Cinematography

**Edipi**

The most recent, most strange and wonderful application of electricity is the cine-phonograph (‘**cinematofonografo**’), which, for now, however, is only in America. Rather, is only in the workshop of Mr. Edison. And I will speak about that further on.

But those of us in old Europe have stayed with the **cinematograph**, which, even though the science of it is two or three years old, is only just now beginning to be of interest to the **masses**.

Do you know what a **cinematograph** is? The photographic reproduction of the ‘fleeting moment’ through the succession of hundreds of thousands of operations.

You embrace a pretty young woman. Then, 800 instantaneous photographs gather the different gradations of your embrace in an orderly fashion. Then a machine sets the numerous photographs into vertiginous movement. A continuous series of sparks illuminate them. An electric reflector slams them up against a canvas. A magnifying lens brings the very small dimensions of the photograph to almost natural proportions. ...And you present a spectacle of the intensity of your affection to the cultured audience and to the illustrious garrison...

This is the cinematograph, that is to say, a perfected kinetoscope.

But, in the ecstasy of your amorous delirium, did you utter any phrases? ‘I love you, I adore you...and you? And you?...Do you love me?...Tell me you love me?...’

Well, an indiscreet phonograph gathers the words and the sound of your voice, and then repeats them while the scene unfolds...

And this is the **cine-phonograph**.

If I explained well, and you have carefully followed what I’ve been saying, you must agree that the widespread diffusion of such a discovery might bring about strange moral and social upheavals.

Meanwhile, listen to what my friend **Yorickson** has written:’

Among the scenes presented by the **cinematograph**, there was one that was particularly interesting: a pretty young lady who was undressing to go to bed. She took off her dress, her petticoat, her corset...she started to loosen her elegant pantaloons...then suddenly the light goes out, and the rest of the action is taken away from the viewers’ sight. I asked myself,
then, the reason for this premature darkness, which took away from us the spectacle of so many delightful details. And it came to me that morality was shutting off the light at that moment because there were ladies in the audience!

Indeed, a curious reason! I would have understood in a similar circumstance a certain concern for male modesty. I, for example, was beginning to be concerned for my innocence! But what could the ladies have seen that they didn't already know by heart?

Mysteries of photographic morality!...

The observation of this elegant and lively writer on morality is witty: but do you know how many other observations it could generate?

Listen. Without wanting to compete with Pierre Bayle, who has written an entire volume about obscenities in order to defend his *Dictionnaire historique* (*Historical Dictionary*), from which—the Walloon Church wanted to suppress all the obscenities and 'dirty' expressions, I hope to affirm and demonstrate in a few words that obscenity and modesty do not exist if not through a curious convention or through a natural separation from grace and gentility.2

I have argued that a woman is a more curious and careful admirer of her own graces than masculine ones. If women are dancing a cancan at the theatre—so long as they dance with refinement, of course—almost a majority of the audience will be women. What drives away the lovely female audience is, instead, men’s excitement from this abundance of attractiveness: when a man gets carried away by the ‘exhibitions’ of the womanly semi-nudes of the stage and applauds with cries that seem like bellowing of wild beasts, then women get upset, blush and turn away.

In the first act of *Divorçons* (*Let’s Get a Divorce*), Cyprienne says some things that are very bold.3 But, she says them with a grace that is so exquisite, and with phrases and words that are so refined, and so eminently comical that the ladies go crazy for these scenes—scenes in which these audacious statements are so openly, and so gracefully, defended.

But, try to have Cyprienne De Prunelles’s theories expressed by some farmer’s wife, or by a ‘manufacturer’ of popular dramas, or—God save us all—by a legal reporter from some ‘daily political-ARTISTIC(?!)-administrative newspaper’?!!

In every church, there are baby Jesuses that are portrayed, let’s say, *au naturel*, and no one even thinks of being scandalized.
Only the young ladies ‘who experience the embraces of the horsemen and the stabs of a dagger’ have fiery words...if there happens to be a handsome bronze putto (‘cherub’) who exposes a bit of his penis...

That is what Giosuè Carducci observed. And he put it into verse.

In this way, the childish perfection of the forms of Michelangelo’s David, and the exquisite beauty of those of Cellini’s Perseus, and the powerful drama that emanates from those two figures, save...the ‘situation’. And it will never be forgivable that the esteemed mayor of Florence—for I don’t know what strange reason—wanted their nudity defiled, and in this case truly obscenely, with a fig leaf.

Let’s go back to the cinematograph, which I have briefly described above. Barnum has offered Sarah Bernhardt $100,000 to let herself be recorded in some of his creations with the cine-phonograph. The great tragic actress refused. And one can see why—with the cine-phonograph, she would have been competing with herself!

Then, in America they have thought of using the cinematograph for advertising.

In his most recent article in the La Revue des deux mondes (Revue of Two Worlds), Maurice Talmeyr spoke about the poster, the king of the walls, at the end of this century. The art of illustrated advertising is a new art to which famous painters are dedicating themselves; they are even inspired by sacred things.

Puvis de Chavannes painted a St. Geneviève for a sign in a laundry!...And if only you knew what the talented painters of Fiametta were preparing!

But, getting back to the subject, can you imagine what heights the art of advertising will reach now with the CINE-PHONOGRAP?H?

Can you imagine having Tina di Lorenzo, who radiates beauty and who has a golden voice, recommending Giacosa, the baker’s sandwiches—which she goes crazy for?4

And the captivating Virginia Reiter encouraging people to buy Piedmontese truffles and the lavish Sauterne wine?

Zacconi, disguised as Judas, advertising nails, or rope, or rods, or to some other thing related to the Christ...of Bovio?5

[Ermete] Novelli dressed as Othello, and Tommaso Salvini as Iago, who recommend an excellent soap that can even wash away stains...of the conscience?

Cesare Rossi signed on by a maker of silk MUFFLERS?

And Giovanni Emanuel recommending the Jungfrau or some other mountain?
Or Eduardo Boutet demonstrating the need to buy dictionaries of the Italian language?

And so on and so on, up until Cammillo [sic] Antona Traversi, advertising all the... Rozeno of Italy?6

Oh, male readers, can you imagine? And you, female readers?

What do you say?

Immoral?...Ah, I understand. You’re afraid that the use of the cinephonograph will become so universal that it will do away with other forms of entertainment. But really, this is a victory for morality: what are your husbands doing right now?

They are going to a Café-Chantant—they get carried away by the half-concealed and half-revealed graces of the young singers, and then...they take the chanteuse to dinner.

When the cine phonograph has done away with the singer, what would you like your little husband to take to dinner instead? The batteries, or the storage battery? Or the camera?

If he has followed the performance very eagerly, he will instead take his little wife to a cabinet particulier ...

An eminently conjugal solution, just like in Let’s Get a Divorce.

So, in this case, the collodion and the silver nitrate will be powerful creators of marital bliss!

Going back to morality, I confirm and maintain that, on the whole, obscenity is in the mind of the person who is watching and listening, rather than in the thing that is shown or said.

Indeed, the same subject can be at one point a galeotto and at another be revolting.7

But because for the materialist school the state of the mind is always subject to that of the body, one must take into consideration whether the person listening and watching is fasting or is sated.

A beautiful woman, like a beautiful cut of beef, can awaken an irresistible appetite. But after a big meal!?

So, to conclude, whoever exhibits an ordinary cinematograph should always take care to ask the audience how long it has been since they have eaten!...

‘Cinematografo’, Fiammetta, 1/23 (4 October 1896), pp. 2–3. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.
Notes

1. [Editors' note. Pseudonym of the writer and journalist from Livorno, Umberto Ferrigni (1866–1932).]
2. [Editors' note. Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) was a French philosopher, writer, and encyclopaedia editor. Walloon refers to the Calvinist Church in the Netherlands. See Bayle, Dictionnaire historique.]
3. [Editors' note. Sardou and Najac. Divorçons!]
4. [Editors' note. The author is referring to Caffè Giacosa, a famous café in Florence frequented by painters and writers, and known for its truffled sandwiches and as the bar where the negroni cocktail was invented.]
5. [Editors' note. Giovanni Bovio (1837–1903) was an Italian philosopher, writer of among other works, the drama Cristo alla festa who founded the Partito Repubblicano Italiano ('Italian Republican Party') in 1895.]
6. [Editors' note. Antona-Traversi, Le Rozeno.]
7. [Editors' note. Reference to Canto V of Dante's Inferno in which the reading of a tale of seduction pleases the readers and induces them become lovers. The 'galeotto' is a seductive prompt.]