

A Million Pictures.

Magic Lantern Slide Heritage as Artefacts in the Common European History of Learning



Minutes of Workshop 3: The Magic Lantern Today: Creative Re-Use of Cultural Heritage

27 – 29 October 2016, Antwerp, Belgium

The idea behind the workshop

The research team of Antwerp concentrates on two aspects of the magic lantern: its performativity, and ways of re-using this very important technology of visual entertainment and means of education in 19th and partly 20th century Europe. Therefore, it was agreed that the topic for the 3rd workshops of *A Million Pictures: Magic Lantern Slide Heritage as Artefacts in the Common European History of Learning* would deal with *different aspects of re-using slides and magic lanterns*.

Many libraries and museums across Europe hold tens of thousands of lantern slides in their collections. However, it is not only a lack of standards for documentation and preservation that limits the impact of existing initiatives and hinders the recognition of the object's heritage value and potential exploitation. Also, the holder's respect for the artefact as traces of the past, its material vulnerability and material value, the hesitation to employ it for modern museal purposes, sometime a lack of ideas as to how to use it in a contemporary environment together with the reluctance to let a modern audience "play" with it, often result in classic museological presentation forms in which historical objects are presented behind metal bars, glass walls or in vitrines (or stored in boxes in dark warehouses not visible for public audiences).

The Antwerp workshop explored *different strategies* for curators, artists and educators *to revive the legacy of the magic lantern as cultural heritage*. It explored how the artistic and educational re-use of old lanterns can today function as a creative tool to revalue the lantern as an important visual technology in the history of new media. Instead of exhibiting this old apparatus as an antique object, or historically re-enacting a Galantee show, media artists and curators develop contemporary strategies for the re-use of the magic lantern in which they reflect on media history, concepts of vision and the role of media in our times. For this 3rd workshop of *A Million Pictures*, the letters of invitation went to researchers and collectors, and especially to museum curators, archivists and artists *to promote the idea that sustainable use of these breakable visual artefacts can be combined with creative re-use* to bridge the often-observed gap between museums and visitors, and to awake or sensitize the audience's understanding for the cultural practices of the past.

THURSDAY 27 October 2016

14:30-16:00 PANEL 1: Curating the lantern

Chair: Kurt Vanhoutte (Antwerp University)

During the first panel, curators and archivists from Belgian institutions spoke about their experiences in re-using artefacts kept in their archives, presented ways of giving access and showed the advantages and disadvantages of their models.

Edwin Carels (KASK/School of Arts HoGent), **“Revisiting Vrielynck”**

In 2003, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp (M HKA) acquired ‘custody’ of the Robert Vrielynck collection, the private collection of a notary from Bruges. The collection illustrates the development of film and projection equipment, comprising all types of technologies including the magic lantern and the camera obscura. As part of Carel’s research into media archaeology, he invited three visual artists (Julien Maire in 2011, Zoe Beloff in 2012, David Blair in 2013) to do an intervention in the collection, which led to the curation of three large-scale exhibitions. These not only opened up the collection to a public in each time a very adventurous way, they also established a stimulating dialogue between audio-visual artefacts and contemporary art.

Bart Sas (City archive, Turnhout), **“The world according to Van Hal. Exhibiting local collections of lantern slides in the City museum of Turnhout”**

In 2013 the City Archives and Museums Turnhout and the Holy Sepulchre School organised an exhibition of two collections of lantern slides. One was made by a local priest, Paul van Hal, and stored in the City Archives since 1976, the other was found on the attic of the school belonging to the convent of the Sisters of the Holy Grave (Zussen van het Heilig Graf) which gave the title to the exhibition: “The forgotten slides of the Holy Grave”. The lecture focused on the preparation of these collections and their presentation in the museum.

16:30-18:30 PANEL 2: Lantern dramaturgies

Chair: Sabine Lenk (Antwerp University)

For the second panel, collectors with a long-time experience as professional showmen were invited to share their ideas about re-using traditional projectionists’ equipment in recreated turn-of-the-century or modern diapositives.

Karin Bienek (lanternist illuminago), **Ludwig Vogl-Bienek** (lanternist illuminago, Trier University), **“illuminago / media archaeology & performance”**

The illuminago ensemble has presented magic lantern performances in many European countries and in the US and Canada since 1986. The experimental re-enactments and creative re-uses of magic lanterns and slides involve musicians, actors and other performers. In this talk Karin Bienek and Ludwig Vogl-Bienek discussed different approaches to lantern dramaturgies: the first example was about staging one work of the historical art of projection in one programme: the Wagnerian Operas. Afterwards, they talked about telling the history of the screen as live performance and the final examples were about presenting lantern slides from the 20th century that were used to show the First World War and to document ‘The Expulsion of the Armenian People into the Desert’ (www.illuminago.de)

Sarah Vanagt (film artist), **Nele Wynants** (Antwerp University, ULB), “*Schijnvis / Showfish / Poisson Brillant: Archaeology of the projection microscope*”

The projection microscope is a particular type of magic lantern, developed for showing enlarged images of microscopic subjects. This historical lantern inspired film artist Sarah Vanagt for an exhibition at M HKA (27 October – 13 November 2016). For *Schijnvis / Showfish / Poisson Brillant*, Vanagt revisited the history of microscopes for a new installation and lantern movie. She thus offered a contemporary perspective on microscopy, science and spectacle. In their talk, Vanagt and Wynants discussed this fascination with the history of optics and early media and how this artistic re-discovery of the projection microscope today can function as a model for a theory and practice between science and art (www.balthasar.be).

SCREENING: The Last Slide Projector (Paige Sarlin, USA 2007)

For Panel 2 a fifth speaker, the lanternist and scholar Mervyn Herad (www.mervynheard.com), was invited, but unfortunately he had to cancel his trip to Antwerp. Instead, a documentary film was projected about the last Carousel slide projector produced by the US company Eastman Kodak. The small diapositives for 35mm acetate film (image size 24 x 18 mm) and the devices to screen them can be seen as direct technical successors to the magic lantern projector and its glass slides (mostly 85 x 85 mm or 100 x 85 mm). The film documented the end of an era and traced the varied histories of an apparatus and a medium that have been central to family memories, to education, to art history and to the development of both cinema and corporate culture.

19:00 Opening of the EXHIBITION *Schijnvis / Showfish / Poisson Brillant*, M HKA: Inbox

For the installation “a scotch gesture”, Sarah Vanagt used five children lanterns from the Robert Vrielynck collection (held by the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp) which she lined up in an irregular row. These light sources were connected by a transparent adhesive tape on which the artist had fixed small leaves and other little plant parts, reminding of a silent film running through the slide stages, like a filmstrip which had been stopped to project the fixed shadows of natural structures, thus forming a series of still life. On the other side of the room an elegant single mahogany lantern on a wooden tripod projected a collodion positive on glass. This projected image was based on the short film “a microscopic gesture” (6 min.) shown in loop at the entrance of the exhibition. In this film, she referred to the discoveries in the field of optics in the seventeenth century, more in particular by Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, who is considered to be the inventor of the microscope. Using a tiny glass lens, van Leeuwenhoek was the first to see moving ‘diertgens’ (*animalcules*) in a drop of rain water. Vanagt used a fish egg as a lens and filmed the world through the egg.

In a second video loop, “the first microscopist” (8 min.), Vanagt connected the microscope to the magic lantern. Both technologies are able to enlarge something that is initially quite small. But while the microscope only gives images to one individual viewer, thanks to the lantern, microscopic images can be shared with a larger audience: the multiform life in a drop from the Schelde River can fill the walls of a museum. For this second movie, Vanagt used an original projection microscope (in collaboration with Ludwig Vogl-Bienek and Karin Bienek) to film enlarged images of cobwebs, water drops and even the eye of a fly.

FRIDAY 28 October 2016

10:00-11:00 PANEL 3: Historical and future case studies I

Chair: Nele Wynants (Antwerp University, ULB)

Panel 3 was devoted to the topic of re-use, first seen from a more theoretical point of view, then in the form of a case study.

Sabine Lenk (Antwerp University), **“Re-use in the past”**

The act to use something a second time has a long tradition, which goes back to Antiquity. The idea sounds almost like invented by environmentalists: why throw something away if you can make use of it again. Nevertheless, this simple action can have several meanings, therefore the word ‘re-use’ is part of an important semantic field. Using some examples from the past, Lenk showed in her talk the wide range of connotations with the intention to contribute to a better understanding of the term's significance.

Emily Hayes (Exeter University), **“Making maps speak and thinking geographically: Halford Mackinder’s visual and verbal knowledge-making practices for less expert audiences c. 1885-1914”**

Synthesizing scholarship from the burgeoning field of lantern studies with historical geography, Hayes examined in her paper the life-long championing of the magic lantern by the first Reader in the ‘new’ geography at Oxford, Halford Mackinder (1861-1947). She concentrated on the formative influence of notionally ‘popular’ scientific lantern presentations on the geographical imagination and teaching practices of Mackinder. She mapped the visual and verbal knowledge-making practices and lantern performances of Mackinder to a diverse demographic and age range of students of geography across the period c. 1885-1914, including Oxford University Extension lectures to working class audiences, Royal Geographical Society audiences, school and higher education level students of geography.

11:30-12:45 PANEL 4: Historical and future case studies II

Chair: Frank Kessler (Utrecht University)

For panel 4 two practical interactive applications of the lantern principle out of an academic and museal environment were presented. A third lecture theorised the insertion of historical slides as authentication tools in modern media productions.

Daniel Pitarch Fernández (Girona University), **“Re-using and implementing optical toys: synthesis of movement and contemporary phenakistoscopes and zoetropes”**

Pitarch’s presentation showed different contemporary examples of reusing and implementing 19th century optical toys related to the synthesis of movement (phenakistoscopes and zoetropes). His examples demonstrated not only a contemporary attraction to these devices (as an interactive medium, for instance) but also helped to better understand the possibilities of the original technology (and therefore its value and interest). The presented case studies could serve as an inspiration for exploring a broader contemporary use of the magic lantern.

Anna Carpena Torrens (Cinema Museum Girona), **“Spreading magic lantern knowledge through workshops for children”**

For eighteen years, the Girona Cinema Museum has been performing magic lantern workshops for children aged 8 to 12. This allows them to discover the artistic, technological and social importance of magic lantern shows. Carpena explained the origin of the workshop and its evolution, its demand, children’s and teachers’ opinions and summarized her own observations and experiences after years of organising this educational service offered by the museum.

Emjay Rechsteiner (film producer at Staccato film, historian), **“Lanterns in film production”**

From his own practice as a producer and historian, Emjay Rechsteiner demonstrated how, in his film projects, he seeks to add an impression of authenticity by adding archival footage to fiction. In his talk, he addressed the following questions: Can magic lanterns be deployed to the same effect? If so: what infrastructure is required to facilitate the use of lanterns in films?

14:00-15:30 PANEL 5: Taxonomy and cataloguing

Chair: Sarah Dellmann (Utrecht University)

As already discussed in workshop 1 and 2, in this last panel officially open to external visitors, taxonomical reflexions and cataloguing questions stood again in the centre of the attention.

Patrice Guérin (collector, historian of the art of light projections), **“A study to develop a classification of magic lanterns and its accessories”**

In his lecture, Guérin insisted that magic lantern slides and other images on glass plates destined to be projected on a screen cannot be studied exhaustively without examining the apparatus that is used for their projection. As an historian, he sees a reciprocal influence, as there is an interaction between what is projected and how it is projected. Guérin first developed the three elements that are necessary for this kind of projections: an image, a light source and an optical system, the latter two being components of the magic lantern. Then he described the parallel evolution of slides, lanterns and light sources from the 18th century to the 1950s and presented a taxonomy of its different forms. Last, but not least, he talked briefly about an example of re-use currently on exhibition at the Musée National de l’Education (Rouen) in which slides, projectors and light sources are intimately interwoven: ten interactive displays showed images in their historical context. (<http://diaprojection.unblog.fr/>)

Carmen López (Salamanca University), **Francisco Javier Frutos** (Salamanca University), **“A vocabulary for magic lantern slides depending on their discursive genre”**

Based on content analysis as a method for the taxonomic organization of magic lantern slides, López and Frutos proposed a controlled vocabulary for magic lantern slides depending on their discursive genre. In their standardized vocabulary, they aim to define and classify the genres of magic lantern slides. This will also be applicable to the “Type of Slide Subject”-category (in Lucerna’s ‘search for slide sets’). They brought together 29 terms and subterms that were defined according to the concurrence of all the variables used in the codebook resulting from an empirical content analysis study. Based on this vocabulary, they will develop a mobile application (app) to facilitate the creative re-use of the magic lantern slides of the Museu del Cinema-Tomàs Mallol in the context of a temporary exhibition dedicated to this cultural heritage, which it is scheduled to open at the Museu in 2017.

Ludwig Vogl-Bienek (Trier University, illuminago), “Introduction to The Companion for the Historical Art of Projection”

Vogl-Bienek presented an on-line publication project at Trier University which is part of the Media Studies' research project “Screen1900”. The “Companion” will present well-founded insights into the main topics of research on the history of the magic lantern, the screen and the art of projection in an interdisciplinary framework. It also shall introduce experiments in media archaeology such as re-enactments and creative re-use of historical works and practices in the art of projection and integrates their results into the rendering of fundamentals of media history. The Companion would like to address scholars in the fields of media, theatre, and arts as well as museum curators, collectors and historians of all disciplines. It is supposed to provide media historical information for users in journalism, publishing, schools and adult education responsible for introducing history to a larger audience. To creators who use lantern slides in performances or who design video installations it will offer useful historical background information.

16:00-18:00 Working group meetings

In parallel sessions, the teams “Best practice of Digitization” and “Metadata and Cataloguing” convened. A third group was created by those of the participants who were particularly interested in the topic of “re-use”. External participants of the workshop were invited to take part in the discussions.

The working day was closed by the formal conference dinner at the Antwerp Fotomuseum FoMo and a film show introduced by film-maker Sarah Vanagt who showed three of her most recent films.

An evening with Sarah, CINEMA ZUID, Antwerp | Waalsekaai 47

SATURDAY 29 October 2016

10:00-12:00 Research Team Assembly

Chair: Sarah Dellmann (Utrecht University)

The discussion concerned practical and organizational matters as well as the project conference of *A Million Pictures* in Utrecht in August/September 2017. *See separate minutes.*

At 12:00 the Assembly was finished. All participants thanked the organisers of the Antwerp team (Sabine Lenk, Kurt Vanhoutte, Nele Wynants) as well as the colleagues from M KHA (Sabine Herrygers, Liliane Dewachter and Jan Devree) and Cinema Zuid (Jos van den Bergh, Frank van der Kinderen) for the flawless organisation of a varied and inspiring programme, which made this workshop a big success.

The next workgroup meeting of *A Million Pictures* will take place at the conference “History, Archiving, and Creative Re-use of Educational Magic Lantern Slides” from 29 August – 1 September 2017 in Utrecht, The Netherlands.

At 12:30, the workshop was closed.

For the notes: Sabine Lenk, Kurt Vanhoutte, Nele Wynants
Antwerp, 22 December 2016.

