

SECTION V. NEW PUBLICATIONS – REVIEW ESSAYS, REVIEWS AND PRESENTATIONS

V.1: REVIEW ESSAYS

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New Publications on Eduard Fuchs

- **Ulrich Weitz: Eduard Fuchs. Der Mann im Schatten [Eduard Fuchs. The Man in the Shadows], Berlin, Karl Dietz Verlag, 2014. 400 pp. – ISBN 978-3-32002-299-0.**
- **Heiner Jestrabek: Eduard Fuchs. Kunstsammler und Zeitkritiker. Eine biographisch-politische Skizze [Eduard Fuchs. Art Collector and Contemporary Critic. A Biographical-Political Sketch], Reutlingen-Heidenheim, Freiheitsbaum, Edition Spinoza, 2012. 191 pp. – ISBN 978-3-92258-953-2.**
- **Micha Brumlik: Innerlich beschnittene Juden. Zu Eduard Fuchs' "Die Juden in der Karikatur" [Internally Circumcised Jews. On Eduard Fuchs' "The Jews in Caricature"], Hamburg, KVV konkret, 2012. 128 pp. – ISBN 978-3-93078-665-7.**

In the last decade our knowledge of Weimar-era Communism has been greatly expanded through the publication of several biographies dedicated to lesser known but supremely important figures such as Richard Müller, Werner Scholem, and Ruth Fischer.¹ Add the studies recently issued on the various Left oppositions, regional/local deviations to the party line, documentary compendia of internal debates and transnational circuits of bi-directional influence, and the result is a much richer, complex picture of the KPD.² Static depictions of a monolithic party apparatus commanding a passive membership will no longer do. Historians of the period must now contend with Communist milieux more porous and contested than

¹ Ralf Hoffrogge: Richard Müller. Der Mann hinter der Novemberrevolution, Berlin, Dietz, 2008 (republished as: Working-Class Politics in the German Revolution. Richard Müller, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and the Origins of the Council Movement, ed. Radhika Desai, trans. Joseph B. Keady, Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2015); Id.: Werner Scholem. Eine politische Biographie (1895-1940), Konstanz, UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2014; Mario Keßler: Ruth Fischer. Ein Leben mit und gegen Kommunisten (1895-1961), Köln, Böhlau, 2013; Id.: Grenzgänger des Kommunismus. Zwölf Porträts aus dem Jahrhundert der Katastrophen, Berlin, Dietz, 2015.

² There are far too many titles to list but a few that stand out include: Ben Fowkes (ed.): The German Left and the Weimar Republic. A Selection of Documents, Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2015; Marcel Bois: Kommunisten gegen Hitler und Stalin. Die linke Opposition der KPD in der Weimarer Republik. Eine Gesamtdarstellung, Essen, Klartext, 2014; Kasper Brásken: The International Workers' Relief, Communism, and Transnational Solidarity. Willi Münzenberg in Weimar Germany, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

once assumed. Unfortunately, outside of a few notable exceptions studies of Weimar culture have yet to acknowledge such developments and continue to be dominated by formalist and Frankfurt School-oriented perspectives. Discussion of Communist-aligned artists or cultural production relies heavily upon retroactive transpositions of contemporary theoretical models or further deployment of Benjaminian analogies, with Berlin Dada and photomontage as the perennial favorites. Rare are investigations of contemporary critics and theorists outside the known pantheon of Weimar studies. Were the re-evaluation of Weimar-era Communism extended to the realm of culture, our conception of the party and the period would likely require even further re-calibration. There remain a number of undervalued figures whose participation in interwar cultural debates and impact upon Communist cultural policies was significant. The collector-cum-historian Eduard Fuchs is one such figure.

Born in a small town just east of Stuttgart in 1870, Fuchs belongs to a small circle of militant left-wing intellectuals whose influence spanned the caesura of World War I. His pronounced Swabian dialect combined with his deteriorating eyesight (due to cataracts) made him look a "beetle-shaped" man in the words of George Grosz, and Fuchs remained a subject of fun among Berlin friends and comrades throughout the 1920s.³ Yet by the time he fled the Nazis in 1933, this bohemian outsider was considered a leading authority on art and culture. Fuchs published over twenty-five books during his lifetime, on topics ranging from graphic satire to French porcelain, erotic art to Tang dynasty sculpture. Royalties from these studies, and in particular his best-selling three-volume *Illustrierte Sittengeschichte*, enabled him to amass an art collection that, in the words of prominent art critic Paul Westheim, "knows no boundaries or limitations."⁴ His vast collection of prints comprised a veritable history of European caricature, including six thousand by the famous French artist Honoré Daumier alone. These, in addition to the twenty-six paintings he owned by the artist, made him one of the leading private collectors of Daumier in Europe.

Today Fuchs is remembered (if remembered at all) as the foil to Walter Benjamin's adumbration of an historical materialist conception of culture, sketched out in his essay "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian" for the fall 1937 issue of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*.⁵ Benjamin ridicules much of Fuchs' thought, bound to an outdated Second International framework, but praises his practical activity as a collector; in a dialectical twist, it is precisely Fuchs' backwardness that makes him a materialist pioneer. Due to the influence of Benjamin, Fuchs' reputation as a collector and connoisseur has long overshadowed his political activities.⁶

Such oversight is unfortunate, since Fuchs' political activities were multifarious and influential. As described in Ulrich Weitz's stellar biography, *Der Mann im Schatten*, Fuchs

³ George Grosz: Ein kleines Ja und ein großes Nein, Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1955, pp. 184-185.

⁴ Paul Westheim: Das Haus eines Sammlers. Die Sammlung Eduard Fuchs, Zehlendorf. In: *Das Kunstblatt* (1926), pp. 106-113, here p. 108. An earlier article on Fuchs' collection appeared in 1912: Robert Breuer: Die Sammlung Eduard Fuchs. In: *Kunst und Künstler* 10 (1912), 10. The acquisition of works was aided by Fuchs' second marriage to Greta Alsberg, whose family owned the third largest department store chain in Germany.

⁵ Walter Benjamin: Eduard Fuchs, der Sammler und der Historiker. In: *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 6 (1937), pp. 346–381. The English translation can be found in many collections of Benjamin's writings, including Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, Thomas Y. Levin (eds.): *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008.

⁶ For an intriguing assessment of the essay and its central argument, see Frederic J. Schwartz: *Walter Benjamin's Essay on Eduard Fuchs. An Art-Historical Perspective*. In: Andrew Hemingway (ed.): *Marxism and the History of Art. From William Morris to the New Left*, London, Pluto Press, 2006, pp. 106-122.

was in truth a key figure of the Weimar Left, whose role as secret agent for the KPD and early supporter for organizations like the *Institut für Sozialforschung* belies his contemporary depiction as a dundering Swabian rube. Weitz's biography is one of three new books on Fuchs and by far the best introduction to this underappreciated historian *engagé*.⁷ Building upon an earlier study published in 1991,⁸ Weitz takes the title for the new book from an unpublished autobiographical manuscript written by Fuchs. It refers to an episode that occurred in the winter of 1918, when Fuchs was sent to Moscow by Rosa Luxemburg to meet with the Bolsheviks as an official representative of the *Spartakusbund*. According to Fuchs, Lenin told him just before New Year's Eve, "[a]lways remain the man in the shadows. As such you will serve the party most valuably [...] Most want their personality to always shine. You my friend belong to the few [who do not]."⁹ Valuable advice for a man who would turn forty-eight in less than a month and would soon become a key courier between Soviet Russia and Germany on behalf of the KPD.

But Fuchs also knew firsthand the consequences of "shining" too brightly as a political personality. He joined the outlawed *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei* in 1886 while apprenticing at a printer's. In 1890 he moved to Munich to begin work at the SPD's publication bureau, soon taking over the second-most popular Social Democratic satirical magazine of the era, the *Süddeutsche Postillon*, in 1892. Fuchs' *Postillon* mocked the imperial establishment through an innovative mix of illustrations, poems, and articles, and the popularity of the magazine brought him renown within party circles, two jail sentences, and sufficient funds to begin collecting art (he is said to have amassed nearly four thousand original Daumier lithographs by 1909 alone). In 1901 he relocated to Berlin and took over editorship of the party's festival publications, but soon ran into trouble with the revisionist right wing for favoring caricature and new trends in contemporary art over more traditional, idealist representations of the labor movement. In addition to overseeing official party publications, Fuchs also organized pamphlets that mocked leaders and revisionist ideas within the party itself. These activities on behalf of the Left led to Fuchs being pushed out of his position in 1908. Thereafter he worked almost exclusively on his historical studies of graphic satire and his three-volume *Sittengeschichte*, with which he subsequently became synonymous—*Sittenfuchs*.

The success of the *Sittengeschichte* volumes (republished throughout the 1920s) and his ever-growing art collection solidified his reputation as a respectable connoisseur. Yet his political activities continued unabated. Although a member of the KPD from the very beginning, Fuchs never held an official position within the party, instead serving as the treasurer of the Comintern's clandestine Western European Secretariat. He did, however, continue to play an important, supporting role. He accompanied Paul Levi to the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920, and joined the executive board of several united front groups such as the Society of Friends of the New Russia in 1923. When the party decided to erect a monument to Luxemburg and Liebknecht in 1925 they turned to Fuchs, who advised they chose Mies van der Rohe for the project and convinced the party executive to accept van der Rohe's abstract construction in place of the original design—which was to feature a sculpture by Rodin that Fuchs planned to donate out of his own collection. Around this same time Fuchs acquired the greater part of the KPD's archives for a research center in Berlin dedicated to materials and publications produced by social movements across the globe that

⁷ Earlier overviews of his career include Luciana Zingarelli's article: Eduard Fuchs. Vom militanten Journalismus zur Kulturgeschichte. In: *Ästhetik und Kommunikation – Beiträge zur politischen Erziehung* 7 (1976), 25, pp. 32-53.

⁸ Ulrich Weitz: *Salonkultur und Proletariat. Eduard Fuchs – Sammler, Sittengeschichtler, Sozialist*, Stuttgart: Verlag Bernd Stöffler & Dieter Schütz, 1991 (a revamped version of Weitz's dissertation).

⁹ Weitz, *Der Mann im Schatten*, p. 17.

he set up with the *Institut für Sozialforschung*. Fuchs had been associated with the institute from its initial founding in 1922, when he, Kurt Albert Gerlach, Friedrich Pollock and Lucio Felix José Weil established the financial organization that oversaw the institute's creation. Although harassment by the police and ensuing legal conflicts persuaded the institute to close the archive only a year after its opening, Fuchs' role demonstrates his continued work behind the scenes on the KPD's behalf, putting his contacts and expertise to their disposal.

As the 1920s wore on, Fuchs grew more and more disillusioned with inner-party squabbles and third-period policies, eventually joining the KPD(O), led by his old friends Heinrich Brandler and August Thalheimer, in 1929. However, apart from providing the opposition with monthly financial support, Fuchs refrained from participating as an active member (he was nearly 60 years old by this point). The repressions that followed the burning of the Reichstag in February 1933 forced him to flee Berlin for France, and Fuchs spent the final years of his life in Paris, desperately trying to regain control of the vast art collection he left behind before he died in 1940.

All these fascinating biographical details and more are discussed at length by Weitz, who does an admirable job backing up claims and citing sources without these getting in the way of the story. The supporting images Weitz has chosen, drawn from the contents of the *Postillon*, Fuchs' art collection, and snapshots, enliven the narrative even further. Heiner Jestrabek's shorter overview of Fuchs' life hits all the high points, but lacks the comprehensiveness of Weitz's, as well as the knowledgeable commentary Weitz provides regarding political and historical context. Jestrabek includes lengthy excerpts from Fuchs' writings that give the reader some sense of Fuchs' authorial style and wide-ranging interests, but fails to provide a cohesive analysis of these works. Both biographies present a much more favorable and fuller portrait of Fuchs than we find in Benjamin, and make a strong case for recognizing his importance as a Communist impresario. But the more fundamental question remains unanswered: why should we care about Fuchs as a cultural historian?

Although Weitz addresses Fuchs' various writings and editorial innovations, these subjects do not receive the same treatment that they do in his earlier study. Doubtless this is due to space and time constraints; books can only be so long and cover so much ground, particularly when seeking to introduce audiences to unknown historical figures in an accessible way. The consequence, however, is that the single best analysis of Fuchs' published works remains Thomas Huonker's 1985 study, long out of print and never translated.¹⁰ Huonker covers an array of issues pertaining to Fuchs' works that are only touched on in the biographies: historical influences, methods, Fuchs' later attempt to combine materialist cultural history with insights taken from psychoanalysis – which persuaded Max Horkheimer to commission the essay by Benjamin in the first place. Excellent topics all, but in dire need of re-evaluation and assessment in line with up-to-date knowledge of historical context.

Scholarly interest in Fuchs has typically concentrated on specific titles. In the early 1970s a reprint of Fuchs' 1906 study *Die Frau in der Karikatur* was subjected to fierce criticism for its essentialist claims regarding gender.¹¹ The Benjaminian angle has since come to dominate

¹⁰ Thomas Huonker: *Revolution, Moral und Kunst. Eduard Fuchs. Leben und Werk*, Zürich, Limmat Verlagsgenossenschaft, 1985.

¹¹ See Silvia Bovenschen and Peter Gorsen: *Aufklärung als Geschlechtskunde. Biologismus und Antifeminismus bei Eduard Fuchs*. In: *Ästhetik und Kommunikation – Beiträge zur politischen Erziehung* 7 (1976), 25, pp. 10-30

contemporary perspectives of Fuchs.¹² His writings are seldom treated in a sustained manner, attuned to the development of Fuchs' thought. Instead they are often read as symptomatic documents of historical or intellectual dynamics. Micha Brumlik's book is a case in point. Brumlik takes Fuchs' 1921 study *Die Juden in der Karikatur* as an attempt by Fuchs to provide a cultural materialist explanation for historical and contemporary antisemitism through commentary on past and present graphic satire. Although, as Brumlik explains, the book reflects Fuchs' genuine antipathy to racism and antisemitic tropes, his reliance upon problematic historical sources, namely Werner Sombart's *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (1911), result in the transference of shoddy and questionable formulations. Brumlik is quite right to point out Fuchs' shortcomings as a cultural historian – he was an amateur, after all, not a trained professional – but the fact that Fuchs published his book as an explicit challenge to the increase of antisemitism following the revolutions in Germany and Russia reflects the author's commitment to anti-racist internationalism.

What we lack is a thorough, grounded investigation of the relationship between Fuchs' cultural interests and his political commitments, especially after World War I. Did Fuchs' writings have any bearing on Communist cultural policy during the Weimar period? Did they impact the parameters of Weimar culture at large? There are several ways of assessing this question. One would be to focus on Fuchs' love for satirical images. A devout francophile, Fuchs' historical studies of graphic satire are largely derivative of nineteenth-century French precedents; yet Fuchs established a historical framework in his commentary specifically addressed to German audiences, espousing the aesthetic and propagandistic power of caricature. In many ways his efforts as a promoter of satire through the *Postillon* and later as an historian of the art form represent a conscious effort to shift the visual culture of the pre-war labor movement in a more populist direction. Fuchs' support for an uncompromising graphic satire willing to take on sensitive issues and inner-party debates bespeaks a trust in the ability of working-class audiences to think for themselves and take pleasure in images. In my view, his defense of caricature's mass character and tendentious credentials likewise reflected a desire to bring the SPD's cultural policies in closer alignment with the everyday life of its members, whose tastes and experiences no longer fit the organizational model that had sustained the party during the years of the Anti-Socialist laws. These efforts arguably set the stage for the eventual embrace of artists such as George Grosz and Rudolf Schlichter, whose sardonic depiction of life in Berlin became the house style of the KPD by the mid-1920s, visible in demonstration posters, countless publications, and exhibitions.

Future research will doubtless confirm Fuchs' influential role during the Weimar years. In the meantime, all three books offer compelling insight into Fuchs, although Weitz's biography stands out as a worthy addition to the revival of lost Weimar Communists. It merits immediate translation into English and will hopefully lead Fuchs out of the dark and back into the light of historical recognition.

¹² For example, Ulrich Bach: Eduard Fuchs between Elite and Mass Culture. In: Lynne Tatlock (ed.): Publishing Culture and the 'Reading Nation', Rochester, Camden House, 2010, pp. 295-312.