

ENG 560: Visual culture from the Victorians to the Moderns



Professor Russell A. Potter

In this class, we will read selected contemporary theories of visual culture in the context of a survey of pictorial productions from the Victorian era through our own. We will begin with Robert Barker's invention of the Panorama in 1794, and the search for the "all-encompassing view" that followed. Navigating a passage through Victorian optical entertainments, from the magic lantern and the daguerreotype to the "moving panorama" and early film, from the Phantasmagoria of Robertson to the turn-of-the-century "Cinema of Attractions," we will explore ways of reading and theorizing these diverse visual texts and technologies. We will also examine their social function and value through the response of contemporary viewers, and their role in shaping the twentieth century as the 'age of ideology.'

It's a commonplace to remark that there are no 'unmediated' acts of seeing, and, following Lacan, that there is no prison but misprison. Yet for this very reason, the mode and method of "seeing" matters enormously, as there is no "untrained eye" available. Our notion, for instance of taking in a "panoramic view" began, not with an unaided eye upon some mountaintop, but inside a circular building built in London's Leicester Square by Robert Barker, where a cylindrical canvas of vast proportion and carefully calculated perspective, first tricked the public eye. The notion of a visual sense of "being there" has moved through many other technologies since then, from the traveling canvas of the "moving panorama," the subtle light-changes of Daguerre's Diorama, through to the "dissolving views" of lantern shows - all in their way foreshadowing the technology of the cinema. At the same time, these technologies traced a gradual circuit from public to private spectacle, within which each technical mode of seeing shrank, Alice-like, to the scale necessary to enter the domestic sphere. Home lanterns, stereoview cards, and miniature toy panoramas had, in some sense, a relationship similar to that between the DVD and the modern multiplex.

At the same time as we examine these technologies and their social contexts, we will attend with care to the training of the eye itself. From infinite perspective and the "God's eye" view, to the centrifugal gaze of Barthes's photographic "punctum," we will trace the movements of the visible with an 'eye' toward the ideological implications of the phrase "seeing is believing."

Books (required)

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*

Erkki Huhtamo, *Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles*

Books (recommended)

Denise Blake Oleksijczuk, *The First Panoramas*

Terry and Debbie Borton, *Before the Movies: American Magic Lantern Entertainment and the Nation's First Great Screen Artist, Joseph Boggs Beale*

Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*

Media objects and films:

Robert Barker, *Panorama of London from the Roof of the Albion Mills* (1792)
W.H. Mason's *Moving Panorama of Brighton* (1833)
Robert Burford, *Circular Key to the Panorama of Boothia* (1834)
Russell and Purrington's Grand Panorama of a Whaling Voyage 'Round the World (1848)
Grand Moving Panorama of Pilgrim's Progress (1850-51)
Garibaldi Panorama (1860)
Busy London (1900)
Panorama of Ealing from a Moving Tram (1901)
Edison: *Circular Panorama of Electric Tower* (1901)
Edison: *Panorama of the Moving Boardwalk* (1901)
George Méliès, *A Voyage to the Moon, The Conquest of the Pole, Joan of Arc* (1901-1914)
Canadian Car Ride (1908)
Bill Douglas, *Comrades* (1986) (excerpts)
Patrick Keillor, *Robinson in Space* (1997)

CLASS SCHEDULE

Class meets Mondays 4-6:50, Craig-Lee 203

Week I (Jan. 26) - Introduction to course. Theoretical basis for cultural studies generally, and visual culture in particular. Reading: Oetterman, from *The Panorama*, "The Origins of the Panorama" (pp. 5-47); introduction from Oleksijczuk, *The First Panoramas* (handout).

Week II (Feb. 2) - The Barker Rotunda: Early subjects and shows. Reading: Oetterman, "The Panorama in England" (pp. 99-141); Handbills and pictorial keys for early Barker panoramas; 1818 Spitzbergen Panorama (blog links); excerpts from Oleksijczuk, *The First Panoramas*.

Week III (Feb. 9) - New Technologies of Vision: The Panorama, the Diorama and the Moving Panorama. Reading: Oetterman: "Moving Panoramas: An Art Form for American Tastes" (pp. 323-344); Huhtamo, "The Moving Panorama: A Missing Medium" (pp. 1-26);

Week IV (Feb. 16): The Diorama. Reading: Huhtamo, Chapter 5: "Transformed by Light: The 'Diorama' and the Dioramas" (pp. 139-16); Oetterman, "Technical Features of the Panorama and its Offshoots" (pp. 49-97); In-class viewing: excerpt from the Bill Douglas film *Comrades*.

Week V (Feb. 23): The Moving Panorama Craze. Readings: Huhtamo, Chapter 6: "Panoromania" (pp. 169-213); Dickens, "Some Account of An Extraordinary Traveller" (blog link). Viewing: *Garibaldi Panorama, Russell & Purrington, Grand Moving Mirror of Pilgrim's Progress*.

Week VI (March 2) : Illuminated lectures and dissolving views: The Magic Lantern from the age of Robinson to the invention of the limelight. Viewing: Victorian Magic Lantern Shows (blog links); excerpts from *Before the Movies*; Huhtamo, Chapter 9, "Moving Panoramas and Magic Lanterns" (pp. 263-285).

SPRING BREAK

Week VII (March 16) - The Fiendish Mirror of Daguerre. "Self-Operating Processes of Fine Art" (1839); "The Pencil of Nature" (1839); "Probable Effects of the Discovery of Daguerre" (1840); Poe,

“The Daguerreotype” (1840) (all from the Daguerreian Society’s website); Benjamin, “A Little History of Photography” (handout).

Week VIII (March 23) – Reading the photograph. Text: Barthes: *Camera Lucida*

Week IX (March 30): From spectacle to drawing-room: later progress of the moving panorama and magic lantern show. Readings, “Instructions for Home Lanternists.” Viewing: PowerPoint of “Jacques’s Excursions Across the Atlantic” (a miniature Panorama from 1877); Huhtamo, chapter 10, “A Medium’s Final Fanfares” (pp. 287-329).

Week X (April 6) – Earliest cinema. The career of Louis Augustin le Prince. Reading: Article on Le Prince from the *Adventures in Cybersound* page. Viewings: “Leeds Bridge” (1888); “Roundhay Garden Scene” (1888); “Boy with Melodeon” (1888); early Edison films.

Week XI (April 12) – The Cinema of Attractions. Filmic panoramas, phantom rides, and ghostly views. Viewings: *Panorama of Ealing from a Moving Tram* (1901); Edison: *Circular Panorama of Electric Tower* (1901); Edison: *Panorama of the Moving Boardwalk* (1901) (all on WebCT). In-class viewing: Georges Méliès, “The Four Troublesome Heads” (1898), “A Fantastical Meal” (1900), “A Trip to the Moon” (1902). Reading: Kenneth MacGowan, *The Story Comes to the Screen: 1896-1906* (blog).

Week XII (April 19): “Virtual” realities: The rise of the “Actuality” film. Viewings: Edison actualities of the Boer War; Bioscope films “Beginning of a Skyscraper”; “Star Theatre”; “Drill by Providence Police” (1903); early newsreel footage. Reading: Auerbach, “Chasing Film Narrative: Repetition, Recursion, and the Body in Early Cinema.”

Week XIII (April 26): Early experiments with color, sound, and “special effects”: Hand-painted films, Dickson’s sound experiment, Urban’s Kinemacolor, Méliès’s multiple exposures, two-strip Technicolor. Viewings – COLOR: “Death of Marat” (Lumière, 1897); “Danse Serpentine” (Lumière, 1898); “Joan of Arc” (Méliès, 1900); “The Arab Sorcerer” (De Chomon, 1906); “Inauguration of the San Marco Campanile” (Charles Urban, 1912). SOUND: “Dickson Experimental Sound Film” (Edison, 1895) (WebCT); “Nursery Favorites” (Edison Kinetophone, 1913); “Snappy Tunes” (DeForest Phonofilm, 1923); “Governor Young Hails Greater Talkie Season” (1928).

Week XIV (May 4): “Seeing by Wireless” – Earliest television broadcasts, 1928-1936. John Logie Baird’s Phonovision recordings from 1928 (WebCT); the first Television Drama, “The Man With the Flower in His Mouth” (1930) (blog links).