Invisibilising the Corporeal – exploring concepts of compositing and digital visual effects

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Abstract.

This thesis seeks to explore the way in which invisibility as a concept becomes explicitly housed within digital compositing, visual effects (VFX) and certain attendant techniques. The chapters will establish how compositing and effects techniques can be seen as pushing modern filmmaking into concealing, and therefore visually releasing, certain physical structures within films’ images and their production. This shall be achieved by drawing upon a combination of texts that disseminate the technical nature and make-up of VFX, alongside discussion and theorisation of their use within cinema, together with other established film theory.

I will examine cases of VFX techniques within cinema that can be used to investigate how their construction and utilisation create invisibility to accommodate and nullify the profilmic elements captured through the camera and aspects of technology. The chapters begin by examining how the work of Georges Méliès, whose films use the concept of invisibility to promote a breakdown of temporal and spatial qualities, become redeployed in certain modern digital effects-based films. Expanding on this, the second chapter explores how theories surrounding realism as espoused through mise-en-scène and the so-called physical “truth” of the captured world can be rearticulated through VFX both optical and digital. Chapter three looks at how breaking down the physical structure of a performer through VFX and motion-capture result in characterisations that produce a sense of ghostliness, where the Bazinian mummification of photographic capture has new existence breathed into it. Finally, chapter four explores how recent developments in effects techniques in creating the Invisible Man act as a reflection of the physical body unbound in a digital world. Here, the digital infrastructure of modern culture, such as the Internet, is used to highlight how a more free-flowing and vivacious body can exist and make use of unseen and non-physical practices to commit nefarious acts, such as hacking. It is these aspects that become reflected in the most recent film iteration of the Invisible Man, Hollow Man (2000).
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