THE PANORAMA
By Jorge Luis Marzo

During the whole of the 19th century, the industrial fusion between the new horizon of the empire, the reconstituting leisure belonging to a new age of work and scientific individualism gave rise to the appearance of an endless stream of artefacts and systems of visual reproduction which, while they were not entirely new, like almost everything else, they did mark an important dividing line with their antecedents: the symbiosis between the mechanisms and the effects were to form an indivisible whole, an authentic integrated system of representation which would lay the foundations for the appearance of the audiovisual models of the 20th century.

Among all these systems of representation, the Panorama constituted one of the main points of reference and confluence: illusionist pictorial exercises that could be traced all the way back to the Baroque[1] and its sense of illusionary space, which, together with new optical investigations coming from numerous scientific fields, were trying to give expression to a *zeitgeist*, a certain vision of modern time, space and the individual. The panorama, fundamentally defined as a mural painted on a circular space around a central platform on which spectators were situated, these being able to look in all directions and see the scene *as if* they were in the middle of it, represented "a medium of instruction on how to see, an optical simulator in which the extreme sensory impression, the sensational new experience, could be practiced over and over again [...] Panoramic paintings became a pattern for organizing visual experience."[2].

Throughout the whole of the 19th century the bourgeois and administrative classes, imbued with the literary and historical theories of Romanticism,

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[1] With respect to the change in the paradigm in the baroque space and its influence in mass visual culture, see Jorge Luis Marzo, "From Parallax to the Spectacle", *Architecture Parallax: SnackLunch*, (Alexander Pilis, ed.), Saint-Norbert Arts and Cultural Centre, Winnipeg, Canada, 1998, pp. 30-59

[2] Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama. History of a Mass Medium*, Zone Books, New York, 1997, 22

undertook a determined search for a communion between new models of vision, more in tune with the triumph of modern individualism, played out against a backdrop of rising nationalism and an especially complex perception of the world given that it was now acquired "in movement", thanks to the development of new methods of locomotion. All this would lead to a singular reading of the idea of "horizon", from the ideological point of view as much as from the cultural, artistic and technical perspective. The idea of voyage would lead to a new conceptual territory in which the new phenomena of tourism and leisure within Europe and the USA would be legitimised and, through it, a new colonial order was mythified, incarnated in nationalist wars in "strange" countries and in the exploration of Africa, while the mass media saw to it that they reached the general public with large doses of manipulation and exoticism. This new situation would largely be responsible for the success of systems of representation such as the panorama[3].

Voyages now extended to distances which were unheard of up until then, including space voyages with all the perceptive projection inherent in these[4]. Besides, the appearance of the steam boat[5], the aerostatic balloon and the

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[3] According to recent studies, approximately 100 million Europeans attended the dozens of panoramas which took place in the major continental capitals during the second half of the 19th century. See Oliver Grau, *Into the Belly of the Image*, Humboldt-University Press, Berlin, 1997

[4] Some of the most successful cycloramas in Coney Island, New York, referred to space travel, such as "A Trip to the Moon", 1902 and "A Trip to Mars by Aeroplane", 1911. In "A Trip to the Moon", 60 passengers were taken on a lunar voyage through a mixture of compressed air, images and audio which gave the real impression of being in a ship, even managing to land, with fantastic simulation of movement, according to the chronicles of the time. In Jorge Luis Marzo, "Illusion and Ideology in the Viewing Machine", *Singular Electrics* (Jorge L. Marzo and Tere Badia, eds.), Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona, 1998, 142

[5] In 1898, the optician Louis Régnault opened the "Mareorama" in Paris. A simulated voyage in ship, with cinema projections at the sides nearest the

train[6], all accelerated the rise of a "panoramic" perception of reality. Reality seen in movement, as a *continuum*, would now take on the character of a fleeting inner experience whose sensations had to be fixed in time and in the memory, and which the landscape panorama would translate. It is symptomatic to note how the panorama and the carrousel developed parallel to each other. Both systems responded to a new conception of the gaze in movement, of the capturing of the surrounding environment under the sign of an ephemeral and blurred sensation captured by a subject in movement. Nor is it coincidental that the first panorama was patented (although Robert Barker had actually designed

spectators, incorporating the idea of a mobile platform with compressed air added to produce the wind and waves, together with a hidden orchestra playing a symphony. In the prospectus for the attraction the intention was described as "creating an impact on all the senses at the same time and to obtain the most complete realist effect". In Marzo, "Illusion…", 142

[6] The *Hale's Tours* or voyages simulated in train, one of the most successful integrated panoramic systems from the beginning of the 20th century, were presented for the first time in the Universal Exposition of St. Louis, in 1904. The original project by William Keefe, which was later watered down somewhat, was as follows: "A train carriage without one of its sides and turning round in a circular tunnel, whose walls were an endless screen. On this, images taken from a train in movement would be projected."
According to Noël Burch, the illusion of the journey had to be reinforced by resorting to railway tracks unevenly marked, which would provoke vibrations and rocking motion, creating the type of sensation of great speed. In the same way, a series of bellows had to be installed in the tunnel, producing a strong current of air running through the carriage. We would also suppose that there would be appropriate sound effects–the roar of the engine, whistles, the squeaks and noise of the carriage, etc. […] Finally, the formula for which Hale's Tours would be known all around the world, for seven prosperous years, would only put into play one fixed "carriage" […] The dimensions of the screen and the distance between this and the projector are such that the image completely covers the field of vision of the occupants of the carriage and, therefore, is *life size*. In Noël Burch, *El tragaluz del infinito. Contribución a la genealogía del lenguaje cinematográfico*, Cátedra, Madrid, 1999, 53-54 (orig. ed., London, 1981)

it in 1787) by the North American Robert Fulton, who would invent the first steam boat in 1807. These new ways of seeing were directly correlated with new ways of perceiving space in movement. In less than a decade, the most important rivers in the East of the USA were already serviced by *steamboats*[7], while there was also the appearance of a new distinctive form of tourism characteristic to river cruisers.

The craze for alpinism and for air balloons[8], forms of romantic journeys within one's own continent, whose experience could not be reproduced simply by a decontextualized photograph, was to lead to the first investigations into panoramic images providing the sight with the most complete possible view –a bird's eye view – of this new horizon which was the world itself. The development of techniques, known as *geognosis* at the time, related to cartography, biology, geology and geography, which at the same time used optical devices such as binoculars or microscopes, would provide the necessary scientific basis for which the voyages would suppose a whole defined programme of institutional attitudes indelibly marking the idea of horizon and also of panorama.

At the same time, the success of landscape panoramas had a lot to do with the new trends in leisure and entertainment arising in the shadow of the industrial

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[7] Daniel R. Headrick, *Los instrumentos del imperio. Tecnología e imperialismo europeo en el siglo XIX*, Altaya, Barcelona, 1998, 22 (orig. ed., Oxford, 1981)

[8] In 1900, the French engineer Grimoin-Sanson presented the Cineorama, during the Universal Exposition in Paris. The fundamental principle was the following: During filming, ten devices were arranged in a circle, all working in strict synchronicity thanks to a mechanical device; for the projection, ten projectors equally arranged in the centre of a more or less spherical hall, restored the ten bands filmed in each "part". For the needs of the spectacle five views were taken, in five European cities, as well as the Sahara, adding two scenes taken in the basket of a balloon at taking off and later landing at Place de la Concorde, images to open and close the representation. In order to view the spectacle, whose images were also coloured, spectators got into the basket of a "balloon"; the projecting device was located in a cabin at their feet. In Burch, 56

revolution and the gradual regulation between working hours and leisure time necessary to optimise the productive capacity of the worker. The development of tourism during the 19th century, especially in the upper classes, would produce a domino effect in the rest of society which was soon taken advantage of by businessmen who set up panoramas as a form of cheap amusement for the masses.

On the other hand, the new postal services, new means of communication, such as the underwater cable, the telegraph or the photographic camera and the new industrial printing presses which allowed large editions, advertising, etc, were all to lead to a closing of the distance between the faraway horizon and the very heart of the city. In this respect, it is important to highlight the influence of exploration expeditions, most of which were carried out by "special correspondents" (sponsored by newspapers and publishers) which, thanks to these new technologies, provided snippets of information suitably sprinkled with heroic and romantic descriptions, and dressed up in a moral of the individual facing the hostility of the "other"[9]. These would end up as grandiose epic narratives for quick consumption and easy merchandising, both in the press as well as the panorama itself. The world was unfolded before the citizen without him ever having to embark on a journey. As a British observer commented in 1824, "Panoramas are among the happiest contrivances for saving time and expense… What cost a couple of hundred pounds a year a half century ago, now costs a shilling and a quarter of an hour."[10].

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[9] Often the very language itself of 19th century explorers when referring to the moral values to guide those African journeys, took on an interesting resemblance to the discourses appearing on the importance of the "point of view" within the panorama: "[…] the harmonious functioning of a team must not be achieved at the expense of the individual, and that the individual must remove the causes of conflict, not by the moral act of obeying a code but by attaining a *véritable point de vue* –that is, by regaining his sense of reality." In Johannes Fabian, *Out of Our Minds. Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa*, University of California Press, 2000, 26

[10] Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities. Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris*, University of California Press, 1998, 151

Anne Friedberg, echoing the idea of "mobile privatisation" proposed by Raymond Williams[11], has spoken of the "mobilised virtual gaze"[12] in order to describe the movement and visibility in the dioramas and panoramas of the 19th century, which occurred alongside "the emerging consumer culture of the first arcades and department stores, and on into the twentieth century mobilisation of the consumer through the imaginary landscapes of cinema, tourism, television, shopping malls, the internet."[13]

If there is one thing repeated in all the advertisements accompanying the establishment of panoramas in the European urban environment, it is the idea of immersion in space; we would no longer be dealing with a representation restricted to a given format, for example the renaissance recourse to perspective, but an authentic "battery of sensations". The spectator was totally surrounded by a stage, which often covered the 360° of the interior of the rotunda. We would therefore be faced with a representation of reality which went far beyond simulation, given that "visual mechanisms are perceived as substitutory, leading to the genesis of cinematic illusion"[14]. Furthermore, some of the critical commentaries written at that time made reference to the "fear" of losing the capacity to discern reality[15]. When, between 1909 and 1913, the German inventor Hans Goetze improved the panoramic film camera, he wrote:

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[11] Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, Schocken, New York, 1975, 26

[12] Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*, University of California Press, 1993, 2

[13] Allen Meek, "Benjamin, the televisual and the 'fascistic subject'", *Screening the Past* (Ina Bertrand and Peter Hughes, eds), La Trobe University, Victoria, Australia, no. 3, May 1998, 13

[14] Marzo, "Illusion…", 140

[15] "Panorama was criticised for psychological reasons. It was argued that illusion could lead to an incapacity to perceive reality." Grau, 34

"The cinematographic panorama can transport visitors to the traffic hub of a great metropolis, where vehicles and pedestrians converge from all sides; it will take them to busy airports, where they can follow the maneuvers of any type of aircraft; it will give them ring-side seats at bicycle, automobile, and horse races, at football games and sports events of all kinds; it will let them see hunts, parades, festivals, and exhibitions, and give them a "general's eye view" of troops on maneuvers. The moving panorama can whisk its visitors to the deck of a ship directly in the line of battle, to observe the maneuvers of the fleet. Spectators can travel on other ships to visit beautiful lakes, interesting canals, busy ports and shipyards, or survey lovely countryside as if from a gigantic open carriage..."[16]

The point of view, given the spectator's location in centre stage, as if he were part of the same, was one of the most important paradigmatic changes introduced by the panorama, the diorama[17] and other similar models. The spectator was no longer simply facing a stage, as if we were dealing with the distant and restricted stage of a theatre, but was now submerged in a hallucinatory universe with a high content of reality: "Transporting the spectator to the interior of the diegetic visual (and eventually sonorous) space, even penetrating it, was the greatest gesture around which the representation itself would be constituted"[18]. In this sense, it would seem to be clear that the panorama is an antecedent of all later experiments and techniques on the

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[16] Oettermann, 88

[17] Jonathan Crary pointed out that the circular panorama clearly broke with the localised point of view of perspective painting or the camera obscura, allowing the possibility of roaming throughout space, freely using the movement of eyes and head; nevertheless, with Daguerre's diorama in 1822, or the "multimedia diorama", the autonomy of the observer was done away with because the platform rotated mechanically, as well as using sudden changes of lighting: "The diorama was a machine of wheels in motion, one in which the observer was a component". In Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, MIT Press, 1990, 112-113

[18] Burch, 55

amplification of the cinematographic screen carried out in the 20th century and also a predecessor of the technology of Virtual Reality which has appeared in recent decades. This immersion in a para-reality would eventually converge with the very social model of the individual in its articulation of the public space/spectacle. The development of the idea of the "private" individual compared with the surrounding social theatre finds a perfect response in the panorama, where the spectator is isolated from his surrounding environment and contemplates a superimposed reality in silence, "enraptured": "The silent spectator who looks at nobody in particular, protected by his right to remain alone, could now be single-mindedly given over to his thoughts and his dreams; paralysed from a sociable point of view, his conscience can now float freely"[19]. The spectacle offered an individualised territory of perception, in the same way that the modern citizen of the 19th century was isolated from his equals in the train or in the tram while they observed the world from the window. According to Richard Sennett leisure is a form of silence, of that silence which is the prerequisite of the apprehension of reality: only the silent hear.[20]

Parallel to this new value conferred on the "interiorised" perception in this type of public representation, the political institutions, immerse in nationalist processes, saw in the panorama a channel for ideological transference, sufficiently convincing and spectacular as to reinforce concepts of "national communion". Thus, for example, a large part of the panoramas were used in international fairs celebrating imperial conquests, like some sort of display of technological power and political ideas. On the other hand, there also arose a necessity to change the themes and contents due to the changes in taste of the bourgeoisie: the allegorical and mythological figures only comprehensible for educated *connoisseurs*, gave way to representations of realist urban visions, political stories or battles, recognisable to the middle classes[21].

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[19] Richard Sennett, *El declive del hombre público*, Península, Barcelona, 1978, (orig. ed., New York, 1977), 269

[20] Joseph Pieper, "Leisure as Contemplation", *Mass Leisure*, (Eric Larrabee, Rolf Meyersohn, eds.), The Free Press, Illinois, 1958, 342

[21] Oettermann, 32

Both Napoleon and Lord Nelson, to give two examples of highly influential characters, instantly recognised the propaganda potential of the panorama. In 1810, Napoleon went to a panoramic rotunda in Paris. On leaving, he immediately commissioned eight panoramas of the most important battles won until that moment. Later in Germany, after the war with France in 1870–1871, one of the most famous panoramas of the time was created, "The Panorama of the Battle of Sedan", an authentic celebration of German nationalism.[22]

The majority of panoramas and cycloramas created in the USA also glorified the nationalist vision of war or dealt with natural disasters which the sensationalist press ensured were soon turned into spectacles.[23] In the cycloramas of Coney Island in New York, the great sensation was the war against Spain in Cuba, a spectacle openly sponsored by the press and the North American government

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[22] The "Panorama of the Battle of Sedan", created by the artist Anton von Werner, was a monumental circular construction with a screen of 1800 m^2. Opened in Berlin in 1883, this was presented as "the military birth of an empire". The commentary in the press highlighted the quasi-reality of the represented: "At first the visitor is startled, he is surprised, and naturally keeps a distance. He is afraid to collide with the horses and feels inclined to move backwards. The air seems to be filled with swirled-up dust and mist. Trumpets sound and drums beat. It is as if one were standing amidst the awful battle." In Grau, 48

[23] Some of the war panoramas and cycloramas were: "The Boer War", World Fair of Saint Louis, 1905; "The Fall of Adrianopolis", Coney Island, New York, 1913; "The Great Naval Spectatorium (War of Worlds)", Coney Island, 1904; "The Fall of Port Arthur in the Russo-Japanese War", Coney Island, 1907. The titles on disasters could be summarised in the following: "The Fire Cyclorama", Colombine Exhibition, Chicago, 1893; "The Galveston Flood", Coney Island, 1902; "The Volcanic Eruption of Mount Pelee in Martinique", Coney Island, 1902; "The Johnstown Flood", Coney Island, 1903; "The Fall of Pompey", Coney Island, 1904; or "The Earthquake of San Francisco", Coney Island, 1906. In Jeffrey Stanton, *Coney Island: Disasters, Spectacles and Cycloramas*, New York, 1997.

itself[24]. At the present moment in time countries such as North Korea, China, Iraq, the former Soviet Union or Egypt have created panoramas of great battles as a means of promoting national unity[25].

In fact, the development of the panorama is an acute reflection of a phenomenon which was to end up having a decisive effect of the western televisual apparatus, especially in our times. Because the panorama, the diorama, the cyclorama, etc, opened the doors for two, initially superimposed, tendencies before finally creating a divergent dynamic. On the one hand, the panorama introduced the idea of a space of collective perception through the installation of huge surrounding screens on which concrete scenes were reproduced, such as in the cinema or in the IMAX[26]. However, on the other hand, it prefigured an individualised perception of the technical apparatus, already being profiled in the successful appearance of the stereoscope at the midpoint of the 19th century and as happened later in Edison's kinetoscope (conceived for a personalised vision through use of the peep-show); a format that has also been adopted by television, Virtual Reality and domestic technology. In this

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[24] Marzo, "Illusion…", 149
At the same time, the first incursions into mass cinema in the USA happened in the following manner. The film "The Battle of Santiago" was made by Albert E. Smith and J. Stuart Blackton in 1899, under the express request of the media, who wove a strategy of public opinion with respect to the Hispano-North American war in Cuba. At the end of the day, Blackton would be one of the founders of Warner Bros.; see Erik Barnouw, *The Magician and the Cinema*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1981, 75

[25] Grau, 48

[26] IMAX, perhaps the present day format with closest links to the old panoramas, is only commercially viable because it is located in the large Science Museums or in large entertainment and leisure complexes. On their own, it has been demonstrated that they are not viable, which would indicate to some extent the change in perceptive register that the cinema has left on our visual consciousness.

sense, it is worth remembering the Panorama of the Kaiser (1883)[27], which was basically a collective peep–show anticipating a large part of the models of vision associated with the amusement arcades of the 20th century[28].

At the moment, it is possible to see renewed interest for the panorama and similar formats in cultural theory and artistic production[29]. This probably

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[27] With respect to the Panorama of the Kaiser (1883), see Oettermann, 229-234 and Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception. Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture*, MIT Press, 1999, 136-139

[28] Following is a list of systems and models of representation, belonging to each one of the tendencies:

Amplification of the physical space of vision
Panorama (Robert Barker), 1787; Diorama (Daguerre), 1822; Cinematograph (Lumière), 1895; Mareorama (Louis Régnault), 1898; Cosmorama-Cineorama (Raoul Grimoin-Sanson), 1900; Cyclorama, 1902; Hale's Tours (William Keefe), 1904; Cinemascope (Henri Chretien), 1919; Magnascope (Paramount), 1924; Polyvision (Abel Gance), 1926; Vitarama (Fred Waller), 1938; 3-D, 1952; Cinerama, 1956; Circorama (Walt Disney), 1958; Carrousel-Panorama, 1967; Omnimax, 1971; Dolby Stereo (Dolby Labs), 1976.

Reduction of the physical space of vision
Zoetrope (William G. Horner), 1834; Daguerreotype (Daguerre), 1835; Stereoscope, 1849; Kaiserpanorama (August Fuhrmann), 1883; Kinetoscope (T. A. Edison), 1894; Animatograph (Leopoldo Fregoli), 1910; Proto-experiments in television (Alexander Victor), 1910; First TV transmissions (RCA-BBC), 1930; Sensorama (Morton Heilig), 1958; Head-Mounted Display or virtual headset (Ivan Sutherland), 1968; Fusion of interfaces -screen, keyboard, mouse- (Douglas Engelbart), 1968.

[29] Some of the artists who have worked recently or are working at the present moment with direct or indirect references to panorama are Edmund Kuppel, Marin Kasimir, Jeff Wall, David Hoffos, Maureen Connor, Mira Bernabeu or Komar & Melamid.

responds to a growing need to analyse the original blueprints from which we cut the televisual patterns which we use today and which conform our most direct horizon. The appearance of Virtual Reality and computer simulation, practically omnipresent in current entertainment and information technology, is leading to an analysis of the "illusionist" character of the techniques and technologies of representation which are given to us (or which we have given ourselves), and of the importance of the very historical development of the means in the process of social consensus that has been generated around them. Modern pre-technology represented by the panorama partly supposes the original skin in which we have built the current apparatuses of vision and reproduction. The panorama is still a powerful reference point for the understanding of the role of the spectator in a culture of spectacle, defined by the idea of immersion and by the accentuated presence of the institutional discourse in the closely-woven fabric of televisual reality.

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