

SCREEN CULTURE AND THE SOCIAL QUESTION, 1880–1914

Ludwig Vogl-Bienek and Richard Crangle (eds)

In the late nineteenth century, public performances using the magic or optical lantern were a regular part of cultural life. While this is commonly known among MLS members, this essay collection will provide new insights even for magic lantern experts. The focus is not on physical objects or particular individuals but the cultural contexts in which these objects were used and in which lecturers engaged with an audience. Taking the case of debates around the Social Question in the UK, the US and Germany between 1880 and 1914, sixteen authors investigate how magic lantern shows used the screen as a public space where different agents strove to convince the audience of their position.

The book is organised in three parts. In the first part, six essays investigate how public performances of magic lantern slides and film were used by campaigning organisations and individuals to argue for social reforms. In his contribution, Ludwig Vogl-Bienek takes the slide sets 'Street Life or People We Meet' (Riley Brothers, c. 1887) and 'Slum Life in Our Great Cities' (Archer & Sons, 1892) as a starting point to chart the various aspects that should be considered when lantern slides are investigated as part of performance practices. Other articles cover the economic exploitation of lantern slides and film in the same show (Martin Loiperdinger); the use of the magic lantern and the cinematograph for political persuasion (Stephen Bottomore); the presentational strategies used by the social reformer Jacob Riis (Bonnie Yockelson); the adaptation of literary works by George R. Sims to lantern slides (Joss Marsh and David Francis); as well as aesthetic and narrative similarities of Christmas lantern slide sets and early Christmas films (Caroline Henkes).

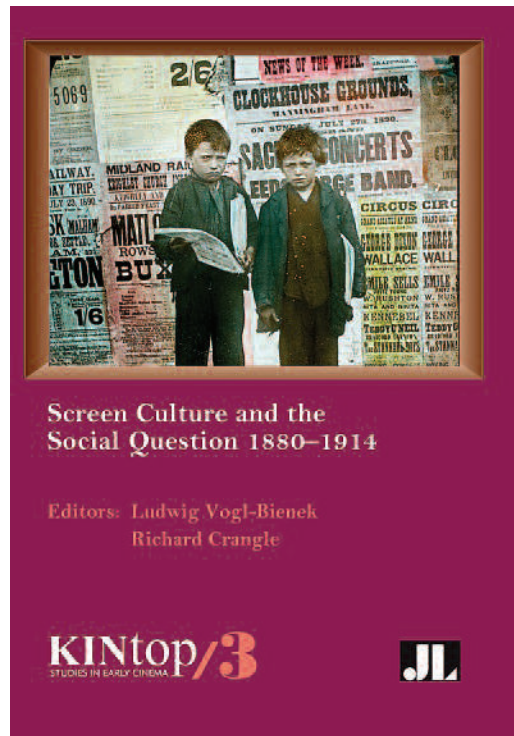
The essays in the second part show how charitable organisations used lantern shows, films and photography for the education and entertainment of the poor. These well-researched cases cover health education in the US (Marina Dahlquist); the temperance movement (Annemarie McAllister); charitable food distribution events for children (Karen Eifler); the use of lantern slides and film in New York's immigrant Jewish community (Judith Thissen); and the various media used in the Harvard University's Social Museum (Michelle Lamuinère). All these studies show that there is much to gain in our understanding of these historical materials when questions about their context are considered. This leads the authors to understand lantern slides as a performance medium; one element in a show that also comprised many other elements.

In the last section, three essays reflect on the possibilities for teaching, studying, documenting and archiving the relationships between single slides and the spoken and written word, to other slides and slide sets, and to other visual media.

This is the first publication on magic lantern slides in which authors from various disciplines, institutions, and research traditions study the same topic and use the same terminology to describe and analyse. As such, *Screen Culture and the Social Question* is likely to help enable a dialogue between studies around the magic lantern by introducing a vocabulary that allows for a systematic comparison of findings between academics, collectors, archivists and curators. This integrative approach comes at just the right moment as in the last five or so years, there has been a rising interest amongst scholars from various disciplines towards studying the magic lantern as a medium in its own right rather than as a forerunner of cinema – a change in perspective that many MLS members have long argued for.

The reproductions of lantern slides, film stills and newspaper clippings are nicely executed, many of them in full colour, which really is worth mentioning in academic publishing. Moreover, the authors largely avoid jargon, making this a pleasurable lecture for collectors, who afterwards might look at the Life Model slides in their own collections with more appreciation. In spite of a missing glossary and index, I recommend *Screen Culture and the Social Question* to everyone with an interest in western nineteenth-century social history or in lantern culture.

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