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book review of

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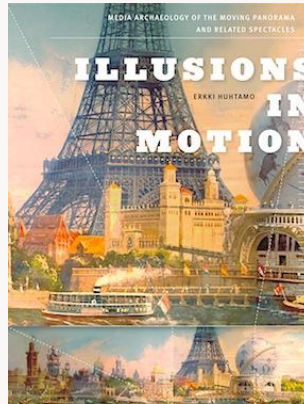
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Erkki Huhtamo,

Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles.

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In his expansive study *Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles*, Erkki Huhtamo traces the development of the moving panorama medium in its multiplicity of technological and discursive forms during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Circular panoramas, the large permanent installations that immerse the viewer in the round, have already come into academic focus, and Huhtamo directs our attention to its moving counterpart. The colorful roster of names that emerged for the medium in motion best articulates the broad scope of his study; the diorama, cyclorama, phenakisticope, myriorama, peristrepthic panorama, eidophusikon, diorama, myriopticon, and stereopticon illustrate some of many innovative viewing experiences that charmed and beguiled audiences in Europe and the United States before the invention of celluloid film. *Illusions in Motion* guides the reader through the myriad of mediated realities across continents and from hand-held panoramic toys to utterly spectacular enterprises.

Huhtamo conceptually frames his study with the idea of the discursive panorama, which “refers to the moving panorama as a figure of speech, writing, or visual representation” (15). The discursive panorama and panoramic *topoi*, are the manifestations of the moving panorama that have outlasted their physical referents in the cultural sphere. Huhtamo continues, “in such discursive contexts the moving panorama can be interpreted as a *topos*—a persistent cultural formula that appears, disappears, and reappears, gaining ever-new meanings in the process” (15). Though the panoramic image is frequently recalled in everyday language, today the term ‘panorama’ is far from its etymological origin and from the moving panoramas that for two centuries fascinated the public. In this media-archaeological study, the author attempts to dig up the origins and permutations of the technological form and its residue from an expansive set of source materials. Yet, he states that to research the “life” of

topoi is “a way to penetrate beyond accepted historical narratives, uncovering omissions, gaps, and silences” (16). Art historians might find the lack of in-depth attention to the panoramic images themselves perplexing, particularly as they relate to painting and popular visual tropes. However, Huhtamo seeks to reconstruct the varied identity of moving panoramas and the dynamic experience of viewing them from ephemera that outlasted the often-lost painted panoramic images. Broadsides, explanatory booklets, and reviews substantiate and richly illustrate the history of the innovative, illusory media that were as much about the apparatus, its spectacle, and context, as it was about the image painted on its surface.

The following eleven chapters unfold in roughly chronological order, each with a thematic interest presented through several case studies that can be read in order or studied individually. This review focuses on a select few that demonstrate the variety of media materials and approaches taken to the moving panoramas. Chapter 2, “The Incubation Era: Antecedents and Anticipations” examines the picture rolls contained in the eighteenth century peepshow boxes and the roll transparencies created by Louis Carrogis, or Carmontelle (1717–1806), for aristocratic circles. Among the sources the author consults are a rare surviving roll transparency at the J. Paul Getty Museum and Carmontelle’s memoirs, from which Huhtamo assesses the composition and movement of the apparatus and its relation to the fashionable *jardin pittoresque* environments painted on the surface of the delicate transparencies. The crank that turns the transparency roll guides the viewer through the garden scene, perhaps placing them in the perspective of a carriage (44). From the outset, the moving panoramic medium mimicked new technologies and ways of experiencing the world. The transparencies were not re-discovered until the twentieth century, and at the end of chapter 2, the author discusses the hazy history of Carmontelle’s inspiration and influence. Huhtamo points out numerous curiosities designed to entertain the French bourgeoisie around the same era as Carmontelle created his transparencies, including a moving panorama handscreen and palm-sized toy panoramas. Though inventive and enterprising artists and showmen stand out in the record of the performative medium, Huhtamo demonstrates that the history of the moving panorama does not follow a singular developmental trajectory.

Chapter 4, “Rolling across the Stage: the Moving Panorama and the Theater” examines connections between moving panoramas, actors, the stage, and new experiences of travel and motion, such as hot air balloon rides. The author’s heterogeneous examples demonstrate the medium’s uninhibited potential in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. To start, Huhtamo draws a direct link to baroque theater through his study of the French-Italian stage designer Jean-Nicolas Servandoni (1695–1766). Formally trained in Rome and a member of the *Académie Royale de Peinture et Sculpture*, Servandoni employed his illusionistic painterly talents to create alluring optical spectacles on the stage, often at the king’s theater at the palace of Tuileries. Following Servandoni’s lead, the younger painter and set designer Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg (1740–1813) invented the Eidophusikon, a miniature mechanical theater that he exhibited privately in 1781 (98). The controlled environment of the Eidophusikon eliminated acting jobs by incorporating moving pictures and mechanical elements to imitate natural phenomena, such as the aurora borealis.

Huhtamo then considers the integration of the satirical theater of pantomime and the moving panorama. Current events became a popular subject matter for technological spectacle that integrated actors and viewers into the viewing experience. A fascinating example is the sub-

genre of the balloon panorama that emerged with the invention of hot air balloons. Spectators became aeronauts and experienced the novel way of looking down at the world by watching the vertically moving panorama. By the 1880s, the precision of panoramic technology made it possible to imitate horse races, in which horses ran on treadmills alongside a rapidly moving large-scale panorama. Huhtamo's plethora of examples reveal several such surrogate experiences and demonstrate that intrinsic to the medium was its connection to coextensive developments in transportation technologies and modes of experience.

Palpable in Huhtamo's study is the cross-continental movement of technological, and subsequently panoramic, innovation. Chapter 6, "The Midcentury Moving Panorama Craze", examines the medium's hybrid forms as they entered America and became truly itinerant attractions. Noting that circular, permanent panoramic installations never quite caught on in the United States, Huhtamo suggests that the moving medium as a traveling production was well suited for the expanding country. In nineteenth-century Europe, audiences delighted in visions of exotic lands and dangerous excursions that allowed viewers to travel vicariously through the medium. While travel and fantasy still piqued the interest of American audiences, the author proposes that the American viewer preferred to experience the mysteries of their own frontier. As Huhtamo proves with his study of the savvy self-promoter John Banvard and his Mississippi panoramas, the American frontier as a genre was a profitable commercial enterprise in United States and eventually Europe.

The author's occasional, tangential interjections about small-scale panoramic productions best conjure a sense of the panorama as popular culture in America. Though he dismisses homemade versions of public entertainments as not particularly 'exceptional', they are indeed fascinating products of the intersection of mass media and popular entertainment. The popularity of the moving panorama peaked during the Civil War as a means for disseminating and processing current events. Examples such as homemade panoramas created by children using illustrated magazine images were deserving of more attention (178). Huhtamo's interest in panoramic *topoi* very literally concerns the use of the word 'panorama' in popular culture. However, he pays less attention to the medium's relationship to turmoil in the United States and questions of national identity, the debates surrounding which the moving panorama surely played a part. The *Grand Panorama of American Slavery* created by Henry "Box" Brown, a former slave who escaped by shipping himself to Philadelphia, is a case in point. Brown traveled with his panorama and emerged from a box on stage before telling his story (185). His popularity certainly played a role in slavery discourse, yet an analysis of the adoption of the medium by various social spheres is not at the forefront of the book. Huhtamo does return to the role of the panorama and lantern slides during the American Civil War in chapter 9.

Chapter 7, "Panoromania in Practice: Albert Smith and his Moving Panoramas" is the most in-depth case study offered in the book, and a refreshing focus when compared to the wealth of examples that divide the reader's attention in previous chapters. Huhtamo illustrates Smith's career as a brilliant showman and businessman with an analysis of his moving panorama, titled *Albert Smith's Ascent of Mont Blanc*, that made some 2,000 runs at London's Egyptian Hall. The dual fiction and reality of Smith—as a character within his panoramas and as a figure in real life—at work in his moving panorama enterprise makes for an interesting reading of the interplay of business, showmanship, and technical production in panoramic performances. Even at its most sophisticated moment, the moving panorama still depended upon the

showman to turn the wheels of the spectator's imagination. Huhtamo compares Smith's enterprise to the business acumen of PT Barnum. For example, Smith capitalized on his self-portrayal exceedingly well by selling merchandise such as paper fans, evening programs, and stereocards. The section on "Parodying the Panorama" in chapter 8, "The Moving Panorama Performance", proves that with the commercialization of the moving panorama came its parody. In this valuable section, Huhtamo explains the usefulness of panoramic parodies to the media archaeologist. Such humorous performances reveal the standard operation of moving panoramic apparatuses and performance tropes based on audience expectations.

Chapter 9, "Panoramas and Magic Lanterns" initiates a discussion of Roland Barthes' 'reality effect' as it relates to the introduction of photography into the world of the moving panorama. For instance, when it came to depicting contemporary events of the Civil War, panoramas had the advantage of color and the ability to show large battle scenes in action, whereas photography was still limited to black and white, still images. However, following Barthes, Huhtamo argues that the photograph compelled panorama showmen to provide evidence of the accuracy of the images they portrayed. Stories about the creation of the panorama circulated, including testimonies about the accuracy of the experience portrayed, and artifacts such as Brown's box were exhibited alongside panoramas (273). Considering the incorporation of the daguerreotype into the process of creating panoramas, Huhtamo notes, "the dissemination of photography suggested new criteria of authenticity. Painting was unable to compete with the new medium in reproducing the surface of things; it had to find new roles, or at least to defend its status" (274).

Did photography, and eventually film, take the wind out of the moving panorama's mighty nineteenth century sails? Huhtamo does not provide a direct answer to this question, and just as the reader begins to naturally come to this conclusion, the author reveals the medium's last loud gasp in chapter 10, "A Medium's Final Fanfares". Huhtamo's reference to the discovery of the Théâtre Morieux 'time capsule' in a warehouse in Ghent, Belgium a few years ago not only points researchers to an unprecedented resource, but to the massive investment in the panoramic production during the fin-de-siècle. The section "'Vehicular Amplification' Or the Quest for Immersion" details the simulacra of moving panoramas that used gas engines, hydraulic pistons, massive canvas rollers, and elaborate dioramic effects to imitate the pitch and roll of the ship, the luxury and comfort of sleeping railway cars, and the illusion of travel. Rather than eclipsing the moving panorama, perhaps the photograph pushed it into spectacular, completely immersive dimensions that foreshadow the fantastic, Disney-like experiences of the twentieth century.

Though his study stops roughly with the development of celluloid film, the author makes clear his intentions to avoid a positivistic stance of the development of the medium, in which the medium of film is projected back onto the developments of the moving panorama; "The moving panorama never had an unchanging and clearly delineated identity; giving it one *a posteriori* would be an act of falsification" (17). It is, however, nearly impossible not to give in to this impulse, and there are moments, such as the 'uncanny' resemblance of Carmontelle's transparencies to the television set, where Huhtamo draws associations between the two media (42). Relaying anecdotes about the experience of viewing panoramas, such as the *topos* of the drunken sailor viewing the media spectacle for the first time, he states that "film culture did not inherit only material features from earlier shows; also the imaginary around it

accommodated pre-existing discursive formulas” (79). A short, concluding chapter that discusses the relation of the moving panorama to film is sorely lacking as it would have satisfied this need to connect the two media and clarified the subtleties of why projecting the development of film onto earlier moving images is problematic.

The impressive, perhaps overzealous scope of material that encompasses Huhtamo’s study makes it tempting to call *Illusions in Motion* ‘panoramic’. Moving from France, to England and the United States; from the most spectacular, intact specimens to reconstructions based on the printed ephemera; from true innovation to lucrative knock-off, the moments in the history of the moving panorama that Huhtamo reconstructs offer a constellation of the panoramic imagination, rather than a definitive narrative of its development. The author traverses the vast body of material quickly, giving the reader only momentary glances at each element or example. Many sections do not live up to the detailed study that their lengthy subheadings promise, and the encyclopedic focus at times reads like a textbook. An appendix of known complete moving panoramas, fragments and variants compiled by Suzanne Wray and Peter Morelli details the profiles of 27 sources, many of which are difficult to locate. The staggering 36-page bibliography, as well as the numerous black and white images of various moving panorama apparatuses will be a necessary reference for scholars of the moving image. Huhtamo gives many leads into instances in panoramic production that are waiting to be further explored and *Illusions in Motion* will be an invaluable reference for scholars of visual cultural phenomena in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

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