Widescreen Dreams

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Sometimes I think I should have been an architect. When I was little I loved to build things—blocks, Lincoln Logs, Lego, and later, plastic model houses. My passion was for domestic architecture, not municipal buildings, not skyscrapers. Home—that’s what I was always trying to re-create with the materials, however recalcitrant, at my disposal. I would always reach the point where the wooden blocks became too blunt to evoke, say, a dormer in the roof, or the Lego set didn’t come with elegant enough windows and doors, so I was prevented from building a mansion in the grand style I dreamed about; or the Lincoln Logs never looked enough like smooth, white, aluminum siding or handsome grey stone walls, no matter how much I squinted at them and tried to pretend differently. But I never gave up trying to make a perfect home.

In *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy wants to escape her dull, black-and-white Kansas home by going someplace over the rainbow. “What she expresses here,” Salman Rushdie argues in his stunning book-length essay on the famous 1939 film starring Judy Garland, “what she embodies with the purity of an archetype, is the human dream of leaving, a dream at least as powerful as its countervailing dream of roots. At the heart of *The Wizard of Oz* is a great tension between these two dreams; but as the music swells and that big, clean voice flies into the anguished longings of the song, can anyone doubt which message is stronger?” (Rushdie 23)

In a way, I was just the opposite of Judy Garland’s Dorothy: I dreamed of creating my own home within the home I grew up in. I was more like Dorothy in *The Wiz*, the 1978 film version of the black Broadway musical. As played by Diana Ross, Dorothy is not a child anymore but a young woman in her twenties who likes living at home with her Aunt Em and Uncle Henry, likes her job as a preschool teacher, never ven-
tures outside of Harlem and, for reasons unknown, shows no interest in men (she rolls her eyes when Aunt Em tries to set her up with a guy in the neighborhood). But she's a misfit. When all the members of her extended family sing about the good feelings they have for each other at a holiday dinner party, Dorothy sits alone in the kitchen and confesses in song, "I don't even know the first thing about what they're feeling." Not exactly fulfilled at home, she is committed to it nonetheless.

Both films, of course, devote most of their energy to an elaboration of the fantasy of going, as Rushdie calls it, "Elsewhere" (23), and _The Wiz_ in particular loses all interest in Dorothy's homecoming by the end of the film: from across the street, we watch her walk through the front door of her dear old apartment building, but then the movie ends and the closing credits start to roll. We're treated to none of her joy at seeing her aunt and uncle again, and we're given no idea of how she'll fit into her former life now that she's been to the Emerald City and back. But the fantasy of home remains alive. In the end, we never really learn what makes Dorothy so ambivalent about home.

A remake (a film version) of a remake (a Broadway musical) of a remake (the 1939 MGM film) of an original (a children's book), _The Wiz_ became one of my top ten favorite movies in the late seventies because it seemed to capture, however indirectly, my mixed, inarticulate feelings about where I came from and where I was going to . . .

One of my favorite pastimes as a kid was to explore the houses under construction in and around my neighborhood. This was one of the many things I did alone as a child, and I don't recall feeling guilty or sad or lonely while doing it as I sometimes did, for example, when I listened to my Barbra Streisand records or when I shot baskets on our driveway while privately fantasizing about my favorite movies. I would climb or sometimes just walk right through windows, enter a room and try to figure out which one it was supposed to be depending on how much progress had been made on the house. I'd stand at the edge of an abyss (a stairwell, perhaps? or maybe it had some utilitarian purpose, a shaft of some kind—I couldn't say what for—that would get hidden, eventually, underneath the final, cosmetic layers of bricks and siding) and walk the gangplank to the lower level or descend the ladder if there was one or just jump (yikes!), free falling, to the next, lower landing. I would imagine staircases not yet put in place, or I'd ascend and descend staircases whose railings hadn't yet been attached, pretending I was Barbra Streisand as Dolly Levi, coming down the red staircase of the Harmonia Gardens Restaurant. I would try to figure out how some odd space, not quite big enough for a family room but not so small as a closet or stor-
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age space, suspended, say, halfway between the first and second story, might reasonably be made use of by the strange new occupants to come. I wished the house I lived in had odd, out-of-the-way spaces like the ones I found in these houses.

Sometime in the late 1960s, my parents took us down to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida to visit my Nana and Granddaddy Horrigan, who spent some portion of each winter vacationing there, in a hotel-condominium called Ireland’s Inn. We stayed at the Mark 500, a hotel nearby, which to me was an amazing place. It was three or four blocks long, and each of its several buildings was connected by a system of bridges, stairs, balconies, and walkways. One night after dinner, I ran up and down and all over the ramps and bridges, not just because I was bored (we had dinner at Ireland’s Inn with Nana and Granddaddy that night, and not only did the service take forever, but we didn’t even sit down until around 8 P.M.—that is, not until after Nana and Granddaddy enjoyed their before-dinner cocktails. Never again, said my parents, will we delay the children’s dinner just so Mom and Pop can have a drink! Imagine how hungry those poor kids must have been! Why, they probably didn’t even have any appetite left by the time the food came! [I ordered spaghetti and meatballs]), but also because the space produced feelings in me that no architectural space had ever done before. The Mark 500 was my discovery of architecture as space. (I vomited up all my spaghetti later that night.)

During that same trip to Florida we took a nighttime river cruise, with dinner and live music on the boat, and we sailed past one big, beautiful house after another along the shore. These houses were extraordinary because everyone of them was a “trophy,” a unique architectural statement, probably designed by “name” architects, and they were modern: huge glass picture windows and spiral staircases; indoor swimming pools, seemingly right in the middle of the living room where a coffee table or a sofa should have been; flat instead of gabled roofs; surprising terraces and balconies, some off second-story bedrooms; roof gardens with umbrella tables and chairs; spotlights calling attention to the cars parked in the open-air garages (the weather was so perfect all the year round, no need to protect the cars at night from the cold wind and wet rain like you had to do in Pennsylvania); and grand double-door front entrances with doorbells that chimed an entire melody before the pert butler or maid answered the door and said, who may I say is calling? For the lucky people who lived in these modern pleasure palaces, there was no difference between inside and outside. Everything was on display, everything visible, nothing secret, nothing shameful; everything was made, proudly, to be seen and enjoyed as a thing of beauty.
I think what I missed in the house I grew up in was a sense of spatial perspective. The house, built around 1960 (fig. 17), is a sturdy, two-story colonial with four bedrooms upstairs; a den, living room, kitchen, and dining room downstairs; a big two-room basement; four bathrooms (two upstairs, one downstairs, one in the basement); a two-car garage with two garage doors and a driveway that goes straight from the house to the street (no elegant crescent-shaped driveways as some people had in my neighborhood); a path from the curb to the front door, also straight, which we rarely used, and a cement area connecting the driveway to the kitchen door on the side of the house. (The distinguishing feature of this cement square was a pair of baby shoe prints, which my brother, John, had made when he was a little boy of two or three and the cement hadn’t dried yet and, impetuously, John just walked right onto the wet cement while my dad was smoothing it over; years later when we had the cement redone, my parents decided not to pave over the shoe prints but to leave them there for all to see as a kind of little concrete welcome mat.) There’s an attic with a crescent window at each end (after I’d
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grown up and moved away, after I'd seen Europe—seen how four-square London looked after Paris, how new and straight and plain everything in the U.S. looked after London—I realized with some feeling of wonder, wow, those windows in the attic are almost beautiful! I had taken them for granted all those years, but there they were: beveled glass, window panes in the simple shape of a starburst or a peacock's tail fan, and they opened out on hinges instead of sliding up and down like all the other windows in the house). And a single brick chimney on top.

In addition to the crescent windows in the attic, there were a few special features here and there: a cupola on top of the garage, crowned by a weather-vane; brick on the first floor, aluminum siding on the second; a street-side lamppost with a glass-paneled chamber on top; small built-in bookshelves on either side of the fireplace in the living room; bricks around the fireplace and large, grey flagstones at its hearth; a large built-in wall of shelving in the den with a discreet, narrow door on one side that opened onto a space behind the shelves and which could be used to store card tables, or other unwieldy but flat objects; a bay window in the den looking out onto the backyard, though without quite enough room in the window seat to sit or recline comfortably; wood paneling waist-high in the dining room; an outdoor stairwell in the back of the house leading down to a door in the basement—all of these, minor, diverting touches in what seemed an otherwise unremarkable house.

The main experience of being inside the house was one of discontinuity in space. When you were in the kitchen, you couldn't see the den or the living room. And while through one kitchen doorway you caught a glimpse of the stairway down the hall, and through another you could see into the adjoining dining room, both doorways had doors in them (these weren't graceful, ceremonial thresholds), and if you closed the doors, you'd feel as if you were in the only room in the whole world. And it was like that in nearly every other room in the house as well. The house wasn't cramped exactly, or at least it didn't feel cramped, but I guess it was designed for maximum room size and so it minimized in quantity and quality the passage from room to room. That was one of the wonderful things about the houses in Ft. Lauderdale: attention had been given, it seemed, to the transition from room to room, to the relationship between rooms, to all the rooms together as an aesthetic ensemble. There seemed to be an awareness on the part of architects and inhabitants alike that living in a house consisted not just in being in any particular place, but, more importantly perhaps, in moving from place to place within, in looking from a particular vantage point, in being seen from another. The person who designed my family's house seemed to have thought of none
of this; the architecture of our house was driven neither by the special needs of its eventual inhabitants nor by the unique, overarching vision of its designer.

The modern architecture I saw in Florida, however, was not the only architecture that came as a relief from the unimaginative efficiency of the house I grew up in. During roughly the same period as our trip to Ft. Lauderdale, my parents took us on a trip to Chicago to visit our friends, the McDonalds, a big family with six or seven kids, who had lived in our town for a few years but then had to move to Chicago because of Mr. McDonald's work. The McDonalds lived in an enormous old Victorian house in suburban Chicago unlike anything I'd ever seen. This house had six floors! (Our house only had two floors, plus an attic, which didn't count as a floor because we only used it for storage, and a basement.) There wasn't just one upstairs floor of bedrooms like in our house, but three of them, and each floor had its own unique plan, different from the others. The staircase was twisty and irregular, with several cozy little landings (our staircase at home was just one straight shot, nothing fancy); there were fireplaces in some of the bedrooms (imagine bothering to make life in the bedroom so pleasant!) and stained-glass transoms above some of the doors. There was a big front porch with a flight of stairs leading up to it (we had no front porch at our house, just a narrow porch area elevated by only a single step from the driveway, and you couldn't really fit tables and chairs on it the way you could on the McDonalds' front porch, and you would never visit people on our little porch area the way the McDonalds could entertain people on their front porch, all day if they wanted to).

What I discovered, then, in the Mark 500 and in the mansions along the river in Florida and in all those unbuilt houses going up in my neighborhood and in the McDonalds' rambling old Victorian funny house was a feeling of self-consciousness made possible by the structure, or lack of structure, of the space itself. It was the same feeling I had when seeing and imagining what it would be like to inhabit the high-ceilinged entrance foyer of the von Trapp family villa, or the opulent Harmonia Gardens Restaurant, or the grand, ill-fated ballroom of the SS Poseidon: the feeling of being out in the open air even as you stayed indoors—open interior space; a feeling that no matter what you did and no matter how insignificant it was, you were visible—that all the various parts of the house were not only physically connected with each other but were, somehow, aware of each other. Sentient space. A feeling that there had been an aesthetic intention, not simply a functional one, in the arrangement of space. Space designed to meet the individual needs of its inhabitants, rather than the inhabitants forced to adjust their needs to the
constraints of the space. (Some years later, as a college junior in London, I would again feel this way—not, however, about a style of architecture, but, rather, about a style of writing: the high, woman-centered modernism of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, with all of its dynamic tension between interiority and external reality. It was *Mrs. Dalloway* that made me realize how much it was possible to love to read, and eventually to write.)

But you could also get lost in all of this architecture old and new, built and unbuilt, and that was its other main attraction for me. Because for all the internal fragmentation of the house I grew up in, somehow it always seemed there was never enough privacy. I always seemed to be getting caught doing something I didn’t want anyone else to know about. Once, my cousin Jimmy caught me lip-synching to the original Broadway cast album of *Camelot*. I had just seen a local high school production of the musical that spring and was busy imagining a multi-million-dollar film version starring Barbra Streisand as Guenevere. (I hadn’t yet seen the actual film version starring Vanessa Redgrave, but I’d just started listening to my parents’ copy of *The Second Barbra Streisand Album*, on which Barbra sings “Who Will Buy?” from *Oliver*, and she did that so beautifully that I figured she would be a good choice to play Guenevere because, after all, playing a medieval queen would be no more of a stretch for a modern Brooklyn girl like Barbra than singing the song of a nineteenth-century London orphan boy.) And another time, some years later, my sister Suzanne’s friend Tom, who came home with her on their spring break from college, caught me masturbating in my room, which I had to share with him during his visit. (I might have been caught jerking off many more times if my room hadn’t been right at the top of the stairs so that the sound of people’s knees cracking or their pocket change jingling as they climbed the stairs served as a warning for me to pull up my pants, smooth out the covers, and resume whatever it was I was supposed to be doing—studying, playing records, or sleeping.)

I lacked privacy, however, not only because there were eight of us living under one roof, and then the house was always full of visitors and relatives and friends milling about. I felt perpetually exposed because the walls were so thin you could hear conversations in the kitchen when you were upstairs in the bedroom. You couldn’t block out the sound of the TV in the den when you were in the living room, even if you shut the door between the two rooms. Mom and Dad’s snoring could be heard all the way down the opposite end of the hall (what a drag). The rooms were bunched up and piled in on each other. Intimacy and beauty had been sacrificed for volume and economy.

My dad says that when they bought the house in 1961, it cost $40,000, “which seemed like a ton of money then,” but it was worth the invest-
ment because they had been living in a smaller ranch-style house where everything was on one floor, and it was so hard once you put the kids to bed to watch a little TV or even just to have a conversation because the noise would wake them up—and of course the family kept growing, so they needed a bigger house with a bigger yard.

In *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Betty Friedan argues that “the contemporary 'ranch' or split-level house” is part of what keeps women from realizing their full personhood beyond the spousal and maternal duties enshrined in “the feminine mystique”: these kinds of houses “give the illusion of more space for less money. But the women to whom they are sold almost have to live the feminine mystique. There are no true walls or doors; the woman in the beautiful electronic kitchen is never separated from her children. She need never feel alone for a minute, need never be by herself. She can forget her own identity in those noisy open-plan houses. The open plan also helps expand the housework to fill the time available. In what is basically one free-flowing room, instead of many rooms separated by walls and stairs, continual messes continually need picking up. A man, of course, leaves the house for most of the day. But the feminine mystique forbids the woman this” (245–46). I doubt that moving from the smaller ranch-style house to the larger colonial-style house gave my mom a sense of freedom to transcend her roles as wife and mother, and I’m not sure that the differences between the two houses in terms of their organization of space had much of an effect, in the long run, on my family’s quality of life. Over the years my family made relatively minor adjustments within the overarching dome of suburbia (even now, my parents are busily engaged in building a bigger kitchen and a new den onto the house), but the larger, deadening fact of suburbia, and its attendant architectural ethos of mass production, never changed.

For all the ambitiousness of my architectural wishes, I did have one oddly small-scale idea for a house that I would return to in my mind again and again over the years, especially as I grew into my teens. I imagined a modest one-story dwelling with a simple front door—no fanfare—that opened into a rather dark foyer. The house consisted basically of one not very large rectangular space. As you entered the house through the front door, you immediately faced a large, plain wall. The wall in my mind was always a dour shade of blue (I hadn’t forgotten about the wall that Barbara Streisand faced as a teenager, with her back to her friends, singing the sad song that made them cry). It seemed to have no structural function; it didn’t reach all the way to the ceiling, nor was it flush with the right-hand or left-hand walls of the house. It was almost like a
screen for projecting things onto, or a blank canvas ready for painting. Or it was like sculpture: you could walk around the wall to the other side of it. The wall existed tentatively, as if it was on the verge of not being a wall, but it was and remains to my mind the single most striking and important feature of the house.

I also imagined two coach lamps, one at either end, attached to the wall, casting a dull glow, and against the wall in the center, a small table for the placement, perhaps, of letters (like the letter that Maria left on the side table in the von Trapp family foyer—the letter that said, "I'm leaving, farewell") or keys or cards or flowers or some other small, ordinary objects. Behind the wall my mind went cloudy—there would be some kind of kitchenette, and a bedroom, or maybe just a bed. I didn't envision much of a living space here, although there did seem to be something quite self-sufficient about the place, sufficient for one lonely person, at least.

For attaching to the place was always that peculiar feeling of loneliness, sadness, sterility—of being bereft. Increasingly I would imagine this place as the setting for a movie; it would be the kind of place to retreat to when you are old and alone, or when you've just had a miscarriage, or an abortion, or when you've just gotten married but still you feel awkward with your partner, and the life you are about to embark upon holds little promise, hardly any flavor, or your husband (or your wife) is still a mystery and a stranger to you after years of marriage and you feel like you're entering a void. The place looked neat and well-kept, but it was in so many ways an impoverished place, a place without windows, without much air to breathe. In a way, it was a place of death, a funereal home. A house nowhere.

I can think of two possible sources for this architectural fantasy. One is a part of the downstairs hallway, a wall maybe eight feet long, in the house I grew up in. Against the wall there was a bulky wooden bench that doubled as a toy chest, but kind of a crappy-toy chest—I mean, the toys we kept in it weren't the ones we used much because the bench was cumbersome to open and close. On the wall above the bench two sconces were hung (fig. 13, in chapter 3).

The other source is my hometown church, Sacred Heart. Behind the altar and the priests' and altar boys' chairs there was a large, freestanding wall, papered in gold. It provided a backdrop to the altar and (its main function) concealed the entrance to the sacristy directly behind it. For years until I became an altar boy, I was fascinated by the thought of what went on behind that wall—where did they disappear to when they went behind there after the mass was over? What did it look like on the other side of the wall?
My imaginary wall and the melancholy house that contained it may have first come to me when I heard Carole King’s “It’s Too Late” one summer in the early 1970s while visiting my Aunt Rita’s house at the Jersey shore. I may have been thinking (as I often did whenever we went to someone else’s house) how much more comfortable our beach house was, and then the song was so honest and true about a relationship gone irreversibly lifeless, and for some reason I felt as if I had lived through the kind of trouble Carole King was singing about: “Something inside has died and I can’t hide and I just can’t fake it.”

I had all kinds of architectural ideas growing up, most of them gigantic, and, increasingly, implicated in fantasies about making movies. I would always have major architecture fantasies when I would be taking a bath. I loved baths better than showers because you could wallow in them, and they were the perfect occasion to practice stroking my cock. They went on for forty-five minutes, sometimes an hour at a time, until someone else in the house lost their patience and shouted for me to get out. At some point around the same time as stroking my cock started to feel really good (but before I had my first orgasm), I found that running water from the spigot in the bathtub plus liberal helpings of shampoo made lots of slippery soap suds, and they were great for cock-stroking (what a waste, my mother would say if she only knew how much shampoo I was using!). As I lay in the water up to my ears, playing with myself, slowly lifting my leg out of the water and pretending it was some great and terrible sea monster breaking the surface, I transformed in my mind the porcelain sides of the tub and the tile walls of the shower into acres and acres of luxury high-rise apartments and office buildings. The tub would often become a kind of spectacular apartment building/hotel/shopping mall/entertainment complex with mile-long escalators (the outside surface of the rectangular tub was carved with sleek, diagonal lines) and an occasional, fanciful roof garden or grand balcony (the soap dish, carved into the inside surface of the tub). I imagined thousands of people enjoying this mega-complex, with long lines of them waiting to get in to see a movie. (In his history of suburbia in America, Crabgrass Frontier, Kenneth T. Jackson describes the advent of the “super regional mall,” not unlike the one I fantasized about while soaking in the bathtub: “During the 1970s, a new phenomenon—the super regional mall—added a more elaborate twist to suburban shopping. Prototypical of the new breed was Tyson’s Corner, on the Washington Beltway in Fairfax County, Virginia. Anchored by Bloomingdale’s, it did over $165 million of business in 1987 and provided employment to more than 14,000 persons. . . . Most elaborate of all was Huston’s Galleria, a world-famed set-
Movies and architecture converged again in my mind for my famous deluxe movie theater/convention center, which was so massive a structure that it couldn't be envisioned in an urban context as a series of skyscrapers but had to be built in the suburbs instead. You had to drive at least two hours from anywhere to get there (the way, for example, we had to drive two hours or so to get to Hersheypark in Hershey, Pennsylvania, which, along with New York City, was one of my favorite destinations growing up). The main attraction of this place was a huge movie screen several stories high with an incredible sound system (inspired by the several-stories-high movie screen at the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C., which I'd visited sometime in the early seventies), and they even gave you a program when you came in, like they did when you went to a Broadway show (I always wished there was more fanfare associated with going to the movies, like my mom said there was when she was a kid).

But that wasn't all. The place was such a labyrinthine city-in-miniature that you needed a special color-coded map to find your way around (I wasn't exactly sure what the complex contained besides the cinema, but I knew that whatever it was, it was of great importance—maybe a hospital—certainly nothing so common as the shops at our local mall). I learned this, I'm pretty sure, from watching a Medical Center episode, or some kind of doctor or detective show on TV, in which the path to any particular part of the hospital was indicated by a painted stripe along the floors or walls. So, for example, if you wanted to go to pediatrics, you just followed the blue line—kind of like Dorothy following the Yellow Brick Road to Oz right from the very beginning in Munchkinland. Likewise, in my fantasy movie theater/convention center, there was a bewildering network of variously colored stripes on the floor, and you were given special cards that got punched by machines every so often (I'm not sure exactly what all of this was for, but it reminded me of driving along the highway and every so often going through a toll booth and receiving a card with numbers and hole punches all over it—who knew what all those numbers and hole punches meant?—or dropping money in a bucket or giving it to the attendant).

The point was, it all felt very serious and off-putting, and that's what I was reaching for with my complex: it was a place where you could easily get lost, you frequently did get lost, and when you did, boy, were you in trouble. I even had police squads in residence to go in search of poor lost souls, as well as an emergency room for people who got lost and were so overcome with panic and fear that they needed spe-
cial medical assistance. I loved the idea of entertainment shading into nightmare—learned partly from disaster movies, partly from reports of audience members fainting or otherwise going into hysterics over *The Exorcist* and having to be carried out of the movie theater on a stretcher or in a wheelchair, and partly, I think, from having to endure the uncontrol­lable bodily changes brought on by puberty, like getting an erection every morning at the bus stop for no reason at all and not knowing where or how to stand so that people wouldn't see it. So I imagined audience members going into convulsions and needing medical assistance over, for example, the movie version of *Mame*—obviously not because there was anything horrific about *Mame* or movies like it, or about Lucille Ball, but because the audience would be so overstimulated by the spectacle of New York City in the Roaring Twenties and the wrenching sadness of the Depression that abruptly followed and the profundity of Lucille Ball's performance that encompassed it all that they would need to lie down and take a nap.

People always used to say to me, when I'd usher them into the den or down to the basement to see the finished product of my afternoon's labor, a great pile of blocks in the form of a spiraling, turreted, gabled, pinnacled estate, "You're going to be an architect someday." For some reason, that felt like an accusation. I felt embarrassed and mildly insulted by the suggestion. For one thing, architecture sounded somehow like a man's job, and I didn't like to see myself in the burdensome role of manhood. Secondly, I thought what I really wanted to be when I grew up was a priest. I may have perceived on some level that designing build­ings meant that you would eventually have to let them go, whereas being a priest meant that you were always up there on stage, at the center of everyone's attention, talking and singing and leading everyone in prayer.

But at the same time, architecture and religious life had something in common. Sometimes when I built blocks I had an inkling of infinity: I would look at the structure I had just made, and think, in this house (the house I lived in) lives a boy (me) who builds blocks, and in the house of blocks he builds there lives a boy who builds blocks, and in that house there's a boy who builds blocks, and in that house a boy who builds blocks and in that house . . . and in that house . . .

I loved dollhouses and probably would have developed a lifelong interest in them if it hadn't been impressed upon me so forcefully that dollhouses were for girls. My sisters had a simple dollhouse in one of their bedrooms which eventually I had to play with in secret. At a certain point during the day, my mom would notice that I wasn't in the base-
ment or on the first floor, and I hadn't gone outside, so where could I have gone? I wasn't in my bedroom—wasn't in any of the bathrooms—she would call my name:

"Patrick, where are you?"
"I'm up here."
"Where's 'here'?"
"In Mary Jo and Sue's room."
"What are you doing?"

As if she didn't know. And now what was I going to say? Should I lie and say that I had lost something and I was looking for it in the girls' bedroom? But she would never believe that—what could I possibly have lost in the girls' bedroom? And anyway, what would I have been doing there in the first place? There seemed to be no way to keep up the deception, so I had to give up playing with dollhouses.

But not before I tried to get a dollhouse of my own. I wanted a Fisher Price dollhouse which, however, my mom said wasn't appropriate for me because the package said it was for children ages three to eight, and I was nine. But I knew the real reason was, I was a boy and dollhouses were for girls, even though there was a picture of both a boy and a girl playing with it on the box—though it's true, the boy looked to be about four years old or even younger, while the girl was more like seven or eight, the implication being, look at the little boy trying to join in playing with his older sister's dollhouse, he doesn't quite know what he's doing (he's not invested in domestic fantasy and interior design like she is), isn't his unself-consciousness cute! Whereas if I had gotten a dollhouse, I would have known exactly what I was doing.

My dad would often tell the story of how, when he was still living at home as a young man with his parents and younger siblings, one of his sisters had made a new dress and was proudly showing it off to everyone. He said to her, "Why, that dress is big enough to fit a house."

"Oh Jack, no it's not!" she cried.

"Oh yes it is," he said, "I'll show you." And he took the dress and put it over the girls' dollhouse and said, triumphant, "See? I told you it was big enough to fit a house!"

"Oh Jack!" she cried.

Every year from around the time I was seven years old until I went to high school, my father and I would build a miniature train-yard at Christmas. We would begin discussing the layout for the train-yard sometime in late October. One year Dad took me out to breakfast after church on Sunday morning—we went to a diner (I loved diner breakfasts: pancakes, sausage, juice, and hot chocolate, and sometimes a sec-
ond and even a third cup of it!)—and after we’d eaten, or while we were waiting for the food to come, Dad took a napkin from the silver dispenser on the table and started sketching possible ways to lay out the train tracks this year. The usual platform we used was eight feet by four feet, but, I wondered, couldn’t we make it bigger this year, say in an L shape, by adding another four square feet to the platform? Well that’s getting quite elaborate—do we have enough train track for that? Dad asked. No, but couldn’t we buy some more? I asked in return. We’ll see. How about a figure eight? Possibly. Then there were the years when we got more proficient and added mountains, and even an elevated train track and a tunnel. Dad would say, now we know better than last year how to construct a mountain. We know we have to lift the entire track on pilings; the train can’t make it up any steep inclines. But how will we prop it up? Oh, I’m sure they sell some kind of thing for that—they have all kinds of stuff for really fancy track work, but, as you know, your father is somewhat limited as to what he can come up with, but we can certainly give it a try. The possibilities seemed endless. I couldn’t conceal my excitement about all the things we would try this year—this year, I knew, it would be the best train-yard we had ever done.

Every night when Dad got home from work I would hound him to come downstairs to the basement and work on the train-yard with me. Some nights he didn’t have time or could only give me a couple of hours, or maybe just a half hour, but then other nights it would be all evening, and then he would spend all day Saturday or all day Sunday with me as well. I would often hear my mom or someone else say, “Okay, now, leave your father alone! He spent how many hours with you on that train-yard yesterday, and now he’s going to rest!” Or, “and now he’s going to play some tennis with your brother and sisters!” or, “he’s going to spend some time with me!”

“You can do it by yourself, you don’t need me, you know what you’re doing,” my dad began to say more and more, the older I got. But that wasn’t the point.

One night Dad and I were doing the lighting for the train-yard. This was always a backbreaking job for my dad (I watched but didn’t completely understand what he was doing): you had to run two wires from the generator underneath and across the length of the platform. Then you had to attach all the other lights in the train-yard—the tiny lights inside each of the houses, street lamps, traffic lights, train signals, and so on—to these two main wires. It was a tough job, requiring Dad to lie on his back underneath the platform, and I’d have to shine a flashlight on what he was doing and adjust the pillow under his head and sometimes
even mop the sweat off his forehead. And every year my mom would worry that it was too much of a strain on him and that he would injure his back doing it, and why didn’t he teach me how to do it myself?

Mom came downstairs to see how things were going. I was completely absorbed in what we were doing, but I was also thrilled that she showed an interest in the train-yard because it was something that no one else in the family shared with my dad but me. Wanting to show off, I told her, “Stick around, you might learn something!”

Suddenly my dad barked at me, “Don’t say that to your mother!”

“I just meant—”

“Jack, that’s enough, it’s been long enough, it’s almost eleven o’clock. You’ll miss the news.”

“Okay, Peg.” Then to me, “I think you owe your mother an apology.”

I vaguely remember one conversation I had with my dad about girls while we were working on the train-yard. I asked him if he ever had any girlfriends when he was my age (nine or so), and he said, yes, there was a girl he liked named Virginia, and this surprised me because I’d never heard him talk about any other girls or women in his life besides Mom. I forget if he asked me if I had any girlfriends—at that time it would have been a new girl in school named Elizabeth Hoffman—and I’m not sure, if he had asked, how much I would have said about her.

I learned a lesson in delayed gratification working on the train-yard with my dad. This was the first year we decided to try building a mountain. We started with blocks as a base (my wooden blocks, which I had long ceased playing with—the ones that made everyone think I should become an architect), then we molded and stapled chicken wire around them (I wondered, but never asked, what is “chickeny” about “chicken wire” anyway?), then applied layer upon layer of paper towels soaked in plaster-of-paris (another strange term I never openly questioned—“of Paris,” as in the city?) on top of the wire. Finally we spray painted it green and added miniature shrubs, trees, and houses. As we were just beginning to apply the plaster-coated strips of paper towel, I created what seemed to me a perfect and realistic mountain ridge out of the ripples and folds of the paper towels. Already I could see my mountain taking shape! Dad, working fast and, I thought, sloppy, indelicately
plopped down on top of my beautiful little mountain ridge a whole wad of soaking-wet paper towels, thereby obliterating it completely. "Nnnoooooo!" I protested. "I wanted it like that!"

Again exasperated, he said sharply, "Pat, this is only the beginning! We're gonna have to put multiple layers of this stuff on to make it strong. You're not even gonna begin to see what it'll look like when it's finished until we've done all the plastering and then the painting. Then you can start fussing about how you want the trees and shrubs, or what have you, to look, but we're nowhere near that stage yet. Okay?" (plop!)

"Okay." (tsk)

My favorite part of building the train-yard was putting on all the finishing touches—designing the system of (cardboard) roads, deciding which end of town to put the three little houses under construction, placing the trees and hedges, fencing in the lawns with little plastic white picket fences, positioning the little people-figures here and there (always a cluster of them in front of the church, and another bunch milling around the train station). And then the ultimate thrill was announcing to my mom that it was finished and she could come downstairs now to see it.

Wait, wait! First I had to turn off all the basement lights, then I turned on the train-yard lights—a perfect sparkling little world—and set the train steadily, slowly, peacefully in motion (fig. 18). I stepped back and said, "All right, you can come down now."

My mother always reacted to the sight of my completed train-yard with wonderment and surprise: "Oh, Pat!! It's beautiful! Oh my goodness, how do you do it! It's just wonderful, honey. You are so talented, you and your father."

Then, after a few minutes, "I've got rolls in the oven. I must get upstairs. This was great, honey. Jack, will you come slice the meat? As soon as you're ready. Dinner should be on the table in half an hour."

"Okay, Pat, I'm going upstairs to help your mother."

I could have sat staring at the train-yard, the train sadly making its way around and around the tracks—into the tunnel, out of the tunnel, around and around in its small world without an exit—dreaming of another world for another hour and another hour after that.

II

I love living in New York. The feeling has deepened over the fourteen years that I've been here. I went through a period of not liking it, which
roughly coincided with graduate school. I'd gotten to the point where I almost couldn't be out in public—crowds on the sidewalk drove me crazy, the mere presence of other people, at home or out of doors, made me angry. I feel differently now, the way I felt when I first moved here in the fall of 1985, which was a kind of perpetual "I can't believe I live here all the time!" I walked everywhere—to work, to the Village, to Times Square, to Central Park, to Penn Station when friends arrived from out of town for a visit. At the beginning of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa Dalloway says to Hugh Whitbread, blithely, "I love walking in London. . . . Really, it's better than walking in the country" (6). I felt like that about New York.
In fact, one of the reasons I loved *Hello, Dolly!* so much as an adolescent was that it captured so well, I thought (though I didn’t learn the word until years later), the flaneur’s ecstatic submission to the tidal wave of city life. The brilliant precredit sequence opens with what looks like an authentic photograph of late-nineteenth-century New York City. It’s a brown-and-white shot of the movie set, a stupendous replica of New York circa 1890—but then it begins to change into color: green first, then blue, then full color. Then, the picture gradually comes to life (a thin, curved line expands from the upper-right-hand corner of the screen, setting the image into motion as it moves from right to left). Next, images of feet—walking, hopping, strutting, skipping magically, “accidentally” in time to the music: a horse’s hooves clip-clopping along the street; a man sweeping the gutter with a broom; a woman walking along the sidewalk (is it Dolly?—apparently not, because the camera moves away); a boy rattling a stick along a fence; a man and a small girl coming out of a doorway, the girl skipping, past a tall, skinny man who, after getting his shoe shined, struts along the sidewalk (watching the movie with me recently, my friend Tom said, “well there’s a big queen!”) until he bumps into a young woman, at which point they change course and walk off in a different direction together; a girl playing hopscotch, and, beyond her, three girls playing jump rope, until a horse-drawn street-cleaning car sprays water on the sidewalk, shooing them away; a man flanked by two women, proudly strutting down the street, then dodging the street cleaner’s hose; a kid zipping by on a scooter; a woman carrying groceries, climbing the front stairs of an apartment building (could this be Dolly?), and passing at the top of the stairs another woman, wearing a colorful reddish-brown dress and swinging her handbag—a chorus of male and female voices sings “call on Dolly . . .” (now we know, *this is Dolly!* though we haven’t yet seen her face) “. . . if your neighbor needs a new romance”—and the camera pulls away from her feet, as we watch her, from behind, strutting down the block, her arms stretched out on either side of her, as if to embrace the day, the sunlight, the music, the whole of New York City itself!

Shot only from behind or, in one instance, from above, Dolly now swims through the city, here on foot, there on top of a street car, like a fish in her element, handing out her calling card—first to this woman, then to that man; then to a policeman, a workman hanging upside down from a street lamp, a man in a sewer, and a fat woman riding on top of a trolley. In a breathtaking overhead shot, two white-capped street cleaners push their carts along the cobble-stoned street as Dolly passes between them in the opposite direction, extending her card generously to each one. And now, a shot of what at first looks like a somewhat abstract
arrangement of turkey feathers—the camera begins to circle around it—we have been looking, it turns out, at Dolly's hat, and the hat, we now realize, is on top of her head. Finally, we see Barbra Streisand's face come into full view. She smiles warily at the camera, gently snickers as if sharing a little private joke with us, as if she's known us for years and is glad to see her old friends again; she sings, "I have always been a woman who arranges things . . . ."

The message of the opening sequence of Hello, Dolly! seemed to be that Dolly was somehow a part of all those anonymous people whose feet we saw going about their daily business and to whom she extends her card. Dolly struts through the city with her arms outstretched because, in some important sense, she is the city. She encompasses everything she sees, she sums it all up in herself—in her spirit, her sense of humor, her variegated speaking style, her rhythm, her generosity.

In his 1863 essay “The Painter of Modern Life,” Charles Baudelaire says of the painter Constantin Guys what might also be said of Barbra Streisand's Dolly:

[T]he crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect flaneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world—such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define. . . . the lover of universal life enters into the crowd as though it were an immense reservoir of electrical energy. Or we might liken him to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life. (9–10; emphasis in the original)

Seeing Barbra Streisand as Dolly Levi walk the streets of New York, I came to think of urban life as infinitely generous; it turned me into the kind of “passionate spectator” of urban life that she herself was and that Baudelaire called “the perfect flaneur”: “. . . he hurls himself headlong into the midst of the throng, in pursuit of an unknown, half-glimpsed countenance that has, on an instant, bewitched him. Curiosity had become a fatal, irresistible passion!” (7)

The depiction of urban life in Hello, Dolly! was different from anything I’d encountered before. When I was in grade school, for example, I learned about city life from reading and rereading Virginia Lee Bur-
ton’s *The Little House*. In this classic children’s story, written in 1943, a little pink house, comfortably situated “way out in the country” (1), suffers the transition from an agricultural to an industrial society but in the end manages to return to a preindustrial, pre-urban, prelapsarian way of life. The house is a typical mid-twentieth-century ticky-tacky box, but the time period when the book opens is marked as the preindustrial nineteenth century—the mother figure wears a long hoop skirt; the father a pair of checked trousers and a Byronic head of hair and beard; and a horse-drawn carriage, cart, and sleigh dot the landscape. Little by little, a booming, dirty, overcrowded city mushrooms around the poor, sweet house. Finally, it is rescued by “the great-great granddaughter,” now grown and married with children of her own, “of the man who built the Little House so well” (32) (throughout the book, the house is gendered female—the cover illustration bears the subtitle “HER-STORY”). The house is carefully and easily lifted off its foundations and towed out of the city, like a patient on a stretcher, to a still-undeveloped spot in the country: “Never again would [the Little House] be curious about the city . . . Never again would she want to live there . . . The stars twinkled above her . . . A new moon was coming up . . . It was Spring . . . and all was quiet and peaceful in the country” (40; ellipses in original).

Looking now at *The Little House*, I think that one of the exciting things about it is watching the city, as the pages turn, grow and grow from a paved road to rows and rows of suburban tract housing to block after block of tenement buildings, and then a trolley system, an elevated train, and a subway, one after another, burst on the scene. Meanwhile skyscrapers have risen all around and eventually supplant the tenements; lights blaze at night, crowds of people—pedestrians, shoppers, tourists, businessmen, construction workers, little families—point and shuffle, gape and hurry by, as traffic rushes, rushes night and day!

A smear of browns, grays, and blacks, the city as Burton rendered it wasn’t meant to be pretty—certainly not as pretty as the house in the country enjoying the colorful change of seasons (my mother often says that she prefers living in Pennsylvania to places like California or Florida because “I love the change of seasons. I’d hate it if it were always summer or always winter. I love seeing the leaves turn color in the fall—the fall, really, is my favorite season of the year. I guess if I had to choose just one climate, it would be a fall climate”). But I can’t imagine that I didn’t enjoy each successive, methodical cutting away of the countryside, each spurt of urban growth, loud, chaotic, and violent though it was. And no child, I would think, could miss the visual pleasure of Burton’s masses of city dwellers, strips of little watercolor strokes in purple, brown, yellow, pink, blue, and green, sweeping right and left—as pleasing and as
abstract as the arc of thirteen orange and yellow suns with happy faces tumbling and laughing their way across the sky at the beginning of the book, the Little House at peace with all the world ("She watched the sun rise in the morning and she watched the sun set in the evening. Day followed day, and each one a little different from the one before . . . but the Little House stayed the same" [2; ellipses in original]), or the rows and rows of "white daisies cover[ing] the hill"—precisely drawn white circles amid innumerable strokes of kelly green—during "the long Summer days" (8). Still, the return of the Little House to the countryside came as a relief to me when I was a child. I liked Burton's city, but it was at best an exciting place to visit, never a place to call home.

III

My parents took me to my first Broadway show, *Annie*, in the winter of 1977, and in the spring of 1978 I went to New York to see *The Wiz* on a high school day trip. From then on, I visited New York with family, school groups, and eventually with my friends—especially my friend Beth, who shared my love of New York and Broadway theater—as often as I was allowed (two or three visits per year). I loved everything about the experience of going to New York, including the smell of bus exhaust at six or seven o'clock in the morning, before the bus pulled out of the Reading Bus Terminal in downtown Reading, and then the sun coming up and the morning fog lifting over the rolling brown and green farmlands between Reading and Kutztown, which was the first stop on the way to New York.

I didn't automatically think, however, that because I loved New York so much I could or should live there when I grew up. I had to dwell on the idea of New York before the desire and, more, the determination to live there overtook me. And it wasn't the idea of New York City enshrined in a Broadway musical that enabled me, eventually, to make it my new, second Home (for example, the image, however lovable, of 1930s New York in *Annie*: "NYC! You make 'em all postcards!"); rather, it was the idea of New York elaborated in a Hollywood musical that changed my mind: the dream-vision of New York City as Oz in the 1978 film version of *The Wiz*. (Director Sidney Lumet prefaced a new edition of L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, which coincided with the release of the film version of *The Wiz*, as follows: "The last line of Frank Baum's original story reads, 'And oh, Aunt Em, I'm so glad to be at home again.' The last line of the superb movie that MGM made with Judy Garland was, 'Oh Aunt Em, there's no place like home, there's no place like home.' The last song in *The Wiz* that Charlie Smalls wrote,
the curtain song, is called 'Home,' and its last word is 'Home.' To me, in essence, this is what the movie *The Wiz*, is all about" [vii].

Not long before I saw *The Wiz* on Broadway, I heard or maybe read somewhere that the upcoming film version of the musical was going to be set in New York City. This was all I needed to know for my imagination to flare up with ideas for how the movie would look if I were making it myself. I loved *The Wiz* on Broadway, but I'm sure that even my initial experience of it in the theater was filtered through my desire to see it done on screen—what I saw on stage was a sketch, merely, of the movie version to come.

The first scene that came to me was the Winkies' joyous celebration after Dorothy kills Evillene, the slave-driving, sweatshop-ruling Wicked Witch of the West. Luther Vandross's anthemic "A Brand New Day" was the best, most immediately stirring song in the show ("Can't you feel a brand new day?"), and I recognized its big-screen possibilities immediately. I felt that there needed to be many more singers and dancers than were used on stage, and that the number should feel not just like a "day of independence" (as the Munchkins call it when Dorothy's house lands on the Wicked Witch of the East in the 1939 film) but full-scale national liberation—the second coming! Armageddon! May Day! The dawn of a new era, at long, long last, the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth!

It seemed only natural, then, to stage this production number on the roof of the tallest building in New York City, the World Trade Center, which had been used so stunningly in the 1976 remake of *King Kong*, although, it was true, Kong never straddles the twin towers in the film as he is pictured doing in the movie poster (if only they had pulled off *that* special effect!). I'd already heard that the World Trade Center would stand in for the Emerald City in the film, and so I figured that the celebration of the witch's death would not happen there but, rather, somewhere nearer her lair—which, being a sweatshop, I had trouble visualizing, since I didn't even know what a sweatshop was. I had some notion that it was a factory, but why "sweat"? Because the working conditions were so awful or the work so strenuous that it made you sweat? Because they made sweatshirts and sweatpants in this kind of factory? Or you had to *wear* sweatpants and sweatshirts in this place? The point is, not knowing enough about what a sweatshop looked like and how to stage a big production number in it, I felt that the World Trade Center was the best place to send up fireworks about the witch's death.

I figured we could shoot parts of the scene on a soundstage made to look like the top of the World Trade Center (although I knew there were two towers, I only imagined the scene taking place atop one), but for the really big effects, we would actually have to get the entire cast up there
on the roof somehow and shoot the scene with swooping helicopters, which would fly toward the top of the building so close as if they were about to crash right into the side of the building, but just at the last split-second, they would glide right over the top of it, over all the actors' heads, showing, as in a Busby Berkeley production number, the elaborate, abstract patterns they made as they danced.

I had a few precedents for this aerial photography. First, the camera work at the beginning of The Sound of Music, which culminated in a zoom-in shot, via helicopter, of Julie Andrews on top of a mountain; second, the climax of "Don't Rain on My Parade" in Funny Girl, where the camera flies across New York Harbor and zooms in on Barbra Streisand as Fanny Brice, standing at the prow of a blue tug boat, singing; third, the shots of Yves Montand in On a Clear Day You Can See Forever singing "Come Back to Me" to Barbra Streisand's Daisy Gamble (he's her psychiatrist; she doesn't know it but she's the reincarnation of a nineteenth-century English noblewoman, Melinda, with whom he has fallen in love, only Daisy finds out inadvertently by hearing the tapes of her sessions with him, so she runs away—it's a long story), as, again, the camera, suspended from a helicopter, floats toward him (I always thought it should have been Barbra up there on the roof of the Pan Am building, singing a song!); and fourth, the image of a lone helicopter in The Towering Inferno (all about how the tallest building in the world burns down), underneath the opening credits, flying over sea and mountains (of all things, The Towering Inferno most resembles The Sound of Music at this point), making its bumblebee way toward San Francisco and the roof of a gleaming, unnaturally tall skyscraper; and again later in the film, when a helicopter tries to land on the roof to rescue a group of women stranded in a restaurant on the top floor of the building as the fire rages below them, but as the poor mechanical bird nears touchdown, something goes wrong, and it bursts into flames!

I also imagined, in my movie version of The Wiz, huge banks of floodlights—possibly tinted green—shooting off the roof of the World Trade Center as hundreds of people sing and dance and the camera buzzes around the top of the building. (Hollywood is slowly catching up with me: there's a scene very much like this in Independence Day [1996].) We would shoot the scene at night, so you wouldn't be able to see the ground, except maybe for a splattering of lights; you'd feel, instead, as if you were rocketing through space on a flying beam. (My love of spectacle often carried over into my real life during the late seventies and not always with the best consequences. For example, as editor in chief of my senior yearbook in high school, I wanted to have a hand in planning the school mass on the day the yearbooks were distributed. I had
ideas for hymns and readings that would be particularly appropriate for this special mass, ideas about how the yearbook staff [with me at the head] would process into the gymnasium along with the priest and the altar boys, how maybe I or one of my sub-subeditors could read select passages from the yearbook after communion but before the recessional hymn [or maybe we could have a slide show after communion featuring photos from the yearbook!], ideas about how we could all be wearing our official yearbook-staff pins or perhaps corsages bought especially for the occasion [were funds available for such things? I wanted to know]. One day a bunch of us staff members were standing in the hallway discussing all of this with the principal, whose permission we needed, and Mrs. Kreisel, the yearbook faculty advisor. Now, Mrs. Kreisel and I had battled it out all year over the yearbook. I felt that she was only doing her job as faculty yearbook advisor for the little stipend she got for it at the end of the year but that, otherwise, she had no real interest in, and certainly no real aptitude for, making a book; I, on the other hand, was supercommitted to every detail of every phase of the book's production and revealed in the responsibility and the authority vested in me as editor in chief [this was another thing I had in common with Barbra Streisand—both of us were perfectionists, and the older we got the more important it became that we controlled as many aspects of our work as possible]. But it was late May, the book was finally finished, nerves were frayed, and Mrs. Kreisel, frankly, had had it up to here with my big ideas. As I proposed to the principal all the things we might do with the yearbook mass, Mrs. Kreisel, now out of all patience, raised her voice at me, right there in the middle of the hallway, in front of everyone: "Patrick! We'll have none of your Cecil B. DeMille productions! We're not doing anything fancy for this mass! It'll be just another mass like any other mass, yearbook or no yearbook, and that's final!"

The next major cluster of images that came to me for the film version of The Wiz that I was developing in my head—images that were partly inspired by something I'd heard about the making of the film (that the avenues and bridges of New York were being paved with golden linoleum, called "Congoleum," representing, of course, the Yellow Brick Road)—involved Dorothy and her companions dodging and darting their way through the carnival of New York City street life. It was a combination of ethnic pride parade and noisy, bustling New York traffic—taxis, cars, buses, trucks, pushers, peddlers, pedestrians, strollers, vendors, dancers, acrobats, people on skates and people on skateboards, bicycles, unicycles, tricycles, and bicycles built for two, even a fleet of horse-drawn carriages—all merrily making their way on a pilgrimage across the Brooklyn Bridge toward some promised land, which, how-
ever, was nothing more or less than midtown Manhattan (for that was the only part of New York that I was really familiar with). In other words, their destination was the place where, at least in my mind, they already were. I could see Dorothy and her friends caught in a (wonderful!) traffic jam, having to climb over the hoods of cars and buses, weaving through rows of stalled traffic, running the red lights. Just getting around New York City, never mind the nitty gritty of the Wizard, the Witch, and the Winkies, was dreamworld enough. It gave you enough to do, to see, and to remember for a lifetime; it was all the initiation into the real world, into adulthood, that you—or Dorothy, or anyone—would ever need. Imagine living there! Imagine waking up and seeing all of that outside your window. Life would be one continuous production number after all!, not unlike the New York City of 1890 in Hello, Dolly!, where one production number—“Dancing”—flows seamlessly into another—“Before the Parade Passes By”—and where the narrative is advanced, not impeded, by singing and dancing! Street life in New York City was wall-to-wall musical comedy. I couldn’t think of anything else for Dorothy and her friends to do there other than, simply, to be there. No going back to Kansas after that.

(Years later, on a bright sunny Sunday in June of 1986, my parents came to New York for a visit. We were walking down Fifth Avenue from the Guggenheim Museum to the Plaza Hotel when we accidentally intercepted the annual Gay Pride March—at that moment, the gay square dancers’ contingent was turning the corner at Fifty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue. I didn’t realize that it was Gay Pride Day and I’d never seen the march before. I had to watch. But my parents were ambivalent: “The sun is too bright on this street, it’s hurting my eyes; let’s walk over one block to Madison Avenue, okay?” my mom said.

“Okay, if you want to,” I said, “but I’ll catch up with you in half an hour, how does that sound?”

Okay, they said and departed. I stood on the corner and watched in utter amazement, as if I’d stumbled upon the cast and crew of The Wiz filming “A Brand New Day.” I was out to myself and to my family, but I still hadn’t come out in the world—as yet I didn’t know anyone in New York who was gay. This must be why I’m here, I thought, this is what I’ve been searching for, as hundreds of gay people streamed past in broad daylight. I had never felt so happy to be alone in a crowd.)

Little by little my appreciation for the actual film version of The Wiz crowded out my fantasy of what the film should be. It’s too bad, in a way, because I think if they had followed my instructions, they would have made a better film. I learned about the film in bits and pieces, through
advanced notices; feature stories on members of the cast; the new paperback edition of Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, which I bought not because I wanted to read the book but because it had (as the book jacket proclaimed) "32 full pages of exciting, colorful scenes from the spectacular hit movie plus Director Sidney Lumet's account of how Baum's Kansas fantasy was transformed into the Manhattan extravaganza of Universal's great new motion picture"; and a large souvenir book about the making of *The Wiz*. I even bought the November 1978 issue of *Ebony* with Diana Ross as Dorothy on the cover—the first time I ever purchased a "black" magazine, though I don't remember what I thought about the rest of the magazine. All that mattered to me, I suspect, was that I was getting what I craved: information about *The Wiz*!

My first major exposure to the film, before actually seeing it at the Berkshire Mall movie theater in December of 1978 (the same place I had seen *The Poseidon Adventure* six years earlier), was an article on the film that appeared in the October 1978 issue of *Life* magazine, the first issue since it had ceased publication some years before. I bought the magazine when my family was visiting Boston College for parents' weekend (my brother John was a freshman and my sister Suzanne a junior). I still associate that big, beautiful, brand new issue of *Life* with the leaves falling and the crisp air and Boston and the feeling that nothing was so exciting or so important to me as the arrival of *The Wiz*.

There was a photo of hot air balloons on the cover (the caption read, "Balloons are bustin' out all over!"), along with the headlines "'Godfather' Puzo's New Novel," "Spectacle in Rome: Pope John Paul I," and 'The Wiz'—Most Expensive Musical Ever." One of the most important differences, I learned from the article, between the actual film version of *The Wiz* and my fantasy version was that the real film looked abstract, two-dimensional, and surprisingly (unaccountably, at times) spare—for all the $28 million spent on the film, there was a capricious, offhand curvaceousness, an odd imbalance to Tony Walton's set designs that took some getting used to: bulbous where it might just have been sleek (for example, his bulging, yellow and black-and-white checkerboard fantasy taxis—why hadn't he simply used real New York taxis?); spare where I would have made it dense (his Oz skyline inexplicably consisted of five towers equidistant from each other, and there wasn't a person in sight—why hadn't he made it more like the Emerald City of the MGM movie, a bunch of sparkling green glass tubes of various widths and heights, or more like New York City itself, corridor after steamy corridor of great, tall buildings and apartment houses on top of each other with roof gardens and terraces with awnings and streets glutted with vehicles and pedestrians?); harmlessly childlike where I would have made
it more grownup and menacing (Evillene's costume, all reds, purples, and oranges, was "inspired by a dog's rubber toy" ["Golden" 60]—why hadn't it been, like Margaret Hamilton's costume in the 1939 film, feline, regal, and black?), all scattered and piecemeal, where I wanted solidity, conviction, symmetry.

Apparently, Walton had conceived of Oz as a catalog of references to famous New York City architectural landmarks (fair enough, I thought: after all, I had already begun planning my "Brand New Day" production number atop the World Trade Center). A series of photographs in Life showed what looked like an empty fountain and a highway ramp that led nowhere, transformed through the magic of special effects into an image of the beginning of the Yellow Brick Road (which emerged out of the dotted yellow line in the middle of the highway), now leading nowhere but to a stately skyline of five Chrysler buildings—one large, central tower, and two slightly smaller towers on either side of it—in back of which you could see the twists, turns, ups, and downs of a rollercoaster.

Hmm. I didn't get it. If this was the beginning of the Yellow Brick Road, then those Chrysler buildings couldn't already be the Emerald City (because the Emerald City is at the end of the Yellow Brick Road, not the beginning), although there was a dreamlike air about the image (something about the slightly blurred quality of the lines of the buildings and bridge) that reminded me of the famous shot in the 1939 film in which Dorothy and her friends first catch sight of the Emerald City rising up in the hazy distance out of the wide, flat plain.

Then, what was the rollercoaster all about? A caption in the article read, "I'm a Tin Man from Coney Island, so how 'bout slidin' some oil to me?" so I thought, okay, that must be the Coney Island rollercoaster, called the Cyclone, where Dorothy and the Scarecrow meet the Tin Man (the Cyclone—oh, hey, clever! Cyclone! I get it! But in the movie, I learned, Dorothy gets whisked to Oz not by a tornado but by a snowstorm, so what was the reference to the cyclone doing in the movie?).

I guess I thought it would have made better sense if Dorothy had lived in, say, the rural South, had dreamed she got sent off to, say, Brooklyn or Newark, and then went in search of Manhattan. One of the many things Pauline Kael disliked about the film was exactly this quality of dislocation: "Although Oz is meant to be Manhattan, it includes locations in Queens, the Bronx, and Brooklyn, and after Dorothy accumulates her traveling companions, they have to go over a couple of bridges to get to the Emerald City (the capital of Oz), in lower Manhattan. Geographically, we're thoroughly dislocated. When Dorothy first arrives in Oz, she's in a dark-bluish playground with graffiti-covered walls. The cyclone [sic] seems to have tossed her around the corner. When she's in
a rubble-strewn lot and we expect her to say 'Damn, it looks just like home,' she dithers, 'Where am I?'—as if she'd never seen a burned-out block in Harlem" ("Saint Dorothy" 138).

I was delighted by the inventive ways the movie was going to translate the identities of the characters in the stage version: the Tin Man, an amusement park/junkyard heap (as Life magazine explained, "the Tin Man appears beyond repair but manages to pull himself together—with odd cogs and gears . . . spinning tops [bow tie], rusted food and beer cans, scouring pads [hair] and a pie tin [hat]" ["Golden" 59]); the Lion, one of the lion statues at the New York Public Library; the Scarecrow, a trash bag slung over a TV antenna stuck in the cornfield-garden of a tenement apartment building (well, this translation didn't quite add up: why had the filmmakers not decided to transform the story fully into urban terms? How many cornfields could there be in New York City?). All in all, the movie characters made their Broadway counterparts look low-budget and amateurish by comparison.

The Witch's henchmen were now not flying monkeys but Hell's Angels–style monkeys on motorcycles, or rather monkeys-as-motorcycles (my friend James and I admitted to each other to being shocked and titillated by how scantily clad the Winged Monkeys were in the Broadway production—we remarked how they wore nothing more than g-strings, and we speculated that those may even have been made of fishnet). And the munchkins were playground kids sprung to life from graffiti walls. Now that was a good idea! These were gimmicks I probably couldn't have devised on my own, because although I loved New York, there were aspects of it I didn't pay attention to or know anything about.

But I was ready to learn. For example, the Poppies. In this film version, the field of poppies was a crowd of prostitutes, an idea I could never have dreamed up—although it's true, during my high school years New York had already come to mean "sex" to me. My parents' gift to me for my sixteenth birthday was a three-day weekend in New York, including tickets to two Broadway shows (They're Playing Our Song and Ain't Misbehavin') and, the pièce de résistance, tickets to see Liza Minnelli in concert at Carnegie Hall. We stayed in what was then (September 1979) called the City Squire Hotel (it's now a Sheraton), right in Times Square, which was an especially sexy place for me because during these years there was a billboard advertising The Gaiety, an all-male stripper club, right there across the street from the half-price tickets ("tkts") booth, just above the Howard Johnson's on the corner of Broadway and Forty-fifth Street. The billboard pictured a handsome young man, I forget in exactly what stage of undress, but I'm sure his torso was naked, and men's chests and stomachs never failed to make me horny and hard (I did nothing but ogle
and fantasize about my high school classmates’ naked torsos, and sometimes even their fully naked bodies, as they stepped out of the shower after gym class). The Gaiety man may also have been showing off those extra few sweet inches of tummy just above the pubic hair that drive me wild. So there he was, every time I walked out of the City Squire into the sizzling mid-September streets.

One night in our shared hotel room, the lights were out, Mom and Dad were in their bed, I was in mine, underneath the sheets and blankets, and I wanted to masturbate. I had to do it, and in my determination I figured, somehow, that I could do it without causing a disturbance or unduly calling Mom and Dad’s attention to me.

I started rubbing. Rubbing, rubbing. (This was before I discovered I could do it by hand—jerking off by frottage was a lot more conspicuous than a hand job would have been.) Rubbing, rubbing. Rubbing rubbing rubbing rubbing rubbing rubbing rubbing rubbing rubbing rubbing rubbing rubbing rubbiiiinnngggg——!!!

Mom’s voice, only a few feet away: “Hey, what’s going on over there? It sounds like you’re on a rollercoaster.”

Aside from the depiction of Oz as New York City, the other stunning difference, of course, between the film version of The Wiz and all previous versions of the story was that here Dorothy would be a twenty-four-year-old kindergarten teacher, not a little girl, and she would be played by Diana Ross. While I had to go through a period of adjusting to the particular ways in which Oz was designed in the film, I instinctively and immediately understood the logic of making Dorothy an adult. For one thing, I had learned years earlier to accept and even to cherish Barbra Streisand’s unorthodox portrayal of Dolly Levi, and in a way, there was little difference between a twenty-something woman (Barbra) playing a middle-aged widow (Dolly) and a thirty-something woman (Diana) playing a twenty-something schoolteacher (Dorothy). Plus, the risk of spending tens of millions of dollars on a Hollywood musical seemed to warrant an equivalent risk in characterization and casting. But most important, the idea of an adult Dorothy made sense to me given that the story now took place in New York City. To me, New York was an escape from the evils of my adolescence in Reading, and when I learned that Dorothy would now be an adult, for the first time in my life it occurred to me that adulthood, too, could be a kind of escape from childhood, that just being grown up meant that you had gotten out of the trap of being young, powerless, and provincial. In the movie version of The Wiz, then, and particularly in Diana Ross’s performance as Dorothy, those two things would finally merge in my consciousness: New York City and adulthood.
The opening few scenes in the film establish Dorothy's ambiguous predicament. It's holiday time, and family and friends are arriving for dinner. When Dorothy's cousin arrives with her newborn baby, all eyes are upon them. At dinner, Aunt Em sings a song about how much love exists within the family, and she addresses the song initially to her daughter with the new baby. She then walks into a bedroom, interrupts a young man and woman who have been kissing (it's not exactly clear who these young people are or what relation they bear to Aunt Em), and ushers them with a knowing smile into the dining room. When the couple make their belated appearance at dinner, the entire family gives them a hearty round of applause, as if everyone in the family knows and fully approves of what they'd been doing in the bedroom (if you had been caught doing something like that right before dinner in my house, you would have gotten in trouble).

During all of this, Dorothy is busy, like Cinderella, tending to people's hats and coats and putting the finishing touches on the meal. When Dorothy doesn't show any interest in a handsome young man who has come to the party, Em explains to him apologetically, "don't worry, Gale, she's just a little shy." And during Em's song at the dinner table, Dorothy looks confused and embarrassed when Em sings to her that one day she, Dorothy, will be "out in the world . . . on your own." Promptly she rushes into the kitchen to look after the dessert cake and to be alone for a few moments. She sings a song written expressly for the film, "Can I Go on Not Knowing?"; "Something tells me this is more than I can deal with." What can't Dorothy deal with? It seems to have something to do with the fact that nearly all the affection and attention in her family goes to the children who exhibit strong heterosexual tendencies (the young woman with the baby, the guy and the girl necking in the bedroom).

After the party is over, Em encourages Dorothy to take a job teaching high school, arguing that exposure to high school students would be good for Dorothy—"such an important time in their development," Em says. (In other words, Dorothy needs to be around people who are going through puberty?) But Dorothy insists that she is content teaching kindergarten. Em assures her, "I know gettin' out in that world ain't easy, even for Uncle Henry and me. But we'll always be here for you, Dorothy. And whatever your fears are, well, they'll be defeated just by facing up to 'em." (This wasn't all that different from the advice the Reverend Mother gave to Maria in The Sound of Music: "Maria, our abbey is not to be used as an escape. . . . You have a great capacity to love. What you must find out is how God wants you to spend your love. . . . Maria, these walls were not built to keep out problems. You have to face them. You have to live the life you were born to live." ) Dorothy's problem has
something to do with love: the love she feels for her family, the love they feel for her; but it's also a love that goes beyond family, a love she's afraid of. "Now you take that new job and find a place for you and Toto. It's time for you to make a home of your own," Em says firmly.

"A home of your own"—no wonder Dorothy was frightened. Aunt Em and Uncle Henry loved Dorothy, that was clear, but they were also always pushing her away. Although as an adolescent I wasn't at peace with my home surroundings, and although the older I got the more enamored of New York I became, the thought of actually being out on my own was beyond frightening—it was a thought almost inaccessible. I just couldn't picture it: where exactly would I live? How would I eat? What would I do? Who would I know? I didn't know how to answer any of these questions apart from my immediate family and the life I knew with them. I was caught between wanting, needing to get out and not knowing where to go or how to get there. Diana Ross's Dorothy seemed to be caught in a similar bind.

The solution that the film offers Dorothy is an interior one: she must understand that "home" is inside of her. As Glinda the Good Witch of the South (played by Lena Horne) explains toward the end of the film, "Home is a place we all must find, child. It's not just a place we eat or sleep. Home is knowing—knowing your mind, knowing your heart, knowing your courage. If we know ourselves, we're always home, anywhere." When the wizard (played by Richard Pryor), now discovered to be a fraud, asks Dorothy if there is anything she can do for him now that she's learned the secret of home, she answers him, "I don't know what's inside you. You'll have to find that out for yourself. But I do know one thing. You'll never find it in the safety of this room. I tried that all my life. It doesn't work. There's a whole world out there! And you'll have to begin by letting people see who you really are."

But in the end we never quite find out who Dorothy really is, nor do we know what path she now intends to follow or where it will lead her. Will she take that job teaching high school? Will she take a liking to Gale, the handsome young man Aunt Em is trying to fix her up with? Will she find the words to name her fears? And will she have the imagination to overcome them?

I saw The Wiz, finally, with my friend John (with whom I used to look at Playboy magazine, only it was pretty clear to me that we were both focusing mainly on the guys in the pictures. There was one spread that we spent a lot of time looking at which involved a farm scenario, and there was this really cute guy with his legs spread, and with a hard-on, leaning against a bail of hay inside a barn, waiting for a cowgirl or a milkmaid
or someone like that to come in to have sex with him). The act of seeing the film became almost as sacred as the film itself. I had already done so much thinking about the film before I saw it that, when the time finally came to see it, I didn’t just watch the movie—I watched myself watching it. I remember, as I sat with John waiting for the lights to go down, and then all throughout the film, being acutely conscious of the fact that I knew exactly what kind of socks I was wearing (white tube socks, each with two bands of purple around the calf).

My favorite scene in the film was and still is the one where Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, the Lion, and the Winkies sing “A Brand New Day” upon Evillene’s death (Dorothy melts her by activating the sprinkler system). Though the number didn’t end up looking anything like the one I had planned atop the World Trade Center, it nevertheless had the uplift and the sheer spectacle that always appealed to me in big, expensive Hollywood musicals. Tony Walton’s sweatshop set eventually took its place in my heart alongside the von Trapp foyer, the Harmonia Gardens Restaurant, and the SS Poseidon saloon: it was a vast, gable-roofed warehouse divided into three airy sections by rows of slender pillars and two long, low work tables (perfect for singing and dancing on top of). The place felt more like a church than a factory: at one end of the wide, central aisle sat Evillene’s throne, a huge and grotesque toilet seat mounted on a pedestal, which looked, on a much larger scale, like the baptismal font in my hometown church. And along three of the four walls loomed handsomely arched stained glass windows, filled with Gothic, cobwebbed leading and topped with exhaust fans in place of rose windows.

The number contains two movements. In the first, Dorothy leads the former slaves in a disco-dancing rendition of “A Brand New Day” (“We always knew that we’d be free somehow—free at last!” the Tin Man ad-libs). With their Muppet-like, heavily padded bodysuits—androgynous hodgepodge of dopey face masks, skirts, pantaloons, and aprons—the Winkies sing and dance and jump up and down for joy, but they never look anything more than earthbound, and that’s what I loved about this part of the number. The down-to-earth disco beat and the dancers’ thumping tread made me feel that their freedom was still very much of this world. Freedmen, they looked and moved pretty much the same as when they were enslaved. Everything looked the same—the only difference was that whereas before they were slaves, now they were free. Freedom had a clear, visible relation to what came before it, and that, somehow, was a deep comfort to me when I was fifteen.

The second movement of the number, however, felt different. At a certain point, the disco beat pauses, the actors freeze, and they begin
to unzip their thick, rubbery costumes from head to toe, revealing their lithesome bodies underneath, clad only in scant yellow undergarments. What follows is a series of closeups (anomalies in a scene made up mostly of long shots—one of several things Pauline Kael objected to about the film's handling of the musical numbers: "The big production numbers are free-form traffic jams. They're shot the way a fagged-out TV crew arriving at the scene of a riot in the streets might grab whatever it could from behind the police barriers. Was Lumet trying to get the whole block in every shot?" [142]): a young woman's face drinking in daylight as if for the first time in her life; a young man, his shaved head beading with sweat, eagerly pulling himself out of his suffocating overalls; a young woman looking in awe at her own freshly ungloved hand; another woman shrugging off her costume, her long hair falling in innumerable tight braids around her bare shoulders; a man's well-developed pectoral muscles flexing as he inches off his shirt. Suddenly one by one, their garments burst into flames and disappear. The Winkies resume their dance, infused now with classical balletic moves, leaping higher, doing somersaults, looking lighter and more airborne than ever before.

For some reason I didn't like this part of the number as much as the first. It seemed redundant to me that the Winkies, fully dressed, should sing and dance about how happy they were to be free, only to then peel off their clothing and go through the whole number again. Could it be that the sight of half-naked brown and black bodies, male and female, offered up as objects of unequivocal beauty, made me uncomfortable? Would I have felt differently if these had been white bodies? Had I not yet learned to appreciate the beauty of the unencumbered, athletic human body? (Well, I was having all kinds of fantasies about naked guys, including athletes, around the same time that I became mentally and emotionally involved with The Wiz. . . ) Was it that musicals and nudity—musicals and sexual liberation—just didn't go together in my waking imagination?

Or was my quarrel with the second part of the "Brand New Day" number not that it was "too black, too sexual," but that it wasn't black enough—not sexy enough? For one of the advantages, I felt, of the Winkies' bulging costumes, as opposed to their unadorned dancer's bodies, was that the costumes filled the screen and gave the first part of the number a much-needed look of density. This, after all, was the look I had in mind when I imagined the Brooklyn Bridge traffic jam scene for my personal film version of The Wiz—the look of thick-textured, gritty reality as I felt it on my skin every moment I spent in humid, midtown, lunch-hour Manhattan. I guess Pauline Kael lived in New York all year round, so traffic jams had lost their charm for her ("the big production numbers
are free-form traffic jams"). But she was right about Lumet’s mishandling of the musical numbers: he stands back, surrounding his actors with empty, unused space. The camera rarely interacts with them when they sing and dance, and what good is singing and dancing if you can’t feel it when you’re doing it, if you can’t feel it when you’re witnessing it? “Can’t you feel a brand-new day?” Not really. And that was the problem with the second movement of the liberation number. The slaves’ bodies had been gorgeously revealed, gloriously set free, but just at that moment the camera’s distance from them and the overwhelming size of the surrounding sweatshop set made them look shrunken, scrawny, a forest of undifferentiated arms and legs. Why had Lumet recoiled from the Winkies just when they had become most sensual, most free?

The number raised some other unsettling questions: Why didn’t the Scarecrow (played by Michael Jackson) peel off his cumbersome costume (you could hardly see nineteen-year-old Michael through all the face makeup, the peanut-butter-cup nose, the wig, the baggy shirt and pants, the floppy shoes) to reveal the agile, sweet-tempered young man underneath? For that matter, why didn’t the Tin Man (Nipsey Russell) and the Lion (Ted Ross) do the same? And what about Dorothy? We get no idea of what she thinks or how she feels about the seductive bodies all around her. Do they turn her on? Which ones does she desire—to have? To be? How many layers of clothing and inhibition and memory would she have to peel away before she arrived at some irreducible core of her sensual self?

A little more than a year after I saw The Wiz, my parents, my Grandmother Horrigan, and I went to New York to see a brand new musical (so new, the original cast album hadn’t even been released yet, and they hadn’t yet produced a souvenir booklet) about a nineteenth-century London barber who murders his customers, has them chopped up into little pieces and bakes them in pies and eats them (something like that), and it was called Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street. Stephen Sondheim wrote the music and lyrics, and I dimly recognized his name, though I had never to my knowledge heard his music, and I’d never seen any of his other shows. It was being called “a musical thriller,” not the usual “a new musical” or “a musical comedy,” and that seemed intriguing. I think my mom first became interested in Sweeney Todd because she’d heard or read an article saying that someone from Reading was in the chorus. Then one of the Reading papers ran a story on the soon-to-open show that focused in equal parts on the man from Reading and on the set, a gargantuan nineteenth-century factory (reminiscent of the sweatshop set in The Wiz) filling the entire stage of the Uris (now Gersh-
Theater and even spilling into the first seven or ten rows of seats. (The seats had to be removed to accommodate the massively elaborate set. I loved learning anecdotes like that: how nature had to be wrestled with in order for art to proceed, or how people became so crazed by art that they turned violent, like the original audiences for Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*—somewhere along the way I'd learned that the opening-night audience was so incensed by the music that they *ripped out the seats*!). Eventually, I would discover that everything that could be said of the set (it wasn't so much a filling of space on stage as it was the creation of stage space itself) could also be said analogously about Sondheim's ambitious, capacious, dissonant, mind-altering score.

That Saturday afternoon in New York, it was raining. We headed all the way downtown to the World Trade Center to see the view from the observation deck and then to have lunch at the Windows on the World restaurant. The observation deck and the restaurant were just fine, terrific even, but all I could think about (apart from anticipating *Sweeney Todd*) was seeing the plaza where the great Emerald City sequence in *The Wiz* was filmed. We walked across the plaza when we arrived, but I don't remember the experience all that well. I do remember, though, wondering why the plaza looked so different in real life than it did in the movie (figs. 19, 20). I assumed—wrongly, it turned out—that anything used for location shooting in *The Wiz*, as a number of New York City sites had been, would be instantly recognizable. The first unmistakable difference was the missing Z from the "OZ" sculpture in the middle of the big fountain on the plaza. In the film, you saw a huge bronze globe with, here and there, sections carved out of it and other pieces of it bulging forth as if it were a living organism (the O), and a zigzag structure (the Z) superimposed upon it. But now there was just the globular O. Then in the film there seemed to be neon rings around the fountain, but no such rings were now in sight. If these things were added to the fountain for the making of the film, why hadn't any of them been retained—especially the Z? It was a lesson, if I hadn't already learned it, in how magical Hollywood filmmaking really can be, but also, in how disappointing life usually is in comparison to the movies.

Our table at Windows on the World was also disappointing because I couldn't get close enough to the glass to look down squarely on the plaza and enjoy the same—almost the same—bird's-eye view of it as the camera sees in the film (we were separated several feet from the window by a golden railing, apparently for safety reasons). From our table I could just barely make out one corner of the plaza, but not enough to fully conjure up the missing pieces in my mind. Or rather, I could imagine the rest of the plaza, the parts I was prevented from seeing because...
of the angle of my vision, but now that I had gotten this close to the real thing, mental drawings of the space were a poor substitute. I was closer than ever to the real thing, but, ironically, the real thing was further away from the “truth”—the screen truth—than before I'd gone to the World Trade Center.

But I can't say that I was ultimately let down by my visit to the World Trade Center and to the site of the filming of *The Wiz*. As usual with *The Wiz*, and with all the movies that became my love objects during these years, I rallied my strength and adapted to each new stage in the unveiling of its mystery. From my fond fantasies of what *The Wiz* could be if only it dared, to the intractable reality of the actual film (I figured the film's success was also seriously damaged by its “G” rating—no important or respectable films, it seemed, were rated “G” anymore), to the even cruder reality of the stuff from which it was made, again and again I realigned my expectations and standards in the face of what the world gave back to me, and to tell the truth, I think I derived as much pleasure—maybe more pleasure—from that mental exercise than I would
have if I had just been left alone with my untouched fantasy or if my every wish had been fulfilled.

IV

A couple of summers ago my then boyfriend Joe and I decided to celebrate our three-month anniversary at the Windows on the World. It was a Saturday and we made a reservation for 11:00 P.M. that night (the earliest we could get). I needed a jacket and tie, so we spent the afternoon searching to buy me a new set of clothes. After looking in several stores but not finding anything that suited my taste, we decided I might as well splurge at Barneys. With the help of Joe and a very sweet, obviously gay clerk named Richard, I bought a crisp, light-weight woolen black jacket by Paul Smith; a pair of creamy bone-white Calvin Klein pants; a finely ribbed Georgio Armani dress shirt with thin blue, gray, black, and white stripes spaced close together, creating an overall light blue-grayish effect; and a tie by Ermenegildo Zegna featuring a collage of large black, gray, and blue vertical rectangles, as well as blue squares with little golden classical portals drawn inside, the rectangles and squares alike outlined in thin strips of golden white. It all worked together beautifully.

Windows on the World had recently been remodeled, and its new ar-
chitect had finally removed the brass rails that made me feel so cut off from the views outside when I first visited there in 1979 (but I still couldn't see any more of the plaza down below). The tables were now arranged, like seats in a theater, on platforms that rose higher the farther away you got from the windows, so that no matter where you were sitting you had a more-or-less unobstructed view. Our table was located in the center of the restaurant, along the central aisle running the length of the room, overlooking a sunken area of tables against the windows.

At the end of the night, still high from the wine and food and coffee, and from the joint we'd smoked before heading downtown, we asked for our check, and our waiter said, "There's no check; your dinner has been paid for by Mr. Lee, a member of the restaurant." Shocked and curious to know who this mysterious Good Witch "Mr. Lee" was, but hesitant to ask too many questions for fear of discovering that a mistake had been made, we said, "Please tell Mr. Lee we said thank you very much," and we said good night. After intense speculation, we decided the best hypothesis was that Mr. Lee was a wealthy older gay man who saw us together, thought we looked handsome (which we did!), figured we were in love and that tonight was a special occasion, and so wanted to give us a gift.

Around 1:30 in the morning, the last ones to leave the restaurant, Joe and I had the elevator to ourselves, and we kissed each other down all 107 flights. It was a magical night. And this time it was magic like you see in the movies. For a moment, I—we—felt at home in the world.