

REVOLUTION AND THE CITY:  
MARXIST ANTHROPOLOGIES IN THE INTERWAR REALIST NOVEL

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## ABSTRACT

Nicholas David Jones: *Revolution and the City: Marxist Anthropologies in the Interwar Realist Novel*  
(Under the direction of Richard Langston)

The German Revolution of 1918-1919 failed to topple the capitalist system that interwar Marxists held responsible for World War I. For those Marxists, the interwar era's unprecedented urbanization reinstated capital's dominance, representing a counterpart to the wartime destruction. Theorists including Georg Lukács and writers such as Siegfried Kracauer, Arnold Zweig and Alfred Döblin held that the capitalist city, like the battlefield before it, distorted and diminished human nature, foreclosing the possibility of revolutionary social transformation. This dissertation argues that interwar Marxist philosophers and authors consequently turned to the realist novel; they imagined it as a poetic form of architecture that literarily reconstructed urban space to expose its capitalist foundations. The realist novel thereby empowered readers to imagine alternative spaces and emboldened them to resist by reactivating their capacities for collective action and creative transformation.

The dissertation first demonstrates that Lukács's interwar writings intervene into architectural and urban planning discourses to present the realist novel as a shelter from and a weapon against the capitalist city. Three exemplary literary works then reveal how this literary challenge to the capitalist city was imagined and reimagined as Germany's political situation deteriorated. Written during the Weimar Republic's Golden Age, Kracauer's *Ginster* (1928) depicts a destructive wartime homogenization of space that transforms both battlefield and home front. The novel resists this homogenization by mapping alternative spatial organizations intent on fostering human potentialities. Penned during fascism's rise, Zweig's *Erziehung vor Verdun* (1935) shows how urban technological progress under capitalism unleashes the very destruction that flattens the city during the war. Zweig's novel unfurls an ideal of construction capable of breaking this self-destructive cycle by reconnecting humanity's innovations with human need.

Commenced as war loomed again, Döblin's *November 1918* (1939, 1948, 1950) shows how the 1918-1919 revolution was misdirected by the urban spaces it sought to conquer. Drawing lessons from this historic failure, Döblin's roman-fleuve sketches a limitless and dialectical progression as a critical corrective to existing conceptions of revolution.

Ultimately, this dissertation uncovers a hitherto overlooked literary tradition that presents the realist novel as a critical tool for reckoning with capitalism's domination of our built environments.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES . . . . .	VIII
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
CHAPTER I. TOWARD AN ARCHITECTURE OF THE REALIST NOVEL: GEORG LUKÁCS AND THE PROBLEM OF DWELLING IN MODERNITY . . . . .	48
CHAPTER II. IN SEARCH OF AN EXIT: CONFINEMENT AND LIBERA- TION IN SIEGFRIED KRACAUER'S <i>Ginster</i> . . . . .	94
CHAPTER III. BUILDING THE REVOLUTION: ALIENATION AND RE- DEMPTION IN ARNOLD ZWEIG'S <i>Erziehung vor Verdun</i> . . . . .	142
CHAPTER IV. FLOODING THE CITY STREETS: FLOW AND FORM IN ALFRED DÖBLIN'S <i>November 1918</i> . . . . .	184
CONCLUSION . . . . .	234
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	238

## LIST OF FIGURES

1	MAX PECHSTEIN, WOODCUT FROM THE <i>Arbeitsrat für Kunst Berlin</i> PAMPHLET, 1919. . . . .	13
2	THE NEW TOWER OF BABEL: A FILM STILL FROM FRITZ LANG'S <i>Metropolis</i> , 1927. . . . .	39
3	"LASST SIE ZUSAMMENFALLEN": A DRAWING FROM BRUNO TAUT, <i>Die Auflösung der Städte</i> , 1920. . . . .	58
4	SANT'ELIA, <i>La Città Nuova</i> , 1914, INK ON PAPER, 50 X 39 CM. COMO, PINACOTECA CIVICA DI PALAZZO VOLPI. . . . .	84
5	THE DESTRUCTION OF LOUVAIN, BELGIUM, 1914 (IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUMS). . . . .	148
6	STRASBOURG CATHEDRAL, 1858 (A.D. WHITE ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHS COLLECTION, CORNELL UNIVERSITY LIBRARY). . . . .	165
7	ARMED WORKERS AND SOLDIERS ON LINDENSTRASSE, JANUARY 1919 (PHOTOGRAPH BY WILLY RÖMER. DEUTSCHES HISTORISCHES MUSEUM, BERLIN). . . . .	191
8	BERLIN'S REICHSKANZLEI AROUND 1900 (BUNDESARCHIV). . . . .	201



## INTRODUCTION

Philosophical anthropology is back. With the onset of posthumanism in the 1990s and its rejection of all things anthropocentric, Hannes Bajohr argues, it seemed as if Michel Foucault's famous expectation that "man"—as a discursive object—"would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" had been realized at last.<sup>1</sup> What Foucault did not foresee, however, was the dawning of the "Anthropocene." The reemergence of the human as an actor on a geological level, its unmistakable role in the ecological collapse that promises to define our era and beyond, has, Bajohr makes clear, necessitated a reevaluation of the human: "[Die Auseinandersetzung um den Anthropos im Anthropozän] zeigt, dass der Mensch zumindest als diskursiver Gegenstand just in dem Moment auf die Bühne der Geisteswissenschaften zurückgekehrt ist, da seine endgültige Verabschiedung schon sicher schien."<sup>2</sup> For Bajohr, then, the ongoing threat of global warming compels us to ask what the human after posthumanism looks like: does our era of climate catastrophe and mass extinction reveal that humankind is fundamentally "defined by destructive impact" or does human nature instead reveal that hope for a different future persists?<sup>3</sup>

With such questions in mind, it is worth considering the ramifications of what Kate Brown calls the "nuclear Anthropocene." "Many scientists agree that the Earth has left the Holocene behind and is now in the Anthropocene," argues a 2015 article by the Anthropocene Working

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<sup>1</sup>Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An archaeology of the human sciences* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 422. See Hannes Bajohr, "Keine Quallen: Anthropozän und Negative Anthropologie," in *Der Anthropos im Anthropozän. Die Wiederkehr des Menschen im Moment seiner vermeintlich endgültigen Verabschiedung*, ed. Hannes Bajohr (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 1–18, 2.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>3</sup>Claire Colebrook, "We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene: The Anthropocene Counterfactual," in *Anthropocene Feminism*, ed. Richard Grusin (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 2017), 6–7.

Group, “but there is less agreement about when the Anthropocene began.”<sup>4</sup> The article goes on to argue for the increasingly popular notion that, in the words of Brown, the detonation of “520 nuclear bombs [...] from 1945-1963,” the fallout from which “settled down [and] became part of ‘background’ or ‘natural’ radiation,” marks the moment when the human emerged as critical geological actor.<sup>5</sup> The Anthropocene, that is to say, arguably began on July 16, 1945, when “the world’s first nuclear device exploded at the Trinity Test Site [...] in New Mexico.”<sup>6</sup> The atom bomb certainly constitutes a powerful symbol that captures the world-altering impact of what McNeill and Engelke describe more broadly as “the Great Acceleration,” the unprecedented explosion of technological developments and technologically mediated interventions into the natural world after 1945.<sup>7</sup> The image of the nuclear weapon, that is to say, makes patently visible humankind’s capacity to massively, fundamentally, and enduringly transform its environment—and itself.

Christa Wolf’s 1987 work *Störfall. Nachrichten eines Tages* notably reflected on precisely these issues at a historical moment when the catastrophe at Chernobyl had underlined the earth-changing ramifications of human actions. Indeed, Wolf’s text arguably bears witness to the way in which the 1986 explosion at Chernobyl’s Reactor 4 and the subsequent meltdown of the reactor core belatedly revealed to a European audience the full ramifications of the Trinity Test as a geological event. Wolf’s first-person narrative, which invokes Chernobyl without naming it, certainly discerns in the accident an epochal shift: “Wieder einmal, so ist es mir vorgekommen,

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<sup>4</sup>Colin N. Waters et al., “Can nuclear weapons fallout mark the beginning of the Anthropocene Epoch?,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 71, no. 3 (2015): 47.

<sup>5</sup>Kate Brown, “Very Recent History and the Nuclear Anthropocene,” in *Altered Earth. Getting the Anthropocene Right*, ed. Julia Adeney Thomas (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 182.

<sup>6</sup>Waters et al., “Can nuclear weapons fallout mark the beginning of the Anthropocene Epoch?,” 46.

<sup>7</sup>See J. R. McNeill and Peter Engelke, *The Great Acceleration. An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).

hatte das Zeitalter sich ein Vorher und Nachher geschaffen.”<sup>8</sup> By juxtaposing the ramifications of the reactor explosion, not least the global radioactive fallout, with her brother’s ongoing brain surgery, Wolf’s narrator explores the danger and promise of technological innovation and seeks to draw lessons about humanity and its responsibility to the world and itself. In this vein, Sabine von Mering argues that although “human responsibility for climate change was not yet widely understood in the 1980s, [. . .] Wolf’s exploration of the underlying tendencies in human nature that seem to propel humanity towards catastrophe, though inspired by the Chernobyl accident, also applies to human-made ecological crises in general.”<sup>9</sup>

By the time Wolf wrote *Störfall*, she had long been interested in the relationship between poetic and scientific modes of writing and thinking. As Sonja Hilzinger tells us, *Störfall*—“als textuelles Gewebe, als Netzwerk, das eine Fülle von Assoziationen, Motiven und intertextuellen Bezügen verarbeitet”—demonstrates that Wolf had come to recognize in the “besondere, mehrdeutige und unhierarchisch aufgebaute Aussagekraft der bildhaften Sprache” an essential corrective to the “auf Eindeutigkeit und Dichotomie basierend[e] begrifflich[e] Sprache,” which seemingly dictated global geopolitical developments.<sup>10</sup> The narrator’s reflections accordingly seek to work through dominant hierarchical dichotomies, between technology and nature, men and women, mind and body, in order to reveal a human nature instead characterized by interrelations, by “Spannung und Vieldeutigkeit.”<sup>11</sup> Wolf’s work thereby searches for a “poetische Praxis” that points to alternative possibilities for humanity and is thus better able to intervene into a world shaped by scientific discourses, a poetic praxis that “sich [. . .] der individuellen und

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<sup>8</sup>Christa Wolf, “Störfall. Nachrichten eines Tages,” in *Christa Wolf. Werke, Bd. 9*, ed. Sonja Hilzinger (München: Luchterhand Literaturverlag, 2001), 44.

<sup>9</sup>Sabine von Mering, “Nature, Power and Literature: Rereading Christa Wolf’s *Störfall*. Nachrichten eines Tages as ‘Ecological Force’ in Times of Climate Crisis,” in *Christa Wolf. A Companion*, ed. Sonja E. Klocke and Jennifer R. Hosek (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 97.

<sup>10</sup>Sonja Hilzinger, “Nachwort,” in *Christa Wolf. Werke, Bd. 9*, ed. Sonja Hilzinger (München: Luchterhand Literaturverlag, 2001), 373, 374.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 376.

kollektiven (historischen) Verantwortung stellt.”<sup>12</sup> It is against this backdrop that Deborah Janson suggests Wolf was “at the forefront of the ecocritical literary movement,”<sup>13</sup> for when faced with the evidence of humankind’s capacity to radically transform its world, Wolf assigns to literature an indispensable role in redirecting and reimagining that transformation.

While Wolf’s text affirms the notion of a “nuclear Anthropocene,” examining the significance of post-1945 technological innovations for our understanding of humanity and its environment, *Störfall*’s prioritization of literary form, of “bildhafte Sprache,” simultaneously connects the event with an earlier historical precedent: namely, World War I. The “Urkatastrophe” of the twentieth century—together with the artworks it inspired—is curiously absent from discussions of Wolf’s work. The global conflict, which has tellingly been called the Chemists’ War, was itself an exhibition of humanity’s capacity for technologies of sheer destruction. It was moreover the original stage for the “unsichtbare Wolke” with which Wolf’s text repeatedly evokes the threat of airborne radioactivity, of the anthropogenic transformation of the environment.<sup>14</sup> The deployment of poison gas on the battlefields of World War I not only prefigured that later invisible cloud, but—as Peter Thompson argues—specifically anticipated the threat of “chemical death” that would come to be associated with nuclear technologies: “Until the American deployment of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, cultural visions of global apocalypse were invariably soaked in chemicals such as chlorine, phosgene, and mustard gas.”<sup>15</sup> In this way, then,

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<sup>12</sup>Hilzinger, “Störfall,” 377.

<sup>13</sup>Deborah Janson, “Unearthing a Post-Humanist Ecological Socialism in Christa Wolf’s ‘Selbstversuch’, Kassandra and Störfall,” in *Christa Wolf. A Companion*, ed. Sonja E. Klocke and Jennifer R. Hosek (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 94.

<sup>14</sup>C. Wolf, “Störfall,” 16, 81.

<sup>15</sup>Peter Thompson, “The Pale Death: Poison Gas and German Racial Exceptionalism, 1915–1945,” *Central European History* 54 (2021): 274.

the mass destruction of World War I haunts Wolf's text, with Chernobyl figuring as a recurrence and intensification not only of Trinity but also of Ypres.<sup>16</sup>

Thus gesturing both forward and backward in time, Wolf's *Störfall* ultimately connects our contemporary conjuncture with the interwar era on which this dissertation focuses. Just as, for Wolf, the Chernobyl accident triggered her search for an art form capable of interrogating human nature and the societal status quo, so too did the industrial-scale destruction of World War I precipitate manifold literary reckonings with humanity's remaking of the world, poetic interventions into the potentials and pitfalls of humankind's transformation of its environment. For the socialist authors and theorists considered in the following chapters, this entailed not ecocriticism as we understand it today, but instead the examination of modernity's built environments, not least the city and the battlefield, and their relationship to human nature.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, the following chapters attempt not to establish interwar Germany as a simple starting point for ecocritical discourses that continue today, but rather to do the work of a Foucauldian genealogy, "trac[ing] the struggles, displacements and processes of repurposing out of which contemporary practice emerged, and [showing] the historical conditions of existence upon which present-day practices depend."<sup>18</sup> This dissertation approaches interwar Germany, that is to say, as a complicating factor, a site of debates, conflicts, and experiments that challenge and

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<sup>16</sup>The first major gas attack took place on April 22, 1915, at the Second Battle of Ypres in Belgium. The German army deployed six thousand cylinders of chlorine gas over a seven-thousand-meter front, killing around one thousand soldiers and injuring thousands more. See P. Thompson, "The Pale Death," 278–281

<sup>17</sup>The term "built environment" is used throughout this dissertation. As Tom J. Bartuska argues, the term—which emerged in the 1980s and grew popular in the 1990s—acknowledges that "the environments with which people interact most directly" are never purely natural but rather "are often products of human initiated processes." The term thus denotes all the ways in which the world has been, and continues to be, remade by humans; the built environment refers therefore not to specific settlements or architectural constructs, but to "everything humanly created, modified, or constructed, humanly made, arranged, or maintained." The concept thereby points to the way in which humanity intervenes into its surroundings in order to refashion the conditions in which it exists according to its "needs, wants, and values"—and, we might add, its ideologies. See Tom J. Bartuska, "The Built Environment: Definition and Scope," in *The Built Environment. A Collaborative Inquiry into Design and Planning* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 3–14, 4.

<sup>18</sup>David Garland, "What is a "history of the present"? On Foucault's genealogies and their critical preconditions," *Punishment & Society* 16, no. 4 (2014): 373.

expand our contemporary conception of human nature as it relates to its (built) environment. Ultimately, then, in uncovering a previously overlooked interwar Marxist discourse on human nature, the modern built environment, and revolution, this dissertation seeks to invite new ways of thinking about the problematic “Wiederkehr des Menschen” in our contemporary era of looming environmental catastrophe.

### **The Battlefield and the Capitalist City**

Wolf, writing in the DDR on the eve of real-existing socialism’s collapse, sought with her work to uncover the possibility of what Janson calls an alternative “socialist utopia that would foster the full development of its citizens.”<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, *Störfall* makes visible her ongoing attempt to “break with the conventional precepts of socialist realism,” which had shaped her earlier writings, and find a literary form better able to express her utopian aspirations.<sup>20</sup> In the interwar reworking of bourgeois realism explored in this dissertation, we see a similar attempt to challenge the political and socioeconomic status quo by “push[ing] the boundaries” of literary heritage.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to Wolf, however, the authors and theorists examined here sought not to redirect a nominally socialist state that had, Wolf indicates, largely forgotten its ideals, but instead to inspire the overthrow of an increasingly hegemonic capitalist world order. Such figures connected the devastation wreaked by World War I with the immiseration in the modern metropolis and argued that both serve the interests of capital at the expense of the soldiers and workers they disfigure and destroy. As will be shown, these socialists thereby defied the dominant philosophical anthropology of the Weimar Republic, which strove to justify capitalist modernity

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<sup>19</sup>Janson, “Unearthing a Post-Humanist Ecological Socialism,” 81.

<sup>20</sup>Robert Weninger, “The Rise and Fall of Socialist Realism: The Case of Christa Wolf,” in *Landscapes of Realism. Rethinking Literary Realism in Comparative Perspectives. Vol. 1*, ed. Dirk Göttsche, Rosa Mucignat, and Robert Weninger (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2021), 752.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 759.

on the basis of human nature. Instead, they argued that human flourishing necessitated a radical remaking of capitalist society and its oppressive built environments.

The notion that capitalism was fundamentally responsible for the brutality and destruction of World War I acquired its most iconic formulation in the later years of the interwar era when Bertolt Brecht rewrote Carl von Clausewitz's mantra by describing war as a "Fortführung der Geschäfte mit anderen Mitteln."<sup>22</sup> Two decades earlier, as World War I raged, it had been central to perhaps the most famous anti-war publication of the era, Rosa Luxemburg's *Junius-Broschüre* (1915). For Luxemburg, the war was the necessary consequence of economic competition between the principal capitalist states: "Der heutige Weltkrieg als Ganzes [ist] ein Konkurrenzkampf des bereits zur vollen Blüte entfalteten Kapitalismus um die Weltherrschaft, um die Ausbeutung der letzten Reste der nichtkapitalistischen Weltzonen."<sup>23</sup> Luxemburg writes of how the wartime "Mordwerkindustrien" reproduced dynamics inherent to peacetime industry by putting the proletariat to work with an "außerordentlich hohen Technik" that furthers the interests of capital through (self-)destruction: "Hier erweist sich aber auch der heutige Weltkrieg nicht bloß als ein grandioser Mord, sondern auch als Selbstmord der europäischen Arbeiterklasse. Es sind ja die Soldaten des Sozialismus, die Proletarier Englands, Frankreichs, Deutschlands, Rußlands, Belgiens selbst, die einander auf Geheiß des Kapitals seit Monaten abschlachten."<sup>24</sup> Brecht and Luxemburg hereby express a widespread socialist conviction that reckoning with modern warfare necessitated comprehending it as an extension and intensification of tendencies already inherent to capitalism.

V. I. Lenin's work on imperialism sought to make sense of this interconnection of war, capitalism, and the remaking of the world. According to Lenin, World War I heralded a watershed moment that decisively brought to an end capital's era of colonization: "For the first time the

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<sup>22</sup>Bertolt Brecht, "Dreigroschenroman," in *Werke, Bd. 16*, ed. Werner Hecht et al. (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1988), 173.

<sup>23</sup>Rosa Luxemburg, "Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie," in *Gesammelte Werke, Bd. 4* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1974), 153.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 154, 163.

world is completely divided up, so that in the future only redivision is possible.”<sup>25</sup> Neil Smith, writing in *Uneven Development* (1984) on the implications of Lenin’s theory of capitalist imperialism, states that

as long as the absolute geographic expansion of capital continues, the contradictions which riddle the social fabric of capital can be cast in aspatial terms; space can be treated as external. When economic development is turned inward toward the acute internal differentiation of geographical space, the spatial dimension of contradiction [...] becomes more real in that space is drawn closer to the core of capital.<sup>26</sup>

Whereas “space” was previously external to the capitalist center, the object of exploration, colonization, and primitive accumulation, the internal organization of space now becomes vital to continued growth in a world wholly dominated by capitalism. The capitalist integration of the world leads not to spatial uniformity, but rather to internal differentiation, to an “uneven development” necessary for maintaining capital’s circulation. World War I thus marks a fundamental shift in the global economic organization: capitalism’s contradictions are henceforth primarily (and futilely) combated through what David Harvey calls spatial fixes, through contestations and reorganizations within a ubiquitous capitalist built environment.

This fundamental change in the capitalist relationship to space creates a threatening continuity between war and peace. Reflecting on Harvey’s *The Limits to Capital* (1982), Smith argues that urbanization and warfare represent interconnected responses to the challenges faced by imperialist capitalism; “both are functional for capitalism even if the first is systematic and daily while the second erratic and periodic.”<sup>27</sup> Their commonality derives from the tension between the shifting demands of capital and the fixity of spatial solutions: urbanization allows for a centralization of the means of production and therefore rapid capitalist accumulation, but its fixed spatial form is unable to keep pace with economic developments: “What was once a

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<sup>25</sup>V.I. Lenin, “Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism,” in *Collected Works, Vol. 22*, trans. Yuri Sdobnikov (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 255.

<sup>26</sup>Neil Smith, *Uneven Development. Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2008), 121.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 179.



dynamic built environment for production, at the cutting edge of expansion, now demonstrates its inertia.”<sup>28</sup> The problem demands a continuous reorganization through the “rational devaluation of capital and a controlled reinvestment,” something that is, however, rendered impossible under capitalist conditions by the “anarchy of free competition.”<sup>29</sup> What instead occurs are therefore periods of destruction, of “brutal devaluation”: “The rational logic of accumulation leads to utter irrationality [. . .] in which laborer and capital alike are rudely devalued.”<sup>30</sup> Capitalist urbanization and modern warfare, Smith writes, are critical tools in this process:

Urban space [. . .] not only provides an absolute space of centralized production, but an equally absolute if more hideous space which, in constraining the mobility of the proletariat, ensures and brings about the downward leveling of nature, in this case human nature. It is precisely the same with the devaluation of capital in war [. . .]. With the destruction of capital through war, massive absolute spaces are created where all of nature—human and otherwise—is leveled.<sup>31</sup>

By realizing this devaluation of labor and capital, the city and the battlefield contribute to the transformation of space required to defer capitalism’s crises.

This dissertation suggests that World War I, despite being—as John Keegan puts it—“a rural conflict,” nevertheless exemplified for interwar theorists and authors the modern co-existence of construction and destruction outlined by Smith.<sup>32</sup> Keegan is of course correct to say that both eastern and western fronts of World War I were fought in agricultural spaces and that, unlike in World War II, “no large European city was destroyed.”<sup>33</sup> Indeed, what makes World War I particularly notable in this regard is, as Nicholas Murray emphasizes, that it was characterized not by urban destruction but, in fact, by unprecedented levels of construction: “In the West, within a

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<sup>28</sup>Smith, *Uneven Development*, 178.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 179–180.

<sup>32</sup>John Keegan, *The First World War* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2000), 8.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

few months, continuous field fortification would cover an area from Switzerland to the North Sea.”<sup>34</sup> These vast and sophisticated trench networks necessitated the construction of similarly complex transportation systems to carry soldiers, weapons, materials, and food across the continent. Thus, far from flattening cities, World War I precipitated what could be described as Europe’s internal colonization, the integration of the European countryside into industrialized modernity. Tellingly, this construction project created a test site for technologies of destruction that were designed “specifically to break through these new types of deep defensive systems” and that included “the increased use of aircraft, the introduction of poison gas, the invention of tanks, the building of good roads, and the rise of reliable motorized transportation.”<sup>35</sup> The rural battlefields of World War I thereby became the stage for the development and refinement of those modern practices of construction and destruction so central to the spatial fixes described by Smith.

World War I can similarly be seen as exemplary when it comes to the human cost of the interconnection between city and battlefield under imperialist capitalism. Spatial fixes temporarily stave off the threat of capital’s contradictions, but only at the cost of greatly exacerbating the suffering and immiseration of the populace, of the “downward leveling” of (human) nature. Accordingly, the city-battlefield nexus defers economic crises while stoking longer-term social unrest. For Luxemburg, it was accordingly clear that definitively ending the war was necessarily coterminous with halting the underlying capitalist dynamics:

Der Wahwitz wird erst aufhören, und der blutige Spuk der Hölle wird verschwinden, wenn die Arbeiter in Deutschland und Frankreich, in England und Rußland endlich aus ihrem Rausch erwachen, einander brüderlich die Hand reichen und den bestialischen Chorus der imperialistischen Kriegshetzer wie den heiseren Schrei der kapitalistischen Hyänen durch den alten mächtigen Schlachtruf der Arbeit überdonnern: Proletarier aller Länder, vereinigt euch!<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Nicholas Murray, *The Rocky Road to the Great War. The Evolution of Trench Warfare to 1914* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2013), 235.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>36</sup>Luxemburg, “Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie,” 163–164.

Thus, in Luxemburg's view, just as the tensions inherent to the capitalist metropolis led inexorably to war, so too did the horrors of international warfare demand from the urban proletariat a revolutionary opposition to capitalism at home:

Der Sozialismus allein ist imstande, [. . .] die tausend blutenden Wunden der Menschheit zu heilen, die vom Zuge der Apokalyptischen Reiter des Krieges niedergestampften Fluren Europas in blühende Gärten zu verwandeln, [. . .] alle physischen und sittlichen Energien der Menschheit zu wecken und an Stelle des Hasses und der Zwietracht brüderliche Solidarität zu setzen, Eintracht und Achtung für alles, was Menschenantlitz trägt.<sup>37</sup>

At stake in the fight against the war and the capitalist city was, Luxemburg argues, the fate of humankind and (human) nature.

Luxemburg's hope for a radical transformation of capitalist society promised to bear fruit in 1917 when two revolutions in the Russian capital of Petrograd saw Tsar Nicholas II deposed and a Bolshevik government installed. Largely a response to wartime suffering and immiseration, these revolutionary events reverberated in Germany, which had in 1916 seen around 240,000 soldiers die in the futile fight for Verdun before the Turnip Winter left the German home front battling against starvation. Even prior to the mutinies in Wilhelmshaven and Kiel that initiated the November Revolution, strikes had paralyzed cities across Germany in April 1917 and January 1918. When the revolution finally arrived in early November 1918, it spread quickly from the coastal cities to the rest of Germany and soon found its center in Berlin. It was there, on the city streets of the German capital, that opposition to the war and to capitalism intersected. On November 9, the day of Wilhelm II's abdication, Karl Liebknecht gave his famous speech declaring the birth of the Free Socialist Republic of Germany. Seeking to inspire the continuation of the revolution, Liebknecht makes clear that attention must now turn from destroying the capitalist order of old to building the socialist state of the future:

Wenn auch das Alte niedergerissen ist, [. . .] dürfen wir doch nicht glauben, daß unsere Aufgabe getan sei. Wir müssen alle Kräfte anspannen, um die Regierung der

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<sup>37</sup>Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, "An die Proletarier aller Länder," in *Gesammelte Reden und Schriften*. Bd. IX. Mai 1916 bis 15. Januar 1919 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1968), 610.

Arbeiter und Soldaten aufzubauen und eine neue staatliche Ordnung des Proletariats zu schaffen, eine Ordnung des Friedens, des Glücks und der Freiheit.<sup>38</sup>

Liebknecht intimates here that a new process of construction must now begin, one not riven by the contradictions of capitalism but rather guided by humanity's longing for peace, happiness, and freedom.

This ideal of human flourishing through a radical break with capitalist urban planning played an important role in Germany's revolutionary events. The *Novembergruppe* and the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, which eventually merged in November 1919, were both founded in December 1918 to support the revolution. As Deborah Barnstone writes, both “called for unity in art, architecture, crafts, and urban planning, and for creating a bridge between artists and the common people.”<sup>39</sup> The more politically involved of the two, the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, in which influential architects like Bruno Taut and Walter Gropius played a leading role, sought to unify the arts under “den Flügeln einer großen Baukunst” driven not by capital and the profit motive, but rather by humankind's elevation: “Was ist Baukunst? Doch der kristallene Ausdruck der edelsten Gedanken der Menschen, ihrer Inbrunst, ihrer Menschlichkeit, ihres Glaubens, ihrer Religion!”<sup>40</sup> Architectural regeneration thereby promises a social and spiritual “Revolution”: “Unmittelbarer Träger der geistigen Kräfte, Gestalter der Empfindungen der Gesamtheit, die heute schlummern und morgen erwachen, ist der Bau.”<sup>41</sup> The utopian visions of the *Arbeitsrat* combined with more concrete political ambitions and—as Barnstone writes—“it sought to install artists in positions of

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<sup>38</sup>Quoted in Verena Wirtz, *Ästhetisierung. Kunst und Politik in der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus Verlag, 2021), 42.

<sup>39</sup>Deborah Ascher Barnstone, *The Break with the Past. Avant-Garde Architecture in Germany, 1910–1925* (London; New York: Routledge, 2018), 51.

<sup>40</sup>Bruno Taut, “Der neue Bagedanke,” in *Programme und Manifeste zur Architektur des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Ulrich Conrads, Walter Gropius, and Adolf Behne (Gütersloh: Bauverlag, 2013), 43.

<sup>41</sup>Bruno Taut, “Arbeitsrat für Kunst: Unter den Flügeln einer grossen Baukunst,” in *Programme und Manifeste zur Architektur des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Ulrich Conrads (Gütersloh: Bauverlag, 2013), 41–41, 42; Bruno Taut, “Ein Architektur-Programm,” in *Programme und Manifeste zur Architektur des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Ulrich Conrads (Gütersloh: Bauverlag, 2013), 38–40, 38.



Fig. 1: Max Pechstein, woodcut from the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst Berlin* pamphlet, 1919.

political power to help rebuild the German art world and its institutions, as well as German society more broadly,” tellingly demanding that “architects be installed in Government decision-making positions”: “Under the aegis of the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, the architect’s responsibility broadened exponentially to shaping every aspect of the physical environment in the new German political order.”<sup>42</sup> The interwar era began with leftist dreams of moving on from the destruction of the war by radically remaking the modern city.

It is, however, the collapse of these avant-garde visions of urban transformation, which faltered and failed together with the revolution, that provide the immediate backdrop for the considerations in this dissertation. Weimar Germany’s urban culture was defined not by Taut’s utopian ambitions but by an intensified pursuit of spatial fixes. The German Revolution gradually petered out in the months and years following the murders of Luxemburg and Liebknecht in January 1919, and the avant-garde utopianism of the *Arbeitsrat* was ultimately ignored by the new Weimar government. Many of its leading members thereafter abandoned their radical aspirations, and—as Sabine Hake tells us in *Topographies of Class* (2008)—“the revolutionary fervor of the immediate post-World War I years quickly gave way to pragmatic reform initiatives, and fantastic

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<sup>42</sup>Barnstone, *The Break with the Past*, 52, 54, 56.

visions were soon superseded by modest designs.”<sup>43</sup> As the new republic consolidated, especially after overcoming the crisis year of 1923, what had been a revolutionary surge against capitalism and its interweaving of urbanism and war turned into a renewed search for a way to ameliorate capital’s worst excesses such that the dual threat of war and revolution could be avoided. No one formulated the prevailing sentiment more clearly than the hugely influential Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier, who argued that interwar Europe faced a simple choice: “architecture or revolution.”<sup>44</sup> For Le Corbusier, the capitalist city needed to transform itself: it had to overcome the tension inherent to all spatial fixes by integrating mobility and movement into its form, and it must improve the living conditions of workers so that revolution could be forestalled. Le Corbusier thereby indicated it was possible for capitalism to have its cake and eat it: the accumulation of capital could continue indefinitely while workers’ living standards could enjoy similarly enduring improvements.

When Greater Berlin was created in 1920, becoming—with four million residents—the third most populous city in the world, the German capital quickly became emblematic of capitalist urban modernity. While, as Hake makes clear, “the trope of revolution continued to dominate architectural debates and haunt the urban imagination throughout the 1920s,” any ambition for social transformation was now tempered by Weimar’s “divided allegiances”: “the egalitarian principles of social democracy” co-existed with the pressures of “maximizing resources under capitalism.”<sup>45</sup> Ultimately, then, as Hake summarizes, “most of the architects associated with New Building remained true to their class and profession and practiced, in the bitter words of Manfredo Tafuri, ‘architecture rather than revolution.’”<sup>46</sup> This problem was memorably formulated in 1929 by the then-editor of the Bauhaus journal, Ernő Kállai. Kállai recognized the pragmatic need for

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<sup>43</sup>Sabine Hake, *Topographies of Class: Modern Architecture and Mass Society in Weimar Berlin* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 104.

<sup>44</sup>Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (New York: Dover Publications, 1931), 8.

<sup>45</sup>Hake, *Topographies of Class*, 101, 107.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 104.

construction: “niemand wird es leugnen wollen, daß wir wohnungen brauchen, daß noch unendlich viele und gute wohnungen gebaut werden müssen, um dem menschenunwürdigen wohnungselend zumal des proletariats gründlich abzuhelfen.”<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, he concluded his article “wir leben nicht, um zu wohnen” with a revision of a famous Marxian dictum: “nicht nur religion und kunst, auch wohnungen können opium sein!”<sup>48</sup> Kállai argues that the innovations of *Neues Bauen* now stood in the way of any social transformation. Modern homes—be they “luxushäuser” or “volkswohnungen,” “traditionalistisch” or “modernistisch”—ultimately served to quell revolutionary forces by providing the illusion of order: “man baut sich praktische fiktionen der ordnung und übersichtlichkeit vor, während das leben in unberechenbaren wucherungen gegen unsere konstruktion antreibt.”<sup>49</sup> Le Corbusier was right, Kállai laments, and despite the persistence of exploitative social relations, the urban populace is pacified.

The Weimar-era search for spatial fixes was crucially underpinned by influential anthropological theories that rejected any notion that the capitalist city necessarily causes the “downward leveling of human nature” and instead affirmed the capitalist city as a potentially ideal site for human flourishing. While right-wing figures like Ernst Jünger celebrated the experience of war and imagined the industrial city as its continuation, the influential theorists of philosophical anthropology attempted to defend the new republic by seeking to distance the modern city from the battlefield.<sup>50</sup> Max Scheler was perhaps the first philosopher to give impetus to this new engagement with human nature, but it is Helmuth Plessner who has become virtually synonymous with interwar philosophical anthropology. Plessner contrasts warm communities in which the individual submits to a group identity with cool societies in which individuals maintain

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<sup>47</sup>Erő Kállai, “Wir leben nicht, um zu wohnen,” in *Gesammelte Werke, Bd. 4*, ed. Monika Wucher (Budapest: Argumentum Kiadó, 2003), 89.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>49</sup>Erő Kállai, “Bauen und leben,” in *Gesammelte Werke, Bd. 4*, ed. Monika Wucher (Budapest: Argumentum Kiadó, 2003), 93.

<sup>50</sup>For a summary of Jünger’s anthropological thought, see for example George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 159–181.

distance between one another.<sup>51</sup> While the former led, for Plessner, to World War I and, in the form of left-wing and right-wing groups, threatened Germany's fledgling republic, Plessner argues that the latter is the ideal social organization. Individuals should forgo the impossible attempt to express themselves fully through group identity and instead accept the need for interpersonal distance, diplomacy, and performance: "Wir wollen uns sehen und gesehen werden, wie wir sind, und wir wollen ebenso verhüllen und ungekannt bleiben, denn hinter jeder Bestimmtheit unseres Seins schlummern die unsagbaren Möglichkeiten des Andersseins."<sup>52</sup> For Plessner, then, individualistic self-interest is not only necessary for humankind, but desirable, because it is only by keeping distance from others that individuals can realize their full capacities.

Plessner's theories have enjoyed a long afterlife, and they undergird the understanding of Weimar's urban culture outlined by contemporary theorists like Peter Sloterdijk and Helmut Lethen. In *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft* (1983), Sloterdijk attributes a valuable prescience to Walter Rathenau's *Zur Kritik der Zeit* (1912), which outlines the era's rapid urbanization: Humanity "baut Häuser, Paläste und Städte; sie baut Fabriken und Magazine. Sie baut Landstraßen, Brücken, Eisenbahnen, Trambahnen, Schiffe und Kanäle; Wasser-, Gas- und Elektrizitätswerke, Telegraphlinien, Starkstromleitungen und Kabel; Maschinen und Feuerungsanlagen..."<sup>53</sup> Rathenau suggests such relentless construction had become self-perpetuating; it "hat sich zum Selbstzweck erhoben."<sup>54</sup> To avoid becoming "nur [ein] Rädchen [dieser] entfremdeten übergroßen Maschine," Sloterdijk suggests that the interwar individual embraced Plessnerian coolness, seeking not to overthrow the prevailing social relations but rather to cynically pursue its own interests within them.<sup>55</sup> For Lethen, the city moreover

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<sup>51</sup>See Helmuth Plessner, *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft. Eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2001).

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>53</sup>Quoted in Peter Sloterdijk, *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1983), 780.

<sup>54</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*, 782.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 783.



offered a structure ideally suited for those cool strategies: traffic. In *Verhaltenslehren der Kälte* (1994), Lethen invokes the plans of Martin Wagner, the Berlin city planner, to contend that enabling the flow of traffic became the guiding principle of urban planning in Weimar Germany. This is telling, Lethen suggests, since the individual in traffic enjoys “Bewegungsfreiheit” while benefiting from the stability of a fixed and regulated system: “Der Verkehr verwandelt Moral in Sachlichkeit und erzwingt funktionsgerechtes Verhalten.”<sup>56</sup> Traffic thereby allows individuals to navigate the metropolis while shielding their individuality. For Sloterdijk and Lethen, Weimar’s capitalist cities provided the ideal conditions for Plessner’s vision of an egoistic human nature.

These Plessnerian readings of Weimar’s urban culture are, this dissertation fundamentally argues, necessarily limited, for they flatten the variform contestations of anthropology and urban planning that animated the interwar years. This dissertation calls into question such accounts by uncovering and exploring the interwar Marxist anthropologies that remained steadfast in their critique of the capitalist city even after the failure of the revolution and the avant-garde’s utopian visions. Such anthropological discourses, I argue, continued to analyze the modern city as an extension of the battlefield and as a bulwark of the capitalist order. Leftist theorists and authors of the era intimated that the relationship between city and humankind certainly was not as harmonious as Plessner suggested; instead, they argued, the modern metropolis perverted human nature: faced with the overwhelming scale of the urban environment and its dissolution of community bonds, the creative and social human being was reduced to the powerless and isolated city dweller. In response to this threat to political agency, these thinkers and writers ultimately discerned hope in literary realism. They began conceiving of the realist novel as a site of refuge, a literary space and an architectural form of poetics, that affords readers respite from the deleterious impact of the modern city. This dissertation examines novels written in interwar Germany to reveal this hitherto overlooked literary intervention into interwar urban space that deploys the realist novel as a shelter from and a weapon against the capitalist city. Within this imagined

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<sup>56</sup>Helmut Lethen, *Verhaltenslehren der Kälte. Lebensversuche zwischen den Kriegen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1994), 44, 45.

refuge, readers encountered a literary reworking of not just the city, but also the urban relations that makes visible the capitalist dynamics that underpin city life, empowers readers to imagine alternative organizations of space, and emboldens them to resist, reactivating their human capacities for collective action and creative transformation.

Significantly, the Marxist discourses on the city, human nature, and literature examined in this dissertation did not end with the fall of the Weimar Republic and the rise of the Nazis. Instead, those catastrophic events made the attempt to realize revolutionary change even more pressing. Those leftist discourses can accordingly be situated within a broader interwar struggle that bridges the Weimar and exile eras that are often treated as distinct in literary histories. For this reason, I follow Enzo Traverso's work on the concept of the European Civil War, which he uses to characterize the period from 1914 to 1945: "Framed by two total wars, the European civil war was also made up of a number of local civil wars."<sup>57</sup> Traverso's reference to civil wars between the World Wars gestures not only to the era's military conflicts, but also to a broader interwar intensification of ideological conflict in public life: "The methods and practices of trench warfare were transferred into civil society, brutalizing its language and forms of struggle."<sup>58</sup> Socialist debates on the political potential of literature certainly belong to this heated struggle over Europe's political future that played out within civil society. Shaped by the experiences of World War I and the growing threat of World War II, such discussions pervaded the interwar era: from the *Kunstlump* controversy to the experiments of *Gruppe 1925* to the theorizing of the *Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller*. They ultimately reached their famous climax with the Expressionism Debate of the 1930s. The theoretical and literary works examined in this dissertation provide exemplary case studies of this ongoing ideological struggle that began with the end of World War I in 1918 and that continued until the outbreak of World War II in 1939.

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<sup>57</sup>Enzo Traverso, *Fire and Blood. The European Civil War 1914–1945*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2016), 44.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 53.

## Marxism and Anthropology

To suggest that we can speak of Marxist anthropologies is itself a provocation. In his 1964 essay “Marxism and Humanism,” the French philosopher Louis Althusser declared that the “rupture with every philosophical anthropology or humanism is no secondary detail; it is Marx’s scientific discovery.”<sup>59</sup> Althusser intimates that Marx’s break with Feuerbachian anthropology, which had animated his early writings, decisively set Marx’s theories apart from the Young Hegelian thinkers who preceded him. Marx’s later writings built on this “scientific discovery” that there is no essential human nature, that the human is itself historical, an “Ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse.” Tellingly, however, Althusser’s intervention was no mere reinstatement of accepted fact, but a response to a twentieth-century revival of the young Marx’s anthropological thought. Against the backdrop of growing discontent with real-existing socialism, many Western thinkers argued that a focus on human nature promised to reorient Marxist theories that had been misdirected by an overemphasis on economic processes. By demonstrating that many of these contentious post-1945 discussions revisited, often unknowingly, discussions critical to the interwar discourse on the modern city, this section maps the critical tensions in Marxist anthropological thought and underlines the enduring timeliness of the interwar theories. The following reflections moreover demonstrate that interwar Marxist anthropological thought went beyond many of the debates that followed World War II: linking the interwar struggle over human nature to Georg Simmel’s theory of “the tragedy of culture,” I ultimately argue that interwar thinkers discerned a critical stumbling block that threatened to derail all hope of revolution in the relationship between human nature and its (built) environment.

When discussing Marxist anthropologies, this dissertation specifically refers to philosophical anthropology, the study of the fundamental attributes of human nature. In his monograph on Marx’s anthropology, Thomas C. Patterson distinguishes between two anthropological approaches in Marx’s writings. First, he refers to Marx’s “empirical anthropology,” which

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<sup>59</sup>Louis Althusser, “Marxism and Humanism,” in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2005), 227.

includes the fields of archaeological, biological, cultural, and linguistic anthropology: “[‘Empirical anthropology’] examines both the external characteristics of human beings and their cultural achievements, including how they communicate symbolically, the activities that define their social lives and relationships, and the material evidence for their history both social and as a species.”<sup>60</sup> Marx was certainly interested in these anthropological concerns, something made clear by both his interest in the theories of Charles Darwin and his anthropological reflections in *Die ethnologischen Exzerptheft*. The focus of this dissertation rests, however, on the other anthropological strand of Marx’s thought: “[‘Philosophical anthropology’] is concerned with the presuppositions of the various traditions of empirical anthropology, especially with what its practitioners believe to be the core features, or ontological structures, that constitute human beings.”<sup>61</sup> The reception of this Marxian philosophical anthropology, which unsurprisingly diverges significantly from Plessner’s conception of the human, was belated: the openly anthropological texts of Marx’s early work, such as the *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844*, were not published until the interwar period. Accordingly, it was twentieth-century theorists and writers for whom determining the ramifications of Marx’s anthropology for socialist politics became a central concern.

The role of philosophical anthropology in Marx’s thought evolved over the course of his life, but we can speak broadly of two approaches. In the writings of the young Marx, which here denotes those texts written before the 1845 break with Ludwig Feuerbach heralded by the “Thesen über Feuerbach,” anthropology played a critical role. As David Leopold puts it, the young Marx appeals “to the flourishing of human nature as the benchmark by which emancipation might be measured (and modern society criticised).”<sup>62</sup> In his *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*, first published in 1932, Marx formulates this idea

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<sup>60</sup>Thomas C. Patterson, *Karl Marx, Anthropologist* (London: Berg, 2009), 1.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>62</sup>David Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx. German Philosophy, Modern Politics, and Human Flourishing* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 220.

emphatically: capitalism is to be opposed because it alienates workers from the product of their labor, the activity of production, other workers, and their own human nature. The result is an impoverished humanity, a dehumanized humankind that is unable to find fulfillment through labor and suffers from an absence of community. The anthropological consequence, as Marx famously formulates it, is “die einfache Entfremdung” of all “physischen und geistigen Sinne”: “Auf diese absolute Armut mußte das menschliche Wesen reduziert werden, damit es seinen innern Reichtum aus sich herausgebäre.”<sup>63</sup> The perversion of human nature thus provides the basis for Marx’s critique of prevailing social relations, and it moreover motivates resistance, for the promise of communism is precisely the actualization of suppressed human potential, the “Aufhebung des Privateigentums als menschlicher Selbstentfremdung und darum als wirkliche Aneignung des menschlichen Wesens durch und für den Menschen.”<sup>64</sup>

With his 1845 “Thesen über Feuerbach,” however, Marx distanced himself from this anthropological approach and paved the way for the economic focus associated with his mature work. Where previously Marx followed Feuerbach in arguing that modern society alienated humanity from its nature, his Sixth Thesis now subjects even human nature to historical-dialectical development, and he argues that there is in fact no fixed human essence: “Das menschliche Wesen ist kein dem einzelnen Individuum innewohnendes Abstraktum. In seiner Wirklichkeit ist es das Ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse.”<sup>65</sup> The human, that is to say, is entirely the product of its socioeconomic environment. In the subsequent work *Die deutsche Ideologie*, Marx accordingly shifts toward an immanent critique of bourgeois society. His analysis no longer contrasts human nature as it is with human nature as it could be; instead, he exposes the distance between what bourgeois culture promises and whom it actually serves: “Die persönliche Freiheit [existiert] nur für die in den Verhältnissen der herrschenden Klasse

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<sup>63</sup>Karl Marx, “Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844,” in *Marx-Engels-Werke*, Bd. 40 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1968), 540.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 536.

<sup>65</sup>Karl Marx, “Thesen über Feuerbach,” in *Marx-Engels-Werke*, Bd. 3 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1960), 6.

entwickelten Individuen und nur, insofern sie Individuen dieser Klasse waren.”<sup>66</sup> Marx’s economic writings of the 1850s and ‘60s continue to explore this tension between ideology and social relations, between cultural superstructure and economic basis. He argues that the tension is necessarily exacerbated by contradictions in capitalist production and its consequent tendency toward crisis. Ultimately, Marx suggests, capitalism inevitably fashions both its “eigenen Totengräber,” the downtrodden proletariat, and the conditions for revolution: “Die kapitalistische Produktion erzeugt mit der Notwendigkeit eines Naturprozesses ihre eigene Negation.”<sup>67</sup>

Little attention was afforded to Marx’s anthropological thought until the twentieth century, when it emerged as a symptom of crisis within the international communist movement. For the socialist humanists of the 1950s and 1960s, for example, the anthropological thought of the young Marx offered a focal point for a reorientation of communist politics. Writing in 1957, following Stalin’s death in 1953 and Nikita Khrushchev’s famous speech at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party in 1956, E. P. Thompson argued that socialist humanism “represents a return to man: from abstractions and scholastic formulations to real men.”<sup>68</sup> Thompson rejected what he called Stalinism’s “resounding abstractions”—“the Party, Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism, the Two Camps, the Vanguard of the Working-Class”—and argued that they merely veiled the degeneration of revolutionary theory into a vulgar economic determinism in which the human is nothing more than “an appendage to the ‘instruments of production.’”<sup>69</sup> Stalinism, for Thompson, is accordingly characterized by “a colossal contempt [. . .] towards working men and women” and a corresponding “hostility to democratic initiatives in every form.”<sup>70</sup> With his notion of socialist humanism, Thompson wishes to reawaken a “faith in the revolutionary perspectives [. . .] of real

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<sup>66</sup>Karl Marx, “Die deutsche Ideologie,” in *Marx-Engels-Werke*, Bd. 3 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1960), 74.

<sup>67</sup>Karl Marx, *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Dietz Verlag, 1962), 791.

<sup>68</sup>E.P. Thompson, “Socialist Humanism,” in *E.P. Thompson and the Making of the New Left. Essays & Polemics*, ed. Cal Winslow (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2014), 53.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 53, 76.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 76.

men and women.”<sup>71</sup> Thompson invokes the Marxian notion of a “human potential” that, denied “full realisation” under existing relations, inspires resistance:

New men and women are arising who seek to create a society [. . .] where the false dialectic of class is replaced by the human quarrel between the actual and the potential, between the boundless aspirations of life and the necessary limitations of the particular, the concrete, the personal. They seek to make men whole.<sup>72</sup>

For Thompson, then, the return to human nature makes possible a reorientation of both critique and praxis, the restoration of human need and potentiality to the center of socialist politics.

Significantly, the origins of Thompson’s socialist humanism are to be found in the era considered by this dissertation. Barbara Epstein identifies Georg Lukács and his 1923 work *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* as critical not only for the emergence of Western Marxism more generally, but also specifically for the reorientation of Marxist theory toward human nature.<sup>73</sup> Lukács’s work, written and published prior to the publication of Marx’s early manuscripts, explored the Hegelian influence on Marx’s thinking and thereby anticipated the centrality of alienation for the young Marx. *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*—and in particular his essay “Die Verdinglichung und das Bewußtsein des Proletariats”—foregrounds the human cost of the capitalist economic system. For Lukács, the dominance of commodity relations means that “die Tätigkeit des Menschen sich ihm selbst gegenüber objektiviert, zur Ware wird.”<sup>74</sup> This has an “entmenschten und entmenschlichenden” effect, reducing the worker to a “mechanisiert[en] Teil” incorporated into “ein mechanisches System,” and moreover destroying “jene Band, die die einzelnen Subjekte der Arbeit bei ‘organischer’ Produktion zu einer

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<sup>71</sup>E. Thompson, “Socialist Humanism,” 53.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>73</sup>See Barbara Epstein, “The Rise, Decline and Possible Revival of Socialist Humanism,” in *For Humanism. Explorations in Theory and Politics*, ed. David Alderson and Robert Spencer (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 34–38.

<sup>74</sup>Georg Lukács, “Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein,” in *Georg Lukács Werke. Bd. 2. Frühschriften II* (Neuwied-Berlin: Hermann Luchterhand, 1977), 261.

Gemeinschaft verbunden hat.”<sup>75</sup> Especially for the worker in the modern rationalized workplace, all “die menschlichen Eigenschaften und Besonderheiten [erscheinen] immer mehr als bloße Fehlerquellen.”<sup>76</sup> In this context, as Epstein outlines, revolution means the overthrow of the prevailing relations, the proletariat’s “rejection of its own status as commodity,” which would “lead to the creation of a society in which [. . .] humans would recognise one another as fellow human beings, engaged in the common project of creating a society in which all could flourish.”<sup>77</sup> Lukács’s Marxist philosophy provided an influential model for socialist humanism that further developed the anthropological arguments of Marx’s *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte* before they were even published.

However, to read Lukács simply as a precursor to the anthropological approach of the socialist humanists overlooks his preemptive critique of that very approach and thereby oversimplifies the leftist anthropological discussions of the interwar era. While Epstein is correct to note Lukács’s foregrounding of capitalism’s impact on humankind and human consciousness, she makes no reference to Lukács’s critique of “eines jeden ‘Humanismus’ oder anthropologischen Standpunktes.”<sup>78</sup> Lukács tellingly invokes Marx’s Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach to reject an “abstrakt verabsolutierten Menschen” and all non-historical and non-dialectical anthropological points of view that “den Menschen zu fixer Gegenständlichkeit beiseite [schieben].”<sup>79</sup> Certainly, this critique could be leveled against Thompson’s socialist humanism, which—with its notion of the “whole man”—threatens to fall back into a Feuerbachian materialism. Accordingly, Lukács’s own vision for the transformation of society is spearheaded not by human nature’s rebellious search for fulfillment, “by the human quarrel between the actual

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<sup>75</sup>Lukács, “Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein,” 267, 263, 265.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 263.

<sup>77</sup>Epstein, “The Rise, Decline and Possible Revival of Socialist Humanism,” 34.

<sup>78</sup>Lukács, “Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein,” 373.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 376, 373.



and the potential.”<sup>80</sup> Instead, the reification of consciousness that Lukács describes creates the conditions necessary for a path to revolution premised on the reconciliation of subject and object: the proletariat, reduced to an object in and through the production process, is nevertheless able to reflect on the objectification of its own capacities. According to Lukács, this proletarian subject-object is able to perceive the social relations underlying capitalist society’s reified appearance, and the inevitable result is revolution. Thus, while Lukács does shift the focus to capital’s human cost, he highlights that grounding an analysis in a fixed human nature risks becoming non-dialectical and non-historical.

Lukács’s focus on human consciousness inspired manifold interwar reflections on the challenges that modernity poses for social transformation, but his Hegelian faith in revolution’s inevitability allowed him to avoid reckoning with the tensions inherent in his attempted reconciliation of the young and mature Marx. All faith in the inevitability of revolution was severely tested following the failure of the German October uprising in 1923 and the subsequent stabilization of the Weimar Republic, and Lukács’s theory of capitalism’s deformation of the human now complicated attempts to plot an alternative path to revolution. This tension was spelled out particularly emphatically after 1945 in the negative anthropology of the Frankfurt School and perhaps most explicitly in the writings of Theodor W. Adorno. According to Martin Jay, Adorno’s writings constitute “a critique of both ‘scientific’ and ‘humanist’ Marxism” that “unequivocally repudiated the anthropological elements in the humanist tradition.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, in *Negative Dialektik* (1966), Adorno underlines the ramifications of Marx’s Sixth Thesis: “Was der Mensch sei, läßt sich nicht angeben. Der heute ist Funktion, unfrei, regrediert hinter alles, was als invariant ihm zugeschlagen wird [...]. Die Verstümmelungen, die ihm seit Jahrtausenden widerfahren, schleppt er als gesellschaftliches Erbe mit sich.”<sup>82</sup> Adorno’s “negative

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<sup>80</sup>E. Thompson, “Socialist Humanism,” 73.

<sup>81</sup>Martin Jay, “The Frankfurt School’s Critique of Marxist Humanism,” *Social Research* 39, no. 2 (1972): 291.

<sup>82</sup>Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1966), 128.

anthropology” thereby dismisses the anthropological claims of Marx’s *Paris Manuscripts*, for—as Fabian Freyenhagen puts it—Adorno “tells us that we cannot know positively what the human potential is,” instead “suggesting that we can [...] only know the bads that cripple human beings.”<sup>83</sup> Adorno’s arguments challenge the socialist humanist attempt to ground revolutionary critique and praxis in human nature, for if the human is wholly historical, a product of its socioeconomic environment, the indeterminate (and undeterminable) promise of fulfilled potential could scarcely inspire a diminished humankind to move toward revolution.

Although the political pessimism underlying Adorno’s assessment of human nature had not been widespread amongst the leftists of the interwar era, the problems to which his writings gesture were critical to the discourses explored in this dissertation. There was, for example, a widespread recognition that modernity had transformed humankind and fashioned new challenges for revolutionary ambitions. This idea, already central to Lukács’s exploration of reification, was further explicated by Walter Benjamin. For Benjamin, the “Chocks und Kollisionen” central to those key sites of modernity—the metropolis and the battlefield—inspire in the modern subject emotions of “Angst, Widerwillen und Grauen.”<sup>84</sup> The “ungeheur[e] Entfaltung der Technik” thereby connects “das ‘Erlebnis’ des Arbeiters an der Maschinerie” to the soldier’s involvement in those “ungeheuersten Erfahrungen der Weltgeschichte”: “Eine Generation, die noch mit der Pferdebahn zur Schule gefahren war, stand unter freiem Himmel in einer Landschaft, in der nichts unverändert geblieben war als die Wolken, und in der Mitte, in einem Kraftfeld zerstörender Ströme und Explosionen, der winzige gebrechliche Menschenkörper.”<sup>85</sup> Benjamin outlines the ramifications in terms of “eine ganz neue Armseligkeit” that is “über die Menschen gekommen,” namely the impoverishment of “Erfahrung” such that modernity appears to the subject, recoiling

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<sup>83</sup>Fabian Freyenhagen, *Adorno’s Practical Philosophy. Living Less Wrongly* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 5.

<sup>84</sup>Walter Benjamin, “Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire,” in *Illuminationen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), 207.

<sup>85</sup>*ibid.*, 209; Walter Benjamin, “Erfahrung und Armut,” in *Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. 2.1*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 213–219, 214.

from an overwhelming and apparently autonomous environment, as a series of discrete and disconnected moments.<sup>86</sup> Richard Wolin details the wide-ranging impact of this “universal leveling of the conditions of experience”:

The onslaught of reification, initially confined to the workplace, becomes absolute and all inclusive in modern life; society in its entirety is dominated by the technical considerations of formal reason. The man on the street betrays the symptoms of this fate no less than the worker on the assembly line: the behavior of both has become strictly regimented, stripped of its individuality, and rendered homogenous.<sup>87</sup>

Benjamin’s reading of modernity notably calls into question a central premise of the Soviet Marxism popular among interwar socialists, namely the notion that humankind has an inborn capacity to transform its surroundings. Whereas Benjamin imagines the human as a product (and victim) of its modern environment, the Soviet Marxism of the period emphasized the human’s capacity for (self-)creation. Nikolai Bukharin’s influential *Historical Materialism* (1922), for example, portrays the human as a builder, an animal characterized by its constructive engagement with the natural world. Bukharin makes explicit a link between (human) history and nature, outlining a process of reciprocal adaptation: “When human society adapts itself to its environment, it also adapts the environment to itself, not only becoming subject to the action of nature, as a material, but also simultaneously transforming nature into a material for human action.”<sup>88</sup> It is on this basis that Bukharin distinguishes humans from nonhuman animals, since humankind “adapts itself not biologically, but technically, actively”: the very innovations Benjamin views as the cause of humankind’s modern predicament thus constitute, in Bukharin’s eyes, an extension of the human body, “an artificial system of organs”: “Present-day society [...] with its vast stone cities, its giant structures, its railroads, harbors, machines, houses, etc.; all

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<sup>86</sup>Benjamin, “Erfahrung und Armut,” 214.

<sup>87</sup>Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin. An Aesthetic of Resistance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 233.

<sup>88</sup>Nikolai Bukharin, *Historical Materialism. A System of Socioliogy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 111.

these things are material technical ‘organs’ of society.”<sup>89</sup> Benjamin’s emphasis on humankind as a product of its environment thus supplements and complicates Bukharin’s contention that humankind is a producer of environments.

The contrasting positions taken by Benjamin and Bukharin represent attempts to think through Marx’s anthropology at a time when non-Marxist theorists like Georg Simmel were calling into question fundamental premises of Marxist theory. Fundamental to Marx’s mature writings was the notion that the human is not only an “ensemble of social relations,” but also the producer of those social relations: humankind shapes its (social) environment and thereby fashions its own history and itself. However, as Marx famously declared in *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte* (1852), “die Menschen machen ihre eigene Geschichte, aber sie machen sie nicht aus freien Stücken, nicht unter selbstgewählten, sondern unter unmittelbar vorgefundenen, gegebenen und überlieferten Umständen.”<sup>90</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, Georg Simmel sought to revise this claim. For Simmel, the “Tragödie der Kultur” lies precisely in the tension between humankind’s creativity, the “vibrierend[e], rastlos[e], ins Grenzenlose hin sich entwickelnd[e] Leben der in irgend einem Sinne schaffenden Seele,” and the “fest[e], ideell unverrückbar[e] Produkt” of that creativity.<sup>91</sup> In modernity, humankind finds itself increasingly confronted with this overwhelming “objective life,” with “unzählige Gebilde” that burden humans and foreclose further creativity, “als ob die zeugende Bewegtheit der Seele an ihrem eigenen Erzeugnis stürbe.”<sup>92</sup> Marx’s dialectic thereby threatens to come undone, for the human’s powers of creativity diminish as the world of objects grows in strength, assuming an “Eigenentwicklung” that “noch immer Kräfte der Subjektive verbraucht, noch immer Subjekte in

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<sup>89</sup>Bukharin, *Historical Materialism*, 116, 132.

<sup>90</sup>Karl Marx, “Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte,” in *Marx-Engels-Werke*, Bd. 8 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1960), 115.

<sup>91</sup>Georg Simmel, “Der Begriff und die Tragödie der Kultur,” in *Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 12, ed. Rüdiger Kramme and Angela Rammstedt (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2001), 199.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 194, 199.

ihre Bahn reißt, ohne doch diese damit zu der Höhe ihrer selbst zu führen.”<sup>93</sup> Simmel turns Marx’s dictum on its head: men no longer make their history at all; instead, they and their history are made by the circumstances they inherit.

The full significance of the engagement with human nature in the writings of Benjamin, Bukharin, and Lukács becomes clear against the backdrop of the problem Simmel outlines. The success of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia allowed Bukharin to insist on the image of the human as builder, as the animal that transforms its environment. In contrast, the failure of Germany’s revolutionary struggles, which were faltering as Lukács published *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* and long-since over as Benjamin was writing his essays, seemed instead to affirm Simmel: for Benjamin and Lukács, the tendencies and dynamics inherent in modern technological capitalism dominated all aspects of human society and human nature to such an extent that the human’s creative-constructive capacity had been almost entirely suppressed. Tellingly, Simmel argues that it is in the modern metropolis that we see this tendency most clearly. Simmel’s “Typus großstädtischer Individualitäten”—which influenced both Benjamin and Lukács—exemplifies humankind’s modern transformation; the metropolitan man “[schafft sich] ein Schutzorgan gegen die Entwurzelung, mit der die Strömungen und Diskrepanzen seines äußeren Milieus ihn bedrohen: statt mit dem Gemüte reagiert er auf diese im wesentlichen mit dem Verstande.”<sup>94</sup> This is, as Simmel underscores, a consequence of the subject’s clash with the city as embodiment of modernity’s overwhelming objective culture:

[Das Individuum ist] zu einer quantité négligeable herabgerückt, zu einem Staubkorn gegenüber einer ungeheueren Organisation von Dingen und Mächten, die ihm alle Fortschritte, Geistigkeiten, Werte allmählich aus der Hand spielen und sie aus der Form des subjektiven in die eines rein objektiven Leben überführen. Es bedarf nur des Hinweises, daß die Großstädte die eigentlichen Schauplätze dieser, über alles Persönliche hinauswachsenden Kultur sind.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Simmel, “Der Begriff und die Tragödie der Kultur,” 219.

<sup>94</sup>Georg Simmel, “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben,” in *Gesamtausgabe, Bd.7.1* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), 117.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, 129–130.

The interrogation of human nature accordingly assumed critical importance for interwar leftists, for if Simmel was correct in arguing that urban modernism had transformed humanity beyond recognition, specifically suppressing its ability to forge its own future, then the very possibility of revolution was in jeopardy.

The consequent attempt to work through the challenges posed to revolutionary theory by anthropology thus connects the interwar left with those theorists of the 1970s and 1980s who sought to move beyond Adorno's negative anthropology. While thinkers like Lukács and Benjamin recognized that humanity's mutability threatened to become its downfall, they did not follow Adorno in abandoning their Marxist faith in the revolutionary working class; instead, they determined to think through the ramifications for the communist movement. Fundamentally, Marx's anthropology necessitated that the interwar left uncover how the human's constructive potentialities might be reactivated. In this sense, they were more akin to the theoretical tradition that emerged from the 1968 student movement and the rise of the New Left. Outlined by Richard Langston in *Dark Matter* (2020), this tradition saw 1970s thinkers like Ulrich Sonnenmann, Wolf Lepenies, and Helmut Nolte argue for an "anthropological experimentalism" that "sought to ward off definitive pronouncements in the name of defending man as an inexhaustible possibility."<sup>96</sup> This renewed interest in theories of Marxist anthropology culminated, Langston argues, in the early eighties when Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge intervened into the "unresolved anthropological issues from the West German student movement" by seeking to think through the relationship between "the anthropological young Marx and the economic mature Marx."<sup>97</sup> Thus, even as the interwar Marxist anthropologies explored in this dissertation constitute an intervention into the political particularities of the era, they also represent a forgotten contribution to discussions that retained (and retain) their significance for theorists and authors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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<sup>96</sup>Richard Langston, *Dark Matter. A Guide to Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt* (London: Verso, 2020), 111.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 112.

For the interwar attempts to think together the human as producer and product of its environment examined in this dissertation, the “dialectical anthropology” sketched by Adorno’s Frankfurt School colleague and collaborator, Max Horkheimer, offers perhaps *the* critical model. Horkheimer’s 1935 essay “Bemerkungen zur philosophischen Anthropologie” argues that philosophical anthropologists like Scheler and Plessner were laboring under a fundamental misconception: in attempting to uncover a transhistorical human nature, they merely essentialize phenomena and behaviors specific to their contemporary socioeconomic conjuncture. The anthropologists’ attempt to reveal how all aspects of human society result from a “Grundstruktur des Menschseins” is accordingly “unmöglich,” for it presumes a process of cause and effect that begins from a fixed and abstract human nature in order to explain real-world social structures.<sup>98</sup> What it thereby overlooks, Horkheimer indicates, is precisely the way in which “human nature” is mutable; it is shaped—as Marx’s Sixth Thesis intimates—by the interaction between human and environment:

Der gesellschaftliche Lebensprozeß, in dem [Gruppen] entstehen, verbindet menschliche und außermenschliche Faktoren; er ist keineswegs bloß Darstellung oder Ausdruck des Menschen überhaupt, sondern ein fortwährender Kampf bestimmter Menschen mit der Natur. [. . .] Die menschlichen Qualitäten werden somit fortwährend durch verschiedenartigste Verhältnisse beeinflußt und umgewälzt.<sup>99</sup>

The ramifications of this critique for an understanding of the human’s relationship with the city are significant, since Horkheimer suggests that what Plessner takes to be proof of humankind’s compatibility with the modern city is, in fact, proof that modernity’s urban societies have transformed the human, producing a new kind of human nature.

Significantly, Horkheimer argues that human nature can nevertheless offer orientation points for revolutionary critique and praxis. Horkheimer is willing to acknowledge certain enduring human traits, specifically the “Sehnsucht nach Glück und Freiheit” and “der Schrecken des

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<sup>98</sup>Max Horkheimer, “Bemerkungen zur philosophischen Anthropologie,” in *Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 3* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1988), 251.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*, 250.

Todes.”<sup>100</sup> The “Bild des künftigen Menschen,” the “bestimmtes Ideal” implicit in these traits is no “Urbild,” however; it is no transhistorically fixed notion of “man made whole.” Instead, the ideal is itself historical, one that is a “von seinen Trägern selbst als durch die gegenwärtigen Verhältnisse bedingte, mit ihnen selbst vergängliche Zielvorstellung.”<sup>101</sup> What Horkheimer thereby gestures toward is not a sudden reversal of alienation such that a de-alienated humankind emerges, but instead a dialectical process of self-transformation in which the ideal of de-alienated humankind provides an orientation point that changes together with human nature. Crucially, Horkheimer argues that this process of self-transformation is necessarily also a process of social transformation, for recognizing those fundamental human needs necessitates acknowledging the failure of existing social relations to meet them, it “setzt die Erkenntnis des Mißverhältnisses von Bedürfnissen und Kräften der Gesellschaft einerseits und ihrer gesamten arbeitstechnischen und kulturellen Organisation andererseits voraus.”<sup>102</sup> Horkheimer’s dialectical anthropology thus aspires not to pseudo-scientific neutrality, but rather aims to expose the “Not der Gegenwart” and the necessity of the “Kampf um ihre Beendigung”: “Sein Ziel ist die Anpassung des gesellschaftlichen Lebens an die Bedürfnisse der Allgemeinheit, eine Gesellschaftsform, in der die Menschen ihre Arbeit bewußt für ihre eigenen Interessen und Zwecke organisieren und immer aufs neue damit in Einklang bringen.”<sup>103</sup>

Horkheimer’s sketch of a dialectical anthropology provides a blueprint for grasping the human as both product and producer of its environments, for critically engaging with a dystopian present while retaining hope for a utopian future. It is an approach evident in all three of the literary works considered in this dissertation: despite their diverse influences and aims, Siegfried Kracauer, Arnold Zweig, and Alfred Döblin share the conviction that those interconnected sites of

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<sup>100</sup>Horkheimer, “Bemerkungen,” 259, 253.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 259.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 253.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 253.



modernity, the capitalist city and the battlefield, threaten to ensnare a brutalized human nature in a cycle of exploitation and violence. For all three, escaping this cycle necessitates reflection on the ways in which the human shapes its environment and is, in turn, shaped by that environment. While there are critical differences in the authors' respective diagnoses of the problem and their visions of potential solutions, it is clear to them all that solving the problem outlined by Simmel's tragedy of culture is a prerequisite for overcoming the threats of capitalism and fascism, as well as for realizing a socialist transformation of society.

### **Architecture and the Realist Novel**

In *Miniature Metropolis* (2015), Andreas Huyssen positions Horkheimer's philosophical essays of the 1930s in close proximity to literature. Highlighting the influence of "the aphoristic writings of such anti-systemic philosophers as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche," Huyssen identifies an interwar tendency that saw "philosophy becoming ever more literary" and the emergence of "highly condensed short prose that self-consciously merged conceptual and metaphoric language."<sup>104</sup> This literary approach to philosophical questions was exemplified in the relationship between "modernist literature and critical theory, whose major figures contributed compellingly to this literary project" and Huyssen mentions Horkheimer explicitly in this context, pointing to the philosopher's "aphoristic reflections on morality, values, and the right life that were collected in the volume *Dämmerung* of 1934."<sup>105</sup> The reason for this coalescence of literature and philosophy was, Huyssen contends, literature's capacity for engaging productively with "the disorienting and exhilarating novelty of the metropolis at the end of the nineteenth century and the immediately following decades."<sup>106</sup> The "metropolitan miniatures" on which Huyssen focuses "sought to capture the fleeting and fragmentary experiences of metropolitan life,

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<sup>104</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *Miniature Metropolis. Literature in an Age of Photography and Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 14–15.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

emphasizing both their transitory variety and their simultaneous ossification.”<sup>107</sup> For Huyssen, such literary mediation of modernity thereby offers unique insights into the “urban condition,” into “urban realities that become visible only in their poetic and narrative metamorphoses—that is, in language.”<sup>108</sup> Reckoning with the modern built environment, Huyssen’s work suggests, could not be achieved through philosophy alone. Literature was required.

Although Huyssen engages specifically with the literary miniature, a similar attempt to wrestle with the capitalist city in interwar realism is the focus of this dissertation. In his work *Realism After Modernism* (2012), Devin Fore argues that realist artists sought to adapt to the conditions of modernity: “The critical dismissal of interwar realism as merely an aesthetic restoration underestimates the degree to which the reappearance of older artistic devices in this period was an active and deliberate strategy to expropriate the capital of the ‘cultural heritage.’”<sup>109</sup> In Fore’s account, interwar realism represented a return inasmuch as it was a “rehumanization of art,” a turn away from modernist experimentation in favor of a renewed focus on the human: “The human body started to reappear [. . .] in diverse forms of narrative prose as well, where modernist authors renounced their previous experimental ephemera and [. . .] now set about writing novels populated with vivid and individuated characters.”<sup>110</sup> This realism necessarily differed from earlier instantiations, however, precisely because—as we have seen—the modern environment threatened to overwhelm those “vivid and individuated characters.” Paraphrasing the interwar author Erik Reger, Fore states that “Modern industrial and commercial networks [. . .] had become so complex that it was no longer possible to locate individual actors within this infinitely elaborate system of trusts and filiations.”<sup>111</sup> Thus, when

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<sup>107</sup>Huyssen, *Miniature Metropolis*, 2.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>109</sup>Devin Fore, *Realism after Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 10.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, 6, 1.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, 79.

Fore tells us that “man was back,” he is referring to an unstable, mutable vision of the human; he rejects “the heuristically useless distinction between ‘authentic’ human nature and ‘inauthentic’ technical construct” in order to suggest that realism sought to work through the ramification of humankind’s entanglement with its modern environments.

This dissertation builds on the insights of Huyssen and Fore by considering the interwar realist novel not just as a tool for thinking through the modern built environment, but as a direct intervention into that environment. The following chapters contend that, in the eyes of interwar theorists and authors, this literary counter-architecture appeared as a tool uniquely capable of combating capitalism’s deformation of the human and overcoming the modern built environment’s obstruction of revolution. As will be shown, the novels by Kracauer, Zweig, and Döblin reconstruct existing architecture in their literary works in order to critique and expose it, and they thereby seek to reveal the necessity and potential for real-world revolutionary transformation. The novels turn architecture into literature in the hope that their literature might ultimately become architecture.

The interwar authors and theorists considered in what follows thereby contributed to a long history of comprehending literature as a form of architecture. We find a famous reflection on this relationship in Victor Hugo’s 1831 work *Notre-Dame de Paris*. The premise is that while both architecture and literature are examples of what Simmel describes as objective culture, human thought expressed in physical form, the latter had supplanted the former as the dominant form of such expression. The chapter’s title, “This Will Kill That,” accordingly refers to the death of architecture at the hands of the written word:

Here was a premonition that human thought had advanced, and, in changing, was about to change its mode of expression, that the important ideas of each new generation would be recorded in a new way, that the books of stone, so solid and enduring, was about to be supplanted by the paper book, which would become more enduring still. [. . .] That one art would dethrone another art. It meant: Printing will destroy architecture.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, trans. Walter J. Cobb (New York: Signet Classic, 2001), 175.

Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, "the greatest event in history," triggered a "fundamental change in mankind's mode of expression," one that was "not only more durable and more resistant than architecture, but also simpler and easier."<sup>113</sup> Architecture, stripped of its original expressive impulse, was reduced to pure functionality, becoming a mere "specter," "a shadow" of its former self.<sup>114</sup> The era of architecture was accordingly over, once and for all:

Architecture is dead, irrevocably dead, killed by the printed book, killed because it is less durable, killed because it is more costly. [. . .] Architecture will never be the social, collective, dominant art it was. The great poem, the great structure, the great masterwork of humanity will never again be built; it will be printed.<sup>115</sup>

Henceforth, Hugo's text intimates, the fate of humankind, its knowledge and self-expression, will be bound up with the written word.

Even as Hugo elucidates this story of progression and change, however, his chapter underscores important continuities. Even before its replacement by books, architecture is imagined as "the principal, universal form of writing," "a vast book" that comprised "those books called edifices," that is, "books of stone." It was through construction that humankind both expressed and recorded its "great ideas," inscribing them into stones that resignified the earth: "Architecture began like writing. It was first an alphabet. A stone was planted upright to be a letter and each letter became a hieroglyph. And on every hieroglyph there rested a group of ideas, like the capital of a column."<sup>116</sup> The victory of the written word over architecture is thereby portrayed as the victory of one form of writing over another. Tellingly, however, Hugo's chapter ends with a passage that indicates the inverse also holds true, namely that the written word can be understood as an architectural form:

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<sup>113</sup>Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, 182.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, 175.

If we try to form a collective picture of the combined results of printing down to modern times, does not this total picture seem to us like an immense structure, having the whole world for its foundation, a building upon which humanity has worked without cease and whose monstrous head is lost in the impenetrable mist of the future?<sup>117</sup>

These final passages complicate any simplistic notion of progress, gesturing instead toward a continuity grounded in humankind's endless (and futile) drive toward self-expression. Products of the printing press represent a "prodigious building" that necessarily "remains forever incomplete": "The press, that giant engine, incessantly gorging all the intellectual sap of society, incessantly vomits new material for its work."<sup>118</sup>

Hugo ultimately invokes Babel to suggest that the interconnection of literature and architecture, their shared origin in the pursuit of self-expression, speaks to a longing for harmony between humanity and its environment. Hugo concludes his ambivalent depiction of literary architecture with a reference to the Biblical story: "Here, too there is a confusion of languages, untiring labor, incessant activity, a furious competition of all humanity, a promised refuge for the intelligence against another deluge, against another submersion by the barbarians. It is the second Tower of Babel of the human race."<sup>119</sup> While the invocation of Babel seemingly underscores the futility of humankind's search for self-expression, it also plays with the ambiguity inherent to the story of the Tower of Babel. As David Spurr points out in *Architecture and Modern Literature* (2012), "If, according to Judeo-Christian doctrine, the story should teach us humility before the will of God, it also fails to suppress a counterdoctrinal motif that affirms the possibilities of human solidarity based on a common language that renders humanity capable of constructing its own future."<sup>120</sup> Spurr here contends that Babel speaks not only to self-destructive hubris, but in fact also reveals humankind's latent capacity for God-like powers of creation. This constructive

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<sup>117</sup>Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, 187.

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>120</sup>David Spurr, *Architecture and Modern Literature* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 11.

potential is bound up with linguistic possibility, for Babel is predicated on a shared language that the tower's architecture, in turn, expresses. Babel thus represents the dream of an architectural-linguistic mode of self-expression that endows humankind with God-like powers of creation and transformation. Humanity's striving for this unrealized power to radically remake the world seemingly underlies Hugo's invocation of architecture as literature and literature as architecture.

The dream of a unified humankind forging its own future clearly lends sociopolitical implications to the story of Babel. These implications were certainly of interest to interwar culture, and they were notably explored in the era's most famous film, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927). Babel is ubiquitous in Lang's work with the depicted city appearing as a modern city of Babel with a tower, The New Tower of Babel, at its center. Set in the year 2000, *Metropolis* depicts the futuristic New Tower of Babel as the product not of a unified humanity, however, but of modernity's technological innovations. Accordingly, when Maria relates a secularized version of the Babel story to the city's workers, it is class divisions that condemn the project to failure. No longer is it a vengeful deity who punishes humankind's hubristic desire for transcendence; instead, Maria tells of the visionary architecture of a ruling elite that is ultimately brought down by a revolt of the exploited workers tasked with constructing it. This narrative notably mirrors that of the film, which ends with the collapse of the New Tower of Babel during a workers' uprising; as Anton Kaes puts it, the Babel narrative "condenses the message of the entire epic into a three-minute parable" that warns of the self-destructive consequences of "discord and rebellion."<sup>121</sup> Significantly, then, against the backdrop of a technological modernity, *Metropolis* reimagines the sociopolitical stakes of the Babel story: the dream of an architecture that embodies the God-like creative powers of a unified humankind is perverted by the domination of one class by another. Babel comes to stand for a dream of humankind's self-elevation undermined by the alienation of workers from the (architectural) products of their labor.

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<sup>121</sup> Anton Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema. Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 188.



Fig. 2: The New Tower of Babel: A film still from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, 1927.

Lang resolves the problem of class domination with the infamous handshake that concludes the film. This utopian ending replaces the vertical hierarchy of domination embodied by the New Tower of Babel with the horizontality of the handshake, the symbol of an unlikely and ambiguous parity between exploiters and exploited. While the dream of Babel is thereby abandoned at the diegetic-architectural level, the largely unmotivated conclusion of *Metropolis* is scarcely explicable without reference to Lang's comments on the medium of film as a substitute for Babel: "Through the silent speech of its moving images, in a language that is equally understood in all hemispheres, film can make an honest contribution to repairing the chaos that has prevented nations from seeing each other as they really are ever since the tower of Babel."<sup>122</sup> Because the silent film is accessible across languages, Lang here suggests, it is not limited by national borders or linguistic difference. The "silent speech" of film endows the medium with a truly universal language that, according to Lang, promises to reverse God's vengeance on the builders of Babel,

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<sup>122</sup>Fritz Lang, "Looking toward the Future: On the Occasion of the Paris Congress," in *The Promise of Cinema. German Film Theory 1907–1933*, ed. Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael Cowan, trans. Sara Hall (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 509.

the confounding of language and the scattering of peoples. *Metropolis* thereby positions itself as a filmic counter-architecture to The New Tower of Babel; Lang imagines it as an artistic intervention into the modern technological city that makes possible sociopolitical transformation. It is arguably for this reason that *Metropolis*'s ending takes its implausible course, for the final scenes imagine the realization of the promise Lang attributes to cinema, an uncritical and instantaneous on-screen heeding of the film's own reconciliatory and anti-revolutionary message.

While his anti-revolutionary fantasy bore little appeal to the leftist writers at the heart of this dissertation, Lang's exploration of the interrelation between art, architecture, and social transformation was symptomatic of a broader interwar tendency. In his 2019 work *Architektur aus Sprache*, Roland Innerhofer situates Fritz Lang's film (and Thea von Harbou's novel) within a primarily literary entanglement with architecture during the Weimar period. Innerhofer

geht von der [...] Annahme aus, dass in der Zeit der klassischen Moderne [...] das Eindringen architektonischer Ästhetik, architektonischen Denkens und architektonischer Modelle in literarische Texte ebenso evident und unabweisbar wird wie das Einfließen literarischer und rhetorischer Modelle in die Theorie und Praxis des architektonischen Planens und des Bauens.<sup>123</sup>

In this context, Babel as an image that encapsulates both the promise and dangers of modern architecture reflects interwar art's "verschiedenartig[e] und oft ambivalent[e]" responses to "die Entfesselung architektonischer Visionen," namely "einerseits [...] eine Allianz mit der Architektur beim Entwurf neuer künstlicher Paradiese; andererseits [...] Inversionen, bei denen die Macht der Architektur zu Angstträumen der Überwachung in neuartigen Raumregimes mutierte."<sup>124</sup> Lang's ambivalent Babel reflects this fundamental tension in the relationship between art and architecture that pervaded the period: the fear that architectural developments threatened a repeat of humankind's hubristic downfall, its subjugation to its own creations,

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<sup>123</sup>Roland Innerhofer, *Architektur aus Sprache. Korrespondenzen zwischen Literatur und Baukunst 1890–1930* (Berlin: Eric Schmidt Verlag, 2019), 31.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.



coexisted with the hope that a unification, an “Allianz,” of artistic vision and architectural potential could make possible a utopian future.

Both Hugo and Lang gesture toward the power of language as architecture, to what Innerhofer describes as an “Architektur aus Sprache,” and it is accordingly necessary to ask how exactly we are to understand this notion when it comes to the interwar realist novel. Explorations of the literature’s entanglement with architecture have taken many forms: while, for example, Innerhofer demonstrates the significant influence of architectural discourse and praxis on literature, Gerhard Neumann and Julia Weber delineate the metaphorical, symbolic, and allegorical roles that literary portrayals of architecture can assume.<sup>125</sup> However, it is Anna Kornbluh’s recent contributions to New Formalist discourse that offer us a model for comprehending literature as architecture. Kornbluh’s 2019 work *The Order of Forms* pushes back against the notion of realism as representation, rejecting “today’s hegemonic consensus that literature is information, and that the task of the critic is to tabulate information, correlating work to cause, word to referent, with ever more granularity.”<sup>126</sup> Instead, Kornbluh builds on the theories of Henry James and Fredric Jameson to define literary realism as a form of (architectural) modeling, thereby “privileging realism’s drafting and projecting of worlds.”<sup>127</sup> Fundamentally, Kornbluh argues for an approach to realism that comprehends “form as space,” attending to “the volumes produced by a work, the force field it generates, the integral fusion of its elements with one another that enables it to be perceived as a contoured whole.”<sup>128</sup> In this sense, “the production

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<sup>125</sup>See Gerhard Neumann and Julia Weber, “‘Lebens- und Liebesarchitekturen’. Zur Fragestellung und Konzeption des Bandes,” in *Lebens- und Liebesarchitekturen. Erzählen am Leitfaden der Architektur*, ed. Gerhard Neumann and Julia Weber (Freiburg i.Br.: Rombach Verlag, 2016), 9–30.

<sup>126</sup>Anna Kornbluh, *The Order of Forms: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 16.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

of realistic aesthetics” is inherently architectural: “Realism is not the index of fact but the house of fiction; not reference, not evidence, not representation; realism is architecture.”<sup>129</sup>

Underlying Kornbluh’s investment in the interrelation of literary realism and architecture is a notion of “political formalism.” In her 2015 monograph *Forms*, Caroline Levine understands form as “all shapes and configurations, all ordering principles, all patterns of repetition and difference. [...] It is the work of form to make order. And this means that forms are the stuff of politics.”<sup>130</sup> Levine argues for the ubiquity of form in our social and political surroundings and, accordingly, the necessity of reckoning with it: “Too strong an emphasis on forms’ dissolution has prevented us from attending to the complex ways that power operates in a world dense with functioning forms.”<sup>131</sup> Kornbluh follows Levine in rejecting “the lure of formlessness,” instead arguing for a “political formalism” that recognizes forming as “a value unto itself: a value that animates literature”: “Contrary to the destituent paradigm’s ideal of formlessness, a formalism of the political avouches the constitution and agency of forms, underscoring that life itself essentially depends upon composed relations, institutions, states.”<sup>132</sup> In Kornbluh’s view, the pressing task in a world necessarily organized by forms is ultimately not just critique and deconstruction, but instead “the work of building—not just resisting but reconstituting; not just just breaking forms but building new ones; not just performative disruption but scaled construction—founds affirmative orders.”<sup>133</sup> That is to say, the prevalence of forms demands that the exposure of unjust existing orders must coincide with constructive attempts to fashion alternatives.

It is precisely this invaluable “work of building,” of engaging with what currently exists while giving shape to new forms of human sociability, that both architecture and realism promise

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<sup>129</sup>Kornbluh, *The Order of Forms: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space*, 54.

<sup>130</sup>Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 3.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>132</sup>Kornbluh, *The Order of Forms: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space*, 4.

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

to perform. On the one hand, architectural projects are constrained by real-world limitations: “Architecture often attenuates its imaginary, relenting to the exigencies of engineering, subjectivizing material, financial, political, cultural limits.”<sup>134</sup> A sociopolitical utopianism nevertheless inheres in architecture’s promise of transformation:

Architecture’s spatializing of the possible and reconfiguring of the political [are] the foundations of its intrinsic utopianism. [. . .] Not only is architecture utopian, but utopia is essentially architectural, for it is nothing other than the ‘anticipation of a space adequate for human beings.’ [. . .] Architecture does not represent, depict, denote, or refer—it rather takes place, makes space, composes shape, inaugurates contour; it negates and exceeds what exists.<sup>135</sup>

Situated at the intersection of reality and possibility, architecture is beholden to prevailing relations and yet it gestures to the potential for something else, thus “delineating extant constellations, exposing the artifice and contingency of constellation as such, precipitating other spaces.”<sup>136</sup> This is also true of realism, Kornbluh argues, for “the encounter with limits, [. . .] that endorsement of temporal, physical, social limits [. . .] distinguishes realism from romance and science fiction.”<sup>137</sup> Like architecture, realism nonetheless “does not reify the extant order of things”; instead, through its (re-)construction of a world, it is able to intervene into reality, exposing the arbitrariness of what exists and building toward what could yet be. Kornbluh accordingly pleads that we view realism as “figurative, as spatially inventive world-mapping but also world-making, as [. . .] projective modeling, as critical in its very negation of the already made, its very exceeding of what exists, as utopian in its very exertion to build something else.”<sup>138</sup>

This combination in literary realism of world-mapping and world-making, of critique and construction, was invaluable to the interwar Marxist discourses explored in this dissertation. The

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<sup>134</sup>Kornbluh, *The Order of Forms: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space*, 42.

<sup>135</sup>*Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.*, 55.

novels by Kracauer, Zweig, and Döblin literarily reconstruct their contemporary society together with its threatening and overbearing built environments in order to gesture toward the potential for its transformation. In this way, they follow Lang in depicting modern-day Babels, vast human-made environments in which humanity is separated from the (architectural) products of its labor with dystopian results. But whereas Lang ultimately makes his filmic appeal for peace and diplomacy, the authors considered in the following chapters retain a conviction that the dangers of the prevailing order demand a more fundamental social transformation. Even as they attack the capitalist metropolis, therefore, they simultaneously uphold Babel's utopian aspect, sketching a united humanity that overthrows class society and reconstructs the world in its own image. The works of Kracauer, Zweig, and Döblin thereby return us to the ambiguous interrelation of architecture and literature depicted by Hugo: the realist novels in question confront their contemporary built environment with their works' literary architecture, but they do so in order to underscore the necessity of and potential for real-world reconstruction.

## **Chapter Overview**

Chapter I of this dissertation, "Toward an Architecture of the Realist Novel: Georg Lukács and the Problem of Dwelling in Modernity," establishes the theoretical stakes of the project by reinterpreting Georg Lukács's writings, from *Die Theorie des Romans* (1916) to *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* (1923) to his essays on realism from the 1930s, as a response to the era's problems of architecture and urban planning. Leftist architects and theorists of the period argued that the modern built environment transformed humankind, beautified capitalist modernity, and suppressed revolutionary resistance, but they struggled to theorize or enact a coherent response. The chapter argues that Lukács outlines the realist novel as a potentially critical tool in this context, a unique form of architecture that is able to expose the underlying dynamics of the capitalist city. For Lukács, the realist novel is capable of bringing the reader into connection with the outside world while ensuring they are not overwhelmed by it. Such a reader moreover gains insight into the way in which what appears to be an immutable second nature is in fact the product

of human hands. What results, according to Lukács, is a revolutionary consciousness that discerns and seeks to act upon humanity's collective ability to transform its surroundings.

The three literary works I thereafter examine reveal how this novelistic capacity to inspire resistance to the city was imagined and reimagined as the political situation in interwar Germany rapidly worsened. Inevitably, Lukács is ubiquitous in all three chapters, just as he was ubiquitous in the relevant discussions amongst the interwar Marxist left. Nevertheless, the chapters serve not simply to affirm Lukács's theories but instead to show, on the basis of three exemplary case studies, how authors responded to the problems set out by the philosopher and how they thereby complicated and further developed the Lukácsian conception of literature's relationship to the built environment. All three writers—Siegfried Kracauer, Arnold Zweig, and Alfred Döblin—return in their novels to those emblematic scenes of capitalist modernity, World War I and the capitalist city, to make sense of the revolutionary failures of the past and to outline the utopian potential of a literary counter-architecture.

In Chapter II, "In Search of an Exit: Confinement and Liberation in Siegfried Kracauer's *Ginster*," I argue that Kracauer's 1928 novel, written during Weimar's Golden Age, depicts a wartime homogenization of space that transforms both battlefield and home front. Kracauer connects this obliteration of spatial alterity to the suppression of individuality in the wartime community, invoking Helmuth Plessner's critique of a *Gemeinschaft* that promises harmony between the individual and the collective but actually eliminates the possibility of individual self-expression. Kracauer nevertheless pushes back against Plessner's celebration of *Gemeinschaft*'s counterpart, *Gesellschaft*. Kracauer points to a continuity between the wartime community and Weimar Germany's society that results from the persistence of class divisions. Accordingly, Kracauer sketches the need for a more radical reshaping of society. Pushing back against the focus on totality in Lukács's *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* and drawing inspiration from Ernst Bloch's writings, Kracauer sees utopian potential in *Ginster*'s playful and non-confining architectural designs, even as those sketches remain powerless to affect reality. Ultimately, the novel's open-ended form takes up the self-expressive playfulness of *Ginster*'s

drawings, integrating it into a literary counter-architecture that also underlines the necessity of social transformation.

In Chapter III, “Building the Revolution: Alienation and Redemption in Arnold Zweig’s *Erziehung vor Verdun*,” I contend that Zweig’s 1935 novel, written as the fascist era dawned, recognizes in the interrelation of city and battlefield a self-destructive dynamic: the very technological progress the city makes possible ultimately unleashes a human-made destructive power that, manifested in the war, turns on the city itself. Combining insights from both Marx and Gustav Landauer, *Erziehung vor Verdun* suggests that capitalism’s alienation of the human from its natural proclivity for creative (self-)transformation is to blame for this misdirection of technological innovation. Perhaps surprisingly, Zweig discerns a model for an alternative and utopian relationship between the human and its environment in the Gothic cathedral, which was subject to renewed interest at the start of the twentieth century. Zweig portrays the cathedral as a human-made construct that simultaneously affirms humanity’s collective capacity for God-like creativity and humankind’s rootedness in a natural world characterized by chance and unpredictability. With *Erziehung vor Verdun*, Zweig seeks to reproduce this cathedraic model in literary form, crafting a rigorous critique of capitalist modernity while foregrounding that meaningful change is possible only if humanity embraces the contingencies of (its own) nature.

In Chapter IV, “Flooding the City Streets: Flow and Form in Alfred Döblin’s *November 1918*,” I show that Döblin’s multi-volume novel (1939, 1948, 1950), on which he began working as war loomed once again, characterizes the post-war chaos by its tsunami-like destruction of physical borders: the revolution surges through Berlin, breaking through the walls of prisons and penetrating into the spaces of power. However, Döblin’s work also underlines the critical weakness of this surging revolutionary flow, the way in which even as it enters into previously inaccessible spaces, it finds itself ultimately directed and confined by them. Influenced by the Marxist theorist Karl Korsch, Döblin suggests this problem of revolutionary flow and architectural stasis reveals the loss of humankind’s erstwhile “Zwitterstellung”: where humanity once shaped its environment and was, in turn, shaped by that environment, the revolution’s failure

underlines the loss of this position and, with it, the possibility of dialectical progression. For Döblin, then, a successful revolution must reactivate the human's twofold positionality, and Döblin's *November 1918*, written in the French tradition of the roman-fleuve, seeks to model the requisite reconciliation of flow and form, to realize a (literary) structure able to make space for ongoing development and change.

## CHAPTER I. TOWARD AN ARCHITECTURE OF THE REALIST NOVEL: GEORG LUKÁCS AND THE PROBLEM OF DWELLING IN MODERNITY

The influential expressionist architect Bruno Taut begins his utopian sketch of the future city, *Die Stadtkrone* (1919), with a bitterly sardonic parable by Paul Scheerbart entitled *Das neue Leben*. Scheerbart's parable imagines an apocalyptic scene in which the dead arise and are led by angels through magnificent castles and cathedrals into the eternal life beyond. Regrettably, this new world is an exact replica of the old one, with all its inequality and poverty, albeit with one key difference: "Doch ganz so schlimm wie damals, als die Sonne noch hell schien, ist das alte Elend nicht anzuschauen. Es ist anders umrahmt! Im Palastgeschmack!"<sup>1</sup> Scheerbart has the angels address some would-be revolutionaries, "die bösen Menschen" who are "natürlich mit nichts zufrieden [. . .] — sie wollen Abendbrot mit Austern und starkem Getränk."<sup>2</sup> In their arguments, the angels claim the superiority of dwelling, which here denotes the passive adaptation to a suboptimal reality, over living, which stands for the activity of creation and self-actualization: "Ihr werdet's niemals verstehen, daß anständig 'wohnen' besser ist als anständig 'leben'."<sup>3</sup> The angels, unable to deter the "Bösen" in this way, ultimately kill them anew ("Jede Spur der Bösen ist bald verweht"<sup>4</sup>), and the remaining inhabitants continue dwelling contentedly in their new old life.

From the perspective of the real-life revolutionaries, this was the fate for which Germany seemed destined following the murders of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg in 1919 and

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Scheerbart, "Das neue Leben. Architektonische Apokalypse," in *Die Stadtkrone* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1919), 13.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 15.



Weimar's consolidation in 1924. Scheerbart's notion of illusory change, an alteration of framing without any reorganization of life, ultimately corresponded to a German revolution that saw significant shifts in governance—notably the deposing of the Kaiser—but little of the sweeping social changes for which many, not least the expressionists around Taut, had hoped. Against this backdrop, Scheerbart's parable also reflects a growing fear that the era's architectural innovations, from the pioneering work of the *Deutscher Werkbund*, founded in 1907, to its most famous expressions in the Bauhaus School and *Neues Bauen*, did not promise a socioeconomic transformation, but instead threatened to beautify and mask the actual continuity in German society. Accordingly, the pursuit of revolutionary changes in Germany increasingly necessitated a reckoning with the political limitations and failures of the architectural avant-garde and the enduring challenge of turning the modern city into a home where—to use Scheerbart's language—humanity might not merely dwell, but truly live.

A conviction that—in spite of the era's architectural innovations—humankind was not entirely at home in the modern world is, this chapter contends, the red thread running through Georg Lukács's work, from *Die Theorie des Romans* (1916) to *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* (1923) to his essays on realism from the 1930s. Certainly, his concept of “transzendente Obdachlosigkeit” has become a permanent fixture in our understanding of modernity. This homelessness results, Lukács argues in *Die Theorie des Romans*, from a lost sense of totality in modernity. Where the ancient Greeks experienced the world as a coherent whole imbued with meaning, a home in which each had their place, modern humans face the opposite, a chaotic and fragmented reality disabused of all metaphysical meaning. Considering the enduring attention this theory has received, it is surprising that Lukács's writings on the dissolution of the home following his post-1916 Marxist turn have gone unnoticed. By the time Lukács wrote his 1938 essay “Marx und das Problem des ideologischen Verfalls,” he had long-since turned from metaphysics to Marxism. Nevertheless, Lukács insists that the problem of “homelessness” persists: while he now argues that a totality does inhere in modernity, namely that of capital's ubiquitous commodity structure, the individual perceives only fragmented surface

phenomena. Modern individuals, still confronted by a reality to which they seemingly have no meaningful connection, suffer from a “heimatlos gewordene, sich in Handlungen nicht umsetzende Gefühlsleben.”<sup>5</sup> In this way, although Lukács’s analysis of society underwent a radical shift during the interwar period, he remained convinced that humanity’s inner “homelessness” continued to pose a serious problem.

While *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, a philosophical work apparently unconcerned with both literature and dwellings, appears to stand apart from Lukács’s earlier theories and subsequent focus on literary realism, its conceptualization of consciousness is critical for comprehending his reckoning with humanity’s modern-day homelessness.<sup>6</sup> This chapter accordingly follows Sara Nadal-Melsió’s recent lead in considering Lukács’s writings on realism from the 1930s not as a break from his political and philosophical essays of the 1920s, but instead as “a development of the philosophical insights of *History and Class Consciousness* and as a corrective to the aesthetic theory of *The Theory of the Novel*.”<sup>7</sup> It is undoubtedly true that, radicalized by the experience of the World War I, Lukács had, by 1918, turned away from the metaphysical worldview that informed *Die Theorie des Romans*. Following a brief political career in the Hungarian Republic, which collapsed in 1920, Lukács fled to Vienna where he wrote *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, making sense of the war and the revolutionary failures in Hungary and Germany by outlining the “Verdinglichung” of consciousness, the commodity structure’s penetration into the very mind of the individual, which obstructs progress toward revolution by preventing the modern proletariat from discerning the true nature of its capitalist

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<sup>5</sup>Georg Lukács, “Marx und das Problem des ideologischen Verfalls,” in *Georg Lukács Werke. Bd. 4. Probleme des Realismus I* (Neuwied-Berlin: Hermann Luchterhand, 1971), 259.

<sup>6</sup>I do not go as far as Parker, however, who boldly suggests that *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* can be read as a literary theory in its own right. I instead follow thinkers like Jameson and Bernstein, who have—as Parker himself puts it—“tried to provide [an explicit aesthetic program] for *History and Class Consciousness* by linking it with Lukács’s more obviously literary writings.” See Ben Parker, “History and Class Consciousness as a Theory of the Novel,” *Mediations* 29, no. 2 (2016): 65–84, 65. See also J.M. Bernstein, *The Philosophy of the Novel. Lukács, Marxism and the Dialectics of Form* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) and Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form. Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

<sup>7</sup>Sara Nadal-Melsió, “Georg Lukács: Magus Realismus?,” *Diacritics* 34, no. 2 (2004): 62.

surroundings. Over the course of the 20s, Lukács's unorthodox approach to Marxist theory and strategy ultimately led to censure from the Comintern. Against this backdrop, his subsequent focus on literature during the 1930s, when he began making his contributions to the debates of the *Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller* (BPRS) and, later, to those of the exile community, has sometimes been understood as a retreat from philosophy, an opprobrious kowtowing to the party line.<sup>8</sup> As this chapter seeks to demonstrate, however, his attempt in the 1930s to uncover in literature a solution to the problem of homelessness represented continuity rather than a caesura, for it hinged on the theory of reified consciousness he had developed in the 1920s.

Fundamentally, Lukács believes that the realist novel can reveal to its reader the true nature of capitalist modernity, breaking through reified consciousness and making possible social transformation.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, he positions the novel as a solution to a problem that figures like Taut and Scheerbart understood as fundamentally architectural. It was, after all, the era's architectural innovations that—Scheerbart's parable suggests—created an illusion of change that defused the post-war revolutionary fervor. Even in Lukács's own philosophy, it was the capitalist environment that was responsible for subjecting the worker to the logic of the commodity structure. Significantly, however, Lukács frames his interest in literature not as a withdrawal from the built environment, but—this chapter argues—as an intervention into it. Indeed, in both *Die Theorie des Romans* and his realism essays, Lukács suggests that the realist novel's literary (re-)construction of external reality makes it an architectural form in its own right. This unique literary building method lends to the novel a structure that is impossible to realize in conventional

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<sup>8</sup>For an extensive overview of the debates within the BPRS, see Helga Gallas, *Marxistische Literaturtheorie. Kontroversen im Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller* (Neuwied-Berlin: Hermann Luchterhand, 1971). For an account of the Expressionism Debate, which grew, in part, out of the BPRS discussions, see Hans-Jürgen Schmitt, *Die Expressionismusdebatte. Materialien zu einer marxistischen Realismuskonzeption* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1973).

<sup>9</sup>Taek-Gwang Lee argues in this context that, for Lukács, “realism does not mean an imaginary correspondence, as in naturalism and symbolism, but a ‘self-containment’ that intensively reflects everyday life in ‘proper proportion.’” This chapter seeks to understand how we can comprehend this “self-containment” as a literary architecture. See Taek-Gwang Lee, “The Politics of Realism. Lukács and Reflection Theory,” *The AnaChronisT* 10 (2004): 61–79, 76.

architecture, and it is this unusual architectural form that allows the novel to break through the reader's reified consciousness.<sup>10</sup>

This chapter outlines this novelistic architecture by considering two critical characteristics that Lukács attributes to literary realism. Firstly, the novel wrestles with the problem that inhabitants of the modern city are either powerless and isolated in their own home, something described by Walter Benjamin in his critique of the bourgeois home, or else, as the Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier recognized, integrated into the rapid pace of capitalist circulation outside and thereby pacified. The Lukácsian novel seeks to avoid both fates by bringing the outside inside, inviting readers into a reproduction of urban relations that, contained within the literary form, empowers the reader to perceive the capitalist dynamics that underpin city life without being overwhelmed by them. Secondly, the novel achieves the impossible dream that Simmel attributed to the avant-garde, the unification of form and movement. Literary realism, Lukács contends, exposes the capitalist totality as a comprehensible whole while simultaneously revealing it to comprise of a living network of human actions and relations.<sup>11</sup> The architecture of the realist novel thus brings the external world into a literary interior without, however, forcing that world to assume a fixed and immutable form. Instead, the Lukácsian realist novel is a mobile architectural form, a “bewegtes Ganzes,” that reveals to readers their capacities for transformative action—and ultimately their belonging to a collective capable of enacting such transformation.

In a 1982 interview entitled “Space, Knowledge, and Power,” Michel Foucault was asked whether he saw “any particular architectural projects, either in the past or the present, as forces of liberation or resistance.” His answer remains instructive:

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<sup>10</sup>As far as I am aware, there do not exist any comparable attempts to read Lukács's literary theory together with architectural critique. Tally Jr.'s recent article on cognitive mapping in Lukács's *Die Theorie des Romans* does, however, similarly attempt to read Lukács in relation to questions of space. See Robert T. Tally Jr., “Lukács's Literary Cartography: Spatiality, Cognitive Mapping, and The Theory of the Novel,” *Mediations* 29, no. 2 (2016): 113–124.

<sup>11</sup>As Yoon Sun Lee puts it, “Lukács seems torn between describing plot as a static structure, an architectural balancing-act, and seeing it as a temporal experience with a certain directionality.” Whereas Lee ultimately focuses on the latter element, the way in which movement (through time) structures Lukács's understanding of literature, this chapter examines what this tension means for Lukács's “architectural balancing-act.” See Yoon Sun Lee, “Temporalized Invariance: Lukács and the Work of Form,” in *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence. Aesthetics, Politics, Literature*, ed. Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall (London: Continuum, 2011), 17–35, 19.

I do not think that there is anything that is functionally—by its very nature—absolutely liberating. Liberty is a practice. So there may, in fact, always be a certain number of projects whose aim is to modify some constraints, to loosen, or even to break them, but none of these projects can, simply by its nature, assure that people will have liberty automatically, that it will be established by the project itself.<sup>12</sup>

It is not possible, we might infer from Foucault's argument, to build one's way out of capitalism. Of course, Foucault recognizes that structures can be more or less congenial to human need, but architectural innovation alone cannot produce social transformation. This chapter ultimately suggests that those Lukácsian theories considered in this chapter recognize and seek to think through this problem in light of the interwar debates about the capitalist city. Whereas, according to Foucault, architecture "can and does produce positive effects when the liberating intentions of the architect coincide with the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom," Lukács opts for the architecture of the novel because it realizes its "positive effects" not through coincidence, but by revealing to its reader the possibility and necessity of what Foucault calls the "real practice of people."<sup>13</sup> The realist novel as imagined by Lukács is uniquely capable, that is to say, of mediating between architectural structure and revolutionary practice.

### **Homelessness and Literature**

Karel Teige's work *The Minimum Dwelling* (1932) exemplifies Marxist architectural theory at the time when Lukács was writing his realist essays of the 1930s. Teige lambastes the capitalist city in which workers "lack sufficient means and are forced to live on the lowest level of the so-called subsistence minimum, while our cities fail to offer them an opportunity for decent human living."<sup>14</sup> The modern worker, Teige contends, "is sapped to exhaustion and his health is destroyed," but this takes place not just in the workplace, but "in the worker's dwelling as well, in

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<sup>12</sup>Michel Foucault, "Space, Knowledge, and Power," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Christian Hubert (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 245.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 246.

<sup>14</sup>Karel Teige, *The Minimum Dwelling*, trans. Eric Dluhosch (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 2002), 1.

the rental barracks to which industry consigns its robots, which destroy the physical strength and the health of its inhabitants even more violently.”<sup>15</sup> The proletarian dwelling in the modern metropolis reveals a “monstrous decline of social and hygienic conditions” that brutalizes the worker in both body and mind.<sup>16</sup> For Teige, the situation must urgently be corrected and he tasks “the architectural avant-garde” with “promulgat[ing] with all its energy the negation of existing cities and existing ways of dwelling.”<sup>17</sup> In place of existing built environments, Teige contends, there must emerge a socialist city:

Architecture [. . .] must confront unhesitatingly the problem of creating a new environment for socialist life and provide the physical setting for a new material as well as cultural era in which a more cooperative spirit will flourish. Architecture’s task is to help in the reorganization of both private and public life, which will allow both women and men to become militant and useful creators of the future.<sup>18</sup>

Teige here imagines a form of dwelling that not only provides for the human’s physical needs, but that also inspires both “a rich collective life” and a “well-developed individual life.”<sup>19</sup> A humanity thus housed would rediscover its strength and forge its own future.

There is, however, a tension inherent to Teige’s depiction of the city—and its relation to revolution—that underscores the difficulty posed by the capitalist city to the era’s Marxist theory. Teige is clear that “the housing question [. . .] is inextricably linked to the current economic system, it cannot be eliminated unless the system is eliminated and a new one established.”<sup>20</sup> This is, in part, because “a basic lack of planning and the anarchy of today’s economic situation”

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<sup>15</sup>Teige, *The Minimum Dwelling*, 113.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 113, 12.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 392.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 364.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 60.

makes it impossible “to organize policies to ensure viable living conditions in the city.”<sup>21</sup> To overcome the housing crisis Teige describes, society must be transformed so that “comprehensive planned interventions” become possible.<sup>22</sup> Thus, in order to solve the housing problem, Teige ultimately marginalizes it, making it a “lesser evil” to be solved after capitalism’s overthrow: “The housing problem, once recognized as a lesser (but not the least) evil besetting humanity, can be solved definitively and decisively only after the elimination of a more fundamental evil, which is the exploitation of man by man.”<sup>23</sup> This marginalization fails to hide the tension in Teige’s theory, however, for if the proletarian housing situation so damages the human, producing “the kind of mentality that not only is inimical to the growth of a fully human, living culture but in fact is its nemesis,” then it is unclear how such physically and mentally depleted workers could lead a revolution.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, there is a hint of a paradox here, for Teige suggests that workers must first become “militant and useful creators of the future,” driving forward society’s revolutionary transformation, in order to create the environmental conditions that would make it possible for them to do so.

This fear that modern environments were transforming and limiting the human pervaded the interwar era and had been expressed over a decade prior to the publication of Teige’s work by leftist expressionist architects like Bruno Taut. For Taut, there had once been a harmonious relationship between the human and its environment. In *Die Stadtkrone*, Taut writes of the “old city,” the medieval cathedral city, which gave expression to its inhabitants’ inner life: “Das Gefüge der alten Stadt ist ein deutliches Abbild des inneren Aufbaues der Menschen und ihre Gedanken.”<sup>25</sup> In the central “Gotteshaus,” humanity’s “höchst[e] Gedanken,” namely “Glaube,

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<sup>21</sup>Teige, *The Minimum Dwelling*, 60.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 402.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 170.

<sup>25</sup>Bruno Taut, *Die Stadtkrone* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1919), 52.

Gott, Religion,” found expression, and the old city thereby gave architectural form to “alles [. . .], was die Menschen in Lebensgenuß, Lebensfreude und Weltanschauung vereinigt.”<sup>26</sup> All this has, however, been lost in a modernity defined by capitalist circulation and the “Anwachsen des Verkehrs durch die Eisenbahn.”<sup>27</sup> The city still corresponds to the life that unfolds within it, Taut contends, but that life is one disabused of togetherness and transcendence: “Die wildesten Mietskasernenviertel, ja jedes einzelne Haus steht [. . .] immer, wie häßlich es auch sein mag, in Harmonie zu dem Leben, das sich in ihm abspielt.”<sup>28</sup> With his declaration in *Die Auflösung der Städte* (1920) that “Steinhäuser machen Steinherzen,” Taut moreover underlines how the brutally immanent modern city reinforces the suppression of humanity’s “highest thoughts”: where humanity once expressed its unity and shared faith through its cities, the city now imposes on the human the physical and spiritual poverty that—for Taut—characterizes capitalist modernity.<sup>29</sup>

Taut’s description of the city’s degeneration clearly accords with Lukács’s 1916 work *Die Theorie des Romans* in which the philosopher argued that modernity was characterized by “transzendente Obdachlosigkeit.”<sup>30</sup> Like Taut, Lukács tells a story of decline, arguing that in earlier epochs, most notably that of Ancient Greece, there existed an organic togetherness, a social whole in which “Seele” and “Form” corresponded: the “Beziehungen [des Menschen] zu den anderen und die Gebilde, die daraus entstehen, sind geradezu substanzvoll, wie er selbst, ‘philosophischer’, der urbildlichen Heimat näher und verwandter.”<sup>31</sup> In contrast, modernity offers to its atomized and isolated individuals no such “totality” in which everything and everyone has its place: “Unsere Welt ist unendlich groß geworden und in jedem Winkel reicher an Geschenken

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<sup>26</sup>Taut, *Die Stadtkrone*, 52.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>29</sup>Bruno Taut, *Die Auflösung der Städte* (Hagen: Folkwang Verlag, 1920), 1.

<sup>30</sup>Georg Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans* (Darmstadt: Hermann Luchterhand, 1971), 32.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 25.



und Gefahren als die griechische, aber dieser Reichtum hebt den tragenden und positiven Sinn ihres Lebens auf: die Totalität.”<sup>32</sup> Where previously there had been a seemingly natural sense of belonging, to be a human in modernity, in “der Neuen Welt heißt [. . .]: einsam sein.”<sup>33</sup> It is on the basis of this notion of historical development that Lukács argues the modern human has become homeless. Where previously the world was “weit und doch wie das eigene Haus,” this home has been lost in modernity and there now exists only a “Welt der Konvention,” which assumes the form of an artificial “zweite Natur.”<sup>34</sup>

Taut proposes to solve the problem of transcendental homelessness by radically remaking humanity’s modern environments. The utopian settlements of the future must once again be the coherent expression of humanity’s highest thoughts, but that no longer means medieval religiosity:

Der Sozialismus im unpolitischen, überpolitischen Sinne, fern von jeder Herrschaftsform als die einfache schlichte Beziehung der Menschen zu einander, schreitet über die Kluft der sich befehrenden Stände und Nationen hinweg und verbindet den Menschen mit dem Menschen. — Wenn etwas die Stadt bekrönen kann, so ist es zunächst der Ausdruck dieses Gedanken.<sup>35</sup>

It is this vision of a built environment that, by expressing a united and flourishing humanity, makes a home for the human once more that Taut wishes to see realized. Accordingly, in *Die Auflösung der Städte*, Taut portrays the collapse of the capitalist city with the accompanying words “Lasst sie zusammenfallen.”<sup>36</sup> He thereafter depicts an ideal of small-scale communes (“Arbeitsgemeinschaften”) with “möglichst Zerstreung über das ganze Land”<sup>37</sup> In this new environment, humanity regains its capacity for creativity and development, and this, in turn,

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<sup>32</sup>Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans*, 26.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 21, 28.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 21, 53.

<sup>35</sup>Taut, *Die Stadtkrone*, 59–60.

<sup>36</sup>Taut, *Die Auflösung der Städte*, 1.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 6.

heightens the sense of unity: “Räumlich entfernter von einander führen die Menschen ein stärkeres Einzelleben, dessen gesteigerter Wert den Wert der Gesamtheit steigert.”<sup>38</sup> Creative self-expression thereby leads back to an architecture perfectly attuned to the needs of individual humans and a collective humanity: “Aus der natürlichen Zusammengehörigkeit im Tun und Leben ergeben sich die gemeinsamen Interessen — und sie bilden ihre eigenen Einrichtungen zum Schutz, Austausch, zur Weiterbildung und Entwicklung.”<sup>39</sup> In order to liberate the human from its entrapment in the city, Taut argues, the world must be remade in the image of a united humankind.



Fig. 3: “Lasst sie zusammenfallen”: A drawing from Bruno Taut, *Die Auflösung der Städte*, 1920.

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<sup>38</sup>Taut, *Die Auflösung der Städte*, 7.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

For Taut, then, he and his fellow visionary architects had the power to lead a brutalized humanity from the inhuman present toward humanity's utopian home of the future, but their failure ultimately exposed the fallibility of this dream. The catastrophic war years had, as Deborah Barnstone argues, politically radicalized the expressionist architects, leading to the foundation of the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* in 1918.<sup>40</sup> Taut's article "Was bringt die Revolution der Baukunst?," published in November 1918, is indicative of the architects' belief that it fell to them to give to the revolutionary post-war tumult its fullest expression: "Was in jedem einzelnen widerklingt und sich in der großen Einheit findet — es muß Gestalt und Ausdruck gewinnen in der Seele der Architekten. Es ruft: Aufbau!"<sup>41</sup> The architect, as Taut here intimates, is ideally positioned to realize the potential of the revolution by mediating between the wishes of the masses and the material world, to effect the revolutionary reshaping of the world, such that the "Bauwerk" of the future takes shape as if constructed by the "Seelen" of the "Masse": "Wir Architekten haben nun einen Boden, unser Werk wird die Menge hinreißen, ihre Seele beschwingen und voll Jubel erfüllen als Abbild und Zeichen der alle umfassenden Empfindung."<sup>42</sup> Despite all this bombastic rhetoric, however, the *Arbeitsrat's* utopian ambitions were soon ended by the revolution's failure. In this way, rather than leading their own revolution, the architects around Taut merely demonstrated that their projects had depended on the actual revolution's success. Teige's paradox rears its head once more: the transformation of the built environment threatened to become, impossibly, both prerequisite and consequence of the revolution.

This very same problem also animates Lukács's 1923 work *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*. His essay "Die Verdinglichung und das Bewußtsein des Proletariats" recasts the metaphysical problem of transcendental homelessness as a materialist problem: capitalism alienates workers from themselves, from others, and from the world around them. Critically, the

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<sup>40</sup>Barnstone, *The Break with the Past*, 2.

<sup>41</sup>Bruno Taut, "Was bringt die Revolution der Baukunst?," *Vorwärts* (Berlin), November 1918, 2.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

persistence of this sense of alienation depends upon what Lukács calls “verdinglichtes Bewußtsein.”<sup>43</sup> Under the conditions of capitalist modernity, Lukács argues, in which “die ganze Gesellschaft, wenigstens der Tendenz nach, einem einheitlichen Wirtschaftsprozesse untersteht, [...] das Schicksal aller Glieder der Gesellschaft von einheitlichen Gesetzen bewegt wird,” the capitalist order is increasingly reified, appearing as a necessary, immutable “second nature”: “Die Verdinglichungsstruktur [senkt sich] immer tiefer, schicksalhafter und konstitutiver in das Bewußtsein der Menschen hinein.”<sup>44</sup> As a result, those trapped within the modern capitalist environment can no longer imagine a different world, no longer perceive the shared humanity celebrated by Taut: “Die in der unmittelbaren Warenbeziehung verborgenen Beziehungen der Menschen zueinander und zu den wirklichen Objekten ihrer realen Bedürfnisbefriedigung [verblässen] zur vollen Unwahrnehmbarkeit und Unkenntlichkeit.”<sup>45</sup> Escaping capitalist modernity, Lukács hereby intimates, is bound up not only with a transformation of environment, but also with a transformation of consciousness.

While *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* itself ultimately imagines that revolution will necessarily follow from workers’ unique position as both subjects and objects within the production process, the work’s focus on consciousness paved the way for Lukács’s renewed interest in literature during the 1930s. As Rodney Livingstone puts it, “the underlying assumption” of Lukács’s essays on realism “is that actual consciousness, that which is immediately ‘given’, is not enough. For if under capitalism consciousness is reified, then the immediate reflection of appearances can never transcend that reification.”<sup>46</sup> As a result, Livingstone argues, Lukács formulates “the hope that art can somehow break through the

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<sup>43</sup>Lukács, “Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein,” 268.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 266, 268.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 268.

<sup>46</sup>Rodney Livingstone, “Introduction,” in *Essays on Realism* (London: Lawrence / Wishart, 1980), 12.

limitations of actual consciousness and for a moment overcome human alienation.”<sup>47</sup> Lukács invests this hope specifically in the realist novel, which, Lukács argues, is characterized precisely by its ability to break through the reified surface and reveal what lies beneath: “Jeder bedeutender Realist bearbeitet — auch mit den Mitteln der Abstraktion — seinen Erlebnisstoff, um zu den Gesetzmäßigkeiten der objektiven Wirklichkeit, um zu den tiefer liegenden, verborgenen, vermittelten, unmittelbar nicht wahrnehmbaren Zusammenhängen der gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit zu gelangen.”<sup>48</sup> While it remains to be explored how exactly the realist novel achieves this and what exactly it thereby reveals, it is important to note that Lukács connects this literary capacity back to the revolutionary needs of the day, making clear—in Livingstone’s words—that “realism is [. . .] not a substitute for political action: it is the structure of consciousness that accompanies it.”<sup>49</sup> Realism makes it possible to reverse capitalist modernity’s deleterious impact on the human and thereby create the conditions necessary for social transformation.

This focus on the realist novel and the problem of reified consciousness might appear as a turn away from the architectural framing of the problem sketched by Teige and Taut. Crucially, however, Lukács had already made clear with *Die Theorie des Romans* that he understands the novel as an architectural construct. Lukács declares that the novel heralds the victory of an artificial “Architektur” over a natural “Organik.”<sup>50</sup> According to Lukács, the previously described historical transition from the togetherness of ancient Greece to the atomization of modernity is manifest in the displacement of the epic by the novel. The epic “gestaltet eine von sich aus geschlossenen Lebenstotalität,” while, for the novel, there is no such immediately apparent

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<sup>47</sup>Livingstone, “Introduction,” 12.

<sup>48</sup>Georg Lukács, “Es geht um den Realismus,” in *Georg Lukács Werke. Bd. 4. Probleme des Realismus I* (Neuwied-Berlin: Hermann Luchterhand, 1971), 323.

<sup>49</sup>Livingstone, “Introduction,” 21.

<sup>50</sup>Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans*, 29.

totality.<sup>51</sup> Instead, the novel has to literarily reconstruct a world in which “die extensive Totalität des Lebens nicht mehr sinnfällig gegeben ist.” Accordingly, the novel cannot merely reflect modern-day reality, for it is a world of fragmentation and disconnect. Instead, the novel’s “strenge, kompositionell-architektonische Bedeutung” aesthetically constructs out of the fragmented experience of capitalist modernity a totality that is otherwise absent. It is through this process of construction that the realist novel makes visible connections—those aforementioned “tiefer liegende, verborgene, vermittelte, unmittelbar nicht wahrnehmbare Zusammenhänge”—that lie beneath the surface of modern life: the novel “sucht gestaltend die verborgene Totalität des Lebens aufzudecken und aufzubauen.”<sup>52</sup> As Anna Kornbluh argues when summarizing these passages, it is “in this way [that] [Lukács] evokes architecture—the deliberate building of social space—as the trope of realist form.”<sup>53</sup>

The Lukácsian theory of reified consciousness allowed the philosopher both to explain the failure of the post-war revolutions in Germany and Hungary and to identify the problem that had to be overcome if future revolutions were to be more successful. It created space for what Lukács outlines as the architecture of literary realism to overcome the paradox encountered by Teige and Taut by assuming a central role in mediating between present-day homelessness and humanity’s socialist home of the future. By considering how such poetic architecture interacted with, and diverged from, conventional architecture, the subsequent sections of this chapter will explore why and how Lukács attached such importance to the architecture of the realist novel when it came to the question of revolution.

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<sup>51</sup>Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans*, 51.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 47, 51.

<sup>53</sup>Kornbluh, *The Order of Forms: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space*, 47.

## Confronting Reality

To understand how the realist novel as architectural form intervened into the existing built environment, it is important to note that Lukács anticipated Walter Benjamin's critique of the bourgeois concept of home.<sup>54</sup> It is in *Das Passagen-Werk* and the essay "Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts" (1938) that we find Benjamin's engagement with the problem of bourgeois dwellings. For Benjamin, to dwell is something essential to human life, "das Uralte — vielleicht Ewige."<sup>55</sup> It is the activity through which the human, individually and as a species, works on its surroundings, reshaping them in its own image: "Wohnen als Transitivum. [...] Es besteht darin, ein Gehäuse zu prägen."<sup>56</sup> Connecting the term "wohnen" with "gewohnt," Benjamin moreover argues that human habitats give shape to human habits, and therefore, inasmuch as the human dwells, it determines both its environment and itself. Under conditions of capitalism, however, this originary form of dwelling has been perverted, assuming its "extremst[e] Form."<sup>57</sup> Faced with humankind's disempowered uniformity, its reduction to a "Zubehör der Maschine" in Taylorized workplaces, dwelling ceases to be a mutually transformative work that links humans with each other and external nature, instead becoming an isolated refuge: "Für den Privatmann tritt erstmals der Lebensraum in Gegensatz zu der Arbeitsstätte. [...] Der Privatmann, der im Kontor der Realität Rechnung trägt, verlangt vom Interieur in seinen Illusionen unterhalten zu werden."<sup>58</sup> Thus defined by its opposition to the capitalist workplace, to dwell henceforth means to seek refuge from the urbanized world outside in the isolated bourgeois home.

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<sup>54</sup>Nadal-Melsió briefly gestures to this connection between Lukács and Benjamin and their shared interest in the tension between the public and the private. See Nadal-Melsió, "Georg Lukács: Magus Realismus?," 77.

<sup>55</sup>Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. 5. Das Passagen-Werk*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 291.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 52.

In order to maintain the illusion of autonomy under these conditions, individuals fashion the confined space of the home into a substitute world in which they can maintain a degree of control: “[Seine private Umwelt] stellt für den Privatmann das Universum dar. In ihm versammelt er die Ferne und die Vergangenheit.”<sup>59</sup> For the dweller of such an interior, dwelling is a process of collecting, of gathering objects and arranging them into apparent displays of creative individuality. This provides, however, a mere illusion of individuality, and Benjamin describes how such a modern dweller, together with their habits, becomes increasingly shaped and confined by the objects they amass. The aforementioned *Gehäuse*, the “Urform allen Wohnens,” turns into a “Futteral” in which the human is so deeply inserted, “daß man ans Innere eines Zirkelkastens denken könnte, wo das Instrument mit allen Ersatzteilen in tiefe [. . .] Sammethöhlen gebettet, daliegt.”<sup>60</sup> Where the activity of dwelling had previously seen the human shape its surroundings and itself, the dwelling itself, together with all the objects collected there, increasingly forms and confines the human. The bourgeois dwelling begins, for Benjamin, as an attempt to resist capitalism’s flattening of individuality and ends as the threat’s realization. Benjamin exposes how the apparent security of the bourgeois home, its separation of interior from exterior, merely distracts its inhabitants from capitalism’s permeation into every sphere of life. The bourgeois home, Benjamin intimates, is an illusory site of self-entombment, not safety.

Lukács’s essays from the 1930s anticipates this Benjaminian notion of continuity between workplace and bourgeois home. The human, Lukács argues, is fundamentally “kein isoliertes, sondern ein gesellschaftliches Wesen, dessen jede einzelne Lebensäußerung mit Tausenden von Fäden an die anderen Menschen, an den gesamtgesellschaftlichen Vorgang gebunden ist.”<sup>61</sup> However, under the prevailing capitalist relations “der Mensch fühlt sich vereinsamer, er steht

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<sup>59</sup>Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. 5. Das Passagen-Werk*, 52.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>61</sup>Georg Lukács, “Die intellektuelle Physiognomie des künstlerischen Gestaltens,” in *Georg Lukács Werke. Bd. 4. Probleme des Realismus I* (Neuwied-Berlin: Hermann Luchterhand, 1971), 175.



einer unmenschlicher werdenden Gesellschaft gegenüber.”<sup>62</sup> Thus isolated and confronted by this “unmenschlich werdende Gesellschaft,” individuals comprehend themselves in the modern workplace as “ein kleines Rädchen in einer ungeheuren Maschinerie” who have “von deren Gesamtbewegung keine Ahnung” and thus no ability to affect its machinations: “Die Unmenschlichkeit der Gesellschaft erscheint dem durch die ökonomische Entwicklung selbst im unmittelbaren Leben sich vereinsamenden Menschen als eine grausame und fatalistische zweite Natur.”<sup>63</sup> In response to this situation, the individual seeks solace and autonomy in its home: “‘My house is my castle’: das ist die Lebensform eines jeden kapitalistischen Philisters.”<sup>64</sup> Just like Benjamin, however, Lukács contends that the security thus sought in the home is a seductive illusion: the home merely becomes a counterpart to the technological and rationalized workplace, a complementary space where “der in der Berufsarbeit geduckte und streberhafte ‘kleine Mann’” imagines himself to be a figure of authority and thereby finds release for his corrupted drives and desires, his “unterdrückten und pervertierten Machtinstinkte.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, for both Benjamin and Lukács, the bourgeois home offers an illusion of refuge while actually affirming the hegemonic capitalist order.

For Lukács, the retreat into the bourgeois home is symptomatic of a broader flight from reality in his contemporary culture. The home as a site of irrational resistance to the powerlessness experienced by the individual in the workplace corresponds in this way, Lukács’s writings suggest, to the rise of the subjective “Irrationalismus” of avant-garde art. In “‘Größe und Verfall’ des Expressionismus,” Lukács contends that the expressionists, faced with the complexity of advanced capitalism and the chaos of war and revolution, renounced objective reality

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<sup>62</sup>Lukács, “Die intellektuelle Physiognomie des künstlerischen Gestaltens,” 164.

<sup>63</sup>Lukács, “Marx und das Problem des ideologischen Verfalls,” 259; Lukács, “Die intellektuelle Physiognomie des künstlerischen Gestaltens,” 164.

<sup>64</sup>Lukács, “Marx und das Problem des ideologischen Verfalls,” 259.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 259.

altogether, turning instead to an “extreme[n] Subjektivismus.”<sup>66</sup> Accordingly, Lukács contends that the ecstatic *Dichtung* of the expressionists positions the individual as the sole source of meaning and constancy: “Die Wirklichkeit erscheint ihnen also derart ‘sinnlos’, ‘seelenlos’, daß das Eingehen auf sie nicht nur nicht lohnt, sondern sogar entwürdigend ist. Die Dichtung hat die Aufgabe, in diese ‘Sinnlosigkeit’ selbstherrlich einen Sinn hineinzutragen.”<sup>67</sup> Just like the deluded bourgeois dweller, however, this artistic response to an overwhelming and illegible reality, which searches for a solution to the individual’s powerlessness in a “gedankliche Überwindung,” leaves real-world structures entirely out of the picture.<sup>68</sup> Far from revealing the human to be, intrinsically, “ein gesellschaftliches Wesen,” the expressionist artwork and the bourgeois home empower an irrationalism “als Weltanschauung” that “fixiert nun diese Entleerung der menschlichen Seele von allen gesellschaftlichen Inhalten und stellt sie der ebenfalls mystifizierten Entleerung der Welt des Verstandes steif und ausschließend gegenüber.”<sup>69</sup>

In contrast with expressionism’s focus on irrational interiority, Lukács argues that the realist tradition alone can force the required confrontation between the reader and external reality. For Lukács, “nur ein Realismus, nur eine Kultur des Realismus im Sinne der Klassiker kann unsere große Wirklichkeit adäquat ausdrücken.”<sup>70</sup> To achieve this, Lukács argues, realist authors must display “Ehrlichkeit” and “Unerschrockenheit” in order that they “über das Subjektiv-Formale hinausgehen” while maintaining “einen gesellschaftlichen und weltanschaulichen Inhalt,” such that “die Kraft dieses Inhaltes in der Richtung eines Aufgeschlossenseins, eines Offenseins der

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<sup>66</sup>Lukács, “Die intellektuelle Physiognomie des künstlerischen Gestaltens,” 169.

<sup>67</sup>Georg Lukács, “‘Größe und Verfall’ des Expressionismus,” in *Georg Lukács Werke. Bd. 4. Probleme des Realismus I* (Neuwied-Berlin: Hermann Luchterhand, 1971), 138.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>69</sup>Lukács, “Marx und das Problem des ideologischen Verfalls,” 260.

<sup>70</sup>Lukács, “Die intellektuelle Physiognomie des künstlerischen Gestaltens,” 195.

Wirklichkeit gegenüber wirken.”<sup>71</sup> The Lukácsian realist novel does not merely portray external reality, however, but rather exposes the individual’s inescapable involvement in the social relations it outlines. Thus, what makes realist literature “ein großes und bedeutsames Gebiet der Entdeckung und Erforschung der Wirklichkeit” is its ability “die Widersprüche, Kämpfe und Konflikte des gesellschaftlichen Lebens so [zu] gestalten, wie sie in der Seele, im Leben des wirklichen Menschen in Erscheinung treten.”<sup>72</sup> The realist work thereby shatters the illusions nurtured by the individual within the bourgeois dwelling, demanding that readers recognize in “die vielfältigen Verbindungen zwischen den individuellen Zügen [der] Helden und den objektiven allgemeinen Problemen der Epoche” their own involvement in the world beyond their four walls. As a result, readers experience “selbst die abstraktesten Fragen ihrer Zeit als ihre eigenen, individuellen, sie auf Leben und Tod interessierenden Fragen.”<sup>73</sup> In this way, the realist novel tears down the walls of the bourgeois home and compels the reader to recognize their own imbrication with the world outside.

There is, Lukács contends, a powerful critical potential to this confrontation with reality. By depicting the individual’s relationship to the prevailing capitalist social relations, the realist novel becomes “spontan, aus ihrer eigenen Logik heraus eine desto energischere Entlarvung der Unmenschlichkeit des Kapitalismus.”<sup>74</sup> It is impossible, Lukács here intimates, to honestly depict the fate of humankind under capitalism without that depiction becoming a scathing critique of the existing socioeconomic order. As a result, “der Schriftsteller, der wirkliche Menschen gestaltet, braucht sich keineswegs vollständig, ja er braucht sich überhaupt nicht dessen bewußt zu sein, daß eine Gestaltung wirklicher Menschen in wirklichen gesellschaftlichen Konflikten bereits der

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<sup>71</sup>Lukács, “Marx und das Problem des ideologischen Verfalls,” 270.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 274.

<sup>73</sup>Lukács, “Die intellektuelle Physiognomie des künstlerischen Gestaltens,” 156.

<sup>74</sup>Lukács, “Marx und das Problem des ideologischen Verfalls,” 280.

Anfang einer Rebellion gegen das herrschende System ist.”<sup>75</sup> Lukács accordingly describes a shift in the “Sehnsucht nach Harmonie” effected in and through the realist novel. Those bourgeois subjects outlined by Benjamin wish to find “eine Harmonie in ihrem Innern [. . . ], indem sie sich von den Kämpfen der Gesellschaft abschließen.”<sup>76</sup> This harmony is, however, necessarily “scheinbar, oberflächlich” and “sie muß bei jeder ernsthaften Berührung mit der Wirklichkeit in Nichts zerstieben.”<sup>77</sup> The realist novel as articulated by Lukács effects precisely this contact with reality, and it replaces the illusory harmony of the bourgeois interior with a new insight, namely “daß die Harmonie des Individuums seine harmonische Zusammenarbeit mit der Außenwelt, seine Harmonie mit der Gesellschaft voraussetzt.”<sup>78</sup> The readers’ literary clash with external reality thus has the potential to transform their political consciousness, inviting them to imagine a harmonious existence not through retreat into the bourgeois home but rather through resistance to the existing social order.

Lukács’s sketch of a literary solution to the problem of dwelling in modernity notably diverges from Benjamin’s architectural focus. Benjamin invokes the historical example of Baron Haussmann’s hugely destructive reshaping of Paris in the Second Empire to outline a dialectical process of creative destruction apparently inherent to capitalism. As Benjamin details, Haussmann’s 19th-century renovation of the French capital flattened much of Paris’s labyrinthine medieval center. In its place, an urban plan more amenable to modern capitalism was imposed: embodied by the “die perspektivischen Durchblicke durch lange Straßenfluchten,” the rationalized built environment prioritized the circulation of traffic and commodities.<sup>79</sup> For Benjamin, Haussmann’s example demonstrates that the relentless expansion of capitalism into all areas of

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<sup>75</sup>Lukács, “Marx und das Problem des ideologischen Verfalls,” 280.

<sup>76</sup>Georg Lukács, “Das Ideal des harmonischen Menschen in der bürgerlichen Ästhetik,” in *Georg Lukács Werke. Bd. 4. Probleme des Realismus I* (Neuwied-Berlin: Hermann Luchterhand, 1971), 299.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>79</sup>Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. 5. Das Passagen-Werk*, 56.

life precipitates a process of construction that is inextricably bound up with destruction. Accordingly, in his essay “Der destruktive Charakter,” Benjamin reimagines Haussmann as a generalized figure: “Der destruktive Charakter kennt nur eine Parole: Platz schaffen; nur eine Tätigkeit: räumen.”<sup>80</sup> Tellingly for the consideration of dwelling, this destructive character poses a threat specifically to the “etui-man” who seeks safety in the home: “Der Etui-Mensch sucht seine Bequemlichkeit, und das Gehäuse ist ihr Inbegriff. [...] Der destruktive Charakter verwischt sogar die Spuren der Zerstörung.”<sup>81</sup> Even as the prevailing capitalist relations force the individual to retreat into the illusory safety of the bourgeois home, Benjamin here suggests, those self-same relations also threaten that home with demolition.

Benjamin perceives in the modern architecture of *Neues Bauen* a reactivation of this process of creative destruction in his own era that constitutes a potentially utopian break with the bourgeois dwellings of the past. Benjamin contends “daß dem Wohnen im alten Sinne, dem die Geborgenheit an erster Stelle stand, die Stunde geschlagen hat.”<sup>82</sup> The dwellings of the twentieth century are instead characterized by their breaking down of barriers, their “Porosität, Transparenz, [ihr] Freilicht- und Freiluftwesen”.<sup>83</sup> The architecture of “Giedion, Mendelssohn, Corbusier” have begun, Benjamin seems to indicate, to free the human from its self-entombment in the bourgeois home.<sup>84</sup> Capitalism, which ushered in the era of dwelling as passive isolation, now brings that era to an end. “Das Wohnen hat sich vermindert,” Benjamin argues, and the human finds itself liberated from the confines of the bourgeois home and reconnected in its new “Aufenthaltsort,” a “Durchgangsraum aller erdenklichen Kräfte und Wellen von Licht und Luft,”

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<sup>80</sup>Walter Benjamin, “Der destruktive Charakter,” in *Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. 4*, ed. Tillman Rexroth (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 396.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 397–398.

<sup>82</sup>Walter Benjamin, “Die Wiederkehr des Flaneurs,” in *Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. 3*, ed. Hella Tiedemann-Bartels (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 196.

<sup>83</sup>Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. 5. Das Passagen-Werk*, 292.

<sup>84</sup>Benjamin, “Die Wiederkehr des Flaneurs,” 196.

with the movement and transformations of external reality.<sup>85</sup> Since, in his reflections on Haussmann, Benjamin suggests that the urban planner's destructive work ultimately called forth resistance and the 1871 Commune, Benjamin's positive assessment of the avant-garde demolition of the bourgeois home indicates he anticipates similar political confrontations once the dwelling no longer functions as an illusory refuge. Certainly, as Hilde Heynen highlights, Benjamin saw in this modern "architecture of steel and glass" the foreshadowing of the "transparent and classless society" of the future.<sup>86</sup>

Benjamin seeks to solve the problem of an isolating and disempowering architecture by sketching a dialectic of dwelling, the notion of a capitalist architecture that necessarily unmakes itself. This solution seemingly eliminates the need for human agency: to the extent that the modern dweller's consciousness is transformed by its forced encounter with external reality, this happens—Benjamin indicates—automatically and inevitably. Elegant as this solution is in avoiding the pitfalls encountered by Teige and Taut, it seemingly renders the Lukácsian realist novel superfluous, for there is no need for a literary challenge to reified consciousness if modern architecture alone transforms the worldview of those it accommodates. There is, however, an ambiguity in Benjamin's argument, an unexplained gap between architectural innovation and social transformation. As will be shown, Lukács perceives this aporia as a dangerous oversight, a critical problem that threatens to render the modern transformation of the dwelling anti-revolutionary. It is for this reason that, even as Lukács argues that the realist novel forces a confrontation with reality, he contends that it retains an architectural form. The realist novel brings the outside inside, Lukács argues, and it thereby creates a refuge for readers where they can comprehend external reality without being subjected to its deleterious impact.

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<sup>85</sup>Benjamin, "Die Wiederkehr des Flaneurs," 197.

<sup>86</sup>Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity. A Critique* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 97.

## Inside the Outside

In the architectural theory and practice of Hannes Meyer, who succeeded Walter Gropius as Bauhaus director in 1928 and brought an openly Marxist perspective to the school, we find an elaboration of the revolutionary process to which Benjamin's writings gesture. In his 1926 manifesto *Die neue Welt*, Meyer, like Benjamin, contends that the expansion of capitalism has transformed dwelling, introducing movement where there was previously stasis and collapsing dividing walls. Crucially, this takes place not only at the level of individual homes but at the level of nations, of *homelands*, too: "Unsere Wohnung wird mobiler denn je: Massenmiethaus, Sleepingcar, Wohnjacht und Transatlantique untergraben den Lokalbegriff der 'Heimat'. Das Vaterland verfällt. [...] Wir werden Weltbürger."<sup>87</sup> For Meyer, the transformation of dwelling is part of a broader process in which the expansion of capital, by dismantling all obstacles between people(s) and nations, by making possible international travel and communication, renders existing political and spatial arrangements obsolete. Where there currently exists the nation state and national particularisms, there begins to emerge a universal "Schicksalsgemeinschaft." People, previously atomized and isolated, are reconnected: "Kooperation beherrscht alle Welt. Die Gemeinschaft beherrscht das Einzelwesen."<sup>88</sup> The destructive dynamics of capitalism thus pave the way, in Meyer's vision, for an egalitarian community that encompasses all of humankind and in which the needs of each human is the same, having been internationally standardized by capitalism, and can therefore be met equally: "die Befriedigung gleicher Bedürfnisse mit gleichen Mitteln."<sup>89</sup> This united humanity, no longer divided and disempowered, collectively reclaims the original creative sense of dwelling described by Benjamin, and the Tautian utopia of a united humankind dawns.

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<sup>87</sup>Hannes Meyer, "Die neue Welt," in *Bauen und Gesellschaft. Schriften, Briefe, Projekte*, ed. Lena Meyer-Bergner (Dresden: VEB Verlag, 1980), 28.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 30.

There is, however, a counter-revolutionary potential to border breakdown in modernity, something made clear by the interwar writings of the influential architect Le Corbusier. Le Corbusier, a supporter of the capitalist order, agreed with Benjamin and Meyer that society's built environment needed to be updated. In his work *The City of To-morrow* (1929), Le Corbusier anticipates Benjamin's interest in Haussmann's transformation of Paris, designating Haussmann's work a "magnificent legacy" and declaring that it must be continued: "The centres of our great cities must be pulled down and rebuilt."<sup>90</sup> Whereas, however, Benjamin and Meyer imagine that this process will inevitably transform the prevailing socioeconomic relations, Le Corbusier believes such a modernization is necessary in order to entrench the capitalist order:

The anachronistic persistence of the original skeleton of the city paralyzes its growth. Industrial and commercial life will be stifled in towns which do not develop. The conservative forces at work in great cities obstruct the development of transport, congest and devitalize activity, kill the progress and discourage initiative.<sup>91</sup>

The current state of architecture, Le Corbusier here argues, hinders the full development of the capitalist economy, creating obstacles for the "rhythm of business," the circulation of capital and goods, which requires space for "speed and the struggle for speed."<sup>92</sup> Le Corbusier accordingly dreams not of Meyer's egalitarian *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, but rather of the "simple and ingenuous pleasure of being in the centre of so much power, so much speed."<sup>93</sup>

In *Towards a New Architecture* (1923), Le Corbusier uses his famous formulation "architecture or revolution" to make explicit his desire to see social transformation forestalled through architectural innovation. Significantly, Le Corbusier focuses in that work on the same topic that interested Benjamin, namely the modern transformation of the dwelling, to claim that "the problem of the house is a problem of the epoch. The equilibrium of society to-day depends

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<sup>90</sup>Le Corbusier, *The City of To-morrow and its Planning*, trans. Frederick Etchells (New York: Dover Publications, 1987), 93, 96.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 84.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 94.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., xxiii.



upon it.”<sup>94</sup> Currently, Le Corbusier argues, there is a tension between the modern workplace and the anachronistic spaces of family life: “There is no real link between our daily activities at the factory, the office or the bank, which are healthy and useful and productive, and our activities in the bosom of the family which are handicapped at every turn.”<sup>95</sup> Thus forced to reside in “their uncleanly old snail-shell,” “an old and hostile environment” that they recognize as anachronistic, workers experience “demoralization,” and demoralization—Le Corbusier argues—leads to revolution.<sup>96</sup> Le Corbusier thus turns Benjamin’s argument about anachronistic dwellings on its head, claiming that it is precisely the inability of the bourgeois home to provide for the needs of modern humans shaped by the capitalist city and the Taylorized workplace that leads to social unrest: “There reigns a great disagreement between the modern state of mind [ . . . ] and the stifling accumulation of age-long detritus.”<sup>97</sup> It is therefore on the basis of the unfolding revolution “in the conception of what Architecture is” that Le Corbusier argues social revolution “can be avoided.”<sup>98</sup>

Lukács expresses a concern that Le Corbusier could be correct, that a breakdown in the distinction between home and workplace might lead not to revolution but to the strengthening of the existing social order. He rebukes those who claim that “die breite Form der entfalteten Menschengestaltung der klassischen Realisten” is not able to capture the modern “Lebenstempo.”<sup>99</sup> Such emphasis on the “pace of modern life” reveals, Lukács argues, an uncritical conformation to the surface phenomena of capitalist society: “Was ist aber dieser berühmte ‘Lebenstempo’? Eben die Unmenschlichkeit des Kapitalismus, die die Beziehungen der

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<sup>94</sup>Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 6.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, 279, 288, 276.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*, 288–289.

<sup>99</sup>Lukács, “Marx und das Problem des ideologischen Verfalls,” 284.

Menschen zueinander auf eine gegenseitige Ausnützung, auf Betrügen und Nichtbetrogenwerden zurückführen will.”<sup>100</sup> According to Lukács, this capitulation to existing social forces is part of a broader “ideologischen Verfall” in which even those intellectuals, scientists and artists who claim to interrogate the world around them increasingly abandon attempts “die wirklichen Kräfte der Gesellschaft unerschrocken, unbekümmert [. . . ] zu begreifen” in order to propagate an “ideologisch zurecht konstruierte, oberflächlich aufgefaßte, subjektivistisch und mystisch verzerrte Pseudogeschichte.”<sup>101</sup> The attempt to keep up with the “pace of life” leads such figures merely to serve the “wirtschaftlichen und politischen Bedürfnissen der Bourgeoisie.”<sup>102</sup> Lukács here outlines a counterpart to the irrationalism of those who seek refuge in the bourgeois home, a “Rationalismus” that does engage with external reality but only in the form of a “kampfloses und schmähliches direktes Kapitulieren vor den objektiven Notwendigkeiten der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft.”<sup>103</sup>

This “rationalist” focus on superficial developments in capitalist modernity distracts from the fact that such surface phenomena are mediated expressions of the economic order that underpins them. By accepting capitalist modernity as it appears to the individual, that is, as a rapid and incomprehensible circulation of commodities and people, the bourgeois rationalists criticized by Lukács fail to recognize what he previously spelled out in *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, namely that “die Gegenstände der Empirie” can be understood only when they are grasped as “Momente der Totalität, d.h. als Momente der [. . . ] Gesamtgesellschaft.”<sup>104</sup> Modernity’s overwhelming “Lebenstempo” is, Lukács hereby indicates, a manifestation of the

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<sup>100</sup>Lukács, “Marx und das Problem des ideologischen Verfalls,” 284.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 245.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 244.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 260.

<sup>104</sup>Lukács, “Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein,” 346.

underlying capitalist order that governs society absolutely. To truly comprehend capitalist modernity, therefore, it is necessary to recognize it as mediated:

Das empirische Dasein der Gegenstände [ist] selbst ein vermitteltes [. . .], das nur darum und insofern den Schein der Unmittelbarkeit erhält, als einerseits das Bewußtsein der Vermittlung fehlt, andererseits die Gegenstände (eben deshalb) aus dem Komplex ihrer wirklichen Bestimmungen gerissen und in eine künstliche Isolation gebracht worden sind.<sup>105</sup>

In this way, Lukács makes clear that simply exposing individuals to the world beyond their dwelling is insufficient for cultivating in them a comprehension of their environment and a capacity to transform it. Instead, it is also necessary to create an “awareness of mediation,” so that any individual thus exposed can make sense of the world with which they are faced.

When, in the early 1930s, Georg Lukács intervened into the debates of the BPRS on the revolutionary role of the novel, he accused the group of failing to do precisely this awareness-raising work, of mistakenly focusing on the surface appearance of capitalist society. In two *Linkskurve* articles on the works of Ernst Ottwalt and Willi Bredel, he lambasted their empirical style of “Reportage,” which—inspired by the sober spirit of *Neue Sachlichkeit*—had been held up as an ideal by the BPRS in the latter half of the 1920s. As Lukács argues, authors pursuing this approach had been misled by “die Illusion einer [. . .] höheren Objektivität”: “Die dichterische Darstellung des Durchschnittlichen ist ohne Zutaten der Phantasie, ohne Erfindung von eigenartigen Situationen oder Charakteren möglich.”<sup>106</sup> Rather than revealing the dynamic interrelation of individual and society, this literary approach isolates the social world, such that it becomes a static structure—“poor, dry, abstract and un-literary”—and reduces the characters’ experiences to arbitrary and meaningless events, “denn im Alltag stumpfen sich die großen Widersprüche ab, erscheinen durchkreuzt von gleichgültigen, zusammenhanglosen Zufälligkeiten,”<sup>107</sup> Thus, by marginalizing human experience and focusing on the portrayal of a

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<sup>105</sup>Lukács, “Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein,” 346.

<sup>106</sup>Lukács, “Die intellektuelle Physiognomie des künstlerischen Gestaltens,” 168.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 160.

“Scheinobjektivität,” authors like Ottwalt and Bredel could only ever reveal a “Teilwahrheit,” because as long as the authors persisted with their restrained empiricism, as they long as they “bei der unmittelbar gegebenen Oberflächenerrechnung stehenbleib[en], muß bei [ihnen] diese ‘Gesamtheit der Momente der Wirklichkeit’, die nicht auf der Oberfläche liegen, [. . . ] fehlen.”<sup>108</sup>

In contrast, the realist novel celebrated by Lukács breaks through immediate appearances and reveals them to be manifestations of underlying social relations. Tellingly, Lukács portrays this impact as the creation of a literary home that shelters the reader from the threatening capitalist reality while also rendering that reality comprehensible. The author of the realist novel “macht den Leser sicher, beheimatet ihn in der Welt der Dichtung” not by isolating readers from reality, but rather by mediating between surface phenomena and underlying socioeconomic order.<sup>109</sup> The realist mediation of reality does not merely mirror the world, seeking to keep up with the modern “Lebenstempo,” but instead seeks to contextualize the events it portrays by connecting them to the “tiefer liegenden, verborgenen, vermittelten, unmittelbar nicht wahrnehmbaren Zusammenhängen der gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit.”<sup>110</sup> Authors thus provides their readers with the aforementioned homely “Sicherheit” by reconstructing the world in a manner that reveals isolated moments ordinarily experienced by the individual as fragmented and chaotic to be manifestations of a constant social totality. The reader is accordingly able to recognize “die Richtung, die die Ereignisse kraft ihrer inneren Logik, kraft der inneren Notwendigkeit der Personen einnehmen müssen.”<sup>111</sup> The realist author makes the reader at home in the novel, that is to say, by revealing “die besondere Bedeutung jeder an sich unscheinbaren Einzelheit für die endgültige Entwirrung,

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<sup>108</sup>Georg Lukács, “Reportage oder Gestaltung?,” in *Georg Lukács Werke. Bd. 4. Probleme des Realismus I* (Neuwied-Berlin: Hermann Luchterhand, 1971), 66.

<sup>109</sup>Georg Lukács, “Erzählen oder beschreiben?,” in *Georg Lukács Werke. Bd. 4. Probleme des Realismus I* (Neuwied-Berlin: Hermann Luchterhand, 1971), 215.

<sup>110</sup>Lukács, “Es geht um den Realismus,” 323.

<sup>111</sup>Lukács, “Erzählen oder beschreiben?,” 215.

für die endgültige Offenbarung der Charaktere.”<sup>112</sup> In this way, the realist novel as dwelling represents an aesthetic totality in which the reader can safely confront its real-world surroundings.

The safety afforded to readers by the realist novel does not, however, reproduce the self-entombment that Benjamin attributed to the bourgeois home. Instead, the novel as architectural space reveals to readers that they are inexorably imbricated in the external sociopolitical reality. Tellingly in this regard, Lukács argues that “die breite und dauernde Wirkung des großen Realismus [darauf beruht], daß die Möglichkeit [des] Zugangs [. . . ] durch unendlich viele Türen gegeben ist.”<sup>113</sup> The realist novel appears here once more as an edifice, this time characterized explicitly by accessibility, and this accessibility results from the novel’s mediation of modern life, its “tiefe und richtige Auffassung dauernder, typischer Erscheinungsweisen des menschlichen Lebens.”<sup>114</sup> Lukács here intimates that, by portraying the variform surface phenomena of capitalist modernity to be manifestations of underlying totalizing structures, the realist novel allows its reader to identify with the characters, to recognize them as “typical,” as products of the same environment to which readers are themselves subjected. The “Leser aus den breiten Massen des Volkes” is not therefore confronted by the inaccessible “Eingleisigkeit des ‘Avantgardismus,’” but instead perceives its own fate intertwined with that of the depicted characters; the reader has “von den verschiedensten Seiten seiner Lebenserfahrung her Zugang” to the literary space of the novel.<sup>115</sup> Thus, by bringing the outside inside, the realist novel not only prevents readers from being overwhelmed by the real-world socioeconomic structures, but it also creates space for readers to subject those structures—and their own place within them—to their critical comprehension.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>Lukács, “Erzählen oder beschreiben?,” 215.

<sup>113</sup>Lukács, “Es geht um den Realismus,” 340–341.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 341.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 340.

<sup>116</sup>For Nadal-Melsió, this is “the most radical conclusion of the Lukácsian philosophy of narrative”: “since without mediation there is no possible apprehension of the real, reality has first to be mediated through art—that is, the realist

## Movement and Form

Truly comprehending the modern world meant, for Lukács, not only perceiving the ubiquitous power of capitalism, but also recognizing one's role in creating it and one's capacity to transform it. Accordingly, the task for the realist novel is twofold: as we have seen, it brings the outside inside to expose the totalizing capitalist order underlying the individual's fragmented and chaotic experience of modern life, but, in doing so, it must also integrate movement into its architectural form to dissolve the seemingly immutable and all-powerful economic order into a network of human actions and relations. We have seen how, where there appears to be overwhelming movement, the novel reveals a static and comprehensible order. Our attention now turns to those moments where that order threatens to become an unshakable second nature and where the novel is accordingly tasked with revealing that it comprises countless human actions and relations that can—and must—be transformed. The realist novel as described by Lukács ultimately demonstrates to readers their capacity to forge humanity's future by overcoming a tension between form and movement that had, as will be demonstrated on the basis of Georg Simmel's theories and the futurist aspirations of F.T. Marinetti and his architect accomplice Antonio Sant'Elia, undermined the architectural projects of the avant-garde.

In his 1918 essay "Der Konflikt der modernen Kultur," Simmel foregrounds the loss of human agency in modernity. He outlines the relationship between the creative, expressive life of the human and the forms that the human thereby produces: "Die schöpferische Bewegung des Lebens [hat] gewisse Gebilde hervorgebracht [. . . ], an denen sie ihre Äußerung, die Formen ihrer Verwirklichung findet, und die ihrerseits die Flutungen des nachkommenden Lebens in sich aufnehmen und ihnen Inhalt und Form, Spielraum und Ordnung geben."<sup>117</sup> Human subjectivity, in Simmel's view, longs for such objective manifestation, for physical expression, and humankind

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novel—in a utopian reflection of the Marxist narrativization of history in order to enter the totality of the real, and the 'real' is always expressed as a narrative discourse." Nadal-Melsió, "Georg Lukács: Magus Realismus?," 77.

<sup>117</sup>Georg Simmel, "Der Konflikt in der modernen Kultur," in *Gesamtausgabe, Bd. 16*, ed. Gregor Fitzi and Otthein Rammstedt (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1999), 183.

has consequently found itself increasingly confronted by a world of human-made “Gebilde” under which Simmel imagines everything from “sozial[e] Verfassungen” to “Kunstwerke, die Religionen und die wissenschaftlichen Erkenntnisse, die Techniken und die bürgerlichen Gesetze und unzähliges andere.”<sup>118</sup> As Simmel had already made clear in his 1911 essay on “Der Begriff und die Tragödie der Kultur,” however, as the historical products of human creativity amass, they begin to impinge upon their creators and impede life’s creative impulse: “Dem vibrierenden, rastlosen, ins Grenzenlose hin sich entwickelnden Leben der in irgend einem Sinne schaffenden Seele steht ihr festes, ideell unverrückbares Produkt gegenüber, mit dem unheimlichen Rückwirkung, jene Lebendigkeit festlegen, ja erstarren zu machen.”<sup>119</sup> Life resists this suffocating effect of ossified culture, and an “age-old struggle” between life and form ensues.

The capitalist city is, according to Simmel, the emblematic modern site of the struggle between humanity and the world of objects it has created. Writing in 1903, Simmel argues in “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben” that cities are “die eigentlichen Schauplätze dieser, über alles Persönliche hinauswachsenden Kultur sind.”<sup>120</sup> They are spaces in which the individual “zu einer quantité négligeable herabgerückt [ist], zu einem Staubkorn gegenüber einer ungeheueren Organisation von Dingen und Mächten, die ihm alle Fortschritte, Geistigkeiten, Werte allmählich aus der Hand spielen und sie aus der Form des subjektiven in die eines rein objektiven Leben überführen.”<sup>121</sup> On the one side of Simmel’s dichotomy, we see the vast metropolis, an endlessly complex organism, where human-made artifacts amass to a degree previously unknown. Those artifacts have assumed a life of their own, pursuing an “eigene Logik ihrer Entwicklung,” and the city, fundamentally unaffected by human agency, follows instead the dictates of a money economy that “höhlt den Kern der Dinge, ihre Eigenart, ihren spezifischen Wert, ihre

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<sup>118</sup>Simmel, “Der Konflikt in der modernen Kultur,” 183.

<sup>119</sup>Simmel, “Der Begriff und die Tragödie der Kultur,” 199.

<sup>120</sup>Simmel, “Großstädte und Geistesleben,” 130.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 129–130.

Unvergleichbarkeit rettungslos aus.”<sup>122</sup> On the other side of the dichotomy, Simmel presents to us the human subjected to this urban space. “Der Typus des Großstädtlers,” the “metropolitan man,” who is bombarded from all sides by “äußer[e] und inner[e] Eindrücke” and who “[schafft] sich ein Schutzorgan gegen die Entwurzelung, mit der die Strömungen und Diskrepanzen seines äußeren Milieus ihn bedrohen.”<sup>123</sup> The human of the city reacts to its overwhelming environment by suppressing emotional responses and developing instead a cold, calculating intellect. In the battle between form and life, therefore, the city appears to represent the decisive victory of the former. The human, adapting to surroundings over which it can exert no control, surrenders its own emotional life.

The influence of Simmel’s theories on Lukács’s own portrayal of a seemingly autonomous external reality that shapes and disempowers the modern human is certainly apparent. Fundamental to the modern individual’s experience of being overwhelmed by an external reality is, Lukács argues in *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, the alienation of workers from the products of their labor. The capitalist economy turns any such product into a commodity that is subject to the “menschenfremden Objektivität von gesellschaftlichen Naturgesetzen,” which is to say that it necessarily beholden to the logic of the market, and must therefore “unabhängig von Menschen ihre Beziehung vollziehen.”<sup>124</sup> In this way, for Lukács as for Simmel, humankind is increasingly confronted by an autonomous “Welt von fertigen Dingen” that is seemingly governed not by human volition, but by “Dingbeziehungen,” “deren Gesetze [...] in diesem Fall [den Menschen] als unbezwingbare, sich von selbst auswirkende Mächte gegenüberstehen.”<sup>125</sup> The threatening external reality that drives individuals to seek refuge in their homes is, then, a “gespenstige” world haunted by the “eigene Arbeit [des Menschen],” which has become “etwas

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<sup>122</sup>Simmel, “Großstädte und Geistesleben,” 118, 122.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., 116–117.

<sup>124</sup>Lukács, “Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein,” 261.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 261.



Objektives, von ihm Unabhängiges, ihn durch menschenfremde Eigengesetzlichkeit Beherrschendes gegenübergestellt.”<sup>126</sup> However, even as Lukács recognizes the impact of this second nature on the human, the way in which the worker, confronted by the laws of the commodity structure, “sich willenlos zu fügen hat,” he seeks to uncover how the human can be restored to its subject position, how it can reclaim its creative powers of its environment.<sup>127</sup>

Significantly, Simmel’s essays indicate that Lukács, by seeking to plot an escape route from modernity’s overwhelming objective culture, was following in the tradition of the avant-gardists whom Lukács so strongly criticized in his later essays. Simmel’s “Der Konflikt der modernen Kultur” specifically explores avant-garde art as representative of a “neue Phase des alten Kampfes, der nicht mehr Kampf der heute vom Leben gefüllten Form gegen die alte, leblos gewordene ist, sondern Kampf des Lebens gegen die Form überhaupt, gegen das Prinzip der Form.”<sup>128</sup> The conflict between subjective expression and objective culture has led in Simmel’s historical moment to a “Gesamtnot der Kultur” and life’s attempt “die Form überhaupt, nicht nur diese und jene [zu] durchbrechen und in seine Unmittelbarkeit auf[zu]saugen [. . .], um sich selbst an ihre Stelle zu setzen, seine eigene Kraft und Fülle so und nur so strömen zu lassen, [. . .] bis alle Erkenntnisse, Werte und Gebilde nur noch als seine unweglosen Offenbarungen gelten können.”<sup>129</sup> It is this notion that Simmel concretely links to the avant-garde, “der Sinn” of which—he claims—is to give a virtually unmediated expression to life, to “die innere Bewegtheit des Künstlers [. . .] so, wie sie erlebt wird” while reducing form to “nur eine sozusagen unvermeidliche Äußerlichkeit.”<sup>130</sup> Like Lukács, Simmel here suggests, the avant-gardists sought

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<sup>126</sup>Lukács, “Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein,” 260–261.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 264.

<sup>128</sup>Simmel, “Der Konflikt in der modernen Kultur,” 185.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 185.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., 190, 192.

to overcome an overwhelming external reality in order to restore to humanity its full creative power.

The emergence of futurism in 1909 following the publication of Marinetti's *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism* exemplifies, however, the difficulty associated with this attempt to break with constraining forms. Marinetti's text seizes upon an ambiguity latent in the city as described by Simmel, which is both static, a gigantic gathering of those previously mentioned "fixed" and "unshakeable" products of human creativity, and simultaneously perpetually in motion, driven by its own "developmental logic" toward a "swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli." On the one hand, Marinetti celebrates the city, perceiving in its factories and shipyards with their "vibrating nocturnal fervor" and in the "roaring automobile," trains and airplanes the dissolution of all fixed barriers and the emancipation of movement from ossified forms.<sup>131</sup> His text celebrates the "new form of beauty: the beauty of speed," which has smashed the confines of time and space and replaced them with "velocity which is eternal and omnipresent."<sup>132</sup> On the other hand, Marinetti seeks to reclaim the urban dynamism, thereby turning the city against its own structures: he calls upon his readers to "seize your pickaxes, axes, and hammers, and tear down, pitilessly tear down the venerable cities!"<sup>133</sup> Inherited cultural artifacts and those who seek to preserve them likewise have no place in his vision: "We intend to free this nation from its fetid cancer of professors, archaeologists, tour guides, and antiquarians. [...] Let the glad arsonists with the charred fingers come! [...] Go ahead! Set fire to the shelves of the libraries!"<sup>134</sup>

Antonio Sant'Elia's 1914 *Futurist Architecture* manifesto outlines this vision of remaking the built environment more explicitly. Sant'Elia wishes to see architectural form subjected utterly

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<sup>131</sup>F.T. Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," in *Futurism. An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 51.

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, 52.

to the transience of the individual's self-expression: "Architecture must be understood," Sant'Elia tells us, "as the attempt [. . .] to harmonize man and his environment, that is, to render the world of things into a direct projection of the world of the human mind."<sup>135</sup> Accordingly, Sant'Elia shares Marinetti's distaste for stasis and permanency: "We have lost the sense of the monumental, the massive, the static."<sup>136</sup> He moreover calls for the outright destruction of all that might hinder free movement: "We should blow sky-high all those monuments, pavements, arcades, and flights of steps and we should dig out our streets and piazzas."<sup>137</sup> In their place, Sant'Elia demands "the light, the practical, the ephemeral, and the swift," insisting that "we must invent and rebuild our Futurist city like an immense and tumultuous shipyard, active, mobile."<sup>138</sup> In order to safeguard the dominance of life over form, however, any such rebuilding must itself be subject to a permanent process of construction and destruction. It is for this reason that Sant'Elia's text concludes with the proclamation that "our houses will last less time than we do. Every generation will have to make its own city anew."<sup>139</sup> It is with this vision of incessantly remaking the metropolis that Sant'Elia seeks to definitively overcome the subordination of life to form.

In truth, however, the very impossibility of Sant'Elia's futurist vision exposes futurism's failure to resolve the divide between the subjective and the objective. This is made clear by the parallel fate of the imagined creator and inhabitant of Sant'Elia's architecture, Marinetti's "multiplied man." This answer to Simmel's metropolitan man embraces the dynamism of the city, heightening his creative powers and becoming able "to externalize his will in such a way that it is

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<sup>135</sup> Antonio Sant'Elia, "Futurist Architecture," in *Futurism. An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 201.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

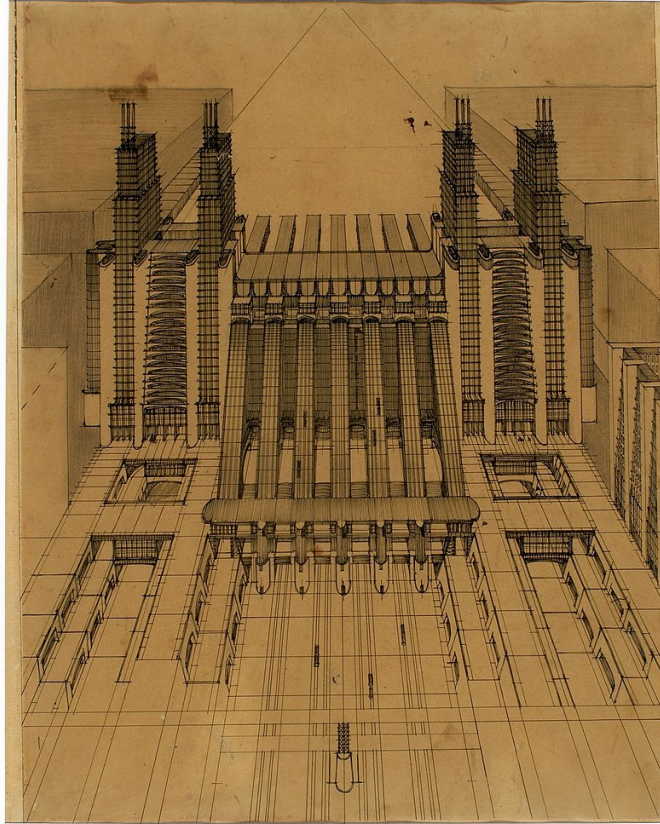


Fig. 4: Sant'Elia, *La Città Nuova*, 1914, ink on paper, 50 x 39 cm. Como, Pinacoteca Civica di Palazzo Volpi.

prolonged beyond himself like an immense, invisible arm.”<sup>140</sup> In this way, the multiplied man participates in the interminable change of the futurist architecture, precipitating a perpetual (self-)transformation that finds its manifestation in the “possibility of an incalculable number of human transformations.”<sup>141</sup> And yet, an irresolvable tension inheres in this dream of complete freedom embodied by the multiplied man and his futurist architecture: while the futurist city can exist only as a dream, a purely subjective vision that leaves reality untouched, Marinetti’s multiplied man ultimately submits to the cold impersonality of Simmel’s city and its corrosive impact on interpersonal relations. The unification of man and modern technology will call forth a

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<sup>140</sup>F.T. Marinetti, “Selections from *Le Futurisme*,” in *Futurism. An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 90.

<sup>141</sup>*Ibid.*, 90.

figure defined by its limitations, “an inhuman type [. . .] in which moral suffering, generosity, affect, and love will be abolished.”<sup>142</sup> The multiplied man, free to dream of endless transformations but actually shaped by the prevailing social relations, reproduces rather than reconciles the divide between subjective creativity and objective culture. In this way, futurism remained trapped within the dilemma sketched by Simmel. Unable to fundamentally change their surroundings, the futurists—and their multiplied man—remain hopelessly beholden to modernity’s objective culture while boisterously declaring their unity with it. The futurist emancipation of humankind becomes a celebration of the modern human’s confinement.

While Lukács similarly aspires to restore to humanity its power over objective culture, he forgoes avant-garde utopianism and thereby avoids the futurists’ ultimately fascist fate. In *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, Lukács argues that “jede Theorie des Sollens” that is, any theory that proclaims simply what humanity should do, is necessarily utopian: it retains “einen bloßen subjektiven Charakter” that allows “das [. . .] Dasein der Empirie [. . .] unverändert stehen zu lassen.”<sup>143</sup> Just as was the case with Sant’Elia’s impossible architecture and its resident multiplied man, then, “Sein und Sollen [bewahren] ihre starre, unüberbrückbare Gegensätzlichkeit.”<sup>144</sup> The consequence, as has been shown, was futurism’s “falsche Transzendieren” of the conflict portrayed by Simmel, which “[fixiert und verewigt] die Unmittelbarkeit der Empirie mit allen ihren unlösbaren Fragen.”<sup>145</sup> In contrast, Lukács’s realist novel seeks to change the prevailing relations by uncovering “jene Prinzipien [. . .], vermittelt welcher das Sollen überhaupt imstande ist, auf das Sein zu wirken.”<sup>146</sup> Lukács’s literary realism does retain an implicit “ought”: by bringing to the fore the “Rundung und [. . .] Reichtum” of

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<sup>142</sup>Marinetti, “Le Futurisme,” 90.

<sup>143</sup>Lukács, “Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein,” 344.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., 345.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., 346.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., 344.

humanity and its manifold relations and simultaneously bearing witness to the reduction of humans to “Fragmente” under prevailing relations, the novel underscores to its reader the need to transform society.<sup>147</sup> However, the realist novel does not sketch a utopian vision, but instead aspires to help its readers overcome its alienated perspective, so that they can recognize and act upon the potential latent in their present-day activity.

Critical for this goal is the novel’s ability to reveal the capitalist second nature to be a mobile network of social relations. The novel replaces Simmel’s antagonistic confrontation between the subjective and the objective with social processes in which the actual interconnection of individual and world is apparent. For Lukács, the social relations underpinning capitalist modernity are characterized by movement, by “eine lebendige Wechselbeziehung der Menschen selbst,” which represents not a static object of scientific study, but rather a “living” constellation of interactions that connect humans to each other and to their environment and that are constantly (re-)produced and—potentially—transformed.<sup>148</sup> It is precisely for this reason that the realist novel becomes so critical for reconstructing this reality: as Fredric Jameson tells us, the Lukácsian resolution of the divide between subject and object “is to be found [. . . ] in the nineteenth-century novel: for the process he describes bears less resemblance to the ideals of scientific knowledge than it does to the elaboration of plot.”<sup>149</sup> Jameson’s argument points to the way in which literary plotting is a building material uniquely able to represent the hidden social relations that connect the human to external reality because their dynamism and changeability correspond to plot’s own forward momentum: “Die unbefangene, richtige, tiefe und umfassende dichterische Widerspiegelung ihrer Wirksamkeit im menschlichen Leben muß in der Form der Bewegung erscheinen.”<sup>150</sup> In this way, the Lukácsian novel reveals capitalist society to be a totality in motion, “ein bewegtes Ganzes,” a

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<sup>147</sup>Lukács, “Marx und das Problem des ideologischen Verfalls,” 279.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., 274.

<sup>149</sup>Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 189.

<sup>150</sup>Lukács, “Erzählen oder beschreiben?,” 109.

“lebendige Einheit,” in which the workers’ actions, far from being powerless to alter external reality, enact and thereby reproduce the very social relations that determine the objective world.

Society is “ein bewegtes Ganzes,” the Lukácsian realist novel intimates, and the novel is able to reveal this because, crucially, it itself assumes the shape of “ein bewegtes Ganzes” The novel balances form and movement, its stability as literary form, as aesthetic totality, on the one hand and the movement and change inherent in its plot on the other. Crucially for literary realism’s revolutionary potential, this novelistic interrelation of form and movement inverts Simmel’s conflict between the individual and its objective culture. Thus, for Simmel, the overwhelming experience of rapid circulation in capitalist modernity takes place within the framework of an autonomous, and seemingly immutable, capitalist objective world. The novel reveals this view to be fundamentally mistaken, for the novel’s aesthetic totality exposes the apparently autonomous circulation of objects to be the illusory manifestation of the static social order, which is a “sich ununterbrochen bewegend[e], gespenstisch[e] Starrheit.”<sup>151</sup> While the novel’s aesthetic totality thereby transforms chaotic movement into a legible form, its plot simultaneously converts form into movement, precisely because—as we have seen—capitalism’s objective culture appears as mutable social relations; it “[löst] sich in den Prozeß, dessen treibende Kraft der Mensch ist, [auf].”<sup>152</sup> Through thus inverting the interplay of form and movement, the realist novel turns Simmel’s theory on its head: while its aesthetic totality dispels the notion of an autonomous objective culture, its plot reveals that human action always already determines a society that is—fundamentally—a network of enacted social relations.

In this way, the novel as a “lebendige Einheit” realizes the architectural reconciliation of movement and form to which Sant’Elia could only aspire. Whereas Sant’Elia’s vision of a city that perpetually remakes itself was made unrealizable not least by the fixity of conventional architecture, the novel’s literary architecture makes it possible to sustain that co-existence of movement and form. As a result, the architecture of the realist novel is able to inspire the

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<sup>151</sup>Lukács, “Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein,” 367.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 367.

emergence not of the monstrous multiplied man but instead of a genuinely revolutionary consciousness. The realist novel reveals to the reader the possibility of reclaiming human agency over the objective world, over its socioeconomic environment not through any futurist embrace of the modern “Lebenstempo,” but instead by revealing to readers the already extant power of their actions. By making manifest in this way that human action always already determines society, namely through the “Wechselbeziehungen der Menschen zueinander,” the realist novel underlines how capitalist second nature must constantly be reproduced by human hands and can, therefore, also be radically transformed by those hands.<sup>153</sup>

### **Building Revolutionary Realism**

Ohne eine solche Liebe zum Menschen und zum Leben, die den tiefsten Haß gegen die Gesellschaft, die Klassen, die Menschen, die ihn erniedrigen und entstellen, notwendig einschließt, kann heute in der kapitalistischen Welt kein wirklich großer Realismus entstehen. Diese Liebe und der ihr komplementäre Haß führen die Schriftsteller dazu, den Reichtum der Beziehungen im menschlichen Leben aufzudecken, die ertötete Welt des Kapitalismus als einen ununterbrochenen Kampf gegen diese ertötenden Mächte darzustellen. Mag die Gestaltung zeigen, daß die heute lebenden Menschen armselige Fragmente und Karikaturen des Menschen sind, der Schriftsteller muß in sich erlebt haben, was die Möglichkeiten des wirklichen Menschseins, seiner Rundung und seines Reichtums sind, um die Karikaturen als Karikaturen sehen und zeichnen zu können, um aus dem Zerschlagen der Menschen zu Fragmenten eine Kampfstimme gegen die Welt, die dies täglich und stündlich hervorbringt, zu erleben und zu entfachen.

— Lukács, *Marx und das Problem des ideologischen Verfalls*, 278–279

In his 1973 work *Architecture and Utopia*, Manfredo Tafuri, the Italian Marxist architect and theoretician, explained the failure of the architectural avant-garde’s responses to the capitalist city—which is to say, as Paul Jaskot puts it, that Tafuri “explode[d] the ideological projections of the avant-garde by employing a materialist analysis of capitalism’s developing use of built and

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<sup>153</sup>Lukács, “Erzählen oder beschreiben?,” 231.



urban form.”<sup>154</sup> Tafuri achieved this by identifying two central tendencies, one destructive and one creative, that underpin the period’s architectural innovations. Neither of these approaches were successful in their ambition of effecting revolutionary socioeconomic change precisely because, Tafuri argues, capitalism feeds off both destruction and creation. The destruction of the old makes room for creation, for further development and growth. Thus, writing of the avant-garde rejection of existing structures and norms, something that was evident in Taut’s dream of tearing down the capitalist city, Tafuri states that “the destruction and rendering ridiculous of the Western bourgeoisie were conditions for the liberation of the potential, but inhibited, energies of that bourgeoisie itself.”<sup>155</sup> What’s more, the creative tendency necessarily affirms the status quo, something recognized (and celebrated) at the time by Le Corbusier. As we have seen, Le Corbusier emphasized the improvement and modernization of housing forestalls rather than promotes revolution. It keeps workers content and better integrates them into the technologized city. The crucial mistake of the architects, Tafuri therefore indicates, was that they believed architectural innovation was sufficient to restructure society’s socioeconomic foundations. They would not or could not accept that one cannot build socialism with bricks and mortar alone.

While Tafuri pinpoints the causes of modernist architecture’s failings, he doesn’t dismiss the high stakes of architecture previously described. Indeed, Tafuri affirms architecture’s significance: the projects of the 1920s failed, he argues, because, as the leftists had feared, architecture entrenches the capitalist organization of life. The question is therefore: can architecture assume only this counterrevolutionary role? Or is there an architectural form capable of intervening into economic structures? Bertolt Brecht offers a useful indication of how we might answer these questions. Writing in 1928, Brecht establishes that conventional architectural form tends to mask rather than reveal capitalism’s socioeconomic impact: “Eine Photographie der Kruppwerke oder der AEG ergibt beinahe nichts über die Institute. [. . .] Die Verdinglichung der menschlichen

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<sup>154</sup>Paul Jaskot, “Political Economy,” in *Kunst und Politik. Jahrbuch der Guernica-Gesellschaft, Bd. 21*, ed. Nobert Schneider, Martin Papenbrock, and Andrew Hemingway (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2019), 127.

<sup>155</sup>Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. Barbara Luigia La Penta (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976), 55–56.

Beziehungen, also etwa die Fabrik, gibt die letzteren nicht mehr aus.”<sup>156</sup> For Brecht, then, if we wish to confront and ultimately overcome the economic order underlying our built environment, the solution to this problem must lie in an entirely new form of building, one that makes visible the socioeconomic tendencies that dominate humans and their society: “Es ist also tatsächlich ‘etwas aufzubauen’, etwas ‘Künstliches’, ‘Gestelltes’” — and this means, for Brecht, that “es ist also ebenso tatsächlich Kunst nötig.”<sup>157</sup> It is in art, the aesthetic, that Brecht here discerns the possibility of an architecture able to expose and thereby challenge capital’s hegemony.

We might conclude this chapter’s exploration of the architecture of the Lukácsian realist novel by suggesting that it seeks to realize precisely the type of building described by Brecht, a type of building that thereby breaks with Tafuri’s dichotomy of creation and destruction. The novel creates a space that protects the individual from the total integration into capitalism that Le Corbusier prophesied, but a space that nevertheless breaks down the barriers between people and thereby necessitates a confrontation with existing social relations. The end goal of this novelistic transformation of dwelling is not the complete abandonment of form, the reinstatement of Tafuri’s dichotomy through the celebration of one side against the other. Instead, Lukács envisions the overcoming of reified consciousness, of humankind’s alienation from the products of its own labor. The realist novel reveals to its readers, that is to say, that what appears as an unchangeable second nature is in fact a product of human beings, their actions and their relations. It thereby breaks through the modern workers’ reified consciousness in order to reveal to them that they were always already responsible for shaping their world—and now they merely need to do so consciously and freely. Accordingly, for the Lukácsian realist novel, it is not primarily a question of inspiring the destruction of existing social relations, but rather of reactivating the dialectical, creative relationship between the human and its surroundings. With the singular architecture of the realist novel, Lukács discerns the possibility not of choosing one side of dichotomy sketched

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<sup>156</sup>Bertolt Brecht, “Der Dreigroschenprozess. Ein soziologisches Experiment,” in *Gesammelte Werke, Bd. 18* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1967), 161.

<sup>157</sup>*Ibid.*, 162.

by Tafuri, but rather of transforming readers' comprehension of their world and their own capacity for action.

Significantly, the capacity for action made manifest by the realist novel is bound up with a class consciousness to which the novel necessarily contributes. As Lukács tells us in *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, the preconditions of proletarian class consciousness, the creation of a “gemeinsam[e] Lage und [. . . ] gemeinsam[e] Interessen,” result from modern processes of industrialization, the “Vereinigung vieler Arbeiter in großen Betrieben, [. . . ] Mechanisierung und Uniformisierung des Arbeitsprozesses, [. . . ] Nivellierung der Lebensbedingungen.”<sup>158</sup> This latent class identity will become “das eigene Dasein als Klasse für das Proletariat” as soon as “die falschen Erscheinungsformen dieses Daseins in seiner Unmittelbarkeit” are—with the help of literary realism—exposed.<sup>159</sup> This will inevitably happen, Lukács suggests, because for workers to perceive the reality of their social situation means to acknowledge that the proletariat's “gemeinsame Lage” is precisely the absence of individual identity. Since capitalist modernity reduces workers to commodities and alienates them from their own capacities, the proletarian class exists inasmuch as workers experience a shared loss of individuality. Thus, what the realist novel reveals to its readers is precisely the “Aufhebung der Vereinzelung,” the reality that the very system that brutalizes them, reducing them to commodities, also ensures that they belong to a collective with the capacity and motivation to enact social transformation: “Das Zur-Ware-Werden der von der Gesamtpersönlichkeit des Menschen abgetrennten Leistung [erwächst] [. . . ] im Proletariate zu einem revolutionären Klassenbewußtsein.”<sup>160</sup> In this way, the realist novel allows workers to discover collective strength where they had previously experienced individual powerlessness.

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<sup>158</sup>Lukács, “Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein,” 358, 357.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., 357.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid., 356.

By entering the space of the realist novel, therefore, the reader gains the insights necessary for the realization of revolutionary social change that can only be effected, however, outside of the novel and through the reader's collaboration with a collective. The Lukácsian novel presents to readers not a still life, in which they can find a stable hideaway for themselves, but rather a narrative that, by propelling the reader ever onward through the story, provides a model of dwelling diametrically opposed to the isolated inhabitant of the bourgeois home who hides from a fast-paced and immutable second nature. The readers of the novel dwell—are "beheimatet"—in movement and learn, moreover, to understand that movement. With the end of the novel, such readers, departing their transitory literary home, return to a reality they now comprehend and recognize their belonging to a collectivity able to change it. In this way, Lukács's realist novel makes space for the human to recognize that its position and its power within the existing social order, and this social transformation is, for Lukács, predicated on this recognition. It is by translating this transformation of consciousness into praxis that the laborious and uncertain break with reification, with capitalist modernity's oppressive environment, can begin. Ultimately, then, although social transformation itself can "nur die — freie — Tat des Proletariats selbst sein," the architecture of the Lukácsian realist nevertheless succeeds in giving "dem Proletariat [. . .] die Möglichkeit und die Notwendigkeit zur Verwandlung der Gesellschaft in die Hand."<sup>161</sup>

Famously, Lukács's theories of literary realism did not meet with universal approbation. His two-fronted attack against both the literary reportage of the BPRS and the modernist experiments of the expressionists precipitated lengthy debates that continued throughout the 1930s and culminated in the Expressionism Debate. Nevertheless, the very intensity with which writers and theorists sought to counter Lukács's provocative account of realism underscores his influence in the later years of the interwar era. It speaks to the way in which his theoretical writings stood alone in consistently raising the period's critical questions of literary production; as Jameson puts it, Lukács "produced, as no other contemporaneous oeuvre did, the elements of a systematic

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<sup>161</sup>Lukács, "Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein," 397.

history of prose narrative and a sustained account of the relations between ideology and literary form.”<sup>162</sup> Thus, even as his contemporaries strove to challenge him, Lukács’s work remained a crucial touchstone, an unavoidable point of reference for anyone seeking to realize their own vision of revolutionary literature. The case studies in the following chapters of this dissertation are intended to be read in this spirit. The realist novels in question certainly pushed back against aspects of Lukács’s theories, but they nevertheless recognized and responded to the philosopher’s diagnosis of the problems examined in this chapter. In this way, as the following case studies argue, the novels of Kracauer, Zweig, and Döblin complicate and further develop the Lukácsian concept of literary realism’s relationship to the built environment.

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<sup>162</sup>Fredric Jameson, *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1980), 14.

## CHAPTER II. IN SEARCH OF AN EXIT: CONFINEMENT AND LIBERATION IN SIEGFRIED KRACAUER'S *Ginster*

“Finster ist der Bau,” wrote Siegfried Kracauer in a 1931 essay on Franz Kafka and his prose collection *Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer*, “den eine Generation nach der anderen errichtet. Finster aber darum, weil er eine Sicherheit gewährleisten soll, die für Menschen nicht zu erlangen ist.”<sup>1</sup> Kracauer discerns throughout Kafka’s collection an image of the human who, desirous of security, seeks to fashion the world into a stable, hospitable home. The very constancy of the world thus transformed is, however, incompatible with human nature. The human’s built environment accordingly becomes not a home, but rather a suffocating cell: “Je systematischer [die Menschen] [den Bau] anlegen, desto weniger können sie in ihm atmen, je lückenloser sie ihn aufzuführen streben, desto unvermeidlicher wird er zum Kerker.”<sup>2</sup> For Kafka, Kracauer contends, it remains unclear whether the human is capable of breaking free from this self-imposed confinement.<sup>3</sup> Kracauer perceives in Kafka’s stories “eine Spur von Hoffnung,” glimpses of a more harmonious relationship between human and environment and indications that such a relationship may yet be realized through a revolutionary transformation of society.<sup>4</sup> The only thing that Kracauer can state with certainty about such a transformation, however, is that it would

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<sup>1</sup>Siegfried Kracauer, *Das Ornament der Masse* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), 256.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>3</sup>Indeed, Kata Gellen suggests it is precisely this ambiguity that underpins what she calls Kafka’s “architectural narration,” which unfolds “through and against architecture”: Kafka’s stories are namely full of “buildings and sites [that] are often incomplete or labyrinthine [...] which means they both require endless elucidation and resist conclusive answers.” See Kata Gellen, *Kafka and Noise: The Discovery of Cinematic Sound in Literary Modernism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2019), 74

<sup>4</sup>Kracauer, *Das Ornament der Masse*, 267.

necessarily require collective action: “Das Dach des niedrigen Lebens zu öffnen: allein die Gemeinschaft besäße nach [Kafka] diese sprengende Kraft.”<sup>5</sup>

The tripartite constellation of the human, its built environment, and the possibility of revolutionary transformation that Kracauer thus maps in reference to Kafka had, in truth, dominated his own work throughout the previous decade. Kracauer’s interpretation accordingly has less to do with Kafka himself than with Kracauer’s understanding of his contemporary moment, and Kafka’s texts appear to him as a product of the epochal events that shaped “unsere Welt”: “Sie sind in den Jahren des Kriegs, der Revolution und der Inflation niedergeschrieben. Obwohl sich kein einziges Wort im ganzen Band unmittelbar auf diese Ereignisse bezieht, gehören sie doch zu seinen Voraussetzungen.”<sup>6</sup> The (im)plausibility of Kracauer’s Kafka interpretation notwithstanding, therefore, the essay succinctly delineates contours of Kracauer’s thought that will be at stake in this chapter. On the basis of Kracauer’s first novel, *Ginster*, it will be shown that, for Kracauer, the possibility of the revolutionary liberation of the human and its community from an oppressive modern environment forms the cornerstone of his interwar output. The political vision Kracauer developed in those years must therefore be viewed together with his interrogation of the limitations and potentialities of human nature.

*Ginster* was published in 1928 with the subtitle *Von ihm selbst geschrieben* after initially appearing episodically in the *FZ*. Despite poor sales, it was critically acclaimed. The novel tells the story of the eponymous protagonist from the outbreak of the First World war up to the November Revolution. A final chapter, which was criticized by Adorno for its apparently optimistic outlook and which Kracauer had removed from the 1963 reprint of the novel, takes place five years after the end of the war. The work is replete with autobiographical allusions, and the novel’s protagonist is notably employed—as Kracauer was at the beginning of the interwar period—as an architect. Nevertheless, the manifold autobiographical allusions in the novel should, as Später observes, be approached with caution:

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<sup>5</sup>Kracauer, *Das Ornament der Masse*, 268.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 259, 256.

Dass es sich bei diesem Roman um einen quasiautobiographischen Text handelte, darum hat Kracauer nie ein Geheimnis gemacht. [...] Gleichzeitig allerdings war Ginster eher ein Medium für Expeditionen in die Kriegsgesellschaft als ein Ich. [...] [Die Figur] war nichtig, geradezu ein 'Anti-Subjekt' — freilich mit dem Ziel, Subjektivität und Individualität zu retten, die im Krieg geopfert und zerstört worden waren.<sup>7</sup>

In thus warning against a reading of *Ginster* that focuses too heavily on the parallels in the lives of the author and his protagonist, Später draws attention to those elements of social critique and the possibility of transformation evident in Kracauer's review of Kafka. The novel's social critique of the "Kriegsgesellschaft," Später suggests, foregrounds the destructive impact of that society on the human and seeks to reverse that destruction.<sup>8</sup>

To suggest, as this chapter does, that Kracauer was interested in Marxist theory and a socialist transformation of society contradicts much scholarship on the writer. It is certainly true that his correspondences with Ernst Bloch showcase a fondness only for Marx's more humanist impulses, and they also demonstrate his dislike for Georg Lukács's Marxist philosophy, ultimately offering only glimpses of a political vision. Frisby summarizes the situation by stating that Kracauer did not "[create] for himself a secure place within the Marxist tradition."<sup>9</sup> Kracauer is accordingly viewed simply as an "unaffiliated and experimental leftist" for whom, Jay observes on the basis of a 1970 letter written by Kracauer's widow, Lili, "all forms of conformity, including solidarity with the working-class movement [...] were anathema."<sup>10</sup> A skepticism toward conformity certainly animates *Ginster*, and this chapter brings Kracauer's novel into

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<sup>7</sup>Jörg Später, *Siegfried Kracauer. Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016), 217–218.

<sup>8</sup>*Ginster* has nevertheless been interpreted productively as an auto-biographical text. Rogowski, for example, argues that "The entire novel can be read as an effort on the part of the subject, Ginster (i.e., Kracauer), to control the narrative of his own life, to 'write' the story 'himself,' rather than having an identity ascribed to him by others." See Christian Rogowski, "'Written by himself': Siegfried Kracauer's 'Auto-Biographical' Novels," in *Culture in the Anteroom. The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer*, ed. Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 199–212, 206.

<sup>9</sup>David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity. Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), 125.

<sup>10</sup>Martin Jay, "The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer," *Salmagundi* 31/32 (1975): 61, 63–64.



dialogue with the philosophical anthropological theories of Helmuth Plessner to demonstrate parallels in their respective critiques of “Gemeinschaft.”<sup>11</sup> For both Plessner and Kracauer, *Gemeinschaft*’s promise of a perfect harmony between individual and collective is necessarily illusory. As this chapter demonstrates, Kracauer explicates this idea in *Ginster* on the basis of Germany’s wartime community, outlining how the brutal reality of World War I ultimately smashed the illusion of the German “Volk.”

Nevertheless, this chapter also challenges the assessments of Frisby and Jay by showing that Kracauer, critically engaging in the second half of the 1920s with the theories of Lukács and Bloch, did in fact forge a unique position in the materialist tradition—and that, moreover, he formulated that position in and through *Ginster*. Certainly, *Ginster*’s materialist engagement with the modern built environment and the human was written at the height of Kracauer’s interest in revolutionary Marxism.<sup>12</sup> Kracauer had been in regular contact with significant left-wing figures such as Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno throughout the 1920s, but it was Ernst Bloch, with whom he began a correspondence in 1926, who became his principal discussion partner when it came to the topic of Marxism. While Kracauer remained skeptical of the more esoteric aspects of Blochian philosophy, he did, in the latter half of the decade, discover in Bloch a friend who shared his interest in restoring the human to the center of Marxist theory. Tellingly, this interest led Kracauer, during his work on *Ginster*, to also write an ultimately unpublished monograph on the concept of the human being in Marx.<sup>13</sup> This chapter accordingly shows that while Kracauer does invoke Plessner’s critique of community, he does not accept the Plessnerian celebration of

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<sup>11</sup>For Kracauer’s generally positive assessment of Plessner’s writings, see for example Später, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 130. Sieg has also written about the Plessnerian influence on Kracauer, describing how Plessner’s community critique influenced Kracauer’s writings on city life. See Christian Sieg, “Heimat Berlin. Siegfried Kracauer und Alfred Döblin als urbane Ethnografen der klassischen Moderne,” in *‘Heimat’: At the Intersection of Memory and Space*, ed. Friederike Eigler and Jens Kugele (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 93–107, especially 97.

<sup>12</sup>Vedda writes of Kracauer “conceiving his first novel while in the midst of an intense examination of Marx’s writings, as well as some of the most outstanding Marxist works of those years.” Miguel Vedda, “The Novel of a Melancholy Outcast. On *Ginster*,” in *Siegfried Kracauer, or, The Allegories of Improvisation* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 43.

<sup>13</sup>Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity*, 126.

(Weimar) society. Instead, *Ginster* points to a destructive continuity in the society-community nexus, a continuity rooted in the persistence of the depicted class society. As long as soldiers and workers remain beholden to the ruling class, *Ginster* intimates, the problem of the individual's unfreedom cannot be overcome.

The political vision of *Ginster* builds on the insights of Kracauer's earlier theoretical work *Der Detektiv-Roman*, which he completed in 1925.<sup>14</sup> *Der Detektiv-Roman* represented a shift toward the critique of everyday life in Kracauer's work, for—as Mülder-Bach makes clear—it was “die erste Arbeit, in der Kracauer aus den ‘Höhenlagen’ etablierter philosophischer Themen in die ‘Niederungen’ der Unterhaltungskultur hinabsteigt.”<sup>15</sup> For Frisby, the work reflects a moment of transition in Kracauer's oeuvre: Kracauer here shifts away from the conservative social critique that had shaped his early writings.<sup>16</sup> Instead, Kracauer seeks in *Der Detektiv-Roman* insight into the tensions and contradictions intrinsic to his contemporary society. The work thus heralds the beginning of a philosophical trajectory that would shape Kracauer's output for the rest of the decade. It is significant, therefore, that *Der Detektiv-Roman* critically interrogates the philosophy of Georg Lukács, reproducing the Lukácsian critiques of capitalist modernity but ultimately diverging decisively when it comes to the question of social change. Whereas, in *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, Lukács philosophically demonstrates that the proletariat must inevitably become “the subject-object of history” and transform bourgeois society, Kracauer indicates that such a philosophical resolution must necessarily remain

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<sup>14</sup>By reading *Ginster* together with *Der Detektiv-Roman*, this chapter seeks to make possible an analysis of the novel that has arguably been overlooked because of the dominant tendency in scholarship to interpret Kracauer's novel alongside his more famous theoretical work, “Das Ornament der Masse” (1927). As this chapter hopes to show, it is specifically on the basis of his literary reworking of motifs from *Der Detektiv-Roman* that Kracauer outlines his political vision in *Ginster*. For examples of approaches that foreground “Das Ornament der Masse,” see, for example, Konstantin Schuhmann, “‘Rechteck’, ‘Strich’ und ‘Strichnetz’. Von der geometrischen Wahrnehmung in Siegfried Kracauers Roman *Ginster*,” *REAL — Revista de Estudos Alemães* 5 (2014): 51–63, 56; and Inka Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer — Grenzgänger zwischen Theorie und Literatur. Seine frühen Schriften 1913–1933* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1985), 135.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>16</sup>See David Frisby, “Between the Spheres: Siegfried Kracauer and the Detective Novel,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 9, no. 2 (1992): 14.

disconnected from a reality that cannot be fully captured by any philosophical system. Indeed, for Kracauer, the hope for a different future lies precisely in breaking with all such abstract systems, in creating space for alterity, for the unfolding of humanity's manifold potentialities.

This notion of "creating space" is central to *Ginster*. Kracauer's deeply held interest in architecture leaves its mark on the political aesthetics of his novel. After earning his doctorate in engineering, writing his dissertation on the use of wrought iron in the architecture of Berlin and Brandenburg, Kracauer had thereafter begun training as an architect.<sup>17</sup> Although he abandoned this career path in 1920, architectural developments continued to occupy a central role in his journalistic and essayistic writings of the interwar period, something emphasized by Henrik Reeh: "With his experience as an architect and his interest in social science, Kracauer possessed a great sensitivity regarding urban phenomena. [. . .] Kracauer was able to allow his interest in modern urbanity to develop in the comprehensive culture section of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*."<sup>18</sup> This interest fundamentally informs *Ginster*, in which the impact of the war effort on the built environment is imagined as a radical homogenization of space: the depicted suppression of individuality in the wartime community is paralleled by the obliteration of spatial alterity. Although the persistence of this overbearing built environment after the war's conclusion underlines a continuity between World War I and Weimar Germany, Kracauer also discerns a utopian potential in the depicted architecture, for *Ginster*'s own playful approach to design models a different approach to space, one that seeks not to confine and direct those contained within, but rather to make room for their flourishing, their creative self-expression.

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<sup>17</sup>Reeh offers the following pithy summary of the key takeaway from the positive assessment of wrought iron in Kracauer's dissertation: "[T]hree elements—beauty, individuality, and joy—sum up Kracauer's early aesthetic position: the anonymous yet masterly art of wrought-iron work, whose amorphous yet intellectually cohesive and detailed yet harmonious latticework constitutes a neglected yet decisive element in pre-modern Berlin." Henrik Reeh, *Ornaments of the Metropolis. Siegfried Kracauer and Modern Urban Culture* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2004), 69. Zimmerman considers this dissertation in her useful overview of Kracauer's architectural thought before and during the Weimar years in Claire Zimmerman, "Siegfried Kracauer's Architectures," in *Culture in the Anteroom. The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer*, ed. Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 149–165.

<sup>18</sup>Reeh, *Ornaments of the Metropolis*, 2.

The novel's investment in architecture ultimately helps us comprehend why Kracauer chose to make his contribution to the Marxist tradition in literary form. This chapter contends that Kracauer's *Ginster* draws parallels between the closed philosophical systems prevalent in the German intellectual culture depicted in the novel—and taken up by Lukács even as he sought to fundamentally transform the prevailing social relations—and the homogenized and constraining architecture that shapes the (self-)destructive wartime community. Kracauer's novel thereby presents such theoretical constructs as themselves a form of abstract architecture, the theoretical counterpart to the real-world architecture he depicts. By attacking these philosophical foundations of the social order with his own literary work, Kracauer declines to counterpoise one totalizing system with another. Instead, his open-ended novel provides the blueprint for a different kind of architecture, one that underlines the necessity of a revolutionary social change that affirms the utopian potential of *Ginster*'s playful creativity. Whereas *Ginster*'s utopian designs falter when confronted with reality, becoming exposed as unrealizable or else assuming a structural fixity that undermines their intent, Kracauer's literary architecture is—as this chapter demonstrates—able to retain its openness. In this way, the novel underscores the necessity of collective social transformation but it declines to prescribe a specific path forward, instead leaving space for the future to be forged through the unfolding of humankind's manifold potentialities.

### **Community and the Homogenization of Space**

In his depiction of World War I's outbreak in *Ginster*, Kracauer invokes the historical “war enthusiasm” with which many Germans—including Kracauer himself—initially greeted the conflict.<sup>19</sup> Infamously, many German intellectuals and artists initially celebrated the war “as a

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<sup>19</sup>Schuhmann and Grünwald also highlight Kracauer's invocation of this widespread excitement amongst intellectuals. See Schuhmann, “‘Rechteck’, ‘Strich’ und ‘Strichnetz’. Von der geometrischen Wahrnehmung in Siegfried Kracauer's Roman *Ginster*,” 53; and Heidi Grünwald, “Mit kleinen Dingen gegen das große Getöse. Zu Siegfried Kracauer's Roman *Ginster*. Von ihm selbst geschrieben,” in *Retornos / Rückkehr. La Primera Guerra Mundial en el contexto hispano-alemán / Der Erste Weltkrieg im deutsch-spanischen Kontext*, ed. Heidi Grünwald, Anna Montané Forasté, and Thomas F. Schneider (Osnabrück: Universitätsverlag Osnabrück, 2015), 195–203, 199.

way of providing relief from the boredom and sterility of bourgeois materialist culture.”<sup>20</sup> It is this aspect of the war’s reception to which *Ginster*’s opening pages direct the reader’s attention: “Der Krieg war erklärt worden [. . .]. Hochs wurden ausgebracht. Es trommelte.”<sup>21</sup> Otto, a friend of the eponymous protagonist, later justifies this enthusiasm by suggesting outright that the war promises to enliven a decadent and ailing culture: “Die jungen Leute [. . .] machen mit, weil sie an den Universitäten im Spezialistentum verkommen und nun endlich einmal ein Ziel zu gewahren glauben, dem sie als ganze Menschen sich widmen dürfen” (*G*, 46). These young people described by Otto wish to escape a narrow intellectual culture in order to reawaken in themselves a more holistic human nature. Indeed, central to Otto’s desire to participate in the war is his desire to express a corporeality otherwise neglected in his university lifestyle: “Ich bin ein junger kräftiger Mensch, und wenn ich zu Hause bliebe, solange die andern draußen im Feld. . . ich könnte es nicht ertragen” (*G*, 46) For soldiers like Otto, then, the war promises a fulfillment of their human nature, a realignment of mind and body, of inner life and physical form.

Otto’s comprehension of the war stands in uneasy tension, however, with assessments of the war made by other characters in Kracauer’s novel. The hope for the fulfillment of human nature is seemingly undermined by those figures who, despite similarly supporting the war effort, emphasize the wartime need for a collectivity disabused of individual identities. *Ginster*’s uncle, for example, becomes the “Vaterland in Person” following the war’s declaration and proclaims that “Das Stück Land ist im Osten besetzt, ein Befreiungskrieg, der einzelne hat in der Gesamtheit unterzugehen” (*G*, 46). The uncle here prioritizes not the flourishing of human nature, but the sacrifice of the individual to a community, to the wartime “Volk” that emerges apparently instantaneously upon war breaking out: “Wir sind überfallen worden, wir werden es den andern schon zeigen. Sie waren auf einmal ein Volk” (*G*, 8). That this subsumption of many individuals into a communal “Wir” contrasts sharply with Otto’s focus on individual fulfillment is

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<sup>20</sup>Wolfgang J. Mommsen, “German Artists, Writers, and Intellectuals and the Meaning of War, 1914–1918,” in *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, ed. Josh Horne (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 21.

<sup>21</sup>Siegfried Kracauer, *Ginster* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1990), 8. Hereafter *G*.

foregrounded by Ginster himself, who expresses his own skepticism toward the war thus: “Das war jetzt alles ein Volk. Ginster hatte niemals Völker kennengelernt, immer nur Leute, einzelne Menschen” (*G*, 9). Kracauer’s novel hereby juxtaposes two apparently mutually exclusive manifestations of war enthusiasm: Otto’s dream of the battlefield flourishing of the individual stands side by side with the uncle’s insistence that the war demands the absolute prioritization of community over individual.

The co-existence of Otto’s hope for personal fulfillment and the reality of the individual’s suppression gestures toward the influential theory of “Gemeinschaft” formulated by Helmuth Plessner. Across two works written in Weimar Germany—*Grenzen der Gemeinschaft* (1923) and *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* (1928)—the philosophical anthropologist Plessner set out his theory of human nature and the form of sociability best suited to it. Kracauer’s appreciation for the writings of Plessner is well-documented and there are clear similarities between the dangers Plessner associated with community (*Gemeinschaft*) and that Kracauer perceives in the wartime *Volk*. For Plessner, who built upon Ferdinand Tönnies’s distinction between society (*Gesellschaft*) and community (*Gemeinschaft*), community is premised on the collapse of all interpersonal distance: “Gemeinschaft bedeutet ihren Verfechtern den Inbegriff lebendiger, unmittelbarer, vom Sein und Wollen der Personen her gerechtfertigter Beziehungen zwischen Menschen.”<sup>22</sup> For Plessner, then, community’s appeal lies precisely in its promise of a seemingly impossible harmony between individual and collective. The idealized community is itself the “authentic” expression of each constituent individual’s inner life, their “Sein und Wollen,” such that “Echtheit und Rückhaltlosigkeit” become community’s “wesentlichen Merkmale.” The Plessnerian community thereby connects Otto’s longing for a more holistic human nature to the uncle’s emphasis on collectivity by imagining the community as the real-world manifestation of the individual’s inner life. Kracauer’s apparently contradictory wartime *Volk* points to this communal ideal as outlined by Plessner.

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<sup>22</sup>Plessner, *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft*, 44.

Significantly, however, Plessner believes the ideal of *Gemeinschaft* to be fundamentally illusory, and his anthropological theory explores the destructive ramifications of community's internal contradictions. Plessner argues that, in reality, community does not actualize individuality; instead, it eliminates individuality altogether: "Die Tendenz nach Zerstörung der Formen und Grenzen fördert aber das Streben nach Angleichung aller Unterschiede. Mit gesinnungsmäßiger Preisgabe eines Rechts auf Distanz zwischen Menschen [. . .] ist der Mensch selbst bedroht."<sup>23</sup> The suppression of social distance leaves no space for the unfolding of individuality and therefore ultimately equates, in Plessner's view, to an utter suppression of difference. Personal identity dissipates and is replaced completely by shared values and collective identity: "[D]ie einzelne, verschlossene Person [gibt sich] auf, um ihre Selbständigkeit aus einer übergeordneten Seinsquelle, dem Zusammenhang aller Glieder, dem in ihrem Haupt gestalthaft gegenwärtigen Stiftungsgedanken, neu zu empfangen."<sup>24</sup> The utopian vision underlying the dream of *Gemeinschaft* is, in Plessner's view, therefore a dangerous illusion: the community as described by Plessner erodes individuality even as it fails to realize the utopian sociability that it promises. The human is flattened, and all community members are defined by "Treue" and "Opferbereitschaft" to a community that determines the horizon of their own existence and in which all members are interchangeable.<sup>25</sup>

With *Ginster*, Kracauer invokes Plessner's theories in order to develop his own critique of community that connects the relationship between the wartime obliteration of individual identity to a suppression of spatial alterity. In the aforementioned quote from *Ginster's* uncle, the war is framed as the contestation of a "Stück Land im Osten." The uncle argues that the individual must become part of the wartime community specifically in order to "liberate" this "occupied" territory. This notion that the war is fundamentally a contestation of space recurs throughout

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<sup>23</sup>Plessner, *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft*, 28.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 48.

Kracauer's novel. Indeed, Ginster, who approaches the enthusiasm of his peers skeptically, later repeats his uncle's reference to the "Stück Land," but transforms it into a critique of the conflict: "Seit rechts im Osten ein Stück Land vom Gegner besetzt worden ist, jammern [alle Leute] als gehöre es ihnen privat" (*G*, 42). Kracauer's novel hereby portrays the military operation as a spatially expansive one, which is intended primarily to oust an enemy and establish German control over the space. Tellingly, the conquest of the "Stück Land" proceeds not because of any material advantages it might yield to those who undertake it; instead, control of the land becomes—as a public speaker overheard by Ginster makes clear—the principal goal: "[Der Redner] erklärte, daß die Bevölkerung um des Landes willen vorhanden sei, für das sie freudig ihr Leben hingeben werde" (*G*, 50).

The war of *Ginster* does not just contest space, however; instead, the war represents an effort to transform space. The novel foregrounds this process within Germany itself. The liminal space of Frankfurt's *Stadtwald*, for example, initially traces the border between the city's built environment and the natural world. It is there that, shortly after the war's outbreak, Ginster meets with Otto, who has since volunteered for military service. Whilst Ginster remarks upon the metamorphosis undergone by this new member of the wartime community ("Sie haben ihn ganz ins Rechteck gezwungen [. . .], ein Automat."), such changes are, albeit only briefly and partly, reversed during their conversation in the forest: "Beherrschte ihn unter den Bäumen auch weniger das System, so ließ sich doch die Uniform nicht entfernen. [. . .] [E]r war der Otto von früher" (*G*, 45–46). The natural space of the forest thus constitutes a societal zone that remains largely external to the war's influence. With the intensification of the conflict, however, comes the military intervention into this space too: Ginster is tasked with overseeing the construction of a leather factory that, deep in the *Stadtwald*, will produce boots for the soldiers. The construction of the factory heralds the military colonization of this previously heterotopic space: "Die Maschinen waren noch verwöhnter [. . .], das Fabrikgebäude hatte sich rein nach ihren Bedürfnissen zu richten" (*G*, 96). Where previously the forest had offered Otto temporary reprieve from his reduction to a de-individualized "Automat," it now provides mere backdrop for an architecture



designed explicitly to accommodate military machines. In this way, Kracauer's novel indicates that the war effort—both abroad and at home—targets a radical homogenization of space.

As the case of Otto as “Automat” suggests, the homogenization of space corresponds to and reinforces a military training that imposes a rigid framework on individual identity.<sup>26</sup> An exemplary site in this regard is the *Bezirkskommando* to which Ginster is commanded after he is called up for military service. Like the leather factory in Frankfurt's *Stadtwald*, the *Bezirkskommando* embodies the military expansion into sites previously on the threshold to the natural world. It is situated, namely, in an erstwhile dairy farm, which is, moreover, adjacent to fields on which Ginster played as a child: “Vor vielen Jahren hatte er dort mit anderen Knaben öfter Bälle hin- und hergeschleudert [. . .]. Auch den angrenzenden Milchhof kannte Ginster aus den Kinderjahren von innen” (*G*, 131). While the location thus figured in Ginster's personal history as a peripheral space that, by bringing the individual into contact with a heterotopic natural sphere, permitted a playful freedom prior to any formal socialization, it is these very characteristics that are lost as a result of the military colonization, which extends to the fields (“Die Spielwiese wird jetzt angebaut” (*G*, 131)). The farmhouse forecourt now becomes notable for its unnatural uniformity: “Die eingeebnete Fläche erinnerte Ginster an seinen alten Schulhof, nur fehlte die Bäume [. . .]. Die Bäume mochten unmilitarisch sein” (*G*, 132). What had been an area where the individual could play and develop naturally now becomes a farm for the cultivation of human beings into soldiers.

The *Bezirkskommando* underscores how such denaturalized spaces serve the process of transforming individuals into soldiers. It is here that the conscripts begin their process of deindividualization, their absorption into the ranks of the “Uniformen” who initially inspect them: “Die Uniformen unterhielten sich, ohne auf die Leute zu achten [. . .]. Alle standen, nichts außer den Reihen” (*G*, 133). Thus standing to attention in ordered ranks that reproduce the straight lines

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<sup>26</sup>Jarosinski also offers an examination of ways in which the built environment of the novel reinforces the prevailing social relations and shapes the depicted figures Eric Jarosinski, “Urban Meditations: The Theoretical Space of Siegfried Kracauer's Ginster,” in *Spatial Turns. Space, Place, and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture*, ed. Jaimey Fisher and Barbara Mennel (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2010), 180–182.

of forecourt's "mannshöhe" walls, the soldiers experience alienation from their very names: "[D]ie Namen strichen an [Ginster] vorbei, ein langes Band, das die Hiers ununterbrochen durchdrangen [...] Eigentlich bestand es gar nicht aus ganzen Namen, sondern aus einzelnen Silben [...], die sich zu einem sinnlosen Muster aneinanderschlossen" (G, 134). The optical illusion Ginster perceives in the forecourt walls is significant in this regard: "Der Hof war von einer mannshohen Mauer umringt, die sich so beständig und ununterbrochen fortsetzte, als lief sie stets geradeaus. Dennoch machte sie — ein Irrtum war ausgeschlossen — an mehreren Stellen scharfe Knicke" (G, 132). Whilst in reality demarcating the oppressive confines of the military order, the walls appear to extend indefinitely, not merely eliminating any possibility of escape but moreover giving the impression that no external world exists. Ginster's inability to discern the wall's shape ("Ginster [wanderte] mit den Augen an der Mauer [entlang], um aus der Ferne die Knicke zu suchen" (G, 132)) reflects this dangerous narrowing of perspective, which suggests that for those individuals dehumanized by the suppression of spatial alterity, the militarized environment appears as an immutable second nature.<sup>27</sup>

Through such portrayals of the militarized environment, Kracauer's novel follows Plessner's critique of community in suggesting the soldiers experience not the liberation but rather the decisive limitation of their human capacities. As the military training progresses, the destructive consequences of this limitation for the soldiers becomes increasingly clear. Within the military spaces, all expressions of individuality are increasingly eliminated and replaced by collective behavioral patterns. Following his entrance into military service, for example, Ginster's own transformation into an *Automat* begins with his attempt to master the gestures necessary for moving through his new environment: "In den Stuben, im Flur und auf den Straßen erhoben sich Vorgesetzte, die von der Undurchdringlichkeit einer Märchenhecke waren. Damit die Hecke wich, hatte er ihr besondere Zeichen zu machen" (G, 148). Rather than discover in such codes of conduct the harmony between inner life and physical form to which Otto aspired, Ginster instead

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<sup>27</sup>This implication of entrapment, the absence of exits, reappears throughout the novel. "Außerdem wurde jede Flucht durch die Mauern verhindert," becomes—with light variations—a common refrain (G, 135).

experiences the military drills as a disintegration of self. The practice marches, for example, increasingly alienate him from his own body: “Die Beine waren allein auf der Welt. [. . .] Das einzige, was außer ihnen übrig blieb, waren die Rücken und Hälse, die als Prellböcke dienten. Auf und ab, auf und ab, Ginster zerfiel in zwei Teile” (G, 162). Legs, back, neck: Ginster relates to his own corporeality in these moments as a set of component parts engaged in an act that, while affirming his integration into the military order, creates a disconnect between inner life and physical form.

The battlefield represents the terrible end point of the deindividualizing process begun in Germany’s militarized environment. In Kracauer’s novel, Ginster never makes it to the front, and the novel only ever depicts the battlefield indirectly. The battlefield accordingly does not appear as a specific place, but rather as a signifier of the inescapable fate that awaits the soldiers in their homogenized world: the total de-differentiation of both space and individual. It is there, on that nameless “Stück Land,” that the human is finally reduced to mere “Menschenmaterial” for the war effort (G, 88). Reflecting on the reporting on the casualties of war, Ginster makes the observation that “[das Publikum] hatte sich so an die hohen feindlichen Zahlen gewöhnt, [. . .] daß er erst von einer gewissen Summe an zu zählen begann” (G, 49). In the reports, the individual disappears entirely. The human exists only in terms of quantity, which is to say only inasmuch as it has been fully incorporated into the military collective. The sameness of those involved is hereby emphasized and they can, for that reason, be described merely as “Zahlen” and “Ziffern”: “Bei der Höhe der Ziffern konnten die durch sie bezeichneten Menschen nicht mitgedacht werden” (G, 49). The complete suppression of the soldiers’ individuality in the military order coincide in the reports with the soldiers’ real-world deaths. Kracauer’s novel thus follows Plessner’s theory in emphasizing the inevitably destructive consequences of *Gemeinschaft*: the military homogenization of space and the concomitant transformation of the human ultimately represent, *Ginster* suggests, nothing less than the human’s complete destruction.

## Capitalist Continuity

For all the parallels in their respective critiques of *Gemeinschaft*, Kracauer and Plessner diverge in their assessments of community's counterpart, *Gesellschaft*. For Plessner, *Gesellschaft*, which upholds interpersonal distance and diplomacy where community emphasizes unity and authenticity, represents the ideal social arrangement. In Plessner's view, Weimar Germany had the potential to become precisely such a society. His theories are accordingly an apologia for the Weimar Republic, a plea "an unsere Generation" to resist "Gemeinschaftsradikalismus," which is "das Idol dieses Zeitalters,"<sup>28</sup> and instead remain true to the societal project of liberal democracy, "nicht müde zu werden, aus [...] dem Geist des Taktes, der Verhaltenheit, der Güte und der Leichtigkeit das verkrampfte Gesicht dieser Menschheit von heute in einer Kultur der Unpersönlichkeit zu lösen."<sup>29</sup> In contrast, as we will see, Kracauer uses the critical perspective of his protagonist in *Ginster* to reconceptualize the relation between community and society. Thanks to his architectural profession, Ginster is well-placed within the novel to recognize the dangerous ramifications of the wartime destruction of spatial alterity. Thus, while Plessner claims that there was a fundamental break between the Germany of World War I and the republic that emerged after the war's conclusion, Ginster's architectural experiences convince him that the German Revolution 1918-1919 fails to fundamentally alter the state's relationship to space and, therefore, to the individual. Where Plessner sees a historical caesura, Kracauer argues for a radical and dangerous continuity.

Plessner's celebration of Weimar society is grounded in an understanding of the human as "konstitutiv heimatlos."<sup>30</sup> For Plessner, there is no possibility of unmediated articulation of personal identity, which, Plessner argues, is inextricable from the inner life—the "Seele"—of the

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<sup>28</sup>Plessner, *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft*, 28.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>30</sup>Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch. Einführung in die philosophische Anthropologie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), 385.

individual. Human history unfolds as a perpetual attempt to find an adequate medium for self-expression: “Durch seine Expressivität ist [der Mensch] also das Wesen, das selbst bei kontinuierlich sich erhaltender Intention nach immer anderer Verwirklichung drängt und so eine Geschichte hinter sich zurückläßt.”<sup>31</sup> Community seeks to conclusively conclude this process, but thereby merely misunderstands its significance. The unmediated sociability of *Gemeinschaft* is not only impossible in Plessner’s view, but it is also undesirable. The distance between inner life and physical form makes possible that the human can cater for both: “Wir wollen uns sehen und gesehen werden, wie wir sind, und wir wollen ebenso verhüllen und ungekannt bleiben, denn hinter jeder Bestimmtheit unseres Seins schlummern die unsagbaren Möglichkeiten des Andersseins.”<sup>32</sup> Society, characterized by its creation of conventions, social norms, and formal relationships, creates the space needed by individuals to express themselves without binding them entirely to their physicality and thus delimiting their inner potentialities. Plessner accordingly heralds society as the ideal form of social organization precisely because its artifice enshrines the principles of mediation and distance:

Zum Grundcharakter des Gesellschaftsethos gehört [. . .] die Sehnsucht nach den Masken, hinter denen die Unmittelbarkeit verschwindet. Die Gesellschaft gibt den bloßen Handgriffen und Hilfsmitteln notdürftigen Lebens [. . .] einen neuen Sinn und den Antrieb, aus diesem Sinn heraus zu gestalten.<sup>33</sup>

Certainly, it is clear that Kracauer, like Plessner, was concerned about the impact of *Gemeinschaft* on the individual’s ability to realize its capacities. However, his novel breaks decisively with Plessner by suggesting a continuity between wartime Germany and the Weimar Republic.<sup>34</sup> It is the built environment that, in the tumultuous aftermath of the war portrayed in

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<sup>31</sup>Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, 416.

<sup>32</sup>Plessner, *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft*, 63.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>34</sup>My argument diverges in what follows from Oschmann, who sees continuity not in any “militarization of everyday life,” which would apparently be “in Kriegszeiten zweifellos trivial,” but in the “alltäglich-lebensweltliche Überformung des Militärischen in der Heimat,” the endurance of everyday life despite the war. After all, he suggests,

*Ginster*, ensures the revolution comes to its underwhelming conclusion. When the revolution commences, Ginster makes clear that society's imprisoning structures must now be demolished: "Man sollte alles zerschlagen" (*G*, 223). Ginster's hope goes unfulfilled, however. Indeed, it is not the populace who takes control of its environment, but rather the existing exit-less structures that once more exert their power, directing the revolution's movement and limiting its scope: "Als sei eine Panik ausgebrochen und die Massen suchten auf dem Korridor vergeblich den Ausgang. An die Möglichkeit von Ausläufen schien bei der Anlage der Stadt nicht gedacht worden zu sein" (*G*, 222). Even as the war itself ends, therefore, the militarized second nature persists, narrowing perspectives and rendering escape routes inaccessible. Although Ginster realizes the necessity of directing the revolutionary energy against the *Stadtbaurat* responsible for the cityscape, his view is not shared by others: "Ginster wollte es zücken: 'Wie wäre es, wenn Sie Ihren großen Schlag gegen den Stadtbaurat führten. Der Zeitpunkt zum Schlagen ist günstig. . . ' [ . . . ] 'Unmöglich, mein Lieber [ . . . ]. Wir haben viel erreicht, man darf die Dinge nicht übertreiben. . . '" (*G*, 225). Kracauer portrays an environment that, by continuing to confine and direct human development, bridges the gap between wartime and peacetime Germany. While Plessner believed his contemporary society offered human nature the best possible conditions for its actualization, Kracauer remains staunchly unconvinced by Weimar's utopian pretensions.

Kracauer's depiction of the revolution in *Ginster* gestures to his conviction that Plessner has misunderstood the relationship between community and society. In his 1924 review of Plessner's *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft*, Kracauer describes the "[praktischen] Hauptwert" of Plessner's theory: "Indem sie die positive Bedeutung äußerer Formalien und öffentlichen Beieinanders für die Bewahrung existentiellen Seins hervorhebt, verhält sie sich ungleich wirklicher als jene Unentwegten, die auf das rein Gesinnungsmäßige das menschliche Zusammenleben zu gründen

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"niemand erträgt den permanenten Ausnahmezustand." While Oschmann contends that this is one of the novel's "ganz praktischen Wahrheiten," the point of the novel—as I hope to demonstrate—is that the war is not an "Ausnahmezustand." Dirk Oschmann, "'Der Alltag ging weiter.' Die Selbstbehauptung des Lebensweltlichen in Siegfried Kracauers Roman *Ginster*. Von ihm selbst geschrieben," in *Literatur & Lebenswelt*, ed. Alexander Löck and Dirk Oschmann (Vienna; Cologne; Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2012), 175, 179.

suchen.”<sup>35</sup> Kracauer here affirms Plessner’s positive evaluation of *Gesellschaft*, emphasizing that society’s conventions and formal relationships are necessary for creating space for the individual’s flourishing. Crucially, however, Kracauer also revises Plessner’s theory: his review suggests *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* do not signify mutually exclusive modes of sociality, but rather two interrelated elements of all social forms. Indeed, Kracauer lambastes both those who “die Gemeinschaft an sich zur Absolutheit erhebt und ausschließlich in ihr sämtliche Gebilde und Vorkommnisse gründen zu können wähnt,” as well as those who desire that the “Sphäre der Gesellschaft [. . .] Selbständigkeit sich anmaßt und keine Grenzen mehr findet.”<sup>36</sup> Kracauer here intimates that society’s artifice and conventions necessarily determine the sense of communal togetherness that emerges from it, which is to say “das Geistige [wurzelt] nicht im Leeren [. . .], sondern [steht] stets in irgendeinem Zusammenhang mit den besonderen sozialen Verhältnissen [. . .], die es aus sich entlassen.”<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, Kracauer ultimately criticizes Plessner’s oversimplified celebration of society: “Zu wünschen wäre eine stärkere Betonung der Aussage gewesen, daß die Sphäre der Gesellschaft nur dann zu Recht besteht, wenn eine wirkliche Gemeinschaft sie aus sich hervortreibt.”<sup>38</sup> The problem (and the potential solution), Kracauer suggests, lies not in the choice between society or community but rather in recalibrating the relationship between them.

The idea that the wartime community is in fact overarched by a problematic societal framework is a core component of *Ginster*. It is in the manifold moments of corruption that this is particularly clearly the case. Ahrend, a former schoolfriend of Ginster who is conscripted at the same time as the novel’s protagonist, is, for example, able to avoid military service. Ahrend, “ein besserer Herr” and factory owner, uses his wealth to bribe his way to safety: “Am anderen Tag

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<sup>35</sup>Siegfried Kracauer, *Werke, Bd 5.2: Essays, Feuilletons, Rezensionen* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), 150.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 151.

wurde [Ginster] zugetragen, daß [Gefreiter] Knötchen und der Unteroffizier gestern nach der Rückkehr Zigarrenkisten in ihren Bettspinden vorgefunden hätten. Ahrend” (*G*, 132, 156).

Although such a strategy doesn't occur to the substantially less affluent Ginster, he is nevertheless given an opportunity for bribery while later requesting a medical leave of absence: “[E]r [hatte] die Bestechung nicht eingeleitet, aber immerhin traute ihm doch der Sanitätsunteroffizier die Fähigkeit zu, bestechen zu können” (*G*, 188). When another factory owner, Direktor Baum, uses his “Beziehungen zum Generalkommando” to engineer his own escape from military duty, Ginster underlines the significance of such moments for his understanding of the military order: “Ginster fühlte sich durch eine solche Selbstbefreiung beunruhigt. Es widersprach seinem Begriff von der Allmacht der Organisation, daß sie aus Menschen bestand, die durch andere Menschen ohne die Dazwischenkunft von Instanzen zu beeinflussen waren” (*G*, 85). In these moments of corruption by factory owners, *Ginster* highlights a capitalist class for whom wealth and power create an escape route from the wartime community.

Tellingly, there is another dimension to the built environment depicted in the novel that corresponds to this societal framework. A limited spatial alterity that embodies the privilege of the depicted capitalists finds expression in the verticality of the architecture deployed in *Ginster*. The connection between verticality and power is clear in the case of a monument to the war dead that Ginster is tasked with designing. Ginster recreates the subordination of soldiers to their superiors with a “Denkmal” that “blickte auf die Truppe nieder, als ob es unter ihr Musterung halte” (*G*, 105). Elsewhere, the connection to the ruling class is made explicit when the “Magistratsbeamter” announces the meager concessions to the revolutionary crowd “vom Rathausbalkon herunter” (*G*, 225). This topography of power is invoked most explicitly when, in the aftermath of the revolution, Ginster visits the aforementioned *Stadtbourat*, an influential political figure in the city for whom Ginster works while in Q. In his comments on the revolution, the *Stadtbourat* emphatically states the interrelation between his position of authority and existing spatial arrangements: “[W]enn die Tagediebe hundertmal Revolution machen, sie kriegen uns nicht. Ich sc... auf die Revolution; mit Verlaub. [...] Hier oben bin ich, und für alle Zeiten bleibe ich



oben” (*G*, 227). In this denouncement of the revolution, it is his own power that the *Stadtbourat* wishes to see preserved despite the war’s conclusion. The *Stadtbourat* hereby collapses the distinction between architectural and political power: by retaining his position of control within (and over) the built environment, the *Stadtbourat* retains his power over those contained within it.

The implications of this continuity for “das Gesindel,” as the *Stadtbourat* calls those below him, are apparent in Ginster’s final architectural project of the novel. Tasked with designing “eine Arbeitersiedlung” prior to the war’s conclusion, Ginster expresses his confusion: “Erst wurden [die Arbeiter] erschossen und dann in die Gärtchen verpflanzt — er begriff den Zusammenhang nicht, es sei denn, daß [Stadtbourat] Schmidt das Gedeihen der Arbeiter wünschte, damit sie im folgenden Krieg wieder frisch verwandt werden konnten” (*G*, 197). Corresponding to the *Stadtbourat*’s persisting power, the reader here sees the resultant enduring powerlessness. The passive statement of the initial sentence gestures to the manner in which the environment—and, with it, the fate—of the soldier-workers continues to be determined by others. Far from offering workers a reprieve from the wartime community, a space in which to express personal identity, the illusory homes of the *Siedlung* uphold the suppression of individuality and thereby structurally reproduces the war’s destructive impact. Ginster accordingly considers the project a reinstatement of a vertical topography in which the worker takes his place beneath the ground: “Freilich konnte man die Arbeiter auch nicht in Löchern unterbringen, aber richtig wäre gewesen, statt der bunten Glaskugeln Grabsteine im Garten aufzustellen” (*G*, 197). The implication is that the continuity between war and Weimar depicted by Kracauer is motivated by a capitalist ruling class that wishes to maintain its own position. As long as they succeed in doing so, the Plessnerian postwar society can only provide an illusion of freedom to the workers who remain entrapped in the same fundamental structures of power.

The problem of the wartime community, Kracauer’s novel suggests, must be understood as a symptom of German class society, and the novel thematizes the troubling persistence of that society even after the revolution. As the plot unfolds, the “Grenzen” of the wartime community become apparent, since the (negative) equality of the *Volk* ends, it seems, at the point at which it

threatens the interests of the powerful. In such moments, those aspects of the war previously described—the creation of community and the domination of space—are revealed to be, at heart, political instruments of control. The full implications of Ginster’s realization, during his military medical examination, that he is an object of study thereby become clear:

Die Entziehung des Passes geschah auf Grund eines handschriftlich geführten Buches, in dem Ginster chronologisch genau verzeichnet war. Bisher hatte er in Unkenntnis darüber gelebt, daß eine Macht, die stets im Hintergrund blieb, ihn mit Notizen begleitete; wie ein Dauerexperiment, dessen Fortgang beobachtet werden muß. (*G*, 82)

However, although the novel invokes in such moments the socialist notion of the workers’ (and soldiers’) exploitation at the hands of the capitalist class, the very historical continuity highlighted by the novel is predicated on the failure of the socialist revolution. Thus, even as *Ginster* invokes a socialist critique, it simultaneously calls into question orthodox models of collective action and revolutionary change. In doing so, the novel foregrounds the built environment as an obstacle to revolution that must be comprehended and grappled with before meaningful social transformation can take place.

### **Reckoning with Revolution**

One year after his review of Plessner’s *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft*, Kracauer completed his own theoretical work on society and community under the conditions of modernity, *Der Detektiv-Roman*. Kracauer seeks in *Der Detektiv-Roman* insight into the tensions and contradictions intrinsic to the modern “durchrationalisiert[e] zivilisiert[e] Gesellschaft.”<sup>39</sup> His study focuses on the popular detective novels, which—Kracauer argues—“halten dem Zivilisatorischen einen Zerrspiegel vor, aus dem eine Karikatur seines Unwesens entgegenstarrt” (*DR*, 10). On this basis, Kracauer contends that detective novels make possible a powerful social critique, and it is this critique that laid the groundwork for Kracauer’s subsequent “materialist

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<sup>39</sup>Siegfried Kracauer, *Der Detektiv-Roman. Ein philosophischer Traktat* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1979), 11. Hereafter *DR*.

turn,” which shaped his later literary and theoretical output. By briefly considering Kracauer’s reflections in this earlier theoretical text, it will be possible to discern the fundamental problem to which *Ginster*’s constraining built environment gestures. As will be shown, the (dis-)similarities between *Der Detektiv-Roman* and the philosophy of Georg Lukács’s *Die Theorie des Romans* and *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtein* will moreover make clear why Kracauer’s novel depicts the German Revolution’s failure before the capitalist environment and where we might uncover the possibility of a break with the status quo in *Ginster*.<sup>40</sup>

The modern world as portrayed in the detective novels Kracauer studies bears striking similarities with the militarized environments of *Ginster*. Everything in the modern world as described in *Der Detektiv-Roman* is subjected to processes of rationalization that are particularly apparent in the application of the law. Contemporary built environments are thereby reduced to an immanent “Nebeneinander”: “[D]as räumlich unausdrückbare paradoxe Zugleich des Lebens im Gesetz und jenseits seiner Grenze verkümmert zum unproblematischen und räumlich allgegenwärtigen Nebeneinander der legalen und illegalen Figuren” (*DR*, 83) The spaces of modern society, Kracauer argues, thereby reflect the superficiality of the social order, dissembling a communal life based on shared values and ideals whilst, in reality, the “Öffentlichkeit in Straßen, Hotels und Sälen [...] ist nicht die Außenseite des verborgenen Innern; vielmehr, wenn die ratio das Innere vertreibt, tritt das Öffentliche als das Kalkulable, Abstrakte, allgemein Greifbare an die Stelle personhafter Beziehung zu dem [transzendentalen] Geheimnis” (*DR*, 73). Modern spaces of apparent togetherness are mere facade: their superficiality renders them accessible to rationalizing processes, while the actual suppression of individuality and community is masked, “[d]enn die Öffentlichkeit [...] kann nichts Einzelnes dulden, das ihr sich entzöge, und die Elemente, aus denen sie gebildet ist, sind nicht mehr als ihre Elemente, da sie rational unfaßlich sonst wären” (*DR*, 74). In thus effecting a homogenization of space and the emergence

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<sup>40</sup>Frisby has previously outlined Kracauer’s interest in Lukács in Frisby, “Between the Spheres: Siegfried Kracauer and the Detective Novel,” 6; Jay provides perhaps the most thorough account of Kracauer’s engagement with Lukács in Jay, “The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer”; more recently, García Chicote compared the two thinkers on the basis of their respective “Persönlichkeitsbegriff” in Francisco García Chicote, “Zum Persönlichkeitsbegriff bei Siegfried Kracauer und György Lukács,” *Ibero-Amerikanisches Jahrbuch für Germanistik* 7 (2013): 35–49.

of an illusory community, the totalizing pretensions of rationalization in *Der Detektiv-Roman* mirror the militaristic elimination of spatial alterity in *Ginster*.

Significantly, this modern world that Kracauer outlines in *Der Detektiv-Roman* represents a distortion of an originary human condition. Following Kierkegaard, Kracauer describes the “menschlichen Zwischenzustand” that has been lost: “[Der Mensch] hat teil an dem Geschaffenen, Elementarischen, dem nur Seienden, aber er hat auch teil an dem Anderen, dem jenseitigen Wort und den Verkündigungen, und er ist wirklich, insofern er seine Teilhabe an dem Unten und dem Oben in der Existenz bewährt” (*DR*, 13). Kracauer here outlines a dialectical tension in which the human exists between the immanent world governed by law and a realm that transcends this world and from which meaning is drawn. The dialectical tension between these two poles—which we might imagine as what currently exists and what humanity is capable of creating—propels forward human society, the connection to the ineffable transcendent ensuring an enduring transformative process that gives meaning and direction to an otherwise static immanent realm of convention. As long as this tension prevails, the human discovers in the world a space, “ein[en] erfüllte[n] Raum,” in which to realize its capacities as a “Gesamtmensch”: “Der Raum des gemeinsamen Lebens ist [. . .] ein erfüllter Raum, weil die Menschen nicht nur mit dem einen oder anderen Teil ihres Wesens, sondern als Existierende ihrem ganzen Wesen nach in ihn eingehen. Ihr Ausgerichtetsein macht sie zu Gesamtmenschen” (*DR*, 16). Here we see the positive model of sociality of which Otto dreams but that is ultimately absent from *Ginster*, a model that truly makes possible a communal togetherness while retaining space for the development and self-expression of a holistic human nature.

In both the detective novels Kracauer considers and in *Ginster*, however, it is precisely this dialectic tension that has been lost in the modern world. The result is fragmentation of the individual who finds itself disconnected from a world over which it no longer has any control:

Bei erschlaffender Spannung zerbröckelt die unteilbare Ganzheit des nach oben ausgerichteten Gesamtmenschen, und als Träger der Gesellschaft erstet ein fragmentarisches Individuum, das eine gleich ihm zerfallene und ob ihrer

Unbezogenheit doppelt fragwürdige Welt zum stummfremden, nur gewalttätig formbaren Gegenüber hat. (*DR*, 25)

Modernity collapses the human's connection to the transcendent and confines it to immanent reality in which no meaningful relationship between the human, its community and its environment exists. The unfolding of human potential, embodied by the *Gesamtmensch*, is lost. The immanent world, determined by rationalization and its rule of law, dominates completely and arbitrarily the "leeren Raum" that is left behind: "[D]as legale Tun [...] wird zur Konvention eingeebnet, deren moralische Indifferenz auf das Nichts hinweist, aus dem die ratio sämtliche Besonderungen zu schöpfen meint" (*DR*, 28, 26). In this way, *Der Detektiv-Roman* reaffirms Kracauer's diagnosis of the human cost of capitalist modernity in *Ginster* even as it sketches the outline of an utopian alternative.

Although Kracauer's *Der Detektiv-Roman* is no political treatise, its political implications are nevertheless apparent if the text is understood as a response to Georg Lukács's philosophical work in the late 1910s and early 1920s. When Kracauer began working on *Der Detektiv-Roman*, he had already positively reviewed Lukács's influential 1916 work *Die Theorie des Romans*. For Lukács, as for Kracauer, the contemporary world is characterized by its disconnect from meaning. In *Die Theorie des Romans*, Lukács couches his theory in a philosophy of history, contrasting the modern condition with the totality of life in ancient Greece. The significance of this "Totalität" in which meaning is immanent both to the soul and to human actions, attuning all culture and social institutions to a harmonious unity, cannot be overstated,

[d]enn Totalität als formendes Prius jeder Einzelperscheinung bedeutet, daß etwas Geschlossenens vollendet sein kann; vollendet, weil alles in ihm vorkommt, nichts ausgeschlossen wird und nichts auf ein höheres Außen hinweist; vollendet, weil alles in ihm zu eigenen Vollkommenheit reift und sich erreichend sich der Bindung fügt.<sup>41</sup>

The totality creates a holistic space, a "notwendige und egeborene Heimat," in which human potentialities can find complete expression in the world and in which the gods too are provided room to guide developments: "[W]enn die Gottheit, die die Welt verwaltet [...], unverstanden

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<sup>41</sup>Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans*, 26.

aber bekannt und nahe den Menschen gegenübersteht, [. . . ] dann ist jede Tat nur ein gutsitzendes Gewand der Seele.”<sup>42</sup> Lukács here anticipates Kracauer’s description of the “erfüllten Raum” of the “Gesamtmensch,” a home for humanity in which everyone and everything has its rightful place.

Lukács, like Kracauer, describes the collapse of this former totality and the emergence of a modern world that, disconnected from all transcendence, has become bereft of meaning. He famously diagnoses the consequent human situation as one not of Plessnerian constitutive homelessness, but of “transzendente Obdachlosigkeit,” a concept that—as recognized by Frisby—recurs in Kracauer’s own works and that is, in turn, reshaped by Kracauer:

The novel, for Lukács, arose when “meaning vanished from the world” and “opened up an abyss between soul and form, the inner and outer world”. As an “expression of the transcendental homelessness” of the modern period, of “the world disintegrated into a chaos”, Lukács’ characterization of the novel announced a central theme of Kracauer’s work: the transcendental homelessness or later the ideological homelessness of humanity or specific social strata.<sup>43</sup>

This harmonious totality is the very thing that has been lost in modernity. A “Riss” has appeared, an “Abgrund” between human life and meaning that has banished the gods and their plans to a realm of transcendence disconnected from reality. The organic totality is replaced by a “Welt der Konvention,” which heralds the dominance of law and takes the form of “eine Zweite Natur” in which “[die Gebilde] sind etwas einfach Seiendes, vielleicht Machtvolles, vielleicht Morsches, tragen aber weder die Weihe des Absoluten an sich, noch sind sie die naturhaften Behälter für die überströmende Innerlichkeit der Seele.”<sup>44</sup> Where once the world constituted a meaningful whole and everything had its rightful place within it, there now exists arbitrary structures incompatible with the human soul. The harmony of old becomes “Entfremdung zwischen dem Menschen und

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<sup>42</sup>Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans*, 55, 22.

<sup>43</sup>Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity*, 117.

<sup>44</sup>Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans*, 53.

seinen Gebilden”<sup>45</sup> and the world, previously “weit und doch wie das eigene Haus,”<sup>46</sup> is now encountered with “Fremdheit.”<sup>47</sup> This then is the “transzendente Obdachlosigkeit” to which Lukács refers and it is, for both Lukács and Kracauer, the defining feature of the modern world.

Lukács also points to the impact of this disconnect between social convention and human need on humanity and forms of sociality. For Lukács, the totality of old manifested itself in the form of an organic community in which the fate of all was intertwined: “[D]as Tragen dieses [Welt-]Schicksals [. . .] knüpft [ihren Träger] vielmehr mit unlöslichen Fäden an die Gemeinschaft, deren Geschick sich in seinem Leben kristallisiert.”<sup>48</sup> With the collapse of the totality, however, this community and the interconnection of its members have vanished. The modern era is accordingly defined by loneliness (“[I]n der Neuen Welt heißt Mensch-sein: einsam sein.”<sup>49</sup>) and the individual’s desperate wish to return to the prelapsarian form of sociality: “[Die Einsamkeit] ist zugleich die Qual der zum Alleinsein verdammt, sich nach Gemeinschaft verzehrenden Kreatur.”<sup>50</sup> This interrelation of social environment, community, and human once again anticipates Kracauer’s text, in which the “existentielle Gemeinschaft” is contrasted with the modern “entwirklichte Gesellschaft” (*DR*, 30). Indeed, Kracauer’s formulation of the problem starkly parallels that of Lukács; he describes how the *Gemeinschaft* falls victim to modernity, in which the “Denkweisen, Gesinnungen, Handlungen” of individuals disconnected from the transcendent realm “dichten keine Atmosphäre des gemeinsamen Lebens ab. [. . .] Mit der Ungebundenheit dieser Schein-Individuen [. . .] hängt ihre Unfähigkeit zusammen, einen begrenzten Gemeinschafts-Leib zu bilden” (*DR*, 27). It is apparent that Kracauer’s depiction of

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<sup>45</sup>Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans*, 55.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

the modern world and its effects on humankind was deeply impacted by Lukács's *Die Theorie des Romans*.

It is precisely because the similarities between their diagnoses of modernity are so similar, however, that their divergence when it comes to the question of solutions is so notable. Lukács ultimately formulated his proposal in his 1923 work *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*. In that text, which was composed following his embrace of Marxism, he abandons the metaphysical language of home and homelessness, but an analogous condition persists in the form of alienation from oneself, other people, and—crucially—the objects of one's labor. At the beginning of the text, Lukács recapitulates Marx's theory of commodity fetishism, describing the "gespenstige Gegenständigkeit" that characterizes the modern commodity structure, which lends "eine Beziehung zwischen Personen den Charakter einer Dinghaftigkeit [. . .], die [. . .] jede Spur, ihres Grundwesens, der Beziehung zwischen Menschen verdeckt."<sup>51</sup> What emerges is the ghostly presence of an exchange system that, reified and therefore apparently independent of humans, determines the social environment. This ghostly presence casts a new light on the conventions that govern modern society, and Lukács invokes Weber to argue that capitalism and its commodity structure necessarily seek growth and expansion, compelling social institutions to serve their needs:

Die Ablösung der Phänomene der Verdinglichung vom ökonomischen Grund ihrer Existenz [. . .] wird noch dadurch erleichtert, daß dieser Umwandlungsprozeß sämtliche Erscheinungsformen des gesellschaftlichen Lebens erfassen muß, wenn die Voraussetzungen für das restlose Sichauswirken der kapitalistischen Produktion erfüllt werden sollen. So hat die kapitalistische Entwicklung ein ihren Bedürfnissen entsprechendes, ein sich ihrer Struktur strukturell anschmiegendes Recht, einen entsprechenden Staat usw. geschaffen.<sup>52</sup>

Modern institutions, just like the modern human, are shaped by the spectral ubiquity of the commodity form. The processes of modernity do not merely destroy the organic totality of old; instead, they create a new totality in their own image. The human, its culture, its institutions are

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<sup>51</sup>Lukács, "Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein," 97.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 106.



harmonized once more—but now in alignment with the self-destructive, dehumanizing rationalism of commodity capitalism.

This materialist shift allows Lukács to philosophically posit a solution to the previously described problems of modernity. In the alienation of the worker from the products of their labor, which now take on a life of their own, Lukács identifies the root issue of the idealist division between subject and object. In turn, he contends that this issue will therefore inevitably be overcome by the proletariat, for inasmuch as workers are able to reflect on their own objectification, the commodification of their labor power, they embody a reconciliation of subject and object:

Die Verwandlung des Arbeiters in ein bloßes Objekt des Produktionsprozesses wird [...] dadurch, daß der Arbeiter seine Arbeitskraft seiner Gesamtpersönlichkeit gegenüber zu objektivieren [...], zustande gebracht. Durch die Spaltung [...] zwischen Objektivität und Subjektivität in dem sich als Ware objektivierenden Menschen [...] wird diese Lage zugleich des Bewußtwerdens fähig gemacht.<sup>53</sup>

The worker as an object within the production process and a subject capable of reflecting critically on its position is able—as part of the proletarian collective—to recognize the arbitrariness of the totality and remake it:

Die entscheidende Waffe [...] des Proletariats [ist]: seine Fähigkeit, die Totalität der Gesellschaft als konkrete, geschichtliche Totalität zu sehen; die verdinglichte Form als Prozesse zwischen Menschen zu begreifen; den immanenten Sinn der Entwicklung [...] ins Bewußtsein zu heben und in Praxis umzusetzen.<sup>54</sup>

The proletariat becomes the subject-object of history and ushers in a new age in which a meaningful community ensures that human potential can unfold fully. With this move, Lukács's turn to Marxism allows him to solve that problem of postlapsarian division that he had initially set out in *Die Theorie des Romans*.

Despite all similarities between *Der Detektiv-Roman* und Lukács's philosophy, Kracauer's text decisively rejects Lukács's idealist solution. We have seen that Kracauer similarly criticizes

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<sup>53</sup>Lukács, "Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein," 160.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 182.

an exploitative power structure. Nevertheless, Kracauer implicitly accuses Lukács, and other thinkers like him, of reproducing the very abstract structures that they criticize:

Wie der Idealismus in engerem Sinn, so verhält sich jedes Denken, das in sich selber den Abschluß zu haben glaubt: [...] gleichviel [...], ob der Anbruch der klassenlosen Gesellschaft zur immanenten Notwendigkeit sich verzerre, oder der Fortschritt in Permanenz sich erkläre, [...] stets wird das Hier und Jetzt preisgegeben und ein Ende bestimmt, das Wirklichkeit als Bestimmung nur hätte. (*DR*, 133)

In his speculative prediction of the coming classless future, Kracauer argues, Lukács seeks to force reality to conform to a theory no less abstract and totalizing than the rationalized order it apparently overcomes. The proletarian victory that Lukács imagines is accordingly a hollow one, realizable only within the theoretical confines of his philosophical system: “Das Ende, das gar keines ist, da es eben nur die Unwirklichkeit beendet, lockt das Gefühl hervor, das unreal ist, und Lösungen, die keine sind, werden zum Schluß eingeführt, um den Himmel, den es nicht gibt, auf die Erde zu zwingen” (*DR*, 135). As Kracauer’s depiction of the revolution in *Ginster* suggests, socialist theories of social change such as Lukács’s are foiled by a failure to perceive the fundamental problem in the prevailing relations, a failure to break free from abstract systems disconnected from reality.

For Kracauer, then, meaningful social transformation must heed and be guided not by abstract principles of rationalization or idealist philosophy, but rather by the reality of human existence. Hansen’s summary of Kracauer’s thoughts on Lukács in his subsequent correspondence with Ernst Bloch is telling in this regard:

Kracauer not only rejected Lukács’s notion of the proletariat as both object and subject of a Hegelian dialectics of history but also balked at the conception of reality as a totality. For Kracauer, the diagnosis of the historical process required the construction of categories from within the material; bringing Marx up to date, he wrote to Ernst Bloch, required ‘a dissociation of Marxism in the direction of realities.’<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience. Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley; LA; London: University of California Press, 2012), 43.

Such a “dissociation of Marxism in the direction of realities” requires, *Der Detektiv-Roman* indicates, searching for hints of that lost transcendent sphere, seeking to discern the limits of the prevailing static and totalizing systems, the moments where reality can no longer be reduced to a rationalized “Nebeneinander” and traces of alternative possibilities come into view. The search for “realities,” that is to say, means recognizing that “Wirklichkeit ist der Zwiespalt, die Zerrissenheit, das Geöffnetsein dem Öffnenden, das Haben und das Nichthaben zugleich” (*DR*, 131). Lukács, Kracauer contends, has correctly identified the problem of modern society but his solution is no solution at all. In contrast, Kracauer declines to offer a determinate solution to the problems that he and Lukács portray; *Der Detektiv-Roman* doesn’t fashion a new philosophical system but instead exposes the superficiality of the existing order and gestures fleetingly toward glimpses of an alternative.

### **Utopian Architecture**

Kracauer’s notion of “Wirklichkeit” existing in the gaps, in instances of “Zwiespalt” and “Zerissenheit,” leaves unclear what this means for real-world praxis, whether—that is to say—Kracauer’s philosophy merely interpreted the world or also sought to change it. It is in *Ginster* that Kracauer takes up the same problem of human sociality and the built environment, but now expands and revises that theory. This development was occasioned by Kracauer’s own shift toward Marxism in the years immediately following the completion of *Der Detektiv-Roman*. Kracauer had dedicated *Der Detektiv-Roman* to Adorno and he had long been friends with Benjamin, but it was his friendship with Ernst Bloch, with whom he began a correspondence in 1926, that decisively informed his relationship to Marxism. The influence of Bloch’s philosophical writings, not least his work *Geist der Utopie* (1918), is clear in *Ginster*, and by exploring that influence in this section, it will become clear how Ginster’s architectural projects translate the social critique of *Der Detektiv-Roman* into a utopian vision of social transformation. Ginster’s individualist attempts to overcome the militarized environment thus offer the vision of a different, and better, world, but—as will be shown—such individual acts alone are ultimately no

more able to effect the requisite social transformation than was the collective action of the revolution.

With his various architectural projects over the course of the novel, Ginster experiments with different responses to the existing social order. When, for example, Ginster participates in a competition for the design of a cemetery for fallen soldiers, he submits a plan intended to reproduce and thereby reveal the horrors of the war: “[Die Kriegszeiten] forderten eine Anlage, in der sich ihre Schrecklichkeit wiederholte” (*G*, 104). This is achieved through what Reeh describes as a “symbolic architecture” that gestures to the military’s uniformity and the absence of individuality: “[D]ie Gräbermale [standen] in Reih’ und Glied; kleine Steinflächen ohne Schmuck” (*G*, 104).<sup>56</sup> The gravestones “in Reih’ und Glied” reproduce the ordered military ranks, the gravestones replacing the soldiers whose deaths they commemorate. Ginster’s design hereby makes visible the connection between the wartime suppression of individual identity and the battlefield deaths. The aforementioned central monument expands on this architectural commentary: “Das Denkmal blickte auf die Truppe nieder, als ob es unter ihr Musterung halte; indessen ließ sich nicht die geringste Unregelmäßigkeit entdecken” (*G*, 105). To his design’s lament of the wartime *Volk*, Ginster adds this monumental representation of the power hierarchies responsible for overseeing the wartime destruction. For Reeh, “the basic strategic thought underlying Ginster’s project” is that “barbarity is certain to exercise its own critique.”<sup>57</sup> That’s to say, Ginster’s design—like the detective novels Kracauer describes in his earlier theoretical works—exposes the status quo by reproducing it and thereby making visible its brutality.

Ginster’s critique is, however, unrecognizable for a populace whose perspective has been so delimited by modernity’s homogenized spaces as to make alternatives unimaginable. Accordingly, when Ginster’s design wins the competition and his boss, Herr Valentin—who claims the work as his own—gives the acceptance speech, Ginster’s critical architectural quotation of the military order is resignified:

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<sup>56</sup>Reeh, *Ornaments of the Metropolis*, 45

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 46.

[I]ch [d.h. Herr Valentin] [habe] statt der gekrümmten Linien gerade gezogen, die so unerschütterlich sind wie die Reihen unserer Krieger, zahllose parallel laufende Reihen, an denen viereckige Gräberplatten nebeneinander stehen, deren genau abgemessene Gleichheit in der Einfachheit gipfelt, die dem grauen Ehrenkleid unserer Braven entspricht. (*G*, 109)

In the hands of Valentin and the public to whom it is presented, the design is perceived to be an unthinking reaffirmation of the military order. Whereas for Ginster, whose authorship of the plan makes him aware of its contingency and artificiality, the cemetery creates a standpoint of critical distance, there is no such distance for those for whom the built environment has become a second nature. Thereby disabused of its critical potential, Ginster's quotations are celebrated as compelling reproductions of the military order. The elimination of spatial alterity and its deleterious effect on the perspectives of the German populace renders Ginster's critical quotation of the military order unable to provoke a corresponding response from its audience.

Kracauer's novel nevertheless makes clear that architecture, while perhaps more easily refunctionalized than other forms of artistic expression, retains a unique power to gesture toward the possibility of alternative arrangements of people and space, something apparent in the militarized spaces of wartime Germany. Ginster enters the military world, for example, when he joins a *Sanitätskolonne*: "Nach der Ausbildung wurde die Kolonne in einer Halle einquartiert, die früher zu Varieté-Aufführungen benutzt worden war" (*G*, 53). Here we encounter a space previously devoted to playful performance and artistic expression that has now, in accordance with the military conquest of space previously described, been reduced to functional accommodation. Elements of its earlier use persist, however, creating a contrast between its current restrictiveness and the elaborate forms and shifting lights that previously characterized the space: "Aus dem finsternen Holzlabyrinth der Dachkonstruktion hingen eiserne Kronleuchte herab" (*G*, 53). In describing the downstairs bowling alley, moreover, Ginster brings the simultaneity of contrasting uses more clearly into focus: "Die Halle stand mit einer Wirtschaft in Verbindung, deren Untergeschüß zu einer Kegelbahn hergerichtet war. Oft donnerte es aus der Tiefe wie von Geschützen" (*G*, 53). While it is here the rumble of the bowling balls that

threateningly resembles artillery fire, the inverse relationship is implicit in the formulation: Even under the conditions of war, it is possible to detect an alternative possibility (of play). The architecture of *Ginster*, functionalized by the military, remains a repository of its own history.

It is these architectural traces that call to mind the philosophy of Ernst Bloch. Writing in the immediate aftermath of the war, Bloch's *Geist der Utopie* anticipates Kracauer in identifying the problem of a ruling class that outlives the war and the revolution: "Der Krieg ging aus, die Revolution ging an und mit ihr die offenen Türen. Aber richtig, sie haben sich bald wieder geschlossen. Der Schieber rührte sich, setzte sich, und alles Veraltete schwemmte an ihm wieder an."<sup>58</sup> This historical analysis provides the framework for Bloch's principal focus: modernity's perversion of human nature. In this regard too, there are noteworthy parallels between Bloch and Kracauer. Just like Kracauer's soldiers, Bloch's modern human is disconnected from its inner life: "Zudem sind die Meisten um uns [...] so träge schmutzig geworden, daß fast keiner der dergestalt Verbrühten und Gezeichneten noch an schwierige innere Regungen herankommt."<sup>59</sup> Thus disabused of interiority, the fragmented individual finds its experiences reduced to the purely immanent and calculable:

Es gelingt [dieser Zeit] [...] besser, an das Sichtbare als an das Unsichtbare zu glauben. [...] Das wirkt sich aus und führt jener totalen Zersetzung alles Originalen entgegen, die überhaupt nur noch Irdisches, Kalkulierbares und an diesem selbst wieder nur die einfachsten Triebe, Inhalte als veränderbar kennt und als wirklich anerkennt.<sup>60</sup>

The emptiness of the human coincides with an absence of any meaningful connection to the existing society. In these broad strokes, the congruence of thought between Kracauer and Bloch is clear: the human, transformed by the conditions of their contemporary class society, is no longer able to recognize its own oppression, and the revolution, unable to meaningfully disrupt the existing power relations, fails to pave a path to liberation.

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<sup>58</sup>Ernst Bloch, *Geist der Utopie. Zweite Fassung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1985), 11.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 209.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 210–211.

Bloch nevertheless believes that there is the possibility of what he calls “Heimkehr.” He ascribes to the human an awareness of that which has been lost: “Geblieden ist zum mindesten die Verzweiflung, daß wir nicht glauben, daß der inwendige Mensch halb stehen bleibt [. . . ], geblieden oder verstärkt ist aber auch die Ahnung unserer verdeckten Kraft, [. . . ] unseres gediegenen, endlich enthülsten, endlich allernächst herangerückten Besitzes.”<sup>61</sup> Suppressed though the expression of human interiority may be, it cannot—in Bloch’s eyes—be destroyed completely. Latent in human nature, the desire to give articulation to its inner life never leaves the human entirely: “Das eingessesene Leben ist zu Ende, und auch die Reste seines Safts sind wachsend dumpf geworden. Doch in uns tief drinnen will es anders gären, und wir suchen nach jenem Korn, das so hier nicht wuchs.”<sup>62</sup> In order that this natural proclivity might flourish, the human instinctively searches for traces of its own utopian potential in the external world. This is perhaps the central premise of *Geist der Utopie*. Bloch, uninterested in providing definitive answers, instead traverses culture and history to locate glimpses of meaningful human expression. Accordingly, Bloch introduces his work with the following words:

Hier nun aber, in diesem Buch, setzt sich genau ein Beginn, neu ergreift sich das unverlorene Erbe [. . . ]. [E]s hebt sich über allen Masken und abgelaufenen Kulturen das Eine, das stets Gesuchte [. . . ]. [D]ieses klingt auf, gedeutet schon an einem bloßen Krug, gedeutet als das apriorisch latente Thema aller ‘bildenden’ Kunst und zentral aller Magie der Musik.<sup>63</sup>

With this description of cultural artefacts that point the way toward a more human society, Bloch’s work provides a framework with which to comprehend Kracauer’s depiction of architectural traces in *Ginster*.

It is significant, therefore, that Bloch specifically contrasts the cold lifeless architecture of modernity with the childlike emphasis on play and creativity. The problem of modernity, Bloch suggests, is that “man ist arm, hat verlernt zu spielen. Wir haben es vergessen, die Hand hat das

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<sup>61</sup>Bloch, *Geist der Utopie*, 213.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 213.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 13.

Basteln verlernt.”<sup>64</sup> Modern architecture has accordingly fallen entirely under the dominion of the machine: “Sie verstand es, die Maschine, alles so leblos und untermenschlich im einzelnen zu machen, wie es unsere neuen Viertel im ganzen sind.”<sup>65</sup> No human interiority is expressed in these modern environments; the machine serves the needs not of the human, but of the economic order in which it is embedded:

Denn Übergang und Kapitalismus haben die Technik, wenigstens im gewerblichen Gebrauch, bislang durchaus nur zu dem Zweck billiger Massenproduktion mit hohem Umsatz und großem Gewinn, und wahrhaft nicht [. . .] zur Erleichterung der menschlichen Arbeit oder gar zur Veredelung ihrer Resultate konstruiert.<sup>66</sup>

The built environment Bloch describes has been integrated into the existing system and becomes entirely functional. In contrast, Bloch invokes the figure of childish play as an alternative model of creative expression, one that points to the possibility of newness and transformation: “Als Kinder schon sind wir beständig unruhig, zu warten, unser selbst darin endlich zu versichern. [. . .] So öffnet sich überall dort, wo neues Leben beginnt, jenes offene Fragen, Schäumen, verhüllte Enthüllen als der Erwartungszustand des Heraufkommens überhaupt.”<sup>67</sup> Although, with the passage of time, this childhood excitement for what is to come falls victim to processes of socialization (“[N]ichts [wohnt] in diesem Raum [. . .], das nicht bereits irgendeinmal, in der Kindheit oder Vorgeschichte, vergegenwärtigt war und nun herabsank, verdrängt und verschüttet wurde”<sup>68</sup>), Bloch nevertheless holds up the revelatory function of childish play, its capacity to hint at an alternative way of being.

In Kracauer’s novel, childhood experiences decisively influence Ginster’s outlook and his approach to architecture. Although those sites of Ginster’s childhood playfulness are everywhere

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<sup>64</sup>Bloch, *Geist der Utopie*, 20.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 241–242.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 238.



suppressed by the military transformation of space, Ginster nevertheless seeks to channel his youthful creativity in his architectural projects. In particular, his first project of the novel, a swimming pool that he is in the process of designing when war breaks out, is inspired by his early experiences of learning to swim. It is remembered as a space of unimpeded movement (“Dann wurde ich frei” (*G*, 13)) that finds its correspondence in Ginster’s architectural design of infinitely diverse shapes (“Es müssen sich Muster auf den Wandplatten herumziehen, die das Wassergekräusel wiederholen” (*G*, 12)) and ceaselessly shifting light: “Ich schwamm gern auf dem Rücken und sah ins Glasoberlicht. Wir müssen in der Decke über dem Bassin ein großes Kaleidoskop einlassen, das [...] in immer anderen farbenprächtigen Figuren sprüht” (*G*, 13). Ginster here imagines an architecture that contrasts starkly with the military homogenization of space, one that instead creates space for movement, change, and play. The result is the communal space of a swimming pool that brings people together without directing or impeding the individual’s movement: the flowing water and sparkling lights invite individualized and non-hierarchical interactions. They thereby correspond to the building’s many entrances, “Nebeneingänge,” that ensure accessibility for all: “Die meisten Leute, die es benutzen, steigen gewöhnlich doch nur über Lieferantentreppen in die Geschosse” (*G*, 12). Ginster’s design thus follows the ideal outlined by Bloch, constituting an edifice that does not reaffirm the economic order but rather seeks to reawaken those human powers of creativity and (self-)transformation that have been lost to socialization and military training.

Ginster’s swimming pool design rejects the prevailing power hierarchies and promises a sense of community that also respects the individual’s subjectivity. Kracauer’s *Ginster* thereby moves from a critique of the prevailing relations to a gesture toward utopian alternatives. The broader sociopolitical ramifications of this approach for his projects is more explicitly evident in another design. Before settling on his aforementioned plan for a cemetery as a critical quotation of the military order, Ginster first considers a blueprint that, entirely unrealizable, emphatically foregrounds Ginster’s desire to create space for subjective experience: “Wenn es nach Ginster gegangen wäre, hätte man die Gräber so geheim angeordnet, daß ein jedes nur denen sich zeigte,

die an ihm zu trauern begehrten” (*G*, 104). Whereas the military colonization of the environment both within Germany and beyond during the war creates spaces that dictate utterly the development and perspective of the human, Ginster’s designs aspire to a decolonization that reverses the military power hierarchy. The structures he designs, far from compelling the human to assume any particular shape, create space for individuals to move freely and participate in change. The projects do not, however, proscribe determinate characteristics to the human nature they are intended to serve. Like Bloch, for whom potentiality (“Möglichkeit”) alone can be attributed to the human’s unknowable interiority, Ginster’s architectural ideals, unpredictable in their unceasing shapeshifting, make space for a similarly inconstant nature. They thereby gesture to those moments of “Zwiespalt,” “Zerrissenheit,” and “Geöffnetsein” that Kracauer claimed in *Der Detektiv-Roman* to be a remedy to modern society’s ills.

It cannot be overlooked, however, that Ginster’s individualized acts of resistance fail. Mere moments after Ginster has presented his swimming pool ideas, news of the mobilization for war reaches him and prematurely ends his architectural aspirations: “Aus dem Schwimmbad wird nichts werden” (*G*, 13). In truth, however, even before the outbreak of war, it is unclear whether the designs could come to fruition, for a swimming pool accessible only by side-doors and situated beneath a giant machine-operated kaleidoscope is only scarcely more realizable than a cemetery in which the respective graves reveal themselves only to those who wish to mourn the individual buried there. Thus, while Ginster’s designs undoubtedly offer a sketch of an idealized social organization, a desirable alternative to the existing society critiqued by the novel, they also call into question the possibility of realizing an architecture that could call forth this utopia. In this way, Ginster’s search for an architecture that creates space for a positive community by remaining responsive to its constituent individuals ultimately leads him to the very limits of architectural possibility—and beyond. Consequently unable to realize his designs, Ginster’s individualist resistance to the prevailing social relations ultimately proves no more able to effect social change than did the collective action embodied in the failed revolution.

## A Literary Blueprint

Ginster is not ignorant to the tension between his designs and the process of realizing them. Even before the war interrupts and redirects his architectural work, Kracauer's protagonist finds himself dissatisfied with the process of translating his drawings into buildings: "[Er] erkannte [. . .], daß der Zauber der zeichnerischen Darstellungen sich verlor, sobald sie durch Backsteine und Maurer verwirklicht wurden" (*G*, 22–23). His discontent results from the loss of flexibility and responsiveness that follows from the realization of his sketches. He accordingly dreams of an inverted process in which the fixity of the built environment gives way to the mutability of his designs: "Statt sonderbar verschlungene Figuren in Gebäude münden zu lassen, hätte er es vorgezogen, alle nützlichen Gegenstände in Figuren zurückzuerlegen" (*G*, 20–21). The relationship between built environment and written "Figuren" to which Ginster here refers is, the final section of this chapter argues, critical for understanding Kracauer's literary intervention into the sociopolitical impasse his work outlines. After all, Kracauer's novel does precisely what Ginster longs for, dissolving his contemporary world into "Figuren," that is, into the written words of his text.<sup>69</sup> In doing so, Kracauer not only exposes to the reader the sociopolitical blueprint of the prevailing social relations, but he also demands that we view his novel itself as a potential architectural sketch, a model for a different social order. In this way, Kracauer's novel continues the reckoning with Lukács that had begun with *Der Detektiv-Roman*: whereas, in Kracauer's view, Lukács sought to solve the problem apparent in the novels of *Die Theorie des Romans* through his philosophical system of *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, Kracauer's

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<sup>69</sup>Jarosinski's exploration of "the spatial dimension of language, and the linguistic dimension of space" is relevant here, but while Jarosinski identifies certain aspects of the "dimensions" in question, he does not consider the (causal) interrelation of language and architecture for which this chapter ultimately argues. See Jarosinski, "Urban Meditations: The Theoretical Space of Siegfried Kracauer's Ginster," 187. For a more general overview of language's centrality to Kracauer's novel, see Gertrud Koch, *Kracauer: An Introduction*, trans. Jeremy Gaines (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 49–59.

*Ginster* takes the opposite approach, shifting Kracauer's focus from theory to fiction and suggesting that a socialist future necessitates a break with all such closed systems.<sup>70</sup>

Kracauer's critique in *Der Detektiv-Roman* of philosophical systems that remain futilely disconnected from reality is explicitly invoked in *Ginster*. Towards the end of the novel, the protagonist finds himself in the secluded city of Q. Health concerns have brought his brief military training to a premature end, and he has returned to the architectural work that had occupied him at the outbreak of war. It is in these final days of the First World War, as *Ginster* devotes his plentiful free time to reading, that we encounter a passage strongly reminiscent of Kracauer's reflections in *Der Detektiv-Roman*:

Des Onkels wegen las *Ginster* die vorhandenen philosophischen Systeme, die er gewöhnlich am Ende aufschlug, um zu erfahren, worauf sie hinausliefen. Meistens fing er sie dann gar nicht mehr an. Entweder forderten sie eine vollkommene Welt oder setzten die Vollkommenheit schon voraus. In der Zwischenzeit fielen die Soldaten. Lauter Systeme. (*G*, 218)

Evident here is a disconnect between abstract philosophical systems that target or presuppose a totalizing "Vollkommenheit" and the reality that they ineffectively seek to explain, represented in this case by the brutality of the battlefields. Reproducing Kracauer's critique of Lukács in *Der Detektiv-Roman*, the novel suggests that this disconnect renders such theoretical structures unable to intervene into the scenes of destruction on the battlefield.

*Ginster* also builds on the arguments of *Der Detektiv-Roman*, however, and the novel brings such abstract systems into connection with the built environment. *Ginster*'s critique of Otto's philological work is, for example, expressed through an architectural analogy:

Ein bekannter Baumeister [...] war mit der Rekonstruktion einer mittelalterlichen Burgruine beauftragt worden. [...] Die Neuanlage [...] entsprach dem Stand der

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<sup>70</sup>In this regard, my argument agrees with Grünewald who pushes back against those who suggest Kracauer's theoretical writings lack a utopian dimension: "Zusammenfassen lässt sich sagen, dass Kracauer die Utopie als fertig gedachte Gegenrealität abweist und nur die Fokussierung des Utopischen als konstruktiven geistigen Aufbruch annehmen kann." However, Grünewald leaves *Ginster* out of her reflections and does not account, therefore, for Kracauer's novelistic attempt to derive from this utopian gesture a political vision. See Heidi Grünewald, "Phänomene des undeutlichen Lebens. Utopische Entwürfe in Siegfried Kracauers exterritorialem Denken," in *Utopie im Exil: Literarische Figurationen der Imaginären* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017), 45–64, 48–50.

modernen Archäologie. Daß sie dem Mittelalter nicht entsprach, ging aus alten Plänen hervor, die man zum Unglück verspätet entdeckte. (G, 31)

Ginster here suggests that Otto's abstract construct accords less with reality than it does with academic theories, and Ginster suggests—once more in architectural language—that Otto's ideas are always premised on the reaffirmation of such theories: “Die langen Perioden, zu denen Otto ausholte, wurden stets zu Ende geführt. Gewöhnlich erbrachte erst der Abschluß der Konstruktionen den Beweis für ihre Möglichkeit” (G, 30). The analogous relationship between language and architecture in the previous example is replaced here by a metaphorical architecture created by Otto's linguistic articulation of his systems. It is accordingly noteworthy that, in his reproduction of the self-enclosed systems endemic to the depicted culture, Otto displays an affinity for an unusual form of architecture: “[J]ede Gebäude war [Otto] recht, wenn es nur einen Eingang besaß” (G, 33). With an entrance but no exit, the architectural embodiment of Otto's self-enclosed systems points to their internal logic that cannot, however, be related back to reality. Crucially, this affirmation of Kracauer's critique of abstract philosophical systems in *Der Detektiv-Roman* also connects such systems to the previously examined exit-less built environments that confined the soldiers and obstructed the revolution. The foundations of the real-world architecture critiqued by the novel are to be found in a corresponding linguistic architecture.

This imposition of abstract systems onto reality tellingly underpins Kracauer's portrayal of the war in *Ginster*. While the philosophical systems Ginster reads while in Q. offer no exit from the reality of war, Kracauer's novel also suggests that such systems bear responsibility for bringing about the conflict in the first place. Indeed, the war itself appears at times as the projection of abstract concepts onto reality. In the opening pages of the novel, following the declaration of war, Ginster reflects on war as an abstract concept: “Von Kriegen hatte Ginster nur in der Schule gehört. [...] Unser oberster Kriegsherr — aus den Schulbüchern schlug das Wort in die Hitze und dröhnte über den Platz” (G, 8). Our first encounter with the war of Kracauer's novel is thus not as a real-world event but rather as an abstraction come to life. Over the course of the

novel, it accordingly exhibits attributes characteristic of the theoretical systems described above, not least in its fundamental rootedness in language. Even as the war unfolds and reports from the front reach the civilian population, the events on the battlefield cannot be disentangled from their linguistic formulation: “[Der Onkel] lobte die knappe Sprache, die den Literaten als Beispiel dienen müsse. Die Tante stürzte sich ebenfalls wortreich auf das Knappe des Tagesberichts. Sümpfe oder Grammatik: sie frohlockten über den Sieg” (*G*, 51). In being thus perceived on the home front, the war is a play with words, an abstract architecture, that now begins to give shape to a dreadful new reality and, of course, an increasingly militarized real-world architecture.

Kracauer’s novel intervenes into the modern society it portrays by attacking its underlying abstract architecture. It achieves this by literarily staging the clash between the concept of war and the reality. Thus, when Biehl’s wife finally receives news that her son has been killed, she experiences it as the defeat of abstract language: “Das Sprechen hat nur einen Sinn, wenn es die Wirklichkeit einsperrte und sich in Freiheit erging. Nun war die Wirklichkeit ausgebrochen, die Sprache verweht” (*G*, 90). Where previously the war had provided a discursive architecture that contained reality, thereby rendering it legible, the experience of personal loss reveals the terrible insufficiency of that linguistic structure. Similarly, it is when confronted with his own death that Otto—in his final letter to Ginster—is able to see through the futility of his studies:

Ich fühle tief, wie lächerlich der Ernst war, mit dem ich Philologie betrieb, fühle die ganze Unangemessenheit der großen Straßen, die uns vorgezeichnet sind und die in diesen Krieg führten. Wie eine Decke lagen bisher die Worte auf mir: Beruf, Pflicht und alle die andern Worte, die mich einspannten und gefangenhielten, ohne mir das geringste Ausweichen zu gönnen. (*G*, 73)

Otto’s critique of the war hereby gestures towards the dangers of any philosophical system that feigns to render the world intelligible whilst, in truth, merely creating an artificial “Decke” that conceals—but ultimately cannot suppress—reality.<sup>71</sup> Those who embrace the war are

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<sup>71</sup>Kramer also comments on this moment, noting the way in which language becomes the “Akteur” and not the “freie und autonome Individuum.” Kramer more generally believes that the depiction of language in the novel is used to satirize an out-of-touch intellectual culture. My argument goes further by showing how the novel suggests that Kracauer holds this language at least partially responsible for the war itself. See Sven Kramer, “Vergesellschaftung in der Sprache. Zu Kracauers Romane Ginster und Georg,” in *‘Doch ist das Wirkliche auch vergessen, so ist es darum*

unknowingly directed down those “großen Straßen” and thereby set on a potentially fatal collision course with the hidden reality. By thus exposing the limitations of the structures that made possible the war, Kracauer’s novel seeks to effect their demolition.

*Ginster* goes further than *Der Detektiv-Roman*, however, for it seeks not only to do the work of demolition but also to initiate a process of reconstruction. In this context, it is significant that the novel draws a link not only between architecture and the vacuous intellectual culture widespread in capitalist modernity, but also between architecture and the design work that underpins Ginster’s more imaginative projects. Ginster is encouraged to become an architect because of the childhood sketches completed during his school years: “Von früh auf zeichnete er gern Ornamente. In seinen Schulheften schossen auf den unbeschriebenen Rändern Spiralsysteme in die Höhe, die sich nach oben verjüngten. [...] Seiner Spiralen wegen wurde ihm zur Architektur geraten” (*G*, 20). This drawing impulse, which appears as another indication of that playful creativity that Bloch associated with childhood, is tellingly informed by a concomitant interest in natural shapes not dominated by military regimentation: “Zu den wunderbaren Erfahrungen gehörte ihm das Auftauchen fremder Linienwelten an beliebigen Orten. Viele Stunden verbrachte er über dem Mikroskop, in die Strukturen der Stoffe vertieft” (*G*, 21). Ginster’s architectural projects thus speak more fundamentally to his fascination with the variform shapes of a nature untouched by aggressive forms of socialization. However, whereas Ginster’s designs remain hopelessly utopian, unrealizable and therefore unable to affect reality, Kracauer’s literary intervention is able to avoid this fate. Kracauer’s *Ginster* counterpoises the architecture implicit in the depicted theoretical systems with its own literary blueprint. In this way, Kracauer is able to sketch his own linguistic architecture that affirms the utopian potential of the natural forms that fascinate Ginster while simultaneously challenging the prevailing social relations.

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*nicht getilgt*: *Beiträge zum Werk Siegfried Kracauers*, ed. Jörn Ahrens et al. (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2017), 59–79, 67–68

It is the contested final chapter of the novel that clearly foregrounds the ambition of Kracauer's literary architecture.<sup>72</sup> The chapter, set five years after the revolutionary events that brought the war to an end, takes place in the French city of Marseilles, and its open ending reveals the constructive capacity Kracauer attributes to literature. In the architecture of Marseilles, Ginster finds a site of endless traces, a citywide embodiment of those youthful and natural shapes and movements in which he previously found inspiration: "Sonne erfüllt die Höhlen und Schläuche, eine Richtung zu finden, war unmöglich. [...] Unzählige Kinder und Katzen quollen in einem hofartigen Sträßchen aus den Pflasterritzen, krochen durch Wände, schrien, vermischten sich" (*G*, 232). The play of children here finds an ideal environment in the disordered and porous spaces of the city. It is a city that, in an apparent process of disintegration, foregrounds always its own transience and the possibility of change:

An einer Stelle war eine Schlucht aufgerissen, die das Gerippe der Häuser freilegte. In ihrem Dunkel lagerte ein Haufen von Balken, Dachteilen, Mauerbrocken und Stegen. Vielleicht wäre der unverständlich Knäuel mit einem Schlag zu entwirren gewesen und hätte dann herrlich gestrahlt. (*G*, 233)

In this way, Marseilles seems to represent the architectural solution to the problems previously depicted.

When an acquaintance of Ginster, Frau van C., arrives in the city, however, she intrudes on this apparent utopia by bringing with her a reminder of the capitalist power hierarchies that persist: "Sie überzeugte die Menge davon, daß der Kapitalismus mächtiger sei als je und das Proletariat von neuem geknechtet wird. [...] Wir müssen kämpfen, forderte sie und verwies Ginster der Mutlosigkeit" (*G*, 237). Ginster, conscious of the narrowed perspectives that ensured

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<sup>72</sup>The chapter, the apparent optimism of which was criticized by Adorno, was elided from the 1963 reprint of the novel. See Theodor W. Adorno, "Der wunderliche Realist," in *Noten zur Literatur, Bd. 3* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1965), 83–108. Its perceived impact (or lack thereof) for the novel's overall meaning has since inspired manifold interpretations. The interpretation presented here supplements Mülder-Bach's reading, which highlights the utopian perspective of Marseilles: "Was Kracauer einmal an anderer Stelle emphatisch den 'richtigen Stand des Einzelnen' nennt, wird hier zum Maßstab einer humanen Welt, in der sich der Mensch in der Dialektik seiner Existenz wiederzuerkennen vermöchte: in seiner Vergänglichkeit, die allen Vollkommenheit oder Dauer präntierenden Ordnungen widerspricht." However, the analysis in this section seeks to show that this utopian potential thus depicted can, in Kracauer's view, be realized only if it becomes the inspiration for revolutionary action. See Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer — Grenzgänger zwischen Theorie und Literatur*, 142–145. For a brief overview of the chapter's publication history, see See Reeh, *Ornaments of the Metropolis*, 221.



the failure of the revolution, resists Frau van C.'s demands and instead tries to open her eyes to their surroundings. During the tour of the city, however, it becomes clear that Frau van C.'s own perspective remains dangerously narrow. She is repulsed by the chaotic life of the city in which (human) nature is ubiquitous: "Entsetzlich... nur fort. [...] Welch ein Elend... Das Gewimmel, wie unter dem Mikroskop—" (*G*, 234). Whereas it had previously been under the microscope that the young Ginster had excitedly explored organic forms, Frau van C. invokes the same image here to distance herself from its disorder. In this way, her political project does not point toward a liberation of human nature, but rather threatens to make the same mistake as Lukács, rejecting reality in favor of yet more abstract systems. Accordingly, in Ginster's reaction to her political speech, her revolution threatens to reproduce the war and its *Volk*: "Schlagworte schlagen, dachte [Ginster] und duckte sich unwillkürlich. Dann ergriff er, Frau van C. nachahmend, das Wort Europa. Zuletzt schwangen beide die Knüppel. Rechtes Bein, linkes Bein, wie beim Marschieren" (*G*, 237). Frau van C. thus stands for a revolutionary politics no more able to effect revolutionary change than did the events that ended the war. It is a politics that, limited by its theoretical approach, fails to apprehend the nature of the humanity it nominally seeks to save.

There exists, however, a counterimage to Frau van C. in the final chapter of *Ginster*. The impression made on the protagonist by this figure points to a way forward even as it demarcates the revolutionary limits of utopian traces. Following Frau van C.'s departure, Ginster is left alone in his seemingly ideal city. It is precisely in this moment, when Ginster immerses himself in the freedom afforded to him by Marseilles, that another figure enters the scene:

Nun fand er sich in der Helle vor dem Café. Sie strahlte nicht aus, sie hüllte ihn ein, und wie ein Goldfisch durchschwamm er nach allen Seiten ihren glänzenden Fluß. Noch glitt er dahin, als sich vor seinen Augen ein Riff erhob — eine schwarz gekleidete Alte, die einer Reiterin gleich einen Jockeihut trug. (*G*, 239)

Momentarily it appears as if Ginster had here found a real-life equivalent for the swimming pool he once designed, as he moves freely through shifting lights, but this movement is abruptly interrupted. A rider in black, the old woman—even without any pale horse—figures clearly as a symbol of death: "Ginster [hatte] Zeit, ihr Gesicht zu betrachten. Es war eine schneeweiß

gepuderte Larve, die aus dem Grab geholt zu sein scheint. Berührte man die Wangen, so zerfielen sie sicher in Staub” (*G*, 239). Such ostentatious bodily decay stands in direct contrast to the superficial beauty of Frau van C., and this inversion extends to the old woman’s relationship to human nature. In contrast to Frau van C.’s rigid discipline, the old woman dances, sings, and flirts: “Mit tänzelnden Schritten bewegte sie sich, wirklich, sie tänzelte, eine Primaballerina, die Straße war ihr Parkett. [. . .] Unterwegs blieb sie vor den Cafés stehen, verzögerte sich bei Burschen und Männern” (*G*, 239). Where Frau van C. embodied a soberly theoretical worldview that sacrificed individuality to revolutionary ambition, the old woman figures as the inverse: pure self-expression with no regard for physical form or the external world.

The seemingly liberatory potential of a celebration of nature is, however, undercut by the vulnerability that clearly results for the old woman.<sup>73</sup> The old woman’s disinterest in reality leaves her at the mercy of events over which she has no control, something that her connection to the war underlines: “[Ginster] bemerkte, daß ihr Kleid mit Kriegerabzeichen geschmückt war. [. . .] Die Orden stammten von ihrem Mann, oder der Sohn war gefallen” (*G*, 239) Her perseverance with self-expression, in spite of all the misery occasioned by the prevailing social relations, becomes, therefore, the expression of an identity broken and perverted by events it overlooks: “Ginster [vernahm], daß sie unaufhörlich vor sich hinsang. Dem Singsang fehlten die Worte; ein Gemurmeln mehr als ein Singen” (*G*, 239–240). Her association with death thus stems from her own experience of it, but also from the fate to which her suppression of the external world dooms her. Her form of self-expression, utterly individual and unmoored from social reality, is entirely incapable of forming the basis of collective action and the old woman’s attempts to connect with others necessarily assume grotesque shape: “[S]ie grinste ihn an. Jedenfalls konnte der weit geöffnete, zahnlose Mund nur ein Grinsen bedeuten. Wie ein gewaltiger Krater lag er in der weißen Totenlandschaft ihres Gesichts” (*G*, 239). Kracauer hereby underlines the impossibility of challenging the prevailing relations through individual acts of

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<sup>73</sup>Bub also draws attention to the way in which *Ginster* characterizes Marseilles not just positively but also negatively Stefan Bub, “Porosität und Gassengeschlinge: Siegfried Kracauers und Walter Benjamins mediterrane Städtebilder,” *KulturPoetik* 10, no. 1 (2010): 53.

self-expression: There is no possibility of a future here, no utopian collective; the way of pure self-expression leads, under the prevailing socioeconomic relations, only to death.<sup>74</sup>

The twofold significance that the old woman has for Ginster is nevertheless important. She is, firstly, a threatening mirror image. Marseilles is for Ginster what it is for the old woman too: an apparent refuge from the outside world that corresponds to the human's inner life. The close affinity between the city and the woman is accordingly emphasized: "Tagaus, tagein würde sie auf und ab wandern mit den Kriegermedaillen auf der Brust" (*G*, 240). It seems as if Ginster understands the message that is thus communicated to him—that, namely, death will come for him too if he lingers too long in this illusory refuge—for immediately following his observations on the old woman, he determines to leave the city: "Ich gehe jetzt, sagte Ginster zu sich" (*G*, 240). There is, however, secondly, a positive aspect of the experience for Ginster. Earlier in the chapter, when discussing with Frau van C., Ginster connects, in a way that anticipates the appearance of the old woman, death to nature and Marseilles. Referring to a past sexual encounter, Ginster states: "[I]ch hatte den Tod gelernt. [. . .] [I]ch [stoße] in diesem armseligen Hafenviertel endlich auf eine Welt [. . .], die dem Zustand entspricht, in dem ich mich nach dem Mädchen befand" (*G*, 236). This seemingly implausible constellation revolves around the transience that, as has been shown, underpins the perpetual change of human nature (and desire) and the French city but that, furthermore, finds its definitive expression in death. Like the traces previously described, death is an irrepressible marker of change and alterity. In its finality, however, death has a potency that exceeds all other traces, exposing definitively the limit of all human-made philosophies and systems.

The confrontation with death inspires in Ginster not only an appreciation for the manifold forms assumed by life, but also a hatred: "[Mein Haß] galt der Herrscherei der Menschen, die sich zu solchen Schlössern versteigt, und allen Ordnungen, die das Elend verleugnen. [. . .] Sie

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<sup>74</sup>Vedda is perhaps the only person who has so far even attempted to address the figure of the old woman in *Ginster*. While he similarly recognizes her as a figure of death, he sees in her—despite all her negative associations and despite the fact Ginster elects to leave Marseilles after the encounter—a figure with whom "Ginster may well find the only kind of fraternity to which a melancholy and malcontent outcast can aspire." Vedda, "The Novel of a Melancholy Outcast," 57.

kennen den Tod nicht” (*G*, 236). Ginster experiences a fury against the human-made systems, and the buildings (the “Schlösser”) in which they are enshrined, that seek to deny change, that seek to repress the inescapable fact of death. It is a fury that contains the potential for revolutionary action:

Abreißen sollte man die Bauten, die schlechte Schönheit, den Glanz, herunter damit. [. . .] Sie müssen zerfallen, auseinanderbröckeln müssen sie, bis sie selbst zu Dreck werden. Eher kann ich mich nicht zufrieden geben. Ja freilich, wenn das Glück aus diesen Gassen aufstiege, wenn die Schönheit ihnen ins Angesicht schaute und doch schön wäre. . . (*G*, 236)

Kracauer here portrays a revolutionary energy that, in contradistinction to Frau van C.’s political perspective, seeks to transform external reality on the basis of human nature. The shapeshifting Marseilles acts as model and inspiration for this change, which would see the world fashioned into a true home for the human and its variform potentialities. In these final moments of Kracauer’s novel, therefore, we see an alternative political vision take shape, one that not only upholds the utopian vision of a world that corresponds to human nature, but also aspires to transform the prevailing social relations accordingly.<sup>75</sup>

This Marseilles chapter of *Ginster* stages the problem of revolution, and its open-endedness underlines the novel’s unique ability to navigate the poles represented by Frau van C. and the old woman. *Ginster* ends neither with the fixity of Frau van C.’s political vision nor with the powerlessness of the old woman’s self-expression. Instead, the protagonist chooses to leave Marseilles. His decision is undoubtedly driven by his desire, previously expressed by his architectural projects, to shape human society according to the natural forms he admires. While, for Kracauer, this seems to be the basis for any truly revolutionary movement, *Ginster* makes clear that the journey thus undertaken can be neither predicted nor proscribed, its success neither inevitable nor determinable. Kracauer establishes with Frau van C. and the old woman a

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<sup>75</sup>I accordingly depart from the readings that Koch offers as the two possibilities of interpretation for the final chapter. Both the Nietzschean “abandonment of remembrance” and the Benjaminian “empty moment of sovereign Creation” overlook, namely, the way in which the chapter, far from uncritically holding up the forgetfulness and newness associated with Marseilles as an ideal, points instead to the necessity of integrating the city’s creative potential into an explicitly political vision. See Koch, *Kracauer. An Introduction*, especially 56–59.

(negative) dialectical model with no determinate synthesis. Indeed, any attempt to determine a clear synthesis would necessarily abandon the mutability of self-expression in favor of the fixity of systems. Accordingly, Kracauer's revolutionary theory is expressed in *Ginster* not through any fixed system but rather through the novel's narrative: it is only through the journey itself—the dialectical search for a world beholden to the human—that *Ginster's* biography and its political vision can take shape, and it is the continuation of that perpetual journey that now propels *Ginster* onward once more with the ideal of a utopian future always on the horizon.

### CHAPTER III. BUILDING THE REVOLUTION: ALIENATION AND REDEMPTION IN ARNOLD ZWEIG'S *Erziehung vor Verdun*

Hans-Albert Walter wrote in 1987 of the “Elend der Zweig-Rezeption,” underlining the enduring accuracy of Marcel Reich-Ranicki’s 1970 assessment that “Für die Germanistik in Westdeutschland existiert [Arnold Zweig] nicht. Seine Bücher sind hier in Vergessenheit geraten.”<sup>1</sup> Like Walter, Sternburg attributed this “Vergessenheit” to Zweig’s “Entscheidung, sich in Ostberlin niederzulassen, die DDR und ihr System zu unterstützen,” which “wurde ihm in der Bundesrepublik lange nicht verziehen.”<sup>2</sup> It is a fate that would have been unimaginable in the 1920s when Zweig rocketed to prominence with the publication of his 1927 novel *Der Streit um Sergeanten Grischa*, a work described by Jean Améry as “nicht nur Arnold Zweigs Meisterwerk, [. . . sondern] ganz gewiß auch das wichtigste Buch, das in deutscher Sprache über den Ersten Weltkrieg geschrieben wurde.”<sup>3</sup> By the end of the decade, Zweig had become the “Vorsitz des ‘Schutzverbandes deutscher Schriftsteller,’” and was celebrated as “eines der prominentesten Mitglieder im linksintellektuellen Lager.”<sup>4</sup> The subsequent success of his 1935 novel *Erziehung vor Verdun*, which—like the *Grischa* novel—formed part of Zweig’s World War I novel cycle, *Der große Krieg der weißen Männer*, secured his position as one of the era’s foremost German authors: “Der Erfolg [von dem Roman] [...] stellte sich sofort ein. Schon nach wenigen Wochen

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<sup>1</sup>Marcel Reich-Ranicki, “Der preußische Jude Arnold Zweig,” in *Deutsche Literatur in West und Ost. Prosa seit 1945* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1970), 189–214, 189. For Walter’s argument, see Hans-Albert Walter, “Vom Elend der Zweig Rezeption,” in *Arnold Zweig: Materialien zu Leben und Werk*, ed. Wilhelm von Sternburg (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1987), 237–255.

<sup>2</sup>Wilhelm von Sternburg, *Um Deutschland geht es uns. Arnold Zweig: die Biographie* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1998), 12.

<sup>3</sup>Jean Améry, “Auch ein ‘roter Preuße’. Über den deutschen Enzyklopädisten des Ersten Weltkriegs, Arnold Zweig,” in *Arnold Zweig: Materialien zu Leben und Werk*, ed. Wilhelm von Sternburg (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1987), 180.

<sup>4</sup>Sternburg, *Um Deutschland geht es uns*, 163.

hatte Querido 3000 Exemplare abgesetzt, was unter den damaligen Exilbedingungen geradezu sensationell war.”<sup>5</sup>

Much has changed in Zweig scholarship in the intervening decades, but ambivalence toward his politics persists. His turn away from Zionism and growing commitment to communism in the 1930s is, for example, often downplayed: “Zweigs Haltung zur Sowjetunion blieb in den dreißiger Jahren [. . .] weiterhin kritisch distanziert.”<sup>6</sup> To the extent that it is acknowledged, it is attributed to Zweig’s apparent vices, not least his vanity: “Nicht die materielle Lage war schuld an der steigenden Entfremdung [vom Zionismus] sondern gekränkter Ehrgeiz.”<sup>7</sup> Kröhnke has rightly pushed back forcefully against such approaches:

Wer da meint, Arnold Zweig sei 1933 als liberaler Jude ins palästinensische Exil gegangen und, durch spätere Erfahrungen belehrt, Sozialist und DDR-Bürger geworden, übersieht nicht nur seine linkssozialistische Gesinnung schon während der ‘Weimarer’ Jahre, sondern verkennt wohl auch das politische Profil der zionistischen Siedlungsbewegung dieser Zeit.<sup>8</sup>

It is true that Zweig was no orthodox communist in Weimar Germany, no member of the fledgling *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, and he viewed Stalin’s rise critically. Nevertheless, as Sternburg says, “Seine Sympatheien für die bolschewistischen Experimente in der Sowjetunion bleiben wach, glaubt er doch, wie mancher in dieser Epoche, die Moskauer Führung erfülle das, was seinem eigenen humanistischen und sozialistischen Engagement entspreche.”<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, Zweig greeted the October Revolution enthusiastically, wrote for “Die Weltbühne” a “Grabrede”

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<sup>5</sup>Jost Hermand, *Engagement als Lebensform: über Arnold Zweig* (Berlin: Sigma, 1992), 120.

<sup>6</sup>Arie Wolf, “Stationen des geistigen Wandels des Haifer Exilanten Arnold Zweig,” in *Arnold Zweig: Sein Werk im Kontext der deutschsprachigen Exilliteratur*, ed. Arthur Tilo Alt and Julia Bernhard (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999), 217.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>8</sup>Karl Kröhnke, “Arnold Zweigs teurer Traum. Politische Überlegungen zu seinem Leben und zu seinem Werk,” in *Arnold Zweig: Materialien zu Leben und Werk*, ed. Wilhelm von Sternburg (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1987), 263.

<sup>9</sup>Sternburg, *Um Deutschland geht es uns*, 166.

for Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in January 1919, and had, by 1926, become a member of the *Gesellschaft der Freunde des neuen Rußland*.

It is perhaps the unease around Zweig's politics that has led scholarship on *Erziehung vor Verdun* to overlook the attempt, at the heart of the novel, to reconcile a Marxist critique of capitalism with Gustav Landauer's utopian elevation of individual acts of resistance. Such a reconciliation may appear paradoxical, given that Landauer inherited his socialism from the anti-Marxist anarchist tradition born out of the First International conflict between Karl Marx and Mikhail Bakunin, but it also gestures toward the originality of Zweig's revolutionary ideals. *Erziehung vor Verdun* was written at a critical juncture in the development of these ideals, at a moment when Zweig's increasingly intimate friendship with Bertolt Brecht, his exile in Palestine, and his involvement in the anti-fascist *Volksfront* brought him into ever closer contact with communists and communist ideas. These were experiences that complicated Zweig's view of Landauer, who had decisively influenced Zweig's politicization in the immediate postwar years. It is a change in Zweig's thinking evidenced by his 1933 theoretical work, *Bilanz der deutschen Judenheit*. In that text, Zweig celebrates Landauer's insights into the power of the "persönliche Tat," but he devotes far more space to Marx's economic insights. This chapter argues that in *Erziehung vor Verdun*, written two years later, Zweig sought to literarily explore how these two traditions might be thought together.

Central to Zweig's political vision in *Erziehung vor Verdun* is Marx's idea that capitalist society alienates the human from its natural proclivity for creative (self-)transformation. Zweig depicts World War I as the culmination of this alienation, as a conflict in which humankind's technological innovations are turned against a humanity reduced to an animalistic fight for survival: While bombers loom threateningly overhead, brutalized humans scurry like rats through the muddy trenches. In this chapter, I contrast the vertical topography inherent in this image of soaring planes and earthbound rodents to an alternative form of verticality, namely that of the Gothic cathedral. Interest in the Gothic was widespread in early-twentieth-century Germany, inspired partly by the art historical considerations of Wilhelm Worringer and partly by the



political utopianism of anarchists like Landauer.<sup>10</sup> Both influences are starkly apparent in Zweig's 1925 novella *Pont und Anna*, in which the protagonist, Laurenz Pont, overcomes his creative block through encounters with the Gothic cathedrals in Strasbourg and Como. Pont's personal recovery opens his eyes to a vision for postwar society: humanity's capacity of innovation, which orients it upward, toward the divine power of creation, must be reconnected to a recognition of the human's place in the natural world, of the human as animal. The verticality of the Gothic cathedral reveals to Pont, an architect, an ideal of building that, by fulfilling human nature, reverses the alienation of capitalist society.

While Pont's ideal of constructing a new society persists in *Erziehung vor Verdun*, Zweig's faith in Landauer and the political efficacy of individual acts of building had dissipated by the mid-1930s. Cathedralic inspiration is insufficient, Zweig's novel intimates, to combat a capitalist order that, as the era's leftists argued, was willing to unleash fascism to stave off the internal threat of its own contradictions and the external threat of communist revolution. What is required in such a context, Zweig indicates, is a way of grounding Pont's hopeful vision in a critique of the prevailing social relations, an exposure of the human actions and structures that uphold the capitalist order. It is precisely this combination of critique and utopianism that Zweig seeks to unite in his novel. Certainly, Zweig's novelistic tendency for critique has been acknowledged, not least by Georg Lukács, for whom the exposure of the social totality under capitalism constituted literature's purpose, and who believed he had discovered in Zweig "den Kronzeugen für seine

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<sup>10</sup>Bushart, who provides a detailed account of the Gothic revival's influence on the era's art, describes the impact of Worringer's work as a "Gotikboom." See Magdalena Bushart, *Der Geist der Gotik und die expressionistische Kunst* (München: Silke Schreiber, 1990), 50. As Werner points out, however, Worringer's interest in the Gothic was not unprecedented but rather represented a critical engagement with Romanticism's Gothic reception as well as *Neugotik* in architecture. See Michael Werner, "Medievalism and Modernity: Architectural Appropriations of the Middle Ages in Germany (1890–1920)," in *Manufacturing Middle Ages: Entangled History of Medievalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Patrick J. Geary and Gábor Klaniczay (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 239–255, 241–243. Landauer, in contrast, wrote in the years immediately prior to the publication of Worringer's work, and—as Kuhn and Wolf argue—likely inherited his view of the Middle Ages from the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin. See Gabriel Kuhn and Siegbert Wolf, "Introduction," in *Revolution and Other Writings. A Political Reader* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010), 18–61, 30. Kropotkin, in turn, was influenced primarily by the Gothic reception in England, which was spearheaded by William Morris and John Ruskin. See Steven G. Marks, "Kropotkin's Anti-Darwinian Anarchism," in *How Russia Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 38–57. Significantly, then, the early-twentieth-century Gothic revival in Germany represented the convergence of two separate trajectories of Gothic reception, something largely overlooked in existing accounts of the period.

Theorie vom epischen Realismus.”<sup>11</sup> What has received far less attention, however, is Zweig’s cathedralic utopianism, which brings him into the proximity of Lukács’s principal adversary in the 1930s debates on realism and expressionism, Ernst Bloch. This chapter ultimately contends that, with *Erziehung vor Verdun*, Zweig forges his own path through the period’s literary controversies, combining elements of Lukácsian and Blochian thought, to fashion a novel that both exposes present power hierarchies and reorients the reader toward a utopian future.

### **The City and/or the War**

For Zweig, the city is bound up with the development of human civilization. He makes this argument in the theoretical work *Bilanz der deutschen Judenheit*. It is a text that seeks to repel Nazi antisemitism by outlining contributions made by Jews to European and German culture. For my purposes, however, the work’s significance lies in its spatialized conception of human nature and history. For Zweig, human history is a movement toward “Gesittung,” a civilizing process that is guided by reason. The human as “Träger der Vernunft” has been able, by suppressing the demands of its animalistic instincts, to develop increasingly sophisticated civilizations and cultures. Thus, according to Zweig, “der Verlauf der europäischen Kulturgeschichte zielt auf [. . .] Versittlichungen hin” and Zweig describes “die Zähmung des wilden Menschen” and “die Unterwerfung herdenhafter und hordenhafter Naturwesen unter die sinngebenden Gesetze der Kulturentwicklung.”<sup>12</sup>

The city for Zweig acts as expression and catalyst of this civilizing process: “Immer und überall hat sich unsere Gesittung von Städten her ausgebreitet” (*BdJ*, 28). The city, on the one hand, gives material form to humankind’s development and capacity for peaceful coexistence. The increasingly sophisticated “Gesittungssysteme [. . .] [entsprechen] den Straßensystemen der großen Städte [. . .] mit ihren Umwallungen, Tempeln, Gerichtstätten, Märkten und Wohnungen”

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<sup>11</sup>Sternburg, *Um Deutschland geht es uns*, 48.

<sup>12</sup>Arnold Zweig, *Bilanz der deutschen Judenheit 1933: ein Versuch* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1998), 238. Hereafter *BdJ*.

(*BdJ*, 28). On the other hand, the city influences human nature and bolsters the progression toward reason. It is “im engen Zusammenleben mit der aufnahmefähigen, ‘nach Neuem gierigen’ Atmosphäre der Stadt” (*BdJ*, 29) that the human’s creativity is cultivated:

Die Städte sind es, in denen die Kultur geschaffen wird. Von der Verfeinerung der Seelen bis zur Verfeinerung der Technik, von der Kühnheit neuer Ausdrucksformen in Dichtung, Malerei, Plastik und Tanz bis zur Kühnheit neuer Mischungen in der Chemie, der Strahlungsforschung, der Elektronentheorie und der Photographie von Klängen sind die Städte die Orte des Vorstoßes aus dem Gewohnten ins Ungewohnte, aus dem Beherrschten ins noch Unbeherrschte. (*BdJ*, 31)

In Zweig’s view, the transcendence of destructive drives through a gradual civilizing process is precisely what defines human nature: “Den Menschen macht zum Menschen, daß er dem fremden Wesen wie dem eigenen eine reiche seelische Person einverleibt, die wert ist, daß um ihretwillen der Zerstörungstrieb [...] beherrscht wird, aufgesogen, in andere Seelentriebkraft umgeschaltet” (*BdJ*, 44). The city enshrines and uplifts humankind’s transformation of destructive instincts into creative energies and its progress towards a peaceful societal form based on shared humanity.

It stands to reason, then, that in *Erziehung vor Verdun*, a novel that explores the brutality of World War I, the city should be conspicuous by its absence. Historically accurate for a war fought mainly in the European countryside, the city’s absence is also crucial for Zweig’s critique of the conflict. The depicted events are framed, firstly, by the frequently invoked memory of German atrocities committed in Belgium and France. “Ich war dabei, wie kleine Städte niedergebrannt wurden,” remarks one character, who further comments on the “hundertfacher Mord, Raub, Vergewaltigung, Brandstiftung, Kirchenschändung” and the “Niederbrennen von Tausenden von Häusern.”<sup>13</sup> The events are framed, secondly, by the prospect of more destruction. A major, for example, daydreams of destroying the Italian army, “so daß die deutschen Divisionen über Turin und Savoyen in Frankreich einbrechen konnten und augenblicklich die Städte Lyon und Avignon zerstören” (*EvV*, 324). With these remembered and imagined destructions of urban space, the novel invites us to understand the Battle of Verdun itself not as a conflict between opposing

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<sup>13</sup>Arnold Zweig, *Erziehung vor Verdun* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2001), 185–6. Hereafter *EvV*.



Fig. 5: The Destruction of Louvain, Belgium, 1914 (Imperial War Museums).

armies, but as a battle waged against the city: “Die Stadt Verdun [. . . ], sehr beschädigt, stand. Angriffe drohten ihr, Gegenangriff deckte sie, der Krieg trampelte ‘an Ort’” (*EvV*, 100).

Accordingly, the humans we encounter in Zweig’s novel are not agents of any civilizing process. While Verdun historically stood in the tradition of the city as described by Zweig in his theoretical writings, a space in which “zivilisierte Gehirne” (*EvV*, 97) were formed, the wartime assault on the city takes aim at those very brains: “Granaten [heulten] in die Straßen der Stadt, erschlugen Einwohner, splitterten Kinderschädel ein” (*EvV*, 98). The soldiers exposed to this violence undergo a process of devolution, something captured by the novel’s animal imagery. Take, for example, the rats, which are constant companions to the soldiers and which struggle desperately to survive in a hostile environment, seeking refuge and sustenance wherever they can. The line between soldiers and rats increasingly blurs. The humans, under constant threat of aerial and artillery bombardments, are forced underground into cellars and trenches. The inhabitants of

these “Rattenlöcher” (*EvV*, 44) or “Rattenställe” (*EvV*, 42) become rat-like: they live in filth, become carriers of parasitic insects, and desperately seek food. These animalized humans are incapable of comprehending or challenging the circumstances in which they exist. The soldiers’ existence no longer has anything to do with creative innovation; instead, it is reduced to a relentless battle for survival.

The depiction of World War I as the disruption and reversal of humankind’s civilizing process accords with Zweig’s account of war in *Bilanz der deutschen Judenheit*. Zweig there describes how “Krieg den Gesittungsprozeß stört”: “Kriege [. . .] hinterlassen die Kultur und die Natur des Menschen in einem schwer beschreiblichen Zustand von Verwüstung” (*BdJ*, 42). War is, according to Zweig, the “Enthronung der Vernunft” (*BdJ*, 46): “Man beweist nicht mehr, man behauptet apodiktisch, man gründet nicht mehr, man schlägt tot. Man überzeugt nicht mehr, man befiehlt oder sperrt ein” (*BdJ*, 46). What results is an empowering of those “Grundtriebe in der Menschenseele, die in die Tierreihe hinüberleiten” and therewith a return to the past, to the “primitiv[e] Wildheit” (*BdJ*, 43) of earlier human societies. This notion of regression is also expressed in Zweig’s novel. During a conversation between wounded soldiers about post-war life, for example, one states that “Unser Verstand hat sich getrübt, unsere Urteilsfähigkeit ist ziemlich futsch, unsere Fachkenntnisse haben sich verflüchtigt. Auch was Gesittung ist, Zivilisation, werden wir neu zu lernen haben” (*EvV*, 352). It appears then that in both his theoretical work and his novel, Zweig presents us with a clear dichotomy: on the one side, progress, reason, and the city; on the other, war, destruction, and regression.

Upon closer inspection, however, this dichotomy as it is portrayed in *Erziehung vor Verdun* proves less certain. After all, World War I was the first industrial and technological war in Europe, a mass mobilization of humankind’s scientific innovations. As one character states:

“Wir benutzen die Elemente, wir beuten die Gesetze der Physik und der Chemie aus, wir berechnen erhabene Parabeln, damit Granaten sie beschreiben. Wir untersuchen wissenschaftlich die Windrichtung, um unser giftiges Gas abzublasen. (*EvV*, 187)” Similarly, industrial labor practices ready the urban population for war: The soldiers are described as “Fabrikarbeiter der

Zerstörung” (*EvV*, 173), and the city dwellers become “das Rückgrat der Verteidigung” (*EvV*, 176) because of their familiarity with modern technology. The novel’s protagonist, Werner Bertin, is an *Armierungs-Soldat* responsible for the construction of the wartime landscape, the network of trenches, fortifications, and train lines, in which these factory workers operate. If, according to Zweig, cities are “Orte des Vorstoßes aus dem Gewohnten ins Ungewohnte, aus dem Beherrschten ins noch Unbeherrschte,” Bertin’s work—like the military harnessing of scientific and technological developments—appears to position the war as an extension of, rather than an attack on, urban space and labor practices.

It is significant in this context that, when it comes to human nature, the novel depicts both rats in the trenches and bombers in the sky. If the rats speak to the regression of humankind because of wartime destruction, the bombers represent human innovation and progress. As one soldier puts it, “[Ein Flieger] ist seinen Feinden überlegen, ein Wesen höherer Ordnung, ein Schritt voran in der trägen Entwicklung des Wirbeltiers, das Mensch heißt” (*EvV*, 238). Rats and bombers: the war of Zweig’s novel precipitates simultaneous processes of human devolution and evolution. Significantly, these processes are not independent of each other. The bombs dropped destroy human settlements, introduce into the lives of soldiers and civilians the constant threat of violent death, and force them into their trenches and cellars, their “Rattenlöcher.”<sup>14</sup> The human, like the city, becomes victim to the possibilities of aerial bombardment unlocked by humankind’s technological advancements and their (literal) elevation of human nature. Far from a clear dichotomy, the relationship between the war and the city emerges as a self-destructive cycle: the city, that site of human innovation, becomes a wartime casualty of the very technological progress it inspired.

With the outlining of this self-destructive cycle, *Erziehung vor Verdun* revises the conception of history presented by Zweig in *Bilanz der deutschen Judenheit*. The theoretical text depicts human history as a progression from the most “primitiv” to the most “vernünftig.” Humankind,

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<sup>14</sup>It might also be noted in this context that rats are primarily urban animals. Even as they suggest a regression, therefore, they also reinforce the notion of an interplay between technological advance and humankind’s impoverishment.

endowed with reason, moves from the former to the latter, albeit in certain moments, such as during war, that progress temporarily reverses and human society regresses. *Erziehung vor Verdun* complicates this understanding by introducing a vertical topography, represented by the constellation of earthbound rodents and soaring planes, which allows for the coexistence of past and future. Crucially, there is a disconnect inherent in this verticality. This is apparent not only in the night-time bombing raids in which the soldiers on the ground cannot even perceive the threat overhead, but also in the case of Eberhard Kroysing, a central character, whose aspiration to become a pilot is thwarted when he instead falls victim to an air strike at the novel's conclusion. In *Erziehung vor Verdun*, we thus see a hostile relationship emerge between (most of) humanity and its innovations. Where that relationship as depicted in *Bilanz der deutschen Judenheit* was one of alignment, wherein the interests of humankind are furthered by its technology, which thereby guarantee the progress of human civilization, the innovations in *Erziehung vor Verdun* ensure further development is impossible. As a result, the war appears not as a momentary regression in humankind's unstoppable civilizing process, but rather as the dawning of an eternal present of barbarism for a humanity no longer able to propel itself forward through invention.

### **Verticality and the Difficulties of Resistance**

Zweig's spatialized conception of history in *Erziehung vor Verdun* has a notable precursor in the writings of Gustav Landauer, whose 1911 *Aufruf zum Sozialismus* hugely influenced Zweig's politicization in the immediate postwar years.<sup>15</sup> Landauer would have had little sympathy for the understanding of history Zweig articulates in *Bilanz der deutschen Judenheit*, the idea of human history as progression, as a teleological process driven by reason. Landauer mockingly summarizes the notion that human society progresses constantly and necessarily towards an improved state with the following words: "Die Menschen [. . .] sei in einem stetigen Fortschritt,

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<sup>15</sup>For further information on Landauer's enduring influence on Zweig, see Julia Bernhard and Hans-Harald Müller, "Das Gewissen schlägt die Augen auf": Eine Skizze der Landauer-Rezeption im Werk von Arnold Zweig," in *Arnold Zweig. Berlin, Haifa, Berlin: Perspektiven des Gesamtwerkes*, ed. Arthur Tilo Alt et al. (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 1995), 30–41.

in einer Aufwärtsbewegung von ganz zu unterst nach ganz oben begriffen; immer weiter und weiter, vom tiefsten Höllendreck zu den allerhöchsten Himmeln.” Landauer does not agree: “Wir hängen hier keinerlei solchen sogenannten wissenschaftlichen Wahnvorstellungen an; wir sehen die Welt und die Menschengeschichte anders.”<sup>16</sup> Landauer, invoking his own notion of verticality, instead sketches history as a series of high and low points for human culture: “Wir sagen, daß die Völker ihre Blütezeiten, ihre Höhepunkte der Kultur haben, und daß sie von diesen Gipfeln wieder herabkommen.”<sup>17</sup>

This distance between Landauer’s account of history and the arguments of Zweig’s theoretical work notwithstanding, the depiction of devolution and barbarism in *Erziehung vor Verdun* has distinct parallels with Landauer’s writings. This is perhaps most evident in their respective vertical topographies. While Landauer writes of the “tiefst[e] Höllendreck” and the “allerhöchst[e] Himmel,” Zweig presents us with earthbound rodents and soaring planes. The elevated position in this topography is—in Landauer’s understanding—made accessible by “Geist.” *Geist*, according to Landauer, exists within the human and uplifts it by connecting the individual with the collective: “Der Geist hat die Völker zur Größe, zum Bunde, zur Freiheit geführt. Da brach aus den Einzelnen heraus wie eine Selbstverständlichkeit das nötige Müssen, sich zu Gemeinsamen zu verbinden mit den Menschenbrüdern.”<sup>18</sup> This “verbindend[e] Geist,” which provides the basis for cooperative work on improving the lives of humankind, is what makes possible that creativity and innovation celebrated by Zweig: “Der Geist schafft, zeugt und durchdringt die Gegenwart mit Freude und Kraft und Seligkeit; das Ideal wendet sich vom Gegenwärtigen ab, dem Neuen zu; es ist Sehnsucht nach der Zukunft, nach dem Besseren, nach

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<sup>16</sup>Gustav Landauer, *Aufruf zum Sozialismus* (Berlin: Paul Cassirer, 1919), 5.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.



dem Unbekannten.”<sup>19</sup> By connecting above and below, Landauer’s *Geist* also links present and future, guaranteeing historical progression.

Where the communal impulses of *Geist* are suppressed or unheeded, however, a gap in the vertical topography emerges and the forward propulsion of human history falters. For Landauer, like Zweig, the contemporary moment is precisely such a moment. Where Zweig depicts the soldiers of World War I as powerless rats, Landauer describes the situation thus: “Wir sind das Volk des Niederganges. [. . .] Wir sind das Volk des Herabgleitens. [. . .] Wir sind das Volk des Untergangs.”<sup>20</sup> According to Landauer, in such a moment of “Geistlosigkeit,” where the human can no longer elevate itself, the higher position in the vertical axis must be otherwise occupied because “etwas, das wie Geist aussieht und tut, muß da sein. Lebendige Menschen können ohne Geist nicht einen Augenblick leben.”<sup>21</sup> Humankind needs purpose and direction, Landauer argues, and a substitute for *Geist* necessarily emerges. It is human-made institutions, most notably the state, that take on this function: “Um in all dieser Geistlosigkeit, diesem Unsinn, diesem Wirrwarr, dieser Not und Verkommenheit Ordnung und Möglichkeit des Weiterlebens zu schaffen, ist der Staat da. [. . .] Der Staat ist das Surrogat des Geistes.”<sup>22</sup> The state does not reunite individuals with their fellow humans and their creative capacities, however, but instead violently imposes an artificial social structure:

Der Staat sitzt nie im Innern der Einzelnen, er ist nie zur Individualeigenschaft geworden, nie Freiwilligkeit gewesen. Er setzt den Zentralismus und Disziplin an die Stelle des Zentrums, das die Welt des Geistes regiert: das ist der Schlag des Herzens und das freie, eigene Denken im lebendigen Leibe der Person.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Landauer, *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*, 9.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 18–19.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 20.

Landauer's vertical topography hereby becomes a power hierarchy between those below, who become victims of state violence, and those who occupy the elevated positions of power.

A similar power hierarchy of violence from above and powerlessness below is apparent in Zweig's vertical topography in *Erziehung vor Verdun*, and it is therefore notable that Landauer spells out a link between war and the state's elevated status: "Dieser Staat will also ein Geist und ein Ideal, ein Jenseitiges und ein Unbegreifliches sein, für das Millionen enthusiastisch und todestrunken einander hinschlachten."<sup>24</sup> Landauer here argues that a disciplined populace, which mistakes the state's interests for their own, i.e., for *Geist*, can be mobilized for conflict, for committing terrible acts in the name of that state. The danger Landauer describes reappears in Zweig's novelistic depiction of the German military, in which we discover an important correlate to the vertical topography of bombers and rats in the military. The military order demands complete obedience from the lower ranks while endowing the higher echelons with almost unlimited power. At the novel's beginning, for example, Bertin exhibits an enthusiastic readiness to risk his life for a military order that treats him like a "dressierter Hund" (*EvV*, 20). The willingness of those in power to protect their positions by employing violence ultimately becomes the focal point of the plot: the Unteroffizier Christoph Kroysing is killed after being improperly stationed in an advanced position. Christoph had previously sought to challenge abuses of power by officers, and his superiors send him to the front to suppress his complaints by engineering his death. The destructive power relation in the novel's constellation of rats and bombers is reproduced by the military and the power of its higher ranks over the life and death of the soldiers.

Despite these similarities in their portrayal of the problem, Zweig is skeptical when it comes to Landauer's solution, which calls for individuals to follow the inner calling of *Geist* and independently resist the status quo. It is this aspect of Landauer's thought that Zweig foregrounds in *Bilanz der deutschen Judenheit*, where Landauer is described as "der Schüler Proudhons, der die persönliche Tat weit über die marxistische Doktrin stellt" (*BdJ*, 210). The reference to the influential 19th-century French socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon is telling, for Marx famously

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<sup>24</sup>Landauer, *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*, 20.

accused Proudhon of “utopian socialism,” of sketching an ideal society without accounting for how it relates to the present and therefore for how we might arrive at it. Marx’s notion of utopianism could only have appeared tragically befitting for Landauer following the failure of Bavarian Soviet Republic, which Landauer helped found in 1918. Rather than fulfilling Landauer’s hope that individuals might establish alternative communities within existing social structures and thereby inspire others to resist the status quo, the republic was swiftly crushed in 1919 and Landauer was murdered by the Freikorps. Nevertheless, Landauer’s writings do attempt to offer a basis for his optimism, identifying in the human an inborn desire for justice: “Das Gesetz der Gerechtigkeit [. . . ], das will, daß jeder geachtet, geehrt, ungefährdet neben dem Andern bestehe, [. . . ] liegt überall, wo Menschen neben Menschen wohnen, und es zeigt sich, wenn Menschen gegen Menschen wirken.”<sup>25</sup> It is with this concept of a human “Geiste der Gerechtigkeit” that Landauer seeks to ground the passage from an oppressive present to an emancipated future.

In *Erziehung vor Verdun*, Zweig seems unconvinced by the political efficacy of such individual action, and we can read in the fate of the character Eberhard Kroysing a depiction of the limitations of Landauerian *Gerechtigkeit*. The war, as we have seen, transforms human nature in *Erziehung vor Verdun*. This is certainly true of Kroysing, a pioneer who is famed for his military exploits and who is explicitly driven by a desire for justice for his brother. Shaped by his experiences in the trenches, he views life as a Hobbesian conflict of all against all. Life is simply surviving and overcoming one’s enemies. Accordingly, his search for justice is no search for a societal transformation that benefits all, but rather, upon discovering the circumstances of his brother’s death, Kroysing seeks justice through vengeance. His campaign against the *Hauptmann* he holds responsible proceeds within the existing system, and he initially appeals to the military courts. He thereafter does to Hauptmann Niggel what was done to his brother, arranging for Niggel’s unit to be transferred to the front. Kroysing has no intention of overthrowing the military order but instead hopes to win on its terms. In doing so, however, he merely reproduces the

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<sup>25</sup>Landauer, *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*, 86–87.

existing vertical topography, and his plan leads to the deaths of numerous soldiers belonging to the captain's unit while the captain escapes unscathed.<sup>26</sup> Kroysing thus inadvertently reinforces the nefarious divide between those above and those below, and Zweig makes clear that a sense of justice alone is not sufficient to overcome the military hierarchy.

Kroysing's example speaks to the insufficiency of a search for justice that lacks political direction. What leads Kroysing astray, Zweig indicates, is a lack of understanding of those institutions that shape his life. Within Zweig's novel, it is not the individualist Kroysing, but the Marxist Wilhelm Pahl who provides this missing structural analysis. Pahl, one of Bertin's companions, argues that the military order must be understood as an extension and intensification of capitalist society:

[Der Krieg] ist der Gesellschaft im Streit um die Weltmärkte unentbehrlich, schaltet die Spannungen im Inneren der Staaten nach außen um und führt die Proletarierheere, die sich morgen gegen die herrschenden Klassen erheben könnten, heute zum gegenseitigen Abschlachten ins Feld der Ehre. (*EvV*, 26)

The novel reinforces Pahl's analysis, highlighting the continuity between the military officers and the "besitzende Klasse" (*EvV*, 29) to which they largely belong, while the common soldiers are portrayed as those "factory workers of destruction."<sup>27</sup> The implication is that the war and the military order, which are necessary by-products of capitalism's expansionist tendencies and the desire of the ruling class to distract from domestic tensions, exacerbate the violence already latent

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<sup>26</sup>This does not mean, however, that—as Wetzel claims—"there is no difference between the motives of Kroysing and Niggel. Neither of them is driven by moral principles; they both try to further their personal welfare." Kroysing is driven by a sense of justice entirely alien to Niggel; it is not their motives but their methods (and therefore their results) that are the same. Heinz Wetzel, "War and the Destruction of Moral Principles in Arnold Zweig's *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* and *Erziehung vor Verdun*," in *The First World War in German Narrative Prose: Essays in Honour of George Wallis Field*, ed. Charles N. Genno and George Wallace Field (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 63.

<sup>27</sup>Köpke makes this point even more forcefully: "Im Militär setzt sich das Klassensystem der deutschen Gesellschaft unvermittelt fort. ... Offiziere sind normalerweise Adelige und Akademiker, der Unteroffizierstand rekrutiert sich aus Kleinbürgern, die Mannschaft aus Proletariern, Handwerkern, Bauern und Arbeitern." See Wulf Köpke, "Wozu kann Verdun erziehen? Arnold Zweigs *Erziehung vor Verdun* als Roman des Exils und als Stück einer lebenslangen Auseinandersetzung," in *Im Banne von Verdun: Literatur und Publizistik im deutschen Südwesten zum Ersten Weltkrieg von Alfred Döblin und seinen Zeitgenossen*, ed. Ralf Georg Bogner (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2010), 354.

in capitalism's exploitation of the worker. To quote Pahl once more, "Immerfort steht die Schlachtbank da, jetzt im Kriege sieht man sie bloß überall" (*EvV*, 358). The vertical topography of power that is institutionalized in the army ranks originates in the power imbalance between capitalist and worker.

Pahl's comments introduce an explicitly communist perspective on the war. They invite us to understand the city's self-destructive cycle as a consequence of capitalism's pernicious influence, and they suggest another reading of the disconnect between rats and bombers: namely, as a depiction of Marxist alienation. Marx's most extensive passages on alienation were published in Germany in 1932 as Zweig was working on his novel. The *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844* detail a theory of alienation clearly relevant for Zweig's portrayal. Marx describes how the products of human labor under capitalism, created not freely but rather for others and under economic duress, appear to the human as an alien and hostile power:

Die Entäußerung des Arbeiters in seinem Produkt hat die Bedeutung, nicht nur, daß seine Arbeit zu einem Gegenstand, zu einer äußern Existenz wird, sondern daß sie außer ihm, unabhängig, fremd von ihm existiert und eine selbständige Macht ihm gegenüber wird, daß das Leben, was er dem Gegenstand verliehn hat, ihm feindlich und fremd gegenübertritt.<sup>28</sup>

This description mirrors Zweig's depiction of humanity's antagonistic relationship with its own innovations in *Erziehung vor Verdun*, and Marx emphasizes a process of development and regression akin to Zweig's constellation of evolution and devolution: Capitalism "ersetzt die Arbeit durch Maschinen, aber sie wirft einen Teil der Arbeiter zu einer barbarischen Arbeit zurück und macht den anderen Teil zur Maschine. Sie produziert Geist, aber sie produziert Blödsinn, Kretinismus für den Arbeiter."<sup>29</sup> While Marx here anticipates Landauer's dichotomy of *Geist* and *Geistlosigkeit*, he grounds the division concretely in the socioeconomic order and its labor relations.

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<sup>28</sup>Marx, "Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte," 512.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 513.

Just as with Landauer, however, Zweig has doubts when it comes to the solution proposed by Marx. By the time Marx detailed his theory of revolution in *Das Kapital*, his interest in anthropology had been marginalized by his theory of historical materialism, which positioned economic activity as the engine of social change. The consequence was a theory of revolution that, in contradistinction to that of Landauer, focused not on individuals, but rather on economic processes. At times in Marx's writings, these processes seem to proceed independently of any human action, and the revolution appears as an inevitable by-product of economic development: "Die kapitalistische Produktion erzeugt mit der Notwendigkeit eines Naturprozesses ihre eigene Negation."<sup>30</sup> It is precisely this aspect of Marx's writings, which strongly informed Bolshevism and the parties of the Comintern, that worried Zweig. Although, in *Bilanz der deutschen Judenheit*, Zweig admires Marx as the "Verkünder von Gesetzen des ökonomischen Prozesses," he describes his teachings as "vergänglich [. . .], wo sie auf einer zeitbedingten Konzeption geschichtlichen Werdens beruh[en]" (*BdJ*, 208). Writing after the failure of the post-war communist-led insurgencies in Germany, not least the Spartacist Uprising of 1919, the Ruhr Uprising of 1921, and the German October of 1923, the notion of the revolution's inevitability appeared outdated to Zweig.

Zweig's explanation of the inadequacy of imagining the revolution as the inevitable result of economic activity is provided by the character Wilhelm Pahl. Pahl, who clearly subscribes to Leninist vanguardism, focuses on systemic issues at the expense of individuals. Bertin, who is politically naive but instinctively compassionate, appears to Pahl as precisely the kind of soldier he wishes to win for his revolutionary cause. But Pahl is unable to comprehend what motivates Bertin or to connect his theories to Bertin's experiences.<sup>31</sup> He keeps his revolutionary plans secret from Bertin because of the latter's political ignorance, denying Bertin any insight into his capitalism critique. And when Pahl receives a package for Bertin that is crucial for the Christoph

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<sup>30</sup>Marx, *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, 791.

<sup>31</sup>As Müller puts it, "Ziel und Wünsche Pahls und Lebehedes gelten dem zukünftigen 'Genossen' Bertin, nicht dem Individuum." See Hans-Harald Müller, "Militanter Pazifismus: Eine Interpretationsskizze zu Arnold Zweigs Roman *Erziehung vor Verdun*," *Weimarer Beiträge* 36, no. 12 (1990): 1894–1914, 1897.

case, he disposes of it, viewing the individual search for justice as a distraction from the revolutionary cause. Accordingly, it is not the readiness of Bertin that leads Pahl to argue the revolutionary moment has arrived; instead, it is his belief that the correct historical juncture has been reached: “Auf die Signale aus Rußland hin habe ich ja eingesehen, es sei Zeit” (*EvV*, 334). His faith in the inevitability of revolution leads him to overlook the readiness of the soldiers and workers around him. Thus, while Pahl, unlike Eberhard Kroysing, does challenge existing power structures, he replaces them with his own vertical topography, wherein a revolutionary intellectual vanguard seeks vainly to guide and direct workers and soldiers.<sup>32</sup> The theoretical apparatus fashioned over the heads of those individuals remains hopelessly disconnected from their everyday reality.

With the death of Kroysing and Pahl and the reintegration of Bertin into bourgeois society at the conclusion of *Erziehung vor Verdun*, the revolutionary visions of both Landauer and Marx appear defeated. Nevertheless, Zweig’s novel offers a critique of existing socioeconomic relations that is clearly indebted to those two theorists, and the necessity of challenging the vertical topography and its power hierarchy haunts the novel even as the depicted revolutionary efforts falter. The ideal of a revolution befitting Zweig’s notion of human history as a civilizing process, as a movement toward “Gesittung,” is explicitly invoked when characters read excitedly of the events at the Zimmerwald Conference where Lenin gathered revolutionary communists to discuss opposition to the war:

Sie [...] riefen den beherrschten Klassen zu, die Gesittung zu retten und die geheiligten Ziele des Sozialismus, ihre eigentlichste Aufgabe, im unversöhnlichen Klassenkampf mit demselben Todesmut durchzufechten, den sie seit Ausbruch des Krieges gegeneinander einsetzten. (*EvV*, 261)

The necessity for violent resistance expressed here is repeated later in the novel, when a doctor offers a “Bestätigung für das Prinzip der Revolution” by describing the “Zwang, Druck, Blut, Geschrei” associated with childbirth and summarizes thus: “Wenn Sie gegen die Gewalt sein

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<sup>32</sup>Where Wetzel views Pahl’s “textbook Marxism” as “artificial,” I argue that its artificiality, i.e., its abstractness, is the point. It is the object of Zweig’s critique. See Wetzel, “War and the Destruction of Moral Principles,” 69.

wollen, müssen Sie zu allererst gegen das Leben sein” (*EvV*, 444-445). The doctor, to whom Zweig gives the last word in the discussion, hereby indicates that the birth of the new, the further progression of human society, necessitates violent revolution, the forceful overthrow of the existing constellation of above and below.

Zweig’s critique of Marx and Landauer is not, therefore, a rejection of revolution as such. Indeed, as has been shown, Zweig’s literary portrayal of the violence and exploitation described by Marx and Landauer underlines the necessity of social transformation. Zweig’s engagement with the two thinkers does, however, point to what he considers a key problem within existing revolutionary theory: Where Landauer’s focus on the individual, on the “persönliche Tat,” leads him to overlook the importance of socioeconomic structures, Marx’s preoccupation with economic processes risks leaving behind the individual, the human. Zweig’s novelistic interrogation of the revolutionary theory of Marx and Landauer and his depiction of failed acts of resistance thus hints at the necessity of a third model. Such a model, Zweig suggests, would need to be a properly dialectical approach to social transformation. It would have to uphold the agency of the human even as it unmask the influence of economic activity on humankind and its societies.

### **The Revolutionary Cathedral**

In *Die Stadtkrone* (1919), the architect Bruno Taut identifies the medieval cathedral town as a utopian alternative to his contemporary cities. Whereas the latter are characterized by soul-crushing “Mietskasernen, Fabriken, Geschäftshäuser,” the former expresses the “inneren Aufbau[] der Menschen und ihrer Gedanken”: the “Zusammenhang” between built environment and inhabitants “ist so eng, daß er [. . .] alles umfaßt, was die Menschen in Lebensgenuß, Lebensfreude und Weltanschauung vereinigt.”<sup>33</sup> Taut longs to revive such a harmonious relationship between humanity and its architecture, and to this end, he sketches in *Die Stadtkrone* the cathedral cities of the future. Significantly, while the Gothic cathedrals at the heart of

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<sup>33</sup>Taut, *Die Stadtkrone*, 54, 52.



medieval towns articulated a social unity centered on “Glaube, Gott, Religion,” the cathedralic “Stadtkrone” of the new city instead expresses a transcendent sense of shared humanity: “Es muß etwas in jedes Menschen Brust leben, das ihn über das Zeitliche hinaushebt und das ihn die Gemeinschaft mit seiner Mitwelt, seiner Nation, allen Menschen und der ganzen Welt fühlen läßt.”<sup>34</sup> Traces of Taut’s influential writings are certainly evident in Zweig’s own revolutionary vision, which we can recognize by considering the character Laurenz Pont. Unlike Eberhard Kroysing and Wilhelm Pahl, Pont appears only briefly in *Erziehung vor Verdun*. He is, however, one of the rotating cast of figures that reappears throughout Zweig’s novel cycle. Pont, an architect, is also the protagonist of the 1925 novella, *Pont und Anna*, which paved the way for the cycle that began two years later with *Der Streit um Sergeanten Grischa*. By examining Zweig’s own utopian understanding of the Gothic cathedral in the novella, it will become possible to identify an alternative vertical topography that opens up a new perspective on the political impasse in *Erziehung vor Verdun*.

*Pont und Anna* takes place after the war. Just as those figures in *Erziehung vor Verdun* are diminished by their wartime experiences, finding themselves trapped in an eternal present, Pont is also damaged, and he is similarly cut off from his past, unable to recall any details of his life prior to the conflict. While traveling for work, Pont visits two Gothic cathedrals, in Strasbourg and in the Italian town of Como, and it is during a service at the latter that Pont’s memory begins to return. Pont senses an “Einheit” in the cathedral that emerges “aus all dem Funkeln, den aufjubelnden Harmonien, dem Steigen der Pfeiler, Hingehen des Raumes, Rauschen der Menschen, Aufwölbung der Decke und ihrer hellfenstrigen Durchbrechung.”<sup>35</sup> Where previously we saw alienation, a vertical topography of disconnect, here we see the opposite, a unity in which terms like “steigen” and “aufwölben” suggest continuity between below and above, between the churchgoers and the “dreieinigen Gott im Himmel” (*PA*, 154). This is no religious conversion, however, as Pont acknowledges: “Aber ich glaube nicht, wiederholte sich Pont [. . .] ich weiß

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<sup>34</sup>Taut, *Die Stadtkrone*, 53, 59.

<sup>35</sup>Arnold Zweig, *Pont und Anna* (Potsdam: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1928), 153–154. Hereafter, *PA*.

vielmehr, ich stehe hinter den Geheimnissen, kenne ihren Aufbau, ihre Entstehung, den Geist der Umfärbung und Auslegung, ihr heillos Künstliches: und doch, und doch!” (PA, 154) If the Gothic cathedral models an alternative topography, we must make sense of Pont’s relationship to it to grasp its meaning for Zweig’s critique of alienation.

Renewed interest in Gothic architecture and the Gothic cathedral predated Taut and was popularized in Germany by Wilhelm Worringer’s art historical accounts in his 1907 *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* and his 1911 *Formprobleme der Gotik*. The cathedral was, for Worringer, the epitome of Gothic architecture. The cathedral, a “versteinerte Vertikalbewegung,”<sup>36</sup> discloses the medieval human’s attempt to transcend an opaque and threatening external reality: “Innenwelt und Aussenwelt sind in [der gotischen Seele] noch unversöhnt, und die unversöhnten Gegensätze drängen nach einer Auslösung in transzendenten Sphären.”<sup>37</sup> The Gothic style thus did not follow classical art in representing, and thereby celebrating, nature. Instead, the Gothic’s abstract forms are characterized by an “Ausdrucksmacht”<sup>38</sup> through which the human expresses its transcendental longing. However, whereas, for Worringer, abstraction in primitive art denotes a complete renunciation of the material world, Gothic abstraction ultimately seeks to transform the human’s relationship to nature: “Die Gegensätze gelten noch nicht für unversöhnlich, sondern nur für noch unversöhnt.”<sup>39</sup> The seemingly overbearing and arbitrary external reality promises to become accessible and meaningful to a humanity able to attain a divine perspective. Indeed, for Worringer, the Christian God is merely the arbitrary symbol, the “Ersatz,”<sup>40</sup> for the Gothic longing for this transformation of the human’s relationship its environment. The Gothic thus seeks to bridge the heavenly above and the earthly below, making the human at home in both.

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<sup>36</sup>Wilhelm Worringer, *Formprobleme der Gotik* (München: R. Piper & Co., 1912), 68.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 58.

Worringer's description of the Gothic cathedral further elaborates his argument and provides a framework with which to make sense of Pont's experiences. Worringer distinguishes between the cathedral interior and exterior. The former, he argues, spiritualizes the natural; it is characterized by an "[organisch-sinnliche] Transzendentalismus."<sup>41</sup> The organic-sensual forms of the interior architecture, which are untypical for the Gothic style, ensure "alles Harte, Eckige [. . . werden] vermieden" and lends to the "Dienste und Rippen" their "vollrund oder halbrund" shape. These nature-derived forms are infused with the spiritual through the "Entmaterialisierung" realized in the interior's upward orientation: the "birnförmige Zuspitzung [der Profile]" means "die Aussenflächen der Profile schwingen sich nach innen, so dass nur ein von beiden Seiten mit dichtem Schattenwerk eingefasster schmaler Steg übrigbleibt, der an Stelle der körperlich fassbaren Funktion endgültig ein rein geistiges unfassbares Ausdruckswesen setzt."<sup>42</sup> For Worringer, this space of spiritualized natural forms is intended to activate the human's own "Sinnlichkeit," triggering a "Sinnenberauschung," a sense of being "überwältigt,"<sup>43</sup> that precipitates the individual's realization of their own rootedness in the material world. External reality thereby ceases to be a threatening Other and instead appears to the human as a coherent whole—a "Garten Gottes"—in which humanity has its place: "Das Göttliche [ist] nicht mehr ausserhalb der Welt, sondern in der Welt, d.h. in der menschlichen Seele und alle, was ihr zugänglich ist."<sup>44</sup>

Pont's experience inside Como cathedral corresponds closely with Worringer's description. The dematerialization of the interior architecture is explicit: "Die Kathedrale [...] gab ihre unvergleichlich reinen Maßverhältnisse den Augen nicht her; überall verdämmerte die Grenzen des Umbauten in Schwärze." (*PA*, 152) The interior is not something Pont can experience

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<sup>41</sup>Worringer, *Formprobleme der Gotik*, 108.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 105–106.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 120.

visually, at a critical distance; instead, distance dissipates, and Pont undergoes the “Sinnenberauschung” described by Worringer: “Was habe ich, was ist mir denn, um Gottes willen, was geschieht in mir? Er fühlte [...] eine Spannung sich ausweiten, die nach irgendeiner Entladung drängte, eine Wildheit gnädiger Art sich stauen um sein Herz.” (PA, 153) Pont seeks an escape from this tension, this animalistic “Wildheit,” by transcending it, by turning from the bodily to the spiritual and looking to the heavens. Upon looking up, however, Pont’s eyes fail once more to create space for the “Entladung.” Instead, the space between above and below collapses, and Pont encounters not God, but his tears, his own corporeality: “Pont sah empor, er wollte vielmehr, er hielt sein Haupt hoch, aber zwischen ihm und der Sicht stand etwas; heiß, feucht, trübend. . . Ich weine doch nicht? Ich weine ja!” (PA, 154) Pont’s “Sinnenberauschung” thus compels him to encounter his own corporeality, his rootedness in the world, in the place of the divine. The consequence, just as Worringer anticipated, is that Pont’s eyes hereafter perceive not distance but a divine unity inherent in the material world: “Pont saß [...] mit freierem Herzen und mit Augen deshalb, denen die Dinge sich offenbarten, und die durstig aufsogen, was an Einheit aus seelenweitendem Gebirge, rauschend heller Wasserwelt, menschlicher Mühe und der genialen Fruchtbarkeit des Bodens auf ihn eindrang.” (PA, 157)

Pont’s visit to Como must be considered together with his earlier experiences outside Strasbourg cathedral. There, again, Worringer’s framework is essential. For Worringer, the Gothic cathedral’s exterior represented not the spiritualization of nature, but rather the humanization of the divine. The exterior, for which its towers are emblematic, makes no concessions to the natural world and instead stands as an expression of humankind’s drive to transcend external reality: “Die höhenstrebenden Kräfte, die im Innern noch nicht zur Ruhe gekommen sind, sie scheinen nach aussen zu drängen, um, von aller Begrenztheit und Beengtheit befreit, sich im Unendlichen zu verlieren.”<sup>45</sup> Whereas the interior brings the divine down to earth, spiritualizing the natural world, the exterior lifts the human up to the divine. It is an elevation that is achieved, as its intricate patterns attest, through human capacities of reason and creativity. It is because of this that

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<sup>45</sup>Worringer, *Formprobleme der Gotik*, 111.

Worringer links the cathedral's external form to scholasticism, arguing that there is a correspondence between the "chaotischen und in seiner Logik doch so kunstvollen Wirrwarr der Denkbewegung"<sup>46</sup> in scholasticism and the "kunstvolle Chaos" evident in the "verwirrender Bewegtheit und Unendlichkeit" apparent in the cathedral exterior. Tellingly, Worringer suggests that the "Scholastiker [...] durch die Art seines Denkens [...] wollte [...] des Göttlichen teilhaftig werden."<sup>47</sup> Thus, what the orientation of the exterior toward the transcendental expresses is not the human's rootedness in external reality, but rather it's ability to liberate itself from nature through a rationality that allows it to participate in those divine powers of creativity and innovation.



Fig. 6: Strasbourg Cathedral, 1858 (A.D. White Architectural Photographs Collection, Cornell University Library).

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<sup>46</sup>Worringer, *Formprobleme der Gotik*, 116.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 116.

Worringer's cathedralic exterior, which expresses humankind's creative capacities, underpins Pont's observations in Strasbourg. The connection between the Gothic ascensional orientation and humankind's self-elevation is explicit in Pont's reflections:

Menschenwerk hob sich zum Gebirge, die Massen trugen sich selber empor, verloren sich im Blau, und es enthüllte sich ein gehöhlt, ein strebendes, ein fließendes Magierspiel aus Geist und Stein. Hier lobpries sich selbst der Mensch, der es verstand, sich zu entichen und einzufließen in das Übergeordnete, ins Losgelöste, ins Absolute. (PA, 75–76)

Significantly, however, Zweig shifts the focus away from Worringer's focus on scholastic intellectualism and concentrates instead on the human capacity for construction evidenced by the cathedral. The cathedral speaks to a unification of "der Mensch" with the "Heiligen Geist, der baut" (PA, 76). This formulation, which gestures to the biblical creation of the world, indicates that, for Zweig, humankind's capacity for building, for transforming its environment and thereby elevating itself, is what makes possible the human's unification with the divine. Indeed, Zweig's novella foregrounds the capacity for building as the human's defining characteristic: "Überallhin trugen Menschen ihre gestaltende Not. Wo Fruchtbarkeit lohnte, setzten sie ihre verändernden Hände und ihre Werkzeuge an" (PA, 158). The human ideal represented by the Gothic cathedral is, in Zweig's *Pont und Anna*, the human as builder, as a being able to transcend its immediate surroundings by transforming them.<sup>48</sup>

Pont's dual cathedralic experiences reveal to him a trajectory for human creativity that diverges from the one we see in *Erziehung vor Verdun*. While cathedral interior foregrounds humanity's place in the natural world, the exterior highlights humankind's natural capacity to transform—and thereby transcend—its environment: "Bauen als Ausschwitzung des Menschen, der eine Ausschwitzung der Erdoberfläche ist" (PA, 205). Pont's criticism of contemporary architecture indicate that its relationship to (human) nature has been lost: Even though the war is

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<sup>48</sup>Significantly, the connection between the Gothic cathedral and an idealized form of building was key to Expressionism's Gothic reception. The "Dombauhütte," which Pont references explicitly while in Strasbourg (PA, 73), represented an ideal of collaborative artistic labor that, amongst other things, was at the heart of the self-conception of the early Bauhaus. See Christoph Wagner, "Gotikvisionen am Bauhaus," in *Mittelalter und Mittelalterrezeption: Festschrift für Wolf Frobenius*, ed. Herbert Schneider (Hildesheim: Olms, 2005), 382–406.

now over, the human's creative powers continue to be harnessed—just as they are in *Erziehung vor Verdun*—by prevailing socioeconomic hierarchies. Building work is thereby reduced to economic expediency and formal convention: “Er und jedermann heut setzte aus Tradition Häuser hin, mit mehr oder weniger Geschmack, gräßlich aus Geldnot hergeklügelt oder Zweck — ganz ohne lebendiges Wissen um den Grund des Seins” (PA, 206). Following his cathedralic encounters, Pont's eyes are opened to a different kind of building: Humankind constructs buildings “wie die Schnecke ihr gewundenes Horn, Bienen ihre sechsheitige Zelle, das Vogeldotter seine Schale, die Nuß ihren doppelten Panzer” (PA, 205). The human's architectural self-elevation must accordingly proceed through and with nature, so that the human's self-elevation becomes nature's self-elevation. The human realizes its potentialities by unlocking those of the natural world: “[A]us [...] eine[m] Rechteckflächner oder Würfel die un abzählbarste Vielfältigkeit entwickeln, ohne aus der Einheit zu fallen” (PA, 205). The human ability to build, to transform the natural world, thereby ceases to herald a relationship of domination, of an above and below, of bombers and rats. Instead, Pont discerns the possibility of a mutually beneficial transformation.

With his vision of building as a dialectical process, in which the human, a product of the natural world, remakes that world and is, in turn, remade, Pont hints at a break with the eternal present and imagines the further progression of human society. On this point, Zweig's depiction is informed not only by Worringer, but once more by Landauer, whose theories also influenced Taut.<sup>49</sup> Landauer introduced into Germany another significant trajectory of the early-twentieth-century Gothic revival. For Landauer, the Middle Ages represented a historical moment in which *Geist* infused a unified society and precluded the divisions between the above and the below that resulted, in Landauer's era of *Geistlosigkeit*, from the growing autonomy of the state: the Gothic era represents “eine Stufe der Kultur, wo mannigfaltige Gesellschaftsgebilde, die ausschließlich sind und nebeneinander bestehen, von einem einheitlichen Geist durchdrungen

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<sup>49</sup>See Iain Boyd Whyte, *Bruno Taut and the Architecture of Activism* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 101–102.

wurden und eine in Freiheit sich zusammenschließende Gesamtheit vieler Selbständigkeiten darstellen.”<sup>50</sup> Tellingly, this unity was realized and developed through architecture, “Baukunst,” which was realized in “den Kirchen, den Rathäusern, den Plätzen, den Straßen, den öffentlichen oder privaten Repräsentationsräumen,”<sup>51</sup> and “aus dem Bau der Gesellschaft als Wahrzeichen emporrage” as “das Symbol vereinigter und lebendig erfüllter Volkskraft.”<sup>52</sup> While this unified society and its architecture, which closely resembles Pont’s ideal, lie in the past, Landauer believes they also direct us forward: “[Die soziale Revolution ist] ein friedlicher Aufbau, ein Organisieren aus neuem Geiste und zu neuem Geist und nichts weiter.”<sup>53</sup> Landauer’s medieval past thus reorients us away from the dystopian present and toward a revolutionary, utopian future.

The temporal progression through a revolutionary “Aufbau,” a process of construction, which Landauer outlines, is evident in Pont’s architectural vision. The historic architecture of the Gothic cathedral triggers the return of Pont’s memory and thereby inspires him to forge a future through his architectural work: “so bauen, daß man [. . . ] angerührt ward von solchen Grundstimmungen, solchen Melodien: das allein verlohnte, von Müttern auf gepöppelt worden zu sein und durchgemahlen durch soviel Leid” (*PA*, 207). Significantly, by rediscovering his past in the Gothic cathedral, Pont’s personal past becomes bound up with a societal past, that of the Middle Ages. Similarly, his future gestures not just to his own future but rather a future direction for society: “Verpflichteten nicht, nach dem zerstörendsten der Kriege, tausende von Aufgaben jeden echten Baumeister, mit Inbrunst Beispiele zu schaffen?” (*PA*, 206) Pont’s personal recovery gestures to the possibility of a wider societal recovery, the possibility of reactivating the social progression through innovation that Zweig outlined in *Bilanz der deutschen Judenheit*. Zweig thus indicates in *Pont und Anna* that, by reorienting its creativity according to this historic

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<sup>50</sup>Gustav Landauer, *Die Revolution* (Frankfurt a.M.: Rütten & Loening, 1923), 42.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 114.



precedent, the human can fulfill its nature and usher in a new social order. The vertical topography of the cathedral thereby offers an alternative to the reduction of the human in *Erziehung vor Verdun* to the subservient soldier or exploited worker cut off from both its creative capacities and its creations.

### **“Was Worte alles ausrichten können”**

By the time Zweig completed *Erziehung vor Verdun* in the 1930s, Germany looked very different than it had done when *Pont und Anna* was published in 1925. Indeed, the first copies of the novel were printed days before the enactment of the Nuremberg Laws. Zweig had long-since fled the country, leaving in March 1933 in the wake of the Reichstag Fire. What followed was a fifteen-year exile in Palestine. As Wilhelm von Sternburg makes clear, however, despite the length of his stay, Zweig never felt at home in Palestine, for “Zweig [schlägt] zu einem Zeitpunkt seinen Wohnsitz im neuen Kanaan [auf], als er dem Zionismus bereits ablehnend gegenübersteht und mit zunehmender Skepsis die jüdische Besiedlung Palästinas betrachtet.”<sup>54</sup> Accordingly, Zweig’s exile experience was defined by the “Dauerthema” of his return to Europe and his frequent trips to similarly exiled colleagues and friends who had remained there.<sup>55</sup> Thus, despite Zweig’s distance from Paris, the center of the German exile community, he remained attuned to the discussions taking place in the French capital, and it is notable that Zweig’s novel appeared at a time when attempts were underway to unite the different communist and social democrat parties in a *Volksfront* to resist the fascist threat. While, as Jean-Michel Palmier underscores, this *Volksfront* “never formed a mass movement able to act as united front,” the idea nevertheless created “a surge of solidarity, a dream.”<sup>56</sup> The “immense hope” it inspired, the hope for a

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<sup>54</sup>Wilhelm von Sternburg, ed., *Arnold Zweig: Materialien zu Leben und Werk* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1987), 180.

<sup>55</sup>See *ibid.*, 180–205.

<sup>56</sup>Jean-Michel Palmier, *Weimar in Exile: the Antifascist Emigration in Europe and America* (London: Verso, 2006), 347.

community united in its resistance to fascism, animates Zweig's *Erziehung vor Verdun* and its desire to revive the cathedralic ideal.

The specific role that literature had to play in contributing to any such *Volksfront* resistance to fascism was a hotly debated topic. At the *Kongress zur Verteidigung der Kultur*, held in Paris mere months before the publication of Zweig's novel, "writers from across the world — including some of the greatest — discussed before an audience of thousands the question of the defense of cultures against the fascist threat."<sup>57</sup> Arnold Zweig did not attend the congress, but *Erziehung vor Verdun* can be understood as his belated contribution to the discussions about the antifascist role of literature that took place there. As we have seen, whereas *Pont und Anna* is set after World War I, with Zweig seeking to sketch a radical reconstruction of society after the horrors of the conflict, *Erziehung vor Verdun* returns its readers to the battlefield. Zweig, it seems, perceived in the war years an enduring relevance for the exile era, and it is certainly true that both periods were characterized, albeit in very different ways, by widespread violence, the destruction of culture, and the displacement of people. Fundamentally, then, both represented historical moments of crisis that precluded the realization of the transformative project of construction to which Pont aspired. Accordingly, Zweig seeks with *Erziehung vor Verdun* to reformulate Pont's ideal of building in the face of the fascist threat. It is in the written word, this section argues, that Zweig perceived hope for upholding and reimagining the cathedral's promise.

Although Pont's idealized form of building is absent in *Erziehung vor Verdun*, hope that it might return persists. As we have seen, the city, which represented a construction site for human reason and innovation, is gone. What remains is the work carried out by Bertin's *Armierungs-Bataillon* and the "Fabrikarbeiter der Zerstörung," expressions of alienated constructive capacities that ensure a (self-)destructive relationship between the human and its environment. The *Kriegsgerichtsrat* Posnanski combines biblical imagery with the Prometheus story to diagnose this misdirection of labor: "Der Mensch hatte das Feuer schlecht gezähmt, das vom Himmel gefallen war; auch die Vernunft, das Himmelslicht, und die Sittlichkeit, auf dem

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<sup>57</sup>Palmier, *Weimar in Exile*, 208–209.

Sinai geboren, hatte er verwaltet wie ein Schuljunge” (*EvV*, 387). The solution, Posnanski intimates, is not to wait for the “Aufhören des Brandes,” but instead to steal “das gestaltende Prinzip in aller Stille dem Zerstörenden” (*EvV*, 387). Bertin, commenting on innovations in wartime weaponry, similarly gestures to the necessity of reorienting human invention away from destruction and toward construction: “‘Alles zur Vernichtung’, und er schüttelte den Kopf [. . .]. ‘Wann wird man diese Zaubereien mal zum Aufbau benutzen?’” (*EvV*, 157) Indeed, the enduring centrality of building to Zweig’s anthropology is stated outright by the narrator: “Die menschliche Materie, dieses unergründliche, wachsende und beseelte Zellgewebe enthält in seiner Entelechie oder gesetzlichen Zielform den unleugbaren Hinweis darauf, daß der Mensch die Oberfläche der Erde umzuformen hat” (*EvV*, 428).

If the ideal of building in *Pont und Anna* attested to Landauer’s enduring influence on the younger Zweig, it is complicated in *Erziehung vor Verdun* by Marx’s insights. In *Pont und Anna*, Zweig follows Landauer in emphasizing the power of individual acts of resistance. Pont’s post-cathedral epiphany leads him to believe that the individual, by reconnecting with nature, can create new buildings that will act as “Beispiele” (*PA*, 150) for others. Where Pont thus needed merely to change his perspective to embrace a new trajectory for humankind, the fortified structures of military hierarchy and the capitalist order stand between the protagonists of *Erziehung vor Verdun* and their self-elevation, their reconciliation with their own human potentialities and the natural world. It is therefore no longer an option to simply ascend to the divine by recognizing one’s place in nature and pioneering a new architectural style. Instead, one must also find a means of reckoning with the prevailing social structures, which themselves represent an oppressive form of architecture: “[D]ie Welt war aus den Fugen [. . .]. Sie hat kleine Konstruktionsfehler, diese Welt. [. . .] Aber wo steckt der Fehler?” (*EvV*, 160) Thus, if the model of revolution as building is to translate to *Erziehung vor Verdun*, it must also do the work of overcoming the old so that “aus diesem scheußlichen Gezodder und Gezappel wenigstens ein anständiger Neubau der Gesellschaft herauspringen wird; ein wohnlicheres Haus als das alte preußische” (*EvV*, 180–181).

The wartime destruction of cities and their cathedrals underscores the more desperate situation in *Erziehung vor Verdun*. The war obliterates the traces of the Gothic past that, in *Pont und Anna*, precipitated Pont's transformation, and the relevance of the Christian tradition represented by the cathedrals is called into question: In a discussion with the military chaplain, Kroysing accuses the chaplain of attempting to uphold "eine Fiktion [. . .] eine Scheinwahrheit: nämlich die der christlichen Staaten, christlicher Geistung" (*EvV*, 187). Even the chaplain agrees that the war poses grave questions: "Glauben Sie nun [. . .] dies werde ohne dauernden Schaden für unsere deutsche Seele enden, der Mord an Tausenden unschuldiger Menschen?" (*EvV*, 186) Where Pont made possible a future by recognizing continuity between present and past, the protagonists of *Erziehung vor Verdun* fear terminal discontinuity, the complete loss of any cultural tradition able to challenge the status quo. This loss is central to the novel's Christian imagery, which foregrounds not the cathedral but sacrifice, most notably in the "Opferung" of the soldiers. The novel, which Zweig dedicates to "den Opfern," to the victims but also to the sacrificed, depicts characters discussing the wartime deaths explicitly in the context of Christ's "Opfertod auf Golgatha" (*EvV*, 439). Such imagery is revealing, for while it complements the destroyed cathedrals in underscoring the fallenness of the world, the separation of the earthly from the divine, it also invites both reader and characters to wonder about the possibility of redemption, "Erlösung," the "Drang [. . .] nach messianischem Aufschwung in eine besser geordnete Welt" (*EvV*, 441).

The wartime constellation of sacrifice and redemption is bound up, in Zweig's novel, with the fate of the written word. Referring to the propaganda circulated on the home front, the *Unteroffizier* Süßmann emphasizes how the mass death is made possible by the journalistic beautification of reality: "Bloß auf dem Papier geht der Krieg immer glatt. Die Pest über alle schreibenden Schakale!" (*EvV*, 164) Language deviates from reality, and such misrepresentations quash potential resistance to the war on the home front. The brutality of the battlefield moreover casts doubt on the very possibility of restoring truth to the written word: "Nichts ist wahr, was in Gedrucktem steht, einschließlich der Bibel, und alles ist erlaubt, was Männer tun wollen,

einschließlich meiner und Ihrer, wenn Sie nur die Traute haben” (*EvV*, 163). Textual artifacts like the Bible, which presuppose generalizable claims about moral values and human nature, can no longer keep pace with a reality in which any sense of shared humanity and common morality dissolves. Words, Süßmann indicates, once conveyed truths and fostered community-building values, but the war has stripped them of those powers. The invocation of the Bible moreover positions this linguistic disempowerment within the novel’s Christian imagery: Just like the flattening of the cathedrals and the sacrificing of the soldiers, the undermining of the Bible exposes the world’s fallenness, the way in which wartime technology represents a misdirection of humanity’s divine creative powers, which no longer advance society but rather accelerate its disintegration.

While the untruthful word attests to, and bolsters, the wartime alienation, Zweig indicates that the truthful written word holds the promise of redemption. A document written by the novel’s central Christ figure, Christoph, is key in this context.<sup>58</sup> Christoph’s letter to his mother, which Bertin is tasked with delivering, precipitates the novel’s story. When it is eventually read following Christoph’s death, the reader encounters a cathedralic gesture toward the divine. What counts as the heavenly in this case is the truth:

Ihr habt uns dazu erzogen, die Wahrheit zu sagen und in der Verfolgung dessen, was recht ist, vor niemandem zurückzuweichen; Gott mehr zu fürchten als die Menschen, nanntest Du es. Und wenn ich auch nicht mehr an Gott glaube [. . .], stürzt damit doch nicht das ein, was uns eingepflanzt wurde. (*EvV*, 117)

If, for Pont and the Gothic tradition, striving for the godly represented the search for a transformed relationship between the human and its environment, Christoph’s letter sees the possibility of such a transformation in truth-telling. A truthful account of reality, he indicates, must effect such a transformation, must open humankind’s eyes to their surroundings: “Vieles hat

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<sup>58</sup>Christoph’s Christ connection, already apparent in his soldierly sacrifice, is underscored by his name (and even more so in its shortened form, Christl). It is also foregrounded during his death when, moments before the fatal shot, he appears as the Lamb of God, “das jagdbare Wild” who “springt jugendhaft” and “trabt.” Thereafter, like Jesus on the cross, he calls out both to the divine Father, “Gott, Gott, Gott, denkt er,” and to his mortal mother: “Mutter, Mutter, Mutter” (*EvV*, 47-48) as he dies. The blood of this Christ thereafter drenches the letter intended for his mother, highlighting its import.

sich als Schwindel entlarvt, viel mehr, als Ihr ahnt, viel mehr, als erlaubt ist” (*EvV*, 119).

Christoph’s truth here diverges from the Gothic tradition, however, for he does not seek to reconcile people to their (social) environment. Instead, his letter shatters the illusions perpetuated by the propaganda and calls for collective action to construct human society anew: “wir werden alles neu aufzubauen haben, damit der Welt die Wiederholung dessen erspart wird, was wir jetzt mit [...] unseren eigenen Händen tun und an unseren eigenen Körpern erleiden” (*EvV*, 119).

The written word promises, by revealing the truth, to assume the cathedralic function and redeem humankind. The promise of Christoph’s letter does not go unnoticed, and the protagonists of Zweig’s novel attempt a broader reconnection of written word and reality. Bertin, following encouragement from both Süßmann and Kroysing, turns his writing abilities to the reporting of the truth: “Solange die Wirkungen dieses Krieges fortzittern, wird gewissenhaftes Zeugnis das Wichtigste sein für den, der davonkommt” (*EvV*, 180). Bertin portrays this notion of bearing witness, of the writer as a reporter, as an ideal necessary for breaking through the lies of propaganda: “Es wird doch über diesen Krieg so viel gelogen werden wie über kein anderes Schützenfest der Völker. Wer davonkommt, hat die Wahrheit zu sagen” (*EvV*, 182). Wartime brutality must be written, Bertin indicates, in order to expose propagandistic misrepresentations and redirect the “kommende Generation” (*EvV*, 182). The truthful text is thereby assigned the role occupied in *Pont und Anna* by the Gothic cathedral. Like the cathedral, which provided insight into an initially opaque and oppressive environment, the written word in *Erziehung vor Verdun* similarly promises to illuminate humanity’s surroundings. Whereas, however, the cathedral provides only direction forward for human creativity, the truthful text makes possible a different future by exposing the reality of the present. It offers its own model of building, of “kunsthaftes Bauen” (*EvV*, 180), that promises both to critique the prevailing order and gesture toward a utopian future.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Bertin actually contrasts the artistic approach to writing, the “kunsthaftes Bauen,” with the sober reporting he now plans to do. However, when he writes his novella, the cathedralic imagery returns: “Die wunderbare Gnade der Eingebung hatte ihn überfallen. Satz für Satz glitt aus dem Unterbewußten in die Feder, das herrliche Fieber der Schöpfung erhitzte ihn, die große Ausweitung, durch die ein Einzelner aufhört, ein Ich zu sein und zum Werkzeug drängender Gewalten wird, die der Geist in ihn gelegt hat.” (*EvV*, 268) Just as Pont spoke of the process of “ent-ichen”

## Realism Between Necessity and Contingency

To write the truth, one must know which truths to tell and how to tell them, questions that were central to the literary debates that raged amongst leftists during the 1930s. Key to those debates was the discussion between Ernst Bloch and Georg Lukács about the legacy of the avant-garde. Bloch saw value in modernist experimentation, in its attempts to find a form befitting the truth of modernity's social fragmentation, to realize a "Kunst, die reale Zersetzungen des Oberflächenzusammenhangs auswertet und Neues in den Hohlräumen zu entdecken versucht."<sup>60</sup> Lukács, in contrast, argued that literature must seek to render subjective experiences of fragmentation comprehensible by revealing their embeddedness in a capitalist system, in the "'Totalität' des kapitalistischen System, der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft in ihrer Einheit von Wirtschaft und Ideologie," which "unabhängig vom Bewußtsein [. . . ] ein ganzes bildet."<sup>61</sup> For Lukács, the bourgeois realist novel was the ideal art form for this task, able to relate individual experience to the social whole. While the proximity of *Erziehung vor Verdun*, a realist novel, to Lukács's theory is more immediately apparent, Zweig's novel navigates between the positions of Lukács and Bloch. Zweig sets out, on the basis of his cathedralic model, a vision of realism that both exposes the status quo and reorients the human toward a greater respect for (human) nature. His novel thereby takes on the responsibility for truth-telling that the characters of his novel fail to find. In this way, against the backdrop of the exilic debates on literature and antifascism, Zweig models a literary realism in the spirit of the *Volksfront*, combining insights from both sides of what would ultimately become the Expressionism Debate to craft a novel intended to inspire resistance to fascism and hope for the future.

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undertaken by the builders of Strasbourg cathedral, so too does Bertin experience a transcendence of self through creative writing. The tension between Bertin's commitment to sober truth-telling and the reality of this ecstatic writing experience will be explored in the next section of this chapter.

<sup>60</sup>Ernst Bloch, "Diskussionen über Expressionismus," in *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1962), 270.

<sup>61</sup>Lukács, "Es geht um den Realismus," 316.

In his 1939 article, “Arnold Zweigs Romanzyklus über den imperialistischen Krieg 1914—1918,” Lukács celebrated Zweig as a realist “alten Stils.”<sup>62</sup> Lukács highlights Zweig’s apparent disinterest in “modernen Experimenten der Montage von Dokumenten” and “dem surrealistischen Durcheinander.”<sup>63</sup> Instead, Lukács discerns in Zweig’s approach a continuation of bourgeois realism and argues that Zweig realizes “eine umfassende Darstellung des ganzen Krieges [. . . ], indem [er] kunstvoll, allmählich, durch die innere Logik der individuellen Handlungen die Totalität vor uns entstehen läßt.”<sup>64</sup> Zweig is thus successful, according to Lukács, in revealing individual actions and atomized events to be constitutive of a social totality. For this reason, Lukács argues, Zweig’s novelistic approach does not mystify reality—which, in Lukács’s eyes, was the result of the avant-garde’s preoccupation with the subjective and fragmentary—but rather exposes the objective conditions underlying all subjective experience. Zweig’s work thereby becomes more truthful than reality itself:

Die Wahrheit der Gestalten Zweigs [. . . ] macht das Bild des Alltags wahrer, als der Alltag des Krieges selbst war. Denn was im wirklichen Alltag nur unvollständig, abgebrochen, fragmentarisch erscheinen konnte, zeigt sich hier stets in der Vielseitigkeit sich kreuzender, sich menschlich auswirkender, ihre sozialen Bestimmungen restlos offenbarender Interessen, gibt in den dargestellten Stücken des Kriegsalltags die Totalität jener Momente, die objektiv das Ganze der Kriegswirklichkeit bewegt haben.<sup>65</sup>

The reflections on the written word within *Erziehung vor Verdun* suggest that Lukács’s understanding of Zweig’s work cohered, at least in part, with Zweig’s own literary vision. This is evident if we consider the novella within the novel, Bertin’s “Kroysingnovelle.” Bertin intends his novella to be a faithful account of his experiences. After considering the unlikely coincidences in his encounter with Christoph, Bertin asks: “Finden Sie das glaubhaft? Dürfte ich mir leisten, so

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<sup>62</sup>Georg Lukács, “Arnold Zweigs Romanzyklus über den imperialistischen Krieg 1914–1918,” in *Werke Bd. 3.1*, ed. Zsuzsa Bognár, Werner Jung, and Antonia Opitz (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2021), 162.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 162.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 166.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 166.



etwas zu erdichten? Und doch ist es wahr.” Precisely because what is true is no longer believable, Bertin argues, “in unserer Lage [. . .] ist das Wahre dringlicher gefordert als das Glaubhafte” (*EvV*, 180). Nevertheless, when Bertin gives his work to Posnanski in the hope that it will assist in the case against Niggel, Posnanski focuses not on the accuracy of the portrayal but on the text’s impact on the reader: “[Die Arbeit] beschwor die Gestalt, vom Begegnenden richtig gefühlt, sie zeigte das Ereignis auf, ganz und mitleidlos, sie rührte an den Schlaf der Welt, ließ sie nicht weiter schnarchen” (*EvV*, 386). For Posnanski, the novella thereby begins to fulfill the demands of Lukácsian realism, for it invites the reader to recognize in Niggel just one representative of underlying power structures: “Hinter den kümmerlichen Schipphäuptlingen enthüllte [die Arbeit] riesengroß den Umriß der Gewalt-haber und Gewalt-entfesseler — all derer, die den Selbstmord Europas anlegen und durchführen durften” (*EvV*, 386). Despite Bertin’s commitment to simply bearing witness, his novella underlines the potential of literature to expose the social totality that frames individual events.

Precisely because Bertin is so preoccupied with soberly reporting the truth, however, the potential of his novella is only partially realized. While Posnanski recognizes the broader potential of Bertin’s work, Bertin himself presents his work as a “Bericht [. . .] als Novelle hingelegt” (*EvV*, 369), thus gesturing to the way in which its literary function is secondary to its function as a record of real-world events. Posnanski similarly underlines this proximity of Bertin’s text to reality, “[die] Tatsache [...], daß sich Bertin [. . .] mit dem Erfinden von Namen durchaus nicht aufgehalten hatte. Der Held hieß einfach Christoph, andere Namen waren durch Anfangsbuchstaben angedeutet” (*EvV*, 386). If the novella hints at a Lukácsian ideal of revealing the underlying truth of capitalist totality, therefore, it is unintentional, and Posnanski ultimately concludes that Bertin’s work is “als Novelle [. . .] kaum vertretbar, sie enthielt keine kunstvoll angelegten Charaktere [. . .]. Manchmal störten sprachliche Härten [. . .] oder starke Ausdrücke, wo zurückhaltendere eindringlicher gewirkt hätten” (*EvV*, 386). The problem for Bertin is that his text, with which he seeks to soberly express his experiences in literary form, fails both as legal document and as literary work: limited in its value as the latter, it is also inadmissible in the

courts. Despite his praise of Bertin's novella, Posnanski concludes that "im Fall Kroysing ist vorläufig nichts zu machen" (*EvV*, 387), and the text disappears into his folders.

Bertin's professed commitment to the truth casts a new light on Zweig's own novel, for *Erziehung vor Verdun* is precisely untrue in the sense idealized by Bertin.<sup>66</sup> Rather than faithfully relaying real-world experiences, Zweig offers a fictional reworking of reality. Unlike Bertin, he responds to the problem of untruth by producing an untruth of his own. As we have seen, however, Zweig's novel seeks not to obfuscate reality, but rather his untrue story serves to excavate those previously discussed deeper truths about war and capitalism. Zweig prioritizes this Lukácsian truth over the truthful recounting of individual events, sketching a "Bild des Alltags" more truthful than Bertin's actual "Alltag." He thereby solves Bertin's problem of believability. Events appear "unbelievable" to Berlin precisely because he cannot discern their embeddedness in the social totality: "Der Krieg, ein von Menschen eingerichteter Betrieb, erschien [Bertin] immer noch als ein vom Schicksal verhängtes Unwetter, eine Entfaltung reißender Elemente, nicht kritisierbar und niemandem Rechenschaft schuldig" (*EvV*, 112). What appears to Bertin as coincidence and chance is shown, by Zweig's novelistic approach, to be the necessary consequences of underlying power structures. The truth of capitalism and the military order attests to the story's "Glaubhaftigkeit."

It would be a mistake to end our analysis of Zweig's approach here, however. The truth renders things believable, it reveals contingency and chance to be manifestations of underlying laws that literature brings to the surface. Simultaneously, however, there is a danger associated with this move, as Bloch indicates in his critique of Lukács. Bloch, defending the expressionists against Lukács's claim that they were "Pioniere des Zerfalls," asks: "wäre es besser, wenn sie Ärzte am Krankenbett hätten sein wollen? Wenn sie den Oberflächenzusammenhang wieder

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<sup>66</sup>Here I diverge from Hüppauf, who also remarks on the novels's focus on the "Verantwortung des Dichters gegenüber der Wahrheit" and the "Intention, die unsichtbare Struktur der Welt sichtbar zu machen," but who doesn't differentiate between the respective efforts of Bertin and Zweig. See Bernd Hüppauf, "Erziehung durch Krieg? Arnold Zweigs Frage nach einer moralischen Begründung des modernen Kriegs," in *Arnold Zweig. Poetik, Judentum und Politik*, ed. David Midgley et al. (Bern: Peter Lang, 1989), 70.

geflickt hätten [. . . ], statt ihn immer weiter aufzureißen?“<sup>67</sup> Bloch argues that to present reality as a coherent whole, where it is in reality fragmented and broken, is to beautify the reality of capitalism, to conceal its crises and vulnerabilities, and thereby foreclose the possibility of its transformation. Zweig similarly highlights such dangers, this time through his depiction of another written text, namely the confession that Kroysing wishes Niggl to sign. Unlike Bertin, who hopes to tell the truth even where he deems it unbelievable, Kroysing seeks to forcefully reconcile truth and believability by creating a legally binding document. Zweig indicates that through this attempt to render the truth acceptable to the legal system, Kroysing risks stripping the truth of its revolutionary potential and reintegrating it into the prevailing power hierarchies.

Fundamental to the confession Kroysing writes for Niggl is the same desire to restore truth-telling power to the written word that inspired Bertin. Kroysing gives the confession to the military chaplain and asks him to convince Niggl to add his name, whereupon the priest requests that Kroysing alter the document's language, pointing out that the current formulation would result in Niggl signing his own death sentence. Kroysing responds with the following words: "Hier halte ich mit Pontius Pilatus, als er antwortete: Was ich geschrieben habe, das habe ich geschrieben" (*EvV*, 184). Pilate's famous declaration ("Quod scripsi, scripsi") refers to the sign he ordered displayed on Jesus's cross, which read "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." According to the Gospel of John, "Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews." While the priests wished, through the inclusion of "he said," to emphasize the gap between speech act and reality, Pilate insists that because Jesus was called King of the Jews, that is what he is. Irrespective of how we understand Pilate's much-discussed intention, he upholds a performative conception of language in which language and reality correspond, and his refusal to countenance an alteration of the written word speaks to a rejection of any weakening of that connection.

The reason for Kroysing's quotation of Pilate is seemingly simple: He believes that the confession he has written for Niggl, which is based on the information in Christoph's letter, is

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<sup>67</sup>Bloch, "Diskussionen über Expressionismus," 271.

true, that it corresponds with reality, and he wishes to reinstate this connection between word and world. There is, however, a significant twist in Kroysing's invocation, and this modification is responsible for the inevitable failure of Kroysing's attempt to realign the true and the believable. Whereas the source of the language in the case of Pilate is Jesus himself, and Pilate's sign merely reproduces this self-identification, Kroysing seeks to complete the process in reverse. Kroysing formulates the language and then delivers it to Niggl for his signature. This reversal transforms the meaning of Pilate's phrase, turning it from an acceptance of language's correspondence with reality to an attempted violent unification of the two. This coercive attempt at reconciliation speaks less to the truthfulness of language and more to its malleability, its vulnerability to external pressure. Even if Niggl were to sign the confession, therefore, the underlying problem would be exacerbated and not solved: what is presented as the truth merely reflects existing power relations. It is for this reason that, by assuming the role of Pilate, Kroysing transforms Niggl into a Jesus figure: Niggl would be sacrificed for a problem that extends far beyond his person.

Kroysing's commitment to rendering the truth believable to the courts ultimately results in the betrayal of the truth. If Zweig's critique of Bertin's novella served to outline his own understanding of truthfulness, his novelistic rejection of Kroysing's approach reveals his ideal of believability. Whereas Bertin's prioritization of the true over the believable produced a work that, while unusable within the justice system, at least hinted at the greater significance of Christoph's story, Kroysing's forceful reconciliation of the true and the believable eliminates that significance altogether. Zweig presents Kroysing's attempt to reduce the "unbelievable" story of his brother's death and its aftermath to a verifiable chain of events, to the enumeration of facts, as a literal falsification that elides its truth content. Instead, Zweig's novel tells precisely the story that Bertin describes as "nicht glaubhaft." While *Erziehung vor Verdun*, on the one hand, reveals seemingly chance events—not least Christoph's death—to be the predictable consequences of underlying power structures, it also, on the other hand, retains genuine chance, making contingency integral to the story it tells. It would be impossible to list all the improbable occurrences in the novel—beginning with Christoph's spontaneous decision to approach Bertin and ending with the

accidental hospital air strike that kills Kroysing—but it is clear that Zweig is disinterested in Kroysing’s legalistic conception of believability. For Zweig, believability must not mean distorting the truth to make it acceptable to external authorities.<sup>68</sup>

Zweig’s invocation of chance, of that which cannot be reduced to legal documents, is precisely what Bloch celebrates in his writings. In his 1931 essay “Poesie im Hohlraum,” Bloch bemoans the literary attempt to render society as a totality in which everything can be explained: “Gar der neue ‘Empirismus’ und ‘Positivismus’ kommen nicht daher, daß man den bewegenden Kern des heutigen Geschehens entdeckt hätte, sondern soll nur die Hohlräume zuschließen, in denen das Unbeherrschte und Ausgelassene dieser Welt, allemal metaphysisch, gärt.”<sup>69</sup> Such a rendering of society as a coherent whole is necessarily misleading, Bloch argues, precisely because it overlooks those unpredictable elements—the “Unbeherrschte und Ausgelassene”—that resist integration into the social totality. Crucially, it is in this sphere, in which the “Irrationale,” “Unfertige,” “historisch nicht Beschlossene und Liegenbleibende” reside, that “Imagination” and “Phantasie” can unfold.<sup>70</sup> It is here, according to Bloch, that we can win glimpses of alternative, utopian worlds and find inspiration and hope. The value of literature, Bloch argues, lies not simply in its disenchantment of the world, its Lukácsian work of exposure, but also in its embrace of these utopian traces, in its gesturing toward the possibility of moving beyond existing social relations: “Die echte Utopie hat von der gekommenen Entzauberung [. . .] zu lernen und umgekehrt; so gibt es auch eine Geburt der Utopie aus dem Geist der Destruktion und umgekehrt.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>For Midgley, Zweig’s rejection of the notion that literature ought merely to provide “sachliche Reportage” developed during his 1920s opposition to *Neue Sachlichkeit*. See David Midgley, “Schreiben um der Vergeistigung des Lebens willen. Das Verhältnis Arnold Zweigs zur Neuen Sachlichkeit,” in *Arnold Zweig. Poetik, Judentum und Politik*, ed. David Midgley et al. (Bern: Peter Lang, 1989), 105.

<sup>69</sup>Ernst Bloch, “Poesie im Hohlraum,” in *Literarische Aufsätze* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1965), 124.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 131–133.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 132.

Significantly, this Blochian interest in the utopian potential of chance is bound up with his own interest in the Gothic cathedral. Bloch's 1918 work *Geist der Utopie* contained an influential expressionist reading of the Gothic, which was inspired by Worringer and corresponds with Zweig's interest in the twofold dynamic of spiritualizing nature and humanizing the divine.<sup>72</sup> Tellingly, in his 1930s defence of expressionism, Bloch explicitly invoked this Gothic heritage of the avant-garde, and it is notable that his above descriptions of expressionism's interest in the contingent mirrors Worringer's description of the cathedral interior's spiritualizing impact on nature: "das Menschliche, Bedingte, Zufällige könnte sich so weit ausweiten, um des Göttlichen, des Unbedingten, des Absoluten teilhaftig zu werden."<sup>73</sup> Expressionism inherited from the Gothic, Bloch intimates, a focus on chance, on the "Zufällige," for it is in such contingency that the divine can be glimpsed. It is a notion central to Zweig's novel, in which—against the backdrop of a capitalist order that reduces the human's relation to the external world to something entirely destructive—the improbable events of the story create space for acts of selflessness and love, for Bertin's tireless search for justice, and for those unlikely friendships—between *Armierungs-Soldat* and *Pionier*, for example—that gradually open the protagonists' eyes to the brutality of the war and the exploitative power hierarchies that perpetuate the conflict.<sup>74</sup>

It is through this novelistic unification of the Lukácsian exposure of necessity and the Blochian celebration of chance that Zweig's novel seeks to tell the truth.<sup>75</sup> If the portrayal of Niggel's confession highlights that the distilling of facts cannot suffice for initiating the

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<sup>72</sup>See Benjamin M. Korstvedt, *Listening for Utopia in Ernst Bloch's Musical Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 65—67.

<sup>73</sup>Worringer, *Formprobleme der Gotik*, 121. For Bloch's writings on the avant-garde's Gothic heritage, see Bloch, "Diskussionen über Expressionismus," 272.

<sup>74</sup>Hüppauf similarly recognizes that the hope for the future outlined by Zweig lies not in a postwar break with the past but in the glimpses of human nature and institutions largely destroyed by the war. See Hüppauf, "Erziehung durch Krieg?," 59.

<sup>75</sup>It is a combination hinted at by Schiller who sweepingly ascribes to Zweig's exile writings both "die Funktion, die Wirklichkeit zu durchleuchten" and "Phantasie, in die der Erinnerungsschatz der Vorwelt einfließt." Dieter Schiller, "'Hitler und Antihitler' — Arnold Zweigs Exilpublizistik als Bemühen um den Dialog unter Antifaschisten," in *Arnold Zweig. Poetik, Judentum und Politik*, ed. David Midgley et al. (Bern: Peter Lang, 1989), 261.

revolutionary process of building, chance alone proves similarly insufficient. Although Bertin's improbable involvement in the aftermath Christoph's death initiates his "Erziehung," emboldening his solidarity with others and opening his eyes to acts of injustice, he is never able to fully comprehend the military and capitalist systems in which he operates. Contingency, like the cathedral interior, can reveal the human's relationship to the natural world and its own nature, but in order to become politically effective, such insights must be combined with the lesson imparted by the cathedral exterior, namely that of humankind's powers to creatively transcend its surroundings. For Zweig, that necessitates discerning between the truly natural and the apparently natural, and *Erziehung vor Verdun* accordingly combines a celebration of contingency with a Lukácsian operation of exposing the mutability of existing social relations. Zweig's novel hereby seeks to do the work of the cathedral, to initiate a revolutionary building process that empowers the human to fulfill its own nature by breaking decisively with the status quo and constructing a utopian future.

**CHAPTER IV. FLOODING THE CITY STREETS: FLOW AND FORM IN ALFRED  
DÖBLIN'S *November 1918***

“Wenn ich Alexanderplatz meine, sage ich Alexanderplatz, und wenn ich Quatschkopf meine, sage ich Becher.”<sup>1</sup> With these words, Alfred Döblin defended his most famous novel, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), against attacks from his erstwhile colleague from Gruppe 1925, Johannes Becher, and the newly founded *Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller* (BPRS). For the BPRS, which in its early years promoted literature by and for the working class, Döblin represented a “linksbürgerliche” literary tradition they rejected, and *Berlin Alexanderplatz* a testament to the counter-revolutionary role of bourgeois authors. As Klaus Neukrantz wrote in the BPRS’s journal, *Die Linkskurve*: “Döblin hat in diesem Buch seiner offen erklärten Feindschaft gegen den organisierten Klassenkampf des Proletariats unverhüllten Ausdruck gegeben.”<sup>2</sup> This ongoing conflict—which Döblin’s biographer Wilfried F. Schoeller describes as the “vielleicht heftigste Literaturfehde der Weimarer Zeit”<sup>3</sup>—likely motivated the author’s decision, in 1931, to set out his political worldview in the text *Wissen und Verändern*. Unsurprisingly, however, his declaration in that work that he was, in fact, a socialist, one who simply did not share the BPRS’s prioritization of economic categories and class warfare, failed to satisfy his critics: “Der Abdruck im ‘Tage-Buch’ und die Erwiderungen in der ‘Neuen Rundschau’ lösten eine der fulminantesten öffentlichen Debatten der späten Weimarer Jahre aus.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, critical responses now came from a broader range of sources, including Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, and Döblin felt

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Döblin, “Katastrophe in der Linkskurve,” in *Schriften zur Politik und Gesellschaft* (Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1972), 251.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Wilfried F. Schoeller, *Alfred Döblin: Eine Biographie* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2011), 346.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 346.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 366–367.



compelled to publish a lengthy response to his critics, “Nochmal: Wissen und Verändern,” later that year.

It is fair to say then that Döblin was no orthodox Marxist, and yet these various political conflicts should not distract from his increasing closeness to Marxists and Marxist thought as the 1930s progressed. Most notable in this context was his relationship to Karl Korsch, the Marxist theorist who shaped Bertolt Brecht’s politicization and with whom Döblin had attended a discussion group in 1927.<sup>5</sup> More significant in this context was Korsch’s later “study group for critical Marxism”: “Ab November 1932 bis zum Februar des nächsten Jahres nahm Döblin wie Brecht, Günther Anders und Wolfdietrich Rasch an einem achteiligen Kurs von Karl Korsch teil; an der Karl-Marx-Schule in Neukölln diskutierten sie über ‘Lebendiges und Totes im Marxismus’.”<sup>6</sup> Döblin was, according to Patrick Goode, “one of the most regular participants in the study circle,”<sup>7</sup> and, as Schoeller puts it, “Von Karl Korsch [. . .] ließ [Döblin] sich beeinflussen.”<sup>8</sup> While the group’s activities were prematurely ended by the rise of the Nazis and Döblin’s flight into exile in 1933—first to France via Switzerland and then, in 1940, to the USA via Portugal—Döblin’s reconciliation with the Marxist left continued. As the international communist movement shifted toward the *Volkfront* strategy it officially adopted in 1935, seeking to unite socialists of all stripes in opposition to the fascist threat, Döblin found himself reintegrated into old circles: he attended Becher’s 1935 *Kongress zur Verteidigung der Kultur* in Paris, published in 1936 his essay on the historical novel in the Moscow-based journal *Das Wort*, and received in 1938 an unlikely public endorsement from Becher, who now proclaimed Döblin an antifascist author.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Schoeller, *Alfred Döblin*, 312.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 385.

<sup>7</sup>Patrick Goode, *Karl Korsch: A Study in Western Marxism* (London: Macmillan Press, 1979), 136.

<sup>8</sup>Schoeller, *Alfred Döblin*, 364.

<sup>9</sup>See *ibid.*, 377.

This chapter takes these developments to be crucial for comprehending Döblin's political and literary essays from the late 1930s and, in particular, his four-volume *Erzählwerk, November 1918. Eine deutsche Revolution*. Döblin began this work, a historical novel in the tradition of the French roman-fleuve, in 1937, and the first volume, *Bürger und Soldaten*, was published in 1939 by the Amsterdam-based exile publishing house Querido. Although exile and the post-1945 political environment ensured the complete four volumes were not published together until 1978, the manuscripts were finished during the war years (with the final volume, *Karl und Rosa*, notably written after Döblin's 1941 conversion to Catholicism). The focus of this chapter, the second volume, *Verratenes Volk*, existed in "Rohfassung" by the time of Döblin's 1940 transatlantic journey.<sup>10</sup>

The politics of this work, which recounts the events of the German Revolution 1918-19, have long been central to its admittedly limited reception. However, these interpretations rarely engage with Döblin's political experiences outlined above and, as Oliver Jahraus points out, often provide a merely "oberflächlich[e] Lesart" in which the novel becomes simply "eine literarische Analyse jener [historischen] Gründe [. . . ], die für das Scheitern der Novemberrevolution namhaft zu machen wären."<sup>11</sup> Even where critics proceed beyond this—to examine, for example, the utopian dimension of the novel—there is a tendency to dismiss the depiction of the historical events themselves as "satirical" and to focus almost exclusively on individual characters and the Christian imagery particularly prevalent in the final volume.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>For a detailed account of Döblin's progress on the work, see Oliver Jahraus, "Historisches Epos: November 1918. Eine deutsche Revolution (1939, 1948, 1950)," in *Döblin Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, ed. Sabina Becker (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2016), 156–159.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>12</sup>See, for example, Alan Bance and Klaus Hofmann, "Transcendence and the Historical Novel: A Discussion of November 1918," in *Alfred Döblin*, ed. Steffan Davies and Ernest Schonfield (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 296–321; Klaus Hofmann, "Revolution and Redemption: Alfred Döblin's 'November 1918'," *The Modern Language Review* 103, no. 2 (2008): 471–489; and Ulrich Kittstein, "Zwischen Revolution, Gewalt und göttlicher Gnade. Alfred Döblins Romantrilogie November 1918 (1939–50)," in *Friede, Freiheit, Brot!*: *Romane zur deutschen Novemberrevolution*, ed. Ulrich Kittstein and Regine Zeller (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2009), 307–324.

In what follows, this chapter argues that *November 1918* outlines a Korsch-inspired critique of revolutionaries whose economic motivations ultimately make them indistinguishable from the capitalist profiteers Döblin depicts, and this leads, inevitably, to revolutionary defeat. Fundamentally, Döblin's work explores questions of political transformation and obstructions to such change as they pertain to human nature and society. Central to the following analysis is the urban setting of *November 1918* and its ambivalent role as a site of both motion and stasis, a revolutionary site and a bulwark of existing power hierarchies. Berlin's significance for *Verratenes Volk* in particular has been subject to critical attention, and my argument builds on work by David Dollenmayer, who designates *November 1918* a Berlin novel even as he emphasizes that it "contains none of the large-scale city montages that articulate the structure of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and make Berlin itself a character in the novel."<sup>13</sup> Ernest Schonfield goes further, claiming that "topography functions as a major level of signification within the narrative economy of November 1918."<sup>14</sup> For all of Schonfield's insights, however, his focus on the "symbolic, cognitive function" of space is too limited, since it suggests the city's importance lies only in its relation to Döblin's characterization of events and figures.<sup>15</sup> While Adriana Cutieru's convincing claim that the novel stages the "Auflösung der historischen Zeit und des historischen Raums in die monumentale und in die phänomenologische Zeit" does inform my own reading of the novel, the following reading diverges from Cutieru's conceptualization of Döblin's work as a "Geschichte des Verfalls," which largely abstracts the spatial-temporal constellation from the novel's political ambitions.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>David B. Dollenmayer, "November 1918: A German Revolution," in *The Berlin Novels of Alfred Döblin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 131.

<sup>14</sup>Ernest Schonfield, "November 1918: Topography of a Revolution," in *Alfred Döblin*, ed. Steffan Davies and Ernest Schonfield (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 279.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>16</sup>Adriana Cutieru, "Die Geschichte als Verfall in Alfred Döblins historischem Roman November 1918," in *From Magic Columns to Cyberspace: Time and Space in German Literature, Art, and Theory*, ed. Daniel Lambauer, Marie Isabel Schlinzig, and Abigail Dunn (München: Martin Meidenbauer, 2008), 97.

Through my analysis, *November 1918* emerges as an intervention into two critical political debates of the interwar period: first, the discussion of dialectics prompted by Georg Lukács' claim, in his 1923 *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, that nature is exempt from dialectical movement; second, the exile debates on the antifascist potential of the historical novel to which, inevitably, Lukács provided the most substantial contribution with his 1937 work *Der historische Roman*. This chapter argues that with *November 1918*, Döblin sets out his political vision of the late 1930s by bringing together these two discourses. Döblin's novel suggests that it is precisely the capitalist perversion and regulation of natural movement, its flows and cycles, that dooms the revolutionaries to failure. For Döblin, the human's "Zwitterstellung" between nature and artifice, between natural flows and constructed forms inspires dialectical progression and ensures it encompasses both nature and society, but awareness of this twofold positionality has been lost in capitalist modernity.<sup>17</sup> The lesson of the revolutionary defeat is, for Döblin, that this awareness must be regained if fascism is to be successfully combated. The historical novel promises to play a critical role in this context, for Döblin's roman-fleuve is able to reproduce precisely this negotiation between real-world movements and human-made form. The unwieldy *November 1918* and its self-aware narrator represent not an attempt to obstruct movement, to monumentalize history and fix its meaning. Rather, it models how human creativity and human-made forms might interact dialectically in a constructive process with time's passage and nature's flows.<sup>18</sup>

### **Revolutionary Flows/Capitalist Circulation**

Decades after Döblin completed *November 1918*, the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari envisioned, as Ronald Bogue puts it, "a universe of ubiquitous flows and

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<sup>17</sup>Alfred Döblin, "Prometheus und das Primitive," in *Schriften zur Politik und Gesellschaft* (Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1972), 351.

<sup>18</sup>While this chapter focuses on the question of flow as it appeared in interwar architectural, literary, and Marxist discourses, it is worth noting that Inga Pollmann's recent work *Cinematic Vitalism* makes clear that interest in flows, not least the "flow of life," was ubiquitous in Weimar Germany. Pollmann uncovers in the early-twentieth-century reception of vitalism notions of flow and rhythm that decisively influenced the era's film theory and practice. See Inga Pollmann, *Cinematic Vitalism. Film Theory and the Question of Life* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018)

fluxes.”<sup>19</sup> In their works *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), they argue for the ambivalence of this constant movement, for while “the possibility of creative transformation” does inhere “in the proliferation of interconnecting networks of flows,” the state of flux is also conducive to “the schizophrenic logic of market capitalism, with its law of universal equivalence whereby anything may be exchanged for anything else” and the “nightmarish vision of economic globalization, whose expanding fluxes of international capital wash across political, social, and cultural boundaries and threaten to drown the earth in a single homogeneous commercial sea.”<sup>20</sup> Under capitalism, Deleuze and Guattari argue, these flows coexist with what they call the “State apparatus,” an ordering instance that regulates “these schizophrenic flows, [. . .] constantly recod[ing] flows in newly constructed improvisatory formations.”<sup>21</sup> In *November 1918*, Döblin anticipates this post-Marxist capitalism critique in his depiction of a revolution that seems poised to sweep away the status quo but is quickly revealed to be (mis-)directed by the capitalist order entrenched in Berlin’s built environment. In this way, Döblin’s novel uses the contrasting evaluations of movement in the architectural theories of Hannes Meyer and Le Corbusier to outline an original materialist analysis that conceives of capitalist society as an interplay of movement and stasis that suppresses flow’s potential for “creative transformation.”

*Bürger und Soldaten*, the first volume of Döblin’s *Erzählwerk*, begins on November 10, 1918, one day after the Kaiser’s abdication and one before the signing of the Armistice. It is a moment of transition, the effects of which are only intensified by the reorganization of borders that follows Germany’s capitulation. The Germans must abandon their territorial gains and retreat: “Wie Wurzeln eines Baumes, die tief und verzweigt im Boden haften, so mußte das gewaltige deutsche Heer nach dem Waffenstillstand vom 11. November seine Truppen aus den

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<sup>19</sup>Ronald Bogue, “Nomadic Flows: Globalism and the Local Absolute,” *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 31, no. 1 (2005): 8.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

Gräben, Stollen, Häusern ziehen.”<sup>22</sup> Those borders are ultimately to be reorganized and reinstated elsewhere: “Die alliierten Sieger würden [den deutschen Truppen] dann auf das Ostufer des Rheins folgen, um die Brückenköpfe von Köln, Koblenz, Mainz in einer Tiefe von dreißig Kilometer zu besetzen, und dort haltmachen” (VV, 25). However, the events of Döblin’s novel take place principally in the interstice, after old borders have dissolved but before new ones have emerged. It is a moment of movement and possibility, something foregrounded, in the novel’s first volume, by the focus on the contested city of Strasbourg and the unnamed Alsatian “Städtchen.” By the time we reach the second volume, the “kurze Herrschaft der deutschen Revolution” has already ended in the French borderlands and a new order looms for a region, which “nun wieder zu Frankreich zurückkehrte.” (VV, 39) It is at this point, in the second volume, *Verratenes Volk*, that Döblin’s novel turns its attention to the principal site of flux: Berlin.

Against this backdrop of border dissolution, it is significant that *Verratenes Volk* opens with the “Sturm auf das Polizeipräsidium.” During this episode, in which Berlin’s insurrectionist masses rush to the police headquarters upon hearing that political prisoners are being held there, the would-be revolutionaries are portrayed as an irresistible force of nature that, now liberated from any external constraints, pours through the streets: “Die Menge flutete hinaus. Man kletterte über Bänke, schrie, drohte. [...] Es traten [...] geschlossene Züge von Männern auf die Straße und bewegten sich die Brunnenstraße, Rosenthaler-, Münzstraße herunter auf den Alexanderplatz zu” (VV, 18). With the narrator’s references to “fluten,” we already have here the implication of fluidity and unrestrained movement, and the group’s goal is correspondingly the further erosion of borders. The swelling crowd burst into the headquarters, “strömen” through the corridors, and liberate the prisoners within: “Matrosen erbrachen das Seitentor, liefen durch den beleuchteten Gang des Erdgeschosses, verjagten die Soldaten von der Treppe, gelangten auf den Hof, öffneten das große Gitter, und nun strömten Scharen herein” (VV, 20). In Berlin’s city streets, we thus rediscover those elements of destabilization and transition previously operative at the national level, now in the form of an apparently revolutionary deluge.

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<sup>22</sup>Alfred Döblin, *Verratenes Volk* (München: DTV, 1978), 25. Hereafter VV.



Fig. 7: Armed workers and soldiers on Lindenstraße, January 1919 (Photograph by Willy Römer. Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin).

The episode at the Polizeipräsidium gestures toward an interconnection between the breakdown of physical boundaries and the collapse of social and political orders. Those November 9 events that frame Döblin's novel include not only the abdication of Wilhelm II, but also the SPD's Philipp Scheidemann's proclamation of a German Republic, and the Spartacist Karl Liebknecht's same-day declaration of a "Freie Sozialistische Republik Deutschland." The novel forgoes a portrayal of these events to focus instead on the consequent power vacuum and contestation of political visions.<sup>23</sup> Tellingly, it is precisely these notions that the narrator invokes as the masses set out to free the prisoners: "Da noch keine gegründete Ordnung bestand, mußte man selber Ordnung schaffen. Man war [...] in einem Urzustand: zugleich Gesetzgeber und Richter" (VV, 18). Here the notion of the revolutionaries as a natural force, as a tsunami overwhelming all physical boundaries in its path, reflects a sociopolitical return to nature, an

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<sup>23</sup>In the same vein, Hofmann writes of the novel's interest in "the magic moment of 'Stillstand', the suspension of authority, law and order." See Bance and Hofmann, "Transcendence and the Historical Novel," 309.

“Urzustand,” in which established power sources have collapsed and authority is contested. Significantly, the relationship between physical borders and symbolic orders in these passages is mutually reinforcing: the collapse of power hierarchies inspires the challenge to the prison’s physical boundaries, and the breakdown of those boundaries accelerates the disintegration of established authority.

The restraints imposed by physical and symbolic structures begin to loosen in Döblin’s work, and a fluid revolutionary movement gains pace. It is accordingly fitting that when we later encounter Liebknecht, he stresses that the Spartacists’ success depends upon forward momentum. Speaking to the mutinous sailors now stationed in Berlin, Liebknecht warns against trusting the head of the transitional government, Friedrich Ebert, whose apparent desire for a “geordneter Rückmarsch” of the German army leaves the government unwilling to entertain demands for more radical sociopolitical transformations: “Um der lieben Ordnung und Ruhe willen gibt man Todfeinden der Revolution wieder Machtmittel in die Hand, die das Erreichte in den Grundlagen bedrohen” (VV, 183). What is instead required, Liebknecht intimates, is further progression, a “fortschreiten von der bürgerlichen Reform der Ebert-Scheidemann zur sozialen Revolution” (VV, 184). In language that speaks to the sailors’ experiences but also recalls Döblin’s description of those revolutionaries who flooded the streets to wash away the prison bars, Liebknecht urges his audience not to fear the post-war disorder: “Dunkel ist das Meer, stürmisch und voller Klippen. Sollen wir vor unseren Aufgaben zurückschrecken, weil sie schwer sind? [...] Sollen wir wegen der Klippen unser Ziel aufgeben? [...] Wir halten die Augen auf und werden zum Ziel gelangen” (VV, 185). This watery and disorderly “Urzustand” is not the end goal for Liebknecht, but its continuation makes possible a passage toward a socialist future.

The interconnection of border breakdown and social progression to which Döblin’s novel gestures in these passages notably resonates with the era’s socialist theories of urban planning. The influential expressionist and socialist architect Bruno Taut, for example, celebrates in *Die Auflösung der Städte* (1920) an imagined destruction of modern cities (“Lasst sie fallen”<sup>24</sup>)

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<sup>24</sup>Taut, *Die Auflösung der Städte*, 1.



precisely because this destruction creates space for the emergence of a more just social order. This idealized post-urban “Gemeinschaft,” liberated from the city’s spatial constraints, is able to provide more space for the individual’s personal development while also inspiring a greater sense of solidarity between people, causing borders to vanish (“keine Zäune”<sup>25</sup>) and a new form of togetherness to emerge: “Räumlich entfernter von einander führen die Menschen ein stärkeres Einzelleben, dessen gesteigerter Wert den Wert der Gesamtheit steigert.”<sup>26</sup> These ideas were later reimagined by the socialist architect Hannes Meyer, who succeeded Walter Gropius as Bauhaus director in 1928. In his 1926 manifesto *Die neue Welt*, Meyer contends that we no longer need await a sudden cataclysmic collapse of the city. Instead, modernity’s technological innovations, not least those in travel and communication, are themselves eroding all spatial boundaries and irreversibly transforming our relationship to place and people. Meyer envisions the unavoidable disappearance of nationalisms and national particularisms and the emergence of a universal “Schicksalgemeinschaft”: “Koooperation beherrscht die Welt. Die Gemeinschaft beherrscht das Einzelwesen.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, for thinkers like Taut and Meyer, the socialist transformation of society proceeded through the breakdown of architectural boundaries, the introduction of movement and fluidity into previously static spaces.

It was not just socialist architects who dreamed of a collapse of urban boundaries, however. The influential Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier, a committed defender of capitalism, similarly outlined the need to make room for motion in the city. “The anachronistic persistence of the original skeleton of the city,” Le Corbusier argues in his 1929 work *The City of To-morrow and its Planning*, “paralyzes its growth. Industrial and commercial life will be stifled in towns which do not develop.”<sup>28</sup> Le Corbusier, like Meyer, believes that innovations in industry have

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<sup>25</sup>Taut, *Die Auflösung der Städte*, 2.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>27</sup>Meyer, “Die neue Welt,” 29.

<sup>28</sup>Corbusier, *The City of To-morrow*, 84.

inspired movement, created in modern life an “acceleration without cease.” For Le Corbusier, the result is an increasingly fraught clash between new modes of life and inherited cityscapes: “Our physical and nervous organization is brutalized and battered by this torrent; it makes its protest, of course, but it will soon give way unless some energetic decision [. . .] brings order once more to a situation which is rapidly getting out of hand.”<sup>29</sup> To solve this problem, Le Corbusier argues that we must transform our cities: “The centres of our great cities must be pulled down and rebuilt. [. . .] We must constitute [. . .] a protected and open zone, which [. . .] will give us absolute liberty of action.”<sup>30</sup> Le Corbusier’s city center thereby becomes an “intensely active form of capital” with the potential for movement as its fundamental organizing principles: “We must de-congest the centres of cities in order to provide for the demands of traffic.”<sup>31</sup> For Le Corbusier, then, the breakdown of urban boundaries means not the overthrow of a capitalist status quo, but rather its fortification, the creation of more space for capital’s circulation.

*November 1918* is not ignorant of the capitalist dynamics outlined by Le Corbusier, but the work does not share Le Corbusier’s idealization of capital’s expansion. The opening passage of *Verratenes Volk* concludes with reference to the “speckigen Götter, [. . .] die der Krieg hervorgebracht hatte, die sich von der neuen Not der Menschen nährten, die Götter mit den Köpfen von Aasgeiern — die Spekulanten und ihr Anhang” (VV, 10). These profiteers act in the post-war moment as the revolutionaries’ counterparts: both seek to use the disorder to transform society, but whereas the latter argue for a more just sociopolitical order, the former pursue self-enrichment. The profiteers of Döblin’s novel, represented by Wylinski and his “ganzen Stamm von Wylinskis, die neben ihm aufschossen,” have the function, “ein mächtiges Triebwerk in Bewegung zu setzen, eine Umwandlung aller Werte vorzunehmen” (VV, 283) The imagery of movement here appears anew, but now refers neither to the liberation of prisoners nor

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<sup>29</sup>Corbusier, *The City of To-morrow*, 86.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 96.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 96, 100.

Liebknecht's revolutionary vision; instead, it gestures to the growing influence of opportunistic capitalists, who become powerful at others' expense: "Alles floß ihnen zu. [...] Wer besaß und mit Schloß, Haus, Fabrik, Bergwerk in das Triebwerk geriet, der — verlor. Nur daß das Verlorene dann nicht in den leeren Raum strahlte, sondern in die Taschen der Wylinskis fiel" (VV, 283). Notably, just as those who stormed the prison both emerged from and furthered the post-war disintegration of boundaries, so too the Wylinskis: "sie leiteten den fließenden und himschemlzenden Besitz. [...] Sie beschleunigten [seine Umwandlung]" (VV, 284).

Problematically for Liebknecht's utopian aspirations, the distinctions between revolutionaries and profiteers in Döblin's novel begin to blur while their similarities become increasingly pronounced. When the former soldier Eduard Imker visits the revolutionary sailors stationed in the Marstall in the hope of learning more about the revolution, he poses the question: "Was macht ihr hier?" (VV, 226) The response, "Löhnung empfangen," is followed by some similarly revealing advice: "Geh mal nach dem Reichstag. Die leben auch schön in den Tag" (VV, 227) Indeed, it is apparent that everyone and no one is a revolutionary in Döblin's Berlin. The "Kriegsopfer, Amputierte, Zitterer und Schüttler" who silently display their misery on the city streets, who stand "vor den Dielen und den großen Restaurants [...], zerlumpt und frierend," see their redemption in the revolution (VV, 300). They are, however, motivated not by solidarity and utopian longing, but by envy and a desire for violent vengeance: "Das Heil ist bei Spartakus. Es ist Zeit, zu rauben und auszurotten" (VV, 300). The profiteer Brose-Zenk similarly sees hope in the Spartacist cause because he wishes to resist a governmental threat to his fledgling cigar business: "Es ist alles aus. Wir müssen doch zu den Spartakisten. [...] Diese Republik — Republik nennt sie sich — versagt bis auf das letzte. Man beschlagnahmt neuerdings Zigarren. [...] Meine Zigarren! Wo ich erst seit einer Woche Zigarren verkaufe" (VV, 135). The arch profiteer Wylinski most clearly expresses the corruption of Liebknecht's revolutionary vision, repurposing the very idea of socialism, "die Krone, die Blüte einer menschlichen Entwicklung," to reduce a theory of collective self-emancipation to that of an individualistic pursuit of wealth:

“Sie kommen durch Geld zur Freiheit. Als Sozialist vertrete ich die Befreiung der Menschheit und wünsche daher, daß jeder frei wird. Das ist nur mit Geld möglich” (VV, 200).

It is not then the theories of Taut and Meyer, but rather those of Le Corbusier that resonate with the post-revolutionary chaos Döblin depicts. Accordingly, it increasingly becomes unclear whether a revolution is even taking place. The opportunistic self-interest Imker experiences during his visit to the Marstall leads him to reflect on this very issue: “Keiner kümmert sich um was. Jeder macht, was ihm Spaß macht. [...] Wenn die bloß ihren Lohn kriegen und Zigaretten haben” (VV, 227). It is a question that, soon hereafter, is answered by Döblin’s narrator, who interrupts the narrative to announce that “Mit der Revolution wird es auf diese Weise nicht vorwärtsgehen. [...] Bisher sind wirkliche revolutionäre Massen nicht in unser Gesichtsfeld getreten” (VV, 242). Although, as the narrator suggests, we have encountered “einzelne guten Willens und mutig,” the imagery of flowing water is invoked to make clear that “Tropfen machen keinen Bach, geschweige einen Sturzbach” (VV, 242). Channeling the perspective of Berlin’s populace, the narrator explains this inability to sustain the tsunami-like power that once tore open the Polizeipräsidium: “Machen kann man doch nichts, und wer es dennoch versucht, erledigt seine weiteren Angelegenheiten auf dem Friedhof” (VV, 243). A pessimistic evaluation of collective strength here combines with individualistic self-preservation instincts to curtail utopian ambitions. To the extent a “revolution” exists at all, then, it consists of a radical emboldening of self-interest and a corresponding transfer of wealth and power to a caste of capitalist profiteers.

### **The Monumentalization of Power**

In Döblin’s novel, Karl Radek, the USSR delegate sent to Germany at the end of 1918 to advise the Spartacists, seeks to motivate the wavering Liebknecht by telling the story of the Bolshevik Alexei Rykov. Rykov—who, like Radek, was ultimately killed during the purges of the late 1930s—held several important governmental roles in the USSR’s early years, but Radek tells of his initial skepticism about the revolution’s chances of success in 1917:

[Radek] war imstande, [. . .] von Rykow zu erzählen, wie der damals mit einem Genossen durch Moskau spazierte: “‘Sehen Sie diese gewaltigen Steinhäuser’, sagte Rykow, ‘die reichen Läden, den wimmelnden Geschäftsbetrieb. Und da kommen wir, wir, und was sind wir hier? Pygmäen, die einen Berg verschieben wollen.’ Solche Hochachtung hatte Rykow vor den Einrichtungen der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft. (VV, 358)

Radek’s story positions the city and its buildings, its “gewaltigen Steinhäuser,” as an immovable bulwark of existing power structures and, as such, an oppositional force to the flows we have previously seen. But the point of the Rykow story, for Radek, is that revolution did happen. Rykow had underestimated the collective power of the brutalized workers to resist their built environment. He had been, “um mit Lenin zu sprechen, oberflächlich, dumm” (VV, 358). It is a message entirely lost on Liebknecht who, in a later conversation with Radek, instead suggests Rykow’s analysis holds true for Germany: “Ihr habt ein riesiges Land. Ihr zerstört da ein bißchen und da ein bißchen. Bei uns geht es schwer. Wir wohnen dichter” (VV, 412). Germany’s dense cityscapes represent, in Liebknecht’s eyes, a formidable entrenchment of existing power structures that leaves little space for opposition and threatens to break the revolutionary wave. Liebknecht is not entirely wrong, Döblin’s novel intimates, and considering the depiction of urban space in *November 1918* helps us make sense of the revolution’s failure and its capitalist turn.

The post-war relationship between fluidity and the solidity bemoaned by Rykow is perhaps best encapsulated by the monuments scattered throughout the novel. Early in the second volume, a returning soldier tells his father that he sees “eine große Zeit kommen [. . .] für die Granitklopfer und Bildhauer” (VV, 44). The construction of monuments, the son suggests, allows the state to falsify history, to transform disruptive events with unpredictable consequences into an affirmation of the status quo: “Ich laß’ mir jedenfalls meine Kriegserinnerungen durch patriotischen Quatsch nicht rauben. Auf einen Granitblock kriegt ihr keinen von uns” (VV, 44). Where previously we saw the promise of social transformation through a washing away of spatial boundaries, here we see the counter-revolutionary halting of time through its spatialization, the conversion of fluid developments into stone fixity. Monumentalization hereby determines the meaning of the past (and the dead) so that its transformative potential for the present (and the living) can be

suppressed: “So weit wird man das Maul aufreißen für den kleinen Kumpel und Bauernjungen — vorausgesetzt, daß er tot ist. Was uns Lebende anlangt, sehe ich etwas anderes vor” (VV, 44).<sup>32</sup>

Döblin’s 1931 text *Wissen und Verändern* is instructive when it comes to determining the nature of the power structure embodied in Germany’s monuments. According to that earlier political and philosophical work, “Man findet nach dem Krieg in Deutschland drei Kräftegruppen: die feudalistische, die kapitalistische, die proletarische.”<sup>33</sup> We have already encountered the latter two in the novel, but the first deserves closer attention, especially given Döblin’s description of feudalism’s longevity in Germany:

“Die Feudalität ist in Deutschland greifbar und fühlbar an der Macht geblieben. Sie hat sichtbar bis 1918 geherrscht, nicht mit einem vorgetäuschten Apparat, mit einer Kulisse oder gar selber als Kulisse, sondern höchst real. Bei ihr war der Staat und die Nation.”<sup>34</sup> Döblin’s work anticipates in this way Helmut Lethen’s later characterization of Germany as a “verspätete Nation”: Döblin outlines how the bourgeois revolution of 1848 failed to displace the feudal aristocracy under whose leadership the country was eventually unified in 1871. For Döblin, Germany of the late 1800s and early 1900s was accordingly characterized by the synchronicity of the non-synchronous: capitalists and aristocratic lords competed for power while a revolutionary proletariat began to take shape.

The relationship Döblin attributes to capitalists and aristocrats was not one of open hostility, however. Instead, Döblin indicates that the bourgeois subject, defeated in 1848, thereafter

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<sup>32</sup>This vision is vividly realized in the fourth volume, *Karl und Rosa*, in which, as Schonfield summarizes it, “Döblin mocks the official heroic version of history by bringing the statues in the Siegesallee sclerotically to life at midnight on the supposedly crucial date (for the German Revolution) of 6 January 1919, as a metaphor of history ‘solidified’, running counter to the flux which is reality.” See Bance and Hofmann, “Transcendence and the Historical Novel,” 301. In this context, it might also be added that whereas Cutieru sees this persistence of the past as a “Verzeitlichung des Raumes” in the novel, I suggest it is more accurate to speak of a “Verräumlichung der Zeit”: Döblin depicts not the happenstance haunting of present-day spaces by specters of the past, but rather a persistence of historic orders that results from their entrenchment in monuments and architecture. See Cutieru, “Die Geschichte als Verfall,” 98.

<sup>33</sup>Alfred Döblin, “Wissen und Verändern! Offene Briefe an einen jungen Menschen,” in *Der deutsche Maskenball, Wissen und Verändern* (Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1972), 254.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 218.

willingly submitted to feudal authority: “Wenn aber 1848 auch nichts erfolgte, was Freiheit brachte, so erfolgte doch etwas anderes [. . .]: Der Untertan schloß sich reuig, demütig an den Herrn an; ja, er ließ sich [. . .] von dem Herrn verschlucken.”<sup>35</sup> The result of this “Veruntertanung” was the bourgeoisie’s embrace of the feudal “Herrenklasse” and “ihre Art, ihre Moral, ihre Denkweise,” specifically its “Sachlichkeit, Herrschsucht und [. . .] Menschenverachtung.”<sup>36</sup> According to Döblin, both the capitalists and aristocrats of Germany thereby came to be guided by the following principle: “Ich kenne keine Menschen, ich kenne nur Deutsche, nämlich Instrumente meines Willens.”<sup>37</sup> It is this dominant and dominating mindset that, for Döblin, led Germany inevitably into World War I, and it is a mindset that, owing to its transferal from the representatives of feudalism to those of capitalism, outlives the abdication of Wilhelm II in 1918: “Sogar die Kriegsniederlage von 1918 und der November konnten [der Feudalität] nichts antun, denn sie hatte inzwischen ihre Macht bis in die Personen hinein ausgedehnt, — und in dieser Weise lebt die Feudalität noch weiter.”<sup>38</sup>

While, in *Wissen und Verändern*, Döblin attributes the endurance of feudalism to servile capitalists, *November 1918* draws attention to its monumentalization and architectural entrenchment. The novel offers the reader a feudal precursor to the World War I statues anticipated (and criticized) by the aforementioned soldier: the “Sibylle,” an elderly countess who remains loyal to the Kaiser, describes Frankfurt’s Hessendenkmal from 1793 with the following words: “Das Denkmal [. . .] ist ein sehr altes Monument, errichtet zur Erinnerung an deutsche Patrioten, die im Kampf gegen Fremdherrschaft unter dem ersten Napoleon fielen” (VV, 175). Here we see the model for the “patriotischen Quatsch” that the soldier previously rejected, a monument that similarly beautifies wartime deaths by suggesting that dying for one’s nation and

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<sup>35</sup>Döblin, “Wissen und Verändern,” 163.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 164.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 165.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 218.

those who govern it is honorable. This monumental celebration of soldiers as heroic “Instrumente” of feudal authority is complemented by other statues that glorify the “Herrenklasse” itself. In this case, too, the novel outlines a lineage, which includes Christian Daniel Rauch’s equestrian statue of Friedrich der Große (“Der olle Kurfürst auf seinem Gaul” (VV, 225)) and Reinhold Begas’ Nationaldenkmal to Wilhelm I (VV, 175). This lineage extends, moreover, into the present moment: Paul von Hindenburg, the ultimate representative of the aristocracy’s enduring post-war influence, appears even in life as a immovable monument celebrating feudal power: “Gegenüber am Tisch, mit den grauen Zügen, die schon bei Lebzeiten zu Granit erstarren, sitzt jemand, der mehr als [ein] Vorgesetzter ist” (VV, 344).

The feudal power embodied explicitly by the city’s monuments help us to return to Rykow’s “gewaltige Steinhäuser” and make sense of the relationship between the stalling revolution and urban space more generally. The chapter where we first encounter Friedrich Ebert begins with the narrator’s reflections on Berlin’s streets and squares, which—the narrator suggests—one could call “lethargisch” given their constancy in position and appearance, “aber dann erinnert man sich, daß sie aus schwer beweglichen, langsamen, zögernden Elementen gemacht sind, aus Stein, Mörtel, Lehm und Beton, die über größere Zeit als wir verfügen” (VV, 26).<sup>39</sup> What this “größere Zeit” might include soon becomes apparent when Ebert arrives at his destination: the Reichskanzlei, “ein Gebäude, das sich früher deutsche Kaiser und Könige hatten errichten lassen, um ihren obersten Beamten in Greifweite zu haben” (VV, 28). At first glance, the arrival of Ebert at the Imperial Chancellery heralds the continuation of post-war transformations, the entrance of a nominally socialist leader into the halls of power. It quickly becomes apparent, however, that Ebert merely adapts himself to his new environment, uncritically adopting the trappings and mannerisms of feudal authority: “Der Diener [läuft ihm] nach, der sich seit der Kaiserzeit hier

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<sup>39</sup>In this context, Schonfield writes of a “monumental form of time,” which helpfully points to the way in which this description of Berlin’s buildings suggests they “exude a sense of inertia” comparable to that of the previously described statues. Schonfield insightfully adds that “architecture here serves to keep people in check, by instilling passivity and subservience,” but his essay doesn’t ask—as this chapter seeks to—why this is or whose interests the urban space defends. See Schonfield, “Topography of a Revolution,” 288. It is also worth noting the ambiguity in Döblin’s passage, namely that the building materials described gesture beyond any social history and toward a grander sweep of natural history, a temporal layer that will be examined in the next section of this chapter.





Fig. 8: Berlin's Reichskanzlei around 1900 (Bundesarchiv).

befindet. Und sofort, wie von einem magischen Finger berührt, vom Hauch der Vergangenheit angeweht, knöpft sich der kleine Mann den Mantel auf, reicht seinen Hut hin, und der Diener hilft ihm aus dem Mantel" (VV, 28). Hereafter seated in Bismarck's "Präsidentenstuhl," addressed as "Exzellenz," and served by the "kaiserliche Diener," Ebert's relationship to power is dictated by his environment.<sup>40</sup>

Ebert's relationship to the spaces of power is symptomatic of his personal ambition; Döblin portrays Weimar's first chancellor as an opportunist par excellence, a political counterpart to the Wylinskis. His susceptibility to the architecture of the chancellery speaks to his pre-existing

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<sup>40</sup>Döblin's portrayal of Ebert has received plentiful critical attention. Bogner, Cutieru, Dollenmayer, and Schonfield offer similar arguments about Ebert's relationship to the chancellery with Schonfield posing the critical question: "does Ebert appropriate the office, or does the office appropriate him?" See Schonfield, "Topography of a Revolution," 290. See also Ralf Georg Bogner, "Institutionen, Institutionenkritik und Institutionalisierungsprozesse zwischen historischer Fiktion und utopischem Programm in Alfred Döblins Romantrilogie November 1918," in *Internationales Alfred-Döblin-Kolloquium Mainz 2005: Alfred Döblin zwischen Institution und Provokation*, ed. Yvonne Wolf (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 273–282, Cutieru, "Die Geschichte als Verfall," and Dollenmayer, "November 1918: A German Revolution."

disinterest in revolutionary political change. He regrets the Kaiser's abdication and Scheidemann's decision to proclaim a republic: "Ich habe mein Wort dafür gegeben, daß nichts gegen die Monarchie geschieht, und wir hatten die Möglichkeit, friedlich mit [den] Offizieren zu arbeiten" (VV, 296). Imagining a situation in which Germany's pre-war power structures had survived, albeit with Ebert himself now in a position of authority, he bemoans the real-world hostility of the aristocratic officer class: "Dieselbe Monarchie, die wir bequem und nach unserem Geschmack hätten haben können, werden sie uns so eines Tages mit Feuer und Schwert aufzwingen" (VV, 296). His objective throughout the novel is accordingly to consolidate his personal gains while seeking alliance with the officers to halt both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary movements. To achieve these aims, Ebert fully embraces the chancellery's in-built purpose: the building, conceived to keep the "oberste Beamten" within the Kaiser's grasp, now connects—via Geheimlinie 998, a secret telephone line—the latest "oberste Beamte," Ebert, to that icon of the Kaiserzeit, Hindenburg. The personnel has changed, but the structures of power remain the same, and this is—for the opportunistic Ebert—the optimal scenario.

The success of the opportunists and profiteers in Döblin's novel stems from this willingness to compromise with the feudal structures they inherit. Certainly, Ebert's method of social climbing through adaptation to one's environment is mirrored by Wylinski and his entourage. This is undoubtedly true of Finsterl, for example, to whom the narrator refers as a "Schatten Wylinskis" (VV, 284). Finsterl exploits the post-war chaos precisely by acquiring spaces of business and wealth in various cities. One such apartment in Berlin exemplifies his subsequent approach to interior design: "Die große Wohnung [. . .] war von Finsterl hochherrschaftlich ausgestattet worden mit Teppichen, Bildern und Möbeln aus einem von ihm erworbenen märkischen Schloß" (VV, 285). Far from challenging the status quo in this revolutionary moment, Finsterl uses the disorder to import aristocratic paraphernalia into the modern city—and to thereby unite the trappings of feudal power with his own capitalistic pursuit of wealth. His strategy seemingly bears fruit, for if "alle Wylinskis zeichneten sich durch Beziehungen aus, Beziehungen zu wichtigen, hohen und höchsten Personen," Finsterl's apartment succeeds in

attracting both business owners and, the narrator implies, politicians too (VV, 283). Figures like Finsterl are thus able to benefit from the dissolution of boundaries in the post-war moment precisely because the transformation they seek (namely, self-enrichment) respects the power structures embedded in the city itself.

The same cannot be said for the revolutionaries. *Verratenes Volk* culminates with the events of December 6, 1918. During an anti-government rally in Berlin, news arrives that the Vollzugsrat has been arrested and Ebert has been declared “Reichspräsident.”<sup>41</sup> The participants instantly transform into a mobile force of nature once more: “Sie waren ein schäumendes Element geworden, rachdürstendes, rechtheischendes Volk, das sich in Bewegung setzte” (VV, 392). Moreover, the destination is clear to all: “Nach der Reichskanzlei. Wir stürmen die Reichskanzlei” (VV, 392). They make for the chancellery but, unlike Ebert, they do not go there to practise their aristocratic mannerisms. Instead, with the suggestive reference to “stürmen,” the narrator recalls the prison liberation scene by suggesting a natural movement with an unmistakably oppositional (and destructive) relationship to the built environment. On this occasion, however, with the very existence of the pre-war political power structures at stake, the city resists. Not only do the city streets channel and direct the group’s movement (“Daß diese Versammlung, wenn sie einmal auf die Straße stieg, diesen Weg nehmen würde, war schon am Morgen vorauszusehen” (VV, 394)), but the “Barriere” of soldiers from the Guards Fusiliers, a military regiment with historic ties to the German aristocracy, appears as if conjured up by the city itself: “Wie es [. . .] kam, daß auf diesem Wege sich auch die Gardefüsiliere einstellten, blieb für alle Zeiten unaufgeklärt” (VV, 396, 394). In this moment, we see neither compromise nor opportunism but, instead, direct confrontation, the clash between flow and stasis, revolution and conservation.

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<sup>41</sup>Readers will recall that there existed at this time two critical councils: the Rat der Volksbeauftragten (Council of the People’s Deputies) was the de facto transitional government that had been put in place by the workers’ and soldiers’ councils and was headed by Ebert. As this Council moved rightward, it was involved in an increasingly bitter power struggle with the more radical Vollzugsrat (Executive Council), which had also been founded by the councils in order to oversee the activities of the Volksbeauftragte. For a detailed account of the conflict between these two bodies, see Pierre Broué, *The German Revolution, 1917–1923*, trans. John Archer (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2006), 172–188.

The outcome of the confrontation prefigures the ultimate failure of the revolution. The soldiers namely open fire: “Als die Kugeln spritzten und die Menschen fielen, zerbarst die Menge in tausend Einzelpersonen” (VV, 396). Clashing against the static military line, the collective power of the demonstration, that singular “schäumendes Element,” instantly collapses into its constituent parts. The crowd of scattered “Einzelpersonen” quickly dissipates too: “Das Entsetzen trieb sie in die Häuser der Invaliden- und Chausseestraße, jagte sie Treppen herauf, hieß sie an fremden Türen klingen, warf sie auf finstere Höfe. Nach wenigen Minuten waren die Straßen leer” (VV, 396). Forced from the streets, the site of their (mass) movement, the isolated protesters seek refuge in the surrounding houses and courtyards. Having set out to overthrow and transform static architectural structures and the symbolic orders they uphold, the demonstrators end up searching desperately for safety in precisely such spaces. It seems then that while the revolutionary situation does create space for the social mobility of Ebert and Finsterl, which proceeds in and through the physical and symbolic structures of Berlin, it does not produce the force necessary to challenge those power hierarchies inherited from feudal authority and entrenched in the city’s monuments and buildings.

### **Blood and Water**

By framing the revolution along the lines of fluidity and stasis, Döblin directs our attention to a more fundamental disequilibrium that the revolution brings to the fore.<sup>42</sup> It becomes apparent in that moment of defeat for the revolutionary demonstrators. There is in this instant a moment of doubling. The clash between flow and fixity reappears, this time among the casualties themselves, who are transformed once more into liquid, namely in the form of blood: “Das Blut, das auf dem Pflaster gerann und verklumpete, hatte menschliche Seelen getragen” (VV, 402). Just as the clash

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<sup>42</sup>With this notion of a more fundamental disequilibrium, I diverge from Kittstein’s contention that “auf die Frage nach den Ursachen für das Scheitern der Revolution, das heißt für das Ausbleiben eines heilsamen Neubeginns nach dem Weltkrieg, gibt der Roman keine eindeutige Antwort; stattdessen präsentiert er wieder divergierende Deutungen, von denen einige einzelnen Figuren in den Mund gelegt werden.” Kittstein is of course correct that the novel presents a polyphony of perspectives, but I argue that Döblin’s novel takes its own specific position, one that is the focus of this chapter’s remaining sections. See Kittstein, “Zwischen Revolution, Gewalt und göttlicher Gnade,” 315.

between demonstrators and soldiers had underlined the irreconcilability of flow and form, so too does the blood depart from the structure that had contained it, “von dem großen Körper, in dessen Haus es warm gewohnt hatte” (VV, 402). But whereas the wave of demonstrators was defeated by the remnants of Germany’s history entrenched in the city, fluidity’s own connection to time is here outlined:

Um [die Blutlachen] hauchte Morgengrauen und Abenddämmerung Sonnenauf- und -untergang. [. . . ] Das Blut [wußte] vom Gang der Gestirne, vom Blitzen des Mondlichts, von Viehweiden und Alpenwiesen, von Gebirgen, über deren Gletscher sich Wanderer schleppen, von blauen Seen, von Tanzkapellen. (VV, 402)

Suddenly, the apparent permanence of human-made structures is relativized, contrasted with a grand sweep of natural history in which the only constancy is that of movement, change, and transience. Central to the depicted relationships between fluidity and stasis is therefore a negotiation of human society’s relationship to the natural world. By considering that negotiation more closely, the enduring relevance of the depicted revolutionary moment for the exile period will become apparent.

Questions of nature, its movement and its significance for revolution were widespread in the interwar period. Significantly, one of the central writers on the topic, the Marxist theorist Karl Korsch, was the principal influence on Döblin’s political thinking in the 1930s. Döblin’s interest in nature was longstanding, and his nature philosophy found expression in his books on the topic, *Das Ich über der Natur* (1927) and *Unser Dasein* (1933). Following his visits to Korsch’s study circle, however, Döblin’s understanding of nature increasingly assumed louder political overtones, not least in his 1938 essay “Prometheus und das Primitive.” Korsch’s own engagement with nature was part of a longstanding theoretical contestation among socialists, one that received new impetus from Georg Lukács’ *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*. Lukács’ suggestion in that work that dialectics does not apply to nature triggered a prolonged and heated debate. As part of the response, a collection of Engels’ writings on nature was published for the first time in 1925 under the title *Dialektik der Natur*, in which Engels attempts “to prove that dialectics is essential

to natural sciences”<sup>43</sup> precisely because “die gesamte Natur, vom Kleinsten bis zum Größten, von den Sandkörnern bis zu den Sonnen, von den Protisten bis zum Menschen, in ewigem Entstehen und Vergehen, in unaufhörlichem Fluß, in rastloser Bewegung und Veränderung ihr Dasein hat.”<sup>44</sup> At stake in the discussion was, as Korsch emphasizes, the sundering of theory and praxis, of Bewußtsein and Sein, such that Marxism threatened not to promote revolutionary progress by responding to a dynamic reality but instead to become a fixed ideology disconnected from real-world developments.

For Korsch, Lenin and the USSR (“jen[e] eigentümlich zwischen revolutionärem Fortschritt und finsterer Reaktion oszillierenden ideologischen Diktatur”<sup>45</sup>) symbolized the danger of misreading nature’s dialectical motion. In his 1930 response to critics of his influential 1923 work *Marxismus and Philosophie*, Korsch takes aim at Lenin’s writings on nature. While Lenin, unlike Lukács, does argue that nature is beholden to dialectics, Korsch accuses him of implausibly suggesting it is possible to observe the movements from a safe distance:

Indem Lenin und die Seinen die Dialektik einseitig in das Objekt, die Natur und die Geschichte verlegen, und die Erkenntnis als eine bloße passive Widerspiegelung und Abbildung dieses objektiven Seins in dem subjektiven Bewußtsein bezeichnen, zerstören sie tatsächlich jedes dialektische Verhältnis zwischen dem Sein und dem Bewußtsein.<sup>46</sup>

While Lenin correctly contends that dialectics extend across both society and nature, Korsch suggests, the human (and, specifically, human consciousness) remains curiously external to the process, capable of studying societal and natural developments from a seemingly stable external position. Lenin, Korsch contends, thereby implies that there exists, alongside all dialectical

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<sup>43</sup>Kaan Kangal, *Friedrich Engels and the Dialectics of Nature* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 136. Kangal also provides a helpful overview of the debate provoked by Lukács.

<sup>44</sup>Friedrich Engels, “Die Dialektik der Natur,” in *Marx-Engels-Werke, Bd. 20* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1975), 320.

<sup>45</sup>Karl Korsch, “Der gegenwärtige Stand des Problems ‘Marxismus und Philosophie’. Zugleich eine Antikritik,” in *Krise des Marxismus: Schriften 1928–1935*, ed. Michael Buckmiller (Amsterdam: Stichting beheer IISG, 1996), 351.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 345.

developments, “einen grundsätzlich widerspruchslos fortschreitenden evolutionären Prozeß,” namely “einen unendlich Progreß der Annäherung an die absolute Wahrheit.”<sup>47</sup> Korsch hereby contends that Lenin’s understanding of nature ultimately reproduces the dualism between human and nature that obstructs Marxist revolutionary progress.

Korsch also pushes back, however, against the socialist-Darwinist reflections of Lenin’s German opponent of the late 1910s, the “renegade” Karl Kautsky.<sup>48</sup> In his *Die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung* (1929), Korsch explores Kautsky’s Darwinian divergence from Lenin (as well as Marx and Engels):

[Kautsky] erklärt gleich anfangs, daß er nicht, wie Marx und Engels, von Hegel, sondern von Darwin ausgegangen sei und infolgedessen von Anfang an den ‘von Marx und Engels weniger betrachteten Erscheinungen’, die sich aus der Einwirkung des ‘natürlichen Faktors in der Geschichte’ ergeben, ein größeres Interesse entgegengebracht hätte.<sup>49</sup>

Kautsky focuses on nature in this way in order to demonstrate that there is a “allgemeine Naturgesetz aller natürlichen und gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung.”<sup>50</sup> He thereby risks transforming the entirety of human history, including the “Bewegung und Entwicklung dieser gegenwärtigen bürgerlichen Gesellschaft und all[e] in ihr ausgefochten[e] Konflikt[e],” into the inevitable result of transhistorical natural laws, of “von außen wirkenden naturgesetzlichen

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<sup>47</sup>Korsch, “Der gegenwärtige Stand,” 346.

<sup>48</sup>Here I refer to Lenin’s famous work *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* (1918) in which Lenin, responding to Kautsky’s criticism of Bolshevism, accuses Kautsky of diverging from Marxism and “argu[ing] like a typical philistine petty bourgeois, or like an ignorant peasant.” Kautsky had been, as the erstwhile leader of Europe’s largest socialist party, one of the leading figures and theorists of the pre-war socialist movement. He left the SPD for the USPD during the 1917 split, but rejoined the party in 1920 following the USPD’s disintegration. He remained a relatively insignificant political figure throughout the Weimar years, and it is testament to the importance that Korsch attributed to the question of natural dialectics that he felt compelled to respond to Kautsky’s little-read texts.

<sup>49</sup>Karl Korsch, “Die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Karl Kautsky,” in *Krise des Marxismus: Schriften 1928–1935*, ed. Michael Buckmiller (Amsterdam: Stichting beheer IISG, 1996), 213.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 214.

Notwendigkeit.”<sup>51</sup> Kautsky sets out to demonstrate that dialectics inheres to nature and that the human belongs to this natural-dialectical world, but Korsch indicates that he instead sketches an unchanging “Naturgesetz” that entirely dominates and directs an accordingly immutable humankind. For Korsch, Kautsky ends up with a “naiv[e] Entwicklungsmetaphysik” that is nothing more than the “dogmatisch[er] Versuch [. . . ], diese eine ‘darwinistische’ Grundgleichung: Mensch = Tier [. . . ] auf allen Wissensgebieten zu wiederholen.”<sup>52</sup> Kautsky overcomes the dualism of human society and nature but at the expense of promoting a political quietism, an acceptance that our fate is not in our hands.

In his critiques of Lenin and Kautsky, Korsch refers back to his own understanding of dialectical movement that he outlined in his 1922 text *Der Standpunkt der materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung*. At first glance, that text anticipates the positions of Kautsky and Lenin. Like Kautsky, he accepts that “wir, und alles, was es gibt, zu einer Welt [gehören], die wir uns als ‘Natur’, d.h. als eine von unserem Denken, Wollen und Wirken gänzlich unabhängige, ‘unmenschliche’ Welt gegeben vorstellen können.”<sup>53</sup> At the same time, he foreshadows Lenin’s implication that the human occupies an external position by arguing that “wir als denkende, wollende, handelnde Menschen zugleich in einer Welt [stehen], auf die wir praktisch einwirken und deren praktische Einwirkungen wir erfahren, und die wir daher wesentlich als unser Produkt [. . . ] ansehen müssen.”<sup>54</sup> For Korsch, however, it is precisely the dialectical reciprocity of these two worlds that motivates real-world developments:

Diese beiden Welten [. . . ] sind aber nicht zwei getrennte Welten, sondern vielmehr ein und dieselbe: Ihre Einheit liegt darin begründet, daß sie beide eingebettet liegen in den passiv-aktiven Lebensprozeß der Menschen, die in ihrem arbeitsteiligen

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<sup>51</sup>Korsch, “Die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung,” 220.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 217, 298.

<sup>53</sup>Karl Korsch, *Der Standpunkt der materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung* (Hamburg: Association Verlag, 1973), 18.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 18.



Zusammenwirken und Denken ihre gesamte Wirklichkeit fortwährend reproduzieren und weiter entwickeln.<sup>55</sup>

Humankind is both product and producer of its environment, an animal that meets its needs and transforms both itself and its understanding of the world through a continuous remaking of its surroundings. The distinction between human society and natural movement thus begins to collapse: inasmuch as the human is natural, society is also natural, and natural developments are realized with and through humankind.

Given Korsch's influence on Döblin's politicization, it is perhaps unsurprising that of all the Marxist concepts Döblin explores in *Wissen und Verändern*, it is dialectics he defends most ardently. His understanding of dialectics follows that of Korsch, and he outlines a notion of dialectical development that encompasses humankind, human society, and the natural world:

Es gibt [. . .] innerhalb der Natur Geistigkeit als das Funktionieren dieser Natur, als ihr Leben, als das Prinzip ihrer Bewegung. [. . .] Die Geistigkeit dieser neuen Welt wird bezeichnet durch die Gesetze der Physik, Chemie, der Ökonomie, Historie, durch Gesetze noch nicht erkannter Tiefen, durch die Eigentümlichkeit der menschlichen Natur, der menschlichen Mentalität und durch den Verlauf in Gegensatz, Widerspruch und Verschmelzung, das ist Dialektik.<sup>56</sup>

Döblin also follows Korsch in arguing of the dangers that follow from the Lukácsian separation of natural and societal developments, something he describes in the section "Der dialektische Naturismus ist verdorben zum historischen Materialismus." The historical materialism that Döblin here criticizes is a worldview that views socioeconomic developments in isolation from the broader motions of (human) nature. The "Einengung und Beschränkung auf das Ökonomische" leads not to revolution, Döblin suggests, but to "eine Art ökonomischer Verblödung oder Geistesschwäche, mangelnde Werbekraft, mangelnde gesellschaftliche Gestaltungskraft, Verfall in schlechtbürgerliche Unkultur."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Korsch, *Der Standpunkt der materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung*, 18.

<sup>56</sup>Döblin, "Wissen und Verändern," 194–195.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 229.

Döblin's essay "Prometheus und das Primitive," published one year before the first volume of *November 1918*, reaffirms Döblin's commitment to Korschian dialectics, spelling out the relationship between the human and the natural world in greater detail. The human is, for Döblin, a natural creature: "[Der Mensch] erlebt sich mit einem Leib, einem Organismus, der ihn den Tieren annähert, der den Veränderungen aller Naturkörper unterliegt, der behaftet ist mit Geburt, Wachstum und Stoffwechsel und der vor sich die sichere Aussicht des Todes hat."<sup>58</sup> The human, however, occupies a "Zwitterstellung," for nature endows it with what Döblin labels a Promethean drive that propels humankind "immer mehr danach [zu] verlangen, nur von sich abzuhängen, von den selbständig gefertigten Produkten zu leben, die Erde nach ihren Bedürfnissen umzuschaffen."<sup>59</sup> If history were defined solely by the progression of human technologies, "so wäre sie gradlinig, durchsichtig und leicht zu schreiben," but "sie ist es nicht."<sup>60</sup> Instead, the human's Promethean drive toward finality, toward total control over its surroundings, is complicated by its rootedness in "der ganzen anderen viel-

dimensionalen Natur."<sup>61</sup> The natural "Gegenbewegungen, Mitbewegungen, Durchflechtungen" consequently called forth by human action ultimately further the flows and transformations inherent to nature, "die damit verbundene Veränderung, das ständige Aufrollen und Verwerfen, die Auflösung und Neubildung."<sup>62</sup>

The notion of the human as a natural being is evident in Döblin's *November 1918*. It was present in the previously described imagery of flowing blood, which links the human to nature and natural flows, and it is moreover foregrounded explicitly by the Oberleutnant Friedrich Becker, a recurring character who spends the novel physically and spiritually recovering from his

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<sup>58</sup>Döblin, "Prometheus und das Primitive," 347.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 351.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 351.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 351.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 351, 346.

wartime injuries.<sup>63</sup> Exiting the hospital following a check-up, Becker dwells on the human's corporeality, its "Wunden," "Fleisch," and "Knochen"—that's to say, its rootedness in the natural "Leib" Döblin describes in his Prometheus essay—and he describes the patients' treatment thus: "Das war ein Ameisenhaufen. Wimmelnde Tierchen betreuten ihre Puppen in den pergamentnen Hüllen, lagerten sie um und setzten sie der warmen Sonne aus" (VV, 360). This collapse in the distinction between the social and the natural occurs frequently in the novel, and the narrator mobilizes the language of nature to describe, for example, the "Naturgeschichte" of Wylinski and the other profiteers in the chapter "Von Wanzen und ihrer Lebensweise" or Becker's coming to terms with the post-war situation in the subchapter "Raupen- und Puppenstadium."

The depiction of humankind's Promethean drive, of humankind as the producer of its surroundings, is also apparent in *November 1918*. Mere moments after Becker leaves the hospital and enters the city streets, his thoughts turn away from "wimmelnde Tierchen" and toward the human as creator: "Das haben die Menschen alles gemeinsam gebaut. Dafür haben sie sich zusammen hingesetzt, einen Plan entworfen und ausprobiert, und nun funktioniert es, und sie wohnen in den Häusern und fahren in den Wagen auf Schienen" (VV, 361). Where previously Becker highlighted corporeality and behaviors consistent with the animal world, here he focuses on those Promethean faculties of forethought and invention. This human capacity to remake the natural world is in fact invoked from the very beginning of the second volume. The opening passages uncover in Berlin a natural and social history, the long-term transformation of natural flows, once more represented by water imagery, into human-made structures: "Die Stadt Berlin wucherte auf Sand, der in Urzeiten Meeresboden war. Wo früher Fische schwammen, lebten jetzt

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<sup>63</sup>As Jahraus's summary of scholarship on the novel makes clear, many critics consider Becker to be not merely a recurring character, but rather the novel's protagonist. This chapter doesn't dispute Becker's importance but suggests that his significance cannot be fully grasped if his role is not considered together with the elements of *November 1918* explored here. See Jahraus, "Historisches Epos," 165–166.

Menschen” (VV, 9).<sup>64</sup> Döblin’s novel, like his theoretical considerations, imagines the human as both product and producer of its environment.

As we have seen, however, the novel thematizes not a dialectical reciprocity between natural movement and humankind’s Promethean creations, but instead the antagonism between revolutionary flows and human-made structures. Accordingly, the novel indicates that a critical imbalance has emerged between nature and society, something apparent in the portrayal of the Spree, Berlin’s “armseliges Rinnsal” (VV, 9). Significantly, running water has long been an image of dialectical movement, something Korsch (following Hegel and Engels) knew well: “‘Alles fließt’, mit diesen beiden Worten drückte der erste große Dialektiker, Heraklit der Dunkle von Epheus, die tiefe Wahrheit aus, daß kein wirkliches Ding auf der Welt auch nur einen einzigen Augenblick lang das bleibt, was es eben noch gewesen ist.”<sup>65</sup> This message is lost to Döblin’s Berlin: the revolutionary currents momentarily surge through the streets only to evaporate moments later, and although the Spree continues to trickle through the city, it is hidden and its movement is harnessed and made functional: “Das Flößchen nahm schwarze und schillernde Farben an von den Abwässern, die man hineinleitete, die Häuser wandten ihm den Rücken zu, Schuppen und Kohlenlager bedeckten seine Ufer” (VV, 9). Heraclitus’ famous dictum, quoted by Korsch, “du steigst nicht zum zweiten Mal in denselben Fluß”<sup>66</sup> assumes a darkly ironic significance in the modern city, for the only character we see accessing the Spree is indeed doing so for the last time: “Das ist nun der vierte Mensch, der zu uns herunterkommt. Eine Frau. Sie legt sich gleich auf den Grund. Sie hat die Taschen mit Steinen gefüllt” (VV, 205). The Spree and

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<sup>64</sup>Readers may note that the reference to “wuchern” in this passage has connotations of unruly natural growth. On that basis, we could suggest that Döblin here shows how the Promethean drive is itself natural and connects humankind, through the human’s constructive activity, back to nature. Given the term’s negative connotations, however, not least its connection—via Wucherer—to Berlin’s previously described profiteers, it might more readily imply that the depicted urban environment is a misdirection or perversion of nature. As we will see, such a reading dovetails neatly with this chapter’s interpretation of the novel.

<sup>65</sup>Karl Korsch, “Dialektik des Alltags,” in *Krise des Marxismus: Schriften 1928–1935*, ed. Michael Buckmiller (Amsterdam: Stichting beheer IISG, 1996), 574.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 574.

its flow is thus not only powerless to affect the city, but inasmuch as the passage from city to river appears as terminal, the river also reaffirms the irreconcilability of the natural world and the depicted human society.<sup>67</sup>

Returning now to the blood of the demonstrators, we recognize that it speaks not only to a defeat for the revolution, but also to an underlying nullification of natural developments by the city. Even as the blood alludes—as previously described—to a grand sweep of natural history, it is but a fleeing glimpse that is quickly muddied and redirected by the urban infrastructure: “Da strudelte das Blut der getöteten Menschen den Rinnstein entlang, mit Bindfaden, Papierfetzen, Hundekot und Obstresten. Es stürzte in den Gully zu Jauche und Abwässern” (VV, 403). The blood with all its connotations of nature, transience and movement becomes part of those “Abwässer” that are pumped into the Spree and, from there, transported out of the city. The city with its immovable monuments and buildings, products of humankind’s Promethean powers of construction and images of stasis and conservation, reigns supreme. It is a situation that resonates with Döblin’s sociopolitical diagnosis in his Prometheus essay: “Wir leben in der Epoche der Vorherrschaft des prometheischen Triebes. Wir haben uns auf das technisch werkzeugliche Leben, Fühlen und Denken zurückgezogen und eingeengt.”<sup>68</sup> In *November 1918*, Döblin uses Berlin to explore the ramifications of this situation and to demonstrate that the one-sided dominance of human-made structures has severed humankind from (its own) nature, reducing the possibility of movement to the circulation of capital and trapping the populace in immovable feudal power hierarchies. As the above quote makes clear, moreover, this fundamental disequilibrium is one that, in Döblin’s view, persists into the 1930s. Accordingly, for Döblin, reckoning with this imbalance was key to the pressing political issues of the day.

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<sup>67</sup>It is accordingly significant that this same image (and problem) is invoked at the conclusion of the final volume—and at the moment of the revolution’s definitive defeat—when Rosa Luxemburg’s body is dumped into the Landwehrkanal and Friedrich Becker’s body is cast into the Hamburg harbour.

<sup>68</sup>Döblin, “Prometheus und das Primitive,” 351.

## The Crisis of Socialism

With his novels, Döblin sought to tackle the stalling of society's dialectical progression as a result of the disequilibrium between human-made forms and nature. Throughout his life, Döblin contended that literature ought not merely to attempt a reproduction of reality; instead, it must intervene into society, something he argued emphatically in his 1936 essay—which will be examined more closely later in this chapter—“Der historische Roman und wir”: “[Der Autor] wird [. . .] nicht getrieben von einem wahnhaften Objektivitätsdrang, sondern von der alleinigen Echtheit, die es für Individuen auf dieser Erde gibt: *von der Parteilichkeit des Tätigen.*”<sup>69</sup> However, for Döblin, such authorly partisanship does not mean merely rewriting political tracts as literature. Instead, as he makes clear in his 1929 essay “Kunst ist nicht frei, sondern wirksam: ars militans,” the claim “Kunst ist wirksam und hat Aufgaben” means not a rudimentary “Politisierung der Kunst,” but rather the unfolding of art's particular powers of intervention, of aesthetic *Wirksamkeit*; that is to say, it means “ars militans, Wiederherstellung, Renaissance der Kunst.”<sup>70</sup> Before we determine how Döblin sought to realize this literary power with *November 1918*, it is first worth dwelling on the reasons for his rejection of more orthodox political literature, which he attacks repeatedly both in *November 1918* and his essays from the late 1930s.

Throughout the 1930s, Döblin's understanding of art was connected to his conception of German history. At the heart of Döblin's description of Germany's sluggish sociopolitical development in *Wissen und Verändern* is the notion that, beginning with Luther, the German individual was divided, its spirit and intellect liberated while its material concerns remained subject to political domination. This divide was inherited by the emerging bourgeoisie who went about creating their own culture without calling into question the feudal status quo. As a result, there emerged an intellectual culture fundamentally distanced from reality, one that tends toward

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<sup>69</sup>Alfred Döblin, “Der historische Roman und wir,” in *Schriften zu Ästhetik, Poetik und Literatur* (Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1989), 311.

<sup>70</sup>Alfred Döblin, “Kunst ist nicht frei, sondern wirksam: ars militans,” in *Schriften zu Ästhetik, Poetik und Literatur* (Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1989), 251.

philosophical abstractions and shies away from everyday reality. This is an issue Döblin speaks to repeatedly in the the exile period, most extensively in his 1938 essay on “Die deutsche Literatur”: “[Die Entwicklung des Deutschen] stand furchtbar unter dem Zeichen der Verachtung und Verneinung des ‘Alltags’, der ‘privaten Dinge’. Man hatte sehr ‘hohe’ Dinge im Kopf, und das waren Abstrakte.”<sup>71</sup> While Döblin argued that literature had to overcome this heritage, he also made clear that writing “political” literature in the manner demanded by, for example, the BPRS was no solution: “Man hat jetzt keine Schärmer und Heilande, dafür politische Erlöser und Märtyrer, statt religiöser Spintisiererei Parteischwatz.”<sup>72</sup> For Döblin, such works uphold literature’s distance from everyday life.

Döblin’s skepticism of existing socialist movements and the efficacy of their approach to literature once more builds on Korsch’s critiques. Korsch had been highly active in the German communist movement throughout the 1920s, but his non-orthodox positions led to him being increasingly sidelined. Goode summarizes the development thus:

For the [...] five year after the appearance of *Marxism and Philosophy*, Korsch was intensively involved in party political activity. In bewildering succession he found himself a Communist Minister in a regional government (1923); in a leading position in the left turn made by the KPD (1924) after the defeat of the German revolution [i.e., the German October 1923]; attacked as an ‘ultra-left’ as the party turned rightwards (1925); finally, expelled from the KPD, and the leader of a small splinter group around the periodical *Kommunistische Politik*.<sup>73</sup>

While he remained committed to Marxism throughout the late 1920s and 1930s, he became increasingly critical of existing tendencies within the communist movement and worked on theorizing an alternative path forward. In his “Thesen zur Diskussion über ‘Krise des Marxismus,’” Korsch argues the dominant Marxist tendencies were interested only in reconstructing Marx’s arguments, in turning his writings into a fixed science: “[Die Theorie] ist

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<sup>71</sup>Alfred Döblin, “Die deutsche Literatur (im Ausland seit 1933),” in *Schriften zu Ästhetik, Poetik und Literatur* (Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1989), 334.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 336.

<sup>73</sup>Goode, *Karl Korsch*, 97.

[...] das zusammengefaßte Resultat der Klassenkämpfe einer früheren Epoche, ohne jede unmittelbare Beziehung zu den unter völlig veränderten Bedingungen eben neu beginnenden Klassenkämpfe.”<sup>74</sup> Leaning on his arguments from *Marxismus und Philosophie*, in which he sought to historicize Marxism itself, identifying how different historical moments had produced differing interpretations of Marxist theory, Korsch here suggests that this process had largely stalled. Just as, for Döblin, a dichotomy had emerged between an abstract intellectual culture and reality, so too, for Korsch, had a gap emerged between Marxism’s theory and praxis: the problem for the era’s communist movements is “die ideologische und doktrinäre Loslösung der ‘reinen Lehre’ von der wirklichen geschichtlichen Bewegung einschließlich der Weiterentwicklung der Theorie.”<sup>75</sup>

Döblin also invokes a “Krise des Sozialismus” in his text from the late 1930s, “Das Vakuum nach dem Sozialismus,” and, tellingly, he suggests the renewal of socialism must come through recalibrating the relationship between human society and nature. Following Korsch, Döblin indicates that the originally revolutionary impulse of Marx’s theory has been lost. While Döblin attributes various achievements to the working-class movements inspired by Marx and Engels, not least the “unzweifelhafte[n] Verbesserungen der Lebenslage der Arbeiter, Lohnerhöhungen, [...] Krankenversicherung, Altersversicherung, [...] den 10 Stunden- und Achtstundentag,” he argues that the movements’ focus on economic and material conditions ultimately limited their ambitions: “Die ‘Verwirklicher’ des Sozialismus wurden seine Totengräber. Man wurde praktisch, politisch, bürokratisch [...]. Man besaß zuletzt noch Rauch und Asche, die als Literatur und Sonntagspredigt feilgeboten wurde.”<sup>76</sup> Just like Korsch, Döblin describes the gradual reduction of a transformative and living movement into something static and

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<sup>74</sup>Karl Korsch, “Thesen zur Diskussion über ‘Krise des Marxismus,’” in *Krise des Marxismus: Schriften 1928–1935*, ed. Michael Buckmiller (Amsterdam: Stichting beheer IISG, 1996), 142.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 141.

<sup>76</sup>Alfred Döblin, “Das Vakuum nach dem Sozialismus,” in *Schriften zur Politik und Gesellschaft* (Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1972), 369.



disconnected from the daily concerns of the majority. It is this process that underlies Döblin's critique of existing political literature, the fundamental failure of which was its desire to realize political emancipation without overcoming the distance between cultural and material concerns.

*November 1918* explores the self-defeating consequences of the political and literary approach Döblin attacks in his essays. Of the political figures depicted in the second volume of Döblin's work, it is the outsider, Kurt Eisner, who offers a vision most consonant with Döblin's own political ideals. Eisner, who led the People's State of Bavaria until his assassination in February 1919, travels to Berlin to attend the Reichskonferenz that brings together representatives from all parts of Germany to discuss the future of the revolution. For Eisner, the revolution is about "das Schicksal der Menschheit": "Dies ist unsere Zeit. [...] Jetzt darf man nicht im Winkel sehen. Es ist die neue Menschheitsära" (VV, 157). Eisner is accordingly horrified by the "Konterrevolution" taking place in Berlin: "Ah, diese Regierung, diese Rechtssozialisten! [...] Sie haben alle Fäden in der Hand, die alten Taktiker, die gerissenen, sie spielen mit den Offizieren zusammen, sie können uns den Massenmördern ausliefern" (VV, 155). Notably, however, Eisner's most stinging criticism is reserved for Liebknecht. Speaking to his friend and fellow socialist Gustav Landauer, Eisner says the following: "Weißt du, was das schlimmste ist? Liebknecht. Er spielt ihnen in die Hand. Er zerreißt das Volk. Er versündigt sich an der Revolution" (VV, 157). According to Eisner, Liebknecht's approach ("Moskau und Radek, [...] Gewalt, Diktatur und Terrorismus") is irreconcilable with socialist ideals: "Und das soll die Befreiung der Menschheit sein" (VV, 156).

Eisner's critique of Liebknecht suggests that the latter's revolutionary strategy is fundamentally self-destructive. On the one hand, Eisner affirms the Korschian notion of a crisis in socialism by pointing to the way in which Marxism has been transformed into an apparently universally valid doctrine that can simply be imported from the USSR. It is a concern proved legitimate when Radek later responds to Liebknecht's suggestion that the situation in Germany differs from that of Russia: "Die Sätze Lenins bleiben zu jeder Zeit und an jedem Ort unumstößlich" (VV, 415). Notably, however, Eisner's criticisms go further, for they suggest

Liebknecht's reliance on Bolshevik violence, his attempt to further the chaotic post-war fluidity in order to fundamentally transform society threatens to turn the revolution on its head. Rather than delivering Eisner's dream of an emancipated humanity living together in harmony, a "Versöhnung der Völker," Liebknecht's strategy "zerreißt das Volk" (VV, 142, 157). This concern that the destructive means might foil the utopian ends is ultimately expressed by Liebknecht himself, who—increasingly wavering as the events unfold—articulates his reservations to Radek: "Sogar ihr führt noch heute Bürgerkrieg, und ihr könnt ihn euch leisten. Wohin kommen wir aber dabei. [...] Sozialismus will [...] nicht ruinieren, er will höhere Entwicklung" (VV, 415–416). A successful revolution, the novel hereby suggests, requires more than mere destruction.

The suggestion that a "Befreiung der Menschheit" requires not violent destruction but rather a "höhere Entwicklung" resonates with Döblin's concerns about the divide between cultural and material need. It gestures back to Döblin's conviction that movements that focus on material needs without remedying the distance between intellectual culture and everyday life curtail socialism's utopian ambitions: "Man hatte die Leute zehnmal dümmer gemacht, als sie hätten sein brauchen. Man hatte sie in der menschlichen Entwicklung zurückgehalten."<sup>77</sup> In contrast, Döblin's hope for a "allgemeine humanistische Bewegung" that expressly goes beyond humankind's animal needs: "Es handelt sich nicht allein darum, ein tierisches Wesen zu sättigen [...], sondern ihm seinen Platz in der Welt verschaffen und diese Platz benennen."<sup>78</sup> Liebknecht—like Eisner—begins to fear that this goal has been forgotten, and that the violent approach to revolution, rather than bolstering a holistic human development, actually diminishes the revolutionaries, reducing them all to an unthinking mass: "Das Volk, die Massen, wirklich, dieser heiße Zorn der Massen erlaubt keine persönliche Meinung. Ich kann nicht irgendeinen Gedanken, einen Hinweis von mir dazu formulieren. [...] Sie nehmen einem das Ich weg. Mein Ich ist wie ausgelöscht" (VV, 411). Here we see an obliteration of the individual that constitutes not a reconciliation of culture and politics but rather the end result of their divergence. The

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<sup>77</sup>Döblin, "Das Vakuum nach dem Sozialismus," 369.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 369.

revolutionaries are condemned to mindless, animalistic destruction: “Ich kann nur sagen: Vorwärts und vorwärts und immer wieder vorwärts” (VV, 411).

Implicit in all this is the indication that, while nature and its flows are necessary for social change, they alone cannot bring about a new society. In his Prometheus essay, Döblin intimates that the Promethean drive furthers the natural process of individuation: “Es gehört zu den eigentümlichsten Bewegungen der Natur, von denen sie nicht läßt: Gebilde zu erzeugen, die sich von ihr absondern und sich ihr gegenüber stellen.”<sup>79</sup> The Promethean individual seeks to disconnect humankind entirely from its natural past, “das fragende und leidende Urgefühl des Individuums zu zerreißen, niederzutreten und umzubiegen.”<sup>80</sup> What Liebknecht describes, however, speaks to a counteracting “primitive” dynamic that Döblin also outlines in his essay: the human desire to return to nature, “ein Antrieb aus der Isolierung, die eine Fragmentierung ist, heraus, zur Vervollständigung.”<sup>81</sup> The human, once indivisible from nature feels a draw to return to it, a pull toward deindividuation. By invoking this “Antrieb” through his description of the deindividuated and animalistic masses, Liebknecht suggests, however, that the drive is no more a positively connotated “Vervollständigung” than it is a “höhere Entwicklung” of the human. Instead, it represents a reduction of the human to its animal functions, its complete disconnect from the individual’s Promethean qualities of creativity and innovation. What a truly socialist revolution must achieve, Döblin’s work thereby intimates, is a reconciliation of the cultural with the animalistic, Promethean invention with the natural world’s movement and dynamism.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Döblin, “Prometheus und das Primitive,” 347.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 349.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 348.

<sup>82</sup>On this point, I push back against Köpke’s reading of the novel, which also uses the Prometheus essay but which contends Döblin ultimately rejects the Promethean entirely and turns solely to the “primitive.” As outlined in this section, both the novel and Döblin’s essays from the period celebrate qualities associated with the Promethean drive even as they warn against its hegemonic dominance. See Wulf Köpke, “Die Überwindung der Revolution: November 1918,” in *Internationales Alfred-Döblin-Kolloquium Bergamo 1999*, ed. Torsten Hahn (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), 243–259, 253.

It is in this context that we catch a glimpse of the potential of culture and intellectuals. During a brief visit to the Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Döblin's narrator in *November 1918* states the following: "Ob Krieg oder Frieden, Sieg oder Niederlage, der menschliche Geist ruht nicht. In Finsternis sind wir eingestellt, aber wie ein Glühwürmchen in der Nacht erhebt sich unser Geist und blickt um sich" (VV, 100). Here we see a gesture to the higher functions of the human, its inborn Promethean desire for knowledge and learning, something neglected by the depicted socialist movement. Indeed, this aspect of human nature is also devalued by those who have made it into their career. Max Planck defends the scientific endeavors of the academy thus: "Was wir können, ist das eine: die deutsche Wissenschaft und ihre Stellung in der Welt, ihren Glanz und Ruhm verteidigen [. . .]. Dazu ist die Akademie in erster Reihe berufen" (VV, 101). Planck presents a vision of the sciences not as a common good intended to further the welfare of humankind by winning new insights into the wider world. Instead, science becomes a tool of stasis, something that consolidates the existing power of Germany and something that is, moreover, cut off from the common people, which is made emphatically clear by the conclusion of the section in which, while revolution rages outside, the scholars within read "eine Untersuchung über die Finanzverwaltung Ägyptens in hellenistisch-römischer Zeit" (VV, 101).

Even where intellectuals attempt to support the revolution, Döblin underlines their inability to reconcile humankind's basic needs with the pursuit of knowledge. The *Rat der geistigen Arbeiter* comprises intellectuals and writers who meet to determine their approach to the revolution. They exchange abstract (and largely vacuous) opinions on "Diktatur" and the "Volk" ("Wir gehen mit dem Volk, aber wir machen uns nicht mit ihm gemein") before settling on the empty phrase "Radikalismus des Geistes," which they all agree sounds "ausgezeichnet" (VV, 240). The entire scene, which concludes with the figure who first proposes "radicalism of the spirit" leaving for an appointment to receive "Einspritzungen gegen Impotenz," satirizes an intellectual caste that imagines itself a revolutionary leader but that is, in fact, entirely disconnected from real-world concerns (VV, 241). Significantly, the intellectualism of the

depicted writers begins where their (extensive) animal needs briefly end: “Das tierisch pflanzliche gemeinsame Wühlen im Trog liegt hinter ihnen, sie haben sich davon für eine kleine Weile separiert, sind Individualitäten geworden” (VV, 239). While the narrator thereby suggests that these intellectuals do transcend immediate needs, undergoing here a Promethean individuation, they merely shift from one extreme to the other. These well-to-do intellectuals consume endlessly (“Sie haben gegessen und ausführlich ihres Lebens Notdurft befriedigt. Und sie sind noch immer nicht gesättigt” (VV, 238)) before indulging in idle musings entirely disconnected from reality. They offer no balance between the human’s different faculties nor between their intellectualism and the wider populace. Instead, their idle chatter begins where everyday concerns end; it is a privilege afforded to them by their comfortable social standing.

In this depiction of the *Rat geistiger Arbeiter*, we can recognize the political writers Döblin criticized in his essays. We see how out-of-touch intellectuals replace “religiöser Spintisiererei” with “Parteischwatz” and empty philosophical phrases, substituting one set of vacuous abstractions for another. The fundamental divide between culture and reality persists. It is a depiction that makes clear the task Döblin sets for himself and other writers: on the one hand, it is necessary to elevate humankind beyond their basic needs, to reconnect them to their Promethean capacities of creation and transformation. This is an idea Döblin explicitly invokes in his essay on “Die deutsche Literatur,” which also mobilizes the image of Prometheus: “Zweierlei ist [. . .] die Funktion des Künstlers: das Urfeuer in sich zu bewahren, und es weiter zu geben.”<sup>83</sup> On the other hand, the author must navigate the Scylla and Charybdis of this human capacity for creativity, ensuring that human constructs neither become “erstarrt und erkaltet,” entrapping humankind in the unchanging historic structures portrayed in *November 1918*, nor morph into complete abstractions with no meaningful connection to reality. “Was ich denunzierte,” Döblin states, “war allein die Verachtung der Realität und der menschlichen Gesellschaft, und das Hängen an blutlosen Phantomen, an Abstraktionen, die sich für Mystik ausgeben, und Zeichen der

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<sup>83</sup>Döblin, “Prometheus und das Primitive,” 350–351.

Aushöhlung, der Ernüchterung, Austrocknung, ja Entartung sind.”<sup>84</sup> For Döblin, then, literature must model the possibility of a “höhere Entwicklung” by reconciling culture with reality, Promethean creativity with natural flows.

### **The Novel Between Form and Flow**

Döblin’s *November 1918* aspires—this concluding section argues—to fulfil the lofty challenges its author sets for literature. It does so by building on the tradition of the roman-fleuve, a genre of historical novel popular in interwar France and described by Nicholas Hewitt as “an extended series of novels [. . .], each of which may be free-standing and read separately, but which form part of a coherent and continuous narrative.”<sup>85</sup> The term roman-fleuve was coined by the French novelist Romain Rolland in the preface to the seventh volume of his novel cycle *Jean-Christophe* (1904–1912) and, although the reference to river (“fleuve”) makes apparent a point of connection with the foregoing considerations, the genre nevertheless represents a surprising choice for Döblin. Indeed, the first volume of *November 1918* includes French characters discussing and criticizing the misguided celebration of the German national character in Rolland’s novel: “Romain Rolland. Jean Christophe, Kraft und die Überlegenheit der deutschen Rasse. [. . .] Er sang den Ruhm Deutschlands. [. . .] Rolland ist durch den Krieg widerlegt. Sein ganzes Werk hat Bankrott gemacht.”<sup>86</sup> Although the roman-fleuve was, as Hewitt indicates, “a genre that belongs essentially to the interwar years and the immediate post-World War II years,” there is a sense in which—as Döblin’s character here suggests—it had been made outdated by the war. It represented a continuation of the Bildungsroman tradition and 19th-century realism more generally, and its politics were accordingly conservative: the

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<sup>84</sup>Döblin, “Die deutsche Literatur,” 332, 340.

<sup>85</sup>Nicholas Hewitt, “Roman-Fleuve,” in *Encyclopedia of the Novel*, ed. Paul Schellinger (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998), 1110.

<sup>86</sup>Alfred Döblin, *Bürger und Soldaten* (München: DTV, 1978), 345.

roman-fleuve “is essentially hostile to change, whether coming from inside a society in the form of revolutionary action or from outside in the form of war.”<sup>87</sup>

Döblin’s use of the roman-fleuve can be understood only in the context of exile-era discussions on the historical novel.<sup>88</sup> The Expressionism Debate of 1937-38 provides the immediate backdrop for Döblin’s novel. Through the debate, which took place in a series of articles written in the Moscow-based exile journal *Das Wort*, authors and theorists sought to determine the Volkfront’s attitude toward expressionism and Germany’s literary heritage more generally. In truth, however, attempts within the exile community to establish how best to oppose fascism through literature began much earlier in the 1930s. Significant for this chapter was the growing interest in the historical novel. Historical novels had become a popular genre for exile writers and significant exile works included Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus* (1947) and the *Joseph* novels (1933–1943), Heinrich Mann’s *Henri Quatre* (1935–1938) and Hermann Broch’s *Tod des Vergil* (1945). At the *Kongress zur Verteidigung der Kultur*, held in Paris in summer 1935, Lion Feuchtwanger presented his famous defense of the historical novel, “Vom Sinn des historischen Romans”: “Die Erinnerung an frühere Siege und Niederlagen, die Legende, der historische Roman scheinen mir eine Waffe, die wir, in unserem Stadium dieses ewigen Kampfes, gut brauchen können.”<sup>89</sup> Within a year, Döblin gave his own speech on the subject, “Der historische Roman und wir,” at a meeting of the *Schutzverband Deutscher Schriftsteller* (SDS), and as if to underline the significance of these engagements with the historical novel, the text of Döblin’s speech was published in a 1936 edition of *Das Wort* devoted entirely to the historical

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<sup>87</sup>Hewitt, “Roman-Fleuve,” 1110–1111.

<sup>88</sup>Whether Döblin’s *Erzählwerk* should be considered a historical novel is much discussed in scholarship. Bance and Hofmann outline two possible readings: “One view sees the novel meeting the challenge of a desperate historical situation; the other sees the historical novel—and the promises of history—being abandoned in the face of the same challenge.” In contrast, this chapter asks not whether November 1918 should or could be considered a historical novel, but rather how and why Döblin chooses to invoke and challenge the genre’s conventions. See Bance and Hofmann, “Transcendence and the Historical Novel,” 296.

<sup>89</sup>Lion Feuchtwanger, “Vom Sinn des historischen Romans,” in *Exil. Literarische und politische Texte aus dem deutschen Exil 1933–1945*, ed. Ernst Loewy (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1979), 877.

novel. The question of the historical novel's suitability as an antifascist weapon had thus established itself as a central concern of the exile community in the years leading up to Döblin's work on *November 1918*.

It was inevitably Georg Lukács, ubiquitous in the literary discussions of the 1930s, who made the most substantial contribution to the historical novel debates with the publication of his literary-philosophical work *Der historische Roman* in 1937. For Lukács, the historical novel “[kann und sicherlich wird] in einem solchen antifaschistischen Kampf eine ungeheure Rolle spielen,” because it seeks to correct the “Fehler aller linken Parteien und Strömungen,” and in particular “die Enge ihrer Auffassung der deutschen Geschichte, der Verbundenheit der heutigen Lebensprobleme des deutschen Volkes mit seinem historischen Entwicklungsgang.”<sup>90</sup>

Accordingly, the goal of the exilic historical novel is

jene gesellschaftlich-geschichtlichen und menschlich-moralischen Kräfte aufzuzeigen, deren Zusammenspiel die Katastrophe Deutschlands vom Jahre 1933 möglich gemacht hat. Denn erst das wirkliche Verständnis dieser Kräfte [...] kann zeigen [...], welche konkrete Entwicklungsrichtungen sie nehmen können, um zum revolutionären Sturz des Faschismus zu führen.<sup>91</sup>

Lukács uses Döblin's 1936 essay to build his argument, agreeing with the novelist that an effective historical novel must engage truthfully with the past: “[Döblin] wendet sich mit Recht gegen die vielen Verfälschungen der Geschichte durch die Schriftsteller, er plädiert mit Recht für eine echte und wahrheitsgemäß Auffassung der Geschichte.”<sup>92</sup> According to Lukács, however, Döblin's commitment to history leads him to the “weitverbreitete naturalistische Vorurteil, die Photographie (und die Zeitung!) für wirklichkeitstreuer als die tief bildnerische Gestaltung der Wirklichkeit [zu halten].”<sup>93</sup> In contrast, for Lukács, it is precisely the literary reworking of reality

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<sup>90</sup>Georg Lukács, *Der historische Roman* (Neuwied: Hermann Luchterhand, 1965), 338, 329.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, 420.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, 334.



that breaks with the reified “‘Tatsachen’ des unmittelbar gegebenen Lebens” and uncovers “die großen objektiven Gesetzmäßigkeiten, die wirklich entscheidenden historischen Entwicklungstendenzen.”<sup>94</sup>

Lukács’s characterization of Döblin’s essay is remarkably misleading, and their positions are in fact far more alike than Lukács suggests. Certainly, Döblin emphasizes that any good novel must engage with history (“Der einfache erfundene Roman [...] hat [...] einen Fonds Realität nötig”<sup>95</sup>) and that “wenn die Handlungen unglaublich, (verglichen mit der Realität) unwahrscheinlich sind, so lehnen wir diesen Roman ab.”<sup>96</sup> However, this does not lead Döblin to proclaim historians and their sources better able to capture reality than authors. Indeed, far from succumbing to any “naturalist prejudice,” Döblin states outright that the historian’s claim to objectivity is fundamentally fallacious: “Ehrlich ist nur Chronologie. Bei der Aufreihung der Daten fängt schon das Manöver an. Und klar herausgesagt: Mit Geschichte will man etwas.”<sup>97</sup> Indeed, for Döblin, the key difference between historian and author lies not in their proximity to truth, but rather in their degree of self-delusion:

Der Künstler arbeitet entschlossen und bewußt, springt mit seinem kleinen Material wie ein Herr und Meister um, der Historiker wühlt im Material, durchsucht es, er ist gehandikapt und hat ein schlechtes Gewissen. Denn er folgt einem wahnhaften Wahrheitsideal, einem wahnhaften Objektivitätsideal, dem jedes seiner Einteilungen und Grundkonzeptionen widerspricht.<sup>98</sup>

Not only does Döblin hereby argue strongly against the prejudice of which Lukács accuses him, but he also arrives at a Lukácsian defense of literature: “[Die Schriftsteller und Dichter] haben aus Gründen ihrer Wissenschaft mehr Zugang zur Realität und zu mehr Realität Zugang als sehr viele

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<sup>94</sup>Lukács, *Der historische Roman*, 336.

<sup>95</sup>Döblin, “Der historische Roman,” 293.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*, 302.

andere, denen ihr bißchen Politisieren, Geschäftemachen und Handeln als die einzige Realität vorkommt.”<sup>99</sup> Contrary to Lukács’s characterization of Döblin, the two figures share a strikingly similar conception of literature’s relationship to reality.

Significantly, for both Lukács and Döblin, the literary access to truth rests on the relationship between the novelist and the wider populace. Lukács anticipates Döblin’s critique in *November 1918* of intellectuals who imagine themselves radical while remaining hopelessly disconnected from any movements:

Aus den Lebensbedingungen der hervorragenden Intellektuellen der imperialistischen Periode erwächst naturgemäß der Glaube, daß die in der Gesellschaft vereinsamte, zur Gesellschaft in Opposition stehende Intelligenz die wirkliche, die eigentliche Trägerin der Ideale des Humanismus sei. Aber so naturgemäß diese Überzeugung aus dem Boden dieser gesellschaftlichen Lage herauswächst, so sehr ist sie mit den liberalen Tradition der Entfremdung vom Volk belastet, durch sie verbogen und verzerrt.<sup>100</sup>

For both Lukács and Döblin, authors gain insight into deeper truths precisely by expressing their connection to the everyday life of society through their art. Thus, for Lukács, “a writer’s connection to the life of the people” does not discount their work as subjective or biased; instead, it is an essential prerequisite for accessing “those really decisive tendencies”: “Der Schriftsteller, der mit den wirksamen Tendenzen des Volkslebens innig vertraut ist, sie gewissermaßen am eigenen Leibe miterlebt, fühlt sich selbst nur als durchführendes Organ dieser Tendenzen; seine Wiedergabe der Wirklichkeit erscheint in seinen Augen nur als eine Reproduktion dieser Tendenzen selbst.”<sup>101</sup> Döblin, this time writing in his 1938 essay on “Die deutsche Literatur,” is in agreement: “In die tiefste Einsamkeit nimmt jeder Künstler, jeder Schriftsteller die

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<sup>99</sup>Döblin, “Der historische Roman,” 308.

<sup>100</sup>Lukács, *Der historische Roman*, 388.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, 335.

Gesellschaft, in der er lebt, mit. Sie ist es, die mit ihm zusammen dichtet und formt, in der Sprache, in den Urteilen, Bildern und Begriffen, die er mitgenommen hat.”<sup>102</sup>

In order to understand Döblin’s ambition to express a connection with society through his work, his subversion of the roman-fleuve must be considered more closely. The roman-fleuve typically upholds “the illusion that it is exploring ‘real’ people in a ‘real’ world”: it refuses “to endanger the illusion of reality, to draw attention to its own fictional identity, and to adopt explicitly a frame of reference that is aesthetic rather than thematic.”<sup>103</sup> The traditional roman-fleuve, that is to say, succumbs to that “widespread naturalist prejudice” that presumes to simply reproduce reality “as it really is.” In contrast, from his early essays onwards, Döblin explicitly characterizes the art of narration as one not of imitation, but of construction (“man erzählt nicht, sondern baut.”<sup>104</sup>), an idea he reaffirmed in his famous 1928 essay “Der Bau des epischen Werks”: “Hier konkurriert einer mit dieser steinernen festen und soliden Realität und zaubert darauf los und bläst Seifenblasen aus demselben Stoff, aus dem der Weltschöpfer die ganze schwere Erde, den Himmel und alle Tiere und ihre Schicksale gemacht hat.”<sup>105</sup> This notion of novel-writing as a process of construction is apparent in the narrator’s various self-reflections in *November 1918* (e.g., “Wir wechseln das Szenarium” (VV, 39)) as well as in the use of Brechtian alienation strategies. For example, the text draws attention to its own organization by beginning each chapter with a summary of the events to be narrated. Döblin’s novel does not, therefore, present an illusion of objectivity; instead, it deliberately highlights its own artificiality.

This break with pseudo-objectivity allows Döblin’s novel to unearth deeper social truths and establish its connection to the wider population by literarily performing humankind’s Promethean

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<sup>102</sup>Döblin, “Die deutsche Literatur,” 331.

<sup>103</sup>Hewitt, “Roman-Fleuve,” 1112.

<sup>104</sup>Alfred Döblin, “An Romanautoren und ihre Kritiker,” in *Schriften zu Ästhetik, Poetik und Literatur* (Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1989), 122.

<sup>105</sup>Alfred Döblin, “Der Bau des epischen Werks,” in *Schriften zu Ästhetik, Poetik und Literatur* (Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1989), 222.

capacities. The narrator's frequent interventions into the story foreground the power of (artistic) creativity: "Wir sind wieder in Berlin. Die Phantasie macht von ihrem Recht Gebrauch, ohne Schienen und Flugzeug den Ort zu wechseln" (VV, 54). The narrator hereby not only emphasizes that Döblin's text is a fictional construct, a work of fantasy, but also underlines the advantages of this approach. Where we previously saw the movements of the novel's characters being constrained and directed by the feudal arrangements of space, fantasy allows the narrator to move freely, a contrast to which the narrator also draws our attention: "Wer dies liest, wird sich gern von ihr da- und dorthin tragen lassen, leicht, federnd" (VV, 54). There is thus a radical gesture in Döblin's self-stylization as a literary builder: despite the spatial limitations imposed by the real-world spaces, the narrator realizes Promethean potentialities through writing. The narrative transcends the boundaries entrenched in the built environment, fashioning new spatial arrangements within the novel and thereby creating an alternative perspective from which the sociopolitical critique outlined in this chapter becomes possible. What's more, the above quote ties the narrator's self-awareness to an awareness of the novel's audience ("Wer dies liest. . ."), suggesting that it is precisely this shared desire for movement and creative construction that connects the text to the "Volksleben."

For all these invocations of construction and literary architecture, Döblin's use of the roman-fleuve, the "novel-river," nevertheless suggests a link between the text and those natural flows previously explored. As Ashok Collins suggests, Rolland's invocation of the river was certainly not accidental: "The motif of the river [. . .] encapsulates Jean-Christophe's personal journey both in a geographical sense [. . .] and in a spiritual sense, as he undertakes a journey of transformation and renewal."<sup>106</sup> We here recognize associations of the river with natural movement and change that resonate with Döblin's invocation of the revolution's watery surges and the Spree in *November 1918*. More specifically, Collins argues that Rolland's reference to the river in roman-fleuve points to "a vision of subjectivity which exceeds the limits and boundaries

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<sup>106</sup>Ashok Collins, "The Roman-Fleuve," in *The Cambridge History of the Novel in French*, ed. Adam Watt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 441.

of the artistic expression in which it is codified.”<sup>107</sup> That is to say, the roman-fleuve as a depiction of development is not interchangeable with the traditional Bildungsroman because the transformations it depicts create a very particular tension with the literary form itself. The multiple volumes and excessive length of the roman-fleuve speaks to an ongoing negotiation between authors and their material: “The river provides a discernible pathway forward [. . .], and yet [. . .] it evades attempts to fully conceptualise it as it flows beyond the line of sight over the horizon in much the same way as the psychological and spiritual dimensions of the human person resist discursive attempts to plumb them.”<sup>108</sup> The roman-fleuve is motivated by an attempt to find a literary form flexible enough to capture the complexity of natural development.

This negotiation between form and content appears in *November 1918* as a tension between the narrator’s constructive capacities and the demands of the material. Despite possessing power to traverse the landscapes, organize materials and construct the narration, the narrator remains fundamentally bound to the real-world events: “Der Schreiber dieser Zeilen ist betrübt, seine Leser trotz aller phantastischen Möglichkeiten dauernd zur Verfolgung der Ereignisse und der Schicksale der Personen durch trübes Wetter, Regen jagen zu müssen [. . .]. Es ist nicht seine Schuld. [. . .] Es ist Berlin und bleibt November” (VV, 132).<sup>109</sup> At first glance, this merely references the other side of the creative process, namely that “Fonds Realität” necessary to write a good novel. On closer inspection, it becomes clear that this link to reality does far more for Döblin than merely provide material for the writing process. In another self-reflective moment, the narrator characterizes that reality, the historical events depicted, as a flow of water: “Überblicken wir an diesem Punkt die Ereignisse, die verflossen sind und uns unabwendbar überströmen [. . .]” (VV, 242). The passage of time and the course of the history Döblin narrates is here connected to the natural flows with their connection to development and change. The

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<sup>107</sup>Collins, “The Roman-Fleuve,” 441.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 446.

<sup>109</sup>Cutieru also remarks on this tension between the narrator’s freedom and restrictions. See Cutieru, “Die Geschichte als Verfall,” 111–112.

implication of this narrative meta-reflection is that using one's powers of artistic creation to falsify the past would be to reproduce the divide between Promethean forms and natural flows.

It is in this repurposing of the novel-river that Döblin's divergence from Lukács's philosophy of the historical novel becomes clear. Lukács had not been satisfied with his attack on Döblin's essay on the historical novel; instead, *Der historische Roman* takes another swipe at the author during a passage on *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. According to Lukács, a novel must tell a particular story that brings "die Lebensprobleme der Epoche unmittelbar und zugleich typisch zum Ausdruck."<sup>110</sup> Döblin's 1929 novel fails to do this, in Lukács's eyes, for what does Franz Biberkopf—whom Döblin "aus dem Arbeiterleben herausreißt, aus ihm einen Zuhälter, einen Verbrecher macht und ihn dann [. . .] zu einem mystischen Schicksalsglauben führt"—have to do with "der deutschen Arbeiterklasse der Nachkriegszeit"?<sup>111</sup> But what Lukács here presents as a prioritization of typicality over eccentricity is actually, Döblin implies in *November 1918*, Lukács's prioritization of form over content, an attempt to force an unpredictable and variform reality to conform to a preconceived understanding of the world. Accordingly, we read Döblin's narrator complain of "eine Sorte von Erzählern und Geschichtsschreibern" and, tellingly, "ernste[n] Philosophen" for whom the world can be reduced to "Logik" alone: "Für sie folgt in der Welt eins aus dem anderen, und sie betrachten es als ihre Aufgabe, dies zu zeigen und die Dinge entsprechend auseinander zu entwickeln" (VV, 385). Döblin's narrator rejects this approach, however, precisely because nature's movements are not so easily reduced to a determinate formula: "Wir halten die Natur für viel leichtfertiger als die genannten Geschichts- und Geschichtschreiber" (VV, 385).

This break between Döblin and Lukács has significant aesthetic and political ramifications. For Lukács, the author articulates a connection to the wider populace by revealing the underlying dynamics of life under capitalism through an appropriate literary form. There is accordingly a sense of teleology to Lukács's aesthetics that mirrors his political vision. That is to say, Lukács

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<sup>110</sup>Lukács, *Der historische Roman*, 347.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, 347.

imagines a gradual progress toward both an ideal literary and societal form. In *Der historische Roman*, these two tendencies often overlap:

Die revolutionäre Befreiung des Volkes vom Joch des Kapitalismus [...] räumt [...] gerade alle Hindernisse, die vor der Entfaltung der menschlichen Energien in den Volksmassen stehen, hinweg [...]. Diese Perspektive der wirklichen und dauernden Befreiung des Volkes ändert die Zukunftsperspektive der historischen Romane. [...] In dieser Hinsicht wird der neue, aus dem volkstümlichen und demokratischen Geist unserer Zeit entstehende historische Roman geradezu im Gegensatz zum klassischen stehen.<sup>112</sup>

Lukács' language here is telling, for while he speaks in a language not dissimilar to that of Döblin, one of overcoming "obstacles" and initiating the "unfolding of human energies," the overthrow of capitalism represents for him a decisive break in history, the removal of "all" obstacles and the onset of an "enduring" and seemingly final state of liberation. Here then is the telos Lukács imagines, and it is this end goal that informs his ideal for the historical novel, which is born from this "popular and democratic" spirit.

In stark contrast to Lukács, Döblin defines history not as teleology but rather as limitless dialectical progression. Accordingly, *November 1918* indicates that the historical novel's strength lies in its mutability, its continuous negotiation of literary form and reality. At one point, the narrator fears the events of the novel have become predictable ("Ein schlimmer Fall, wenn die Interesselosigkeit an einem Buch schon bei dem Autor anfängt" (VV, 244)). In an apparent attempt to enliven the story, the narrator performs the aforementioned negotiation, adopting different literary registers to describe the revolution as a lost "Blumenmädchen" in a possible reference to Wedekind's *Lulu* before attempting to render Ebert's conflict with the generals as that of Odysseus and Polyphemus. Ultimately, however, the narrator determines that this play with form isn't helping: "Ehrlich gesagt, was geht es uns an? Soll von uns aus Ebert die Generale oder die Generale den Ebert fressen" (VV, 243-244). Instead, the narrator suggests, what makes the historical novel worthwhile is the way in which the literary explication of history reintroduces movement and possibility into a seemingly fixed past. Accordingly, Goethe's *Novelle* and its

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<sup>112</sup>Lukács, *Der historische Roman*, 425.

famous “unerhörte Begebenheit” provide the impulse for the novel’s continuation: “Es könnte sich zum Beispiel ereignen, daß zwei Männer sich schlagen, dabei fällt die Petroleumlampe um, das Haus brennt ab, aber auch das Nachbarhaus, welches grade eine Menagerie ist, und ein Löwe, der drin sitzt, wird frei und läuft in die Stadt” (VV, 244). Tellingly, both in Goethe’s text and in Döblin’s reference, the clash between nature and society—fires and lions versus houses and cities—realizes a creative destruction, making space for change and development, for the “Unerhörte” to emerge.

Through the clash between literary form and history staged in *November 1918*, Döblin’s novel applies this notion of creative destruction to his work. It thereby articulates its connection to the wider populace by placing itself in humankind’s Zwitterstellung between Promethean creativity and natural flows. As we have seen, in the Berlin portrayed in the novel, the dialectical relationship between society and (human) nature has come undone. The societal conception of human history is instead embodied by those previously described monuments and buildings that give to history a singular and fixed meaning and thereby eliminate the possibility for progress and change. Like Döblin, Lukács imagines the historical novel as a weapon against this monumentalization, and he wishes to see such novels mobilized to expose those capitalist dynamics that are excluded from the built environment and that made possible the rise of fascism. For Döblin, however, Lukács’s own teleological approach risks fixing the meaning of history anew, opposing the present-day monumentalization of history only to ascribe it a different pre-determined meaning and destination—and thereby to obstruct its flow—once again. Döblin, in contrast, wishes to see humankind’s creative capacities unfold indefinitely through a continuous interaction with the natural flows and transformations that constitute reality. By modeling precisely such an interaction, *November 1918*’s unique form itself stands as testament to the creative process and formal experimentation that thereby become possible.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>Given this chapter’s interest in questions of (Promethean) construction, it is not unsympathetic to Schonfield’s suggestion that “in its forbidding scale, [*November 1918*] almost resembles an enormous shrine, cathedral, or monument.” Whatever monument the work may resemble, however, it is fundamentally unlike any of the monuments the novel depicts. It is, in this sense, a monument constructed in opposition to traditional monumentalization, a literary anti-monument. See Schonfield, “Topography of a Revolution,” 295.



For Döblin, socialist ideals should not be consigned to some distant destination, but rather realized in and through a process of (self-)transformation. Indeed, he expressed overtly in *Wissen und Verändern* his opposition to problematic incongruities between ends and means within existing socialist organizations: “Wir haben als Ziel den auch im Natürlichen, im Ökonomischen, Politischen und Geistigen freien Menschen, dessen Verwirklichung wir nicht in die graue Zukunft schieben können. Und ferner dessen Verwirklichung wir nicht auf dem Umweg über eine neue Gewaltherrschaft anstreben.”<sup>114</sup> What is instead required, he insisted with growing vigor during the 1930s, is the reconceptualization of socialism: “Der Sozialismus muß ganz von vorne anfangen. [. . .] Er hat sich auf seinen Ausgangspunkt zurückzubewegen: eine allgemeine humanistische Bewegung, die in allen Menschen den Menschen sieht und seine Gesellschaft erneuern will.”<sup>115</sup> Here we see brought together the core components of the socialist vision toward which Döblin gestures in *November 1918*: socialism as a “movement” that recognizes the full—that is, natural and social—humanity of all, and thereby brings about a process of perpetual societal renewal. Literature, as we have seen, has a unique and critical role to play in this process, albeit only “in dem Maße, wie sie tief und wahrhaft in das alte menschen-aufbauende Zentrum eintaucht.”<sup>116</sup> With *November 1918*, Döblin seeks to do precisely that, to gesture toward creative possibilities that follow from humankind’s twofold positionality, its “Zwitterstellung,” and to communicate the urgency of acting upon them.

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<sup>114</sup>Döblin, “Wissen und Verändern,” 207.

<sup>115</sup>Döblin, “Das Vakuum nach dem Sozialismus,” 370.

<sup>116</sup>Döblin, “Die deutsche Literatur,” 340.

## CONCLUSION

Georg Lukács's interwar theories sought not only to make sense of World War I and the failure of the German Revolution, but also to plot a path forward for the Marxist left. While non-Marxist philosophical anthropologists like Helmuth Plessner and urban planners like Le Corbusier imagined the Weimar era as a decisive break with the past, Lukács and other Marxist thinkers contended that the underlying capitalist contradictions that had unleashed the war persevered in Weimar society. Indeed, for such theorists, wartime destruction and interwar urbanization represented interconnected and complementary attempts to stabilize capitalism, to remedy its tensions through spatial fixes. With his theories, Lukács examined how such attempts to save the capitalist order through the reorganization of space transformed and perverted human nature, thereby threatening to foreclose the emergence of revolutionary consciousness. Against this backdrop, Lukács set out to salvage the human and its revolutionary potential, and he perceived the realist novel as a critical tool in this context. In the preceding chapters, we have seen how Lukács—in his writings from *Die Theorie des Romans* to *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* to his essays on literary realism from the 1930s—depicts the realist novel as a site of safety for the reader, a shelter from an overwhelming external reality that nevertheless makes possible the reader's critical engagement with capitalist modernity. The realist novel fashions a poetic counter-architecture in which capitalism's apparently immutable second nature is revealed to be the product of social relations, and it thereby empowers readers to recognize their collective capacity to transform those relations. In Lukács's theory, literature thus emerges as a tool uniquely capable of intervening into social and political problems, rescuing the human and its potentialities from the suffocating threat of capitalism's spatial fixes.

The exemplary novels by Siegfried Kracauer, Arnold Zweig, and Alfred Döblin that this dissertation has explored conform to varying degrees with Lukács's theories of literary realism. They each return to World War I to expose the continuities with their contemporary interwar

moment, and they invoke different aspects of Lukácsian theory in order to interrogate the same constellation of problems identified by the philosopher. Fundamentally, they follow Lukács in indicating that the damage inflicted on human nature by the spaces of capitalist modernity risks precluding any possibility of social transformation. Kracauer's *Ginster* shows how the German war effort precipitated a complementary urbanization and homogenization of space on the home front. By thus interrogating the interconnection of the battlefield and the city, *Ginster* sketches the ways in which modern built environments give shape to superficial communities in which individuality is suppressed and all things human are ultimately obliterated. In Zweig's *Erziehung vor Verdun*, we encounter soldiers cowering in trenches, threatened from all sides by the technological products of human innovation. In this way, it portrays the war as the realization of capitalist modernity's inherently self-destructive trajectory, the catastrophic result of humankind's alienation from the products of its own labor. Döblin's *November 1918* explores how, even in the apparent moment of revolution in Germany, the revolutionaries' ambitions are limited and their actions misdirected by the entrenchment of existing power in Berlin's architecture. Their efforts necessarily fail, and the hegemony of the capitalist city, with all its profiteers and opportunists, prevails.

The purpose of this dissertation has not been, however, to suggest that the novels of Kracauer, Zweig, and Döblin merely correspond to Lukács's theory. Instead, what has emerged over the course of this study is a contested and productive discourse spanning philosophy and literature. Certainly, the novels do answer Lukács's call for literary realism as counter-architecture; they seek to create space for readers to safely and critically engage with the dangerous continuities between wartime Germany and their contemporary moment. However, as we have seen throughout the previous chapters, their works also reveal decisive divergences and deviations from Lukácsian literary realism. Specifically, their novels complicate Lukács's conception of human nature; they reimagine and expand on the revolutionary potential of humankind's capacity for creative (self-)transformation. Kracauer, fearing that Lukács's desire to overthrow the existing social order would merely force humanity to conform to a new fixed

system, instead seeks with his novelistic blueprint to inspire not only resistance to the capitalist status quo, but also to create space for the free unfolding of humankind's endless potentialities. Lukács held up Zweig as a representative of the literary realism he espoused, and *Erziehung vor Verdun* certainly does seek to break the reified surface of capitalist society, to reveal the exploitative social relations that lie beneath. However, Zweig combines this work of exposure with a cathedralic utopianism that, manifest in moments of chance and contingency, gestures toward the promise of humanity's unrealized constructive capacities. Lukács's negative evaluation of Döblin, in contrast, belies key similarities in their conception of the historical novel, not least its capacity to reveal truths inaccessible to non-fiction texts. Nevertheless, Döblin's roman-fleuve aspires not toward any fixed utopian destination but instead models for its readers the ideal of a natural and limitless dialectical progression.

This notion of a contested discourse applies to the relation between the individual literary texts too. Despite the similarities between the novels and their common engagement with Lukács's writings, this dissertation has demonstrated how the novels sketch a historical trajectory, with each speaking in different ways to the worsening political situation over the course of the interwar period. In this regard, the social transformations imagined by novels also reflect their authors' respective engagements with political, and specifically Marxist, theory. As has been argued, all three novels were written at the height of their respective authors' interest in Marxism, but the engagement of Kracauer, Zweig, and Döblin with revolutionary theory was motivated by different interests and mediated by different interlocutors, not least Ernst Bloch, Gustav Landauer, and Karl Korsch. Their divergence from Lukács's theories and from each other attests, therefore, to an attempt to make literary realism relevant to the needs of their specific historical conjunctures based on their understanding of Marx's works. *Ginster* corresponds to the hopefulness of a burgeoning Western Marxism in the late 1920s, an attempt to imagine a revolutionary project that breaks with the era's orthodox Marxism by prioritizing the unfolding of individual potentialities. *Erziehung vor Verdun*, published during the early exile years, moves beyond the optimism Zweig had previously expressed in his 1925 novella *Pont und Anna* by demonstrating that making space

for human creativity necessitates collective resistance to the prevailing social relations. *November 1918* explores the failure of the historical revolution to make sense of the consequent sociopolitical trajectory that led to the Nazis. Begun on the eve of World War II, Döblin's novel articulates the desperate necessity of a critical examination of past failures and an urgent readjustment of the era's understanding of revolutionary social transformation.

Ultimately, by uncovering this previously overlooked Marxist literary discourse from interwar Germany, the foregoing chapters sought to do the work of a Foucauldian genealogy, challenging and expanding our conception of human nature as it relates to its (built) environment. In our contemporary moment, such topics have once again assumed great importance against the backdrop of the Anthropocene's onset and the ongoing reality of ecological collapse. We are today compelled to address, with renewed urgency, the capitalist organization of built environments and to ask whether and how humankind might yet build a radically different world, one better able to serve humanity's needs and to make room for the flourishing of human potentialities. The theoretical and literary works considered in this dissertation certainly offer us powerful interrogations of the built environment's interrelation with the economic order. They draw attention to the ways in which this interrelation depletes or distorts humanity's capacity for creative (self-)transformation with disastrous consequences. They demand that we consider how meaningfully reckoning with the problems we face today necessitates collective action and social transformation. Fundamentally, they argue strongly for the indispensable role that the aesthetic—and literary poetics in particular—must play in tackling the existential challenges that confront us. For all the differences that exist between Lukács, Kracauer, Zweig, and Döblin, all four maintain that it is only with and through art that we can begin to replace the capitalist domination of space with something more human.

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