'Three Times as Thrilling!'

The Lost History of 3-D Trailer Production, 1953-54

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The trailer for *Beneath the 12 Mile Reef* (Webb, 1953) promotes an exciting new star image from its first frames – but that star is not human. Instead of an actor, the trailer hails 20th Century Fox's CinemaScope, the technology responsible for the new wider screen dimensions displayed through the trailer text. CinemaScope is 'the Greatest Step Forward in the History of Entertainment,' a 'modern miracle', its 'amazing anamorphic lens' engulfing audiences 'in the panoramic range of an underwater world.' These trailer sentiments were echoed in Hollywood, where CinemaScope was hailed as the 'Moses' that would lead the film industry 'out of a film wilderness' ('CinemaScope, Robe Triumph,' 1953, 1), and in academia, with André Bazin and Charles Barr heralding the technology as a groundbreaking aesthetic development that would hasten the end of montage editing techniques. (Bazin, 1953; Barr, 1963) However, amongst the potent demonstration of its new technological star, the *Beneath the 12 Mile Reef* trailer also offers a telling dismissal of a competitive cinema technology, one that has been largely overlooked in favor of the wider screen aesthetic ushered in by Cinerama, CinemaScope and VistaVision. A title claims that CinemaScope is 'The Modern Miracle You See Without Special Glasses,' a barbed commentary on the polarized glasses audiences had to wear to view the rival 3-D film process. Often dismissed within modern film histories as a 'transitory fad… [an]

occasional novelty,' (Thompson and Bordwell, 1994: 379-80) 'technically far from perfect… a gimmick,' (Maltby and Craven, 1995: 154) the contemporary evidence of the *Beneath the 12 Mile Reef* trailer suggests that in 1953, 3-D was a much more potent and popular technological option than later writers have allowed.

Rather than look at the 3-D films that were produced between 1953 and 1954, this article will examine and reconsider the place of 3-D film technology through the reconstruction and analysis of the trailer texts that were used to educate audiences about forthcoming attractions. Trailer study is useful here because it offers a unique perspective on what has become a lost moment in film history. With contemporary discussions of the 1950s 3-D technology being largely dismissive, or restricted to the mechanical properties of the different processes, returning to original promotional texts such as trailers creates a deeper sense of how film studios attempted to talk to their audiences, what specific lures were used, and how technology was positioned as a prime attraction to get viewers back into cinemas. Reconstructing the historical production of these trailers through original trailer scripts, studio files, and close analysis of original trailer texts reveals that 3-D trailer analysis has implications for the construction of film history in this period: exposing the dominant 3-D aesthetic used to attract contemporary audiences; creating a compelling link between 1950s technology and female sexuality; and, with the creation of 'flat' trailers for use on television, complicating the traditional debate around the movement of visual imagery between the film and television screens.

The article's evocation of a 'lost' perspective within film history extends beyond the notion that 3-D has been overlooked in favor of widescreen, and poses a particular historical challenge at the level of primary research. Most full 3-D trailer texts are not available in their original 3-D format, not archived or readily available to

view: only two full 3-D trailers, for *It Came From Outer Space* (Arnold, 1953) and *The Maze* (Menzies, 1953), are currently available, although there are 'flat' (non-dimensional) trailers for almost all 3-D projects. Creating a timeline of 3-D trailer production (for both film and television) allows the article to identify which of the surviving trailers were produced in 3-D, and analysis of the surviving 3-D trailers will create a series of conventions that can be applied to flat trailers to uncover any nascent 3-D trailer aesthetics or structure.

Isolating and analyzing these absent 3-D trailers is a necessary step to opening up this moment in film history, to exploring the lost technological star of 3-D and its important place within both trailer and technological histories of the film industry. Between 1952 and 1955, the Hollywood studios introduced a variety of cinema-specific technologies to coax audiences back into movie theatres, using each technology as a weapon that turned the cinema screen itself into a site of difference. This was not simply a competition of film versus television, but studio versus studio and technology versus technology, each emphasizing new experiential qualities of size, depth, smell, hearing or touch. Film trailers were key texts in this attempt to display the unique attributes of each technology, and to educate and excite audiences over the latest screen 'improvement'. While it may have been wedged between the wider screen innovations of Cinerama and CinemaScope, the new perspective offered by trailer study reveals how 3-D remains an important moment in film history.

'Every THRILL… Comes Off The Screen… RIGHT AT YOU!'

[The] new entertainment miracle, third dimension… makes the screen absolutely real and alive. People, objects, landscapes take on a depth,

dimensions such as they have in real life. And it has an added quality –

objects actually seem to come out of the screen. So real, they almost

touch you.

Richard Carlson's words, spoken in the 'flat' trailer for *It Came From Outer Space*,

encapsulate many of the 3-D attractions that the new technology offered as a lure to

audiences. His sentiments – the screen coming alive, reference to depth and reality,

objects coming out of the screen – are repeated over and over in the 3-D trailers of

1953 and 1954 and encapsulate what these 3-D previews will offer as a technological

free sample. The presentation of these elements create a trailer aesthetic which

foregrounds extreme 3-D moments, editing them together to create a narrative where

technology is again a central star image. Like Cinerama before it, the 1950s 3-D craze

has been largely overlooked, regarded as a 'dead end' both aesthetically and

technologically – but the trailer evidence offers a compelling link between 3-D and

the other contemporary technologies. Visual content and competitive positioning are

central to this series of 3-D trailers, particularly the use of experiential images and

subjective point-of-view shots that foreground 3-D's technological aspects and echo

technological rival Cinerama (which also foreground envelopment as a key audience

lure). The genesis of a thematic link between 3-D and CinemaScope trailers can also

be seen, in particular the use of key footage to showcase the technology's range and

the suggestive sexual links that many of these trailers draw between the female form

and the technological process. Through this analysis it becomes clear that 3-D was

not a dead end, but a crucial bridging step in the development of 1950s technology

trailer conventions.

Trailer production to promote 3-D went through three distinct stages between 1952 and 1955: from 'flat' trailers to promote 3-D films ('flat' here refers to standard film projection, with no 3-D element), to full 3-D trailer advertising (where 3-D glasses would be required to view the trailer), then back to 'flat' trailers that offer little or no technological sales message, focusing attention onto more generic or star-based sales messages. The historical and technological grounds for the rise and fall of 3-D trailers are explored below, but analysis of the 3-D trailer aesthetic involves a consideration of the 'absent' text. Trailers for 3-D films were produced from the very beginning, but there is an important visual absence that complicates any modern attempt to view and understand them: only two trailers are currently available in their full three-dimensional format, with many others only surviving in their 'flat' versions. The absence in the majority of these trailer texts is the 3-D image itself, the visual display of the technology. The following analyses will offer a series of ways to deal with this absence: those 3-D trailers that exist in their entirety (and which can be viewed in three dimensions) will be regarded as potential templates for the placement of 3-D imagery; these aesthetic conventions will be defined and applied to other 'flat' trailers for signs of absent 3-D footage; original trailer scripts will be used to differentiate between flat and 3-D previews; and the network of influences that surround and infuse the trailer texts will be interrogated for additional historical or industrial information. This approach will investigate the place of 3-D footage in the contemporary trailer texts, explore its attempt to create an active audience, and consider how the technology was positioned against competing processes.

One of the few original trailers to survive in its full 3-D form is *It Came From Outer Space*. After a short series of titles, the trailer opens with a 'Master of Ceremonies' segment that features actor Richard Carlson, set against a shadowy

desert landscape. The camera tracks forward, framing him in a medium shot, and allowing his 3-D image to loom out of the screen, the desert receding into the background: 'Ladies and gentlemen, the events that I'm about to describe may sound incredible to most people – but I know they happened. I saw them happen.' Carlson (in character) controls the first half of the trailer, narrating over a series of 3-D images that showcase the technology and which, after his narration ends, then continue his story of alien invasion through excerpted scenes and title work. The Master of Ceremonies functions as part of the story: the trailer narrative is included within the film's diegesis, and the main character offers the audience access to the story world, 'including' them through his address and use of 3-D. The trailer makes no specific mention of the technology that is making Carlson's 3-D appearance possible but the footage showcases the additional depth given to the screen. By comparison, the surviving 'flat' trailer for the same film has Carlson in the same location, but as 'himself' and offering audiences an explanation of 3 Dimension. Rather than placing them 'inside' the story (as the 3-D trailer promises to do) the 'flat' trailer excludes audiences, offering a non-diegetic Master of Ceremonies who offers production knowledge, rather than access to the story world. Unlike the widescreen process Cinerama, whose technological star was based around replacing narrative with spectacle, this 3-D trailer combines narrative and technology within its star image. The technology available for each trailer creates two distinct sales messages: a 3-D one around narrative and envelopment, and a 'flat' one around a lack of 3-D, using technology as a lure for audiences to search out their local 3-D theatre so that they too can be 'active', included within the story world.

The use of 3-D footage in the *It Came From Outer Space* trailer offers a further comparison with the film's 'flat' trailer: the latter is hyperbolic while the 3-D version

is restrained, using its display of 3-D technology to sell the process and its effectiveness. The trailer offers a synthesis of 3-D imagery: gimmick-laden moments of objects being thrown at the screen alongside a more subtle demonstration of the possibilities offered by depth photography – illustrating Carlson's comment that the film shows people, landscapes and objects in dimensions similar to real life. This strand of the trailer is established early on: after Carlson's introduction, the trailer cuts to a fireball streaking right to left across the sky, placed above a set of trees, which are distinct (and on a different 'level') from the desert and mountains beyond. Later, Carlson is shown peering through a hexagonal hole in the side of the ship. Shot from inside, with the interior of the ship in the foreground, Carlson hovering in a mid-ground, and the landscape far back in the distance, the scene offers different levels within the image. We then get Carlson's POV into the ship – a long cavernous space, a distant room full of stars and planets – the camera tracks towards this, so that this room looms towards the camera, becomes clearer, a more defined and rounded image. At the end of Carlson's narration, there is an effective sense of depth in a point-of-view shot of the alien walking behind Carlson and Barbara Rush. As Carlson and Rush walk by two large rocks, the rocks extend out of screen then pass off-camera – Carlson moves forward, so that he recedes a little, and Rush becomes the main focus of the image – just as a wispy hand reaches out to touch her shoulder. Here, as well as emphasizing depth, the spatial dimensions of the screen also allow the trailer to reinforce character and narrative information – Rush's position, literally hovering between the human Carlton and the unseen alien presence, caught between them, presages the later takeover of her body by the aliens (seen later in the trailer). Layering 3-D images in this way can also be seen in *The Maze*, the other full 3-D trailer. Actress Veronica Hurst claws her way through a series of huge cobwebs, each

set at a different depth to the others. The use of 3-D makes her passage through the webs (and towards camera) elongated and suspenseful – here, the 3-D footage offers genre information by combining technologically innovative visuals with a classic horror image. In both trailers, these images structure the display of 3-D, giving the illusion of a real space on screen.

Such scenes work to place characters and locations in their own 3-D 'space', stressing Carlson's 'real life' dimensions – but the 3-D trailer aesthetic also features a more overt demonstration: the 'coming out of the screen' strand of 3-D trailer content. There are two occasions of this in the *It Came From Outer Space* trailer: pieces of rock tumble down a cliff-face straight 'into' the camera (including several fake or special effects rocks that literally bounce towards the audience), and Rush's character fires two ray blasts from a long wand 'at' the audience. These represent the strongest use of visual spectacle in the trailer, offering the gimmick of 3-D filmmaking rather than the more composed sense of depth and character placement that the earlier scenes focused on. *The Maze* trailer also uses its presentation of things coming out of the screen for shock value – Richard Carlson jabs his hand forward towards the viewer (noting, and illustrating, that 'something from the great beyond reaches right out of the screen at you') – but also to reinforce generic staples, with various shots of vampire bats flying 'into' the camera punctuating the trailer.

Apart from the use of existing 3-D visuals excerpted from the feature, or specially filmed for the trailer, these 3-D previews also use graphic titles to stress the new depth of the screen. *It Came From Outer Space*'s trailer lacks the frequency of screen-filling titles found in other 3-D trailers, but the quality and use of 3-D footage sells the process more effectively through demonstration. The trailer opens with one hyperbolic title claim around 3D, but titles are more commonly used here to sell

narrative events: 'Sights human eyes have never seen…. one of the most suspenseful stories ever filmed.' The actual rhetoric of the graphic titles is not as effective as the way the titles emphasize the display of 3-D technology. In contemporary trailers for competitors Cinerama and CinemaScope, titles literally stretch across screen, underlining the wider screen by filling it. In the case of the 3-D trailers for *It Came From Outer Space* and *The Maze*, the words seem to float above the screen, distinct from the scenes they overlay, as though the viewer could look 'around' and behind them to see the image they were superimposed above. The words themselves may be exclamatory but their use of 3-D imagery relates more to the subtle use of depth photography than the shock 'coming at you' examples.

The visual evidence of these two trailer texts shows that a strong 3-D aesthetic was promoted through trailer advertising. The test of the hypothesis presented here – that the three elements of an active screen, objects being thrust at the viewer and an attempt to create a more realistic image formed the basic conventions of the 3-D trailer – would be to apply such criteria to other trailers from the 1953-54 3-D boom. Although the absence of other full 3-D trailers makes this project difficult, analysis of the remaining flat trailers (particularly the placement of potential 3-D imagery) and their network of influences may offer a partial solution. The ability to identify and distinguish between 3-D and flat trailers is aided by historical information from trailer scripts and the early trailer texts. The first 3-D feature to debut in the 1950s was produced outside the Hollywood studio system. *Bwana Devil* (Oboler, 1952) was described as 'a feature picture… that any exhibitor with two machines in his booth can exhibit in full three-dimension.' (Weaver, 1952, 55) The key phrase is 'any exhibitor with two machines' – like its rival Cinerama, 3-D used multiple projectors to create its on-screen image. The dual success of Cinerama and 3-D – parallel

attempts to expand the appeal of the cinema screen through technology that changed the dimensions of the screen – convinced the Hollywood studios to jump onto the 3-D bandwagon while it was still financially successful. Existing projects were transformed into 3-D films in the race to be first onto cinema screens – and it is this rush to be first that lies behind the initial phase of flat trailers. The trailer for *Bwana Devil* did not contain any 3-D footage, no free sample of the technology – and the studio's initial response was the same: desperate to sell the technology as a star but unable to demonstrate the appeal of that star.

The set-up of the projection system created the initial problems – 3-D projection required two projectors, running simultaneously, showing two strips of film (left and right eye images) that had to be completely synchronized to create the 3-D effect. Intermissions were needed to change reels (since most theatres only had two projectors, which would normally run in succession, not simultaneously), increasing the length of the screening. In early to mid 1953, theatres displayed slides informing audiences of intermissions to change projectors, or to warn them when in the program to put their glasses on. Like Cinerama, the effect of the wider or deeper screen was considered paramount, and 3-D trailers ran the risk of lessening the impact of the technology. Flat trailers from this time period can be identified by the level of rhetoric in titles and voiceover, centering the 3-D technology in the sales message, but unable to display it. The *House of Wax* (De Toth, 1953) trailer exclaims it is the 'first feature production by a major studio in 3 DIMENSION' but despite titles that exclaim 'Every THRILL Of Its Story Comes OFF The Screen RIGHT AT YOU' the trailer remains a two dimensional experience. The use of exaggerated language suggests the trailer's status as an early flat trailer, but it also creates strong links between the nascent technology and its main widescreen rival, Cinerama. Titles such

as 'YOU probe into the screaming terror / YOU are engulfed in its mysteries / YOU actually sense its chilling menace… its evil touches YOU!' are reminiscent of Cinerama's claims of envelopment and the active audience. The repetition of 'YOU' in such trailers places interaction at the core of this technological sales message – and recalls the promotion of Cinerama: 'you won't be gazing at a movie screen – you'll find yourself swept right into the picture.' (Belton, 1992, 98)

The move from flat to full 3-D trailers can be traced to the middle of 1953 and lasts until 1954, when studios began to phase out their 3-D projects. Although a firm timeline cannot be established for the beginning of 3-D trailer production, the existence of *The Maze* trailer (released in July 1953), original trailer scripts, and the network of other three-dimensional elements of the theatrical program suggest a mid-1953 date. Newsreels, short subjects, cartoons (including animated stars Popeye, Tom and Jerry and Bugs Bunny), and advertising films were all being shown in 3-D by the second half of the year. ('Theatre Publicity using 3-D', 1953, 15) Even theatre lobbies entered the third dimension – trailer company National Screen and toy manufacturer ViewMaster® issued 'movie preview reels… to promote the release of several 3-D and "flat" movies' that were shown in special lobby display units to allow 'movie-goers to preview the film with realistic 3-D pictures.' (Van Beydler, 2000) With the entire theatrical experience becoming 3-D, it suggests that most trailers for 3-D films from mid-1953 on were produced in 3-D – alongside flat versions that were produced in order to promote the technology in cinemas that had yet to convert. Proof of this last point comes from the Universal and MGM trailer script archives, with annotations that note '3-D version' or 'flat version' – often using the same script and imagery in both. This, of course, only confuses the issue of which

trailer has survived, but given that 3-D and flat versions used the same imagery, it is possible to evoke the absent 3-D aesthetic even when only the flat version remains.

Of the remaining thirty of so trailers that fit into this dating schema, some broad conclusions can be drawn from their structure and apparent use of faux 3-D imagery. Certain structural and stylistic patterns do recur. The Master of Ceremonies figure features in several trailers, but the general resurgence of this trailer style in movie and television promotion in the 1950s alongside its use in distinctly different flat and 3-D trailers for the same project (such as the *It Came From Outer Space* example, above) reduce the likelihood that this was a specific 3-D convention. Of the three conventions identified from the existing 3-D trailers, the use of graphic title design remains impossible to judge based purely on the archived flat trailers. However, the two other elements – a sense of 'real' dimensions on screen, and objects thrusting into camera – are all potentially visible in the other trailer texts. The use of layered depth photography is difficult to judge based on the trailers and scripts available – the nuances of character placement within landscape are often too subtle to spot in the flat versions. It seems likely that an ambush scene in the trailer for *Taza, Son of Cochise* (Sirk, 1954) would have allowed the 3-D photography to isolate and accentuate the Indian figures in fore and background, and create tension around the soldiers caught between them; equally, in the *Jesse James vs. the Daltons* (Castle, 1954) trailer a long shot, through a noose (foreground), as a lynching party approaches (background), offers a sense that 3-D composition was still central to sales messages. The idea of objects being rammed towards camera is a more fertile ground when attempting to fill in these absent texts – from flaming torches in *Drums of Tahiti* (Castle, 1954), spears in *Jivaro* (Ludwig, 1954), harpoon guns firing in *Creature From the Black Lagoon* (Arnold, 1954), or people being thrown over the

camera in *Hondo* (Farrow, 1953), the 3-D trailers are full of potential examples.

Trailer scripts from the Universal-International script archive make clear that these

elements are important structural cues: scripts for *Creature From the Black Lagoon*

and *Revenge of the Creature* (Arnold, 1955) reiterate scene choices that focus on 3-D

visuals: 'monster swimming towards camera,' 'swimmer shooting harpoon into

camera,' 'crowd running towards camera,' and 'monster walking forward with girl.'

Although much of this must remain conjecture, what is clear is the important role that

the technology played in these trailers – the display of the 3-D footage was central to

the sales message, creating a star image around the technology itself.

There is another specific (and highly suggestive) absence that this list of

potential 3-D images does not contain: the link between the technology and its

presentation of the female body. This association appears in 3-D poster and trailer

advertising, but the surviving 3-D trailer texts cannot fully illuminate the extent to

which this relationship was visually expressed through a 3-D aesthetic. During 1954,

as studios shifted production away from 3-D towards the increasingly dominant

CinemaScope process, advertising for films such as *Kiss Me Kate* (Sidney, 1953) and

Dial M For Murder (Hitchcock, 1954) became flat again, reverting to genre and star-

based trailer narratives rather than technology. One of the last studio features to be

released in 3-D was the Jane Russell vehicle, *The French Line* (Bacon, 1954). Its

trailer (produced originally in 3-D) only exists in a flat version, but poster advertising

makes clear what the film's important 3-D attributes are: 'J.R. in 3D… It'll knock

both your eyes out!' Indeed, the flat trailer showcases several scenes with Russell

dancing, strutting and jiggling: a suggestion that she was the object that would thrust

its way off the screen. Looking back through the available trailers, the link between

3-D technology and sexuality is overt even from the earliest examples: from the

abstract images of sensuous female lips and feminine shadows in the flat trailer for *House Of Wax* to a fascinating display of masculine and feminine roles in the flat trailer for *Sangaree* (Ludwig, 1953).

After some introductory titles the *Sangaree* trailer cuts to a long shot of a screen-filling red curtain. The male voiceover repeats the film's name, then announces that 'beautiful Arlene Dahl… [will] tell you all about it.' Female voiceovers were almost unheard of in trailers and the female presence was most often reduced to glamorous images in excerpted scenes or close-ups – so the appearance of Dahl, and her apparent control of the sales message, feels revolutionary. That feeling does not last. Dahl appears and talks about how exciting it was making the film, but says the story is so big, she will have to ask her (male) co-star, Fernando Lamas to help explain 3-D. As Lamas appears, Dahl turns to him: 'Fernando, we have quite a problem. Just how are we going to show these people how wonderful *Sangaree* looks in third dimension?' The suggestion here is that the actress cannot explain anything technologically advanced, but that the actor will be able to through his mastery of technological expertise. However, the following exchange, as Dahl stands demurely to one side while her male co-star tries to explain 3-D, foregrounds 3-Ds potential for displaying sexuality, particularly the 3-D glory of the female form. Given this flat trailer is unable to physically exhibit 3-D visuals, Lamas attempts to demonstrate the point by describing a flat screen – he waves his hand horizontally in front of him; for length, he pulls his hands apart horizontally; height – he raises his hand vertically, palm down; and then, 'the most interesting thing… depth.' At this point, he makes a circular motion with his hands, as though describing the shape of a sphere. 'Now, let me tell you about depth… depth is… uh… well… eh.' The reason he is having so much trouble is that he can't take his eyes off Arlene Dahl's breasts, which his hands,

still attempting to demonstrate 'depth', are emulating the shape of. Rather than one sphere, his hands momentarily cup two imaginary globes before sliding down in an imitation of an idealized female shape. Uncertain, he takes one last (long) look at Dahl, drops his hands to his sides and says 'uh… it's depth… I think you have to go and see it to understand.' A reassuring smile from Dahl allows them to move on to talk about safer things, such as how epic a story it is. But that moment remains. Not only has Lamas failed in his masculine role (since the trailer for *The Jazz Singer* (Crosland, 1927), men have always been the ones to educate and inform audiences of new developments) but he has linked 3-D to Arlene Dahl's chest, suggesting that this new technology is only useful because it will allow breasts to thrust their way off the screen.

Debates about the female form in cinema are clearly not new but trailers add a fresh contemporary perspective on how closely linked technology and female sexuality were in this particular moment. This can be seen in other trailers, both flat and 3-D. Randolph Scott describes his *The Stranger Wore a Gun* (De Toth, 1953) co-star Claire Trevor as 'three-d in any language'; *Those Redheads From Seattle*'s (Foster, 1953) trailer opens with the three red-heads in question high-kicking their way off the screen, petticoats flying around, with superimposed 3-D titles that exclaim 'THREE REDHEADS… IN THREE (WOW) DIMENSIONS'; while the positioning of Rita Hayworth in the *Miss Sadie Thompson* (Bernhardt, 1953) trailer suggest that she was also 3-D in any language. It is difficult to state definitively how explicit this sexual link was, but the most common elements within the available trailers (beyond the generic 'something is thrown at the camera') are the presentation of 3-D bodies, with the most common examples being either feminine – or alien. Jane Russell, Rita Hayworth, Claire Trevor and Arlene Dahl might have knocked both

your eyes out, but their 3-D counterparts are not masculine heroes, but the Creature

From the Black Lagoon, Robot Monster, and the aliens who Came From Outer Space.

This use of titillation through technology suggests a contemporary (masculine)

uncertainty over the female body – at once desirable and sexual but also alien and

unknowable. Fernando Lamas' insecurity over how to talk about the mystery

represented by a woman's body, and his need to fall back on the most basic visual

cue, represents both the fear and excitement of such imagery. Yet the frustrating

absence of full 3-D trailer texts means this imagery remains a potential aesthetic and

thematic component, suggestive rather than definitive. Even in the trailer for *Cat

Women of the Moon* (Hilton, 1953) – where alien monster and sexually charged

female form are combined in the same 'body' – the absence of a complete 3-D text

means the only absent 3-D image that can be fully identified is a giant spider that

lunges at the camera.

These details confirm that the lost history of 3D trailer production offers new

revelations about how audiences in 1953 were made aware of this technological star,

with structural and aesthetic elements that are unique to this contemporary historical

moment. 3-D trailers were designed to educate audiences through free samples of the

central technology, but this extended beyond the gimmick of objects poking out of

the screen. These trailers show a creative use of graphic titles and the layering of

character and landscape to convey character and genre detail, or to add drama and

tension to a key narrative moment. While the textual link between 3-D and the female

body remains speculative, it corresponds to larger cultural anxieties of the time

period. Reconstructing these lost trailers offers a way to re-examine the 3-D

movement of the 1950s, to see moments of coherence across the largely incoherent

production schedule. Trailer analysis reveals that 3-D was a bigger technological

threat than traditionally allowed, providing a lost piece of that era of film history: but the place of this technological star also extends beyond the cinema screen and on to the 'rival screen' of television. An essential part of this 'lost' history of 3D promotional materials, the final section will consider whether 'flat' television trailers mirrored the developments seen on the cinema screen.

'The Rival Screen': 3D on TV

Earlier, the division of the surviving flat trailers into three distinct groups was based on their production status and the emerging timeline of 3D production: flat trailers rushed out to capitalize on the first 3D films; flat trailers that were also produced in 3D; and flat trailers produced after the main spurt of 3D production. There is a fourth element of flat trailer promotion for 3D films, however: the nascent television trailers used to advertise these films on American television. Although none of these TV spots have survived in any audio-visual form, there remains archival evidence about the production and creation of these television trailers. As such, the focus provided by trailer study adds to the growing literature that challenges the conventional emphasis on hostility between the media of the 1950s. Following the work of writers such as Christopher Anderson (1994) and Su Holmes (2005), analysis of these television trailers replaces the traditional notion of an antagonistic relationship with a more complex and multifaceted affiliation. Reconstructing the essential components of the television trailer through original scripts from the Universal script archive, and their commonalities with the existing film trailers, expands the history of 3D trailers onto a new medium, considering how a technological sales message was built up without the ability to display a free sample of 3D footage.

Television trailers for film releases were not an overnight success in the U.S. Although trailers exist as early as 1950, the bulk of the archival evidence suggests that they became more widespread in 1953, with original scripts for films such as *Abbott & Costello Go To Mars* (Lamont, 1953)*, Jeopardy* (Sturges, 1953) and *All American* (Hibbs, 1953). The dominant feature of these TV spots, despite experiments in direct address from celebrity figures and simple still images, was the use of excerpted scenes from the film. The television trailer for *Born Yesterday* (Cukor, 1950) used specially shot medium images recorded on the set (Ames, 1951, 6X), while *Abbott & Costello Go to Mars* relied on a montage of close and medium-shot images taken from the film (the scripts list shot locations from the feature negative). From 1953 on, however, the technologies of 3D, CinemaScope and VistaVision would complicate the notion of using feature excerpts, given that the television screen could not show images in their full depth, width, sound quality or color. Although 3D, widescreen, stereophonic sound and Technicolor have traditionally been seen as technologies designed to combat the rival screen of television, key television trailers for 3D films actively embrace the new screen, positioning technology as a central sales message despite lacking the ability to present a free sample of the film-specific technology. In many ways, the television trailer flourished because of its relationship with the new film technologies.

The TV trailer scripts for *Wings of the Hawk* (Boetticher, 1953) position their 3-D visuals in the foreground of the sales message. Visual instructions include 'horses thundering towards camera… biggest explosion… machine-gun into camera.' One of the strongest 3-D cinema trailer aesthetics – items coming out of the screen, aimed at the audience – is mirrored here, a reiteration of the 3-D image as the trailer's core visual appeal. Yet these 3-D television trailers are flat, they offer no free sample of

the 3-D visuals that enhance the thundering horses or machine gun fire. Given the prevalence of flat theatrical 3-D trailers, the presence of faux 3-D footage is not surprising, but its use suggests the TV spots were doing more than simply highlighting the most exciting images. The *Wings of the Hawk* campaign uses two sixty-second and four twenty-second TV spots, but instead of offering different angles on the film (that, if the viewer sees all six, add up to a more complete picture), these commercials largely repeat the same visual information – the horses, the machine gun, explosions, and shots of stars Van Heflin and Julia Adams (apart from one distinct example, discussed below). Instead of building a larger framework for the feature, the television trailers work to remind audiences of the central 3-D visuals – visuals that suggest the action and faux 3-D effects, and which could have been intended to prompt cinemagoers to recall the same images from the full 3-D theatrical trailer.

By centering these visual cues, the television trailer highlights its own lack, unable to offer a free sample of the 3-D technology at the core of its sales message. Without such striking images, the TV trailers rely instead on the narrative voiceover to sell the technology. The written language of the trailer scripts show that these announcers foreground exaggeration over intimacy: 'A thousand new thrills in three dimension' or 'a thrilling love-story bristling with explosive action – amazingly alive in the magic of spectacular 3-dimension!' There appears to be a dual purpose to these exclamations: without access to the technological imagery, the scripts increase the volume and exaggerated claims of the 3-D-based sales message but they also allow the film studios to differentiate the cinema screen from the television one, dismissing the small screen at the same time as relying on it to promote their products. This can be seen as early as the *Abbott & Costello Go To Mars* script, where the narrator

states: 'Life at home was <u>never</u> like this. The laughs at the movies were <u>never</u> so wild!' [original emphasis in script] Although there is a narrative purpose to these words (Abbott and Costello are literally away from home, on Mars) this can be read as a suggestion that home life (watching television) is dull or unexciting, while the movies are even more wild and entertaining. The subtlety of such messages was reduced with the introduction of new technology and the insistence on the screen as a site of difference: the *Wings of the Hawk* script exclaims that the only place to see this '3-dimension Technicolor triumph' is 'on the full-sized theatre screen!' Not necessary for promotional purposes (the final few seconds of all television trailers were left silent for a local announcer to list cinema playdates) such inclusions allowed the studios to differentiate the cinema screen from the television one. The nature of such messages appears to support the view of the film industry competing with television, but again, these statements are contained within potent television trailers designed to utilize the broadcast technology and target the new mass audience of television. This contradiction points up one of the key issues of this period: the uncertainty of the studio response to television and their growing (though reluctant) reliance on the medium for box office success.

Promoting 3-D films in television trailers without access to 3-D footage was not a major technological hurdle in 1953-54. Audiences were used to faux 3-D effects through their use in the 'flat' cinema trailers discussed earlier, all 3-D films were in Academy ratio and many were in black and white. Excerpts could still focus attention on to the 3-D moments, and the voiceover's 3-D specific messages reminded viewers of the technology. The lack of 3-D display may actually have worked in favor of the television trailer, particularly when the popularity of 3-D began to fade. 1954 TV spots for *Creature From the Black Lagoon* reduce the emphasis on the 3-D process,

using the strong visual excerpts to focus on genre characteristics over technological ones. Many of the main technology-centric images are obscured with screen-filling titles that sell star and narrative action, reducing the impact of the faux 3-D shots. The sense that technology has been replaced by genre spectacle is made clear in one of the *Creature* TV spots, where there is an option to drop the technology message completely. A notation states that the title 'the screen's first underwater three-d thrill' could be changed to 'the most terrifying of all underwater adventures.' The option to alter the sales message suggests producers were aware of the fading appeal of 3-D, but it also highlights the ability of television trailers to respond to such changes. By not offering a free sample of the technology, the content of the TV spot was more fluid, able to adapt to changing circumstance, and to be replaceable on television screens at short notice. With some American and British theatres reluctant to change or adapt their cinemas to the new technologies, the flexibility of the television trailer may have added to its longevity in the publicity field.

The suggestive link between 3-D technology and female sexuality identified in many 3-D film trailers can also be seen in one of the surviving trailer scripts. Few of the television trailers of the early 1950s show any understanding of the possibilities of demographic targeting, of producing different messages for different groups: but *Wings of the Hawk* TV script #2 'Sex' shows a nascent ability to offer a new sales angle. The script repeats the campaign's central message (a 3-D action film) but adds in blatant sexual imagery. Excerpted visuals ('Jail bar kiss… Lane-Dolenz clinch showing bosom') appear between the action-based images, and the voiceover links action, sex and technology: 'The 3-Dimension Theatre-screen pulses with danger – and desire… seductive Abbe Lane whose kisses branded her an outcast.' Unlike the flat cinema trailer, which has some potential 3-D images within it, this television

trailer was never designed to be seen in 3-D, but it still underlines the importance of the female body and the technology. The screen pulsing with danger and desire could be seen as hyperbole, but the focus on specific sexual imagery – particularly Abbe Lane's heaving bosom – extends the earlier link between female sexuality and 3-D beyond the cinema screen and onto the new medium of television.

The television trailers available for 3-D films of 1953 all emphasize the importance of screen technology, retaining the focus on 3-D as a technological star attraction. They complicate existing notions of how the film and television industries worked together in the early 1950s, with potent textual evidence of how the film companies hoped to exploit the new medium for financial gain, while equally promoting products designed to challenge its growing dominance. The development of the television trailer beyond 1954 moves beyond the scope of this article, and its focus on 3-D, but it seems clear that advertising this cinema technology helped establish the viability of television trailers. For the purposes of this piece of lost history, the TV spots reveal another instance of flat footage standing in for the absent 3-D image, embellishing such excerpts with added declamatory language, but still focusing attention onto key 3-D moments, and extending the connection between the technology and female sexuality.

Conclusion

What then can this new perspective on a moment in film history tell us about the display of 3-D technology or the place of technology within the film industry of the early 1950s? 3-D itself has been dismissed as a technology because of its 1950s failure to secure a steady audience.[1] It is possible to see 3-D as a passing fad, a post-Cinerama attempt to engulf the audience that failed to see the future was wider

screens, not deeper ones. Close analysis of both the surviving trailer texts and the historical context of their production reveals that 3-D trailers created their own distinct and unique technological star. Taking the concept of spectacle and audience envelopment from contemporary rival Cinerama, these 3-D trailers emphasize the strongest visual cues, the most prominent displays of the technology's attributes (most often the shock of an object breaking free of the screen) and reassert the need to use key technologically created imagery at the heart of a trailer sales message. Unlike hybrid trailers of the 1930s and 1940s, which were largely produced from production off-cuts and B roll footage, and often without access to a completed cut of the film, analysis of these 3-D trailers shows the necessity of using actual finished footage. In flat trailers such as *House of Wax* or *Sangaree* the absence of 3-D imagery forces the trailer to rely on colorful language and hybrid conventions based around genre and star image; with the introduction of 3-D footage in *The Maze* and *It Came From Outer Space* the emphasis shifts to a trailer structure dependent on important visual spectacle from the film. 3-D trailers did create this trailer convention – in the late 1920s, trailers for epics such as *Noah's Ark* (Curtiz, 1929) used key special effects sequences as a structural conceit – but they redefined and popularized the use of technology in such structures.

This reconstruction of this moment in film history reveals the important place that 3D created for itself in 1953-54, a bridge between the technologies of Cinerama and CinemaScope. Mirroring Cinerama, 3-D trailers positioned envelopment and being 'within' the image as central aspects of its technological star; and the link between the female body and the three dimensional image is continued in CinemaScope trailers such as *How to Marry a Millionaire* (Negulesco, 1953), where Marilyn Monroe's body is draped horizontally across the wider screen, while titles

claim 'Only CinemaScope Can Do Justice to Monroe.' Trailer analysis has revealed

the importance of such technological star images in the early 1950s, and the necessity

of rooting such analysis within the network of cultural and industrial forces that

impacted on trailer production: from cultural changes towards technology and

American leisure activities, to sexual attitudes within 1950s society and the

competitive nature of the Hollywood studios. Combining this textual and contextual

knowledge reveals a unique perspective on Hollywood's attempt to revise the cinema

screen of the 1950s, and its attempt to utilize the television screen for its own

purposes. 3-D may have lost its potential for useful exploitation by early 1954, but for

the six to nine months that its star image burned brightest, it was a potent competitor

for the rival technological processes, and it reconfirmed the importance of a visual

display, a free sample of the technology being advertised. Although 3-D films and

trailers have been lost, or overlooked, in traditional film histories, it might now be

time to return to such lost texts; to expand the search to include promotional and

publicity materials; and to reconstruct absent or missing texts in order to discover

what else these contemporary products can reveal about the studio system, society

and technology of the 1950s.

[1] This perspective is not helped by the failure of attempts to revive the technology: 3-

D and pornography in *The Stewardess* (Silliman Jr., 1969), 3D and horror in *Jaws 3-

D* (Alves, 1983) and *Friday the 13th Part III* (Miner, 1982). More recently, digital 3D

technology has been used in *Sky Kids 3D: Game Over* (Rodriguez, 2003), *Beowulf*

(Zemeckis, 2007), and for 3D sequences in IMAX versions of *Superman Returns*

(Singer, 2006) and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (Newell, 2007). Given

the support of James Cameron, George Lucas and Steven Spielberg this latest attempt
to add depth to the cinema screen may yet succeed where the others have failed.

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Trailer scripts for *Abbott & Costello Go to Mars, All American, The Creature From the Black Lagoon, Jeopardy, Revenge of the Creature* and *Wings of the Hawk* are all taken from the Universal Pictures Trailer Script Archive, at the Margaret Herrick Archive, Los Angeles.