

Stereo Cards Virtual Exhibit: Annotated Bibliography

Babbitts, Judith. "Stereographs and the Construction of a Visual Culture in the United States."

Memory Bytes: History, Technology, and Digital Culture. Lauren Rabinovitz and Abraham Geil, eds. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004. Print.

Babbitts examines the socio-cultural view of the stereo card as an epistemological and pedagogical tool, and how this contributed to the rise of a visual culture in the United States during the 19th and early 20th centuries. She points to commercial advertising and the widespread use of stereo cards in schools, discussing how they both tapped into and promoted "an ideology and vocabulary of visual knowing" and a "redefinition of learning that emphasized visuality, efficiency and the retention of facts" (145). Babbitt's essay is especially useful for its contextual information on the practice of selling and educating with stereography—practices that many other scholars allude to but do not discuss at length.

Brewster, David. *The Stereoscope; its history, theory, and construction, with its application to the fine and useful arts and to education*. London: Hotten, 1870.

David Brewster is, along with Oliver Wendell Holmes, one of the most often cited 19th-century authors on the stereoscope. His treatise on the stereoscope and stereography provides a detailed discussion of both the science and its applications to other fields. Many

scholars cite Brewster's work for its treatment of the stereograph's mimetic or realist qualities and its link to pedagogy and/or education.

Though a valuable contextual source, Brewster's discussion of stereography is limited in that it is overwhelmingly positive and was published before the so-called "Second Age" of stereography from the 1880s until the end of the First World War. It does not, for example, account for stereo cards of disasters, which do not neatly fit the "pleasing" artistic model of the stereograph that Brewster describes.

Clayton, Owen. *Literature and Photography in Transition, 1850-1915*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Print.

Clayton examines the interactions between literature and photography around the turn of the century, using Henry Mayhew, Robert Louis Stevenson, Amy Levy and Jack London as his case studies. Clayton's methodology emphasizes an attention to multiple "photographies" (photographic practices like photo-engraving or trick photography) and the material realities of how viewers came to encounter them. In this way, Clayton seeks to complicate the oft-studied relationship between photography and "normative realism" by asserting that different methods of photography had different effects.

Colligan, Colette, and Margaret Linley, eds. *Media, Technology, and Literature in the Nineteenth Century: Image, Sound, Touch*. Farnham, Surrey, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011. Print. The Nineteenth Century Series.

Colligan and Linley's collection focuses on 19th-century media as "not only the exponential explosion of print" but also "the massive proliferation of a wide variety of popular mechanical devices," including the stereoscope (1). Each chapter tackles a specific visual, aural or haptic medium while acknowledging the ways in which such forms were often multimedia or multi-sensory. The collection provides a good historical and contextual grounding for 19th-century media studies.

Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1990. Print.

Crary provides a historical account of visual culture in the 19th century—specifically, how different philosophical, scientific, socio-political, and aesthetic discourses shaped the role of the observer. Crary also examines the ways in which the observer interacts with different visual instruments (e.g. kinoscope, stereoscope) and how this influenced Victorian views on the relationship between man and machine.

Crary is mainly interested in developments before 1850 and modernist "ruptures" or breaks from the dominant view of vision as accurate representation of objective reality. He discusses the 19th century observer as an active subject and sees this movement as part of a "crucial systemic shift" that anticipates later modernist visual techniques.

Darrah, William. *The World of Stereographs*. Gettysburg: William C. Darrah, 1977. Print.

Though self-published and seemingly dated, *The World of Stereographs* remains a very useful resource for identifying and categorizing stereographs. Darrah provides an overview of different genres, publishers, and photographers that is, nevertheless, more detailed than many other resources. Darrah also pays particular attention to the material processes by which stereo cards were printed and distributed. In this way, this book is a product of material research rather than humanistic or socio-cultural research.

Fyfe, Paul. "Illustrating the Accident: Railways and the Catastrophic Picturesque in *The Illustrated London News*." *Victorian Periodicals Review* 46.1 (2013): 61-86. Web. 20 Feb. 2015.

Fyfe contrasts the “industrial picturesque”—a visual genre that focused on the railway’s “most placid moments and idealized features”—with a genre he terms the “catastrophic picturesque” (64). Fyfe sees the catastrophic picturesque as a visual strategy that soothes anxiety over railway accidents—and by extension, industrialization—while simultaneously betraying a fascination for them. Fyfe traces his argument through examples of engravings taken from the *Illustrated London News*. He also argues that photography, with its fixed viewpoint and ability to capture scenes in great detail, challenges and eventually signals the end of the catastrophic picturesque. “Illustrating the Accident” is a clear and well-written discussion of how Victorians visualized and represented disaster—with horror, pleasure, and ambivalence.

Holmes, Oliver W. *The Stereoscope and Stereoscopic Photographs*. 7th ed. New York:

Underwood & Underwood, 1899. Web. Nineteenth Century Collections Online (NCCO):
Photography: The World through the Lens. 11 Mar. 2015.

Along with David Brewster, Oliver Wendell Holmes is one of the most often cited 19th-century authors on the stereoscope. In this book, he gives an explanation of the stereoscope, the physiology that allows it to work, and argues that stereography should be considered an educational tool rather than merely an entertaining toy. He also relates stereography to the concept of archiving, proposing a “comprehensive and systematic stereographic library, where all men can find the special forms they particularly desire to see as artists, or as scholars, or as mechanics, or in any other capacity” (28). Holmes also offers a long meditation of stereography as simulated, embodied travel, describing the experiences of “travelling” to distant places through stereographs. Notably, this book (and subsequent editions) were published by Underwood & Underwood, a popular stereo card publisher and seller who would have a vested interest in promoting their positive aspects.

Natale, Simone. “Photography and Communication Media in the Nineteenth Century.” *History of Photography*. 36.4 (2012): 451–456. Web. 20 Feb. 2015.

Natale argues that scholars have largely overlooked the relationship between photography and the “so-called revolution of communication in middle-nineteenth-century America.” She draws comparisons between photography and communication media such as

telegraphy, the railway, and the postal system. In her comparison, she sees photography as complicit in the same dramatic reorganization of time and space in the Victorian imagination, which such technologies prompted. For example, she discusses the concept of photography as the “railway and telegraph of art,” allowing viewers to simulate instantaneous travel to far off places. Furthermore, she cites its ease of circulation in portable forms as a way to “transform reality into an easy-to-handle commodity that be carried, marketed and sent to distant locations.”

Natale’s essay is a concise and compact introduction to thinking about photography in parallel with other technological developments of the time. Though she limits her analysis to an American context specifically, her ideas would likely apply to a British one as well.

Newhall, Beaumont. “Documentary Approach to Photography.” *Parnassus* 10.3 (1938): 3–6. *JSTOR*. Web. 3 Jan. 2015.

Newhall’s discussion is considered one of the first attempts to define social documentary photography or photojournalism. In it, he lays out a “documentary approach” that is interested in factual events yet ultimately reveals the emotion of the photographer or provokes emotion in the viewer. Rosenblum, writing in *A World History of Photography*, calls it an attempt to “imbue facts with feeling” (341). Furthermore, Newhall pays particular attention to the pragmatics of documentary photography and makes suggestions about how to print and present documentary photographs to an audience.

Osborne, Peter. *Travelling Light: Photography, Travel, and Visual Culture*. New York:

Manchester University Press, 2000. Print. The Critical Image.

Osborne offers a detailed account of travel photography and its impact on visual culture from its precursor in the camera obscura through to the 20th century. Of particular note are his two chapters on 19th-century photography: “The reverie of power” and “Worlds in a house.” Relying heavily on Said’s *Orientalism*, the former is a discussion of photography as a process of “othering” wherein the imperial subject commodifies the colonial object. This relationship between observer and observed draws on and perpetuates Western biases and attitudes. “Worlds in a house” examines this commodification and power relation with specific reference to the Victorian home as a constructed space. Osborne reads the Victorian home as a place of imagined stability against anxiety over an increasingly globalized world. Much of Osborne’s argument, or strands thereof, can be found in other works on the subject (see Strain or Pietrobruno).

Pellerin, Denis and Brian May. *The Poor Man’s Picture Gallery: Stereoscopy versus Paintings in the Victorian Era: An Exploration of the Connection between Stereo Cards and Paintings, and Other Popular Victorian Media*. London: The London Stereoscopic Company, 2014. Print.

Pellerin and May’s book is a beautifully illustrated exhibit catalogue centred on Victorian narrative paintings and the stereoscopic photographs that they inspired. Each entry provides

a brief piece about both the painting and the stereo card, displaying them side-by-side for comparison. Pellerin and May explore the complicated relationship between painting and (stereo) photography in the 19th-century, ultimately arguing for a reconsideration of stereography as a valid artform and cultural medium worthy of study. What is perhaps particularly interesting is the introduction, where the authors describe their editorial decisions for remediating the stereo cards and their physical exhibit into a printed book.

Pietrobruno, Sheenagh. "The stereoscope and the miniature." *Early Popular Visual Culture* 9.3 (2011): 171-190. Web. 13 Nov 2014.

Pietrobruno argues that 19th-century users saw stereographs as visual miniatures, transforming vast landscapes and cityscapes into commodified views for touristic consumption. She also sees a power relation emerge between the viewer and the stereographic miniature wherein the scale of the miniature allowed the former to “possess and dominate” the latter as a mass-produced commodity (176). Furthermore, she argues that this miniaturization also led to the commercial standardization of how certain cities were represented stereographically. By examining stereo cards of New York City and Istanbul, Pietrobruno argues that stereography codes the former as a bastion of industrial progress and the latter as an exotic “other.”

Robin Lenman, and Angela Nicholson, eds. *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Web. 9 Mar. 2015.

The Oxford Companion to the Photograph is a useful encyclopedia of photography. It is especially useful for its information on key stereographic photographers, publishers, and sellers, and the sources listed at the end of each entry. Notable entries include the ones on “stereoscopic photography”, “three-dimensional photography”, “David Brewster”, and “Underwood & Underwood.”

Rosenblum, Naomi. *A World History of Photography*. 4th ed. New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2007. Print.

Rosenblum’s *A World History* is an ambitious overview of photography and the many forms and purposes it has taken on throughout its history from the camera obscura to the present. Rosenblum takes on many different perspectives of photography—(art) historical, aesthetic, commercial, technical, documentary—in her investigation. Although Rosenblum does speak specifically (though very briefly) to stereography in one of her “Short Technical Histories,” other sections are also useful for a broader understanding of different artistic genres and movements happening in photography throughout the long 19th-century.

Schiavo, Laura Burd. "From Phantom Image to Perfect Vision: Physiological Optics, Commercial Photography, and the Popularity of the Stereoscope." *New Media, 1740-1915*. ed. Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey B. Pingree. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003. Print.

Schiavo argues that, though scientific rhetoric recognized the stereoscope “raised fundamental questions about the status and reliability of vision”, commercial rhetoric did not necessarily promote this view (Schiavo 114-116). Rather, stereo card publishers and sellers vaguely alluded to science as authority without considering the stereoscope’s scientific complexities or implications. Schiavo’s essay is a useful discussion of how the layman, the target audience for stereography, comes to encounter stereography as a commodity and “faithful image of human perception” (126).

Silverman, Robert J. “The Stereoscope and Photographic Depiction in the 19th Century.”

Technology and Culture 34.4 (1993): 729–756. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 Mar. 2015.

Silverman provides a general overview of the stereoscope’s origins and its transition from a purely scientific device into a “philosophical toy” that “provided entertainment but also illustrated scientific principles” (730). Silverman examines popular 19th-century attitudes about the stereoscope and photography—for example, the attitude that the camera, as an artificial eye, is a reliable, accurate visual recording instrument. He also notes that rhetoric around the stereograph contradicted itself by emphasizing its potential for “taste and artistic illusion” (753) rather than passive, realist observation. Silverman then connects this insight to 19th-century debates about the status of photography as Art. Though this article provides a useful introduction to stereoscopy, stereography, and 19th-century debates about photographic representation, it lacks a discussion of the medium’s materiality and wider

audience reception. For example, Silverman does not mention stereography's widespread use and distribution in stereo card format.

Strain, Ellen. "Exotic Bodies, Distant Landscapes." *Wide Angle* 18.2 (1996) 70-100. Web. 9 Mar. 2015.

Strain argues that 19th-century (stereo) photography configured the world as a pleasurable, touristic spectacle. Strain sees photography as complicit in and perpetuating an imperialist project to construct a "racial and cultural hierarchy"—placing Western nations at the "pinnacle of progress and evolution" while relegating non-Western nations to the bottom (79). Stereography objectified Indigenous populations by treating them as commercial views of "exotic" peoples made for white, middle-class consumption. Strain traces her argument through, not only photography, but also the practice of early anthropology, "freak shows" and other examples of 19th century popular spectacle.

Sussman, Herbert L. *Victorian Technology: Invention, Innovation, and the Rise of the Machine*. Santa Barbara, Calif: Praeger Publishers, 2009. Print. *Victorian Life and Times*.

Sussman examines key Victorian inventions or technological developments such as the railway, telegraph, and electrical power. While Sussman devotes much of his text to describing the inner mechanical workings of such inventions, he also draws connections to their larger social implications, such as the rise of commodity culture and poor working conditions that lead to political protest and reform. Much of Sussman's arguments speak in

very broad terms and may already be familiar to many Victorianists. Nevertheless provides a useful, if basic introduction to the sociological and historical impacts of technology and the Industrial revolution on Victorian society.

Tucker, Anne, Will Michels and Natalie Zelt. *War/photography: Images of Armed Conflict and Its Aftermath*. Houston : New Haven: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston ; distributed by Yale University Press, 2012. Print.

This book surveys the many different roles—both culture and strategic—that photography plays in armed conflict. It examines war photography from some of its earliest days (e.g. the Crimean War, the American Civil War) through to the 21st-century. It also covers aspects of war beyond the conflict itself, including recruitment, the daily lives of soldiers, and the aftermath of war. Tucker et. al are especially interested in questions of representation and subjective biases that influence photographic representation, reception and interpretation. The authors thus include interviews with military veterans, historians, archivists, the subjects of the photographs, and others to provide multiple perspectives.

Wilder, Kelley. *Photography and Science*. London: Reaktion Books, 2009. Print.

Wilder provides a broad overview of photography's relationship and development in vis-a-vis with science and art. She discusses major developments in all three areas while demonstrating how such categories are fluid and permeable. Though her book is not intended as in-depth socio-cultural analysis, it is still a useful introduction to the major

debates and discussions surrounding the roles of science, art, and photography in society and how they interact. There is relatively little about the 19th century specifically; though she includes some historical analysis, Wilder seems to be more focused on modern photographic methods.