



**“The Spectacle of the Masquerade and Pleasure Gardens:  
English Society in the Eighteenth Century”**

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The Spectacle of the Masquerade and Pleasure Gardens:  
English Society in the Eighteenth Century

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## Abstract

The masquerade and pleasure gardens were two of the most essential public entertainments in eighteenth-century England. The similarity of both of these events was that they mingled all ranks of people. Because the masks concealed identities which permitted promiscuous sexual escapades, the masquerade has been the most controversial subject matter and been condemned by the English elite society as the emblem of corruption and moral decay. While establishing the pleasure garden intended to generate egalitarian environment and reform English society for the better, social exclusivity among hierarchies remained. This paper aims to explore how commodification functioned in this hodge-podge of gender and class bending, which in turn reveals English social and cultural anxiety. The commodification of masquerades and pleasure gardens can be examined according to Debord's theses from *The Society of the Spectacle*, and through discussing costumes, social relations, and the developing English consciousness of gender and class oppression, to further suggest that public entertainments marked a move toward capitalist society.

## Introduction

In the eighteenth century, England experienced a burgeoning bourgeoisie, London was an emerging metropolis, public entertainments mushroomed and flooded into English life. The rise of commerce motivated people from all social ranks to consume fashion and seek pleasure. This paper aims to examine eighteenth-century English social and cultural fluctuation by concentrating on two major public entertainment events: pleasure gardens and the masquerade. The essence of the masquerade was to be disguised; the masks gave the opportunities to conceal one's identity. As the masquerade flourished in England, it invoked the decay of English civilization, sexual and moral chaos, and transgression between gender and social boundaries. The pleasure garden was intended to provide an escape from moral decay, and a desire to reform English decorum and promote social equality. Yet there were still patterns of social divisions beneath the appearance of this "polite, egalitarian" public space. At the pleasure garden, people from various social ranks mingled together in scenes in which commoners rubbed shoulders with aristocrats. Many have indicated that both of these events, pleasure gardens and masquerades

pushed the boundaries between gender, morals and social class, however it is arguable that these events also allowed social and gender inequality to repeat. On the other hand, public venues were stages for people to deliberately perform through clothing. Thus, the costumes reflected desires, and had the same effect as masks to blur the reality and forge identity. This paper will also consider the cause of the popularity of public entertainments, and whether they were products of emerging capitalist society given that they created fantastic, utopian images to lure people into consuming pleasure.

Guy Debord's *La Société du spectacle* (*The Society of the Spectacle*) is a wide-ranging meditation and interrogation on consumer culture and capitalism. Debord critiques that capitalism reduces modern society to a series of spectacles, which the individual and everyday life are shaped by such distorted images of reality, and in which everything becomes a pure commodity. While both of the public events, masquerades and pleasure gardens, can be viewed first as separate miniature versions of society, but also as spectacles and as commodities. As Debord writes, "The spectacle presents itself simultaneously as society itself, as a part of society, and as a means of unification" (Debord Thesis 3). The "spectacle" is Debord's term for "mass media"—advertising, television, film, celebrity—in which all manifestations are results of consumer society and driven by capitalism. This paper refers to the spectacle as the phenomena that disrupt eighteenth-century English society, while Debord's theses will be incorporated to analyze the ways in which the masquerade and pleasure gardens were commodified. The discussion about the masquerade in this paper will be based on Terry Castle's book *Masquerade and civilization*. Castle has undertaken a comprehensive study of the masquerade phenomena in relation to social practices and eighteenth-century English culture, and she views the masquerade as subversive and was overall positive to the English society.

Jonathan Conlin in his article “The afterlife of a London Pleasure Garden, 1770-1859” indicates that the central activity at the pleasure garden is *autovoyeurism*. *Autovoyeurism* refers to the practice of seeing others and being seen by them. On the other hand, the English caricatures made much fun of the *macaronis*. The *macaronis* refers to the ultra-fashionable young man who had been on the Grand Tour and adopted the extravagant continental style: brightly colored, tight-fitting clothes and towering wigs. Not only were the *macaronis* popular objects in caricatures and satire, but the Macaroni fashion was also seen regularly in the pleasure garden and masquerades; hence, it will be examined in this paper to explore English social and political messages it has carried.

The commercialization of eighteenth-century popular culture occurred simultaneously with and influenced the development of public entertainments. The masquerades and pleasure gardens are about the commodification of English society, which is one of the reasons for the upsurge of social anxiety and class and gender bending. The developing desires for forming and presenting idealized identities were a result of cultural anxiety, social oppression, and commodified pleasure. Compared to the contemporary period, one can see societal similarities in eighteenth-century England: despite the transformation of technologies, the broad issues have stayed the same---commodification and commercialization, social anxiety and fragmentation, marking the transition to industrial capitalism.

In this paper, Terry Castle’s argument of the inversive dressing phenomenon at the masquerade invoked sexual liberation and temporarily disrupted patriarchal society, Jonathan Conlin’s discussion of people who went to pleasure gardens practiced *autovoyeurism* and role-playing with themselves, Miles Ogborn’s case of the Macaroni style and a classic affray in the garden that challenged conventional masculinity, and Sophie Carter’s discussion of the

relationship between prostitution and print-culture will be analyzed as they relate to Debord's thesis of "the spectacle is the stage at which the commodity has succeeded in totally colonizing social life and the world we see is the world of commodity" (Debord Thesis 42). The first section looks at eighteenth-century English larger social context to lay the foundation for the argument about commodification and social anxiety, which will be treated in the final two sections of the paper.

### Eighteenth-century England History Revisited

After the 1707 Act of Union kick-started the century creating Great Britain – Scotland, England and Wales – the English experienced social and cultural ambivalence. England was trying to preserve its refined manners, fashions, and arts, while the Scottish casual brutality, violent sports, squalor and epidemic gin drinking had intertwined within England culture ("An introduction to Georgian England"). Besides, throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, the English had anxiety over the Jacobites, the civil war ignited by Scottish subjects who wanted the House of Stuart to reclaim the English throne, the Jacobites attempted two major invasions in 1714 and 1745. On April 16, 1746, the Battle of Culloden finally extinguished the Jacobite threats. Following closely was the Seven Years' War, from 1756 to 1763, in which the rivalry between the British and the French was fought around the world. Britain was the leading force and benefited the most from the war. The war advanced the circulation of fabrics such as silk from India to English cities, and the growth of haberdashers allowed fashion and the upper-class dress that was no longer out of touch. Besides, eighteenth-century England had no sumptuary laws dictating people's choice of dress, "The main legislative constraints on dress came from customs and excise duties, and they were intended to protect domestic manufacturers, especially manufacturers of woolen textiles, while raising revenue in ways that favored what governments

regarded as the everyday necessities of ordinary people over superfluous luxuries” (Styles 15). Pannier dresses, wigs, and three-cornered hats(tricorne) were some of eighteenth-century England fashion features.

Through the latter half of the eighteenth century, although Britain lost thirteen colonies in North America after the Revolutionary War of 1775-1783, the British empire expanded with the commercialization of agriculture and manufactured goods, which was significant in jumpstarting the first industrial revolution in 1770. Altogether, commercialization was at the heart of the development of British society, while it seemed the British were indulging in seeking pleasure more lustily than ever before, which was what the expanding capitalist society desired. “The eighteenth century was obsessed with the challenge to established notions of social, moral and political order posed by the material abundance arising from Britain’s commercial success” (Styles 16). While the British elites consciously set out to reform and unite English society through manners and politeness, “The English society was conscious of its unity and its common culture, and able therefore to devote itself to the elaboration of the elegancies of life” (Laver 8). The two German Hanoverian King, George I and George II, both made very little impact on English fashion and lifestyle because of their German stiffness. The royal court was no longer the fashion trendsetter, individual members of the aristocracy and foreign style influenced eighteenth-century English fashion. Masquerade costumes were in great variety: in 1757 Thomas Jeffreys recorded in his book, showing “a collection of the dresses of different nations, both ancient and modern, and more particularly old English dresses after the designs of Holwein, Vandyke, Hollar...” (Ribeiro, *the Dress Worn at Masquerade in England*, 40), thus the masquerade generally presented the height of English fashion.

## A Dress Can Lie

A Swiss count, Johann Jacob Heidegger, arrived in London in 1708 and first introduced

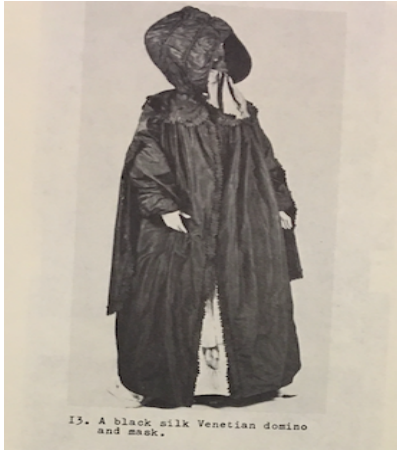


Figure 2 A black silk Venetian domino  
From: Rebeiro Aileen *The dress worn at masquerades in England, 1730 to 1790,*

the masquerade to London so the masquerade henceforth became one of the predominant forms of English entertainments and social life. Masqueraders would indulge in everything the masquerade had to offer. The domino, fancy dress, and character dress were three generic types of masquerade costumes (Castle 58). The *domino*, as shown in figure 1, was the classic Venetian costume of a black hooded cloak and one of the most common costumes worn of the time at the



Figure 1 *Eva Maria Veigel, Mrs David Garrick (1724–1822), with a Mask, Johann Zoffany (1733–1810) (attributed to) mid-18th century, (c) National Trust Collections UK*

masquerade. The sex and silhouette of the person were totally obscured beneath the domino. While fancy dress was frequently appropriated from non-English tradition, in fact, Oriental dress was the most stylish fancy dress worn to the masquerade (Castle 60). As shown in figure 2, the *Portrait of Eva Marie Veigel, Mrs David Garrick* by unknown artist in approximately 1749, Eva Marie is shown holding a mask, and wearing a rather Turkish style over-jacket and a button-up waistcoat, which evokes a bit of masculinity, which illustrates the vogue for Oriental masquerade costumes carried over into

fancy dress portraiture and the muddiness of masqueraders' gender. Character dress was the impersonation of specific figures, in figure 3, *Portrait of Helena Fourment, Rubens' second wife*



by Thomas Chambers in 1767, she wears a fine feathered hat, a fur coat over her shoulders and



Figure 3 Portrait of Helena Fourment, Rubens' second wife, wearing a fur coat over her shoulders From: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

holds a piece of feather in her hand, notably only the upper-class often ornamented their clothing with feather. Ruben's wife was one of the most popular female masquerade characters (Castle 68). While masquerade costumes represented an essential feature, that is to disguise one's true self, and generally to be the opposite of oneself, whether to be the opposite sex or the reverse position in the family and society. "Everyone here wears Habit

which speaks him the Reverse of what he is," wrote the author of the *Universal Spectator* after a

masquerade in 1729" (Castle 5). Only at masquerades, one can see men dressed as women, women as men, the nobles as milkmaids and shepherds, the servants as bishops and duchesses... with the help of masks, one's identity was concealed. As Debord says, "In a world that has really been turned upside down, the true is a moment of the false" (Debord thesis 9). The masquerade was literally a world upside down as masqueraders indulged in inversive dressing. While masqueraders using costumes to disguise and deceive was considered false, the notion of people habitually doing that revealed the truth in which the existence of social anxiety. Masks have long been a means of disguise, but the act of disguise itself and the popularity of the masquerade also revealed anxiety. As shown in William Hogarth's *The Bad Taste of the Town* print, crowds gather for entertainments, in which the masquerade and Italian opera are notable, and are



Figure 4 William Hogarth *The Bad Taste of the Town, or 'Masquerades and Operas'*, 1724, engraving

ridiculed as 'Bad Taste'. In the middle of the print, a woman rolls a trolley that carries the 'Waste Paper' of great works of British literature by Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Dryden...etc. As the print shows the cultural ambivalence between British culture and foreign culture, thus illustrating

English social and cultural anxiety. Masqueraders are mostly in fancy dresses, and there are also those who sport animal cross-dressing. The enthusiasm for the Italian-originated masquerade contrasts with English negligence and rejection of their own cultural products.

Inversive dressing was concerned with gender roles and helped the expression of sexuality and desire. The phenomenon of trying out opposite gender roles was rather because of the oppression of social and gender inequality. It was different from the ideology of gender fluidity today, which is more about taking control of one's gender and adopting whichever gender identity one prefers in the moment. As Castle suggests the analogy between language and fashion is that "The eighteenth century perceived a deep correspondence between the two: not only was language the "dress" of thought—that lucid covering in which the mind decorously clothed its ideas---but clothing was in turn a kind of discourse" (Castle 55). The brain clothed the ideas in mind and then circulated them by language. While clothing has long been used as a discourse, it speaks symbolically. The features of the self, gender, class, occupation, all can be expressed by dress. Character dress, for example, once appeared it offered complete false

messages about identity. While fancy dress carried partial messages to confuse others, such intentions to uphold mysteriousness showed that inauthenticity about human nature. Just as language can be misunderstood and may lie, a dress can lie as well. Cross-dressing is not only a means to disrupt social standards but rather an exploration of fantasized identity. Similarly, Conlin shows how dress had been deceitful at the pleasure gardens, “The Italian dress, cravats, and ornate accessories these male dandies affected were made to be seen and admired... In reality, however, they regularly turned out to be haberdashers’ assistants rather than lords” (Conlin 724). While the lower middle class could impersonate the upper class by adopting their dress, of course, they wanted to be seen, had they made efforts to find and imitate the fancy dress of their superiors. The macaronis were often being impersonated, because of their rarity yet unfamiliar and exotic to the English.

#### Mingle in the Garden

Jonathan Tyers, the second tenant of the Vauxhall Garden, obtained the garden in 1728, establishing the garden as a civilized environment with an air of refinement and politeness (Southworth 17). He envisioned his pleasure garden as egalitarian and courteous; the requirement for entering the garden was only a ticket with an affordable price, not restricted by titles or guest lists. Vauxhall garden was also regarded as a superior place in terms of entertainment venues as monarchs and aristocrats of foreign countries would pay the garden a visit; the garden essentially represented London and English social life on the world stage. The establishment of Vauxhall garden was also desired to reform and unite a polite English society. As Conlin indicates, “Vauxhall could still be seen as a way of remodeling society for the better” (Conlin 741). People from all ranks who went to the garden would not ease up on their dress. As late as 1782 Carl Moritz wrote, “For those of the lower class who go (to the gardens), always

dress themselves in their best, and thus endeavor to copy the great. Here I saw no one who had not silk stockings on” (Southworth 112). The nobles at least dressed well-fitting their social standards, whereas the lower class would do their best to dress like their superiors. It should be noted that in eighteenth-century silks were mostly used by the upper class, while cotton was for the middle and lower classes. As shown in Rowlandson’s painting (figure 5), Prince of Wales



Figure 5 After Thomas Rowlandson (British, London 1757-1827 London),  
Published by: Published London by John Raphael Smith From: The MET

whispers to his mistress Mary “Perdita” Robinson (The MET). Only people in power are delicately painted, the crowds in the back are mostly blurred. A sense of frivolity in eighteenth-century England is shown in the painting. The only detailed dress of a non-aristocrat seen in this

painting is the singer’s dress. Through the ornaments, the hat, and the cut of the bodice, it is possible to see the dress differences between the nobles and the middle class.

Apart from enjoying food, music, and scenery, another particular pleasure made the garden more intriguing is autovoyeurism. *A description of Vauxhall Gardens* published in 1762 for guiding those who visit the garden to be a proper companion wrote, “A curious and contemplative spectator may at this time enjoy a particular pleasure in walking round the grove, and surveying the brilliant guests; the multitude of groups varying in figure, age, dress, attitude and the visible disparity of their humors”(Hooper, 1762. p.49). While observing in all kinds of people freely, the observer simultaneously became an observing subject. Thus, people in the

garden deliberately confined their behavior, and showed up with more secrecy and personal intentions. As Conlin suggests, “Here autovoyeurism was the central activity, indulged in consciously and deliberately by men and women of different generations and social classes. It was closely associated with role play and illusion” (Conlin 719). Visually, the pleasure garden was an open public space. Thus, the features of the garden itself were desired by autovoyeurists in their seeking of pleasure. Some noblewomen were looking for company of similar rank, while other noble ladies might have been searching for future husbands of the same social rank as well. Men, with or without titles, indulged in observing beautiful women and ideally looked for sexual partners. The lower middle-class women might have hoped to be chosen by a nobleman. The middle-class men attempted to climb to a higher social rank. As it was, everyone had their secret motives in the garden. The space allowed various ranks to mingle and gave them the illusion of possibilities to fulfill their desires. However arguably, there was no real sociable interaction going on in the garden cross hierarchies. The elite characterized the pleasure garden as a site for conventions of elite society, as Greig accounts, “Elite commentators registered their companions and the privileged company by name on the newspaper reports, in 1765 Elizabeth, countess of Pembroke, and her sister had set out to Vauxhall specifically to meet the duke and duchess of Bedford...Finding company of similar rank was so vital that visits were cancelled if it was thought elite companions might not be found” (Greig 69). The garden technically put different ranks of people together, but titled elites preserved social interactions only within the same rank. The idea of “mingled class” vaguely and falsely provided a fantasy of broader social encounters. Thus, there is a contradiction about whether egalitarian only existed symbolically in the garden since such social exclusivity proved the idea that the liberation of hierarchies was only a fantasy. This egalitarian fantasy was provided by a momentary hobnobbing of various ranks, while it



would disappear once the moment of mingling has passed (Greig 55). In comparing to Debord's words, "In the spectacle, a part of the world represents itself to the world and is superior to it. The spectacle thus reunites the separated, but it reunites them only in their separateness" (Debord thesis 29). The garden as the spectacle represented the part of English society to the world. "The separated" refers to all ranks of people, although the garden allowed various class mingling in the same place in which the spectacle reunites the separated, the "separateness" which is social division among hierarchies remained.

### The Macaroni and Commodification

The macaronis vogue and caught the eye of the English society from the 1760s, and since then they have been frequently satirized and ridiculed by English society. There was a



Figure 6 *The Macaroni Sacrifice*, 1773 *The Vauxhall Affray* From : the British Museum

well-known Vauxhall affray between a group of macaronis who gazed at a married woman and a gentleman called Bate who came forward to protect the woman (Ogborn 445-446). An anonymous satirical print (Figure 6) in 1773 represents Bate's victory, three macaronis chained together stand on top of an altar who are small and effeminate (British Museum), while Bate stands on the ground, posing as shown conventional masculinity, as the sacrifice

of the macaronis Bate revived 'degraded manhood'. The print highlights the anxiety of English society was anxious about the macaronis that challenged social norms and heroic masculinity.

The affray also suggests the stereotypical sense that effeminacy in the context of macaronis necessarily implies homosexuality, rather, the macaronis were more about male narcissism and

“they were men with more interest in themselves than in the opposite sex” (Ribeiro, *On Englishness in Dress*, 21). Yet the macaronis did allow homosexuals to hold a place in the public realm. There were a series of scandals in the early 1770s England that attached the macaronis to the queer, a century before the term homosexual ever existed. Hence, macaroni fashion was used by men to turn themselves into displays to impress others (more concerned with impressing men than women). Dressing as a Macaroni became a form of new masculine competition and display.



Figure 7 The Macaroni Dressing Room I. W. Coloured etching by I.W. June 26 1772. From: Artstor

As an anonymous etching created in 1772 shows (figure 7), the man in the gown sitting on a chair has an extremely elaborate wig and the other men are clothed in bold colors, their faces are heavy made up and decorated with patches, so that their genders are unclear. A man practices fencing, and another plays with pet parrot, which shows they are self-centered

and self-obsessed. Such implication of outlandish flair and narcissism was criticized as unpatriotic and lavish at the time. As Janes argues, “Dandyism, therefore, was equated with a treasonous flirtation with the nation’s luxury-obsessed enemy across the Channel” (Janes, “Macaroni and Sexuality”). The macaronis were criticized not only because of their unconventional style and eating habits, effeminate and foppish characteristics, but also as they were in thrall to French luxuries. Macaroni fashion popularity emerged just about the time that the Seven Years' War ended, reflecting anti-French patriotism. The macaronis privileged French luxurious fabrics and style and were indeed considered unpatriotic. Society’s attack on the

macaronis also implied its rejection of women's status, as it could not accept effeminate masculinity or the vanity that characterized the macaronis as women of fashion.

As Debord says, "In the spectacle's basic practice of incorporating into itself all the fluid aspects of human activity...we recognize our old enemy *the commodity*" (Debord thesis 35). On top of the fact that Macaroni fashion involved luxurious consumption, the Macaroni character was also commodified within comedy plays. As accounted in the catalogue of *Plays and Poetry* section in *The Scots Magazine* in January 1773, "The Macaroni: a comedy. As it is performed at the theatre-royal in York. 1s6d. After being exposed to public ridicule in a variety of lights, a person under the title of a Macaroni is here produced upon the stage. Extreme self-love, pusillanimity, and effeminacy are the qualities which distinguish his character" (*The Scots Magazine* Vol 35, p.483). The sarcastic description of the Macaroni was an advertisement to sell the play. The Macaroni also created themselves as spectacles of commodities, but Macaroni spectacles were problematic as turning men's bodies into feminine display and overthrowing heroic and sympathetic imperial masculinity (Ogborn 455). They created and commodified a new type of persona themselves which unsettled conventional English society; henceforth, the society turned such revolt into commodities. Likewise, Vauxhall garden was made of spectacles, and itself was a spectacle as well, which consisted full of commodities. Besides the food, the wine, the music, the illuminations, more noteworthy, the garden sold commodified pleasures and illusions. Henry Fielding's essays denounced England as a place where 'Money is the universal Idol of all Ranks and Degrees of People', and ended with an account of Vauxhall: I must avow, I found my whole Soul, as it were, dissolv'd in Pleasure; not only you, but even Paris itself was forgot...See here the taste of Britain" (qtd. in Ogborn 452). From Fielding's essay, one can see that the garden was commoditized as Paris, considering that the trees and the walks in the garden



as representations of Paris boulevards. Paris or London were both commoditized as fashionable objects that presented an enchanting utopia. The garden weaved illusions and pleasures of social relations to sell. It also revealed social ambivalence within English society, since France was the enemy of the nation, however the English covertly admired French luxuries. While Vauxhall moved Paris to England, everything became palatable and salable, and at this moment that the capitalist-driven consumer society was definitively born.

Additionally, costumes people wore were also part of commodification, “in England there was a feeling that dress had to be correct and suitable for the occasion” (Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*, 30). Hence illuminates the reason why no masqueraders would go to a masked ball without a proper costume, and no one would go to the pleasure garden without putting on silk stockings. It is evident to see that clothing was substantial to the commodification of English society. Since the English had their strong systems towards proper dressing, regardless the rich, the poor could not afford costumes for every single time they went to a public event, so that warehousemen obtained a new business for lending fine dresses and costumes. There were frequent advertisements appearing in periodicals and newspapers, such as in the *General Advertising* of April 6, 1749, “The Widow Hughes, from Tunbridge Wells; who has always had the Honour of serving the First Quality, still continues to make and let out all Sorts of Masquerade Dresses entirely New, likewise all sorts of Venitian Dominies and Masks”; and The *Morning Chronicle* of 16 May 1787 has an advertisement which describes: “Great Variety of Dominos and fancy dresses to be let at 7s 6d and 10s 6d for the night. Some elegant new silk Dominos to be let or sold with hats, feathers, masks, rakes, crooks, gieves, etc” (Ribeiro, *the Dress Worn at Masquerade in England*, 41-42). With the great variety of masquerade costumes

advertised as such, it is obvious to see the expansion of consumerism and the reflection of modern publicity.

### Prostitution and the Masquerade

Prostitution was one of the most popular subject matters for eighteenth-century England prints. In an emerging metropolis like London, the figure of the prostitute was central to understand English society's fabric. In the meantime, prostitution was a significant segment of rising commerce, and as the masquerade was known as a chaotic sexual venue, prostitution would sometimes disguise as the masquerade. "Prostitution is not merely undertaken at the masquerade, it is itself a form of continual and professionally necessary masquerade, undertaken by the commercially astute prostitute under the guidance of the equally shrewd bawd, which capitalizes upon the cultural commodification of beauty, demeanor, and virginity" (Carter 70). Carter suggests that prostitution was not only an integral part of the masquerade activity, but the masquerade was also sometimes entirely hosted by and for prostitution. In order to compete with each other and attract more customers, bawds threw masquerades and charged differently for sustaining their businesses. Thus, the masquerade became a scheme for pure commercialization, in which bawds guided and cultivated prostitutes in accordance with cultural and social standards; thus, prostitutes were presented as delicate commodities, in selling their beauty, performance, and virginity. Interestingly, those who were knowingly prostituting still looked for virginity, no matter the virginity was forged, they just needed to fool themselves as they were purchasing virgins. As Debord says, "Commodification is not only visible, we no longer see anything else; the world we see is the world of the commodity" (Debord Thesis 42). While prostitutes constituted a part of masqueraders, they were also the attractions that made people want to go to the masked balls. The commodification value of prostitution and costumes both



Figure 8 Hogarth, William, *A Harlot's Progress, Plate II*, 1732, Etching and engraving. The Met Museum, New York. (Photograph: The Met Museum)

successfully occupied the masquerade. In Hogarth's plate II of *A Harlot's Progress* print (figure 8), a mask lies on the left-hand table and a masquerade costume lies in the right-hand corner, the harlot Moll Hackabout, dresses in opulent silk and

gratifyingly shows one side of her breast which implies that she has adapted to her identity as a harlot. At the same time, she distracts the man by tipping over the table so that the two people in the back can slip out of the room quietly. Many authoritative descriptions say that the person in the back is her lover, but clearly, there are a man and a woman in the back, it is questionable whether they are both her lovers. Given the frame of the masquerade, it might subtly suggest that they had a threesome, thus criticizing the masquerade as being promiscuous. The harlot and the masquerade integrate, and both are subjects of society's condemnation. On the other hand, as shown in the print, the room is lavishly decorated, the sumptuous dress, the little black servant, all seem to indicate that Moll is an upper-class lady. "The prostitute was not merely constructing a pleasing facade in accordance with the eighteenth-century canon of beauty, but, more disturbingly, using this facade as a form of social passport" (Carter 71). The print depicts the harlot's desire, by appropriating clothes and exteriors of the upper class, as she aims to transcend her social rank.



Figure 9 William Hogarth, *Masquerade Ticket*, Plate I, 1727, engraving (From: *La Clé des Langues [en ligne]*, Lyon, ENS de LYON/DGESCO (ISSN 2107-7029),

While in Hogarth's *Masquerade Ticket* (figure 9), one can see a grotesque presentation of characters in which the crowds are clothed in distinctive masquerade costumes and masks, such as dominos and fancy dresses. At

the top of the print, the lion

and the unicorn grasp their tails as in a masturbatory fashion; the front pairs seem to consist of women and people of unknown gender who sport animal masks kissing; the painting that hangs in the back of the hallway displays various licentious sexual acts in a sarcastic fashion.

Altogether, the print reveals the masquerade as the site of sexual license and deviance and socially forbidden sexual conduct, including acts of homosexual, incest, cuckoldry, and prostitution. The promiscuity of the masquerade manifested both sexually and socially. The masquerade ticket metaphorically represented an entrance to sexual adventures, and such adventures were part of actual commodities sold by the masquerade. Apart from the masquerade being a promiscuous assembly and empowered women and men to indulge their sexual inclinations freely, such emancipation towards social and gender norms was on the surface.

There were double standards between men and women who went to a masquerade; the risks for women were plenty, such as pregnancy, rape, sexual abuse, and loss of reputation. As Castle points out that "any women at a masquerade might be viewed as a "prostitute in disguise" --at once hypersexualized, hypocritical, and an exploiter of innocent men" (Castle 33). The

patriarchal society's pattern was retained and practiced, it is possible that part of the masquerade anxieties centered around the threats posed to women, even though the identities were hidden. When the costumes and masks concealed women's true identities, what the false identities expressed might have been their rejection of male-dominance and social prerogatives. From the point of view that the masquerade invoked promiscuity, gender-bending, and moral decay, it appeared to be false, while the patriarchal and capitalist society was considered true, while Debord says, "the true is a moment of the false" (Debord thesis 9). Male-dominance and capitalist-driven social fragmentation were false, but the masquerade was not the cure to social and gender oppression, it was a product of capitalist expansion. Debord's interrelation of the true and the false also applies to William Hogarth's caricatures, while caricatures exaggerate things, the significance of caricatures is that there is some truth in it.

#### Conclusion

The commercialization of popular culture in eighteenth-century England drove the development of public entertainments. The prevalence of certain clothing styles and public events both reflected a form of foreign cultural appropriation, which illuminated English social anxiety and cultural ambivalence, while the expanding capitalist society successfully turned all into commodities. The masquerade and pleasure gardens were spectacles that presented the prevailing way of eighteenth-century English social life, while digital manifestations---news, propaganda, social media, advertisement, entertainment, are modern spectacles. The spectacle is the heart of this real society's unreality (Debord Thesis 6). Compared to the contemporary period, social media could be viewed as a global-sized modern masquerade at pleasure gardens. Even though the platform gathers people all around the world, social detachments and cultural divisions are preserved. While people indulge in role-playing behind the screen, playing out the

lives they wish they really lived. Although the masked balls and pleasure gardens disrupted gender orders, moral standards, and social class not as much as the surface showed, they did provide the freedom of exploring sexual deviance and transcending social rank, and that freedom was real product of reality. The inversive dressing, the impersonation, and the online persona, all of the unreality was driven by social and cultural oppression, anxiety, and fragmentation. The distance between one's true self and one's idealized identity is also thus created.

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I. W. A man in a gown is sitting on a chair in the middle of the room, preparing his dress and very elaborate hair style, with other men in the room. Coloured etching by I.W. June 26 1772. Artstor, library-artstor-org.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/asset/24886346

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