Performing New Media

1890–1915

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Performing Painting: Projected Images as Living Pictures

Valentine Robert

Projecting painting

> How might we recover this madness, this insolent freedom that accompanied the birth of photography? In those days images travelled the world under false identities. To them there was nothing more hateful than to remain captive, self-identical, in *one* painting, *one* photograph, *one* engraving, under the aegis of *one* author. No medium, no language, no stable syntax could contain them; from birth to last resting place, they could always escape through new technologies of transposition.[1]

In this remarkable description of the dynamic that took hold of images around 1900, Michel Foucault invokes, emblematically, the 'birth of photography'. Yet it was the proliferation of all these 'new technologies of transposition', all the new media of the nineteenth century, which made possible and gave stimulus to these images' 'mad escapes'. Among these new technologies, one new 'cultural platform',[2] the screen, had a very important role.

Projection is a major means of disseminating artistic images. Stereopticon slide catalogues[3] show that the 'principal paintings in French museums',[4] the 'contemporary art' of the nineteenth century,[5] were *exhibited* on screen. These included the complete works of Raphael[6] and 'Gustave Doré's Fine Engravings'.[7] This was true not only in art history lectures. History lectures were also illustrated with 'paintings by the great masters'.[8] Lives of kings or of Joan of Arc were shown with pieces from museums.[9] Biblical stories were also 'compiled from pictures by various artists',[10] while most popular stories were re-transcribed using engravings by Cruikshank, Kaulbach or Grandville. We find the same phenomenon among the earliest projections of *moving* images: several films are advertised in the catalogues as 'inspired by paintings by the great masters',[11] as 'living reproductions' of 'familiar' painted scenes,[12] or as 'faithful recreations of famous paintings on film'.[13]

Projected images were thus part of the iconographic succession described by

Foucault. They even had a special place therein, because they did not limit themselves to reproducing these compositions: they changed the way images were perceived and received. In the present article, we will see how, in this frenzy of visual transfers, projection brought a new dimension into play by *spectacularising* the image and by transforming *established* images into *performed* images.

Fine arts spectacularisation

To demonstrate this claim, I will focus on the case of what are surely the projections richest in terms of iconographic heritage, namely religious lectures. Biblical images have a nodal position in the history of projection, both fixed and moving. While the first Domitor conference demonstrated the predominant role of the Passion Play in the earliest film entertainments,[14] depictions of Christ were just as central to fixed projections, because religious circles, more than any other, developed, theorised and documented the medium, which they saw as an ideal device for education and propaganda. Biblical depictions were thus not only unavoidable in projected images; they are also exemplary for the present discussion. For this 'apostleship through images' did not wish to break with fifteen centuries of iconography; it sought instead to 'popularise the names of the great artists' at the same time as 'Christian ideas':[15]

> Let us make an Apologetic by the Artistic. Let us leave aside the mediocre daubers and draw on the work of the great masters. . . . The people are more able to appreciate art than we think. They know how to appreciate true beauty. When a true master's painting appears on the screen they are fascinated, they are drawn in. We can explain the painting to them, they are interested in it, they fix it in their minds, they don't forget it, and neither will they forget the explanations of it given to them.[16]

Projections thus became 'reproductions of masterpieces',[17] with some lanternist priests even pursuing the ideal of 'depicting great religious subjects *solely* through paintings by the masters'.[18] The sources demonstrate the extent of the phenomenon. In an illustration of a sermon with projections given in a Paris church in 1903, Fra Bartolommeo's *Deposition* was magnified on the wall of the nave (Figure 1).[19] Many collections of preserved religious lantern slides reproduce canonical works such as Munkácsy's *Christ before Pilate*, to which an entire section of floor has been added to adapt it to the square format of the slide (Figure 2b).[20] In catalogues, most religious series are riddled with references to the great names of art history, particularly Renaissance painters.[21] Contemporary artists are also cited, illustrators in particular, as new iconographic models took hold in illustrated Bibles in the nineteenth century.[22] Tissot, Doré, Bida, Copping and Hofmann brought about changes in Biblical imagery in a manner

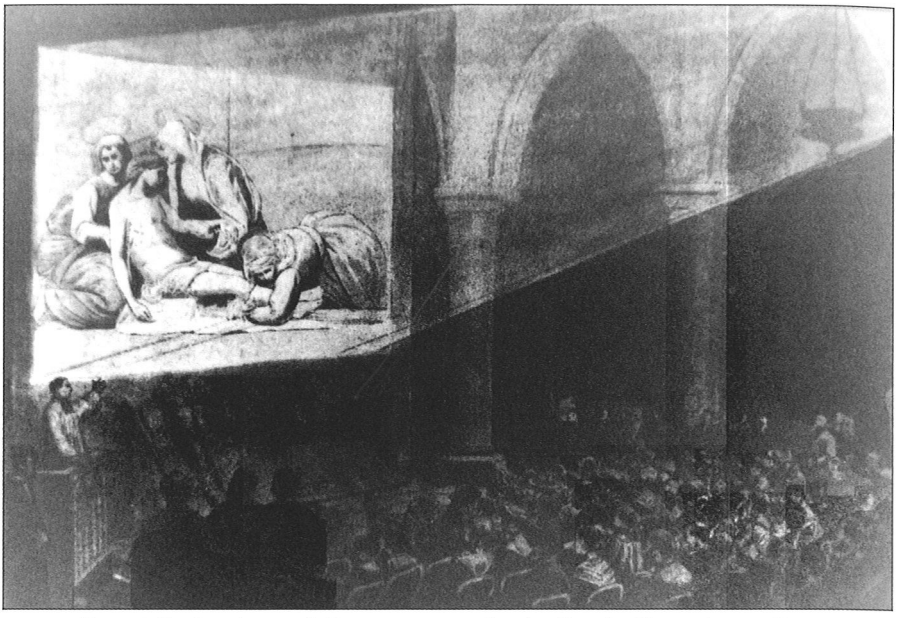

Figure 1: Fra Bartolommeo's *Deposition* projected in the Church of Sainte-Anne in Paris [*Le Fascinateur* 4 (April 1903): 98].

so widespread as to be of almost graphic novel proportions, meeting with 'phenomenal worldwide success'[23] and becoming the preferred model for illustrated lectures. These biblical slides were already placed in series compiled to accompany the speaker's remarks. Several catalogues, moreover, offer monographic series reproducing almost all the engravings in a single illustrated Bible, presented as a veritable 'projected Bible'.[24] These gave concrete meaning to the adage that 'projection is to the lecture what engravings and illustrations are to books'.[25]

This comparison between illustrated Bibles and illustrated lectures, however, has a fundamental limit in that, in the case of projection, the text is *performed*. A lecture involves an orator reading a text aloud while facing the audience, live: it is a kind of performance. The reader must become an actor:

> To be alive is the lecturer's entire programme, the entire secret of his power over the audience. Eloquence is a form of drama. The lecture is a tussle. Through the strength of his conviction and the energy of his will, the orator tries to take hold of his listeners. And in this violent tension of his whole being, as he himself is greatly moved, sooner than the others, by the violent effort he expends to rouse them, oratorical passion, momentum and movement suddenly appear in his speech.[26]

And, proclaimed the First Congress of Catholic projections, 'speech is not

everything': 'the speaker's physiognomy, the gestures accompanying his words, must give them more energy and expressiveness'.[27] Finally, the religious context heightened the intensity of this 'embodiment of the Word' by the actor-preacher, through his words but also through his 'voice', 'his breathing, his palpitation, his quivering':[28] 'It is no longer a voice we hear, but a living soul, stirring both speaker and audience'.[29]

Multimedia exhibition

The performance quality of the event is not limited to the lecturer: we are in the presence here of true 'multimedia' spectacles. Projections were added to pre-existing sermons, ceremonies, lectures and catechism sessions, which already had numerous rhetorical and media resources at their disposal. Projections did not take the place of these resources, but joined them in a new performative logic which provided for 'the eye and the ear'.[30] In 1909, for example, it was decided, emblematically, to incorporate projections into the traditional Catholic schools concert at Armentières, renamed 'Redemption after the Great Masters of Music *and Painting*'.[31]

In this audio-visual dynamic, preachers became veritable *performers*, one-man bands handling a thousand media at once, as this review of the Easter projections put on in Saint-Joseph that same year makes clear: 'Behind the screen and invisible to the viewers [nothing could be more impressive]: the projection device, a harmonium, a choir of 50 girls, a group of a dozen men and youngsters and, in the midst of all that, the worthy priest directing it all, running his lamp, showing his slides, keeping time, singing along'.[32] The songs could also be accompanied by media, as gatherings of this kind specialised in using the phonograph, making it possible to play airs and hymns sung by experienced singers. Most often, these 'great melodies' were paired with 'great paintings', matching famous works of art with recorded songs in a dual play of references, both musical and pictorial.[33] Sometimes the slides themselves displayed this two-fold reference by joining verbal and visual quotations, such as the Newton slide which arranged the words and music of the hymn 'O Sacred Head' around a central medallion showing Guido Reni's *Ecce Homo*.[34] These slides, a sort of karaoke *avant la lettre*, encouraged those in the audience to become a chorus, transforming the multi-media event into a *total performance* involving the spectators. This 'active role' that members of the flock should 'take on in the ceremony'[35] – praying, singing, standing up, kneeling – was, moreover, a typical performative element of these religious lectures. And recognition of (and often

applause for) the masterpieces projected was an essential part of this interactivity.[36]

The final element was the intervention of another medium: the *kinematograph*. The joining of fixed and moving projected images was a specialty of these religious events, as Jacques and Marie André have noted[37] and as demonstrated by machines such as the Immortel, a projector specifically designed (and named!) by the French apostolic industry to make possible instantaneous transitions between glass slides and films. Guillaume-Michel Coissac suggested that 'perfection consists in knowing how to use fixed and moving projected images in combination',[38] and it was indeed in multimedia form – using a magic lantern, phonograph and kinematograph – that religious projection met with phenomenal success[39] and even received absolution by the pope in 1904! This play of media could go as far as pure juxtaposition, if we go by the sample programme presented at the 1910 congress, which suggested that the same story, the legend of St Nicholas, be projected *first* as fixed images by the stereopticon and *then* as moving images by the kinematograph.[40] This gives an idea of the extent to which the pleasure afforded by the performance resided in comparing the effect the new media had on the same imagery.

An exemplary case of this performative blend of fixed and moving projected images was *Jeanne d'Arc*, given by Father Fouchécour in Paris in 1903, which used slides (copied from paintings by Lenepveu in particular) for the explanatory section addressed to the viewer's 'intelligence' and film sequences for the dramatic moments to 'lead them' and make them 'more than understand': to 'see, feel and *live* the truth'.[41] These transitions occurred instantaneously and were carried out surreptitiously by trained assistants, playing on their surprise effect: '[Suddenly] the picture we were looking at was different from those that had come before it: the kinematograph had replaced the fixed-image device and we now admired a truly living spectacle before us'.[42] Film projections were more 'alive' than fixed images because the spectacle had gained a supplementary performative dimension. With films, the performance was no longer limited to the live elements in the hall: the images themselves were performed.

Model Acting

With respect to the original picture – such as this painting by Munkácsy (Figure 2a) – slides reproduced the inanimate painted or engraved forms (Figure 2b) while in film the images took shape, moving and coming alive (Figure 2c). Cinematic staging necessarily involved the scenes being acted out by flesh and blood actors who, at the moment of the film shoot, before the projection, already

Figure 2: (a)Mihály Munkácsy, *Christ before Pilate*, 1881 [oil-on-canvas, 417x636cm; Art Gallery of Hamilton]; (b)T.H. McAllister's lantern slide *Christ before Pilate: Munkacsy*, n.d.[gelatin-on-glass, 8.3 x 10.2cm; George Eastman House]; (c)*Vie et Passion du Christ* (Pathé, 1902). [35mm film frame; Cinémathèque suisse.]

transformed the imagery into performance. In their filmic 'escapes', masterpieces of painting and engravings in illustrated Bibles were not just reproduced; they were embodied. Acted-out interpretations of sacred iconography were, moreover, controversial, especially in the theatre, where putting Christ on stage ran up against censorship.[43] Cinematic 'embodiment' gave rise to more nuanced discussions, by virtue in particular of the sublimation made possible by the silent, two-dimensional projection, creating a painterly effect. This iconographical re-embodiment was not, moreover, exclusive to projections of moving pictures. A genre of fixed projection slides, called 'Life Models', appeared in the late nineteenth century; these were not painted or engraved images but staged photographs with real actors posing. Once again, religious circles played a key role in exploiting this technique,[44] but most of the time sacred figures were not depicted in flesh and blood, continuing rather to be *drawn* in hybrid slides that were part-photograph, part-painting. La Bonne Presse appears to have been one of the only publishers of glass slides with true embodiments of religious iconography, such as *Pastorale de Noël* (1908), *Saint Tarcisius* (1909) and *Sainte Cécile* (1910), adapted from painterly models but photographed using *living* models.

At the initiative of Honoré Le Sablais, a filmmaker-priest, La Bonne Presse went even further and produced the *same* staged event in the form of *both* fixed and moving images. I have been able to identify more than a dozen of these double-edged productions which gave rise simultaneously to both a film (or more precisely to a series of sequences which could be obtained individually) and to a series of slides. The film and photographic versions were sold under the same title, such as *La Passion de Notre Seigneur* (thirty-five slides/twenty-two sequences), *Jeanne d'Arc* (thirty-two slides/seven sequences) and *Bernadette et les Apparitions de Lourdes* (twenty-six slides/eleven sequences), to mention only the first titles released, in 1909. The publisher's advertising encouraged people to alternate between the fixed and moving image series and to use them to complement each other, announcing from the outset that the 'complete film' was 'not for every budget' and suggesting that the work be purchased 'in pieces' in a manner conducive to hybridisation.[45] Lecturer-priests could thereby allow themselves the luxury of 'selecting the most moving scenes' from the moving images version[46] without forgoing the complete and uninterrupted story, told in all the colourful slides.[47]

In the case of the films at issue here, which is to say films with an iconographic referent which cultivated an intertextual relation with still images, filmic and photographic shoots were made compatible thanks to 'living pictures' or 'tab-

leaux vivants' (English speakers often used the French term, with its high-brow social and cultural resonances).

Living pictures have been mostly forgotten today, but in the nineteenth century one could speak of 'tableau-mania'.[48] They consisted in reproducing famous artistic compositions on stage with immobile (or almost immobile) actors, and they appeared in every kind of live performance (theatre, opera, pageants, music-hall numbers, fairground attractions, high-society entertainments), especially in religious theatre, which specialised in these 'immortalised' painterly 'embodiments'. In the iconographic interlocking that Foucault described, leading from the painted to the projected picture, the performed living picture is a true missing link: it transferred a drawn composition to a living scene and transformed an established image into a performed image in the form of a live, collective show. In this sense, it was a direct, explicit and essential model for both the Life Models and the films. Performed living pictures were the key to these 'dual' film and photographic shoots, and the key and conclusion to the present article.

Living Pictures

On all his many 'cine-photographic' shoots, Honoré Le Sablais worked with living pictures. Reviews and visual documents show that the scenes were recreated 'from paintings by the greatest masters'[49] or from widely circulating engravings, for example in François Guizot's volume *Histoire de France*.[50] Descriptions of the day remark that the actors wore 'faithfully reproduced' costumes and moved slowly, more slowly even than all the other 'religious scenes depicted in the cinema to date'[51] – which was no mean feat given the hieratic acting found in all the versions of the Passion Play[52] – whose gestures tended towards 'poses',[53] enabling them to be photographed as well as filmed.

Projected images thus became a new field for the growth of living pictures, to the point that the terminology changed and was appropriated by film and photography. At first, the expression 'tableaux vivants' was applied to the technique 'executed'[54] by the models acting in front of the still and movie cameras of La Bonne Presse, to their manner of both 'interpreting' and 'fixing' the scene, of 'embodying' a 'perfect recreation' of the 'theme'.[55] People spoke of 'photographs of tableaux vivants',[56] of tableaux vivants 'recorded and reproduced' by the still camera and the kinematograph.[57] Gradually, however, a terminological slippage led to the expression being used to describe the final product, the media performance, the slides and films projected – in other words, the re-lived picture on the screen in front of the viewers.

The expression 'tableaux vivants' became current as one of the French equivalents of the English expression 'Life Models'. On 1 January 1909 (twenty-five years after Bamforth), *Le Fascinateur* pompously announced an 'entirely new genre' of 'projection slides' under the heading 'tableaux vivants',[58] and the term became standard amongst projectionists to describe these 'series' in generic terms. The journal vaunted these 'finely coloured tableaux vivants'[59] and, in some slide catalogues, the term became a veritable category.[60] The term 'tableaux vivant' also extended to descriptions of films: '[The] operator played *La Cène*, one of the 11 films on the *Passion de Notre-Seigneur* published by la Bonne Presse. This very well-made tableau vivant made a great impression on the assembly'.[61] This use of the term 'tableau vivant' to describe moving pictures was common in French. We find the same linguistic association in English, because until the expression 'moving pictures' was stabilised, the term 'living pictures' was often used to describe films and was even more common than the French expression.[62] This terminological re-appropriation was 'officialised' in a way by the Governor General of Canada when he discovered films embodying Napoleonic iconography: 'The scenes represented may indeed justly be termed Living Pictures, actually made to live and move before our eyes'.[63] This terminological shift is thus the 'last word' in my demonstration by showing that fixed and/or moving projected images created living pictures of a new kind, in which the 'life' breathed into works of art was not solely carnal but also media-based, wherein it was no longer so much bodies performing as it was media.

Translated by Timothy Barnard

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Notes

1. Michel Foucault, "Photogenic Painting (1975)", trans. Dafydd Roberts, in Sarah Wilson (ed.) *Photogenic Painting: Deleuze, Foucault, Fromanger* (London: Black-Dog Publishing, 1999), 84. Translation modified slightly – Trans.
2. Charles Musser, "Le stéréopticon et le cinéma: forme de média ou plate-forme de médias?", in François Albera and Maria Tortajada (eds), *Ciné-dispositifs* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 2011), 136 [forthcoming in English, Amsterdam University Press].
3. Ibid., demonstrates that, rather than the term 'magic lantern' (associated with children's stories

and entertainment), the word 'stereopticon' (more serious and technical) became institutionalised for illustrated lectures.

4. *Catalogue des projections de la Bonne Presse* (Paris: La Bonne Presse, 1905), 194.
5. *L'histoire de l'art par les projections lumineuses* (Paris: Molteni, 1912), 47.
6. Ibid., 108.
7. *Marcy's Sciopticon Catalogue* (Philadelphia: Moore, 1877), 36.
8. *Catalogue La Bonne Presse*, 113.
9. *Catalogue des vues sur verre pour les projections lumineuses* (Paris: J.-E. Bulloz, 1911), 6–17.
10. *The Lantern Slide Gallery: A Catalogue* (London: Newton & Co., n.d.), 18.
11. *Liste générale des vues cinématographiques Gaumont* (Paris: Gaumont, 1903), 3.
12. *Catalogue La Bonne Presse*, 262.
13. *Le Sacre de Napoléon*, Pathé KOK Advertisement 17-D [n.d.].
14. Roland Cosandey, André Gaudreault and Tom Gunning (eds), *An Invention of the Devil? Religion and Early Cinema* (Lausanne: Payot, 1992).
15. Fr. Poulin, "L'Apostolat par l'image", *Le Rayon* 7, no. 2 (February 1912): 28.
16. Fr. Jager, "L'Art en projections", *Le Rayon* 5, no. 2 (February 1910): 20.
17. Fr. Limagne, "A Montluçon", *Le Fascinateur* 28 (April 1905): 175.
18. Fr. Lemoine, "La question des projections artistiques", *Le Rayon* 5, no. 5 (May 1910): 66.
19. Fr. Clair, "Les Projections à l'Eglise", *Le Fascinateur* 4 (April 1903): 98.
20. The George Eastman House lantern slide collections are representative of this painting reproduction trend, with series by C.W. Briggs (86:0768-0770), Levy & Ses Fils (88:0401-0402), La Bonne Presse (87:0555) and T.H. McAllister (89:0377, from which is taken the illustrated slide [fig. 2b]).
21. See for example *Catalogue La Bonne Presse*, 81–83.
22. See for example *The Lantern Slide Gallery*, 15–18.
23. Philippe Kaenel, "De l'édition illustrée à la bande dessinée: réimaginer la Passion au XX^{e} siècle", *Relief* 2, no. 3 (2008): 312.
24. The best example concerns Gustave Doré's Bible, see Valentine Robert, "Gustave Doré's Works on Screen", in Philippe Kaenel, Edouard Papet and Paul Langand (eds), *Gustave Doré (1832–1883). Master of imagination* (Paris/Ottawa: Musée d'Orsay/National Gallery of Canada, forthcoming).
25. G.-Michel Coissac (plagiarising Fouchécour), *Manuel Pratique du Conférencier-Projectionniste* (Paris: Bayard, 1908), 177.
26. Fr. Thellier-de-Poncheville quoted by G.-Michel Coissac, "La séance de cinématographie", *Le Fascinateur* 105 (September 1911): 238.
27. Fr. Fouchécour, "Organisation d'une conférence", *Le Fascinateur* 27 (March 1905): 108.
28. Fr. Thellier-de-Poncheville quoted by G.-Michel Coissac, 238.
29. Fr. Fouchécour, 108.
30. Ibid.
31. *Le Rayon* 4, no. 4 (April 1909): 49–50. My emphasis.
32. *Le Rayon* 4, no. 3 (March 1909): 36.
33. *Le Rayon* 5, no. 2 (February 1910): 19.
34. Private collection (http://janehousham123.blogspot.ch, June2011).

35. Fr. Thellier-de-Poncheville, "Les conférences dans les églises", *Le Fascinateur* 27 (March 1905): 134.
36. Karen Eifler, "Between Attraction and Instruction: Lantern shows in British poor relief", *Early Popular Visual Culture* 8, no. 4 (November 2011): 376.
37. Jacques and Marie André, "Le rôle des projections lumineuses dans la pastorale catholique française", in *An Invention of the Devil*, 46–48.
38. G.-Michel Coissac, "La séance de cinématographie", 237.
39. See the emblematic *Soldiers of the Cross* lecture (www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/documents-artefacts/soldiers-cross).
40. *Le Rayon* 5, no. 10 (October 1910): 131.
41. Fr. Fouchécour, "Instruire en amusant", *Le Fascinateur* 6 (June 1903): 163–164.
42. Ibid., 164–165.
43. See Valentine Robert, "La Sainte Face interdite de toile: Apparitions et disparitions du Christ au cinéma", in Paul-Louis Rinuy and Isabelle Saint-Martin (eds), *Visages de Dieu dans l'art contemporain* (Paris: Presses de Paris-Ouest, forthcoming).
44. Bamforth, the principal publisher of Life Models, explained that 'the main source for [his] business was to do with the religious worship of the time and the social movements associated with religion'. Quoted by Robert MacDonald, *The Illustrated Bamforth Catalogue* (London: Magic Lantern Society, 2009), 27.
45. *Le Fascinateur* 84 (February 1910): 23.
46. Paul Feron-Vrau, *Le Fascinateur* 84 (December 1909): 388.
47. The economic argument for this fixed-moving hybrid was of primary importance, as La Bonne Presse did not move to a film rental system until 1920. See Pierre Véronneau, "Le Fascinateur et la Bonne Presse: des médias catholiques", *1895 Revue d'histoire du cinéma* 40 (June 2003): 31.
48. *Athenaeum* (3 February 1849): 118.
49. "Jeanne d'Arc", *Le Fascinateur* 74 (February 1909): 43.
50. *Le Rayon* 4, no. 6 (June 1909): 85.
51. "La *Passion de Notre Seigneur*", *Le Fascinateur* 84 (December 1909): 358.
52. See Valentine Robert, "Les Passions filmées: des codes en appropriation, un cinéma en canonisation", in Peter Bianchi, Giulio Bursi and Simone Venturini (eds), *The Film Canon* (Udine: Forum, 2011), 371–379.
53. Honoré-Le-Sablais, "Le Cinématographe", *Le Fascinateur* 84 (December 1909): 387.
54. "*Pastorale de Noël*", *Le Fascinateur* 84 (December 1909): 357.
55. G.-Michel Coissac, "Quelques précisions", *Le Fascinateur* 89 (May 1910): 117.
56. *Le Rayon* 4, no. 4 (April 1909): 49.
57. G.-Michel Coissac, "L'Art de demain", *Le Fascinateur* 88 (April 1910): 84.
58. *Le Fascinateur* 73 (January 1909): 14.
59. *Le Fascinateur* 96 (December 1910): 424.
60. "Nouvelles Séries de Vues de Projection", *Le Rayon* 4, no. 7 (July 1909): 100.
61. G.-Michel Coissac, "Une séance de projection", *Le Fascinateur* 2 (February 1903): 40.
62. See Valentine Robert, "Le tableau vivant ou l'origine de l'*art* cinématographique", in Léonard Pouy and Julie Ramos (eds), *Le tableau vivant ou l'image performée* (Paris: INHA, forthcoming).
63. "Government House testimonial (22 March 1898)" quoted by Germain Lacasse, *L'Historiographe. Les débuts du spectacle cinématographique au Québec* (Montreal: Cinémathèque québécoise), 17.

In the years before the First World War, showmen and women, entrepreneurs, educators and scientists used magic lanterns and cinematographs in a variety of contexts and venues. The use of these silent screen technologies to deliver diverse and complex programmes usually demanded audio accompaniment, so these events were effectively always performances. Projectionists, exhibitors, onstage talent, musical accompanists, backstage crews – all contributed to performances that could include live music, song, lectures, narration and sound effects in union with projected imagery. In addition, these performances often borrowed from parallel practices, such as shadow plays and tableaux vivants, and were influenced by social and cultural forces, such as censorship or reform movements. This collection of essays considers the various ways in which different image practices at the turn of the twentieth century were performed and in turn shaped performances on and beside the screen.

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