

NOTES ON KRACAUER & MASS ORNAMENT

I "EPHEMERAL PHENOMENA"

pp. 68 - 69: concern with popular culture: film, the streets, sports, operetta, revues, advertisements the circus; interest in Paris street map, boredom, hotel lobbies, best-sellers, photography, dance, musical revues, picture palaces, white collar office workers and changing trends in film-making

anticipates today's cultural studies

p. 70: Kracauer's theory of entertainment: a spatialization of time, a transformation into spectacle (See Mulvey on woman as object of the look & male as bearer of look)

p. 72: K focused on new kind of consumerism resulting from rootlessness, isolation, economic & emotional insecurity and stress of urban living

p. 73: spaces of this new culture: Berlin cafes and dancehalls with their exotic décor; the role of popular music

II. THE MASS ORNAMENT

p. 77: instead of voyeurism, which involves male protagonist with whom male spectator identifies and woman as object of their looks, K highlights collective nature & depersonalized force of modern visual pleasure: female revues; parades, crowds & armies

p. 78: collective form of reception & different mode of identification & self-representation: K shows how **Tiller girls or spectator sports** can stand as structural analogues to capitalism and its mode of production. The revues and sporting contests **parody the reality of Taylorized assembly-line factory system.**

Tiller girls: "the possibility of an aesthetic relation to organized toil: "The legs of the Tiller Girls correspond to the hands in the factory" as "the aesthetic reflex of the rationality aspired to by the prevailing economic system."; fragmented into "indissoluble girl clusters" by the spectacular choreography, they are composed of "arms, thighs, and other segments." Like the assembly line, in which "everyone does his or her task on the conveyor belt, performing a partial function without grasping the totality," the chorus line turns dancers into cogs in a suprapersonal, paramilitary machine and turns dance into a "marking of time." (K 76-79).

K **on spectators** of these events: "arranged by the stands in tier upon ordered tier," spectators become absorbed into the mass ornament, mesmerized by a mirror image of their own condition. (K 76-79)

III. RECEPTION = DISTRACTION

p. 80: DISTRACTION = a mode of attention for dealing with a complex visual environment:
alertness under conditions of discontinuity

p. 81: Material discontinuity in film strip + heterogeneity of apparatus (optical, mechanical, chemical) -> surface flow and disconnected sensory stimuli typify the conditions of reception of all modern art and sports, e.g., Super Bowl

IV. BUSBY BERKELEY REALIZES THE MASS ORNAMENT VIA CINEMA, SURPASSING THE THEATRICAL

Berkeley mistrusted editing and filmed sequences with 1 camera, with which he rejected conventional perspective: material quality of shot is flattened & freed from realist restraints: image = pure surface contributing to composition of geometrical figures. (130)

Structure of Berkeley's choreography: synecdoche and metonymy: the one becomes many, and the many become one:

- 1) establishment of individual or couple
- 2) number opens up and individual is absorbed into mass
- 3) individual returns, intact but transformed

"The experience of losing oneself in the group, in the great ensemble, is akin to ecstasy. It is a moment of transcendence and fusion, analogous to orgasm, but erupting beyond the confines of the ego to merge self and society, sexuality and political content, emotion and ideology" (Martin Rubin, "The Crowd, the Collective, and the Chorus" p. 78)