The Caveman and the Machine. Edition No. 1

Description: In this book Willis Peter Bilderback examines two discursive tendencies found in the American Musical Film during the period 1929-1935. The first is a tendency toward "the technological sublime" as displayed by the films that Busby Berkeley choreographed for Warner Brothers studios. The second is "the eroticization of the primitive" as found in a significant number of "pre-code" Hollywood Musicals. Bilderback unpacks the meaning of these discourses through a close analysis of the films, and by referencing the cultural, economic and political history of the United States during the early part of the twentieth-century, and the 1930s in particular.

Bilderback finds a parallel between Fordist production methods and the kind of disciplines the body is subjected to in Berkeley's elaborate production numbers, that parallels the American public's own complicated, ambivalent relationship to technology and industry during the Depression. Additionally, he finds in the "eroticization of the primitive" evident in many "pre-code" Musicals, an alternative relationship to modernity in which the "primitive" is imagined as modernity's vital, libidinal other.

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