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¹ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams: an Autobiography* (Boston 1918).

² "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses," in Tony Bennett, Susan Boyd-Bowman, Colin Mercer, and Janet Wollacott, eds., *Popular Television and Film* (London 1981), 216-235.

³ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London 1961).

⁴ Raymond Williams, *Communications* (Baltimore 1962).

⁵ Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, Edited and Introduced by Tony Pickney, (London and New York 1989), 159.

⁶ Stuart Hall, "Only Connect: The Life of Raymond Williams" in *New Statesman*, (5 February, 1988), 20-21.

Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*. Translated by Quintin Hoare and with an Introduction by Inka Mülder-Bach. (London/New York: Verso, 1998).

How we think about twentieth century "modernity" still continues to be influenced by the writings of Weimar cultural theorists such as Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer. One obvious reason is that the problem of the future was more sharply posed in the Germany of the 1920s than almost anywhere else in Western Europe. Berlin was the vanguard metropolis of the early twentieth-century where "modernity" was pushed to new extremes. In the streets, squares, movie theaters, department stores and other public spaces of the German capital, observers detected the emerging outlines of a new "mass society" and "mass culture."

Siegfried Kracauer's contribution to the Weimar project of understanding this modernity was essential. Yet, in the English-speaking world, the full-range of Kracauer's work is less well known than that of Benjamin. Until quite recently, Kracauer has been seen primarily as a film theorist, author of the classic *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. Along with the recent translation of *The Mass Ornament*, the short book under review here shows us a more versatile and complex Kracauer who is no less interested in the rationalization of clerical labour in Berlin's large banking or insurance companies than in the composition of movie audiences.

Kracauer saw capitalist rationalization as the motor of modernity. Unlike his Marxist contemporaries, however, Kracauer refused to advance any overarching theory. In his view, history was essentially a "destructive process, a process of disintegration" (11). The fragmentary nature of modernity demanded a fragmented analysis which extended even to the specific form in which Kracauer presented his arguments – a series of relatively short articles published in the *feuilleton* section of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* on diverse practices and spaces of everyday life, from travel and dance to hotel lobbies.

Although modernity revealed itself in disparate fragments, Kracauer nonetheless believed that the capitalist mass media were in the process of creating ever more uniform perceptions and tastes. This argument initially prevented him from being particularly interested in the class and gender identities of consumers. Yet, the “more rigorously he analysed the ideology of mass media products, the more insistently the question confronted him of the kind of audience that would swallow these products.”(13) This desire for sociological knowledge led Kracauer to undertake an ethnological expedition to the “newest Germany,” the world of the Berlin salaried employees. Kracauer began to realize that the new “mass audience” was in fact composed primarily of white collar workers, at least in the Weimar metropolis. In Berlin, it was not the working class but the “salaried masses” that had expanded most significantly since the First World War (29). Consequently, Berlin was now a city with “a pronounced employee culture”(32). In this respect, Berlin was admittedly an extreme case but Kracauer insisted that “Only from its extremes can reality be revealed.” (25)

In the middle years of the Weimar republic (1925-1928), rationalization transformed the nature of the salaried employees’ daily labour. Many now performed merely mechanical tasks. Many were also women. The working conditions of these “mutually interchangeable private soldiers” were now really not so different from those of industrial workers. Some salaried employees drew the obvious lesson and organized themselves into trades unions. Yet, many others clung to the illusion that they were still “middle-class.” (82-83) This central contradiction “hampers solidarity among salaried employees themselves” (83) and divides them from the organized working class. In Kracauer’s eyes, the salaried employees were in fact more alienated from their real existence than the industrial working-class who at least clung to the ersatz religion that German Marxism provided. (88)

Because the actual job skills required to perform the highly rationalized work of many salaried employees were steadily diminishing, employers accentuated the importance of non-functional characteristics. Appearance and self-representation began to assume a new significance. Age, or rather the appearance of youth, became vitally important. Employers wanted to get rid of older workers who could claim higher salaries (53). Consequently, “ladies *and* gentlemen dye their hair, while forty-year-olds take up sports to keep slim.” (39) Yet Kracauer offers us more than just a materialist reading of this Weimar “fetish” of youth. His discussion of employers’ attempts to get rid of older employees also provides the occasion for wide-ranging reflections upon the flight from death in the Weimar Republic (including the spectre of the millions killed in the trenches of World War One). Kracauer insists that the worship of “youth,” feverishly promoted by the illustrated newspapers and other mass media, was not only a desperate attempt to deny death but, even more importantly, to repress confrontation with the lack of meaning, the spiritual

emptiness of life in a highly rationalized, mass society.

This “disenchantment” of everyday life had in fact generated its opposite – new myths. In the most highly rationalized enterprises, managers and executives seldom came into direct contact with the people who worked for them. Yet, at the same time, modern employers in large-scale enterprises tried to foster the myth that the company was a “community.” Leisure-time activities, such as company-sponsored sports clubs, were meant “to conquer the still vacant territory of the employees’ souls,” (78) and to “distract from trade-union interests.”

The Berlin leisure industry offered salaried employees other ways to find a temporary shelter from their spiritual “homelessness.” Alienated, rationalized labour found its cultural counterpart in the commercial provision of mass, rationalized leisure in such “pleasure barracks” as the Haus Vaterland. (91) Here salaried employees could escape “the imperceptible dreadfulness of normal existence” (101) for at least a few hours. In the Haus Vaterland, the Wild West Bar or a room with a simulated “splendid view of Vienna by night” (92) transported salaried employees to another world “not as it is, but as it appears in popular hits. A world every last corner of which is cleansed ... of the dust of everyday existence.” (93)

Walter Benjamin’s postscript depicts Kracauer as “a ragpicker at daybreak ... in the dawn of the day of revolution” (114). It is not, however, clear why Benjamin should have believed that revolution was one of the possible outcomes of the “spiritual homelessness” of the salaried masses that Kracauer so brilliantly describes. One part of the answer might be found in Kracauer’s brief observations about the structural failures of the current system. The Weimar economy “does not function for the sake of the masses who work in it, but at best manages them” (100). At the same time, the apparently unassailable ideological dominance of German capitalism had already been forced to make significant rhetorical (and real) concessions to the strong German socialist movement (98). Yet, vulgar-Marxist theory prevented Weimar Social Democrats from seeing the culture of everyday life as anything more than “merely the superstructure over the particular socio-economic infrastructure” (103). “How,” Kracauer lamented, “is everyday life to change, if even those whose vocation is to stir it up pay it no attention?” (101) The cultural and symbolic space which the employers had begun to evacuate but the Left seemed incapable of occupying would, in a few years, be conquered by the Nazi movement. The spiritual homelessness of the salaried masses eventually drove many of them in the direction of a different sort of “revolution,” quite the opposite of what Benjamin had hoped for – the Nazi racial revolution. The Nazis violently banished spiritual “emptiness” with a new “religion” of race.

In Weimar Germany it might have been reasonable to conclude that standardized, rationalized forms of capitalist production and administration were erasing the class, religious, regional, gender and even national identities

and cultures inherited from the nineteenth-century. Yet, the concepts of “mass society” and “mass culture” have not provided the best predictions about the future of modernity in the late twentieth century. “Fordism” has given way to flexible production. The monolithic “mass” marketing of entertainment that appeared to be the inescapable consequence of an expanding “culture industry” has now dissolved into much more complex (and constantly changing) amalgams of mainstream and niche marketing.

Since Kracauer wrote this book, cultural studies and the “history of everyday life” (*Alltagsgeschichte*) have also taught us to read “modernity” in different, perhaps less pessimistic ways. The homogenizing effects claimed for twentieth century modernity and increasing globalization, have not prevented individuals and groups from defining and redefining their identities and interests in complex and changing ways – gender, class, race, religious and other differences have by no means been submerged in a shared collective “mass” identity. Though leisure and entertainment may often, as Kracauer suggests, function as avenues of escape from the monotony of work, the meanings of both work and leisure are not solely determined by either the employers or the culture industry. They are also actively constructed by ordinary people’s attempts to “assert themselves” (*Eigensinn*).

Cultural historians are still struggling to find a vocabulary that can serve as an adequate alternative to the compelling imagery of “mass society” and “mass culture.” Quintin Hoare’s subtle translation of Kracauer’s *The Salaried Masses* and Inka Mülder-Bach’s excellent introduction allow us to see the original language of “mass culture” in the process of formation. This alone will make this slender volume indispensable to anyone interested in the history of cultural theory.

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Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff, eds., *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

Art and fascism seem a strange mix, especially to those historians whose work explores the conflicts between the European avant-garde and conventional artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Such studies have stressed a fundamental dichotomy between modernist art and traditional art, and between modernism and nationalism — a dichotomy that separates categories of progressive art (read good) from art associated with regressive political movements (read bad). Research on art under Nazism would seem to confirm this type of judgment; after all, the works of so-called “degenerate” artists like Beckmann, Jawlensky, Dix, and Grosz were far superior in quality