

Daniel Weidner\*

# “Going together without coming together”: “Die Kreatur” (1926–1929) and Why We Should Read German Jewish Journals Differently

DOI 10.1515/naha-2016-0006

**Abstract:** Between 1926 and 1929, Martin Buber, Victor von Weizsäcker, and Joseph Wittig edited the journal *Die Kreatur*. Its contributors included prominent authors such as Walter Benjamin, Ernst Simon, Franz Rosenzweig, Hugo Bergmann, Florens Christian Rang, and many other leading German and German-Jewish intellectuals of the early interwar period. Its very title, *Die Kreatur*, programmatically suggested a new anthropology while avoiding direct theological discourse and instead fostering dialogue both between secular and religious thought and between the three religions of its editors: Judaism, Protestantism, and Catholicism. Thus, by its very nature, the journal was typical of the complex intellectual discourses that marked the Weimar period and of the “dialogic” thought that Buber and others came to stand for. Reading *Die Kreatur* as a journal poses major methodological challenges and questions not a few presuppositions of current intellectual history, which tends to focus on individual (more or less canonical) authors and their “works.” Rather than picking out single texts and constructing individual “positions,” we would be better off trying to understand *Die Kreatur* in terms of its multivocal, heterogeneous and pluralistic features. This article claims that dialogic features are characteristic of periodicals in general and constitute their productive power: they allow new ideas to emerge and institute discourses which, while lacking systematic coherence, explore new approaches and attitudes that interconnect in less rigid ways. The article makes a case for new forms of reading and conceptualizing journals – forms that will furthermore help to understand the hybrid and often idiosyncratic nature of German-Jewish discourses during the interwar period.

**Keywords:** Weimar Judaism, German-Jewish Culture, Jewish-Christian relations, Kreatur, Die (Journal), Cultural Journal, Buber, Martin, Rosenzweig, Franz, Wittig, Joseph, Weizsäcker, Viktor von

---

\*Corresponding author: Daniel Weidner, Stellvertretender Direktor des Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung, Schützenstr. 18, 10117 Berlin, E-mail: weidner@zfl-berlin.org

In the summer of 1926 the first issue of a new journal, *Die Kreatur*, appeared, edited by Martin Buber, Viktor von Weizsäcker, and Joseph Wittig. The collaboration of these three men, a Jew, a Protestant, and a Catholic, was remarkable at the time, given the arrogance with which Protestants often treated not only Jews but also Catholics. The editorial preface stressed that differences of belief should not be downplayed.

“However, what is possible and needed today is dialogue (*das Gespräch*): the greeting call, a receptiveness to one another anchored in the strength and clarity of one’s own particularity, the discourse about our common concern for the creature. We can go together without coming together, work together without living together. [...] We should not anticipate, but we can prepare.”<sup>1</sup>

Over the following three years the quarterly *Die Kreatur* published texts by authors such as Franz Rosenzweig, Walter Benjamin, Eugen Rosenstock, Rudolf Ehrenberg, Florens Christian Rang, Leo Shestov and Hans Trüb. Their mostly essayistic texts strive for a new anthropology beyond either naturalism or idealist philosophy; they develop different forms of cultural critique, seek a spiritual renewal, deal with philosophy and education, but also with art and literature and occasionally touch upon politics. Each issue comprises some 120 pages, thus in total the three volumes comprise roughly 1,500 pages.

This is fascinating and interesting material, and one could well address it at length for its own sake. However, we can also conceive of it as a paradigm whereby to discuss the more general hermeneutic question of what it means to read a journal such as *Die Kreatur*. Of course, German-Jewish journals such as *Der Jude*, *Ost und West* as well as Weimar cultural journals like *Die Literarische Welt* or *Die Weltbühne* are well known and also well documented sources of intellectual history. However, more often than not we tend to read these journals somewhat naively, as repositories for individual texts in which we are interested, yet we hardly pay attention to them *as* journals. To put this in positive terms, I claim that there is great potential for future research if we focus our attention on the very medium of the journal. For the dialogic moment stressed in the editorial quoted above does not refer merely to the multi-confessional nature of *Die Kreatur*, nor simply to the dialogical philosophy of Martin Buber – it is also an essential feature of the medium of the journal and of the specific form of

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin Buber, Viktor von Weizsäcker, Joseph Wittig: “Vorwort,” *Die Kreatur*, 1.1 (1926–1927), 1. On the journal, see the anthology *Die Kreatur. Anthologie einer ökumenischen Zeitschrift*, edited by Hans Dieter Zimmermann, Schriftenreihe des Forum Guardini 11 (Berlin: Dreieck Verlag, 2003), especially Lothar Müller, “... daß die Stummheit der letzten Jahrhunderte aufhört”; Franz Rosenzweig, “Beziehungen zur Zeitschrift,” 1–23; and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, “Rückblick auf *Die Kreatur*,” 215–222.

journals that happened to emerge in the interwar years. More generally, I will argue that reading journals in a conscious way might have a broad impact on the scholarly field in general – focusing on journals *as journals* might change our perception and give us a fresh outlook on German Jewish studies as well as on the role of literature and literary studies in intellectual history. To substantiate this claim, I shall (1) give an example of how a typical issue of *Die Kreatur* is composed; then (2) address the state of art of the research on journals; which I then use to (3) depict the network that lies behind *Die Kreatur*; (4) to analyze one of its core discourses, namely the pedagogic one; and finally (5) to focus on the rhetoric that is characteristically used in *Die Kreatur*, especially where religious topics in a broad sense are concerned. In all cases I shall emphasize – but hopefully not exaggerate – the programmatic implications that such an analysis might have for wider historical and hermeneutical questions.<sup>2</sup>

## 1 An example: heterogeneity and coherence of an issue

The first issue of the second volume of *Die Kreatur* published in July 1927 contains five different texts. An introductory poem by Ludwig Strauss titled *Call out of Time* (*Ruf aus der Zeit*) is followed by an essay by Joseph Wittig, one of the editors, titled *My last Class*, which narrates how Wittig taught Creation at school and how he then encountered the forces of different creatures when building his house: creatures as diverse as the wood and the building ground. The third text is a long essay by Florens Christian Rang about *Faith, Love, and Workmanship*, which discusses the future of the work ethos in the modern world, and concludes that only the spirit of faith can renew the work ethos that modernity requires. This text, which originally took the form of an open letter to Walther Rathenau dated May 1914, is obviously part of the heated discussion on the relationship between Protestantism and modern capitalism provoked by Werner Sombart and Max Weber. Taking issue with Rathenau, who had proposed that a new spirit of love should compensate for the shortcomings of modernity, Rang claimed that it was not love but only faith that could overcome individual egoism to strive toward something transcendent. The fourth essay is Walter Benjamin's *Moscow*, in which he conveys his impressions of a recent visit to the capital of socialism, noting the

---

2 The following reflections evolved from the preparation of a research project together with Gerald Hartung (Wuppertal), Madleen Podeswki (Berlin), and Yfaat Weiss (Jerusalem). We plan to elaborate the analytical program outlined here in future.

rapid changes in social form in the Bolshevik capital: “every day, every thought is a laboratory.”<sup>3</sup> A text by the Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev concludes the issue. This is the first part of a longer essay on the End of Renaissance, in which Berdyaev argues that the humanism of the Renaissance cut humankind off from transcendence, which eventually led to its downfall. In the second part of the essay, which appeared in the following issue, Berdyaev not only insists that socialism represents the deepest degradation of humanism, but also offers a more optimistic glimpse into the future, since he believes that the present sense of longing is a sign of Christianity’s return, and as he concludes, “we must pass from the day of history of the modern age into the medieval night without fear or hesitation. May the false and deceptive light be extinguished.”<sup>4</sup>

This issue is a fairly typical one in both content and form. It comprises texts that are different both in genre and in argument, but nevertheless overlap to some extent. For a start, in his description of Moscow Benjamin shares a common interest with Rang, as far as the interplay between economic change and cultural forms is concerned. Moreover, Rang likewise displays a hint of sympathy for socialism, but comes to the conclusion that it lacks a theological foundation. As far as Berdyaev is concerned, one might surmise that the editors put his text next to Benjamin’s because of their “Russian-ness,” yet they display contrasting views. For example, Berdyaev argues that socialism is nothing but a complement to liberal individualism, whereas Benjamin depicts new forms of social life emerging in Moscow that are no longer oriented toward the individual. Moreover, Berdyaev’s diagnosis of the current end of modern times appears to fit well with Rang’s text, and together they provide a frame of sorts for Benjamin’s. Wittig’s text appears to be quite different to Benjamin’s, but in effect they share an interest in education, although Wittig’s explicitly subjective approach contrasts with Benjamin’s rather objective description. And so on – the different texts in this issue create a web of associations that links them together.

The authors of this issue seem to be quite aware of the context in which their texts are to appear. If we turn, for example, to Walter Benjamin, his correspondence with Buber reveals both such attention to the genre of the publication as well as negotiations about his own text that are quite typical of journals. In a letter dated February 1927, Benjamin announces that his text will be purely descriptive: “my presentation will be devoid of all theory. This, I hope, is precisely what will enable me to give voice to the creaturely aspect

---

3 Walter Benjamin: “Moskau,” *Die Kreatur*, 2.1 (1927–1928), 71–101: 79. The text appears also in Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. IV (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991).

4 Nikolaj Berdyaev, “Das Ende der Renaissance,” (II part), *Die Kreatur*, 2.2 (1927–1928), 227–244: here 243.

[*das Kreaturliche*].”<sup>5</sup> Buber, however, was obviously not too happy with the text he received and asked Benjamin to make it more personal, which Benjamin refused to do. This discussion is far from being arbitrary, since Benjamin himself had claimed that the experience of Moscow demanded a “standpoint,” and that only one who made a “decision” could make observations here, without, however, revealing the standpoint he took.<sup>6</sup> Following publication of the issue in July, Benjamin wrote a letter of thanks to Buber, in which he admits that it took him some time to comprehend the essence of the issue of the *Kreatur* to which he contributed: “It is a whole that I grasped only gradually.”<sup>7</sup> He was thus now all the happier to read his text alongside Rang’s letter, and hoped that some readers would discern that his “optical” descriptions of Moscow followed certain “coordinates” conceived by Rang – as if the latter’s text would somehow offer the theory that his own observations lacked. But Benjamin also stresses how “remarkable if not uncanny” he found the work of Wittig, who had managed to express “these simple experiences that are also infinitely difficult to grasp.”<sup>8</sup> He does not forget to ask for reactions to his text and states that he would be happy to contribute to *Die Kreatur* again.

It is not only Benjamin who reads his texts in the context of the journal. Any contemporary reader would consider the Moscow text by a largely unknown writer in relation to the other texts in this issue, drawing on the similarities and contrasts just mentioned. It would be misleading to describe these relations in terms of influence, for while Benjamin was surely influenced by Rang, whom he admired,<sup>9</sup> it is improbable that he was aware of Rang’s particular text, let alone Berdyaev’s, when he wrote *Moscow*. The coherence among these texts is of a different sort. It lies in part in the eye of the reader, in part unconscious – and again, this is quite typical of journals where texts go together without coming together. This is even true of academic journals in

---

5 Walter Benjamin to Martin Buber, February 23, 1927, in: Walter Benjamin, *Briefe*, vol. I, edited by Theodor W. Adorno and Gershom Scholem (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), 442. It appears that Buber had asked Benjamin to contribute to the journal.

6 Walter Benjamin, “Moskau,” 71.

7 Walter Benjamin to Martin Buber, July 26, 1927, in Walter Benjamin, *Briefe*, vol. I, 447. Benjamin adds that “*Moscow* would have more clearly assumed that more personal note which you mention in your last letter if I had been able to discuss with him [Rang] what agitated me before, during, and after my sojourn there. Nevertheless, I hope that some readers clearly understood that these “optical” descriptions are embedded into a system of mental coordinates.”

8 *Ibid.*

9 Lorenz Jäger, *Messianische Kritik. Studien zu Leben und Werk von Florens Christian Rang* (Köln/Weimar: Böhlau, 1997).

which we publish: we may know some of the colleagues, we might have heard this one or that talk, and may even have read drafts; we “respond” to this or that position – more often than not, however, we will only vaguely address topics that are dealt with in the journal without knowing the exact context in advance.

Since Benjamin’s Moscow piece represents his stance on socialism and the shift of his political understanding during these years, and since one may compare it to its source, the Moscow diary, there exists considerable scholarship on this text, which focuses mainly on the development of Benjamin’s oeuvre or reads the text alongside Benjamin’s descriptions of other cities.<sup>10</sup> Remarkably and symptomatically, however, hardly a reader has considered its original locus of publication. Automatically, commentators tend to read this text as part of Benjamin’s *Gesamtausgabe* – which is striking in the case of an author whose “work” consists of scattered pieces written on different occasions and collected only posthumously.<sup>11</sup> Of course, we can potentially and legitimately read texts very differently according to the context we choose: that of the work and its internal development, that of a genre, let’s say the genre of travel literature, or, more narrowly, of contemporary descriptions of Moscow. Yet texts are part of their immediate textual context, and we can therefore also read *Moscow* as part of *Die Kreatur*, i. e., both as part of this particular issue and of the discourse of the journal as a whole. I do not assume that this is the only correct or even “prior” or “objective” reading, but I contend that it reveals certain features that are not only typical of essayistic writing, but are also often overlooked or even marginalized by readings that focus on the authorial context. This neglect is all the more surprising in the case of Benjamin, whose work has drawn so much attention in recent decades that it is hard to find any aspect of his work that has not been subjected to thorough interpretation. If this context has been neglected, as has the medium of the journal itself, which was Benjamin’s primary mode of publication, we may suspect that this has deeper reasons that call for more general reflection on the status of the journal in literary history.

---

**10** Irving Wohlfarth: “‘immer radikal, niemals konsequent.’ Zur theologisch-politischen Standortsbestimmung Walter Benjamins,” in: Norbert Bolz, Richard Faber, *Antike und Moderne. Zu Walter Benjamins ‘Passagen’* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1986), 116–137; Iris Bäcker, “Über Moskau nach Berlin. Walter Benjamins ‘Moskau’ als Vorbote seiner ‘Berliner Kindheit,’” in: *Text + Kritik. Zeitschrift für Literatur*, edited by Heinz Ludwig Arnold, Heft 31/32: Walter Benjamin (München: Edition Text + Kritik, 2009), 45–56.

**11** Detlev Schöttker, *Konstruktiver Fragmentarismus. Form und Rezeption der Schriften Walter Benjamins* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999).

## 2 Blind spots and future potentials: research on the journal

Some ten years ago, Erdmut Jost stated that the analysis of literary journals was probably the last *terra incognita* of German literary studies.<sup>12</sup> And not much has changed since. Of course, there is bibliographic research that has registered the bare facts, but even this is largely oriented toward single authors.<sup>13</sup> To be sure, it is widely acknowledged that major novelists like Fontane or Raabe, as well as intellectuals such as Benjamin or Siegfried Kracauer published their texts initially in journals, but this is generally noted merely as an arbitrary fact that has no bearing on their interpretation. Media studies, by contrast, which have emerged in recent decades, usually focus on print culture in general and find little interest in the specificity of journals. All in all, as Grustav Frank, Stefan Scherer and Madleen Podewski highlight in a survey of recent research, the journal as a format appears to fall between different disciplinary discourses of literary studies, and, even more importantly, it largely seems to run counter to the deeply rooted tendency of literary studies to focus on canonical texts, or, to be more precise – to canonize texts by their very reading.<sup>14</sup>

As we have seen, this is precisely what happens in the case of Benjamin, whose readers deliberately ignore the context trying to read his texts in a more sophisticated manner. It is not without irony that current techniques of reading stress the ambivalence, hybridity and indeterminacy of texts, but in fact project all these on just a few leading authors, such as Kleist, Kafka, or Benjamin. Similarly, in the positivistic field of editions, German philology in particular invests great effort in presenting texts as open, even fragmented phenomena (think of the recent editions of Hölderlin, Kafka, or Büchner) – but in the end collects these marvelous products into volumes of a *Werkausgabe* devoted to a

---

**12** Erdmut Jost, *Ästhetizismus im luftleeren Raum*, Rezension von Vera Viehöver, *Diskurse der Erneuerung nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Konstruktion kultureller Identität in der Zeitschrift “Die Neue Rundschau”* (Tübingen: Francke, 2004). IASL Online 5.7.2004.

**13** Alfred Estermann, *Die deutschen Literatur-Zeitschriften 1815–1850. Bibliographien, Programme, Autoren*, 11 vols. (München et al.: Saur, 1991); Alfred Estermann, *Die deutschen Literatur-Zeitschriften 1850–1880*, 5 vols. (München et al.: Saur 1987–89); Thomas Dietzel and Hans Otto Hügel, *Deutsche Literarische Zeitschriften 1880–1945. Ein Repertorium*, 5 vols. (München et al.: Saur, 1988); Thomas Dietzel and Hans Otto Hügel, *Deutsche literarische Zeitschriften 1945–1970. Ein Repertorium*, 4 vols. (München et al.: Saur, 1988).

**14** Gustav Frank, Madleen Podewski, and Stefan Scherer, “Kultur-Zeit-Schrift. Literatur- und Kulturzeitschriften als ‘kleine Archive,’” *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*, 34.2 (2009), 1–45.

single author. This persistent longing for the canonical renders the reading of journals marginal. Yet reading journals may have a strategic meaning for the entire discipline, since it resists or at least reflects the trend toward the canonical through historical contextualization as well as the development of new modes of reading.

If we ponder the German Jewish context, the situation is not that different. Here, the material has become very accessible ever since Compact Memory, the archive of digitalized German Jewish journals, went online in the early 2000s.<sup>15</sup> It was an extraordinary experience to find all these volumes that had often been difficult to access just a mouse click away. Not only did it become easy to access the texts of individual authors for which one searched, but also, which was probably even more exciting, one came across adjacent texts by authors of whom one had never heard. I remember thinking that some of my heroes, like Buber, Rosenzweig and Scholem, appeared far less unique and outstanding than I had thought them, when I realized that they had actually been part of a far broader discourse. I regretted having written my dissertation on Gershom Scholem<sup>16</sup> without the help of Compact Memory, and I foresaw a major shift in the analysis of German Jewish culture – and yet, all in all, this did not happen. True, as early as in 1988 Gert Mattenklott stressed that the German Jewish “literary aesthetic and generally cultural critical journal” of the period from 1900 to 1930 was the paradigmatic medium of modernity, whereas the book was too slow and too cumbersome to keep up with these stormy debates.<sup>17</sup> According to him, journals proved to be the testing ground of an “essayistic culture,” which comprised both avant-garde thought and conservative cultural criticism. Yet very few studies have addressed this claim. Of course there is a considerable body of research on the role of literary journals in German literary history,<sup>18</sup> and there is also a small but productive body of ongoing research on

---

**15** Hans Otto Horch and Til Schicketanz, “Ein getreues Abbild jüdischen Lebens. Compact Memory – ein DFG Projekt zur retrospektiven Digitalisierung jüdischer Periodika im deutschsprachigen Raum,” *Menorah* 12 (2001), 387–405.

**16** Daniel Weidner, *Gershom Scholem: Politisches, esoterisches und historiographisches Schreiben* (München: Fink, 2003).

**17** Gert Mattenklott, “Spuren eines gemeinsamen Weges. Deutsch-jüdische Zeitschriftenkultur 1910–1930,” *Merkur. Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, 42.7 (1988), 570–581. Mattenklott paradigmatically discusses the *Neue Blätter*, *Der Jude*, the expressionist *Daimon*, and finally *Die Kreatur*.

**18** Hans Otto Horch, *Auf der Suche nach der jüdischen Erzählliteratur. Die Literaturkritik der Allgemeinen Zeitung des Judentums (1837–1922)* (Frankfurt am Main, Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 1985); Itta Shedletsky, “Literaturdiskussion und Belletristik in den jüdischen Zeitschriften in Deutschland 1837–1918” (Phd Dissertation: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1986).



the Jewish press that has benefited from digitalization.<sup>19</sup> Several new monographs address specific journals, such as Eleonore Lappin’s book on *Der Jude*, which analyzes the tension between political and cultural issues at the level of the editing,<sup>20</sup> Isabella Gartner’s valuable collection of material on *Menorah*,<sup>21</sup> and Madleen Podewski’s study on the role of literature in *Ost und West*, which analyzes how the vagueness of literary discourse enables it to tackle the problematic status of Jews in Germany.<sup>22</sup> However, this is far from being a paradigm shift and remains on the margins of the rapidly growing literary and historical scholarship on German Judaism. As in other fields, there is a gap between the digital corpus that has been assembled in recent decades and the vast majority of research that uses these resources merely as auxiliary tools to locate specific texts of particular authors. Texts are still being torn from their context; and even if context matters, it is largely used as material in commentaries, thus once again limited to very few canonical authors. The specific nature of the journal as a medium, as a collective and sequential publication, and the specific co-textuality of different texts characteristic of that medium is usually ignored. Given this situation, what we require are case studies that go beyond mere documentation, let alone digitalization, and develop new modes of reading that take into account the very form, genre, and materiality of the journal. Owing to its quality and scope, *Die Kreatur* is an excellent test case through which to develop such forms of reading and to reflect on the possible effect they might have on the field of literary history. In what follows, I shall therefore discuss three of these aspects: authorship and network, interdiscursivity, and religious rhetoric.

---

**19** *Zwischen Selbstbehauptung und Verfolgung. Deutsch-jüdische Zeitungen und Zeitschriften von der Aufklärung bis zum Nationalsozialismus*, edited by Michael Nagel (Hildesheim et al.: Olms, 2002); *Deutsch-jüdische Presse und jüdische Geschichte. Dokumente, Darstellungen, Wechselbeziehungen* [The German Jewish Press and Jewish History. Documents, Representations, Interrelations], 2 vols., edited by Eleonore Lappin and Michael Nagel (Bremen: Lumière, 2008); *Die jüdische Presse. Forschungsmethoden – Erfahrungen – Ergebnisse*, edited by Susanne Marten-Finnis, Markus Bauer, and Markus Winkler (Bremen: Lumière, 2007).

**20** Eleonore Lappin, *“Der Jude” 1916–1928. Jüdische Moderne zwischen Universalismus und Partikularismus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

**21** Isabella Gartner, *“Menorah” Jüdisches Familienblatt für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur (1923–1932). Materialien zur Geschichte einer Wiener zionistischen Zeitschrift* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2009).

**22** Madleen Podewski, *Komplexe Medienordnungen. Zur Rolle der Literatur in der deutsch-jüdischen Zeitschrift “Ost und West” (1901–1923)* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2013); David A. Brenner, *Marketing Identities. The Invention of Jewish Ethnicity in “Ost und West”* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998).

### 3 Multiple authorship: the journal as a network

A journal is a multi-authored text, and this fact alone presents a methodological challenge. For not only does the journal collect different texts by different authors that interact with one another, but there are other agents besides the authors who contribute to the production of texts: the editors, perhaps also reviewers, or, less formally, friends and advisers. This group might determine the program of the journal, if there is one; it generally decides which texts to include and recommends or acquires new contributors; it might discuss texts that have been submitted and ask for revisions, and so forth.

In the case of *Die Kreatur*, this group is rather diverse. There are the leading spirits of the entire project: Florens Christian Rang, who initially conceived the idea to found a tri-denominational journal but died in 1924 before he could realize it, and Franz Rosenzweig, who took up the idea and, while he did not formally edit the journal, continued to influence editorial decisions.<sup>23</sup> Rosenzweig then approached Buber, who in turn asked Viktor von Weizsäcker, a medical doctor who would subsequently found the field of psychosomatic medicine, to act as coeditor. Weizsäcker was reluctant to take up the offer, since he feared the journal would fade into the literary sphere and doubted the necessity of a new journal, asking Buber: “could you, could we not say what we have to say in *Hochland* or in *Zwischen den Zeiten*?”<sup>24</sup> This reaction not only exhibits the ambivalence toward the intellectual sphere of *Literatentum* typical of German thinkers, especially those of the existentialist sort to which the authors of *Die Kreatur* belonged. It also locates the project in the contemporary context, namely by linking it to the leading journals of Progressive Cultural Catholicism (*Hochland*) and of Protestant Dialectical Theology (*Zwischen den Zeiten*). Nine months later, however, Weizsäcker changed his mind and *Die Kreatur* became an “affair of the heart” for him since he realized that it would serve as a platform to publish his own ideas, which were not yet fit for a book: “things for which I had no place so far, that I never managed to form into a book, can now be made public.”<sup>25</sup> As for

---

<sup>23</sup> The last issue stresses the meaning of both: “This journal, once founded in memory of Florens Christian Rang, is now closed in memory of Franz Rosenzweig. From Rang it acquired its editorial structure, from Rosenzweig, its name,” *Die Kreatur*, 3.3 (1929–1930), 424. On Rosenzweig’s role, see in particular Lothar Müller: “... dass die Stummheit der letzten Jahrhunderte aufhöre.”

<sup>24</sup> Viktor von Weizsäcker to Martin Buber, July 12, 1925, in: Martin Buber, *Briefwechsel aus sieben Jahrzehnten*, vol. II (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1973), 230.

<sup>25</sup> Viktor von Weizsäcker to Martin Buber, April 5 1926, in: Buber, *Briefwechsel aus sieben Jahrzehnten*, 249.

the others, the journal became an experimental space in which new ideas were developed that would only later be incorporated in a book.

Buber also recruited the third editor, Joseph Wittig, a Catholic theologian and popular author, who agreed enthusiastically to contribute: “Rosenstock knows me. This is the sole guarantee I can give you. I simply step into the circle of the pious men who want me among them. How the forces will fit together was a question for me that I did want to leave to you.”<sup>26</sup> Despite this enthusiasm, Wittig, who was at the time severely criticized by the church (eventually he would be excommunicated), suggested that Buber rather look elsewhere: “I think, being separated from the church, that I will be of no use to you.”<sup>27</sup> However, Buber and Weizsäcker decided that Wittig would become the third editor as well as a regular contributor to the journal. The three of them managed to win over the publisher Lambert Schneider, yet another important agent, who supported the journal while reminding the editors from time to time that their project was not a commercial success.<sup>28</sup> Finally, there were further agents such as Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who attentively read the journal and occasionally corresponded with Buber about it.

Producing a journal is a matter of compromise and constant negotiation – if you will, a dialogical affair. Of course it is far from easy to observe these complex and intricate processes, and we may or may not have access to the sources that allow us to do so. *Die Kreatur* was not a peer reviewed journal that kept reviews in its files; there are no minutes of meetings of the editors, and whether or not the correspondence between the publisher and the authors survived is still unclear. As Weizsäcker later recalled, it was particularly Buber, with his “clear taste,” and the “enthusiastic and self-sacrificing” publisher Schneider who created the journal: “Buber did the editorial work mostly on his own, his co-editors had less time, less connections, and were less active.”<sup>29</sup> As a glimpse at Buber’s published correspondence confirms, this work entailed correspondence and networking, as we have seen in the case of Benjamin’s Moscow text.

Again, this is fairly typical of a journal like *Die Kreatur*. Unlike an academic journal, it did not rely on the structure of a discipline, and unlike a newspaper, it was not produced through a hierarchical and formal division of labor in different

---

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Wittig to Martin Buber, July 28, 1926, in: Buber, *Briefwechsel aus sieben Jahrzehnten*, 231.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Lambert Schneider to Martin Buber, February 7, 1928, in: Buber, *Briefwechsel aus sieben Jahrzehnten*, 307. Schneider tells Buber: “I want to continue *Die Kreatur* for a third year. I cannot decide to let it collapse.”

<sup>29</sup> Von Weizsäcker, *Begegnungen und Entscheidungen* (Stuttgart: Koehler, 1949), 30.

departments. Decision-making and communication was largely conducted face to face, and this type of interpersonal relationship was not only part of the fast and lively “essayistic culture” of the journal, but also quite typical of the open intellectual field from which it emerged. It was a “network,” to use a metaphor which has become increasingly popular in recent intellectual history,<sup>30</sup> whose different contributors formed relations that cut across the categories by which we usually classify the intellectual field: professionals and laymen, left and right, religious and secular. They all cooperated on a common undertaking that had a dialogic, quasi net-like-existence in itself: the journal. Thus, the project of a journal is a paradigmatic site through which to investigate such a network, since here, the different and diverse nodes in the net have a common focus.

To reconstruct the network, it is necessary to investigate the different correspondences in a systematic manner. At first, this appears to be an endless task, but since *Die Kreatur* was a fairly small-scale undertaking, it can be done step by step, beginning with the correspondence among the editors in the years between 1926 and 1930, proceeding to the communications between the editors and the contributors, among the contributors, prominent readers, etc. Quite a few of these correspondences have been preserved, but most have never been studied. A small selection of Buber’s correspondence has been published, von Weizsäcker’s is held at the Marbach archives, and that of Wittig at the University of Frankfurt. The correspondence of several of the more or less renowned contributors is likewise stored in archives. Eugen Rosenstock’s papers are kept in Bethel, Ernst Michel’s in Frankfurt and Hans Ehrenberg’s in Bielefeld.

Examining these relationships is essentially a collaborative project which should itself be conducted in the form of a network, and its end product should likewise take this form. There is not much point in reproducing this correspondence, which rather calls for documentation in the form of a digital archive that contains both biographical and bibliographical information and materials, be these facsimiles, transcripts, excerpts or merely references. Further links, digital texts, etc., could be added. Such a platform would ensure the openness of the network and exploit the potential of digital data in innovative ways, as some similar projects already do.<sup>31</sup> This approach to researching *Die Kreatur* could

---

**30** *Kreise, Gruppen, Bünde. Zur Soziologie moderner Intellektuellenassoziation*, edited by Richard Faber and Christine Holste (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 2000); *Netzwerke: Allgemeine Theorie oder Universalmetapher in den Wissenschaften? Ein transdisziplinärer Überblick*, edited by Heiner Fangerau and Thorsten Halling (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2009).

**31** See, for example, the project “Vernetzte Korrespondenzen” on correspondence in exile: <http://exilnetz33.de> [last access: July, 28, 2016] and the digital edition of Van Gogh’s letters: <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/> [last access: July, 28, 2016].

then be used by other researchers and serve as a model for future projects. It is not an easy matter to set up such a platform and its success is by no means guaranteed. Those engaged on such a project run the risk of going astray, of using inappropriate tools and of overlooking the needs of readers. Nonetheless, as mentioned above, the discipline is in need of ambitious case studies, and *Die Kreatur* could serve as an interesting test case.

## 4 Consensus and dissent: the journal as a discourse

Not only is the process of publishing a journal rather complex, its product is complex as well. A journal of the type of *Die Kreatur* is a Janus-faced entity; it is neither an established oeuvre nor a systematic collection of different essays; it does not concern itself with daily affairs in the way a newspaper and even the feuilleton does, nor does it possess the aura of finality that a book does. Linguistically, a journal is less of an enunciation than a discourse, a site or institution that produces multiple sequential enunciations – both multiplicity and sequentiality being among the essential features of a journal. To analyze a journal, one must take into account its historical and generic specificity and develop new ways of reading.

Historically, *Die Kreatur* belongs to the type of “general” or “cultural” journals that began to flourish in the early twentieth century.<sup>32</sup> These “cultural journals” no longer addressed a general need for entertainment and popular knowledge, as had the family journals of the latter half of the nineteenth century, most prominently *Die Gartenlaube*, but rather targeted an elite readership. Nor were they part of an academic or erudite discourse, as were the numerous scientific journals that proliferated in the second half of the nineteenth century alongside the ongoing differentiation of the various disciplines. By contrast, these cultural journals programmatically avoided specialization and sought to provide the new function of “orientation.” Typical of the genre is *Die neue Rundschau* founded in 1890, which initially focused on theater-criticism but soon transformed into a general essayistic journal. This process reflects the quest for *Weltanschauung* in fin-de-siècle Europe, which became all the more

---

<sup>32</sup> Kai Kaufmann, Erdmut Jost, “Diskursmedien der Essayistik um 1900. Rundschauzeitschriften, Redeforen, Autorenbücher. Mit einer Fallstudie zur Essayistik in den *Grenzböten*,” in: *Essayismus um 1900*, edited by Wolfgang Braungart, Kai Kaufmann (Heidelberg: Winter, 2006), 15–36.

pressing after the great crisis of World War I.<sup>33</sup> The orientation provided by the *Neue Rundschau* and similar journals lies beyond the different fields of knowledge, and typically mediates between academic, literary and political discourse. If the journal is a dialogic medium, we can understand this attribute also in the Bachtinian sense, in that it finds room for different languages, idiolects and discourses. It is an interdiscursive medium that implies a certain vagueness of agenda: even if there is some implicit consensus about the “position” of such a journal, it is usually difficult to pin down, since the constant movement of translation and transfer between different standpoints and discourses tends to blur boundaries.<sup>34</sup>

Let me illustrate this point by an example from *Die Kreatur*. Among the different topics of the journal, education or *Bildung* is central. In the very first issue, no less than three of the eight contributions deal programmatically with education, namely Hans Ehrenberg on *Faith and Bildung*, Martin Buber’s *Speech on Education*, and Eugen Rosenstock’s essay on *Leader or Teacher [Führer oder Lehrer]*. In later issues, this would become a pervasive concern common to very different texts, including Wittig’s reports from his class, case studies on individual children by the teacher Heinrich Sachs, highly abstract reflections by Rang and Buber, and quite specific reports about attempts to educate the working class.

Most of these texts refer to the “crisis of *Bildung*,” a debate of central importance in the early Weimar republic.<sup>35</sup> Conceived in the context of *Bildung*, pedagogical questions are not a matter for specialists but belong to the fundamental intellectual world of the educated bourgeoisie. Interestingly enough, quite a few of the contributions on this topic in *Die Kreatur* are written by outsiders, either by practitioners such as teachers, or by dilettantes who stress that they aren’t pedagogues in the true sense, such as Rudolf Ehrenberg: “If I try to say something on this question [of faith and *Bildung*], I have neither the authority of theology, nor the competence of pedagogy; I have neither revelations to make, nor can I proclaim the aims and means of *Bildung*. Since I speak as a biologist, as a natural life scientist, I can but try to find this opposition [of faith and *Bildung*] in natural life, as the created simile of faith or

---

33 Horst Thomé, “Weltanschauungsliteratur. Vorüberlegungen zu Funktion und Texttyp,” in: *Wissen in Literatur im 19. Jahrhundert*, edited by Lutz Danneberg, Friedrich Vollhard (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2002), 338–380.

34 Cf. Rolf Parr, “‘Sowohl als auch’ und ‘weder noch.’ Zum interdiskursiven Status des Essays,” in: *Essayismus um 1900*, 1–14.

35 Georg Bollenbeck, *Bildung und Kultur. Glanz und Elend eines deutschen Deutungsmuster* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1996).

the material basis of mental existence.”<sup>36</sup> As this quotation shows, this decidedly amateurish position led to an idiosyncratic discourse that did not confine itself to biology but referred to philosophy, religion, history and other areas.

Despite all their idiosyncrasies, the authors of *Die Kreatur* share certain basic assumptions and arguments, agreeing that *Bildung* was undergoing a radical crisis; that it had to be reformulated and was in need of a new rationale; and that neither the old form of coercive education nor the new emphasis on freedom would suffice. Yet this was far from constituting a clear position of the journal. Especially with regard to the necessary reformulation, the authors seem to go together without coming together. Ehrenberg, for example, argues that the *Bildung* of the individual must be linked to a transcendent realm: “Life does not recognize any fixed existential individuality, and this is the very reason that there has to be a trans-individual reality that is fixed from the perspective of man.”<sup>37</sup> Buber argues along the same lines, albeit in far more explicit terms, which include the programmatic terminology of the “creature”: “Man, as a creature that figures and reconfigures that which has been created, cannot create himself. But he can, everyone can open himself and others up toward the creative. He can call upon the creator to salvage and perfect his image.”<sup>38</sup> Other authors barely reach these sublime registers and confine themselves to their own experiences or to practical pedagogical initiatives.<sup>39</sup>

We find even less agreement about the relation between old and new education or between coercion and freedom. Buber, for example, points out that freedom is only a prerequisite for education and should not become its principal aim: “Freedom is the ground on which new life will be erected, but it is not also the fundament.”<sup>40</sup> He is particularly critical of the current emphasis on pedagogical *eros*, since unlike the erotic, education is never a symmetrical relation. More explicitly, Eugen Rosenstock distinguished between “leader” and “teacher” as two different types, or *Grundnaturen*, which stand in functional opposition and should not be confused.<sup>41</sup> Implicitly, although quite obvious to contemporary readers, Rosenstock polemicizes against the youth movement here, and since many of *Die Kreatur*’s readers were involved in the youth movement or at least strongly influenced by it, Rosenstock’s article provoked a

---

36 Rudolf Ehrenberg, “Glaube und Bildung,” *Die Kreatur*, 1.1 (1926–1927), 3–16: 4.

37 *Ibid.*, 7.

38 Martin Buber, “Rede über das Erzieherische,” *Die Kreatur*, 1.1 (1926–1927), 31–51: here 51.

39 Typical examples of more descriptive texts are Hans Sachs, “Vom Leben und Bilden einiger Kinder,” *Die Kreatur*, 1.4 (1926–1927), 438–467, and Ernst Michel, “Über eine Lehrstätte für Arbeiter,” *Die Kreatur*, 1.4 (1926–1927), 426–437.

40 Buber, “Rede über das Erzieherische,” 39.

41 Eugen Rosenstock, “Lehrer oder Führer,” *Die Kreatur*, 1.1 (1926–1927), 52–68: 54.

lively debate. In the following number, Albrecht Mirgeler criticizes Rosenstock's dualism for being a modern construction, arguing that the unity of teacher and leader existed in the past and would reappear in the future.<sup>42</sup> In later issues, open letters claimed that it was not the idea of the leader, but rather the experience of community that typified the youth movement.<sup>43</sup> We thus observe a degree of consensus alongside many differences that generate discussion and even activate the readers to contribute.

Of course, the different texts should be read in their respective contexts. One should compare them to other texts by the same author and should reconstruct the particular debate in which the authors are involved, the readership they are addressing, and any other agents in the field in relation to whom they are positioning themselves. Buber's speech on education, for example, was originally delivered at a conference of educators and begins by criticizing the very title of the gathering, "The evolution of creative forces in the child," word by word. Obviously, an analysis of these texts must take into account these different contexts, which turn the contributions to *Die Kreatur* into a part of an open network related to the contemporary intellectual milieu in diverse ways.

However, the model of the network is only partly appropriate, or, to put this differently, the network does not merely comprise the individual nodes, but possesses a coherence and a force of its own. For quite a few of the pieces find their context in the journal itself, as when Mirgeler responds to Rosenstock and subsequent contributors position themselves with respect to this discussion. Moreover, beyond the individual context of each contribution, the journal itself plays a specific role in regulating what and how things are said. Given the journal's function of orientation and overview, the very selection of contributions represents the current state of debate. The journal acts as a gatekeeper, but also as an interface: it decides what will become part of the public discourse, and it articulates different positions, thereby exhibiting shared views and implicit knowledge but also internal conflicts and even contradictions. Following the paradigm developed by Lukas, Scherer, and Podewski, we can describe the journal as a small archive which contains and organizes different texts that enunciate various, though overlapping, positions.<sup>44</sup> If anywhere, this seems to

---

<sup>42</sup> Albert Mirgeler, "Der Weg der kommenden Generation," *Die Kreatur*, 1.2 (1926–1927), 230–244. Typically, the response is also highly idiosyncratic and takes a wide detour via cultural history.

<sup>43</sup> "Two voices from the youth movement," *Die Kreatur*, 1.3 (1926–1927), 361–366. These two statements are announced in an editorial note at the end of issue 1.2 (1926–1927), 246.

<sup>44</sup> Frank, Scherer, Podewski, "Kultur-Zeit-Schrift. Literatur- und Kulturzeitschriften als 'kleine Archive,'" 41ff.



be an appropriate place in which to develop a discourse analysis – or rather, an analysis of interdiscursive space which is devoted to the rules and implicit assumptions, but also to the possibilities and hybridities of what can be said and in which way.

Again, this is an exciting task at the methodological level as well. The multiplicity of authors and the scope of the journal call for the combining of hermeneutical methods with forms of distance reading and of corpus analysis. One must identify the major topics and arguments, elaborate on the central controversies, and group similar texts together. Such a reading requires an adequate form of presentation, which would probably not be a coherent written monograph but rather a more archive-like product that allows the reader to understand the discourse of *Die Kreatur*, but also to pursue his or her own interests. This would be more than mere documentation, perhaps more like a model that describes and analyzes the journal to make it accessible for further inquiry. As we saw with regard to the question of the network, only a research-driven effort can carry us forward here and generate further questions, methods, and tools.

## 5 Rhetoric and religion: the journal as a site of enunciation

However, the journal does not merely mirror contemporary discourse, but also generates it. The essayistic forms that characterize it combine existing discourses but also give rise to new ideas and new forms of expression that investigate things not yet said and topics that had previously been ignored. By virtue of its collective and collecting nature, the journal mediates between the subjectivity of the specific author and the objective nature of a more general discourse, thus playing on a tension that characterizes essayistic writing as such.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, as a periodical, a journal is fueled by the principle of continuity. It might even provoke internal debates such as that on the youth movement mentioned above, or that between Eberhard Griesebach and Hermann Herrigel. In the first issue of the third volume, Griesebach reviewed Herrigel's book *The New Thought*, and Herrigel published some “remarks” on Griesebach's *The Present. A Critical Ethics*. In the next number, Herrigel responded in an open letter, which in turn elicited a reply by Griesebach in the third issue. Once it begins, the dialogue always invites further contributions and indicates that the

---

45 On essayistic writing see *Essayismus um 1900*.

topics under discussion are ongoing concerns – however, we can also well imagine how Buber had to maneuver tactically to get the two reviews, the responses and the counter-responses published. In any case, this demonstrates the creativeness in the promise of continuity. What remains unresolved, or even contradictory, can be taken up in a later issue, as in the “to be continued” of Berdyaev’s two-part text.

It is this essayistic culture that Mattenklott attributed to the journal as well as to Weimar thought in general.<sup>46</sup> To analyze it, it is insufficient and may be even misleading to focus on the single text and its content. Upon analyzing, for example, Rosenstock’s “theory” of education expounded in his essay on *Leader or Teacher*, we might take this piece of writing too seriously, or in other words, we might force something tentative and volatile, which does not fit very well, into the procrustean bed of a systematic argument. Essayistic writing is, rather, characterized by a certain use of form, by subjective and metaphorical language, sudden shifts of argument, a combination of description and interpretation, etc. We need to analyze these turns and transfers, since they express in particularly clear terms what can be said and what is difficult to express.

These essayistic features do not take a systematic form, but they might be something more than just part of the individual styles of the writers. They might possess certain generic traits that we could work out if we focus on a certain corpus in which different authors share certain modes of argument, certain images and metaphors, certain topics, forms of narration, and even idiosyncrasies; in short, a certain “style of thought” in the sense in which Ludwig Fleck uses the term.<sup>47</sup> If we wish to explore such styles as social facts – and style is obviously to some certain extent a social fact – we need case studies that comprise larger groups of contributors who might share such a style or even imitate one another stylistically. Once again, this is not easy to describe, since a common style does not exclude, but rather presupposes individual variation. The contents of a specific journal of the type of *Die Kreatur* might be a good test case, since there is obviously overlap without identity, which is not bound to a specific individual style as in a book, and differs also from a newspaper, with its extensive process of stylistic rewriting and editing.

Indeed, upon browsing through the different texts of *Die Kreatur* we recognize certain forms and features that appear to be characteristic of the journal. One is what we might call the specific disjunction. For example, Ehrenberg’s text on *Faith and Bildung* opens by making a distinction: “If you connect two nouns

---

<sup>46</sup> Mattenklott, “Spuren eines gemeinsamen Weges.”

<sup>47</sup> Ludwig Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

by the word ‘and’ and this is more than a mere addition, the two concepts acquire a critical relation toward each other.”<sup>48</sup> The text that follows does precisely this. It creates types such as the categories of faith and *Bildung* that are different, albeit not entirely opposite; rather, they move in different directions: “In faith, the individual is lived by reality, in *Bildung* he gives life to trans-individual reality.”<sup>49</sup> The polarity between faith and *Bildung* is transformed into a typology that is at the same time very abstract and can easily be filled with all sorts of detail, and which also has broad anthropological and even metaphysical consequences. Similarly, Rosenstock’s distinction between “leader” and “teacher” is both quite concrete and has far-reaching implications. Whereas the leader incorporates a generation and stands for the contemporary, the teacher represents history and is the “translator” of the past.<sup>50</sup> Numerous other distinctions such as “seeing” versus “thinking,” “nation” versus “empire,” “knowledge” versus “conscience,” etc. abound in the contributions to the journal – distinctions that all seek to make a difference in a given field by applying a typology that is both empirically grounded and somewhat surprising.

We can conceptualize these distinctions as a certain rhetorical figure of thought among others that are characteristic of many contributions to *Die Kreatur*, such as the paradox, the deliberate use of prepositions – as in Ehrenberg’s “being lived *by* reality” versus “giving life *to* reality” – or the way that many texts directly address their readers. Obviously, these features can be linked to Rosenzweig’s “new thinking” and its directive to think according to the facts of language. But what appears to be systematically coherent in Rosenzweig is far more diverse and fluid here. The journal represents the general proliferation of forms of speech that are used in very different contexts without entirely losing their coherence. Conceived as a discourse, as a common discursive space, the journal offers its authors a certain style which they might use to express themselves.

This rhetorical dimension is particularly relevant to the aspect that distinguishes *Die Kreatur* from other contemporary publications, namely its inter-confessional orientation. Many articles contain strong religious overtones typical of the return of religion in the early interwar years. Yet the fact that this led to cooperation between a Jew, a Catholic and a Protestant is rather exceptional. As Weizsäcker later recalled, it was precisely the search for a new form of religion that made this collaboration possible, without ignoring the differences between the religions: “The question was, if the denominational-religious ties were not that superficial and devoid of their original content that only new combinations

---

48 Ehrenberg, “Glaube und Bildung,” 3.

49 Ibid., 4.

50 Rosenstock, “Lehrer oder Führer,” 57–59.

and realizations could bring about salvation. The journal should be neither trans- nor inter- nor non-confessional. But faith went into exile for all of us, and everyone spoke to the others from his exile.”<sup>51</sup> The journal, which Rang initially considered naming *Greetings from the exiles*, thus sought to create religious renewal not beyond, but among the existing beliefs. Once again, we see how things go together without coming together. Here too, focusing on the format of the journal and its specific rhetoric affords new perspectives on a general problem of intellectual history, namely the role of religious intellectuals in modernity.

In fact, scholarship has, in recent decades, devoted greater attention to Weimar religious intellectuals like Walter Benjamin, Gershom Scholem, Carl Schmitt and, to a lesser degree, Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber. In the context of the renewed attention to the religious sphere that has emerged in our post-secular age, these thinkers appear to afford a better understanding of the relation between religion and modernity.<sup>52</sup> However, this contemporary reading often goes hand-in-hand with certain distortions and biases. The case of Benjamin is typical. After years of leftist readings of Benjamin that eschewed his engagement with religion, today the pendulum has swung in the other direction and has led readers to focus on “Benjamin’s theology,” although it is far from clear what is actually meant by “theology” here. Readers tend to conceive it as a theoretical foundation, configured as an esoteric hidden core, or “crypto-theology” that comprises Jewish (probably Cabbalistic) sources that may inform and go some way toward explaining the peculiarities of Benjamin’s thought.

However, such a conception has two major flaws. First, it downplays the widespread religious interest that Benjamin and other thinkers share with much of Weimar discourse, just as it tends to ignore the growing prominence of Theology Proper, which came to the fore in the debates over protestant Dialectical Theology in the years immediately after 1918. Second, for Benjamin as for most of his contemporaries, religious “ideas” do not function as dogmas, neither as systematic concepts nor as personal faith, but are rather figures of speech within a highly syncretistic and at times idiosyncratic discourse that can hardly be conceived of as fundamental.<sup>53</sup> The construction of “Benjamin’s

---

<sup>51</sup> Von Weizsäcker, *Begegnungen und Entscheidungen*, 26.

<sup>52</sup> On the concept of the religious intellectual, see *Intellektuellen-Götter. Das religiöse Laboratorium der klassischen Moderne*, edited by Friedrich Wilhelm Graf (München: Oldenbourg, 2009). A paradigmatic recent study is Brian Britt, *Post-Secular Benjamin. Agency and Tradition* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016).

<sup>53</sup> Daniel Weidner, “Thinking Beyond Secularization. Walter Benjamin, the ‘Religious Turn,’ and the Poetics of Theory,” *New German Critique*, 111 (2010), 131–148.

theology” is rather a naïve projection that springs from author centeredness and canonical reading, and is fueled by the search for a non-dogmatic, quasi-secular faith that suits us, today’s secular intellectuals – a longing that is rarely free of philosemitic projections. Reading a journal such as *Die Kreatur* might prove helpful in exploring the modern discourse of religion in both a broader and more sophisticated way, namely as a hybrid, idiosyncratic, experimental and essayistic discourse.

The very program and title of *Die Kreatur* is itself hybrid, since focusing on the created and the creaturely was not merely a formula for compromise between the religions and a timely topic in the Weimar years, when the creaturely had become a central theme for very different authors.<sup>54</sup> It also implies the tendency not to speak about religion directly, but in a mediated way – something that Rosenzweig, in particular, stressed from the outset, arguing that such a journal needed some “non-theology” [*Untheologie*].<sup>55</sup> The three editors thus insisted that the journal be decidedly “worldly”: “This journal will speak of the world – of all beings, of all things, of all events of our contemporary world – in a way that reveals its creaturely nature. It seeks not to practice theology, but more modestly: cosmology.”<sup>56</sup>

What this means, however, differs again widely from one contribution to the next. It ranges from the seemingly naïve way in which Wittig tells stories about small creatures and even about the creaturely features of building materials like wood, via Buber’s and Weizsäcker’s emphasis on the specific nature of the personal encounter, to the common but often very rhetorical reference to an ultimate reality that we find in the debates on education. Nor does the program exclude rather straightforward theological contributions such as Rosenzweig’s translation and comments on Yehuda Halevi’s *The Name*, or texts in which reference to the creaturely is implicit at best, as in Benjamin’s piece on Moscow. The journal thus accommodates and even calls for a number of distinct and diverse voices, and easily bears and produces new attempts that combine different types of discourse.

To repeat, reading a journal seems to be a good way to explore religious “discourse” among contemporary thinkers, since it might enable us to locate a

---

54 Helmut Lethen, *Verhaltenslehre der Kälte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), especially 245ff; Eric Santner, *On Creaturely Life. Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

55 Franz Rosenzweig to Martin Buber, undated, probably April, 27, 1926, in: *Franz Rosenzweig: Briefe und Tagebücher*, vol. II, edited by Rachel Rosenzweig and Edith Rosenzweig Scheinmann in cooperation with Bernhard Casper (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979): 1091.

56 Buber, Weizsäcker, and Wittig, “Vorwort,” *Die Kreatur*, 1.1 (1926–1927), 2.

common ground of assumptions and arguments that most contributors share. Quite often, for example, religion features negatively in a critique of secular reason by questioning idealism, humanism and mechanism. A good number of contributions also address the figure of the exile to depict the present as an era of discontent, as we saw in Weizsäcker's recollections. In both cases, the positive perspectives and expectations that follow from this shared diagnosis might vary widely, but it is nonetheless remarkable how these figures serve to integrate different approaches and foster coherence over a range of very different topics.

Paul Mendes-Flohr describes the program of *Die Kreatur* as a “post-liberal religion,”<sup>57</sup> a term that well describes Weimar religion. Following World War I, the liberal conception of religion that had reigned during the nineteenth century lost its power, most notably in the crisis of cultural Protestantism and its individualized piety in combination with a certain spiritual nationalism that also impacted the Jewish reform movement. “Post-liberal” itself implies the lack of a new, unifying paradigm. For post-liberal religion is not necessarily conservative, or libertarian, or mystical. Religious discourse is multifaceted and hybrid, and the journal was a perfect medium for expressing and analyzing this.

In retrospect, however, the end of liberalism did not merely result in intellectual productivity. In a letter to Buber, Rosenzweig reflected upon the possibilities and potential of the post-liberal age. It is true, as he argues, that liberalism put an end to religious persecution and fostered tolerance – but also ignorance: “The Christian ignores the Jew to be able to tolerate him, the Jew ignores the Christian to be tolerated [...]. Now we enter or rather we have already entered a new era of persecutions. Nothing can be done about this, neither by us nor by well meaning Christians. What can be done, however, is that this era of persecution should also become an era of religious dialogue, as in medieval times, and that the silence of the last centuries be ended.”<sup>58</sup> To us, speaking bluntly of a “new era of persecutions” sounds uncannily prophetic and casts a shadow over any engagement in “dialogue” between religions that might result from it. However, if we are to honor Rosenzweig's intellectual courage, we should probably not retreat into a liberalism in which religious affiliations would be cast into a state of mutual toleration that renders them indifferent to

---

<sup>57</sup> Paul Mendes-Flohr, “Zwischen Deutschtum und Judentum – Christen und Juden,” in: *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Neuzeit*, edited by Avraham Barkai et al., vol. 4 (München: C.H. Beck, 1997), 154–166: here 161.

<sup>58</sup> Franz Rosenzweig to Martin Buber, March 19, 1924, in: *Franz Rosenzweig: Briefe und Tagebücher*, 947–948.

one another. By contrast, we should be aware of the different, complex, and multiple ways in which Jews, Catholics and Protestants interacted with each other.

## 6 Conclusion: *Die Kreatur* as a project

The final issue of *Die Kreatur* appeared in spring 1930, numbering only 80 pages. It appears that the editors had simply run out of contributions, while the publisher had run into financial difficulty associated with the economic crisis of 1929. However, the editors did not see this as a failure, since from the outset they had conceived the journal to be a temporary project, more like an *Athenaeum* than a Jewish quarterly, as Rosenzweig had stressed.<sup>59</sup> This too may be considered a typical feature of such journals: they do not represent an epoch but rather a threshold, a phase of some years, before their internal dynamics lead to dissolution. They have an inner life, a biography if you will, which might allow us to understand certain transformations and transitions. *Die Kreatur*'s relatively short life span leaves us with abundant material to develop such an understanding.

*Die Kreatur* represents a network of intellectuals ranging from prominent agents of the Weimar years such as Buber and Benjamin to less prominent but still well known authors such as Ehrenberg, Rosenstock, Rang and Wittig, to those who are practically forgotten, such as Mirgeler, Fritz Klatt and Georg Koch. The reconstructed network would be more than a collection of biographies, for a project such as *Die Kreatur* might allow us to conceive of intellectual exchange *in actu* – at least this is my hope. That this exchange cuts across religious affiliations, political standpoints, professions and styles, makes it all the more interesting.

Furthermore, the collection of texts that the 1,500 pages of *Die Kreatur* represent is not only interesting in itself and symptomatic of the essayistic culture of the Weimar period. It might also allow us to develop new forms of reading across the different texts; a reading that would use the adjacent texts not merely as contexts, but as co-texts, namely texts that acquire their significance by their relation to other texts. The need to combine different forms of close and distant reading is all the more challenging.

---

<sup>59</sup> Franz Rosenzweig to Martin Buber, June 19, 1925, in: Buber, *Briefwechsel aus sieben Jahrzehnten*, 224.

I assume, finally, that such a reading is particularly suited to the sort of essayistic texts we find in *Die Kreatur* and in many other similar publications. This is a mixed genre that presents the usual hermeneutic difficulties. However, it also allows one to conceive what happens in-between the existing discourses, topics and genres – in the realm from where new ideas emerge. Reading essays is a rewarding task, and its potential benefits and pleasures should motivate us to read not only the great works in this genre of the few canonized authors we admire, but also the writings of the less famous authors, the small, forgotten creatures that nonetheless deserve our attention.

**Acknowledgments:** This article is based on a lecture held on June 3, 2015 at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem as part of the “Walter Benjamin Lecture Series.”