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Reinventing Reality--The Art and Life of Rouben Mamoulian

Mark J. Spergel

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Theatre and film director Rouben Mamoulian (1897-1987) is known chiefly as a technical innovator and stylist. His stage credits include the original Broadway productions of *Porgy and Bess* (1935), and *Oklahoma* (1943); his sixteen completed films include *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), *Golden Boy* (1939), *The Mark of Zorro* (1940), and *Silk Stockings* (1957).

In the theatre, Mamoulian integrated the various contributory arts of the American musical, transforming the near variety-show format of musicals into a dramatic unity of plot, character, music, and dance. He thus opened the stage to what would later be termed the "golden age" of the American book musical of the 1950s and 60s. In early sound films, Mamoulian restored mobility to the camera, rediscovered montage, redefined close-ups, split-screen, and dissolves, invented the voice-over, and was first to use multitrack sound recording. He directed the first live-action Technicolor film, *Becky Sharp* (1935).

Spergel introduces previously undisclosed personal documents about the Mamoulian that necessitate a re-examination of Mamoulian's own statements about his life. He shows that the central theme in Mamoulian's art and life, as he describes it?to overcome the world and embrace truth?extended to the telling of his own history. Mamoulian believed he could alter that history through stylized presentation, idealizing the truth, and thereby raising numerous questions about historiography in general.

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