

CHAPTER ONE

THE IDEA OF EFFIGY

JUST INSIDE the entrance of the Grand Café on the central boulevard of present-day Oslo, there is a table reserved for a missing person. The awaited guest is that café's most famous historical diner, the playwright Henrik Ibsen, who for most of the 1890s came punctually to the Grand every noon and late afternoon, always sitting at the same table for an aperitif and a newspaper. The restaurant has been waiting for Ibsen to return since 1978, when the management of the restaurant reenshrined his reserved table in a museum-like display. They implied in the arrangement of traces and artifacts around the table (his hat, his cane, a yellowed newspaper, and reading glasses) that he might still be expected at any moment.¹ Imagined to be present while historically absent, Norway's best-known literary celebrity now makes his appearance in the café as an evocative spatial effigy—a missing person. In this placeholder mode of display, Ibsen has been equated with the space in which he would fit were he to return.

This arrangement has a certain appeal for those diners who notice the restaurant's historical gesture off in the corner of the room. The space reserved exclusively for Ibsen, that is, also provides viewers with an imaginary kind of participation, an implicit invitation to try that space on for size in their minds, measuring body for body, imagining their own fit to his obviously well-worn chair (isolated here in a publicity photo for the café, fig. 1.1).² The missing-person effect thus works both ways: the absence of Ibsen's body makes way for the spectator's potential presence within the scene, but viewers must also absent themselves from their own bodies in order to participate in the representational game. The display creates missing persons on both sides of an imaginary divide; it encourages spectators to be border dwellers, both inside and outside the display (and their own bodies) at the same time.

Picture for a moment some alternative display scenarios. The dynamic of the given scene would shift substantially if, say, a wax effigy of Ibsen were used to fill the absence in the chair. It is easy to imagine the uncanny



FIGURE 1.1. Ibsen's chair, isolated for publicity photograph purposes, ca. 1974. Now positioned at the reserved table at the Grand Café. Photo courtesy of the Grand Hotel Driftsselskap. Photographer unknown.

effects that such a materially present body would introduce by staring blankly at the diners sharing the room with the mannequin. The current, more subtle invocation of Ibsen's historical presence would be turned into something else, the cultural profile of the upscale café perhaps giving way to that of a theme restaurant. Ibsen would still be missing, of course, but in a less obvious way. Instead of encountering an evocatively empty space that encourages them to perform the imaginary substitution of bodies, viewers would be asked to negotiate the presence of a corpselike body with uncanny properties.

Yet another possibility would be a living-history display, with a role-playing actor making up for Ibsen's absence. This has in fact been the practice at the Grand on special occasions, such as reopenings of the café after renovations in 1978 and 1994. In both cases, a costumed Ibsen impersonator once again walked down the Karl Johan Boulevard precisely at noon, Ibsen's habitual time, stopped to set his watch by the clock on the street, and took up his reserved table at the café, filling temporarily what would from that moment forward be Ibsen's reserved, empty space. The actor was served dark beer and port, Ibsen's customary drinks, in the arti-

fact drinking glasses engraved with his name. The various guests at the café's reopening were then given the opportunity to mingle with "Ibsen" and to half imagine themselves as historical patrons in the Grand Café's bohemian heyday in the 1890s.³

A joke moment staged at the 1994 event suggests still another possibility, with the hotel's marketing director humorously usurping Ibsen's place at the reserved table for a photo opportunity. Doing so, he momentarily ignored the chair's inscribed metal plate, which explicitly marks off the space for Ibsen. In the staff's private photo album, the caption reads, "But Mr. Hasselknippe—you know that this is a reserved seat!" It is easy to appreciate this joke of the good-natured interloper, the person who flouts the invisible social boundaries and behavioral conventions that keep the rest of us out. For a brief moment, too, one becomes aware of an entire set of assimilated assumptions about the qualities of display space—about the in-between status of objects that are only apparently in use, about the imperative to look but not touch, about the ways in which one routinely inhabits space in the imagination that is technically off-limits.

Rounding out these scenarios with a final one makes the usual invisibility of those assumptions even more obvious. Imagine an ordinary patron in the café doing the same as the marketing director, deliberately ignoring the implicit lines marking off the Ibsen table as display, separate from the rest of the room. The clues are many—the difference in furniture style, the fact that hat, cane, newspaper, and reading glasses are mounted to the wall, or the little sign on the table cautioning, "The glasses are glued on. Please don't touch." Suppose someone, in the course of a visit to the restaurant on a less ceremonious day, decided to inhabit this space more literally by taking a seat at the table, trying on Ibsen's hat, reading his newspaper, testing out the cane, and ordering a meal. That spectator, who otherwise would of course be more than welcome to participate in a more subtle, halfway game of inhabitation, would at that moment turn rube or transgressor, and the delicate ontological balance of the display space would collapse.

Thinking through the various possibilities of display in this way, it is striking to note how easily spectators today negotiate this complex game of oblique access to the living scene of a missing person. None of the preceding scenarios are unfamiliar, each having earned a place in a repertoire of public behaviors easily called up when one is interacting with modern forms of display. Comingling with representational bodies presents no particular conceptual challenge to spectators accustomed by a wide range of late twentieth-century media experience to thinking of themselves as simultaneously inside and outside the world of representation, and of bodies on display as both convincingly present and conveniently absent. Our visual culture quite simply demands broad compe-

tency in effigies—not simply the mannequin kind but an entire range of recorded and digital bodies.

Our familiarity with an ever-expanding effigy practice may prevent us from noticing the particular variety represented in the missing-person display. For here, the body appears as space, not substance or image. Literally surrounded by evocative traces and signifiers, Ibsen's missing body is purely a display effect. Like the body of H. G. Wells's invisible man, or the concave bodily indentations left in Pompeii's volcanic ash, Ibsen's body is evoked as a trace space, a negative impression taken in the medium of its surrounding things.⁴ His corporeal form is outlined not by flesh, bone, and skin but by the array of objects and clothing that mark the boundaries of where it should be, but is not. This book's cover photo shows that effect in a contemporary display of historical costumes at the National Museum in Denmark, where the missing bodies are conjured up by a painstaking display technique designed specifically to make them appear substantial in absentia.⁵ The range of ready analogies reminds that the missing-person display at the Ibsen table is of course not the invention of the Grand Café. The very familiarity of the idea, however, raises an interesting series of questions: What is at stake in effigy effects of this kind? Does this kind of display have a history, a moment of invention or proliferation, and how does that relate to the more general history of effigy? Most important, what are the possible social resonances of this practice of imagining missing persons?

A turn to the longer history of the term *effigy* reveals connections from embalming to statuary, from portraiture to public demonstration.⁶ The most familiar meaning is the latter, the political substitution of likeness for body, originally for symbolic punishment (in cases of escaped criminals) or for ritualized protest (burning leaders or enemies in effigy). The wider range of meaning, according to the entries in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, encompasses any practice of corporeal image production but is reserved especially for “habited,” or clothed, figures. Wax and plaster mannequins would seem to be at the heart of this category, set off as they often are from other forms of sculpture by realistic costuming and theatrical techniques of *mise-en-scène*.

Late nineteenth-century modernity probably comes to mind as a likely place to look for this more obvious kind of effigy practice. One senses intuitively that the mannequin had a particular claim on this period; these lifelike yet staring figures seem tightly linked to the social context of commodified bodies and urban crowds in the late nineteenth century. The claim would not be one of invention—there is of course a much longer cultural history of mannequin display—but instead of degree and scale. During the period in question, from about 1880 up to the time of World War I, lifelike plaster and wax figures proliferated throughout many of

the visual-cultural venues of European urban life. They could be found increasingly in storefront windows, at international exhibitions, and in several interrelated forms of popular museum display. The visual-cultural repertoire of the time required abilities in mannequin viewing; as urban spectators found themselves negotiating an increasingly frequent contact with these lifelike figures, they were forced to sift through the mannequin's sometimes inconspicuous, finely nuanced ontological distinctions between the living and the dead.

Still, one senses that there is more to the idea of effigy than mannequins, and a final *OED* entry provides a hint of the larger semantic field. As a now-obscure transitive verb form, "to effigy" is glossed as "to serve as a picture of, to 'body forth.'" This is an evocative phrase. It suggests a more extended conceptualization of effigy, one that encompasses but is not necessarily limited to a material representation of the body. I will argue this point at length in what follows, namely, that it was a combination of mannequin display, new recording technologies, and missing-person effects that served to "body forth" a convincingly lifelike yet mobile body in late nineteenth-century visual culture. More than an age of mannequins, the period in question could more productively be seen as an effigy culture in this broader sense. Mannequins were but one tangible manifestation of a wider array of circulating corporeal traces and effects that worked to "body forth" at seemingly insignificant ontological cost to the original body and helped form the late nineteenth century's reputation as the era of a newly mobilized body. This broader sense of "effigy" helps us understand the means by which these bodies were circulated, capturing as it does both the presence effects that made them convincing and the absences that made them portable.

It ups the ante of this claim a notch to realize that it was not simply the bodies on display that could claim a new degree of circulation. "Mobility" is perhaps too cheerful a term for some of the correlative social experience of urban in-migration or poverty-induced emigration, since it skews the notion too much in the direction of the expanding systems of middle-class travel and tourism. But the fact remains that in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the European population had access to sensations of displacement on a wider scale, even if reactions to the experience of finding oneself elsewhere ranged fully from regret to delight. This study will deal carefully with both possibilities, showing how "uprooting" got marketed as "access" in popular museum displays. At this introductory point, however, it is enough to register the fact that the impulse to "body forth" arose in a widespread social context of real bodies out of place.

The preconditions of this corporeal mobility and effigy culture were new possibilities for imagining space and time. The testimony of late nineteenth-century cultural commentators is not bashful about making claims

for a radically new kind of spatiotemporal experience. After all, this was the self-proclaimed era of the “annihilation of space and time,” a phrase repeated in reaction to everything from railroad travel to phonography.⁷ Subsequent historical studies have further enshrined that idea; for example, Stephen Kern’s *Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918*, proceeds precisely from the phenomenological assumption that “sweeping changes in technology and culture created distinctive new modes of thinking about and experiencing time and space.”⁸ Recent studies of pre- and paracinematic visual culture (as disparate as they may be, given everything those terms pull into their orbit) generally agree on this point: time and space were remade by urban modernity.⁹

It is easy to object that one buys into modernity’s own rhetoric when one assumes that these were *novel* experiences of space, time, and body. “New” is an intellectually seductive word, especially for historicizing accounts interested in locating crucial moments of paradigm shift, a tendency that suggests the need for caution in making these kinds of claims. The world was not simply static before, nor fully mobilized after the transitions we call urban modernity. If nothing else, the continued “annihilation” of time and space throughout our own century, right up to the Internet age and its own dreams of universal access, suggests that some sifting of claims is in order. Paul Valéry’s statement, “For the last twenty years neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial,” may indeed deserve pride of place as the opening epigraph of Walter Benjamin’s most famous essay on modernity, but it nevertheless seems late compared with other claims when one realizes Valéry was describing the twentieth century in his 1928 essay on ubiquity.¹⁰ Benjamin’s own position on the cultural effects of mechanical reproduction admits to many incremental advances in the practice prior to the nineteenth century. Furthermore, any notion that aura had “withered” definitively and finally when he wrote his essay in 1936 needs only a reminder of the public’s continued marvel at more recent media transformations of time and space to realize that there is no clear before and after in this process.¹¹

What remains after these cautionary remarks is the discursive claim that many commentators in the late nineteenth century were in fact caught up in the exhilaration of mobility and called it new. The impression of simultaneous presence in multiple places or durable presence through time sparked a collective, public imagination of access and visual availability, even if commentators tended to mistake effects of cultural acceleration for absolute movement. Far from invalidating the claim of “newness,” however, these adjustments make it even more useful and interesting to delineate the particular characteristics of that moment of corporeal imagination—which factors had in fact recently been added to the mix, and which had not yet made their arrival.

A useful point of departure is Anne Friedberg's claim in *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* that the central achievement of nineteenth-century visual culture was the wedding of virtuality and mobility. Cinema is not the only destination of this combination in her argument, but she does see film as the most successful and enduring of the late nineteenth century's virtual mobility systems. The resulting "imaginary flânerie," she writes, "produced a new form of subjectivity—not only de-corporealized and derealized, but detemporalized as well. For the cinematic observer, the body itself is a fiction, a site for departure and return."¹² The coming and going of the spectator's body turns out to be the crucial link between modern and postmodern spectatorship in Friedberg's argument, the link upon which she builds her discussion of space, time, and shopping.

The present study shares Friedberg's interest in modernity's cultural fantasies of mobility but is more inclined to emphasize the alterity of that moment. Now that the period we confidently used to call *the* turn of the century has become simply *a* turn of the century, it may be possible to see the historicity of that moment in a new way. That is, instead of asking what was new about that visual culture in order to draw lines of continuity to the present, it might be helpful now to ask in retrospect: What seems *old* about it? The key to that question resides in a slight objection to the first term of Friedberg's equation: virtuality. Granted, she is primarily concerned with a spectatorial experience of mobility, not that of the field of display. But what strikes me about the dominant forms of late nineteenth-century visual entertainment (cinema excepted) is precisely that spectators' impressions of their own mobility still depended so insistently on the actual mobility and assembly of objects and bodies in the physical world. That period's obsession with authentic chains of reference to real time and space does not get its best account through use of the term "virtual."

Museum-related display practices of the time force this point: at natural history museums, folk-ethnographic museums, open-air museums, and even wax museums, there is an allegiance to the object and original space that sets their brand of mobility apart both from other more simulative media, on the one hand, and from the efficiently circulating and mechanically reproducible recording media, on the other. This is not surprising, given that the very idea of a museum carries with it a long-standing institutional commitment to unique objects and authenticated traces. The mobility of museum artifacts has long been dependent on processes of collection and physical relocation—an elaborate choreography of bodies and objects that necessarily plays itself out in real space and time.¹³

A new development in the museum of the late nineteenth century, however, was the rejection of taxonomic display principles in favor of living, contextualized scenes. The growing, concurrent popularity of the natural

history museum's "life group," the wax museum's tableau, and the folk-ethnographic museum's genre scene demonstrates this common interest in a compensatory project of *mise-en-scène* that gave displaced objects and bodies a new kind of scenic home.¹⁴ If one adds the observation that animal display at zoos was similarly moving from principles of menagerie to living habitat display during the same period,¹⁵ a broad cultural trend comes into focus. Erasing the traces of the collection process, these various kinds of curators increasingly presented objects in use and bodies in context, allowing spectators an impression of direct physical access to previously distant times and spaces. As museums strove to make available not just distant objects but original scenic space as well, museum visitors easily mistook the inventory's mobility for their own. Enthusiasm grew for the idea of a portable scene, for space that seemed to have been moved intact and placed at the viewer's feet, due to the careful coordination of the collected objects within it.

The power to become just missing enough to enjoy these ambiguous mobility effects depended on the revivification made possible by elaborate scenification techniques. It is in this way that the popular museums of the late nineteenth century fit into a larger cultural fascination with "living pictures"—a ubiquitous term throughout the visual culture of the time, covering everything from *tableau-vivant* posing to stereographs, from museum scenes to the cinema.¹⁶ A central concern of the current study is in fact to make sense of the common spectatorial exclamation "Why, it's just like a living picture!" and to understand the appeal of the underlying sensation that made the idea so popular across various media.

Such was not the case everywhere. Research within the field of early cinema studies, for example, suggests an interesting cultural variability, at least where film was concerned. Yuri Tsivian's work on the reception of early cinema among the intellectual elite of St. Petersburg and Moscow reveals a distinct cultural response to film in that setting, one that would be much less inclined to link the words "living" and "picture."¹⁷ The famous, now-canonical account of Maxim Gorky and his first encounter with the early Lumière films in St. Petersburg depicts film instead as a "kingdom of shadows," filled with ghosts, phantoms, and death: "This is not life but the shadow of life and this is not movement but the soundless shadow of movement."¹⁸ The overwhelming impressions of the filmic world for him are its macabre grayness and its grotesquely silent inhabitants. Gorky's response, Tsivian shows, was foundational for the symbolist-influenced, intellectual viewers who left behind the most articulate early reactions to film in Russia. Viewers in that cultural setting seized upon the aspects of the film image that conveyed loss—the loss of speech, of color, of dimensionality—and embraced the cinematic medium more for its estrangement effects than for its powers of revivification.

For contrast, take the inaugural accounts of film viewing from Denmark and Sweden, where the same Lumière films were marveled at primarily for their liveliness instead of their ghostliness. When reports of the Paris cinematograph's debut first filtered up to Scandinavia, the new experience was apprehended in a way more typical of its international reception.¹⁹ This report, which appeared in the leading Swedish journal of amateur photography three months after film's debut, sets the pattern for the Scandinavian reception:

All of Paris is presently making a pilgrimage to Boulevard de la Madeleine in order to take in a new wonder, the so-called cinematograph. It is being shown at a little theater and the performance lasts only twenty minutes. But within this tight frame and this short space of time one sees a whole world pass by. Not dead pictures [*döda bilder*], without life and movement, but a world that lives and moves altogether as it does in reality.²⁰

When these same Lumière films traveled to Scandinavia for the first time, the reaction was similar. In Denmark, the most frequently cited account of the first showing in Copenhagen, from early June 1896, begins its description thus: "One sits in darkness staring at a large piece of white, out-stretched linen. Then it begins. The linen comes to life, and various fashionable scenes are unfurled for us," scenes whose intensity reportedly gave the writer a powerful experience of sequential, convincing immersion.²¹ In Sweden, the debut of the Lumière films three weeks later at the Malmö Exhibition elicited an even more appreciative response: "One actually sits there completely surprised to see the photograph fully alive. In one picture [*tafla*], for example, we see the workers streaming out of a factory. These are not automata we see there in front of us, but fully living figures—every little movement, every twitch of a muscle stands out so clearly that we seem to see the picture [*taflan*] in real life."²²

In each of these accounts, it is the living presence of the image that impresses the writers—its power to supplement and animate the photograph. Among these Scandinavian journalists, at least, the screen image found a receptive ground for the notion that the image was alive, and that the recorded status of the image would keep it alive in perpetuity. That was the potential wonder of the new machine; these were not dead images but living, breathing, twitching beings. To these viewers, the bodies did not seem mediated by technology (they were not "automata") but organic and natural instead.

Here we arrive at a central paradox of modernity's visual mobility systems: the more radical representational absence of recording-based media allowed for correspondingly greater mobility of the depicted world (the Lumières' backyard home movies of feeding the baby preserved and sent to St. Petersburg or Stockholm), yet at the ontological cost of lost color,

tangibility, and spatial depth. The “living pictures” in late nineteenth-century museums, by contrast, seem far more limited in range due to their commitment to the unreplicable object, necessarily entrenched in a single location and time yet able to convey to viewers substance, color, and three-dimensional form. The idea of the living picture subsumes these and other possibilities at the time, hovering above them all as some kind of composite attraction to liveness and immediacy made visually available.

I will proceed from the assumption that there is value in teasing out the distinctive subset of the museological from the cinematic in this shared culture of living persons. The balance between moving the world and keeping it alive met different media demands in the museum. It was especially the fact of shared space, as Alison Griffiths has also emphasized in her study of the natural history museum, that set museological practices apart from those fitting more properly under the rubric of virtual mobility.²³ A photograph could bring the Alps to the viewer without moving mountains, so to speak, but a museum display had to do just that to be true to its object. The museum version of scene grabbing, unlike those of other forms of recording, entailed dragging original space along with the object. The anchor in the material world placed these efforts of *mise-en-scène* on a hyperbolic trajectory, which required that entire milieus be disassembled in real time and space only to be reassembled elsewhere, again in real time and space. The fascinating thing is that some late-century museums, undeterred by the physical intransigence of the medium, attempted mobility effects with what must be considered very large objects: buildings, groups of buildings, and extended architectural and natural settings. The easy flow of digital bits in our own era only makes such dogged manipulation of the material world seem all the more fascinating in retrospect.

The shared tangibility of this kind of museum space and the sheer effort required to assemble it necessarily give it a peculiar social dimension unavailable to recording media such as photography. Even realists among photographic theorists like Roland Barthes acknowledge that the photographic medium’s “certificate of presence,” to use his term, is always accomplished in delay. Presence in a recording-based medium is always *former* presence, and the material world so carefully preserved has always in some important sense already expired.²⁴ Not so for the late nineteenth-century museum’s scenic sensibility: the remarkable effect of these elaborately staged and reconstructed scenes was their tantalizingly shared space, their combination of tangibility and remoteness that provided spectators with unique effects of both presence and mobility. Unlike photography’s “reality one no longer can touch,” to cite Barthes again, late nineteenth-century museum practice teased spectators with games of voyeurism that could quite conceivably become games of immersion in-

stead. When the only boundaries separating off display space from spectators were those of social protocol, and not ontological difference, there was nothing fundamental to prevent scenarios like the one mentioned at the outset here, in which a marketing director can seat himself in Ibsen's chair at the Grand Café.

My interest in the museums of turn-of-the-century modernity thus proceeds from the way they embrace notions of mobility and circulation yet attempt these effects with the most material of means. Their loyalties are split between older models of collection, preservation, and authentication, on the one hand, and the promise of unlimited access and visual availability, on the other. This puts them at the intersection of the traditional and the modern, not only in their social function but also in their representational strategies. Though profoundly informed by the living-picture logic of recording technologies and other new media, the museums of the time could never quite achieve the scenic flexibility or reproducibility of something like cinema. The present study parts company with other studies of precinematic visual culture, however, in seeing the museum's commitment to real space not as a dead-end limitation of the medium, a clunky approximation of effects better accomplished by film (as a cinematic teleology would have it). Instead, I take the idea of mobility in real time and space to be an interesting mode of spectatorship in its own right, one that was not as much "replaced" or "superseded" by cinema as it was diverted to the side, where it has continued to evolve into other forms of theme space and immersive environments.

Nowhere are these issues more interesting than in Scandinavia at the end of the nineteenth century. Because Denmark, Sweden, and Norway experienced a comparatively belated modernization on the northern periphery of Europe, the juxtaposition of traditional and modern forms of experience there was at times quite striking. Commentators from the period describe powerful sensations of overlap in which folk-cultural and metropolitan fantasies existed side by side. In countless descriptions of situations there, Scandinavian spectators consistently imagined themselves in threshold positions, voyeurs of both the old and the new. The claim that Marshall Berman makes about all moments of modernization is especially true of Scandinavia's compressed experience of modernity; he speaks of a public that "can remember what it is like to live, materially and spiritually, in worlds that are not modern at all. From this inner dichotomy, this sense of living in two worlds simultaneously, the ideas of modernization and modernism unfold."²⁵

Models of visual culture developed with the larger European cities in mind might easily forget that claim in the embrace of urbane notions of *flânerie* and distraction, but an account of Scandinavia's modern visual experience has a harder time doing so. The social context of display space

there made the spectator's position at the border particularly fraught, with the appetite for lost coherence competing forcefully with the taste for distraction. One of the most useful generalizations about late nineteenth-century Scandinavia, in fact, is that a significant part of its cultural production, ranging from the naturalist theater stage to museums to the cinema, demonstrated a profound respect for the integrity of original space. Ibsen's and Strindberg's dramaturgy of minutely realistic illusionism is perhaps best known in this regard, but the early Scandinavian cinema's innovative use of deep staging and early bias against editing and reversal of field was equally indebted to this tradition.²⁶ To borrow some filmic terms, this was broadly speaking more a culture of *mise-en-scène* than of montage.

The idea of the portable scene at the museum accommodates both this disposition and the attractions of multiple views. With modernity played out representationally at the level of the scene, as it frequently was in Scandinavia, spectators could indulge in fantasies of grounding and ubiquity simultaneously. This observation seems key to Scandinavia's museum culture of the time. In fact, only in Scandinavia are there such close institutional ties between what seems like a quintessential purveyor of modern amusement and distraction (the wax museum) and the more serious representation of folk culture in the ethnographic and open-air museums. Despite differences in their institutional profiles, the wax and folk museums nevertheless shared an interest in vicarious scenic experience and often borrowed display techniques from each other, at times making them nearly interchangeable in terms of spectator experience.

In Copenhagen, the connection was quite insistently literal: the first wax and folk museums opened within a week of one another in the mid-1880s in the same building in the rapidly developing Vesterbro entertainment district, shown in an illustration from 1880 (fig. 1.2). This area was the heart and soul of an urban expansion project intended to create a Continental-style entertainment district for Copenhagen's middle class. Here one could find the convergence of the 1879 international exhibition site, many kinds of museums, new variety theaters, a circus, a panorama, the Tivoli amusement park, and the city's main railroad station, all set along Vesterbrogade, a newly constructed Parisian-style boulevard. By the end of the century, in fact, the mental geography of Copenhagen had shifted to the city's newly developed west side. The illustrator of this 1897 depiction (fig. 1.3) uses this recently transformed district to make the case for the city's essential modernity, surveying the historical Copenhagen city center through the foregrounded space of Vesterbro, with the train station, the amusement locales, the new city hall, and the wide boulevard all magnified in importance.

Dead center in this illustration, just to the right of the obelisk and immediately across the street from the railroad station, is Vesterbrogade 3,



FIGURE 1.2. Illustration of the boulevard Vesterbros Passage in 1880, with the entrance to the Tivoli amusement park to the right. *Illustreret Tidende* (15 August 1880). Photo courtesy of the Royal Library (Copenhagen).

the “Panoptikon building.” In August 1885, spectators were welcomed into the new wax museum on street level, the Scandinavian Panoptikon (Skandinavisk Panoptikon), in order to interact with its mannequin effigies of famous celebrities, its historical tableaux, and its games of optical illusion.²⁷ Six days later, they were similarly invited to visit the new Danish Folk Museum (Dansk Folkemuseum), located immediately above the panoptikon on the next floor (fig. 1.4). Here visitors could find painstakingly re-created rural interiors that allowed for a temporary immersion in the material remnants of vernacular Danish culture in surround-style, whole-room displays.

It is not just the immediate spatial proximity of this folklife sanctuary and Copenhagen’s most modern amusements that is so evocative, but the fact that the two new museums opened under the direction of the same man, Bernhard Olsen. The folk museum (along with its later offshoot open-air museum, Frilandsmuseet) became his longer-lasting legacy, the one that arguably established him as the father of modern museology in Denmark. His wax museum, often characterized as a youthful indiscretion, has by contrast receded somewhat both in his official biographical profile and in public consciousness.²⁸ Yet at their inception, his two museums shared more than the address at Vesterbrogade 3. They relied on a shared genealogy of display practices emphasizing objects and effigies in



FIGURE 1.3. Perspectival illustration of Copenhagen, 1897, seen through the Vesterbro district in the foreground. The Panoptikon building is to the right of the obelisk at center, the old train station to the left. *Illustreret Familiejournel* 40 (1897). Photo courtesy of the Royal Library (Copenhagen).

carefully contextualized scenes. These two institutions, in fact, linked by Olsen's leadership, form an especially interesting pair for examining the mix of voyeurism and immersion in modern visual culture and the fate of the scenographic imagination. Both institutions shared a fascination with the authentic corporeal trace, with elaborate systems of effigy, and with the spectator's relationship to themed space. They drew on the same Vesterbro public for their visitors; it is even likely, given their close proximity, that many spectators made an afternoon of it and visited both in succession.²⁹

In the other Scandinavian countries, the spatial juxtaposition of modern and traditional display content was not as conveniently literal as it was in Copenhagen, but the conceptual affiliation of new folk museums with the panoptikon tradition was just as pronounced in display practice, if not more so. In Sweden, plaster mannequins became something of a folk-museum specialty, with extremely detailed and sophisticated genre scenes becoming quite popular in Stockholm and renowned at all the important international exhibitions late in the century. The use of what were seen as wax museum techniques in the more respectable ethnological institutions touched off a fierce museological debate in Scandinavia, one that goes right to the heart of the model of spectatorship described here: Should



objects be presented in a theatricalized context? Does the literal reconstitution of missing persons in effigy violate long-established standards of museum display?³⁰

The identity of the museum, the fate of the scene, the desire for immersion in the space of display—all these issues are played out along the axis of comparison between the wax and folk museums. Both museums attempted innovative display techniques designed to investigate the boundary between spectator and display. The Scandinavian wax museums did tend toward voyeuristic models, but they still played extensively with the threshold space of display and with decoy joke figures in the spectating space. The immersion remained imaginary, even if the wax tableaux were designed to simulate transportation of spectator to scene (or vice versa). The Scandinavian folk museums, by contrast, while perhaps not inventing the idea of theme space and immersive spectatorship, certainly helped establish it as a dominant mode of twentieth century visual culture. The voyeuristic models of mannequin display that played an important part in these museums' early development eventually came into conflict with the goal of the folk museum—the continued, imagined viability for the museum visitor of traditional folk-cultural forms. An emerging aesthetic of immersion gave rise to the missing-person display and placeholder techniques of spatial effigy (which the Grand Café's Ibsen table now perpetuates faithfully). Allowing the spectator to cross the threshold and enter the display space held out the promise of a more successful replacement of previously lived connections to folk life.



FIGURE 1.4. Exterior photograph of the Panoptikon building, located at Vesterbrogade 3 in Copenhagen, ca. 1903. The entrance to the Panoptikon is to the left; a sign advertising the Danish Folk Museum is visible in the second-floor window. Photo courtesy of the Royal Library (Copenhagen).

The study that follows presents two parallel sections of four chapters each to force the point of a composite visual experience embracing both the rural and the urban, both grounding and ubiquity. This approach to Scandinavian visual culture does more than delineate that region's interestingly unique cultural characteristics; the situation of compressed cultural change there also helps recover a fuller sense of modernity's connection to tradition. In more purely metropolitan models of modernity, one might, by contrast, be inclined to focus exclusively on the mannequin's ready theoretical appeal for thinking about urban anonymity. Georg Simmel's comments on the peculiar mixture of proximity and distance that characterized increased interaction with strangers in 1903 Berlin spring to mind; like the encounter with the stranger in the crowd, meeting mannequins required skills of ontological assessment and detection.³¹ Mannequins, shopping, and *flânerie* also seem suitable as companion concepts, emphasizing as they do the way issues of visual commodification and consumption can be played out on an objectified body. In no other cultural setting, however, are these more modern uses of the mannequin body intertwined with the reconstitution of folk culture, as they are most emphatically in Scandinavia. For spectators there in the late nineteenth cen-

ture, the sight of a mannequin would likely have called up competing connotations of the urban and the rural.

The public attraction to a visually available folk culture thus forces an issue that is less obvious in mainstream models of modernity. When a situation like that in Copenhagen raises the possibility of spectators taking in both the modern and the traditional in a single afternoon's outing, it becomes clear that content is less important in thinking about spectatorship than the *mode* of display. A central claim of this study will be that apparently dichotomous cultural responses to modernity in Scandinavia—both the celebratory embrace and regret-filled cultural nostalgia—nevertheless relied together on the quintessentially modern notion of availability in their presentation to the public. The accessibility of both as visual alternatives helped establish a fundamentally modern relationship to the traditional past. Folk culture became a place to visit, a modality of visual experience that now found itself in series with other kinds of urban visual mobility. If the larger world of the late nineteenth century came to be seen as fundamentally moveable through new media or virtual travel systems, then it stood to reason that the same might be true of folk culture: it might be preserved past its impending demise and relocated around these newly mobile spectators. The constant suggestion of both wax- and folk-museum scenes was the idea that the movable world was somehow capable of retaining its coherence and continuity. The strong presence of folk culture in the overall visual-mobility system of Scandinavian modernity thus provides a compelling example of how the idea of access was given a conceptual safety net.

The following discussion pays close attention to the spatial experience of museum visitors at the time, derived for the most part from the extensive public commentary elicited by these profound changes in museological practice. What emerges is a nuanced picture of a certain kind of social space at a particular historical moment, one that can serve as an important chapter in international media history. In a visual culture that today similarly promises both authentic visual sensation and infinite variety, it seems especially worthwhile to examine those historical precedents where questions of “here” and “there” seemed absolutely crucial, and when it still mattered when a person went missing.