

‘Bad taste of the town’: Hogarth satirised eighteenth-century theatre, but the public wanted spectacle

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William Hogarth, Alexander Pope and other social commentators of their age believed there was an intellectual decline in the cultural output of the eighteenth century. Hogarth demonstrated his derision of ‘lowbrow’ entertainment in his satirical engraving Masquerades and Opera, and subtitled ‘The Bad Taste of the Town.’¹ For Pope, dullness was a pervasive force in British culture cruelly depicted in his mock epic ‘The Dunciad.’² Yet this popular culture was often underpinned by some of the Enlightenment’s distinctly ‘highbrow’ philosophical and scientific advances such as the magic lantern, which used sophisticated optical technologies. Using Hogarth’s engraving and an image of a magic lantern, typical of Paul de Philpsthäl’s sensational show Phantasmagoria of 1803, as artefacts, this paper seeks to demonstrate that in the name of cultural purity, satirical criticism of the theatre, ignored significant advances in natural philosophy of the long eighteenth century.

And every year be duller than the last.
Till raised from booths, to theatre, to court,
Her seat imperial Dulness shall transport,
Already opera prepares the way.³

Alexander Pope (1688-1744) in *The Dunciad* satirically portrays the goddess Dulness [sic] reigning over eighteenth-century culture, and Joel Blair suggests that William Hogarth believed ‘[t]he entertainment was either vulgar or overly sophisticated’.⁴ Satire was telling the public that culture and theatrical entertainment in particular was in decline. Hogarth and Pope obviously found plenty to mock and deride with new trends and cultural imports differing in style and content from older English theatrical traditions, such as Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. However, change was almost inevitable. Brander Matthews suggests Puritans had broken off theatrical traditions by closing places of entertainment, and ‘when playhouses opened again after the Restoration, the managers had to gratify new likings which king and courtiers had brought back with them from France’.⁵ The satirists are suggesting there is cultural decline, and the biting humour would be lost if there was not some form of prejudice against, in this case, the new, spectacular,

¹ Print entitled *Masquerades and Operas. Burlington-gate*. Also known as *The Bad Taste of the Town*. Engraving by William Hogarth (1679-1764) first published 1724. George Speaight Punch & Judy Collection. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1159950/the-bad-taste-of-the-prints-hogarth-william/> [accessed: 10 January 2020].

² Alexander Pope, ‘The Dunciad in Four Books’ in *Selected Poetry* (Oxford, Oxford World’s Classics, 1996), pp. 129-173.

³ Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad, Third Book*, 298-301.

⁴ Joel Blair, ‘Hogarth’s Apologia’, *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 25, no. 3 (1984), p. 265.

⁵ Brander Matthews, ‘The Drama in the 18th Century’, *The development of the drama* (New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1912), pp. 263-264.

and economically lucrative, supposedly damaging intellectual content of theatre. However, by making a wider study of what was underpinning much of the new popular theatre one can see it employs sophisticated technology utilising the latest thinking. To understand Hogarth's point of view this article will look at his 1724 engraving *Masquerade and Opera* supported by a playbill of Paul de Philipsthal's *Phantasmagoria* of the latter part of the long eighteenth century. A second artefact, the magic lantern, will be discussed as intrinsic to spectacular and Gothic inspired shows, such as the *Phantasmagoria*. These artefacts illustrate an enjoyment of spectacle by the contemporary theatregoers, and also identifies the technically advanced practices underlying the entertainments. The second part of the discussion will examine some of the Enlightenment thinking and application of theoretical natural philosophy, in particular Sir Isaac Newton's work on mechanics and optics that underpins theatre technology like automata and magic lanterns. The aim is to demonstrate intellectual advancements were alive and well, and therefore difficult to argue that deterioration illustrated through satire was a good gauge of eighteenth-century cultural change.

William Hogarth's 1724 engraving *Masquerade and Opera* (Fig.1) tells a story of cultural decline and foolishness through a fictitious London street scene, with buildings framing the picture and structuring the visual narrative. The street forms an irregular triangle in which most of the human action takes place. This comprises a number of separate images or tableaux, which focusses Hogarth's satirical allusions. Prominent in the centre of the foreground is a hawker shouting 'waste paper for shops' with a wheelbarrow full of works by renowned literary artists such as Shakespeare, Dryden, and Ben Johnson. By performing a close reading of the picture one can identify the scrapping of traditional English artistic culture forms a type of visual punchline.



Masquerades and Operas. Burlington-gate.

Figure 1: Hogarth, *Masquerade and Operas*, 1724, Ink on paper, 14.8 × 18.9 cm (Collection: Victoria and Albert Museum, Reference S.952-2010; © Victoria and Albert Museum, London)

The story is told using architecture and its perspectives, particularly through the lines of the brickwork. These create a vanishing point and focus behind the large banner hanging from the building on the right-hand side of the street. The banner is entitled 'Opera' and the picture shows a number of actors arranged with the leading lady raking in coins from two gentlemen as they say, 'Pray Accept 8000l'. The Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum suggests in its object summary the castrato Senisino is depicted in the banner,⁶ and was paid a fabulous annual salary of £2,000 to partake in the new craze for performing Italian opera.⁷ This is poking fun at the recently imported Italian Opera. The anti-Italian theme is supported by the 'The Academy of Arts', which the V&A concludes is the façade of Burlington House, with statues of *Michelangelo* and *Raphael* dominated by the contemporary architect *William Kent*.⁸ Burlington House was

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/0-9/18th-century-opera/> [accessed: 10 January 2020].

⁸ Ibid.

designed by William Kent who studied in Italy and brought back to England a Palladian neo-classical style.⁹ Hogarth disliked the idea of importing and creating false Italian styles, as Joel Blair suggests Hogarth thought ‘foreign taste leads to imitation of an unnatural style’.¹⁰ The money and import of foreign taste can be seen as a particular irritant for Hogarth.

Hogarth highlights his antipathy for the money circulating in the London theatre business by drawing attention to two eighteenth-century impresarios. On the left side of the picture, Hogarth positions a man leaning out of the window next to the banner with an ‘H’ on the ledge. The V&A suggest this to be the ‘Swiss entrepreneur John James Heidegger (1666-1749), who promoted masquerades and balls at the King’s Theatre from 1710 onwards’.¹¹ Below the banner is a crowd of people being roped into the ‘Masquerade’ by a jester and a devil who holds a money bag inscribed with ‘1000’. Heidegger was famous for making money; Judith Milhous states profits of £300-500 were possible from the notorious upper-class fancy dress masquerade balls.¹² On the right-hand side of the picture another crowd is entering a theatre advertising ‘Dr Faustus is here’, with an armed guard keeping order at the door. The V&A describes it is the John Rich (1692-1761) production of *Harlequin Faustus* that opened at the Lincolns Inn Theatre in 1723.¹³ Phyllis Dircks refers to John Rich as a ‘pantomimist and theatre manager’ suggesting his 1723 production of *The Necromancer, or Harlequin Doctor Faustus* at Lincoln’s Inn Fields was in response to John Thurmond’s *Harlequin Doctor Faustus* at Drury Lane¹⁴. All of the *Faustus* pantomimes were very popular and is possibly why Hogarth included the armed guard, as Al Coppola describes:

[T]he London public had gone absolutely mad for Harlequin Faustus, and the two London patent theaters mounted rival productions of farcical afterpieces loosely inspired by Christopher Marlowe’s tragical history.¹⁵

By choosing Rich and *Faustus*, and Heidegger and *Masquerades*, Hogarth combines two references to ‘cultural decline’. There is also an Italian link between these shows and Burlington House because the pantomimes contained the *Commedia dell’arte* characters such as, Pierrot, Punch, and Scaramouch.¹⁶

⁹ John Harris, ‘Kent, William (bap. 1686, d. 1748), painter, architect, and designer of gardens and interior furnishings’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) [accessed 24 January 2020].

¹⁰ Joel Blair, ‘Hogarth’s Apologia’, p. 266.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Judith Milhous, ‘Heidegger, Johann Jakob (1666–1749), impresario’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) [accessed: 10 January 2020].

¹³ <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1159950/the-bad-taste-of-the-prints-hogarth-william/> [accessed: 10 January 2020].

¹⁴ Phyllis Dircks, ‘Rich, John (1692–1761), pantomimist and theatre manager’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) [accessed 24 January 2020].

¹⁵ Coppola, Al, ‘The Spectacle of Experiment: The Politics of Virtuoso Satire in the 1670s’, *The Theater of Experiment: Staging Natural Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford University Press, Oxford Scholarship Online 2016)

¹⁶ Listed in the *Dramatis Personae* of Thurmond, John, and John Rich, *An exact description of the two fam’d entertainments of Harlequin Doctor Faustus; with the grand masque of the beathen deities...* (London, 1724), p. 3.

Hogarth is clearly layering the satirical slights and possibly suggesting decline is now embedded in the culture.

Another form of import to the London theatre scene is represented in the engraving by a sign next to the central banner showing Faux's 'dexterity of hand'. The V&A interprets this as referring to Isaac Fawkes (d.1731) the sleight of hand magician.¹⁷ Helen Stoddart describes how Fawkes in the early 1700s performed at booths in the Southwark and Bartholomew fairs, and later moved into permanent theatres such as the Haymarket. She also suggests that his successes were not only based on traditional 'magic' tricks but also the use of complex mechanisms.¹⁸ Stoddart goes on to state that Isaak Fawkes's sophisticated mechanical devices were made by his collaborator, the clock and automata maker, Christopher Pinchbeck (1690-1732).¹⁹ Pinchbeck was a true 'man of the Enlightenment' as he was not only a renowned clock and automata maker but he invented an alloy of copper and zinc that resembled gold, and is still known as Pinchbeck gold.²⁰ Hogarth does not directly allude to these automata but mechanical entertainments are specifically advertised for later shows like de Philipsthal's *Phantasmagoria*. However, the content of Hogarth's engraving certainly portrays an antipathy to London's cultural life in the early eighteenth century and is specifically deemed 'bad taste' through its alternative title *The Bad Taste of the Town*. The phrase is explained to the viewer by a separate adjoining plate that appeared in the 1724 *Daily Courant* with a verse 'Could new dumb Faustus to reform the age, | Conjure up Shakespeare's or Ben Johnson's ghost, | They'd blush for shame to see the English stage | Debauched by fool'ries at such great a cost'.²¹ This gives no room for doubt that Hogarth thought the scrapping of traditional literary works with their replacement by poor 'cultural imports' was retrograde with the allusions of magical conjuring, pantomime fooleries, and excessive money making are all lampooned as low-brow and untasteful.

The satire and derision of the early part of the eighteenth century did not seem to detract from the continuing popularity of visual entertainments striving for sensation. In 1802-3 Paul de Philipsthal (1785-1828) brought to London his *Phantasmagoria*, which was a show originally produced on continental Europe.²² A playbill (Fig.2) illustrates the mysterious and magical nature of the performance, with de

¹⁷ <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1159950/the-bad-taste-of-the-prints-hogarth-william/> [accessed: 20 January 2020].

¹⁸ Stoddart, Helen, 'Fawkes, Isaac (d. 1731), magician', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), Online, [accessed 20 January 2020].

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Clarke, Michael. "pinchbeck." In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), Online, [accessed: 20 January 2020].

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https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1417088&page=4&partId=1&subject=16778 [accessed: 10 January 2020].

²² Mervyn Heard, 'Paul de Philipstahl and the Phantasmagoria in England, Scotland and Ireland: part one. Boo!' in *The new magic lantern journal*, volume 8 number 1 (October 1996), p. 4.

Philipsthal dressed as a magician conjuring a ghostly woman within a magic circle²³ and seems to fall firmly within Hogarth's subject for satire.



Figure 2: Paul de Philipsthal (1803) *Phantasmagoria Playbill*, article image (Reproduced under compliance with JSTOR's Terms and Conditions)²⁴

The associated programme of the *Phantasmagoria* (Fig.3) expands on the playbill's words 'Optical Illusions and Mechanical Arts'. The programme highlights mechanical devices such as 'the mechanical peacock' and 'self-impelled windmill' similar to the mechanical devices created by Pinchbeck and used by Isaac Fawkes. The programme deliberately promotes in the optical part of the show that it 'will introduce the phantoms or apparitions of the dead or absent'. Although clearly advertised as 'optical' the programme is avoiding informing the audience it is a trick or produced via a machine.

²³ Description of de Philipsthal's act in Mannoni, Laurent, and Ben Brewster, 'The Phantasmagoria', *Film History*, vol. 8, no. 4 (1996), p. 395.

²⁴ X. Theodore Barber, 'Phantasmagorical Wonders: The Magic Lantern Ghost Show in Nineteenth-Century America', *Film History* 3, no. 2 (1989), pp. 73-86, (p. 79) www.jstor.org/stable/3814933 [accessed 24 January 2020].

Under the Sanction of His Majesty's Royal Letters Patent.

PHANTASMAGORIA,

THIS and every EVENING till further Notice,
AT THE
LYCEUM, STRAND.

As the Advertisement of various Exhibitions under the above Title, may possibly mislead the unsuspecting Part of the Public (and particularly Strangers from the Country) in their Opinion of the ORIGINAL PHANTASMAGORIA, M. DE PHILIPSTHAL, the Inventor, begs Leave to state that they have no Connexion whatever with his Performances. The utmost Efforts of Imitators have not been able to produce the Effect intended; and he is too grateful for the liberal Encouragement he has received in the Metropolis, not to caution the Public against those spurious Copies, which, failing of the Perfection they assume, can only disgust and disappoint the Spectators.

M. DE PHILIPSTHAL

Will have the Honour to EXHIBIT (as usual) his

Optical Illusions and Mechanical Pieces of Art.

At the LYCEUM, and at no other Place of Exhibition in London.

SELECT PARTIES may be accommodated with a MORNING REPRESENTATION at any appointed Hour, on sending timely Notice.

To prevent Mistakes, the Public are requested to Notice, that the PHANTASMAGORIA is on the Left-hand, on the Ground Floor, and the EGYPTIANA on the Right-hand, up Stairs.

The OPTICAL PART of the EXHIBITION

Will introduce the PHANTOMS or APPEARANCES of the DEAD or ABSENT, in a way more completely illusive than has ever been offered to the Eye in a public Theatre, as the Objects freely originate in the Air, and unfold themselves under various Forms and Sizes, such as Imagination alone has hitherto painted them, occasionally assuming the Figure and most perfect Resemblance of the Heroes and other distinguished Characters of past and present Times.

This SPECTROLOGY, which professes to expose the Practices of artful Impostors and pretended Exorcists, and to open the Eyes of those who still foster an absurd Belief in GHOSTS or DISEMBODIED SPIRITS, will, it is presumed, afford also to the Spectator an interesting and pleasing Entertainment; and in order to render these Apparitions more interesting, they will be introduced during the Progress of a tremendous Thunder Storm, accompanied with vivid Lightning, Hail, Wind, &c.

The MECHANICAL PIECES of ART

Include the following principal Objects, a more detailed Account of which will be given during their Exhibition: viz.

Two elegant ROPE DANCERS, the one, representing a Spaniard nearly Six Feet high, will display several astonishing Feats on the Rope, mark the Time of the Music with a small Whistle, smoke his Pipe, &c.—The other, called Pajazzo, being the Figure of a young sprightly Boy, will surpass the former in Skill and Agility.

The INGENIOUS SELF-DEFENDING CHEST—The superior Excellence and Utility of this Piece of Mechanism is, that the Proprietor has always a Safe-guard against Depredators; for the concealed Battery of Four Pieces of Artillery only appears and discharges itself when a Stranger tries to force open the Chest.—This has been acknowledged by several Professional Men to be a Master-piece of Mechanism, and may with equal Advantage be applied to the Protection of Property in Counting-houses, Post Chaises, &c.

The MECHANICAL PEACOCK, which so exactly imitates the Actions of that stately Bird, that it has frequently been thought Alive. It eats, drinks, &c. at command, unfolds its Tail in a brilliant Circle, and in every respect seems endowed with an intuitive Power of attending to the Thoughts of the Company.

The BEAUTIFUL COSSACK, enclosed in a small Box, opens it when ordered, and presents herself to the Spectators in a black Habit; which, as soon as desired, she changes with astonishing Quickness into a most elegant Gala Dress, compliments the Company, and dances after the Manner of the Cossacks; she will also resolve different Questions. &c. &c.

The SELF-IMPELLED WINDMILL, which is put in Motion, or stands still by the most momentary Signal from the Spectators, and in a Manner which apparently does away the Idea of all Mechanical Agency.

The whole to conclude with a superb OPTICAL and MECHANICAL FIRE-WORK, replete with a Variety of brilliant and fanciful Changes.

↓ Doors to be opened at SEVEN o'Clock, the Commencement at EIGHT.

BOXES, 4s.—PIT, 2s.

YOUNG, Printer, Br. w's Street, Covent Garden.

Figure.3: Paul de Philipsthal (1803) *Phantasmagoria Programme*, book image
(Reproduced under compliance with the Project Gutenberg licence.)²⁵

In 1802, Philipsthal tried to patent what he called 'meritorious discoveries' related to his *Phantasmagoria* but the register entry states 'every person conversant in the very first elements of science will easily perceive, that these meritorious discoveries, as they are called, depend upon the simple and well-known principle of the magic lanthorn'.²⁶ The descriptions of eighteenth-century popular entertainments showed a continuation of the long tradition of making use of technology to improve performances. The rise of

²⁵ Image taken from Houdini, Harry, *The Unmasking of Robert-Houdin*. (New York, 1909), pp. 102-3.

²⁶ "New Patents Lately Enrolled" in *The British Register*, June 1802, p. 488.

early pantomime's popularity in the 1700s was fuelled by its simple and sensational value, as 'its emphasis was on spectacle – with clever tricks, rapid scene changes, lavish sets and costumes – and in this respect the role of the 'magician', whether Harlequin or Faustus, was paramount'.²⁷ The 'clever tricks' in early pantomime were supported by sophisticated mechanical engineering such as 'hinged flaps of canvas painted on both sides that switched to reveal new settings; pivots, flying systems, and traps in the stage'.²⁸ These feats of engineering were not new and had origins in the Greek theatre in particular the 'deus ex machina' where gods would appear via the use of a crane or other device to solve an otherwise insurmountable narrative problem.²⁹ The Romans introduced traps in the stage to enable devils and other residents from hell to suddenly appear on stage.³⁰ Although there is a long history of stage technology to support the narrative of the play eighteenth-century impresarios were exploiting technical advances, and trying to own them, because of their popular and sensational effects. The idea that sensation was superseding narrative content instead of supporting it could point to Hogarth's view that contemporary theatre was killing off the more traditional aspects of plays, which were seen as more literary in content.

The popularity of sensationalism and the ability for shows such as *Phantasmagoria* to conjure ghosts and demonstrate supernatural powers reflected the late eighteenth century fashion for Gothic Romanticism. Gothic became a popular cultural phenomenon particularly in the realm of literature which Carol Davidson suggests was 'especially vilified as vulgar'.³¹ However, this cultural trend also took hold in the theatre, as Jeffrey Cox suggests after 1789 'the Gothic would become a truly powerful force on the London stage'.³² In a similar way pantomime was trading on spectacle and sensation. Jeffrey Cox adds the Gothic theatre incorporated shock and wonder but interestingly it was 'arguably the first form to capitalize fully on evolving lighting techniques, [and] new stage effects'.³³ This growth in what could be termed anti-enlightenment supernatural, illusional, and 'vulgar' entertainments is following the principles of Hogarth's illustrated cultural decline.

However, the sensational entertainments were facilitated by the enlightenment's technical and scientific advances. These scientific practices were noticed by Alexander Pope who, while deriding the dullness in eighteenth-century art, was given to believing that the ability to engage with natural philosophy was a God given gift, and therefore, not a base and vulgar activity, as he highlights in *The Dunciad*:

²⁷ See website: *Chalemie: early music, dance & commedia*, <http://www.chalemie.co.uk/Faustus.htm> [accessed: 10 January 2020].

²⁸ <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/victorian-pantomime> [accessed: 10 January 2020].

²⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/art/deus-ex-machina> [accessed: 10 January 2020].

³⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/art/stage-machinery> [accessed: 10 January 2020].

³¹ Carol Margaret Davison, *History of the Gothic: Gothic Literature 1764-1824* (University of Wales Press, 2009), p. 2.

³² Jeffrey N Cox, 'English Gothic Theatre.' Chapter. In *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, edited by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 127.

³³ *Ibid.*

But oh! With one, immortal one dispense,
The source of Newton's light of Bacon's sense!
Content, each emanation of his fires
That beams on earth, each virtue he inspires,
Each art he prompts, each charm he can create.

Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad*, Book the Third, 217-221.

It can be seen that Pope was an admirer of Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727), highlighted in *The Dunciad*, and supported in his unused epitaph for Newton's tomb 'Nature and Nature's Laws lay hid in Night | God said, 'Let Newton be' and all was light.'³⁴ Pope was using light as the biblical reference but also illustrating how Newton significantly progressed the natural philosophy of light. This points to the fact that Pope could see there was intellectual advancement happening in the eighteenth century and not just 'dullness' that was epitomised by spectacular shows such as the pantomimes, and *Phantasmagoria*.

Newton had been researching and lecturing on light since the 1670s and finally published 'Opticks' in 1704,³⁵ In addition, Newton's work on mechanics in *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* first published in Latin 1687 and later in English in 1726, was bringing a new awareness to the laws of motion and engineering. These advances in science, which were still circulating in the realms of the academicians and nobility, were slowly advancing into a wider arena through public lectures. However, advances were more visible through the creation of scientific instruments such as telescopes and orrery, which were used for the enquiry into the nature of the universe.³⁶ The orrery were essentially clockwork devices showing planetary positions and movements. One of the most advanced was the 1733 'Grand Orrery' made by a mathematical instrument maker Thomas Wright of Fleet Street for King George II, which showed the movements of all the known planets.³⁷ John Brooke suggests 'Newton's philosophy of nature is commonly seen as the apotheosis of the clockwork universe',³⁸ and is being directly modelled during the eighteenth century by master craftsmen. One can see that the same fascination for such ingenious mechanical models helping to support the popularity of the automatons displayed by Fawkes and de Philipsthal.

³⁴ <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/sir-isaac-newton> [accessed 20 February 2020].

³⁵ Shapiro discusses Newton's work on light in Buchwald, Jed Z., Robert Fox, and Alan E. Shapiro. "Newton's Optics." In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Physics*. (Oxford University Press, 2013, Oxford Handbooks Online, Online Publication 2017), [accessed 20 February 2020].

³⁶ See The British Museum's Enlightenment Gallery, London. or Silke Ackermann and Jane Wess "Between antiquarianism and experiment" in *Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century* Kim Sloan (ed), (The British Museum Press, 2003), pp. 150-7.

³⁷ As described by The London Science Museum's description of *George II Grand Orrery*. <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co537727/george-iiis-grand-orrery-orrery-planetary-motion-model> [accessed; 20 January 2020]

³⁸ John Hedley Brooke, 'Divine Providence in the Clockwork Universe.' In *Abraham's Dice: Chance and Providence in the Monotheistic Traditions*, edited by Karl W. Giberson. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2016), [accessed 10 February 2020].

The spectacular visual ‘Gothic’ elements of the eighteenth-century performances were facilitated through the use of advancements in optics and the magic lantern. In 1668 Robert Hooke suggested: ‘It [a magic lantern] produces Effects not only very delightful, but to such as know the contrivance, very wonderful; so that Spectators, not well versed in Opticks,... would readily believe they were supernatural and miraculous’.³⁹ Fig.4 shows an eighteenth-century magic lantern as used in phantasmagoria performances, and Fig.5 shows a simple diagram of the internal components of a magic lantern similar in design to the phantasmagoria lantern.



Figure.4: Phantasmagoria magic lantern, late eighteenth century, material: glass, iron and tin plated, Museum inventory number 1916-7. (The Science Museum Group Collection Online, released under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 Licence)⁴⁰

³⁹ Robert Hooke in Charles Hutton et al, *The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, Number 38, (London, 1810), p. 269

⁴⁰ <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co3785> [accessed 3 January 2020].

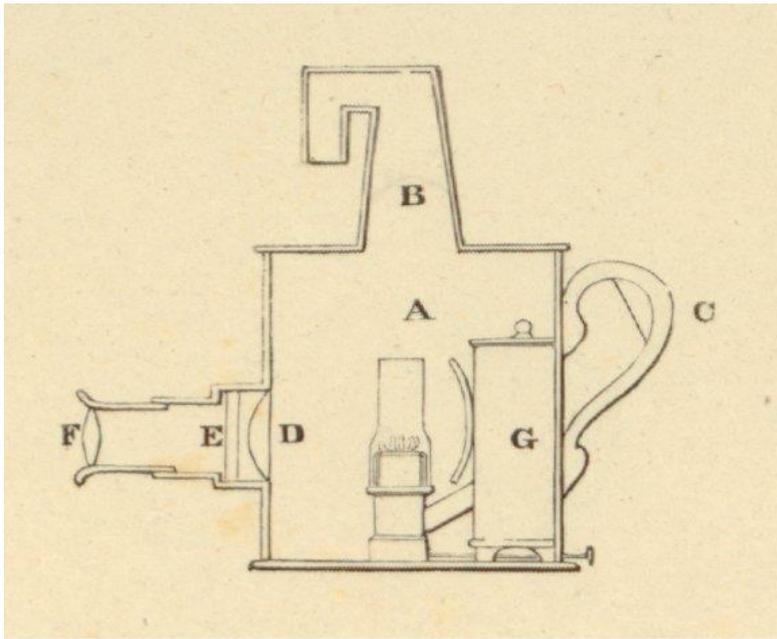


Figure.5: *Vignette of magic lantern*, (c.1862) magazine image of wood-engraving in *Every Boy's Book* (London: 1843-c.1862, Routledge & Sons)

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The main scientific element of the magic lantern is the ability to condense the light from a source e.g. a lamp ('A' in Fig.5) by a mirror ('G' in Fig.5) and lenses ('D' and 'E' in Fig.5). It was the work of natural philosophers like Newton and craftsmen like Wright and Pinchbeck that enabled science to be transformed into technology such as automata, orrery, and magic lanterns for sensational entertainments.

Magic lanterns were capable of producing spectacular effects for audiences without the object being obvious to an uneducated audience. The playbill shows a ghostly woman appearing in front of the magician, with no explanation of how this apparition is conjured. Mervyn Heard describes an eyewitness account that the 'appearance was formed by a magic lanthorn upon a thin cloth or screen'.⁴¹ There is faint evidence in the playbill image to the existence of a gauze like cloth or screen surrounding the ghost. Paul de Philipsthal wanted to exploit the technology in the cause of entertainment as his attempted patent of his 'meritorious discoveries' shows. The patent registrar added to de Philipsthal's submission that 'at the Lyceum no attempt has been made to explain to the less enlightened part of the audience, the principles upon which the dilusions [sic] are founded, or the apparatus with which the exhibitions are made'.⁴² This illustrates that spectacular entertainments were designed to thrill and surprise and not to educate and

⁴¹ Mervyn Heard, 'Paul de Philipstahl and the Phantasmagoria in England, Scotland and Ireland: part one. Boo!' in *The new magic lantern journal*, volume 8 number 1 (October 1996), p. 4.

⁴² 'New Patents Lately Enrolled' in *The British Register*, (June 1802), p. 488.

improve, which falls inside Hogarth's and Popes satirical sphere, as there is no attempt to explain the world, just exploit the audiences enjoyment of the visual and Gothic sublime.

Hogarth's street scene *Bad Taste of the Town* and Paul de Philipsthal's *Phantasmagoria* illustrate a fashion for the sensational. This produced, what the satirists saw as entertainments that were less intellectual than traditional English plays. There seemed to be a consensus among the literary and artistic elite of a perceived decline in the intellectual standards in eighteenth-century entertainment. However, there were hints by Pope and evidence from Enlightenment thinkers that all was not lost in the realm of intellectual endeavour. The publication of experiments and public lectures in Natural Philosophy were becoming more popular but still concentrated in the more rarefied atmosphere of the wealthy and academic. The consequence of publication and widening experience of science allowed a number of entrepreneurs and artisans to take advantage of the mysterious nature of some of the phenomena. This was mainly achieved by engaging practical engineering expertise gained in clock and scientific instrument making and turning it into usable theatre technology. The effects of this theatre technology can be evidenced by the use of the magic lantern in transforming images and light into sensational and exiting experiences. The eighteenth-century entertainments may have appeared to be in 'bad taste' as pantomimes and Gothic shows demonstrated intellectual decline to some, but advancements in science and technology were demonstrating an intellectual vitality in being able to produce them.

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