

The Future is a Fairground

ATTRACTION AND ABSORPTION IN 3D CINEMA

By CARTER MOULTON

A pre-show advertisement currently running in AMC Theaters begins with three friends strolling into a brightly-lit theater. They take their seats, arms full with popcorn bags and Coca-Cola. As the film begins, their chairs slowly sprout vines, and the theater roof opens upward, exposing the night sky. Trees emerge from the walls; grass grows along the aisles; flowers poke up through the floor; a lightning bug flutters along. The three theatergoers find themselves in a Pandora-like world (*Avatar* (2009)), overlooking a hazy horizon. The letters "AMC" appear via searchlight in the purple sky.

Although the three friends in AMC's pre-show advertisement aren't wearing 3D glasses, Hollywood is currently marketing 3D technologies as a means of achieving this level of immersion. By paying a few more dollars for 3D glasses, audiences are promised a more realistic viewing experience. Or, as James Cameron told readers in an interview: "pay a couple of extra bucks and you get a little more sense of being there."¹ RealD, whose name confirms my claim, is the most widely used 3D technology in Hollywood. They promise to provide "ultra realistic images so lifelike you feel like you've stepped inside the movie."² This rhetoric and the AMC clip described above bring to mind Andre Bazin's notions of a "total cinema," wherein cinema's technological advances emerge from the desire to achieve an ultimate realism, a "perfect illusion of the outside world in sound, color, and relief."³

Lev Manovich suggests, though, that we should place these marketing claims into an historical context:

"The introduction of every new modern media technology, from photography in the 1840s to virtual reality in the 1980s, has always been accompanied by the claims that the new technology allows to represent reality in a new way. Typically it is argued that the new representations are radically different from the ones made possible by older technologies; that they are superior to the old ones; and that they allow a more direct access to reality."⁴

NOTHING THAT HAS GONE BEFORE CAN COMPARE WITH THIS!

Beauty and Terror meet in your seat...as every thrill of its story comes off the screen right at you in NATURAL VISION

RIGHT AT YOU!
The hand is at your throat...

RIGHT AT YOU!
The kiss is on your lips...

RIGHT AT YOU!
The horror that chills the spine!

3-DIMENSION

WARNER BROS. BRING YOU THE FIRST FEATURE PRODUCED BY A MAJOR STUDIO IN 3D

"HOUSE OF WAX"
WARNERCOLOR

Many scholars and critics have suggested that the resurgence of Hollywood 3D can be read as an effort to remain on top of today's ever-shifting media climate. Manovich suggests contemporary Hollywood's increasing reliance on computer effects and technology is "a reaction to the new competition of the Internet," specifically on-demand and internet streaming.⁵ Similarly, Roger Ebert, a well-known loather of 3D, notes that "whenever Hollywood has felt threatened it has turned to technology: sound, color, widescreen, Cinerama, 3D, stereophonic sound, and now 3D again."⁶ In "Machines of the Visible," Jean-Louis Comolli points to deep focus—the Bazinian aesthetic—as an example of how cinematic styles can "disappear or drop into oblivion" only to resurface later as "realistic" techniques.⁷ The fact that 3D technology itself has been substituted in and out of mainstream cinema—recall the "Golden Era of 3D" (1952-1955) and its brief revival in the 1980s—complicates this idea of a linear progression toward total realism.

Yet, interviews and articles surrounding upcoming Hollywood films seem to confirm art's journey toward a total, complete representation of reality. Peter Jackson's *The Hobbit* trilogy is an apt example. Jackson, who shot *The Hobbit* in 3D

and 48 frames-per-second (fps) as opposed to the standard 24 fps, said in an interview that he is trying to "take away the artifacts that we're used to seeing in cinema," to provide a "much more realistic" viewing experience.⁸ Word recently broke that the film is also being released with Dolby Atmos sound technology, which promises to provide "a more natural and realistic sound-field, transporting [audiences] into the story with a life-like sensory experience."⁹ These new technologies, Jackson says, "allow audiences to leave their seats and sort of go into the film."¹⁰

This effort for an enhanced realism, though, has a strained relationship with the artificiality of Hollywood production. Of course, this is most plainly seen in Hollywood's infatuation with computer generated special effects and fantastical worlds, not to mention that many 3D releases are filmed in 2D and later converted into "fake 3D." Interestingly in the case of *The Hobbit*, Jackson's use of RED Epic 3D cameras at 48 fps both added and minimized artificiality in different areas of production. On the one hand, the camera's ability to capture minute details and textures forced the art department to abandon prop or "fake" materials (plastic in particular) in favor of metal and

ceramics. On the other, Jackson and his crew had to overcompensate for the RED Epic's strange color-rendering. The makeup department, for instance, had to "redden up the faces of the actors much more than usual because otherwise their skin colour will turn up yellow."¹¹

This strange artificiality-for-the-sake-of-realism would seem to disjoin it from Bazinian notions of progressive realism. That being said, I am not particularly interested in debunking Bazin's myth or confirming Comolli's theory. Constance Balides writes that these theories "are less appropriate theoretical points" when discussing digital cinema.¹² While this is true in some respects, I believe they still prove useful when thinking about 3D spectatorship, which is why I'll return to them later in this article.

I'd like to focus more closely, though, on the way 3D aesthetics are situated in a specific strand of new media theory. In an effort to identify the "new" within new media, many scholars suggest that emerging technologies often reinvigorate and reform pre-existing practices through a "combination of change and continuity over time."¹³ Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, for instance, posit a process of remediation, in which new media is "in a constant dialectic with earlier media."¹⁴ Although he doesn't apply this notion to 3D—stereoscopic—images, Manovich also suggests that "new" technologies are usually not as new as they seem. That is, new technologies often "activate certain aesthetic impulses already established in the past."¹⁵ He traces two of these impulses—the use of special effects and documentary style—back to early cinema, calling Georges Méliès "the father of computer graphics" and likening the Lumières to digital video realists. Still, he is careful to point out that these aesthetics are not frozen in time.

In what follows, I build on Manovich's work by examining stereoscopic Hollywood cinema. Like Manovich and Barbara Klinger, whose work on Werner Herzog's *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010) greatly influenced the direction of this article, I

connect contemporary 3D to early cinema (Méliès and Lumière, specifically). I also briefly touch on mid-20th century 3D. I examine two characteristics of the 3D image: its ability to bring elements of the diegesis into *our* world, and its ability to pull us into the *filmic* world. For the ease of clarification, I call the first effect the "outward aesthetic" and the second effect the "inward aesthetic."

Using Tom Gunning's work on the attraction, I suggest that these two aesthetics functioned most frequently and potently in the early cinema of attractions (through shocks, displays, and ride-simulations). These aesthetics, I argue, are being used today in contemporary 3D movies to create a similar "spectator of attractions," one who is cognizant of and interested in cinema's technological achievements in addition to (or rather than) than its story-telling capabilities. My goal here is to think about how time and technology might lead to what David Bordwell calls "an intensification of established techniques."¹⁶ With help from Leon Gurevitch, I conclude by suggesting that the continuation and amplification of these outward and inward aesthetics has also intensified Hollywood's reliance on the attraction in their marketing of 3D movies.

OUTWARD AESTHETICS

The Shock

The idea that cinematic objects could "pop out" or emerge outward from the two-dimensional screen is one that is linked to early cinema and Gunning's "cinema of attractions," which is largely considered to apply to most films predating 1906. With little effort we can trace this outward aesthetic back to 1896. The legend of Lumière's *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1895) at the Grand Café imagines a set of naive spectators who "reared back in their seats, or screamed, or got up and ran from the auditorium" due to fear of being run over by an oncoming train.¹⁷ (Lumière actually re-shot and re-presented



Cave of Forgotten Dreams

this film in stereoscopy to the French Academy of Sciences in 1935.) While research on this tale has revealed a less dramatic story, Stephen Bottomore concludes that audiences did indeed experience an “anxious or panicky reaction to films of approaching vehicles.”¹⁸ Gunning points to Maxim Gorky’s description of the film’s exhibition in 1896: “It speeds *right at you*—watch out! It seems as though it will plunge into the darkness in which you sit, turning you into a ripped sack full of lacerated flesh and splintered bones.”¹⁹

Seven years after Gorky’s account, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) threatened audiences not with an oncoming train but with a loaded pistol. The shot is described in the following excerpt from the Edison Films Catalogue, January 1904:

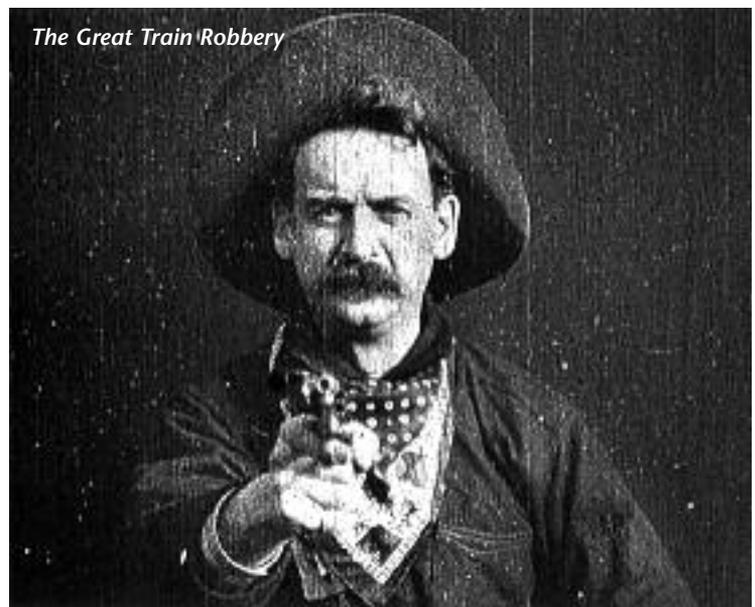
Scene 14—Realism. Full frame of Barnes, leader of the outlaw band, taking aim and firing point blank at the audience. The resulting excitement is great. This section of the scene can be used either to begin the subject or to end it, as the operator may choose.²⁰

Why does this early advertisement describe the most confrontational, presentational moment of the film as pure realism? While we need to be careful not to oversimplify Gunning’s attraction as being synonymous with shock or uncomfortableness, these aesthetics are very much a part of the cinema of attractions and work to produce an “*exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption.*”²¹ Here, both the oncoming train and the barrel of Barnes’ gun are the objects of display insofar as they threaten the viewer with protrusion, outward from the screen.

With the 3D boom in the 1950s, filmgoers continued to encounter these outward aesthetics. A scene from *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954) features David and Mark scuba-hunting for the evil Creature. The camera is positioned so that they swim directly toward us. Immediately after the Creature performs a surprisingly human-like backstroke, a harpoon is raised and fired into the camera—“into the theater.” This shot is repeated less than a minute later, and it is a frequent occurrence for guns, lamps, and rocks to be pointed or thrust toward the viewer throughout the film.

The contemporary 3D spectator is also being bombarded with these outward shock aesthetics. Within the last decade, audiences have been shocked by lightning (*Spy Kids 3D: Game Over* (2003)); attacked by a school of piranhas (*Piranha 3D* (2010) and *Piranha 3DD* (2012)); splintered by glowing Identity Discs (*Tron: Legacy* (2010)); cracked by whips (*A Christmas Carol* (2009)); pummeled by exploding asteroids (*Superman Returns* (2006)); paralyzed by spells (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2* (2011)); and impaled by pickaxes (*My Bloody Valentine 3D* (2009)), among others. Like *The Great Train Robbery*, a scene in *Resident Evil: Afterlife* (2010) positions us in the line of fire. Here, 3D depth leaves less to the imagination of the spectator by intensifying the sensation of protrusion from the screen. As the camera retreats in slow motion, though, it is revealed that these bullets are caught by zombie skulls.

As Gunning has frequently reminded us, shock aesthetics and attractions are not confined to early cinema and remain “a component of narrative films” such as *Resident Evil: Afterlife*.²² While this is undoubtedly true, I think it proves useful to reform the notion that attractions are necessarily supplanted by narrative. How are these films being sold to audiences? It’s a question I return to in my conclusion.



The Showman

The showmanship of Méliès serves as an appropriate analogy to describe another, less threatening, form of the outward aesthetic—one that has been more dramatically intensified by 3D. Many Méliès films feature a showman (often Méliès himself) presenting a series of tricks—self-decapitations, vanishings, transformations, and the like. Through the showman’s movement and minimal *mise en scène*, spectators are encouraged to look at the object of display and appreciate what Gunning calls the “cinematic gesture of presentation.”²³ These presentational aesthetics often take place on filmed stages or flattened sets and thus aren’t particularly concerned with illusions of outward or inward movement (an exception comes to mind in *The Big Swallow* (1901)).

One popular scene in *House of Wax* (1953) features a showman who eerily resembles Méliès and, like him, confronts the theater audience as part of a cinematic trick. As he toys with a paddle ball on the streets outside the wax museum, we see the paddle ball move back and forth in space perpendicular to the screen—it appears to pop in and out of the space of the theater. He continues his routine:

Promotion for
The Adventures of Tintin



Watch it young lady! Careful sir. Keep your head down, or I'll tap you on the chin. Look out, duck!...Well there's someone with a bag of popcorn. Close your mouth, it's the bag I'm aiming at—not your tonsils! Here she comes! Well look at that, It's in the bag!²⁴

Through its direct-address dialogue and camera positioning, this scene temporarily suspends the narrative. By “stressing the actual act of display,” the paddle-ball scene utilizes 3D as a tool to present a cinematic object to the viewer.²⁵ Returning to Manovich's notion that technological innovation might simultaneously activate and alter old aesthetic impulses, we can say that this use of 3D revives the presentational aesthetics of early cinema while heightening the illusion of protrusion. The stereoscopic variant of the outward aesthetic, in other words, contradicts Christian Metz's claim that spectacles occur “as if an invisible but airtight partition were keeping” the diegesis and the movie theater “totally isolated from each other.”²⁶ It creates the illusion of a transdiegetic object.

Current 3D seems intent on displaying one or two transdiegetic objects at a time. Take a scene from *The Polar Express* (2003), in which a boy loses his train ticket en route to the North Pole. The ticket slips from his hand and floats alongside the moving train; after it settles to the snow, a pack of wolves run by and kick it back into the air; an eagle catches in its mouth and feeds it to her baby. Eventually, the ticket miraculously returns to the train car through an open door. This three-minute scene in no way furthers the narrative; the transdiegetic ticket ends up where it began. Other examples of transdiegetic objects include the a Queen's crown in *Alice In Wonderland* (2010), two colliding bubbles in the opening scene of *Avatar*, a levitating pocket-knife in *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, and sheets of Méliès' conceptual art in *Hugo* (2011).

These moments often employ shallow focus or a rack-focus

to present certain objects as nearer to the spectator than the rest of the blurry and unreachable diegesis in which they are situated. In this way, they seem to puncture the “airtight partition” which Metz describes. So, while more threatening forms of outward aesthetics have certainly been intensified by 3D, presentational aesthetics have *become* outward.

INWARD AESTHETICS

Riding

Reading about the cinema of attractions evokes the smell of hot dogs and sea air, images of long, winding lines, men in straw boaters and women in feathered hats, ferris wheels and lights—these were the atmosphere of early cinema exhibition. And, no aesthetic links the attraction of the fairground and the multiplex movie theater more tightly than the “phantom ride.” In early phantom-ride films, filmmakers mounted a camera on the front (or back) of a train to provide a first-person perspective, one which creates the illusion of transporting a viewer onto the moving train.

In *Passage d'un tunnel en chemin de fer* (1898), the Lumières attach a camera to the front of a moving train as it approaches and emerges from a dark tunnel. While the train's movement is relatively slow and straightforward, the sensation of movement is enhanced by our seeming ingestion of railroad and the interlaced nature of the bridge it traverses through. “Hale's Tours of the World,” which emerged in the 1900s, supplemented this phantom-ride imagery with sounds of train whistles and moving platforms that were furnished as railway carriages. Geoff King frames the Hale's Tours as an early attempt to create “motion simulation illusions”—what Hollywood is now advertising as “4D”—and a predecessor for the Hollywood film-based attractions found at Universal Studios and Disneyland.²⁷

As I mentioned above, the thrill of these phantom rides hinges on their ability to create the illusion of transporting the spectator onto a moving vehicle. The thrill a spectator might

feel is the result of the illusion or simulation of movement through a filmic world. Yet, because early cinema phantom rides lack narrative, it seems problematic to suggest that they transported spectators into a fully formed diegesis.

Like other attraction aesthetics, those of the “ride” variety have continued to appear in films, usually during quickly-paced action montages. Most popularly, *Rollercoaster* (1977) folded extended phantom-ride sequences into a thriller-suspense narrative. This intense inward immersion, though, extends beyond just “being on the ride.” The same sort of kinesthetic spectacle can be achieved by placing a camera slightly behind characters as they zoom through filmic space. Constance Balides explores this phenomenon through the “movie ride” film:

The immersion effect in mainstream film now...generally works through imaginary emplacement of the spectator in the world of the film achieved through textual strategies such as placement of the camera in the literal position of a character (a point of view shot) or one associated with the purported character’s view as well as special effects zoom shots...suggesting movement inward into the image.²⁸

Writing in 2003, Balides suggests that Hollywood’s newfound interest in 3D “may change cinematic immersion” through a “more intense perceptual transformation of the physical position of the spectator.”²⁹ It has indeed. Recent 3D movies love to hurl spectators onto moving vehicles—a train in *Hugo*, a snipe in *Up* (2009), a scooter in *Bolt* (2011), a Barsoomian spacecraft in *John Carter* (2012)—or just behind a rapidly-moving subject—a flying Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*, a dragon in *How To Train Your Dragon* (2010), Tintin’s motorcycle in *The Adventures of Tintin* (2011), Ghost Rider’s motorcycle in *Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance* (2011). Even the body can be vehicle-ized when it’s leaping and slinging its way across New

York City (*The Amazing Spider-Man* (2012)). Two aforementioned 3D films, *The Polar Express* and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2*, provide the best examples of how this inward ride aesthetic has been intensified. As *The Polar Express* roars toward the North Pole and Harry plunges into the depths of Gringotts Bank, Lumière’s train-ride aesthetic is amplified in three ways: the speeds are faster, the grades steeper, and the perspectives closer to the track.

I’m hesitant to make the claim that 3D is the main reason for the re-emergence of these phantom-ride aesthetics, mostly because all of the films listed above are more or less action-oriented, and many of them are entirely computer-generated. Both of these conditions make them more likely to feature some form of inward ride aesthetic. Currently, though, *these are the only type of Hollywood 3D film to analyze*. So, while the extent of this ride-aesthetic revitalization is unclear, it is unquestionably true that almost all contemporary 3D films are employing it. Often too, these ride sequences are elongated and repeated within the course of the film.

Roaming

The inward aesthetics I’m exploring are a result of forward camera movement through filmed space. “Camera movements,” Klinger writes, “that call attention to their own visibility better accentuate the viewer’s awareness of the recession or progression of space or of its sheer magnitude.”³⁰ And so, contemporary 3D films often feature a “conspicuously active camera.”³¹ But, how is the inward aesthetic functioning at a peaceful pace?

Slowing down the camera’s movement certainly opens up a temporal space for the viewer to visually explore the image. I point this out because most all of the outward and inward aesthetics I’ve discussed so far discourage a visual exploration of the image; their effects function through a direct hold on the viewer’s gaze. Whether an object is being thrown at us or we find ourselves moving speedily through filmic space, these 3D



aesthetics bring forth visceral, instinctual reactions on the part of the spectator. By combining 3D with deep focus, long takes, and slow inward camera movement, filmmakers can detach these guided gazes and invite a more Bazinian spectator. These, I would argue, are the form of inward aesthetics that 3D might put to use should it want to absorb audiences and set them free in a diegesis.

Currently, though, filmmakers are positing this absorption as non-spatial, equating depth with emotion rather than with spatial exploration. Robert Neuman, stereoscopic supervisor on *Bolt*, writes that he and his team tried to produce “a restrained and story-serving use of stereoscopic depth.”³² A “depth score”—like a musical score—is made to reflect the emotional content of the film, wherein “the emotional impact of the film’s content was proportional to the stereoscopic depth being presented.”³³ This means that greater depth intensities were reserved for the “big moments in the film.”³⁴ In addition to those quoted in this article, many other filmmakers have expressed interest in immersing the audience through 3D technology. But, it remains rather unclear whether they are interested in transporting us into the space of diegetic worlds or into the affect of diegetic characters.

Pete Kozachik, director of photography on *Coraline* (2009), notes that he and director Henry Selick utilized 3D to add “scope and excitement without nuking the eyeballs,” to help “immerse the audience [into their] handcrafted worlds.”³⁵ (The word “worlds” is plural here because *Coraline* features a heroine who stumbles upon an almost-parallel world—a twisted, fantastical, nightmarish space.) By “immerse,” Kozachik is referring to an emotional immersion. He continues:

We all agreed 3-D had to be used to enhance story and mood, like any other photo technique... Henry wanted 3D depth to differentiate the Real World from the Other World, specifically in sync with what Coraline is feeling... We found that a setting receding deeply behind the screen creates a sense of space and freedom and is more effective at evoking pleasant feelings than bringing everything out into the theater. You might notice this in *Coraline*’s establishing shots, interior as well as exterior. Sometimes we did the opposite, crowding images into theater space to invoke claustrophobia or discomfort.³⁶

Bordwell also speaks of this affective immersion, noting the “inconsistent” depth cues of the Real world compared to a more naturalistic depth in the Other World.³⁷ So here, again, 3D is being mobilized as a sort of stereoscopic expressionism. I wonder if this emphasis on emotional immersion rather than spatial exploration is due to the ludic, explorative features of video games. Have they freed cinema, like the painting and photograph before it, from its pursuit of total realism?

Despite the unclear rhetoric from filmmakers and their Bazinian implications, a few moments in *Coraline* undoubtedly work to absorb us into the *mise en scène*. These usually occur when Coraline is in her Other World. Let’s analyze a moment when Coraline first wanders into a magical garden in her Other World. The scene begins with a shot of the garden from afar. As Coraline enters through the gate, we are met with a few outward aesthetics—a frog’s appearance startles both us and Coraline. Yet, these give way to a deep composition, and as Coraline ascends the bricked stairs of the garden, we are free to

visually roam the grounds: Coraline, the luminous vegetation, the orange hummingbird, the surrounding architecture, and the stars beyond are equally crisp. The camera follows Coraline, slowly tracking and panning while preserving a sense of continuous time and space.

Through a multiplicity of layers, Kozachik and Selick create the phenomenon of a vaster visual space to explore, which encourages “a more active mental attitude” on the part of the spectator.³⁸ In her analysis of *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, Klinger suggests that Werner Herzog’s incorporation of 3D, deep focus and traveling shots provide the spectator with a similar sensation—the “vicarious experience of cave exploration.”³⁹ Klinger carefully frames the complementary use of these aesthetics as having a “double impact” of realism and of spectacle. While a heightened realism is achieved through the preservation of continuous time and space, there is also constructed a spectacle of “the majesty and exhilaration of highly self-conscious presentations of space.”⁴⁰ Although this roaming form of inward aesthetic is difficult to analyze without a 3DTV, the examples above attest to way in which Bazinian aesthetics might be intensified by 3D.

CONCLUSION: Selling 3D

Thus far I’ve outlined the way stereoscopic technology might be used to remediate or amplify existing aesthetic impulses. Outward aesthetics continue to be used as attractions, either to shock the audience or display to them a transdiegetic object. Inward aesthetics are also being propelled in this direction through a continuation of the ride aesthetic. While it seems that some filmmakers are thinking of 3D immersion as emotional (depth scores) rather than spatial (visual exploration), another form of inward aesthetic incorporates Bazinian techniques, stereoscopic layering, and slow inward camera movement. To the degree which editing and framing allow, this opens up a space for spectatorial exploration of a diegetic world.

Gunning writes that certain genres (comedies, musicals) are more friendly to the attraction. As mentioned above, most all of the contemporary 3D films listed above (with the exception of *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, which was an independent release) are action-oriented films about journeying to, escaping from, or battling in faraway lands and times. Gunning suggests that in these genres, attractions can actually “threaten to mutiny” and overtake the dominance of narrative.⁴¹ But, I’m not sure how useful this question of genre is moving forward. We might place it on the shelf for now, readying it for the future to see if 3D finds its way into other genres like courtroom dramas, psychological thrillers, romantic comedies, or period dramas (perhaps *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* and upcoming releases like *The Great Gatsby* (2013) and *Gravity* (2013) are gestures in that direction).

I propose we shift our focus from certain attraction-friendly genres to the marketing techniques of Hollywood. How are these films being sold to audiences? Could it be as King suggests, that today’s multiplex theaters are modern fairgrounds, the 21st century’s “equivalent of the early cinema of attractions?”⁴² Undoubtedly, the first uses of mainstream stereoscopy were advertised as pure attractions. A promotional poster for *House of Wax* (1953) reads:

Warner Bros. bring you the first feature produced by a major studio in 3D! Nothing that has gone before can compare with this! Beauty and Terror meet in

your seat...as every thrill of its story comes off the screen *right at you* in Natural Vision 3 Dimension! **Right at you! The hand is at your throat... Right at you! The kiss is on your lips... Right at you! The horror that chills the spine!**⁴³

These words are sprinkled around the image of a movie theater, and a half-naked woman appears to be lunging out from the screen toward the audience. The rhetoric of this poster points to 3D and the experience of viewing—and not the film itself—as the main draw. In doing so, it invites a spectator of attractions, one who, like the early cinema spectator, goes to the theatre to “see machines demonstrated (the newest technological wonder)... rather than to view films.”⁴⁴

And with Hollywood’s recent addiction to remakes and re-releases in 3D (*Journey to the Center of the Earth*, *Alice In Wonderland*, *Saw 3D* (2010), *The Lion King 3D* (2011), *Monster’s Inc. 3D* (2012), *Titanic 3D* (2012), *Toy Story 3D* (2012), *Silent Hill: Revelation 3D* (2012), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3D* (2013), *Jurassic Park 3D* (2013) etc.), is it so clear that narrative maintains dominance over stereoscopic technology? What kind of spectatorship is Hollywood constructing through these 3D re-releases? Doesn’t the fact that “3D” remains in the title of these stereo-

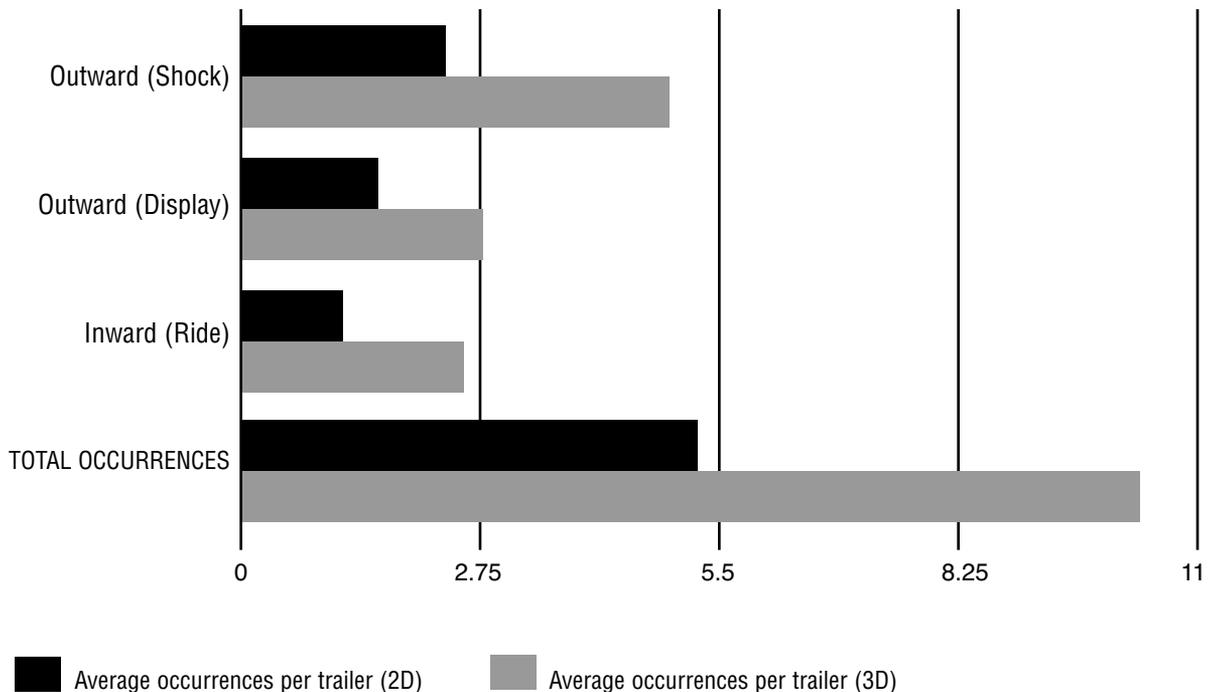
sopic films suggest that attraction and narrative and being equally emphasized? These titles, which downplay narrative, evoke the exhibitionism of Méliès, whose stories were self-admittedly nothing more than “a frame upon which to string a demonstration of the magical possibilities of the cinema.”⁴⁵

Leon Gurevitch uses the term “cinemas of transactions” to describe the relationship between the attraction and its promotional use. He builds on Bottomore’s work to suggest that early accounts of oncoming-train films (*L’Arrivée d’un train en gare de La Ciotat*, Edison’s *The Black Diamond Express* (1896)) “were most likely exaggerated precisely because they served a promotional function that benefited all involved.”⁴⁶ Simply put, spectacle sells. Gurevitch argues that today’s digital attractions “are constructed to operate across multiple textual forms as both attractions and advertisements simultaneously.”⁴⁷ Among other salient examples, he points to the theatrical poster for *Titanic* (1997), which is essentially a freeze frame from the film’s most expensive, expansive, CGI-driven scene. Here, the attraction is not merely used to immerse or entertain; it is used to “sell” the film to the viewer.

To examine how 3D films might be selling their attractions, I looked at the theatrical trailers for 25 contemporary non-release 3D films (2003–2012) and 25 similar 2D films released

Inward and Outward Aesthetics in Theatrical Trailers

Sample size: 50 film trailers



Occurrences of Inward and Outward Aesthetics in Theatrical Trailers 3D (2003–2012)

Title (In Order of Release Year)	outward (shock)	outward (display)	inward (ride)	Total Occurrences
Spy Kids 3D: Game Over (2003)	12	4	5	21
The Polar Express (2004)	0	4	10	14
Bolt (2008)	6	1	0	7
Journey to the Center of the Earth (2008)	5	3	6	14
A Christmas Carol (2009)	3	3	4	10
Avatar (2009)	7	1	3	11
Coraline (2009)	1	12	1	14
My Bloody Valentine 3D (2009)	8	2	0	10
Up (2009)	3	4	0	7
Alice In Wonderland (2010)	5	4	2	11
How to Train Your Dragon (2010)	9	3	5	17
Piranha 3D (2010)	4	3	0	7
Resident Evil: Afterlife (2010)	8	1	3	12
Saw 3D (2010)	10	0	1	11
Shrek Forever After (2010)	4	4	4	12
Toy Story 3 (2010)	4	1	4	9
Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance (2011)	4	5	1	10
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2 (2011)	10	1	4	15
Hugo (2011)	1	1	2	4
Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter (2012)	8	4	1	13
The Amazing Spider-Man (2012)	0	1	2	3
The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey (2012)	2	1	0	3
Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted (2012)	5	3	2	10
Piranha 3DD (2012)	5	2	5	12
Silent Hill: Revelation 3D (2012)	2	2	0	4
Average occurrences per theatrical trailer	5.0	2.8	2.6	10.4

near the beginning of 3D's resurgence into Hollywood cinema (1999–2006). I then marked down the frequency to which these aesthetics were showcased in the promotional trailers. I focused on the three stereoscopic aesthetic subcategories (outward: shock, outward: display, and inward: ride) that most clearly intensify the early cinema attraction. Because I don't have a 3DTV, admittedly, I worked from 2D trailers and my memory of these films' 3D screenings. This presents a challenge in analyzing 3D techniques, and I have a newfound respect for all scholars writing before the VCR.

As the graph above shows, I noted a slight increase in each aesthetic category, which led to a more noticeable increase (a doubling) in overall occurrences per trailer. This suggests that trailers for 3D films are featuring an increased amount of easily-recognizable inward and outward aesthetics—Gurevitch's notions of a "cinemas of transactions" at work. Of the 25 3D movie trailers I watched (see previous data tables), four of them depicted a theater audience wearing 3D glasses and physically responding to a protruding image—a move that cultivates a certain aura around the 3D theatergoing experience. With this quick and rather amusing look at film trailers, I hope to illustrate that while filmmakers, studio executives, and technology suppliers are expressing a desire to "put down the paddle ball aimed at the camera" and "pull the viewer deeper into the experience," other paratextual material (the title of the films, the nature of their release, their theatrical trailers and posters) are actively marketing an amplified attraction.⁴⁸

I'd like to conclude by clarifying a few things. I am not suggesting that these inward and outward aesthetic categories and subcategories (shock, display, ride, roam) are the only way to think about 3D aesthetics; nor am I suggesting that every frame of a 3D film is employing them; nor am I saying that outward and inward aesthetics are mutually exclusive. They most certainly interact with one another and amalgamate throughout the course of a single film. As I have tried to illustrate, though, a potent outward aesthetic posits a spectator of attractions, a viewer whose adrenaline surges from the thought of filmic objects crashing into the theater or protruding from the screen. The inward aesthetic seems to work toward diegetic absorption by extending the back wall of the theater, but it too has been made a vehicle for the attraction through the phantom-ride aesthetic. With much of this work, I'm quite content to risk being overly-categorical if it means opening up a space for future work to interrogate the tensions between theories of cinematic realism, Hollywood's marketing of 3D, and the images we see in the theater.

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