CHAPTER 1

The Resubjectivization of Modern Urban Culture

1. ANALYSTS OF THE URBAN PRIOR TO KRACAUER

Some Modern Writers on the Urban

Kracauer is not the first person to have thematized the conditions for the subjectivity of the modern metropolis. Both prior to and contemporary with his literary activity, a modern urban awareness was central for a number of writers, literary as well as sociophilosophical. From around 1850—and even before this date—it is possible to discern the self-reflective nature of the modern mentality in such writers as Edgar Allan Poe (*The Man of the Crowd*), Baudelaire (*Spleen parisien*), Flaubert (*L'éducation sentimentale*), and Rainer Maria Rilke (*Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*). Without mobilizing a sociological framework, each of them articulated in prose the depersonalizing, mobile, and overwhelming culture of the city. No matter whether, like Poe, they referred to London or, as was the case with the other three writers, based their utterances on a Parisian experience, they all supplied a significant part of the foundation for Kracauer and other interwar writers such as Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin, both of whom will be regularly referenced in the notes in order to place Kracauer's texts in a wider perspective. However, between Poe, Flaubert, and Baudelaire, on the one hand, and Kracauer, Bloch, and Benjamin, on the other, lie the writings of an author whose significance for an understanding of modern urban culture ought not to be overlooked.

The man in question is one of the classic figures of German sociology—Georg Simmel (1858–1918), whose lecture "The Metropolis and Mental Life" has, since it was delivered in 1903, been a seminal text for the broad field of urban analysis.[1] The power of Simmel's work derives in part from its ability to pinpoint empirical characteristics of a city mentality—characteristics whose relevance has remained unchanged. It also provides a theoretical framework for an interpretation of urbanity. Simmel's conceptual system surpasses both in generality and in its number of academic discourses the one that is made explicit by his successors Kracauer, Bloch, and Benjamin.

It is doubtful whether these three interwar writers were especially familiar with Simmel's urban analysis, which dates from the turn of the century and was then

available only in periodical form. But to a certain extent the question of such familiarity matters little, as all three of them, with varying degrees of engagement, found themselves in Simmel's Berlin audience at important points in their intellectual development. From 1908 to 1913, Bloch was a close acquaintance of Simmel and participated in the latter's private seminars.[2] Benjamin mentions that he took part in Simmel's well-attended series of Berlin lectures,[3] whose popularity and magnetic appeal were inversely proportional to their formal academic recognition (Simmel did not gain a professor's salary until 1914—in Strasbourg).

Kracauer's connection to Simmel is more obscure. Everywhere in the secondary literature on Kracauer's work one is struck by the feeling that some sort of close teacher-pupil relationship existed between them. Since the publication of Adorno's essay "Der wunderliche Realist" in 1964, the assertion that Simmel was highly influential in causing Kracauer to give up his profession as an architect and to embark on philosophy and the critique of culture has been widely accepted.[4] This claim is apparently based on a letter, dated February 15, 1962, from Kracauer to a female German student, Erika Lorenz, who, under Adorno's guidance, was writing an unpublished *Diplomarbeit* with the title "Siegfried Kracauer als Soziologe."[5] Despite its importance, this connection and its historical development are very poorly documented.

Not until 1989 did documents emerge that bear witness to the fact that Kracauer was interested in Simmel's conceptual universe at the early age of eighteen.[6] Kracauer was then among the audience at one of Simmel's lectures at the Berlin Art Society. He paid a visit to Simmel the following day, under the pretext of wanting to get some information about his "sociological seminars" (M, pp. 11–12). No real teacher-pupil relationship has ever been documented, however. On the contrary, the name Simmel crops up again only toward the end of the First World War in the chronological table (M, p. 28) found in the first attempt at a Kracauer biography (an exhibition catalogue published in connection with the centenary of his birth in 1889, based on the comprehensive, well-organized Kracauer archive in Marbach am Neckar). In a reply by letter to Kracauer, who at this juncture (November 1917) had been called up for military service, Simmel invites him for coffee during a lecture visit to Frankfurt am Main.

What happened in the intervening decade (1907–1917) is still a matter of conjecture, in part because Kracauer's diaries and notes from the probably crucial years of study in Berlin (1909–1910) are missing.

Kracauer's Intuitive Concept of Ornament—A Differentiation from Simmel

That the meeting with Simmel in 1907 was important for Kracauer is shown not just by a diary criticism of 1912, whose target is the traditional ivory tower and striving academic philosopher—the diametric opposite of Simmel. The inspiration goes much

deeper, not least in the field that is the subject of this work: the relationship between the modern experience of the metropolis and Kracauer's use of ornament.

If one reads closely a short extract from Kracauer's diary for 1907, one can confirm that his later concept of ornament is largely anticipated in this attempt to delimit Simmel's view. It is tempting to see in the note from 1907 a first, yet at the same time intuitively precise, formulation of the complex of problems that are going to be examined below in Kracauer's writings on the urban.

Kracauer sets out his position in his diary as he summarizes Simmel's lecture "The Problem of Artistic Style." In line with Adolf Loos (see the introduction) and Le Corbusier, Simmel also makes a general distinction between art craft and the work of art proper. Art craft is linked to the public and thus differs fundamentally from the work of art, which must be thought of as the expression of a personality. From these contrasting affiliations Simmel derives two aesthetic definitions: one is "stylizing" and the other emotionally oriented, corresponding to the article of everyday use and the work of art. As a student of architecture, Kracauer concentrates in his summary on the consequences for articles of everyday use, which, because of their function in ordinary life, "are to spread pleasure and therefore have to be 'stylized'" (M, p. 12).

Although Kracauer is aware that this difference is drawn on a theoretical level, he cannot resist, in a parenthesis, blurring the not very dialectical distinction between design and artistic expression. This does not—as one might perhaps have expected, given Kracauer's participation in ornament-drawing courses as early as his first term as an architect student—take the form of an apology for the decorative element in the designed object. In a foreshadowing of Kracauer's negative and critical concept of ornament, his gaze is turned away from the work of applied art in order to localize, in the very act of artistic creation, elements of the profanely ornamental—or, as he puts it in an extension of Simmel's vocabulary, elements of a stylizing nature. Kracauer's remark concludes the crucial section, the last part of which reads: "He [Simmel] then gave a detailed presentation of the essence behind our articles of everyday use, which are to spread pleasure and which therefore have to be 'stylized,' as opposed to the individual work of art, which causes a commotion in our innermost feelings. (As if Botticelli did not 'stylize' too.)" (M, p. 12).

Kracauer's parenthetical comment does not, perhaps, take Simmel's complex mode of thought into consideration. Simmel would presumably place Botticelli among the geniuses who also "express [their] period" (M, p. 12) in their particular, personal expression and therefore can be assumed, at the formal, visual level as well, to advance toward the general—the "stylized." The crucial difference, however, is that Kracauer, in his resolution of the dichotomy between art and art craft, makes possible the idea of a *personal expression in the formally general.* In the stylized form, which in everyday life

works to spread ease, peace, and tranquility, Kracauer indirectly uncovers the possible presence of something personally general—just as the general, thanks to the stylized, was present in Botticelli's paintings. The general forms of art craft are *used* by Botticelli. By means of this figure of thought, everyday articles are indirectly ascribed the privileged role of being able to contain personal expressions of substantial meaning. Art craft, because of its utility function, exceeds the level of the individual subject in favor of a collective, sociocultural subject, a germinal form of Kracauer's later interest in the critique of society and culture.

It can be hard to gain an overview at an exclusively conceptual level of the range of this collective yet still particular expression of something that is apparently unrefined and general. To make such an attempt would also contradict the nature of the expression as a meeting between the particular and the general. For this reason, the remainder of this work will be concerned with the form of expression of individual Kracauer texts, analyzed in order, so that I may give a picture of his concept of ornament that is both general and nuanced.

Kracauer's writings published thus far do not convey in connection with his concept of the metropolis even a very early and lapidary attitude toward Simmel's essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life." In the introductory section to Kracauer's book on Simmel published in 1920 (see below), Simmel's lecture is not mentioned once. Nevertheless, it is one of the basic hypotheses of the present work that *Kracauer's writings on cities must be understood as a historically and socially articulated exploration of the perspectives for a "resubjectivization" of what Simmel calls the city's "objective culture"* (or objective spirit). This hypothesis can be argued with the support of certain elements in Kracauer's essay on Simmel, even though it must first and foremost prove its relevance in the following reconstruction of his many-faceted essay writing on the urban. But to be able to assess the inspiration and the striking shifts from Simmel to Kracauer, we must first subject "The Metropolis and Mental Life" to an analysis.

2. SIMMEL AND THE CULTURE OF THE METROPOLIS

Contexts for a Reading of Simmel's Essay on the Metropolis

Simmel's text "The Metropolis and Mental Life" ("Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben") has in recent times been recognized as one of the decisive, even paradigm-forming treatments of modernity's specifically urban conditions of existence. But even though the text is thus considered a classic of sociology, cultural criticism, and philosophical history, it most often receives a relatively cursory reading. Typically, a couple of Simmel's striking observations are called to attention without these being seen as part of a complex theoretical construction. Even in the essay on Simmel's concept of

modernity by the Simmel expert David Frisby,[7] very little effort is devoted to connecting Simmel's experience-organizing (i.e., empirical) hypotheses with the theoretical framework that has enabled Simmel to formulate them. This means that the many theoretical levels in Simmel's text on the metropolis threaten to collapse together.

A reading that fully considers its context in the history of knowledge cannot be undertaken here.[8] The task will instead be limited to presenting the main layers in Simmel's analysis of the metropolis, taking into account the main figures of thought from the individual branches of knowledge. Emphasis will also be placed on the cultural tendencies Simmel uncovered, tendencies that will prove to have a crucial influence on Kracauer's critique of culture.

The Individual and the Culture of the Metropolis

Simmel's analysis—only fifteen pages long, yet for that reason condensed and complex—can seem, for the purpose of theoretical, academic consideration, to break down into a number of strains (sociological, psychological, economic, and historico-philosophical) that may not converge. Yet it should be noted that the title of the essay only indirectly indicates an overall opposition that ensures the presentation's inner cohesion and subtle analysis.

The various levels and the examples contained in them all serve to illustrate the encounter between the individual and the culture of the metropolis. Rather than being a harmonious joining together of individuals in social institutions, this encounter is more of a *confrontation.* In Simmel, the individual is not exposed to a psychoanalytical decentering; he is, on the contrary, kept enclosed within himself so that he thereby may be able to encapsulate a metaphysically irreducible element.[9] But in the everyday life of the metropolis, the individual is subjected to overwhelming pressure. This pressure and its effects are in fact what Simmel is talking about when he refers to "mental life"—"das Geistesleben."

DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIOLOGY

Taking into consideration Simmel's position as one of the founders of German sociology, it might at first glance seem strange that group and developmental sociology (in the strict sense) receive so little attention in his analysis of the metropolis. Nevertheless, halfway into the essay Simmel advances a number of thoughts concerning what the city means in the history of the individual. In spite of the city's many features that break down the individual, which are later emphasized on the psychological and economic levels of analysis, its meaning for the individual is in general *emancipatory.*

The history of the city coincides with the step-by-step emancipation of the individual from social bindings and surveillance structures of smaller groups (see I,

pp. 198–200, §§13–18)—including those of the small town (see I, p. 199, §§16–17). The individual's physical and mental bonds are loosened in the city and the metropolis, where *freedom* from an invasive, totalizing social life is at the same time a *loss.* The freedom that can be confirmed at the level of group sociology must in no way be confused with a feeling of emotional well-being. The individual's emancipation from habitual life patterns places even greater demands on him, as that shared life takes place in the technically and socially organized mechanism of the metropolis.

PHYSIOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY

When Simmel in the rest of his essay on the metropolis ascribes great importance to a psychological consideration, his reason for doing so is still sociological. For Simmel it is a question of uncovering the conditions of the individual's encounter with social life. The social can be read less from the institutions of society than from the "negative images" that can be observed in connection with individuals.

Simmel's scientific tools in this area are shaped by their origins in a psychology free from contact with Freudian psychoanalysis. The "psychological" (I, p. 192, §2) analysis undertaken by Simmel is characterized as "physiological" (I, p. 196, §9), which clearly reveals that the frame of reference is not a dream analysis based on language and images but rather is biologically inspired. The starting point for Simmel's conclusions is that man is a "creature of difference" (I, p. 192, §2). In his reactions to differences in the world around him, man expends energy to ensure both his awareness and his mastery of situations. In the life space of the metropolis, demands on the individual are aggravated by the general and inevitable "Steigerung des Nervenlebens" (I, p. 192, §2)—that is, an acceleration or intensification of physiological-sensory life. Without the mastery of a comprehensive network of technical and social codes, whose learning calls for a disciplining of man's behavior, survival in the metropolis becomes problematic. A situational awareness that reacts instantly is "the psychological basis on which the type of metropolitan individualities is constructed" (I, p. 192, §2).

In stressing the existence of a "type of metropolitan individualities," Simmel is alluding to a particular individually articulated mentality that carries out the difficult balancing act between, on the one hand, functional reactions (to social and technical events) and, on the other hand, an exaggerated insensitivity to individual differences. Given his postulation of this functional, callous person, it has to be explained how Simmel can describe "the life of the mind" in the metropolis as being of an "intellectual nature" (I, p. 193, §3).

That description does not imply that Simmel credits the metropolitan mentality with a fully developed power of reflection. On the other hand, there is a hint of what was for early sociology (e.g., Tönnies) the central contrast between country and town:

that is, between a traditional form of life that grows naturally within the framework of a *Gemeinschaft* and an "artificial," Babylon-like culture that assumes the form of an anonymous *Gesellschaft.* But Simmel also makes a radical attempt to detach the culture of the metropolis from the condemnation heaped on it in the German political and literary tradition. By accepting the metropolis as a fact of life and thus being able to analyze it as something other and more than a decline in comparison to tradition, Simmel is stepping far beyond most of his contemporaries.

In his positive characterization of the mentality of the metropolis, Simmel is admittedly still dependent on the dichotomy between the metropolis and cultural tradition. The smaller town does not provide norms for him, though it serves as a basis of comparison by representing "temperament and emotional relationships" between people that are part of a development dominated by "the quiet harmony of unbroken habits" (I, p. 193, §3). These qualities of the province are set in opposition to the dominance of reason in the metropolis. Urban reason, despite "the intellectual nature of the life of the mind in the metropolis" (I, p. 193, §3), typically is not open to new people, things, and events. On the contrary, the individual in the metropolis generally regards his surroundings with a blasé and reserved state of mind.

Like Freud after the First World War (in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) and Walter Benjamin shortly before the Second World War (in the second version of his essay on Baudelaire and Paris), Simmel distinguishes—within the framework of a physiological system of metaphors—between a surface level and a deeper level of consciousness. The surface level is the seat of reason: "The place of reason is . . . the transparent, conscious, uppermost layer of our minds; it is the most capable of our inner forces at adapting itself" (I, p. 193, §3). Benjamin agrees that the reasonable—"conscious"—layer serves as a *Reizschutz* (protection against stimuli), which in Simmel's physiological psychology becomes a "protective organ" (I, p. 193, §3). But Benjamin, who knew of the psychoanalytical concept of the unconscious (and the repressed), would not share Simmel's confidence that this privileging of reason conversely leads to "the exclusion of irrational, instinctive, sovereign essential characteristics and impulses" (I, p. 195, §7).[10] As early as the 1920s (the time of Kracauer's urban essays), psychoanalysis had become so widespread in the German critique of culture that Simmel's physiologically based hypothesis about "the intensification of nervous life" slid into the background. Instead, writers like Kracauer and Benjamin draw attention to the basically mental structuring of the subject. Benjamin, Freud, and Kracauer as well stress precisely the events that are not picked up by the automatic workings of the "protective organ" but that penetrate into the unconscious. As they break through, the events enable unconscious fragments to return with new force to everyday life. This means that the violence of the

metropolis is treated as one of the conditions necessary for both individual and collective memory.

In the absence of an underlying psychoanalytical configuration, Simmel remains focused on the *neutralizing effects* of this apparently transparent, centrally located, but not particularly sensitive reason. His analysis of both the blasé and reserved state of mind implies that the mentality of the metropolis, in its relation to objects and people, excludes essential qualities. A *blasé state of mind* covers over the fact that man as a creature of difference can find himself exposed to so great a number of stimuli that he responds with a "lack of ability to react to the new influences with the . . . appropriate energy" (I, p. 196, §8). The person's psyche becomes *inert,* which, in relation to other people, results in a "negative attitude," a general "*reserved state of mind*" as regards the anonymous individuals of the masses of the metropolis (I, p. 197, §11). The social level is cast into "a quiet aversion, a mutual alienation and repulsion" (I, p. 197, §12).

Simmel's analysis deals with the metropolis at its *level of totality.* He is well aware that there is a finely graded hierarchy of emotions, in which, for example, the street and the department store represent engagement at the lowest and most anonymous level of mental and social contact. But there is no room for the analysis of breaks in the general indifference, whether these take place in the street or in the intimate sphere's inversely proportional worship of consumer goods and human emotions.

Both of these fields—the street and the interior—have high priority in Kracauer, who leaves Simmel's relatively harmonious view of metropolitan culture to examine instead the dysfunctional features of everyday life. The mere possibility of dysfunction (e.g., in the blasé attitude toward technical understanding, resulting in a car accident, or in exaggerated attempts at mastering the cultural sphere) lies undisplayed in Simmel, whose article at this point shows signs of having been written in Berlin at the end of the nineteenth century. Kracauer and Simmel are, however, both critical of urban reason, whose use results in functional mastery rather than in intellectual and social reflection concerning the human conditions in the metropolis.

QUANTITATIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

Simmel anticipates many of the critical theoreticians of civilization (Georg Lukács, Henri Lefebvre, Theodor W. Adorno, Alfred Krovoza, etc.) who, in the course of the twentieth century, concerned themselves with how the capitalist economy makes itself felt in matters of consciousness and thus propagates a culture that focuses on quantity. The exchange value characterizes ever more visibly the aspect of goods that could previously be captured in utilitarian terms. To an increasing extent, this "use value" has to be understood on the basis of a system of needs that is differentiated culturally (i.e., semiotically and socially).

Although Simmel does not use Marx's system of economic concepts in his analysis of the metropolis (or in *The Philosophy of Money,* a work that is much more fully developed theoretically), basing his understanding of economics on the neoclassical idea of marginal value, he has, in a more striking way than the authors mentioned above, concerned himself with the impact of a money-based economy in a specifically *urban* context. The basic theoretical figure for an explanation of the social conditions confronting the individual in the metropolis emerges by means of an analogy between the metropolis, the economy, and the supremacy of reason (I, p. 193, §4). Only when the above-mentioned considerations of sociological evolution and physiopsychology are supplemented by the economic dimension has Simmel's theoretical apparatus been fully set forth.

Simmel does not need to have recourse to a Marxist theory of value in order to demonstrate the impact of the quantitative principle on the life-world of the metropolis. He simply refers to the effects of the production activity being no longer based on commission but destined for an anonymous, comprehensive market (I, p. 193, §5). Consideration of the individual is replaced by this economic context of an objective and formal (though also abstract and potentially inconsiderate) justice. Furthermore, the money economy also assumes importance for the development of particular forms of consciousness in everyday life and knowledge.

"The modern mind has become a schemer," Simmel concludes (I, p. 194, §6), after having proposed that the money economy "reduces all quality to the question of the simple 'how much'" (I, p. 194, §4). Under the gaze of calculating, scheming reason, the quality of things recedes into the background.

The city of the money economy is also of importance for the development of intersubjective relations. The urge of the individual to reproduce himself by means of income establishes a general climate of competition that does not stop at a discreet aversion to collectivity but is heightened in the attempt to escape the mass culture and mass economy that envelop everybody. Both the advanced division of labor and a widespread tendency to extravagant conduct are explained as part of the individual's efforts to attract the attention of an anonymous public.

The blasé individual who rules via reflexive actions proves to embody a number of colorful characteristics that express individualism more than they do individuality. The extravagance is not linked conceptually with psychoanalysis's (later) theory about narcissism. But Simmel implies the social basis of narcissism in his explanation of extravagance, which is characterized as "the only means, via a detour through the consciousness of others, to salvage some sort of a feeling of self-worth and . . . the awareness of filling a particular space" (I, p. 202, §25).

This last quotation indicates the extent to which Simmel's use of radically different levels of scientific analysis is fluid and permeated by transitions. At no point is it denied that interaction between various separate levels is necessary to understanding the relationship between a culture of reason and a money economy. The psychological and the economic levels of analysis are kept relatively independent of each other, without dominance being attributed to either. In Simmel, economic determinism's "in the last instance" is omitted, whereas it would become central in, for example, the Althusser-inspired, so-called structuralist Marxism of the late 1960s.

Although Kracauer concerns himself in depth, from the mid-1920s onward, with Marx, especially the early writings, he never adopts a mechanically materialistic mode of thought. Doing so would have distanced him so much from Simmel's methodological relativism that a theoretical relation between the two would be harder to demonstrate. Kracauer's basic aversion to ambitious constructions of theories makes him rather less explicit, more object-bound in his considerations than Simmel, whose work related to concrete themes did not exactly shun a conceptually creative perspective. Even after publishing the seminal programmatic essay "Das Ornament der Masse" (1927), which will be dealt with in chapter 5, Kracauer was inspired by Marxism primarily when establishing a framework for the concrete investigation of cultural phenomena. He chose for his point of departure the organization of production, whereas Simmel, as mentioned, concentrates on the medium of the circulation process: money. In both instances, the critique of culture builds on an analogical construction with several levels on an equal footing. This common feature is important and overshadows the difference in the natures of their critiques of the urban. Simmel could otherwise have found a basis for a critical involvement in his well-developed perception of the place of the metropolis in the development of history. Instead, it is Kracauer who shoulders this task.

The Metropolis: The Role of a Sociomental Place in History

The enumeration of the theoretical levels and the concrete observations that belong to them focuses the question on the unifying point: the metropolis. Only the metropolis remains an anchor: "The only thing that is certain is that the form of the metropolis is the most fertile soil for this interaction" (I, p. 194, §5) is how Simmel concludes his thoughts about the relationship between psychology and economics. Shortly afterward, he defines the city's status as the social arena where methodical relativism finds a model in reality: "It is the conditions of the metropolis that are both the cause and the effect of this essential characteristic [i.e., the calculating mind]" p. 195, §6).

The metropolis occupies a special position in modernity by being at one and the same time the point of departure for epoch-making experiences and the model for an epistemological position. Kracauer later stresses the radical difference between the

pursuit of culture in a small provincial town and in the metropolis, where all classes and strata are part of a relatively uniform mass public (O, p. 313). Similarly, the term *Großstadt,* "metropolis," also means for Simmel an essential change in relation to the tradition-bound town.

Simmel does not primarily treat the metropolis as a *morphological* feature—that is, as a city that can find an adequate cartographic representation and be defined by its size and by its specific administrative, political, and ownership structure.[11] The metropolis for Simmel builds on real relations, but has a quality added to it as a *cultural place* (in the philosophical sense),[12] functioning as the setting for cultural relations that—like the theoretical levels in Simmel's article on the metropolis—have a tendency to become detached from each other.

Because of its totalizing nature, the metropolis avoids the daily reminder of its difference from the country, appearing instead as an independent, fragmented, but integral form of culture. It assumes such dimensions that its contrast with the rural is resolved into a new quality. The metropolis serves as a place for social and cultural practice. It becomes a supposed intersection between—and thus an ideal reference point for—a number of different points of view regarding urban reality. That these perspectives are only rarely collected in a common vanishing point is precisely one of the metropolitan culture's challenges to the social analyst.

Simmel advances a common denominator for the many discourses analyzing the urban in his essay by letting the metropolis assume a privileged place in a reflection on the philosophy of history. In light of the individual's history of development, which becomes the focus of Simmel's diverse thematic interests, the metropolis is no longer one single place among many. It becomes *the place* (the definitive place)—the place where the polarities of modern life unfold. From being, in the first sections of the essay, a potential meeting place for examples, tendencies, and discourses, the metropolis, toward the end of the presentation, is ascribed "a completely new value in the universal history of the mind" (I, p. 204, §28). The metropolis becomes the essential cultural sphere for subordination to what Simmel calls the "objective mind" (technology, institutions, culture):

> The deepest reason for its being precisely the metropolis—no matter whether it is always justified or fortunate—that directs one's attention to the most individual personal existence would seem to me to be this: The development of modern culture is characterized by a predominance of what one could call the objective mind over the subjective, that is: within both language and law, production technology and art, knowledge and the objects of domestic surroundings, a certain amount of mind is embodied, whose daily growth is followed

> only very incompletely and at an increasing distance by the mental development of the subjects. (I, pp. 202–203, §26)

For Simmel's metaphysical concept of the individual, the metropolis is the greatest challenge to date. The relation between the subjective and objective mind shifts there in favor of the heavy and hard-to-master expressions of civilization: knowledge, technology, buildings, media, and institutions. The dominance of objective culture is the real and generally formulated basis for the blasé and quantifying mentality. So the question is what *potential for development* Simmel's conceptual apparatus can outline regarding the individual's (but also, more generally, subjectivity's) signs of increasing powerlessness.

Simmel's essay "The Concept and Tragedy of Culture" ("Der Begriff und die Tragödie der Kultur"), published for the first time in 1911, provides tools for a different strategy than the text on the metropolis, which—with a concept of history polarized between a subjective and an objective mind as its point of departure—limits itself to concluding that "our task is not to accuse or forgive, simply to understand" (I, p. 204, §29). The somewhat later text presents a more fully developed conception of history, and thereby also implies the possibility of combining the hermeneutical strategy for an understanding of urban culture with the perspective of cultural criticism.

The article on the tragedy of culture operates with a historical process of the mind that is divided into three, allowing the concept of culture itself to depend on this process taking place. Culture is defined in its pure form as the movement of the mind "from enclosed unity via unfolded diversity to unfolded unity."[13] For life in the metropolis to be converted into culture Simmel requires, in other words, that the subjective mind, in an initial movement, be exteriorized into an objective (projected) form. But the crucial, almost Hegelian condition for the happy outcome of the total process is that a subsequent movement resolve the objective mind in a third form. The objective mind, which dominates the individual under modernity, must in principle be *reappropriated* by the subjective instance before the concept of culture finds fulfillment in history.

Although the conditions for the reappropriation are not particularly promising, the abstract possibility of completing the movement still exists. A general explanation of the tragic—in a classical sense—derailing of the development is also provided. Simmel thematizes "the tragedy of culture" as a structure of destiny (*Schicksal*), which, in a fateful way, makes it possible for unsuccessful development always to be present in the very concept of culture. Before the three-part process is completed there is an important and real risk that the objective mind will make itself independent of the control of the subjective instance:

> It is the concept of all culture that the mind creates something independently objective, through which the development of the subject passes from itself to

> itself; but by that very fact, the integrating, culture-determined elements involved must necessarily undergo a self-development that either uses up the forces of the subjects or always pulls the subjects into their orbit, thereby bringing them up to their own level: the development of the subjects can now no longer take the same path as the objects; if they nevertheless follow the latter, they lose themselves in a cul-de-sac or in a state of emptiness as regards their inner and own life.[14]

The subjects neither can nor ought to follow the objective mind further, but must insist on a perspective different from the development of this objective culture that has made itself independent. That remains "the great project of the mind: to overcome the object as such by creating itself as an object and, thereby enriched, to return to itself." In modernity, generally speaking, this project is infrequently fulfilled, although Simmel insists that over the whole history of the mind, it "succeeds on innumerable occasions."[15]

Even in the culture of the metropolis, objective culture has a "chance of resubjectivization" (I, p. 140, §34). The only difficulty is that the general problem—which consists of indicating concrete paths to the subjective mind's reappropriation of that which it (according to Simmel's speculative concept of history) itself has exteriorized—is even more acute in the metropolis. The individual's confrontation with objective culture is inevitable, taking the form of polarizations of individual and mass, of body and space, of the labor force's necessary reproduction and the prevailing conditions of production, and so on. The discrepancy between the individual's qualifications and the total social and technical division of labor is not easy to overcome, either conceptually or in an actual life.

To a great extent, Simmel defends a strategy of individual self-development (*Bildung*) as the only realistic answer to a situation that affects all individuals. But this strategy, whose justification in the long term is Simmel's concept of the metaphysical individual, is surpassed by Kracauer, whose conception of the individual and subjectivity is marked by his experiences in the First World War. As a result, Kracauer sees the problem mainly from a social perspective.

3. THE RESUBJECTIVIZATION OF OBJECTIVE CULTURE — KRACAUER'S AND SIMMEL'S STUDY OF THE METROPOLIS

Kracauer's Emphasis on "The Philosophy of Money"

Kracauer's published writings present no real stance toward Simmel's article on the metropolis and the strategy of cultural criticism whose possibility is implied in "The Con-

cept and Tragedy of Culture." The two articles are not directly mentioned. It is also possible that Kracauer was not familiar with "The Metropolis and Mental Life," published in the 1903 yearbook of the Gehe Foundation. Given this background, it may seem surprising that in what follows, Kracauer's urban essays will be read against Simmel.

Yet the hypothesis concerning Kracauer's attempt to contribute in a social and historical perspective to the resubjectivization of the objective culture of the metropolis is far from baseless. First, Kracauer's urban writings, whose inner cohesion is reconstructed in the present book, show that he actually followed such a strategy during the interwar years. Second, the published introductory section of his much more comprehensive book on Simmel[16] contains certain indications that support the idea that his subsequent writing about the city is inspired by Simmel on precisely those points Kracauer criticizes in Simmel's work. These points will now be dealt with briefly, after which a number of analyses of Kracauer's writings will attempt to uncover how the programmatic ideas were fulfilled.

The metropolis is mentioned only once in the introductory section of Kracauer's 148-page-long manuscript "Georg Simmel: Ein Beitrag zur Deutung des geistigen Lebens unserer Zeit"[17] ("Georg Simmel: A Contribution to the Interpretation of the Mental Life of Our Time"). This is in connection with fashion—a metropolitan phenomenon ("eine großstädtische Erscheinung"; O, p. 236)—and not in a comment on Simmel's essay on the metropolis. Even if he was unfamiliar with "The Metropolis and Mental Life," Kracauer is nevertheless in contact with its conceptual world, since he draws attention to Simmel's 1900 book *The Philosophy of Money* as being the "finest example" (O, p. 238) of that fundamental idea in Simmel that there is a mutual link and interdependence between the most diverse points in the totality. The metropolis is probably included in the "core principle of Simmel's thought" (O, p. 217)—revealed precisely in connection with *The Philosophy of Money*—that "All the utterances of mental life . . . are connected to each other in innumerable ways; none [of them] can be detached from the contexts in which they find themselves with others" (O, p. 218).

The Philosophy of Money is at the center of Kracauer's interpretation of Simmel. Since this title is also listed in footnotes in Simmel's essays on the metropolis and on the concept of culture (considered in the secondary literature to be Simmel's works of cultural criticism) as the work that motivated the essays' briefly expressed thoughts, the link between Kracauer and the texts that convey Simmel's thoughts about the metropolis is established as certain.

The Defense of Things, History, and the Link between Individual and Society

At his modest distance from *The Philosophy of Money,* Kracauer notes three points where he feels he can identify weakness in Simmel's work: first, the threat against the

individual object; second, the absence of historical awareness; and third, Simmel's conception of the individual. All three points are later important in Kracauer's own urban writings.

First, Kracauer's insistence on a delimited ornament as both the starting and finishing point of the written interpretation underlies the critical observation that Simmel, in his attempts to establish mediation between the individual object and the totality, tendentiously dissolves the object and "loses himself in the infinite" (O, p. 241). This problem, which is of immediate importance to any interpretive practice applied to fragments, is articulated by Kracauer in practical experiments within the problematics of the ornament.

Second, Kracauer is apparently trying to overcome the relativistic tendencies in Simmel's thought by appealing to history. At any rate, in his introductory delineation of Simmel's work he draws attention to history's unobtrusive position: "Likewise he [Simmel] lacks a conception of history in the grand style; interpreting the course of history is alien to him; the historical situation in which people find themselves at a given time is something he does not consider to be important" (O, p. 209). The criticism is concealed in remarks about Simmel, but can nevertheless be read as a hint of Kracauer's own intentions regarding historical consciousness.

Third, in the presentation of Simmel's view of the individual one can see an early sketch of Kracauer's later attempts to mediate between history and the single individual. Kracauer seems—judging by the following quotation—not to approve of Simmel's generally metaphysical view of the individual: "The unity of meaning and purpose [double meaning of *Sinneinheit*] that Simmel denies the world he assigns to individuals. . . . Only Simmel detaches human individuality completely from the world totality, while nevertheless considering all other complexes on the basis of their interwovenness in the whole" (O, p. 243). As can be seen from his book on Jacques Offenbach, Kracauer does not turn against the individual as such, but feels it is necessary to illuminate the individual in terms of the surrounding society. Kracauer finds such a method of analysis represented in Simmel's work on Goethe. Here, an intense, integral relationship is developed between the *individual* and *history:*

> On one single occasion, in his book on *Goethe,* Simmel has attempted to grasp *the individuality of a life* at the root. According to him, the secret behind the figure of Goethe is, among other things, concealed in the fact that the writer himself "knows perfectly well that obeying his own law corresponds to the law of things," in that each of his experiences, as well as everything that comes to him from the outside, fits in a wonderfully fateful way into the stream of his total personality, and, having melted into it, finds creative expression. (O, p. 247)

It is precisely this analogy between the individual and society that Kracauer attempts to develop in his book on Offenbach and Paris, which will be dealt with in the third part of the present volume.

It should by now have been shown that Kracauer is a discreet spokesman for the particularity of the single thing, the central position of history, and mediation between the individual and society. But it has not been proven, in a stricter sense, that Kracauer consciously distances himself from Simmel in his analytics of urban culture in order to promote the resubjectivization of the city's "objective culture." Against this background, the seemingly paradoxical hypothesis nevertheless has to be advanced that Kracauer is intuitively so close to Simmel regarding the question of the threatened position of subjectivity in the metropolis that he—consciously or unconsciously—can have omitted any direct comment on Simmel's position. This unvoiced but critical continuity may have protected a joint urban inspiration that would lose its effect if openly and bluntly proclaimed. But given the writings of Kracauer now available, any explanation of the fact that he deals only indirectly with Simmel's attitude to modern urbanity in the introductory chapter to his book on Simmel must remain conjectural.

* * *

This first chapter has attempted to reconstruct the relationship between Simmel and Kracauer concerning the points that are central for the investigation of the ornaments of the metropolis. At a number of different levels, the close link between Simmel and Kracauer has been demonstrated. Adorno may possibly be right in claiming that "Simmel's influence on him [Kracauer] was really more at the level of a turn of thought than of an elective affinity with an irrationalist philosophy of life."[18] Only Adorno tendentiously reduces Simmel to his final vitalistic period, thereby avoiding any detailed consideration of the question of Simmel's substantial inspiration of Kracauer. In connection with the issue of the metropolis, this influence seems to be decisive.

An overall methodological problem arises because Kracauer's published writings do not directly express an attitude toward Simmel's analysis of the metropolis. So it must remain a *hypothesis* that Kracauer's own essays on the metropolis can fruitfully be seen as a socially and historically oriented attempt to promote the resubjectivization of alienated, objective urban culture. The plausibility of this hypothesis will be demonstrated in the following pages.

The first section, which has already been introduced, will concentrate on Kracauer's anonymous fictive autobiography, *Ginster.* The progression of the main character of the novel from experiencing a boring, everyday life as an architect to identifying hope in the city space will be established in detail. This in itself will provide an

opportunity to see how Kracauer constructs the link between the individual and urban society. To a certain extent, the novel is a reply to Simmel's biographies of, for example, Rembrandt and Goethe. However, the main character has less in common with these geniuses than with the "type of metropolitan individualities" outlined by Simmel in his essay on the mental life of the metropolis.

A concluding quotation from Simmel's essay on the concept and tragedy of culture must stand as a symbol of Kracauer's fictional doppelgänger, Ginster. Anticipating later remarks, the observation can be made here that *Ginster* is a historically concrete display of the type of personality that lives under the increasing dominance of objective culture. In describing the situation of the individual, Simmel states that

> at several points there [is] more of a decline in the culture of the individuals concerning spirituality, sensitiveness, individualism. This discrepancy is basically a consequence of the growing division of labor—for that requires of the individual efforts that become more and more one-sided and, if pushed to the extreme, often allows his personality as a whole to waste away. At any rate, the individual becomes less and less equal to coping with the spread of objective culture. (I, p. 203, §27)

The next three chapters will illustrate this situation, using material from Kracauer's novel *Ginster.*