**YouTube: the New Cinema of Attractions**

Teresa Rizzo

Tom Gunning has described cinema prior to 1906 as a cinema of attractions (Gunning 1990: 56). According to Gunning, unlike contemporary narrative cinema, which solicits a voyeuristic spectatorial gaze, early cinema is an exhibitionist cinema where the spectator is overtly acknowledged and invited to look. As Gunning puts it, “It is the direct address of the audience, in which an attraction is offered to the spectator by a cinema showman, that defines this approach to film making (Gunning 1990: 58). It was a cinema based on spectacle, shock and sensation. Today many of the clips on video-sharing sites like YouTube bear a remarkable similarity to these early films. They too address the audience directly, are exhibitionist and are frequently sensational and shocking. This essay examines how the concept of attractions might be useful for understanding video sharing sites like YouTube. It explores the possibility that media practices specific to YouTube not only extend the concept of attractions, but more importantly produce a unique form of attraction specific to the medium, one that might be thought about as *YouTube attractions*.

Gunning opposes the cinema of attractions to a cinema based on narrative constructions in a number of ways. Firstly, he argues that unlike the narrative form, “attractions address the viewer directly, soliciting attention and curiosity through acts of display.” Addressing the audience directly destroys any possibility of a voyeuristic viewing experienced. Instead it produces a very visceral viewing experience full of shocks and thrills. Gunning explains that, “As moments of spectacle, their purpose lies in the attention they draw to themselves,” rather than in the development of narrative devices such as “characterization, causality, narrative suspense, and the creation of a consistent fictional world” (Gunning 1994: 190). Today many of the clips on video-sharing sites like *YouTube* bear a remarkable similarity to these early films.

The cinema of attractions was dominated by acts of display that manifested themselves through sudden burst of presentation such as a still shot of a train suddenly coming to life through movement and rushing forward. These acts of display produced a sense of immediacy and presence and therefore were highly affective and engaged the senses. The erotic film of early cinema could be understood as an extreme example of this kind of exhibitionist cinema. The cinema of attractions was more about the pleasure of the spectacle than narrative absorption. Andre Gaudreault who collaborated with Gunning on developing an early version of the concept of attractions states, “The attraction is there, before the viewer, in order to be seen. Strictly speaking, it exists only in order to display its visibility” (Gaudreault 2006: 95). Whereas narrative film works through a cause and effect chain of events building toward a climax or conclusion, the acts of display that dominate the cinema of attractions are autonomous, instantaneous moments. In this sense the cinema of attractions is not interested in creating characters with psychological motivations.

This exhibitionist tendency manifests itself through a range of practices such as performers gesturing to the audience with an inviting look or wink (*Mary Jane’s Mishap*, and *Sick Kitten*, Albert Smith, 1903), conjurors bowing in magic films (*Un homme de têtes*, 1889 and *L’homme orchestre*, 1900, Georges Méliès), and comedians smirking at the camera (*The Fatal Sneeze*, Hepworth Manufacturing Co, 1907 and *Par le trou de serrure*, Pathe Freres 1901). It can also be cinematic in nature as in the trick films, which used cinematic manipulation such as using stop-action editing as the primary source of novelty (*Grandma’s Reading Glasses*, Albert Smith, 1901, *An Extraordinary Cab Accident*, R.W. Paul, 1903 and *The Big Swallow*, Williamson’s Kinematograph Co Ltd, 1901). Performance itself can be a form of exhibition, such as dance and acrobatic performances, comedy and vaudeville acts, as well as novelty animal acts such as boxing cats. The sense of exhibition also emerged from the way the world was put on display through actualities and topicals. Actualities and topicals were films that documented a wide range of non-fiction subject matters from everyday life to political events. Actualities tended to focus more on capturing movement such as a scene of the ocean (*Rough Sea at Dover*, R.W. Paul, 1895) whereas topicals focused more on significant events such as political speeches, wars and cultural events (*The Melbourne Cup*, Walter Barnett, 1896). Actualities and topicals might be seen as precursors to documentaries and news programs.

Finally, an equally important aspect of the concept of a cinema of attractions is the mode of exhibition popular at the time. Prior to 1906 films appeared as one attraction amongst many on a vaudeville programme. A film could be surrounded by a number of unrelated acts including, singers, comedians, slides shows, narrators, circus acts, dances and magical acts. This was an environment that produced an atmosphere similar to a fairground with its many attractions, the cinema being but one of them.
Like the early cinema of attractions many of video-sharing sites are dominated by this sense of exhibitionism including addressing the audience directly, erotic dances and performances, gags and novelty acts and putting the world on display by documenting significant events and capturing exotic locations. This sense of exhibition is taken to an extreme as audiences are not only invited to look but also post comments and video responses. This paper looks at the similarities between early cinema and video-sharing sites and asks whether these sites can be considered a new cinema of attractions. It does this in three parts. The first part looks at the context in which the concept of the cinema of attractions emerged. The second part aims at defining the cinema of attractions in greater detail through a close reading of three cases studies. The final part explores the connections between the early cinema of attractions and the video-sharing site YouTube. Because of the high turnover in clips uploaded on YouTube it is impossible to include links to particular clips as they may disappear at any time. Therefore, I have created a playlist of clips for this article which will be updated from time to time. To view examples of the clips discussed in this essay visit this page.

**Part One: An historical intervention**

Gunning’s concept of the cinema of attractions has had a profound effect on the study of early cinema. Through this concept Gunning not only identified a mode of address in early cinema that had been previously overlooked, but also initiated a healthy and strong debate about the way early cinema had been theorised and understood. According to Scott Bukatman, Tom Gunning’s essay ‘The Cinema of Attraction(s): Early Film, Its Spectators and the Avant-Garde’ is the only essay that has rivalled the impact and influence of Laura Mulvey’s 1975 essay ‘Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema’ on cinema studies (Bukatman 2006, 71). Therefore, before applying Gunning’s concept of the cinema of attractions to a contemporary media environment it is worth revisiting the context in which the concept emerged to fully comprehend its significance and its possible relevance to contemporary media.

Gunning’s work can be understood as an intervention into the way early cinema was conceptualised and written about in the late 1970s. Essentially, he was dissatisfied with the way early cinema had been theorised mainly from the perspective of the development of narrative films. He especially objected to the way techniques and innovations in early films, such as editing, were conceived as primitive attempts at narrative cinema (Gunning 1990: 56). For Gunning this focus misreads and distorts the work of these early filmmakers as well as the forces at work in cinema prior to 1906. Gunning rejected the perspective that views “cinema’s first decades as embryonic forms of later practices or stuttering attempts at later achievements” (Gunning 1994: 189). He argues that the distinguishing feature of early cinema is not the narrative drive that later dominated the medium. Challenging the way early filmmakers such as G. A. Smith, Georges Méliès and Edwin Porter were studied primarily for their contribution to film as a storytelling medium, Gunning instead discovered “differences rather than organic development, a series of contrasting conceptualisations of cinema’s role, mode of exhibition, and method of address” (Gunning 1994: 189). Through a close analysis of these differences Gunning identified a mode of address that had an exhibitionist quality.

Gunning also had issues with the way the concept of cinematic apparatus was used to theorise cinema in general, as this too did not account for the different modes of exhibition and address in early cinema. He points out that there is a discord between early cinema and the kinds of ideological critiques of the cinematic apparatus that dominated film theory of the time. This is because ideological critiques tended to focus on narrative cinema and unconscious processes. He writes, “In that era, the inheritance of the 1970s High Theory still confined ideas about spectatorship to uncovering ideological complicity in the narrative construction of popular films, while describing cinema spectatorship technically as a process of unconscious enthralment” (Gunning 2006: 32). For Gunning this approach seemed to overlook this— a contribution to theories of spectatorship.

In addition to reacting against the dominant reading of early cinema, Gunning was inspired by a number of different filmmakers and theorists that were interested in the way cinema addressed audiences in a variety of ways. These include Laura Mulvey and her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (Mulvey 1975), which explores the notion that films employ different modes to cue audiences. In particular he was inspired by its “thesis that spectatorship may not be determined by the nature of the cinematic apparatus but shaped by its relation to filmic modes, such as spectacle and narrative” (Gunning 2006: 35). He was also influenced by the work of early film practitioners because of their interest in the “novel ways cinema took hold of its spectator” (Gunning 2006: 35). The most significant influence was Sergei
Eisenstein’s concept of the montages of attractions, which was based on a kind of cinema that produced shocks through calculated juxtapositions. Gunning writes, “Eisenstein, who first poached the term ‘attractions’ from both the realm of science and the fairground, defined it in aesthetic terms as any aggressive element that ‘subjects the spectator to a sensual or psychological impact’” (Gunning 2006: 35). Gunning’s concept of the cinema of attractions particularly resonates with the kind of sensual or psychological experiences associated with fairground attractions. As Charles Musser explains, “Gunning thus utilized a term that reaffirmed early cinema’s affinities with Coney Island and its rides that thrill, disorient, and shock those who visit these heterotopic spaces” (Musser 1994: 205). The connection with the fairground was further enhanced by the way the cinematic apparatus was frequently presented as an attraction. The camera and projector would be placed on display for audiences to marvel at. As Gunning points out “Early audiences went to exhibitions to see machines demonstrated… rather than to view films. It was the Cinématographe, the Biograph or the Vitascope that were advertised” not the films themselves (Gunning 1990: 58).

**Part Two: Case Studies**

Through the use of three examples I am now going to take a close look at some of the basic mechanisms of the cinema of attractions: they are the Lumiere brothers’ film *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (1895), Méliès’ *The Conjuror* (1899) and Thomas Edison’s *Turkish Dance, Ella Lola* (1898). (Interestingly, today all of these early films can all be found on YouTube.) Although quite diverse these three films all share the quality of attractions. The first example, Lumière’s actuality film *Arrival of a Train*, consists of a single shot of a train arriving at a train station where a small crowd awaits. It is shot on a tripod and with a locked off camera. The attraction works through a fascination with movement. As Gunning points out, “The audience knew that motion was precisely what the cinematograph promised….” (Gunning 1989: 35). The Lumière film is also an actuality film and as such also works as an attraction because it presents a view of the world. This idea of putting the world on display was exemplified through the travel films and topicals of the time which brought interesting events and new places to audiences. Gunning’s assertion that prior to 1906 cinema was not dominated by a narrative drive rests partially on the importance of these kinds of actuality films, as they far out numbered narrative films.

The second example, by Méliès, *The Conjuror*, is basically a reworking of a traditional magic trick where the magician makes the assistant disappear. To achieve this effect Méliès employed camera stop-substitution, a technique used in many of his films. Here the attraction works at the level of the trick film where the source of the novelty stems from cinematic manipulation aimed at attracting the spectator’s fascination and amazement. According to Gunning, the trick film was extremely popular prior to 1906. He describes them as films that “work as a series of displays — of magical attractions — rather than a primitive sketch of narrative continuity” (Gunning 1991: 41). Gunning argues that role of narrative in Méliès films is very different than later traditional narrative films, as plot and story are used as excuses for stage effects (Gunning 1990: 58). As Richard Able points out Méliès himself admitted that the cinematic tricks and effects were more important than story or plot. “A film’s scenario never amounted to much, he would later insist, because it merely served as a ‘pretext’ for tricks or tricks and striking tableaux” (Able 2003: 64). Furthermore, Able points out that Méliès’ first task in preparing for a film was to come up with a series of tricks or grand effects. For these reasons rather than see Lumiere and Méliès in opposition Gunning sees them as united through a fascination with cinema’s possibilities beyond its storytelling potential. Diverse films such as the trick film and the actuality film are both types of cinema that present a series of views to audiences that are fascinating because of their illusionary power. For Gunning Méliès offers magical illusions and Lumiere the illusion of motion.

The third film by Edison, *The Turkish Dance*, was one of a number of erotic dances found in the Kinetoscope parlours. The attraction is both one of eroticism and exoticism. *The Turkish Dance* is also fascinating because it operates as a display of a cultural other, that is, something exotic and unknown to Western audiences. It should be pointed out though that there was a whole genre of dance films that were not erotic films. These films were artistically inspired and exhibited a fascination in capturing the body in motion such as the work of dancer Loïe Fuller. Laurent Guido suggests that early films featuring physical performances such as dance, sport and acrobatics produced a particular kind of an attraction based on a fascination with capturing the body in motion. He writes, “Whether it concerned the showing of mechanisms invisible to the naked eye by presenting the decomposition of a gesture — as an isolated or sequenced shape — or the illusion of mobility, which thanks to optical machines resulted from the animation of these same images, all public displays of chronophotographic images evidently had a spectacular dimension” (Guido 2006: 142).

**Part Three: YouTube Attractions**
This final section analyses some of the similarities and differences between the early cinema of attractions and YouTube. It explores how the concept of attractions is useful and relevant for understanding the YouTube phenomena. I want to go further, however, and argue that YouTube has extended the concept of attractions — such that we can begin to speak of YouTube attractions. It argues that practices specific to media sharing sites like YouTube produce their own unique forms of attractions relevant to a contemporary society.

One of the major similarities between the early cinema and YouTube is that a large amount of material found on YouTube is not about telling stories or developing narratives — rather, it has a similar quality of attractions found in early cinema. Like the cinema of attractions, the YouTube experience produces a variety of different attractions. While some YouTube clips seem to resonate directly with the kinds of attractions found in early cinema — like the hundreds of clips showing animals playing and performing tricks — others extend the concept of attractions by producing new and unique attractions within a rich intertextual field — like the remediated clips used to create political satire. These clips were particularly popular over the 2007 Australian Federal election campaign. In addition, the video sharing experience cues viewers in much the same way as the cinema of attractions. It confronts viewers with moments of novelty, curiosity, or sensationalism and invites them to stop and stare. The following description by Gunning of the viewer of attractions could apply to a YouTube viewer. “The viewer of attractions is positioned less as a spectator in the text, absorbed into a fictional world, than as a gawker who stands alongside, held for the moment by curiosity or amazement” (Gunning 1994: 190). The difference being that although YouTube clips arrest our attention and encourage us to gawk similarly through novelty and curiosity throughout the course of a day, they also invite us to respond and participate in a variety of ways. I will discuss these further on.

While acknowledging that many of the clips on YouTube employ narrative form, on my analysis they can still be understood under the heading of attractions because they are not presented as self-contained narratives inviting the viewer into a diegetic world. They are decontextualised and recontextualised by users for the purpose of attraction. The fact that clips on YouTube are limited to a duration of ten minutes adds a further complication. While long-form programs such as television series can be uploaded in short segments, the upload constraint disrupts narrative continuity. This dismantling can have the effect of favouring specific segments or moments, making attractions of them.

Clips that promote or are designed to function primarily as attractions are extremely popular on YouTube. I would suggest this is particularly the case with links that are shared via email. These clips are distributed precisely for their amusement, shock or sensational qualities. As in early cinema, many YouTube clips solicit our attention through novelty and curiosity, and are based on acts of display such as gags, tricks, erotic dances, animal acts, songs, exotic locations to name but a few. YouTube also continues the practice of screening everyday life and important social and political events in a similar way to the actualities and topicals of early cinema. In this sense, as with the cinema of attractions, YouTube is an exhibitionist medium that revolves around acts of display.

These similarities between early cinema and some YouTube clips suggest that Gunning’s theory can usefully be applied to YouTube. I want to go further, however, and argue that YouTube extends the concept of attractions. I want to explore the existence of what I call ‘YouTube attractions’, making special reference to clips that draw on three subject areas: relating to trains, dancing and re-mediation.

Results for the search terms ‘arrival of a train’ on YouTube reveal hundreds of clips uploaded from around the world that reference the Lumiere brother’s film Arrival of a Train. Many of these clips are remarkably similar to the Lumiere text in that they consist of a single shot of a train arriving at a train station, most often with passengers waiting to board. The main differences are that the recent clips contain sound, and unlike the Lumiere film are generally shot hand held. There are also numerous clips shot from the passenger’s point of view inside the train looking out, either arriving at a platform or travelling through different landscapes. These clips are the modern day equivalent of the travel experience simulated in early cinema by the Hale’s Tours, which situated viewers in train cars and projected films from around the world (Gunning 1991: 41).

These railway clips work as attractions in at least two ways. In one way, they replicate the early fascination with the railroad. On another level, they operate as attractions through a kind of novelty of referencing and reworking the subject matter captured by early cinema. In relation to the first level, railway films were a powerful way of displaying the cinematic apparatus’ ability to capture movement. In this respect Gunning argues that too much focus has been placed on the idea that early spectators mistook images of moving trains for reality and reacted with fear. For him this misreads
their reaction. He describes how, for purposes of creating suspense, the image of the moving train was withheld from the audience at the start of the show. In an act of showmanship the presenter would project a still image of the train while talking up the marvels of the moving image. Then suddenly the projector would crank up and the image would come to life with the movement of the train rushing forward. As Gunning suggests, “Rather than mistake the image for reality, the spectator is astonished by its transformation through the new illusion of projected motion. Far from credulity, it is the incredible nature of the illusion itself that renders the viewer speechless” (Gunning 1998: 34).

As a relatively new technology, which like the cinema transformed the use and understanding of both time and space, the train was the perfect subject to showground the moving image. This is particularly so as both the railway and the cinema are exemplars of the modernist experience. In her book Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema, Lynn Kirby explores the way cinema and the railways are nostalgically linked through a parallel history. She looks at the similarities between the experience of train passengers and cinema audiences. For Kirby both technologies challenge notions of reality by altering perceptions of time and space and by producing new views on the world (Kirby 1996).

Taking into account the number of clips of trains and train travel on video-sharing sites, I would suggest that the fascination with both the railway and with capturing movement is very much alive today.

The second way these clips operate as an attraction is through the novelty of referencing and reworking the subject matter captured by early cinema. For example, interesting reworkings of the Lumiere brother’s film are the numerous clips featuring the arrival of a sushi train. Variations of these include a clip of a model train set carrying the sushi on its carriages as people cheer, and clips that are shot from the point of view of the sushi train, which as a result, position the audience on the sushi train looking out. Here we see diners smiling and greeting us as we slowly wind our way around the restaurant on board the sushi train. The attraction in these clips works through the novelty of intertextual references. While some of these references may be conscious — as indicated by the title or description entered on YouTube — others may not be. Regardless of the intent, the novelty of the reference operates as a powerful attraction because these are images that have been referenced so many times since the beginning of cinema that they have now entered our cultural unconscious and seem very familiar.

The second group of YouTube clips I want to discuss is a series of dance clips that resemble films such as Edison’s Turkish Dance, Ella Lola. Like many of the early dance clips the attraction for the YouTube dance clips operates at the level of exoticism and eroticism. However, a significant point of difference between the YouTube dance clips and the early dance films is that the performances found in early cinema were clearly shot for public exhibition and were already in the public realm. They were often well-known performers and therefore part of the attraction was their celebrity or notoriety. In addition the early films were generally shot in a sparse or empty studio making the dancer the sole focus of attention and clearly demarcating the space as a performance space. In this respect the studio operated in a similar way as a stage where the dance is signalled as a performance filmed for public consumption. Furthermore, the sense of a public performance is reinforced as this arrangement aligns the cinema audience with the theatre audience.

The YouTube clips blur the distinction between the private and the public sphere. They usually consist of a sole person dancing in front of the camera, often erotically. The performer is an ordinary person, usually a young woman, but not always — there are also a number of young men uploading clips of them dancing eroticly. These clips are shot in a domestic environment, most often in the privacy of a bedroom by the performer with a locked off camera. Unlike early cinema, the YouTube performances appear to be private performances uploaded to a public site. However, this sense of the private made public is an illusion, as these clips are shot for public consumption (although there are also clips that are shot or uploaded without consent). I would suggest that while the YouTube clips draw on the eroticism of the early cinema examples they escalate the shock aspect of attraction by appearing to make something private public. This confusion between the public and private makes it difficult to know if watching these clips is a legitimate or illegitimate activity and there is a strong sense of the illicit surrounding them. This confusion may well be part of the attraction.

These clips show that it is possible to apply and extend Gunning’s work on the cinema of attractions to YouTube. Not only do they specifically reference the cinema of attractions but also rework the attractions of other sites such as exotic clubs, pornography, musicals and most of all video clips. However, what I find most fascinating is the way the set up of these performances unconsciously replicate so many of the cinematic techniques found in early cinema — particularly the Edison shorts filmed in the Black Maria film studios. These techniques include the locked off camera, the one take shot, the creation of a kind of proscenium arch — through the use of doorways, the acknowledgement of the audience, this ranges from looking directly at the camera and therefore at us, to using peripheral vision to sneak a look — the
performances are, after all, filmed for us to look at, even to gawk at. And as Gunning says of the cinema of attractions, they are “moments of spectacle, their purpose lies in the attention they draw to themselves…” (Gunning 1994: 190).

Gunning’s concept of the cinema of attractions can thus usefully be applied to YouTube. However, YouTube also produces its own attractions with its own specificities. One important way in which these dance clips on YouTube produce a kind of attraction with their own specificity emerges from the dialogical nature of the video-sharing sites. An interesting aspect of these clips is the amount of repetition that occurs from one clip to the next. In some instances this occurs because several dancers mimic a particular video clip, copying the moves and style of the original. In other cases this occurs by posting a video response. Sometimes these responses are reminiscent of a dance off where each dancer tries to outdo the other. In any case, what occurs is a video dialogue between subscribers. Hence, while the attraction for these dance clips operates in a very similar way to the early erotic dance films, the dialogic nature of video sharing sites produces a new kind of attraction. The attraction extends beyond drawing attention to itself through acts of display to provoking a response, from posting comments to uploading a video. A particular video can provoke a whole network of responses in a way that the attraction starts to take on an interactive dimension.

The third group of YouTube clips I want to look are clips that are produced through the practice of remediation, such as the re-titling of Bollywood movies with nonsense subtitles. These types of clips are central to the way video-sharing sites extend the notion of attractions. As Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin discuss in their book Remediation: Understanding New Media, remediation is the process of reusing or reworking material from one media in a different media. Furthermore, in the process of doing so new meaning is generated. They write, “With reuse comes necessary redefinition, but there may be no conscious interplay between media. The interplay happens, if at all, only for the reader or viewer who happens to know both versions and can compare them” (Bolter and Grusin 1999: 45). YouTube is awash with the kind of interplay between media that requires specific audience knowledge in order to make meaning. It requires the audience to be in on the joke in order for it to work. Television footage can be re-worked to construct anything from a cheap gag to biting political satire.

Other examples of remediation include segments of films where the dialogue has been dubbed to create new meaning — this genre also includes creating humorous subtitles for foreign language films and songs, and machinima films that combine vision from games or Second Life with Hollywood movie sound tracks. Election campaigns supply fruitful material for remediation, as political advertisements are re-edited for political satire. I would argue that some of the best political satire of the Australian election campaign of 2007 and the USA election campaign of 2008 emerged on YouTube. These examples demonstrate that remediation is central to the aesthetics or experience of attractions on video-sharing sites.

As Bolter and Grusin point out the practice of remediation has been around for some time. Therefore, it is not distinctive to video sharing sites. In fact, the practice of remediation can be found in early cinema including the filming of popular and well-known dancers and acrobats, vaudeville acts and gags, magical acts as well as re-enactment of special events like famous boxing matches. However, although not new, remediation functions in a unique and powerful way in relation to video-sharing sites. The practice of remediation has the effect of putting the medium itself on display and making an attraction of it. The medium’s power rests in its ability to transform spectators into creative producers or artists, and the practice of remediation foregrounds this potential. Remediation is a way of showing off the force of the medium. In the same way Gunning argues that the early films of moving trains reveal the force of the apparatus, the practice of remediation reveals the power of video-sharing sites. Gunning argues in relation to the railroad films, “What is displayed before the audience is less the impending speed of the train that the force of the cinematic apparatus. Or to put it better, the one demonstrates the other” (Gunning 1989: 34). I would like to suggest that remediation works in a similar way where it demonstrates the force of the medium, and likewise the medium demonstrates the creative power of remediation. This force has to do with the way viewers are provoked into participating in the creation of media texts and sharing them or in other words putting them on display. Acts of display are now open to anyone willing to engage in the medium. The viewer becomes not only the film producer but also the equivalent of the showman of early cinema. It is a kind of attraction that requires participation at a very visceral level as putting oneself or one’s work on display can be an unnerving experience. Perhaps this means that the attraction is also about taking a risk. The cinema of attractions is ultimately about acts of display, or exhibitionism rather than storytelling in a similar way remediation is all about showing off by being clever and creative. It is a self-conscious practice that points to the producer, itself and to the power of the medium.
I have sought to apply Gunning’s theory and identify new forms of attractions. One of the key reasons for proposing that a new form of attraction exists (or is taking shape) has to do with the specific mode of exhibition and distribution of video sharing sites. Social networking sites such as YouTube are populated by subscribers actively looking for novelty. Therefore, YouTube clips engage an audience that is highly attuned to attractions. This may have also been the case in relation to the cinema of attractions, but there is something more intense about the way this search can take place anywhere at anytime. Its immediacy means that exhibition, shock and sensationalism become everyday events. This should not be surprising as these qualities are found, and indeed have always been found, in the media — but today’s proliferation of media makes it a very intense experience. Early cinema was an event in itself that required audiences to put time aside to attend the theatre. YouTube attractions are available all day and night. The form itself is incredibly self-conscious, as clips arrive through email on daily basis demanding to be watched with subject lines like — “watch this cool clip”, “amazing video clip”, “check this out” and “watch this it’s hilarious”. Through the use of email, video sharing becomes a distribution and viewing model that takes the concept of attractions as outlined by Gunning to its limit, as it constantly puts itself on display. YouTube attractions like the cinema of attractions as Gunning puts it “directly solicits spectator attention, by inciting a visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle — a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself” (Gunning 1990: 58). Furthermore, the dialogic nature of video sharing sites produce a kind of hyper-attraction as not only are subscribers invited to watch clips but post comments or respond through video posts. A system that operates on the basis that subscribers upload clips with the hope that they are noticed, commented on and even shared is a system that is based on an aesthetics of attraction. Attraction is the whole aim of uploading clips. In this respect while video-sharing sites operate within the logic of attractions as outlined by Gunning they also have their own unique forms of attractions that emerge from the specificities of the medium.

Bibliography


