Abstract

This thesis examines the history of magic in Western culture, particularly focusing upon the contemporary period in which magic is performed within a context of secular entertainment such as that of cinema.

It begins with a conceptual discussion of magic that defines the term through the cultural attributions of its performance, namely, that magic is a descriptive term used to make sense of unknown or ambiguous phenomena. This thesis then goes on to ground this assertion historically, by suggesting that magic is a culturally contingent term that has been defined through two main phases. These are the periods of Spiritual Magic, a pre-Enlightenment context in which magic was an efficacious principle of causality, and that of Entertainment Magic, in which the belief that once gave magic its efficacious powers is eliminated by the secular turn of culture and magical performance becomes a form of entertainment.

Entertainment Magic relies upon the conjuring of magical appearances and experiences, or effects and affects, through illusion. This thesis examines one strand of this illusion making: that of screen displays which instrumentally construct projected visual illusions as magical appearances. These instruments, which include the Camera Obscura, Magic Lantern, Phantasmagoria and the Kinetoscope, provide the technical legacies of illusion making and magical performance that come to inform the cinematic medium as the apotheosis of this form of visual illusion making.

The final section of this thesis examines the films of Georges Méliès to explore cinema as a medium of magic that is comprised of effects and affects. The trick film demonstrates that cinema’s magical effects are part instrumental, based upon technological special effects that create magic through visual illusions, and part narratival, for it is a narrative context that gives meaning to illusions and encourages the spectator to suspend their disbelief in illusory effects. Further, however, the status of cinema as a magical entertainment is also based upon its ability to affect the spectator, to conjure the conditions of magical experiences through the mediums imaginary appearances.

This is to certify that the thesis comprises only my original work except where indicated in the preface; due acknowledgment has been made in the text to all other material used; the thesis is 30,000 words in length inclusive of footnotes, but exclusive of tables, maps, appendices and bibliography

Gala Hingston
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Introduction

Defining Magic

This thesis discusses the concept of magic and magical performance across the history of Western culture. The nomenclature of ‘spirits to screen’ that rests in its title articulates the historical continuum of magical performance that this thesis presents; namely that magic can be thought to be expressed through two distinct phases one in which magical appearances are manifested by way of spirits, supernatural beings or numinous spiritual powers, and a latter era in which magical appearances are manifested through the conjuring of entertaining illusions, in particular illusions that are centered around technologies of the screen. These phases will be outlined as the eras of a pre-Enlightenment Spiritual Magic and post-Enlightenment context of Entertainment Magic in turn. By way of introduction, these eras are distinguished not only temporally, but by their performative aims, which distinguish between “magic as entertainment and magic as efficacy.” (Mangan: 2007: xxiii)

To some degree it would be equally apt to describe the history of magic as one that transitions from spirits into the stage, rather than between spirits and screens. This is because the era of Entertainment Magic is notable for its several centuries of stage based performances of magic. These encompassed entertainments based upon large scale magical illusions, but also prestidigitation or sleight of hand trickery, animal magnetism or hypnosis, spiritual mediumship and even seemingly mundane displays of curious technologies, all of which, were made magical through their extraordinary appearances and their affective ability to delight and amaze. Whether on a large theatrical stage, the exhibition hall or in the parlors of middleclass homes, the magic of the stage reached its “Guilded Age” of popularity in the nineteenth century in which such stage performances became a “major part of the urban entertainment landscape.” (Cook, 2001: 26) While such stage based magical performances may not be as popular in a contemporary context they nevertheless persist as part of the entertainment landscape. This can be seen through the bevy of performers who reinvent these traditions for a modern audience, including
well known stage illusionists such as Siegfried and Roy, Criss Angel and David Copperfield.

While this thesis does not intend to overlook the associations of magic and the stage, it focuses upon a specific aspect of illusion making that has been present in staged performances of Entertainment Magic throughout this tradition: the forms of illusion making that have been achieved through screen technologies. These include performances such as the Phantasmagoria, a display that created illusions of animated ghosts and phantoms that was made possible through the use of apparatuses of light projection that remained a popular magical entertainment across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is such display and projection technologies that form the basis of screen based magical entertainments, whether they be in the guise of the Phantasmagoria or in the context most familiar to the contemporary spectator, that of the magical displays of the cinema screen.

The reason why magic must be thought of as a form that is closely associated with the screen is not founded exclusively upon the manner in which such technologies have constituted primary modes of illusion making in magical performances over time, but because the screen is the source of magic’s tenacious persistence in cultural entertainments. Cinema represents the primary example through which the popularity of screen based illusions has grown unabatedly. Unlike the stage based illusions - the gilt of which has tarnished since its nineteenth century popularity - cinema is a form of screen illusion that has allowed magic to continually flourish in the context of contemporary entertainment. Mechanistically, cinema is a trick that begins by capturing a diffusion of light and shade onto a strip of film. Transmogrified by the processes of production, this same celluloid is then again projected as a diffusion of light and shadow, only now in a different place and time, presented on a magnificently large scale many times the size of the original image. It is an illusion that the audience loves and one that has been repeated for over a century. Constantly engaging, then, in a mode of performative illusion, the transformations of cinema over time have at their heart a mode of the magic trick. While not often theorized as a form of magical performance, cinema conforms to this mode in a
more general sense insomuch as it creates magical performances through the extraordinary appearances of its screen and the affective ability of the medium to create magical experiences for the spectator.

This thesis will examine such technical and performative continuities by demonstrating how cinema belongs to an evolutionary continuum of screen based magic, which includes not only cinema and the Phantasmagoria, but also technologies such as the Magic Lantern and the Kinetoscope, as apparatuses which sought to create magic through projected screen illusions. It is possible to contend that Cinema represents a pinnacle in this form of screen based illusion making. This is not because cinematic illusions are more sophisticated than the illusions created by the medium's technological predecessors. Such increasing refinement in the appearance of illusions is a natural consequence of the evolutionary nature of technological developments but does not necessitate that cinema is a more successful illusion than the Magic Lantern, for instance, as they both represent successful magical entertainments. Cinema represents a height of this tradition not only because of the scale of the illusions that it produces, but because of the scale of the medium itself, insomuch as cinema has become a dominant loci for the experience of magic and entertainment.

While you can concretize an understanding of magic through the conditions of its performance over time, such as in the observation of the material shifts between the performance of magic a context of Spiritual or Entertainment Magic (an observation that will make up much of the critical analysis of this thesis), it must also be acknowledged that magic is also a conceptual determination. This is because magic is not just a mode of performance but is a descriptive category, that of the magical, that is culturally ascribed to a diverse array of phenomena. This introduction has been titled defining magic because it seeks not only to define the issues that will be discussed by this thesis but because it works to articulate a definition of magic that takes into account these conceptual aspects of the term.
There is a certain difficulty in discussing magic, simply, that magic engages all the curiosity and intangibility of the mysterious and the indefiniablity of the numinous. That is the trick - magic is illusion, evasion, and deception - when we think it is caught, a turn of the hand reveals that our prestidigitations in fact hold only air. Thus the beginning of this discussion begins with the observation, by both academic and colloquial account, that magic is qualitatively linked to the idea of the unknown. Because one of the essential properties of magic is that it is unknown or mysterious, it appears to be a banner term for that which defies explicit definition. As objects that are described as magical are almost innumerable in their miscellany, comprised of often conflicting material and immaterial objects and beliefs, this thesis seeks first for a way to discuss magic as a bounded whole. It does so by adapting Simon During’s concept of the “magical domain,” (2002: 39) as the cultural assemblage that is seen to collect these various magical phenomena, which gain a relation of similarity because the magical domain furnishes them with a descriptive categorization as magical. But this categorization of magic also brings with it the valence of the unknown and as such the magical domain is recapitulated, like magic, as a category for the unknown.

It will be shown that magic may be thought of not just as a descriptive category, one which describes the unknown, but is also a liminal determination that mediates between dialectical cultural concepts. This can be seen in the way in which magic is seen to help separate the known from the unknown; however magic mediates between a range of cultural dialectics. By consequence magic is often apprehended as being ambiguous because magic is an attribution that is not given by any inherent magical properties, but is rather given through a phenomena’s liminal status. Magic is thus given form through those very dialectical concepts between which it falls. This tendency is examined in relation to the range of ways in which magic has been described as a liminal or dialectically ambiguous form in academic literature. While this ambiguity contributes partly to the difficulty of defining magic, it also offers a form of productive uncertainty which is essential to magic because ambiguity is an attribute in which enchantment, fascination, curiosity and wonder may germinate, while also furnishing magic with a vital capacity for deception.
Moving on from the more conceptual aspects of magic, this introduction follows on to investigate the performance and function of magic in culture from a historical perspective. In the process of defining magic, this periodization of magic allows for the observation that the dialectics and relational intersections that work to bound magic are historically contingent. The historical account of magic developed by this thesis suggests that magic can be divided into two main phases of cultural performance. As has been introduced previously, there is a distinct delineation that occurs between Spiritual Magic, which predominates before Enlightenment, and that of Entertainment Magic which distinguishes most performances of magic in the time since. While these terms will be brought to light in the continuation of this chapter, they introduce the key components of magical performance: Spiritual Magic utilizes conjuring to create real effects, being an efficacious magic that generates transformation in the world, while Entertainment Magic conjures effects in order to create illusions of transformation, however both are capable of creating affects or experiences of the magical.

**Magic as Unknown**

This section introduces the notion that magic is, or holds, some essential property of the unknown. It is taken for granted that magic relies on the unknown in the context of entertainment for the creation of illusions requires hidden objects and movements, unknown or invisible actions that create tricks of appearance or transformation. Thus magic is only able to deceive or entertain only insomuch as it can remain unknown. However magic does not just rely on the unknown in this material sense, but also is inhered with the quality of the unknown on a conceptual level. By way of example, Edward Claflin provides us with the appropriately numinous reflection that: “we know that whenever someone explores the unknown, he walks the borders of the imprecise boundary called magic.”(1977: 123) The real imprecision, in Claflin’s account and many like it, rests in the sense that this quality of the unknown is an element that is accepted rightly, but uncritically, as a key aspect of magic. The task of this section is to

1 A similar description of magic through its inherent unknown qualities can be found in the work of Simon During who suggests that magic can exist “only in so far as it remains unknowable.” (2002: 39)
demonstrate how articulating and understanding this attribution of the unknown can contribute to defining magic and the components of its performance.

There is a sense in theoretical accounts of magic that while this unknown aspect is apparent, it is difficult to isolate or articulate. Perhaps this is because the notion of the unknown is itself formless or elusive. However it is also attributable to the manner in which the unknown aspects of magic are attributed to the equally indeterminate associations of magic with mystery, the supernatural, the invisible. This thesis directly challenges the notion that the unknown resists articulation, rather, it posits that defining and discussing magic requires a theoretical orientation towards the unknown as an energetic property of magic. This thesis takes the view that the unknown constitutes a productive energy that contributes to magic in three economic forms: it calls these energies the intangible, the invisible and the interrogative.

Initially, the unknown describes the intangible energies that make up magic. These intangible energies encompass the forms of magic that engage with supernatural causes. It is the intangible energies of these unknown causes that make magic performance numinously efficacious. The source of this intangible energy, or even power, comes not only from supernatural sources, but has a more tangible origin in the energy contributed to magic by belief – the cultural source that makes magic imaginatively efficacious. Magic also relies on invisible energies - the tangible but hidden aspects of technical trickery - which are unknown because they go unseen. It is these invisible energies that make up magical illusions, illusions that become and remain magical by remaining unknown and by defying perception. The invisible energy of magic redoubles the sense of magic as unknown, because not only does trickery rely on hidden machinations, but magic also seems to make the real invisible, the truth of the world becoming something that is also unsure, mysterious or hidden. Finally, magic’s unknown elements also rely on a form of interrogative energy centred upon the spectator experiencing magic. The unknown is described as an interrogative energy here because magic always defies perception in a manner that encourages an active questioning of both the trick and of reality. The interrogation of magic tricks proper is based upon questions
of mechanics: typically, what is in the hat and how did the rabbit get there. But there is a
second questioning of reality and whether or not the experience of magic is real. Illusions
are experienced for all intents and purposes as real - but this authentic experience is felt
in spite of the frame of trickery and illusion in which they occur. Because the experience
of magic can only provide ambiguous answers, ones that suggest that magical experience
is both real and unreal, magic remains unknown. Magic offers for the spectator, then, an
ambiguous experience of truth and reality, their interrogations of this experience can be
answered only through individual belief. Questioning and belief are the chimerical
aspects that magical performances can experientially excite, but never fully command.

In describing the unknown as an energetic property of magic, which transacts in
intangible, invisible and interrogative forms, the unknown is transformed into the
intelligible. Overcoming then the critical uncertainties that surround descriptions of
magic as unknown, such a system of categorization allows us to understand magic’s more
elusive qualities and examine their relation to the range of cultural objects, performances,
functions and beliefs that make up the more immediately tangible aspects of magic.

**Magic as a Cultural Category or Magical Domain**

This analysis of magic now turns to those very objects, performances, functions
and beliefs that are both conceptualized and categorized as magical. Such an analysis
must begin with the quite evident observation that magic appears to describe an
innumerable number of phenomena. This was partly established in the opening
paragraphs of this introduction which showed how magic is a term that could is
applicable to entertainments such as parlour magic or motion pictures while also being a
qualitatively different form of performance that occurred in a spiritual context. A similar
diversity is observed when the term magic is associated with its taxonomy in popular
culture, in which magic encompasses an entire array of ghosts and gods, apparitions and
amputations, devils and disappearances, marvels and magicians, rabbits and hats. These
images and associations span the gambit from secular to sacred, magic describing
simultaneously the popular entertainments of technical deception and illusion as well as
the efficacious spiritual acts of shamanism or witchcraft. What becomes clear from this
tertiary summary is that the criteria that make something magic are not discrete: it is a quality that may be attributed to objects, beings, experiences, aesthetics or encounters and, further, it may describe contradictory ones at that.

One of the key challenges of defining magic, then, is to develop an approach that can allow these popular understandings of magic, in all their variety, to be assessed as a critical category. This thesis develops a way of classifying this range of phenomena through Simon During’s concept of the “magical domain,” (2002: 39) which will be introduced shortly. Further however, this chapter also concerns itself with the notion that there must be some criteria by which objects become labelled as magic or magical. In order to understand the apparently eclectic array of magical phenomena it must be determined also how the label of magic is one that is not only diverse, but is culturally functional, describing the relational boundaries of the known and unknown. During introduces the term of the “magical domain” within the concluding passages of his introduction in *Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic*. This placement is significant - the chapter having just outlined During’s own account of the history of magic - because the magical domain emerges here as an umbrella term under which the diverse array of phenomena that have been attributed as magical over time fit. In this way the magical domain becomes a term that collectively describes the artefacts and performances that have been considered, currently or in the past, as magic or magical. Allowing this grouping gives both During and this thesis a way to describe the sum of popular magic; the term the magical domain uniting the diverse ephemera of magic performance into a single category.

An immediate criticism of the categorization offered by the magical domain is founded insomuch as it seems to unite seemingly disparate elements, for instance the polarities of performances of Spiritual and Entertainment Magic as equivalent under the banner of magic. One commonality found between performances of Spiritual and Entertainment Magic could said to be found in the performative figure of the magician. In the performances of Spiritual Magic the magician is encompassed by the figure of the shaman or witchdoctor whose magical practice was based upon ritual: magic performed
by way of spells, incantations, or symbolic actions that were seen to create efficacious magical effects in the natural world. Through this magical performance this spiritual figure was seen to “[accomplish] things beyond the power of normal human beings.” (Mauss, 2001: 42) This traditional magical practitioner appears to be a distant ancestor to today’s entertainment magician or conjurer, who is a showman rather than a shaman. The term showman is particularly apt because the entertainment magician creates illusions which produce the appearances of effects alone. The entertainment magician produces spectacles of effect rather than those of efficacious transformation and as such the quality of this performance of magic, both in terms of its aims and effects, differs greatly from that of the spiritual magician. However, it must be observed that the magical domain is not a matter of determining either equivalence or hierarchy, and as such it does not praise or criticize either form of magician or magical practice, but rather neutrally positions magic as a descriptive cultural attribution. Understanding the phenomena found in this domain relies on observing that their magical status is not given by any inalienable magical property rather magic has been a critical term utilized to describe different objects and performances by culture over time. It follows then that magic is a property that can be endowed upon nearly anything - it merely needs to satisfy the criteria that make a phenomena magic in any period.

To understand the criteria that make a phenomenon magical or part of the magical domain, we may return to During and the discussion that the magical domain is not only a collective category but is also a “barrier… regulated in terms of human desires and meanings.” (2002: 37) This statement highlights the notion of magic as a culturally given attribution but also suggests that the magical domain is a form of boundary, or at least, a bounded category. In examining the attributes of objects usually marked as magical, During notes that the objects that make up the magical domain commonly defy the limitations of time, space, life and causality (2002: 38). By summarising these features During comes to the conclusion that magic is the quality that is attributed to anything that does not fit within common human experience or understanding. Magic becomes a descriptive term for, and the magical domain becomes the category for, that which is “radically ‘other’ to ordinary life” or “unknowable.” (During, 2002: 39)
To return to the concept of magic as unknown momentarily it seems that magic is a term which absorbs the unknown but is not the unknown per se. Magic instead works to describe the unknown, magic being a quality which is attributed to anything which does not fit within the normal boundaries of human understanding. Magic is a term that communicates an ambiguity or uncertainty, then, because it describes a convergence of the unknown and the known. When the limits of the known becomes no longer clear or contained the resulting unknown or unfamiliar experience is labelled as magical. Thus the term magic functions to categorize, bound, and make sense of these convergences between the known and unknown. The term magic thus has a categorizing function, determining phenomena as unknown or other, while simultaneously making such phenomena meaningful. An understanding of these phenomena is provided from within their placement in an alternative paradigm, that of the magical domain. As such, the functional role of magic in culture is to categorize and hence makes sense of inexplicable phenomena however magic, when organised as a magical domain, also acts as a bounded category that ensures that these magical elements remain separated from the elements of everyday life.

**Magic as a Relational Cultural Boundary**

Culture does not exist in a form that merely insists on a known-unknown dichotomy: culture exists through a myriad of categories that make sense of experience and organise perception. If magic functions to help define the boundaries of culture, by articulating the differences between exoteric and esoteric phenomena or the known and the unknown, it is perhaps unsurprising to suggest that magic may also help mediate a number of other cultural categories. Magic can be seen to be a boundary that is relationally contingent, defined through the manner in which it comes into contact and communicates between a range of dichotomous cultural concepts. In order to illustrate the manner in which magic is relationally defined, sufficient evidence can be found within pre-existing scholarship of magic. This literature is pervaded by arguments that define magic through dialectical ambiguity and the observation that magic appears to be a feature that is present amidst dichotomous cultural categories. A summary of these
positions is provided in this section to emphasize the manner in which magic is often rendered as being a mediatory form. Hence, it may be concluded that magic mitigates cultural contradiction by marking ambiguous phenomena, those that bridge more than one cultural category, as magical.

In what appears to be a near universal mode of analysis in the study of magic, magic is often summarized through either-or-neither-nor dialectical equations. The following represent a collection of the oft repeated categories that are seen to surround magic. Conceptually magic is seen to negotiate between dialectics of “faith” and “reason,” (During, 2002: 16) simultaneously operating within the logics of the “rational” and the “irrational.” (Stivers, 2001: 13, Stafford, 1994: 73) Magic can generate illusions or more profound spiritual apparitions, constituting magic as “secular” and the “sacred.” (Otto, 2008: 2-3) This dynamic also constitutes magic as part “reality” part “fantasy,” (Warner, 2004: 14) both “real” and “unreal,” (During, 2002: 16) part “supernatural” and part “superstition.” (During, 2002: 22)

Another array of contrasts are narrated in the performance and reception of magic, which may engage an audience through “science” or “amusement,” (Hankins and Silverman, 1995: 13) “art” or “science,” (Stafford, 1994: xxiv) belief or disbelief, “faith” or “scepticism.” (Pels, 2003: 37) Magic tricks themselves embody dialectics insomuch as they oscillate ambiguously between tensions of “revelation and concealment,” (Pels, 2003: 3) the “visible” and “invisible” (Stafford, 1994: 79) or “truth” and “deception.” (Cook, 2001: 28) Similarly in their content magic tricks break down through extraordinary appearances distinction such as those between “human and machine,” (Mangan, 2007:xv) observable when a magic trick may bring an apparently inanimate object to life such as in the case of early displays of animated automata.2 Similarly magic renders indistinct the divisions between the “human and the supernatural” (Mangan, 2007:xv) or even “life and death” (During, 2002: 38) dialectics that are narrated not only by the array of apparently death defying tricks that populate the magical stage - such as

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2 For a historical account of automata see Bedini, S.A. (1964) “The Role of Automata in the History of Technology.”
sawing a woman in half\(^3\) – but also through the many spectral apparitions that were conjured through screen based illusions such as the Magic Lantern.

At their most poetic magic tricks, particularly those based upon screen technologies, are performed between “light and shadow.” (Mannoni, 2004: 42) This dialectic of light and shadow is of particular curiosity because light and shadow describes the aesthetic quality of the many optical illusions of the screen that make up the history of magical performance, for it is a dichotomy that describes the sort of material shadow play that defined the displays of these technologies. For instance, this can be seen in Étienne Robertson’s Phantasmagoria shows of the nineteenth century, which were lantern shows that featured supernatural images of ghosts and uncanny apparitions, images that could only be rendered through the lantern mediums ability to create uncertain, shadowy and ethereal images that rested between darkness and light. While light and shadow describes the aesthetic quality of the supernatural images depicted through the Phantasmagoria, light and shadow also describes the “emotional aura of the supernatural” (Ndalianis, 2004: 231, Castle, 1988: 30) that also attended these illusions. This is because such displays walked a line between the darkness and light in the emotional quality of the apparitions they conjured. For instance the Phantasmagoria show could recreate the conditions of a séance, (Barber, 1989: 73) in which positive images of the ghosts of loved ones manifest in a brief return to the land of the living, or they may have recreated the conditions of a black rite or horrific encounter with the supernatural, manifesting images of maleficent spirits, such as in the popular theme of images of Mephistopheles from Goethe’s *Faust* (Warner, 2006: 154) or the vengeful and bloodied spectres of recently deceased French Revolutionaries. (Castle, 1988: 37) The Phantasmagoria was a presentation that broke down a range of distinctions between science and spectacle, the real and the unreal, magic and fraud – issues that will be explored when this mode of performance is discussed in a later part of this thesis – but also embodied the uncertain emotional quality of all supernatural illusions that balance shadow and light in their...
oscillations between manifestations of beings inhered with “benevolent intention and 
malvolent manoeuvre.” (Stafford, 1994: 74).

While many of these dialectics will reappear in this thesis, it currently seems vital 
to ask why discussions of magic are so vigorously populated with these kinds of 
simultaneities. Because magic lacks a definable form, given over, conceptually, to the 
ambiguities of the unknown, these dichotomies represent a relational impetus in 
scholarship, one that seeks to reveal the typography, or boundaries, of magic through the 
concepts that surround it. Richard Stivers, in examining the paradigmatic links between 
magic and technology, makes a particularly reflexive summary of this tendency 
suggesting that: “magic has always been related to other social practices; therefore, it can 
only be understood in conjunction with religion, science and technology, and within a 
historical context.” (2001:14) Typically then, magic is defined through relational 
ascrption, through its fringe associations with the social practices and the cultural 
concepts that these dichotomies describe.

By contrasting the role of magic in relation to a range of alternative concepts it 
can be demonstrated that much of the ambiguity of magic appears in scholarship because 
such relational meanings may be multiple. Stiver’s relational categories of religion, 
science, technology and history, are perhaps the most critical intersections between magic 
and culture and offer ideal examples for a brief analysis of the multiple relational 
meanings that attend magic. To begin, in relation to religion magic is a quality that 
divides the mundane from the supernal or transcendent. This is because magic is seen to 
be a quality that is possessed and created only by those beings that transcend the human. 
This can be seen in Marina Warner’s summary of the manner in which magic was 
categorized after the period of the Dark Ages:

In the era of faith, magic was carefully distinguished according to three 
categories: first, miracles by God by which the laws of physics were suspended; 
secondly, Natural Magic, or the wonderful properties of earthly things; and last, 
the illusory work of the Devil. (Warner, 2004: 14)
We can see that even within the context of religion that the relational meanings of magic were multiple: magic could be celebrated as heavenly miracle, as natural wonder or as witchcraft depending upon the power to which magical effects were attributed. In all forms, however, magic was constituted as an apotheosis of a cultural other, insomuch as it was a provenance that was always beyond the reach of the human.

The modern paradigm of science, which eclipsed religious reasoning after Enlightenment, has also always constituted magic as other. One key strategy of both scientific and Enlightened thought has been to discredit magic as superstition. This has occurred through the manner in which science has helped shape attitudes to the magical domain. Science placed into the magical domain all of magic’s explanatory hypotheses and beliefs, which were collected and criticised as irrational in order to strengthen science’s own claims to meaning. While relationally science constructs magic as the antithesis of reason and truth, science also has an ambiguous relationship to magic because magic has also been created through scientific endeavour. As the ultimate testament to the tenacity of magic, science has helped remake magic as a mode of technological illusion after Enlightenment, such scientific transformations constituting the performative bases of Entertainment Magic.

To complete an analysis of Stivers relational categories, the importance of history in the definition of magic is found insomuch as history defines not only the boundaries of magic and the unknown in culture, but it also defines the boundaries of the relational categories, like science and religion, with which magic intersects. Before this thesis undertakes a wider examination of magic from a historical perspective, it is worthwhile to reiterate the understanding of magic and its function that have been developed thus far. While it is possible to define magic as a bounded domain of artefacts - the magical domain - which is conceptually regulated by a meta-dialectic that separates the known and unknown, magic is also defined from between a wide range of relational intersections. In either context, magic represents a descriptive term that both identifies and classifies that which is other. Magic, as a form which rests at the boundaries of any
number of contradictory cultural categories, becomes an attribution that is multiple and, hence, may appear to be ambiguous and difficult to define. What an awareness of magic as a relationally given attribution contributes to the study of magic is an awareness that magic must be defined in relief against culture and as such magic needs to be addressed as a contingent form. This cultural contingency requires that any understanding or definition of magic must be grounded in both time and space, features which are enabled when the analysis of magic is undertaken from a historical perspective.

**Assessing Magic Historically**

Much like in the case of defining magic that began this chapter, historicising magic initially appears to be a task that is made difficult by the variety of forms that have been labelled as magical over time. While the magical domain has provided us with a way to categorize the phenomena of magic amidst this historical continuum, it seems pertinent to understand some of the reasons why this array is so vast. Partly the mass and diversity of the magical domain can be attributed again to the fact that magic has functioned, and hence accumulated, alongside culture for millennia. However, it is possible to suggest that this array is also attributable to the aesthetic priorities of magic and magical performance, those aesthetics which privilege novelty, eclecticism and variety. This is a feature that is best illustrated through magic in the context of entertainment performance, for as a commercial enterprise, magic has often evolved through the very novelties that are created to attract paying audiences with a voracious appetite for excitement and the unseen. Magic despite its pre-modern roots has also been constructed for what are seen as “modern” tastes: those which seek “savage plurality, a taste for the unheard of an unexpected… a diversity cultivated for itself and where there are found some shreds of esotericism.” (Faivre, 1994: 42) Yet as ever, magic is elusive, for this very sense of novelty is one of magic’s primary illusions. This is because while artefacts within the magical domain appear to accumulate exponentially, this is often due to superficial alterations in the presentational mode of magical performance, alterations that mask the fact that the same instrumental tricks are again and again repackaged to keep up with popular taste and the desire for novelty in entertainment.
An example of this constant reinvention of magic tricks can be seen in the instance of the popular Vanishing Lady trick. Initially developed by the magician Buatier DeKolta in 1886 (Steinmeyer, 2006: 54) the trick began with the mundane image of a woman in a chair. The magician would drape a shawl over her figure that clearly showed her shape underneath and when the shawl was removed the woman was seen to miraculously disappear. This trick was achieved via use of a trap door and a pivoting wire frame attached to the chair which would “simulate her head and shoulders and knees, concealing her movement through the chair and trap.” (Steinmeyer, 2006: 55) Steinmeyer suggests that the trick was so popular that it was “copied to the extent that it completely exhausted its audience,” (Steinmeyer, 2006: 54) but that it also underwent several alterations to maintain its novelty and longevity. These included the simple elaboration that would see the woman and the shawl disappear, snatched up the magicians sleeve and leaving the stage stunningly empty. A further elaboration was seen in David Devant’s illusion The Mascot Moth, first performed in 1905, (Steinmeyer, 2006: 49) which placed the disappearing woman into a narrative context, an elaborate story of a lucky moth, appearing for the first time in twenty years, whose manifestation saves a gambler from financial ruin. The trick itself was elaborated insomuch as the costumed moth woman would drop from the ceiling to the stage, then would be apparently disappear in mid air. The trick was achieved through a hidden clear tube and the costume itself (which was attached to pulleys running through the tube), that allowed the figure to not only disappear from sight, but did so with the addition of the eerie effect of dragging the figure four feet through the air. Lucy Fisher in *The Lady Vanishes: Women, Magic and the Movies* (1979) further demonstrates that this trick of the Vanishing Lady was also reinvented by cinematic trick films which achieved this trick through substitution editing that could make a woman, or even several women, disappear in the transition between two film frames.

James Cook brings to light the veiled continuity of magic trickery over time by suggesting that it makes up an essential part of magic’s repertoire of “artful deception.” (2001: 21) Cook views artful deception as the aesthetic pattern underpinning magical performance. It is one that is again made up of a calculated ambiguity, drawn from the
essential intermixing of the “genuine and the fake, enchantment and disenchantment, energetic public expose and [the] momentary suspension of disbelief.” (Cook, 2001: 17) A key aspect of this artful deception was the recycling of illusions, as Cook highlights magic’s “curious objects of wonder, sleight-of-hand tricks, trompe l’oeil pictures – are all hundreds of years old, and change only at a glacial pace” despite being “positively evanescent in their historical variations, evolving into something new with each performance, playbill, venue and audience.” (Cook, 2001: 21) Cook deals with the dynamics of apparent change and glacial continuity by insisting that the history of magic “operates according to the longue durée – so long, in fact, that it requires a periodization of at least three or four centuries to become visible. (Cook, 2001: 21) This thesis agrees with Cook’s assessment of the slow shifts that take place technologically in the construction of magical entertainment, an aspect that is demonstrated in the chapter Entertainment Magic which details a periodized analysis of magical technologies of the screen. For now, however, it is possible to examine the longue durée also as an appropriate measure for understanding continuity and change in the historical function of magic in culture.

Like the technologies of magical performance the cultural functions of magic show great continuity across their millennial lifespan. Considering that, this thesis contends that magic can be divided into two dominant cultural phases. The first phase is that of Spiritual Magic, which specifies the pre-Enlightenment period in which magic functioned as an explanatory cosmological paradigm that made magic efficacious by way of belief. The second phase, that of Entertainment Magic, is a post-Enlightenment era in which magic predominantly described technological performances, performances which exchanged magic’s efficacious powers for an ability to conjure magical effects. These types of magic are differentiated by the cultural context in which they are performed and function. However, the most crucial distinction that separates them is determined by the distinction between “magic as entertainment and magic as efficacy,” (Mangan, 2007: xxiii) which determines that while Entertainment Magic tricks, Spiritual Magic is real and its performances are able to transform.
In summary, given the assertion that magic is a form that is contingent upon the cultural setting and time period from which it is defined, social forces alter our commonsense attitudes towards magic over time. These shifts are encouraged by developments in cultural knowledge and by technology but also, more completely, by the social attitudes that surround these developments. Observing the manner in which the self understanding of Western culture has shifted from a paradigm of cosmological belief, orientated to the magical properties of the world, to the attitude that the world is rationally explicable, offers us the best guidepost to understanding how and why magic has been transformed from a spiritual system into a mode of entertainment over time. While the proceeding chapters of this thesis will articulate this historical transition from Spiritual to Entertainment Magic, this chapter has demonstrated how magic is a concept that has been shaped by culture. However, the importance of studying magic is revealed when it is understood that magic also influences this same culture. During emphasizes this by suggesting that “magic has helped shape modern culture… from the moment that they were widely tolerated and commercialized, magic shows have helped provide the terms and content of modern culture’s understanding and judgment of itself.” (2002: 1) One of magic’s most crucial tricks, then, is the manner in which its very mystery, the unknown to which magic conforms, can bring into focus the cultural structures that it must articulate itself against. Through magic it is possible to draw a number of conclusions about the cultural moment in which it is encountered. Magic is a trick that surprisingly reveals not esoteric mystery, but the operations of exoteric culture over time.

The following chapters of this thesis approach magic chronologically and from within a context of exoteric Western culture. Chapter One, *Spiritual Magic*, examines magic from a historical perspective, discussing how and why magic was first conceived by culture to function as an explanatory paradigm of belief. In this period magic of Spiritual Magic, magic was seen to be the force that animated the universe. The manifestation of this force or *mana* was guided by supernatural beings, the spirits of cosmological systems. Cosmologies are described as being explanatory cultural paradigms through which the unknown appearances of the world were made comprehensible and which used the notion of magic to make unknown appearances
explicable. It is in this period that the supernatural and extraordinary attributions of magic originated, evocative supernatural energies that continue to haunt the term to the present day.

Continuing the historical analysis of magic, the second chapter of this thesis, *Entertainment Magic*, demonstrates how Enlightenment destabilized the cultural belief in Spiritual Magic. After this cultural transition, which began in the mid seventeenth century, magic underwent a significant transformation in form and function. While performances of magic that aimed to entertain existed before Enlightenment, as early as the transition from BC to AD according to Richard Cavendish, (1977: 1) this phase of Entertainment Magic marks a significant transition in the performative and technological history of magic because, as a response to the pressures of rationalism and secularization, magic became a form of entertainment based upon the creation of illusions that, while renewing the appearances of supernatural animation known to Spiritual Magic, was a quality of magic attributable to terrestrial causes or the instrumental conjuring of effects. Thus, the period of Entertainment Magic describes a performative and technological phase of magic, one founded upon the creation of illusion and deception through scientific practices and instrumental apparatuses. While this creation of Entertainment Magic was often based upon stage performance, this thesis focuses on creating an overview of one aspect of this phase of magic, the not insignificant history of illusions of the screen. It follows the effects of projected illusion instrumentally, from their genesis in the lantern technologies through to their manifestation in the cinematic medium. Concurrent to a material discussion of these technologies, this thesis explores how these effects also created affects in the spectator - experiences of the magical in an otherwise secular audience- that were based upon a suspension of disbelief.

Chapter Three, *Cinema Magic*, follows the contentions established around the phase of Entertainment Magic to their logical conclusion, by discussing that pinnacle of instrumental illusion making: the cinema. It draws upon examples of the magical trick films of director George Méliès, to outline a concept of cinema’s unique forms of magical performance. It argues that cinema is a trick comprised of special effects, which
are instrumentally based appearances, and narrative effects which describe the fictional and structural tricks performed by cinema. By seeing these effects as modes of attraction, a concept adapted from Tom Gunning’s theory of the cinema of attractions, it is possible to demonstrate how the spectacular excess of such effects allowed cinema to create magical experiences, or affects, for the audience. This experience of the magical lies at the heart of cinema as a form of Entertainment Magic, because such experiences thwart the rational or edifying apprehension of cinema images as illusions, instead rendering cinema as an expressions of extraordinary realities, realities animated through the spirit of imagination.
Chapter Two

SPIRITUAL MAGIC

Introduction

Spiritual Magic is a denomination that this thesis uses to delineate the historical period that precedes Western Enlightenment in which magical beliefs and performances were significant aspects of social life. The assertion of a period of Spiritual Magic emerges from the context of anthropological inquiry which observes that before the rationalised scientific thought of Enlightenment began to present understandings of the world based upon terms of scientifically observable phenomena that knowledge and social activity was guided by a belief in the existence of magic. Through the work of anthropologists Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss and J.G. Frazer this chapter will demonstrate, through concrete examples, how a belief in magic defined knowledge and social practice in the era of Spiritual Magic.

A cultural context of Spiritual Magic can be seen to be delineated through one core feature: the belief that magic exists as an intangible though efficacious energy that animates the natural world. The impacts of such an apprehension upon a given cultural context are located in the manner in which magic came to define the parameters of knowledge and belief. This chapter will argue that this can be seen insomuch as such magical energies were narrated into cosmological belief systems, supernatural myths or narratives that detailed the systems of efficacy and causal effect that magic was seen to have upon the phenomenal world. While cosmology can be seen to formally define a system of magical beliefs, such belief also influenced cultural practice for man also sought ways to communicate with and influence these innate magical energies. Thus ritual emerged as the earliest form of magical performance, one that was based upon sympathetic or symbolic actions, which significantly sought to engage with magical energies but also to produce tangible effects.
Spiritual Magic describes a period of magical belief that anthropological inquiry argues has been universally expressed across all culture at one time or another and even continues to persist in cultural contexts that have not been overwhelmingly absorbed into Enlightened or Modern thought. Despite the universal nature of this stage of cultural belief, the nature of magic energies, their effects, as well as the cosmologies and rituals that attended them, innumerably differed between individual social groups. Thus while this chapter will introduce examples of these aspects, given the scope of this thesis, it is untenable to discuss them comparatively. Nevertheless, such limited examples still serve to demonstrate the key features of the context of Spiritual Magic. Crucially, it will be emphasised that belief is the universal tenet that confirms the existence of magic, but also the efficacy of magic and the effects of ritual practice.

Enlightenment and its effects upon Spiritual Magic will be addressed by the latter half of this chapter, but by way of introduction, this chapter contends that, because Spiritual Magic operates from a context of belief, it became largely untenable in the Western world after Enlightenment. Enlightenment describes the period of European or Western culture roughly associated with the period between the mid 1600s - 1800s. Also known as the Age of Reason, Enlightenment is characterised largely through the ideological ideals that emerged within the period, ideals which were in direct opposition to those that fostered Spiritual Magic. Such Enlightenment ideals included the emergence of scientific rationalism, in which knowledge was confirmed through processes of observation and quantification, or through reason, which worked to destabilise the magically based suppositions that characterised knowledge in the period of Spiritual Magic, a contention that will be supported through the discussion of the work of Barbara Stafford, Michael Mangan, among others, who directly address the transformations of magic that took place amidst Enlightenment.

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4 See for instance the discussion on 27 of this thesis which discusses how Spiritual Magic has been see to be a ‘primitive’ belief that has been held onto by non-Western cultures who have not been so fully exposed to the rationalism that acted to make such magical beliefs untenable in a Western context after Enlightenment.

5 The temporal delineation of the period of Enlightenment often varies in light of the polemic of a given author, however this period of 1600 – 1800s is generally accepted and can be seen in the work of Stafford, 1994, Schmidt, 1998 and Grau, 2007, among others.
The phase of Spiritual Magic belongs to pre-Enlightenment because the rationalities of progress in this era worked to destabilize the validity of spiritual magical beliefs and animation. This is because rationalism re-determined the terms of worldly knowledge, relocating cause and effect from sources of innate magical energy to those of natural science. However, magic persisted in culture in spite of the impacts of Enlightenment, finding new expression, not as a mode of belief but as a performative mode of Entertainment Magic.

Despite the ongoing focus of this thesis upon such technological continuations of magic, the conclusion of this chapter, however, will consider the persistence of magical belief after Enlightenment. Rather than demonstrating a cultural trend towards Spiritual Magic, however, it will be argued that these beliefs have only been tenable on an individual rather than societal scale. Thus the status of Spiritual Magic in contemporary culture has only proved to persist as a firmly counter-cultural belief, as is exemplified through revivals such as the nineteenth century occult revival or the current spiritual revival of the New Age, which have not demonstrated that they could exert the depth of influence that Spiritual Magic had upon society’s beliefs and practices in a pre-Enlightenment context.

**Anthropology and Spiritual Magic**

Spiritual Magic and the characteristics of the cultural landscapes in which it is to be found have been identified largely through anthropological study. This assertion is evidenced by the impact that studies by theorists such as Marcel Mauss, Emile Durkheim and J.G. Frazer have had upon the study of magic over time.6 This section will address these authors to see how their work has been adopted into most studies of magic, consciously or unconsciously, through their identification of the period and functions of Spiritual Magic.

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6 These impacts can be traced particularly in the texts *Primitive Classification* (Durkheim and Mauss, 1969), *A General Theory of Magic*, (Mauss, 2001) and *The Golden Bough*, (Frazer, 1994) which this chapter actively draws upon.
The era of Spiritual Magic is not one that is explicitly named as such by anthropologists but rather is one that is insinuated through the many permutations of the term ‘pre-history.’ Pre-history as a period of magical belief and practice grounds Spiritual Magic as an age that predates rational modes of thought which, due to the alternative explicable modes of reason that emerges alongside scientific rationalism, can be defined as belonging to a pre-Enlightenment context. Anthropology, particularly in the case of the founding authors of the twentieth century discussed here, sought to reveal pre-historic or pre-modern thought through its apparent persistence in the practices of ‘primitive’ or non-Western societies. Thus anthropological writing of this period is marked by a largely Western or colonial perspective. The cultural assumptions of this perspective - one which championed the teleological ‘progress’ of the Western world over any alternative foreign paradigms of belief and reason - often led to analyses that primitivised any context in which Spiritual Magic was seen to operate. While it is accurate to note that anthropology “systematized the magic/reason opposition and inserted it into an implicitly colonialist theory of history and society,” (During, 2002: 16) such analyses more importantly aimed to explain how and why such beliefs were reasonable and appropriate in the context of their performance. Hence, such primitive editorializations do not necessarily undermine the descriptions of Spiritual Magic that are found in early anthropological studies. The cosmological systems and ritual that anthropology has documented continues to work as valid evidence for a period of culture that was animated by Spiritual Magic.

The animation of culture through Spiritual Magic rests upon the supposition of a belief in magic. An alternative description for such spiritual energies can be found in the term “mana,” which originates in the writings of Mauss, as a description for this “innate power” that, while seen as being universal and transcendent, nevertheless gains further power through “widespread belief in its reality.” (Butler, 1993: 5) As a general rule, the nature of mana as a spiritual or animated force is founded upon the notion that such energies are not only innate but efficacious. Efficacy simply is the principle that “magic makes or changes something,” (O’Keefe, 1982: 27) a principle which makes magic an active principle of animation. Spiritual Magic represents a period in which such magical energy was believed to be an animated and animating force of the universe.
This belief in magic or mana can be seen to be expressed through the manner in which thought, in the context of pre-history, was based upon non-rational or magical ideas. This observation can be seen in *Primitive Classification*, a key text of structural anthropology authored by Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss in 1903, which demonstrates how such magical beliefs were embedded in the classifications of phenomena, and hence knowledge, in the context of Spiritual Magic. According to Durkheim and Mauss society thinks collectively in terms of classification, tenets of understanding through which “we construct, project and localize in space our representations of the tangible world.” (1969: 3) For Durkheim and Mauss the classifications that mark pre-history are seen to define phenomena not through rational, but rather, magical forms of logic. This magical logic is made manifest in “religion and folklore” which express, through myth or cosmology, classifications that are magical in quality because they are based upon a “fundamental confusion in ideas…metamorphoses, the transmission of qualities, the substitution of persons, souls and bodies, beliefs about the materializations of spirits and the spiritualization of material objects.” (Durkheim and Mauss, 1969: 5) Such classifications, which could themselves be called beliefs, rely on the fundamental assumption of the existence of magical energies as the principle of animation that gives efficacy to such spiritual classifications or beliefs.

Such ‘materializations of spirits and the spiritualization of material objects’ can be seen in the example of any cultural belief that animates inanimate objects with personality or spiritual powers. For instance, J.G. Frazer in *The Golden Bough* – a canonical comparative study of the performance of magic in pre-history first published in 1922 - offers an example of this form of belief in a Western context by arguing that the pre-history of Europe is marked the widespread worship of trees and tree spirits. If classification works, as Mauss and Durkheim suggest, to construct understandings of the tangible world, albeit through magical concepts, trees appear to be a “natural” point of convergence for spiritual associations in this continent where, once, “Europe was covered

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7 The widespread nature of such tree worship is examined through an in-depth and comparative catalogue of such beliefs in Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*. (1994) Not only does the discussion of such tree worship cover several chapters of the text but is also suggested in the title of this canonical tome.
by vast primeval forests, in which scattered clearings must have appeared as islets in an ocean of green.” (Frazer, 1994: 108) What is perhaps interesting is the manner in which such animism of trees was also anthropomorphic, in the sense that their conditions of being were often equivalent to those of man, leading to beliefs in which man “thinks that they have souls like his own and treats them accordingly.” (Frazer, 1994: 110)

The spiritual animism of trees and such anthropomorphic qualities can be seen in the example of Austrian attitudes to forest trees, Frazer accounting that peasants maintain the generationally transmitted belief that will “not allow an incision to be made in the bark without special cause… [as] the tree feels the cut not less than the wounded man his hurt. In felling a tree they must beg its pardon.” (Frazer, 1994: 112) Frazer accounts that in many instances a tree spirit that has not been treated respectfully will “avenge themselves by visiting with grievous sickness,” an eye-for-an-eye response to those who would “injure them wantonly.” (Frazer, 1994: 112) Also attendant to these corporeal equivalences in feeling, in most instances this was also linked to ideas of a human mortality, expressed insomuch as “the spirit is seen to be incorporate in the tree; it animates the tree and must suffer and die with it.” (Frazer, 1994: 114) This can be seen for instance in the Slavonian and Bulgarian Christmas eve rituals which ritually threaten barren fruit trees with death. While one player swings an axe threateningly another man “intercedes for the tree, saying, ‘do not cut it down, it will bear fruit’… after that [it is believed] that the frightened tree will certainly bear fruit next year.” (Frazer, 1994: 113) Any rituals surrounding trees are not only performed to appease the tree spirits, but in the case of this fertility ritual, are performed also to encourage the apparent beneficent powers attributed to these tree spirits. For where trees become spiritual, or more than man, is founded upon their apparent beneficent qualities which include their influence upon creating abundant crops as well as their ability to encourage rain and sunshine. (Frazer, 1994: 116) Frazer suggests that the most typical of such rituals in Europe are those based upon the concept of the spring may-pole, a symbol that embodies the reverence of trees and wood, as ceremonial celebration of the abundance of nature that Frazer identifies as a modern relic of older forms of tree worship that is still performed across most of central Europe. (1994: 116 – 134)
Mauss and Durkheim’s suggestion that magical classifications are based upon “confusion” rather than logic is of critical error. This can be seen insomuch as the animation of trees is based upon the logical conditions of trees as a major part of the natural landscape that needed to be understood and classified. This undertaking was logical insomuch as it drew upon the limitations of human knowledge, such as can be divined in the projected equivalence between the embedded experience of trees with the embedded experiences of the human body, but also through causal observation, such as in the links between groups of trees and the appearance of precipitation. While seeing such beliefs as confused rather than logical may be attributed to the primitivisation of magical beliefs within the anthropological tradition, Mauss and Durkheim’s work still purposefully suggests that magical classification of phenomena expresses “fundamental notions of the understanding” (Durkheim and Mauss, 1969: 88) of the phenomenal world, and while these notions differed between social contexts, the knowledge they embody stems from the supposition of the existence of magical energies which, by turn, created the magical beliefs that narrated their existence.

In context of pre-history the relational categories of the known, science and religion, had not yet been formalized (neither was magic a category that was strictly bounded as unknown or other), rather magic was the meta-category that fulfilled the explanatory roles of these later categories. As a result Spiritual Magic is a denomination that does not just describe an era of history, but is a denomination of quality, insomuch as it describes the nature of magic as an explanatory paradigm in this period. As Claflin suggests: magic represented a “complete system of concepts… [it] was part of religion, nature, society and the mysteries of the universe.” (1997: 52) Thus while Spiritual Magic does not describe a systematized knowledge, it does describe a mode of reasoning, a distinct rationality in which magic was central in the explanation of the operations of the phenomenal world. If the period of Spiritual Magic is underpinned by a belief in magical energies, by consequence the classifications and understandings of this period also attend to this condition, thus making Spiritual Magic a period that also fostered magical world views. It can be said, then, that the period of Spiritual Magic is attended by spiritual
beliefs in magic. This general principle can be given form through the notion that such beliefs are formalised by a given cultural group in the form of myth or cosmologies as those “hierophanous” world views or narratives, which describe specifically how this magic or “sacred manifests in substance itself.” (Eliade, 1985: 85)

Cosmologies are comprised of magical beliefs, but also describe the perceived nature of magical energies, the nature of their efficacy and also detail, in the form of ritual, the manner in which such intangible energies may be influenced. While an analysis of any specific cosmologies is beyond the scope of this thesis (given that they are all-inclusive world views), it rather introduces this term as a way to describe how, through encompassing cultural narrative, that belief confirms the existence and efficacy of magical energies. While the manner in which belief constructs the efficacy of magic will be discussed shortly, it remains to demonstrate tangible evidence of the belief in magical energies. This thesis asserts that ritual practice is actively demonstrative of magical belief, for without such belief its actions would not only be ineffectual but without apparent cause. This is because ritual is a mode of purposeful social actions, one that attempts in all instances to influence the magical energies encompassed in the universe.

Ritual is a performance that attempts to conjure magic, to “assert power through actions that are believed to have a direct and automatic influence upon man, nature and the divine.” (Cavendish, 1977: 2) In this schema the “magician” emerges as the figure who “accomplishes magical actions.” (Mauss, 2001: 23) As a social actor, the magician is seen to have heightened access to or influence upon magical forces. In the context of Shamanistic beliefs, according to Mauss, such power is expressed through the magician’s ability to “send forth his soul,” (2001: 43) alternatively a magician may express a “general power over objects” that expresses talents that are “beyond the power of normal human beings.” (Mauss, 2001: 42) Whether titled as shaman, witchdoctor, sorcerer or any other form of ju-ju man, in all contexts of Spiritual Magic the magician is delineated as a liminal figure, for his powers are neither entirely human nor inhuman, they are visible and invisible, they pass between life and death, the phenomenal and the spiritual, and thus make the magician the embodiment of magic’s own ambiguously liminal properties.
Again the magician, like magic itself, is seen to be an efficacious agent - one that is able to create real effects in the world - however the magician does so by proxy as an agent whose actions do not create effects directly, but rather influence animating magical energies into creating favourable effects. The magician does so through means of ritual, contexts of performance that are seen to induce a heightened state of communication between the magician and these magical energies.

Frazer argues that most forms of ritual magic work through a principle of sympathy. Sympathetic magic is magic that “produces like,” a magic where “an effect resembles its cause,” (Frazer, 1994: 37) that is achieved by way of symbolic performances of transformation. This can be illustrated through a simple example of weather influencing rituals. As a near universal need of the agrarian conditions of pre-history, rain making is a common theme of such rituals, wherein “if they wish to make rain they simulate it by sprinkling water or mimicking clouds.” (Frazer, 1994: 62) This action is one of symbolic equivalence that sympathetically communicates the desires of the magician to the magic energies that control rain. One Western example of such performance is attributed by Frazer to the Arcadia region of Greece, wherein “the priest of Zeus dipped an oak branch into a certain spring on Mount Lycaeus. Thus troubled, the water sent up a misty cloud, from which rain soon fell upon the land.” (Frazer, 1994: 76)

Further, such action was also seen to gain the attention of Zeus, the thunder-bringer of their cosmological pantheon, the god most likely to manifest rain.

It is possible to contend that the symbolic actions that mark performances of sympathetic magic constitute the origins of more mundane forms of conjuring like prestidigitation. This is because the technological conjuring of magical effects finds its roots in such performances of Spiritual Magic. Michael Mangan for instance observes that the traditional shaman would often use sleight of hand tricks as part of ritual performances. These prestidigitations are interpreted by Mangan as a sympathetic device, as tricks that would symbolize transformation in a way that made it ‘actually manifest to the audience/congregation.” (2007: 11) This scenario isolates that the fact that the mechanical production of magic has a long history amidst civilisation, but so to does the
psychological effects of trickery upon the spectator. For in the context of ritual practice
gauging the effects of such performances were less about measurable transformation, but
the audience’s belief in magical and attendant perception of magical efficacy. Richard
Cavendish suggests that ritual action is not always successful, but is perceived to produce
efficacious effects “often enough to inspire confidence.” (1977: 2) This indirect and
perhaps uncertain manifestation of magical effects highlights the crucial fact that the
success of magical performance or ritual is not determined by the actions of supernatural
or human agents, but through that indeterminate but infinitely powerful force of human
belief. For in a context of Spiritual Magic it is belief which determines the existence and
efficacy of magic.

One critical aspect of Frazer’s work, yet unmentioned by this thesis, is the
argument that the efficacy of magic is constituted through belief. Again positioning the
magician as a performative social mediator, Frazer summarizes that:

Underlying the whole system is a faith, implicit but real and firm, in the order and
uniformity of nature. The magician does not doubt that the same causes will
always produce the same effects, that the performance of the proper ceremony,
accompanied by the appropriate spell, will inevitably be attended by the desired
result. (1994: 48)

There are multiple aspects in the comment that can be unpacked to represent Frazer’s
essential argument. Firstly, “the uniformity of nature” reiterates the Durkheimian context
of pre-history, one in which magic is taken as being a natural condition of the world that
is explained through the magical classifications of a given culture. However, this
seemingly natural condition – the existence of magical energies - is made to be implicitly
manifest not through any tangible forms of apprehension, but through belief. Because the
perception of magical effects in Spiritual Magic is determined by an observer that is
invested in efficacious manifestations the apparitions encountered in a context of belief
are taken as a genuine and caused by magic. This is true of a social group or an individual
possessing magical belief, in which case there is a willingness of the perceivers to see
magical transformation, to see the magical performance align the world to their effective will and to confirm their magical belief. The results of magic performances then are preordained. Magic is seen as implicitly efficacious because its success is interpreted through a positive faith or self confirming belief.

While Spiritual Magic requires belief to guide and interpret its effects, this performance has to be enabled by a cultural context in which such belief is tenable. For magic is not just a matter of personal desire, but instead refers to a wider culture of belief that engages not only cosmology, but an entire series of conceptual paradigms that regulate our experiences of reality. As such belief is resilient, especially on a personal scale, but is subject to significant cultural influence which may alter the possible meaning and influence of magic over time.

**Enlightenment**

Thus far it has been established that Spiritual Magic is a designation that describes an era of culture in which the belief in magical energies guided worldly knowledge. Such understandings were formalised through the classification of phenomena through magical suppositions, suppositions which can be observed in cosmological systems of belief and their attendant ritual practices. In this schema such innate magical energies were perceived to be efficacious, to possess powers that allowed them to have a causal impact on the terrestrial world. Such magical energies, as well as their attendant powers, are not necessarily factually existent – their reality can neither be proved nor disproved adequately – but are better thought of as the real manifestations of cultural belief. This is because the perception of magical energies and their attendant efficacy is a product, foremost, of belief. This period of Spiritual Magic has been explored partly through the temporal designation of pre-history given by anthropologists, given as the period in which such beliefs were commonplace, however this thesis argues that Spiritual Magic is more accurately thought of as a pre-Enlightenment era, for it was only after the processes of disenchantment that accompany Enlightenment that magical belief, at least in the Western world, became an invalid cultural paradigm.
It has already been introduced briefly that Enlightenment represents a cultural period centred around Europe between the mid 1600s through until the 1800s, the “Age of Reason” (Stafford, 1994: 73) in which scientific inquiry brought about rational modes of knowledge, understandings that consequently invalidated those based upon magical suppositions that defined cultural thought in the period of Spiritual Magic. While it could be argued that the destabilization of Spiritual Magic and its attendant beliefs, cosmologies and practices began before Enlightenment, particularly in the Western world, it is still notable as the period in which the relational categories of science and religion became the dominant paradigms of thought and belief that ideologically regulated social practice. This section will demonstrate how the cultural ideals of Enlightenment, such as progress, rationalization and secularization, re-oriented cultural practice and belief in such a way as to make belief in Spiritual Magic unviable.

The first step in understanding the impacts of Enlightenment upon Spiritual Magic is to understand, specifically, the features that made Enlightenment such a significant period in Western cultural history. Theorizing the impact of Enlightenment upon the Western world is a line of academic inquiry that is unquestionably large, as it is an issue addressed by most humanities focused upon socio-historical inquiry, but for this thesis it finds specificity in studies that explore the impacts of Enlightenment upon magical belief and performance. As a general framework, however, the theorization of Enlightenment is marked by certain key concepts that describe the topography of social change since this period. The decline of the Spiritual Magic is but one aspect of the social change catalysed amidst Enlightenment, yet is an aspect that directly linked to these key terms, the triadic equation of progress, secularization and rationalization so succinctly summarized by Daniel Lawrence O’Keefe:

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We witness in recent centuries a great progress called ‘secularization,’ which ‘disenchants’ the world of superstitious ideas, substitutes scientific explanation, displaces religious authority, and substitutes legal-rational institutions. Secularization in turn is part of a broader process sometimes called ‘rationalization,’ which is nothing less than the logicalization of thought and life. (1982: 460)

Rather than expanding these terms directly, they may be rendered just as clearly through discussing the relationships these processes of progress, rationalisation and secularization affected between Spiritual Magic and the wider cultural context.

Western society, since Enlightenment, has been engulfed in a narrative of progress. Progress describes the manner in which culture has been seen, since this period, to be a teleological project. The sum goal of this teleology is, simply, the “maturation of human knowledge.” (Berman, 1981: 69) Progress is seen to begin amidst Enlightenment, predominantly, because this was the period in which scientific inquiry began to flourish into formalized principles of rational thought. These scientific principles were seemingly rational not only because they described and made sense of the natural world, but because science consecrated a system of matured knowledge that was significantly “free from animistic or metaphysical presuppositions.” (Berman, 1981: 70) This can be seen in the earlier example of the perceived causes of rain, where once such causality was attributed to the magical interventions of metaphysical rain gods like Zeus or to animistic tree spirits, science revealed the natural causes of rain, those processes of evaporation and precipitation achieved not though magic but through atmospheric conditions. Spiritual Magic was greatly challenged by such rationalization of thought because the presuppositions of magical energy or mana that its knowledge of causality was based upon were disproved by the physical laws observed by science; science replacing magical notions of animation with a proof of natural causality. While nature is often conceived metaphorically as being an inherent force, making it somehow symbolically equivalent to the idea of the forces of mana, nature is nonetheless not magical because it is not seen to be spiritually animated. Rather it is based upon scientifically identifiable principles that
act indifferently to human intervention. While science, therefore, undermined the magical tenets of knowledge that emerged from the context of Spiritual Magic and its cosmological attempts to explain or make sense of worldly phenomena, such rationalisation also eliminated the need for magical performance because rituals sympathetic actions could no longer be believed to be efficacious.

It is widely observed, then, that Western culture has progressed from a self understanding governed by cosmological belief systems, which were oriented to the magical properties of the world, to that of a post-Enlightenment attitude that knowledge is to be located in the observable or quantifiable. It is within Enlightenment that “scientific reasons uncontested right to narrate the evidence, to compose the sole acceptable version of the story” (Bauman, 1991: 239) became a tenet of progress, one in which the narration of the world was determined only through that which was explicable. It is a rationalized attitude that does not allow for the persistence of spiritual animation - not only because it disproves the magical pre-suppositions that make up magic - but because magical beliefs also became maligned as illogical and superstitious.

In the context of Enlightenment scientific observation began to replace magic as a foundation for knowledge, but as science had not yet evolved sufficiently to explain all phenomena, the suppositions of belief still formed part of cultural knowledge. However, rather than championing magical belief – which would have been in direct contest to the promotion of progress – belief became the exclusive provenance of monotheistic religion. Magic became the antithesis to progress because it was only through the discreditation of magic that alternative paradigms of thought, which include those proffered by scientific rationalism but also the formalized belief of religion, could be validated as suitable alternatives to magical belief and understanding. Michael Mangan suggests that Spiritual Magic has been discredited by “advancing the claims of western rationalism over those of folk rituals,” (Mangan:2007:112) and this is certainly a process that has been actively undertaken by science and religion. While features of this opposition will be outlined shortly, through the example of the persecution of magical practices as witchcraft in Europe between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, it is important to note, as Mangan
suggests, that these oppositions are always indicative of the wider “archetypal conflict between civilization and magical belief” (Mangan:2007:112) which has accompanied culture from Enlightenment through to the Modern period because of the ideal of progress that accompanies the evolution of Western culture.

Formalized religion gained ideological validity by re-orientating the cultural tenants of belief, which can be seen insomuch as the Western world after the Dark Ages, or the 1400s, began to be increasingly ensconced in the meta-narrative of Christianity. Replacing belief in Spiritual Magic with a faith that the miraculous phenomena of the world was the provenance of one God had the consequence of marginalizing magical belief over time. Thus, the process of destabilising magical belief did not begin with Enlightenment, but rather preceded it by several centuries. However Carlo Ginzburg suggests that the persecution of magical beliefs by the Church was catalysed by the same conflict that placed magic at odds with science, namely, the contradictions between “folk culture and learned culture” (1990: 11) or the more archetypal conflict between belief and reason. This can be seen in the manner that both religion and science attempt to brand folk culture or magic as an irrational superstition or even dangerous practice. This can be seen in the European witch hunts that occurred between 1450 and 1750, (Luhrmann, 1989: 27) the Church sanctioned persecutions sought to reveal and punish anyone suspected of engaging with magic or ritual. In this context maleficent or diabolic intent was attributed to all magical practices, even those as banal as using herbal remedies or anti-social behaviour, the punishment for which was usually torture and death. While such practices were cultural hold overs from a context of pagan forms of Spiritual Magic, those “nature-oriented religions” (Luhrmann, 1989: 388) whose sympathetic practices logically utilised natural objects as localizations of power, they were attributed without fault to rituals of Satanic intent. The apotheosis of these rituals being the witches Sabbath, the black rite equivalent to a diabolic communion, which was greatly feared at the time but was, as Ginzburg suggests a “myth” not a “ritual” that was constructed through the “hostile testimonies, originating from or filtered by the demonologists, inquisitors and judges” (Ginzburg, 1990: 10) whose polemical persecution of magic lead to its diabolization across this period. In this way maleficent practices of witchcraft were
made real through belief, much like the confirmation of a more positive magical efficacy in earlier celebrations of Spiritual Magic, but such belief did not originate through invested participants but through those opposed to the performance of magic.

Mangan again makes a vital observation that while attempting to purge magical belief such witch trials express a cultural context engaged in a simultaneous “belief and unbelief” (2007: 31) in magic. Like Ginzburg’s balance of the folk and the learned, belief and unbelief suggests a context in which the existence and efficacy of magic is contested. It can be suggested then that even into the period of Enlightenment the general suspicion surrounding witchcraft bespoke to the fact that magic was still believed to be, to some degree, efficacious. However magic’s destabilization by both formalised religion and rationalization worked actively to purge such beliefs over time. Continuing the argument that science and religion worked to replace the cultural functions of magic, while religion adopted the powerful role of belief, science was largely responsible for eliminating Spiritual Magic’s role as an explanatory paradigm. It has already been mentioned that science refuted magical animism and its attendant principles of efficacious causality. This is of significant import because, in response to this elimination of magical explanation, science posits that knowledge or truth was to be found only within explicable or terrestrial observation, an orientation that constructed a secular culture. Seeing causality as the natural consequence of unchanging principles of natural physics meant that knowledge was forevermore to become determined through secular bases rather than through the determinations of magical classification. As a result, science is seen to reveal an independent truth, not guided by the exigencies of human imagination or the ‘animistic and metaphysical presuppositions’ that constitute the human assumptions that make up magic and even religion. It is for this reason that, within the schema of cultural progress, science eventually replaced not only magic, but “religion in a zero-sum contest to explain the world.” (Bruce, 2006: 37)

It can be summarised that amidst Enlightenment the paradigms of religion and science provided the basis of the disenchantment of Spiritual Magic while consequently remaking cultural knowledge and belief through the ideals of secular progress. As a
conceptual field, Spiritual Magic was constructed as a “production of illusion and
delusion that was,” accurately, “thought to recede and disappear as rationalization and
secularization spread throughout society.” (Pels, 2003: 4) However Enlightenment did
not eliminate magic entirely but rather transformed its conceptual limits for magic, as it is
known today, is a product of the same forces that sought to eliminate it from cultural life.
This can be seen insomuch as the era of Spiritual Magic was followed by a period in
which magical performance did not recede from cultural life but rather was transported
from a context of spiritual belief into one that celebrated magic as a form of
entertainment. As this thesis contends the era of Spiritual Magic is followed by one of
Entertainment Magic, a context in which magic became a form of performance based on
creating entertainments, peculiarly edifying scientific entertainments which unexpectedly
complimented the Enlightenment ideals of reason and learning.

According to Barbara Stafford, Enlightenment is defined through its polemic
opposition to all forms of apparent deception or fraudulent knowledge, which was
expressed through the ideal of progress as a “methodological attack against all pseudos.”
(1994: 281) Such methodological attack, that provenance of the quantifications of
scientific rationalism, significantly created the tenets for the proof of reasoned knowledge
against forms of pseudo knowledge. This designation of pseudo partly encompassed any
irrational or non-explicit forms of knowledge, in particular those bases of belief or
superstition that made up the sum of Spiritual Magic, but also encompassed, according to
Stafford, the debunking of fraudulent appearances. Such frauds were particularly
manifest in wide ranging entertainments and magical performances of the era that created
deception through sensory experiences of illusion. Such an argument can only be
understood once it is observed how Enlightenment, while prompting the decline of
Spiritual Magic, was the context in which Entertainment Magic – that form of magic
based upon entertaining spectacles of deceptive magic achieved through technological or
scientific apparatus, such as the optical illusions of screen technologies like the camera
obscura and magic lantern – gained widespread popularity. Thus based upon rational
mechanisms but irrational appearances, these entertainments were ambiguously
positioned as edifying and as forms of “fashionable fraud” (Stafford, 1994: 103)
performed for, and enjoyed in spite of, the apparent deceptions that they presented. Stafford argues that, in light of such widespread revelry in deception, that Enlightenment is not just defined through its rational ideals, but rather also through the “the ubiquity and diversity of scheming in opposition to which the ages chief thinkers defined themselves.” (Stafford, 1994: 129) Thus Enlightenment was established against, in the case of Spiritual Magic, and through, in the case of Entertainment Magic, its magical antitheses.

Under the rubrics of progress, rationalization and secularization that were catalysed in Western culture during Enlightenment, magical understandings of the world were seen to be eliminated from everyday life and thought. While it has been demonstrated that culture partly eliminated magic, by re-orienting its functions amidst the alternative paradigms of belief and knowledge offered by religion and science, magic still remains as a potent element in the cultural imagination. As will be discussed in the next chapter the persistence of magic is manifested predominantly through the transformation of magic into a form of Entertainment Magic after this period. However, it remains to be shown here that Spiritual Magic still persists in a Western context, though rather than representing a dominant system of knowledge and classification, Spiritual Magic has become a counter-culturally based modality of belief and practice.

**The Persistence of Spiritual Magic and Belief**

As earlier discussion of the magical domain have contended, magic has found a comfortable home amidst the secular reconfigurations of life that make up contemporary experience. But as Anthony Aveni, discussing magic in the context of Modernity emphasizes: this “world of rabbits and hats, saws and ladies, hocus and pocus – is only the tiniest remnant of what history has bequeathed us; the telltale appendage of an epic story of humanity’s quest for knowledge and truth, and for what is real.” (1996: xi) The quest for knowledge and truth, which shares certain equivalence with the ideal of progress itself, is a process that has never been able to fully shirk the influence of magic upon man’s thoughts about the world and particularly the unknown. Aveni makes a similar supposition by emphasizing the indomitable character of magic which, along with science and religion, makes up an “eternal triangle of ideological warfare,” of social
forces that constantly alter our “common sense about the natural world and its relation to
the human spirit.” (1996: xi) Aveni, however is not talking about culture in the past tense,
referring to some moment closer to that contentious time of Enlightenment, rather the
author sees these categories as active features of the contemporary period, one which
continues to “[treat] both magic and science as a belief system.” (1996: xi)

Aveni’s comments can be said to argue that the persistence of magic continues to
make it an influential paradigm in cultural belief and practice. While this thesis does not
refute this argument, it is important to elucidate how Spiritual Magic has changed in
response to the secular trajectory of Western culture over time. In particular, it seems that
while magic is resilient, the persistence of magical belief is largely enacted on a scale that
is individual or counter-cultural, an argument that will be made through the example of
the New Age revival of magical belief that will be undertaken shortly, an example which
demonstrates how Spiritual Magic persists as an alternative source of the determination
of knowledge but does not hold the same degree of influence as it did in a pre-
Enlightenment context. Unlike science, magic has not claimed an uncontested right to
narrate or “explain the world” (Bruce, 2006: 37) since the time of Enlightenment, but has
offered an alternative, even complimentary, paradigm of knowledge and belief for the
modern subjectivity.

Arguments of progress and rationalization observed that culture actively denied
spiritual animation and redistributed the truth making function of magic to religion and
science. Accompanying such progress is the underlying assumption that such ideological
attitudes will be carried through into the belief of peoples. This is an assumption based
upon the logic that reason, the outlook of scientific rationalism, determines knowledge as
a transcendent category. Knowledge, when arrived at through rational inquiry, is seen to
possess an irrefutable truth status because it is, simply, reasonable. Such knowledge
cannot be refuted by the unquantified, and therefore illogical, suppositions of magic or
even religion. Yet, the belief that makes up both religion and magic is tenacious, as E. M
Butler suggests, that “where supernatural phenomena are concerned humanity believes in
the teeth of evidence, or disbelieves in spite of the evidence, but never because of the
evidence” (Butler, 1948:11) It is a syllogism that suggests that there is no determining consequence between truth and disbelief, one that can be expanded to show that rationalism does not refute magical belief apriori. It is because of such tenacity that a belief in Spiritual Magic has been able persist amidst secular culture. This persistence of magic encompasses both the resilience of apparent superstition as well as the sound suspicion of the equivocal. Magic has provided independent cultural agents with an alternative truth making paradigm, one that may not be tenable across culture as a whole, but one that may function efficaciously on a more personal or eclectic scale.

While continued revivals of spiritual-magical beliefs may appear to champion a continuation of the structures of the efficacious cause and effect that typified Spiritual Magic, the persistence of Spiritual Magic is based on systems of personal efficacy and alternative belief, rather than the social viability of magical belief. By consequence any revival of Spiritual Magic can only be viably endorsed on a scale of individual rather than social efficacy. This can be demonstrated through the examples of the nineteenth century Occult Revival or the twentieth century New-Age, which are examples of the renewal of belief in Spiritual Magic on a wide scale.9 However, they act as examples that demonstrate that such renewals of Spiritual Magic are only viable in a counter-cultural context, the influence of which upon mainstream society is fairy negligible. This is because such revivals represent rediscoveries of Spiritual Magic that were motivated by personal rather than social goals. Simon During identifies that such contemporary forms of magical belief are “interiorized, commercialized and fictionalized” and most prevalently “secular.” (2002: 42) This assessment could be applied to any number of further quasi-magical belief systems engaged with widely under the banner of the New-Age, including such examples as Reiki, Buddhism, Tantra, Astrology and even such mainstream practices as Jungian or Freudian Psychoanalysis (which relies on the analysis of magical realms such as symbols, dreams and archetypal material). These systems represent a form of Spiritual Magic that is interiorized insomuch as they are seen to be efficacious beliefs and practices: they are seen to have tangible effects. However the

9 While the Western occult and New Age revivals will be discussed further at a later point in this chapter, discussions of these movements as renewals of magical belief can be found in Jorgenson, 1992, Faivre, 1994, and Drury, 1987.
system of causality that they are engaged in relies largely on the status of the individual practitioner to gauge these effects. As has already been discussed, the efficacy of magic rests in belief, and this is also true in the case of individual belief, for the New-Age practitioner, as a magician of self, never doubts that magical action will “inevitably be attended by the desired result.” (Frazer, 1994: 48) It can be observed, then, that while many New-Age practices continue to champion the existence of animated spiritual forces, they do not rely upon these energies to determine the efficacy of their practice.

It remains, then, to understand why there are such continued revivals of Spiritual Magic. A thread that can be found in most inquiries that address this question suggests that there is a certain dissatisfaction attached to a modern experience that is evacuated of spiritual meaning and experience. Neville Drury, discussing the history of magic, comes to the conclusion that such revivals are an example of a “mythic back-lash,” catalysed because:

it has proven to be unsatisfactory, and indeed possibly pathological, to attempt to repress the vestiges of mythological thought in modern man in the vain hope of eliminating ‘superstition’ with the advance of science. Clearly we humans require domains of mystery; we need to know where the sacred aspects of life may be found and how to understand the intuitive, infinite and profoundly meaningful visionary moments which arise in all of us at different times. (1987:100)

A similar dissatisfaction is highlighted by Danny Jorgenson, who suggests that the New-Age responds to a definite sense of lack, arising because rational culture is “unable exhaustively to provide meaningful accounts of all human experiences,” and as a result, “esotericism and occultisms will persist in some form as alternative ways for accounting for otherwise ambiguous experiences and realities.” (1992: 236) While this thesis has already discussed the manner in which magic is utilised as a paradigm of thought that is used to explain and make sense of anomalous experience there is no reason to think that these dissatisfactions occur only as a response to ambiguous experience. This same systemic lack has been associated with more pervasive feelings of disenchantment amidst
an everyday life that is evacuated of all spiritual animation and, hence, belief. The renewal of belief, through revivals of Spiritual Magic or through the magical reanimation of life with spiritual presence, has been theorized as a form of ‘compensation:’ the equation goes that these alternative paradigms of knowledge may mitigate the negative aspects of Modern experience, those feeling of disenchantment or lack, by reinvigorating “everyday life in a meaningful fashion.” (Jorgenson, 1992: 29)

While the variety of spiritual expressions that make up the New-Age may act as examples of re-enchantment, it is often one that is problematically enacted from within secular culture. This can be seen in the New-Age’s peculiar relationship to consumer culture. Because the New-Age offers, alongside its alternative spiritual patterns of belief and action, a range of material goods, these objects are often reconfigured as what Richard Stivers calls “hierophanies of consumption.” (2001: 40) Again, highlighting issues of spiritual efficacy, Stiver’s suggests that phenomenal objects are able to become “differentially sacred depending on individual circumstances.” (2001: 40) The renewal of the presence in phenomenal appearances may certainly alleviate the perceived vacuity of secular consumer cultures as it allows the object world to become not only meaningful but magical. However, this cannot be accurately labelled as a renewal of Spiritual Magic as the animation given to these phenomenal objects need not rely on spiritual presence or even belief, merely the projection of individually perceived efficacy. Such perceptions of efficacy can be seen in such examples as crystal healing or colour therapy, which like pagan forms of Spiritual Magic rest upon the localization of magical power in natural objects, however the success of such therapies can never be gauged by any observable or quantifiable effects but can only be gauged by the internalized response of the participant whose well being, perhaps depending on whether or not they are susceptible to a placebo, is either unchanged or greatly improved but participants in New Age therapies rarely perceive efficacious effects that are detrimental to their sense of well being.

This seems to return to the recurring conundrum of Spiritual Magic: because efficacy is grounded in belief, magic needs to be accepted as efficacious on a level of society as a whole, or else it is restricted to being an individualized paradigm of
knowledge, classification and effect. This conundrum will persist at least up until the point that the existence of magical forces can be proved as an unequivocal feature of the universe, for as Butler showed, believers do not require evidence but sceptics certainly do. In the meantime, while magical belief may, to some extent, re-enchant our feelings about modern life, the compensation it provides is equally influenced by the ideological precepts and restrictions of secular culture, in particular, its prioritizations of interiorization and consumerism. Thus, while belief in magic may still be viable or even vital in the contemporary period, it cannot be taken for granted that these practices are not in equal proportion secular manifestations, making spiritual renewals of magic equivalent to cultures wider reinventions of magic as a secular mode of entertainment since Enlightenment.
Chapter Three:
ENTERTAINMENT MAGIC

Introduction

As has been expressed throughout this thesis, the history of magic can be divided into two main phases. While the phase of Spiritual Magic, and the various legacies of Spiritual Magic that have persisted up until the contemporary era have been discussed, the phase of magic that followed Enlightenment, that of Entertainment Magic, has yet to be outlined. This chapter addresses this task. This is particularly vital because it is possible to theorize that cinema exists as a technology and as an entertainment that has evolved from the wider practices of Entertainment Magic.

After the phase of Spiritual Magic, magic was stripped of its efficacy and became something that was largely performed in the context of and for entertainment. This chapter will show how in this later phase of Entertainment Magic, magic became a mode of performance that is comprised out of the essential elements of mechanical effect and experiential affect. Further the context of entertainment can contain or even exploit the certain ambiguities that such magical performances encourage between the rational or scientific basis of this trickery and the experiences of wonder that they can produce. The same ambiguity is manifest in the eclecticism of the audience, whose belief or contrary scepticism surrounding magic, is nevertheless subsumed by magic’s ability to trick, to suspend the disbelief of such audiences in the momentary magical experiences of entertainment. Such suspension of disbelief is contingent on the verisimilitude of illusion that is enabled through complex technologies of trickery upon which Entertainment Magic is based. By examining a particular strand of such trickery, the technologies of visual illusion and screen display, it is possible to establish cinema as a technical legacy of Entertainment Magic, yet one that also continues to nurture the magical imagination of culture in its production of both magical effects and affects.
The final part of the discussion of Entertainment Magic that this chapter presents will discuss the lineage of the instrumental technologies of Entertainment Magic. It is through mechanical technologies that Entertainment Magic was established and allowed to flourish amidst the entertainments of secular culture. In particular, this thesis will be focusing on a certain trajectory of technologies: the optical illusions of visual projection and the screen. This chapter features an extended discussion of the key technologies of the Camera Obscura, the Magic Lantern, the Phantasmagoria, the photographic image, the Kinetoscope, and finally cinema. It discusses both the technical features of these instruments and the manner in which their illusion making potential was developed into magical performances. This discussion is developed through the archival work of authors such as Laurent Mannoni, Charles Musser, Marina Warner and Eric Barnouw, among others, yet outlines an independent interpretation of these technologies as part of the evolution from Spiritual to Entertainment Magic.

**Entertainment Magic**

In some ways, a definition of Entertainment Magic should be self-evident. It is comprised of those forms of magic trickery that have pervaded the spaces of entertainment since the seventeenth-century. The art of entertaining or “fictitious magic [which] encompasses a wide range of wonder-exciting performances,” (Mangan, 2007: 100) including those novel and entertaining spectacles of prestidigitation, optical illusion, and technological wonder, that have preserved the vitality of magical performance in secular culture. However, like all things magical, Entertainment Magic is equally enigmatic, a form that has been shaped out of a range of cultural and ideological influences that make its definition anything but straightforward.

It is because of such uncertainty that the discussion of a phase of Entertainment is not proposed without an academic pretext, for such tensions in the evolution of magic have been identified in the work of many authors who attend to the historical interplay of magic and culture over time. While the term Entertainment Magic as a designation for this phase of magic is one independently developed by this thesis, it is a designation that is foreshadowed in many academic works that identify a shift in the *raison d'être* of...
magic since Enlightenment (works which will be discussed in depth as this chapter progresses). Despite the differing focal points of these studies of magic they all attend to certain key cultural influences upon magic. It can be paraphrased through the work of Leigh Schmidt who summarises that “Enlightenment did not so much assault [Spiritual] magic as absorb and secularize it; with the help of the market, legerdemain was transformed into a widely distributed commodity of edifying amusement.” (1998: 275) James Cook emphasizes that with the scientific turn of magic, it ‘began to claim disenchantment as [its] raison d’être in the post-Enlightenment world… [paving] the way for stage magic’s movement into a novel cultural location: the rapidly proliferating urban entertainment venues dominated by the rising middle class.” (Cook, 2001: 179) This movement of magic from ritual spaces into those regulated for public entertainments is a key feature of Entertainment Magic. Further Entertainment Magic was bolstered by the invention of a leisure culture and its spaces of amusement: the stage, the “exhibition hall” and the “dime museum,” (Stulman Dennett, 1997: 117) the “street” (Cavendish, 1977) and even the home when “parlour magic” became easily “one of the Gilded Age’s most popular bourgeois hobbies.” (Cook, 2001:167)

What is perhaps the greatest consequence of the movement of magic into spaces of entertainment was the shift in spectatorial position required by these spaces and performances. While in the context of Spiritual Magic the spectator was engaged as a participant - because they were seen to be the recipients of efficacious magical effects - in Entertainment Magic the role of the spectator is that of the audience member. This audience is engaged largely through their sensory capacities, rather than through participation. Michael Mangan suggests that magic is popular because it works via the “universal competencies” of visual perception, thus being a successful entertainment because it “required few cultural competencies to be enjoyable… [magic’s] capacity to delight and amaze was potentially effective across linguistic and cultural barriers.” (2002: 68) This dynamic is interesting because it would appear that Entertainment Magic is somehow more mundane than its efficacious spiritual ancestor. Yet, Entertainment Magic can still be seen as a form that also attempts to fulfil the persistent desire for magic in culture, a balm for the sense of loss that was discussed at the end of the previous chapter.
As Cook suggests, to the public and to the theorist alike it seems, “the very fact that magic had become mere entertainment only increased its fascination, social relevance, and historical importance.” (Cook, 2001: 166) In particular, it may be speculated that Entertainment Magic retains its magical qualities simply because it is resituated into entertainment. While it may be argued that there may be the ability for amusements to be edifying, insomuch as Entertainment Magic is situated as being an Enlightened entertainment because it is partly scientific, it would be remiss to claim that entertainment has ever privileged the rational. Entertainment is not the realm of science and rationality, for while entertainment may utilize technology it does so imaginatively, quickly usurping such edifying preferences for those of make believe, fantasy and abandon. Such a dynamic is true of Magic Lantern displays insomuch as their capacity as “scientific instruments” presents mundane images equivalent to the displays of “slide projectors and overhead projectors.” (Hankins and Silverman, 1995: 71) The magic of this device is not based upon its instrumental capacities but rather the adaptation of science to the priorities of entertainment. The spectacular priorities of entertainment and the deceptive priorities of magic coalesced to render the lantern as a tool capable of constructing imaginary projected illusions such as ghostly Phantasmagoria shows.

While being partly scientific or edifying, then, Entertainment Magic was equally influenced by the impulses towards spectacle and deception. The reinvention of magic as scientific was necessary to make such entertainments, which belong to the realm of fantasy and deception, compatible with Enlightenment ideals that leisure should be edifying. Again it is possible to make reference to Barbara Stafford’s assertion that such magical entertainments fulfilled Enlightenment predilection for “fashionable fraud,” (1994: 103) entertainments in which the superficial packaging of scientific merit would lend respectability to what were, essentially, displays designed to entertain rather than inform. Such fashionable fraud was just one articulation of the nature of entertainment culture during the period of Enlightenment; Stafford’s work is regulated mainly through the wider designation of “artful science” as a description for an entire era of amusement that actively blurred the divisions between “entertainment and information, pleasure and learning” (Stafford, 1994: xxiv) and to which can be added the further ambiguities of
truth and deception, science and amusement, revelation and concealment, and the rational and irrational, which were attributed to magic in the introduction of this thesis.

Despite the fact that magic was subsumed into expressions of entertainment during and after Enlightenment, such entertainments provided a form of magical experience that remained spiritual in quality. This is because while the secular context of Enlightenment could not admit a persistence of spiritual belief in magic, the feeling structures that attended magic, that of the magical, were renewed through these forms of Entertainment Magic. The experience of the magical represents the experiential efficacy of Spiritual Magic, the ability for unknown, spectacular or wondrous visions to transport their spectator into a state of preternatural delight or awe. Vivian Sobchack suggests […] the visual illusions presented in contemporary science fiction film, the genres use of visual effects making it a distant relatives to… the illusionistic displays of an earlier Entertainment Magic, create two forms of magic: “special affect (joyous intensities and euphoria)” and “special effects (grand displays of ‘industrial light and magic’).” (1999: 282) This delineation of effects from affects is applicable to the construction of Entertainment Magic, the effects of which are encompassed in the technological creations of illusion that comprise their magical appearances, while the affects of Entertainment Magic encompass the spiritual intensities encompassed in the experience of enchantment and wonder that such illusory effects can catalyse. As Angela Ndalianis observes in regards to special effect oriented cinema, “for the audience, it is the effects technology that evokes a state akin to this rapturous state of other-worldliness” (2004:213) as, vitally, “states of amazement [that had] little to do with rationality” (2004:209) This condition is also met in Entertainment Magic in which the experience of magic effects works to create affect as the other-worldliness of the magical that accompanies the extraordinary experience of illusions.

While this thesis now turns to an extend discussion of the manifestation of effect and affect in Entertainment Magic, by way of introduction, such a division helps resolve some of the apparent contradictions that attend the notion of magic for it allows magic to simultaneously present rational effects and yet create irrational or emotional experiences,
to be progressively scientific yet also maintain a certain degree of spiritual efficacy centred upon the experiencing subject. Further, in observing Entertainment Magic’s ability to produce magical affects is vital because it allows this mode of performance to resist the designation of being mere entertainment. An orientation to affect allows Entertainment Magic to maintain a spiritual element, a degree of experiential efficacy that simultaneously ensures that, even in secular culture, the performance of magic remains magical.

**Effects**

In the introduction to this chapter it was suggested that Entertainment Magic is dually determined through effects and affects. These components are, in some ways, simple to extrapolate. Effects refer to the production of technologically generated special effects of illusion within the performance of Entertainment Magic. Affects are the experiences of magic – enchantment, awe, and amazement - that are to be found as the outcome of these same technical effects.\(^{10}\) So, while effects may be scientific and edifying forms of entertainment, it is in the experiential affects catalysed by magic where the contention of the social respectability of magic is thwarted. This is because magic creates an affective experience of the magical in which the feelings of animation attributed to magic are renewed. Entertainment Magic, then, is fraught with the same ambiguity that haunts magic throughout history. Here it is found in the disunity that arises between effect and affect: the appearances of illusion, when met with the experiences of magical enchantment make illusions, at least on an experiential level, expressions of real magic.

To begin, the magical effects of Entertainment Magic are found in the creation of what have come to be widely termed as special effects, those instrumental technologies that create visual illusion. The creation of special effects, especially those that pervade magical performances, began their life as an adaptation of the scientific instrumentation

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\(^{10}\) This division of effect and affect in technologically produced entertainments has been addressed not only by Sobchack and Ndalianis, but is also apparent in the work of Stafford insomuch as the author suggests that the technologies of artful science were “sensuous,” (1994: xxiv) focused not just upon the effects of magical appearances but upon eliciting an experiential relationship with the spectator.
of Natural Magic to the purposes of entertaining display. Natural Magic does not describe a phase of magic in culture, but rather the designation given to early scientific investigation undertaken within the Renaissance period of the mid 1500s. These pursuits were termed as magical because they examined what was seen to be the “miraculous” (Hankins and Silverman, 1995: 4) or magical properties of the natural world. Finding that examining nature scientifically required mechanical aids that overcame the limitations of human systems of perception: Natural Magic not only investigated nature, but invented the instruments that made such investigation possible. Hankins and Silverman suggest that “the purpose of the instruments of natural magic was to produce wondrous effects. Natural magic differed from black magic,” or efficacious Spiritual Magic, as its “effects were natural rather than supernatural even though they may have appeared to be miraculous.” (1995: 4) Yet such appearances were what came to define these devices, their role as scientific instrumentation being quickly adapted to their more successful purpose of producing, or better reproducing, these natural effects as entertainments.

In understanding how these devices came to magic it must be understood that Natural Magic was a strand of early science that was particularly focused on one strand of inquiry and instrumentation, that of optics. Marina Warner observes that the interest in the production of wondrous effects was carried into the “early enterprises of optical researchers and instrument-makers… [who] aimed at enhancing the visual experience of the world as it offers itself to the human eyes.” (2006: 152) This can be seen through the invention of the Camera Obscura, a simple device that relied on the refraction of light that captures light rays through an aperture. As light travelled through this opening it would contract and diffuse outwards, producing a projected image that would appear upon a surface parallel, but inverted, from the original light source. While the Camera Obscura and its origins will be addressed more fully at a latter stage of this thesis, such image effects were more than meets the eye, as the saying goes, because in reproducing the conditions of perception they met the eye as if they were real, such realistic reproduction making them suitable for scientific display but also for miraculous reproductions of entertainment.
While this thesis focuses on such instruments of display as part of the wider impulses of Entertainment Magic, Charles Musser suggests that such technologies of display represent a cultural history of “screen practice - projected images and their audio complement- which dates back to the 17th century.” (Musser, 1994: 1) Laurent Mannoni identifies the same trajectory of magical displays, but addresses them through the designation of “deceptive arts” (2004: 43) or the “art of light and shadow” (2000). These terms are perhaps more productively evocative than that of Musser’s screen practice, for culture was not fascinated with the screen itself, so much as the illusions it presented: the deceptions that relied on the manipulation of optics, visual perception and light. Tom Gunning paraphrases Mannoni’s focus, suggesting that these deceptive arts make up a “multi-century trajectory for the invention of and fascination with illuminated, moving or technological images… the intersection of a scientific fascination with elements of visual perceptions – the science of optics – with a delight in the creation of illusions.” (Gunning, 2000: xxii) But in discussing instrumental technologies Manonni stresses that one must never lose sight of the fact that they exist primarily as devices that express cultures obsession with the production of illusion “as an autonomous current of aesthetic and technical questing, of which the cinema is just one of the most attractive strands.” (2004:43)

This thesis, like Mannoni, celebrates cinema as a constituent legacy of these deceptive arts, but instead of focusing its reflections upon culture through a context of technologies of display, this thesis examines the longer, and arguably larger, context of magic in culture. While the nodes of connection are the same – science, spectacle, and the visual - it sees these deceptive arts as but a part of a wider phase of Entertainment Magic, a lens that is again widened to place such entertainments as part of a wider history of magic in culture. Where this lens takes us, however, suggests that magic is given over to one particular continuity, a trait that haunts deceptive arts and technologies, Entertainment and Spiritual Magics, that of magical experience.
Affect

Entertainment Magic, while grounded in technological effects, is driven, essentially, by the impulses of entertainment. While it has been argued that the technological effects that make these illusions may be edifying, they are not entertaining because of the sort of mental satisfaction that may accompany a knowledgeable understanding of these mechanical devices. Such satisfactions pale to those experiences of magical that also accompany these entertainment devices. Marina Warner suggests that magical illusions “give delight, but the pleasure in being deceived keeps pace with the pleasure in knowing how the deception works, and the one is ceaselessly trying to outpace the other.” (2004: 22) This is again encompassed in Stafford’s notion of fashionable fraud, entertainments that delighted but were also seen to satisfy the inquisitive drive that underlies the Enlightened predilection for unmasking fraudulent appearances. However, the pleasures of entertainment must be seen as the inevitable champion of these drives because magic is conditional upon magical experiences but is never conditional upon the understanding of illusions. It is within these experiences of magic that we find the conjuration of affect.

Affect, in the context of this thesis, has been used to refer to the transformative intensities of experience that are compelled within an audience when engaged with magical entertainments, be they illusions of a tradition of conjuring or those of the cinema text. In order to discuss affect this section will draw upon the author Edgar Morin who discusses affect as the quasi-magical experience of cinema. Affect, it will be argued, is the experience that engages the audience in illusions, that transforms their grasp on reality and transports them into magical experience. However, as Ndalianis notes while effect is “representable” it provokes “affect which is unrepresentable” (2004: 218) because while universally magical, affect is a subjective and intangible experience. Rather than trying to articulate affect through those unrepresentable experiences such as amazement or wonder, it is possibly more productive to examine the process of affective transportation that occurs when a spectator encounters magic. This transport occurs through three stages – those of perception, cognition and emotion - which can be thought
of as separate aspects of the experience of magic, though the shifts between them may be momentary or simultaneously encountered.

In the context of Entertainment Magic, affect is compelled in the audience initially through the alteration to perception that occurs when watching illusion. Michael Mangan emphasizes that the essence of magic is found within the “immediacy” of “encounter” (2007: xvii) that is engaged in the audience during the performance of magic. It is from this immediacy that perceptual affect is drawn. Entertainment Magic strategically creates illusion around the limitations of perception. This is apparent the concept of the optical illusion, which works by tricking the perceptual limitations of the eye. An example of an optical illusion can be found in the thaumatrope which emerged around 1820 in England. The device featured a piece of card attached to two lengths of string, on each side of the card was printed a distinct image such as that of an image of a bird and an image of a cage. When the string was wound then allowed to unravel between the spectators hands, this card would spin and oscillate between the two images. Because of the persistence of vision, (Musser, 1994: 43) the tendency of the human retina to retain an impression of an image for a short time, the quick interchange of the images would create the appearance of a bird in a cage. Marina Warner suggests that “deception grows in the ground of understanding, so the more that is known about the way the mind works, the more possible it becomes to slip underneath its defences and conjure illusions.” (2004: 22) This is not just found in the case of devices of optical illusion, but is a condition of experiencing illusions that is already built in to Entertainment Magic because it exploits the limitations of perception. Crucially perceptual affect is immediate and is experienced as real because it is conjured through the sensory apprehension of illusion. The core affect drawn out of perceptual competencies is the experience of the trick as real because magical illusions are experienced inline with everyday visual experience, thus perceptually they are accepted as real.

It is within the second stage of affect- that of cognitive affect - that the status of reality attributed to this initial perceptual experience is negotiated subjectively. Edgar Morin proposes a theory of affect in the cinema that may be appropriate to extend to the
affects of Entertainment Magic, particularly because it addresses what this thesis views as the perceptive and cognitive aspects of affect. Morin suggests that cinema is composed of two compelling components of “affectivity and magic.” (Morin, 2005:7) The magical components of cinema are found not in the contents of the illusions it presents, but rather within the particular ambiguous relationships that it encourages, “the wandering from spectator to the image, from the interior soul to the fantastic exterior. The subjective aspects of cognitive affect can be found in Morin’s own concept that cinema, like Entertainment Magic, relies upon a spectatorial position of “affective participation.” (2005: 88) Following the initial perceptive experience, which is the universal experience of the illusion, “affective blossoming, succeeds the magical stage… the melting of magic liberates enormous fluxes of affectivity, a subjective flood. (Morin, 2005: 88) Affective participation, then, refers to the manner in which magical experience is internalized subjectively and interpreted, an interpretation that is a cognitive event. Michael Mangan suggests that the truest experience of magic occurs when “the ‘magical’ explanation of what has taken place may seem as plausible as the actual (and rational) explanation.” (Mangan, 2007: xxvi) In reality, however, cognitive affect is constructed through a range of influences. The perceptual experience of magic, which interprets magic as real, is not necessarily the primary criteria for the ongoing interpretation of this experience, which is contested by subjective criteria. This interpretation of magical experience on a cognitive level, then, works to determine if an event is really magic or illusion and does so through subjective criteria, cognitive limitations such as reason, scepticism or belief.

Essentially, cognitive affect asks the subjectivity a singular question -Am I witnessing magic- and here the answer to this question is restricted simply to yes or no: the experience before you is real magic or it is illusion. Yet, this affective impulse to interpret magic is balanced with yet another level, that of emotional affect, which is the level at which magic is experienced as magical or enchanting, but is also the level at which magic is enjoyed as an entertainment. The cognitive interpretation of affect determines whether or not magic will be enjoyed as an efficacious event or as one of entertaining artifice. While the former requires a belief that may be thin on the ground amidst the Enlightened audience there is a further position that complicates the rationality
of secular culture and allows an emotional experience of Morin’s magical affective flow to persist amidst a rationally sceptic audience, that of a suspension of disbelief.

**Emotional Affect and the Suspension of Disbelief**

This section discusses the suspension of disbelief as the final stage of affect, one that is based upon emotional interpretations of magical experience. The notion of the suspension of disbelief comes via the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who sees this state as a feature of the audience of written literature, who in encountering compelling characters, enact a “transfer from our inward nature, a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.” (Coleridge, 1817) This willing suspension of disbelief allows for the growth of faith that the experience of meaning or affect created between a literary work and the reader remains valid despite the illusory status of the medium from which it has been motivated. While Anthony Ferri notes that the willing suspension of disbelief “now serves to describe audience captivation in any medium,” (2007: ix) the appropriateness of this paradigm to understanding the emotional-affective aspects of magic is clear: like in the case of reading a novel or poem the there is a knowledge that when an audience views magic that they are engaging with an illusory paradigm. Yet, there is a willingness to “allow our imaginations to run free and accept as real what at first appears illogical or improbable.” (Ferri, 2007: ix) This willingness to privilege experience is the mechanism by which the cognitive affects of magic are usurped and by which the emotional experiences of magic come to define its core affects.

This thesis places the suspension of disbelief as a mechanism of emotional affect because it is a paradigm that defies the rational criterion of interpretation that marks the cognitive stage of magical experience. This is because it allows the audience to insist that even if magic is not real, the experience of magic remains magical because it is experienced as such on an emotional level. It is separate from perceptive affect, which is sensory, universal and immediate, because it is, like cognitive affects, a subjective component of the experience of magic. While such emotional responses to magic are subjective, the likely form of these emotional responses is also guided by the structures of
performance that surround illusion making. In forthcoming discussion it will be shown that magic shows have tended towards encouraging two forms of emotional response, those that preference delight and amusement and then those that seek to produce terror or fright. These responses are given by the narrative frame in which magical effects are encountered, which tend on the whole to conform to these two polarities through a magic founded in macabre supernatural displays such as those of the Phantasmagoria or those that produce magic as a general entertainment such as in the context of stage conjuring. However, for the moment, it remains to be demonstrated how the suspension of disbelief represents the subjective component of the emotional affects of magical experience.

Jim Steinmeyer argues that the suspension of disbelief equates to falling under a spell - that it requires an audience to “accept an effect without question or wonder.” (2006:37) If this is the case, Steinmeyer argues, the suspension of disbelief is contradictory to the aims of illusion making which:

Starts with a basic reality and attempts to make it deliberately special or surprising. In a magic show there is no willing suspension. The magician cannot risk the audience ignoring his illusions or accepting them as part of a larger context; they must be held apart and treated as unique.” (2006: 38)

While Steinmeyer’s argument does elucidate an important feature of magical performance, namely that magic requires a calculated verisimilitude (a condition that that depicts illusions in a netherworld between reality and the uncanny or as magical yet believable), the author misapprehends the mental processes of affect that informs the suspension of disbelief. There is a subjective calculation amidst the audience, they do not accept an effect without question but rather accept magical affects in spite of their questioning: the audiences give primacy to the emotional-affectual experiences of magic despite the cognitive doubts these experiences also raise.

Perhaps this primacy of experience can be explained through the poetic faith that underlies a suspension of disbelief. That the suspension of disbelief requires a form of
faith is particularly appropriate to the experience of magic, for while magic may be accepted through direct belief, that spectre that creates magic’s efficacy, it may also be affirmed through a secondary - less direct - faith that is founded upon the validity of the emotional affects produced by magic’s effects. For it is in the faith endowed within these experiences, demonstrated by an audience who accepts their own unlikely enchantment, that cognitive affect is bypassed by emotional affect and a safe abandonment of rational scepticism and disbelief is enabled. It replaces these doubts with a form of temporary faith or a suspension of disbelief that allows a valid emotional experience of magic to emerge which, whether pleasurable or frightening, validates magic as an emotionally enchanting entertainment.

To summarize, Entertainment Magic is created out of two components: the illusions of effect and those of affect. Effects are founded in the tangible aspects of magic performance, the technologies and instruments that produce illusions. Affects, instead, describe the experiences of these effects, referring to the engagement of the audience upon the levels of perception, cognition and emotion, in technical illusions. The reason why distinguishing these levels is vital is because they allow us to understand the wider significance of Entertainment Magic. The period of Entertainment Magic, at a cultural level, celebrated the component of effects. This is because magical effects were seen to be edifying amusements that were largely scientific in nature. That such effects should be celebrated through an ongoing array of deceptive arts and technologies seemed a natural compliment to Western culture’s own sense of self: these displays became an embodiment of our societies own ideals of progress and rationality. Yet, there was a complication in this story, for magic found purchase in society in a particular sphere – that of entertainment – a sphere that was never compelled towards the rational. It was the status of magic as entertainment that celebrated and exploited the second component of magic, its ability to conjure affects. Entertainment Magic’s ability to engage the audience in experiences that defied rational cognition, that required them to suspend their disbelief and accept these experiences as somehow real, undermined the dominant cultural attitudes of scepticism towards the appearances of real magic. The affects of Entertainment Magic create a continuation of magical experience which originated in
Spiritual Magic, thus Entertainment Magic may be seen as the culminative expression of a yearning for entertaining experiences and yet also represent an older persistent desire for spiritual forms of magical experience.

These ambiguous pleasures, that rest at the crossroads of the supernatural and the scientific, edification and enchantment, belief and disbelief, the irrational and irrational, are embedded in the performative strategies of Entertainment Magic. These dualities present themselves through the very illusions that Entertainment Magic performs, ones that can be best described through the conjunction of supernatural-entertainments, tricks that themselves stand as metaphors for the ambiguous cultural confusion that has haunted magic throughout its progress towards the contemporary age.

**Magical Instruments and Supernatural-Entertainments**

This section discusses the key technologies of display that make up what Laurent Mannoni has described as the deceptive arts. It does so with two aims in mind, firstly to demonstrate the developmental connections between Entertainment Magic and cinema, while also outlining the forms of magical performance that were created through these technologies. Secondly it will be shown through an analysis of the effects and affects they produce, that their ambiguous magical presentations are best thought of as supernatural-entertainments. In part the conjunction of supernatural-entertainments refers to the themes that these entertainments most commonly presented: supernatural images of ghosts, gods and ghouls. However, supernatural-entertainment is also a conjunction that also relates to the ability of these same illusions to create magical experiences in the spectator, ones that were not just based upon magic’s ability to make illusions appear real, but that could also recreate experiences of the supernatural that intuitively recalled the animation of the period of Spiritual Magic by renewing experiences of mystical encounter that were seen to recede with Enlightenment.

Before it begins, this section acknowledges that it is indebted to the detailed archival work of scholars such as Laurent Mannoni, Eric Barnouw, Charles Musser, and Marina Warner, among others, whose work I use as a basis for recounting the
technologies of the Camera Obscura, the Magic Lantern, Phantasmagoria performances, cinema, as well as the performers, players and spectators who contributed to their development. They are the salve for a frustration identified by Oliver Grau in his studies of the same devices, recounting that “without actual experience of the performances, access to the origins of modern audiovisual media is blocked for interested observers. Imagine what it would be like for our appreciation of modern art if the paintings of Matisse or Monet were available only as postcards or book illustrations!” (Grau, 2007: 142) Michael Mangan suggests that as scholars of magic we are forced to “accept that we are engaging with ghosts and echoes of a vanished event,” leading to a reliance upon the “surrounding fragments and ephemera” (Mangan, 2007: xvii) such as playbills, newspapers and interviews from which considered interpretations may be formed. The interpretive process of this thesis has relied on these authors because they present and comment upon such a wide amalgamation of these sources, fragments, and ephemera, which, because of the scale and breadth of this thesis, would be untenable to collect in a similar fashion. Rather, it utilizes the research of these authors as a springboard from which to interpret the performances of Entertainment Magic.

Before turning to these specific instruments of Entertainment Magic, it seems pertinent by way of introduction to explain the conjunction of supernatural-entertainment that marks their performances. It may be possible to do so by assessing Charles Musser’s reflection that early screen technologies have always seemed to be haunted by a dialectic of “strangeness and familiarity.” (1994: 1) While this observation again labours the ambiguous and dialectical features of magic it is not introduced here to further emphasize this point. Rather, the observation of strangeness and familiarity is one that helps us understand the conditions of reception that met these forms of illusion. This familiarity is surely a double for the verisimilitude to which such technologies have always aimed, that aim to the real that is impelled through the “continual perfecting of the illusionizing potential of the media.” (Zielinski, 2006: 3) It was a verisimilitude that made these images convincing and that normalized a suspension of disbelief, because their images were persuasive in the perceptive sense. And yet, the strangeness inferred in these magics is not necessarily drawn from the fantastic or frightening content that they depicted, but
also thorough a foreignness that is conjured in terms of perception. As Grau contends, such “tiny lights [made] a great impression in the dark nights of those days, which we have great difficulties imagining today.” (2007: 144) It may be difficult for contemporary audiences to conceive of how the simple projections of early magic technologies could be seen to be so unfamiliar that they were interpreted as supernatural appearances, yet the size, scale, mechanization, and repetition that attended these projected images was foreign and so too was the itinerant contexts in which such illusions were encountered. Thus it is the experiences that these illusions provoke that make them supernatural, as much as their thematic content, for they induce extraordinary forms of perception as simulations that “[place] the observer in the dislocating yet oddly pleasurable situation of not knowing where reality begins and ends.” (Warner, 2004: 23)

The Camera Obscura
The history of the display technologies of Entertainment Magic begins with the Camera Obscura. It is a device that has been discussed previously in this thesis as an optical device that was developed as part of the scientific pursuits of Natural magic. In this context the Camera Obscura was celebrated for its ability to use the refractive properties of light to create projected images. As it was adapted to the context of entertainment this same device was celebrated for its ability to create magical effects. The key aim of the following discussion of the Camera Obscura, as well as the devices that follow it, is to observe how Entertainment Magic exploited the dramatic potential of such instrumental devices to create effects of supernatural illusion.

In studying the Camera Obscura it shortly appears that the invention of the device is a divisive subject. While its invention is commonly attributed to the Italian scientist Giambattista della Porta (1535 – 1615), for he authored the Magiae Naturalis (first published in 1558) in which the earliest known description of the Camera Obscura is found, it is a claim rejected by Laurent Mannoni as “erroneous.” (2000: 4) This is because the “phenomenon of the projection of light rays,” upon which the Camera Obscura is based, “has been known since antiquity,” (Mannoni, 2000: 4) and precedes della Porta’s research by several centuries. It is a sensible suggestion, for the Obscura is a
relatively simple device that basically demonstrates the principles of light refraction. To reiterate an earlier illustration of the device, the Camera Obscura effect is achieved by piercing a small aperture in “the wall or window shutter of a fully darkened room, the scene outside (or any other exterior object) will be projected into the interior of the room, on the wall opposite the aperture.” (Mannoni, 2000: 4) This principle of construction “did not change from the thirteenth century to the start of the sixteenth: the only variation was whether the aperture was formed in a wall or in a shutter.” (Mannoni, 2000: 7)

While it may be questioned whether Giambattista della Porta invented the Camera Obscura, he was certainly the first to discover and exploit the magical or illusion making potentials of the device. For it is within the *Magiae Naturalis* that della Porta explored the possibilities of using the Camera Obscura as the basis for an entertaining optical show. The following quote from the *Magiae Naturalis*, as recounted by Mannoni, demonstrates the practical application of the Obscura to the production of both entertaining and convincing illusions. Here, the audience:

in the Chamber shall see Trees, Animals, Hunters Faces, and all the rest so plainly, that they cannot tell whether they be true or delusions. Swords drawn will glitter in at the hole, that they will make people almost afraid. I have often shewed this kind of Spectacle to my friends, who much admired it, and took pleasure to see such a deceit; and I could hardly by natural reasons, and reasons from Optiks remove them from their opinion, when I had discovered the secret. (2000: 9)

It is a quote that identifies several features that would accompany the adaptation of scientific instruments to the purposes of Entertainment Magic. The first is that there is a production, or perhaps reproduction, of verisimilitude in the image. In some ways, in the case of the Camera Obscura, this is a given because the images that the device produces are direct reproductions of an image source that is hidden from the view of the audience. That the means of production are hidden from the audience is a feature that will ensure, in the instance of the Camera Obscura as well as in the technologies that follow, that the technical basis of these images is obscured from view. It is such artful deception that
helps make the sources of display ambiguous, veiling their causes as possibly technical and possibly supernatural.

As this passage of the *Magiae Naturalis* recounts, this ambiguity is also aided by an audience who are reluctant to accept a scientific explanation for the visions that appear before them. Perhaps this is due to the tenacity of affect, the inability of the audience to discount their own perception, when illusions are encountered in a social context in which reality is interpreted through the senses as primary arbiters of truth. While the acceptance of such illusions may be attributable to their unprecedented verisimilitude, as projections that reproduced natural images in life like terms, there is also a vital willingness of the audience to believe in these appearances of illusion. This can be seen in della Porta’s observation that the spectator “took pleasure to see such a deceit.” This observation highlights the manner in which a willingness to be deceived, or a suspension of disbelief, has attended the reception of instrumental illusions since their inception. Vitally, this suspension of disbelief appears to express an essential condition that, even for the Enlightened spectator, the desire to experience the magical is greater than the desire to resist deceit, a balance that ensured the longevity of magical entertainments in rationalised society.

**The Magic Lantern**

While the Camera Obscura can be seen as the device that discovered the entertaining potential of projected display, it was the Magic Lantern that discovered the full potential of these images, perfecting the Camera Obscura’s techniques of projected display to create uniquely magical effects. The discussion of the Magic Lantern presented by this thesis will first discuss the technical developments that improved the devices ability to create projected images however the focus will then turn to a discussion of how the Magic Lantern became an instrument that was central to magical entertainments. Again commandeered out of a scientific context, the Magic Lantern was repurposed for entertaining public display of supernatural or fantastical images. This may have occurred because the depiction of magical objects and beings may have amplified the magical attributions of the device itself, making the Magic Lantern a popular and profitable
entertainment because it could depict sights normally unseen. However, this section will focus on explaining how these instruments of projection were aesthetically suited to the depiction of magical and supernatural themes. This is because the incandescent, apparition-like quality of the images that the lantern device presented were conditionally suited to depict the cultural concepts of magical beings which were aesthetically positioned as being similarly incandescent.

Instrumentally the magical lantern, which was first invented in the mid-1600s, adapts the principles of the Camera Obscura as it relies on the same principles of light refraction and projection. However it contained this formula of light and aperture in an optical box, adding to it an independent light source, mirrors that would refract and amplify this light and a glass slide with a painted image through which this light would pass. As this refined light passed through the slide it would project this image onto a wall or a screen. The significance of the adaptations to image projection that the Magic Lantern enabled cannot be underestimated, for it was through the Magic Lantern that magical effects were truly discovered and adapted for the aims of entertainment, as the following discussion will demonstrate. For instance, the new source of light greatly improved the nature of these displays, turning them from shadowy reproductions, into images that could be finessed - through the alteration of brightness and focal length - into evermore convincing apparitions. The role of slides was also significant because through these the device was able to project any form of fantastic imagery and further could even animate these images if “the slide included a mechanism which allowed the subject to be moved.” (Mannoni, 2000: 33) The effects of projection, animated movement and also the creative transition between different slides can be seen as being some of the earliest forms of visual special effects. It was this range of effects that made the device magical and entertaining and these effects that cemented the Magic Lantern as a device of Entertainment Magic.

Like in the case of the Camera Obscura, the origins of the invention of the Magic Lantern have been lost to time, but generally the device is attributed to two figures: “Athanasius Kircher, its pseudo-inventor, and the Dutch Protestant Christiaan Huygens,
its true ‘father.’" (Mannoni, 2000: 34) Huygens (1629 – 1695) is known as the first true lanternist because he was responsible for authoring the first known template for a “moving slide for the Magic Lantern:” (Mannoni, 2000: 38) dating from 1659 the slide features the image of a skeleton that removes its head from its shoulders, an animation that thus brought life to death. This slide is notable not only for its technical innovation but its thematic foreshadowing of the supernatural images that will come to define the device and its entertainments. Considering this intuitive grasp of this slide, it is surprising to note that Huygen disliked the lantern, precisely because it was far more proficient at creating amusements than its limited capacities as a scientific instrument. As Manonni recounts it was Huygen’s father Constantin who saw the marvellous potential of the device as an asset, commissioning his son to create these machines for entertaining displays, one intended audience of which was to be the Court at the Louvre in Paris. Yet, the son Christiaan was reluctant, as Mannoni summarizes, “Huygen’s displeasure is quite clear. He was afraid that his lantern, and even worse he himself, would become a subject of ridicule” (2000: 42) if the lantern was taken from a context of science into that of entertainment. Huygens had a pessimistic attitude to the ambiguous potentials of display that were embedded in the lantern, seeing the ability of the device to be used for displays of scientific principles as well as for entertainment as an unfavourable feature. Yet this ambiguous potential would accompany the lantern throughout its cultural life and subsequent displays, helped along largely by the other key figure of the lanterns invention Athanasius Kircher (1601 – 1661).

Kircher, by comparison, seemed not only to make the intuitive leap towards the representation of supernatural images through the lantern, but also was the first to fully explore the potentials of the device in creating magical entertainments. The German attributed as the inventor of the Magic Lantern, an unlikely though logical attribution compelled out of his 1646 publication *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbre*. It was a text which discussed the burgeoning science of light, refraction and projected screen displays as the first known text to demonstrate not only detailed illustrations of the lantern instrument and illustrations of the lantern in action, but it also was the first to suggest the inclusion of a source of “artificial light to the device.” (Mannoni, 2000: 22). In this way, Kircher
contributed the invention of the lantern, as this critical addiction of artificial light made the device highly portable, but also transformed the illuminated projections of the lantern, making them into more firm, and hence persuasive, illusions.

The *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbre* is a text that is also notable for its particular aesthetic focus. Marina Warner identifies that in the second edition of the text, published in 1671, that all illustrations of the lantern share a remarkable feature: “the projections are almost always supernatural creatures, with looming devils and dancing skeletons predominating.” (2006: 139) Warner provides a logical commentary of these illustrations; that such “supernatural subject-matter was chosen, as if it went without saying, to illustrate the powers of the new machines of illusion.” (2006: 139) However, these instruments of projection were also aesthetically suited to the depiction of magical and supernatural themes, because they eloquently reflected the pre-existing cultural imaginations of what supernatural images should look like. The visual makeup of magic and the supernatural has always been comprised not only through thematic images of devils and ghosts but also an accompanying aesthetic predilection, one that favours the incandescence of light and darkness, eerie reflections and even images that could be said to be insubstantial or ambiguous. It is these particular aesthetic bases which seem to have been reproduced by such projected illusions, inhering them with a particular supernatural aesthetic beyond the thematic representations of the same. Laurent Mannoni’s determination of illusion technologies as those of a “great art of light and shadow” (2004: 92) speaks to this aesthetic predilection, so to does Marina Warner’s suggestion that these technologies tended to recreate images that were normally the hallucinatory provenance of the “minds eye.” (Warner, 2006:139) Presenting images not normally seen by way of the eye, these “new instruments reproduced the perceived activity of the imagination itself; by imitating the motion of the spirit within, they cast on the screen fantastic pictures of the supernatural.” (Warner, 2006:143) It is possible to conclude from these intimations that the supernatural thematic lexicon of Entertainment Magic is, in some ways, a secondary feature to the similarly supernatural or magical aesthetic lexicon that is ready built into these technologies of display. While such supernatural themes and images may have proved to be endurably entertaining, and certainly have accompanied
Entertainment Magic throughout its history, it is the general “machinery [which] encouraged a trend to the spectral or macabre.” (Barnouw, 1981: 24) Simply, while Entertainment Magic may have exploited supernatural imagery in its displays, it is the technology that made these illusions supernatural, because the conditions of perception that they created aesthetically recalled the conditions of magical visions.

The discussion of the Phantasmagoria, to which this thesis soon turns, will show how the desire to produce more convincing supernatural visions impelled further technological developments in the lantern, developments that were requisite to produce yet more convincing supernatural effects. Yet, there are several centuries in between the invention of the lantern and its initial compulsion towards supernatural spectacular visions which need to be addressed first. The popularity and significance of the lantern as a device of Entertainment Magic is observed by Mannoni, who contends that after 1660 that “this small scientific wonder spread just as fast as the plague or cholera” (Mannoni, 2000: 46) and remained largely unchanged, at least technologically, into the nineteenth century. The spread of the lantern was restricted by the specialized nature of manufacturing, particularly the crafting of lenses, which meant that the device was a rarity well into the 1800s. This preserved the novelty of the instrument for several centuries, which was often to be found only as part of major cultural displays, such as exhibitions, or encountered commonly through the display of the lantern by “itinerant showmen.” (Hankins and Silverman, 1995:49) Adapting the new portability of the Magic Lantern these travelling lanternists are largely responsible for the exploitation of the lantern as a magical entertainment. While the exhibition hall or exhibit space provided for the use of the lantern as a tool for scientific display - one which preference display of terrestrial images of spaces, places and objects of the real world – the showman positioned the lantern as a tool of spectacular displays, the most spectacular of which has always been entertaining apparitions of the supernatural.

The Phantasmagoria

The Phantasmagoria names not an instrument but a form of entertainment performance centred upon lantern effects that came into popularity across Europe at the
end of the 1700s. The Phantasmagoria is seen as being a unique type of performance to lantern shows because of the variety of technical effects that these performances encompassed. Laurent Mannoni suggests that what distinguishes Phantasmagoria performances from the lantern spectacles that preceded them was found in the device's ability to create mobile projections. (2000: 141) Yet the moving apparatus that allowed for such mobile projection was but one effect of a wider arsenal of techniques - adjustable focuses, multiple projections, “bigger [audiences] and brighter projections,” (Hankins and Silverman, 1995: 64) - which transformed lantern shows into complete immersive entertainments. The success of the Phantasmagoria was based not only upon the convincing technical effects that it produced, but also to the aesthetic and thematic frame that these effects were placed within, the Phantasmagoria being a form of Entertainment that was staged through complete immersive environments of the supernatural.

Like in the cases of the Camera Obscura and Magic Lantern, distinguishing a single inventor of Phantasmagoria is treacherous, particularly because it describes a mode of performance rather than an scientific instrument and because in both its staging and instrumentation it elaborates upon the pre-existing and popular tradition of lantern shows. However, Oliver Grau traces a specific genealogy for the Phantasmagoria that begins in the middle of the 1780s in the lantern performances of German Johann Schröpfer, “a freemason and Magic Lantern illusionist, whose occult powers were legendary.” (Grau, 2007: 144) Though Schröpfer is not commonly associated with the Phantasmagoria, the lantern magician provides two important features that would inform its development. Firstly, Schröpfer’s lantern shows focused upon the supernatural images for they were performed in the context of a spiritual “séance”. (Barber, 1989: 73) While it has already been discussed that such images were staples of the iconography Entertainment Magic displays, Schröpfer’s lantern show was notable for a specific effect: the projection of ghostly apparitions onto smoke using a concealed Magic Lantern.” (Grau, 2007: 144) This is notable as it expresses one of the first instances of performance which elaborated further effects – here smoke - to frame or surround the core effect of projection to heighten the overall success of the illusion. Secondly, in performance Schröpfer
cultivated a performative identity that was part occult magician and part showman, a persona necessary to the context of the séance, which imbibed the magical effects of the show with a possible spiritual animation. This character of magician as showman and shaman would come to be an influential feature of magical performances through until the nineteenth century as would the depiction of heightened effects based around supernatural themes, staple features, particularly, of the Phantasmagoria performance.

The invention of the Phantasmagoria proper is commonly attributed to German Paul Philidor, who modelled this new form of lantern show by elaborating the innovations of Schröpfer. The first showings of the Phantasmagoria were carried out in Paris in 1792, (Mannoni, 2000:141) before later moving to Berlin, the setting in which the Phantasmagoria was first encountered by Étienne Gaspard Robert (1763 - 1837) who, taking the stage name Étienne Robertson and pilfering most of Philidor’s techniques, returned to Paris, to become the most famous showman of this form of Entertainment Magic. Yet, the Phantasmagoria originates with Philidor because of the instrumental innovations that he contributed to the basic Magic Lantern. Philidor was the father of the effects that defined the Phantasmagoria, effects that were born of relatively minor alterations in the lantern apparatus. These effects included the development of mobile back projection which was achieved by mounting the lantern apparatus to a box with wheels that would travel along a track and project onto a screen from the rear (again hiding the apparatus from the view of the audience). Yet, more vitally, Philidor also changed the light source of lantern, which formerly used candles or lamp oil, to a chemical source: the “recently invented Argand lamp, which produced a much stronger light and thus enabled larger audiences to see the images.” (Grau, 2007: 144) While these techniques originated with Philidor, his performances of Phantasmagoria are often overshadowed by those of Robertson, because while he stole everything from Philidor “he did so with such a scientific approach, such an impassioned mastery, and in such a lasting manner (1798 – 1837, nearly forty years of projection), that he played a far more prominent role in pre-cinema history than his unfortunate predecessor.” (Mannoni, 2000: 147) Certainly Robertson was also responsible for a most prolific elaboration of basic lantern effects but, as we shall see, the showman’s most inventive contribution to the
development of the Phantasmagoria was found in his attention to elaborate framing effects, those nuances that worked to heighten the core illusion of screen projection.

Upon returning to France, Robertson began staging this magical entertainment in 1798 in Paris, renaming the show as the *Fantasmagorie* while unsuccessfully attempting to patent the Argand lit lantern which he named the Fantascope. (Mannoni, 2000: 153) Robertson’s Phantasmagoria, embracing Entertainment Magic’s predilection for effect and affect, is best summarized as a complete immersive and experiential entertainment spectacle based around supernatural themes. The entertainment spectacle was wildly successful, a success that is attributable to Robertson’s intuitive understanding how to best exploit the supernatural essence of the projected lantern image, an aptitude for staging, as well the man’s own charismatic showmanship. In each instance these features were used to support the supernatural appearance of the magical illusions presented. In terms of apparatus Robertson drew upon the illusion making repertoire of moving slides, as well as Philidor’s use of mobile back projection, but added to them the use of multiple lenses that could create projected images that could be sharpened across various focal distances. This allowed for the effect of an enlargement and reduction in the size of the image projected - or an effect of zooming in or out - that gave the images presented an animated appearance. Robertson also used multiple lanterns in his show which, through their compounded sources of projection, could create the effects of cross-fades and dissolves. In particular this was the basis of many of the magical visual transformations seen in the Phantasmagoria. Typically such transformations were achieved by compounding one image into another; fading between them created a visual metamorphosis, such as the image of “The Three Graces, turning into skeletons” (Castle, 1988: 360) which dramatically brought death to beauty and youth in but an instant.11

Alongside the novel projection effects developed by Robertson, the staging of the Phantasmagoria engaged many effects of framing, which heightened the apparently supernatural attributions of these projected illusions. The importance of staging can be

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11 For further accounts of specific tricks and narratives depicted amidst Phantasmagoria displays see Castle, 1988 and Barber, 1989.
seen in Marina Warner’s description of the Phantasmagoria as a “Gothic horror spectacular,” (2006: 147) a designation that was attributable partly to the supernatural images that made up the primary illusions of the show, however the scale of this macabre spectacle was also attributable to the staging of the magic show amidst the eerie and “funeral” (Mannoni, 2000:158) setting of the Couvent des Capucines. The move to this setting, occurring a few short months after the entertainment’s debut, was Robertson’s most effective gimmick: in terms of staging, the cloisters of the old convent and the crypt that surrounded them introduced the audience into a setting associated with hauntings and otherworldly beings. It was an effective way to heighten both the anticipation of the audience as well as their likely acceptance of the later supernatural images seen in the lantern show. Further, as part of this aesthetic induction, the audience were invited to walk through a series of rooms which were dressed in spectral accoutrements, fantastic paintings as well as optical, scientific and supernatural curiosities, (Mannoni, 2000: 159-160) before reaching the final darkened area in which the main illusion would be staged. Waiting in the dark projected ghosts would appear all around out of the shadows. This transition into darkness was an affective dramatic tool, fostering anticipation and possibly a degree of fear, but was also a mode of staging that had the practical use of obscuring from view the many screens and elaborate apparatuses that made these illusions possible. Into this mise-en-scene, Robertson also introduced smoke and eerie sound effects such as unexplained hammering or the spectral melodies of a glass harmonica. In all aspects this setting was staged to compliment and heighten the supernatural tone of the images and, by extension, the immersion of the audience in these effects. Consequently the affect of the suspension of disbelief was compelled and normalized within the staging of the Phantasmagoria.

Another vital part of the staging of the Phantasmagoria was the construction of ambiguity in the illusions themselves - a questioning of whether these apparitions were illusions or more than meets the eye - an uncertainty which was created largely through the narration of these performances by Robertson who took on the persona of the shaman-showman magician, a role which made it uncertain whether the show was constructed through supernatural appearances or apparition. Michael Mangan argues that
a magicians patter is vital part of magical performance because it “provides the cognitive frame with which the magician wants to tease (or completely deceive) the audience.” (2007: 108) The esteem in which Robertson is held as a showman of Phantasmagoria and his aptitude for presenting illusions extended to the stage patter that made these illusions all the more persuasive. Laurent Mannoni recounts, by way of commentaries of the era, that narratively the “the aim of the show was always stated as the destruction of ‘absurd beliefs, the childish terrors which dishonour the intelligence of man.’ However, with habitual ambiguity, Robertson kept the actual method of producing the phantoms and spectres which he created before the assembled crowd very much to himself;” (Mannoni, 2000: 161) in a manner that was contrary to this sense of demystification. This again left the perceptual experience of the spectator as the arbiter of truth, made responsible for separating reality from illusion, the immersive and verisimilitudinous nature of Robertson’s illusions made it unlikely that the audience could completely rationalise their experiences. Further, X. Theodore Barber argues that such ambiguity was also apparent in the playbills of the Phantasmagoria which claimed that apparitions of the dead or absent will appear in the show in “a way more completely illusive than has ever been offered to the Eye” (1989:78). The conditional nature of these claims was only present in the small print, which rationalized these appearances as illusions, to state that “the specters being conjured up were in no way real and were meant to be an elucidating entertainment” (Barber:1989:78)

Robertson’s patter appeared to present a counter dialogue that would seek to demystify the uncanny apparitions of the Phantasmagoria, yet really renewed the uncertainty surrounding such entertainments. They were simultaneously framed as scientifically edifying or rational experiences, but also appealed to the irrational, the belief in the supernatural and the possibility that such illusions could be real. The contradictory nature of this display is clear for such dialogues of scientific demystification were always less intelligible, particularly on a sensory level, than the immersive realism of these illusions. Given the context of display it is likely that for many spectators the scientific dialogue that accompanied illusions would be less intelligible than the illusions themselves, which bypassed any cognitive shortcomings to
directly affect the senses of the audience and transport them into the illogics of the experiences of entertainment and the magical. As Mangan suggests, such patter plays on an “ambiguity which for some audience members will be understood as part of the entertainment, but for others will seriously complicate their picture of reality.” (2007: 108) It would be fair to conclude, then, that in an audience that was not conditioned to the regular experience of such visual spectacles it took little, by way of illusions, staging or narration, to turn “any spectator from a cool observer into a willing, excitable victim” (Warner, 2006: 147) despite the rational narrative frame in which such illusions were presented.

The affect catalysed by the sum of these effects of the Phantasmagoria was dramatic, for in the context of reception they gave an unequivocal “impression of vitality,” which Marina Warner equates with the qualities of “conscious life” or “animation.” (2006: 148) This concept of an animated vitality is useful because it expresses the manner in which the Phantasmagoria was able to present magical displays that had an unprecedented level of visual verisimilitude which, when bolstered techniques of framing and staging, made these supernatural entertainments seem convincingly real. Yet animation also returns us to the notion that such illusions, especially when drawn in supernatural imagery, were made all the more believable because they seemed to recall the apparent energetic animation of magical appearances bound to human sentiment during the time of Spiritual Magic. While the renewal of Spiritual Magic that may have been found in the performances of supernatural Entertainment Magic are valid to observe, for now it is more crucial, given the leading arguments of effect and affect, that such animation was achieved only insomuch as the Phantasmagoria affectively immersed the spectator on the sensory experiences of these illusions. Joining a progressively verismilitudinous image with an increasingly immersive experience of the same, Robertson’s Phantasmagoria did not just ask the spectator to suspend their disbelief, but immersed them in the appearance of the supernatural so fully, through staging and even showmanship, that these experiences were not entertaining so much as they were affectively enthralling. As such, Robertson remained less a scientific instructor than a guide to an entertaining underworld.
What we can perceive from this analysis is that what the Phantasmagoria reveals and revels in is the transformation of technological displays into elaborate performances of Entertainment Magic. On every level, the Phantasmagoria plays upon the dramatic potentials of illusory effects to create a performance that engages the audience immersively in the effects and subsequent affects that characterize Entertainment Magic. The reason why the Phantasmagoria can be linked to cinema is through the observation that both of these mediums attempt to create immersive and affective entertainments achieved through technical effects. There are a few stages of instrumental development that enact the transition from Phantasmagoria-type Entertainment Magics into those found in the medium of the cinema to which this thesis now turns. Perhaps because cinema is a ubiquitous feature of contemporary life and its entertainments the associations of the medium with magic have been obscured from view. However when cinema is considered as a historical medium of entertainment, much like the Camera Obscura or Magic Lantern, the associations of the medium with magic come into relief. The following section examines the manner in which the cinema is technologically linked to the screen practices of Entertainment Magic by outlining the instrumental innovations that lead from lantern style projections to the complex moving photographic projections that make up the cinematic illusion.

**Photographic Images**

To begin, the journey from the lantern to the cinema is largely reliant upon one invention - that of photographic imaging - which captured the real life images that made the moving projections of the cinema possible. As Charles Musser suggests, “photography provided the first key element of standardization in screen practice” (1994: 32) because photography made the production and reproduction of images cost and labour effective. This can be seen even in the later years of the Phantasmagoria, in which photographic slides were produced and led to a far wider distribution of the apparatus because, in eliminating the need for illustrated slides, photographic slides helped reduce the costs of production. More significantly, however, the introduction of the photographic slide “enhanced the lifelike quality of the screen image” and “offered a much more
accurate record of reality.” (Musser, 1994: 32) Given that the technological aims of screen practice were seen to be the continual perfecting of visual illusion, an impulse also at the heart of Entertainment Magic, it is these features of increased realism that made photography such a significant development in the history of projected images.

While the specific materials used to capture real life images would change over time, photography is defined by the process which captures an image of a moment in time, by mapping varying exposures of light onto a chemically reactive medium. The first instances of this process were achieved by Nicéphore Niépce (1765 -1833), who fixed the “images that can be seen inside the Camera Obscura” (Mannoni, 2000: 192) to a piece of sensitized paper in 1816 thus inventing the first negative image. Louis Dauguerre (1787-1851) in 1839 revealed to the public the first photograph, a paper print achieved through capturing light onto chemically treated copper plates. While later developed onto strips of film, this principle of chemically capturing light was constant through until the development of digital photography which rendered these same degrees of light and shadow into data.

As the methods of photography were refined, great experimentation with the magical potentials of the medium was also catalysed. One particularly pertinent example of this experimentation was found in the development of spirit photography, a practice which, like the lantern practices that came before it, explored the manner in which a technological medium could create dramatic supernatural effects. Spirit photography was a practice developed in the mid-1800s as an adjunct to the pursuits of Spiritualism, the part-spiritual-part-scientific study of supernatural and psychic phenomena that was a popular feature of intellectual life in the nineteenth century,\(^\text{12}\) which sought to document such phenomena on film.\(^\text{13}\) Typical of spirit photographs were images such as those that depicted “spectral ectoplasm” (Jolly, 2006: 85) or “spirits of the dead” (Jolly, 2006: 90) which, despite being widely claimed as authentic by Spiritualists, used newly discovered

\(^{12}\) For an account of Spiritualism and its relationship to spirit photography see Gunning, 1995 and Jolly, 2006. For a discussion of the oppositions between entertainment cultures of magic and Spiritualism see During, 2002.
photographic effects to render “transparent wraith-like images” (Gunning, 1995: 46) or illusions of entities and spirits. A typical technique of spirit photography would use multiple exposures to superimpose to faces of several ghostly figures around the subject of a main portrait. These lightly exposed or ghostly heads would be seen to represent extras or spirit guides that accompanied the subject. However, as another example of fashionable fraud, such photographs exposed, in a thematic sense, the ongoing fascination with supernatural themes that haunted the modern subjectivity and entertainments long after Enlightenment. Thus, photography is not just linked to Entertainment Magic because it was a scientific instrument that was able to produce the effects - whether the magical capturing of reality or the technical conjuring of images of spirits - but also remained tied to magic because early experiments with photography returned once again to the production of spectral and supernatural images that constitute one of the key fascinations of Entertainment Magic.

Spirit photography exemplifies experimentation with the medium of photography that was driven by tricks and effects like superimposition (which would be replicated by the cinema at a later date), however what was to become a more influential strand of photographic experimentation was founded upon the interest in creating a moving image. The innovations in photography that lead to the development of moving images rely on the apprehension that while a photograph may capture a moment, movement occurs through time. To capture and depict movement, then, required the development of ways to capture consecutive moments, a technique that was achieved through chronophotography. The inscription of movement through chronological photography began with an astronomer Jules Janssen (1824 -1907) and his invention of the photographic revolver in 1874. Shaped like the gun from which it takes its name, the device featured a sensitized disc that would move automatically to capture 48 separate images in 72 seconds (Mannoni, 2000: 300) as the first device to capture sequential images of movement in time. The most famous studies of chronophotography, however, belong to Eadweard Muybridge (1830 – 1904) who used sequential photography to study the movement of subjects as horses and women. Described by the 1878 patent as an “Apparatus for Taking Instantaneous Photographs of Objects in Motion” (Mannoni,
Muybridge developed a process of capturing motion through multiple electrically triggered cameras with fast shutter speeds that could expose small intervals in time. This process was further perfected by Étienne Marey (1830 – 1904) who in 1890 captured sequential images onto celluloid film and thus inventing the medium onto which the chronological movement of cinematic images would come to be inscribed once a means of projection was found.

The Kinetoscope

The Kinetoscope can be viewed as part of the history of Entertainment Magic of screen practice as it was the first device to successfully create a projected moving photographic image. While the images depicted by the device consisted mainly of filmed realities or “actualities,” (Gunning, 1990: 56) which could belie the status of the device as a magical apparatus, it belongs to the history of Entertainment Magic insomuch as it inaugurates the transition of magical effects and experiences into cinematic style displays, the popularity of which was soon to eclipse all other forms of magical entertainment. Marina Warner confirms this dynamic by reflecting upon the early use of the Kinetoscope to depict newsreels, which depicted images of current affairs, real events which were “familiar as to be banal.” (Warner, 2004: 23) However, through the medium such images became “prodigious: time past unfolding in time present, events that had taken place beamed forward into space-time… light carried the past and transported it into the future.” (Warner, 2004: 23) This prodigious experience was magical because it performed the sort of time-travel that was otherwise only available to the imagination: such images, even in their banality, defied the temporal and spatial limitations of reality to make the images of the Kinetoscope conceptually magical apparitions. What is vital to the magic of the moving image, then, was not the depiction of spiritual or magical subject matter – like in the explicit depictions of magical subjects of spirit photography - but was founded upon the apparently magical properties of mediums of the moving image and its ability to capture or create images of artificial life, images that rediscovered the ideals of spiritual animation.
First conceived in 1888 but patented by the prolific American inventor Thomas Edison (1847 – 1931) in 1891, the Kinetoscope merged Muybridge’s photographic experiments with movement, Marey’s moving and continuous film negatives and Edison’s own experiments with projection, to produce the first form of moving photographic picture. The Kinetoscope was a peep-show style device, designed for a single viewer, which would project up to seven hundred consecutive photographic images to produce an impression of continuous movement. These segments of movement would last around thirty seconds, a restriction which obviously this limited what could be depicted by the device. As such, common Kinetoscope images would feature a self-contained attraction, such as a segment of a prize fight which can be seen in Leonard-Cushing Fight (Thomas Edison: 1894) or even the everyday image encompassed in the title of Edison Kinetoscope, Record of a Sneeze. (W.K.L. Dickson: 1894) The device proved to be unequivocally popular and Edison was quick to take advantage of its commercial potential. Distributed through penny arcades and attraction halls, the demand for Kinetoscope devices as well as for pictures to fill them was fast apparent. In response Edison produced one of the first film studios at his West Orange laboratories in February 1893, the charismatically titled “Black Maria.” (Musser, 1991: 32)

The Kinetoscope was another instrumental device that relied upon the universal competencies and limitations of human visual perception, namely, the “persistence of vision.” (Musser, 1994: 43) The persistence of vision is best described as another form of perceptual affect. This is because it relates to the human brains ability to process only a restricted degree of the visual information received through sight. As a barrier to sensory overload the persistence of vision draws upon this limitation and observes that the mind will merge consecutive images separated by a small interval so that they are perceived as a continuous image. The interval of separation that has been standardized by cinematic projection is of 24 frames a second, the persistence of vision being a phenomenon that is continued into the creation of cinematic illusions, which project these continuous but separate images from film stock onto a large screen. To achieve this projection of movement, Edison developed for the kinetograph the form of continuous, vertically
framed and sprocketed film which was to become the standard medium for photographically capturing cinematic images.

**The Cinematograph**

Capturing cinematic images was to become the provenance of the instrument of the *cinématographe* or cinematograph which was developed shortly after the Kinetoscope. The cinematograph, which we have come to know as the basic instrument of cinematic projection, was in some ways a fusion of the Magic Lantern and the Kinetoscope. It passed light through film stock which acted much like a slide, and projected moving photographic images onto a parallel screen. The apparatus for achieving this effect was sought by many inventors of the period, but has come to be associated with two brothers in particular, that of Auguste (1862 - 1954) and Louis Lumière (1864 – 1948). It was the Lumière’s who presented the first public screening of cinema at the *Indien du Grande Café* in Paris on “December 28, 1895,” (Barnouw:1981:43) using their *cinématographie* projector which could also work as “cameras or printing machines” (Barnouw:1981:43) It was a screening that featured the most famous of the Lumière’s films, the short one shot film, *Arrival of a Train at Ciotat* (Auguste and Louis Lumière: 1895), which is renowned for the shock that it impelled in the audience. The myth follows that “the first audiences for the Lumière’s *Arrival of the Train at Ciotat* rushed from the auditorium for fear of being demolished by the oncoming engine.” (Gunning, 1989: 3)

While this myth is partly credible given that the as-yet-unseen size, scale, and realism of cinema’s projected illusions of a moving train could have inspired shock or awe, Gunning suggests that such mythology does not consider the audiences pre-existing familiarity with visual illusions, a familiarity with magical spectacles that would defy this naive response. Gunning argues that early cinematic audiences interpreted the experiences of these projections through a familiar “context of visual illusions, the transforming tricks and Magic Lanterns that vaudeville at the turn of the century exhibited with increasing frequency.” (1989, 4) Gunning sees such cinematic illusions as a continuation of an attractions tradition, displays of visual spectacles associated with the
entertainment spaces of fairgrounds and exhibition halls that sought to “solicit spectator attention, [incite] visual curiosity and [supply] pleasure through an exciting spectacle - a unique event.” (Gunning, 1990: 58) Evidently, in light of the timeline of Entertainment Magic presented by this thesis, it could easily be said that audiences were conditioned by several centuries of such experiences of visual illusion, as the notion of the attraction fits well with the sorts of part-magical-part-technological displays that constituted the basis of Entertainment Magic. While the cinema was able to present illusions that were technologically more complex than the illusions that preceded it, such illusions were not the unique providence of the new media, rather, such illusions had been entertaining and conditioning audiences for a significant period of time.

Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey Pingree, and Siegfried Zielinski independently argue that technology does not become more entertaining as technologies become more complex, but rather each new media holds a “novelty” (Gitelman and Pingree, 2003: xi) that makes the value of former technologies diminish, due mainly to the voracious gaze of the public and their “overhasty orientation on a new master medium.” (Zielinski, 2006: 8) The vital reflection follows that while cinema may create more complex illusions on a technical level than preceding lantern based entertainments (as an “advance from primitive to complex apparatus), (Zielinski:2006:7) the success of a medium of Entertainment Magic is based not upon its complexity but, rather, upon its ability to deceive and entertain. This is a criterion that further crystallises the continuities in reception between the screen technologies of Entertainment Magic and cinema, because the desire for edifying entertainments and fashionable frauds has been operational in technological attractions since Enlightenment. Cinema must not be thought of as being the most successful form of Entertainment Magic, though it may have proved to be the most enduringly popular, rather cinema must be seen as a master medium through which such illusory novelties were oriented at the turn of the century and through which such experiences continue to be expressed.

It is possible to contend that the myth of the shocking first encounter with cinema is maintained, perhaps, because it is the most vivid metaphor for the success of the
technology itself. It expresses cinema’s fulfilment of those values of entertainment and deception, achieved through the realism of the illusions of the cinematograph as the material sources of such awe. However it is a myth that does not just relate the success of the medium, but also chronicles the rapid demystification of the medium. The medium of cinema was quickly disseminated into the arena of entertainment however later showings of cinema were not associated with such forms of shock because cinema was not distributed as an entertainment of deception but was presented to the public as a technological wonder. This can be seen in the manner in which cinema was first adapted into stage performances of magicians, an observation chronicled in Erik Barnouw’s *The Magician and the Cinema*. Barnouw details how magicians, already “virtuoso” technicians of Entertainment Magic who offered up “illusions based upon projected images,” readily saw the cinema as the “next logical step” (1981: 5) to be integrated into their performances. While cinema may have been a logical step for magicians already engaged with the instruments of projection encompassed within Entertainment Magic, it was an adoption that occurred on an unprecedented scale. Due to the relatively cheap cost of the apparatus and its inherent portability the motion picture became the primary illusion of the age, the “rapid diffusion” of which “owes much to the magician’s whirlwind travels.” (Barnouw, 1981: 5) Barnouw’s detailed chronology of the magicians who adopted the cinematograph into their performances and those who transported these performances across the globe- the recollection of which is beyond the scope of this thesis – demonstrates how within the space of two years the illusion was introduced to “every continent and planted the word *cinema* into most of the world’s languages.” (Barnouw, 1981: 64) However, unlike the forms of Entertainment Magic that preceded it, the illusions produced through the cinematic apparatus did not produce supernatural-entertainments or seek to deceive the audience into perceiving their images as any form of apparition. Rather, cinema was positioned as being a magical technology, its wonder built upon the very transparency of the illusion: the magic of being able to capture images of reality.

While the following chapter of this thesis will complicate this idea of cinema as a technological entertainment, one enjoyed on the merits of its edifying transparency, it is
sufficient currently to summarise that the conjunction of cinema and magic occurred through the instrumental history of Entertainment Magic. Cinema, in terms of technology, represents an adaptation or continuation of historical forms of Entertainment Magic such as the Camera Obscura or Magic Lantern. While cinema represents the current master medium of these evolving forms of visual deception, it is one that, despite its continuing popularity, is unlikely to be the endpoint of this adaptation. Similarly, the presentational aims of Entertainment Magic and cinema are parallel, a factor that will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter, insomuch as cinema fulfils the desire for magic to be an edifying entertainment and, contrarily, to create the enjoyments of deception, aims that are satisfied by cinema’s ability to recreate the conditions of technical effects and magical affects that have always comprised the illusions of Entertainment Magic.
Chapter Four:  
CINEMA MAGIC  

Introduction  
This chapter grounds the contention of cinema as an Entertainment Magic comprised of instrumental effects and magical affects through filmic analysis, specifically of the trick films of Georges Méliès. It begins by considering cinema as technology that is not directly magical, insomuch as it does not seek to trick the audience as was the case with the deceptive technologies of Entertainment Magic that preceded it, but rather presented itself as a spectacle of technology. Consequently, the cinema addresses an audience who knowingly participate as spectators of illusion, and appears to represent a form of entertainment that is not only edifying but through this rational transparency seems to transcend the context of magic altogether.  

Yet, as a mode of entertainment cinema has remained a medium through which irrational appearances and experiences of magic are expressed. Rather than being a vehicle for rendering reality or the limited appeal of rational entertainments, as is embodied in the actuality or documentary films of the Lumière Brothers, cinema has remained a medium for the expression of imaginative or magical realities. This is an overt feature of the trick films of Méliès, films that initiated a genre in which the depiction of magic was the primary content, but were films that also discovered the magical potentials of the cinema as an instrumental medium capable of producing an enchanting array of visual spectacles and illusions. The success of the cinematic medium, as a magical entertainment or entertainment in general, is achieved through the mediums ability to create entertainment spectacles, which do not conform to satisfying reason or the mind, but to satisfying the imagination through the creation of magical experience.  

As a medium of magical spectacles, cinema effects ultimately transcend their technological basis because they become expressions of an un-containable excess. Impelling a suspension of disbelief, the cinema spectator finds the magic of cinema is not
found within its technological effects, but within its excessive or extraordinary
spectacles, which inspire awe and delight, and transport the spectator into a state of
magical experience or affect. The films of Georges Méliès demonstrate how cinema is
comprised of a range of instrumental effects but, because of the extraordinary nature of
these effects, cinema also remains a medium through which the experience of such
magical affect is enabled.

The Spectacles of Actuality and Attraction

To paraphrase a former argument, cinema unlike the forms of Entertainment
Magic that preceded it, does not create supernatural-entertainments or seek to deceive the
audience into perceiving their images as any form of apparition. Rather from its inception
cinema was positioned as being a magical technology, the wonder of which was based
upon the transparency of its illusions as photographically captured images of real
phenomena. Further, because the magic of the cinema was irrevocably tied the status of
its illusions as technical wonders, it could be suggested that cinema fully realised the
Enlightenment ideals of edifying entertainment albeit in the Modern period. This is
realised not only through the demystification of the medium, the insistence that cinema
was an entertainment based strictly upon technologically produced images (not magical
causes), but also through the images depicted by the medium, in particularly the films of
the Lumière Brothers which glorified the wonders of reality rather than the sorts of
supernatural images that had haunted screen technologies up until this point. Like early
Kinetograph films, the Lumière films such as *Arrival of a Train at Ciotat* or *Exiting the
Factory* (1895), whose content is doubled in their titles, were images of “actualities”
(Gunning, 1990: 56) documentary images that stand as objective records of everyday
realities. Such images are not only rational in the sense that they shirk the thematic
frivolities of the supernatural, but are rational because they represent images that
celebrate the achievements of Enlightened society: the wonders of industrialization and
its capacities for auto-mobility, the order of the exiting industrial workforce as well as the
secondary wonder associated with the cinema as a product of these same forms of
industrial production and technological ingenuity. However, cinema soon turned to the
more gratuitous pleasures of entertainment - the desire for spectacles and images that
transcended the appearances and experiences of the everyday - which refashioned cinema as a medium of magical attractions rather than one of magical deceptions.

This thesis has introduced the concept of attraction previously in the chapter *Entertainment Magic* as Tom Gunning’s term for entertainments constructed through instrumental means that engaged a spectator through excessive or spectacular displays. Such displays entertained because spectacle is seen to inspire attention, curiosity, fascination and even awe in a spectator. The main appeal of cinema as an entertainment is based upon its status as such a form of spectacular attraction. This was particularly true of cinema at the turn of the nineteenth century, wherein the spectacle of the medium was based upon its technological novelty, but persists in a contemporary context as cinema remains a vehicle for excessive displays of special effects, particularly in the genres such as science fiction or action blockbusters which use special effects with abandon and, vitally, continue to delight spectators.14

Such attractions are spectacular expressions of technology but are wondrous because they depict the unreal; they imagine and technologically engineer the magic of the unseen. This is why cinema must be seen as a magical entertainment, because it is constructed through the simultaneous conjunction of the illusions of effect, the illusions of a magical imagination, and also as a vehicle for the experiences of magical affect. To reiterate the work of Sobchack, which was introduced in the chapter *Entertainment Magic*, cinema is an entertainment comprised through “special effects” or “grand displays of industrial light and magic” and of “special affect” as those forms of “joyous intensity and euphoria,” (1999: 282) or the magical, that attractions of special effect inspire within the spectator. While this thesis has already shown how such effect and affect manifested within earlier mediums of Entertainment Magic, it remains the task of this chapter to illustrate, through filmic examples, how such effects and affects are embedded in the cinematic medium.

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The unique status of cinema as a vehicle of not technological but magical attractions occurred primarily through the work of one film-maker, George Méliès, a stage magician who quickly saw the potential of the medium to create not just spectacles of wondrous technology, but saw the capacity of filmic imagery to depict magic. Méliès utilised the cinema as a technology that was able to produce an array of instrumental effects and illusions (and his experimentation in these areas discovered the techniques of special effects and editing that continue to define the instrumental magic of the cinematic medium to this day). However, Méliès also perceived in cinema a unique capacity to depict magic on a level of content, turning the screen into an expression of the magician’s stage by recreating the performative spectacles of imaginative transformation and trickery known to this arena.

Cinema as a vehicle for literal magical trickery and for magical special effects, represents a spectacle that satisfies the criteria of magical entertainments as displays of effect. However affect, as always, accompanies such illusions. Méliès’s films are quintessential examples through which audiences experienced the magic of cinema, which was not just enacted through technical spectacles, but through the ability of cinema’s illusions to transport the audience into extraordinary appearances and fanciful narratives that made cinema a vehicle for the joyous intensities of magical experience. This can be seen in the manner that Méliès’s films resist actuality, creating dreamscapes that recall the magical stage and the mind of the magician, instead focusing upon images of transformation, metamorphosis, the spiritualization of objects and all those forms of confused magical ‘classification’ that attend magically animated realities. While cinematic realities do not directly fulfil parameters of a context of Spiritual Magic, they also do not fit the ideals of Enlightenment comfortably. Cinema, insomuch as it is comprised of attractions, is closer to being comprised of spiritual forms of animation than through the animation of reason, attractions which, as Scott Bukatman suggests, possess a “phenomenological excess that alludes to a reality beyond the ordinary.” (2003: 119)

Thus, through creating magical effects, but also affective experiences of the magical and diegetic realities ordered by magical logics and classifications, Méliès reinvented cinema as a medium that is encompassingly magical. Not only did this defy the rationalization of
cinema as an edifying entertainment, but turned it into a medium for the expression of the imagination, that point through which magical beliefs and the perception of spiritual animation originated and to some degree persists in the cultural landscape, for as Bukatman suggests, the experience of spectacular technologies extends the “realms of human experience and definition” (2003: 119) insomuch as such experiences “remove the strictures of instrumental reason” (2003: 117) in favour of those of the infinite possibilities of the magical imagination.

**Cinema Effects and George Méliès**

To explore the special effects of cinema this section will turn to their point of origin: the discovery and innovations in cinema technique that occurred when magicians discovered the medium. The previous chapter suggested that it was through the performances of magicians that the rapid diffusion of cinema technology occurred. This section will discuss in more detail the magician most responsible for this success of the cinematic device: Georges Méliès. By examining the film making process and films of Méliès it is possible to establish the manner in which cinema was created out of the presentational legacies of the stage performances of Entertainment Magic, legacies which, having been formalized into a pantheon of special effects, continue to inform the medium to this day.

The following section provides a short biography of Méliès that is drawn primarily from the texts *Georges Méliès* by Elizabeth Ezra and *George Méliès: Father of Film Fantasy* by David Robinson. Frenchman Georges Méliès (1861-1938) was born the youngest son of a successful shoe manufacturer. Before Méliès became a film maker, his early life was divided between artistic pursuits and work in the family business overseeing the “mechanical functioning of the boot factory.” (Ezra, 2000: 7) It was during a trip to England in 1884 that Méliès became enthralled with magic stage performances. Méliès soon spent most of his leisure time at Cooke’s Egyptian Hall, a

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15 It has been suggested that these diversions appealed to Méliès because they placed “the least strain on his small command of English.” (Robinson, 1993: 5) This universal appeal of the magic show would come to be recreated in his silent films which relied on the same universal competencies of vision that defined the illusions of Entertainment Magic in general.
“theatre specializing in conjuring.” (Ezra, 2000: 8) Likely to have witnessed performances by the foremost performers of the era, John Nevil Maskelyne (1839 – 1917) and David Devant (1868 – 1941), it was not long before an inspired Méliès was rehearsing prestidigitation, attempting to replicate the magic of these greats.

Returning to France in 1885 Méliès began performing magic tricks for friends and family before moving onto more professional parlours and venues. (Ezra, 2000: 8) On the retirement of his father in 1888, Méliès sold his share of the family business and purchased one of Paris’ most famous magic theatres, drawing its name from the pre-eminent conjurer who established it, the Théâtre Robert-Houdin. The theatre was to become the testing ground not only for Méliès the magician but also for Méliès the filmmaker. After several years of performing successful magic shows which had integrated Magic Lantern projections as amusements to fill the time between each act, Méliès began creating and then displaying motion pictures on this stage. Méliès was a member of the audience of the Lumière’s first showing of the cinematograph in 1895 but being spurned in his requests to purchase one of the devices, began researching the manufacturer of his own cinema apparatus. Purchasing a Theatograph\(^\text{16}\) from the manufacturer and filmmaker Robert W. Paul (1869 – 1943) in early 1896, Méliès used the Theatograph in his magic shows at the Robert-Houdin but also studied its components. By September Méliès had developed his own device, the Kinétograph which functioned as both a camera and a projector. (Robinson, 1993: 12 -13) Méliès began making films, at first following the trend to filming everyday images. However Méliès innovative approach to the development of the Kinétograph apparatus soon flowed into his production of films, which shortly became focused upon creating displays of magic achieved through instrumental camera and editing tricks. Thus Méliès invented a new genre of cinema, comprised of effects and illusions, which has become known as the “trick film.” (Barnouw, 1981: 103)

\(^\text{16}\) The Theatograph was a device designed shortly after the Cinematograph by manufacturer and filmmaker Robert W. Paul which was used to project Edison’s Kinetograph films onto a screen.
To understand how Méliès, and film-making in general, turned to the depiction of magic and then the trick film, Erik Barnouw suggests that there is a sort of conceptual progression that marked the early display of cinema images. This progression began with the presentation of film as a “new miracle,” (1981: 87) wherein the moving images of the device were seen to be an attraction in and of themselves, thus creating magic within the medium’s initial documentary style images. These images of the ‘new miracle’ are clearly encapsulated by the early Lumière actualities, the titles of which mirrored their imagistic content such as in the example of Card Party (Auguste and Louis Lumière: 1895) which saw men playing cards across a table in a garden setting. This can also be observed in Méliès’s earliest known film, which plagiarizes the Lumière’s in style and content, Une Partie de Cartes (1896), a one minute affair which shows “Méliès and two friends playing cards in a garden.” (Robinson, 1993: 14)

Barnouw describes the second phase of cinema’s integration into Entertainment Magic as the phase of “wizards on camera.” (1981: 87) This phase was one in which magicians became film makers who, after seeing the entertaining potentials of the device, turned to material that was natural to them and filmed performances of magic. As Barnouw accounts, “in the delirium of the hour it must have seemed essential that leading magicians… should if possible be recorded by the camera and go out to the world, and perhaps to posterity, on film,” (1981:87) yet these images of magic on film failed to be as entertaining as was expected. This can be seen in the series of films created by the famous escape artist Harry Houdini (1874 – 1926) between 1902 and 1923. Terror Island (James Cruze: 1920) for instance follows the typical formula of these productions in which a fictional pretext - here a group of treasure hunters seeks diamonds lost in a shipwreck off the South Seas - impelled Houdini to perform versions of his famous escape routines which here included an array of underwater stunts. Simon During assesses that “Houdini’s movies failed because they attempted to exploit what he was famous for, namely those daredevil or ‘live risk’ stunts which are what film (as mechanical reproduction) cannot capture… his aura depended on people witnessing him triumph over risk, danger, even death, in that very moment, and not just seeing it represented.” (During, 2002: 174) This same sense of immediacy was the prerequisite
that was unfulfilled in any ‘wizard on film’ narratives, which were in fact better described as filmed actualities: recorded images of illusions that failed to express the immediacy and affect that accompanied live performances of magic.

In some ways Méliès reconfirmed this dynamic of magicians performing magic on film, as many of his films feature a magician as the central character. This can be seen in the film The Mermaid (1904) or Tchin-chao the Chinese Conjurer (1904) which like many trick films of the era used “the magician as the occasion for magic,” (Barnouw, 1981:88) a tendency which was prevalent even after narrative in general was discovered to be an equally effective justification for magic. However Méliès’s depiction of the magician on screen did not conform to the formula of filmed actualities of illusions that made up depictions of wizards on screen. This is because Méliès constructed performances that were beyond the scope of the magician as a stage performer, presenting impossible tricks that were only able to be achieved through the magical effects of the cinematic apparatus as a spectacular attraction.

**Magic Shows and the Trick Film**

Cinema’s magical aesthetic was invented not when magic was recorded on film, but in the discovery that followed this failure, that of the discovery of the magic of film: the potential of the cinematic apparatus to recreate and invent its own visual language of magic tricks. Méliès, like his magician contemporaries, saw cinema as the next great attraction of Entertainment Magic. However, unlike the ‘wizards on film’ approach of many of his rivals, Méliès approached cinema from the perspective of a magical entertainer as well as that of an innovative artist. Apprehending that cinema was suited to the same kind of instrumental based illusion making that Entertainment Magic had relied on for centuries, Méliès’s approach to filmmaking became one that drew upon stage traditions of illusion making but also one of invention, for Méliès sought discover and exploit the magical potentials of the cinema medium itself. Through his playful approach to the film medium, Méliès came to be the pioneer of cinema magic, inventing the trick film genre which reinvented magical performance for the screen and discovered a language of magical visual effects that have defined the illusions of cinema ever since.
As Michael Mangan suggests, “Méliès unique genius – and eventually his limitation – lay in perceiving and exploiting the similarity between the creative possibilities of film and the pleasure of the conjurers act,” (Mangan, 2007: 130) a dynamic that can be seen in the trick film *The Mermaid*. At first *The Mermaid* appears to satisfy the conditions of Barnouw’s category of the ‘wizard on screen’ for the narrative starts with what appears to be a filmed illusion. The film begins with an image of a Méliès starring as a magician – a role which is visually evoked through the quintessential costume of the tuxedo and top hat – who is inspecting an aquarium. The illusion begins when the magician removes his hat, shows the audience it is empty, miraculously pulls a jug from within and starts filling the hat with water. Drawing a rod from another part of the set, the magician starts fishing from his hat, pulling out an array of dangling fish and placing them into the aquarium where they swim about animatedly. The appearance of these fishes has been achieved by subtle, yet not imperceptible film cuts or an effect of editing whereby the film is stopped in order to place a fish on the line and then restarted with the actor in same pose so that the action seems to continue naturally. While this illusion has been achieved via visual effects, it is not unfeasible to suggest that up until this point the film has presented an illusion that could be filmed as an actuality. The film becomes one of the trick genre, then, when these effects escalate. With a sort of trumping mentality, the same form of stop-motion cut is repeated, yet rather than having fish appear, suddenly the magician transforms costumes into the garb of a fisherman. The gag continues when the magician-come-fisherman produces a net that catches more and more live fishes. This example of escalating trickery in *The Mermaid* demonstrates that the designation of trick films does not just recognize the effects that make up the ‘tricks’ presented on screen. Where a film becomes a trick film is in its tone of entertainment and excess: one, which like Tom Gunning’s designation of the “cinema of attractions,” (1993: 6) draws attention to the creation of illusions that are only achievable through the cinema medium.

Commonly the trick film expresses this unique magic of cinema through its presentation of a succession of screen tricks. This tendency is apparent in *The Mermaid*’s
mile-a-minute attitude to the presentation of effects. It is a presentational strategy that may be said to be a legacy of the vaudevillian performance style of stage conjuring, which would present a variety of tricks or entertainments as part of any total performance that evolves beyond it, for the effects of the screen are more elaborate than those that can be achieved in the context of the stage. Alternatively however, a trick film may elaborate upon a single effect such as in the case of The Man with the Rubber Head, (Georges Méliès: 1901) a film which features an image of the vivacious head of Méliès which appears to expand on the pretence of being blown up with a set of bellows. This effect is achieved through exposing onto a black background the image of the head which is made to enlarge by moving it closer to the camera. Despite the singular effects of the film it remains a trick film by maintaining the sense that the cinematic effect is the star: the illusion being the loci attention for the spectator which entertains through the technical virtuosity of the cinema medium and this links the film to the idea of cinema as a form of technological attraction. However this trick remains contingent upon an imaginary or magical scenario, that despite being illogical in terms of reality, nevertheless justifies the appearance of this effect, consequently making it a magical spectacle in a thematic sense.

**Screen, Stage, Cinematic and Narrative Effects**

This thesis has yet to interrogate the sum of the parts of the trick film, those illusions which constitute cinema’s special effects. In large the effects used by early trick cinema find their origins either in the techniques of projection or in the techniques of stage illusion, thus these effects may be seen as being legacies of Entertainment Magic in general. However cinema effects are further comprised of tricks that are the unique providence of the medium, designed out of the magical potentials of the cinematic apparatus and associated instruments, like film, or processes such as editing. It is these latter aspects of cinematic trickery that represent film’s own contribution to the array of Entertainment Magic.

The film effects that originate in the traditions of screen practice, those projected displays of Entertainment Magic that include the Camera Obscura, Magic Lantern and Phantasmagoria performances, include effects of the dissolve, superimposition, zooms in
and out, substitutions, fades and cross-fades. While it may at first appear that the 
translation of these techniques could be uncomplicated, because the cinema relies on the 
same core mechanisms of projector and screen, creating these same effects on film 
required the development of far more elaborate techniques than the display technologies 
that first created these effects. For instance, where the Magic Lantern could create a 
superimposed image by fading an image from one projector into an image from another 
projector, in cinema achieving the same effect requires either a double exposure of a film 
negative or editing that would overlay two sequences of film to create this impression of 
visual merger. This is used to great effect, for instance, in Méliès’s film *The Living 
Paying Cards* (1904), where a life size two-dimensional image of the King of Clubs is 
made to come to life through superimposition, transforming the image into the human 
figure of the King. This simple example demonstrates why Méliès’s creation of cinematic 
special effects, though they may be familiar to the illusion making language of 
Entertainment Magic, required significant virtuosity and innovation to replicate.

Méliès films are also notable for the effects that they reinvented out of the 
ilusions and performative gestures of stage magic and the conjurers act. Part of Méliès’s 
adaptation of the traditions of stage magic can be said to be based upon aesthetics rather 
than effects. This can be seen in the tendency of Méliès films to recreate the theatres 
proscenium arch in their mise-en-scène, where a central performer or ensemble will play 
to an audience as if from a stage, such as can be seen in the performance of the magician 
in *The Mermaid*. Further, Méliès films are marked by the use of painted backdrops and 
sets which, like in magic shows, could hide any number of secret compartments or 
ingeniuous devices used for illusion. Following the traditions of magic as a loci for the 
mechanical production of illusions, Méliès sets were often designed as key tools of his 
visual trickery. This often occurs through the metamorphic animation of set pieces 
achieved through visual effects which draw “undoubtedly on the tradition and methods of 
behind-the-scenes manipulation found in late-nineteenth-century magical theatre. 
(Gunning, 1989: 10) Such effects can be observed in *The Living Playing Cards* when the 
giant card came to life or in *The Hilarious Posters* (Georges Méliès: 1905) which uses 
the same techniques of superimposition to depict how a range of advertisements plastered
on a wall become animated when not directly observed. While the effects of these films are achieved through the manipulation of the cinematic medium, Méliès’s tricks of setting could also be materially driven. The magical stage is recreated for instance in *The Scheming Gambler’s Paradise* (Georges Méliès: 1905) in which entire elements of the set are placed on pivots so that they can quickly be transformed from elements of a casino into those of a clothing store when the constabulary come calling. Méliès’s attitude to using the film set almost as an active character, rather than as just an aesthetic setting for action, can be seen to be a legacy of conjuring because such performances relied on the active use of props and staging in the creation of illusion.

Méliès also recreated the magician’s stage in his cinematic effects through the direct quotation of tricks and visual themes. In a general sense Méliès’s films recreate the landscape of the Entertainment Magic of the stage through his celebration of the visual topography of magicians, levitating women, nefarious demons, fantastical creatures, dancing skeletons and ghostly apparitions found in the magical assemblage. This thematic and iconographic adaptation of stage magic, for instance, can be seen in the opening plot of *The Mermaid* which has already been recounted by this thesis. Which utilizes the iconography of the gentleman magician, the trope of pulling objects out of hats – further emphasized by the facts that when the magician is finished with fishes he starts drawing rabbits out of the same waterlogged garment – and, more vitally, it’s playful attitude to appearances and transformation, that thematic foundation upon which the gross of magic trickery is built.

Méliès’s greatest contribution to Entertainment Magic, perhaps, lies in his invention of a language of effects that were uniquely able to be produced by film. While it has been shown that even the rendering the effects of early projection required adaptation to the medium of film, film also made as yet unimaginable effects possible. These tricks, which rely on the capacities of the cinematic apparatus and film medium, include effects of masking or matt photography, mirroring, multiple exposure, exposures onto black backgrounds, the inversion of film-stock to create a backwards image, the impression of slow or accelerated motion, as well as techniques of editing (those cuts that
made many sudden disappearances or transformations possible). While not all of these tricks of the cinematic medium originated with Méliès, the virtuosity he showed in rendering these effects made him their true inventor. To this list can be added those features that Elizabeth Ezra argues originate with Méliès: the model shot, the close-up, the tracking shot, montage and the use of depth staging, which have become part of the “standard vocabulary of classical cinema.” (2000: 29 -33) The tricks that Méliès exploited could also be considered to include those standard features of the medium – that of photographic reproduction and animated movement – aspects which arguably constitute cinema’s core special effects.

*The Mermaid* again acts as a useful example, for it depicts not only some of these uniquely cinematic effects, but as a whole demonstrates how cinema was able to create illusions that were beyond the scope of stage performances. It has already been recounted that the first half of the narrative, which features a magician performing tricks, presented illusions which while achieved through special effects in this instance could have been achieved on the stage. The second half of the film is of a different tone, transitioning into the fantastic realms that so often feature in the trick film. This occurs after the magician places a painted frame of coral around the aquarium, a set piece which comes to act as a gateway into an undersea world. Through dissolves the parlour scene turns into the murky depths and, as the fish tank is moved closer to the camera, the fish become creatures swimming in this sea. Through a fade in transition a mermaid appears behind these swimming fish, making them an effect in themselves: the aquarium as a primitive filter that gives the impression of multiple exposure. Méliès uses this mermaid – who is a wiggling actress hidden from the waist down by a painted backdrop of a tail – to play on one of the classic tricks of stage magic, that of the levitating woman, by having the magician duck under her apparently floating form. Yet, these adaptations of set and stage are soon out done by the films “apotheosis:’ the final display of visual transformations of great effect,” (Warner, 1993: 14) which depicts a display of effects only achievable through film. Here the magician places the mermaid into a half shell and then seats himself above her. Through a lingering dissolve the magician is transformed into the iconic image of King Neptune, while the dark background is put to use to allow several
sea nymphs to slowly appear in this scene as if out of thin air. This sequence of events and effects, which take the audience from an image of an aquarium into the dreamscape of an undersea world, narrates a more general contention for it demonstrates how the filmic production of illusion successfully triumphed over the illusions of the stage. Because the effects of the cinema were not inhibited by material limitations, they were better equipped to depict the unbounded visions of the imagination to which magical entertainments have always strived.

Méliès’s trick films, while sharing certain presentational strategies with stage magic nevertheless improved upon the real-time production of illusions because of the variety of tricks that they could produce, the speed at which such appearances could be conjured (as is seen in the excess of transformations that make up *The Mermaid*) or in the scale and virtuosity of the tricks that they could produce (as is attested to by the physically impossible feat seen in *The Man With The Rubber Head*). While Erik Barnouw might nostalgically bewail the loss of staged magical performances in the wake of the cinema, this was only the natural response of Entertainment Magic, which has always sought to simultaneously satisfy and enlarge the appetites of an audience, through its productions of novel visual spectacles. Thus, while cinema can be thought of as being a form of Entertainment Magic because it conforms to the construction of projected visual illusions as an entertainment spectacle - a criteria fulfilled by the documentary images or actualities of early films - cinema found its longevity as a magical entertainment via the trick film. This is because the attitude to creating novel effects, a tendency that was virulent in a stage magic that sought to create never before seen illusions, was adopted into the trick film. Because the novelty of the cinematic medium was constantly renewed, fortified by the constant invention of new effects and hence new enchantments, its entertainment value was maintained. This novelty is maintained not only by tricks of effect which continue well into the contemporary era, for instance through the renewal of the medium though CGI effects, but also through the effect of narrative, that trick which cinema constantly elaborates but never acknowledges as a magical feat.
It has thus far been demonstrated how Méliès brought to film a range of effects drawn from the projected displays and stage performances of Entertainment Magic while also inventing a range of effects that were unique to the filmic medium. Yet, the filmmaker also discovered how to create and exploit what is, perhaps, cinema’s most successful effect: that of narrative. Narrative, which is usually theorized as a formal structure of filmic story telling, can be considered to be a magical effect. After the Lumière’s actuality films and phase of wizards on film, in which cinema presented entertainments that were based upon actualities, to stay entertaining cinema needed to discover not only more complex visual effects but also more complex ways to communicate. This occurred primarily through the development of narrative storytelling, which gave cinema’s new magical effects meaning. Most famously known for his creation of magical visual effects, Méliès can also be thought of as the father of cinema narrative. This is because while his films are fanciful they represent a complete mode of storytelling, visual enacting cause, effect and narrative closure, the features which David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson suggest comprise “classical' narrative cinema.” (1997: 109) As Barnouw suggests, mere effects “like disappearances, needed firmer dramatic context to hold interest.” (Barnouw, 1981: 92) This was true for magical performances, which created a dramatic context through the lyrical patter of the magician, as it was for film which Méliès intuited to alternatively require something closer to theatrical narrative to contextualize its magical appearances. While the narratives of Méliès films lack the length and complexity of those that have emerged in the intervening period, they require the same forms of audience engagement. As Mangan suggests, the “games” that Méliès’ films “play with reality demand an agile imaginative response from a spectator who is engaging with the story being told.” (Mangan, 2007: 134) Méliès’ The Mermaid is one example of a narrative film for it conforms to a structure that travels from beginning to end by way of motivated cause and effect, but is more commonly narrative is associated to Méliès’s A Trip to the Moon (1902) which stands as one of the earliest examples of an extended cinematic narrative.

It follows the cyclic narrative structure of the adventure genre, which sees a group of skilled adventurers travel to an exotic destination, encounter both wonders and
dangers, before returning home to accolades of victory. In *A Trip to the Moon* this journey is undertaken by a group of astronomers who adventure to the moon by way of a rocket fired from a large canon. After being launched amidst great fanfare, the rocket crashes on the moon and the travellers delight in seeing the earth and galaxy from such a vantage point. However, being worn down by the cold of a snowstorm, they venture underground in search of shelter but unexpectedly encounter the alien inhabitants of the moon, the Selenites, who capture the travellers and imprison them in their palace. Rising to this challenge of captivity, the travellers escape, catalysing a chase sequence across the surface and get to their rocket just in time. Launching off the surface, they fall back to earth and after landing in the ocean are towed back home to fanfare and celebration, which is capped by their own unexpected capture of a rogue Selenite. *A Trip to the Moon*, which is constructed over 12 independent scenes which in themselves feature numerous effects, satisfies all the criteria of a trick film but also satisfies those of the narrative film for it conforms to a structure of beginning, middle and end that follows the typical formation of an adventure narrative.¹⁷

Film theorists often suggest that Méliès’s films fell out of style over time because they resisted the style of film that was coming to dominate motion picture entertainments, namely, narrative films that privileged an aesthetic of realism. As such, Méliès’s films are often overlooked for their narrative content. While Méliès’s films were narrative based, they did not tend towards realism, but rather were trick films that aimed to attract and entertain through their very lack of realism. Because the same material effects occur in both texts based on realism and fantasy - a unity brought about by the standardization of visual effects as the basic language of the cinema apparatus - it is the effects of narrative that distinguish these modes of film. Méliès’s films are narrative based because they do not depict a series of unmotivated tricks, but rather are filled with effects that become

¹⁷ This narrative formula that was heavily plagiarized, even by Méliès, who returned to the “fantastic voyage formula for major productions: *Voyage à travers l’Impossible*, (1904) *Le Raid New York – Paris en Automobile*, (1908) *A La Conquête du Pole*. (1912) (Robinson, 1993: 42) The first, *Voyage à travers l’Impossible*, could almost be considered a remake, for it follows the narrative sequence of *A Trip to the Moon* almost exactly but with simple elaborations: instead of a rocket the scientist travellers are fired into the sky in a complex train-come-submarine contraption and crash into the sun rather than the moon. In either case, this perilous journey is rewarded by a heroic return to earth, with satisfies the cyclic structure of the adventure narrative.
meaningful because of the storytelling structures that surround them. Specifically, the frame of comprehension that narrative provides for these trick films is founded upon the fantastical setting in which they occur; wherein the contexts of literal magical performance, imaginary adventures underwater or across the galaxy, give occasion for the equally magical effects featured in these films. Thus it can be contended then that narrative is utilized as a fictional effect that frames special effects.

This equation whereby narrative actions continue to justify or explain the visual actions of a film does not fundamentally change in other genres, however films—particularly those given to an aesthetic of realism—may express a covert attitude to the depiction of filmic effects. Méliès himself observed this covert attitude to cinema as an illusory form arguing that “what he called the ‘modern technique’ in film was merely another form of trick cinema, in which (and fatally) the tricks were not motivated.” (During, 2002: 170) Méliès’s films featured tricks that declared themselves overtly as illusions through their fantastic settings. Yet cinematic realism is also illusionary because it is fictional. This expresses a contradiction that has followed the cinematic medium since its inception, namely that despite being based upon mechanical illusions narrative cinema seeks to efface its own medium and be accepted as real. Partly the desire to depict illusions as realities comes from the long impulsion to perfect the illusionising potential of any mediums of display. While cinema does not achieve this perfection on a material or perceptual level, narrative creates a context in which perfect illusions may be created on an experiential level. It is that due to the effect of narrative, which makes cinema illusions appear real, that the suspension of disbelief is a spectatorial affect that is directly impelled by the film text, making narrative cinema’s most successful trick of all.

Affect and Cinema’s Magical Imagination

While this chapter has widely articulated the forms of magical effects invented through Méliès’s film practice it has not directly addressed the notion of magical affect that is also manifested through these texts. Perhaps, as Ndalianis suggests, this reinforces the notion that while effects are tangible or “representable,” and thus able to be isolated in film analysis, the magical affects of cinema remain “unrepresentable.” (2004: 218)
Earlier discussions of affect made by this thesis suggested that in response to experiences of Entertainment Magic audiences constructed perceptual, cognitive and emotional response that allowed them to determine whether or not an experience of magical was real or illusion. A spectator could then respond to these stimuli either through a measure of belief or a suspension of disbelief. However because cinema is transparently represented as a medium of illusion such levels of engagement do not occur, making the suspension of disbelief an implicit condition of spectatorship. Understanding cinematic affect, then, is not an issue of clarifying reality, but is a measure if the experience of an imaginative reality.

Cinematic affect is expressed through the sum of effects, the ability of a medium of illusion to transport an audience, through necessarily imaginary visions, into states of extraordinary magical experience. Bukatman attributes this transportation to the experience of “phenomenological excess,” (2003:119) a criteria that is satisfied by all cinema insomuch as its images and narratives are illusions. This is true of actualities, which depict illusions of a past event that is otherwise inaccessible to the audience, in trick films which are overt displays of magical spectacles but also narratives based upon imaginary conditions, or even in that partly realistic but really fictional condition of film in general, which seeks to slip the pretence of being illusory artifice and transport the audience into imaginary, sometimes convincingly real, diegetic spaces. Thus cinema will always be magical because its instrumental and thematic contents are based upon illusion, but also because the experience if the medium relies upon the acceptance of the possibilities of the imagination, that spirit that animates cinema as a magical entertainment.
While this thesis has explored how the associations of magic and cinema are maintained on a material level through the undeniable technological and performative legacies of magic that have made their way into the apparatus and formal structures of cinema respectively, it also meditates to a degree upon the idea that it is through the cinematic medium that Western culture has continued to be embedded not only in magical entertainments, but also magical experiences. While many of the magical attributes of the cinema have faded as the experiences of its illusions have become increasingly normalized as a part of everyday life, it continues to be a medium that expresses the magical imaginations of culture. This is because while cinema has lost the magic that it created in and of itself – the wonder elicited in response to its effects of visual projected illusion – cinema continues to create magic through the manner in which it transports the spectator into representations of extraordinary realities and, by extension, persistent and affective magical experiences. By consequence of this apprehension this thesis, to some degree, also seeks to highlight the experiences of the spirit from within the screen the extraordinary experiences of the magic that can be apprehended through such illusions.

Despite the appearances offered by this thesis, cinema did not begin with the Lumière’s and end with Méliès. Cinema is a form of Entertainment Magic that, like its predecessors, has been elaborated over centuries. However the essential composition of cinema as an entertainment is comprised of illusory effects and magical affects has not changed. Again like its instrumental predecessors, the essential forms of trickery and address found in the medium have not changed greatly except by way of technological advancement and through superficial alterations to films as products attend to the contingencies of taste and market trends. Cinema is, and remains, magical despite its status as a secular entertainment.
The aim of this thesis has been to discuss the history of magic in culture in order to understand how and why magic in the contemporary period comes to be expressed through secular entertainments, in particular through the unique magic of the cinematic medium. It has developed a definition of magic that is part conceptual, composed out of the view that magic is an assemblage of cultural artefacts that are united by their possession of unknown qualities, and part historical, in so much these attributions are necessarily determined out of a contingent cultural context. As such, it has divided the functioning of magic in culture into two phases: that of Spiritual and Entertainment Magic.

Spiritual Magic was discussed as the context of pre-history in which magic was the foundation of explanatory cosmological systems. Here magic emerged as a paradigm to explain and categorize the unknown appearances of the natural world, appearances that were causally attributed to supernatural beings who directed magic as an intangible and efficacious energy guiding the phenomenal world. Concurrently, this thesis has suggested that magic works through two means; effect and affect. The effects that this period narrates are those of transformation because magic was efficacious and could thus transform terrestrial conditions. Such transformations were predicated upon belief, which determined the efficacy of magic, but also upon the affectual experiences of magic as magical. Magical is an ascription given to unknown qualities of perception or experiences of the extraordinary which, filtered through the belief, become experiences of real magic.

In the phase of magic after Enlightenment, that of Entertainment Magic, the terms of effect and affect attributed to magic changed. Having been stripped of its spiritual attributions, magic became a performance enacted in the secular arena of entertainment which sought to recreate magical effects and affects through non-efficacious forms of illusion making. Thus magic became based upon illusory effects, the instrumental tricks that created magical or extraordinary appearances through technological means. The affects of magical experience persisted in this period, but now such experiences were not predicated upon belief, but a suspension of disbelief in the reality of magical illusions. This thesis went on to outline the specific technologies and performances that created the
effects and affects of a one strand of entertainment illusion, that of projected screen displays encompassed through the technologies of the Camera Obscura, Magic Lantern, Phantasmagoria, the Kinetoscope and finally the photographic motion pictures of the cinema.

Cinema has been discussed as the current master medium of this form of visual illusion making. As a magical entertainment cinema has been shown to be partly comprised out of these legacies of instrumental effect making but also as a medium informed by the magical illusions of the stage which thematically and visually influence the construction of early films, particularly the trick films of Georges Méliès. The reason why cinema may be seen as an apotheosis of illusion making, however, was founded upon its discovery and utilization of the effect of narrative as narrative worked to justify the spectacular appearances of illusory effects. Further cinema narrative creates an implicit suspension of disbelief because cinema does not ask an audience to believe that its illusions are real magic, but to experience them as real expressions of a diegetic reality, thus creating the affective experience of magical animation.

In conclusion, while this thesis has journeyed from spirits to screen, insomuch these terms enunciate the historical transition from a Spiritual Magic invested in supernatural beings and beliefs into that of an Entertainment Magic where spirits manifest as the illusory apparitions of screen technologies, there is also a sense of the spirit renewed through the screen. For in all performances of magic, particularly those of the cinema, there is a belief attached not to the reality of magic, but to the reality of magical experience. The audience is made to believe, if temporarily, in the extraordinary appearances and experiences of magic, which are not created by spirits, but through the wilful conjuring of film-makers as magicians.


The Man With the Rubber Head. 1901. Directed by Georges Méliès. Méliès the Magician. 2001, Arte Video, Facets Video


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Stulman Dennett, A.


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Author/s:
HINGSTON, GALA

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