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"The visual is essentially pornographic," writes Fredric Jameson, "films ask us to stare at the world as though it were a naked body." In *Signatures of the Visible*, one of America's most influential critics explores film and the culture surrounding it, interrogating the relationship between the imaginative screen world and the historical world onto which it is projected. By seeking the historical dimension of the visual, Jameson evaluates the power of the filmic form as a vehicle for the critique of culture and the diagnosis of social life. Jameson pursues this investigation through readings of politics, class, allegory, magic realism, and "the historical" in such films as *Diva*, *The Shining*, and *Dog Day Afternoon*. Throughout the book, he is concerned with the relationship between the achievements and limits of contemporary film theory itself, "a relationship," he argues, "which allows one to take the temperature of history itself."