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Street advertising and cinema in Weimar Germany

The evolving design of US cinema auditoria

Sound and colonialism in *Trader Horn*

High and low in postwar European cinema

The politics of disgust in *Pink Flamingos*

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The architecture of the illusive distance

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In the early to mid 1930s, film theatre design in the USA underwent a profound transformation. By the end of the decade, new film theatres bore little resemblance to those of the preceding decade (figures 1 and 2). The call for change had come at least as early as 1927 from, among others, the film critic Seymour Stern. It was not until the early 1930s, however, that the picture palaces of the preceding decade were supplanted by a new film theatre design, of which Benjamin Schlanger's Thalia Theater of 1932 was a pioneering example.

This impetus for change and its eventual realization coincided conspicuously with the arrival and eventual widespread adoption of cinematic sound. Although sound was introduced to a general 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'. As significant as it might appear, however, film theatre historians have found no apparent connection between the widespread adoption of sound and the advent of a new film theatre design besides their temporal coincidence. Richard Stapleford notes, for instance, that 'the rise of the talkies and the simultaneous demise of the Atmospheric Theater seem too coincidental to be unrelated. Yet a clear causal link between the two phenomena is difficult to establish.'[1] The link is indeed difficult to establish insofar as it is posited as a technological and/or acoustic question.

Although the US film theatre's transformation in the 1930s did not, nor was it meant to, create better acoustics, the transformation was indeed related to sound, or more specifically to the talking image in motion. The proponents of change had foremost in mind the transformation of the

1 Richard Stapleford, *Temples of Illusion: the Atmospheric Theaters of John Eberson* (New York, NY: Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery, Hunter College, 1988), p. 12.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjt038

Fig. 1. Thomas W. Lamb, Loew's Ohio Theater, Columbus, OH, 1928.

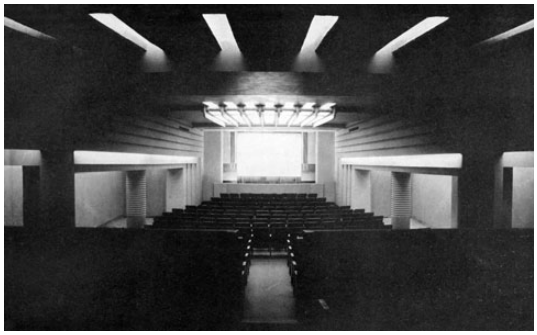

Fig. 2. Benjamin Schlanger, Thalia Theater, New York, 1932.

audience's relationship to the filmic event, conditioned as that experience is by the spatial characteristics of the auditorium in particular and the film theatre in general. As Benjamin Schlanger, a leading voice in the movement, demanded: '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'.[2]

The plea to alter the customary separation of the auditorium and the stage, and thus 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 brought about by the introduction of sound. The ensuing transformation of the auditorium from a *place* to an experiential path *between places* – the real world at one end and the imaginary world of the screen at the other – effectively served to reestablish the ideational distance between the real and the imaginary before and after the filmic event. This is the distance that would be perpetually lost to the uncanniness of the talking images on the screen, were it not for an imaginary journey through a place that was designed to be no place.

2 Ben Schlanger, 'Motion picture theatres of tomorrow', *Motion Picture Herald*, February 1931, p. 13.

At the outset, it is important to note that of all the various changes to film theatre design in the 1930s, the most explicit was stylistic. A new style, termed art deco or streamline moderne, began to supplant existing designs. This change, a precursor of the wider shift to modern architecture in the ensuing decade, is the aspect of transformation that has received the greatest attention from film theatre historians.[3] However, had the film theatre design transformations of the early 1930s been solely stylistic, it would have been of little note or significance in the context of the stylistic eclecticism of the preceding decade – the golden age of silent movies. The film theatre designers of the silent era experimented with virtually every known stylistic idiom, and art deco would have been merely one more addition to this rich repertoire, as it indeed was in the late 1920s. Benjamin Schlanger, among others, 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'.[4] Significant and instrumental as the dynamic formal characteristics of art deco may have been to the broader objectives of film theatre reformers, what is evident from Schlanger's statement is that a stylistic shift in film theatre design was not the principal objective. Rather, it was to change the relationship of the audience to the filmic event as it existed in the picture palaces of the 1920s. What that relationship was and how it was to be transformed, as well as the reasons for the perceived need for transformation, will be the focus of the remainder of this essay.

Inasmuch as the film theatre insinuates itself, as it has from its inception, between the real world outside and the imaginary world unfolding on the screen, it inevitably locates and localizes the real and the imaginary at a pronounced physical distance. The modalities of this pronouncement define and articulate the perceived relationship between the real and the imaginary. Any call for change in these modalities may well stem from a perceived change in the established relationship between the real and the imaginary. Each of the three phases in the history of film theatre design – the nickelodeon, the picture palace and the sound theatre – was a response to such a change.

Before the advent of film theatres, the initial and perhaps most profound change in the relationship of the real and the imaginary happened with the invention of cinema itself. The addition of motion to photographic reproduction altered the preconceived distance between the real and the imaginary to the point of a spatial, if not ideational, crisis. As film overlaps and condenses time and space, it inherently displaces every place it happens to be. It produces a strange cohabitation between heterogeneous spaces, past and present, real and illusory, virtual and actual. The ensuing sense of displacement is well documented in early reactions to film exhibition, coming as they did before the advent of the film theatre.

A well-known case is Maxim Gorky's review of the Lumière Cinématographe exhibition at the Nizhni-Novgorod Fair of 1896.[5] The spatial consequences of the encounter for the future development of the film

3 See Lary May, 'Designing multicultural America, modern movie-theaters and the politics of public space 1920–1945', in James Combs (ed.), *Movies and Politics: the Dynamic Relationship* (New York, NY: Garland, 1993), p. 213. See also Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: an Architectural History of the Movie Theatre, Starring S. Charles Lee* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994); David Naylor, *American Picture Palaces: the Architecture of Fantasy* (New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1981); Jane Preddy, *Glamour, Glitz and Sparkle: the Deco Theatres of John Eberson* (Chicago, IL: Theatre Historical Society of America, 1989), pp. 1–39; Christine Basque, 'The paradoxes of paradise: elements of conflict in Chicago's Balaban & Katz', *Marquee*, vol. 27, no. 2 (1993), pp. 4–12; Ben M. Hall, *The Best Remaining Seats: the Story of the Golden Age of the Movie Palace* (New York, NY: C. N. Potter, 1961); Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: a History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (London: BFI Publishing, 1992); Ina Rae Hark, *Exhibition, the Film Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002).

4 Schlanger, 'Motion picture theaters of tomorrow', p. 13. See also Randolph Williams Sexton, 'The changing values in theatre design: an architect's analysis and prophecy', *Motion Picture Herald*, no. 25 (1931), p. 25.

5 Maxim Gorky, 'A review of the Lumière programme at the Nizhni-Novgorod Fair', in Jay Leyda (ed.), *Kino: a History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 407–09.

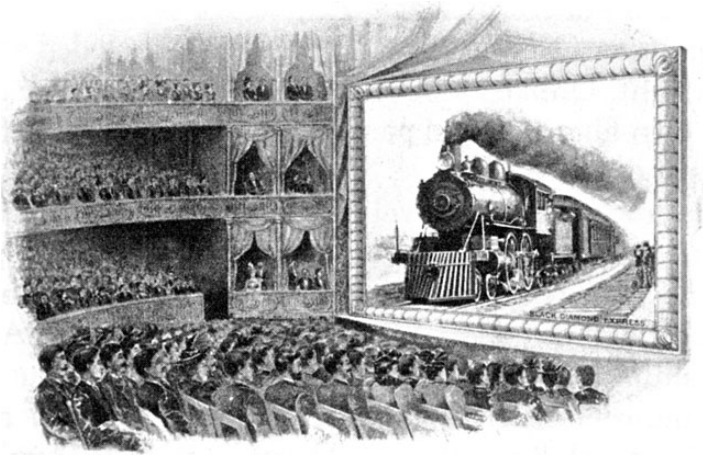

Fig. 3. Lyman H. Howe's Animotiscope exhibition poster, 1897.

theatre are significant. The scene Gorky reviewed was not entirely different from the one depicted in an 1897 advertising poster for the Lyman H. Howe's Animotiscope exhibition (figure 3).[6] The audience and a train locomotive are depicted in a head-to-head confrontation on two sides of a gigantic picture frame that reassuringly separates and localizes the moving picture within a well-delineated and laterally contained space opposite the spectators' gaze. Gorky's encounter does not appear to have had the benefit of Howe's frame, whose logic would become, in time, the film theatre's.

> 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.[7]

Gorky is 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: bodies and buildings are 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 disfigurement, knowing the images to be mere shadows, is a question I return to 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';[8] other, perhaps exaggerated accounts have the audience rushing from the theatre in panic. The physical reaction, slight or severe, does not come from any confusion of the dim grey illusion on the screen with reality. Instead, it is an improper involvement with the image – being dialogically involved with

6 Charles Musser and Carol Nelson, *High-Class Moving Pictures: Lyman H. Howe and the Forgotten Era of Traveling Exhibition, 1880–1920* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

7 Gorky, 'A review of the Lumière programme', p. 408.

8 Musser and Nelson, *High-Class Moving Pictures*, p. 66.

instead of looking *at* the image – that causes the audience to react. It is the fear of proximity to something that should remain at a distance that makes the audience reestablish that distance by physically removing themselves from the image.

Much as Gorky tries, from the outset, to imagine film as a distinct place – a kingdom no less – this place is anything but clear and distinct. Affording no clear hold on presence or absence, 'this mute, grey life finally begins', Gorky tells us, 'to disturb and depress you'.

> 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.[9]

9 Gorky, 'A review of the Lumière programme', p. 408.

Although Gorky does not specify what the warning of the mute grey life on the screen actually is, fraught as he imagines it to be with a vague but sinister meaning, he is quite clear on its consequence: in its company, he forgets where he is. The dissolution of his sense of place is coupled with a loss of control over his thoughts. Strange imaginings *invade* his mind, as his thoughts, too, become displaced and his consciousness wanes and dims.

Suddenly 'a gay chatter and a provoking laughter' in the audience returns him to his place outside the kingdom of shadows. There, from 'the vague but sinister meaning' of this experience, Gorky 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?' If anywhere, it should be left in the hands of scientists within the confines of the laboratory; anywhere else, it is displaced and displacing. Nevertheless, he suspects the entertainment value of this peculiar invention will outweigh its scientific value, and it will be placed where it should have no place. Gorky's suspicion was well founded. Nonetheless, the logic of his imaginary placement of film at a distance in an Other space was to shape the place of film for the rest of its history.

The novel spectacle that was the type of early film exhibition reviewed by Gorky, which Tom Gunning calls the 'cinema of attractions', encourages the viewer to assume the role of an observer.[10] This observational role fixes the subject's place *outside* the attraction, and requires the subject to look *at* the attraction in recognition of the space that is transformed into distance between the viewer and the attraction itself. This distance, contingent as it was in the cinema of attractions on the threat of an imaginary collapse, was both volatile and to a degree unsettling, as Gorky's review clearly indicates. The addition of a narrator and/or musical accompaniment to early silent film screenings would soon go some way towards remediation of the type of dialogical involvement with silent films that purportedly disturbed and depressed Gorky. They 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 to stabilize and localize the audience in its place,

10 Tom Gunning, 'An aesthetic of astonishment: early film and the (in)credulous spectator', in Linda Williams (ed.), *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), pp. 114–33. See also Wanda Strauven (ed.), *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2007).

with the screen located now behind the source of sound directed at the audience.[11]

The challenge of (dis)locating and keeping film at a distance ('there') from the audience ('here') became increasingly acute as narrative cinema supplanted the cinema of attractions, wilfully collapsing the space the former confronted and effectively constituted as distance between screen and audience. Avoiding any recognition of the audience in a dialogical role, narrative cinema cast the audience in a spectatorial role.[12] It absorbed and integrated the audience into the type of immersive experience that was the source of this cinema's persuasive appeal. The task of reconstituting the distance between the real and the imaginary would shift in the transition from attraction to narration to a new building type: the film theatre. The first of its kind was the nickelodeon.[13]

Despite its short history, the nickelodeon had a profound influence on the development of film theatres in the century to come. As Gorky's comments illustrate, cinema brings other spaces and times to our space and time, creating a potentially uncanny cohabitation. The designers of the nickelodeon sidestepped this challenge by turning the experience on its head, conceptualizing it as a journey out to an Other place. To constitute this Other space for film, the designers of the nickelodeon focused primarily on fabricating a thick borderline between the world outside and the screen placed at the end of the auditorium furthest, both conceptually and literally, from that world. The process often began, as David Hulfish explained in 1911, with the conversion of a vacant store.[14] The transparent glass facade was removed and replaced with an opaque wall set back six feet or more from the kerb (figure 4). In addition to this literal spatial remove, the reading of the nickelodeon's separation from its context was augmented with the superimposition of gateway imagery on its facade. An articulated frame, often employing the classical orders with various degrees of abstraction, was placed on the physical border between the nickelodeon and the street, and the inscription of an arch within this frame created a gateway evocative of a Roman triumphal arch and the city-gate it symbolically embodied. The divide, thus instituted as a deep threshold between the real and the imaginary, denoted separation and prolonged passage, heightened by the ubiquitous ritual at the ticket booth. Thus cinema would always happen in an Other space, as it would at the end of a journey, past a pronounced and deep threshold. If the film theatre is, as Mary Heaton Vorse noted in 1911, 'the door of escape, for a few cents, from the realities of life', this escape was not merely imaginary.[15] It was also a literal experience enacted architecturally and ritually to effect the estrangement of narrative cinema from every place it happened to be.

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', but

11 For a detailed discussion of the role of sound and music in early film exhibitions, see Richard Abel and Rick Altman (eds), *The Sounds of Early Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001); Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005).

12 For a detailed discussion of the emergence of the spectator as a historical construction from early to classical cinema, see Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

13 For a detailed discussion of the history of the nickelodeon, see Q. David Bowers, *Nickelodeon Theatres and Their Music* (Vestal, NY: Vestal Press, 1986). See also Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994); Charlotte Herzog, 'The archaeology of cinema architecture: the origins of the movie theater', *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, no. 9 (1984), pp. 11–32.

14 David S. Hulfish, *Motion-Picture Work: a General Treatise on Picture Taking, Picture Making, PhotoPlays, and Theater Management and Operation* (Chicago, IL: American School of Correspondents, 1913), p. 176.

15 Mary Heaton Vorse, 'Some picture show audiences', *Outlook*, no. 98 (1911), p. 442.

Fig. 4. Theatorium postcard, circa 1912.

> 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'.[16]

This middle-class anxiety led to a concerted effort at censoring and policing cinema in the decade that followed the advent of the nickelodeon.

Focusing on the experience of the immigrant and women audiences at the nickelodeon, Miriam Hansen argues that the disjunctive exhibition programme of the nickelodeon, consisting of the 'variety format, nonfilmic activities like illustrated songs, live acts, and occasional amateur nights – fostered a casual, sociable if not boisterous, atmosphere', and did not allow the audience to become fully submerged into 'the illusory space on screen'.[17] The audience remained conscious throughout of 'the actual theater space' and their collective place within it.[18] In addition,

> 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

16 Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), p. 13.

17 Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, p. 61.

18 Ibid., p. 84.

> experience of disorientation and displacement the objectivity of collective expression.[19]

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'.[20] It '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'.[21]

Hansen's acute observations, however, 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 separated from those surroundings both visually and ritually. This was the primary aim of the nickelodeon designers, given that the music and the captions during screenings, and the live entertainment in the intervals, kept the imaginary at a distance in the auditorium. If the nickelodeon was indeed 'an objective correlative of the immigrant experience',[22] it was by virtue of leaving one's 'familiar surroundings' on a journey to an Other world, into which the audience was given brief glimpses, and from which it remained distanced, if not segregated. In a sense, everyone at the nickelodeon was an immigrant – an outsider by design. Any shift in gender and social roles within the bounds of the nickelodeon merely underscored the alterity of the film theatre as fantastic and otherworldly – a place apart, where *real* norms did not apply.

The development and ensuing popularity of feature-length films in the early 1910s triggered an important shift in the relationship of the audience to the filmic event. The demand for a new form of film theatre ensued as the nickelodeon was declared 'inefficient and obsolete and altogether unsuited to the presentation of this modern form of entertainment'.[23] What made it so was the obsolescence of its localization in the face of greater intensity and duration of involvement with the imaginary. As one of a handful of prominent architects' practices specializing in the emerging field of film theatre design in the early 1910s, Rapp and Rapp played a major role in the transformation of the nickelodeons into the picture palaces of the late 1910s and 1920s. George L. Rapp attributed the changing shape of things to a new vision of what the film theatre 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.[24]

This vision was not entirely new. In common with the old approach, it transformed the cinemagoing experience into a journey to an Other place. But whereas the nickelodeon's primary aim was the institution and

19 Ibid., p. 108

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., p. 118.

22 Ibid., p. 108.

23 George L. Rapp, 'History of cinema theater architecture', in Arthur Woltersdorf (ed.), *Living Architecture* (Chicago, IL: A. Kroch, 1930), pp. 58–59. See also P. R. Pereira, 'The Development of the Moving Picture Theater', *American Architect*, no. 106 (1914), p. 178.

24 Rapp, 'History of cinema theater architecture', p. 59. See also E. C. A. Bullock, 'Theater entrances and lobbies', *Architectural Forum*, vol. 42, no. 6 (1925), p. 370; John F. Barry and Epes W. Sargent, *Building Theatre Patronage: Management and Merchandising* (New York, NY: Chalmers Publishing, 1927), p. 12.

Fig. 5. Thomas and Mercie Architects, Oriental Theater, Portland, OR, 1927.

elaboration of a threshold in between the real and the imaginary, the picture palaces of the silent era focused on fabricating a 'different world' beyond the nickelodeon's threshold. Film was now to happen in a world apart, one where exoticism, and soon thereafter orientalism, underscored a difference that was visceral, dramatic and literal.

The architect Thomas Lamb, one of the seminal figures in shaping the history of the picture palace, succinctly articulated the strategy for this 'new' motion picture theatre 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.[25]

Cutting off the audience from the rest of city life began on the street. Building on 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' at the outset of their journey to a 'different world' (figure 5).[26] Past the ticket booth, the doors of the inner lobby, and the ticket attendant, the cinema*goer*, having been ritually constituted as such by design and 'taken up on the architect's magic carpet', was delivered to 'a celestial city of gorgeous stage settings, luxurious hangings and enchanting music'.[27]

25 Thomas W. Lamb, '"Good old days" to these better new days', *Motion Picture News*, June 1928, p. 14.

26 Barry, *Building Theatre Patronage*, p. 12.

27 Bullock, 'Theater entrances and lobbies', p. 371.

Fig. 6. Thomas W. Lamb, Fox Theater, San Francisco, CA, 1929.

The construed grand spectacle of a palace, that wasn't, 'transformed' everyone who entered. In presenting 'to their eyes a general scheme quite different from their daily environment', as Lamb called for, the picture palace turned cinemagoers into tourists visiting a displaced and displacing land. Here, everyone was, by design, out of place by rite of visitation to a space that was not only out of the ordinary but ornate and complex in appearance. Ben Rosenberg's memory of such encounters 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' (figure 6).[28] Overwhelmed by the sublime spectacle, the urge was to transform the 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 there in each chandelier? How do they clean the chandeliers?"'[29] In the substitution of information for the sight's incomprehensible sublimity, questions of authenticity about, for instance, marble and gold speak to both a compulsory involvement with appearance and a disjuncture between appearance and substance. The imaginary as representation supplanted the 'real'; this was what was 'different'. In the 'land of romance', by design, one had access only to a disarming multitude of impenetrable appearances. The imaginary was not brought by the film to its place of exhibition, it was a reception the place imposed on the film in advance.

The palatial theme introduced in the lobby, and the subsequent mezzanines and foyers, reached a climax in the monumental auditorium (figure 7). Although stylistic details varied, what picture palace auditoria

28 Ben Rosenberg, 'An usher's life – Part I', *Marquee*, vol. 27, no. 2 (1995), p. 20.

29 Ibid.

Fig. 7. Thomas W. Lamb, B. F. Keith Memorial Theater, Boston, MA, 1928.

had in common were richly articulated wall surfaces leading up to an imposing ceiling whose monumental concentric patterns often culminated at the centre in a grand chandelier. This may not have been the most effective means of illuminating a large interior, but it was a very effective way of creating, in conjunction with the concentric ornamental patterns of the ceiling and the vertical wall articulations, a centralized space that located and localized the audience, and which Lamb insisted should be 'rich and self-contained' (figure 1).

An important factor in the auditorium's requisite self-containment as a *place* was the elaborate and ornate proscenium arch. Erected as a monumental threshold at the far end of the auditorium, opposite the entry doors, the proscenium arch marked a literal end to the auditorium but also visually extended the journey that had started outside on the pavement, through the auditorium into the exclusive domicile of the imaginary, into which the audience could peer but not enter. The proscenium arch underscored the inherent tension between the forward gaze of the audience from their seats and the concentric, self-enclosing envelope of the auditorium – between a directional visual *path* and a concentric *place* – localizing the audience and the imaginary in their respective and mutually exclusive places. The separation was characteristically augmented with layers of elaborate curtains, bordered by intricate cloth frames hanging over a raised shallow stage that visually articulated the spatial depth of the proscenium arch. These were followed by a segregated space inside the auditorium devoted to the orchestra and/or the Wurlitzer organ. Together they created a permanent multilayered spatial barrier, augmented by a temporal sound barrier between the audience, the proscenium arch and the place of the imaginary beyond.

Fig. 8. John Eberson, Loew's Theater, Louisville, KY, 1928.

Few, if any, characteristics of the picture palace described thus far had much impact on the actual screening. As the lights dimmed, the curtains parted, and the projection began, the space and time of the auditorium were supplanted by the space and time of the film. All that mattered was to ensure that the audience lost awareness of their place within the auditorium for the duration of the screening. Extensive studies on proper illumination, sightlines and air quality were undertaken as early as the mid 1910s to ensure nothing could 'spoil the illusion' of the auditorium's erasure,[30] thus avoiding the type of uncanny cohabitation of heterogeneous spaces and times to which Gorky alluded.

The palatial design of the first picture palaces was derived from European baroque architecture and its nineteenth-century, second-empire variant. The designers soon looked to more distant and exotic imagery from a vast and diverse repertoire subsumed under the label of 'the Orient'. They borrowed and combined freely from Egyptian, Persian, Indian and Chinese architecture, among others, to fabricate a world for the filmic event far more distant and exotic than the first film theatres (figure 8). The designers were concerned with neither orthodoxy nor fidelity to any of the numerous and diverse sources; all that mattered was the exoticism and otherworldliness of the result. Lamb, who played a decisive role in the adoption of the oriental theme, was once again 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.

30 See Charles A. Whittemore, 'Planning for sight and projection lines', *Architectural Forum*, no. 27 (1917), pp. 13–18, and 'The artificial illumination of motion picture theatres: present abuses and suggested improvements', *American Architect*, no. 118 (1920), pp. 678–81.

> Passing on into the inner foyers and the mezzanine promenade, one continues in the same lndo-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.[31]

31 Lamb, '"Good old days" to these better new days', p. 14.

Much as the overt orientalism of the second-generation picture palaces, which was conceived and presented as a 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 a distance. In this oriental imaginary, the occidental mind was de facto on a tour in a 'foreign' land where film was made to stand in the same relationship to the real as the Orient did to the Occident, by design.

Looking back in 1930 at the short history of film theatre design in the USA, George L. Rapp anticipated the coming of a third phase of design 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, 'will result in a new third period in cinema architecture.'[32]

32 Rapp, 'History of cinema theater architecture', p. 56.

The advent of the 'third period', although connected to the 'popularity of sound pictures', was not motivated by changes in technology or acoustics per se, as noted earlier. Writing in a 1932 issue of *Architectural Forum*, the RCA engineer Harry Braun suggested that 'Equipping an auditorium for "sound movies" is 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'.[33] Along with new theatres, the picture palaces of the 1920s were retrofitted for mechanical sound, and many remained in operation for decades to come.

33 Harry B. Braun, 'Sound motion picture requirements', *Arch Forum*, no. 57 (1932), p. 381.

The film theatres of the 1930s could rely from the outset on mechanical amplification of sound in the auditorium, whereas those of the 1920s had to rely solely on the auditorium design to ensure ample and even distribution of sound throughout their very large auditoria (upwards of 5000 seats). In this respect, the architects largely excelled.[34] Apart from placing sound horns behind the screen and related mechanical equipment in the projection room, the auditoria required little or no modification. In other words, if film theatre design changed in the 1930s, it was not to achieve better acoustics; in fact, the redesigned auditoria were, to a degree, acoustically regressive. Edwin Newcomb pointed out in 1930 that an auditorium that is 'high, rather than deep', 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'. By contrast, the longer, narrower and smaller auditoria introduced in the 1930s taxed the audio technology of the day,[35] presenting a distinct challenge to the even distribution of sound throughout the space. Fredric Pawley noted in 1932 that

34 See Rosenberg, 'An usher's life', p. 22; Philip Morton Shand, *Modern Picture-Houses and Theaters* (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott, 1930), p. 23.

35 Randolph Williams Sexton (ed.), *American Theatres of Today, Volume II* (New York, NY: Architectural Book Publishing, 1930), p. 41.

'the volume of sound sufficient to reach distant seats is generally too great for seats near the screen'.[36]

The technology that brought sound to film was only in the early stages of development when it was introduced to a wider audience in 1927. The initial Vitaphone or sound-on-disc technology proved notoriously unreliable for keeping image and sound in sync.[37] It was not until the early 1930s, when it was abandoned in favour of sound-on-film technology, that the synchronization problems that besieged early talkies were finally overcome. It took equally long to realistically reproduce the human voice. It is at roughly this latter period that a new film theatre design came into vogue.[38] In the meantime, the talking picture challenged the audience in ways that exceeded the technology's initial deficiencies.[39]

Two years after the introduction of sound, Alexander Bakshy complained about being 'treated to hollow and squawking and lisping voices, and even to imperfect synchronization'.[40] He also identified, however, an even greater problem with the talking picture:

> 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.[41]

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 had 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*, whence it emanates. As such, sound had the same novel and thrilling effect on the audience as did Gorky's onrushing train. 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 threatened the space and the distance between the audience and the filmic event, radically altering their relationship. 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 pictures 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 colour film would in time overcome had everything to do with the coupling of the two-dimensional image with 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'.[42] This is 'because

36 Fredric Arden Pawley, 'Design of motion picture theaters', *Architectural Record*, no. 71 (1932), p. 439.

37 See Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926–1931* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

38 In 1929, only 37% of all film theatres in the USA were wired for sound. By 1931, 62% had converted to sound. Ibid., p. 155.

39 For detailed discussion of audiences' reaction to early sound films, see Robert Spadoni, *Uncanny Bodies: the Coming of Sound Film and the Origins of the Horror Genre* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

40 Alexander Bakshy, 'A year of talkies', *Nation*, June 1929, p. 773.

41 Ibid.

42 Luigi Pirandello, 'Pirandello views the "talkies"', *New York Times*, 28 July 1929, p. 71.

the voice is of a living body' and 'there are no bodies' in film, there are only 'images photographed in motion'. The irreconciled juxtaposition of the 'living voice' with the 'illusion of reality', Pirandello noted, 'disturbs, like an unnatural thing unmasking its mechanism'.[43] As with Gorky, the displacement and juxtaposition of heterogeneous elements, which unmask and expose something disturbing, should remain at a distance.

Two years before Bakshy's and Pirandello's comments, Seymour Stern, like many film critics of his generation, expressed considerable concern over the imminent arrival of sound, colour and stereoscopy in cinema. 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 abominations', 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.[44]

Mindful of the impending displacement, Stern imagined a new film theatre 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'.[45] He imagined, in other words, the eradication of that carefully instilled distance in the picture palace that proved all too vulnerable to sound. Leaving the journey to the auditorium intact, Stern focused his entire attention on altering 'the house of spatially discontinuous perception', of 'disinterested contemplation' and 'spectatorship'. 'In the film-house of the future', he imagined, 'the "role" of spectator will be unknown.'[46] 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'.[47] 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'.[48] At issue was not the music but the location. Though not in the visual path of the audience, in the orchestra's presence 'the spectator is made annoyingly conscious of his spectatorial role', and his place in the auditorium in relation to the screen.

The alternative to two places for 'seeing' and 'being seen', Stern imagined, was not any one place but, in a sense, no place at all. He imagined the auditorium of the future to be an emphatic path to an imaginary destination. As in the past, the screen was to read 'like the vision of another world'.[49] 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'.[50] 'All architectural lines must lead to and meet in the screen', Stern demanded. Whereas the architectural envelope of the auditoria was vertical in emphasis – affecting its reading as a *place* – the film house of the future was to be

43 Ibid.

44 Seymour Stern, 'An aesthetic of the cinema house: a statement of the principles which constitute the philosophy and the format of the ideal film theatre', *National Board of Review Magazine*, no. 2 (1927), pp. 7–8.

45 Ibid., p. 8.

46 Ibid., p. 19.

47 Ibid., p. 10.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

decidedly horizontal in emphasis – affecting its reading as a *path*. To further stress this horizontal directionality, 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, was to be 'pronouncedly phantasmagoric, two-dimensional and cinematic'.[51]

51 Ibid., p. 19.

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 recontextualizing the encounter with film became emphatic and widespread. In time, Stern's vision for the film house of the future was largely realized because he had correctly anticipated the type of immersive experience in the cinema that talking pictures in motion would eventually affect.

By 1931 there was an increasing level of demand both from within the film industry and in architecture trade journals for changes to film theatre design. One of the leading proponents was Ben Schlanger. In the prophetically entitled 'Motion picture theatres of tomorrow', he articulated a vision that closely paralleled Stern's in its immersive experience, and soon became the blueprint for the motion picture theatre of the sound era.[52] Schlanger's objective was not to alter stylistic features, but rather to 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'.[53] As the initial resistance to sound proved futile, the solution to the spatial displacement that it created was, in effect, 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' for the temporal duration of the filmic event.[54] The solution was, in other words, to erase the distance that sound had breached.

52 Schlanger, 'Motion picture theatres of tomorrow', p. 13.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

This erasure meant systematically dispensing with all the architectural implements that constituted the auditorium as a destination, a place, and a 'different world'. It also meant recontextualizing 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 picture

palace into an infinite distance. It meant never being able to locate the imaginary in a place 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'.[55] 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', the 'ornamental side walls, which are always treated vertically with columns, pilasters, arches, etc'.[56] 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'.[57] 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'.[58] The 'usual domes, suspended from above and resting on air', and all other centralizing motifs, including the ubiquitous chandeliers were to disappear.

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.[59]

This meant that not only would the screen get larger, the forward portion of the auditorium side-walls would curve or angle towards the screen 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, already there.[60]

For Schlanger the opportunity to realize his new vision for the film theatre came with the Thalia Theater commission of 1932 in New York City. Thalia Theater's emphatic horizontal directionality and abstract formal vocabulary were glaringly different from the prevailing practice in film theatre design (figure 2). The theatre dropped all the trappings of exoticism and orientalism to be transformed 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

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Ben Schlanger, 'New theaters for the cinema', *Architectural Forum*, no. 57 (1932), pp. 257–58.

60 See Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: from Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), for a broad discussion of the cinematic screen.

Architectural Record and the September 1932 issue of *Architectural Forum*.

Although far fewer film theatres were 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 the picture palaces of the silent era. Noteworthy examples are the Rapps' 1937 Rhodes Theater in Chicago (figure 9), as well as Lamb's 1936 New Rialto Theater in New York and John Eberson's 1936 Penn Theater in Washington, DC (figure 10). These projects could not have been more different from the works of the very same architects only a few years earlier.

It was no mere boast, therefore, when Schlanger declared the war on picture palaces to be all but over in the July 1938 issue of *Architectural Record*, which was devoted to film theatres. 'We have all but eliminated', he declared, 'the "atmospheric" treatment of the auditorium and its indefensible competition with the exhibition.'[61] Schlanger's justification for the elimination of the silent era decorations was reiterated by many in

61 Ben Schlanger, 'Theaters, cinema, community, broadcasting', *Architectural Record*, no. 84 (1938), p. 96.

Fig. 9. George & W. C. Rapp, Rhodes Theater, Chicago, IL, 1937.

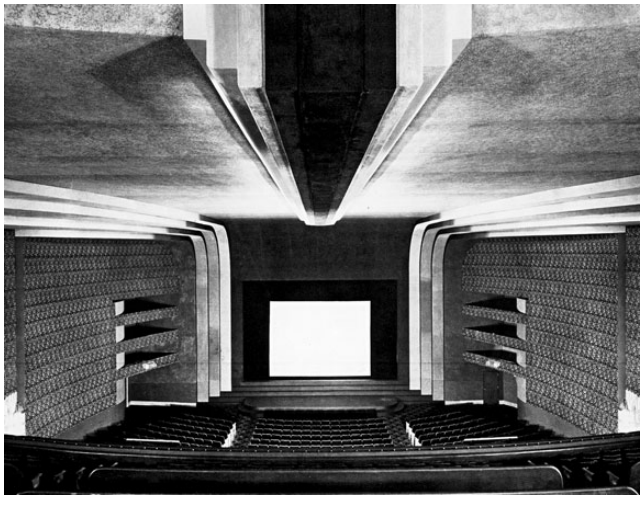

Fig. 10. John Eberson, Penn Theater, Washington, DC, 1936.

various trade publications throughout the late 1930s and well into the late 1940s. These statements often accompanied the reviews of recently renovated 'atmospheric' film theatres, such as that in November 1948 of the Wareham Theater in Wareham, Massachusetts (figure 11) and the Strand Theater in Hartford, Connecticut (figure 12), both renovated by William Riseman Associates.[62]

The oft-repeated assertion that 'distracting wall decorations interfere with the illusion', or 'compete with the presentation' are, from a certain perspective, perplexing. Schlanger himself, in his 1931 critique of the picture palace, noted:[63]

> 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.[64]

Schlanger, like his contemporaries, was aware that revisions to the old auditoria were of little or no consequence for the duration of the filmic event.

Fig. 11. William Riseman Associates, Wareham Theater, Wareham, MA, 1948.

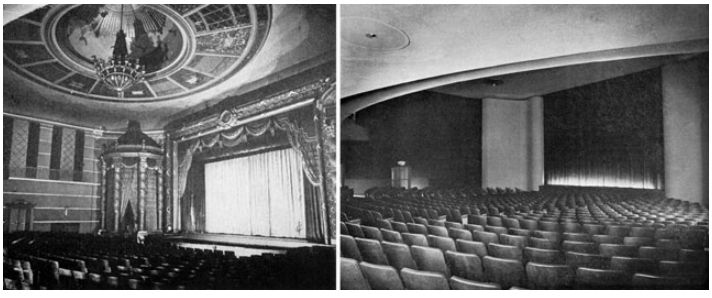

Fig. 12. William Riseman Associates, Strand Theater, Hartford, CT, 1948.

62 'A new architecture for the movie-theater', *Architectural Record*, no. 104 (1948), p. 122.

63 Helen M. Store (ed.), *The Motion Picture Theater: Planning, Upkeep* (New York, NY: Society of Motion Picture Engineers, 1948), p. 32. Schlanger, 'Motion picture theatres of tomorrow', p. 13.

64 Schlanger, 'Motion picture theatres of tomorrow', p. 56.

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 – 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'.[65] This was the illusion of being anywhere and everywhere other than where one actually was; of a viewer being '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'.[66] There was to be no *here*, only an *elsewhere*; where one actually *was* had to disappear. In the auditorium of the post-silent era, 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 from elsewhere. One is already elsewhere and there is, virtually, no longer a *here*: the elsewhere is nowhere real, nowhere that is not an imagined destination or an Other world. This is one reason why the mandate and the measure of success for the post-silent era film theatre has always hinged on maintaining the illusion of the erasure of being where one is, and with it the path that got one there.

Having affected the erasure of *here* for the duration of the filmic event, all that remained was to localize and explain where one found oneself before and after. It was precisely in this context that the picture palace auditorium'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 film theatre architects of the postwar years as giving too much character and identity. It too was abandoned as a 'futile effort to create screen importance', whereas its 'omission would better serve this purpose'.[67] In place of formal horizontality there was to be 'a completely neutral enclosure', with a strong spatial direction towards the screen. The Modern Museum of Art's film theatre in New York City by Goodwin and Stone Architects, shown in the November 1948 issue of *Architectural Record*, is an early example of the type (figure 13).

Looking back in 1961, Schlanger eloquently reflected on the objectives of the postwar film theatre:

> 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 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 Transcenium suggests itself.[68]

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

65 'A new architecture for the movie-theater', p. 123.

66 Walter A. Cutter, 'Psychology of the theater', in Store (ed.), *The Motion Picture Theater*, p.21.

67 Ben Schlanger, 'How function dictates an auditorium style that endures', *Motion Picture Herald*, 6 January 1945, p. 7.

68 Ben Schlanger, 'Motion-picture system from camera to viewer', *The Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers Journal*, vol. 70, no. 9 (1961), p. 685.

the 'Transcenium' would keep the audience in 'transport' to and from an imagined and imaginary destination. On the way, the audience would remain in transit through a 'floating void' on the path to everywhere and nowhere. To be in transit is to be *not there*. The Transcenium 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 picture 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 Transcenium, by contrast, having to confine a vocal imaginary that would not be limited or bordered by any threshold, eschewed any sense of place, much less an arrival at anywhere but an illusory destination. The place of the vocal imaginary in the Transcenium became no place at all – no place that was not imagined and imaginary, and as such infinitely postponed/distanced. Much as the picture palace's strategy was to contain and confine, the Transcenium's strategy was to postpone and delay. As images spoke, the auditorium was driven to silence.

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 the opposite trajectory.[69] While the modalities of the spacing that has kept film at bay have changed drastically over time, the actual spacing has not. Film theatres over the course of the last century have been, despite significant changes in form and experience, variations on a theme introduced in the

69 Walter Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York, NY: Schocken, 1978), p. 222.

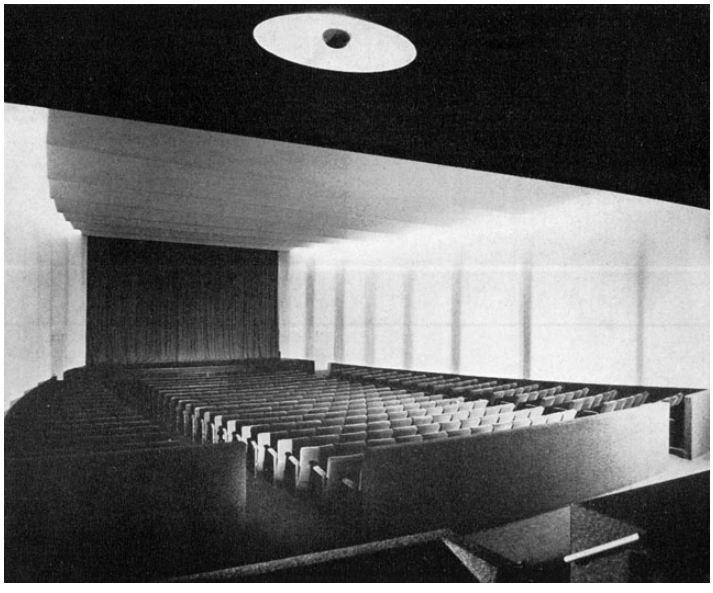

Fig. 13. Goodwin and Stone, Architects, Modern Museum of Art film theatre, New York, 1948.

nickelodeon: a journey to an Other space/place. Why this particular 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 any possible confusion between the real and the imaginary per se, but 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'.[70] Although he did not explain what this vague but sinister meaning actually was, certain as he was of its menacing nature, we find one explanation in Freud's essay on the uncanny, two decades later: 'An uncanny effect 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'.[71] 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.[72]

What in the uncanny is familiar and repressed, and ought to have been kept concealed, is not the substitution but rather 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 provides a cogent account both of what gives the imaginary its power of substitution and of its potentially dire consequence.

> 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

70 Gorky, 'A review of the Lumière programme', p. 408.

71 Sigmund Freud, 'The uncanny', in *Studies in Parapsychology* (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1977), p. 50.

72 Ibid., p. 47.

montage, for example), and of authentic reality. It is a necessary illusion but …[73]

Admittedly no one assumes the images on the cinematic screen to be real. Yet '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'.[74] This necessary reality effect, however, 'quickly induces a loss of awareness of the reality itself, which becomes identified in the mind of the spectator with its cinematographic representation'.[75] What concerns Bazin is not attributing to cinema more than is due but attributing to reality less than is prudent. It is not that cinema may be confused with reality but that reality may be confused with cinema, to the former's detriment. More may appear to be less, and the ability 'to tell where lies begin or end' is lost.[76]

The depreciation Bazin ascribes to the identification of 'authentic reality' with the cinematic illusion has at least one aspect in common with the 'decay of aura' Benjamin attributes 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'.[77] In both cases the substitution of a mechanical reproduction for 'the uniqueness of every reality' leads to the depreciation of the latter. Benjamin recounts an instance of this uncanny effect as relayed by Pirandello, who noted that in front of the camera, the film actor '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.'[78] 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'.[79] However, 'now the reflected image has become separable, transportable'.[80]

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. The self is always in exile from 'reality', which is never given though always desired. This, in a sense, is the '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, then, always already an 'illusion of reality' – divided and deferred and, as such, a substitute for a desired reality that is undivided and present unto itself, that is, as Freud says, 'nothing new or foreign, but familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged

73 André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume I* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), p. 27.

74 Ibid., p. 48.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

77 Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', p. 223.

78 Ibid., p. 229.

79 Ibid., p. 230.

80 Ibid., p. 231.

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 would always 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 film theatre. Much as the uncanny marks the site of a collapsed distance between the real and the imaginary, its evasion must perpetually await the institution of that distance. Hence the architecture of an illusive distance, that is a distance never given yet a distance perpetually in place. Should one wish to conceive of the relationship between the imaginary and the real world, from which the imaginary is separated by a path, in anything other than mutually exclusive binary terms, one must confront and contradict the immediate experience of the film theatre. Just as the imaginary resists the divide and confounds the distance, the film theatre successfully resists film's defiance of the divide to the point of invisibility.

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