Theater, Cinema, Power

The emergence of the theater as an enclosed architectural form in the sixteenth century coincided with the codification of new perspective laws and with the political emergence of the bourgeois city-state. For the first time, architecture froze the positions and seating arrangements of spectators viewing the dramatic spectacle into an orderly perspective that reflected not only a visual coherence, but also a new political hierarchy. Today, the precise representational devices through which the architectonics of the theater are linked to power are more clearly readable, now that cinema has replaced theater as the producer of today's order of power.

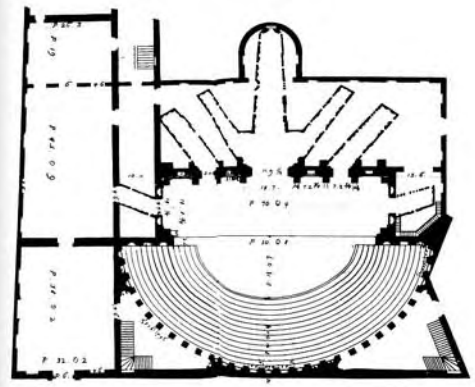
The conventions of the Renaissance theater were equivalent to those of Renaissance painting: each spectator, believing himself or herself to have the ideal view, fixed his or her eyes on the gridded perspective field of the stage. The stage was a tableau with a succession of set-back scenery flats on the left and right sides, tilted slightly inward, and painted to suggest a perspectival depth. The succession of scenes, in which the tableau was altered to represent different places and times, created a self-contained narrative. Scenes changed, but the spectator remained in a fixed position, passively experiencing the "ideal" one-point-perspective illusion created by the play.[1]

This enclosed, perspectival theater was conceived so as to turn inside out and to turn outside into illusionistic "inside." Typically, for example, early stage settings often represented the public piazza of the city in which the theater was located. The theater thus became an ideal representation of the city. It also linked the ideal of the Roman theater of Vitruvius to the new perspective system.

Andrea Palladio and Vincenzo Scamozzi's Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza (completed 1585), based on the Roman manuscripts of Vitruvius, borrowed the plan of the traditional Roman theater. It had five stage entranceways, three in the back and one on each side. The audience was seated in a semicircular theater with tiered, rising rows of seats, half of the hemisphere of a Roman amphitheater. The stage was a perspective-based network of slightly oblique streets leading to a central city square. The surface of the stage tilted upward to accentuate the perspective; the streets tapered inward. Sounds or lines sounds spoken at varying depths by actors within the interior "streets" were made fainter in accordance with perspectival laws.

Like many early theaters (including Shakespeare's Globe), the Teatro Olimpico functioned as a popular theater with the perspective of the staged spectacle arranged so that the best views were in the lower rows. The rules of privileged perspective were drastically altered with the development of the court theater—designed for nobility alone. There the privileged position was accorded the ruler and all other viewing positions were assigned on the basis of social rank. This became the dominant form of theater for the future. Prototypical was the theater constructed for Prince Vespasiano Gonzaga's new city of Sabbioneta in 1539. In this more rectilinear theater, the prince viewed the performance from a box located in the rear, upper loggia. His ideal view—in which all representations

Andrea Palladio and Vincenzo Scamozzi. Teatro Olimpico, Vicenza, 1580–85. View of the stage and auditorium.



Palladio and Scamozzi's Teatro Olimpico. Floor plan.

were addressed to his absolute power—conformed to and defined the representation of power in the state.

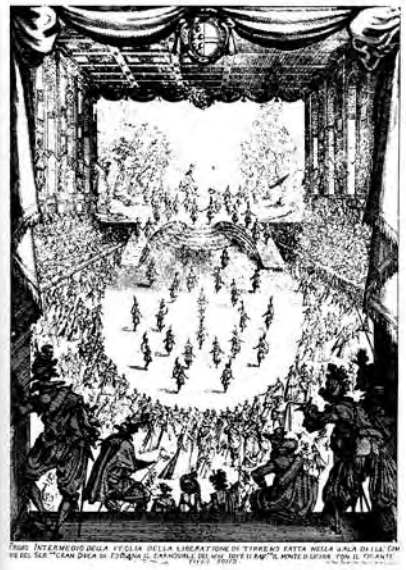
Moreover, the stage set for Gonzaga's theater represented the city's main plaza. In reality, just in front of the theater building, across the main plaza, was Prince Vespasiano's ducal palace from which he observed the square. His position of observation in the theater—behind and above the audience—symbolically replicated his position of power/architectural vantage in the "outside" world: "Viewed from [the Prince's] loggia, the socially inferior spectators were ranked on tiers and spread across the sloping orchestra floor toward the stage where the orthogonals of its set began to recede to infinity . . . Taken together the *cavea* and stage resemble an elongated tear-shape, as the conical neck, corresponding to the deeply recessed stage, opens into the curving loggia."[2] At the prince's eye level, to the right and left of the upper stage, were square windows providing a view of the courtyard in which the theater was *actually* located and juxtaposing this view to the illusionistic perspective of the urban square represented on stage.

Vespasiano's theater conventionalized the rule that the actors and the acting should be addressed at all times to the gaze of the ruler. Actors should gravitate toward center stage and project their speech toward the distant perspective of the ruler's powerful presence. This notion derived from court etiquette. The actor's role was dual: on the one hand, they were to indicate to the prince and spectators their own very low status in real life (as opposed to the fictional roles they might portray on stage), and on the other hand, they were to simultaneously represent for the prince *his* ideal view of the world. In this context, the prince was the subject of both the actors' and the spectators' gaze, just as the actors on stage and the spectators were the subjects of the prince's gaze. In other words, there were numerous perspectival lines of sight simultaneously brought into play: the actors' looks toward each other within the representation (play); and the actors' looks toward the prince's presence signifying that they represent his view; and the spectators' gaze of the actors, a nonideal vantage point. The spectators could *identify* with the ideal vantage point by placing themselves in the perspective of the ruler; they could also turn away from the stage 180 degrees, to view the ruler's (ideal) view.

Geometrically and numerologically reflected in the secret proportions of the architecture of the Renaissance theater was the assumption that the theater itself acted talismanically as a microcosm of the world ("All the world's a stage and we are but players"). It was thought that the astrological signs painted on the ceiling influenced Heaven and that the area below the stage was (symbolically) Hell. Much of Shakespeare's language refers, in a double sense, to the literal stage architecture, as well as to its metaphoric allusion. Early Renaissance theory also related the harmonic proportions of architecture to astrological and Neoplatonic numerological magic. For instance, in the Teatro Olimpico, the positions of the seven auditorium gangways and the five stage entries "are determined by the points of four equilateral triangles inscribed within a circle, the centre of which is the centre of the orchestra. These triangles . . . correspond to the . . . [ones] which astrologers inscribe within the circle of the zodiac. The circular form of the theatre thus reflects the zodiac, and the seven entrances to the auditorium and the five entrances to the stage correspond to positions of the twelve signs and of the four triangles connecting them."[3] Although the exact plan of the Globe Theatre remains undetermined, scholars have suggested that it probably followed an astrological geometry similar to that of the Teatro Olimpico.

The ultimate occult "theater" was not a theater at all. Giulio Camillo's theater of memory, the Teatro dal Mundo, attempted to create an identity between memory and symbolic images. These images were magic, talismanic representations of a coded system of the world: "The Theatre rises in seven grades or steps, which are divided by seven gangways representing the seven planets. The student of it is to be as it were a spectator before whom are placed the seven measures of the world 'in spettaculo,' or in a theatre."[4]

Either transportable pavilion or unrealized idea, Camillo's model was intended to exist as an *actual* miniature theater, only large enough for one spectator-scholar, who would stand in the center, the stage-area. The "spectator" would use the device to learn the structure of the universe in an encyclopedic ritual. This theater reversed the conventions of spectatorship: the audience member was

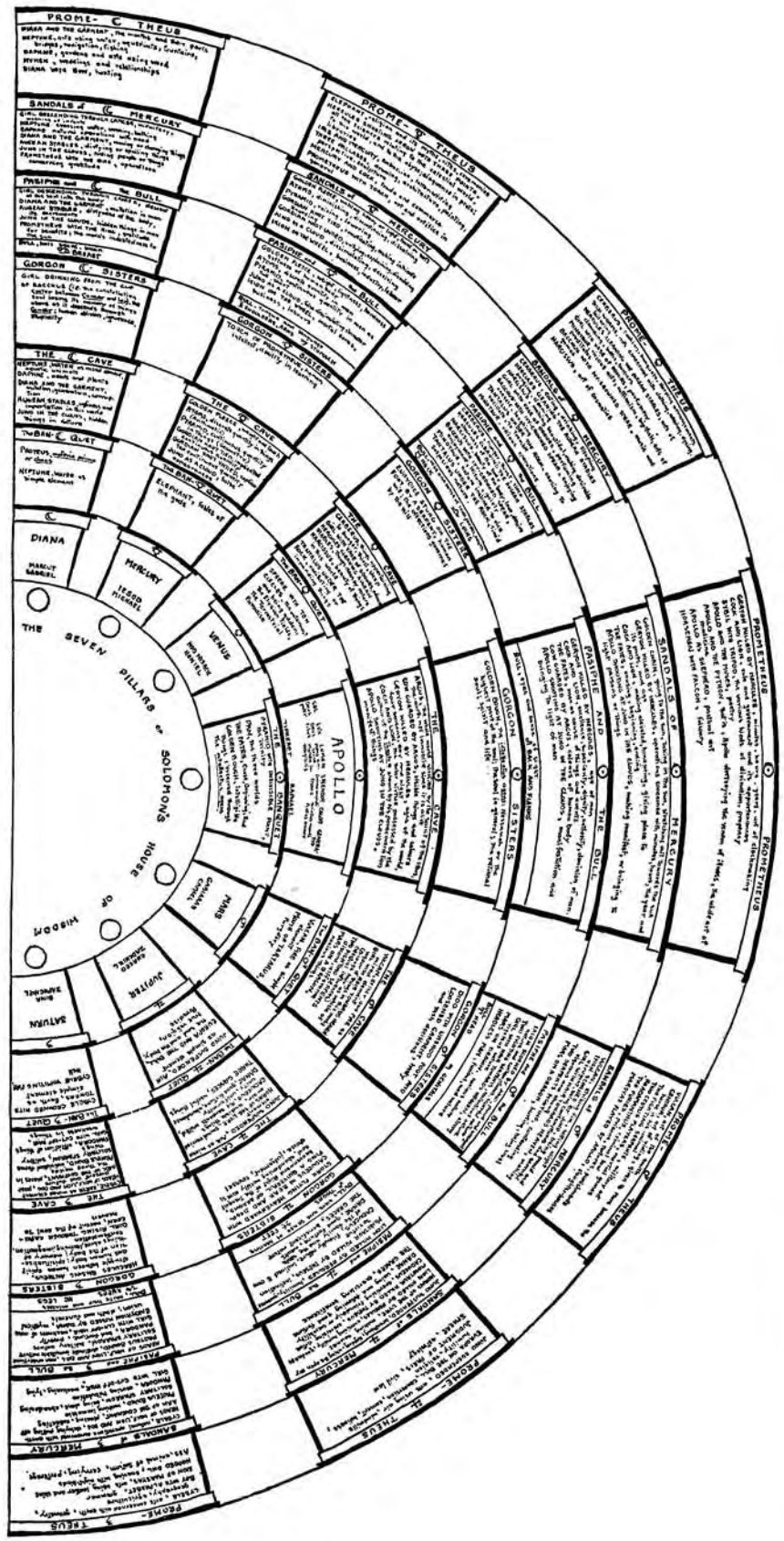


Bernardo Buontalenti. Uffizi Theater, 1586. As shown in Jacques Callot's etching, First Intermezzo, *1617.*

placed on the stage instead of looking *at* the stage and its spectacle. The viewer would gaze at images on the seven-tiered steps. Each tier represented aspects of the "universe expanding from First Causes through the stages of creation."[5] Images of planetary gods were placed on the outside of each grade. Under these images were "drawers, or boxes, or coffers of some kind containing masses of papers, and on these papers were speeches, based on the works of Cicero, relating to the subjects recalled by the images."[6] Its goal was not to "expose" reality, but to reveal a hidden one through a different schema. This schema was embedded in the architecture. The structure's ultimate purpose was like a Jesuit exercise: to remake memory. In Camillo's theater, memory was given coherence and micro-macrocosmic meaning. Dante wrote that prior to the visions of the ultimate order-meaning of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise that he exposed in *The Divine Comedy,* his memories had no substance.

Camillo's conception tried to combine astrological, Neoplatonic, and magic rituals with a radical appropriation of the medieval artificial memory tradition. In Camillo's time, artificial memory was an attempt to resurrect what was originally a part of Greek (and later Roman) rhetoric. Before printed books, public speakers needed a method by which they might record long passages of speech. Quintilian, the first-century Roman critic and master of rhetoric, devised specific chains of thought by which memories could be associated with artificially chosen architectural sites. He proposed the following formula in his treatise *De Institutio oratoria:*

> Places are chosen, and marked with the utmost possible variety, as a spacious house divided into a number of rooms. Everything of note therein is diligently imprinted on the mind, in order that thought may be able to run through all the parts without let or hindrance . . . Then what has been written down, or thought of, is noted by a sign to remind of it. This sign may be drawn from a whole "thing," as navigation or warfare, or from some "word"; for what is slipping from memory is recovered by



Guido Camillo. Scheme for the Teatro dal Mundo.

> the admonition of a single word. . . . These signs are then arranged as follows. The first notion is placed, as it were, in the forecourt; the second, let us say, in the atrium; the remainder are placed in order all around the impluvium, and committed not only to bedrooms and parlours, but even to statues and the like. This done when it is required to revive the memory, one begins from the first place to run through all, demanding what has been entrusted to them, of which one will be reminded by the image. Thus, however numerous are the particulars which it is required to remember, all are linked one to another as in a chorus . . . What . . . [can be] done in a house can also be done in public buildings. . . . Or we can imagine such places for ourselves.[7]

For every architectural location, a memorable image was to be associated:

> Suppose that we are the counsel for the defense in a law suit. "The prosecutor has said that the defendant killed a man by poison, has charged that the motive of the crime was to gain an inheritance, and declared that there are many witnesses and accessories to this act. . . . We shall imagine the man in question as lying ill in bed, if we know him personally. If we do not know him, we shall yet take some one to be our invalid, but not a man of the lowest class, so that he may come to mind at once. And we shall place the defendant at the bedside, holding in his right hand a cup, in his left, tablets, and on the fourth finger, a ram's testicles." The cup would remind of the poisoning, the tablets of the will or the inheritance, and the testicles of the ram through verbal similarity with *testes*—of the witnesses. . . . This . . . is a classical memory image . . .[8]

During the later Roman era (in the third century A.D.), "memory" took on Neoplatonic connotations; its rediscovery by medieval scholars in this form presented problems to the church. Finally, in the late thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas put the rhetoric of memory to a new use: the regulation of the body and soul into theologically correct patterns of thinking and acting. Memory became a propaganda machine for ordering all the correct ways of acting and thinking in God's universe.

Whereas the Renaissance stage metaphorically represented the city as defined hierarchically in terms of the prince-ruler's power, in the Baroque period the city itself became a theater. At all times, the city was subject to ceremonial adornment for royal spectacles, which presented the official "line" to the public (the more arcane messages were communicated to the nobility in private banquets and theatrical masques). Baroque spectacles represented and justified the ruler's regime and its policies in terms of divine right. Kings would cast *themselves* in the double role of actor and absolute ruler, often depicting themselves in masque as Greco-Roman gods, supposed progenitors of their line of descent. Through mythological symbolism, the royal pageant plays (written by the most distinguished poets and writers of the realm) prepared both the public and the nobility for future political policies:

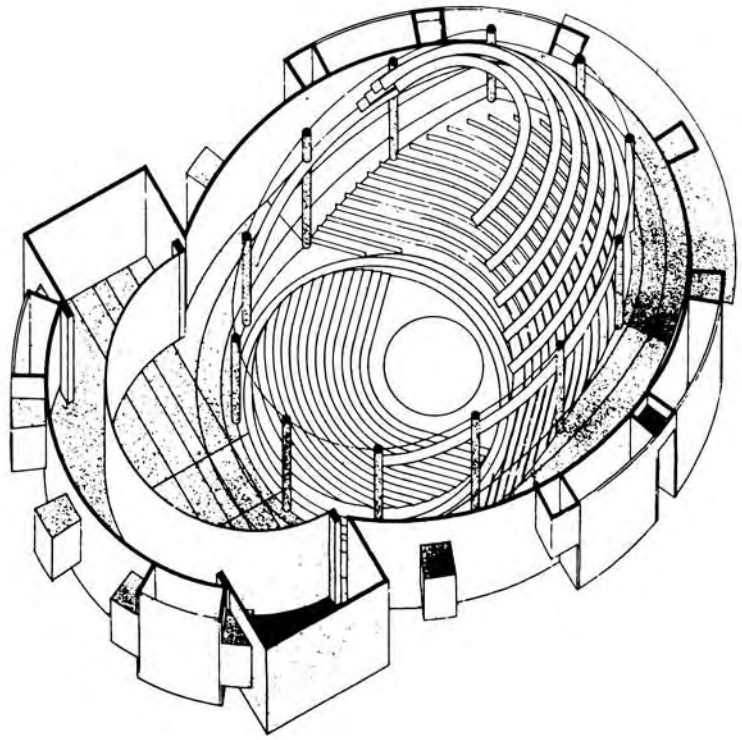
> The programme designed by Ronsard and Dorat . . . was a public programme, intended to be exhibited publicly to the people in the streets. The theme, the Trojan-Imperial descent of the Kings of France, was an ancient and well-worn theme, thoroughly familiar in the traditional royal propaganda . . . The presentation of Catherine de' Medici and her children in mythological rôles—Artemisia, Juno, Castor and Pollus, and so on—was a tradition which had been carefully built up by the poets as royalist propagandists . . . as well as the public programme in the streets . . . there was a private programme . . . for the élite . . . first revealed to a very select court gathering on the occasion of the banquet offered to the Queen by the city . . . the day after her entry . . . it expressed the imperial theme in terms of Bacchus, the world-conquering god of the East . . .[9]

After the public presentation, private court masques were staged in which the royal patrons enacted symbolic roles. Afterward, the king descended from the stage, mingling with the lesser nobility who had previously been spectators. Masques were also used as contests in which rival kings or factions within the court power structure might symbolically represent and resolve—in a highly coded form—their political differences.

During his reign as king of France (1643–1716), Louis XIV served as author, director, and enactor of a continuous court drama (distinguishable from "real life"), staged to reinforce an elaborate bureaucratic hierarchy based on codes of etiquette. For Louis XIV, etiquette was a political device. Each "player" was precisely defined in terms of the limits of his or her authority and function (i.e., position at court) through codes of dress and food and by the minutiae of court ritual and manners. Declaring himself "The Sun King," Louis ordained Versailles the "Sun Temple." His presence (and that of Versailles), was an expression of the pure emanation of the sun. The ultimate aim of Louis XIV was the consolidation of French national identity by linking the myth of the absolute monarchy to the spiritual identity of the nation.

By the early twentieth century, the belief that the theater had meaning through its utopian illusion was being questioned. The theater had begun to equate its gestures to the actual urban environment. Dada performances took place in the streets (mirroring the gestures of the French Revolution). Mimicking the mechanization of both the city environment and the body, which excluded the possibility of spontaneous play, Dada provided an example of theater's new tactic, the "shock" effect. "Shock" both mirrored the shock effected on the individual in urban life and attempted to open up a space in perceptive consciousness in which to objectively grasp the city's dehumanization. According to Bertolt Brecht, an exponent of shock-effects in the theater,

> An alienation of the motor-car takes place if after driving a modern car for a long while we drive an old model T Ford. Suddenly we hear explosions once more; the motor works on the principle of explosion. We start feel-



Walter Gropius. Totaltheater for Erwin Piscator, *1927. Axiometric view and three floor plans with variant positions of stages.*

Johannes Duikers. Handelsblad Cineac, Amsterdam, 1934. Elevation.

ing amazed that such a vehicle, indeed any vehicle not drawn by animal-power, can move; in short, we understand cars, by looking at them as something strange, new, as a triumph of engineering and to that extent something unnatural. Nature, which certainly embraces the motor-car, is suddenly imbued with an element of unnaturalness, and from now on this is an indelible part of the concept of nature.[10]

Here, Brecht was influenced by Viktor Shklovsky's theory of "making strange," or emancipating objects from their traditional concepts or meanings in order to force new perceptions; and by the mechanistic theater of Vsevolod Meyerhold and Erwin Piscator. Piscator believed in bringing the relationship between the actor and urban technology back into the theater by totally mechanizing the theater apparatus in order to mimic the intersecting flows of information constituting the new cityscape. To do this he used multiple revolving stages, elevators, still and movie screens in flexible positions, sound tracks, newsreels, and other media devices. His aim was to deconstruct the entertainment aspects of these media forms and to turn them into readable, didactic devices. The theater would ultimately be a parliament, with the spectators placed on the same level—in terms of information available and possible political action/responses—as the author/director and actors. This was a way of substituting the "centreless space of the metropolis, with the artificial reconstruction of that metropolis in a new 'centre.'"[11] Of course, this reintroduced the utopian illusion of the traditional theater now via the architecture itself, which substituted for the real city's tragic failure.

In Piscator's theater, the public was asked to become "a collective corrector" of the proposals offered by the actors, author, and producer: Piscator's strategic first step was to create a "didactic machine."[12] But this made the theater—a representation that at this point mimicked urban technology totally—into total architecture, a total architectural environment. Piscator worked with Walter Gropius on the design of a "Totaltheater," conceived, according to its creators' metaphor, as a typewriterlike device. In reality it was to be a moving architectural machine, flexible and manipulatable enough to both draw the spectators into the center of the stage action, and alternatively, to allow them to "reassociate with the actor in a new 'community.'"[13] The devices of Piscator's theater had the effect of objectifying the spectator's body and perception to the same level as the actor's mechanization. Piscator saw this as an accurate representation of the state of the bourgeoisie's "distracted" urban spectator; the aim of his theater was to activate this distracted spectator to become part of the revolutionary mass. Only when the proletariat have taken possession of the stage could the final technical theater revolution begin.

Handelsblad Cineac. Night view with illumination.

In general, the aim of Productivist and Bauhaus theater architecture was to deconstruct illusionary image-production by revealing the device—the literal mechanism through which the image illusion was produced. Simultaneously, the architecture's own structural system was to be revealed through the use of literally transparent glass walls.

Johannes Duikers's Handelsblad Cineac, built in Amsterdam in 1934, has levels of transparent corner glass cutaways that reveal the interior to the passersby on the street outside. A cantilevered section of curved glass above the

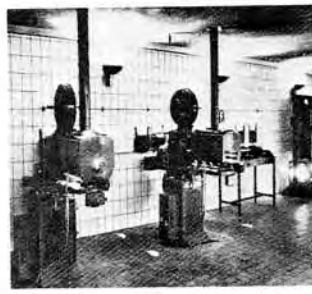
street-front and entrance lobby exposes the function of the film projection apparatus from the viewpoint of its operator in the projection booth. One level up, a rectilinear glass cutout exposes to the passing pedestrians the rear of the audience observing the film from the upper balcony. By stripping away the architectural facade to reveal the "machine as medium,"[14] the literal technology that produces the illusion is exposed, both demystifying it and making it accessible to the average person.

The public, observing from the street level, is placed not in front of the illusion (as are the paying patrons inside the cinema), but behind the equipment that produces it. Revealing the technical mechanism of the cinema's production, as in the Piscator-Gropius Totaltheater, suggests that the average person has the potential to gain control of the means of production; at the same time, it helps to deconstruct the illusion of bourgeois entertainment forms. This involves a utopian metaphor: that visual access to the apparatus that produces aesthetic experience would inspire a Productivist "revolution" of the masses and allow the workers to gain control over the means of representation in the media.

Beyond its reduction of social function to visual metaphor, a further difficulty with Duikers's project is that, like many Bauhaus projects, it involved a one-way perspective whereby the outside spectator looks objectively (like a scientist) at the machine to analyze its effects. In actuality, in the cinema—as in real life in the city—all looks are two-way and intersubjective. In the film itself, the characters look at one another, or one character may look at another who is momentarily out of frame, or else that character is looked at. Similarly, the spectator is vaguely aware of the presence of other spectators mimicking his or her own looks at the screen and at other viewers. The psychological circuit of intersubjective looks and identifications is echoed in the architectural form (interior and exterior). It is difficult to separate the optics of the architecture (including the film apparatus) from the psychological identifications constructed by the film images.

While Piscator's and Brecht's theater encompassed film, photography, radio, and other information media on stage, creating a montage of these elements, theater in the 1920s remained identified with a middle-class public. Earlier aristocratic traditions and narrative conventions of the theater culminated in either catharsis or utopian sentimentality. Film created a new paradigm, as Walter Benjamin observed in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction":

> [New] technique[s] of reproduction detach the reproduced object from the dominant of tradition. . . . Mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art. The reactionary attitude toward a Picasso painting changes into the progressive reaction toward a Chaplin movie. . . . Individual reactions are predetermined by the mass audience response they are about to produce. . . . Painting simply is in no position to present an object for simultaneous collective experience. . . . Thus the same public which responds in a progressive manner toward a grotesque film is bound to respond in a reactionary manner to surrealism.[15]



Handelsblad Cineac. Interior views showing projection booth, cutting room, and offices.

Unlike surrealist painting, film introduced the psychoanalytical and unconscious to the contemplation of reality. The transparent view of "reality" which film gave was the result of technology that had "penetrated so deeply into reality that its [illusion of a] pure aspect . . . of reality (without equipment) . . . [is] the height of artifice."[16] The film appeared to present a view of present-time unfolding without, for example, the awareness of the play's illusion experienced by theatergoers.

Films are viewed in a darkened room; each spectator sits immobilized, fixated by a single hypnotic frame of light, semi-somnambulant, isolated, but surrounded by the presence of others. This unique social and psychological experience produces a pleasure similar to that derived from dreams, and which can later be discarded and disavowed. Below the conscious level of illusionistic reality that the film produces, there is a subliminal effect on the viewer. Film implants a manufactured dreamlike "memory," which from then on will function as if it was actually experienced by the spectator's unconscious.

Freud contrasted the coherent "reality" of wakefulness to the unconsciously determined language of dreams. In dreams, distorted memories are translated, rebuslike, into a nonsyntactic language. Freud used various metaphors to delineate the relation of the conscious state to the unconscious. In his essay "A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad" (1925), his model was a type of wax writing tablet used by children. This device had two layers: the top layer was transparent celluloid, the bottom layer was waxed paper adhering to a wax tablet. For Freud, the two levels offered a clear analogy for the unconscious and conscious aspects of memory:

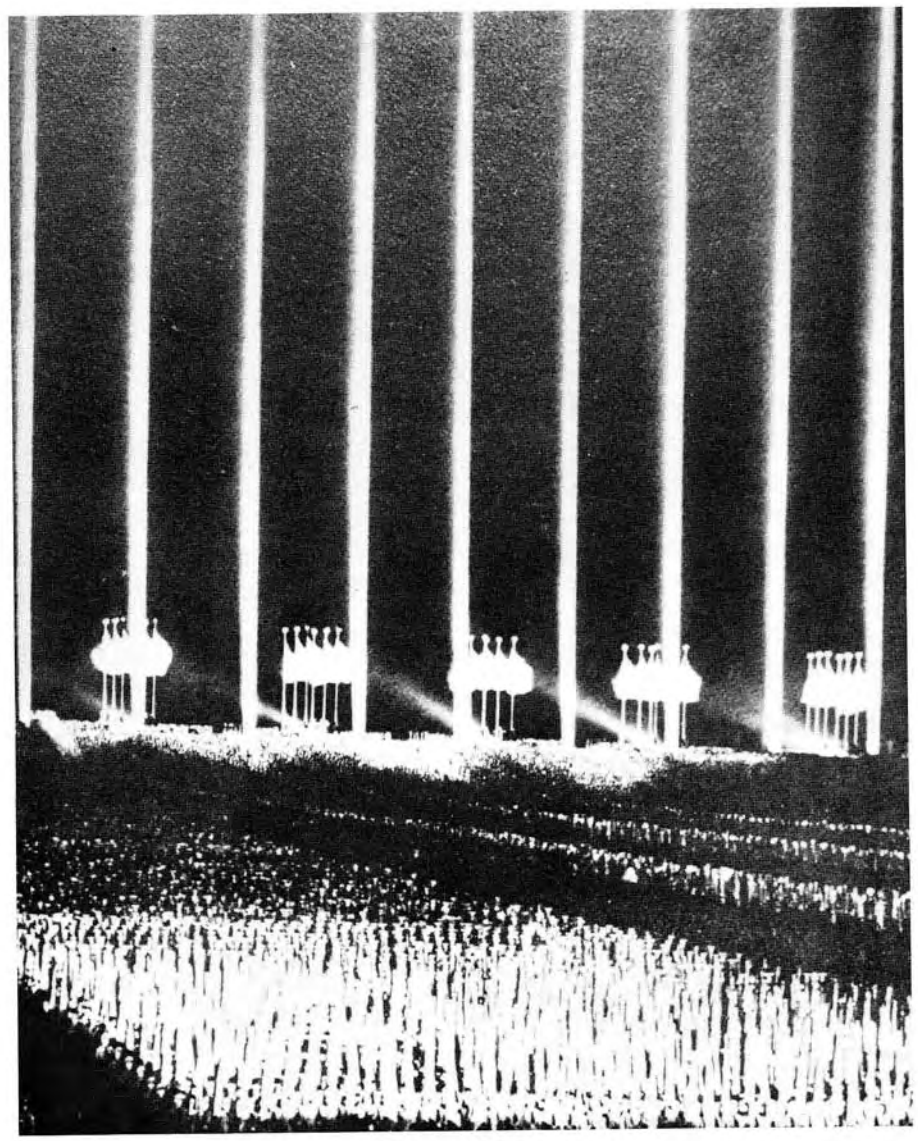
> If we lift the entire covering-sheet—both the celluloid and the waxed paper—off the wax slab, the writing vanishes and . . . does not reappear again. The surface of the Mystic Pad is clear of writing and once more capable of receiving impressions. But it is easy to discover that the permanent trace of what was written is retained upon the wax slab itself and is legible in suitable lights. . . . [This is how] our mental apparatus performs its perceptual function. The layer which receives the stimuli—the system Perception-Consciousness—forms no permanent traces; the foundations of memory come about in other, adjoining, systems.[17]

Freud's "discovery" that dreams are languages in which highly condensed associations or prelogical images stand for normal syntactical discourses recalls the restructuring of artificial memory:

> [The latent dream-thoughts are] symbols, which have become alien to conscious thinking, for representing certain objects and processes . . . subjecting the material to compression and condensation. As a result of condensation, one element in the manifest-dream may correspond to numerous elements in the latent dream-thoughts; but, conversely too, one element in the dream-thoughts may be represented by several images in the dream.[18]

Film critic Thierry Kuntzel has elaborated on Freud's metaphoric comparison of the functional relation of the conscious to the unconscious to describe the perceptual functioning of the film apparatus:

> The filmic apparatus is composed of a plane surface and a strip of film. The surface—the screen—is uniformly white. . . . The film strip is composed of two layers: the transparent . . . [and] . . . emulsion [sides]. . . . The film moves along a path through the projector. An opening in the path . . . frames the image and directs a light beam through it. The light projects the images greatly enlarged, through a lens onto the screen. One only needs to extinguish the projector lamp . . . [and] the surface is clear of writing and it is again capable of receiving new impressions. . . . The frames . . . [pass through] the aperture . . . at the rate of twenty-four frames per second. In projection, everything happens as if it were in-



Albert Speer's "Cathedral of Light," illumination spectacle for the Nuremburg Rally, 1934.

scribed and erased on the screen without stop: in the operation of the Mystic Writing Pad, one hand would raise the covering-sheet periodically while the other would write upon the surface.

The writing disappears at the instant it appears . . . [but] is conserved on the film strip, capable of reappearing . . .[19]

Thus film induces a subliminal effect; one might say that it implants an artificial memory directly onto the unconscious of the viewer, *as if it were his or her own, real memory.* It is in the nature of the film's functioning that, like hypnosis, the viewer cannot be aware of its mechanism for it to work. Benjamin also noted that while film appears to show present-time unfolding, the theatergoer is always aware of the play's illusion. Similarly, he regarded it as symptomatic that the film actor's performance, unlike that of the stage actor, is always mediated by a camera. The physical presence of the actor in film is replaced by a coded appearance that can be edited into any meaning the director desires by "composing the sequence of positional views."[20] What is more, according to Kuntzel, these film effects take place on an unconscious level. Politically, this has frightening possibilities.

In 1934, Leni Riefenstahl, a chorus-line dancer who became a German film star in the thirties and was admired by Hitler, was chosen to direct *Triumph of the Will,* a film document of the Nazi Party's Nuremberg rally. The political purpose of the film was to generate in the mass audience a feeling of unified national will while deifying the Führer. Although it appears to be a straightforward documentary, there is still a controversy over whether some of the events were staged for the film. Once again, the legitimation of political power was inseparably linked to the production of entertainment spectacle.

Much of the impact of *Triumph of the Will* derived from architect Albert Speer's mise-en-scène for the rally. The staging of the rally's spectacle involved the creation of a huge outdoor theater through the use of powerful searchlights (placed at forty-foot intervals and visible to a height of twenty to twenty-five thousand feet), gigantic banners, and an enormous sculptured eagle with a one-hundred-foot wingspan.

> The feeling was of a vast room, with the beams serving as mighty pillars of infinitely high outer walls. Now and then a cloud moved through this wreath of lights, bringing an element of surrealistic surprise to the mirage. . . . this "cathedral of light" was the first luminescent architecture. . . .[21]

The film begins with a view through the cockpit of a plan of various cloud formations. A pan from right to left emphasizes the dynamic forward thrust of the plane through the clouds, which

> have been an essential ingredient in the whole apparatus of spectacle in European art. In offering to the spectator's gaze a set of forms which mask and fill an otherwise empty and potentially infinite space (the sky) while simultaneously signifying the very emptiness and infinity that they

> mask, clouds have come to . . . signify spectacle itself. . . . the spectating subject is inscribed, via the spectacle of the cloud formations, in interrelationship with an easily flowing and effortless series of movements . . . the gaze able almost to encompass the infinite, such is its position of visual privilege . . .[22]

"As the plane descends, the clouds appear . . . to draw apart like a stage curtain, to reveal the aerial spectacle of the city itself, spread out below for our gaze. . . . the plane's shadow passes over the street and its parading troops. . . . the spectator's gaze (above the crowd, above the city . . .) is reinscribed in its position of all-encompassing mastery."[23] After Hitler emerges from the plane, a series of shots relates the crowd's gaze and that of the movie audience to Hitler as privileged object—Hitler the political "star" with whom millions can subliminally identify via film and radio.

Already by 1934, film had become one of the fascist regime's primary propaganda mechanisms—a means of politicizing the masses. Nazi films, as much as Hollywood entertainment films, had destroyed the "aura" of old works of art, as well as their aristocratic cultural rationales. Created in their place were Hitler's spectacles, used to gather mass support for his political regime. Politics and aesthetics were inseparably interrelated.

If film has the power to falsify "reality" and to eradicate historical meanings, memory of the past can be exterminated. Yet it is in historical memory alone, according to Benjamin's notion of "historical redemption," that the struggle for social justice can look for meaning:

> The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. . . . Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. . . . Nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. . . . [The oppressed have a] retroactive force and will constantly call in question every victory, past and present, of the rulers. . . . The true picture of the past . . . can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. . . . To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. . . . Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins.[24]

Benjamin also predicted that the technical characteristics of film, which caused the unique "aura" or presence of the actor to be replaced by his superficial screen qualities, would mean the ascendancy of the director. This "loss" of the actor's presence, Benjamin believed, was curiously compensated for by the "build up of the 'personality' outside the studio."[25] The market was structured around the investibility of the star.

Indeed, producers soon discovered that the most economically effective way to create product identification for their films was via stars. The star system rationalized consumer demand for brand-name products while, at the same time, establishing an easy way to rate, distribute, and promote films. And, as a by-product, it eliminated all but the major studios who had the cash to invest in promoting a star. And stars know their own position in this economic arrangement. Benjamin wrote:

> While facing the camera, [the actor] knows that ultimately he will face the public, the consumers who constitute the market. This market, where he offers not only his labor but also his whole self, his heart and soul, is beyond his reach. . . . [The film actor was the first to be aware] of the alienation of his "image" from the "real self." His "constructed self" has become based on a self-conscious knowledge of its commodification.[26]

Hollywood stars, unlike conventional political figures who might be seen as ruthless and scheming to usurp power, are not seen by the public as objects of envy, but resemble more Greek gods, their foibles and personal tragedies magnified by the press and the legend. If they lost stature, their "star" status was always potentially recoverable. As the public felt that it was *their* desire which had made them "stars," the public resented the producers' unfair power over the "stars'" lives (e.g., Elvis Presley and Colonel Parker), never realizing that it is the producers who created the illusion of "stars" which we, the public, believe in. (The very ideology of the star, as a quasi-religious concept equivalent to that of the absolute monarch or media-created "national savior," had the function of obscuring the truth of the origin and function of the star in the real economics of the film business—that of exchange commodity.)

Wesley E. Barry. Still from Creation of the Humanoids, *1962. Color sound film, 35mm, 75 min.*

When Pop Art first appeared, it seemed antihumanist, a deliberate reversal of abstract expressionism's objections to mechanical reproduction and advertising. In part this stance served to demystify the liberalist belief in genius, the artist's unique gesture, and the romantic idealism of art. This antihumanist position was epitomized by Andy Warhol, who stated, "The reason I'm painting this way is because I want to be a machine. Whatever I do, and do machinelike, is because, it is what I want to do. I think it would be terrific if everybody was alike . . . Machines have less problems. I'd like to be a machine, wouldn't you?"[27] Here Warhol was paraphrasing a favorite film of his, *The Creation of the Humanoids.*

In this film, humanoids, robots of advanced design whose bodies and knowledge are indistinguishable from those of humans, have been programmed to serve the interests of mankind. Although in many cases the robots can outperform and outthink humans, and although they lack the conflicting emotions and cruelty of humans, the human philosophers argue that humanoid robots have no souls. They are treated as slaves by the essentially McCarthyite persecutions by working people who fear losing their jobs to the robots. These "Human Leaguers," despite their "correct" humanistic views, are shown as reactionaries fighting against the inevitable, the more just and rational new order of the machines.

Belief in "humanity," at the expense of the symbiotic relationship of machine and man, is represented as naive bigotry. There is a silent revolution by the robots, who gradually replace human bodies with machine parts. Before this, humans had been entering into "union" with robots of the opposite sex and electing to convert to robots. As the "Brechtian" style of acting throughout the film—by humans and robots—is neutral and stiff, we are not only "distanced" from human identification (allowed to examine the philosophical and historical consequences of the behavior represented/actor's behavior), but we are forced to assume the viewpoint of the already-dominant robot civilization. Despite our identification with the robots' view, there is still a repressed, bittersweet nostalgia for the emotionally based (former) human civilization, doomed to replacement by the stoicism of the new order.

Michel Foucault applied Benjamin's ideas about historical memory to the question of film and the conditioning of popular consciousness. His view of media was more pessimistic than was Benjamin's:

> Now, a whole number of apparatuses have been set up ("popular literature," cheap books and the stuff that's taught in school as well) to obstruct the flow of . . . popular memory. And it could be said that this attempt has been pretty successful. . . . There's a battle for and around history going on at this very moment which is extremely interesting. The intention is to reprogramme, to stifle . . ."popular memory"; and also to propose and impose on people a framework in which to interpret the present.[28]

In 1971 Foucault collected, with his students, an archive on the legal case of a peasant, Pierre Rivière, who murdered his mother, sister, and brother in 1835. This dossier consisted of Rivière's memoir as well as medical, press, and legal interpretations of the incident. There is a play between Rivière's peasant

Sam Wood. Still from Kings Row, *1941. Black-and-white sound film, 35mm, 127 min. Starring Ann Sheridan and Ronald Reagan.*

discourse and that of the institutional discourses of power and knowledge in France at that historic moment. In 1976, the filmmaker René Allio made a film entitled *I, Pierre Rivière* from these memoirs. The film had Foucault's full approval. He wrote that the film

> had to be taken in the light of the peasantry's position then, and is illustrated best by real peasants now. Ultimately, through 150 years, it is the same voices, the same accents, the same gauche and harsh words telling the same story hardly altered. Because Allio chose to commemorate this act on virtually the same location and with almost the same characters as 150 years ago, the same peasants in the same place make the same gestures again. . . . [This] is quite unique . . . in the history of cinema . . . it is also politically important to enable the peasants to enact their peasant text.[29]

Like Benjamin, Foucault wanted to use the positive recon-struction of historical memory in order to have the oppressed people glimpse a moment of their "real" history unobscured, freed from the state control expressed in the false history presented by the media: "People are shown not what they were, but what they must remember having been. . . . As soon as you start seeing pictures of war every evening, war becomes totally acceptable."[30]

Where Foucault's logic was questionable was in the naive historicism implied in assuming that the descendants of Rivière were, in fact, the same people as Rivière's family 150 years ago. The use of "real" people—amateur actors—will not, in itself, historically undercut the established conventional film "star" system.

> On the screen appeared the enormous, three-dimensional, full-color familiar ruddy but tanned, healthy, hard-cut features of Talbot Yancy . . . The Protector . . . programmed by a computer which in turn is fed speeches by well-trained elite men [was] in actuality a robot simulacrum. . . . Solemnly, at its large desk, with the American flag behind it . . . the competent, fatherly, mature . . . features . . .[31]

Philip K. Dick's science-fiction novel, *The Penultimate Truth* (1964), depicts the world after World War III. It is divided into two spheres: a densely populated, underground population, and an aristocracy living on the earth's surface. Those on the surface manipulate the underworld via the television programming of Yancy's pseudo-speeches in order to convince people that the earth's surface remains contaminated with fallout. The aristocracy's rationale for their deception is a fear that if the population below rose up, the earth's ecological balance would be destroyed and that another, devastating war would ensue . . .

Ronald Reagan's career began as a Hollywood film "contract player," one of many actors signed by the major studios in the thirties and forties for movies they produced on an "assembly-line" basis. Studio corporate heads totally controlled their actors, constructing their public images, typecasting them in "appropriate," publicly consumable roles. Casting determined not only the type of roles an actor was likely to play for the duration of his or her contract, but also how they were represented to the public via media in their "real-life personalities." In turn, a star's "personality" conditioned the public's identification and unconscious response to media-manipulated stereotypes.

Reagan was usually cast as the wholesome, athletic, all-American "boy next door." A particularly outstanding role was in the film *King's Row* (1941), in which he portrayed a young man injured in an auto crash. Reagan is treated by a doctor who, prior to the accident, had violently objected to Reagan dating his daughter. The doctor unnecessarily amputates both of the athletic boy's legs. Coming out of the anesthesia, Reagan asks: "Where's the rest of me?" (Reagan's first autobiography is titled *Where's the Rest of Me?*).

After the war, the studio system over, Reagan found himself unwanted. He adapted by changing his acting style to the cooler, underplayed persona required in television. First as host of *Death Valley Days* and then as host of *General Electric Theater,* his rugged but competent presence lent credibility to General Electric's "corporate image." The company, in its campaign for "free enterprise," observed that Reagan had good credentials; in the forties, he was a moderate Democratic spokesman for the Actor's Guild (union). He fought communist influence in the union, taking a moderately conservative position. Reagan accepted when General Electric proposed that the actor serve as a public relations spokesman, traveling the banquet circuit reading prescripted speeches extolling the virtues of the free enterprise system and decrying government intervention. Paid a substantial retainer, the actor easily accommodated his philosophy to this latest role. Moving from studio corporation actor to spokesman for another corporation was not an unnatural transition. The public rapidly identified him as a new, affirmative conservative spokesman. Reagan was always able to project a sense of being "himself"—of complete integrity and a belief in his role. Here is one of his stories:

> Not too long ago, two friends of mine were talking to a Cuban refugee. He was a businessman who had escaped from Castro. In the midst of his tale of horrible experiences, one of my friends turned to the other and said, "We don't know how lucky we are." The Cuban stopped and said, "How lucky you are? I had some place to escape to." And in that sentence he told the entire story. If freedom is lost here there is no place to escape to.[32]

President Reagan's theater reverses the origins of Western theater. Where Prince Vespasiano would objectively observe some lowly actor representing his point of view on an illusionary stage, Reagan the actor plays "himself" and speaks the views of power. The corporate puppeteer is hidden somewhere in the wings.

Notes

First published in *Parachute* (Montreal), no. 31 (Summer 1983), pp. 11–19. This essay came directly out of Graham's work on the cinema, particularly as an attempt to trace its origins to a class-based theater architecture. In addressing the broad theme of architecture and power, this essay continues many of the arguments Graham raised in "The City as Museum," which was published slightly earlier. Here Graham attempts to identify what he calls "the change-point" between theater as a political-aesthetic metaphor and the mass-cultural phenomena of cinema. The essay was inspired by Graham's visit to the Teatro Olimpico, but it also reflects contemporaneous debates about historical memory, particularly as originally enunciated in the writings of Walter Benjamin and Michel Foucault.

1. For a more detailed account, see Kurt W. Forster, "Stagecraft and Statecraft: The Architectural Integration of Public Life and Theatrical Spectacle in Scamozzi's Theater at Sabbioneta," *Oppositions* 9 (Summer 1977): 63–87.
2. Ibid., pp. 74–76.
3. Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), pp. 170–171.
4. Ibid., p. 136.
5. Ibid., p. 141.
6. Ibid., p. 144.
7. Quintilian, *De Institutio oratoria,* quoted in Yates, *The Art of Memory,* p. 22.
8. *Ad Herennium* (author unknown), quoted in ibid., pp. 11–12.
9. Frances A. Yates, "The Entry of Charles IX (1571)," in her *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 140–141.
10. Bertolt Brecht, "Short Description of a New Technique of Acting," in *Brecht on Theater,* ed. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), pp. 144–145.
11. Manfredo Tafuri, "The Theatre as a Virtual City: From Appia to Totaltheater," *Lotus International* 17 (1977): 47.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. See Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture* (London: Renata Publishing, 1980), pp. 13–32.
15. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations,* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 234–235.
16. Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 233.
17. Sigmund Freud, quoted in Thierry Kuntzel, "A Note Upon the Filmic Apparatus," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 1, no. 3 (August 1976): 267.
18. Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychanalysis,* trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1964), p. 20.
19. Kuntzel, "A Note Upon the Filmic Apparatus," pp. 268–269.
20. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," p. 228.
21. Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1970), p. 59.

22. Steven Neale, "*Triumph of the Will:* Notes on Documentary and Spectacle," *Screen* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 67.
23. Ibid., pp. 67–69.
24. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations,* pp. 254–255.
25. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," p. 231.
26. Ibid.
27. Quoted in *Andy Warhol* (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1968), p. 6
28. Michel Foucault, "Film and Popular Memory—Cahiers du Cinéma/Extracts," *Edinburgh '77 Magazine,* no. 2: *History/Production/Memory* (1977): 22, 24.
29. Ibid., pp. 31–32.
30. Ibid., pp. 22, 225.
31. Philip K. Dick, *The Penultimate Truth* (1964; New York: Bluejay Books Inc., 1984), p. 187.
32. Ronald Reagan, quoted in *Reagan the Man, the President,* by Hedrick Smith et al. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1980), p. 9.