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

**Submitted by Paul Johnson to the University of Exeter
as a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy by Research in English
In October 2011**

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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).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my partner Helen for being my inspiration and rock over the past few years during this adventure/journey. Without her I would not have succeeded in completing the following work. A shout must go out to Prince, the Kings of Leon, Fatboy Slim, The Killers, James Brown, Maxwell, D'Angelo, Erika Badhu, Otis Redding, Miles Davis, Satan Getz, The Beatles, MAW and the countless other musical artists whose music has made writing more pleasurable when it was hard. Mondo thanks to my supervisor Dan North, for his constructive criticism, help and patience, not to mention the book loans. Hello especially to Morwenna Hussey, and the entire post-grad administration department for their help in obtaining "stuff". I'd very much like to thank the kindness of the archivists and staff at the University of London's Harry Price Library of Magical Literature.

Last but not least praise and thanks to Auguste and Louis Lumiére, Georges Méliès, and the countless pioneers of cinema, special and visual effects: Ray Harryhausen, Willis O'Brien, John Dykstra, Denis Muren, Phil Tippett, Joe Johnston, George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, James Cameron, Sam Raimi, Robert Zemeckis, Cooper and Schoedsack, Pixar, Walt Disney and the (often) unsung animators at his company, and of course, H G Wells and the Invisible Man. Without you, your work and your escapades, none of this would have been possible.

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