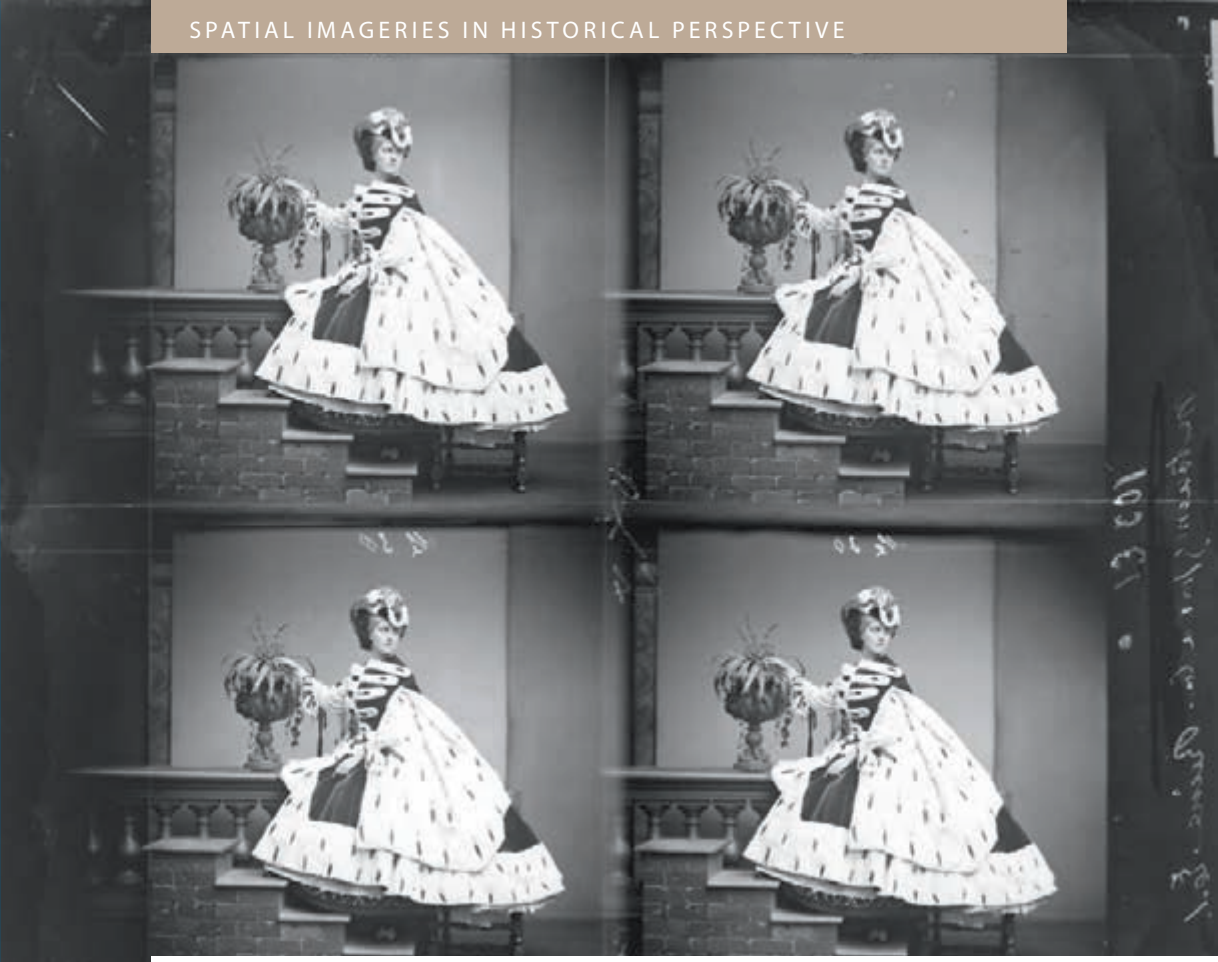
SPATIAL IMAGERIES IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE



Edited by Dominique Bauer and Camilla Murgia

The Home, Nations and Empires, and Ephemeral Exhibition Spaces

1750-1918

Amsterdam University Press

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Spatial Imageries in Historical Perspective

This series is looking for interdisciplinary contributions that focus on the historical study of the imagined space, or of spaces and places as sensorial, experiential or intellectual images, from the interior to the landscape, in written, visual or material sources. From (closed) gardens and parks to cabinets, from the odd room to the train compartment, from the façade to the prison cell, from the reliquary to the desk, a variety of spaces in the shape of imageries and images unveils historical attitudes to history, to the object, to the other and the self and presents a subject that experiences, acts, imagines and knows. Spatial imageries and images in this sense constitute a prominent theme in various fields within the Humanities, from museum studies, intellectual history and literature to material culture studies, to name but a few.

Spatial Imageries in Historical Perspective therefore addresses a broad audience of scholars that engage in the historical study of space in this sense, from the Early Middle Ages to the Recent Past in literature, art, in material culture, in scholarly and other discourses, from either cultural and contextual or more theoretical angles.

Series editor
Dominique Bauer, University of Leuven, Belgium

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Introduction: Ephemeral Exhibition Spaces and the Dynamic of Historical Liminalities

Dominique Bauer

Abstract

The following study addresses ephemeral exhibition spaces between 1750 and 1918. The focus is placed upon the private home, the nation, and the empire as distinctive spaces or spatial concepts. These either function themselves as ephemeral exhibition settings, or they are exhibited and made discernable in settings that are fundamentally ephemeral, and sometimes literally mobile, from the more traditional museum, a variety of smaller and larger scale exhibits, to the foldable paper peepshow or text-image sources which also function as spaces. Firstly, all of these simultaneously challenge and communicate elusiveness, fragmentation, disappearance, and otherness within their cultural context. Secondly, as liminal spaces, they all testify to the ambiguous connections between identification and projection vis-a-vis objectification and otherness.

Keywords: ephemerality, liminality, domestic spaces, nation, empire

This is the first of two volumes of essays concentrating on ephemeral exhibition spaces, between 1750 and 1918, in various European countries, Russia, and the United States. The term refers to a wide and stimulating variety of spaces, both public and private, the fixed, the portable, or the foldable. We shall see that the term also materialized in written and visual-textual sources, for example, catalogs, travel accounts, or politico-religious documents. As material spaces, they accommodated temporary shows or exhibits that were, either deliberately or otherwise, short-lived, quickly abandoned, or constantly under construction. They could function as alternative, unusual,

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or unexpected exhibition venues. As ephemeral exhibition spaces, they represented and tried to stabilize realities that were explicitly elusive and fragile, on either a personal level or the level of "other," vanishing cultures behind fragmentary museum objects, or political entities that tried to establish or imagine themselves in these spaces.

Initially, studying these ephemeral exhibition spaces makes it possible, firstly, to recognize the role of ephemerality in exhibiting, collecting, and preserving as such in the period studied. Additionally, it also makes it possible to understand how these activities were embedded in a world that, on a much broader scale, had to deal with ephemerality, and that, moreover, had become fundamentally museal, as Alexandra Stara has shown for the iconic case of Alexandre Lenoir's Musée des Monuments Français.[1] Jonathan Crary has furthermore argued that the world and reality had become an "extended exhibition space," again outside the walls of its exhibition spaces, museums, collections, and the like.[2]

The chronological scope of these volumes goes from the aftermath of the Baroque movement to the end of the First World War. Admittedly, the choice of 1750 is relative and represents a much less clear break than 1918. It does, however, have the great advantage of providing a broad comparative framework and a longer-term perspective of continuities, discontinuities, and radicalizations within a shared cultural context of ephemerality that this evolutive topic may require. Juxtaposing, for example, early-modern political geographies of ephemeral lands and the modern constructions of the nation state makes it possible to assess more clearly how the changing dimensions of private and public space affected exhibiting, imaging, representing, or mise en scène. The majority of the essays study nineteenth-century cases in the context of a new relationship between the public and private realms of society. This context is characterized by an increasingly expanded bureaucracy and economy, a colonial culture, imperial and scientific aspirations, and a frenzy for collecting and exhibiting. This nineteenth-century evolution is subsequently followed by the more elaborately subjective and alternative exhibition spaces of the first decades of the twentieth century which announce and embody both new and radicalized museological and exhibitional views.

The cases studied bear witness to a cultural historical context in which ephemerality played a fundamental role. Without neglecting connections

1 Alexandra Stara, *The Museum of French Monuments 1795–1816. 'Killing Art to Make History'* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing), 147–162.

2 Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception. Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2001), 236.

with pre-revolutionary and pre-modern developments and precedents in the aftermath of the Baroque movement, these cases are primarily addressed in a context of rapid change and (r)evolution that followed the closing decades and the fall of the Ancien Régime, a time in which an increasingly different historical awareness and sense of time emerged. Based on the legacy of Koselleck's *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, amongst others, Peter Fritzsche, in *Stranded in the Present. Modern Time and the Melancholy of History,* and François Hartog, in *Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expériences du temps*, have further addressed the historically determined awareness. Exploring the transition from the Ancien Régime to the modern world, of the ineluctable discrepancy between past and present, and of the fundamental otherness of the past. In recent years, the historicization of concepts of time and history, as well as the growing awareness of the importance of Benjaminian thought in this context, which reveals a deep affinity with the breakdown of aura, with the fragment, the old-fashioned, the trace, etc., has opened up interesting connections with museum and exhibition studies.

Studies focused on the long-term development of exhibitions, museums, collections, and period rooms have also connected exhibiting with a sense of loss and fragmentation, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett robustly demonstrated in her groundbreaking *Destination Culture. Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. The museum was embedded in a museal culture, while the museum object became what Krzysztof Pomian termed a "semiophore," an object without use that signifies absent realities.[3] The distinction between the living relic and the dead specimen highlighted the opposition between (a constructed) connection and the disconnection between past and present.[4] Simultaneously, the experience of the visitor became increasingly more private, something that, amongst others, Dominique Poulot has studied in his influential museological work, and ultimately more subjective, fragmented, and volatile towards the end of the century. As Mark Sandberg has convincingly argued in his *Living Pictures, Missing Persons. Mannequins, Museums and Modernity*, this was the point at which the truly modern spectator emerged.

This sense of loss, of absence and fragmentation, was simultaneously compensated for with the creation of new continuities and strategies of

3 Krzysztof Pomian. *Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux. Paris, Venise: XVe–XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), 30.

4 Stephen Bann, "Historical Text and Historical Object: The Poetics of the Musée de Cluny," *History and Theory* 17 (3) (1978): 259.

presentification. That is, a fixed vivification in a stable here and now. The panoramic theatre and the diorama, as well as the historical novel and endeavors in scholarly fields, such as archeology to establish site-based historical continuities, are examples of this struggle.[5] The exposition and preservation of things was the hallmark of a culture in which the world itself had become ephemeral in this respect.[6] In the modern urban culture of fast impressions, spectators of exhibitions and museums also integrated ephemerality as a fundamental, positive dimension of their perception and experience of these spaces (Sandberg). Finally, the ideological and self-legitimizing, socio-political, or economic motives that permeated the grand-scale exhibits in the second half of the century, like studies by Paul Greenhalgh on the great expositions, and Pascal Blanchard and others on the so-called human zoos have demonstrated, can also be interpreted as ways to respond from various angles to the challenges of ephemerality as a much broader cultural challenge. The ephemeral exhibition space is thus a paradox. It reveals of a broader cultural awareness of ephemerality, whilst simultaneously being part of the attempt to create, often against all odds, new continuities and new forms of lasting vivification within the intellectual and experiential grasp of its spectator.

This volume, *The Home, Nations and Empires, and Ephemeral Exhibition Spaces: 1750–1918*, explores both domestic and public spaces of display, from grander scale exhibitions to smaller temporal ones, for example in a railway station, to the case of the portable and foldable London tunnel paper peep show. As will be seen, the portable paper peep show constitutes a hybrid and volatile space in terms of its material localization. Belonging to either the private domestic or the public ideological realm, and its denomination as either an interior or an exterior space. In fact, all the cases addressed in this volume concern hybrid, liminal, or threshold spaces in some way, in which transition, overlap, simultaneity, or sometimes uncanny friction on the frontiers between public and private, interior and exterior, play a fundamental role. They mix aspects of the domestic and the public or the

5 See in this respect the seminal studies of Martin Meisel, *Realizations. Narrative, Pictorial, and Theoretical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), Stephan Oettermann. *Das Panorama. Die Geschichte eines Massenmediums* (Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1980) and Gillen d'Arcy Wood, *The Shock of the Real. Romanticism and Visual Culture 1760–1860* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

6 Dominique Bauer, "The Elusiveness of History and the Ephemerality of Display in Nineteenth-Century France and Belgium. At the Intersection of the Built Environment and the Spatial Image in Literature," in *Ephemeral Spectacles, Exhibition Spaces and Museums: 1750-1918,* eds. Dominique Bauer and Camilla Murgia, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press), 161-189.

private and the political. They intersect either between the personal, contingent, and subjective and the ideal, objective and sometimes distinctively timeless world beyond the domestic frame, as the case of Viollet-le-Duc's last house La Vedette will show. Or they conflate the national, the domestic, and the authentic, as in the Vlaams Huis ("Flemish House") of the Belgian architect Charle Albert, which is also analyzed in this volume. They may show the visitor's private itinerary, interests, and (decorative) tastes, which are plunged into the greater picture of the identitary, self-legitimating exhibitions of the colonial age. Finally, they may, on the contrary, also embody the secret and private existence of national identities in lands that never were or were no more.

Domestic spaces of display and public exhibitions in national and imperial contexts share a dynamic of identity formation in which the boundaries between the public and private are often blurred. They therefore, constitute interesting cases of historical liminality, between the dweller's sociability and the nation, or between the visitor's increasingly subjective and isolated private gaze and the economic and ideological mechanism behind the endeavor to put things, products, artifacts, the "nation," or "empire" on display. Boundaries are also simultaneously blurred in terms of a variety of other dimensions that are related to the public and the private, or exteriority and interiority. The essays in this volume, for example, address the transitions, coincidences, sometimes even uncanny confrontations between the creative and the scientific, the intimate and the personal vis-à-vis the aesthetic and the theatrical. These become comprehensible as situations of liminality that are spatialized and materialized in the ephemeral exhibition space that negotiates this dynamic. All of the cases studied ultimately show how this dynamic emerges as an attempt to deal with or resist the mentioned sense of loss, fragmentation, and elusiveness that marked the broader cultural context of ephemerality during the period studied. As has been noted, ephemeral exhibition spaces are, paradoxically, spaces that unfold continuity, stability, and presence, whether successfully or not. They do so as a means of identity formation, through the simultaneous representation of historical eras and forms of immersive, as-if-really-there experiences of absent or past worlds. From this perspective, the essays add a refreshingly new insight to a variety of scholarly fields, such as museum and exhibition studies, colonial and material culture studies, the history of architecture and design, of gardens and landscapes, art history, historiography and the experience of time and the study of the domestic space.

The first part "The Home" presents three cases of domestic spaces: Viollet-le-Duc's La Vedette; Charle Albert's Vlaams Huis; and the Countess

de Castiglione's domestic, architectural mise en scène of photographic self-portraits. These cases exemplify the paradoxical nature of the ephemeral exhibition space that both communicates the elusiveness of being and a strategy against that elusiveness. The cases of Viollet-le-Duc and Charle Albert, in this sense, display a discourse of fullness and of the simultaneous, exhaustive presence of either the strata of the natural world, or the historical eras of the national past. The negotiation of liminality and the establishment of continuity and presence emerge most saliently in the way these domestic exhibition spaces try to re-present historical evolutions simultaneously, or aim to render the original state of things or past eras in a kind of stable isolation, unaffected by the passing of time. The latter can be interpreted, quite literally, in the case of Viollet-le-Duc's La Vedette, the architect's final house in Switzerland from which Lake Geneva and the Alps could be viewed. In his study, Viollet-le-Duc realized a vast painting of Mont Blanc, which is analyzed by Aisling O'Carroll in her chapter "Panorama as Critical Restoration: Examining the Ephemeral Space of Viollet-le-Duc's Study at La Vedette." Against the backdrop of a totalizing geo-historical awareness and combining imaginative creation and preservation, Viollet-le-Duc restores the essential Mont Blanc as an act of both creativity and scientific understanding, as he had previously restored the essential gothic cathedral: "As an extension of his work in architecture, his investigation of the underlying geological order and its restoration demonstrates his effort to penetrate a totalizing historical experience through geological narrative."

The Vlaams Huis ("Flemish House") near Brussels, designed by Belgian architect Charle Albert as his personal *Buen Retiro*, also served as an annex to the 1880 National Exhibition. It displayed a similar kind of immersive essentialism that is based upon a synthetic succession of eras. As Daniela Prina argues in her chapter "An Ephemeral Museum of Decorative and Industrial Arts: Charle Albert's Vlaams Huis," Charle Albert's construction of this Neo-Renaissance domestic space was grafted upon the construction of Belgium's self-image as a youthful, powerful nation that reclaimed "its history by engaging with its great artistic tradition." Interestingly, for this kind of integration of the historical home and the modern nation into a sense of continuity and "present" history, is the fact that "the rooms were arranged following a staged progression retracing the historical evolution of Flemish Renaissance styles of decoration, from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century." In this sense, the Vlaams Huis also offered a kind of stratified, simultaneous view.

In contrast, the Countess de Castiglione's photographic-architectural setting constitutes a hybrid scenographic space between intimacy and

objectification, in which the boundaries between self-fashioning, estrangement and objects collapse. In her chapter "Expanding Interiors: Architectural Photographs of the Countess de Castiglione," Heidi Brevik-Zender shows how the somewhat uncanny objectification of a self in terms of self-display simultaneously becomes a tool to critically tackle gender roles. The Countess's "400 studio photographs taken of her in elaborately costumed and staged tableaus," clearly develops this dynamic. Brevik-Zender argues that the Countess, and occasionally also her young son who appears in some of the photographs, the objects, photographic backdrops, props, and the architecture of the room, become elements in a hyperbolic narrative of "excess." They become signifiers in the stage-home as a liminal space in the sense of a critical subtext, a subtext in which the boundaries between the interior and the exterior, and of the interior as a logic of confinement, are disrupted, uncovered, and surpassed. The dimension of liminality between mise en scène, on the one hand, and the realm of the intimate and personal on the other, is thus explored in a manner that runs counter to the creation of a kind of constructive fullness and meaningfulness. On the contrary, it raises poignant and uncanny possibilities of disruption, of sub-textual dissection of the museal, voyeuristic, imagined, gendered nature of spaces.

Ephemeral exhibition spaces thus negotiate, alter, and redefine spaces in different ways and do so while engaging with fundamental cultural themes such as elusiveness, loss, absence, disappearance, displacement, identity, self, subjectivity, memory, imagination, and creativity. In the home, the nation, or the empire and in its spatial imageries, these themes emerge in comparable ways, often explicitly mixing the realms of the domestic and the public, as already shown in Prina's chapter on the Vlaams Huis. As previously mentioned, the ephemerality of these spaces not only refers to the material fact that their occurrence itself was transient, elusive, or not meant to be preserved. These spaces are frequently the reflection of, or a way to deal with, realities that, in many respects, revealed themselves as ephemeral or disappearing, irrevocably gone, constantly changing or under construction. This perspective is central in the second part of this volume, "Bygone Nations and Empires under Construction. Political Imaginations." Here the chapters concentrate on the representation of politico-cultural liminal geographies and on how they relate to the fiction of never having existed, of having disappeared, or of being under construction, through the examples of Poland as a land that was no more, the archbishopric of Karlovci as "the land that never was," or Russia as an empire under construction. The cases of the archbishopric of Karlovci and its 1757 *Festive Greeting*, that of Princess Izabela Czartoryska's Temple of the Sibyl at her estate in Puławy in

Poland, and of the Russian architect Aleksei Benois, show this mechanism on the level of nation building and political territorial fictions in a long-term perspective. These examples communicate how the ephemeral exhibition space is entwined with the ephemerality of the world it represents, a world it simultaneously wants to pervade with continuity, stability, and existence.

Jelena Todorovic argues in her chapter, "The Land that Never Was: Liminality of Existence and the Imaginary Spaces in the Archbishopric of Karlovci," that the eighteenth-century archbishopric of Karlovci, an Orthodox domain in the Catholic Habsburg Empire, led a liminal existence on the intersection of its actual geographic and confessional liminal position and the ideality of "the land of the lost past." This liminality was, interestingly, infused with a symbolic, hidden, and secretive dimension of privacy, the hallmark of domesticity, exemplified by Zaharija Orfelin's *Festive Greeting* to the new bishop Mojsej Putnik, an illustrated panegyric celebrating the investiture of the new bishop. This manuscript, at once a ritual space and liminal territory, only remained accessible to a limited, controlled audience and, in that sense, constituted "the ultimate invisible space," thus taking ephemerality to its most radical limits.

In the chapter "The Theatre of Affectionate Hearts: Izabela Czartoryska's Musée des Monuments Polonais in Puławy (1801–1831)," Michał Mencfel analyzes the so-called Temple of the Sibyl as a *lieu de mémoire*. This museum was constructed as a patriotic response to the loss of Polish independence in 1795 and its disappearance from the map of European nations, at Izabela Czartoryska's estate in Puławy, which had become a center of Polish sentimentalism. The objects collected were relics of the glorious history of Poland and monuments to memory. The experience of a visit to the place, caught in ritual, was both a "quasi-religious" and a "para-theatrical" experience that allowed for an emotional, "affective" experience of history. The elaborate rituals at Puławy in this sense "brought solace by offering a guarantee of continuance, an atmosphere of (only briefly questioned) permanence." The continuity of the public realm in this sense connected with personal-affective involvement.

In the chapter "A Burning Mind, a Dream Space, a 'Fantastic Exhibition,'" Inessa Kouteinikova studies the case of the Russian architect Aleksei Benois and the creation of an ideal exhibition space in Tashkent, the new capital of Russia's Central Asia, in a world that was under construction. In its identity formation, the Russian Empire had to determine its own position vis-à-vis Western expositional models in a dynamic context of fascination for Central Asian architecture, while Russian and European styles were, in return, adopted in Central Asia. Here also, the logic of synthesis, of the microcosmos,

for example in creating a "miniature image of old Moscow," echoing the kind of historical simultaneity that is addressed in other chapters, of the full presence of past and present, surface in the 1890 Tashkent Exhibition, where "Aleksei Benois took aim at the entire edifice of old history and the new culture of Russian Central Asia that he strived to express in a single drawing or structure."

Western expositional models take us to the heart of the later nineteenth-century public space which was determined by colonialism, industrialization, and big-city culture. This context is addressed in the last part "England and the British Empire. Civil Society, Civil Service, and Ephemeral Exhibition Spaces." This final part of the volume presents three different cases of exhibition spaces in England, each of which maintain a different balance between the public and the private sphere, the public and personal or autobiographical, the exterior and the interior, and their shifting interconnections. In her reconstruction of Saloon G at the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857 in the chapter "An Ephemeral Display within an Ephemeral Museum: The East India Company Contribution to the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857," Elizabeth Pergam sheds light on cultural attitudes to non-European objects and what she refers to as their own "timelessness," which also resonate in private homes and collections, as well as to the applied arts and how these related to theories of good design. Particular attention is paid to the perception of the items exhibited and, therefore, to the impact of the visit to the exhibition intended as a visual and cultural experience.

In Jeff Rosen's chapter "Julia Margaret Cameron's Railway Station Exhibition: A Private Gallery in the Public Sphere," the spatial multifacetedness and interconnectedness between the nation, the new public space, and the home takes a literal form. Studying Juliet Margaret Cameron's unique exhibition of photographs "of the great men of our age" in the waiting room of Brockenhurst Junction Station, the railway as a binding force of national identity is knitted together with the importance of the railway in the colonies for the expansion of civil service. Crucially, at the same time, this connection entwines with Cameron's personal life, in a waiting room that touches the domestic space, where time slows down and becomes more intimate and personal, and where one can reflect for a moment. It was at Brockenhurst Junction that Julia Margaret Cameron met her son, who was a governmental administrator in Ceylon, after an absence of four years.

The intriguing case of the aforementioned paper peepshow, studied by Shijia Yu in her chapter "Paper Monument: The Paradoxical Space in the English Paper Peepshow of the Thames Tunnel, 1825–1843," shows the

extent to which ephemeral exhibition spaces can intertwine and reflect the very ephemerality and liminalities that distinguish the surrounding historical context, in this case also in a highly palpable and material way. Analyzing the Thames Tunnel paper peepshow, Yu argues that this optical toy holds a threshold position, similar to the position of the actual Thames tunnel under construction that it represented and that was essentially "an underground arcade." Like the arcade, the peep show establishes a liminal space between the "unruly public realm and the ordered private realm." It is encapsulated, and thus "controlled and contained," in the private realm of the home, where the fear for the tunnel's fragility, which echoed the middle-class fear of industrialization, could be kept at bay.

The ambiguities, but also the versatility of ephemeral exhibition spaces that determines their cultural-historical meaning, reside in their in-betweenness and liminality. It is there that ephemeral exhibition spaces develop themselves as pieces of sub-textual criticism and as creative strategies, in which personal worlds and the world beyond the home, the personal and the national, the world of scientific understanding, the gendered society or the industrialized public space, intertwine and confront each other.

Note on the use of translations

All translations of sources in other languages into English are by the chapter authors, unless indicated otherwise.

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Dominique Bauer is Assistant Professor of History at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Leuven, Belgium, and a member of the Centre d'Analyse Culturelle de la Première Modernité at the Université Catholique de Louvain. Her research focuses on spatial images and interiority in literature, art and scholarly discourses, mainly in long nineteenth-century France and Belgium. She published *Beyond the Frame. Case Studies* in 2016, a long-term analysis of the interior and anemic subjectivity. Taking this framework further, she currently studies notions of absence, presence, and temporality, communicated through spatial images in context. On this theme, she published a number of book chapters and articles and a monograph *Place-Text-Trace. The Fragility of the Spatial Image* in 2018. She

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