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## **Global Visions: Around-the-World Travel and Visual Culture in Early Modernity<sup>1</sup>**

*Tiago de Luca*

Over the last two decades the world has emerged as a ubiquitous trope in our audiovisual landscape: whether we think of multinarrative films directed by global auteurs, such as *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006), *360* (Fernando Meirelles, 2011) and *Mammoth* (Lukas Moodysson, 2009); the explosion of documentaries and TV series that have the planet as their focus, including the BBC series *Planet Earth* (2007), *Home* (Yann Arthus-Bertrand, 2009), and countless others carrying Earth in their titles; the 3D variations of this genre as produced for the IMAX theatre, such as *Sacred Planet* (Jon Long, 2004) and *A Beautiful Planet* (Toni Myers, 2016); ‘world symphony’ films like *Samsara* (Ron Fricke, 2011), *One Day on Earth* (Kyle Ruddick, 2012) and *Life in a Day* (Kevin Macdonald, 2011); or even a single web-environment like Google Earth. Connecting these otherwise disparate audiovisual forms and formats is a simple – though of course ultimately unattainable – goal: to depict not a world, but the world, that is to say, the entire world.

No doubt such a proliferation of world-encompassing formulations is largely connected to socio-economic globalising processes on the one hand, and an acute sense of our global environmental crisis on the other, and thus restricted contemporary phenomena. Yet a quest to encompass the whole world certainly has precedents in media and film history. In this essay I argue that the global imaginaries surrounding the emergence of cinema provide a meaningful field against which contemporary ones can be held up and deconstructed, and vice versa. While globalising phenomena and discourses are often associated with the end of the twentieth century, a look at the media-scape within which cinema emerges reveals that grappling with the world as a – and in its – totality was deeply built into the visual culture of the time – a phenomenon that resulted in no small measure from the contemporary popularity (and feasibility) of round-the-world travels and imperialist expeditions. To investigate some of the earliest examples by which the world was visually encompassed and the respective discourses they mobilised might thus help us shed a more nuanced light on the ways we currently conceive of and perceive the Earth.

## **From a Panoramic to a Planetary Consciousness**

As one of the most popular visual mediums of the nineteenth century, the panorama has received voluminous scholarly attention, with many authoritative histories on the subject published in English (Oettermann 1997; Comment 1999; Oleksijczuk 2011; Huhtamo 2013). Its importance for genealogies of the cinema has, likewise, been stressed by a number of scholars, whether as a means of exploring its conceptual and formal connections with early cinema and beyond (Gunning 2006; Doane 2002; Castro 2009; Miller 1996), or as a way of suggesting possible avenues through which this medium can be theorised as a precursor of contemporary manifestations in our audiovisual landscape, notably immersive realities and IMAX experiences (Roberts 1998; Grau 2003; Griffiths 2013). Their many disagreements notwithstanding, however, the majority of these studies converge on one point, namely that, more than a visual spectacle and cultural phenomenon, the panorama inaugurated a novel, decidedly modern and ‘particular way of seeing and looking at the world’ (Castro 2009: 10). In this section, I would like to explore this idea along more literal avenues, and to take ‘world’ not as a mere rhetorical device or an abstract entity designating ‘reality’, but to explore it in terms of a specifically nineteenth-century conception and perception of the planet’s scale and totality.

The nineteenth century has been examined in relation to how the profusion of panoramas engendered the formation of a ‘panoramic consciousness’ (Rice 1993: 70) in terms of a new mode of vision that ‘aims to take in the whole’ (Oettermann 1997: 22). It has also been linked to the emergence of a ‘planetary consciousness’ in relation to an enhanced awareness of the planet as a totality owing to a sense of confidence triggered by round-the-world travels (Chaplin 2012). I would like to forge an explicit link between these two modes of consciousness and to propose that they are, in fact, deeply entwined. My interest lies in uncovering how the panorama – and later film – was both part and parcel of a modern paradigm whereby the notion of a world totality manifested itself through different modes of visuality. Below I examine three of these modes – the metonymy, the icon and the inventory – and then move on to briefly suggest the ways in which they gained cinematic form in early cinema and beyond.

As immortalised by Jules Verne’s novel *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1872), the whole world during the nineteenth century began to be perceived as being within reach, navigable and traversable: the site of utopian dreams of foreign views and exploratory quests of

land possession. As Bernard Comment points out, the ‘yearning for other countries, other places, for changes of scene, developed considerably during the nineteenth century ... and a thirst for discovery, for knowledge was born, not to mention the imperialistic and colonial policies that heightened people’s interests in faraway lands’ (1999: 132). The cultural production of this period is thus inserted within a wider perceptual and epistemological shift according to which the world was increasingly seen as an object to be encompassed and described in its totality. Not only Verne but many illustrious writers during the period attempted to carry out such a task. Already in 1848, Edgar Allan Poe had published his prose poem *Eureka: An Essay on the Material and Spiritual Universe*. Poe was inspired by the Prussian geographer and naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, to whom *Eureka* is dedicated, and who had expressed his desire to portray the entire world in a single work, an idea he subsequently carried out in his four-volume work *Cosmos: A Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe*, published between 1845 and 1862.<sup>2</sup>

Within the domain of visual forms, the consolidation in the nineteenth century of the panorama (which was commended for its educative value in *Cosmos*) also testified to a quest to ‘see all’, as evidenced by the etymologies of its combined Greek words. Originally invented and patented by the Irishman Robert Baker in the late eighteenth century, the panorama consisted of a large-size 360-degree realistically painted surface placed inside a rotunda specifically designed for such a purpose. As one of the first mass mediums of the nineteenth century, its emergence in many European metropolises more or less coincided with the birth of the tourism industry. At first, the panorama’s subject matter was often confined to the views of the cities in which they were located as a means of highlighting, by way of comparison, its impressive illusionistic qualities. However, it soon started to offer a surrogate for travel around the world in the form of exotic landscapes to which patrons could be transported in no time and at a modest price.<sup>3</sup>

In this respect, the panorama entertained a dual relationship with the concept of a world totality. On the one hand, as Stephan Oettermann has noted, the panorama was in many ways the antithesis of the ‘ideal’ landscape painting tradition, according to which ‘the world in its entirety and not just a segment of it’ was symbolically depicted (1997: 26). Unconcerned with realistic detail, the ‘ideal landscapes’ genre abided by aesthetic conventions the aim of which was an allegory of the world as centripetally enforced by the limits of the frame. The novelty of the panorama in this context resided in the way it literally disregarded the borders of the frame as the

enabler of a circumscribed world, featuring no aspirations to convey a symbolic totality but only a portion of the world reproduced in painstaking topographical detail. On the other hand, the panorama participated in the consolidation of a new visual regime that, together with phenomena such as alpinism and the invention of the hot-air balloon, rescaled the perceptual stakes of the world through the experience of the horizon in the field of vision (Oettermann 1997: 7–8). To be sure, the idea that the horizon was introduced at that time has been refuted on the basis of other precedents across the history of visual arts (see Grau 2003: 62). Yet its *prevalence* in nineteenth-century visual culture is undeniable, one that is not only evidenced in the Romantic painting tradition of the sublime (as in Caspar David Friedrich’s work) but also in the literature of the period.

A famous example is an extract from Goethe’s *Italian Journey* diary, which both Oettermann and Comment cite as emblematic of the new ocular paradigm within which the panorama emerged and which it helped cement. Alone on the open sea, Goethe claimed that ‘no one who has never seen himself surrounded on all sides by nothing but the sea can have a true conception of the world and his own relation to it’ (cited in Oettermann 1997: 7–8). Although it could be argued that ‘world’ is employed merely figuratively in Goethe’s lines, other historical evidence confirms that the panorama, as a new way of visually appropriating the world, *metonymically* implied the entire planet as an extension of the here and now of the depicted landscape. This is observed, for example, in Poe’s aforementioned poem *Eureka*. Speaking of the 7,912 miles ‘diameter of our own globe’, Poe writes:

<EXT> If we ascend an ordinary mountain and look around us from its summit, we behold a landscape stretching, say 40 miles, in every direction; forming a circle 250 miles in circumference; and including an area of 5000 square miles. [...] – yet the entire panorama would comprehend no more than one 40,000th part of the mere *surface* of the globe. Were this panorama, then, to be succeeded, after the lapse of an hour, by another of equal extent; this again by a third, after the lapse of another hour [...] – and so on, until the scenery of the whole Earth were exhausted; and were we to be engaged in examining these panoramas for twelve hours of every day; we should nevertheless, be 9 years and 48 days in completing the general survey (1848: 108–9). </EXT>

Poe's use of the word panorama to refer to a given vista, and its implication that it is co-extensive with the spherical surface of the planet makes apparent the extent to which the panoramic landscape acted as a metonymical substitute for the vastness of the world.

The frameless nature of the panorama, as the upper and lower parts of the canvas were hidden from view, further contributed to the idea of a global spatiality that extended beyond the visitor's sight, as did the keys distributed to patrons upon their visits. Initially these were single-sheet circular souvenirs meant to guide and orient the visitor, and their graphic transformation across the first twenty-five years of the panorama in many European capitals is worth noting. At their origin, these keys were drawn with an anamorphic technique that translated the 360-degree format into a two-dimensional circular figure around which a given panorama's settings and events were arranged, and within which the centrality of the spectator was implicitly or explicitly demarcated.<sup>4</sup> In her meticulous study of Robert Baker's circular keys from 1794 to 1816, Denise Blake Oleksijczuk has noted how the 'design shifts from locating the spectator within a flat, immersive landscape that ends at the limit of the horizon to an elevated view at the pinnacle of the globe that extends the space encompassed by pushing the horizon back into the distance' (2011: 128).

Indeed, a closer look at these anamorphic circular keys, which concurrently matured into a more or less homogeneous format across a number of countries during the panorama's first decades, suggests that the figure of the globe needs to be reckoned with as an important influence on these keys' design. In this respect, Comment's contention that 'the true panorama aspired to total illusion, [while] the circular view [of the keys] was a response to the notion of totality as perceived from a particular vantage-point' appears as less of a contradiction in terms (1999: 166). For this 'notion of totality as perceived from a particular vantage-point' was itself inscribed in the panorama as a concept, which the keys made visible by connecting a single view to a spherical spatial extension with clear global implications (Figure 1.1). As Jean-Marc Besse summarises, at its origin the panorama is informed by two organising principles: '[it] is an enclosed circular space, and one that opens itself to the contemplation of the limitless totality of the world' (2003: 183).<sup>5</sup>

While this 'limitless totality of the world' was often implied through metonymy, in some of the panorama's offshoots, such as the Georama, the idea to depict the planet gained quite literal contours through recourse to cartographic imagery as the *icon* of a world totality. Clearly

modelled on the scale and format of panoramas, the Georama first appeared in France in 1825. Conceived by Charles Delanglard and located in Paris next to other rotundas at the *Boulevard des Capucines*, the attraction consisted of an enormous globe measuring one hundred feet in circumference and containing two viewing platforms inside. As with the panorama, visitors had to walk up flights of stairs in order to reach these platforms, yet here they were confronted with the curious image of the map of the entire world ‘inside out’ rather than a single landscape. As Besse explains, the idea of reproducing a world map in a concave rather than convex surface was the main originality of Delanglard’s project, the aim of which was to deliver ‘a global vision ... that remains materially inaccessible to the spectator’s natural eye’ (2003: 200). Besse goes on:

[T]he Georama is not, properly speaking, a globe but a concave map which is intended to make possible a type of perception that neither the flat map nor the convex globe allow: a global, and so to speak immediate, view of the totality of the surface of the Earth. The Georama, better than the world map and the convex globe ... fulfils the perceptual programme of the *géographie générale*: to directly see the whole. (2003: 214)

This idea was taken up in the following decades both in France (by M. Guérin) and England. Inspired by Delanglard’s model, the mapmaker James Wyld built his Great Globe in Leicester Square in London in 1851, where it stayed for eleven years. More impressive than the Georama, the Great Globe measured 40 feet in diameter and 188 feet in circumference, and contained four rather than two viewing platforms inside, one above the other. It also displayed plasters in relief across the inside spherical surface depicting the Earth’s continents and oceans, and painted stars on the outside. The attraction’s selling point of offering an iconic image of the planet was further articulated in the form of a tour across the world by adjoining ‘halls for related objects such as small globes, atlases, maps and scenes from various places around the world’ (Oettermann 1997: 90).

Another offshoot of the panorama, the Cosmorama, similarly attempted to produce a total picture of the world, though it did so in terms of an *inventory* of the world landmarks through which visitors could travel. First opened in Paris in January 1808 by Abbé Gazzera and advertised as a ‘historical, geographic and picturesque voyage to different parts of the world’, its model was soon imitated in other cities such as London, New York and Boston (Huhtamo 2012:

40). If the idea of travelling to different places was, for some time, the *raison d'être* of the panorama and coterminous with the rise of tourism, the Cosmorama amplified and multiplied this idea through a series of paintings of different corners of the globe. These were much smaller images painted in watercolour and placed in a semicircle within a case in front of a window. As the natural daylight illuminated the paintings from the outside, visitors could study the images through magnifying glasses set in front of the case from the inside. The paintings varied in terms of content but, as a general rule, the images often catered to an upper-class clientele with a newly acquired taste for exotic vistas. At the Regent Street Cosmorama exhibition in 1825, for example, visitors had the opportunity to walk through world landmarks as they divided their attention between two main galleries: one of Europe, which contained historical and geographical views from Brussels, Rome and Valencia, among others; and the other of Asia and Africa, in which paintings of Grand Cairo, Egyptian pyramids and the Island of Phyloë were exhibited side by side. As Erkki Huhtamo notes, 'the mode of behaviour that was built into the Cosmorama's apparatus implied bodily motion ... Viewers had to displace themselves physically to "visit" all the sights/sites' (2012: 40).

By contrast, a moving panorama like *Whaling Voyage Round the World*, created by Benjamin Russell and Caleb Purrington in 1848, produced the opposite effect by showing a world tour of the planet's landscapes that paraded before an immobile spectator. These scenes were painted on cloth and the '8½ by 1,275-foot canvas was then mounted on upright rollers and rotated by cranks, which gave spectators the sensation of transit' (Chaplin 2012: 181). Another germane example is the *Grand voyage autour du Monde*, a moving panorama that extended for 90 metres and was exhibited at Le Théâtre Mécanique Morieux de Paris (Huhtamo 2013: 300). Moving panoramas enjoyed great success in many countries, so much so that it was this form 'that most people in Britain and in the United States would think of when the word "panorama" was mentioned', as Ralph Hyde has noted (n.d.: 63). And as the examples above demonstrate, the rolling nature of the canvas lent itself particularly well to the trope of travel, and indeed round-the-world travel.

In England, such was the popularity of travelling panoramas, and so identified with the idea of an inventory of the world had they become, that in one of the booklets commemorating 100 years of the Pooles' 'Myriorama', in 1937, the panorama is retrospectively defined in the following terms:

<EXT>And what was a panorama? It was a series of pictures, usually entitled ‘A Trip Round the World’, starting with a picture of London and finishing in England.

Away one went, from Charing Cross, across the channel to Calais, Paris, Rome, Brindisi, North and South Africa, Australia, North and South America, and back across the Atlantic to Liverpool and home. (Poole 1937: 3) </EXT>

Established in 1837 as a travelling panorama company by the showmen George and Charles Poole, and subsequently managed by several of the family successors, the Myriorama explicitly capitalised on the idea that it was a way of acquiring world knowledge for those without the means to undertake global travel. One of its programmes, entitled ‘Sights of the World’, for example, recognises that ‘there is no more easy or agreeable way of adding to our store of knowledge than travel’, but concedes that ‘the desire to see the foreign parts is not always accompanied with the means of gratifying it’ (Poole n.d.: 2).

In his history of the moving panorama, Huhtamo has stressed the need to differentiate it from the circular panorama: unlike the latter, moving panoramas were itinerant enterprises that travelled through the countryside, often accompanied by a lecturer and other performance and musical acts. Likewise, they failed to deliver the sense of immersive experience associated with the circular rotundas located in the big cities, and harboured tighter links with concepts such as narrativity and sequentiality. Yet, as Huhtamo also concedes, both forms shared ‘features and topics, and responded to similar desires’ (2013: 8). One such desire was to embrace a world totality, a desire that informed not only all panoramic forms mentioned above, but also other spectacles, such as the many world’s fairs that sprouted up in Europe and the US in the second half of the nineteenth century. Displaying the latest advances in manufacturing, technology and science from a variety of countries, these fairs comprised stands of ‘exotic’ spectacles of indigenous and non-Western cultures, arranged in an effort to catalogue a global humanity to be consumed in its diversity within the confines of a clearly demarcated space. As with the panorama and its variants, the trope of round-the-world travel was duly exploited in events that capitalised on the idea of a flattened and miniaturised globe through which visitors could spatially traverse. As the bastion of ethno-anthropological epistemologies, positivist beliefs and colonialist ideologies, the effect of such fairs, as Timothy Mitchell has noted, ‘was to set the

world up as a picture. They arranged it before an audience as an object on display – to be viewed, investigated and experienced’ (1989: 220).

At the risk of conflating a wide range of forms and eclipsing their specificities, the practices and attractions mentioned above participated in a visual regime whereby the human’s relation to the world and the world as a totality were redrawn along new parameters and paradigms. To varying extents, they all mobilised the trope of round-the-globe travel and attested to a quest to appropriate the world through and as images – a mode of visual appropriation that ran parallel to, and was informed by, a reconfiguration of the planet’s coordinates in the context of the growing popularity and feasibility of global travels and imperialist explorations. Although colonialism was not a nineteenth-century nor a European invention, European colonialism, as Ella Shohat and Robert Stam have noted, differed from previous manifestations in terms of its ‘affiliation with global institutional power, and its imperative mode, its attempted submission of the world to a single “universal” regime of truth and power’ (1994: 15–16).

The images produced at this time not only reflected but also intervened in these world-encompassing discourses. As Tom Gunning has argued, if the panorama and its offshoots in the nineteenth century must be situated within ‘a larger context [that] extends from the travel lecture to the postcard industry to world fair exhibits’, this is because these forms are ‘more than an effect’ of the development of the tourism industry, new modes of travel and colonialist enterprises. They instead ‘supply essential tools in the creation of a modern worldview underlying all these transformations’ (2006: 30). Gunning writes:

One cannot understand modernity without penetrating its passion for images. Images fascinate modern consciousness obsessively, and this modern sense of images comes from a belief that images can somehow deliver what they portray. Image as appropriation dominates the modern image-making industry, and travel images provide a unique perspective onto this modern phenomenon. Lynne Kirby has pointed out that the epigraph to Burton Holmes’s memoir reads: ‘to travel is to possess the world’. (2006: 30)

If the recent popularity of travel provided the means by which the world was possessed, and advanced the idea that to travel the world was indeed to possess it, then the profusion of world images and images of the world not only participated in this idea but provided new means by

which the planet could be visually appropriated. In so doing, these images must also be placed alongside the proliferation of increasingly refined globes, maps and other geographic and cartographic equipment, all of which showed an ‘ever greater emphasis on nonlinguistic representations ... as accurate registers of vision’ (Cosgrove 2001: 207).

As Denis Cosgrove points out, an ‘ability to distinguish visually the observer from the object seen (the [subject] from the globe or map) and the seen object from the reality it seeks to represent (the globe or map from the earth itself) has been fundamental to a modern Western geographical imagination’ (2001: 226). This distinction was also felt in the global imaginaries and spectacles of the time, many of which capitalised on the idea of an overwhelming world that engulfed the human, while providing at the same time a distance that guaranteed some sense of control and mastery. The panorama was the embodiment of this dualism. On the one hand, its appeal was largely connected with its superlative dimensions and lack of a single perspective, which produced sensory overload and visual excess, as indicated by the many sensations of dizziness reported by patrons at the time. On the other hand, ‘the central elevated viewing platform ... gave cramped urban spectators a quick hit of immersive spectacle and momentary sovereignty over all surveyed, placing them at the heart of a simulated universe where they looked down upon the world’ (Griffiths 2013: 77). Speaking of world fairs, Timothy Mitchell has similarly noted,

the contradiction between the need to separate oneself from the world and to render it up as an object of representation, and the desire to lose oneself within this object-world and to experience it directly – a contradiction that world exhibitions, with their profusion of exotic detail and yet their clear distinction between visitor and exhibit, were built to accommodate and overcome (1989: 231).

This sense of a world instrumentalised for a viewer at its centre was famously conceptualised by Martin Heidegger as the ‘age of the world picture’, which he deemed ‘one and the same event with the event of man’s becoming *subjectum* in the midst of [the world, in its entirety]’; a world thus measured ‘from the standpoint of man and in relation to man’ (132–3). Although it is tempting to read Heidegger’s proposition literally in relation to the centrally positioned human gaze at the heart of many nineteenth-century visual spectacles, his

observations relate to a wider epistemological shift whereby a number of technological, scientific and cultural phenomena radically reformulated the stakes and the scales of the world in relation to the centrality of a subject – which, of course, was European, white and male.

### **‘We Put the World Before You’**

The emergence of photographic and cinematic images must be situated within these globalising discourses of visual appropriation and examined in terms of their relations with the forms and spectacles preceding or coinciding with their appearance. To varying extents, photography and film lent continuity to the visual expressions of a world totality examined above. In their quest for all-embracing images, both mediums cemented a panoramic mode of vision understood in terms of a metonymical quest for increasingly larger chunks of the world. As Teresa Castro has noted: ‘The history of panoramism as a cultural phenomenon of the nineteenth century is inseparable from that of photography, which from its inception was interested in elongated formats’ (2011: 64). The same interest is identified in early cinema, whether in the form of ‘panoramic views’ of landscapes that were ‘elongated’ in space through a moving camera (often perched on a train), or in terms of circular or half-circular descriptive camera movements that would carry the panorama in abbreviated format in its very title. All-embracing images are also produced in early cinema through the coupling between recording and aerial technology (Castro 2013:119), showing an underlying quest to contemplate the world from a distance that would culminate in the famous photographs of the Earth taken during the Apollo missions in the late 1960s.

Yet a desire to embrace the world is discerned in photography and early cinema beyond metonymy. For these forms promised more than all-encompassing images of single locales; above all they promised to show all corners of the globe. To the extent that many of the paintings adorning -orama spectacles attested to a quest to realistically reproduce world landscapes, photography outperformed these practices owing to its evidentiary quality. The same is true of cinema, whose mission to ‘transport’ viewers to faraway places was accomplished with a remarkable sense of novelty derived from its ability to record movement, with ‘travel films’ and ‘travelogues’ emerging as one of the most popular and consolidated genres, and screened in spaces that often compounded the thrill of experiencing movement by simulating means of transport.

The ability to travel around the world and inventory its human and physical diversity was not simply programmatically embraced by the nascent film industries so much as it was often advertised as its fundamental asset: whether we look at the prevalence of trips around the world as a recurrent topic in early cinema (see Costa 2007); the Lumière brothers' widely advertised travels to exotic places; Pathé's 'World Wide Activities'; or indeed, the phrases and logos quickly adopted by film companies. Already in 1896, Méliès's *Star Film* promised to bring 'The Whole World within Reach', while in 1903, in the UK, the Charles Urban Trading Company vowed to 'Put the World Before You' (Figure 1.2). Later in the decade, a number of companies in Europe and the US, including RKO and the UK Korda brothers, adopted the iconic image of a globe for their logos, some of which, as in the case of Universal, still exist to this day.

<FIGURE 1.2 HERE>

Of course, this global ambition was clearly informed by colonial discourse and must be situated within the context of expansionist ideologies. As Shohat and Stam note, the 'dominant European/American form of cinema not only inherited and disseminated hegemonic colonial discourse, it also created a powerful hegemony of its own through monopolistic control of film distribution and exhibition in much of Asia, Africa and the Americas' (1994: 103). Yet a utopian impulse must also be accounted for in some globalising projects and discourses of the time. A germane example is Albert Kahn's monumental *Archives of the Planet* (1909–31), which during its two decades 'employed eleven independent cameramen and photographers ... to record and collect life ... in over forty countries', amassing 'a vast, multi-media, ethno-geographic visual inventory of the globe' (Amad 2010: 6). Globalism was also mobilised in the prevalent conception of film as a 'universal language' – a notion that was theorised from within different conceptual frameworks by writers as diverse as Vachel Lindsay in the USA, Ricciotto Canudo in Italy, Louis Delluc in France and Béla Balázs in Austria. In its most utopian form, the universal language idea hailed film's purely visual properties as a 'language' able to transcend cultural and national differences in the name of a global humanity.

Irrespective of the distinctive and even conflicting ideologies underlying the above forms, projects, discourses and ideas, they all attested to a conceptualisation of the film medium in terms of its ability to make the world visible, to show images of the world to the world, and to map out a newly discovered global space.

## <A>Towards a Comparative Media History

As has been noted, the dynamic media constellation within which cinema emerged offers itself as a particularly fruitful contrasting field against which to examine our contemporary audiovisual landscape, in which intermedial interactions are similarly the norm (Gunning 2007: 35–6; Elsaesser 2016: 183–4). Spurred on by the advent and proliferation of ‘new media’ in the early 1990s and now largely referred to as ‘media archaeology’, this approach, as Jussi Parikka sums up, has often focused ‘on the nineteenth century as a foundation stone of modernity in terms of science, technology and the birth of media capitalism. Media archaeology has been interested in excavating the past in order to understand the present and the future’ (2012: 2). Yet media archaeology has also raised its own conundrums, accused in some quarters of a certain arbitrariness in terms of how its objects of study are excavated and put in dialogue; a heterogeneous comparative model that risks lacking historiographical and contextual rigour when confronting the old and the new (see Elsaesser 2016).

With this caveat in mind, I would argue that to put the media-scape of early and late modernity on an equal footing makes especial sense when we consider the ways in which they have variously grappled with the conception of a world totality, often through recourse to the trope of global travel. This is not to say that the category of the global becomes inadequate as film matures into a narrative form and moves into the twentieth century, but only that it manifests itself with a remarkable vigour in both periods, thus allowing for a more meaningful and historicised comparative approach. Joyce E. Chaplin, for example, has noted that the planetary consciousness of our time is as pronounced as it was in the mid- to late nineteenth century, with the difference that the sense of *confidence* in round-the-world travel which characterises the consciousness of that period has been supplanted by one of *doubt* as associated with the ‘growing sense that the environmental costs of planetary domination have begun to haunt us’ (2011: xxi). As a result, the whole planet has reemerged as a ubiquitous theme and trope in audiovisual culture.

It is symptomatic in this respect that the self-promotional discourses surrounding many of the forms and texts I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter boast technological and technical wizardry as enabling new travels across a world whose hidden visual wonders are seemingly inexhaustible. The extremely popular BBC series *Planet Earth*, with its reliance on high-definition technology and new camera supports that generate ‘stunning new views of the Earth’

(Nicholson-Lord 2006: 6), perfectly exemplifies this phenomenon. Not coincidentally, the show has also been accompanied by a flurry of photographic and literary publications, one of which is tellingly included in the Lonely Planet series as *The Traveller's Guide to Planet Earth*. Google Earth, the internet resource which maps the planet through the superimposition of images obtained from satellite imagery, aerial photography and geographic information system (GIS) onto a 3D globe, may also be profitably understood as one more chapter in an illustrious genealogy of planetary visualisation. Seen in this light, it may be more than coincidental that a promotional poster for *Planet Earth* bears an uncanny resemblance to the anamorphic keys distributed to patrons upon their visits to panoramas (Figure 1.3). Similarly, the fact that viewers can zoom in to photographed street views which they can then rotate 360 degrees in a mode of vision that immediately recalls the panorama may signal the persistence of a mode of visibility whose underlying proposition is the positioning of a centralised human gaze in relation to the entire world.

However, if the world as newly imaged and imagined can be traced back to earlier images and imaginings, there is a crucial difference related to the ways in which the planet is now conceptualised as an object haunted by disappearance. In other words, if the emergence of cinema is inseparable from a fascination with its ability to record the world in movement for the first time, then recent global constructions can be said to derive their renewed visual appeal from the fact that they could be recording the Earth in its last throes. They articulate their visual urgency within holistic and ecological discourses that highlight the corporeal fragility of an interconnected though highly endangered planet. As the Earth has changed more drastically in the last fifty years than in all human history, a spectre of disappearance hovers over the planet, thus imparting a pressing urgency to its recordings. To critically engage with these imaginaries is therefore an urgent task of our time, yet in order to truly grasp their aesthetic, cultural and political significance, we must be prepared to situate them within a much larger history of global visions.

## Notes

- 1 This chapter would not have been possible without a stipend I was awarded by the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum, University of Exeter, to conclude research at its archives, I am grateful to Phil Wickham and Helen Hanson for their generous help and support.

- 2 As Comment further points out, an ‘all-knowing and all-seeing fantasy also emerged ... in Balzac’s *La comédie humaine*. Totalisation operated on a level that was logical (everything is revealed, causes as well as effects), topological (the town and the countryside) and chronological (saturation of time and eras)’ (1999: 142).
- 3 From early on, the panorama is also exploited for nationalist purposes, with military battles an increasingly prevalent subject matter.
- 4 From around 1815, the anamorphic drawing was then replaced by a rectangular horizontal print that sacrificed the circular format in the name of perspectival illusionism. Oleksijczuk attributes their transformation to a need to facilitate engagement on the part of the viewer with the keys’ visual content, as the panorama became increasingly exploited in the service of national pride and interests, with military battles a recurrent trope.
- 5 All translations in this essay are mine.

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