

compiled, which will include new entries and important corrections. These will also appear in paper form in future issues of the *Journal*. So if you have a Whirliscope lantern attachment that isn't in the book, or if you know of an interesting inventor, showperson or slide-making process that we didn't cover, we are very keen to hear from you. Information may be sent to me either in the form of notes or as a 'finished' entry (typed entries by post, electronic entries by e-mail, in any language). If you send information by e-mail, please use the 'body' of the message only – no attachments. Illustrations, on paper or as image files, are also welcome. Please be sure to cite the references used, and include copyright information for pictures.

## REVIEW: *LIVING PICTURES*

Richard Crangle

*Living Pictures*, Volume 1, Number 1 (2001).  
Edited by Simon Popple and Vanessa Toulmin.  
Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 2001.  
108pp., ill. ISSN 1467-0577.  
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29 Bradford Road, Trowbridge, Wiltshire BA14 9AN. UK £20;  
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**IN THE STRANGE** and often secluded world of academia, one of the favourite words of the age is 'interdisciplinary'. A piece of work which is interdisciplinary is generally seen as a Good Thing, though there is always the problem that nobody is quite sure what the word really means. It should, perhaps, indicate work that takes a wide-ranging look at whatever it's supposed to be studying without being limited or tangled up by the boundaries which fence round most areas of academic study (English scholars don't talk to History scholars, and so on, even though they may read the same books). All too often, though, 'interdisciplinary' tends to mean that one area of study 'borrows' material which 'belongs' to another, uses it for its own ends, tosses it back when it's finished, and never actually crosses the boundary at all. The academic discipline of Film Studies, for example, often treats the magic lantern and other 'pre-cinema' media as curious ancestors which can make for interesting or amusing comparisons with the cinema industry, but which aren't really worth understanding in their own right.

So a new journal like *Living Pictures*, which declares an aim to 'stimulate research and interdisciplinary studies in relation to popular forms of visual entertainment before 1914', sets itself a challenging task. On the basis of this first issue, it succeeds pretty well. It might, just possibly, still seem a little like a Film Studies journal which is trying to branch out a bit (three of the five main articles, plus the annotated bibliography, are primarily about moving pictures), but perhaps that depends on one's point of view. There is certainly enough coverage of things which aren't film-based to justify its claim to be 'a multi-disciplinary journal ... to complement the work of more specialised and media-specific publications'.

Of course, it has to be said that *Living Pictures* is first and foremost an academic journal, and that means that it won't be to everyone's taste. The editors and contributors have successfully avoided most of the excesses of jargon and obscure expression which blight so much modern academic writing, but there are still a few references to things like 'potentially transgressive spaces', 'dialectical moments' and 'the interactive nature of different mediated forms' which may have the lay reader reaching for the dictionary. But on the basis of this first issue, the ideas are good enough and most of the writing is clear enough to make it a rewarding read for anyone with a serious interest in the histories of the various optical media.

At first sight, the items which are perhaps likely to be of greatest interest to MLS members are a fine piece by our own Mike Simkin on the marketing techniques of the panorama showman Albert Smith, and J.N. Maskelyne's three-part article on 'Natural Magic',

When we have a reasonable quantity of material, the database will appear on the Society's website.

One of the benefits of a Society such as ours is the results of the work of its members: the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Or it should be – so set to it: pencils sharpened, quills cut, and pocket spyglass at the ready. The lantern world awaits your discoveries!

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reprinted (though not identified as such) from *The Leisure Hour* of 1878. The latter, even if it does perpetuate the old myths about Kircher and Robertson, is especially valuable in the way it places the lantern in a very broad context of the techniques of optical trickery and illusion. An excellent and elegantly written article by Reena Suleman on the Victorian cartoonist and photographer Edward Linley Sambourne is also stimulating: while not lantern-related as such, its account of the use of a new technology (photography) in relation to other arts throws some useful sidelights on the position of the lantern, as both the 'influencer' and 'influencee' of other media. And one item in particular, the first part of Stephen Bottomore and Deac Rossell's annotated bibliography of publications since 1995 on 'Projection, Early Film and Allied Arts', is an invaluable and long overdue aid to the study of all media since the various centenaries of cinema (slightly) shook up the way we view them.

But really, to list those articles which are likely to be most interesting to a given group of people is to miss the point of an enterprise like *Living Pictures*. Truly interdisciplinary research and publication allows subjects to come together in ways which are not familiar or expected, and so allows us to think about our own interests in relation to other subjects. Media such as the lantern, photography, panorama, early cinema and so on never existed in isolation from each other. If we are going to stand a chance of understanding them more fully, we shall have to be able to think about them in their wider contexts.

So items like Tom Gunning's fascinating and challenging article on the nature of early moving pictures (which successfully brings together automata, spiritualism and the author of *The Wizard of Oz*), C. Paul Sellors' detailed and finely-focused discussion of the early film trade in one district of Manhattan, or Alison Griffiths' piece on ethnographic films in relation to the various World's Fairs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, all have things to offer the reader who approaches without mental boundaries. And another reprint, a strange article taken from *All the Year Round* of 1874 on physically deformed women displayed as freaks, might seem a bizarre inclusion, but in listing and discussing its 'odd women' it does point out some important aspects of the 19th-century interest in visually strange things.

Although the selection of subjects covered by *Living Pictures* might at first glance seem quite random, it doesn't take too long to begin thinking of connections. That is the mark of a successful interdisciplinary approach. It doesn't necessarily matter whether the connections themselves are of great importance; what really matters is the way of thinking about a wider range of subjects than just 'our own'. If it can keep up the standard it displays in this first issue, *Living Pictures* should live up to its promises.

