

INTRODUCTION



Kracauer on and in Weimar Modernity

What religion do I confess? None of all those that you
have named. And why none? Out of religion.
—Goethe, “Xenien,” in *Goethe und die Religion*, 21

First the Zionist Congress in Basel, then the day before yester-
day Lourdes: again and again I come across profound adepts
in that kind of demonstrativeness that is called religious.¹
—Kracauer to Werner Thormann, 22 September 1927

In the fall of 1927, Siegfried Kracauer was in Basel to report on the fifteenth Zionist Congress. By this time, Kracauer was a respected writer and editor who was known to have leftist sympathies; he also had carved out his niche as a film critic. He had shown little inclination toward Zionism, and it is uncertain why his employer, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (FZ), chose him for this assignment. The year before, his severe criticism of a new translation of the Bible by Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber had angered many Jewish intellectuals. Indeed, so Kracauer later recollected, Buber had snubbed him during a chance encounter at the conference.² In general, Kracauer had an ambiguous impression of the congress, and though he recognized the energy and variety of the Zionist movement, his final dispatch struck a skeptical tone. Zionism, he suggested, would find it hard not to become a nationalist movement, and he could not see this as the way forward.³

After filing his report from Basel, Kracauer spent little time reckoning with the dilemmas raised at the Zionist conference, at least in print. He next travelled to Lourdes where he took part in a torchlight procession to the holy shrine. As he told his friend Werner Thormann, he joined the march with the consent of the pilgrims. One suspects that he was aware of some of the irony of his situation. He was a Jewish intellectual with Marxist inclinations who

often compared religion to myth, yet he found himself marching among the Catholic faithful to the sacred grotto where in 1858 Bernadette Soubirous is supposed to have seen the Virgin Mary. Yet, despite the subtly mocking tone that his remarks conveyed, his letter was not meant to be derogatory. Thormann, the recipient of his card, was a devout Catholic though of a leftist stamp. Moreover, his companion in Lourdes—Elizabeth Ehrenreich, who he later married—also came from a family of Alsatian Catholics. His remarks were probably not intended to offend their religious sentiments. Rather, behind the bewilderment that Kracauer expresses when confronted with the demonstrativeness of religion, both in Basel and Lourdes, there is the attitude of the religious flâneur, an outside observer who enjoys the cultural mobility that allows him to move between religious milieus. Yet, there is also a trace of angst, as if Kracauer knows that this mobility has hidden costs yet to be recognized.⁴ On the one hand, he appears to have seen his mobility as a privilege of the secular world where religious institutions could no longer compel faith, but suspected that this redrawing of the religious sphere must have consequences.

The following study investigates how these consequences were understood by Kracauer, and how they were discussed in the intellectual milieus that he inhabited. It intends to show how the postwar religious revival informed debates over culture and how the concept of culture was interrogated and recast in light of secularism and religious revival.

For Kracauer, the emergence of a secular world was an accomplished fact. Cultural modernity was accompanied by the loosening of religious dogma and the withering of religious institutions. However, for Kracauer this decline of religious authority was also problematic. A secular world that allowed the kind of mobility that he experienced on his trip in 1927 was one where both culture and religion had an uncertain status. For some contemporaries, culture was a function of religion; only in a world where religion retained its authority could one even think of a meaningful culture. For others religion was simply a cultural manifestation—a product of myth, metaphysical longings, or ethical impulses—but it had no foundational function. However, if this were so, could culture furnish its own norms and values, that is, could it become a foundation for itself? Kracauer, in spite of his repudiation of religious revival, remained ambivalent on this question. This study charts how he attempted to resolve this problem via cultural criticism.

In the early years of the Weimar Republic, the distinctions between culture and religion were less defined for Kracauer, but he appears to have put much faith in the role that culture might play in German society. In November 1918, just before the German defeat and the outbreak of revolution, Kracauer was reading one of the more aggressive tracts of German cultural particularism: *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* by Thomas Mann. According to his later testimony, this book had had a formative influence on him. There is some

irony in the fact that on the eve of the birth of the republic, Kracauer was enthralled by this notorious defense of Germany's cultural mission. Within days an armistice would end five years of war, and, as a result, Mann's polemic would find an audience that had to respond to an altogether different situation. The armed conflict between German culture and Western civilization was over, and Mann's idea of the "culture nation" had lost. In his journal, Kracauer wrote down a one-word entry on 8 November: "Revolution!"⁵ What he thought of these events is mostly a matter of conjecture, but as did many intellectuals, he probably assumed that a fundamental transformation had begun and that a cultural reformation would accompany the birth of a new political order. The critique of culture begun during the *Kaiserreich* thus continued into this uncertain age.⁶ For some, the shocks of the war and revolution gave further impetus to these ideas, increasing the passion with which they were held.

In his early career, Kracauer sometimes subscribed to this view, often expressing a pessimistic but utopian strand of this "nonpolitical" idea. In a seldom-mentioned review of a 1920 publication by the philosopher Georg Burckhardt, he argued that one must turn to philosophy and religion to find solutions to the present crisis.⁷ These were the disciplines that must meet the difficult task of creating a new order. He made no mention of politics, but his idea of culture clearly had political implications. Life in Germany was broken, he stated: "an order that had long rotted from the inside had collapsed, the protective circle of forms was no more; and thus, dark and nameless life-forces flooded unrestrainedly inward, shaking the foundations of the soul." To counter this spiritual catastrophe Germany had to draw on its cultural resources, but also, more specifically, on religion. "From within our breasts," he wrote, "one longs for a faith to vault over us, round and full."⁸ To Kracauer, the relevance of Burckhardt's work derived precisely from the fact that it recognized the loss of this sheltering idea of culture. From this point of view, political crises were best resolved by importing culture into politics.

However, disentangling this idea of culture, especially in relation to religion, was more difficult, and the problematic nexus of religion, culture, and politics constitutes a persistent undercurrent in Kracauer's work of the 1920s. In a letter to the Frankfurt poet and essayist Margarete Susman, Kracauer explicitly privileged culture over politics. The latter, he argued, was of limited importance for it was "all the same whether one lived under socialism or communism."⁹ Unless everyday existence was transformed, nothing of deep or lasting value could be achieved. To be sure, revolutionary Russia offered a compelling political model, but one had to seek its roots in the passionate Russian spirit and not simply look to the political order derived from this spirit. Similarly, he concluded his review of Burckhardt's work with an exhortation to imbue socialism with cultural ideals, though he added that these were "in the best sense bourgeois."¹⁰ This is an odd conflation of bourgeois values and

revolutionary thought; but behind these strange bedfellows, I would argue, is the idea that culture preceded politics. The deep social and political conflicts of modern Germany were to be mended neither by liberalism nor socialism, but rather by a strengthening of cultural foundations. However, this was not a strictly apolitical view of culture, but rather one that gave primary emphasis to a sound culture as a basis of political change; it suggested that the proper sphere of political transformation was in the individual not the political party, and in the street and not parliament.¹¹

The idea that culture was an organizing principle for politics has a long and controversial history in Germany, one that readily becomes entangled in discussions of the German *Sonderweg*. By arguing for the precedence of culture over politics, Kracauer was thus by no means exceptional. Nor was he alone in looking to religion and philosophy as vital sources of cultural renewal. In the postwar period, particularly among intellectuals, there were numerous calls for spiritual or religious revival. This led some contemporaries to believe that the present was in fact a time of resurgent religiosity. The Catholic philosopher Max Scheler, the Protestant theologian Karl Barth, the intellectuals associated with the Free Jewish School, all spoke of the present as an age of spiritual angst that called out for a renewed religion.¹² Such convictions had deep roots, and they persisted throughout the short history of the Republic (indeed, most of these thinkers have exerted an influence up to the present). In 1928, for instance, the painter Max Beckmann, when asked for his views on politics in a special article of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, stated that politics concerned him only if it hastened the end of this “materialist epoch.” Politics, he continued, only had worth insofar as it engaged with “metaphysical, transcendent, and therefore, religious things in a new form.” His response was all the more provocative as the newspaper editors had framed this article as a secularized inversion of the *Gretchenfrage* from *Faust*. Whereas Gretchen had questioned Faust regarding his position on religion, the editors used Gretchen’s words, but turned them to politics. However, Beckmann refused to go along with their intentions; instead, he routed the question back to its original context, enmeshing politics in the question of religious belief.¹³

Kracauer almost joined the religious camp. He admired the work of Scheler, and in the early years of the Republic, he was devoted to the charismatic rabbi Nehemiah Anton Nobel, whom one contemporary described as an “uncanny mystical enchanter.”¹⁴ Nobel’s teaching united the mystical traditions of Judaism with an extensive knowledge of German literature and philosophy, and in Frankfurt he led a study group to which Kracauer belonged for a short period. Though Kracauer may have been drawn mostly by the intellectual rigor of Nobel and his group, one cannot exclude an attraction to his charismatic religiosity. Indeed, the religious current in Kracauer’s thought at this time emerges unmistakably in his letters to Susman. In early 1920, Kracauer

described himself to her as a seeker of religious knowledge. “I have only gone half way down my path,” he stated; “at the end stands knowledge of the divine.”¹⁵ Among the numerous projects that he confided to her, he mentioned his intentions to construct an ethical system based on religious principles.¹⁶

Yet, Kracauer’s path soon altered. By the end of 1922, he had broken with Scheler and was in conflict with the pioneers of the religious revival. With the death of Rabbi Nobel in 1921, one of the few religious figures he admired was gone. By the end of the 1920s, his interest in religious subjects appeared to have faded, and he was engrossed by the social and political dimensions of film and mass culture.¹⁷

Why did Kracauer alter course and, moreover, what does this tell us about religion and secularization in the Weimar Republic? Kracauer’s attitudes towards religion are not easy to pin down, for even as he repudiated the religious revival, theological concepts remained an important part of his critical attitude to culture. His intellectual trajectory, I argue, should be read as a moment of secularization, a period in which intellectual culture responded to the loss, transformation, and revival of religious thought. As used here, *secularization* means the adjustment of religion to modern societies, whether it be by way of a “worlding” of theological concepts, or a process of disintegration and reconstruction in terms of religious institutions and patterns of thought.¹⁸ Following the lead of much scholarship devoted to this subject, secularization should not be seen as a matter of religion’s decline, but rather of its reorientation. In this respect, to speak of a “moment” of secularization is slightly misleading as the term refers more to a series of moments, a complex of processes transpiring over the course of at least two centuries. Indeed, according to some historians, a truly secular society did not exist in Europe until the 1960s, and for many the secularizing process is a subject of ongoing dispute.¹⁹ In the 1920s, the clash between secular and religious discourse was a burning issue among intellectuals, one in which the contending parties often portrayed the present as a time of crisis. Since Kracauer registered the myriad impulses circulating in this debate, his work offers an entry point into the conflicts between religion and secular culture, as well as a means of questioning how these conflicts have been conceptualized.

The remainder of this chapter offers an overview of Kracauer’s career, and a brief discussion of his importance to the issues of secularization and Weimar culture. The second chapter delves into the early biography of Kracauer in more depth, describing his situation as a Jewish intellectual amid the cultural crisis of late Imperial Germany and establishing why Kracauer allows us significant access to the tensions in his cultural milieu – for Kracauer was an assiduous reader of sociology and philosophy, as well as of polemics that tended to portray postwar Germany in crisis-ridden terms. In Chapter 3, I analyze his reading of some of these so-called war books as a means of

illuminating his political opinions between the end of 1918 and 1922, a period for which there are unfortunately fewer sources. To a degree, Kracauer himself disappears for part of this discussion, but this is not entirely accidental; for, as Dagmar Barnouw has pointed out, Kracauer reflected on the process of inserting himself into the “recorded thought of others,” trying to assess how his own work would be perceived when set against that of his contemporaries. Thus, his textual milieu needs to be discussed in order to reckon with how he positioned his own writing.²⁰ Moreover, this dovetails with one facet of my argument that draws attention to Kracauer as an exemplar of a particular kind of critical approach. In this respect, I do not suggest that he was representative of a specific attitude or point of view regarding religion and modernity; but rather that his work gave expression to the polarities that emerged in an ongoing dispute over the place and function of religion in a predominantly secular society. This is evident in his criticism of the “war books.” In his essays and letters concerning this literature, Kracauer outlines one of the key motifs of his thought in the postwar period: the desire to open a critical space between the theological sphere and that of secular modernity.²¹

An early model of Kracauer’s method is to be found in his posthumously published study, *The Detective Novel*, which is the subject of Chapter 3.²² Kracauer wrote this unusual work between 1922 and 1925, and only one chapter was published in his lifetime. Scholars have recognized the transitional nature of the work, for it is here that Kracauer first combines his early philosophical interests with an investigation of mass culture. Ostensibly a study of detective fiction, the work was indebted to Kierkegaard, whose model of interrelated spheres (aesthetic, ethical, and religious) Kracauer appropriated. This importation of Kierkegaard was only “seemingly archaic,” for as Hannah Arendt commented in 1932, after the war Kierkegaard was the philosopher of the day.²³ Why such a deeply Christian thinker became influential to intellectuals of different confessional backgrounds is a broad question that cannot be answered here, but some discussion of the contemporary reception of Kierkegaard is needed to situate Kracauer’s use of his concepts. These concepts deeply informed his idea of critical vocation.²⁴

Kierkegaard also offers a tragic frame for Kracauer’s cultural-political agenda in the Weimar period. Kracauer shared an intense interest in Kierkegaard with the young Theodor Adorno, whom he met when the latter was sixteen. They probably read Kierkegaard together during the early 1920s, and it was as a symbol of this shared affinity that Kracauer dedicated *The Detective Novel* to his younger friend. Eight years later Adorno returned this gesture when he completed and published his *Habilitationsschrift*. The work, entitled *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, was dedicated to “my friend Siegfried Kracauer.” Adorno’s book appeared on an unpropitious day in German history, the very day that Hitler came to power. Kracauer wrote a short review that

he planned to publish in the *FZ*, but events rapidly intervened and Kracauer fled Germany shortly afterwards. Adorno had been eager to know Kracauer's opinion of the work, for to his mind the book was no individual achievement, but rather a testimony of their "common philosophical past."²⁵ The joint project symbolized by this book came to an end in 1933 and the intellectual distance dividing Kracauer from Adorno grew wider in the years of exile and emigration as Kracauer became more isolated, while Adorno drew closer to Max Horkheimer. Nonetheless, between these two works the outlines of an alternative reception of Kierkegaard appeared, one that differed considerably from the work of other writers influenced by him such as Theodor Haecker, Emmanuel Hirsch, and Martin Heidegger.²⁶

Chapter 4 discusses how the critical model manifested in the detective study was influenced by, and responded to, contemporary religious trends. In the early years of the Republic, Kracauer followed developments in contemporary religious thought. Moreover, Frankfurt offered an excellent vantage point from which to observe the various efforts to reform and revive religious thought and practice. The concluding chapter explores how Kracauer's criticism continued to be influenced by the rivalry of sacred and profane in light of a controversy provoked by the 1930 publication of a polemical work by Alfred Döblin: *To Know and To Change! Open Letters to a Young Man*.²⁷ This chapter also shows how the critical model described in the above chapters was put into practice in the cultural politics of the late Weimar Republic.

An afterword synthesizes some tendencies in Kracauer's work that I argue are representative of a strand of thought within Weimar culture. The baroque figures of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza furnish the departure point for these concluding remarks. Quixote, of course, has become cultural shorthand for delusional romanticism; yet, for some German intellectuals Quixote was an iconic figure who symbolized the ambiguities of the "unfinished project of modernity." For Kracauer, there is a marked shift of sympathy from the flamboyant Quixote to his relatively earthbound squire, Panza. If in the early 1920s he identified with Quixote, by the end of his life it was Panza with whom he sympathized more. Yet what conceptual distance is actually traversed in the course of this move? That Kracauer identified more with Panza was not meant as an abandonment of utopia in favor of a pragmatic realism; rather, it was a matter of inflecting revolutionary passions across a different paradigm. It was also a means of questioning the meaning of utopia, its origins, and its potential for actualization.

Kracauer during the Weimar Republic

The life of Kracauer was riven by the conflicts and contradictions of modern German society. Today, much of his reputation is based on two classic studies of film history and theory: *From Caligari to Hitler* and *Theory of Film*, published between 1947 and 1960. Aside from these important texts, he is also known as one of the earliest critics to turn his attention to film, and to argue that the medium had an important sociopolitical content. Yet, though he is justly known for this work, Kracauer was polymathic in his range of interests, and he approached the problems of modern life through a kaleidoscopic lens, encompassing philosophy, architecture, sociology, and literature. He was productive in all of these areas, even though he was, by his own admission, an uninspired architect. In terms of his background and early education, there is little that anticipated Kracauer's later profusion of interests. He was born in 1889 to a family that was Jewish on both sides and that had engaged primarily in various forms of commercial trade, showing little inclination towards scholarly or artistic pursuits. His paternal uncle, Isidor Kracauer, a noted historian of the Jews of Frankfurt, and his wife Hedwig Kracauer were both exceptional in this regard. Kracauer later denied that his aunt had had any kind of intellectual influence on him, even though Adorno argued that both he himself and his friend Benno Reifenberg could remember Kracauer making just such a claim.²⁸ Kracauer's reasons for denying her influence are unclear. Yet, the episode shows that Kracauer was concerned with how his work was viewed by his contemporaries.

In his education, Kracauer followed a path that was part technical and part intellectual, both practical and speculative. His declared subject was architecture, but he had stronger inclinations towards literature and philosophy. While pursuing his degree, he devoted himself to the study of these latter subjects, and he began to write in his spare time. By 1919, he had accumulated several manuscripts, most of which remained unpublished during his lifetime, including the bulk of his study on the sociologist Georg Simmel with whom he established contact in 1907.²⁹ During the war, Kracauer maintained relations with Simmel and also with the philosopher Max Scheler whom he met in 1916; both men encouraged his philosophical aspirations. His friendship with Margarete Susman, whom he must have met no later than 1918, was also valuable in this respect. She too had studied with Simmel, and she had numerous intellectual contacts: Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, and Gustav Landauer were among her circle of friends and acquaintances. Moreover, she had a potentially useful connection to the press, being a friend of Heinrich Simon, the lead editor of one of the most prestigious newspapers in Germany, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (FZ). Kracauer did, in fact, suggest that Susman should speak to Simon on his behalf, though there is no evidence that she did so or that this had the desired effect.³⁰

In any case, Kracauer's access to Weimar's cultural life expanded after 1921, when he found a position as a journalist on the *FZ*. In 1924, he became a full editor, and, in collaboration with his colleague Benno Reifenberg, he helped to turn the *FZ* feuilleton into a remarkable forum for cultural experimentation. Kracauer himself appears to have thrived in this situation as his large literary output in the second half of the 1920s suggests. During this period, he wrote hundreds of articles on film, mass culture, and literature. In 1928, he published his first novel, *Ginster*; two years later there followed a much-discussed sociological study of white-collar workers.³¹ In 1930, he was transferred to Berlin where he had the chance to acquaint himself with the social and cultural world of the capital.

Although Kracauer is often described as an "outsider," or in his preferred formulation, as an "extraterritorial," he was, nonetheless, well connected to contemporary intellectual life. This is true of Frankfurt, but also of Berlin and even of Paris. His letters indicate an extensive network of contacts including André Malraux, Ignazio Silone, Rudolf Kayser, Gabriel Marcel, Karl Mannheim, Hendrik de Man, Asta Nielsen, and Jean Renoir. These names suggest something of the breadth of culture that Kracauer was exposed to in these years, from the abstruse phenomenology of Edmund Husserl to the expressionist dance troupe of Mary Wigman.³² To be sure, Kracauer expressed some antipathy to this world of literary cliques and official culture, especially in Berlin. Shortly after his move to the capital, he informed his friend and fellow editor Bernhard Guttman that he had met just about everyone there: Döblin, Brecht, Weill, and so forth. "Without wanting to be arrogant," he continued, "I must still say that in general one gives much more than one receives."³³ However, behind this reserve to the Berlin cliques, there is a definite preference to remain an outsider, to become a privileged observer. Kracauer valued his intellectual distance; extraterritoriality meant preserving a gap between himself and his milieu, and his comments regarding Berlin should be read with this in mind.³⁴ This does not mean, of course, that there was not some failure of rapport between Kracauer and some of his contemporaries. He was almost certainly disappointed by the tepid reception of his novel *Ginster*, for instance. For though the work received many positive reviews, among the "literary radicals" there was no one, so one of his few admirers told him, who considered the book to be an "essential work."³⁵

Similarly, in Paris, where Kracauer fled in 1933, his severe financial situation overshadowed the degree to which he still retained important social ties during his years of exile. These were critical when he later required affidavits to secure his release from the French internment camps where he was twice placed after war broke out in 1939.³⁶ While his connections were unable to reverse his perilous finances, there is still reason to believe that he was well known and respected among French intellectuals. Jean Paulhan, for instance,

described him as one of the “best Germans,” and he was angry to discover that Kracauer had been interned even as known spies roamed free all over Paris.³⁷ When the art historian Julius Meier-Graefe sought a closer tie to Paulhan and the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, he appears to have asked Kracauer to intercede on his behalf.³⁸

Of course, these connections to French intellectual and diplomatic circles do not altogether override Kracauer’s feelings of being on the periphery, nor do they negate the tangible hindrances that pushed him towards the margins of the intelligentsia. Kracauer, in spite of his close relationship with Reifenberg, was never part of the inner circles of the *FZ* around Heinrich Simon. Moreover, his relations with some of the paper’s leading figures, Friedrich Sieburg and Rudolf Kircher, appear to have been cool.³⁹ In more concrete terms, his career was stymied by a speech impediment, and also by what many saw as his bizarre and foreign appearance. Count Harry Kessler, ever the aesthete, stated that he could scarce abide Kracauer’s “hideous ugliness.”⁴⁰ In April of 1925, Kracauer sent Adorno a photograph of himself with the accompanying words: “I hate images of myself—this one, every one.”⁴¹ In an age that celebrated the blonde beast—a tendency that Kracauer believed was rife among his contemporaries—his appearance was decidedly a disadvantage.⁴² During the war fever of 1914, some patriots mistook Kracauer for a “foreigner,” and according to his friend Viktor Klemperer, he cut his hair in an effort to look less conspicuous. The anxiety caused by his appearance is difficult to measure, but one can assume that it contributed to his sense of exclusion.⁴³ These impediments, together with his Jewish birth, effectively barred Kracauer from an academic career. Even those who were friendly to him, such as Meier-Graefe and Joseph Roth, found it difficult to imagine him taking on a leading public role for the newspaper.⁴⁴

What little is known of Kracauer’s sexual inclinations also suggests an outsider status. One can only speculate on the subject, but the early years of his relationship with Adorno appear to have had a strong homoerotic element. To his friend Löwenthal, he confided that his feelings toward the much younger Adorno led him to believe that at least in intellectual and spiritual matters he was homosexual.⁴⁵ This relationship will be discussed further below, but it should be noted here that Kracauer appears to have had a general inclination towards similar mentoring relationships with younger men. His intentions in these cases may or may not have been entirely platonic, but they always depended on an intensive intellectual rapport. A close collaboration that mingled the erotic and the intellectual framed his early critical endeavors, thus generating a tension between his unspoken desires and his public persona.⁴⁶ His often, but not always, muted attraction towards men, however, did not preclude marriage. In 1926 he met Elisabeth Ehrenreich, a student of music and art history, and a librarian at the Frankfurt School. They married in 1930 and remained together until his death in 1966.

After the Reichstag fire of 1933, Kracauer fled from Germany in the company of his wife to Paris, a city where his prior friendships and professional contacts would have led him to assume the potential for a stable existence. These hopes were disappointed and his emigration to France brought his career as a journalist, more or less, to an end.⁴⁷ Shortly after his arrival in Paris, he was dismissed from the *FZ* under acrimonious circumstances.⁴⁸ Afterward, the Kracauers spent much of their time fending off financial collapse, while anxiously planning their emigration to the United States and trying to help Kracauer's mother and aunt leave Germany. What time remained he devoted to a work that he hoped would become a commercial success: his *Jacques Offenbach and the Paris of His Time* published in 1937. However, the much-needed relief that this "social biography" was supposed to bring never materialized. The book sold miserably and many of his friends (especially Adorno) condemned it as a betrayal of his earlier work.⁴⁹ He would not publish another substantial work until ten years later when his study of the German cinema *From Caligari to Hitler* appeared in English. By that time, he had found refuge in New York, arriving after much struggle early in 1941. The move to the United States would become permanent, his Parisian exile constituting a threshold across which he would not pass again. To one of the few friends from Frankfurt with whom he renewed contact after the war, he wrote:

There lies too much in between. To name only the most personal: the unthinkable terrible end of my old mother and aunt; and the long years of our first emigration in France when, with one or two exceptions, none of our German friends let some sign come our way, even though it would have been possible until '38 or '39. From this comes the differences in position, experience, point of view; and, not least, there are the human relationships that were forged in difficult times and now fulfill our present life. The past is actually past, and even if I wanted it, I cannot transform it into the present.⁵⁰

In America, Kracauer abandoned German for the purposes of his work. His final books, *Theory of Film* (1960) and the unfinished *History: The Last Things before the Last* (1969) were written, as was the *Caligari* book, in English.

This brief overview of Kracauer's career demonstrates the degree to which he was embedded in the daily bustle of Weimar culture and its afterlife. To one observer, Kracauer was one of the "most considerable talents" on the *FZ*, a writer who had created a "new kind of journalistic genre."⁵¹ In the sphere of cultural experimentation, he was both investigator and participant, and his work embodied numerous conflicting impulses. He was influenced by Marxism, but he was never a doctrinaire thinker and often critical of Marxism-inspired literature; he was remarkably open to the forms of "low culture" that accompanied the rise of a consumer-based society, yet he sometimes adopted

a mandarin tone when discussing popular media.⁵² More relevant to this study, he remained interested in religious and theological currents, but avoided religious commitments in his own life.

How then does religion figure into Kracauer's conception of modernity and the critic's role as interpreter of social reality? Since Kracauer was an acute observer of Weimar's cultural pluralism, and because he wanted this pluralism to be reflected in his critical practice, his response to this issue is relevant to more than just the study of his intellectual development; rather his work is an entry point into the conflicted zones where religious and cultural values were contested. For Kracauer, the emergence of a secular society was a basic premise, yet, what this meant for religion was less clear. He was skeptical of attempts to subsume the functions of religion through culture, and thus he also rejected any sacralization of mass politics. Religion was to be replaced by neither a "political religion" nor a secular one.⁵³ Instead, Kracauer sometimes sought to preserve theological concepts in a modern setting, and this meant that traces of these concepts persisted in his work in a variety of forms. For Kracauer religion was besieged by the impersonal forces of instrumental reason, or *ratio*, and as a result theological concepts were detached from the life of religious faith; thus they began a period of wandering in the secular world. Here, they led a shadow existence—a form of functional negativity that, cloaked in irony and humor, undermined and interrogated the notion of a complete or fulfilled culture.⁵⁴ If some saw the religious community as a model for a secular utopia, for the establishment of a New Jerusalem, Kracauer saw theological concepts such as redemption and "waiting" as a means of demonstrating that such utopian visions were false. "Waiting" became an important quasi-theological theme in his work that occupied a middle ground between skepticism and positive religion, between secular culture and a revival of the sacred.⁵⁵ In this sense, his work sought to undermine the triumphalism of secular culture, showing it to be a form of quixoticism that foundered on the shoals of a reality that Kracauer conceived of in quasi-theological terms. To be sure, such ideas remained vaguely expressed in Kracauer's work, and they cannot be readily equated with positive religiosity. Nonetheless, they suggest the complex and ambiguous way in which Kracauer approached this issue. As Inka Mülder-Bach argued in her pioneering study of the early Kracauer, his apparent realism was always predicated on ideas of an "essentially metaphysical sort, even after 1925."⁵⁶

More significantly, Kracauer's deliberation on the fate of religion in modernity was not an isolated venture in Weimar culture. His discussions on religion and cultural crisis did not occur in a vacuum, but rather were part of an ongoing dispute with the religious and intellectual currents of his day. This suggests that attitudes towards religion, both in the later years of the *Kaiserreich* and during the Republic, were not negligible to the formation of cultural

criticism, and hence, they are not negligible to an understanding of Weimar's seemingly intractable cultural crisis.⁵⁷

Searching for the "Hollow Spaces": Between Secularization and Political Religions

Two historiographic issues inform the discussion that follows: the question of postwar religious revival and the historiography of secularization. A revived interest in religion was far from uncommon after the Great War, and the phenomenon has been the subject of increasing historical interest. Throughout Europe this resurgence took various forms, from the persistence of traditional belief that resulted in a return to the church, to spiritualist attempts to commune with the souls of the dead.⁵⁸ As a defeated power, Germany was particularly susceptible to the mood of crisis, a perception that was aggravated by the November revolution and the threat of civil war; there was then rich material upon which the rhetoric of crisis could draw.⁵⁹ In the wake of these events numerous utopian visions emerged, many of which offered alternative models of spiritual and social redemption.⁶⁰ Many attempted to move beyond a strictly materialist point of view, and even the relatively secular forms of social transformation could still be interpreted with a religious slant. In this vein, the Frankfurt writer Alfons Paquet, a fellow traveler, Quaker, and a member of the German-South Slavic Association, perceived the Bolshevik revolution as a manifestation of Russia's spiritual profundity, a depth of passion also expressed in the works of Dostoevsky.⁶¹ Publications inspired by utopian longings spilled from the presses. *The Spirit of Utopia* (1918) by Ernst Bloch and *The Theory of the Novel* (1920) by Georg Lukács are two of the more prominent and influential publications of this kind. However, there were numerous lesser known and today mostly forgotten works such as *The Intellectual Crisis of the Present* (1923) by Arthur Liebert, or Kristina Pfeiffer-Raimund's *A Woman's Letters to Walther Rathenau* (1918).⁶² Some of these utopian expressions had roots in the nineteenth century, in diverse sources such as the *Lebensreform* movements and the enthusiastic visions of technocratic progress. However, in the aftermath of war such projects took on a more radical and sometimes apocalyptic character; indeed the profusion of radical religiosity outside the churches provoked the acerbic commentary of observers such as Carl Christian Bry, who published his *Disguised Religions* in 1925.⁶³ Whereas to critics such as Bry these religious experiments were often distinguished by a faulty connection to reality, to some converts they appeared viable, especially in light of the political and social experiments then taking place in Russia and, briefly, in Bavaria and Hungary.

Moreover, these redemptive desires did not seem so out of place after four years of warfare and a devastating loss of life. If, as Hannah Arendt claimed, death was the “fundamental problem” confronting Europeans after 1918, then the numerous attempts to redeem existence seem warranted.⁶⁴ Aside from the massive suffering that the war caused, the Weimar Republic was also beset by a virtual catalogue of what could go wrong in modern societies. To this day the Republic remains a shorthand for crisis, whether one views it as a democratic experiment that failed, or as a social and political laboratory that succeeded in its worst imaginings.⁶⁵ In every sphere there was disruption. The economy underwent periods of depression, inflation, and hyperinflation, creating severe and nearly chronic instability; cultural affairs often assumed an extremist and militant tone; and parliamentary gridlocks plagued the political system.⁶⁶ In light of this turmoil, the constructed categories of class and gender were rendered uncertain. Historian Detlev Peukert described the resulting political and social collapse as a “crisis of classical modernity,” a crisis that compounded the traumas of war and its aftermath with the darker potential lying dormant beneath the rational face of modern industrial societies. This does not mean that the Republic should be understood as doomed from the outset, or as a transitional step in a supposedly inevitable and crisis-driven march towards fascism, but rather as a period of ferment, a forum where conflicting social and political experiments were articulated.⁶⁷

Within this classically modern setting religion occupies a somewhat anomalous position. Drawing on centuries of tradition and on long-established institutional hierarchies, religion appeared to have preserved its connections to a world prior to industry, science, and the “isms” of modern politics. At the very least, the traditional sources of religious authority could be said to have antedated these later developments; therefore, it could be argued that the core of religious belief remained immune to the vagaries and conflicts of modern society.⁶⁸ The very presence of the aged gothic churches in German towns and cities appeared to proclaim religion’s deep and mystical past. On the other hand, definitions of modernity, especially those influenced by early sociology, often viewed the decline or subordination of religion as a precondition of modernity itself, thus relegating religion to the historical dustbin.⁶⁹ Indeed, for Kracauer and some of his contemporaries, the decline of religion and the accompanying disenchantments of the secularized world were often perceived as established facts, a decisive shift that had occurred during the nineteenth century. The loss of this world could be mourned, but it remained beyond recovery.⁷⁰ From this point of view, religion had to “modernize,” that is, it must accept its limitations in a secular world that made greater claims on areas of authority and belief.

Yet, if the days of pilgrimages and holy tunics were supposedly over, religion still had a ghostly relationship to the modern. Thus, Kracauer sounded almost

surprised to find himself in 1927 attending the Zionist congress in Basel, and then participating in a torchlight parade at Lourdes. It was as if he had discovered again Max Weber's "old gods" who still worked their magic beneath a "Janus-faced" rationalism.⁷¹ He saw the signs of religious vitality everywhere, yet the meaning of this tenacity was less clear. Religion appeared to have a dual existence. In one sense, it represented a vanished mode of life, pushed aside by the triumphal march of reason; yet, simultaneously, it could not be denied that the disappearing idols still held their allure. As the protagonist of the *Man without Qualities* by Robert Musil remarked, "there were undeniably still a great many churches around."⁷² These artifacts of the past preserved a lost social vision, a vision of the whole, of the spiritually grounded community that religion presupposed. To some this appeared as a counterweight to the modern world and a means of renewing it. The search for the new could then look backwards as well as forwards. For Adorno, this retrospective gaze to the past must be resisted as a recrudescence of the archaic in the form of the new;⁷³ but Kracauer, as will be seen, was not ready to disavow religious contents completely.

How then should one conceive the relationship between religion and modernity, and what role did it play in the European crisis of culture, particularly in 1920s Germany? Moreover, how was this crisis perceived, contested, and, in some sense, legitimated within intellectual milieus? A recent discussion of modernism draws attention to its penchant for images depicting violence and wounds, and herein lies some grounds for looking at the critique of religion as a contribution to the crisis-ridden atmosphere of Weimar Germany, as a means of generating a rhetoric of crisis.⁷⁴ The perception of violence in modernist art is ambiguous. It was sometimes celebrated insofar as it unleashed the supposedly regenerative power of "primitive passions." In this guise violence constitutes a purgative force that wipes the slate clean and creates something new; the sacrifices that it demands are entered into a catalogue of martyrs that list the sufferings obligatory to the creation of the new. In this regard, the sometimes violent language that infused Kracauer's descriptions of rationalization is not without significance. "Dismember," "disembody," "hollow out" (*zerreißen, entwirklichen, entleeren*) are significant words in his early writing, and the individual is often dismantled into "complexes of atoms" and "particles of soul."⁷⁵ Thus, it is secular reason that destroys and the religious vision of the whole that suffers. In its victimization and in its clear hostility to materialist worldviews, religion then finds an ally within some strands of "Janus-faced" modernity. If cultural modernism rejected the staid and materialist culture of the nineteenth century, it could find support among the faithful. Religious passion could emerge as a critique of a faded past, as something startling and originary—thus, the vision of the Christian aviator in Apollinaire's poem "Zone." In the sinking world of modernity, the poem implies, only religion

retained the aura of the new. In this world of modernist experimentation, Pius X emerges (much to his own surprise, no doubt) as “the most modern of Europeans.”⁷⁶ Therefore, however ancient religion was, it still preserved its originary force, a force related to the primal impulses that modernists had also sought in regenerative violence, or the unruly passions of the so-called primitive.⁷⁷ Such violence was redemptive, a creative act, and as Karl Kraus once stated “origin is the goal.”⁷⁸ Thus, for some strands of modernity religion could appear in modern guise.

A rhetorical strategy that described the conflict between the secular and the religious in terms of violence did little to alleviate the prevalent discourse of crisis in Weimar.⁷⁹ Secularization was portrayed as a metaphysical catastrophe, uprooting humanity from its origins, and leaving individuals spiritually bereft. Therefore, to some observers, secularization could *only* appear as a crisis; as a result, the clash between the sacred and profane was often perceived as trauma—both by the supporters of secularism and its critics. Moreover, it was an event with consequences for the nation; for wherever rationalism and abstract reflection reared their ugly heads—in the newspapers, the state schools, the Reichstag, or cinema—the nation’s spiritual vitality would soon, so it was argued, wither away. In this regard, Kracauer too was not immune to the belief that secularization had harmed the national community.⁸⁰ This is not to say that the cultural crisis of Weimar should be reduced to a critique of secularization, nor could it be said that all such critiques were intended to incriminate the Republic; but such polemics did contribute to the fevered pitch in which cultural matters were discussed. Viewing secularization as wound and crisis perpetuated a mood of spiritual turmoil, and it prodded intellectuals to search for increasingly radical solutions to a supposedly deepening malaise.

Hence, insofar as Kracauer used this language in his writing, he contributed to a more general discourse that described the conflict of sacred and profane in the starkest of terms. Such discourse could be found across the political spectrum.⁸¹ Thus, one finds that the Kracauer of the early 1920s has some affinity for the cultural pessimism of the late nineteenth century.⁸² Writing to Margaret Susman, for instance, he declared his antipathy to all things intellectual, to circles of literati, and to the hopes placed in the postwar political order. However, in spite of this hostility, his public statements were far more moderate, especially when compared with those of his contemporaries.⁸³ Moreover, Kracauer was ambivalent to programs that found political renewal through violence. The apocalyptic or messianic tendencies that one finds in the work of Ernst Bloch or Walter Benjamin are by and large absent, even in his writing during the economically and politically unstable years of 1918 to 1923.⁸⁴ Still, his contribution to this apocalyptic discourse should not be discounted. The discourse of secular crisis encompassed both problem and solution; the radical, sometimes violent, proposals for root and branch reconstruction cor-

related with the alarmist tones in which the sense of crisis had been perceived and represented.⁸⁵ Kracauer, as will be seen, was an avid participant in this discourse; he was one of many writers who sounded the alarm of cultural crisis in the Weimar era. Through most of the 1920s and the early 1930s, Kracauer resisted what he saw as a harmful overgrowth of superficial religiosity. This meant staking out a territory in the expanding discourse of sacred and profane, a linguistic territory contested by a profusion of new religions that rushed in to fill an alleged spiritual void. For some observers, the result was a form of religious dilettantism, or what the sociologist Karl Dobbelaere has called *religion à la carte*.⁸⁶ This could be described as a kind of metaphysical *flânerie*, a subject that Kracauer criticized in his 1922 feuilleton "Those Who Wait."⁸⁷ Yet, Kracauer also partook of this new religious landscape. Free to wander among any number of religious milieus, Kracauer too could on one day witness the debates between Orthodox and Reform Judaism and, on the next, tour the shrines of Catholicism. He recognized that the choice to participate in a religious community was no longer simply a matter of inner conviction or social convention, but just as often a manifestation of curiosity, or, as in his own case, a product of rational observation coupled with a vague and imprecise sense of spiritual angst.

What did these haphazard engagements with religion mean? The fragmentation of religious beliefs suggested that redemption had left the churches and synagogues and had gone out "into the street." Religious ideas circulated among spiritual consumers as if they were so many goods on the shelves of a department store. The individual who sought spiritual wholeness was now at liberty to peruse and sample these spiritual goods and then to move on when a particular product did not satisfy. Aside from the wares on offer from the established faiths, there were now numerous disciplines of the soul from which one could choose. Bry called them "disguised religions" (*verkappten Religionen*), while historian Thomas Nipperdey has referred to them as "vagabond religiosity."⁸⁸ These movements existed on the fringes of, and sometimes in opposition to, established religious traditions and hierarchies.

In regards to these phenomena there were two vital issues at stake for Kracauer. On the one hand, he was increasingly aware of contemporary desires to give collective bodies a religious meaning, and he was alarmed by the emergence of a sacred aura around the collective in nationalist, and to a lesser extent, socialist rhetoric. In part, this was a critique of what he saw as a reductive form of collectivism, but it was also due to his fear that an ill-considered plunge into a false religiosity would preclude further engagement with social realities. This aspect of his critique was on the surface directed at religion, but in the early 1920s Kracauer sometimes voiced the belief that the essence of religion was, in fact, to be found through contact with the profane. A religiosity that avoided profane reality would exclude itself from the religious sphere it sought to attain.

For this reason Kracauer, as will be seen, sometimes cited religious authorities when criticizing the religious revival. Thus, in repudiating the work of Ernst Bloch, he referred to the doubt and irony that he claimed to find in the work of Augustine and rabbinical tradition; such expressions, he argued, were both more in keeping with contemporary reality and closer to the truth contents of religion.⁸⁹ In a sense, he sought to preserve a sphere in which religious contents could survive, safe from the dual threats of encroaching rationalism and resurgent religiosity. He associated this with a position of “waiting”—a decision to remain suspended between skepticism and devotion, to neither believe, nor to conclusively deny. This was a form of reluctant skepticism that desired but still resisted utopia. A view of Judaism as the faith of a people who waits is clearly relevant here, though as a religious motif it had a wider resonance of which Kracauer was well aware. The background to his critique of religion was what Samuel Moyn has referred to as the “transconfessional religious thinking of a particular Western European moment . . . a thorough-going revolution in Weimar-era theology.”⁹⁰

The theological implications of this gesture of “waiting” constitutes an undercurrent in modernist culture as can be found in the work of Samuel Beckett, or also Kracauer’s more immediate contemporary Robert Musil. Similarly, his friend Walter Benjamin conceived of a “life of deferment,” an existence based upon perpetual waiting before the divine.⁹¹ This was a theology of the unsayable; it was predicated on an unspoken anticipation of revealed truth, an event that took place outside of material reality, but nonetheless had definite consequences within it. This type of “negative theology” is not without some echoes in Kracauer’s work, and similar ideas were widely discussed among his contemporaries—Barth, Bloch, Buber, Rosenzweig, and Susman among others.⁹² Their writings contested common ground and, as a result, their disagreements were fought with much tenacity. Kracauer’s position on religion was taken in direct confrontation with many of these writers. Indeed, underlining the differences between himself and his contemporaries on religious questions was a means of defining his own position in relation to his cultural milieu.

Still, what meaning religion had for Kracauer is unclear, and since war and immigration led to the loss of a significant portion of his papers, his early views on religion must remain obscure. We know little to nothing of his early attitudes towards Judaism outside of a brief reference to the perfunctory observances practiced among his relatives.⁹³ There is no evidence of a decisive break or repudiation of Judaism, but as historian Enzo Traverso has argued, there was little need for Kracauer to discuss, let alone repudiate, whatever religious beliefs he may once have held; for him religion appears to have been a truly “invisible church.” Religious positions were best left unstated, and thus they never became a point of internal dissonance in his work; as he stated in a letter

to Simmel, general principles are, in a certain way, “invisible” (*Unsichtig*).⁹⁴ Yet, even as religion became a less significant theme in his writing, theological concepts remained, stowed away as contraband close to the core of his critical project.⁹⁵

If Kracauer’s idea of critical vocation derives from the conflict between religious revival and secularism, what might his work tell us about Weimar intellectual culture and secularizing processes?⁹⁶ Scholars have investigated the religious and theological influences in the work of Horkheimer, Adorno, and others associated with the Frankfurt School.⁹⁷ Given Kracauer’s proximity to this milieu and his recognized influence on the young Adorno, a study of this theme in connection to his work will help illuminate this important chapter in Weimar cultural history.⁹⁸ It can also expose some of the contexts of Weimar-era cultural criticism, and the degree to which it was shaped by opposing concepts of the culture/religion nexus. For the theologian Paul Tillich, religion was “the spiritual substance of culture,” a view with which Kracauer would have sympathized in the early 1920s. In a brief article devoted to a lecture by Martin Buber, for instance, Kracauer expressed his agreement with Buber’s argument that religion is the groundwork of all culture, not one of its more spiritual emanations.⁹⁹ However, as Kracauer devoted more attention to mass culture, he adopted a different approach to this issue; during the mid-1920s his thinking wavered between differing positions over the need of religious foundations for culture. While rejecting a flight into religious certainty, he became increasingly concerned with what he saw as the pitfalls of radical cultural agendas.

The debate over such questions has generated a discourse on culture that retains its relevance up to the present day. A recent discussion of the origins of Marxist socialism offers some context for this development. Marxism, as Gareth Stedman Jones points out, did not arise from a discussion of social justice and equity, but rather out of philosophical debates concerning the meaning of history after the disappearance of God—Marxism finding new meaning by constructing a materialist teleology.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, one could argue that theories of mass culture arose from the debate over the postreligious meaning of culture itself. With the disappearance of divine purpose, the meaning of history was cast in doubt; without this larger schema to legitimate it, culture too had to respond by relying on material resources to explain its values and evolution. The critic of culture then stepped into the place vacated by religious authority, or which religious authority could no longer secure on the basis of its weakened power. As Marx argued, all criticism was essentially the criticism of religion.¹⁰¹

Religion as repository of timeless values was thus no longer tenable, and nor could culture move into its position. By the mid-1920s Kracauer began to work with an idea of culture that is much more akin to our age than his own.

Culture was not a system of meanings and values derived from eternal verities, but one that was embedded within social and economic processes; it was a constructed system, and to interpret contemporary reality meant that one had to recognize one's own position within this construction. William Sewell, in a recent essay, emphasizes that definitions of culture should be understood as "a dialectic of system and practice . . . and as a system of symbols possessing a real but thin coherence that is continually put at risk in practice and therefore subject to transformation"—a view with which I think Kracauer would agree.¹⁰²

Kracauer embraced criticism at a moment when this transfer of authority appeared to be in process, yet its implications provoked uncertainty. He was inclined to interpret the role of the critic from inside the secularization framework; but even as he repudiated religious revival, he still defended religious concepts at different points throughout the 1920s. Indeed, these concepts remained vital to him as they supported his critical stance to modern society. In this sense, he refashioned them for different purposes. Thus, while the fate of religious institutions was a secondary matter to him, this was not true of religious ideas. For this reason, many scholars of his work have recognized the stubborn persistence of the theological. Miriam Hansen argued that the Gnostic and messianic traditions in Judaism were an important influence bridging the early and later periods of his career.¹⁰³ Inka Müller-Bach, Martin Jay, and Olivier Agard have also pointed out the presence of religious or metaphysical motifs in his work, though it is generally accepted that by the mid-1920s these motifs receded as, influenced by Marx and Weber, Kracauer began to reassess his attitudes to mass culture.¹⁰⁴

If Kracauer had stopped writing before 1925, he probably would have remained mostly unknown, for it is difficult to imagine that his earlier writings would have elicited the same amount of interest as his later work. Nonetheless, I would argue that this early period was something more than a transition leading from "cultural pessimism" to a relatively progressive theory of modern culture. His perception of the critic's vocation was solidified during the earlier period: to the critic of modernity he gave the task of mediating between the social realities of a secular world and the theological concepts that continued to haunt it in new shapes and guises.

Through an exploration of Kracauer's idiosyncratic mingling of the sacred and the profane, this study will engage with questions concerning the historiography of secularization. Germany in the 1920s demonstrates many of the contradictory impulses that have been central to the debates over what was involved in this process, and even to what extent it actually occurred. Thus, when the Weimar assembly established the formal separation of church and state, some argued that it was little more than recognition of the status quo, a simple confirmation of the diminished position of the Protestant churches that had long been evident, for instance, in the shortage of trained pastors in many

parts of Germany.¹⁰⁵ Yet, the 1920s was also an extraordinarily fruitful period in theology. Karl Barth, Rudolf Otto, Rudolf Bultmann, Max Scheler, Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas, Romano Guardini, and Paul Tillich all wrote important works in this period, and their theological works still resonate in the present. That this happened during a time of intensive political and cultural flux does not seem accidental, and indeed, this was when the term *political religion* became commonly used to describe the conflation of religion and politics.¹⁰⁶ One of the most famous arguments concerning the origins of modern political principles was articulated during the turmoil of Weimar: Carl Schmitt's dictum that all modern political concepts are derived from theological ones.¹⁰⁷ Thus, the difficult question of what role religion should have in the postwar political order was one that was hard to ignore, especially among intellectual circles.

The decline of "social significance" that is implied by the secularization thesis has been a controversial subject. Few would argue that relations between church and state did not undergo a dramatic change in the course of the long nineteenth century, and that the same could be said for forms and patterns of religious thought and belief. However, the question of whether this means European societies became more secular before 1914 is much less certain. Evidence of the persistence of religious sentiment in the last century has led some scholars to reject the thesis of secularization altogether, arguing that it has no, or very limited, interpretive validity.¹⁰⁸ From the point of view of its critics, the concept is damaged irreparably by its dependence on some of the dubious assumptions that have supported sociological theories of modernization. For instance, the normative assumption that modernity can be equated with secularism, that the model of industrial-capitalist progress tends toward a secular idea of modernity, has been questioned by many including the anthropologist Talal Asad.¹⁰⁹ To some critics, this position derives from the intertwining of the origins of the secularization thesis and the discipline of sociology. The latter was in some respects predicated on the former, a relationship recognized by sociologist Niklas Luhmann.¹¹⁰ Sociology as a field of critical discourse on society and politics, so the argument goes, was won at the expense of religion. It is to be expected that Kracauer, as a student of sociology, would have been well acquainted with some of the fatalistic views of religion that influenced the formation of the sociological discipline.¹¹¹

However, the secularization thesis has nonetheless proved to be remarkably resilient. Karel Dobbelaere, the author of a classic study of the subject, recently revised his work in light of two decades of new research and debate, but he held to most of its central premises—in part because his statement of key arguments was more nuanced than its critics have recognized.¹¹² In any case, few scholars would now view secularization as a linear process in which religion was on the losing side of a zero-sum game with rational enlightenment.

Instead, historians have emphasized the reorientation of both religious institutions and beliefs.¹¹³ Rather than dwelling on the declining “social significance” of religion, they have identified the different forms of religious practice that emerged as religion responded to the shifting conditions of modern societies. The growth of such practices accompanied the emptying out of churches and synagogues, thus complicating our notions of what secularization involved. One speaks more of the adjustments of religion or the “decline of Christendom” in order to indicate that the waning of religious institutions does not necessarily entail a decline in religious sentiments. Thus, a straightforward linear narrative has been displaced.¹¹⁴

Kracauer felt that secularization had altered the world, that modernity was a realm of disenchantment. In effect, the forces of secularization had won and “there was no simple way back.”¹¹⁵ Yet, Kracauer’s critical project only makes sense if it is understood as a response to secularization as an ongoing and nonlinear process. As he stated in his famous essay on the “mass ornament” the process of “demythologization” was not complete.¹¹⁶ Instead, it was a hesitant and perpetual process, one that moved in a number of twists and turns that were to be found in the reorientation and redefinition of theological concepts. To observe and reflect on this process, as well as to intervene in it, was the leitmotif of his critical efforts. For these reasons, Kracauer’s work offers a vantage point from which to observe the problem of secularization as it was perceived during the Weimar Republic. Moreover, many themes that emerged from his attempt to expose the inner workings of disenchantment have remained important to discussions of secularization up to the present day. If one compares his work with some of the subjects that Luhmann, for instance, argued were central to the study of religion and society, Kracauer seems remarkably prescient. The emergence of a polyphonic (*polykontextural*) mode of observation, an expanded definition of culture in which religion is accorded a distinct if ambiguous sphere, a transformed perception of time and space, a recognition of the crucial role played by media—all of these themes were approached by Kracauer in the course of his work in the 1920s.¹¹⁷

A methodological consideration: it should be conceded at the outset that Kracauer rarely addressed such themes in an extended or substantial study. Rather his ideas on religion are woven into a variety of texts—fiction, sociology, and journalism—as a constantly resurfacing theme. This study suggests that the lack of a focused treatment on his part makes his relevance to a discussion of secularization more, not less, compelling. Kracauer argued that the ephemeral and chance expressions of a society afforded deeper insight into its true nature.¹¹⁸ By using some of Kracauer’s lesser-known writings, I hope to demonstrate the continued relevance of his claim.

“God’s Policeman”? Preliminary Conclusions

Some indication of the religious underpinnings in Kracauer’s work appear in the contemporary judgment of one of his friends, the Austrian writer Joseph Roth: “Dr. Kracauer . . . has angered me greatly. He is one of the Jehovah Jews, and Marxism is his Bible; the Eastern Jews have a good word for such men: God’s policemen.”¹¹⁹ When Roth sent this letter, he had known Kracauer for some years, probably since the early 1920s. He had been a regular contributor to the *FZ*, and he was also close to Reifenberg who had supported the work of both writers. Their friendship was sometimes uneasy, but of course this could be said of most of Roth’s friendships.¹²⁰ In any case, they remained in contact until Roth died in Parisian exile in 1939. Roth had admired Kracauer’s work, and he had intervened with his publisher, Samuel Fischer, in order to promote the publication of *Ginster*. Indeed, Kracauer later credited Roth with the stimulus to begin his novel.¹²¹ His death, Kracauer stated, had been hard for him, provoking reflections on their common struggles in Germany and their shared fate in exile.¹²²

Roth implies that Kracauer is the model of someone who has found a political religion. Marx displaces the Bible; the religious zealot is transformed into an ideological fanatic. Kracauer, the “policeman of God” thus becomes the exponent of a secular religion, and from the doctrinaire believer comes the political dogmatist.

This surprising and rather idiosyncratic description of Kracauer is suggestive of the themes to be explored in this study. It is, on the surface, consistent with one of the two theories of secularization that were proposed by the French historian Jean-Claude Monod.¹²³ On the one hand, secularization is conceived of as old wine in new bottles, a model in which modern political forms merely appropriate religious functions. They adopt its hierarchical institutions and its sense of historical mission; hence, they mediate religious energies into a secular world view. On the other hand, secularization represents a distinct, if qualified, rupture—a position argued by Hans Blumenberg in his study, *The Legitimacy of Modernity*. Blumenberg believed that some aspects of religious thought would have hindered the secular idea of progress and, as a result, secularization meant more than just an adaptation of religious energies to secular practices. Instead, a deeper shift in terms of content had to have occurred in terms of how people thought, felt, and expressed the differences between sacred and profane.¹²⁴ Only in this way could one explain the conditions of modernity. These two theories are, of course, not mutually exclusive, as literary scholar Vincent Pecora has pointed out. Of greater significance is the investigation of how these interpretations confronted one another in specific historical contexts.¹²⁵ If we return to Kracauer as a case study, there is some reason to subscribe to the “old wine in new bottles” theory, for as

his interest in Marxism and mass culture increased, the interest in religious subjects faded.

Yet, the transformation of socialism into a pseudoreligious creed is not straightforward in Kracauer's work. He was alarmed by the emergence of a political religiosity, and indeed it was probably this phenomenon that led him to conceive of a more positive valuation of reason. For if *ratio* is the villain of earlier studies such as *The Detective Novel*, after 1925 he sees in reason more than just the destroyer of religious unity, or a malignant force in the grand narrative of secularization. The "cloudy reason" of *ratio* is set against a positive, "genial" form of reason, and from this latter instrument one need not fear that it "rationalizes too much, but too little."¹²⁶ However, as will be discussed below, this more reflective rationalism was to be used not only against the old truths of religion, but also against what one critic has called a "revolutionary culturalism."¹²⁷

What did Kracauer think religion was? Definitions of religion are, of course, a vast and intractable subject that is outside the scope of this study. Durkheim once stated that *society is religion*, a formulation that provokes as many questions as it might answer. For my purpose, it may do to accept the definition offered by Luhmann that "religion is whatever can be observed as religion."¹²⁸ The imprecision that ensues when one tries to define it is, in fact, a significant aspect of the debates to be discussed in the following pages. What remains more important, however, is not the relative validity of such concepts and assumptions, but rather how they emerged and functioned in Weimar-era discourses—how they derived from, or responded to their specific contexts. In other words, what were the social and political stakes involved in trying to decide what belonged to God and what to Caesar?

The conflict that ensued over this question was not a minor one in the context of Weimar culture. Secular viewpoints could alienate voters and galvanize religious communities. Conflicts over issues such as the separation of church and state or religious instruction in the schools were still capable of mobilizing social interests into political action.¹²⁹ Thus, when a number of independent Socialists returned to the SPD after the acrimonious split at the end of the war, it was thought expedient to alter the party's charter in order to accommodate the return of the radicals. The new charter of 1925 dropped a significant tenet of the earlier Erfurt program of 1891: the statement that religion was a "private affair." This may have been more a matter of political tactics than of secular convictions; but the move implicitly recognized the persistent struggle over religion in politics.

Given the present revival of conflicts between religion and secularism there is good reason to explore manifestations of these conflicts in different historical contexts. The ban of headscarves in France, the proposed entrance of Turkey into the European Union, and the debate over "reasonable accommo-

dation” in Québec are just some of the issues that have stimulated a renewed interest in past historical conflicts. This has found expression in numerous publications that make it clear that the debate is not confined to academia. Charles Taylor, Michael Burleigh, Slavoj Žižek, Jürgen Habermas, Mark Lilla, and Christopher Hitchens are among those who have recently made contributions to the subject. It is certainly noticeable that some of these discussions have returned to the same textual terrain that Kracauer went over in the 1920s: Kierkegaard, Weber, and Barth, and more surprisingly, the Catholic mystery writer, G. K. Chesterton. There should be no surprise, then, that present-day discussions have been fraught with baggage from the Weimar period. In 2004, Habermas addressed this resemblance in an essay written at the invitation of the Catholic Academy of Bavaria. In part, the speech defended the legitimacy of secularization. When confronted with the argument that given what we know about the persistence of religion, European secularism was the “odd one out,” he countered that “this reminds one of the mood in the Weimar Republic in Germany . . . it evokes Carl Schmitt, Martin Heidegger, or Leo Strauss.”¹³⁰ Here again, we are in terrain that Kracauer would have found familiar.

Weimar’s cultural crisis was never resolved; rather, it was submerged in the conformist cultural policies imposed by the Nazi regime. For Kracauer and many of his contemporaries, 1933 meant flight, exile, silence, or death; but for others, such as the *FZ* editor and archivist Hermann Herrigel, 1933 was the year of potential redemption. A friend of Kracauer, follower of both Martin Buber and the Protestant theologian Friedrich Gogarten, Herrigel’s philosophical trajectory found its terminus in a theology that readily allowed one to give allegiances to God and Caesar; his faith did not conflict with his support for the Hitler revolution, as will be discussed below. The relationship of National Socialism to religion is, nonetheless, too complex to do justice to in this study, but at the very least at a time when it has become common to refer to the inability of some religions to adjust to secular modernity, it is worth considering whether secularization has been such an easy process in European history.¹³¹

Notes

1. I have translated what appears to be a neologism (*Angebenheiten*) as “demonstrativeness.” The handwriting in this letter is exceptionally clear relative to most of Kracauer’s letters, so I have taken this odd word to be intended and not a misspelling of a different word.
2. Kracauer to Hans Kohn, 4 February 1964, quoted in *Siegfried Kracauer, 1889–1966: Marbacher Magazin* 47, ed. Ingrid Belke and Irene Renz (Marbach am Neckar, 1988): 47. His objections also met with agreement, including his friends Leo Löwenthal and Walter Benjamin. For an account of his critique, see Martin Jay, “Politics

- of Translation: Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin on the Buber-Rosenzweig Bible," in *Permanent Exiles: Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York, 1986), 198–216; Lawrence Rosenfeld, "On the Reception of Buber and Rosenzweig's Bible," *Prooftexts* 14, no. 2 (May 1994): 141–65, and Brian Britt, "Romantic Roots of the Debate on the Buber-Rosenzweig Bible," *Prooftexts* 20, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 262–88.
3. Kracauer, "Der Baseler Zionistenkongreß: Die Krisis in Zionismus," *Frankfurter Zeitung (FZ)*, 7 September 1927 in Kracauer, *Werke* 5.2, ed. Inka Müllder-Bach and Ingrid Belke, 9 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 2004–2012), 657–63.
 4. On Kracauer and cultural mobility see Olivier Agard, *Kracauer: Le chiffonnier mélancolique* (Paris, 2010), 349–54.
 5. Belke and Renz, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 30. In a letter Kracauer sent to Mann in 1935, he stated that *Tonio Kröger* and the *Reflections* had "a decisive influence on my development." See Kracauer to Mann, 4 June 1935, Kracauer Nachlass (KN), Deutsches Literaturarchiv (DLA), Marbach am Neckar.
 6. See Matthew Jefferies, *Imperial Culture in Germany, 1871–1918* (Basingstoke, 2003), 135–228, and Wolf Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in Germany History* (Princeton, 2006), 9–55.
 7. Siegfried Kracauer, "Philosophie des Werks," *Frankfurter Zeitung (FZ)*, 27 July 1920, in *Werke* 5.1, 89–94. The book reviewed was *Individuum und Welt als Werk: Eine Grundlegung der Kulturphilosophie* (Munich, 1920).
 8. Unless stated otherwise, all translations from German texts are my own. I have translated all German sources into English except in instances where an English translation, I believe, would diminish the argument.
 9. Kracauer to Susman, 11 January 1920, Susman Nachlass (SN), DLA. Some of the words in this text are not legible, but the general sense is clear. On Kracauer's opinions of Russia and the USSR, see Ingrid Belke, "Siegfried Kracauer als Beobachter der jungen Sowjetunion," in *Siegfried Kracauer: Neue Interpretationen*, ed. Michael Kessler and Thomas Y. Levin (Tübingen, 1990), 17–38. Margarete Susman (1872–1966) was a poet and essayist who worked in and around Frankfurt. She was married to the painter Eduard von Bendemann from 1905 to 1928. She studied with Simmel for a period and had numerous friends and acquaintances among the intelligentsia. After the rise of Nazism, she fled to Switzerland where she remained until her death.
 10. Kracauer, "Philosophie des Werks," *Werke* 5.1, 93.
 11. Kevin Repp, *Reformers, Critics and the Paths of German Modernity: Anti-Politics and the Search for Alternatives, 1890–1914* (Cambridge, 2000), and Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New Haven and London, 2011), 31–32.
 12. See Max Scheler, "Zur religiösen Erneuerung," *Hochland* 17, no. 1 (1918/1919): 5–21. On Karl Barth and the theology of crisis, see Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York, 2007), 268–85; on the Free Jewish School, see Nahum N. Glatzer, "The Frankfort Lehrhaus," *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute* 1 (1956): 105–22; and Wolfgang Schivelbusch, "Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Judentum: Das Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus," *Intellektuellen-dämmerungen: Zur Lage der Frankfurter Intelligenz in den zwanziger Jahren* (Frankfurt am Main, 1982), 27–41. For an overview of these trends in postwar Germany, see Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, "God's Anti-Liberal Avant-Garde: New Theologies

- in the Weimar Republic," *German Historical Institute London: Bulletin* 32, no. 2 (November, 2010): 3–24.
13. *Frankfurter Zeitung*, "Nun sag' wie hast Du's mit der—Politik?" *FZ*, 25 December 1928, *Morgenblatt*. The article solicited responses from a number of prominent individuals of different social and economic backgrounds, but with a slight bias towards intellectuals. The contributions were prefaced by the following remarks: "Certainly, many swings of opinion lie beneath the commitment of nonpoliticians to politics. Through war and revolution, the interest in public affairs deepened: so how do things stand today? . . . we intend an interesting contribution to the question, what position does politics—we do not mean some or another party position, but rather politics in general—have in the spiritual [*geistigen*] life of the nation."
 14. Caesar Seligmann, quoted in Schivelbusch, 38.
 15. Kracauer to Susman, 11 January 1920, SN, DLA.
 16. Kracauer to Susman, 26 July 1920, SN, DLA.
 17. For overviews and general interpretations of Kracauer's work, see Martin Jay, "The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer," in Jay, *Permanent Exiles: Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York, 1986), 152–97; Inka Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer—Grenzgänger zwischen Theorie und Literatur: Seine frühen Schriften, 1913–1933* (Stuttgart, 1985); Michael Schröter, "Weltzerfall und Rekonstruktion: zur Physiognomik Siegfried Kracauers," *Text und Kritik* 68 (October 1980): 18–40; Gertrud Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer: An Introduction* (Princeton, 2000); Enzo Traverso, *Siegfried Kracauer: itinéraire d'un intellectuel nomade* (Paris, 1994); and Thomas Y. Levin, "Introduction" to Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge, 1995), 1–30. More recently, see Agard, *Kracauer: le chiffonnier mélancholique*; the essays collected in Frank Grunert and Dorothee Kimnich, eds., *Denken durch die Dinge: Siegfried Kracauer im Kontext* (Munich, 2009); and Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke, eds., *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer* (Ann Arbor, 2012).
 18. The expressions used here are borrowed from Vincent Pecora, *Secularization and Cultural Criticism: Religion, Nation, and Modernity* (Chicago, 2006), 1–6. See also Schröter, "Weltzerfall und Rekonstruktion," 18–26.
 19. The vastness of the literature on secularization forbids an overview here, but see the essays collected in Steve Bruce, ed., *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford, 1992); Hartmut Lehmann, ed., *Säkularisierung, Dechristianisierung, Rechristianisierung im neuzeitlichen Europa: Bilanz und Perspektiven der Forschung* (Göttingen, 1997); Hugh McLeod, *Secularization in Western Europe, 1848–1914* (Basingstoke, 2000); Hermann Lübke, *Säkularisierung: Geschichte eines ideenpolitischen Begriffs*, 3rd ed. (Freiburg and Munich, 2003); and Benjamin Ziemann, "Säkularisierung, Konfessionalisierung, Organisationsbildung: Aspekte der Sozialgeschichte der Religion im langen 19. Jahrhundert," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 47 (2007): 485–508. Marcel Gauchet, in his study *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion* (Princeton, 1997) takes an even longer view of the secularizing process, arguing that the shift to the secular begins with the advent of monotheism and the division of the world into sacred and profane. For a more recent critique of the place of secularism in modernity, see Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, 2003).
 20. Dagmar Barnouw, *Critical Realism: History, Photography, and the Work of Siegfried Kracauer* (Baltimore, 1994), 4–5.

21. On this motif, see Leo Haenlein, *Der Denk-Gestus des aktiven Wartens im Sinn-Vakuum der Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main and Bern, 1984), 133–135; Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer—Grenzgänger*, 60; and Miriam Hansen, “Decentric Perspectives: Kracauer’s Early Writings on Film and Mass Culture,” *New German Critique* 54 (Autumn 1991): 50. The equation of secularism with modernity is problematic, and has been the subject of much criticism. This issue will be discussed below.
22. Kracauer, *Der Detektiv-Roman: Ein philosophischer Traktat* (Frankfurt am Main, 1979). I am indebted to the discussions of this work that can be found in Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer—Grenzgänger*, 35–48; Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 15–25; David Frisby, “Between the Spheres: Siegfried Kracauer and the Detective Novel,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 9, no. 2 (1992): 1–22; and Thomas Weber, “La réalité emphatique: *Le Roman policier. Un traité philosophique*, Une première interprétation de la culture de masse,” in *Culture de masse et modernité: Siegfried Kracauer sociologue, critique, écrivain*, ed. Philippe Despoix and Nia Perivolaropoulou (Paris, 2001), 23–39. Agard’s study of Kracauer appeared after this chapter was written. I agree with much of his reading of this key Kracauer text; see Agard, *Kracauer*, 49–71.
23. Frisby, “Between the Spheres,” 3; and Hannah Arendt, “Søren Kierkegaard,” *FZ*, 29 January 1932 in Arendt, *Essays in Understanding: 1930–1954*, trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (New York, 1994), 44–49.
24. Inka Mülder-Bach, “Der Umschlag der Negativität: Zur Verschränkung von Phänomenologie, Geschichtsphilosophie und Filmästhetik in Siegfried Kracauers Metaphorik der ‘Oberfläche,’” *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 61, no. 2 (June 1987): 359–73.
25. Adorno to Kracauer, 19 July 1931, in *Theodor W. Adorno/Siegfried Kracauer: Briefwechsel, 1923–1966*, ed. Wolfgang Schopf (Frankfurt am Main, 2008), 286.
26. On Hirsch see Lilla, *Stillborn God*, 281–82. On Kierkegaard reception in Germany and Europe see Jon Stewart, ed., *Kierkegaard’s Influence on Literature, Criticism and Art: Tome 1: The Germanophone World* (Farnham, 2013); and Habib C. Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard: The Early Impact and Transmission of his Thought* (Washington, DC, 1997).
27. Döblin, *Wissen und Verändern! Offene Briefe an einen jungen Menschen* (Berlin, 1931).
28. See Kracauer to Adorno, 3 November 1964, *Briefwechsel, 1923–1966*, 676, and Adorno’s response written on 13 November 1964, *Briefwechsel, 1923–1966*, 680.
29. These works have been collected in *Werke 9: Frühe Schriften aus dem Nachlaß*.
30. Kracauer to Susman, 20 January 1920, SN, DLA.
31. Kracauer, *Ginster: vom ihm selbst geschrieben* (Berlin, 1928); *Die Angestellten: Aus dem neuesten Deutschland* (Frankfurt, 1930). Since 1989, the study of Kracauer is greatly indebted to the bibliography put together by Thomas Levin, see Levin, *Siegfried Kracauer: eine Bibliographie seiner Schriften* (Marbach am Neckar, 1989).
32. Kracauer had limited contact with both. In 1934, when he was desperate for sources of income, Husserl wrote appreciatively of Kracauer’s early sociological work. See Husserl to Kracauer, 14 January 1934, KN, DLA. Kracauer appears to have been acquainted with Wigman’s sister, Elizabeth. Her surviving letters to him, preserved in KN, suggest a friendly if brief relationship. On 26 April 1925 (KN, DLA), she wrote to him inquiring whether he would be able to supply some private quarters for some of the dancers. “Is the world now so frail and beautiful?” she wrote, “Do you see that also?”
33. Kracauer to Guttmann, 16 March 1931, KN, DLA.

34. Martin Jay emphasizes this theme in his early article on Kracauer, "The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer," *Permanent Exiles*, 152–53.
35. Richard Gabel to Kracauer, 29 March 1930, KN, DLA. Gabel was a freelance contributor to the FZ.
36. Belke and Renz (*Siegfried Kracauer*, 95) have noted the interventions from the following individuals: the French diplomat Henri Hoppenot; the bookseller Adrienne Monnier; the historian Daniel Halévy; the publishers A. P. von Seggern and A. P. J. Kroonenburg; and Lucien Gaget from whom Kracauer and his wife rented rooms. The diplomat and later resistance member Pierre Viénot also appears to have supported Kracauer in this regard, as did Gabriel Marcel. See Kracauer's letter to Marcel dated September 1945, KN, DLA.
37. Paulhan to Armand Petitjean, 11 November 1939, in *Choix de Lettres II, 1937–1945: Traité des jours sombres*, ed. Dominique Aury and Jean-Claude Zylberstein (Paris, 1986), 130.
38. See Kracauer to Meier-Graefe, 24 August 1933 and 16 March 1934, KN, DLA.
39. After the war, Kracauer referred to Sieburg as the "primordial model of the opportunist, nearly its allegory." See Kracauer to Max Niederlechner, 24 March 1957, KN, DLA. Adorno alleged that Kircher detested Kracauer; see Adorno to Kracauer, 2 January 1931, in *Briefwechsel, 1923–1966*, 257–64, esp. 260.
40. Count Harry Kessler, *Berlin in Lights: The Diaries of Count Harry Kessler*, trans. and ed. Charles Kessler (New York, 2000), 456.
41. Kracauer to Adorno, 16 April 1925, *Briefwechsel, 1923–1966*, 51.
42. Kracauer counted himself as one of the admirers of the blonde beast. See Kracauer, *History: The Last Things before the Last* (Princeton, 1994), 173–74.
43. Klemperer, *Curriculum Vitae: Erinnerungen einer Philologen, 1881–1918, II* (Berlin, 1989), 183–84. See also the comments in Martin Jay, "The Extraterritorial Life," *Permanent Exiles*, 153.
44. See Joseph Roth to Bernard von Brentano, 19 December 1925, *Joseph Roth: Briefe, 1911–1939*, ed. Hermann Kesten (Berlin and Köln, 1970), 70; Meier-Graefe to René Schickele, 20 June 1931, in *Kunst ist nicht für Kunstgeschichte da: Briefe und Dokumente*, ed. Catharine Kraemer (Göttingen, 2002), 268–69. This may have contributed to his failure to secure a position in Paris following his forced emigration in 1933.
45. Kracauer to Löwenthal, 12 April 1924, in *steter Freundschaft: Leo Löwenthal–Siegfried Kracauer, Briefwechsel, 1921–1966*, ed. Peter-Erwin Jansen and Christian Schmidt (Lüneburg, 2003), 53–55. See also, Kracauer to Adorno, 5 April 1923 and 22 September 1924, *Briefwechsel, 1923–1966*, 9–18. Gertrud Koch has noted the sexual ambivalence that characterizes the protagonists in the novels, *Georg and Ginster*; but she cautions against reading this as a "key to his own sexuality." See Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 60–65.
46. In this respect, see the discussion of the Adorno/Kracauer relationship in Heide Schlüppmann, *Ein Detektiv des Kinos: Studien zu Siegfried Kracauers Filmtheorie* (Frankfurt am Main, 1998), 11–34.
47. He still contributed articles to journals such as *L'Europe Nouvelle* and others, but he never had a stable position during his exile years in France.
48. The stated reason for his dismissal was an article that Kracauer had published in Leopold Schwarzschild's *Das neue Tagebuch*, an act that was in breach of internal protocols. However, it appears that Kracauer was fired on account of his reputation

- as a leftist and a desire to deflect attacks on the paper by limiting the number of Jews on staff. See Momme Brodersen, *Siegfried Kracauer* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 2001), 94–97.
49. Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 68–69. See Adorno's letter to Kracauer dated 13 May 1937 in *Briefwechsel, 1923–1966*, 352–59.
 50. Kracauer to Max Niederlechner, 21 February 1947, KN, DLA.
 51. Ernst Erich Noth, *Erinnerungen eines Deutschen* (Hamburg, 1971), 208–209.
 52. On Kracauer's reception of Marx, see Inka Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer—Grenzgänger*, 56–60. See more generally, Gertrud Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer* (Princeton, 2000); Michael Schröter, "Weltzerfall und Rekonstruktion"; and Helmut Lethen, "Sichtbarkeit: Kracauers Liebeslehre," in *Siegfried Kracauer*, ed. Kessler and Levin, 195–227.
 53. On the concept of political religion, see David D. Roberts, "'Political Religion' and the Totalitarian Departures of Inter-war Europe: On the Uses and Disadvantages of an Analytical Category," *Contemporary European History* 18, no. 4 (2009): 381–414; and Philippe Burrin, "Political Religion: The Relevance of a Concept," *History and Memory* 9, no. 1/2 (Fall 1997): 321–49.
 54. Mülder Bach, "Der Umschlag"; David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin* (Cambridge, 1986), 115–17; and Agard, *Kracauer*, 65–70.
 55. Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer—Grenzgänger*, 44–45.
 56. Mülder, 18. See also the comments in Thomas Y. Levin, "Introduction," *Mass Ornament*, 13–14.
 57. I am much indebted to the discussion of these issues in Pecora, *Secularization and Cultural Criticism*.
 58. Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14–18: Understanding the Great War* (New York, 2002), 113–34; and Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1995), 119–30 and 145–77; Graf, "God's Anti-Liberal Avant-Garde"; and Kurt Nowak, *Geschichte des Christentums in Deutschland: Religion, Politik und Gesellschaft vom Ende der Aufklärung bis zur Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1995), 205–42.
 59. The concept of "crisis" in the Weimar Republic and among its later historians has been the subject of recent reevaluation; see Graf, "God's Anti-Liberal Avant-Garde"; Rüdiger Graf, "Either/Or: The Narrative of 'Crisis' in Weimar History and Historiography," *Central European History* 43 (2010): 592–615; Wolfgang Bialas, "Krisendiagnose und Katastrophenerfahrung: Philosophie und Geschichte im Deutschland der Zwischenkriegszeit," in *Geschichtsdiskurs 4: Krisenbewußtsein, Katastrophenerfahrungen und Innovationen, 1880–1945*, ed. Wolfgang Küttler, Jörn Rüsen, and Ernst Schulin (Frankfurt am Main, 1997), 189–216; and the essays collected in Moritz Föllmer and Rüdiger Graf, eds., *Die "Krise" der Weimarer Republik: Zur Kritik eines Deutungsmusters* (Frankfurt and New York, 2005). For a study that emphasizes crisis as a moment of future-oriented potential, see Rüdiger Graf, *Die Zukunft der Weimarer Republik: Krisen und Zukunftsaneignungen in Deutschland, 1918–1933* (Munich, 2008), 83–134. More generally, see Reinhart Koselleck, "Some Questions Concerning the Conceptual History of 'Crisis,'" in *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Samuel Presner et al. (Stanford, 2002), 236–47.
 60. On this subject see John Willett, *Art and Politics in the Weimar Period: The New Sobriety, 1917–1933* (New York, 1996); Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as*

Insider (New York, 2001); Michael Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe, a Study in Elective Affinity* (London, 1992); and Klaus Vondung, *The Apocalypse in Germany* (Columbia and London, 2000).

61. See Kracauer's account of Paquet's speech on behalf of the *Deutsch-Südslawische Gesellschaft* in Kracauer, "Deutsch-Südslawische Gesellschaft," *FZ*, 14 December 1921, *Abendblatt*.
62. Kracauer reviewed the work by Liebert and a subsequent book by Pfeiffer-Raimund; see "Die geistige Krisis der Gegenwart" *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 51, no. 3 (March 1924) in *Werke* 5.2, 45–48; and Kracauer, "Von kommender Hochkultur," *FZ*, 7 August 1921, *Morgenblatt*.
63. Carl Christian Bry, *Verkappte Religionen* (Gotha, 1925).
64. Hannah Arendt in Anson Rabinbach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe of Catastrophe: German Intellectuals between Apocalypse and Enlightenment* (Berkeley, 1997), 9.
65. Peter Fritzsche, "Did Weimar Fail?" *Journal of Modern History* 68 (September 1996): 629–55.
66. Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York, 1992). On the cultural and social ramifications of the hyperinflation, see Bernd Widdig, *Culture and Inflation in Weimar Germany* (Berkeley, 2001).
67. Graf, "Either/Or"; and Fritzsche, "Did Weimar Fail?"
68. Nowak, *Geschichte des Christentums*, 230–35. This study's focus on the religions of the Judeo-Christian tradition should not be taken to suggest that other faiths had no presence in Europe; moreover, as will be seen, awareness of the growing popular interest in religions outside this tradition was part of the Weimar religious landscape.
69. See the study of German sociology by Harry Liebersohn, *Fate and Utopia in German Sociology, 1870–1923* (Cambridge, 1988).
70. For instance, see "Idee und Stoffgebiet der Soziologie," *Frankfurter Universitätszeitung*, 31 December 1920, in *Werke* 5.1, 108–9; and Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 20–21.
71. See Peter Fritzsche's discussion of Peukert's work in "Did Weimar Fail?" 648–49.
72. Robert Musil, *Man without Qualities* 1, trans. Sophie Wilkins (New York, 1996), 25.
73. Adorno to Walter Benjamin, 2 and 4 August 1935, in *The Complete Correspondence, 1928–1940*, ed. Henry Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge, 1999), 109–10. Adorno, of course, also advises Benjamin in these letters not to neglect the theological in favor of a crude, Brecht-influenced Marxism.
74. Modris Eksteins, "Drowned in Eau de Vie," *London Review of Books* 30, no. 4 (21 February 2008): 23–24.
75. Schröter, "Weltzerfall und Rekonstruktion," 38–39.
76. Guillaume Apollinaire, "Zone," in *Alcools: Poems by Guillaume Apollinaire*, trans. Donald Revell (Hanover and London), 2–11. The poem was first published in 1913.
77. David Pan, *Primitive Renaissance: Rethinking German Expressionism* (Lincoln, 2001), 66–79; and Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Toronto, 1989).
78. Kraus quoted in Rabinbach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe*, 31.
79. On the role of intellectuals in the crisis of Weimar, see the concluding remarks of István Deák, *Weimar Germany's Left-Wing Intellectuals: A Political History of the Weltbühne and Its Circle* (Berkeley, 1968), 222–28. Nowak also notes that among the defenders of the Republic are not the theologians of crisis, but rather

- the much maligned exponents of “cultural Protestantism.” See Nowak, *Geschichte des Christentums*, 212–15.
80. See, for instance, his strikingly idealized vision of the organic community in his 1921 review of Lukács’s *Theory of the Novel* in Kracauer, “Georg von Lukács’ Romantheorie,” *Der verbotene Blick: Beobachtungen, Analysen, Kritiken*, ed. Johanna Rosenberg (Leipzig, 1992), 82–89.
 81. See the comments in Graf, “God’s Anti-liberal Avant-Garde,” 21–24. For a nuanced interpretation of the political predilections of *Kulturkritik* see Georg Bollenbeck, “Kulturkritik: ein unterschätzter Reflexionsmodus der Moderne,” in *Philosophie und Zeitgeist im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Marion Heinz and Goran Gretić (Würzburg, 2006), 87–99.
 82. Most critical writing on Kracauer draws a distinction between his earlier years when he was influenced by a conservative “cultural pessimism,” and his later period as a more perceptive observer of modern culture. See Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer*; Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer—Grenzgänger*; Hansen, “Decentric Perspectives”; Levin, “Introduction,” *Mass Ornament*; Brodersen, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 28–35; Janet Ward has drawn attention to the motifs that Kracauer shared in common with cultural criticism from the right even late in the Weimar era, see Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley, 2001), 183–89.
 83. Kracauer to Susman, 26 July 1920, SN, DLA; and Kracauer, “Bekanntnis zur Mitte,” *FZ*, 2 June 1920, in *Werke* 5.1, 70–74; concerning the political considerations that influenced the moderate tone of this feuilleton, see Brodersen, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 32–34.
 84. On messianic thought in German Judaism, see Rabinbach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe*, 27–65; Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia*, 14–26 and 200–209; and Benjamin Lazier, *God Interrupted: Heresy and the European Imagination between the Wars* (Princeton, 2007).
 85. On the rhetoric of crisis see R. Graf, “Either/Or.”
 86. Karel Dobbelaere uses this term to describe the fragmentation of religious practice and belief. See Dobbelaere, *Secularization: An Analysis at Three Levels* (Brussels, 2002), 173–74.
 87. Kracauer, “Those Who Wait,” *Mass Ornament*, 129–40. On the occult and religious movements outside the church see Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the Modern* (Baltimore, 2004).
 88. Bry, *Verkappte Religionen*; and Thomas Nipperdey, *Religion im Umbruch: Deutschland, 1870–1918* (Munich, 1988), 143–53.
 89. Kracauer to Löwenthal, 14 January 1921, *In steter Freundschaft*, 19–20.
 90. Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics* (Ithaca, 2005), 12.
 91. See the discussion in Rabinbach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe*, 54; and Michael L. Morgan, *Interim Judaism: Jewish Thought in a Century of Crisis* (Bloomington, 2001), 43–45.
 92. The correspondence between Kracauer and Susman is fragmentary; outside of a single letter from Susman written in 1926, only Kracauer’s letters have survived, and only from 1920 to 1922. In 1925, Kracauer told Adorno that Susman had broken off their friendship because of a disagreement stemming from one of his articles, see Kracauer to Adorno, 16 April 1925, *Briefwechsel, 1923–1966*, 49.

93. See the diary entry of 17 and 18 September 1907 in Belke and Renz, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 10.
94. Enzo Traverso, "Sous le signe de l'extraterritorialité: Kracauer et la modernité juive," *La pensée dispersée: Figures de l'exil judéo-allemand* (Clamécy, 2004), 186–97; Kracauer to Simmel, 30 November 1917, in Otthein Rammstedt and Angela Rammstedt, eds., *Georg Simmel: Gesamtausgabe 23, Briefe, 1912–1918: Jugendbriefe* (Frankfurt am Main, 2008), 880–84, here 882.
95. Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer—Grenzgänger*, 18.
96. The risk of conceptualizing the conflict between secularism and religion in terms of fixed and opposed positions should be avoided. Weimar-era debates over secularization could, as in the case of Friedrich Gogarten, lead to more positive valuations within a religious framework. See the comments in Ulrich Ruh, "Bleibende Ambivalenz. Säkularisierung/ Säkularisation als geistesgeschichte Interpretationskategorie," in *Ästhetik, Religion, Säkularisierung I: Von der Renaissance zur Romantik*, ed. Silvio Vietta and Herbert Uerlings (Munich, 2008), 29–30.
97. See the essays collected in Raymond Geuss and Margaret Kohlenbach, eds., *The Early Frankfurt School and Religion* (London and New York, 2005); and Jack Jacobs, *The Frankfurt School, Jewish Lives and Antisemitism* (Cambridge, 2015), 7–42. A collection of Frankfurt School writings on religion has also been published: Eduardo Mendietta, ed., *The Frankfurt School on Religion: Key Writings by the Major Thinkers* (New York, 2005).
98. Martin Jay argued this point in "The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer," *Permanent Exiles*, 162. Also, see Adorno's 1964 essay, "The Curious Realist: On Siegfried Kracauer," *New German Critique* 54 (Autumn 1991): 159–77.
99. Tillich quoted in Modris Eksteins, *Solar Dance: Van Gogh, Forgery and the Eclipse of Certainty* (Cambridge, 2012), 84; also see Kracauer, "Religion als Gegenwart," *FZ*, 21 January 1922, *Werke* 5.1, 360–62.
100. Gareth Stedman Jones, "Introduction," to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (London, 2002), 3–187, esp. 8.
101. Miriam Hansen argued that a form of "redemptive critique" readily facilitated Kracauer's shift to mass culture and away from overtly metaphysical subjects; see Hansen, "Decentric Perspectives," 71. For a discussion of the relationship between religion and cultural criticism, see also Pecora, *Secularization and Cultural Criticism*, 25–66; a sociological view of this relationship is to be found in Niklas Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main, 2000), 309–17; and on the Marxist view of religion, see Nowak, *Geschichte des Christentums*, 110–11.
102. William H. Sewell Jr., "The Concept(s) of Culture," in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, ed. Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley, 1999), 52.
103. Hansen, "Decentric Perspectives," 53–55.
104. Jay, "Extraterritorial Life," 154; Agard, *Kracauer*, 65–70; and Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer—Grenzgänger*, 18 and 57–67.
105. Daniel Borg, *The Old-Prussian Churches and the Weimar Republic* (Hanover, 1984), 6–7.
106. Burrin, "Political Religion," 321–49; Roberts, "'Political Religion' and the Totalitarian Departures"; and Michael Burleigh, *Earthly Powers: The Clash of Religion and Politics in Europe, from the French Revolution to the Great War* (New York, 2005), 1–22. Burrin offers a compelling defense of the concept, while Michael Burleigh,

- who refers to the work of the Catholic political theorist Eric Voegelin, has also revived it in his work. For a brief statement by Voegelin see his "Ersatz Religions," in *Science, Politics, Gnosticism: Two Essays* (Chicago, 1997), 55–78. My own skepticism towards the concept derives from the material presented in this study as well as some of the problems inherent in the very term itself—can there be an apolitical religion, as the concept may imply? And how do we draw these distinctions without a definition of what religion is that most parties could agree upon? As will emerge below, the notion of political or secular religions that displaced "authentic" ones may obscure the fact that religion and radical politics were not mutually exclusive. For a critical view see Neil Gregor, "Nazism—a Political Religion? Rethinking the Voluntarist Turn?" in *Nazism, War and Genocide: Essays in Honor of Jeremy Noakes*, ed. Neil Gregor (Exeter, 2005), 1–21.
107. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago, 2005). "Theology" and "religion" are contested words in much of the writing that will be investigated here; Kracauer does not always use them in ways that suggest he had sharp distinctions between them, though "theology" inasmuch as it suggests concepts that were freed from institutional religion is often the word of choice for Kracauer by the later 1920s. He was, as will be seen, more hostile to the idea of "new churches" or political religions, but less so the persistence of theological concepts in secular society. For the purposes of this study, "political theology" as defined by Schmitt will only be used when referring to his notion of the theological origins of modern political concepts pertaining to sovereignty, while "political religion" has a wider valence.
 108. McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe*, 3–12. See also Rodney Stark, "Secularization, RIP," *Sociology of Religion*, 60, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 249–73; Callum Brown, "The Secularization Decade: What the 1960s Have Done to the Study of Religious History," in *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750–2000*, ed. Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf (Cambridge, 2003), 29–46; and Ian Hunter, "Secularization: The Birth of a Modern Combat Concept," *Modern Intellectual History* 12, no. 1 (2015): 1–32.
 109. Asad, *Formations of the Secular*. Indeed, Kracauer's critique of a normative cultural secularism in some ways anticipates the work of Asad.
 110. Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft*, 278–85.
 111. Liebersohn, *Fate and Utopia*, 1–10.
 112. Dobbelaere, *Secularization*, 157–60. The study first appeared in the journal *Current Sociology* in 1981.
 113. See, for instance, David Blackburn, "The Catholic Church in Europe since the French Revolution," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33 (1991): 778–90; and the essays collected in Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf, eds., *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750–2000* (Cambridge, 2003). On Judaism and secularism see David Jan Sorkin and Frances Malino, eds., *Profiles in Diversity: Jews in a Changing Europe, 1750–1870* (Detroit, 1998).
 114. Hugh McLeod has tried to steer a middle ground between these positions, recognizing what is valid in opposing interpretive models. It should be added that some of the classic statements of the secularization thesis such as that of Dobbelaere or Owen Chadwick's *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1975) have been aware of many of the issues raised by critics of the thesis.

115. See Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 20.
116. Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," *Mass Ornament*, 80–81.
117. Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft*, 289–314.
118. Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," *Mass Ornament*, 75.
119. Roth to Zweig, 30 August 1930, in *Briefe:1911–1939*, 175–76.
120. See the engaging memoir by his friend Soma Morgenstern, *Joseph Roths Flucht und Ende: Erinnerungen* (Köln, 2008).
121. Belke and Renz, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 94. See also, Kracauer to Max Tau, 13 May 1961, KN, DLA. Kracauer told Tau that Roth was his *graphologe*: "One evening in the Hotel Englischer Hof in Frankfurt, where we usually sat in the evenings, I recounted to Roth my experiences in the war, how I had peeled potatoes against the enemy and so forth. He laughed and laughed and told me I had to make a novel out of this . . . and so it began."
122. Kracauer to Walter Landauer, 4 June 1939, in Belke and Renz, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 94.
123. Jean-Claude Monod, *La querelle de la secularization de Hegel à Blumenberg* in Pecora *Secularization and Cultural Criticism*, 5–6.
124. This was not, however, viewed by Blumenberg as an absolute rupture as Pecora points out, see *Secularization and Cultural Criticism*, 59–61. See also Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, 1983).
125. Pecora, *Secularization and Cultural Criticism*, 5–6.
126. Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," *Mass Ornament*, 81.
127. Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept* (Berkeley, 1984), 98–101.
128. Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft*, 308.
129. Jorg Thierfelder, "Religionspolitik in der Weimarer Republik," in *Religionspolitik in Deutschland: von der frühen Neuzeit bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Kurt Nowak and Anselm Doering-Manteuffel (Stuttgart, 1999), 195–99.
130. Jürgen Habermas, "Pre-political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?" in Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco, 2006), 37–38. Habermas has also recognized the legitimate place of religion in modernity under the rubric of "postsecularism," stating that "those religious interpretations of the self and the world that have adapted to modern social and epistemological conditions have an equal claim to recognition in the discourse of modernity to the competing approaches of postmetaphysical thinking." See his "Reply to My Critics" in Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, eds, *Habermas and Religion* (Cambridge, 2013), 348.
131. On this subject see Richard Stiegmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919–1945* (Cambridge, 2002); and Karen Poewe, *New Religions and the Nazis* (London and New York, 2006).