Search Engine for the History of Special Effects

By 1510, the fundamental elements of special effects *immersion* had been laid in Florence and Rome. They were housed beneath *domes*; one might call these prototypes for "virtual" systems later on. They were recorded through *Optics* that led circuitously to cinema, and engineered through systems of *Perspective*, essentially a Renaissance database technology. Even the *mirror* itself proved useful: it combined all these technologies into *spectacles*, through compositing.

In special-effects environments, the sum of these was an *inverted Renaissance*: proportions were upside down (*topsy-turvy*), the charm of harmonies gone awry. Essentially we recode the Baroque, but in the context of 2003. Why did the Counter-Reformation and the early modern state sponsor Baroque illusions similar to what we find today? Could it have anything at all to do with a crisis of privatization similar to those we find today? We test that theory, linking, by contrast to the nineteenth-century railroad culture.

Public/Private: In western Europe (1400–1700), the vast growth of merchants' businesses generated enormous instability in royal governments. Some princes, like Henry VIII, allied directly with, merchant/bankers. French kings in the seventeenth century allowed the merchant/bankers into the nobility. Through the policy of bullionism, the Spain of Philip II tried to circumvent the merchant class altogether, perceived as too Protestant or Jewish. All of these princely alliances and misalliances play parts in the awesome grandeur of Baroque special effects. But the politics that supported these effects was extremely unstable, volatile enough to help fuel world wars from the 1520s to the 1790s. It also forced continual showdowns at the councils run by princes, as they steadily relied more on mercantile systems. These uncertainties, in turn, were reflected in public culture, the incongruent blends of mercantile spectacle inside the old feudal spaces.

However, one process was strangely consistent: Baroque *spectacles* tended to ignore whether they were indoors or outdoors. That is essential to their

charm. One could say that public and private spectacles were "blurred," or that distinctions like *public/private* came later. Perhaps something of the debate on the "public" realm applies here, but so often, these categories can oversimplify the problem. Better to keep the matter simple: whether inside or outside, nearly the same theatrical effects were used, on behalf of the *Mercantile Baroque* alliance—between late feudal privilege and the merchants desperate to buy into the nobility. Living within this alliance were guilds of craftsmen, artist/engineers, various small tradesmen in design and painting. They relied on the support of this alliance for major commissions. Quite literally, this was an era when princes were sometimes descended from bankers, Jesuits became missionaries for mercantile illusion, kings borrowed much of the mystique of absolutism from the genius of commerce. Crews of artist/designers were employed to invent a style that made these anxieties grandiose. The space appeared navigable like a ship coming to port from the Americas, or from the far ends of the Mediterranean. Those kinds of spatial ironies suited their clients.

This new mode of scripted space first emerged clearly in the commercial city-states of fifteenth-century Italy, then, in centuries to came, was applied by early modern national governments throughout western Europe. The fashion amounted to an *occlusive* mix of animated sculpture, radical perspective in the theater, very *immersive* church ceilings and spectaculo (often political festivals). It was an *inversion of nature by Artifice*. This structural grammar—*three acts in two seconds*—could be housed inside churches, palaces, or in piazzas, theaters, indoors or out: spectacles, *fireworks*, *fairs*, reenactments of great battles, even the burning of witches (*auto-da-fé*). This structural grammar speeds up and globalizes much faster with the Counter-Reformation (*Jesuits* and special effects after 1560). But by 1600, it had evolved increasingly toward a secular blend of optics and theatricality, in France, but even more clearly in Protestant England and Holland, as commercial expansion in Europe shifted irretrievably toward the Atlantic.

Thus, Baroque special effects are architectonic scripted spaces where optics, sculpture, theater, mathematics, shipping operate like mixed media, where the charm of Artifice exceeds the harmonies of nature itself. This Artifice suggested a hierarchical, layered navigation of space, an allegory for the hierarchies of the *neo-feudal* world (the seigneurial remnants that are no longer feudalism as it was, but are essential for the power of the prince, must be reinforced culturally at least). But again, these were unstable hierarchies: "Divine" right is filtered, not absolute. It is filtered through sensual optics

and twisted perspective—the technologies of the merchant. These tools now serve the merchants who also serve the princes, in the era identified with mercantilism.

It was a very clumsy early modern state. The institutions that used these tools overlapped unevenly between entertainment, business, and many authorities, from the Holy Roman Empire, to the guilds, to the power of the Vatican, to banking families across five cities, to tariffs along the Rhine—sometimes crossing many borders, sometimes fiercely inside the palace of the prince. They were public private in the way that this earlier modem state was public and private, partly "neo"-feudal, partly not. It was not nearly as insulated or unified as the industrial state by 1880. But our civilization may he approximating some of its overlapping structure. Today, as in 1660, special effects speak for a political culture where, business and salvation are integrated oddly, through overlaps between "corporate" bodies slipping uneasily between and without the so-called national government.

The occlusive effects during the Baroque era served as an allegory for the political convulsions of the day. Political authorities overlapped the unclear boundaries of very inchoate nations. Today, digital capitalism, and our special effects entertainments echo the collapses within nation states. Thus, we call the chaos neo-Baroque.

In much the same way, Baroque special effects overlapped the public into the private culture. Jaded pseudo religious spectacles—like an intimate mass celebrated very public events like sieges and feasts of fools, that stood in for mercenary armies on the loose, and a locust swarm of freelance businesses. Multinational privileges allowed Jesuits beyond the law. Medieval feudal laws kept slipping uneasily into the so-called "modern" national government. Inconsolable waste was the result, that squandered the national budget, twisted national policies.

Occlusive effects are often identified as Expressionist: occlusive lighting and camera movements. They narrate the lost point of view within an invaded self. A similarly lost POV was common in Baroque culture as well (memento mori). In many respects, the membranes separating public from private were extremely thin. This was a leftover from the late feudal experience that was still vivid in the seventeenth century. Think of occlusion as a bridge where a witch is put on fire, gruesomely melting public into private; the insanity of public faith melting her soul on earth. Think of special offices—like passports—to worthies from another country. These offices allow the bearers to invade public policy at will, as if there were no government at all. The Enlightenment

philosophes railed against these so-called corporate bodies. We today have media cognates to that. The boundaries of our interior life are freely invaded by transnational media; not to ignore how our politics are being destroyed through media. Transnationalism flourished during the Baroque era as well, and was honored in their special effects, in freakish religious spectacles about sieges and feasts of fools (collective madness as political ecstasy).

In Venice by 1740, all public festivals were privately run (through urban nobility, baronial courts), a kind of semi-national spectacle. They spoke for the madness of public/private alliances, again, in the interiors of palaces, in the staging of piazzas, in fireworks displays. The French engraver Callot, like all court engravers of the seventeenth century, was hired to record the dwarfs and the spectacle of the grotesque, in court and in piazzas, but also to record the sieges, the machinery of war for the prince he served.

How should we transfer the Baroque models of illusion from 1740 to our transnational culture today? One point is consistent: in Baroque scripted space, the rules of a guild might intersect with rules from the Holy Roman Emperor, or from theocratic, Jesuitical transnational corporate bodies. There was no legal way to separate public from private media (nor is there today on the Internet). However, beneath this "blur," governments struggle to adjust, to balance public with private by way of spectacle. At the Versailles palace of Louis XIV, special effects could service ten thousand people at once—on behalf of the king's fashions and politesse. Louis tried to convert venality (the offices of nobility, often for sale) into scripted spaces for his courtiers; many from families that had made war against his family during the Fronde (1649); they were indeed capable of setting up their own armies against him. Thus, while the courtiers drifted into theatricalized seductions (sex in the gardens) and lavish spectacles on the king's island or in Versailles itself, Louis tried to balance their pleasure with his wars, keep aristos off balance.

The so-called absolutism of Louis XIV was a desperate attempt to offset unruly nobles with the glamour of mercantile technologies Louis was caught in a double bind—to keep those princes of the blood (cousins of the royal line) away from their home base, while at the same time, manage the growing pressures as the economy relied increasingly on, commerce. Eventually in Louis's dotage, the court fled Versailles anyway, and after his death, by 1715, moved to Paris, to novelties more identified with merchant classes during the Rococo, the world of Watteau, and afterward.

What do Baroque scripted spaces tell us about power in our crazy world? As allegories, Baroque theatricals pitted feudal government against commer-

cial expansion; they suggested that the full integration of the two is impossible. Thus, the Baroque is an inversion of Renaissance *proportion* (the merchant city-state), on behalf of commercial expansion mixed with the Counter-Reformation ("their" *Cold War*), making the orderliness of proportion impossible to maintain, or even desire. In the Baroque, the Golden Mean is supposed to be subverted. As a culture deeply reliant on special effects, the *moment of wonder* is supposed to be unstable, a form of bourgeois revelers dressed in neo-feudal silks. Its public/private inversions (noblesse to merchant) continue to flourish during the eighteenth century as well—Baroque /Rococo illusionism in theaters, architecture, and *handheld optical novelties*.

Only the rather inscrutable shifts after 1780 put a stop to *Baroque special effects* (for the most part, not entirely). The painted dome seemed quaint by 1820, a *late Baroque* remnant; in England surely a bit too papist for the scientistic "protestantized" scale in oversized *panoramas*. 1820 was already mass culture, for a patronage of paying customers, not of *haute bourgeois* or courtly patrons. Parallel shifts—in response to new technologies—can be found in theater, in urban planning (toward the city of circulation), in the all-embracing view. A new model for architectural immersion appears—panoramic, an unobstructed view, modeled in a quasi-scientific way, in detailed natural history etchings (circa 1770)—*anamorphotic* more than anamorphic (circa 1640). As in Newton's occult laboratory, his twisted studies in alchemy: when natural philosophers invaded metaphysics, Baroque techniques grew even more occluded, more overlapping. In that way, the Baroque era closed down, partnered with the Enlightenment. Through optics and science (even calculus), Baroque occlusion grew ever more "multimedia." Finally, by the 1790's, the panoramic effect removes the occlusion—optical vision is now unimpeded, an homage to scientific nature over Artifice, as far as the eye can see. And yet, panoramas were simply another mode of occlusion.

Baroque special effects were recoded as too feudal (larded over with seigneurial, hierarchical references)—not suitable for nineteenth century plain architecture, but perfect for gothic revival glam theaters, as pastiche. However, by contrast, Baroque optics remained appropriate, crossed in 1800 easily. Optics were much less identified with the Old Regime, and oligarchy. In short, the centuries-old alliance between architecture and optics splits in two after 1780, just as the old alliances between the late feudal monarch and capitalism were being sundered. As a related point of growing importance today: European mercantilism vanishes after 1789. That ends an occlusion of another variety, symbols borne out of European traders on the defensive—as equals in

Asia after 1500. There is a vast literature on how Asian trade still outpaced the West until 1750, as it had for millennia. Here lies a crucial distinction, many clues for us in 2023.

Asia's domination, despite the decline of India and China, took centuries to reverse (1500–1800). The see-saw in world trade generated a very existential response in European special effects—illusions about the anarchy on the Open Sea, about shipwrecks, piracy, Indian wars, maps of lost worlds, of chinoiserie (eighteenth century), as well as fascinations with the Muslim world after the French take Algeria in 1830. We see the power shifting very clearly in the eighteenth century, but only shifting. There are complicated reactions in eighteenth century China and Japan, in new dialects transmuted from the West. But that world-systems field of study is too overwhelming for this book alone. For clarity's sake, I will stay narrowed on Europe and the Americas, on scripted illusions within the white male continents. For example, there was no time to throw in chapters about Qing dynasty illusionistic landscape painting (tongjinghua) or trompe l'oeil porcelains. They reflected eighteenth century China forming dialects of the West, but also hollowing out. If I were starting out from scratch, I would have easily incorporated eighteenth century Asia. Instead, this book focused on "white" European civilization, leaving out Asia and Africa in depth; not even America in depth, more as frontier illusion to Europeans—until special effects from the Americas comes of age in the late nineteenth century.)

By 1851, of course (at the Crystal palace in London) European and American special effects begin to respond directly to how the West was swallowing up the world; holding five continents in a death grip for 120 years. Then comes the electronic Baroque, scripted spaces after 1970, responding to the anxious period after the European imperialism collapses. All that is for another book in the future … one that I am actually completing at the moment. Thus, for clarity's sake, I follow a European timeline, next special effects during the "age of revolutions".

The era after 1780 invents a technological alternative to Baroque special effects. Theater sets glorify the conquest of nature by industrialism. The shift took only twenty years. By 1800, many quadratura crafts simply disappear, with no generation of apprentices left to train anymore.

After 1840, the transition is even more evident. Many of the Baroque media were perceived as old-fashioned crafted illusion compared to photography, telegraphs, steam power beyond shipping and looms, steam-driven printing, stereography, magic lanterns, persistence of vision toys, automata. This

new tech steadily grows as an industry, toward artisanal factories for mass culture. Steam-driven printing presses (after 1825) usher in a golden age of mass publishing—along with the railroads, and vastly expanded cities and national governments. After 1850 in particular, we find larger symphony halls, more extensive newspapers, more bookstores, larger pubs, more reading societies, more Montgomery Ward catalogues, more dime novels, larger magic lantern libraries (up to 200,000 slides). Increasingly, after 1880, those effects are made portable enough to fit into street life, into this rapidly changing (faster) urban culture (i.e., the hand camera, small movie cameras). However, certain Baroque special effects continue to evolve. They are the hand-crafted aspects of Old Regime technology, before industrial processing. Special effects gave a brass sheen to many of these crafted illusions. The fantasy of this world hosts many gentleman scientists, in tales by Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, Conan Doyle, even Baum's Oz.

These Victorian special effects are both ultra-crafted (very Rococo), and industrial (through cast iron Art Nouveau molds). They even occasionally point toward Fordist assembly lines that do not yet exist—in the abstracted scale of world's fairs, the department store, the steamship line, the Cook's Tour. Armchair tourism embraces an imperialist model of illusion. After 1850, signage on boulevards announce the arrival of consumerism as an offshoot of colonial fantasies. Trolleys at city intersections deliver a phantasmagoria where time is trapped in a bottle. From the glass ceiling of arcades and train stations, evanescent light streams like a railroad timetable.

Increasingly, architectural lighting heroizes the nineteenth century metropolis. Principal downtown streets become arc lit after 1850. Their splendidly artificial glow extended the late afternoon for miles. City managers had to decide what time of day to simulate. Noon was too brilliant. Finally, they decided on the late afternoon, essentially on early twilight.

Meanwhile, a few relevant changes: As part of midcentury modernism, the Baroque theater of the streets is steadily torn down—or dies back—in many key metropolises. This goes far beyond sub urbanization. There is also a key shift in tone for many American cities: After World War II, the deco curves of 1920's downtowns are reengineered into right-angle flattened surfaces.

Behind all this, from 1850 to 1960, a technological alliance is forged, quite different from the Baroque. Industrial media transforms the fabric of urban life, for example, telephones, radio, victrolas; and large movie studios as a new mode of scripted spaces. This metamorphosis requires a much more plastic idea of time via telephones, cinema, radio, automobiles, subways; pho-

tolithography, etc. New styles of illusion are needed to promote this idea of flex time—as part of a new stage of capitalism—to the industrial nation state itself. Two partners nourish each other: commercial media and the boundaries of the state. They also help bring imperialism, and nationalist jingoism into the media world.

To help clarify this idea of illusion and time, we return briefly to the nineteenth century: The principal engineering of time came with the networking of railroads after 1850. The massive railroad culture was essentially the model for world's fairs and for monumental reliquaries (museums, stock market architecture) that honor this capitalist/national alliance. But this required more vertical modes of illusion. They operated like the valves of the heart. Like the chambers inside a Victorian house, or the policing and arc lighting of city streets, industrial spaces relied on very crisp distinctions between public and private. The narratives behind these post-1850 scripted spaces differed vastly from the Baroque; they represented vertical monopoly rather than the overlapping of power in the merchant companies of the Baroque era.

But again., the crafted tradition from the late Baroque continues. Industrial entertainment was provided by a nest of smaller companies, almost artisanal compared to Ford, Morgan, Carnegie, Krupp. Entertainment barely topped the Fortune 500 until the 1930s, and mostly because industrial companies slid during the Depression. Indeed, the fun factory, even at MGM, was not a mercantilist rival overlapping the state, not "Baroque" at all.

Some elements of Baroque architectural illusion survived during this adjustment to industrial special effects (1850–1960). We see them in merry go-rounds, and in amusement parks, in fun houses, in dime museums. Various optical illusions from Baroque era also find a place in cinema—perspective awry, as well as telescopic, even stereoptic miniatures; and of course, peep shows). These were survivors into the late Enlightenment (after 1750), then during the wars of revolution after 1789: automata, puppet theater, movable books, old carnival roustabout gags). Penny arcade peepholes serve as viewing platforms for the Edison's kinetoscope (the birth of cinema in 1893). Thus, some Baroque curiosities do bond with industrial cinema. To a degree, Baroque curiosities and "industrial" cinema do meet. But eventually, the movie screen is so dominant, we lose that direct tactility, of a peephole, or a brass projector shining on a table, etc.

In public spaces though, Baroque and medieval systems continued at circuses, amusement parks, fairs, and of course in animated trick films. There are industrially made automatons; puppets. In film production, there is gizmo

compositing; trompe l'oeil; anamorphic lenses; mirror mattes; rear projection. But, again, cinema before 1920 was a tiny business, almost fly by night. Movies were produced by small artisan novelty company—dwarves inside the city of 1895, mushrooms next to gigantic symphony halls, panoramas, huge pubs, boulevard signage, and the hyper-stimulated roar of trains, and early trolleys. During the industrial takeoff, fully extended by 1890, cinematic effects that copied the Baroque were seen as part of the Gothic Revival; they were treated as medieval dollops, marketed like gadgets. Early nickelodeons do resemble penny arcades.

A touch of Baroque flimflam might help with a merry-go-round, magic mirrors; and haunted rides in Coney Island. A Baroque palatial touch helped glorify the vast proscenium arches for the new opera houses. A scrolled detail or the grotteschi looked classy in the entrances of apartment buildings. Finally, by 1905, these Baroque add-ons reached their peak in Coney Island's amusement areas by 1905. At night, ribs of light outlined phantasmagorical structures—in the shadow of roller coasters (simulated train accidents fifty feet above the ground). Towers in each of the Coney Island parks (Steeplechase, Luna Park, and Dreamland) stood like beacons, where past and future met. The towers, as high as 250 feet, were lit by hundreds of thousands of electric bulbs. Let us imagine that each era has its lighthouse of Alexandria, to be copied in architecture and entertainments alike. For entertainment and urban planning in the quasi-industrial city of 1890, this lighthouse was the Eiffel Tower, the Chicago skyscraper, the Otis elevator; then after 1907, the panoramic overhead inside an airplane, a New York skyscraper—or the imaginary that was Tatlin's Monument to the Third International (1920). They were a twentieth century answer to the Vatican dome, or to the yawning Rococo staircases of the period 1550–1790. By the end of World War I, the Baroque was forgettable, like the Hapsburg Empire.

However, in 1925, in Germany and the United States, that contempt for Baroque architectural illusion began to reverse. Special-effects environments came of age once again, on a corporate scale, in two films: Metropolis and The Lost World. Modernist imaginaries based on New York or on scientific dioramas (dinosaurs that walk) took on a Baroque grandeur. Architectural tricks circa 1650 (sculptural and foreshortened fantasy as a walk-through narrative) cropped up in production for these two films, in the improved miniatures, stop motion, "3D" mattes, camera work and editing. The success of King Kong (1933) should have ushered in a new era of special effects glamour. But somehow, the live-action effects divisions were still only a secondary bungalow, next to props

and costumes; or a "termite terrace." The directors of cartoons at Warners (subcontracted through Schlesinger Productions) were paid a tenth of what live-action directs got.

Then clearly, after 1960, despite the age of highly abstracted modernism, trompe l'oeil imagery reappears on a massive scale. It helps usher in the consumer themed space as early as the 1950's, through Disneyland especially. But most of all, in the second half of the Cold War (1962–89), Baroque techniques prove useful—in trompe l'oeil and stereoptic projection; and in theming throughout the world. At the same time, at the movie theater immersive effects (accelerated perspective, widened middle ground) show up on the 70 millimeter flat screen. And on the drive to the multiplex, even the windshield of your a car is another screen— where the inside and the outside are joined.

By 1990, immersive effects have systematically blurred media into brick and mortar on a scale never seen before. It is as if our homes were an undressed movie set. This collapse of public into private—as a kind of special effect—provides a master code for supply-side economics as well. Stock prices (as a way to buy other companies) replace industrial production itself. More and more fictional money aggregates on a master screen, where transactions are held. This screen, where so many intimacies are revealed, is also a graphic animation about capital investment. It is an AI timetable about false money—a scripted space. The world of investment, often called Casino Capitalism back in the nineties, most certainly operates increasingly like an AI game or a slot machine. We pattern our life increasingly as a derivative investment. Even our relationships become imaginary business friends, as the era of Facebook is replaced by the era of Instagram, and then of Tik Tok.

This sounds a bit like an episode from Black Mirror. We are indeed tourists in our own bodies. But the changes after 2003 also alter our sense of "Baroqueness." The differences between the Electronic Baroque of 2003 and the original Baroque of 1640 grow ever more urgent. Of course, the two are close relatives. They belong to the same phylum. They both camouflage the uneasy alliances between the nation and capitalism. Despite the utterly different technologies, they apply illusion in much the same way, have a similar grammar. Their transitions after 1800 tell us everything about where we are heading today. What they called *trucs* in 1640 echoes what we call f/x today. They both whimsically play with economic confusions. There is a clear arc in the history of special effects since the Renaissance. Feudo-capitalism in 1640 is the ancestor of global capitalism today. Historians have confirmed this arc, a nearly 400-year rockslide.

This contrast between relatives has grown ever more vital since 2003. Today, special effects invade the senses ever more directly, from one gadget to the next. This has utterly warped the history of time itself. The original Baroque, as in shipwrecks from Rabelais to Swift, was often about medieval time dissolving. Mercantile technologies required a new clock. The past grew as wobbly as the contracts set up between monarchs and business. But it also monumentalized dynasties and religion.

The Electronic Baroque tended to erase these verities, however unstable they were to begin with. Its shopper's instantaneity delivered a consumer-driven replacement for Baroque time. This electronic nation state had a new clock designed by data capitalism. The masters of this clock were Baroque in their hatred of the states. They wanted to destabilize government. Partnering with tech was just as suicidal to the king allying with the bourgeoisie after 1500.

After 2000, the Electronic Baroque began to spin out of control. The public loved its toys anyway. But digital capitalism, especially the internet, was erasing memory of the present itself. Digital capitalism was all about "living in violet," in a plastic surgery of the present—The past and the future were in dieback like the oceans. Early versions of time warp were coming of age. In the nineteenth century, there were arcades delivering the so-called "Arabian Nights effects"—bottled light through glass. This warping of memory is featured in Benjamin's studies of the nineteenth century—of paramnesia while inside arcades with glass barrel vaults.

Glass ceilings announced psychodramas about the erasure of Baroque power—and the rise of the industrial nation state. The commodity took us on pilgrimages about imperial conquest and class warfare. The glass and steel illusion was neurotically triumphant. Finally, with the railroad after 1830, what little remained of pre-1800 ideas of time remembered became a dead issue. Invaded natural time. Imagine yourself at a train station in 1870. You keep checking your timetable. Signage guides you. Everywhere, light through glass reflects a new set of rules. Your train—whether in motion or at rest—has "conquered" nature itself. Time is now filtered through timetables.

This denaturing effect speeds up tremendously by the 1920's. There are novels and art about this denaturing of the moment, even a Baroque expressionism after 1906. That eventually finds its way into the cinematography of noir (1944 on). Imagine ourselves watching a noir movie in 1948. The title sequence resembles a printed crime novel, as if lifted from a newsstand. Then there is overhead tracking: an abject city unfolds. Winding stairways and alleys—an

AI world of effects—replace nature. Even the skyline glows unnaturally from a naked light bulb. There is great risk, symbolized by a dumpy hotel room. The plaster and wallpaper form a skull that houses a brain. Dangerous narrative hooks are installed. Then a long flashback begins.

Eighties cyberpunk pushed this skull gag even further, toward nano noir. That was because capitalism was going nano as well. First, there were transistors, various prosthetic extensions of the body (TV, radio, Palm Pilots, telephones). These were miniaturized immersive environments, pocket-sized scripted spaces. Real streets became shrunken heads on a key chain, apps on a hand-held screen.

The parallels between 1600 and 2003 provide a range that we need. We must take apart a wide range of Baroque clocks that never tell good time. These clocks speak more about the collapse of our identity, where memory is colonized by tech. We even shop as tourists in our own bodies, through metropolitanized suburban planning; and now, the suburbanization of downtowns. The handheld illusion replaces the mall and the multiplex. And now, scripted spaces will glamorize AI robotics. We are now Baroque cyborgs, where perspective awry invades our private life—as promised since the 1950's. Scripted spaces are now matrices about a new kind of free will, where we are the program and the player. Intimacy becomes another form of public shopping. Public space invades privacy it-self (consumer privatization). Rules of intimacy are rapidly adjusting to a vast global shift. At first, this shift was toward a global supply chain. But after 2020, the covid pandemic warped our rules of intimacy even further.

In that shift, public space, as defined circa 1910, "dissolves." By that I mean: the social imaginary called the public realm, so deeply associated with the growth of the industrial nation-state—and featured in metropolitan centers like New York, Paris, London—is dumped like so much refuse left unpaid at the warehouse. From public utilities to public streets, government is privatized on behalf of transnational shopping and tourism. At last, by 2000, the sum of illusions for sale amount to a world unto itself, a downtown alternative. This privatized matrix rivals the multivalent public spaces in cities from 1910. Digital capitalism pretends to replace industrial modernism, but after the trauma of covid, our special effects grow more solid, more physical again. The tangible grows too overwhelming for the special effects of the past half-century to hide anymore. A new species of Baroque is about to begin. But our sense of privacy has been utterly transmogrified.

Where does this invasion of identity leave our public culture today? At the end of this book (first edition anyway), I compared the Baroque mercantile public world of 1620 to 2003. But in 2023, we must confront the cybernetic maturity of this meta-consumerism. Is drone warfare a kind of computer game? How nano is this invasion going to go? Feedback systems have been added to special effects. The cybernetic imperium today uses the same optics and perspective on behalf of war machines and the deepest intimacies. Special effects, now as in 1600, tend to bear arms on behalf of a neo-mercantilist theatricality. But people do and will die. Once computer effects grew to assume the authority we associate with national government, they become even more essential. They were featured in the Iraqi retro imperialism of George W. Bush; and his eminence grise, Dick Cheney. This Bushismo tried reinventing nineteenth-century imperialism and nuclear gunboat diplomacy in 2001–2003. But it was greeted with dismay and disbelief throughout much of the globalized world. So whatever political atavisms arise with the new special effects, certain fundamentals cannot be removed. No matter how much homeland rule is anchored to the airports, or how much brinksmanship and saber rattling, the private sector will, in the end, dominate. An electronic feudalism (unsupervised chaos as all against all) will grow underneath whatever is left of the industrial state, much the way neo-feudalism in the seventeenth century could barely police itself.

Like a Christian fortress in medieval Moorish Spain, scripted spaces in 2003 lend imaginary order to electronic feudalism. On various screens, on faux streets, in our mind's eye, we walk through cybernetic puzzles about how political and moral power operate. They are precision tools for mercantilist definitions of identity. But to see how the gears work emotionally and phenomenologically, we must retrain our eyes. We have to study how the Electronic Baroque generates an intimate, but also utterly public, narrative for spectators, invites them to navigate inside a story where they are the central characters.

In Part I, we begin at the theater, inside narrativized architecture. The first act usually opens with a sense of shock, of wonder, a gasp of pleasure. Special effects terrorize with surgical irony, precision-tooled like the old automaton itself. But they also rely on omissions, evasions, absence.

So on behalf of absence, feel free to read this book inside out, like a sock If you'd like, try the notes first. They are browsers about absence—a picaresque of roads not yet taken, designed in anti-sequence as a trackless wilderness. Then try the search engine: it reminds us that there is a program behind simulation. And finally return to the chapters: through case studies, we tease out the

phenomenology of power that is the charmed life of the special-effects environment.