

**‘Time and space in the depiction of workers’ leisure in *Mother Krause’s Journey to Happiness*, *People on Sunday* and *Kuhle Wampe*’**

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**Abstract**

This article comparatively assesses the representation of workers’ leisure in Berlin in three significant examples of experimental German cinema from the late Weimar Republic: *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (*Mother Krause’s Journey to Happiness*, dir. Piel Jutzi, 1929), *Menschen am Sonntag* (*People on Sunday*, dir. Robert Siodmak, Edgar G. Ulmer, 1930), and *Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt?* (*Kuhle Wampe or Who Owns the World?*, dir. Slatan Dudow, 1932). There are distinct thematic and formal parallels between this set of nearly contemporaneous, generically hybrid films, and the article assesses the inter-related functions of time and space in the films’ depiction of leisure experiences in Berlin. Focal points include the depiction of urban space, especially the tenement block and the ‘semi-public’ space of the courtyard; the Freibad or lakeside bathing resort; the worker sports movement; and the comparative relevance of the work of the Berlin artist Heinrich Zille. The article approaches the films in the historical context of the workers’ movement and working-class culture, and is further informed by insights into urban space developed within the sociological discipline of leisure studies.

This article seeks to reassess the representation of workers’ leisure in Berlin in three significant examples of experimental cinema from the late Weimar Republic: *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (*Mother Krause’s Journey to Happiness*, dir. Piel Jutzi, 1929, hereafter referred to as *Mother Krause*), *Menschen am Sonntag* (*People on Sunday*, dir. Robert Siodmak, Edgar G. Ulmer, 1930), and *Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt?* (*Kuhle Wampe or Who Owns the World?*, dir. Slatan Dudow, 1932, hereafter referred to as *Kuhle Wampe*).<sup>1</sup> The thematic and formal parallels between the films, all made in the space of three years between 1929 and 1932, are, I shall argue, clear. Yet, perhaps because they fall outside the dominant critical paradigms for what Anton Kaes terms ‘the classical cinema of Weimar Germany’ (Kaes 2009, 14),

they have rarely been considered in close comparison, and the centrality of leisure in their portrayal of the urban working classes has yet to be fully explored.<sup>2</sup> My focus here is therefore on the inter-related functions of time and space in the films' depiction of leisure experiences in Berlin. I approach them in the historical context not only of the workers' movement but of working-class culture, which can be understood, as Sabine Hake has recently proposed, as a set of 'cultural practices' that have an 'emotional function', and not, as is often implied, 'as an extension of social reality or an expression of party politics' (Hake 2017, 17). This approach, which is further informed by insights into urban space developed within the sociological discipline of leisure studies, allows me to address some of the critical blind spots, and to reveal both the parallels and differences between the films.

### **The films: contexts, legacies, reception**

The three films are both the product and a document of transitions, most obviously those from relative stability to economic and political crisis, and from silent to sound film. *Mother Krause*, like *People on Sunday* a silent film, was produced by Prometheus Film, as *Kuhle Wampe* was also intended to be. Prometheus was founded in 1925 with funding from the *Internationale Arbeiterhilfe* (Workers International Relief) organisation and the German Communist Party (KPD).<sup>3</sup> In an attempt to build on the international success of innovative Soviet films such as Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), the intention was both to distribute Soviet films in Germany and to produce formally inventive, avowedly socialist films for the German market, working outside the commercial restrictions of the dominant studios. As a Prometheus film *Mother Krause* was produced in order to further a political agenda and can in that sense be considered propaganda, but the film also engages with everyday working-class experience distinct from political activism. Relevant in this respect is the fact that it was conceived as a tribute to the popular Berlin artist Heinrich Zille (1858–1929), known for his accessible and humorous depictions of contemporary city life, who had died shortly before *Mother Krause* began filming in September 1929.

The film, directed and photographed by the former artist and illustrator Piel (a.k.a. Phil) Jutzi (see Freund and Hanisch eds. 1976, 167–8), can be compared to 'street films' of the era dealing with themes such as prostitution and poverty (e.g. *Die freudlose Gasse/ The Joyless Street* (dir. G. W. Pabst, 1925)), but was publicised as 'The Great Zille Film'.<sup>4</sup> This was both strategic marketing, as Zille had reached a peak

of popularity in the 1920s, as well as an indication of the esteem in which Zille was held within leftist culture.<sup>5</sup> Zille was undoubtedly a socially critical artist, but his work does not espouse a specific agenda, and was above all committed to the human experience of the working class in Berlin, especially in the central district of Wedding, his so-called *Milljöh* (dialect for milieu).<sup>6</sup> This is an aspect of his work that Jutzi is evidently concerned to reflect, political themes notwithstanding, in the visual style of *Mother Krause*. The eponymous elderly mother, whose ‘journey’ leads not to ‘happiness’ but to suicidal despair, is drawn from Zille’s provocative typology of the urban poor. The film’s geographical focus is Wedding, which the reviewer for the communist *Rote Fahne* suggests is the ‘main actor’ in the film (Durus (Kémeny), 1/1/1930), and the use of location and space can be productively read in direct comparison with Zille’s work.

The realist strategy employed in *Mother Krause* differs markedly from many previous German cinematic portrayals of the living conditions of the urban working class. Whereas films such as Murnau’s *Der letzte Mann* (*The Last Laugh*, 1924) and Pabst’s *The Joyless Street* had used elaborate studio sets, *Mother Krause* made extensive use of actual Wedding locations and employed amateur performers and locals as extras, a method also utilised in the other two films under discussion.<sup>7</sup> This gives the film a distinctive ‘documentary’ character that lends credibility to the political dimension of the narrative.<sup>8</sup> Despite these distinctive qualities, *Mother Krause* has received relatively little scholarly attention. In common with many other films from the silent era, the original negative of *Mother Krause* is lost, and a partial restoration was completed in 1957 in the GDR, where it enjoyed high status. Despite or, more likely, because of this, there has been a tendency for it to be dismissed as mere propaganda with a ‘surfeit of melodrama’ (Hake 2017, 329) or as imitating ‘already popular successes of the major studios’ (Silberman 2008, 314), both assumptions which misrepresent the film.<sup>9</sup> However, despite a more complete restoration in 2012, the film is still only rarely screened, and is not currently available as a commercial DVD.

*People on Sunday*, released just weeks after *Mother Krause*, presents a radically streamlined story proceeding from a simple premise – four young Berliners spend a summer Sunday at the Wannsee lake. Unlike *Mother Krause* and *Kuhle Wampe* it does not seek to promote a political agenda, but even left-wing reviewers acknowledged that it was ‘interesting’ in that it diverged from the norms of

commercial cinema and the major studios (Dur[us] (Kémeny) 7/2/1930, 11). The film is unusual in two respects: as a co-operative, experimental creation by a group of young filmmakers, including Robert and Curt Siodmak, Edgar G. Ulmer, and Billy Wilder; and as a film in which an amateur cast were asked to play themselves rather than fictional characters, hence the title card at the start announcing a ‘film without actors’.<sup>10</sup> As with *Mother Krause*, the original negative of *People on Sunday* has been lost, and for decades it existed mainly as an early reference point in biographies of its creators, rather than as an accessible work open to new readings. This changed with the restoration, completed in 2000, of a near-complete version, which has resulted in a gradual renewal of interest. A narrative in which chance plays a greater role than causality, the treatment of ‘everyday’ material culture, and the inclusion of intermedial references (to newspapers, film postcards, photography, and gramophones) invite interdisciplinary approaches (see Koepnick 2008, 247) and productive readings of the film as, in Elodie Roy’s phrase, ‘a cultural artefact in and of itself’ (Roy 2017, 35).

*Kuhle Wampe* was also a product of a group or ‘collective’ rather than a single ‘authorial’ director, and as such comes close to ‘realizing the idea of deindividualizing (aesthetic) production in the cinema’ (Silberman 2008, 316), a principle its co-writer Bertolt Brecht had favoured since his unsuccessful attempt to sue the studio which had produced the film version of his play *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*; film directed by G. W. Pabst, 1931). The creative team were all members of or closely affiliated to the KPD, and the film’s disrupted genesis has been well documented (Gersch and Hecht 1969, 171–79): escalating production costs, the collapse of Prometheus Film (Mühl-Benninghaus 2012, 57–9), delayed completion with a different company, and further delay at the hands of conservative censors who feared the impact of an explicitly communist film (Gersch and Hecht 1969, 103–139; Hake 2017, 329).<sup>11</sup> The collective was certainly influenced by *Mother Krause* (Happel 1980, 170). Their film blends a comparable realist aesthetic in its use of Berlin locations (the tenement, the street) with a storyline that echoes some of the same dramatic motifs (unemployment, homelessness, suicide), but is formally more radical, using defamiliarising montage effects (Silberman 2008, 319), breaking of the ‘fourth wall’, and an agitprop performance style that reflected Brecht’s dramaturgical principles.

Unsurprisingly, *Kuhle Wampe* also enjoyed canonical status in the GDR, and was rediscovered by Western leftist scholarship in the 1970s. Film historians have tended to

approach it either in the context of Brecht's oeuvre and his theories of epic theatre, or to consider it as an example of propaganda and an historical censorship 'case' (Birgel 2009). Readings of the film often focus on its use of distancing strategies as a means of encouraging political engagement, with the result, as Hake (2017, 329–31) notes, that the film's emotional content has been overlooked or criticised. Hake reads the film's unusual blend of the emotional and the disinterested, persuasively, as an attempt to produce a cinematic equivalent to Sergei Tretyakov's 'operative' art, designed with the intention to make the audience 'active participants in the transformation of social reality' (Hake 2017, 320). The film clearly prioritises its political message, discernible in the provocative questioning of 'ownership' in the full title, and presents its narrative as a didactic case study: the first half of the film presents a set of social and human problems, which is followed by a solution that makes both political and emotional sense. However, the unevenness and relative brevity of *Kuhle Wampe*, and its 'scrambling' of discourses (Hake 2017, 327), have continued to divide viewers and critics. Siegfried Kracauer was one early reviewer who had defended the film against censorship but was mystified at the prominence granted to a leisure activity – a workers' sports festival – at the conclusion: 'A sports festival is something that could never, even metaphorically, counterbalance the misery of everyday life' (Kracauer 2008, 54). As is the case for *People on Sunday*, scholarship has more recently adopted a broader and far more nuanced approach to the film as both cultural and political artefact, interacting with its context in ways that had previously been ignored.<sup>12</sup>

### **The value of leisure in historical context**

The sports festival in *Kuhle Wampe* is just one memorable example from the films of a leisure 'space' that has transformative value. In their focus on various types of leisure, all three films can be said to proceed from an understanding of its value that has its origins in nineteenth-century socialist thought. A key insight was that 'self-actualisation' for the masses, what Marx refers to in the third volume of *Capital* (pub. posthumously 1894) as 'the realm of freedom', is only made possible by firstly removing the expectation of 'surplus labour' (work beyond what is necessary) and secondly recognising the value of life outside the realm of 'necessary' or required labour:

In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is

determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. [. . .] Beyond [the realm of necessity] begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working-day is its basic prerequisite. (Marx 1999, 593)

In a recent article David James argues that Marx is not implying that labour that is ‘necessary’ (James 2017, for society) has less intrinsic value than the realm outside work, and suggests that Marx hoped that a balance between freedom and necessity might eventually co-exist. Jan Kandiyali goes further in arguing that ‘participation in the realm of necessity is required for human freedom’ (2017, 834). Nevertheless, Marx’s recommendation of ‘the shortening of the working-day’ would seem to confirm that a maximisation of ‘free’ time should be a key principle in the fight for workers’ rights, echoing Paul Lafargue’s earlier pamphlet *The Right to be Lazy* (1880), perhaps the most explicit socialist attempt to defend the value of human freedom beyond the spatio-temporal world of exploitative work.

The establishment in late nineteenth-century Germany of organised leisure for workers, notably worker sports clubs, and choral and dramatic societies, has sometimes been understood as the third important element to the workers’ movement, alongside the Party (the SPD) and the unions (see M. Krüger 2014, 1101; Geary 2000, 389). Hake observes that choral societies, which had played an important role during the period in which the SPD was effectively outlawed by Bismarck’s anti-socialist legislation (1878–90), continued to play a role in establishing an ‘alternative public sphere’. They operated ‘outside the traditional channels of labor activism and party politics’ (Hake 2017, 86). Although there was debate about the extent to which leisure activities contributed to class consciousness, the inherent value of the right to ‘eight hours recreation’, as Robert Owen’s famous campaign slogan put it, was widely accepted within the workers’ movement.<sup>13</sup> ‘Recreation’, at least for the urban working classes whose homes were cramped and overcrowded, necessarily took place outside the home, and was most likely a social activity. Evenings aside, it was often associated with Sunday, which had by the early twentieth century become the ‘secular day of leisure’ (Geary 2000, 395). And of course, following the establishment in German law of an

eight-hour working day in 1919, a major achievement for the workers' movement, German workers in theory had more free time than ever before, and more spaces in which to enjoy it.

In each film, as we shall see, the active use of leisure time creates the potential for both pleasure and autonomy in the metropolised, capitalist society embodied by Berlin, at a time when the city's population had reached 4 million, having grown rapidly since German unification in 1871, when the figure had stood at 865,000 (Large 2000, 9). *People on Sunday* signals in its generalising title that the intention is to say something about the people (of Berlin) as a whole, on an ordinary or typical Sunday. All three films proceed from a broadly Marxian understanding of society, and seek to expose the network of relations between the necessary but restrictive 'reality' of the working day (or the frustrating search for work) and the pleasurable impermanence of leisure time that is, depending upon how and where it is spent, both authentic and transformative. The growth of a leisure 'industry' in postwar Berlin is of course visible in other films of the Weimar Republic, including perhaps the most famous example of the documentary city film of the 1920s, *Berlin: die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (*Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, dir. Walter Ruttmann, 1927), which culminates in a montage of Berlin 'at play' that offers a subtly critical commentary on mass entertainments such as the chorus line. The films under discussion here differ from Ruttmann's film in their focused exploration of the impact of the spatio-temporal expansion of leisure on the working classes in particular. Space (and spaces) are at least as important as time. The films ignore the frequently celebrated sites of Berlin's leisure industry in this period, such as cabarets, the spectacle of professional sport, or the extravagant department stores. Instead, urban space is placed in contrast with 'natural' space, and domestic space with 'other', liminal spaces such as the *Freibad* (lakeside beach resort), a leisure site which plays a significant role in all three films, and on which I expand below.

### **Interior and domestic spaces**

In all three films geographical contrast plays a role – at the most basic level between inside and outside spaces in the city. That said, the thematic contrasts in the films depend on an understanding of urban space, not only in physical or topographical

terms but also, as Amanda J. Johnson and Troy D. Glover have proposed in relation to public space in the city, as ‘a complex socio-spatial construct’ (Johnson and Glover 2013, 191): ‘Our perceptions of space enliven, animate, and occupy it, thereby offering complex coded, re-coded, and de-coded versions of social life.’ (Johnson and Glover 2013, 192) This understanding of multiple ‘encodings’ of certain sites is relevant to my reading of the films, as is Michel Foucault’s notion of the ‘heterotopia’, a special category of site, or, in Peter Johnson’s formulation, a ‘spatio-temporal unit’ (Johnson 2006, 78), which is closely associated with leisure, and sometimes claimed to have the capacity to liberate and disrupt power relations.

All three films present depictions of interior domestic spaces early on, and draw on an existing tradition of social criticism of Berlin’s tenement housing, which since the late nineteenth century had often been depicted as overcrowded, unsanitary, dark and unhomey. Each challenges and reverses the bourgeois presumption that a home is automatically encoded with domesticity, privacy and a sense of ‘ownership’. Ostensibly ‘private’ interior spaces are contrasted with outdoor public spaces that allow forms of self-realisation that prove impossible in the proletarian ‘home’. Dick Geary, reflecting on working-class culture in Germany, notes that poor living conditions made the ‘bourgeois ideal of domesticity’ (Geary 2000, 396) unachievable for the working classes, not least because ‘privacy’ was unavailable. His comments on the practical consequences are especially relevant to the lives of the central characters in *Mother Krause*:

In these circumstances privacy was impossible, and from infancy socialisation took place in the corridors, on the staircases, in the yards or on the streets of the working-class neighbourhood. Solidarity was built not only by the experience of work in the factory but also by the bricks and mortar of the tenement. (Geary 2000, 296)

*Mother Krause* sets its scene – working-class Wedding – with a series of quotations from a text by Heinrich Zille, illustrated with an accompanying montage:

‘The miserable neighbourhoods of the sunless rental barracks – the dusty street for recuperation – the fairgrounds, the joy of the younger generation’.

Tenement housing blocks were known as *Mietskasernen* (‘rental barracks’), a term that reflects the aforementioned lack of domesticity; Zille’s words associate them



further with misery and darkness, and it is only in public spaces – the street, the fairground – that a sense of autonomy, freedom and life can be achieved. Indeed, both in this film and in *Kuhle Wampe*, the domestic space of the tenement is closely linked to death as a motif. Living conditions in Berlin's tenements were indeed terrible, characterised by over-crowding and exploitative rents. As in other cities such as London and New York, by the early twentieth century poor urban housing was often linked to a range of broader 'social questions'. In Berlin, the tenement blocks in the working-class districts in the north and east of the city were typically five storeys high, and had multiple wings and inner courtyards. The common practice of accommodating lodgers in already cramped conditions, as is the case in *Mother Krause*, was frequently criticised; such lodgers, as Isabel Rousset notes, were 'considered dubious figures that disturbed the traditional sanctity of the conjugal home' (Rousset 2017, 1214). She continues: 'The tenement flat thus gained a reputation as a penetrable space, easily exposed to dangerous outside influences' (Rousset 2017, 1214). In the 1920s, the most notorious example of a tenement block was Meyers Hof, Wedding (Ackerstraße 132/133), which housed around 5,000 tenants and had six linked inner courtyards.

These communal courtyards, which were effectively 'hidden' from the outside world, feature prominently in Zille's work. The first sequence in the prologue of *Mother Krause*, in which Zille's own words are brought to life in the accompanying images, moves us from the outside world into a tenement courtyard (*Hinterhof*). Zille's reference to the 'sunless rental barracks' is paired with a montage of six shots of archetypal five-storey tenements and courtyards, in which the direction of travel is from high to low, and implicitly from light to darkness. We begin with a pair of roof-height shots revealing the scale of the architecture, which are followed with contrasting, ground-level shots, in which the building towers up oppressively around us and children play next to a rubbish bin. In four of these shots the camera either moves or pans downward, with cross-fades further enhancing a sense of a gradual descent in the editing.

An audience familiar with Zille's art, even if they were not also familiar with Wedding, will have recognised the location instantly. His great achievement was not only to have drawn attention to poor living conditions, but also to have documented and celebrated the courtyard as a social site. It was a flexible, shared space that shaped the process of socialisation, referred to by Amanda Brian, in her analysis of

Zille's work, as 'semi-private, semi-public' (Brian 2013, 41). We see this, for example, in his depiction of a harvest festival celebration in a courtyard (Zille 1922, 25), and in his 'Circus in a Berlin Courtyard' (Schumann 1987, unpag.). Unlike in a traditional circus, here the distinction between performers and audience seems fluid, and that between the circus 'ring' and the space set aside for spectators is far from clear.

The opening scene of the main narrative in *Mother Krause* is recognisably indebted to Zille's motifs, and makes the liminal, ambiguous status of ostensibly 'private' and 'public' zones quite apparent. The reception of a courtyard performance by musicians extends beyond the happy crowd to the apartment above, where we find the tenant's daughter Erna (Ilse Trautschold) dancing to the music with the lodger (Gerhard Bienert), an exploitative pimp who, in keeping with the common perceptions of such lodgers, later tries to coerce Erna into prostitution. With the sequence cross-cutting from the dancing inside the apartment to the naturalistic shots of the women and children enjoying the music outside, the family home is made to seem like an extension of the courtyard (and vice versa). The absence of private space partly explains why Mother Krause's unemployed son Paul chooses to spend his time in the local pub, another 'semi-private' space, familiar from Zille's work (see Brian 2013, 37; Geary 2000, 396), but with gendered and implicitly negative associations. The debt crisis which sends the family spinning out of control, culminating in the son's participation in a burglary and Mother Krause gassing

both herself and the daughter of the prostitute who also lodges with her, has its origin in the pub, where Paul squanders his mother's earnings from delivering newspapers, their only source of income.<sup>14</sup>

*Kuhle Wampe* is similarly focused on the fate of one working-class family, this time at the peak of the global financial crisis. Our first glimpse of the interior of their tenement apartment recalls the liminality of the apartment in *Mother Krause* by allowing the audience, as we meet the characters for the first time, not only to see but also to hear a musical performance taking place in the courtyard outside. The parents attempt to present their home as a hub of bourgeois domesticity, complete with carefully placed fruit bowl and a sampler on the wall with a pious proverb encouraging familial duty and passive acceptance of one's lot.<sup>15</sup> Their own language, peppered with similar clichés that tend to blame the individual for problems rather than the capitalist system that has caused them, reinforces the impression of a family in denial of its own identity and interests. Only the daughter, Anni (Hertha Thiele), is perceptive enough to see their situation for what it is, making her openness to political enlightenment immediately apparent. As Hake (2017, 323) observes, even her physical appearance, with her short, rather androgynous hairstyle in the style of the 'new woman', is suggestive of modernity rather than tradition.

In *Kuhle Wampe* the tenement apartment provides the setting for conflict and death. The context, spelt out in a montage of newspaper headlines in the opening sequence, is the catastrophic economic depression. By 1932 registered unemployment in Germany had reached 5.3 million (Herbert 2014, 264), peaking at 6 million in 1933 (and the true figure may have been considerably higher). In Berlin the figure stood at 603,000 (Large 2000, 248). Young people were hit especially hard, and by January 1933 63% of men in Berlin aged under 25 were unemployed (Herbert 2014, 264). In 1931, emergency measures had removed the entitlement to benefits from young people living at home, as the father (Max Sablotzki) observes in his first line in the film with reference to his son (Alfred Schaefer).<sup>16</sup> The latter spends a day cycling around the city in search of work, only to face criticism and humiliation from his parents, especially from the patriarchal father. The young man's diminished status is signalled by the fact that he remains both voiceless and nameless (he has no lines, and is referred to by the others only as 'the boy') and appears to be a 'human shell' (Rippey 2007, 6). The sequence, which began by blurring the distinction between

interior and exterior space with the sound of the courtyard music, concludes by doing something similar in a much more brutal fashion, when the son commits suicide by calmly stepping out of their fourth-floor window, almost as if he were leaving the room in the conventional way. It is a very public death, his body visible to all in the courtyard; the accompanying shots of gossiping neighbours and children pointing to the apartment clearly imply an absence of solidarity – a key motif – in the working-class neighbourhood.

*People on Sunday* differs from the two Prometheus films by concentrating on characters who do not belong to the traditional industrial working classes but embody the new urban or white-collar worker: a film extra (Christl Ehlers), a shop worker (Brigitte Borchert), a travelling salesman (Wolf[gang] von Waltershausen), a taxi driver (Erwin Splettstößer) and a model (Annie Schreyer). The film, which as Koepnick (2008, 239) notes, ‘privileges atmospheric detail over narrative causality, chance and play over goal-oriented action’, reflects both the freedom and unpredictability of social interactions in

the metropolis. An entirely random encounter on the street between Wolf and Christl, picked up by a camera that itself seems to be a ‘roaming flaneur’ (Koepnick 2008, 240), results in four paths converging. Although the film has a romantic subplot, generic expectations are undermined, for example in the slow pan from Wolf and Brigitte’s first kiss to an adjacent pile of rubbish, reminding us that this is not ‘unspoilt’ nature, and the hint at the end that Wolf will choose to go to the football the following week rather than see Brigitte again. Such apparent cynicism contrasts with the tone in *Mother Krause* and *Kuhle Wampe*. Yet *People on Sunday* shares with those two films the desire to overturn conventional expectations of genre, story and happy endings. And in the active experience of leisure the film’s characters do undergo a form of transformation, or self- realisation, that is powerful even if it is not political.

The basis for this transformation depends, as in the other two films, upon spatio-temporal contrast. The characters in *People on Sunday*, whom we only glimpse in their work environments, give the impression of enjoying a degree of financial independence that is entirely absent from the lives of the protagonists of *Mother Krause* and *Kuhle Wampe*. Yet they are all precariously and exploitatively employed; even with the ‘eight- hour day’, shop workers like Brigitte typically worked 48 hours per week, over six days (Benninghaus 2000, 46). Erwin’s rented room features at the start of the film as a site of domestic tension, confinement, and petty frustrations at the end of the working week. The scene revolves around points of conflict. Erwin and his girlfriend Annie get annoyed about dripping taps, wardrobe doors that won’t stay shut, their plans for the evening and how Annie should wear her hat. Annie is characterised by fatigue and apathy, to the extent that she oversleeps and spends the entire Sunday asleep in bed, whereas Erwin finds active release on a day trip to the Wannsee, the lake to the west of Berlin. Koepnick (2008, 246) reads Annie’s sleep positively, relating it to a reclaiming of the bed as a site of ‘rest and relaxation’. Yet its excessiveness, the product of extreme exhaustion, surely has little to do with ‘relaxation’; by the time she wakes up the weekend has disappeared. The couple illustrates a distinction that is central to socio- logical thinking about leisure – free time is not the same thing as leisure, which has been defined, for example by the social scientist Rolf Meyersohn (cited by Zuzanek 189), as an active attitude to free time fulfilling specific functions: rest; entertainment; self-realisation; and spiritual renewal. For these purposes, the *Freibad* was an obvious choice.

**Exemplary leisure sites: the *Freibad*, the demonstration, the sports festival**

For Berlin's masses, leisure options fulfilling all of Meyersohn's criteria were limited, as many of the most popular leisure spaces, such as the pub, tended to reduce the individual to a passive consumer.<sup>17</sup> Amongst the most popular, not least because it was cheap, inclusive and family-orientated, was a visit to a *Freibad* or *Strandbad*, an open-air bathing resort with the sort of tourist infrastructure familiar from seaside resorts. The Wannsee serves as the main location for *People on Sunday*, and similar sites play significant roles in the two other films, with the work of Heinrich Zille again offering visual and thematic parallels. Zille (1926) had published a volume, *Rund um's Freibad (Around the Lakeside)*, collecting his many frank, humorous and often risqué depictions of the bustling *Freibad* resorts around Berlin. In *Mother Krause Jutzi* takes particular care

to stage the *mise en scène* of Erna and her boyfriend Max's trip to the lake to recall Zille's depictions of working-class men, women and children at the *Freibad*.

Seaside beach resorts and spas had become popular through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries across Europe. In Germany, resorts were established from the late eighteenth century on both its North Sea and Baltic coastlines, and became destinations for the well-to-do. For the majority of Germany's working classes, such resorts were both physically remote and unaffordable. Yet there were few alternatives, and in Prussia public bathing in lakes and rivers remained prohibited through to the start of the twentieth century (Dettbarn-Reggentin 1987, 5–7). This finally changed in 1907, under public pressure, when the *Strandbad* at the Wannsee opened, a small, fenced-off section of the lake at which bathing in suitably modest swimwear was permitted (Dettbarn-Reggentin 1987, 8–9). The popularity of this new venture was immediate and extraordinary, with a reported 220,000 visitors making the trip to the Wannsee on one single Sunday (Dettbarn-Reggentin 1987, 8). With the Wannsee and Berlin's other lakes accessible via the city's expanding public transport network, a culture of urban summer bathing emerged that is still going strong in Germany today. The resort at the Wannsee was expanded and improved over the following decades, and the original dress codes and suggested separation between genders were gradually relaxed. Thus the characters in *People on Sunday* and *Mother Krause* dress and interact with a striking lack of inhibition. For the urban working classes, in the era before the emergence of affordable travel and package holidays abroad, such day trips offered a unique leisure opportunity and a contrast with the living conditions of the tenement block. In both *People on Sunday* and *Mother Krause*, the socio-cultural meanings encoded in the *Freibad* location have both a spatial and a temporal dimension. As Rob Shields suggests in an analysis of Brighton, such resorts tend to be 'associated with pleasure, with the liminal, and with the carnivalesque' (Shields 73). On the one hand, the lake and beach offer a topographical contrast with the built environment which the characters usually occupy – hence the pronounced sense of space emphasised by the cinematography of *People on Sunday* in particular, in which there is surprisingly little evidence of crowds. On the other hand, they exist outside 'everyday' reality, defined by the chronological routine of work (or the search for work), and prompt our adult characters to become childlike and joyful, behaviours we see in both of the

aforementioned films. Shields' reading the beach 'as a site fit for leisure' (Shields 75) is relevant here: 'a socially defined zone appropriate for specific behaviours and patterns of interaction outside of the norms of everyday behaviour, dress, and activity' (Shields 75). Zille documents this phenomenon, and makes much of the sensual and emotional impacts of the resort – for example in the pleasurable breaking of taboos relating to dress.

*People on Sunday* offers parallels to this. The cinematographer Eugen Schüfftan's frequent close-ups make the film unusually intimate and emotional. This is particularly evident in the sequence following the work of a photographer at the *Freibad* as a diverse range of visitors strike a pose directly to camera, pulling faces and playing roles in ways that evidently take them beyond their everyday identities. Likewise, Schüfftan's camera lingers throughout on the faces of the four young characters, their emotions and expressions so easy to read that intertitles can be kept to an absolute minimum. It's true that there are hints throughout of their 'day job' identities – record shop assistant Brigitte brings along a gramophone and records, taxi-driver Erwin delights in taking charge of



a pedal-boat. Hake suggests, echoing left-wing criticism of the film in 1930, that the film shows leisure as an extension of capitalism, not as an escape or alternative to it ('the reproduction of labor power in the name of profit maximisation', Hake 2017, 326). Yet the film surely invites us to view leisure as having intrinsic value; it is positively transformative, allowing a more spontaneous and authentic version of the self to emerge. This is, perhaps, the implication of the motif of the chrysalis that attracts Christl's interest at the start of the film. That this self is dormant (or cocooned) during the week is indicated by the film's conclusion, when, following the return to the city and to 'reality', the final intertitles announce: 'And then on Monday / back to work / back to everyday life/ back to weekdays / 4 million people once again wait for the next Sunday.' This final line reminds us of the universalising title and the film's desire to serve as a general document of leisure time. It clearly lacks, in contrast to the two socialist films, any sense that the pattern of the week could or even should be changed – in this film it is people who have the capacity to change, not the world.

In *Mother Krause*, the most positive strand in the narrative relates to the burgeoning relationship between Erna and the worker Max (Friedrich Gnass). Their visit to a *Freibad*, anticipating *People on Sunday*, likewise offers the young lovers a sense of escape from routine. Indeed, it is noticeable that the relationship between the socialist Max and the politically naive Erna develops through a series of encounters in urban leisure spaces in which identities become fluid – they meet at a fairground, fall in love at the lakeside, and get engaged at a neighbourhood garden party. Silberman (2008, 314) suggests that the 'beautiful images of nature' in such scenes imply that the 'everyday working world' is an 'oppressive world to be tolerated' (314), presumably in the assumption that the availability of leisure time and space can offset the misery of the rest of the week, as it seems to in *People on Sunday*. In fact, the film makes clear that Erna's political conversion has an emotional as well as an intellectual basis, and is facilitated rather than hindered by her experience of leisure spaces. A significant moment in this regard comes immediately after Erna narrowly escapes being raped. In a dramatic sequence employing rhythmic montage reminiscent of Eisenstein, she joins Max at a political demonstration, a form of leisure space in which pleasure is not the ostensible purpose, but a side-effect. The distinction between leisure and activism was often blurred within the workers' movement, and Geary (2000) notes that 'demonstrations and festivals frequently

involved the whole family, unlike most pub-based activities'. This may have been true of SPD activism earlier in the century, but the KPD in the Weimar Republic was dominated by men, and as Michaelis (1980, 164) observes of the scene in *Mother Krause*, the vast majority of the demonstrators seem to be men. The scene is therefore exemplary both in terms of gender inclusivity and political awakening, all the more so as it is presented as both the rational and emotional consequence of Erna's decision to resist the abusive patriarchy represented by the pimp/lodger. As Erna joins in the singing of the *Internationale* we see her feet gradually fall into step with the other marchers, and the audience recognises that her personal, romantic fulfilment coincides with her entry into a political community. Yet although the film ends with a reprising shot of Erna's marching feet, the scene is not the 'final sequence' of the film, as Silberman (2008, 314) claims, and as Kémeny, writing in the *Rote Fahne* (Durus (Kémeny), 1/1/1930), suggests it should have been – Erna's 'conversion' offers hope, but the film concludes with her mother's death, a bleak reminder of social reality and an emotional call to arms.

The narrative arc of *Kuhle Wampe*, made close to the peak of the unemployment crisis of the early 1930s, parallels that of *Mother Krause* in key respects, as the factory worker Anni moves from abject despair to a tentative sense of hope, in her case facilitated by an inspirational Sunday at a workers' sport festival. In this film, too, the lakeside resort plays a pivotal role, but in a way that effectively re-codes the spatio-temporal values that are attached to it as a leisure site. 'Kuhle Wampe' was the name of one of Germany's oldest dedicated campsites, founded in 1913 on the southern shore of the Müggelsee lake. When the Bönike family find themselves unable to pay their rent, the legal system treats them brutally, judging their misfortune to be 'their own fault', and they are evicted from their apartment. Their only option is to move to the campsite, with all their belongings, on an indefinite basis. This scenario had a factual basis; the economic crisis saw homelessness soaring throughout Germany, with thousands taking up unregistered residence in such camps, or in summer houses, allotments and the like. Although there is anecdotal evidence that some residents at the Kuhle Wampe site may have quite enjoyed being away from the city, surrounded by nature (Large 2000, 249), *Kuhle Wampe* plausibly documents the psychological consequences of a surplus of 'free' or 'discretionary' time. Foucault, in his account of 'heterotopias', observes that both holiday resorts and festivals are by definition temporary, related 'to time in its most fleeting, transitory,

precarious aspect' (Foucault 1986, 26). A campsite would seem to be doubly defined by impermanence, both physical (tents as accommodation) and temporal (the finite duration of a weekend or holiday). An open-ended residence there, without structure or purpose, results in a space intended for pleasure becoming oppressive. Thus Anni's father becomes ever more threatening and abusive, and her relationship with her boyfriend Fritz (Ernst Busch), by whom she is now pregnant, becomes fractured. This is consistent with numerous surveys examining experiences of life satisfaction; as Jiri Zuzanek (189) notes: 'It seems that the developmental potential of free time materializes only when juxtaposed with the world of necessity'. This is a variation on Marx's observation about the 'realm of freedom' – leisure is defined as an experience that co-exists with the 'necessary' world that includes work.

For Anni, things change with her involvement with Worker Sports, which is thematically introduced by a montage of industry and offers her a time-orientated structure and purpose. This, rather than her alienated paid labour, represents the world of necessity, of meaningful (even if unpaid) work. Alongside the developmental benefits of active leisure we see it enable 'the cultivation of [a] physical and mental self' (Zuzanek 189). When Fritz goes looking for Anni at the workers' club, presented to the viewer as a hive of activity in preparation for the sports festival, he implies that she is 'wasting' her time there. Kurt, one of the group's leader-figures, objects, stating: 'She's one of us and is working.' The phrase emphasises not only belonging ('one of us') but also work.

The penultimate section of the film, focused on the worker sports festival, starts and ends with a performance of Brecht and Eisler's anthemic 'Solidarity' song. In keeping with the film's working title *Weekend – Kuhle Wampe* (Dümling 2001, 197), which had highlighted the importance of leisure time, the original version of the song ('Sonntagslied der freien Jugend'/'Sunday song of the free youth') dramatises a simple, positive contrast between a 'grey week' and the 'red weekend' in the first verse. In the version performed by Ernst Busch in the film, the opening verse, which is, unusually, *preceded* by the chorus with its emphasis on 'Solidarity', presents the work/leisure binary slightly differently:

Erstens sind hier nicht wir  
 alle Zweitens ist es nur ein  
 Tag Wo die Arbeit einer  
 Woche  
 Uns noch in den Knochen lag. (Gersch and Hecht eds 1969,  
 62) (Firstly, not all of us are here  
 Secondly, it's only one day,  
 When a week of work  
 Still sits in our bones.)

This emphasises both the need for recovery from the brutality of the working week (in the capitalist system) but also that this is an almost impossible task. It will only be made possible through collective action and ‘solidarity’ – the chorus provides the answer to the problems posed.<sup>18</sup>

Of the films under discussion *Kuhle Wampe* seems to owe least to Heinrich Zille, as the redemptive, heterotopic qualities of the spaces celebrated in his work, both ‘semi- public’ spaces such as courtyards and leisure sites like the campsite, are seen to disappear when they are inescapable or permanent. Similarly, the potentially liberating act of riding a bicycle becomes, for the desperate young men who spend their days riding the streets in search of work, a symbol of circularity, dehumanisation and pointlessness. Brecht himself (Gersch and Hecht eds 1969, 90), reflecting on the cycling sequence in the film, notes how the activity has become itself a form of ‘work’ (‘the search for work as a form of work’), albeit in an unproductive and alienating form. Whilst the rhythmic montage and Eisler’s score are suggestive of action and movement, the cinematography, presenting the bicycles in almost-abstract close-up, suggests mechanisation and repetition. Redemption comes through political engagement as physical, lived experience in the workers’ sport festival, which was staged for the film with the co-operation of some 4,000 members of the Arbeiter-Turn- und Sportverein Fichte Berlin, the largest worker sports club in the country.

Sport, despite Kracauer’s bemusement, was not chosen as the film’s key motif for frivolous or aesthetic reasons. As already noted, workers’ sport, which had boomed with the eight-hour day, had a tradition in Germany stretching back many decades. Those on the left, both Social Democrats and Communists, valued sport as a means of fostering wellbeing, solidarity and class consciousness among workers, and the

workers' sport movement in Germany did not split along party lines until the very end of the Weimar era (A. Krüger 1996, 14). In general, socialists of all types were against the capitalistic commercialisation of professional sport as a form of mass entertainment, and instead encouraged participation and team spirit at grass-roots level. They also rejected the cult of individualism in sport, tending to discourage competition and metrics such as records (A. Krüger 1996, 13–14). The worker athletes' club in *Kuhle Wampe* is noticeably emblazoned with a slogan confirming this principle: 'Arbeitersport bekämpft Rekordwahn' ('Workers' sport against the craze for records').

The sports festival in *Kuhle Wampe* therefore stages leisure time idealistically as an holistic, dynamic and above all collective experience. Anni's participation takes her for

the first time outside the structures of family, work and industrial society. Undoubtedly, the sequence has a utopian quality. Although public spaces such as courtyard and the lakeside have functioned as sites of conflict in this film, the festival is able to transform other public spaces (the river, the road) and create a sort of disruptive ‘placeless place’ (Foucault 1986, 24) or ‘other’ space.<sup>19</sup> It takes its inspiration from successful events such as the International Worker Olympics, which had taken place in Frankfurt in 1925 in front of 150,000 spectators (A. Krüger 1996, 17). Competitive racing is not absent, but is accompanied by more inclusive, cultural activities such as marches and agitprop theatre performances. The depiction of the sporting action emphasises both the joy of movement and the theme of ‘solidarity’ rather than individual victory and glory. Although the montage of motorbikes, rowers and swimmers, recalling Futurist aesthetics, is accompanied by a song (‘The Sports Song’) encouraging a victorious mentality (‘Learn to win’), it is noticeable that the ceremonials involve every competitor receiving applause, and not just the victors. The contrast with the static ‘everyday’ life of the characters, which has been characterised by stagnancy and work, where it can be found, that is repetitive and stultifying, is stark. There is undoubtedly also an ironic visual parallel between the cycling motif from the start of the film, associated with the soul-destroying search for work, and the joyous motorcycle racing at the festival.

## Conclusion

*Kuhle Wampe*, unlike both *People on Sunday* and even the politically committed *Mother Krause*, dares to imagine that leisure can have a transformative effect that extends beyond the ‘red weekend’. While *Mother Krause* concludes with a moment of bleak horror that is only partially balanced by a reminder of Erna’s conversion to the cause, and *People on Sunday* concludes with a return to the ‘everyday life’ of weekdays, *Kuhle Wampe* closes with political discourse and a call to action (to ‘change the world’) that is directly addressed to the audience. Despite these differences of tone in their respective endings, the three films, as I have argued, offer close parallels in their playful documentary style – what a contemporary review of *Mother Krause* referred to as a ‘spirit of truth’ (Freund and Hanisch 1976, 132) – and in a shared vision of active leisure as a means to self-actualisation. In the repetition of images of autonomous movement – walking, running, marching,

swimming, rowing – the films also plot journeys of a more symbolic nature. They each map the trajectory of their chief characters from enclosed, private space to open, public space, and from time as a means of control and restriction to a ‘free’ time that is as much a state of mind and an attitude as it is a point on the clock or in the calendar. *Kuhle Wampe* may differ by inviting the viewers, directly, to take action and to change what they do not like about the world, yet each film makes the case for the transformative power of the ‘other space’ of leisure time. Of course, just a few short years later the Nazis were in power in Germany and championing a divisive and instrumental vision of sport and leisure as a means of exerting and extending political control. Their vision of the submissive, disciplined and obedient body, and of homogeneous cheering crowds, made visible by Leni Riefenstahl in her notorious films of the 1930s, has tended to obscure the memory of these earlier depictions of working-class Germans at play. Indeed, the role played by leisure remains underexplored in the scholarship on the cultural responses to working class life in Germany and elsewhere. My discussion in

this context of these three important films will, I hope, help to offer a corrective and to open up this field for further examination.

## Notes

1. The original UK title of *Kuhle Wampe* was *Whither Germany?*.
2. Many surveys of Weimar cinema, from Kracauer's classic study to more recent monographs by Elsaesser and Kaes, pay relatively little attention to these films. An exception is represented by the 2008 volume on the 'classic films' of Weimar cinema edited by Noah Isenberg, which includes chapters on both *People on Sunday* (Koeppnick 2008) and *Kuhle Wampe* (Silberman).
3. It produced fourteen such films in total, the last being *Kuhle Wampe*, during the making of which the company declared itself bankrupt. See (Mühl-Benninghaus 2012, 49; Silberman 213).
4. I present quotations from German in (my own) English translation throughout. In the case of film titles I use the established English translations where they exist.
5. Michaelis (1980, 106–7) sees *Mother Krause* as a reaction against the sentimentality of earlier 'Zille films' (e.g. *Die Verrufenen* (*The Slums of Berlin*), dir. Gerhard Lamprecht, 1925; *Die da unten* (*Those at the bottom*), dir. Victor Janson, 1926).
6. The question of whether the film's political message is consistent with Heinrich Zille's beliefs was a subject of some controversy, with Zille's family publicly disowning the film (see Freund and Hanisch eds. 1976, 165).
7. There were exceptions, notably *Die letzte Droschke von Berlin* (*The Last Horse Carriage of Berlin*, dir. Carl Boese, 1926), which establishes its Berlin setting with extensive location footage and was conceived as a realist companion piece to *The Last Laugh*.
8. This commitment to a form of social realism was undoubtedly also informed by its two executive producers/advisers, the socialist artists Otto Nagel and Käthe Kollwitz, the latter known for her emotive portrayals of suffering, especially of mother figures and children.
9. A volume presenting a detailed transcript of *Mother Krause* alongside critical



and contextual

materials was published in in the GDR in 1976 (Freund and Hansich eds 1976). In the FRG, Margo Michaelis' scene-by-scene analysis of the film as an 'exemplary' work of realism, first published in 1978 (Michaelis 1980), remains the most substantial engagement with the film.

10. Although Robert Siodmak and Ulmer were credited with direction and Wilder and Curt Siodmak with the writing, the precise distribution of roles and duties among those involved remains unclear. Ulmer and the theatre producer and author Moritz (aka Moriz) Seeler were listed as producers, with the former claiming chief responsibility for organising and financing a one-off 'studio', Filmstudio 1929, for the production and distribution of the film (Seidman 1977, 5, 39). For further insights into the highly unusual collaborative methods used by the team and cast see also Gerald Koll's short documentary film *Weekend am Wannsee* (2000), which features interviews with both Brigitte Borchert and Curt Siodmak, included as an extra in BFI Blu-Ray release of *People on Sunday*.
11. The credits read like a 'who's who' of leftist culture in the Weimar Republic: the Bulgarian-born director Slatan Dudow, co-writers Bertolt Brecht and Ernst Ottwalt, composer Hanns Eisler, a cast including Hertha Thiele and Ernst Busch, and songs performed by Helene Weigel and Ernst Busch.
12. T. F. Rippey, for example, reads *Kuhle Wampe* as an ambivalent response to Weimar body culture. Christoph Schaub has examined the film's modernism in relation to 'the aesthetics of working-class performance practices' (Schaub 2018, 328), which are particularly evident in the sequence set at the sport festival.
13. 'Eight hours' labour, eight hours' recreation, eight hours' rest.' First coined by Robert Owen, 1817. There is a distinct echo here of a similar situation in F. W. Murnau's film *Phantom* (1922), based on Gerhart Hauptmann's novel and Expressionistic rather than realist in tone, in which a son commits a robbery in desperate attempt to find money to repay a debt.
14. The sampler reads: 'Beklage nicht den Morgen, der Müh und Arbeit gibt, es ist so schön zu sorgen für Menschen, die man liebt.'/'Don't complain about the morning which brings you toil and work, as it's so nice to care for those you love.'

15. A further, more explicit reference to the legislation was removed to appease the censor. See Gersch and Hecht 1969, 78.
16. Both *Mother Krause*, in the scene in which Paul wastes money on drink, and *Kuhle Wampe*, in the scene in which the family celebrate their daughter Anni's engagement at an alcohol- fuelled party, contain unmistakable polemics against alcohol.
17. There are striking parallels between Brecht and Eisler's song and Ewan MacColl's contemporary 'The Manchester Rambler' (1932), the song inspired by the Kinder Scout mass trespass in April 1932 and the campaign for public access to open spaces led by the British Worker Sports Federation: 'I may be a wage slave on Monday/But I am a free man on Sunday'.
18. One of the censored scenes from this part of the film was a shot of young people bathing naked. The motif was perhaps intended to suggest that the bourgeois *Freibad* had also been re-encoded with the same liberated vitality we see elsewhere at the festival. See Gersch and Hecht 1969, 78.

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