

The history of media is not just a chronology of visionary successes, but also one of (commercial) failure and thus of disappearance. With his principle of series photography, Eadweard Muybridge paved the way for more than just film. His zoopraxography discs, which he made in 1893 for the world exposition in Colombia, did not sell, so he destroyed them in a rage. As a result, there are only a few examples still extant today. They can be displayed using a combination of the magic lantern and the »wheel of life«, and show such things as the movements of a horse and its rider. As well as avant-garde film directors, these days it is above all the makers of digital video art who pay tribute to these figures from the generation of their (great)-grandfathers, such as Muybridge and Jules-Etienne Marey. The renewed use of old media and media techniques in an artistic context now seems less anachronistic than ever. And antiquated projection methods are also increasingly featured in contemporary installations. Even the science-fiction author and cyberspace theorist Bruce Sterling pays homage to »dead« media with the outstandingly nerdy web site www.deadmedia.org.

Even before the birth of cinema there were moving pictures that could be described as audio-visual mass culture. In 1892, for example, Emile Reynaud publicly presented some of the first animated sequences using the praxinoscope, a more developed form of William G. Horner's daedalum. To make the illusion more perfect, Reynaud hid his praxinoscope set-up (the word »praxinoscope« comes from Greek roots meaning »action viewer«) behind a translucent projection surface. For an admission fee, the scientist showed 12-15 minute pieces like »Pauvre Pierrot«, which he provided with a musical accompaniment, on long, transparent strips of pictures. The audience response was enthusiastic.

The mutoscope had no sound and functioned on the principle of a mechanized flip book. Around 1,000 single frames could be moved using a hand-operated crank. The American Herman Casler had it patented in 1894 as a slot entertainment machine that was placed in railway stations, casinos and bars. Many of these media are not only »old« or extinct, but now largely inaccessible or unknown. This is not only because they have been overtaken by progress, but also because museums have not sufficiently put them in their collections. Technical, scientific and art institutions did not feel responsible for archiving these various visual devices because they were considered the province of trivial or popular culture. For example, the lamposcope (ca. 1880) - a more developed version of the magic lantern which was screwed on to a paraffin lamp and was intended to guarantee safe use within the family - has not been honoured by being added to a single state collection. And the museums of design, which - perhaps partly as a result of an established label fetishism - today exhibit common electronic entertainment devices ranging from computers to DVD players, did not become fixtures in the cultural landscape until the late 20th century. Around 1900, stereoscopes were propagated as an integral part of every household. From 1850 onwards there were series-produced stereoscopes that were filled with stereo images. When we look at two slightly different images of an object through such a device, our brains fuse them together as one. The most popular subjects were portraits and »colonial scenes«. By using such devices as the »Holmes viewer«, it was possible to bring images from journeys to distant

places up close in a »realistic« fashion without spending much money. In the 1880s, the German August Fuhrmann developed his »Kaiser-Panorama«. This was a circular visual device with stereo images that allowed up to 25 people to sit around it. It is seen as the precursor of the cinematic newsreel. Two hundred and fifty of these places of entertainment existed up into the mid-twenties, until they were gradually replaced by the new medium of film. Only around twenty historical panoramas have survived worldwide, including the Battle of Bergisel in Innsbruck, the Battle of Waterloo in Braine-l'Alleud near Brussels, and the Bourbaki Panorama in Lucerne. The demise of the old media thus makes the function of collectors a central one. As well as displaying the antiquated hardware, they are mostly the ones to provide the costly, specialized and rare demonstrations in privately organized circles.

Until the start of January, 2005, the exhibition »Eyes, Lies & Illusions« in the Hayward Gallery in London presented a number of visual apparatuses, mostly from the collection of Werner Nekes (www.hayward.org.uk).