

The Architecture of the Illusive Distance

Each representation discards or retains various of the qualities that permit us to recognize the object on the screen. Each introduces, for didactic or aesthetic reasons, abstractions that operate more or less corrosively and thus do not permit the original to subsist in its entirety. At the conclusion of this inevitable and necessary "chemical" action, for the initial reality there has been substituted an illusion of reality composed of a complex of abstraction (black and white, plane surface), of conventions (the rules of montage, for example), and of authentic reality. It is a necessary illusion but it quickly induces a loss of awareness of the reality itself, which becomes identified in the mind of the spectator with its cinematographic representation. As for the film maker, the moment he has secured this unwitting complicity of the public, he is increasingly tempted to ignore reality. From habit and laziness he reaches the point when he himself is no longer able to tell where lies begin or end. There could never be any question of calling him a liar because his art consists in lying. He is just no longer in control of his art. He is its dupe, and hence he is held back from any further conquest of reality. (A. Bazin 27)

THE MORE IS LESS

The immediate success and lasting appeal of cinema over the course of its short history have had much to do with its persuasive and ever-increasing approximation of reality. Yet, despite Cinema's incessant technological drive toward greater approximation, from enhancements to image, to sound, to color, to stereoscopy, and so on, reality has remained a constant measure of cinema's decided and decisive alterity.¹ This may well be the only measure the various theoreticians of cinema, including Bazin, Mitry, Metz, and Boudry, among others, share in common. Each evokes reality, only to locate cinema at a measurable distance from it.² Each not only assumes a priori that cinema is essentially an illusion, but finds it necessary to emphasize the imaginary nature of cinema—its unreality—as its salient characteristic and incontestable ground for theoretical speculation.

The insistence on the illusory nature of cinema, emphatic and incontestable as it has been, has not to do with any probability of confusing film with reality. Rather, the two have to be conceptually and for that matter, as we shall see later, spatially kept apart, partly because of what Metz calls "the problem of verisimilitude" (72) and what Bazin attributes to the possibility of substitution (A. Bazin 27). For Baudry it is the Platonic Cave syndrome ("The Apparatus"). Admittedly, no one assumes the images on the cinematic screen to be real. The audience, Metz tells us, "is not duped by the diegetic illusion, it 'knows' that the screen presents no more than a fiction" (72). However, he tells us, "it is of vital importance for the correct unfolding of the spectacle that this make-believe be scrupulously respected ... that every thing is set to work to make the deception effective and to give it an air of truth" (72). This is Bazin's version of the same:

If the film is to fulfill itself aesthetically we need to believe in the reality of what is happening while knowing it to be tricked. ... All that matters is that the spectator can say at one and the same time that the basic material of the film is authentic while the film is also truly cinema. So the screen reflects the ebb and flow of our imagination which feeds on a reality for which it plans to substitute. (A. Bazin 48)

It is the "air of truth," according to Bazin that enables film as an "illusion of reality," to act as a substitute for "authentic reality" (27). This substitution has distinct and potentially dire consequences. The substitution "quickly induces a loss of awareness of the reality itself, which becomes identified in the mind of the spectator with its cinematographic representation" (27). What concerns Bazin is not attributing more to cinema than it is due; it is attributing less to reality than is prudent. It is not cinema that may be confused with reality; rather it is reality that may be confused with cinema to the former's detriment. More may appear to be less. As for the filmmaker, the price of this transgression is the inability "to tell where lies begin or end," thereby becoming the "dupe" of his or her art. Once this happens, there can be no "further conquest of reality" for want of clear boundaries (27).

The depreciation Bazin ascribes to the identification of "authentic reality" with the cinematic illusion has at least one thing in common with the "decay of aura" Benjamin attributed to "the desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction" ("The Work of Art" 223). In both cases, the substitution of a mechanical reproduction for "the uniqueness of every reality" leads to the depreciation of the latter.

The situations into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is always depreciated. This holds not only for the art work but also, for instance, for a landscape which passes in review before the spectator in a movie. (221)

I'll return to this curious consequence and what is, in effect, reality's vulnerability to film. For now it is important to note that both Benjamin and Bazin gauge the "authentic reality" and its mechanical reproduction in spatial terms and in relation

to distance. Benjamin defines the “aura” of the real as “the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be” (“The Work of Art” 222). This is a distance measured in experiential rather than literal terms, that is, “however close it may be.” Conversely, the destruction of “aura” has to do with attempts to overcome this distance through the agency of mechanical reproduction, for example, the cinema. Also, to insist, as Bazin and many other theoreticians of cinema do, on the illusory nature of film in relation to reality, is to insist on the spacing of reality and illusion to the two sides of a line that readily allows one “to tell where lies begin or end.” Though generally presumed, the implement of this spacing is not necessarily a given. In the least, the spacing is vulnerable. It fails when and where “authentic reality” is identified with illusion of reality. This is why the place and the conditions under which this identification could happen, which is wherever film takes place, have been a matter of considerable concern and careful consideration since the inception of cinema.

If cinema is, as Benjamin contends, a direct response to “the desire of contemporary masses to bring things ‘closer’ spatially and humanly,” the history of cinema’s place and placement has followed the opposite trajectory. A reverse spatial logic has seen to the formation of the place of film from inception. That film is not reality is not only a persistent theoretical note; it is also implemented and imposed by the designed experiential peculiarities of the historic places that have circumscribed the filmic event.

Locating and placing film is a formidable challenge confounded by the fact that film overlaps and condenses time and space. It, in a sense, displaces every place it happens to be. It produces a strange cohabitation between heterogeneous spaces, past and present, real and illusory, virtual and actual. This is something that does not happen in reality, though it happens in reality.

The ambivalence that persistently overshadows any question of a place for film is compounded by cinema’s constant technological strives toward ever-greater approximation of reality. Despite the constant strive toward greater technological approximation, or rather because of it, film from inception has been persistently placed at a marked experiential distance from reality. The modalities of this placement have changed drastically overtime. The placement has not. In effect, it has increased with every technological abridgement of the distance between film and reality. In the coming pages, I will trace the modalities of film’s placement from the Kinetoscope to the multiplex through the course of the twentieth century. I will come back to address the peculiar logic of this spacing and the ideological consternations it is meant to circumscribe.

THE BORROWED SPACES

In a sense, cinema has never been here, where the I as a measure of reality subsists. It has always been there, at an irreconcilable distance by design.

In its earliest incarnation, the moving picture was confined within the well-defined box of the Kinetoscope (1891). To see the moving picture, one had to

look inside the box from the outside through a peephole. The box, despite all the variations on form, material, and ornamental detail, retained the moving picture within its limits at a clear distance from the viewing subject who initiated and terminated the viewing (Figure 5.1). Since the Kinetoscope was self-contained and mobile, it could be placed at any place, as it was at fairgrounds, parlors, arcades, department stores, and so on. The novel displacement of time and space that happened within it remained within it wherever it happened to be.³ And there, it was always in borrowed space.

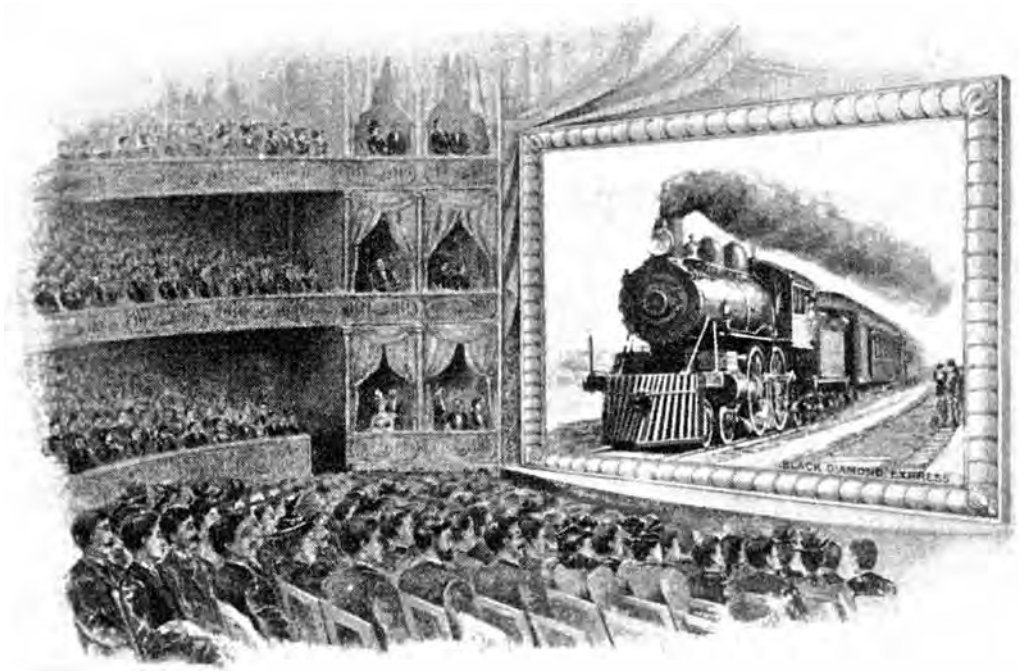
As compared to the Kinetoscope, the projected film, in any of its many



Fig. 5.1 *Holland Brothers' Kinetoscope Parlor, 1894*
Photo Credit: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Edison National Historic Site

designations, Cinémaographe, vitascope, eidoloscope, bioscope, and so on, constituted an entirely different type of viewing experience, and presented an entirely different set of challenges. The projection brought the moving picture out of the box and into the same space as the viewing subject. The effect is best described in an April 4, 1896 *New York Journal* article enumerating the wonders of the new machine (vitascope): "For two hours dancing girls and groups of figures, all of life size, seemed to exist as realities on the big white screen which had been built at one end of the experimenting rooms" (qtd. in Musser 14). The novelty and wonder of the new machine is, in part, a function of approximation, both of size and space—the size of "life" and in its space. What "seemed to exist" as reality comes to inhabit the same space as what exist as reality. However, as the author is quick to locate and localize the event, this novel displacement of space and time happens on the "white screen" and "at one end" of the room, that is, there, at a perceived distance from the viewer, however close s/he may be.

The space that intervenes as a divider between what is and what seems to be what it is not and where it is not, acts in ways that are similar to the bounding box of the Kinetoscope. Even though the solid has given way to a void, the emplacement



of an experiential divide between reality and illusion is fundamentally the same. The functioning of this void has everything to do with the novelty of the event as well as the subject matter of early films or what Tom Gunning calls the “cinema of attractions”—a cinema that offers scenes to look at, rather than narratives to be engrossed in (114–33).⁴ Both the novelty and the attraction encouraged the viewer to assume the role of a spectator. The spectatorial role fixes the subject’s place outside the spectacle. It requires the subject to look *at* the spectacle in recognition of the space that is transformed into distance between the spectator and the spectacle. Early films often addressed themselves specifically to this space/distance for the thrill and amusement of the viewing spectators. Cases in point are the ubiquitous and all too popular films of on-rushing trains and other moving vehicles, waves breaking at the shore, and so on. One such scene is well depicted in an 1897 advertising poster for the Lyman H. Howe’s Animotoscope exhibition (Figure 5.2). The audience and the train locomotive are depicted in a head to head confrontation on two sides of a gigantic picture frame that reassuringly separates and locates the moving picture within a well-delineated and laterally contained space opposite the spectators’ gaze. The picture frame is a recurring theme in depictions of early film exhibits. It is not certain how prevalent the use of a picture frame around the movie screen, often a stretched muslin sheet, may have been in the early exhibits. Its absence may well have exacerbated the audience’s reaction. Nevertheless, the frame is a prevalent feature of idealized depictions of the exhibit.⁵

Having delineated the spectacle within a frame and located the spectators outside it—in the least in the idealized depictions—what followed in these early

Fig. 5.2 Lyman H. Howe’s Animotoscope exhibition poster, 1897
Photo Credit: From the Collections of the Luzerne County Historical Society

exhibits, is perhaps best described by Maxim Gorky, in his review of the Lumières Cinématographe exhibition at the Nizhny–Novgorod Fair of 1896.

Suddenly something clicks, everything vanishes and a train appears on the screen. It speeds straight at you—watch out! It seems as though it will plunge into the darkness in which you sit turning you into a ripped sack full of lacerated flesh and splintered bones, and crushing into dust and into broken fragments this hall and this building, so full of women, wine, music and vice. (408)

Gorky is well aware of his place in the darkness opposite the “train of shadows” on the screen. He knows that it only “seems as though” the train will cross the line of the screen into the domain of the living. Nevertheless, these shadows are “terrifying to see,” because of the graphic images that the contemplation of an abridged distance brings to mind. What he imagines is not merely death, but disfigurement. It is bodies and buildings transformed into flesh and bone, dust and broken fragments—deprived not only of life, but also of *form*! Why the contemplation of shadowy illusions crossing into reality should evoke such graphic images of disfiguration, knowing the images to be mere shadows, is a question we’ll have to answer later. The immediate reaction to the scene unfolding on the screen was perhaps closer to this account: “involuntarily you scramble to get out of the way of the train” (Musser and Nelson 66). Other and perhaps well-exaggerated accounts have the audience rushing out of the theater in panic. The physical reaction, whether slight or severe, does not come from any confusion of a dim grey illusion on the screen with reality. Instead, it is an improper involvement with the image, that is, being dialogically involved instead of looking *at* the image that has the audience react. It is the fear of proximity to something that should remain at a distance that would have the audience re-establish the distance by physically distancing themselves from the image.

In the end, the experience of this illusory breach is only reassuring. The uncanny is transformed into the sublime. “Noiselessly,” the locomotive “upon approaching the edge of the screen, vanishes somewhere beyond it” (Gorky 407). The edges of the screen hold the threat of death and disfigurement at bay by keeping the train where it belongs: there, in the “kingdom of shadows.” The distance between the spectators and the spectacle is experientially and forcefully re-established. However, despite the thrill of defying death and disfigurement, the tampering with the line separating reality from illusion exacts a price. Having defied death, Gorky cannot, nevertheless, locate and localize it in the “kingdom of shadows” and outside the darkness in which the audience persists. Thoughts of death linger on and torment him through the remainder of the short-films to follow, as these shorts did in most early film exhibitions.

The card players in an ensuing film appear full of life and “laugh until their sides split but not a sound is heard.” “It seems as if these people have died and their shadows have been condemned to play cards in silence unto eternity” (Gorky 407). The presence/absence of the players on the screen has Gorky imagine not their present lives elsewhere, as he well and accurately might have, but their imaginary death prior to, if not as the condition of, their silent shadowy presence on the

screen. Unable to separate and localize the absence he senses on the screen, Gorky temporalizes it by locating it in the past, as an imaginary death. Nevertheless, the problem persists, since it is the film itself.

Much as Gorky tries, from the outset, to imagine film as a distinct place—a kingdom no less, with sovereign boundaries—this place is anything but clear and distinct. This kingdom forcefully evokes and inexorably confounds presence and/as absence, life and/as death, at once. It makes the separate inseparable. This is perhaps the problem with verisimilitude; it cannot be reduced to any one thing, in any one place. Affording no clear hold on presence or absence, “this mute, grey life finally begins,” Gorky tells us, “to disturb and depress you” (408).

It seems as though it carries a warning, fraught with a vague but sinister meaning that makes your heart grow faint. You are forgetting where you are. Strange imaginings invade your mind and your consciousness begins to wane and grow dim ... (408)

Although Gorky does not specify what the warning of the mute grey life on the screen is, fraught as he imagines it to be with a vague but sinister meaning, he is quite clear on the consequence. It disturbs and depresses him. In its company, he loses his sense of place and forgets where he is—in the darkness, amidst the audience. The dissolution of his sense of place is coupled with a loss of control over his thoughts. Falling, by all appearances, into the grip of language over which one has no hold, strange imaginings *invade* his mind. His thoughts too become displaced, as his consciousness wanes and dims.

Suddenly “a gay chatter and a provoking laughter of a woman” in the audience returns him to his place outside the kingdom of shadows. There, from “the vague, but sinister meaning” of this experience he tries to distance himself by locating and placing cinema elsewhere. In his place he imagines cinema to be “out of place.” “Why here, of all places,” he asks repeatedly, “are they showing this latest achievement of science?” Though he is not certain of the exact scientific value of this invention, he is certain it safely and usefully belongs in the realm of science and in the hands of scientists within the confines of the laboratory. Any place else, it is displaced and displacing. Nevertheless, he concludes with the uneasy knowledge that the entertainment value of this peculiar invention will outweigh its scientific value, thus placing it where it should have no place. Gorky’s fears were, of course, well founded. The logic of his imaginary placement of film at a distance elsewhere was, however, to shape the place of film for the remainder of its history.

The addition of a narrator and/or musical accompaniments to early silent film screenings would soon go some distance toward remediation of the type of dialogical involvement with silent films that purportedly disturbed and depressed Gorky. By 1914, Charles Wittemore would go so far as to attribute the broad appeal of, by then, narrative cinema to the introduction of the organ:

It is difficult to say what new features may be added to the development of the motion picture in the next few years, but certainly the introduction of the organ in connection with the picture program has done much to arouse a universal

interest among the class of people who are not fascinated by the "thrillers," and to raise the tone of the programs by this very fact. (C. A. Whittemore, The Moving Picture Theater 43)

The organ music and the narrator's voice acted in ways that were similar to the "gay chatter" and "provoking laughter" that extracted and retuned Gorky to his *place*. Interjected between the audience and the screen, the narrator and/or the music helped stabilize and localize the audience in their place in relation to the screen located now behind the source of sound directed at the audience. Irrespective of this stabilizing addition, film's place was to remain no place for a time. Pending the transformation of the cinema of attractions into narrative cinema, film would be confined to temporal and borrowed spaces. It would be kept on the move by traveling showmen, such as Lyman H. Howe noted earlier, from locality to locality and a heterogeneous body of borrowed spaces, including churches, schools, city halls, vacant stores, vaudeville theaters, and so on, in each of which film was, in a sense, a novelty out of place. Else, film was placed in the company of other oddities, wonders and curiosities—things that had no place inside the place of everyday life, and were placed in the borrowed and temporal spaces of fairgrounds, circuses, and other traveling entertainments. All these were carefully demarcated and segregated spaces at a measurable experiential and literal distance from the course of daily life.

THE PLACE ELSEWHERE

The technological novelty of the moving image inevitably dissipated in a relatively short time. With it waned the appeal of the cinema of attractions that celebrated and in turn sublimated the uncanny effect of film. Meanwhile, as the lasting appeal and entertainment value of narrative film became clear, it was circumscribed a permanent place of its own in the space, if not the place of the real. The cohabitation offered distinct challenges. Where to place a displacement, no less, of space and time?

The affinity between narrative cinema and theater made the latter a logical precedent for the constitution of a place for film. This was particularly true of vaudeville theaters that had hosted the film as a novel supplementary sideshow from early on. However, as compared to both theater and cinema of attractions, narrative cinema required a distinctly different mode of reception from the audience, and as such a different type of space/place. This difference rendered the spatial solutions associated with prior venues not fully suited to the task at hand.

In contrast to the cinema of attractions, narrative cinema willfully collapsed the space the former confronted and effectively constituted as distance between the screen and the audience. Avoiding any recognition of the audience in their spectatorial role, in what has become a time-honored tradition, narrative cinema cast the audience in a voyeuristic role. It absorbed and integrated the audience into the type of immersive experience that was both the source of this cinema's persuasive appeal and what both Bazin and Metz warned us against as a problem

with verisimilitude, and Benjamin placed at the root of the decay of aura in the age of mechanical reproduction.

The immersive voyeuristic experience of narrative cinema sets it apart from not only the cinema of attractions, but the “legitimate” theater as well. In the latter, the imaginary is always *there*, at a marked distance from the audience. It is always circumscribed to a carefully sequestered and segregated *stage* where actors may readily and safely assume identities other than what is presumably and properly their own. The proscenium arch that locates the audience and the staged fiction in opposition, elaborately and clearly articulates the line where the imaginary meets but never touches reality. This dividing line is not only constituted formally and experientially, but also legally and as such atemporally. This is the only place where identities become interchangeable without causing consternation or having the legal consequences they would have any place outside this place.

The distance between the real and the imaginary in theatre is additionally augmented and controlled by the literal presence of the actors on stage.⁶ This presence invariably underscores the absence, and the illusory nature of the characters staged. In contrast, on the virtual stage of the narrative cinema there are no actors. There are only characters. The audience is the only presence in the cinema that is cast, nonetheless, in a voyeuristic role and immersed in the action for the duration of the film. However, the duration of early narrative films was short (10 to 15 minutes on average by 1905) and the captions pulled the audience out of the action at regular intervals and located them opposite the flat screen. Both effectively kept the illusion at bay in early narrative cinema as it was in the cinema of attractions. In addition, the narrative short films, accompanied as they were by live music for the duration, were often seamlessly integrated with live performances of popular songs and music between reels. Siegfried Kracauer delineated the role of this auxiliary entertainment long ago. “If scenes of real physicality are ... displayed alongside the movie” Kracauer noted in 1926, “the latter recedes into the flat surface and the deception is exposed. The proximity of action which has spatial depth destroys the spatiality of what is shown on the screen. By its very existence film demands that the world it reflects be the only one; it should be wrested from every three-dimensional surrounding lest it fail as an illusion” (91–6).

It would not be before silence gave way to sound in what by then would be a very different movie-theater that Kracauer’s call could and would be heeded. In the early decades of film, the live performances that preceded and followed the filmic illusion, in addition to their entertainment value, allowed the illusion to strategically and effectively “fail,” that is, to depreciate and distance itself as illusion by receding into the background.

Therefore, the principal challenge for the designers of first movie-theaters was not keeping the film at bay in the space of the auditorium. Until the advent of feature-length movies, the music and captions during and the live entertainment at the intervals was sufficient. Rather, the principal preoccupation was situating the narrative cinema in relation to reality. The challenge was to contextualize and explain how the displacement of time and space that didn’t happen in reality, happened



Fig. 5.3 *Theatorium* postcard, c.1912, Gotham Book Mart Collection, University of Pennsylvania Library

in reality.⁷ This challenge was met at a gate erected formally and augmented experientially in between the real and the imaginary.

The process often began with the conversion of a vacant store (Figure 5.3). David Hulfish provided a vivid description in 1911 of a process that dated from the first years of the new century.

A vacant business house having been selected both for its location and for size, the process of converting it into a motion picture theatre is to remove the glass front and framing for the door and window, to replace it with a closed front a few feet back from the sidewalk line and into which are built the ticket seller's booth and the entrance and exit doors and on the inside of which is built a projection operator's booth. At the far end of the room a muslin screen about three by four yards is stretched. The room is filled with rows of chairs, either kitchen chairs or opera chairs, as the expense justified by the location will permit, and a piano is placed near the picture screen. (13)

A vacant store began its transformation into a movie-theater when the visual continuity of its transparent façade was supplanted by a requisite opacity. The implied distance of this opaque facade was in turn amplified by placing it at a measured distance from the sidewalk. This setback instituted a void that intervened as an unabridged divider between the inside and the world outside. A vacant store became a movie-theater, in other words, by withdrawing and distancing itself from its context.

The reading of this separation was augmented on the street façade with a superimposed gateway imagery whose ubiquity made it in short order synonymous with the nickelodeon. An articulated frame, often employing the classical orders in various degrees of abstraction, was typically superimposed on the physical borderlines of the nickelodeon's street façade. The inscription of an arch within this frame completed a gateway imagery that more often than not evoked a Roman Triumphal Arch and the city-gate it symbolically embodied.

The gateway theme for the movie-theater façade became prevalent in short order, to the point of being prefabricated, and offered for sale by various vendors (Figure 5.4).⁸ The Sears & Roebuck company's 1908 catalogue claimed "the 5-cent theater is here to stay" and "almost any vacant storeroom can be made into a five-cent theater by removing the glass front and replacing it with a regular Theater front similar to the illustration shown" on the catalogue page (qtd. in Schroeder 535).⁹ The "regular" is the arch in frame format serving as a forceful dividing line.

The nickelodeon's arch in frame facade also bore more than a passing resemblance to the legitimate theater's proscenium arch. The analogy was underscored by the omnipresent electric lights that lit up the nickelodeon entrance like a stage. Strategically, however, the nickelodeon did not erect its proscenium arch at the edge of the stage and the auditorium, but on the sidewalk. As such, the nickelodeon's audience was made to go not so much to look at the world of illusion from the other side of the proscenium arch, as they were made to cross it into an elsewhere constituted on the other side of this instituted and elaborate borderline. In time, the thematic of elsewhere would be fully explored in the exotic interiors



Fig. 5.4 *Sheldon Theatre*, Chicago, c.1909

Photo Credit:
Library of
Congress, Prints
& Photographs
Division, LC-
USZ62—92105

of movie palaces. The nickelodeon's focus, however, was entirely on the fabrication of a divide, the related production of an elsewhere, and the subsequent transition from the place of the real to the (dis)place(ment) of the imaginary.

The requisite depth of the nickelodeon's "regular façade" was equally, if not more significant, to the thematic of elsewhere than the triumphal arch iconography. David Hulfish explained the intent of this otherwise nebulous void clearly. Although "the front partition of a typical theatre is placed six feet back from the sidewalk," he noted, "a still deeper front is desirable if the floor space can be spared" (177). Besides more advertising space, his reasoning had to do with the fact that the void "suggests retirement in the theatre, and when the prospective patron steps off the sidewalk he feels he is already within the theatre, even before he has purchased his admission ticket" (178). In other words, the void as a third transitional space was meant to denote departure and prolonged passage. It had one step off and depart from the place of the real before traversing its depth to enter the consequently imagined and the imaginary world/place beyond. To underscore the importance of the outdoor lobby and ticket booth in motion picture theater design, the anonymous author of a 1911 article on the subject tells us: "A spacious lobby has always been an important consideration with the owners in the planning of a moving picture theatre, and a pretentious ticket booth, placed in the centre thereof, considered of the utmost importance" ("The Moving Picture Theatre").

Placing the ticket booth as a freestanding entity in the center of the outdoor lobby was to leave no room to ambiguity. It transformed what otherwise would

have been a static space into a bi-directional space on two sides of a well-defined center. In form and detail, relative transparency, and controlled access, it had the trappings of a guardhouse at the borderline. More significant, however, was the elaborate ritual of passage to which the ticket booth along with the outdoor lobby and the front gate was the setting. The placement of the ticket booth in the outdoor lobby was a significant departure from an analogous practice in legitimate and vaudeville theaters, where tickets were commonly vended on the interior lobby of the theater instead of the exterior. The displacement meant having to purchase tickets at the gate (border), before and as the condition of entry. The right of passage to the other side here required the rite of a peculiar and elaborate exchange.

To enter the movie-theater, then and since, one has had to first exchange currency at the border. Beyond the ticket booth, only the ticket, as substitute money, could secure one's entry. In principle, no amount of *real* money could do so, without the requisite ritual of exchange prior and as the condition of crossing the inner borderline. Unlike real money, however, this substitute money is not a medium of free exchange. Its currency is delimited to the borderline, and even there, it is not exchangeable or exchanged with any commodity. If the logic of money is logged in exchange of value, this logic is suspended, in a sense, at the point of entry into the movie-theater.

Once the requisite currency exchange is complete, one has to carry the movie currency only a few feet from the ticket booth, across the entry door, and surrender it to an authority figure whose recognition and subsequent destruction of this money, both validates and invalidates it as currency.¹⁰ Whereas the destruction of real money causes considerable consternation outside the movie-theater, precisely because the exchange value is lost, its proxy—the ticket—assumes currency only in being destroyed. To gain entry into the movie-theater, one has to consent to the destruction of the ticket's exchange value and carry forward a torn stub that retains the memory of the destruction/loss at its edge and as such sanctions one's presence for the duration of stay.

As part of a broader cost-cutting plan for an "automatic theater" in the early 1930s, Charles S. Lee proposed to forego the ticketing process and have the audience enter the theater through a turnstile upon cash payment. Prudent as the proposal may have been at the time, it didn't go past a prototype. The ritual, expensive as it was for the theater owner, proved indispensable. This is because what this ritual of transformation and destruction institutes at the border, as the border between the real and the imaginary, is their irreducibility. What it disavows is any intermediary or exchangeable value between the real and the imaginary. The tearing of the ticket locates the imaginary outside the circuit of restricted economy and renders the divide between the real and the imaginary ritually absolute. The condition of admission into the movie-theater has been a ritual renunciation of equivalency/exchange between the imaginary and the real.

The movie-theater does not, it is important to note, exclude real money from its bounds. One may readily exchange real money for food, and in principle, any other item, within the bounds of the movie-theater. There is only one significant exception. What the movie-theater solely and adamantly excludes from within its

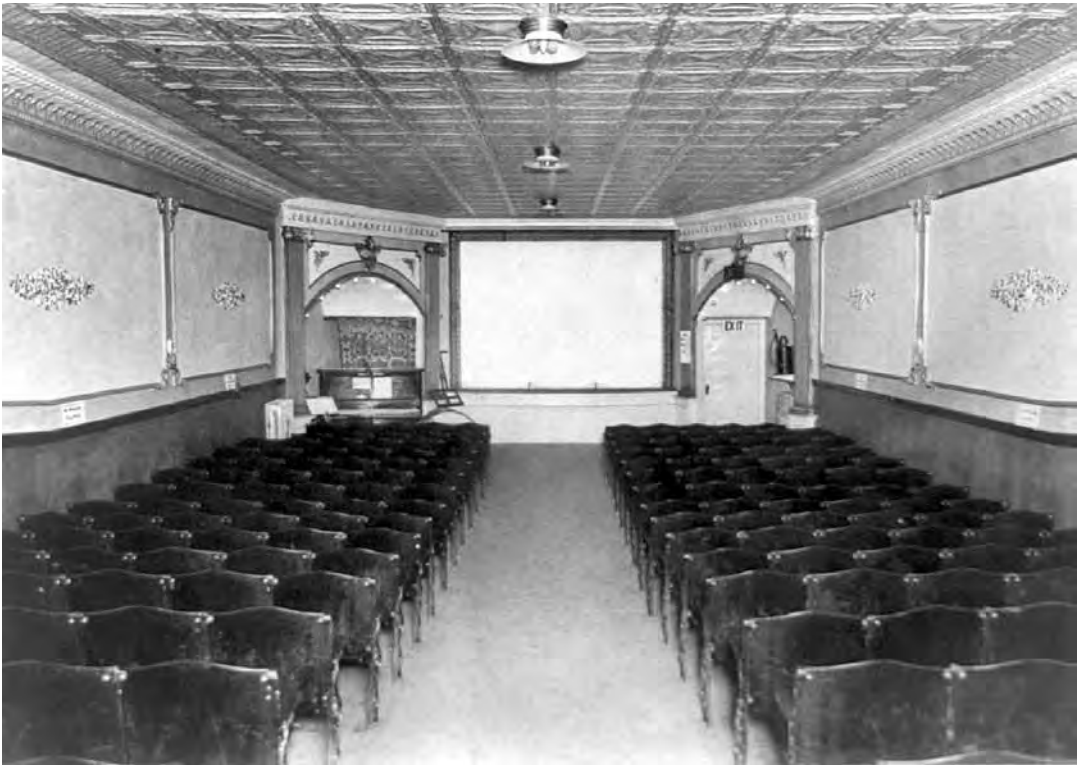
bounds, through the ticketing ritual, is any intermediary or exchangeable value between the real and the imaginary.¹¹ Also, the ticketing ritual is not unique to the movie-theater. It is used for every occasion where an activity has to be sequestered and set apart. The extraordinary nature of the event is construed in each instance by the suspension and exclusion of the ordinary through, in part, the ticketing ritual. Depending on how the ritual is contextualized, however, its message could vary considerably. A case in point is the difference between the ticketing rituals of legitimate theater and cinema. In context, one speaks to transition, the other separation. In legitimate theater, one is never given to leave the real. In the movie-theater departure is, it seems, a prerequisite.

Once admitted, the experiential journey that had started on the sidewalk would be merely prolonged by the directional space of the nickelodeon's auditorium. The directionality of this space had as much to do with the literal dimensions of the often narrow and long auditoria, as with the strategic location of the screen at the "far end" of the room (Figure 5.5). As the focal point of this directional space, one's movement in the auditorium was progressively toward, though never arriving at, the literal place of the imaginary: the screen. Placing the screen at the "far end" of the auditorium was not, however, the only option. Besides the side walls, John Klaber noted in 1915, "The type of hall where the screen is at the same end as the main doors has been advocated by some authorities as lessening the fire risk, since the audience face toward the principal exits, and need not pass the operating room to reach them" (550). Fire was an ever-present threat in early cinema due to highly flammable nature of nitrate film. Fires often started in the projection booth, whose proximity to the entrance and exit doors created a very volatile condition. Klaber's suggested relocation of the screen was quite practical. However, the relocation would have drastically altered the experience and with it the intended relationship between the real and the imaginary. Consequently, fire exits were placed, at some expense, in proximity to the screen to allow it to remain in its desired location at the "far end" of the auditorium. The screen has since been at the "far end" of the auditorium, despite considerable transformations and endless contextual variations from time to time and place to place.

Though the placement of the screen at the "far end" of the auditorium kept it at an unabridged distance from the audience, nonetheless, this arrangement placed the audience and the screen in the same space. The cohabitation presented a distinct challenge. This had not to do with the projection of moving images on the screen. It had to do with its absence as Hulfish explains:

The picture screen is an unsightly object in the theater when there is no projected picture upon it. The appearance of the room is improved greatly during the intermission by lowering an ornamental drop curtain over the picture screen. (61)

At face value, it is difficult to imagine what would be unsightly about a blank white surface. Yet, covering the screen with a curtain was a practice that would persist for over 70 years. It would only be displaced by a virtual curtain of advertisements and other projected images at the advent of the multiplex. In contrast to the legitimate theater, where the drawing of the curtain between performances served both a



ritual and a practical purpose, in the movie-theater the curtain served no purpose other than to hide the “unsightly” screen when there was no image projected on it. The live performances that preceded and followed the screening of movies at the nickelodeon took place, unlike legitimate theater, at the closing of the curtain and in front of it. In other words, the persistent wish to spare the audience the sight of the blank screen was primarily ritual and ideational. What was unsightly about the blank screen was what it represented and kept in sight.

Echoing Hulfish’s sentiment nearly two decades later, Barry advised, “that the audience never see a blank screen.” He reasoned the screening of a movie “cannot be satisfactory if something happens to spoil the illusion—something that reminds the patron that he or she is sitting in a theatre chair looking at a two-dimensional surface covered with light and shadow,” that is, precisely what caused Gorky much consternation and anguish. Barry went on to note: “the blank screen at any time makes it so much harder to create that illusion,” by which he meant before and after the screening (12).

As a displacement of time and space, the movie is ideally transformed, at its conclusion, into the memory of another time and place, leaving behind no trace of the displacement. However, inasmuch as the screen bounds and localizes the displacement, it memorializes it. It allocates it an “unsightly” place that perpetually speaks to past and anticipates future displacements. While the screen is in sight, the displacement does not disappear without a trace. The curtain not only hides this trace from sight; it also divides the auditorium in two. It localizes the audience

Fig. 5.5 *Normal Theatre, Chicago, c.1909*

Photo Credit:
Library of
Congress, Prints
& Photographs
Division, LC-
USZ62-92107

to one side and locates the imaginary outside this place, out of sight, in a place that seemingly recedes infinitely behind the curtain.

The distance the curtain effectively emplaced between the audience and the screen would be the subject of greater articulation, in the form of elaborate frames and arches at the “far end” of the auditorium in the waning years of nickelodeon’s near decade long popularity, and that in anticipation of the elaborate proscenium arches of the movie palaces to come.

Despite its relatively short history, the nickelodeon had a profound influence on the history of movie-theaters in the century to come. Whereas literally, if not in effect, cinema brings other spaces and times to our space and time and as such creates a potentially uncanny cohabitation—raising questions of place and placement as it did Gorky—the nickelodeon effectively side stepped this challenge by turning the experience on its head, conceptualizing it as a journey out to an Other place. This was the nickelodeon’s contribution and lasting legacy. Whence, cinema would always happen elsewhere, as it would at the end of a journey. If the movie-theater is, as Mary Heaton Vorse noted in 1911, “the door of escape, for a few cents, from the realities of life,” this escape—no less from reality—was not merely imaginary (442). It was also a literal experience that was enacted architecturally and ritually to the estrangement of narrative cinema from every place it happened to be.

Of course, consternation about the adverse effect of the imaginary on the real did not dissipate with the advent of the nickelodeon. It was merely localized there. As Lee Grieveson points out, in the imagination of the emergent middle-class the nickelodeon not only attracted the “vulnerable and dangerous,” that is, “children, women, and lower-classes and immigrant audiences,” also “experiences at moving pictures in nickelodeons were regarded as particularly dangerous, principally because of the realism of moving pictures, because images were seen to be linked closely to imitative responses from ‘suggestible’ audiences and because the ill-lit space of the nickelodeon provided what the Juvenile Protective Association of Chicago described as ‘a cover for familiarity and sometimes even for immorality’” (13). The middle-class consternation about the imaginary’s adverse effect on the real led to a concerted effort at censoring and policing cinema in the decade that followed the advent of the nickelodeon. These included legislative measures at the municipal, state, and federal levels, as well as, self-regulatory practices by the movie industry.

In contrast, focusing on the experience of the immigrant and women audiences at the nickelodeon, Miriam Hansen makes a sharp distinction between their experiences and the audience experience of “classic cinema” as it would emerge in the second decade of the twentieth century. In classic cinema, Hansen argues, “the absorption of the viewer into narrative space on a stylistic level corresponded to an increased derealization of the theater space—the physical and social space of the spectator” (83). On the other hand, “the neighborhood character of many nickelodeons—the egalitarian seating, continuous admission, and variety format, nonfilmic activities like illustrated songs, live acts, and occasional amateur nights—fostered a casual, sociable if not boisterous, atmosphere. It made moviegoing an

interactive rather than merely passive experience" (61). The disjunctive exhibition program of the nickelodeon had two distinct consequences for Hansen. It did not allow the audience to get fully submerged into "the illusory space on screen." Throughout, the audience remained conscious of "the actual theater space" and their collective place within it (84). Also, "this aesthetics of disjunction not only contested the presumed homogeneity of dominant culture and society in the name of which immigrants were marginalized and alienated; more important, it lent the experience of disorientation and displacement the objectivity of collective expression" (108). The nickelodeon, Hansen argues, played much the same role for female audiences in so far as "it 'simultaneously represented, contested and inverted' the gendered demarcations of private and public spheres ... Bounded by familiar surroundings and culturally accepted, within the working-class community at least, the movie-theater opened up an arena in which a new discourse on femininity could be articulated and the norms and codes of sexual conduct could be redefined" (118).

Hansen's acute observations are based on an exclusive focus on the auditorium space. Taking into account the entire experience may well lead to a more nuanced interpretation. Though indeed "bounded by familiar surroundings," the nickelodeon was effectively separated and segregated from those surroundings both visually and ritually. This was the primary focus of the nickelodeon designers, given that the music and the captions during and live entertainment at the intervals effectively kept the imaginary at a pronounced distance in the auditorium. If the nickelodeon was indeed "an objective correlative of the immigrant experience," it was by virtue of leaving one's "familiar surroundings," on a journey to an Other world, into which the audience were given short glimpses, and from which they remained effectively distanced, if not segregated. In a sense, everyone at the nickelodeon was an immigrant, that is, an outsider by design (108). Any shift in gender and social roles within the bounds of the nickelodeon merely underscored the alterity of the movie-theatre as the fantastic and other worldly—indeed a place apart where *real* norms did not apply.

The difference between the nickelodeon experience and the "classic movie" experience at the movie-palaces of the late teens and twenties may not have been as pronounced as Hansen portrays it. The disjunctive program of the nickelodeon did not entirely cease with the demise of the nickelodeon. The live music at a grander scale, the captions during, as well as the live entertainment on occasion would continue to play much the same role in the movie palaces as they did at the nickelodeon.

THE IMAGINARY PLACES

As one of a handful of prominent architecture firms specializing in the emerging field of movie-theater design in the early nineteen teens, the work of the architecture firm Rapp and Rapp for Balaban and Katz (later Paramount) played a seminal role in the transformation of nickelodeon into the movie palaces of the late teens

and twenties. Looking back in 1930, at the development of movie-theaters over the preceding three decades, George L. Rapp attributed the development of the movie palace to “tremendous development in the production end of the motion picture industry” in the early nineteen teens (56). His reference was specifically the development and ensuing popularity of feature-length movies in the early teens, which in the words of P.R. Pereira some 16 years earlier, “helped to a great extent to raise the standard of this form of amusement from that of the lower to the higher branches of dramatic art” (178). This change required, he went on to note, a new form of movie-theater. Rapp was to echo the sentiment:

Logically the tremendous development in the production end of the motion picture industry was reflected in demands for a similar development in the exhibition of the pictures. To successfully exhibit the rapidly improving film productions, ideas and problems were presented which rendered the earlier picture theaters and even legitimate houses inefficient and obsolete and altogether unsuited to the presentation of this modern form of entertainment. (58–9)

The changes that made the nickelodeon obsolete were not technological per se. Aside from ongoing improvements to projection equipment leading to relatively brighter images on the screen, the main developments in the movie industry had to do with the movie’s duration and content, in particular, narrative plot, acting and the relative realism and polish of the production. Although, these “wonderful advances” immersed the audience in an imaginary reality to far greater degree and for far greater duration than the ubiquitous short duration films of the nickelodeon, nevertheless, none of these advances mandated, for any functional or practical reasons, a new type of movie-theater to which both Pereira and Rapp allude (Pereira 178). Even the ever-increasing popularity of the movies that led, by deliberate choice, to fewer and much larger movie-theaters as opposed to more numerous smaller theaters, could account for the shape of things to come.¹²

If, aside from providing a controlled environment for exhibition of film, the primary purpose of the movie-theater is, as I have tried to argue so far, to locate and localize the imaginary in relation to the real, what made the nickelodeon “inefficient” and “altogether unsuited” to the exhibition of feature-length movies was the obsolescence of its localization in face of greater intensity and duration of involvement with the imaginary. Rapp aptly attributed the shape of things that became to a new vision for what the movie-theater ought to be in face of rapidly improving film productions:

A second period in the history of the motion picture theater began—with the advent in the field of a different type of showman—one who believed that people go to the theater to live an hour or two in a different world; that the atmosphere of a palace should prevail in a theater, and that this could be arrived at by gorgeous stage settings, luxurious drapes and enchanting music. (59)

Of course, this new vision was not entirely new. Rapp was merely paraphrasing what had been previously expressed by many authors/architects. For instance:

The people of today's hurly-hurly, commercialized world go to the theater to live an hour or two in the land of romance. So it is that the sophisticated playgoer must be taken up on the architect's magic carpet, and set down suddenly in a celestial city of gorgeous stage settings, luxurious hangings and enchanting music. The atmosphere of a king's palace must prevail to stimulate the imagination of those who come within its doors. (Bullock 370)

Also:

People come to the motion picture theatre to live an hour or two in the land of romance. They seek escape from the hum-drum existence of daily life. ... People realize that for a small charge they can be lifted up on a magic carpet and set down in dream city amidst palatial surroundings where worry and care can never enter, where pleasure hides in every shadow. (Barry and Sargent 12)

Grand as the new vision was, what it had in common with the old is rendering the movie-going experience a journey out to an *Other* place. Whereas the nickelodeon's primary focus was the institution and elaboration of a threshold in between the real and the imaginary, the movie palaces of the silent era focused on fabricating a "different world" beyond the nickelodeon's threshold, literally. Film was now to happen in a world apart, where exoticism, and in short order, Orientalism were to underscore an alterity that was not only visceral, but also dramatic and literal.

Thomas Lamb, whose work for Marcus Loew also played a seminal role in shaping the history of the movie palace, succinctly articulated the strategy for this "new" motion picture theater in 1928:

To make our audience receptive and interested, we must cut them off from the rest of the city life and take them into a rich and self-contained auditorium, where their minds are freed from their usual occupations and freed from their customary thoughts. In order to do this, it is necessary to present to their eyes a general scheme quite different from their daily environment, quite different in color scheme, and a great deal more elaborate. (14)

Cutting off the audience from the rest of the city life begun, as it did, on the sidewalk.¹³ Assuming the nickelodeon's lessons, the street facade was transformed into a more pronounced, deeper and more directional threshold, if only to enhance "the patrons' spirit of adventure,"—the journey to elsewhere (Barry and Sargent 12). Extending a marquee over the sidewalk in front of the outdoor lobby enabled the designers of the "new" motion picture theater to add much greater directional depth to the front lobby than their predecessors had in the nickelodeon (Figure 5.6).

The design of the movie palace façade, erected as it was as a pronounced threshold over the outdoor lobby, followed no one style. Nonetheless, in a 1925 article devoted to "Theater Entrances and Lobbies," E.C.A. Bullock summed up the overall objective of the façade as creating "an attractive theatrical appearance," by which he meant "an exterior design in which the curves of graceful arches predominate, but are not overdone, provides a pleasing contrast to the cold,

Fig. 5.6 Rubush & Hunter architects,
Indiana Theatre,
 Indianapolis, 1927
 Photo Credit:
 Library of
 Congress Prints
 and Photographs
 Division, HABS
 IND,49-IND,29-25



straight and commercial lines of the usual surrounding buildings" (370). The same exact phrase would be used by, among others, Barry (12) in 1927 and Rapp (62) in 1930. In addition to having to differentiate itself from its context through overt formal contrasts, "the entrance motifs above and below the canopy," Bullock tells us, "should be made up of large and broad unobstructed openings, providing generous and alluring glimpses of the interior." To be "compelling," and "inviting," the new façade had to be selectively transparent to provide glimpses of a "different world" beyond the threshold to underscore passage through the divide. The distinction also meant greater ornamental embellishment for the movie-theater façade than was customary in the surrounding commercial buildings.

In contrast to the deep, directional and strategically transparent façade of the movie palace, dramatically emphasizing division and passage, the nickelodeon's façade may well appear static and subdued, or else, as Rapp had it "unsuited" and "obsolete."

Past the marquee, the ticket booth, and through the depth of the outdoor lobby, the *moviegoer*, having been constituted as such by being "taken up," as an oft repeated metaphor at the time had it, "on the architect's magic carpet," was sat down "in a celestial city of gorgeous stage settings, luxurious hangings and enchanting music" (Bullock 71). In other words, ticket in hand, the moviegoer was delivered to the attendant in the grand lobby where "the atmosphere of a king's palace" had to "prevail to stimulate the imagination of those who come within its doors" (71). Here, they were to be reconstituted as spectator/audience in the "dream city," the "land of Romance," or "temple of day-dreams" the movie palace was meant to be, by appearance and by experience (Figure 5.7).



The palatial lobby was often the first in a series of sequentially layered spaces that included a grand staircase, foyers, vestibules, and mezzanine promenades. These had to be sequentially traversed to reach the auditorium at considerable perceptual, if not literal distance, from the point of entry. The journey was meant to be transformative. The lobby, Bullock tells us, had to be “a place of real interest,” where “the waiting throng may be transformed from the usual pushing, complaining mob into a throng of joyous and contented people” (71). The instrument of this transformation was, of course, the palatial setting.

The construed grand spectacle of a palace, that wasn’t, transformed everyone entering into a spectator. In presenting “to their eyes a general scheme quite different from their daily environment,” as Lamb called for, the movie palace transformed moviegoers into visiting tourists in a displaced and displacing land. Here, everyone was, by design, out of place by rite of visitation to a place that was not only out of the ordinary, but also overwhelmingly ornate and complex in appearance. Ben Rosenberg’s remembrance of the encounter is telling: “I think my most memorable impressions of working in the lobby came from the expressions on the faces of patrons as they walked in, often stopping, looking upward and uttering words of amazement at the splendor about them” (20). Overwhelmed by the sublime spectacle, the urge was to transform the incomprehensible strangeness of the sight into tangible information: “In the lobby, patrons asked us myriad questions: ‘What is the seating capacity? Are those marble columns real? How high is the lobby? Is that piano on the loge floor really gold? How many bulbs are

Fig. 5.7 Thomas W. Lamb, *Fox Theatre*, San Francisco, CA 1929
Photo Credit: Motion Picture News 40

there in each chandelier? How do they clean the chandeliers?" (20). In the spur to substitute information for the incomprehensible sublimity of the sight, questions of authenticity, and of substance behind appearance, raised as they were about, for instance, marble or gold, speak to both a compulsory involvement with appearances and a disjuncture between substance and appearance in the mind of those who entered the palace, that wasn't. Here, in this "different world," the imaginary as representation supplanted the "real," as marble or gold, for instance, appeared to the spectator as appearance with indeterminable substance. This was what was to be "different." In the "land of romance," by design, one had access only to impenetrable appearances in disarming multitude. If various authors and architects insisted, as they did then, on the other worldly character of the movie palace, in order to "stimulate the imagination" and make the "audience receptive and interested," what they demanded was the forced suspension of the *real* and acquiescence to the imaginary, as appearance relieved of purported substance in a world apart. The imaginary wasn't per se what the movie brought to its place; it was a reception the place imposed on the movie in advance. The overarching assumption in this strategy was that the public's encounter with feature-length narrative film in that early stage could not or rather should not happen without proper preparation, stimulation, and mediation, that is, it should not happen outside the land of sublime appearances.

The lobby and the ensuing spaces, as sites of visitations rather than habitation, also had to be, Bullock tells us, "as open in treatment as possible, permitting the moviegoer to get one vista after another, which will produce a decided spirit of adventure and a desire to gain admittance to the other parts of the house." In the "celestial city," one was not to linger or contemplate. Led on by succeeding vistas through successive spaces that according to another author "open into one another like chambers in a maze" the sightseeing "adventure" of the audience/tourist was to continue and culminate in the auditorium (L. Lewis 176).

The palatial theme introduced in the lobby and extended to the succeeding mezzanines and foyers reached its climax in the monumental auditorium of the movie palace (Figure 5.8). These variously held from 2,000 to over 5,000 seats. Although the style and the details varied, what movie palace auditoria shared in common was richly articulated wall surfaces that decisively enveloped the auditorium space and led up to an imposing ceiling whose monumental concentric patterns culminated at the center in a grand chandelier. Though the latter may not have been the most effective means of illuminating a large interior, it was a very effective way of creating, in conjunction with concentric ornamental patterns of the ceiling and the wall articulations, a decidedly centralized space that located and localized the audience in Lamb's requisite "rich and self-contained" place.

An additional measure of the auditorium's requisite self-containment was the location of the audience in relation to the screen. In contrast to the nickelodeon, the audience and the screen in the movie palace auditorium were carefully segregated. Each was designated a place of its own on the opposite sides of an elaborate proscenium arch erected at the "far end" of the auditorium opposite the entry doors. The screen, carefully framed, was located at some distance behind the



Fig. 5.8 Thomas W. Lamb, *Loew's Ohio Theatre*, Columbus, OH, 1928
Photo Credit: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS OHIO, 25-COLB, 4-24

ornate proscenium arch and away from the audience. When there was no image projected on the screen, it and the space in front of it were covered by layers of elaborate and ornamental curtains, bordered by intricate cloth frames at the outer edge of the proscenium arch. In turn, a raised shallow stage in front of the curtains articulated the spatial depth of the proscenium arch, followed by a demarcated and segregated layer of space inside the auditorium devoted to the orchestra and/or the ubiquitous Wurlitzer organ between the audience and the proscenium arch. Together, they created both a permanent multilayered spatial barrier and a temporal sound barrier between the audience and the monumental opening of the proscenium arch. The curtains' role in keeping the audience inside the "self-contained" auditorium was assumed, in other words, by the orchestral and/or organ music at the curtains' opening.

In as much as the objective in the movie palace was, from the outset, to localize the movie event in a "different," distant, and exotic world, two further developments beyond the palatial theme would allow the objective to reach a logical conclusion in short order.

Whereas the palatial atmosphere of the first movie palaces was derived from the European baroque architecture and its nineteenth century second empire variant, the designers of the movie palace soon looked, in the cause of alterity, to more

distant and exotic imagery from a vast and diverse repertoire subsumed under the label "Orient." They borrowed and combined freely from Egyptian, Persian, and Indian, to Chinese, and every other source in between, to fabricate a world for the filmic event far more distant and exotic than the first movie palaces ever were. What mattered to the designers of these movie palaces was neither orthodoxy nor fidelity to any of the numerous and diverse sources that constituted the "Orient" in the public imagination. All that mattered was the exoticism and other-worldliness of the end result. Thomas Lamb, who played a decisive role in the adoption of the Oriental theme was, once again, quite succinct in describing the outcome.

The styles of architecture vary, but are all permeated with a touch of the Orient, which has always been brightly colorful, emotional and almost seductive in its wealth of color and detail. The grand foyer ... represents a festive procession all in Oriental splendor ... It is pageantry in its most elaborate form, and immediately casts a spell of the mysterious and to the Occidental mind exceptional. Passing on into the inner foyers and the mezzanine promenade, one continues in the same Indo-Persian style with elaborate ornamentation both in relief and in painting, all conspiring to create an effect thoroughly foreign to our Western minds. These exotic ornaments, colors and scenes are particularly effective in creating an atmosphere in which the mind is free to frolic and becomes receptive to entertainment. (14)

Much as the overt Orientalism of the second-generation movie palaces, conceived and presented as sensual, emotional, and seductive surface effect, aided the self-fabrication of the "Occidental" mind in opposition to it, it also placed and kept the "Occidental" mind at an unabridged distance. In this Oriental imaginary, the Occidental mind was de facto on tour in a "foreign" land where film was made to stand in the same relationship to the real as Orient did to Occident, by design (Figure 5.9).

Having reached unqualified formal and stylistic alterity, perhaps all that remained was to subvert space and condense time in pursuit of the "mysterious" and the "exceptional" as the site of the filmic event. This would be John Eberson's contribution to the genre. In his "atmospheric" theaters, interiors became exteriors, time became elastic, and any doubt about the suspension of the real at the gates of the "celestial city" all but dissipated in the thin matter of interior surfaces.

Eberson and his followers conceived the movie palace auditorium as a stage "set in an Italian garden; in a Persian court; in a Spanish patio," or any multitude of other distant and exotic outdoor places, all "canopied by a soft moonlit sky" taking the place of the centralized ceilings of earlier palaces (373). As the audience/tourists assumed their designated spectatorial role on seats surrounded by the thin veneer of any one distant and exotic outdoor place, in un-real time, the mid-day sun would set in minutes, "twinkling stars" would fill the evening sky above, "moving clouds" would roll overhead, the music would begin, the curtain would open, and the movie would appear behind the proscenium arch.

However novel, strange, and/or engrossing the displacement of time and space behind the proscenium arch may have been, at every draw of the curtain, one inevitably found oneself at a distance from both the event and the illusory

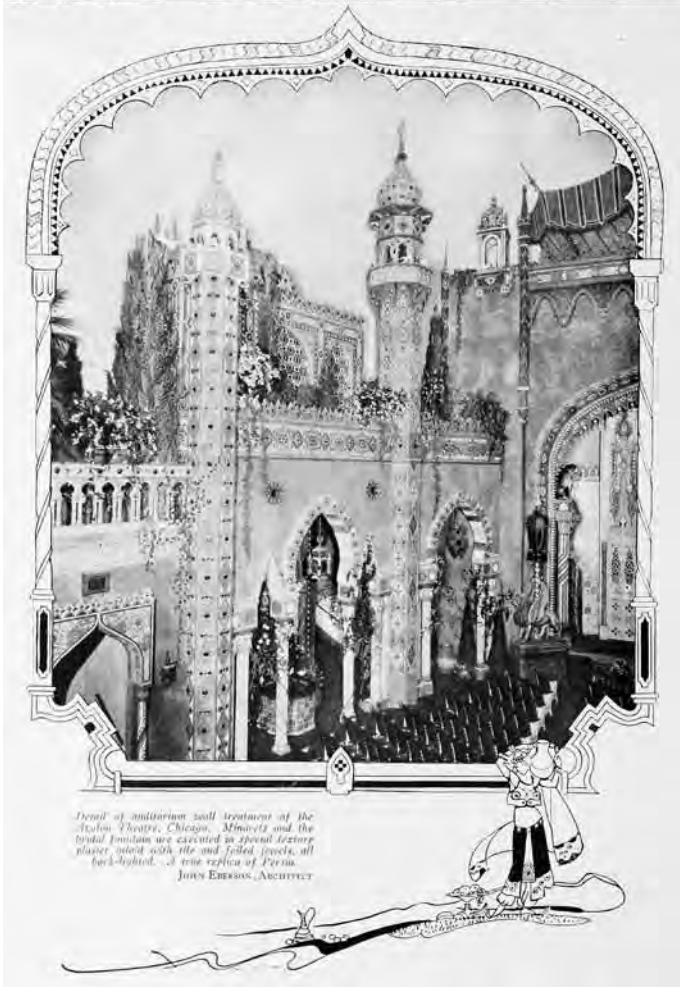


Fig. 5.9 John Eberson, top: *Loew's Theatre*, Louisville, KY, 1928; bottom: *Avalon Theatre*, Chicago, 1927
Photo Credit: top, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS KY,56-LOUVI,17-47; bottom, Motion Picture News 36

enveloping veneer of an outdoor, that wasn't. Here, in an Other world designed to be look at and at that from the outside, one was never let in, though all the while inside.

At the conclusion of the movie, the moonlight sky would turn to dusk, the sun would virtually rise, and the audience would trace its steps back from the exotic land of un-real time and distance to the land of the real.

Aiding the audience out, much as they had been on the way in, was an army of ushers in imaginary military uniforms, complemented by the disciplined mannerism of an army corps and an exclusive silent sign language. The message was unequivocal. The celestial city's army not only aided and controlled the movement of the visiting audience/tourist for the duration of the visit; this army also effectively underscored both the alterity of this world and authoritative control over it. Different as "celestial city" was meant to be, it was nevertheless effectively guarded under the watchful eyes of the palace guard (Figure 5.10).

Fig. 5.10 John Ebersson, *Grand Riviera Theatre*, Detroit, 1925
Photo Credit: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS MICH,82-DETRO,16-11



Despite the ever-presence of the palace guard, the media coverage of the movie palaces in the 1920s is replete with reference to the democratic nature of the movie palace as an institution. This too, however, merely underscored the alterity of "dream city." Lloyd Lewis' account is telling.

Most of these cinema palaces sell all their seats at the same price; and get it; the rich man stands in line with the poor; and usually tipping is forbidden. In this suave atmosphere, the differences of cunning, charm, and wealth, that determine our lives outside, are forgotten. All men enter these portals equal, and thus the movies are perhaps a symbol of democracy. Let us take heart from this, and not

be downcast because our democratic nation prudently reserves its democracy for the temple of day-dreams. (176)

At the gates of “celestial city,” ticket in hand, one not only had to ritually disavow any intermediary or exchangeable value between the real and the imaginary as condition of entry; one also had to leave behind much that socially and economically characterized “lives outside.” If the “temple of day-dreams” was democratic, it was so by way of being/construed as the radical other of the real.

The question that we will have to allow to linger for now is the essential assumption behind all the spatial and experiential drama, the exoticism and the overt Orientalism of the place designed for and dedicated to the encounter with the filmic event. It is that unwavering assumption in the filmic encounter mandating the proper mediation, contextualization, and preparation of a place that appears as anything and everything other than the real!

THE IMAGINED PLACES

From the early to mid 1930s, movie-theater design in the United States underwent a profound transformation. By the end of the decade, new movie-theaters bore little resemblance to the movie-theaters of the preceding decade. The call for change had come at least as early as 1927 from, among others, Seymour Stern, the noted film critic. However, it was not until the early 1930s that the movie palaces of the preceding decade were supplanted by a new movie-theater design, of which Benjamin Schlanger’s Thalia Theater of 1932 was a pioneering example (Figure 5.11).

The call for change in movie-theater design and its eventual realization coincide all too conspicuously with the introduction and eventual widespread adoption of sound in movies. Although introduced to a wider audience in 1927, it was not until the early 1930s that the initial technological challenges were overcome, the novelty dissipated, and the “talkies” became merely movies.¹⁴

The initial Vitaphone or sound-on-disk technology proved notoriously unreliable for keeping image and sound in sync. Donald Crafton notes:

The Western Electric sound-on-disc system, which would become Vitaphone, may have achieved perfect synchrony in the laboratory, but in the field—that is, in the nation’s theaters—the picture-sound match was frequently off a bit, owing to the inevitable slippage in the mechanical link between turntable and projector head. This small lapse between the ‘flapping’ of the lips and the hearing of the voice militated against the illusion of naturalism. Additionally, the telltale needle-scratching in the background was always audible and must have reminded viewers that Vitaphonic recording was a product of the phonograph industry. (59)

It was not until the early 1930s, when Vitaphone was abandoned in favor of sound-on-film technology that the synchronization problems besieging the early “talkies” were finally overcome.¹⁵ It took equally long to achieve realistic reproduction

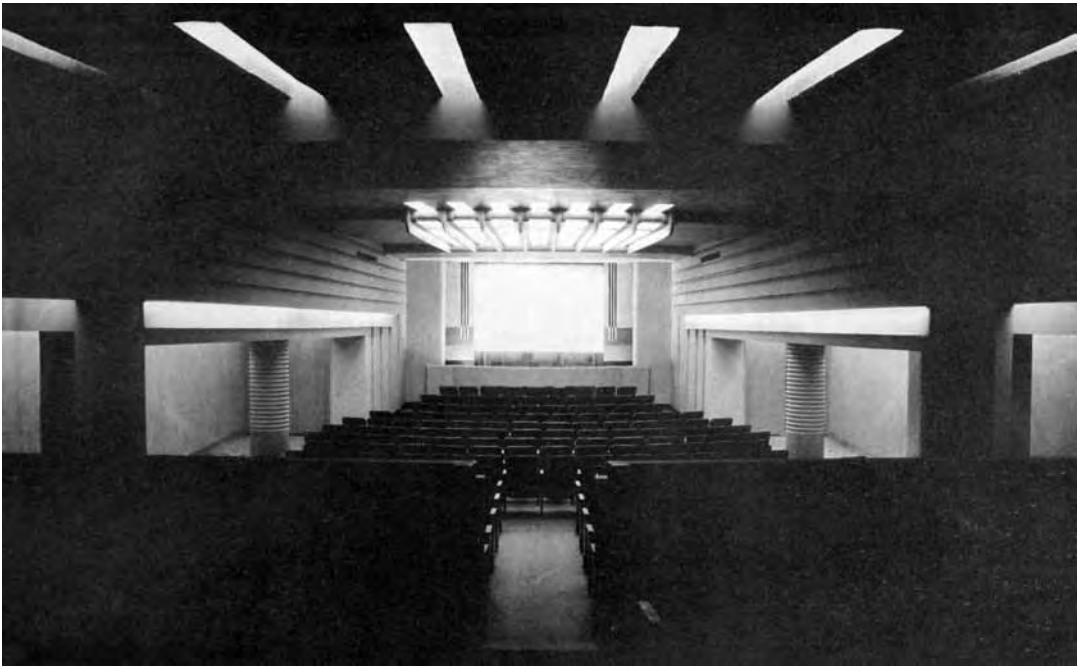


Fig. 5.11
Benjamin
Schlanger, *Thalia
Theatre*, New
York, NY, 1932
Photo Credit:
Keystone-
Underwood,
*Architectural
Record* 71

of human voice. It is approximately at this latter date that a new movie-theater design comes into vogue. In the meantime, Alexander Bakshy's complaint about being "treated to hollow and squawking and lisping voices, and even to imperfect synchronization" remained commonplace (773).

Significant as the introduction of sound was and closely as it was followed by calls for change in movie-theater design, movie-theater historians have found no apparent connection, besides their temporal coincidence, between the widespread adoption of sound and the advent of a new movie-theater design. For instance, "the rise of the talkies and the simultaneous demise of the Atmospheric Theater," Richard Stapleford notes, "seem too coincidental to be unrelated. Yet a clear causal link between the two phenomena is difficult to establish" (12). The link is indeed difficult to establish insofar as it is posited as a technological and/or acoustic question.

"Equipping an auditorium for 'sound movies' is," the RCA engineer Harry Braun noted in a 1932 issue of *Architectural Forum*, "a simple procedure, being merely a matter of selecting the necessary equipment and making provision for proper installation in conformation with applicable laws or ordinances and in accordance with manufacturers' specifications" (381). This procedure was the same for movie-theaters designed before or after the introduction of sound. Along with the new theaters, the movie palaces of the 1920s were retrofitted for mechanical sound in short order, and many remained in operation for many decades to come. The change was not, in other words, a technological mandate.

Also, whereas the movie-theaters of the 1930s could rely on mechanical amplification of sound in the auditorium from the outset, movie palaces of the

1920s had to rely solely on the auditorium's design to ensure ample and even distribution of sound throughout their very large auditoria (upwards of 5,000 seats). In this respect, the architects of the movie palaces, by and large, excelled. Ben Rosenberg's recollection of movie palaces of Rapp & Rapp in particular is telling:

The thing which impressed me most was the marvelous acoustical treatment associated with their work. Remember that in those days no amplification of any kind was used. The sounds from the stage had to project into every nook and cranny of those huge auditoriums. I can recall standing in center balcony tunnel entrances, where I could almost hear the performers take a breath, so wonderful were the acoustics.¹⁶ (22)

Aside from placing sound horns behind the movie screen and related mechanical equipment in the projection room, the auditoria in movie palaces required little to no modification. In other words, if the movie-theater design changed in the 1930s, it was not to achieve better acoustics. In fact, the redesigned auditoria of the new movie-theaters were, to a degree, acoustically regressive. Whereas an auditorium that is "high, rather than deep," as Edwin Newcomb noted in 1930, allows "the preponderance of melody from a multitude of voices and musical instruments to rise and blend into a pleasing consistency before reaching the listener," the longer, narrower, and smaller auditoria introduced in the 1930s taxed the audio technology of the day (Sexton, *American Theatres of Today* 41). It presented a distinct challenge to the even distribution of sound throughout the auditorium. As Fredric Pawley noted in a 1932 issue of *Architectural Record*, "the volume of sound sufficient to reach distant seats is generally too great for seats near the screen" (439).

Although the American movie-theater's transformation in the 1930s did not, nor was it meant to affect better acoustics, the transformation had much to do with sound, or more to the point, the advent of talking image in motion. The link appeared evident at the time, though it has become obscure since.

Much as George Rapp attributed the second phase in the history of the movie-theater to the advent of feature-length movie, he anticipated a third phase in response to another major change in the nature of the filmic experience. "The universal popularity of sound pictures and the prospect of wide dimension film, in the opinion of many," he wrote in 1930, "will result in a new third period in cinema architecture" (56). Charles A. Whittemore had made a similar prediction as far back as 1917. The technological drive toward greater realism in movies, focused as it was on bringing sound, color, and stereoscopy to film, would in time lead to, as Whittemore predicated, "corresponding changes in the character of the theaters themselves" ("The Motion Picture Theater" 171). These changes were slow in coming, as were the technological advances, and when the changes came, profound as they were, they had little to do with technology per se.

The advent of the movie palace in the early nineteen teens and the very different sound/image movie-theater of less than two decades later had at least one thing in common. Both were conceived in response to a major transformation in the prevailing mode of film reception. The proponents of both also offered remarkably

similar justifications in defence of their two mutually exclusive solutions. Both were intended to envelop the filmic event in an environment that not only better prepared the audience for the filmic event, but made the audience “more receptive” to the unfolding imaginary events on the screen. The only contextual difference was the imaginary being silent in one instance and vocal in the other. What covert connection there may have been between a transformed architectural setting and the silent or the vocal moving images it enveloped will be the focus of the ensuing discussions.

At the outset, it is important to note that of the various changes in the movie-theater design of the 1930s, the most explicit was stylistic. A new style, variously termed art deco and/or streamline moderne widely supplanted others.¹⁷ The stylistic change, followed as it was by a shift to modern architecture in the following decade, has been the aspect of transformation that has received the greatest attention from movie-theater historians. It has been attributed to broader formal and stylistic trends in architecture, stemming, in the context of the Great Depression, from “a shift in public taste” and “changes in aesthetic ideas,” and/or the expression of “a utopian ideal of a classless machine world, coordinated and rooted in egalitarian symbols” or an expression of hope and dynamism in an age of despair and stagnation (May 213).¹⁸

Had the design transformations of the early 30s been primarily stylistic, it would have been, besides its wider cultural implications, of little note or significance in the context of the stylistic eclecticism of the preceding decade—the golden age of silent movies. The movie-theater designers of the silent era experimented with virtually every known stylistic idiom. Art deco would have been a mere addition to a rich repertoire, as it indeed was in the late 1920s. Benjamin Schlanger, a leading proponent of change in movie-theater design of the 1930s, saw little difference between “expressing” oneself “on the side walls of the auditorium in some Spanish or French historical palatial style of architecture, or in some modernistic ornamental mode” (“Motion Picture Theatres” 13). The “modernistic ornamental mode” is, Schlanger concludes, “what is now known blindly (both to the public and the theatre industry as the modern theatre structure” (13).

Significant and instrumental as the dynamic formal characteristics of art deco may have been to the broader objectives of the movie-theater reformers, what is evident from Schlanger’s statement above is that a stylistic shift in movie-theater design was not the principal objective. Rather, what Schlanger and the other proponents of change had foremost in mind was to transform the audience’s relationship to the filmic event, conditioned as that experience is by the spatial characteristics of the auditorium in particular and the movie-theater in general. “The theatre structure of tomorrow must become,” Schlanger demanded, “more a part of the art which it is serving, and not be separated, as it is now, into an auditorium and a stage” (“Motion Picture Theatres” 13).

The plea to alter the customary separation of the auditorium and the stage, and along with it, the established relationship between the audience and the filmic event, had much to do with changes in the relationship of the audience to the filmic event, affected by the introduction of sound. The ensuing transformation

of the auditorium from a place to an experiential path placed between the real world to one end and the imaginary world of the screen to the other served to re-establish the ideational distance between the real and the imaginary before and after the filmic event. This is the distance that is perpetually lost to the uncanniness of the talking images on the screen for the duration, were it not for an imaginary journey through a place that was designed to be no place.

Of course, were one to look at architecture in formal and stylistic terms, one would be hard-pressed to see any connection between sound on the one hand and art deco or streamline moderne on the other. It would be equally difficult, if not absurd, to link silence in motion pictures to a baroque palatial style. However, were one to focus on the broader institutional and ideational agenda of the movie-theater and see the choice of any one style and/or formal arrangement in relation to that agenda, a different picture may well emerge.

Although the technology that brought sound to film stood considerable improvement from the late 1920s to the early 1930s, from the outset the talking picture challenged the audience in ways that exceeded the technology's initial deficiencies.¹⁹ Complain as Alexander Bakshy did about being "treated to hollow and squawking and lisping voices, and even to imperfect synchronization" two years after the introduction of sound, there was, as he saw it, a greater problem with the talking picture (773).

For reasons which it is difficult to discern, the total effect of the talking picture is generally thin, lacking in substance. ... In the talkies, much as you may be moved by the drama, you feel it is a drama in a world of ghosts. Perhaps, the introduction of stereoscopic projection coupled with color will solve this problem. (773)

As this quote illustrates, sound for Bakshy was not so much an addition as a subtraction, raising questions of substance, and resurrecting the very "world of ghosts" that unsettled Gorky many years before. Here too the problem was essentially spatial.

Much as sight takes cognizance of distance, sound overcomes and collapses distance. It is heard and felt *here*, where the listener happens to be, rather than *there*, from where it emanates. As such, sound had the same novel and thrilling effect on the audience as did Gorky's onrushing train. It too threatened the space and the distance between the audience and the filmic event. Reaching the audience from across the multiple thresholds erected to keep the filmic event at a safe distance in a place of its own, the talking picture radically altered the relationship between the audience and the filmic event. The defences built to date against the uncanny effect of film were no defence against sound. Crossing through and filling the audience's space, the sound film was no longer merely *there* as silent movies had been by design, but in effect *here*. More to the point, it was both here and there, close and far, two and three dimensional, living and dead. Restoring the imaginary to its desired place *there*, at a marked distance from the audience, would require significant modifications and a very different strategy.

The “world of ghosts” perception of early talking pictures that Bakshy presumed stereoscopic or three-dimensional color film would in time overcome had everything to do with the coupling of the two-dimensional image with the three-dimensional sound. Luigi Pirandello articulated its effect in greater detail, arguing that in the talking picture, “all illusion of reality is lost,” that it ceases to be merely and clearly an “illusion” (71). This is “because the voice is of a living body” and “there are no bodies” in film” (71). There are only “images photographed in motion.” Furthermore, “images do not talk, they can only be seen,” that is, viewed in two dimensions, at a safe distance. Should images be made to talk “their living voice is in striking contrast with their quality of ghosts” (71). The irreconciled juxtaposition of the “living voice” with the “illusion of reality,” Pirandello noted, “disturbs, like an unnatural thing unmasking its mechanism” (71). As with Gorky, the displacement and juxtaposition of heterogeneous elements, which unmask and expose something disturbing, should remain at a distance. The same disturbing juxtaposition is the bases for Pirandello’s third objection. Given that “the setting represented by the film ... is outside the hall where the film is being projected ... the voices ring inside the hall with a most disagreeable effect of unreality” (71). We’ll return to this disagreeable effect and the unmasking that disturbs later.

Conscious, if not preoccupied with the dimensional and spatial discrepancy between sound and image, Pirandello tells us, “the quick succession of talking images tires the eyes” and “the dialogue loses all forcefulness” (71). Pirandello, like Bakshy, complained of poor sound quality—“a machine-made voice far from human, the vulgar muttering of ventriloquists accompanied by the buzzing, frizzling noises of phonographs” (71). Nevertheless, he too attested that “even when technical improvements have eliminated this frizzling nuisance, and have obtained a perfect reproduction of the human voice, the main ailment will still be there, for the obvious reason that images are images, and images cannot talk” (71). The one is there, the other here. To combine them is to leave one nowhere or in no one place that is not disturbing.

Two years before Bakshy and Pirandello’s comments, Seymore Stern, like many film critics of his generation, expressed considerable concern over the imminent arrival of sound, color, and stereoscopy to film. He believed that these additions were detrimental to an art that was quintessentially a two-dimensional interplay of “silence” and “shadow.” Each of the innovations, he noted, “is the greatest of bastardizations, the most intolerable of abomination,” because each threatened to turn film’s distinct identity into “a hodge-podge of the stage, painting, and conventional reality,” that is, no one thing, in no one place (7–8).

Mindful of the impending displacement, Stern imagined a new movie-theater where “the aesthetic appreciation of the work of art of the future will be determined by the extent to which it permits the projection of the ego of the spectator into its form, resulting in a complete excitation of the emotional system” (7–8). He imagined, in other words, the eradication of that carefully instilled distance in the movie palace that proved all too vulnerable to sound.

Leaving the journey to the auditorium intact, Stern focused his entire attention on altering the auditorium of “the house of spatially discontinuous perception, of ‘disinterested contemplation,’ of spectatorship”—the movie palace (19). “In the film-

house of the future," he imagined, "the 'role' of spectator will be unknown" (19). To this end, his points of attack were consistent and telling. It began with "abolishing" the proscenium arch, including "all forms and varieties of present-day theatrical architecture which in any way divide the house into two parts, that is, into a place for seeing and a place for being seen" (27). The stage was also to disappear for the same reason and the orchestra should be removed because "nothing," Stern noted, "is more disconcerting in the contemporary movie house than the presence of a body of musicians between the spectators and the screen" (27). At issue was not the music, but the location. Though not in the visual path of the audience, in the orchestra's presence, Stern noted, "the spectator is made annoyingly conscious of his spectatorial role" (27), and his place in the auditorium in relation to the screen. This consciousness was, of course, as we noted earlier, deliberately affected in the movie palace.

The alternative to two places for "seeing" and "being seen," Stern imagined, was not any one place as such, but in a sense, no place at all. He imagined the auditorium of the future to be an emphatic path to an illusive/imaginary destination. As in the past, the screen was to read "like the vision of another world" (10). In the film-house of the future, however, the screen was to be evermore "like some hallucinatory sphere, passing uncannily before our eyes" (27). To enhance the screen's otherworldliness, Stern imagined it occupying the entire far end of the auditorium. For the rest of the auditorium "the general direction will be one of converging graduation, ending, visually, architecturally and psychologically, in the screen" (27). "All architectural lines must," Stern demanded, "lead to and meet in the screen." Whereas the architectural envelope of the movie palace auditoria was decidedly vertical in emphasis—affecting its reading as a *place*—the film-house of the future was to be decidedly horizontal in emphasis—affecting its reading as a *path* (27). Furthermore, "the whole interior will be emphatically triangular, and the screen will be the apex of the triangle ... even the ceiling will slope till it meets the screen-top, and focalization will be complete" (27).

To further stress the horizontal directionality of the auditorium as a path, the walls of the auditorium were to be plain and "painted in tones of grey." There was to be no "decoration," nothing "borrowed from the architecture of the past periods," nor "any note suggestive of the three-dimensional forms belonging to standardized reality." The latter were to be left entirely behind—stylistically, dimensionally, and tonally—on the journey through a path that, if not entirely surreal, it was to be "pronouncedly phantasmagoric, two-dimensional and cinematic" (27).

Finally, to complete the illusion of a path to an imagined destination, Stern demanded the insertion of a "void" between "the final portion of the visual path"—the last row of seats, and the "screen." This "spatial 'break' between audience and silversheet" was to be "a thing of darkness, of absolute emptiness," meant to "set off the screen as a clearer, more emphatic entity than it could otherwise hope to be," that is, apart from the path and as such, its destiny (27). The spacing of the screen placed it, in effect, at an emphatic distance that could only be breached virtually.

Frederick Kiesler's Film Arts Guild Cinema of 1929 was a close approximation of Stern's vision for the film-house of the future, though a wide uptake of the new

vision had to await technological advances in synchronization and natural sound reproduction. It was at that point in the early 1930s—when the novelty of sound had worn off and with it much of the initial objection and fear, when the talkies had become merely movies, and instead of being trapped in the discrepancy between sound and image, film stood to engross spectators in its reality effect, without any captions or live music to keep them at bay—that the call for re-contextualizing the encounter with film became emphatic and widespread. In time, Stern's vision for the "film-house of the future" would be largely realized, because he envisioned, in advance and for different reasons, a type of immersive experience in the movies that, contrary to his assumption, talking pictures in motion would eventually affect.

The call for a different movie-theater design, widespread as it became in both the movie industry and the architecture trade journals starting in 1931, was not voiced, much less justified in stylistic terms. The early proponents of a new movie-theater design were careful to make and insist on this point. In a 1931 article for the *Motion Picture Herald*, the noted theater architect R. W. Sexton wrote:

Of late there has been a tendency to design so-called "modern theatres." And yet we find on analysis that most of the modern theatres today are based on the same plan and section—that has been adhered to so closely for the last 50 years. These theatres are modern in their decorative treatments because the design of their decorations does not suggest the influence at any one of the old styles and periods. But we still find the elaborate proscenium arch, the huge orchestra, the squeezed-in mezzanine and the deep-sloping balcony. (25)

Sexton's remarks closely echoed Ben Schlanger's remarks of a month earlier in the same journal (quoted earlier). In the prophetically entitled "Motion Picture Theatres of Tomorrow," Schlanger articulated a vision that closely paralleled Stern's in its immersive experience and would soon become the blueprint for the motion picture theater of the sound era ("Motion Picture Theatres" 13). In the years to come, Schlanger would play a leading role in the articulation and realization of the various facets of this new vision. To it, he would devote his professional career as an architect, critic, and theater consultant in the three decades that followed.

From the outset, the objective of Schlanger and the other proponents of the new movie-theater design was not to alter the stylistic features of the movie-theater, as noted earlier. Rather, the objective was to fundamentally alter the relationship of the audience to the filmic event from a spectatorial to an immersive voyeuristic experience, in tacit recognition of the talkies' inherent spatial displacement. Echoing Stern, Schlanger wrote that the "theatre structure of tomorrow must become more a part of the art which it is serving, and not be separated, as it is now, into an auditorium and a stage" ("Motion Picture Theatres" 13). As the initial resistance to sound proved all too futile, the solution to the spatial displacement that it created was to dislocate the audience from its established spectatorial place at a distance in the "place for seeing," and thereby allowing, if not requiring, every audience member to "completely envelop himself in that which he is viewing," though only for the temporal duration of the filmic event (13). The solution was, in other words, to erase the distance that sound had breached. This is the instituted

distance in the movie palace whose breach disallowed both Bakshy and Pirandello from assuming the familiar spectatorial position in relation to the moving picture, without also allowing either, in those early days, to assume the type of voyeuristic posture that the realistic reproduction of sound would allow in the 30s.

The erasure of the breached distance in the movie palace auditoria meant systematically dispensing with all the architectural implements that constituted the auditorium as a destination, a place, and at that a "different world." It also meant re-contextualizing the new immersive experience in a new auditorium that would transform and reconstitute the finite distance erected between the audience and the screen in the movie palace, into an infinite distance. It meant never being able to locate the imaginary in a finite place as such and at a distance susceptible to breach.

As Stern had done, Schlanger focused almost entirely on altering the auditorium's design. The "slaughtering," he wrote, "should begin and concentrate itself" on the "proscenium frame," since "it is here where the mood is determined" ("Motion Picture Theatres" 13). Next to the "slaughtering" of the proscenium arch and with it the auditorium as a "place for seeing" came the "usual treatment of the rest of the auditorium," that is, the "ornamental side walls, which are always treated vertically with columns, pilasters, arches, etc" (13). Schlanger's objection to columns, pilasters, and arches was not stylistic; it was to their *verticality* and the "symmetrical repetition of motifs from the proscenium to the rear of the auditorium, which causes a disturbing pull of the eye away from what should be the main focal point" (13). He objected, in other words, to the architectural motifs that imparted a distinct sense of place to the auditorium and reinforced the dissociation between "a place for seeing" and "a place for being seen." Instead, the sidewalls of the auditorium "should have a gradual simplification and omission of forms as they recede to the rear of the auditorium." In addition, "the forms used should have strong horizontal direction, instead of vertical emphasis, fastening the eye to the screen, the focal point, at the front of the auditorium." To reinforce the envisioned emphatic horizontal directionality of the new auditorium "the ceiling, even more so than the sidewalls, should be left as simple as possible" (13). The "usual domes, suspended from above and resting on air," and all other centralizing motifs, including the ubiquitous chandeliers were to disappear from the new auditorium.

Schlanger was the inventor of the "Parabolic Reverse Floor" that was intended to improve sightlines in the auditorium. The Parabolic Reverse Floor introduced a pronounced curvature to the auditorium floor that made the floor dip and flare upwards in the front portion of the seating area, reaching up to meet the screen. In addition to improved sight lines, it effectively enhanced the directional momentum of the auditorium.

The screen was next on Schlanger's transformation agenda—as it had been on Stern's and for similar reasons:

The screen as it is presented in today's cinema is still an obviously framed picture instead of a space into which we peer, seeing the projected other world of the cinema. It should, if possible, dominate the whole forward portion of

the auditorium. The spectator can thereby be made to feel that he is actually encompassed in the action which he views. ("New Theaters" 257–8)

This meant that not only would the screen get larger—as it would—the forward portion of the auditorium side-walls would curve or angle toward the screen—as they would—to make the screen appear as the sole destination of the path the new auditorium was meant to become. It is important to note, however, that this focal point was never quite in sight, but hidden behind a curtain that exponentially added to its mystery and distance. When the curtains parted, it was not the screen, but the filmic event that was in view and one was, by then, as it were, already there.²⁰

Having articulated a clear vision for the new movie-theater, what remained was the opportunity to realize it. For Schlanger that opportunity came with the Thalia Theater commission of 1932 in New York City (Ben Schlanger and R. Irrera, Architects). Thalia Theater's emphatic horizontal directionality and abstract formal vocabulary were as glaringly different from the prevailing practice in movie-theater design, as were, of course, the intentions behind each. In sharp contrast, the Thalia Theater dropped all the trappings of exoticism and Orientalism to be transformed from an exotic destination into a path to an imaginary destination. Different as the Thalia Theater was, it was widely acclaimed in various architectural and trade journals, including the June, 1932 issue of *Architectural Record* and the September, 1932 issue of *Architectural Forum*.

Although far fewer movie-theaters were to be built during the Depression and the ensuing World War, Schlanger's vision was soon embraced by most architects of his generation. Most notably, it was adopted by the very architects who were responsible for the rise and development of movie palaces of the silent era. Noteworthy examples are C. W. & G. L. Rapp's 1937 Rhodes Theater in Chicago (Figure 5.12), as well as Thomas W. Lamb's 1936 New Rialto Theatre in New York and John Eberson's 1936 Penn Theatre in Washington, DC. These projects could not have been more different from the works of the very same architects of only a few years prior.

It was no mere boast, therefore, when Schlanger declared the war on movie palaces to be all but over in the July 1938 issue of *Architectural Record* devoted to movie-theaters. "We have all but eliminated," he declared, "the 'atmospheric' treatment of the auditorium and its indefensible competition with the exhibition" ("Theaters, Cinema, Community, Broadcasting" 96). Schlanger's justification for the elimination of the silent era decorations because of competition and distraction was reiterated by many in various trade publications throughout the late 1930s and well into the late 1940s. These statements often accompanied the published reviews of recently renovated "atmospheric" movie-theaters, such as that in November 1948 of the Wareham Theater in Wareham, Massachusetts (Figures 5.13), and the Strand Theater, in Hartford, Connecticut (Figure 5.14), both renovated by the William Riseman Associates ("A New Architecture for The Movie-Theater" 122). "A florid architectural style," we are told, "only competes with the illusion on the screen" (122). Having removed "the distracting wall decorations" of the old movie-



Fig. 5.12 George & W. C. Rapp, *Rhodes Theatre*, Chicago, IL, 1937
 Photo Credit: Hedrich-Blessing, *Architectural Record* 84



Fig. 5.13 William Riseman Associates, *Wareham Theatre*, Wareham, MA, 1948
 Photo Credit: George M. Cushing, *Architectural Record* 104



Fig. 5.14 William
Riseman
Associates, *Strand
Theatre*, Hartford,
CT, 1948
Photo Credit:
George M.
Cushing,
*Architectural
Record* 104

theater, “plain wall surfaces now direct the eye toward the screen” as they must in the post-silent movie era, and that, purportedly, not out of deference to any stylistic conviction or a desire to be formally up to date. In either example, much as others, what of the old has been renovated is not so much the event as it is the message, that is, how the filmic event is contextualized and framed.

The oft repeated assertion that “distracting wall decorations interfere with the illusion” or “compete with the presentation” are, from a certain perspective, perplexing justifications, coming repeatedly from, among others, Schlanger himself who in his 1931 critique of movie palaces noted (“Motion Picture Theatres” 13):

The walls and ceiling are usually designed as if they were going to be seen in broad daylight, neglecting the fact that the light in the auditorium of a theatre must be kept quite dim during most of a performance. Thus the architectural forms employed are blotted out and have little or no effect on the viewer during the performance. (56)

Schlanger, like his contemporaries, was well aware that revisions to the old auditoria were of little or no consequence for the duration of the filmic event. The formal and spatial characteristics of the auditorium, old or new, were only visible and consequential before and after the filmic event. If they contributed or distracted, competed or promoted, it was not to the filmic event per se, but to its contextualization and localization before and after the fact, that is, where the audience found itself and how it localized itself in relation to the imaginary.

For the duration of the event, every detail, from illumination, to sight lines, chair comfort or air conditioning to make the audience “unconscious of surrounding temperature conditions or even odors” was attended to within the dark confines of the auditorium in order to create the perfect “illusion” (“A New Architecture for The Movie-Theater”).

The comfort of the patron also requires more careful attention in the cinema than in the legitimate theater. The spectator in the cinema must be at ease and must

feel neither bodily nor ocular discomfort. This is essential to help complete the illusion of realism desired, despite the fact that the images on the screen have technically only two dimensions. (Schlanger, "New Theaters" 255)

In the sound-era auditorium, the "illusion" was being anywhere and everywhere, other than where one actually was. In the movie palace auditoria, the music that filled the auditorium kept the audience at a safe spectatorial distance, or as Stern put it, made the spectator "annoyingly conscious of his spectatorial role" (10). In the post-silent era, sound had the exact opposite effect. It stood the chance of suspending the audience between where it was actually and where it was virtually. It stood the chance, in other words, of affecting the type of dialogical involvement with the imaginary that unsettled Gorkey and in time Bakshy and Pirandello. Hence the far more acute and urgent need to erase any and all sense of a here in the new auditorium.

Ideally, in the post-silent era, one had "to be able to look at that picture, lose himself in it completely, and have no reminder of the fact that he is in an enclosure and looking at a picture" (Cutter 21). There was to be no *here*, only an *elsewhere*. Where one actually was had to all but disappear for the duration. In the post-silent era auditorium, the illusory was not to be the filmic event per se. It was also not being where one was, by design. This is to say that so long as the illusion of not being where one happens to be is sustained; sound's uncanny spatial displacement remains curtailed since sound no longer comes to one from elsewhere. One is already elsewhere and there is, virtually, no longer a here, and the elsewhere is nowhere real—nowhere that is not an imagined destination or "a different world." This is one reason why the mandate and the measure of success for the post-silent era movie-theater has always hinged on affecting and maintaining the illusion of the erasure of being where one is, and with it, the path that got one *there*.²¹

Having affected the imaginary erasure of *here* for the duration, all that remained was to localize and explain where one found oneself before and after the filmic event, in the place that one wasn't to be for the duration. It was precisely in this context that the movie palace auditoria's intended sense of place as a "different world" was purported to be distracting and "indefensible." In time, even the emphatic formal horizontality of the 1930s auditoria appeared to the movie-theater architects of the postwar years as giving too much character and identity to the auditorium. It too was abandoned as a "futile effort to create screen importance," whereas its "omission would better serve this purpose" (Schlanger, "How Function Dictates" 7). In place of formal horizontality there was to be "a completely neutral enclosure" with a strong spatial direction toward the screen. The Modern Museum of Art's movie-theater in New York City by Goodwin and Stone, Architects, published in the November 1948 issue of *Architectural Record* is an early example of the type (Figure 5.15).

Looking back in 1961, Schlanger eloquently reflected on the objectives of the postwar movie-theater:

The desire in the designing was to permit the viewer to the fullest possible extent to be able to transport himself in imagination to a different time and space by

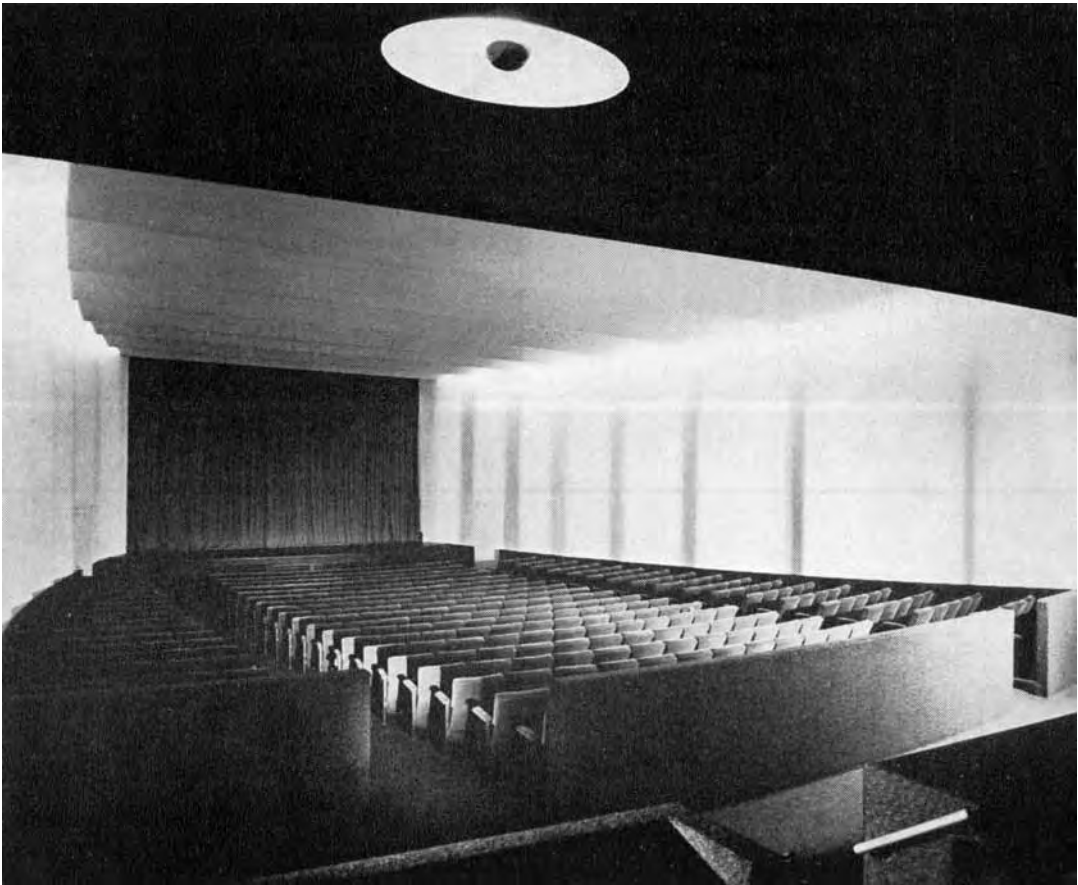


Fig. 5.15
Goodwin and
Stone Architects,
*Modern Museum of
Art Movie Theatre*,
New York, NY, 1948
Photo Credit:
*Architectural
Record* 104

furnishing a floating void or optical vacuum to provide the transition to the new time and space and to hold him there by eliminating all distractions. The name Transcendum suggests itself ... ("Motion-Picture System" 685)

This would be the decisive solution. The audience would thus never arrive in a literal, much less literally exotic place. The placeless "optical vacuum" of the "Transcendum" would hereafter keep the audience in "transport," as it were, to and from an imagined and imaginary destination. On the way to and from, the audience would remain in transit through a "floating void" on the path to everywhere and therefore nowhere. To be in transit is to be *not there*. The Transcendum as such would be a journey without end. Understanding it as the floating, optically vacuous void that it was designed to be would entail anticipation of going/being elsewhere.

The movie palace auditoria, predicated as they were on a journey to and an unmistakable arrival at a "different world," designated the silent imaginary a definite place beyond the threshold of the proscenium arch. The Transcendum, by contrast, having to confine a vocal imaginary that would not be limited or bordered by any threshold, eschewed any and all sense of place, much less

an arrival at anywhere but an ever-illusory destination. The place of the vocal imaginary in the Transcendum became no place at all, that is, no place that was not imagined and imaginary and as such infinitely postponed/distanced. The Transcendum, in effect, exiled the imaginary from the movie-theater. The imaginary was no longer located in the movie-theater, that is, not localized by the movie-theater, as there was to be no movie-theater for the duration and otherwise merely a path, a floating void, or optical vacuum to nowhere identifiable as such, much less real. Much as the movie palace's strategy was to contain and confine, the Transcendum's strategy was to postpone and delay. As images spoke, the auditorium was driven to silence.

Although much of the critical reform in the 1930s and 1940s was focused on the auditorium, the rest of the movie-theater kept pace. The formal vocabulary and spatial characteristics of the auditorium were extended to the preceding sequence of foyer, inner lobby and outer lobby, if only to "induce a mood of pleasurable anticipation" in each and thereby extend and link the path through the auditorium to its conceptual start at the outer façade and the ticket booth beneath the marquee (Clute 11). Also, as movie-theaters migrated, along with the population, to the suburbs, freestanding movie-theaters became the norm, relieving the façade from having to differentiate and separate itself from its context through overt formal contrasts. In turn, the Transcendums' façade became a monumental opaque, frontal surface that forcefully announced the line where reality ended and the journey to the imaginary began, aided as this demarcation was by attached or free-standing pylons whose verticality sat in sharp contrast to the horizontality of the new façade, together emphasizing both separation and passage (Figure 5.16). The Delman Theater in Dallas, Texas, (Raymond F. Smith, Architect; A. E. Swank, Jr., Associate) published in an *Architectural Record* issue of 1949 is a telling example of the type ("Where Parking Is No Problem" 84).

As color film overcame yet another divide between the real and the imaginary and went from being an exception to becoming norm in the 1950s and early 1960s, the movie-theater was transformed yet again to re-establish the abridged distance between the real and the imaginary. This time the logic of the movie palace was conjoined to the logic of the "Transcendum" theater as the movie-theater was (re) moved to a new profoundly segregated world dedicated to spectatorship: the mall. To reach the new "Transcendum" theater, one now had to travel to a new and "different world" through roads, across a sea of parking segregating it, like a moat, from its surrounding environment, only to arrive at an indoor outdoor space, where the passage of time and the vagaries of weather and seasons were suspended in a theatrical space dedicated to exhibition and spectatorship. Here, everyone was transformed into a spectator/tourist away from home in an exaggerated version of the movie palace's exotic alterity, long before embarking on a temporal journey through the "floating void" of the auditorium to an imaginary destination.

From here on, were the movie-theater not to depend on a mall, it would fabricate its own mall in front of the "Transcendum" theater, as multiplexes have and continue to do.

Fig. 5.16
 Raymond F. Smith,
Delman Theater,
 Dallas, TX, 1949
 Photo Credit:
*Architectural
 Record* 105



THE UNIMAGINED IMAGINARY

If cinema is indeed a response to what Benjamin referred to in 1936 as “the desire of contemporary masses to bring things ‘closer’ spatially and humanly,” the history of cinema’s place and placement has followed, as we have seen, the opposite

trajectory ("The Work of Art" 222). Much as ambivalence persistently overshadows any question of a decidable place for film, nevertheless, a persistent spacing has kept film at bay from inception. While the modalities of the spacing have changed drastically over time, the actual spacing has not. Movie-theaters over the course of the last century have been, despite significant changes in form and experience, variations on a theme introduced in the nickelodeon: a journey to an Other space/place. The lingering question is why this particular and persistent spatial strategy? What is the logic, or else the illogic of this persistent (dis)placement?

At face value, the objective has been to keep the real and the imaginary at a distinct distance from each other. This has not been for fear of unbridled cohabitation, or any possible confusion between the real and the imaginary per se. Rather at issue in the exclusion of each from the construed place of the other has been the clarity of the line separating the real from the imaginary—their radical alterity. Gorky forcefully reminded us long ago how even the contemplation of an imaginary collapse of the distance between the imaginary and the real leads to consuming anxiety, along with "a warning, fraught with a vague but sinister meaning" (408). That experience not only disturbed and depressed Gorky, it caused him to lose his sense of place, along with his footing in the real, as "strange imaginings" invaded his mind. And this was all because he could not localize the imaginary at a controlled distance.

Although Gorky did not explain what the "vague but sinister meaning" of his experience was, certain as he was of its menacing nature, we find one explanation in Freud's essay on the uncanny, of two decades later. "An uncanny effect," Freud noted in 1919, "is often and easily produced by effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, ... or when a symbol takes over the full functions and significance of the thing it symbolizes, and so on" (50). A case in point, Freud noted, is confusing one's own reflection for someone real and other than oneself. This uncanny sensation has not to do with the confusion so much as the sensation associated with the recognition of the confusion after the fact—the recognition of having momentarily and involuntarily taken the imaginary for the real. Regarding the cause of the sensation, Freud notes:

This uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression. This reference to the factor of repression enables us, furthermore, to understand Schelling's definition of the uncanny as something which ought to have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to light. (47)

What in the uncanny is familiar and repressed, and ought to have been kept concealed, is not the substitution, but rather it is the condition of its possibility. It is the possibility of the distinction between the real and the imaginary being the function and the effect of spacing, or being extrinsic rather than intrinsic to the real and the imaginary alike. It is the repressed recognition that what is imagined and imaginary is the line separating the real and the imaginary, as the condition of the possibility of substitution and/or confusion.

André Bazin provided a cogent account of both what gives the imaginary its power of substitution, and the potential dire consequence of it in the opening passage of this chapter. As discussed earlier, the depreciation Bazin ascribes to the identification of “authentic reality” with the cinematic illusion has at least one thing in common with the “decay of aura” Benjamin attributed to “the desire of contemporary masses to bring things ‘closer’ spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction” (“The Work of Art” 223). In both cases, the substitution of a mechanical reproduction for “the uniqueness of every reality” leads to the depreciation of the latter.²² Benjamin recounts an instance of this uncanny effect as relayed by Pirandello. Before the camera, the film actor, Pirandello noted:

... feels as if in exile—exiled not only from the stage but also from himself. With a vague sense of discomfort he feels inexplicable emptiness: his body loses its corporeality, it evaporates, it is deprived of reality, life, ... (229)

Benjamin compares the “feeling of strangeness that overcomes the actor before the camera” to the “estrangement felt before one’s own image in the mirror” (230). However, “now the reflected image has become separable, transportable” (231).

The sensation of exile from the self in front of the camera, accompanied as it is with a *vague* sense of discomfort, has to do with the recognition of an *inexplicable* divide within the self as the condition of possibility of duplication. Whereas one’s image in the mirror remains at a fixed distance, and can be animated at will to simulate possession and control, cinema dispenses with the possibility of idealizing the image as a mere reflection. This is not to say the image that is “separable” and “transportable” dispenses with the referent. On the contrary, much as it references and remains bound to the referent, to the point of involuntary substitution, it deprives the referent of its “corporeality,” “reality,” “life,” and much of everything else that may constitute a radical difference between the real and the imaginary.

For the image to be separable and transportable, and at that subject to involuntary substitution, it must be always separable and transportable already, in origin, as it is in every repetition. Cinema’s dispensation with the presence of the referent as the point of origin—without the loss of pretense to objective representation—brings to surface a gap between the visual and the substantive contents of reality. This gap between form and substance, or image and identity, may be covered but never bridged. The exposure of this gap offers a serious challenge to the privileged antecedence and alterity of reality as measured against representation. Cinema subjects the aura of humanist reality to radical query insofar as the possibility of its fabrications and the proximity of its representations strip reality of its endowed authority as the site of a causal link between form and substance, or image and identity. The visual content of the real can only be made to precede and be independent of its actual substantive content in the imaginary world if the two had not a causal, but a conventional relationship in the real. Cinema can only give visual content spatial and temporal mobility if reality that is always rigorously distinguished from representation is itself already a form of representation. Subject as it is to cinema’s manipulative interventions

and imaginary doubling that forgo the possibility of a site for causality, humanist reality stands to disappear as a selfsame entity, only to surface as a suppressed imaginary and a purposed construction, always already. Otherwise, there could be no signification without a present referent. In “authentic reality,” as in the “illusion of reality” the referent is perpetually deferred. The self has never been but in exile from the “reality,” which is never given though always desired. This is, in a sense, that “warning, fraught with a vague but sinister meaning,” that accompanies any “illusion of reality” that encroaches on the space and place of “authentic reality” by way of substitution.

That “authentic reality” is, in a sense, always already an “illusion of reality”—divided and deferred and as such a substitute for a desired reality that is undivided and fully present unto itself, is, as Freud says, “nothing new or foreign, but familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression.” That the difference between “authentic reality” and “illusion of reality” is also an indifference is what ought to “have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to light” in the figure of the uncanny. Cinema always stands to be uncanny, were it not for the spatial supplements that seek to mitigate its “warning.” This brings us full circle to the site of our encounter with cinema: the movie-theater. From the nickelodeon through every mutation and modification of the movie-theater, the preoccupation with an Other place for film is primarily a preoccupation with preserving the presumed/desired alterity of the imaginary as measured against the real. Opening a place elsewhere for film is tantamount to performatively opening a place for its presumed other and for otherness as such to the imaginary. Much as the uncanny marks the site of a collapsed distance between the real and the imaginary always already, its aversion is perpetually pending the institution of that distance. Hence, the architecture of an illusive distance, that is a distance never given yet a distance perpetually in place.

NOTES

- 1 To the list one may add such short-lived technological curiosities as Smell-O-Vision and Odorama.
- 2 See Metz; Mitry.
- 3 The television sets in decades to come would have much in common with the Kinetoscope. The television set too contains the moving image within a well-articulated frame, subject to the viewer’s control.
- 4 See also Strauven.
- 5 Whether actual or imaginary, the logic of this frame, if not its form, would remain with cinema for the remainder of its history.
- 6 For a detailed discussion of this subject please see A. Bazin 76–124.
- 7 This is a question that to legitimate theater had neither the urgency nor the immediate pertinence it had for movie-theaters.
- 8 See Bowers 17–18.

9 Also reprinted in Bowers 17.

10 The implement of exchange was a gendered role from the outset and for many years to come. So was the authority that validated and consecrated the exchange at the inner borderline—the ticket-taker. The former, all gender role stereotypes withstanding, was female and the later male.

11 Although food was not initially offered for purchase inside the nickelodeon, what food was popularly associated with the movies and offered for sale outside and later inside the movie-theater was and remains frivolous food that bear the same conceptual relationship to real or substantive food as film is assumed to bear to reality. Be this frivolous candy and soda, or what denotes deflated value—peanuts—or food that is all form and little substance—popped corn. In time, the latter supplanted the former to become virtually synonymous with the movie going experience.

12 Whereas the average nickelodeon had 300 seats and up to 1,200 by the early teens, the average movie palace had over 3,000 seats and upwards of 5,000 seats in some cases.

13 Hence, Charles S. Lee's famous dictum, "the show starts on the sidewalk." For an in-depth discussion of Charles S. Lee's work see Valentine.

14 By 1929 only 37 percent of all movie-theaters in the United States were wired for sound. By 1931 62 percent of all movie-theaters had converted to sound (Crafton 155).

15 Qualitatively, the sound-on-film system was not superior. As Barney Balaban explained in 1929: "While at the present time it is our experience that sound-on-disc gives better tonal results, we find sound-on-film to be so much more simple and convenient to handle that we feel it is much to be preferred" (qtd. in Crafton 147).

16 Also,

The advent of talking films has entailed very little reconstruction in German cinemas, as nearly all of them were originally planned with due regard to acoustic properties owing to the fact that variety turns are often sandwiched in between the films. (Shand 23)

17 For instance, Valentine notes:

Through the 1930s, owing to changes in aesthetic ideas as well as budgetary considerations, theatre design became increasingly restrained and simpler, drawing closer to commercial Art Deco and the strand of Modernism that challenged historical principles. Streamlined design reached its peak during the middle and late 1930s, by which time the movie palace had been replaced by the next phase of movie theatre design, the neighborhood house. (88)

18 Also see Basque; Gomery; Hall; Stapleford; Valentine.

19 For detailed discussion of audiences' reaction to early sound films see Spadoni.

20 For a broad discussion of the cinematic screen see Friedberg, *The Virtual Window*.

21 Illumination levels in the auditorium during the movie screening were carefully studied with the stated intent of reducing "screen consciousness." The adopted recommendation was to avoid total darkness and screen reflection from surrounding surfaces, if only to avoid spectatorial consciousness.

22 Benjamin notes:

The situations into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is always depreciated. This holds not only for the art work but also, for instance, for a landscape which passes in review before the spectator in a movie. ("The Work of Art" 221)

The Epilogue

In much of the preceding discussions my intent has not been to infer any inevitability either to the theoretical postures and strategies discussed in the first two chapters or to the spatial postures and strategies discussed in the last three chapters. My intention has been to point out that the perseverance of these strategies points to an enduring desire for an alterity to representation that is never given. Much as the metaphysics of presence instigates the desired alterity, the performative acts that comprise architecture—acts that produce the very condition they purport to represent—perpetuate the desire.

Space, of which architecture is a vehicle of articulation, is intimately implicated in the constitution of the Other as such. The Other is, by definition, spatially distanced. Alterity is, in other words, a spatial performative whose modalities strategically differ in deference to the perceived proximity of the Other. The greater, for instance, the proximity of a mode of representation is to its referent, the more emphatic is the spacing. To space, it is important to note, is also to sublimate contingency, since contingency is, in effect, a distortion of space and a collapse of distance.

It is this indispensable dependency of the otherness of the Other on spacing that perpetuates the desire for the alterity of the Other. This spacing, whose other designate is ornamentation, at once defers what it offers. It thereby sees only to the perpetuation of the desire. If on the construed line between the self-referential reality and the contingent representation, there is the architecture of libraries, art museums, and movie-theatres, among others, seeking to systematically remove the trace of their indifference, this is not because they inevitably must for any reason other than a supplemental/ornamental response to the desired alterity of the real, the original, the authentic, the present, and so on. This is the alterity that their supplemental/ornamental introjection can only offer and defer indefinitely.

What I have also tried to point out thus far is that the virtual or cultural reality that architecture helps fabricate as inevitable and natural is both powerful and persuasive. It is also a fragile and volatile *representation*. Its greatest challenge does not come, however, from other worldviews or competing realities. Although these

challenges can affect profound changes in the worldview and ethos of a culture, they only amplify the call for architecture, among other tools and technologies, to forge a new synthesis and constitute a new reality, where our assumptions about the world, changed as they may be, are again transposed into our experience of it. The reality that a culture forges can successfully undergo radical change, so long as all traces of fabrication can be perpetually erased from it. The greatest challenge that this reality faces is not, in other words, to its shape or content, but to its authority and its ability to assume the guise of inevitability. The challenge where it is faced is to the reality of the real. Construed, as it is in the West, to appear as the non-contingent Other of representation, the virtual or cultural reality that architecture helps fabricate faces a constant challenge to its authority as a self-referential or non-representational inevitability from its contingent representational Other. No degree of control can overcome this challenge in any other than a temporal form.

There is also, no *outside* to this metaphysics. To dream the dream of an outside is to concede the first and most fundamental assumption of this metaphysics—the outside. Nevertheless, the choice is not to either facilitate—without any ethical burden—the dominion of this metaphysics or seek to supplant it by what can only amount to an inevitable recourse to its strategies of delimitation, and exclusion. The first implied choice is merely a call for consequential complacency; the second a call to ideological warfare that at best merely supplants the players, leaving the game intact. The very conception of a choice here is and can only be formulated from within the bounds of the same metaphysics. However, rather than facilitate through complacency or opposition, one can offer resistance to, not the tenants of this metaphysics, but to the authority and the ability of this metaphysics to disguise itself as physics.

One may readily imagine, even if only in principle, an architecture that resists rather than enables the facile formal and spatial dichotomies that supplement the authority of this metaphysics. One may readily imagine an architecture that does not confirm or offer answers, but only questions. An architecture that does not arm, but disarms. An architecture that is neither and both as measured against the sides of any formal and spatial dichotomy. Imagining an architecture of resistance is not difficult. Architecture is, after all, merely a construct. It is not difficult to think or think through an architecture that contextually resists facile dichotomies. Committing to this architecture palpably is. The architecture that offers resistance will not be aesthetic. It may well be uncanny. However, the uncanny is, as Freud reminded us long ago, as homely as it is unhomely and one can never know which. The inherent dilemmas of this architecture are not metaphysical or ideological. They are indelibly ethical.