

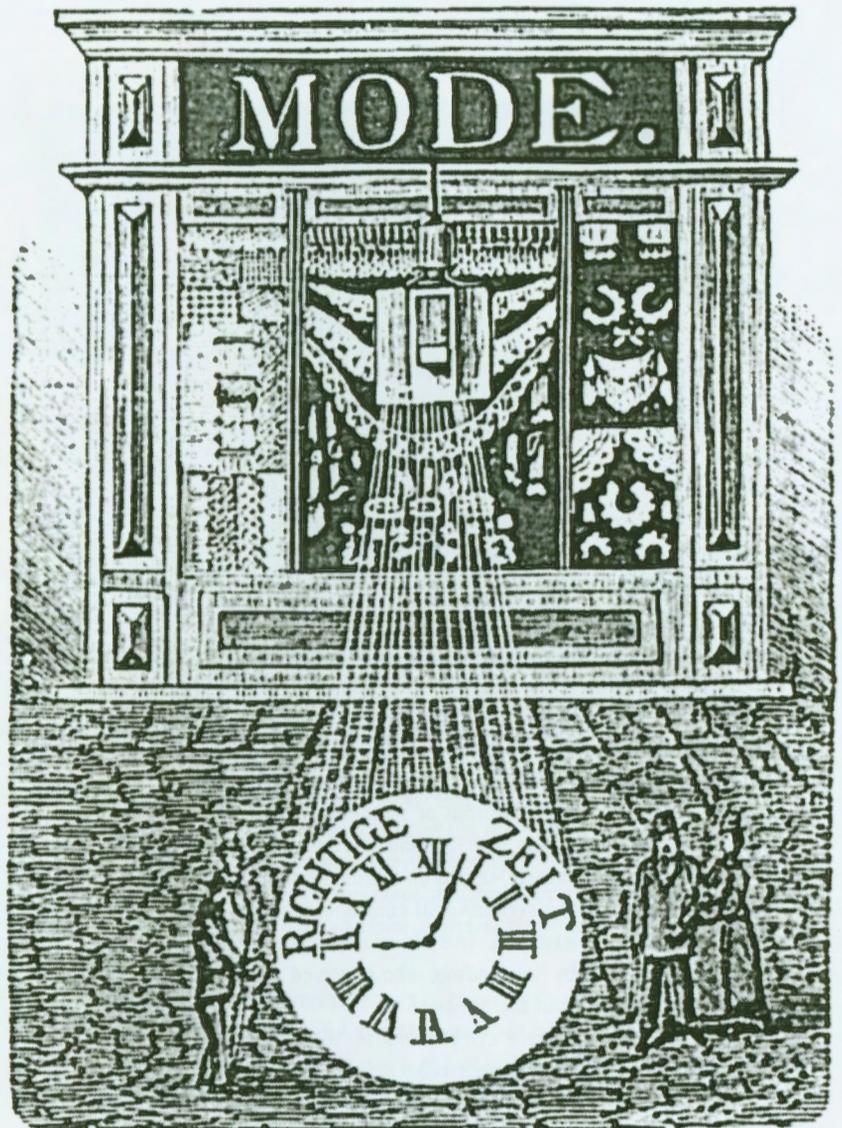
## ADVERTISING WITH LIGHT COMMERCE AND THE MAGIC LANTERN

Daniela Müller-Kolb

Although some published works mention uses of the magic lantern for advertising purposes, this history has not been adequately explored by advertising historians.<sup>1</sup> Considering the wide range of available literature that discusses the complex interdisciplinary themes of advertising, this seems a curious omission.<sup>2</sup> It creates the impression that the history of advertising is straightforward: it begins with different print products such as flyers, announcements and posters and shifts directly into early cinema. On the question of whether there was anything else in between, no answer can be found – unless you happen to know about the role of the magic lantern. Even in specialised literature this usage is only mentioned marginally. Any further analysis of the pictorial material, methods of performance, questions about production and distribution, or of local differences, has been very superficial. As the media historian Erkki Huhtamo observed in 2009 there is still a research gap. 'Commercial outdoor projections became a well-established tradition, although their full extent is not yet known.'<sup>3</sup>

Advertisers have always tried to use the available media environment to spread their sales message as widely as possible. At the same time, they have tried to separate themselves from the messages of their rivals through novel and inventive means, to get the attention of the particular circle of people in which they are interested. The many spectacular modes of advertising found in the late nineteenth century show that advertisers knew that the emotional response of the recipient would lead to a better acceptance of their sales message. This was recognised even before the establishment of market research in the early twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

Psychologists have shown that pictures and transferred emotions have a positive effect on recall, recognition and approval, which results in an unconscious positive assessment by the consumer.<sup>5</sup> However, recipients soon develop defence mechanisms through daily exposure to different kinds of media, and become less receptive to these kinds of messages. These might seem to be modern theories, but articles in the German journal *Die Reklame* make clear that advertisers were already recognising this effect, long before it was scientifically proven.<sup>6</sup> Constant innovation



An automechanical projection on the pavement with a Reklame-Reflexlaterne. The pictures could be changed every 15 seconds. See 'Reklame-Reflexlaterne mit Uhr', *Die Reklame*, vol. 3, no. 10, 20 October 1893, p. 217.

in the way advertisements were offered, diversifying messages to make them more interesting, shows how vital it was (and, indeed, still is) to continually change advertising in order to maintain the recipient's attention.

### THE INVOLVED SPECTATOR

Kroeber-Riel and Esch define 'Involvement' as 'the commitment someone has towards an object or activity [...] It encourages the consumer to work with the product or the service in an intellectual or emotional way.'<sup>7</sup> Presenting advertising as part of a show or performance where the audience is emotionally engaged not only positions a product in a positive light, but also anchors it in the recipient's memory. The more a spectator is interested in the presentation, the more likely it is that he will stay, watch and

### NOTES

1. Erkki Huhtamo, 'Messages on the Wall, An Archaeology of Public Media Displays', Scott McQuire, Meredith Martin, Sabine Niederer (eds), *Urban Screens Reader 5*, Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2009. See also David Robinson, Stephen Herbert, Richard Crangle (eds), *Encyclopaedia of the Magic Lantern*, London 2001, p. 10. See also Steve Humphries, *Victorian Britain through the Magic Lantern*, London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1989, pp. 122–31.
2. Dieter Brecheis, *Gabriele Siegart: Werbung der Medien- und Informationsgesellschaft*, Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag, 2010, p. 18.
3. Huhtamo, p. 23. For the full issue and see [http://www.networkcultures.org/\\_uploads/US\\_layout\\_01022\\_010.pdf](http://www.networkcultures.org/_uploads/US_layout_01022_010.pdf) [accessed 20.12.14].
4. See 'Polemische Reklame', *Die Reklame*, vol. 3, 2. issue, 20.02, 1893, p. 26.
5. See Georg Felser, *Werbe- und Konsumentenpsychologie*, Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag 2007.
6. A journal published 1891–1900 by Robert Exner.
7. See Werne Kroeber-Riel, Franz-Rudolf Esch, *Strategie und Technik der Werbung*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011, p. 195.

To be lent



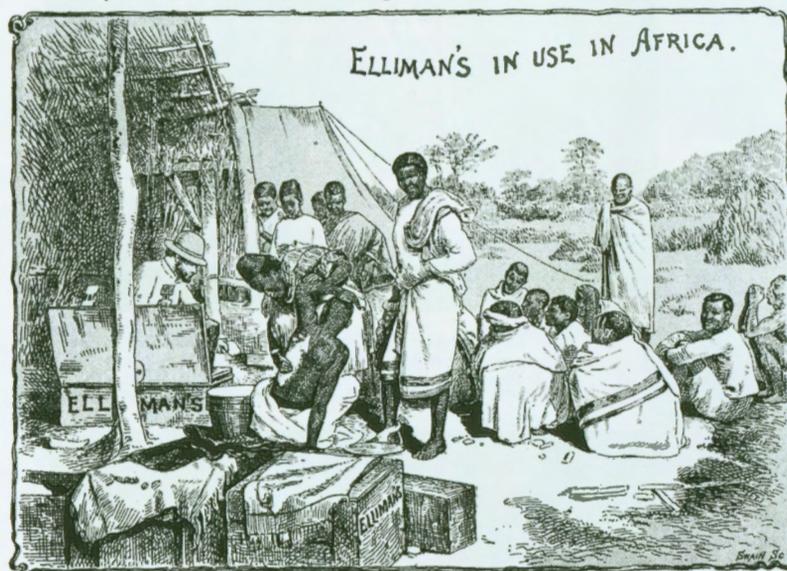
# FREE



A set of SIX COLOURED LANTERN SLIDES.

By ELLIMAN, SONS & Co., Slough, ENGLAND.

LENT AT OWNERS' RISK AND  
RETURNABLE MAY 1ST, 1896



THE subjects are various, being reproductions in colours of "Elliman" Advertisements. No payment will be made for exhibiting these Slides.

Apply to

**ELLIMAN, SONS & CO.,  
Slough, ENGLAND.**

The Optical Magic Lantern Journal and Photographic Enlarger, vol. 6, no. 79, 1895, S. xx (advertisement section)

generally become involved in what is being shown.

Several sources and descriptions show that advertising slides were used in diverse contexts during the nineteenth century. These ranged from informal compilations of slides strung together (for example, on screens in public places) to the possibility of using them as part of a sophisticated magic lantern performance. Depending on the kind of presentation, there are different levels of involvement on the part of the viewer:

- a) Low-level involvement: completely separated from any entertainment offering. The advertising message serves as an 'eye catcher', for briefly attracting the audience's attention. Only the advertising message is presented. Example of use: advertising in the street.

- b) Moderate-level involvement: a separate commercial break before, after or during a performance, which can be recognised as such by the viewer, who sees this as an acceptable intrusion for which he will be rewarded with the promise of further entertainment. Advertisement and entertainment are here equal. Examples of use: advertising which interrupts a performance, but also street advertisements that present entertaining aspects.
- c) High-level involvement: slides casually embedded in an information or entertainment programme. The audience focuses on the entertainment, not on the advertisement.

#### LOW-LEVEL INVOLVEMENT

The first known use of a magic lantern in the streets for advertising purposes was in 1870 in a shop window in Paris.<sup>8</sup> In the following years, this innovation spread first to America, then to Great Britain and lastly to Germany. Curtains in shop windows, walls, pavements and even screens stretched across high rooftops, were all used for projection; with single slides or compilations of several slides shown in the evenings without commentary. The only requirement for the operator was to change the pictures at regular intervals, until, in 1888, even this work was superseded by clockwork-based mechanisms.<sup>9</sup> To illuminate the walls, or the screens hanging on them, it was common practice to place the operator in a window on the opposite side the street, hidden from passersby. Where this was impossible a small, unheated shack on the roof was sometimes the only shelter for both the operator and his projection device.<sup>10</sup>

After examining different sources, it appears that this kind of advertisement programme was projected after dark for up to three hours each day.<sup>11</sup> Depending on the season, these presentations finished by 11 p.m. at the latest. Every slide was shown on the screen for 10 to 60 seconds, before being exchanged for the following one.<sup>12</sup> The repertoire of slides was shown several times during these three hours, a fact which was particularly mentioned to prospective advertisers and agencies.<sup>13</sup> Probably for financial reasons, this form of nocturnal advertising was only given in exclusive shopping districts

8. 'Sketches from Paris', *The Times*, 31 August 1870, p. 9, as well as the record in David Robinson, Stephen Herbert, Richard Crangle (eds), *Encyclopaedia of the Magic Lantern*, London 2001, p. 10.

9. Even if there were other forms of presentations on the street, like complete entertainment performances.

10. 'Advertising Extraordinary', *The Times*, 18 January 1876, p. 7. See also 'Ether Saturator', *The Optical Magic Lantern Journal and Photographic Enlarger*, vol. 3, no. 33, February 1892, p. 25.

11. 'My Experience with the Oxy-Ether Light and Scott's Benzoline Saturator', *The Optical Magic Lantern Journal and Photographic Enlarger*, vol. 2, no. 26, July 1891, p. 127. See also the article 'Discussion on Saturators', *The Optical Magic*

*Lantern Journal and Photographic Enlarger*, vol. 5, no. 58, March 1894, p. 46. An example in Germany can be found in the article 'Frankfurt a. M.', *Laterna Magica*, 2, no. 34, 1887, p. 35.

12. 'Am Boulevard Montmartre in Paris', *Laterna Magica*, 1, no. 33, 1887, p. 15. See also the article 'Railway Station Advertising by Means of the Lantern', *The Optical Magic Lantern Journal and Photographic Enlarger*, vol. 1, no. 9, February 1890, p. 69. 'New Apparatus', *The Optical Magic Lantern Journal and Photographic Enlarger*, vol. 6, no. 76, 1895, S. 145.

13. There are various producers offering material of this kind in their catalogues.

in large cities of America, Great Britain and Germany. These kinds of announcements were mentioned for the last time in around 1903, when they were supplanted by new, cheaper forms of advertising using electrical lighting.

#### MODERATE AND HIGH LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

Advertisements introduced into magic lantern performances, where people attended freely and where darkness made it difficult for them to look away from the screen, were naturally of great interest to the advertiser. Whether or not it was possible to identify a separate commercial break during a running magic lantern performance was determined by the artistic judgment of the operator, and in practice, there was considerable overlap between 'high' and 'moderate' levels of involvement. Through his skill and imagination, the showman could introduce slides seamlessly without the commercial background being immediately recognised by the audience. But even when this was made more overt, the audience could still be entertained by what they saw if the slides were sufficiently appealing. The only problem might be if the advertising agency or the slide producers gave instructions that a picture had to be shown at a particular moment or specified the text the operator was to deliver. The only reason for the showman to commit to such restrictions, if he was not an employee of the enterprise, was the opportunity to improve his programme with attractive slides provided for free.<sup>14</sup>

Given the heterogeneous nature of magic lantern entertainments (Ludwig Vogl-Bienek describes them as 'Gestaltungssystem von Aufführungsereignissen'<sup>15</sup>), it is not surprising that advertisers offered a wide range of different material. After all, it was essential not to imitate the intrusive methods of market traders, but instead to ensure that the performers retained their usual style and allowed advertisements to be absorbed as part of their shows. Companies developed a variety of material suitable for every kind of situation. They offered motto slides for opening and closing the show, complete narrative series, and even chromotropes in which the centre was left open for lettering or trademarks.<sup>16</sup> Sometimes whole events were devised for commercial purposes, as the soup manufacturer Maggi did at the beginning of the twentieth century. The audience was invited to visit a free event, where delicious soup was served and an entertainment promoting the company's work and manufacturing methods provided.<sup>17</sup> The problem for the audience in such a case was the fine distinction between 'advertising' and 'entertainment', which came to form an almost inseparable and symbiotic relationship. It was sometimes impossible to say where information ended and advertising began.

Though this is only a short review of the possibilities for making the magic lantern part of the economic supply chain, it is clear that companies exploited this medium in many different ways. Slides continued to be used for announcements in the cinema until the late twentieth century, but by then most of the other advertising methods used in projection had long since disappeared from everyday life. It is only through careful analysis of surviving catalogues, slides and other records that we can hope to build a clearer picture of this little-known aspect of magic lantern history.

**Daniela MÜLLER-KOLB** is studying for a PhD in media sciences at the University of Trier. She is analysing projection catalogues as part of self-marketing strategies and would love to hear your opinions about advertising with early projection devices. muel2c01@uni-trier.de



Motto slides for magic lantern performances labelled with different products. See Richard Crangle, Mervyn Heard, Ine van Dooren (eds), *Realms of Light, Uses and Perceptions of the Magic Lantern from the 17th to the 21st century*, London 2005, pp. 195 and 202.



14. See Steve Humphries, *Victorian Britain through the Magic Lantern*, London: Sidgwick Et Jackson, 1989, p. 122.
15. Ludwig Vogl-Bienek, *Die historische Projektionskunst*, Frank Kessler, Sabine Lenk, Martin Loiperdinger (eds), *KINtop 3*, Oskar Messter, Frankfurt a. M.: Stroemfeld, 1994, p. 14.
16. See 'Chromatrop-Rahmen mit einer feststehenden Scheibe', Eduard Liesegang, *Reklame-Bildwerfer. Zur Lichtbild-Reklame für Bekanntmachungen selbsttätige Projektionen in Ausstellungen usw.*, liste no. 42, Düsseldorf, 1930, S.24.
17. Yvonne Zimmermann, 'Training and Entertaining Consumers', Frank Kessler, Sabine Lenk, Martin Loiperdinger (eds), *Travelling Cinema in Europe*, Frankfurt a. M.: Stroemfeld, 2008.