

CGI (Cheap Gimmick Increase): A Hollywood Epidemic  
By Frederick William Springer III / March 20, 2006

I'm so sick of seeing movies masquerading as technological breakthroughs that, despite their supposed state-of-the-art animation, look blaringly bogus to my eyes. There is a difference between using Computer Generated Images to enhance your film and using CGI because you're too lazy or cheap to do it the old fashioned way. Just because you can, doesn't necessarily mean that you should. And movies today have gotten a little too carried away.

I'd rather the film have limitations and look real than be loaded with fake looking CGI. I'm primarily speaking of characters (as environments and landscapes tend to look realistic, usually only briefly seen from a distance in establishing shots). The biggest example of this trendy offense is the newest "Star Wars" trilogy. I don't think anyone would argue that the original Yoda and Jabba the Hut looked 100 times more realistic as puppets in the original trilogy than their CGI counterparts in the prequels. So did the robots. Speaking of which, there's nothing that makes the trickery more apparent than keeping the main robot characters, C-3PO and R2-D2, real and creating all other robots in post. Throwing in CGI is a cheap shortcut that insults the audience.

"Spider-Man" is one of the very few exceptions to the rule. The teasers (focusing on a CGI Spidey swinging through the city) looked unrealistic but, to my surprise, the movie was actually good. Why? Because the story telling was so skillfully executed that you forgive your suspended belief when the obviously fake computer Spider-Man did his thing. (It also helped immensely that they used a live-action Spidey when feasible--CGI Spidey was sort of a last resort). But when you throw together a lousy story with animated characters mixed in, just for the sake of having them in your film, you get bad results. Case in point--"The Matrix Reloaded" in which an animated Neo fights thousands of equally animated Agent Smiths, leaving viewers wondering when the movie became a cartoon. In "Hulk," another instance of poorly

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implemented animation, the title character never comes across as realistic or even plausible--an "incredible" waste of 2.5 million computer hours and over 150 ILM employees.

So, on behalf of your audience, please refrain from using gratuitous CGI. It is unneeded and far from as cool as you may think it is. If you want to make the next "Toy Story" or add breathtaking scenery in the background of a live-action movie (one of the few things the new "Star Wars" trilogy did do right), that's fine. Otherwise, when in doubt, return to the basics because elements molded and shaped in the real world tend to, more often than not, seem more realistic on screen and, as a result, more awe inspiring to your viewers than the CGI cop out ever will.

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