'Shivers down your spine': panoramas and the origins of the cinematic reenactment'

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> *To realize that this magnificent pageant is, after all, only an illusion, requires a stronger mental effort than to accept it for reality.*[1]
> *While looking at the picture* he must live in its scene.[2]

The circular thrill: cinema and early panoramas

The proposition that nineteenth-century panoramas constitute significant precursors to the twentieth-century motion picture is by now familiar to film historians. Indeed, long before contemporary art historians and cultural theorists connected the hyperrealism of these large-scale immersive paintings to the mechanized mimeticism of the cinematic image, earlier historians had linked the two representational forms. In 1933, Monas N. Squires argued that panoramas of the 1840s and 1850s were 'ancestors of the modern moving picture', a label endorsed three years later by Bertha L. Heilbron, who called nineteenth-century panoramas 'travel "movies"'. Similarly, in 1959, panorama scholar Joseph Earl Arrington argued that the panorama was indubitably the 'pre-photographic ancestor of the motion picture', and in his 1965 book, *Archaeology of the Cinema*, C.W. Ceram discussed several panoramic precursors of cinema.[3]

If the analogy between cinema and panoramas seems obvious on some levels, what is less clear is exactly *how* these representational

1 'Brochure for *The Siege of Paris* panorama (1877) painted by Paul Philippoteaux, on exhibition daily at the corner of Columbus Avenue and Ferdinand Street, Boston', p. 8. Theater Collection, New York Public Library.

2 'The Cyclorama', *Scientific American*, vol. 55 (1886), p. 296. Emphasis mine. The author is referring to Paul Philippoteaux's panorama *The Battle of Gettysburg* painted in 1886, which I discuss in greater depth later in the essay.

3 Monas N. Squires, 'Henry Lewis and his mammoth panorama of the Mississippi River', *Missouri Historical Review*, vol. 27 (April 1933), p. 246, cited in Bertha L. Heilbron, 'Making a motion picture in 1848: Henry Lewis on the Upper Mississippi', *Minnesota History*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1936), p. 132; Heilbron, 'Making a motion picture', p. 133; Joseph Earl Arrington, 'William Burr's moving panorama of the Great Lakes, The Niagara, St. Lawrence and Saguenay Rivers', *Ontario History*, vol. 51, no. 3 (1959), p. 141; C.W. Ceram, *Archaeology of the Cinema* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965).

forms anticipated cinema, how their operational and aesthetic norms made them its striking antecedents. Beyond addressing the general textual and phenomenological correspondences between panoramas and cinema (how the scale and hyperrealism of the panorama was proto-cinematic, for example), this essay examines how the panorama was discursively understood by certain spectators in distinctly cinematic terms. One way to illuminate this connection is to focus on the reenactment as a structuring principle of both early cinema and panoramas. Not only was the reenactment a key organizing principle of many nonfictional panoramas[4] but, in a wider sense, it came to define the very idea of the panorama effect as one of revisitation, of witnessing again, in modified form, that which has occurred in a different time and place. In ways both similar to and distinct from cinema, panoramas laid claim to the historical and geographical real through an indexical bond, premissed on their status as topographically correct and authentic reconstructions of battles, landscapes or ancient antiquities such as the Acropolis in Athens.

4   There were many panoramas of fictional subjects, including John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

But while the panorama anticipated some of the phenomenological and discursive features of the cinematic reenactment, there were also important differences, the most obvious being that while the panorama *reconstructed* a scene from history, a newspaper headline event or the natural world, it did not literally reenact this event for the spectator. Because the panorama was an image frozen in time, the scene was not literally reperformed for the spectator as in a film reenactment of a battle or an execution; there was no *action per se* in the painting. However, if panorama exhibitors could not avail themselves of cinema's possibilities for literal reenactment (the panorama's only method of depicting the kinetic involved the physical movement of the canvas before the spectator in the case of the moving panorama or when dioramic lighting effects gave the impression of changes of time in Daguerre's diorama), they compensated by explicitly foregrounding the panorama's status as a *reconstitutive* mode of address. Thus, the depicted events reassembled for the spectator were to be interpreted *as if* the action was happening along an immediate temporal and spatial presence and continuity. The reenactment as a cinematic trope may thus provide a useful theoretical frame for understanding the historical and formal links between the panorama and early cinema.

The reenactment has assumed an ambiguous status in traditional cinema scholarship: easily identified, on the one hand, as a staple of both early actuality filmmaking and contemporary docudrama, the reenactment has nevertheless failed to generate as much detailed theoretical explication as its ubiquitous status – within both Hollywood and television 'infotainment' – would seem to invite. While the reenactment has been the subject of some discussion, both descriptive and prescriptive, in standard documentary film texts, less attention has been paid to how its forms of spectatorial address were

5 For more on the history of panoramas and their exploitation of the conceit of virtual travel, see Alison Griffiths, '"The largest picture ever executed by man": panoramas and the emergence of large-screen and 360-degree internet technologies', in John Fullerton (ed.), *Reception Studies in Film, Television and Digital Culture* (Sydney: John Libbey Press, 2003).

6 Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), pp. 101, 103.

7 For more on panoramas, see Oettermann, *The Panorama*; Ralph Hyde, *Panoramania! The Art and Entertainment of the 'All-Embracing' View* (London: Refoil Publications in association with the Barbican Art Gallery, 1988); Richard Altick, *The Shows of London* (Harvard, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978); John Francis McDermott, *The Lost Panoramas of the Mississippi* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Angela Miller, 'The panorama, the cinema and the emergence of the spectacular', *Wide Angle*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1996), pp. 34–69; Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 149–76.

8 Lee Parry, 'Landscape theater in America', *Art in America*, vol. 59 (December 1971), p. 53.

9 Evelyn J. Fruitema and Paul A. Zoetmulder, *The Panorama Phenomenon*, catalogue produced for the preservation of the Centarian Mesdag Panorama (The Hague: Mesdag Panorama, 1981), p. 18.

rehearsed in numerous precinematic entertainments. As interstitial texts, straddling 'high' and 'low' entertainment in their blending of the promotional discourses and artistic techniques of both fine arts and popular amusements, panoramas often evoked the reenactment experience. Offering facsimiles of actual events and geographical locales, promoters of the nineteenth-century panorama exploited its spectacular mode of address. A visit to a panorama promised a unique experience, offering an immersive representation of historical events and locales portrayed with a heightened sense of fidelity and verisimilitude. While similar claims of verisimilitude were offered on behalf of realist easel paintings at the time, three factors make panoramas unique as precursors to film reenactments: first, the mode of spectatorship invited by their scale (unlike viewing easel paintings or photographs, spectators gazed at huge canvases that filled the space before their eyes); second, their status as technologies of virtual transport and invocation of presence as a constituent feature of the panoramic experience; and third, in the case of moving panoramas, their exhibition context – a fixed, as opposed to an ambulatory, mode of spectatorship, in which audiences sat in a darkened auditorium for the duration of a performance, complete with musical accompaniment and explanatory lecture.

Before examining the complex relationship between the wildly popular nineteenth-century panorama and the forms and practices of early cinema, a brief discussion of the origins of panoramas might be helpful. Panoramas were among the earliest (and most commercially successful) forms of mass visual entertainment, going in and out of fashion throughout the nineteenth century. Patented by the Irishman Robert Barker in 1787,[5] the first panorama premiered in London's Leicester Square in January 1792. Entitled *A View of London*, it began as a half-circle but, recognizing its success, Barker quickly extended it to a full circle. Barker's painting stood fifteen feet high and stretched forty-five feet in diameter; visitors paid one shilling to enter the building and could also buy an orientation aid in the form of an anamorphotic (bird's eye view) diagram (figure 1) and a set of six aquatints.[6] The 360-degree painting was suspended from the interior walls of a specially designed circular building within which was built a viewing platform (belvedere) for spectators to stand on (circular panoramas such as this were also called cycloramas between 1872 and 1885).[7] Responding to the phenomenal success of this panorama, in 1794 Barker built a ninety-foot rotunda in Leicester Square (called 'The Panorama') that also contained an upper circle for showing smaller paintings (figure 2).[8] The *vellum* (an umbrella-like canopy over the spectator's head) and bottom of the painting were concealed by a cloth of the same colour stretching from the lower edge of the platform towards the bottom edge of the canvas.[9] With a newly invested omniscience, the spectator was thus enveloped in an artificial reality in which all boundaries delimiting the real

Fig. 1. Key to the panorama
The Battle of the Nile showing
Lord Nelson's defeat of the
French, 1799. Picture courtesy:
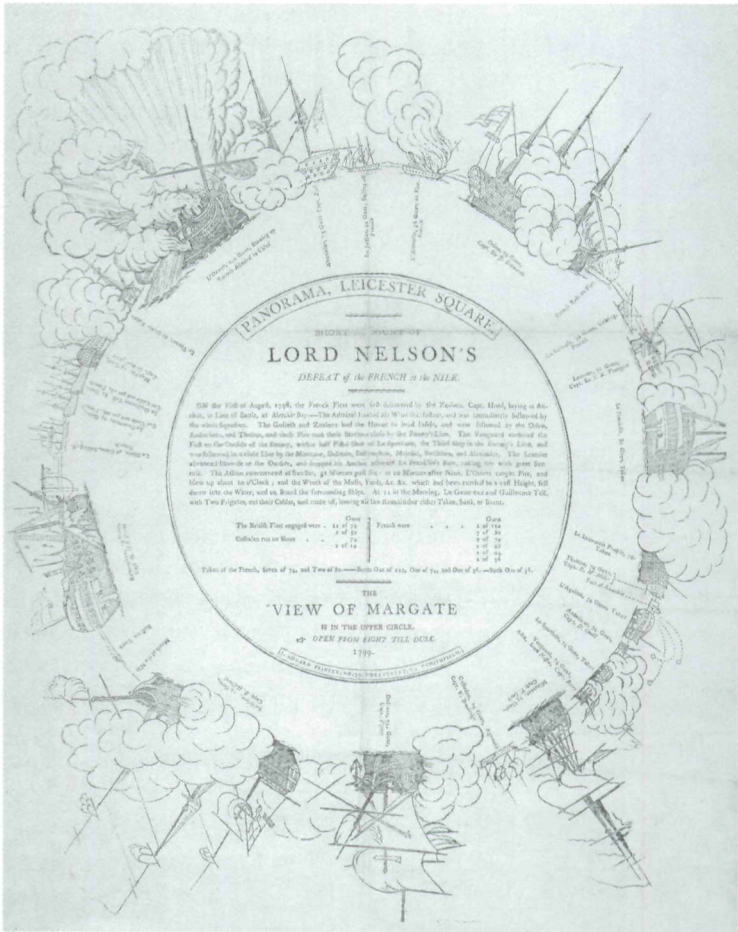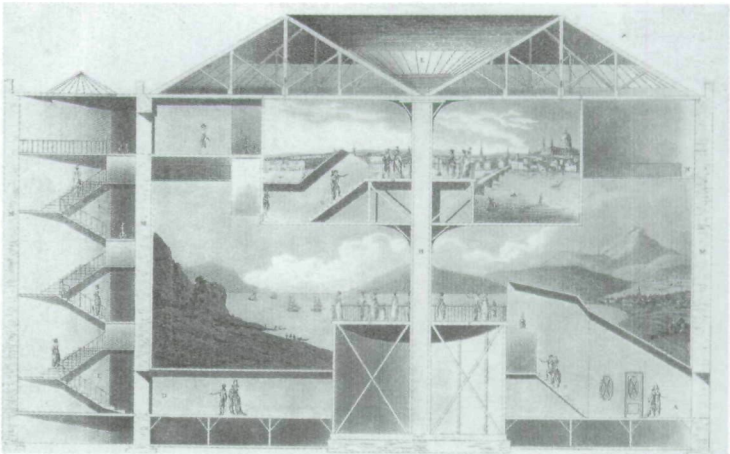Guildhall Library Corporation of
London.

Fig. 2. Cross-section of Robert
Barker's panorama rotunda in
London's Leicester Square,
c. 1798, showing the upper and
lower levels.

from the synthetic had been putatively eliminated; as art historian Lee Parry has noted, 'the viewer's eye was intended to be directly opposite the horizon line of the painting'. Left with nothing within which to locate the painting, the spectator was more likely to accept the illusionism of the visual field than if the painting had been conventionally framed or bounded (figure 3). Unlike the frame, which functions as a window onto an illusionistically-rendered space, the panorama attempted to create the sensation of the spectator's physical relocation into the centre of such a space. At the same time, as this illustration of a group of visitors on the viewing platform suggests, the mode of spectatorship invited by the panorama permitted a level of sociality quite distinct from the darkened auditorium of the nickelodeon theatre.

The methods by which these events were reassembled for the audience changed over time and even incorporated temporality as a design element. While early panoramas were based upon the idea of representing a single temporal and spatial situation (what a spectator would actually see were she situated at the centre of a scene on a hill or on top of a tall building – what I call 'naturalistic' panoramas), later panoramas, especially those concerned with depicting action, often constructed their scenes as 'composite' views, combining discrete incidents from an extended battle or other event into a 360-degree, apparently seamless visual field. There is thus a certain tension between the near perfect illusionism of the
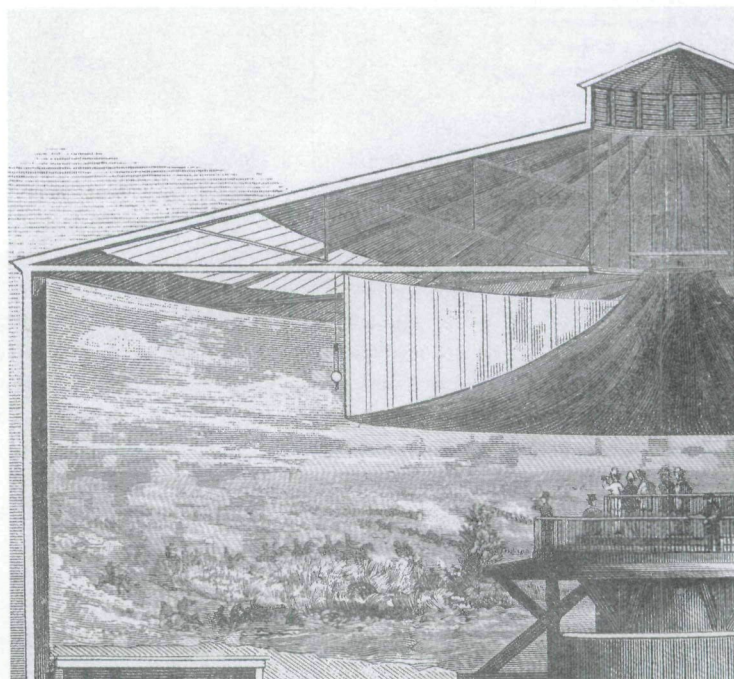

Fig. 3. Spectators standing on the viewing platform of Paul Philippoteaux's *The Battle of Gettysburg* panorama, 1884.

non-composite, 'naturalistic' 360-degree panorama and the edited composite view. While each of these styles is linked to cinema, they anticipate the 'cinematic' in quite distinct ways. If the 'naturalistic' panorama remained faithful to Barker's initial idea of circular 'panoramic vision' in its evocation of cinema's spatial illusionism, the composite panorama mimicked the multi-perspectivalism, narrativism and selection of detail associated with the multishot filmmaking of the early cinema period.

Both modes of panoramic painting – those premissed upon a faithful imitation of a single 360-degree view and those synthesizing events separated in time and space – typically were accompanied by pull-out orientation maps helping observers to identify specific points of interest via numbered items (figure 4). The presence of a lecturer was usual at moving panorama exhibitions and occasionally a feature at circular panoramas. In this regard, such orientation guides functioned like the intertitles and sequential tableaux one might find in early cinema reenactments. These orientation maps appeared on the inside covers of panorama booklets on sale at the exhibition site; the roughly eight-by-sixteen-inch folded orientation map could be pulled out for closer inspection of the enumerated points of interest, with the first item routinely appearing in the top left-hand corner (the panorama was always represented as two equal halves, one on top of the other). Reading the orientation map from left to right, spectators could find out more about each feature by turning the pages of the booklet to the section elaborating upon most, if not all, of the numbered items.[10] Organizing the 'views' as a series of attractions that should be seen in a specific order oriented or codified the ostensibly autonomous vision of the spectator by compiling a sequentiality akin to viewing edited images in a film.

An offshoot of the circular panorama was the moving panorama, in which a single continuous canvas between eight and twelve feet high and up to a thousand or more feet in length was guided between two rollers before the viewer.[11] The canvas was framed by a proscenium arch which varied in scale depending on the size of the painting. Originating in the UK as a theatrical attraction in itself, or a feature of staged pantomimes in which background scenery would move to signify travel, the moving panorama was especially popular in the USA after 1846, when amateur scene painter John Banvard painted his giant panorama of the Mississippi River, which was claimed, in hyperbolic US style, to be three miles long.[12] Condensing days of actual travel time into an exhibition–performance of a few hours (Banvard's journey would then have taken at least four days by steamboat to complete), moving panorama paintings were either exhibited as one apparently continuous image, such as the banks of a river with occasional detours to river towns or scenes of Native American life, or as a series of separate scenes or

10 Some items did not receive further explication, although there does not seem to be a particular rule for determining which numbers are written about and which ignored.

11 Kevin J. Avery, 'Movies for manifest destiny: the moving panorama phenomenon in America', in *The Grand Moving Panorama of Pilgrim's Progress* exhibit catalogue organized by The Montclair Art Museum, 1999, p. 1. As Wolfgang Born has noted, the rollers necessary for panorama exhibition anticipate the reels used in motion picture exhibition. Born, 'The panoramic landscape as an American art form', *Art in America*, vol. 1 (January 1948), p. 3.

12 The first panorama to be shown in America was English artist William Winstanley's painting of Westminster and London in 1795; according to Lee Parry, it may have been copied from engravings by Robert Barker. Parry, 'Landscape theater in America', p. 54.

Fig. 4. Explanation of *A View of Cabul, the Capital of Afghanistan* panorama, 1842.
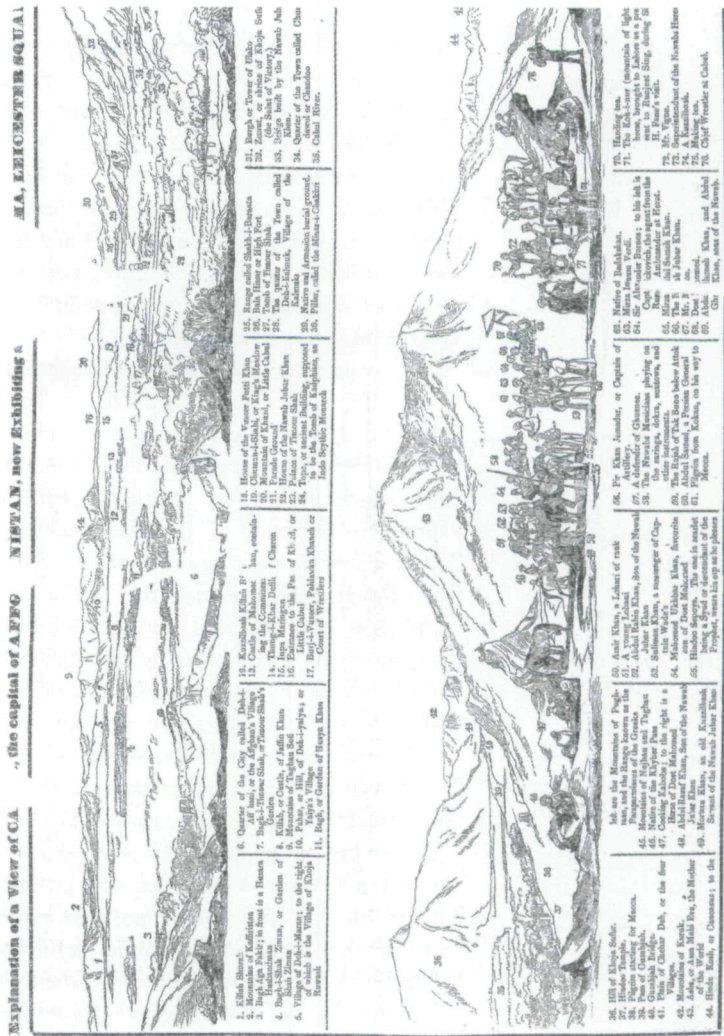
'frames', each displayed in the proscenium opening. River panoramas claimed less to represent the entire length of a river from start to finish than to highlight the most picturesque aspects of the journey, which for Banvard usually meant representing Native American life. Selecting the highlights of the journey for visual representation on the canvas is akin in many ways to decoupage, where the filmmaker reassembles reality from temporally and spatially distinct scenes. Closer to theatrical scene paintings (they were painted in distemper, a painting process used to create backdrops in which the pigments are mixed with an egg yolk emulsion) than to highbrow examples of fine art, their vast size necessitated broad brush strokes from which the spectator would have received impressions rather than detail of the images represented on the canvas. Each of these frames contained a different scene or aspect of the route, which the lecturer would discuss as it was scrolled along the viewing frame; in the words of a contemporaneous London reviewer in *The Times*: 'drawn along on two cylinders, a small portion [of the panorama was] exhibited at a time, so that the audience may imagine they are performing the journey along the river, especially as the illusion is heightened by diorama effects representing changes of the day'.[13]

As a perceptual apparatus for framing human vision, both the 360-degree and moving panoramas were frequently promoted with an appeal to the notion of the reenactment as a way of foregrounding the uncanny mimetic prowess of the technology. Audiences, it was felt, would fully appreciate the illusionistic effect of the panorama only if its subject matter were ontologically linked to ideas of grandness and monumentality; in other words, the locations and events painted by panoramists had to resonate as suitable subjects for this epic mode of representation: 'big subjects for big pictures'. As avid consumers of both 360-degree and moving panoramas in the nineteenth century, when panoramas went in and out of fashion in both the USA and Europe, audiences familiarized themselves with the viewing protocols of a mass medium that would share many textual and formal similarities with cinema.[14] By closely examining how battle and river panoramas were promoted both as uncannily mimetic views and staged public performances, we are able to understand better how early film audiences made sense of filmic reenactments and to offer a more historically-nuanced account of the links between precinematic visual culture and motion pictures. This essay considers the two most common types of panorama from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[15] The first is the battle panorama, an exemplary instance of the reenactment model of panorama viewing; the second is the river panorama, an example of what I call the 'sublime vista' panorama, which offered spectators a form of 'enriched vision' and an opportunity for virtual travel. The essay concludes by briefly exploring how the theme of death serves

13 'Mr Banvard's moving panorama', *The Times*, nd., np., in 'John Banvard and family papers', Minnesota Historical Society, microfilm M360, hereafter BFP.

14 Oettermann, *The Panorama*, p. 7.

15 A third genre, not discussed here, is the illustrated sermon panorama depicting religious scenes, exemplified by the famous moving panorama of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1850–51). Since this subgenre of panorama painting makes claims to verisimilitude in different ways to battle and river panoramas, it will not be covered in this essay. For more on the *Pilgrim's Progress Panorama*, see the *The Grand Moving Panorama of Pilgrim's Progress* exhibition catalogue. The exhibit was installed at the Montclair Art Museum from 31 January to 2 May 1999, before touring to the Portland Museum of Art (Maine) and The Edwin A. Ulrich Museum of Art at Wichita State University.

as a unifying discourse in panoramas and cinematic reenactments, regarding not only their iconographies but coming to constitute their very ontologies.

Nineteenth-century battle panoramas: revisioning the past

One of the most popular genres of both circular and moving panoramas was the battle subject. As Dutch historian Yvonne van Eekelen has argued, 'battle panoramas held an enormous appeal for the man in the street who liked to imagine himself being pitched into battle, crossing unexplored territories or stepping back into biblical times'.[16] Yet the popularity of war as a panorama subject is not without irony, since of all the subjects available to panoramists, the battle seemed in some ways the least amenable to pictorial representation, given the abundance of action; as Evelyn J. Fruitema and Paul A. Zoetmulder have noted, 'the battlefield shows a tangle of moving soldiers and horses, whereas the immobility of "moving" objects on the canvas disturbs the optical illusion'.[17] Two main types of battle panorama existed in the nineteenth century: illustrated newspaper panoramas, which depicted major news stories of the day and were exhibited mostly in purpose-built rotundas in European capitals, and national memorial panoramas, which were discursively constructed as commemorative paintings celebrating victories that may have occurred many years previously. According to Richard Altick, the democratizing conventions of panorama exhibition played a major role in the rise of battle panoramas. In contrast to private galleries of the time, anyone who could afford to pay the entrance fee and looked respectable could view the painting. While still retaining some public appeal, mythical, allegorical and biblical subjects in the UK gave way to the depiction of major political and military events, such as the burning of the Houses of Parliament (which painter Charles Marshall constructed in one week),[18] the Coronation of King George IV,[19] and the Battles of Waterloo, Sedan, Trafalgar and Champigny-Villiers.[20]

Illustrated newspaper panoramas often appeared very soon after news of a major battle had reached British shores (though the battle itself may have taken place months before the news finally reached London); in 1801, English panoramist Robert Ker Porter painted the 270-degree *The Storming of Seringapatam* in a remarkable six weeks after reports of the battle reached Britain, in order to exploit topical interest in the event.[21] While it is unclear which sources Porter used in representing the event in paint – most likely a combination of newspaper accounts, etchings and verbal descriptions – he shared the arduous job of completing the scene with his fourteen-year old apprentice William Mulready, whose job it was to paint the approximately seven hundred soldiers depicted in the panorama. Even

16 Yvonne van Eekelen, 'The magical panorama', in *The Magical Panorama: the Mesdag Panorama, an Experience in Space and Time*, trans. Arnold and Erica Pomerans (Zwolle/The Hague: Waanders Uitgevers/BV Panorama Mesdag, 1996), p. 11.

17 Fruitema and Zoetmulder, *The Panorama Phenomenon*, p. 33.

18 Oettermann, *The Panorama*, p. 176.

19 This panorama was Henry Aston Barker's biggest success grossing £10,000. Altick, *The Shows of London*, p. 177.

20 Oettermann, *The Panorama*, p. 32.

21 Porter used panorama inventor Robert Barker's term *coup d'oeil* to describe his painting, rather than 'panorama', either because he wanted to differentiate his establishment from Barker's Leicester Square Panorama or because his paintings were never a full 360 degrees. Ibid., p. 115.

though news of the British victory in Southern India had taken months to reach England, Porter reacted swiftly with a panorama that might have had the same impact as satellite-delivered television news in its ability to virtually transport spectators to the battle front through a heightened sense of realism.[22] Reporting on the phenomenal popular success of the painting, the German magazine *London und Paris* stated that: 'Those people were few in number who did not go several times to the Lyceum in the Strand to see the renowned painting of an unforgettable occurrence, for in addition to seeing accurate portraits of the main participants, almost all visitors were stirred by the sight of events on the subcontinent'.[23] Achieving overnight fame with *The Storming of Seringapatam*, Porter attempted to repeat the success with other battle subjects and garnered a reputation as a painter of British military victories. Porter's second panorama, *The Siege of Acre*, painted in 1801, documented another recent British battle, Sir Sidney Smith's liberation of the British troops and their allies from Napolean's army in Egypt. Explicitly signalling the status of this panorama as a reenactment or a kind of proto-newsreel, one reporter noted that

> To the extent that it is possible to re-create events on canvas, this picture succeeds in the opinion of knowledgeable visitors. . . . Go to the Lyceum at any time of day, and you will always find people there. Many go back to see the picture two and three times. The political importance of the event depicted, the variety of the scene, the enthusiasm with which the artist has painted it, and the great resemblance of the portraits to the participants in the battle have awakened an extraordinary amount of interest in the exhibit.[24]

Another example of the panorama-as-illustrated-newspaper or proto-newsreel can be seen in R. Dodd's 1805 panorama, *View of Gibraltar and Bay,* which was exhibited at the Panorama in Leicester Square. The booklet accompanying this panorama included an anamorphotic drawing (see figure 1) in which sketches of the images seen on the painting were reproduced and numbered for further explication. Highlighting such notable events as the 'Burning of His Majesty's Ships' and 'Escape of the Grand Fleet from the Flames', the public was reminded that this panorama was 'not so much in commemoration of that unfortunate event' but a demonstration of the 'alacrity of the British seamen . . . [in] sending their boats to the relief of the distressed, and saving nearly the whole of the ship's company'.[25] That panoramas such as these should have looked to the day's headlines for artistic inspiration should come as no surprise; there clearly would have been built-in public interest in having this military news from overseas dramatically visualized for patriotic citizens back home. Such nationalistic scenes also furthered the interests of the State, helping to secure public support for British naval operations and imperial adventures.

22 According to Oettermann, John Thomas Serres's panorama called *The Pandemonium of Boulogne* is the most compelling example of nineteenth-century amusements foreshadowing contemporary television journalism, 'providing as up-to-date visual information as possible on the current military situation'. Ibid., p. 125.

23 *Journal London und Paris,* vol. 7 (1801), pp. 105–6, cited in Oettermann, *The Panorama,* p. 115.

24 Ibid., pp. 103, 113, cited in Oettermann, *The Panorama,* p. 117.

25 Guide for *View of Gibraltar,* 1805, British Library.

26 See Oettermann's discussion of this in *The Panorama*, pp. 106–26.

27 Anon., 'The panorama, with memoirs of its inventor Robert Barker, and his son, the late Henry Astor Barker', *The Art-Journal*, vol. 9 (1847), pp. 46–7. Conflicts with Napoleon had been successfully represented in panoramic form, including *The Battle of the Nile* (1798) and *The Battle of Trafalgar* (1805), Herbert C. Andes, 'The Leicester Square and Strand panoramas', *Notes and Queries*, vol. 159, nos 4–5 (26 July 1930), p. 59. Napoleon, too, was struck by the panorama's potential for propaganda, although as Parry notes, his plan to construct eight rotundas to display the great battle of the Revolution and Empire was defeated by the events of 1812–15. Parry, 'Landscape theater', p. 54.

28 Evelyn Onnes-Fruitema, 'Of panoramas old and new', in *The Magical Panorama*, p. 31; For example, The modern *Battle of Al-Qadissiyah* panorama in Iraq depicts a battle that took place in AD 637; reaching the viewing platform either by stairs or elevator, the spectator is encircled by combat. By way of heightening the spectacle and illusionism, recorded sound effects of the war play continuously in the background.

29 John Banvard, *Descriptions of Banvard's Geographical Painting of the Mississippi River, Extensively Known as the* Three Mile Picture, *with New Additions of the Naval and Military Operations on that River, Exhibiting a View of the Country 1,500 Miles in Length, from the Mouth of the Missouri to the Balize* (New York: L.H. Bigelow, 1862).

30 Marie L. Schmitz, 'Henry Lewis: panorama maker', *Cultural Heritage: Quarterly Journal of the Missouri Historical Society*, vol. 3 (Winter 1982), p. 41.

Audiences attending the typical nineteenth-century battle panorama would not only have been entertained by the spectacular painting but would have been interpellated into the roles of historical witnesses or war reporters. The ability to re-experience an event of enormous national significance, to step inside history, which was metaphorically enacted via the spectators' physical location and locomotion around the central viewing platform, were doubtless intended to trigger feelings of nationalistic fervour for early nineteenth-century spectators. As Stephan Oettermann points out, Porter played a major role in popularizing the battle panorama and achieved recognition for his ability to transform major military events of the day into dramatic pictorial reenactments.[26] The propagandistic function of Porter's panoramas cannot be underestimated: displayed in the commercial and political centre of the world's foremost colonial power, the panoramas of military victory and colonial reign served to enhance public support for empire by their transformation of war into visual spectacle. Lord Nelson said he was indebted to panoramist Robert Barker for 'keeping up the fame of his victory in the battle of the Nile for a year longer than it would have lasted in the public estimation'; indeed, the *Panorama of Waterloo* was so successful that Barker was able to retire from panorama painting and live off the profits that it generated.[27] This ideological role of the relatively rare contemporary panorama continues today; Evelyn Onnes-Fruitema notes that eight of the ten panoramas constructed since 1960 portray patriotic national battles.[28]

Further evidence of the illustrative newspaper function of panoramas can be seen in the case of Banvard's Mississippi painting, which I discuss further below. As John Hanner has pointed out, the Civil War brought renewed interest in Banvard's Mississippi panorama, leading Banvard to substitute the Ohio and Missouri sections for 'new naval and military operations' on the Mississippi.[29] Rival river panoramist Henry Lewis also used his panorama to respond to local events, adding a panel showing the great fire of St Louis, and, as we shall see below, Godfrey N. Frankenstein, painter of the Niagara Falls panorama, revised his moving panorama to reflect newsworthy events such as a fatal accident.[30] That Banvard had few qualms replacing river sections with current events suggests both the panorama exhibitor's need to draw new audiences (and entice back regulars) and the panorama's intermediary status as both art and illustrated newspaper. The panorama exhibitor's reordering of sections of the painting also anticipates early cinema showmen rearranging the order of their films in an attempt to construct a narrative or to respond to topical events or the interests of a particular audience.

Panoramas, however, did more than simply anticipate early cinema's fascination with events drawn from the day's headlines, with local footage included in programmes when on tour in rural

locations; panoramas also constructed the experience in proto-cinematic ways, foreshadowing the shot structures of typical early travelogues and inviting the spectator to read the painting as a seamless synthesis of a place and its people. The accompanying printed material for Burford's 1842 panorama, *View of the City of Cabul, Capital of Afghanistan*, for example, includes seventy-six points of interest (see figure 4). The painting's guide directs the spectator first to a distant view of the mountains of Kaffiristan, Nejhau and Taghau, before moving to closer views of the indigenous people of the region (46–76 in the orientation map). Paragraph-long descriptions of each of the numbered images are contained in the booklet, along with information about the opening times and the admission fee of one shilling.

The decision to combine general topographical views with representations of specific noteworthy figures is vividly illustrated in Burford's *View of the Battle of Sobraon, with the Defeat of the Sikh Army of the Punjab* (also appearing at the Panorama in Leicester Square) (figure 5). In the panorama's orientation map (figure 6) the action is represented on two levels, although the painting itself would have been viewed as one continuous image. In both the map's top and bottom levels we see distant Sikh villages, along with British and Sikh cavalry and guns; we are also presented with a high-angle view of the British and Sikh artillery on the page immediately

DESCRIPTION

OF A VIEW OF

THE BATTLE OF

SOBRAON,

WITH THE

DEFEAT OF THE SIKH ARMY

OF THE

PUNJAB,

NOW EXHIBITING AT

THE PANORAMA, LEICESTER SQUARE.

————————

PAINTED BY THE PROPRIETOR, ROBERT BURFORD,

ASSISTED BY H. C. SELOUS.

————————

LONDON:

PRINTED BY GEO. NICHOLS, EARL'S COURT, LEICESTER SQUARE.

1846.

Fig. 5. *A View of the Battle of Sobraon* panorama poster, 1846.