

**Andreas Killen: Homo Cinematicus:
Science, Motion Pictures, and the Making of Modern Germany**

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Killen's book reads on some level like an updated version of Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), with Weimar's films functioning more as a premonition than as a reflection of pre-war modernization and its cataclysmic culmination. Wilhelm Stapel's 1919 text "Der homo cinematicus," from which Killen draws his book's title, depicts a nightmare figure, a thoughtless, unfeeling zombie. Stapel, a right-wing critic of the Weimar Republic and early adopter of Nazism, imagined a populace hypnotized into passivity by the flickering screen, not unlike Siegfried Kracauer's hypnotized somnambulist. For Killen, however, *Homo cinematicus* is not Cesare. The creature may still be passive, but too many seek to control it, complicating prefigurations of totalitarianism.

The book unfolds thematically rather than chronologically, giving broad overviews and then closing in on an aspect of the preceding tableau. Divided into five chapters, the first summarizes the film-science dialogue comprising

the book's general scope. 'Schundfilme' (trash films) are explored in the second chapter through censorship cases, reform, and public health policy. The third chapter melds cinematic and political history in its choice of bookends: 1895 (the first commercial screening of a film) and 1933. Killen traces the theme of hypnotism in medical discourse and film, using fears of cinematic suggestibility to re-examine *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler* (1922) and *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920). In the next chapter, the 'Aufklärungsfilme' ('sex-education films') represent cinema's transformative promise for human science in the most explicit sense with aims as diverse as improving social welfare to encouraging eugenics. The last chapter stretches into World War II, focusing on Nazi instrumentalization of film against alternative medicine.

Killen situates *Homo cinematicus* at the nexus of cinema, science, and policy as a speculative and importantly, a malleable figure. Peter Fritzsche's "Did Weimar Fail?" (In: *The Journal of Modern History* 68 [3], 1996, S.629- 656), arguing that the republic was defined by constant

experiment is noted; Killen however shifts the focus from the experimenters to the experiments themselves. A “new professional caste – made up of psychiatrists and experimental psychologists, industrial experts and crowd theorists, sexologists and psychoanalysts, mental and racial hygienists” (S.18) viewed the moving image’s potential in their research subject, the *Homo Cinematicus*, fusing cinema with human science. *Homo Cinematicus* dialogues with Christian Bonah, Anja Laukötter, and Ulf Schmidt, among others. Killen uses Bonah’s and Laukötter’s formulation from their article “Moving Pictures and Medicine in the First Half of the 20th Century” (In: *Gesnerus* 66, 2009, S.121-146) of medical films as *boundary objects*, mediators between genres of film, science, modes of address, audiences, and disciplines, to train a multidisciplinary lens on the Aufklärungsfilm. He builds on Schmidt’s continuities in “Sozialhygienische Filme und Propaganda in der Weimarer Republik” (In: *Gesundheitskommunikation*. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2000, S.53-82) between Weimar ‘social hygiene’ and Nazi ‘racial hygiene’ as expressed in educational film.

Unique in Killen’s book is his emphasis on the medium, rather than subject matter. Transitioning between famous and lesser-known works, he reveals unexpected causalities and parallels. *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler* (1922) and *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920) share

near-equal billing with melodramatic ‘Aufklärungsfilme’ and filmed psychological experiments. This scientific angle both offers a fresh perspective on Weimar cinema’s political and artistic aspects and pushes these from center stage. Preceded by a discussion of filmed hypnotism experiments, *Dr. Mabuse* transforms into a reflection of the period’s cutting-edge science.

The Weimar Republic’s inglorious end casts a shadow on any study of the period and its presence in *Homo Cinematicus* is necessary. Even as Killen reins in his characters to keep them from rushing ahead, they still manage to do so. The camera is a tool employed in social hygiene, and teleological implications – particularly as embodied by screenwriter and doctor Curt Thomalla, medical consultant for the syphilis film *Falsche Scham* (1926) who worked after the Nazi takeover for the Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda, – drag film along with them. Perhaps this is inevitable, considering the role Killen argues cinema was thrust into in 1918/9: an absence of authority “partially filled by moving images” (S.3). Voices from below might confirm film’s new role, but they are not the focus of this study. Instead it is the filmed experiment and the academic discourses surrounding it that reduce the moviegoing public to *Homo Cinematicus*.

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