KRACAUER'S ARCHITECTURE

THE ORNAMENTAL NATURE OF THE NEW CAPITALIST ORDER

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KRACAUER'S ARCHITECTURE
The Ornamental Nature of the New Capitalist Order

Carsten Ruhl

with a response by
Philip Ursprung

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EDITORIAL

Today, it is natural to speak of media and computer architecture, the architecture of European foreign policy, philosophical constructs, the corporate architecture of major companies, and even of security architecture. In the case of built architecture, contemporary examples such as the internationally discussed reconstruction of the Neue Altstadt in Frankfurt reveal the extent to which socio-political notions of order and historical narratives are recognized through the visual and spatial organization of architecture. However, current developments reflect more than a mere trend toward an increasingly broad understanding of architecture, which is now one of the key fields of social self-perception: Planned and also constructed buildings spark controversial debate on the importance of architecture as the deployment of order in a spatial discourse. In this context, the LOEWE research cluster "Architectures of Order" is dedicated to studying architecture as a cultural technique that manifests itself not only aesthetically, materially, spatially, and discursively, but also epistemologically. "Architectures of Order" refers to the significance of ordering techniques in the practices of architecture, while investigating the relevance of architectural thought in social discourse on order.

The series “Architectures of Order”, which is published within CCSA Topics, presents monographic texts by researchers who participate in and are associated with the research cluster. The broad range of the series reflects the project’s interdisciplinary approach, while unifying architectural-historical and theoretical expertise with historical, cultural, media-studies, sociological, and design-theoretical competence, complemented by perspectives from the field of practical architectural design and media.

LOEWE research cluster “Architectures of Order”

KRACAUER'S ARCHITECTURE

THE ORNAMENTAL NATURE OF THE NEW CAPITALIST ORDER

HATING ARCHITECTURE

Since Giorgio Vasari's biographical account of the "più eccellenti architetti, pittori et scultori" (1550), architects have been introduced as men fabricated through a lifelong process of self-perfection.[1] To build not only meant to erect palaces or houses but also to create a character embracing all sorts of knowledge, combined with a strong belief into one's own strength and capabilities. This understanding of the architect was inspired by the catalogue of qualifications attributed to the architect since antiquity, spanning from writing, sketching and rhetoric to philosophy and mathematics. But in Renaissance thinking, this became intertwined with biographical myths that remained effective for centuries: since then, the architect's life has been presented as a process analogous to the evolution of the mind, from the material world of crafts (*artes mechanicae*) to the higher spheres of metaphysical intellectualism (*artes liberales*). The term architecture therefore not only indicated a well-built house, resting on a proper material foundation. It also indicated a well-proportioned mind, built on a solid education in the nature of matter, as received in the workshops of carpenters, goldsmiths, or stonemasons. Comparable to buildings, architects thereby themselves became something constructed.

The assumed ideal balance between life-building and building practice, as epitomized by architects, was of course instrumental to introducing political order as something emerging from a widely accepted ideal process of self-perfection. On this

basis, sovereigns frequently presented themselves as architects, thereby bearing witness to their supposedly consummate character. From here it was only a small step to the idea that creating architectural and political order would finally lead to the moral improvement of all human beings.[2] As we know, this pedagogical impetus still played a significant role in the early 20th century. Because architects managed to build their own life out of the material world, the authority to build the lives of others was handed over to them. Again, this is embedded in some sort of biographical myth. But unlike the age of Vasari, this time the lives of architects were built by architects themselves. Take for instance Louis Sullivan's autobiography published for the first time in the *Journal of the American Institute of Architects* (1922–1923). The magazine's editors announced Sullivan's series of texts as a first attempt in architectural history to unfold theoretical ideas within an "autobiographical process".[3] Accordingly, modernity's rationalism as expressed in the law of "form follows function" is introduced here as an enigmatic revelation that is intuitively felt by the architect.[4] The architect himself in turn is presented as a genius whose knowledge is primarily derived from an aesthetic sensibility towards natural phenomena rather than from books. Large parts of the autobiography do not even deal with architecture. What is at stake here is the design of an ideal human shaped by an aesthetic and sometimes even spiritual encounter with nature, subsequently accomplished by diligence, discipline, talent, and labor.

As the case of Sullivan clearly demonstrates, the making of an architect is an undertaking strongly bound to a more general process of subjectification. In this sense, autobiographies serve a much higher aim. What is unfolded in endless poetic descriptions is a life finally leading to very simple but nonetheless fundamental "truths," such as in the case of Sullivan, the functional nature of any creation. In other words, the architectural sphere is extended here from the classical realm of building production to life production. In line with this shift from dead matter to living matter, subjectivity itself was about to become a creative work.[5] But in the early 20th century, this work could no longer be legitimized by higher aims such as god, reason or genius, though authors like Sullivan were still adhering to some of these ideas. The question whether or not one's own life could be regarded as something well built in the first place became dependent on admiration by others. At this point it could be revealing to draw our attention to sociological and psychological explanations on how individuals create *life styles.*

In his *Science of Living* (1930), the German psychologist Alfred Adler defines the style of life as something "grown out of the difficulties of early life and out of the striving for a goal."[6] The main reason for these alleged difficulties of childhood, according to Adler, is an innate feeling of mental and intellectual deficiency shared by all humans. It bears the risk of a lifelong inferiority complex by inevitably deviating from Adler's assumed "normal style of life."[7] The only

way out is to become an accepted member of society: "Social interest and social cooperation are therefore the salvation for the individual."[8] Adler's notion of sociability is then the basis for a "categorical imperative." In his *Note on the Author and his Work*, the sociologist and translator of Adler's book Phillipe Mairet even states, "that every man's duty is to work to make his profession, whatever it may be, into a brotherhood, a friendship, a social unity with a powerful morale of co-operation, and that if a man does not want to do this his own psychological state is precarious."[9]

Adler's categorical imperative perfectly fits into what has been called the invention of creativity. Following sociological analysis of the term, building one's own subjectivity must be regarded as a creative process totally complying to the new capitalist order. Against this background, Sullivan's functionalism is by no means confined to architecture. Though embedded in stereotypes and clichés of architectural genius, it consciously or unconsciously worships and thereby mystifies the functional logic of capitalism: as if architecture were the outcome of a rational process based on its own logic of necessities, rather than the product of decisions made for other reasons than for the fulfillment of concrete needs. Of course, this also sheds new light on Sullivan's architecture. As has recently been stressed, his "ability to adapt the naturalism of the Gothic style to new functions and new materials" must not only be regarded as a great artistic achievement, but also as the "triumph of

business and technology over the forces that threatened to destabilize the city."[10]

Since then, however, architecture, perhaps more than any other profession, has been instrumental in making us believe that real individuality is only possible under the auspices of capitalism. It is no coincidence that Henry Roark, the protagonist of Ayn Rand's famous novel *The Fountainhead* (1943), is introduced as an architect struggling for his own ideas.[11] Against all the odds, he finally manages to resist all kinds of oppression, namely social compromises, collectivism and socialism. Naturally, this is entirely compliant with Rand's assumption that a nation could only prosper through the unconstrained egoisms of the new creative class of entrepreneurs. Against this background the idea of the architectural genius should not only be seen within a new capitalist regime of subjectification. It actually became a role model. To this purpose, Rand comprehensively studied the *life styles* of quite a number of famous architects, including Frank Lloyd Wright and Ely Jacques Kahn. Needless to say, in the 20th century, architects themselves sought to become celebrities. And it is a truism that postmodern debate enormously contributed to the rise of the star architect instead of overcoming its modern prerequisites.

This essay, however, is not conceived as an analysis of the architect's self-design, nor of its usage in discourse on subjectivity politics, though this would be a worthwhile undertaking. Nor does it aim

to investigate the ways architects have carried out autobiographical projects ever since, a subject still not comprehensively researched. Instead, it deals with the other side of the story. Assuming that architects, like their buildings, could be regarded as a synthesis of quite different agendas, knowledge fields, practices and interests, the question arises whether this stereotypical idea, or role model, was not only instrumental for the creation of subjectivity, but also for its critical analysis. Of course, this makes it necessary to digress from the many stories on the rise of the architect-hero since the Renaissance. What I propose instead is to focus on a position that questions common ideas and clichés of the modern architect, as successfully established in the first half of the 20th century.

What exactly I am talking about? Well, I think the best way to provide an idea of what we are going to deal with is to start with a text that does not exist in architectural history. In 1928, the German architect Siegfried Kracauer published his novel *Ginster. Von ihm selbst geschrieben* (trans.: Ginster. Written by Himself).[12] Similar to Sullivan's autobiography, parts of it had been published before in a series of texts. But this is not the only parallel. Studies on the book frequently underlined its autobiographical character. And in fact, the protagonist of this novel, called Ginster, could easily be identified with Kracauer. But unlike Sullivan, the architect no longer describes the implementation of architectural ideas, nor does

his life culminate in some sort of completeness. It is the other way round. Instead, the fabric of the architect falls into unrelated parts even before the solid foundations for life-building have been laid. Although Ginster studied Architecture, he never felt comfortable with this choice. He even hates being an architect: "I am now 28 years old and I hate architecture."[13] Besides, the choice of studying Architecture was made by his parents, rather than Ginster himself. The recommendation to study Architecture was merely based on his persistent ornamental doodling and sketching of spiral systems. But once the decision had been made, Ginster refused to leave behind the playful sphere of ornamental mazes. He was all the more fascinated by the fact that in art history books, even ground plans appear as ornamental figures.[14] Sullivan's somehow spiritual insight into the functional nature of architecture therefore never came to Ginster's mind. Instead, ornaments and the material world remain irreconcilable oppositions. Accordingly, Ginster avoids any aspiration to become a valuable and esteemed member of society by developing his career as an architect. Any tendency towards the materialization of plans evokes unease in Ginster. This however leads to a permanent conflict. Forced to practice as an architect, Ginster is frequently confronted by the impositions of reality.

Thus, if Sullivan might be considered as the first architect who literally built his own life, Kracauer might be considered the first architect who literally

demystified such models of agency. We are instead confronted with the absurdities of bureaucratic planning processes, reconstruction campaigns, the functional banality of architectural designs, the way people present themselves in their new modern interiors, the outdated sublimity of monuments, and the architect's refusal of course to trade the world of drawn ornaments for the material world.

Taking Ginster's hatred of architecture as a point of departure, this essay not only explores how Kracauer dismantled the idea of the heroic architect, but also aims to demonstrate in what sense his "autobiography" and other writings were instrumental to create places of *non-existence* exactly at a time when modern architecture promised a better *existence*. Starting with this destabilization of architectural *life styles,* the following observations are mainly conceived as a cross-reading of textual buildings Kracauer penned in the Twenties and early Thirties.[15] These buildings of course were no longer made of great narratives, but of scattered figures of thought. Whether or not this indicates a postmodern position before postmodernism came into being is a worthwhile question. Truly, if it is right that postmodernism taught us to "live with ghosts, including the ghosts of future, past and present," but also "the ghosts of others alive and dead,"[16] then Kracauer's writings might already be regarded as conjuring up these very ghosts. The buildings he created are populated by shadows, living dead, and skeletal remnants of the past, which

resist against any precise differentiation of time layers. With regard to Kracauer's later reception, we could even say that he himself became a ghost only visible at night when the white walls and translucent facades of modern houses turn into scary rooms.
It is therefore no coincidence that Kracauer's writings on architecture and urban space had raised greater interest by the end of the 20th century, if not before. Exactly at a time when critical debate on modern functionalism concluded—and postmodern architecture came into its own, as Andreas Huyssen states[17]—Kracauer became an important reference in the history of modernity's reverse side. It is no coincidence that Anthony Vidler's still fascinating "cultural history of agoraphobia" had its point of departure at a conference on Kracauer's exile criticism.[18] Yet the German critic is primarily treated here as a sociologist or media theorist detached from the architectural debates of his time.[19] As Kracauer frequently expressed his aversion towards architecture—and incidentally also pleased his lifelong friend Adorno in downplaying his experience as an architect[20]—a total ignorance in this respect seemed to be more than legitimate.
I argue instead that Kracauer's architecture is by no means reducible to a mere critique of modernity, nor to an anticipation of postmodern thinking.[21] By disclosing the ornamental nature of his time instead of praising its rational pureness, Kracauer ultimately questioned the existence of modernity as the climax of progress.

THE ORNAMENTAL CONDITION

As we know, Kracauer tried hard to become a valuable member of society by building his own *life style*. But unlike the many self-made men in architecture at the turn of the 20th century, he preferred a rather solid education not far from his home town. In 1905, he enrolled at the Grand-Ducal Technical University in Darmstadt and subsequently continued his studies in Berlin and Munich. At the time, academic curricula were still dominated by stupendous exercises in the imitation of historical ornaments. These of course were rather different from Ginster's spiral doodles and his childlike fascination for purposeless figures.[22] The general basis for this practice was a strong belief in ornaments as a key to an objective documentation of what art history conceived as a sequence of styles. It was believed that the overall character of an epoch could be grasped by tracing every single line of an ornament. The extent to which Kracauer adhered to this idea of *objective* description becomes clear in his dissertation thesis on the history of wrought iron ornaments, published in the second year of the war.[23] As Kracauer mentions in his book, the subject was proposed by the archaeologist and government builder Richard Borrmann, who was one of Kracauer's professors at Technische Hochschule Charlottenburg. In his thesis, Kracauer not only quotes from Borrmann's sober inventory *Die Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler von Berlin*, but also owes a great deal to his overall methodological approach. This could best be described as a combination of a typological order ("Fortifications,"

"Churches," "Castles," "Palaces," "Public Buildings," "Bridges," and "Monuments") with rather general historical explanations. As the table of the dissertation's contents already indicates, Kracauer is totally in line with this proceeding, though unlike his professor, he is not concerned with building history in the strictest sense. In applying this method to wrought iron ornaments, he chose to focus on works rather marginalized in architectural history. Whether or not this decision should be considered a programmatic statement is rather unclear, since Kracauer avoids any explanation on this issue. He rather aims to totally comply to what might be called the exact rules of building history. Accordingly, a review of the dissertation especially praises its diligence and Kracauer's careful illustrations.[24]

However, though Kracauer's dissertation lacks any critical reflection on building history's documentary rigor, its overall belief in scientific objectivity makes it seem hardly possible that he was not aware of a quite different treatment of the ornamental in art history. While studying Architecture in Berlin, he attended the lectures of Heinrich Wölfflin, who repeatedly criticized the banality of historical chronology for its lack of an aesthetic dimension. Already in his dissertation thesis *Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture* (1886), an awareness of architecture's unmediated presence was regarded as the key to a deeper understanding of its nature.[25] According to Wölfflin, only through sensual immediacy could

the intimate relationship between the bodily existence of the viewer and its counterpart, the "art of bodily masses," be felt. Ornaments play a significant role in this respect. As an aesthetic excess of a formative force, they not only order an architectural organism but, more than any other part of a building, reveal the human idea of form in the concreteness of matter. It is exactly this specific quality of the ornament that allows the viewer not only to perceive a building, but also to literally experience it as something mirroring their own mental disposition.

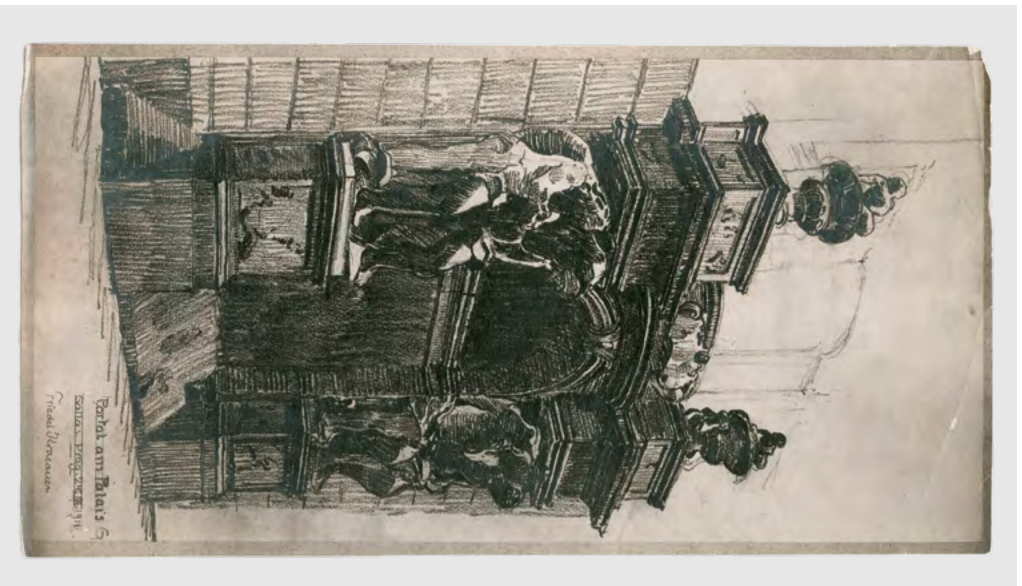
This essay cannot dwell further on Wölfflin's remarkable rethinking of an otherwise well-known anatomy of architectural form (symmetry, proportion, and harmony) based on what has since been called *Einfühlungstheorie*. What interests more in respect to Kracauer's architectural education is the fact that the key to self-knowledge lies in the aesthetic perception of ornamented surfaces rather than in their careful imitation. Besides, with other influential writings on the issue, such as Alois Riegl's seminal text *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament* (1893),[26] the ornament was introduced as the culmination of converging temporalities, rather than as a key to chronology. Following Riegl, the tendency to interpret ornaments as something directly evolving from the development of techniques, pragmatic needs, or Darwinist evolution must be regarded as an oversimplification. It ignores the fact that ornaments stem from "thoughts creating art"[27] without

necessarily depending on the materials or techniques applied. As non-instrumental forms, ornaments equally absorb the time in which they were created, as well as traces of the time-span of their existence, thereby determining the perceptive experience of the respective viewer.[28] A simultaneous perception of all three temporal dimensions is considered indispensable to escape the uninspired chronological order delivered by building history.[29]

The impact the notion of aesthetic immediacy had on art history and far beyond could hardly be overestimated. It set the stage for a growing interest in surface appearance and its perception. Besides, it contributed to a far-reaching redefinition of the ornament. Beyond its status as a subject of archaeology, building history, anthropology, and art history, the ornament made it into a universal perspective. It embraces all sorts of material culture, no matter what size and how ordinary its objects might be. Conceived as a direct imprint of former life forms, still present, ornaments mediate between the past and present, but also between dead and living matter. In this sense, historical remnants play a significant role. They visibly protrude into today's life, thereby confronting us with a world of ambiguities and hybrids: a quality Kracauer seemed interested in while visiting Prague in 1911. In his drawing of the Palais Clam-Gallas **[Fig.1]**, an important Baroque building in the city, he focuses on one of the palace's porticos by leaving out the rest of the facade. The portico is presented here as the

Fig. 1

Siegfried Kracauer,
Drawing of the Palais Clam-Gallas in Prague, 1911



uncanny architecture of a tomb, burying the remnants of the now ending Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The atlases on each side of the entrance, supporting two entablatures with urns, now appear as the guards of a past no longer accessible—the portico is closed by wooden panels—but are still present in everyday life through its ornamental remnants.

The nature of ornaments as forms making history accessible by confusing different temporalities points to the very center of Kracauer's approach to architectural surfaces. What interests most here is the fact that via ornamental surfaces, traces of the past, regardless of their original purposes or concrete meaning, are present in daily life. What is missing here is any reflection on the architectural ornament as a highly formalized expression of social order, as described in countless writings on architecture since antiquity. What is communicated by ornaments is an intuitively felt idea of form, rather than a rational system of motifs deliberately conceived either to manifest or to hide the ruling socioeconomic order. This was of course instrumental to interpreting ornaments as something superfluous, a position Kracauer at least to some degree also shared with Adolf Loos. It might also be more than mere coincidence that Loos's iconic text "Ornament and Crime" appeared for the first time in German in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (1929) shortly after a number of seminal texts by Kracauer had been published by the same newspaper, including "The Mass Ornament" (1927). Both authors

knew very well how to express the new reality of capitalism in quite straight and undecorated words, gleefully imbued with irony, polemics and exaggerations. Loos even took the economization of ornamental issues to extremes. In some of his famous polemics based on the writings by Semper and Riegl, but also on late 19th century criminal anthropology,[30] he ironically imagined the ascendency of an era wherein ornaments would no longer be necessary. He therefore repeatedly stressed that a lack of ornamentation is nothing to regret. This should be regarded as a long overdue renunciation of everything that is not justified by rationalism. Any ignorance towards this necessary shift from an ornamental to a non-ornamental age was to be seen as a crime, a waste of time and labor. In line with this argument, he criticized elsewhere the way architects were educated. Thanks to the endless exercises in ornamentation, they somehow lost a deeper understanding of building as a cultural practice.[31]

Kracauer never commented directly on Loos, but in his early articles on modern architecture penned for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, he agreed with the general diagnosis that with the excesses of historicism, ornamentation had somehow reached a problematic point. Yet, the historical settings wherein Loos and Kracauer discussed ornamental issues could not have been more different. At the turn of the century, when Loos penned most of his famous texts, ornamental expression was still regarded as an

anthropological constant. It was thus taken for granted that ornaments will remain an indispensable part of material culture. Loos's *delightful horror* caused by his vision of a time without ornaments was only made possible because a time without ornaments was just unthinkable. This totally changed with postwar debate. The ghosts Loos was calling for, at least in some cases, were about to become quite a concrete reality. And though Loos still adhered to the understanding of ornamental surfaces as an important part of architecture, "Ornament and Crime" became the most important reference for those who were claiming the opposite.[32]

So, by the time Kracauer began his career as a critic, the situation had changed fundamentally. Surely, not unlike Loos, the economic perspective played a significant role in Kracauer's approach to architecture and urban space. In his article "Über Turmhäuser" (trans.: On Tower Houses, 1921)[33] the need for skyscrapers is mainly derived from the economic conditions of the modern metropolis, the "reality of life." It would meet the general lack of time and space and corresponds to the long overdue concentration of business life, which according to Kracauer, would finally lead to a relaxation of the housing market. In another lengthy article, published on the first high-rise building in Frankfurt, Kracauer seems to be fascinated by the project's economic benefits as well as its technical and infrastructural features **[Fig. 2]**. Only in the closing

Fig. 2

Siegfried Kracauer, Article "Das Frankfurter Hochhaus", 1922

Nr. 5. IV. Jahrgang, 1922. Frankfurt a. M., 15. April

DAS TECHNISCHE BLATT

ILLUSTRIERTE BEILAGE DER FRANKFURTER ZEITUNG

Das Frankfurter Hochhaus.

Von Dr. **S. Kracauer.**

Obwohl sich der Hochhaus-Gedanke nach dem Krieg in Deutschland verhältnismäßig leicht durchgesetzt hat, ist er doch vorderhand nur als Gedanke anerkannt und diskutiert worden, ohne daß man bislang über den Zustand der Projektierung solcher Bauten hinausgekommen wäre. In Frankfurt soll jetzt, zum ersten Male, von der Planung zur Tat geschritten werden, und es besteht begründete Hoffnung, daß trotz mancherlei Widerstände, die sich dem Projekt noch entgegensetzen, dieses doch Verwirklichung findet. Bauherrin ist die in Frankfurt ansässige Firma Fritz Vogel & Co. Sie hat das gegenüber dem Messegelände gelegene Grundstück zwischen Moltkeallee, Bismarckallee und Königstraße erworben und den Frankfurter Architekten Fritz Voggenberger mit dem Entwurf und der Bauleitung des von ihr beabsichtigten Bauvorhabens beauftragt.

Abb. 1.

Erst im Verlauf der Vorarbeiten sind Bauherrin und Architekt auf Grund von wirtschaftlichen Erwägungen zu dem Entschluß gedrängt worden, einen Teil des Gebäudes als Hochhaus hochzuführen. Maßgebend hierfür war vor allem die Notwendigkeit, eine den Baukosten angemessene Verzinsungsmöglichkeit zu erhalten, ferner das zwingende Bedürfnis, in unmittelbarer Nähe der Messe eine größere Anzahl vermietbarer Räume für Industrie- und Handelsfirmen zu schaffen, die sich im Zusammenhang mit der Messe in Frankfurt niederzulassen gedenken, woran sie die hier herrschende Raumknappheit bisher stets gehindert hatte. Gerade als Bürogebäude bietet ja das Hochhaus große Vorteile. Die Zusammenlegung möglichst vieler Büroräume in ein einziges Gebäude verringert den zur Abwicklung des geschäftlichen Verkehrs erforderlichen Zeitaufwand in erheblichem Maße und trägt dadurch zu einer besseren wirtschaftlichen Verwertung kostbarer menschlicher Arbeitskraft bei. Begreiflicherweise hat in Frankfurt eine lebhafte Diskussion über das Für und Wider des Hochhauses eingesetzt. In den weitesten Kreisen ist man sich darüber einig geworden, daß seine Errichtung für die Stadt einen Gewinn bedeutet, denn abgesehen davon, daß die Baukosten rein aus privaten Mitteln bestritten werden, das Gebäude ermöglicht auch den Zuzug großer fremder Firmen und fördert so die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung Frankfurts. Hinzugefügt sei nur noch, daß die Künstlerschaft ein Hochhaus auf dem vorgesehenen Gelände prinzipiell für wünschenswert und mit ästhetischen Rücksichten für durchaus vereinbar hält.

Die Anordnung des Hochhauses an dem freien Platz vor der Festhalle (Abb. 1) ergab sich aus praktischen und ästhetischen Gründen. Der hier gelegene teuerste Teil des Grundstücks befindet sich in nächster Nachbarschaft der Messe, ein in geschäftlicher Hinsicht nicht zu unterschätzender Vorzug, außerdem spricht für seine Wahl, daß die Entleerung des Hochhauses zu Beginn und Schluß der Bürozeiten sich direkt nach dem Platze zu vollziehen kann. Vom ästhetisch-städtebaulichen Standpunkte aus läßt sich die Hochführung des Gebäudes gerade an dieser Stelle dadurch rechtfertigen, daß der hier aufsteigende Turm als weithin sichtbarer Blickpunkt der Hohenzollernallee und als Kopf der Moltke- und Bismarckallee zu dienen vermag.

Abb 2.

Raumverteilung und Grundrißlösung sind so übersichtlich wie nur möglich (Abb. 3 und 5). Was zunächst das Hochhaus selber anlangt, so wird es rein als Bürogebäude in völliger Unabhängigkeit von den übrigen Gebäulichkeiten errichtet. Es wächst zu einer Höhe von knapp 60 Meter an, einer Höhe also, die sich weit unterhalb der Höhe amerikanischer „Wolkenkratzer" hält, und umfaßt 15 Obergeschosse, die bei gegebenen Achsen beliebig in Büroräume aufgeteilt werden mögen. In der großen Eingangshalle befinden sich außer den Portierlogen ein Raum für erste Hilfeleistung, ein Briefablage-Raum mit Signalvorrichtung zu den einzelnen Büros, weiterhin ein Boteninstitut, eine Telegraphenstation, öffentliche Fernsprechzellen usw. Zwischen dem 15. Obergeschoß und der Plattform hat der Architekt noch ein niedriges Zwischengeschoß eingeschaltet, das zur Aufnahme der Aufzugsmaschinerie, der Zirkulationsleitungen usw. dienen soll. Die Anordnung von Toilettenanlagen, Garderobe- und Waschräumen in jedem Geschoß versteht sich von selber. Ueber die Verkehrsregelung und die technischen Einrichtungen wird noch zu sprechen sein.

Die beiden Längsflügel, der kurze Verbindungstrakt zwischen den Höfen und der Querbau

passage at the end of the text—after detailed descriptions of elevators, hydrants, pump units, heating systems, traffic circulation, canteens, and operating facilities—does he allow himself to say a few words on the architecture of the building. Kracauer thereby draws a strict line between the construction technology of a building and its architecture, i.e. its ornaments: a dichotomy arising in 19th-century thinking, soon assuming the character of a paradigm in architectural discourse. Ever since, it therefore effectively determined the way not only how people perceived architecture, but also how they conceived it, as Anne-Marie Sankovitch has pointed out.[34] Kracauer's reflections on skyscrapers could be regarded as a case in point. On the one hand, he approaches buildings with a precise description of its construction and technical facilities, while on the other, he perceives it as a purposeless "art of physical masses," logically rising from the ground plan and rhythmicized by the ornaments of its facade. Unlike the advocates of architectural functionalism, Kracauer therefore never believed the radical erasure of ornaments would indicate new progress in architecture. In the long run, he rather feared this might lead to a fatal ignorance of the very nature of architecture. As freely disposed forms, ornaments may appear as the most dispensable parts of buildings. But at the same time, they are indispensable for architecture's general acceptance as a medium of the individual's self-experience.

HATING ARCHITECTURE THE ORNAMENTAL CONDITION

AGAINST FUNCTIONALISM

With respect to architectural bodies, Kracauer's opposition to distinguishing between structure and ornament for the sake of functionalism may be interpreted as part of a general skepticism towards any kind of objectification. In *Ginster*, Kracauer ironically reverses the logic of architectural practice by playing with the idea of transforming buildings back into purposeless figures.[35] On the other hand, it was hardly possible to ignore the fact that the very ornament theories he was relying on substantially contributed to the criticized objectification of ornaments. Alina Payne convincingly pointed out in *From Ornament to Object* (2012) that authors like Riegl effectively blurred the lines between architecture and objects.[36] Furniture for instance could assume the ornamental character of architectural monuments, whereas buildings could be regarded as large-scale objects translocated and collected via medial reproductions, that is drawings, models, and photographs. Thus, architecture seemed to be immersed in a world of ornamental objects regardless of scales, purposes or media. The impact this general approach towards ornamental phenomena had on early 20th-century thinking can hardly be overestimated. This especially applies to modern architecture, as Payne stresses. With the removal of ornaments, she argues, this paradigm shift from ornaments to objects underwent its most radical application. Ever since, objects—we may also add technical structures—have taken over functions that had formerly been reserved for architectural

ornaments. Authors like Georg Simmel, who had a great impact on Kracauer's thinking since his architectural studies in Berlin, were pretty much aware of this transformation. In his famous review on the *Berliner Gewerbe-Ausstellung* (Berlin Trade Exhibition, 1896), Simmel interprets the exhibition's overwhelming number of heterogeneous ornamental objects, ranging from art to machines, as compensation for modern society's *tristesse*.[37] But this short text also includes reflections on the exhibition's architecture and the double nature of the merchandise as something serving a purpose and attracting the eye of consumers. It is revealing how the presentation of unrelated objects within the exhibition's frame is described here as a relief, i.e. as a surface consisting of objects with changing plasticity and corporeality.[38] And this might be exactly the reason why Kracauer was so fascinated by wrought iron ornaments. More than any other part of a building, it revealed the multifaceted nature of ornaments as something evolving from architecturally bound reliefs to rather detached objects.

However, what we can learn from Simmel's review is how objects became perceivable as ornaments even if they are industrially produced or determined by pragmatic purposes. Besides, though the new culture of objectiveness no longer seems to allow for highly individual artworks, the acquisition of style is still possible. It is created through the combination of mass-produced objects, themselves lacking any

individuality. For, as Simmel states in *The Problem of Style* (1908), the individual specificity of a style no longer lies in single art works but in a collection of standardized objects oriented towards their owner at the center, we could even say the curator, of the entire arrangement.[39] Even objects claiming to be determined exclusively by their functional purpose may thereby assume qualities that had hitherto only been attributed to ornaments. It is no coincidence that exhibitions are the place where the ornamentality of objects is clearly revealed. Kracauer's report on the Berlin show "So wohne alle Tage" (trans.: So live all days) (1931) betrays a certain awareness in this respect. In it, he argues that modern furniture differs much less from the ornamentally overloaded objects of the younger past than it initially seems: "Loosely arranged groups of steel furniture create the impression of carefree private elegance," while instead of consistently applying objectivity, these new objects are "inflated to a size that is meaningless."[40]

Though Kracauer does not explicitly use the term here, the ornament is always present in these observations. Moreover, its theoretical implications as defined by Wölfflin, Riegl, and Simmel determined the way Kracauer approached architectural issues in a broader sense. But there was another lesson to be learned from Simmel's writings. Trade and building exhibitions allowed for a much deeper grasp of the ornamental self-understanding of modernity than the traditional analysis of facades. Accordingly, the

most important observations by Kracauer on modern architecture are presented in a series of exhibition reviews published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* or elsewhere. This becomes clear for instance in his lengthy article on the Werkbund exhibition "Die Form" (trans.: The Form), which opened in June 1924 precisely at the place where the old main station of Stuttgart once stood. Shortly after Gropius had propagated a new unity of art and technique on the occasion of the great Bauhaus-exhibition in Weimar, Kracauer unmistakably criticized the "cubic fanaticism" and "dogmatic style" of the Bauhaus.[41] In the end, he fears, functionalism and aesthetic pureness could lead to a "new romanticism" or even to a "dead end."[42] The question whether or not ornaments are needed is therefore misleading. One can hardly escape from ornaments. They are even there when called into question. In this sense, the criminalization of ornaments appears as pure rhetoric. It successfully prevents us from seeing how modernity itself creates ornaments. More precisely, how ornaments are created from what has formerly been masked through ornamental layers: the technical, structural, and economic forms underneath. In his article on the Werkbund exhibition, Kracauer clearly expresses this paradoxical nature of modern architecture:

"On the one hand, the reflection on simple forms leads to a sort of subtraction method: the so-called ornaments are just subtracted from the fully equipped pieces, declaring the meager rest as

absolute form. Yet, the positive is far from achieved by this act of pure negation—unless in the sense of Fichte's inverted dialectic, wherein the ego arises from the not-ego. And one tires of the glamorous results all too quickly. On the other hand, one only returns to form in order to drive out form again ornamentally."[43]

The paradoxical formula of *returning to form only in order to drive out form ornamentally* clearly reveals that Kracauer's criticism not only addresses modern architecture's negation of traditional ornaments. Surely, traditional ornaments are also increasingly overlooked, as Kracauer frequently observed. In his "Abschied von der Lindenpassage" (trans.: Farewell to the Lindenpassage, 1930) for instance, concerning a building erected in 1876, he literally regrets the vanishing ornaments of its Neo-Renaissance facade **[Fig. 3]**. Not unlike an archaeologist, Kracauer follows the hidden traces of the former historicist building with the "awful beautiful style imitations of our ancestors."[44] With great enthusiasm, he again describes its ornamental richness exactly at a time when it fell victim to *Neue Sachlichkeit*. It even becomes a mysterious place, passage or swamp: the last reservation of things or even displaced beings singled out by bourgeois life and buried in the new "marble grave," as designed by the Swedish architect Alfred Grenander. Modern architecture is introduced here as the gravedigger of spatial constructions, which anachronistically protrude into the

Fig. 3

Alfred Grenander, Conversion of the Passage Unter den Linden in Berlin, photographs by Atelier Stone, 1933

present. But this does not necessarily mean that Kracauer believed the envisioned age of non-ornamental culture had already become a reality. Quite the contrary, modernity's rejection of anything ornamental actually entails a massive explosion of ornamental production, even though the nature of ornaments totally changed in this process. What was formerly bound to the materiality and verticality of small objects, motifs and figures, sometimes populating facades, sometimes being small-scale objects, either passed over to the ornamental use of undecorated objects, as for instance tubular chairs, or to the abstract megastructures imagined by modern city planners. In both cases, functionalism is far from the fulfillment of pragmatic necessities, but a somehow paradoxical aesthetic effect: the creation of ornaments of ornamentlessness. Thus, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, as understood by Kracauer, does not present itself as something deliberately made in the way traditional ornaments had been designed, but as stemming directly from rational ideas that are comparable to the way everything was created in nature. Thanks to the claimed naturalness of modernity, the actual arbitrariness of its ornamental forms is overlooked, an insight wonderfully described in Roland Barthes's essay on the Eiffel Tower.[45] According to Barthes, the many utilitarian arguments to legitimize such an enormous undertaking as the construction of the Eiffel Tower obscures its true nature as a self-contained and purposeless building. Functionalism therefore must

primarily be regarded as a metaphorical strategy. Clearly, Kracauer would have agreed with Barthes's interpretation of rationalism at this point, but unlike the French philosopher, modern architecture is understood here as something that literally transforms these notorious metaphors into real material facades. What is actually taking shape here is not rationalism as an intellectual ideal or as part of a building's justification, but what must instead be regarded as the ornamental nature of the new capitalist order. So unlike Barthes's metaphors, those used by Kracauer assume the materiality of "real" ornaments conceived as concrete materializations that claim to shape reality through a new ornamental organization of society: a materiality that pretends to be immaterial, in the sense that architects apply new materials and techniques such as glass to prevent us from seeing the actual material reality of its ornaments. As Kracauer knew, buildings are extremely influential in this respect. Often invisible in our daily routines, and therefore difficult to grasp, they effectively influence our lives, both as material constructions and as material metaphors, i.e. ornaments.

Thus, for Kracauer the term *Neue Sachlichkeit* not only indicates a paradigm shift in aesthetics, but also the project of a new social order and its all-encompassing ornaments. To visualize its invisible ornamental structure, he uses metaphors against functionalism. One of his first articles for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* is revealing in this respect.[46] At a

time of political turmoil, the question is posed why extreme political positions are currently losing their importance in postwar Germany. According to Kracauer, the answer lies in the modern state's bureaucratic and institutional nature. Institutions, Kracauer argues, certainly form the basis of every society. They guarantee the lasting existence of a *Gemeinschaft*, a term coined by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies.[47] But in doing so, they also aim to organize, regulate and standardize our customs, daily routines, and even our thinking. Under these conditions, it is hardly possible to maintain political positions that are not in line with institutional agendas and procedures. The institutional ignorance towards societal dynamics and changing political ideas, or even their deliberate oppression, would inevitably run into a culture of average thinking. Against this background, Kracauer emphasizes the paradoxical character of institutions. Though they originally evolved from current needs, they lose any timeliness once they have been established since they lack any flexibility towards future needs. Thus, the functionalism of institutions, not unlike that of architecture, should be considered as static and immobile constructions conceived only for a fixed number of purposes. Against this background, Kracauer uses architectural metaphors that evoke ideas of organic beings and their fossil remains, such as "ossification," "crust-like structures," "buildings," "mould housings," "calcification," and "foundations" to underline this argument.[48]

Clearly, architectural metaphors are used here in a way that undermines their classical meaning as something based on reason, necessity, and logical thinking. Institutions such as buildings become monuments of historical needs rather than instruments to solve current problems. Thus, their maintenance bears the risk of revolutionary turmoil, which might lead to the destruction of institutions, but also of the "entire building" that guaranteed their existence.[49] Kracauer therefore never shared the growing belief in institutions as a guarantee of progress, nor did he share the trust in modern architecture as part of the solution. This also throws light on the way Kracauer approaches architectural history. The remnants of the past are conceived as a petrifaction of former needs, which were either preserved for other reasons than their original purposes, or which are destroyed in order to make place for new needs. In both cases, architectural forms are understood as footprints or even fossil remains of the societies that created them:

"The undisrupted development of any human community is bound to the existence of solid institutions with unquestionable validity. They serve as the foundation on which the community's lived reality is built. Lasting habits and rigid facilities are the waste products of the people who, by the excretion of such a crust-like building, document normal growth in a specific state system."[50]

In this sense, architectural and institutional functionalism were two sides of the same coin.

They aim to eternalize bureaucratic architecture, which by definition could hardly be more than the satisfaction of temporary needs. *Neue Sachlichkeit* is neither regarded here as an aesthetic ideal nor as the climax of progress. Instead, it indicates the loss of any potential to meet more than the banality of bureaucratic functionalism. This functionalism of course itself becomes an ornament once it has lost its original purpose. But its radical pureness no longer allows for the ambiguities and contradictions of former ornamental figures. Unlike Wölfflin's notion of the ornament as a vital energy, those realized by modernity are no more than dead matter. Against this background, Kracauer's *Farewell to the Lindenpassage* could easily be understood as a more general farewell to building as a multifaceted complex of economic, technical and fictional/ornamental qualities. By assuming that ornaments are needed for any kind of objective expression in society, modern functionalism marked an unprecedented low-point in history. Constantly proclaiming that ornaments were no longer needed prevents architecture from its necessary renewal as an ornamental being in its own right.

Besides, texts like the article on the Lindenpassage clearly demonstrate how Kracauer became an architect of textual buildings rather than of material ones. It even seems as if the dualism of structure and ornament has been merged with the dualism of text and metaphor. Metaphors are for texts what ornaments had once been for built structures.

As freely disposed figures, they may have the potential either to stabilize or to destabilize their tectonic/textual substructures. And this is exactly how Kracauer approaches urban space. His dramatic presentation of historicist architecture as a being that is threatened and even buried by modern architecture clearly demonstrates to what extent the lines between material ornaments and immaterial metaphors are blurred. For it is striking that Kracauer's textual reanimation of ornamental beings is instrumental in visualizing the many contrasts that contemporary society creates: not only in terms of urban planning, but also in all parts of existing society. At this point, metaphorical buildings no longer serve to legitimize scientific rationalism, a knowledge canon, or accomplished education, as comprehensively described in literary studies.[51] Instead, they become "analytical instruments," located somewhere between "textual and social domains."[52]

HATING ARCHITECTURE THE ORNAMENTAL CONDITION AGAINST FUNCTIONALISM

METAPHORS AND TERRITORIES

But what exactly is a metaphor? And what does it mean when it comes to the criticism of Kracauer? As Petra Gehring points out in her illuminating article "Erkenntnis durch Metaphern?" (trans.: Knowledge through Metaphors?, 2010),[53] metaphors are not precisely defined images, motifs, or symbols, as many encyclopedic collections in Literary Studies suggest, as if they were objects to be collected in archives. Instead, their decisive quality is to create context breaks. Naturally, to interpret metaphors as such assumes seeing them within their *con-texts* rather than as isolated entities. Metaphors are site-specific. They are related to specific frames, as Gehring puts it, in order to focus the very nature of otherwise complex or abstract issues as the classic concept of unity in variety. At the same time, they form contrasts with the disciplinary field in which they are used. The notorious notion of organic architecture for instance could be regarded as such a context break. On one side the metaphor of the human body serves to visualize the idea of architecture as a complete body. On the other hand, we are pretty aware of the fact that architecture is by no means a living being. Yet surprisingly enough we frequently ignore this fact, because for centuries, we have been accustomed to the idea of architecture or the city as something organic. It was even instrumental to architecture's self-justification, though it tells us only little about architectural practice. By consequence, the metaphor of the human body assumed the character of an

architectural cliché. It helped to mystify the built as something perfect and rational, though in most cases it is quite the opposite. Images of the human body, animals, and plants run like a common thread through architectural history, both in buildings and texts. Not to mention the many attempts in architectural theory to legitimize certain positions and stabilize the whole discipline with the help of organic metaphors.[54] Of course, this should not only be seen as conscious references. Recent studies have instead pointed to the fact that metaphors such as those used in architecture should instead be considered as corporeal and terrestrial biases of our thinking.[55] In what sense? Well, what is encapsulated or even stored in metaphors/ornaments is no less than the terrestrial, bodily, and gravitational nature of our knowledge.

However, in the early 20th century, this all seems to belong to a lost world of ornamental wilderness and myths, something only to be found in the obscure parts of the city not yet reached by the glare of modern rationalization; or at uncanny places meandering between the real, the imaginary, and the phantasmagoric. Places like Positano, a small village on the steep slopes of the Amalfi coast, a place Kracauer and Adorno visited in 1925 during their trip to Capri and Naples.[56] They encountered other intellectuals there who were associated with the Frankfurt School and Western Marxism, including Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Alfred Sohn-Rethel, and Asja Lacis, for whom the experience of these places

marked a paradigmatic shift. Instead of Goethe's classic temples of Paestum, they discovered a material culture that was as different from the Arcadian landscapes of philosophical idealism as from the alleged purity of modern rationalism: the Neapolitan metabolism of machines, handicraft, *objets trouvés*, fragments of the past, infrastructures, and houses that were maintainable only through constant improvisations and manual interventions. This somehow archaic practice of tinkering not only confronted the group with a fragile state between stabilization and destabilization, but also gave rise to the idea of porosity: a quality of the regional tuff that provided the terrestrial tone for a number of important writings such as Sohn-Rethel's "Ideal des Kaputten" (trans.: Ideal of the Broken, 1926), Benjamin and Lacis's "Neapel" (trans.: Naples, 1925) and Bloch's "Italien und die Porosität" (trans.: Italy and Porosity, 1925). Since then, building material and textual architectures/ infrastructures out of hollow stones and hybrid constructions has been an obsession shared by all members of this Neapolitan group.

The fascinating, unreal setting of Positano, hovering between the sea and the rocks, inspired Kracauer in his essay on the village to actually design a *città morta.*[57] It consists of "house skeletons," "slowly crumbling in the stagnant air," forming an underworld or a mythological twilight zone populated by displaced gods, demons, and witches stubbornly resisting the all-encompassing process of civilization

and rationalization.[58] The metaphors Kracauer uses here no longer create context breaks within the text, but between different territories: that of the city's "rock madness" and the alleged modern rationalism.

To conjure up a world of fragmented, ruined, and dispersed remnants populated by the living dead became an obsession long before this group of dazzling Naples travelers penned their texts. Especially in modern Italian art, the disappearance of antiquity's mythological realm played a significant role, spanning from Giorgio de Chirico's *pittura metafisica* to Mario Sironi's gloomy images of scattered classicism. Often, the remembered places condense into a general idea of the traditional Italian city, the architecture of which is largely anonymized. It is only a meaningless reference to a mystical past that stands in monumental silence to one's own present. Enigmatic perspectives, eroded standards, blind window and door openings, as well as deep black shadows make any thought of a euphoric expectation of what is to come seem inappropriate. Sometimes the architecture of images is even presented as fragile, skeletal constructions or as an enigmatic combination of disordered ornaments. The metaphysical city thus becomes the backdrop of a world out of joint, wherein human beings are only present on the stage of the picture by means of their self-created things—sculptures, torsos, machines, or puppets.

When Kracauer met the Swiss writer Gilbert Clavel, he encountered an intellectual in Positano

who was not only familiar with this iconography of a vanishing world, but also known for his articles in *Valori Plastici*, a magazine proclaiming a *retour à l'ordre*. Moreover, at the time when Kracauer visited Positano, Clavel was about to create a real *architettura metafisica*. Obsessed by the Positanian forces, Clavel, according to Kracauer, literally became an engineer in the service of the un-constructible, a paradox that was based on the remnants of Kracauer's dead city. In 1909, Clavel purchased a 16th-century watchtower in Positano. Ten years later he began to gradually transform this ruin into an architecture of the chthonic, as Clavel called it **[Fig. 4]**. This bizarre building not only negated the general idea of architecture as unearthly construction, but went further by productively inverting the planning process, turning construction into destruction; hollowing out the interior of the tower and its adjacent rocks became an obsession. Its aim was no less than to create a monumental embodiment of its creator. This is also the way Kracauer approaches the "gigantic absurdities"[59] of the subterranean labyrinth, which was still under construction at the time he made his trip to Positano: "The flights of stairs are unfathomable, a snake-like bowel that sneaks into the room. It secretly winds around each one and curls up to tunnels that are no higher than their overgrown master."[60]

Clavel's uncanny architecture, not unlike Kracauer's Lindenpassage, is then imagined as a grave for the unconscious and the instinctive,

POSITANO

TORRE FORNILLO.
Ein ehemaliger Sarazenenturm, zur Verteidigung der Küste gegen die Seeräuber angelegt. Er erhebt sich auf einem stark vorspringenden, unterwühlten Felsen und ist von dem Basler Gilbert Clavel (gest. 1927) zu einem Wohnturm umgebaut worden

Bild links:
EINE KLEINE WEINKNEIPE,

DIE FARBIGE STADT

VON DR. JAKOB JOB
MIT PHOTOGRAPHISCHEN AUFNAHMEN DES VERFASSERS

Wäre ich ein indischer Nabob, der die weite Welt zu seinem Hause machen kann, dann wollte ich am meisten geliebten neapolitanischen Golfe zwei Häuser haben, eines in Capri und eines in Positano. Capri, das Felseneiland, brauche ich niemandem vorzustellen: Blaue Grotte, Faraglioni, Salto di Tiberio — wer kennt die Namen nicht! Freilich schlie-

Fig. 4

Jakob Job, Torre Fornillo, 1930

recalling the realm of Hades and the world of Greek mythology. Yet, some of the tower's chambers may initially appear as the anticipation of the Bauhaus, as Kracauer ironically states. And of course it is the use of modern techniques that made this architecture possible in the first place. But this by no means indicates that Clavel's building followed the logic of a plan or the primacy of functionalism. The employment of modern techniques rather revealed, if not enforced, the overall irrational and hybrid nature of this "pompous"[61] excavation process. Accordingly, the achievements of modern technology are immersed into a process of quite archaic, disordered and irrational building. Even more irritating than the lack of any concrete purpose is the fact that this project was never completed. Until his death in 1927, Clavel continued to hollow out the rock, thereby creating a direct imprint of his restless obsession. What has been monumentalized here is the "delightful horror" of disoriented and decentralized subjectivity, rather than autobiographical perfection. In recent studies, the project has even been interpreted as a "site for symbolic suicide,"[62] taking into account that Clavel alludes to death symbols with the architecture of the chthonic.

Deviating from this characterization, the attempt has been made to link the tower's transformation to Clavel's earlier engagement with the topic in his dystopian novel *Un istituto per suicide* (1917). In this book, which is beautifully illustrated by the befriended artist Fortunato Depero, the Positanian

architect tells quite an irritating story. As already indicated in the title, it deals with an institute whose only purpose is to transform suicides into a bureaucratic and organized process, thereby offering more "convenient" deaths. The architecture of the institute resembles that of a bank, while the people working in this institute look like bank clerks who treat their clients with great discreteness and reliability. Other clerks are dressed like nurses or doctors employing modern technologies in their surgeries, as Clavel did in his rock excavation. In this way, the experience of death, described by Clavel as a shift of the subject's center, appears as totally detached from any religious connotation. It is the result of a radical advancement of what Kracauer would call *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Bureaucracy does not even hold back from the individual's wish to die. It is transformed into a standardized and regulated process not allowing for any unforeseen emotions or passions. And yet even here, in this factual treatment of what has been formerly associated with procedures left out by the general process of rationalization, a nearly forgotten world of myths once more comes to the fore. Allusions of death dances, the idea of death as a passage between different modes of life, motifs of rebirth and rites of transformation echo Clavel's great enthusiasm for the myths of Egyptian antiquity.[63]

As Kracauer's article on Positano clearly reveals, he was extremely fascinated by these surreal entanglements, yet on different levels and for

different reasons. In the first place, this was because he encountered aesthetic positions that perfectly complied with his analysis of the present society. However, Kracauer himself never advocated a *retour à l'ordre* in the sense imagined in the works of the Novecento movement. Furthermore, the whole territory of Positano, with its unreal setting, skeletal houses and Clavel's tower miraculously built in the rocks, served as a perfect, monumental metaphor of what remains after the alleged process of total disenchantment: cities of fragmented, disproportioned, disoriented, and scattered forms, and beings whose former meaning somehow got lost. All that is left are empty symbols that only partially reveal their original content and are rarely understood. As such, *Positanian* architecture could be regarded as a counterpart to the architecture of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Whereas the latter propagates the end of ornamental figures for the sake of a new rationalism, the former resists any kind of purpose-oriented thinking, thereby creating overwhelming, sometimes uncanny or even scary images of a territory at the rear of modern civilization. But this of course is not conceived as a strict distinction. Instead, both Clavel and Kracauer played with mutual penetrations, enigmatic entanglements and dialectical transfers. In his textual design of the dead city, Kracauer even adopts Clavel's method. Like the latter, he departs from what could be found at the construction site of his textual building, thereby becoming an architect of the chthonic, who

constantly switches between real and mythological places. Architectural designs are somehow lost in this kaleidoscopic simultaneity of the non-simultaneous. As Kracauer's *Farewell to the Lindenpassage* and other texts clearly show, the metaphors employed to build the dead city of Positano could also be used to create site-specific context breaks in the modern metropolis. Phenomena of the modern world such as engineering technologies and the new social class of clerks were occasionally immersed in quite archaic practices associated with the chthonic. If the Bauhaus and Positano are to be considered as two extreme poles, which also mark two different territories with different realities, then the modern city is the place where both spheres clash. The contrasts this creates are not only instrumental to navigate through real and fictional spaces. As conceptual buildings,[64] they also cause irritating effects that are indispensable for Kracauer's general criticism of the modern society; incidentally, this criticism is largely based on the experiences Kracauer made as a practicing architect. For as an employed architect, he himself did not only belong to the new class of clerks, as analyzed in his seminal text *The Salaried Mass*, but also directly experienced the paradoxes and dysfunctionalities of the growing planning bureaucracy and the general impact this had on architectural practice.

And this is exactly how Kracauer approaches architecture. He never aspired to become one of the leading figures of architectural discourse, such as

the art historians Adolf Behne and Sigfried Giedion. His relationship with architecture is of a different kind. Instead of delivering historical explanations for the avant-garde's strong belief in modern architecture's potential to shape social relations, Kracauer demystified what itself claimed to emerge from a demystification process: the idea of functionalist design. In line with this inversion of programs and manifestos, architecture is not so much seen as a starting point for a better world, but rather understood as the manifestation of a new ornamental order in the broadest sense. Surprisingly enough, the many interpretations of Kracauer's work only paid little attention to this fact, or rather stated that Kracauer himself denied that his experience as an architect ever had an impact on his thinking. As we learn from his criticism, this could not be further from the truth.

HATING ARCHITECTURE
THE ORNAMENTAL CONDITION
AGAINST FUNCTIONALISM
METAPHORS AND TERRITORIES

ARCHITECT(URE) WITHOUT CONTENT

Even though Kracauer combined architectural practice with journalism in the early Twenties, he became a committed advocate of his former profession. In "Standesfragen der Architektenschaft" (trans.: Status Issues of Architects, 1921), one of his early articles for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, he used the foundation of the Federation of German Architects (BDA) as an occasion to draw his readers' attention to the precarious situation of architectural production in the postwar period. Kracauer sees the main reasons for this crisis in the total absence of public commissions and competitions in post-war Germany, as well as the new dominance of planning bureaucracy.[65] Once again, this is based on Kracauer's experience as a practicing architect. Shortly before Kracauer started his career as a journalist, he desperately applied for several positions in architectural offices. Two years later, he again criticized the problematic situation of his profession. In this context, and unlike *Ginster*, it becomes clear that Kracauer still adheres to the idea of the architect as a role model for life building. Accordingly, the title of architect could only be awarded to those who are entirely devoted to what he calls the art of building or even art. This is followed up by a number of secondary and more pragmatic qualifications. Being an "able builder" does not only require great design skills, but also the capacity to consider every single detail of a building, both in terms of its purpose and its aesthetic treatment. Technical skills, the talent to organize people in support of a

higher aim, knowledge of legal issues, experience communicating with different types of people and professions, excellent education, and a cultivated taste are considered equally indispensable. With this profile, Kracauer deliberately recalls a rather idealistic understanding of the architect's subjectivity. Moreover, it is his conviction that it must be protected from the increasing impact that building authorities and their bureaucratic procedures have on architectural production and urban planning. Accordingly, he reminds the reader that the "architectural heyday Germany has witnessed in the past two or three decades was certainly not due to its construction officials. Quite the contrary, it once more confirmed the old wisdom that in nearly all cases, the civil service is the death of all artistic creation."[66]

However, Kracauer was by no means the only author in the early 20th century who considered bureaucracy as the greatest threat to the "able architect." In his nearly forgotten book "Der Architekt" (trans.: The Architect), published in 1907 as part of a quite prestigious series of monographs edited by Martin Buber,[67] the art critic Karl Scheffler even took the crisis of the architect as a symptom of society's present state: "For the general is expressed in personal fates; the object of time is always reflected in the subject."[68] According to Scheffler, this mirror-image ratio between architect and society especially came to the fore with the new capitalist order. Ever since, the architect's subjectivity, traditionally

understood as the embodiment of universal knowledge, has fallen into unrelated parts, either becoming a degenerated entrepreneur, an uninspired scientist, or a pedantic bureaucrat.[69] As Scheffler clearly states in his book, it is by no means the architect alone who is responsible for this problematic situation. Assuming that architects could hardly be better than the society they emerge from, Scheffler argues against an artificial distinction between the subjectivity of the architect and that of other members of society. Instead, architecture falls under the responsibility of all subjects: "Figuratively speaking, everybody is therefore an architect."[70] By consequence, architecture could be considered a cultural technique of ordering practiced by all humans, even when this is not manifested in buildings.

It seems seductive to interpret this understanding of the architect as an anticipation of what has been called an "architecture of society."[71] But Scheffler is neither interested in an analysis of architecture as a representation of ideological or political concepts, nor is he trying to pave the way for architecture sociology. He instead regards his book as an opportunity to express his strong belief in a new symbiosis carried out by a generation of architects who would be able to shape a new style in the age of industrialization, as attributed to Peter Behrens, the designer of Scheffler's book: Scheffler still adheres to the idea of an overarching expression of a nation's "will to culture."[72] He returned to the subject in his

later published *The Architecture of the Metropolis* (1913),[73] calling for a new bourgeois art conceived as a monumental embodiment of the capitalist order.

Though Kracauer shared Scheffler's criticism, his admiration for Behrens[74] as well as his definition of the ideal architect, he had sincere doubts whether a new synthesis would be feasible. This becomes clear in another early article for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* on the *German Trade Fair* (1922). It was the first exhibition of its kind after the war, which took place in Munich, presenting commercial products ranging from small objects of daily use to experimental buildings for social housing, including Peter Behrens's enigmatic *Dombauhütte*.[75] Kracauer took his review as an occasion to reflect more generally on design issues rather than to focus on specific displays. Similar to the protagonists of a new "life style," he blames the 19th century for its "entirely uncultivated taste."[76] But at the same time, Kracauer criticizes the avant-garde's adherence to an elitist idea of art, thereby failing to address the new mass audience. This analysis of the state of the arts leads Kracauer to reflections on the relationship between content and form. To this aim, he again looks back on history, associating earlier periods with a "higher order": "Every single object of this time therefore breathes a unified spirit…"[77] His contemporary society must in turn be regarded as a "torn transition period" that only allows "skeptical optimism."[78] In this context, Kracauer questions whether the many attempts to regain the alleged

former ideal state by introducing art as crafts, instead of improving crafts to art, would have any effect. According to Kracauer, the only way out of the crisis would be a "change of our entire life style."[79] But it remains unclear what exactly is meant by this request. In any case, *Neues Bauen* or *Neue Sachlichkeit* could hardly offer a way out of the crisis for the same reasons that such modern institutions had to be considered as part of the problem.

Against this background, it is by no means surprising that Kracauer comments critically on the German Werkbund and its famous exhibition *The Apartment* (1927).[80] Since its foundation in 1907, one of the Werkbund's most important goals was to reconcile craft, arts, and architecture with mass production and the new industrialized construction technologies. This of course gave rise to many controversies, as has been pointed out in numerous studies on another Werkbund exhibition presented in Cologne at the cusp of World War I. On the occasion of this renowned show with its famous experimental buildings, Muthesius and other representatives of the Werkbund called for the all-encompassing standardization of forms. This conflicted with the positions of other Werkbund members, who insisted more than ever on the artist's individuality. What both groups had in common was the overall belief in the advent of a new aesthetic totality, as associated with the idea of style. Yet, the question of how this could be reached even in a time of far reaching economic and political

changes remained unanswered. However, neither art history nor artists were able to shed light on the secret of style, as Muthesius repeatedly stressed in his lectures and writings even before the foundation of the Werkbund.[81] But he strongly believed that it must be built on the basis of materialist thinking, namely on economic reason and production conditions. Academic discussions on aesthetic forms are therefore useless unless the new material reality of contemporary society has been fully accepted as key to a new aesthetic unity that might one day be acknowledged as a true style.

Kracauer's attitude towards these discussions remained ambivalent. Though his abovementioned articles on the deficient conditions of architectural production betray a rather idealistic understanding of the architect, he was by no means advocating a new individualism in architectural practice as proposed by Scheffler. Besides, he rather welcomed Muthesius's plea for an unconstrained acceptance of socio-economic realities. But unlike Muthesius and the Werkbund, Kracauer had sincere doubts whether this would actually lead to the new desirable cultural homogeneity. His position therefore constantly shifts between general approval, fundamental criticism, and of course irony, a somewhat contradictory practice, which was incidentally instrumental in maintaining the perspective of a distanced viewer as represented by Ginster. Naturally, Kracauer very much welcomed Mies van der Rohe's appointment

as the second Secretary of the German Werkbund a year before the Weissenhof Settlement was opened.[82] For, unlike the first generation of modern architects, he would totally accept the new reality of the machine.[83] Besides, he knew how to convincingly transform this into a new aesthetic reality, as Kracauer emphasizes. But instead of praising the new functionalism presented by Mies and parts of the international avant-garde, Kracauer laconically describes how the new houses of the Weissenhof Settlement now suit the "precise water taps"[84] of the industrialized age. The overall aim of the mechanization that was taking over was to deliver apartments for people working in major rationalized corporations, using cars and airplanes, playing the necessary sports in stadiums, whose characters are guided by the masses. According to Kracauer, any private sphere or individual withdrawal from this new reality is now presented as an outdated model of earlier periods. Accordingly, the new architectural facades lack any individuality, thereby complying to the new way people perceived the city from cars and airplanes. As a result, the grounded viewer perceiving buildings was replaced by the, "roaming and penetrating observer; or the aviator, to whom they present their flat roofs… "[85] In this sense, modern houses become mass ornaments that leave behind the "old-style European perspective."[86] As such, they are directly connected to the capitalist order, whereas the old-style European perspective turned into the new aesthetic forms of historicity,

void of any concrete meaning. Kracauer thus deliberately undermines the overall understanding of *Neues Bauen* as an ideal synthesis of aesthetic and functional rationalism. Instead, what makes modern society so different is the way it created a new type of ornamental reality taking shape in spatial surfaces, masses, and territories, rather than in figurative motifs. This of course totally changed the way Kracauer approached the issue of the ornament. As Claire Zimmerman rightly points out, Kracauer subsequently, "transferred the investigation from one of research on the past (in his dissertation) to one with a contemporary focus (in his critical work of the 1920s)."[87] Consequently, Kracauer was no longer interested in the technical conditions of ornament production, nor in its concrete historical contexts or genesis. Unlike his dissertation thesis, he now focused on surfaces and their visual effects, including the ornamental surfaces of modern ornamentlessness.

This shift from traditional ornaments to modern surfaces becomes clear in a seminal text Kracauer published only a year before his review on *The Apartment*. In *Cult of Distraction: On Berlin's Picture Palaces* (1926) the traditional idea of the architectural ornament is no longer regarded as a proper cultural expression of the new "mass taste". For better or worse, it became part of a cultural heritage instead of remaining a lively part of contemporary society. Thus, any attempt to create a uniform illusion space in shape of the total artwork would be a useless

undertaking.[88] This primarily ignores the fact that the privilege of creating illusionary effects passed over from architecture to the mass media. Yet, architecture still plays a significant role: to unfold its full illusionary potential, film is strongly dependent on modern architecture's renouncement of ornaments. Otherwise, its three-dimensionality would undermine the spatial illusion of the screen.[89] The migration of ornaments from stable architectural surfaces to an unstable sequence of moving images is therefore a decisive prerequisite for exploiting filmic effects to the full. Possibly because of this subtle connection between architecture and film, Benjamin, Kracauer's congenial interlocutor, regarded architecture as the prototype of an artwork whose reception is already based on collective distraction. The question, however, to what extent the mass media in turn changed the reception of architecture remained unanswered.[90]

In any case, the consequences this all has both for the general understanding of architecture and the nature of ornaments could hardly be overestimated. Firstly, picture palaces are no longer allowed to be palaces in the traditional sense. These building types lost their status as an elaborated cultural expression, as has been repeatedly stressed in the many histories of styles. They become frames whose main task is to act against their own nature by denying as far as possible the material reality of ornamental surfaces. To flatten architecture is therefore not considered to be a functional necessity, as proclaimed

by many protagonists of *Neues Bauen*. In essence, it is a consequence of the unstoppable evolution of media technologies. In the very moment architectural ornaments are set free from their material constraints, literally becoming *moving figures*, they are encapsulated in spaces that are no longer accessible. By consequence, empty screens become ornamental surfaces, whereas the ornamental surfaces of architecture are transformed into empty screens. Both are indispensable for what Kracauer called the cult of distraction: the more ornaments are removed from the adjacent architecture, the more the on-screen images may appear as reality. More than ever, the incalculable effects of ornaments are now under media control framed by de-ornamented architectures. But this is not the end of architecture as an eminent medium of projection. Quite the contrary: Surely the white walls of modern architecture were nothing else than screens? Similarly, was not the life taking place in these new architectures of order none other than a projection of modern clichés and images?

In this sense, the white cubes of modern architecture, with their shallow spaces, must themselves be regarded as screens. It is no coincidence that Kracauer's critical report on *The Apartment* culminates in reflections on the surfaces of this new architecture.[91] But instead of praising its transparency as a long overdue removal of ornaments, its glass walls are presented as uncanny "Spiegelhaftigkeit" (reflection).[92] Accordingly, Lilly Reich and Mies van der Rohe's

“Glassraum” for the German Mirror Glass Association, an installation made of glass slabs, becomes a kaleidoscopic, haunted house inhabited by uncanny shadows and disembodied silhouettes, projected onto de-ornamented walls.

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It is worthwhile at this point to note that while Kracauer penned his lengthy review of the Weissenhof show, he was working on a number of other seminal texts discussing the above-mentioned phenomena from different sides. What they all have in common is that they first appeared in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* within a remarkably short time: in March 1926 Kracauer, published “Kult der Zerstreuung” (trans.: Cult of Distraction), in June 1927 “Das Ornament der Masse” (trans.: The Mass Ornament), in July 1927 “Das neue Bauen” (trans.: The new Building), in April 1928 fragments of *Ginster*, followed by “Die Angestellten” (trans.: The Salaried Masses) in January 1930. I argue that this is more than just a series of unrelated texts. Precisely at the time when modern architecture came to its own by realizing some of its most iconic buildings, Kracauer proposes in “Cult of Distraction” to interpret its abstractedness as an evolution of ornamental form and media technologies, rather than as the climax of functional progress. In “The Mass Ornament” however, Kracauer not only imagines how architecturally bound ornaments are transformed into *moving images*. They literally become *moving figures*, that is individuals dissolving into ornamental masses without being aware of how much the new architectural/ornamental order of capitalism determines their lives. In this sense, ornaments are no longer mere motifs, images, or symbols but a structuring device for the organization of social space. “The Salaried Masses” in turn is dedicated to the intellectual homelessness of

a new class, which more than any other is regarded as a symptom of the overall rationalization of life, including the ornamental overkill of the new entertainment/media architecture. In *Ginster*, these general observations are merged into a fictional character without any individuality. To this purpose, Kracauer deliberately chose the architect as an ideal embodiment of a well-built subjectivity in order to demonstrate how this *role model* became an empty formula, oscillating between the dumbness of thoughtless procedures and the distanced position of the critic. Respectively, as an observer, Ginster is somehow fascinated by the new architectural, bureaucratic, and military complex of modern rationalism. But at the same time, he feels a form of alienation when confronted with it. The architectural subject Kracauer presents here lacks all ambition to give sense to the mindless forms, procedures, and practices of modernity. He is totally compliant with the regulations and specifications that planning bureaucracy provides. It is only by chance that he is reminded that his most important task would be to design monuments. It is therefore striking that a mere autobiographical approach to *Ginster* underscores the role the novel plays within Kracauer's critical thinking.[93] For Ginster is not just the alter ego of his author. The novel is even not reducible to Kracauer's general attitude towards architectural or urban phenomena. I rather argue that the novel has to be seen within a much wider scope. In what sense? Well, we can hardly ignore that *Ginster* was published

at a time when Kracauer was intensively concerned with the issue of the ornament, while the removal of ornaments in modern architecture became a widely accepted ideal in the Neues Bauen movement. Besides, the story itself begins with the outbreak of World War I. This is another watershed moment where the issue of the ornament was still debated, though the absurdities of modern functionalism analyzed by Kracauer in several texts already came to the fore. It seems that Kracauer is considering this timespan as a threshold moment wherein architectural form was not yet entirely identical to the new formalist bureaucracy of the modern state as expressed in ornaments of ornamentlessness. A time Kracauer himself made his first experiences as a practicing architect.[94] These were of course important for Kracauer's critical writings on the social status of the architect.

Besides, in his novel, Kracauer also seems to refer to some projects he carried out during his time as a practicing architect, yet in a quite irritating sense. For instance the novel's narrator reports on a conversation between Ginster and his boss, the architect called Valentin. They discuss a design for a cemetery of honor dedicated to the fallen soldiers of the war. Obviously, this alludes to a project Kracauer completed while working in the office of the Frankfurt architect Max Seckbach during the war **[Fig. 5]**. One of the few architectural drawings by Kracauer kept in the German Literature Archive

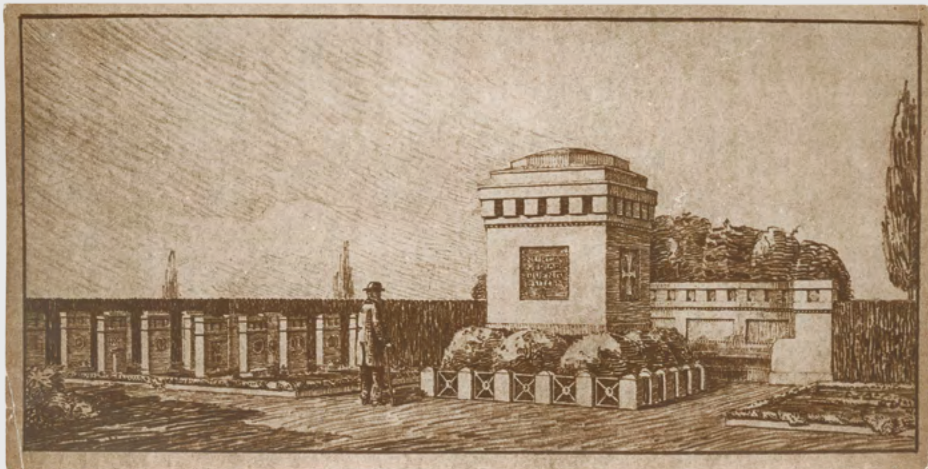

Fig. 5

**Siegfried Kracauer,
Design for a Cemetery of Honor in Frankfurt, 1916**

in Marbach shows the design for a cemetery of honor intended for the Jewish community of Frankfurt, to commemorate the victims of the war. Accordingly, the centerpiece of the project, like many other Jewish cemeteries of that time, is a memorial in the shape of a monumental altar concluding a row of standardized graves. This new building type, which emerged at several places in Germany during the Weimar Republic, was instrumental in demonstrating the strong patriotism of the German Jews after the war and even after the National Socialists came to power.[95]

Though the competition for the Frankfurt cemetery was already announced in 1916, it took nearly ten years for it to be completed. As the *Gemeindeblatt der Israelitischen Gemeinde Frankfurt* reports in December 1925, the consecration ceremony was organized by the Israeli Community of Frankfurt and the Association of Jewish Front Soldiers (RjF). It was conceived as a military memorial to the 487 "German soldiers of Jewish faith," who gave their lives for their country, as stated several times in speeches held in the presence of city and community officials. Accordingly, the ceremony was embedded in strict military protocol. Before the official program started, 400 members of the Association of Jewish Front Soldiers marched in, taking their position in front of the memorial.[96] As the report of the *Gemeindeblatt* indicates, the whole procedure must have been executed with great precision: The parade literally mirrored

the abstract quality of the cemetery's architecture, whose monumental order and standardized graves could also be regarded as a parade of the dead.

With the lengthy dialogue between Ginster and Valentin, Kracauer, not unlike Clavel's *istituto per suicide*, pushes the bureaucratic treatment of individual fates to the extreme. Ginster complains that the potential number of fallen soldiers by the end of the war is still unclear.[97] Totally in line with this disrespect towards the fate of individuals, the cemetery's design is mainly based on standardized specifications for graves. Its centerpiece is a memorial. But in his conversation with Valentin, it came to Ginster's mind only after noticing the wart on the neck of his boss.[98]

Such passages clearly demonstrate how Kracauer used his experience as an architect to focus on rather general phenomena of contemporary society, such as the bureaucracy of planning, the interplay between architectural and military order, the disappearance of the individual in the masses, the profanation of religious memorial forms, and the absurdities of the protocol. We could even say that modernity is analyzed here through the lens of architectural practice. But unlike its traditional understanding, Kracauer avoids any heroic attitude in this respect. The architect's subjectivity is far from the achievement of great individual talents and qualifications usually attributed to it and once more reiterated in Kracauer's earlier texts. Quite the opposite, Kracauer instead introduces the architect as a man owning no other quality

than the great ability to completely adapt to the present society at the expense of all independent ideas. In this sense, he could be regarded as an embodiment of societal collectivity. Built forms in turn become material expressions of quite debased ceremonies. Even funerary monuments, which according to Adolf Loos are the only building type where architecture rises to art, are void of all solemnity. They are instead presented as symbols of quite banal practices, spanning from specifications and bureaucratic planning processes to the mechanisms of architectural parades. Accordingly, the cemetery's design as described in *Ginster* is based on a rigid symmetrical order.

Thus, while in *Ginster*, architectural issues are explicit, in *The Mass Ornament* they are implicitly effective through widely unnoticed surface phenomena. Accordingly, Kracauer opens his text with a statement that I suppose has become its most quoted passage ever since. Departing from the fundamental insight that an epoch's place in history could be determined more convincingly through its inconspicuous surfaces than through its self-judges, Kracauer delivers an illuminating redefinition of the ornament.[99] As already stressed in earlier writings, it is no longer conceivable as a figure, motif or vertical geometric order, as in former times, nor is it visible as such. It is out of sight. Not only because it has vanished from facades but instead because it became an invisible structure of our lives, controlled by a quite anonymous power. To be clear at this point,

Kracauer is not referring to architecture here. He does not even mention the term. Instead, he is concerned with phenomena like the "Tiller Girls" or the "Rocketeers" in order to illustrate what is meant by the term mass ornament: a superstructure created by human beings whose uniformed bodies function like mindless machines. But his short analysis of popular culture could easily be applied to what happened to the ornament in modern architecture, as revealed in the Werkbund exhibition of 1927. Not unlike the abstract forms of functionalism, with its supposedly unarticulated masses, the individuals of modern society literally live in ornamental constructions: invisible in daily life and obviously created by someone outside the masses. They are therefore visible only from a distance. So, in daily life, it never comes to mind that the world surrounding us is something intentionally made. Unless you board an airplane looking from above. But as always, the view from above is a privilege. Clearly, Kracauer's use of the term "mass" is ambivalent in this respect. Since the 18th century, it was used to characterize or even mock the great number of uneducated people lacking any capability to pursue concrete aims or even to organize themselves.[100] It was therefore common sense that it would be up to the bourgeois elite to establish an order providing orientation to the masses. But since the visibility of order was regarded as a privilege of those who created them, criticism actually became quite a contradictory practice. This is especially the case

when one's position is left out in critical practice, thereby perpetuating a clear split between observers and those being observed. This is precisely what happens in Kracauer's later analysis *The Salaried Masses*. The new masses of employees and civil servants are described as a disorientated class incapable of asking critical questions.[101] Whether consciously or unconsciously, Kracauer therefore still adhered to quite an elitist idea of social order. But no signs of reflection on this issue can be found. It rather remains a blind spot of his thinking, indispensable for the ornament's further development from a concept of description to an architecture of order. This order no longer only consists of stone and steel, but of quite different materials such as masses of humans, parties, institutions, and whole nations to be shaped by political leaders, as Kracauer stressed in an early article on the topic.[102] This blind spot of course reminds us of the fact that observing and controlling are two sides of the same coin. If it is true that social order can be described exclusively by its creators, then criticism mainly contributes to its manifestation, rather than to its challenge. In this sense, Kracauer takes on the position of a distant viewer who only indifferently reacts to the present regime, or, as in the case of Frankfurt, even totally ignores it.

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MASS ARCHITECTURE

Kracauer returned to Frankfurt in 1920 and moved to Berlin ten years later as head of the Arts section of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Exactly in the midst of this period, the *New Frankfurt* initiative was launched, one of the biggest urban campaigns of the Weimar Republic. Perhaps, more than any other project of its time, it symptomatically demonstrated the extent to which serial mass housing could be identified with the "realization" of a bureaucratic-capitalist order and its communal networks.[103] The efficiency with which thousands of housing units were built within a period of only five years, partly under industrialized conditions and on the basis of a new bureaucratic apparatus, not only reflects an altruistic design stance or philanthropy. Social aspects were clearly subordinate to economic considerations, as is evident in the speech on the "human economy"[104] and "human material."[105] In that sense, the new bureaucratic-technical aristocracy of *New Frankfurt* was highly effective. In harmony with the program of an expansive economic policy, as propagated by liberal politicians including Friedrich Naumann, Frankfurt's new elite doubled the city's size in only a few years, attracting new industries to move there and expanding the transport network, including regular flight connections and a regional airline. In this context, addressing subsistence levels and the social aspect of housing at all was a plausible—if extremely suggestive—method of communicating such matter of factness in daily life and the legitimacy of a new social order and its elite;

indeed without people constantly being aware of it in everyday life. *New Frankfurt* is therefore not merely determined by reformist urges in the first place, since it would have completely contradicted its bureaucratic nature. Bureaucracies and institutions are aimed at the long-term implementation of order, rather than change. *New Frankfurt* was therefore never an anti-capitalist or anti-bourgeois project that merely failed to implement its ideas. Mass architecture and a bourgeois-capitalist social order, as strived for by the city's modern bureaucrats, are not mutual contradictions, but in fact depend on each other. Both are conceived as determined by "simplicity" and "functionalism", without "superfluous, decorative ornamental measures."[106] Architectural form therefore does not spring from any kind of dependency on function. It also rejects pure representation. Its preference for an abstract "system of pillars and surfaces," as well as for a "far-reaching repetition of the same entities and individual forms"[107] rather embodies the claimed rationalism of public municipal institutions. In this sense, the new settlements literally become institutional buildings whose all-encompassing infrastructures could best be observed from above.
The undertaking was made possible by the opening of Frankfurt's first "modern" airport, ironically housed in an old grange dating back to the 13th century **[Fig. 6]**.

Fig. 6

Photographer unknown,
Frankfurt Rebstock Airport, 1926

Der Flughafen von Frankfurt am Main

(Aufnahme der Bildabteilung der Südwestdeutschen Luftverkehrs-A.-G.)

Nachdem nun die Flugverkehrssperre über das besetzte Gebiet gefallen ist, gewinnt der am 16. August d. J. eingeweihte neue Flughafen von Frankfurt a. M. erhöhte Bedeutung. Unser Luftbild zeigt die Beendigung des Weiheaktes. Der Frankfurter Flughafen wird von allen Sachkennern als der größte und schönste Deutschlands gerühmt. Dabei wurde zum Flughof ein alter, schon vor dem Jahre 1300 erwähnter Gutshof umgestaltet. Aus Scheunen und Viehställen sind mustergültige Bureaus, Abfertigungshallen und Restaurationsräume geschaffen worden, so daß sich älteste Vergangenheit und neueste Zeit die Hände reichen. Wie glücklich das damit gegebene architektonische Problem gelöst wurde, zeigt unser Bild.

However, we do not know whether Kracauer ever boarded a plane to observe Frankfurt's new mass settlements from above. Others certainly did. There are plenty of photographs capturing the new settlements from an airplane, revealing what hardly could be observed from the ground: the geometric rigor of its serial housing units. Of course, this perspective must be seen as part of an iconography that started long before photography became a widely used medium in architecture. But only with the further development of aerial photography and aircraft technology in the early 20th century did the bird's-eye view become a reality. Despite its military use, this new technology soon had a great impact on geography and urban planning, as has been stressed in many studies.[108] Aerial surveys increasingly provided data that were indispensable for the analysis both of natural and human landscapes. This also changed the general idea of the ornament, as the architectural historian Paul Zucker observed in a number of publications. The airplane is regarded here as a "medium" of a new mode of seeing that allows one to perceive cities as bodily works of art or as cityscapes.[109] Le Corbusier even attributed to this new media technology a general precision of seeing, thinking, and decision-making.[110] *New Frankfurt* could be regarded as a case in point: only through this new technology could its undecorated volumes appear as ornamental surface structures. As such, they were invisible to its inhabitants but nonetheless effective in daily life:

Thousands of middle-class people were living in endless rows of housing units, literally becoming part of an all-encompassing order, without being aware of its overall geometric nature in their daily routines. Like the rows of uniform dancers or military parades described by Kracauer, these ornaments are of a different kind. Whereas the seemingly endless parades follow a strict and merciless choreography of uniformed female bodies, standardized ground plans, and facades not only allowed performances but also suggested the synchronization of life itself. Modern functionalism was therefore instrumental in introducing this new ornamental order as something self-evident or natural in the sense that it was presented as an indispensable condition of the entire life. Similarly, the "masses" living in these parades of uniformed houses perform this architecture of order day by day, without ever being aware of how much this organizes their private lives. Yet this somehow dystopian reality also bears risks. In the long run, the reduction of life to pure functionalities has the potential to fuel unrest among the inhabitants. The more this new order manages to totally absorb reality, the less it serves to distract from the monotony of capitalism and its bureaucratic procedures. Seriality, standardization, mechanization, abstraction, uniformity, temporality, and repetition must therefore not only become aesthetic qualities totally detached from concrete requirements, but also, more than ever, must be overwhelming spectacles to at least

temporarily distract from how much capitalism is failing to provide a meaning of life. Again, architecture plays a significant role in this respect. In *The Salaried Masses,* Kracauer is somehow fascinated by Berlin's new amusement palaces. Especially *Haus Vaterland,* a building perfectly compliant with the new thirst for glamour and entertainment, serves Kracauer to elaborate further on how the new order's architecture developed its full illusory power. For example, the style of the entrance hall would reveal the pseudo-rigor of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. It must be regarded as a facade, pretending to be wrested from spatial depth but actually veiling the abundant sentimentality one step behind.[111] Yet, what is understood by the term sentimentality is far from the refined sentiment of the enlightenment. Quite the contrary, in *Haus Vaterland*, mass consumers were immersed in an overwhelming world of cinema spaces, panoramic views and exotic interiors ranging from a Wild-West bar to the Rhine terraces and a Turkish café **[Fig. 7]**. This was made possible by countless infrastructures, machines, and technical innovations such as elevators, transformers, ventilation systems, pneumatic tube systems, assembly lines, and lightning effects.[112] Day by day, thousands of workers were required to operate this monumental apparatus of hyper-reality.

Fig. 7

Photographer unknown,
The Turkish Café at Haus Vaterland, undated

ARCHITECTURE
THE
ORNAMENTAL
CONDITION
AGAINST
FUNCTIONALISM
METAPHORS AND
TERRITORIES
ARCHITECT(URE)
WITHOUT
CONTENT
ARCHITECTURAL
PARADES
MASS
ARCHITECTURE

SPACES OF NON-EXISTENCE

What can we infer from these observations? Well, in the first place that modernity, like earlier periods, engendered masses of ornaments and hybrid objects that were far from the pure outcome of rationalist thinking. But unlike earlier times, these were no longer visible in urban space. Instead of being intertwined with the full complexity of daily life, they are sorted out, no longer serving any other purpose than to entertain the new class of salaried masses in their leisure time. This somehow led to a kind of ornamental overkill in places strictly separated from daily life, such as cinemas, amusement palaces and Luna parks. The more surfaces are cleaned from everything that might destabilize their rational appearance, the more it seemed necessary to encapsulate ornaments, puppets and labor in the spaces of the mass media and mass entertainment. This of course converges with the overall functional hygiene of modernism. Organizing the territory of a city meant disentangling its many functions–traffic, work, living, entertainment–thereby building contrasts in time and space, or even different climate zones, as in the case of *Haus Vaterland*.

From this perspective, the city of Frankfurt might be considered a particular case, not only because it was the city where Kracauer practiced as an architect and penned most of his architectural critiques. The case of *New Frankfurt* is rather revealing with respect to the extent of ornamental emigration, as well as the functional division of the city, ultimately

paving the way for a quite ambivalent return of what has been called the ornaments of the metropolis.[113] As far as I know, and this might be surprising, Kracauer never commented directly on this remarkable project, which was completed in only five years, though he sympathized with *New Frankfurt* architects such as Ferdinand Kramer and Ernst May. However, apart from a short article on Ernst May's own house in Frankfurt, no further comprehensive analysis of this housing program and its protagonists exists. Even the second *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne*, which was held in Frankfurt in 1929, failed to prompt Kracauer to deliver any reflections on the far-reaching modernization of his hometown. Surely, some of the passages in Kracauer's *Ginster* could be read as a comment on what was happening on his doorstep, and some work has been carried out in this respect.[114] But it is questionable whether *Ginster* is a critical comment on Frankfurt's mass housing program. Such interpretations ignore the fact that housing projects are not even mentioned in *Ginster*. Many other references to architectural practice are of a rather general nature. Similarly, although Ginster's already mentioned design for a cemetery could be interpreted as a metaphor for mass housing, this indicates all the more that Kracauer carefully avoided any direct critical comment on what was happening locally. This of course also applies to plans of *New Frankfurt* to standardize even the design of cemeteries on the basis of new regulations, as

propagated in a special issue of the magazine *Das Neue Frankfurt,* precisely at the time when Kracauer's novel was published.[115] But only years before the campaign was initiated, he allowed himself to mention the city of Frankfurt as an extreme case of planning bureaucracy. And only after Ernst May's move to the Soviet Union, which marked the end of *New Frankfurt*, and Kracauer's own move to Berlin, did the latter publish another article on the architect, reporting on a lecture on the occasion of a preparatory meeting of the CIAM group. By contrast, the protagonists of *New Frankfurt*, including May himself and the Swiss art historian Joseph Gantner, repeatedly used the *Frankfurter Zeitung* to explain their goals.

In any case, to this day, the question why Kracauer did not use the chance to comment on a project that perfectly proved what he elaborated elsewhere (and by the way allowed for unrestricted on-site observations) remains unanswered. One possible reason might be that Kracauer was too much part of Frankfurt's elitist networks to assume the position of a distanced viewer. He had known May since school and held strong ties with the bourgeois elite, as well as with the new liberals, whose economic and political agenda was shared in great parts by the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Beyond this, Kracauer was a member of organizations sharing interests with the *New Frankfurt* campaign. This especially applies to the so-called *Association of active Friends of the Old Town*. It was founded by the art historian Fried Lübbecke only a

few years before the *New Frankfurt* campaign started. Its main goal was to transform parts of the existing city into a romantic image of the past. Officially, this was described as a preservation campaign. Lübbecke tirelessly underlined the district's significance as a national artwork, created by centuries and representing a completely preserved Gothic quarter. From then on, the project of the old town became a kind of obsession. Countless richly illustrated books praised its particular beauty. This radical aestheticization of a district, which had previously been regarded as a no-go area or a swamp and was literally dried up by Ernst May's later embankment project, was consolidated by the romanticizing images of the photographer Paul Wolff, who also worked for the *New Frankfurt* campaign. But this is by no means the only intersection between both projects. The magazine *Das Neue Frankfurt* is revealing in this respect. In one of its issues, it advertises a book on the old town. The short text betrays the extent to which the modern city depends on the construction of its assumed counterpart, the old town:

"A real artwork and at the same time of the highest historical value. Loving portrait of the old city center in images and straight historical words. Old Frankfurt lying like a huge architecture museum embedded in the modern city and belonging to the most prestigious documents of German urban architecture."[116]

Clearly, the imagined "huge architecture museum" as well as the "modern city" were equally considered as parts of the New Frankfurt campaign. In the association's 1926 yearbook, the convergence of both culminates in a vision for the year 2000: Traffic technology will then have developed tremendously, overcoming time and space regulated by the mega-city's clever administration. The old city center is imagined as an ancient, respectfully protected area where its old miserable alleys will have been turned into an open-air museum now populated by friends of antiquity, rich citizens and scholars attracting huge masses of tourists from all over the world.[117]

This is not the place to consider to what degree this "vision" came true. Of much greater interest, at least for the moment, is the fact that Kracauer among other editors of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* belonged to the signatories of the association's founding document.[118] Unlike his silence on the mass housing program, he repeatedly commented on its activities.[119] In a number of articles, he openly sympathized with its ideas to transform the quarter between the Dom and Römerberg into a cheerful museum space **[Fig. 8]**. Thus, its labyrinthine, somehow muddy and obscure character, stemming from centuries of economic and political decay, is criticized as fatal "negligence in matters of taste."[120] Of course, Kracauer's use of the term "taste" is by no means coincidental. It alludes to the new museum's purpose to shape the taste of the people, that is to create,

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nicht selten begangenen Fehlgriffe zu vermeiden, sich vor Uebertreibungen zu hüten und allenthalben, zumal bei der bisher nicht immer geglückten Ornamentierung, jene Behutsamkeit walten zu lassen, die sich bei der Wieder-Instandsetzung historischer Bauten nun einmal anempfiehlt.

Unseren Abbildungen, die etliche Altstadthäuser zeigen, muß die Farbenphantasie des Beschauers zu Hilfe kommen. Da ist etwa gegenüber dem Dom die Gebäudegruppe am Weckmarkt: Das Haus „Zum Freienstein" auf gelb und rot gestimmt. Daneben die ruhige grüne Fläche des Nachbarhauses — das Ganze bis auf die Ornamentik ein guter Farbenzusammenklang und zumal als Platzabschluß von einiger Wirkung. Auch das Haus zum „Würzburger Eck", dem Prof. Cissarz seine Fürsorge gewidmet hat, ist wieder von den Toten auferstanden. Auf rotem Sockelgeschoß erheben sich die grünen Wände, die den gelben Erker einfassen. Das Gelb der Beschriftung und der Ornamentik der schmalen Fensterpfeiler überstimmt die grüne Tönung, die eine weitere Unterbrechung durch das Weiß der Fensterrahmen erfährt. Die bunten Füllungen der beiden Giebel bekrönen das leichte Farbenspiel.

Kr.

Würzburger Eck (Prof. Cissarz)
Fahrgasse, Ecke Schnurgasse.

Portal des Hauses
„Zum Albanierhof."
Seckbächer Gasse bei der
Weißfrauenkirche.

Zur goldenen Weinrebe
und
Das große Hirschhorn
(Regierungsbaurat Cuno)
Am Liebfrauenberg.

Zum Storch,
Zum Hunger und
Zum Freienstein.
Weckmarkt am Dom.

Fig. 8 Photographs of the old town, clippings by Siegfried Kracauer from his article “Das Bunte Frankfurt”, undated

legitimize, and conserve aesthetic canons. It is also clear that members of the association regarded themselves as part of this tradition. Thus, it is not surprising that from its very beginning, the old-town project aimed to create a territory totally complying to the "taste" of Frankfurt's bourgeois elite. To this aim, it extinguished traces of the immediate past for the sake of an unspecified historicity. In this sense, the immaculate ornaments it produced were certainly no less a revolution against spatial constructions that anachronistically protrude into the present than modern architecture was. Thus, Kracauer became an advocate of quite a different cult of distraction. For what was actually taking shape here was not the refurbishment of single buildings, but the construction of a territory that ignored the historical traces of urban space and was associated with pure functionalism in equal measure.

Yet, regardless of his support for the old-town-project, Kracauer was well aware of its ambivalence. His short text "The Non-Existence of the Old-Town" is an ironic comment on the network he himself belonged to. It was published together with articles by other "friends of the old town"[121] to remember the great, colorful masquerade ball held in the "official rooms of the venerable Germaniae dance hall in the Römer of the city of Frankfurt". As the term *non-existence* might indicate, the city's core is treated as something unreal. In fact, at the time Kracauer penned his short text, the old-town project was still

in the making, partly with the help of architects like Bruno Taut, but was above all supported by the same planning departments that were also in charge of the *New Frankfurt* campaign.

Yet, the actual meaning of *non-existence* in Kracauer's thinking is quite different. It rather indicates the dystopian character of modern life. This of course is hardly separable from its architectural framework. Spaces are like hieroglyphs that need to be deciphered in order to get unrestricted access to the ground of social reality, as Kracauer states.[122] In this context, the term *non-existence* signifies a mode of existence that lacks all collectivity and higher values, as is assumed for instance in religious communities and their sacred spaces. According to Kracauer, we encounter these debased life forms in the modern metropolis. This of course is largely inspired by Simmel's psychopathological analysis of the *Metropolis and Mental Life.*[123] Accordingly, a new class of urban individuals, somehow phlegmatized by overstimulation, gathers around or passes by without ever taking notice of each other. They exist but as Kracauer stresses in *The Salaried Masses*, this existence lacks any idea that could give meaning to their lives. By consequence, modern societies fall into unrelated parts and singularities, while capitalism can only engender the appearance of collectivity.

But what exactly is the meaning of the term in the case of the old-town project? Kracauer ironically suggests that it would only allow an existence

without content. In what sense? In the first place, because it acts against historical traces that anachronistically protrude into the present as much as modern functionalism does. Yet there are differences. Whereas modern architecture, as it is understood by Kracauer, fought against the impure world of hybrid ornamental beings in the name of functional hygiene, the “old town” did the same in the name of history, authenticity and collective memory. Metaphorically speaking, like functionalism, the latter serves as a facade. We could even say as a mask. But what does this mean for the practice of criticism? Criticism as understood by Kracauer is not a means to simply unmask ideologies. Any attempt to create such a clear split between surface and substance is misleading, as it is in architecture. It not only ignores the material nature of masks, but also uncritically repeats the modern longing for functional and historical hygiene. For, as Kracauer stresses in his later analysis of totalitarian propaganda, only masks reveal the true nature of their monstrous wearers.[124]

But what does that mean in the case of the old-town project? In the first place its new colorful facades are by no means reducible to a cultural-heritage project, as repeatedly announced by Frankfurt’s bourgeoisie. Transforming a whole district into a museum space actually affords the displacement of objects and subjects that no longer fit in this perfect ambience of timeless historicity. At this point, it again becomes clear that the new/old Frankfurt

campaign represents two sides of the same coin. One legitimizes its mass ornaments by utilitarian, social, and sometimes even scientific and economic arguments, whereas the other seems justified by the alleged necessities of urban reconstruction. Both equally use “objectivity” as an argument for the city’s partition into different territories or zones. In this sense they both negate the full complexity of life’s ornamental nature as experienced by Kracauer in southern Italy. For what is taking shape in these territories is the modern idea of spatial and timely hygiene, sorting out the ornament’s former hybridity as something mediating between dead and living matter, relief and image, past and present, expression and perception, as well as abstraction and representation.

Against this background, it is revealing to look at the programmatic cover of the first issue of *Das Neue Frankfurt* **[Fig. 9]**. We see a montage of two aerial photographs, highlighting the contrasts between the old town center and the new peripheral settlements. At the edges, there is the tangle of the old town, while in the center, there is the clarity and rationalism of the new settlement architecture still under construction. In a sense it is an inversion of actual urban spatial conditions. The new moves from the periphery into the center, while the old urban core is displaced to the edges. Those who are also aware of the topographical situation will notice that something is not quite right. The modest size of

Fig. 9 **Cover of the first edition of *Das Neue Frankfurt, Monatsschrift für die Fragen der Grosstadt-Gestaltung*, 1926–27**

Frankfurt's old town hardly conforms to the sea of houses in the image's background. The photo of the city center has clearly been cut into two halves, placed at the side of the settlement architecture and thereby stretched to increase its width. What can we infer from this arrangement of images? Does the montage imply that the new is triumphing over the old, that order faces disorder, supplanting centuries of old urban structures with context-free rationalism? This would concur with our standard grasp of the avant-garde, but nevertheless falls short in this case. I would rather argue that both are strongly dependent on each other. What we see before us, I believe, is not so much an "either-or" situation as "both this and that." The two spheres are designed accordingly in the magazine's title, brought together in broad black bands. On one side, we have the invention of the old town as a reserve of memory, thought, and perhaps even history, with its meandering, labyrinthine passages. On the other side, there is the rhythmic march of the new, timeless planning rationalism of serially produced housing.

So, it becomes clear that modern architecture was not conceived as an attack on the existing city. Quite the contrary, it rather served as an indispensable prerequisite for the construction of another project: the old town. In what sense? As has been emphasized by many authors, the disorder of the old town could only appear as a unique territory with quite precise contours because of the new settlement's

rigid seriality. Correspondingly, the new settlements, as well as the new infrastructures, could be introduced as rational constructions because of their contrasts with the old town's architecture.[125] In this sense, the montage of the first issue of the magazine *Das Neue Frankfurt* takes the dialectic nature of modern urban planning to the extreme. Two parts of the city otherwise separated from each other clash, thereby building contrasts totally compliant with the avant-garde's radical separation from the immediate past. In other words, the invention of modern architecture and the invention of the old town are two sides of the same coin. Against this background, it is by no means coincidental that the *New Frankfurt* campaign and the many initiatives to "preserve" the old town coexisted peacefully and were even inseparably linked to each other. Perhaps for the first time, Kracauer realized how much both projects were intertwined. As *territories of non-existence*, they equally contribute to the ornamental fabrication of a new equality, i.e. to the implementation of a new order.

CONDITION
AGAINST
FUNCTIONALISM
METAPHORS AND
TERRITORIES
ARCHITECT(URE)
WITHOUT
CONTENT
ARCHITECTURAL
PARADES
MASS
ARCHITECTURE
SPACES OF
NON-EXISTENCE

(POST)MODERN REVERBERA- TIONS

From here it would be easy to jump into the year 2000 as proposed by the already mentioned yearbook. Yet, the vision it describes is surpassed by reality. Though large parts of Frankfurt were destroyed in World War II, the modern idea of the old town not only survived, but even became radicalized. The imaginary power of this project, fostered by countless books, images, photographs, paintings, models, and other media, now unfolded its full potential in urban planning. Ever since, the anti-Positanian reconstruction of the old town as it had never existed became an enduring obsession, only recently culminating in the transformation of a whole district **[Fig. 10]**.[126] Besides its inherent paradoxes, this is part of a reorganization of the city that started with neoliberal politics. Along with the increasing (re)constructional rigor on what might be called a *territory of non-existence* since the 1980s, the city's officials simultaneously drove forward the museumization of urban space. These ambitions of course did not engage with the entire city. They primarily focused on areas representing Frankfurt's bourgeois tradition and its aesthetic aristocracy. This especially applies to the riverbanks opposite the old-town project, with its line-up of villas and museums. Once again, it was considered necessary to build contrasts. But this time, modernity had turned its weapons against itself. What was formerly conceived as a complementary co-existence of contrasting *territories* now evolved into a timely succession of irreconcilable oppositions. Whereas one side of the modern city

Fig. 10

Facade detail of the New Old-Town in Frankfurt, 2022

remained in the realm of modern mass housing, industries and infrastructures—the other side—the construction of museums and old towns—began to deny the forces that made them possible in the first place. Not surprisingly, this entailed a number of simplifications, paradoxes, and contradictions necessary for this fundamental shift of perspective. This especially applies to the way modern architecture was valued in (post)modern criticism. Not unlike historicism, but for different reasons, it was about to become a problematic excess that was unprecedented in architectural history. Ironically, to overcome this imagined split, (post)modern criticism created another one using the very same mechanisms of historical narration that already served the avant-garde to create a paradigm shift from a world of ambiguities to a world of rational clarity. In this sense, already the project of modernity is based on an aporia: the more modernists believed their own words and the more they insisted on the purity of forms as part of a homogeneous ensemble of entities, the more likely they were to act against them. According to Latour, at no other time have more hybrids been created and at no other time has there been more systematic denial for the sake of cultural hygiene.[127] This paradox not only applies to architecture but also includes the practice of criticism, as is clearly demonstrated by Kracauer's writings. On one side, his reflections on Positano paved the way for a number of seminal texts more or less dedicated to the capitalist semantics of surface

phenomena. On the other side, the very same writings omit the Positanian metabolism of daily life as a somehow subversive state between construction and deconstruction for the sake of total ornamental control. It seems as if it never came to Kracauer's mind that even the non-existence of modern settlements could make it into a real existence by unfolding the full potential of life, that is the individual appropriation, transformation, and ornamentation of uniform houses. Criticism is therefore not detached from what it is criticizing, but to some degree creates it in the first place. Respectively, Kracauer's mass ornaments quite uncritically mirrored the radical program of a total re-organization of society's architecture by turning its megalomaniac visions into a dystopian reality. By contrast, the ornaments of the past are used as beings in their own right with no specific meaning, thereby witnessing this irreversible shift from existence to non-existence.

The historians of modernity in turn presented some of these historical ornaments as evidence of the real existence of the imagined process of civilization. Fabricated to revolutionary styles, epochs, ideas etc., they were stored in archives and museums, wherein these relics of a bygone past could be visited again and again as evidence that progress is something that is really happening. Given the fact that this line-up of historical revolutions actually served to purge history of everything that does not fit into this time regime, thereby de-historizing its material

remnants, modernity turns out to be a monumental cult of self-deception. It ultimately fell victim to the same radical partition of time that originally served to legitimize its historical timelessness. Yet, whereas the avant-garde transformed historical narrative into a kind of concrete operation, the overall aim of (post)modernism was to reverse this process. It is no coincidence that it was largely based on the negation of what now became known as the regime of functionalism. Paradoxically, having taken modern architecture's plea for functionalism as a matter of fact rather than rhetoric, (post)modern critics substantially contributed to its retroactive realization. This of course was instrumental in literally building new time layers from spaces of non-existence. Only with the myth of emptied and dehistoricized forms of modernism could the new colorful richness of (post)modernism come to the fore. It is exactly here where the collective imagination of modern architecture actually turned into a space without content, populated by the analogous thinking of postmodern architects and their fetishes (historical references, architectural models, biographical objects, objets trouvés etc.). But this did not necessarily entail the return of the ornament, as might be suggested. To mention its existence remained a taboo among architects, while there was much talk instead of metaphors, analogies, quotations, allegories, iconographies, semiotics, or decorated sheds. Against this background, postmodernity could hardly be interpreted as a new construction of space.

It actually appropriated or even inhabited spaces that already existed, both metaphorically and literally. Through the transformation of the avant-garde's white cubes into the (post)modern *tabula rasa* of exhibition spaces, places of non-existence converged with the idea of architectural autonomy. So modern space was literally populated by (post)modern architects presenting themselves as role models for the creation of self-determined subjectivity. But as Kracauer already stressed in his writings—and of course unfolded expansively in his autobiographical novel—ideas of personality and inwardness no longer signified higher values but were instrumental to distract from the deficiencies of capitalism. Against this background, (post)modern architects substantially contributed to a cult of distraction, though many believed in the project of autonomy as an act of political resistance. But it is more than questionable whether this project ever led to more than sophisticated *life styles*. On the other hand, this made (post)modern aesthetics so appealing to neoliberalism's politics of historicity. The idea of author-driven architecture, curated to a network of autobiographically charged objects, allowed profitable projects to be legitimized by historical formulae without coping with the concrete history of their places. From this perspective, Kracauer not only anticipates the (post)modern idea of modern architecture. His writings could equally be regarded as a critique on (post)modern thinking even before (post)modernism came into being.

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UNDER THE VOLCANO

TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE THEORY OF ARCHITECTURE

In his essay, Carsten Ruhl discovers a strong and original literary impulse that has the potential to revive and revise today's architecture theory. It originates in the mid-1920s, when a group of Weimar intellectuals, mostly descendants of assimilated Jews, met on the island of Capri and in Naples. The spectacular Bay of Naples, an area of geological instability, corresponded with the interwar period marked by political instability. Far from Germany, at the foot of Mount Vesuvius, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Siegfried Kracauer, Asja Lacis, and Alfred Sohn-Rethel developed ideas and wrote texts that changed Western thinking.[1]

Ruhl focuses on the texts by Siegfried Kracauer, thereby reintroducing his critical voice and literary style to architectural discourse. Kracauer, who is famous for his writings on film, cinema, and popular culture, originally studied Architecture and practiced as an architect in the early 1920s. Ruhl highlights, as he puts it, "a text that does not exist in architectural theory,"[2] namely Kracauer's anonymously published autobiographical novel, *Ginster: Written by Himself* (1928).

AGAINST HEROISM

As an anti-war novel, *Ginster* stands in the shadow of Erich Maria Remarque's international bestseller *Im Westen nichts Neues* (*All Quiet on the Western Front,* 1929). Whereas Remarque's book describes World War I from the perspective of a young soldier and

fascinates the readers with depictions of the horrors of the battlefield, *Ginster*, which was never translated into English, describes the war from the perspective of a civilian who does not fight.

"Ginster" ("gorse" in English) is the name of a robust plant that grows throughout Europe in areas with low nutrients. In fact, the narrator considers himself plant-like. A lower middle-class academic in his mid-twenties, he still lives with his mother and seems to have hardly any needs besides cheap cigars. He has no close friends, no professional goal, no religious faith, no political conviction, no sexual adventures (he represses his bisexuality and only indirectly alludes to his desire for younger men). He does not like his job as an employee in small architecture offices. Overqualified—he holds a doctorate in Architecture while his bosses do not even have a degree—he can neither identify with his profession nor his social position, instead remaining a skeptical observer.

His main ambition is to avoid being drafted for military service at the front. He wants to survive. The longer the war goes on, the more he wishes to become invisible. He gets thinner and thinner. It seems that he is about to dissolve or even turn into "foam".[3] When his boss presents Ginster's design at the competition for a local military cemetery, he is not bothered that his authorship is omitted—on the contrary, he is happy to disappear under a "magic hat."[4]

There is nothing heroic about Ginster. He lacks a clearly defined subjectivity and can be compared to Charlie Chaplin's tramp character, a movie figure that Kracauer admired. Yet this anti-heroism offers an alternative vantage point to discuss architecture, one that takes the perspective of the employee, not the genius, and the everyday building, not the masterpiece. It is a critique of the canonical and the idolatry of Architecture with capital A. It goes against the mainstream of architectural history and theory, which perpetuates the heroification of the image of the architect as a genius, the idea of the triumphant cultural avant-garde and the myths of progress, newness, originality, and creativity.

Rather than following a plot, where events succeed in time, the narrator juxtaposes situations in space. He gives a voice to the built environment, to surfaces, materials, and spatial atmospheres. The heads in a crowd are "glowing like asphalt."[5] Ginster loves "topographic debaucheries."[6] A clinic, which Ginster visits in the hope of being certified unfit for service, consists of "stone tiles, air, light, and white color."[7]

The story ends shortly after the end of the war, in other words prior to the triumph of modernist architecture in the 1920s. However, the novel locates the inhuman origins of modernist design and planning in the capitalist greed for profit, the bureaucracy of the war economy. Instead of formal or stylistic elements, the problem lies in the militarization of daily

life, the way language adapts to hierarchical order, in spatial organization, norms, and codes. In the end, the organization of factories and cemeteries resemble each other. (Ironically, the fact that Ginster designs both a munitions factory and a war cemetery, which are essential tasks, saves him from being conscripted.)

There is no explicit critique of the core values of modernism, such as abstraction, purism, and functionalism. The text operates with allusions and associations. Small details stand for a larger whole, and anecdotes evoke a more general meaning. As in the work of Walter Benjamin, the structure of the text is allegorical. For example, the scene where Ginster, finally drafted and stationed with his comrades in a provincial hotel, is ordered to clean a window with a cloth on top of a ladder, can be read as a critique of transparency, another core value of modernist design:

"The cloth was so dirty that Ginster could not imagine how the glass could be made transparent again with its help. [...] Then he rubbed [...] the panes, the cloth was brittle and clung poorly to the surfaces. The harder he rubbed, the more cloudy the glass became, and in the process, in his excitement, he had long since stopped rubbing with the rag alone, but rubbed his whole body against the window; the ladder swayed, he did not listen to its moaning. Gradually, to his horror, an impenetrable smear emerged, which admittedly filled him with a certain triumph at the same time, since the smear corresponded to the rag

whose bad intention Ginster had immediately seen through. Ginster was about to stop working when he noticed that different patterns could be created depending on the way he wiped. For example, if he stirred the slurry in a circular motion, snails would form. Perhaps by exploiting the wrinkles in the rag, he succeeded in creating artificial frost flowers."[8] His superior orders him to stop. "You are no use for anything," he declares and "sent up another gunner with the same rag, who immediately restored the yellowish outside world. Ginster did not know how."[9]

ORNAMENT AND POROSITY

The useless soldier on his ladder is typical of the intertwining of anecdote, theoretical reflection, and irony that prevails in *Ginster*. One could easily imagine Chaplin performing the task. In the context of architecture theory, mentioning patterns and artificial frost flowers inevitably relates to the notion of the ornament, an aspect greatly emphasized by Ruhl. He recalls that Ginster was encouraged to study Architecture because he liked to draw ornaments in school. "From an early age, Ginster liked to draw ornaments. In his exercise books, spiral systems shot up the blank margins, tapering toward the top. [...] Because of his spirals, he was advised to become an architect."[10] The ornaments are emblematic of the pupil's disorientation. They also allow Ginster to hide. "When looking at careful embroidery, he often harbored the wish that a particle of the pattern might break free from the context."[11]

Ruhl notes that Kracauer's doctoral dissertation dealt with wrought iron ornamentation in early 20th-century architecture. He refers to one of Kracauer's most famous essays, "Mass Ornament" (1927), recalling that in his capacity as Editor of the *Frankfurter Zeitung,* Kracauer invited Adolf Loos to publish the essay "Ornament and Crime" in 1929, thus contributing to the canonization of a text that Loos had written for a series of unpublished lectures two decades earlier.

Ruhl demonstrates how in Kracauer's writings, the architectural ornament is transferred to the ornamental sequence of images in movies. His hypothesis that Kracauer's writings can be read both as a prefiguration of postmodernist architectural theory and its critique is compelling. I would like to continue here with a notion of ornament that is both formal and figurative, both concrete, as an element of design and allegorical as an operator of meaning.

This leads back to the above-mentioned encounter between the Weimar intellectuals at the foot of Mount Vesuvius. Most of them were in uncertain stages of their academic careers. Benjamin and Lacis as well as Kracauer and Adorno were also in uncertain phases of their relationships. Lacis was married to another man. Adorno was much younger than Kracauer and their homoerotic relationship was marked by tensions. Most stayed for periods of several months, attracted not only by the beauty but also by the low cost of living compared to Germany, which allowed them to

concentrate on writing. The exchange was highly productive and resulted, among others, in a series of writings on a topic closely related to ornament, namely porosity. Ernst Bloch's *Italien und die Porosität* (1925), Alfred Sohn-Rethel's *Ideal des Kaputten* (1926), Kracauer's *Felsenwahn in Positano* (1925) and the most famous today, Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis's "Neapel" (1925).

In their essay, Benjamin and Lacis evoke porosity as a metaphor of the spatiality, life, and society of Naples. They depict the grottoes and caves carved into the rock that the city is built upon and state: "As porous as this stone is the architecture."[12] They perceive the city as a scenography for a performance that is ongoing night and day, blurring the stage with the actors and spectators. The backdrop inspires the play, and the actors animate their environment. They also conceive porosity as a symbol for improvisation and as a way of life.

Benjamin and Lacis use porosity both in a concrete and in a metaphorical sense. Naples is not only built on the ground of the volcano, it is also constructed with its material. Most buildings, streets, walls, and squares are made from porous, volcanic stone. Benjamin and Asja recall that the city looks "grey" rather than colorful. The man-made environment and the geological ground blur.

The porous can be seen as the extension of the ornament from the surface to the three-dimensionality. Kracauer probably worked on his novel *Ginster* during his stay on Capri. Although he does not mention the notion of the porous in the novel and only rarely refers to the notion of ornament, the entire structure of the novel is porous and ornamental. The dense interviewing of observations that characterizes the novel reminds one of filmic montages, but also ornamental patterns. Meaning is not fixed or defined, but appears to float, connect, transform as if the entire book were a porous sponge, soaked by various narratives that, like the narrator, have a foamlike texture.

Even more than the notion of the ornament, the porous, with its multiple openings, goes against dualism and binary models of thought. This might explain why the narrator of *Ginster* does not contrast figuration with abstraction, nor the old with the new. In fact, the novel can be read as a plea against binary norms, be they generational, sexual, political, religious, ideological or spatial, human and non-human, animated and non-animated. The novel sets examples of how to overcome these norms, which to some extent still prevail in architectural discourse.

This does not mean that Ginster has no stance. His main critique is against authoritarian power. At some point, on his way to an appointment with the military bureaucracy, the train halts in a residential town in the middle of the night. He perceives a huge

castle and is struck by a sudden hatred of the building:

"Ginster could have torn it to pieces, smashed its columns and dissolved the window corridors, behind which splendid rooms slept untouched. Fear befell him, just do not cross the square, what did the beautiful facade know about the war. Perhaps there were compositions that did not confine, freely flung spirals and scribbles and shifted surfaces that stirred without order—unlike that horrible figure."[13]

Much later, in the concluding episode after the end of the war, Ginster recalls the episode when he by chance runs into a woman he had met earlier. (For the first time in the novel, the narrator gives the name, Marseille, while all German cities during the war remain reduced to their first letter, such as M. (Munich) or F. (Frankfurt).) "Only now, at the moment I am talking to you, do I understand my hatred. It was directed at the domination of the people, who bow before such castles, and all the orders, which deny the misery. (...) Tear down the buildings, the bad beauty, the splendor, down with it."[14]

Ginster is not a systematic architecture theory. It criticizes authority not only in society and space, but also in language. The tone is that of a long essay, full of miniature observations, but devoid of final conclusions. It offers no definitions, no norms, but rather uncertainty and speculations. There is nothing apodictic in Ginsters's dialogues, but a constant questioning of power and much respect for those who work for others in the shadow of the

offices and in the households of the homeland. Unlike the uncanny nocturnal castle, the poor and busy neighborhood of the old harbor filled with children and workers contains real life. As Ginster explains to his interlocutor: “On the waterfront here, nothing is encapsulated, the bare ground here lies open. (…) The waterfront will outlast all the castles that feel so magnificent and great.”[15]

The concluding passage of *Ginster* is clearly connected to the experience in Naples, which resonates in the depictions of everyday life by Kracauer, Lacis, Benjamin, and Bloch. Vibrant, chaotic, and seemingly uncontrolled life stands in contrast to the division of labor, the idolatry of the machine, and the belief in progress, which at the same time animates the formal repertory of, for instance, the newly established Bauhaus in Dessau. And the allegoric, formal and porous style of the texts by Kracauer and Benjamin literally undermines the apodictic publications of the protagonists of modernist theory, such as Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Sigfried Giedion.

Kracauer mistrusts the self-assurance of the modernist narrative because he suspects where it comes from and where it might lead to. Following *Ginster*, we understand why the heroes of modernism are eager to prohibit ornaments, smooth out the porous and avoid the allegorical. Like a mirror image, it reveals the scandalous foundations of their claim for order, unambiguity, organization, and norms,

namely the continuation of power, the control of the ground and the domination of the laws of nature. Seen in this light, ornament is not the excessive and the superfluous. It is about the concrete, about connection, opening, complexity, and life. Ornament is freedom.

ENDNOTES

KRACAUER'S ARCHITECTURE. THE ORNAMENTAL NATURE OF THE NEW CAPITALIST ORDER

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ENDNOTES

UNDER THE VOLCANO: TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE THEORY OF ARCHITECTURE

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FIGURES

Fig. 1
Siegfried Kracauer, Drawing of the Palais Clam-Gallas in Prague, 1911, © Suhrkamp, Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach

Fig. 2
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Fig. 3
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Photographer unknown, The Turkish Café at Haus Vaterland, undated, © Klaus Lindow

Fig. 8
Photographs of the old-town cropped by Siegfried Kracauer from his article "Das Bunte Frankfurt", undated, in *Das illustrierte Blatt*, 5.12.1922, Klebeband Kracauer DLA, Fotografien von Walther Schmidt, © Suhrkamp, Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach

Fig. 9
Cover of the first edition of *Das Neue Frankfurt, Monatsschrift für die Fragen der Grosstadt-Gestaltung*, 1926–27

Fig. 10
Facade detail of the New Old-Town in Frankfurt, 2022, © Carsten Ruhl

Cover
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