

NOTES ON BUSBY BERKELEY'S *DAMES*

Lucy Fischer, "The Image of Woman as Image: The Optical Politics of *Dames*"

Introduction:

1) thesis: different from other Berkeley works because production numbers deal with same thematic issues as narrative

2) Portrayal of women in cinema:

a) nature of image of women in film

b) relation of female on screen and male narrator/director

c) Hollywood's attitude toward women

3) Screen space = fantastic, no reference to concrete external world

I. Feminine mystique and cinematic technique

A. **Space**: editing creates impossible geography from one cut to another: use of jump cuts -> spatial relation = illusion

Cp. Keaton, Eisenstein

B. **Time**: unmeasurable; causality = dissolved

C. **Women as Décor**

1. no men

2. **women lose identities** in creation of abstract design -> sexual objects

Use of rows of women & other rows to present their mirror images

3. **uniformity of appearance**

4. **use of stereotypes** of female styles, rather than careers as with men

D. Berkeley girls often could not dance -> image of woman = an "image" itself & particularly a film image, which could be molded and manipulated

e.g., Dick Powell's fantasy: "I only have eyes for your":

women = advertising posters

+ dissolves transform each model's face into that of Ruby Keeler

in black amorphous space -> Multiple Rubies

+ final segment: PLAYING WITH SCALE

a. Ruby steps into mock-up mirror

b. mirror frame reduced in scale -> supported by small Ruby figures

c. hand of large Ruby figure enters from off-screen left

d. final jig saw vision of Ruby's face—produced by 3D women who lift skirts over their heads to present a photographic representation made of "pieces" suggesting individual "shots"

II. Sweet and Hot:

A. The location of musical #s in a) narrative

b) historical context of film censorship

1934 – release date of *Dames* + enforcement of Production Code

Plot of *Dames*= parody

B. Censor ship of film is represented by censorship of theater, particularly

in Busby's dance #s-> sly parody, e.g., "The Girl at the Ironing Board"

Voyeurism & fetishism: portrayed by male laundry at end of #: she is "gang raped"

Fetishism: selection of "favorite" partner among the pjs