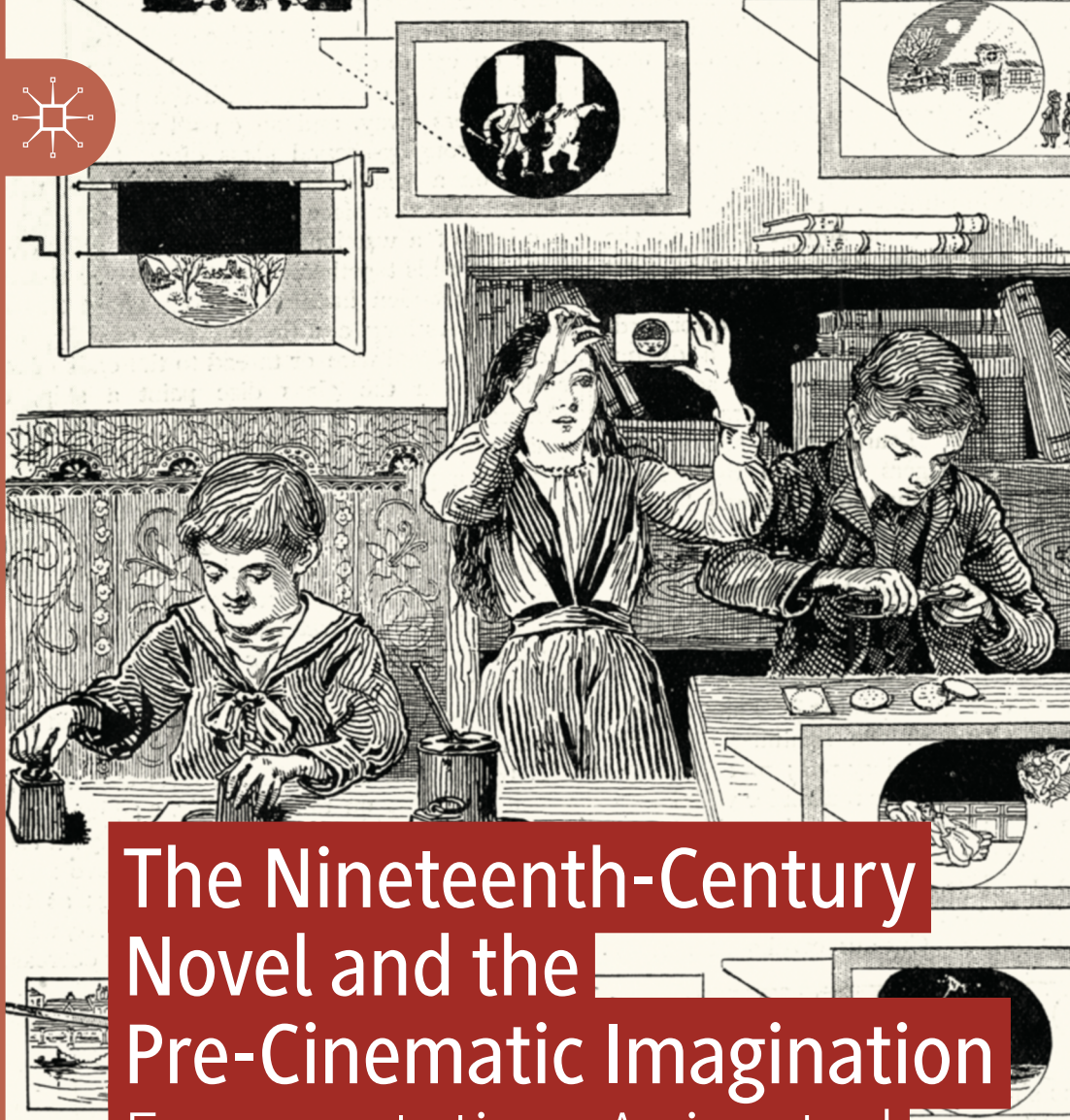

# The Nineteenth-Century Novel and the Pre-Cinematic Imagination

## Fragmentation, Animated Movement and the Modern Episteme

Alberto Gabriele

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CHAPTER 1

# Introduction: Ut Pre-cinema Poesis—Fragmentation, Animated Movement and the Modern Episteme

Critics of the nineteenth century novel have traditionally drawn parallels between the art of novel writing that offers a vision of reality for the viewer to contemplate and several, specific forms of visual culture that may have inspired it. *Ut pictura poesis*, the tradition of pictorialism leading back, through Renaissance codifications, to the classical analogy between writing and painting, has been a dominant mode that no doubt mirrored the prestige that fine arts entertained in the educational curriculum and the appreciation of contemporaries. The higher cultural value that photography gained in the course of the twentieth century has made it a topic of equally exhaustive attention, reclaiming for the twentieth-century reader the immediate associations that many critics of nineteenth-century literature made between photography and the contested site of emergence of modernity.[1] Despite this ongoing interest in nineteenth-century natural

[1] Martin Meisel, *Realizations: narratives, pictorial, and theatrical arts in nineteenth-century England* (Princeton, N.J. and Guildford Princeton University Press, c1983); Hugh Witemeyer, *George Eliot and the Visual Arts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the* Victorians: *Photography and the Culture of Realism* (Itahca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), Alyson Bryerly, *Realism, Representation, and the Arts in Nineteenth-Century* Literature (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Gerard Curtis, *Visual Words. Art and the Material Book in Victorian England*. (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: the Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), Flint Kate. *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University



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and technologically induced vision, a form of nineteenth-century popular entertainment, i.e. pre-cinematic spectacle, while gaining more importance in recent years, particularly in the study of Romantic poetry and literature, has not been explored thoroughly, through a transnational and comparative perspective, as the equivalent of a yet uncharted nineteenth-century theory of the modern novel.[2] In my earlier book *The Emergence of Pre-cinema: Print Culture and the Optical Toy of the Literary Imagination*, published in 2016, I identified a self-reflexive modality of perception and representation that was discursively present since the late Renaissance, as a new

Press, 2000), Julia Thomas, *Pictorial* Victorians *The Inscription of Values in Word and Image* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004), Daniel A Novak, *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Jacob Lothe 'Narrative Vision in Middlemarch' in *Middlemarch in the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 177–199, Susan S. Williams, *Confounding Images. Photography and Portraiture in Antebellum American Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997). Among the works interested in new forms of ekphrasis see also Maurice Samuels, *The Spectacular Past. Popular History and the Novel in Nineteenth-Century France*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004). Lindsey Smith in *Victorian Photography, Painting and Poetry. The Enigma of Visibility in Ruskin, Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge eUniversity Press, 1995) maps a nuanced articulation of the visual phenomena in the work of Ruskin and Morris.

[2] The presence of pre-cinematic modes of vision in poetry has been discussed, among others, by scholars such as William H Galperin in *The Return of the Visible in British Romanticism* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), Jerome Christensen in *Lord Byron's strength: romantic writing and commercial society*, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Gillen D'Arcy Wood, *The Shock of the Real. Romanticism and Visual Culture, 1760-1860*, (New York and Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), Simon During in *Modern Enchantments: the Cultural Power of Secular Magic*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2002) Helen Groth in 'Kaleidoscopic Vision and Literary Invention in an 'Age of Things:' David Brewster, Don Juan and 'A Lady's Kaleidoscope' in *English Literary History* 74.1 (Spring 2007) 217–237, Sophia Thomas, both in her articles and in the monograph *Romanticism and Visuality. Fragments, History, Spectacle* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), Peter Otto, *Multiplying Worlds. Romanticism, Modernity, and the Emergence of Virtual Reality* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), David J Jones, *Textualities, Pre-cinematic Media and Film in Popular Visual Culture 1670-1910* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011). Several aspects of nineteenth century media, not necessarily visual, have been the focus of studies collected in the edited editions *Art, History and the Senses, Illustrations, Optics and Objects in Nineteenth-Century Literary and Visual Cultures* and *Media, Technology, and literature in the Nineteenth Century. Image, Sound, Touch*. While each one of them is a welcome contribution to the study of nineteenth century visuality, none of them attempts to take a broader perspective to advance at theory on the development of the experimental nature of visuality in the long nineteenth century. For a discussion of the late eighteenth century period see Alberto Gabriele, *The Emergence of Pre-cinema: Print Culture and the Optical Toy of the Literary Imagination* (New York and London: Palgrave/ Macmillan 2016).

positioning of the subject in relation to vision. This self-reflexive mode, therefore, can be seen as the site of emergence of a new form of vision and interpretation, which processes visual and intellectual stimuli in the temporality of perception.[3] The starting point of this book is the hypothesis first advanced by Max Milner in 1982, i.e. that creativity is conditioned by the history of optics and defined by the techniques that affect perception and representation. His suggestion to pursue a Foucauldian genealogical approach has found several echoes in the following decade, especially for his reference to optics as a significant component in an 'archeology of knowledge.'[4] The pioneering research of Werner Nekes has mapped the history of several of these optical devices, while indicating the crucial role of the subjective observer in operating pre-cinematic devices and in *de facto* creating the reality in front of their eyes. The years approaching and following the 'anniversary' of the 'invention' of cinema, or, rather, of the public screening of the device perfected by the Lumière brothers, have spurred scholars to look back upon the pre-history of the medium. Their aim was to map the technological and cultural history of the optical machines that preceded and in some cases evolved into the medium of cinema. Anticipated by the research of Werner Nekes in *Film Before Film*, Jonathan Crary's 1990 *Techniques of the Observer* classified and identified specific modalities of vision captivating the eyes of the urban crowds of the early nineteenth century.[5] Both Nekes and Crary recognise the central role of the viewer's perception in shaping and, actually, *creating* the spectacle made possible by optical toys such as the thaumatrope, the phenakistoscope and the zoetrope, whose visual lure is based on the persistence of vision on the retina of the observer: it is only the perception of the viewer that enables the possibility of creating a like-like illusion of movement. Laurent Mannoni's history of pre-cinema, whose French edition was published in 1995, as well as the research of the scholars contributing to collections of

[3] Alberto Gabriele, *The Emergence of Pre-cinema: Print Culture and the Optical Toy of the Literary Imagination (*New York and London: Palgrave/Macmillan 2016). Lindsay Smith, *Victorian Photography, Painting and Poetry. The Enigma of Visibility in Ruskin, Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995) opened new paths for critical enquiry but in its narrative arc at time zeroes in on a more teleological understanding of nineteenth-century innovation that is less attuned to the complex trajectories of sight and embodied vision that precede the shift that is ascribed to the nineteenth century.

[4] Max MIlner, *La fantasmagorie* (Presses Universitaires de France: 1982), 5.

[5] Warner Nekes, *Film Before Film*: Filmförderung Nordrhein-Westfalen, 1986. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century* (Cambridge, Mass –London, England: MIT Press, 1990).

essays such as *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* edited by Vanessa Schwartz and Leo Charney, as well as *Viewing Positions. Ways of Seeing in Film* edited by Linda Williams (both published in the same year), expanded the understanding of the visual and intellectual horizons of nineteenth-century everyday life as a way to place the 'emergence' of cinema in a history of visual technologies and modalities of spectacle that is more complex and dispersed than the narrative of an 'invention' of a new medium by a memorable individual.[6] This output has inspired over the following years, and continues to inspire literary scholars interested in nineteenth-century media, more specifically in the many forms of visual spectacles (panoramas, thaumatropes, phantasmagorias) that might be seen as an apt metaphor for the narrative and rhetorical strategies of specific literary genres, such as the historical novel, or gothic fiction.[7] While acknowledging the importance of

[6] Laurent Mannoni. *The Great Art of Light and Shadow. Archeology of the Cinema*, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000 [1995]), Vanessa Schwartz and Leo Charney. Eds. *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), Linda Williams. Ed. *Viewing Positions. Ways of Seeing in Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995). The term 'the emergence of cinema' is Charles Musser's, see *The Emergence of Cinema. The American Screen to 1907* (Toronto: Collier Macmillan Canada; New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1990). See also, in a more teleological narrative leading to the invention of cinema, Martin Quigley, *Magic Shadows. The Story of the Origin of Motion Pictures* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1948).

[7] For a pioneering discussion of the phantasmagoria in relation to gothic and nineteenth century fiction see Terry Castle's 1995 *The Female Thermometer* (Oxford University Press, 1995). On the invention of the phonograph phantasy of cinema in Villiers de l'Isle-Adame see Tom Gunning, 'Doing for the Eye What the Phonograph Does for the Ear' in Richard Abel. Ed. *The Sounds of Early Cinema* (Indiana University Press, 2001) pp. 13–31. For a discussion of popular literature, the montage effect of industrial modernity and print culture as 'screen-practice' see Alberto Gabriele, *Reading Popular Culture in Victorian Print* (New York and London: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2009) and the recent work by Helen Groth, *Moving Images: Nineteenth Century Reading and Screen Practices* along the same lines (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013). Maurice Samuels singles out the panorama in a metaphorical understanding of the historical novel as a panorama in *The Spectacular Past. Popular History and the Novel in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004). For a study of nineteenth-century fiction see Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds. Glass Culture and the Imagination. 1830-1880* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). For the thaumatropic effect in Melville's Pierre see Alberto Gabriele, 'Traces and Origins, Signs and Meanings: Analogy and the Pre-cinematic Imagination in Melville's *Pierre, or, the Ambiguities,*' *Leviathan, a Journal of Melville Studies* 15 (2013) 1, pp. 42–62. Studies dedicated to early cinema such as *A Companion to Early Cinema*. Eds. André Gaudreault, Nicolas Dulac, and Santiago Hidalgo (Chichester, Malden and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) still overlook the importance of print culture and periodical literature in shaping both the modalities of vision and the narrative structures of the early history of

these studies, I believe that these optical devices, which were called at the time of their first circulation 'philosophical toys,' demand more than an anecdotal and circumscribed attention in relation to medial synergies in the history of nineteenth-century literature; their impact, in fact, helps redefine not only the emergence of figurative realism, whose claim to truth can now be understood within a more complex pre-nineteenth-century tradition of self-reflexive spectacles. The self-reflexive construction of vision that these devices enable helps to question the immersive paradigm associated with realism itself. A study centring only on the material history of these devices, however, misses out the philosophical context these processes of vision an interpretation stem from, particularly the nineteenth-century one that was formalising new scientific approaches and syntheses. I want to argue that pre-cinematic 'philosophical toys,' by providing a pathway to build, out of the very same disparate stimuli experienced in the temporality of perception, a form of consistency which makes possible the illusion of reality and the constructed intuition of a more or less organic whole, contribute to circulate, from the standpoint of the culture of the everyday, the formalisation of the new intellectual horizons of the modern episteme, exemplified by Michel Foucault in the nineteenth-century disciplines of philology, biology and the theory of value.[8] The nineteenth-century novelists included here, in writing self-reflexive narratives that can be read as epistemological allegories, often reference philology, biology, or other pseudo-scientific disciplines that were current attempts at systematising the unreadable reality of the emerging modernity. The intertextual network of references woven by these authors manifest a clear consciousness that fiction-writing joins an ongoing debate making fiction an often unacknowledged contribution to the contemporary history of the production of knowledge.

The awareness of the time-bound process of perception that rearranges parts in a larger system was a self-reflexive modality of theorising, in coterminous disciplines, a possible synthesis of the scattered fragments set in motion by the inception of industrial modernity. Insisting only at the synchronic level on inter-medial synergies between specific nineteenth-century spectacles and literature, or limiting their popularity only to a literary genre such as the gothic, or the realist novel, as Maurice Samuels or Davi J. Jones

cinema. See for instance the essay by Anemone Ligense 'Sensationalism and Early Cinema,' pp. 163–182.

[8] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock, 1970 [1966]).

have done, is a form of zeroing-in on the more visible and material artefacts of the culture of urban modernity that misses an important rapprochement between science, popular culture and novel theory that can be recognised in three separate national contexts: France in the first part of the nineteenth century, the United States of America in the middle of the century and Great Britain in the second hall of the century. Balzac's *Comédie Humane*, Herman Melville's *Pierre*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* can thus help to test and possibly corroborate the hypothesis I advance, i.e. that the history of technology, modern science (and what we call now pseudo-science), political theory and novel writing, by sharing these experiments in material and intellectual vision, resonate with the modalities of conceptualising a site of emergence for the structural workings of knowledge that recast the existing epistemological paradigms.

In order to exemplify the rapprochements that I propose I shall put under a genealogical lens the very conventions of the ordered dynamic system associated with the emergence of the nineteenth-century disciplines constituting the modern episteme. Striving to order the new reality of industrial modernity as it was beginning to be formalised in England, France and the United States (before impacting the rest of the world in a similar modality), becomes at the time a normative pull that circulates through several discursive forces. Retracing the explorations by these novelists of a rich array of visual phenomena inspired by the pre-cinematic spectacle partakes of a much larger aesthetic polarity alternating on one hand fragmentation, with the chaotic overkill of sensory data which resist figurative representation and a contemplative inner view of the whole, and on the other one the intellectual choreography that sets them in a dynamic order that can recapture a lost unity. These two modalities, the fragmentary and the unitary, are steps in the same self-reflexive move: a constructed view of the whole can be achieved only through a constant awareness of the constituting parts contributing to such a dynamic unity. Identifying in the history of the novel the self-reflexive visual and intellectual operations out of which such a theory of knowledge can emerge is therefore significant as it helps to map different, often experimental aesthetic modalities that fall outside of the tradition of pictorialism that had defined the parallelism between painting and literature. The literary imagination, therefore, exceeds a purely reflective adaptation of contemporary popular culture and proves to be one of the most important institutions, alongside the ones studied by Michel Foucault, that enabled the widespread circulation of

discursive formations and the formalisations of new epistemic shifts that only a genealogical perspective can best illuminate in their complex history, however partial and unsystematic it may appear to be. This is why my book offers in each chapter an analysis of the nineteenth-century context that the literary imagination incorporated, while often gesturing towards later developments which, while not being the main focus of my analysis, can engage a broader audience interested in genealogical perspectives. Among these gestures towards a history of fragmentation are the alternative aesthetics explored in the novels discussed. As often unacknowledged empirical foreshadowings of matter they pave the way for the emergence of other modernist experiments with perception, materiality and the ensuing nostalgia for a lost unity that rapper in many later 'epiphanies' and 'moments of being' in the first half of the twentieth-century.

The modern novel and print culture that enables its circulation in several material forms, can be seen in themselves as fragmentary and at the same time unitary media. This double understanding of fragmentation pointing paradoxically to a lost unity was a discursive cultural trace, which did not appear only in the language of science or the new technologies of vision. Among the first theorists of the new genre of the novel are the Jena Romantics, more specifically Friedrich Schlegel, who equalled the novel with the fragmentary form through many of the fragments he authored in the *Athenaeum Fragments*. The novel was in his view the literary genre closer to his own experimentations with systematic statements in parcels, such as the philosophical treatise in fragments that he championed when publishing the *Athenaeum Fragments*. In fragment no. 26 he calls the novel the 'Socratic dialogues of our time.'[9] He recognises, furthermore, in fragment 254 the dominant role the novel holds in contemporary literature to be similar to the role the Roman satirical tradition had in late antiquity.[10] Schlegel's condensed insights on the nature of the novel and on fragmentation as a mode of reading constitute an early theory of the novel pointing to its composite, 'dialogical' components requiring the temporality of the exchange of the Socratic dialogue to find an adequate parallel, or the mixed ingredients of the Roman satire to give a sense of the multiplicity of topics,

[9] Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*. Translated by Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 3, (*Critical Fragments* no. 26). For a discussion of Schlegels's *Fragmente* and the montage effect of print culture see Alberto Gabriele, *The Emergence of Pre-cinema: Print Culture and the Optical Toy of the Literary Imagination* (New York: Palgrave/ Macmillan: 2016).

[10] *Athenaeum Fragments*, op. cit. no.146, pp. 36–37.

individualities and visions that resist the inclusion in a higher synthesis. Both the satirical tradition and the Socratic dialogue present a non-univocal structure that is crucial for an understanding of Schlegel's novel-theory and his reflections on the fragment, although the two references have been often overlooked in the study of the impact of Schlegel's work in other theories of the novel such as Bachtin's.[11] The new study of classical antiquity formalised by the third emergence of philology as a scholarly discipline in Germany from the second half of the eighteenth century sought to redefine the scope of critical analysis so as to include any single work by an author within the macrotext of the whole *opus* of any given author and, in an even more innovative fashion, within all cultural production of the age.[12] The origin of Schlegel's neologisms such as 'sympoetry' and 'symphilosophy' can be traced, I believe, to the disciplinary openness of the field of the new classical philology proposed by Johann Gottfried Heyne in his seminars at Göttingen, which were attended, among others, by Alexander von Humboldt, the Schlegels, and Coleridge. Foucault's provocative systematisation of the modern disciplines of philology, biology and the theory of value in *The Order of Things/ Les Mots et les Choses* is explicitly inspired by the 'rapprochement' of 'comparative grammar of languages' and 'comparative anatomy' that Schlegel first made in *On the Language and Philosophy of the Indians.*[13] I am interested, therefore, in foregrounding other analogies between systems (beyond the three disciplinary fields of biology, philology

[11] Hans Eichner's proposes a retrospective view of Schlegel's possible literary models only with references to 'postclassical' authors (post Dante), see 'Friedrich's Schlegel Theory of Romantic Poetry,' PMLA 4 (Dec 1956), pp. 1018–1041. While he concedes that in his notebooks 'by 1798' Schlegel included Lucian, Apuleius and Petronius, he does not recognise the centrality of the satirical imagination in Schlegel's theory and practice of modern literary genres. Victor Lange in 'Friedrich Schlegel's Literary Criticism' overlooks the references to the *lanx satura by stressing, instead, the philosophical inspiration deriving from Schlegel's insistence on the Socratic dialogue, without elaborating on the proximity of *lanx satura and Socratic dialogue in Schlegels' reflexion on the novel form as, at the same time, a fragmentary and unitary genre. Robert L. Leventhal, however, in *The Disciplines of Interpretation Lessing, Herder, Schlegel and Hermeneutics in Germany, 1750-1800* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1994), p. 12, employs the term 'dialogic critique' when discussing Schlegel.

[12] See Robert L. Leventhal. *The Disciplines of Interpretation* and Tuska Benes, *In Babel's Shadow Language, Philology, and the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008).

[13] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock, 1970 [1966]) p. 280. See a discussion of this theoretical matrix in Alberto Gabriele, *The Emergence of Pre-cinema: Print Culture and the Optical Toy of the Literary Imagination*, op. cit.

and the theory of value studied by Foucault) rather than in extrapolating the minutiae of any separate field of inquiry, such as modern technologies of vision, or the contemporary sciences, and grafting them onto a reading of a novel. What makes the nineteenth-century novel interesting in this history is precisely the non-exclusive attention to a variety of visual phenomena and discursive forces often diametrically opposed, and, more uniquely, the desire to reach a synthesis between the abstract and the particular, between matter and transcendental intuition, between isolated parts and dynamic systems of provisional coherence. In doing so, literary narratives naturalised psychological and conceptual processes that were isomorphic with the systematisation of knowledge advanced by the disciplines of the modern episteme, while often indulging in the exploration of moments of invisibility, as we shall see, rather than the clarity of vision associated with figurative realism.

The more I read into the archive of nineteenth-century culture the more I realised that a wider timeline is needed to recast the question of nineteenth-century mimesis over a long period, one which requires a more complex genealogy of the genre of the nineteenth-century novel in its moment of formalisation in several national literatures. I am here limiting my analysis to the period going from the 1830s to the 1870s but each cultural context inevitably opens up a more complex history predating the decades in which the novels appeared. A genealogical analysis of this kind helps to chart the discursive practices and aesthetic conventions that may lie outside of the pervasive figurative paradigm of representation. Only through the perspective of such a *longue durée*, can the canonical definitions of make-believe associated with the literary imagination be, literally, let loose from the hold on the imagination of a figurative, pictorial model of representation and be placed within a context that has a rich preceding history. Often incorporating the immediate modalities of the pre-cinematic vision to explore an alternative aesthetics, the authors discussed in this book can thus reveal an uncharted territory, a 'grey area' that subtracts vision from its naturalised identification with the traditional arts of mimetic representation and the categories that informed these visions. Highlighting these moments of heightened susceptibility to vision opens up the question of the genealogy of the nineteenth-century notion of a plausible representation of reality to a non-linear history running parallel and sometimes intertwining with the development of other aesthetic sensitivities. The fascination with light in all its sublime power of dazzlement and insight is one of them, as well as the fragmentary impressions deriving from the

immersion in the sensorium of modern life and the recurrence of older philosophical traditions which imperceptibly structured several fields, including political theory, when they explored fragmentation and its counterpoint, transcendence into an intuited form of unity.[14]

Seeing the history of vision in the nineteenth century only through the lenses of any established medium or technological device, as some scholars have done, runs the risk of dismissing the wider system of reverberations that vision had for many authors throughout a period of uninterrupted engagement with the discourse of light, fragmentation and movement. I propose, therefore, a *longue durée* perspective for the periodisation of the poetics of fragmentation and movement discussed here, one that reaches the experimentations of the twentieth-century avant-garde, while having a dispersed genealogy that I examined in my previous book. Ascribing only to the perceived innovations of modernist practices features such as the ground-breaking foreshadowing of matter, the disjoined juxtaposition of views and the literal syn-aesthetic expansion of the sensory horizons in the futurist vortexes and in modernist poetics misses the recurrent presence of these impressions that were explored in many nineteenth-century works. The authors considered, who had no aesthetic theory or programmatic manifesto to claim the legitimacy of these investigations of perception, were nonetheless sensitive to the more scientifically grounded imperative of observation of the phenomena associated with sight within the sensorium of industrial modernity and, on a higher plane, with the desire to reinstate a stabilising force of cogency.

The history of nineteenth-century optical devices and optical tricks, in sum, allows to retrace an alternative pleasure of seeing and knowing the world through literature that has not been charted in relation to the evolving notions of realism and literary mimesis in general, which grow out of

[14] These complex systems of visual phenomena in nineteenth-century fiction do challenge an ideological pull to naturalise the 'disciplining effects' of the discourse of realism itself, which is presented as pervasive in Mieke Bal's 'De-disciplining the Eye.' *Critical Inquiry* 16 3 (1990): pp. 506–531. They also help to predate the 'disruption of traditional space-time perceptions in science, art, literature and philosophy' usually ascribed to the end of the nineteenth century and to the modernist avant-garde. See for instance Anson Rabinbach's overview of the late nineteenth-century context in *The Human Motor. Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992 [1990]), p. 84 and related footnote.

the experimentations of the late Renaissance and Baroque period.[15] Studying pre-cinematic spectacles in relation to the history of the modern novel, as I do in this book, helps, therefore, not only to complicate the linear and at times teleological narratives of the emergence and dominance of one technological medium (academic painting, photography, cinema) as a parallel of literary mimesis.[16] The nineteenth-century novel, taken here in the broad definition of its generic features and associations advanced by the Jena Romantics, i.e. as a modern-day satire, a hodgepodge of disparate elements, is placed at the cross-roads of modern and traditional discourses that cannot be singled out in isolation to write an equally compartmentalised history of the technologically defined modes of vision and representation, without trying to reconstruct the analogies between different systems of knowing and representing the world, which, taken together, point to a larger discursive framework that encompasses them all.

## Pre-cinematic Spectacles as Philosophical Toys

Pre-cinematic spectacles, and, more importantly, the way their functioning apparatus and modes of visualisation were woven into the fabric of the novel need to regain the status of the eighteenth-century devices such as the thaumatrope, which contemporary treatises on vision and representation called a 'philosophical toy.' Novel-writing was instrumental in reshuffling the categories of perception and knowledge construction beyond the models of pictorialism and of the static frontal view of the 'window onto the world' model of observation and painterly representation. The literary imagination was able to do so by applying some of the optical principles of these devices to a medium, such as print-culture, with a much larger circulation. The awareness by these novelists of the mediated circulation of

[15] See again, *The Emergence of Pre-cinema*, op. cit. The whole pre-nineteenth century context helps to place under a genealogical analysis any discursive formation associated with the technologies of vision, a task which more recent scholarships on the discourses of vision seems to overlook.

[16] For an attention to the 'cinematic' qualities of nineteenth century fiction see the pioneering work of John Fell, *Film and the Narrative Tradition* (University of Oklahoma Press: 1974) which analyses several forms of narrative, from theatrical melodrama to popular fiction, comics, and painting, and recognises the presence of pre-cinematic effects, for instance of the phenakistoscope, in Richard Harding Davis' *Soldiers of Fortune*, p. 56, or the stereograph, p. 59, in a teleological trajectory leading to the instances of cinematic technique projected on nineteenth-century novelists. See also p. 13 and following.

fiction in the industrial age, as well as the frequent self-reflexive asides as narrators striving to reach a synthesis of reality past fragmentation, found in the characters of doctors, philologists, philosophers and daguerreotypists an apt parallel of the epistemological concerns of the new sciences, which fiction popularised.

The modern novel, which a long tradition of criticism has seen and continues to see within the established theory of the correspondences between the 'sister arts,' to be mediated alternatively through a painted view of modern life or, later, a photographic rendition of it, actually presents a wider gamut of visual phenomena often antithetical to the aesthetics of the traditional codes of *ut pictura poesis*. As a means to integrate the scholarship on the history of nineteenth-century mimesis, my book chooses to highlight the *visual phenomena* incorporated in the open genre of the novel by retracing two seemingly contradictory aesthetic formations: one self-reflexively deconstructing the illusion of representation, rejuvenating the tradition of Baroque visuality, and the other one incorporating and surpassing imaginatively fragmentation to reinstate a notion of unity driven by a Neoplatonic discursive force that had persisted in various cultural forms.[17] This loosely Platonist tradition reappears under several guises, often in secularised forms and, more surprisingly, even within the formalisations of the 'modern' episteme. In retracing the history of how a new intellectual model advanced a dynamic, interactive assembly of different aspects of reality into a dynamic synthesis, which surpasses multiplicity into a cogent intuition of ordered unity, I chose to see this polarity as operating according to the apparently paradoxical logic of what Michel Foucault in his 1978–79 course at the College de France called 'mutual incompatibilities.'[18] Any stress, in a literary or artistic representation, on an unstructured sequence of fragmentary data provided by the senses goes together with an attempt to surpass them in a higher unity. The apparent incompatibility of the two modes is actually a mutual bind, which became a paradigmatic structure reintroducing a notion of intuited order in the face of the sensory

[17] The constructed, often man-mediated nature of the pre-cinematic spectacle was very present to contemporary viewers and novelists reflect on the de-mystified notion of representation that this spectacles presented to viewers. See for instance the short story 'Ethan Brand' by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

[18] Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique. Cours au College de France (1978-1979)*. Édition établie sous la direction de Francois Ewald et Alessandro Fontana, par Michel Senellart. Paris: Gallimard, 2004, p. 44 and 23n.

disorientation provided by the redefined intellectual horizons and the lived, embodied experience of modernity. Exploring the two modes helps identifying forms of representation, such as the mere registration of fragmentation and movement, that have sometimes been overlooked, while in fact revealing innovative and disrupting modes of vision that the nineteenth-century imagination engages with from the beginning of the century.[19] In doing so, these alternative forms of vision and representation explored by the literary imagination predate the interest that the modern disciplines of psychology, sociology and the study of movement have, according to scholars such as Anson Rabinbach analysed only at the end of the nineteenth century.[20] A more complex genealogy of the modern episteme is needed, extending over a *longue durée* that escapes a paradigm-shift narrative, which has been commonly placed either at the end of the eighteenth-century/beginning of the nineteenth or within the context of the *fin de siècle*. The literary imagination appears to be an important component among other systems of knowledge-formation, such as the ones identified by Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things*. Whereas Michel Foucault is interested in providing an archaeology of the modern sciences, the intellectual horizon of nineteenth-century fiction which investigates a more or less visible reality exceeds the methodological premises of the modern disciplines studied by Foucault, as the investment on the part of nineteenth-century authors in mesmerism, magic and other occult forces can attest. Literature was therefore paradoxically more attuned to the wide range of experimental explorations of the human faculties within the modern sensorium, and it circulated some of the structuring elements that formalised the new paradigmatic synthesis provided by the disciplines of philology, biology and the theory of value.

I shall now turn to some of the foundational texts in the history of the disciplines of the modern episteme to begin identifying the vast discursive reach of the emerging paradigm, which extends beyond the limited focus on philology, biology and the theory of value proposed by Foucault to

[19] See also Alberto Gabriele, *The Emergence of Pre-cinema*, op. cit.

[20] For the challenge to the Kantian categories in nineteenth century science Anson Rabinbach's work *The Human Motor. Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992 [1990]) is an important starting point. For the paradigmatic shifts in the notion of objectivity and subjectivity in the same period see Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison. *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007). For the notion of 'mutual incompatibility' see Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique. Cours au Collège de France (1981-1982)*. Édition établie sous la direction de François Ewald et Alesandro Fontana, par Frédéric Gros (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 2001), p. 44 and 23n.

weave a vast intertextual map incorporating also political reform. I am making here brief references to the literary imagination, postponing a more detailed analysis in the chapters dedicated to each novel. I shall begin with the discipline of philology, formalised for the third time, after the earlier Alexandrinaian and Humanist sites of emergence, in Germany in the second half of the eighteenth-century, only to stress its transnational resonance in parallel with the reorganisation of the study of literature in the modern university system.[21] The theoretical premise of one of the founding texts in the discipline, Franz Bopp's *A Comparative Grammar of the Sanskrit, Zend, Greek, Latin, Lithuanian, German, and Slavic Languages* rests upon a system of etymological relations whose pervasive principle retraces a lost unity out of the fragmentary multiplicity of modern languages: it 'spring[s],' Bopp argues with, from one imagined origin, the Sanskrit language. To make this claim Bopp recurs to a system of metaphors deriving from the organic world: he associates linguistic traits with the unpredictable movements of water, as if appearing from hidden sources, 'springing' from unexpected quarters, as in a baroque pleasure garden, to reinstate a common origin.[22] The associative logic of the author unites different locations on the world map and varying linguistic expressions with the quick tempo of a mercurial force reaching far to shape and encompass word terminations, vowel progressions, 'favourite exchanges' and unexpected reoccurrences in disguise under new forms.[23] They are all accounted for in the narrative of a single origin in which they can be recognised. Any identifiable linguistic trait can, thus, loose its individuality to a higher force that alters it, for instance when Bopp states it is 'sacrificed to the suffix.' In *amaris, ameris* etc. 'the personal character' might as well have 'been unable to withstand the inclination to become r when placed between two vowels.'[24] A stronger force alters them, reinstating a shift that can be likewise retraced in other contexts. In another example drawn from the same text, Bopp discusses the second person plural form of the imperative, *amamini*, in which the *mini* suffix has assumed the character of a verbal

[21] See Tuska Benes, *In Babel's Shadow. Language, Philology, and the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008) and chapter 3 of *The Emergence of Pre-cinema*.

[22] Franz Bopp's *A Comparative Grammar of the Sanskrit, Zend, Greek, Latin, Lithuanian, German, and Sclavonic Languages* (London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate; Paris: B. Duprat; Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1856), p. 565.

[23] Franz Bopp, *A Comparative Grammar*, op. cit., p. 663.

[24] Franx Bopp, op. cit., p. 663.

termination that transforms it, having 'lost the consciousness of its nominal nature, renounced its distinction of gender.'[25] The discreet elements of phonetics and morphology are acted upon by unseen forces that endlessly alter their appearance, echoing the same forms from distant points on the imagined map of the ideological construction of the Indo-European common origin. Melville's *Pierre* engages with this tradition throughout the meta-literary narrative of a Romantic mind in his quest for biological or philological origins —his angst regarding his family line goes parallel to his deconstruction of linguistic and gendered conventions: in the chapter 'Young America in Literature' Melville points to the pervasiveness of the discursive power of the new discipline of philology to infiltrate the practices of the literary market through the 'philological conductor' of a literary magazine.[26] Contemporary reviews of Melville's Pierre confirm the widespread reach of this discursive field: the *Whig Review*, in fact, called the novel a 'philological reform' of the English language.'[27]

The biologist Xavier Bichat in *A Treatise on the Membranes*, insists on the 'continuity' of 'neighbouring parts' and on identifying fibrous membranes as the irreducible part made of tissue that connects, despite their variations, the organs they surround: membranes, in fact, 'make but *one whole*, but one single organ.' [Emphasis added][28] A purely mechanistic view is countered by the return to a vitalist one: in the history of medicine, as Elizabeth Haigh reminds us, Bichat stressed the communication of a vital principle to inanimate matter: 'in passing from time to time through the living bodies, matter is penetrated at different intervals with the vital properties which are found in combination with the physical ones.'[29] The same desire to connect parts in order to contemplate a provisionally systematic sense of unity is the lesson drawn from natural science by George Eliot, as we shall see, when she adapts it to the definition of her notion of literary

[25] Franz Bopp, op. cit., p. 664.

[26] Herman Melville, *Pierre, or the Ambiguities.* (New York and London: Penguin Books, 1996). p. 246.

[27] Quoted in Michael S Kearns 'Interpreting Intentional Coherence: Towards a Disambiguation of Melville's 'Pierre; or, The Ambiguities' *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 16:1 (Spring 1983), p. 34.

[28] Xavier Bichat, *A treatise on the membrane sin General and on Different membranes in Particular.* (Boston: Cummings and Hilliard, 1813), p. 107, 109. On the innovations that his study had in pathological classification see Elizabeth Haigh, *Xavier Bichat and the Medical Theory of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1984), pp. 84–85, 94.

[29] Elizabeth Haigh, *Xavier Bichat*, op. cit., p, 113.

realism: 'in natural science, I have understood, there is nothing petty to the mind that has a large vision of relations, and to which every single object suggests a vast sum of conditions. It is surely the same with the observation of human life.'[30] Literary representation, while apparently registering the simplest data available for observation, is able to reinstate a system of relations that provides an interactive understanding of parts subsumed into a higher, more embracing dynamic unity, which in her case may lead to a new arrangement of parts in the network of a local community or to a Romantic reflection on the unattainable unity of past civilisations, shared by the philological studies of the character of Casaubon.

The system of intellectual relations that the disciplines of the modern episteme draw, and the more dispersed discursive formations of old they reproduce, would not be so pervasive in nineteenth-century culture had not their reverberations reached other fields of cultural production than the specialised language of scientists and theorists. The discursive force attempting to posit and reinstate a lost unity partially reintroduced the musings of the mystically inclined Neoplatonic minds of old that preserved the same principle of a binding unity behind the teeming multiplicity of reality. This common background to a secularised notion of unity found echoes also in the language of political reform, which is present in all authors discussed in the book. The language of radical political reform was energised precisely by the possibility to bring these intuitions to an engaged form of political action through a new relation between dynamic parts and a utopian new sense of unity, as the character of Dorothea in *Middlemarch*, the figure of the daguerreotypist and his acolytes in *The Hose of the Seven Gables* and other characters I shall later discuss can attest. These reformers were enthused by the same mystical inclinations when striving to regain a principle of order in a new form of political unity. An early French socialist such as Pierre Leroux claims that 'Life manifests itself only in unity; it disappears were this unity to cease,' and the cosmic connections between the workings of nature and social theory are constantly underlined, in opposition to a purely mechanistic reading of the phenomena of nature.[31] In Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's *Notions synthétiques et physiologiques de philosophy naturelle* the cosmic poetry of Dante's mystic vision of the universe returns

[30] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1932), vol. II., p. 4.
[31] Loïc Rignol, p. 429.

when discussing '*the* universal law' —emphasis added— as 'cause of all movements and arrangements in the universe.'[32]

The reverberations of the language of these mystical thinkers reach the progressive circles of American lecture series, as we shall see in both Melville's *Pierre* and Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*. An inspiration for both, Ralph Waldo Emerson, elaborated the same suggestions in his writings, for instance in his diary in verses 'The Adirondacs.' Centring on a trip in the region in New York State, the poetic voice remembering it enjoys the unspoiled territory that envelops him and his fellow travellers. He frames that as, at first sight, antithetical to any mark of civilisation that man might have left on the landscape: 'Nothing was ploughed, or reaped, or bought, or sold.'[33] This communion with nature, however, harbours an epistemic shift and demands a political transformation among him and his companions, 'waking a new sense/ inviting to new knowledge, one with old.'[34] The landscape, far from infantilising the party of men, makes them into a group of 'freemen of the forest laws.'[35] Apparently encouraging an escape from civilisation, the book of nature, in fact, reveals among its leaves a political allegory, if properly read. The group, turned into a company of 'freemen of the forest laws,' is, thus, able to reverse social hierarchies: '… let men of cloth/ Bow to the stalwart churls in overall: *They* are the doctors of the wilderness … .'[36]

The link between transcendentalism, political radicalism and the reverberations of the discourse of light, unity and cogency beyond fragmentation are the discursive threads of the culture in which optical toys and popular entertainment were popularised. Reappearing as a filigree trace in the new conceptualisations of what was believed to be the separate, more secular fields of modern science, they call for a broadening of the scope of a genealogical analysis of the intellectual processes that accompany the reflections on the rise of industrial modernity and the dissemination of new visual technologies. Vision and representation of reality are never offered transparently to the senses; they rather engage different intellectual

[32] Loïc Rignol, p. 431, referring to footnote 2497.

[33] *Poems*. New and Revised Edition (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company and Cambridge: the Riverside Press, 1895), p. 161.

[34] Ibid.

[35] It is a typology different from the one identified by Lloyd Willis in *Environmental Evasion. The Literary, Critical, and Cultural Politics of "Nature's Nation"* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2011).

[36] Emerson, *Poems*, pp. 161–2.