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Film Studies 380

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Final Reading Response 7: *Jurassic Park* (1993)

Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993) is loud, big and fun, like a thrilling amusement park ride that you find yourself continuing to come back to. I find this particular movie to be quite nostalgic for me, mostly because I remember seeing it on the big screen for the first time on my very first date. Because my girlfriend and I were only 14 at the time her father decided it would be wise to attend the showing along with us, and unfortunately chose to sit directly in the seat behind mine. When people ask me what it was like seeing *Jurassic Park* in the theater, I immediately tell them it was an extremely frightening and constantly thrilling experience, but not for the usual reasons you'd imagine. My attention was not on the movie but rather on my girlfriend's father, his piercing velociraptor-like eyes constantly observing me and my actions, ready to ferociously pounce and attack me if I tried to lay one finger on his daughter.

Watching *Jurassic Park* again in class I realized that the CGI special effects have barely aged and at times looked even more convincing than modern CGI effects. Since CGI was an entire new effect at the time Spielberg was wise to restrain from using so much of it, especially when it wasn't necessarily needed. When creating the effects for *Jurassic Park*, Spielberg meshed various old fashioned practical effects like animatronics for the close-up shots of the dinosaurs alongside the CGI effects for the larger-scale more massive sequences. I believe this approach is mainly due to why the films visual effects continue to feel timeless, even after twenty years. I have always been supportive of the various new technological advancements that

are constantly being experimented within the world of the cinema. The use of every additional tool can be highly beneficial, especially when used appropriately. But like any tool, it can also be misused and abused. Unfortunately it feels today many young filmmakers take for granted the glory of digital technology. Since technological tools and programs being presently used in creating effects are much easier to own and access, it seems that filmmakers tend to lazily incorporate CGI in almost everything, even for a simplistic effect which could be as easily achieved with practical effects like miniature models, puppets or animatronics.

In the article by Julie Turnock titled “The ILM Version: Recent Digital Effects and the Aesthetics of 1970s Cinematography” Julie explains how many of us perceive ‘realistic looking’ special effects in cinema as being ‘perceptual realism,’ and it is anything but that. She states that digital imaging doesn’t try and recreate the illusion of perceptual realism, but it instead creates an aesthetic called ‘photorealism’ which imitates the look of how we view photography. “On closer examination, it is clear that in contemporary special effects, digital imaging does not simply try to imitate a common sense notion of perceptual realism, but instead replicates an accepted aesthetic photorealistically; rather than modeling its look on the ‘real’ or phenomenal world, special effects digital techniques imitate the look of photography” (Turnock 158). This photorealism that spectators have been conditioned to accept as ‘real’ throughout the decades helped expand the special effects departments of the 1970’s, as its technical aesthetics continued to thrive all throughout the early 2000’s and into the new digital era.

This all brings into question the addition of digital effects which gives the camera an ‘ultimate cinematographic realism’ on what the camera can see. “Perceptual realism is a realism that is based on what the eye sees in real life. Cinematographic realism, on the other hand, is a photographic realism: it is based on what the camera sees, not on what the eye sees and implies

the impossible attainment of an ‘ultimate realism’ (Turnock 160). I found it interesting that theorist Tom Gunning argued that digital technology will never be indexical and that photography will always be indexical. He believed how there was an aesthetic distance between the real world and the photographic fixed image (Turnock 159). This immediately made me think of how I felt when watching James Cameron’s *Avatar* (2009) in the theater. Throughout the picture I was never completely convinced that what I was looking at was a perceptual image. The non-indexical digital effects presented an extremely high cinematographic realism, but there was always a feeling of emotional detachment because I subconsciously knew that the photorealistic image was the result of digital imaging fabricated entirely on a computer, and was not a perceptual indexical image, object or person that was historically recorded on a camera lens.