In the ‘Proteus’ episode of *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus, crossing Sandymount Strand, considers at some length Bishop Berkeley’s proposition that reality is made in the mind. ‘The good bishop of Cloyne took the veil of the temple out of his shovel hat: veil of space with coloured emblems hatched on its field’.¹ According to Stephen’s redaction of Berkeley, the visible world is a ‘veil of space’ or flat screen onto which emblems differentiated by colour have been (divinely) projected. How come, then, that we experience it in three dimensions?

Coloured on a flat: yes, that’s right. Flat I see, then think distance, near, far, flat I see, east, back. Ah, see now: Falls back suddenly, frozen in stereoscope. Click does the trick. (*Ulysses*, 48)

Flatness is what we see, Stephen reckons, depth (or distance) what we think we see. The third dimension has been produced mechanically, by a conjuring trick, a scene-change in the theatre of the mind. ‘Signatures of all things I am here to read,’ he had previously told himself, with a nod at Jakob Boehme’s *De Signatura Rerum*; and criticism, taking that particular hint, now routinely casts him as an exegete or semiotician of the visible.² However, his subsequent reflections on the veil of space do not encourage further resort to the Renaissance sage. His own rapid experiment has demonstrated that the perception of depth reconfigures the world, and that it doesn’t really help to imagine the process as a reading of signatures. What enables him to come to a conclusion about the nature of the visible is not recondite visual theory, but the visual practice constituted by a mechanism at once mundane and utterly entrancing: the stereoscope.

The basic principle of stereoscopy is simple. Paired images made with a twin-lens camera produce, when seen through a binocular stereoscope, a startling illusion of three-dimensionality. The mind converts the flatness of the images set side by side on a piece of cardboard into depth. Click
(adjustment to the appropriate focal length) does the trick. By 1904, it was a trick easily performed. The stereoscope had received its first major exposure at the Great Exhibition of 1851; production of the device, and of images for use in it, was soon on an industrial footing. By 1858, the London Stereoscopic Company had a trade list of more than 100,000 titles. The invention of a cheap hand-held model established the stereoscope as a staple of home entertainment. By the end of the nineteenth century there were millions of images in circulation: views, for the most part, of location, of architecture and landscape; but also of events, some actual, some staged. Scientific applications were proposed, from time to time, in surgery, or aerial reconnaissance. But stereoscopy was, above all, a medium of mass-entertainment. It survived as such until the 1930s; indeed, it still survives, here and there, on the stalls outside heritage sites, as a marketable gadget. The basic effect it produces, of hyper-reality, cannot fail to enthrall; the flimsier the apparatus, the duller the image viewed, the more profound the enthralment. On the whole, however, we have forgotten what it means to view or to think stereoscopically.

My own interest in the stereoscope arose out of my efforts to get to grips with phenomenological theories of film which emphasise either the embodiedness of the spectator, or what David Clarke has described as cinema’s ‘sensorial immediacy’. Clarke poses in relation to cinema a question posed by Maurice Blanchot in relation to imagery in general. ‘What happens when what you see, even though from a distance, seems to touch you with a grasping contact, when the manner of seeing is a sort of touch, when seeing is a contact at a distance?’

In film theory, the question has been pursued most productively with the aid of the distinction made by the art historian Aloïs Riegl (1858–1905) between two kinds of visual experience: the optical, which delivers a survey, an account of (and accounting for) distinguishable objects in deep space; and the haptic, which feels its way along or around a world conceived as an infinitely variable surface, alert to texture rather than outline. In haptic experience, the manner of seeing is, as Blanchot puts it, a ‘sort of touch’. Riegl spoke of a ‘haptic’ (haptein = to fasten) rather than a ‘tactile’ look, because he did not want this look to be understood as a literal touching. The optical manner of seeing stands back from the world, withholds itself in and for survey, or surveillance (it will become the bad gaze of twentieth-century cultural theory); the haptic, so fast (in both senses) in its fastening, is a form of attachment.

Two recent books have demonstrated the concept’s enduring explanatory force. In The Skin of the Film, Laura Marks examines the ways in which audiovisual media evoke, ‘within their own constraints’, the senses of smell,
taste, and touch. She argues that such evocations have been used to inform and make sense of the experience of moving from one culture to another. Intercultural cinema ‘appeals to contact – to embodied knowledge, and to the sense of touch in particular – in order to recreate memories’. It does so by drawing attention to the texture both of the world and of the medium itself. In a move full of implication for cinema of all kinds, Marks opposes ‘haptic visuality’ to the meaning generated by narrative. In *Atlas of Emotion*, Juliana Bruno explores the relation between visual fastening and kinesthesis (our ability to sense our own movement in space). For her, the haptic is an ‘agent in the formation of space’. It plays ‘a tangible, tactical role in our communicative “sense” of spatiality and motility, thus shaping the texture of habitable space and, ultimately, mapping our ways of being in touch with the environment’. Bruno argues that cinema is the latest (or next to latest) in a series of configurations of a ‘topographical “sense”’ which cannot be understood entirely in terms of perspectivism, or of a theory of the gaze. Cinema, she concludes, has established ‘its own sentient way of picturing space’.

Marks situates the work of contemporary intercultural film-makers within a ‘history of tactile looking’ in cinema in general. The appeal of the first films, she observes, was to bodily rather than narrative identification. For Bruno, cinematic kinesthesis descends ‘genealogically’ from an eighteenth-century ‘spatial curiosity’, or hunger for vistas and views. The ‘haptic consciousness’ once fed by panoramas and travel literature was to find further and even more lavish sustenance in the travelling shots of the first Edison actualities.

Antonia Lant has pointed out that the emergence of cinema in the 1890s coincided with the development of haptic theory in art criticism. The haptic qualities Riegl and others had seen in ancient Egyptian art found an analogue, Lant argues, in cinema’s ‘novel spatiality’: a teeming flatness often made vivid, during the early years, by the incorporation of ancient Egyptian motifs. In my view, an understanding of stereoscopy can help us to define that phase in the ‘education of the eye’ which also includes early cinema.

The stereoscope provided a point of reference for those theorists who sought to demonstrate that visual media had evolved, within their own constraints, a sentient way to picture space. In *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture* (1893), a work decisive for Riegl, the sculptor Adolf Hildebrand argued that the eye perceives space in two modes, optical and kinesthetic, the one appropriate to distance from the object of vision, the other to a close-up view. The term Hildebrand found for kinesthesia was ‘stereoscopic vision’. A painting, he said, might belie its own flatness by an appeal to kinesthetic perception. It might produce a ‘stereoscopic impression’.
believed that the same was true of cinema. The stereoscope thus illustrates clearly that the knowledge of the flat character of pictures by no means excludes the actual perception of depth, and the question arises whether the moving pictures of the photoplay, in spite of our knowledge concerning the flatness of the screen, do not give us after all the impression of actual depth. The stereoscope is the historically specific visual technology which haptic theory requires to make its case in relation to that phase of the education of the eye which includes early cinema.

The reality effect produced by the stereoscope is variable: objects in the middle or far distance appear to be arranged along planes separated from each other by a void; while objects in the foreground, solid enough to touch, assume an astonishing palpability. In the most incisive account yet offered of the stereoscope’s role in the constitution of a ‘modern observer’, Jonathan Crary observes that its distinctive feature is the organisation of the image as a sequence of receding planes. ‘We perceive individual elements as flat, cutout forms arrayed either nearer to or further from us. But the experience of space between these objects (planes) is not one of gradual and predictable recession; rather, there is a vertiginous uncertainty about the distance separating forms.’ There are some similarities, Crary adds, between the stereoscopic image and classical stage design, which synthesises flats and real extensive space into an illusory scene. Like Stephen Dedalus, Crary grasps the theatricality of the process by which the mind makes an image out of retinal difference. Nothing, however, he goes on, ‘could be more removed from Berkeley’s theory of how distance is perceived than the science of the stereoscope’. This ‘quintessentially nineteenth-century device’, which constructs relief through an organization of optical cues, undid Berkeley, who had always regarded depth perception as a function of movement and touch, rather than of sight. For Crary, the stereoscope was the product and vivid embodiment of a new (modern) emphasis on the ‘autonomy and abstraction’ of vision.

It is important, however, not to overestimate the extent to which the stereoscope delivers autonomy and abstraction. In the composition of many stereoscopic images, theatricality gives way to something else altogether. Crary himself points out that the purpose of these images, in the eyes of those who produced them, ‘was not simply likeness, but immediate, apparent tangibility’. Optical cues alone would not be sufficient to create this overwhelming illusion of tangibility. The illusion is a product of the assertiveness with which objects in the foreground occupy space: the feeling that one could reach out and touch them, or be touched by them. Two visual systems, optical and haptic, inform stereoscopy. It may have been their coexistence – rather than, as Crary suggests, the replacement of one by the
other – which gave the stereoscope a role in the constitution of a modern viewing subject. Of the two effects it generated, of tableau and of tangibility, the less memorable, the less disturbing, in 1850, or in 1900, or in 1910, must surely have been the former.

It was tangibility on which Oliver Wendell Holmes, inventor of the hand-held stereoscope, laid the emphasis, in an essay published in 1859. ‘By means of these two different views of an object,’ Holmes wrote, ‘the mind, as it were, feels round it, and gets an idea of its solidity. We clasp an object with our eyes, as with our arms, or with our hands, or with our thumb and finger, and then we know it to be something more than a surface’. In trying to understand the consequences of this (haptic) knowledge that the object is more than a surface, we might return to Maurice Blanchot. When the image seizes on it, Blanchot says, ‘the gaze is drawn, absorbed into an immobile movement and a depth without depth’. To be absorbed by an image is not simply to be sucked into it (sorbere), but to be sucked into it away from (ab) where one once stood. By Blanchot’s account, absorption preempts meaning (the meaning that might be delivered by perspective, by an ‘optical’ look). ‘What fascinates us, takes away our power to give it a meaning, abandons its “perceptible” nature, abandons the world, withdraws to the near side of the world and attracts us there’. Viewed stereoscopically, objects in the foreground abandon their perceptible nature; a loss, or a gain, easily measured against the degree zero of that other view on offer, the view of objects in the near and middle distance, as in a theatre.

To look through a stereoscope is to feel the need for a theory of the haptic. But the incorporation of historical instance into a theory sometimes alters the theory. Haptic theory seems committed to Benjamin’s thesis that film is an art of shocks in rapid succession: in cinema, as in the street, every touch at a distance is an assault, a lightning strike. The Dadaist work, Benjamin wrote, was ‘an instrument of ballistics’.

It hit the spectator like a bullet, it happened to him, thus acquiring a tactile quality. It promoted a demand for the film, the distracting element of which is also primarily tactile, being based on changes of place and focus which periodically assail the spectator.

What the stereoscope offers, by contrast, even at its least comfortable, is not shock, but absorption; and the whole point about absorption is that it is in itself utterly unshockable. It has already drawn us away from that place where we might suffer shock. In Benjamin’s view, spectatorship is a necessary and productive act of defence. ‘Man’s need to expose himself to shock effects is his adjustment to the dangers threatening him’. Absorption, by contrast, is neither offensive nor defensive.
In February 1911, Franz Kafka, looking for a way to pass the time while on a business trip to the northern Bohemian cities of Friedland and Reichenberg, stumbled upon an apparatus known as the Kaiserpanorama, with which he had been familiar in his youth. The Kaiserpanorama was a device invented by the scientist and optical entrepreneur August Fuhrmann for the public and profitable display of his collection of glass stereoscopic photographs. First installed in Breslau in 1880, and then in Berlin in 1883, it was soon in operation at some 250 venues in cities in Germany, Austria, and elsewhere. The first Kaiserpanorama was about fifteen feet in diameter and could accommodate twenty-five spectators, who would simultaneously view different images illuminated by small lamps. The images rotated from viewer to viewer at roughly two-minute intervals, a bell ringing as they were about to change. In a later model, separate coin slots were installed at each viewing station. The mechanism, in short, allowed for individual absorption into the reality effect generated by each image.

What Kafka saw in the Kaiserpanorama was scenes set in Italian cities. Brescia, Cremona, Verona. People inside like wax figures, their soles fixed to the ground on the sidewalk. Funerary monuments: a lady with a train trailing over a short flight of steps pushes a door slightly ajar and looks back as she does so... The scenes more alive than in the cinematograph, because they allow the eye the stillness of reality. The cinematograph lends the observed objects the agitation of their movement, the stillness of the gaze seems more important. Smooth floor of the cathedrals in front of our tongue. Why is there no combination of cinema and stereoscope in this way?

Kafka was quite explicit about the two kinds of looking the stereoscope invited. On the one hand, there are figures in the middle and far distance poised like wax figures, the soles of their shoes fixed to the ground; on the other, there is a foreground immediately in front of the tongue, almost tangible in its solidity. The first effect could be compared to a theatrical tableau or museum display; the second, an immobile movement, or depth without depth, is unique to the medium. Kafka, at the Kaiserpanorama, was looking to be absorbed. One of the stereoviews he saw was entitled 'Funerary Monument to a Widow'. His written account omits any reference to the widow, the monument's raison d'être. It does not make anything out of, or indeed even envisage, the tableau of a woman entering her own tomb. Instead, Kafka laps up whatever is solid in the image: a garment trailing over some steps, pressure on a door, a backward glance. Or, he laps up the solidity of an image which has abandoned its perceptible nature. Existence (that which has been felt round) precedes essence (the monument as monument).
A brief survey of some commonplace, though by no means representa-
tive, stereoviews should help to establish their hapticity. Look at *Fountain in
Hyde Park* (Fig. 1) through a stereoscope and the figures of the two men in
the rowing-boat recede; they clearly belong, despite the stare one of them
gives the camera, to a world set back beyond (and below) the fountain, a
world steadied by the contour of the far bank, which rises gently up to a
path, and some elegant, sun-dappled woodland. The mind can certainly
feel its way into those depths, take a virtual stroll. More remarkable,
however, and perhaps more unsettling, is what occupies the foreground:
water which does not so much fall from the fountain’s basin, as festoon it
stringily, or curdle at its foot. In *Modern Painters*, John Ruskin had described
how a storm beats the sea ‘not into mere creaming foam, but into masses of
accumulated yeast, which hang in ropes and wreaths from wave to wave’.  
Even Turner, he said, would have struggled to paint the yeastiness of these
‘writhing, hanging, coiling masses’, these ‘clotted concretions’. The very
insistence of Ruskin’s language is an absorption, an attempt to feel round
and so come to terms with that which has abandoned its perceptible nature.
The fountain in Hyde Park scarcely provokes such intensity of awe verging
on nausea. But stereoscopy has endowed it, too, with clotted concretions.
The view withdraws to the near side of the merely perceptible
world. The view’s most remarkable feature is the solidity of the metal rail
whose corner protrudes into the room, somewhere in front of our tongue, as
Kafka might have put it; indeed, the triangular shape it forms is, in some
ways, a kind of prosthetic tongue. This tongue touches the elaborately
prepared scene on the raw. Its tip rests up against an object which would
seem to have no place in it, no meaning: a handkerchief laid casually on the
chair. The news which is spreading has passed the handkerchief by (though
it may yet activate the fan the woman holds). What stereoscopy’s haptic
consciousness touches, here, is (the illusion of) contingency itself.

Some stereoviews deliberately ‘foreground’ the haptic–contingent. In
*Foreign Offices, London* (Fig. 3), stereoscopy attributes to the building itself a
volume entirely appropriate to the dignity of its function. But the eye is
drawn magnetically away from the building to the clump of rushes on the
near side of the vista. In this case, the haptic–contingent could even be said
Figure 1  *Fountain in Hyde Park.* Stereoview. J. F. Jarvis. Author’s collection.
Figure 2  Quicker Way to Spread News. Stereoview. H. C. White Co. Author's collection.
Figure 3
to obtrude on the vista, to spoil it. Oliver Wendell Holmes had long since
noted the violence inherent in the stereoscopic foreground. ‘The scraggy
branches of a tree in the foreground run out at us as if they would scratch
our eyes out. The elbow of a figure stands forth so as to make us almost
uncomfortable’. The lower the angle of the shot, the livelier the potential
discomfort. In *Houses of Parliament* (Fig. 4), the building itself recedes
magnificently, but without interest, while the barges in the foreground
compel by the sheer weight and intricacy of clotted concretion. I like to
imagine the photographer waiting for a particularly ripe selection of
detritus to swim into view before taking the shot. But draw back a little
further, and absorption dwindles, that sense of being between sight and
touch. *Houses of Parliament and Towers of Westminster Abbey* (Fig. 5) frames its
object altogether too comfortably. The balance established by the higher
angle of the shot between foreground and background (between authority,
commerce, and leisure) returns the image to its perceptible nature, to mere
pictorialism.

Stereoscopy, then, involves the visualisation of tangibility. That which we
might want to touch takes shape in front of our eyes. The shape it takes
is that of its own tangibility. There is a choice, here, of a low angle;
and potentially a politics, an education of the eye in the pleasures of the
haptic–contingent. The stereoscope, although for the most part put to
genteel use, was in itself democratic, as Holmes had been the first to
recognize. ‘A painter shows us masses; the stereoscopic figure spares us
nothing, – all must be there, every stick, straw, scratch, as faithfully as the
dome of St Peter’s, or the summit of Mont Blanc, or the ever-moving stillness
of Niagara. The sun is no respecter of persons or of things.’ Examining
stereoviews of Ann Hathaway’s cottage, Holmes noted the marks and stains
left by passage through the doorway. Whenever it gives us a group of houses,
he added, the stereoview ‘insists on finding’ a clothes-line.

The choice of a low angle might, of course, indicate lowness in general.
The stereoscope as a means of representation was inherently *obscene,*
Jonathan Crary remarks, drawing upon the term’s folk etymology, ‘in the
most literal sense. It shattered the *scenic* relationship between viewer and
object that was intrinsic to the fundamentally theatrical setup of the camera
obscura’. And it was indeed used, from the very early days, for purposes
of obscenity. ‘It was not long’, Baudelaire complained in 1859, ‘before
thousands of pairs of greedy eyes were glued to the peepholes of the
stereoscope, as though they were the skylights of the infinite. The love of
obscenity, which is as vigorous a growth in the heart of natural man as
self-love, could not let slip such a glorious opportunity for its own
satisfaction’. Rich collections of pornographic stereoviews survive.
Figure 5  Houses of Parliament and Towers of Westminster Abbey. Stereoview. Keystone View Company. Author’s collection.
the mind does, as Holmes had put it, feel round the object represented. Linda Williams has written illuminatingly about the ‘new porno-erotics of corporealized observation’ of which these images were a part.  

Baudelaire’s homily had been provoked by a society woman’s request to see some pornographic stereoviews (‘Let me see; nothing shocks me’). The decision to become absorbed was not restricted by gender. Representations of stereoscopes in use, and of the Kaiserpanorama, show a full complement of female viewers. Restriction by class is harder to assess, but presumably eased as the instrument itself became cheaper and more widely available. Pornographic stereoviews were usually in colour, and therefore relatively expensive. Generally speaking, though, the stereoscope’s grasp on the haptic–contingent – this sight of something which is not exactly visible, which is more or less than visible – can be understood in relation to the ‘new mode’ of reflexivity, at once modernist and vernacular, that Miriam Hansen has described in Hollywood movies.  

A hankering after three-dimensionality is as old as cinema itself. In 1903, the Lumière brothers produced a stereoscopic version (in two-colour format) of one of their earliest actualities, Arrivée d’un train à La Ciotat. To British film-makers of this period, the phenomenon of motion parallax – the stereoscopic effect created when the camera moves in a curve around a scene in which more than one plane is visible – offered the enticing prospect of a 3-D cinema which did not require the use of special projectors or viewing arrangements. Giovanni Pastrone said that in Cabiria (1914) he had moved his camera along curved rather than straight tracks in order to create a stereoscopic effect, an ‘impression of relief’. On the whole, though, film-makers seem to have aimed at no more than an approximation to stereoscopic effects.

The most productive of those approximations, in use from the very beginning in films such as G. A. Smith’s Grandma’s Reading Glass (1900), was the close-up, or cut-in enlargement of detail. Increasingly, the close-up served the purposes of narrative, dramatic, or allegorical clarification. However, there is evidence to suggest that the use of close-ups continued to cause a certain unease. Company executives at Biograph notoriously objected to the close-ups D. W. Griffith had begun to introduce into his films. ‘The actors look as if they were swimming – you can’t have them float on, without legs or bodies!’ The cut-in shot made it hard to understand the relation of part to whole; it severed foreground from background. Eisenstein was to criticise Griffith’s close-ups for their independence of the contexts in which they occur. In his view, such shots should not show or present, but designate, or give meaning, as a unit of montage; whereas Griffith’s merely show or present. Quite, Siegfried Kracauer responded,
with the close-up of Mae Marsh’s hands in the trial scene in *Intolerance* in mind: ‘the face appears before the desires and emotions to which it refers have been completely defined, thus tempting us to get lost in its puzzling indeterminacy’. Big close-ups, Kracauer went on, ‘metamorphose their objects by magnifying them’. Such metamorphoses seem to me to involve something more than indeterminacy. They involve that visualisation of tangibility also proposed by the stereoscope’s grasp of the haptic–contingent. What is at issue, in cinema as in stereoscopy, is a rapid alternation of prospects: a movement to and fro between framed theatrical tableau and a foreground full, as Vachel Lindsay put it, of ‘dumb giants’, of bodies in ‘high sculptural relief’.

One purpose served by such high sculptural relief had to do with what Noël Burch calls the close-up’s ‘erotic vocation’. In this respect, there was a considerable overlap, both of subject matter and of technique, between early cinema and the stereoscope. For example, in *Don’t Get Above Your Business* (Fig. 6), the high sculptural relief into which the woman’s stockinged foot and the man’s measuring hands have been thrown makes it quite clear why the transaction might prove a cause for concern. It enables us, like the man seated in the background, to visualise tangibility. Other versions of the view provide the woman with a wary chaperone. Edison’s *The Gay Shoe Clerk* (1903) transposes the scene from small-town cobbler’s shop to metropolitan emporium. It consists of three shots. In the first shot, a young woman and her chaperone, both dressed with utmost respectability, enter the emporium. The young woman takes a chair, while the clerk offers her a selection of shoes. She chooses one, and he crouches on a stool, slips it onto her foot, and starts to lace it up. Cut in on the axis to a close-up of the foot. The young woman slowly raises her skirt, almost to the knee, revealing in the process a fair amount of undergarment. The close-up does not merely enlarge; it enacts, as Kracauer might have said, a metamorphosis. Foreground has been severed from background. Although not seen in relief, the section of leg on display has been transformed from an object of vision to the object of something like touch. Cut back to the initial long shot. The clerk, as though still inhabiting the idyll of desire created in close-up, cannot stop himself getting above his business. He rises up and leans forward to kiss his inviting customer. The chaperone suddenly realises what is going on, and sets about him brutally with her umbrella. Desire has shown itself, and been punished. The two women leave.

The scene returns us to *Ulysses*: if not to Stephen Dedalus on the beach, in ‘Proteus’, then to Leopold Bloom on the beach, in ‘Nausicaa’, an episode which has many connections with ‘Proteus’. Realising that she has Bloom’s
Figure 6  Don’t Get Above Your Business. Stereoview. Universal Stereoscopic View Co. Author’s collection.
full attention, Gerty MacDowell ‘just lifted her skirt a little but just enough’. She sees the ‘meaning’ in his look.

He was looking up so intently, so still and he saw her kick the ball and perhaps he could see the bright steel buckles of her shoes if she swung them like that thoughtfully with the toes down. She was glad that something had told her to put on the transparent stockings thinking Reggie Wylie might be out but that was far away. Here was that of which she had so often dreamed.44

Katherine Mullin has shown convincingly that the medium in which Joyce conceived the erotic encounter between Gerty and Leopold Bloom was that of a specific modern visual technology: the mutoscope.45 The mutoscope was a motion picture device consisting of photographs mounted sequentially on a cylinder driven by a hand-crank. After masturbating, Bloom reimagines the experience as a visit to a mutoscope parlour.

A dream of wellfilled hose. Where was that? Ah, yes. Mutoscope pictures in Capel street: for men only. Peeping Tom. Willy’s hat and what the girls did with it. Do they snapshot those girls or is it all a fake. Lingerie does it. Felt for the curves inside her déshabillé.46

As Mullin points out, Gerty’s ‘returned look’ at Bloom imitates the collusive glance to camera of the heroine of mutoscope scenarios such as Willie’s Hat and What the Girls Did with It who reveals her reciprocal longing at the same time as her body.47 What the mutoscope did not do, of course, was foreground the haptic–contingent. The intensity of the encounter between Bloom and Gerty, in which each touches and is touched by the other’s look, seems to demand a further context: that of the close-up’s erotic vocation. Bloom’s thoughts about the mutoscope are preceded by the memory of an incident early that morning, described in ‘Lotos Eaters’, when a tram passing had cut off a glimpse of a woman’s ankle, as she mounted her carriage outside the Grosvenor Hotel. Then, his pique had found a cinematic metaphor. ‘Flicker, flicker: the laceflare of her hat in the sun: flicker, flick’.48 The analogy in that case might be with G. A. Smith’s As Seen through a Telescope (1900), in which a close-up renders a woman’s ankle in high sculptural relief. Bloom does not own a stereoscope. Perhaps he doesn’t need one. He is already a connoisseur and advocate of the haptic–contingent.

For Stephen Dedalus, as we have seen, the stereoscope is proof of the autonomy and abstraction of the visible. Its tableau-effect appeals to him rather more strongly than its tangibility-effect. In this respect, he could be compared to the narrator of À la recherche du temps perdu, who imagines that watching a play in performance must be like looking into a stereoscope.49
To be sure, Stephen has his Ruskinian moments. He closely observes a dog halted at the ‘lacefringe’ of the ocean, barking at the waves. ‘They serpented towards his feet, curling, unfurling many crests, every ninth, breaking, plashing, from afar, from farther out, waves and waves’. But the observation exists for the sake of the rhythm it has generated. ‘Lacefringe’ is brilliantly apt, but stops short of absorption into the world, because it has not removed Stephen from his habitual literariness; it has not drawn him over to where the image stands. Tangibility eludes the epithet, as it also eludes a merely rhythmic prose. Stephen is a Ruskin without Ruskin’s taste for the haptic–contingent, without Ruskin’s nausea. How much of the world does he want to see? How much of the world might he have seen, if he hadn’t, as we eventually learn, broken his glasses the day before?

Notes

2 ‘The world exists before him (there must be a text to be read),’ Johnson explains, ‘but comes alive to him in the act of “reading” it’ (Ulysses, 784). There has also been a tendency to make out of Stephen Dedalus’s ruminations on Sandymount Strand a universally applicable epistemology. ‘The modality of the visible’, Nicholas Miller concludes, ‘is ineluctably textual: to see is to read’ (Modernism, Ireland and the Erotics of Memory, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 23).
3 The account given by William C. Darrah in The World of Stereographs (Gettysburg, PA: W. C. Darrah, 1977) remains the most comprehensive. According to Darrah, the stereoscope, ‘though but one type of photograph, was the first visual mass medium’ (p. 2).
7 Riegl developed his theory of haptic looking in Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament, first published in 1893, trans. Evelyn Kain (Princeton:


10 Marks, Skin of the Film, 170–71.


13 The phrase is Peter de Bolla’s; see The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape, and Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Britain (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).


17 Ibid., 123–4.


21 Ibid., 252. Steven Shaviro’s account of the violent tactility of the film image defines spectatorship as an act not so much of defence as of masochism (The Cinematic Body, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

22 There are intriguing parallels, as well as important differences, between stereoscopic visuality and the ‘sentimental look’ whose emergence in Britain in
the 1760s has been described by de Bolla. ‘Neither gaze nor glance,’ de Bolla writes, ‘the sentimental look operates via a fully somatic insertion into the visual field. It makes the body present to sight, and in so doing it stimulates the cognitive process of affective response.’ De Bolla argues that certain paintings by Joseph Wright of Derby educated the eye by captivating it (*Education of the Eye*, 11, 66).


26 It is reproduced by Zischler in *Kafka Goes to the Movies*, 29.


29 Ibid., 77, 80.


50 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 46.