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| Kracauer, Siegfried (1889–1966) |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Siegfried Kracauer was born to a middle-class German Jewish family in Frankfurt-am-Main. Though best known to English-speaking readers for his film theory and criticism, Kracauer initially studied sociology under Georg Simmel and Max Scheler and trained to be an architect. In 1915, he earned his doctorate in engineering. His subsequent career as an architect failed, and in 1921 Kracauer began writing freelance journalism. From 1924 to 1933, he served as the editor of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, a prestigious newspaper read by the educated and liberal bourgeoisie. During the Weimar period, Kracauer wrote copiously and published over two thousand articles, mostly in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Many of these pieces appeared in the *feuilleton* section of the paper, wherein Kracauer sought to provide a stimulating critique of every day life, culture, fashion, arts, and film. It was during the interwar years that he composed *The Mass Ornament* (1927; the original essay “The Mass Ornament” appeared in 1922), a significant study and critique, written in the vein of New Objectivism and inspired by Adolf Loos, of the ‘cult of distraction’ produced by Weimar’s unstable capitalist culture. |
| Siegfried Kracauer was born to a middle-class German Jewish family in Frankfurt-am-Main. Though best known to English-speaking readers for his film theory and criticism, Kracauer initially studied sociology under Georg Simmel and Max Scheler and trained to be an architect. In 1915, he earned his doctorate in engineering. His subsequent career as an architect failed, and in 1921 Kracauer began writing freelance journalism. From 1924 to 1933, he served as the editor of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, a prestigious newspaper read by the educated and liberal bourgeoisie. During the Weimar period, Kracauer wrote copiously and published over two thousand articles, mostly in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Many of these pieces appeared in the *feuilleton* section of the paper, wherein Kracauer sought to provide a stimulating critique of every day life, culture, fashion, arts, and film. It was during the interwar years that he composed *The Mass Ornament* (1927; the original essay “The Mass Ornament” appeared in 1922), a significant study and critique, written in the vein of New Objectivism and inspired by Adolf Loos, of the ‘cult of distraction’ produced by Weimar’s unstable capitalist culture. Kracauer’s critique of the ornament had a decisive influence on Benjamin’s dialectical approach to novelty and on Adorno’s critique of the rational will to the domination of nature. Kracauer’s most important sociological work appeared as *Die Angestellten* (*The Salaried Employees*) in 1929–1930, a study of the forms of cultural distraction (from sports to entertainment) that had arisen to mollify a sickened workforce during the depression. Much of Kracauer’s Weimar period writings were not translated into English until well after his death.  After fleeing Germany in 1933, Kracauer and his wife went to Paris. He made a meager living by publishing fiction, essays, and cultural criticism, including a study of Jacques Offenbach. In 1941, with the aid of Adorno, Lowenthal and others, Kracauer and Lili sailed for New York City. Once in the United States, Kracauer repudiated his German tongue, learned to write in English, and turned his attention entirely to film criticism. While working at the film library of the Museum of Modern Art and with the support of the Experimental Division for the Study of War Time Communications, a United States government division, Kracauer wrote several studies of Nazi war propaganda. In 1947 he published the controversial critique of national German cinema *From Caligari to Hitler*, which provoked a heated debate among film historians, cultural critics, and political writers alike. Though the book contributed to a narrative that demoralized German nationalism and Weimar filmmakers, especially Fritz Lang, it is now considered a seminal piece of socio-psychological film criticism. In 1960, Kracauer published his second major work on cinema, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, which offered a less political and more sensorial critique of film’s effects on perception and experience. Kracauer’s last book remained unfinished, but has been completed and edited by Paul Oskar Kristeller and published under the title *History: The Last Things before the Last* (1969). It is a book that attempts to avoid the teleological concern with ‘last things’ by confining the historian’s focus to the delicate balance between mere chronology and the ‘bundles of shaped time’ that are the product of subjective understanding. |
| Further reading:  (Levin) |