

SPECTACLES OF LIGHT

MEDIA PERFORMANCE HISTORIES

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Spectacles of Light

The Magic Lantern as Popular Entertainment, 1810–1930

Edited by

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BREPOLS

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Introduction



A Central European Magic Professor

Dissolving Views, Stage Magic, and other Lantern Practices by Ludwig Döbler

▼ **ABSTRACT** The chapter examines the role of a Vienna-based performer, Ludwig Döbler, in introducing the visual technology of the *dissolving views* to audiences of continental Europe in the early 1840s. Referring to a specific lantern genre, dissolving views enabled the projection of transformative images and soon became popular forms of nineteenth century entertainment. Started off as a charismatic and acknowledged magician in the 1820s, Döbler performed successful productions, including magic tricks, wonders of vision, and spectacular media presentations, on various prominent stages of Europe. In 1843, he premiered his first optical show of dissolving views and continued with an extensive continental tour, which contributed to the new genre being shared across borders. The chapter argues that Döbler's influence was most significant during the productions at the Hungarian and German public theatres of Pest-Buda, a city of heated political debates and emancipatory movements. Two local performers, György Telepi and Imre Róth, were inspired by the Austrian performer's outstanding shows, and from 1844, they became transcultural mediators of the technology themselves. Consequently, Telepi and Róth assisted the further travel of the dissolving views to the eastern parts of the Austrian Empire, and even to the Ottoman Empire. The interconnected histories of the three performers above calls attention to the relevance of Central and Eastern European popular performance cultures and itinerant performers in circulating new visual apparatuses, perceptual experience, and scientific findings in the nineteenth century among various ethnic and social communities of the continent and beyond.

Before the magic tricks begin, spirit lamps go off, leaving the audience in an annoying total darkness. After the curtain is raised, we see the purest azure blue sky with wreath-like clouds flying around, and we watch the coming wonders silently. In the middle of the azure blue sky, spots are appearing, turning into questionable objects—similar to *fata morgana* or a mirage; the pleasant blue is blurring, and the clouds are melting

into stone walls and buildings, while everything is becoming clear, becoming alive, coming closer and developing a natural colour—until we see a magnificent image of an Italian castle and its city, Itri.¹

This text was published in a Hungarian journal in 1843 as a reaction to a new visual experience presented at the recently built Hungarian National Theatre in Pest-Buda (Budapest). The reviewer described a specific genre of magic lantern shows, the so-called dissolving views, which was first introduced to European audiences in the 1830s.² The technology was based on the apparatus of a double magic lantern with at least two lenses, which allowed lanternists to project transformative images. It meant that during the display, one image faded out as the new one faded in, while the light remained at a constant intensity, creating a gradual transition between the pictures. Presenting images of landscapes and cities, spectacular buildings and their interiors, as well as exotic and distant places, dissolving views soon became a popular form of nineteenth-century entertainment and an important medium of visual knowledge circulation in Europe and elsewhere.

As dissolving views offered a brand-new experience of perceiving movement and image-based narration, these shows dazzled spectators. The size, colours, intensity, and movement of images together with the performers' storytelling or demonstration, the accompanying music and at times various activities (such as communal singing) all contributed to an active, immersive, and wondrous experience. Dissolving views appeared throughout the century in various public spaces, such as scientific institutions, public theatres, and fairs. Apart from the stunning multimedial experience of the lantern shows, itinerant lanternists, as argued by art and theatre historian Nele Wynants, can also be viewed and examined as mediators and actors of cultural transfer, '[a]s go-betweens, crossing borders between geographic spaces, languages and cultures'³

This became especially important in Central and Eastern Europe, where the nineteenth century saw a marked rise in national emancipation processes, and consequently, new cultural objects and technologies were used as modes of contribution to cultural nationalism, which embraced the establishment of national literary languages and the nationalization of cultural contents. Therefore, it is not by chance that novel visual technologies and entertaining genres in the region usually ended up not only in high-status institutions (mostly in public or national theatres), but also in a politicized context. Travelling showmen had to adapt their productions within this environment in order to satisfy local audiences that demanded images and themes of not only foreign locations, but also contents that would please the national or imperial imagination.

1 *Világ* (28 October 1843): 706. If not specified otherwise, English translations of German and Hungarian texts are (author's translation).

2 For debates on the actual date of the first dissolving views presentation, cf. Edwin Dawes and Mervyn Heard. 'M. Henry's dissolving views', in *Realms of light: uses and perceptions of the magic lantern from the 17th to the 21st century*, edited by Richard Crangle, Mervyn Heard, and Ine van Dooren (London: Magic Lantern Society, 2005), 159–61; Mervyn Heard. *Phantasmagoria: The Secret Life of the Magic Lantern* (Hastings: The Projection Box, 2006); Erkki Huhtamo. 'Ghost Notes: Reading Mervyn Heard's Phantasmagoria. The Secret Life of the Magic Lantern', *The Magic Lantern Gazette* 18.4 (winter 2006): 10–20.

3 Nele Wynants. 'The travelling lantern: the Courtois and Grandsart-Courtois family theatres as transcultural mediators at the nineteenth-century fair', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 17.3–4 (2019): 237.

The exchange of visual technologies helped along by touring performers, illusionists, stage magicians and experimental physicists points to the historical interconnection among the practices of science, theatre, and stage magic. Offering new and even subversive means of human perception, the various genres of magic lantern shows often fused together scientific innovation and popular entertainment,⁴ and they also reframed questions on the experience of spectatorship as well as the viewer's identity. In the last decade, important research has been conducted on the intersections of the history of theatre, culture, and science, performance theory, and media studies,⁵ and more specifically, on the role of West European or North American popular entertainers in shaping visual culture. These studies have also observed magic lanterns as mobile forms of media influencing visual knowledge formation in the nineteenth century, as well as the networks of travelling showmen in Western Europe.⁶

However, little is known about how Central and Eastern European performers and showmen contributed to the dissemination, re-purposing, and adaptation of lantern projections, nor how they became important factors in circulating technologies and visual knowledge in Europe and elsewhere. Therefore, the present chapter aims to examine the role of a travelling illusionist from the Austrian Empire as a continental mediator of a new visual technology in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Vienna-based performer Ludwig Döbler was one of the earliest and most significant figures in popularizing and introducing the genre of dissolving views to European audiences in the early 1840s.

Stage Magic and Fame

Ludwig Döbler (1801–1864) was an accomplished showman and entrepreneur of his time, who not only performed popular pieces on various prominent European stages between the 1820s and 1840s, but also made a considerable fortune as a ‘magician of rare charm, skill, and ingenuity’⁷. His success should be understood within the context of a rising visual culture in the long nineteenth century, where the cultural roles of spectacular media and theatre institutions contributed to new modes of urban experiences and subject positions.⁸ Experiments, tricks and wonders of vision, no matter whether they were framed as stage

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- 4 Kurt Vanhoutte. ‘Deep Time Through the Lens of the Magic Lantern: Genesis and Geology’, in *Faith in a Beam of Light: Magic Lantern and Belief in Western Europe, 1860–1940*, edited by Sabine Lenk and Natalija Majsova (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022), 187–207.
 - 5 C.f. e.g., Tracy C. Davis and Peter W. Marx (eds). *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance Historiography* (London: Routledge, 2020); Nele Wynants (ed.). *Media Archaeology and Intermedial Performance*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).
 - 6 Cf. e.g., Sabine Lenk and Natalija Majsova (eds). *Faith in a Beam of Light*; Martyn Jolly, Elisa deCourcy (eds). *The Magic Lantern at Work: Witnessing, Persuading, Experiencing and Connecting* (New York: Routledge, 2020); Kurt Vanhoutte and Nele Wynants. ‘On the passage of a man of the theatre through a rather brief moment in time: Henri Robin, performing astronomy in nineteenth century Paris’, *Early Popular Visual Culture* 15.2 (2017): 152–74.
 - 7 Milbourne Christopher. *Magic: A Picture History* (New York: Dover Publications, 1991), 67.
 - 8 Cf. Werner Faulstich. *Medienwandel im Industrie- und Massenzeitalter (1830–1900)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004); Nic Leonhardt. *Piktoral-Dramaturgie* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2007); Sofie Nield. ‘Technologies of Performance’, in *A Cultural History of Theatre in the Age of Empire*, edited by Peter W. Marx (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 203–26; Peter Marx. ‘Introduction: Cartographing the Long Nineteenth Century’, in Marx (ed.), *A Cultural History of Theatre in the Age of Empire*, 1–32.

Fig. 1. Portrait of Ludwig Döbler, the Magic Professor. Illustration showing a man on a stage with an array of magic tricks in the background. *Der Spiegel*, 15 April 1829. Courtesy of the Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Collection of Periodicals.



magic or popular science, became entertaining ways of encountering the instability and transformative nature of (visible) reality. Raising questions about whether images could be trusted, staged perceptual inconsistencies and applied cognitive biases helped audiences to experience the impossible⁹ in the realm of a growing scopic regime.¹⁰

In addition, new spaces and modes of seeing became crucial regarding the social and political processes throughout Europe, which seemed to be at the crossroads between

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- ⁹ Gustave Kuhn. *Experiencing the impossible: The science of magic* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019).
¹⁰ Cf. Vanessa Schwartz and Jeannene Prysblyski. 'Visual Culture's History: Twenty-First Century Interdisciplinarity and its Nineteenth Century Objects', in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Vanessa Schwartz and Jeannene Prysblyski (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 7; Martin Jay. *Downcast Eyes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

empires and nation states.¹¹ This dialectic situation especially became a major issue in Central and Eastern Europe, where different ethnic groups of the Austrian Empire (Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Croatians, Romanians, Serbians, Italians etc.) sought out their own national acknowledgement or independence, together with cultural, social and political emancipation, whereas the Habsburgs tried to maintain the centralized state of a conservative monarchy.¹² Theatres and other public displays, including museums and scientific institutions, often served the aim of national or imperial agendas by creating visual representations of various identities.

Within this geopolitical and cultural environment, Döbler started his career as a stage magician in 1825 in Vienna, capital of the Habsburg Empire. His first public performance included tricks and popular physics experiments in the salon of the Weckbecker family. In the same year, he premiered his shows at the coronation ceremony of Empress Caroline Auguste in Pressburg (Bratislava, or Pozsony). As argued by Robert Kaldy-Karo, author of an impressive document collection and biography on Döbler:

One of these performances was attended by chance by Prince Metternich, where he and his companions had a good time. A few days later, Prince Metternich's office instructed Döbler to present his performance to Emperor Francis I and his family in the hall of the royal house in Pressburg.¹³

In 1826, he started to perform at the Leopoldstadt Theater in Vienna, and in nearly thirteen years, he earned the prestigious nomination of 'artist of the Prussian court'. From 1826, Döbler also travelled to many cities in the Austrian Empire with his magic shows, and newspaper coverage underlined not so much the quality of the tricks, but his performance style, his excellent way of expressing himself on stage, his elegant movements and nice smile.¹⁴ All in all, he was a charismatic performer. That was probably the reason why he left a memorable mark not only on popular performative genres, but also on local material culture and Vienna's cultural memory. Postcards, stamps, Biedermeier bouquets, chocolates, pretzels, porcelain figurines, 'hats, gloves and neckwares à la Döbler'¹⁵ were sold in the shops of Vienna, and later a street in the seventh district of the city was also named after the showman. In terms of cultural memory, two books were published in 2001 on the life of Döbler: one was authored by the above-mentioned Austrian magician and former director of the Viennese Circus and Clown Museum, Robert Kaldy-Karo, and the other was by German pedagogue and researcher of local histories, Werner H. A. Debler.¹⁶

11 Cf. Marx. 'Introduction', 4–12.; Bruce McConachie. 'Theatre, Nation, and Empire', in *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, edited by Phillip B. Zarrilli, and others (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), 270–85; Johannes Paulmann. *Pomp und Politik: Monarchenbegegnungen in Europa zwischen Ancien Regime und Erstem Weltkrieg* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2000).

12 Cf. Johannes Feichtinger and Heidemarie Uhl (eds). *Habsburg neu denken: Vielfalt und Ambivalenz in Zentraleuropa* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2016); Moritz Csáky. *Das Gedächtnis der Städte: kulturelle Verflechtungen: Wien und die urbanen Milieus in Zentraleuropa* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2010).

13 Robert Kaldy-Karo. *Ludwig Döbler—Genius des Biedermeier* (Horitschon: Verlag Novum, 2001), 19–20.

14 *Ibid.*, 24.

15 Christopher. *Magic*, 69.

16 Werner H. A. Debler. *Leopold Ludwig Döbler 1801–1864: Wiener Hoftaschenspieler und Zauberprofessor aus einem alten Schwäbisch Gmünder Geschlecht* (Offenbach am Main: Ed. Huber, 2001).



Fig. 2. A street named after Ludwig Döbler: Döblergasse in present Vienna. Photograph showing a building with a German street sign. Photo taken by Linda Erker.

Döbler's stage name, used in nineteenth-century advertisements, was the *Zauberprofessor* (*Magic Professor*), which consciously situated his practice at the margin of science and stage magic. As it will be shown, the choice of stage name was more than a mere advertising trick and can help reveal the interconnection of technological innovation and the birth of modern stage magic. Presenting magic and optical shows to European audiences, Döbler became one of the most influential popular performers in the region in the first half of the century. From 1829, he was touring all over Europe with premieres in several cities and countries including German, Hungarian, Russian, Swedish, English, French, Belgian, and Dutch territories.¹⁷ Döbler presented not only magic tricks, but also genres of magic lantern shows including phantasmagorias and dissolving views as well as automatons and moving image projections on various private and public stages, supposedly giving a total of 362 performances between 1829 and 1839.¹⁸ These shows attracted diverse audiences ranging usually from middle class spectators to members of the elites and even monarchs. Döbler's scientific magic was endorsed by many intellectuals and political figures, such as

17 Cf. Christian Gruber. *Wiener Zaubertradition: Theatrale Aspekte der Zauberkunst im 19. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Diplomica Verlag, 2016), 28; Constantin Wurzbach. *Biographisches Lexikon des Kaisertums Österreich—Vierzehnter Teil* (Graz: Universitätsbibliothek Graz, 1865), 426.

18 Gruber. *Wiener Zaubertradition*, 28.

Goethe,¹⁹ Chancellor Metternich and Emperor Franz II,²⁰ and he also appeared in front of most royal houses of Europe, including Queen Victoria and her family.²¹

Döbler's European tours contributed to various genres, technologies and devices being shared across borders, and they played a major role in popularizing a new visual experience. In addition, many of his tricks became a sensation throughout Europe at that time, including his bouquet routine (producing hundreds of flower bouquets from an empty hat), his travelling bottle (a seemingly empty bottle pouring wine or champagne for the audience), or his lighting of two hundred candles with one pistol shot. Döbler also reformed the conventions of staging magic by introducing elegant and colourful scenery with costumes such as velvet clothes and black silk trousers.²² His routines, presentation skills and refashioned scenery influenced the French stage magician who would later become very well known, Robert-Houdin.²³ Döbler was also a major pioneer in introducing a new and popular lantern technology to audiences of continental Europe, thus his role as an agent of technological exchange is also worth examination.

Döbler and the Dissolving Views

By the early 1840s, Döbler was known in many parts of Europe as a travelling performer. In 1842, John Mitchell, a fresh manager of the St James Theatre in London, hired the Austrian performer 'for a fixed fee, including expenses and travel.'²⁴ Döbler arrived in London in March 1842, and according to contemporary newspapers, he performed magic tricks and optical illusions under the title 'Natural Magic' for three months at the St James Theatre starting in April.²⁵ He premiered 'numerous new experiments' alongside well-known ones such as 'The Miraculous Washing', and 'Flora's Gifts', and besides performing in public theatres, he also entertained the royal family.²⁶ However, the series of performances in London, and his later tours in England and Scotland, proved to be most relevant in the light of Döbler's upcoming visual wonder.

It is worth mentioning that Döbler was not only a skilled showman but also educated in the fine arts and knowledgeable in contemporary mechanics and physics. These were the most important areas of expertise that would provide the necessary skillset of successful lanternist showmen of the era. In 1836, for example, Döbler received a license from the

-
- 19 Goethe supposedly even wrote this into his album in Weimar: 'Do you still need a diploma sealed? You have shown us the impossible!'. Dániel Molnár and Katalin Teller (eds). *Show und Business in Pest-Ofen: SeilgängerInnen, Automaten und andere Kunststücke von Weltruf* (Budapest: BHM Kiscell Museum, 2022), 102.
 - 20 Magdolna Kolta. *Képmutogatók: A fotográfiai látás kultúrtörténete* (Kecskemét: Magyar Fotográfiai Múzeum, 2003), 83.
 - 21 Deac Rossell. 'The Public Exhibition of Moving Pictures before 1896', in: *Quellen und Perspektiven / Sources and Perspectives*, edited by Frank Kessler, Sabine Lenk, and Martin Loiperdinger (Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld/ Roter Stern 2006), 178.
 - 22 *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon 1815–1950* (https://www.biographien.ac.at/oeb1/oeb1_D/Doebler_Ludwig_1801_1864.xml [accessed 8 June 2024]).
 - 23 Harry Houdini. *The Unmasking of Robert-Houdin* (New York: Publishers Printing Co., 1908), 182–92.
 - 24 Kaldy-Karo. *Ludwig Döbler*, 111.
 - 25 Christopher. *Magic: A Picture History*, 71.
 - 26 *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* (24 July 1842).

German authorities at Schleswig-Holstein for a hydrogen-oxygen gas microscope,²⁷ which was able to produce an intense light, and he was also one of the pioneers of limelight use in projection practices.²⁸

According to Döbler's diary, which was published in Robert Kaldy-Karo's extensive biography on the showman, Döbler started to look for a mechanic in London at the end of May 1842. This person could build new equipment for him, supposedly a double magic lantern. Döbler made the order on 6 June, as stated in Döbler's personal calendar: 'June 6 (Mo) At the mechanic. Machine ordered. Received letters from Vienna. Midday and evening friends. Visit to the Adelaide Gallery'.²⁹ On 27 May, Döbler also visited the Adelaide Gallery to purchase optical slides, which were to be painted custom for him.³⁰ In addition, he visited the emblematic venue of popular science in London, the Royal Polytechnic Institution, in May and July of the same year.³¹ It was there that he most likely saw some of the famous lantern shows of the time, even by one of the first lanternists who used double and triple magic lanterns for public display, Henry Langdon Childe. Döbler's visit coincided with the Polytechnic Institution's introduction of a larger format of slide and lantern projection which would refine the quality and effects of the projected images.³² While Childe is considered a pioneer of dissolving views by many,³³ Döbler is argued to be the first who introduced the genre and the connecting apparatus to continental Europe.³⁴

As film historian Deac Rossell points out, Döbler consciously made use of contemporary patents and new technologies in order to offer, almost on a yearly basis, increasingly spectacular images and a unique visual experience for audiences who would pay good money for experiencing fresh visual wonders.³⁵ Besides the double magic lantern, which became his signature device from 1843, he developed the so-called phantascope, another memorable acquisition which would combine the phenakistiscope and the magic lantern, allowing large-scale moving image projections, marking one of the first examples of early cinematic experience.³⁶ Rossell adds that 'Döbler's apparatus had twelve lenses at its front, each provided with its own phased image from a full set that comprised a simple motion. An additional internal pair of lenses was rotated by a crank and directed powerful limelight

27 For a Victorian context, cf. Meegan Kennedy. "'Throes and struggles ... witnessed with painful distinctness': The oxy-hydrogen microscope, performing science, and the projection of the moving image", *Victorian Studies* 62.1 (Autumn 2019): 85–118.

28 Kaldy-Karo. *Ludwig Döbler*, 51.

29 *Ibid.*, 121–22.

30 *Ibid.*, 121. However, he had to return to Vienna without the slides as the painter did not finish the job. Debler. *Leopold Ludwig Döbler 1801–1864*, 252.

31 *Ibid.*, 121 and 125.

32 That was several years before the institution added a new theatre to its building as a specific venue for spectacular lantern shows. Phillip Roberts. 'Optical Pantomimes at the Royal Polytechnic Institution', *Film History* 28.1 (2016): 4.

33 However, it was argued by Mervyn Heard that the real inventor of the technology had been Paul de Philipsthal—arguably the same person as Paul Philidor—while he had spent time in Ireland in 1804. In his review, Erkki Huhtamo questioned the arguments that supported this view. Huhtamo. 'Ghost Notes', 19.

34 Rossel. 'The Public Exhibition', 178–79; *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon 1815–1950*.

35 Rossel. 'The Public Exhibition', 178.

36 *Ibid.*

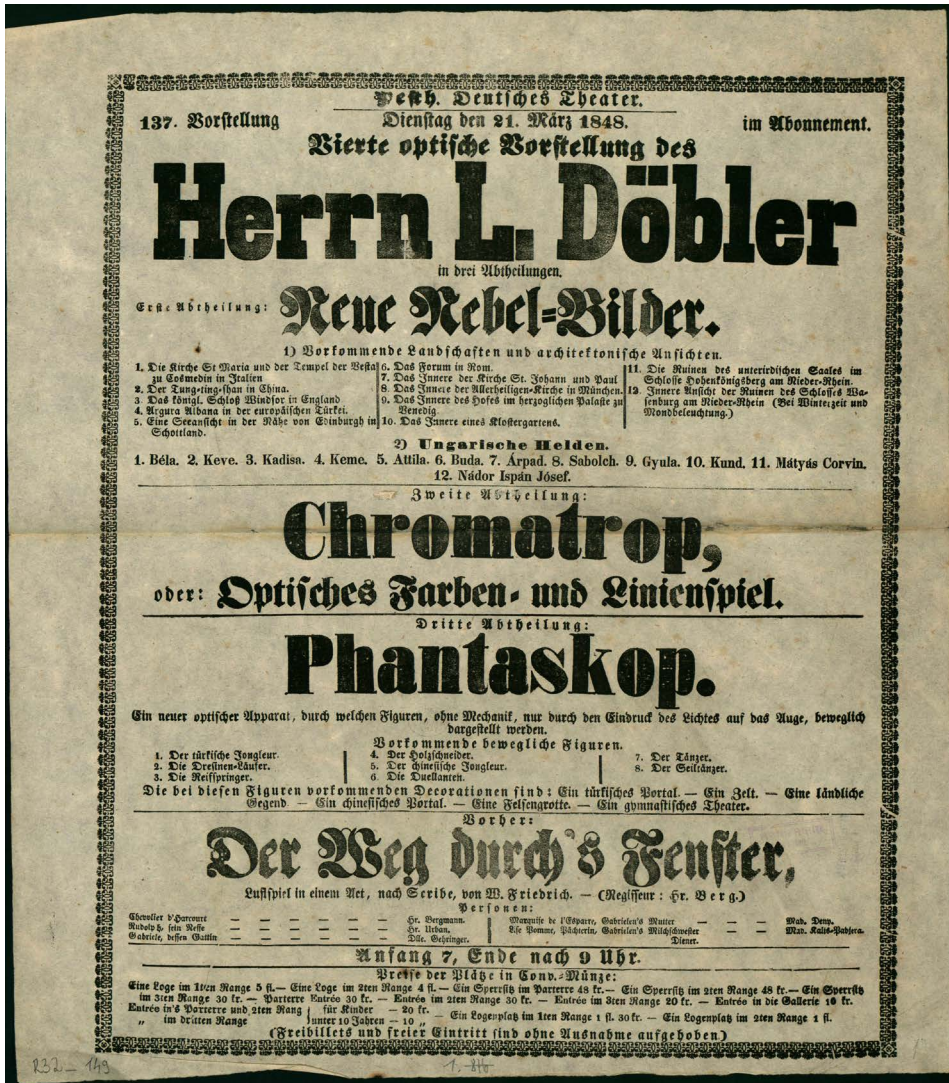


Fig. 3. Playbill of Döbler's visual show of three parts at the German Theatre of Pest in 1848. Photograph of a playbill in German. Courtesy of the Hungarian National Archives.

illumination at each of the front lenses in succession.³⁷ Döbler exhibited the device in January 1847 at the Theater in der Josefstadt of Vienna, showing eight moving images in between a series of dissolving views and a display of chromatropes. He then took the show on another tour in Europe.³⁸ Thanks to the very early moving image projections, Döbler's practice has been examined as a significant chapter in the prehistory of moving

37 *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 178–79; Deac Rossell. ‘Die Laterna Magica’, in *Ich Sehe was, was du nicht siehst! Sehmaschinen und Bilderwelten*, edited by Bodo von Dewitz and Werner Nekes (Cologne: Steidl, 2006), 134.

images and cinema,³⁹ however, little attention was given to the fact that he was a person of theatre and a charismatic performer, showing the most recent optical devices in public theatres throughout Europe.

Several reviews and playbills in 1843 from Germany, Austria, and Hungary confirm that at this time, Döbler was best known for introducing the genre of dissolving views to continental audiences. As previously mentioned, the technology was based on projecting with double and later triple magic lanterns, which had two and three lenses, allowing a gradual transition from one image to another. The origins of dissolving view projections stem from the 1830s, however, some suggest that they go further back in time to the first years of the 1800s.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, by the 1870s, double and triple magic lanterns spread across Europe and the US, and then soon became commercial products. The novelty of the genre came from the fact that it made the transformation of various images possible thanks to the multiplication of lenses. Moreover, dissolving views created a new type of visual storytelling without a strict storyline but with multiple settings, allowing a mobilized wandering of the imagination. Usually the transformation itself, when one image dissolved into another, was associated with fantasy, dreams and curiosity because of its visual characteristics. As suggested by media archaeologist Erkki Huhtamo,

Dissolving views [...] shifted from topic to topic, and between levels of reality, gliding into fantasy and back again. Their transformations followed the logic of dreams rather than rivers, trails, or marching armies. [...] The moving panorama represented linear continuity, whereas dissolving views were associated with non-linearity, transformations, and fuzzy edges.⁴¹

In addition, lantern historian Bernd Scholze indicated a social role of dissolving view presentations: audience members, regardless of their class or ethnicity, could see themselves merge and become somewhat united through the visual experience of diffusing images.⁴²

Döbler first presented his own dissolving views in March 1843 at the Theatre in der Josefstadt of Vienna, roughly half a year after the end of his visit in England. The premiere was followed by a European tour between 1843 and 1846, including locations such as Pest-Buda (Budapest), Pressburg (Bratislava or Pozsony), Prague, Dresden, Hamburg, Graz,

39 Deac Rossel. 'The Public Exhibition'; Franz Schlager and Peter Gruber (eds). *Von Döbler bis DV-Cam: Ergonomics für Amateurfilm* (Frankfurt and New York: Peter Lang, 2001).

40 Heard. *Phantasmagoria*, 197. Regarding the origins of the genre, Erkki Huhtamo notices the ongoing debates regarding the first instance of dissolving views: 'the first documented use of dissolving views was by M. Henry in 1826, however, using the concept "Dissolvent Views"; further, the first documented example of Childe's use of the magic lantern is only from January 1827, when the *The Flying Dutchman* premiered at the Adelphi. He did not use dissolving views in this context. Whether "Dissolvent Views" were actual dissolving views, realized with a lantern pair, has been questioned by John Barnes, who thinks that "'Dissolvent' here [in a playbill from 1833] implies that the light was gradually lowered in the lantern, the view changed for that of another, and the light again increased". In such a case, only a single lantern would have been used. According to Barnes, the first time he has seen the expression "Dissolving Views" used is in two playbills (Barnes Collection), both from the Adelphi, 1837; the lanternist was Childe.' Huhtamo. 'Ghost Notes', 19–20. (Footnote 47).

41 Erkki Huhtamo. *Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 271–72.

42 Bernd Scholze. 'The Magic Lantern as an Ambassador between Cultures and Religions: Imrich Emanuel Roth and the First Dissolving View Shows in the Ottoman Empire, 1845–1846', in *Scientific instruments between East and West*, edited by Neil Brown, Silke Ackermann, and Feza Günergun (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 236.

London, and St Petersburg. During the tour, Döbler fulfilled the role of technological mediator for a new lantern apparatus⁴³ and a new visual genre among both Western and Eastern audiences of the continent. The performer must have used an early horizontal type of biunial magic lantern consisting of two lanterns positioned next to each other. From the 1860s and 1870s, this was followed by a more widespread vertical version consisting of two or three lanterns that were placed on top of each other, which is more commonly found in various collections nowadays.⁴⁴ Although Döbler usually ordered new painted slides for his upcoming tours (one time more than 200 slides)⁴⁵, most of the images, known from playbills between 1843 and 1848, showed outdoor scenarios such as landscapes and spectacular buildings as well as some interiors located in Europe (Edinburgh, Venice, Rome, Rheinland, Munich), or at the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea and at the Ottoman Empire (Bosporus, Jerusalem, Constantinople), and later also in the eastern part of Asia (China).⁴⁶

Döbler used limelight for the projections to raise the quality of images, and he was said to use rear projection, as it also improved the sharpness of images, the lenses of his lanterns being insufficient to project from the auditorium.⁴⁷ Some reports also stated that after the opening of the curtain, 'Döbler could be seen. This suggests that [...] he stood ahead of the screen and remained visible to the audience'.⁴⁸ This argument falls in line with existing praises of Döbler's charm and charisma as a stage magician, so it is most probable that—during the approximately thirty-minute-long lantern slide displays—not only live music but also Döbler's storytelling skills built up the event alongside visual wonders. After the first few shows, positive reviews spread across the newspapers of Vienna: 'The impression produced by the images is peculiar, and one might say a truly poetic kind of engaging the imagination more than the eye'.⁴⁹ Kaldy-Karo's book mentioned James Savren as an assistant of Döbler during the 1842 tour in London. However, no other sources have been found concerning other assistants who might have worked for the magician, especially regarding the dissolving view projections. Döbler's personal diary published by Kaldy-Karo also confirms that his wife, Elise, usually accompanied him during the tours, assisting him in preparing for the shows and occasionally helping on stage when an assistant was missing.⁵⁰ However, there is no reference to whether Elise took an active role in the mechanical work of operating the magic lanterns. Given the probable position and mechanism of the double magic lantern, there must have been one or more assistants helping Döbler, however, their names and identities are still an open question.

43 The fact that Döbler used devices purchased in London was reflected in an 1844 Hungarian newspaper article as common knowledge: 'The whole Europe is paying for Mister Döbler, giving him the opportunity of buying his impeccable tools on English land.' *Nemzeti Ujság* (20 January 1844): 47.

44 I studied various lantern types in the Nekes Collection at the Theatre Collection of the University of Cologne.

45 Kaldy-Karo. *Ludwig Döbler*, 140.

46 Cf. Playbill of Döbler's dissolving views presentation at the Hungarian National Theatre, 26 October 1843; and Playbill of Döbler's show at the Deutsches Theater of Pest, 21 March 1848.

47 Kaldy-Karo. *Ludwig Döbler*, 139.

48 *Ibid.*

49 *Ibid.*, 138.

50 *Ibid.*, 111–256 and especially 228 and 247.

Although Döbler shaped various parts of continental Europe as an agent of cultural and technological exchange, his influence on the geopolitical region of Central and Eastern Europe seems to be more significant. Within this context, I will examine his repeated tours to cities of the Austrian Empire, that were important locations for Hungarian national emancipatory movements. On the one hand, these cases may show that popular performers were often used as assets in the war of cultural nationalism, especially in Döbler's case, for whom the choice of venue (i.e. German or Hungarian theatres) raised questions which reached the level of public discourse. On the other hand, it seems even more important that Döbler's visits to Pest-Buda inspired local performers to purchase new apparatuses and try out new visual genres, which furthered the journey of dissolving views technology all the way to the Ottoman Empire.

A Transcultural Agent

After his premier in Vienna in March 1843, Döbler and his new device reached Pest-Buda in October, and he began a series of performances at various public theatres between 26 October and 6 December of 1843. At that time, the city of Pest-Buda hosted a multicultural community with German and Hungarian dominance, however, it also became the nominal capital city of Hungary. Since the end of the Turkish wars in the seventeenth century, Hungary had been part of the Austrian Empire, which embraced many cultures and ethnicities of Central and Eastern Europe.⁵¹ Therefore, its social realities were formed by processes of exclusion and inclusion, nationalistic as well as imperial interests, and trans- and intercultural exchanges. Often described as a contrastive area, under the Habsburg reign 'no single province was inhabited only by members of one cultural or ethnic group or one religious denomination, speaking only one language.'⁵² However, within the empire, the Hungarian territory represented a structurally different—and for the Habsburgs, often problematic—case. As argued by historian R. J. Ewans, during the early 1800s 'an empire originally brought together on the basis of oligarchy and Catholic culture was turning into an empire regulated by new institutions and precepts which seemed perforce to stop short at the river Leitha, leaving a diet, local administration, distinct legal system, and stagnant agrarian economy behind Hungary's separate customs frontier'.⁵³ Therefore, it is not by chance that the desire for self-governance both endured and was nourished by a strong sentiment for the late Hungarian kingdom as a separate realm, a feeling which existed among the second largest population within the empire at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The centre for political and cultural emancipation, as well as radicalism, was located in Pest-Buda, which eventually became a hotspot of the revolution in March 1848.

51 Vera Bácskai, Gábor Gyáni, and András Kubinyi. 'Budapest története a kezdetektől 1945-ig', *Vároštörténeti Tanulmányok* 6 (2000): 79.

52 Johannes Feichtinger and Gary B. Cohen (eds). *Understanding Multiculturalism: The Habsburg Central European Experience* (New York-Oxford: Berghahn, 2014), 5.

53 R. J. Ewans. *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs: Essays on Central Europe, c. 1683–1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 174.

The first half of the 1840s, the time of Döbler's repeated visits to the city, marked an intensification of political opposition within the Austrian Empire, especially among the liberal Hungarian aristocracy.⁵⁴ Much of the emancipatory practices connected to the right of national language use, therefore both cultural institutions (such as public theatres and the press) and political institutions (through law making and official discussions) tried to strengthen the role of language. Additionally, the geographic location of Pest-Buda on the banks of the Danube, plus its relative distance from Vienna, contributed to the rise of the new capital, which consisted of two parts. Buda represented a centre of public administration, whereas Pest became a rapidly growing economic and cultural centre. From the 1830s, Pest also became a political centre along with Pressburg, which was the official location of the Hungarian Diet (Parliament).⁵⁵ Pest was further strengthened by its role as an international trading centre, the second biggest in the empire after Vienna.⁵⁶ This contributed to the rapid changes of transport within and to the city, including steam ships, railways, and even omnibuses. Its population also grew five times bigger throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁷ Pest also served as the location for newly created, high status Hungarian public institutions such as the National Library (opened in 1802), the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (opened in 1825), and the first National Theatre opened in 1837. This also shows the rising attempts to strengthen the status of Hungarian language and culture under the idea of cultural nationalism, as mentioned above.⁵⁸ The city also served as a model in fashioning a modern way of life with its urban designs and cultural goods. In the light of urbanization, economic growth, and cultural and technological changes, it is not by chance that the nearly two decades between 1830 and 1848 are usually referred to as the Reform Age in Hungary. This environment provided the background of Döbler's visit, which proved to be significant regarding the history of dissolving views and the future circulation of the technology.

By 1843, Döbler was already known by local audiences at Pest-Buda, as he performed on various stages in the city in 1829 and 1840 as a stage magician. After these performances, Döbler was referred to as a juggler, a king of stage magic, a professor, and a father of wonders in various newspapers.⁵⁹ Moreover, a Hungarian play was written and premiered about 'a fake Döbler' with 'songs, dances, attractions of natural science and strength' by István Balog, who was not only an actor at the Hungarian National Theatre, but also a specialist of gas lightning.⁶⁰ However, in 1843, the main public issue surrounding Döbler's performances in Pest-Buda had to do with the symbolic meaning of the choice of venues for his performances, which was discussed by articles in both German and Hungarian periodicals. This was also a result of Pest becoming the centre of the Hungarian political press and liberal communities fighting for various forms of social and ethnic emancipation. Besides the Hungarian National Theatre where he performed fourteen times, Döbler also

54 *Ibid.*, 250.

55 Bácskai, Gyáni, Kubinyi. 'Budapest története a kezdetektől 1945-ig': 89.

56 *Ibid.*, 90.

57 *Ibid.*, 91.

58 József Takáts. *Modern magyar politikai eszméletörténet* (Budapest: Osiris, 2007), 62–74.

59 *Honművész* (21 May 1840): 327; *Honművész* (24 May 1840): 335; *Der Spiegel* (9 December 1840): 793; *Hirnök* (31 December 1843): 308; *Honderú*, (11 March 1843): 351.

60 *Jelenkor* (23 May 1840): 167.

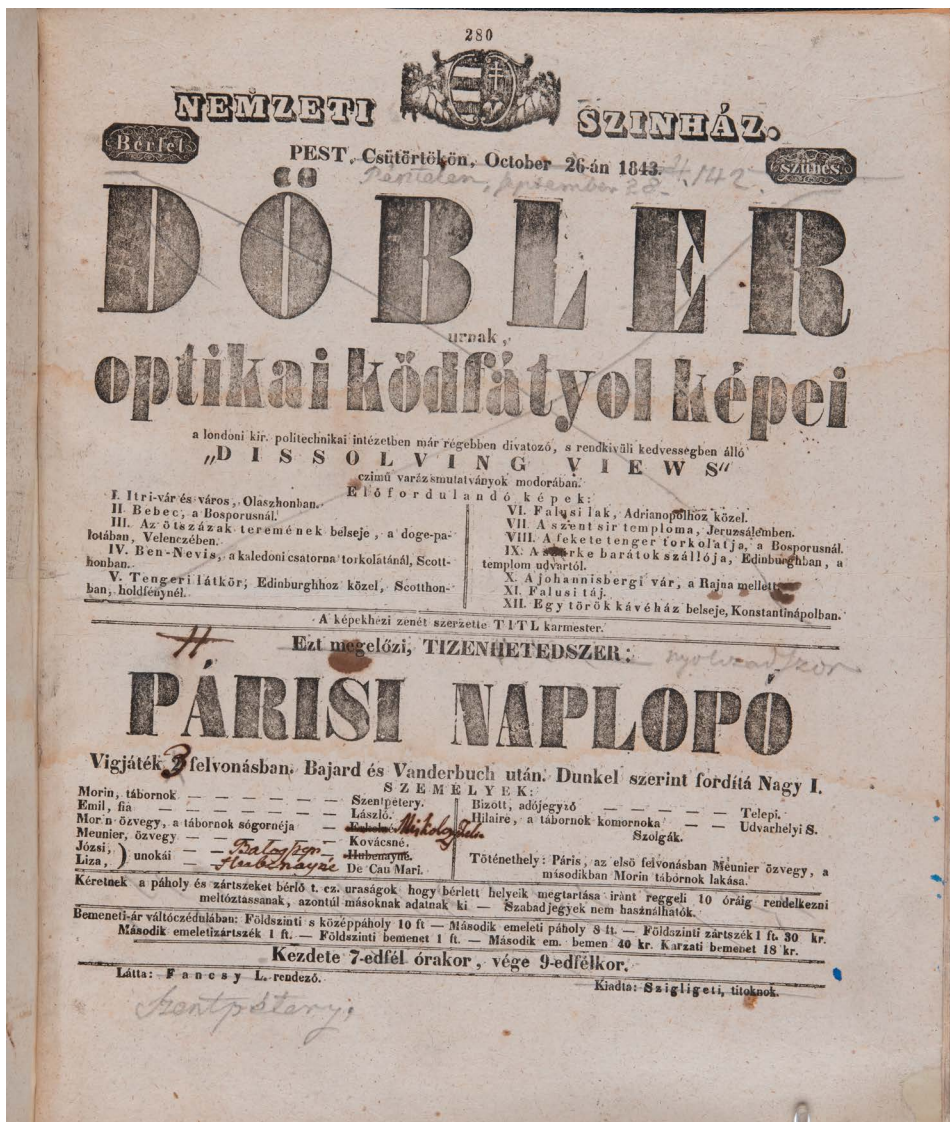


Fig. 4. Playbill of Döbler's opening night at the Hungarian National Theatre of Pest-Buda in 1843. Photograph of a playbill in Hungarian. Courtesy of the Theatre History Collection at the Theatre and Music Department of the National Széchényi Library.

presented his visual displays at the German Theatre of Buda with three performances. Roughly two weeks after Döbler's arrival, the Hungarian journal *Honderű* (*Serene Homeland*) reported a story about a 'German gentleman' who tried to convince the performer to erase his contract at the Hungarian National Theatre and perform only on the German stages of the city for more money:

The gentleman did not stop, and wrote another letter to Mr Döbler, calling his attention to fulfilling his 'patriotic duties', and urging him to perform (according to the letter)

on the German stage, since ‘you are a German artist, and let us not allow our national treasures being usurped by individuals of another nation.’⁶¹

In the context of heated public debates, which were arguably also used as tools of advertisement, Döbler was well-aware of the specific localities of his Central and Eastern European destinations. It seems to be a very conscious decision, for example, that he integrated images of prominent local, historical and contemporary personalities into his displays alongside outdoor scenarios. Namely, during the 1843 dissolving view presentations in Vienna, images of Archduke Carl and Frederick appeared as symbols of the future of imperial power. They were depicted as conquerors on horse or shown after a victorious battle.⁶² In contrast, in 1844, Döbler was reported to please Hungarian audiences in Pressburg with images of wreaths and the subtitles ‘God Bless the Hungarian Home’ and ‘Long live the Hungarian nation.’⁶³ Furthermore, in March 1848, during the days of the Hungarian revolution, he integrated a separate series of visual displays into his performance at Pest-Buda, showcasing known Hungarian heroes and kings such as Árpád, Kund and Mátyás Corvin.⁶⁴ This also connected to the idea of cultural entertainment as a form of national beautification.⁶⁵

Apart from the contextualization of national topics, the transformation of colours and images in the lantern shows confronted audiences with a new perceptive model, which could be connected to both outer and inner mobilization. Characterized also as a ‘chaotic confusion of colours’⁶⁶, Döbler’s displays offered the experience of an ever more mobilized urban environment, and the fantastic contents of the mobile human mind also found their visual representation. In 1843, transformative images were an unquestionably new and somewhat magical experience for the spectators of Pest-Buda, as shown in the reviews:

The last image was especially surprising: a country image in winter colours, the house was covered by snow, icicles were hanging from the rooftop, children were standing on slippery ice, trees were covered by frost, while in the background mountains could be seen—and the same land suddenly turns into the most beautiful summer image, the snow disappears, the trees are green, the land is a green velvet carpet, the foggy air turns into the purest azure blue, and the ice melts into a clean creek, and all of this was presented in such a strange way as if we could look into nature’s transformation itself. [...] Döbler’s images were not panorama, not diorama, not cosmorama images—but something brand new and peculiar.⁶⁷

The memory of Ludwig Döbler’s visual wonders became part of not only the technological and theatrical heritage of the region, but also of the literary and linguistic. The experience of Döbler’s dissolving views soon became an integral part of poetic and metaphoric

61 *Honderű* (11 November 1843): 606.

62 Kaldy-Karo. *Ludwig Döbler*, 138.

63 A reviewer noted that the integration of some Hungarian landscapes into the image sequence would have been more welcome than the subtitles. *Nemzeti Ujság* (3 January 1844): 4.

64 Playbill of Döbler’s show at the Deutsches Theater of Pest (21 March 1848).

65 Takáts. *Modern magyar politikai eszmetörténet*, 19–20.

66 *Regélő Pesti Divatlap* (23 November 1843): 1343.

67 *Világ* (28 October 1843): 706.

language use, especially for Hungarians. The transformative, vanishing, and dream-like images were ideal forms for depicting disappearing hopes which, from a historical and cultural perspective, were a common social experience for the various ethnic groups of the Austrian Empire throughout the century. Therefore, communal and individual emotions raised by failed revolutions and national emancipations, criticized political conciliations, and false imperial aims seemed to find their sensual description in the *Zauberprofessor's* memorable and influential dissolving images.⁶⁸

Travelling Technology: Döbler, Telepi, and Róth

Even though Döbler gave smaller scale shows for private audiences in Pest-Buda, his main influence must be found in his public theatre performances. The role of theatres in achieving political and cultural agendas was significant in the Austrian Empire. In the 1780s, Joseph II, in the way of an absolutist monarch, tried to integrate the multilingual and multiethnic regional communities of the empire under the idea of a centralized, modernized and bureaucratized civil state.⁶⁹ The king also utilized theatrical spaces to confirm his plan and thus, for example, inspired by Hamburg's Nationaltheater, renamed the Burgtheater of Vienna in 1776 to National- und Hoftheater, raising it to the status of a German national theatre.⁷⁰ However, in the same year the king passed a law 'which permitted the establishment of private theatres and allowed the theatrical profession to be exercised freely in the Habsburg Monarchy.'⁷¹ This allowed actors of any nationality in the empire to earn money with their professions and build an infrastructure around the profession. Nevertheless, strict censorship policies heavily limited the possibilities of what could be staged and by whom,⁷² which resulted in the affirmation of Vienna, the capital of the Empire, as a model for repertoires, invited performers, and troupes in the monarchy. Most bigger cities in the Empire (Pest-Buda, Prague, Cluj, Pressburg, Zagreb) mirrored the repertoire of Viennese theatres, which was also part of the imperial strategies for unification.⁷³ Opposed to centralization and inclusion, various national agendas tried to establish their own exclusive representational spaces by creating national theatrical venues throughout the 1800s. These theatres represented public spaces where cultural memory and national identities could be shaped, staged, and reinforced.

Regarding Döbler's 1843 shows at the Hungarian National Theatre, lantern historian Bernd Scholze gave an estimation of 15,000 possible viewers in an institution which 'provided enough space for 1000 spectators [...] out of a total population of 100,000 people

68 For example: 'My happiness faded away just as Döbler's dissolving views did, especially the one which depicts landscapes of the spring turning into winter.' *Hölgyfutár* (23 March 1850).

69 Zoltán Imre. *Az idegen színpadra állításai* (Budapest: Ráció, 2018), 31–32.

70 *Ibid.*, 31.

71 Danijela Weber-Kapusta. 'Travelling Theatre Companies and Transnational Audiences: A Case Study of Croatia in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Global Theatre History* 2.1 (2017): 2.

72 It is not by chance that the king initiated more careful censorial rules for theatres than printed materials, in the fear of possible influences on illiterate audiences, cf. Pieter M. Jodson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016).

73 *Ibid.*, 4–5.

at this time.⁷⁴ However, Scholze underestimated the capacity of the theatre, as during the 1840s it was able to host almost 2000 spectators.⁷⁵ Furthermore, based on the financial journals of the theatre, the total number of the tickets sold for the fourteen performances by Döbler was around 17,000.⁷⁶ Out of these performances, the lowest number of sold tickets was 725, whereas the highest number was 1750.⁷⁷ Although this altogether suggests an average utilisation of 61%, these numbers should be interpreted in the light of the local context. As theatre historian Lilla Szalisznyó underlined, full house performances at the Hungarian National Theatre were extremely rare and even one thousand spectators meant outstanding numbers in the 1840s.⁷⁸ Based on the cash registries, it seems more important that Döbler's dissolving views, compared to an average night, could provide four or five times bigger daily income for the theatre.⁷⁹ In addition, Döbler performed three times at the German Theatre of Buda in early December,⁸⁰ which added approximately 4000 more spectators in the city. Given the additional private performances by the artist, the real total could be around 22,000 possible spectators out of a correctly estimated⁸¹ population of 140,000 citizens. However, the visit becomes significant not only from a quantitative perspective, but also from a qualitative one, as two important future lantern artists most likely witnessed Döbler's first dissolving views in the city. Actor, painter and scenic designer György Telepi (1801–1885) was an important agent in adapting dissolving view slides for various Hungarian audiences, whereas academic painter and later pioneer in photography, Imre [Imrich] Emanuel Róth (1814–1885), was known for taking the technology to the Ottoman Empire.

In December 1844, György Telepi was advertised as the first Hungarian performer to display dissolving views at the Hungarian National Theatre. Telepi was not only an acknowledged comic actor but also designed and built various apparatuses and machines for the theatre, and supposedly even prevented the mechanical failure of the institution.⁸² Regarding his dissolving view presentation, he became famous for showing not only exotic and distant locations, but also unique Hungarian landscapes, most of which were painted by himself. Symbolic outdoor images included locations such as Pest-Buda, Tihany, Lake Balaton, Visegrad, Margaret Island, Pressburg or Kosice. However, due to a technological drawback, it was noted that '[t]hese dissolving views cannot be said to be as perfect as Döbler's, but Mr Telepi's experiment also worked quite well'.⁸³ It seems that Telepi's role

74 Scholze. 'The Magic Lantern as an Ambassador between Cultures and Religions', 232.

75 Ferenc Kerényi. 'A Nemzeti Színház a polgári forradalom előestéjén (1840–1848)', in *Magyar színháztörténet I.*, edited by Ferenc Kerényi (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1990), 290.

76 Pénzszedői napló 1843, NSZ-KÖT-370, Theatre History Collection at the National Széchényi Library.

77 *Ibid.*

78 Lilla Szalisznyó. 'A Bánk bán színházi kanonizációja', *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 6 (2024): 693.

79 *Ibid.*; Pénztári napló: Nemzeti Színház: 1843–1847, NSZ-köt-621, Theatre History Collection at the National Széchényi Library.

80 Hedvig Belitska-Scholtz and Olga Somorjai. *Deutsche Theater in Pest und Ofen 1770–1850*, volume 2 (Budapest: Argumentum, 1995), 1267.

81 Cf. Bácskai, Gyáni, Kubinyi. 'Budapest története a kezdetektől 1945-ig': 91.

82 Gábor Békési. "'Maradok szeretve tisztelő barátod...': Telepi György a dokumentumok tükrében', in *A Herman Ottó Múzeum Évkönyve XLII.*, edited by László Veres and Gyula Viga (Miskolc: Herman Ottó Múzeum, 2003), 416.

83 *Regélő Pesti Divatlap* (8 December 1844): 159.

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NEMZETI SZÍNHÁZ.

Bérlet Pest, csütörtökön, december 12-én, 1844. 205-dik szám

Telepi Gy.

ködfátyol képei,

hazai tájakat ábrázoló. Előfordulandó képek:

I. Bevezetés II. BUDA-PEST Margit Szigetétől. III. TITANY és Bálton. IV. VISEGRÁD, Esztergom felől. V. KOLIMBÁZS a sz. rb határon. VI. VASKAPU UT.	VII. DÉVEN Austria felől. VIII. TRAJAN útja. IX. ÁRVA VÁR. X. MEHÁDIA. XI. TELI VIDEK, átvezetők. XII. TAVAZI VIDEKRE.
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Ezt megelőzi, nyolczadszor:

Tündér-kastély

MAGYARHONBAN.

Vígjáték 2 felv. dalokkal. Hirschfeld után magyarosítva.

S Z E M É L Y E K:

Gróf Vámbézi, nyugalmazott tábornok Ferencz,) fiai Lajos, Laura,) gyámleányai Zsófi.	Bartha. Sz. etl. Egrossy B. Hubenayné. Balog József.	Farkas, elbocsátott katona Maresa, uti társa Ádám, inas Éva, szobaleány	Székfi. Éder Lúcia. Petrik. Bartókné.
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A SZÍNHÁZ FÜTVE LESZ.

Schodelné és Laborfalvi R. gyöngékedik Lendvayné, László beteg. Kezdeté 7-edfél órákor, vége 9-előtt

Holnapután, szombaton, december 14-én, LENDVAY Márton javára, barátságnussal, e l ó z s ó r;

DON CAESAR DE BAZAN.

Drama 5 felv. Francziából fordította Diósy.

Látta: Lendvay, rendező. (Nyomatott Beimel József betűivel.) Kiadta: Szigligeti, titoknak.

Fig. 5. Playbill of Telepi's dissolving view presentation at the Hungarian National Theatre of Pest-Buda in 1844. Photograph of a playbill in Hungarian. Courtesy of the Theatre History Collection at the Theatre and Music Department of the National Széchényi Library.

in further circulating the new visual experience reached not only Pest-Buda and other urbanized environments in 1845, such as Cluj or Debrecen, but also a number of locations in the countryside, which undoubtedly influenced the social and ethnic composition of the possible audience. During the 1845 tour, he was reported to change his displays by integrating a separate prologue with the image of a crest and a title 'God keep the

Hungarians', which resembles Döbler's dramaturgy. Furthermore, a reviewer in Cluj also noted a later refinement of Telepi's magic lantern(s): 'The sudden change of objects, as the first view was conjured into the next one, as they dissolved and disappeared in charming light, was a very nice and pleasant vision'.⁸⁴

The other performer, Imre Róth, as discussed by Scholze, was 'an early pioneer spreading dissolving views across the East and the West'.⁸⁵ Róth first presented his displays in May 1844 at the German Theatre of Pest, showing mainly outdoor images of Scotland, Munich, Paris, London, Bologna, painted by the performer himself, being an academic painter trained in Vienna, Paris, and Munich.⁸⁶ Besides painting, Róth had a close connection to certain mechanical innovations of the time, as his Paris-based brother Dávid [Didier] Róth registered six patents between 1840 and 1844, and Imre Róth presented some of these new machines in Pest-Buda, including an early version of a calculator.⁸⁷ Reports stated that Róth was the most successful early follower of Döbler's genre, as the quality of his images was especially high.⁸⁸ Later, he went on performing in the northern part of the Empire including locations such as Kosice (Kassa), Pressburg (Pozsony), and Presov (Eperjes), and then he turned to the south-eastern parts such as Szeged, Timisoara (Temesvár), Sibiu (Nagyszeben), and Bucharest.⁸⁹ Róth then continued by entering the Russian Empire and performing in Odessa, and finally in May 1845 he reached the Ottoman Empire and Constantinople.⁹⁰ Róth was asked on the spot

to take part in the wedding ceremonies with a dissolving view presentation in the theatre for the Sultan. Róth had the privilege and honour of giving the first performance in the Ottoman Empire, which took place on 20th May 1845.⁹¹

Hungarian newspapers also reported that 'Mr Róth was highly liked in Constantinople by the Sultan'.⁹² Róth stayed in the Ottoman Empire until the spring of 1846 and then travelled to Egypt, where he spent more than a year with occasional dissolving view presentations at the king's court.⁹³ Both Telepi's extensive tours to Hungarian locations, and Róth's successful journey towards the east can be seen as evidence of the unquestionable influence of Ludwig Döbler's 1843 shows in Pest-Buda on the history of dissolving views in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond.

84 *Múlt és Jelen* (18 March 1845): 126.

85 Scholze. 'The Magic Lantern as an Ambassador between Cultures and Religions', 239.

86 *Ibid.*, 233.; Zsuzsa Farkas. 'Panorámák és ködfátyolképek az 1840–1850-es években Pesten és Budán', in *A Magyar Nemzeti Galéria évkönyve 1997–2001*, edited by Erzsébet Király and Anna Jávör (Budapest: MNG, 2002), 143.

87 Judit Brody. 'An emigre Physician. Dr David (Didier) Roth, Homoeopath, Art Collector, and Inventor of Calculating Machines', *Journal of Medical Biography* 4 (2000): 215.

88 *Der Spiegel* (22 May 1844).

89 Scholze. 'The Magic Lantern as an Ambassador between Cultures and Religions', 234.

90 *Ibid.*

91 *Ibid.*, 235.

92 *Honderű* (Spring 1845): 505.

93 Imre Emanuel Róth. 'Ein ungarischer Maler in Alexandrien Zweites Brieffragment', *Kunstblatt* (Nr. XVI): *Beilage zu den Sonntagsblättern* (2 August 1846): 741.; Imre Emanuel Róth, 'Ein ungarischer Maler in Alexandrien. Dritte Mittheilung', *Kunstblatt* (Nr. XIX): *Beilage zu den Sonntagsblättern* (13 September 1846): 885. Cf. Ágnes Mészáros. *Adalekok a 19. századi magyar festészet orientalista vonatkozásaihoz* (PhD thesis, ELTE University, 2018), 113–21.

By the 1870s, double magic lanterns in Central and Eastern Europe were integrated into the commercial flow of goods, and the devices also appeared as tools of (popular) science and education.⁹⁴ During the 1880s, a growing number of newspaper advertisements offered double and triple magic lanterns for individual use or especially for Christmas presents.⁹⁵ However, the popular visual genre of dissolving views and other lantern practices remained a relevant part of the region's public entertainment at the end of the century as well. For instance, the entertainment building complex of the 1896 millennial exhibition in Budapest intensively used various lantern genres, including dissolving views, to evoke the 'magical, spectacular characteristic of the past, the East and various technologies, as well as their sensual pleasures'⁹⁶.

Conclusion: Showmanship, Success, and Heritage

Döbler's entertaining practices call attention to the importance of the Central and Eastern European geopolitical region in technological and cultural exchange during the first half of the nineteenth century. In addition, reports on shows by Döbler and his immediate successors highlight the complementary nature of technological innovation, visual knowledge circulation, and showmanship. While György Telepi was praised for his good skills as a comedian, the quality of his images and device was questioned. However, in Imre [Imrich] Róth's case, the sharpness and standard of his images were—literally—applauded. Being an actor, Telepi seemed to be stronger in entertainment, while Róth achieved admiration as a trained painter through his own handmade slides. It seems that Döbler could become highly influential and successful because he found a way to combine the skills of entertainment and entrepreneurship as well as artistic and technological excellence.

As an experienced stage magician, Döbler was well aware of the methods of charming and enchanting audiences, as well as of rhetorically contextualizing those visual wonders which seemed impossible at first. Trained as an engraver, Döbler was amazed by technological innovations from a relatively young age.⁹⁷ As a result, he not only integrated new visual devices into his shows but also created electromagnetic experiments.⁹⁸ He consciously looked for new patents and visual devices, and he also kept an eye on visual shows and emerging new equipment at his various (mostly European) touring locations in the 1830–40s. Also, by creating a professional network of theatre managers and a social network of elite families and celebrated individuals, he was able to build an established and profitable European touring route.

After his success in 1843 with the double magic lantern, Döbler continued in the next five years with new visual devices and experiments, building a large-scale optical show of

94 Ottó Pilcz and Ede Merkl (eds). *A Délmagyarországi Természettudományi Társulat közlönye: Természettudományi évkönyv* (Temesvár, 1875), 11.

95 *Pester Lloyd* (16 December 1880); *Siebenbürgisch-Deutsches Tageblatt* (19 November 1884); *Vasárnapi Újság* (1887/51): 860.; *Vasúti és Közlekedési Közlöny* (20 January 1889).

96 Izabella Füzi. *A vurstlitól a moziig: A magyar vizuális tömegkultúra kibontakozása (1896–1914)* (Szeged: Pompeji, 2022), 31.

97 Kaldy-Karo. *Ludwig Döbler*, 15–16.

98 *Ibid.*, 239.

three stages including dissolving views, chromatropes, and a phantascope.⁹⁹ Between 1843 and 1849 he visited many of the well-known locations from the previous decade such as Vienna, London, Graz, Pest-Buda, Hamburg, and St Petersburg.¹⁰⁰ It is probably not by chance that after more than two decades of significant economic success as a stage performer, Döbler retired from showmanship in 1849. He devoted himself to another occupation, becoming the mayor of the small Austrian town of Eschenau in 1850,¹⁰¹ and for his work in local developments, he was given a Golden Cross of Merit with Crown in 1854.¹⁰²

To conclude, this contribution highlights how the genre of dissolving views and the double magic lantern apparatus travelled from the British Empire as early as 1843, with the help of Ludwig Döbler as a transcultural agent, first to Central and Eastern Europe and later to the Western parts of the continent as well. Through his well-established touring routes, the stage magician played a major role in introducing a new visual experience to contemporary audiences by showing dissolving views at various public and private stages. His influence regarding the further circulation of the technology seemed to be most significant during his premieres at public theatres of Pest-Buda in October 1843. His performance at the Hungarian National Theatre of Pest-Buda was an interesting case, partly because the public discourse around Döbler's visit focused not only on the new technology, but also on the idea of national emancipation, as they problematized the venues of his performances and the content of his images. Most importantly, Döbler's presence in Pest-Buda influenced two early practitioners of the genre who were not only inspired by the experience of transformative images, but they even went on to present their own dissolving view shows in the year following the Austrian performer's visit. Telepi and Róth also functioned as transcultural agents themselves, and they assisted the further spread of the technology in 1844 and 1845, either to little towns in Hungary, or to eastern parts of the Austrian Empire, and even to the Ottoman Empire. Döbler's practice also underlined how he consciously paid attention to the sensibilities of various ethnic groups of the Austrian Empire in a time of heated emancipatory movements. This early chapter in the history of dissolving views proves the relevance of Central and Eastern European popular performance cultures and travelling performers in circulating new perceptual conventions, visual apparatuses, and scientific findings among various ethnic and social communities of the continent, across nineteenth-century empires and states.

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⁹⁹ Molnár, Teller (eds). *Show und Business in Pest-Ofen*, 102–03.

¹⁰⁰ *Der Spiegel* (13 March 1844) and (12 June 1844); *Honderű* (13 January 1846) and (31 March 1846); *Erdélyi Híradó* (7 January 1848).

¹⁰¹ Kaldy-Karo. *Ludwig Döbler*, 207.

¹⁰² *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon 1815–1950*.

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