Expanded Stereoscopy:
Developing New Aesthetic Forms for 3D Films

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Abstract

A growing number of contemporary moving image artists are exploring unique types of perceptual illusions in 3D filmmaking which stand in opposition to mainstream discourses of stereoscopic (3D) art. This research examines some of these alternative artistic potentialities of "expanded stereoscopy" (Hattler 2019, 74) and discusses how artists experiment with various concepts and techniques to expand or subvert normative stereoscopic vision.

These alternative artistic approaches are examined from an aesthetic-perceptual viewpoint which aims to understand the resulting new perceptions and aesthetic forms from perceptual and cognitive perspectives. The perceptual illusions brought about by such alternative uses of binocular imaging can expand our senses and allow for new ways of seeing that are impossible in the real world. Expanded stereoscopy can turn us into active and highly engaged spectators and open up new visual imaginations and technologically-aided "fantasies." Drawing on textual analysis and artist interviews, the research delineates various examples of expanded stereoscopic moving image works which can be understood as the foundation of an emergent new aesthetics for the future of 3D cinema.

Fantasies and Imagined Things

In stark contrast to the notion that "3D might find its best uses in bringing real rather than imagined things to us" (James 2011, quoted by Elsaesser 2013, 237), the artists under review have brought to the audience "imagined things" based on reality as well as impossible spaces that can only exist in expanded stereoscopy. Blake Williams for example presents in his experimental stereoscopic films what he calls "fantasy," which he defines as a desired reality that does not (yet) exist. His 3D works show a different kind of reality, such as through the media archaeology of certain stereoscopic media in *Prototype* (2017), which avoids and transcends the conventional practice of cinema to 're-present' reality.

Fig. 1. *Prototype*, 2017, Blake Williams, 3D stereoscopic film.

Others aim at expanding our senses and sensations, while also prompting us to engage rationally. Kazuhiro Goshima's *Shadowland* (2013) for example, extracts 3D depth from two-dimensional source material to integrate a poetic narrative of unfamiliarity with the sensory experience of "impossible" depth perception. This offers the viewer an alternative way to feel and think about the real. Such expanded, artistic uses of binocular imaging for "imagined things" problematize debates related to realism and perceptual illusion in different ways.

Active Spectatorship, Subjective Experience and Thought Processes

Instead of the traditionally-assumed passive role of audiences proposed by the psychoanalytical approach in film studies, 3D cinema has

comparatively turned viewers into active spectators. Experimental stereoscopic artists have adopted multifaceted strategies to engage spectators' active thinking, mental processes, exploration and engagement through the aesthetic experience. Memo Akten for example, taking the act of seeing as an active process psychologically, explores binocular rivalry in his virtual reality work *Fight!* (2017), which allows spectators to experience meaning-making processes to be affected by their viewing experience and direct interaction with the artwork. Blake Williams, focusing less on the viewers' responses to visual stimuli, highlights the expression of his subjective artistic vision and the way spectators are encouraged to think through the logic system of his stereoscopic films which aim to provide sensory approximations of the sublime. Referring to an aesthetic experience that urges him to question his own existence as completely and cosmically insignificant, his stated intention is to prompt the audience to understand subjective sensory experience through an engagement of faculties of reason and reflective judgment.

References

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Biography

Max Hattler is an artist, researcher, curator and educator who works with experimental animation, video installation, and audiovisual performance. After studying in London at Goldsmiths and the Royal College of Art, he completed a Doctorate in Fine Art at the University of East London. He is an Assistant Professor at School of Creative Media, City University of Hong Kong. Hattler's work has been shown at festivals and exhibitions worldwide, receiving prizes from Annecy Animation Festival, Prix Ars Electronica, Montreal Festival du Nouveau Cinéma, Punto y Raya Festival, Cannes Lions and London International Animation Festival. Hattler's current research focuses on synaesthetic experience and visual music, the narrative potential of abstract animation, and expanded artistic approaches to binocular vision.