Latour, 1998, p. 60.

¹⁰ Kracauer, 1995, p. 160.

¹¹ Kracauer, 1995, p.144.

¹² Kubler, George, *The Shape of Time. Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1962).

understood as a composite of numerous formal problems in various stages of being solved. The date of a specific art object is therefore less important for its interpretation than the aggregate “age” of the miscellaneous temporary solutions it represents. “The fact”, explains Kracauer:

that related consecutive solutions are often widely separated in terms of chronological time further suggests that each sequence [of solutions] evolves according to a time schedule all of its own. Its time has a peculiar shape. This in turn implies that the time curves described by different sequences are likely to differ from each other. In consequence, chronologically simultaneous artistic achievements should be expected to occupy different places on their respective time curves, one appearing early in its series, a second being far remote from the opening gambit. They fall into the same period but differ in age.¹³

In a letter to the French historian Henri I. Marrou, Kracauer makes it quite clear how he considered that favouring either the idea of time as “various existing peculiar time sequences” or as a “homogeneous chronological” flow was unjustifiable.¹⁴ By “assigning” to both notions “the same reality character”, Kracauer affirmed both his belief in their complementary relationship, and his hesitance in identifying history as a uniform or consistent process.¹⁵ “Hegel’s [and in turn Marx’s] error”, Serres states, is “claiming that contradiction produces time, whereas only the opposite is true: time makes contradictions possible.”¹⁶ “As Walter Benjamin judiciously observes”, notes Kracauer in *History*, “the idea of a progress of humanity is untenable mainly for the reason that it is insolubly bound up with the idea of chronological time as the matrix of a meaningful process”.¹⁷ However, adds Kracauer, Benjamin “drives home the nonentity of chronological time without manifesting the slightest concern over the

¹³ Kracauer, 1995, pp. 144 – 145. For Kubler’s assessment of Kracauer’s understanding of shaped time see, Kubler, George, *The Shape of Time Reconsidered* in Thomas F. Reese (ed), *Studies in Ancient American And European Art. The Collected essays of George Kubler* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 429.

¹⁴ Kracauer Letter to Marrou, May 18th, 1964. Quoted in Jay, Martin, *Permanent Exiles. Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 191.

¹⁵ Jay, 1985, p. 191.

¹⁶ Serres & Latour, 1998, pp. 49 – 50.

¹⁷ Kracauer. 1995, p. 14.

other side of the picture”.¹⁸ The result is that Benjamin’s philosophy of history (which purports to be the exposition of dialectical materialism) indulges in a decidedly “undialectical approach”.¹⁹

Kracauer’s retrospective criticism of his friend’s dialectical method should not however obscure the fact that Benjamin’s critical insight into the nature of the temporal continuum (especially in relation to chronology) provides an important component of Kracauer’s own mixed theoretical approach. This positive reading of his friend’s method is evident in Kracauer’s review of Benjamin’s *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* [The Origin of German Tragic Drama, 1928].²⁰ “The difference between traditional abstract thinking and Benjamin’s manner of thinking”, writes Kracauer in his review of the book, is that “the former drains objects of their concrete plenitude, the latter burrows into the material thicket in order to unfold the dialectic of essentialities”.²¹ In Benjamin’s work, argues Kracauer:

Where meanings come together under the sign of an idea, they jump to one another like electric sparks rather than being ‘sublated’ into a formal concept. In the course of history, they eventually also undergo dialectical separation, and each acquires a subsequent history of its own, on its own.²²

For Kracauer an exemplar of Benjamin’s approach is his explication of the concept of “origin” in the book’s “Epistemo-Critical Prologue”. “The term origin”, Benjamin explains, “is not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance”.²³ “Origin”, explains Benjamin:

is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis. That which is

¹⁸ Kracauer. 1995, p. 150.

¹⁹ Kracauer. 1995, p.155.

²⁰ Benjamin, Walter, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1928). Benjamin, Walter. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, translated by John Osborne (London: New Left Books, 1977).

²¹ Kracauer, Siegfried, *The Mass Ornament. Weimar essays*, translated and edited by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard U.P., 1995b), p. 260.

²² Kracauer, 1995b, p. 260.

²³ Benjamin, 1977, p. 45

original is never revealed in the naked and manifest existence of the factual; its rhythm is apparent only to a *dual insight*. On the one hand it needs to be recognized as a process of restoration and reestablishment, but, on the other hand, and precisely because of this, as something imperfect and incomplete. There takes place in every original phenomenon a determination of the form in which an idea will constantly confront the historical world, until it is revealed fulfilled, in the totality of its history.²⁴

As well as prefiguring (to a certain extent) Kubler's notion of shaped time, what Benjamin's concept of origin also demonstrates is the necessity of a "dual insight" in understanding the non-homogenous nature of the time and therefore historical change and development. The idea of a non-synchronous now (a critical notion of the present being a mix of discordant temporal sequences) was one that had been proposed in the work of Kracauer and Benjamin's mutual friend the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch.²⁵

Bloch's primary formulation of the idea of "non-simultaneity" and the "non-synchronous" appears in the 1932 text "*Ungleichzeitigkeit und Pflicht zu ihrer Dialektik*" [Nonsimultaneity and Obligation to Its Dialectic].²⁶ "Not all people exist in the same *Now*", states Bloch:

They do so only externally, through the fact that they can be seen today. But they are thereby not yet living at the same time with the others. They rather carry an earlier element with them; this interferes.²⁷

²⁴ Benjamin, 1977, pp. 45 – 46. My emphasis.

²⁵ For a detailed analysis of the influence of Benjamin's work on Adorno and the development of Critical Theory see, Buck-Morss, Susan, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: The Free Press, 1979). For an overview of Bloch's work see, Geoghegan, Vincent. *Ernst Bloch* (London: Routledge, 1996).

²⁶ Bloch, Ernst, "Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics", translated by Mark Ritter, *New German Critique*, No. 11 (1977), p. 22 – 38, this essay has also been translated as "Non-contemporaneity and its obligation to the dialectic", in Bloch, Ernst, *Heritage of Our Times*, translated by Neville and Stephen Plaice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 97 – 148. For the problem of translating the term "*Ungleichzeitigkeit*", see Mark Ritter's note on translation in Bloch, 1977, p. 22.

²⁷ Bloch, 1991, p. 97.

In a letter to Bloch written in February 1935, Kracauer stated his appreciation for the “*Ungleichzeitigkeit*” essay.²⁸ However, though he applauded Bloch’s insight into what Dagmar Barnouw describes as the “anachronistic presence” in “the middle of accelerated modernization of the work world, of old desires and modes of behaviour”, (as with his criticism of Benjamin) he felt that it maintained too much of an intellectual distance from the actuality of everyday life.²⁹ When Kracauer readdresses the concept of “*Ungleichzeitigkeit*” in *History*, it is interesting to note that he acknowledges the Marxist pedigree that Bloch attributes to it in *Heritage of Our Times*, but adds a significant caveat to the construction of this particular lineage. “As might be expected,” he writes, “there is no lack either of statements acknowledging the nonhomogeneous character of the historical period”.³⁰ But, states Kracauer:

it is two different things to notice a phenomenon and to realize its potential meaning. None of these statements testifies to an awareness of what the divergence of the elements that comprise a period may imply for the significance of chronology. Even though Marx, for instance, is enough of a realist to perceive, and codify, “*Ungleichzeitigkeit*,” he nevertheless clings to Hegel’s idea of a dialectical historical process, which involves the conventional identification of homogeneous linear time as the time of history.³¹

In parallel to Kracauer’s writing of *History*, Bloch had published *Tübinger Einleitung in die Philosophie* [The Tübingen Introduction in Philosophy, 1963]. In a letter of congratulations, Kracauer wrote, “[y]ou are to my knowledge the only one who presents the problem of time. And what you say about it strongly touches my own ideas on the antinomy at the center of the chronological concept of time”.³²

Kracauer’s characterization of “modern man’s intellectual landscape”, as a composite of multifarious, non-simultaneous *nows* is also evident in the epilogue to *Theory of*

²⁸ For a detailed account of the relationship between Kracauer, Bloch, and Adorno see Barnouw, Dagmar, *Critical Realism: History, Photography, and the work of Siegfried Kracauer* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 33 – 52. Bloch left Germany in 1933, moving first to Switzerland and then to the United States. In 1948 he returned to East Germany, where he stayed until his defection to the west in 1961, see Geoghegan, 1996, pp. 9 – 46.

²⁹ Barnouw, 1994, p. 102.

³⁰ Kracauer, 1995, p. 148.

³¹ Kracauer, 1995, p. 149.

³² Letter dated June 17th 1963, quoted in Jay, 1985, p. 195.

Film. “We not only live among the ‘ruins of ancient beliefs’”, writes Kracauer, “but live among them with at best a shadowy awareness of things in their fullness”. So, asks Kracauer in *History*, how should we deal with “the dilemma in which we find ourselves?” On the one hand, suggests Kracauer:

measurable time dissolves into thin air, superseded by the bundles of shaped times in which the manifold comprehensible series of events evolve. On the other, dating retains its significance in as much as these bundles tend to coalesce at certain moments, which then are valid for all of them.³³

These “relatively uniform periods” of confluence, explains Kracauer, “is an antinomic entity embodying in a condensed form the two irreconcilable time conceptions”.³⁴ However, the way in which we experience such uniform historical periods, explains Kracauer, “may not be identical with the experiences of chronologically earlier or later periods”.³⁵ As a consequence, Kracauer concludes, “transitions between successive periods are problematic”, to get from one to another you must “jump”.³⁶

Marx’s dialectical philosophy of history, Kracauer argues, is predicated on the inevitability of such convulsive disruptions to historical fluency. In this view, “all histories featuring the ‘March of Time’ are mirages – paintings on a screen which hides the truth they pretend to render”.³⁷ Successive “paintings thus produced cover, layer after layer, the ever expanding screen” of history.³⁸ This process, Kracauer writes, is “perfectly illustrated” by Henri-Georges Clouzot's documentary film, *Le mystère Picasso* [The Mystery of Picasso, 1956].³⁹ This film, writes Kracauer:

shows the artist in the act of creation. We see: once Picasso has outlined what he appears to have in mind, he immediately superposes upon his initial sketch a second one which more often than not relates only obliquely to the first; and in this way it goes on

³³ Kracauer, 1995, pp. 154 – 155.

³⁴ Kracauer, 1995, p. 155.

³⁵ Kracauer, 1995, p. 155.

³⁶ Kracauer, 1995, p. 155.

³⁷ Kracauer, 1995, p. 155.

³⁸ Kracauer, 1995, p. 155.

³⁹ *Le mystère Picasso* [The Mystery of Picasso, 1956], directed by Henri-Georges Clouzot.

and on, every new system of lines or color patches all but ignoring its predecessor.⁴⁰

Watching Clouzot's film [Figure 10], it becomes clear that Picasso's over-painting does not completely obliterate the previous layers of drawing etc. In the final image evidence of previous activity or its absence remain visible in pockets on the surface of the artwork. These blank pieces of canvas and fragments of earlier designs compete for our attention upon its surface, like exposed archaeology in a landscape. In *History*, Kracauer writes of the "puzzling problem" of the "'limited' relativity of certain ideas emerging from such pockets", as "they must be thought of as lying both inside and outside flowing time". They must be thought of, Kracauer concludes, as existing in a state of "temporal extraterritoriality".⁴¹



Figure 10. Temporal transitions. *Le mystère Picasso* (1956)

Kracauer's insights into the "co-existence of the simultaneous and the un-simultaneous", suggests the literary historian and theorist Hans Robert Jauss, "far from leading historical knowledge into a dilemma, emphasize the possibility and necessity of uncovering the historical dimension of literary appearances in synchronic cross-sections".⁴² What is true for literary appearances is also true for cinematic ones. As Kracauer's recourse to Clouzot's film demonstrates is that for Kracauer the

⁴⁰ Kracauer, 1995, p. 156.

⁴¹ Kracauer, 1995, p. 156.

⁴² Jauss, Hans Robert, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," in Ralph Cohen (ed.) *New Directions in Literary History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 33.

medium's ability to render communicable such temporal "cross-sections" was an integral part of his approach.

In the following sections, developing the ideas proposed in the previous chapters, I shall examine in detail how *Theory of Film* can be interpreted as an illustration of Kracauer's philosophy of time and the different ways Kracauer uses literary and cinematic images in order to articulate his cinematic approach as a mode of being.

8.3 *The Nature of Cinematic Narratives*

So how does this non-linear temporal complexity, the pleating to which Serres refers, present itself in *Theory of Film*? One way is narrative indeterminacy. For a film to achieve this, Kracauer argues, it must avoid the finality of theatrical tragedy, where all "the incidents contingent on it are made to figure as elements of a forcedly significant composition".⁴³ "The main thing", suggests Kracauer, "is that the ending does not mark the end."⁴⁴ An example of this indeterminacy is the last scene of Federico Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria* (1957) [Figure 11].⁴⁵ Kracauer writes:

As the heart-broken Cabiria walks through the nocturnal wood where young people are making music and dancing and drifting about in a Dionysian mood, we do not know what will happen to her; we only learn from a change of her facial expression that she will walk on and that there is no end to her story.⁴⁶

Read in the context of his exposition of the idea of the "found story", the analogy Kracauer is making here between this scene and the temporal continuum, the flow of life is clear. The notion of a "found story", Kracauer explains, "covers all stories found in the material of actual physical reality".⁴⁷ "When you have watched for long enough the surface of a river or a lake you will detect pattern in the water which may

⁴³ Kracauer, 1997, p. 258.

⁴⁴ Kracauer, 1997, p. 258.

⁴⁵ *The Nights of Cabiria* [Italian: *Le Notti di Cabiria*], directed by Federico Fellini (Italy / France: Dino de Laurentiis Cinematografica / Les Films Marceau, 1957).

⁴⁶ Kracauer, 1997, p. 269.

⁴⁷ Kracauer, 1997, p. 245.

have been produced by a breeze or some eddy”.⁴⁸ “Found stories,” Kracauer states, “are in the nature of such patterns.”⁴⁹ As well as invoking the imagery of Benjamin’s *Trauerspiels* study, the fluid dynamics of Kracauer’s temporality of cinematic



Figure 11. The final scene is not the end. *Nights of Cabiria* (1957)

narratives offer another parallel to the work of Serres. “Yes”, argues Serres, “time flows” like a river, but not in the uniform way envisaged by conventional philosophy. Those who draw the analogy in order to fix the idea of time’s inexorable progress demonstrate a certain naivety towards how rivers actually function”.⁵⁰

In order to substantiate his position Kracauer draws upon an interview given by Fellini to Gideon Bachmann and published alongside his own essay on “The Spectator” in Robert Hughes’ 1959 *Film Book 1: The Audience and the filmmaker*. “I think it is immoral”, Fellini argues, “to tell a story that has a conclusion”:

Because you cut out your audience the moment you present a solution on the screen [...] Conversely, by not serving them the happy ending on a platter, you can make them think, you can

⁴⁸ Kracauer. 1997, p. 245.

⁴⁹ Kracauer. 1997, p. 246.

⁵⁰ Serres & Latour, 1995, p. 58.

remove some of the smug security. Then they'll have to find their own answers.⁵¹

Fellini's "existentialist argument", suggests Kracauer, "is by itself insufficient".⁵² "It is not just the lack of a ready-made ending which challenges the spectator; rather he becomes "engaged" because of the nature of the qualities and processes which do not end".⁵³ For Kracauer, the "beautiful finale of *Cabiria* with its enchanted woods in which tears and music, grief and the joy of living fuse into each other," stands apart from films whose imagery "exhausts itself in trying to project what its creator believes to have put into it."⁵⁴

What is interesting here is the limited amount of cinematic agency (ability to produce cinematic content) that Kracauer credits to Fellini (as compared to that he attributes to Chaplin). For Kracauer, what makes Fellini's, De Sica's and Rossellini's work distinct is not their artistic acumen, their skill as artists, but a cinematic sensibility that resists transforming the raw material of camera reality into art. "[A]ll of them", suggest Kracauer, "are imprecise in that they fail to connect the elements or units of their narratives in a rational manner".⁵⁵ However, it is not entirely down to chance that their films contain moments that engage the spectator. It is, concludes Kracauer, as "if they possessed a divining rod enabling them to spot, on their journey through the maze of physical existence, phenomena and occurrences which strike us as being tremendously significant".⁵⁶ The "divining rod" to which Kracauer refers is the film camera and like the supernatural knowledge that provides the inert stick with divinatory potential so too does knowledge of the interrelationship between the temporal and material continuum, for Kracauer, provide the cinematic apparatus with a comparable revelatory function. Incidences of this peculiar cinematic disclosure,

⁵¹ Quoted in Kracauer, 1997, pp. 269 -270. See also, Bachmann, Gideon, 'Federico Fellini: An Interview', in Robert Hughes (ed.) *Film: Book 1. The Audience and the Filmmaker* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), pp. 97 – 105.

⁵² Kracauer, 1997, p. 270.

⁵³ Kracauer, 1997, p. 270. The concept of "engagement" was central to Sartre's existentialist idea of praxis, see Adorno, Theodor W., 'Commitment', translated by Francis McDonagh, *New Left Review*, Nos. 87-88 (September-December 1974), pp. 75 – 89.

⁵⁴ Kracauer, 1997, p.191. Parallels can also be made between Kracauer's reading of the intervention of the jovial youths in the last scenes of Fellini's film and Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony and unfinalizability as they occur in his notion of carnival see, Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

⁵⁵ Kracauer, 1997, p. 257.

⁵⁶ Kracauer, 1997, p. 257.

suggests Kracauer, are characterised by the unsettling effect they have not just on the film's narrative but also on the spectator. Alongside the example of *Nights of Cabiria*, Kracauer lists:

The lone horse passing by the abandoned Gelsomina at dawn and the sick child with the eyes of a scared small animal which has never left its cave (LA STRADA) [Fellini]; the street invading the rooming house and the rows of Roman facades, as seen from a moving streetcar (UMBERTO D.) [De Sica] [Figure 12]; the group of German-speaking priests in the rain (THE BICYCLE THIEF) [De Sica] [Figure 13]; the Naples marionette theatre where the drunken American Negro soldier mistakes the puppets for real warriors and joins in the battle (PAISAN) [Rossellini] - these scenes and images, found in the world around the story proper, are singled out with unrivalled precision. Selected from among the many incidents with which the environment teems, they are very special samples indeed. They are beckoning us with great urgency, like the three trees in the Proust novel.⁵⁷

Kracauer's qualifying reference to Proust here is significant because it suggests a framework with which to interpret these cinematic phenomena "which strike us as being tremendously significant".⁵⁸

The passage concerning the trees in Proust's *À la Recherche Du Temps Perdu* [In Search of Lost Time, 1913 - 1927] provides an image that recurs in many guises throughout *Theory of Film* and *History*.⁵⁹ However, unlike his recourse to Kafka, Kracauer is careful to qualify his utilization of the French writer. Proust, notes Kracauer, was "a contemporary of the rising new medium", and acknowledged the influence of cinema in various ways but at the same time he completely ignored it "in

⁵⁷ Kracauer, 1997, p. 257. *The Road* [Italian: *La Strada*], directed by Federico Fellini (Italy: Ponti-De Laurentiis Cinematografica, 1954); *Umberto D.*, directed by Vittorio De Sica (Italy: Rizzoli-De Sica-Amato, 1952); *Bicycle Thieves* [Italian: *Ladri di biciclette*], directed by Vittorio De Sica (Italy: De Sica, 1948); *Paisan* [Italian: *Paisà*], directed by Roberto Rossellini (Italy: Organizzazione Film Internazionali, 1946).

⁵⁸ Kracauer, 1997, p. 257.

⁵⁹ See Kracauer, 1997, pp. li, 23, 27 & 238. See also, Kracauer, 1995, pp. 57 & 68. Proust, Marcel, *Remembrance of Things Past. Volume One: Swann's Way and Within a Budding Grove*, translated by C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (London. Penguin Books, 1989).

his capacity as a writer”.⁶⁰ His “affinity for the cinema”, suggests Kracauer, made him “sensitive to transient impressions, such as the trees which look familiar to him”, but “when he identifies the trees as yet un-deciphered phantoms of the past ‘appealing to me to take them with me, to bring them back to life’, he exchanges the world of the cinema for dimensions alien to it”.⁶¹

However, even considering his reservations regarding Proust’s symbolic development of the image of the trees, what remains significant for Kracauer is Proust’s attempt (in its first instance) at the articulation of the immediacy of a particular kind of material experience in a form that does not either completely consume it nor negate its future potential. “Note”, Kracauer writes in *History*, “Proust leaves open whether or not the massage of the three trees bears on his infancy and through it on his present self”.⁶² It is this quality (Proust’s consideration for the preservation of the intermediate), that draws the comparison from Kracauer between the novel and the enigmatic sequences that intervene in the cinematic stories of Fellini, De Sica, and Rossellini. As Kracauer suggests:

Any attempt at an allegorical interpretation would drain these ideograms of their substance. They are propositions rather than rebuses. Snatched from transient life, they not only challenge the spectator to penetrate their secret but, perhaps even more insistently, request him to preserve them as the irreplaceable images they are.⁶³

The cinematic narrative, as Kracauer envisions it, is therefore not totally identifiable with a particular open ended or circular format. The cinematic quality of a narrative is determined by its “porosity”, its capacity to host elements antithetic to its linear continuation and a receptiveness to their influence.⁶⁴ This is why Fellini’s existential explanation for the structure of his open-ended narrative is for Kracauer inadequate. It is also why Proust’s narrative exhibits a cinematic quality only up until he retrospectively attributes meaning (and therefore a narrative function) to the indeterminate phenomena that have until then populated his circuitous text.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Kracauer, 1997, p. 238.

⁶¹ Kracauer, 1997, p. 239.

⁶² Kracauer, 1995, p. 78.

⁶³ Kracauer, 1997, p. 257.

⁶⁴ Kracauer, 1997, p. 258. Kracauer also discusses “porosity” in Kracauer, 1995, p. 181.

⁶⁵ Kracauer discusses Proust’s narrative devices in more detail in Kracauer, 1995, pp. 166 – 163.



Figure 12. The view from the moving streetcar in *Umberto D.* (1952)



Figure 13. The German priests in the rain. *The Bicycle Thief* (1948)

If Proust supplies a (not entirely successful) literary precedent for Kracauer's idea of cinematic narrative in *Theory of Film* then the work of D.W. Griffith offers an "admirable non-solution"⁶⁶ for what Kracauer perceives as the antinomy of narrative determinacy and "prototypes of cinematically significant imagery".⁶⁷ In the following section I will look at how Kracauer develops Griffith's "non-solution" as a critique of the consideration of film as an art form and how cinematic imagery resists subsumption into art's associate philosophical frameworks.

8.4 *Griffith's Admirable Non-Solution*

"Griffith", writes Kracauer, "is generally recognized as the first to narrate a given story – mostly a theatrical one – in cinematic terms".⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Kracauer adds, perhaps the most significant characteristic of his approach is that "unlike many of his successors, he remains keenly aware of the gulf which separates the theatrical story from the cinematic narrative".⁶⁹ Griffith's films, explains Kracauer, "are full of fissures traceable to his cinematic instinct rather than technical awkwardness". As Kracauer explains:

On the one hand, he certainly aims at establishing dramatic continuity as impressively as possible; on the other, he invariably inserts images which do not just serve to further the action or convey relevant moods but retain a degree of independence of the intrigue and thus succeed in summoning physical existence. This is precisely the significance of his first close-up. And so do his extreme long shots, his seething crowds, his street episodes and his many fragmentary scenes invite us to absorb them intensely. In watching these pictures or pictorial configurations, we may indeed forget the drama they punctuate in their own diffuse meanings.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Kracauer, 1997, p. 47.

⁶⁷ Kracauer, 1997, p. 62.

⁶⁸ Kracauer, 1997, p. 231.

⁶⁹ Kracauer, 1997, p. 231.

⁷⁰ Kracauer, 1997, p. 231.

“Eisenstein”, argues Kracauer, “criticizes the close-ups in Griffith films precisely for their relative independence of the contexts in which they occur”.⁷¹ Calling them “isolated units which tend ‘to show or to present’”, Kracauer suggests, Eisenstein insisted that “to the extent that they indulge in isolation they fail to yield the meaning which the interweaving process of montage may elicit from them”.⁷² The function of the close up, for Eisenstein, is to “signify, to give meaning, to designate”.⁷³ In contrast, Griffith’s magnification of “small material phenomena are not only integral components of the narrative but disclosures of new aspects of physical reality”.⁷⁴ For Kracauer, Griffith’s approach to filmmaking:

seems to have been guided by the conviction that the cinema is all the more cinematic if it acquaints us with the physical origins, ramifications, and connotations of all the emotional and intellectual events which comprise the plot; that it cannot adequately account for these inner developments unless it leads us through the thicket of material life from which they emerge and in which they are embedded.⁷⁵

The example Kracauer provides as an illustration of this indelible affinity between Griffith’s aesthetic sensibility and the material environment from which it was gleaned comes from the modern episode of *Intolerance*.⁷⁶ During a sequence that depicts the actress Mae Marsh in the midst of a courtroom trial, Griffith inserts a close up of the distressed character wringing her hands [**Figure 14**]. “As we are watching them”, suggests Kracauer, “something strange” happens:

we will forget that they are just ordinary hands. Isolated from the rest of the body and greatly enlarged, the hands we know will change into unknown organisms quivering with a life of their own.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Kracauer, 1997, p. 47.

⁷² Kracauer, 1997, p. 47.

⁷³ Kracauer, 1997, p. 47.

⁷⁴ Kracauer, 1997, p. 47.

⁷⁵ Kracauer, 1997, p. 48.

⁷⁶ *Intolerance: Love's Struggle Throughout the Ages*, directed by D.W. Griffith (USA: Triangle Film Corporation, 1916).

⁷⁷ Kracauer, 1997, p. 48.

For Kracauer, extreme close-ups “metamorphose their objects by magnifying them,” and in doing so open up “expanses which we have explored at best in dreams before”.⁷⁸

In order to give some credence to his assertions in relation to Griffith’s imagery, Kracauer looks to the previously critical Eisenstein. “Years after having seen *Intolerance*”, recounts Kracauer, Eisenstein admitted that he “no longer remembered who is who in the street sequences of this film’s ‘modern story’; but the figure of a passer-by visible only ‘for a flashing glimpse’ still stood vividly before his inner eye”.⁷⁹ Though there is a similarity between this reference to Eisenstein’s

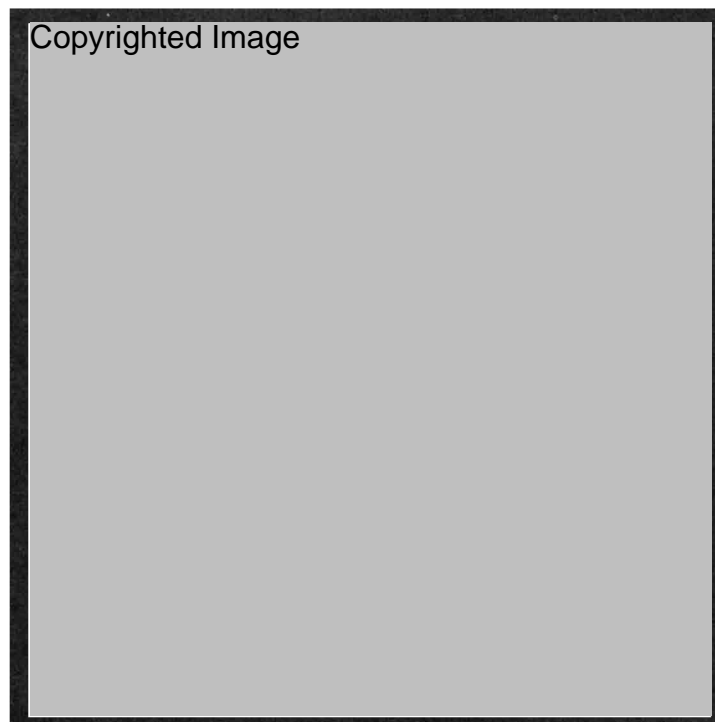


Figure 14. Mae Marsh’s hands in *Intolerance* (1916)

recollection and the one previously discussed by the poet Cendrars, Eisenstein’s anecdote plays a distinctive role in *Theory of Film* (a fact affirmed by Kracauer’s repeated use of it as an example).⁸⁰ For Kracauer, Eisenstein, and in particular the Eisenstein of *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) onwards, stands as the doyen of a particular

⁷⁸ Kracauer, 1997, p. 48.

⁷⁹ Kracauer, 1997, p. 231. Kracauer’s quotation is from Eisenstein, Sergei, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, edited and translated by Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1949), p. 199.

⁸⁰ Kracauer, 1997, p. 63.

formalist approach to film making. This is a formalism that “obstinately sticks to the harmony of a film’s various elements”.⁸¹ “The zeal with which he forces all aural and visual components of a film into the service of its leading ideas,” Kracauer writes in a 1943 review of Eisenstein’s book *The Film Sense*, “recalls somewhat the Wagnerian conception of the ‘total work of art’”.⁸² However, this was not always the case. At the beginning of his career, explains Kracauer, “Eisenstein left the theatre to become a film director, because he recognized that only the cinema would allow him to express the specific notions and revolutionary ideas he had in mind”.⁸³ For Kracauer, the most significant of these was Eisenstein’s realization that the “screen is better able than the stage to represent masses and collective actions.”⁸⁴ As the confluence of such myriad processes the “seething” crowd becomes, for Kracauer, a genuine cinematic object.⁸⁵

This affinity, that Eisenstein recognized, between an amassed population and its filmic representation is readdressed in *Theory of Film*. “At a time of its emergence”, writes Kracauer, “the mass, this giant animal, was a new and upsetting experience” that the traditional arts proved unable to “encompass and render”:

Where they failed, photography easily succeeded; it was technically equipped to portray crowds as the *accidental agglomerations* they are. Yet only film, the fulfilment of photography in a sense, was equal to the task of capturing them in *motion*. In this case the instrument of reproduction came into being almost simultaneously with one of its main subjects. Hence the attraction which masses exerted on still and motion picture camera from the outset. It is certainly more than sheer coincidence that the very first Lumière films featured a crowd of workers and the confusion of arrival and departure at a railway station.⁸⁶

The urban mass as it was presented to a collective spectatorship in early non-narrative films was not an entity with a fixed cultural meaning, an ideological pictogram (as

⁸¹ Kracauer, Siegfried, ‘In Eisenstein’s Workshop’, *Kenyon Review*, Vol. 5, No.1 (1943), p. 152.

⁸² Kracauer, 1943, p.153.

⁸³ Kracauer, 1943, p. 152.

⁸⁴ Kracauer, 1943, p. 153.

⁸⁵ Kracauer, 1997, p. 231. My emphasis.

⁸⁶ Kracauer, 1997, pp. 50 – 51.

Eisenstein argues), but as kinetic phenomenon with a peculiar visceral appeal.⁸⁷ A characteristic it maintains (albeit fleetingly) even in its later, more staged manifestations (Kracauer cites the flood episode in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* as an example [Figure 15]).⁸⁸

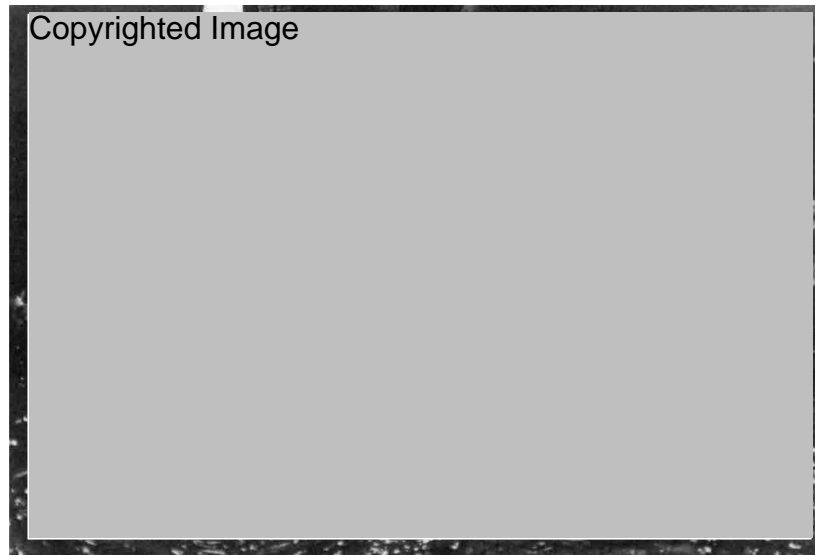


Figure 15. The giant animal mass. *Metropolis* (1927)

As with amorphous “unknown organism” that was Mae Marsh’s hands, the accidental agglomeration of human crowd as it appears in Lang’s film presents itself to the spectator (Kracauer) as a genuine cinematic entity. Its identification as such relates both to its analogous formal relationship with the non-laminar complex of temporal relations (like Serre’s analogy between time and the “the dance of flames in a brazier”)⁸⁹ but also its contextual relationship with the linear narrative that accommodates it. However, Kracauer’s reference to Lumière’s non-narrative films suggests a relationship between cinematic imagery and the temporal continuum that exists in parallel to (but distinct from) that exhibited by an individual film’s configuration of its narrative and visual constituents.

⁸⁷ For example the “factory gate” genre of films popular c. 1900 such as *Employees Leaving Vickers and Maxim’s in Barrow*, directed by James Kenyon and Sagar Mitchell (UK: Mitchell & Kenyon, 1901).

⁸⁸ Kracauer, 1997, pp. 61 – 62. *Metropolis*, directed by Fritz Lang (Germany: Universum Film (UFA), 1927).

⁸⁹ Serres & Latour, 1998, pp. 58 – 59.

In the following sections I will look at how Kracauer's use of the remembered film sequence (such as the previously discussed examples of Cendrars and Eisenstein) gives his notion of cinematic imagery a "reality character" beyond that of the film to which it initially relates.⁹⁰

8.5 Saturated Images

The final image of *Theory of Film* is an intriguing one in both terms of content and in relation to its critical function. It is a scene from Satyajit Ray's 1956 film *Aparajito* (The Unvanquished), the second part of Ray's Apu trilogy [Figure 16].⁹¹ This is how Kracauer describes the sequence:

The camera focuses on the ornamental bark of an old tree and then slowly tilts down to the face of Apu's sick mother who yearns for her son in the big city. In the distance a train is passing by. The mother walks heavily back to the house where she imagines she hears Apu shout "Ma": Is he returning to her? She gets up and looks into the empty night aglow with water reflections and dancing will-o'-the-wisps. India is in this episode but not only India.⁹²



Figure 16. The dancing will-o'-the-wisps in *Aparajito* (1956)

⁹⁰ Jay, 1985, p. 191.

⁹¹ *Aparajito / The Unvanquished* [Bengali: *Ôporajito*], directed by Satyajit Ray (India: Epic, 1955)

⁹² Kracauer, 1997, p. 311.

This passage comes at the end of a short section titled “The Family of Man” (a reference to Edward Steichen’s 1955 photography exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art in New York). In this section Kracauer briefly describes how the photographic medium has the potential to “record the material aspects of common daily life” and therefore, through its exhibition, has the potential of facilitating an “actual rapprochement between the peoples of the world”.⁹³ In order to contextualize his choice of *Aparajito*, Kracauer quotes from a *New York Times* review of the film by Frederick Laing that gives testament to the universality of Ray’s humanism:

What seems to me remarkable about *Aparajito* [writes Laing] is that you see this story happening in a remote land and see these faces with their exotic beauty and still feel that the same thing is happening every day somewhere in Manhattan or Brooklyn or the Bronx.⁹⁴

In relation to its context (The Family of Man) Kracauer’s choice of scene is somewhat strange, as it does not really corroborate its argument by means of an appropriate illustration. In Laing’s review the point of commonality (between Bengal and the Bronx) is a narrative one. The implication being that, no matter where it takes place, the story of human life’s struggle to survive is a common one. However, the sequence in *Aparajito* where Apu’s mother watches the fireflies in the forest has a definite extra-narrative quality to it. Its dreamlike nature gives its peculiar content an indeterminate meaning. Its enigmatic function in *Theory of Film* is amplified by Kracauer’s concluding statement:

Much as these propositions differ in terms of content, they all penetrate ephemeral physical reality and burn through it. But once again, their destination is no longer a concern of the present inquiry.⁹⁵

⁹³ For details of the exhibition see, Steichen, Edward, and Carl Sandberg, *The Family of Man* [1955] (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1996). For an overview of recent criticism of Steichen’s project see, Stimson, Blake, *The Pivot of the World: photography and its nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2006), pp. 59 – 103.

⁹⁴ Kracauer, 1997, p. 311.

⁹⁵ Kracauer, 1997, p. 311.

As with the end of his essay of “The Spectator”, the reader is left guessing the meaning of the imagery Kracauer employs in relation to his philosophical intentions.⁹⁶ As with Kracauer’s earlier reference to Proust, the critical function of the symbolic indeterminacy in the conclusion of *Theory of Film* also has a literary precedent, this time the Victorian Art critic John Ruskin’s autobiography *Præterita*. Like Kracauer’s *Theory of Film*, Ruskin’s “outlines of scenes and thoughts perhaps worthy of memory in my past life” ends with an image of the fireflies “among the scented thickets.” “How they shone!” writes Ruskin, “moving like fine-broken starlight through the purple leaves” in the “still undarkened air”.⁹⁷

Ruskin’s *Præterita* exerted a strong influence on Proust’s work and is mentioned twice in *Theory of Film*. The first is in the introductory survey of the historical development of photography. The second forms part of his exposition of film’s “shift of emphasis from the meanings of speech to its material qualities”.⁹⁸ In the former, he relates Ruskin’s enthusiasm over the “sensational realism”, of some small glass plate photographs of Venice; “it is, said he, ‘as if a magician had reduced the reality to be carried away into an enchanted land’”.⁹⁹

Kracauer’s reference to Ruskin’s idea of a “sensational realism,” suggests an intriguing relationship between it and Kracauer’s own notion of physical reality. What the two texts have in common is what William Arrowsmith identifies in Ruskin’s work as “saturated images”, visual motifs endowed with a “kind of special intensity”.¹⁰⁰ For such phenomenon, “obscurity is a quality to be respected, a guarantee of emotional complexity and wholeness, of the poet’s respect for the organic, germinal mystery, which could be revealed only by the suggestion of its intrincating products”.¹⁰¹ Like the undecipherable film images “[s]natched from transient life”, described by Kracauer, “they not only challenge the spectator to

⁹⁶ Kracauer, Siegfried, “The Spectator”, in Robert Hughes (ed.), *Film: Book 1. The Audience and the Filmmaker* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 22.

⁹⁷ Ruskin, John, *Præterita and Delicta, Vol. 3* (London: Georg Allen, 1907), p. 148.

⁹⁸ Kracauer, 1997, pp. 109 – 110. For the bibliographical reference to Ruskin see p. 348.

⁹⁹ Kracauer, 1997, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Arrowsmith, William, “Ruskin’s fireflies”, in John Dixon Hunt (ed.), *The Ruskin Polygon*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), p. 199.

¹⁰¹ Arrowsmith, 1982, p. 199.

penetrate their secret but, perhaps even more insistently, request him to preserve them as the irreplaceable images they are”.¹⁰²

Arrowsmith’s concept of the saturated image is one derived from the poet T.S. Eliot’s 1919 interpretation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (also the subject of Benjamin’s *Trauerspiels* study). For Eliot, what marks Hamlet out as distinct from the rest of Shakespeare’s work as a whole, is that in it he “tackled a problem which proved too much for him [...] to express the inexpressibly horrible”.¹⁰³ “The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art”, states Eliot:

is by finding an ‘objective correlative’; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.¹⁰⁴

However, in *Hamlet*, explains Eliot, Shakespeare is intent on trying to express:

an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear. The intense feeling, ecstatic or terrible, without an object or exceeding its object is something, which every person of sensibility has known.¹⁰⁵

Eliot concludes that, “Hamlet’s bafflement at the absence of objective equivalent to his feelings is a prolongation of the bafflement of his creator in the face of his artistic problem”.¹⁰⁶ Under “compulsion of what experience,” asks Eliot, “he attempted it at all is an insoluble puzzle”. In order to answer this we would have “to know something, which is by hypothesis unknowable, for we assume it to be an experience which, in the manner indicated, exceeded the facts. We should have to understand

¹⁰² Kracauer, 1997, p. 257.

¹⁰³ Eliot, T.S. “Hamlet”, in *T.S. Eliot. Selected Prose*, edited by John Hayward (London: Penguin Books, 1953), p. 109.

¹⁰⁴ Eliot, 1953, p. 108.

¹⁰⁵ Eliot, 1953, p. 109.

¹⁰⁶ Eliot, 1953, p. 108.

things which Shakespeare did not understand himself”.¹⁰⁷ Eliot returned to the subject of saturated images fourteen years later in a lecture given at Harvard University in 1933. In this lecture Eliot states:

Only part of an author’s imagery comes from his reading. It comes from the whole of his sensitive life since early childhood. Why, for all of us, out of all that we have heard, seen, felt, in a lifetime, do certain images recur, charged with emotion, rather than others [...] such memories may have symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell, for they come to represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer.¹⁰⁸

One such image, saturated with an indeterminate symbolic value, which recurs in *Theory of Film*, is one gleaned from the Georges Franju's documentary about Parisian abattoirs, *The Blood of the Beasts [Le Sang des Bêtes, 1949]* [Figure 17]. In one instance, Kracauer describes how in Franju’s film:

puddles of blood spread on the floor while horse and cow are killed methodically; a saw dismembers animal bodies still warm with life; and there is the unfathomable shot of the calves' heads being arranged into a rustic pattern which breathes the peace of a geometrical ornament. It would be preposterous to assume that these unbearably lurid pictures were intended to preach the gospel of vegetarianism; nor can they possibly be branded as an attempt to satisfy the dark desire for scenes of destruction.¹⁰⁹

How Kracauer subsequently chooses to qualify Franju’s unsettling imagery is particularly revealing when considered in relation to Eliot’s proposal concerning the emotional origin of a symbolically indeterminate “objective correlate”.¹¹⁰ For Kracauer, “Franju's dread of the abyss that is everyday life,” is identified as “the kind of dread which befalls an adolescent who awakes by night and suddenly realizes the presence of death, the togetherness of pleasure and slaughter” – the ellipsis here is

¹⁰⁷ Eliot, 1953, p. 109.

¹⁰⁸ Eliot, T.S. “Poetic Imagery” in Eliot, 1953, p. 95.

¹⁰⁹ Kracauer, 1997, p. 305.

¹¹⁰ Eliot, 1953, p. 108.

significant.¹¹¹ As with his reference to Ray's *Aparajito*, this unfinished sentence denies Kracauer's line of reasoning (like Fellini's *Cabiria*) a resolution so that its elements (unlike the trees in Proust's novel) retain their contingent nature as prompts instead of meaningful revelations.

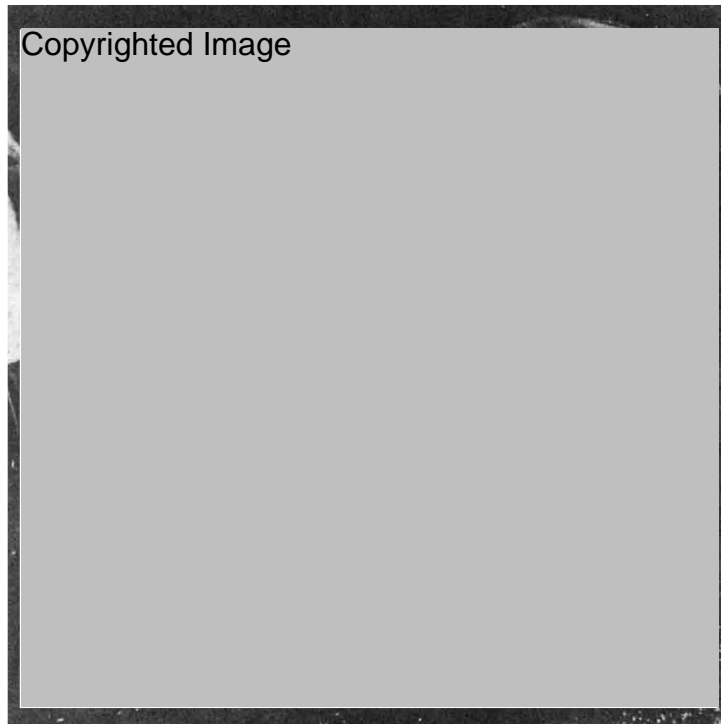


Figure 17. The abyss of everyday life, *Le Sang des Bêtes* (1949)

In the final section of this chapter I will explore further the idea that certain images in *Theory of Film* have a function in addition to their role as illustrations. Returning once more to the work of Kafka, Adorno and Benjamin it will suggest that the ambiguous imagery Kracauer uses in *Theory of Film* suggest film can perform an experimental function in relation to philosophy. This function, though distinct from that of a philosophical thought experiment is integral (as Wartenberg argues) rather than merely an ornamental addition to Kracauer's film theory.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Kracauer, 1997, p. 310.

¹¹² See chapter 4.3 of this study.

8.6 *The Wish to be a Red Indian: The Cinematic as Felt Reality.*

What the ambiguous images that recur in Kracauer's text have in common is (to use a phrase of the novelist Ian McEwan's) a sense of the "microscopic lattice work of consciousness" - they are "third person accounts that contain a pearl of first person experience".¹¹³ Kracauer's analogy between the experience of watching Franju's film and "the kind of dread which befalls an adolescent who awakes by night" certainly suggests a particular first person experience not immediately comprehensible to the average reader. However, in his 1964 essay on Kracauer, Adorno relates a childhood memory of his friend's that sheds some light on its intellectual provenance. Adorno writes:

Kracauer once told a story from his childhood about being so obsessed with Indian stories that they overflowed into reality. One night he awoke abruptly from a dream, saying, "A foreign tribe has robbed me." This outlines his rebus, the horror that became literal in the deportations, along with a yearning for the unpunished and more innocent barbarism of the natives he envied.¹¹⁴

The model for Adorno's subsequent analysis of Kracauer's dream of being an Indian is Benjamin's 1934 essay, "Franz Kafka. On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death".¹¹⁵ In the course of interpreting a formal childhood photograph of Kafka, Benjamin juxtaposes the precisely controlled environment of a nineteenth century photographic studio with a short prose piece by Kafka called "*Wunsch, Indianer zu werden* [The Wish to be a Red Indian]. In this text Kafka writes:

If one were only an Indian, instantly alert, and on a galloping horse, leaning into the wind, kept on quivering briefly over the quivering ground, until one shed one's spurs, for there were no spurs, throw away the reins, for there were no reins, and barely saw the land

¹¹³ McEwan, Ian, "Am I really a believer", *The Guardian Review* (16th February 2013), p. 4.

¹¹⁴ Adorno, Theodor W., "The Curious Realist: On Siegfried Kracauer", *New German Critique*, No. 54 (1991), p. 177. For an account of the impact and influence of the Cowboy film on early 20th century German cinema audiences see, Koepnick, Lutz P., 'Unsettling America: German Westerns and Modernity', *Modernism/Modernity*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1995), pp. 1 - 22.

¹¹⁵ Benjamin, Walter, "Franz Kafka. On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death", in *Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings. Volume 2: 1927 - 1934* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press, 1999), pp. 794 - 818.

before one as a smoothly mown plain, with the horse's neck and head already gone.¹¹⁶

According to Benjamin's interpretation, Kafka's yearning to be free, like the Indian, expresses not just the immediate desire to get out of the stuffy formal surroundings of the studio, but links the child's wistful daydream with a deferral of identification that he associates with the mimetic faculty. "A great deal is contained in this wish", Benjamin concludes, and its "fulfilment, which he finds in America, yields up its secret".¹¹⁷ Of course, Kafka never went to America; he died in 1924 from tuberculosis aged 40, having never left Europe. The America to which Benjamin refers here is Kafka's unfinished novel *Der Verschollene* [The Missing / The Man Who Disappeared] that was posthumously published in 1927 with the title, *Amerika*.

For Benjamin, the most significant aspect of this Kafka's *Amerika* is encompassed in the section pertaining to the protagonist's encounter with the "Nature Theatre of Oklahoma". For it is here, argues Benjamin, that Kafka demarcates the spatial and temporal context to which much of his corpus relates. A "good number of Kafka's shorter studies and stories", states Benjamin, "are seen in their full light only when they are, so to speak, put on as acts in the 'Nature Theatre of Oklahoma'". "Only then", Benjamin explains:

will one come to the certain realization that Kafka's entire work constitutes a code of gestures which surely had no definite symbolic meaning for the author from the outset; rather, the author tried to derive such a meaning from them in ever-changing contexts and experimental groupings. The theatre is the logical place for such groupings¹¹⁸

Here, alongside Kafka's "Red Indian" in one such experimental grouping can be placed the cinematic images that recur throughout *Theory of Film*. Both Kafka's and Kracauer's images share a certain kinetic energy, which, as Kafka scholar Ronald

¹¹⁶ Kafka, Franz, *In the Penal Settlement: Tales and Short Prose Works* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949), p. 37.

¹¹⁷ Benjamin, 1999, p. 800.

¹¹⁸ Benjamin, 1999, p. 801.

Gray suggests, “does much to bring it home as a felt reality”.¹¹⁹ It is this sense of movement that is atrophied by Adorno by burdening it with the fixed meaning of a rebus. As suggested in his essay 1927 “Photography”, for Kracauer, cinema provides another suitable context for Kafka’s “experimental groupings”.¹²⁰

Benjamin develops the analogy between Kafka’s work and film made by Kracauer in *Photography* in the section titled, “Sancho Panza” of his Kafka essay. “The invention of motion pictures and the phonograph”, argues Benjamin:

came in an age of maximum alienation of men from one another, of unpredictably intervening relationships, which have become their only ones. Experiments have proved that a man does not recognize his own gait on film or his own voice on the phonograph. The situation of the subject in such experiments is Kafka's situation; this is what leads him to study, where he may encounter fragments of his own existence—fragments that are still within the context of the role.¹²¹

So, as with Kracauer’s interpretation of the Griffith’s close-up, Benjamin’s reading of Kafka’s galloping horse is similarly freed from the burden of a designated purpose. It is the resultant “puzzling indeterminacy” of its meaning that affords it the potential to disclose “new aspects of physical reality”.¹²² As the moving image of Mae Marsh’s hands on screen invites us to “deepen our insight into the bodily components of the whole of her existence,” so too do the fragments of existence that present themselves in the “Nature Theatre of Oklahoma” offer to perform a similar role.¹²³ For it is on these occasions, amidst the ever-changing contexts and experimental grouping of a “fragmentized reality”, that Kafka’s theatre becomes reconstituted on Kracauer’s screen.¹²⁴ It is then that “unknown organisms” emerge from their “dormant state, its state of virtual non-existence”,¹²⁵ and present themselves to the spectator “quivering

¹¹⁹ Gray, Ronald D. *Franz Kafka* (London & New York: Cambridge University Press. 1973), p. 53.

¹²⁰ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 63.

¹²¹ Benjamin, 1999, p. 814.

¹²² Kracauer, 1997, p. 52.

¹²³ Kracauer, 1997, p. 49.

¹²⁴ Kracauer, 1997, p. 298.

¹²⁵ Kracauer, 1997, p. 300.

with a life of their own”.¹²⁶ “It is no great distance”, writes the French Surrealist poet Paul Eluard, “through birds, from clouds to men; it is no great distance, through images, from man to what he sees, from the nature of reality to the nature of the imagined. They have the same value.”¹²⁷

8.7 Conclusion

“The Age of Enlightenment”, suggests Michel Serres, “was very instrumental in categorizing as irrational any reason not formed by science”.¹²⁸ However, argues Serres, “there is as much reason in the works of Montaigne or Verlaine as there is in physics or biochemistry and, reciprocally, that often there is as much unreason scattered through the sciences as there is in certain dreams”.¹²⁹ “Reason”, Serres concludes (with a statement reminiscent of Kracauer’s critique of quantitative analysis),¹³⁰ “is statistically distributed everywhere; no one can claim exclusive rights to it”.¹³¹

It is clear from the above examination of the film sequences that Kracauer refers to in *Theory of Film* that some are considered by the author as acting in a capacity beyond that of mere illustration. Their role is not just to corroborate certain elements of Kracauer’s theoretical propositions as they are articulated in the text but also to contribute (as Serres suggests) something philosophically distinct alongside them. As with Serres, the cinematic for Kracauer does not represent (to use Sinnerbrink’s phrase) an “inferior form of knowing” when compared to science or philosophy but an alternative to their modes of reason.¹³² Though intellectually ambiguous, cinematic images are philosophically significant, argues Sinnerbrink, because they cast doubt on “the assumption that conceptual theorisation should be privileged” over other modes of human activity.¹³³ Film’s significance in this regard, argues Sinnerbrink, “lies in

¹²⁶ Kracauer, 1997, pp. 48 – 49.

¹²⁷ Eluard, Paul, “Au delà de la peinture”(1937) quoted in Quinn, Edward. *Max Ernst* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), p. 28.

¹²⁸ Serres & Latour, 1998, p. 50.

¹²⁹ Serres & Latour, 1998, p. 50.

¹³⁰ Serres & Latour, 1998, p. 50.

¹³¹ Serres & Latour, 1998, p. 50.

¹³² Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 26.

¹³³ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 26.

its capacity to vividly disclose forgotten or obliterated aspects of experience, making us receptive to difference and sensitive to possibility”.¹³⁴

A key component of Murray Smith and Paisley Livingstone’s criticism of film-philosophy involves the exclusivity of what Livingstone refers to as “cinematic insight” and its subsequent incommensurability in relation to traditional modes of philosophy.¹³⁵ If the cinematic contribution to philosophy can be communicated by conventional literary means, argues Livingstone, this negates any claims for its “significantly independent, innovative, and purely “filmic” philosophical achievement”.¹³⁶ On the other hand, suggests Livingstone, if it cannot be “paraphrased” then “reasonable doubt arises with regard to its very existence”.¹³⁷

Incommensurability, as Adorno notes in his essay on Kracauer, was the “central theme” of his friend’s work and, as demonstrated in this chapter, it was certainly a primary concern in *Theory of Film*.¹³⁸ It would be a mistake though to consider (as Adorno does) the ambiguous images that pervade Kracauer’s theory as philosophical rebuses (picture puzzles) that Kracauer (in the role of film-philosopher) has personally identified as being vehicles for “cinematic insight”. As such, Livingstone’s criticism of these insights as expression of a wishful thinking on behalf of a medium whose philosophical significance is solely in the mind of the individual philosopher would be valid. However, as argued above in relation to Kafka’s wish image, their ambiguity relates not to a hidden meaning but to a continuous deferral of one. The cinematic approach identifies prompts, triggers for the initiation of alternative modes of reason, it does not attribute meaning to things. Film can and does contribute something that philosophy cannot and that is provide (to use Eliot’s phrase) an objective correlation between elements of our experience that have until its development evaded our attention by resisting philosophical inquiry that has in turn either ignored or disparaged their existence. In the forward to his 1964 book on compilation films, *Films Beget Films*, Jay Leyda writes: “Siegfried Kracauer once boasted to me that he specialized in all the subjects that were too common to have

¹³⁴ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 41.

¹³⁵ Livingstone, Paisley, “Theses on Cinema as Philosophy, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Winter, 2006), p. 12.

¹³⁶ Livingstone, 2006, p. 12.

¹³⁷ Livingstone, 2006, p. 12.

¹³⁸ Adorno, 1991, p. 163.

invited anyone else's analysis."¹³⁹ The cinematic approach therefore can be understood as relating to the commonplace rather than extraordinary. It is not a privileged "cinematic insight" that it provides but the democratization (to paraphrase Laruelle) of revelatory experience.¹⁴⁰

In the next chapter I will look in detail at how the fundamentally kinetic nature of the examples identified by the cinematic approach addresses the criticism of the subjectivity of film-philosophy and how Kracauer uses the private and public experience of film to suggest an alternate perspective on the relationship between film and its peculiar theory.

¹³⁹ Leyda, Jay. *Film Beget Films* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964), p. 10.

¹⁴⁰ Mullarkey, John, "Film Can't Philosophise (and Neither Can Philosophy): Introduction to a Non-Philosophy of Cinema, in Havi, Carel and Greg Tuck (eds.), *New Takes in Film Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 90.

CHAPTER 9:

THE CRITICAL EXPERIENCE OF CINEMATIC ANALOGIES

9.1 Introduction

As previously discussed in Chapter 4, though philosophy can exhibit the same abstract properties as an artwork (for example: complexity, ingenuity, inventiveness, density, ambiguity and profundity), Murray Smith questions whether we should “value them in just the same way”.¹ “Few criticisms”, argues Smith, “are more apt to strike terror into the heart of the philosopher than the assertion that such-and-such a proposition is “ambiguous,” while in the art world the term is more likely to be used as a term of praise”.² As Wartenberg defends cinematic philosophy by suggesting that those cynical of its contribution often have a very limited idea of what constitutes a film, so can a similar criticism be levied at Smith’s understanding of what constitutes philosophy.³ In this chapter I will introduce the concept of the thought-image [*Denkbild*] as a form of critical theory that is reliant on ambiguity in its critique of Idealist philosophy. The thought-image, I argue, provides an alternative perspective for interpreting the evanescent cinematic motifs that recur in Kracauer’s *Theory of Film*.

With reference to the work of Georg Simmel I will demonstrate the various critical functions that Kracauer’s illustrations and film references in *Theory of Film* fulfill. In particular I will focus on the kinetic nature of certain cinematic motifs that recur throughout the text and how Kracauer uses them to explore the relationship between the spectator’s physiological and intellectual response to film. These motifs, I conclude, are not ciphers for the decoding of the ambiguous elements of Kracauer’s theory – they are not keys to the films’ or the theory’s hidden meanings - but prompts (invitations) to reconfigure the relationship between film and theory in a different way.

¹ Smith, Murray, “Film Art, Argument, and Ambiguity”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Winter, 2006), p. 40.

² Smith, 2006, p. 40.

³ Wartenberg, Thomas E., “On the Possibility of Cinematic Philosophy”, in Havi Carel and Greg Tuck (eds.), *New Takes in Film Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 11.

9.2 Cinematic Thought-Images

The “*Denkbild*”, explains Gerhard Richter, “is a brief aphoristic prose text typically ranging in length between a few sentences and a couple of pages that both illuminates and explodes the conventional distinctions among literature, philosophy, journalistic intervention, and cultural critique”.⁴ Two important pioneers of the format were the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and the French poet, Charles Baudelaire. Their aphoristic prose styles and focus on the perplexing experience of urban life exerted a significant influence upon early twentieth century proponents of the thought-image such as Stefan George, Karl Krauss, Robert Musil and Berthold Brecht. Though disparate in manner and style, what the work of these writers had in common was a concern for the specificity of a quotidian object or the seemingly negligible phenomenon. However, in the context of philosophy, the most influential exponent of the thought-image was the German sociologist Georg Simmel. For Simmel and his students, the microscopic focus of thought-image proved an innovative way of deciphering the surface phenomena of modernity as the expressions of larger covert social processes. As discussed in Chapter 3, Kracauer, Bloch and Benjamin all studied under Simmel and it is through the influence of their work that the thought-image became the *modus operandi* for Adorno in the development of Critical Theory. Benjamin’s *Einbahnstraße* [One Way Street, 1928], Adorno’s *Minima Moralia* [1951], Bloch’s *Spuren* [Traces, 1930] and Kracauer’s numerous *Feuilleton* pieces from the 1930s (later collected in *Straßen in Berlin und anderswo* [Streets in Berlin and elsewhere, 1964] are all key texts in the development of the *Denkbild*.

For the Frankfurt School and its associates, “*Denkbilder*”, argues Richter, “are neither programmatic treatises nor objective manifestations of a historical spirit, neither fanciful fiction nor mere reflections of reality”.⁵ Rather, suggests Richter:

The philosophical miniatures of the *Denkbild* can be understood as the conceptual, hovering between philosophical critique and aesthetic production. The *Denkbild* encodes a poetic form of condensed, epigrammatic writing in textual snapshots, flashing up

⁴ Richter, Gerhard, *Thought Images. Frankfurt School Writers’ Reflections from Damaged Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 7.

⁵ Richter, 2007, p. 2.

as poignant meditations that typically fasten upon a seemingly peripheral detail or marginal topic, usually without a developed plot or a prescribed narrative agenda, yet charged with theoretical insight.⁶

For Benjamin (who was the first amongst the Frankfurt group to use the term in the 1920s) the *Denkbild* represented a reconfiguration of the relationship between the conceptual classifications of philosophy and the aesthetic categories of art. “Art”, Adorno writes in *Aesthetic Theory*, “requires philosophy, which interprets it in order to say what it is unable to say, whereas art is only able to say it by not saying it”.⁷ In other words, for Benjamin and Adorno, what a philosopher communicates cannot be considered independently of how they communicate it; both style and content are identical to meaning. The reason for this conflation of the aesthetic and philosophical, Adorno explains in his introduction to Benjamin’s *One Way Street*, is as a result of the perceived conceptual limitations of the philosophical idea:

The pieces in *One-Way Street* [...] are not images like the Platonic myths of the cave [...] Rather they are scribbled picture-puzzles, parabolic evocations of something that cannot be said in words [*des in Worten Unsagbaren*]. They do not want to stop conceptual thought so much as to shock through their enigmatic form and thereby get thought moving, because thought in its traditional conceptual form seems rigid, conventional, and outmoded.⁸

In contrast to Wittgenstein’s proposition “*Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen*” [Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent], the *Denkbild* (in Benjamin and Adorno’s understanding of it) works to articulate through a specific literary image and its reception that which resists communication in conceptual terms.⁹ As its reception, its effect is essential to its meaning, the *Denkbild*, argues Richter, “cannot be paraphrased”. The “presentation of philosophy”, he

⁶ Richter, 2007, p. 2.

⁷ Adorno, Theodor, *Aesthetic Theory*, translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor (London & New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 94.

⁸ Quoted in Richter, 2007, p. 12.

⁹ Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, with an Introduction by Bertrand Russell (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1922), p. 162.

concludes, “is not an external matter of indifference to it but immanent to its idea”.¹⁰ As Adorno states in *Negative Dialectics*, in a section titled “Fragility of Truth”:

Essentially [...] philosophy is not expoundable. If it were, it would be superfluous; the fact that most of it can be expounded speaks against it.¹¹

“What prevents a Denkbild from being superfluous”, concludes Richter, “even when it addresses philosophical issues”:

is its resistance to being fully translatable into philosophical truth-claims or formal propositions. Indeed, its very resistance to such translation and paraphrase is part and parcel of what it signifies and of what it gives us to think philosophically.¹²

Adorno’s idea of the aesthetically constructed thought-image as being not the receptacle for philosophical truth but a catalyst for an act of philosophical translation anticipates Sinnerbrink’s proposal for a mutually transformational relationship between film and philosophy. In this respect, Adorno’s Critical Theorist and Sinnerbrink’s “romantic” film-philosopher both assume the role of a “translator” who mediates critically between different “media of thought: cinematic and philosophical, aesthetic and conceptual, poetic and political”.¹³ Like Plato, Adorno’s negative intellectual assessment of representational art forms (such as photography) would exclude the cinematic from contributing to a notion of an aesthetically informed critical theory but could the same be said of Kracauer’s approach?¹⁴ Can the ambiguous images that recur in *Theory of Film* be understood philosophically as cinematic *Denkbild*?

¹⁰ Richter, 2007, p. 19.

¹¹ Adorno, Theodor, *Negative Dialectics*, translated by E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), pp 32 – 33.

¹² Richter, 2007, p. 19.

¹³ Sinnerbrink, Robert, “Re-enfranchising Film: Towards a Romantic Film-Philosophy”, in Havi, Carel and Greg Tuck (eds.), *New Takes in Film Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 43.

¹⁴ Adorno’s dismissal of film as a genuine art form is discussed in Hansen, Miriam. “Introduction to Adorno, ‘Transparencies on Film’ (1966), *New German Critique*, Nos. 24/25 (1981 - 1982), pp. 186-198.

In considering the *Denkbild* as a genre of philosophy, argues Richter, “one runs the risk of eliding the resistance that the *Denkbild* itself mounts against such taxonomic and classificatory impulses”.¹⁵ Therefore, the role of the reader identifying what qualifies as a thought-image is as much part of the philosophical process as the act of creating the text itself. For Richter, what connects the work of Adorno, Bloch, Benjamin and Kracauer is not a common philosophy but a belief “that any philosophical truth-content their writing may contain invariably is tied to, and mediated by, its specific and potentially unstable figures of presentation”.¹⁶ Identifying what constitutes a thought-image in Kracauer’s work is therefore a matter of philosophical perspective. Richter (following Adorno) limits his analysis of Kracauer’s *Denkbilder* to his Weimar period, in particular his *Feuilleton* pieces from the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Though Richter does not discuss Kracauer’s film pieces, he does not (in relation to the work of Simmel) reject film as an appropriate subject for a *Denkbild*.¹⁷ However, Adorno and Bloch do not match Richter’s accommodation of Simmel’s work in this respect. Both consider the ambivalence Simmel displays in relation to the social and political processes his work helps identify as demonstrating a fundamentally regressive ideological character.¹⁸

As discussed in Chapter 1, what motivates Kracauer’s interest in film (what Schlüppmann identifies as his “love of the cinema”),¹⁹ Adorno argues, is also what stops his thought from becoming philosophy.²⁰ Kracauer’s work, he suggests, “is tinged with a kind of amateurish thinking on his feet, just as a certain slackness damped self-criticism in favor of a playful pleasure in felicitous insights”.²¹ The source of this attitude, Adorno argues was Simmel:

Not only did Simmel train Kracauer's capacity to interpret specific objective phenomena in terms of the general structures that, according to this view, appeared in them; Kracauer was also

¹⁵ Richter, 2007, p. 18.

¹⁶ Richter, 2007, p. 2.

¹⁷ Richter, 2007, p. 8.

¹⁸ Richter, 2007, p. 7. For an overview of the critical reception of Simmel’s political ambivalence see, Cronan, Todd, “Georg Simmel’s Timeless Impressionism”, *New German Critique*, No. 106 (2009), pp. 83 – 101.

¹⁹ See Chapter 2.5

²⁰ Adorno, Theodor W., “The Curious Realist: On Siegfried Kracauer”, *New German Critique*, No. 54 (1991), p. 164.

²¹ Adorno, 1991, pp. 161 – 162.

indebted to Simmel for a style of thought and presentation that connects one element to another with a gentle carefulness, even where the movement of thought could dispense with many such intermediate parts, where the tempo could become quicker: thinking with the pencil in hand. Later, during his activities as an editor, this moment of carefulness protected Kracauer from journalism. It was hard for him to get rid of the circuitousness that always had to find everything for itself, even what was familiar, as though it were freshly discovered.²²

Though Adorno adds that Simmel's influence on Kracauer “lay more in the gesture of his thought than in any affinity with the irrationalist philosophy of life”, the implication of this debt is clear. “Philosophy had not been Kracauer's major at the university”, states Adorno, “and the power of its great constructions [...] remained alien to him”.²³ For Adorno, Kracauer was an insightful writer, a novelist, a poet but not a philosopher; he could construct a thought-image but could not translate one into philosophy. It is this inability to complete the process that, for Adorno, made Kracauer erroneously identify the cinematic as a potentially charged with “theoretical insight”.²⁴

In relation to the ambiguous images that recur in Kracauer's *Theory of Film* I agree with Adorno on two counts. Firstly, I do not think that they constitute thought-images (in the way Adorno and Benjamin conceive them). Secondly, I concur with Adorno that it is Simmel's influence that sets them apart. However, where I differ from Adorno is in arguing that “the circuitousness” of Kracauer's approach, “that always had to find everything for itself, even what was familiar” is exactly what stops Kracauer's cinematic approach from becoming a matter of subjective judgement; an act of exclusive philosophical connoisseurship. As I will demonstrate in the following text, the identification of Kracauer's work as a meaningful constellation specific “thought-images” has distorted the kinetic nature of the cinematic images he refers to in *Theory of Film*. As Thomas Levin suggests, the “physiognomic essayistics” practiced by Kracauer whilst at the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, exercises a “minute decoding

²² Adorno, 1991, p.162.

²³ Adorno, 1991, p.161.

²⁴ Richter, 2007, p. 2.

of the surface phenomena of modernity as complex historical ciphers” in a fashion closer to Simmel’s *Momentbilder* than Benjamin’s *Denkbilder*.²⁵ The contemporary “ubiquity” of Benjamin’s term in contemporary literary studies has, argues Levin (in conjunction with Adorno’s derisory interpretation of *Momentbilder* as an inferior inchoate form of the *Denkbild*) negated their differences.²⁶

As David Frisby explains, at the time of Simmel’s adoption of the term *Momentbild* (1900 – 1903) it was the word used to describe photographic snapshots. “It still retained”, writes Frisby, “the literal meaning of a fleeting or momentary image or picture”.²⁷ What interested Simmel, suggests Frisby, was “not merely the fleeting image that the snapshot provides but also what can be seen as enduring about the image”.²⁸ None of the social phenomena examined by Simmel, argues Kracauer (in his unpublished monograph on his former teacher), “live in historical time”:

Rather, everything that is interwoven in the past and future he transposes into eternity, that is the sole form of existence in which it can exist as pure essentiality and can also be contemporary with us at any time.²⁹

Kracauer’s criticism of the peculiar temporality of Simmel’s approach bears a significant similarity with his later reproach of Adorno’s “infinite dialectics” (and Benjamin’s non-dialectic approach) as proceeding from a mistaken belief in the “unity of the historical period”. Adorno’s assumption, argues Kracauer, “alienated” him from all the “substances, intellectual or social” that “he pretends to penetrate and set moving”.³⁰ Movement is the key to understanding Kracauer’s cinematic approach, it is, he states in *Theory of Film*, “the alpha and omega of the medium”.³¹ Whereas Simmel’s static snapshots transposed everything into the non-time of “eternity”, the

²⁵ Levin, Thomas Y., “Introduction” in Kracauer, Siegfried, *The Mass Ornament. Weimar essays*, translated and edited by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard U.P., 1995b), p. 6.

²⁶ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 6.

²⁷ Frisby, David, *Sociological Impressionism: a reassessment of Georg Simmel’s social theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 102.

²⁸ Frisby, 1992, p. 102.

²⁹ Quoted in Frisby, 1992, p. 103.

³⁰ Quoted in Jay, Martin, *Permanent Exiles. Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).p. 230.

³¹ Kracauer, Siegfried, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality* [1960] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 158.

motion picture camera, argues Kracauer, can sustain the interwoven dynamic of the past and the future in its moving image.

In the rest of this chapter I will argue that the kinetic nature of Kracauer's cinematic images is crucial not in decoding (or translating) the philosophical meaning of *Theory of Film's* animated *Momentbilder* but in comprehending their function as a democratized form of the thought-image. These evanescent images, like Benjamin's abstruse *Denkbild*, are cogenerated by the interaction of the object and the subject; they are a product of what Kracauer refers to in *Theory of Film* as "psychophysical correspondences".

The term "psychophysical correspondences", explains Kracauer, describes the "fluid interrelations between the physical world and the psychological dimension".³² The cinematic shot, as a product of this correspondence, states Kracauer (quoting French philosopher Lucien Sève), "delimits without defining" and in doing so is unique amongst the arts by "offering not much more explanations than reality itself".³³ The *Denkbild* can be understood as representing the critical moment of aesthetic (subjective) and philosophical (objective) correspondence frozen in perpetuity (less like a snapshot and more like in a fairy tale) so that its potential remains intact until it is later deciphered and translated by philosophy. In comparison, the cinematic *Momentbild* is a record of the dynamic processes that (to appropriate Adorno's phrase) gets "thought moving" by means of induction.³⁴ To release its critical potential requires not a special philosophical sensibility but a film projector (or some other form of digital media player).

Neither unique and cryptic like the literary thought-image nor expoundable and instrumental like its antithesis the thought experiment, the cinematic image exists somewhere between the two. In this state of being in-between it has the potential to meet the spectator psychologically and physiologically (psychophysically?) halfway and thus make the challenge of becoming an artist and/or philosopher a less extraordinary activity. If Adorno's aesthetic theory interprets (his mentor) Arnold

³² Kracauer, 1997, p. 69.

³³ Kracauer, 1997, p. 69.

³⁴ Quoted in Richter, 2007, p. 12.

Schoenberg's dictum that, "if it is art, it is not for all, and if it is for all, it is not art" as a justification for the specialist roles of the philosopher and artist then Kracauer's belief in popular film as "art with a difference" stems from a desire to collapse their social exclusivity and democratize their insights.³⁵

In the following section I will examine how Kracauer articulates the significance of movement to the cinematic approach in *Theory of Film*. I will also demonstrate how consideration of the cinematic imagery that Kracauer describes in *Theory of Film* as *Denkbilder* codifies their content in relation to an existential interpretation of his work.

9.3 *The Unthinking Resonance Effect*

Kracauer concludes his preface to *Theory of Film* with a personal reminiscence. It describes a childhood memory of going to the cinema for the first time. The images on the screen, he explains, have since haunted him and like Proust's trees these "undeciphered phantoms of the past" have held sway over the temporal topology that informs *Theory of Film*. "The impression it made upon me", writes Kracauer, "must have been intoxicating, for I there and then determined to commit my experience to writing".³⁶ "What thrilled me so deeply", Kracauer explains:

was an ordinary suburban street, filled with lights and shadows which transfigured it. Several trees stood about, and there was in the foreground a puddle reflecting invisible house facades and a piece of the sky. Then a breeze moved the shadows, and the facades with the sky below began to waver. The trembling upper world in the dirty puddle – this image has never left me.³⁷

What is significant here and what has been overlooked by recent scholarship is that what Kracauer is describing is a moving image. Its kinetic nature cannot be stressed enough. For example, there is nothing in Tara Forrest's interpretation of this image as

³⁵ Schoenberg, Arnold, "New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea" [1946], in *Style and Idea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 124.

³⁶ Kracauer, 1997, p. li.

³⁷ Kracauer, 1997, p. li.

a metaphor of its author's "alienated mode of perception" that distinguishes it from a reading of a photographic still.³⁸ As with Hansen, Schlüpmann and Koch, there is no attempt in Forrest's work to comprehend the kinaesthetic effect of the moving image in Kracauer's film theory. As the cryptic nature of the thought-image forces the reader to address how the presentation of philosophy is (to quote Richter) "not an external matter of indifference to it but immanent to its idea" so should the kinetic nature of Kracauer's cinematic imagery be considered as immanent to his theory.³⁹ In negating movement from her analysis, Forrest does no more than confirm Adorno's assertion that as reflections (perfect illustrations) of extent reality, photography affirms established conceptual frameworks rather than prompting the discovery of possible alternatives. Read erroneously as thought-images, Kracauer's cinematic *Momentbilder* are rendered subservient to philosophy rather than allowed to act alongside it as (to paraphrase Sinnerbrink) a comparable rather than an "inferior form of knowing".⁴⁰

Returning to the image of the "trembling upper world in the dirty puddle", its interpretation as an ambiguous symbol or allegory attributes it a specific function in relation to philosophy. Distilling movement from the image and rendering it static allows a fixed meaning to be attributed to it. Key to this process in Forrest's, Koch's and Mülder-Bach's work is the identification of Kracauer's use of "extraterritoriality" in *History* with a form of existential displacement.⁴¹ As previously discussed in the context of Lukács' and Bloch's image of the bourgeois subject's contemplation of nature as landscape (Chapter 5), ontological exclusivity requires a uniformly laminar temporality in order to demarcate it as an autonomous historical phenomena. Such distinct ontological delineation is irreconcilable with Kracauer's turbulent and non-homogenous conception of time (Chapter 7).

³⁸ Forrest, Tara, *The Politics of Imagination: Benjamin, Kracauer, Kluge* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2007), p.106. The film that Kracauer refers to is unknown but an example of such a photograph is Ilse Bing's *Puddle, rue de Valois*, Paris, 1932, a copy of which is in the V&A collection, London: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/i/ilse-bing-queen-of-the-leica/> [accessed 14/2/2013]

³⁹ Richter, 2007, p. 19.

⁴⁰ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 26.

⁴¹ Kracauer, Siegfried, *History. The Last Things Before the Last*, completed after the death of the author by Paul Oskar Kristeller (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1995), p. 83. See also: Forrest, 2007, p. 117 and Koch, Gertrud. "Not Yet Accepted Anywhere": Exile, Memory, and Image in Kracauer's Conception of History", translated by Jeremy Gaines, *New German Critique*, No. 54 (Autumn, 1991), p. 105.

Kracauer states the significance of movement to the cinematic approach in the section on the spectator in *Theory of Film*. “Different kinds of pictures call forth different reactions”, explains Kracauer:

some address themselves directly to the intellect, some function merely as symbols or such. Let us assume that, unlike the other types of pictures, film images affect primarily the spectator's senses, engaging him physiologically before he is in a position to respond intellectually.⁴²

In order to support this assumption, Kracauer breaks his argument up into three parts. Firstly, suggests Kracauer, the “reality character” of film, the verisimilitude of the photographic representation of physical objects, provokes an automatic response to its images comparable to that caused by the objects themselves (“nature in the raw”).⁴³ This “appeal” to the spectator’s “sensitivity”, he concludes, urges them “through their sheer presence unthinkingly to assimilate their indeterminate and often amorphous patterns”.⁴⁴

Secondly, and most significantly for Kracauer, “film renders the world in motion”. “Take any film you can think of”, states Kracauer:

by dint of its very nature it is a succession of ever-changing images which altogether give the impression of a flow, a constant movement. And there is of course no film that would not represent- or, rather, feature-things moving. *Movement is the alpha and omega of the medium*. Now the sight of it seems to have a "resonance effect," provoking in the spectator such kinesthetic responses as muscular reflexes, motor impulses, or the like. In any case, objective movement acts as a physiological stimulus.⁴⁵

In contrast to its usual description as primarily a story telling medium, the effect of a film’s kinetic nature offers, for Kracauer, an insight into its appeal distinct from its

⁴² Kracauer, 1997, p. 158.

⁴³ Kracauer, 1997, p. 158.

⁴⁴ Kracauer, 1997, p. 158.

⁴⁵ Kracauer, 1997, p. 158. My emphasis.

function as a narrative vehicle. “We cannot turn our eyes away from the film”, writes the French philosopher and psychologist Henri Wallon:

whose images supersede each other not only because we would then drop the thread of the story and no longer understand what will follow but also because there is in the flow of the successive images a sort of attraction, a sort of inducement [induction] enjoining us, our attention, our senses, our vision, not to lose anything [of that flow].⁴⁶

Wallon’s observation demonstrates for Kracauer how film appeals to our “deep bodily layers” and that its “attractiveness” in this respect is automatic and compulsive.⁴⁷ Though Kracauer is reluctant to speculate on the reason for our automatic response to moving images, he does (with reference to the educational psychologist Friedrich Copei) suggest that the universality of the reaction probably indicates that it relates to our “biological heritage”.⁴⁸

If the first two elements of Kracauer’s explication of film’s “impact on the senses” relates to the medium’s recording function then the third concerns its ability to reveal “hidden provinces” of physical reality.⁴⁹ Due to the dynamic nature of these cinematic discoveries about “spatial and temporal configurations”, argues Kracauer, there is an “increased demand on the spectator’s physiological make-up”. “The unknown shapes he encounters”, concludes Kracauer (adopting a personal perspective):

involve not so much his power of reasoning as his visceral faculties. Arousing his innate curiosity, they lure him into dimensions where sense impressions are all-important.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Quoted in Kracauer, 1997, p. 158

⁴⁷ Kracauer, 1997, p. 158.

⁴⁸ Kracauer, 1997, p. 158. For an introduction to contemporary research into the “biological heritage” of film’s kinesthetic appeal see, Gallese, Vittorio and Michele Guerra, “Embodying Movies: Embodied Simulation and Film Studies”, *Cinema*, No. 3(2012), pp. 183 – 210.

⁴⁹ Kracauer, 1997, p. 158.

⁵⁰ Kracauer, 1997, p. 159.

In the following section I will examine in detail some specific examples of these visceral cinematic images as they occur in *Theory of Film* and how Kracauer interprets them as communicating an aspect of the manifold nature of time.

9.4 *Pferdegalopp: The Motif of the Galloping Horses.*

Motion, for Kracauer “is the alpha and omega” of the film medium and is the source of a “resonance effect” in the cinema spectator.⁵¹ For Kracauer, films that juxtapose moving images with motionless photographic elements demonstrate the potency of cinema’s peculiar kinaesthetic effect. For example, writes Kracauer, the Ukrainian film director, Alexander Dovzhenko:

in both ARSENAL and EARTH frequently stops the action to resume it after a short lull. The first phase of this produces a shock effect, as if all of a sudden we found ourselves in a vacuum. The immediate consequence is that we acutely realize the significance of movement as an integral element of the external world as well as film.⁵²

Whereas Wartenberg’s Kantian reading of Warhol’s *Empire* attributes an instrumental rationale to film’s unique ability to depict “stasis”, for Kracauer such transcendental categorisation would render it subordinate to an extent philosophical system (which would in turn strip it of its historical novelty). As John Mullarkey suggests, rather than harnessing the transformative power of film (in relation to philosophy), the Structuralist approach to film making (as proposed by Wartenberg and Carroll) “aped the subtractive gestures of modernism in painting, literature and theatre, in the hope that this would somehow reveal the essence of cinema lying beneath”.⁵³ However, argues Mullarkey, what lies beneath:

⁵¹ Kracauer, Siegfried, “The Spectator”, in Robert Hughes (ed.), *Film: Book 1. The Audience and the Filmmaker* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 4.

⁵² Kracauer, 1997, p. 44. Alexander Dovzhenko (1894 – 1956). *Arsenal or January Uprising in Kiev in 1918* [Russian: *Арсенал*], directed by Alexander Dovzhenko (USSR: VUFKU, 1928/9); *Earth* [Russian: *Земля (Zemlya)*], directed by Alexander Dovzhenko (USSR: VUFKU, 1930)

⁵³ Mullarkey, John, *Philosophy and the Moving Image: Refractions of Reality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), p. xv.

is not a fixed essence but a shifting process. What film converges on, with its various inheritances from the other arts and its increasingly convoluted technology, is not a singular reality but diverging, plural realities.⁵⁴

In contrast to Wartenberg's choice of experimental artist's film or Sinnerbrink's transcendental preference for the work of the auteur director, Kracauer cites the "genuine Western" as the sight for a potentially transformative philosophical activity. A "genuine" Western, explains Kracauer, is one that includes a pursuit or a race on horseback. Quoting Robert Flaherty, Kracauer writes, "people never get tired of seeing a horse galloping across the plains".⁵⁵ "Its gallop", Kracauer suggests, "seems still to gain momentum by contrast with the immense tranquility of the faraway horizon" [Figure 18].⁵⁶



Figure 18. A "genuine" western. *The Iron Horse* (1924)

From its earliest stages, the image of the galloping horse operated as an important phenomenological axiom in *Theory of Film*. The draft table of contents Kracauer wrote in Marseilles on the 19th November 1940 (included as an illustration to

⁵⁴ Mullarkey, 2009, p. xv.

⁵⁵ Kracauer, 1997, p. 42.

⁵⁶ Kracauer, 1997, p. 42. Kracauer review of John Ford's "The Iron Horse" appeared in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* Jg. 70 (10th March 1926), p. 4, see Levin, Thomas Y., *Siegfried Kracauer: Eine Bibliographie seiner Schriften* (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1989), p. 151.

Hansen's 1997 introduction to *Theory of Film*) illustrates this.⁵⁷ Here, Kracauer gives the title *Pferdegalopp* [Horses Galloping] to both the introduction and conclusion of his proposed book on film.⁵⁸ Hansen credibly identifies its inclusion as the initial chapter heading for the first section of the manuscript as demarcating the historical starting point of a brief discursive history of cinema technology and technique (ending with Griffith), possibly using Benjamin's *Little History of Photography* as a model.⁵⁹ Following what was by 1941 already a convention in the writing of film history, the horse Hansen assumes Kracauer intends to start his study with is the one photographed by Eadweard Muybridge in 1878 [Figure 19].⁶⁰ Though drafts of what was to eventually become *Theory of Film* do contain references to various early and proto-forms of Lumière's cinematograph, in the final published version Kracauer allocates relatively little space to Muybridge's "instantaneous photography" and no reference is made to his galloping horse.⁶¹ Though omitted as a title in *Theory of Film*, the image of the *Pferdegalopp* remains however a significant motif in the final version of the text.



Figure 19. "Sallie Gardner", Eadweard Muybridge (1878)

⁵⁷ Kracauer, 1997, p. xvi

⁵⁸ Hansen, Miriam, "Introduction" in Kracauer, 1997, p. xiv.

⁵⁹ Hansen, 1997, p. xvii. Benjamin's 'Kleine Geschichte der Photographie' [Little History of Photography] essay was published in *Die literarische Welt* in 1931, see Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927 – 1934*, edited by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, translated by Rodney Livingstone, et al. (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press, 1999), pp. 507 – 530.

⁶⁰ *Sallie Gardner at a Gallop or The Horse in Motion*, photographed by Eadweard Muybridge (USA: Leland Stanford, 1877). Early examples of film history that start with Muybridge are: Hampton, Benjamin B., *A History of the Movies* (New York: Covivi Friede, 1931) and Ramsay, Terry, *A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture Through 1925* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1926).

⁶¹ Kracauer, 1997, p. 27.

The question of why it persists as a motif throughout the versions of *Theory of Film* is perhaps best answered by looking at how Kracauer uses another equine example to differentiate between a physiognomic and intellectual reaction to cinematic images and the significance of that distinction. The example this time is from Fred Niblo's 1925 version of *Ben Hur* [Figure 20]. In the chariot race episode of the film, Kracauer describes how the “manes of the galloping horses” appear as “flying threads or streamers rather than manes”.⁶²



Figure 20. The “manes of the galloping horses”, *Ben Hur* (1925)

For Kracauer, these moving images, through their cinematic transfiguration into “indeterminate and often amorphous patterns”, attain significance beyond that given to them by the film’s narrative.⁶³ “Evanescent, like dream elements,” Kracauer writes, “such impressions may haunt the moviegoer long after the story they are called upon to implement has sunk into oblivion”.⁶⁴ This haunting quality, Kracauer explains, is indicative of these sequences resistance to interpretation; they stay with us as mental phenomena because they cannot be fully rationalised (or categorised – to use a Kantian notion) and so remain philosophically unresolved (an active). Therefore, in

⁶² Kracauer, 1997, p. 52. *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*, directed by Fred Niblo (USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1925). Kracauer reviewed the film for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* on the 23rd October 1926, see Kracauer, Siegfried, *Kino: Essays, Studien, Glossen zum Film*, edited by Karsten Witte (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 163 – 165.

⁶³ Kracauer, 1997, p. 158.

⁶⁴ Kracauer, 1997, p. 52.

order to comprehend the critical function that Kracauer attributes to them in *Theory of Film* it is perhaps better to start by looking at what function they do *not* provide in relation to the cinematic approach.

For instance, the image of the horses' tangled manes can be interpreted as a visual representation of Kracauer's (and Serres') idea of the turbulent temporal continuum. This symbolic interpretation of the recurring imagery in *Theory of Film* is given further credence when the printed illustrations that Kracauer includes are also considered. For example, Kracauer's notion of history as an intermittent and non-laminar complex of heterogeneous narratives appears to be perfectly illustrated by Kracauer's choice of a still from the British propaganda film *Desert Victory* (1943) [Figure 21].⁶⁵ The visual similarity between the "fiery traces of the projectiles that tear the night" and the drawings Laurence Sterne includes to illustrate the tortuous timelines of the various narratives in his novel *Tristram Shandy* (1759 – 1767) [Figure 22] are indeed remarkable.⁶⁶ Though Sterne's work (alongside Proust's) provides an important literary reference point in Kracauer's *History*, identifying the examples as they appear in the text with those that appear as still photographs in the book robs the former of their kinetic nature and in turn their philosophically transformative potential.⁶⁷ This does not mean that the images Kracauer includes in his book do not perform among other tasks a simple illustrative function. However, regarding them all solely as illustrations of Kracauer's film theory diminishes film's significance as active agent in (to use Mullarkey's term) the co-generation of Kracauer's cinematic approach to philosophy.⁶⁸ As Sinnerbrink suggests, when considered as incidences of peculiar aesthetic disclosure (peculiar as in belonging to the medium of film) these elements become examples of when film is "allowed to show rather than tell; to reveal rather than be reduced".⁶⁹ In other words, the recurring cinematic motifs of *Theory of Film* (such as the horses) should be understood not just as manifestations of the "thinking dialogue" maintained by Kracauer between his philosophy of time and his experience of film but as evidence of the importance he

⁶⁵ *Desert Victory*, directed by David MacDonald (UK: Office of War Information, 1943)

⁶⁶ Kracauer, 1997, p. 52.

⁶⁷ Kracauer was a keen reader of Sterne's work, see Kracauer, 1995, p. 189.

⁶⁸ See Chapter 4.5

⁶⁹ Sinnerbrink (2011), p. 40.

assigned to the kinetic nature of the cinematic as the source of philosophy's and aesthetics mutually "transformative engagement" in film.⁷⁰



Figure 21. Images of the North African campaign, *Desert Victory* (1943)

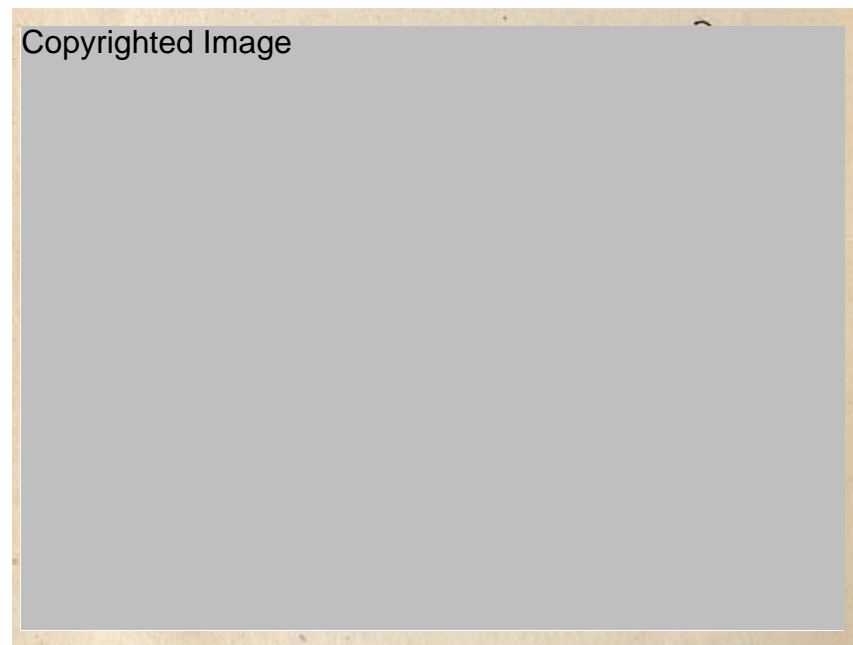


Figure 22. The tortuous course of Sterne's narrative, *Tristram Shandy* (1759 – 1767)

⁷⁰ Sinnerbrink (2011), p. 36.

In the following section I will analyse how Kracauer uses the audio-visual rhythms of dance films to articulate, explore and render communicable the nature of this “transformative engagement” as a felt experience and in turn how Kracauer envisaged their critical function in relation to Simmel’s *Momentbilder*.

9.5 Identifying Cinematic Analogies

“Perhaps the most loveable side of Kracauer”, writes Pauline Kael:

is his desperate attempt to make musicals, which he obviously adores, fit his notion of cinema as nature in the raw. A man who likes Fred Astaire can’t be all pedant. How touching he becomes when he tries to explain that it is Astaire’s dancing “over tables and gravel paths into the everyday world [...] from the footlights to the heart of camera-reality” that makes him acceptable. He’s like a man trying to sneak his dear – but naughty – friends into heaven.⁷¹

Kracauer’s enthusiasm for song and dance numbers may appear relatively odd to those with an image of him either as an austere German casuist or as an existentially exiled philosopher. However, when considered in relation to *Theory of Film*’s explication of non-synchronous nature of temporal events these musical interventions can be seen as performing a specific and important critical function.

Astaire’s dance routines, though contained within the chronology of the film narrative, operate according to their own temporal criteria; one derived from the rhythm of the music not the story. In a temporal sense the dances act extraterritorially, but this does not mean that they are removed from their physical context. “Astaire’s consummate dancing”, writes Kracauer, “is meant to belong among the real-life events with which he toys in his musicals; and it is so organized that it imperceptibly emerges from, and disappears, in the flow of these happenings” **[Figure 23]**.⁷² This

⁷¹ Kael, Pauline, “‘Is There a Cure for Film Criticism?’ Or, Some Unhappy Thoughts on Siegfried Kracauer’s *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*”, in *I Lost it at The Movies* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1965), p. 277.

⁷² Kracauer, 1997, p. 213. In *Theory of Film* Kracauer references two Astaire films: *Top Hat*, directed by Mark Sandrich (USA: RKO Radio Pictures, 1935) and *Swing Time*, directed by George Stevens (USA: RKO Radio Pictures, 1936) see Kracauer, 1997, p. 318, n. 5.

antinomic movement “away from the story and again back to it” that “materializes in the very form of the musical,” is analogous to the dialectic of spectatorship itself, with the alienating effect of the photographic reproduction intertwining with its visceral appeal of the moving image.⁷³ As Kracauer explains:

No sooner does the real-life intrigue of a musical achieve a certain degree of consistency than it is discontinued for the sake of a production number which often has already been delineated at a prenatal stage, thereby corroding the intrigue from within. Musicals reflect the dialectic relation between the story film and the non-story film without ever trying to resolve it. This gives them an air of cinema. Penelope fashion, they eternally dissolve the plot they are weaving. The songs and dances they sport form part of the intrigue and at the same time enhance with their glitter its decomposition.⁷⁴

For Kracauer, the “glitter” of the dance routines, their immediate appeal as animated conglomerations of audio and visual stimuli is as significant as any information gleaned by analysis of their narrative content. As with Adorno’s explication of the *Denkbild*, the kinetic nature of their aesthetic form is immanent and not extraneous to their philosophical function.



Figure 23. Fred Astaire toying with real life. *Top Hat* (1935)

⁷³ Kracauer, 1997, p. 213.

⁷⁴ Kracauer, 1997, p. 213. The reference to Homer’s Penelope echoes that of Benjamin’s in his Proust essay, see Benjamin, 1999, p.238.

The appeal of Astaire's dance routine is not discrete from its function as an analogy with temporal continuum; it is, for Kracauer, partially appealing because of this correspondence. The analogy has, for Kracauer, a very specific intellectual character and an equally distinct critical function in relation to thought. As Kracauer explains in his essay on Simmel, the analogy "brings together two phenomena that in some way manifest the same behavior", in contrast the metaphor "tries, by means of an image, to give sensuous expression to the meaning that a certain phenomenon has for us".⁷⁵ In contrast, an analogy, Kracauer explains:

never refers to that specific being of a thing (its value, its makeup) which is available only through experience. [...] The value of an analogy depends exclusively on its objective validity, since the only processes it compares are those that really operate according to one and the same schema. When you have an authentic analogy, the parallelism of events that it claims must actually exist. Their synonymy is free of all subjective arbitrariness; *we discover it, but we do not constitute it.*⁷⁶

For Kracauer, the metaphor attributes a meaning to an object or situation, whilst an analogy offers no such judgment. Subsequently, the processes compared in an analogy have parity of status, whereas in a metaphor one component is always subordinate to the essence of the other. "What takes on form in the metaphor", explains Kracauer, "is precisely the incomparability of an object, its internal makeup". Analogy, Kracauer concludes:

is either true or false, whereas metaphor is either beautiful or ugly. In other words, no matter how ingenious and surprising the analogy may be, it stands and falls with its factual verification. We recognize it, if it is a feature of the phenomena themselves. The metaphor, however, is a creation of fantasy, of the imaginative power of the psyche; we evaluate it aesthetically and furthermore require that it be striking and illuminating—that it render visible, in a complete and unadulterated way, everything we have projected

⁷⁵ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 235.

⁷⁶ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 236. My emphasis.

intellectually or emotionally onto the object. It is not a type of knowledge like the analogy, but is rather a receptacle for our thoughts about things, an expression of our interior, a mirroring of the self in the world of appearances. The analogy: a relationship between objects. The metaphor: a representation of the relationships between subject and object.⁷⁷

For Kracauer, the significance of drawing comparisons between cinematic phenomenon and the material and temporal processes that delimit our physical existence has a philosophical function that goes beyond merely enriching our literary activity. Using Simmel's work as an example, Kracauer argues that, what is "at stake for the thinker" in this process of recognising the analogous, "is the liberation of the thing from its isolation".⁷⁸ "[S]hallow, everyday understanding obliterates all fluid transitions between phenomena", states Kracauer, it "rips apart the texture of appearance, and incarcerates its henceforth isolated parts, each on its own within a concept".⁷⁹ "In their rigid conceptual housings", Kracauer argues:

things become univocal; only one of their facets is ever facing us, and we grasp them in whatever way they are useful to us. No wonder they are lying about next to each other, unreconciled! Their commonalities fade, and of their many meanings only the one that indicates their intended use has survived.⁸⁰

Subsequent to their liberation from such an unreconciled state, Kracauer explains, things can once again be woven "into an extensive net of relations" and "our consciousness of the world's manifold" can in some part be restored.⁸¹ "The more reality opens itself up to man", Kracauer concludes:

the more foreign to him the average world with its distorted conceptual petrifications becomes. He recognizes that a boundless plenitude of qualities inhabits each phenomenon, and that each is

⁷⁷ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 236.

⁷⁸ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 235.

⁷⁹ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 234.

⁸⁰ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 234.

⁸¹ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 235.

subject to widely differing laws. But the more he becomes aware of the many-sidedness of things, the more it becomes possible for him to relate them to each other:- Among the many determinations of some phenomenon that are unveiled to him, one of them can also be attributed to another phenomenon: everywhere he looks, relations between phenomena impose themselves upon him.⁸²

What distinguishes Kracauer's explication of the philosophical function of the analogy in his 1920 / 21 monograph on Simmel and the film's revealing function as it is presented in *Theory of Film* is the subjective role of the philosopher in the process of liberating the object from the conceptual framework that currently defines it. As discussed in the previous chapter, Kracauer in *Theory of Film* presents agency in the cinematic approach as being coproduced by the philosophical subject and the film camera. The ersatz objectivity of the Enlightenment subject is replaced by the mechanical objectivity of the cinematic apparatus. What this shift enables the cinematic approach to do is to open the singular philosophical perspective of the philosopher into one substantially more pluralistic. The consciousness of the world's manifold itself become manifold, (like Rancière's emancipated community) a non-localized process. The objective nature of film's rendering strange of our material environment (as discussed in chapter 5) lends its liberated objects (liberated by their absolute commodification as image) a commonality that therefore allows them (as Agamben argues) to appear "for the first time perfectly communicable".⁸³ For Kracauer, cinematic analogies by their kinetic nature do not just impose themselves more emphatically upon an already receptive consciousness they also go somehow (through the dynamic process of their reception) in inducing in the spectator the conditions for that consciousness to manifest. "Film is a dream", Kracauer states in his essay "The Spectator", "which makes (one) dream."⁸⁴

"In many an otherwise insignificant story film", writes Kracauer in *Theory of Film*, "the continuity is suddenly disrupted, and for a short moment it is as if all clocks ceased to tick; summoned by a big close-up or a shot of heterogeneous fragments,

⁸² Kracauer, 1995b, p. 234.

⁸³ Agamben, Giorgio, *The Coming Community*, translated by Michael Hardt (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 47.

⁸⁴ Kracauer, 1959, p. 10.

strange shapes shine forth from the abyss of timelessness”.⁸⁵ This shining forth is because, as Ronald Gray suggests (in relation to Kafka’s image of the Red Indian discussed in the previous chapter), we experience them as a “felt reality” whose character is comparable to that of phenomena we experience outside of the cinema.⁸⁶ “[S]truck by the reality character” of these images, states Kracauer, “the spectator cannot help reacting to them as he would to the material aspects of nature in the raw”.⁸⁷ However, as with Griffith’s extra-narrative excursions, the cinematic nature of these images is relative to their narrative context, their “reality character” exists only in relation to their specific film context. The cinematic can therefore be considered as an epiphenomenon peculiar to the processes of film production and reception. Therefore, the cinematic is not an attribute of a transposable component of a film but occurs as part of the process where the two antinomic elements (the narrative and visually peculiar – what Kracauer refers to as “deviant images”) co-exist as a complementarity.⁸⁸ This is why, for Kracauer, the cinematic resides in a genuine Western that includes a horse chase and not in an experimental film that comprises of just such sequences assembled together. In *Theory of Film*, Kracauer discusses this relative nature of the “reality character” of the cinematic in relation to Roger Tilton’s 1954 documentary film, *Jazz Dance* [Figure 24].⁸⁹



Figure 24. The Dancer’s Frenzy, *Jazz Dance* (1954)

⁸⁵ Kracauer, 1997, p. 235.

⁸⁶ Gray, Ronald D. *Franz Kafka* (London & New York: Cambridge University Press. 1973), p. 53.

⁸⁷ Kracauer, 1997, p. 158.

⁸⁸ Kracauer, 1997, p. 49.

⁸⁹ *Jazz Dance*, directed by Roger Tilton (USA: Tilton, 1954).

For Kracauer, the “deviant images” presented to the spectator by film, such as the weird organisms that were once Mae Marsh’s hands, occupy “a reality of another dimension” that he calls “contrived reality”.⁹⁰ “Contrived reality pictures”, explains Kracauer, are more often than not “ambiguous” and as such “they may or may not bear on physical reality as commonly perceived”.⁹¹ This is not to say, he argues, that they have no “relation to physical existence proper”. “If they form part of an otherwise realistic film”, states Kracauer, “they are likely to affect us as an outgrowth of the same realism, which animates the rest of the picture; they will be conceived, that is, as disclosures of hidden aspects of the world about us”.⁹² In Tilton’s *Jazz Dance*, Kracauer writes, there are certain shots:

which, taken out of the context, would hardly resemble any known real-life objects, initiate us into the secrets of a material universe set afire by the dancers' frenzy. If, on the other hand, pictures constituting reality of another dimension are used as elements of creative compositions unconcerned about physical reality, they lose their reality character and often impress one as freely invented shapes. Many an experimental film plays upon the ambiguity of these deviant pictures by transforming them, before our eyes, from representations of reality into patterns completely disengaged from the latter.⁹³

Alongside the big close-up, writes Kracauer, significant contributors to the production of film’s “deviant images” are the “correlated techniques” of accelerated and slow motion. For example, Kracauer suggests:

Pictures of stalks piercing the soil in the process of growing open up imaginary areas; and racing legs shown in slow-motion do not just

⁹⁰ Kracauer, 1997, p. 49.

⁹¹ Kracauer, 1997, p. 49.

⁹² Kracauer, 1997, p. 49.

⁹³ Kracauer, 1997, p. 49.

slow down but change in appearance and perform bizarre evolutions
– patterns remote from reality as we know it.⁹⁴

“As contrived-reality pictures”, concludes Kracauer, “the deviant images gained by both techniques [slow and accelerated motion], may well figure in non-realistic experimental films [but] they live up to the cinematic approach only if they are made to fulfil a revealing function within contexts focusing on physical existence”.⁹⁵

“Referring to waves in slow-motion and clouds in accelerated motion”; concludes Kracauer, the filmmaker Jean Epstein “declared that for all their ‘startling physics and strange mechanics’ they ‘are but a portrait – seen in a certain perspective – of the world in which we live’”.⁹⁶ This is why the “racing legs” of Muybridge’s horse, though contributing to the development of cinema, are themselves not cinematic as they are without context and so inhabit a realm too far “from reality as we know it”.

“Like science”, Kracauer concludes, film “breaks down material phenomena into tiny particles, thereby sensitizing us to the tremendous energies accumulated in the microscopic configurations of matter. These analogies may well be related to the nature of film”.⁹⁷ With reference to the “Filmology” approach to cinema espoused by Gilbert Cohen-Séat, Kracauer defines the experimental nature of the film – science analogy as follows:

Science postulates principles bearing on the nature of the universe or some dimension of it, deduces their implications, and tries to verify them by experiment and observation. The physical universe being indefinable, this is an endless process, involving ever-new hypotheses, ever-new verifications. Facts emerge which do not conform to the original propositions; consequently, more fitting propositions must be evolved and again tested, and so on. It is a

⁹⁴ Kracauer, 1997, p. 53. The idea of the close up as spatio-temporal rupture is examined in the context of the work of Béla Balázs and Gilles Deleuze in Doane, Mary Ann, ‘The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema’, *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2003), pp. 89 -111.

⁹⁵ Kracauer, 1997, p. 53.

⁹⁶ Kracauer, 1997, p. 53. Although Kracauer does not give any examples of this revealing function in this section about slow motion, two examples do spring to mind from films Kracauer references elsewhere in the text: the dormitory scene in Vigo’s *Zéro de Conduite* (1933) and the dream sequence in *The Forgotten Ones / The Young and the Damned* [Spanish: *Los Olvidados*], directed by Luis Buñuel (Mexico: Ultramar Films, 1950).

⁹⁷ Kracauer, 1997, p. 50.

process, which can also be, described as a continuous to-and-fro movement between the hypothesized qualities of complex entities and the observed qualities of their elements (which partly elude direct observation, though). The similarity between this movement and the editing sequence long shot - close shot - long shot, etc., consists precisely in their common aspiration to comprehend, each in its way, large ensembles and eventually nature itself.⁹⁸

In contrast to the abstruse *Denkbild*, Kracauer's concern for the "reality character" of the film indicates that he considers communicability as an essential attribute of the cinematic approach. This is not to say that Kracauer, as Kael complains, is asserting that only realistic films – films that adopt a supposedly objective and non-stylised naturalism – are cinematic.⁹⁹ Though Kracauer displays a preference for the work of directors associated with Italian Neo-Realism (Rossellini, De Sica, Fellini etc.) he does so, not because he shares their ideological convictions (which he dismisses in *Theory of Film*),¹⁰⁰ but because these filmmakers' initial inquisitiveness regarding the material environment manifests itself in the film's open narrative structure and their penchant for visual ambiguity.

The model for such an approach, argues Kracauer is Griffith, whose influence in the development of the long shot - close shot - long shot editing technique helped extend photography's innate capacity to reveal hidden material relations into a temporal context. This is why, no matter how stylised a film sets out to be, whether a Hollywood musical or an Eisenstein historical epic, for Kracauer, if it uses a camera and / or employs a style of editing related to that established by Griffith's "admirable non-solution" it contains within it the potential to exercise the medium's peculiar revealing function. As Kracauer states in *Theory of Film*:

⁹⁸ Kracauer, 1997, p. 52.

⁹⁹ Kael, 1965, pp. 291 – 292.

¹⁰⁰ Kracauer, 1997, pp. 309 – 310. For an introduction to the ideology of Italian Neorealism see, Shiel, Mark, *Italian Neorealism: Rebuilding the Cinematic City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

Many a commercial film or television production is a genuine achievement besides being a commodity. Germs of new beginnings may develop within a thoroughly alienated environment.¹⁰¹

However, appreciating occurrences of film's insight into the material and temporal complex of physical reality has, unlike science's experimental method, a problem when it comes to replication of results. As Livingston argues: "proponents of a bold epistemic thesis have to fall back on appeals to an indescribable cinematic *je ne sais quoi* that they believe they have experienced, in the hope that others may have a similar experience and come to agree that philosophical insight or understanding has been manifested in a film".¹⁰²

As science is the result of application of the scientific method, so Kracauer's notion of the cinematic should be understood not as a quality immanent to the individual image, shot, or narrative but as that which results from the practice of the cinematic approach. Admittedly, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, the philosophical circularity of such an intellectual activity can be interpreted as entirely subjective and intentionally obfuscatory (Kael, Andrew and Perkins). However, as argued in this chapter, the kinetic nature of the cinematic images identified by Kracauer suggests that their capacity to generate novel analogous relationships (the fostering of which is the function of the cinematic approach) is experienced (in part) intuitively - as a common "felt reality" – not solely as the product of individual judgement or quasi-rational deduction.

Like Serres', Kracauer's cinematic approach can therefore be comprehended as one which (in contrast to Enlightenment Idealism) considers reason as having an emotional component which in turn is fundamentally related to an individual's subjective physiological experience (as opposed to a Hegelian notion of a trans-historical objective spirit).¹⁰³ As the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio has recently argued, emotion is not "the evil twin of reason", but is rather "a very natural and inextricable component of the nature of being rational, for better and for worse". "It is

¹⁰¹ Kracauer, 1997, pp. 217 – 218.

¹⁰² Livingston, Paisley, "Theses on Cinema as Philosophy, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Winter, 2006), p. 13.

¹⁰³ See Chapter 8.6

not the case”, he concludes, “that we should reason with emotion alone but rather that we cannot reason without it.”¹⁰⁴

Though the cinematic approach is indisputably reliant on the immediate experience of the individual, Livingston’s criticism of film-philosophy’s fundamentally idiosyncratic nature is however inapplicable in relation to Kracauer’s consideration of the medium’s peculiar revealing function. If, as argued above, the revealing function of film is identical to that of the analogy (as espoused by Kracauer in his Simmel text) then though it has been discovered partially by means peculiar to the individual (the cinematic approach) what is revealed (the “parallelism of events that it claims”) is “either true or false”.¹⁰⁵ “No matter how ingenious and surprising the analogy may be”, Kracauer states, “it stands and falls with its factual verification”.¹⁰⁶ We “discover” an analogy, claims Kracauer, “we do not constitute it”.¹⁰⁷ For Kracauer, the marvels that film discovers in everyday life are not exclusive rewards for having faith in an individual philosophical position (or its technological mediation) but the knowledge of the many-sidedness of things or (to use Mullarkey’s phrase) that there “is not a singular reality but diverging, plural realities”.¹⁰⁸

Though the significance Kracauer places on the intuitive component of the cinematic approach has in the past been erroneously identified as being analogous to mystic divination, Kracauer is careful in *Theory of Film* to distinguish the medium’s revealing function from the extraordinary experience of theological insight. Instead, as I shall demonstrate in the following section, Kracauer exhibits the pluralist intentions of the cinematic approach by identifying it exclusively with the habitual and commonplace.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Damasio, Antonio, ‘Emotion and reason in the future of human life’, in *Mind, brain and the environment: The Linacre lectures 1995-1996*, edited by Bryan Cartledge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 68 – 69.

¹⁰⁵ See note 77 in this Chapter.

¹⁰⁶ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 236.

¹⁰⁷ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 236.

¹⁰⁸ Mullarkey, 2009, p. xv.

¹⁰⁹ Fearing, Franklin, ‘Films as History,’ *Hollywood Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 4, July 1947, p. 426. Fearing compares the method Kracauer employs in *From Caligari to Hitler* with Lucien Levy-Bruhl’s concept of *participation mystique*.

9.6 *Rehabilitating Everyday Vision*

Photography's "unique capacity", writes Kracauer, quoting Lewis Mumford's *Technics and Civilization* (1934), is its ability to depict the "complicated, inter-related aspects of our modern environment", and "where photography ends, film, much more inclusively, takes over".¹¹⁰ "Without any conscious notion of its destination", writes Mumford, "the motion picture presets us with a world of interpenetrating, counterinfluencing organisms: and it enables us to think about that world with a greater degree of concreteness".¹¹¹ "This is not all", adds Kracauer:

In recording and exploring physical reality film exposes to view a world never seen before, a world as elusive as Poe's purloined letter, which cannot be found *because it is within everybody's reach*. What is meant here is of course not any of those extensions of the everyday world which are being annexed by science but our ordinary physical environment itself. Strange as it may seem, although streets, faces, railway stains, etc., lie before our eyes, they have remained largely invisible so far. Why is this so?¹¹²

"For one thing", Kracauer argues, "it should be remembered that physical nature has been persistently veiled by ideologies relating its manifestations to some total aspect of the universe".¹¹³ However, in the contemporary context, admits Kracauer, this theological explanation of our failure to notice the world around us is no longer convincing. Today, Kracauer suggests:

The truly decisive reason for the elusiveness of physical reality is the habit of abstract thinking we have acquired under the reign of science and technology. No sooner do we emancipate ourselves from the 'ancient beliefs' than we are led to eliminate the qualities of things. So things continue to recede. And, assuredly, they are all the more elusive since we usually cannot help setting them in the

¹¹⁰ Kracauer, 1997, pp. 298 - 299. Lewis Mumford (1895 – 1990), American historian and philosopher.

¹¹¹ Mumford, Lewis, *Technics and Civilization* (Harcourt, Brace & Company: New York, 1934), p. 343. Quoted in Kracauer, 1997, p. 299.

¹¹² Kracauer, 1997, p. 299. My emphasis.

¹¹³ Kracauer, 1997, p. 299.

perspective of conventional views and purposes which point beyond their self-contained being.

“Just as consciousness finds itself confronting the unabashedly displayed mechanics of industrial society”, writes Kracauer in *Photography*, “it also faces, thanks to photographic technology, the reflection of the reality that has slipped away from it.”¹¹⁴ For Kracauer, technology presents us (Europeans / Americans) with a reality that we are as yet unable to fully comprehend so we shape it to fit what we already know.¹¹⁵ As Kracauer notes in his 1925 essay, *Die Reise und der Tanz* [Travel and Dance]:

We are like conquistadors who have not yet had a quiet moment to reflect on the meaning of their acquisition. Technology has taken us by surprise, and the regions that it has opened up are still glaringly empty.¹¹⁶

In *Art and Illusion*, published in the same year as *Theory of Film*, E.H. Gombrich writes:

The current idea that we look lazily into the world only as far as our practical needs demand it while the artist removes this veil of habits scarcely does justice to the marvels of everyday vision.¹¹⁷

Doing justice to everyday vision (what Kracauer describes in *History* as rehabilitating “objectives and modes of being which still lack a name and hence are overlooked or misjudged”) is the common thread that connects all the work in his disparate oeuvre. The fundamental role of film in this project, Kracauer explains in the preface of *Theory of Film*, is borne out by the title of his earliest literary project, “Film as the Discoverer of the Marvels of Everyday Life”.¹¹⁸ In the epilogue of *Theory of Film*, under the heading of “Moments of everyday life”, Kracauer ventures to give some

¹¹⁴ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 62.

¹¹⁵ The “role which cultural standards and traditions may play” in the cinematic approach is dealt with briefly by Kracauer in a section discussing African audiences in, Kracauer, 1997, p. 53.

¹¹⁶ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 73.

¹¹⁷ Gombrich, E. H., *Art and Illusion Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (1960), quoted in Coote, Jeremy, “Marvels of Everyday Vision’: The Anthropology of Aesthetics and the Cattle-Keeping Nilotes”, in Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (eds.), *Anthropology Art and Aesthetics* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1992), p. 245.

¹¹⁸ Kracauer, 1995, p. 4.

examples of, what he deems in *The Salaried Masses*, “the exoticism of a commonplace existence”.¹¹⁹ This “dimension”, Kracauer writes, “is made up of moments within everybody’s reach, moments as common as birth and death, or a smile, or ‘the ripple of the leaves stirred by the wind.’”¹²⁰

Along with the image of the galloping horses, the image of “the trembling leaves” is one that recurs time and again in *Theory of Film* and like its animal equivalent relates to the oldest layers of Kracauer’s project.¹²¹ Excluding mentions of their literary counterpart (Proust’s trees), the cinematic image of the leaves is initially introduced to the reader as a quotation from Henry Cook’s and Gaetano Bonelli’s description of their “Photobioscope”(1867) and its effect on established forms of “photographic art”. “We will see [...] landscapes”, they announced, “in which the trees bow to the whims of the wind, the leaves ripple and glitter in the rays of the sun”.¹²² However, like the galloping horse in Muybridge’s zoopraxiscope, for Kracauer, the image only attains cinematic significance in relation to the Lumières’ work. The critical point of reference in this respect is the Parisian journalist Henri de Parville’s contemporary account of the Lumières’ 1895 film *Repas de bébé* (Feeding the Baby.)¹²³ This short film (it is only 41 seconds long – compared to the potentially infinite running time of Muybridge’s circular zoopraxiscope disk) depicts **[Figure 25]** a domestic garden scene of a mother and father (Marguerite and Auguste Lumière) feeding a baby (their daughter, Andrée Lumière) and was shot by Louis Lumière. Ordinary domestic scenes such as this, explains Kracauer, concern “in a very personal way the individuals who live in it, but it also (and for that reason) concerns the elementary things which men in general have in common”.¹²⁴ Here Kracauer is quoting from Erich Auerbach, whose consideration of the comparative autonomy of certain aspects of “daily life” in

¹¹⁹ Kracauer, Siegfried, *The Salaried Masses. Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, translated by Quintin Hoare (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 29. Kracauer’s contribution to what is now referred to as the cultural theory of “everyday life” has recently been acknowledged by the inclusion of his 1924 essay *Langeweile* [Boredom] in Highmore, Ben (ed.), *The Everyday Life Reader*, London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 301 – 304. See also Highmore’s introduction in the same volume, pp. 295 – 296, and 301.

¹²⁰ Kracauer, 1997, p. 303.

¹²¹ For example, see Kracauer, 1997, p. 27, p. 31, p. 134, p.156 and p. 222.

¹²² Quoted in Kracauer, 1997, p. 27. For a history of the Photobioscope see, Mannoni, Laurent. *The Great Art Of Light And Shadow. Archaeology of the Cinema*, translated by Richard Crangle, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), pp. 245 – 247.

¹²³ Kracauer, 1997, p. 31. *Feeding the Baby / Baby’s Dinner* [French: *Repas de bébé*], directed by Louis Lumière (France: Lumière, 1895).

¹²⁴ Kracauer, 1997, p. 304.

Mimesis (1946), allows Kracauer to ground his own speculations on their significance. The “small random moment”, writes Kracauer:

which concern things common to you and me and the rest of mankind can indeed be said to constitute the dimension of everyday life, this matrix of all other modes of reality.¹²⁵



Figure 25. The “trembling leaves” in *Repas de bébé* (1895)

What concerns Kracauer here is not so much the trans-cultural nature of basic domestic routines demonstrating (as discussed in the previous chapter) the potential for an “actual rapprochement between the peoples of the world”¹²⁶, but something more basic even than that, something that attests to our shared “biological heritage”.¹²⁷ The “trembling leaves” belong to a dimension that “extends, so to speak, beneath the superstructure of specific story contents”, their kinetic nature triggering an innate and automatic neurological response.¹²⁸ What film does is re-discover these marvels of everyday life, which have (until their cinematic rendering) receded from our attention. The review of *Repas de bébé* is testament to film’s ability to rescue these

¹²⁵ Kracauer, 1997, p. 304. Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, translated by Willard Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953).

¹²⁶ Kracauer, 1997, p. 309.

¹²⁷ Kracauer, 1997, p. 158. For an introduction to contemporary research into the “biological heritage” of film’s kinesthetic appeal see, Gallese, Vittorio and Michele Guerra, “Embodying Movies: Embodied Simulation and Film Studies”, *Cinema*, No. 3(2012), pp. 183 – 210.

¹²⁸ Kracauer, 1997, p. 303.

aspects of physical reality from the background and in turn reacquaint us (the film audience) with them. The cinema, suggests Kracauer (quoting the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel), helps us to see anew what we have grown tired of seeing out of habit, its “power peculiar” in this respect is “literally redeeming [*salvatrice*]”.¹²⁹ “Hence”, Kracauer concludes, “were it not for the intervention of the film camera, it would cost us an enormous effort to surmount the barriers which separate us from our everyday surroundings”.¹³⁰

However, the kinesthetic experience of being presented with such cinematic phenomena, suggests Lucien Sève, “... requires of the spectator a new form of activity: his penetrating eye moving from the corporeal to the spiritual”.¹³¹ For Kracauer, film’s true philosophical potential (its capacity as a facilitator of a non-instrumental mode of reason¹³²) is not entirely identical to its capacity to demonstrate or test complex philosophical propositions (its aptitude as a cognitive device) but is also connected to its immediate sensory appeal. “No doubt”, Kracauer argues, in *Theory of Film*:

a major portion of the material, which dazes and thrills the moviegoer consists of sights of the outer world, crude physical spectacles and details. And this emphasis on externals goes hand in hand with a neglect of the things we usually consider essential [...] The cinema seems to come into its own when it clings to the surface of things.¹³³

For Kracauer, such an overt ontological characteristic has led many philosophers to conclude that films “divert the spectator from the core of life”.¹³⁴ For example, suggest Kracauer, French poet and philosopher, Paul Valéry argues, “by featuring the outer aspects of inner life, the cinema all but compels us to copy the former and desert the latter. Life exhausts itself in appearances and imitations, thus losing the

¹²⁹ Kracauer, 1997, p. 304.

¹³⁰ Kracauer, 1997, p. 300.

¹³¹ Quoted in Kracauer, 1997, p. 309.

¹³² See Chapter 7.6

¹³³ Kracauer, 1997, p. 285.

¹³⁴ Kracauer, 1997, p. 285.

uniqueness which alone would make it worthwhile".¹³⁵ In other words, because of film's peculiar interest in physical appearance, it hinders us from paying attention to spiritual concerns. The "life of the soul", for philosophers such as Valery, writes Kracauer, "is smothered by our immersion in the images of outer life on the screen".¹³⁶ "Perhaps", Kracauer adds:

contrary to what Valery assumes, there is no short-cut to the evasive contents of inner life whose perennial presence he takes for granted? Perhaps the way to them, if way there is, leads through the experience of surface reality? *Perhaps film is a gate rather than a dead end or a mere diversion?*¹³⁷

If film is a gateway, then the cinematic approach that Kracauer maps out in *Theory of Film* is a route to it. However, this approach is no "highway through the void" but a combination of many, often divergent, paths that "wind through the thicket of things".¹³⁸ It is film itself, not Kracauer or his theory that is our guide to this gateway. The illumination the cinema screen casts upon our route is like "the light of olden times" that Kracauer writes about in his essay on Kafka, which streams through "the gap-riddled construction" of the Great Wall of China.¹³⁹ This light, streams from the past "into the present era, not in order to direct us back to its shimmer, but rather in order to illuminate our utter darkness just enough so that we can take the next step".

¹⁴⁰ As Kracauer states in his 1926 essay *Die Bibel auf Deutsch* [The Bible in German]: "Today, access to truth is by way of the profane".¹⁴¹

9.7 Conclusion

If cinematic insight, argues Livingston, can be communicated by literary means this negates any claims for its "significantly independent, innovative, and purely "filmic" philosophical achievement".¹⁴² However, he adds, if it cannot be "paraphrased" then

¹³⁵ Kracauer, 1997, p. 286.

¹³⁶ Kracauer, 1997, p. 286.

¹³⁷ Kracauer, 1997, p. 287. My emphasis.

¹³⁸ Kracauer, 1997, p. 309.

¹³⁹ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 276.

¹⁴⁰ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 276.

¹⁴¹ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 201.

¹⁴² Livingston, 2006, p. 12.

“reasonable doubt arises with regard to its very existence”.¹⁴³ As I have demonstrated in this chapter, the inability to be “paraphrased” does not necessarily exclude something from being considered philosophy. In fact, in relation to the *Denkbild*, Adorno argues that it is philosophy’s ability to resist being expounded that essentially keeps it from being superfluous. However, such essentialist disagreements about the nature of philosophy (or film), as Felicity Coleman suggests (in Chapter 4), suspends the critical potential of film-philosophy in a circular ontological debate. By emphasising the kinetic nature of the imagery it generates, Kracauer’s work looks to present film not as a fixed object, to which theory relates itself, but as an array of relational processes. “If film is to think, if film is to philosophize”, Mullarkey argues, “then we must get away from any definition of film, as well as any definition of thinking and philosophy”.¹⁴⁴ Film’s essence, argues Mullarkey, is its “processual complexity” which in itself is the negation of essence. To assert any one property of film (be it cognitive or metaphysical) as its essence constitutes a refusal to “see how film’s complexity resists one’s theory”.¹⁴⁵ As Laruelle’s “democracy of thought” strives through its aggregation of theories to demonstrate the part that theory plays in constituting its object, then so does the pluralism inherent to Kracauer’s cinematic approach work to erase the necessity of its own personalism. In other words, the redemption of reality that Kracauer identifies with the cinematic approach will manifest itself as the collapse of distinction between theory and its (film) object. The “pure individuality” to which Kracauer “seemed to adhere so obstinately”, suggests Adorno, manifests itself “as an aversion to anything uniform, anything that was one hundred percent what it was”. I propose, that this unwillingness “to grant the concept of solidarity much significance” includes his film theory.¹⁴⁶ A favourite adage of Kracauer’s, and one he includes in *History*, is Marx’s declaration “that he himself was no Marxist”.¹⁴⁷ If the concept of the cinematic is the essence of Kracauer’s film theory then the cinematic represents an infinite permeability: the ability to neither exhaust itself or be exhausted by conceptual categorisation. The cinematic approach is therefore not a concept nor an idea but the beginning of their transformation into

¹⁴³ Livingston, 2006, p. 12.

¹⁴⁴ Mullarkey, 2009, p. 12.

¹⁴⁵ Mullarkey, 2009, p. 10.

¹⁴⁶ Adorno, 1991, p.164.

¹⁴⁷ Kracauer, 1995, p. 6.

something different. In a letter to Bloch, Kracauer articulates this sceptical relationship with philosophy:

You know my fearful mistrust in big dreams that are not marginal annotations but allowed to interfere to the extent of making radically transparent what is closest to us in experience that we are almost left incapable of seeing that and how it is [...] There is so much in-between and things themselves are so tenacious and of so many shapes. In short, my attitude is not unlike that figure identified by Kafka as Sancho Panza.¹⁴⁸

As I will explain in the concluding chapter of this study, the relationship between Kracauer's and Bloch's work provides not just a clarification of the utopian function that Kracauer identifies with the cinematic but also provides in the figure of Sancho Panza an analogy for the relationship between philosophy and film.

¹⁴⁸ Quoted in Barnouw, Dagmar, *Critical Realism: History, Photography, and the work of Siegfried Kracauer* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 153.

CHAPTER 10:

CONCLUSION: UTOPIA OF THE INBETWEEN

10.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the conclusion of the previous chapter, Adorno suggests that Kracauer exhibited “an aversion” to anything that was “100 percent what it was” including his own philosophy.¹ For Adorno, Kracauer’s “reluctance to become the vassal of either his own theory or that of others” relates to what he considered was a personal obligation to “the inexplicable residue”: that which is left over by philosophy’s subsumption of its object.² The film camera, argues Kracauer in *Theory of Film*, like “a rag-picker” shows no “inhibitions” when it comes to depicting what “most people turn their backs on” or ignore out of habit.³ Taking its cue from the film camera, the cinematic approach likewise operates not in opposition to convention but alongside it with an “inborn curiosity” about what other theories have disregarded and left behind.⁴

In this final chapter, before offering a summary of Kracauer’s peculiar philosophical mediation between film theory and its object I will look at the relationship between the cinematic approach and the utopian quotient of his critical project as a whole. Doing so, I argue, enables the contemporary reader of Kracauer’s work to get a better idea of how Kracauer set about answering the question that he poses in *Theory of Film*: “what is the good of film experience?”⁵ Central to this examination of Kracauer’s utopian impulse is Bloch’s identification of the “inexplicable residue” as having a specific critical potential. Unpacking Bloch’s notion of the utopian in relation to Adorno’s derision of it and then relating that to Kracauer’s final and unfinished work on *History* provides an important critical perspective on the philosophical function of Kracauer’s film theory. As Rancière criticises modernist

¹ Adorno, Theodor W., “The Curious Realist: On Siegfried Kracauer”, *New German Critique*, No. 54 (1991), p.164.

² Adorno, 1991, p.164.

³ Kracauer, Siegfried, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality* [1960] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 54.

⁴ Kracauer, 1997, p. 54.

⁵ Kracauer, 1997, p. 285.

theatre as “a mediation striving for its own abolition”, so too can Kracauer’s theory also be interpreted as being an equally self-annulling activity.⁶ However, Kracauer’s cinematic approach is not motivated (like modernist theatre) by desire for a synthetic reconstitution of a prelapsarian state of grace. As he reiterates in *Theory of Film*, “nature”, “physical existence” and “camera reality” all constitute reality as we experience it.⁷ In the epilogue of *Theory of Film*, Kracauer states that:

there are different realities or dimensions of reality, and our situation is such that not all of these worlds are equally available to us. Which of them will yield to our advances? The answer is, plainly, that we can experience only the reality still at our disposal.⁸

For Kracauer, philosophy’s ersatz “nostalgia for perfect immediacy”⁹ (that it propagates through the binary opposition of subject and object) provides the impetus for a circular reasoning that hinders our relationship with actuality and allows us to experience it “only with the fingertips”.¹⁰ In contrast, argues Kracauer, the mongrel plural realities that present themselves through performative cinematic analogies enables us to “seize” and “shake hands” with the things around us.¹¹

10.2 *Last Things Before the Last – Utopian Residues*

On August 12, 1960 in the Hotel Sonnenheim in Berguen, Switzerland Kracauer and Adorno met up in order to discuss their current projects. After their meeting Kracauer transcribed their discussion in his notebook. In this unpublished text Kracauer describes a bad tempered debate about (what Jay refers to as) Adorno’s “ontological agnosticism”.¹²

On the subject of the “concept of utopia”, Kracauer writes:

⁶ Rancière, Jacques, *The Emancipated Spectator*, translated by Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009), p. 8.

⁷ Kracauer, 1997, p. 28.

⁸ Kracauer, 1997, p. 297.

⁹ Kracauer, Siegfried, *History. The Last Things Before the Last*, completed after the death of the author by Paul Oskar Kristeller (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1995), p. 10.

¹⁰ Kracauer, 1997, p. 297.

¹¹ Kracauer, 1997, p. 297.

¹² Jay, Martin, *Permanent Exiles. Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 229.

I cited Benjamin against Teddie [Adorno]. Does not Benjamin time and again feel himself bound by visions of partial ontological truths? And does he not orient his presentations of concrete entities toward these messianic visions, which are rich in content, as indeed utopian ideas should be in order to carry meaning? Here I had Teddie trapped. True, he tamely criticized Benjamin for not being the perfect dialectician à la Hegel and Teddie himself (who invokes the Hegel of his making as a sort of protective cover and shield), but on the other hand, he could not well deny Benjamin's strength as an autonomous thinker and undermine his position.¹³

“Both Benjamin and I”, Kracauer continues in a later section of the transcript, “in not accepting immanent dialectics” are “engaged in terms of substances”:

We think under a sort of ontological compunction, utopian or not, whereas Adorno is “free-hovering and does not feel any such compunction. At this point, I believe, Teddie was at the end of his rope.”¹⁴

Kracauer later formalized his critique of Adorno's “unfettered dialectics which eliminates ontology altogether” in the last unfinished chapter of *History*. Adorno's “rejection of any ontological stipulation in favor of an infinite dialectics”, writes Kracauer:

seems inseparable from a certain arbitrariness, an absence of content and direction in these series of material evaluations. The concept of utopia is then necessarily used by him in a purely formal way, as a borderline concept which at the end invariably emerges like a *deus ex machina*. But Utopian thought makes sense only if it assumes the form of a vision or intuition with a definite content of a sort.¹⁵

¹³ Quoted in Jay, 1985, p. 229.

¹⁴ Quoted in Jay, 1985, p. 229.

¹⁵ Kracauer. 1995, p. 201.

From this, Kracauer concludes, that Adorno's intention was to show that "the concept of utopia is a vanishing concept when besieged; it vanishes if you want to spell it out".¹⁶

In 1964 Bloch and Adorno took part in a radio programme where they discussed in a rigorous but convivial manner the contradictions inherent in the historical manifestations of Bloch's "utopian longing".¹⁷ In the published version of their dialogue, Adorno's critique of utopia presents itself as less hostile than in his earlier encounter with Kracauer. However, for all his arcane maneuvering around Bloch's position, Adorno remained adamant that, epistemologically, utopia could only be conceived in a negative way. For Adorno, this meant a "prohibition" against "casting a picture of utopia [...] for the sake of utopia".¹⁸ As with the Biblical commandment, "thou shalt not make a graven image", this prohibition, Adorno explains, is a "defense" for the "utopian consciousness" against "the cheap utopia, the false utopia, and the utopia that can be bought".¹⁹

Understanding technology's function in the commodification of the utopian plays an important role in Adorno's account of the datedness of the utopian consciousness. As Adorno reminds Bloch at the very beginning of their discussion:

numerous so-called utopian dreams – for example, television, the possibility of travelling to other planets, moving faster than sound – have been fulfilled. However, insofar as these dreams have been realized, they all operate as though the best thing about them has been forgotten [...] the fulfillment of the wishes takes something away from the substance of the wishes.²⁰

¹⁶ Jay, 1985, p. 230. The "analytical versatility" of Utopia as a concept is explored in, Levitas, Ruth, *The Concept of Utopia* (New York and Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011).

¹⁷ Bloch, Ernst. *Gesprache mit Ernst Bloch*, Rainer Traub and Harald Wieser (eds.) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1975). The English language translation appears as Bloch, Ernst. "Something's Missing: A discussion between Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing (1964)", in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*, translated by Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 1 – 17.

¹⁸ Bloch, 1988, p. 11.

¹⁹ Bloch, 1988, p. 11.

²⁰ Bloch, 1988, p. 1.

Though in agreement with Adorno's conjecture that wish fulfillment negates the substance of wishes, Bloch's understanding of the process deals in less absolute terms: "There is a great deal", replies Bloch:

that is not fulfilled and made banal through the fulfillment –
regardless of the deeper viewpoint that each realization brings a
melancholy of fulfillment with it. So the fulfillment is not yet real
or imaginable or postulatable without a residue.²¹

It is this "residue", the something left over from the technological fulfillment of a false utopian consciousness, which Bloch identifies as a refuge for the genuine utopian impulse. Therefore, argues Bloch, "I believe that we live not far from the topos of utopia, as far as the contents are concerned, and less far from utopia":

When Bloch speaks of utopia as "not *yet* in the sense of possibility; *that* it could be there if we could only do something for it", he posits its existence not in the realm of fantasy but in a concrete reality whose "registration" as actuality (as opposed to mathematical possibility) awaits the appropriate epistemological conditions.²² In the meantime, as Bloch explains in the conclusion to his discussion with Adorno, all that is necessary to redeem utopia from the false consciousness that prevails in the technologically mediated second nature of advanced capitalism is the insistence that, to quote Brecht, "something's missing" [*Etwas fehlt*].

The phrase, "something's missing", comes from the Bertolt Brecht / Kurt Weill epic opera, *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* [*Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*], where it functions, argues Frederic Schwartz, as an indicator "for a kind of thinking that is perpetually to come".²³ However, Bloch's usage of it here suggests a proximity to utopia, which in turn suggests a finite rather than an infinite quest. "Something's missing", writes Bloch, "is one of the most profound sentences that Brecht ever wrote", but what is this "something"?²⁴ "If it is not allowed to be cast

²¹ Bloch, 1988, p. 3.

²² Bloch, 1988, p. 3.

²³ Schwartz, Frederic. J. *Blind Spots: critical theory and the history of art in twentieth-century Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 90.

²⁴ Bloch, 1988, p. 15.

in a picture”, (as Adorno argues) states Bloch, “then I shall portray it as in the process of being [*seined*]”.²⁵

It was not long after Adorno’s critique of the affirming function of a false utopian consciousness that Kracauer had his own opportunity to explain his critical approach in relation to Bloch’s. In 1965 Kracauer was asked by the then head of the publishers *Suhrkamp*, Siegfried Unseld, to contribute to an edited volume called, *Ernst Bloch zu Ehren; Beiträge zu seinem Werk* [Contributions in honour of Ernst Bloch].²⁶

Kracauer’s text consists of two distinct parts. The first is in the form of a personal letter to Bloch written in German. The second, written in English, consists of an exegesis of the work of the 16th century Christian scholar and friend of Thomas More (the author of *Utopia* (1516)), Erasmus.²⁷ Though the text on Erasmus was composed as a discrete work (it was to form part of the introduction to *History*) its pairing with the letter enabled Kracauer to triangulate his utopianism relative to Bloch’s and to “reflect on what connects and divides” their thinking.²⁸

“[O]ne who is not caught up in *the here*”, states Kracauer in his letter to Bloch, “can never reach *the there*.”²⁹ For Kracauer, it is Bloch’s “entanglement with ‘the here’”, that gives his “utopian thought its distinctive character”, and what in the end unites their thinking. In *History*, Kracauer stresses the proximity of “the here” to its corresponding utopian “there” through the identification of the former as an “anteroom area”.³⁰ An anteroom, or antechamber (from the Latin *ante camera*, meaning “room before”), exists as such only in relation to another room to which it is connected. A room cannot be an anteroom if the other chamber to which it relates does not yet exist. In other words, the spatial temporal complex that delimits “historical reality” is analogous to an anteroom in that its relationship to a utopian other is concrete not speculative. In this regard, Kracauer suggests, “historical reality”

²⁵ Bloch, 1988, p. 15.

²⁶ Unseld’s role in getting the disparate protagonists of critical theory together during this period should not be underestimated. See Unseld’s obituary in *The Guardian*, Friday 1st November, 2002. Available online <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2002/nov/01/guardianobituaries.germany> (accessed 18/2/2010)

²⁷ Kracauer, Siegfried, “Zwei Deutungen in zwei Sprachen” in *Ernst Bloch zu ehren. Beiträge zu seinem Werk*, (ed) Siegfried Unseld (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1965), pp. 145 – 155. Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus (1466 –1536), Dutch Renaissance humanist, Catholic priest, and theologian.

²⁸ Kracauer, 1965, p. 145.

²⁹ Kracauer, 1965, p. 145.

³⁰ Kracauer, 1995, p. 191.

relates to utopia in the same way as “photographic reality” relates to physical world, as both “realities are of a kind, which does not lend itself to being dealt with in a definite way”. Kracauer explains further:

The peculiar material in these areas eludes the grasp of systematic thought; nor can it be shaped in the form of a work of art. Like the statements we make about physical reality with the aid of the camera, those which result from our preoccupation with historical reality may certainly attain to a level above mere opinion; but they do not convey, or reach out for, ultimate truths, as do philosophy and art proper. They share their inherently provisional character with the material they record, explore, and penetrate.³¹

For Kracauer, Bloch’s idiosyncratic approach, unlike Adorno’s, did not seek a synthesis of art and philosophy (in the *Denkbild*) but exercised an unsystematic intertwining of aesthetic and critical practice that enabled him to grasp the elusive nature of the “peculiar material” that defines history’s anteroom (the present – now).³² Bloch’s theory, states Kracauer, “is not a system that existed in isolation” from him, but is a “perpetual effort to objectify a vision” of a “utopia that comprises of man and the universe”. In this respect, Kracauer adds, it is not philosophy “in the usual sense of the word but something else, something utterly incommensurable. It belongs in the lineage of the historic utopias; it is a revolutionary manifesto.”³³ Kracauer continues:

Your willingness to look the contrary facts in the eye, is indicative of your being at home in the uncanny, which threatens to question your theoretical concepts. You apportion as much weight to the manifoldness of historical periods, which endanger the notion of historical progress as to the fact that there are ideas and ideologies, which not so much confirm the economic substructure as condition it.³⁴

³¹ Kracauer, 1995, p. 191.

³² Kracauer’s positive assessment of Bloch’s methodological intertwining of antinomic approaches can be read as a response to Adorno’s recent criticism of his own idiosyncratic method. See Adorno, Adorno, 1991, pp.161 – 164.

³³ Kracauer, 1965, pp. 148 – 149.

³⁴ Kracauer, 1965, p. 146.

With this approach, Kracauer suggests, Bloch's writing style (like Griffith's "non-solution") articulates a complementarity, which combines "utopian impatience with the German storyteller's ability to dwell upon something at length".³⁵ It is an expression of a "desire not to tell just what is needed, but capture the unsayable" in "a narrative manner so that it can be experienced however imperfectly".³⁶ "Even your most abstract explanations", Kracauer concludes, "are full of life and curious objects. You preserve something of the magic of the things that you disenchant [entzauberst]".³⁷ For Bloch, argued Kracauer, art is "pre-appearance [Vor-Schein] of the utopian".³⁸

In the accompanying "utopian excursion" on Erasmus, Kracauer postulates that at the root of the Renaissance theologian's "personal leanings" and "intellectual pursuits" was an unerring "fear of all that was definitely fixed".³⁹ "Everything falls into a pattern", suggests Kracauer, "once you think of this fear as the prime mover behind the scenes".⁴⁰ Subsequently, in parallel to Adorno's and Bloch's negative assessment of wish fulfillment, Kracauer characterizes Erasmus' philosophy as being essentially motivated by the conviction that the truth ceases to be true as soon as it becomes a dogma, thus forfeiting the ambiguity that marks it as truth. "Utopian visionaries", writes Kracauer, "condemn those who stick to the middle of the road on the ground that they callously betray mankind by trying to perpetuate a state of imperfection". In "the case of Erasmus", concludes Kracauer, "the middle way was the direct road to utopia" but his "message pointed into an abyss: did he fathom its depths?"⁴¹

In relation to this "abyss" Kracauer concedes both in the Bloch / Erasmus text and the final chapter of *History*, that the essential ambiguity that defines the "intermediary area" of Erasmus' "middle way" and his own "side-by-side" approach, does court misinterpretation. Evoking the cinematic memories of Cendrars and Eisenstein, Kracauer suggests:

³⁵ Kracauer, 1965, p. 147.

³⁶ Kracauer, 1965, p. 146.

³⁷ Kracauer, 1965, p. 146.

³⁸ Kracauer, 1965, p. 149.

³⁹ Kracauer, 1965, p. 150.

⁴⁰ Kracauer, 1995, p. 10.

⁴¹ Kracauer, 1995, p. 14.

The difficulty of deducing the truths in the interstices from the high-level statements, principles, or doctrines under whose rule they fall does not imply that they were sheer mirages. Sometimes that which is buried under an imposing either-or may shine forth from a casual aperçu, written at the margin of a close-up.⁴²

Therefore, Kracauer argues, any enquiry into the ambivalent nature of this area requires, a “constant effort [...] on the part of those inhabiting it to meet the conflicting necessities with which they are faced at every turn of the road.” “They find themselves”, he concludes, “in a precarious situation which even invites them to gamble with absolutes, all kinds of quixotic ideas about universal truth.”⁴³

10.3 Conclusion: *The Truth about Sancho Panza – a Film-Philosophy Analogy.*

As the figures of animals gradually appear and disappear in the layers of paint that Clouzot filmed in *Le Mystère Picasso*, so too can certain images be seen to emerge and submerge in the theoretical complex that constitutes Kracauer’s work. One image in particular persists through the layers: the figure of Sancho Panza from Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*. For example, Kracauer argues in his debate with Adorno that an individual can live free from ideology in a way that parallels “the relation of Sancho Panza to Don Quixote”⁴⁴ and in his letter to Bloch he compares his approach (with its distrust of the intoxicating effect of big ideas and the sober diligence towards things) with “Kafka’s Sancho Panza”.⁴⁵ The significance of Sancho Panza for Kracauer, specifically Kafka’s interpretation of the character, is confirmed by the quotation, in its entirety, of Kafka’s short prose work, “The Truth about Sancho Panza”, at conclusion of *History*:

Without making any boast of it Sancho Panza succeeded in the course of years, by devouring a great number of romances of chivalry and adventure in the evening and night hours, in so diverting from him his demon, whom he later called Don Quixote, that his demon thereupon set out in perfect freedom on the maddest

⁴² Kracauer, 1995, p. 216. For the Cendrars reference see Chapter 6.3, for the Eisenstein, Chapter 8.4

⁴³ Kracauer, 1995, p. 216.

⁴⁴ Memorandum by Kracauer dated July, 1964, quoted in Martin Jay, 1985, p. 231.

⁴⁵ Kracauer, 1965, p. 145.

exploits, which, however, for the lack of a preordained object, which should have been Sancho Panza himself, harmed nobody. A free man, Sancho Panza philosophically followed Don Quixote on his crusades, perhaps out of a sense of responsibility, and had of them a great and edifying entertainment to the end.⁴⁶

Robert Sinnerbrink also finishes his book *New Philosophies of Film* with a “coda” about Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.⁴⁷ Sinnerbrink’s frame of reference however is not Kafka’s take on the story but Giorgio Agamben’s. Though aware of the Kafka text (through his work on Benjamin), Agamben’s reference in his short text is to another Kafka acolyte, the American filmmaker Orson Welles.⁴⁸ Agamben’s text, which appears as chapter 10 in his 2005 book *Profanazioni* [Profanations] with the title, “*I sei minuti più belli della storia del cinema*” [The Six Most Beautiful Minutes in the History of Cinema] is a lyrical description of a fragment from Welles’ unfinished film of Cervantes’ novel.⁴⁹ The sequence involves the characters transported from the 17th century of Cervantes’ novel into contemporary (20th century) Spain where they enter a crowded provincial cinema. Quickly realizing what is happening, Sancho Panza sits down in the auditorium next to a little girl and starts to watch the film. However, distressed by the images on screen, Don Quixote jumps onto the stage and sets about the screen with his sword. As the crowd heckles and jeers, Don Quixote continues to fight the characters on the screen until it is torn to shreds. Some children on a balcony cheer him on but the little girl next to Sancho Panza (identified by Agamben as “Dulcinea” – after Don Quixote’s imaginary lady love) “stares at him in disapproval”.⁵⁰ Agamben ends his description of Welles’ film with the following conclusion:

⁴⁶ Kracauer, 1995, p. 217.

⁴⁷ Sinnerbrink, Robert, *New Philosophies of Film: Thinking Images* (London & New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. 194 – 196.

⁴⁸ Benjamin, Walter, “Franz Kafka. On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death”, in *Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings. Volume 2: 1927 – 1934*. (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press, 1999), pp. 794 – 818. For Agamben’s use of Kafka’s essay see, Agamben, Giorgio, *Profanations*, translated by Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007b), pp. 29 – 36.

⁴⁹ Agamben, 2007b, pp. 93 – 94. For a detailed appraisal of Welles’ unfinished film see, Stainton, Audrey, “Don Quixote: Orson Welles’ Secret”, *Sight and Sound* Vol. 57, No. 4 (1988), pp. 252 - 260. A version of the film assembled by the director Jesús Franco (that does not include the scene in the cinema) was released in 1992, *Don Quixote* [Spanish: *Don Quijote de Orson Welles*], directed by Orson Welles (Jesús Franco) (Spain: El Silencio Producciones, 1992). The scene is available on watch on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GU9xJVnFy9M> (assessed 8/10/2012).

⁵⁰ Agamben, 2007b, p. 93.

What are we to do with our imaginations? Love them and believe in them to the point of having to destroy and falsify them (this is perhaps the meaning of Orson Welles' films). But when, in the end, they reveal themselves to be empty and unfulfilled, when they show the nullity of which they are made, only then can we pay the price for their truth and understand that Dulcinea - whom we have saved - cannot love us.⁵¹

In drawing attention to “our paradoxical love of images”, argues Sinnerbrink, “Agamben renders Welles' scene as though it were a parable by Kafka”.⁵² The “fictional power and wonder of the movies”, that which attracts and entices the spectator to unravel their meanings is also, explains Sinnerbrink, what leads to their “moral or aesthetic dismemberment”.⁵³ In other words, the element of the film experience that invites critical investigation is the very thing that such analysis nullifies. As Sinnerbrink explains:

The price of revealing the truth about the 'nullity' of images, exposing their imaginative power, is that we destroy the very object of our love. Should we take this as an ironic allusion to the film-philosophy relationship?⁵⁴

If Agamben’s “transformative hermeneutics”, suggests Sinnerbrink, renders this scene from Welles’ film allegorical then it does so ironically in order to “to show, even stage: the limits and ambiguities of the film-philosophy relationship”.⁵⁵ The problem, as Sinnerbrink sees it, is that though “film-philosophy invites us to consider whether philosophical writing on film can be something other than always explanatory, argumentative or theoretical” it has “its own rhetorical and conceptual risks”. In this respect, Agamben’s ironic allegory can therefore be understood as an attempt to “avoid the trap of philosophical allegory that seems to beckon as soon as image meets concept”.⁵⁶ In other words, Agamben’s parable is an allegory demonstrating the conceptual limitations (the destructive nature) of philosophical allegory. It is, to

⁵¹ Agamben, 2007b, pp. 93 – 94.

⁵² Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 196.

⁵³ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 196.

⁵⁴ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 196.

⁵⁵ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 195.

⁵⁶ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 195.

quote Rancière, “a mediation striving for its own abolition”.⁵⁷ Is Welles’ film sequence “beautiful” to Agamben, asks Sinnerbrink, “because of its staging of the philosophical destruction of the image”? “Its modest beauty”, he suggests, “makes us bear witness to how film, in an ironic gesture of self-sacrifice, invites philosophy, which would rather dominate the image, to relinquish its mastery and learn to see”.⁵⁸

For Rancière, such philosophical circularity, however ironic its application is indicative of one set of conceptual principles (in this case philosophy) identifying itself as an “exemplary” form of activity and therefore indispensable.⁵⁹ As Laruelle argues, in this respect philosophy is “intrinsically anti-democratic” as it presides over a cultural hierarchy of thought and action.⁶⁰ A way out of this ontological *mise-en-abyme*, Mullarkey suggests, is to not conceptualise film’s “unphilosophical” aspects as catalysts for the aesthetic mutation of philosophy (whose future form will be able to accommodate such anomalies in a less inimical fashion) but to consider them as already philosophy’s equal that requires no such synthesis.⁶¹

Though Sinnerbrink’s certainly convincing interpretation of Agamben’s reflexive parable provides insight into how he conceives the provisional nature of film-philosophy it does not fit quite so comfortably with Mullarkey’s and Laruelle’s attempt to decentre philosophy’s critical relationship with the film experience. With its insistence that it does not try to think *of*, *on* or *about* film but rather *alongside* it, non-philosophy like Kracauer’s cinematic approach adopts Sancho Panza’s perspective.⁶² If in Agamben’s text, as Sinnerbrink suggests, Don Quixote represents the philosophising subject (“the philosopher-knight errant”) then in Kafka’s text, where the roles of master and servant are reversed, it is Sancho Panza that is attributed the critical agency. However, as with Agamben’s interpretation of Kracauer’s image of the mass ornament, Kafka’s character’s mutual emancipation comes as a result of being freed from the dual restraints of “biological destiny and

⁵⁷ Rancière, 2009, p. 8.

⁵⁸ Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 195.

⁵⁹ Rancière, 2009, p. 6.

⁶⁰ Mullarkey, John, “Film Can’t Philosophise (and Neither Can Philosophy): Introduction to a Non-Philosophy of Cinema, in Havi, Carel and Greg Tuck (eds.), *New Takes in Film Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 91.

⁶¹ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 93.

⁶² Mullarkey (2011), p. 90.

individual biography”.⁶³ Whether Don Quixote here plays the part of philosophy (the “demon” invoked by Sancho Panza’s consuming desire for narrative), film (philosophy’s phantom tormentor) or reality itself (the fear of which is placated by fantasy) is, unlike in Sinnerbrink’s parable, insignificant. What is important is that they no longer exist solely as a binary antagonism but define themselves through a performative practice that does not seek to negate their autonomy but demonstrates their relationship as existing “side-by-side”.⁶⁴ As Kracauer concludes in *History*:

The definition which Kafka here gives of Sancho Panza as a free man, has a utopian character. It points to a utopia of the in-between, *a terra incognita* in the hollows between the lands we know.⁶⁵

As with Bohr’s complementarity principle in quantum mechanics, in which antithetical interpretive systems are required to explain the behaviour of single phenomenon, so is the reality of the film (“camera reality”) accessible only by the consideration of it being both a discrete object and a process. For Kracauer, fundamental to this understanding, and what Kafka’s Sancho Panza demonstrates, is the function of our observation and its record (in whatever form it is articulated: philosophy, theory, criticism, conversation or interior monologue) in determining the manner in which it behaves. The cinematic approach is therefore not identical to a single theory or philosophy but a mixture of many (it is a non-hierarchical aggregate); it is not essentialist but operates under an “ontological compunction”⁶⁶ to demonstrate the “many-sidedness of things”.⁶⁷ Kracauer’s *Theory of Film* is not a theory of the cinematic; it does not intend to construct a standard for its identification and reproduction. Like Kafka’s Sancho Panza text, Kracauer’s text describes the relationship between a subject and its “preordained object” as a performance.⁶⁸ This performance, that he calls the cinematic, is not the transmission of the philosopher’s knowledge to the reader or the artist’s inspiration to the spectator, it is, as Rancière describes, “a third thing that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one,

⁶³ Agamben, Giorgio, *The Coming Community*, translated by Michael Hardt (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 47.

⁶⁴ Kracauer, 1995, p. 216.

⁶⁵ Kracauer, 1995, p. 217.

⁶⁶ Jay, 1985, p. 229.

⁶⁷ Kracauer, Siegfried, *The Mass Ornament. Weimar essays*, translated and edited by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard U.P., 1995b), p. 234.

⁶⁸ Kracauer, 1997, p. 69.

but which subsists between them, excluding any uniform transmission, any identity of cause and effect”.⁶⁹ As suggested in the previous chapter, film’s ontological indeterminacy (its existence in-between process and object) gives it the potential to meet the spectator psychologically and physiologically halfway and thus makes the challenge of becoming an artist and/or philosopher an everyday ordinary activity. It is this democratization of intellectual practice, the blurring of what constitutes (to quote Rancière again) “those who act and those who look: between individuals and members of a collective body”, that delimits without defining utopia as an extent concrete reality in-between versions of our manifold present.⁷⁰ The utopian nature of Kracauer’s *Theory of Film* (its relation to the redemption of physical reality) is also its performative character; its reflexivity as both record of and participant in a process that correlates antinomic phenomena and reveals them as sharing the same reality character. In this respect the cinematic approach is more heuristic than hermeneutic method. In “Farewell to the Linden Arcade”, the 1930 essay with which Kracauer concludes his collection of Weimar texts *The Mass Ornament*, he describes his boyhood preference for the moving landscapes glimpsed through the peepholes of the World Panorama to the photographs of cities on picture postcards.⁷¹ “These landscapes”, he writes, “are already almost homeless images, illustrations of passing impulses that gleam here and there through the cracks in the wooden fence that surrounds us”.⁷² This visual experience like ones that he describes later in *Theory of Film* are, to paraphrase Kracauer, the “pre-appearance [*Vor-Schein*] of the utopian”.⁷³

What has become evident from writing this study is that the conceptual porosity that Kracauer worked so hard to cultivate in his work, motivated by his “fear of all that is definitely fixed”, invites misinterpretation.⁷⁴ For example, as Pauline Kael’s reading of *Theory of Film* demonstrates, the heuristic impulse that motivates Kracauer’s cinematic approach can be read as both naïve and supercilious. From one perspective (e.g. Rancière’s) Kracauer’s ambiguous subject position is evidence of an emancipatory practice; from another (Kael’s) it is the expression of an innate

⁶⁹ Rancière, 2009, p. 15.

⁷⁰ Rancière, 2009, p. 19.

⁷¹ For a detailed account of the role of the panorama in the development of contemporary visual culture see, Oettermann, Stephen, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*, translated by Deborah Lucas Schneider (New York: Zone Books, 1997).

⁷² Kracauer, 1995b, p. 340.

⁷³ Kracauer, 1965, p. 149.

⁷⁴ Kracauer, 1995, p. 10.

arrogance that considers its conclusions as self-evident truths. But why court such misinterpretation? Why make the philosophical intent of your film theory so ambiguous? Whereas other critical strategies have looked to interpret the meaning of these ambiguities in various ways (as ciphers for an arcane personal philosophy or evidence of literary sleight of hand) the perspective of film-philosophy allows the reader of *Theory of Film* to assign them a less definite critical status.⁷⁵ This does not mean that the film-philosophy approach works to negate the significance of the obscure motifs that recur throughout in *Theory of Film*. What film-philosophy brings to Kracauer scholarship is an understanding of how (like the trees in Proust's novel) interpretation affects the nature of their ambiguity and with it their critical potential. Alongside an analogy with Proust's work, the non-philosophical potential of Kracauer's cinematic approach is also substantiated (though unwittingly) by Pauline Kael's critique of his film theory.

In her polemic against Kracauer's *Theory of Film*, Kael argues that, in general, film theory acts as a barrier; an unnecessary mediation, between film and our proper appreciation of it. Kracauer's contribution to this prohibition is particularly deplorable, she argues, because it is not entirely convincing as a theory either because it is riddled with inconsistencies. Kracauer's argument, concludes Kael, is full of holes.⁷⁶ However, like Kafka's depiction of the Great Wall of China, the film-philosophy approach facilitates an understanding of the gaps and fissures in Kracauer's film theory not as problems (that need to be fixed for it to perform as intended), but as openings for the practice functional transformation. In other words, its inability to be one hundred percent one thing (film theory) allows it to be the locus of many of activities.⁷⁷ As Kracauer states in *History*, holes in walls allow "the improbable to slip in".⁷⁸

As discussed in Chapters 8 and 9, the ambiguous nature of the imagery in *Theory of Film* relates to Kracauer's attempt to preserve a sense of film's kinetic nature (and therefore its potential to induce a peculiar critical experience) in his theory. "The truth ceases to be true as soon as it becomes a dogma", Kracauer states in *History*, "thus

⁷⁵ Carel, Havi and Greg Tuck (eds.), *New Takes in Film-Philosophy* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 2.

⁷⁶ See Chapter 2.2

⁷⁷ Kracauer, 1995b, p. 276.

⁷⁸ Kracauer, 1995, p. 8.

forfeiting the ambiguity which marks it as truth”.⁷⁹ By reading the ambiguity of the cinematic approach as incidences of a transformative encounter with its object (rather than symbolic of a deeper meaning), film-philosophy also offers a different perspective on its practical application as a critical method. As Kracauer readily admits in *History*, the successful replication of his approach is difficult to ascertain by conventional standards, as the results it produces are often “intangible as a transient glow in the night, a fairy-tale's promise”.⁸⁰ However, as the film of the fireflies in Ray's *Aparajito* demonstrates, recording such evanescent phenomena is immanent to the cinematic approach thus making their “promise” of something different a public rather than a private experience. Through the reproducibility of its content and effect, the cinematic approach reveals philosophical practice not as an extraordinary activity but an everyday experience (what Kracauer describes in *Theory of Film* as “a mode of human existence”).⁸¹ As Gershom Scholem, the Jewish scholar (and friend of Benjamin and Kracauer) explains to those wishing to understand the “messianic” impulse in Benjamin’s work states:

Judaism, in all of its forms and manifestations, has always maintained a concept of redemption as an event, which takes place publicly, on the stage of history and within the community. It is an occurrence which takes place in the visible world and which cannot be conceived apart from such a visible appearance.⁸²

I am not arguing (as Hansen does) for Kracauer’s work to be read as a secularisation of a covert theological tendency but what Scholem’s text does bring to the fore is the fundamental public and communal nature of Kracauer’s “redemption of physical reality”.⁸³ As discussed in Chapter 7, for Kracauer, the “pre-appearance [*Vor-Schein*] of the utopian” in film is a communal performative practice that (using the work of

⁷⁹ Kracauer, 1995, p. 10.

⁸⁰ Kracauer, 1995, p. 12.

⁸¹ Kracauer, 1997, p. xi

⁸² Scholem, Gershom, “Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea”, in Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), p. 1.

⁸³ Kracauer argues the case for a messianic reading of Kracauer’s work in Hansen, Miriam, “Decentric Perspectives: Kracauer’s Early Writings on Film and Mass Culture”, *New German Critique*, No. 54 (1991), pp. 47 – 76. The “redemption of physical reality” is from the title of *Theory of Film*, see Kracauer, 1997, p. 300.

Kafka and Chaplin as guides) has no metaphysical guarantee but originates from an interaction with the residues that Idealism (in any form) leaves behind.⁸⁴

If film-philosophy revitalises the cinematic approach can their relationship be understood as reciprocal? What can Kracauer's historic film theory contribute to the film-philosophy debate apart from a spurious intellectual pedigree? What keeps Kracauer's cinematic approach from being film-philosophy is also what makes it relevant to its future development. Kracauer's understanding of what constitutes film, philosophy and art is historically fixed; it is temporally conditioned. Developments in contemporary art practice, in particular its use of digital video and computers as well as internet based modes of dissemination, are well beyond the remit of an historical theory of the film medium that baulks at the idea of colour photography.⁸⁵ However, in response to Wartenberg's complaint about the blinkered view of the movies maintained by many philosophers⁸⁶ and Mullarkey's criticism of the film-philosopher's "transcendent choice of film", Kracauer's cinematic approach does offer an alternative approach to what constitutes the cinematic.⁸⁷ As demonstrated by his enthusiasm for Fred Astaire's dance routines (Chapter 9), Kracauer's notion of the cinematic is in part immanent to its effect and therefore not entirely reliant on predetermined technological or cultural criteria.

The apparent asceticism that Kracauer articulates in the introduction of *Theory of Film* is not, as has been interpreted by Kael and Hansen, the statement of an essentialist view of what constitutes the medium's pure aesthetic form (e.g. the black and white 35mm narrative film) but recognition of its infinitely manifold nature. Film, states Kracauer, is a "very complex medium" and "the best method of getting at its core is to disregard, at least temporarily, its less essential ingredients and varieties".⁸⁸ The core of the medium, its "intrinsic nature", Kracauer argues, relates to the effect on the spectator of its animated photographic elements. If "my book", writes Kracauer

⁸⁴ Kracauer, 1965, p. 149.

⁸⁵ Kracauer, 1997, p. vii.

⁸⁶ Wartenberg, Thomas E., "On the Possibility of Cinematic Philosophy", in Havi Carel and Greg Tuck (eds.), *New Takes in Film Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 21.

⁸⁷ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 89.

⁸⁸ Kracauer, 1997, p. vii.

(prefiguring Mullarkey's complaint), "halfway serves [its] purpose, as I dare hope it does, it must of course apply to all elements and derivatives of the medium".⁸⁹

I am not suggesting that Kracauer's theory represents a philosophy of media convergence *avant la lettre* but it is intriguing to think of what he would make of the experience of our contemporary heterogeneous modes of video production and reception.⁹⁰ For example, in *Theory of Film* (in the context of Roger Tilton's *Jazz Dance*), Kracauer is reluctant to attribute a revealing (critical) function to experimental films made entirely of ambiguous "deviant images" stripped of an establishing material context. However, would such criticism still be valid if such a film was physically contextualised within a dynamic material context (i.e. was watched online on a phone whilst travelling on a bus on the way to the cinema)? Maybe asking what Kracauer would think misses the point? "If one claims that film can think", states Mullarkey, "then all films can think: one doesn't prove the claim that all humans can do mathematics just by studying the minds of Fermat and Poincaré".⁹¹ Equally, one doesn't prove that everybody can do film-philosophy by studying Deleuze and Cavell, but a case could be made for such a democratization of the discipline from the study of Kracauer's peculiar theory.

In a letter he wrote to Adorno in 1955, Kracauer agrees with his former pupil that sometimes, in the writing of fiction, "essential things can be said only in German".⁹² However, he adds:

your Catonian [inflexible] dictum is certainly invalid for the expression of thought, of theory – I am referring here to my thoughts, my theory [...] My ideal style would have language disappear in the subject of inquiry, as does the Chinese painter in the picture, though I am aware of the fact that the painter and the picture are one – up to a point.⁹³

⁸⁹ Kracauer, 1997, p. vii.

⁹⁰ For analysis of this idea of media convergence see: Jenkins, Henry, *Convergence culture: where old and new media collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006). Tyron, Chuck, *Reinventing Cinema: Movies in the Age of Media Convergence* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

⁹¹ Mullarkey, 2011, p. 88.

⁹² Quoted in Barnouw, Dagmar, *Critical Realism: History, Photography, and the work of Siegfried Kracauer* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 156.

⁹³ Barnouw, 1994, p. 156.

Kracauer returns to the image of the Chinese painter four years later in his essay on the spectator. In this text (discussed in Chapter 6), Kracauer suggests that the spectator:

much like the legendary Chinese painter who, longing for the peace of the landscape he had created, moved into it, walked toward the faraway mountains suggested by his brush strokes, and disappeared in them never to be seen again.⁹⁴

Kracauer's explication of the cinematic approach in *Theory of Film* is as much about his search for his "ideal style" as it is about recording the medium's peculiar revealing function in relation to philosophy and theory. In a 1925 article called "Der Künstler in dieser Zeit" [*The Artist in His Time*], Kracauer wrote: "America will disappear only when it discovers itself fully."⁹⁵ It is my conclusion that the problem of philosophy in Kracauer's *Theory of Film* (or indeed in any film theory) will also disappear only when it discovers itself fully; that is "discovers itself" as communal practice that includes the object of its study. Amidst this co-generated performance, the individual artist or philosopher can lose themselves in the *terra incognita* between looking and doing.

So, what does film-philosophy bring to Kracauer scholarship apart from just another way of interpreting his work? What film-philosophy brings to the mixed (or "mixte" – to use Laruelle's term) approach to Kracauer is a sense of reflexivity. This is the same reflexivity that Kracauer articulates in relation to the cinematic approach (amongst other things) where the object and subject of thought and experience exist as a dynamic and intertwined performance (see Chapter 5). In other words, the perspective of film-philosophy can help the contemporary reader comprehend the performative nature of being Kracauer (as spectator, philosopher, theorist and poet) and also Kracauer's theory (as film theory, aesthetic theory, political theory, etc.). What a composite of Mullarkey's non-philosophy of cinema, Wartenberg's moderate pro-cinematic position and Sinnerbrink's Romantic film-philosophy affords Kracauer's film theory is an epiphenomenal conceptual space from which it is allowed to show

⁹⁴ Kracauer, 1959, p. 13.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Levin, "Introduction" in Kracauer, 1995b, p. 20.

rather than tell how film democratises the philosophical process by presenting objectivity as a felt reality. This reality is a construction in which we all participate alongside Kracauer and his peculiar theory of philosophy's remnants.

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Alphabetical by English title:

50 Years Before Your Eyes, directed by Robert Youngson (USA: Warner Brothers, 1950)

Alexander Nevsky [Russian: *Александр Невский* (Aleksandr Nevskii)], directed by Sergei M. Eisenstein (USSR: Mosfilm, 1938)

An Andalusian Dog [French: *Un Chien Andalou*], directed by Luis Buñuel (France: Buñuel, 1929)

Aparajito / The Unvanquished [Bengali: *Ôporajito*], directed by Satyajit Ray (India: Epic, 1955)

About Nice [French: *À Propos de Nice*], directed by Jean Vigo (France: Vigo, 1930)

The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station [French: *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat*], directed by Auguste and Louis Lumière (France: Lumière, 1895)

Arsenal or January Uprising in Kiev in 1918 [Russian: *Арсенал*], directed by Alexander Dovzhenko (USSR: VUFKU, 1928/9)

L'Atalante, directed by Jean Vigo (France: Jean-Louis Nunez, 1934)

Battleship Potemkin [Russian: *Броненосец «Потёмкин»*, (Bronyenosyets Potyomkin)], directed by Sergei M. Eisenstein (USSR: Goskino, 1925)

Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ, directed by Fred Niblo (USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1925)

Bicycle Thieves [Italian: *Ladri di biciclette*], directed by Vittorio De Sica (Italy: De Sica, 1948)

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Crimes and Misdemeanors, directed by Woody Allen (USA: Orion Pictures, 1989)

Desert Victory, directed by David MacDonald (UK: Office of War Information, 1943)

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Earth [Russian: *Земля* (Zemlya)], directed by Alexander Dovzhenko (USSR: VUFKU, 1930)

Empire, directed by Andy Warhol (USA: Warhol, 1964)

Employees Leaving Vickers and Maxim's in Barrow, directed by James Kenyon and Sagar Mitchell (UK: Mitchell & Kenyon, 1901)

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Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, directed by Michel Gondry (USA: Focus Features, 2004)

Feeding the Baby / Baby's Dinner [French: *Repas de bébé*], directed by Louis Lumière (France: Lumière, 1895)

The Floorwalker, directed by Charlie Chaplin (USA: Mutual, 1916)

The Golden Twenties, directed by Richard De Rochemont (USA: March of Time, 1950)

The Gold Rush, directed by Charlie Chaplin (USA: United Artists, 1925)

The Hustler, directed by Robert Rossen (USA: 20th Century Fox, 1961)

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The Iron Horse, directed by John Ford (USA: Fox Films, 1924)

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Louisiana Story, directed by Robert Flaherty (USA: Flaherty / Standard Oil, 1948)

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