

NOTES ON FRITZ LANG'S *M*, AERIAL VISION + MAPPING IMPULSE

I. KEY ASPECTS TO FOCUS ON

1. New Objectivity: anti-Expressionism

2. Focus on consumerism + objects in display windows in geometrical arrangements

Luring girls with consumption of toys leads to being consumed and displaced by objects as traces.

3. Urban culture

4. High angle shots of anonymous crowds + cartography

5. Redefinition of identity:

a] traces an individual leaves behind, i.e., identity papers, handwriting, scent, police records (Beggars' investigation involves branding)

b] interchangeability of people and objects

6. Fascination with objects

II. TOM GUNNING ON *M*

No immediately identifiable protagonist, no pov (164)

Sound & use of off-screen space -> uncertainty of the frame: at any moment the frame can bleed toward an unseen area simply by including a sound whose source is not seen.

Opening of screen space in dialogue with unseen space. (165)

Frame = border between seen & unseen (166)

"New Objectivity": movement that differs from 19th c. realism through emphasis on non-human patterns, blend of abstraction & detailed rendering of objects. (166)

Lang moves away from Expressionist influences to influences of New Objectivity, facilitated by fascination with objects (= a turn towards realism). Objects become opaque (not allegorical), material and manifest a decorative impulse (184)

Sound & its source also attract attention via magnification (167); for Lang, sound evokes the unseen and off-screen, but also the unheard (silence) (167)

Discontinuity: sequences edited with intercutting between scenes (167); discontinuity used to create a sense of the space of the city: topographic view and parallel editing (168);

Lang's topography shows people united in patterns, yet alienated and separate from each other (168)

Beckert introduced via off screen space & shadow on poster: signs of identity (172)

Urban space based on surveillance & communication; bereft of narrative and engaged in in geometrical subdivision, abstraction (173)

Love of diagram & abstract representation of space: the topographical view from above, nearly 2 dimensional (174)

Atomistic narrative -> fragmentation; scenes are linked by sounds (176)

Topographical view of city in process of looking for murderer is narrated by phone conversation between minister and chief of police: their distance from one another emphasizes discontinuity; conversion of city into series of charts and maps. Lang capitalizes on telephone's extension through space and its role as a network to make his own connections between shots taking place in different locations; also the speakers' voices disconnected from their bodies. (177)

Shot of huge fingerprint contrasts in scale with the man at desk, dwarfed by the image: power of this conception of identity as a print of itself, a kind of diagram. (178)

Survey of candy shop owners: crime scene model becomes center of bull's eye of concentric circles traced by huge compass; view from above = pattern of lines and forms, intersections & borders, geometry (180)

Surveillance network -> identity = identity papers, fingerprints, asylum & hospital records (181)

Objects presented from high angle view: geometrical, symmetrical, and ordered arrangements, e.g., tools of thieves and stolen objects (184); in Beggar's hall: cigars, cigarettes, sandwiches (284)

Cp goods displayed in shop windows (184): shot of Beckert through shop window which is itself reflecting another scene and projecting it over Becker (a natural superimposition); a large diamond-shaped pattern of knives pointed inward frames Beckert's head; his belly is circled by an array of spoons. This is followed by a shot previously off screen of a young girl circled by knives. Beckert is captured by one of the devices of consumer culture and the girl is his object. His entrapment is reinforced by the superimposed geometrical patterns.(188-89)

Loss of identity and place in community -> anonymity which necessitates machinery of categorization & surveillance (185)

Final scene of confrontation with the outlaws: use of 180 degree reverse angle (194)