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Toward a Reevaluation of Siegfried Kracauer and the Frankfurt School

Daniel Sullivan

University of Arizona, Tucson, USA, swolf22@arizona.edu

Abstract: This essay reviews the anthology *Siegfried Kracauer: Selected Writings on Media, Propaganda, and Political Communication* (2022), edited and with translations by Jaeho Kang, Graeme Gilloch, and John Abromeit. The editors describe the volume as "a selection of Kracauer's diverse materials on propaganda and political communication – texts hitherto unavailable in English or strewn among different […] journals, periodicals, and magazines" (2). Beyond this, *Selected Writings* presents readers and scholars with an opportunity to re-evaluate the legacy of Siegfried Kracauer, particularly in connection with the strands of mutual influence and parallel thought between his work and the development of early Frankfurt School critical theory. The volume contains remarkable and largely unpublished work on totalitarian propaganda in film; the manipulative devices of the U.S. advertising industry of the 1940s and 50s; and philosophy of science in the area of sociologically informed empirical research.

Keywords: Siegfried Kracauer, propaganda, fascism, totalitarianism, advertising, culture industry, film theory, philosophy of science

1. Introduction

For all those interested in the history and ideas of either early Frankfurt School critical theory, Siegfried Kracauer, or both, this new edited volume of Kracauer's scholarly writings will prove indispensable. Its editors and primary translators – Jaeho Kang, Graeme Gilloch, and John Abromeit – are all experts in communications research and theory, the history of the Frankfurt School, or both. In the most straightforward way, they describe *Selected Writings* as "a selection of Kracauer's diverse materials on propaganda and political communication – texts hitherto unavailable in English or strewn among different […] journals, periodicals, and magazines" (2)[1]. Their work is a long time coming, given that Kang and Gilloch have been researching and writing on Kracauer since around the turn of the century. It represents a careful and comprehensive effort that does us all a service, perhaps primarily because of the opportunity this volume affords for re-assessment of the interrelationships between Kracauer and the "inner circle" of the Institute for Social Research (Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, etc.).

We may begin such a re-assessment by reflecting on Kracauer's biography. Indeed, the editors chose to organise the 20 contributions to *Selected Writings* (spanning 1936-1958) chronologically, dividing them between Kracauer's major career and life stages. His written corpus proper begins around 1920, when he started work as a journalist for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, initially in that city and later in Berlin. Although this "classic" period in the development of Kracauer's philosophical and methodological perspective is not directly represented in this anthology, it was the time during which he wrote influential essays such as *The Mass Ornament* (later included

[1] Unless noted otherwise, all direct quotations are from *Selected Writings*, the presently reviewed volume.

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in the collection of that title; Kracauer 1995) and carried out the ethnographic study of the Weimar middle class translated as *The Salaried Masses* (Kracauer 1930/1998). With the rise of anti-Semitism, like so many other intellectuals the Kracauers fled to Paris in 1933, where they remained until opportunity for escape to New York crystallized in 1941.

As the editors note in their comprehensive and orienting Introduction, these transitional periods proved pivotal in the historical entanglement of Kracauer and the Frankfurt School. Kracauer hoped to gain security through his long-distance association with the Institute for Social Research during his years in Paris, and at Horkheimer's behest conducted a pathbreaking study of totalitarian propaganda in Germany and Italy that is comprehensively presented in English for the first time in *Selected Writings*. Yet Adorno – who was becoming increasingly close to Horkheimer in this period of the Institute's relocation to the United States – was critical of Kracauer's work on propaganda (his review is also included in this volume), as well as a book on Jacques Offenbach which Kracauer published in 1937. Kang, Gilloch, and Abromeit suggest that the distance between Kracauer and the Frankfurt School (which increased both during their lifetimes and in their subsequent academic reception) was due partly to these acerbic exchanges, but in larger part to the role New York emigration ultimately played in the Kracauers' lives. After the war, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Friedrich Pollock returned to Frankfurt to rebuild their original institution and German sociology. By contrast, Kracauer – who finally escaped Europe through an appointment with the New York Museum of Modern Art to research German cinema – remained in the city until the end of this days, maintaining academic ties to Columbia University and publishing (beyond his later books) in American journals as well as the *New York Times*.

Like Frankfurt Critical Theory itself, Kracauer's scholarly reception has been fractured; there are essentially two different visions of him in the contemporary versions of film theory and critical theory. Critical theorists such as Jeremiah Morelock (2021) or Doug Kellner (2010) focus on Kracauer's critique of film as ideology or collective dream, articulated in the Weimar essays and in *From Caligari to Hitler* (Kracauer 1947/2019; as the *Selected Writings* editors observe, the latter book "is the sun around which the works in this anthology orbit", 15). On the other hand, film theorists at large tend to judge Kracauer primarily based on his late opus *Theory of Film* (Kracauer 1960), and somewhat reductively classify him as a pioneer of "cinematic realism" (for a more sophisticated reading, see Turvey 2008). *Selected Writings* offers yet another vision of Kracauer: As a unique theorist who innovatively combined social science with philosophy and aesthetic analysis, in ways that complement and enrich Frankfurt School theory far beyond what prior critical reception has uncovered.

Throughout their extensive commentaries (Kang, Gilloch, and Abromeit not only offer a lengthy General Introduction, but shorter Introductions historically contextualising each of the volume's four parts), the editors stress the importance of film in Kracauer's work: "[He saw] the possibilities of film, not only as a phenomenon through which the contemporary collective psyche may be discerned and deciphered, but also as the most important modern medium whose essence, for Kracauer, is to restore human perception and appreciation of the physical world so as to reveal it anew and thereby redeem it from a state of oblivion" (19). As they astutely emphasize, Kracauer's writings combined a continual critique of the malaise of modern individualism – which he described in *Theory of Film* as "prevailing abstractness" – with an ambivalent, yet penetrating, focus on cinema as the lodestone for

manufacturing, understanding, and breaking through that very malaise. As Kracauer described our condition: “We are submerged by pictures and at the same time prevented from really perceiving them. The pictures become a veil between us and the visible world” (265). Mass media and its social-psychological consequences are indeed the leitmotif of Kracauer’s scholarly output. If one were to organise the *Selected Writings* in a more thematic (rather than chronological) fashion, they would naturally fall into analyses of (1) fascist/totalitarian propaganda (including the sections labelled by the editors as “Studies of Totalitarianism, Propaganda, and the Masses (1936-1940)” and “The Caligari Complex (1943-1947)”), and (2) U.S. mass advertising and consumer society (the section labelled “Postwar Publics (1948-1950)”).

2. Totalitarian Propaganda: The Hypostatisation of the Mass

Undoubtedly, the centrepiece of *Selected Writings* for many readers will be Kracauer’s remarkable 1938 study “Totalitarian Propaganda”, which went unpublished during his lifetime and was only recently reconstructed from archival sources and published in German. As mentioned, this work was commissioned by and intended for publication in the Institute’s journal. However, the plan went unfulfilled when Adorno attacked Kracauer’s work. Here the editors present a series of notes prepared by Kracauer, as well as two key sections of the lengthy essay.

Building on Simmelian insights into the social psychological condition of the early 20th Century – the lower and middle classes in a state of anomie and aimlessness – Kracauer begins his analysis by assuming that fascism is a “pseudo-solution” (p. 51) to the problem of widespread alienation under capitalism. Successful fascist propaganda achieves a “hypostatization of the mass” (52) – in other words, it creates artificial solidarity; it seeks to convince people that they belong to a unified collective when their ties to tradition and to one another have in fact been shattered by unchecked economic growth combined with massive disparities of resource distribution. Given this, for Kracauer there is a tight interconnection between fascist propaganda and the fascist movement itself: “Within the sphere of power of the totalitarian regime, propaganda is not merely an instrument of politics; politics is also an instrument of propaganda” (73). In light of its goal, totalitarian propaganda has three central characteristics that differentiate it from other forms: (1) it is *regressive*, insofar as it hopes to de-individuate the masses by fostering conformist, irrational (anti-liberal, anti-intellectual) thoughts and feelings; (2) it is *totalistic*, insofar as it demands “total power over opinion formation” (p. 116) and the elimination of competing ideologies; and (3) its only criterion is success in capturing mass adherence, because it does not actually seek to convince the populace of the validity of a particular agenda, but rather to alter their collective psychology. “The ideal is attained when the entire people permanently constitute themselves as a mass rally, or at least when all individuals find themselves constantly in the state of mass particles” (74).

What does it mean for people to be constituted as a mass in this totalitarian sense? Kracauer discusses several aspects of the fascist mass which – as Abromeit points out in his rich commentary on the essay (395-421) – synch up with similar observations made by Institute scholars such as Fromm and Horkheimer. There is the hallmark of what Nietzsche called *ressentiment* and what we now call authoritarian populism: namely, the scapegoating of isolated groups (e.g., the Jewish people) in order to deflect mass repressed affect from its origin in the oppressive practices of the elite class. A key aspect of this dynamic to which Kracauer draws attention is the relationship between the mass and its charismatic leader – whom, in anticipation of *From Caligari to Hitler*, he refers to as a “mass hypnotist” (69). The logic of this

relationship stems from fascism's unique form of cultural individualism: Personality is only recognized and celebrated in the form of the strong leader destined to exert their will upon history; whereas the majority of individuals are portrayed as common, contemptible, and in need of leadership. Kracauer further emphasises that the propagandistically generated fascist mass operates as a psychological *Heimat* ("homeland") for the alienated individual, presented in "the aesthetically seductive form of an ornament or striking image" (52).

The resonances between Kracauer's analysis of totalitarian propaganda and the studies on the topic published a few years later in the United States by Adorno, Löwenthal, and Guterman are striking. Certain theoretical premises – such as the idea that this propaganda does not deal in arguments but rather in the creation of emotional states – are carried over more-or-less wholesale into the later studies. *Prophets of Deceit* (Löwenthal & Guterman 1949/2016) even includes a chapter titled, "A Home for the Homeless" that seems like an homage to Kracauer's ideas in his earlier *Angestellten* study[2].

It is true (as Abromeit points out) that Adorno's subsequent work – particularly the essay "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda" (Adorno 1951/1982) – elaborates in far greater detail than Kracauer's the nature of the psychological identification between the mass and the fascist agitator, and that Kracauer drew heavily on Horkheimer's earlier work in this connection. But at the very least, with the appearance of *Selected Writings* it is indisputable that Kracauer deserves greater recognition than he has historically received for his contributions and insights into the early critical theory of authoritarian propaganda.

Much of the later Frankfurt School writings focused on the content of messages delivered via radio. Kracauer was also attuned to the significance of radio as a modern medium which dismantled boundaries and turned the private residence into a one-sided public square, constantly inundating the individual with ideology (certainly an observation rendered prescient in the era of Fox and Breitbart). He also stressed that totalitarian messages were more effectively communicated through the spoken than the written word, given their aim of engendering emotional resonance (rather than critical engagement) in the audience. But Kracauer's writings on propaganda are unique in the attention they give to cinema as a medium. In his article "The Conquest of Europe on the Screen: The Nazi Newsreel, 1939-1940" (135-151), Kracauer offers several detailed discussions of editing and camera techniques employed by the filmmakers in their portrayal of Berlin rallies and receptions. For instance, the editor frequently cuts between long shots of the crowd and close-ups of individuals, who are often shown not in their entire person but only through glimpses of isolated parts of the body. Only Hitler himself, at the conclusion of the reel, is shown as a fully autonomous and commanding individual. For Kracauer, such techniques symbolically contrast the complete personality of the leader with the fragmented and dependent nature of common individuals, who are only present to fulfil the function of mass assembly. "Because the mass constantly appears here, there, and everywhere at the command of Fascist and National Socialist propaganda, it gets caught up in a steady movement that takes hold of all its elements and the movement becomes an end in itself […] the uninterrupted activity of the mass particles" (72).

[2] The link is not made explicit; however, Löwenthal was a longstanding friend, and Kracauer is thanked in the acknowledgments of the volume.

3. Psychological Imperialism in U.S. Advertising

Kracauer's writings on totalitarian propaganda become even more interesting when they are balanced across the *Selected Writings* by his analyses of the U.S. advertisement industry as a propaganda machine, written in the immediate aftermath of the war. As is the case throughout the volume, Kracauer's most interesting work in this connection remained unpublished until recently, in particular the essay "Popular Advertisements" (223-232). Here – in arguments that startlingly parallel Horkheimer and Adorno's (1947/2002) famous culture industry analysis – Kracauer contends that rather than exclusively focusing on the task of marketing a particular product to a base, U.S. advertisements operate at a deeper level to promote a uniform ideology. They do so to achieve what Kracauer calls "'psychological imperialism' – a tendency, powerful in this country, to prefabricate souls as if they were houses" (232).

Kracauer writes once more as if anticipating our own moment, observing how market saturation and diminishing returns must be met by strategies of planned obsolescence and competitive advertising: "As the world is shrinking and supply is apt to surpass demand, this tendency to condition – or rather precondition – the buying public psychologically is likely to increase" (224). Thus, if totalitarian propaganda aims to produce the fascist mass by manufacturing a compelled inclusion, U.S. advertising produces the individual consumer-worker through an opposing route: the threat of exclusion from the illusory collective.

Drawing on copious illustrative examples ranging from 1940s/50s ads for whiskey to coffins, Kracauer elaborates the worldview that they are all promoting: "The American dream, as told by ads in our popular magazines: the happily conforming young aspire to success and manage to attain it, thereby serving the ideal of progress" (227). He notes in particular that the characters in ads are expert planners who always seem to be thinking two or three steps ahead about their career, love life, etc.; in this way, ads not-so-subtly encourage consumers to engage in social comparison and thereby augment the general time consciousness of the public. Kracauer further discerns a preoccupation with conformity and security in ads – insistence that a young man must purchase hair tonic or be rejected by friends and lovers; warning that older couples must choose the right insurance plan or come to ruin – and this, he believes, betrays a widespread psychological need on the part of the consuming public for assuagement of their real anxieties. U.S. advertisements therefore enact a dialectical movement between anxiety and security, reality, and fantasy:

> "The public constantly [wavers] between the two opposite poles of ads – the dream of happiness they spread and the pressure of the reality they admit. The psychological result is that the dream mitigates that pressure, which in turn makes the dream seem more palpable. This intermingling of life as it is and life as it might be having the intoxicating power of a drug" (231).

As in the case of totalitarian propaganda, it cannot be denied that Horkheimer and Adorno (1947/2002) developed similar theoretical arguments about the culture and advertisement industries to a more sophisticated extent than Kracauer's unpublished efforts[3]. Yet again the reader is immediately struck by the echoing themes: the

[3] It is far beyond my expertise to make claims about the history of ideas and influence in the early Frankfurt School. Speaking as a non-historiographer, I find it striking that there is an absence of explicit discussion in most works on Kracauer as to whether he was influenced by *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. This is perhaps in part due to the fact that (as Kang, Gilloch, and Abromeit note) "Popular Advertisements" represents Kracauer's most sustained and

overarching goals of manufacturing need and conformity; the mass-production of stereotypes through media; the dialectical tension between imaging compensatory fantasy and stark depiction of a menacing reality; the blurring of lines between commercial and "artistic" production. An interesting divergence between the analyses, however, lies in the fact that, for the most part, Horkheimer and Adorno allude to Fascist art and propaganda primarily to underscore parallels with American mass culture; whereas across his relevant writings Kracauer – ever the observer of artistic technique – is keen to highlight points of difference. He is particularly alarmed by the way in which U.S. media of the 1940s/50s overwhelmed the viewer with stimuli, with a "deluge of pictures" resulting from a "wanton habit" of "pictorialization" (265). Some of Kracauer's most insightful comments on propaganda aesthetics are to be found in his comparisons of newsreels produced in the United States and Nazi Germany (135-143; 233-237). He notes that the latter consisted of relatively fewer shots with very minimal accompanying voiceover narration; whereas U.S. news of the time was characterized by frequent edits and nearly incessant vocal commentary, preventing the viewer from constructing their own interpretation of the images.

Here is another example of Kracauer's ability to connect aesthetic and cultural-comparative analysis: He reconstructs the way in which totalitarian propaganda submerges the individual in the collective through contrived but powerful emotional experiences, whereas capitalist mass culture aligns the individual with its worldview by deconstructing their cognitive capacities.

4. Simmelian Social Science: Reconstructing the Total Situation

The majority of the *Selected Writings* fall into the preceding categories of studies of either totalitarian or advertising communications. However, there is a third thematic category of work throughout the volume, representing Kracauer's impressive (and heretofore underrated) contributions as a social scientist and qualitative researcher. Such essays primarily constitute the fourth section of the volume, designated "Cold War Tensions (1952-1958)" by the editors, which centers on Kracauer's part-time academic work with Columbia University's Bureau of Applied Social Research, initiated by Paul Lazarsfeld. To be sure, one reason why Kracauer's late work in social science and communications research has received less recognition is doubtless because much of it contributed more or less directly to U.S. propaganda and imperial machinations in the Cold War context; in other words, Kracauer was working with colleagues who were decidedly engaged in "administrative", as opposed to critical, research. To their credit, the editors at least address these uncomfortable issues for Kracauer's reception (268-272), although perhaps they are a bit too ready to offer favourable interpretations.

From my perspective, the concrete research efforts Kracauer contributed to during this period should today be viewed as questionable at best in ethical terms. What is

critical analysis of U.S. commercial culture, and yet it was never published. It may well be the case, as Martin Jay has argued when it comes to the like of Adorno and Kracauer, that "On certain occasions, one would complain about the appearance of his ideas in the writings of another, and it is in fact difficult to establish whose claim to originality is correct in many cases" (Jay 1986, 161). Both Von Moltke (2016) and Koch (2000) point out ways in which the culture industry analysis (or other arguments of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*) map on to Kracauer's recurrent concerns (particularly in *From Caligari to Hitler*), without explicitly commenting on Kracauer's degree of familiarity with it. As Huyssen (2018) notes, if Kracauer's later work might have been partly indebted to Horkheimer and Adorno, they were certainly indebted to his earlier work.

certainly of value, however, and much on offer in *Selected Writings*, are the defences and explication of method and philosophy of science which Kracauer penned in his twilight years as a working social scientist. In the unpublished but phenomenal late essay, "On the Relation of Analysis to the Situational Factors in Case Studies" (330-350), Kracauer offers both an insightful exegesis of his own methods as a sociologist and content analyst as well as a compelling attack on contemporary trends in empirical social science (which have continued unabated, nay accelerated, in recent decades). As with so much of Kracauer's writings, these arguments parallel many raised by Marcuse and Adorno against "technocratic" and "positivist" science, yet are presented in more concise language and with compelling examples close to the workaday logic of practicing researchers[4].

At a basic level, the essay concerns generalization from data in social science, with Kracauer's premise being that case studies – based on either qualitative or quantitative data – achieve generalizability largely by "reconstructing the total situation" (341) which gives rise to their primary variables. He distinguishes between studies which at least partly achieve this goal – which he calls "oriented" case studies – and the majority of contemporary empirical work, which he designates "unoriented."

> "The former tries to relate their variables to the total situation, whereas the latter do not sufficiently consider the impact of local influence and in consequence leave the degree of generality of their results in the open. Whenever the tendency toward unoriented research asserts itself, it is as if research evolved in a vacuum" (335).

But what does it mean to "reconstruct the total situation"? Kracauer further distinguishes between a "psychological dimension" and a "sociological dimension" of variables in any social scientific study, the former referring to "attitudes, behavior-patterns, preferences, status-aspirations, etc." and the latter to "structural or functional characteristics…economic and political conditions […] historical influences, etc." (333, 341). Based on this, Kracauer asserts "a case study is oriented only if its variables or units are related to the possibly relevant sociological determinants […] [such that] any psychological unit must be traceable to the ensemble of sociological characteristics framing it" (341). Methodologically, he suggests this can be accomplished via either of two routes: "In order to get hold of the total situation contextual analysis may either start from sociological assumptions and constructs its variables accordingly, or avail itself of [psychological] variables […] and reinsert them into sociological contexts" (345).

Kracauer's essay is particularly insightful when it turns to a critical appraisal of the dangers inherent in unoriented research. He argues that such studies often succumb to an interpretive "psychological fallacy" (345), whereby multifaceted situational determinants are reduced to individual-level constructs. He notes that this fallacy often derives somewhat innocently from a scientific concern with precision in measurement, which encourages reductionism and the elimination of "confounding" variables. But he thinks the consequences of uncritically or vaguely generalising from such an approach for a socially-applicable interpretation of the phenomenon under study can be

[4] Apparently, this work was commissioned by the Columbia Bureau as a kind of early science and technology studies enterprise, and was internally discussed by members such as Robert Merton. Kracauer himself noted that Adorno had made similar philosophy-of-science arguments, but that they would not succeed in the U.S. context because they strayed from working empirical methods and were "too philosophical" (Löwenthal 1991).

disastrous. The psychological components only appear reliable and universal in their isolation because the multilevel context from which they arise has been methodologically occluded. The problem is compounded in quantitative studies by an overreliance on statistical presentation; researchers forget the subjective decision-making processes that determined the nature of the data themselves and focus instead on the reified results. Commission of the psychological fallacy entails that "it is the shadow of the events rather than the events themselves which are summoned by analysis" (347). Kracauer gives the compelling example of the study of racial-ethnic prejudice, which often reduces historical and geographic complexity to seemingly recurrent and innate individual tendencies towards "ingroup bias".

He contends such work, in the absence of rigorous specification of boundaries of generalisability, is problematic on multiple levels: Methodologically, the nature of the prejudice itself may not have been adequately understood (it may be context-dependent in a manner left unilluminated by the particular study method), and ideologically it may encourage a misdirection of blame by construing prejudice as an individual, rather than societal, dilemma.

What is perhaps most remarkable about "Situational Factors in Case Studies" is the way in which this minor methodological treatise – written when Kracauer was in his late 1960s – transparently articulates the very concerns and methods he had employed in sociological work throughout his scholarly career. One can observe an example of oriented research in Kracauer's monograph on *The Salaried Masses* (completed three decades earlier), in the way he derived abstract categories such as "spiritual homelessness" from his examination of copious interviews and government statistics on the Weimar white-collar workers. And as Kracauer himself describes his method in *From Caligari to Hitler*:

> "I hypothesized, on the basis of my material, the existence of certain inner dispositions among the Germans of the Weimar Republic; instead of passing them off as independent entities, however, I tried to embed them in the sociological contexts of the period and to trace changes in collective psychological behavior to the changing economic, social and political conditions. It was psychology in the sociological dimension and sociology derived from psychological constants" (342)[5].

For this reader, rediscovery of Kracauer's "Situational Factors" essay – and the several other pieces of original research gathered in the fourth chronological section of *Selected Writings* – should serve as one more nail in the coffin of the surprisingly undying myth that the empirical studies of the early Frankfurt School were merely secondary efforts of mere historical interest today. Not only is it the case that Adorno, Horkheimer, Pollock, and their affiliates and students continued to conduct radical empirical research in post-War Frankfurt; but furthermore, those allegedly exiled or distanced from the "inner circle", such as Erich Fromm, also pursued empirical projects in their later years which showed striking continuity with their earliest efforts in the Institute for Social Research[6].

[5] As additional examples of oriented case study research, Kracauer mentions Löwenthal's (1944/2004) content analysis of popular magazine biographies (informed by cultural-historical interpretations), as well as his own co-authored study of the attitudes of refugees from the Soviet bloc (Kracauer & Berkman 1956).

[6] See Fromm and Maccoby (1970/1996). For an overview of the Institute's empirical program on authoritarian psychology, see Sullivan (2021).

Kracauer has by now earned his own place amongst those who crossed paths with the early Frankfurt School, and in so doing played a significant part in the development of social science on both sides of the Atlantic. His particular role was unique insofar as he acted as a bridge between classic social theory in the tradition of his early mentor Georg Simmel and the critical vision of research and philosophy that would be developed by the Frankfurt School. After all, Kracauer was the man who famously taught Adorno how to read Kant. When one reads the essays on method in *Selected Writings,* it is striking to recall that Kracauer first expressed the approach of "reconstructing the total situation" in some of his earliest scholarly work on Simmel:

> "People do not keep in mind the intimate reciprocal relations among the pieces that have been split off from the living totality. Instead, these pieces are considered to be independent and eventually congeal into rigid entities, whose meanings are irrevocably attached to features singled out more or less arbitrarily from their semantic totality rather than developing out of a consideration of that totality itself. Thus, for example, people make feelings or character traits into constructs with hard contours, into things which are sharply isolated from one another and which can be so cut to size and made presentable that their concepts no longer in any way refer to the manifold of being, which is, after all, simultaneously presented along with them. One of Simmel's fundamental aims is to rid every [psychological] phenomenon of its false being-unto-itself and show how it is embedded in the larger contexts of life" (Kracauer 1921/1995, 233).

The publication of *Selected Writings* provides us a timely opportunity to reflect on the philosophical continuity and brilliance of Kracauer's interrelated contributions to social science and aesthetic theory. Time and again one is surprised by the extent to which his work anticipated or resonated with that of his contemporaries in the inner circle of the early Frankfurt School. If – as Adorno (1991) tended to argue – the chief comparative deficit of Kracauer's corpus is a lack of theoretical sophistication, perhaps contemporary readers and scholars will be inclined to re-evaluate this "deficit". If Kracauer waged a lifelong war against the "prevailing abstractness" of modern culture, his Simmelian attention to the details of concrete observation – whether in film analysis or in ethnography – was surely his sharpest weapon.

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About the Author

Daniel Sullivan
Daniel Sullivan is an Associate Professor in the Social Psychology Program at the University of Arizona in Tucson. He received a BA in German Studies from the University of Arizona and a PhD in Psychology from the University of Kansas. He has previously written on film theory, as well as the empirical methodologies of the Frankfurt School. He is also the author of *Cultural-Existential Psychology* (2016) from Cambridge UP.