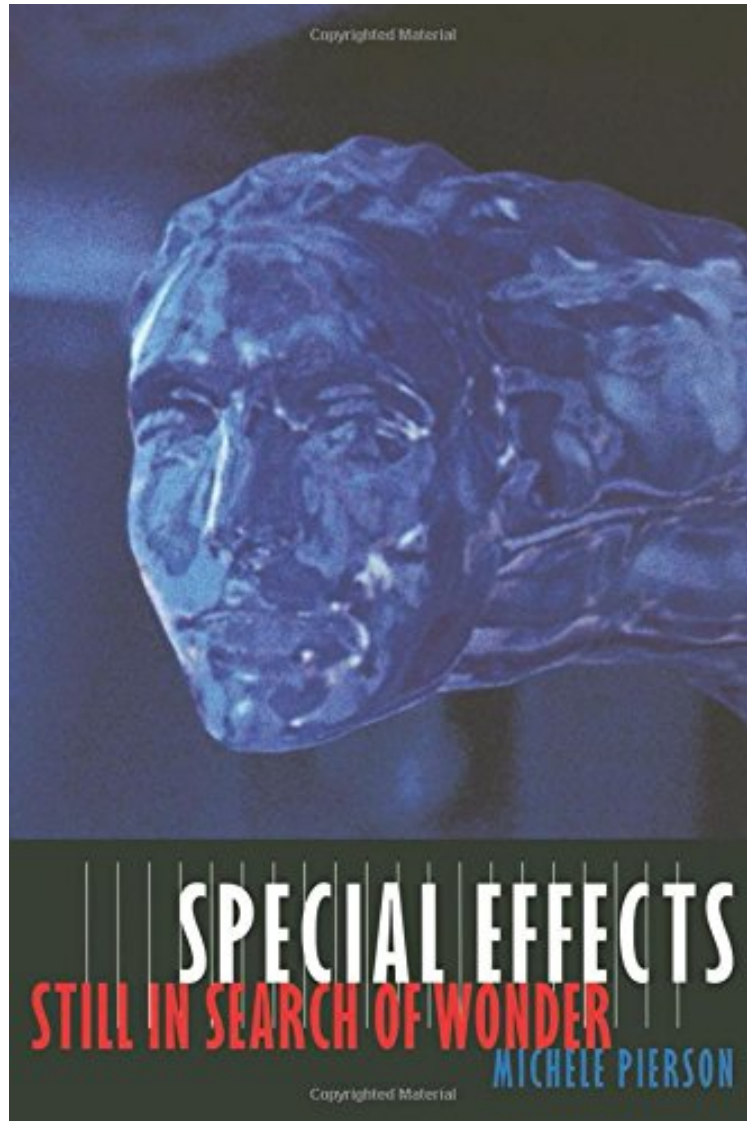


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Special Effects: Still in Search of Wonder

Michele Pierson

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Designed to trick the eye and stimulate the imagination, special effects have changed the way we look at films and the worlds created in them. Computer-generated imagery (CGI), as seen in Hollywood blockbusters like *Star Wars*, *Terminator 2*, *Jurassic Park*, *Independence Day*, *Men in Black*, and *The Matrix*, is just the latest advance in the evolution of special effects. Even as special effects have been marveled at by millions, this is the first investigation of their broader cultural reception. Moving from an exploration of nineteenth-century popular science and magic to the Hollywood science fiction cinema of our time, *Special Effects* examines the history, advancements, and connoisseurship of special effects, asking what makes certain types of cinematic effects special, why this matters, and for whom. Michele Pierson shows how popular science magazines, genre filmzines, and computer lifestyle magazines have articulated an aesthetic criticism of this emerging art form and have helped shape how these hugely popular on-screen technological wonders have been viewed by moviegoers.

It is something of a cliché to think of special effects as 'movie magic,' but Pierson helps us to understand the substance behind that cliché, tracing our current fascination with computer-generated imagery back to discourses about magic and popular science in the late nineteenth century. Much as these earlier magicians helped to excite public interest and shape popular perceptions of emerging technologies, Pierson shows how CGI has become one of the most visible aspects of the digital revolution and how effects-laden films have often sought to examine their own precarious position somewhere between simulation and reality. (Henry Jenkins, Director, Comparative Media Studies Program, MIT author of *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participator*) Intriguing.... This is not a 'nuts and bolts' history of onscreen magic, but a specific analysis of the 'cultural reception' that visual effects have enjoyed throughout the history of cinema. (American Cinematographer) [A] ground-breaking book... Pierson's journey through the history of special effects offers us an important new perspective which has previously been left out of cinema-related academia and formal criticism. (John McGowan-Hartmann *Senses of Cinema*) About the Author Michele Pierson is lecturer in film studies and visual culture at the University of Queensland, Australia.