

Intraterritoriality: Money, Inclusion, History

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A Paul Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

—Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*

In her interview with *Money on the Left*, historian Julie Mell opens the door for a reconsideration of money's place in history by debunking the pernicious myth of the Jewish medieval money lender. The podcast conversation, like Mell's two volume book, is haunted by the memory of antisemitic atrocities throughout time, including the holocaust. Across both mediums, Mell harnesses that memory and stretches open the wings of Benjamin's oft cited angel of history. Once open, an inverted history of money is revealed to be hidden behind them, a history of public money. This history exposes the myth of so-called "external" Jewish money creation, as well as the myth of Jewish externality as such. In doing so, Mell's history—inflected with the neochartalist lens foregrounded by *Money on the Left*—opens up a space for inalienable historical inclusion in a diverse public money relation capable of caring for all. Developing the critical theory tradition from

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which Benjamin's angel arises, I articulate this historiographic method, and claim it as *Money on the Left's* guiding historical vision.

Throughout *The Myth of the Medieval Jewish Money Lender: Volume I-II*, Mell critiques the myth of the Jewish medieval money lender in its particular historiographic manifestations. Uncovering the "meta-narrative *within which* scholars explore the history of medieval European Jewry," Mell argues that the myth is "a historical narrative that shapes the limits of 'the possible' within which historians investigate the past."¹ In imagining the source of credit creation as external, derived from banks and individuals conceived of as ultimately outside the mediating legal structures of power, derived from Jews, the blighted historiographic trajectory of this narrative formed the foundation of modern antisemitism. Mell argues that the narrative "has been used since the nineteenth century to provide a rational, economic explanation for antisemitism based on economic competition between an in-group and an out-group."² As a result, its dismissal reveals new *possibilities* for understanding the calamitous experiences of 20th century critical theorists—many of whom were Jewish—and their theory. These new possibilities take the form of inalienable inclusion within an all-encompassing, participatory, and public relationship to money. This revelation demands that we imagine a new mode for investigating the acute historical intersection of economic depression, antisemitism and the so-called exclusion of exile experienced by many critical theorists.

In its historiographic approach, critical theory has long insisted on "immanent" critique. One sense of that term is the refusal of any position outside or external to history. But it's curious that critical theory quickly abandons this commitment when it comes to money as well as a host of interrelated phenomena. In re-imagining money as a public relation of abundant capacity throughout history, I honor critical theory's desire for such immanence.

The life and work of German-Jewish critical theorist Siegfried Kracauer offers a prescient formulation of this desire for immanence in critical theory. Through Kracauer's subjective critical gaze, and his so-called extraterritorial perspective, I theorize such inalienable immanence to the monetary *and* interrelated aesthetic abstractions he critiqued, and in doing so, demonstrate an ambivalent affirmation of this *internal* subjectivity within critical theory as a whole.

Born in 1889 in Frankfurt, Kracauer left his career as an architect in the early 1920s to become a film and literary editor at the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.³ His most

¹ Julie L. Mell, *Myth of the Jewish Medieval Moneylender: Volume 1*, (New York: Palgrave Studies in Cultural and Intellectual History, 2017), 6.

² *Ibid.*, 5.

³ Getrud Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer: An Introduction*, trans. Jeremy Gaines (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), ix-xii.

acclaimed work comes from this period. Upon Nazism's rise to power, his employment at the paper grew tenuous, until he was forced to flee to Paris in 1933. Though he was productive, he struggled to make a living in France.⁴ Subsequently, when the war began, he fled to Marseille and onward to Portugal where he departed for New York on April 15, 1941.⁵ Upon arrival in New York, Kracauer worked for Iris Barry at the Film Library of Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in support of the war effort, which culminated in the publication of his book on Weimar film: *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947). In 1951, he moved to Columbia University to do empirical research. During this time, he wrote his expansive *Theory of Film* (1960), where he attempted to redeem film on realism's terms. He spent the last six years of his life on a book on history, attempting to reckon with his own place in the world.

Most scholars process Kracauer's life under the terms of the myth of Jewish externality, which I claim Mell's work reveals as a falsehood. This account of the life and work of a Weimar turned American intellectual is understandable, as Kracauer even shared that vision of himself. Working through Kracauer's archive in Marbach, intellectual historian Martin Jay came across a selection of Kracauer's letters titled "extraterritoriality." Using Kracauer's self-identified lens of "marginality, alienation [and] outsidersness," Jay argues that "Kracauer's life's work can be read as a series of seemingly disparate projects almost all with the common goal of redeeming contingency from oblivion."⁶ Such claims, ones of "oblivion" and "outsiderness," have been nuanced by a small selection of Kracauer scholars, including Johannes von Moltke, who insists on Kracauer's social subjectivity in his analysis. "However complicated and idiosyncratic Kracauer may have been," von Moltke writes, "anecdotes about the isolation of this 'Einzelgänger' or 'lone wolf' misconstrue his work in the United States as cut off from all social interaction, film culture, and intellectual discourse."⁷ Extending von Moltke's critique, I reject extraterritoriality as an ontological construct, a flawed construct which is presented ambivalently in Kracauer's oeuvre.

Across a wide swath of his work, from America to France to Germany, the theoretical and historiographic stakes of this construct manifest most acutely in his Weimar essays. Rather than as an "outside" observer, one of the central themes

⁴ Olivier Agard, "L'Exil Parisien de Siegfried Kracauer," *ATALA*, no. 9, "Le France et l'Allemagne," 2006, 60.

⁵ Johannes von Moltke, *The Curious Humanist: Siegfried Kracauer in America*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 1.

⁶ Martin Jay, "The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer," *Salmagundi*, no. 31/32 (1976), 50.

⁷ Johannes von Moltke, *The Curious Humanist: Siegfried Kracauer in America*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 10.

of his writings for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* was embodied participation in the diagnosis of a particular historical moment. My emphasis on such participation is aligned with Thomas Y. Levin, who translated many of Kracauer's essays into English for the first time, and argues that Kracauer utilized aesthetic or "surface" objects for "their diagnostic value as social facts, reading photography and film (prior to any specific content) as material expressions of a particular historical condition."⁸ Such a method served to glimpse the imperceptible historical process through the performance of the negative at the level of method. Levin writes that this commitment "insists on the possibility of a utopian — or even messianic — moment in what he calls the 'revelation of the negative.'"⁹ For Kracauer, such negative illumination via "surface-level expressions...by virtue of their unconscious nature, provide unmediated access to the fundamental substance of the state of things."¹⁰ Unlike Kracauer, or many other modern critical theorists, I am less concerned with the *substance* of things as such, and more with said substance's embeddedness in an all-encompassing web of abstract, immaterial relations actualized in legal structures of governance — including the "substance" of Kracauer's embodied authorial subjectivity. Further, within the Frankfurt School mode, these relations reveal themselves within such interstitial methods of negativity, and allow for a more robust historical causality to be surmised, one I call "intra-territoriality," or a persistent inalienable subjectivity within the money relation.

Thanks to Mell and *Money on the Left's* neochartalist approach to history and money, the relationship between such historical substance and public structures — of debt to credit, of law to polity — are revealed both in the political affirmation and negligence of said relationships. Just as the long history of antisemitic atrocities haunts Mell's work, even make up vast swaths of the "wreckage" of Benjamin's angel, the history of such atrocities also reveal, in such violent denials of ontological relationality, dependence and connectedness, that we are all constitutive to a totality organized and maintained by manifold and overlapping public structures of money created *ex nihilo* through legal mechanisms. Once such an intraterritorial lens is applied to Kracauer's life and work, similar revelations manifest about the human calamity of Weimar and the proceeding years of fascist rule across Europe and the world.

On August 24, 1930, Kracauer wrote a solemn letter from Berlin to Theodor W. Adorno, who was already living in the United States at that time. Inside, Kracauer situated his subjectivity within German society, and noted that he was not optimistic about the future. It reads:

⁸ Thomas Y. Levin, "Introduction," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 20.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament" in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 75.

The situation in Germany is more than serious... We will have three to four million people unemployed and I can see no way out. A disaster is hanging over this country and I am certain that it's not just capitalism. That capitalism may be bestial is not due to economic causes alone.¹¹

Echoing such specific political economic sentiments in his essayistic work at that time, Kracauer wrote an essay in 1930 called "Farewell to the Linden Arcade" that thematizes such fears, revealing the relationship between money and Kracauer's embedded critique of architectural form.

In the work, Kracauer analyzes the legacy of prewar Germany's "reconfiguration of metropolitan topography."¹² The essay begins in Kracauer's typical contradictory style. "The *Lindenpassage* (Linden Arcade) has ceased to exist," he writes.¹³ In being written off to this so-called oblivion—as Jay would certainly term it—the *Lindenpassage*, as a hideaway, was a bustling pocket of energy supposedly hidden to the forces of modernity. However, with the rise of the smooth lines of architectural modernisms, its vitality has been struck mute, encased between commodity laden shops and seamless physical features. The *Passage* was "now sinking into a mass grave of cool marble."¹⁴ Except, of course, the *Passage* was never actually separate from, or outside of, the abstract mediations of "cool marble" he laments. Its construction, maintenance and refurbishment, not to mention any transactions occurring within its enclosed material shape, were always constitutive to the legal regimes that enabled them, whether through the allocation and reallocation of money, legal permits, power infrastructure or even window and street cleaning. Within that persistent intraterritorial relation, manifested in Kracauer's generative dialectical negativity, lies the redemption which Kracauer—and Benjamin—yearned for throughout Weimar.

Such yearning is marked with an ambivalent utopian despair. For example, Kracauer writes that in the *Passage*, "all objects have been struck dumb. They huddle timidly behind the empty architecture, which for the time being, acts completely neutral, but may later spawn who knows what—perhaps fascism, or perhaps nothing at all."¹⁵ Despite his fears and nearly paralyzed orientation toward modernity, and its alienations, Kracauer eschewed the oft alleged teleological relationship between abstract mediations and fascism. Through the negativity of his affective and methodological orientations, Kracauer reveals his intraterritorial relation to the "nothing at all." All while declaring in the letter to Adorno that he saw "no way out" of the problems of mass Weimar unemployment, he was able to

¹¹ Siegfried Kracauer, Quoted in Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 304;

¹² Thomas Y. Levin, "Introduction," in *The Mass Ornament*, 30.

¹³ Siegfried Kracauer, "Farewell to the Linden Arcade" in *The Mass Ornament*, 337.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 342.

show in his essays that *Nichtigkeit*, public money creation *ex nihilo*, abstraction and not substance, are what could engender his “way out” to *no place* at all, or utopia.

This sort of utopian despair for abstraction stands in direct opposition to other prominent critical theorists of the era. Taking influence from Karl Marx’s critique of utopianism, Georg Lukács, in his influential book *The Theory of the Novel*, insisted on an ontology of substance over that of abstract relation. “If ever this world should come into being as something natural and simply experienced, as the only true reality,” Lukács writes, “a new complete totality could be built out of all its substances and relationships.”¹⁶ Such a view belies Kracauer’s introduction of a contingency on the route to fascism’s attempted exclusions. Lukács all but confirms it in his persistent solemnness: “But art can never be the agent of such a transformation: the great epic is a form bound to the historical moment, and any attempt to depict the utopian as existent can only end in destroying the form, not in creating reality.”¹⁷ Instead of attempting to “depict the utopian as existent,” or maintain inclusion as a function of spatial “reality,” the *Money on the Left* project insists on abundant inclusion based in the inalienability of the legal relationships of money that are not “bound to the historical moment,” as Lukács argues of great works of literature, but that organize and cultivate societies and people across time, across space and throughout history. These abstract forms, lacking in “substance,” are what make up Benjamin’s storm; they cultivate such progress, such direction; they cultivate an alternative teleology.

Such an alternative teleology sits in direct opposition to our neoliberal present’s austere political topography. Instead of a historiography that operates along the lines of the inevitability of alienation and inhuman domination, intraterritoriality insists that the locus of social relations manifest in the *abundant and inclusive capacity* of monetary participation. Under such methodological conditions, Kracauer’s Weimar essays cultivate a reconfiguration of the ways in which the past can inform our present. Weimar, the holocaust and other atrocious calamities throughout time manifest just the alternatives neoliberalism attempts to occlude. Through such negative method and authorial performance, solemn musings as Kracauer’s inform the urgency of contemporary political and monetary transcendence. In doing so, intraterritoriality changes the shape of Rosa Luxemburg’s famous “socialism or barbarism” ultimatum. Rather than a binary that leans toward calamity, the ultimatum turns into a question of avowal. Given the persistent intraterritorial ontology of sociality, we are called upon, as scholars, activists and social participants, to answer the following question: will we avow our inherent inclusion? Or continue to repress it to our own social and ecological doom?

¹⁶ Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A historico-philosophical essay on the forms of great epic literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1977), 152.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Critical theory must respond to this urgent call. Paradoxically, in some of Kracauer's work there are hints of such an avowal. In his 1920s essay called "The Hotel Lobby," Kracauer calls upon the ubiquity of medieval relationships to God in ways that invoke the persistence of inalienability made method in intraterritoriality. "It is true that only those who stand before God are sufficiently estranged from one another to discover they are brother;" Kracauer writes, "only they are exposed to such an extent that they can love one another without knowing one another and without using names."¹⁸ It is precisely in that so-called "estrangement" that such inalienability manifests. Dead or alive, exiled or prisoner, past or present, we all, plant, animal or human being, continue to inform the provision of meaning, of history, of collective production in our persistent relations. Further, we need not be contiguously or substantially connected to organize such dependencies. They manifest as my colleague Scott Ferguson would say, abstractly, simultaneously and at-a-distance. They manifest in the public monetary medium that cultivates such production.

For all beings organized in the wake of such public production, there is no outside; no oblivion to-which the marginalized can be ontologically ostracized by neofascisms on the ascent. The shattering of long held myths—in both history and the present—like this one, the so-called ontological possibility of exclusion, or the myth of the Jewish medieval money lender that Mell repudiates, creates a space for new critical possibility that needs to be filled. With *Money on the Left*, as we are propelled into the future by Benjamin's storm, we have only begun to embark on just that task.



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¹⁸ Siegfried Kracauer, "The Hotel Lobby" in *The Mass Ornament*, 182.