1.2 The Human Qualities of Reportage

One way to enter into a deeper exploration of literary journalism's mediating function is through the genre of reportage; the term has even been used interchangeably with "literary journalism."[1] As I will show, reportage has been conceptualized as "eyewitness account". Therefore, its central workings can be examined via the comparably much more developed analysis of the witness's mediating function. "The division of fact and fiction," John Durham Peters has stated, "so central for historians and sports fans, as well as the structuring principle of media and literary genres, turns on witnessing. An event requires witnesses, a story only needs tellers and listeners."[2] Like journalism performed by humans, witnessing anchors its referentiality to extra-textual reality in an experiencing observer's body.

The main attempts to theorize reportage in Europe in the 19th and early 20th century reflect motives similar to those that drove the shaping of literary journalism in the United States. European writers and thinkers synthesized ideas emerging from literary realism and science, while further emphasizing the problem of communication, during a time of rapid modernization. Like their American counterparts, European writers and thinkers positioned reportage as the human artistic cure, rooted in phenomenological experience, against the capitalist forces of hitherto unconceptionalized mediatization. They observed that these forces were both changing human experience in modern societies and affecting the very communication of that experience. However, the European theorization of reportage was also frequently informed by piercing anti-

1 The term reportage was considered at the founding conference of the *International Association of Literary Journalism Studies*. Roiland, "By Any Other Name: The Case for Literary Journalism," 72. Additionally, the IALJS' website refers to its mission as "the improvement of scholarly research and education in Literary Journalism/Reportage."; International Association of Literary Journalism Studies, "About Us."

2 Peters, "Witnessing," 2009, 37.

American criticism of developments in the emerging journalism business and capitalism in general.

In their theoretical debates, Marxist writers and critics, such as Egon Erwin Kisch and Walter Benjamin, went much further than their American colleagues as they elaborated and scrutinized the reportage writer's own mediating function. First, reportage was defined as an eyewitness account with a particular epistemology. Second, and more decisively, it was forged as a real political weapon against the threat of fascism. Strongly influenced by the analysis that fascism was a direct outgrowth of the increasingly technological mediation of reality—and hence false class consciousness—writers were actively looking for a representational form that corresponded with the aesthetics of human sense perception.

Perception Against Profession: The Beginnings of Reportage

The history of reportage as a generic category is complex, dynamic, and intercultural.[3] The word *reportage* has its roots in the French verb "reporter," which in 11th century Anglo-Norman and Middle French meant "to take back." It was not until the 12th century that it acquired the meaning "to bear (witness)."[4] Significantly, in the United States,[5] reportage has to this day been primarily associated with the practice of reporting applied in journalism, or some variation of the news story, "meaning a piece of direct, informative reporting, as opposed to comment."[6] In Europe, however, reportage has acquired the narrower meaning of an "eyewitness account." For instance, in his introduction to *The Faber Book of Reportage* (1987), the English literary scholar John Carey identified the reporter's role of witness and his or her main reliance on human sensory experience as one of the main criteria used in selecting the texts.[7] Similarly, in his introduction to *The Granta Book of Reportage* (2006), English journalist Ian Jack

3 Hartsock, *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience*, 100.

4 "Report."

5 Hartsock, *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience*, 83; Marcus, *Second Read: Writers Look Back at Classic Works of Reportage*; Silvers, *The New York Review Abroad: Fifty Years of International Reportage*.

6 Roy, "Reportage," 696.

7 Carey, "Introduction," xxix.

emphasized that reportage "has this nice sense of the thing seen, the event observed."[8]

Importantly, the theorization of reportage as the explicitly written product of an intentional human eyewitness coincides with the further increase in mechanization and the electrification of the media environment in Western societies. A set of innovations in media technology, such as the invention of the telegraph and the portable photocamera (between 1850 and 1940 for the most part) profoundly changed how human communication worked. In retrospect, the telegraph in particular was associated with a new degree of technological transcendence of time and space and, consequently, the separation of sign and referent that is said to be one of the postmodern's defining characteristics.[9] Until the mid-19th century, what are called reports, dispatches, or travelogues today had been published in a diverse and complex set of print media, such as books, pamphlets, or journals. These various publication formats had been brought about by the steady mechanization of the printing press and contributed to the intensification of translocal communications and, in some ways, also helped establish colonial states.[10] However, the rapid transmission that the telegraph made possible further changed the scale and speed of these communications and contributed to the building of new media-based communities not primarily determined by time and space. The invention of the telegraph, according to Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp, created "shared rhythms of simultaneous experience and new narratives of commonality", and "new forms of near-instantaneous, reciprocal communication".[11]

The technological development of photography in the early 20th century posed an even more fundamental competition for reporters' texts based on their subjective experience of reality. Key to their rise was the invention of the Leica in Germany, the first hand-held camera to take pictures of unposed action in high quality. Importantly, its mass production in the 1920s coincided with the first transmissions of photographs via telegraph. By the 1940s, at least in the U.S., magazines such as *Life* or *Look* had turned photojournalism into big business.[12] An appreciation of the new media technology accompanied this

8 Jack, "Introduction," vi.

9 Carey, "Time, Space, and the Telegraph."

10 Couldry and Hepp, *The Mediated Construction of Reality*, 40–44.

11 Couldry and Hepp, 47.

12 Cmiel and Peters, *Promiscuous Knowledge: Information, Image, and Other Truth Games in History*, 147–150.

rise. Compared to text, the pictures produced by photojournalists appeared superior. On the one hand, cameras were thought to deliver more reliable representations of reality than any description of human perception could muster in text, particularly in the early days of photojournalism.[13] On the other hand, the photograph's supposedly superior representational power resulted in an appreciation of a manufactured effect manifested in a "feel of artlessness".[14] While the interpretation and selection inherent in journalistic writing had become negatively associated with bias, photographers were celebrated if their pictures managed to communicate interpreted essence.[15]

These technological innovations in specific call into question the communication of subjectively experienced reality of a human medium. The telegraph affected both the very production and publication of texts and indirectly contributed to the genesis of the journalistic ideology of objectivity.[16] Photography challenged the very credibility of textual journalistic genres and their phenomenological bases of knowledge.

Reportage has developed alongside such challenges as textual form and professional practice. The genre is an amalgamation of two different generic categories. On the one hand, scholars have traced the form's roots to Herodotus' *Histories*[17] and later to the travelogues of the 17th and 18th centuries.[18] As hinted at previously, however, reportage must also be regarded as a byproduct of the American press's transformation from traditional political-partisan journalism to mass newspapers during the second half of the 19th century.[19] As such, it was accompanied by the emergence of new forms of advocacy journalism that sought to move readers emotionally and positioned

13 Hicks, "What Is Photojournalism?," 22–33.

14 Cmiel and Peters, *Promiscuous Knowledge: Information, Image, and Other Truth Games in History*, 151.

15 Cmiel and Peters, 151.

16 Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers.*, 4.

17 Homberg, *Reporter-Streifzüge: Metropolitane Nachrichtenkultur und die Wahrnehmung der Welt 1870–1918*, 42.

18 Homberg, 56; Hartsock, *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience*, 95; Geisler, *Die literarische Reportage in Deutschland: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen eines operativen Genres*.

19 Lindner, *The Reportage of Urban Culture*, 7–11; Homberg, *Reporter-Streifzüge: Metropolitane Nachrichtenkultur und die Wahrnehmung der Welt 1870–1918*, 47–49.

the reporter's profession front and center.[20] Early American reporters worked under precarious and highly competitive conditions in the hunt for new and spectacular stories. Along with other factors—such as competition among newspapers and the desire for personal recognition—this encouraged sensationalist exaggeration, embellishment, and even the invention of facts and entire stories.[21]

Some of these developments, and their influence upon local journalism, drew harsh criticism in Europe which was experiencing a similar transformation of its media industries. In the United Kingdom, for example, the poet and critic Matthew Arnold opined in 1887 that this "new journalism … throws out assertions at a venture because it wishes them true; does not correct either them or itself, if they are false; and to get at the state of things as they truly are seems to feel no concern whatever."[22]

The emergence of what was actually called reportage was shaped by developments in the French Third Republic, which witnessed an explosion of publications after 1870. On the one hand, early French reportage was likely influenced by the colonialist writings of travel writers such as Henry Morton Stanley, who worked for the *New York Herald*. His travel account *How I found Livingstone* (1872) was translated into French in 1874.[23] On the other hand, the emergence of reportage was also interwoven with a critique of sensationalist fashions in American journalism, similar to the one advanced by Arnold in the United Kingdom.[24] In a manifesto attached to his novel *Le Sieur de Va Partout, souvenirs d'un reporter* (1880), the French journalist Pierre Giffard launched a debate in which he defended reportage's literary qualities and further emphasized the reporter's role as an eyewitness on the spot.[25] The basis for his

20 Homberg, *Reporter-Streifzüge: Metropolitane Nachrichtenkultur und die Wahrnehmung der Welt 1870–1918*, 47–49.

21 Smythe, "The Reporter, 1880–1900. Working Conditions and Their Influence on the News."

22 Arnold, "Up to Easter," 638; Campbell, "W.E. Gladstone, W.T. Stead, Matthew Arnold and a New Journalism: Cultural Politics in the 1880s."

23 Martin, *Les grands reporters: Les débuts du journalisme moderne*, 32–35.

24 Martin, *Les grands reporters: Les débuts du journalisme moderne*; Homberg, *Reporter-Streifzüge: Metropolitane Nachrichtenkultur und die Wahrnehmung der Welt 1870–1918*, 48–52.

25 Homberg, *Reporter-Streifzüge: Metropolitane Nachrichtenkultur und die Wahrnehmung der Welt 1870–1918*, 50–51.

argument was a fierce critique of American sensationalism. In his text, Giffard argued that American reporters exaggerated for capitalist reasons:

> They have no artistic sense. They are note-taking machines. Incidentally, they are neither writers, nor artists, nor critics. We the others have to be all this. The French reader does not support the banal inventory that forms the base of the yankee reporters' baggage.[26]

Significantly, Giffard did not uphold the rough distinction between objective journalism and subjective reportage. Rather, Giffard exposed a conflict within reportage itself with his critique, one that he located in the reporter's self-understanding. By opposing the ideas of the reporter as an industrious producer of sensationalist entertainment and the reporter as an artist, he imbued reportage with an—albeit somewhat vague—artistic and reactionary imperative.

Observation and Experiment

Giffard's critique came at a time of rapid expansion and alongside the press's commercialization, which coincided with the emergence of modern literary realism in the form of naturalism. With his call for precise examination, combined with experimentation within reportage, Giffard's arguments showed similarities to the views of the French novelist Emile Zola, who had published his manifesto *The Experimental Novel* (1880) that same year.[27] In this text, Zola places additional emphasis on the earlier promotion of science in literature by his fellow countrymen Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert and calls for a fusion of the detailed observation of reality with literary experimentation.[28]

While the French debate only hinted at reportage's potential as an artistic response to the capitalist forces of an emerging entertainment industry, the German discourse resulted in a rather explicit theorization of reportage as a functional genre. Key to the theoretical formation of reportage as a literary genre was the acknowledgment of the reporter's own function as a medium.

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26 Giffard, *Le Sieur de Va-Partout*, 330–331, my translation.

27 Homberg, *Reporter-Streifzüge: Metropolitane Nachrichtenkultur und die Wahrnehmung der Welt 1870–1918*, 51.

28 Morris, *Realism*, 70–71.

This idea was elaborated a few decades later in Germany, but—crucially—it also took place in an environment of increased technical mediation. Following the end of the First World War, writers faced increased competition from new media, such as film and radio. Along with the end of censorship, these new media contributed to an environment of "information overload" for the German public.[29] In 1916, the German writer Hermann Kesser was among the first to argue that the reporter had to be viewed as an involuntary framer, because nothing could be registered automatically or objectively.[30]

It was the Czech reporter Egon Erwin Kisch, however, who initiated a lively theoretical discussion about reportage in Germany. Kisch was the first to formulate the idea of reportage as an explicitly literary genre. He repeatedly published programmatic manifestos that borrowed from other ideas circulating in cultural debates and reacted to societal and political realities in post-war Germany. Over time, in Kisch's programmatic considerations, the initially apolitical insight that the reporter essentially had the function of a human medium gradually morphed into a political responsibility. A communist writer, Kisch produced a trove of reportage, only parts of which have been translated into English.

Kisch's process of self-definition began with the central insight of the reporter's own role as human medium. In 1918—also under the strong, but compared to Giffard belated, influence of Emile Zola—Kisch sought to elevate the reporter's role. He designated the reporter's work as the "most honest, most factual [*sachlichste*], most important."[31] In Kisch's view, the reporter's importance was grounded in his or her function as a transmitter of facts in an account that also turned him or her into a kind of mediator. Kisch placed the reporter between the artist and the common citizen as "an intermediary [*Zwischenstufe*] that both sides are hostile to."[32] Reporters set themselves apart from other journalists through their use of, mainly, phenomenological experience. Unlike columnists, who rarely left their desks, drew their evidence from quotes from other publications, and were by nature "second-hand," Kisch argued that

29 Mayer, "Die Epoche der Weimarer Republik," 76.

30 Homberg, *Reporter-Streifzüge: Metropolitane Nachrichtenkultur und die Wahrnehmung der Welt 1870–1918*, 54–55.

31 Kisch, "Wesen des Reporters," 40. Unless explicitly noted, all translations of Kisch's quotes are my own. Emile Zola's *The Experimental Novel* (1880) was not translated into German until 1904, two years after Zola's death.

32 Kisch, 44.

the reporter's research yielded results that were "first-hand, from life."[33] The reporter, according to Kisch, had to process and transmit these facts in a way that strongly resembled Zola's concept of the experimental novelist:

> Of course, the fact is only the compass of his journey, but he also needs a telescope: "logical fantasy". For the autopsy of a crime scene or venue, the overheard utterances of participants or witnesses, and the assumptions presented to him, never provide a *complete* [*lückenlos*; emphasis in the original] image of the circumstances. He has to create the practicalities of the event, the transitions to the results of the inquiries himself and only has to pay attention that the line of his account lead precisely through the facts known to him (the given points of the route). It is now ideal that this curve of probability drawn by the reporter corresponds to the real line connecting all phases of the event.[34]

While Kisch does not discuss events witnessed first-hand by the reporter here, he does emphasize the distinction that the reporter must make between facts and presentation, account and image. Kisch also emphasizes the reporter's self-awareness as a medium who actively shapes the facts.

Zola's clear influence on Kisch indicates the existence of a link between the theorization of realist fiction and reportage. For instance, Kisch celebrated the French writer as the "greatest reporter of all times" in his collection of works of what he called "classic journalism" from 1923.[35] Kisch credited Zola with introducing the "infinite realms of truth into the novel" and argued that, in his journalism, Zola was "as ravishing as in his novels" because he "started out from the fact and the autopsy."[36] The most explicit parallel, however, can be found in the specific idea of the reporter as a medium, which corresponds to Zola's merging of observer and experimenter in the novelist. In *The Experimental Novel*, which was translated into German in 1904, Zola had argued that the observer "ought to be the photographer of phenomena; his observation ought to represent nature exactly."[37] The experimenter, on the other hand:

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33 Kisch, 41.

34 Kisch, 41.

35 Kisch, *Klassischer Journalismus: Die Meisterwerke der Zeitung*, 405.

36 Kisch, 405.

37 Zola, "The Experimental Novel," 165.

> is he who, by virtue of a more or less probable but anticipatory interpretation of observed phenomena, institutes an experiment in such manner that in the logical framework of prevision, it furnishes a result which serves as a control for the hypothesis or preconceived idea.[38]

Despite the aforementioned correspondences, Kisch appeared more cautious than Zola in his assessment of the reporter's ability to represent reality. In his text, Zola introduced the idea of a certain "determinism of the phenomena under study"[39] that not only affects the particular series of events recounted by the novelist, but also turns the experimental account itself into an observation.[40] Kisch avoided this determinism, however, by upholding the separation of fact and fantasy when talking about the reporter. As shown above, he asserted that there could never exist a complete image of the circumstances. The curve of probability in the account corresponded to the real line of events only on an ideal level.

Reportage's Political Turn

In retrospect, Kisch's insistence on the separation between observation and account, between fact and fantasy, already anticipated the conception of reportage as more narrowly the account of an eyewitness, and consequently the genre's politicization. In the famous preface to his collection of reportage *Der rasende Reporter* (1925), Kisch clearly embraced a more modest and scientific conception of reportage. By now, Kisch had abandoned his previous concept of logical fantasy. Instead of Zola, Kisch took the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer as his main point of departure.[41] The facts, or objects, were now seen to be speaking entirely for themselves, while Kisch located the good reporter's main drive in his desire to experience first-hand in an environment of untruths:

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38 Zola, 165.

39 Zola, 166.

40 Zola, 166.

41 In "On Writing and Style," from which Kisch quotes, Schopenhauer had distinguished between writers who write for the things they write about and writers who write for the sake of writing itself. In Schopenhauer's view, the former write because they had a certain thought or experience, the latter write for money. Schopenhauer, "On Writing and Style."

> The reporter has no tendency, he has nothing to justify and no stance [*Standpunkt*]. He has to be an unbiased witness and to testify unbiasedly, as reliably as it is possible to give testimony… The good [reporter] needs the ability to experience for his business, which he loves. He would experience if he did not have to report on it. But he would not write without experiencing. He is neither artist nor politician or scholar.[42]

What is important, then, is Kisch's early insistence on the reporter's distinct quality as witness and that it include a kind of distanced objectivity. However, it is just as important to remember that Kisch conceived of this idea of the unbiased reporter against the backdrop of the Weimar Republic's social segmentation which, in the years following the end of the First World War, alternated between stabilization and inflation-related chaos.[43] Kisch took the sense of the reporter's work to lie in "the dedication to his object" as they found themselves "[i]n a world, immeasurably flooded by the lie… a world that wants to forget itself and thus only strives toward falsehoods."[44] Furthermore, he characterized the ideal reporter's "independence from the effect of the moment [*Unabhängigkeit von der Augenblickswirkung*]" as "perhaps un-American."[45] While Kisch's formulated stance can be characterized as non-partisan, the material basis in first-hand phenomenological experience indicated a certain political concern that he had yet to articulate.

Kisch's bold positioning, against bias and cheap sensationalism, had significant repercussions. A year later, in a Weimar Republic that the critic Leo Lania viewed as "virtually living second-hand,"[46] Lania praised Kisch for having the courage to feel the present's contours, "to view it ever anew, to auscultate it—to experience it."[47] He further credited Kisch with attaching a name to the "modern direction," in respect of the departure from artistry and romanticism. In his view, Kisch was raising interest in the activity of objective description, in what he saw as a time of a fragmenting division of labor and a general need for public attention.[48] However, this did not mean that Kisch's reportage was apo-

42 Kisch, *Der rasende Reporter*, VI–VII.

43 Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*; Feldman, *The Great Disorder: Politics, Economics, and Society in the German Inflation, 1914–1924*.).

44 Kisch, *Der Rasende Reporter*, VIII.

45 Kisch, VIII.

46 Lania, "Reportage als soziale Funktion," 5.

47 Lania, 5.

48 Lania, 5.

litical. In fact, his actual reportage differed rather significantly from what was announced in the programmatic preface. As Keith Williams has shown, Kisch's reportage pieces in *Der rasende Reporter* (1925) sought to "subvert concepts propagated by the capitalist media and unmask the economic and political interests lying behind them."[49]

It did not take long for Kisch to theorize this political turn more explicitly. Following the end of both the First World War and the Russian Revolution, Kisch not only traveled extensively throughout Europe and the Soviet Union,[50] but he also worked for the bourgeois press and determined that "the disclosure of many things has to be rejected as politically or economically damaging by newspapers."[51] Kisch definitively abandoned Emile Zola as his writer of reference, replacing him with the American John Reed. Kisch praised Reed's account of the Soviet Revolution, *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919), as "the most important book for the understanding of the present."[52] In a preface to the second translation of Reed's book from 1927, Kisch claimed that

> Emile Zola defined art as a piece of truth seen through a temperament. To us, contemporaries of the World War, of revolutions successful and unsuccessful, this definition does not suffice anymore. To us, art is a piece of truth seen through a *revolutionary* [Kisch's emphasis] temperament.[53]

Zola's fall in Kisch's estimation was connected to what Kisch felt was an absence of commitment in Zola's writing that he associated with a detachment from reality. One year later, in 1927, Kisch called Zola a "bourgeois socialist… tired of reportage"[54] who, "from the landscape of reality deserts into a quite naïvely imagined land of fantasy."[55]

Kisch amended his conception of the reporter at around the same time, whom he nonetheless still characterized as an eyewitness who is reliant on sensory perception: "Every reporter," he wrote in 1928, is a "writer and journalist who is intent on factually describing circumstances or events for their own

49 Williams, "The Will to Objectivity: Egon Erwin Kisch's 'Der rasende Reporter,'" 94.
50 Williams, 93.
51 Kisch, "Was Reporter verschweigen müssen," 116.
52 Kisch, "Soziale Aufgaben der Reportage," 11.
53 Kisch, "John Reed, Ein Reporter auf der Barrikade," 104.
54 Kisch, "Die sozialistischen Typen des Reporters Emile Zola," 62.
55 Kisch, "Soziale Aufgaben der Reportage," 10.

sake through his own visual inspection [*um ihrer selbst willen aus eigenem Augenschein*]."[56] Importantly, this explicit witnessing of the reporter also had clear political consequences. Kisch called it the social "awareness that by far the majority of all seemingly so heterogeneous events and the interest they cause rests on the same basis."[57]

Kisch did not explicitly distinguish between reportage's form and function in his writings. However, he acknowledged that they did not always go hand in hand in his last theoretical texts. "It's difficult to posit the truth precisely without losing drive or form", Kisch wrote in one of his last manifestos in 1935. "[R]eportage means making work and way of life visible—these are often unwieldy, grey models in today's times."[58] He openly admitted that he had not yet found a solution to the problem that he had identified. "With all our power," Kisch urged, "we have to seek a form for an expression of our awareness that satisfies all the ideal principles of an absolute aesthetics."[59]

In the U.S., concern with reportage's more explicitly political function was more pronounced. The American writer Joseph North, strongly influenced by Kisch, tried to infuse Kisch's ideas into theoretical American literary debates in socialist circles. However, North defined the genre mainly in terms of its superior potential to affect readers, similar to the conceptualization of photojournalism. He argued that it could transcend the gaps inherent in communication and make readers "feel the facts".[60] For instance, North repeatedly stressed what he perceived as the transcending power of reportage in a preface to the reportage section of a 1935 anthology of proletarian literature. The reporter's writing, North argued, "must result in an experience, which in turn induces a mode of action" and claimed that reportage "helps the reader *experience* the event recorded."[61] He called reportage "one of the best weapons in the literary arsenal" and insisted that it "is the presentation of a particular fact, a specific event, in a setting that aids the reader to experience the fact, the event."[62] No

56 Kisch, 9.

57 Kisch, 9.

58 Egon Erwin Kisch, "Reportage als Kunstform und als Kampfform," in *Reporter und Reportagen: Texte zur Theorie und Praxis der Reportage der Zwanziger Jahre*, ed. Erhard Schütz, (Giessen: Achenbach, 1974), 47.

59 Kisch, "Reportage als Kunstform und als Kampfform," 45.

60 North, "Reportage"; Dingledine, "'Feel the Fact': The 1930s Reportage of Joseph North, John L. Spivak and Meridel Le Sueur."

61 North, "Preface to 'Reportage,'" 211.

62 North, 212.

real challenge to North's conceptualization of reportage arose in the US that could develop into a debate.

Fascism and the Writer as Producer

In Europe, however, Kisch's ideas had only started to set in motion a more urgent search for the right form for expressing an awareness that could counter fascism. It was the German-Jewish critic Walter Benjamin who forcefully articulated what Kisch had grasped only superficially. Walter Benjamin had fled Germany for Paris only weeks after the burning of the Reichstag and Hitler's taking of power in mid-March 1933. He had already criticized fascism and he would theorize it as a socially unjust manipulation of the proletariat, by way of a specific kind of mediation made possible by new media technologies, in the years that followed. In his famous essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproduction" (1935), he argued that fascism:

> attempts to organize the newly proletarianized masses while leaving intact the property relations which they strive to abolish. It sees its salvation in granting expression to the masses–but on no account granting them rights. The masses have a *right* to changed property relations; fascism seeks to give them expression in keeping these relations unchanged. *The logical outcome of fascism is an aestheticizing of political life.*[63]

This aestheticizing of political life, Benjamin argued, was made possible by reproductive media technologies such as photography or film, which—simply put—address their audience as passive consumers experiencing readily available reality, rather than involved co-producers who are aware of a decisive temporal distance between themselves and the work of art.

This argument is crucial because it is connected to a more nuanced critique of reportage. Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, among others, claimed that reportage did not, by nature, fulfill its social function in favor of the proletariat, as some of their younger comrades had claimed.[64] According to this argument, reportage carried the potential to aestheticize and thereby glorify

63 Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," 41.

64 Schütz, *Kritik der literarischen Reportage*, 13–14.

misery. If reportage, with its focus on particulars, only managed to portray the surface of life, then it would not lead to just change but would instead act like a kind of propaganda of the existing.[65] This line of critique was based on critical analyses of photography or film. Siegfried Kracauer argued in one of the most prominent passages of reportage critique from his ethnographic study of white-collar workers, *The Salaried Masses* (1930):

> A hundred reports from a factory do not add up to the reality of the factory. Reality is a construction. Certainly, life must be observed for it to appear. Yet it is by no means contained in the more or less random observational results of reportage; rather, it is to be found solely in the mosaic that is assembled from single observations on the basis of comprehension of their meaning. Reportage photographs life; such a mosaic would be its image.[66]

Krakauer's problematization of reportage was connected to a problematization of class—and to the fact that witnessing always implies speaking for somebody else. In a 1930 review of Kracauer's book, Benjamin asserted that: "in a class society social existence is inhuman to the degree to which the consciousness of the different classes, far from being adequate, is highly mediated, inauthentic, and displaced."[67] Writers contributed to such false consciousness because their bourgeois privilege of education and literary instruments made for individual modes of production that nevertheless resulted in standardized literary products. Benjamin argued that even "the proletarianization of the intellectual hardly ever turns him into a proletarian",[68] because the intellectual's bourgeois education created a sense of solidarity with the bourgeosie that differed markedly from a true proletarian's constant being on alert.[69] In 1930, Benjamin praised Kracauer's approach for its difference from the radical left-wing reportage he found to be demagogic. However, he had not yet formulated a definition of an authorial stance that he himself had deemed adequate.

Benjamin found the solution to this fundamental problem of authorial subjectivity in a class society in the Soviet Union, in which a group of writers was working to expose the alienation of automized everyday life by defamiliarizing

65 Schütz, 13–15.

66 Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, 32.

67 Benjamin, "An Outsider Makes His Mark," 306.

68 Benjamin, 309.

69 Benjamin, 309.

automized representation.[70] Crucially, these Soviet Futurist factographers like Sergei Tretiakov understood facts themselves as results of processes of production. In the 1920s, the young Soviet Union, like the Weimar Republic, had experienced an explosion of new media technologies. Devin Fore has argued, "the factographers understood acts of signification not as veridical reflections or reduplications of an ontologically more primary reality, but as actual and objective components of everyday, lived experience."[71] In such a "society on the cusp of the modern media age the distinction between the object and its image grew increasingly tenuous."[72] The *ocherks*, the factographers' literary texts, have been characterized as experiments between literature and science, comparable to sketches, essays, and reportage.[73]

Referring to Sergei Tretiakov's concept of the operative writer, Walter Benjamin situated the writer of reportage, more explicitly than Kisch had, within the capitalist forces of the apparatus of cultural production and introduced self-reflection as potential relief. In "The Author as Producer," written in 1934, but which remained unpublished during his lifetime, Benjamin rejected what he perceived as the dogmatic connection between the political line of a writer's work and its literary quality. Instead, he fused the two and introduced the category of literary tendency. "The correct political tendency of a work," he argued, "includes its literary quality *because* it includes its literary *tendency*."[74] According to Benjamin, this literary tendency was embodied by the author whose "work will never be merely work on products but always, at the same time, work on the means of production."[75] Benjamin consequently demanded of the author "*to think*, [emphasis in the original] to reflect on his position in the process of production. We may depend on it: this reflection leads, sooner or later, for the writers who *matter*… to observations that provide the most factual foundation for solidarity with the proletariat."[76] This solidarity, then, was based on the writer's transformation "from a supplier of the productive apparatus into an engineer who sees it as his task to adapt this apparatus to the purposes of the proletarian revolution."[77]

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70 Williams, "'History as I Saw It': Inter-War New Reportage," 40–41.

71 Fore, "Introduction," 6.

72 Fore, 6.

73 Fore, 9; Hartsock, *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience*, 106–116.

74 Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," 80.

75 Benjamin, 89.

76 Benjamin, 91.

77 Benjamin, 93.

Of course, Kisch's theorization of the reporter or writer, and later Benjamin's conception of same, can be read as the reporter's increased politicization as one who becomes transformed from a neutral observer into an actor in class struggle. However, this politicization was always tied to the transformation of the political landscape and the simultaneous industrialization and technologization of the media. And most importantly, it went hand in hand with the increasing self-awareness of the writer's own role as a human medium.