



# Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War

*Anton Kaes*

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*Shell Shock Cinema* explores how the classical German cinema of the Weimar Republic was haunted by the horrors of World War I and the devastating effects of the nation's defeat. In this exciting new book, Anton Kaes argues that masterworks such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Nosferatu*, *The Nibelungen*, and *Metropolis*, even though they do not depict battle scenes or soldiers in combat, engaged the war and registered its tragic aftermath. These films reveal a wounded nation in post-traumatic shock, reeling from a devastating defeat that it never officially acknowledged, let alone accepted.

Kaes uses the term "shell shock"--coined during World War I to describe soldiers suffering from nervous breakdowns--as a metaphor for the psychological wounds that found expression in Weimar cinema. Directors like Robert Wiene, F. W. Murnau, and Fritz Lang portrayed paranoia, panic, and fear of invasion in films peopled with serial killers, mad scientists, and troubled young men. Combining original close textual analysis with extensive archival research, Kaes shows how this post-traumatic cinema of shell shock transformed extreme psychological states into visual expression; how it pushed the limits of cinematic representation with its fragmented story lines, distorted perspectives, and stark lighting; and how it helped create a modernist film language that anticipated film noir and remains incredibly influential today.

A compelling contribution to the cultural history of trauma, *Shell Shock Cinema* exposes how German film gave expression to the loss and acute grief that lay behind Weimar's sleek façade.

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