Panoramic Perspectives on Digital Images (Marburg, 17–18 Jul 25)

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In the 19th century, the panorama became one of the first image-based mass media. Huge paintings of cities, landscapes, and battle scenes were mounted on cylindrical walls to be viewed from observation platforms. When visitors entered a panorama, they were immersed in a pictorial environment. However, the immense image could not be grasped at a glance, but had to be experienced sequentially, with the beholders moving around the physical space of the platform and directing their gaze to specific sections of the pictorial space.
While panoramas in the traditional sense fell out of fashion at the end of the 19th century, the dispositif was taken up in a modified form in more recent media, not the least in digital image culture (Streitberger 2013). The virtual or digital 'panorama' made up of digital photographic images that are digitally stitched together presents itself as a contemporary successor. However, users do not move in physical space to experience an immense picture in its entirety, but instead move the digital image itself. Google Street View might be considered the ultimate example of the digital panorama but differs from this dispositif by allowing users to wander through the photo-based environment, thereby constantly shifting their standpoint. Being able to roam around the panoramic space, zoom in on details, and look at people, their homes, and personal data concerns matters of privacy, and Google Street View is often criticized for being a surveillance apparatus (Wolthers 2016). In fact, Google Street View is actively used by police authorities to convict criminals, as recently demonstrated in a murder case in Spain. While lacking an interactive dimension, it is no coincidence that the original panorama dispositif and its total view was a major inspiration for Bentham's panopticon (Foucault 1975), further supporting theorizing it in the digital realm as a surveillance technology in the case of moving and even live images of 360° videos. In this context, surveillants may control the virtual camera as a means of observation. Such 360° videos are also used in documentary practice to establish an interactive view of events, including remotely, in situations too dangerous for physically present human observers, for example in case of an earthquake in Haiti (Rothöhler 2014).
In a similar vein, players of three-dimensional video games can move their avatars around and operate the virtual camera to explore vast virtual environments. The virtual camera established itself in the mid 1990 with the popularization of 3D video games and became synonymous with terms such as "mobility" and "maneuverability" (Krichane 2021). While not media-specific to video games, the virtual camera can be considered typical for this digital medium (Schröter 2003). As mentioned above, Google Street View affords a virtual camera that simulates three-dimensional perception and movement in a two-dimensional image space that is stitched together from billions of different digital photographs (Hoelzl/Marie 2015; Siegel 2018). Video games offer by con-

trast not an image space but a space image that simulates motion as players can look and move around 3D rendered image objects (Günzel 2008). Hence, 3D video games are not just still or moving images, e.g. single frames or cut scenes, but moveable images that are rendered in real-time to be maneuverable by the players. Virtual reality offers even more immersive image environments by bringing the screen closer to the eyes of users and matching their perspective with that of the virtual camera.

As immersive pictorial environments digital panoramas can become sites of photographic practices. They invite users to let their gaze wonder like in 'real life' environments and then frame and fix their perceptions by screenshotting, which is frequently likened to taking photographs (Frosh 2023). Taking such pictures either in video games or Google Street View is quite common as a form of reducing the complexity of the environments into something manageable and temporally stable. Such screenshots can subsequently be shared on social media and displayed as wallpapers on widescreen monitors, which are a new panoramic technology.

The conference wants to consider the panorama not so much as a (historical) phenomenon, but as a tool to understand the movable images of digital media cultures. We invite researchers to join us in exploring the panorama as a concept for theorizing and analyzing digital images. Therefore, we welcome contributions that open panoramic perspectives on digital imagery as briefly outlined above. The panorama allows us to view digital media such as video games, VR, screenshots, and the like in a new light of continuous imagery that can be explored by navigating through virtual environments and interacting with movable images. Contributions are possible but not limited to the panoramic aspects of the following digital media and their imagery:

• The sequence image of digital panoramas and panoramic camera modes
• The operative image of Google Street View
• The moving image of 360° videos
• The space image of 3D video games
• The immersive image of panoramic views in virtual reality
• The still image of scenic screenshots taken in virtual environments
• The screen image of wide screen monitors and projectors

The conference is organized by Prof Jens Ruchatz and Dr Kevin Pauliks as part of the research project Capturing Movable Images and will take place at the University of Marburg on July 17–18, 2025. The conference will be held in English and German. Train travel and accommodation costs are covered for participants. Flights will be subsidized if necessary. Please send us your abstract of approximately 300 to 500 words and a short CV to pauliks[at]staff.uni-marburg.de by February 17, 2025.

Reference:

CFP: Panoramic Perspectives on Digital Images (Marburg, 17-18 Jul 25). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 15, 2025 (accessed Jul 11, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/43708>.