'MUCH CAN BE LEARNT THROUGH THE EYE'
Review of *Learning with Light and Shadows*
Richard Crangle

Learning with Light and Shadows: Educational Lantern and Film Projection, 1860-1990
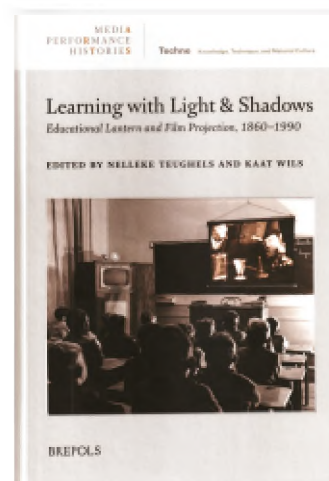Edited by Nelleke Teughels and Kaat Wils
Brepols Publishers, Turnhout, Belgium, 2023
270 pages, illustrated
ISBN 978-2-503-59904-5 hardback, €75
ISBN 978-2-503-59905-2 e-book, free download from www.brepolsonline.net

This second lantern-related volume in the *Techne* series from the Belgian publisher Brepols follows on smoothly from *Faith in a Beam of Light* (reviewed in *TML* 32), which dealt with uses of the lantern in religion. In ten essays and an introduction this book gives a varied and in-depth look at another of the mainstays of latter-day slide use: the educational projected image. It's a bit more cosmopolitan that the first volume, covering projection history in Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Switzerland, Austria,

A very Spielbergian approach to educational projection in the logo of the Dutch Lichtbeelden Vereeniging *('Lantern Slide Association')*

the UK and the German Democratic Republic (yes, 'East Germany'!). If your response to a term like 'educational slide use' is to roll your eyes and go off in search of something more entertaining, I'd suggest not doing so in this case. As we know, education in a broad sense has been one of the main uses of lantern slides for centuries, and it's worth understanding if only to compare and contrast with comedy, song, storytelling and all the other more 'fun' activities.

In their introduction, the editors set out one of their main aims: to emphasise the importance of a 'bottom-up' approach to the use of projection in teaching. What they mean by this is that most previous studies have tended to treat this area as a 'top-down' initiative by governments and other authorities to 'modernise' or 'improve' school and college teaching by imposing new techniques and technologies, whereas they see just as important a contribution by teachers themselves in devising their own methods in spite of whatever directives may be coming down from on high. That's an interesting point in itself, and tends to fit with my feeling that most aspects of projection history have been rather small-scale, unofficial, and often 'amateur' in the best sense.

But concentrating on the 'bottom-up' approach also makes clear that there has already been quite a body of academic work from the 'top-down' viewpoint, which those of us taking a 'lantern history' approach have tended to miss because it's taken place under self-contained headings like 'history of education'. I don't have enough time or space here to go on about how much I hate the division of academic work into separate territories, but I should say how pleased I am to find a work that knocks down a few of the fences so that we can all learn from each other. It's good to find work here by a number of authors I know, mainly through their work in the *B-magic* project, but equally good to come across names that are new to me. I'm probably not going to set out on a major catch-up project to read as much of the existing education-history literature as I can find – but at least I now know where I should start if I was going to do that.

Another quite unusual aspect of the book is its range – that '1990' in the subtitle isn't a typo, it really does cover projected education up to (what I still think of as) recent times. That's as refreshing as it is surprising – most works that take any notice of the optical lantern at all do so in a purely historical way, which is fine but tends to give the impression that it's something that has had its day and exists only in the past. OK, I know that 1990 is the past as well, but avoiding some of the easy cut-off points (WW1, WW2, 'birth of cinema' etc.) in telling the story of the use of projection in education is quite a bold move, and one that I'd be happy to see repeated in other contexts. Interestingly the reason for choosing 1990 as a cut-off point is the increasing use of digital images (as opposed to 'analogue' or physical slides) from around that time, though like all end points that's a bit debatable – I can certainly remember giving talks with 35mm slides in the early 2000s.

Learning with Light and Shadows is an academic work, of course, and if you're looking for a pretty picture book to decorate your coffee table, this isn't it. That said, though, it's written with clarity and variety, and even if educational slides aren't your personal thing it's worth reading to open up understanding of other areas besides 'our' own. If you're not convinced, you don't even have to pay to dip in and out of the contents: once again the full book is available *free of charge* at the Brepols website, and once again that gesture gets warm approval from me, as does the book as a whole.