The Cinema of Special Effects Attractions and Its Representation of Reality:
The Comparison between the Early Tricks and Digital Effects

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I. Overview

The development of special effects technologies, from Edison’s Kinetograph to digitally composited films of recent Hollywood blockbusters, has transformed modes of filmmaking; it has changed the audience’s aesthetic perception. Film is presenting, or representing, the lives of human beings—a story of the relationships between and/or among people of the world in which we are living. Thus, film is located within the boundaries of reality, and its fundamental role is to seek and trace reality. A film’s reality depends on the degree of realism exhibited by the world depicted in the film: whether or not it keeps pace with the development of technology. The development of technology provides the opportunity to improve the functions of camera, editing techniques, and various environments. The more technology develops, the more reality can be variously represented. With improved technology, reality can be told in new ways, and we can say that society and its culture are more highly developed.

The most effective way of examining the relationship between technology and reality, using concrete texts, is comparative research between the early trick films and the recent digitally imagined films. The early special effects used in trick films, and contemporary special effects, accompanied by the cutting edge of 3-D computer generated imagery (CGI), share many similarities with aspects of the cinema of attractions (Editorial, 1996). However, their realities and their visions of technology seem to stand facing opposite directions. First, the early trick films show the real events physically presented in front of the camera, despite the fact that the tricks are shown as magic; in contrast, 3-D CG draws an artificial reality using computers to increase “perceptive reality.” Even if both special effects of the early trick films and Hollywood S.F. have the same goal of cultural pleasure that contemporary new media offer to audience, the features of the realities created by the two special effects are opposite in terms of existence of
references in the real world, that is ontology. Secondly, the aesthetics and functions of realities generated by special effects are somewhat different between the early trick films and recent Hollywood blockbusters. The magic scenes and simple tricks of early films serve to “alienate” the audiences from the narrative; however, the digital effects of Hollywood, as represented by *The Matrix* series, function as a catalyst of perfect empathy.

In this context, I will compare the features of both realities generated from the early trick films and the recent Hollywood films using 3-D CGI, identify the cultural meanings of each reality, and determine the implication of the shared and unique features between the two realities. There are many examples of tricks in the early films and digital special effects in recent digitally composited films. However, since this paper intends to directly compare the realities of two different types of special effects, all the early and recent texts referred to must be dependent upon special effects. I choose to examine as examplesThanhouser Film’s *Cinderella* (1911) and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1912) as recently-rediscovered, and the Wachowski Brothers’ *The Matrix* series (1999/2003/2003). The two Thanhouser films are not famous or canonical like D.W. Griffith’s. However, they are significant in that they are early-narrative focus films that represent the historical era of very early “classical Hollywood” or “transitional” classical Hollywood film practice after Gunning’s “cinema of attractions.” Using the method of close textual analysis and theoretical frameworks of the cinema of attractions, classic realism, and hyperrealism, I will comparatively analyze the scenes in which tricks, magic scenes, and digital effects are used.

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**II. Reality of Attractions: The Sameness and Difference between the Early Tricks and 3-D CGI**


Tom Gunning’s very influential article, “The cinema of attractions: early film, its spectator and the avant-garde,” is essential for understanding the aesthetics and implications of the early tricks’ reality. However, since Gunning (1990) sets the textual data using films before 1907, my research data of *Cinderella* (1911) and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1912) somewhat deviates from Gunning’s periodical setting. Gunning’s periodical standard depends upon whether the elements of “the relation to the spectator” are narrative structures or spectacle-oriented-attractions (pp. 56-57). He refers to the pre-1907 films, which relied heavily on machinery, as spectacles, and at the same time, makes light of the narrative in the cinema of attraction. In contrast, he evaluates the films released from 1907 to 1913, as having accomplished “true narrativization” (pp. 57-60). However, both of my sample films, produced in 1911 and 1912, highly rely on trick spectacles; they exhibit cinematic technology itself, rather than trying to absorb audiences into the narratives; so, they are perfect in the role of the cinema of attractions. In addition, since both films were remakes of a famous fairy-tale and novel, audiences were already familiar with their stories; thus, since audiences’ expectations were not as concerned with the narrative structures, “what the stories were,” as with the exhibition of the narrative, “how the stories were shown.” The filmmaking of both original literatures was under the influence of the cinema of attractions. As Gunning, himself, acknowledges the cinema of attractions within narrative films, “In fact the cinema of attractions does not disappear with the dominance of narrative, but rather goes underground, both into certain avant-garde practices and as a component of narrative films, more evident in some genres (e.g. the musical) than in others,” the filmic tradition of the cinema of attractions has been continued through mainstream narrative cinema (p. 57). In this respect, despite the periodical limitations, Gunning’s theory of the cinema
II-1. The Sameness: the Spectacle of Attractions and Psychological Reality

As Gunning (1994) points out, tricks of attractions, “improperly” applied to narrative construction, make audience keep “gawker[s] who stands alongside, held for the moment by curiosity or amazement” rather than “a spectator-in-the-text” (p. 190). The technology during the period of the early films creates the signification of the reality of the spectacles through reflection of the references, interrupts the audiences’ empathy to the whole narrative structure, and at the same time, provides amusement. In addition, during the moment that special effects are used, the psychological narrativization, which can be supported by Bazin’s classical realist theory, aids the audiences’ understanding of the tricks. Gunning’s theory of the cinema of attractions asserts that it is the spectacle created by the early films, from 1895 to 1907, that attracted audiences. Gunning (1990) states that the cinema of attractions is the film’s ability to grasp the attention of the audience by virtue of visual effects, and that “a cinema showman” directly places this barrier of absorption between audiences and narratives (pp. 58-59). In other words, it is a style of entertainment, regardless of the audience’s empathy toward the narrative; rather, it focuses on machine-made cinematography and technological spectacle. Thus, technology itself, operationalized through the camera, is more attractive than main themes generated by the narrative and story. In terms of this technological spectacle, early cinema shares a vein with Hollywood filmmaking today (North, 2001, p. 70). The fantastic CGI in X-Men or Spy Kids overwhelms the narratives from beginning to end, fascinating the spectators. These spectacles are evidence of the cultural and technological heritage of the cinema of attractions. As
North indicates, Gunning uses Méliès’ method of filmmaking; making light of the stories, he considers the “scenario only as a pretext for the stage effects, the tricks, or for a nicely arranged tableau” (p. 73). Thus, for Gunning, storytelling is a mere appendage, serving as a background of cinematic special effects attractions. The attraction has a feature of mechanical aesthetics that is heavily dependent upon technological tricks, a method that has been used in both early and recent films.

Likewise, since temporal spectacles catalyze the narrative’s attraction, audiences temporarily escape from the dramatic tension of the whole diegesis. At the same time, however, there is an instant dramatic connection established between the frame before the tricks and the one that follows, accomplished, paradoxically, by means of psychological reality produced by the spectacle. The early trick films try to respectfully decorate the screen in front of the audiences; by doing so, they seem to fill up the relatively loose narrative. In this respect, if the whole narrative of the cinema of attractions can be compared to the reality of a documentary film, the reality at the moment of tricking can be said to produce a psychologically perceptive reality. For example, in Thanhouser’s *Cinderella* (1911), during the scene in which Cinderella’s rags are transformed into a fine ball gown, the audiences awake from the tension of the whole narrative through the amazement of the spectacle of trick: it is the cinema of attraction, as well as the effect of alienation. However, the temporal connection between the frame that Cinderella is dressed in rags and the next frame of a fine ball gown depends on a psychologically perceptive reality; then, the audiences perceive that Cinderella’s costume was changed. Thus, since Gunning’s theory of the cinema of attractions only indicates that special effects or their spectacles dominate over the narrative from the viewpoint of the whole film, and as a result, audiences tend to be less attracted by the narrative, it neglects the temporal narrativization of
psychological realism. The close textual analysis of *Cinderella* will be continued in the textual analysis section.

This psychological perceptive realism is directly related to André Bazin’s classical realist theory, developed in the 1960s. Bazin suggests that film is dependent upon reality, making it a reality-mediated art. Bazin argues that spectators reconstruct the reality that is described by films. Realism in film is not about themes or stories, but of space (Bazin, 1967, p. 108). Film most clearly depicts reality in terms of the space in which the objects are located, and in terms of the spatiality that the objects possess (p. 14). However, the spatial perception of the objects cannot explain why film is shown in the context of reality. Thus, Bazin uses the psychology of realism. Seeing a film is not seeing the real, but feeling the reality that is embedded within the film. The important aspect of reality is not the exactness of representation of the real world, but the degree to which a film can inspire a belief that the object of representation resembles reality. Bazin explains why film can be shown as real, or why film has reality, by means of spatial realism and psychological realism. In other words, Bazin’s realism is to obtain psychological verisimilitude through the camera. In this aspect, the temporal reality generated by the early special effects is connected to Bazin’s psychological realism. The temporal realism of tricks is similar to the hyperrealism of digital effects, because digital realism also pursues “perceptual reality” using the audiences’ imagination (Prince, 1996, p. 36). Despite the shared conception of imaginative reality, while the early tricks generate reference-based-scenes, digital realism goes beyond the limit represented by the technology of the present.

Although Méliès devalues the narrative importance of film, he manages to combine special effects with an effective narrative. Méliès’ *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) is a typical example of the cinema of attraction. The reason why the film is frequently referred to as one of
the most important films is that not only were the stage effects and tricks deftly presented, but also the synthesis of its narrative and tricks is superb, despite his own devaluation of the film’s narrative. The famous scene in which human beings make a landing on the moon and set foot on the ground symbolizes the human lust for conquest of the moon; in this respect, the spacecraft in the film serves as a cinematic representation of technology. Technology is the human’s tool for exploration and research of the unknown world, as well as the will to challenge the impossible. This narrative is beautifully combined with the special effects, in spite of the devaluation by the author himself.

Special effects can dominate, while harmonizing with the narrative, as a synthesis of the external form and the internal narrative. It represents a confidence and a desire for technology, by means of the contemporary cutting-edge of the stages effects and tricks; thus, it is Méliès’ “appropriation of mechanical perception for the purpose of fantasy” (Cubitt, 1999, p. 119). This cinema of attractions, in which special effects dominates as well as harmonizes with the narrative and also illuminates the “technology” of that period can also be frequently seen in recent Hollywood Science Fiction films (SF), such as the Star Wars series, particularly Episode I (1999) & II (2002), and The Matrix series. The external form of the recent SF, with computer-mediated filmmaking, shows a strong confidence of technology, just as Méliès’ film did. As we can see that the newest technological properties in the films are realized in the near future, film’s imagination foresees and guides the development of technology. In this sense, a century ago, CGI technology generating digital effects was already anticipated by the early tricks. Likewise, the spectacle of attraction, with the support of special effects, has continued from Georges Méliès to George Lucas, along with the importance of the narrative.
II-2. The Difference: the Realities of Attractions

In spite of the shared features of ‘these two cinemas of attractions,’ there is a difference between the realities produced by the special effects of early film and recent film. When film was born in the world, people were filled with anxiety about the new technology. An article in *The Empire State Express* reported about two women who, upon seeing *Train Arriving at a Station* (The Lumières, 1896), were thrown into a panic, thinking the train would burst through the screen. Bottomore (1996) suggests the audiences’ uneasiness about the adaptation of new technology. Even though the article presented the audiences’ distrust and anxiety about the new technology during the early period of film, the fact that the women perceived the train as the real emphasizes the splendid reality presentation of the early film’s spectacle. The fact that the audiences experienced the reality on the screen as a real event in the real world indicates that the reality faithfully presented the reference – the train – as the object in the real world. From the viewpoint of digital effects generated by the present computer technology, the tricks of the early films seem petty artifices with the use of still photography; however, in contrast to the digital image’s hyperreality, the spectacle taken by the early camera was the real event that was occurring in front of the camera-lens.

Although the early tricks’ image seems to be felt as magic, it is full of meaning in the real world, because the camera speaks about real references, the real events, and the real world. On the other hand, CGI’s reality is a result of a specific computer program’s artificial rendering onto the film frames; it does not have the reference to or information of the subject. Since it is artificial reality, it only contributes to audiences’ perception; it cannot support the truth of real life, because it has no foundation in the real world. Baudrillard (1994) proposes that simulation is “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality,” and argues that the era of
simulation, dominated by hyperreality, is derived from “a liquidation of all referentials” (pp.1-2). Although a way of representation from the early films to recent Hollywood has shared a common feature of mimesis, Baudrillard argues that the mimetic representation of reality disappears in the simulation, today, because the era of simulation begins with a liquidation of all referentials. As a result, Baudrillard’s perspectives of “liquidation of the origin” and “image’s reproduction of image” imply the impossibility of representation of the real, which ascribes meaning to real things of the world. For Baudrillard, all matters are meaningless, and are dominated by simulacra and the hyperreal. All things that we touch are simulacra. All things, of which we are informed, comprise the hyperreal. All meaning, which is delivered through media, is imploded and disappears. Accordingly, meaningful events disappear, and meaningless simulation dominates the representation of the real. Thus, according to Baudrillard, history ends. Although Baudrillard’s view is too nihilistic to illuminate the digital world of the present and future, his theoretical position on the notion of code provides us with a key to the implication of digital reality, derived from computer-generated-images. The reality of CGI is severed from the real world’s event, in spite of its cutting edge of attractions. The early and recent special effects have approached audiences as perceptive reality; however, their foundational and/or ontological meanings, beyond the magical spectacle, depend on the existence and nonexistence of the reference in the real world.

In addition to the difference between the features of the realities, the functions of both attractions are different, as well. As Gunning (1994) asserts, the purpose of the attraction is the audiences’ attention to the mechanical spectacle, rather than the absorption into the whole narrative (p. 190). The purpose of the tricks of attractions is to frequently make audiences awaken from the whole narrative development, despite the fact that in the moment of the special
effects, psychological narrativization operates. However, the CGI attractions drive the audiences into amazingly artificial worlds, and ask for perfect empathy, in both aspects, into the whole narrative, as well as into the temporal narrativization during the moment that special effects occur. Present-day audiences do not doubt when they see animated dinosaurs that are perfectly made by CGI; rather, the audiences solicit the main characters’ rescue from them, and are held in real suspense as to the outcome. The audiences are thoroughly absorbed into the film through the whole narrative, as well as during the moment of seeing the CGI dinosaurs. If the perfect absorption into narrative is the function of the CGI attractions, the early trick films tend to make CGI scenes distant from the narrative. Despite the same category of special effects, the function within the narrative is different.

As I stated earlier, within the frames that tricks are taken, narrativization occurs through psychological realism, which is a common part of the digital effects; however, the trick scenes are alienated from the whole narrative, which is opposite of the digital effects. In terms of the alienation of audiences from the narrative, the tricks of attraction seem to be related to the theatrical tradition that Brecht calls “Verfremdungs effect (V-effect/alienation effect).” Brecht (1992) said that the artist must compose a new form and content, in order to create a new art for the purpose of propagating social messages, because art follows reality (pp. 29-30). Brecht’s notion of alienation indicates that it makes spectators be distanced from the narrative; thus, it rejects spectators’ empathy. In this sense, the early trick films’ use of special effects has the same result as the V-effect of Brecht’s epic theatre. However, the two historical art forms do not correspond with the socio-historical meaning of the alienations. The function of abrupt alienation of the early tricks is to “present technology itself,” reifying the development of technology accompanied with social changes; however, that of epic theatre serves as a barrier, keeping
spectators at a distance from the story, so they can maintain coolheaded judgment and criticize social problems. Thus, while the early trick films’ alienation implies the bright side of society, in particular of technology, Brecht’s alienation serves as a surveillance of his society. Likewise, the audiences’ temporal empathy within trick frames produces an alienation from the film’s whole narrative. The digital effects, however, absorb the audiences into the CGI scenes, as well as through the whole narrative. The reality of digital effects has a feature of hyperreality, because there is no reference in the real world.

III. The Textual Analysis

III-1. Cinematic Special Effects Attractions, the Reality and Utopian Vision of Technology in the Early Trick Films

III-1-1. Cinderella (George O. Nichols, December 22 1911, Thanhouser Company)

According to Zipes (1996), in the early fairy-tale films, only the spectacle was embossed, while the narrative almost disappeared. Since early films had no voice and the story was already famous, audiences would naturally focus on the image on the screen. The protagonist was not the character in the film, but the machinery image itself. Thus, a storyteller was replaced by the tricks. Audiences had a new experience of the fairy-tale, with magical scenes as a substitution for the imagination produce by the oral narration. This substitution of a storyteller by tricks can be typically exemplified with Thanhouser’s Cinderella (1911), a film of one of the most well-known and enduring German fairy-tales.

The magical reality, created by basic trick plays of still photography in Cinderella, becomes the primary tool for the main character’s problem solving. When she is sobbing because her stepmother prevents her from attending the prince’s grand ball, a fairy godmother suddenly
appears and helps her through a magical spell. A fairy godmother not only transforms a pumpkin, a lizard, some mice, and a rat into a coach, coachman, footman, and horses, but also Cinderella’s rags into an elegant ball gown. The camera captures this magic, using the stop-motion technique, an editing skill of still photography. Although it is represented as magic, its cinematic presentation is operated by the camera trick, and it becomes the object of the audiences’ amazement. The audiences are not surprised by the magic feature of the already known story, but are amazed by the technology that allows it to be shown on the screen. The amazement stems from the spectacle that the imagination produced from reading the book is depicted in front of the audiences’ eyes. This amazement induces escape from the narrative empathy. This is a typical moment of the cinema of attractions. However, at the same time, psychological narrativization is operated between the frame of a pumpkin and the next frame of a coach; the audiences view this trick as a presentation of the magical feature of the story. The fairy godmother opens the gateway for princess-like Cinderella and her coach. In the scene, we can see that the rear wall surrounding the fireplace is transformed into a driveway for the coach. The director, George O Nichols, “physically” removes the stage set of the kitchen and fireplace and reshoots the driveway, by means of the stop-motion. The reality of this trick takes a step toward the realm of the arts, which is founded on mimesis of the human world, through catching the real properties’ physical movement, in spite of the figure of magic in diegesis.

In contrast to the referential presence of Cinderella’s story, in The Matrix, since the scene of Neo’s dodging bullets, which can never be possible in the real world, is composited by 3-D CGI, it is distanced from the mimesis of the real subject and/or human world; the objects/referent of digital effects do not exist in the real world. Thus, even though the CGI rendering is more real than the real, the reality of digital effects cannot escape from the devaluation of internal or
artistic meaning. Basically, this difference of existence and nonexistence of the reference derives from the difference of the level of technology. Because the level of technology in 1911 was relatively low, the camera had no choice but to take the real event. Cinderella, in 1911, had to play after changing her clothes for a fine ball gown. Cinderella in 2004, however, will be in no need of physically changing clothes, because digital morphing techniques will support a more natural effect than physical tricks. In this respect, we can say that the level of technology controls the quality of the reality and the evaluation of the referential meanings that are produced by the special effects.

Although Cinderella is one of the early trick films following the tradition of the cinema of attractions, its camera does not use various styles of shots at all sequences. For example, the cross cutting and dissolve techniques, already shown in the early 1900s, are not used. Nichols’ camera takes the spectacle with the objective – nonevaluative - long shots. When the camera only takes the objects, without any movement, the audiences can most easily perceive the space on the screen. Although most of the sequences of Cinderella were shot in the studio set, it obtained psychological verisimilitude, which was supported by static operation of space, by means of the fairy-tale like stage construction, use of the appropriate properties, and above all things, the presentation tricks as the fairy godmother’s magic. The audiences’ loose attention to the narrative construction, caused by the emphasis on the spectacle of tricks, was recovered by the psychological realism of space, emphasized by André Bazin. The magic that transforms a pumpkin into a coach and mice into horses functions as a trick out of diegesis and as the psychologically perceptive reality in diegesis. The audiences, on the one hand, feel amazement; but on the other hand, they perceive magic.
In the last scene, Cinderella proves that she is the owner of the slipper. With the use of magic, the fairy godmother again transforms her rags into the ball gown. Technology of tricks helps the presentation of the magical scenes. Whenever Cinderella is in trouble, technology, symbolized by magic, helps her and supports her transformation of social status. In this sense, technology is the configurization of a tool for the rise of social status, which is the cinematic representation of the utopian vision of technology. Likewise, the storytelling of Cinderella is dependent upon the tricks, which are based on technology. Substituting the function of a storyteller, Cinderella shows the feature of the cinema of attractions in which image dominates the narrative. The reality of the tricks, from the viewpoint of the comparison with the digital reality, is meaningful, because it is full of references to the real world.

III-1-2. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (January 16 1912, Thanhouser Company)

As Janet Staiger (1992) asserts that the textual analysis of the films without the socio-historical context has a tendency to be “fallacious,” I believe that it is effective to grasp the meaning of the special effects by means of historical condition, through examining the press review about both films at those times (p. 104). The time difference between the release of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Cinderella was approximately three weeks. Cinderella, released on December 22, 1911 may have set the goal for profit-making during the Christmas season, and was expected to earn more box-office profits than that of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, due to be released on January 16 1912. The review columns of the press, at those times, were filled with praises. However, the comments on both films’ use of special effects are noteworthy. The Moving Picture World vaguely commented on the tricks, “artistically staged in every way,” in the review of Cinderella, while, it described the trick plays of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, in great
“It offers one of the most attractive themes to picture makers, because of the effectiveness with which the substitution of Jekyll for Hyde and vice versa can be accomplished. … Exhibitors will make no mistake in using this as a special attraction and in advertising it as an unusually strong production” (Bowers, 2001, CD-ROM). As you can see, the magazine focused on the success of Jekyll and Hyde’s transformation on the screen. It is a high tribute to the realization of Robert Louis Stevenson’s famous story, as well as the attention to the real presentation of the transformation with the tricks. It is interesting that the magazine’s review was different, even though both films, in fact, presented the same level of basic trick plays. In addition to *The Moving Picture World*, *The Morning Telegraph* reviewed the special effects of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*: “It is admirably acted, double exposure and other tricks of the camera effecting the changes of the character of Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde, and vice versa, in a way quite impossible in stage presentations” (CD-ROM). *The Morning Telegraph* also paid attention to the special effects, remarking that film accomplished the feat of cinematizing the theatrical impossibility. We can also find this positive perspective of technology at *The New York Dramatic Mirror*’s review on the film. “In making the change from one character to the other the actor, of course, had the advantage of the motion picture camera before which to make his change, but his work in this film is a thoroughly artistic achievement and one of great force and merit” (CD-ROM). The press’ spotlight on technology is an expression of confidence about technology, and at the same time, is a utopian vision of the future technological society. From this, we can infer the sociocultural atmosphere of the future-oriented perspectives. Despite *Cinderella*’s trick plays, it was the past-oriented filming of the fairy-tale. However, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was the literally future-oriented film, through the narrative of scientific technology and the special effects of the tricks. This difference of perspectives seemed one of the reasons why the press presented
somewhat opposite reviews on the tricks of both films, in spite of Thanhouser’s expectation of
Cinderella’s box-office profits. In this sense, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde can be defined as a film for technology by technology.

As several magazines pointed out, the film’s most attractive features were the scenes of Jekyll and Hyde’s transformation. These scenes make up the film of the cinema of attractions. We can see that when Jekyll takes a drug, which transforms the body and soul, he changes himself to Hyde. In the filmmaking, there were two actors playing Hyde. According to Q. David Bowers (2001), the author of Thanhouser Films CD-ROM, the actors are James Cruze, who simultaneously played Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and Harry Benham who, in several scenes, played Mr. Hyde. In this case, we can say that the references of Mr. Hyde, in diegesis, are two persons in the real world. On the contrary to the non-referential reality created by the digital effects, the disguise of the trick produces the double references. The two references cannot guarantee the tricks’ meaning in reality; however, at least, I believe that the meaning of the real-based referential reality is more faithful than that produced by the digital effects, in terms of reflection and mimesis of the real world.

The stop-motion special effects that are used in the scenes, in which Jekyll transforms into Hyde are the same tricks used in the scene in which the mice change into horses in Cinderella. Richard Rickitt (2000), the author of Special Effects: the History and Technique, defines stop-motion as “a method of animating models by physically altering their position in between the photography of each frame” (p. 312). As a result of stop-motion, we can perceive the illusion of natural movement when the frames are projected at normal speed. This is a very basic trick from the viewpoint of the present special effects, but was cutting edge technology during the early films. Since the scene in which Jekyll transforms into Hyde is operated by only
two frames, the representation is harsh, to some extent. However, as the psychological perceptive reality, which I stated earlier, fills the gap between the two frames, the trick gains verisimilitude.

The development of technology determines the representation of reality. Jumping a century, in *The Matrix*, the morphing technique is used in order to represent the same effect. Morphing is the computer-mediated process in which an image seamlessly transforms into another (Rickitt, p. 310). An example of this technique can be seen in the scene when Smith, a security agent of the cyber world, permeates into the homeless person’s body. The digital effects of morphing are very naturally perceived to us; however, it is too real to be plausible, because such a natural transformation of a face into another will never be possible in the real world. Since the tricks in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* are unnatural, caused by the technological limitations restricted in the real world’s physical realm, accordingly, it faithfully mirrors the real world. However, the digital morphing goes beyond the laws of nature. Although the audiences are perfectly absorbed into the attractions, the reality of the digital effects is outside of mimesis of the real. In this respect, paradoxically, the early tricks are “more real” than the digital effects.

If the early tricks that Méliès shows in *A Trip to the Moon* represent the lust for conquest of space with the confidence of technology, the tricks in *Cinderella* represent the utopian vision of technology, which is accompanied by the main theme of the shift of social status. On the other hand, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* delivers the message of the warning to humans’ avarice and the distorted affection of technology, by means of the spectacle of the tricks. Dr. Jekyll takes a drug and changes into Mr. Hyde. Consequently, the will of Dr. Jekyll makes a decision to commit suicide, in order to punish his evil self. If we set a metaphor that the drug is a symbol of technology, and Jekyll and Hyde are users of technology, the very last scene in which Dr. Jekyll, with a face of evil Hyde, consumes poison and commits suicide, represents the message that the
distorted development of technology ruins human beings. In terms of the film’s implication of the warning to the misuse of technology, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* largely resembles *The Matrix*. In spite of the difference of the realities generated by the special effects and the time difference of about a century, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is premonition of the caution to technology developing extremely fast speed, which is a common theme of the present SF.

**III-2. Hyper-Reality and Dystopian Vision of Technology in The Matrix series**

Recent films that are closely related to the subject of technology and the use of digital effects is *The Matrix* series (The Wachowski Brothers, 1999/2003/2003). The films represent a manipulated virtual reality that is thought to be the real world; in the future, A.I. (Artificial Intelligence) takes human beings’ bodies and souls hostage, controlling what takes place in the virtual world. With the assistance of Morpheus and Trinity, the protagonist (Keanu Reeves), who lives in the two worlds under the names of Thomas Anderson and Neo, escapes from the virtual reality that A.I. has constructed, and becomes “the One” who saves the real world, Zion. Neo proposes a human paradigm in the contemporary digital age. He downloads programs, learns instantly, and temporarily consumes them. And he utilizes this power of the virtual-self in simulation of the Matrix to save the people of Zion. He achieves perfection of the real self, via the digital simulation. He downloads Kung Fu programs in order to learn jujitsu and lots of guns for rescuing Morpheus; he opposes the digital Matrix. The following line shows that as the digital effects drive the spectators to perfect empathy, digital simulation allows Neo to do perfect performance.

Morpheus: It is our loading program. We can load anything from clothing to equipment, to weapons, and to training simulations, anything we need.
From Morpheus’ lines, we become aware that people in a computer program can do anything they want. But the ability cannot be retained. It is only possible when they are in the Matrix. It is allegorical representation of man and the digital effects; as man who is a mere being in the real world becomes a superman in the computer-mediated world, the digital effects, which are ontologically meaningless, produce the computer-mediated images, which are more real than the real.

The term “matrix” has original meanings in the womb and the regular formation of elements into columns and rows in mathematics. In relation to this, on the one hand, the terminology symbolizes the closed space, which is pregnant with the virtual reality in the film; on the other hand, it lends meaning to the heartless digital world symbolized by the combination of the binary code of 0 and 1. Thus, the subtext of the title, “The Matrix,” implies the plot and story of the film, and guides the spectator through the world of simulation. In addition to the title, the characters’ names also give implication of the plot. At first, the protagonist has two names, contrary to the others. Specifying Neo as a being between the virtual reality and the real world, it implies that he is going to rise to the surface of the new history, born from the tension between the two worlds. There are three layers of the world in the diegesis of the film: the real world, the virtual reality in the Matrix, and that of the cyberspace within the virtual reality. Cutting to the blinking cursor, the camera signals that the story begins in the last layer, the cyberspace within the virtual reality of the Matrix. The names of characters are, thus, set up in the last layer through their networking on-line user-identifications. Since they were not born to the real world, they have no real name. Their real names are substituted for the cyber IDs. Thomas Anderson (Keanu Reeves) who has the other name Neo, which is originally his user I.D. of cyberspace in the Matrix, becomes reborn to Neo in the real world. His cyber identification becomes his name of
the real. As Dongjin Lee (1999) points out, the IDs, the actual names in diegesis, imply the characters’ unique attributes. Firstly, Neo is a prefix derived from Greek ‘neos;’ accordingly, the name symbolizes that Neo is ‘the One’ bringing in the new epoch. Secondly, Morpheus, the leader’s name, is the name of the god of dreams in Greek myths. His name symbolizes that Anderson’s world is A.I.’s virtual image and Neo’s world, like Anderson’s dream, is the real world. Thirdly, the heroine’s name, Trinity, refers to the three sacred warriors of Neo, Morpheus, and Trinity herself; the assuming the Holy Trinity implies that they will not die through the narrative despite the fact that Trinity is dead in the last film. Fourthly, the three Agents’ very ordinary and banal names, Smith, Brown, and Jones, represent that ordinary people are buried under the Matrix, and implies the ubiquity of the virtual realities. Finally, the turncoat’s name, Cypher, has an etymology of a numerical representation; thereby, the name symbolizes that now he is pretending to fight with the virtual system; in the end, he will come back to the digital world. Like this, the way of naming characters and the title itself forms the foundation of the narrative, and serves as a curator, guiding audiences from the real to the world of simulation.

In addition to this formal naming, the directors’ voice, that *The Matrix* is about simulation, appears in the beginning of the film, in the scene when Neo draws out floppy diskettes from the inside of a book. That book is Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation* (Weberman, 2002). Baudrillard (1981) argues, in the chapter of “Clone Story,” that the Father and the Mother are removed, and the functions of the parent figures are substituted with matrices. As a result, the mirror stage, during which the subject begins to recognize and seek out his/her identity, is removed. In the film, human beings are raised by A.I. They are no longer born, but replicated and cultivated. They have no father and mother, only the Matrix. Thus, they have no experience in the mirror stage, forming their identities. Throughout their whole lives, they only
have a dream about the virtual reality, via the electronic mental projection. However, Neo is reborn as a real being with the help of the Father figure Morpheus and the Mother figure Trinity, and he experiences the mirror stage after his escape from the dream of the Matrix (Kimball, 2002). Since Neo could not breathe in and see the real world and he has existed as a simulacrum given by A.I., he does not have an identity. Thus, in his birth, namely in the moment of unplugging, he experiences the mirror stage. When Neo swallows a red pill and touches the broken mirror, the mirror becomes liquefied, and at the same time, the spectators experience the digital effects attractions. The liquefied mirror travels along his body, and he wakes from the long dream. The scene cannot provide the exact causality between the liquefied mirror and his awakening. The camera just takes in the dazzling spectacle of the CGIs. It is the digital effects attraction focusing more on the spectacle than the storytelling. The viewers do not hesitate to follow through the spectacle and even are perfectly absorbed into those. Waking, Neo retrieves the new self, which is his original identity. As a result of this delayed mirror stage, Neo recognizes that the world of the 1990s, which he believes as the real, is a simulation of the Matrix, and that the world in 2199 like a desert is the real world. Therefore, this scene is the Wachowski brothers’ cinematic transition of Lacan’s mirror stage as well as the cinema of attractions.

Being deprived of knowledge about their real existence, most humans live as simulacra, which A.I. manipulates. Cultivating humans, A.I. provides “residual self-image” as the mental projection of one’s digital self in order to exploit energy from the human bodies.

Morpheus: Your clothes are different. The plugs in your body are gone. Your hair has changed. Your appearance now is what we call “residual self-image.” It is the mental projection of your digital self.
The camera represents the reflection of their digital selves within cyberspace. The viewers have an experience of looking at the inside Matrix that they have never been experienced. Keanu Reeves and Laurence Fishburne enact the “residual self-image” in front of the blue screen. There is no referent of cyberspace; however, the digital effects produce new spectacles and make the most plausibility; thus, the spectators’ empathy. These are the digital effects attractions which are different from the tricks in spite of their common emphasis on exhibitionist style. At the aspects of narrative, this is the vital cinematic representation concerning Baudrillard’s warning against the image’s domination over the real. We are living in the digital age in the real world, as well as in the world of The Matrix. Making avatars in an on-line community, we are making our digital selves in cyberspace. Moreover, some users show signs of poisoning and live in isolation, as they cannot leave the digital world. In this context, The Matrix delivers a serious message about reflection on the present digital culture. In the film, Morpheus says that the real world is the desert.

Morpheus: What is “real”? How do you define “real”? If you’re talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, taste and see… then “real” is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain. This is the world that you know. The world as it was at the end of the twentieth century. It exists now only as part of a neural-interactive simulation that we call the Matrix. You’ve been living in a dream world, Neo. This is the world as it exists today. … Welcome to the desert of the real.

As Morpheus says, diegesis in the film seems to be a desert. However, the message that his line gives us is very important. While the digital world as the world of simulacra is a beautiful, fertile, productive, delicious, and vigorous dream world, the reality does not seem to be like that. Human beings have limitations and enjoy liberty merely within that. Humans cannot have everything that they want in the real, but can obtain as much as their effort can achieve. In the computer-mediated world, however, we can download anything, wear any clothes, and change to any identity, whatever we want to be. The digital world seems to be a utopia. Conversely, the
real seems to be a desert. However, as the digital effects attractions’ non-referential spectacle, the digital world is not the actual but only imaginatively “perceptual” (Prince, 1996, p. 36). It is the limitation of the spectacle that digital media produce.

Likewise, The Matrix trilogy represents the discourse of digital realism. The very first scenes of the three films always begin with green computer codes, composed of Japanese characters and some ciphers, which transform into the characters on the monitor or the figure of the table clock. It informs the viewer that these films are about the events within the virtual reality that is produced by digital environments. The scene of Neo’s dodging bullets in the first The Matrix and the scene of Trinity’s death by shooting in Reloaded are the representations of hyperreality that we cannot see and experience. At this time, these spectacles are composed of the digital effects of slow motion, because in order to compose the extremely quickly passing moments and to show them as real to the spectators, the slow motion technique is inevitable. The digital effects—making the invisible space shift and the unlikely time expansion possible—create another different world, separated from the existing world in which we are living, just as the virtual world of the Matrix and the human world of Zion are separated in the films. The digital world, by creating its own time and space, helps diegesis to be more really represented. In other words, even though it is an opposition to the ontology of realism, to create digital time and space produces extreme attractions, and at the same time, absorbs the viewers.

In the final film, Revolutions, Neo negotiates with the machine to save Zion and defeats Smith. When the machine asks Neo for the purpose, Neo says, “peace.” Neo’s purpose is not beating the computer world, but keeping peace for the human world. Neo removes Smith, as a strong virus, instead of the machine; thus, Zion recovers peace. The Matrix trilogy describes the future of technology as dystopia, thoroughly dominated by the machines, through the ending that
human beings have no choice but to depend on the computer in order to remain in existence. This very dystopian viewpoint is represented again in the very last scene.

Oracle: What about the others?
Architect: Obviously, they will be freed.
Oracle: I have your word.
Architect: What do you think I am? Human?

Architect’s last line presents the machine’s disdain for human beings that led to the digital dystopia. Ultimate responsibility of the digital dystopian future lastly reverts to human beings.

That is the Wachowski Brothers’ caution to the future society’s stronger and stronger dependence on technology as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde did it about a century ago. The digital effects of attractions of The Matrix trilogy provide perfect empathy for the spectators despite the non-referential and hyperreal rendering of CGI. It proves that the tradition of the cinema of attractions is being inherited through the vein of narrative films.

IV. Conclusion

The early trick films, analyzed with the two Thanhouser films, typically follow the tradition of the cinema of attractions, taking a more serious view of the spectacles than of their narratives. However, psychological reality fills the void of empathy produced by the tricks; by doing so, the dramatic tension is maintained. In this context, Gunning’s theory of “the cinema of attractions” needs to be revised to reflect the importance of narrative, and it is supported by psychological reality. In contrast to the hyperreality generated by the digital effects, the meaning of the early tricks’ reality is truthful through transparent reflection on the real world and its events. The early trick films, examined through Cinderella and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, not only present the confidence and utopian vision of technology by means of the special effects of
tricks, but also imply a warning about the misuse of technology and avarice nature of human beings.

The digitally compositied *The Matrix* series shows a continuation of the tradition of the cinema of attractions by means of cutting edge digital technology. Though the storyline is very complicated and somewhat philosophical, the splendid spectacle overwhelms the story from the beginning to the end. The reality that digital effects generate is hyperreal and ontologically meaningless; however, it absorbs audiences into the narratives. *The Matrix* trilogy suggests the dystopian vision of the future technological world, which can be understood as the artists’ warning against excessive dependence on computers today, and at the same time, proposes coexistence of computers and human beings that implies the necessity of digital technology.
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