THE VIEW FROM BELOW: FILM AND CLASS REPRESENTATION IN BRECHT AND LOACH

Keith O'Regan (York University)

Depicting the working class on film has been a fraught affair. A thoroughgoing charge against Marxist and/or socialist investigations of class is that they have been static and reductionist. In part this critique has originated from a rejection of any notion of a causal relation or link between the economic and the political. As Dennis Dworkin sums up this position, "economic life, however broadly conceived, could not play a prominent role in creating forms of politics and ideology."[1] Likewise, as Teresa Ebert and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh note, class is emptied out of any relation to the material or concrete "by the inversion of class from an economic category to a political concept."[2] Seen from this perspective, any depiction of the connections and mediations between a capitalist economy and resulting worldviews is seen as dimming the picture rather than enlightening it. Thus a criticism of Marxist theory is that it leads to an abstracting away from lived experience and reverts to a portrayal of class that is founded upon an "identity of being,"[3] an ontologically fixed formula of class relations that assigns class as a fixed position that negates agency and obscures shifting structural determinants. If, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri advance, that "Class is determined by class struggle,"[4] materialist notions of class appear dehistoricised and reinforce ideal types that project an image of a worker based upon the place of extraction of surplus value, and as such "essentialist and in need of deconstruction."[5] Continuing in this vein is the recent development in so-called "New-Materialism." In this manifestation, materialism negates determination even in the last instance, as "determination within dynamic systems is non-linear, terminal effects cannot be construed as possibilities that were already latent in some initial moment."[6] Both positions veer away from a conception of structured class experience that may still involve agency. As Terry Eagleton notes,

> Whereas mechanical materialism suspects that human agency is an allusion, vitalist materialism is out to decentre the all-sovereign subject into the mesh of material forces that constitute it. In drawing attention to those forces, however, it sometimes fails to recognize that one can be an autonomous agent without being magically free of determinations.[7]

What these diversions away from determination occlude is a picture of working classes' "identities of becoming." That is, the processes in which class is constantly determined structurally (not as a matter of choice) and remade and resituated in relation to the dominant system. In the following I will examine two exemplary works that speak to the identities of working class becoming. Bertolt Brecht's *Kuhle Wampe, oder: wem goehert die Welt?* (*Kuhle Wampe, or: Who Owns the World?*, 1932) and Ken Loach's *Raining Stones* (1993) focus on the agency and structured lack thereof of the working classes, and each film offers a view of class not merely as a neat economic relation but as a relational form of life that dictates and influences social phenomena as much for those who are in employment as those who are without. Far from being secondary, these elements are the concrete determination that is represented in the *sine qua non* of working class social relations.

THEORIZING CLASS

One of the first railings against reductionist readings from the Marxist tradition comes from Marx himself. As Jacques Bidet argues, efforts to avoid the complex of mediations between structured experience and determinants miss Marx's point between the "relationship between classes" and the "relationship between individuals." "Marx," Bidet notes, "polemicises against 'vulgar' conceptions that claim to account for the historical process in terms of inter-individual relations, such as competition. In his view, the individual moment is certainly just as "essential," but is only conceived in the context of generally defined structures."[8] Much of the confusion around reductionist arguments falls on Marx's short-form distinction of the economic base and cultural and political superstructure. Marx famously writes that "The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond definite *forms of social*

consciousness."[9] While this reduction results in part from its cursory nature of the metaphor, a more significant problem is that such a formulation delineates away from the processes that produce dominant social relations. The economic is delinked from the social and political realities, and as such history is studied less on its own terms, and more so as a product of certain economic "prime movers." What follows is, as Ellen Meiksins Wood notes, a form of historiography (of past and present) that "universalizes capitalist relations of production by analyzing production in abstraction from its specific social determinations." This, she argues, is antithetical to Marx's approach which "differs […] in his insistence that a productive system is made up of its specific social determinations — specific social relations, modes of property and domination, legal and political forms."[10] In Wood's response, attention need be paid not merely on the specific mode of appropriation, but the entirety of social relations which make that system possible, and the various determinants that accompany that form of exploitation.

Similarly, Raymond Williams developed[11] and productively argued that it is not merely economic phenomena that define capitalism's really existing "structure of feeling" but rather the dominant social relations as such which act as limitations, to use a phrase closer to Marx's concept of *bestimmen*, as Williams notes.[12] This realigns our focus from the analysis of economic extractions to the multi-layered forms in which that extraction takes place, and re-assigns agency (and further highlights the structured denial of agency) to those who are subjected to this rule and articulates a cultural politics attuned to contradictory lives.

This oppositional stance based around class struggle is irreconcilable with that of "today's late capitalism," as Žižek notes, which "with its 'spontaneous' ideology, endeavours to obliterate the class division itself by way of proclaiming us all 'self-entrepreneurs.'"[13] Likewise, as Ebert and Zavarzadeh argue, "getting class out of culture, which is the environment of everyday life, produces the illusion that there are no classes and everyone lives freely".[14] In contrast to this position, the authors stress that class is defined in relation to compulsion; "The working class still has to sell its labour to the owning class."[15] This analysis shifts from the universally existing category to a universally informed particularity. Mike Wayne has similarly noted that the importance of history is seen in this widening, shifting terrain:

> This way of thinking about history requires us to locate the actions and beliefs of individuals in their wider socioeconomic context and to understand change as something that is brought about not by individuals realizing a "timeless" principle but by individuals and collectives operating within conflictual and contradictory relationships that shape what can be thought and what can be done at any particular point in time and space.[16]

Class, in this regard, can never be taken for granted, and the place of shifting historical forces need be taken into account. As we will see, the focus on unemployment is a starting off point for Brecht and Loach to not take for granted class relations, and to take up their totality as a means to rethink social relations both politically and aesthetically.

It should be made clear that the definition of class as never taken for granted necessarily relies on the changing structural demands of capital, and within this framework unemployment as a constant necessity can never be removed. While it is true, as Silvia Federici points outs, that Marx "analyzed primitive accumulation almost exclusively from the viewpoint of the waged industrial proletariat,"[17] this does not imply that the working class is waged. Christian Fuchs telling argues that we must move beyond "wage-labor fetishism"[18] and consider labour in relation to its productivity *for* capital. In Fuchs analysis, productive labour includes that which produces value for use and surplus value, yet crucially "Labour of the combined/collective worker, labour that contributes to the production of surplus-value and capital." This last element has mostly been ignored by those "Scholars who argue that you must earn a wage for being a productive worker."[19] In doing so "wage-labour fetishism disregards the complex dialectics of class societies."[20]

Missing out on the "complex dialectics" are those instances in which the particularity of class relations are blurred through recourse to supposed historical variations. Most important for our purposes is the category of the "precariat," a neologism formed by a contraction of the terms "precarious" and proletariat." As R. Jamil Jonna and John Bellamy Foster point out, the concept of precariat moves away from the specificity of the conjuncture and mystifies more than it elucidates.

> But since Marx himself defined the *proletariat* as a class characterized by precariousness, the term *precariat* is often no more than a fashionable and mistaken

> substitute for proletariat itself (in Marx's sense) — or else is employed to refer to a subcategory of the proletariat, i.e., the subproletariat. This resembles earlier theorizations of the "underclass" as a separate entity divorced from the working class as a whole. In these various formulations, the notion of the precariat is often contrasted with what is characterized as an overly rigid concept of the proletariat — the latter defined as a formal, stable industrial workforce of the employed, usually organized in trade unions (a notion, however, far removed from Marx's classical definition of the proletariat).[21]

What Jonna and Foster's position cogently articulates is that the term proletariat, from Marx's own formulation, takes into account a lack of access to waged labour. Thus, following what recent critics such as Fuchs have argued, the category "proletariat" should not be seen as synonymous with wage-labour.

Structuring both films is an emphasis on unemployment, and how the lack of work both reflects and reinforces the gender norms of working class communities, and provides for spaces that operate outside or challenge and reinforces notions of respectability and dignity in these communities. In this regard, to be unemployed is still to "belong" to the working class and rejects the ontological category, to be working class is to have work. This framework rejects a static identity of being that discounts the role of structural unemployment in capitalism, but also the ways in which working class communities, as a whole, are defined by shifts from higher levels of unemployment to lower levels. As Mary McGlynn argues in her examination of "classlessness" and film in Thatcherite Britain, "Using occupation as the basis for the categorisation works as yet another method of marginalizing the unemployed as irresponsible, undeserving poor: they become, in such a system, classless — discounted and beyond measure."[22] These films are historically situated which depict the working class in a state of becoming, both inheriting the determined realities and moralities of a previous time while contending with those of the present.

LOACH: PRECARITY AND SOCIAL LIFE

Raining Stones follows Bob Williams' quest to buy his daughter a new communion dress. Bob is unemployed, and recently had his van stolen. In his search for money while

receiving unemployment benefits, Bob and his friend Ricky are reduced to both theft (sheep, turf, etc.) and borrowing money from a loan shark. This last move proves dangerous, and Bob and his family are terrorised when unable to pay the funds back. In an altercation with the loan shark, Bob inadvertently kills the loan shark. In the final scene, the police arrive at his door not to arrest Bob, but to tell him that his stolen van has been found.

Loach's portrayal of the effects of Thatcherism, especially as regards the destruction of full time, family and community sustaining, work across Northern England and Scotland stands in relation to similar working class films of the time, as a "tragic-comedy of urban survival."[23] The work offers a portrayal of class that is without access to steady work, and in response draws heavily on received notions of dignity and its absence that those who find themselves victims of a growing structural unemployment experience. This lack has defined the lead character Bob's social existence, and that of his family, and the categories of his and his family's own meager survival become amplified by the pressure to maintain some semblance of respectability, in this instance the purchasing of a dress for his daughter's upcoming communion. The terrain of respectability is defined in terms of the gradual downward shift into desperation that is apparent in Bob's community, in ways that while complex are not entirely presented in unproblematic ways.[24] The pursuit of dignity is not a record of Bob's suffering from "false consciousness," as suggested by John Hill,[25] "given that he is repeatedly warned (by his wife and even the local priest) that the expense of a new dress is unnecessary," but rather an attempt by Bob to regain some control over his life, and as more convincingly argued by Hill, "an attempt to hold on to the last remnants of his sense of self-worth"[26] in a social and individual life that is increasingly becoming defined by precarious accept to work.

Loach engages this notion of respectability, and moves away from judgment or dismissal, in order to highlight the importance of the class character of his desire to purchase the dress. While dismissing the insistence of his wife and local priest that he get one second-hand, Bob's pursuance of a new one marks out his own struggle for an aspect of individual achievement determined by his class position. The inability to purchase a dress would be to resign to the determinants of his social position, and thus his insistence is clearly understandable on these terms. Loach is clear in his depiction that we reserve our censuring of Bob, even as the consequences of his actions will be violently felt by him and his family. A "Loachian" technique is to employ a "consistent use of medium and

long shots" through which his films acquire a documentary feel, which establishes "the nature of place and space and people's position within them, both in relation to each other and to the Otherness of authority and power."[27] This engenders a critical attitude towards the film's characters' choices as respective of the individual worldview in response to one's class position. In this framework we make sense of the Bob's insistence on buying a new (promising outlook to the future) as opposed to used (de-individualised, hand-me-downs, poor, etc.) dress. The dress becomes not only a comment on his personhood but his ability to maintain his own sense of self-respect. As George McKnight notes, Bob's conception of self-respect is ultimately tied into his position as a failed breadwinner and the stain that this leaves on his family, at least as perceived through his own eyes.

> Insisting on a new Communion dress when he cannot afford it can be tied into ideas such as that the new dress is the sign of his daughter's purity; demonstrating his economic self-sufficiency; reaffirming his own individual self-worth as a male; retaining the traditional male position as decision-maker when large sums of money are involved; and maintaining social appearances.[28]

The maintenance of social appearances dictates the re-enforcement and attention to the maintenance of a gendered status quo. In the 1990's, as Claire Monk notes, "jobless, skill-less masculinity was increasingly defined as a problem."[29] Loach's set-up of Bob's construction of gender, as McKnight describes above, does not produce, or given the observational standpoint engendered is not meant to produce, in the mind of the viewer, a negative casting. The entrenchment of his masculinity is seen as symptomatic of his unemployment and the dignity that rises or fall depending on his access to work. His unemployment offers no freedom, and the absence of traditionally male dominated forms of factory work to not offer liberation but a further retrenchment of these norms.[30] This formations and reformations of the working class has a long history, and is structured by conceptions of gender, and specifically around perceived notions of masculinity and femininity. As Geoff Eley notes "the crisis in working-class culture — in particular, the tensions between traditional ideals and the consumer society and its values — is mapped by these films onto differences of gender."[31] Gender and class, and the remaking of each, are inextricably linked in the film.

Loach is at pains, however, to not portray this as an example of a slice of life as the "underclass" — a segment of society that has "always been with us" - and depicts Bob and his society involved in a process of desperate disintegration. The specificity of the story, while generalizable on some level, shifts us towards the specific. This has occasionally been lost on commentators. Notice here the a-historicity of the following comment:

> Underclass males are a dominant feature of contemporary British cinema and take a variety of forms. The underclass male is a *paradoxical* Everyman as his representativeness comes through his social marginality, not, as in previous periods, through his ability to express an acceptable standard.[32]

Such statements, rather than elucidating the specific situations Bob encounters in the remaking of the British working class, mask his struggle for survival. Contrary to Thatcherist ideology, he is anything but feckless, but rather he does not have Thatcher's heart for mercilessness. The stealing of the sheep leads to, given his inability to slaughter himself, "tragic, traumatic and rather sordid elements" ending farcically in "little financial value."[33] This episode is a perverse rendering of his own predicament.

A bi-product of the unhelpful distinction between the working class and the unemployed is the notion that the unemployed members of the working class are no longer part of it, or are sufficiently removed from it. In this regard, Claire Monk "takes the 'underclass' to be a *post-working* class that owes its existence to the economic and social damage wrought by globalization, local industrial decline, the restructuring of the labour market and other legacies of the Thatcher era."[34] While Monk is clear to distance herself to conservative "work-shy" notions of the underclass, this demarcation, despite its allusion to historical forces, hides that the working class as depicted in the film are unable to live on benefits and, far from being "post" work, their lives are increasingly being defined by the variety rather than singularity of a workplace.

To the problem of short-term employment and poverty, the film itself provides two forms of interpretation. The first is in the form of Bob's father-in-law, Jimmy. Jimmy's socialist credentials seems firm, evidenced by the hatred of the class-betraying, good for "fuck all" Labour Party which threatens him with legal action in response to a proposed rent strike. It is from Jimmy that the film derives its title, that "when you are a worker, it

rains seven days a week." There is little doubt that the socialist interpretation that Jimmy provides is well received and speaks to a form of knowledge that Bob himself understands. Yet the distinction in class analyses that causes friction is Jimmy's insistence that the Church, as James F. English notes, is "not a counterforce to the state or to free-market ideology but is 'part of the problem', pacifying the masses with 'a lot of mumbo jumbo' and preventing them from 'thinking for themselves'."[35] This is where Jimmy is fundamentally out of sync with the class politics of his day, and his analysis loses the form of class specific sentiment that is required. Despite the poster on Jimmy's wall which asks "Is There a Socialist Alternative" there is a sense, given the limit while supportive role Jimmy plays, the answer is not now. The role of the articulate socialist organizer is also a fading figure in Loach's non-historical films given Loach's "despair to the lack of radicalism within the New Labour government" as evidenced in this and other films at the time, such as *My Name is Joe*.[36]

In this regard, the place of religion within the film is in fact contrary to that supposed by Jimmy. The communion dress is not a mark of religious piety or adhering to religious custom, but rather a marker of class pride. The Catholic Church itself as an institution may have sided against the working class historically, but in this instance, the Church provides a moment of clear class alliance with Bob and his wife at Bob's weakest moment. The religion on offer bears little resemblance to the demand of servitude and submission of moral values that are clearly out of proportion to the social setting of the film. Where there any greater signs we could focus on the communion dress, which matters little as a symbol of religious observance or coming of age in the Catholic Church. Nor does the priest resemble anything like a traditional cleric when he counsels Bob, who has killed the loan shark who lent him the money to purchase the dress but has now begun to threaten his family, to *not* turn himself in. In contradistinction to perceived roles, what saves Bob, and what allows him to maintain his and that of his family's crumbling place in their crumbling society is that they go *against* the mores of traditional roles. This contradiction cleaves open the notion that class relations dictate the choices and narratives of working class people. While the mere fact of being working class is hardly something Marxists have valorised, the Church itself as an institution is also distinguished between its members and itself as an organisation with universalist principles that may differ with the people who serve its cause. While Loach has called upon the Catholic Church's alliance with the status quo in, inter alia, *Land and Freedom*, the class solidarity evident in the

priest's advice seeks to encourage an understanding gaze in the viewer's pre-conceived positions regarding the political actions of the Church. This allows for the films' fairy-tale-like ending, reminiscent of the working class fantasy *Miracolo a Milano* (*Miracle in Milan*, 1951).

BRECHT: UNEMPLOYMENT, INDIVIDUALITY AND AESTHETICS

Kuhle Wampe, oder: wem goehert die Welt? follows the Boenike family, in particular their son, Franz, in the first act on his quest for a job in late-Weimar Berlin. Unsuccessful, Franz commits suicide. The second act features the daughter, Anni, who becomes pregnant with her partner, Fritz, with whom she has a hastily put together marriage. Deciding against staying with Fritz, Anni joins the communist cause in Berlin and gets an abortion. The third act sees Anni and her comrades first at a Communist-run sports fair, then on a train home there is a discussion of the origins of the Great Depression, and a communist response to change the world is offered.

While Loach's treatment of Thatcherist Manchester is reflected through an analysis of an individual family, and highlights the individual worker's decline within that framework, Brecht's trajectory works in the opposite manner. For Brecht, capitalism atomizes and reinforces all social ills as markings of personal failings, and therefore the examination of individuality is refracted through the lens of the social class, yet the individual worker must first of all be seen, at least partly.[37] In the opening scenes of the film, the frantic spinning of wheels dominates the screen. Workers speed on bicycles from factory to factory in the hopes of finding a day's work. At this stage, they exist only a group of workers, a blur of disappointment and despair as they are told again and again that there is no work available. Without names or locations, from capital's perspective they are a mass of unproductive labour, even though they are all both figuratively and literally "on their bikes." Their productivity is judged only in relation to capital's needs. Through the story of the son of the Boenike family, Franz, we see how unemployment makes itself felt on individual workers. Yet while the individual is important in this regard, Brecht displays how this problem is anything but individualizable, and as soon as a safe reading of the individual emerges Brecht implicates the social in the actual effects of this abstract unemployment. Although the young son's mother and father seem intent on

personalizing his unemployment (his inability to find work show that his attitude is wrong, he's lazy etc.), his communist influenced sister defends him against the causes of his situation that exist outside of the individual's door. Hers is a social perspective that seeks to eschew and cancel any perspective as such.

In his narrowing in on the Boenike family, however, Brecht is wary of creating a possible predominant emotive response (that is, emotionally identifying with Franz) to this situation. This is not due to the fact that Brecht attempted to dissuade an emotional connection. Rather, as Anthony Squiers notes, the distance that Brecht promoted was not from one's emotional standpoint but "The estrangement Brecht desired was an internal estrangement from one's current *Weltanschauung* or worldview."[38] The preferred reading is to encourage the viewer's pity for the young character but to place this response in dialogue with the larger social conditions that articulate more fully what is going wrong in these scenes and then to approach it on that basis. In order to achieve this Brecht utilises distancing techniques to break the audience from the habit of emotional investing in these social causes. One way of accomplishing this, as Bruce Murray notes, was to introduce each act in such a way as to "interrupt the narrative flow and encourage the audience's intellectual engagement. They do so by commenting ironically on the unfolding, by foreshadowing what will transpire and, in every case, by minimizing the potential for building suspense."[39] This negation of suspense building, in contradiction to Loach's method whose plot is determined by a ramping up of social and individual tensions, acts as a barrier to the acceptance of official responses to Franz's death. The police officer's statement of "unknown" as the cause of Franz's suicide marks the judgment complicit in his suicide. This produces a confrontation connecting the individual and the social, as without recourse to the social we can not interrupt the real life decisions of the individual.[40]

The integration of the social and the individual here marks a deep connection in the specific Benjaminian *jetztzteit* — we are now in the moment of the crisis of the dissolution of the individual and the collision of the individual moment of the effect of capitalism and the larger social processes at work — and this is, as mentioned above, a tactic devised with maintaining this recognition by the viewer in mind. The reception of class as an instantiation of the larger processes at work are key in the completion of the meaningfulness of the scene. Before Franz jumps out of his parent's window, he is careful and considerate of his actions. He slowly considers his actions, and the removal of his

watch is a transference of the sole concrete value (again, as defined by capitalism) that will not be lost to his family.

Brecht holds up in contrast both an individual and social moment, and shows the sociality the logic of the economic act. For Franz, the matter is tragically announced in the spinning away of his time. Before he jumps though he pauses to gaze into the camera. As Franz Birgel notes: The suicide is presented as purely mechanical rather than an impulsive act, which, as the censor in "Kleiner Beitrag zum Realismus" asserts, the viewer does not even want to prevent in the absence of "artistic, human, warm-hearted representation."[41] This "purely mechanical" act, marks a significant challenge to traditional aesthetics. Theodore Rippey notes that this is the film's

> first breach of the cinematic fourth wall. The turn is virtually his only action in the entire apartment sequence; his expression conveys his powerlessness and visually poses the question: "What other options do I have?" He now views suicide as the only viable release from oppression. In a bow to the family's economic plight, young Bönike leaves his watch on the windowsill before leaping to his death. Dudov (the film's director) adds emphasis with an extreme close-up of the watch two shots after the jump.[42]

The depiction of the state of things having been met, the question will eventually become of the response to such horrific predictability. Capitalism's separation of the economic and the political is hollow outside of an understanding of the actual relation of class to the economic. Franz's death is both a fulfillment of economic rationality (he was surplus to society and got rid of himself) yet the actual reasons he did so (despair, the threat of eviction, social and familial pressures) are hidden from view. The viewer is the only fuller witness to capital's artifice or conceit.[43] The sociality of the act conditions its proposed reception. As Esther Leslie notes,

> As a Marxist, Brecht insists that people's actions are less a product of their autonomous needs and desires, and human nature and psychology, and more the product of an objective network of social relations, in whose all-encompassing web people's lives have become entangled. These social relations need to be shown — as just that — social, and also historical, not naturally or divinely given.[44]

If one's position as an individual is tied with one's class position, and always understood in relation to this "dangerous affair," there is equally a danger of re-using formal techniques that no longer respond to the "objective network of social relations." Dana Polan argues that the production of an over-formalised Brecht has lost sight of, or even obscured, the importance of Brecht's political aesthetics. Brecht himself, notes Polan, insisted that all art contained a distancing or alienating feature to it. Yet there is nothing "socially distancing" about this.[45] Whereas audiences may have begun to become used to these alienating forms of making strange, many artists themselves have shied away from the conscious towards intuitive abstraction. In order to challenge this in aesthetics, Polan notes, we must replace the processes which "keeps literary production in the realm of accident and signals a refusal to situate such production within the actual workings of history" and instead adopt a "scientific attitude."[46] The adoption of such an attitude should not privilege an anti-communal or anti-social experience. In fact, the living out of this attitude is made clear only in the moment where a plurality are involved.

Perhaps the clearest example of this shift occurs with the barely commented upon "play within a play" section of *Kuhle Wampe* (a device which Brecht would call on throughout his life) as the political aesthetics of the now are here perhaps nowhere clearer than in any other part of the film. Often lost in analysis of the film is probably its most deliberate statement about politics and aesthetics.[47] It is the play within a play that is meant here, put on by the *Rote Sprachchor*, and the particular role of art in changing social scenarios. Throughout the film we are witness to tales of homelessness not as an abstract category or ontology but as a process, or social event. A person or group is not simply homeless as a state of being through some fault of their own; rather the process by which this has come about consistently acts as a frame of the film. Its offshoots such as suicide, expressing the right to choice,[48] not to mention the role of sexism, a punishing judicial system and a raft of destructive emotions are not backdrops but the thing itself. The role of art is necessarily to assess these and then respond. This is the distinctly social nature of Brecht's formal practice.

In this regard, returning to Franz's unstated question as to "what other options do I have" is an important one as it also poses the political aspect of the cultural producer's position through a formal method. On formal invention in the film Katie Trumpener notes that "Brecht's writings around his 1932 film script for *Kuhle Wampe* suggest how non-traditional and dialectical uses of film syntax (the establishment of a counterpointal

relationship between image and music, for instance) can be used to unsettle the spectator and to create a critical space for (political) reflection."[49] That is, the political aspect is not, and in this moment cannot be, separate from the formal strategy. The moment is one of a social-political aesthetics which seeks to liberate both in a propagandistic sense — that is to challenge the dominant views — as well as challenging the dominant modes of viewing.

This raw material of lived relations is taken up in the play within the play. The latter section of the play which offers the expression of organised opposition frames the play as the socialist artistic or cultural response to the capitalist crisis. This is not, one should clarify, a template for oppositional aesthetics. Rather, this is how a particular form of aesthetics responds in this situation (particularly one that is protest oriented). What is important and worthy of generalisation is the emphasis on beginning from the concerns of the contemporary problem and then finding ways of addressing this problem through encouraging collective activity. The distinctions between the cultural fields and the material base of culture are, in this formulation, are quite narrow. As Teresa Ebert argues, "culture is not autonomous [...]. Rather, through various formations and subtle articulations, the material conditions of culture always assert themselves as necessary, no matter how thick and opaque these meditations might be."[50] Brecht's position to this is similar, and he defines his project's conception of realism in relation to capital's crisis ridden manifestations. As he notes in "The Popular and the Realistic," "Realist means: laying bare society's causal network/showing up the dominant viewpoint as the viewpoint of the dominators/writing from the standpoint of the class which has prepared the broadest solutions for the most pressing problems afflicting human society/emphasizing the dynamics of development/concrete and so as to encourage abstraction."[51] In this instance the film's depiction of the Boenike's eviction is mirrored in the depiction of the content of the Agit-Prop group. Brecht's aesthetics are responsive. They must be focused on addressing and shaping actual lived social situations and the importance that Brecht gives to the troupe "Das Rote Sprachrohr" ("The Red Megaphone") in the film suggests a larger proposal for action and strategy. Here is one "critic's" take on the film:

> Yes, you will be astonished that I reproach your depiction for not being sufficiently *human*. You have not depicted a person but, well, let's admit it, a type. Your

> unemployed worker is not a real individual, not a real flesh-and-blood person, distinct from every other person, with his particular worries, particular joys and finally his particular fate. He is drawn very superficially. As artists you must forgive me for the strong expression that *we learn too little about him*, but the consequences are of a *political* nature and force me to object to the film's release.[52]

The "critic," as one may deduce from this last sentence, was the censor who blocked earlier releases of the film.[53] Yet this is only relevant given that Brecht, upon hearing this appraisal, had the "unpleasant impression of being caught red-handed" and went further to commend the censor by stating that "he had penetrated far deeper into the essence of our artistic intentions than our most supportive critics."[54] What this censor had understood was the attempts at redefinition of the individual in capitalist society, although clearly the censor objects to this for the reasons stated above.

Brecht constructs a cinematic form of repetition whereby the individual is, in relation to their class, capable of reconstruction. The reconstruction here is the gap filled by the arc created by the suicide at the beginning of the play. Whereas the speeding of the wheels locates workers in a race against each other and at the expense of each other, the collective marching through the streets on the way to the festivities presents the opportunity to highlight what Eugene Lunn terms the "positive potentials of the depersonalised, urban, machine age."[55] That is, by working through the constructs that capitalism provides, one is able to produce something that is able to liberate itself. The purpose of the actors is to support those being made homeless by late-Weimar capitalism. In this way, their practice is necessarily defined by the positions of their allies in the particular historical moment. This adeptness requires a collective experience and one which liberates the construct of the singular bourgeois artist from his individuality to the position of collective cultural producer. As noted by Birgel below, such a political aesthetic project was itself attempted in *Kuhle Wampe*.

Working with over 4000 participants, including the members of the leftist Fichte Sports Club, the agit-prop group Das Rote Sprachrohr (The Red Megaphone), and several choruses, Brecht wanted the production to be a learning experience for all involved. As in his *Lehrstücke* from this period, the collaborative process was just as important, if not more so, than the final product. In addition, the audience was to be a co-producer of the film. By disrupting the illusion of reality through his well-known alienation technique, Brecht

wanted the viewers to become active participants who reflect on what was happening on the screen and relate it to their own lives.[56]

The collective nature of the production and its nimble nature, able to respond in a meaningful way in the lives of workers in a moment of great need (eviction), necessitates a move away from a firm formal structure (so often the cause of misunderstandings of Brecht) and the understanding of Brecht's political aesthetics as a process which requires a move towards experimentation. This interest in "experimentation, his strictures against any too rigidly constructed theory of political art," as Dana Polan explains, "are so many attempts to minimize predictability and keep art open to the changing demands of history."[57]

CONCLUSION

In his otherwise excellent *9.5 Theses on Art and Class*, Ben Davis argues that "The working class is distinguished from the middle class not by how its members have more modest houses or watch different TV shows but by the level of authority they have over the conditions of their own work."[58] One need add to the concluding phrase, "if they are lucky to have it." This last point is a fundamental aspect to the problems of unemployment in capitalism, and its structural necessity to capitalism's reproduction. Fredric Jameson, in his reading of the Capital: Volume 1 concludes that there is no need to invoke a "political and ideological strategy when insisting on the fundamental structural centrality of unemployment in the text of *Capital* itself." At this moment of globalised capitalism, which produces "massive populations…who have been deliberately excluded from the modernizing projects of First World Capitalism and written off as hopeless or terminal cases," it is more than ever clear that "unemployment is structurally inseparable from the dynamic of accumulation and expansion which constitutes the very nature of capitalism as such."[59]

In these two films we see the centrality of unemployment to capitalism's structuring of working class experience, especially in periods of drastic social re-organisation. For Brecht, we witness the disintegration of the Weimar period as workers' lives speed to despair, and for Loach, the de-industrialisation of one of the key historical sites of the process itself leads to workers' desperation and psychic disintegration and the

entrenchment of gender norms. While the working classes are always being re-constituted, the films do not eschew entirely the existence of structured experience. In this regard, "Class is an explanation of the social structures of exploitation."[60] If the working class is always being formed, always becoming again — even if in forms not of its choosing — it is also still subject to the unfashionably universalist dilemmas of those moments in capitalism's history when high levels of unemployment are far more the norm rather than the obverse.

In both films we see the question posed of what, in fact, they are being repositioned for. The only clear aspects of their lives are that capital has no idea what to make of them and the fact that there is no work for them. The resulting existential crisis created from this absence resounds as they are left to wander aimlessly but doggedly, internalizing the degradations of their lives, while seeking out daily, hourly respites from the punishingly relentless question of how to materially reproduce themselves. In this context class, and the social relations of class, is made.

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1. See Dennis Dworkin on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, in his *Class Struggles* (London: Harlow, 2007), 75.

2. Teresa L. Ebert and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, *Class in Culture* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2008), 16.

3. Himani Bannerji's useful distinction between "identities of being" and "identities of becoming" offers a conceptual means by which static and productive histories of working class life can be interrogated. Bannerji's contribution allows us to bridge experiences and moments in cultural representation which are otherwise placed into exclusive and occluded categorisations and act as a means to deny new, productive forms which take seriously the connections between class and its determinants. See Himani Bannerji, *The Writing on the Wall: Essays on Culture and Politics* (Toronto: TSAR Publications, 1993), xii-xiii.

4. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 104.

5. Ebert and Zavarzadeh, *Class in Culture*, 16.

6. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics,* ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 14.

7. Terry Eagleton, *Materialisms* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 13.

8. Jacques Bidet, "Bourdieu and Historical Materialism," in *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism*, ed. Jacques Bidet and Stathis Kouvelakis (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 593.

9. Karl Marx, "From 'Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," in *Marxist Literary Theory*, ed. Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996), 31.

10. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 22. As Wood further states, "The premise here is that there is no such thing as a mode of production *in opposition* to 'social factors,' and that Marx's radical innovation on bourgeois political economy was precisely to define the mode of production and economic laws themselves in terms of 'social factors'." (24).

11. This metaphor has, however, dominated much Marxist cultural theory and analysis. Reflecting on the legacy that the most important New Left cultural thinker inherited, Terry Eagleton notes that "When Raymond Williams came to write in the early nineteen-fifties, the ethos of thirties criticism, compounded as it was of vulgar Marxism, bourgeois empiricism and Romantic idealism, could yield him almost nothing." Terry Eagleton, "Criticism and Politics: The Work of Raymond Williams," *New Left Review* 95 (1976): 7.

12. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 83-84.

13. Slavoj Žižek, *Disparities* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 151.

14. Ebert and Zavarzadeh, *Class in Culture*, 4.

15. *Ibid*., 90.

16. Mike Wayne, *Political Film: The Dialectics of Third Cinema* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 64.

17 Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004): 63.

18. Christian Fuchs, *Digital Labour and Karl Marx* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 110.

19. Fuchs, "The Digital Labour Theory of Value and Karl Marx in the Age of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Weibo," in *Reconsidering Value and Labour in the Digital Age*, ed. Eran Fisher and Fuchs (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 28

20. *Ibid*., 29.

21. R. Jamil Jonna and John Bellamy Foster, "Marx's Theory of Working-Class Precariousness," *Monthly Review* 67 (2016): 3.

22. Mary McGlynn, "Collectivism and Thatcher's 'Classless' Society in British Fiction and Film," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 62 (2016): 322.

23. Ian Christie, "As Others See Us: British Film-making and Europe in the 1990s," in *British Cinema of the 1990s*, ed. Robert Murphy (London: British Film Institute, 2000), 71.

24. In one scene, clearly presented to mark devolution in the state of working class communities, a teenage girl accosts a teenage boy of a similar age in the middle of the street. While the fight itself denotes the manifest disintegration, the presentation of a violent girl and a passively receiving boy suggests not simply a devolution of working class communities, but of a problematic departure from gender norms.

25. See John Hill, *Ken Loach: The Politics of Film and Television* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 179.

26. *Ibid*., 179.

27. John Kirk, "Urban Narratives: Contesting Place and Space in Some British Cinema from the 1980s," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 31 (2001): 374.

28. George McKnight, "Ken Loach's domestic morality tales," in *Agent of Challenge and Defiance: The Films of Ken Loach*, ed. George McKnight (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 88.

29. Claire Monk, "Men in the 1990s" in *British Cinema of the 1990s*, ed. Robert Murphy (London: British Film Institute, 2000), 159. While this trend is relevant, the above statement, as the following that "1990's British cinema seemed preoccupied with men and masculinity in crisis. These crises spanned the post-industrial economic desperation of the male no-longer-working-class" seems to suggest that Bob is merely unemployed, whereas in fact he holds several jobs throughout the film (see 156).

30. For a useful riposte to the supposed liberatory possibilities that unemployment offered men in similarly themed films, see Teresa Ebert, *The Task of Cultural Critique* (Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 2009), 4-6.

31. Geoff Eley, "The Family is a Dangerous Place: Memory, Gender and the Image of the Working Class," in *Revisioning History: Films and the Construction of a New Past*, ed. Robert A. Rosenstone (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 20.

32. Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 188.

33. Nigel Mather, *Tears of Laughter: Comedy-Drama in 1990's British Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 31.

34. Claire Monk, "Underbelly UK: The 1990s Underclass Film, Masculinity and the Ideologies of 'New' Britain," in *British Cinema, Past and Present*, ed. Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (London: Routledge, 2000), 274.

35. James F. English, "Locus Focus, Global Frame: Ken Loach and the Cinema of Dispossession," in *Fires were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*, ed. Lester D. Friedman (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), 277.

36. Steve Blandford, *Film, Drama and the Break-Up of Britain* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect Books, 2007), 74.

37. This is valid at the level of the social world, but also at an aesthetic level. Angelos Koutsourakis argues that in Brecht's filmic strategy, he understood that "cinema challenges the understanding of art as a reflectionist process, and the medium's political efficiency is grounded in its ability to engage with the material reality, so as to point to structures that are not necessarily comprehended even by the filmmaker. The prerequisite for the radical employment of the medium is that the story is an epiphenomenon. What matters most is the ability to use the technological apparatus so as to engage with the social reality and point to social mechanisms beyond the narrative world" (Koutsourakis, "Utilizing the 'Ideological Antiquity': Rethinking Brecht and Film," *Monatshefte* 107 (2015): 252). Koutsourakis is examining the connections between Brecht and Walter Benjamin's famous essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." For more on the similarities between the two see Marc Silberman, "The Politics of Representation: Brecht and Media," *Theatre Journal* 39 (1987): 448-460.

38. Anthony Squiers, "A Critical Response to Heidi M. Silcox's 'What's Wrong with Alienation,'" *Philosophy and Literature* 39 (2015): 244.

39. Bruce Murray, *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic*: *From Caligari to Kuhle Wampe* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 222.

40. The suicide itself, coming as it does in the first third of the film, "practically defies all German screen traditions", states Siegfried Kracauer. Despite being asked repeatedly to shift this scene towards the end "so as to re-establish the natural order of things," Brecht and Dudow held firm. "In displacing the suicide myth, Kuhle Wampe disavows psychological retrogression" (that is, making a social act into a individual one). Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), 246. This shift would have also "prevented spectators from interacting with it as they had grown accustomed to interacting with mainstream films" (Murray, *Film and the German Left,* 224).

41. Frantz A. Brigel, "*Kuhle Wampe*, Leftist Cinema, and the Politics of Film Censorship in Weimar Germany," *Historical Reflections* 35 (2009): 51.

42. Theodore Rippey, "Kuhle Wampe and the Problem of Corporal Culture," *Cinema Journal* 47 (2007): 7.

43. Here, Mike Wayne's comments on the politically bridging project of Brecht (and Benjamin) is insightful: "The reason why modernism could not and cannot be dismissed as simply the cultural capital of the intelligentsia is that it articulates aspects of the lived experience of the urban masses in industrial capitalism and mass culture. Benjamin and Brecht understood this, perhaps more than anyone. They detected within the industrial and cultural forms of modernity new potentialities: collective identities, the capacity to make connections swiftly between spatially different phenomena, a critical, skeptical attitude, a thirst for information, a willingness to innovate, and so on. They also recognized that the socioeconomic and cultural forces of modernity could brutalize, mystify and manipulate the masses." Mike Wayne, *Political Film: The Dialectics of Third Cinema* (London: Pluto Press, 2001): 41.

44. Esther Leslie, "Adorno, Benjamin, Brecht and Film," in *Understanding Film: Marxist Perspectives*, ed. Mike Wayne (London: Pluto Press, 2005): 48.

45. Dana Polan, *The Political Language of Film and the Avant-Garde* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985): 92.

46. *Ibid*., 93.

47. Jeff Kinkle and Alberto Toscano note how the historical fact of the destruction of perfectly good coffee to raise the price of it, a fact that is mentioned in *Die Heilige Johanna*, "led Brecht to Marx, and to the dramatization of the link between class position, social knowledge, and aesthetic form evident in the coffee scene from Kuhle Wampe." See Jeff Kinkle and Alberto Toscano, "Filming the Crisis: A Survey," *Film Quarterly* 65 (2011): 48.

48. While often overlooked, female sexuality and a woman's right to choose are important aspects of the film, and, as Kerstin Barndt notes, it is the character Anni's "sexual independence, though, that ultimately determines the heroine's fate and brings the drama of abortion into play". It is Brecht's task in the film to show how Anni's positionality is defined by her social setting. This politics of situatedness is show to be in contrast to the ephemeral notion of young lovers. See Kerstin Barndt, "Aesthetics of Crisis: Motherhood, Abortion, and Melodrama in Irmgard Keun and Friedrich Wolf," *Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature & Culture* 24 (2008): 82.

49. The formulation "unsettle the spectator" needs further thought, this quote is useful as it clearly articulates that Brecht began to articulate a formal strategy aligned with his political purpose. See Katie Trumpener, "Theory, History and German Film," *Monatshefte* 82 (1990): 300.

50. Ebert, *The Task of Cultural Critique*, 21.

51. John Willet, ed., *Brecht on Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 109.

52. Marc Silberman, ed., *Brecht on Film and Radio* (London: Methuen, 2000), 208.

53. One should note that besides getting the film through the censors, the film was effected by the very depression is sought to examine on film. Nevertheless, despite the best efforts of the authorities to keep the film from being seen, it was relatively successful. After a successful first week, the film was prolonged and opened in 15 separate cinemas. This was followed by showings in London, Amsterdam and Paris. Jan Knopf, *Brecht Handbuch 2*, 443. See Vance Kepley Jr., "The Workers' International Relief and the Cinema of the Left 1921-1935," *Cinema Journal* 23 (1983): 19.

54. Silberman, ed., *Brecht on Film and Radio*, 208-9.

55. Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982): 103. As Katherine Roper notes, Kuhle Wampe was unique — alongside Piel Jutzi's *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Gluck* (*Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness*, 1929) — in that it was the only film to "refer to revolutionary transformation of institutions and the Communist movement that would carry it out". See Katherine Roper, "Looking for the German Revolution in Weimar Films," *Central European History* 31 (1998): 90.

56. Birgel, "*Kuhle Wampe*, Leftist Cinema, and the Politics of Film Censorship in Weimar Germany," 49. Brecht's admiration for groups such as Das Rote Sprachchor was in part due to their ability to put forward arguments to workers' organisations (not merely labour unions) directly. Yet Brecht also was keen to show, as in the tram scene at the end of the film, "the value of proletarian common sense, in which young workers successfully debated older bourgeois passengers about the need to change the world." See Richard Bodek, *Proletarian Performance in Weimar Berlin: Agitprop, Chorus, and Brecht* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1997), 146.

57. Polan, *The Political Language of Film*, 95.

58. Ben Davis, *9.5 Theses on Art and Class* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket, 2013), 13.

59. Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One* (London: Verso, 2011), 149.

60. Ebert and Zavarzadeh, *Class in Culture*, 101.