KRACAUER, Siegfried (8 February 1889- 26 November 1966)

Siegfried Kracauer was a German cultural critic and theorist. He wrote film and cultural criticism for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in the twenties and early thirties. From 1933 to 1941 he was in exile in France, before moving to the United States. He wrote criticism for various New York publications in the forties and fifties. His major works include *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (1947), *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960), and the posthumously published *History: The Last Things Before the Last* (1969). Kracauer is perhaps most famous for his essay “The Mass Ornament” (1927), an exploration of the relationship between the geometrical patterns produced by the Tiller Girls—precision dance troupes popular across Europe and the United States at the time—and contemporary economic and political realities. Kracauer would later apply the notion of the mass ornament to both the mass displays of Leni Riefenstahl’s Nazi documentaries and the Hollywood musical spectaculars designed by choreographer Busby Berkeley. After leaving Nazi Germany for the United States, Kracauer wrote his seminal text on German cinema, *From Caligari to Hitler,* in which he views Weimar film through the lens of national psychology, finding in them a harbinger of the Nazi state. In *Theory of Film,* Kracauer, seeing film as an extension of photography, argues for a cinema that operates in a realistic mode. Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke have described Kracauer’s criticism as being that of the “medium shot,” resisting both close readings of works and Abstract cultural criticism in favour of a middle distance where, as Kracauer put it, “ambiguity is of the essence.”

Further reading:

Gemünden, G. and von Moltke, J., eds. (2012) *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.

Hansen, M. (2012) *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Paratextual material?

[A mass ornament, same as for Busby Berkeley:]

Dance Heritage Coalition page on Busby Berkeley:

http://www.danceheritage.org/berkeley.html

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