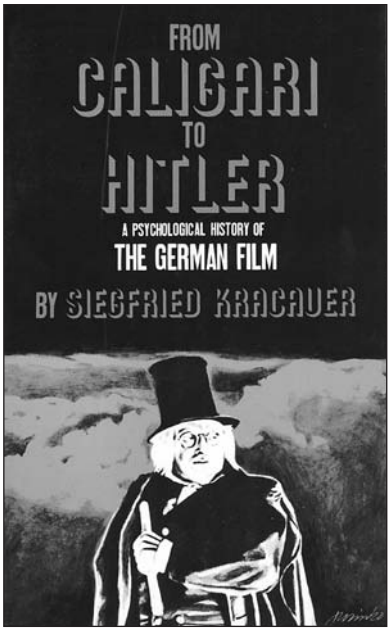

From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film 1947

(Click here to view our web site description.)

Siegfried Kracauer

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.

Kracauer was an important film critic in Weimar Germany. A Jew, he escaped 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.