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CRIME STORIES

CRIMINALISTIC FANTASY AND THE CULTURE OF CRISIS IN WEIMAR GERMANY

TODD HERZOG

Crime Stories

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Acknowledgements

When my high school German teacher gave the class an assignment to memorize a text and recite it, I chose a passage from Bertolt Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*. Little did I know that twenty years later I would still be thinking about that text as I completed a book on the topic of crime fiction in Weimar Germany. As far as my interest in German crime fiction of the 1920s is concerned, this book has been two decades in the making. But the initial ideas began to take form ten years ago when I was a student at the University of Chicago. There, for the first time I encountered Fritz Lang's *Dr. Mabuse* films (in Courtney Federle's seminar on Weimar Cinema), became aware of the *Außenseiter der Gesellschaft* series (by chance while in the Regenstein Library looking for another Döblin text), and began to explore the connections between real criminals and their fictional counterparts. Sander Gilman guided me with grace and wit from my initial scattered and incomplete ideas to a coherent research project. Katie Trumpener shared her boundless knowledge of and enthusiasm for books and films with me. And Eric Santner had a way of taking my ideas and reformulating them with a level of brilliance and clarity that I could never hope to achieve. I express my deep sense of gratitude to all three of these great mentors and hope that they enjoy the book that arose from those conversations and papers.

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Introduction

Weimar Germany: A Culture in Crisis and a Culture of Crisis

> I have a pretty thorough knowledge of history, but never, to my recollection, has it produced such madness in such gigantic proportions. All values were changed, not only material ones; the laws of the State were flouted, no tradition, no moral code was respected, Berlin was transformed into the Babylon of the world. Bars, amusement parks, honky-tonks sprang up like mushrooms. … Even the Rome of Suetonius had never known such orgies as the pervert balls of Berlin, where hundreds of men costumed as women and hundreds of women as men danced under the benevolent eyes of the police. In the collapse of all values a kind of madness gained hold particularly in the bourgeois circles which until then had been unshakeable in their probity.[1]

Stefan Zweig's description of Berlin in the years following the end of the First World War presents a vivid and familiar image of Weimar Germany as a period of decadence and crisis. Countless other observers of the period echoed Zweig's view of Weimar culture. In his *Sittengeschichte der Inflation* (Social History of the Inflation), Hans Ostwald refers to Germany in the 1920s as a "hellish carnival" replete with "plundering and rioting, demonstrations and clashes, graft and smuggling … a madness for gambling, an addiction to speculation, an epidemic of divorce … police raids and trials, jazz bands, drugs."[2] Iwan Goll proposed in his novel *Sodom Berlin* that the notorious Weimar-era serial killer Fritz Haarmann should stand alongside the poet Friedrich Hölderlin as a symbol of the pathological German nation.[3] The National Socialist police official Kurt Daluege referred to the period as "the heyday of criminality."[4] And Walther Rathenau once mocked Berlin's self-description as "Athens on the Spree" by claiming that it much more closely resembled "Chicago on the Spree"—referring, of course, to Al Capone's Chicago.

This image of a culture in crisis dominates our understanding of the period to this day. Nearly every historical study—from Herbert Kraus's *The Crisis of German Democracy* (1932) through Detlev Peukert's *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (1989) to Arthur Jacobson and Bernhard Schlink's *Weimar:*

Notes for this section begin on page 10.

A Jurisprudence of Crisis (2000)—understands the Weimar Republic as a culture in crisis.[5] During the fourteen turbulent years from the end of World War I to the election of Adolf Hitler all aspects of society, from politics and economics to artistic practices and social roles, seemed to be in a perpetual state of flux. Gordon Craig sums up the dominant historical view of the Weimar Republic succinctly: "Its normal state was crisis."[6]

Few issues united the deeply divided political and intellectual figures of the Weimar Republic and the often equally divided historians of the period. However, commentators from all political and historical perspectives are in general agreement that the Weimar Republic was a decadent and crime-ridden society. But how accurate is this image? Criminal activity did indeed increase dramatically after the end of World War I. By the height of the inflation in 1922–3, reports of crimes reached a level that "had never been seen in Germany since the compilation of statistics had begun."[7] Drugs and prostitution were rampant, property crime was ubiquitous, gangster organizations (*Ringvereine*) sprung up around the country, and horrible serial killers such as Haarmann and Karl Großmann terrified (and entertained) the nation. After 1924, however, crime rates decreased sharply throughout Germany, ultimately reaching levels even lower than they had been before the War.[8] The same Stefan Zweig who would later recall inflation-era Germany as a time of madness and orgies complained in a 1925 article of "the monotonization of the world" and the excruciating dullness of Berlin.[9]

Even as crime rates dropped, however, the popular perception of widespread lawlessness continued and criminals remained pervasive in Weimar Germany's cultural output: newspapers devoted unprecedented attention to the sensational stories of criminals, their crimes, and the police detectives who pursued them; countless guidebooks with titles such as *Was Nicht im "Baedecker" Steht* (What You Won't Find in Baedecker)[10] and *Führer durch das "lasterhafte" Berlin* (The Guide to Decadent Berlin)[11] offered curious readers tours through the spaces occupied by the German underworld; writers such as Alfred Döblin, Bertolt Brecht, Robert Musil, and Jakob Wassermann repeatedly turned to the subject of crime in their epic attempts to depict contemporary history; painters such as Georg Grosz, Otto Dix, and Max Beckmann filled their canvases with images of murderers and underworld figures; criminological works such as Robert Heindl's *Der Berufsverbrecher* (The Career Criminal)[12] went through multiple printings and reached an unprecedented popular audience; and films from *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari) in 1919 to *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* (The Testament of Dr. Mabuse) in 1933 projected larger-than-life criminals onto the screens of packed theaters throughout Germany.

This was a culture fascinated by criminals and their crimes. Political, economic, social, and aesthetic issues were invariably viewed through the lens of criminality. Tales of crime—from scientific criminological works to true crime novels to mass-market penny dreadfuls—achieved an unprecedented level of popularity during the Weimar Republic, and discussions of criminality and legal reform were carried out in a broad public forum. Perhaps criminal activity was no

more prevalent in Germany than in other European countries or (after the end of the inflation) than in Germany before the War, but it was certainly more visible than ever before or since. Weimar Germany was acutely conscious of its own perceived decadence; it even seemed to take pleasure in the spectacle of crime, in imagining itself as a criminal space.

Criminalistic Fantasy

This seemingly excessive involvement with matters of crime, especially in the popular press, eventually prompted charges of sensationalism from critics. In an article titled "Kriminalsensationen" (Criminal Sensations) printed in the *Vossische Zeitung* in 1927, Bernhard Weiß, Deputy President of the Berlin Police Force and a respected commentator on police and legal matters, addressed the issue of the dramatic increase in the public's engagement with criminality and attempted to answer these charges.[13] Pointing to the existence of a "great, crime-hungry readership" eager to consume "tasty journalistic treats of criminality," Weiß concluded that the modern reading public found the straightforward reporting of facts unsatisfying; they had come to demand "as complete a description as possible of the latest criminal activities and criminal personalities, accompanied whenever possible by pictures."[14] Weiß surprisingly did not condemn this widespread and admittedly excessive interest in crime, but rather maintained that the active engagement of the public in matters of crime, both real and fictional, is an essential element of modern life. He further argued that this overwhelming interest in the topic of of criminality was a positive development that served two crucial functions. He believed on a practical level that an engaged public could serve as an important ally to police in fighting criminals and battling crime. On a more theoretical level, he argued that sensational criminals and their seemingly aberrant crimes were, in fact, central to the narrative of contemporary history, providing insights into the normal workings of society.

Weiß coined the term "criminalistic fantasy" to describe this active interest and engagement of the public in matters of crime.[15] Although Weiß did not develop this term, his short article raises crucial questions that deserve to be investigated further. In the pages that follow, I adopt Weiß's suggestive term and examine the Weimar criminalistic fantasy. Although I do not wish to minimize the very real danger and very real crises that the Weimar Republic and its citizens faced, I argue that the actual danger and crises were clearly outstripped by the *perception* of danger and crisis. The image of Weimar Germany as a decadent and crime-ridden space dominated this society's perception of itself, just as it has dominated our historical perception of Weimar. Discussions of criminality in the Weimar Republic constantly wavered between documentary reporting and sensational fantasies until the two became blurred. In the Weimar criminalistic fantasy, the boundaries between fiction and reality, as well as between the aberration and the norm, became unstable. It is through the lens of this criminalistic fantasy that

Weimar Germany saw itself, weaving together fantasy and reality, the sensational and the mundane, to narrate its stories about itself.

The complex interweaving of documentary evidence with the most sensational tales that characterizes the Weimar criminalistic fantasy is readily apparent in Fritz Lang's classic expressionist crime film *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler* (Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler, 1922). Lang's epic four-hour film is divided into two parts. The title of Part One translates as "A Picture of Our Times"; that of Part Two as "A Play about the People of our Time." Spectators who were understandably led by these titles to expect a sober documentary report on contemporary life encountered a very different film. *Dr. Mabuse* is based on a series of popular novels by Norbert Jacques and tells the story of a criminal genius and master of disguise, Dr. Mabuse (Rudolf Klein-Rogge), who leads a complex criminal organization. Over the course of the film, Mabuse rushes from one underground gambling club to another, steals secret diplomatic documents, abducts a countess, assassinates a wealthy young American, drives an aristocrat to suicide, throws the stock market into confusion, hypnotizes his opponents, and runs a counterfeiting ring that operates in his underground hideaway. He is pursued by the state's attorney, von Wenk (Bernhard Goetzke), who eventually closes in on Mabuse, leading to a spectacular shootout during which Mabuse escapes into an underground tunnel. He finally collapses in his subterranean counterfeiting shop, plagued by mad hallucinations of his workers and victims and is carried off by the police.

The program notes accompanying the premiere of the film sums up this cops and robbers spectacle by asserting: "The world that appears before our eyes in this film is the world in which we all live today."[16] *Dr. Mabuse* is, the program continues, "a picture of the times, just as representative of the year it was made as are the actors, who portray its characters and the architects, who created the sets, the cameraman, who brings the image to life."[17] Nearly every contemporary reviewer picked up on and repeated this statement. "The film … is a living picture of the present," proclaimed one critic. "A typical film of its times," wrote another. "A picture of the times … no vice of our generation is missing … a mirror of the times," effused the critic for the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger.*[18] The reviewer for *Der Roland* went so far as to claim that "the distance between the cinema and reality is completely abolished.… Every title, every image proclaims: 'That is you!'"[19] Are we to believe that this sensational world of parapsychology, gambling, cocaine, exotic dancing, wild car chases, and nighttime shoot-outs faithfully depicts, as the program accompanying the film's premiere soberly notes, "the world in which we all live today?" And if the historical record does not bear this out, then what are we to make of the seemingly universal reception of this film as a document of its times? To understand the seeming disconnect between the events depicted on the screen and the reception of the film as a documentary narrative of contemporary society is to understand the essence of the criminalistic fantasy.

Two years after *Mabuse*'s premiere and after the end of the inflation period, Lang defended this improbable melding of pure sensationalism with claims to documentary accuracy in suggestive terms:

> The film as a document of its times [*Zeitdokument*], a genre of which Mabuse was only a still-grounded precursor, shows the people of today … in the same exaggeration with which I showed them in my *Nibelung* film … It requires a pedestal of stylization just as much as do historical films about centuries long past. One does not place monuments right on the pavement.[20]

Lang's argument is that documentary accuracy is not precluded by, but rather demands, fantastic stylization. The sensational crime film (or play or novel) as "document of its times" occupies an uncertain space located between a faithful documentary picture of contemporary people and events and the expressionist costume dramas that were popular in Germany in the early 1920s. Fantastic fictional images and documentary images thus exist side by side in films such as *Dr. Mabuse,* which Lang originally planned to open with documentary-like footage of street-fighting during the Spartacist Rebellion, the murder of Walther Rathenau, and the Kapp Putsch. At the end of this documentary introduction, Lang claims that he initially intended to add an intertitle posing the question, "Who is responsible for all of this?" He then planned to cut to the image of the master criminal with which the surviving version of the film opens and proceed with the story outlined above.[21] Even without this heavy-handed introductory sequence, the argument of the film and the publicity surrounding it is clear: the best way to understand the world in which we live is not through sober reportage, but through sensation. How else can one make sense of the illogical political, economic, and social conditions of early 1920s Germany? Surely, the argument goes, these chaotic conditions must ultimately be traceable to a central cause, a "Great Unknown" (one of Mabuse's nicknames in the film) that is the ultimate order behind the disorder. In the popular novel on which Lang's film was based, Norbert Jacques makes this link even clearer, stating that Detective von Wenk's adversary "was more than a card cheat … it was the whole time that had been torn from the bosom of hell by the catastrophe of the war and now rained down upon the world and his homeland."[22] We cannot understand the chaos that we see around us without understanding the shadowy forces that produce and profit from this chaos. To understand our times we need to understand our criminals. This is the central tenant of the Weimar criminalistic fantasy.

Crime Stories is an investigation into this worldview, which one repeatedly encounters in criminalistic fantastic texts such as *Dr. Mabuse.* In its examination of Weimar Germany's criminalistic fantasy, this book poses questions that are central to understanding this crucial period in German history: What does it mean when a society begins to understand itself through its criminals, and when crime and crisis become a part of a society's discourse about itself? What happens when the boundaries between fantasy and reality blur to the point at which they become indistinguishable and even inseparable? What happens when the boundaries between criminal and noncriminal become unstable and the boundaries between professionals and non-professionals in dealing with criminal matters become permeable? What happens when the boundaries between different types of crime narratives become less distinct and begin to borrow from one another?

During the Weimar Republic, crime fiction borrows increasingly from real criminals and real criminals borrow increasingly from crime fiction. Criminologists and true-crime writers address a similar audience with similar methods. The police invite an enthusiastic public to aid them in crime fighting. This book argues that all of these different approaches to crime and different types of crime stories are intricately related and that they provide insight into what historians have long seen as the central feature of the Weimar Republic: its permanent state of crisis.

As I mentioned above, the Weimar Republic has almost invariably been understood as a culture in crisis. During the Republic's fourteen-year history, the economic, political, and social orders all seemed to be in a perpetual state of chaos. It was also a *culture of crisis,* a society that did not just suffer from crises but continually defined itself through its perceived crises. This culture of crisis, as the discussion of *Dr. Mabuse* has shown, can best be examined through Weimar's engagements with criminality, for crime not only cut across all other spheres of society, it seemed to provide access and insight into the normally hidden workings of that society. From the popular press to high modernist literature to professional criminological and legal treatises, criminality was frequently seen as the best lens through which to understand the modern world, and more broadly to understand modernity.

Many critics have suggested that fantasies about criminals and their crimes served Weimar society by providing a bored public with the means to escape from the monotony of everyday life. Others have argued that crime stories served to establish a countertype against which one could define oneself and through which one could reaffirm core bourgeois values. On some level, as we shall see, crime stories did indeed accomplish both of these tasks. But they continually served a more central and more crucial function: the Weimar Republic understood itself through its criminals. This book also seeks to understand the Weimar Republic through its criminals. But, more precisely, it seeks to understand the Weimar Republic through the fact that it understood itself through its criminals. The traditional distinction between law and outlaw, criminal and noncriminal, the normal order of society and the moments at which that order breaks down no longer seemed to make sense in post–World War I Germany. This is the world that will be explored throughout this book.

The Crisis of Evidence

The conflation of reportage and sensation, the belief that the world is a fundamentally dangerous place, the overestimation of the volume of criminal activities that are taking place right outside one's window—these elements are surely not unique to post–World War I Germany. As countless commentators have noted, the bulk of news reported in the press and on television in Germany, the United States, and other societies to this day consists of accidents and crimes. The Weimar Republic, however, is distinguished from other historical times and places

by a fundamentally different relationship to these accidents and crimes. The first major difference, as I have been arguing, is the extent to which these accidents and crimes became the self-definition of the Republic and its citizens. There is a second facet to the culture of crisis that also makes it historically interesting: the Weimar criminalistic fantasy rests upon a fundamentally different view of the role and use of evidence. What happens during the Weimar Republic, as I will argue throughout this book, is that the use of evidence to distinguish criminal from noncriminal goes into crisis. As a consequence, the question of evidence itself becomes a matter of investigation. This crisis of evidence can be seen everywhere in Weimar crime stories. It is found in the new crime journalism of writers such as Gabriele Tergit, who frequently reported on the failures of the police and the courts, both comic and tragic, and once asserted that "only dilettantes end up in court, while the master criminals sit on golden thrones."[23] On a theoretical level, it can be seen in the new criminology of Theodor Reik, who argues that putatively modern, rational jurisprudence is beholden to a primitive belief in magic oracles and cleverly shifts the subject of his investigation from the criminals to the society that judges them, showing the latter to be anything but innocent and impartial.[24]

The failure of the mechanism by which the criminal is distinguished from the noncriminal prompted writers and filmmakers to turn to the sites of this mechanism—to investigate the very process of distinguishing normal from aberrant. Alfred Döblin acknowledged that the failure of mechanisms of distinction was the motivating factor behind his 1929 crime epic, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. Referring to the important role that his experience working as a doctor in eastern Berlin played in the production of the novel, Döblin writes:

> My medical career often brought me into contact with criminals. Several years ago I had an examination clinic for criminals, which led me to make many interesting and remarkable observations. When I saw these people in the clinic and other similar types outside, I developed a unique perspective on our society. I saw that there could be no strictly formulated border between criminals and non-criminals, that society at all levels—or at least those that I was able to observe—was completely undermined by criminality. That was indeed a unique perspective.[25]

As I hope to make clear, Döblin's perspective was, in fact, anything but unique. Indeed, it could serve as a mission statement for the way in which crime was understood in the Weimar Republic. The crisis in the ability to distinguish between the criminal and the noncriminal was pervasive throughout the cultural productions of Weimar Germany.

This breakdown of borders—between reality and fantasy, criminal and noncriminal, public and professional, and narrative genres—is the most crucial aspect of the Weimar discourse on criminality. In the pages that follow, I will trace this crisis of evidence through discussions of criminal cases of the time and then examine how literary and cinematic texts attempt to work through this crisis. The dominant factor at work in the Weimar criminalistic fantasy was not primarily

the discursive construction of a criminal Other, such as Michel Foucault and others have noted in their work on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but rather that the means deployed in this construction (such as case histories, judicial trials, and visual stereotyping) themselves went into crisis.

This is not the story that I initially expected to tell. When I began this project, I intended to investigate the criminal as an object of social construction, following a paradigm that has become common in recent cultural studies. I expected my narrative to begin with the introduction of the "dangerous individual" as a type of person in the nineteenth-century criminal anthropology of Cesare Lombroso and Hans Kurella, trace the further development of this view of society in the early twentieth century, and show how it led directly to the criminalization of Jews and other Others in the Third Reich. The Weimar period would, in this narrative, bear witness to an increasing separation of the criminal from the noncriminal. In the course of my research, however, I discovered that the dominant factor at work in what I have, following Bernhard Weiß, come to call the Weimar criminalistic fantasy was not primarily the solidification of a discourse in which the criminal is cast as Other and the Other is cast as criminal, but rather the loosening of borders between the two in popular, scientific, and literary discourse. The story still, of course, ends with the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the horrors of the Third Reich. But the role that engagements with criminality play in leading from Weimar to Hitler is surprising and more complex than has commonly been imagined.

Crime Stories

Although, as we shall see, this crisis of evidence played an important role in actual engagements with criminals and their crimes, its most noticeable and interesting effects can be observed in the world of fiction. The crisis of criminal investigation registered itself on the genre of the crime narrative, which began to turn its attention to the process of distinction itself. George Bernhard Shaw once quipped that "the Germans lack talent for two things: revolution and crime novels."[26] Though I do not wish to take Shaw up on his first charge, the second charge is worth pondering. Indeed, as we shall see, during the Weimar Republic German authors exhibited a great interest in and talent for crime novels. Both Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin shared a lifelong devotion to crime fiction, a passion that they recorded in numerous essays. And they were not alone among German intellectuals of the Weimar Republic. Siegfried Kracauer, Heinrich Mann, and Ernst Bloch all voiced their opinions on the genre of the crime novel. Egon Erwin Kisch, Leo Lania, and Gabriele Tergit developed new journalistic techniques largely by reporting on matters of crime and justice. And, as I mentioned above, countless authors and filmmakers regularly turned to the criminal world for the subjects of their works.

Shaw's charge is thus not supported by the evidence. It is, however, understandable, for German crime fiction did not look much like other examples of international crime fiction of the 1920s. In place of the dominant genre of the detective novel, German writers and filmmakers developed a new type of crime novel that replaced the investigation based on evidence with the investigation of the status of evidence itself. At the same time, as I noted above, criminologists such as Theodor Reik, Franz Alexander, and Hugo Staub took a similar turn in developing a new type of scientific criminology that departed from more traditional methodologies and focused on the psychology of those judging, rather than those being judged. Generic boundaries between different types of crime stories began to blur just as much as the boundaries between criminal and noncriminal. Mechanisms of distinguishing criminal from noncriminal, rather than the search for the criminal, consequently became the principal matter of investigation in these texts. *Crime Stories* thus examines social historical developments in Weimar society as well as literary historical developments in modernist crime fiction, and makes a case for the crucial linkage between the two. Throughout the book I will continually discuss "crime stories" in the widest sense of the term, encompassing narratives told by judges, detectives, criminologists, journalists, and fiction writers. Like these texts themselves, I will consequently continually alternate between "real" criminal cases and "fictional" reconstructions of those cases—between, that is, texts that ask to be read as scientific or sociological works and texts that ask to be read as works of imagination.

I take a similarly expansive approach to the varieties of crime that I consider in the pages that follow. Most of the studies of criminality in interwar Germany that have appeared in increasing numbers in recent years focus on specific types of crime—most notably violent crime, and indeed two particular types of violent crime: serial killing and poisoning.[27] While this approach has produced some fascinating and important analyses, I am interested in understanding the ways in which seemingly disparate types of criminality were actually brought together in the Weimar criminalistic fantasy. Thus serial killers and confidence tricksters, poisoners and hotel thieves will stand side by side in this book, just as do criminologists and novelists, journalists and filmmakers. By examining the fascinating and often unexpected connections between the ways in which different types of criminality were imagined in different contexts, an understanding of the fundamental form of the criminalistic fantasy in this period will emerge that will provide insights into how the Weimar Republic imagined itself.

The following chapters thus range widely in the types of texts that they consider. These disparate texts, however, are united as examples of various aspects and consequences of the Weimar criminalistic fantasy and the corresponding crisis of evidence and culture of crisis. The first chapter examines the fascination that crime held for German modernists. It places German crime narratives in the context of international crime narratives of the time and traces the crossover from the detective novel to the crime novel, the latter of which represents a modernist

attempt to understand the condition of modernity. The following chapters are devoted to different mechanisms of distinguishing criminals from noncriminals. Chapters 2 and 3 continue to probe the criminalistic fantasy of German modernism and its attempts to rethink the genre of the case study. Chapters 4 and 5 turn to the more practical side of criminal investigation. They examine the criminalistic fantasy of the broader public and their loss of faith in the use of visual evidence to track criminals. The concluding chapter traces the legacies of the Weimar experiment in conceptions of criminality after the collapse of the Republic. Taken together, these chapters paint a broad portrait of a culture that viewed itself through its crises and whose fantasies about itself have continued to influence the way in which we view this period in German history.

Notes

1. Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 313.
2. Hans Ostwald, *Sittengeschichte der Inflation: Ein Kulturdokument aus den Jahren des Marksturzes* (Berlin: Neufeld & Henius Verlag, 1931), 7.
3. See Iwan Goll, *Sodom Berlin: Roman,* trans. Hans Thill (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1988).
4. Kurt Daluege, *Nationalsozialistischer Kampf gegen das Verbrechertum* (München: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher Nachf., 1936), 9.
5. Herbert Kraus, *The Crisis of German Democracy: A Study of the Spirit of the Constitution of Weimar* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1932); Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity,* trans. Richard Deveson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989); Arthur J. Jacobson and Bernard Schlink, eds., *Weimar: A Jurisprudence of Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
6. Gordon A. Craig, *Germany: 1866–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 434.
7. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic,* 149–50.
8. For a detailed account of criminal statistics during and after World War I, see Franz Exner, *Krieg und Kriminalität in Österreich* (Vienna: Holder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1927) and Moritz Liepmann, *Krieg und Kriminalität in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1930). Statisticians are, of course, much more specific in their analyses of crime rates. As Richard Wetzell notes in *Inventing the Criminal: A History of German Criminology, 1880–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), Exner and Liepmann both agreed that overall crime figures were mostly meaningless, and instead offered a more detailed breakdown of crime by examining various categories of offenses and offenders (see Wetzell, *Inventing the Criminal,* 109–20). Peukert notes the decline in crime rates in *The Weimar Republic,* 150.
9. Stefan Zweig, "Die Monotonisierung der Welt," *Berliner Börsen-Courier* 1 Februar 1925, rpt. in *Weimarer Republik: Manifeste und Dokumente zur deutschen Literatur 1918–1933,* ed. Anton Kaes (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1983), 268–273.
10. Eugen Szatmari, *Was Nicht im "Baedecker" Steht: Berlin* (München: R. Piper & Co., 1927); rpt. as *Das Buch von Berlin* (Leipzig: Connewitzer Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1997). See esp. 147–56.
11. Curt Moreck, *Führer durch das "lasterhafte" Berlin* (Leipzig: Verlag moderner Stadtführer, 1931). See esp. 186–229.

12. Robert Heindl, *Der Berufsverbrecher: Ein Beitrag zur Strafrechtsreform* (Berlin: Pan-Verlag Rolf Heise, 1926).
13. Before World War I, Weiß had started out on a promising career in the judiciary, but after fighting in the war, he entered the Berlin police force, where he served until his forced retirement in 1932 after the Papen Putsch. During the Weimar Republic, he also served as editor of the standard journal of German criminalists, *Kriminalistische Monatshefte.* Weiß, who was Jewish, was mercilessly attacked by the Nazis in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The attacks were led by *Der Angriff* and Joseph Goebbels, who disparagingly labeled Weiß "Isidor." Goebbels wrote in his diary on June 24, 1932: "Der muß nun zur Strecke gebracht werden. Sechs Jahre lang kämpfe ich gegen ihn. Er ist für jeden Berliner Nationalsozialisten der Repräsentant des Systems. Wenn er fällt, dann ist auch das System nicht lange mehr zu halten." Weiß fled Germany in 1933, first for Czechoslovakia, then London. He returned to Berlin briefly in 1949 and died in London in 1951. Dietz Bering has written an exceptional study of Weiß's career, his fight with the Nazis, and the "battle over names" in *Kampf um Namen: Bernhard Weiß gegen Joseph Goebbels* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992). The Goebbels diary entry that I cited above appears on 102.
14. Bernhard Weiß, "Kriminalsensationen," *Vossische Zeitung,* 16 Januar 1927, Morgenausgabe.
15. Weiß, "Kriminalsensationen."
16. Programmheft der Uco/Deca-Bioskop, Teil 1, Vorwort, rpt. in, *Dr. Mabuse: Roman Film Dokumente,* ed. Gunther Scholdt (Ingebert: W.J. Rohrig Verlag, 1987), 173.
17. Programmheft, in Scholdt, *Dr. Mabuse: Roman Film Dokumente,* 173.
18. See the reviews collected in Scholdt, *Dr. Mabuse: Roman Film Dokumente*, 177–96.
19. See Scholdt, *Dr. Mabuse: Roman Film Dokumente,* 185.
20. Fritz Lang, "Kitsch – Spannung – Kultur – Film," in Scholdt, *Dr. Mabuse: Roman Film Dokumente,* 174–175. Here, 175.
21. Lang made this claim three decades after the film's release: "Au début du film je montrais, par des images rapides, des combats de rue et des barricades, analogues à celles qui surgirent dans une Allemagne qui avait perdu la guerre; une brève scène, le meurtre d'un ministre, s'inspirait de l'assassinat de Rathenau. Je crois me rappeler aussi qu'un metteur en scène de mes amis m'envoya d'Amérique un livre sur Al Capone. Probablement cela m'a aussi un peu influencé." (Fritz Lang, "A propos du Docteur Mabuse" in Scholdt, *Dr. Mabuse,* 175). Lotte Eisner repeats this story in *Fritz Lang* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1976), 59. As Tom Gunning points out, the murder of Rathenau took place two months after the film's premiere, leading him to doubt the veracity of the claim. However, Lang could still have intended this introduction, and simply forgotten some of the details when he recounted it decades later. (See Tom Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity* (London: bfi, 2000), 118).
22. Norbert Jacques, "Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler," in Scholdt, *Dr. Mabuse,* 75. Hania Sibenpfeiffer argues convincingly that Jacques' novel is nothing short of a "literary 'criminalization' of an epoch" in which "social, political, cultural, and economic upheavals are relocated from the social to the pathological sphere" where they coalesce in the figure of the Great Criminal Mabuse. (Hania Siebenpfeiffer's *Böse Lust: Gewaltverbrechen in Diskursen der Weimarer Republik* [Köln – Weimar – Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2005], 68.)
23. Tergit's court reportage is collected in *Wer schießt aus Liebe?* (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 1999). The line quoted above is on 20.
24. See Theodor Reik, *Der unbekannte Mörder* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1983). This study, which originally appeared in 1925, is admittedly quirky, but his critique of trial by evidence and his investigation into the unconscious motives of those who judge, as opposed to those who are judged, are in line with more mainstream works such as Franz Alexander's and Hugo Staub's *Der Verbrecher und seine Richter* (Wien: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1929). Both works have been translated into English: Theodor Reik, *The Compulsion to Confess: On the Psychoanalysis of Crime and Punishment* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1959) and Franz

Alexander and Hugo Staub, *The Criminal, the Judge and the Public* (New York: Macmillan, 1931).

25. Alfred Döblin, "Mein Buch 'Berlin Alexanderplatz,'" in *Berlin Alexanderplatz: Die Geschichte vom Franz Biberkopf* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1965), 412.
26. Quoted in Jürgen Roland, "'Time doesn't move forward … ,'" in *Out of the Dark: Crime, Mystery and Suspense in the German Cinema 1915–1990,* trans. Leslie Ann Pahl (Munich: Goethe-Institut, 1992), 5.
27. A recent example of the concentration on violent crime is Hania Siebenpfeiffer's excellent *Böse Lust.* Her cultural studies methodology and her consideration of a wide variety of discourses are similar to mine, but she differs in her concentration on three types of criminality: poisoning, child murder, and sexual murder. She argues that by limiting her consideration to these types of criminality, she is able to elucidate the strong role that gender plays in constructions of criminality (2). Maria Tatar also limits her consideration to a specific type of crime—sexual murder—in order to understand the connection between violence and gender in the Weimar Republic in her seminal work *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Both scholars produce fascinating and illuminating studies that I have relied on extensively in my own work. By taking a more expansive approach to criminality, however, I hope to view the topic from a different angle that brings into question the notion of a marked gendered discourse (or ethnic discourse, for that matter) in favor of a more holistic understanding of the criminalistic fantasy that cuts across the traditional lines of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation in interesting and often surprising ways.

Chapter 1

Crime, Detection, and German Modernism

Murder in the Elevator Shaft

In September 1933, Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin, two of the most prominent and politically-engaged intellectuals of the Weimar Republic, met in Paris to begin work on a collaborative project. Adolf Hitler had come to power in Germany eight months earlier, driving both Brecht and Benjamin into exile. The two writers devoted almost an entire week from the end of September to the beginning of October to this project. What was the urgent project that occupied them at this important historical moment? It was not, as one might expect, a political manifesto or a critical analysis of recent developments in Germany. Rather, Brecht and Benjamin met in the fall of 1933 to map out a series of crime novels that they planned to coauthor. Unfortunately none of the proposed novels was ever completed; only some working notes survive that hint that it would have been an anti-detective novel, a genre that would become popular after World War II.[1]

To plan such a project at such a crucial period in European history and these authors' personal histories points to the importance of the crime genre for Benjamin and Brecht. Both men shared a lifelong devotion to crime fiction and devoted numerous essays to discussions of the genre and reflections on their fascination with it.[2] Indeed, crime fiction was a passionate interest of a remarkable number of Germany's most prominent modernist intellectuals. In addition to Benjamin and Brecht, Siegfried Kracauer and Ernst Bloch wrote important essays on the theory of detective fiction. Heinrich Mann regularly reviewed detective novels for periodicals and Hermann Hesse edited a volume of true crime stories.[3] And, as I

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noted in the Introduction, countless modernist authors, artists, and filmmakers repeatedly turned to the subject of crime as the basis for their fictional works.

The evidence clearly points to a profound fascination of German modernists with criminals and the subject of criminality. Even a cursory review of their output exhibits a pronounced criminalistic fantasy among intellectuals of the Weimar Republic. Their interest in criminality clearly paralleled that of the general public. For modernist intellectuals, as for the broader public, criminality seemed to provide a point of access into modern German culture, an account of the hidden sources of the seemingly arbitrary and chaotic events of the Republic, something like a secret history of contemporary Germany. But for modernists such as Kracauer, Brecht, and Benjamin, criminality also provided further, more abstract insights into the modern world: it offered a point of access into modernity, an investigation not just of modern society but of modernity itself.

It has long been recognized that one of the chief features of European modernism is its insistence on calling into question assumptions about the possibility of establishing rationality and causality in both life and art. As Irving Howe has noted, traditional, premodernist narratives begin with the assumption that there is a rational structure to human actions and that this structure can be ascertained and narrated. Modernist literature, however, questions these assumptions, taking its departure from the belief that it is impossible to determine meanings and establish a structure to human actions.[4] Although there is a highly-charged debate over when and where to date the origin of this skepticism toward rationality and causality, most critics agree that it has been the predominant tendency in literature since the last half of the nineteenth century.

The classic detective novel, with its insistence on rationality and the ultimate establishment of an unbroken causal chain of events, would thus seem an odd genre to have so captivated the attention of German modernists. For, as Franco Moretti has argued, detective fiction's self-appointed task is to defend logic and causality against accident and chance:

> It creates a problem, a "concrete effect"—the crime—and declares a sole cause relevant: the criminal. It slights other causes (why is the criminal such?) and dispels the doubt that every choice is partial and subjective. But, then, discovering that unique cause means reunifying causality and objectivity and reinstating the idea of a general interest in society, which consists in solving *that* mystery and arresting *that* individual—and no one else. In finding one solution that is valid for all—detective fiction does not permit alternative readings—society posits its unity, and, again, declares itself innocent.[5]

From its very beginnings in the mid nineteenth century through the second quarter of the twentieth century, the genre of detective fiction maintained a steadfast faith in the existence of a logical causal chain and the ability of the analytic detective to uncover this chain. Edgar Allan Poe established the paradigm of the detective as pure reason incarnate when he created the first literary detective, C. Auguste Dupin, who repeatedly claimed that "my ultimate object is only the truth."[6] Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes differed from Dupin greatly

in character and temperament but maintained his faith in the existence of a stable code that is capable of unlocking the most mysterious events.[7] The detective as disembodied intellect perhaps reached its apex in Jacques Futrelle's turn-of-the-twentieth-century stories about the detective he nicknamed "the thinking machine."[8] By the 1920s, the rules of the genre were so well established that they could be codified. S. S. Van Dine's well-known "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Fiction" insists (with tongue only slightly in cheek) that "the culprit must be determined by logical deductions—not by accident or coincidence or unmotivated confession."[9] He continues, "[t]he method of murder and the means of detecting it must be rational and scientific" (191). In the world of rational analytic detective fiction, there are a finite number of possible causes and effects and there exists a regulated and invariable relationship between them.

It is precisely this commitment to logic and causality in classical detective fiction that attracted the attention of German modernists who sought to disrupt such assumptions. By reading detective fiction against the grain, as I demonstrate in the first part of this chapter, leftist intellectuals were able to rescue a critical modernist potential from this typically conservative genre. I examine the fascinating but little known analyses of detective fiction presented in the works of three of the most prominent commentators to engage the genre in the Weimar Republic: Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, and Siegfried Kracauer. These essays provide insight into the philosophies of each of these important thinkers and, taken as a whole, articulate the common elements of a German modernist theory of detective literature. I then turn from theory to practice and argue that, although detective fiction provided German modernists with a basis for theorizing about the role of reason and causality in modernity, it was not a genre in which they found it productive to write. The second part of this chapter examines the creation of a new type of crime literature in Weimar Germany that arises from the theoretical reflections on detective fiction, but departs significantly from the classical form of the genre. Unlike the analytic detective story that dominated English, French, and American literature in the 1920s, the German crime story dispensed with the figure of the detective (the very incarnation of reason and logic) and crossed over to a focus on the figure of the criminal (often the very incarnation of inexplicability and illogic). The German *crime* novel, in contrast to the English, French, and American *detective* novel, situated itself in a realm outside of reason, logic, and order, thus making it a central concern of both the political and the aesthetic avant-gardes after World War I. By exploring a realm outside of reason, crime fiction offered a means of understanding modernity as a period of perpetual crisis and undecidability.

Misfortunes and Crimes: Walter Benjamin

Walter Benjamin recalls in his memoir *Berliner Kindheit um 1900* (Berlin Childhood around 1900) that as a child he would go forth into the city every day in

search of "misfortunes and crimes."[10] This search, which combined childhood fantasy with urban reality, was for him the essential daily experience of the modern metropolis: "The city would promise them to me with the advent of each new day, and each evening it would still be in my debt" (378). Benjamin recounts how every store window and every passing truck was transformed by his childhood imagination into "suffocating receptacles of calamity," in which all sorts of mysterious criminal activities lay hidden beneath a concealing façade (378). Despite the young detective's attempts to uncover these pervasive mysteries of the city, however, they remained elusive: "Misfortune was everywhere provided for; the city and I had a soft bed ready for it, but nowhere did it let itself be seen" (379). What Benjamin is describing is, of course, the cherished childhood game of cops and robbers, in which the child alternately imagines himself as a detective pursuing fantasy criminals and as a criminal being pursued by fantasy detectives—a child's version of criminalistic fantasy.

But playing detective was, for Benjamin, not just a childhood game. He did not lose his sense of the city as a transgressive space as he got older: "In times of terror," he writes, "when everybody has something of the conspirator in him, everybody also has the opportunity to play the detective."[11] References to crime and detection can be found throughout the extensive writings of this lifelong reader of detective fiction. When read together, these scattered references and short essays present a complex version of criminalistic fantasy, the active imaginative engagement in matters of crime (both real and fictional) that Bernhard Weiß saw as an essential element of modern life.

Benjamin, too, saw crime and detection as central to the experience of modernity. The "misfortunes and crimes" that guided his childhood wanderings in Berlin developed into a more nuanced narrative of crime and detection that would guide the wanderings of the *flâneur,* the urban walker who plays such an important role in his philosophy. Benjamin's complex, voluminous, and scattered writings on the *flâneur* have been the subject of numerous critical analyses, which have demonstrated the multiplicity of meanings that Benjamin attributed to the topic. Critics have uncovered and emphasized markedly different aspects of Benjamin's conception of the *flâneur,* ranging from gender to class politics to shopping and consumption, and have thereby illuminated many interesting and divergent aspects of Benjamin's philosophy of modernity. However, one facet that unites nearly all of these different emphases is the consistent view of the *flâneur* as the quintessential modern subject, a figure that embodies modernity's new modes of perception and subjectivity and illustrates the process of urbanization and industrialization.

Despite the incredible amount of attention that has been devoted to the subject of the *flâneur* in Benjamin's philosophy, it has been little noticed how frequently Benjamin infuses these issues of urban modernity with criminalistic fantasy. The *flâneur* rarely makes an appearance in Benjamin's works without the accompaniment of the analogous figures of the criminal and the detective. The urban, the modern, and the criminal all blend together in Benjamin's analysis of the *flâneur*

and his/her status as the quintessential modern subject. For the adult Benjamin, just as for the child Benjamin, crime and detection occupy a privileged status and turn out to be among the most compelling terms by which to understand the modern metropolis and the subjects that negotiate it.

As Raymond Williams has argued, the emergence of modernism coincided with the emergence of the modern metropolis. Although major cities such as Paris, London, and Berlin had long achieved a size and complexity that made them no longer knowable communities, the dominant perception of these urban spaces as a mysterious "crowd of strangers" can be traced to the nineteenth century.[12] What is essential to the modernist experience of the city, Williams argues, is "the rapid transition from the mundane fact that the people in the crowded street are unknown to the observer … to the now characteristic interpretation of strangeness as 'mystery'" (40). Normal social relationships and the laws that govern them seem to collapse in the modern metropolis, resulting in the loss of what Wordsworth referred to as "the ballast of familiar life" (40). The individual now perceives himself as lonely, isolated, and alienated in the impenetrable city. Modernism emerges when this physical experience of isolation and impenetrability expands and comes to be seen as a general condition of modernity. Williams cites several new modes of representation that emerge to address this condition, including "one important literary response … the new figure of the urban detective" (41–2). The importance of the detective story in representing urban modernity is its ability to render strangeness as mystery. Once strangeness is converted into a mystery, a possibility emerges to penetrate the mystery, thus rendering the city knowable. Williams notes that modern detective stories contain "a recurrent image of the penetration by an isolated rational intelligence of a dark area of crime which was to be found in the otherwise … impenetrable city" (42). The detective story, like the metropolis itself, represents (and more pointedly reacts to) the most crucial experience of modernity: the alienation of the individual and the unknowability of the city and the laws that govern social interactions.[13] Strangeness and complexity—the cornerstones of urban modernity—are transformed into a mystery that would allow one to make sense of and perhaps ultimately overcome this strangeness and complexity. The detective story is thus a thoroughly modern phenomenon that depicts and attempts to understand the condition of the individual in modernity.

This is the context in which Benjamin understood the literary figures of both the *flâneur* and the detective. In his writings on the *flâneur,* Benjamin traces the emergence of new modes of perception and representation in the modern metropolis much as Williams would later describe it. And he too places crime and detection at the center of his investigation. Benjamin often describes the *flâneur* in terms that read like an adult game of cops and robbers, imbued with the same criminalistic fantasy that he described in his childhood memoir of growing up in Berlin. Benjamin's *flâneurs* frequently assume the role of a detective searching the modern city for clues to an undetermined mystery, attempting to penetrate the strangeness of the modern urban experience. At other times, Benjamin's *flâneurs*

take on the role of a fugitive attempting to move through the modern city undetected by undetermined and anonymous pursuers. It is thus not surprising, but nevertheless noteworthy, that Benjamin traces the origin of the *flâneur* to the works of Edgar Allan Poe, who was also the inventor of the modern detective story.

Among the texts most central to Benjamin's analysis of the *flâneur* is Poe's short story "The Man of the Crowd," which was written in 1840, just one year before "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" introduced the figure generally considered to be the first literary detective. Both the *flâneur* as detective and the *flâneur* as fugitive make their earliest appearances in this text, in which Benjamin identifies what he terms a "dialectic of *flânerie*":

> On the one hand you have the man who feels as if he is being observed by everything and everyone, the thoroughly suspicious character; on the other hand, you have the completely undetectable, the hidden. This is the dialectic that "The Man of the Crowd" is presumably developing.[14]

This dialectic of *flânerie* is also a dialectic of modern modes of perception in a world marked by alienation and inexplicability. In the city as mystery, one is always being observed and at the same time one is always anonymously hidden among strangers. Poe's *flâneur* represents and responds to this modern condition with an invocation of criminalistic fantasy in which the individual imagines himself as a fugitive at once hidden and under constant surveillance.

Although Poe's man of the crowd sets the stage for the *flâneur,* it is the nineteenth-century French poet Charles Baudelaire who develops it most fully. And, Benjamin notes, Baudelaire's *flâneur* is just as much a fugitive as Poe's man of the crowd. He "takes refuge in the shadows of the cities" and "finds himself as hindered in his activities as some sort of criminal."[15] From its very beginnings, then, the *flâneur* is the quintessential fugitive figure. He transforms modern urban space into "the latest asylum for the outlaw" and takes as his motto the commandment laid out by Brecht in his *Lesebuch für Städtebewohner* (Primer for City Dwellers, 1926): "Efface your traces!"[16]

At the same time, the *flâneur* is just as much a detective as he is a fugitive. The detective-*flâneur,* like the fugitive-*flâneur,* makes his first appearance in Poe's "The Man of the Crowd." The detective-*flâneur* is represented in this text by the narrator who follows the mysterious man through the town and reports on his activities. "In the figure of the *flâneur,*" Benjamin writes, "the figure of the detective assumes its earliest form."[17] As with the fugitive-*flâneur,* Benjamin finds the more complete development of the detective-*flâneur* in the works of one of Poe's contemporaries. Benjamin describes Alexandre Dumas' novel *Les Mohicans de Paris* (The Mohicans of Paris, 1859) as a "memorable linking of *flânerie* with the detective novel," in which Dumas combines crime, adventure, and urban modernity into a sensational narrative mix.[18] If the task of the fugitive-*flâneur* is to cover up his traces, the task of the detective-*flâneur* is to uncover them:

> Criminalistic abilities combine with the easy nonchalance of the *flâneur* to form the structure of Dumas' "Mohicans of Paris." Its hero sets forth on an adventure when he chooses to follow a scrap of paper that he throws into wind. Whichever clues the *flâneur* might follow, they all lead him to a crime.[19]

By setting loose a piece of paper and choosing to follow it, the protagonist of Dumas' novel turns himself into a detective and thereby gives structure to his otherwise random and meaningless wanderings by infusing them with criminalistic fantasy. In this case, he explicitly sets out to follow a clue that he provides for himself, just as Poe's and Baudelaire's fugitive-*flâneurs* explicitly set out to escape from imaginary pursuers. The criminalistic fantasy provides the structure by which to organize, and ultimately comprehend, the experience of the individual in the modern metropolis.

Whether as detective or as fugitive, the *flâneur* exhibits a pronounced criminalistic fantasy that converts urban modernity into a dangerous terrain to be negotiated. *Flânerie* promises the modern urban dweller the same "misfortunes and crimes" that captivated the young Benjamin. The childhood game of cops and robbers becomes the adult experience of modernity. The perception with which the *flâneur* views the world is the perception of the modern subject attempting to negotiate the alienating and ultimately inexplicable space of modernity. Criminalistic fantasy provides him with the opportunity to give form and meaning to this experience. When the *flâneur* experiences his existence as if he were in the world of a detective novel, he provides it with a form in which he can convert the experience of strangeness into the experience of mystery. The *flâneur* and the detective story thus emerge at the same time, and both are closely related methods of representing the place of the subject in urban modernity.

But, unlike lived experience, detective novels end with a definite closure when the mystery is ultimately solved. To experience life as a detective story is thus to hold open the promise that the mysteries of modernity can be solved and that the impenetrable world can, in fact, be apprehended. Whereas the child playing cops and robbers goes forth into the city in search of adventure, the detective-*flâneur* is in search of something more: clues that will lead him to hidden laws that govern social interactions and enable him to narrate a secret history of modern life. In Benjamin's writings criminalistic fantasy goes beyond embarking on an imaginative adventure; it also offers a means by which to understand the modern world that is hidden to the modern subject.

The detective story thus addresses the experience of public life, arising at precisely the time the *flâneur* takes to the city streets. It also addresses the experience of private life, arising at the same time as the private citizen retreats into the private interior:

> To live means to leave traces. In the interior these are emphasized. An abundance of covers and protectors, liners and cases is devised, on which the traces of objects of everyday use

> are imprinted. The traces of the occupant also leave their impression on the interior. The detective story that follows these traces comes into being.[20]

In this passage Benjamin is tracing the concomitant emergence of two new modern institutions: the private citizen, who enters the stage of history for the first time in the mid-nineteenth century (154), and the detective story that develops simultaneously to record the experience of this modern, private life. According to Benjamin, Poe initiates not only the figure of the *flâneur* and the genre of the detective story, but also a new philosophy of modern experience: "His 'philosophy of furniture,' along with his detective novellas, shows Poe to be the first physiognomist of the interior. The criminals of the first detective novels are neither gentlemen nor apaches, but private members of the bourgeoisie" (156).

With this move, the detective novel takes *flânerie* off the streets and places it behind the curtains of modern life. Indeed, this hidden "terror of the interior,"[21] rather than the more visible terror on the streets, is for Benjamin the central dynamic of the modern detective novel: "This character of the bourgeois interior, which trembles before the unknown murderer like a lustful old woman before her lover, has been penetrated by those authors who received their deserved honor as 'crime writers'—perhaps because their writings gave form to an element of bourgeois pandemonium."[22]

The detective novel finally provides Benjamin with that which had eluded him in his childhood search for "misfortunes and crimes." The criminalistic fantasy answers the questions about what lies behind the curtains covering the windows of the metropolis, behind the frosted glass windows of the ambulances racing by, behind the inscrutability of the crowds that inhabit the streets of the metropolis. The detective novel satisfies these fantasies and reveals life's mysteries as it makes knowable what seems at first to be inexplicable. Benjamin describes Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" as "something like an X-ray of a detective story" that "does away with all the drapery that a crime represents," leaving behind only the essential elements: "the pursuer, the crowd, and an unknown man."[23]

This X-ray of a detective story is also an X-ray of modern life. The laws of social interaction that critics such as Raymond Williams have described as being lost in modernity are recovered in the criminalistic fantasy that converts the impenetrable lived world into the apprehensible narrated world of the detective novel. Despite the apparent simplicity of the genre, it is thus uniquely suited to capture modern metropolitan life in its complexity and contradictions. The modern metropolis is, as critics from Ferdinand Tönnies to Georg Simmel to Oswald Spengler have argued, a site of shock, terror, and alienation.[24] Benjamin recognizes this aspect of modernity. But he also recognizes that the modern metropolis is at the same time a site of adventure and delight that anti-urbanists fail to take account of.[25] In the detective novel, both aspects of the modern metropolis are given form, as it insists that the traumas and the pleasures of modern life are inseparable from each other and indispensable to those who seek to understand the condition of modernity. This perception of modernity is precisely what I

have been referring to as criminalistic fantasy. And this perception permeates all aspects of private and public life in Benjamin's account of modernity. Modern experience is characterized by misfortunes and crimes, but also by adventures and insights. And, in Benjamin's philosophy of modernity, the detective novel emerges as the literary mode most adequate to uncovering and narrating this secret history of modern life.

Life as Catastrophe: Bertolt Brecht

Bertolt Brecht picks up on Benjamin's account of the alienation and inexplicability of modern experience and the role that the detective story plays in portraying it in his essay "Über die Popularität des Kriminalromans" (On the Popularity of the Detective Novel, 1938). In this important essay, Brecht seeks to inquire into the reasons for the detective novel having attained such a high degree of popularity in modern society, as well as the reasons for his own passionate devotion to the genre. Like Benjamin, Brecht locates the popularity of the genre in its unique suitability to the experience of modernity. He makes a bold connection between popular detective fiction and the high modernist novel, comparing the detective novel's turn away from the introspection of the psychological novel to the modern literary efforts of Joyce, Döblin, and Dos Passos.[26] While he does not make a claim that this popular fiction shares the same aesthetic quality as the epic modernist experiments with which he compares it, he argues that the detective novel is perhaps more appropriate to the needs of the modern age than the works of the high modernists (34). What, Brecht asks, does the modern detective novel offer the modern reader that might account for its incredible popularity?

Brecht follows Benjamin closely in his first answer to this question, arguing that among the chief pleasures of the detective novel is its depiction of people as actors, whose actions have definite and identifiable consequences (34). People in modernity pass through life without leaving traces of their existence and their movements. The subjects of detective novels, on the other hand, leave behind concrete traces. "In real life," Brecht notes, "people seldom find that they leave traces. … Here the detective novel offers a definite surrogate" (34–5). High modernist literature doesn't offer its readers such a surrogate; rather, it imitates modern life and refuses its subjects agency. In contrast, the detective novel offers "a definite slice of actual life," thus departing from these tendencies and returning agency to its subjects (34). Much like Benjamin's *flâneur,* the readers of detective novels alternately identify with the criminal being pursued and the detective who is pursuing him/her, and thereby imaginatively experience their own lives as unalienated and intricately connected to their fellow citizens. Brecht is thus arguing along with Benjamin and Williams that the detective novel renders strangeness as mystery, and thereby overcomes individual isolation through the public pursuit of clues. The detective novel thus offers its readers a distinctly connected and physical experience of the world that is denied to them in modern social

relations. Driven by currents that we cannot comprehend, much less control, we remain the objects, not the subjects, of history. The detective story breaks with this reality as much as it imitates it, allowing its readers, like its characters, to become the subjects of the story. The paradoxical argument Brecht makes is that the detective story is interactive in a way that real life is not.

It is thus apparent that Brecht's account of the role that the detective novel plays for its readers is similar to Benjamin's account of the role that the detective novel plays for the *flâneur:* both are infused with criminalistic fantasy that converts the alienated strangeness of modernity into the collective mystery of crime and detection. The experience of reading a detective novel is analogous to the experience of the *flâneur* walking the streets of the metropolis. But Brecht adds another crucial element to his analysis of the popularity of the genre that is more intellectual than physical and more contemplative than adventurous. According to Brecht, the popularity of the analytic detective novel can be attributed largely to the fact that it enables the reader to practice a certain intellectual operation: piecing together a causal chain of events that leads directly from the crime to the criminal. By limiting the field of possible outcomes of this causal chain, the detective novel presents us with the ability to fix causality to human actions. The crime has a motivation and that motivation is attributable to an individual. Actions beget other actions and lead toward a crime. A penetrating intelligence can piece together these actions to lead from a crime back to an individual criminal. And yet, because, as Brecht and other modernists believed, causality does not function in modernity, the piecing together of a causal chain is impossible in real life. Actions do not beget comprehensible reactions, leaving even a penetrating intelligence incapable of connecting them. Whereas Benjamin concentrates on the content of detective fiction, arguing that the figures that populate these narratives express the shock and even terror at the heart of modernity, Brecht finds its aptness to modernity to lie in its form: "The crime novel deals with logical thinking and demands logical thinking from its reader" (33).

This intellectual process, Brecht continues, closely mirrors the modern experience of everyday life: "We experience life in catastrophic form. Catastrophes present us with a way to uncover how our social life functions" (36). We are constantly confronted by crises, depressions, revolutions, and wars that seem to arise out of nowhere, but behind which we suspect that there is an "inside story" that can be uncovered (36). "When we read the newspapers (but also when we read bills, letters of dismissal, mobilization orders)," Brecht writes, "we have the feeling that someone must have done something to bring about the apparent catastrophe" (36). Although this actor cannot be traced in real life, he can be uncovered in the detective novel. And, for Brecht, therein lies the basis of detective fiction's popularity and its suitability to modern society.

The detective novel presents us with the "inside story" (Brecht employs the English term) that is otherwise denied to us in our everyday experiences. We are suddenly confronted with a dramatic event (a murder, a war, a loss of employment). Something must have happened to produce this event. Someone must

have done something. But who? The detective novel allows us to answer this question. It provides the "inside story," the secret history that Lang insisted he presented in *Dr. Mabuse* and that Benjamin sought in the wanderings of the *flâneur* and behind the windows of the metropolis. Unlike in life, in the detective novel all actions have logical consequences and all actions have actors. In life "the laws of causality function at best partially; in the detective story they function again" (36). And in this simultaneous imitation of and break with reality, Brecht locates the principal pleasure of the detective novel and its appropriateness to the needs of modern life. It puts back into place a system that no longer functions adequately in modernity.

The Triumph of Reason: Siegfried Kracauer

Like Benjamin and Brecht, Siegfried Kracauer was a broad and astute reader of international detective fiction. He regularly reviewed new detective novels for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and wrote positively of such popular and trivial authors as Edgar Wallace.[27] In an important monograph, *Der Detektiv-Roman – Ein philosophischer Traktat* (The Detective Novel: A Philosophical Treatise, 1925), he develops a comprehensive theory of the genre that points toward a similar function of detective fiction as noted by Brecht and Benjamin, but argues in a different direction and illuminates a different aspect of the genre. Kracauer never claims the genre as a self-consciously sophisticated work of art (indeed, he explicitly denies it such status), but nevertheless argues that it presents as clear a picture of bourgeois society as any neo-Marxist analysis could: "Without presenting itself as a work of art, the detective novel nevertheless shows civilized society its own image more purely than it is accustomed to seeing it."[28] Like Brecht, Kracauer views the detective novel as an unconsciously modernist art form. And for Kracauer, the essential truth that the detective novel reflects is quite the opposite of the adventurous fantasy with which it is typically compared: it shows us not a sensationally unpredictable and chaotic world but, on the contrary, a thoroughly rationalized society.

Like Benjamin, Kracauer focuses on the characters that populate detective novels. He identifies a triangular relationship among the major figures of the genre, consisting of the detective, the criminal, and the police. He argues that these characters are never individuals with unique characteristics, but rather types. Indeed, Kracauer renders them even more abstractly: they are representatives of intellectual concepts. The police (which, for Kracauer, is always an institution, never individual people) represents authority and "the legal" (156–7). The criminal (who is no more of an individual than the police) represents the negation of the law: "The doer, like the deed, is nothing more than the negation of the legal" (160). Characters thus become ideas, and the real conflict in the detective novel is not between an individual criminal and his/her pursuers, but rather between the law and the negation of the law.

However, according to Kracauer the detective novel is ultimately not particularly interested in either of these figures or the concepts that they represent. The center of the detective novel, as the very name of the genre implies, is the detective. Kracauer's interest also lies with the detective, and he devotes the bulk of his argument to an analysis of this figure. He describes the detective, as he does the police and the criminal, as more of a concept than a character. But the concept represented in the figure of the detective is less easily identified than that of the police or the criminal, who simply represent authority and the negation of that authority. For Kracauer, the detective moves in the space between these various other figures as a representative—even a personification—of reason (*ratio*): "He doesn't focus on reason, he is its personification" (139). His sympathies lie neither with the police, who seek to preserve the law, nor with the criminal, who seeks to negate the law. In fact, the detective has no real interest in or regard for the law; he is interested solely in the process of solving the puzzle that the crime presents (166). And in the end, Kracauer assures us, he always succeeds: "The end of the detective novel is the undisputed victory of reason—an end without tragedy, but fused with the sentimentality that is an aesthetic component of kitsch" (201).

Here Kracauer pursues a line of argumentation similar to Brecht. For Brecht, the triumph of the detective is not the triumph of an individual, but rather the triumph of causality. When he solves the crime, he reinstates a causal chain and the rule of logic. For Kracauer, the triumph of the detective is the triumph of reason. Both analyses are closely related in that both describe the work of the detective novel as reducing the world to a limited set of facts that can, through reason, be formed into a causal chain. For Kracauer, as for Brecht, the detective novel thus ends not so much with the triumph of law over outlaw but with the triumph of reason and causality over the chaos and complexity of the world. And in the kitsch of this false end (false because it misrepresents reality), Kracauer argues, a derealized worldview reveals itself:

> The end, which is not really an end, since it only brings unreality to an end, exerts a feeling that is unreal and offers solutions that are not really solutions in order to force the creation of a Heaven that doesn't exist on Earth. Kitsch betrays such derealized thought that cloaks itself in the appearance of the highest sphere (204).

By depicting the world as knowable, the detective novel compensates for the inscrutability of modernity. And in this rendering of strangeness as mystery it separates itself from the reality of lived experience. Its attempt to understand events that ultimately cannot be understood provides readers with a false sense of comfort. By reading this fiction against its intentions, Kracauer's analysis reveals precisely what the genre attempts to hide: reason cannot penetrate the strangeness of modernity. The unrealistic view of modern life presented in detective fiction can be found outside of the fictional genre as well, as individuals experience modernity within precisely the same fictional structures that detective writers

employ. Its fantastic constructs mirror—however distortedly—the equally false understanding of social relations that govern everyday life.

A Modernist Theory of Detective Fiction

Although Benjamin, Brecht, and Kracauer each emphasize different aspects of detective fiction, their essays display a general coherence that can be brought together to form a German modernist theory of detective fiction. The first crucial point that unites them is their insistence on taking this trivial genre seriously. They read detective novels as unconsciously avant-garde texts that function as mass-market versions of elite modernist works and attempt to come to terms with difficult issues of modernity. Detective novels (often unwittingly) pose important questions about the place of the subject in the modern world, the negotiation of urban space, and the dysfunctionality of reason and causality.

The second element that unites these three theorists is their emphasis on the role that the reader plays in the detective novel. Their view of the genre is thoroughly interactive; they construct an active reader who makes use of the genre to meet his/her own needs. In these theories, readers turn to detective fiction in search of a narrative that gives form and meaning to their inscrutable lived experience. For Benjamin, detective novels convert the strangeness of the city into mystery, thus rendering it potentially knowable. For Brecht, they resurrect the laws of causality that no longer function in life. For Kracauer, they act as a distorted mirror that reflects a thoroughly rationalized and derealized society. These readers find themselves lost in modernity, and the detective novel responds to their situation and compensates for it.

This provocative understanding of the reader's use of crime fiction runs counter to the dominant understanding of the genre. These three theorists refuse to write off the experience of reading detective fiction as simply an attempt to escape from the monotony of everyday life and inhabit a fantasy world of adventure. In place of escapism, they posit a genre that departs from the real world in order to provide a guide to understanding modernity. The result is a powerful mixture of fantasy and reality, imagined adventures and lived experience, which I have been characterizing as criminalistic fantasy. In this modernist theory of detective fiction, criminalistic fantasy serves as a means to understand the modern world and make sense of the paradoxes of modernity.

All three theorists improbably find a critical potential in this conservative genre and just as improbably construct an amazingly clever and attentive reader. They do so by reading the genre against the grain and positing a critical reader that surely exists only in the rarest of cases. As we will see, when German modernists turned to the production of crime fiction, rather than the discussion of crime fiction, they produced texts that were very different from those they had been discussing. Whereas classical detective literature functions for them as a dis-

torting mirror that reveals moments of tension and crisis precisely in its attempt to cover them up, German modernist crime fiction would abandon itself to a world in which crisis is omnipresent and reason does not exist.

Imagining A Space Beyond Reason: The German Crime Story

Each of the theorists I have discussed cites a large and varied number of works of crime and detective literature in the course of making their arguments about the role of criminality in modernity. Poe and Conan Doyle appear constantly, as do their English heirs to the analytic tradition, such as G. K. Chesterton, Agatha Christie, and Dorothy Sayers. "Like the world itself," notes Brecht, "the detective novel is controlled by the English."[29] The French masters of the genre such as Emile Gaboriau and Gaston Leroux also come under discussion in Benjamin's, Brecht's, and Kracauer's studies. Conspicuously absent from all of these writings, however, are references to German-language authors. As with the famous dog that doesn't bark in the Sherlock Holmes story, this absence of German-language detective fiction provides a key clue in our investigation of German modernism. Did German modernists produce crime fiction? If so, what did it look like?

They did indeed. And it did not look much like international crime fiction of the 1920s, the period commonly referred to at the "Golden Age" of detective literature. This departure from the mainstream of early-twentieth-century detective fiction accounts for the obscurity of German crime fiction. The analytic detective novel blossomed in Great Britain at this time, with authors such as Christie and Sayers at the pinnacle of their careers. Meanwhile, in the United States, Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett began to develop the hard-boiled detective novel. And in France, the police procedural advanced as Georges Simenon wrote his first Maigret novels. These traditions differ significantly, but all share a common trait: they all focus on the detective, whose task it is to solve a crime. Neither criminals nor their victims receive much attention in these narratives.

German crime fiction of 1920s tells a different story. Rather than build on nineteenth-century detective literature traditions as English-language and French-language authors did, it abandons the centrality of the figure of detective and focuses instead on the criminal. These are not detective novels, but crime novels. This crossover from the detective novel to the crime novel is intricately related to the critical theories of detective fiction that I outlined above: if international detective fiction allowed readers to explore a fantasy world in which reason and causality function, individuals are connected to each other and their societies, and the law is clearly distinguishable from the violation of the law, then the German modernist crime novel represented an attempt to understand modernity by exploring a space in which such distinctions are not possible and reason no longer obtains. This accounts for the particular German inflection of the early twentieth-century crime novel, which unlike the English, French, and American versions, dispenses with the figure of the detective—the incarnation of reason—and

crosses over to a focus on the figure of the criminal—the incarnation of illogic. These works are more interested in exploring the relationship between criminals and legitimate society than in identifying criminals and resurrecting boundaries between law and outlaw.

This blurring of boundaries between the legal order and the extra-legal order is nicely demonstrated in Brecht's crime novels. Brecht did, indeed, apply his theories of detective fiction to his own writings, and crime maintained a central role in Brecht's fictional works throughout his career. But the criminals and detectives in his crime novels function very differently from their counterparts in the classical detective fiction that Brecht discusses in his essay on the genre. As Benjamin notes in his astute reading of *Der Dreigroschenroman* (*The Threepenny Novel,* 1934), Brecht departs dramatically from the traditional conventions of detective fiction:

> Bourgeois legality and crime—these are, by the rules of the crime novel, opposites. Brecht's procedure consists in retaining the highly developed technique of the crime novel, but dispensing with its rules. In *this* crime novel the actual relation between bourgeois legality and crime is presented. The latter is shown to be a special case of exploitation sanctioned by the former.[30]

This was also the case in Brecht's earlier crime drama, *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera,* 1928), in which the corrupt police chief Tiger Brown and the gangster Macheath are shown to be closely related on both a personal and a professional level. In the play, the happy end in which Macheath is rescued from execution satirizes and undermines the customary closure of the detective novel, which involves the removal of the criminal from bourgeois society and the subsequent restoration of bourgeois order and the rule of law. When he reworked his original material six years later in *The Threepenny Novel,* Brecht intensified his comparison of crime and bourgeois legality, completely eliding the distinction between the representatives of the legal order and those who would seek to challenge this order. The struggle between Macheath and Peachum is, as Benjamin notes, "the struggle between two gangs, and the happy end a gentleman's agreement that gives legal sanction to the distribution of the spoils" (201). As Peachum himself eventually realizes, he and Macheath only seemed to be in combat, but the whole time "we were only doing business with each other" (201). There is in *The Threepenny Novel* no compelling representative of the legal order, as in the classical detective novel, because there is no place for such a figure in this reworking of the crime novel that suspends the conflict between crime and the law.

Detectives are seldom found in Brecht's crime stories, appearing in only a few short stories and some abandoned fragments. When detectives do make an appearance in Brecht's fiction, they are unlike their more traditional counterparts. Indeed, they are parodies of the methodical and rational literary detectives such as Dupin and Holmes, the classical detective figure that Kracauer refers to as *ratio* incarnate. For example, Samuel Kascher, the detective in Brecht's short story "Der Javameier" (1921), has no interest in involving himself directly with wit-

nesses and others who have a close connection to the crime, nor is he interested in inspecting the crime scene. His refusal to examine the crime scene and follow traditional clues, he claims, arises from his fear that such unmediated exposure might detract from his ability to analyze the case objectively. Kascher instead gets his information only from mediated sources that buffer him from a direct involvement with the crime: newspaper reports and distant witnesses.[31] His sources of clues are thus those that are just as available to the general public as to him. This interestingly places Kascher in the same position as the reader of detective stories, whom you will recall Brecht described in his essay "On the Popularity of Detective Novels" as reading reports of catastrophes and suspecting that there is an "inside story" that will remain forever hidden from him. Kascher, a fishmonger by trade, is quite explicitly cast as a representative of the public, an outsider in his own story and, as Lorenz Jäger argues, "a distant, cool … observer."[32] There is no opportunity for the reader to experience the "inside story" vicariously through the literary detective. Brecht thus refuses his readers the very pleasures that he identifies as central to the popularity of the detective genre: the vicarious experience of connection with a detective and a criminal involved in leaving and following traces and the clear, causal chain leading from the catastrophe to the inside story.

The central figure of what was to be Brecht's series of novels in collaboration with Benjamin, the retired judge Lexer, is a similar representative of pure *ratio* in a world in which reason and causal chains no longer have a place. Brecht's sketch of the first novel of this series provides a textbook example of the appropriation of the genre of detective fiction for the service of what is ultimately an anti-detective novel. Brecht's notes for the story, which Jäger has painstakingly reconstructed in his illuminating study of the unfinished novel, sketch the story of Karl Seifert, a corrupt salesman who uses a loophole in the law to extract money from corporations. When he meets a secretary whose company's existence he is threatening, he offers to save her job in exchange for sexual favors. They meet in a hotel, where she pushes him down an elevator shaft to his death. While the police search focuses on the most likely suspects, such as Seifert's jealous wife, Lexer undertakes his own unconventional investigation, armed with a camera and a mania for documenting the smallest and seemingly unimportant details. He uncovers the secretary's guilt, but does not deliver her to the police. He recognizes, as does the reader, that while she committed the crime, true guilt lies more directly with the victim and the corrupt system of economic and social relations that enables Seifert's crimes and threatens the secretary's livelihood. As Jäger notes, Brecht departs from the traditional crime novel in that crime is not localized in one place and attributable to one person, and thus cannot be solved or contained.[33] Pure reason does, indeed, lead Lexer to uncover the offender, but it does not help him to solve the crime because the "inside story" is not the narrative of a guilty individual who is responsible for the crimes and misfortunes that occur; rather, it is the narrative of a flawed economic and moral system with no clear agents directing it. We are a long way from Agatha Christie here.

German crime fiction during the Weimar Republic will continually enter into this world beyond reason and without clear divisions between guilt and innocence. Perhaps no writer inhabited this world more uncompromisingly than Walter Serner, an important but largely forgotten modernist author known primarily for his early involvement with the Dada movement and his authorship of the Dadaist manifesto, *Letzte Lockerung* (Last Loosening,1918).[34] After the end of World War I, Serner devoted his literary energies to the production of more than one hundred very short crime stories, sometimes only two or three pages in length, as well as one crime novel and one crime play, before mysteriously disappearing from the public view. Serner's crime stories are typically located in an indeterminate, international space that mixes nationalities and languages indiscriminately and does not correspond to any actual geographical location. They also take place in an uncertain philosophical space in which the laws of logic and causality are suspended. Like Brecht's detective figures, Serner's detectives seem almost a parody of the literary figures that Kracauer identified as a personification of *ratio.*

In one story, "Die verhängnisvolle Camel" (The Fateful Camel, 1926), the Kommissar investigating a robbery on a train fits all of the standard detective story clichés: he possesses an abundance of confidence, operates in an eccentric and theatrical and manner, and devotes close attention to overlooked details. The story takes place in a similarly clichéd location: on a train full of suspicious characters. When a robbery occurs, the train halts in the Andalusian town of Hornachuelos and nobody is permitted to deboard. When the Kommissar is called in to investigate, we have all of the ingredients of a traditional detective story. And, indeed, the detective proceeds along familiar lines: with great pomposity, he uncovers such clues as a trace of red lipstick on an unusual brand of cigarettes and uses this seemingly insignificant observation to identify and convict a suspect in the robbery. As he arrests his suspect, he proclaims with certainty: "And then you made your coup. In this suit. In this hat. With this revolver. When you returned you were—luckily—still smoking a Camel. This betrayed you. The investigation is complete. You are under arrest."[35] This is where a traditional Golden Age detective story would end—with the triumph of the brilliant analytic detective, the capture of the criminal, and the restoration of bourgeois order. But Serner's story continues: we learn in the final paragraph that the detective's analytic prowess and airtight case led him to detain everybody on the train *except* precisely the two culprits (who were the only people he allowed to deboard), and ultimately resulted in a prison sentence for the man who was in reality the victim of the robbery. Serner thus takes all of the classical elements of the genre and uses them to undermine the faith in evidence and reason that are the foundation of classical detective fiction.

Other detective figures in Serner's stories fare even worse than the Kommissar in "The Fateful Camel." They are continually being outsmarted by the criminals. The detective investigating the case in "Homingmanns schönste Komposition" (Homingmann's Greatest Composition, 1926), for example, is sent away in defeat and in a rage, while the guilty hotel thief he had been pursuing marries a wealthy

aristocrat.[36] The detective investigating a group of gangsters in "Die Bande Kaff" (The Kaff Band, 1925) is tricked by the criminals he is pursuing and shot to death.[37] Throughout Serner's works the detective is subordinate to the criminal.[38] He can easily be dispensed with, and, indeed, many of Serner's crime stories exclude the detective altogether.

It is not that Serner had no regard for the law. In fact, he was trained as a jurist and wrote a dissertation on liability law.[39] There is simply no room for the representatives of law and order in Serner's stories, which dwell in a world composed entirely of gangsters and imposters, pickpockets and hotel thieves, prostitutes and coquettes. His characters bear inscrutable names such as Fec, Kencim, and Posada, inhabit exotic and indeterminate spaces where it always seems to be nighttime, and wander seemingly without purpose from one odd experience to another. Characters interact but do not connect. Reason is nowhere to be found, and causal chains fail to hold together. Serner's narratives invariably pick up *in medias res* and frequently end unresolved after only a handful of pages. Serner's world is a strange world that is rendered as mystery, as in classical detective fiction. But not only is the solution to the mystery withheld, as in Brecht's crime novels, even the possibility of a solution is withheld. Serner's crime stories present mysteries without solutions in a narrative form without beginnings or ends. They thus represent modernity as a space that cannot be apprehended or given narrative form, populated by subjects who lack agency and leave no traces.

Each of Serner's short story collections bears a subtitle that tallies the number of tales it contains, viz. (in English): *The Blue Monkey: 33 Crime Stories* (1921), *The Eleventh Finger: 25 Crime Stories* (1923), *The Whistle Around the Corner: 22 Crime Stories* (1925), and *The Treacherous Street: 19 Crime Stories* (1926). The enumeration of the stories in each volume emphasizes the seriality of Serner's project, in which seemingly interchangeable narratives are steadily sent to the reader as if on a conveyor belt, without a clear notion of where they begin or where they will end, why they are organized as they are, or whether they can be made sense of. Serner's characters display a constant mood of unshakable indifference and are entirely devoid of emotion. They behave unpredictably and ultimately cannot be understood. Presumably he wishes for a similar attitude of detachment from reality and complete abandonment to chaos of modern existence from his readers. Serner's stories refuse to make sense of everyday life by converting strangeness into a compact and apprehensible mystery and issuing a detective to solve that mystery. They refuse to render life knowable. The first line of Serner's novel *Die Tigerin* (The Tigress, 1925) could well serve as a motto for the hundreds of characters who populate Serner's crime stories: "Nobody knew whereof he actually lived."[40]

And yet these texts do not function as parodies in the way Brecht's crime stories do. Indeed, Serner's performance instructions accompanying his crime drama *Posada, oder der große Coup im Hotel Ritz* (Posada, or the Great Coup in the Ritz Hotel, 1926) specify that "the scenery should always be constructed accurately right down to the smallest details … free from any stylization, simplification,

or symbolic elements" and "the play is to be performed neither as parody nor as grotesque, but rather realistically."[41] In his bizarre crime stories, Serner sought not to escape the reality of everyday life but rather to depict it. Contemporary critics frequently praised Serner as "a lively reporter" and "traveler through the underworld," whose "factually accurate, reliable accounts" of "episodes from the everyday life of outsiders, imposters, and adventurers" are presented with "almost exact objectivity."[42] The criminalistic fantastic imagination is as clearly at work here as in Fritz Lang's contemporary crime film *Dr. Mabuse,* which evoked similar comments of realism and objectivity from critics seemingly out of touch with the bizarre events being depicted.[43]

As unusual and unique as they seem, Serner's stories are, I would argue, paradigmatic for modernist German crime fiction, which attempted to understand the modern world through criminals and their crimes. Like Serner's stories, the German crime novel, in contrast to the English, French, and American detective novel, situated itself in a realm outside of reason, logic, and order. By exploring this realm, crime fiction offered a means of understanding modernity as a period of perpetual crisis and undecidability. In the German crime narrative, the interplay between the detective (if there even is one) and the criminal is ultimately less an interplay between good and evil, or law and outlaw, and more an interplay between order and disorder, reason and chaos, understanding and undecidability. And disorder, chaos, and undecidability always triumph in the end.

The modernist artist and illustrator of some of Serner's books Christian Schad asserted in 1927 that Serner's first collection of crime stories, *Zum blauen Affen* (The Blue Monkey), which was first published in 1921, "constituted the beginning of the 'New Objectivity.'"[44] Like the critics I quoted earlier, Schad clearly recognized the crucial element of cool reportage in these bizarre stories. However, it might be more accurate to assess Serner's place in literary history as being on the border between Dada and the New Objectivity. Crime narratives offered him a way to keep one foot firmly planted in each of these two literary movements. In the following chapter, I will turn to a series of books that pick up on the criminalistic fantasy as represented in Brecht's and Serner's new type of crime fiction and combine it with the critical approach to crime and law as represented in Benjamin's, Brecht's, and Kracauer's analyses of detective fiction in order to develop a new type of critical crime novel that would truly usher in the beginning of New Objectivity and represent the apex of German modernist crime fiction: the documentary crime novel.

Notes

1. Lorenz Jäger discusses the meeting in "Mord im Fahrstuhlschacht: Benjamin, Brecht und der Kriminalroman," in *The Other Brecht II / Das andere Brecht II,* ed. Marc Silberman, Antony

Tatlow, Renate Voris, and Carl Weber, *The Brecht Yearbook / Das Brecht-Jahrbuch* 18 (1993): 24–40. I discuss the plans for the first novel below.

2. Among the numerous essays both Benjamin and Brecht wrote on the subject of crime fiction, see, for example, Walter Benjamin, "Kriminalromane, auf Reisen," in *Gesammelte Schriften,* ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuse (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1972), IV: 88–89 and Bertolt Brecht, "Über die Popularität des Kriminalromans," in *Der Kriminalroman: Poetik, Theorie, Geschichte,* ed. Jochen Vogt (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1998), 33–37.
3. Hermann Hesse, *Mordprozesse* (Berlin: Verlag Seldwyla, 1922).
4. Irving Howe, *The Decline of the New* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), 27.
5. Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), 144.
6. Edgar Allan Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," in *Great Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1951), 129.
7. See Moretti, *Signs,* 145.
8. The character of Professor Augustus S.F.X. Van Dusen, PhD, LLD, FRS, MD, etc., etc., aka "the Thinking Machine," first appears in Futrelle's 1906 novel *The Chase of the Golden Plate.* Several short stories and novels featuring Van Dusen followed until Futrelle's untimely death aboard the Titanic in 1912.
9. S.S. Van Dine, "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories," in *The Art of the Mystery Story,* ed. Howard Haycraft (Carroll & Graf: New York, 1983), 189–193. Here, 190. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.
10. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 3,* ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland, and others (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 378. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.
11. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften,* I: 542.
12. Raymond Williams, "Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism," in *The Politics of Modernism* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), 37–48: Here, 49. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.
13. Jon Thompson skillfully applies Williams' theory of the modern metropolis to the emergence of detective literature in his excellent study of the modern and postmodern crime novel *Fiction, Crime, and Empire* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 19–21.
14. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften,* V: 529. The figure of the *flâneur* is complex and often contradictory in Benamin's voluminous writings. At times, Benjamin contradicts Baudelaire's assertion that Poe's man of the crowd is a *flâneur* (see "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire," in *Illuminationen* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp, 1977), 185–229, esp. 204). Elsewhere, he proclaims the man of the crowd to be the essential *flâneur* (see, for example, *Gesammelte Schriften,* I: 550). Susan Buck-Morss has offered a convincing explanation for this apparent flip-flop, arguing that Benjamin's conception of the *flâneur* changed over the years as he witnessed the rise of a whole class of professional *flâneurs* who made loitering their trade (See Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 304–7). Anne Friedberg has also argued compellingly that Benjamin always has two different types of *flâneur* in mind: the nineteenth-century Baudelairean *flâneur* and the twentieth-century professional *flâneur* (see Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 34–5).
15. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften,* V:554, I: 550.
16. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften,* V: 559.
17. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften,* V. 555.
18. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften,* V: 553.
19. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften,* V: 543.
20. Walter Benjamin, *Reflections,* ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 155. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.
21. See Walter Benjamin, "Einbahnstraße," in *Gesammelte Schriften* IV: 88–9.

22. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften,* VI: 89.
23. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 4,* ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott and others (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 27.
24. See Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Association* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1988); Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *On the Individuality of Social Forms,* ed. Donald Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); and Oswald Spengler, *Decline of the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
25. Graeme Gilloch argues for Benjamin's dual perspective on urban modernity in *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2002). See especially 7–8.
26. Bertolt Brecht, "Über die Popularität des Kriminalromans," in *Der Kriminalroman,* ed. Jochen Vogt, 34. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.
27. See, for example, "Spannende Romane," in *Frankfurter Zeitung* (27 January 1925); "Hamlet wird Detektiv," in *Frankfurter Zeitung* (28 March 1926); "Neue Detektivromane," in *Frankfurter Zeitung* (24 April 1927); "Neue Kriminalromane," in *Frankfurter Zeitung* (28 September 1930); and "Edgar Wallace," in *Frankfurter Zeitung* (13 Feb 1932).
28. Siegfried Kracauer, *Der Detektiv-Roman. Ein philosophischer Traktat,* in *Schriften I* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971), 116. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.
29. Brecht, "Über die Popularität des Kriminalromans," 33.
30. Walter Benjamin, "*Brecht's* Threepenny Novel," in *Reflections,* ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 193–202. Here, 201. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.
31. See Brecht, "Der Javameier," in *Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe* (Berlin/Wiemar and Frandfurt a.M., 1988), 11: 62–72 and Lorenz Jäger's discussion of the text in "Mord im Fahrstuhlschacht," 28.
32. Jäger, "Mord im Fahrstuhlschacht," 28.
33. Jäger, "Mord im Fahrstuhlschacht," 31.
34. Walter Serner, *Letzte Lockerung* (Hanover: Paul Steegman, 1920).
35. Walter Serner, "Die verhängnisvolle Camel," from *Die tückische Straße: Neunzehn Kriminalgeschichten*, in *Das erzählerische Werk in drei Bänden,* ed. Thomas Milch (München: btb, 2000), III: 35–42. Here, 42.
36. Walter Serner, "Homingmanns schönste Komposition," from *Die tückische Straße: Neunzehn Kriminalgeschichten,* in *Das erzählerische Werk in drei Bänden,* III: 111–9.
37. Walter Serner, "Die Bande Kaff," from *Der Pfiff um die Ecke,* in *Das erzählerische Werk in drei Bänden,* III: 97–103.
38. See Andreas Puff-Trojan, *Wien/Berlin/Dada: Reisen mit Dr. Serner* (Wien: Sonderzahl Verlag, 1993), 244–6.
39. Walter Serner, *Die Haftung des Schenkers wegen Mängel im Rechte und wegen Mängel der verschenkten Sache: Nach dem bürgerlichen Gesetzbuch für das Deutsche-Reich* (Berlin: Ebering, 1913).
40. Walter Serner, *Die Tigerin,* in *Das erzählerische Werk in drei Bänden,* II: 5.
41. Walter Serner, *Posada, oder der große Coup im Hotel Ritz* (München: Goldmann Verlag, 1990), 6.
42. Max Herrmann, "Zur Naturgeschichte der Vogelfreien," in *Der Abreiser: Materialien zu Leben und Werk*, *Gesammelte Werke,* ed. Thomas Milch, X: 63–4, and Hugo Mayer (Manfred Georg), "Der Pfiff um die Ecke," in the same volume, 160–1.
43. See my discussion of this film and its reception on 4–5.
44. Christian Schad, "Doublette oder Plagiat," in *Der Abreiser,* 108.

Chapter 2

Writing Criminals

Outsiders of Society and the Modernist Case History

Introduction

> Our case becomes rounded off and difficulty after difficulty thins away in front of us. … I shall soon be in the position of being able to put into a single connected narrative one of the most singular and sensational crimes of modern times.[1]

Sherlock Holmes (and, of course, his creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle) recognized quite clearly the relationship between solving crimes and telling stories: to solve a crime is to write its narrative. Crime disrupts the social order. The detective is called in to solve the mystery of the crime, catch the criminal, and set the world back in order. But it is not sufficient simply to put the criminal behind bars, for there are always many more criminals to take his or her place on the streets, continuing to disrupt order. To avoid living in a continuous state of crisis, we need to control our anxiety that anybody is a potential criminal threat by clearly distinguishing between the criminal and the noncriminal. This is the crucial task that tales of crime—from scientific criminological works to popular journalistic accounts to fictional texts—seek to accomplish.

Holmes continues his discussion of the Baskerville case by pointing to the important role that these crime stories and their representations of criminals play in his ongoing investigation: "Students of criminology will remember the analogous incidents in Grodno, in Little Russia, in the year '66 and of course there are the Anderson murders in North Carolina, but this case possesses some features which are entirely its own" (616). Criminology is concerned with establishing

Notes for this section begin on page 53.

criminal types by drawing connections between them and, at the same time, drawing clear lines between the criminal and the noncriminal. Traditional crime fiction operates in a similar fashion: the narrative begins with a disruption of bourgeois order (the crime) and ends with the restoration of bourgeois order, as the detective pieces together the "single connected narrative" that explains the "singular" events and distinguishes the criminal from the innocents, clearly locating guilt in a single offender or a small group of offenders. In Holmes's time, at the end of the nineteenth century, these mechanisms of distinction were largely intact. Stories—whether in fictional works such as those of Doyle or criminological works such as the numerous editions of the *Pitaval,* the popular encyclopedia of criminal cases—seemed to be able to explain the causes of criminal behavior. This certainty, however, was beginning to erode.

If narrative is a primary means to distinguish between types, reach judgments, and explain causes, what happens when the belief in narrative coherence goes into crisis, as it does in the twentieth century? It is this question that I seek to address in this chapter, as I turn my attention to a remarkable moment in the development of the criminal case study: the ambitious but short-lived series *Außenseiter der Gesellschaft: Die Verbrechen der Gegenwart* (Outsiders of Society – the Crimes of Today), published by the left-wing publishing house Verlag Die Schmiede in 1924–25 under the general editorship of the poet and important literary-political activist Rudolf Leonhard. In a project without precedent in German literature, Leonhard enlisted the talents of important writers such as Alfred Döblin, Egon Erwin Kisch, Ernst Weiß, Iwan Goll, and Theodor Lessing to author book-length studies of recent sensational criminal cases.[2] The topics covered in the series ranged widely, from the confidence schemes of the impostor who called himself Freiherr von Egloffstein, to the Hitler-Ludendorff trial, to the career of the serial killer Fritz Haarmann. Though forthcoming volumes by such celebrity writers as Max Brod, Arnolt Bronnen, Georg Kaiser, Thomas Mann, Joseph Roth, and Jakob Wassermann were advertised, they never materialized.[3] Owing to financial problems, the series was discontinued and the Verlag Die Schmiede was soon forced to close down entirely.

Though it existed for only a little over one year, the fourteen volumes of the *Outsiders* series occupy a crucial role both in their authors' individual developments and in documenting some of the innovative ways in which criminality was understood in Weimar Germany. It received significant critical attention in the 1920s and was hotly debated in a variety of criminalistic and literary publications.[4] It is thus surprising that the series has received remarkably little attention in both German- and English-language scholarship.[5]

Aside from the presence of an all-star cast of writers, the significance of the *Outsiders* series lies in its rethinking and reworking of the aims and possibilities of the genre of the criminal case study. This series, I argue, sought to intervene in the tradition of crime narratives in order to question the nature and effects of the genre. If narrative is one of the primary techniques by which the criminal and the noncriminal are distinguished, then the crisis of narration that

is a central characteristic of modernist literature would naturally precipitate a crisis of this mechanism of distinction when brought to bear on the discussion of criminals.

When the belief in the ability to narrate a life story, to turn experience into text, comes into doubt, the belief in the ability of a narrative to separate criminal from noncriminal and to reconstruct the events that lead to a crime must also fall under suspicion. This is precisely what happens in these volumes, in which some of Germany's most important novelists, most innovative journalists, and most interesting intellectual figures turn their attention to this breakdown of the case narrative as a means to distinguish the criminal from the noncriminal. The unusual grouping of very different types of writers indicates the hybrid nature of this crossover project, which brings a combination of reportage, fictional techniques, and scientific analysis to bear on an area that is usually the domain of legal and medical specialists. At the same time, the series incorporates medical texts and trial documents into what often reads like a fictional narrative. Contemporary critics thus found it difficult to classify this project, repeatedly questioning what genre it might fit into.[6] This difficulty has certainly not dissipated over the years. Indeed, in 1982, when Suhrkamp republished Ernst Weiß's contribution to the series, *Der Fall Vukobrankovics* (The Vukobrankovic Case, 1924), they labeled it a novel.[7]

Outsiders of Society is ultimately uncontainable under traditional generic concepts because it consciously presents itself as a borderline project that transgresses genres (between history and fiction, scientific analysis and popular sensationalism) in order to question precisely the possibility of generic classification. In so doing, it inaugurates a new genre that would become increasingly popular over the course of the twentieth century: the documentary crime novel.[8] This new genre picks up on the two essential features of German crime fiction in the 1920s that I discussed in the previous chapter—the crossover from the detective novel to the crime novel and the intermingling of fact and fiction—and uses them to investigate the position of criminality within society. The series not only breaks down generic borders, it also interrogates the borders between the criminal and the noncriminal that the traditional criminal case history normally patrols and defends—ultimately locating the criminal squarely within society rather than outside of it. Both "border crossings" are, indeed, intricately related, and I shall explore this relationship in this chapter by presenting an overview of the *Outsiders* series and its contributions to the genre of the criminal case study. In order to demonstrate the radically experimental departure from tradition that this series undertook, I begin with a brief discussion of the development of the relationship between the criminal and the case history from the eighteenth-century *Pitaval* story to Michel Foucault's recent theories of the examination, then examine the ways in which Leonhard's series challenges and attempts to think through these conceptions of the criminal case history. I will then turn to a closer analysis of one of the most complex volumes in the series, Weiß's *The Vukobrankovic Case.*

The Criminal and the Case from Pitaval to Foucault

Outsiders of Society falls squarely within a tradition dating back to the eighteenth century of producing an encyclopedia of sensational criminal cases. François Gayot de Pitaval published the first volume of his *Causes célèbres et intéressantes* (Celebrated and Interesting Cases) in 1734, aiming the series at both professional and lay audiences. Pitaval's collection was an enormous success, appearing in nine separate editions before 1789.[9] The idea of publishing an archive of criminal cases quickly spread throughout Europe and the "Pitaval" story became an important and often-imitated genre that was still very much alive well into the second half of the twentieth century. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, numerous editions of sensational criminal cases continually found a home, as the editor of a nineteenth-century German *Pitaval* asserted, both "in the studies of scholars and the boudoirs of the elegant reading public."[10] The *Pitaval* thus attempted to bridge the gap between official and popular representations of criminality and achieved widespread success in doing so.

As the editors of the German *Neue Pitaval* (New Pitaval), which was first published in 1842, make clear in their introduction to the volume, the *Pitaval* was resolutely centered on the figure of the criminal and not the authorities that judge him.[11] This stance, the editors argue, enables them to present their case materials objectively and thoroughly, "allowing the psychological motives to speak purely and vividly for themselves."[12] The *Pitaval*, then, presented itself as an unmediated archive that sought to survey, explain, and classify criminals and their crimes. However, as Joachim Linder nicely demonstrates in his discussion of nineteenth-century German *Pitaval* literature, this concentration on the figure of the criminal from a seemingly objective stance results in anything but an objective presentation of the facts.[13] In the *Pitaval* tradition the criminal is presented as a curiosity, an aberration from the norm that makes him an interesting case. The powers that judge the criminal are thrust into the background as the individual criminal takes center stage to be documented, classified, and distinguished—by an invisible, purportedly infallible, and generally anonymous narrator.

Michel Foucault has argued, based in part on precisely this type of material, that over the course of the nineteenth century a new conception of the criminal emerges. No longer is a criminal simply someone who commits a crime, as in classical jurisprudence; rather, there now exists a new type of species, the "dangerous individual," whose criminal nature exists independent of a criminal act.[14] This shift, Foucault further argues, is accompanied by a "psychiatrization of criminal danger" (128) and the emergence of a "scientifico-legal complex."[15] In Foucault's analysis, it is not the legal system itself, but rather the scientific apparatus that emerges around it, that is now responsible for distinguishing between the criminal and the "normal" individual. The criminal becomes someone not just to be judged and punished, but also to be known and disciplined—he becomes the object of a series of examinations.

This new approach to criminality, as the *Pitaval* indicates and as Foucault argues, revolves very much around the process of writing—especially the writing of cases. In the much-discussed section on the examination in *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault establishes a clear and direct link between writing, social control, and the concept of the case.[16] "*The examination,*" he writes, "*surrounded by all its documentary techniques, makes each individual a 'case':* a case which at one and the same time constitutes an object for a branch of knowledge and a hold for a branch of power."[17] According to Foucault, in modernity the deviant individual is no longer someone simply to be judged and punished based on his transgression, but rather someone "to be trained or corrected, classified, normalized, excluded, etc." (191). This new form of exercising power is thus tied directly to a new method of forming and organizing knowledge. For Foucault, the techniques of writing and constructing cases establish a direct link between the individual and the institutions that seek to control him or her.

At the center of this new method of organizing knowledge, Foucault argues, lies "a whole meticulous archive constituted in terms of bodies and days" (189). This archive, Foucault continues, situates individuals "in a network of writing" and "engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them" (189). The archive, then, is the site at which institutions establish and maintain their power over individuals. Foucault is notoriously vague in locating the agent of this disciplinary power. His principal argument, in fact, is precisely that these shadowy forces are difficult to locate, because disciplinary power "is exercised through its invisibility" even as it "imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility" (187). Foucault's by now well-known story, then, is of the increasing visibility of the individual as a case subject to a normalizing discipline and the increasing invisibility of the powers that discipline him. Further, these shadowy institutions exercise their power over the individual through their means of organizing and categorizing knowledge. For Foucault, the "case" is a means of making an individual visible and thus an object of control by powers that themselves remain invisible.

Upon first glance, the *Outsiders* series would seem to fit nicely in line with Foucault's story; for in this series the criminal is, indeed, something to be known, the object of a series of investigations. The series explicitly places itself within the *Pitaval* tradition, as contemporary commentators rarely failed to observe, repeatedly describing it with terms such as "Pitaval-like" and "a modern Pitaval."[18] In the *Pitaval,* as in Foucault's history, the criminal is presented as a curiosity, an aberration from the norm that makes him an interesting case. However, something different is at work in the *Outsiders* series (and in modernist crime stories more generally): the invisible knowledge-system that is the object of Foucault's often paranoid descriptions increasingly serves as an object of investigation itself and is consequently made increasingly visible. Just as Foucault saw a new technique of writing working to establish and mask a new technique of power in the nineteenth century, these case studies attempt to locate a new technique of writing that will reveal and destabilize that very power.

Turning their attention precisely to the relationship that Foucault would later concentrate on, that between the criminal and his examiners, these studies repeatedly show the criminal to be the object of juridical, medical, journalistic, popular, and literary attention. The volumes in the *Outsiders* series are, indeed, archives, but not the "meticulous archive" described by Foucault.[19] Rather, they are intentionally disorganized and often self-contradictory archives that contain multiple perspectives and varied approaches to their objects of investigation. Both in the individual volumes (each of which is ultimately the work of a single author) and in the series as a whole (which, in a sense, stands as the work of a corporate "author"), the views expressed in the *Outsiders* volumes simply cannot be reconciled with one another. And this multivalence is precisely what the series strives to attain as it demonstrates the impossibility of clearly locating causality and guilt, seeking instead to map the contradictions between the various discourses that endeavor to make the criminal visible as a distinct and deviant individual. The series thus sets its sights on nothing short of a rethinking of the concept of the criminal case study itself. While I want to do justice to the independence of these volumes (the very fact that each volume has a different, clearly identified author is in itself quite important and a significant departure from the *Pitaval* tradition of presenting a case history as if it were not mediated), I hope also to point to a unity of this project, and indeed to its larger significance for the Weimar understanding of criminality. Before turning to a more detailed analysis of the series, however, I first wish to examine a remarkable contemporary meditation on the relationship between judge and judged in the genre of the case that provides an interesting counter to Foucault's theories and demonstrates that the concern with rethinking the genre of the case in Weimar Germany extended beyond the fourteen volumes of the *Outsiders* series.

In his 1930 study of the basic structures that he sees as lying at the foundation of all literary efforts, *Einfache Formen* (Simple Forms), the German literary theorist André Jolles offers one of the most extended and compelling accounts of the form of the case that has been written to date.[20] After discussing a number of forms "which we can identify by name,"[21] such as legend, saga, myth, and puzzle, Jolles turns to a form that he argues belongs alongside these other more familiar entries in his system of fundamental forms, but for which "we still do not have a standard name" (172). Jolles names this newly discovered form *Kasus*.

Jolles is quick to point out that this new form (*Kasus*, or the case), differs in important respects from other, seemingly similar forms, such as the *example.* In order to demonstrate this difference, he turns to the realm of crime and justice, citing a story from the popular section of the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* (Berlin Illustrated Newspaper) titled "Groteske und Tragik im Strafrecht," (Grotesquerie and Tragedy in the Criminal Code):

> Amid the throngs of the city a pickpocket steals my wallet, which held 100 Marks in small bills. He divides his booty with his girlfriend, whom he tells about his lucky catch. If they are both caught, the girlfriend would be punished as a receiver of stolen goods.

> Let's say I had only a 100 Mark bill in my wallet. If the thief gets change and gives fifty marks to the woman, then she is exempt from punishment. For it is punishable as receiving stolen goods only when it is the exact item attained by the crime, not the change for the money.[22]

After citing the relevant paragraphs of the criminal code, Jolles turns to an analysis of this short text and finds that its seemingly simple structure is actually quite complex: it falls into two separate halves that work both with and against each other. The first half makes a law visible; it is an application of a judicial norm: the pickpocket and his friend are both found to be guilty of theft according to the criteria of the law.[23] As such, it is an *example* of a particular German law, but not in itself a *case*. The actions of the pickpocket and his friend are simply weighed against the relevant paragraphs of the legal code. For it to be a case, Jolles argues, the second half of the text must also be present. He uses the traditional judicial image of a scale to illustrate this point. Just as a scale has two dishes, this text—and the form of the case—has two parts. In the second half of the text the process of judging is turned around: instead of allowing the law to weigh or judge the act, it allows the act to weigh or judge the law itself. In other words, the actions of the thieves are not the only issue being judged here; their actions themselves are also, in turn, judging the law. The resulting text (which only in its entirety is a case) is thus no longer a one-sided example of a law, but rather an interrogation of it. Taken as a whole, the two parts of this text do not point to a law but rather to a loophole in the law: "What comes to light in this totality is the fact that the scales do not weigh correctly, the ruler does not measure correctly. … In this totality the girlfriend is not measured by a norm, rather one norm is measured by another norm" (178–9).

As James Chandler succinctly states in his analysis of this passage: "The text thus turns into a double balancing act in which the balance that weighs an act against the law is balanced with one that weighs one law against another."[24] While this dual weighing of laws and actions has long been recognized as a basic tenet of case law, Jolles' significant contribution is to note that this balancing act is precisely what characterizes the fundamental *structure* of the case. Jolles' crucial point, as Chandler has noted, is that "the case names not only the anomaly for a scheme or system, but also the scheme or system itself, as well as those processes by which anomalies and norms are adjudicated" (208–9).

The case is thus for Jolles not that which deviates from the norm, as Foucault would have it, but the form that provides the means of questioning the norm itself. Whatever its intended function might be, the case ultimately does not illustrate a condition or answer a question; rather, it poses a question, without ever being capable of answering it. The case is not closed—indeed, the case is *never* closed. It poses a question that cannot be answered, because it is not in itself a judgment, but rather a means of judging. It is, as Chandler nicely puts it, "the very form of 'deliberation'" (209). Keeping in mind Jolles' theory of the case as a borderline genre that performs a double balancing act, I now want to return to a discussion of the series of cases that attempted, five years before Jolles published

Simple Forms, to rethink the genre of the case history along precisely the lines that Jolles laid out, allowing acts to judge norms as it allowed norms to judge acts and seeking to find a new narrative structure through which to enact this process.

Society and Its Outsiders: Toward a Documentary Crime Narrative

The dual title of the series—*Outsiders of Society – the Crimes of Today*—indicates a dual object of investigation. On the one hand, just as in the *Pitaval*, the subjects of these volumes are the individual criminals, the outsiders of society. But the other half of the title points toward a different object of investigation: the crimes of today. The intentional ambiguity of the genitive here signals an ambiguity of agency that will be a central concern of each volume: Does it mean that the crimes under discussion are recent in origin? Or is the present (*die Gegenwart*) itself guilty of a crime? Another peculiarity of the title of the series is its unbalanced nature: the first half refers to people (outsiders), the second half refers to things (crimes). Had the series title been more consistent—"Outsiders of Society – The Criminals of Today"—these questions would not have arisen. But the series explicitly seeks to raise such questions. Like Jolles' scales, the series continually attempts to weigh two different objects simultaneously: criminals and crimes, outsiders and society, guilt and innocence, laws and transgressions. These texts announce themselves not only as investigations into criminal matters, but also as investigations into the investigations of criminal matters.

The criminals that initially seem to be the objects of investigation are rarely the most important figures in these texts, as Eduard Trautner clearly indicates in the introduction to his tale of spies and politics in revolutionary Berlin, *Der Mord am Polizeiagenten Blau* (The Murder of Police Agent Blau, 1924).[25] For Trautner, the Blau case, which revolved around the murder of a suspected double agent who had infiltrated the revolutionary communist movement in the chaotic days following the end of World War I, was ultimately not about individuals or even their competing political ideologies. He states quite clearly that "the case of the murdered police spy Karl Blau doesn't interest me so much because of the people involved, and certainly not because of the victim" (7). Signaling his departure from traditional criminal case studies (from the Pitaval to scientific monographs), Trautner notes that his study will not be concerned with the actions of individual participants: "One questions whether one is dealing with actors or with statistics, for one doesn't see individuals here as much as functionaries of invisible currents and movements" (7). Trautner proposes a radically alternative way to view the relationship between criminal and society, which differs from traditional criminological writings in that it is based neither on sociological analysis nor on individual psychology. Rather, his volume seeks to depict a range of forces at work in the events that are usually hidden in sociological and psychological studies.

Trautner attempts to accomplish this task through a narrative experiment that incorporates extended verbatim reproductions of trial documents, witness state-

ments, press reports, and even posters and pamphlets from post-World War I Berlin. The bulk of his study is made up of a montage of citations pertaining to the trial, as well as artifacts that give a more general sense of the atmosphere of Germany in the immediate aftermath of the War. This reliance on materials that are often included in the text without commentary led several contemporary reviewers to accuse Trautner of not giving his material sufficient narrative form.[26] In light of Trautner's theory of outsiders and their roles in a mysterious system of forces, however, his study can be read as an attempt to let the various tales of crime that surround this case stand in their self-contradictory forms, thus allowing his narrative not simply to offer an alternative explanation of the events and thereby add yet another version of the story, but rather to map a battle among and between these various narratives.

Foucault also saw tales of crime as having the potential not only to consolidate power, but to destabilize it as well. Against the monovocal examination that I discussed above, Foucault opposed the dossier, which would, in its intersections of competing discourses, use the figure of the criminal to make disciplinary power visible. His introduction to the collaborative volume on the parricide Pierre Rivière demonstrates the similarity between the project at stake there and the project of the *Outsiders* series as I am reading it:

> I think that what committed us to the work, despite all our differences of interests and approaches, was that it was a "dossier," that is to say, a case, an affair, an event that provided the intersection of discourses that differed in origin, form, organization and function … All of them speak, or appear to be speaking, of one and the same thing … But in their totality and their variety they form neither a composite work nor an exemplary text, but rather a strange contest, a confrontation, a power relation, a battle among discourses and through discourses.[27]

Over fifty years before Foucault, the case studies in the *Outsiders* series consciously function as precisely this type of dossier, recording through their documentary approach the battles among and within discourses that Foucault noted in the case of Rivière. It is not incidental that the authors involved in the *Outsiders* series turn, like Foucault and Jolles, to the field of law and crime to think through these representational struggles, for the form of the modern trial-by-evidence could well be characterized as a sort of battle over who gets to represent the people and events under discussion: the prosecution presents its case—it tells its story based on a selection of the evidence—and the defense presents its case, its own, different story based on a selection from the same body of evidence. Within each competing camp, of course, there are further differing versions of events presented by the accused, the victims, and the witnesses (both the expert and the material witnesses). The judge and jury are charged with voting for the representation that they find the most convincing and thereby officially sanctioning it. The authors in the *Outsiders* series are engaged in a similar battle of representations, but endeavor to break free from this narrative competition and occupy a position outside of the traditional trial schema. By incorporating these

various representations into their narrative, they seek not to endorse one particular version but rather to make them visible as precisely what they are: imaginative reconstructions of events based on what is always inadequate evidence. They are ultimately more concerned with representing the *process* of narrating events than with weighing in on the narrative that they find most compelling.

As such, these volumes constitute an odd genre that falls between nonfiction (trial reports, criminological treatises) and literary fiction. Hermann Ungar, a writer known primarily for his fictional works, seems to be aware of the generic category into which his case narrative of a woman accused of contracting the murder of her husband, a Czech army officer, is likely to be placed. To counter this, he prefaces his study, *Die Ermordung des Hauptmanns Hanika – Tragödie einer Ehe* (The Murder of Captain Hanika: The Tragedy of a Marriage, 1925), with a disclaimer that his book is to be read as a chronicle, not a work of art:

> The presentation that follows does not aspire to be seen as a work of art. It only presents what actually occurred, as can be gleaned from the available material. The reporter was reluctant, in the account of a criminal case, to fill in the gaps with his own inventions, to round out the characters through the addition of imagined characteristics and details—that is to say, to make use of the material as an artist and turn the chronicle into a novella. The goal of the presentation is nothing more than to organize and register the material without further ambitions.[28]

Ungar's language closely echoes that of the *Pitaval,* whose authors similarly claimed to record events without subjectively reworking them. But the story that Ungar tells surely reads nothing like a chronicle. Indeed, Ungar himself admits that the emotionally charged atmosphere surrounding the case precludes even the possibility of neutrality (13–14)—least of all on the part of the judge and the jury, whom Ungar pronounces "surely incapable of allowing the contexts to affect them more deeply, in that they do not see the wider contexts" (66). The "chronicalist" himself, of course, claims a position outside of and above the courtroom, from which these contexts are visible—and are illuminated in the case study he writes (95–6). Ungar's alleged chronicle, as a reviewer for the *Prague Press* noted, is ultimately anything but an objective record of events—and not in spite of, but rather precisely *because of* its ostensibly objective (*sachlich*) style:

> But precisely this method of presenting the material gives the attentive reader a feeling similar to what one has when reading one of Stendhal's Italian novellas: the technical juridical style begins almost from the inside out to provide illumination. The dry recitation of events suddenly becomes thrilling, submerged psychic processes become visible, and it turns out to be much less difficult to give meaning to these puzzling events than one had supposed.[29]

Neither strictly a chronicle nor strictly a work of fiction, Ungar's combinatory approach to his subject occupies a position between traditional genres. And it is precisely this status as a hybrid genre that lends Ungar's account its power. This explains the continual protests on the part of the authors in the series that they

are engaged in writing neither clinical case histories nor works of fiction. As in Jolles' notion of the genre of the case, we are faced here and in the other volumes of the series with a borderline genre that falls between science and fiction in its attempt to maintain a double balancing act between weighing an individual's actions and a society's judgment of them. Exciting and crisply narrated stories combine with clinical analyses and trial transcripts in the pages of these volumes, inaugurating a new genre that would become increasingly popular later in the century: the documentary crime novel. The messy archives of this series consistently present multiple voices and multiple perspectives, which refuse and indeed work against narrative closure by incorporating self-contradictory documents. Following Jolles' notion of the case, these studies are left open-ended; they are acts of deliberation, not pronouncements of judgment.

Although Ungar and others protest that they are not writing works of fiction, they are careful to highlight their proximity to techniques usually associated with fictional genres. For example, in his examination of the case of a murder resulting from a financial dispute in the Austrian lumber industry, *Schuß ins Geschäft* (Shot into Business, 1925), Franz Theodor Csokor explicitly presents his study as a sort of documentary drama, containing chapters with titles such as "The Psychiatrists' Chorus," in which he presents what he terms a "Satyr Play" of psychiatric experts, and "The Fifth Act," in which he relates the trial as an elaborate and to some extent pre-scripted tragic performance.[30] Leo Lania's report on the trial following the 1923 "Beer Hall Putsch," *Der Hitler-Ludendorff Prozeß* (The Hitler-Ludendorff Trial, 1925), incorporates a large amount of material reproduced verbatim from the trial protocol and turns the trial transcript into a dramatic work, referring to the events in the courtroom as a "Tragicomedy," a "Judicial Comedy," and even a grotesque "farce."[31] Iwan Goll invites comparisons with a different medium altogether: he presents a crucial section of his study of the French political terrorist Germaine Berton as a film, thus making the montage technique that he utilizes throughout his story explicit. The chapter, titled "Film of a Boy's Suicide," describes the suicide of a fifteen-year-old boy in short, disconnected "scenes" that lack coherent transitions and refuse to explain his death: "Philippe's Death remains a mystery to everybody."[32] Before the climactic verdict in the trial, Goll returns to the film metaphor, imagining a cinematic version of the defendant, Germaine Berton, sharing the screen with other female political terrorists from different times and places (75). The montage technique derived from film and the documentary drama is thus explicitly applied to the genre of the criminal case history in this series in order to launch a critique of the judicial system that has more force than either pure fiction or the standard case chronicle.

It is through this montage technique that these revisionist case histories seek to accomplish their double balancing act of judging a criminal *and* his/her judges. Indeed, as I argued above, it is ultimately the investigation rather than the investigated that receives the bulk of attention in these volumes. In Berton's trial, Goll argues, the issue that concerned the court was not the murder of which the defendant was accused, but the political philosophy that lay behind the murder (46).

Lania writes of the Hitler-Ludendorff trial in similar terms: "Court proceedings? No, it was more of a seminar on treason."[33] In his volume on an early-twentieth-century trial of an Italian countess accused of murdering her husband, Karl Federn evokes Lania's language of a judicial tragicomedy, describing the proceedings as "from beginning to end, a judicial monstrosity, a tragic farce.[34] Federn's close examination of these tragic and farcical events thus turns the tables and puts society on trial: "There are cases in which the fiction cannot and may not be maintained. There are events in which the backbone of a country, of a society, is tested" (207). It is ultimately this story of a social order put on trial that grips Federn, not the tragic personal tale of a woman whom he believes to have been wrongly convicted of murder. He writes that the memoirs of the falsely convicted woman, Linda Murri-Bonmartini, had little effect on him, but that "what I now read about the trial gripped me so strongly that I was led to follow the proceedings carefully and methodically, and spent almost an entire year occupied only with this event" (7). Like Lania, Goll, Trautner, and most of the other authors in this series, Federn consciously tells the story not of an individual on trial, but of a society on trial: "My book is to this day just as much a presentation and critique of the proceedings as of the crime that was the subject of these proceedings" (13).

These volumes thus serve as inquiries not simply into specific cases but rather into the very modes by which cases are presented. They are investigations of investigations, in which—half-a-century before Foucault—the "scientifico-legal complex" is made visible and critiqued by allowing different narratives to speak with and against one another. On the one hand, then, these investigations of investigations proceed along familiar lines, detailing the ways in which the criminal is socially constructed and bringing to light the contradictions among the various discourses of which he is the object. By now a commonplace in modern cultural studies, the social determination of the concept of the criminal is certainly a hallmark of these volumes. Indeed, the outsiders represented in this series tend to fall under now familiar categories of cultural studies: race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. To be sure, anxieties about these issues run through each of these studies in interesting ways.[35] However, something else is also at work in these studies, which detail not only how the criminal outsider is a fantastic social construction, but also the ways in which the criminal plays a crucial role in constructing society. Social construction, in other words, works both ways. Each of these volumes is centrally concerned with the ways in which society tends to imagine itself around the figure of the criminal.

As I have been arguing, Weimar Germany seemed to take pleasure in the spectacle of crime, in imagining its own decadence. This was a society that celebrated the dissolution of boundaries between the criminal and the noncriminal. Döblin's self-proclaimed "unique perspective" about the uncertain borders between criminal and noncriminal turns out to have been anything but unique.[36] Indeed, every volume in the *Outsiders* series (including, of course, Döblin's) takes this dissolution of borders between criminal and noncriminal as its fundamental point of departure. This blurring of boundaries between guilty and innocent is

conveyed most provocatively in Theodor Lessing's study of the serial killer Fritz Haarmann, *Haarmann: Die Geschichte eines Werwolfs* (Haarmann: The Story of a Werwolf, 1925).[37] In his text, which he wrote following close observation of Haarmann's trial, Lessing makes substantial use of the metaphor of the werewolf, an ancient, mythical, inhuman creature, in order to describe the man who was found guilty of twenty-four brutal murders. According to Lessing, Haarmann is less a human being than a modern manifestation of the primeval werewolf, a piece of "soulless, senseless, insane nature" (186). And yet, he argues, Haarmann unknowingly serves as a symbol for modern society:

> This werewolf with radio and electricity, this cannibal in clean, elegant attire, could serve as a symbol for the soul of western wolf-people in general, repeating on a small scale precisely what occurred on a grand scale during those five heroic years in which every act of murder and every spiritual death was placed in the service of the wolf's morality and when the oldest insight into human nature also became the newest: "Homo homini lupus e natura," man is by nature a wolf toward other men. (180)

Indeed, in Lessing's analysis Haarmann comes out favorably in comparison with those who sat in judgment of him: "After all of the lies of the 'educated and cultured citizens' had been self-righteously and naively proclaimed, it was almost refreshing and liberating to hear Haarmann crudely fibbing and mixing truth and poetry. And one realized: the people of truth are lying. This master actor is telling the truth!" (119) Lessing's Haarmann is more creaturely than human and certainly unaware of his symbolic importance, but precisely because he falls outside of social and intellectual discipline, he offers insights into human nature—insights that are both timeless and timely. Lessing suggests that Haarmann's gravestone bear the inscription: "We are all guilty" (193). On some level, Lessing's entire study of the Haarmann case is a provocative exposition of the nineteenth-century criminologist Alexandre Lacassagne's famous statement that "every society has the criminals it deserves."[38]

Eduard Trautner takes this argument even a step further, arguing that every society has the criminals it needs. "The idea of society itself," he maintains, "sets the role of the outsider as a given" and "dictates the role that he must play within it."[39] Society's outsiders "fill a gap that needs to be filled" and actively work to promote the further development of that society (15). They are a sort of criminal vanguard by which society advances. Society thus *needs* its outsiders, not simply as scapegoats but as a structural necessity in the process of change. These outsiders of society turn out, in fact, to be the ultimate insiders of society, occupying precisely the site at which one can best interrogate the relationship between individuals and institutions in modernity. This positioning of the criminal as a liminal figure who is as inside society as he is outside of society is graphically represented in the series logo imprinted on every volume of the series, which depicts the ornately scripted initials "AG" with an arrow pointing to a dot located within a small loop. This dot presumably represents the "outsiders" named in the title, placing them at the margin, but still within the letter "A." The criminal becomes,

in these volumes, not a monstrous aberration from the norm, who can ultimately be understood, explained, and thereby separated from society, but rather a key to understanding the normal workings of society.

The criminal serves for these authors—and, as I have been arguing throughout this book, for Weimar society more generally—as a sort of "virtual archive" to which they continually return in search of a truth that the criminal and his crime are seen to hold—a truth about human behavior and social structures. Every volume in the series revolves around the question of the relationship between the criminal and his society and in each the crisis produced by the criminal and his crimes is seen as pointing toward a crisis in the "normal" workings of society. This turning of the tables on the investigative apparatus in order to put society on trial did not, of course, originate with this series; there was by the 1920s a long tradition of such works. What is significant about the series is its insistence on the crucial interplay between two related crises: a crisis of causality and a crisis of narrative. What is ultimately at stake in this series is the redefinition of the relationship between the two main terms in the series title—outsiders and society—and the role that narrative plays in establishing this relationship. Instead of utilizing a long-standing mechanism by which to distinguish the criminal from the noncriminal—the case study—the authors of the volumes in the *Outsiders* series turn their attention to this mechanism of distinction itself. They thereby demonstrate that when one refuses to understand a criminal case through a coherent causal narrative, one uncovers an uncertainty about where to locate agency and guilt.

Among the most complex meditations in this series on the relationship between narrative and judgment is Ernst Weiß's *The Vukobrankovic Case,* a text that departs radically from the traditional criminal case study in order to investigate the role that narrative plays in establishing notions of guilt and causality. The complex literary moves that Weiß undertakes in this text make it paradigmatic for the *Outsiders* series, making it a good case through which to illustrate the workings of the series as a whole. I would therefore now like to turn to a consideration of this text and its attempt to develop a new style of case narrative.

Ernst Weiß's *The Vukobrankovic Case* and the Battle Over Representations

Ernst Weiß's study of Milica Vukobrankovic, a Yugoslavian schoolteacher who was twice brought to trial in Austria under accusations of having attempted to poison the families she worked for, consists largely of direct transcriptions of the two trials interspersed with Weiß's own parenthetical comments.[40] He also integrates a number of press reports on the case, quotes the psychiatric experts called in to evaluate the defendant, and undertakes an extended reading of Vukobrankovic's autobiography written while she was in prison, *Weiberzelle 321* (Women's Prison, Cell 321). Altogether, these varied documentary sources compose approximately two-thirds of the entire book, the central "plot" of which

revolves around the struggle over representation of the defendant. Critics and publishers alike have had difficulty classifying this text by an author known primarily for his fictional writings. Joachim Linder and Jörg Schönert speculate in their discussion of the text and its many inconsistencies and nonsequitors that Weiß's opinionated first-person narrator is intended as a satire and is, therefore, probably not to be equated with the author.[41] They thus read it as a literary work with an unreliable first-person narrator. Indeed, in 1982, as I mentioned above, Suhrkamp republished *The Vukobrankovic Case* as a novel. Inge Weiler, on the other hand, finds the narrator to be "consistent in his ability to explain matters," serving as a sort of court of last appeal over the court and the defendant alike.[42] In his reconstruction of the Vukobrankovic case, the historian Gabriel Finder treats Weiß's study primarily as a reliable documentary source alongside trial protocols and journalistic accounts.[43] In contrast, Hania Siebenpfeiffer reads the text as a narrowly focused and opinionated reconstruction of events that employs various narrative strategies in order to pass itself off as an impartial trial protocol.[44] It thus seems that now, as in the 1920s, critics are sharply divided over what to make of the odd genre of this text. It is, I think, difficult to sustain Linder's and Schönert's classification of *The Vukobrankovic Case* as a novel, since it clearly differs from Weiß's more traditional works of fiction. It also clearly differs from a clinical case history or a trial chronicle. What, then, are we to make of this work? How are we to read it?

Weiß's ostensible intention in *The Vukobrankovic Case* is to argue that the defendant can be diagnosed as suffering from what he terms a "Poisoning Complex" that places her in a long line of historical precedents: "Whether poisoning is a crime or an uncontrollable drive remains an open question. What is certain is that V. was a poisoner and that she exhibits all of the typical traits of the great poisoners."[45] The numerous historical and clinical documents that Weiß assembles in his text are intended to support this argument and demonstrate this complex. Especially important for Weiß's argument are the frequent comparisons that he makes between Vukobrankovic and the celebrated nineteenth-century poisoner Gesche Gottfried, whom he pronounces Vukobrankovic's "greater, more devilish sister" (159):

> If one follows the transcript of the trial of Gesche Gottfried, one finds many points of similarity that cut across the many differences between these two women in terms of age, milieu, and family heritage. It even suggests the emergence of a typical complex in which the statements of the two women become almost verbatim repetitions of each other. (191)

As Linder and Schönert have shown in their analysis of the history of representations of female poisoners, Weiß's account is firmly entrenched within the traditional gendered discourse on the subject.[46] Vukobrankovic, says Weiß, proceeds illogically ("typical for a female poisoner"), has a seductive aura ("the singular power of the female poisoner"), combines coldness with sentimentality ("which seems to be especially characteristic of female poisoners") and, finally, shows probable homosexual tendencies and sexual pathologies.[47]

Weiß is not alone in reading the defendant into this tradition. The bulk of the evidence presented in the courtroom also revolved around Vukobrankovic's supposed "typicality" as a poisoner: the prosecutor speaks of leafing through the history of poisoning in his summation, few of the reports on the trial fail to mention historical connections to other poisoners, and even Vukobrankovic's own defense attorney makes reference to the poisoning tradition in presenting his client's case.[48] Perhaps the most interesting piece of evidence marshaled against Vukobrankovic involves her own interest in the tradition of poisoning. According to Weiß, she "occupied herself extensively with the literature on poisoning" (63). Among the most important pieces of evidence cited to demonstrate an excessive interest in the history of poisoning was her alleged possession of a scientific monograph on poisoning written by Erich Wulffen, one of the leading German criminologists of the early twentieth century. The question of whether she had read Wulffen's important technical study of poisoners, *Psychologie des Giftmordes* (The Psychology of Poisoning), and why she might have read it occupies a central role in both trials. The prosecution and its witness continually referred to Vukobrankovic's alleged familiarity with it as evidence that she was guilty of the crimes for which she was on trial. The extensive discussion of this volume and Vukobrankovic's alleged possession of it culminates in a humorous exchange during the second trial, in which the defendant finally interrupts a long discussion of whether she might have possessed this monograph: "My dear minister," she snaps, "when a cook wants to make an apple strudel, she buys a cookbook. She wouldn't buy a book titled 'The Psychology of the Cook.' If I were planning to poison someone, I would buy myself a book about poisons, not about the psychology of the poisoner" (96–7). Even Weiß, who is unrelentingly hostile to the defendant, admits that she scores on this point; the prosecutor, he reports, was unable to respond to her retort.

Vukobrankovic's clever joke is more than a moment of levity in the trial. It is also a moment in which the use of documents in this case takes on a new light. The very document that the experts consult in order to diagnose the defendant turns out, according to their own arguments, to play a role in her own development. Not only do others read Vukobrankovic as part of the tradition that Weiß refers to as a "poisoning complex," but she also reads herself as part of this tradition. What this moment indicates is a certain circularity in the construction of criminal types. Once the "female poisoner" is established as a type of person (and, by 1924, the type is well established), the category begins to acquire a life of its own. Otherwise disparate, individual, and often unmotivated and inexplicable actions then begin to be categorized, explained, and thereby contained within this category.[49] Fears about female sexuality, for example, find themselves being bound up with fears about murder: sexual assertiveness and especially tendencies toward homosexuality, accusations of which are pervasive throughout Weiß's text, become indications of more serious criminal impulses. In other words, a wide and disparate range of fantasies coalesce around the notion of a certain type of person.[50] For instance, although it was an important issue both for the court

and for Weiß, there is utterly no evidence that Vukobrankovic was homosexual, other than the belief that female poisoners tend to be homosexual. Among Weiß's most outrageous "proofs" of Vukobrankovic's guilt is his assertion that she "gives the impression that she is a lesbian, a trait that is not uncommon among teachers" (192). Here we see a coalescence of fears and fantasies about women in positions of power: teacher = lesbian = poisoner.

Such absurd pronouncements inevitably invite the "constructions of … " arguments that have constituted an enormous body of cultural studies approaches to criminality (among other subjects) in recent decades. Being particularly well suited to an intersection of Foucauldian and gender-studies approaches, the popular, legal, and scientific discourses on female poisoners, in particular, have attracted a good deal of attention in recent years.[51] These studies inevitably—and often quite convincingly—see the construction of the female poisoner as a reflection of male fantasies and fears about women in general. However, I want to take this issue of fantasies and social construction in a slightly different direction. As the inclusion of Vukobrankovic's alleged possession of Wulffen's treatise on the psychology of the poisoner as evidence against her during the trial makes clear, this notion of construction is more complicated than most commentators have realized. Fantasies about criminals are also quite often fantasies *of* criminals about themselves. In other words, the discourse of the female poisoner impacts not only how Vukobrankovic is viewed from the outside; it also impacts the ways in which she views herself. Leaving aside the question of whether she is actually guilty of attempting the murders of which she stood accused (and, like Weiß, I am inclined to believe her to be guilty), it is indisputable that at least in her fantasies about herself she inhabited the role of The Female Poisoner. In addition to Wulffen's monograph, other literary evidence against Vukobrankovic presented in the first trial included a reading of her novella "Das Armband" (The Bracelet), a thinly disguised roman-à-clef in which the Vukobrankovic character appears as a falsely accused criminal whose feelings of revenge against society take on destructive tendencies. In Vukobrankovic's novella, a noncriminal finds herself drawn to criminal activities as a result of being viewed as a criminal.

More important to Weiß's investigation is Vukobrankovic's other major literary work, her prison memoir *Weiberzelle 321* (Women's Prison, Cell 321), which describes the injustices faced by her and her fellow prisoners. Weiß discusses Vukobrankovic's memoir at great length in order to prove her guilt by drawing comparisons with the autobiographical writings of Gesche Gottfried. Weiß adopts a sort of cultural studies methodology in his approach to this case, reading Vukobrankovic's fictional and autobiographical works alongside scientific texts and related literature such as Gottfried's autobiography, in order to demonstrate the "poisoning complex" for which he is arguing.[52] Weiß's parallel reading is, in fact, invited by Vukobrankovic's own assertion that, in her first-person memoir, "time and place have been altered, but the inner truth of these lines have not. For much of what my sisters in suffering experienced and endured affected me as if I had experienced it myself" (157). It is not only Weiß and the prosecution, in

other words, who find themselves failing to distinguish between Vukobrankovic and other criminals, but also Vukobrankovic herself. Indeed, her memoir is from start to finish a document of her self-identification with other criminals. She announces that the purpose of her book "is not to discuss my guilt or innocence. Nor will my most personal affairs be touched upon here. I will discuss only that which I have experienced myself or experienced through observing others and which lays claim to universal relevance and general interest" (156). The divide between observed experiences and personal experiences disappears in Vukobrankovic's fantasy world. Whether she experiences something herself or observes the experience of another is an unimportant distinction for her. Her memoir promises to concentrate on experiences of universal significance, at times attributing the experiences of others to herself and at times attributing her own experiences to others. This breakdown of a border between self and other to which the memoir continually bears witness leads Weiß to assert that Vukobrankovic's ventriloquizing of her story through other people as well as her telling other people's stories as her own are all examples of her "own thinly-veiled confession" (164).

Vukobrankovic's intense identification with others is not limited to her fellow prisoners. As she describes the trauma she suffered when police searched her room for evidence, she writes of her peculiar relationship with things: "The things with which I grew up are like good friends to me. Each of these pieces has its own life, its own special story, and I often thought that they knew and loved me too. … It was painful, as if one had murdered a good friend. … The people who rummaged through my bookshelves had no respect for books" (170–1). The books for which the authorities showed no regard were precisely those that would be used as evidence against Vukobrankovic in both trials. The prosecution argued that the fact that her reading list included Goethe's *Faust,* Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* Zola's *Rome,* and a biography of the Austrian cultural critic Karl Kraus, as well as Wulffen's monograph on the psychology of poisoning, proved her to be of an unstable and criminal nature.[53] Though the notion that bad books make bad people might well seem to be a specious—and, even by 1924, somewhat outdated—argument, Vukobrankovic's self-confessed intense identification with these books and other objects as her friends, and even a part of her personality, actually seems to support such an interpretation. There is, in Vukobrankovic's case, a marked failure to distinguish between self and other. Her identification with other people and with literary characters clearly led Vukobrankovic to begin to mold her own life to conform to that of others.

What is at work here, I want to argue, is a sort of "looping effect," through which, as Ian Hacking has argued, "systems of knowledge about kinds of people interact with the people who are known about," thus impacting the "way in which individual human beings come to conceive of themselves."[54] What *Women's Prison, Cell 321* bears witness to, then, is not an asocial or antisocial individual, but an over-identification, a sort of over-socialization, an inability to distinguish between self and others. The memoir, the trial, and Weiß's study all represent a similar inability to distinguish between an individual and a type. Like the mem-

oir, then, the case also bears witness to this "looping effect," a certain circularity at work in the construction of criminal types. Just as the category of the "female poisoner" becomes what Mark Seltzer has referred to in a different context as a "point of attraction around which a range of acts, effects, fantasies and representations then begin to orbit," it also becomes (again, in Seltzer's words) "the point of attraction of the kind of person who traumatically experiences himself as nothing 'deeper' than a social construction."[55]

Fantasies about the criminal and fantasies of the criminal about herself thus merge around the term "female poisoner"—and also around Weiß's suggestive term "poisoning complex." The "poisoning complex" that is made visible in this study is not only (and not primarily) the psychological complex that Weiß intends by his term, but precisely the circularity of representations and constructions that I have been describing. The "poisoning complex" that Weiß's text demonstrates is a different type of complex; it is a self-perpetuating and self-fulfilling circular system, as in the terms "scientifico-legal complex" or "military-industrial complex." It is a sort of "*poisoner's* complex," a circular and self-sustaining system of representations and constructions that revolve around the "type" of the "female poisoner." What is at stake in the trial and in his narrative of the case, Weiß shows, is not whether a crime was committed, but rather whether the defendant can be fit into the category of person who commits the crimes of which she was accused. The question posed by the court and by Weiß is ultimately not: "Did Vukobrankovic attempt to poison the families she worked for?" but rather "Does she conform to the tradition of the 'female poisoner?'"

Weiß's documentary method does not ultimately marshal evidence to prove the defendant's guilt, although he claims that it does precisely that. Rather, it details a battle of representations—between the prosecution and the defense and among experts and journalists. Weiß, however, is interested not primarily in recording the conflicts and contradictions among these various discourses, as were many of the other authors in the *Outsiders* series. His primary achievement—whether intentional or not—comes in tracing the *similarities* among the competitors in this battle.[56] The competing representations in this study ultimately document a breakdown of distinction between individuals and types—at the level of the subject, just as at the level of the system.

The result of this breakdown, Weiß concludes, is an uncertainty that cannot be overcome within the criminal justice system as it exists. At the end of his study, he turns to the practical question of what is to be done with "borderline cases" such as Vukobrankovic, who cannot be adequately accounted for by the legal system. Although he does recommend a judicial response to cases such as that of Vukobrankovic (life in a mental asylum without opportunity for parole), he does not resolve the problem that he presents: both constructionist arguments and arguments that fail to take the process of social construction into account fail to adequately grasp the complex exchanges between criminals and society. But precisely in this failure Weiß found a productive position from which to write. The resulting text thus occupies a complex position between fact and fiction, between

explanation and mystery, and between the investigation of an individual criminal and the investigation of the investigators themselves.

The Vukobrankovic Case, like the other volumes in the *Outsiders* series, has its origins in a series of crises arising from confrontations with criminality in the early twentieth century: the breakdown of belief in clearly defined distinctions between criminal and noncriminal, the loss of faith in the possibility of narrative coherence, the ultimate irreconcilability of competing causal explanations, the uncertain boundaries between inside and outside. The authors of these volumes follow the criminals they depict to these uncertain borders—between people, things, forces, and genres. And it is precisely in this space that they develop a new technique of writing that seeks to reveal and destabilize the very power that Foucault has argued originally established and masked itself through a new technique of writing. In place of Sherlock Holmes's "single connected narrative," the crime stories of the *Outsiders* series offer an often unstable, dossier-like, multiperspectival narrative. They thus represent a sharp break with the traditional case history and the traditional psychological novel and thereby inaugurate a new, critical style of crime fiction, the documentary crime novel. The following chapter traces the further development of this new genre by examining what is perhaps the most celebrated crime story of the Weimar Republic: Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz,* a narrative whose origin can be clearly traced to the experiment in rewriting the genre of the case history undertaken by the *Outsiders* series.

Notes

1. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles,* in *The Illustrated Sherlock Holmes Treasury* (New York: Avenel Books, 1976), 527–631. Here, 616.
2. The volumes were, in order of publication: Alfred Döblin, *Die beiden Freundinnen und ihr Giftmord;* Egon Erwin Kisch, *Der Fall des Generalstabschefs Redl;* Eduard Trautner, *Der Mord am Polizeiagenten Blau;* Ernst Weiß, *Der Fall Vukobrankovics;* Iwan Goll, *Germaine Berton: Die rote Jungfrau;* Theodor Lessing, *Haarmann: Die Geschichte eines Werwolfs;* Karl Otten, *Der Fall Strauß;* Arthur Holitscher, *Ravachol und die Pariser Anarchisten;* Leo Lania, *Der Hitler-Ludendorff-Prozeß;* Franz Theodor Csokor, *Schuß ins Geschäft (Der Fall Otto Eissler);* Thomas Schramek, *"Freiherr von Egloffstein";* Kurt Kersten, *Der Moskauer Prozeß gegen die Sozialrevolutionäre 1922: Revolution und Konterrevolution;* Karl Federn, *Ein Justizverbrechen in Italien: Der Prozeß Murri-Bonmartini;* and Hermann Ungar, *Die Ermordung des Hauptmanns Hanika: Tragödie einer Ehe.*
3. Forthcoming volumes were advertised at the end of the published volumes. Volume 8 (Arthur Holitscher's *Ravachol und die Pariser Anarchisten*) contains the most ambitious list, announcing the titles of thirty-two volumes (such as Arnolt Bronnen on "Der Fall Vaquier" and Joseph Roth on "Der Fall Hofrichter," neither of which ever appeared). See Arthur Holitscher, *Ravachol und die Pariser Anarchisten,* Außenseiter der Gesellschaft 8, ed. Rudolf Leonhard (Berlin: Verlag Die Schmiede, 1925), np.
4. Among the more positive reviews of the series as a whole, see: Fritz Dehnow, "Rudolf Leonhard, Außenseiter der Gesellschaft," *Archiv für Kriminologie* 77 (1925): 314; Erich Ebermayer,

"Außenseiter der Gesellschaft," *Die Literatur* 27 (1924–5): 632–33; Paul Plaut, "Außenseiter der Gesellschaft," *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Soziologie* 2 (1926): 174–9; Heinrich Temborious, "Außenseiter der Gesellschaft," *Literarischer Handweiser* 61 (1925): 694–6; and Ignaz Wrobel (Kurt Tucholsky), "Außenseiter der Gesellschaft," *Die Weltbühne* 21 (1925): 359–60. Negative reviews include: Richard Euringer, "Außenseiter der Gesellschaft," *Die schöne Literatur* 26 (August 1925): 265–6 and Hans Nordeck "Außenseiter der Gesellschaft," *Hochland* 25 (1928): 546–9. That the series attracted attention (both positive and negative) in both scientific and literary journals indicates the crossover nature of the project, which I will discuss below.

5. The only extended treatment of the series that I am aware of is Joachim Linder, "Außenseiter der Gesellschaft. Die Verbrechen der Gegenwart: Straftäter und Strafverfahren in einer literarischen Reihe der Weimarer Republik," *Kriminologisches Journal* 26 (1994): 249–72. Stefan Andriopoulos also offers significant insights into several of the volumes in the series in "Die Zirkulation von Figuren und Begriffen in kriminologischen, juristischen und literarischen Darstellungen von >Unfall< und >Verbrechen<," *Internationalies Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 21: 2 (1996): 113–42. My analysis is indebted to both of these fine discussions of the series.
6. In reviewing the first four volumes of the series, one commentator, for example, places it alternately in the traditions of Dostoevsky, the *Pitaval,* and the feuilleton within the space of a few paragraphs. See Temborius, "Außenseiter der Gesellschaft," 694–5.
7. See Joachim Linder and Jörg Schönert, "Der Mordprozeß gegen Christiane Ruthardt," in *Literatur und Kriminalität: Die gesellschaftliche Erfahrung von Verbrechen und Strafverfolgung als Gegenstand des Erzählens,* ed. Jörg Schönert (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1983), 239–359. Here, 355.
8. Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood,* published in 1965, is usually seen as the inaugural text of this genre, which Capote distinguished from documentary fiction, in that "the criteria of conventional novelistic criticism cannot be brought to bear fully upon this work." Lars Ole Sauerberg discusses *In Cold Blood* as a "test case" of this impure genre in *Fact into Fiction: Documentary Realism in the Contemporary Novel* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 20–2. The above quote from Capote is on 21. In the German context, Ernst Ottwalt's 1931 nonfiction novel of Weimar justice, *Denn sie wissen, was sie tun,* prompted many of the same debates that would revolve around Capote's novel three decades later.
9. See Inge Weiler, *Giftmordwissen und Giftmörderinnen. Eine diskursgeschichtliche Studie* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1998), 15–6.
10. Paul Johann Anselm Ritter von Feuerbach, *Aktenmäßige Darstellung merkwürdiger Verbrechen* (Gießen: 1828–1829). Quoted in Weiler, *Giftmordwissen und Giftmörderinnen,* 17.
11. "Die Form des Rechtsverfahrens steht uns überall nur im zweiten Gliede … Im ersten Gliede steht uns die historische und psychologische Bedeutung des Falles." Julius Eduard Hitzig and Wilhelm Häring, eds., *Der neue Pitaval. Eine Sammlung der interessantesten Criminalgeschichten aus älterer und neuerer Zeit* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1842f.), 7: ix, quoted in Linder, "Deutsche Pitavalgeschichten," 316.
12. *Der neue Pitaval,* 3: xi, quoted in Linder, "Deutsche Pitavalgeschichten," 316.
13. See Linder, "Deutsche Pitavalgeschichten," 342–343.
14. See Michel Foucault, "The Dangerous Individual," in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture,* ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), 125–51.
15. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 23.
16. On Foucault's notion of the examination in the history of the philosophy of the case, see John Forrester, "If *p,* then what? Thinking in Cases," *History of the Human Sciences* 9.3 (August 1996): 1–25, esp. 10–13.
17. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 191.
18. Dehnow refers to it as "pitavalartig" and "ein moderner Pitaval" in "Außenseiter der Gesell-

schaft," 314. Other commentators who refer to the series as coming in the tradition of the *Pitaval* include Hans Nordeck (see Nordeck, "Außenseiter der Gesellschaft," 546); Heinrich Temborious, (see Temborious, "Außenseiter der Gesellschaft," 695); and Kurt Tucholsky (see Wrobel (Kurt Tucholsky), "Außenseiter der Gesellschaft," 359).

19. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 191.
20. My thanks to James Chandler for introducing me to Jolles. His discussion of *Einfache Formen* and its relationship to casuistry and historical fiction in English Romanticism *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) forms the basis of my own discussion of Jolles. See especially 207–9 and 243–5.
21. André Jolles, *Einfache Formen* (Halle [Saale]: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1930), 171.
22. Balder, "Groteske und Tragik im Strafrecht," *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* 3 (1928). Quoted in Jolles, 173.
23. See Jolles, *Einfache Formen,* 176–7.
24. Chandler, *England in 1819,* 244.
25. See Eduard Trautner, *Der Mord am Polizeiagenten Blau,* Außenseiter der Gesellschaft 3, ed. Rudolf Leonhard (Berlin: Verlag Die Schmiede, 1924), 7.
26. See, for example, Erich Ebermayer, "Außenseiter der Gesellschaft:" "Die Darstellung Trautners ist breit, arbeitet das Wesentliche nicht klar genug heraus und hält sich zu sehr an die Akten" (632).
27. Michel Foucault, ed., *I, Pierre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother, my sister and my brother…: A Case of Parricide in the 19th Century,* trans. Frank Jellinek (Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska Press, 1975), x.
28. Hermann Ungar, *Die Ermordung des Hauptmanns Hanika. Tragödie einer Ehe,* Außenseiter der Gesellschaft 14, ed. Rudolf Leonhard (Berlin: Verlag Die Schmiede, 1925), 9.
29. "Außenseiter der Gesellschaft," *Prager Presse* 26 Januar 1926, 6.
30. See Franz Theodor Csokor, *Schuß ins Geschäft (Der Fall Otto Eissler),* Außenseiter der Gesellschaft 10, ed. Rudolf Leonhard (Berlin: Verlag die Schmiede, 1925).
31. Leo Lania, *Der Hitler-Ludendorff Prozeß,* Außenseiter der Gesellschaft 9 (Berlin: Verlag Die Schmiede, 1925), 134.
32. Iwan Goll, *Germaine Berton: Die rote Jungfrau,* Außenseiter der Gesellschaft 5, ed. Rudolf Leonhard (Berlin: Verlag Die Schmiede, 1925), 54. The "film" is on 50–4. Compare Linder, "Außenseiter der Gesellschaft," 261: "Die Deutung des Knabenschicksals bleibt ganz dem Leser überlassen: Er kann die Bilder verbinden."
33. Leo Lania, *Der Hitler-Ludendorff Prozeß,* 83.
34. Karl Federn, *Ein Justizverbrechen in Italien. Der Prozeß Murri-Bonmartini,* Außenseiter der Gesellschaft 13, ed. Rudolf Leonhard (Berlin: Verlag Die Schmiede, 1925), 18.
35. Homosexuality plays a role in the contributions by Döblin, Kisch, Weiß, and Lessing. Ethnicity is a key factor in Csokor's volume. Gender is a central point of discussion in the volumes by Döblin, Weiß, Goll, Federn, and Ungar. Finally, class figures prominently in most of the volumes in the series.
36. See my discussion on 7, above.
37. Theodor Lessing, *Haarmann: Die Geschichte eines Werwolfs.* Ed. Rainer Marwedel (München: dtv, 1995).
38. Alexandre Lacassagne, "Les transformations du droit pénal et les progrès de la médecine légale, de 1810 à 1912," *Archives d'anthropologie criminelle* (1913), 321-65. Here, 364.
39. Trautner, *Der Mord am Polizeiagenten Blau,* 14–5.
40. On the Vukobrankovic case, see Gabriel Finder, "Der Fall Vukobrankovics: Begutachtung und Verurteilung einer Verbrecherin um 1920," *Kriminologisches Journal* 26 (1994), 47–69.
41. See Linder and Schönert, "Der Mordprozess gegen Christiane Ruthardt," 352 and 355.
42. Weiler, *Giftmordwissen und Giftmörderinnen,* 227.
43. See Finder, "Der Fall Vukobrankovics."

44. See Siebenpfeiffer, *Böse Lust,* 134–41.
45. Ernst Weiß, *Der Fall Vukobrankovics,* Außenseiter der Gesellschaft 4, ed. Rudolf Leonhard (Berlin: Verlag Die Schmiede, 1924), 185.
46. See Linder and Schönert, "Der Mordprozess gegen Christiane Ruthardt," 352–55.
47. See Weiß, *Der Fall Vukobrankovics,* 35, 33, 54, 34, 105, 119, and 192. See also Linder and Schönert, "Der Mordprozess gegen Christiane Ruthardt," 354.
48. See Weiß, *Der Fall Vukobrankovics,* 128, 134, and 145.
49. Mark Seltzer has argued this point about a different criminal type, the serial killer, persuasively and brilliantly in *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998). See especially pages 105–23. My discussion of the ways in which the type of the *Giftmörderin* functions in Weiß's study owes much to Seltzer's insights.
50. Interestingly, little is made of Vukobrankovic's Yugoslavian nationality, which is especially surprising given that the trial took place in Vienna around World War One. Weiß evokes her Yugoslavian origins only infrequently. In one passage he pronounces her "certainly a peculiar type of woman of the Yugoslavian race" and proceeds to describe her striking appearance and "glimmer of intellectuality" (27). Gender seems to trump ethnicity in the notion of the "Female Poisoner."
51. See, for example, Weiler, *Giftmordwissen und Giftmörderinnen;* Linder and Schönert, "Der Mordprozess gegen Christiane Ruthardt"; Isabella Claßen, *Darstellung von Kriminalität in der deutschen Literatur, Presse und Wissenschaft 1900–1930* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1988), 147–211; and Siebenpfeiffer, *Böse Lust,* 95–149.
52. See Weiß, *Der Fall Vukobrankovics,* 153–84.
53. See Weiß, *Der Fall Vukobrankovics,* 21, 194.
54. Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 6. Quoted in Seltzer, 107.
55. Seltzer, *Serial Killers,* 108.
56. Hania Siebenpfeiffer contrasts Weiß's narrative strategy with that of Döblin's contribution to the Outsiders series (which I will discuss in the following chapter), asserting that it is "much less complex and avoids the interdiscursive ambivalence of a literary playing field" (Siebenpfeiffer, *Böse Lust,* 140). Although I agree that Döblin's narrative is more complex and effective than Weiß's, I would argue that Weiß's text does ultimately present its readers with a measure of interdiscursive ambivalence, albeit perhaps unintentional.

Chapter 3

Understanding Criminals

The Cases of Ella Klein and Franz Biberkopf

Introduction

Alfred Döblin's study of Ella Klein and Margarete Nebbe, two young married women who fall in love and conspire to murder Klein's husband by contaminating his food with arsenic, was the first volume published in the *Outsiders of Society* series. It is in many ways representative of the general trajectory of the other volumes in the series, but is remarkable in its scope and ambitions. In this chapter, I will take a close look at this text in light of the actual case on which it is based, in order to understand how Döblin frames contemporary debates about crime and justice and relates them to modernist literary theories and narrative techniques. This focus on a particular case and its account will allow me to demonstrate in some detail precisely how the new genre of the nonfiction documentary crime novel works in the *Outsiders* series. I will then proceed to examine Döblin's seminal work of fiction, *Berlin Alexanderplatz,* which is clearly indebted to his earlier work on Klein and Nebbe. This discussion will allow us to understand on a broader level the importance of the *Outsiders* series for the development of literary fiction in 1920s Germany.

Döblin's narrative of the Klein-Nebbe case attempts, five years before his story of another working-class criminal, Franz Biberkopf, to examine not only the breakdown of the borders between criminal and noncriminal and between individual and society, but also the ways in which the criminal case study works to refortify these borders. His ultimate goal in this text, which he titled *Die beiden Freundinnen und ihr Giftmord* (The Two Girlfriends and their Murder by Poison-

Notes for this section begin on page 83.

ing, 1924), is to point to a way in which the genre might be reformed and this refixing of false borders might be avoided. Although the scholarship on Döblin is large and varied, it has largely ignored this text, which in fact does not even appear in the standard edition of his collected works.

Those who have commented on *The Two Girlfriends* have had difficulty classifying it. Nearly every critic since the time of its publication has agreed that this text is a strange hybrid of medical and literary writings. Heinrich Temborious writes in a positive review of Döblin's book that "author and doctor in one person produce this text."[1] Hans Siemsen echoes this sentiment: "We are dealing here not with three people, but five. The three involved in the trial—and then the doctor Döblin and the writer Döblin."[2] Recent critics have continued this tendency to comment on the hybridity of *The Two Girlfriends,* but have tended ultimately to emphasize one of its many facets. At one end of the spectrum lies Manfred Maiwald, who reads it as a "trial report."[3] At the other end of the spectrum, Ernst Ribbat classifies Döblin's text as a "crime novel."[4] Other critics have ended up somewhere in the middle but lean toward one side or the other. Robert Wenzel views *The Two Girlfriends* primarily as a medical case history, a product of the doctor Döblin and clearly related to his other, more clinical texts,[5] while Walter Müller-Seidel emphasizes the literary qualities of the text: "one could call it a short story."[6]

Critics have faced a similar difficulty in classifying Döblin's most famous crime narrative, *Berlin Alexanderplatz – Die Geschichte vom Franz Biberkopf* (Berlin Alexanderplatz: The Story of Franz Biberkopf, 1929). Writing in 1931, Eugen Schmidt labeled Döblin's book "the best literary crime novel in years."[7] Döblin's publisher advertised it as "a crime novel that will take your breath away; a portrait of the Berlin underworld."[8] More recently, Walter Muschg has labeled *Berlin Alexanderplatz* a "criminal novel."[9] Döblin himself rejected this classification, setting the tone for much subsequent discussion of the novel by proclaiming sacrifice, rather than criminality, to be the central theme of his novel.[10] The discussion of whether *Berlin Alexanderplatz* adheres to the generic rules of the crime novel has been overshadowed however by a much larger and more frequent discussion over the dual title of Döblin's novel, which begs the question of whether it is primarily the story of a city (Berlin Alexanderplatz—an urban novel) or of an individual (The Story of Franz Biberkopf—a modernist *Bildungsroman*).[11]

The confusion over how to classify these texts arises from the fact that both represent hybrid genres that are ultimately impossible to classify in traditional terms: they are neither strictly scientific studies nor strictly literary fictions, neither a textbook case of an urban novel nor a *Bildungsroman.* That both of these experiments in blurring generic boundaries revolve around the subject of criminality—and that both could, with some justice, be broadly classified as crime stories—is, as I will argue, not coincidental. Criminality is not incidental to Döblin's narrative experiments, since these experiments arise precisely from an attempt to answer questions that criminal activity poses: questions about agency and causality, uncertain borders, and the circulation of violence. They are, indeed, crime

narratives; but, like the German modernist experiments with the genre that I have been discussing, they are markedly different from traditional crime stories.

Like the other volumes in the *Outsiders* series, Döblin's *The Two Girlfriends* represents an attempt to find the language to narrate the breakdown of borders between the individual and society, as well as between the criminal and the non-criminal, the norm and the aberration. However, he takes his investigation a step further than the other authors, seeking not only to interrogate this breakdown of borders but also to confront the role that narrative itself plays in establishing these borders. *The Two Girlfriends* is substantially more self-reflexive than the other volumes in the series. It thus allows one to view the structure and problems of the new documentary crime novel genre most clearly. Döblin's later crime narrative, *Berlin Alexanderplatz,* carries this investigation even further and adopts a revolutionary narrative form to tell its hybrid story. As I argued in the previous chapter, criminologists, medical experts, lawyers, judges, and novelists are all engaged in a similar process: using evidence to tell stories. In both of his major crime stories Döblin's interest is not only in the competition between these various tales and their various perspectives on causality but also in what these stories themselves can and cannot do. For Döblin, all of the crucial questions raised by criminals and their actions can ultimately be seen as questions of narrative.

The Case of Ella Klein and Margarete Nebbe

When, in 1922, two women were arrested in Berlin for the murder of one of their husbands and the attempted murder of the other, the ensuing trial, which revealed their lesbian relationship and contained all of the major traditional stereotypes of female criminality—hysteria, child-like behavior, hypersexuality—created quite a sensation.[12] The facts of the case were never much in dispute and are, on one level at least, fairly straightforward. In 1918, the nineteen-year-old Ella Thieme, a hairdresser from Braunschweig, moved to Berlin, and two years later she married a carpenter named Klein. Klein was an alcoholic who brutally mistreated Ella in retaliation against her repeated rebuffing of his sexual advances. This mistreatment led her to leave him and seek a divorce after spending only a few weeks together. Her family, however, convinced her to return to her husband, and the mistreatment continued.

Ella soon met another unhappily married woman, Margarete Nebbe, a neighbor in the working-class district of Berlin-Lichterfeld. The two quickly developed an intense emotional and sexual relationship. Over the next several months, they exchanged nearly six hundred letters in which they fantasized about liberating themselves from their husbands so that the two of them could be free to be together. In order to facilitate this liberation, they concocted a plan to poison their husbands by putting arsenic in their food. Ella began the process in February 1922; two months later, on 1 April, Klein was pronounced dead of alcohol poisoning in a Berlin hospital.

Klein's mother quickly grew suspicious of Ella's odd behavior and the mysterious circumstances surrounding her son's death. She launched an investigation into the cause of Klein's death, which an autopsy revealed to be arsenic poisoning and not alcohol poisoning as had been assumed. On 22 May 1922, Ella Klein was arrested and charged with the murder of her husband. One week later Margarete Nebbe was arrested on charges of aiding Ella in the murder and attempting to poison her own husband. Nebbe's mother, Marie Riemer, was also implicated in the plan but was later pronounced innocent.

Over the course of the five-day trial, which began on 12 March 1923, the story of the two women became a topic of widespread public discussion. All six hundred letters that Klein and Nebbe had exchanged were read aloud in court, and their often racy content was reproduced in the press. A series of medical experts, including the noted sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, offered testimony on the case. Though the public was not admitted into the courtroom, the papers reported that large crowds gathered outside the courthouse each day in order to catch a glimpse of the participants and to hear the latest developments.[13] On 16 March both women were found guilty by the jury and given jail sentences that most commentators on the trial found to be shockingly light.[14]

The involvement of the two women in Klein's murder was never really in doubt. Yet, despite the lack of suspense, the case clearly struck a nerve. Surely the sensational elements of the trial—especially the homosexual relationship between the defendants—had much to do with the grip it had on the public. But it was ultimately something else that captured the attention of a number of interested observers: not the case's sensational anomalies, but rather its paradigmatic nature. To most commentators, this sensational case seemed to be as much about Weimar society as it was about two women and their crime. The question was not whether Klein and Nebbe conspired to murder Klein's husband, but rather what ultimately caused them to commit their crime. These questions prompted the resurgence of a long-standing debate among observers of the trial, as well as among the expert witnesses called to testify during the trial, over the extent of the roles that both internal and external factors played in leading these women to commit murder. This was, to be sure, not a new debate, but it seemed to take on a new urgency and reach a new level of sophistication in and around this case.

Among the many interested observers of the case were two of the most prominent writers of the time, Joseph Roth and Robert Musil, both of whom followed the case closely and wrote commentaries on it immediately following the trial. Roth and Musil both emphasized the case's paradigmatic qualities rather than its uniqueness. As Roth notes in an article that appeared in the *Berlin Börsen-Courier* on the day following the decision: "As unusual as this 'sensational trial' is and as odd as these two women are—their marriages and their lives are typical for women of the lower-class circles from which Nebbe and Klein come. It is this typicality that gives the trial its special social and psychological significance."[15]

Although he doesn't retreat from his initial classist observation, Roth does extend the implications of the case beyond the milieu of working-class women:

> The murderers are psychologically interesting in that they supply evidence that in these primitive women, whom one thinks one knows so well because one encounters them in the subway, on the streets and in stores, the most complicated processes are being played out: perversion and refinement, mysteries and obscurities are not only the consequences of a luxurious spiritual decadence. They are not the outcome of well-bred sensitive nerves, but rather natural-unnatural psychological storms whose preconditions are everywhere and in every person—in the "simple" souls of regular people and in the "refined" organisms of intellectuals. (952)

The picture Roth paints here is a familiar enough version of Weimar decadence, but extended beyond the luxurious upper class to which it is typically confined. What the case of Klein and Nebbe reveals is that decadent behavior and oversensitive nerves are not limited to an aberrant minority of disenchanted upper-class Germans in the years after the end of World War I, such as those depicted in films like Fritz Lang's *Dr. Mabuse* and in sensational novels set in exotic locals. Rather, it is a general feature of Weimar society. This universality is, for Roth, the real ground for interest in the case, even though he argues that this was precisely what was lost on the curious public, who was not "mature enough to ignore the excitement and lasciviousness of the events" (952). Roth argues that the real lesson of the Klein-Nebbe case lay in the realization that the "unnatural predisposition" that came to light over the course of the trial is not limited to these two women, nor to others of their class or gender. It is, rather, perhaps present in all of us.

Indeed, Roth argues that it is a structural feature of Weimar society. The crises and tensions of post–World War I Germany are, according to Roth, ultimately responsible for this crime. The two women are not the agents behind their crimes; they are simply symptoms of their time and place. He mentions the tension between the increased visibility of homosexuality coupled with an increased disapproval of sexual behavior labeled as "aberrant." He also argues that new opportunities for women combined with a widespread disapproval of divorce placed these women in an impossible situation that led directly to their criminal actions. Roth's crucial point is that it would be a mistake to label these women and their actions as aberrations that can be attributed to specific physical, psychological, or social circumstances. Their actions are, on the contrary, representations of a structural crisis in Weimar society.

Writing three days later, Musil makes an observation similar to Roth, pronouncing the case "so typical … that it could have been taken from a scientific treatise."[16] For Musil, as for Roth, it is the case's very typicality that makes it interesting. He goes a step further than Roth, however, in that he sees this typicality as not ultimately explaining the events but rather lending an air of uncertainty and mystery to the case (669). The difficulty of the case for Musil lies precisely in the uncertainty as to where to locate guilt: "One should ask in crimes of this type what portion of the blame should lie with society for allowing it to get so far. A resolute criminal has indeed more bad in him/her than a good, but weak, person, but also more seeds of goodness, says John Stuart Mill" (671). For Musil, the murky cause of the crime is ultimately not to be found in feelings of hatred

or revenge but rather in the nature of love itself: "Not only do noble feelings of love transform themselves into crimes, but at the same time outwardly criminal thoughts are internally perceived as indistinguishable from a noble feeling of love" (671). In Musil's reading, these two women committed their crimes out of love, not hatred. Musil seems to be pointing here not toward asocial or antisocial behavior as the cause of the women's crimes but rather toward an over-identification, an over-socialization—not distance, but closeness. As I will argue later, Döblin picks up on this suggestion and develops it in his study of the case.

Roth and Musil were not unique in viewing the murder as a direct result of the perversity of social conditions. An anonymous commentator for the Social Democratic daily *Vorwärts* sums up this position:

> The artificially-cultivated ignorance and mental complacency of women, the position of marital servitude that has been sanctified by tradition and law, the lack of understanding by the parents, the brutality of the "Lord of the creation," the husband in married life, make up the social background of this drama. The women were thus "innocently guilty."[17]

In this view of the case, which emphasizes the political side of the trial, the crime arises from the famously troubled gender relations in Weimar Germany. Like Roth and Musil, the commentary in *Vorwärts* sees the crime as symptomatic of a rapidly modernizing but still in many ways traditional society.

While many argued, along with Roth, Musil, and the *Vorwärts* commentary, that the cause of the crime (and therefore at least part of the guilt) lay in social relations, others argued just as forcefully that the cause of the crime must be sought in the physical or psychological makeup of the defendants. For many commentators, the events had to be viewed primarily within the context of sexual perversity: "Everything in this trial breathed sexuality," wrote Arthur Brandt, the defense attorney for Klein and Nebbe, in the *BZ am Mittag*.[18] In this view, the crime must, therefore, be seen as what another commentator labeled a "sex crime."[19] Indeed, a different report on the trial that appeared in *Vorwärts* (the same paper that had pointed to the societal roots of the crime) argues that "the decisive word in this case belongs not to the field of psychiatry, but to sexual pathology."[20] "In any event," the report continues, "the expert witnesses were in agreement that both of the defendants display congenital psychological defects" and that Klein in particular suffers from "limitations in mental and physical development that extend even to the internal sexual organs." The expert witnesses called by both sides—the highly distinguished team of Magnus Hirschfeld, Friedrich Leppmann, and Otto Juliusburger, whose presence indicates the importance of this case—were indeed united in their diagnosis of physical and psychological deficiencies in the two defendants. Although the three experts differed on the specifics of the case, they all agreed that the women suffered from a sexual pathology that lay in their physical constitution and their sexual orientation.

In this view of the case—which united the expert witnesses and dominated the press reports—the cause of the crimes could be easily traced not to the social repression that Roth and Musil cited but to the physical and psychological con-

ditions of the individual women who were guilty of them. According to these commentators, Klein and Nebbe were not products of a broken social structure that forced them into their crimes, they were products of their aberrant sexuality. They committed the crimes because they suffered from a sexual pathology.

Both the expert witnesses who testified in the trial and the many critics who analyzed the proceedings were thus divided into two opposing groups that offered different interpretations of the events and consequently drew different lessons from them. Those critics who located the cause of the women's actions in the perverse social relationships that made up Weimar society argued that in order to prevent the further occurrence of such crimes one must concentrate on altering social conditions and not on rehabilitating or incarcerating the individual criminals. In contrast, those who located guilt in a psychological or physical abnormality in the two women argued in favor of punishing or treating the women.

The arguments that came to the fore in the case of Klein and Nebbe were not, of course, new or peculiar to the crime under question here. Rather, they revolved around an ongoing debate in criminology since its beginnings: the question of what produces criminal behavior. Over the course of the development of the modern science of criminology at the end of the nineteenth century, there quickly emerged three competing schools of thought on what makes a criminal. The anthropological school, which argued that the source of criminality lay in biological factors; the sociological school, which argued in favor of social factors in determining criminality; and the psychological school, which sought to tie criminality to psychic factors.[21] The debate between (and within) these three general schools as to whether criminality was ultimately inner-determined (psychological or physical) or outer-determined (sociological) was still heated in the 1920s and, indeed, continues to this day.[22] During the Weimar Republic, pioneers in criminal sociology such as Franz Exner argued for the importance of environmental factors in causing criminal behavior, while criminal biologists such as Theodor Viernstein argued that criminal behavior was biologically rooted.[23] This debate is typically characterized as a methodological disagreement about the most effective way to understand a criminal's actions. At its center, however, lie philosophical questions about the status of the individual subject in modernity and the role that causality plays in human actions. This is the point at which the interest of experts in law and criminology merge with the interests of modernist writers and philosophers. As with the theories of detective fiction that I discussed in chapter one and the meditations on the case study that I discussed in chapter two, crime once again becomes a privileged point of investigation for modernist intellectuals. No other subject offered as many insights into the status of individuals and the social structures in which they operate in modernity as did crime—which reveals the moment at which these mechanisms break down.

Döblin's investigation of the case of Ella Klein and Margarete Nebbe locates itself at the intersection of these two debates—the debate over criminology and the legal system and the debate over philosophical and narratological questions. His chief interest is in the implications of the legal-criminological debate for

the literary-philosophical debate. Indeed, his investigation of the case is, in fact, primarily an investigation into the arguments about where to locate the cause of criminality. Is criminality primarily inner-determined or outer-determined? Do these distinctions make sense in this case—or in any case? And what do our answers to these questions tell us about the status of the individual within modern society? Finally, how can we capture the causes and effects of criminality in writing? In answering these questions, Döblin incorporates the various voices—expert and otherwise—that surrounded the case, not in order to judge which is most compelling, but rather (and here he differentiates himself from the other commentators on the case) to understand how they go about reaching their conclusions and to find a way to narrate this condition.

"We understand it—on a certain level": Alfred Döblin's *The Two Girlfriends and their Murder by Poisoning*

In his retelling of the story of Klein and Nebbe published just a year after the trial had ended, Döblin changes the characters' names to Elli Link and Grete Bende, but otherwise makes no attempt to obscure the relationship to the case on which it is based, a relationship that would have been obvious to any informed contemporary reader. Indeed, the links and breaks between the "real" case and Döblin's retelling of it stand at the center of his investigation, which seeks to address the genre of the case study and the ways in which it serves to placate its audience by locating guilt in an individual and thereby preserving the social order. That Döblin saw his case study as an intervention in the traditional form of the genre becomes quite clear in his remarkable epilog to the volume, in which he argues that the reasons behind this crime can never be known and a pattern of behavior cannot be developed: "I wanted to demonstrate the difficulty of the case, to question the impression that one could understand everything or even most things about such a large chunk of life. We understand it—on a certain level."[24]

Döblin had already exhibited this narrative skepticism a decade earlier in his programmatic essay "An Romanauthoren und ihre Kritiker" (To Novelists and their Critics), in which he argued that the psychological novel is "a purely abstract phantasmagoria," in which "the analyses and attempts at differentiation have nothing to do with the workings of an actual psyche."[25] In order to avoid such myths of causality and individuality, Döblin advocates a turn away from psychology and toward psychiatry as the basis of literary production:

> We can learn from psychiatry, the one science that captures the whole psychic life of the individual. It has long recognized the naïveté of psychology and confines itself to noting the products and movements of the psyche—and shrugs its shoulders at anything further, the "whys" and "hows." (120–1)

Döblin's position in this early essay is certainly consistent with the epilog of *The Two Girlfriends and Their Murder by Poisoning,* in which he seeks to question not

just the notion of causality implied by a coherent narrative of a life, but also the effects of its imposition in turning a person and an event into a case:

> We know nothing about psychic continuity, causality, the psyche and its concentrations of elements. We must accept the facts of this case, the letters and actions, and programmatically refuse to truly explain them. Not even if we were to delve here and there more deeply into events, would anything have happened.[26]

As a theoretician, Döblin is remarkably consistent. Yet, these musings on the nature of the case study in the epilog must come as a shock to the reader, since they follow a story of over one hundred pages in which this complex case is related as a crisp, exciting, and smoothly flowing narrative that offers plenty of events and explanations. In retrospect, it becomes clear that this narrative was able to be kept intact only because—as in the *Pitaval*—the narrator's presence was elided throughout the story. In the first line of the epilog the narrator makes his first, sudden appearance: "When I attempt an overview of the entire course of events, it is just like in the story: 'a wind came and uprooted the tree'" (112). The introduction of the first-person tellingly coincides with the evocation of a story. Döblin is clearly pointing to the tale he has just told and indicating that this initial semblance of narrative order was a necessary first step in his argument. Indeed, Döblin admits his own need to establish the very narrative order about which he will, in the epilog, exhibit such skepticism—his need to understand the mysteries of the case:

> When I reflected on the three, four people involved in this affair, I had the impulse to travel the streets that they routinely traveled. I also sat in the pubs where the two women got to know one another, I visited the apartment of one of them, spoke with her personally, spoke with others involved and observed them. (114)

The story that Döblin tells, in which he incorporates newspaper reports, trial records, medical testimony, and statements from those involved in the case, is, in fact, full of "whys" and "hows." Indeed, the question of *whether* Elli was guilty of murdering her husband (along with the question of whether Bende[27] served as her accomplice) was never really an issue, either in the case or in Döblin's retelling of it. What was at stake in the courtroom, as Döblin points out, was something that took the jury well beyond questions of guilt and innocence. As in the trial that Ernst Weiß studied in *The Vukobrankovic Case* (a case that bears many similarities with that of Klein and Nebbe), the chief questions concerned not the crime itself but rather the constitutions of the criminals that led them to the crime:

> A small group of learned men studied the physical and mental constitutions of the women and attempted to form an image on the basis of extensive experience. The prosecuting and defending attorneys both shed light on the lives of these women. In every case it was not the act that stood in the center, the poisoning itself, but rather practically the opposite of an act: namely how this course of events came to be, how it was possible. Indeed, they set out to demonstrate how this event was unavoidable. (100)

These various expert voices are incorporated into Döblin's account of the case and the trial. Döblin's case history, like Weiß's, devotes the bulk of its attention to detailing the arguments and positions presented at the trial. And those issues, as we have seen, break into two main schools in this case: those experts who saw the crimes as arising from certain physical or psychological abnormalities in the two women (childhood trauma, malformed organs, an innate homosexual "drive") and those experts who argued that the causes lay in social conditions (abusive spouses, economic hardship, a society unaccepting of homosexuality).

Döblin ultimately does not, of course, decide between these competing explanations. Indeed, at times he seems to take sides with each. "Elli's female organs," he tells us, "were not properly developed" (100), thus presenting the jury with the task of "pronouncing a uterus guilty" (100–1). But at the same time, Döblin argues, the jury ought to, but cannot, consider other possible locations of guilt, such as Elli's father, who forced his daughter to return to her abusive husband.[28] At one moment the source of Elli's criminality seems to lie in her body; at another moment, it seems to lie in her society. What Döblin offers us is not a mystery that lacks a coherent explanation, as the epilog seems to announce, but rather an abundance of explanations—plenty of "whys" and "hows."

The first part of the story and the epilog, in short, simply do not hold together. Nor, I would argue, did Döblin intend them to. His experiment with the narrative form of the case study attempts to overcome the fixation of guilt and the artificial separation of the aberrant criminal from a normal, noncriminal society by allowing the different parts of his text to come into conflict with one another. In other words, not only does he detail a battle among representations in this case, he also sets up a battle among his own representations; his narrative thus turns on itself and maps the conflicts and contradictions within itself.

In addition to the story and the epilog, Döblin appends two additional sections to his study: the first is a series of charts that are supposed to serve as "a visual overview of the main phases of the case" (110). Though it initially seems that Döblin improbably intends these charts to offer a final explanation of the case, they too fall short of describing the course of events. Döblin's various attempts to explain the "whys" and "hows" of the case are, by his own admission, inadequate; he remarks of the charts that the stress lies less on their presentation of facts than on their vivid visual quality: "The main thrust here lies not on theoretical truth, but rather on the graphic demonstration, the possibility of simply communicating at least the most important elements" (111).

The second section appended to the study is a series of handwriting samples, along with character analyses based on Elli's and Grete's writing styles. Even after the publication of the volume, Döblin continued to be interested in this graphological evidence, writing to the noted graphologist Ludwig Klages and soliciting his opinion on the case.[29] The need to explain, to situate and to separate and the need to avoid the reductions that come with this very act of explanation, situation, and separation are simultaneously present in Döblin's study. He summarizes his presentation thus:

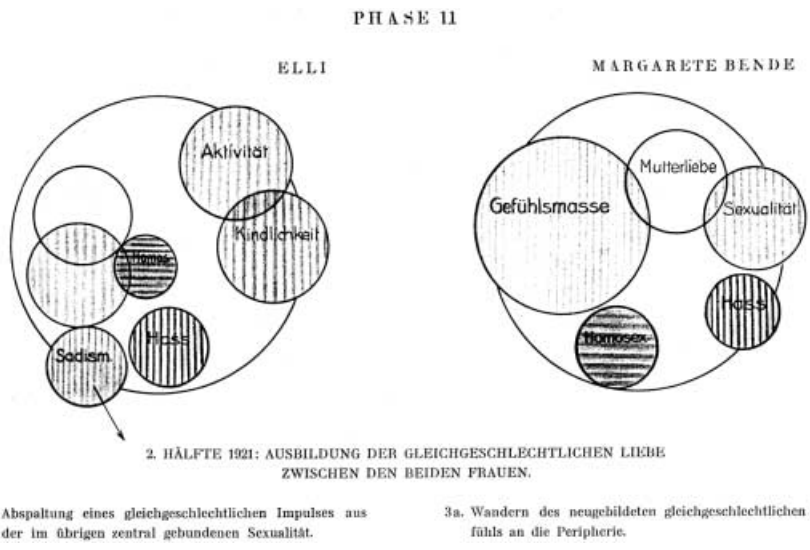

Figure 3.1 A visual overview of one of the main phases in the case of Ella Klein.
Source: Alfred Döblin, *Die beiden Freundinnen und ihr Giftmord* (Berlin: Verlag die Schmiede, 1924). The publisher is no longer in existence.

> The whole thing is a tapestry made up of many individual scraps—cloth, silk, even pieces of metal and clumps of clay. It is stuffed with straw, wire, and yarn and in many places the pieces are not bound together. Many rips are bound together with glue or glass. Then everything is seamless and bears the stamp of the truth. It has been thrust into our customary processes of thinking and feeling. It happened that way—even the participants believe that. But it also didn't happen that way. (112)

Döblin confirms the accuracy of the story he just told: that's the way it happened. Everybody agrees on the basic events. But at the same time he denies the accuracy of his own narrative: it didn't really happen that way. What Döblin emphasizes here is the mythical nature of the traditional case history: a crime cannot adequately be explained and hence contained by giving it narrative form, for the narrative coherence is an illusion. This is precisely the sort of argument that runs throughout the *Outsiders* series. But Döblin also recognizes the need to construct such myths: a crime must be explained and irrational behavior must be given a cause in order to keep our worlds in order. Even as he insists on—and demonstrates—the impossibility of narrating a life, he insists just as forcefully on the need to tell stories, the need for narrative rescue from uncertainty. Indeed, one of the few moments in which Elli seems to find a way out of her tormented life is when she is able to tell her own story: "Then Elli narrated what she was able to—spasmodically, abruptly … Elli achieved something … It was a formal change, a liberation" (23). The narrator and his subject here are both driven by the need to tell a story and there is a definite pathos around this drive for a narrative that is at once impossible and necessary. The narrative in each of these

cases revolves around the same questions of causality, questions for which Döblin insists there are ultimately no clear answers.

Refusing to believe in causality, Döblin adopts instead the notion of mysterious motors that drive events beyond the logic of cause and effect: "Zoology has uncovered actual motors of our actions. The greatest mass of our psyches is driven by instincts. The uncovering and dissection of these instincts brings quite decisive motors of our actions to light" (117). Throughout his study, Döblin turns to various figures to represent these motors, but he never seems able to settle upon one appropriate metaphor. At the beginning of the epilog, for example, it is a wind ripping out a tree.[30] Most notably, the motor figures as a bullet: "Invisible bullets come out of nowhere and strike us, they change us and we notice only the change, not the actual motor, the agent, the bullet. Everything then proceeds within us in a causal manner" (117).

This wind, this bullet, can hit anybody and hence we cannot be assured that "I am not a criminal because I am not like her" and prove this through a case study that shows "her" to be different from "me" and shows "them" to be different from "us." Döblin's study of this borderline case puts this very border—that between criminal and noncriminal, sane and insane, those violently struck by the bullet and those not struck by the bullet—into question. "We were no longer on the terrain of 'guilt and innocence,'" Döblin writes, "but rather on another, terribly uncertain terrain—that of connections, recognition, insight" (100). The legal system, of course, does not (and cannot) permit the judge or the jury to enter into this uncertain territory and the traditional case history also avoids this territory. But Döblin's case study, which takes the modernist crisis of narrative as its starting point in order to depict a larger crisis of faith in the legal and social order, insists that we must venture into this territory, that in the seeming aberration of criminal conduct the otherwise hidden, normal workings of society suddenly become evident. Criminality, Döblin argues, cannot be traced to an understandable cause—neither in the individual nor in society. The criminal justice system, like the criminal case study, seeks to construct a narrative that traces an event back to such a cause. And in so doing, both fall into mythologizing and thereby lose sight of—indeed, even work to obscure—the motors and bullets that prompt our actions.

Not only can experts not point to a cause of criminality, criminals themselves are deceived about the cause of their own actions. In the very opening sentences of his narrative, Döblin plays with this uncertainty of agency:

> The pretty blond Elli Link arrived in Berlin in 1918. She was 19 years old. She had previously worked as a beautician in Braunschweig, where her parents were carpenters. A minor act of juvenile delinquency happened to her: she took five Marks from the wallet of a customer. (5)

After beginning what seems like a straightforward story about a young woman, Döblin inserts a structurally odd sentence that plays a trick on the reader: Elli initially seems to be the victim of a crime ("a minor act of juvenile delinquency

happened to her"), but in fact the elaboration of this statement after the colon reveals Elli to have committed the crime ("she took five Marks from the wallet of a customer"). Long before his musings on the impossibility of a coherent, explanatory narrative in his epilog, Döblin's story takes the reader by surprise, and in so doing clouds the notion of agency.[31] In a traditional crime narrative, this small juvenile delinquency would be used to foreshadow and to some extent foreordain and serve to explain the later, larger crime. But Döblin subtly turns this process on its head. The criminal does not first commit a small crime (petty theft), then proceed to a larger crime (murder), as the traditional history would have it. Rather, the crimes happen to the woman who commits them.

At work here is an interesting notion of trauma that provides an alternative to the more common location of trauma in individual (usually childhood) experiences. As Mark Seltzer notes in his study of serial killers, our tendency to locate trauma in childhood amounts to a privatization of trauma.[32] Döblin's language of an anonymous, impersonal violence hitting one like a bullet from the outside amounts to a publicization of criminality. "Insofar as we react to this blow in our own way," he writes, "we believe that we are in touch with 'ourselves'" (117). Döblin opposes here what might be characterized by paraphrasing a Monty Python sketch: "This trauma that I have—that is to say, which is mine—is mine."[33] But for Döblin one cannot claim possession of one's own trauma, or even one's own crimes—the criminal doesn't commit crimes, the crimes happen to the criminal. Döblin thus goes a step beyond the "looping effect" that we saw at work in Ernst Weiß's study of another accused poisoner, Milica Vukobrankovic. It is not simply pathologically imitative types who are susceptible to a breakdown of borders between self and society; rather, this dissolution of borders is precisely the normal condition of the individual in modernity—the individual in a state of shock.

The implications for the very notion of individuality that lie at the center of the notion of the case study are enormous. In Elli Link, we are no longer dealing with an individual—a subject—but much more with the breakdown of the border between the individual and society, between public and private, between inside and outside. This study of what Döblin repeatedly refers to as a "borderline case" and which constantly attempts to locate and transgress borders, turns out to be about the very permeability of borders in modernity—especially the border between self and society. Similar to Weiß in his analysis of Vukobrankovic and following a path suggested by Musil in his short commentary on the Klein-Nebbe case, Döblin insists that Elli Link is not antisocial or even asocial, but rather *overly* socialized. Döblin writes of Elli's time alone in jail—a situation of the most intense isolation—as precisely a moment at which social forces seem to do battle within her:

> While in prison, Elli was often confronted in dreams and day-dreams with people and events blown up to violent proportions. … Elli was deeply impacted by the events, the imprisonment, the interrogations. … From this source now flowed overly-large masses of social impulses. While she seemed happy during the day and behaved calmly, at night

> and in her dreams she was the object of bourgeois impulses that were flaming up fiercely. (80–2)

Elli becomes here nothing more than an object under attack by social impulses. The language clearly does not depict an individual, but rather a site of conflicting drives. The charts appended to the end of the volume, which purport to present a "Spatial Presentation of the Psychic Developments," similarly depict Elli as an object under attack, as circles representing differing impulses move in and out of the permeable borders that make up the site called "Elli."

The traditional case history—like the psychological novel—fails to explain the cause of criminality precisely because its emphasis on the individual fails to look beyond the borders of individuality, a border that goes into crisis in modernity. Döblin's crucial point is that if one follows the general modernist tendency to view "shock" as the individual's normal experience of modernity, then it is no longer accurate to argue between psychological or sociological motivations and determinations. Rather, as Seltzer has noted in a different context, "it's not a matter either of equating inside and outside (the 'psychological' and the 'sociological') or a matter of choosing between them, since it's precisely the boundaries between inside and outside that are violently transgressed, renegotiated, reaffirmed in these cases."[34] Döblin's case study attempts to find a way to write this non-border, to think both individual and society—and the violent exchanges between the two—together at the same time:

> I did not set out to write a cheap milieu study. The only thing that was clear to me was that the life—or a portion of the life—of an individual cannot be understood in itself. People stand in a symbiotic relationship with other people and other things. … This is in itself a reality: the symbiosis with others and with apartments, houses, streets, places. This is a certain, if murky, truth. If I pull out an individual person, it is as if I were to look at a leaf or a thumb and attempt thereby to describe nature and development. But they cannot be described in that way; the branch, the tree and the animal must also be described. (114)

Döblin clearly states here that his narrative stands in opposition to more traditional case studies: he wishes to avoid both writing a "cheap milieu study" and following individual clues in the manner of a detective. Indeed, the reference to thumbs is not incidental—recall how important body parts are to Sherlock Holmes's investigations, most notably in "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb."[35] Against such narratives, Döblin opposes his own innovative form of crime story that seeks to narrate individuals and their society at the same time and to detail the mysterious and traumatic forces of causality that traditional crime narratives obscure. Prompted by a difficult case that seemed to defy explanation, Döblin found himself confronted with the problems and uncertainties of narrating a life. His experimental narrative attempts to tell multiple stories at the same time and to allow stories to stand in conflict with one another, without choosing between or resolving these conflicts. He refuses to settle upon a single explanation or to tell a coherent story, but at the same time insists on the need to tell stories.

As clever and innovative as *The Two Girlfriends* is, however, it only begins to address the issues that Döblin raises. The theories of narrative, causality, and individuality related in the epilog function as a commentary on the tale that precedes it. Although I agree with Hania Siebenpfeiffer that Döblin's fragmented text can and must be read as a single work that comments on itself and thereby calls into question the various approaches to the case, the three main parts of this short text remain essentially unintegrated.[36] Döblin would continue to work through the process of narrating cases throughout his career, and five years after completing his study of Klein and Nebbe he produced an epic crime novel that would integrate his new theories of subjectivity and narration into the narrative itself: *Berlin Alexanderplatz.* The fictional case of Franz Biberkopf owes its famously innovative form to Döblin's earlier investigation of the Klein-Nebbe case, expanding upon and considering the implications of this new concept of the relationship between the criminal and his/her society.

The Case of Franz Biberkopf

Critics have long discussed the odd dual title of Döblin's most famous novel—*Berlin Alexanderplatz: The Story of Franz Biberkopf*—which announces that it will tell the story of a place (which is not really a place) and the story of an individual (who is not really an individual). Which, ultimately, is it: the story of a city or the story of a person? Osman Durrani poses the question thus: "Are we … to be guided by the title and take the subject to be twentieth-century Berlin, or by the subtitle, which describes the novel as 'Die Geschichte vom Franz Biberkopf'?"[37] Matters are further complicated by the fact that the subtitle was added at the insistence of the publisher and against Döblin's wishes. Döblin had wanted to call his epic simply *Berlin Alexanderplatz,* but the publisher did not know what to make of this odd title, and insisted on adding a subtitle announcing a more recognizable plot.[38] On the other hand, however, Döblin chose to do away with his main title and instead highlight the subtitle in his radio play version of the story, which he called *The Story of Franz Biberkopf.* It seems that even the author was unsure of which half of the title ought to guide us and, like future critics of the novel, felt the need to choose one or the other for his two different versions of the story.

Scholars have been sharply divided over which way to read the novel, but they almost inevitably ultimately choose one or the other possibility. Those who emphasize the main title, and thus view *Berlin Alexanderplatz* as an urban novel, tend to focus on Döblin's revolutionary montage technique, finding the unity of the novel in its depiction of urban modernity.[39] Meanwhile, those who emphasize the subtitle, and thus view *Berlin Alexanderplatz* as the story of a man, tend to focus on the novel's relationship to the genre of the *Bildungsroman,* a relationship that is clearly ironic but nevertheless revolves around a recognizable story, which Walter Benjamin memorably characterized as "the 'sentimental

education' of a gangster, the absolutely last and final stage of the old bourgeois *Bildungsroman.*"[40]

Both takes on the novel have produced many smart and informative readings, but I wish to argue that in deciding between the two stories critics repeatedly miss the central element of Döblin's achievement. For what is at stake in the novel is precisely this uncertain relationship between the two stories being told. It is ultimately neither the tale of a city nor the tale of an individual that is being told here; rather, it is the uncertain and complex exchanges between the two. Döblin had already begun to explore this relationship in *The Two Girlfriends* and continues his investigation in *Berlin Alexanderplatz.*

Just as the two elements—individual and city—improbably coexist in the title of the novel, they also, of course, stand in tension throughout the novel. Like *The Two Girlfriends* and the other texts in the *Outsiders of Society* series that I discussed in the previous chapter, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is a fragmented, messy archive that incorporates a variety of documents and consistently defies integration and narrative reconciliation. It simply does not hold together as a coherent narrative. And yet, as Maria Tatar has pointed out, the enormous number of critics who have written about Döblin's novel—regardless of which camp the critics align themselves with—constantly "gloss over the novel's inherent disorder and indeterminacy" and attempt "to redeem the novel from its surface messiness by imposing order on the 'seeming' chaos." [41] In light of my reading of *The Two Girlfriends and their Murder by Poisoning,* I wish to argue that this chaotic disorder, this uncertainty in locating the border between individual and society, is not something that ultimately can or ought to be reconciled, but rather is the very issue with which *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is concerned. Döblin's novel locates itself precisely at the uncertain border between criminal and noncriminal, self and society, order and disorder. If the novel's consideration of these issues were to end there—with a resignation that social and narrative order are no longer attainable—it would still be an impressive and important achievement. But the greatness of this work lies in the fact that Döblin did not end there; the impossibility of narrative and the crisis of the novel are not the only issues being addressed in *Berlin Alexanderplatz.* This novel is, in fact, just as concerned with the unavoidable desire for narrative, the need to tell stories. Narrative coherence may not be attainable, but it is necessary. Like *The Two Girlfriends, Berlin Alexanderplatz* simultaneously exhibits a thorough distrust of narrative and communicates a deep need for narratives. Stories ultimately cannot—yet must—be told.

The story that is told in this novel is complex, and the numerous side-plots and lengthy descriptions are at least as important as the central plot, but the story can nevertheless be summarized thus: Franz Biberkopf, a former construction worker, is released from prison after serving a four year sentence for the involuntary murder of his girlfriend. He negotiates the fast-paced life of 1920s Berlin with the intention of becoming an upstanding citizen. Long passages abandon Biberkopf's story altogether and relate Weimar-era Berlin through a collage of documents, descriptions, and side stories. After some initial successes, Biberkopf's life begins

to fall apart and he winds up joining a gang of criminals. He experiences a series of violent misfortunes: he loses his arm, his girlfriend is murdered, and Franz is eventually arrested and sent for psychiatric observation. The novel ends with the sudden transformation of Biberkopf and his resolution to begin a new life for himself as an upstanding member of the community.

Like *The Two Girlfriends, Berlin Alexanderplatz* opens with its protagonist entering Berlin. The celebrated montage passages early in the novel demonstrate an inability to distinguish between the individual and the city, both on the part of the narrator and Biberkopf himself:

> He turned his head back towards the red wall, but the car raced on with him along the tracks, and only his head was left in the direction of the prison. The car took a bend; trees and houses intervened. Busy streets emerged, Seestrasse, people got on and off. Something inside him screamed in terror: Look out, look out, it's going to start now.[42]

From the very beginning, then, it is clear that this novel will be concerned not with narrating the story of a place or the story of a person, but will rather endeavor to tell the story of the complex and violent exchanges between the two "protagonists" announced in the title. *Berlin Alexanderplatz* thus represents an attempt to put into practice the theories developed in the epilog to *The Two Girlfriends.* In his novel Döblin demonstrates his earlier assertion that "the life—or a portion of the life—of an individual cannot be understood in itself" and that instead "the branch, the tree and the animal must also be described."[43] The transition from *The Two Girlfriends* to *Berlin Alexanderplatz* might best be characterized thus: what had fallen into two separate and seemingly incompatible parts in Döblin's earlier case study is integrated in his later novel, thus increasing its messiness and indeterminability.

The wind that blows through *The Two Girlfriends* and disrupts the possibility of narrating a life also blows through *Berlin Alexanderplatz*—and with a similar effect:

> There are men, women, and children, the latter mostly holding women's hands. To enumerate them all and to describe their destinies is hardly possible, and only in a few cases would this succeed. The wind scatters chaff over all of them alike. The faces of the eastward wanderers are in no way different from those wanderers to the west, south, and north; moreover they exchange their roles, those who are now crossing the square in front of Aschinger's may be seen an hour later in front of the empty Hahn Department Store. … They have the same equanimity as passengers in an omnibus or in street-cars. … Who could find out what is happening inside them, a tremendous chapter. And if anyone did write it, to whose advantage would it be? New books? (221)

What *Berlin Alexanderplatz* ultimately bears witness to is the impossibility of narrating either of the stories that it announces in its double title: it fails to tell the story either of a life or of a city—and it is well aware of its own failure. As Klaus Scherpe has persuasively argued, "with endless variety and in many voices, the text narrates really only one thing: the loss of identifiable meanings, orientations,

and relationships."[44] Instead, "it speaks of the devastating effectiveness of an increasingly anonymous, amorphous violence" (172). Franz Biberkopf is, like Elli Link, the victim of continual impersonal, anonymous, random acts of violence that come in the form of what the narrator describes as "blows."[45] Trauma in this novel is "something that comes from the outside, with something unaccountable, that looks like fate" (1). It is neither personal nor social. What is at work here is what Scherpe calls "a kind of grammar of violence" that points toward "that which cannot be narrated or demonstrated … the abstract complexity and anonymity of modern society."[46]

The line that Scherpe points to in order to demonstrate his assertion interestingly occurs in the same passage that speaks of a wind that empties individual stories of their meaning that I cited above. As Biberkopf stands on Alexanderplatz, he observes the frenzied action that surrounds him and seems to threaten him:

> Boom, boom, the steam pile-driver thumps in front of Aschinger's on the Alex. … The trains rumble from the railroad station towards the Jannowitz Brücke, the locomotive puffs out a plume of steam. … I beat everything, you beat everything, he beats everything with boxes of 50 and cardboard packages of 10, can be mailed to every country on earth. … I beat everything, but I never beat a retreat. (216–8)

Scherpe comments on this passage: "Franz Biberkopf begins to conjugate the phenomena, which strike him violently, as his 'own' violent compulsion."[47] The confusion of agency and causality here and elsewhere in the novel registers as a breakdown between self and society, between inside and outside. In Biberkopf's conjugation of the verb *schlagen* (to hit), he indicates a certain seriality of violence—blows travel through people and things: pile-drivers, cigarillos, scampering masses, Biberkopf himself—I, you, he, she, we, it, they. As in the case of the juvenile delinquency that "happened to" Elli at the opening of *The Two Girlfriends,* it is ultimately impossible to sort out where crime and violence originate. This "grammar of violence" also indicates the ultimate uncertainty as to how this violence enters the world. As with the metaphor of the bullet without a shooter or even a weapon that strikes Elli in *The Two Girlfriends,* Döblin seems to posit violence as a force that is always present, constantly bubbling around beneath the surface and occasionally registering its effects through a person's actions.[48]

Franz Biberkopf is, like Elli Link, the quintessential modernist subject in a continuous state of shock. Biberkopf's case does, indeed, contain a "truth," as the narrator of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* continually reminds us: "All I have reported in this book *Alexanderplatz, Berlin,* about Franz Biberkopf's fate is true, and you may read it twice or three times and learn it by heart; it contains a truth that can be grasped" (576). But this truth is not unique to Biberkopf—indeed, the truth is that Biberkopf is not unique. At the opening of Book Six, the narrator reflects on the ways in which Biberkopf functions as a case:

> There is no reason to despair. As I continue telling this story on to its hard, cruel and bitter end, I shall quite often use these words: There is no reason to despair; for the man whose

> life I am reporting is, to be sure, no ordinary man; he is an ordinary man only in the sense that we can clearly understand him and sometimes say: step by step, we might have gone the same way, experienced the very things he experienced. I have promised, unusual though it be, not to keep quiet about this story. … I say: there is no reason to despair. I know something, perhaps many others who read this already discern something. A slow revelation is here in progress, you will experience it as Franz experienced it, then everything will become clear. (292)

Biberkopf is a worthwhile case, then, not because he is a unique individual, but because he is not a unique individual. What Biberkopf's case, as well as Elli's, ultimately bears witness to is what Mark Seltzer has termed the "abnormal normality of repetitive violence."[49] If this circulation of violence is seen as the normal situation of the individual in modernity, Seltzer argues, then "the attempt to 'mediate' between historical and psychological accounts, between outside and inside, misses the point" (99). The point is precisely the uncertainty of the border between outside and inside, which, as Seltzer further notes, is intricately connected to "the uncertain localization and demarcation of agency and motive" in modernity (100).

This is, of course, precisely what I have been arguing is Döblin's point in both of his "crime stories" that I have been discussing here. The true subject of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is thus ultimately neither the place nor the individual, but the wind that blows through this place and empties individuals of their individuality, the mysterious "motors of our actions"[50] that defy narration.

As in his account of the case of Elli Link, Döblin incorporates a number of competing explanations of Biberkopf's problems. At the end of the novel, he depicts Biberkopf as the subject of interrogation by a sort of medico-legal complex: "In Buch the detectives and doctors question at great length the death-pale invalid who once was Franz Biberkopf, as soon as he has begun to talk and look around; the detectives, in order to find out what he's been up to, the doctors for their diagnosis" (621). Neither group is, of course, able to come up with satisfying answers to their questions. The doctors argue among themselves over the diagnosis, which Döblin stages as a battle between the younger, psychoanalytically-oriented doctors and the older, somatically-oriented doctors. Though they all agree on the need for "a diagnosis, and, if possible, the right one" (594), they disagree over the proper diagnosis and the consequent treatment. The younger doctors "are inclined to consider Franz Biberkopf's trouble as psychogenic, that is, his rigidity derives from the soul, it is a pathological condition of inhibitions and constraint which would be cleared up by an analysis" (592). The proper treatment is therefore a talking cure. The older doctors, on the other hand, joke that soon even broken legs will be seen as having a psychic origin and treated with a talking cure; they maintain that the cause of Biberkopf's condition is unquestionably physical: catatonic stupor (593–5). The two camps have little respect for one another, but they eventually reach a sort of compromise position:

> The diagnosis of catatonia moves into the background. It was psychic trauma, involving a sort of twilight coma, his family history is not untarnished, he's been on good terms with

> old John Barleycorn, that's obvious. When all's said and done, the fight about his diagnosis is bunk, the fellow certainly was not a malingerer, he had a bat in his belfry, and it was some bat, and that's all there's to it. All right now, that's that. (622)

What we have here is the familiar mixed-bag of causes: one part physical affliction (heredity), one part psychological affliction (psychic trauma), and one part social affliction (alcohol). This diagnosis does not offer a cure, but answers the only question that the legal system requires, whether he is sane enough to be fit for trial: "As for the shooting affray in the Alexander Quelle, he is punishable under Paragraph 51. Wonder if we'll get him back here again" (622).

Döblin is clearly parodying the forensic medical system that, as a practicing psychiatrist, he knew quite well, and which he claimed to be the inspiration behind *Berlin Alexanderplatz.*[51] But this is a parody in the Nietzschean sense, which combines satire and sincerity, and does not preclude a deep respect for the very enterprise about which it expresses skepticism.[52] For the enterprise in which the doctors (as well as the detectives) are engaged—attempting to narrate Biberkopf's story, to probe his case for the questions, answers, and truths that it holds—is, of course, the very enterprise in which the narrator is engaged. It is worth noting that the asylum in which the doctors and detectives examine their patient, the site at which Franz Biberkopf becomes a case, is called *Buch.* The northern Berlin district of Buch is, indeed, the site of an important hospital, one of the numerous references to actual places in Döblin's novel. But it is also the German word for book. This irony was surely not lost on Döblin: in the clinic at Buch, as in Döblin's book, the question is how to narrate this story of mysterious motors and an anonymous circulation of violent blows, this story that resists narration.

Just as it would be wrong to settle on either the main title or the subtitle as the guiding force for the plot of the novel, it would also be wrong to assert that *Berlin Alexanderplatz* can ultimately be neatly summed up as an example of narrative skepticism, an extended argument that it is impossible to tell a coherent story. For, despite Döblin's and his narrator's thoroughgoing skepticism about the possibility of narrating a life, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is chock-full of stories, encompassing numerous mini-narratives of passersby, such as the memorable case of the fourteen-year-old future plumber Max Rüst,[53] to the numerous stories taken from the Bible and ancient mythology. Indeed, such imbedded stories figure especially prominently at both the beginning and the end of the novel. At the end it is Biberkopf's internment in Buch and the trial of Rheinhold; at the beginning it is the story of the confidence man Stefan Zannovich that the Jews in the Münzstraße relate to Biberkopf when he first arrives from prison. Zannovich is an Eastern Jew of modest origins who pretends to be a wealthy prince, befriending the most powerful men in Europe. He ultimately ends up in jail, where he commits suicide.[54] The story occupies a prominent place in the first books of the novel, and Biberkopf continually returns to it, testifying to the positive effect that it had on him: "it was nothing but a story and still it was very good, a good lesson for me in the situation I was in" (69). Of course, he quickly adds, "cognac would have done the work, too" (69).

As Biberkopf continues to retell the story of Zannovich, it becomes clear that the lesson he derived from it is of the need for and possibility of self-assertion, of assuming agency in one's own destiny. Zannovich clearly represents for Biberkopf the model of a self-made man: "You still know the story about Zannovich? A crazy hound. Was a fine chap. Afterwards they killed him. Funny how you know everything. I'd like to be a prince, too, and study. No, I ain't goin' to study" (46).

The story of Zannovich, as Tatar has noted, is one of the novel's many moments of preoccupation with the problem of agency. According to Tatar, it is one of the few moments where agency seems unambiguous: Zannovich "asserts his status as a free agent and curbs intervention in his life up to the bitter end by committing suicide."[55] This seems to be what appeals to Biberkopf about Zannovich. But, interestingly, in his summary of the story Biberkopf alters the final, crucial detail, speaking of Zannovich being killed rather than taking his own life. Indeed, I believe that Biberkopf's confusion of agency is appropriate: what the case of Zannovich relates (like the real cases of celebrated 1920s *Hochstapler,* such as Harry Domela, which Döblin surely had in mind as he wrote this passage[56]) is not a moment of free agency, but rather a moment of confusion between self- and outer-determination. On the one hand, Zannovich appropriates the performative authority to name himself a prince, thus securing his status as a self-made man. On the other hand, he begins his career as an imposter when he is mistakenly addressed as royalty: "In Montenegro they called him count and prince. They wouldn't have believed him if he said: My Father's name is Zannovich, we live in Pastrovich in a village and my father's proud of it! … Then Stefan laughed and said 'You shall have your way'" (18). His appropriation of power is thus, to some extent, imposed on him; he is not a self-made man (recall Elli's juvenile crime at the opening of *The Two Girlfriends* that Döblin views as being imposed on her). Indeed, the Jew who tells Biberkopf the story continues: "They wanted this from him: You're the Baron Warta. That's nice, says he, then I'm Baron Warta. Later on that wasn't enough for him, or not for them" (19). Who, in the end, is constructing whom?

This imbedded story of a small-time criminal and his attempt to find his way in society is supposed to open Biberkopf's eyes and to have a tonic effect on him (20). The narrator of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* continually uses the same language in addressing the reader about how to understand Biberkopf's story. The Zannovich story is thus a mis-en-abyme that suggests a way for the reader to approach the larger novel. Here Biberkopf occupies the same position vis-à-vis the Zannovich story that the reader of the novel occupies vis-à-vis Biberkopf's story. The language with which the Jew in the Münzstrasse introduces the story, in fact, closely echoes the language with which the narrator addresses the reader throughout the novel: "To listen to this, and to meditate on it, will be of benefit to many who, like Franz Biberkopf, live in a human skin, and, like this Franz Biberkopf, ask more of life than a piece of bread and butter" (2).

Statements such as this endorsement of a sort of "narrative therapy," which, as Scherpe has argued, seems to momentarily "rescue" the crisis of narration that

pervades *Berlin Alexanderplatz,*[57] puzzlingly exist side-by-side with passages such as the one at the opening of Book Six, which I cited above as a questioning of Biberkopf's individuality. How, the narrator asks, is one to tell the story of a non-individual: "But isn't this enough to justify despair, what sense we can find in this impudent, loathsome, miserable nonsense, what lying sense can be injected into it so as to construct therewith perhaps some sort of destiny for Franz Biberkopf?" (292) Narratives heal, but they also lie. Destiny is comforting, but destiny is also a myth. Döblin never resolves the opposition that he explores here and in *The Two Girlfriends* between the impossibility of narrating a life without lying about causality on the one hand and the need to tell stories on the other hand.

The novel thus ends in failure. Yet, the narrator proclaims it a success. Biberkopf is cured and uncertainty is cleared up: "We have come to the end of our story. It has proven a long one, but it had to unfold itself, on and on, till it reached its climax, that culminating point which at last illuminates the whole thing" (632). Of course, one does not want to confuse the narrator with the author of the novel. But, rather than take this as a thoroughly ironic statement (what, indeed, has been cleared up?), it is worth following the narrator for a moment here. Biberkopf's story is over at this point, the narrator tells us. Indeed, the person that was Franz Biberkopf is no longer in existence: "Thus died, in that evening hour, Franz Biberkopf, erstwhile transport-worker, burglar, pimp, murderer. Another man lay in the bed, and that other one has the same papers as Franz, he looks like Franz, but in another world, he bears a new name" (617). Leo Kreutzer has argued that the three events related at the end of Biberkopf's stay in the asylum are directly related: the end of Biberkopf, the end of the story, and the successful birth of a new man.[58] The transformation between the old and the new Biberkopf involves Biberkopf's overcoming his sense of having a story and escaping from a belief in his story.

Biberkopf's problem can be clearly seen in his misreading of the Zannovich story as an affirmation of individuality, a result of his belief in his own individuality and destiny. As he is struck with various "blows," he believes them to be part of his destiny. His cure, then, comes in a renunciation of individuality and causality, a renunciation of believing to be, to recall the language of *The Two Girlfriends,* "in touch" with himself.[59] He gives up his story, his individuality, and gives into the state of shock:

> What is fate anyway? One is stronger than I. … A man cannot exist without many other men. The true and the false I will know better now. Once I got myself into trouble for a single word and had to pay bitterly for it, this shan't happen to Biberkopf again. The words come rolling up to us, we must be careful not to get run over; if we don't watch out for the autobus, it'll make apple-sauce out of us. I'll never again stake my word on anything in the world. Dear Fatherland, be comfort thine, I'll watch, and use these eyes o' mine. (633)

Here, the threatening nature of words is once again emphasized. They are something out of control that Biberkopf has to avoid being struck by, just as he avoids

being struck by vehicles. For words mark the point of interchange between self-construction and outside-construction, as Döblin noted in his essay on "The Construction of Epic Works:" "One believes that one is speaking and is in fact spoken, one believes that one is writing and is in fact being written."[60] Biberkopf seems to realize this at the end of his epic journey, and gives up the notion of agency that he had earlier mistakenly read into the Zannovich story.

The story of the pimp, thief, and murderer Franz Biberkopf and the story of the *Hochstapler* Stefan Zannovich ultimately share the same insight: there is no clear distinction between internal and external forces, and agency is uncertain and indirect. This is, of course, also the insight that Döblin gleaned from the story of Ella Klein. Döblin's crime stories all ultimately tell the same story: of the breakdown of the border between self and society, inside and outside, public and private in modernity, and the impossibility of narrating the life of an individual independent of the spaces, people, and things that he/she confronts and unconsciously incorporates.

Berlin Alexanderplatz ends with Biberkopf joining the masses that have surrounded him throughout the novel: "He is no longer alone on Alexanderplatz. There are people to the right, and people to the left of him, some walk in front of him, others behind him" (632–3). The final pages of the novel depict a marching mass that parades outside of Biberkopf's window, but also through his consciousness. As the parade passes by, Biberkopf vows to himself not to join it, and reflects: "If war comes along and they conscript me, and I don't know why, and the war's started without me, well, then, it's my fault, it serves me right" (634). War, the ultimate act of violence, "comes along" and conscripts Biberkopf, and Biberkopf in turn takes the blame for it. He has quite distinctly not progressed since losing himself in the city at the opening of the novel. The borders between self and society have not been reaffirmed and Biberkopf has not become a stable subject. What has changed is that now Biberkopf embraces his lack of subjectivity, his life in a state of shock. The circulation of violence has not ended—indeed, the language is as martial at the end as at any other point in the novel. The novel ends with this chant, the origin of which is uncertain; it might be attributed to the narrator, to Biberkopf, or to the marching mass:

> The way leads to freedom, to freedom it goes. The old world must crumble. Awake, wind of dawn! And get in step, and right and left and right and left, marching: marching on, we tramp to war, a hundred minstrels march before, with fife and drum, drum, brrum, for one the road goes straight, for another it goes to the side, one stands fast, another's killed, one rushes past, another's voice is stilled, drum, brrumm, drrumm! (635)

The ending is troubling not only for its failure to resolve either the social or aesthetic problem that Döblin poses. It is also troubling in its uncertain politics. We are not sure where or why this mass is marching, but what is certain is that it is somehow threatening, not least because its direction is unclear.

The Paranoid Turn: Violence, Power, and the Mass

Döblin's investigation into the case of the convicted poisoners Ella Klein and Margarete Nebbe and his investigation into the fictional case of the convicted murderer and thief Franz Biberkopf ultimately reveal a sort of deindividualized, illogical violence to lie at the base of everything. Like those of his fellow modernists whom I discussed in chapter 1, Döblin's crime stories served as mechanisms for exploring and inhabiting a world outside the bounds of agency, logic, and reason. Like his fellow collaborators in the *Outsiders of Society* series whom I discussed in chapter 2, Döblin's crime stories served as mechanisms to reveal a hidden power and express a loss of faith in the justice system. Recall Döblin's acknowledgment that *Berlin Alexanderplatz* was motivated by his observations of a society in an insolvable crisis: "I saw that there could be no strictly formulated border between criminals and noncriminals, that society at all levels—or at least those that I was able to observe—was completely undermined by criminality."[61]

It is not difficult to see a certain paranoid turn in this literature. In depsychologizing and deindividualizing criminality, these authors did indeed manage to break down the line dividing criminal from noncriminal and expose the naked power and ultimate lack of logic at the basis of the justice system. But this destabilization of boundaries led to unexpected consequences. As Helmut Lethen has argued of Siegfried Kracauer's writings on the detective novel: "When crime is depsychologized, the consequence is universal suspicion. The proposed structure of society implies the need to suspect every individual."[62] As we saw in Ernst Weiß's surprising demand for a system of social self-defense at the end of his study of Milica Vukobrankovic, a left-wing *Justizkritik* can share unexpected common points with a right-wing *Justizkritik.*

The existing system of order clearly does not function in *Berlin Alexanderplatz.* The novel lays bare the shaky foundation of the Republic, and exhibits a thoroughgoing lack of trust in the justice system. The prisons fail to reform inmates and the police are relatively ineffective throughout the novel. Indeed, the location depicted in the title of the novel, Alexanderplatz, was, not coincidentally, the location of Berlin's main police headquarters. To be sent to "Alex" meant, for criminals such as Biberkopf, to be arrested. The police do, indeed, figure in many of the montage passages of Döblin's novel, but they are not the powerful institution that towers over Alexanderplatz and preserves law and order. At the opening of Book II are several graphics depicting the various social and civic services of the city of Berlin (streets and sanitation, fire department, hospitals, etc.); conspicuously absent from a book in which criminality figures so prominently are the police. In one memorable passage in which the police do appear, they are reduced to mechanistic statue-like robots standing on the busy square:

> The police tower over the square. Several specimens of them are standing about. Each specimen sends a connoisseur's glance to both sides, and knows the traffic rules by heart.

> It has putties around its legs, a rubber mace hangs from its right side, it swings its arms horizontally from west to east, and thus north and south. (220)

Unofficial organizations, in contrast, seem much better able to keep things in check:

> The Private Protective Agencies watch everything, they walk around buildings and through buildings, they look into buildings, control clocks, Automatic Alarms, Watch and Safeguard Service for Greater Berlin and environs, Germania Protective Agency, and former Watch and Ward Division of the Café Proprietors' Association of the Society of Berlin House-Owners and Landlords, Associated Management, West Side Central Watchmen's Service, Watch and Protection Company, Sherlock Company, collected works on Sherlock Holmes by Conan Doyle. (155–6)

The mass that Biberkopf may or may not join at the end of the novel could well be a sort of extra-legal organization that seeks to preserve the order that the official organizations fail to keep under control. Throughout the entire novel, a crisis of official justice is just as prevalent as a crisis of individuality and a crisis of narrative. Indeed, as I have been arguing, all three are intimately related in Döblin's crime stories.

Just as Döblin refuses to take sides in the criminological debate between those who argue for internal causes of criminality and those who argue for external causes of criminality, he also refuses to take sides in the debate over the crisis of justice in Weimar Germany. The voices of judicial critique in this novel come from both the Left and the Right. An anarchist agitator speaks to assembled workers urging them to recognize a fundamental crisis of law and justice and take the law into their own hands:

> But legality is the brute force, the violence of the ruling class. … They may talk of a crisis of justice, and indeed justice ought to be reformed, lock, stock, and barrel, the juridical body should be renewed. … But we don't want new judges. We want, instead of this justice, no justice at all. We must overthrow all state institutions by direct action. (365–7)

The same call comes from the right: "Franz now peddles racist, pro-Nordic papers. He is not against the Jews, but he is for law and order. For law and order must reign in Paradise; which everyone should recognize" (97). Both critiques—despite their coming from polar opposites on the political scale—ultimately boil down to the same thing.

In his discussion of the widespread attraction that authors associated with the New Objectivity movement had for matters of power and justice, Helmut Lethen shows how the attempt to weaken the machinery they were critiquing turned around and strengthened that very system, which could easily play into fascist propaganda: "Fascist propaganda draws its attraction from an exposure of the pure, naked violence that refuses to hide itself behind a veil of legitimacy and for that very reason captures the fascination of the masses."[63]

Georg Lukács anticipated this charge, famously accusing the Leftist documentary novel of failing in its stated political goals by simply mechanically noting reality and thus not offering any real hope for change.[64] His remarks were prompted by Ernst Ottwalt's 1931 novel of judicial critique, *For they know what they are doing,* a documentary novel that claims to offer its readers nothing but actual events from the years 1920–31.[65] Ottwalt's novel is clearly indebted to the ideas and narrative forms being developed in the *Outsiders of Society* series, as were numerous similar works of the late 1920s and early 1930s.[66] All of these works were, like *Berlin Alexanderplatz,* intellectual children of the *Outsiders* series, and all depicted and perpetuated the Weimar "culture of crisis" that eroded the foundations of the Weimar social and criminal justice systems.

One can easily see how the insight that power ultimately lies at the base of everything can develop either into a call for a complete overhaul of the system or into a celebration of that very power. As Arnold Zweig noted, like crime, the legal system also has its "attractions."[67] Certainly the troubling ending of Walter Benjamin's essay, "The Critique of Violence" (1921), in which apocalyptic "divine violence" seems to be the only means by which redemption and justice are possible, would fit in with this notion,[68] as would the troubling ending of Döblin's novel. Kurt Tucholsky makes this point perhaps more clearly than anyone. In his essay on "German Judges" in *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles* (1929), he states that "there can in fact be no more talk of a crisis of faith in justice," for "a crisis is an uncertain condition in which a decision must be made: life or death—yes or know. The German workers have decided: No."[69] Tucholsky then calls for a complete overhaul of the judicial system, which he views as based upon an erroneous principal:

> The fundamental mistake in the attitude of German judges lies in the entirely absurd impression they have of what they refer to as penal law. The state has no right to punish. The only right is that of a society to defend itself against those who endanger its order. (160)

The modernist critique of traditional ways of thinking, writing, and judging criminal cases that I have been detailing in these first three chapters—although it played out on a level of intellectual sophistication that seemed to be removed from everyday concerns and effects—also had important and surprising practical implications. It is to this story that I wish to turn in the remaining chapters of this book. The powerful mass that emerges at the end of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* will continually reappear in Weimar criminological and criminalistic treatises and in films and novels, as these texts reenact the battle between individual, mass, and power on a more pragmatic level than the case studies that I have been discussing thus far. The complex connections between the destabilization of boundaries between criminal and noncriminal and the restabilization of those boundaries will become particularly clear as I turn in the following two chapters from theoretically oriented accounts to practically oriented accounts of the Weimar "culture of crisis."

Notes

1. Heinrich Temborius, "Außenseiter der Gesellschaft," *Literarischer Handweiser* 61 (1925): 694–96. Here, 695.
2. Siemsen, "Außenseiter der Gesellschaft," *Die Weltbühne* 21 (1925), 359–61. Here, 361.
3. Manfred Maiwald, "'Die beiden Freundinnen und ihr Giftmord': Juristische Betrachtungen zu einem literarischen Prozeßbericht," in *Literatur und Recht: Literarische Rechtsfälle von der Antike bis in die Gegenwart,* ed. Ulrich Mölk (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 1996), 370–382.
4. Ernst Ribbat, "'Tatsachenphantasie'. Über eine Mischtexte Alfred Döblins," in *Internationale Alfred Döblin Kolloquien 1989/1991,* ed. Werner Stauffacher (Bern: Peter Lang, 1993), 84–101. Here, 94.
5. See Robert Archie Wenzel, "Alfred Döblin and Hysteria" (diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1999), 148–169.
6. Walter Müller-Seidel, "Alfred Döblin, 'Die beiden Freundinnen und ihr Giftmord': Psychiatrie, Strafrecht und moderne Literatur," in *Literatur und Recht,* 356–369. Here, 356.
7. Eugen Schmidt, *Das Verbrechen als Ausdrucksform sozialer Entmutigung* (München, Berlin and Leipzig: J. Schweitzer Verlag, 1931).
8. Quoted in Leslie Ann Pahl, "Margins of modernity: The citizen and the criminal in the Weimar Republic" (diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1991), 231.
9. Walter Muschg, "Nachwort des Herausgebers," in Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz,* 415–30. Here, 418.
10. "Das innere Thema also lautet: Es heißt opfern, sich selbst zum Opfer bringen." (Alfred Döblin, "Nachwort zu einem Neudruck," in Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz,* 413–415. Here, 414.) In her discussion of the question as to whether *Berlin Alexanderplatz* can be classified as a crime novel, Pahl comments: "Franz Biberkopf is a well-cast 'Opfer' but a poorly-cast criminal" (Pahl, "Margins of Modernity," 238).
11. Osman Durrani poses the question thus: "Are we … to be guided by the title and take the subject to be twentieth-century Berlin, or by the subtitle, which describes the novel as 'Die Geschichte vom Franz Biberkopf?'" (Osman Durrani, "The End of *Berlin Alexanderplatz:* Towards the Terminus of Döblin's Tramway," *German Life & Letters* 40 [1987]: 142–50). See my discussion of this issue below.
12. For a discussion of the trial and the attention it received in the daily press, see Isabella Claßen, *Darstellung von Kriminalität in der detuschen Literatur, Presse und Wissenschaft 1900–1930* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1988), 158–98. See also Inge Weiler, *Giftmordwissen und Giftmörderinnen. Eine diskursgeschichtliche Studie* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1998), 131–148 and Siebenpfeiffer, *Böse Lust,* 102–17.
13. See Claßen, *Darstellung von Kriminalität,* 177.
14. Klein was sentenced to four years of prison (*Gefängnis*); Nebbe was sentenced to one and a half years of hard labor (*Zuchthaus*).
15. Joseph Roth, "Die Frauen Nebbe und Klein," in *Werke,* ed. Klaus Westermann (Köln: Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 1989), I: 952–4. Here, 952.
16. Robert Musil, "Das verbrecherische Liebespaar: Die Geschichte zweier unglücklicher Ehen," in *Gesammelte Werke,* ed. Adolf Frisé (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978), II: 669–71. Here, 670.
17. "Der Prozess der Giftmischerinnen," *Vorwärts* 40 (15 März 1923, Morgenausgabe).
18. Rechtsanwalt Dr. Arthur Brandt, "Das Urteil im Mordprozeß Klein," *BZ am Mittag* 46 (17 März 1923). Siebenpfeiffer presents a thorough consideration of the journalistic and medical testimony that pointed toward Klein and Nebbe's suffering from a psychopathological problem (*Böse Lust,* 111–7).
19. "Giftmörderinnen vor Gericht," *Berliner Tageblatt* 129 (12 März 1923).
20. "Die Gutachten über die Giftmischerinnen," *Vorwärts* 40 (16 März 1923, Morgenausgabe).

21. Richard Wetzell presents a history of criminology in Germany from the end of the nineteenth century until the end of World War II in his seminal *Inventing the Criminal.* As Wetzell's history demonstrates, the relationship between the different schools is complex and the divisions are quite permeable.
22. Over the course of the twentieth century, investigations into the causes of criminal behavior have become increasingly specific. However, they continue to break down into the same three main areas: biological, psychological, and sociological explanations—though most commentators tend to emphasize a "mixed-bag" of causes. For a biological approach, see James Q. Wilson and Richard J. Hernstein, *Crime and Human Nature* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), in which even those old somatotype images from turn-of-the-twenieth-century criminological studies pop up once again. A sociological theory of criminality can be found in Ellioe Currie, "Confronting Crime: New Directions," in *Crime and Society* 1, ed. Robert Crutchfield, George S. Brides, and Joseph G. Weis (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge, 1996). For a psychological approach, see Christopher Bollas, *Cracking Up* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995). For a recent attempt at an integrated theory of violent behavior in general, see *Biosocial Bases of Violence,* ed. Adrian Raine, Patricia A. Brennan, and David P. Farrington (New York: Plenum, 1997).
23. For an excellent and nuanced discussion of the battle between sociological and biological/psychological explanations of criminal behavior, see Wetzell, *Inventing the Criminal,* 107–78.
24. Alfred Döblin, *Die beiden Freundinnen und ihr Giftmord,* Außenseiter der Gesellschaft 1, ed. Rudolf Leonhard (Berlin: Verlag die Schmiede, 1924), 117.
25. Alfred Döblin, "An Romanauthoren und ihre Kritiker," in *Schriften zu Ästhetik, Poetik und Literatur,* ed. Erich Kleinschmidt (Olten und Freiburg i.B.: Walter-Verlag, 1989), 119–23. Here, 120. See Georg Reuchlein's excellent study of the relationship between literature, psychology and psychopathology in Döblin's early short story "Die Ermordung einer Butterblume:" "'Man lerne von der Psychiatrie,'" in *Jahrbuch für internationale Germanistik* XXIII: 1 (1991), 10–68.
26. Döblin, *Die beiden Freundinnen und ihr Giftmord,* 112.
27. For the sake of consistency, I will use Döblin's version of the characters' names.
28. "Sie sollten auch eigentlich Recht sprechen über den Vater, der Elli wieder ihrem Mann zugeführt hatte—und dieser Vater war der Inbegriff einwandfreier bürgerlicher Gesinnung. … Das Gericht fragte nicht nach der Beteiligung, 'Schuld', Kleins, des Vaters, der Mutter Kleins" (100). It is interesting to note that for the first and only time in this study, Döblin here uses the victim's real name (Klein) rather than the name he is given elsewhere (Link). Though this "error" is "corrected" in a later edition (see Alfred Döblin, *Die beiden Freundinneen und ihr Giftmord* [Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1992], 95) it strikes me that this use of Klein rather than Link in precisely the paragraph where Döblin insists on looking beyond "was innerhalb des Kreises, der Grenzen geschah" is not coincidental.
29. Döblin wrote to Klages: "Der Fall selbst ist in einer bestimmten Hinsicht dunkel. . . . Ich wollte Sie fragen: mögen Sie einmal das kleine Buch durchblättern, seine Fakten zur Kenntnis nehmen und alsdann mir sagen, wie Sie über die Handschriften denken oder: was sich, in dem gesamten festgestellten Ensemble, über die beiden Personen sagen läßt; —wie sie graphologisch über den—psychiatrisch sehr verschiedenen beurteilten—Fall denken." The letter is dated 23 December 1924. (See *Alfred Döblin 1878–1978: Eine Ausstellung des Deutschen Literaturarchivs im Schiller-Nationalmuseum Marbach am Neckar,* ed. Bernhard Zeller [München: Kösel-Verlag, 1978], 171–72).
30. The passage is quoted above.
31. I am grateful to Thomas Kovach for bringing this odd turn of phrase to my attention.
32. See Seltzer, *Serial Killers,* 257–8. Interestingly, childhood plays an important role in few of the case studies in the *Outsiders* series.
33. In the classic Monty Python sketch, a dinosaur expert is being interviewed about her latest theory concerning the brontosaurus. As she avoids actually presenting her theory, she con-

tinually claims it as her own: "Well, this theory that I have—that is to say, which is mine—is mine." Her theory, incidentally, turns out to be that brontosaurus was thin at both ends and thick in the middle.

34. Seltzer, *Serial Killers,* 100.
35. See "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb," in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories* (New York: Bantam Books, 1986), volume one, 369–88.
36. See Siebenpfeiffer, *Böse Lust,* 132.
37. Osman Durrani, "The End of *Berlin Alexanderplatz,*" quoted in Tatar, *Lustmord,* 200. Compare Tatar's discussion of criticism on the dualtitle of the novel on 134.
38. In 1948, Döblin recalled: "Es wurde *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (ein Titel, den mein Verleger absolut nicht akzeptieren wollte, es sei doch einfach eine Bahnstation, und ich mußte als Untertitel dazusetzen *Die Geschichte vom Franz Biberkopf.*)" Quoted in Gabriele Sander, *Erläuterungen und Dokumente: Alfred Döblin Berlin Alexanderplatz* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1998), 95.
39. See, for example, Volker Klotz, *Die erzählte Stadt: Ein Suget als Herausforderung des Romans von Lesage bis Döblin* (München: Hanser, 1969), 372–418.
40. Walter Benjamin, "Krisis des Romans," rpt. in *Alfred Döblin im Spiegel der zeitgenössischen Kritik,* ed. Ingrid Schuster und Ingrid Bode (Bern und München: Francke Verlag, 1973), 249–54. Here, 253–4. For a strongly humanistic reading of *Berlin Alexanderplatz,* see Fritz Martini, "Alfred Döblins Berlin Alexanderplatz," in *Das Wagnis der Sprache* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1984), 336–72.
41. Tatar, *Lustmord,* 135, 134.
42. Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz: The Story of Franz Biberkopf* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1993), 4–5.
43. Döblin, *Die beiden Freundinnen,* 112.
44. Klaus Scherpe, "The City as Narrator: The Modern Text in Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*," in *Modernity and the Text: Revisions of German Modernism,* ed. Andreas Huyssen and David Bathrick, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 162–79. Here, 172.
45. Döblin uses the same term in both texts: *Schlag.* See, for example, Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz,* 91.
46. Scherpe, "The City as Narrator," 172, 176.
47. Scherpe, "The City as Narrator," 172.
48. As Maria Tatar has pointed out, it is remarkable that critics have long neglected the sheer magnitude of violence in this novel (see Tatar, *Lustmord,* 134–5). This blindness to violence, Tatar argues, is closely related to an attempt to impose order on the novel and to smooth over its many inconsistencies and indeterminabilities. I am in complete agreement with this statement. However, I think that Tatar's attempt to overcome this problem by focusing on violence against women and the sexual politics of *Berlin Alexanderplatz,* although it adds an important dimension to our understanding of the novel, ultimately also imposes a certain overarching form and coherence to the novel that reestablishes agency and causality and cleans up some of the messiness. By reading *Berlin Alexanderplatz* together with *The Two Girlfriends*—one featuring a male protagonist, the other featuring a female protagonist—I hope to show that the confusion of agency between criminal and victim cannot be sorted out along gender lines. As I will argue below, Döblin's novel remains as disturbing as it is in Tatar's characterization, but precisely because of the uncontainablility and directionlessness of violence and trauma and the unresolvable issue of causality.
49. Seltzer, *Serial Killers,* 99.
50. Döblin, *Die beiden Freundinnen und ihr Giftmord,* 117.
51. In a 1932 speech on the origins of his novel, Döblin commented: "Es wäre eine lange Geschichte zu erzählen, wie ich zum Stoff und zu dem Grundmotiv des Buches kam. Hier will ich nur sagen: mein ärztlicher Beruf hat mich viel mit Kriminellen zusammengebracht. Ich hatte auch vor Jahren eine Beobachtungsstation für Kriminelle. Von da kam manches Interessante und Sagenswerte." (Döblin, "Mein Buch 'Berlin Alexanderplatz,'" 412).

52. On Nietzschean parody as being distinct from pure satire, see Sander L. Gilman, *On Nietzschean Parody: An Introduction to Reading Nietzsche* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag H. Grundmann, 1976).
53. See Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz,* 42–43.
54. The story is related in Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz,* 13–27.
55. Tatar, *Lustmord,* 143.
56. Domela's autobiographical account of how he successfully posed as Hohenzollern prince, *The False Prince,* was a bestseller in the late 1920s. See Harry Domela, *Der falsche Prinz* (Berlin: Malik-Verlag, 1927).
57. See Scherpe, "The City as Narrator," 170.
58. See Leo Kreutzer, *Alfred Döblin: Sein Werk bis 1933* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1970), 125–134.
59. See Döblin, *The Two Girlfriends,* 117, and my argument above.
60. Alfred Döblin, "Der Bau des epischen Werks," *Aufsätze zur Literatur* (Olten and Freiburg i.Br.: Walter-Verlag, 1963), 131.
61. Alfred Döblin, "Mein Buch 'Berlin Alexanderplatz,'" in *Berlin Alexanderplatz: Die Geschichte vom Franz Biberkopf* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1965), 412.
62. Helmut Lethen, "Der Habitat der Sachlichkeit in der Weimarer Republik," in *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur,* ed. Bernhard Weyergraf (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1995), 8: 422.
63. Lethen, "Der Habitus der Schlichkeit," 426. Elsewhere, in his standard history of the movement, Lethen dates the beginning of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* in 1924, precisely the year in which first publications in the *Outsiders of Society* series appeared (see Helmut Lethen, *Neue Sachlichkeit 1944–1932: Studien zur Literatur des "Weißen Sozialismus"* [Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1970]). Given the volumes by such important *neusachliche* authors as Egon Erwin Kisch and Leo Lania, as well as the prominent turn away from expressionism by such authors as Alfred Döblin, Ernst Weiß, and Iwan Goll in their volumes in the *Outsiders* series, the series would seem to be a crucial step in the beginnings of *Neue Sachlichkeit.* While I do not wish to argue that the series somehow represents a pure example of the movement (it clearly does not), it does share many common elements and problems with the new Left realism of the mid-1920s. Lethen, interestingly, doesn't mention the series. However, as I have been arguing in this and the previous chapter, a new way of thinking about matters of crime and justice was clearly conceived as concomitant with a new way of writing about matters of crime and justice.
64. See Georg Lukács, "Reportage oder Gestaltung? Kritische Bemerkungen anläßlich des Romans von Ottwalt," *Die Linkskurve* 4.6 (1932): 22–30 and 4.7 (1932): 26–31.
65. Ernst Ottwalt, *Denn sie wissen, was sie tun : ein deutscher Justiz-Roman* (Berlin: Malik-Verlag, 1931), 8.
66. Among the most famous documentary fictional works of judicial critique were Frank Arnau, *Gesetz, das tötet* (1930); Lion Feuchtwanger, *Erfolg: Drei Jahre Geschichte einer Provinz* (1930); Hans José Rehfisch and Wilhelm Herzog, *Die Affäre Dreyfus* (1929); Jakob Wassermann, *Der Fall Maurizius* (1928); and Friedrich Wolf, *Cynkali* (1929). Klaus Petersen discusses these and other works in his excellent study *Literatur und Justiz in der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: J.B.Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1988).
67. Quoted in Lethen, "Der Habitus der Sachlichkeit," 420.
68. Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Reflections,* ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 277–300. On some of the troubling implications of Benjamin's much-debated essay, see Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice,* ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992), 3–67.
69. Kurt Tucholsky, *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 1980), 156.

Chapter 4

Seeing Criminals

Mass Murder, Mass Culture, Mass Public

Introduction

In 1997, the American satirical newsmagazine *The Onion* published the following article under the title "Neighbors Remember Serial Killer as Serial Killer":

> DUNEDIN, FL—In the wake of his capture Monday, serial killer Eddie Lee Curtis is being recalled by neighbors as a serial killer. "He was kind of a murderous, insane, serial-killer type of fellow," said Will Rowell, 57, who lived next door to the man arrested for the murder of 14 nurses in Florida and Georgia. "He sort of kept to himself, killing nurses, having sex with their corpses, and then burying the bodies in his backyard." Neighbor Peg Appleton agreed: "I didn't know him well but he really seemed to hate nurses, the way he was always dismembering them with power tools. I guess you could say he fancied himself a serial killer."[1]

The joke that the article turns on, of course, is the reversal of the by now commonplace occurrence that whenever a serial killer is captured, he invariably does not fit the "profile" of the serial killer. Sander Gilman has pointed to the "pattern in twentieth-century America of evident public surprise when the 'mad bomber' turns out to be a retired, meek little man living on a pension," and attributes this shock to the upsetting of

> our need to have the mad be identifiable, different from ourselves. Our shock is always that they are really just like us. This moment, when we say "they are just like us," is most upset-

Notes for this section begin on page 108.

> ting. Then we no longer know where lies the line that divides our normal, reliable world, a world that minimizes our fears, from the world in which lurks the fearful, the terrifying, the aggressive.[2]

In this chapter, I wish to return to a time when this pattern was still in its early stages—when the faith in the ability to distinguish the criminal from the noncriminal through visual evidence began to crumble and the criminal no longer seemed to be readily identifiable as different from ourselves.

I have been arguing that intellectuals in the Weimar Republic turned to the study of criminality in order to investigate larger tensions and crises in post–World War I Germany and to examine the breakdown of narrative methods to separate criminal from noncriminal. However important they may have been, the texts I have thus far been concentrating on belong to an elite culture that reached a relatively small number of intellectuals. But, as I will demonstrate, the criminalistic fantasy that elided the difference between criminals and noncriminals and imagined a society overrun by criminality also applied to and had implications for a mass public. The fascination of German modernists with the figure of the criminal was paralleled by a large segment of Weimar society. In the following chapters I will concentrate on the practical application of what I have been arguing is a general crisis of distinction in Weimar engagements with criminality, as I discuss both the breakdown of traditional systems of criminal investigation, which no longer seemed adequate to apprehend modern criminals, and the emergence of a new system of criminal investigation that responded directly to this crisis of distinction. The emphasis of the popular criminalistic fantasy, in contrast to the modernist criminalistic fantasy, lay not primarily in attempts to understand the motivations of criminals and to reflect on the adequacy of our methods of understanding and judging them. Rather, the popular employment of criminalistic fantasy focused on identifying and tracking criminals. The basic structure (a crisis in distinguishing criminal from noncriminal and a belief that the foundations of society were undermined by—or even rested on—criminality), however, applies just as well to the mass criminalistic fantasy. The crisis of evidence that caused a reevaluation of the genre of the case study also caused a reevaluation of criminal investigation. That texts as different in tone and intended audience as the philosophical essays of Walter Benjamin and sensational "true crime" stories of serial killers share remarkably similar concerns is a testament to the pervasiveness of the Weimar criminalistic fantasy, which infused all levels of German culture in the 1920s.

Popular crime stories during the Weimar Republic did not share the same fascination with narrative techniques as did the high modernist experiments with the genre. Rather, they turned to questions of the reliability of images. Just as narrative attempts to distinguish criminals from noncriminals went into crisis after World War I, so did the dominant popular method of distinguishing the two groups: visual evidence. Walter Benjamin recognized quite clearly the crucial link between criminology, crime fiction, and visuality:

> The invention of photography … was no less significant for criminology than the invention of the printing press was for literature. Photography made it possible for the first time to preserve permanent and unmistakable traces of a human being. The detective story came into being when this most decisive of all conquests of a person's incognito had been accomplished. Since that time, there has been no end to the efforts to capture [*dingfest machen*] a man in his speech and actions.[3]

Both types of crime stories that Benjamin evokes—the scientific work of criminologists and fictional tales about criminals and detectives—revolve around attempts to capture a criminal's traces. These two types of crime stories, however, utilize visual evidence in different ways: the new criminal anthropology of the nineteenth century attempted to locate a marked body, a distinct, visible difference in the criminal, while detective fiction and, more generally, the modern concept of trial-by-evidence attempted to track visual clues in order trace them back to and capture the individual criminal. Both regimes are connected in their ultimate goal—the removal of the dangerous individual for the protection of society—and in their faith in observation as the tool by which to achieve this goal. In both cases the criminal's body occupies the center of attention and is the object of a professional (or, in the case of amateur detectives such as Sherlock Holmes, well-trained) gaze, but the two regimes of visibility differ crucially in their attitude toward individuality and, consequently, in their methodology. In this chapter, I first discuss these two attitudes toward the visibility of the criminal in the nineteenth century, and then proceed to trace their transformations and appropriations in popular, criminological, and fictional works in the twentieth century. By the time of the Weimar Republic, neither method will prove to be adequate in confronting modern criminality. Just as modern criminals seemed to defy being effectively contained and separated through the case study and the judicial trial, they also defied being distinguished by visual evidence. At the end of the chapter, I will examine those texts that engage this crisis of visual criminal investigation and attempt to develop new methods of tracking criminals.

Tracking and Measuring the Criminal: Detection and Criminal Anthropology at the *Fin de Siècle*

"To live means to leave clues behind," as Walter Benjamin once noted;[4] the role of the detective is to follow these clues back to the individual who left them behind. These two positions vis-à-vis clues (the leaver and the seeker) make up the trajectory of the nineteenth-century detective story, which Tom Gunning has nicely summarized:

> The detective story maps out two positions in this dialectical drama of modernity: the criminal, who preys on the very complexity of the system of circulation; and the detective, whose intelligence, knowledge, and perspicacity allow him to discover the dark corners of the circulatory system, uncover crime, and restore order.[5]

The reestablishment of order is contingent upon distinguishing and removing the individual who disrupts that order. Therefore, the detective story, as exemplified in Arthur Conan Doyle's tales of Sherlock Holmes, is ultimately concerned with individuals and the process of individualization: clues lead the detective from the crime to the individual criminal, at which point they serve as the evidence with which his/her guilt is proven. Detectives such as Holmes are not interested in establishing the criminal as a person, and certainly not in understanding his/her character, but rather in making him/her identifiable. As Lawrence Rothfield has argued, Holmes acts something like a surgeon, locating an individual pathogen and carefully removing it from the social body.[6] "Whether Holmes's method is inductive, deductive, or abductive," writes Rothfield, "one thing is clear. That method always has the same aim: identification or designation" (133). In his self-proclaimed attempt to "reconstruct the man,"[7] Holmes seizes upon small details and body parts (sometimes quite literally: in one story, he uncovers a pair of severed ears; in another it is an engineer's thumb) that ultimately lead not to "the pathologically embodied person of realism, but what one might call the individuated body."[8] As learned and intellectual as Holmes is, it is ultimately the physical confrontation with criminals and crime scenes that provide him with the facts he needs to crack the case. He repeatedly credits his trained powers of observation for his successful detective work. A line from *The Sign of Four* might well serve as the motto for his entire investigative practice: "go everywhere, see everything, overhear everyone."[9]

Nineteenth-century criminology, on the other hand, concerns itself not with tracking individuals, but rather with identifying types. The establishment of criminal types thorough criminological science has received a great deal of scholarly attention in recent years, much of which as been devoted to an analysis of the important and often troubling contributions of the anthropological school of criminality to racial science. Departing from the "fundamental position … that we ought to study not so much the abstract crime as the criminal,"[10] Cesare Lombroso, the founder of the positivist school of criminal anthropology, examined a large number of Italian prisoners, painstakingly measuring their skulls and noting the size and shape of their noses and ears and the color of their hair and skin. The results of his studies, which he reported in his enormously influential four-volume criminological work *L'uomo deliquente* (Criminal Man), the first volume of which appeared in 1876, led Lombroso to conclude that there existed a separate criminal type, the "born criminal" (*deliquente nato*), who were visibly different from "normal" humans in their corporeal constitutions.[11]

Lombroso's theories attracted widespread international attention, much of it in opposition to his positivist methods, but he also attracted a number of supporters. Hans Kurella, a doctor at the Provincial-Irren-Anstalt in Brieg and Lombroso's most important German disciple, succinctly summarizes the theories of the Italian positivist school in his influential *Naturgeschichte des Verbrechers* (Natural History of the Criminal). The central hypothesis of the anthropological school, Kurella argues, is "that all true criminals possess certain consistent physi-

Figure 4.1 Portraits of criminals from Cesare Lombroso's *Criminal Man* (1876). Copyright expired. Image from Wikimedia Commons (http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immagine:Lombroso_1.jpg).

cal characteristics that can be demonstrated through anthropological investigation" and that "mark these individuals as a distinct anthropological type, separate from other humans."[12] According to Kurella, individuals with these physical characteristics will develop inescapably into criminals, completely independent of social or individual circumstances. They are "born criminals, as Lombroso says 'deliquente nato'" (2).

Although there are important differences among the various proponents of the anthropological school of criminology, and even Lombroso began to back away from his original ideas on the biological determination of criminals later in his career, the school's theories are responsible for two key developments in the process of identifying criminals that are important to our narrative here. The first development is the shift from a focus on the crime to a focus on the criminal, which, interestingly, parallels the shift that I traced earlier in the German crime story. The idea of a criminal without a crime, an abandonment of the Enlightenment principle of *nulla crimen sine lege,* would have been unthinkable at the beginning of the nineteenth century. By the end of the century, however, the focus of scientific and legal attention had shifted from the deed to the doer. As Michel Foucault notes, this shift was accompanied by a further shift from punishment to social defense: "from the crime to the criminal; from the act as it was actually committed to the danger potentially inherent in the individual; from the modulated punishment of the guilty party to the absolute protection of others."[13]

Anybody with a knowledge of the development of racist ideas in twentieth-century Europe can see where this type of thinking might head. Indeed, a great deal of scholarship in recent years has been devoted to the anthropological school of criminality, and much of concentrates on the dangerous applications of a system of social defense in the twentieth century. It should be noted, however, that Lombroso was politically liberal, and in his writings he sough not to demonize certain types of people but rather to reform penal laws to make them more modern and more effective. Punishment, he argued, rests upon a "primitive instinct" and prisons are "poison" that should be replaced by a "system of criminal therapeutics."[14] Exactly what this system entails is vague in Lombroso's study, but its general contours are clear enough: it indicates a move from a legal system that responds to crime by punishing the criminal to a legal system that protects against the occurrence of crime—a prophylactic legal system. Lombroso would replace the "fatal retrogression toward theory" that he noticed in the late nineteenth-century judicial system, which was based on deductive reasoning, with a more dynamic system, based on inductive observation (362–4). Society can be protected from the newly discovered dangerous individual, the born criminal, by focusing not on the crime and the determination of guilt but on the criminal, locating him and reforming him or otherwise rendering him harmless.[15]

The second crucial component of criminal anthropology is clear in the passage from Kurella quoted above: its emphasis on the physical signs of criminality. If the existence of the born criminal can be proven through physical examination, then it follows of course that one can see the difference of the criminal. Observa-

tion was just as important to the criminal anthropologists as it was to Holmes. According to Kurella, "the criminal disposition is marked by certain physical signs that do not arise as a result of illness," and "the recognition of these signs shows how their possessors must become criminals and nothing else."[16] Kurella devotes much of his study to detailing these criminal stigmata, accompanied, as is announced on the title page, by "numerous images and pictures of criminals." Lombroso dedicated an entire volume of *Criminal Man* to such illustrations. Criminals, we learn from Kurella's text and illustrations, can be recognized by their oversized or undersized skulls, thick, dark hair, asymmetrical faces, noses that are either large and wide or long, and thin, and misshapen ears (181–5). The anthropological school thus posits a new role for the criminal justice system (social defense replaces punishment) and provides the tools to accomplish this newly defined task: visual evidence will aid in the process of identifying criminals before they commit their crimes.

The new criminal anthropology of the nineteenth century attempted to locate a marked body, a distinct, visible difference in the criminal—I will refer to this as the Cesare Lombroso method. Detectives, both real and fictional, worked with similar presuppositions but in the opposite direction, undertaking to track visual clues in order to trace them back to and capture the individual criminal—I will refer to this as the Sherlock Holmes method. Though they differ in their methodology, both regimes are connected in their ultimate goal—the removal of the dangerous individual for the protection of society—and in their faith in vision as the tool to achieve this goal.

In the twentieth century, both visual approaches to criminality—that of the Holmes-like detective and the Lombrosian criminal anthropologist—would undergo enormous transformations. The movement initiated by Lombroso and his followers toward a study of the criminal, rather than of his crimes, would expand, as the criminal would no longer be the object only of a professional gaze but, now, of a more widespread, popular gaze. A similar expansion to the general public would also be evident in detective work, as general citizens joined in the search for hard-to-track criminals—sometimes with the encouragement of professional detectives. As discussion of criminal appearance and methods of tracing the individual body through the clues that it leaves behind occupied a broader public, the effectiveness of both visual regimes in dealing with the modern criminal came increasingly into doubt.

Criminal Biology and *Hochstapelei*

Tales of crime achieved an unprecedented level of popularity during the Weimar Republic, and ongoing criminal investigations were reported in great detail in the press. Sensationalistic accounts of criminals, their crimes, and the detectives who pursue them were certainly not unique to Weimar Germany—although the relaxation of censorship restrictions combined with new cultural attitudes

and increased competition among newspapers for readership to increase both the scope and tone of such reporting. What is remarkable is the degree of real and perceived cooperation between the police and the public in matters of law enforcement that is evidenced in these accounts. It is worth recalling that when Bernhard Weiß coined the term "criminalistic fantasy" to describe this active engagement of the public in matters of crime, the deputy president of the Berlin police force surprisingly did not condemn this public involvement.[17] For a law-enforcement official to note that the press resorted to sensationalism in its criminal reporting was nothing new; for that same official to validate such sensationalistic reporting and assert that it made a valuable contribution to crime fighting was, however, quite remarkable. Rather than attempt to reaffirm the distinction between professionals and nonprofessionals, as might be expected, Weiß argued that the public was an important ally of the police, and therefore needed to be informed in order to aid the police in fighting crime. Indeed, during the Weimar Republic, the police cooperated closely with the press in order to enlist the aid of the public in capturing criminals. Other attempts to involve the public in the process of criminal investigation included projecting pictures of wanted suspects on movie screens between films and, on at least one occasion, placing evidence from a crime scene on display in a shop window on Alexanderplatz for passersby to observe and potentially assist the police in their investigation.[18] In order to foster this process of cooperative investigation, Weiß argued, the public required "as detailed as possible a description of the latest crimes and criminal personalities, accompanied whenever possible by pictures."[19] To this end, he continued, "every important newspaper has separate inserts with photos that place events and personalities before the eyes of the reader." Especially noteworthy here is the importance of the visual element: the Weimar public wanted to *see* the criminals that they knew to be lurking in their midst. Countless films, newspaper articles, and books, both fictional and nonfictional, would attempt to satisfy the Weimar public by bringing the shadowy criminal world into view, promoting the idea of omnipresent criminality and ultimately calling for alternative systems of tracking criminals, which operated in the name of the law but independent of the legal system. The press and the police actually seemed to be encouraging the turn to extra-legal organizations such as those that appear throughout Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.[20] To track criminals—and this was now the task of all citizens—meant to be able to see criminals, which brought the issues of observation and visual difference that had been raised by nineteenth-century detectives and criminal anthropologists into general discourse.

The belief in the ability to read criminality on the body of the criminal followed two very different directions during the Weimar Republic. On the one hand, criminology became an increasingly medicalized discourse, attempting to locate the sources and signs of criminality on the body of the criminal. Racial science picked up on criminal anthropology's notion of the physical difference of the criminal and increasingly racialized these signs, attributing them, above all, to Jews and Gypsies.[21] On the other hand, however, the careers of modern

criminals and their ubiquitous literary reworkings continually brought the possibility of reading the criminal body into question. Paranoia about the location of criminality thus simultaneously followed two contradictory paths: "evil" was conceived both as easily named and immediately visible and as an invisible, hidden, and omnipresent threat.

Criminal biology continued in Lombroso's tradition of focusing on the physical aspects of criminality and became an increasingly important field of criminal science in Germany and Austria after World War I. The first official criminal-biological research archive was founded in Munich in 1924 and was subsequently followed by the establishment of other such institutes throughout Germany and Austria. Although criminal biologists explicitly distinguished themselves from Lombroso's criminal anthropology, in that they do not posit the criminal as a separate biological type,[22] they did follow Lombroso in locating the source of criminality in the body, thus explicitly countering psychological and sociological approaches to criminality that had become popular since the beginning of the twentieth century.[23] The criminal, in the estimation of the criminal biologists, is a product not of his environment but of his bodily construction.[24]

Much attention has been paid to the work of the criminal biologists, especially their role as a precursor to Nazi criminal policies. They did, indeed, have a profound effect on penal reform, advocating a system of social defense, and on pathologizing criminals and sometimes entire ethnic groups. Less attention has been paid, however, to criminal biologists' attempts to develop a semiotics of criminality, in which every expression and every movement points toward an element of the criminal's personality. Adolf Lenz, who headed the criminal biological institute in Graz, an important site of criminological research since Hans Groß began teaching there in the late nineteenth century, articulated this connection between signifiers and signified in his *Outline of Criminal Biology* (1927): "Every psychic emotion is governed by a law of expression. … Every smile, every glance, every hand movement, every method of writing, every article of clothing and every piece of furniture in a room work together to illuminate a personality."[25] The theory that Lenz was developing reads like a combination of both of the visual regimes that I have been tracing: the Sherlock Holmes method of careful observation combined with the Cesare Lombroso method of medical attention to physical signs and their effect on one's character. Criminal biology during the Weimar Republic continued the tradition of subjecting criminals and potential criminals to an expert gaze, refining Lombroso's and Kurella's theories and combining them with elements of observation taken from analytic detective fiction to develop a holistic visual approach to the identification of criminals. Criminality was visible through symbols that could be read. The task of the criminal biologist was to learn to read these symbols.

Another trend in Weimar criminology that engaged the tradition of being able to read character on the body, but which moved in a very different direction from criminal biology, involved the figure of the *Hochstapler* ("impostor" or "con man"). The *Hochstapler* enjoyed great popularity during the Weimar Republic,

and, as Peter Sloterdijk has suggested, might well serve as a sort of "poster-boy" for Weimar German society in general.[26] Turn-of-the-century imposters such as Wilhelm Voigt and Georges Manolescu reappeared in literary and criminological works after World War I, and Harry Domela, the "false Prince" who for several weeks in 1926 passed himself off as the oldest son of the Hohenzollern crown prince, became something of a cult figure. His 1927 autobiography went through six printings and sold over 120,000 copies.

The *Hochstapler*'s career depends on his ability to physically impersonate something that he is not, whether that be a prince, such as Domela, a military officer, such as Voigt, or another figure—nearly always of a class higher than that into which he was born. The *Hochstapler* consciously utilizes and subverts beliefs about appearances. As such, his brand of criminality would seem to put criminal anthropology's and criminal biology's notions of an inherently criminal appearance or inherently criminal expressions into question and provide the perfect site around which to rethink the ability to read character on the body. This is precisely the case in literary representations of historical *Hochstapler* during the Weimar Republic.

The careers of celebrated turn-of-the-century *Hochstapler* form the basis of a number of Weimar-era fictional works. Thomas Mann's short story version of "Felix Krull" (first published in 1922), for example, is modeled on the memoirs of the turn-of-the-century Hungarian imposter Georges Manolescu; and Carl Zuckmayer's enormously popular drama *Der Hauptmann von Köpenick (*The Captain of Köpenick, first performed in 1931), is based on the career of Wilhelm Voigt. When these compelling figures from German history reappear in Weimar documentary crime fiction, they literally undergo a change in appearance. In these texts, the *Hochstapler* signaled a crisis of visual distinction that authors such as Mann and Zuckmayer sought to work through in their retellings of well-known case histories. There is a crucial shift in German cultural productions after World War One from the notion of the inherent and immediate visibility of the criminal outsider to an interest both in his normality and, crucially, the hidden truths about his society that he reveals. These overtly fictional tales thus function in much the same way as the case histories that I discussed in the previous two chapters. It is not the visibility of the *Hochstapler* but the absurdity of the social order that he *makes visible* that is the ultimate lesson of these fictional case histories.

The quintessential German *Hochstapler* is, of course, Wilhelm Voigt, the shoemaker and longtime prison inmate who in 1906 appeared at the Köpenick city hall in an officer's uniform and, with a group of soldiers in tow, arrested the mayor and made off with the contents of the city's safe. He immediately became a folk hero for making fools of the military and the city government. The notion that "clothes make the man" was, of course, nothing new in 1906. However, the relationship between the clothes and the body of this particular man seemed to touch a nerve, as is indicated in a report in the *Berliner Tageblatt* on the day following what would become known as the *Köpenickiade:*

Figure 4.2 Police mugshot of Wilhelm Voigt, the "Captain of Köpenick" (1906). Photographer unknown. Copyright expired. Image from Wikimedia Commons (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Wilhelmvoight.JPG).

Figure 4.3 Wanted poster for Wilhelm Voigt (1906). Copyright expired. Image from Köpenick im Internet (http://www.koepenick.net/galerie-hist-stadt2/seiten/foto_06.htm.)

> That ten infantrymen followed an improperly uniformed captain with bow legs and a *crooked* nose without hesitation in order to invade the Köpenick city hall and hold the poor mayor at the end of a bayonet: that is a better lesson on the wisdom of our military education than any satirical magazine could invent.[27]

The broken-down and battered body of the imposter, in this report, can be seen clearly through the uniform, even though he managed to fool a group of soldiers. A caricature of a wanted poster in the journal *Kladderadatsch* published shortly after the event pictures an ungainly and most uncaptain-like Voigt in an ill-fitting, badly-patched uniform and announces:

> The captain depicted in the above picture and described below is a fugitive from the law. The man is accused of theft from a mayor and a cashier. Your help is requested in arresting this man and turning him over to the undersigned.
> Description: indescribable.[28]

Figure 4.4 Parody of wanted poster for Wilhelm Voigt (1906).
Copyright expired. Source: *Kladderadatsch.*

Despite his temporary success, Voigt's body ultimately betrayed him—the impossible disjuncture between the shoemaker's body and the captain's uniform expressed in the satirical comment "Description: indescribable" made him visible as an impossible figure and therefore a clear imposter. If the first lesson of the *Köpenickiade* was that the German soldiers had a remarkable faith in uniforms, the second was that, in the end, clothes do not make the man.

In his examination of the memoirs of another celebrated turn-of-the-century *Hochstapler,* Georges Manolescu, the criminologist Erich Wulffen sees a similar (though much more subtle) disjuncture between the body of the *Hochstapler* and the clothes with which he conceals it. Wulffen quotes Kurella extensively to support his claim that one can see in Manolescu "all of the characteristics of the recidivist criminal,"[29] but proceeds to describe how Manolescu's appearance enabled him to "pass" as different figures in his confidence games:

> He made a sympathetic, fascinating impression. … He would always go about in the most elegant clothes and had the manners of a refined gentleman of the world. The image on the front of this book presents a good impression of him during his heyday. … In this photograph one is made aware of how completely Manolescu was able to deceive observers through his physiognomy, although he would be betrayed to the expert by his attached earlobes, which I have yet to discuss. (25–6)

Although Manolescu's elegant clothing concealed his criminal nature from the average person, his ears would betray his degenerate criminality to the trained expert's gaze.

Both Voigt and Manolescu reappear as literary figures during the Weimar Republic, and both are viewed very differently than they had been two decades earlier. It is well known that Manolescu served as the basis of Thomas Mann's *Felix Krull,* which Mann began writing shortly after reading Manolescu's memoirs in 1905 and first published in 1922. Mann's *Hochstapler* shares Manolescu's flair for form, but not his ears—his body seems to be completely unmarked. Although his (self-described) good looks clearly aid him in his confidence games,[30] it is the protean

Figure 4.5 Portrait of Georges Manolescu (1899).

Copyright expired. Source: Erich Wulffen, *Georges Manolescu und seine Memoirien* (Berlin: P. Langenscheidt, 1907)

abilities of his body that contribute the most to the effectiveness of his disguises. Krull writes of the dress-up games he would frequently play as a child:

> Often when my godfather was to sup with us he would send up a large bundle of costumes, wigs, and accessories and try them all on me after the meal, sketching any particularly good effect on the lid of a pasteboard box. "He has a head for costumes," he would say, meaning that everything became me, and that in each disguise which I assumed I looked better and more natural than in the last. … Whatever the costume, the mirror assured me that I was born to wear it, and my audience declared that I looked to the life exactly the person whom I aimed to represent. My godfather even asserted that with the aid of costume and wig I seemed able to put on not only whatever social rank or national characteristics I chose, but that I could actually adapt myself to any given period or century. For each age, my godfather would say, imparts to its children its own physiognomical stamp; whereas I, in the costume of a Florentine dandy of the end of the Middle Ages, could look as though I had stepped from a contemporary portrait … (31–2)

Krull's lack of a "physiognomical stamp" allows him to move freely between times and classes. In a scene that wonderfully satirizes medical science's ability to read the patient's body, he is even able to use his talents to counterfeit the symptoms of illness and fool a doctor into believing him to be sick (386–92). Krull is thus equally able to simulate both typicality and illness. But there is more at stake here than a masking of a "true" character by a skilled actor, for Krull (and, through him, Mann) questions which is the simulation and which is the reality, arguing that "every deception which has not a higher truth at its root but is simply a barefaced lie is by the very fact so gross and palpable that nobody can fail to see through it" (386). The only deceit that has a chance of success is that which is "the product of a lively imagination which has not yet entered wholly into the realm of the actual and acquired those tangible signs by which it alone can be estimated at its proper worth" (386).

Mann's ironic narrative—and this is perhaps its greatest achievement—continually leaves open the question of what is real and what is not. It is, however, insistent on disconnecting the notion of the "real" from that which can be read on the body.[31] The lesson of the popular early twentieth-century genre of the *Hochstapler* autobiography such as Georges Manolescu's memoirs, on which Mann bases his fictional memoir, was really only widely discerned decades later: there is a rupture between corporeal signifiers and the psychological, social, and physical conditions that they are supposed to signify. Cause and effect are likewise problematized, as it becomes difficult to decide what is determined from the outside and what is determined from within—who, in short, is constructing whom. The *Hochstapler* both signals and utilizes the breakdown of what Georg Simmel, in an essay on "The Aesthetic Meaning of the Face," called "the ability of the face to mirror the soul."[32] In Mann's take on the *Hochstapler,* which maps the connections and disconnections between aesthetic significance and social significance, the body is not permanently marked and one cannot read character through the disguise—*Schein* overpowers *sein*.

When Carl Zuckmayer retells the story of Wilhelm Voigt in his 1931 "German Fairy Tale," *The Captian of Köpenick,* he picks up on the body-uniform disjuncture accentuated in contemporary accounts of the case and proceeds to relate two separate "biographies:" the story of the shoemaker and prisoner, who is continually beaten down over the course of the play, and the story of the uniform that he comes to possess. When the haggard body of Wilhelm Voigt is draped in the (by now similarly haggard) uniform, a magical transformation seems to occur. Contemporary reviewers continually praised Werner Krauß, who portrayed Voigt in the original production of *The Captain of Köpenick,* for his skill at depicting the transformations that his character undergoes over the course of the play. Ludwig Marcuse, for example, lauded his ability to portray the "gaunt, gray, bony face of an aging proletariat, on whom one can read the traces of being hounded," and then suddenly transform himself into a "bellowing, barking captain belting out commands."[33] The play ends, however, not with this confident captain, but rather with Voigt asking permission to put on the uniform once again after being arrested, in order to see himself in it for the first time. As he looks in the mirror, he begins to shake with laughter, finally making the pronouncement with which the play ends: "Impossible!!"[34] Marcuse comments on Krauß's portrayal of this "tragic-comic end" of the play: "And Krauß looks into the mirror: a trace of joy begins to flash up. Zuckmayer wanted the play to end with a liberating laugh. Krauß doesn't go that far. He is disgusted by his own image in the mirror—or by whatever vision he sees in that mirror."[35]

This laughter has, of course, many referents—the duped soldiers, Voigt himself, and the society that produced them and him. But it also refers to an "impossible" clash between inner and outer determination, between the uniform that belongs to a public institutional order and the body of an individual that (and this is the tragicomic paradox that sets the entire series of events in motion) lacks the necessary identity papers to properly belong to that public order. When Krauß's Voigt finally sees himself from the outside (as an image in the mirror), he can react only with an uneasy laughter at the thought that the body of a common man could successfully inhabit the uniform of an officer. As I noted above, contemporary accounts of Voigt's *Hochstapelei* saw a physical disjuncture between the proletarian body and the upper-class uniform, thus underscoring the naturalness of the social order that prohibits such class transgressions: the uniform may indeed impart performative power, but only certain bodies can wear that uniform and hence appropriate that power. Zuckmayer's account, in contrast, refuses to physicalize—and hence naturalize—this disjuncture: if performative power is somehow inherent in the uniform, then nothing prevents the shoemaker from appropriating that power, and, by the same account, no natural order ordains that the uniform's "true" owner should have that power. It is not the visibility of the *Hochstapler* but the absurdity of the social order that he makes visible that prompts the laughter with which the play ends and accounts for the uneasiness that Marcuse senses in it.

The Weimar public would laugh at itself when Harry Domela repeated Voigt's class transgression on a longer, grander scale in the mid-1920s, successfully traveling throughout Germany impersonating a Hohenzollern crown prince. Domela, like Voigt, presented his society with what his publishers refer to as a "shamefully funny situation"[36] that arose from the inability to read the "real" through the disguise and thereby threw open the question of the authenticity of both the "disguise" and the "real" themselves. In Weimar, this "impossible disjuncture" between the body (un)marked by its class and the willful misrepresentation of it by the *Hochstapler* seemed anything but impossible. Indeed, Weimar society imagined that *Hochstapler* were everywhere and that bodies were difficult, if not impossible, to read.

Walter Serner, the author who had done so much to transform the German crime story in his tales of exotic criminals, authored (with tongue in cheek) an instructional guidebook to living in a society founded on deceit, *Letzte Lockerung: Ein Handbrevier für Hochstapler und solche die es werden wollen* (Final Loosening: A Handbook for Hochstapler and Those Who Wish to Become Hochstapler, 1928). In this work, which is no less inscrutable than his fictional texts, Serner celebrates a world in which nothing is as it appears—or perhaps more accurately: everything is as it appears and there is no reality at its base. Consider, for example, rule #366: "If you have come to the point that it is so easy to change your personality through your appearance that you have to keep reminding yourself not to mistake your role, then you have become what you must be." The upshot of imagining oneself to live in such a world leads to Serner's clearest maxim in his book, which might well serve as a motto of Weimar criminalistic fantasy: "Trust nobody, look at nobody."[33]

We are thus faced with two distinctly different assessments of the effectiveness of visual evidence during the Weimar Republic. Whereas criminal biologists followed upon nineteenth-century research and continued to develop a system of visual clues by which to determine criminality, fictional authors revisited pre–World War I imposters and employed their narratives to question the status of visual evidence in determining character. As we shall see, this denigration of vision, which was not without its paranoid elements, would combine with the alternative, self-defense-oriented penal system of the criminal biologists in complicated and ultimately dangerous ways.

"The Trained Eye": The Police, the Public, and the Criminal

"Late in the evening you encounter … "[38] Curt Elwenspoek begins his popular 1931 study of police work, *Mord und Totschlag: Polizei greift ein!* (Murder and Manslaughter: The Police Take Action!), by asking his reader to imagine himself near the scene of a murder: a young man sits next to the reader on a bus casually glancing at a newspaper, having just robbed and murdered a woman. You, however, did not realize that "you have experienced this shoulder to shoulder along

with the murder, so to speak—clueless of the events" (7). Presumably having accomplished his mission of getting the reader's attention by imagining that we are all surrounded by criminality, although it remains invisible to us, Elwenspoek then turns from this fictional scene to descriptions of real and contemporary sensational murder cases—those of Karl Denke, Fritz Haarmann, Karl Großmann, and Peter Kürten—and mentions the many witnesses in each case who failed to recognize the men as murderers until after they were captured. The problem, according to Elwenspoek, lies in the types of pictures found in the works of criminal anthropologists and the widespread faith in the visible difference of the criminal:

> You think that one must be able to read a murderer's depravity in his face? Amateurish superstition! … Just look at six, eight images of executed murderers and ask yourself conscientiously whether you wouldn't consider most of them to be perhaps obtuse, but harmless (and many even good-natured) fellows! … Look at the official mug shots, each with the same three-part structure: profile, frontal, half-profile with the left ear! Now dress yourself, your friends, your wife in similar clothing, adopt the same pose and photograph yourself in the same merciless lighting. Try to give the same expression of reluctance and grim defiance and see if a neutral third party is able to tell the criminal from the law-abiding person. … No, there is no truth to the "pronounced criminal physiognomy." (17–8)

Danger is, in Elwenspoek's paranoid universe, present everywhere, either living next door to your apartment or sitting right beside you on the bus—yet it is invisible to all except those who possess what he refers to as "the trained eye" of the professional criminalist (10). However, even with their trained eyes, the professional criminalists do not come out well in this study that bills itself as an "appreciation of the activities of the modern police force" (6), for the cases Elwenspoek presents at the opening of his book are among the most spectacular *failures* of the German police over the previous decade. Germany's most notorious serial killers of the 1920s were not captured by clever police work but by private citizens who acted on a chance observation and uncovered the criminal, as Elwenspoek is quick to point out.

Criminality is everywhere, and criminals are invisible: "There is no possibility," Elwenspoek tells us, "to isolate yourself completely from criminals. Crime is always and everywhere present, it threatens us all constantly—invisible, to be sure, but therefore all the more dangerous" (17). If Serner's *Handbook for Hochstapler* can be seen as a training manual to deceive people, Elwenspoek's *Murder and Manslaughter* can be seen as training manual in spotting deception. The author seeks to enlist his readers in the fight against crime in a world in which criminals can easily deceive through their appearance and instruct them to have "the trained eye" of the professional criminalist. The police clearly need the public's help to track the modern criminal, as Bernhard Weiß had recognized several years earlier.[39]

Elwenspoek ends the book where he began, with an exercise in observation, testing the reader again on his ability to read visual signs and identify the crimi-

nal. He includes a series of mug shots along with the questions "Who is the criminal? Who is the innocent?" (273). The top series of photographs turns out to be the author himself, the bottom series his secretary and the middle series, "a serial sex-killer" (273). The reader is, of course, still unable to read physical

Figure 4.6 "Who is the criminal? Who is innocent?"

Source: Curt Elwenspoek, *Mord und Totschlag: Polizei greift ein!* (Stuttgart: Dieck & Co., 1931).

clues and separate the criminals from the innocents—the serial killer is no more marked than the author of the book.[40] Neither of the two major nineteenth-century beliefs in the visibility of the criminal (criminal stigmata and the following of traces) seem to be effective in the world that Elwenspoek details. And yet, Elwenspoek argues, we must be ever on alert for signs of criminal behavior. Like Bernhard Weiß, Elwenspoek concludes that the proper response to this crisis of visible difference is that the public must be enlisted in the fight against crime. The criminal is no longer the subject only of a professional gaze but of a widespread network of surveillance that is just as omnipresent and invisible as he is.

It is not only in popular works such as Elwenspoek's that one finds this type of paranoid world, in which criminality seems to be omnipresent and invisible. In his enormously influential criminological treatise *Der Berufsverbrecher: Ein Beitrag zur Strafrechtsreform* (The Career Criminal: A Contribution to Penal Reform, 1926), Robert Heindl adopts a similarly paranoid view.[41] Dismissing recent German criminological thought, which he saw as standing "under the influence of metaphysical philosophy" and therefore not interested in "the criminal man, his methods and techniques," Heindl instead advocates a return to the engaged, observational methods of criminal anthropology, which conducted its research "in an atmosphere thick with the odor of the lower classes."[42] Heindl argues that penal philosophy ought to abandon speculative discussions of law and justice and return to a study of the material aspects of the criminal himself. Equating the criminal with a sick patient, Heindl argues that just as "'there are no sicknesses—only sick people,' so should penal measures be directed not at crimes, but rather at criminals" (374).

The foundation of Heindl's criminological system is his distinguishing between two types of criminals—the "opportunistic criminal" and the "career criminal." Heindl argues that whereas the former type of criminal, as the name indicates, "acts under the influence of opportunity" and can therefore be reformed through the existing judicial system in order to become a law-abiding citizen once again, the "career criminal" is a modern development that cannot be handled under traditional techniques and therefore requires a new approach to criminal justice (139). For the "career criminal," Heindl argues, rehabilitation is "utopian" and "a dangerous metaphysical belief" (109). "Only a theory based upon protection," he asserts, "is capable of offering a true solution that meets the practical needs of modern security" (109).

It is this latter figure, as the title of the book indicates, that interests Heindl. The career criminal is, according to Heindl, a new phenomenon that requires equally new techniques of law enforcement in order to combat. Like the other modern criminological works discussed above, Heindl sees his book as an effort to reform the penal system. Indeed, he subtitles his book "A Contribution to Penal Reform." His chief argument throughout this massive work is for a turn from a judicial system that responds to and punishes a crime to a system of prophylaxis that searches out and removes criminals from society. Heindl's system would distinguish the "career criminal" from the "opportunistic criminal," submitting

the latter to the judicial apparatus and removing the former permanently from society in the name of self-defense.

How, though, would this prophylactic system work? How would one distinguish the two types of criminals? Though he admires Lombroso's turn away from abstract theoretical concerns and toward the figure of the criminal, and, like Lombroso, seems to posit a sort of *deliquente nato* in his version of the "career criminal," Heindl does not resuscitate the notion of the visual difference of the criminal:

> The question remains as to how one is to go about distinguishing the two groups in a pragmatic, practical, and routine matter—not systematically as up to now. In no way can this be accomplished by resorting to anthropological observations. One cannot condemn a man to prison because he has an irregular chin or protruding ears. (166)

In a series of pictures titled "Is there a Criminal Type?," Heindl answers his own question in the negative, arguing that "one would … be more accurate in speaking of a 'prison physiognomy' (acquired while under custody) than of a 'criminal type' (Lombroso)" (113). The career criminal cannot simply be subjected to scientific measurement to determine his/her criminality.

Nor have, in Heindl's estimation, the police and their system of tracing the individual criminal through evidence been effective in combating the "career criminal." In a volume titled *Polizei und Verbrechen* (Police and Crime) published concurrently with the first edition of *The Career Criminal,* Heindl devotes over 100 pages to describing modern police methods of collecting evidence, photographing crime scenes, and assembling fingerprints, then turns to suggestions for improving crime fighting. One might imagine that his suggestions would follow upon this discussion and propose further advances in the technology of criminal detection. However, just as he invokes Lombroso in *The Career Criminal* in order to suggest an entirely different path of research, he similarly invokes police tactics in *Police and Crime* in order to argue for progressing in a very different direction. His suggestions, it turns out, have nothing to do with further developing the criminalistic science that he had just described in such detail, but rather with the enlistment of the press and the public in the battle against criminals. In a discussion of police tactics that he considers successful, he praises the chief of the criminal police in Vienna for "herding the entire public alongside the police agents to track his suspect" and "directing a crime drama with the art of a virtuoso."[43]

Heindl further argues, much as Bernhard Weiß had in his article on "Criminal Sensations," in favor of the sensational reporting of crime in the tabloid press, in order to provoke the public into action. "The degeneration of morals," he claims, "is much less harmful than the sterile work of the criminal police" (118). Although it falls within the genre of scientific criminology, Heindl's *The Career Criminal* is also, as Leslie Ann Pahl has argued, something of a sensationalist work, painting a picture of a world in which "crime is everywhere and everyone is potentially a criminal."[44] Like Elwenspoek, Heindl points to sensational recent cases of serial killers and admonishes the public not to forget "the lessons that

Haarmann and Großmann recently taught us!"[45] Notice that at this point in his work of scientific criminology Heindl addresses not fellow criminologists, nor even law enforcement professionals, but rather the general public. Because he hopes to convey the lessons that he has learned from Haarmann, Großmann, and other "career criminals" to the public, Heindl explicitly aims his work not to a professional audience (as did the criminologists he admires and often evokes, from Lombroso to Hans Groß), but rather to the general lay reader:

> Our divergent opinion is not presented in bureaucratic language. One may excuse this decision since this work is not directed exclusively at jurists, but rather aims to alert a large public to the utopian notion of rehabilitation theory, the eminent danger of career criminals and the necessity of lifelong preventative detention by bringing these facts as emphatically as possible before their eyes. (1)

In Heindl's paranoid world, society is continuously threatened by an omnipresent, invisible criminality that is not brought *before the eyes* of the public (note once again the emphasis on vision). Indeed, Heindl estimates (without much evidence) that less than one percent of serious crimes are ever even brought to the attention of the public (221). The criminals cannot be seen and sometimes even their crimes themselves cannot be recognized. The police and the judicial system have proven themselves to be ineffective in halting the modern criminal, thus leading Heindl to leave his readers with the following warning: "Every people [*Volk*] must defend itself against these parasites [*Schädlinge*]. A people that fails to apply this principle rigorously will vanish" (394).

From criminological treatises to theatrical and literary works to the tabloid press, the Weimar "criminalistic fantasy" worked to paint a paranoid picture of a society completely undermined by criminality. The ability to read character on the body, the possibility of visually distinguishing criminal from non-criminal that had been a fundamental tenet of popular and scientific thought at the turn of the century, had clearly gone into crisis by the 1920s. *Hochstapler* and serial killers seemed to be lurking in every shadowy corner, hiding behind the normal appearance of the "man-next-door." This paranoid view further worked to charge every citizen with the task of defending society against these dangerous "parasites." Everyone had to be on alert for the now-invisible modern criminal.

In 1929–30 the citizens of Düsseldorf would respond enthusiastically to the task with which the new Weimar criminology charged them, as a serial killer dubbed "the Vampire of Düsseldorf" continually eluded police and occupied the attention of all of Germany and much of the world. In the following chapter, I examine the case of the Düsseldorf murders as a particularly clear manifestation of the crisis of visual distinction that I have discussed in this chapter. It represents at once an extraordinary and yet representative case in which these matters were brought into a broad and urgent public discussion and new techniques of criminology and detection were employed with very little success. I then turn to fictional works—most notably Fritz Lang's film *M*—that confront and respond to

this breakdown and attempt to work through the issues that the Kürten case and other prominent breakdowns of law enforcement in the Weimar Public raised about criminal appearance, criminal investigation, and the role of the public in preserving order.

Notes

1. "Neighbors Remember Serial Killer as Serial Killer," *The Onion* 31.8 (5 March 1997). Available online at http://www.theonion.com/content/node/32531.
2. Sander L. Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 13.
3. Walter Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings,* ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott and others (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 27.
4. Walter Benjamin, *Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts*, in *Gesammelte Schriften,* ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuse (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1972), V: 53.
5. Tom Gunning, "Tracing the Individual Body: Photography, Detectives, and Early Cinema," in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life,* ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 15–45. Here, 20. I am greatly indebted to Gunning's excellent discussion of the use of visual evidence to monitor and track the individual body.
6. See Lawrence Rothfield, *Vital Signs: Medical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 130–47.
7. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles,* 669, quoted in Rothfield, 133.
8. Rothfield, *Vital Signs,* 134.
9. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, in *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories, Volume I* (New York: Bantam Books, 1986), 161.
10. Cesare Lombroso, *Crime: Its Causes and Remedies,* trans. Henry P. Horton (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1918), 365.
11. See Cesare Lombroso, *L'uomo deliquente,* 5th edition (Torino: Fratelli Boca, 1896).
12. Hans Kurella, *Naturgeschichte des Verbrechers* (Stuttgart: Verlag von Ferdinand Enke, 1893), 2.
13. Foucault, "The Dangerous Individual," 44.
14. Lombroso, *Crime,* 382, xxxv.
15. For more on this shift and its implications, see Foucault, "The Dangerous Individual," esp. 150–1.
16. Kurella, *Naturgeschichte,* 2.
17. See Weiß, "Kriminalsensationen," and my discussion in the Introduction to this volume.
18. See His-Huey Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 116.
19. Weiß, "Kriminalsensationen."
20. See my discussion in Chapter Three.
21. The classic discussion of racial science from the eighteenth century to the Third Reich can be found in George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978). On Lombroso, see esp. 83–7.
22. See Adolf Lenz, *Grundriss der Kriminalbiologie* (Wien: Verlag von Julius Springer, 1927), 7.

23. On criminal biology, see Wetzell, *Inventing the Criminal,* 125–78. Another useful history of criminal biology can be found in Richard Evans, *Rituals of Retribution: Capital Punishment in Germany 1600–1987* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 526–36.
24. See Lenz, *Grundriss der Kriminalbiologie,* 11.
25. Lenz, *Grundriss der Kriminalbiologie,* 60.
26. See Peter Sloterdijk, *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft 2* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1983), 849–59. "In einer so 'verunsicherten' Welt," writes Slotterdijk, "wuchs der Hochstapler zum Zeittypus *par excellence* heran" (850).
27. Paul Block, "Der Hauptmann von Köpenick," *Berliner Tageblatt* 17 Oktober 1906, rpt. in *Carl Zuckmayer: Das Bühnenwerk im Spiegel der Kritik,* ed. Barbara Glauert (Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 1977), 157–60. Here, 157–9.
28. Reprinted in Glauert, *Carl Zuckmayer,* 158.
29. Erich Wulffen, *Georges Manolescu und seine Memorien* (Berlin: P. Langenscheidt, 1907), 99–100.
30. Thomas Mann, "Felix Krull," in *Death in Venice and Seven Other Stories,* trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Vintage Books, 1954), 375–6.
31. In many recent cultural studies approaches, the body has, of course, once again claimed a position as the privileged site of a return to the "real."
32. Georg Simmel, "Die ästhetische Bedeutung des Gesichts," in *Georg Simmel: Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1901–1908*, *Gesamtausgabe,* ed. Ottlein Rammstedt (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), VII: 36–43. Here, 41–42.
33. Ludwig Marcuse, "Ein deutsches Märchen," *Frankfurter Generalanzeiger* 7 März 1931, rpt. in Glauert, *Carl Zuckmayer* 170–2. Here, 172.
34. Carl Zuckmayer*, Der Hauptmann von Köpenick* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1961), 128.
35. Marcuse, "Ein deutsches Märchen," 172.
36. Harry Domela, *Der falsche Prinz* (Berlin: Malik-Verlag, 1927), 8.
37. Walter Serner, *Letzte Lockerung: Ein Handbrevier für Hochstapler und solche die es werden wollen,* in *Gesammelte Werke,* ed. Thomas Milch (Goldmann Verlag, 1981), IX: 77.
38. Curt Elwenspoek, *Mord und Totschlag: Polizei greift ein!* (Stuttgart: Dieck & Co., 1931), 7.
39. Bernhard Weiß, "Kriminalsensationen." See my discussion above and in the Introduction.
40. In fact, I have shown this image to well over a hundred people from various ethnic, national, gender, and educational backgrounds and asked them to identify the criminal. The majority have chosen Elwenspoek. His secretary comes in second, and the real murderer has attracted the least suspicion!
41. Leslie Ann Pahl discusses Heindl's paranoid worldview in "Margins of Modernity," 305–22. I am very much indebted to her excellent reading of Heindl.
42. Heindl, *Der Berufsverbrecher,* 372. In his call to turn away from philosophical speculation and toward engaged, hands-on research, Heindl echoes Lombroso's charges against what he termed a "fatal retrogression toward theory." See my discussion of Lombroso above, 90–93.
43. Robert Heindl, *Polizei und Verbrechen* (Berlin: Gersbach & Sohn Verlag, 1926), 118.
44. Pahl, "Margins of Modernity," 307.
45. Heindl, *Der Berufsverbrecher,* 223. Compare Pahl, "Margins of Modernity," 322.

Chapter 5

Tracking Criminals

The Cases of Peter Kürten, Franz Beckert, and Emil Tischbein

Introduction

As the discussion of criminological texts in the previous chapter illustrated, two important developments coincided during the Weimar Republic that radically transformed the process of criminal investigation: the belief in the ability to identify criminals through the use of visual evidence went into crisis, and the belief that criminality was ubiquitous and constantly threatening to all citizens prompted even some law enforcement authorities to recruit the general public to be ever vigilant against dangerous elements in society. This chapter will examine in detail one of the most remarkable examples of this shift in the process of tracking criminals, the case of the serial killer Peter Kürten, the so-called "Vampire of Düsseldorf," and a film that was inspired by and partly based on the Kürten case, Fritz Lang's *M* (1931). Considered together, these two cases provide great insight into the relationship between criminality and society in the late Weimar Republic. But the Kürten case was certainly an exceptional case and Lang's film was an exceptional film; hence, one must wonder how representative they are of general trends in society. I believe that they are indeed representative and thus turn at the end of this chapter to a very different fictional account of a criminal investigation, Erich Kästner's enduringly popular children's story *Emil and the Detectives,* in order to demonstrate that the Weimar shift in ideas about tracking criminals permeated all levels of this culture of crisis.

In order to demonstrate the crisis of visual evidence that I am describing, I will begin with three scenes involving the viewing of criminals, all from 1931.

Notes for this section begin on page 138.

The first scene takes place in a courtroom in Düsseldorf during the trial of Peter Kürten, a man who stood accused of nine counts of murder and seven further counts of attempted murder. Kürten's defense attorney cross-examines one of the victims who escaped from her attacker:

> *Counsel for Peter Kürten:* What did Kürten look like when he attacked you?
> *Woman Witness:* Like the devil—like the devil incarnate.
> *President of the Court:* What does the devil incarnate look like? (Laughter.)[1]

The second scene is from Fritz Lang's film *M,* which premiered less than three weeks after Kürten was convicted. While a police expert describes the still-unknown child-murderer as having strong psychological defects and traces of insanity, the scene shifts to the murderer, Beckert, who stands before a mirror and pulls down the corners of his mouth to form a grotesque image, transforming himself into the visibly pathological beast being described by the expert on the soundtrack and sought by the police. But his mouth soon returns to its normal position and the killer becomes once again a harmless looking, even childlike man whose criminality is utterly invisible to the police and the public alike.

The third, more famous, scene occurs near the end of the film. Beckert once again stands before a mirror and observes himself. And once again he sees himself as marked by his criminality: he notices, with horror, a chalk letter "M" that had been drawn on his back, marking him as the murderer and making him finally visible and able to be apprehended.

This chapter will trace the movement between these three scenes. What, indeed, does the devil incarnate look like? Certainly not like the man sitting in the Düsseldorf courtroom, who had confessed to a long series of brutal attacks dating back to his childhood. Impeccably dressed, articulate, of average size and with no outstanding features, Peter Kürten seemed the picture of an honest, middle-class German citizen, complete with a wife, a home, and a respectable job. How could this man be the "Vampire of Düsseldorf?" Many observers who eagerly followed the trial through its extensive press coverage agreed with the position expressed in an open letter to Kürten after his conviction: "Kürten, I urge you again: tell the truth; give up the role of the Düsseldorf murderer. … I know you from the trials and have studied your picture carefully."[2] But, of course, Kürten was the murderer—in spite of his normal appearance. The case of the Düsseldorf murders, both before and following Kürten's apprehension, signaled a moment of crisis in which the belief in stable, visible boundaries between the criminal and the noncriminal seemed to break down. And Lang's classic film, as I will argue, examines these unstable boundaries—between criminal and noncriminal, but also between individual and institution, sound and image—in an attempt to work through this crisis in its personal, public, and representational dimensions.

As Janet Bergstrom has perceptively noted, Lang is ultimately not interested in detailing the personality of the murderer but rather in examining the institutional structures that both make him what he is and, crucially, seek to defend

society against him.[3] *M*—which tells the story of a child murder who terrorizes a city and is pursued by two opposing groups, police and gangsters—traces both (1) the collapse of existing official institutions, such as the police, the court, and the scientific apparatus that they sustain, which are unable to deal with the uncanny disturbance in the social order that the murderer represents, and (2) the consequent development of a new institution, a community united to distinguish itself from and defend itself against outsiders. These ideas are not at all unique to Lang's film. Rather, *M* draws together three terms that enjoyed a close relationship in Weimar Germany: mass murder, mass culture, and mass public, all three of which are intricately bound up with the complex and urgent problem of the visibility of the dangerous individual.

"Is This What a Murderer Looks Like?": The Case of Peter Kürten

"Düsseldorf is at a fever-pitch! The Rhineland is trembling with excitement! Let's put it calmly: all of Germany is tumbling these days from one sensation to another."[4] Thus begins a special issue of the popular crime monthly *Kriminal-Magazin* (The Criminal Magazine) from 1930 devoted to the serial killer who had terrorized Düsseldorf since February 1929, having committed no fewer than eight murders and attempted at least seven others, yet continued to elude the authorities. The best criminalists from all of Germany were called in to investigate the case, including the celebrity homicide detective from Berlin, Ernst Gennat. Reporters from around the world descended on the Rhineland, and both Edgar Wallace and a retired detective from Scotland Yard were rumored to have taken temporary residence in Düsseldorf in an attempt to crack the case. This was, indeed, a high-profile case, which all of Germany and much of the world followed closely. Yet, as the police conducted an exhaustive investigation, examining over 13,000 letters and following up "no less than 2,650 clues," the bodies of victims continued to accumulate.[5] The public was frustrated and enraged, leading the *Criminal Magazine* to assert that "not too many criminalists have faith in the possibility of a successful systematic search for the murderer, and the public doesn't believe in it at all."[6]

The serial killer, Peter Kürten, was, indeed, eventually arrested by chance, rather than clever detective work: an escaped victim wrote a letter to a friend describing the attack, which, in an uncharacteristic error by the German postal service, was misdelivered to police headquarters. This set in motion a complicated chain of events, resulting in Kürten's confessing to his wife, who then reported him to the police. When Kürten first appeared before the public, the comment of one reporter was echoed countless times throughout the courtroom and the press: "Is this what a murderer looks like?"[7] Though the press had repeatedly dubbed the serial killer a "vampire" and a "beast," it had become obvious long before his capture that the murderer was, in fact, someone who blended in well with the population—who looked, in short, like everyone else. The Kürten case

marked a crisis of belief in both of the visual regimes that had long dominated criminality—the Holmesian tracking of the individual body through the physical traces it leaves behind and the Lombrosian faith in the measurable, visible difference of the criminal. This moment of crisis provoked an unprecedented widespread public discussion of police tactics and a frantic search for alternative methods of social defense. All of the anxieties and fantasies about the pervasiveness of crime and the need for new methods of combating it that had been in circulation throughout the Weimar Republic came to a head during the search for and trial of Peter Kürten.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Kürten case is the insight it provides into one of the most innovative and important police investigators of the time. Ernst Gennat was the well-respected chief of the homicide division of the criminal police in Berlin and a pioneer in the science of evidentiary investigation. Because of his record of success in conducting criminal investigations, Gennat was called in to aid local authorities in capturing the murderer and proceeded to write a series of articles for the professional journal *Kriminalistische Monatshefte* (Criminalistic Monthly) beginning in January 1930, in which he discussed the case. It was unusual for the standard trade journal of German criminalists to discuss an ongoing investigation, but, as Bernhard Weiß, the editor of the journal and the man who coined the term "criminalistic fantasy," noted in his introduc-

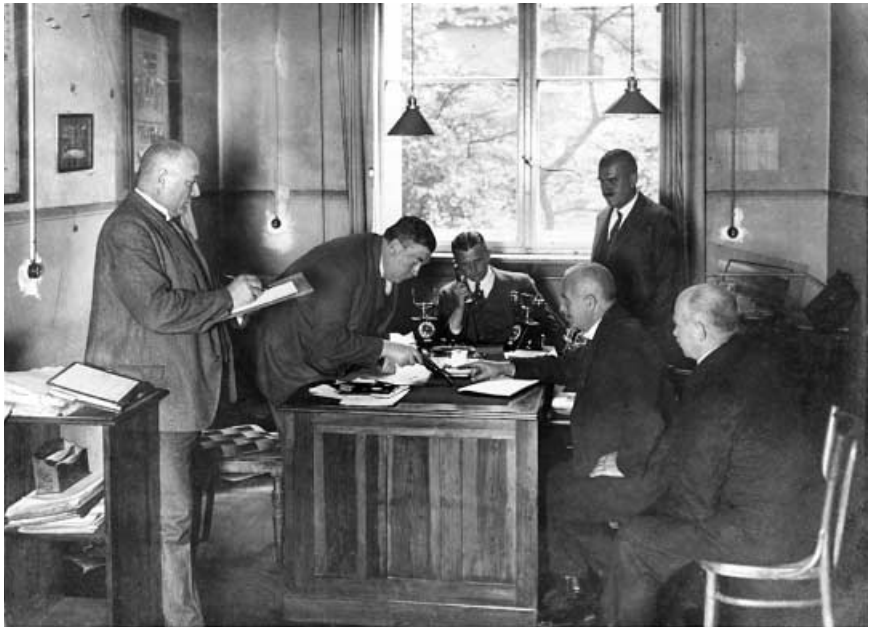

Figure 5.1 Ernst Gennat and his colleagues. Polizeihistorische Sammlung Berlin. Photographer and date unknown. Permission granted by Berlin Police under GNU Free Documentation License. Image from Wikimedia Commons (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Ernst_Gennat_im_Kreise_seiner_Mitarbeiter-2.jpg)

tion to the first installment of Gennat's discussion, the Düsseldorf murders were an unusual case, in which police tactics had received especially widespread attention.[8] The police had come increasingly under attack for their failure to capture the "Vampire of Düsseldorf," and Gennat needed to respond in their defense. The fact that this response came not in a widely circulated publication aimed at a the general public but rather in a professional journal addressed to criminal investigators indicates that the authorities, too, found themselves in a crisis and needed reassuring as to the efficacy of their tactics. And the tone of the articles as well as the fact that they addressed an ongoing investigation indicate that this was a matter of great urgency.

Something of a portly and more desk-bound version of Sherlock Holmes, Gennat was celebrated for his method of careful observation, in which he repeatedly insisted on "the need to study all details—independent of the question of whether they appear to be important or unimportant at the moment."[9] His techniques had earned him a position as one of Weimar Germany's most prominent and respected criminalists, and he put them to work in the Düsseldorf case. In the series of essays that appeared over the course of the first four months of 1930, he painstakingly details the evidence collected in the investigation—weapons, keys, handkerchiefs, letters to the press—carefully describes the crime scenes, compares the timing and methods of the attacks, and even examines the type of paper and the color of the pencil (blue) that the murderer used to write his letters.[10]

Gennat's description of his investigation of the Kürten case is a textbook example of the technique that he had perfected over the course of his career. The first three articles are interesting for the ways in which they demonstrate his application of these techniques to a specific investigation and document his evolving thoughts on the case. But what is truly remarkable is that, by the end of the series, he seems to have lost faith in his long-cherished method of carefully tracking clues in order to apprehend the criminal and abandons his advocacy of a methodical, professional examination of evidence. This series, spread over a period of four months of intensive investigation, provides a dramatic narrative of a crisis of faith in the very methods on which this great detective had based his highly successful career. In the final installment of the series, Gennat calls for a shift in tactics: no longer will the investigation proceed "from the crime scene to the criminal," he writes, but rather much more "from the criminal to the crime scene—to the crime."[11] Gennat argues that whereas the emphasis had until then been placed on the careful collection and examination of evidence, the investigation now had to shift its focus to apprehending the criminal less methodically and more directly. In other words, we are to disregard everything that Gennat had presented in the previous months and pursue a radically different mode of investigation. The Düsseldorf murders seemed to prove even to Gennat that the individual body of the criminal was no longer traceable through the clues that it left behind. The focus had to be shifted to a system of surveillance in which the criminal is spotted *before* committing his crime.

Gennat immediately emphasizes, however, that this move to the person of the criminal cannot be based on outdated notions of visual difference. Commenting on the "personality and appearance of sex-murderers," he writes:

> One generally believes that such people possess a raw, brutal, and violent nature; strangely most are precisely the opposite. One tends to find people who seem sweet and good-natured in their surroundings. This is precisely the reason that sex-murderers are so seldom discovered. One often bypasses the real criminal, even when there is strong evidence to make him a suspect, because his personality stands in such marked opposition to the deed that one considers his guilt to be out of the question.[12]

Here Gennat brings in the second element of the Weimar crisis of faith in visual evidence and presents its central paradox: we must be on the lookout for criminals but remain cognizant of the fact that they are not visibly marked as criminals. Gennat realizes that his call for surveillance aligns him with criminal anthropologists and criminal biologists, two groups from which he wishes to separate himself. Indeed, he is responding to a very specific event, the surprising reemergence in the Düsseldorf case of Lombroso's criminal anthropology, which, as we have seen, had long been held to be outdated. But he leaves his readers—not to mention the anxious citizens of Düsseldorf—in an ambiguous and seemingly hopeless situation: the criminal must be spotted before committing his next crime, yet his physiognomy and gestures will not betray his murderous nature.

Gennat was not alone in attempting to ward off the belief in the visual difference of the criminal. One of his colleagues wrote in the same journal as that in which Gennat's series appeared of the "publications by amateurs … in which the long-dismissed theses pertaining to the coincidence of certain body types with certain criminal tendencies … continually re-emerge."[13] The popular press did indeed repeatedly call for an "emergency application"[14] of criminal anthropology in this case. Those who issued this call seemed to recognize that these ideas had been discredited, but presented with a seemingly hopeless and yet urgent situation, they argued that—just this one time, because it is an emergency—we need to revert to ideas of readily visible criminal difference. The clearest example of this came after the arrest of Hans Stausberg, who emerged as the chief suspect prior to Kürten's arrest. Stausberg was an illiterate, epileptic, mentally challenged 21-year-old who had difficulty speaking—a man, in short, who had all of the features of Lombroso's *deliquente nato,* right down to his alleged "misshaped skull," "hare-lip," "deformed mouth," "assymetrical face," "melanoid eyes," and "twinlking, glassy stare."[15] Though witnesses and the evidence from the crime scenes did not point to Stausberg as being responsible for the crimes of which he was accused, his body did: many wanted to convict him of multiple murders on the evidence of his hare-lip.

Kleinschmidt responds to this reappearance of Lombrosian thought with cynicism, but also with ominous overtones of the system of "social defense" that would be put into place in Germany just three years later:

> What possibilities would present themselves, for example, if it were possible to recognize a criminal as such on the basis of his appearance? Were one to put into place techniques of criminal investigation that would correspond to this, one could see it as a political necessity to separate all criminal elements as a preventative mechanism. We could do away with most of the police officers and jurists and replace them with an "expert" who would examine the creatures from time to time and register all "criminal types" who could then be placed in concentration camps organized according to their crimes.[16]

It is important to remind ourselves that this warning—complete with mention of concentration camps and a mania for organization—was issued in 1930.

Stausberg, of course, turned out not to be the murderer and, when the next body was found after the case had supposedly been closed, "a storm of indignation and terror" broke out throughout all of Germany "with redoubled ferocity."[17] It had become abundantly clear that this "vampire" looked nothing like Friedrich Murnau's Nosferatu, nor did he look like the pictures in the criminal anthropologists' books. When Kürten was eventually arrested, nearly every observer expressed shock (and even disappointment) at the normality of his appearance, going to great lengths to marvel at his meticulous manners, his sartorial graces, and his having maintained a good job.[18]

In the Kürten case, the pattern of shock and surprise that now invariably accompanies the capture of a notorious killer was in its early stages—the system of visible differences had broken down just as the system of evidentiary investigation had broken down. This led to a moment of fear and shock so intense that Gennat, among others, referred to it as a mass "psychosis" brought on by "something akin to a state of war."[19] Gennat considers it a chief duty of the police to battle these psychoses, which he attributes to an over-stimulated public whose fantastic engagement with the criminal ran to an extreme, a paranoid environment that combines a fear of criminality with an excitement in the face of criminality.[20] In other words: he is reacting against the criminalistic fantasy that his colleague Bernhard Weiß had defended a decade earlier. And yet, as I noted above, Gennat's frustrations with traditional tactics in this case and his consequent call for a shift in tactics that would become criminal- and surveillance-centered would seem to imply the necessity of public involvement and the harnessing of criminalistic fantasy. Gennat also seems to be in a state of crisis and confusion in the face of this case and comes across as ambivalent about how to proceed. Neither alternative (traditional investigator-centered methods or the involvement of the public in mass surveillance) seemed acceptable.

The public was anxious and frustrated, to be sure—and with good reason—but recall the words with which the special issue of the *Criminal Magazine* that I quoted above began: the public "is at a fever-pitch," it "trembles with excitement" and "tumbles from one sensation to another."[21] There is a marked excitement in the face of danger. "A mass murderer is playing with a city," reads a section heading of the magazine—and the city seemed quite eager to play along with him (13). The audience of the *Criminal Magazine,* a monthly journal edited by the English crime author Edgar Wallace, consisted not of the professionals being

addressed by Gennat and Kleinschmidt in the *Criminalistic Monthly;* this was a public interested in sensational tales of crime, a public thoroughly infused with criminalistic fantasy. However, the journal makes an argument that is very similar to that of Gennat and Kleinschmidt, emphasizing that "the public had been taken hold of by a psychosis that often resulted in the strangest practices" (13). Maria Tatar argues in her perceptive examination of sexual murder in Weimar Germany that this emphasis on the psychosis of the public "succeeded in transferring signs of the murder's 'disease' to the public," thereby indicating that the "population at large was thus seen as duplicating the psychosis of the murderer."[22] While I think that Tatar is generally correct in this observation as regards a great deal of press coverage of the case, I wish to argue that the *Criminal Magazine* puts this notion of psychosis to an interestingly different use. After diagnosing the populace as suffering from a "murderer psychosis," the *Criminal Magazine* does not proceed, as does Gennat (however ambivalently), to offer a cure for the psychosis; rather, it stresses the *positive* effects of paranoia: "one may laugh at the murderer psychosis of the Düsseldorfers these days," argues the magazine, but "without it the necessary attention of the public would not be possible."[23]

Whereas Gennat seeks to contain the psychosis, the *Criminal Magazine* seeks to mobilize it. Gennat's patient examination of clues proved itself to be unsuccessful; if the crime is to be solved, the magazine states, "the public must unmask the murderer" (37). The issue concludes with a call for a "mobilization of the public" and "the cooperation of the great masses" in order to capture the elusive killer (36–7). Gennat's methods, based on tracking the individual criminal, now seemed to be as inadequate and out-of-date as Lombroso's faith in the visual difference of the criminal. A new system was needed, a thoroughly modern, ever vigilant, surveillance-oriented society to ensure "that this horrible criminal is rendered harmless" (37). This amounted to an implementation of the system that was being developed in criminological works such as Robert Heindl's *The Career Criminal* and journalistic works such as Curt Elwenspoek's *Murder and Manslaughter,* and was even tentatively and ambivalently being advocated by the police themselves. At all levels—from popular novels and films to the press to professional criminalists—the Weimar Republic registered the need for new methods of criminal investigation, and all of the ideas, anxieties, and ambivalences surrounding this reevaluation of traditional beliefs came to the fore in the case of Peter Kürten. And just as the seemingly irresolvable problems and provocative issues of the case of Ella Klein and Margarete Bende attracted Alfred Döblin to examine that case and produce a remarkable document that records and reflects on these issues, the seemingly irresolvable problems and provocative issues of the case of Peter Kürten attracted Fritz Lang to produce a remarkable document that records and reflects on the issues surrounding the Kürten case, the 1931 film *M.* As we shall see, Lang's position toward this new system is as ambivalent as that of professionals such as Weiß and Gennat. He wrestles with various positions in this film, which undertakes to examine various solutions to the crisis of criminal investigation surrounding the Düsseldorf murders. Everyone agreed that methods of tracking

criminals needed to be modernized. But which modern method would prove most effective? And what are the consequences and potential dangers of adopting these methods? These are the questions that Lang addresses in *M*.

The Case of Peter Kürten and the Case of Franz Beckert

Nearly every commentator on *M* from its premiere to the present has mentioned its connection to Peter Kürten and the Düsseldorf murders. Kürten was convicted on nine counts of murder and seven counts of attempted murder shortly before *M* premiered and was executed while the film was still in distribution.[24] Lang himself, however, repeatedly denied that Kürten was the inspiration for his film. In an interview conducted over three decades after the premiere of the film, Gero Gandert asked Lang how he came upon his film's theme and whether the notorious Weimar German serial killers Kürten, Haarmann, and Großmann served as "contemporary models" for the fictional child-murderer Beckert. "Who can truly say how he comes upon a theme? What influences him?" was Lang's evasive response.[25] Although Gandert does not re-pose the question, Lang for some reason feels compelled to return—unprompted—to his denial of Kürten's influence later in the interview. Gandert asks about the well-known anecdote, reported by Siegfried Kracauer, that Lang changed the title of the film from *Murderers Among Us* to *M* under pressure from a member of the Nazi party who apparently believed the "murderers" referenced in the title to pointed to the National Socialists who were gaining influence throughout Germany. Lang, however, answers another (unposed) question: "For once Siegfried Kracauer was not incorrect, except for his assertion that *M* was a film about the Düsseldorf child-murderer Kürten. First, Kürten was not a child murderer, and second the manuscript for *M* was completed before Kürten was arrested" (127).

At this point, one gets the feeling that Lang is protesting too much, acting something like a suspect being interviewed by the police and continually denying his "guilt" in the charge of modeling his film upon the Kürten case. And, interestingly, he seems to betray himself here, getting his chronology confused. According to contemporary reports in two of the most important film journals of the time (*Lichtbild-Bühne* and *Der Kinematograph*), the script for *M* was completed at the end of November 1930 and production on the film began in mid-December of the same year. Kürten had been arrested on 24 May 1930 and—if these reports are correct—he was undergoing psychiatric evaluation during the period in which the script was being completed and the film was being shot.[26]

Despite Lang's repeated disclaimers and regardless of the chronology of the filming, the fact that *M* premiered on 11 May 1931, just over two weeks after Kürten was convicted on nine counts of murder and seven counts of attempted murder, and was still in distribution when Kürten was executed two months later, led nearly every contemporary reviewer to link Lang's film to the Düsseldorf events. Herbert Ihering, for example, labels the film "an intellectual analysis of the prob-

lem of the Kürten case," and, like most critics, condemns Lang for the tastelessness of his timing: "The case of Peter Kürten as the plot of a novel, no, that is not possible."[27] Gabriele Tergit, a pioneer in the field of trial reportage in the 1920s and well acquainted with recent criminal events, recognized *M* as a thinly-veiled version of the Kürten case: "The murderer film *M* is the hastiest attempt to capitalize on events. Just after the beast is in court, he is already on the screen."[28]

Tergit's attack on *M* reminds us that this now classic film—which has found a place near the top of nearly every film critic's top 50 list and which, in a 1994 poll of 500 members of the German film industry, was voted the best German film of all time—was, at the time of its release, something akin to the modern "movie of the week" whose plot was "ripped from today's headlines." For Tergit, there seems to be no distance whatsoever between Lang's film and the Düsseldorf murders; she repeatedly refers to the fictional character of Lohmann, for instance, by the name of the real-life detective Gennat.[29] Tergit goes on to accuse Lang and co-screenwriter Thea von Harbou of bringing "Satan himself … into the business calculations and devoid of all respect or a sense of the gravity of the situation, to mint little pennies of success out of the suffering of the mothers whose children have been robbed from them and the horror of an entire city" (845). She wonders whether the film's producers "will dare to show this film in Düsseldorf as well? Will Fritz Lang show up in a tuxedo and Thea von Harbou in a white dress and take a bow" (845)?

Lang's film does not, of course, follow the Kürten case in detail: Beckert is a child-murderer, whereas Kürten indiscriminately killed women, men, children, and even animals; Lang sets his film in Berlin, rather than Düsseldorf; and, most importantly, Kürten was ultimately captured by the police, not the underworld, as in Lang's film. However, Lang's "fatty Lohmann" is clearly a cipher for Ernst Gennat, the famous homicide detective assigned to the Kürten case whose corpulence was as much his trademark as was his methodological collection of evidence,[30] and even such details as the importance of the color of the murderer's pencil are lifted directly from the case.[31] Even if such circumstantial evidence does not prove the film's indebtedness to the Kürten case, the program issued to accompany the film's premiere makes an undeniable connection, explicitly stressing the link between the Düsseldorf murders and Lang's film, incorporating statements by key figures from the Düsseldorf investigation, and reproducing the letters that Kürten had written to the press.[32]

Most post–World War II critics, like most of the film's contemporary critics, mention the connection between Lang's film and the Kürten case, but the implications of these links are worth pursuing in greater detail. By stressing the connection—as well as Lang's later uneasiness about it—I hope to recover some of the initial shock value of the film. For Lang's classic film must be read as an urgent and controversial intervention in the ongoing debates surrounding the Kürten case—about the process of police investigation, the role of the public, and, crucially, the link between visuality and criminality. *M* traces both the breakdown of systems of investigation based upon the following of visual clues

(as in classic detective work) and beliefs about criminal physiognomy (as in the theories of Cesare Lombroso), and the emergence of a new institution that will take the place of these outdated systems. Read in light of the crisis produced by the Kürten case, Lang's film can be seen as an attempt to examine the crisis of evidence and the consequential development a new system of social defense based not on outdated notions of scientific or police investigation but rather on the employment of a modern, mobilized mass evident in the numerous popular and professional discussions of criminal investigation in the late Weimar Republic that I have been addressing in this and the previous chapter.

At the time of its premiere, Lang referred to his film as "a documentary report" and announced his intention "to correspond to the objective tendencies of the period in which we are living and to produce a film solely from documentary reports."[33] This would align Lang's film with such narrative experiments as those in the *Outsiders of Society* series. In the wake of National Socialism and the Holocaust, Lang would distance himself from this reading of his film as a timely contribution to the debate surrounding criminal justice, just as he would distance his film from the specifics of the Kürten case. He would now choose instead to universalize his film, claiming that he was ultimately interested in the more abstract topic of "man … what drives him to his actions, *what makes him tick*!"[34] He clearly wishes to divorce the film from its specific historical context at the end of the Weimar Republic and reread it as a series of reflections on more general philosophical and sociological concerns about human behavior.

Lang is certainly justified in this interpretation of his film, which owes its enduring power and relevance to its transcending a specific time and place. With or without the connection to Peter Kürten and the debates about criminal investigation in the late Weimar Republic, *M* is a masterpiece that continues to affect and provoke those who view it. However, this generalization of *M*'s message comes at the sacrifice of its place within this contested period in history. It is this place that I seek to recapture and analyze here. I also seek to understand why Lang was so emphatic about distancing himself from the historical specifics of his film after World War II, when all evidence (including his writings on the film in the early 1930s) points to the film as a clear intervention in contemporary events. As the subtitle later added to the film ("A City Tracks a Murderer") clearly indicates (even though it was not added by Lang), Lang is primarily interested not in the personality of the murderer, nor in his crimes, but in the public investigation of the murder.[35] *M* is very much a product of its specific historical context, and it can be profitably read as an exploration of different methods of criminal justice that were passionately debated in early 1930s Germany.

Fritz Lang's Investigation of Investigations

There are, of course, two investigations in *M:* the police search and the gangsters' search. Critics since Kracauer have made much of the scene in which the two are

connected through cross-cutting between the police discussion and the gangsters' discussion of how to capture the killer: "At times," as Noël Carroll observes, "the editing almost elides the two meetings; a criminal could be seen as addressing an official and vice versa."[36] This use of montage, Carroll further notes, "is grounded by a thematic point—namely, the identification of the two groups" (94). Tatar argues that, in this scene, "it begins to dawn on the spectator that there is no real difference between the two factions."[37] Gunning praises the "wonderfully witty cutting on gestures which ties the two groups together" and "reveals their shared use of surveillance and control through hierarchialised power."[38] Kaes points out that "the editing establishes a common goal" and "[s]moking among men establishes a curious commonality which even includes Beckert, who betrays himself by leaving three cigarette butts at the crime scene as evidence."[39] While all of these critics make perceptive and valid points that lead to sophisticated analyses linking the various characters, I would like to emphasize the ways in which the investigations of the two groups are contrasted in this scene and throughout the film. Though both the gangsters and the police share a common purpose—the capture of the child-murderer—Lang stages in this scene and throughout the film a competition between the opposing methodologies of the two groups.

The police are consistently shown to be following the time-honored hermeneutic method of searching for clues. They examine fingerprints, dig up scraps of paper and cigarette butts, and (quite literally) seek out the traces that the killer leaves behind in the form of imprints on his writing surface or bits of red pencil lead on the windowsill. The police investigation depends upon *visual* clues—the method of tracking a criminal through the traces that he leaves behind. Inspector Lohmann is every bit as punctilious as his real-life model, the director of the Berlin Homicide Division Ernst Gennat, carefully following up, as we learn in the film, "more than 1,500 detailed clues" that are collected in "sixty thick volumes."

In a remarkable scene, in which the police president explains his investigation to a government minister who is pushing for results, the two visual regimes that had long dominated discussions of criminality are both shown to be ineffective through Lang's ingenious use of oppositions between the visual track and the sound track. As the police president explains the difficulty of tracing fingerprints and the need to gather clues and submit them to the archive, the film launches into a documentary-like sequence, in which the tedious process of evidence collection is detailed through blowups of fingerprints and scenes of detectives collecting scraps of paper from crime scenes. Even as the president admits that it is "almost impossible to recover a useful fingerprint from a piece of paper that has passed through so many hands," we are shown an enormous projection of a fingerprint, an "unreadable clue,"[40] being carefully studied by the police. Later in the sequence we follow a crumpled piece of paper found at a crime scene on an unsuccessful journey in search of the store it came from. Visual evidence, whether a fingerprint or a scrap of paper, does not lead to the individual who left it behind, but the police seem to lack alternatives to such an investigation. The overall tone is of the hopelessness and inadequacy of the process.

Figure 5.2 Three images of the police investigation in Fritz Lang's *M* (1931).
Source: Screenshot captured from Criterion Collection dvd (1998).

During one part of this long sequence, the film shifts to an archive where a police expert paces around in front of an entire wall of files, dictating a description of the still-unknown criminal. There follows a cut to a shot of the child-murderer Beckert standing in front of a mirror in his apartment as the police employee in the archive is heard in a voice-over describing the pronounced psychological defects of the murderer. The expert is a graphologist who is constructing a profile of the unknown murderer based on his handwriting in a letter to a local paper. According to the graphologist, whose thick glasses, restless pacing, and theatrical intonations seem to be a parody of such experts, the murderer shows traces of insanity: "In the whole form of his writing there is an elusive, but intensively palpable trace of madness." Meanwhile, the visual image shows Beckert pulling the corners of his mouth down, grotesquely distorting his face and constructing himself temporarily as the obviously subhuman beast that is being described. Perhaps for the first time in film history, the sound and the visuals come from two different scenes, and they are employed to comment on each other. According to the graphologist, whose description we hear on the soundtrack, the criminal is different—pathological—and it follows that he should be readily apparent as different. And, for a moment, Beckert's body does betray his deviant nature, just

Figure 5.3 A police expert paces through the archives while he dictates a description of the still-unknown serial killer in Fritz Lang's *M* (1931).
Source: Screenshot captured from Criterion Collection dvd (1998).

Figure 5.4 Franz Beckert (Peter Lorre) examines himself in a mirror while still on the loose. From *M.* Dir. Fritz Lang. Janus Fims, 1931.
Source: Screenshot captured from Criterion Collection dvd (1998).

as criminal anthropologists such as Lombroso had argued it must, and just as the police expert seems to be arguing.

The normal trajectory of the process of investigation, however, is shown to be reversed in this scene: whereas the graphologist seems to be using a clue in order to gather information about the criminal, construct a profile of him, and thereby distinguish him from others, in actuality the process moves in the opposite direction—the criminalist's description actually seems to impact Beckert's appearance, as if Beckert were following the "instructions" as to what his profile should look like (though, of course, unlike the audience, he cannot hear the expert's description). We see here a sort of looping effect, in which the criminal adopts and adapts to notions of what he is supposed to be like—he begins to conform to a type. The archives (which are powerfully visually represented in this scene as the wall of files before which the handwriting expert paces, dictating yet another report to be placed in the files) not only gather information to construct composite profiles; they play a role in forming individuals as types. Serial killers, in particular, frequently take an enormous interest in researching the literature, both popular and clinical, on serial murder. Peter Kürten, for example, confessed to learning the "trade" of serial killing by reading not only stories of Jack the

Ripper (required reading for all serial killers since the 1880s) but also Lombroso's criminological treatises.

Criminological discourse and the Law seem in this scene not so much to be reading signs in the criminal as writing their signs onto the criminal. But, of course, only figurally: nothing is written onto Beckert's body, and as his mouth quickly returns to its normal position he returns to invisibility within society—he is no longer a "type" that can be spotted. His body is as unreadable a clue as the fingerprint and the crumpled scrap of paper depicted elsewhere in the sequence. Indeed, as both Kaes and Gunning note in their discussions of this scene, the camera cuts to Beckert looking in the mirror precisely as the police expert comments on his writing style's "expression of play-acting" and cuts back to the archive on the word "madness."[41] Which, finally, is it: acting or madness? The film never answers this question, as it is ultimately more interested in pursuing instead the seemingly more urgent question of how to identify and distinguish the killer. Despite a powerful performance by Peter Lorre, we never really learn much about "what makes Beckert tick," as Lang would later characterize the intended focus of his film. We do, however, learn quite a bit about what makes criminal investigations work and fail.

The disjuncture between the sound and image tracks in this scene, between the pathogen being described and the man-next-door being seen, is one of Lang's many masterful uses of the new medium of sound in his first sound film. It is also the central problem that the film works through: the breakdown of stable, visible boundaries between criminal and noncriminal and the ineffectiveness of tracking the individual body through evidence. As an elderly detective later tells the police gathered to discuss the case:

> This is perhaps a man who, outside of the state in which he kills, is a harmless-looking, upstanding citizen. … Without this … I want to say … private harmlessness in murderers it is not conceivable that a man such as Großmann, Haarmann, can live for years in the same building with many other residents, without attracting any trace of suspicion.

At this point—the only mention in the film of the real-life serial killers Großmann and Haarmann (and notably not Kürten)—this crisis of visibility leads to a call by one of the police officials to solicit the help of the public in capturing the murderer. When an officer recommends asking for the public's help, however, Lohmann vehemently opposes the suggestion: "Enough with the cooperation of the public!" he snaps, "When I even think about it, it makes me want to vomit." Lohmann then launches into a tirade against the same public "psychoses" that Gennat had seen as impeding his investigation of the Kürten case. This conversation replays the crisis among criminalists in the Kürten case: traditional methods are leading nowhere, but the alternative of public mobilization is equally problematic for these experts.

The police, with their clues, archives, and criminological experts, are unable to apprehend the killer. It is the gangsters, who follow a very different method, that get to him first. Shortly after Lohmann's tirade against the enlistment of the

public's help, Schränker, the leader of the gangsters, slaps his hand down over a map of Berlin and insists that the entire city must be put under surveillance by enlisting the help of the organization of beggars: "We must cover the city with a net of spies. Every square meter must be under constant surveillance. No child in this city will be allowed to take a step without us knowing about it." Schränker's map, covered by his black-gloved hand, contrasts with Lohmann's map, on which circles are slowly drawn as clues are sifted and categorized. Even as Lang's brilliant editing connects the two teams of investigators pursuing Beckert, contrasting images such as the two maps and opposing statements about the employment of the public in the investigative process establish a strong contrast between the methodologies of the two teams.

In contrast to the police, the gangsters do not have archives, do not follow traces and, in general, do not rely on visual clues. Indeed, they do not rely on clues at all; they do not attempt to proceed from the crime scene to the criminal. Instead, they enlist the aid of the public (the organization of beggars) and construct a new system of total surveillance that, interestingly, ends up concentrating not on sight, but rather on aural clues. It is a wonderful irony indeed, as Tatar points out, that it is ultimately a blind man who "spots" the criminal.[42] But it is more than an ironic joke, it is also the central argument of the film. Relying neither on

Figure 5.5 The police map of Berlin. From *M.* Dir. Fritz Lang. Janus Fims, 1931.
Source: Screenshot captured from Criterion Collection dvd (1998).

Figure 5.6 The gangsters' map of Berlin. From *M.* Dir. Fritz Lang. Janus Fims, 1931.

Source: Screenshot captured from Criterion Collection dvd (1998).

the hermeneutics of crime nor on a scientific system of measuring criminal difference, the gangsters turn instead to a system of surveillance and of marking. In the film's most famous scene, Beckert stands once again in front of a mirror, as he had when distorting his face and demonstrating that he was ultimately not visible as a criminal. This time, however, he looks with horror at a chalk letter "M" on his back that marks him as the murderer. The body of the criminal finally betrays his criminality—he has been *made visible* in order to be tracked.

M thus confronts the most pressing questions surrounding the crisis of criminal investigation in the Weimar Republic and engages in the ongoing debate over how to modernize the process of criminal investigation. In cases such as that of Peter Kürten, traditional methods of visual investigation seemed to go into crisis. Journals such as the *Criminal Magazine,* criminologists such as Robert Heindl, and popular crime writers such as Curt Elwenspoek began to call for a new method of investigation: a vigilant mass united against a common criminal. Even law enforcement professionals such as Bernhard Weiß and (ambivalently) Ernst Gennat began to explore the greater involvement of the public in the process of criminal investigation. Critics of *M*—including Lang himself in post–World War II interviews—have long identified this emergence of a mobilized mass over the course of the film as the film's real object of investigation, and most of those crit-

Figure 5.7 Beckert again examines himself in a mirror. But now, he has been identified. From *M.* Dir. Fritz Lang, Janus Fims, 1931.
Source: Screenshot captured from Criterion Collection dvd (1998).

ics have seen the increasingly paranoid and illogical mass as the real object of the film's criticism, while the child-murderer Beckert assumes the improbable role of victim. But this film is as open-ended and often self-contradictory as the debate that it examines, and the question of who comes out in a positive light and who comes out in a negative light in Lang's film is complex and the answer is far from straightforward. One might best approach this question by first asking the same question I addressed in my discussion of *Berlin Alexanderplatz:* Who is the real protagonist of the film?

A City Tracks a Murderer

Critics have long debated over who should be seen as the protagonist of *M.* Beckert would be the obvious choice, but, as Noel Burch has pointed out, he appears more as an absence than a presence, especially in the first half of the film.[43] It is clear that in *M* Lang is primarily interested not in the personality of the murderer, nor in his crimes, but rather in the investigation of the murder. This might lead one to posit Lohmann as the film's protagonist, but, as Gunning notes, he

does not enter until twenty minutes into the film and is absent from many key scenes.[44] I have been arguing throughout this book for a shift in German crime stories of the Weimar Republic from a detective-centered narrative to a criminal-centered narrative. However, Lang's atypical crime film places neither the detective nor the criminal at the undisputed center of the narrative. Indeed, no single character can be said to be the central figure around which the film is structured. Even if Lang's story about his having reworked the film's title against his will at the "request" of a Nazi official from *Murderer Among Us* to *M,* is true, the latter title more accurately captures the lack of a clear center to the film. Whereas *Murderer Among Us* refers both to the murder and those who are victimized by and pursue him (and also connects the fictional events of the film with the audience being addressed in the use of the first person plural), the ambiguous title *M* is brilliant for its lack of a clear referent (more on this below).

Stylistically, *M* is as unfixed as its title: there is no single character whose point of view is adopted by the camera or the narrative. Kaes argues that the camera adopts "a relentlessly panoptic resolve and detached 'cold gaze.'"[45] Gunning also takes this perspective, advancing the clever argument that the city itself could be seen as the true protagonist of the film.[46] This perspective of the city as protagonist would align *M* with other contemporary modernist narratives, such as Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz,* a novel with which Lang's film shares many similarities. I agree with Kaes and Gunning that neither Beckert nor Lohmann can be seen as a proper protagonist in this film. The notion of the city as protagonist is compelling, but I would argue that the story that *M* tells is actually not about an already established protagonist but of the development of a protagonist that appears only at the film's conclusion. The film does not begin with a central organizing figure; it depicts the formation of this figure. The brilliant (even if unintended) title of the film—*M*—is a reference searching for a referent, and only eventually does this referent emerge. Over the course of the film, *M*'s true protagonist emerges, and again as in Döblin's urban crime story this protagonist is not an individual (such as Beckert or Lohmann), nor an entirely abstract entity (such as the city), but rather the mass that forms and unites during the film. *M* imagines the development of a paradoxical entity: a mass *community* united by a shared trauma and against a common enemy.

This story is told in striking visual terms. *M* is full of unforgettable images, from a balloon caught in electrical wires to an enormous room full of gangsters holding court over the murderer they have captured. When one begins to categorize these images a clear pattern becomes apparent and the film falls visually into two parts. The first half of the film is largely occupied with detailing empty spaces: long takes repeatedly show us vacant basements, lonely apartments, open fields, and empty streets. As the film proceeds, these empty spaces of the early scenes of the film give way—beginning with the reports of the murder of Elsie and culminating in the gangster-courtroom scene—to crowded spaces, filled with people and bustling with (often hysterical) energy. Walter Benjamin remarked of Eugene Atget's photographs of empty Parisian streets that "he photographed

Figure 5.8 Empty spaces and broken families at the opening of Fritz Lang's *M* (1931). From *M.* Dir. Fritz Lang. Janus Fims, 1931.

Source: Screenshot captured from Criterion Collection dvd (1998).

them like a crime scene. The crime scene is also empty of people."[47] The empty public spaces of the early scenes of *M* are all, essentially, crime scenes or potential crime scenes; the occupied spaces at the end, on the other hand, cannot be crime scenes. When the streets are full of people relating to one another (often unjustly, it must be admitted), the killer is unable to continue his murders.

But the prevention of crime and the ultimate capture of the killer are only part of the story that *M* tells. It also relates how disengaged private life gives way to engaged public life over the course of the film. A community gradually forms around—and against—the child murderer, as the empty spaces that characterize the opening sequences are replaced by crowded public spaces. The broken families so much in evidence at the beginning of the film (where, for example, is Herr Beckmann?) ultimately gather for what looks like a mass family portrait at the gangsters' "kangaroo court" trial of Beckert. This is a paranoid community, to be sure, founded on a shared fear and hatred, but Lang's world here, as in most of his films, is a paranoid world, in which danger is ever present and usually invisible. How else can one expect his characters to live in such a world? And how are we to live in the world that he clearly addresses in this film? Lang ultimately does not tell us, but instead explores the consequences of different types of behavior.

Figure 5.9 The gangsters gather for a "family portrait" after having captured Beckert. From *M*. Dir. Fritz Lang. Janus Fims, 1931.
Source: Screenshot captured from Criterion Collection dvd (1998).

I do not wish to argue that Lang intended to endorse mass hysteria as an effective means of crime prevention. Nor would I argue that he intended to dismiss it completely. The enduring effect of *M* lies precisely in the film's refusal to deliver a clear moral or to propose a specific course of action. This is why the final scene, in which the three mothers break any semblance of a fourth wall to admonish the parents in the audience to pay attention to their children so often disappoints viewers as hollow and not equal to the complexity of matters as they had been presented in the film. Read in light of the crisis of criminal investigation during the Weimar Republic, as I believe it must be, *M* can indeed be seen as an attempt to wrestle with the problems presented by cases such as that of Peter Kürten, problems for which there were and are no simple answers. Recall that, at the time of its premiere, Lang referred to his film as "a documentary report" and announced his intention "to correspond to the objectivity of the period in which we are living and to produce a film solely from documentary reports."[48] Like the authors of the *Outsiders of Society* series, Lang was attempting to assemble and present images of different approaches to criminal investigation that were in circulation during the Weimar Republic as a means to examine them in all of their complexity and contradictions.

Among the signs of the time that Lang expresses a desire to examine is "the horrifying psychotic fear of the populace" (269). The standard line of criticism on *M* since the end of World War II has repeatedly taken up this statement and read Lang's serial killer as a sort of victim and the psychosis of the populace as the real target of Lang's attack. No critic has pursued this reading as brilliantly as Maria Tatar, who argues that "Lang succeeds in turning a man who commits 'the most heinous crime' [Lang's phrase] into a sympathetic, if also pathetic, character. … By the end of the film, Beckert's pathology begins to take a back seat to the hysteria of the mothers, who are prepared to rush him and to tear him limb from limb."[49]

In light of the Düsseldorf murders, however, the notion of the killer as sympathetic victim is difficult to sustain. Only with sufficient distance from the events on which this film is based and with knowledge of what would happen in Germany in the decade and a half after the film was made can we disengage Beckert from any real-life atrocities and consider him as a potential victim. Contemporary reviews frequently mention the audience's aggressive reactions to the film. Describing the scene in which Beckert confesses his inability to control his murderous impulses to an unsympathetic underworld tribunal, Hans Fell notes: "The women, in contrast—and not only those on the screen—advocate rendering him harmless through extermination."[50] Tergit reported enthusiastic applause throughout the audience at the film's gala premiere during the scene in which a gangster argues against sending Beckert to a legitimate court, on the grounds that he would surely be found mentally incompetent and therefore unable to be executed. "Man is so conditioned," writes Tergit, "that he wants a victim right away. Scratch a bit at the surface and a Tartar will always come into view. There were many Tartars in the Ufa-Theater am Zoo at the premiere."[51] A reviewer for

the Nazi journal *Der Angriff* (The Attack) found *M* well in accordance with his own political tendencies, lauding the film as "the best argument against those who oppose the death penalty."[52] And Joseph Goebbels recorded in his diary after seeing *M*: "Fantastic! Against humanitarian soppiness. For the death penalty. Well made. Lang will be our director one day."[53]

The subsequent crimes of the National Socialists have clearly impacted the ways in which the film is viewed today. Beckert as the outsider pursued by an angry mass and ultimately forced to wear a mark identifying him as an outsider, conjures up images of the victims of the Nazis. It is not difficult to see a connection between the chalk "M" that brands Beckert at the end of Lang's film and the yellow Star of David that the Jews were forced to wear, so that they would not be able to "disguise" themselves as "Germans." Felix Nußbaum's famous *Self-Portrait with a Jew's Passport* rhymes quite closely with the famous scene from *M* in which Beckert sees himself in the mirror and notices the *M* on his shoulder. Nußbaum's painting highlights the Nazi's mania for identification and the shock of the self-experience of the identified. Surely one component of *M* leads fairly directly from Beckert as victim of an angry mob to the Jews as victims of National Socialism. In this view, the film either predicts the crimes of the Nazis and sympathizes with the victimized Beckert (who is equated with the innocent victims of Nazi terror) or paves the way for the crimes of the Nazis by mobilizing an angry populace against outsiders.

But, as Gunning rightly warns, it is not only unconvincing, but also dangerous, to view the film as either proto-Nazi or anti-Nazi.[54] If the film is anti-Nazi, then Beckert is a victim, ruthlessly pursued by an angry lynch mob. If the film is proto-Nazi, then Beckert is a dangerous pathogen that must be eliminated for society to return to proper functioning. In complicated ways the film seeks to explore both views of Beckert, depicting him as both victim and pathogen. The film is thus at once both proto-Nazi and anti-Nazi. *M* presents a complex view of a complex society in a state of crisis over the dangers of the modern world and the competing methods to confront these dangers. It is a society that knows it needs to do something, but is unsure of what direction to proceed in. "It is," as Gunning argues, "precisely the manner in which the film is pre-Nazi that makes it so complex" (198). Lang's original description of the film as a "documentary report" is thus quite apt: *M* depicts and tries out various methods of confronting modern criminals with modern investigative techniques. But while members of the audience might side with one method or another (and there were reports of audience members fighting with one another over whether the film was pro- or anti-death penalty during the film's first theatrical run), Lang's film refuses to take sides. It ultimately details the hopelessness of traditional methods of criminal investigation in dealing with modern criminals and modern society, and presents the enticement as well as the danger of the mass community as an alternative to these methods of controlling the world that no longer seemed valid. It presents us with a snapshot of a society in crisis and at what in retrospect was a crucial turning-point.

The Case of Emil Tischbein

M is one of the most brilliant and complex texts produced by the Weimar Republic. As such it stands apart from other crime stories. Yet it is also quite representative of ways in which criminal investigation was being rethought in this "culture of crisis." That this is a larger theme in late Weimar society can be seen by looking briefly at another film from 1931, which initially seems quite far removed from Lang's dark vision of society. *Emil und die Detektive* (Emil and the Detectives) is a children's film based on Erich Kästner's enormously popular children's book that had been first published three years earlier.[55] *Emil and the Detectives* shares a biographical connection with *M:* Inge Landgut, the actress who plays Elsie Beckmann in Lang's film, portrays Emil's cousin, Pony Hütchen, in Gerhard Lamprecht's film.[56] The story of *Emil and the Detectives* concerns a boy from the provinces, Emil Tischbein, who travels to Berlin to visit his grandmother and deliver to her an envelope full of money. While on the train, Emil falls asleep and is robbed by a mysterious man. Upon arriving in Berlin, Emil does not dare to go to the police to report the crime, primarily because he had recently played a small prank (defacing a statue in his home town) and is therefore "on the lam." He decides to follow the thief, and, along the way, meets Gustav, the leader of a band of children. The children quickly form a well-organized group and keep the thief in sight through a sophisticated network of spies, telephones, and couriers. The children eventually capture the thief, who turns out to be a long-sought bank robber, and turn him over to the police. The children are celebrated by police, press, and public alike.

Both the novel and the film have remained extremely popular to this day. Critics credit Kästner with ushering in a new type of children's literature, which takes children seriously and stresses solid virtues. Siegfried Kracauer praises the film as suggesting "a certain democratization of German everyday life" and portraying Berlin as "a city in which civil liberties flourish."[57] The crime and detective theme of the novel and the film, Kracauer further notes, is not incidental to these values, for "the literary figure of the detective is closely related to democratic institutions" (225). Without denying that this delightful story—in both its print and screen versions—genuinely supports the values that Kracauer and others have ascribed to it, I would like to pursue an alternative reading of the nature of the detective work that goes on here. For, though the children's activities have been alternately characterized as deriving from Holmesian detectives and Indian scouts, they actually do not employ either of these methodologies. Instead, they turn, as in *M,* to an extra-legal crowd to track and capture the criminal.

Upon first learning of the children's ongoing investigative activities, Pony asks her cousin Emil, with the knowing sarcasm that she employs throughout the novel, "And who is your Stuart Webbs?," referring to a popular cinematic detective of early twentieth-century Germany.[58] When Emil points to the child referred to as the Professor, she responds: "Pleased to meet you, Professor … I finally have the chance to meet a real detective" (101). The joke here is of course

that the young child is not at all a proper detective any more than he is a proper professor—neither in his career, nor in his methodology. The "detectives" in Kästner's novel and Lamprecht's film do not, in fact, employ traditional detective work—they do not consult archives, construct profiles, or, indeed, follow clues. Rather, the technique that they utilize in their successful capture of the thief is that of keeping him under continuous surveillance, a feat that is accomplished through an organized mass of children canvassing the entire city of Berlin. The mass continues to form and grow over the course of the novel, until at one point the key organizers recognize that in order to catch the thief they need to change their initial tactics of small-scale hidden surveillance. Emil and the Professor discuss how obvious the growing mass of children assembled outside of Grundeis' hotel must appear to the thief and recognize that this mass has its advantages: "There's only one thing to do," Emil tells the Professor, "We must change our plans. We can no longer surround Grundeis with a circle of spies. Instead we must really hunt him down. So that he notices it. From all sides and with all of us children" (121). The Professor agrees, adding that "we would be best to change our tactics and chase him into a corner until he gives up" (121). The resonances with the Kürten case and *M* (both of which *Emil* predates) are clear enough, even if the protagonists are so different.

The diverse children quickly develop into a close community, as differences in class and origin (Emil comes, of course, from the country) are improbably elided around the common search for a criminal.[59] Emil recognizes that he would never have been able to enter into this community if it weren't for the crime: "Emil was in fact quite happy that his money had been stolen" (92). At the center of *Emil* lies the story that we found at the center of *M:* crime, trauma, and the tracking of a criminal become a gathering point for an unlikely, but highly effective community of children.

As in *M,* this community is explicitly set counter to the official preservers of the legal order, the police. The chief reason that the police are not involved in pursuing the thief, remember, is that Emil considers himself to be on the wrong side of the law. The opening scene of the film depicts Emil's "crime," a prank played on a country police officer: Emil defaces a statue, dressing it up as the policeman who is standing guard nearby, but the officer fails to spot the pranksters.[60] Emil (*Musterknabe* though he be) thus finds himself outside of the official order and more clever than the policeman whom he is able to outwit. Throughout the rest of the story, the police are notably absent and the "outlaw detectives" are allowed to pursue their alternative methods of investigation.

At the end of both the novel and the film, the police again make an appearance when Emil and the reader both receive a lesson in traditional police tactics. Emil asks the police commissioner what is going to happen to the thief now that he is in custody. The commissioner answers:

> We took him to the records department, where he will be photographed and have his fingerprints taken. And then afterwards we will compare his photograph and fingerprints to those in our archives. … That's where we have photos of all of the criminals whom we

> have previously caught. And we also have fingerprints, foot prints, and other evidence from those criminals whom we have not yet caught and who are still on the loose. For it is possible that the man who robbed you had also committed other crimes before he took your money, don't you think? (138)

It turns out, of course, that the thief was a bank robber whom the police had long been seeking to apprehend. And, indeed, the archive of photographs and fingerprints—the traditional techniques of registering and tracking the individual body—proved this. But they failed to capture him.

The film dwells in even greater detail than the novel on the process of the police investigation. Indeed, the scenes following the capture of the robber recall the long, documentary-like interlude in *M* that I discussed above, as the camera turns from the children whose detective work had until now occupied the story, in order to record the work of the "real" detectives in the police archives. In this scene, the camera—which is every bit as detective-like as the camera in *M* in its continual movement throughout the film—assumes the perspective of a police photographer viewing the criminal through his professional apparatus, then cuts to a close-up of a picture of Grundeis that has already been recorded in the catalog of criminal mug shots. Even as the film demonstrates the advanced technology of law enforcement, it points out that previous use of this technology failed them in their pursuit of Grundeis.

Both the novel and the film seem at first to celebrate the work of the police. Kästner's police commissioner is proud of his unit's work as he kindly instructs the children in his methodology. The professional detectives and their archives, however, did not catch the criminal. They had failed in their task until a group of children—ignorant of the techniques of evidence collection and without modern scientific police equipment at their disposal—turned to constant surveillance and communal mobilization to track down Grundeis.

The film illustrates this opposition between the old and the new graphically: as Emil and the others are honored in the Berlin police station for their success in bringing the thief to justice, they are shown to be standing in a room that is decorated with enormous, poster-sized blowups of fingerprints lining the walls. Again, the connection with Lang's film is remarkable, in that both present oversized photographs of fingerprints that would be unlikely in a real police station. The subtle juxtaposition of these two images—fingerprints and the group of children—is telling: above stand the representations of the archives; below the representatives of a mobilized mass. In this juxtaposition, the very argument that I have been making in this chapter about the replacement of the old "Lombroso-Holmes order" with new, mass-oriented surveillance techniques is made explicit. The argument is that this new mobilized mass order is not only more effective than the techniques of the police, it so simple that even a child can master it.

Indeed, *Emil and the Detectives* can also be seen as a sort of training manual not only in mass mobilization but also in having the "trained eye" that Elwenspoek advocated. The book opens with a series of ten pictures introducing the

characters and locations that will be depicted in the story, including the thief, who is referred to at this point only as "the man in the bowler hat." Under his picture appears the caption:

> Nobody knows him. Now, it is indeed true that one should assume the best of anyone unless proven otherwise. But I wish to advise you strongly to be somewhat cautious in this case. For it is better to be safe than sorry. It has been said that people are basically good at heart. That is perhaps true. But one shouldn't make it too easy for these good people. Otherwise they can suddenly become bad. (21)

Appearances deceive, as the harmless-looking man turns out to be a thief. The only proper attitude is one of suspicion and vigilance. This is, of course, precisely the flip-side of the admonition to the mothers at the end of *M* that they should keep better watch over their children: Children, keep watch over yourselves, for you live in a dangerous world where appearances deceive. Surely *Emil and the Detectives* is, in the final analysis, sympathetic to the police and does not wallow in the same kind of paranoid atmosphere that pervades *M.* However, it ultimately joins *M* and the criminological works of Elwenspoek and Heindl in tracing the emergence of a community united around the pursuit of a criminal and thereby positing a new, extra-legal order as being more effective and more enticing than the legal order. It is a very different snapshot of the criminalistic fantasy at the end of the Weimar Republic, but it ultimately reveals the same underlying image.

The Mass at the End of the Weimar Republic

Another image of a united mass that recalls *M* is a John Heartfield photomontage published three years after Lang's film. Heartfield's photomontage rhymes interestingly with the promotional poster for *M,* depicting an arm and a fist composed of the faces of a mass. The image stresses not only the power of the mass (as a fist), but also posits a sort of organic unity (as a body). Heartfield's mass united with a purpose was, of course, an anti-Fascist mass. But this mass community that was assembled in Lang's film and Kästner's novel (as well as at the end of Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*) also took a different direction. The Nazi film *Der Ewige Jude* (The Eternal Jew, 1940) as is well known, contains a clip of Beckert's "confession" scene, and the narration equates the fictional criminal's confession with that of the Jewish actor, Peter Lorre, who portrays him.[61] A photo-essay in a National Socialist newspaper from the same time as *The Eternal Jew* also resuscitates a scene from *M*: under the heading "This Happened Less than Ten Years Ago," it places a still of the scene in which Beckert distorts his face in front of the mirror next to a still from the film *Wien, du Stadt der Lieder* (Vienna, City of Song, 1930), depicting a group of "sons of Israel disguised as Europeans."[62] Both pictures, especially in their juxtaposition, pose the "problem" of making a "pathogen" visible. It is not difficult to see the connection between the chalk "M"

that branded Beckert at the end of Lang's film and the yellow Star of David that the Jews were forced to wear so that they would no longer be able to "disguise" themselves as "Europeans."

This, however does not make Lang and Kästner in any way proto-Nazi. Both, to be sure, opposed Nazi criminal practices, as did nearly all of the authors, theorists, and filmmakers I have discussed in this book. This is precisely what makes these texts so interesting. They present us with snapshots of a society that recognized the lack of visible difference in criminals and the consequent inadequacy of traditional methods of criminal investigation to apprehend modern criminals. A society that imagined itself to be infused at all levels with invisible criminality and was not sure what to do about it. A society that defined itself through and ultimately banded together around criminalistic fantasy. The system of marking ultimately employed by the Nazis has its origins not only in nineteenth-century racial science but rather in the paranoid turn that accompanied a collapse of faith in the ability to distinguish between the criminal and the noncriminal and a recognition of the inadequacy of traditional police methods in tracking modern criminals that these texts depicted. Indeed, *The Eternal Jew,* like a number of popular and clinical Weimar texts, could be seen as a sort of training film in spotting a hidden Other, insisting that bodies cannot—and yet must—be read. To return to the three scenes of criminality with which I opened this essay: although it is not at all straight or obvious—and is, in many ways, counter to the common narrative of a visibly different Other—a line can be traced from the "man-next-door" serial killer Peter Kürten, who can be caught only by accident, through the almost invisible Beckert, who can be stopped only by a totalitarian network, to the Nazi stigmatizing of the Jew and other Others as inherently criminal, who can be preemptively stopped by marking them and removing them from society.

Notes

1. Quoted in Henry T.F. Rhodes, *The Criminals We Deserve* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), 126.
2. Anonymous open letter to Peter Kürten; rpt. in *Leben und Wirken des Peter Kürten, genannt der Vampir von Düsseldorf,* ed. Elisabeth Lenk and Roswitha Kaever (München: Rogner & Bernhard GmbH & Co, 1974), 330–1. Here, 331.
3. See Janet Bergstrom, "Psychological Explanation in the Films of Lang and Pabst," in *Psychoanalysis & Cinema,* ed. E. Ann Kaplan (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 163–80.
4. "Das Geheimnis von Düsseldorf: Wer ist der Mörder?," *Kriminal-Magazin* (Sonderausgabe, 1930), rpt. in Lenk and Kaever, *Leben und Wirken des Peter Kürten,* 13.
5. See George Godwin, *Peter Kürten: A Study in Sadism* (London: The Acorn Press, 1938), 9.
6. "Das Geheimnis von Düsseldorf," 36.
7. "Massenmörder Kürten berichtet," *Berlin Lokal-Anzeiger* 13 April 1931, Abendausgabe.
8. Editor's note to Ernst Gennat, "Die Düsseldorfer Sexualverbrechen," *Kriminalistische Monatshefte* 4.1 (Januar 1930), 2–3.

9. Gennat, "Die Bearbeitung von Mordsachen," 83.
10. See Ernst Gennat, "Die Düsseldorfer Sexualverbrechen," *Kriminalistische Monatshefte* 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 (Januar–April 1930). Anton Kaes discusses Gennat's involvement in the Düsseldorf murders in his wonderful study of Fritz Lang's film *M* in its socio-historical contexts (See Anton Kaes, *M* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), 32–3). My discussion of Kürten and *M* owe a large debt to Kaes's study.
11. Gennat, "Die Düsseldorfer Sexualverbrechen," *Kriminalistische Monatshefte* 4.4 (April 1930), 79–85. Here, 84. Gennat repeats this call in a special issue of the *Deutsches Polizeiblatt* on "Die Düsseldorfer Sexualverbrechen von 1929," which appeared on 8 April 1930, 1–18.
12. Gennat, "Die Düsseldorfer Sexualverbrechen," *Kriminalistische Monatshefte* 4.4 (April 1930), 83–4.
13. Kriminalpolizeirat Kleinschmidt, "Problematik in der Kriminalistik," *Kriminalistische Monatshefte* 4.5 (Mai 1930), 103–6. Here, 103.
14. The phrase is Kleinschmidt's. See "Problematik in der Krimialistik," 103.
15. Quoted in Kleinschmidt, "Problematik in der Kriminalistik," 103.
16. Kleinschmidt, "Problematik in der Kriminalistik," 103.
17. Margaret Seaton Wagner, *The Monster of Düsseldorf: The Life and Trial of Peter Kürten* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1932), 44.
18. See the discussion in Evans, *Rituals of Retribution,* 593–4.
19. Gennat, "Die Düsseldorfer Sexualverbrechen," *Kriminalistische Monatshefte* 4.4 (April 1930): 80.
20. Tatar discusses these "psychoses" in *Lustmord,* 47, and Kaes discusses them *M,* 32–3. Both consider them in relation to Fritz Lang's *M* and argue that the film works to combat these problems. My analysis, as will become clear, differs in that I discuss the ways in which both Gennat and especially Lang are distinctly ambivalent about this situation and, on some level, seek to harness these "psychoses" even as they criticize them.
21. "Das Geheimnis von Düsseldorf," 13.
22. Tatar, *Lustmord,* 45–6.
23. "Das Geheimnis von Düsseldorf," 36.
24. See Tatar, *Lustmord,* 154–5, Kaes, *M*, 30–33 and Todd Herzog. "'Den Verbrecher erkennen.' Zur Geschichte der Kriminalistik," in *Gesichter der Weimarer Republik,* ed. Claudia Schmölers und Sander L. Gilman (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 1999), 51–75 for three extended discussions of the Kürten case.
25. "Fritz Lang über M," in Fritz Lang, *M: Protokoll* (Hamburg: Marion von Schröder, 1963), 123–4.
26. See *Lichtbild-Bühne,* 9 Dezember 1930 and *Der Kinematograph,* 10 Dezember 1930. Kaes's chronology differs slightly from this, as he pronounces the screenplay finished before Kürten's arrest (see Kaes, *M,* 30). He agrees, however, that the Kürten case was a significant influence on the film. The original screenplay for *M* has long been lost, precluding a more detailed investigation of its relation to the Kürten case.
27. Herbert Ihering, "M," *Berliner Börsen-Kurrier* 218 (12 Mai 1931).
28. Gabriele Tergit, "Der Fritz-Lang Film: Der Film des Sadismus," *Die Weltbühne* 27.23 (1931): 844–5. Here, 844.
29. "Wenn Kriminalrat *Gennat* erfährt, daß die Ganoven den Mörder gefangen haben, dann geht er rasch aus dem Zimmer und hält den Kopf unter die Dusche, bitte, in einem *Kürten*-film, einem Film, der an die letzten Dinge zu rühren wagt, an jene dunkle Mauer der Triebe" (Tergit, "Der Fritz-Lang Film," 845.) Emphasis mine.
30. The phrase "der dicke Lohmann" is used by a gangster during a police raid (see Lang, *M: Protokoll,* 33). Part of Gennat's celebrity status rested on his size and his thematization of it. He could well have been the origin of the popular perception of the cop-doughnut connection, and, along with his assistant, whom he dubbed "Bratwurst Helga," he openly preferred desk work to physical work. His weight was, therefore, not incidental to his intellectual and archival

style of investigation. As usual, Lang denied that Lohmann was modeled after a real person: "Ihre Frage, ob es für Lohmann ein Vorbild gab, kann ich eigentlich nur mit Nein beantworten. … Aber natürlich bin ich von Mitgliedern der Kriminalpolizei (vom 'Alex') über die Methoden der Polizei bei ihren Fahndungsaktionen beraten und belehrt worden" ("Fritz Lang über M," 124). Gennat was head of the *Mordinspektion* at Alex when Lang was undertaking his research.

31. The blue pencil that Kürten used to write his letters to the press was an important clue in the Düsseldorf investigation (see Gennat, "Die Düsseldorfer Sexualverbrechen," *Kriminalistische Monatshefte* 4.1 [Januar 1930], 6). In *M*, traces of "Rotstift" found in Beckert's apartment lead Lohmann to proclaim "Herrgott, endlich!! Also endlich sind wir auf seiner Spur!" (see Lang, *M: Protokoll,* 71). Compare Kaes, *M,* 32.
32. See "Reklame-Spiegel: Tatsachenberichte," *Lichtbild-Bühne* 117 (16 Mai 1931).
33. Fritz Lang, "Mein Film 'M', – ein Tatsachenbericht," *Die Filmwoche* 9.21 (20 Mai 1931), rpt. in Fred Gehler and Ullrich Kasten, *Fritz Lang: Die Stimme von Metropolis* (Berlin: Henschel Verlag GmbH, 1990), 267–70. Here, 267–9.
34. Lang, "Fritz Lang über M," 123.
35. Both Bergstrom and Tatar make this point in their analyses of the film. See Bergstrom, "Psychological Explanation in the Films of Lang and Pabst," 163 and Tatar, *Lustmord,* 153–4.
36. Noël Carroll, "Lang, Pabst, and Sound," in *Interpreting the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 92–104. Here, 94.
37. Tatar, *Lustmord,* 166.
38. om Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity* (London: bfi, 2000), 181.
39. Kaes, *M,* 44.
40. Bergstrom, "Psychological Explanation in the Films of Lang and Pabst," 171.
41. Both Kaes and Gunning note the timing of these cuts. See Kaes, "Das bewegte Gesicht. Zur Großaufnahme im Film," in *Gesichter der Weimarer Republik,* ed. Claudia Schmölers und Sander L. Gilman (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 2000), 156–64. Here, 166–8 and *M,* 56; and Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang,* 178–9.
42. Tatar, *Lustmord*, 169.
43. Noel Burch, "Fritz Lang: German Period," in *In and Out of Synch: The Awakening of a Cine-Dreamer,* trans. Ben Brewster (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1991), 21–2.
44. Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang,* 164.
45. Kaes, *M*, 46.
46. Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang,* 164.
47. Walter Benjamin. "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technichen Reproduzierbarkeit," in *Illuminationen* (Frankfurt a.M: Suhrkamp, 1977), 148.
48. Lang, "Mein Film 'M,'" 267–9.
49. Tatar, *Lustmord,* 164.
50. Hans Fell. "Fritz Lang's Tonfilm: 'M.'" *Film-Kurier* 110 (12 Mai 1931).
51. Tergit, "Der Fritz-Lang Film," 845.
52. "M," *Der Angriff* 6.111 (30 Mai 1932).
53. Quoted in Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang,* 192.
54. See Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang,* 197–8.
55. *Emil und die Detektive*. Dir. Gerhard Lamprecht. UFA, 1931. Erich Kästner, *Emil und die Detektive: Ein Roman für Kinder* (Hamburg: Cecilie Dressler Verlag, 1989).
56. My thanks to the sharp eyes of Hillary Hope Herzog for this observation. 57. Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 225.
58. Kästner, *Emil und die Detektive,* 101. On Webbs and other Imperial German cinematic detectives, see Tilo Knops, "Cinema form the Writing Desk: Detective Films in Imperial Germany," in *A Second Life: German Cinema's First Decades,* ed. Thomas Elsaesser with Michael

Wedel (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 132–41 and Sebastian Hesse, "Ernst Reicher alias Stuart Webbs: King of German Film Detectives," in the same volume, 142–50.

59. When Emil and Gustav first meet, Gustav criticizes Emil's provincial clothing: "So, aus Neustadt? Deswegen hast du so 'nen doofen Anzug an." The two boys nearly begin to fight; however, as soon as Emil's criminal investigation is revealed, they quickly become friends. (See Kästner, *Emil und die Detektive,* 76–78. The quote is on 76.)
60. In the novel, the statue is given a red nose and the visual connection with Wachtmeister Jeschke is therefore not as immediately present, as it is in the (black and white!) film. (See Kästner, *Emil und die Detektive,* 37–8.)
61. *Der Ewige Jude.* Dir. Fritz Hippler. DFG, 1940. On the connection with *M*, see Tatar, *Lustmord,* 170–2.
62. The clipping, the source and date of which are not identified, can be found at the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek in Berlin (Mappe 3119 2/2 PA). The caption—"Das ist noch nicht zehn Jahre her"—would seem to indicate a date around 1940.

Conclusion

Criminalistic Fantasy after Weimar

Introduction

The end of this story was, of course, never much of a mystery: we know what followed the collapse of the Weimar Republic. But, as I have argued throughout this book, the route by which Germany arrived at the criminal politics of the Third Reich is surprising. It was not primarily the continuity of nineteenth-century separatist models, which had close connections to racial science and which sought to employ words and images in order to draw a clear distinction between the criminal and the noncriminal, but rather the breakdown of those models and the ensuing paranoid turn that can be traced through the 1920s and early 1930s.

Most of the authors, intellectuals, and filmmakers whom I have discussed in this study were resolutely anti-Fascist. Several, such as Walter Serner and Theodor Lessing, were murdered by the Nazis. Others, such as Bertolt Brecht and Fritz Lang, escaped into exile. But they left behind a vision of the Weimar Republic as a culture in crisis, a vision that would be enthusiastically endorsed by the Nazis and that, indeed, endures to this day. In this chapter, I would like to sketch some of the later developments of the complex I have been tracing here. Criminalistic fantasy as I have been discussing it was a thoroughly Weimar phenomenon. It reached, however, well beyond the brief existence of the Republic. What, indeed, happens to the criminalistic fantasy in Germany after 1933?

Criminalistic Fantasy in Nazi Germany

There was a surprisingly vigorous discussion during the Third Reich about the history of the German crime novel and its status within National Socialist cul-

Notes for this section begin on page 150.

tural and literary politics. On the one hand, crime fiction was commonly derided and dismissed as "asphalt literature" and "pulp fiction." Peter von Werder, for example, devotes an entire chapter to the crime novel in his *Literatur im Bann der Verstädterung* (Literature under the Spell of Urbanization, 1943), condemning the genre as "alien to nature," "soulless" and "individualistic."[1] Wilhelm von Scholz spends three pages in a 1944 issue of *European Literature* castigating this "most debased product,"[2] while Erich Thier argues that because the detective novel is primarily a foreign genre and thus represents the values of Western, capitalistic, and, above all, Anglo-Saxon societies, it needs to be defended against just as much as does the foreign enemy: "The invasion of the detective novel into Germany," he writes, "is comparable to the invasion of a foreign spirit."[3]

All three authors, however, point out that they are speaking of a specific genre of crime fiction, namely, the English, French, and American detective novel, and point to a specifically German variant that they hold up in contrast to detective fiction. Scholz sings the praises of what he terms "the greater ancestors" who wrote criminal-centered stories in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thier names a number of contemporary German crime novelists who represent "notably different approaches" to the genre, such as the Austrian crime novelist Edmund Finke, whose books were distributed in official copies to German soldiers on the front as late as 1944.[4] And Werder recognizes a marked difference between the detective novel and the German crime novel, holding out praise for those novels that exhibit a "poetic treatment of crime" and allow for a glimpse "into the abysses of the human soul."[5] Werder notes, of course, that the Germans have shown a talent for precisely this style of crime novel, as opposed to the detective fiction that characterized the other Western literary traditions. The popular crime novelist Edmund Finke agrees with this assessment, authoring several articles in defense of his trade. He is, however, less optimistic about the current state of the German crime novel in the early years of the Third Reich:

> In the realm of high literature and scientific writings, we Germans march at the front of the parade. But when it comes to the German entertainment and crime novel it is somewhat of a sad case. … Eight out of every ten crime novels by German authors are so ridiculous that one is compelled to put the book down as quickly as possible.[6]

Finke, however, sees great potential for the genre to be placed within the service of the National Socialist state and ends with a call to promote and strengthen a specifically German crime novel.

In a monograph on the German crime story, Thomas Würtenberger suggests what such a German crime novel might look like and outlines a program for the development of a new German style of crime fiction. As he traces the history of German crime fiction, he notes its tendency to focus less on the process of detection and more on the figure of the criminal (the same trend that I have, of course, been discussing in this book, although Würtenberger clearly does not evoke the names of anti-Fascist authors such as Brecht, Döblin, and Serner in his verion of this history) and advocates that this tendency serve as the foundation

of the new German crime novel: "either the person and being of the criminal or the crime that he has committed should stand at the center of the fictional work … and provide it with its fundamental form."[7] Such a criminal-centered fiction, Würtenberger argues, should attempt to probe the causes of criminality, including the uncertain interactions of biology and sociology, individual and society:

> And it must indeed be investigated whether a criminal's inherited constitution or his society and environment carries the most weight in determining his path toward crime. It will nevertheless often be difficult to untangle the closely tied threads of biological and sociological determination, for the personality of an individual resists being divided into individual building blocks. Every analysis of the roots of each individual crime must therefore always be accompanied by an attempt to interpret and understand the entire structure of the criminal personality.[8]

In other words, the National Socialist German crime novel needs to root itself in criminological science and real criminal cases and find a way to work through these cases in a fictional form. In this way, according to Würtenberger, German crime fiction can break free from the "shackles of positivism" that bind other national crime literatures and can thereby serve as an aid in the science of criminology and the process of criminal investigation.[9] What he is describing, of course, is precisely the documentary crime novel that I have been tracing as a product of Weimar society. Indeed, his language about understanding the criminal closely echoes that of Alfred Döblin in *The Two Girlfriends and their Murder by Poisoning,* although the intellectual and political orientations of Würtenberger and Döblin stand in sharp contrast to each other and neither would be happy with the comparison I am drawing between them here.

The basic tenets of the primarily Leftist genre of the Weimar documentary crime novel were surprisingly widely adopted under National Socialism—this time, however, placed in the service of Fascism. Indeed, the criminal-centered documentary crime novel was not only advocated by literary historians such as Württenberger and authors such as Finke; it became part of official state policy under National Socialism. Alfred-Ingemar Berndt, the head of the Writing Division of the Reich Ministry for Education and Propaganda, joined the debate over the value of crime fiction, when he observed in 1939 that in spite of its often lurid content, "it is readily apparent that the exciting crime novel as such should not be abolished."[10] Rather than abolishing it, he suggests, it should be reformed and brought into line with Nazi political and cultural policies. While actions were taken to ban the sale of foreign crime novels, policies were also put into effect to promote German crime fiction along the lines laid out by theorists such as Würtenberger and Werder. Indeed, it is a testimony to the importance of crime fiction in the vast array of Nazi propaganda that these actions were undertaken at the highest levels of the government. Two of the highest-ranking officials in the Third Reich, the Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels and the head of the SS Heinrich Himmler, even worked together to institute a policy to promote a crime literature that would be based on real criminal cases and undertake to

examine the workings of the criminal and the police. They clearly saw potential in the genre to promote political propaganda to a mass public.[11] In order to facilitate this, they opened up the police archives to crime writers and organized visits to prisons in order to supply a source of material for fictional works that would then rework that material.[12] Goebbels and other Nazis may indeed have launched incessant attacks against Bernhard Weiß, but they enthusiastically adopted his notion of cooperation between the police and the public.[13]

One such work that stands in this tradition is Axel Alt's "true crime" novel *Der Tod fuhr im Zug* (Death Rode the Train, 1944).[14] This documentary novel, which was in fact written by Wilhelm Ihde, director of the Reich Chamber of Writers in Berlin, under the pseudonym Axel Alt, first appeared in the years 1942–3 in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung,* and was published in a remarkable run of 500,000 copies in 1944. Its subtitle announces its documentary quality, indicating that it is "retold from the files of the criminal police." It narrates an authentic case from the early 1940s, that of the "S-Bahn-Murderer" Paul Ogorzow, who committed a series of murders of women in Berlin before being captured in 1941. The Ogorzow case was one of the most spectacular and widely followed criminal cases of the time. According to one contemporary report, "no previous crime had occupied the Berlin public as completely as the series of murders committed by the 28-year-old Paul Ogorzow."[15] The widespread public involvement with Ogorzow echoes the widespread public involvement with another serial killer, Peter Kürten, a decade earlier, and Alt's fictionalized account of the case stands in close relation to Fritz Lang's film *M*—at least in terms of its exploitation of a real, recent criminal case in fictionalized form, if not in its aesthetic or intellectual qualities. It thus provides a good case by which to compare the continuities and discontinuities between the Weimar and the Nazi criminalistic fantasies.

Unlike Lang, Alt never denies that his novel is closely based on a recent case. He argues in his preface that "it would have been easy to have changed the setting of the events to another city … and to have changed other details, so that nobody would have been able to determine where our case had in fact taken place."[16] Unlike Lang, however, he chooses not to alter the events, in order, he states, to demonstrate the heroic efforts on the part of the police to protect the public: "We want to instill an appreciation for the battle against the criminal and the men who have undertaken this battle with determination, as well as the methods they employ" (6–7). As Joachim Linder has argued in his excellent study of Nazi crime fiction and the figure of the serial killer, Alt's novel is representative of the dominant tendency of the period to celebrate the work of the criminal police while avoiding any portrayal of the totalitarian apparatus that surrounded criminal politics in the Third Reich.[17] The hero of Alt's novel, Kommissar Überfeld, is shown to be a careful, patient, and modern inspector, "whose consistent comparative method certainly possesses scientific value and represents a system through which the well-trained eye can draw compelling conclusions" (64). Überfeld operates much as Gennat did in the Kürten case, "methodically analyzing the twenty-six cases" and filing his data on meticulously organized index cards (64).

And yet, Alt quickly admits, these systematic investigations bring him no more success than they did Gennat: "To be sure, the various conclusions and deductions did not lead straight to the culprit" (64). Although the police come across significantly more positively than in Lang's similar documentary story, Alt's novel ultimately aligns itself with Lang's film in showing the methodical work of professional detectives to be ineffective in capturing the modern killer and explicitly calling for what I argued was implicit in Fritz Lang's similar story: the recruitment of the public to aid the police in fighting crime. "The criminal expects the police to be his unrelenting opponent," Alt writes

> He does not, however, expect the entire populace to be his opponent! And we will see just how important it is that every delinquent knows absolutely from the beginning that not only the police stand against him, but that the entire populace works alongside the police to oppose him! The police are charged with the task of protecting the community, but the community must not simply stand by and watch patiently like philistines. Rather, the community must work in every conceivable way to help solve the case. (7–8)

This recruitment of the public to aid in the process of police investigation—which, as we have seen, was a Weimar innovation—was institutionalized under National Socialism. In his 1936 book *Nationalsozialistischer Kampf gegen das Verbrechertum* (The National Socialist Battle against Criminality), the chief of police, Kurt Daluege, describes the goal of Nazi criminal politics as the "extermination of the career criminal."[18] His language echoes that of Robert Heindl, whose very popular criminological treatise *The Career Criminal* I discussed in chapter 4. Daluege's argument runs parallel to that of Heindl, in that it involves a shift from a system of punishment to a system of social defense.[19] This is significant because this argument comes from a high-ranking police official, who is in a position to turn these ideas into policy. Daluege is especially emphatic about the importance of the cooperation of the public in this new system of "prevention and prophylaxis" that would replace the system of "pursuit" which, in his view, characterized police work before 1933:[20]

> The attempt must constantly be made to sharpen the observation of the public for such suspicious things that seldom attract attention. This can bear the greatest fruit; the active vigilance of the public actually *prevents* many crimes that would otherwise have been committed. (82)

It should come as no surprise at this point that Daluege praises "the study of crime literature," especially histories of real cases, as "an indispensable means of education and training" (72). Daluege's book follows the lead of popular Weimar criminological and criminalistic studies such as Heindl's and Curt Elwenspoek's in that it is addressed not to experts but to the general public, an attempt to cultivate in the latter the "trained eye" (recall Elwenspoek's term) of the professional criminalist. While the first half of the book condemns the Weimar police force and justice system for its alleged incompetence in dealing with the crime problem

and extols the virtues of the Nazi system of crime fighting that had recently been put in place, the second half of his book is directed toward recruiting the public to join in the battle against criminality. This section, which is titled "Self-Defense of Life and Property," seeks to educate and mobilize the public in the battle against criminals. This mobilized populace, combined with the systematic registration and surveillance of "career criminals," were the cornerstones of National Socialist criminal policy from the very beginning.[21] Daluege explicitly justifies these policies as a response to rampant criminality during the Weimar Republic, which he dubs "the heyday of criminality" (9). Like Elwenspoek and Heindl before him, Daluege mentions the cases of Weimar-era serial killers such as Denke, Haarmann, and Kürten as proof of the need for the turn toward social defense (75). Although Daluege and other Nazi commentators on crime fighting and crime fiction expressly couch their program as an oppositional reaction to the Weimar era, their texts make it clear just how indebted the National Socialist criminalistic fantasy was to the criminalistic fantasy of the Republic that preceded it.

Criminalistic Fantasy After 1945

Recall that Bernhard Weiß enumerated two fundamental aspects of the criminalistic fantasy that I have traced throughout this book: one aspect concerns the involvement of the public in process of fighting crime; the other aspect concerns the understanding of a historical period through its criminals. If the National Socialists picked up on and developed the aspect of the criminalistic fantasy that leads to a mobilization of the public in the aid of the police, post–World War II criminalistic fantasy has picked up on and developed the latter aspect of criminalistic fantasy. Immediately after the end of the Second World War, there seemed to be a tendency to return to Weimar-style depictions of (often nonpolitical) crimes as a means by which to examine the National Socialist period in Germany.

This tendency is particularly noticeable in post–World War II films. The first film produced after the end of the war clearly signaled its relationship to Weimar-era cinema through its title, *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (The Murderers Are Among Us, 1946),[22] which closely echoes the title that Fritz Lang had originally chosen for *M*: *Mörder unter uns* (Murderer Among Us).[23] This film explores unpunished crimes of the Nazi era and wrestles with what role private citizens should or should not play in bringing criminals to justice. Like Lang's pre-Nazi exploration of this same topic, Staudte's post-Nazi film ends with a plea for allowing the official justice system to handle the process of fighting crime—but, again as in Lang's film, it makes this plea only after unleashing the spectator's feelings of revenge and evoking a desire for vigilante justice. Another film that echoes *M* is Peter Lorre's *Der Verlorene* (The Lost One), a remarkable 1951 film in which Lorre once again plays a sex-murderer. This time, however, Lorre's murderer wanders the streets of Nazi Germany, and his crimes are seen as being implicated in the culture of violence in which he lives.[24] Erich Engels' 1948 film *Affaire Blum* (The

Blum Affair) turns to a Weimar-era case in order to examine the pre-1933 roots of anti-Semitism in the German judiciary.[25] Karl Anton's *Ruf an das Gewissen* (Call to Conscience), which began filming in 1944 and was completed after the end of World War II, is a complex tale about a ten-year-old murder case that is reopened by a post-war radio series, causing those involved in the case to reexamine their memories and contemplate their own complicity in this and other crimes.[26] Finally, in Robert Siodmak's 1957 film *Nachts, wenn der Teufel kam* (The Devil Came at Night), the examination of the real-life case of a Nazi-era serial killer becomes at the same time an examination of the criminal and social policies of Nazi Germany and the problem of collaboration.[27] Each of these films exhibits a strong documentary quality and uses the subject of crime as a means to understand German history and prompt its characters and its viewers to ask themselves difficult questions. They thus follow closely in the tradition of Weimar documentary crime fiction.

At the end of the 1950s, however, there is a notable shift in the German crime film away from German settings. The first of what would become an immensely successful series of thirty-two film versions of Edgar Wallace crime novels appeared in 1959. *Der Frosch mit der Maske* (The Masked Frog) was filmed in a Danish studio with a German cast and crew.[28] Yet this and the subsequent Wallace films are set mostly on foggy London streets or maze-like English country manors. The Wallace films are peopled with English butlers, American playboys, members of the London underworld, and Scotland Yard detectives.[29] German characters and German locations are notably absent, thus avoiding the confrontation with German crimes that films of the 1940s and 1950s insisted on. Other popular film series of the 1960s, such as the adventures of "G-Man Jerry Cotton" and the cerebral detective work of G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown, also literally displace the scene of the crime from Germany to England and the United States.[30] Even the quintessential Weimar-era German criminal, Dr. Mabuse, went into exile after World War II. *Im Stahlnetz des Dr Mabuse* (In the Steel Net of Dr. Mabuse) finds Mabuse involved with gangsters in Chicago, and in *Scotland Yard jagt Dr Mabuse* (Scotland Yard in Pursuit of Dr. Mabuse) the master criminal moves to England to overthrow the British government.[31] The murderers, it seemed, could no longer be found among us.

In recent years, however, the trend may be back toward a crime fiction that seeks to combine fantasy and reality in order to probe the past and present in Germany. The most striking return to a Weimar-style documentary crime novel in recent years is Horst Bosetzky's series of documentary crime novels that revisit sensational criminals from various periods of German history. The first of these new true-crime novels, *Wie ein Tier: Der S-Bahn-Mörder: Dokumentarischer Roman* (Like an Animal: The S-Bahn Murderer, a Documentary Novel, 1997), was set in Nazi Germany and revolved around the serial killer Paul Ogorzow.[32] Bosetzky is a Berlin sociologist and crime fiction author who writes his successful crime novels under the pseudonym "-ky" and his other texts under his full name. In this hybrid work, he bases his self-proclaimed documentary novel largely on

Alt's 1944 study of the Ogorzow case, *Death Rode the Train,* which I discussed above.[33] In his afterword to the novel, Bosetzky states that he and his "small research team" conceived of this novel as "a scientific project" that in no way differed from his sociological writings: "As a sociologist, I would have gone about writing a monograph on the history of the Berlin soccer team Hertha BSC or the social services department of Kreuzberg in precisely the same way."[34] Indeed, he even appends a list of "documents and further reading" to his novel (325–6). At the same time, however, he recognizes that his book is "also a novel, a product of my fantasy and the employment of diverse features of the thriller genre" (321). His documentary novelistic technique combines fact and fantasy, sociologist and crime fiction writer (as he dually signs his afterword, "-ky" and "Prof. Dr. Horst Bosetzky," [324]), to approach the subject of Nazi Germany. And the most important document in his study is itself a documentary novel from the Nazi period, Alt's *Death Rode the Train.* Indeed, as Joachim Linder has argued, Bosetzky's novel adopts much of its worldview from Alt's, making it difficult to separate National Socialist literary and criminal politics from Bosetsky's contemporary crime story.[35]

Linder provocatively extends his argument about Bosetzsky to the larger body of post–World War II crime novels, which he views as being indebted to the development of the genre under National Socialism: "German crime novels since the 1960s have enjoyed great success in large part due to the 'Nati-ky onalization' of the crime novel through the literary politics that has its roots in the 'Third Reich'" (194). Linder thereby counters the dominant tendency in histories of the crime and detective genre in Germany to deny the existence of a German style of the genre.[36] He argues instead that there is an identifiable German style of crime fiction and that attempts to deny it are also attempts to deny the continuing importance of Nazi cultural policies after World War II. I agree with Linder that there is indeed a German tradition of the crime novel, but I would trace it to an earlier period than the Third Reich.[37] As I have argued, the line from -ky to Alt must be extended further back to the documentary crime novel of the Weimar Republic. Infused with criminalistic fantasy and fascinated by the notion of an entire culture in crisis, the German crime novel departed from the dominant genre of the detective novel in order to explore a modern world in which reason and causality did not function, and in which traditional mechanisms of distinguishing criminals from noncriminals were no longer valid.

Along with the return of interest in the documentary crime novel, there has been a subsequent return of interest in the criminals of the Weimar Republic in recent years. Films and novels have repeatedly reopened and reexamined many of the Weimar-era cases that I have discussed in this book. Axel Corti and Elfriede Czurda have both returned to the case of the convicted poisoners Ella Klein and Margarete Nebbe, whose stories Döblin told in *The Two Girlfriends and their Murder by Poisoning.*[38] Corti uses the case to examine problems of class, and Czurda uses it to examine problems of gender, both studies being indebted to Döblin's version of the story and both demonstrating the enduring relevance of the issues

of the 1920s. Meanwhile, the cases of the double-agent Alfred Redl, the serial killer Fritz Haarmann, and the burglars Franz and Erich Sass have reappeared in popular films.[39] Numerous books have returned to the darker corners of Weimar Germany and re-animated its criminals and their crimes. The post-Wende series *Edition Scheunenviertel,* which evokes the historical center of the Berlin underworld (the area in the district of Mitte known as the "Scheunenviertel" or "Barn District") in its title, includes volumes such as *Tatort Mulackritze* (Crime Scene Mulackritze, 1994, referring to a popular gangster bar in the 1920s) and *Pitaval Scheunenviertel* (1995), and has republished two volumes of Adolf Sommerfeld's 1920s series of crime novels "from the darkest Berlin."[40] Weimar-era guidebooks such as Curt Moreck's *Führer durch das lasterhafte Berlin* (Guide to Decadent Berlin, 1996, orig. 1931) and (as noted earlier) Eugen Szatmari's *What You Won't Find in Baedecker* (1997, orig. 1927) have been republished in recent years, offering tourists today a trip through the same dangerous underworld sites that an earlier generation of tourists flocked to in the 1920s.[41] One can, for example, wander down the once notorious Mulackstraße in the district of Berlin-Mitte and, armed with one of these guides and perhaps a copy of *Berlin Alexanderplatz,* retrace the steps of the colorful characters that populated that street nearly a century ago. Stopping at Number 15 Mulackstraße, we learn from our guidebooks that this was once the location of the aforementioned gangster bar *Mulackritze,* where authors, actors, and underworld figures gathered during the Weimar Republic. Like the Republic, the Mulackritze is long gone.[42] But just down the street from where it once stood there existed for a while in the 1990s a sushi bar named "Mäcky Messer." This intermingling of fact and fiction, past and present, reality and fantasy offers a symbolic commentary on the state of the criminalistic fantasy today. We might all know that life is in fact not a cabaret, but we continue to insist on believing that life in Weimar Germany was.[43] Just as the citizens of the Republic themselves did.

The motto of the series Edition Scheunenviertel could just as well have been the motto of the *Outsiders of Society* series: "Every civilized city has its Scheunenviertel." It is clear that Weimar Germany's "Scheunenviertel" continues to fascinate later generations as much as it fascinated its contemporaries, and that today's fantasies about Weimar Germany as a decadent and criminal space continue to echo in form and substance Weimar Germany's fantasies about itself.

Notes

1. Peter von Werder, *Literatur im Bann der Verstädterung,* qtd. in Johannes Inama, "Die vergessenen Verbrechen: Eine Untersuchung dem deutschsprachigen Kriminalroman zwischen 1918 und 1945," diss., Leopold-Franzens-Universität, Innsbruck, 1992, 165.
2. Wilhelm von Scholz, "Die größeren Vorläufer," *Europäische Literatur* 3:1 (Jan 1944), 6–8. Here, 6.

3. Erich Thier (1940). Rpt. in Vogt, *Der Kriminalroman* (1971), 485.
4. Thier, 497f. An inexpensively produced paperback version of two of Finke's short stories was distributed to soldiers in 1944. See Edmund Finke, *Die vier Angelhaken / Der Mord in der Parkstrasse*, *Die bunten Hefte für unsere Soldaten* 12 (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1944).
5. Werder, *Literatur im Bann der Verstädterung,* qtd. in Inama, "Die vergessenen Verbrechen," 166.
6. Edmund Finke, "Über den Kriminalroman," *Das deutsche Wort* 12 (1936), 419–22. Here, 419.
7. Thomas Würtenberger, *Die deutsche Kriminalerzählung* (Erlangen: Verlag von Palm & Enke, 1941), 3.
8. Würtenberger, *Die deutsche Kriminalerzählung,* 34.
9. Würtenberger, *Die deutsche Kriminalerzählung,* 34: "Es wird somit eine der vornehmsten Aufgaben der künftigen Detektivgeschichte darstellen, diese kurz angedeuteten Wege zur Erfassung des Wesens der verbrecherischen Persönlichkeit und zur Erhellung der verbrecherischen Einzeltat in künstlerischer Gestaltung sichtbar zu machen. Gelingt dies dem Dichter, so vermag er vielleicht sogar der Arbeit des Kriminalisten manche befruchtende Anregung zu schenken. Auch ist zu hoffen, daß dann der deutschen Detektivgeschichte ein neuer und reicher Sinngehalt erschlossen wird und sie sich vollends aus den Fesseln des Positivismus zu befreien weiß."
10. See Karin Reisinger, "Eine literaturpolitische Auseinandersetzung mit dem deutschsprachigen Kriminalroman in der NS-Zeit am Beispiel des Wiener Autors Edmund Finke," Magisterarbeit, Universität Wien, 1994, 30.
11. Goebbels in particular was an enthusiastic advocate of harnessing popular culture to promote National Socialist policies and ideas in a manner that would not be overtly or obviously propagandistic. A very good discussion of these policies in the sphere of popular cinema can be found in Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1996).
12. See Karin Reisinger, "Eine Literaturpolitische Auseinandersetzung mit dem deutschsprachigen Kriminalroman in der NS-Zeit am Beispiel des Wiener Autors Edmund Finke," Magisterarbeit, Universität Wien, 1994, 30.
13. On the battle between Goebbels and Weiß, see Dietz Bering, *Kampf um Namen.*
14. Axel Alt (pseudonym for Wilhelm Ihde), *Der Tod fuhr im Zug: Den Akten der Kriminalpolizei nacherzählt* (Berlin-Grunewald und Leipzig: Verlag Hermann Hillger K.-G., 1944).
15. "Der Berliner S-Bahn-Mörder gefaßt!," *Berliner Morgenpost* 171 (18 Juli 1941).
16. Alt, *Der Tod fuhr im Zug,* 5. Alt does, in fact, make at least one major alteration to the story: he changes the name of the serial killer from Ogorzow to Omanzow.
17. See Joachim Linder, "Feinde im Inneren. Mehrfachtäter in deutschen Kriminalromanen der Jahre 1943/44 und der 'Mythos Serienkiller,'" in *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 28: 2 (2003), 190–227.
18. Daluege, *Nationalsozialistischer Kampf gegen das Verbrechertum.*
19. See Daluege, *Nationalsozialistischer Kampf gegen das Verbrechertum,* esp. 17, 34–38.
20. Daluege, *Nationalsozialistischer Kampf gegen das Verbrechertum,* 33.
21. The first decree that authorized "preventative police custody for career criminals" came on November 13, 1933. Some of the first concentration camps were erected for "career criminals." See Daluege, *Nationalsozialistischer Kampf gegen das Verbrechertum,* 34–38 and Wagner, *Volksgemeinschaft ohne Verbrecher,* 203–13.
22. *Die Mörder sind unter uns*, dir. Wolfgang Staudte, DEFA, 1946.
23. According to a well-known anecdote, Lang was persuaded to change his title when confronted by a Nazi official, who seemed to think that the "murderers" in the title referred to the Nazis.
24. *Der Verlorene,* dir. Peter Lorre, Arnold Pressburger Filmproduktion, 1951.
25. *Affaire Blum,* dir. Erich Engels, DEFA, 1948.
26. *Ruf an das Gewissen,* dir. Karl Anton, Tobis Filmkunst GmbH, 1944–5. The film first premiered several years after its production, on February 3, 1950.

27. *Nachts, wenn der Teufel kam,* dir. Robert Siodmak, Divina-Film GmbH, 1957.
28. *Der Frosch mit der Maske,* dir. Harald Reinl, Preben Philipsen A/S and Rialto Film GmbH, 1959. By the time of the production of the final film in the series (*Das Rätsel des silbernen Halbmonds*) in 1971, there were thirty-two Wallace productions, as well as several imitators. In other words, two to three Wallace films were produced each year for over a decade!
29. Tim Bergfelder discusses the Edgar Wallace films and their position within the history of the German crime film in "Extraterritorial Fantasies: Edgar Wallace and the German Crime Film," in *The German Cinema Book,* ed. Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter and Deniz Göktürk (London: bfi, 2002), 38–47. Bergfelder analyzes the significance of locating the films in Britain in much greater detail than I am able to here.
30. Eight Jerry Cotton films appeared from 1965–8, beginning with *Schüsse aus dem Geigenkasten,* dir. Fritz Umgelter, Allianz Film Produktion GmbH, 1965. The series of Father Brown films, starring the popular German actor Heinz Rühmann, began in 1960 with *Das schwarze Schaf,* dir. Helmut Ashley, Bavaria-Filmkunst GmbH.
31. *Im Stahlnetz des Dr Mabuse,* dir. Harald Reinl, CCC Filmkunst, 1961. *Scotland Yard jagt Dr Mabuse,* dir. Paul May, CCC Filmkunst, 1963.
32. -ky (Horst Bosetzky), *Wie ein Tier: Der S-Bahn-Mörder: Dokumentarischer Roman* (Berlin: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997).
33. See -ky, *Wie ein Tier,* 321–2.
34. -ky, *Wie ein Tier,* 320.
35. See Linder, "Feinde im Inneren." Bosetzky has subsequently published two further novels in this hybrid genre: *Der kalte Engel: Dokumentarischer Kriminalroman aus dem Nachkriegs-Berlin* (München: dtv, 2004) and *Die Bestie vom Schlesischen Bahnhof: Dokumentarischer Kriminalroman aus den 20er Jahre* (München: dtv, 2005). The latter takes up the case of Karl Großmann, the first of the three most notorious Weimar-era serial killers. Bosetzky paradoxically refers to this novel as his most "academic work" of the trilogy and at the same time the on that contains the greatest number of "novelistic elements" (315).
36. See, for example, Wolf-Dieter Lützen, "Der Krimi ist kein deutsches Genre," in *Der neue deutsche Kriminalroman,* ed. Karl Ermert and Wolfgang Gast, Loccumer Kolloquien, Bd. 5 (Rehberg-Loccum: Evangelische Akademie Loccum 1985), 162–182.
37. Linder does, indeed, recognize that the tradition might extend earlier: "Alle Überlegungen zur Genreentwicklung in der deutschsprachigen Kriminalliteratur bleiben Spekulation, so lange die Produktion, aber auch Rezeption und Literaturkritik der Zeit der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts bis auf wenige punktuelle Aufhellungen ausgeblendet bleiben. Dies um so mehr, als während der Zeit des 'Dritten Reiches' ganz offenkundig ein Wandel stattgefunden hat, der sich bis weit in die zweite Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts und eben bis zur Formierung des 'neuen deutschen Kriminalromans' auswirkte" (195).
38. See *Die beiden Freundinnen,* dir. Axel Corti, 1982 and Elfriede Czurda, *Die Giftmörderinnen: Roman* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1991).
39. See *Oberst Redl,* dir. István Szabó, MAFILM Objektív Filmstúdío, 1985; *Der Totmacher*, dir. Romuald Karmakar, Pantera Film, 1995; and *Sass*, dir. Carlo Rola, Constantin Film Produktion GmbH, 2001.
40. See Hans Pollak, *Tatort Mulackritze: Berliner Unterwelt der zwanziger Jahre* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1994); Margitta-Sybille Fahr, *Pitaval Scheunenviertel* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1995); Adolf Sommerfeld, *Die Tanzdiele am Kurfürstendamm* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1993); and Adolf Sommerfeld, *Der Tresor unter Wasser* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1994).
41. Curt Moreck, *Führer durch das lasterhafte Berlin* (Berlin: Nicolaische Verlagsbuchhhandlung, 1996); Eugen Szatmari, *Das Buch von Berlin* (Leipzig: Connewitzer Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1997). These books are reprints of Curt Moreck, *Führer durch das „lasterhafte" Berlin* (Leipzig: Verlag moderner Stadtführer, 1931) and Eugen Szatmari, *Was Nicht im "Baedecker" Steht: Berlin* (München: R. Piper & Co., 1927).

42. The interior of the *Mulackritze* does, in fact, still exist. When the long-closed bar was torn down in 1963 to make way for a new building, Charlotte von Mahlsdorf rescued the interior and transported it to the basement of the *Gründerzeitmuseum* in Mahlsdorf where it can be visited to this day.
43. This phrase "Life is a cabaret" comes, of course, from the musical *Cabaret,* which is based in part on Christopher Isherwood's writings about his experiences in Weimar Berlin. Bob Fosse's film version (*Cabaret,* dir. Bob Fosse, ABC Pictures Corporation, 1972) is perhaps the text most influential in shaping contemporary images of the Weimar Republic in the English-speaking world. Although it does not focus strictly on criminality, the way in which the often surreal events on stage and the often equally surreal events in "real life" (the fictional world of the film) mirror and comment on each other and begin to blend together is very much in line with the Weimar criminalistic fantastic.

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