REMEDIATING THE DISTANCE FROM THE DIVINE: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ESSAY

DOCTORED PHOTOGRAPHS– EXHIBITION DEVICES– CINEMATOGRAPHIC EFFECT

Ferdinando Gizzi
Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3
nando.gizzi@gmail.com

Catholicism has always maintained a deep, even ontological, relationship with images and their mediations on account and by virtue of its particular interpretation of the dogma of the Incarnation. And yet, in the second half of nineteenth century –especially 'after Lourdes', that is, after the mediatic and popular fortune of the supernatural apparitions to Bernadette Soubirous– the Christian 'scopic' drive spread and grew stronger in France, being redefined in new 'spectacular' modalities and forms. These aimed to bring the divine closer to the spectator's physical and subjective experience, in accordance with the broadest process of subjectivation undergone at this time by the experience of seeing –the 'gaze'– in its whole. My paper will focus, from an archaeological perspective, on three case studies within this remediation turning point: the attempts to photograph a Marian apparition in the small, peripheral village of Tilly-sur-Seulles between 1896 and 1897; the *trompe-l'œil* devices employed by the artist Munkácsy and the gallerist-art dealer Sedelmeyer for the exhibition of life-sized Christological paintings during the 1880s and 1890s that engendered empathic 'spectatorial' reactions; and the emergence of the cinematographic apparatus –and of its phenomenological "train effect"– in conjunction with religious imaginaries, persons, uses and places.

INTRODUCTION

On account of its particular interpretation of the doctrine of Incarnation –and by virtue of it– Catholicism has always maintained a deep, even ontological, relationship with images and their mediations (Didi-Huberman & Repensek, 1984; Freedberg, 1989; Menozzi, 1995). Starting as early as the Baroque times, the use of architectures as vast scenic apparati, along with a new conception of the frame and of the pictorial form itself (Careri, 2017; Stoichita, 1995), led to a fundamental reconfiguration in this relationship; a 'modulation' –and specifically a 'reduction'– in the perceptual, and thus mental, distance from the divine.

However, from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, this Christian 'haptic-scopic drive' (Pinotti, 2005) underwent considerable growth and reinforcement and was redefined in new, purely spectacular modalities, with the advent of new technologies and of popular culture's mass-produced forms.

Here, we will discuss three of these modalities, which we deem particularly significant. Of course, many other cases exist and could be integrated in our 'Christian-media archaeological' analysis –stereoscopic pictures, panorama and diorama shows, magic lantern projections, and so on: all sorts of 'optical devices' (or "*machines à voir*", to employ a well-suited polysemic definition by Gleizes & Reynaud, 2017). We could basically have integrated all of the devices upon which Jonathan Crary (1991) built his seminal argument describing a phenomenological change of the spectatorial paradigm, away from the *camera obscura* model, throughout the nineteenth century: the argument of the bodily subjectivation of the observer's act and moment, that is, of the experience of seeing –the 'gaze'– as a whole. We recognize that the specific forms we have chosen to study cooperate and coexist in such a technological and mediatic ecosystem, and that they manifest some fundamental aspect of it.

From a theoretical point of view, their mediatechnic difference could be understood and conceived of according to a

"gradient model" –as Andrea Pinotti (2017) proposes to do in his 'an-iconological' project– and this model does, in fact, inform the order in which we will present them, "on a scale from a minimum to a maximum" (p. 4) immersive power on the viewer. However, their contemporaneity or quasi-contemporaneity tells us that, historically, they do indeed co-participate in a complex way in the "*dense maillage intermedial*" [dense intermedial network] of the *fin-de-siècle*'s social, cultural and visual Western context (Gaudreault, 2008, p. 113). In this respect, they constitute an "*allure inédite*" [unprecedented appearance] which reveals a "*régime singulier de l'image*" [a peculiar regimen of the image], as Michel Poivert points out (2014, p. 215).

By interpreting a modern scopic desire (or need?) and taking advantage of the Catholic Church's particularly tolerant attitude towards them at that time, these forms remediated the distance between the spectator and the divine, bringing it closer to their subjective psychological and physical experience. Whether they did so for entirely playful or serious reasons is not really the issue, as they have constantly oscillated –in their uses and in their extremely various reception modes, if not in their creators' primary intentions– between the regimens of the spectacular and that of the 'devotional', between their 'public' manifestations and their 'private', intimate appropriations. More importantly, they all produce an "*effondrement et refondation*" [collapse and refounding] of the 'symbolic' in the 'indexical' (Rykner, 2013, p. 11), thus adding a phenomenological layer to the psycho-perceptive mechanism of 'belief' in the image's 'reality' (i.e. in its 'realism') and making it dual instead of strictly religious.

A DOCTORED PHOTOGRAPH OF A MARIAN APPARITION – TILLY-SUR-SEULLES (NORTH-WESTERN FRANCE), 1896

In early 1896, using a technique that was widespread at that time, especially but not exclusively in the field of Spirit photography (Chéroux et al., 2005), Caen-based

photographer and postcards publisher Jules Bréchet, a specialist in "views and instant group portraits", superimposed the image of a small plaster statue of the Virgin Mary surrounded by cotton wool and muslin to form a cloud, onto a photograph, taken from a certain distance, of a field with a tree, crowded with pilgrims and onlookers (Figure 1).

This picture would be published –along with three more documentary ones– in the May 16 1896 weekly issue of *Le Monde illustré*'s report on the supernatural events that had been occurring in the small and picturesque French village of Tilly-sur-Seulles in Calvados, halfway between Bayeux and Caen, since March of that year (A.B., 1896, p. 344). Mary had allegedly appeared –it should be mentioned in passing that authorities in the Vatican never recognized these apparitions– to about sixty young schoolgirls and their teachers, initially, then to some nuns, and later to many other viewers of all ages, genders, and social classes and backgrounds (among whom were two young working-class girls, Louise Polinière and Marie Martel, who would soon emerge and compete for the role of "official seer of Tilly") (Bertin, 2010; Chiron, 1995; L'Espinasse-Langeac, 1901). It is also known that other similar images were circulating at the same time in that region. Photographer Jules Leprunier, for example, seems to have done something similar, judging by the engraved likeness of his (lost) photographs that Parisian radical right-wing journalist Gaston Méry used to illustrate his short essay on the apparitions of Tilly (Méry, 1896, p. 225) (Figure 2).

This kind of (presumed) supernatural-Christian event was in no way exceptional or rare. Throughout the nineteenth century, and especially since the rue du Bac apparition of 1830, Marian epiphanies spread in the whole Catholic world (and particularly in France). They grew so frequent and so broad in their scale, met such success in the media and were so popular that the historian of Christianity Claude Langlois has proposed to dub the entire nineteenth century the "siècle des apparitions mariales" (1991, p. 295). Their relevance mostly pertains to the fact that they profoundly changed the
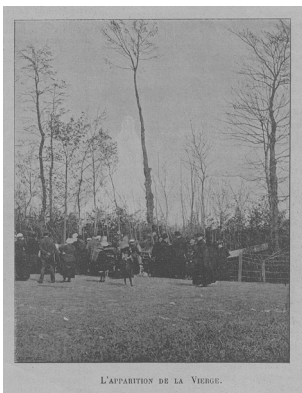

Fig. 1 Jules Bréchet, *The apparition of the Virgin*, 1896. From *Le Monde Illustré* (1896, May 16), p. 344.

L'APPARITION
(d'après un cliché photographique de Leprunier, 53, rue Saint-Malo, à Bayeux).

traditional (and orthodox, from a doctrinarian-catholic perspective) 'visionary paradigm' —one that was based on the Augustinian progressive tripartition of "corporeal/intellectual/spiritual vision" and on the idea of the apparition as a particular private revelation— and thus determined a whole new relationship with the supernatural for Catholics (Albert-Llorca, 2001; Bouflet & Boutry, 1997). 'Modern' apparitions, and in particular those to Bernadette Soubirous in Lourdes in 1858, pushed a new social subject, the 'crowd', to go to the place of the miracle with the desire 'to feel' it in all its physical and temporal proximity, to see it with its own eyes (or at least, 'to see the seer' having a vision). Thus, this crowd constituted itself as a real audience and transformed the supernatural into a public, spectacular and mediatic event entirely based on bodily, visible, and recognisable reactions (Christian, 1996; Harris, 1999; Kaufman, 2004).

And in fact, much like all the other traditional miraculous and visionary sites, Tilly-sur-Seulles, too, soon turned into yet another "fair of the supernatural" (Bouflet & Boutry 1997, p. 170), filled with "*tilloiseries*" hawkers' shacks and attractions, where the borders between 'belief' and 'entertainment' became more and more labile.

However, no one had ever dared to present the photograph of a miraculous Marian apparition before. It should be pointed out that discussions about the limits and possibilities of the photographic medium as a 'revealing device', rather than simply as a documentation and description tool, were unfolding in various contexts at the time. Spiritualists, who, in France, gathered around the revue *Annales des Sciences Psychiques* (Lachapelle, 2011; Alvarado & Evrard, 2012), supported this conversation, while the official Christian religion had also been led into it by experiments related to the revelation of the Shroud of Turin (Celier, 1992; Geimer, 1999; Grojnowski, 2012; Kaenel, 2008).

However, as Claude Langlois (1994, 1998) and Antoinette Guise-Castelnuovo (2013) have demonstrated, the relationship of the 'photographic' with mystical or visionary Christian events remained strictly aimed at recording their physical and physiognomic aspects (the photographs of saints, seers and miraculously-healed persons proposed as "*portraits authentiques*" [real portraits] are their main visual model in this sense) or their domestic, social and material contexts (the places where the seers or saints lived, the people they knew and met, the objects they used, etc.) (Figure 3).

In Tilly-sur-Seulles, on the other hand, the time was ripe for local photographers to start producing and selling images as authentic and direct 'traces' of the miraculous event itself. The authors of this type of images, which were obtained through a "trick" (one that was recognized and explicitly denounced at least once by someone as being "a sham by sellers looking for big profits" –Cervia, 1896, p. 36), actually never denied their artificial, inauthentic, and "fabricated" nature. When questioned by a reporter for *Gil Blas* (Gaillard, 1897), Bréchet proudly claimed: "It is I, sir, who first made the apparition"; and when the journalist, a little amazed by such a frank admission, urged him: "You made it, you say –that is to say, you saw it?", the photographer insists: "No, I made it! [...] It's a matter of work, of execution" (p. 2). Bréchet even proposed other versions of the "miraculous" image to the jour-

nalist, with the superimposed Virgin more or less accentuated, according to customers' tastes. This is why *Gil Blas* could truly present the photographer as "an expert man who possesses the science of apparitions" (p. 2).

Culturally, this pictures thus fits perfectly into the tradition of "genuine" or "authentic fakes" (Chidester, 2005) that has followed every religious tradition, and Christianity's and Catholicism's in particular.

But phenomenologically, in the context of the late nineteenth century's technological and media landscape, this trick, this manufactured visualization of a visionary event that was presumed real, can and must be conceived of as a pivotal moment, when the divine was brought "spatially and humanly closer". It operated on the basis of the 'desire' of believers (that is, those who 'already' believe and 'want' to believe) to 'see' something supernatural with their own eyes, just like the "official" visionaries, and their wish to bring home a souvenir, a relic, a piece of that mystery. Gil Blas' reporter called these people a "madly mystical clientele" (Gaillard, 1897, p. 2): believers turned into spectators, consumers and purchasers of an apparition transformed into a visual commodity. With the 'photographic' implicitly and unconsciously recognized as an objective image, or as a direct index of an external reality (Daston & Galison, 1992; Snyder, 2016), the photographer could propose his picture as a "very nice proof of the apparition", and many believed in its truth ("Some did not believe in the photograph of the tree, many believed in that of the Virgin" – Cervia, 1896, p. 36): in a few months, it sold four thousand copies. And even on the other end of the mediatechnic passage through which the photograph was represented in engravings –that is, when it was further 'remediated'– as in the Leprunier-Méry case, this kind of doctored images of a miracle did not lose any of its value as a 'document' or trustworthy medium, as nineteenth century society was used to perceive current events in illustrated form. Engravings found in newspapers and magazines were considered as faithful reconstructions or records of topical events (Bottomore, 2007; Hill & Schwartz, 2015).

Fig. 3 J.-B. C., *Lourdes – Bernadette (real portrait)*, 1900 ca. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris/Archives et bibliothèques Pau Béarn Pyrénées.

Thus, as a remediation act that brought immediacy, accuracy, and objectivity to the representation of a Marian apparition, these photographs truly represent an attempt to bridge the distance between two remote subjects (which could not be any further apart: the human terrestrial world and the divine, supernatural one), and to satisfy a social and visual desire to, quite literally, experience an absent.

However, as much as the 'photographic' renders "immersive power" and determines "unstable, even uncanny, viewing experiences" (Jarenski, 2015, p. 18), that are open to virtuality, compel viewers to participate directly and eventually function as "fantastic spaces of imaginative possibilities" (p. 31), "an image is an image", as Sabine Lenk and Frank Kessler remind their readers (2018, p. 234), even when it is perceived and received as 'real': the gap between 'here' and 'elsewhere' in Tilly's miraculous photographs remained therefore embedded in a fundamentally iconological relationship.

EXHIBITING CHRISTOLOGICAL PAINTINGS THROUGH *TROMPE-L'OEIL* DEVICES − PARIS (GALERIE SEDELMEYER), 1880S-1890S

At the dawn of the 1880s, some years before the events in Tilly, Hungarian artist Mihaly Munkácsy and his gallerist and art-dealer, Wien-born Charles Sedelmeyer —both of whom had established in Paris in the previous decade— inaugurated the exhibition of the first of a cycle of three life-sized canvases on the Passion of Christ, *Christ in front of Pilate* (1881) (Huemer, 2004) (Figure 4).

In an effort to renew the trite traditional exhibiting practices inherited from the model of the Salon, where paintings were disorderly and seamlessly aggregated on walls (Mainardi, 1993), and in an attempt to escape the 'crisis' that academic art was going through in those years (Bernard, 2000; Sérié, 2014), the two men devised a new exhibition mode that redefined the space of the art gallery and introduced a new viewing apparatus.

They decided to present the Christological monumental painting in a solo show, making the exhibition an 'event', an attraction, a spectacle. After paying a two-franc admission ticket, each visitor could enter the Galerie Sedelmeyer on Rue de la Rochefoucauld, which had been specially arranged for the occasion, and walk through its various rooms –as a sort of preliminary initiatory journey– until they suddenly found themselves before the "Holy of Holies" (U.B., 1881): facing Munkácsy's life-sized painting, which, by a highly expressive play of electric lights, was the only lit object in the room. In addition, an architectural scenography erased the painting's frame and blended it in with the pictorial elements, triggering and increasing the viewer's impression of a true three-dimensional *trompe-l'oeil* vision (Figure 5).

They would also employ this kind of complex theatrical exhibiting apparatus for the second painting of the trilogy, *Golgotha* or *Christ on the Calvary* in 1884, and again about ten years later, in 1896, for the third and last one, *Ecce Homo*, this

Fig. 4 Mihály Munkácsy, *Christ in front of Pilate*, 1881, 4,17m x 6,36m, Déri Museum, Debrecen, HU.

time arranged by the artist alone, as his collaboration with Sedelmeyer had officially reached its end in the late 1880s (Kovács, 2004).

It was explicitly recognised that these new displaying modalities were closely related to the attractions and the immersive technologies of the time. They were compared, in particular, to dioramas, panoramas, and wax museums. In fact, as they employed the same kind of expedients as contemporary spectacular forms to create a complete illusion of reality while simultaneously curbing spectators' haptic reactions, the exhibitions of Munkacsy's Christological works seemed to bear the same promise as them: that of cancelling any distance between the object of the representation and the observer, giving 'power' to the painting in such a way as to bring it out of its frame. In this case, with the object of the representation being one of the most important characters and moments in the Christian religion, the illusionistic force of the painting and the adherence it aroused in viewers ended up being conflated with true devotional feelings and with faith.

And there were a great many accounts of the empathic reactions that this so vivid, realistic, 'close' vision of the evangelical events aroused in spectators at the time. One of the most common reports is of a child who went to see the painting with his mother, and who, being mistaken about the representational status of what stood before him, did not understand why he couldn't also hear it speak (TOUT-PARIS, 1886). Other spectators fell silently at the sight of the painting, or took off their hats, kneeled or crossed themselves –as if they were entering a church or chapel (Carjat, 1881; Comte, 1884).

With the work of art thus transformed into an event that takes place *hic et nunc*, in the very space-time of the spectator, its 'reality' imposed itself. Catholic critic Robert de La Sizeranne (1890), who advocated for a revival of religious art in France and thus became one of Munkácsy's most fervent defenders, described this feeling of an emergence of reality as follows: "Those who saw *Christ before Pilate* a few years ago at the Sedelmeyer Gallery, exhibited not in a frame but

Fig. 5 *Christ in front of Pilate* at Lindenhurst (residence of John Wanamaker), 1900 ca. From E. C. Siter, *Catalogue of the Collection of Pictures by the Old Masters & of the Early English Schools & Mihály Munkácsy*, Philadelphia, Times Printing House, 1904, plate 185.
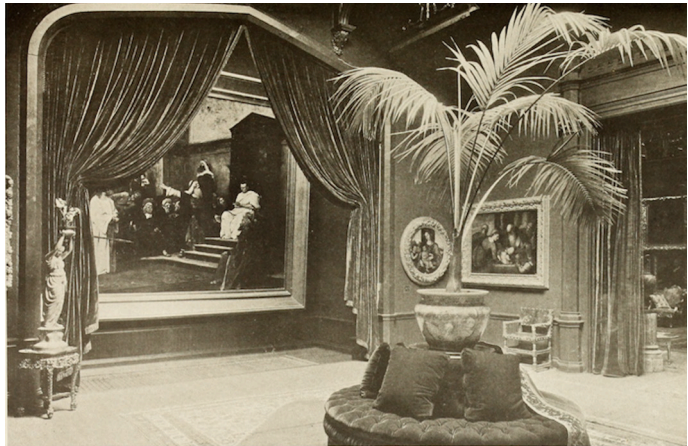
between two columns that seemed to belong to the praetorium, will never forget the gripping experience they had. [...] The eighteen centuries gap that has darkened this fateful day for our imagination had vanished, like tearing a veil of vapours to let us peak into abyss [...] with greed we plunged our eyes into it; we questioned this brutal vision with the fear that it would vanish" (pp. 36-37) –and about *Christ on Calvary*, he recalled above all the sensation of the "Wandering Jew who is about to leave the painting and begin his wandering course" (p. 40).

Critics did not fail to notice and point out these exhibition devices' immersive nature, their ability to overcome physical and temporal distance alike: one of them spoke of the "impression of entering into evangelical subjects" (Buisson, 1887), and Émile Bergerat (1881), a journalist for the republican newspaper *Le Voltaire*, delved in deeper: "When I am in front of *Christ in the praetorium* (*sic*), I suddenly come out of myself to enter an unknown and absolute centre, of which I have everything to explore, to question, to penetrate, and the very notion of which no one had yet suggested to me".

On the other hand, chronicles of the time reported that the immersive power of Munkácsy-Sedelmeyer images was mostly experienced by women. For instance, a reporter for the *Figaro* observed "Oh de jolies larmes on aurait vu couler si les ténèbres ambiantes l'avaient permis [...] les belles invitées

du peintre, toutes pâles, avaient l'air de sortir d'un rêve à la fois délicieux et poignant" [Oh, we would have seen beautiful tears flow weren't it for the surrounding darkness [...] these women, beautiful guests of the painter, all pale, seemed to emerge from a dream at once delicious and poignant] (Parisis, 1886, p. 2). And Pierre Veron, in the *Monde illustré*, pointed out that the display devices had an effect "sur les nerfs des spectateurs et surtout des spectatrices" [on the nerves of the spectators, and especially women] (1886, p. 98). Even Guy de Maupassant, who revisited the events of the Parisian exhibitions of Munkácsy's Christological cycle under fictional names in his novel *Bel Ami* (1885), imagined a female character, Madame Walter, letting herself be totally subjugated by the illusionism of representation and transported to the 'elsewhere' towards which it pointed, until literally throwing herself towards the canvas one night, with the delirious desire to enter it and live there (2nd part - chap. VII and IX) (Figure 6).

This is no coincidence. At the end of the nineteenth century, the 'feminine' emerged as the notion and category *par excellence* where the 'devotional' and the 'spectatorial' intersect, for it defined the subject considered and treated as the least rational by nature, or even the most naturally inclined to abandon oneself to emotions, sensations and feelings; the most sensitive, and even hyper-sensitive, being, on whom new spectacular forms that relied on perceptual shock (as well as religious devotion and beliefs) had or could have the strongest grip (Berton, 2015; Violi, 2004).

And yet, after years of critical and popular successes, of world tours filled with devotee-spectators (Morgan, 2006) –a spectacular and promotional practice they had in common with the other immersive attractions of the time (Huemer, 2009; Huhtamo, 2013)– Munkácsy's canvases stopped arousing interest, and even pleasure, and rapidly fell into oblivion.

This was not sheerly a matter of general transformations in taste and of the emergence of new artistic and critical sensibilities (symbolism, idealism, etc.) that made the 'theatricality' of Sedelmeyer-Munkácsy's exhibition choices

appear excessive, intrusive, insincere, as a pure commercial operation in search of an 'easy' effect. Beyond these changes, crucially, these choices lost their 'aura' because of their reproducible status and their systematic repetition: the public soon grew used to the means employed, which therefore became boring to them.

And, in any case, late nineteenth century attempts at cancelling physical and temporal distance and making the pictorial divine closer to exhibition goers could not have withstood the "remediation force" of the new devices, technologies and media that were emerging at the turn of the twentieth century, with the ability to bring religious imagery –that is, the objects and characters of traditional devotion– even more convincingly and realistically "spatially and humanly closer".
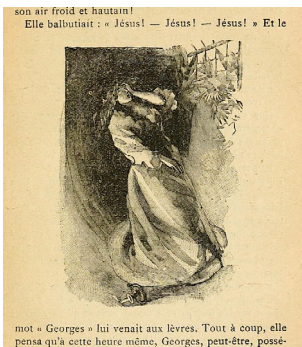

Fig. 6 Ferdinand Bac, illustration for Guy de Maupassant, *Bel Ami*, ed. Paul Ollendorff, 1895, p. 425

CINEMATOGRAPHING POPE LEO XIII AS A "TRAIN RUSHING TOWARD THE AUDIENCE" – VATICAN CITY (ROME), 1898-1900

In 1898, for the first time ever, a film operator entered the Vatican Palace and took moving pictures of Pope Leo XIII. It was the American William K. L. Dickson, who was sent by Thomas Edison with a Mutograph camera on behalf of the company he had founded, the American Mutoscope & Biograph Company (Musser, 1990, pp. 218-221) (Figure 7). This happened again on the occasion of the jubilee year, 1900, on the initiative of Italian operator Giuseppe Filippi –assisted by the Vatican's photographer Francesco de Federicis– who had negotiated with the Lumière brothers and obtained a licence from them to use their *Cinématographe* (Bernardini, 2002, pp. 46-49).

Although the series of documentary *vues* that the two films propose differ in several ways (movement, for instance, follows a mostly horizontal development in the former and a more explicitly perpendicular or almost-perpendicular axis in the latter), both of them show the Pope in a succession of situations which, while they may appear completely

Fig. 7 Photographing his Holiness Pope Leo XIII, in the gardens of the Vatican with the Biograph Camera, *Scientific American*, 1899, January 14, p. 24.

common and trivial to us today, were actually received as 'exceptional' at the time of their production because of the extraordinary 'closeness', the sense of intimacy imparted by the new medium.

The cinematographic image in fact communicated and conveyed the impression of a real, intimate, direct encounter, whose effect Brunetta (1999) did not hesitate to compare to Lumière's *cinématographe*'s famous "shock of the train". Admittedly, the image of the locomotive rushing at full speed toward the crowd of (supposedly) 'primitive' and 'defenceless' spectators (Bottomore, 1999; Loiperdinger, 2004; Sirois-Trahan, 2004) was certainly more "traumatizing than the first appearance of the pope on the screen [...], with his entry on the stage in the carriage and his subsequent apostolic blessing", which "precisely, seemed designed to soothe". Yet it would not have been any less 'exciting', as it carried a sense of a 'real event': "The Pope emerges from the darkness of the Vatican interior with his white robe and smiling face, and is so close to the eye of the camera [...] that it almost makes one want to reach out and touch him" (Brunetta, 1999, p. 552).

Thus, turn-of-the-century audiences were in fact astonished and deeply moved when they saw the person of the Pontiff, whom they had only heard about or, at most, seen represented on postcards or in newspapers, projected "so closely", "almost in the flesh". Chronicles of the time actually testified in amazement to a widespread feeling of closeness and direct contact with the Pope, such that one had the impression of being suddenly admitted –through the cinematographic apparatus– into the very depths of his humanity and his everyday life. An article in a December 1898 issue of the *Montreal Daily Star*, for example, emphasized that the film presented Leo XIII "in his most personal aspect and in his religious character", and summarized the succession of scenes in a series of actions as ordinary in their essence as the tones with which they are described were exceptional: "The moving pictures depict His Holiness walking in the gardens of the Vatican, receiving Pilgrims, talking to his intimates, driving in his landau, smiling, exhibiting interest in those about him, sitting in his favourite seat and bestowing the Papal benediction". And among the "most interesting [moments] of the series", the reporter chose to reproduce the one in which the Pope, ending his walk in the Vatican gardens, "hands his hat to his secretary; he approaches his favourite seat in the garden; he takes off his spectacles; he sits down; he wipes his forehead and says 'It's a warm morning!'" (Anonymous, 1898, December 10).

However, the most important moment, the climax of the film –or rather the climax of almost every single scene of which the film is composed– is when "His Holiness blessed the instrument which had recorded his movements, and through it [...] those who would see the pictures afterwards" (Anonymous, 1898, December 15) (Figure 8).

According to Dickson's own account of the events, it was precisely the indirect, mediated and mediatic possibility of imparting and transmitting his blessing to the many thousands of faithful who would attend the screening –thus, cancelling any distance– that convinced the Pope, after four long

months of negotiations and reflection, to pose for the film in the Vatican gardens (Anonymous, 1898, December 4).

And Dickson's memory is fully confirmed by the words that *Ciné-Journal* attributed to the Pope himself in an article some years later, in which he insisted on this precise aspect: "The images that this man will make will bring my features and my name to the farthest of my children. Though my worn-out body remains captive, my soul will fly with my word across the seas. Now my unknown children from old and new worlds will no longer imagine that the Pope is an image, an icon at the bottom of the temple. They will see me and my hand will rise before the cameraman to bless him and to bless all the peoples over his head" (Bonnefon, 1913, p. 31).

This conception of the cinematographic image as capable of reaching beyond the merely iconological level and achieving a real effect on the audience of spectators/devotees (thus, as 'not-really-an-image' or 'more-than-merely-an-image'), certainly raised questions and ran into unexpected theological, doctrinaire and practical difficulties, leading to real paradoxes and, in some cases, to contradictions. Following the screening of Dickson's film, for example, a debate broke out in the United States to decide whether the papal blessing contained at the end of each scene should be considered valid for the audience (and for 'each' audience), every time it was seen and shown. The Vatican's delegate dismissed the question by resolutely denying such a possibility ("the ability of a moving picture to bestow a blessing is certainly an absurdity" – Anonymous, 1898, December 24), and establishing that the particular circumstances, places and modalities in which those images were projected and received, rather than just the film itself, would eventually legitimize said blessing and make it 'effective' (Anonymous, 1898, July 9; Anonymous, 1898, December 3; Schwain, 2008).

Soon, however, from the real person of the Pope, the process of cinematic remediation, with its power to reduce (if not cancel) the spatial and temporal distances from the viewer, extended to all of Christian imagery and traditional

Fig. 8 William K. L. Dickson, *Pope Leo XIII* (photoprint), American Mutoscope, 1898, Washington DC, Library of Congress – Prints and Photographs Division.

devotional iconography. In 1899, for example, Georges Méliès made a film on the theme of *Christ walking on water* (which is now considered as lost), in which a filmmaking trick –a double exposure effect– was used for the very first time on the figure of the Christ. Thus, as it unfolded as a *trompe-l'oeil* from viewers' point of view (Sirois-Trahan, 2001), the film transformed the evangelical miracle into a scene that seemed to happen at the exact moment and place of its projection (Gizzi, 2018) (Figure 9).

According to its synopsis featured in the American Star Film catalogue (one of the few traces of the film that still exist to this day), it went as follows: "Showing the rolling sea, upon which gradually appears a cloud of mist. From this evolves the figure of Christ, who proceeds to walk on the waves. The rolling movement of the water and the sudden apparition, certainly give a most startling effect, illustrating the biblical miracle of Christ walking on the water" (Méliès, 1908, pp. 12-13).

There is therefore nothing surprising in the fact that, in the late nineteenth century, an American spectator wrote the following –a most explicit testimony to the 'remediating force' over physical and temporal distance that was then at-

tributed to the new cinematic apparatus and to the ways in which it was intertwined with religious belief– about another Christological film, presented as an actual documentary record of a theatrical representation of *Horitz's Passion Play*: "The thought that one is gazing at a mere pictorial representation seems to pass away and in its place comes, somehow or other, the notion that the people seen are real people, and that on the screen there are moving the very men and women who acted the Passion Play last summer in Bohemia forest [...]. Then the players begin to depict the birth and life of Christ, and with this change of subject there comes a new change of mental attitude. So absorbing becomes the interest of the pictures than the onlooker, from merely regarding the figures of real, live people who acted the play in Bohemia, begins to forget all about what was done in Bohemia and henceforth is lost in the thought that the faces and forms before him are the real people who lived in Palestine 2000 years ago, and with their own eyes witnesses the crucifixion of Christ" (Anonymous, January 4).

Fig. 9 *Result of double exposure on positive film. Jesus seems to walk on water*, 1922. From Z. Rollin, Dans le champ de l'opérateur (ou les trucs dévoilés). De la surimpression, *Cinémagazine*, 2(1), 1922, January 6, pp. 17-18.

Fig. 5. — Résultat de la double impression sur pellicule positive. Jésus semble marcher sur l'eau.

CONCLUSIONS

In short, at the turn of the twentieth century, a whole series of psychological, social and cultural conditions came together and allowed for new technological and media forms to emerge, invest religious visual culture (as well as all the other fields of the time's collective imagination), spectacularize it, and bring it closer to the observer.

While this turning point in remediation had originated with the 'photographic' gesture, because the supernatural reached a hitherto unimaginable plane of visualization through it, these photographs never overreached the bounds of their definition as iconic objects. Then came monumental paintings with a religious subject and a strong theatrical charge, associated with 'new' *trompe-l'oeil* exhibition devices ('new' to painting, as they were actually borrowed from pre-existing immersive attractions such as panoramas, dioramas and such). Those framed this act of remediation (of the spectator's physical and mental distance from the divine) more specifically in terms of an empathic experience; the limit of the 'form' remained, because, however realistic, it was still ineluctably pictorial. Therefore, once their means were known and mastered, their effects were all the more weakened as they had been remote from the actual referent all along. The 'cinematic' then seemed to emerge as a synthesis and sublimation of these different technological and media instincts, at the centre of a field of complementary and opposite forces (image/experience; indexical/pictorial, etc.), truly affirming itself as a 'machine' capable of transporting its audience through time and space. A recent exhibition by Antonio Somaini, Eline Grignard and Marie Rebecchi has perfectly illustrated and reconstructed this dynamic (2020).

However, we repeat: if the gradient model we have adopted in this study inevitably, even unintentionally, seems to imply an idea of progression, its usefulness has mainly consisted in functioning as a paradigm and as a tool to think, describe and order our devices according to their "remedial

power"; thus, the deeper reality of them goes beyond any teleology, and the question of their historical relationship remains (and must be reaffirmed as) open to further interpretation and analysis.

The Church's reaction to all this was ambiguous. Faced with the scandal of "pure speculation" and "degradation" to which the image of the Pope was subjected, the Holy See revoked the concession to Dickson and granted all rights on motion pictures of the Pope to the Lumière brothers, with the agreement that they would respect specific projection protocols (Angelucci et al., 2017). The proximity caused by remediation compelled the institution to enforce ever tighter monitoring and control over its image for fear of spontaneous, unorthodox, or illegitimate reactions.

However, those were also the years in which, faced with the challenges of rising positivism, scientism and secularism, authorities in the Vatican tried to win urban populations back through an ever more explicit appeal to the 'heart' –rather than 'reason'– by instituting mostly sentimental devotions and by lending official support to the 'miraculous' in its redefinition as 'marvellous' (Morgan, 2008; Saint-Martin, 2015). This strategic cultural-political agenda to bring the truths of faith psychologically closer to believers through the 'sensitive' and the 'irrational' (or, as other have put it, this "feminisation" of religious devotion –Albert-Llorca, 2002; Langlois, 1984) was particularly driven by Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903), who legitimised and authorised all means to further it.

Thus, while vast swathes of the Church remained suspicious and even hostile towards these practices of mediatic and technological spectacularization (Eugeni & Viganò, 2006), some more 'militant' fringes, such as the French Assumptionist group *Bonne Presse*, used them without restraint because of their capacity to evoke a real presence rather than a representation of their objects. Of particular interest to these groups was the new medium of cinema, which, conceived of as continuing ordinary catoptric practices and remaining faithful to the Christian images tradition, was to

contribute the proximity it created in efforts of propaganda, conviction or conversion (André, 1992; Saint-Martin, 2004). After all, as the Assumptionist review *Le Fascinateur* read in an article recommending the use of moving images for catechetical and pastoral purposes, "*quand dans un film on voit les clous s'enfoncer dans les mains de N.S., personne ne peut retenir ses larmes*" [when the nails are shown being driven into the hands of Our Lord in a film, no one could keep from shedding tears] (Anonymous, 1909, December 1909, p. 388).

Therefore, the new experience of the spectator as it came to be redefined at the turn of the century –which could also be called the 'modern' spectator's experience– intersected and blended ambiguously with the believer's experience, and the latter simultaneously changed into a completely new type of believer. This means Weber's argument of 'disenchantment' can be fully reformulated in terms of a-whole-new-kind of 'enchantment' (Asprem, 2014; Joas, 2017; Josephson-Storm, 2017): one that is generated by the new media and new technologies of vision, technologies of the charmed, enraptured, hallucinated subject (Eugeni, 2002).

REFERENCES

Albert-Llorca, M. (2001). Les apparitions et leur histoire. *Archives de sciences sociales des religions, 46*(116), 53-66.

Albert-Llorca, M. (2002). Les femmes dans les apparitions mariales de l'époque contemporaine. *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire, 15*, 123-134.

Alvarado, C. S., & Evrard, R. (2012). The Psychic Sciences in France: Historial Notes on the Annales Des Sciences Psychiques. *Journal of Scientific Exploration, 26*(1), 117-40.

André, J. & M. (1992). Le rôle des projections lumineuses dans la pastorale catholique française (1895-1914). In R. Cosandey, A. Gaudreault & T. Gunning (Eds.), *Une invention du Diable? Cinéma des premiers temps et religion* (pp. 44-59). Sainte-Foy, QC-Lausanne, CH: Les Presses de l'Université de Laval-Édition Payot.

Angelucci, G., Arnone, G., della Maggiore, G., & Milani, D. (Eds.). (2017). Papi in soggettiva. I pontefici, il cinema, l'immaginario. Roma, IT: Fondazione Ente dello Spettacolo.

Anonymous (1898, January 4). The Passion Play, given here in Boston. *The Boston Herald*, p. 6.

Anonymous (1898, July 9). Mutoscope Pictures of Vatican Life. *Catholic Standard and Times, 3*(32), 1-2.

Anonymous (1898, December 3). 17.000 Pictures of Pope Leo. *Catholic Standard and Times, 4*(1), 1.

Anonymous (1898, December 4). The man who took the Pope's pictures tells how he did it. *St. Louis Republic*, p. 2B.

Anonymous (1898, December 10). Pope Leo's walking in the Vatican Garden. *Montreal Daily Star*, p. 6.

Anonymous (1898, December 15). Moving Picture of the Pope. *New York Tribune*, p. 7.

Anonymous (1898, December 28). The Pope's Pictures: Managers of Mutoscope Make an Absurd Claim, Which Will Injure their Cause if persisted. *Catholic Standard and Times, 4*(4), 2.

Anonymous (1909, December). IV congrès général des Œuvres de conférences et de projections. *Le Fascinateur, 7*(84), 356-388.

Asprem, E. (2014). *The Problem of Disenchantment. Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse, 1900-1939*. Leiden, NL-Boston, MA: Brill.

Bergerat, E. (1881, May 23). Le Voltaire. In G. D. Laverdant (Ed.), *Le Christ devant Pilate – Conférence faite à la société de Saint-Jean - suivie des appréciations des critiques d'art de la presse française* (p. 58). Paris, FR: Dentu.

Bernard, J. (2000). Qu'y a-t-il dans une "crise"? "Problèmes" parallèles dans les mouvements spirituels et les images religieuses de la fin du XIXe siècle en France. In O. Christin & D. Gamboni (Eds.), *Crises de l'image religieuse: de Nicée II à Vatican II* (pp. 213-238). Paris, FR: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme.

Bertin, G. (Ed.). (2010). *Présence de l'invisible: Apparitions Dans l'Ouest Aux XIXe et XXe Siècles: Pontmain, La Fraudais, Pellevoisin, Tilly-Sur-Seulles, Loublande, L'Ile-Bouchard...* Longué-Jumelles, FR: Arsis.

Bernardini, A. (2002). *Il cinema muto italiano. I film dal vero: 1895-1914*. Gemona, IT: La Cineteca del Friuli.

Berton, M. (2015). *Le corps nerveux des spectateurs: Cinéma et sciences du psychisme autour de 1900*. Lausanne, CH-Paris, FR: L'Âge d'Homme.

Bonnefon, J. de (1913, December 18). Le Cinéma devant l'Église Catholique. *Ciné-Journal, 277*, 29-31.

Bottomore, S. (1999). The panicking audience? Early cinema and the 'train effect'. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television 19*, (2), 177-216.

Bottomore, S. (2007). *Filming, faking and propaganda. The origins of the war film 1897-1902* (Unpublished thesis). University of Utrecht.

Bouflet, J., & Boutry, P. (1997). *Un Signe Dans Le Ciel: Les Apparitions de La Vierge*. Paris, FR: B. Grasset.

Brechet, A (1896, May 16). Les Apparitions de Tilly-Sur-Seulles. *Le Monde Illustré*, 344.

Brunetta, G. P. (1999). Divismo, misticismo e spettacolo della politica. In G. P. Brunetta (Ed.), *Storia del cinema mondiale* (vol. I, pp. 527-559). Torino, IT: Einaudi.

Buisson, J. (1887, June 1st). Le Salon de 1881 – M. Munkácsy. *Gazette des Beaux-arts*, p. 487

Careri, G. (2017). *Voli d'amore: Architettura, pittura e scultura nel bel composto di Bernini* (2nd ed.). Milano-Udine, IT: Mimesis.

Carjat, E. (1881, May 19). L'Express. In G. D. Laverdant (Ed.), *Le Christ devant Pilate – Conférence faite à la société de Saint-Jean - suivie des appréciations des critiques d'art de la presse française* (pp. 53-54). Paris, FR: Dentu.

Celier, O. (1992). *Le signe du linceul. Le saint suaire de Turin de la relique à l'image*. Paris, FR: Le Cerf.

Cervia, E. de (1896). *Les Apparitions de Tilly-sur-Seulles*. Montpellier, FR: Hamelin frères.

Chéroux, C., Fischer, A., Apraxine, P., Canguilhem, D., & Schmit, S. (2005). *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult*. New Haven, CT-London, UK: Yale University Press.

Chidester, D. (2005). *Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Chiron, Y. (1995). *Enquête sur les apparitions de la Vierge*. Paris, FR: Perrin Mame.

Christian, W. A. (1996). *Visionaries: the Spanish Republic and the reign of Christ*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Comte, J. (1884, May 3). Le Salon de 1884. *L'Illustration*, p. 283.

Crary, J. (1991). *Techniques of Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Daston, L., & Galison P. (1992). The Image of Objectivity. *Representations, 40*, 81-128.

Didi-Huberman, G., & Repensek, T. (1984). The Index of the Absent Wound (Monograph on a Stain). *October, 29*, 63-81.

Eugeni, R. (2002). *La relazione d'incanto: Studi su cinema e ipnosi*. Milano, IT: Vita e Pensiero.

Eugeni, R., & Viganò, D. (Ed.). (2006). *Attraverso lo schermo. Cinema e cultura cattolica in Italia*. Roma, IT: Fondazione Ente dello Spettacolo.

Freedberg, D. (1989). *The Power of images: Studies in the history and theory of response*. Chicago, IL-London, UK: University of Chicago Press.

Gaillard, L. (1897, June 8). Réouverture de Tilly-Sur-Diable. *Gil Blas*, p. 2.

Gaudreault, A. (2008). *Cinéma et attraction. Pour une nouvelle histoire du cinématographe*. Paris, FR: CNRS.

Geimer, P. (1999). L'autorité de la photographie. Révélations d'un suaire. *Études photographiques*, *4*(6), 67-92.

Gizzi, F. (2018). Il "Christ marchant sur les flots" (1899) di Georges Méliès. La rappresentazione del miracolo evangelico come allucinazione cinematografica. *Immagine. Note di Storia del cinema*, *18*, 55-89.

Gleizes, D., & Reynaud, D. (2017). *Machines à voir: Pour une histoire du regard instrumenté, XVIIe-XIXe siècles*. Lyon, FR: Presses Universitaires de Lyon.

Grojnowski, D. (2012). *Photographie et croyance*. Paris, FR: Éditions de la Différence.

Guise-Castelnuovo, A. (2013). Photographier le miracle: Lourdes, au tournant du XXe siècle. *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, *58*(162), 161-182.

Harris, R. (1999). *Lourdes. Body and Spirit in the Secular Age*. London, UK: Allen Lane-Penguin Press.

Hill, J. E., & Schwartz, V. R. (Eds.). (2015). *Getting the picture. The visual culture of the News*. London, UK-New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic.

Huemer, C. (2004). Charles Sedelmeyer Theatricality: Art and Speculation in Late 19th-Century Paris. In J. Bakoš (Ed.), *Artwork through the Market: The Past and the Present* (pp. 109-124). Bratislava, SK: VEDA.

Huemer, C. (2009). Crossing Thresholds: The Hybrid Identity of Late Nineteenth-Century Art Dealers. In J. Anderson (Ed.), *Crossing Cultures: Conflict-Migration-Convergence* (pp. 1007-1101). Melbourne/Carlton, AUS: Miegunyah Press.

Huhtamo, E. (2013). *Illusions in motion: Media archaeology of the moving panorama and related spectacles*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Jarenski, S. (2015). *Immersive words. Mass Media, Visuality and American Literature, 1839-1893*. Tuscaloosa, AL: Alabama University Press.

Joas, H. (2017). *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*. Berlin, DE: Suhrkamp.

Josephson-Storm, J. (2017). *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*. Chicago, IL-London, UK: The University of Chicago Press.

Kaenel, P. (2008). Le corps du Christ entre imaginaires photographique et graphique au XXe siècle: autour du suaire de Turin. *Études de Lettres*, *2*, 7-28.

Kaufman, S. K. (2004). *Consuming Vision. Mass Culture and the Lourdes Shrine*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Kessler, F., & Lenk, S. (2018). What is a Fake Image?. In S. Curtis, P. Gauthier, T. Gunning & J. Yumibe (Eds.), *The Image in Early Cinema. Form and Material*. Bloomington, IND: Indiana University Press.

Kovács, A. Z. (2004). *Mihály Munkácsy et la critique française* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Paris-Sorbonne Paris IV.

L'Espinasse-Langeac, Marquis de. (1901). *Historique Des Apparitions de Tilly-Sur-Seules: Récits d'un Témoin*. Paris, FR: Dentu.

Lachapelle, S. (2011). *Investigating the Supernatural. From Spiritism and Occultism to Psychical Research and Metapsychics in France, 1853-1931.* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Langlois, C. (1984). *Le catholicisme au féminin. Les congrégations françaises à supérieure générale au XIXe siècle.* Paris, FR: Cerf.

Langlois, C. (1991). Féminisation Du Catholicisme. In J. Le Goff & R. Rémond (Eds.), *Histoire de La France Religieuse* (t. 3, pp. 292-307). Paris, FR: éditions du Seuil.

Langlois, C. (1994). La photographie comme preuve, entre médecine et religion. *Histoire des sciences médicales, 28*(4), 325-336.

Langlois, C. (1998). Photographier Des Saintes: De Bernadette Soubirous à Thérèse de Lisieux. In M. Ménard & A. Duprat (Eds.), *Histoire, Images, Imaginaires (Fin XVe Siècle-Début XXe Siècle)* (pp. 261-272). Le Mans, FR: Université du Maine.

La Sizeranne, R. (1890). *L'Art religieux est-il mort? Étude sur la peinture religieuse contemporaine à l'Exposition universelle de 1889 et spécialement sur les trois maîtres Hébert, Uhde, Munkácsy.* Lyon, FR: E. Vitte.

Loiperdinger, M. (2004). Lumière's arrival of a train: Cinema's founding myth. *The Moving Image, 4*(1), 89-118.

Mainardi, P. (1993). *The End of the Salon: Art and the State in the Early Third Republic.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Maupassant, G. de (1885). *Bel-Ami.* Paris, FR: Victor Havard.

Méliès, G. (1908). *Complete Catalogue of Genuine and Original "Star" Films,* New York, NY: George Méliès.

Menozzi, D. (1995). *La Chiesa e le immagini: I testi fondamentali sulle arti figurative dalle origini ai giorni nostri.* Cinisello Balsamo, IT: San Paolo.

Méry, G. (1896). *La voyante de la rue de Paradis et les apparitions de Tilly-sur-Seulles, 4e fascicule.* Paris, FR: Dentu.

Morgan, D. (2006). Seeing Protestant Icons: The Popular Reception of Visual Media in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century America. In K. Cooper & J. Gregory (Eds.), *Elite and Popular Religion* (pp. 406-428). Woodbridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer.

Morgan, D. (2008). *The Sacred Heart of Jesus: The visual evolution of a devotion.* Amsterdam, NL: Amsterdam University Press.

Musser, C. (1990). *The emergence of cinema: The American screen to 1907.* New York, NY : C. Scribner's sons.

Parisis. (1886, February 12). La vie parisienne — Le tableau chantant. *Le Figaro,* pp. 1-2.

Pinotti, A. (2005). Un'immagine alla mano. Note per una genealogia dello spettatore tattile. In A. Somaini (Ed.), *Il luogo dello spettatore. Forme dello sguardo nella cultura delle immagini* (pp. 119-140). Milano, IT: Vita e Pensiero.

Pinotti, A. (2017). Self-Negating Images: Towards An-Iconology. *Proceedings, 1*(9), 856.

Poivert, M. (2014). Notes sur l'image performée. Paradigme réprouvé de l'histoire de la photographie ?. In J. Ramos & L. Pouy (Eds.), *Le Tableau vivant ou L'image performée* (pp. 215-231). Paris, FR: INHA-Mare&Martin.

Rykner, A. (2013). De la croix à la scène, disposer du sacré. Tableau vivant et photograhie mise en scène. *Bullettin du Centre de Recherche Français à Jérusalem*, 24, 1-16.

Saint-Martin, I. (2004). Sermons lumineux et projections dans les églises, 1884-1912. *Revue des sciences religieuses*, 78(3), 381-400.

Saint-Martin, I. (2015). Approches du merveilleux dans la culture catholique du XIXe siècle. *Romantisme*, 170, 23-34.

Schwain, K. (2008). *Signs of Grace: Religion and American Art in the Gilded Age*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Sérié, P. (2014). Rendre le tableau vivant. "Désempailler" la peinture d'histoire autour de 1880. In J. Ramos & L. Pouy (Eds.), L*e tableau vivant ou L'image performée* (pp. 199-213). Paris, FR: Éditions Mare&Martin/INHA.

Sirois-Trahan, J.-P. (2001). Trompe-l'œil et réception spectatorielle du cinéma des premiers temps: l'exemple du dispositif de représentation scénique chez Méliès. In L. Quaresima & L. Vichi (Eds.), *La decima musa. Il cinema e le altre arti/The tenth Muse. Cinema and other arts* (pp. 221-241). Udine, IT: Forum.

Sirois-Trahan, J.-P. (2004). Mythes et limites du train-qui-fonce-sur-les spectateurs. In V. Innocenti & V. Re (Eds.), *Limina: le soglie del film/film's thresholds* (pp. 203-216). Udine, IT: Forum.

Snyder, J. (2016). Photographie, ontologie, analogie, compulsion. *Études photographiques*, 20(34), 4-18.

Somaini, A., Grignard, E., & Rebecchi, M. (2020). *Time Machine. Cinematic Temporalities*. Milano, IT: Skira.

Stoichita, V. I. (1995). *Visionary experience in the golden age of Spanish art*. London, UK: Reaktion Books.

TOUT-PARIS. (1886, February 10). Bloc note parisien – fantaisie de peintre. *Le Gaulois*, p. 1.

U. B. (1881, May 26). Korrespondenz. *Kunstchronik*, p. 530.

Veron, P. (1886, February 13). Courrier de Paris. *Le Monde illustré*, p. 98.

Violi, A. (2004). *Il teatro dei nervi: Fantasmi del moderno da Mesmer a Charcot*. Milano, IT: Mondadori.