



## 15<sup>th</sup> International Seminar on the Origins and History of Cinema

# Electricity and its impact on modern visual and auditory culture

<b>DATES:</b>	Thursday 5 <sup>th</sup> and Friday 6 <sup>th</sup> of November, 2026
<b>FORMAT:</b>	In-person <sup>1</sup>
<b>ORGANISED BY:</b>	Museum of Cinema - Tomàs Mallol Collection (Girona); Department of History and Art History of the University of Girona (UdG); Research Group on the Origins of Cinema (GROC); and the Research Project of the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities entitled: “ <i>The impact of electricity on turn-of-the-century cinema and photography: from transformations of vision to the animism of objects (1885-1919)</i> ” (ELECTROCINE) PID2024-161149NB-I00

### 1/ CALL FOR PAPERS

During the film, *Passion* (1982), Jean-Luc Godard states: “The film camera, in the end, is always a witness to light.” This statement prompts us to reflect on the importance of light in artistic creation: not only the beauty of natural light, but also the means and methods of lighting that have shaped the history of cinema and, more broadly, that of visual culture.

While light has been essential in the development of cinema, we must also consider the importance of electricity in constructing a cinematic aesthetic. And when we consider electricity, we inevitably arrive at the conclusion that the origins of cinema are firmly rooted in the era of the expansion of this technology, not only in terms of it being symbolic of scientific progress, but also for its mythical quality, which generated all kinds of esoteric speculation. From this perspective, we believe there is a fundamental connection between the development of visual culture during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the development of electricity as a phenomenon capable of altering our vision and perception of the world.

Electricity emerged as a socially visible technology between the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This coincided with the birth of cinema, the expansion of medicine after the discovery of X-rays, and other mass culture phenomena stemming from the Second Industrial Revolution. It is no surprise that the Edison Factory – founded by Thomas Alva Edison – played a fundamental role in the study of electricity, sound, and cinema.

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<sup>1</sup> The organization reserves the right to accept online communications made at the request of participants (see section *In-person Seminar*)



Edison's Kinetoscope, with which he initially sought to integrate image and sound, underwent remarkable progress thanks to electricity.

However, what interests us in this seminar is not so much the technological advances marked by such devices, but rather the 'electric culture' that took shape between the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the emergence of the avant-garde. This electric culture can be understood as a cultural and social utopia, which generated a collective imaginary in line with the new society that was emerging, driven by technologies such as cinema, electricity, changes in the illustrated press, electrical appliances, the automobile, and the early days of aviation, among others.

The seminar will focus on electricity as a transformative element in the visual culture of the time, with particular emphasis on its role in the development of cinema. The study period ranges from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to 1920, with the aim of exploring, in a subsequent seminar in 2028, the impact of electricity on the artistic avant-garde and, in particular, on cinema.

## **2/ IN-PERSON SEMINAR**

The 15<sup>th</sup> edition of the seminar will be in person, and will take place at the University of Girona's Faculty of Arts.

However, in order to encourage greater international impact, some papers may be presented online, in those cases where travel is impossible for reasons that are justified, and that authors request, and justify, so doing upon being informed of our acceptance of their proposal.

## **3/ PROPOSAL FOR PAPERS**

### **3.1 SUBMISSION OF ABSTRACTS FOR THE SELECTION OF PAPERS**

#### **THEME A: Electricity and its impact on modern visual and auditory culture**

##### **– The introduction of electricity in everyday life.**

Street lighting in cities, the presence of light in homes and its relationship with household objects, and communication systems (the telegraph, the telephone, etc.). Transforming the means of transport, the impact of the tram on urban life, and new forms of perception.

##### **– The electric imaginary in literature and the Arts.**

From *Frankenstein* to *The Future Eve* [*L'Ève future*], the dystopias involving electricity, and its representation in early cinema.

### – Esotericism and electricity.

Superstitions relating to electricity: animism and its impact on the visual thinking of the period. Medicine's fascination with electricity, whereby the doctrine of "animal magnetism" – or *mesmerism* – postulated the existence of an invisible fluid responsible for the functioning of the human body.

### – Visual perception and the physiology of body movement.

The circulation of blood, respiration, the heartbeat, and gestures – both animal and human – gave rise to a belief in a universal energy in constant oscillation, that was the source of sound, light, and electrical waves. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, French psychologists even analysed certain transformations of the nervous system in relation to the different "oscillations" of energy circulating through living beings – subsequently considered to be thermodynamic machines. How did electricity modify the conception of medicine and the visibility of the body?

### – The impact and presence of electricity at the World Fairs.

The World Fairs, such as Barcelona 1888, Paris 1889 and 1900, Chicago 1893, St. Louis 1904, and San Francisco 1915, showcased electricity as a symbol of modernity.

### – Electricity as an element of safety and an element of death.

Although celebrated as a sign of progress and urban well-being, electricity was also used as a lethal instrument: in the United States, the electric chair was used for executions. A few years after the first human execution by this method, Edison filmed the famous execution of Topsy the elephant.

### – Electricity in the cinematic imagery of early cinema.

*The Electric Hotel*, by Segundo de Chomón, is a short satirical film in which electricity is the source of the animistic nature of objects. How did other productions of the period reflect the myth of the new electric culture?

### – The impact of electricity on the perceptual rhythms of urban life.

*Slapstick comedy* was a genre that could express the modern individual's bewilderment at the electrical transformation of everyday life, while melodrama began to feature lamps and other electrical devices in domestic settings.

### – Electricity and scientific research on sound, and their applications in cinema.

In the early history of sound film, electricity played a crucial role in sound recording, the development of radio, and the search for methods to amplify sound in movie theatres.

### – The use of electricity in filmmaking.

The pioneers of cinema initially worked with natural light; however, at a certain point, electric lighting, using incandescent arc lamps, gave rise to more comfortable indoor filming. Another relevant aspect would be to determine when lamps and electrical lighting devices appeared within the films of the period, leading to the demise of the glass ceilings typical of studios of the time. Another line of investigation might investigate when electricity was incorporated into projection systems.

### – The transmission of images and sounds using electricity.

The development of radio was part of the electric culture, along with the first attempts to transmit images towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This electrical culture would eventually lead to examples of television prototypes.



### – Electricity and its impact on women's lives.

The origins of the *flâneuse*, or female *flâneur*, are related to the beginnings of electricity in society, and new methods of street lighting. The emergence of *Kitchen Comedies* and the *Nasty Women* characters in slapstick began to challenge traditional relationships with domestic objects.

### Theme B: pre-cinema and early cinema in general

- Presentation of ongoing work in the field of pre-cinema or cinema before 1915.

## 3.2 PROPOSAL SUBMISSION FORMAT

- LENGTH: Abstract of the proposed paper (maximum of 60 lines) outlining the current state of the research topic, the bibliographic references, the primary, secondary, or unpublished documentary sources used in the research, and the novelty of the contribution.
- SUBMISSION DEADLINE: **March 31, 2026.**
- ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON AUTHOR: Name, address, telephone number, email address.
- SUBMISSION METHOD: by email to:  
institutestudis@museudelcinema.cat
- THE SEMINAR'S SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE:  
The members of the Scientific Committee are as follows: Àngel Quintana (UdG), J.E. Monterde (UB-Universitat de Barcelona), Sandro Machetti (UdL-Universitat de Lleida), Bernardo Riego (UniCan-Universidad de Cantabria), Iolanda Ribas (*Filmoteca de Catalunya*), María Tortajada (UNIL-Université de Lausanne), Martin Barnier (Université Lyon2), M. Magdalena Brotons (UIB- *U. de les Illes Balears*), Laurent Guido (*Université. Sorbonne Nouvelle*), Carolina Martínez (UdG), Alan Salvadó (UdG) and Jordi Pons (*Museu del Cinema*). The committee shall assess the proposed papers and inform applicants individually of acceptance or otherwise, **before May 9, 2026.**

## 4/ FORMAL REQUIREMENTS FOR ACCEPTED SUBMISSIONS

- MAXIMUM LENGTH: 10 pages (18,000 characters including spaces).
- LANGUAGES: Catalan, Spanish or English. (**There will be no simultaneous translation**; The texts of the conferences will be distributed.)
- ILLUSTRATIONS: A maximum of 6 images, digital media.
- SUBMISSION DEADLINE: **September 15, 2026.**



- SUBMISSION TYPE: Duly proofread, by email to:  
[institutestudis@museudelcinema.cat](mailto:institutestudis@museudelcinema.cat)
- ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:
  - Name, address, telephone number, and email address.
  - A brief curriculum vitae of the author (5 lines), and a brief summary of the text content (5 lines).
- PUBLICATION: The papers presented during the 15<sup>th</sup> edition of the Seminar will be published both in print and digitally on the website [www.museudelcinema.cat](http://www.museudelcinema.cat), along with the presentations, during 2027, provided they have been defended by the author during the seminar. The scientific committee reserves the right to exclude from publication any papers that do not meet a sufficient standard of quality.

Any further enquiries about the Seminar may be submitted to:

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Girona, December 2025