

# Summoning the Ghosts of Globalization: Using invention & immersion to teach about media, image & culture.

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## 1 History & the CompuObscura

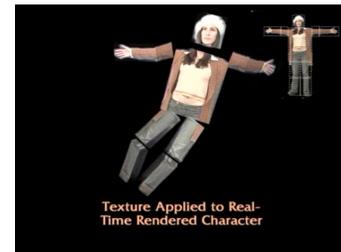
The idea of the camera obscura has been with us since Aristotle, and has been a component of the visual arts in the East and the West for hundreds of years. As used in England and the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a camera obscura was a dark room inside of which viewers could gather to view a projected image of a selected view of the world outside. To continue attracting paying audiences, camera obscura operators started creating pantomime dramas that were performed outside to then be projected inside the device. Due to the popularity of the occult at the time, many camera obscura operators connected their “projected pantomime dramas” with séance-like activities inside their devices, thereby directly linking the display of a projected, narrative-based moving image with ghosts, and a visual projection of the invisible and the unknown.

At California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, a team of two professors and their students have begun early work on a device they call the CompuObscura, a device that updates the ideas and history of the camera obscura. Instead of looking out on the actual environment surrounding the device, the CompuObscura instead peers directly into the real but invisible and ghostly world of moving images that surrounds us all. This parallel world of images exists on the wires of the Internet, on the screens of movie theaters, and in the wireless broadcast of television and computer networking signals. The CompuObscura provides a pinprick view of that world, squeezed down through the focusing lens of the device’s software and hardware then projected on a wall inside the device where audience members will eventually be able to interact with the ghost-like images gathered from the electronic ether of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. (See Figure 1. & Figure 2.)

## 2 The Lumiere Ghosting Project

The power that the moving image has to surreptitiously slip into our unconscious, to smoothly become part of our memories and our dreams, has allowed some cultural concepts (imbedded in alluring imagery) to intertwine themselves into our public and private lives. These complex images lurk in our cultural subconscious, influencing our public and private lives through a subtle interplay between language, image, metaphor and action. We refer to these images as Lumiere Ghosts.

With the spread of electronic images through television and the Internet, we have increased the speed of this process, exchanging so many ghostly concepts, ideals, myths and beliefs that spooky similarities arise simultaneously in distant, seemingly distinct parts of the globe. Suburban neighborhoods become virtually identical as they spread from the outskirts of Los Angeles, Atlanta, Sydney, Singapore, Tokyo, Milan, and Bogota. The images on televisions and computer screens in those homes, the music playing from teenager’s headsets, and the symbols on the t-shirts in the closet have a monotonous, flattened yet



**Figure 1.** *The CompuObscura mapping a participant’s image onto an interactive 3D puppet. Image from the demonstration animation sequence created by Jon Elsdon, December 03.*



**Figure 2.** *The participant interacting with her ghost-like 3D puppet that is immersed in a virtual environment constructed of images gathered from the Internet, movies, and other visual media sources. Image from the demonstration animation sequence created by Jon Elsdon, December 03.*

compelling similarity. The particulars—the names, the faces—may be different, but the overall effect is the same: a simplistic repetition of the same story, the same theme, the same idea, the same vision.

The Lumiere Ghosting Project is designed to serve as a framework inside of which students and faculty can explore the theoretical and historical ramifications of this wide-spread image-driven metamorphosis of cultural communication. The Lumiere Ghosting Project makes use of the CompuObscura both as a device for creation, for technological development, and for theoretical study. Students and faculty connected with the project help design, develop and refine different technological aspects of the CompuObscura, but at the same time they also explore (and add to) the histories that support the object’s design while simultaneously studying and learning from the way viewers interact with the CompuObscura and with similar immersive image devices.

## 3 Presentation Focus

Professors Gillette and Lovaglio, and Cal Poly student Jon Elsdon report on their technological and theoretical work-in-progress with the Lumiere Ghosting & CompuObscura Project. Gillette, Lovaglio and Elsdon then solicit suggestions for additions to the project and discuss how work on similar projects can be directly connected to interdisciplinary courses in new media study.