

# Luxurious Cinema Palaces in the Roaring Twenties and the Twenty-First Century: Critical Analyses of Movie Theatres by Siegfried Kracauer and Their Relevance Today

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## Abstract

*Impressive cinema palaces with exterior façades illuminated appealingly at night were significant for the big city life of the roaring twenties. The film screenings in the prestigious buildings were framed by a diverse supporting programme. Siegfried Kracauer dealt critically with the formative tendency towards theatricality in the new large cinema buildings such as the Gloria-Palast in Berlin in 1926. He also discussed the supporting programme and the aspect of distraction in the context of modern mass and leisure culture in a progressive and extraordinary way.*

*Over the past decade, luxury cinemas have been enjoying a revival. In order to examine today's high-end boutique movie theatres, Siegfried Kracauer's thoughts on large cinemas in the "roaring twenties" in Berlin provide critical impulses. In the first part of my paper, two important texts by Kracauer are analysed. In contrast to previous research, Kracauer's arguments are also compared in greater detail with those by contemporary progressive critics not only in Germany but also in other countries, such as Joseph Roth, Kurt Pinthus, Fritz Olinsky, Kenneth Macpherson, Harry Alan Potamkin and Philip Morton Shand, among others. This also reveals the special nature, quality, and depth of Kracauer's essays. An analysis of modern luxury movie theatres inspired by Kracauer's train of thought follows in the second part of this paper.*

**Keywords:** *Siegfried Kracauer, history of film, luxury cinemas, film palaces, Weimar Republic*

The first permanent cinemas at the beginning of the twentieth century were mostly small and plain. However, larger, more elegant film screening venues were already established in the second half of the 1900s in US and soon afterwards in European cities too (Altenloh 1913: 19f.)<sup>1</sup>. The increasing popularity of film was a major factor in this. In connection with the longer duration and the more sophisticated plots of films, an attachment to high

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culture was also sought architecturally with more prestigious performance locations. Thus, film became more acceptable to the middle classes and was able to establish itself as a mass medium (Korte 1980: 13-89, 55-56).

In the 1920s, movie theatres became even larger and could seat several thousand visitors. They were designed even more luxuriously than live performing theatres. In addition to an increase in pomp, the supporting programme became longer and more diverse (Slowinska 2005: 582). Cinema had thus unmistakably become a socially acceptable leisure activity, where people no longer “went stealthily” but rather paced through a sumptuous entrance in an “evening dress” (Magnus 1929/1930: 967). In Germany, many new film palaces were built or existing cinemas were enlarged after the end of the inflation in 1923. In Berlin, many elegant picture palaces were located around the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church on Kurfürstendamm and served as first-release cinemas (A. [abbr.] 1925).

Due to his training as an architect, Siegfried Kracauer was well suited to critically analyse the new picture palaces in Berlin<sup>2</sup>. Kracauer’s first short article on cinema buildings in Berlin is titled “Palaces of Film. Berlin cinemas”<sup>3</sup>. It was published with three photographs in *Das Illustrierte Blatt*, on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1926 (fig. 1). This weekly illustrated magazine was printed by the Frankfurter Societäts-Druckerei, i.e. the same publishing house as the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (FZ), where Kracauer was employed as an editor. In his article, Kracauer draws attention to a general tendency towards theatricality in the new large cinema buildings such as the Gloria-Palast on Kurfürstendamm. However, in his opinion, with this theatre-like style, the architecture does not correspond to its purpose. This view is based on Kracauer’s reflections regarding the characteristics of the film medium in his previous film analyses, in which he clearly distinguished film from theatre. According to him, carefully arranged scenes, elaborate actions and intellectual transitions are characteristic of theatre. By contrast, the “spirit of film” corresponds to visibly erratic movement, a tendency to surface and improvisation, and improbable events (Kracauer 2004: 38, 46).

The German print media mostly praised the new picture palaces with many superlatives (Kreimeier 1999: 123f.). For example, the Ufa-Theater Turmstraße is said to have been “unanimously recognized by the press as the most beautiful and modern cinema in Germany” (Anon 1925: 27). Furthermore, the *Berliner Tageblatt und Handels-Zeitung* confirmed that the Gloria-Palast had lived up to its claim to be the “festival theatre of the German film” (Anon. 1926b). The new picture palaces also enjoyed strong popularity and attracted a large number of visitors (Naylor 1987: 22).

Kracauer refrains from such a common panegyric in his article; instead, his arguments show parallels to contributions of other advanced critics. For example, Kracauer's media-aesthetic argument that buildings should take into account the differences between cinema and theatre had already been mentioned by Kurt Pinthus regarding the first more luxurious cinemas prior to the First World War (Kracauer 2004: 204, Pinthus 1913/1992: 366f). In the film magazine *Close Up* (1927-1933), Macpherson also condemned the extended supporting programme and highlighted that cinema and theatre would not go together (1927: 13)<sup>4</sup>.

However, Kracauer's remarks are not as polemical as those of the architecture critic Philip Morton Shand, who published an important monograph on early cinema buildings in 1930. Shand favoured modern architecture and therefore condemned the fact that the new film palaces echoed historical buildings as "gaudy opulence of an already bygone age" (17). He condemned the atmospheric film theatres in the US, which also influenced the Gloria-Palast. In addition, Shand compared the picture palaces to cheap novels. According to him, they were "nauseating stick-jaw candy, so fulsomely flavoured with the syrupy romanticism of popular novels" (19)<sup>5</sup>. Despite its brevity, Kracauer's contribution is more profound in terms of architectural theory and film aesthetics compared to other critics, whereby his expertise as an architect and film reviewer becomes clear. His quality and critical perspective – which reveals parallels to other avant-garde film critics – make him quite unusual for the German press coverage at the time. Especially for the *Illustrierte Blatt*, with its main focus on personal and event reports, puzzles, humorous and serial novels, Kracauer's text must be regarded as rather uncommon<sup>6</sup>.

Due to the brevity of his work, Kracauer focuses only on architecture in his contribution to the illustrated magazine. In a longer second text, he also discusses the supporting programme and the aspect of distraction in greater detail. In this article "Cult of Distraction. On Berlin's Picture Palaces" published without illustrations in the FZ on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1926 (1995: 323-330; 2004: 208-213), Kracauer analyses the pomp of the film palaces in the context of modern mass culture. His approach is sociologically more profound than in his first shorter contribution. Kracauer refers to the Gloria-Palast – which he had already dealt with in the *Illustrierte Blatt* – in addition to several other large, well-known new cinemas such as the Ufa-Palast am Zoo (fig. 2) in the west of Berlin in the vicinity of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche (Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church). He also brings up the "American style of a self-contained show"

after Samuel Rothafel who established a supporting programme in the US for film presentations<sup>7</sup>. Such a programme had been first established in Germany in the Ufa-Palast am Zoo. To create a counterweight to the “monotony of the ‘silent stage’”, Rothafel combined the performances of a symphony orchestra and individual artists with ballet interludes, vaudeville performances, decorative lighting and coloured light effects to create a harmonious supporting programme that is tailored to the respective film (Potamkin 1927/1998: 33; Melnick 2012). The film screening was expanded into a “super show”, its entertainment value increased and a theatre atmosphere was created. Rothafel’s staff members Ernö Rapée and Alexander Oumansky were hired for the introduction of the programme in the Ufa-Palast am Zoo (Melnick 2012: 252 ff.).

Kracauer already characterises the film palaces in the introduction as “the total artwork [Gesamtkunstwerk] of effects” (1995: 324). The addition of the notion “effects” is significant for Samuel Rothafel’s supporting programme. Presentations by the orchestra, individual artists, lighting effects, etc. were put together to form a harmonious programme that “adapts itself prologue-like to the meaning and content of the film”, “in order to prepare the mood according to the film work” (Wedemeyer 1925a: 574). According to Rothafel’s employee Ernö Rapée – a film composer and conductor – “atmosphere and the main character of your picture” had to be given special consideration (1925: 11, 8). At theatre openings, the film was even selected to match the architectural style. For example, the Gloria-Palast – designed in the baroque style – was opened with the drama “Tartüff” (Germany 1925) by Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau based on the play by Molière, whose period of action coincides with the neo-baroque style of the film palace. However, despite the coordination of architecture and performance at the openings, a higher purpose was missing, as in Richard Wagner’s concept of the total artwork. According to Wagner, all of the individual genres of art were to be merged into the total artwork, thus enabling a “representation of perfect human nature” (1983: 28f.).<sup>7</sup> Wagner himself criticised the gimmickry of Giacomo Meyerbeer, for example, because his recipe for success included the achievement of “effect without a cause” (1850-1851/1914: 89). In his text, Kracauer similarly criticises the fact that the magnificent pleasure palaces offer no edification and no collection, but only diversion and splendour.

In “Cult of Distraction”, Kracauer deals with the new pompous cinemas in relation to metropolitan leisure culture. In his opinion, modern mass culture is actually only present in the big city of Berlin, because in the

provincial cities the bourgeoisie still dominates, while in the industrial centres the workers orient themselves to bourgeois culture (1995: 324f). In fact, according to contemporary statistics, there were very few cinemas in the industrial cities at that time (Anon. 1926c). By contrast, in 1926 Berlin had 340 cinemas and by national standards a very large number of seats per inhabitant (Anon. 1926.). According to Kracauer, distraction is the necessary counterpart to the alienated everyday working life of people in the big city and it takes place in the same “surface sphere” [“Oberflächensphäre”] as the working world (1995: 325). What is unmistakable in this text is the impact of Georg Simmel’s reflections on the nervousness and distraction of the modern city dweller, which also influenced other statements by Kracauer in 1924/5. According to Simmel:

[t]he lack of the definitive in the center of the soul induces to seek a momentary satisfaction in ever new impulses, sensations, external activities; thus it is only in its turn that it entangles us in the confused perplexity and helplessness that reveals itself sometimes as the turmoil of the big city, sometimes as a travel mania [...] (1903/1995).

In the first sociological study on cinema published in 1913, Emilie Altenloh indirectly refers to Simmel’s observation of secret disquietude caused by modern life: “[...] both the cinema and its visitors are typical products of our time, characterized by constant preoccupation and nervous restlessness (1913: 55f.)<sup>9</sup>.”

Kracauer’s treatment of the topic of distraction was influenced by his studies of Karl Marx in the prior months. For instance, Kracauer associates the distraction that films can provide with revolutionary potential. For him, the earlier performances in simple cinemas are “a reflection of the uncontrolled anarchy of our world” (1995: 327). Thus, they function as a kind of a distorting mirror for the disintegration of contemporary society. According to Kracauer, this is the basis for a revolutionary atmosphere because it is possible to observe the actual constitution of society and change it afterwards. When the “*disorder* of society” is brought before people’s eyes, “this is precisely what would enable them to evoke and maintain the tension that must precede the inevitable and radical change” (ibid)<sup>10</sup>.

However, the “cult of distraction” that was being pursued in Berlin with the latest magnificent cinemas and the film screenings that had been expanded into a revue significantly prevented the creation of a revolutionary atmosphere, according to Kracauer (328). Due to the

orientation to theatrical performances and the creation of a unity of experience between architecture and programme, a former idealistic bourgeois culture was apparently being restituted in the film palaces, according to him. However, the bourgeois façade was only pretended and the social disintegration was thus veiled by an aesthetic illusory totality. Kracauer considered this to be out of date and devaluated it as “applied art” (ibid.). Kracauer also criticised contemporary revue programmes in the FZ on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1925 in a manner similar to supporting programmes in the cinemas, albeit in a more sarcastic style. Their magnificent decoration distracted from the unjust structures, because “[w]hen the audience gathered, they would not know what to do; out of boredom they could cause unrest” (Kracauer 2011: 313).

Kracauer’s approach to distraction is progressive in the sense that he does not condemn it as a fundamentally inferior pastime; instead, he sees distraction as contemporary and important as a recreation from work (ibid.). On the other hand, in conservative circles, the “exaggerated craving for pleasure” was criticized (Teuteberg 1990: 195). Kracauer’s criticism of bourgeois arrogance in “Cult of Distraction” can also be seen as daring: “Their arrogance, which creates sham oases for itself, weighs down upon the masses and denigrates their amusements.” (Kracauer 1995: 325) After all, the educated middle-class citizens criticised by Kracauer were among the main readers of the FZ (Bachleitner 1999§ 114).<sup>11</sup> However, according to Kracauer, economic and social reality had irreversibly changed and bourgeois culture was no longer up to date. Orientation towards middle-class habits would serve to detract from the social damage (326)<sup>12</sup>.

Kracauer’s integration of sacral aspects is striking in his second text on Berlin’s film palaces, whereby the title already contains the word “cult”. He indicates that the architectural cinematic frame tends towards the “lofty and the *sacred* as if designed to accommodate works of eternal significance—just one step short of burning votive candles.” (327, emphasis in the original) In the same way as religion was an “opium” for the people according to Karl Marx and only allowed “illusory happiness” (Marx 1844: 71f.), for Kracauer the modern metropolitan masses now exposed themselves to illusions in film presentations expanded into a revue. The urban public indulged in mass culture in a religious way. Superficially, the mass audience of the 1920s thus imitated the bourgeoisie, for whom art and culture served as a kind of “substitute religion” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The large cinemas of the 1920s and 1930s supported cult associations by their furnishing with organs as well as by sacral

connotations of the interior design (Schivelbusch 1992: 53-56). In the US today, some old film palaces such as “Loew’s Valencia Theater” in New York actually serve as churches (Macfarquhar 1999). In his article “The Ritual of the Movies” from 1933, Harry Alan Potamkin was particularly critical of the cult of cinema and the uncritical visitors in the great modern “cathedrals” of film palaces:

In the building of these large temples and cathedrals – and I say they are rightly called temples and cathedrals – everything has been done to merchandise the show. The money changers are in the temple. What have they done in the last few years? Have they improved the pictures? They have done things to the stage show which is part of the ritual (1933: 3).

In addition to socio-critical considerations, Kracauer cites a media-aesthetic argument against the supporting programme. According to him, as a two-dimensional medium, cinema did not need three-dimensional additions, as these run counter to the illusion of film:

By its very existence, film demands that the world it reflects be the only one; it should be wrested from every three-dimensional surrounding, or it will fail as an illusion (Kracauer 1995: 328).

Potamkin also referred to the media character of film against the introduction of the stage show by Rothafel: “Any artist of intelligence will tell you, that if an art is to transcend the medium, it must do so by virtue of the medium’s characteristics.” (Potamkin 1927/1998: 34.) He represents the idea of a cinema “which should entertain almost solely with movies” (ibid.). Such media-aesthetic reflections as those of Kracauer and Potamkin are lacking in the common contemporary German press coverage of the supporting programme. However, the supporting programme was received more critically by film reviewers than the magnificent architecture<sup>16</sup>. Due to Kracauer’s focus on the socio-critical location of the new Berlin cinemas and the additional introduction of media-aesthetic arguments, the economic motives for the large cinemas fade into the background. For example, in “Cult of Distraction” Kracauer only mentions in a subordinate clause that financing mass entertainment in Berlin is worthwhile because the masses there have become sufficiently large (1995: 325).

In Berlin, Ufa particularly endeavoured to establish premiere cinemas according to the latest standards as well as supporting

programmes based on American models (for example, as outlined in the Ufa-Palast am Zoo and the Gloria-Palast with the engagement of Ernö Rapée and Alexander Oumansky). The “total artwork [Gesamtkunstwerk] of effects” (Kracauer 1995: 324) was also intended to conceal Ufa’s financial difficulties (Kreimeier 1999: 124f.). Ufa expanded in the early-1920s and did not suffer so much damage during the inflation period. However, in the mid-1920s the company ran into financial difficulties. With expensive large-scale productions such as “The Nibelungs” (*Die Nibelungen*, d: Fritz Lang, Germany 1924), Ufa wanted to remain competitive with Hollywood, although the costly films were not sufficiently profitable. In addition, unfavourable contracts with American film production companies had been concluded at the end of 1925 (Kessler 2001: 1179). The large cinemas should achieve positive PR for Ufa and support the success of their film productions with glamorous premieres. The film palaces with their sensational architecture functioned as media-effective “sensation machines” (Sildatke 2010: 13). The Berlin cinemas not only received a lot of attention in Europe (Anon. 1926d) but were also noticed in the US in the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* (Anon. 1929).

They were regarded as “showcase cinemas”, and cinema owners from Paris and London travelled to the opening of these film palaces, in addition to journalists. In 1924/1925, thirteen new large movie theatres were built or acquired by Ufa within half a year. In 1925, the film company owned a total of 150 cinemas, which also allowed it to exercise more control over film performances (Anon. 1925). Kracauer’s rare critical contributions in the German-language press coverage opposed Ufa’s strategy of promoting a positive corporate image with the major film palaces. Kracauer exposed the pomp of the cinemas as pseudo-glamour. The builders propagated this as a democratisation of luxury (Naylor 1987: 22, Anon. 1968).

Kracauer also disavows the claim of Berlin as the most modern and “‘most enjoyable’ city in Europe” (Knickerbocker 1932: 21) by exposing the distraction effect of Berlin’s large cinemas as reactionary, because cinemas functioned as a symbol of modern urbanity (Steidle 2011: 15) and thus contributed to Berlin’s metropolitan flair. In recent years, a revival of luxurious cinemas can be observed, whereby such cinemas with the possibility to eat directly in the auditorium in the US and England are especially popular. For example, in New York, several dine-in cinemas have opened over recent years, such as the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema in Downtown Brooklyn, Metrograph in Lower East Side and IPIC in South

Street Seaport. Although they no longer attract as much international attention as the major cinemas of the Weimar Republic, the openings are still noticed in the regional press. In some cases, the high prices and the distraction caused by the food are criticised, although in general they receive a lot of positive feedback. For a deeper critical examination of these, Kracauer's treatment of the big screen in the 1920s and the views of other film critics can be very inspiring.

Efforts towards increased luxury in the cinema sector were already made during the last turn of the millennium. Thus, in Australia and the US, some cinemas established improved services such as seat reservations and online tickets, which were not common in film theatres at that time, as well as a concierge service (Redstone 2004). This provided some distance from the megaplexes that try to handle as many cinema visitors as possible in a short time (Lora 2018). The small American cinema chain Muvico even offered childcare and valet parking and provided restaurants next to their cinemas (Montalbano 2010: 19). Finally, some cinemas began to serve food in the auditoriums themselves, rather than only snacks to go. This is considered to be particularly forward-looking in the US today. It is hoped that gourmet food and the latest sound and projection technologies will continue to attract visitors after cinema attendance has been declining for several years. One of the reasons for the lower number of cinema-goers was initially the easy way of renting DVDs by post, followed in recent years by online video libraries and streaming services. The former managing director of Muvico – Hamid Hashemi – founded the American luxury cinema chain IPIC in 2006. At the beginning of 2019, it comprised sixteen cinemas in the US<sup>13</sup>. IPIC connects the film theatre with a restaurant and bar, where food and cocktails are also served in the cinema auditoriums.

The cinemas have various types of leather seating, namely comfortable single chairs, chaise lounges for two people to lie on and so-called "pod seats". In these two-person boxes, you can lean back like in a wicker beach chair and be shielded from the other visitors (fig. 3). At the push of a button, the seats extend to a reclining chair. In 2019, one of them cost 30 USD in the IPIC cinema in the South Street Seaport district in Lower Manhattan, making them the most expensive cinema seats in New York (Lynch 2016)<sup>14</sup>. The pod seats are also equipped with a blanket and pillow (fig. 4). For Americans, the cuddly living room accessories are supposed to look particularly homely and comfortable, because the IPIC concept is intended to combine the comfort that they are used to at home when streaming films with additional services in the cinema. For example, food

and drinks can be ordered directly at the so-called “Premium Plus” pod seats.

In addition, the interior design should appear noble and hip at the same time. Walls and floors are kept in dark colours in the IPIC in the Seaport District, which opened in 2016. Several colourful and decorative urban art murals create a young atmosphere and are ideal for Instagram-suitable photos. The slogans on other large-format neo-pop artworks emanate a positive mood, even if they are not very deep in their affirmation. With such up-to-date decorative art, millennials – who are particularly accustomed to streaming – are also to be lured into the cinema. 90% of IPIC visitors are between 21 and 54 years old, while the average age is 33 (Singh / Hashemi 2018). Put simply, the atmosphere is similar to a chic night club or a design hotel. The ticket counter and the polite greeting staff also remind more of the reception in an expensive hotel.

The luxurious atmosphere at IPIC is intended to induce people to stay longer, take selfies that support social media marketing and of course consume gourmet popcorn, expensive food, and drinks. If a visitor initially only chose a cheap seat in the cinema hall and did not consume so much during the film, this can be made up for by a subsequent visit to the integrated restaurant. Overall, the IPIC chain makes 70% of its profit from food and drink and only 30% from ticket sales, while other multiplex cinemas make about 46% of their profit from ticket sales (Loria 2018, Geiling 2013). IPIC describes itself as “America’s premier luxury restaurant-and-theatre brand” (IPIC 2019). However, IPIC does not fit into the earlier concept of luxury for a smaller group of very rich people. In recent decades, luxury goods have instead become more accessible to a mass audience, although the character of luxury in general has also changed (Thomas 2007).

Especially after the financial crisis of 2007-2008, the interest in luxury at lower prices such as perfumes and accessories has increased. Dine-in cinemas are also a kind of “new luxury” for the masses. Instead of having your own movie theatre at home, at least a comfortable lounge will ensure a home-like cinema experience for a few hours. According to the former IPIC owner Hamid Hameshi, his visitors had an average income of 120,000 USD in 2018 (Singh / Hashemi 2018). They belonged to the American middle class (Dogen 2018), which has problems maintaining its former standard of living with this income (Bowman 2017). Even Hameshi’s first efforts at Muvico for more luxury in the cinema sector were aptly classified by Shari Redstone of “National Amusements” in the New

York Times as an “upscale moviegoing experience for the masses” (qtd. in Weber 2005). With their glamorous façade and the pastimes that they create, today’s luxury cinemas have undeniable similarities to the major cinemas of the Weimar Republic as analysed by Kracauer. Even if they try to surpass Broadway theatres with their luxurious ambience, the film palaces of today distance themselves from the traditional bourgeois cultural institutions through the distraction that they offer. In order to reach as large an audience as possible, IPIC cinemas mainly show Hollywood blockbusters and not more in-depth independent/house films (Guida 2015).

In addition, the food orders in the showroom are remindful of dining in music halls and cabarets. Although some of them are legendary today – such as the “Moulin Rouge” in Paris – they were not considered fine by contemporaries. The IPIC luxury atmosphere is therefore rather a superficial decoration from a cultural-historical and social perspective. In this respect, the installation in IPIC Fulton Market by Los Angeles-based artist Mike Stilkey – who has created similar works for other IPIC cinemas – is also significant (fig. 5). He has placed fairy-tale chimeras on books stacked on a wall in the third-floor gastro lounge<sup>15</sup>. The books are very dysfunctional and purely decorative, although they have an educated middle-class connotation that Kracauer already criticised as artificial and unsuitable for the leisure industry in the 1920s. Some elements of luxury cinemas like the recliners have been quickly taken up by multiplex cinemas. For example, in the past two years, the Austrian Cineplexx chain has also partially or completely equipped movie theatres with comfortable leather armchairs in addition to improved projection technology to justify higher ticket prices, among other things. However, small cinemas will find it difficult to keep up with this development of maximising luxury and comfort.

The contemporary high-end boutique movie theatres intend to increase their consumption and profit. They function as “sensation machines”, just like the large film palaces of the Weimar Republic (Silvatke 2010: 13). However, instead of 1920s light organs, they are equipped with 3D urban art murals, and instead of an orchestra of 80 people, they offer state-of-the-art sound and projection technology. In addition to the already very effective Hollywood blockbusters, they also offer spectacular interior design, luxury hotel atmosphere, and maximum comfort and service. With these contemporary eye-catching strategies – which according to philosopher Christoph Türcke are necessary to attract economically

profitable attention in today's "excited society" (Türcke 2012) – the aim is to persuade middle-class cinema-goers to buy a little luxury.

In New York's IPIC in the Seaport district, this mini luxury serves as a short-term distraction from the stressful everyday life of the metropolis, the many hours of work that are common in New York and the alienation that is particularly noticeable there (Langman/Kalekin-Fishman 2012). According to the sociologist W. Peter Archibald, due to the increasing importance of leisure and consumption, paid work is subjectively less important for individuals and they no longer feel the alienating effects of work as intensively as some decades ago. Nevertheless, alienation is increased by the commercialised leisure culture (Archibald 2009). The small luxury of an IPIC visit can indeed serve as a consolation for the fact that greater prosperity is much less attainable for today's middle class than for previous generations. However, with book decorations and art as in the 1920s, a pseudo-bourgeois façade criticised by Siegfried Kracauer is preserved.

#### Notes

1. The article is based on the research for one part of my PhD thesis submitted at the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig in March 2020.
2. Spaces play an important role in Kracauer's oeuvre, for Kracauer's dealing with interiors see Rühse 2014.
3. Kracauer (2004), 204-206. The original titles and quotations in German can be found in my PhD thesis (chapter IV). Unless otherwise indicated, the English translations from German sources are mine.
4. Harry Alan Potamkin also characterised the theatre as the "traditional intruder into cinema practice" [Potamkin (1927) 1998: S. 33].
5. See also William Archer S. Douglas' critical stance – Douglas 1927: 193.
6. On the subject of the *Illustriertes Blatt* see Barr 2016.
7. See also Bazon Brock's definition of the total artwork – Brock 1983: 23.
8. Altenloh refers to Simmel (1900) 1989, S. 675. – See also Wiemer/Zechner 2005.
9. According to Inka Mülder Bach, this view of Kracauer is a "bold thesis", which has also been criticised in more detail by Helmut Lethen – Mülder 1985: 69; Lethen 2000: 103-5.
10. See also Bloch 1985: 309.
11. See also Kracauer on revues: Kracauer (2011): 313-317.
12. Examples for a critical reception of the supporting programme are Blass 1926, Pinthus 1925, Oly. (Olimsky) 1926, Roth (1924) 1989-1991.
13. However, the IPIC Company filed for bankruptcy in late summer 2019. In November 2019, the ownership of the company changed and two IPIC cinemas were subsequently closed. It remains to be seen whether the middle class as the main audience can still afford IPIC cinema visits after the Corona crisis in 2020.
14. The average cinema ticket price in New York is USD 16.50 (Arkin 2019), although the popcorn included with IPIC on the Premium Plus seats costs about 10 USD in other cinemas, i.e. if you consume popcorn IPIC is only 4 USD more expensive.

15. There are more bookcases in the IPIC in the Fulton Market Building on the third floor, which are also intended as decoration.



Fig. 1) Siegfried Kracauer's article "Palaces of Film. Berlin cinemas" in *Das Illustrierte Blatt*, on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1926, scan: Viola Rühse.



Fig. 2) Anon., Kurfürstendamm with Ufa-Palast am Zoo and the view of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche, photo postcard, Berlin (Verlag Nettke), late-1920s/early-1930s, private collection, scan: Viola Rühse.



From left to right:

Fig. 3) Cinema auditorium in the IPIC cinema, Fulton Market Building, New York, opened in 2016, photo: Bernhard Kastner 2019.

Fig. 4) Cinema seat in the IPIC cinema, Fulton Market Building, New York, opened in 2016, photo: Bernhard Kastner 2019.

Fig. 5) Mike Stilkey, installation (“book sculpture”), 2016, New York, IPIC cinema, Fulton Market Building, photo: Bernhard Kastner 2019.

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