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Films lack of CGI within today's Digital Revolution

Today several contemporary films seem to be continuously cluttered with way too much CGI effects. Lev Manovich had such similar thoughts on the way the new technological media seemed to be heading and his article *"Old Media as New Media: Cinema"* he seems to address those particular issues. "Typically it is argued that the new representations are radically different from the ones made possible by older technologies; that they are superior to the old ones; and that they allow a more direct access to reality" (Manovich, 210). The claims that digital effects are essential in telling new realistic stories that were never possible in the past is something Manovich strongly disagreed with. When looking closer under such scrutiny Manovich believes that this newly popular digital revolution age seems to instead create special effects that strayed away from reality than ever before and rarely ever do they achieve to create a closer illusion and perception to realism.

When taking a historical look at many of the films starting at the silent era and continuing throughout the Golden Age of Hollywood, many large scale epics were created with the use of building extremely extravagant sets, on-set location shooting, and a large scope of hundreds of extras; all without the use of any CGI and digital effects. The films throughout the 80's and 90's also managed to pull off similar special effects simply with the use of practical camera tricks,

animatronics and puppeteering, and I am always astonished at just how timeless and realistic many of the effects still seem to be. I would like to add to Manovich's original argument and also state that most of the memorable and unforgettable commercial films in the history of the cinema usually involve a collaboration of various different visual aesthetics when it comes to making special effects all within the world of technology. Most modern films which seem to rely purely on CGI technology like *Battle Los Angeles* (2011), *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* (2009) and *Wrath of the Titans* (2012) are ultimately forgotten after its original release and inevitably become one of many that vanquish into the endless vessel of forgotten cinematic memory.

For instance when witnessing James Cameron's *Aliens* (1986) again, I am always completely awestruck and taken back at how effective and realistic the special effects are of the several hundreds of alien creatures that appear within the film. *Aliens* was made at a time in which James Cameron did not have the technological accesses to create the effects that he wanted all from a computer. This was several years before he had the tools and the technology that he would brilliantly put to use in his science-fiction classic *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991). And so like all other filmmakers, artists and creative minds before him, Cameron had to learn to work around such limitations and obstacles to create the effects that he wanted while making *Aliens*. Cameron only used six alien suits throughout the entire production and simply edited them together all from different angles, locations and point of view shots to give the illusion that there were in fact hundreds of them. Cameron's greatest technological achievement though seemed to be with his creation of the iconic Queen Alien. Without any use of digital effects Cameron magically achieved to bring the Queen to life with the use of several puppeteers,

cables and mechanical hydraulics; which were all required to operate the Queen's various arm, leg and head movements.

When Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* was released in 1993, filmmakers at this time in history were now able to achieve the digital creation of a real-life dinosaur. *Jurassic Park* immediately became famous for being one of the very first commercial films to dabble with the newly experimental technology of digital, computer and CGI effects. And yet similar to what Cameron achieved with in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, Spielberg used the amount of CGI extremely carefully, only placing such effects in the film when absolutely necessary. For many of the sequences involving the deadly Raptors for instance Spielberg used animatronics and stop motion puppeteering to achieve many of the realistic effects, especially for the close-ups of the dinosaurs. Spielberg wisely only resorted to CGI for most of the extreme long shots or for specific sequences that he knew would have been completely impossible to achieve with just the use of practical effects.

Manovich states in his article that an over-reliance of big budget film-making and digital CGI effects led for many modern filmmakers to have a reality check (Manovich, 212) and director Christopher Nolan seems to be one of them. Nolan stated in several interviews on how he was a large fan of the classic era of moviemaking and when making his superhero crime masterpiece *The Dark Knight*, (2008) he had such aesthetics definitely in mind. Nolan wanted to create the original scope, scale and stunts of a largely constructed Hollywood film and felt it was equally important to use practical effects rather than computer graphics unless there was no other option. "I feel quite strongly the audience can tell the difference between things that are animated and created in the computer and things that are photographed," Nolan stated in an interview. For instance, when creating the sequence of an eighteen-wheeler truck being completely flipped

upside down, Nolan suggested on using a full-size vehicle without the use of any CGI. The only use of digital effects within that sequence was of the removal of the remote-controlled piston the crew placed under the truck to have it perfectly flip over.

And yet Nolan's crew realized that the only real way to effectively pull off the visual look of Harvey Dent's scarred face would be with the use of computer animation. Nolan knew make-up wouldn't be enough to create such a dramatic effect and for him to pull off a frightening and realistic image of bones, muscles and joints, digital animation would be the only solution. The aesthetics of CGI can be an extraordinary tool but like everything else it should be used wisely. If it becomes a simple crutch to easily and lazily create an effect that is needed it can ultimately make the final project feel artificial, cheap and not very effective. This is why specific films throughout the last 30 years like *Aliens* (1986*), Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), *Jurassic Park* (1993) and *The Dark Knight* (2008) are looked at as being timeless and extremely memorable entertainments. George Lucas should have taken the advice of his fellow filmmakers when making the *Star Wars* pre-sequels, because these classic films prove that sometimes less can be more.