The Diorama Effect: Gas, Politics, and Opera in the 1825 Paris Diorama

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Abstract

The diorama on the rue Sanson in Paris (1822–39) created a blended image by rotating the auditorium between two tableaux, each painted back and front and illuminated with colored light to create a sense of animation. What I call the “diorama effect” is the way the diorama used projection and reflection—both literally and figuratively—to create the illusion of places and characters known to the audience while simultaneously dissolving these references, seemingly into thin air. The 1825 diorama, the example in this essay, featured a tableau by Charles-Marie Bouton depicting a view of Paris and its new gas meter, and a second tableau by Louis Daguerre presenting a colonnade that disappears. To understand the way that these tableaux participated in then-contemporary debates on gaslight each is read in relation to narratives from the time—notably, the program notes for the diorama, the popular fairy tale of Aladdin and the magic lamp, and public debates in which the gas lamp figures as a political symbol of insurrection or, conversely, as a romantic symbol of exoticism.

Résumé

Le diorama de la rue Sanson à Paris (1822-1839) créait son image composite en faisant tourner le public entre deux tableaux peints des deux côtés et éclairés par une lumière colorée dont la manipulation produisait un effet d’animation. Ce que j’appelle « l’effet diorama » est la façon dont le diorama utilisait la réflexion et la projection (au sens propre et au sens figuré) afin de créer l’illusion de lieux et de personnages connus du public tout en dissolvant ces références, comme si elles s’étaient volatilisées. Le diorama de 1825, l’exemple dans cet essai, présentait une vue de Paris, avec son nouveau gazomètre, réalisée par Charles-Marie Bouton ainsi que l’image d’une colonnade disparaissant dans l’atmosphère, par Louis Daguerre. Afin de comprendre la façon dont ces tableaux ont participé aux débats contemporains au sujet du l’éclairage au gaz, chacun est interprété par rapport aux récits de l’époque et notamment aux notices explicatives du diorama et au conte populaire d’Aladin ou la Lampe merveilleuse, mais aussi aux débats publics où le réverbère fonctionne comme symbole politique d’insurrection ou, à l'inverse, comme symbole romantique de l’exotisme.

In the midst of all this crowd of animation, there is a stillness, which is the stillness of the grave. The idea produced is of a region—a world—deserted; of living nature at an end; of the last day past and over.

– The Times, London, October 23, 1823[2]

The End of an Era

1

On January 7, 1839, François Arago announced the daguerreotype process before the Académie des sciences.[3] The inventor of the daguerreotype, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, was known at the time as the co-inventor of a paint and light spectacle located on the right bank of Paris; the spectacle, in a strange coincidence, was devastated by a fire just two months after Arago's announcement. [4] As tragic as this loss must have been, it was an opportune moment for the diorama to perish. For after the public decree of Daguerre's photographic invention, and his subsequent publication on the topic (which involved revealing the technical processes involved in the production of the diorama as well), he would receive a lifetime pension from the French state and have no need for the diorama, which had been losing money for some time.[5] As well as posing an economic burden to Daguerre, the diorama posed an even more dangerous threat: it linked photography to the era of spectacles and, by the associations imbedded in its tableaux, to painting, opera, and literature. If the diorama had not burned down, photography, touted as an utterly unique inscription of reality, might have appeared to be simply another spectacle.

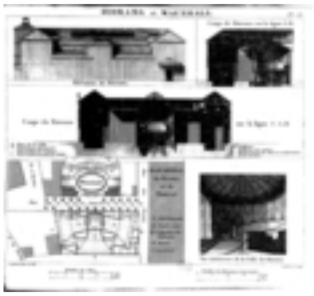
2

The diorama created dynamic tension by employing both reflected and projected light while mining the cultural associations imbedded in these techniques. In terms of its content, the diorama reflected a realistically rendered site or view while simultaneously projecting an imaginary location. In terms of technique, its blended scenes were enabled by advances in lighting, optics, and chemistry—advances that would eventually lead to the development of photography. But although the diorama used these technical advances to create its uncanny effects it did so in the language of paint, installation, and staging. This distancing in terms of medium ultimately meant that the newest technical developments were dramatized in a figural as well as a literal sense. For while the diorama used the chemistry of additive and subtractive color, it also illustrated the idea of chemistry by using atmospheric tricks that made the image seem to appear and disappear as if into a chemical vapor (and the diorama was later called a "chemical view"); while it manipulated the natural light cast on the painting, it also presented images that symbolized the idea of light with lamps and lanterns; and while it employed optics by using the painted surface as both a screen and filter, it was its heightened perspective, sense of depth, and trompe l'oeil details that coaxed the audience into believing that it was peering at the world as if through a lens. By representing chemistry, light, and optics, the diorama was able to participate in the current dialogue among artists, scientists, and politicians about the risks and benefits of progress. Photography, by contrast, employed chemistry, light, and optics to fix an image focused though a camera lens onto a light-sensitive surface, thus proving its efficacy through sheer example.

3

The 1825 diorama is an exemplary case, as it rotated its audience between two tableaux—one featuring a view of Paris with its new gas meter, or gazomètre, as it was called in French, and the other featuring gaseous effects with implicit references to theater, politics, and social critique. While it used reflected and projected light to blend these two tableaux, this diorama, it is argued, presented its audience with a parallax view of gaslight and, by extension, two aesthetic regimes in early-nineteenth-century France—the romantic notion of art as a projection of an inner landscape and the earlier notion of art as reflection of reality, as mimesis. This essay examines the cultural references imbedded in the 1825 Paris diorama, reading its program notes in relation to related cultural artifacts from the Restoration period in Paris—including the fairy tale of Aladdin and the magic lamp (an opera that Daguerre created the sets for), public debates on the dangers of gaslight, and the political discourse that placed the lantern as a symbol of political insurrection and, alternately, the ancien régime—in order to demonstrate the cultural resonance of projection and reflection.

Fig. 1



Architectural plans of the diorama, Alexis Donnet, Orgiazzi and Jacques Auguste Kaufmann, “Diorama et Wauxhall,” Architectonographie des théâtres de Paris, Paris, Lacroix et Baudry, 1837, planche 23, available online: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k86612q.r=.langFR (accessed on August 27, 2015).

I. The Paris Diorama: A Two-Sided Thing

4

A diverse crowd frequented the Paris diorama, and its initial location on the rue Sanson in Paris mirrored this “midway” social position. From 1822 to 1839 it was located near the boulevard du crime—today place de la République—on the right bank of Paris. Its founders, Daguerre and painter Charles-Marie Bouton, contracted the architect Pierre Châtelain to construct the diorama directly across from Wauxhall (a pleasure garden full of “delights,” some reputable, others less so), which was surrounded by melodramas and circus acts to the east and official theaters and opera houses to the west.[6] The entry price for the diorama was also midway—a bit high for a spectacle but inexpensive when compared to the Opéra de Paris—at 3 francs for the box and 2.50 francs for general seating. The auditorium sat approximately 350 viewers, and the spectacle lasted approximately half an hour.[7] An immediate success, the diorama’s painted tableaux were quickly exported to similarly constructed auditoriums in London, and soon after to other major European cities.[8]

5

The diorama’s midway social position in Restoration Paris was underscored by the architecture of the building and the unique apparatus within it. The diorama building featured a long, dark tunnel that opened onto a large viewing rotunda featuring a painted tableau illuminated with natural light that originated from skylights cut into the ceiling. Assistants manipulated pulleys attached to gels and slats to alter the light on the front and back of the tableau. The image was carefully painted so that the light fore and aft would turn the tableau into a filter and screen simultaneously. Through such techniques the scene seemed to shimmer and, when perfected, transform.[9] There were two viewing chambers, each featuring a tableau, and a rotating floor that transported the audience between the two chambers (a third chamber was used for storage). If all of these effects added up to the sensation of going somewhere while sitting still, the journey was not smooth. Rather, the viewing was more on the order of a circus ride and, as one reviewer noted, “You could not, by any possible sketch of fancy, or abstraction of mind, imagine yourself transported from one [tableau] to the other.”[10] Using these techniques the diorama created the impression that the scenes it depicted were in the process of becoming something else. The diorama presented the face of change.

6

Cultural historian Jonathan Crary notes that the innovative period of visual spectacles (of which the diorama was but one) ushered in the age of the modern observer.[11] He writes that, like the kaleidoscope, phenakistiscope, and zootrope, the diorama was a “machine of wheels in motion, and of which the observer was an inflexible component.”[12] As such, the diorama was part of the “uprooting of vision” from a stable referent to subjective vision.[13] The diorama, in Crary's view, is a transitional device that leads from the optical regime supported by the camera obscura and its "timeless incorporeal order"[14] to that of the modern observer—for in the diorama the viewer is immobilized by the darkened auditorium and its rotating floor and simultaneously afforded a corporeal and mobile relationship with the image-apparatus, as in modern photography. For Crary, the two modes of optical engagement represented by the camera obscura and modern photography are incompatible, and he writes that "the camera obscura must be understood as part of a larger organization of representation, cognition, and subjectivity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries…which is fundamentally discontinuous with a nineteenth-century observer." From here his conclusion follows naturally: "Thus I contend that the camera obscura and photography, as historical objects, are radically dissimilar."[15] Upon close study, however, this sweeping schema has productive exceptions. In the present study, I find that the diorama did not operate as a transitional device between two radically dissimilar optical models. Instead, I find that it combined various elements from each, and alluded, as well, to aesthetic debates at the time, and is consequently indicative of a third representational system.

7

Thought in terms of aesthetics, the diorama incorporated the two reigning artistic models of its time, what M. H. Abrams famously calls the mirror (neoclassical art's reflection of an ideal reality) and the lamp (Romantic art's projection of the artist's imagination). Abrams notes, however, that in the early nineteenth century the lamp and the mirror were not mutually exclusive aesthetic regimes, and poets sought a way to reconcile the emerging theory of imagination without jettisoning the interest in reflecting nature.[16] Garrett Green contributes to Abrams's schema by suggesting the lens as an apt metaphor for a third aesthetic regime that combines both mirror and lamp, both reflecting and projecting. Although the metaphor of the lens usefully links aesthetics to optics, the diorama is a better metaphor—for in the diorama light was literally reflected and projected simultaneously. Furthermore, with its large trompe l'oeil paintings of ruins, landscapes, and views, the diorama reflected an ideal reality as well (and, as Abrams argues, mirroring is as much of an ideal reality as it is of the natural world). What I call the "diorama effect" is the way that the diorama employed projection and reflection to create the illusion of places known to the audience while simultaneously transforming these sites into ghostly presences, thereby creating the sense that, as the reviewer in the epigraph to this essay notes, a world was in the process of passing away.

8

The content and the apparatus operated together in the diorama to create images that enraptured a wide range of viewers—including Ultra-Royalists, Bonapartists, and liberals—during the French Restoration period in which it flourished.[17] At this time, the markers of memory had been destroyed during the revolution even while the memories attached to them persisted. Monuments came to fill in the empty placeholders where living memories had once existed and thus, as Pierre Nora puts it, les lieux de mémoire, sites of memory, developed "because there are no longer milieux de memoire, real environments of memory."[18] The diorama provided a way to integrate memories that lacked narrative cohesion, thus dramatizing the destruction but also the mnemonic persistence of religious and royal artifacts. In this sense, the diorama created a necessarily false environment to provide a context for real sentiments that lacked an object. And it is in this context that Charles Baudelaire's curious statement that the diorama is "infinitely closer to reality" than realistically rendered landscapes must be understood. For Baudelaire, a "realistic" work of art produces an affective and imaginative experience of the emerging modern landscape, as opposed to a literal depiction of what is or was.[19]

9

That Daguerre was a set designer for the Académie royale de musique and the Théâtre de l'Ambigu-Comique and Bouton a panorama painter is significant. For, given its emphasis on illusory sites, the diorama might best be described as a decor without singers or actors. Indeed, the diorama functioned similarly to opera decor, which, as historian Jane Fulcher notes, was the most political element of the opera during the Restoration—a period marked by censorship and limited expression. Consequently, in a period that pitted liberals and republicans against the clergy, royalists, and monarchists, political speech went underground and emerged in heated debates over decor.[20] Participating in this dialogue, the diorama tableaux featured charged sites that can be divided into three categories—political, natural, and urban—that often overlapped, thus making the scenes even more dramatic. For example, in

1823–24 the diorama featured Holyrood Chapel in Edinburgh, Scotland, the hideout for the future King Charles X, which was also featured in works by the popular novelist Walter Scott. In this way the diorama combined the penchant for nostalgia and medieval architecture with the politics of the Restoration.[21]

10

The diorama program notes operated in this social and political context. Although the tableaux from the rue Sanson diorama have not survived (and the neighborhood was razed during the Haussmann period), the program notes that accompanied the spectacles provide an important description of each tableau and were most likely an integral component of the diorama experience. Each viewing was accompanied by a printed text of approximately twenty to thirty pages, which included a complete description of each tableau.[22] These anonymous "novelettes"—part promotion, part travel guide, part editorial—created an overt historical narrative, while references to novels, newspapers, theater, ballet, and opera—as well as the widely circulated opera libretti and livrets de mise en scène—would have informed the narrative intertextually.[23]

Fig. 2

NOTICE

ES TABLEAUX

AU DIORAMA.

VUE

Opening page to the 1825 Notice explicative des tableaux exposés au diorama, Paris, Imprimerie de Carpentier-Mericourt.

II. The Gazomètre in a Vue pris aux environs de Paris

11

The program notes suggest that while all of the diorama viewings used reflected and projected light to illuminate two sides of each tableau, and thus animate the scene, the 1825 diorama thematized light. What was the context for this coincidence? In 1825, oil lamps were in the process of being replaced with gas lamps. The oil lamp was associated with autonomy in both a positive and a negative sense: it created a sense of privacy in the domestic realm but was associated with the loss of autonomy when used for surveillance in the streets. And, as cultural historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch notes, the oil reflector lamps, the lanterne à réverbère, were used during the Terror to hang those who used these instruments to survey the population. The gas lamp, on the other hand, was associated with an emerging network that linked the private and public spheres by extending the privacy of the home to the streets. [24] Thus, in 1825 gaslight would have been associated with what we now call the industrial complex, which included the development of hydrogen gas, the 1823 construction of the Paris gazomètre, and the gas lines that fed the pressurized gas to individual homes.[25] Thus, to rebel against power in the age of gaslight one would have had to shut down the gasworks.[26]

12

Imagine: it is 1825, and a viewer enters the rue Sanson diorama, pays for a ticket, and walks down a dark hallway opening onto a large auditorium. Scanning the room, the viewer notices that the auditorium is outfitted sumptuously, and he promptly takes a seat. The lights dim, the curtain rises, and the audience falls silent. A large illuminated tableau depicts a country path with Paris in the distance. The scene shimmers as light moves ever so slightly fore and aft, creating a mesmerizing illusion of incremental movement alongside astonishing detail. The viewer feels as if he is situated on the path while his eye is drawn to the background, and the scene is experienced like a journey from the countryside to the villages in the valley, and from there to Paris and its monuments, amongst which sits the gazomètre. After ten minutes of silence, punctuated by gasps and sighs, assistants beneath the floor rotate the audience to a second tableau. The viewer suddenly finds himself transported in time and space to a colonnade as a fog-like atmosphere rolls in, ultimately covering the entire scene under a dense blanket, and then withdraws to reveal the colonnade once more and the valley behind.

13

As the program notes suggest, Bouton's Vue pris aux environs de Paris opens onto the summit of country path with the city far in the distance. The notes state:

> Le premier objet qui frappe nos regards sur le premier plan du paysage qu'a représenté M. Bouton est le chemin au haut duquel nous sommes sensés placés.
>
> Il aboutit, part l'une de ses extrémités, au bord de la Seine, un peu au-dessous de la verrerie de Sèvres, et par l'autre à la route qui mène de l'avenue du château de Meudon aux Mou'ineaux.[27]

14

In one direction the path leads, as the notes tell us, to Sèvres—a village known for its porcelain factory—while in the opposite direction it leads to the Château de Meudon—associated with royalty and, later, Napoleon. In sum, this tableau confronts the viewer with a choice: shall we go to Paris by way of the hand or by way of the crown? Although the path's two directions are not quite so stark—both share the bond of tradition, and Sèvres was in fact a manufacture royale—a barely visible marker offers the viewer another route to Paris, and the program notes direct the viewer's eye toward it.

> La maison à demi découverte dont nous voyons seulement le faîte, est l'habitation de M. Lerebours, opticien de la marine. Un petit bois, placé sur le revers du chemin des vignes, borne cette demeure, l'une des plus agréables des environs de Paris par sa situation pittoresque.[28]

The viewer is beckoned in this direction by a rooftop, and from the notes it can be inferred that this rooftop belongs to the country home of optician and lens maker Noël-Jean Lerebours. Lerebours's adopted son, Noël-Marie-Paymal Lerebours, would become a prominent lens maker in his own right, eventually constructing a lens for Daguerre's daguerreotype camera, and later publishing his own daguerreotypes of notable architecture and monuments.[29] Although the optician's home foreshadows the "path" that France would eventually take—photography—it would have been an unconventional element to include in a landscape painting at the time. For example, when this tableau traveled to London, a critic complained:

> We wish the high light on the small house in the fore-ground had been transferred to the adjoining trees, to lessen the paramount attention so inferior an object derives from it, and by which the Chateau of St. Cloud, the City of Paris, and all the intermediate rich and extensive scene of hills, valleys, villages, open glades, and leafy refreshment are made to look too much as accessories and mere background.[30]

The optician's home dominates the scene to the extent that, according to this reviewer, the château, the city of Paris, and all the valleys, villages, and open glades serve merely as background to it.

15

The notes will ultimately guide the viewer's eye in the direction indicated by the optician's rooftop, but first the notes describe a shadow cast by an obelisk that cuts across the verdant valley scene. The notes state that, upon closer examination, it is not, in fact, an obelisk, but a cheap copy of an ancient Greek lantern:

> L'obélisque qui s'élève au-dessus d'une masse de verdure qui ombrage le vallon, est cette espèce de phare inutile, qu'on nomme la Lanterne de Démosthène, et qui n'est que la copie d'un ancient monument d'Athènes.[31]

First shown at the Louvre in 1800, this cast of the Lanterne de Démosthène was later moved to Saint-Cloud, where the tableau places it, and where it serves as a de facto warning of fraud in the scene upon which it casts its shadow. For example, the notes state that the factory at Sèvres, which now supports a large number of workers and exports its porcelain to two continents, was once a site of deception. As the notes explain, on this very site a former château was used to trick the people into thinking that the prisoners in the Bastille had been released upon the queen's annual visit to Paris, as was expected. Instead, however, the prisoners were moved to this château temporarily, and then returned to the Bastille upon her departure. The lantern's shadow thus foreshadows the danger that adheres to the path by linking the château and the porcelain factory in a tale of royal deception.

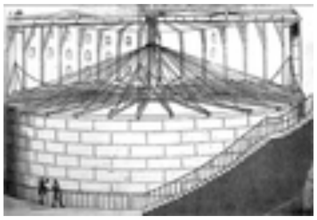
16

After a discussion of the difficult memories evoked by the sites upon which the lantern casts its shadow, the author spies a lovely stone bridge, "un monument élégant et solide." The notes explain that this sturdy bridge is the pont de Sèvres, begun in 1812 to replace an old wooden bridge. Above the bridge is the village of Saint-Cloud, which has a cluster of dark memories attached. Aside from the lantern, which invoked the memory of deception, we are informed that this is also where Henri III was murdered, and reminded of the English sacking of Saint-Cloud in 1338.[32] The notes explain that the repaired bridge was instrumental in creating a new beginning for France by bringing Napoleon to power. Because the pont de Sèvres connects Versailles to Paris, Napoleon was able to install an empire on the ruins of the French revolution. In fact, the French legislature was holding its sessions in Saint-Cloud when Napoleon came running back from Egypt across the pont de Sèvres to seize power and, "le nom de S.-Cloud est inséparable de la mémoire du 18 brumaire."[33] In this tableau the bridge connects Saint-Cloud to Versailles and Paris, but also, by extension, to the villages, castles, churches, windmills, more bridges, bell-towers, and factories in the distance. In Restoration France the bridge was a powerful metaphor, serving, as historian Victoria Thompson notes, "to be popular not only for describing the composition of the new elites... but also for encouraging a more general movement of upward social mobility."[34] Certainly, in the 1825 diorama, the sturdy bridge symbolizes a connection between city and country, industry and nature, and the aristocracy and emerging bourgeoisie. In 1835, the popular "Plan de Paris" emphasizes the latter and, taking the bridge as metaphor, colorfully imagines the aristocratic families of the faubourg offering their hand to the bourgeoisie of the banking neighborhood, and "the parchments and coins sign a peace treaty."[35]

17

With the optician's home as a visual scope and the network of bridges serving as an alternative path, the viewer will eventually arrive at the gazomètre by passing west and then north around Paris while visiting a host of cheerful villages, each with its own monuments. In Montmorency, directly north of Paris and the "bright shining point on the horizon," this unobstructed journey meets a bump in the road as the notes remind us of the revolutionaries who destroyed the monuments here.[36] Despite the memories that stall the path laid out by the bridges this route is ultimately successful. For now, halfway through the scene, the viewer enters a fluid network of villages and bridges leading from Montmorency to Saint-Denis and then on to Passy and Auteuil. Passy, the notes state, attracts a diversity of social classes and was home to an interesting group of inhabitants. For example, the Italian composer Piccini, the philosopher Raynal (who lived in Passy throughout the Terror), and the good Abbé Gérard all died there; Benjamin Franklin lived there for a time, as did F.B Hoffmann, described as one of the most erudite and amiable of authors.[37] The next village, Auteuil, is described as an industrious one, and the first thing remarked upon, "que domine, dans la perspective," is the fire pump of Chaillot, which deserves mention of its inventor's name—"ouvrage hydraulique, fondé par M. Perrier."[38] Likewise, it is the useful establishments, "établissements utiles," that distinguish Auteuil—Mr. Goulin’s wallpaper production, Mr. Triquet’s chemical works, and Mr. Terneaux-Rousseau’s drapery factory.

Fig. 3



“Le gazomètre de la compagnie française d’éclairage par le gaz, 97 rue du Faubourg Poissonnière.” Cabinet des estampes.

© Bibliothèque nationale de France. Reproduced from Jean-Baptiste Fréssoz, “The Gas Lighting Controversy: Technological Risk, Expertise, and Regulation in Nineteenth- Century Paris and London,” The Journal of Urban History, vol. 33, n° 5, 2007

18

Following a trajectory that seamlessly transitions from monuments of history to monuments of industry, the first item remarked upon as the viewer’s eye descends on Paris is the gazomètre.

Le premier édifice qu’on remarque par sa forme circulaire est le Gazomètre; il est accompagné parallèlement d’une longue pyramide qui est la cheminée des fourneaux où s’élabore le gaz.[39]

Completed in 1823, the immense gazomètre was located in the northern area of Paris. It is described in the notes, however, as if it were situated amongst the monuments and churches further south, including the Dome of the Assumption, the Vendôme column, Invalides, and the Military School. According to the notes, the Vendôme column—a monument that sits on a formerly royal plaza but is also a testament to Napoleon’s victory at Austerlitz in 1805—is the vanishing point of the entire tableau due to the position that viewers occupy with respect to the painting’s horizon line.[40] Although it is the viewer who has moved through the landscape with the help of the notes, this scene is described as if the industrial gazomètre arrives at the Vendôme column to become a full-fledged member in a club of elder statesmen.[41]

19

In the final paragraph of the first section of the 1825 program notes, the author undermines this conclusion. Rather than allowing the gazomètre to take its place as a monument to industry amongst historical monuments, it is now likened to a small jewel in a crown of gems poised on a young woman’s head. It is the young woman’s beauty, we are told, to which the viewer ought to attend and not the jeweled crown, which, despite its splendor, is only there to rest our eyes. Using this metaphor the author reminds the viewer to focus, ultimately, on the pastoral beauty and not the “crown” of monuments.

Cette ceinture de monuments qui enveloppe ce beau paysage, semble n’être là que comme serait autour de la tête d’une jolie femme un diadème de pierres précieuses; on ne le regarde que lorsque l’oeil, fatigué de la contemplation de traits ravissants, a besoin de repos.[42]

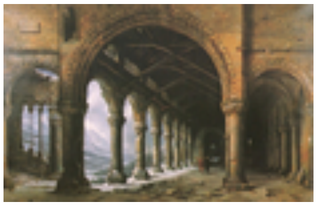
This description enacts a reversal that echoes the deception described as having occurred at Sèvres: where once we saw the gazomètre as a monument to progress—surrounded by historical monuments, and connected by bridges to villages, churches, outskirt factories, and tombs, and these leading to an optician’s humble abode in Meudon near a village path—we are now instructed to see the background as the true point of the scene. Where the notes initially implied that the viewer is moving toward Paris, progress, and a new form of illumination—and the construction of the image certainly implies this— it is now to the countryside that the viewer's eye is directed.

III. The Magic Lamp in *Effet de neige et de brouillard*

20

The second tableau in the 1825 diorama, Effet de neige et de brouillard, contrasts with the previous one in a number of respects. For example, it is an interior scene, and the natural beauty of the snowy landscape is seen through a medieval colonnade. Consequently, the viewer is situated inside looking out rather than outside looking in. And in contrast to the previous tableau this one does not seek to picture "un ensemble de souvenirs historiques," for there are no sites to name or characters to invoke, as there were in the previous scene with its references to revolutionaries and royalty.[43] Despite the depiction of a colonnade there is no historical reference, and this tableau is solely about the effects created through its manipulation of light and paint, which, according to the notes, "résulte absolument du talent de l'artiste." [44]

Fig. 4



Effet de brouillard et de neige à travers une colonnade gothique en ruine, Louis Daguerre, 1826. Oil on canvas, Galerie Gérard Lévy, Paris.

21

The author of the notes is clearly impressed that Daguerre chose not to indulge in historical reverie and "charlatanism," as did Bouton in the previous tableau. Daguerre's innovative approach to this tableau may have been a response to his critics. Particularly suggestive is one reviewer's criticism of his use of a lamp to suggest "eastern fictions" in a diorama tableau executed the year prior, Vue intérieure de la chapelle de Holyrood-House:

> On the right of the picture is introduced the figure of a female in contemplation, standing next a lamp, which burns on a monument… This, though a legitimate object in art, in aiding the intended effects, has a tendency to impair the delusion of the reality of the scene, for who, in exploring these desolate ruins would ever fancy he should find an illustration for the beautiful eastern fiction on the tombs of the Scottish chieftains?[45]

Rather than resorting to symbolism, as he did previously, it is likely that Daguerre sought to enact the meaning inherent to the lamp in his 1825 tableau. However, his penchant for using the lamp to represent fantasy, exoticism, and romantic history was not abandoned entirely, and in an 1826 oil painting of a scene similar to that featured in his 1825 tableau Daguerre pictured two figures in the center of the colonnade, one holding a lamp aloft.[46] However, no such lamp was placed in his 1825 diorama tableau, and the program notes mention only a double gallery, a staircase, a deep valley bounded by towering mountains, a forest, and snow that covers the countryside like a thick carpet and clings to the bases and capitols of the columns of the ruined gallery overlooking the valley.[47] According to a reviewer in London, where the diorama traveled after Paris, "the fog disperses, and through the vast arches are plainly discovered the forests of pine and larch-trees that cover the valley. The magic of this effect of light is indeed most extraordinary and the illusion is complete and enchanting."[48] The program notes also point to Daguerre's effects as the centerpiece of the diorama, stating "[n]ous appelons l'attention des connaisseurs sur la succession des effets et les modifications de la lumière qui donnent à ce tableau un aspect si mobile."[49] In 1825 these effects would have been understood in the context of illumination, broadly, and, in relation to the previous tableau, gaslight. At the same time these atmospheric effects would have referred to the charged symbolism of the lamp as a metaphor for fantasy. Consequently, the theatrical effects employed by Daguerre suggested a dichotomy between fantasy and reality, illusionism and realism. According to Steven Connor, this dichotomy was inherent to the perception of hydrogen gaslight, and he notes that the gazomètre was understood at the time to exist somewhere between "the material and the immaterial, iron and gas, inertia and evaporation."[50]

22

The debates on gaslight that appeared in print often invoked its formal dichotomies (material and immaterial, and others) while linking these to the political situation. For example, it was thought that gaslight lent illumination to the lower classes formerly in darkness while threatening danger to the royal family by exposure. For example, in 1823 Charles Nodier (the same Nodier of the Voyages pittoresques et romantique de l'ancienne France, to which both Daguerre and Bouton contributed illustrations) and Amédée Pichot published an essay on hydrogen gas lighting that paints a dramatic picture. The preface to this tract features a fictional story of a doctor who, upon returning to Paris, is regaled by a friend who informs him of the changes that have ensued since his departure, including public violence, foul odors, and boulevard spectacles. The friend blames the police, but only for "putting public security in the hands of some capricious simultaneous lighting system."[51] It is gaslight that is responsible, and the ultimate culprit, hydrogen gas, is described as an evil genie with a colorful appearance:

il verse des teintes livides et sulfurées qui frappent de reflets hideux les figures les plus ravissantes, et transforment toutes ces grâces en sorcières et en lamies; puis il s'éteint, et laisse l'assemblée épouvantée dans une obscurité profonde.[52]

23

Fig. 5

Title page of Charles Nodier et Amédée Pichot, Essai critique sur le gaz hydrogène et les divers modes d'éclairage artificiel, Paris, Librarie de Charles Gosselin, 1823.

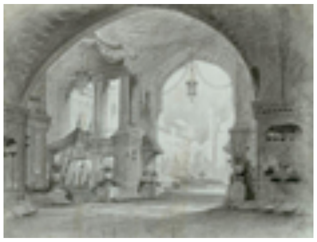
24

Daguerre's innovation in his 1825 tableau was to transfer the debate on gaslight to the visual realm through his use of light, thereby invoking cultural associations without stating them. A primary narrative to which these lighting effects would have alluded is the fairy tale of Aladdin and the magic lamp, for it bespoke the danger and possibility of gaslight with an exotic accent. When the diorama emerged on the boulevard, the story of Aladdin was already a cultural industry, and variations on the tale circulated in novels, operas, and plays. Of particular significance is Aladin, ou la lampe merveilleuse—an opera that opened in 1822 at the theater le Peletier, a temporary opera house built after the murder of the duc of Berry by a Bonapartist outside the previous opera house (which was destroyed in response by King Louis XVIII).[53] The gazomètre was located dangerously close to the theatre district, and critics claimed that it was the uniformity of its illumination that was ultimately to blame for the murder of the duc of Berry.[54]

25

Daguerre worked with Pierre-Luc-Charles Ciceri to create the glimmering sets for Aladin while employing gaslight for the first time at the opera. The theatrical decor suggests the powerful forces that lie latent in the lamp (both in the story and outside the opera house), thus giving visual dimension to the story of a poor Chinese boy who is seduced by a North African sorcerer, but who eventually learns to master the magic lamp and benefit from the aid of the genie within it.[55] We can presume that Daguerre's atmospheric effects for the 1825 diorama were influenced by his acclaimed opera decor, the story of the magic lamp, and, indirectly, to the public debates on hydrogen gas.

Fig. 6



Sketches from the opera sets by Louis Daguerre and Pierre-Luc-Charles Ciceri. Sketch by Daguerre. Acte III, tableau 1: Aladdin's palace, throne room.

Bibliothèque nationale de France, Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra, Esq. 19-13

26

Conversely, however, Daguerre's 1825 tableau might have operated as a means to criticize the public's faith in the fairy tale of progress, as did a version of the story published in 1823 by Honoré de Balzac under the pseudonym Horace de Saint-Aubin. In La dernière fée ou la nouvelle lampe merveilleuse, the story opens with a chemist in his laboratory reflecting on the significance of his realization that "la perfectibilité de la raison humaine devenait la ruine de la société."[56] As the story unfolds, however, the chemist is shown to be blind to his initial intellectual insight. Due to his obsessive commitment to science he ignores his young wife and son and dies penniless. Having no means to live after his father's death, the vulnerable son is lured to Paris by a bourgeois temptress, and in one remarkable scene the temptress dresses up as the genie from the Aladdin story and slides down the chimney to fool the innocent boy. Clearly, Balzac's version of the tale is cautionary—too much faith (be it in fairy tales or science) can blind one to the social and economic factors that, for Balzac, constitute the human comedy. Viewed from this angle, Daguerre's use of atmospheric effects in his 1825 diorama tableau, while echoing his "palace of light" seen at the opera three years prior, might have functioned as a satire on the idea of social and technological progress by emphasizing the illusion involved in its own visual transformation.[57] The notes concur on this point, and the author states that this tableau is merely "a brilliant stage-prop" that refers to nothing other than itself, mocking the public that imagines history where it doesn't exist.

Un spectacle comme celui que M. Daguerre offre au public, peut très bien se passer de l'intérêt historique attaché à certains lieux, à certains monumens, à certaines époques. L'imitation d'une belle situation physique et assez puissante sur l'esprit des hommes qui aiment à observer la nature, pour que leur imagination n'ait pas besoin de s'aider des souvenirs dont l'histoire à doté les monuments et toutes les contrées.[58]

However, the program notes acknowledge that although Daguerre's tableau does not intend to educate, but only to reveal its own artifice, the audience will see historical sites and figures in its atmospheric effects, including Mary Queen of Scots calling out for France and happiness, Albigensians, and an eleventh-century monastery.[59] The fact that the audience would have viewed Daguerre's tableau after Bouton's view of Paris might explain this last point: in its rotation of the audience between the two tableaux the diorama mingled the two such that the monuments from the first tableau, and the stories attached to them, would have haunted Daguerre's more abstract and self-conscious tableau.

27

When the diorama had completed its cycle the audience would have been transported to two scenes one after the other: first, a view of Paris and its gazomètre, with scenery and monuments evoking historical sites that, more often than not, no longer existed, and then a projection of a fanciful place that, at the same time, encouraged historical reverie. I have argued in this essay that the frisson created by this diorama was as much about the desire for and fear of social change as it was about the reflection and projection of filtered light across an opaque, two-sided painting. Although at a safe distance, the diorama viewer would have experienced the affect involved in becoming modern, which included embracing, however tentatively, a potentially explosive form of illumination, an exoticizing vision of the East, and new forms of social exchange that departed radically from what came before.

Conclusion

28

The effect produced by the 1825 diorama has a historical context that pertains to an ambiguity between the real and the imaginary in proto-modernism. By placing the real (and this includes an emphasis on the everyday, fashion, technology, and contemporary events) in a dichotomous relation to illusion or fantasy (Orientalism and fairytales, the notion of "local color" in novels and paintings, the sublime, and the medieval revival), artists forged a sense of temporality that Christophe Longbois-Canil calls the passé proche, a mode of temporality that broke from the Greco-Roman basis of art and aesthetics.[60] The rue Sanson diorama cultivated the sense of recent history and time passing during its seventeen years of operation, and in the program notes we find references to journalistic events and views that speak to the "here and now" placed in tense relation to atmospheric effects and sublime views. The trompe-l'oeil painting, the doubled-sided tableaux, the filters and sophisticated lighting, the moving auditorium, and the imagery of ruins, churches, and landscapes worked toward a psychological push-pull effect. In this way the diorama placed the audience between the mirror and the lamp, suspended, but actively so. The unique sensation produced was indicative of a third model of representation, one that used chemistry, light, and optics while blending the cultural significance attached to the rich cultural metaphors associated with projection and reflection.

29

Although the diorama's popularity would erode with Arago's public announcement of the daguerreotype process and the near-simultaneous destruction of the rue Sanson diorama (Bouton would continue to operate the diorama at other sites in Paris, as well as in London, for at least a decade[61]), and despite the fact that the political and social debates on gaslight would recede, the narratives associated with the diorama—the associations, I have argued, that made the diorama resonant in 1825—would inform the cultural reception of projection and reflection, and these associations would be folded into photographic discourse. As cultural historian Kaja Silverman notes, there is a dichotomy inherent to photography—a dichotomy between the "liquid intelligence" of chemical photography and the "optical intelligence" brought about by the mechanization of the lens-camera-projector apparatus.[62] These terms align nicely with the notion of reflection as a kind of intelligence inherent to chemistry, and thus the fixing and viewing of print photography, versus projection as an intelligence inherent to optics and the lens, and thus to cinema and slide projection. Both employ light. However, while the reflecting qualities of chemical-print photography and the projective effects of the lens are both used in photography—and one certainly finds both in the daguerreotype—the unique blending of the two to create a sense of the passé proche must be dated earlier than 1839. This essay demonstrates that the diorama projected while reflecting, and that this effect must be linked to the amalgamation of realism and illusionism, as well as the development of hydrogen gas, which, as noted above, was both material and immaterial. This unique blending of seeming opposites produced the diorama effect, thereby evoking an emerging modern sensibility. Related cultural texts help us to understand what this effect meant in early-nineteenth-century Paris.

Note biographique

D^r^ Dore Bowen investigates cultural histories of the photographic image. She has curated a number of exhibitions, including, in cooperation with the Arab Image Foundation, Soit dit en passant… (La Compagnie, Marseille), and Not Given: Talking of and Around Photographs of Arab Women (SF Camerawork). Her published essays include “This Bridge Called Imagination: On Reading the Arab Image Foundation” (Invisible Culture Journal, 2008); “Imagine There’s No Image (It’s Easy If You Try): Appropriation in the Age of Digital Reproduction” (The Companion to Art History Since 1945, 2006) and “On the Site of Her Own Exclusion: Strategizing Queer Feminist Art History” (Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories, 2015). She is currently completing a book on three stages in the life of the diorama. She is associate professor of art history at San José State University.

Notes

[1]

For comments and suggestions I thank the editors to this special-issue of Intermédialités and the Salonetta.

[2]

Quoted from a review of the diorama.

[3]

Arago’s announcement of Daguerre’s discovery can be found in “Séance du lundi 7 janvier,” Comptes-rendus de l’Académie des sciences, Paris, t. 8, Paris, Bachelier Imprimeur-Librarie, 1839, p. 4-7: see R. Derek Wood, “A State Pension for L. J. M. Daguerre for the Secret of His Daguerreotype Technique,” Annals of Science, vol. 54, nº 5, 1997, p. 489-506, available online: www.midley.co.uk/Pension/Pension.htm#part4_2 (accessed on August 10, 2015).

[4]

Stephen Pinson, Speculating Daguerre: Art and Enterprise in the Work Of L. J. M. Daguerre, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2012, p. 120.

[5]

Ibid., 2012, pp. 112-115.

[6]

For more on the era of spectacles in Paris, see Vanessa Schwartz, Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-siècle Paris, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999.

[7]

Georges Potonniée, Histoire de la découverte de la photographie; et Daguerre peintre et décorateur [1925], Paris, Jean Michel Place, 1989, p. 50, 70-71.

[8]

Although the tableaux were painted in Paris, they were exported to London and, later, Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol, Dublin, Edinburgh, Berlin, Breslau, Cologne, Vienna, Stockholm, Madrid, and even Havana. See Erkki Huhtamo, Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2013, p. 141.

[9]

In 1834, Daguerre with his assistant Hipolyte Sébronm introduced the double-effect diorama, which "enabled not just a modification but a thorough transformation of a scene, and purely by means of painting." Sophie Thomas, "Making Visible: The Diorama, the Double and the (Gothic) Subject," Romantic Circles, 2005, www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/gothic/thomas/thomas (accessed August 10, 2015).

[10]

Quoted in Huhtamo, 2013, p. 145.

[11]

Jonathan Crary, Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1990, p. 98.

[12]

Crary, 1990, p. 113. Also see Jonathan Crary, "Techniques of the Observer," October, vol. 45, Summer 1988, p. 22.

[13]

Crary, 1990, p. 35.

[14]

Crary, 1988, p. 5.

[15]

Ibid., p. 3, note 2.

[16]

Abrams writes that, "often the matter is left in terms of analogy. Feelings project a light—especially a colored light—on objects of sense, so that things, as Mill said, are 'arranged in the colors and seen through the medium of the imagination set in action by the feelings.'" M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition, New York, Oxford University Press, 1953, p. 54.

[17]

Although the content of the diorama imagery has been of little interest to contemporary scholars it is of capital importance to the diorama effect. As Huhtamo notes, “[m]ost theorists have based their judgments on the apparatus only, paying scant attention to its historical content.” Huhtamo, 2013, p. 144.

[18]

Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les lieux de mémoire,” Representations, vol. 26, Spring 1989, p. 7.

[19]

Baudelaire writes, “Je désire être ramené vers les dioramas dont la magie brutale et énorme sait m’imposer une utile illusion!” Charles Baudelaire, “Salon de 1859,” Curiosités esthétiques II, Paris, Michel Levy, 1868, p. 338.

[20]

See Jane Fulcher, The Nation’s Image: French Grand Opera as Politics and Politicized Art, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 20. See also Denise Z. Davidson, France After Revolution: Urban Life, Gender, and the New Social Order, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 83.

[21]

Although the link to Charles X is not made in the program notes to this diorama, the public would have understood the association. Interestingly, Albert Boime mistakenly titles this tableau “Charles X at Holyrood.” Albert Boime, Art in the Age of Counterrevolution, 1815–1848, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 428. Other charged diorama tableaux include the tomb of Napoleon, the Hôtel de Ville on fire during the July Revolution, sublime views of the Alps, and city views, including that of Ghent (also a political site, where King Louis XVIII fled during Napoleon’s 100 days). The diorama also featured sites of disaster from newspaper reports, such as the murder of a countess Hartzfeld in the Black Forest, which, according to a reviewer, also included a glimpse of the Alps. For more on this tableau by Daguerre see the review in L’artiste, vol. 5, 1833, p. 184. For a list of the diorama tableaux see Potonniée, 1989, p. 121.

[22]

Stephen Pinson names the author of the 1822 diorama program notes as François-Alexandre Pernot. Although this may be true I have not found proof for the claim, nor have I ascertained the identity of the author of the 1825 program notes. See Pinson, 2012, p. 109, 298.

[23]

Fulcher, 1987, p. 291.

[24]

Wolfgang Schivelbusch, Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century, trans. Angela Davies, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995, p 100-101.

[25]

The Paris gazomètre was “an enormous 200 000 cubic-foot gasholder—ten times bigger than the largest in London—that Antoine Pauwels and his Compagnie Française de l’éclairage par le gaz had built in the rue du

Faubourg-Poissonnière, a very fashionable neighborhood in northern Paris during the Restoration.” Jean-Baptiste Fréssoz, “The Gas Lighting Controversy: Technological Risk, Expertise, and Regulation in Nineteenth- Century Paris and London,” The Journal of Urban History, vol. 33, nº 5, 2007, p. 732.

[26]

Wolfgang Schivelbusch explains the changing behavior in relation to lanterns between the 1830 and 1848 revolutions thus: “If we look for an explanation of this remarkable change in rebellious behavior, what comes to mind is the technical change in public illumination that occurred in the period between 1830 and 1848. In 1830 public lighting was still largely based on the traditional réverbères system, i.e. oil lamps. It was only in the 1830s—and then very slowly—that gaslight was introduced in Paris. In 1835 there were only 203 gas candelabres in Paris as against several thousand oil lanterns, and it was only in the '40s that the gas lanterns outnumbered the oil lamps. What does this technical change mean in terms of possible popular attitudes? An oil lamp is a self-sufficient light machine feeding itself from its own fuel reservoir, while a gas light is only an extension or an outlet of a large system that comprises the gas works and the pipe-systems network.” Schivelbusch, “The Policing of Street Lighting,” Yale French Studies, no. 73 (1987), p. 70.

[27]

Notice explicative des tableaux exposés au diorama, Paris, Imprimerie de Carpentier-Mericourt [rue de Grenelle Saint-Honoré nº 59], p. 1-2. The two sections of the booklet are subtitled “Vue: Prise aux environs de Paris (par M. Bouton)” and “Tableau composé: Effet de neige et de brouillard (par M. Daguerre).” Effet de neige was shown from August 15, 1825 to May 4, 1826; the Vue by Bouton, from November 27, 1825 to August 23, 1826.

[28]

Notice explicative, p. 2.

[29]

Nöel-Marie-Paymal Lerebours, Excursions daguerriennes: vues et monuments les plus remarquables du globe, Paris, Chez Rittner et Goupil, 1842.

[30]

Hofland, The London Examiner, November 18, 1827.

[31]

Notice explicative, p. 2-3.

[32]

Ibid., p. 4

[33]

“La législature français tenait ses séances à S.-Cloud, lorsque Bonaparte, accouru d’Égypte pour s’emparer du pouvoir, brisa les faisceaux de la république, dissipa le conseil des Anciens, anéantit les droits des députés de la nation, affecta la dictature, et, sur les débris du gouvernement démocratique, enta la souveraineté militaire, que légitimèrent pour un temps la haine de l’anarchie, la victoire et la diplomatie de l’Europe étonnée.” Ibid., p. 4-5.

[34]

Victoria E. Thompson, "'Spatial Stories': Urban Space and Bourgeois Identity in Early Nineteenth-Century Paris," in Journal of Modern History, vol. 75, nº nº 3, September 2003, p. 548.

[35]

"Alors, l'aristocratie du grand faubourg donnant la main à la bourgeoisie du quartier de la Banque, les parchemins et les écus signent la paix." [Translation mine.] Raymond Brucker, "Le Plan de Paris," Nouveau tableau de Paris au XIXe siècle, vol. 7, t. 6, Paris, 1834, p. 377.

[36]

Notice explicative, p. 8.

[37]

Ibid., p. 10.

[38]

Ibid.

[39]

Ibid., p. 11.

[40]

Many of the buildings mentioned in the notes to Bouton's Vue are related to Napoleon. For example, the Vendôme column was erected by Napoleon to celebrate the victory at Austerlitz (and is made from melted Prussian cannons). My thanks to Nöel Burch for directing my attention to this point. For more on the Vendôme column, see Michael Marrinan, Romantic Paris: Histories of a Cultural Landscape, 1800-1850, Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 114-116.

[41]

Notice explicative, p. 12.

[42]

Ibid.

[43]

Ibid., p. 15.

[44]

Ibid.

[45]

The Times, London, March 21, 1825, p. 2.

[46]

Ralph Hyde writes of Daguerre's 1826 painting, which was inspired by the 1825 diorama: "[t]he figure in the picture accompanying the kilted gentleman wears the red emblem of the Legion of Honour, a reference, it would seem, to the artist himself who had the Cross of the Legion bestowed on him by Charles X in January 1826." Ralph Hyde, Panoramania!: The Art and Entertainment of the "All-Embracing" View, London, Trefoil and Barbican Art Gallery, 1988.

[47]

Notice explicative, p. 18.

[48]

Mirror of Literature, June 30, 1827.

[49]

Notice explicative, p. 19.

[50]

Steven Connor, "Gasworks," 19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century, nº 6, 2008, http://dx.doi.org/10.16995/ntn.470 (accessed August 27, 2015).

[51]

The author writes that, "l'instinct ingénieux de la police, qui a confié toutes les chances de la sécurité publique au caprice de je ne sais quelle lumière simultanée…" Charles Nodier et Amédée Pichot, Essai critique sur le gaz hydrogène et les divers modes d'éclairage artificial, Paris, Librarie de Charles Gosselin, 1823, pp. ix-x.

[52]

Ibid., p. ix.

[53]

This opéra-féerie was written by Charles-Guillaume Étienne, music by Nicolo Isouard, and was first performed at the Opéra's theater (Le Peletier) on February 6, 1822.

[54]

"Let us suppose the whole royal family at the opera, the mistake of a worker at the gazomètre and the presence of a Louvel in the crowd!!!" Quoted in Fréssoz, 2007, p. 733.

[55]

See Barry V. Daniels, “Ciceri and Daguerre: Set Designers for the Paris Opera 1820-22,” Theatre Survey, nº 22, May 1981, p. 80. For a description of Daguerre’s opera sets, see Pinson, 2012.

[56]

Quoted in Ray P. Bowen, “The Composition of Balzac’s Oeuvres de jeunesse and La comédie humaine: A Comparison,” vol. 55, nº 3, September 1940, p. 816.

[57]

Christophe Longbois-Canil names Balzac’s La dernière fée as one of the first instances of the pre-modern impulse, calling it a “riante mythologie de la modernité.” Thus the inference to Aladdin can be understood as part of larger historical context in which artists cultivated the uncanny sensation of time passing, what Longbois-Canil terms the passé proche, to invoke history in the making. Christophe Longbois-Canil, De moderne à modernité. Les généalogies d’un concept, Paris: Klincksieck, 2015, p. 40.

[58]

Notice explicative, p. 21.

[59]

Ibid.

[60]

Longbois-Canil, 2015, p. 41.

[61]

See Huhtamo, 2013, p. 141.

[62]

Kaja Silverman, The Miracle of Analogy: The History of Photography Part I, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015, p. 67-70.

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