Nineteenth-Century Visual Technologies in Contemporary Practices

Deadline: Mar 1, 2022

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We invite proposals for a collection of essays on the ways in which contemporary art and heritage practices have been engaging with forms of nineteenth-century immersive spectacle. The parallels between the technological transformation of our own time and the experiments of the early nineteenth century have long been noted and the origins of twenty-first-century immersive experiences are arguably traceable to that earlier period. In recent years, artists have revisited nineteenth-century visual presentations such as the 360-degree panorama, while museums and heritage sites have experimented with various types of virtual environments as a way to bring the past alive for modern audiences. We welcome contributions that explore and interrogate the ways in which these interventions reinterpret nineteenth-century visual technologies. The edited volume will appear as a special issue of the online peer-reviewed journal *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* (https://19.bbk.ac.uk).

We are interested in testing the ways in which nineteenth-century spectacle has come to be understood. Immersive entertainments of this period have long been associated with notions of passive spectatorship and what Jonathan Crary refers to as the 'private chamber' mode of isolated, absorbed engagement, which he sees as characteristic of modern subjectivity. Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) has been particularly influential in readings that posit nineteenth-century optical entertainments as offering seductive yet dangerous illusions, with Maurice Samuels, for instance, arguing that the spectacular mode of presenting history 'promoted passivity and alienation'. Against this, recent accounts such as that by Alice Barnaby in her book *Light Touches: Cultural Practices of Illumination 1800 – 1900* stress qualities of 'agency, play and experimentation' as inherent to nineteenth-century visuality, while Lynn Voskuil has argued for the communal nature of nineteenth-century spectatorship. Victor Burgin has long drawn attention to the productive excesses of a panoramic subject position and the possibility of an agency that can resist hegemonic mechanisms of representation.

We invite papers that investigate the renewed relevance of nineteenth-century immersive spectacles in contemporary artistic and museological practices: why do such highly-curated embodied experiences of the world in flux find a new relevance in contemporary times? What varieties of subjectivities are articulated for contemporary viewers in these encounters? How do such new sites of memory—lieu de mémoire as conceptualized by the French historian Pierre Nora—thematize the contemporary against the background of ideologies of race, alterity and cultural heritage?

We invite interested authors to send their 300-word abstract and a short 100-word biography to the editors Patricia Smyth (P.M.Smyth@warwick.ac.uk) and Gülru Çakmak (gcakmak@umass.edu) by 1 March 2022. Accepted essays (c. 7000 words) will be due to the editors on 1 October

2022. Since the papers will be published in an online platform, the editors are open to suggestions for incorporating multi-media resources to the published papers such as video, sound file, animation, etc.

Reference:
CFP: Nineteenth-Century Visual Technologies in Contemporary Practices. In: ArtHist.net, Jan 11, 2022 (accessed Oct 6, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/35647>.