John J. McGavin, « To See or Not to See: Ideology and Spectatorship »,
« Theta IX, Théâtre Tudor », 2010, pp. 3-16
mis en ligne en mai 2011, <https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta9>.

Theta IX

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe Vendrix,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 6576

Responsables scientifiques

Richard Hillman, André Lascombes & Pauline Ruberry-Blanc

Date de création

Mai 2011

To See or Not to See: Ideology and Spectatorship

John J. McGavin
Southhampton University

A photograph posted on the London Government website of the last mayor, Ken Livingstone, showed the Olympic torch being carried for the final leg of its journey from Beijing to London ("Dame Kelly Holmes"). Though the mayor of London has changed in the interim, the central section of that photograph, cropped on all margins and with greater zoom, is still available on the London 2012 website. In its most recent form, even greater focus falls upon the torch, upon Dame Kelly Holmes, who is carrying it, and on her immediate escort of Chinese, with UK police back-up, but even its earlier version excluded the original spectators to the event, in effect making the viewer the only spectator.

To anyone who knows the real circumstances in which the torch was relayed, the ideological saturation of this image is revealed by the studied sportiness of the Chinese escort, seemingly track-suit-clad athletes there to pass on the torch from the last nation to the next, but actually security to protect it from pro-Tibet supporters, and by the natty cycling helmets of the British police behind, recalling the nostalgic song line about "bobbies on bicycles, two by two". But it is revealed most clearly by the image's defensiveness in the face of the spectator. What cropped those edges, and excluded the turbulent and contested reality of the event, was probably fear

of the spectator, both of the immediate spectator and of others, unknown but figured, who might see the image in the future. In my view, this image excluded the original spectators from its content because those whose website sponsored its publications were afraid of what future spectators might infer from those original spectators' behaviour. How unlike the early modern maps and cityscapes, in which the foreground contains contemporary men and women confidently placed as potential viewers of the scene and so internally reflecting the real user of the picture.[1] But, of course, there are distinct analogies to be drawn nevertheless between the London Olympic image and the ideological control of early modern spectatorship.

Though many early modern records are silent about actual spectators' responses to plays or other theatrical events, they are *indirectly* eloquent about them, in somewhat the same way as the London image is, because they record attempts to control what could or could not be seen. When Charles I was expected for his first royal visit to Scotland in 1633, the Linlithgow council wanted to promote positive images: a new unicorn for the cross-head had to be purchased in Edinburgh; there were new silk gowns for the baillies. But the records disclose an equal fear that the king and his entourage of courtly spectators might see the wrong images: the town's thatch was to be replaced by slate, and the traditional Scots clothing of blue bonnets and plaids was prohibited on pain of confiscation of the said items of clothing and punishment of the body that wore them:

> In respect that his ma*ies*tie is to come to this brut*h* and considering how wndecent it is to weir plaidis and blew bannettis THairfoir it is statuit and ordainit THat no persone ather in brugh or landwart [countryside] weir ony bannettis nor plaidis duiring his ma*ies*teis remaning in this his ancient kyngdome And that none resort in the towne with bannettis or plaidis Wndir the paine of confiscatione of thair plaidis and bannettis and punichment of thair persoune. (*Linlithgow Town Council Minute Book,* p. 266)[2]

While the record implies that the dignity of the ancient Scottish kingdom was to be maintained by these means, its cultural cringe reveals that the council were already viewing that kingdom through the eyes of their anglicised and more

1 See, for example, the Braun and Hogenburg map of Edinburgh from the *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* (1582).

2 I am grateful to my colleague and co-editor, Dr. Eila Williamson, on whose archival research for the *Records of Early Drama Scotland* I depend for several of the cases mentioned in this paper.

fashionable visitors. National antiquity could be valued in the abstract; but to be avoided were visible traditions which might indicate poverty or a largely rural population, or which might announce Scotland's distinctness in the now-united monarchy of Britain. This is no more than an early modern equivalent of contemporary London asserting its vigorous post-imperial right to participate in simulated equalities of global harmony by choosing an ennobled black woman (Dame Kelly Holmes) as its final torch-relay Olympic representative, while editing out of the image pro-Tibet supporters, and hence occluding the very democratic freedoms by which the UK has traditionally defined itself. What is distinctive in both the early modern Linlithgow record and the modern London image is the close connection between power and shame, and the role of the spectator in connecting these two forces.

It is in the control of spectatorship that existing ideological anxiety is most strikingly perceptible, for those in power have to imagine the judgements and preferences of the future spectator in order to provide that spectator with a spectacle which will carry the right meaning. An ideology thus has to identify its own potential shamefulness in order to defend itself. In this process of imagining, an institution projects onto the potential spectator its own fears about itself—the vulnerabilities which it must disguise or for which it must compensate by the scene it provides (or prevents). The management of public spectacle thus implies losses which have *already* occurred, failures which are already becoming clear, ideals which can no longer be assumed but are now held self-consciously, instabilities in belief which need to be shored up. Whether or not those in power are themselves conscious of frailties in the ideology which sustains them, frailties can nevertheless be inferred by scholars from the administrative records of actions by which those in power attempted to support the ideology. Central among these are controls on public performance, which provide *ipso facto* records of spectatorship—not records of spectators' *actual* responses but, in a more ideologically revealing manner, records of what responses were *imagined* by the planners of events. Thus the ambivalent meaning of Charles's visit to Scotland is reflected in the Linlithgow record: a son of Scotland was in a sense "coming home" through visiting his father's first kingdom, but, since this was a son who had never been in his ethnic homeland, native concerns about what kind of place Scotland truly was surfaced whenever organisers imagined how the visitor might see it. The record of preparation thus shows a tension between pride in the ancientness of the Scottish kingdom, which is explicitly mentioned, and fear that its civic life

had not progressed sufficiently far from its origins—a tension which had probably been growing since the monarchy went south thirty years previously.

Although the examples I have given show anxiety about future spectatorship, a powerful element in the nexus of spectatorship and ideology is actually memory. The modern British painter David Hockney said recently, "Seeing is memory and memory is now" (cited Dougary), and this is as true for those who spectate as it is for artists. Anyone who organised public displays in the early modern period, whether of drama or not, must have known that audiences saw such events with eyes already trained up by past experience. This was part of the problem for the Linlithgow council, who knew that King Charles had no memory of Scotland to give a rosy tint to his spectatorship and permit him to see the burgh's less sophisticated aspects as endearingly homely.

That we see through the lens of memory and that what we see will create the lens of memory for future sights mean that those who wish to supply *new* visual experiences for political purposes are engaged in a necessary negotiation with the past (the past which the spectators already carry with them). However, the reward for managing that negotiation successfully is that the new images may in turn become established so as to determine the norms of future spectatorship, and hence of future judgement. Early records reveal a constant appreciation in Scottish culture that spectacle thus marked the moral intersection of time past and time future. Implicit in this was the understanding that spectating is seeing *as an action*; it has social significance. The world one allows oneself or others to see is implicitly the world one permits—hence, those moments in the records when people take exception to others' clothing or even to another person being in their eye-line ("away—out of my sight"), or when presbyteries advise their Elders on public behaviour.[3] Such rejection or admonition is essential because, in this spectatorial sense, seeing is an action which is itself seen and consequently alters the canons of normality. If one sees something, and implicitly permits it to happen, one gives example to others to do the same. One might as well say, "in my view, the world is allowed to look like that!" Furthermore, when one *chooses* to view something, one tacitly, even if only provisionally, licenses it; in the slightly old-fashioned English phrase which helpfully joins the notion of "spectating" to "permitting", one "countenances" it.

3 For examples of this, see McGavin, chap. 1 ("The Public Scene"; pp. 15-40).

At the most practical level, this could take the form of communities maintaining their rights and identities through public ceremonies, such as beating the bounds of their parish, at which they would insist that the next generation of citizens were present to watch and thus carry the knowledge forward, as in the Linlithgow 1627 Riding of the Marches:

> the ryding of the merches of the co*m*moun landis to be riddin on Tuyisday the xxij day of Maij according to the auld forme wseit thairanent [for that purpose]. And the burgesse*s* eldest sounes to accompanie the Baillies and help the merches as they go by thame And that they may knaw the saidis merches. (*Linlithgow Town Council Minute Book 1620-1640*, p. 134)

When, in 1601, Stirling council realised that the stones defining the shore area where the town could go cobble fishing had been removed, probably by the neighbouring landowner, it demanded that all the inhabitants of the burgh should attend the re-laying of the stones:

> And for that effect ordinis [ordains] the haill inhabita*n*tes of this burgh to be warnit this day eftir none be sweshe [drum] or Bell to accompany the said*is* baillies & counsall In setting and placeing of the said*is* stanes agane In man*er* foirsad*is* of the shore. (*Stirling Burgh Records: Council Records, 10 Oct 1597-19 Apr 1619*, 28 April 1601 [unfoliated])

Here public spectacle was a practical means of preserving economic rights, but also of performing the identity of the burgh as one distinct power among others, and insisting that that identity was re-established for the future. The memory with which inhabitants had previously viewed their surroundings had been disrupted; it had to be re-instated by spectacle, so that they could see with that memory reinvigorated.

When a challenge to the *status quo* emerged, it characteristically expressed itself in terms of spectatorship, through either providing new elements of spectacle or denying traditional elements. Each approach was designed to control the gaze of future spectators, and, by implication, each carried ideological claims about what was legitimate in society. For example, in 1635 we find the crafts of Linlithgow prohibited from spending money from their Common Good fund on election ceremonies and public ridings of the marches *(Linlithgow Town Council Minute Book 1620-1640*, p. 329). The ostensible reason was that they should spend more on the poor, but, in effect, their capacity to provide spectacle, and their own visibility *as* spectacle for other inhabitants of the burgh, was being curtailed. An even more overt struggle between power groups over spectacle culminated in Stirling in 1616,

when the merchant class, who made up the burgh's magistrates, forced the craftsmen to abandon their traditional right to gather as a visibly distinct group on the hills above the town; to give up a new banner, through which they had, in a sense, re-invigorated their identity for spectators at public events, instead keeping to the traditional crafts banner, which implicitly accepted the *status quo*; and, lastly, to abandon the practice by which their leaders carried white batons, a token of authority which parallelled the symbols of authority employed by the council and its servants, and consequently blurred the existing hierarchy.[4]

I suspect that the real reason for this curtailing of craft visibility and the council's insistence on existing patterns of public visibility was the effect such display would have on a very particular, though absent, spectator. Though the official records did not mention the fact, it was already known that James I was planning to return to Scotland, and he did, in fact, return in 1617. What was at issue was not the local spectatorship of Stirling folk, but the possibility that the king would see a resurgent craft identity which appeared factiously to challenge the authority of the establishment. Roofs should be newly covered with slate, not thatch, and clothing should definitely follow the "new guise", but visible power, and hence the ideology which it expressed, should not show signs of change.

The Scottish kirk used issues around the physical conditions of spectatorship to help establish the distinctiveness of its ideology. In particular, it insisted that the church building itself should be devoid of secular distractions. Thus we see the Stirling presbytery in 1592 insisting that the flags and funerary monuments of a deceased local aristocrat should be removed, rather than hung up in St. Ninian's church.

> The brethrein undirstanding that S. Ninianskirk is prophainit [profaned] be erecting th*air*in of Pinsall*is* [standards] & certan uther*is* Monume*nt*is quhilk [which] was born [carried] befoir ye Corps of umq*uhi*ll [the late] S*i*r Ro*b*er*t* dru*m*mond of Carnok kny*ch*t q*uhai*rby the Evangell of Chryst q*uhi*lk is the onelie ba*n*ner sould be displayit in his kirk is disgressit [diminished] and the eyis and mynd*is* of the pepill drawin away from the heiring and lerning of the word to the behawldi*n*g of the said*is* Monume*nt*is q*uhi*lk Ressembill*is* in th*at* plaic rather gentillitie than Christiane religione Thairfor the brethrein ordan*is* the Elderschip of the said kirk to co*m*mand the erectar*is* th*air*of to remove the samin [same] th*air*fra And Incaiss of Disobedience thairoff Ordanis the weill affectit gentill men & parochi*n*nar*is* to remove the sami*n* wi*th* diligence. (*Stirling Presbytery Minutes 1589/90–1595/96*, 28 November 1592 [unfoliated]; u/v, thorn and yogh modernised)

4 The crafts' submission can be found in *Stirling Burgh Records: Council Records, 1597–1619*, 4 November 1616 (unfoliated).

The wording of the record shows the kirk's really quite complex engagement with the relative status of image and word. Although it says that funerary monuments draw the eyes and minds of the people from the hearing and learning of the Word to the beholding of monuments, its desire is not apparently to replace the eye with the ear. It objects to these *particular* sights as expressive more of noble rank ("gentility") than Christian religion, and it says that the Gospel of Christ is the only banner which should be displayed in the church. There is certainly a metaphorical rebalancing of church aesthetics towards the word rather than the image, but at the same time the kirk session members are not discarding the notion of the church as a place for the eyes. Indeed, I think they do literally want the physical Bible to be the focus of spectatorship without distraction. It's not so much a banishing of spectatorship as a change in what properties will be visible within this divine theatre. When the presbytery met with substantial local opposition from the family and a friend who was himself a minister of the church, the presbytery decided that either all funerary decoration must be removed (something which they knew they were not going to achieve) or panelling should be put up to prevent the congregation having sight of all such secular monuments until a permanent wall could be built to separate off a part of the building for funerary purposes.[5] The reality of aristocratic commemoration in the church could not be stopped, but spectatorship could be controlled; the presbytery evidently decided that it would permit the power of the "absent" monument to remain in the minds of some spectators because, over time, the memory of what was behind the wall would fade, and the church's control of the visible scene had been asserted. Attending St. Ninian's Kirk did not cease to be a visual experience; instead, one's sight lines were changed and, if anything, one's spectatorship was even more intensely focused to permit the Word of God to have central place in the experience.

If what one permits to be viewed one implicitly permits to exist, any reformation is of necessity aesthetic, and part of what drove the Reformation *ab initio* may have been a need to discover and then to establish new ways of seeing, as well as new ways of believing. It is evident from early modern Scottish records that visual acculturation was a vital aspect of social life in the contest for reformation: at stake was not only the ending of past traditions or the relative powers of religious and secular forces in the present, but also the spectatorship of chil-

5 See *Stirling Presbytery Minutes 1589/90-1595/96*, 5 December 1592 (unfoliated).

dren as yet unborn. With what eyes would *they* see? When they saw with their memory, what patterns of seeing would that memory supply to them? When these future Scots came to revisit their own pasts in their mental theatres, what scenes would they contemplate? The spectatorship of individual and communal memory is the prized goal of image-makers, whether they are working in literary genres such as plays or chronicles or in the *Realpolitik* of the public scene.

In one respect, the strangest intersection of ideology and spectatorship in the communal theatre of church and state was the act of excommunication itself. The terms in which it was announced to potential victims make this clear. They were always invited to attend the church "to hear and see themselves" judged to be excommunicate.[6] In other words, they were invited to participate as spectators in the congregation at the very ceremonial by which they would be excluded from that community of spectators. If anyone accepted this paradoxical invitation, such persons must have felt the doubleness of the roles they were invited to perform. The complex transferral of the role and power of spectator between different individuals or groups in a given public event is, if not absolutely distinctive of Scottish culture, certainly very characteristic of it in this period, and seems to attract many records, not least because in this dramaturgically intense society, people were constantly thinking of how others might be seeing them.

A good example of the contested nature of public spectatorship is provided by the following record from Stirling in 1630:

> On this day, Harry Balfour … is fined £20 for abusing and injuring John Cunningham of Drumwhassle yesterday evening by exclaiming and crying out of the Tolbooth of Stirling where the said Harry is currently in prison … Elizabeth Preston, wife to the said Lord of Drumwhassle, when she was going and coming to the church, on the way there and back from afternoon prayers—in the company of her servants and various other persons, neighbours as well as strangers—uttering various imprecations and curses against the said Lord of Drumwhassle [and] wishing that the malediction, curse and plague of God should fall upon him. *(Stirling Burgh Records, Court Book 1627-1633*, 3 February 1630 [unfoliated]; text modernised)

One might think that Harry Balfour, presumably framed in the window of the Tolbooth, was the chief object of gaze on these two occasions, but the situation is more complicated: the reason this came to court is that Balfour had

6 This was also the form used in burgh government, when someone would be invited to hear and see himself deprived of his freedom of a burgh. See, e.g., *South Queensferry, Town Council Minutes 1634-1661*, fol. 133^{v}.

made Elizabeth Preston into a public spectacle. What is especially interesting is the recorder's careful designation of the *spectators* here: she was in a public place among those whom she commanded, those with whom she enjoyed friendship and social intimacy, and those "strangers" who did not know her at all, and who therefore had no way of knowing the truth of the matter. All these categories of people were made spectators of *Elizabeth Preston* through Balfour's intervention. The case claims that the injury was done to the Laird, and the curses were directed at him, but the injury was committed through the proxy of his wife being made a public spectacle, with the meaning of that spectacle provided both by what Balfour said and by his visible image in the Tolbooth: supposedly, the visible image of her husband's injustice. Balfour had therefore also turned himself into a spectacle to transfer that role to Drumwhassle's wife. He became the meaning of the spectacle which he forced her to provide. The court decided that if he did this again, he would be chained in a dark corner of the Tolbooth where he could neither see out nor others see him. He had wrested control of spectatorship, making it serve his purpose. In other words, the court's response to this abuse was to threaten loss of the privilege of spectating and of being seen.

Such issues also have thematic force in certain early Scottish histories. The issue of what should not be seen, the moral imperatives about whether, how and when one shows oneself to possible spectators, the shame culture of the visible, which is fundamental to the ideology of reform, are all prominent in Calderwood's *History*, where they are corollaries of his fascination with the real and counterfeit in performance. Here he is on Mary Queen of Scots in 1567 after the murder of her husband, Lord Darnley, which took place supposedly with her connivance:

> The queen, according to an ancient custom, should have kept herself forty dayes within, and the doors and windows should have been closed, in token of mourning; but the windows were opened, to let in light, within the fourth day. Before the twelth day, she went forth to Seton, not regarding what the people either thought or said; Bothwell never parting from her side. There she went out to the fields, to behold games and pastimes. (Calderwood, II: 347)

The windows are metonyms of the viewing eye here, but whose eye? Certainly the queen's, whose metonymic eyelids open to let in light before she goes out physically to gaze at the spectacle of the world. The closed curtains are a licit spectacle for others, signifying proper values, but opened up, they disclose a different spectacle to the viewer—the spectacle of a queen shamelessly exposing

her lack of grief at her husband's death, her indifference to tradition, her willingness to be seen—and they do this regardless of whether she appeared in the window or not. The spectator's eyes are metaphorically opened by this spectacle, and the shame of the queen, which is, of course, her *lack* of shame for her faults, is manifested to the populace. What underlies this is the implied equation between being in the world and sight (both seeing and being seen), an equation which held good in Scottish society until the last quarter of the last century, when the sight of neighbours' curtains closed during the day no longer implied that some disaster had befallen them, which had been a sure inference hitherto.

If one considers an English reformist play like the mid-sixteenth-century *Nice Wanton*, which firmly imagines its events as occurring within a local community of neighbours, and purports to reform the public manners of parents and children along Protestant lines, one finds that the real punishment for sin is not the devil or hell, but "Worldly Shame"—the character who gleefully tells the errant mother that *everyone* knows and reports that her daughter has died of the pox caught in brothels and her son has been hanged for theft, and that "Men will taunt … and mock" (ed. Tennenhouse, l. 474) her as the cause of this. In fact, the neighbours who are in a position to know this are the audience members themselves, who are metatheatrically implied by this threat of public shame. For the reformist, hell truly is "other people", and the play is itself a means by which spectators can be educated to think of themselves as others see them: the spectator now will provide the spectacle later. Thus the ultimate goal of the play is not to tell the audience that drinking, whoring, swearing, and playing truant are bad, or even that parents have to exercise authority over their children to prevent such abuses; it is to educate the audience in a sense of the public matrix of spectatorship within which they exist. In this play, reforming ideology reveals itself as intrinsically spectatorial in nature.

But the intersection of ideology and spectatorship went much deeper for early modern Scots than the ethics of the small town, however prominent these are in Scottish kirk and burgh records. In reformed theology, proof of salvation is only inner; inner conviction is necessary for feeling hope of salvation. One might expect that if spiritual conviction were the best guarantee of salvation, the value of external action would be correspondingly reduced, but the opposite is the case. It is only through public behaviour, and such ceremonial attestations as occurred at the induction of a minister or public penance or sober walking or sober clothing, that a good conscience could be demonstrated

and consequently the likelihood of one's elect condition be indicated to others, and to oneself. A song at the end of *Nice Wanton* does not stop with asking where one can get a pure conscience from, but asks what "practice" is associated with it (ed. Tennenhouse, p. 99, l. 13). In other words, a religious ideology which promoted inner conviction created the need for the outward signs of that inner state—I suspect as much for the individual's own reassurance as to confirm their status in the community of believers.

Reformation in its Calvinist form, as it was experienced in Scotland, played brilliantly to a nation in which the theatre of public action was already the principal form of theatrical display. Since there was no public ceremony by which one could *effect* certain salvation, salvific reassurance had to be gained by the individual and by society through a constant iteration of those modes of public behaviour which might *imply* salvation to one's fellows and to oneself, acting as the self's own spectator. The lack of effectual ritual (in the sense of Catholic ceremonies by which the priesthood binds and looses on earth what will be consequently bound or loosed in heaven) demanded constant supplementation by modes of behaviour which thus acquired a quasi-ritualised character, implying a spiritual reality to the viewer through an accepted "language" of behaviour. Spectatorship was thus deeply embedded in the very ideology which had denied salvific efficacy to outward shows. Eventually, one hopes to live in the mansions reserved for the elect, but until then, one has to cope with the anxiety of living with neighbours, with the possibility that one will do—or has already done—something shameful, with the uncertainty of conviction. The only way of allaying these fears is to *act the part*, and hope that, as well as convincing one's spectators and reassuring oneself, these outward signs are truly evidence of an inner grace.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Braun, Georg, and Franz Hogenburg. Map of Edinburgh from the *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, online at: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Edinburgh_Civitates_Orbis_Terrarum.jpg. Accessed 7 October 2010.

"Dame Kelly Holmes Carries the Beijing Olympic Torch in London". Image online at: http://www.london2012.com/news/2008/04/beijing-olympic-torch-completes-london-leg.php. Accessed 7 October 2010.

Linlithgow, Town Council Minute Book, 1620-1640. National Archives of Scotland, MS. B48/9/1.

Nice Wanton. The Tudor Interludes Nice Wanton *and* Impatient Poverty. Ed. Leonard Tennenhouse. The Renaissance Imagination, 10. New York and London: Garland, 1984.

South Queensferry, Town Council Minutes, 1634-1661, Edinburgh City Archives, MS. SL59/1/1/1.

Stirling Burgh Records, Council Records, 1597-1619, Stirling Council Archives, MS. B66/20/1.

Stirling Burgh Records, Court Book 1627-1633, Stirling Council Archives, MS. B66/16/7.

Stirling Presbytery, Minutes, 1589/90-1595/96. National Archives of Scotland, MS. CH2/722/2.

Secondary sources

Calderwood, David, *The History of the Kirk of Scotland*. Ed. Thomas Thomson. 8 vols. Edinburgh: The Wodrow Society, 1842-49.

Dougary, Ginny, "David Hockney on Why iPhones Are the Future for Art". *The Times*, 9 May 2009. Online at http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/visual_arts/article6248093.ece. Accessed 9 August 2010.

McGavin, John J. *Theatricality and Narrative in Medieval and Early-Modern Scotland*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.