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Law and Transgression in Weimar Film

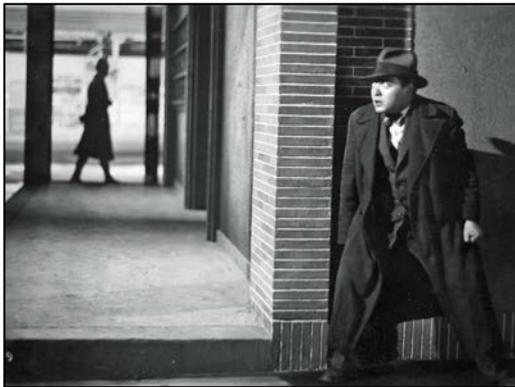
Humanities Research Centre Seminar

Tuesday 28 March 2017, 12.15—1.30pm

Speaker

Dr Steven Howe, University of Lucerne, Switzerland

Seminar Room 2/3, Level 3, Sir Roland Wilson Building, 120 McCoy Cct, ANU



"Because the Law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression"
—Romans 4:15

Still from Fritz Lang's *M* (1931). Accessed via the Austrian Film Museum [filmmuseum.at].

The image of the outsider abounds in Weimar culture. Monsters and vampires, hypnotists and swindlers, gangsters and murderers—the literature and especially the films of the era teem with such 'impostors' (Peter Sloterdijk) who disrupt the extant social order through transgressive practices of violence, sexuality, madness and crime. At a symbolic level, these encounters with the unfamiliar can be—and have been—interpreted as an expression of Germany's fraught interwar experience of crisis and instability. Yet they may also—so the premise of this paper—be mined for their contributions to a critical imaginative engagement with burning issues relating to justice, rights and the politics of law. Through a reading of selected texts, the aim here is to exemplify how Weimar cinematic narratives of transgression disseminate a popular jurisprudence that not only scrutinizes contemporary legal norms and practice but also seeks to produce new views and values—e.g. by triggering perception of the need for legal reform, by encouraging reevaluation of understandings of authority, legality and justice, or by questioning commonly-held assumptions about the pathologies and normality of violence.

Steven Howe is Senior Teaching and Research Fellow at the University of Lucerne, Switzerland. His research interests include German and European Romanticism, early-twentieth-century German literature and film, as well as interdisciplinary themes at the intersection between law and the humanities. His publications include: *Heinrich von Kleist and Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Violence, Identity, Nation* (2012), *Unverhoffte Wirkungen: Erziehung und Gewalt im Werk Heinrich von Kleists* (with Ricarda Schmidt and Seán Allan, 2015) and *Recht und Kultur* (edited with Jessica C. Lai, 2015). He is currently working on a project exploring representations of law, crime and justice in the films of the Weimar era in Germany.

Presented by the

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