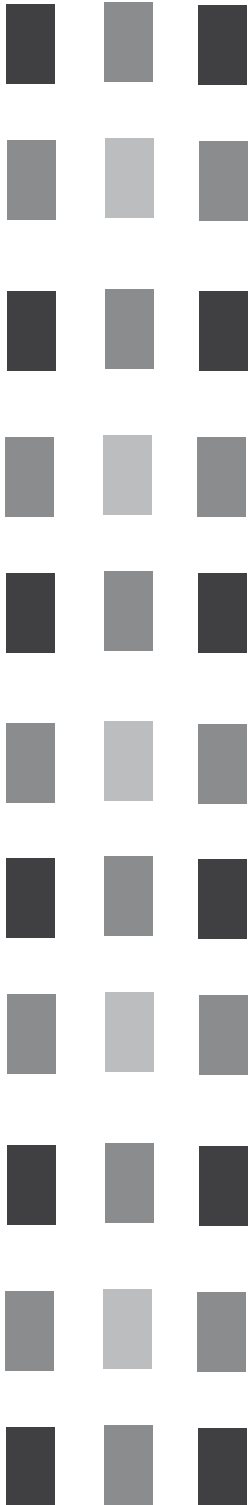


Between Ornament and Monument

Siegfried Kracauer and the Architectural
Implications of the Mass Ornament

Joan Ockman



"Construction plays the role of the subconscious."

Walter Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century" (1935)¹

"Surface-level expressions, by virtue of their unconscious nature, provide unmediated access to the fundamental substance of the state of things."

Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament" (1927)²

How do urban phenomena mediate lived experience and historical knowledge? In what sense can the city be said to have a collective psyche or unconscious? The statements above, from key essays by Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer about the nature of modernity, implicitly reflect different conceptions of the built environment as a medium of consciousness.

For Benjamin, who quotes the above sentence from the opening paragraphs of Sigfried Giedion's *Bauen en Frankreich* (1928), it is the urban infrastructure – literally the city's engineering projects – that contain the seeds of what is to come in the capitalist metropolis. The early buildings in iron and glass are "wish-images," as Benjamin puts it (drawing on both Freud and Marx); they are images of a latent reality, one still obscured by the sedimented forms of the past, its potential as yet barely glimpsed by architects. The first architects to employ the new materials in the 1820s thus embellish iron columns with Pompeian motifs and model their railroad stations on chalets. "Outwardly, construction still boasts the old pathos," continues Giedion in the passage from which Benjamin takes his statement; "underneath, concealed behind facades, the basis of our present existence is taking shape."³ For Benjamin, the early arcades – the German word *Passagen* is semiotically richer – crystallize a dialectical moment in the city's material and social construction. They freeze into form, if only briefly, its passage from premodernity to modernity; like dreams, they are both transitory and transitional. By the twentieth century, the new engineering technology will resolve the architectural schism in France between Ecole Polytechnique and Ecole des Beaux-Arts, constructor and decorator, in favor of industrial modernism. The great architect-engineer will literally be a *deus ex machina*, a figure who, like Le Corbusier, precociously grasps the implications of the new means of production and consciously translates processes of rationalization into rationalist aesthetics. While acknowledging the utopian impulse in both "constituent" and "transitory" facts, as Giedion calls them, Benjamin, like Giedion, affirms the primacy of the former. He heralds the coldness and sobriety of the Corbusian glass house, an object "without aura," as a work of revolutionary nihilism, a moral shock "that we badly need."⁴

The thematics and philosophical background of Benjamin's and Kracauer's writings are closely intertwined in the 1920s. Yet if Benjamin wishes to align himself with the conscious producers of the new culture, Kracauer's affinities are more on the side of reception than production, more on the side of the city than architecture. This is not an insignificant distinction. Ultimately, Kracauer's theory of the city is both *against theory* and *against architecture*; and in it, it is ornament that has privileged status as a bearer of consciousness. For Kracauer, the surfaces of the city, its fleeting appearances and skin-deep effects, are, paradoxically, the true signs of its historicity. Like the arcades for Benjamin, the mass ornament for Kracauer is both a material fact of urban reality and an allegorical figure of modernity. It is also the medium of modern urban consciousness par excellence, by its very nature embodying the superficiality, ephemerality, and transformational potential of modern life. This is the thrust of his most important essay, *The Mass Ornament*; and while this essay seemingly has little to do with architecture – its ostensible subject being a dance troupe called the Tiller Girls – the metaphor of the title and Kracauer's own background as an architect suggest otherwise.

The purpose of the following essay is twofold: first, to reread Kracauer's concept of the mass ornament through his ideas about architecture;⁵ and second, to historicize the mass ornament as a prefiguration of the society of spectacle that later would be theorized by Guy Debord in his polemical tract of 1967.⁶ Against Debord's negativity, however, Kracauer's more redemptive vision of mass culture suggests that the spectacle, like the mass ornament, is a multivalent medium with changing social meanings and functions. A brief glance at two spectacular cinematic practices of the 1930s, that of Busby Berkeley and that of Leni Riefenstahl, will serve to test this idea. Finally, taking note of a distinction made by Debord himself, we shall conclude with a couple of examples of recent architecture that further explore the relationship between surface and substance in an *Ornament der Masse* and offer a contemporary reflection on the spectacle culture of architecture.

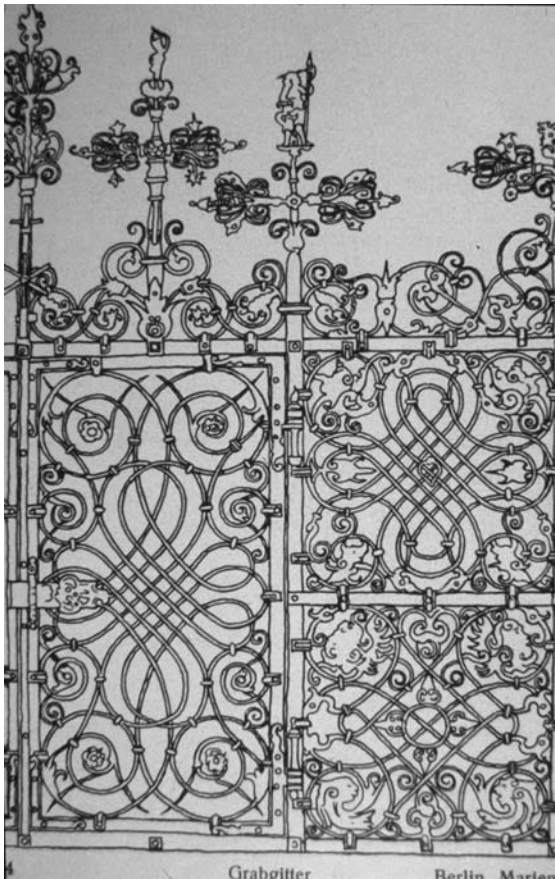
An anti-theory of architecture

To grasp the larger meaning of ornament for Kracauer, it is necessary to recall that he was trained as an architect and practiced for almost a decade before becoming able to support himself by the early 1920s as a journalist and critic at the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Yet his involvement with architecture brought him no satisfaction. A student first in Darmstadt, then in Berlin and in Munich under Theodor Fischer, he would note in his diary early on, "This kind of work is no fun. I consider it frit-

tering away my time. It tires me out and makes me incapable of more serious work and productive creation."⁷ He persevered nonetheless, receiving his professional degree in 1909, then practicing in Munich and Frankfurt. On the evidence of the handful of his drawings that still exist, rather traditional and eclectic relative to what the architectural vanguard was producing at this time (fig. 1), Fischer seems to have had a significant influence on him. Like Camillo Sitte, Fischer rejected cate-



1 | Siegfried Kracauer, project for an administration building in Frankfurt am Main, ca. 1916–17



2 | Wrought-ironwork cemetery gate at the Martenkirche, Berlin, measured drawing by Siegfried Kracauer

gorical applications of theoretical systems, and Kracauer would have appreciated his preference for the perceptual aspects of urban experience.

Upon finishing architecture school, Kracauer undertook doctoral studies in architectural history, completing a dissertation in 1914 on the development of wrought ironwork in premodern Germany. While ostensibly a specialist account, it contains hints of Kracauer's more mature ideas on ornament and the city. What attracts him is the "rich structurelessness" of this anonymous and historically overlooked tradition, particularly as it had developed in Germany as opposed to its more codified and geometric manifestations in France.⁸ In his dissertation, copiously illustrated with his own scale drawings as well as photographs, Kracauer expresses his admiration for the qualities of beauty, individuality, and delight that such forms offer (figs. 2, 3).

A more revealing view of Kracauer's experiences as an architect may be gleaned from his autobiographical novel *Ginster*, published "anonymously" in 1928, a year after the *Mass Ornament* essay, and bearing the subtitle *Written by Himself*. Theodor Adorno would later call it, in a somewhat left-handed compliment, Kracauer's "most significant achievement."⁹ The eponymous protagonist is an architect who chooses, or rather falls into, his profession as a result of a childhood penchant for doodling:

From early on *Ginster* liked to draw ornaments. In his school notebooks, in the unwritten-upon margins at the top of the pages, burst forth systems of repeating spirals. Petals radiated out from vertical spines to right and to left, turning into fine lines and expiring. ... Because of his spirals he fell into architecture. Where this plan had first sur-



3 | Wrought-ironwork sign. From Siegfried Kracauer

faced in his consciousness he could no longer fathom. But as he began to settle on it, Ginster noticed that the ground plans in his art history books formed ornamental figures. He observed that they were independent of their meaning in relation to the elevation; they appeared as black-and-white compositions of line-strokes, alphabet letters, and empty surface areas, whose beauty emanated from their purposelessness.¹⁰

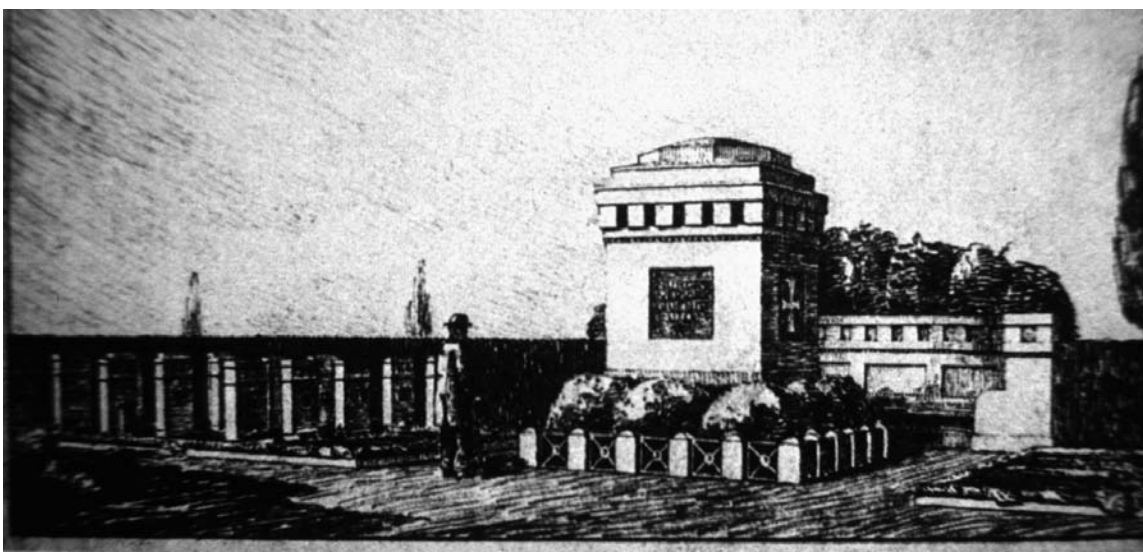
The absence of volition that leads in the novel to Ginster's decision to become an architect also characterizes his decentered, surface-skimming, naive-ironical relation to the world. A kind of good soldier Schweik or Chaplin character, Ginster turns naiveté into a shrewd technique for surviving in a world in which the individual is buffeted by social, political, and economic systems much larger than he is. Ginster's unfocused, atheoretical relation to the world becomes in Kracauer's other writings a theory (or, as Adorno suggests, a conscious anti-theory) of urban modernity. Ginster glides through the kaleidoscopic landscape of the modern city, his absent-minded gaze at times arrested by spatial details and mobile elements – the pattern dust makes on a window, the play of lights in the city at night. But unlike other flâneurs in the tradition of urban literature, he never enjoys a privileged gaze or intellectual overview. The forest of signs fails to congeal into a larger vision.

Like Kracauer, Ginster is bored by his profession; it promises neither self-fulfillment nor social transformation. The novel takes place against the backdrop of World War I, and Kracauer's antiwar sentiments merge with his cynicism about architecture. In an episode partly rooted in his own professional experience, Ginster attempts to challenge the militarism of his society by reproducing

its logic in an exaggeratedly hierarchical, geometric, and stripped-down design for a military cemetery (fig. 4). His attempt to make a critical project ends up backfiring, however, when the monumental scheme, entered in a competition by his boss, is taken at face value and wins first prize.

For Ginster/Kracauer it is only the more aleatory, heterogeneous, experiential, and improvisational parts of the city, especially its interstitial, nonmonumental spaces, that effectively resist the would-be totalizing and objectifying logic of architecture. This is the realm of ornament. Ornament is that which bursts forth within the urban fabric as uncontainable exuberance or preconceptual utterance, exceeding the grids of control and regimentation. It constitutes a reassertion of time – of impermanence – within the territorializing and monumentalizing domain of space. Kracauer interlaces the aleatoriness of ornament into the very texture of his novel through what Adorno calls its "arabesquelike" use of language.¹¹ As Kracauer writes elsewhere, in a statement that almost anticipates the psychogeographic drifts undertaken by the Situationists three decades later, "The value of cities is determined by the number of places in them that are devoted to improvisation."¹²

Conversely, Kracauer condemns the kind of spaces that lack this emancipatory dimension. In an essay on Kafka, one of the writers he most admired, Kracauer calls attention to the sinister imagery of building that recurs throughout Kafka's writings. The massive construction projects at which Kafka's human or animal-like creatures toil, always futilely, attest to their fundamental state of unfreedom, from the burrow of the giant mole to the Great Wall of China to the Tower of Babel. "Conceivably," Kracauer writes, "in his description



4 | Siegfried Kracauer, competition project for a soldiers' memorial in Frankfurt am Main, 1916

of the mole's cave, Kafka had in mind those human organizations whose triumphs consist in trenches, barbed-wire barriers, and wide-ranging finance projects."¹³

In other essays, contemporary architectural and urban sites become points of departure for reflec-



5 | Pedestrians in Berlin. Photograph by Mario v. Bucovich from Berlin

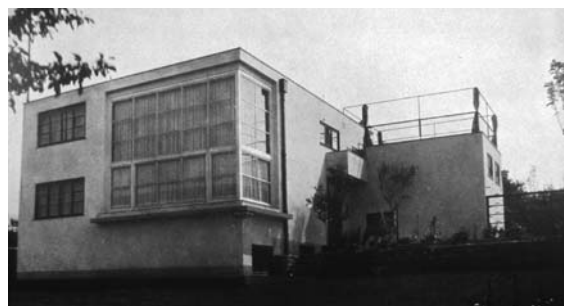


6 | Entry to an arcade building in Berlin. Photograph by Mario v. Bucovich from Berlin

tions on the anomie embedded in the fabric of the ever-changing, instantly obsolescing capitalist metropolis (fig. 5). The influence of the sociological writings of Georg Simmel, whose seminars Kracauer had attended while going to architecture school in Berlin, is evident in Kracauer's depiction of a community of strangers populating the lobby of a large metropolitan hotel.¹⁴ A meditation on the modernization of the nineteenth-century Linden Arcade pursues themes on which Benjamin likewise dwells in his *Arcades Project*: stripped of its ornamentation and idiosyncratic spaces, the now marble-clad passage building with its new glass roof is divested of its connection to history, a characterless and commercial proto-mall.¹⁵ (fig. 6) A similar observation occurs in *Street without Memory*, where Kracauer describes ornament as "a kind of bridge to the past" that has been destroyed.¹⁶

In an essay entitled *Shelter for the Homeless*¹⁷ Kracauer makes clear his critique of the Neue Sachlichkeit, at least in the debased form represented by the lobby of Haus Vaterland, a huge entertainment complex in Berlin built on the model of a department store, each floor offering a different type of amusement. In the kitsch heterogeneity of this early theme park, modernism becomes one more style among others in its ingenuous adjacency to spaces decked out as a Bavarian landscape, a Wild West bar, a romantic Spanish setting, and the like. "The mystery of *die neue Sachlichkeit* could not be more conclusively exposed than here," Kracauer writes. "[I]t is a facade concealing nothing ... it does not derive from profundity, but simulates it. Like denial of old age, it arises from dread of confronting death."¹⁷

Yet Kracauer is not against modernist architecture tout court. And he is altogether opposed to an ostentatious or retrograde use of ornament. This is clear from his reviews of architecture and urbanism in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. In an article on Ernst May's house for himself in Frankfurt, Kracauer affirms the Sachlichkeit of the architect's dwelling



7 | Ernst May, house for himself, Frankfurt am Main, 1926

as an unromantic but aesthetically essential reflection of modern life. "This is a house strictly for people who are averse to darkness, love movement, and are conscious they have a role to play in their time."¹⁸ (fig. 7) Yet, in a qualification that is key for Kracauer, he states that May's abstract constructivism should be seen only as a "passageway" (*Durchgangsweg*) to a "fuller" type of forming.¹⁹ Similarly, in a review of the German Building Exhibition of 1931 in Berlin, he admires Mies van der Rohe's installation as unpretentious and graceful, at once light-handed and firm.²⁰ Yet a month later, revisiting it, he questions the minimalism of the furniture: the steel chairs are not for human beings to sit on, says Kracauer, but their x-ray images.²¹

The ambivalencies in Kracauer's view of modern architecture arise from more than a humanistic compromise between the avant-garde tendencies of his day and a traditionalist ideology of dwelling. Spectral metaphors – not just x-rays but death's heads, spooks, mirrors, skeletons – haunt his descriptions of the Neues Bauen. His most important and fully elaborated statement on the new architecture is an article entitled *Das neue Bauen*, published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1927, just six weeks after *The Mass Ornament*. A review of the Weissenhofsiedlung in Stuttgart, it begins by explaining that the purpose of this model housing settlement is to give evidence that a transformation in both technology and public life is being initiated in the domestic realm. But, Kracauer questions, does the blurring of boundaries between bedroom, dressing room, bath, and living space, as in the house designed by Le Corbusier, or "the dissolution of the house as a perspectively analyzed building mass," as promoted by Mies van der Rohe's overall site plan, truly herald a more open society, a new *Lebensform*, as these architects claim?²² Or do these aesthetic moves do no more than faithfully mirror the abstraction and anonymity of the dominant system? He concludes with an uncanny description of the so-called Glass Room in the exhibition, a space designed by Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich for the German Mirror Glass Association:

In the exhibition halls one finds a striking space by Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich. Its walls are made out of milk- and dark-colored plate glass. It is a transparent *glass box* interpenetrated by the neighboring spaces. Every piece of furniture and every movement creates magical shadow plays upon the walls, incorporeal silhouettes that waft through the air and merge with the mirror images arising from the glass space itself. The conjuring of this elusive glass ghost, which shifts as kaleidoscopically as the light reflections, is a sign that the new dwelling is not a final fulfillment; that to provide running water and remove ornamentation

from iron stoves is not sufficient. As kitsch as the discarded ornaments may have been, what remains after their removal does not compensate for what they once signified. From their content, the new houses seem like *remainders*, that is, up-to-date arrangements constructed of elements stripped of unnecessary excess. And undoubtedly these remainder-compositions are a direct product of contemporary society. But one wishes they would express, more than they do today, sorrow for that which they have had to renounce – that same ludicrous sorrow that clings to the apparitions captured in the glass surfaces. For these house-skeletons are not an end in themselves but the necessary passageway to a fullness from which nothing more needs to be taken away. Today they can only be produced negatively, through sorrow. The skeletons will take on flesh only when man steps out of the glass.²³ (fig. 8)

Here, once again, Kracauer acknowledges that modern architecture is an inevitable, if tragic, stage of history associated with the processes of rationalization and abstraction engendered by capitalist and urban modernization. But it is useless to mourn. For all its spontaneous and aleatory charm, the old-fashioned type of ornament beloved by Kracauer is something the architect committed to his time does not have the option to simulate; there can be no return to that moment of innocence. Yet unlike his more positivistic contemporaries, Kracauer insists that nor can the present phase of abstraction be accepted as final. If for Adolf Loos ornament was the expression of a degenerate culture – "cultural evolution is equivalent to the removal of ornament," as the Viennese architect famously declared in "Ornament and Crime"²⁴ – Kracauer rejects such a telos. Instead, in an argument more reminiscent of the American Louis Sullivan a little earlier, for whom ornament offered a delicate counterbalance to architecture's monumental physicality, the "raiment of which we dream,"²⁵ Kracauer upholds ornament as an essential utopian expression connected with human fantasy and freedom.



8 | Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich, Glass Room at the Weissenhofsiedlung, 1927

Through the surface

This temporal vision likewise underlies Kracauer's *Mass Ornament* essay. If his essay on the *Neues Bauen* is a reflection on modernity at the level of high culture (architecture), *The Mass Ornament* is a parallel but more fully developed interpretation of modernity at the level of popular culture (mass entertainment). Its immediate subject is a precision-trained company of dancers created in the 1880s by a British businessman and producer of church pageants, Arthur Tiller, and exported to the United States and then to the Continent. By the Weimar period, these "products of American distraction factories," as Kracauer calls them,²⁶ were all the rage in Berlin, featured attractions in the city's glittering night life of cabaret, dance hall, and variety show entertainment (fig. 9). Here the members of the new urban class of salaried workers – a class with petty bourgeois aspirations yet alienated from their actual working and living conditions – found diversion and escape from the workaday routine.

Yet Kracauer senses that the form of escapism embodied by the Tiller Girls is less exotic than it appears. In the dancers' geometrically regulated and synchronized patterns of movement, he discovers "the possibility of an *aesthetic* relation to organized toil."²⁷ "The legs of the Tiller Girls correspond to the hands in the factory," he writes. They are "the aesthetic reflex of the rationality aspired to by the prevailing economic system." Although the girls' scantily clad bodies partake of the imagery of fantasy and sexual desire, they are bereft of eroticism, indeed grotesque. The spectacular choreography fragments them into "indissoluble girl clusters" composed of "arms, thighs, and other segments." Like the assembly line, in which "[e]veryone does his or her task on the conveyor belt, performing a partial function without grasping the totality," the chorus line transforms the dancers into cogs in a suprapersonal, paramilitary machine.²⁸ Dance is reduced to a mere "marking of time."²⁹

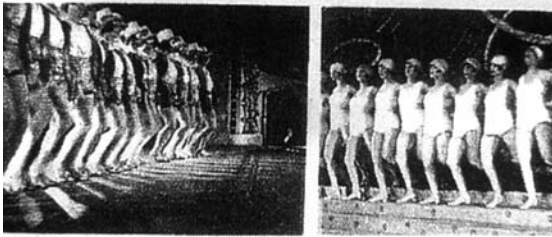
On the one hand, Kracauer stresses the way human subjects introject the abstract anonymity of the economic system that dehumanizes them; on the other, not without ironic accents of the Jewish-messianic view of the world he shares with his contemporaries Benjamin and Ernst Bloch (as well as with Kafka), he projects onto the spirit of capitalism an inscrutable and diabolical agency: "[T]he organization stands above the masses, a monstrous figure whose creator withdraws it from the eyes of its bearers, and barely even observes it himself."³⁰ Kracauer extends his allegorical reading of capitalist production to other examples of Weimar's rampant "body culture" as well, from sports events to beauty pageants, describing the participants in the latter as "sexless bodies in bathing suits." (fig. 10)

Likewise, the spectators at these events, "arranged by the stands in tier upon ordered tier," themselves become absorbed into the mass ornament, mesmerized voyeurs of a mirror image, a spatial hieroglyph, of their own condition.³¹

And yet, states Kracauer paradoxically – and this is the crux – the aesthetic pleasure derived from these mass spectacles is "legitimate."³² As unconscious and immediate "surface-level expressions" of modern life, they reveal, precisely in their *lack* of substance, "the fundamental substance of the state of things."³³ Half a century before post-structuralist philosophers would define postmodernity in terms of simulation and hyperreality, repudiating the notion that any truth or essence lies hidden beneath a mystifying veil of appearances, Kracauer too insists on the value of surfaces for understanding an epoch whose nature is precisely its ephemerality. Unlike the romanticized, often self-serving judgments elite intellectuals make about their own time, Kracauer asserts, these epiphenomena provide a material, concrete, and immediate history of the present. "For today access to truth is by way of the profane."³⁴

Kracauer's forgiving view of mass culture in the 1920s distinguishes him from many of his contemporaries. Unlike the proselytizers of nostalgic and compensatory forms of culture, who pursue mystical cults with "impossible aesthetics"³⁵ and contemporary fads like eurhythmics, Kracauer's critique of the mass ornament does not lead him to yearn for a return to a more "natural" or "organic" form of existence. Once again, the historical process that has led to modernity is irreversible. "The Tiller Girls," he declares unequivocally, "can no longer be reassembled into human beings after the fact." The abstract rationality rehearsed in their denatured bodies is an ineluctable product of contemporary conditions. It cannot be transformed back into a "false mythological concreteness whose aim is organism and form."³⁶

At the same time, Kracauer's attitude toward mass culture distances him from other anti-nostalgic thinkers like Adorno, who see an autonomous art as the only refuge from the onslaught of cultural barbarism. For Kracauer, though, the mass ornament remains a fundamentally ambivalent figure. On the one hand, in refusing the anachronistic pursuit of organic totalities and reproducing the fragmentation of modern life, it participates in the constitution of a new, radically modern subjectivity. On the other, through its seductiveness, its spectacularity, it pacifies the masses into accepting their condition, naturalizing abstraction as a new ideology. For Kracauer the problem with capitalist reason, which he calls *Ratio*, is not that it is evil but rather that it is inchoate – he uses the word "murky"³⁷ – and merely technical. Thus he sees the road ahead as lying not in less reason, but rather in



9 | Tiller Girls

more. "Capitalism's core defect," he states in an often quoted line, is that "it rationalizes not too much but rather *too little*."³⁸

As such, Kracauer anticipates the dialectic of enlightenment that Adorno and Horkheimer will elaborate two decades later, but with a different conclusion. Unlike his two Frankfurt School colleagues, he asserts that the process of transcending the present stage "leads directly through the center of the mass ornament, not away from it."³⁹ Knowledge comes through experience, not from withdrawal. This conclusion echoes the one in his essay on the new glass architecture: the ghosts will be dispelled from the modern house only when man steps out of the mirror. Or as he writes in another essay, on America, "America will vanish only when it fully discovers itself."⁴⁰ Kracauer thus ends "The Mass Ornament" on a redemptive if vague note. The mass ornament "will fade away," he states, "when thinking circumscribes nature and produces man as he is constituted by reason." Not in this essay or any of his others does Kracauer hold out the promise of such a total transformation of consciousness any time soon. Nor does he suggest a way, short of full-scale evolution to another form of society, to transcend the present contradictions between the means of production and the increasingly pervasive culture of spectacle. Rather, for the present, it is only by accepting the latter's inevitability that humanity can retain a hope, at least, to accede to some other life than



10 | Female athletes in Berlin

the one it knows now. In the final line of his essay Kracauer associates the premonition of such a future with another type of ornament, that which appears in fairy tales.⁴¹

This qualified utopian perspective that Kracauer permits himself in the late twenties may be compared to Benjamin's and Bloch's attitudes at the same date. Unlike Benjamin, Kracauer keeps his gaze trained on the phantasmagoria of contemporary life. He thus feels greater solidarity with the new urban workers seeking "a bit of glamour" in their leisure hours as a way to relieve the monotony of their daily existence than with "radical intellectuals," who, he writes, "do not easily get behind the exoticism of a commonplace existence."⁴² As Benjamin himself observes in a laudatory review of Kracauer's book *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, a collection of essays published in 1930, Kracauer strives to apprehend the wish-images of the contemporary class of employees in "encyclopedias, beds, crepe soles, pens that prevent writer's cramp, good-quality pianos, rejuvenation potions, and white teeth."⁴³

For the more melancholic Benjamin, on the other hand, two of whose books – *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* and *One Way Street* – Kracauer reviews in a partly admiring, partly critical essay published in 1928, the understanding of the present is always refracted through a more distanced meditation on history and ideas. Benjamin, writes Kracauer, "hardly takes into account the life he intends to stir up"; he "turns away from immediacy to such an extent that he does not even really come to terms with it."⁴⁴ Knowledge for Benjamin arises out of the contemplation of ruins; only when "the most pressing life has left them" do "they become transparent, allowing the essentialities to shine through."⁴⁵ By means of this quasi-theological, "talmudic" method – Kracauer's word – Benjamin seeks to redeem the overlooked, historically eclipsed fragments he brings to light, but he makes little attempt "to redeem the living world."⁴⁶

Kracauer's presentist perspective is somewhat closer to Bloch's, and the invocation of ornament



11 | Hans Poelzig, Radio Headquarters building, Berlin, 1931



12 | Hans Poelzig, Capitol movie theater, Berlin, 1926

and fairy tales in the last sentence of *The Mass Ornament* has a Blochian ring. Throughout his writings of the Weimar period and after, Bloch attributes an emancipatory dimension to architectural ornament and fairy tales as well as to other forms of popular and mass culture: fashion, advertising, department store displays, travel, film, theater, jokes. He regards them as authentic wish-images, evidence of humanity's aspirations to a better life. Because they put the status quo into question, they also possess the potential to be mobilized for more progressive purposes. Like Kracauer, Bloch sees the functioning of ideology in everyday life as double-edged rather than purely negative. Even though they naturalize and thereby abet the operations of the system in power, these symbolic forms also give expression to genuine longings. Even the films of Walt Disney, writes

Bloch in 1930, retain the age-old promise of "once upon a time" and "happily ever after."⁴⁷

Kracauer remains at a firm remove from Bloch's more millenarian perspective, however. Constitutionally mistrustful of all forms of apocalyptic spirituality and *Innerlichkeit*, he eschews expressionistic fervors. Rather than submerge himself in the troubled depths of the soul, he prefers the boredom of watching surfaces and waiting. Of the contemporary architects, the utopian Bruno Taut is too fanatical for him with his Alpine dreams and glass palaces; the expressionist Hans Poelzig is too full of bathos and bombast, as borne out by the "plaster fantasies" of his theaters, the overbearing facade of his radio building in Berlin, the asparagus-stalk columns and flame-shooting pylons of his scheme for the Berlin *Ehrenmal*⁴⁸ (fig. 11). Later, in *From Caligari to Hitler*, a book published in 1947 after his emigration to the United States, Kracauer will trace an unsubtle line from German Expressionist film to National Socialism.

Dynamics of distraction

In another key essay of the Weimar period, Kracauer points to the battle lines being drawn in the new medium of film between what he calls the forces of integration and disintegration. "Cult of Distraction" – written a decade before Benjamin's "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," which likewise concerns the way both architecture and film are received by viewers in a mode of distraction – is about the interiors of Berlin's movie houses. Here, in spectacular settings, "optical fairylands," cinema combines with architecture and music to assault the senses in a "visual and acoustic kaleidoscope."⁴⁹ While satisfying the need of the urban masses for diversion from their everyday life, the new picture palaces also internalize the city's disorder and fragmentation, reproducing the distraction of the metropolis outside. In this context, the decorative surfaces of the theaters have an essential role to play: "The interior design of movie theaters serves one sole purpose," Kracauer writes: "to rivet the viewers' attention to the peripheral, so that they will not sink into the abyss." Such forms of distraction are meaningful, Kracauer insists once again, "only as improvisation, as a reflection of the uncontrolled anarchy of our world."⁵⁰

Yet even as the dynamics of distraction are being inscribed upon the theater walls, Kracauer already notes the existence of a reactionary counter-tendency. The Gesamtkunstwerk aesthetic, exemplified by a movie palace like Poelzig's Capitol in Berlin, is a dangerous attempt to reassemble the fragments into a pseudo-totality: "Rather than acknowledging the actual state of disintegration that such shows ought to represent,

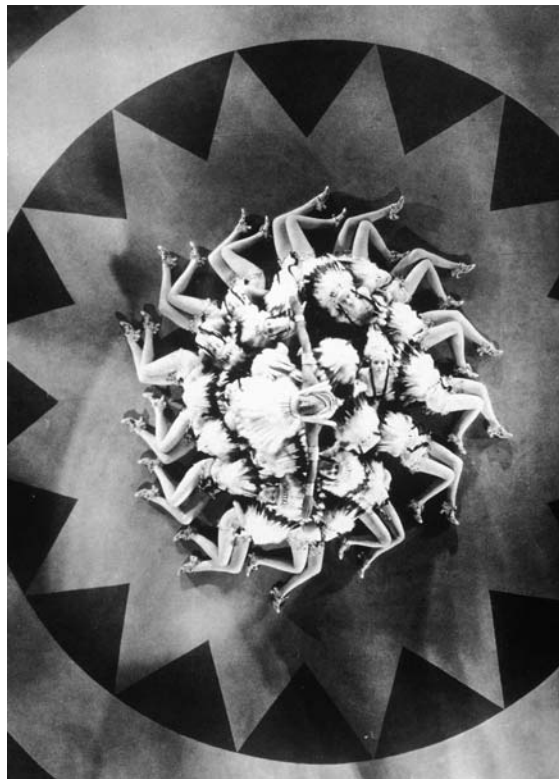
the movie theaters glue the pieces back together after the fact and present them as organic creations."⁵¹ (fig. 12) More and more, cinema evolves from its early multisensory mode into seamless narrativity, abetting rather than subverting its own two-dimensional illusionism and thereby masking disintegration rather than exposing it. At this point, the decorated movie house serves no further purpose and can become the now familiar black box.

Both *The Mass Ornament* and *Cult of Distraction* reflect Kracauer's thinking in the mid twenties, a period during which he is able to place his hopes in "the mass ornament's empty and superficial shallowness."⁵² With the economic crisis of 1929, however, ushering in widespread unemployment and paving the way for the ascendancy of National Socialism in Germany, Kracauer's view of things becomes increasingly somber. In an essay of 1931 entitled *Girls and Crisis*, he revisits his allegory of the female chorus line. It is the Alfred Jackson-Girls this time, not the Tiller troupe, whom Kracauer describes as making up a thirty-two-leg "girl-machine" and striking poses that evoke the regularity of the pistons of an engine. But the bread line has by this point succeeded both the assembly line and the chorus line. The girls now appear "ghostly" and out of date:

I clearly recollect the appearance of such troupes in the season of their fame. When they built a line that moved up and down, they radiantly illustrated the advantages of the conveyor belt; when they tap-danced at a fast tempo it sounded like "business, business, business"; when they threw their legs high with mathematical precision, they happily affirmed the progress of streamlining; and when they did the same thing again and again without breaking ranks one imagined an uninterrupted chain of cars gliding out of the factories into the world ... That has all changed. ... We do not believe the rosy Jackson-Girls anymore! ... They come as a procession of phantoms out of a dead past.⁵³

Disciplined eroticism

Kracauer's valedictory for the mass ornament would, of course, prove premature. The figure would recur in the 1930s in the context of Depression-era America and Nazi Germany, but it would now take on new meanings. This development is exemplified by two exceptional and opposite cinematic practices. In one of them, that of the American director Busby Berkeley, the mass ornament is multiplied by the movie camera into the exorbitance of the Hollywood spectacle. In the other, that of Leni Riefenstahl, Hitler's appointed filmmaker, it is literally mobilized for purposes of fascist propaganda.



13 | *Whoopie!*, 1930, directed by Busby Berkeley. Production still from "The Song of the Setting Sun"



14 | *Dames*, 1934, directed by Busby Berkeley. Production still from "I Only Have Eyes for You," with Ruby Keeler's face as a jigsaw puzzle

Busby Berkeley's films originate in the tradition of the American music hall and the Broadway musical. Yet his most celebrated effects are specifically cinematic, achieved through montage and special film techniques. His own origins combine the theatrical and the military. Born in 1895 into a family of actors, he entered military school at age twelve, was drafted into the army when World War I broke out, and served in the artillery in France, where he became an expert in conducting

parade drills. Upon returning from Europe he spent six years directing dance numbers on Broadway before going to Hollywood in 1930 at the outset of the Depression to make his first film.

In breaking with the theater, Berkeley pushes the fragmentation, technical rationalization, and artificiality that Kracauer associates with the Tiller Girls much further than was possible in live performance. The hallmarks of his art of spectacle are the deployment of large numbers of chorus girls in synchronized formations; overhead shots capturing kaleidoscopic patterns of movement; effects of extravagance, excess, and surreality achieved with lavish settings and strange props; the stylized use of the female body in abstract, objectlike ways; and elements of fetishized eroticism⁵⁴ (fig. 13). These devices, which initially appear to have no purpose other than a decorative one within the overall architecture of the film, may be seen, in Kracauerian terms, as an allegory of the mechanization of modern life, now reproduced through the technical medium of film to the point of delirium.

Yet as film historian Martin Rubin has pointed out, something else is at work in Berkeley's dreamlike extravaganzas beyond either pure entertain-

ment or an allegory of the Fordist factory. In the context of the Depression-era American public – in the midst of economic crisis, New Deal politics, and incipient American reentry onto the world stage to combat the spread of fascism – Berkeley's over-the-top dance numbers rehearse and negotiate new relationships between the individual and the mass, the worker and the boss, the private realm and the public, the citizen and the state, the nation and the world (fig. 14). Characteristically, as Rubin describes, Berkeley's choreography has the following internal structure:

First there is an establishment of the individual or couple. Then the number opens up and the individual is absorbed into the mass, woven in and out of it, sometimes lost completely (but only momentarily). Finally the individual returns, intact, but somehow redefined by the experience of having been dissolved into the group. ... [T]he 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.⁵⁵

The reciprocating figures of synecdoche and metonymy – the one becoming many, the many becoming one – literally enact the passage through the mass ornament.

These complex political and sexual renegotiations are choreographed with the aid of ingenious and explicitly "tricky" camera and editing techniques, which facilitate constant perceptual shifts, destabilizing the viewer's perspective. The fluctuating floral patterns also charge the spectacle with a pulsating plasticity, just as the recurring motif of water renders all boundaries fluid. Berkeley's surrealistic and brilliantly inventive techniques give his cinematic art attributes of both commercial and avant-garde film. Significantly, the relationship between the usually cliché narrative situation and the always exorbitant production numbers is overtly artificial and disjunctive. The conventionality of the diegetic space thus remains at odds with the excess of the spectacle space, much like the divide between waking and dream states. In this respect Berkeley's films go against the grain of the concurrent development of the Hollywood cinema, including the musical, which strives, as mentioned earlier, toward ever tighter integration between narrative and spectacle. In contrast, Berkeley's cinema harks back to his roots in the theater and vaudeville, offering a paradigm of distracted spectatorship ultimately very close to that which Kracauer appreciated so much in the early Weimar movie palaces. Indeed, it is surprising that Kracauer never wrote about any of Berkeley's films despite the scores of reviews of American movies he wrote during his career.



15 | *Gold Diggers of 1935*, 1935, directed by Busby Berkeley. Production still from the opening sequence of "Lullaby of Broadway," with Wini Shaw's face transforming into an aerial view of Manhattan

In one of Berkeley's most haunting numbers, the *Lullaby of Broadway* sequence at the end of the film *Gold Diggers of 1935* (1935), the ornament-spectacle takes on a specifically urban dimension. The sequence, which lasts nearly fifteen minutes, begins with the face of actress Wini Shaw as a distant white dot on a black field. As she sings a seductive invitation to the spectator to "come along" and enter her world, her disembodied face grows progressively larger until it dominates the frame in close-up silhouette. The camera then executes a right-angle turn while remaining focused on her upturned face, which dissolves into an aerial view of Manhattan as her cigarette transforms into a skyscraper. The skyscraper metropolis is contained in the subconscious of the individual, Berkeley thus suggests, just as countless lives are subsumed within the fragmented totality of the big city (fig. 15). Following an interlude that features a long montage sequence – Berkeley's lyrical ode to everyday urban life in Manhattan – we follow Wini and her boyfriend (Dick Powell) to a vast, empty nightclub atop a skyscraper. Gradually the space of the nightclub fills with other dancers, and the pace accelerates to a frenzied crescendo. The scene abruptly climaxes when Wini, pursued by hundreds of high-stepping male dancers, plunges from the nightclub's balcony into the canyonlike depths of the nocturnal city. The city's callous indifference to her fate – the meaninglessness of the individual life in the mechanized city of millions – is symbolized by the image of a clock face that bears the neon message "Credit Jewelers" impassively marking the time.⁵⁶ A final cinematic shift then extracts us from this dream (or nightmare) space of the spectacle, and Wini's surreal suicide, returning us to the light comedy of the narrative situation, where, having literally "gone through" the mass ornament, Wini ends up together with her lover in a happily-ever-after ending.

Delirious New York: as Rem Koolhaas has grasped so well, the alienation of the big city can only be exorcised, or compensated for, in the ecstasy of the spectacle.⁵⁷ The decorative program of Rockefeller Center performs the same function in 1930s Manhattan as do the "Rockettes" – dancers on the stage of Radio City Music Hall, close descendants of the Tiller Girls. The jazzy Art Deco ornaments of the New Deal skyscrapers, like the allegorical murals on their walls, offer a vivid counterpoint to the increasingly massive skyline and the abstract, leveling anonymity of the urban grid. Only a megalomaniac architect like Le Corbusier could have failed to understand the emancipatory meaning of the spectacle in as brutal and all-consuming a metropolis as Manhattan.

From flower to flow: the erotics of discipline

If Kracauer believed in 1931, when he wrote *Girls and Crisis*, that the utopian promise of the mass ornament was already an anachronism, he nonetheless returned to this figure one more time, in his book *From Caligari to Hitler*. Written sixteen years later in New York as a study of the propaganda film, on commission from the Museum of Modern Art, the book belongs to the very different context of postwar America. Kracauer now attributes to the mass ornament purely negative and totalitarian connotations. The first mention of it comes in relation to Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927), a dystopian fable of capitalism that Kracauer describes as a work "rich in subterranean content that, like contraband, had crossed the borders of consciousness without being questioned."⁵⁸ Kracauer criticizes Lang's "penchant for pompous ornamentation," for imposing upon the film an "all-devouring decorative scheme" that "appears as an end in itself." Lang refuses, says Kracauer, to acknowledge any tension between "intrinsic human emotions" and "ornamental patterns." As if confirming the dangers of Lang's aestheticizing approach, Kracauer notes that Hitler admired Lang's films and through Goebbels sought him out (unsuccessfully) to work for the Third Reich.

That task fell to Leni Riefenstahl. Chosen as the Führer's official filmmaker, Riefenstahl made her masterpiece, *The Triumph of the Will*, based on the 1934 Nuremberg party rally, in 1935, the same year Busby Berkeley filmed *Lullaby of Broadway*. Not surprisingly, the dénouement of *From Caligari to Hitler* consists of an extended analysis of Riefenstahl's film, and it is here that the mass ornament makes its second and last appearance in Kracauer's writing. He describes the surging configurations and *tableaux vivants* of soldiers – "faces, uniforms, arms and again faces" – as an ornamental strategy whose function is to impress and overwhelm the viewer by means of its mesmerizing formal qualities, thereby concealing the hollowness of the Nazi program (fig. 16). Pointing out how Riefenstahl carefully stages her effects in a film that is supposed to be an authentic documentary, he denounces *The Triumph of the Will* and its "officially fabricated mass-ornaments" as the construction of a "bastard reality," "a frightening spectacle."⁵⁹

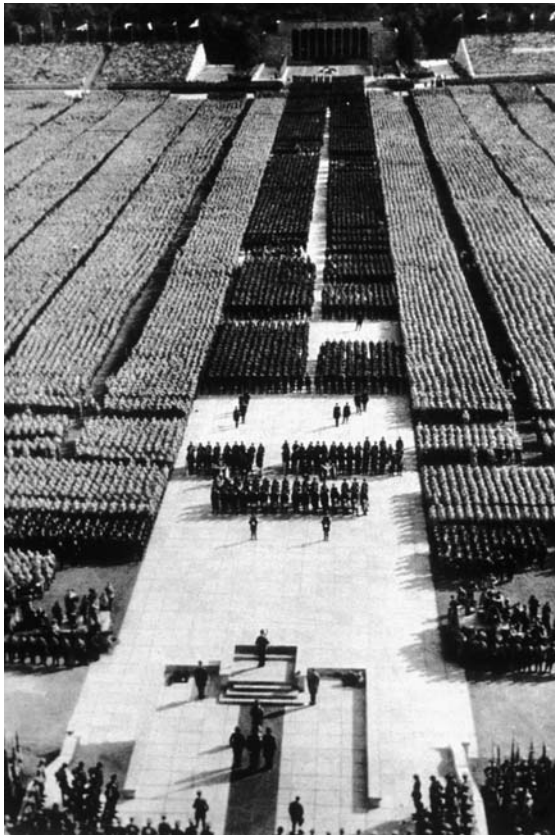
Yet Kracauer never adequately accounts for the emotional power that Riefenstahl mobilizes with her Potemkin effects (fig. 17). As the critic Klaus Theweleit has noted in his psychoanalytic study of fascism, *Male Fantasies*, "Kracauer was on the right track in beginning his reflections on the mass ornamental displays with the Tiller Girls ... and on the mass displays of 'physical culture' which took place in stadiums, and whose ornamental configu-

rations were carried far and wide by the news-reels." However, he continues, "Kracauer completely misreads the situation when he says that organic and 'spiritual' elements were simply 'rejected.' Those elements were the very substance of the ornamental displays."⁶⁰ In other words, fascist spectacle was more than just an aestheticized representation of Nazi ideology; it was an efficacious instrument for channeling bodies and deep-rooted desires "into a monumental system of dams."

In his own book, predicated on an unorthodox theory of masculine identity indebted to Wilhelm



16 | *Triumph of the Will*, 1935, directed by Leni Riefenstahl



17 | *Triumph of the Will*, 1935, directed by Leni Riefenstahl

Reich as well as to Deleuze and Guattari, Theweleit argues that the fascist imagination was above all shaped by dread and revulsion for the female body. The latter, associated with amorphous boundaries, dirty fluids, and unchecked eroticism, threatened the stable ego boundaries of the Nazi "soldiering male." Tapping into misogynist as well as racist fears of ego dissolution coupled with a repressed longing for fusion, the fascist spectacle thus forged an idea of manhood predicated on values of hardness, self-denial, purity, and violence, preparing the German soldier for total war. It is this latent "content" that infuses the surging mass ornaments of Leni Riefenstahl's film – it would as such probably be more appropriate to call them *mass formations* – just as, in the medium of architecture, it is this content that flows through Albert Speer's monumental parade grounds and light spectacles.

We may note that Riefenstahl began her career as a dancer, studying with Mary Wigman, a protégée of Jacques Dalcroze and his occult-spiritual-emotive school of body movement and modern dance – the type of dance Kracauer detested. She then came under the tutelage of the filmmaker Arnold Fanck, inventor of a genre of "mountain film" that draws in equal measure on an "alpine" romanticism and the abstract aesthetics of modernist photography. In her 1935 film, Riefenstahl deploys the Fanckian sublime in a variety of ways, above all through tilting shots that establish the individual's relationship to the demigod Hitler, descending from the sky in his aircraft as the film opens, and through the juxtaposition between the incommensurable, unstoppable male mass and the great, singular, charismatic leader, who is at once the summation of the group and its transcendence (fig. 17). The banner-draped, swastika-bedecked medieval town of Nuremberg forms a festive and empathic backdrop to the construction of this mythic epic, its ornamental portals and Gothic towers testifying to an unbroken line between the nation's past and future. The women who edge the parade routes – the only female presences that the female filmmaker incorporates in her supremely male apotheosis – play a similar decorative role.

Diffuse + concentrated = integral

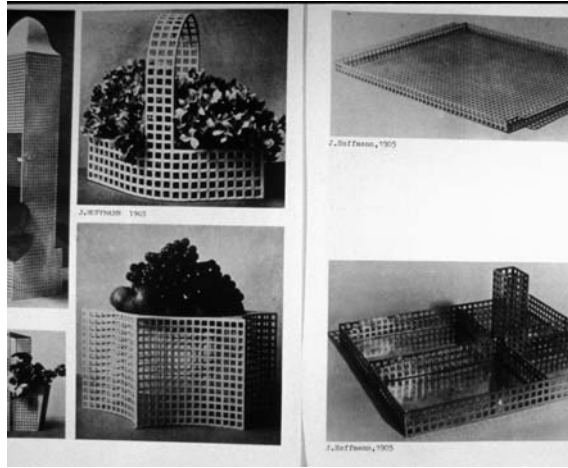
Berkeley's flowers and Riefenstahl's flows both contain an element that Kracauer understood as inherent in traditional architectural ornament but that he misses or denies in his mechanistic interpretation of the Tiller Girls and later of Nazi spectacle, namely its latent eroticism, which in the case of both filmmakers verges on ecstasy. At the same time, the paradoxical gender reversal in these two examples – the fact that it is the male filmmaker who celebrates the protean generativity of the

capitalist metropolis, gendered female, while the female filmmaker aestheticizes the surging formations of the fascist nation, gendered male – suggests that opposite dynamics animate capitalist and fascist spectacle: The capitalist spectacle works to discipline the erotic forces it unleashes, while the fascist spectacle makes an erotics of discipline. The capitalist spectacle diffuses and dissipates its energies by means of its over-and-over, in-and-out kaleidoscopy, while the fascist spectacle is fusional, directional, teleological, channeling desire along lines of flow that aspire toward an ultimate, apocalyptic conclusion. The performative mode of the capitalist spectacle is entertainment, while that of fascist spectacle is solemn ritual.

These antinomies of capitalist and fascist spectacle are confirmed by none other than Guy Debord. Looking back on his book of 1967 two decades later, Debord does not hesitate to confirm the correctness of his original critique, rejecting the contention of postmodern theorists that the spectacle phase of capitalism had now been superseded or eclipsed by the advent of a society of information and media.⁶¹ For Debord, the notion that a media society is no longer about representation – the images produced by an object-oriented, commodity-driven culture – but rather simply about distribution, circulation, and flux is either wishful thinking or ideological obfuscation, in his view; the media is the instrument of the spectacle society. However, he does note one important development that has occurred since the late sixties. In *The Society of the Spectacle* he had distinguished two rival forms of spectacle, the *concentrated* and the *diffuse*, one associated with fascism, the other with capitalism. As he writes in 1988:

The [concentrated spectacle], favoring the ideology condensed around a dictatorial personality, had accomplished the totalitarian counter-revolution, fascist as well as Stalinist. The [diffuse spectacle], driving wage-earners to apply their freedom

of choice to the vast range of new commodities now on offer, had represented the Americanisation of the world, a process that in some respects frightened but also successfully seduced those countries where it had been possible to maintain traditional forms of bourgeois democracy.⁶²



19 | Josef Hoffmann, stamped sheet-iron table objects, 1905. Executed by the Wiener Werkstätte. From *Galerie Metropol, Josef Hoffmann, 1870–1956*



18 | Jean Nouvel, *Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, 1987–88. Interior of lobby of library and media center*



20 | Josef Hoffmann, *Austrian Pavilion at the Paris Exposition, 1925*

He continues: Since then a third form has been established, through the rational combination of these two, and on the basis of a general victory of the form that had showed itself stronger: the diffuse. This is the integrated spectacle, which has since tended to impose itself globally... The integrated spectacle shows itself to be simultaneously concentrated and diffuse, and ever since the fruitful union of the two has learnt to employ both these qualities on a grander scale.⁶³

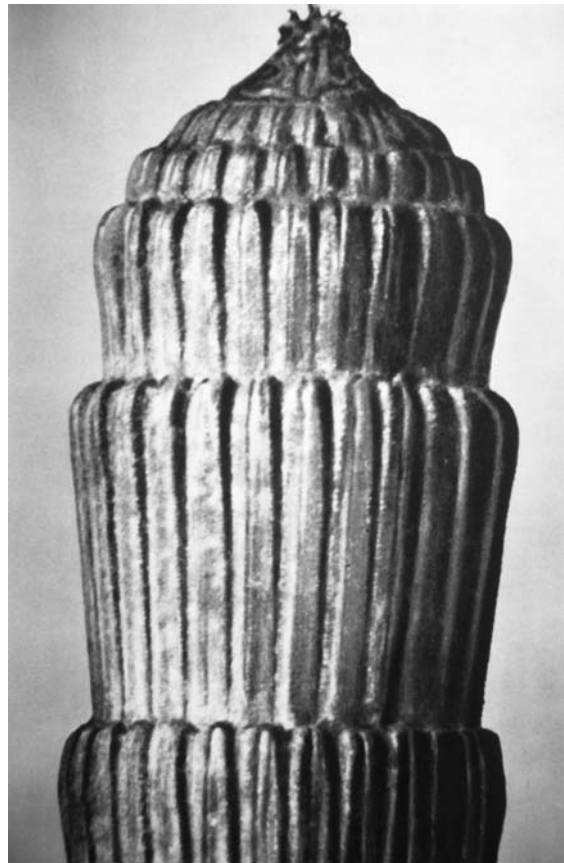
Written on the eve of the end of the Cold War and the impending globalism of the 1990s, this statement reads prophetically. But what symbolic form corresponds to the integral spectacle?

Ornament as monument, monument as ornament

Two architectural projects of recent years, Jean Nouvel's Institut du Monde Arabe (1987–88) and Herzog & de Meuron's Ricola Production and Storage Building in Mulhouse (1992–93), may serve as critical reflections on the mass ornament in the age of the integral spectacle.

In Nouvel's building the great brise-soleil wall in the form of a glass-and-steel grid of photovoltaic lenses provides a paradigmatic example of an architectural mass ornament – one poignantly suffused, moreover, with the cultural contradictions of postcolonialism inasmuch as the high-tech screen consciously alludes to an Islamic lattice or veil. Indeed, all of the building's differently articulated facades function as interfaces: between public and private realms; between technology and culture/nature (both of these pairs with all their gender implications); between the Orientalist gaze of the Western architect (his knowledge of the Arab "world" acquired through the eye of the camera, if not through fairy tale fantasies of Arabian nights) and the literal gaze of the building's inhabitants, extraterritorials in the French capital; between the monumentality of the official cultural institution located in the center of Paris and the sinuous ornamentality of the urban "arabesque" curving along the edge of the Seine. With his exquisitely discreet metallic oculus-apertures, Nouvel invites the urban eye/I to pass through the mass ornament into the realm of a heterotopic architectural poetics (fig. 18).

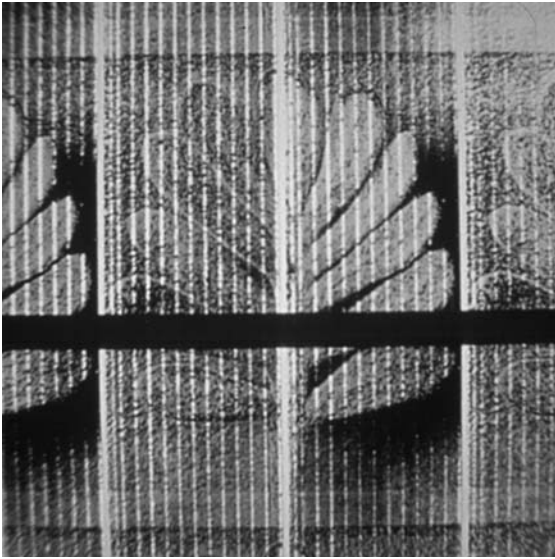
Herzog & de Meuron's building picks up even more directly from Kracauer as it tacitly recapitulates a history of the mass ornament. The subliminal genealogy begins with Art Nouveau and its agonistic struggle to stave off the inevitability of modernization by liquefying iron structure into flowing lines and flowers.⁶⁴ Its equivocal embrace of modernity is illustrated in two projects by Josef Hoffmann. In one, a group of stamped sheet-iron tabletop objects of 1905, executed by the Wiener



21 | Karl Blossfeldt, photograph of a winter horsetail, ca. 1928

Werkstätte, Hoffmann attempts to reckon with the permutations of the grid in a rationalist logic that will literally lead later in the century "from the spoon to the city," ultimately to end up as the expansio ad absurdum of Superstudio's Continuous Monument, a grid encompassing the entire earth. In the other, a room at the Austrian pavilion at the Paris Exposition of 1925, Hoffmann paints the mullions with flowers and mirrors the infill panels in a glittering display of antistructuralism (figs. 19, 20) Herzog & de Meuron's building finds its next point of reference in the photographs of Karl Blossfeldt, who takes the reverse route of Art Nouveau; with modernity now in full bloom, he transforms nature back into architecture with images of flowers as massive and monumental as towers⁶⁵ (fig. 21). Then finally, with a laconic bow to both Mies and Le Corbusier, Herzog & de Meuron perform one more turn. Silkscreening a photograph of a palm leaf by Blossfeldt all over a laconic gridded glass box, they arrive at a terse but lyrical design for a factory and storage facility, combining the rigor of the architectural monument with the phantasmagoric multiplicity of the mass ornament, giving glass the quality of stone and architecture the *faux* naturalism of landscape (figs. 22, 23).

Thus, after displacing the first nature, which was nature itself; and the second nature, which



22 | Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, *Ricola Production and Storage Building*, Mulhouse, 1992–93. Detail of the building's ornamental motif, a silkscreened print of a photograph of a palm leaf by Karl Blossfeldt

was architecture; contemporary architecture appears to arrive at a third nature, that of the material-immaterial surface, the integral spectacle, the ornament-monument. To sum up what we have been trying to suggest: in the context of architecture, the mass ornament becomes ornament as mass – or, more precisely, anti-mass; the ornament becomes monument – or, more precisely, anti-monument. (But may we not, in the case of, say, Frank Gehry, also speak of the monument becoming ornament?)



23 | Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, *Ricola Production and Storage Building*, Mulhouse, 1992–93. Canopy over the production facade

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Notes

This paper is condensed from my book in progress, *Toward a Prehistory of the Spectacle Society*. Sources are cited in English translation unless none exists.

- 1 *Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century*, in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Cambridge 1999, p. 4.
- 2 *The Mass Ornament*, in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* [here after MOWE], Cambridge 1995, p. 75.
- 3 Sigfried Giedion, *Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferro-Concrete*, Santa Monica 1995, p. 87.
- 4 See "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" (1929), pp. 209, 210, 215; and "Experience and Poverty" (1933), in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings: Volume 2, 1927–1934*, Cambridge 1999, pp. 733–34.
- 5 The only full-length study on Kracauer's idea of ornament in relation to architecture is Henrik Reeh's valuable *Storbyens Ornamenter: Siegfried Kracauer og den moderne bykultur*, Odense 1991; it is currently being translated into English. On Kracauer and architecture, see also Gerwin Zohlen, *Schmugglerpfad: Siegfried Kracauer, Architekt und Schriftsteller*, in Michael Kessler and Thomas Y. Levin, eds., *Siegfried Kracauer, Neue Interpretationen*, Tübingen 1990, pp. 325–44; and the contributions by Anthony Vidler, Tillmann Hess, and Helmut Stalder in Andreas Volk, ed., *Siegfried Kracauer: Zum Werk des Romanciers, Feuilletonisten, Architekten, Filmwissenschaftlers und Soziologen*, Zurich 1996, pp. 85–110, 111–29, 131–155.
- 6 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, New York 1995.
- 7 Siegfried Kracauer, *Aus dem Tagebuch des Studenten (1911/1912)*, in Ingrid Belke and Irina Renz, eds., *Siegfried Kracauer 1889–1966*, Marbach am Neckar 1989)

- 8 Dissertation published as *Die Entwicklung der Schmiedekunst in Berlin, Potsdam und einigen Städten der Mark von 17. Jahrhundert bis zum Beginn des 10. Jahrhunderts*, Worms am Rhein 1915, p. 74. See Reeh, *Storbyens Ornamente*, pp. 84–86.
- 9 Theodor Adorno, *The Curious Realist: On Siegfried Kracauer* (1964), *New German Critique* 54 (fall 1991), p. 171.
- 10 *Ginster*, in Siegfried Kracauer, *Schriften*, vol. 7, Frankfurt am Main 1973, pp. 21–22.
- 11 Adorno, *The Curious Realist*, pp. 171–72.
- 12 Kracauer, *Schriften*, vol. 5:1, p. 383; cited in Inka Mülder-Bach, *History as Autobiography: The Last Things Before the Last*, *New German Critique* 54 (fall 1991), p. 147.
- 13 *Franz Kafka: On His Posthumous Works* (1931), MOWE, p. 269.
- 14 *The Hotel Lobby* (1922–25), MOWE, pp. 173–85.
- 15 *Farewell to the Linden Arcade* (1930), MOWE, p. 342.
- 16 *Strasse ohne Erinnerung* (1932), in Siegfried Kracauer, *Schriften*, vol. 5:3, Frankfurt am Main 1990, p. 173.
- 17 *Shelter for the Homeless* (1929), in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, London 1998, p. 92.
- 18 *Das Heim eines Architekten* (1926) in Siegfried Kracauer, *Frankfurter Turmhäuser: Ausgewählte Feuilletons 1906–30*, Zurich 1997, p. 209.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 208.
- 20 *Deutsche Bauausstellung: Vorläufige Bemerkungen* (1931), in Siegfried Kracauer, *Berliner Nebeneinander: Ausgewählte Feuilletons 1930–33*, Zurich 1996, p. 118.
- 21 *Kleine Patrouille durch die Bauausstellung* (1931), in Kracauer, *Schriften*, vol. 5:2, Frankfurt am Main 1990, p. 329. Kracauer's ambivalence calls to mind Dostoevsky's *Underground Man*, who fears glass buildings because "one cannot put one's tongue out at [them], even on the sly." See Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, in *Three Short Novels of Dostoevsky*, New York 1960, p. 210. Interestingly, just as Kracauer was trained as an architect, Dostoevsky was trained as an engineer, but he abandoned the profession because of its antihumanism.
- 22 *Das neue Bauen: Zur Stuttgarter Werkbund-Ausstellung 'Die Wohnung'* (1927), *Schriften*, vol. 5:2, p. 69.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- 24 Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime* (1908), in Ludwig Münz and Gustav Künstler, *Adolf Loos, Pioneer of Modern Design*, New York 1966, pp. 226–27.
- 25 See *Ornament in Architecture* (1892), in Louis H. Sullivan, *Kindergarten Chats and Other Writings*, New York 1979, pp. 187–90: "Why then should we use ornament? ... We have in us romanticism, and feel a craving to express it. We feel intuitively that our strong, athletic and simple forms will carry with natural ease the raiment of which we dream, and that our buildings thus clad in a garment of poetic imagery, half hid as it were in choice products of loom and mine, will appeal with redoubled power, like a sonorous melody overlaid with harmonious voices." (187)
- 26 *The Mass Ornament*, MOWE, p. 75.
- 27 *Travel and Dance* (1925), MOWE, p. 72. Kracauer's italics.
- 28 *The Mass Ornament*, pp. 76–79.
- 29 *Travel and Dance*, p. 66.
- 30 *The Mass Ornament*, p. 78.
- 31 *Ibid.*, pp. 75–76.
- 32 *Ibid.*, pp. 79.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 75.
- 34 *The Bible in German*, MOWE, p. 201.
- 35 *The Mass Ornament*, p. 86.
- 36 *Ibid.*, pp. 78, 81.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- 38 *Ibid.* Kracauer's italics.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 86.
- 40 *The Artist in These Times* (1925), *Schriften*, 5:2, p. 305.
- 41 The sentence reads, "[T]he mass ornament will fade away and human life itself will adopt the traits of that ornament into which it develops, through its confrontation with truth, in fairy tales." *The Mass Ornament*, p. 86.
- 42 *Shelter for the Homeless*, in *The Salaried Masses*, p. 88; *Unknown Territory*, *ibid.*, p. 29.
- 43 *An Outsider Makes His Mark – on The Salaried Masses by S. Kracauer* (1930), in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings: Volume 2, 1927–1934*, p. 309.

- 44 Kracauer, *On the Writings of Walter Benjamin* (1928), MOWE, pp. 263–64.
- 45 Ibid., p. 262.
- 46 Ibid., pp. 259, 264.
- 47 *The Fairy Tale Moves on Its Own in Time* (1930), in Ernst Bloch, *Literary Essays*, Stanford 1998, p. 167.
- 48 For Kracauer's comments on Taut and Poelzig see his early essay, *Über Turmhäuser* (1921), in *Frankfurter Turmhauser*, p. 13; on Poelzig's radio building, *Sendestation* (1931), in *Berliner Nebeneinander*, pp. 250–53; on the Ehrenmal, *Tessenow baut das Berliner Ehrenmal* (1930), *Schriften*, 5:2, p. 213.
- 49 Kracauer, *Cult of Distraction: On Berlin's Picture Palaces* (1926), MOWE, pp. 323–24.
- 50 Ibid., pp. 325–27.
- 51 Ibid., p. 328.
- 52 *The Mass Ornament*, p. 86.
- 53 Kracauer, *Girls and Crisis* (1931), in *Qui Parle* 5, no. 2 (spring/summer 1992), p. 52.
- 54 See Martin Rubin's excellent study of Berkeley's effects, *Showstoppers: Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle*, New York 1993.
- 55 Martin Rubin, *The Crowd, the Collective, and the Chorus: Busby Berkeley and the New Deal*, in John Belton, ed., *Movies and Mass Culture*, New Brunswick, NJ 1996, p. 78.
- 56 Cf. Manfredo Tafuri comments on this film by Berkeley in *The New Babylon: The 'Yellow Giants' and the Myth of Americanism: Expressionism, Jazz Style, Skyscrapers, 1913–30* in Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, Cambridge 1987, pp. 188–89.
- 57 See his *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, New York 1997.
- 58 Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, Princeton 1971 [1947], pp. 149, 163–64.
- 59 Ibid., pp. 300–3.
- 60 Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, vol. 1, Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, Minneapolis 1987 [1977], pp. 433–34.
- 61 Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, London 1998 [orig. 1988]. The major theorist (after Marshall McLuhan) to advance the argument that the paradigm of the spectacle society, as a product of the commodity stage of capitalism, has been overtaken by that of an information-driven media society existing in an "ecstasy of communication" is Jean Baudrillard. In addition to Baudrillard's body of writings beginning with *Simulations* (1983), see Jonathan Crary, *Eclipse of the Spectacle*, in Brian Wallis, ed., *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, New York 1984, pp. 283–94.
- 62 Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, p. 8.
- 63 Ibid., pp. 8–9.
- 64 Walter Benjamin writes in *Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century*: "[Jugendstil] represents the last attempted sortie of an art besieged in its ivory tower by technology. This attempt mobilizes all the reserves of inwardness. They find their expression in the mediumistic language of the line, in the flower as symbol of a naked vegetal nature confronted by a technologically armed world. The new elements of iron construction—girder forms—preoccupy Jugendstil. In ornament, it endeavors to win these forms back for art." *The Arcades Project*, p. 9.
- 65 Karl Blossfeldt published his major work, *Urformen der Kunst*, in 1928, a year after *The Mass Ornament*.

Credits:

- Fig. 1, 4: Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach am Neckar
- Fig. 2, 3: From the publication of Kracauer's dissertation, *Die Entwicklung der Schmiedekunst in Berlin, Potsdam und einigen Städten der Mark von 17. Jahrhundert bis zum Beginn des 10. Jahrhundert*, Worms am Rhein 1915
- Fig. 5, 6: *Das Gesicht der Städte*, Berlin 1928
- Fig. 7: From Walter Müller-Wulckow, *Deutsche Baukunst der Gegenwart*, Königstein im Taunus 1928
- Fig. 9: From Edmund Bucher and Albrecht Kindt, eds., *Film-Photos wie noch nie*, Gießen 1929
- Fig. 11: From *Wasmuths Monatshefte Baukunst & Städtebau*, May 1931
- Fig. 12: From Paul Zucker, *Theater und Lichtspielhäuser* (Berlin: Verlag Ernst Wasmuth, 1926)
- Fig. 19: Exhibition catalogue, Vienna 1981
- Fig. 20: From Roberto Papini, *Le Arti d'oggi: Architettura e arti decorative in Europa*, Milan 1930
- Fig. 21: From Karl Blossfeldt, *Art Forms in Nature*, New York 1967