

Introduction: Lantern Mobilities

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The heterogeneity of lantern slide heritage poses researchers a considerable challenge. The lantern's status as an 'open medium' (Kember 2019), one given to a multitude of possible uses by all kinds of user-groups, often makes it difficult to identify dominant themes or patterns of lantern practice for the material artefacts that remain to us. Lantern slide collections are frequently dispersed, fragmented, derived from donations and purchases large or small that can appear to have little to do with each other. Some parts of collections lend themselves most obviously to storage within photographic collections; others have more in common with collections of historical toys; still others seem best suited to excavations of social histories or to the deep archives of large educational institutions. When lantern artefacts are collected together under the auspices of cinema museums, the emphasis on the lantern as a distinct medium (albeit one placed into a distinct lineage also including technologies such as panoramas, stereoscopes, film, television, and the internet) is more prominent, though here there can also be a risk of losing the cultural contexts into which the lantern was originally placed. Almost always, regardless of the archive in which slides are contextualised, there will be a certain number of images that defy simple explanation, needing lateral thinking in research. Pattern-making in the archives, while always a part of any research project using primary research materials, is therefore at a premium in the context of research on the lantern: there are still so many patterns still to make.

Of course, there are numerous methods of sense-making to be applied here, and these will sometimes map neatly onto the archival priorities associated with the collections. Thus, for example, works concerning the magic lantern's prominent role in connection with popularisers of science (Morus 2006), with social welfare organisations (Eifler 2017), and with cultures of photography (Fiell and Ryan 2013) have all begun the tasks of linking such artefacts with much broader networks of influence, sometimes stretching across national borders, as well as over decades. This second part of a two-part special issue of *Early Popular Visual Culture* concerning the international magic lantern (following issue 17:1 on assorted national traditions) offers some other approaches for thinking through alternative networks of magic lantern use. It seeks to do this in two ways: the first section presents four articles that develop new histories of transnational lantern exhibition, with a particular emphasis on the mobility of exhibitors within especially significant networks; the three papers in the following Digital Portfolio consider the contemporary mobility of lantern slide imagery, paying particular attention to digital mobilisation of lantern slide images for new users. Each section offers a series of specific case studies, but collectively these point towards the significance of mobility and of networking as constitutive of lantern use both historically and in the current, digital, era.

This issue's concern with mobility relates to movement of images and personnel across borders, especially borders between regions, countries, and continents (though also, one might note, between disciplines and across broad stretches of time). This shift of attention to a transnational or trans-regional approach arguably comes relatively late by comparison with other disciplines. Writing in 2010, Will Higbee and Song Hwee-Lim introduced the inaugural issue of the journal *Transnational Cinemas* by asserting the need for a 'critical transnationalism' occasioned but not limited by 'a wider dissatisfaction expressed by scholars working across the humanities (in particular sociology, postcolonial theory and cultural

studies) with the paradigm of the national as a means of understanding production, consumption and representation of cultural identity (both individual and collective) in an increasingly interconnected, multicultural and polycentric world' (2010, 15, 8). Historians of the lantern (and other historical media, I would argue) might profitably emulate this dissatisfaction: the lantern business, too, especially as it developed during the nineteenth century, inaugurated a transnational trade in images and performances which has mostly been approached by scholars from a series of national perspectives. What might direct consideration of the networks implied by such studies have to tell us?

To take one obvious example, the distribution of lantern slides across districts, countries, and transnationally was a fundamental fact of the existence of the lantern trade, and one that became more significant following the industrialisation of slide manufacture during the 1870s and 1880s, largely governing the types of slides and apparatus that were produced. Major slide producers and distributors depended intrinsically upon such networks, incorporating contacts and collaborations within and across national boundaries to secure collectively the financial, commercial, and legal basis of their trade. Of course, the range of networks associated with lantern use was also highly varied, and far from restricted to major producers, distributors and exhibitors. The countless local businesses of opticians, equipment-makers, photographic dealers, and slide rental services implies a massive preponderance of neighbourhood-to-neighbourhood activity, networked on the one hand with other local businesses, institutions, and individuals, and on the other with national and international producers and distributors. A transnational focus does not therefore restrict further consideration of regional or local issues: rather, this broadening of scope implies consideration of the various mobilities that connected, for example, local British opticians with major German producers of children's slides, or Australian itinerant showmen with British manufacturers. In such cases, the connections between local, national and

transnational networks are not atypical, marginal, or transitory, but may be said to constitute the basis of the trade.

The central focus of the first section of this issue, however, is not the transnational distribution of slides from major manufacturers (though this is a subject that certainly deserves far much more attention), but the transnational mobilities of the showmen and women who exhibited them. Again, a fairly direct parallel can be drawn here between the work represented in this issue and approaches already taken in cognate disciplines. Like work on transnational cinema, recent work in global theatre and performance studies has drawn strongly from various aspects of cultural and postcolonial studies in order to build an account of wider networks of theatrical influence. For example, in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Global Theatre History*, Christopher Balme and Nic Leonhardt have argued for an expanded but highly nuanced research programme dealing especially with the global scale of theatrical commerce between 1860 and 1939:

This period saw a huge outflow of theatrical productions from metropolitan centres that brought the full gamut of performance genres from vaudeville acts to high opera to numerous towns and cities around the globe. In this economy of desire and gratification theatre was predicated on mobility and transience for its economic survival, and promised palpable connection with the metropolitan centres and ways of life. Theatre was thus a part of circulating consumer products, which need to be considered within a research paradigm that balances economic with ideological and aesthetic imperatives (2016, 4).

As Balme and Leonhardt are well aware, these imperatives were not always led from the metropolitan centres, but frequently emerged in countless local contexts of action, suggesting that it was often modern conditions of increased mobility that led to advances in this

economy of desire and gratification'. In relation to the magic lantern, a device characterised by its inherent adaptability, it might even be said that the entire global market was primarily constructed (and endlessly reconstructed) from the peripheries. The device's mobility and fluidity made it ideally suited to exhibitors of many types, any of whom could apply it in novel and exciting ways in order to fascinate varied audiences around the world.

The first two articles in the first section address the use of the lantern in a rarely considered context which typifies this fluidity. Drawing on their research in the 'B-Magic' project, both Nele Wynants's article concerning the Courtois and Grandsart-Courtois family fairground dynasty and Evelien Jonckheere and Kurt Vanhoutte's article on fairground *métempsychose* shows consider the inventive use that showmen and women made of the magic lantern across western European fairgrounds. Wynants's contribution details a long family history of magic lantern use on the fairground from 1818 to the end of the century, charting the movements of four generations of showmen and women between alternative applications of the medium and across a broad circuit of showgrounds in countries including Belgium, France, Switzerland and Luxembourg. Noting the linguistic flexibility implied by this wide terrain, Wynants argues that 'the nineteenth-century fairground functioned as platform for cultural transfer and a dynamic interplay of different cultures and languages', emphasising the lantern's central role in this transcultural exchange. Vanhoutte and Jonckheere take a different approach to this subject matter, tracing the use of the lantern in a specific type of ghost illusion on many of the same fairgrounds in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Tracking this illusion from stage traditions into the fair, they argue that 'the ghostly apparition had taken on new guises in confrontation with a global and no doubt socially heterogeneous audience,' exemplifying use of the lantern as a hidden technology employed to fascinate varied audiences.

The following two articles also concern the mobility of lantern exhibitors and imagery, but focus instead on shows given by popular lecturers and other showmen in which the lantern

was likely to be highly visible. Drawing especially from research undertaken in the course of the *Heritage in the Limelight* project, these articles are especially interested in the commercial, cultural and aesthetic connections established by lantern shows between far-flung parts of the Anglophone world. My article focuses on the development of increasingly systematic and commercial popular lecturing systems in the United States, Britain and Australasia between the 1850s and the 1920s, showing that these formed the foundations for the top end of the lantern lecturing trade, and for a new generation of lecturers willing to conduct highly profitable global tours. Drawing on studies concerning theatrical agencies, I describe the businesses of key 'lecture brokers' across Anglophone territories, arguing that their businesses were especially dependent upon the global circulation of celebrity discourses, but also upon a showman-like ability to gauge the tastes of varied audiences in each region. Martyn Jolly's article also considers the inclinations of audiences, but begins with a consideration of William Holman Hunt's painting *The Light of the World* and its many reproductions, using the exhibition of this image as a starting point for an innovative discussion of the specific relationship lantern audiences in Australia entertained with the imperial world. Noting the ways in which lantern shows in Australia succeeded by 'imaginatively collapsing space,' especially between England and its colony, Jolly also points towards the frictions involved with this type of transcultural exchange, a 'tension between belonging and estrangement' shot through with aesthetic and ideological implications for colonial audiences.

In his conclusion, Jolly also suggests that this aspect of colonial modernity ought to be familiar to us: just like colonial audiences of the magic lantern, users of contemporary digital and online media frequently 'imaginatively project themselves through time and space,' only now they do so continually, through any number of screen interfaces. The second section of this issue allows for further consideration of this potent idea, presenting three articles that

play out some of the ramifications of modern digital methods for disseminating and interpreting the increasingly massive archives of magic lantern imagery. Sarah Dellmann draws upon her first-hand knowledge of the process of digitising magic lantern slides for the Lucerna Magic Lantern Web Resource in order to open a broad-ranging study of the implications – practical, aesthetic, ethical, and ideological – for the creation of large-scale databases of these materials. Excavating an array of lantern digitisation projects, Dellmann argues that both digital artefacts and online platforms require epistemological care in their creation and interpretation, always fully acknowledging the processes of contextualisation and framing that different strategic objectives create. A more expansive questioning of what Dellmann calls the ‘positivist assumptions and ideologies engrained in technological progress’ lies at the heart, too, of recent decolonial work challenging the hegemonic assumptions at the heart of most digitisation projects (Risam 2019, 47-64). The complex politics of digitisation and databasing exposed by such thinking also underlies the article by Mary Borgo Ton, which considers the potential of topic modelling and geospatial mapping as analytical tools in relation to a dataset of lantern show reviews drawn from Lucerna. Finding that such tools have the potential to further ‘mediate’ the corpus, enlarging selected trends for the purposes of critical scrutiny, the article asserts that such techniques can be useful in detailing new narratives of lantern use; however, this requires systematic caution, not least when, as Borgo Ton suggests, the sources collected often seem unconnected with local audiences.

The establishment of connections with contemporary audiences is one of the objectives underlying the development of *Linternauta*, an app designed to promote knowledge exchange concerning lantern slides in Spanish collections among heritage and education professionals and the general public. In their article, Carmen López San Segundo, Francisco Javier Frutos and Roberto Therón provide an account of the research and development of this resource.

Having described their content analysis of a sample of lantern slides – a methodology likely to be unfamiliar to many readers of *EPVC* – the authors explain the taxonomy of ‘discursive genres’ that was created, and which would ultimately inform the structure of the app. Again, this framing of lantern slide material has epistemic consequences for users of the app, and the authors reflect in conclusion on alternative structures that might have been used. These are important debates, likely to take root in further developments, but the experiment presented is ground-breaking in its attempt to engage a modern, app-using audience with little-known aspects of lantern heritage.

This issue thus covers a wide range of historical material and contemporary thinking related to the mobility of lantern slides and shows, but it finds focus in ideas of cultural mobility that have increasingly characterised work across the humanities and digital humanities. The questions posed by such work are relatively new in studies of the lantern, but are likely to persist in the next decade as the archival and digital bases for research continue to diversify and expand. In the midst of these processes of pattern-making, Stephen Greenblatt’s questions concerning cultural mobility in general will continue to offer excellent points of departure for researchers and digital designers alike:

What are the mechanisms at work when movement encounters structures of stability and control? How do local actors accommodate, resist or adjust to challenges posed by outside movement? What are the cultural mechanisms of interaction between states and mobile individuals? What happens to cultural products that travel through time or space to emerge and be enshrined in new contexts and configurations? How do they set in motion – imaginatively as well as geographically – people who encounter them and, in turn, are set loose themselves? (2010, 19-20)

Appropriately, in the light of these questions of institutional stability and mobile agency, the concluding Archive Piece of this double special issue returns us decisively to the material archive, and more specifically to the 20,000 strong lantern slide collection held at the Australian Museum, Sydney. Elisa deCourcy and Vanessa Finney's research concerning the hand-coloured lantern slides in the collection uncovers a fascinating story about the roles of female hand-colourists at the Museum, a group that embodied both the intersections of scientific and artistic practices and the central place of women's labour in achieving the objectives of the Museum. The article's excavation of these practices thus typifies the potency of such highly focused, grounded research: uncovering the day-to-day labour of lantern slide making and exhibition, it reorients our understanding of a particular lantern culture 'from below.' In doing so, it also points to the vibrancy and sheer diversity of such cultures across much broader stretches of space and time.

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