



# From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film

By Siegfried Kracauer

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## From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film By Siegfried Kracauer

A landmark, now classic, study of the rich cinematic history of the Weimar Republic, *From Caligari to Hitler* was first published by Princeton University Press in 1947. Siegfried Kracauer--a prominent German film critic and member of Walter Benjamin's and Theodor Adorno's intellectual circle--broke new ground in exploring the connections between film aesthetics, the prevailing psychological state of Germans in the Weimar era, and the evolving social and political reality of the time. Kracauer's pioneering book, which examines German history from 1921 to 1933 in light of such movies as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *M*, *Metropolis*, and *The Blue Angel*, has never gone out of print. Now, over half a century after its first appearance, this beautifully designed and entirely new edition reintroduces Kracauer for the twenty-first century. Film scholar Leonardo Quaresima places Kracauer in context in a critical introduction, and updates the book further with a new bibliography, index, and list of inaccuracies that crept into the first edition. This volume is a must-have for the film historian, film theorist, or cinema enthusiast. In *From Caligari to Hitler*, Siegfried Kracauer--the German-born writer and film critic who shared many ideas and interests with his friend Walter Benjamin--made a startling (and still controversial) claim: films as a popular art provide insight into the unconscious motivations and fantasies of a nation. In films of the 1920s such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *M*, *Metropolis*, and *The Blue Angel*, he traced recurring visual and narrative tropes that expressed, he argued, a fear of chaos and a desire for order, even at the price of authoritarian rule. The book has become an undisputed classic of film historiography, laying the foundations for the serious study of film.

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the rise of Nazism, fleeing to Paris in 1933. Later, in anguish after Benjamin's suicide, he made his way to New York, where he remained until his death in 1966. He wrote *From Caligari to Hitler* while working as a "special assistant" to the curator of the Museum of Modern Art's film division. He was also on the editorial board of Bollingen Series. Despite many critiques of its attempt to link movies to historical outcomes, *From Caligari to Hitler* remains Kracauer's best-known and most influential book, and a seminal work in the study of film. Princeton published a revised edition of his *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* in 1997.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"The thesis of this unusually interesting book is that the German films of the twenties were filled with premonitions of the German totalitarianism of the thirties."--*Nation*

"One of the great works of film history, this look at early German cinema, first published in 1947, is still a must-have for cineastes and scholars alike."--**H.J. Kirchhoff, *Toronto Globe and Mail***

"The book is an invaluable guide to a golden period of cinema."--**Christopher Wood, *The Times***

#### From the Back Cover

"An undisputed classic of modern film historiography, Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* had a major impact on the way we relate movies to history and society. Although Kracauer is not afraid of using such contested concepts as collective psychology and German 'soul,' his productive readings of Weimar films as harbingers of emerging fascism still resonate today. Leonardo Quaresima's engaging and erudite introduction is critical in situating Kracauer's project both in its historical moment and in our time."--**Anton Kaes, University of California, Berkeley**

#### About the Author

Siegfried Kracauer (1889-1966) was a film critic and independent film historian and theorist. He is the author of "The Mass Ornament" and "A Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality", edited by Miriam Bratu Hansen (Princeton). Leonardo Quaresima is Professor of Film History and Criticism and Director of Cinema Studies at the University of Udine, Italy.

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