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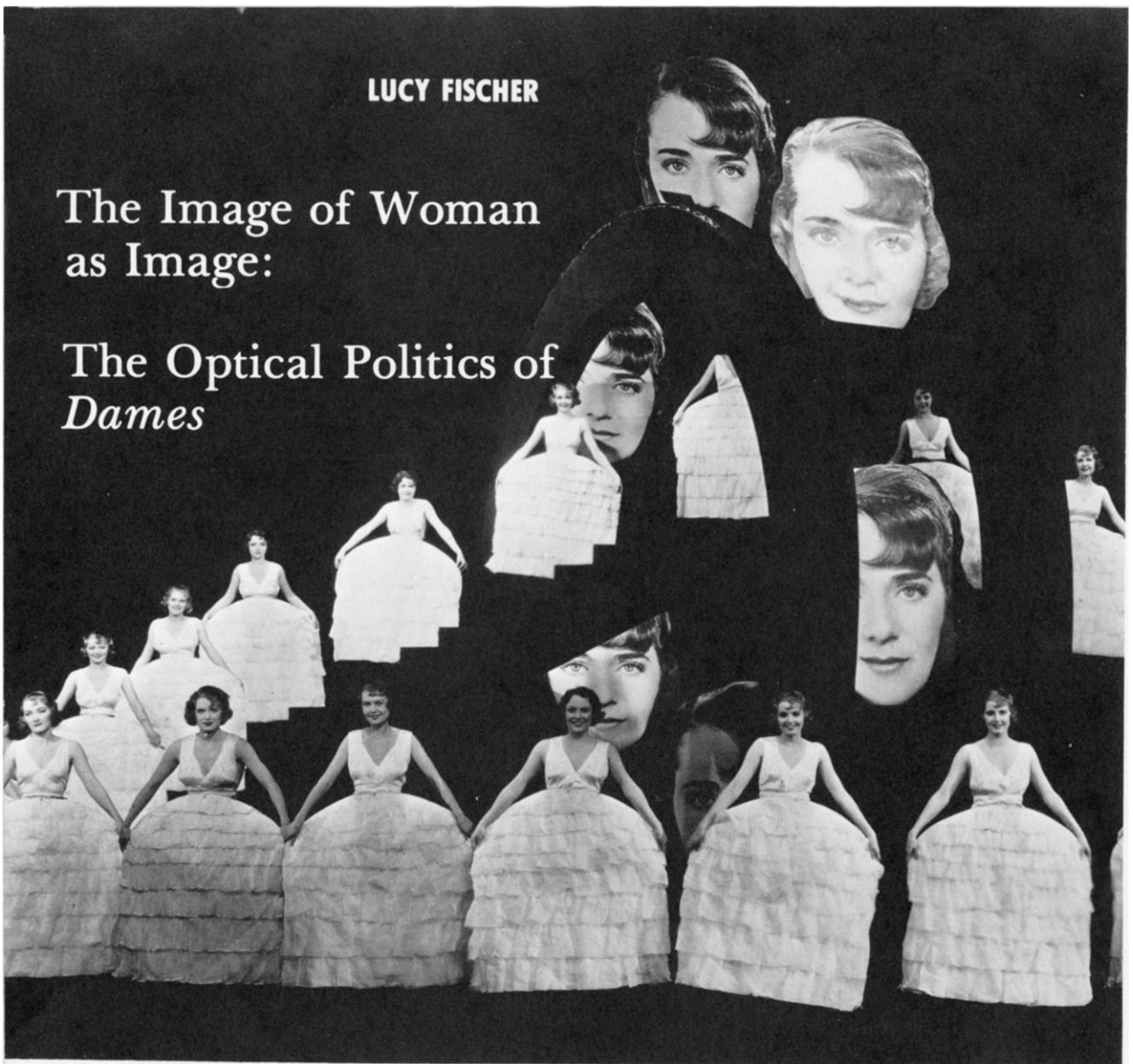


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LUCY FISCHER

The Image of Woman as Image:

The Optical Politics of *Dames*



I never had the intention of making eroticism or pornography. I love beautiful girls and I love to gather and show many beautiful girls with regular features and well-made bodies. It is the idea of spectacle which is expressed in "What do you go for?" What do you come to do, why do you go to a spectacle? It is not the story, it is not the stars, nor the music. What people want to see are beautiful girls.

—BUSBY BERKELEY¹

In the proliferation of literature on the status of women in film the most common critical strategy has been that of distilling from the cinematic narrative an abstract "image" of women in film. Thus, from the reverential treatment accorded to the Gish persona in the films of D. W. Griffith, Marjorie Rosen extracts the image of woman as posed on a Victorian pedestal. From the relationship of the Doris Day character to her male protagonists she posits a vision of woman as militant

crusader for chastity. To characterize the adolescent film heroines of the fifties she conjures the image of Popcorn Venus.² Similarly, Molly Haskell compares the malign erotic presence of Rita Hayworth in *Lady from Shanghai* to that of a mythological siren, and reads from the machismo sexuality of contemporary cinema the image of woman as rape victim.³

In approaching the production numbers of Busby Berkeley, however, we encounter cinematic texts of another order. For rather than present us with a realistic narrative from which we must delect a feminine "image," Berkeley's plastic abstractions present us with the essence of image itself—a vision of female stereotypes in their purest, most distillate form.

Berkeley's *mise-en-scène*, in fact, has a comic propensity to literalize the very metaphors upon which critics like Rosen and Haskell have seized in their characterization of the portrayal of women. While Griffith treats Lillian Gish as though she were on a pedestal, Berkeley, in *Broadway Serenade*, situates Jeanette MacDonald physically upon a pedestal. While some directors shroud their virginal heroines in an aura of sexual impenetrability, Berkeley, in "Pettin' in the Park," shrouds Ruby Keeler in a suit of metal armor. While films of the fifties cast women metaphorically in the role of Popcorn Venus, Berkeley, in *Fashions of 1934*, casts them literally as the goddess and her galley slaves. While certain stars have filled the screen with the sense of mythical sirens, Berkeley, in "By a Waterfall," fills the screen with the presence of mermaids themselves. Finally, as Molly Haskell finds the image of rape inscribed in the content of contemporary films, so one finds in the style of Berkeley's "through-the-leg tracking shots" implications of the sexual act transposed to the rhetoric of camera technique.

Thus Berkeley's production numbers provide a spectrum of images of women that range the continuum from Reverence to Rape. On this level Berkeley's *oeuvre* comes to constitute a definitive text upon the subject—an illustrated catalogue whose elegant pages display the cinematic image of woman in all its varied embodiments and incarnations.*

*In my analysis of *Dames* I will intentionally sidestep several issues which are nonetheless important but too complex to

A privileged work in this respect is *Dames* (1934), a film whose very title seems to propose it as germane to a discussion of women in cinema. What distinguishes *Dames* from other works in the Berkeley repertoire is the manner in which its production numbers (with their symbolic discourse on the feminine stereotype) are implanted within a narrative that deals directly with the same thematic issues. The dramatic episodes of the film were, of course, directed by another man—Ray Enright. But it is, nonetheless, intriguing to examine this Centaurian construction and disclose the ways in which its discrete segments inflect upon each other and create a rather curious cinematic text. In its hybrid totality *Dames* constitutes an eccentric treatise addressed to three interlocking aspects of the portrayal of women in cinema: (1) the nature of the image of women in film; (2) the character of the relationship between the female screen presence and the male spectator and/or director; (3) the attitude of the Hollywood industry toward the position of women in the commercial film medium.

The Feminine Mystique and Cinematic Technique

While conventional film narratives situate their female personae in a realistic universe, the Berkeley production numbers posit their existence in the realm of pure imagery. The space in which his sequences transpire does not conform to that of the concrete external world. Rather, it is abstract, and in its fluid chain of spatial metamorphoses, essentially ambiguous. From this perspective it becomes the perfect décor for fantasy, and often the narrative prologues explicitly locate the numbers in a character's consciousness. "I Only Have Eyes for You," for example, proposes itself as an oneiric meditation occasioned by Dick Powell's having fallen asleep on the subway.

But beyond the motivational ploys of the framing stories, it is Berkeley's cinematic technique which renders screen space as quintessentially fantastic. Often the numbers unfold in a void, black space whose dimensions are unknowable.

examine within the confines of a textual reading of the film. I introduce them here as a series of relevant questions: Can a film like *Dames* be judged aesthetically, independent of its underlying ideology? How exactly do films affect cultural attitudes? How do cultural attitudes affect films and our responses to them?

The mechanics of concealed cuts transport us magically from one locale to another, creating a geography unnavigable by the human body. In "I Only Have Eyes for You," a cut-out face of Ruby Keeler falls away to reveal "behind" it a ferris wheel of costumed girls. In actuality, the sites are connected only by a splice and the implication of spatial relation is merely an illusion. Spatial paradoxes emerge as well. In "I Only Have Eyes for You," we leave Keeler on the exterior rim of the ferris wheel in one shot, only to discover her on its interior surface in another. Movement in the numbers likewise declares itself synthetic, as images rotate, girls fly up to the lens of the camera, or advance forward propelled by Eisensteinian Jump-cuts.⁴

If the geography of the numbers is unchartable, their temporality is unmeasurable; and it is as far removed from the flow of normal time as is that ebony vacuum from the coordinates of conventional space. The constraints of causality are similarly dissolved. Thus in "I Only Have Eyes for You," the external world responds to Dick Powell's obsessional fantasies and a crowd of people can be made to simply "disappear from view."

Given Berkeley's *mise-en-scène* as the potential environment of fantasy, with what particular visions of the female image is it populated?

One approach to the question entails an examination of Berkeley's formal technique and the manner in which certain myths concerning women are inscribed in the seemingly value-free level of plastic composition. One should keep in mind the obvious fact that excepting their narrative prologues the production numbers of *Dames* exclude the presence of men. They are, in fact, elaborate corporeo-plastic constructions of women's bodies "composed" in particular décors. Clearly those compositions are more than just pictorial; and from their physical arrangements of the female form can be read covert assumptions about the female "norm."

We might begin with the very concept of *stereotype* which on one level denotes "having no individuality, as though cast from a mold." Ironically, this very notion of uniformity constitutes a stereotype in the depiction of women in film. One thinks of female screen personae in terms of *types* with a reflex that is not so automatic in the case

of males. We have, for instance, the "blonde bombshell," the "femme fatale," the "vamp," the "gamin," or the "sex goddess." These are not "career" specifications as are the masculine labels of "gangster" or "cowboy," but rather categories of sexual proclivity and physical demeanor. Indeed the entire history of cinema can be seen as constituting an ongoing fashion show of popular female "styles."

This sense of the feminine screen persona as conforming to a particular type is nowhere more apparent than in the chorus-lines of Berkeley's production numbers. Part of the humor of the numbers, in fact, arises from our perception that the women look remarkably alike. This notion is eventually catapulted into another realm entirely in "I Only Have Eyes for You," where women are not merely similar but disconcertingly identical. Berkeley clearly prides himself on this stylistic penchant. He speaks in an interview of a particular day of hiring in which he auditioned 723 women to select only three:

My sixteen regular girls were sitting on the side waiting; so after I picked the three girls I put them next to my special sixteen and they *matched just like pearls*. (Italics mine)⁵

Ultimately this conception of female as stereotype is embodied within the *mise-en-scène* of Berkeley's work, particularly in the production number also titled "Dames." There, as though to demonstrate the precise matching of the Berkeley girls, he lines them up behind one another until their multiplicity is subsumed in an image of apparent unity. "Dames" also contains a sequence emblematic of woman's alleged conformity to an external image: in depicting a row of show girls making up before their dressing-table mirrors, Berkeley deploys yet another row of women to represent their reflections. One thinks of Molly Haskell's statement on this issue and the way that Berkeley's iconography tends to literalize it. For in speaking of the genesis of feminine cinematic stereotypes, she refers to how the Gish persona was succeeded by a "long line of replica mirror-image virgins."⁶

Although Berkeley's relish of the chorus line takes on a transcendent quality, its presence is, after all, a convention of musical comedy. But his

mode of engaging it is not, and it is on this level of stylistic innovation that more significant attitudes toward women emerge. What happens in most Berkeley numbers (and quintessentially in "Dames") is that the women lose their individuation in a more profound sense than through the similarity of their physical appearance. Rather, their identities are completely consumed in the creation of an overall abstract design.

Furthermore the configurations of those designs can clearly be read for meaning. The perpetual arrangement of girls in circular format seems closely associated with symbols of female sexuality. The objects which the chorus line forms are equally tendentious. In "Dames" the girls delineate the sentimental boundaries of a heart. And in "The Shadow Waltz" in *Gold Diggers of 1933* they outline a shapely violin being bowed—a metaphor that any Freudian analyst would be proud to unpack. Thus in the Berkeley numbers the notion of women as sexual *objects* takes on a deviously witty relevance.

The chorus-line patterns tend as well to literalize the notion of two-dimensional feminine screen portrayal. If there is any match for the "flatness" of the Ruby Keeler character in the Enright

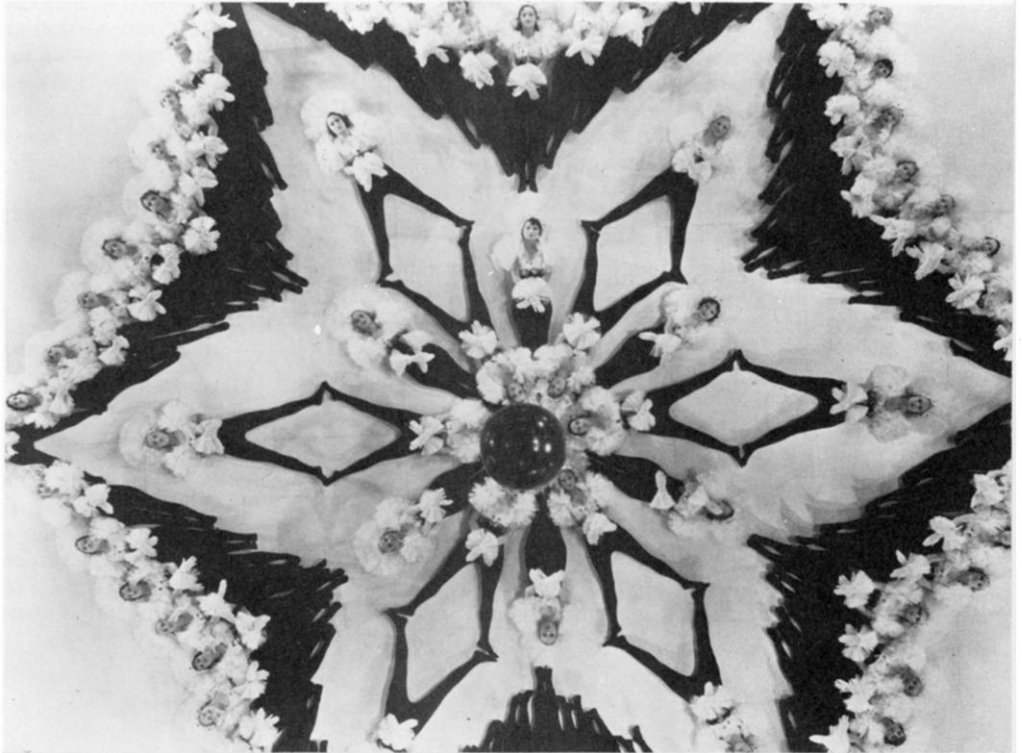
narrative it is clearly the show girls in "Dames" whose bodies are pressed into black-and-white patterns, employed interchangeably with animated designs.

This reduction of the female form to biotic tile in an abstract mosaic is not devoid of overtones of power. It tends, in fact, to literalize the stereotype of the male director as potent Svengali who transforms the dull but malleable female form into an alluring screen presence. The words of von Sternberg seem particularly applicable to Berkeley's cinematic technique:

It is the nature of woman to be passive, receptive, dependent on male aggression . . . In other words she is not normally outraged at being manipulated; on the contrary, she usually enjoys it. I have plenty of evidence to assume that no woman, as opposed to male, has ever failed to enjoy this possibly mortifying experience of *being reorganized in the course of incarnating my vision of her.*⁷ (Italics mine.)

Even the narrative element of the production number "Dames" alludes to the sexuality of power: it portrays an all-male theatrical board of trustees which choreographs the careers of show girls from behind the scenes.

DAMES:
Circular
motifs as
symbols of
feminine
sexuality



Privileged in the canon of female stereotypes is the conception of woman as decoration, a notion which has had its supreme manifestation in the history of film. Once more, in the iconography of the Berkeley sequences we find this cliché in its rarefied form, unencumbered by the obfuscations of a plot. For the function of the women in a number like "I Only Have Eyes for You" is essentially plastic, and their status is equal to that of the décor. They are, in fact, simply elements of the total *mise-en-scène*—facets of its comprehensive ornamental structure. Even the frills of their white organza dresses seem to tell us that they are, after all, pure "fluff."

Relevant to this impression is the curious fact that Berkeley girls did not (and, often, *could* not) dance—a phenomenon which accentuates our perception of their role as visual embellishments. As Berkeley himself unabashedly confesses:

I never cared whether a girl knew her right foot from her left so long as she was beautiful. I'd get her to move or dance, or do something. All my girls were beautiful and some of them could dance a little, some of them couldn't.⁸

In a number like "I Only Have Eyes for You," the women's gestures (swaying back and forth or undulating the folds of their gowns) clearly do not function as choreography. Rather they serve as kinetic designs which interact dialectically with the complex trajectories of the mobile décor and the moving camera. But the awesome proficiency of Berkeley's mechanical décor tends to underscore the technical incompetence of the Berkeley girls and concretize the image of women as essentially passive. The sets of "I Only Have Eyes for You" are elaborate preprogrammed machines for action which transport the girls through dizzying cycles of aimless, repetitive movement. What heightens this sense of passivity is the zombiism of the Berkeley girls, a quality that they exude beneath the surface of their opaque, dissociative grins. The Berkeley girls, in fact, seem to extend passivity virtually into catatonia and propose the image of female as ambulatory Surrealist mannequin.

Ultimately what becomes apparent from a reading of Berkeley's *mise-en-scène* is the way in which he generates an image of woman as "image" itself. This portrayal proceeds on multiple levels. She is represented as image in terms of her em-

bodiment of cultural stereotypes, and as image in her posture of conjured male projection. But the presentation of these first two conceptions depends upon the establishment of a third, and that is Berkeley's obsession with the status of woman as *film image*—as plastic, synthetic, celluloid screen object. Von Sternberg once said of Marlene Dietrich that "she was a perfect *medium* . . . who absorbed his direction and . . . responded to his conception of a female archetype."⁹ While von Sternberg perhaps offered this rhetorically, Berkeley has embraced it literally. For through his articulation of woman as film image she becomes quite concretely a medium—one which in its pliancy can be molded to the configurations of the Berkeley imagination.

All these varied senses of woman as image seem encoded within the iconography of "I Only Have Eyes for You." It is, first of all, a sequence whose feminine imagery is diegetically situated within the realm of Dick Powell's fantasies. Its references to women and advertising (the subway posters for Society Cosmetics and Willards for the Hair) furthermore invoke the cultural clichés of surface beauty and vanity. But what is most important in the sequences occurs with the magical dissolves on the advertising posters (transforming each model's face into that of Ruby Keeler) and with the fluid bridge from the final poster to the huge Ruby Keeler head adrift in a black amorphous space. For through those shot transitions we move from the domain of extra-filmic senses of the female image to the possibilities of its embodiment in cinematic imagery itself.

During the course of the number Berkeley proceeds not only to catalogue those possibilities in formal terms but, ironically, to create a fabric of imagery that comments on his very act of creation. One thinks, for example, of a final segment of the number, comprised of an elaborate chain of process shots. First, we see Ruby Keeler step into a mock-up mirror frame, which becomes reduced in scale and supported by a base consisting of small Ruby Keeler figures aligned in apparent unity. Eventually the entire "mirror" is grasped by the hand of a large Ruby Keeler figure who enters from off-screen left. What we have here, of course, is a pictorial allegory—one which dramatizes the employment of women through cinematic processes to present and support a stereotypical

DAMES

image of women. But the most evocative trope of the number comes in the form of the giant, jig-saw-puzzle vision of Ruby Keeler's face. What we see is an obedient cluster of three-dimensional women who proceed to cover their bodies with a two-dimensional photographic representation (a process which, significantly, is accomplished by lifting their skirts above their heads.) What is most intriguing, though, is the form that photograph takes. For it comes to us in the guise of a jig-saw puzzle—a fragmented version of an image that must be sequentially assembled. In his choice of this conceit Berkeley has again generated an iconography metaphoric of the portrayal of women in film. For it is a portrayal which, after all, involves the constitution of a giant synthetic image through the assemblage of interlocking pieces which we commonly refer to as "shots."

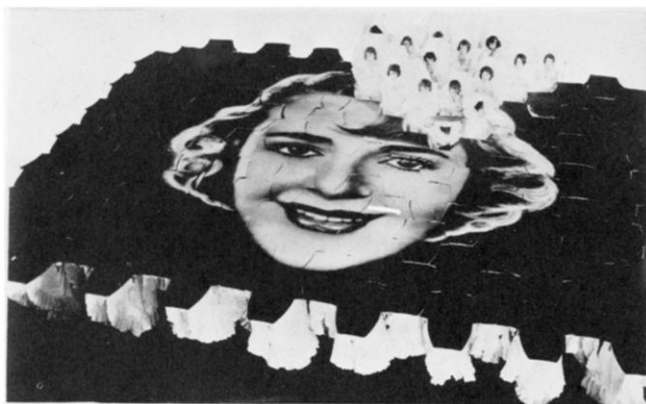
"Sweet and Hot"

In addition to translating certain stereotypes concerning women into the figurative discourse of cinematic imagery, Berkeley's *mise-en-scène* proposes a particular vision of female sexuality. In order to disclose this, however, it is necessary to locate Berkeley's production numbers within the narrative framework of Enright's *Dames*, and to situate *Dames* within the historical context of film censorship.

The Hollywood production code officially came into being in 1930; but since there were no adequate enforcement provisions it remained for some time merely an advisory document.¹⁰ In the early thirties, public criticism of film content mounted and, according to Richard Randall in *Censorship of the Movies*, the year 1934 (the release date of *Dames*) marked "the turning point of self-regulation":

American Catholic bishops formed the Legion of Decency to review and rate films. At the same time they threatened the industry with a general boycott by Catholic patrons if the moral tone of films did not improve. This pressure resulted in the MPPDA's [Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America] formation of the Production Code Administration (PCA) as a quasi-independent, self-supporting body charged with enforcing and interpreting the code.¹¹

Evidently the power of the MPPDA and the PCA was based on their domination by the five largest



companies in the industry which, in turn, controlled 70% of the film theaters.

In this historical perspective the plot of *Dames* seems an ingenious parody of the censorship of movies. For the Legion of Decency, we have the Ounce Foundation for the Elevation of American Morals. (The constant reference to the organization as the "O.F. for the E. of A. M." seems to mock the alphabets of the MPPDA and the PCA as well). For the censorship of film is substituted the censorship of theater. In keeping with the economic realities of film censorship Ezra Ounce (Hugh Herbert) is portrayed as a millionaire and the opening sequence of the film catalogues the name plaques of the myriad enterprises which constitute his monopolistic empire.

Typically, Ezra Ounce's specific objections to the theater focus on the figure of the show girl. It is the flagrant display of women on the musical stage that he identifies as the source of its moral danger.

Clearly we are to regard Ezra Ounce as a blustering fool, a repressed, adolescent man who mistakes "good clean fun" for sinful prurience. After all, what goes on on the stage of the theater is to be so innocuous as to permit the participation of the antiseptic Ruby Keeler (who plays his niece, Barbara).

But ironically what Ezra Ounce supposedly views on the stage as theatrical numbers within the diegesis of *Dames* are, in actuality, the cinematic insertions of Busby Berkeley. This stylistic dislocation is echoed by a shift in sensibility as well. For while the Enright narrative proceeds to spoof the need for censorship of female sexuality, the Berkeley numbers intercede to present it in more slyly perverse configurations than Ezra could have anticipated (or even perhaps appreciated.) This tonal disjunction seems epitomized in the title

of the fictional musical comedy from which the numbers emerge, which is "Sweet and Hot." For the diegesis of the film would have us believe that what transpires on the stage is naively "sweet." But the realities of our viewing experience contradict this and assert that what Berkeley depicts on the screen is unremittingly "hot."

"The Girl at the Ironing Board," for example, presents us with what was called in those days a "specialty number." The epithet seems peculiarly apt since it unfolds as a comic vignette on the sexual "specialty" of fetishism. It begins with Joan Blondell voyeuristically peering through the laundry window at a loving couple in a carriage outside. She sings:

*Nobody ever has whispered to me
The sweet things a girl loves to hear
Nobody's arms ever twined around mine
Still I'm not lonely for romance is near—
A girl who works at the laundry
Has a dream lover all of her own
A lover, unseen, whose love she keeps clean
With water and soap and a washing machine.*

Then, as though the subject of erotic symbolism and fetishistic partialism were not sufficiently overt, she continues:

*There is something about your pajamas
That fills me with sweet ecstasy
And because it's part of you,
I'm learning to love you
So bring back your laundry to me.*

The rest of the number dramatizes the notion of fetish as symbolic substitute for the "normal" sexual object. We see animated male laundry sing and gesture to her from the clothes-line; she even whisks a pair of longjohns from the pile and dances off with them. At the end of the number she is "gang raped" by a mass of laundry which slides down upon her from the lines.

In keeping with the fetishism syndrome the number represents the fetish in the context of a series from which Blondell chooses a favorite partner with "whom" she departs:

The construction of a series of love objects is exhibited in the [fetishist's] choice of a partner by first imagining a whole row of possibilities and then . . . picking one of them as a favorite.¹²

Significantly, the one aspect of the number that



does not conform to the syndrome is the notion of the fetishist as female. Although stereotypes of sexual behavior are currently under re-evaluation for their cultural determinants, it is nonetheless the case that as late as the Kinsey report of 1953 fetishism was considered an overwhelmingly male syndrome.¹³ Thus in "The Girl at the Ironing Board" we would seem to have a clear case of the imposition of a classically male fantasy on the behavior of a female screen persona.¹⁴

Finally, "The Girl at the Ironing Board" abounds in elements that seem to comment parodistically on the idea of censorship. After its eccentric portrayal of sexuality, the sequence ends on the saccharine note of a chirping bird which sings as Blondell and her laundry walk into the sunset. The Griffith-like sentimentality of this touch is comically false, as disingenuous as the stuffed bird itself which sits on an artificial prop tree.

One thinks as well of the song lyric which speaks of "keeping love clean" as one views this as a work whose implications had by-passed the process of Production Code laundering. The propriety of the numbers is much like the moral status of Horace

Hemingway (Guy Kibbee) which Ezra Ounce suspects is "nothing but a snare and illusion."

From the reviews at the time of the film's release, it seems likely that its implications escaped the public eye, as they had that of Ezra Ounce. An innocuous *New York Times* review of August 26, 1934, for example, described it simply as "an original combination of comedy and song . . . which is staged very cleverly."

The Gold Diggers or The Men With the Movie Cameras

But certain things clearly did not escape the public eye and it is precisely to the subject of spectator vision that one must turn to complete an analysis of *Dames*.

The title number of the film confronts the issue most explicitly. It begins with an all-male theatrical board meeting at which various investors argue about the elements which insure commercial stage success. One says: "I tell you gentlemen, if I'm going to put money into this show I want to be sure that we get the best music possible." Others interrupt advocating the importance of story or publicity until finally Dick Powell breaks into a song which establishes the economic base of show business on the male desire to look at women:

*Who writes the words and music for all the
girlie shows?
No one cares and no one knows.
Who is handsome hero some villain always frames?
Who cares if there's a plot or not, if its got
a lot of dames.
What do you go for? Go see the show for?
Tell the truth—you go to see those beautiful dames.*

Then as a horde of show girls enter the board room he expounds on this theme more thoroughly and reveals that the true gold diggers are to be found in the corporate male bureaucracy, and not in the chorus line as generally supposed:

*Leave your addresses, my big successes
All depend a lot upon you beautiful dames.
Oh dames are necessary to show business
Dames—without you there would be no business.
Your knees in action, that's the attraction
What good's a show without you beautiful dames.*

After this framing episode the sequence erupts into the actual production number. Significantly it emphasizes women's "knees in action" as the

girls' black-stockinged legs are employed to create geometric designs against a pure white floor.

Aside from "Dames," however, the theme of vision is referred to in almost every lyric of the score. One song is entitled "Try To See It My Way"; another (a fantasy of prenatal love) has Powell confessing that he adored Keeler when she "was a smile on her mother's lips and a twinkle in her father's eye." There is, of course, "I Only Have Eyes for You" which alternately represents the love of a woman as optical illusion and optical obsession.

But not only is the act of looking alluded to in the song lyrics of *Dames*, it is invoked in the mode of presenting the imagery of the production numbers themselves. Inscribed in Berkeley's optical stylistics is a virtual discourse on voyeurism and its relation to the female screen presence: the "Kino-Eye" has become that of a Peeping Tom. This notion is even brought to the literal surface of the narrative as one shot reveals an insert of a gossip column, "On the Rialto," whose byline is none other than Peeping Tom.

The implicit thesis of cinema as voyeuristic enterprise (as *spectacle*) is advanced on many levels in Berkeley's production numbers. One thinks immediately of his anecdote concerning his introduction of the close-up into the vocabulary of the film musical. Evidently Sam Goldwyn came on the set of *Whoopie* and questioned Berkeley about his motivation for the technique. Berkeley responded: "Well, we've got all the beautiful girls in the picture. Why not let the public see them?"¹⁵

Thus just as Berkeley comprehended the difference between the choreographic potential of theater and cinema, so too he seems to have grasped the difference in their voyeuristic appeal. For the close-up has the power to annihilate the spatial gap which distances the theatrical spectator from the female stage presence.

The number which most clearly transposes the issue of voyeurism into stylistic terms is "Dames." Berkeley fills the screen with girls clothed in provocative "Fredericks of Hollywood"-type negligees and has them engaged in the visually taboo pursuits of sleeping, bathing, and dressing. As though to shame the camera for its intrusion, however, the lens is continually punished by the withdrawal of sight. A whole chain of such instances occurs in the beginning of the number. In

the first such shot, girls run up to the camera and obscure the lens with the fabric of their nightgowns. Then in a masked cut (with attendant change of décor) the fabric is removed to reveal a girl in a bath tub. The girl proceeds to cover the lens with a powder puff which (through another masked cut) is removed by a girl at a dressing table. Eventually the girl takes a bottle of perfume and sprays the surface of the lens. We next see the lens wiped clean, but this time our vision is identified with a particular male stagehand and the lens has become a window through which he watches the show girls approach.

This dialectic of seeing and being prevented from seeing is epitomized in the number's final voyeuristic character, a "blind" man who sheepishly removes his dark glasses to stare at the show girls who pass on the street. (We should remember that as English legend has it Peeping Tom was, in fact, a Coventry tailor who went blind after peering at Lady Godiva.)

Although Berkeley plays on the notion of camera as voyeuristic tool, he nonetheless conceals its presence. While mirrors figure dominantly in the imagery of the numbers (the "mirror" of women in "I Only Have Eyes for You," and the dressing-table "mirrors" in "Dames") they are most often false surfaces which refuse to reflect an image of the camera or of the man who stands behind it.

But the iconography of the Berkeley numbers seem to go beyond engaging the female screen persona as source of mere voyeuristic pleasure. For in addition to the numbers whose effect depends on the presence of *actual* women one is struck by the existence of sequences content with their photographic image.

We might recall, for example, that on the subway in "I Only Have Eyes for You" Dick Powell conspicuously ignores the corporeal reality of Ruby Keeler to embark on a fantasy digression based on her photographic likeness. But the issue seems crystallized in the final sequence of "Dames." What we see on the screen is a shot of the Berkeley harem arranged in pyramidal fashion against a complex décor. Imperceptibly, the image of the actual women transmutes to that of a photographic representation. And in a parody of sexual entry, the number ends with Powell's head breaking through the image surface.

Thus what emerges in *Dames* is yet another sense of "the image of woman as image." For it is not so much the physical feminine *presence* that is celebrated in *Dames* as much as her synthetic, cinematic *image*. And ultimately the privileged status of that image and its mode of presentation propose it as a virtual *substitute* for woman herself. Von Sternberg had spoken of manipulating the female screen image into a "visual aphrodisiac."¹⁶ But in *Dames* it seems, like Blondell's laundry, to have acquired the dimension of a fetish.

Once more we find ironic reverberations of the issue within the Enright narrative. In an early scene of the film, Horace Hemingway goes to visit his millionaire cousin, Ezra Ounce, and with polite duplicity remarks that his daughter, Barbara, sends her love. The following comic dialogue casually ensues, but in retrospect seems to encapsulate the dynamics of the portrayal of women in *Dames*:

Ezra: Barbara sends her love to me? Why should Barbara send her love to me? She's never even seen me!

Horace: She's seen your picture.

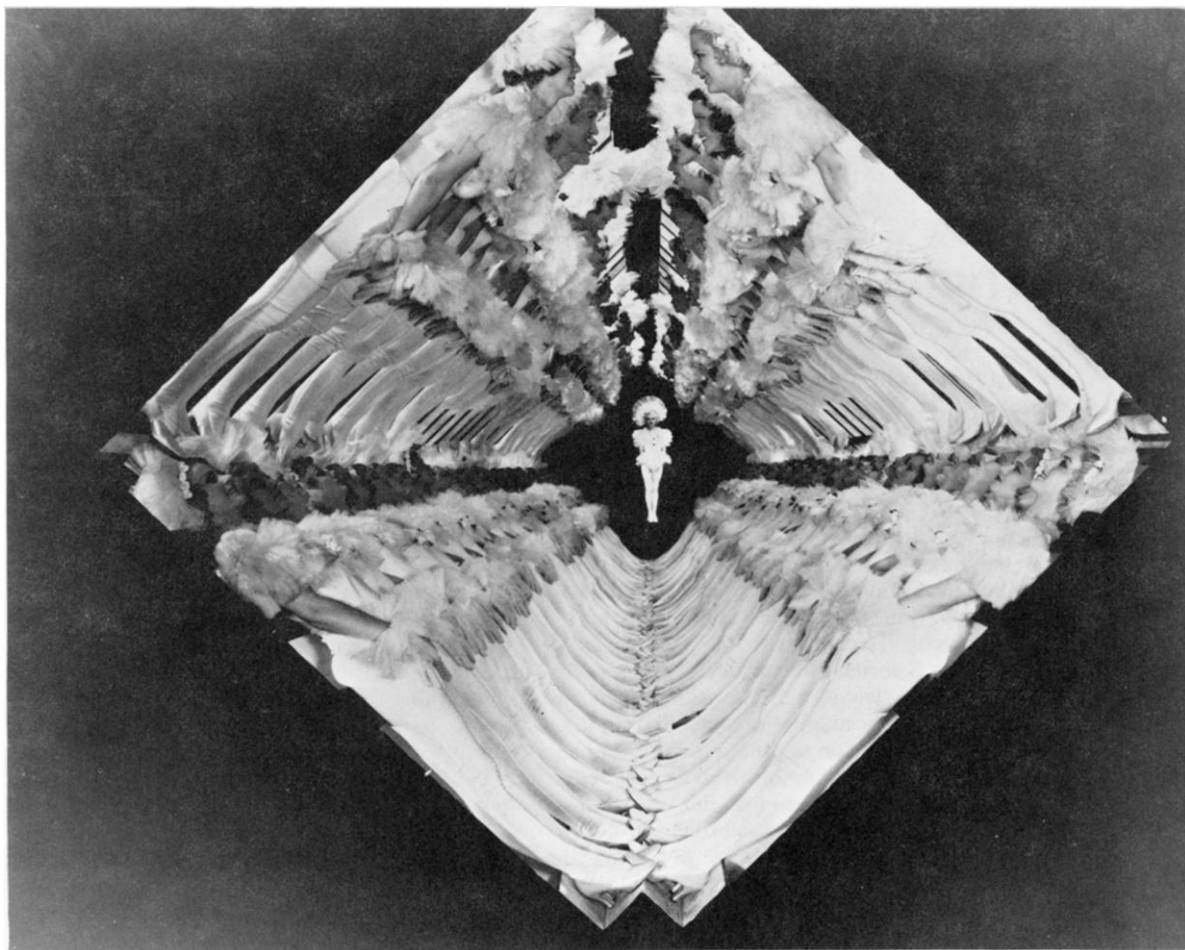
Ezra: Well, then . . . *Maybe she's sending her love to my picture.*

(continued from page 1)

Poague a mistaken affiliation—he is at SUNY-Geneseo—through mixing him up with Peter Hogue (who is a contributor to *Movietone News*).

PERIODICALS

Since a great many university film classes are put on in language departments (English above all), it is not surprising to have a magazine called *Literature/Film Quarterly* (\$2.00 per copy, \$8.00 per year, from Salisbury State College, Salisbury, Md. 21801). The focus is primarily on adaptations and relations between film and theater or novel, but there are some general interviews with directors, some studies of films (*Night Porter*, for instance) without any special literary angle, and an occasional theoretical piece (such as a critique of Wollen's semiology). A few book reviews are also included in each issue. The contributors are all academics, which doesn't seem to make for the liveliest writing, but much careful thought can be found in each issue. Printed in blue ink, which tends to make many still look as if they're faded blueprints.



NOTES

1. Busby Berkeley, "Rencontre avec le grand 'Architecte du Musical,'" *Cinéma*, #103 (Feb. 1966), p. 44.
2. Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus* (New York: Avon, 1973), paraphrase of material on pages 71, 211, 300ff.
3. Molly Haskell, *From Reverence To Rape* (New York: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 204, p. 323ff.
4. I am referring to the series of triadic "jump-cuts" which occur during the coronation sequence in *Ivan the Terrible—Part I*.
5. B. Pike & D. Martin, *The Genius of Busby Berkeley* (Reseda, California: Creative Film Society), p. 64.
6. Haskell, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
7. Josef von Sternberg, *Fun in a Chinese Laundry* (New York: MacMillan, 1965), p. 120.
8. Pike and Martin, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-53.
9. Josef von Sternberg, Introduction to *The Blue Angel—Classic Film Script* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968) p. 12.
10. Richard Randall, *Censorship In The Movies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), p. 199.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Wilhelm Stekel, *Disorders of the Instincts and Emotions* (New York: Liveright, 1952), p. 33.

13. A Kinsey, W. Pomeroy, C. Martin, P. Gebhard, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (New York: Pocket Books, 1953), p. 679.

14. The overtones of fetishism in the iconography of *Dames* would seem to go beyond this particular number. In the Enright narrative we have the absurd character of Ezra Ounce who is depicted on several occasions toying obsessively with a series of ceramic elephants. And the image of dozens of Benda-masked Ruby Keeler likenesses in "I Only Have Eyes for You" has the distinct sense of fetishistic partialism (the necessity for the love object to display particular attributes). Even the precise "matching" of the chorus girls carries similar implications.

15. Tony Thomas and Jim Terry, *The Busby Berkeley Book* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1973), p. 25.

16. Von Sternberg, Introduction to *The Blue Angel*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.