

Examined by the Light of the Moon: Comparing and Contrasting the Critical and Production Reception of Practical Creature Effects in the Films of Rick Baker

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Abstract

Rick Baker's special effects make-up career lasted from 1971 until 2014. He won seven Academy Awards for Best Make-up and Hairstyling during this period. Baker is undoubtedly a critical figure in practical special effects cinema history due to his role in shaping the cultural perceptions of monstrosity and the makers of monsters. As such, this thesis positions Baker and his special effects as a constant variable throughout a historical examination of broader issues concerning the perception of special effects. This thesis will also seek to examine how, why, and in what way does the discourse surrounding Baker's practical creature effects work change over time.

Special effects studies are a relatively new and much-ignored area of research despite the fertile ground it provides for exploration. As such, this research aims to contribute towards and build on the work of previous special effects scholars while testing their theories of special effects appreciation and connoisseurship in relation to the discussions of Baker and the texts he worked on (Pierson, 2002; North, 2008; Prince, 2012). Using a historical materialist methodology (Staiger, 2000; Klinger, 1994.), this thesis will examine various primary sources from newspapers, genre magazines, and industry-specific publications to explore the types of discussions surrounding each case study and how these affect the perception of the special effects.

This research aims to unpack and interrogate the many factors that affect the perception of special effects and the special effects artists who created them. It also aims to explore the relative visibility of special effects and the effects artists themselves. By placing Baker and his effects centrally in this study, the overriding aim of this research is to allow for the proper examination of the role of special effects in the production of Hollywood Cinema.

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Introduction to Terror

Imagine, if you will, a small west country village in the mid to late 2000s. The full moon rises above the mist-covered fields. Then suddenly, a howl of pain. “Help me! Please! Help me, Jack! I didn’t mean to call you meatloaf, Jack.” Then, a life is changed forever.

I cannot precisely remember when I saw *An American Werewolf in London* (John Landis, 1981). What I can remember, however, is being captivated and horrified as I watched David Kessler (David Naughton) reach out to me in desperation as he changed from a man into a wolf, one bone-crunching, muscle-tearing step at a time. I played that sequence repeatedly, trying to determine how the transformation was done. Maybe David Naughton was a Lycanthrope. If it was a special effect, I needed to know who had done it and how. Then, I saw his name superimposed on the ‘Yorkshire’¹ Moors: ‘Special Make-Up Effects Designed and Created by Rick Baker’.

Despite his name featuring so prominently in the credits and the fact that his special effect takes up the entirety of the 20th anniversary DVD cover,² Rick Baker was a name that, as a burgeoning cinephile, I was unfamiliar with. Despite my ignorance, Baker worked as a professional special effect make-up artist from 1971 until 2014. In that forty-plus year career, he had worked on countless projects, spanning different genres in film and television, from B-movies like *Track of the Moon Beast* (Richard Ashe, 1976) and *Squirm* (Jeff Lieberman, 1976); to blockbusters like *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1979) *Men In Black* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1997) and *Hellboy* (Guillermo del Toro, 2004); as well as ‘prestige’ pictures like *Missing Link* (Carol & David Hughes, 1988), *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (John Korty, 1974) and *Ed Wood* (Tim Burton, 1994). Though he was a practical special effect make-up artist, his career

¹ The opening sequence was actually filmed in Wales on the Black Mountains between Capel-y-ffin and Hay-on-Wye.

² I would be given as a gift in later years.

also saw the birth and establishment of digital visual effects in cinema. Eventually, those very same digital visual effects caused Baker to retire, a victim of changing production practices and the unstable landscape of the film special effects business.

Baker is an interesting case in the world of special effects producers. The special effects that we see on the big screen, in the latest superhero blockbuster or transnational action film, are obvious, visible, and, as some critics would complain, unavoidable.³ However, the people who make them are kept ‘below-the-line’ out of sight for most filmgoers, only known to those fascinated by the construction of on-screen unreality. However, while neither star nor auteur, known in the industry as the ‘Monster Maker’, Baker was the first person to win the Academy Award for Makeup and Hairstyling.⁴ It could also be argued that he has gained a recognisable style and reputation akin to an auteur, although, as will be discussed later this term, similarly does not fit him. This contradiction between the seeming visibility of the effects and the invisibility of those that make them is at the heart of this thesis. Using Rick Baker as a case study, this research seeks to examine how visible he and his special effects are within the production of a film and the perception of special effects and the creators of special effects within the critical discourse of film.

To explore this issue, this research will examine interviews, features, trailers, and other marketing materials used by studios. By analysing these materials, this research hopes to explore the factors that affect how special effects and their creators are looked at and thought of. Furthermore, the length of Baker’s career also allows the researcher to explore how these perceptions may have changed over time. Another factor to consider in constructing this research, affected by Baker’s lengthy career, is that it cannot examine all the films and

³ As I will reveal during the analysis of the case studies.

⁴ There had previously been special achievement awards in 1964 for William J. Tuttle’s *Seven Faces of Dr Lao* (George Pal, 1964) and John Chambers ape make-up in the original *Planet of the Ape*’s film in 1968 directed by Franklin J. Schaffner.

television shows that Baker has worked on. Therefore, a list of case studies has been selected to examine how the perception of special effects may change in response to the historical context. The case studies selected are *King Kong* (John Guillermin, 1976), *An American Werewolf in London*, *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes* (Hugh Hudson, 1984) and *Gorillas in the Mist* (Michael Apted, 1988), *Beauty and the Beast* (Ron Koslow, 1987-1990), *Planet of the Apes* (Tim Burton, 2001) and *The Wolfman* (Joe Johnston, 2010).

There are multiple reasons for selecting these case studies. Firstly, as previously stated, Rick Baker is a highly prolific special effects artist with an oeuvre that covers a wide range of films spanning forty years of film history. Thus, attempting a historical examination of Baker's entire filmography would be beyond the scope of possibility for any thesis. It, therefore, became necessary to create a set of criteria by which to select a corpus that is both wide-ranging and illustrative of the various issues, like aesthetic consistency, visibility and realism, that speak to the visibility of Baker and his special effects work.

Firstly, because this study examines how the perception of special effects changes over time, it is vital to have some stable elements that remain throughout the study. This is why in each of the projects that make up this study, the main make-up effect is either an ape or some kind of man-beast such as a werewolf, or in the case of *Beauty and the Beast*, a cat man.⁵ This not only allows for a level of consistency of image but also for more prominent points of comparison of the technological development between case studies, as the special effects artist blends both art and technology to produce the constituent elements of unreal spectacle. The thesis also centres on an examination of the technological developments between *An American Werewolf in London* and *The Wolfman*, as well as between the previous and later versions of

⁵ Though this reception will be compared to that of *Werewolf* a Fox Television show about werewolves airing between 1987 and 1988.

King Kong and *Planet of the Apes*, as viewed through the prism of critical and promotional discourses surrounding these films.

The following significant criterion for selecting case studies was the need to ensure that the research covered different key points within Baker's career. For instance, *King Kong* was selected because, although not Baker's first project,⁶ it was made at the beginning of the new blockbuster era of the late 1970s, and as such, it represents Baker's first major feature film on which he worked with a big budget and even bigger personalities. As such, it is a film of historical and personal importance in terms of the development of Baker's film career and film special effects as a whole. *An American Werewolf in London* was selected because it is the film in which Baker established his career as a leading special effects artist and for which he won the first Academy Award for special effects in 1981. Therefore, it represents a turning point in Baker's career and the broader history of film special effects. Another case study focuses on Joe Johnson's *The Wolfman*. This remake of the Universal horror film *The Wolf Man* (George Waggner, 1941) was chosen because it is arguably Baker's last film.⁷ Baker's interactions with Computer-Generated Imagery in the production of *The Wolfman* led him to leave the film industry. For this reason, *The Wolfman* can be said to represent the culmination of Baker's career while also serving as a study of the early development of CGI technology in film production and its effect on practical effects artists like Baker.

There are, of course, more individual reasons why each case study was picked, which will be explored in more detail later in this introduction. As we shall see, each case study offers different webs of discourse and factors that affect how Baker and his effects are positioned in critical and promotional reception. *King Kong* is important to study because it acts as an early

⁶ That would be *Octaman* (Harry Essex, 1971), a B-Movie he worked on during his second year of junior college.

⁷ Even though Baker subsequently provided make-up for Angelina Jolie's titular character on *Maleficent* (Robert Stromberg, 2014).

film for Baker and the recent conceptualisation of Hollywood's modern blockbusters. However, it is also a remake of a 1933 film that is viewed by many critics as a classic of special effects in cinema. Meanwhile, through examinations of *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes*, and *Gorillas in the Mist*, this thesis will explore the place of special effects outside of the fantasy genres, as well as the philosophical implications of 'invisible' special effects. In the case study of *Beauty and the Beast*, this thesis will also examine special effects and special effects artists in television production and the interactions between a star, the special effects make-up artist, and television audiences. *Planet of the Apes* allows for a temporal comparison in Baker's career in blockbuster cinema spanning the 1970s to the 2000s. Finally, *The Wolfman* allows for an examination of the effect that computer imaging technology has had on the position of special effects within the promotional and reception discourses. Before discussing these in detail, we will first attempt to explore and define the academic discourses that surround special effects in historical film studies.

Hybrid Monster: Issues of Film History and Special Effects

Before engaging with the issues raised by each case study in relation to Rick Baker and his special effects, it is essential to lay the groundwork for how other academics have approached special effects. Special effects, as an area of academic study, is vibrant and complex, although it is still relatively new. However, in the past twenty years, several academics have been exploring the field, including Michele Pierson, Bob Rehak (2015; 2018), Michael S. Duffy (2015), Dan North (2008; 2015), Stephen Prince (1996; 2012), Lisa Bode (2015; 2018), Julie A Turnock (2015) and Scott Bukuatman (1993; 2003).

As noted by North, Rehak and Duffy, the study of special effects is an amorphous field and one that is 'paradoxically slippery and perpetually in prismatic flux' that to study 'in a scholarly context means first choosing how we should define the concept' (2015, p. 1). They

conclude that the subject of the study determines the definition of the term special effects. While their definition is exciting and thought-provoking, their conclusion is ultimately unsatisfying. When discussing special effects with special effects scholars it becomes readily apparent that each has their own specific definition of what special effects are, depending on the techniques or period they focus on. As Stephen Prince argues:

[I]t makes little sense to write or talk about ‘special effects’ in contemporary film. Except in a limited sense, the era of special effects is over. The industry continues to use the term, but it now designates mechanical and practical effects, such as explosions or stunts involving car wrecks. Everything else is known as visual effects.

(2012, p. 3)

This statement feels premature. As this thesis argues, the age of special effects is far from over, as the current spate of superhero movies and action blockbusters that dominate the box office illustrates. Not only do they rely on the visual effects that Stephen Prince writes about, but the films also use make-up, mechanical and practical effects Prince seems to delineate, delegitimise and denigrate that go on to help build and populate the worlds in which our heroes live.

Rather than dismissing special effects as an anachronistic term, this thesis argues that the term is more general, comprising a wide range of techniques that a filmmaker uses to bring the imagined to the screen. As North et al. argue:

[T]his perceived erasure of boundaries between techniques surely attracts scholarship because it gives the impression that studying ‘the digital’ or ‘digitality’ can provide an essential understanding of all effects processes. This erasure also brings special-effects studies cosily inside the remit of postmodernist concerns with film’s simulationist abilities.

(2015, p. 2)

Prince ultimately narrows down what special effects are by dismissing practical effects in favour of the postmodern desire to examine digital effects. Similarly, his study ignores the specificity of labour used to bring those special effects to the screen and how those practitioners

and the effects they make are perceived. After all, the digital effects Prince discusses exist in a completely different industrial and critical context to practical effects. There may be overlap, as both are subcategories of special effects. However, this thesis argues that as special effects are a slippery, broad category, the act of defining terms needs to be able to specify the subset of effects that the scholar is exploring.

In this regard, this thesis' area of focus centres on special effects make-up. These effects are practical, meaning they are filmed in front of the camera. They combine engineering, material science, and make-up practices to transform actors into animals of this world and creatures separate from it. However, it remains an underexamined area of special effects. Lisa Bode's chapter 'Fleshing It Out: Prosthetic Make-up Effects, Motion Capture and the Perception of Performance' (2015) explores the relationship between performance and effects.⁸ It takes a good deal of time to understand modern digital performance capture technology through the development of practical equivalents like make-up and prosthetics. However, there is a lack of focus on the labour that goes into making the effects, which this thesis aims to rectify. Looking at the perception of the labour and labourer regarding special effects as a more comprehensive examination of this overlooked aspect of practical film production is an important endeavour.

Another feature of academic discussions of special effects, as Julia A. Turnock observes in her book *Plastic Reality: Special Effects, Technology, and the Emergence of the 1970's Blockbuster Aesthetics*, is the tendency to 'deploy effects as a *topos* to examine another topic, such as wonder, historicity, magic, fantasy, and sensation in the cinema' (2015, p. 5). Indeed, Turnock argues that 'special effects particularly have been instrumental in the historical emergence in the 1970s of more intensively manipulated styles of filmmaking that have led to

⁸ Mainly how it is viewed as something to be fought against or suffered through, narratives that will appear later on in chapters four and five.

the ability to create indefinitely expandable environments' (p. 5). Turnock sees special effects as a core part of film history. She argues that effects are so significant that they shape film history and aesthetics around themselves, especially when considering certain kinds of films like blockbusters. Thus, the effect deserves specific attention outside of the more philosophical discussions of realism and performance, as practised by North et al.

The reception of practical special effects remains a neglected area of special effects history. While there are examinations of the art of make-up, like Thomas Morawetz's 2001 book *Making Faces Playing Go: Identity and the Art of Transformational Makeup*, these are catalogues of process and history rather than examining the reception of these effects. It, therefore, becomes essential to discuss the perception of these kinds of special effects as they relate to the broader aspects of film consumption and reception. While North et al. examine how the digital effects can affect performance, film industry and filmic reality, it is similarly important to also discuss the impact of practical make-up effects, combining as they do engineering, material science, and make-up practices to transform actors into animals of this world and creatures separate from it. However, this remains an underexamined area of special effects.

Similarly, the period during which Baker was practising, between the 1970s and early 1990s, is a period that special effects scholarship tends to neglect. Pierson's history of special effects in *Special Effects: Still in Search of Wonder*, for instance, jumps from the stop-motion sword and sandal films of the 1960s to the birth of digital effects. This is also true of Dan North's *Performing Illusions: Cinema, Special Effects and the Virtual Actor*. Admittedly, that is because he focuses on the digital unreality and wonder of visual effects. Nevertheless, in most academic studies, there seems to be a rush from Méliès to ILM, in a linear, technologically focused narrative, to move from jump cuts to computer-generated dinosaurs. As a result, there are gaps in the history of film special effects that are ripe for exploration and analysis. Those

areas that speak to issues of production cultures, genre, performance, realism and failure are of particular interest. Through exploring Rick Baker's practical make-up effects and how various factors have affected their perception, this research hopes to initiate further examination of other kinds of effects, whether digital, mechanical, or practical, as well as their creators.

It should also be noted that the history of special effects is remarkably closely tied to the history of film and film technology. As Paul Grainge, Mark Jancovich and Sharon Monteith argue, 'the history of motion-pictures is not easily defined by a single invention or inaugural event' (2012, p. 3). The birth of cinema as a technological apparatus and art form was not immaculate or linear. Indeed, there was a convergence of many different people and technologies that allowed the production of motion pictures. It could be argued that the Lumiere's were the founders of *cinema*, as their Cinématographe birthed modern film exhibition. However, their camera/projector was one of many pieces of technology that 'was met with widespread fascination' at the various fairs, theatres, pleasure peers and roadside attractions where these new technologies were being displayed (p. 5).

Indeed, Tom Gunning's seminal essay 'The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde' speaks to a different way to conceptualise this early cinema. Gunning defines 'The Cinema of Attractions' plainly as cinema's 'ability to *show* something' (2006, p. 382). He points out that 'cinema itself was an attraction' (p. 383). As Gunning recounts:

[T]he cinema of attractions directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle – a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself. The attraction to be displayed may also be of a cinematic nature, such as the early close-ups just described, or trick films in which a cinematic manipulation (slow motion, reverse motion, substitution, multiple exposure) provides the film's novelty.

(p. 384)

Rather than narrative cinema, where the film attempts to create realism through editing and scripting, 'The Cinema of Attractions' is voyeuristic and exhibitionist. The act of showing is also essential; whether a phantom ride, a travel documentary, or a George Méliès fantasy, the new and the novel images act as central to the film's attraction. However, technology itself was just as vital to the cinema of attractions as the film itself. As Gunning states, 'early audiences went to exhibitions to see machines demonstrated (the newest technological wonder, following in the wake of such widely exhibited machines and marvels as X-rays or, earlier, the phonograph) rather than to view films' (p. 383). For Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attractions' is akin to a roller coaster or a fairground ride; it is the act of seeing and experiencing something new or spectacular, whether it be the content of the moving picture or the technology used to project it, that is key.

This is not the first special effect study to use a historical reception materialist study. Indeed, Michele Pierson's *Special Effects: Still in Search of Wonder* (2002) has informed this research as a fertile example of exploring the perception of special effects. Her work examines the 'intense fascination, curiosity, and scrutiny' of computer-generated imagery within the critical discourses in magazines like *Cinefantastique* (2002, p. 3). This comes as a direct response to John Brosnan's *Movie Magic: The Story of Special Effects*, a more informal interview-driven examination of special effects up until the year of the book's publication in 1974.

Pierson argues that 'many different types of writing about special effects [...] regularly reach into the popular archives for firsthand accounts of the business, technology, and the craft of special effects production' (p. 2). However, she argues that publications like *American Cinematographer* and *Popular Science Monthly*, as well as *Wired*, were 'often consulted but rarely made the objects of analysis themselves, these magazines [...] played a role in the social formation of cultures of special effects connoisseurship, appreciation and fandom that has gone

largely unexamined' (2002, p. 2). Pierson uses these publications to explore how communities of special effects fans engage with the thing they love. One of the aims of this thesis is to use similar publications to examine how the special effects and Rick Baker are perceived in the critical reception of the films they appear in and work on and how visible the special effects and special effects artist are in relation to broader discussions that take place within the reception.

This also points to another gap that this thesis seeks to fill: identifying the connection between special effects and the special effects artist. In this regard, this thesis turns to a variety of books on the production history of special effects and the work of special effects practitioners, all of them providing useful histories behind the making of films and special effects.⁹ While these production histories provide an interesting counterpoint to the history presented by the marketing and other pre-release materials, they are not rigorous critical analyses of the productions. Instead, they are popular works aimed at fans and special effects connoisseurs that mediate history through the various personal perspectives of their subjects and contributors.

While the aim of writing this thesis is, in part, to outline a history of the special effects artist, it is also intended to be an examination of the visibility (or otherwise) of special effects and their creators. While there are some popular writers (such as Brosnan, Rinzler and Palmer) who privilege special effects practitioners and their work, they are few and far between. For example, Paul M. Jensen's *The Men Who Made the Monsters* has three of the five chapters on directors (James Whale, Terence Fisher and Freddie Francis), and only two special effects artists (Willis O'Brien and Ray Harryhausen) are mentioned, but they are stop-motion

⁹ See Rick Baker's biography, *Metamorphosis* released in 2019 and written by J.W. Rinzler, (Indeed, *Metamorphosis* grants this thesis a great deal insight into Baker's own thoughts about his position in the productions he worked on.) John Brosnan's *Movie Magic: The Story of Special Effects in the Cinema*, Randy Palmer's *Paul Blaisdell, Monster Maker: A Biography of the B Movie Makeup and Special Effects Artist*, and Tom Weaver's *Interviews with B Science Fiction and Horror Movie Makers*.

animators. I would argue that this approach limits both the definition of those who make monsters and the processes involved in creating special effects. Similarly, Tom Weaver only includes an interview with one special effect make-up artist in his book *Interviews with B Science Fiction and Horror Movie Makers*, Harry Thomas. While these books provide a unique insight into how the special effects artists view themselves, they do not address the crucial aspects of how the artists are viewed regarding wider practices and the broader film press.

One key question might be, why focus on Rick Baker as a case study for this research? Baker has been selected because he is pivotal in special effects production. In his own story, he was inspired by the monster movies he saw as a child ‘eyes glued to the TV set, Rick saw for the first time actor Boris Karloff in his seminal roles as the Monster’ (Rinzler, 2019a, p. 14). He also became the protege of Bob Burns, an actor and make-up artist best known as Tracy the Gorilla in *The Ghost Busters* (1975). However, he is also more than a ‘B Movie’ special effects producer; his fame and work have spread beyond that of cult films made by cult figures within the range of fantasy genres. His very name and reputation are used to market a film.¹⁰ He also operates as the next link in the chain of special effects artists, from Jack Pierce, Bob Burns and Stan Winston, as well as other special effects artists like O’Brien, and Harryhausen. As Michele Pierson observes, ‘it was not only fans who frequently imagined fandom to be preparation for a career in animation; animators’ own accounts of their careers tended to confirm this view’ (2002 p. 69). While Pierson is here referring to the stop motion magazine *Photon*,¹¹ this statement could also be said of other publications like *Cinefantastique* or *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, of which Baker was an avid reader. Indeed, if we view Baker as one figure within a more extensive history, it makes him a key figure worthy of examination and one link in a chain of special effects producers. He is also a figure who was inspired by

¹⁰ As will be seen in his later work on *Planet of the Apes* and *The Wolfman*.

¹¹ Debuting in 1963, *Photon* was ‘a self-published zine address[ing] a culture of special effects fandom long before the first prozines appeared in the late sixties and early seventies’ (Pierson, 2001, p. 57).

other influential special effects practitioners and, in turn, inspires present and future special effects artists. Through an exploration of the work of Baker as a case study, this thesis also aims to develop a new mode of engaging with and researching those more marginal figures within film history to produce different perspectives on film history and film reception.

Below The Horizon: Rick Baker, Labour and Visibility

Compared to other below-the-line special effects technicians, Rick Baker, due to his high profile working on key genre films like *Star Wars*, *An American Werewolf in London*, *Planet of the Apes*, and *Men in Black* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1997), is perhaps one of the most visible ones. Aside from the numerous Oscar and BAFTA awards, Baker was also awarded a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, alongside the famous and influential of Hollywood. He is only one of four make-up artists to have been given such an honour: The Westmores, Max Factor and John Chambers. So, by that measure alone, Baker is a star in the Hollywood industry. However, is that really true? Is Baker actually a star? Moreover, should that label be given to a special effect make-up artist like him?

Before assessing whether it is appropriate to call Baker a Star, we must first define what a star is, both historically and industrially. According to Martin Barker in *Contemporary Hollywood Stardom* ‘stardom was not “invented” in the mythological fashion that some early historians liked to tell it [instead] star processes antedate cinema in theatre, sport and travelling shows – and of course these were among the formative influences on cinema itself’ (2003, p. 3). Indeed, as Richard deCordova argues, the star as a term and concept can be seen as a development of acting, on stage and screen, as well as something he dubs the ‘picture personality’ given to leading actors who are specifically known for their work in film (1990, p. 52). However, what separates a star from an actor or a ‘picture personality’? According to deCordova:

[T]he star emerged out of a marked expansion of the type of knowledge that could be produced about the player [...] [W]ith the emergence of the star, the question of the player's existence outside his or her work in film became the primary focus of discourse.

(1990, p. 98)

For deCordova, the level of public knowledge separates a film actor from a star. This information is presented in film press, newspaper articles, gossip columns and fan magazines. It would cover elements such as lifestyle advice, relationships, diet, and fashion, all of which would combine to construct an image of the star outside the picture. Indeed, Adrienne L. McLean's article "'Give Them a Good Breakfast, Says Nancy Carroll': Fan Magazine Advice Across Time" deals directly with 'the fan magazine as a locus of advice and service' (2019, p. 12). She examines details such as a star's favourite foods and hobbies and how to replicate them.

As a central part of this research, I will explore magazines as vital sources of information and for their importance to film researchers. It is here essential to remember that these magazines were not consumed passively. Indeed, as Tamar Jeffers McDonald and Lies Lackman point out, 'although the fan magazine was produced for, and not by, fans, these fans were not merely passive consumers: the magazines also heavily encouraged interactive readership, and for this reason, they often created competitions, and from their very inception, published and sometimes responded to letters from fans' (2019, p. 2). Thus, the fans intently consumed the identities of the stars presented within the magazines' pages and followed specific stars. It must also be noted that although these magazines presented a number of the stars within the domestic sphere and as 'generous friends' (McLean, 2019, p. 28), there were, of course, large elements of artifice, abstraction and commodification.

This ties in with Richard Dyer's discussions on the philosophical nature of the star image. He argues, 'stars are images in media texts, and as such are products of Hollywood (or

wherever)’ and thus are a kind of commodified object with value to studios (1998, p. 10). The mythic event that is said to herald the start of the star system is

usually taken to be Carl Laemmle’s action of planting a story in the St Louis Post-Despatch to the effect that Florence Lawrence, up to then known as the “Biograph Girl”, had been killed by a trolley car in St Louis, and following it a day later with an advertisement in the trade press denouncing the story as a vicious lie.

(Dyer, 1998, p. 9)¹²

Dyer here continues the theme of stars as both a constructed and consumable image. Later, in *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, he argues:

[T]he market function of stars is only one aspect of their economic importance. They are also a property on the strength of whose name money can be raised for a film; they are an asset to the person (the star him/herself), studio and agent who controls them; they are a significant part of the cost of a film. Above all, they are part of the labour that produces film as a commodity that can be sold for profit in the marketplace.

(2003, p. 5)

The star is an image that is highly economical and tied to capital. Dyer places the star in industrial terms by arguing that not only does the star’s presence allow certain movies to be made, but studios may be more likely to spend money to make the production if the star’s name can be used to market the product, but that this value is also generated by labour, specifically screen performance, but labour nonetheless.

It should be plain that Baker is not a star. He is not an actor, and though he does appear in fan magazines, the interviews and pieces mainly concern his work in film and television rather than his personal life. However, this separation of Baker and stardom is perhaps muddled somewhat when one considers that the use of stars is similar to the use of special effects film narrative. As Paul McDonald argues, ‘stars [...] are distinguished from this general ensemble – that is, the general spectacle of actors – for they are *spectacular* figures’ (2013, p. 185). There

¹² The date of the fake death was reported on the 19th of February.

is undoubtedly something spectacular about these larger-than-life figures. As Dyer argues, the star and their

success myth tries to orchestrate several contradictory elements: that ordinariness is the hallmark of the star; that the system rewards talent and ‘specialness’; that luck, ‘breaks’, which may happen to anyone typify the career of the star; and that hard work and professionalism are necessary for stardom.

(1998, p. 42)

The star is both one of us and larger than life and idealised, something to aspire to be. Their image and presented life are dished up to an eager audience to consume. Similarly, they are incredibly visible, much like the special effects used to market action and genre films. While it may seem like they are two separate film elements, stars and special effects do affect each other.

In a piece he wrote for *Red Herring* in 1998, Barker directly addresses the idea of special effects as ‘stars’. Quoting Jonathan Burke, he writes:

As the success of many such smartly marketed blockbuster shows, special effects can replace the traditional cornerstones of Hollywood films: Star Wars proved that a special effects film with no stars could still win big at the box office, and Independence Day proved that neither stars nor a story were essential.

(pp.80-81)

Following a quick survey of several notable special effects writers, Barker argues that none of them ‘addresses how star systems may be affected by the rising emphasis on special effects’ (2003, p. 9). He then calls for an examination and questions the relationship between stars and special effects. While this question deals with the classical understanding of stars such as Angelina Jolie, this level of examination of the relationship between stars and special effects is perhaps most interesting for this thesis. While this thesis does not examine Barker’s question, ‘how do the requirements of effects shape stars’ performances, and the nature of their on-screen presence?’ (p. 9), even though it presents an interesting relationship between the actor and the effect that other academics like North have sought to ask. This thesis will also ask how the

focus on special effects within the film and the proximity to stars in special effects make-up affect the visibility of the artist designing and applying said makeup. While Baker is not a star according to the definition provided by deCordova, for the most part, he does not exist much outside of his work, the creatures he makes and models onto the actors, like the titular American Werewolf and the various *Star Wars* cantina customers, in some ways are.

As a special effects practitioner, Baker is someone who works below-the-line. To better explore this term, this chapter will draw on the work of John T. Caldwell. Caldwell uses the definition of below-the-line from Wikipedia to illustrate a misconception regarding the general understanding of below-the-line filmmakers. The description reads, ‘individuals considered below-the-line do not have any official influence on the creative direction of the film except at the discretion of the director’ (Caldwell, 2013a, p. 350). Indeed, as Caldwell states, if below-the-line workers are asked about their contribution, they will say, ‘their main goal is to “serve” the overall story in any way the story demands’ (p. 349). This is the stereotypical relationship between the ‘art’ versus ‘craft’ binary that appears to exist within discussions of film production (p. 350). By this definition, Rick Baker would be merely ‘serving’ the director without any creative or reputational power within the production. However, as Baker’s career progresses, as will be shown, his name is raised above the line and is, for example, privileged in the pre-release discussions of films as a signifier of the high quality of the special effects. So, while Baker is not a star, he has significant status within the film industry and among fans. Would this, then, signal his status as that of auteur?

While proponents of auteur theory would argue that great films are the product of a singular voice, usually that of the director, could this theory of authorship apply to a below-the-line worker like Baker? The traditional concept of the auteur is challenged by Gray and Johnson, who argue: ‘[If] we understand how that world of wonder and magic works, the author is often positioned as the figure we must capture and study. Why wouldn’t we want to know

not only who the magician is, but also how his or her tricks are performed?’ (2013, p. 3) This speaks to how cinephiles collect information about those films made by their favourite filmmakers. More than that, this quest to discover ‘how his or her tricks are performed’ is like how special effects fans collect knowledge about movie effects to understand them. This kind of information is supplied in the reviews, articles and interviews with those who make the effects, and, as we shall see, fan and genre magazines also engage in that very same discussion of how special effects are made.

While auteur theory has a long and complicated academic history, from a commercial point of view, the most crucial element is how it relates to the industrial uses of auteurs as a form of marketing. Steve Neale argues in his essay and his essay ‘Art Cinema as Institution’ that the concept of the auteur ‘concretise[d]’ art cinema into a singular institutional space (1981. 15). For Neale, the auteur’s name ‘function[ed] as a “Brand Name”, a means of labelling and selling a film and of orienting expectations and channelling meanings and pleasure in the absence of generic boundaries and categories’ (1981, p. 36). John Caughie develops this further by claiming that any ‘attempt to move beyond *auteurism* has to recognise also the fascination of the figure of the *auteur*, and the way this is used for the cinephile’s pleasure’ (1981, p. 15). This point will be developed further later in this thesis. However, for now, it is necessary to recognise that the name of the ‘auteur’ produces not only textual meaning but also another sense of meaning for those invested in the film. Similarly, Timothy Corrigan argues convincingly that the concept of the modern auteur is ‘a *commercial* strategy for organising audience reception, as a critical concept bound to distribution and marketing aims that identif[ies] and address[es] the potential cult status of an auteur’ (1991, p. 103). Through extra-textual information that comes from promotional material and interviews, Corrigan makes the bold statement that ‘in today’s commerce we want to know what our authors and auteurs look like or how they act; it is the text that may now be dead’ (1990, p. 49). For Corrigan, the auteur

acts as the star attraction for an audience, whose presence attaches expectations and meaning to the film. Thus like the star, the director is similarly used as a site of marketing and attraction by studios to entice audiences to the film.

So then is Baker an auteur? I would argue that he is not. So why use the term at all? Discussions of auteurism and stardom can offer practical theoretical frameworks by which to explore the pattern of visibility and commercialisation that occurs both within the star and the auteur image within the industrial discussions of those that make films, as well as the relatively limited focus of the various kinds of labour that these terms present. While Baker is not considered an actor (although he has cameoed in several films such as *Men in Black* and Peter Jackson's *King Kong*), and he is not a director (thus excluding him from every circle in Andrew Sarris' outdated and problematic three circles, apart from maybe the technician), he is a below-the-line worker, invisible for the most part. Nevertheless, his work is remarkably visible. Furthermore, as his career progresses, his name is used as a site of marketing and a locus of attraction in part because of what he produces and in part due to his reputation. Baker is a mark of quality in special effects, specifically as it relates to werewolves and apes, and he has gained a reputation because of that.

So, then, *what* is Baker? How do we classify his work and his role within the film industry? Ultimately, it would require more research and study of figures like Baker to settle on a new mode of describing them. Although the terms star and auteur may not apply to him, there are certain elements that Baker, as a special effects producer, has in common with both. While below-the-line producers should not be viewed as minor stars or auteurs, in terms of their contribution to filmmaking, they can be said to hold equal value for those academics who choose to examine their careers. While not an auteur or a star, Baker is a 'name'. As a recognisable and, at times, visible figure within the film industry, his name holds a certain level of cache. For these reasons, this thesis shall refer to Baker as 'a name'; a term that could also

be used to describe other special effects contemporaries of bakers, such as Rob Bottin and Tom Savini.

Sculpting the Structure of the Thesis

***King Kong* (John Guillermin, 1976): Building a ‘Badfilm’**

Chapter One will explore the 1976 version of *King Kong* produced by Dino De Laurentiis and directed by John Guillermin. While not Rick Baker’s first film, *King Kong* (hereafter referred to as *KKII*), offers several significant narratives that have affected the perception of the special effects that will be taken forward through the other chapters.

Firstly, *KKII* is a remake of a highly influential film in terms of special effects. This chapter will draw on the work of Constantine Verevis (2006) to better understand the discourses and issues surrounding film remakes. Specifically, it will examine critics’ reactions to remakes. How do critics compare films to previous versions? What do remakes need to add to an original text? How is different language used if the remake is considered worse than the original? This will not only be restricted to the narrative of *KKII*, however. When dealing with special effects and technological development, how can our understanding of film remakes help us understand the reception of the special effects within a remake?

Due to *KKII*’s time of release, 1976, as well as its status as a highly technical film with a rather sizeable animatronic ape, it is perhaps well-placed to be called part of the modern blockbuster cycle; a cycle that began with films like *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975) and was later codified by *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1979). This chapter will then draw from various works on blockbusters, including Julian Stringer’s edited collection *Movie Blockbusters* (2003), including Thomas Schatz’s (2003) ‘The New Hollywood’ section, specifically in terms of the sense of largeness surrounding the film’s marketing and its colossal budget. It will also draw on Kevin S. Sandler and Gaylyn Studlar’s edited collection *Titanic: Anatomy of a*

Blockbuster (1999) to explore the interactions of art, technology and commerce common to the movie blockbuster. Furthermore, Sheldon Hall and Stephen Neale's historical examination of the blockbuster in *Epics, Spectacles and Blockbusters: A Hollywood History* (2010) offers up further context for the development of the Hollywood blockbuster, relating to the time *KKII* was released and made. *KKII* also provides a case study through which to explore how special effects are positioned within the development of the blockbuster format. Meanwhile, due to Kong's spectacular nature, both as a large animatronic and Baker's 'suit-mation', the argument will also take cues from Geoff King, whose exploration of narrative and spectacle allows for understanding how spectacle is used to market films and how audiences respond to it, even if that spectacle fails, as is generally perceived to have been the case with *KKII*.

While in critical terms, *KKII* is still considered to be a failure, it cannot be described as a 'badfilm' in the way that J. Hoberman defines it, wherein 'it is possible for a movie to succeed because it has failed' (1980, p. 7). It is vital to draw on the work of the likes of Ian Q. Hunter (2019), who argues that 'merely stating that a film is bad is to risk insensitivity to or incuriosity about the contexts of its manufacture and reception' (2019, p. 679). It also behoves those critics who explore failure as a topic to ask why something is considered flawed. The issues raised during the discussions of trash cinema, such as intention and marketing, can provide exciting insights into a film's production and the filmmakers' failures to achieve their intention. It can also provide valuable insight into the film's reception.

Ultimately, *KKII*'s failure did not change how blockbusters were made; indeed, it can be seen that it tried and failed to replicate the model set by *Jaws*, the one that *Star Wars* would dominate for nearly 50 years. Similarly, it does not seem to have impacted on how special effects are produced. This chapter begins to consider how failure or quality can be brought in to consider special effects. As Hunter concludes:

The pedagogic value of *Jaws: The Revenge* is that its production of absolute failure offers a good case-study, paradoxically, of industrial logic. All the more relevant in an era of remakes and franchises, the shabbiness and desperation of the whole wretched enterprise is instructive about Hollywood as an exploitative repetition machine.

(2019, p. 689)

While the production of *KKII* suffered, the film was not economically a failure. It was nominated for Best Cinematography and Best Sound, and it won the Special Achievement Award for Best Visual Effects at the 1976 Academy Awards. Industrially, it should have been a success. Yet, De Laurentiis's failure to deliver on his promise of a life-sized Kong had tarnished its critical reputation. No wonder critics were disappointed and vented that disappointment in their by-lines.¹³ This is the main criticism levelled against the film and where most of the negative perception originates.

Finally, the failure of *KKII* in the eyes of critics is partly because of the special effects. To examine this further, it is necessary to draw on the work of special effects scholars such as Dan North (2008) and Michele Pierson (2002). Both provide the theoretical basis for discourses of appreciation and connoisseurship within the discussion of special effects. However, they do not discuss the quality of those special effects. By taking how Pierson and North connect special effects with magic shows of the 1800s and chart a wonder and fascination with new technology and novelty, this thesis hopes to examine how those notions are applied to special effects considered not to work. Furthermore, the research explores how critics create a hierarchy of remakes, how that corresponds precisely to the discussion of special effects and how critics place specific techniques higher than others within their own hierarchy.

Looking at the many threads within *KKII* and placing it within the legacy that Kong has built since 1933 allows for a more comprehensive understanding of why critics dismiss the

¹³ These will be explored in the chapter itself but to provide an example, Vincent Canby titled his review of the film for the *New York Times* 'King Kong Bigger, not Better' (which I borrowed for the title of the chapter) (1976, p. 16).

film. Furthermore, using Rick Baker and the film's special effects as the specific angle for the analysis will help to tackle a part of film production that is not discussed in production histories outside of issues of trash cinema. Similarly, this more historical approach allows us to chart Baker's invisibility or over-visibility within the contemporary production narratives and the stories told later. Baker's later interviews and comments cast him in a heroic light and provide critical insights into the ability of below-the-line workers to transition into above-the-line workers or even challenge this binary after his name was established due to the following case study.

An American Werewolf in London (John Landis, 1981): The Two Wolves

Chapter Two moves forward five years to look at the film that many readers may be familiar with, *An American Werewolf in London* (John Landis, 1981) (hereafter referred to as *American Werewolf*). Like Cynthia Erb's 2009 analysis of the original *King Kong*'s (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1933) marketing campaign, this study seeks to use a synchronic study of the marketing of *American Werewolf* to jump into a broader discussion. Erb's work acts as a springboard into her discussions of the changing meaning of the character of *King Kong* to different parts of American audiences. This analysis will also serve as a way of assessing how other film elements affect how special effects are discussed and perceived. Much like Nicolas Godfrey, this thesis attempts to demonstrate how the 'initial period of critical reception plays an important role in determining whether or not a film may achieve canonical longevity beyond its commercial theatrical release' (2018, p. 2). As *American Werewolf* has garnered longevity of sorts, so it is crucial to analyse the production and critical discourse surrounding the film at the time of its release to see the initial impression that critics had of the film. Then, it will chart fluctuations in this impression and ask what theoretical concerns can be seen to affect the shape as it changes.

However, when discussing issues of legacy and responsibility, we must first consider the concept of authorship. While it is an unfashionable way for academics to approach film studies, the idea of singular authors behind a film still holds tremendous sway in critical reception and marketing. Jonathan Gray and Derek Johnson (2013) argue that the term author is two-fold, that an author 'is a node through which discourses of beauty, truth, meaning, and value must travel, while also being a node through which money, power, labour, and the control of culture must travel' (2013, p. 4). While it was helpful for early film studies to define a director as an author to separate cinema from other art forms, it is also important to remember that the term has been co-opted in the more commercial aspects of the film industry. This is vital to remember during the analysis of the critical and production reception of *American Werewolf* as it seems to rely on the name of John Landis as the film's director and writer. Furthermore, both Neale and Corrigan imply that the uses of the auteur have become commercialised; they are brands that sell films to an audience based on expectations generated by the auteur's name. John Landis is perceived as a comedy director. His previous films, *Kentucky Fried Movie* (1977), *National Lampoon's Animal House* (1978) and *The Blues Brothers* (1980), created a recognisable brand of high-energy comedy. When audiences see Landis' name attached to a new film, they associate this product with this brand. However, does *American Werewolf*, a horror film, sit with conflicting expectations, and how does this affect the perception of the special effects?

Conversely, is it possible to apply the theories of authorship to a below-the-line worker? Regarding Rick Baker as a below-the-line special effects artist, it also becomes necessary to unpack this term and its relationship to the concept of film labour, as laid out by John T. Caldwell. Furthermore, in their assessment of film authorship and its relationship to film fans, Gray and Johnson refer to the collection of information provided by film fans. This information is supplied in the reviews, articles and interviews with those who made the effects. This

gathering and sharing of information or re-examining of works echoes the focus of Barbara Klinger's *Melodrama and Meaning* (1994), in which she explores how the work of Douglas Sirk was reconsidered and canonised in classical Hollywood cinema after it had been maligned for belonging to a genre that was considered to be a lower status than others. Baker's reputation has similarly changed. His position within film production as a special effects star (because of his work on this movie) also retroactively affected how he was seen in previous films, despite his status as a below-the-line worker.

This chapter wishes to challenge the binary and hierarchy within the discussion of film producers, separating the supposed 'artists' from 'craftspersons'. By debating who was responsible for *American Werewolf's* legacy and reputation (Landis or Baker), this thesis also seeks to re-centre Baker and his other below-the-line workers and acknowledge that they, too, inform film aesthetics. While this chapter does not seek to answer the question of who has more of a sway over *American Werewolf's* reputation, it seeks to make space to explore similar questions in other productions.

Springing out of this is a discussion of *American Werewolf's* genre. Much like how a singular director can signal certain expectations of a film, so can genre. The nature of *American Werewolf's* genre is complex, and based on the time the film is being discussed, it can change. Billed both as a horror and as a comedy,¹⁴ what is interesting is that as the genre changes, so too divides responsibility between Landis and Baker, with critics attributing the comedic elements to Landis, his script and his direction, and discussing the special effects as an element of horror.¹⁵ In examining how critics discuss genre, this chapter will draw on the work of Steve Neale (2000, 2002) and Rick Altman (1999). Central to this is the question of how a film's genre would affect how Baker and his special effects are justified and discussed. Despite their

¹⁴ Considered to be genres that are diametrically opposed to each other.

¹⁵ Even if the reviews do not use Baker's name at the time of the film's release.

historical connection to the birth of cinema, special effects are often associated with fantastical genres.¹⁶ A film's genre can also affect how special effects are viewed and considered within its production and reception discourses.¹⁷ Again, the aim is not to answer the question of American Werewolf's genre, as genre studies have moved beyond categorising and ascribing genre markers to individual films. However, it is also necessary to examine how genre affects how special effects are discussed.

Ultimately, this thesis aims to assess Baker's position and the effects of his physical make-up on historical reception and production discourses. As Julie Turnock argues in *Plastic Reality: Special Effects, Technology, and the Emergence of 1970's Blockbuster Aesthetics*:

[E]ffects make-up and other physical effects will not be thoroughly covered [as] I do not believe they played as important a role circa 1977-1982 as they did later on the 1980s. I hope to remedy that gap in future work by focusing on other historical eras.

(2015, p. 13)

American Werewolf represents a turning point for both Baker and special effects (specifically make-up effects), not least because this film created the Best Make-up Academy Award. It also set Baker on the path of special effects 'stardom', impacting his future projects and reputation (as we will see in other chapters, especially chapter six, discussing *The Wolfman*). In regards to this chapter and the others, through engaging in the discussions surrounding the films, this thesis can create a more holistic understanding of what elements of a film impact the discussion of Baker and his special effects. His visibility within the discussion of the film also represents a contrast with his invisibility the next section of this thesis will explore.

***Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes* (Hugh Hudson, 1984) and *Gorillas in the Mist* (Michael Apted, 1988): Cannot See the Apes for the Suits**

¹⁶ Fantasy, science fiction and horror.

¹⁷ We will see this again in Chapter 3 looking at *Gorillas in the Mist* and *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes*.

The first two chapters focus on the obviousness of their effects and the position of special effects artists in creating this visible spectacle. However, chapter three looks at the invisible spectacle of Rick Baker's apes in both *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes* (Hugh Hudson, 1984) (hereafter *Greystoke*) and *Gorillas in the Mist* (Michael Apted, 1988). Baker made ape suits for both films, yet his effects, the artifice and spectacle they provided were minimised and made invisible. As something that should usually be visible and attract attention, how do critics and film producers approach this invisible spectacle?

As this chapter deals a lot with what is seen and what is not, it will draw on the theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968; 2012) and Michel Foucault (2003). In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault discusses many different gazes, including the observing gaze and clinical gaze (2003, p. 131-132). Similarly, Geraint D'Arcy states that there are 'two levels of visibility: the optical—that which is physically able to be seen; and the perceptual—that which we look at and acknowledge' (2017, p. 183). This maps onto Foucault's observing and clinical gazes. While D'Arcy sees two gazes, this chapter argues that there are three levels of gaze concerning special effects. First, the observing gaze, similar to D'Arcy's optical gaze, is the essential act of seeing. Second is the noticing gaze, where the effect is noticed but not understood. Then, finally, there is the perceiving gaze, which synthesises the act of seeing with the act of understanding the nature of the effect.

This similarly maps to Michele Pierson's understanding of special effects fans as connoisseurs growing to understand the technical minutia of the effects (2002, p. 42-43). These are guided by the consumption of paratexts, such as behind-the-scenes documentaries, interviews, articles and how-to-guides provided by studios, industry insiders and film critics. While a fan's knowledge is guided somewhat by the cultural gatekeepers providing talking points, these approaches nevertheless still rely on the visibility of effects, such as the werewolf transformation in *American Werewolf*, and the animatronic in *KKII*. As Baker's effects were

rendered invisible in these two films by the producers, how do the film critics reviewing these movies react to the unnoticed artifice and relate to the tiers of gazes?

Despite the more complicated theoretical ties of the visible and invisible related to special effects, many critics focus on the easily perceived effects that stand at the centre of a film's attraction to audiences. However, these are not the only types of special effects used in filmmaking. As Dan North, Bob Rehak and Michael S. Duffy ask, 'what of "invisible" special effects that hide their manipulations, working quietly in the background to stitch together an apparently seamless screen reality?' (2015, p. 1) North et al, along with others like Prince, discuss how the digital alterations of a filmic image challenge our understanding of indexicality and reality (p. 2). Prince, however, challenges this assumption, arguing that we should do away with the dichotomy of realism and fantasy if we are fully able to understand visual effects within the cinema (2012, p. 3). In this digital visual effects age, techniques such as colour grading, adding film texture or removing roads, along with other non-diegetic elements, can be viewed as 'invisible' effects that are meant to smooth over the artifice inherent in films' creation. So, then the question becomes, if special effects are designed to be unseen, then how are they discussed?

The inclusion of invisible digital manipulation of filmic images in itself breaks the definition of 'special' effect, designed as they are to be ignored and unobtrusive, so allowing for the wider artifice to be accepted. Prince and North, Rehak and Duffy both state that special effects are a core part of filmmaking and film history (Prince, 2012, pp. 2-3;). North et al argue that the term special effects itself lacks specificity (2015, p. 1), while Pierce suggests that visual effects are the core of creating cinematic realism despite their inherent unreality (2012, p. 2). This inability to separate special effects from other filmic techniques is partly due to a core text

in the study of filmic special effects, Christian Metz's 1977 article '*Trucage*¹⁸ and the Film'. Metz is quick to disassociate *trucage* from the more technical 'special effects'; he interestingly concludes that 'cinema in its entirety is, in a sense, a vast *truce*' (1977, p. 670). Ultimately, for Metz, the film's ability to trick audiences into believing the verisimilitude of a film's diegesis through optical illusions makes it a massive invisible special effect.

This broad definition of what a special effect is (or can be) is continued by Bob Rehak, who argues that special effects are 'discursive constructs' as well as industrial ones (2018, p. 8). He concludes that how we use special effects presents arbitrary categories that leave certain things within and outside the taxonomy. For Rehak, the term special effects is flexible and changes depending on the academic or the critic that uses it (p. 8). For this thesis, Rick Baker's practical make-up effects, as the type of special effects it will examine, would imply a particularly narrow field within a broader understanding of a technical part of filmmaking. However, this thesis takes Metz's stance that cinema is a special effect due to film's history as a technological attraction used in magic tricks. This then expands on what a special effect is. Nevertheless, in the critical reception of a film's spectacle, there is always a delineation between the actuality and the manufactured reality of a film.

In his discussion of *trucage*, Metz also invokes the spectre of 'realism' and the real by acknowledging how, through editing, disparate film segments are forged into one cohesive narrative. For many, cinematic realism springs from the theories of Andre Bazin and objective realism. In *What is Cinema?* (2005) Bazin sees the development of art moving toward the accurate representation of reality, likening the 'plastic arts' to 'the practice of embalming the dead' (p. 9). Due to its mechanical, chemical and physical production process, Bazin argues,

¹⁸ In the translator notes, Françoise Meltzer mentions that the translation of *trucage* typically means "trick photography" in the singular and "special effects" in the plural' (1977, p. 657).

film has the luxury of objectivity. Roland Barthes takes this one step further, arguing that when you:

show your photographs to someone – he will immediately show you his: ‘look this is my brother; this is me as a child’ etc.; the Photograph is never anything but an antiphon of ‘Look’, ‘See’, ‘Here it is’; it points a finger at certain vis-à-vis, and cannot escape this pure deictic language, This is why, insofar as it is illicit to speak of a photograph, it seemed to be just as improbable to speak of *the Photograph* [...]

(2000, p. 5)

Here we return to the act of seeing, noticing and perceiving, visibility and invisibility. For Barthes, the photograph is invisible, subsumed into what the photograph is of. In the age of special effects, is what is presented real? Can it be trusted? How do the effects engage with this filmic reality? Are they actual images of apes, or are they actors in suits?

Prince’s (1996: 2012) discussion of ‘perceptual realism’ becomes essential for answering the last question. Prince defines ‘perceptual realism’ as the goal of a digital effects artist. Digital effects are ethereal. The effects then are designed to interact with the world in realistic ways that fit with the established physical rules of the film’s world to be perceived as real. Dan North argues that “‘perceptual realism’ breaks from conventional discussions of filmic realism, which have tended to focus on the camera’s ability to capture life as it is, as opposed to its capacity to make the unreal seem actual’ (2008, p. 21). As Prince himself argues:

Digital tools give filmmakers an unprecedented ability to replicate and emphasise these cues [meaning physical interactions with the real world like weather, environment and light – my comments] as a means for anchoring the scene in perceptual reality that the viewer will find credible because it follows the same observable laws of physics as the world s/he inhabits.

(2012, p. 32)

This blending of the real and artificial defines ‘perceptual realism’. It aims to trick the audience into believing that something digitally composited into a frame exists in the world enough for it to be indexically captured. It is paradoxically both present and not present. This visual doublethink is still here as the unique effect does not aim for the complete replication of an

object or creature but makes that replication solid enough to be perceived as real. While Baker's effects are practical rather than digital, these theories can still be applied to his work in these films as his apes interact with a world so realistically that others can sometimes not tell they are watching actors in make-up.

However, are there any other examples of invisible effects worthy of consideration, especially those overlooked in the predigital era? How might a term like invisible effects apply to visual media? *Greystoke* and *Gorillas in the Mist* stand at an exciting intersection of these questions, as they both contain examples of invisible effects through the ape suits provided by Rick Baker. However, both deal with these issues in vastly different ways; one tries to redirect responsibility for Baker's special effects, while the other tries to deny his existence entirely. This becomes vital to look at as it reveals issues of stardom and discusses the validity of certain film labour within film production. How do the invisibility of these special effects and Baker's rising name status mesh together within the critical reception? Can special effects truly be invisible due to Baker's fame or critic's knowledge of film production?

***Beauty and the Beast* (Ron Koslow, 1987-1990): Taming the Lion**

Rather than another case study of a specific film, Chapter Four examines how special effects operate within the television show *Beauty and the Beast* (1987-1990). This allows for exploring new production and reception contexts and how Baker produces effects. Similarly, *Beauty and the Beast* provides a new spectacle apart from the apparent vistas of a giant ape scaling the World Trade Centre. Instead, the show provides a more emotional, immediate or affective spectacle by presenting a fantastical lion-man hybrid in the New York sewers. This chapter asks what level of perceived importance Rick Baker was given in creating *Beauty and the Beast's* Vincent's effective spectacle.

However, it is also essential to ask if there is a different way to approach special effects in television. Furthermore, how does Baker fit within this new approach? Stacey Abbott argues that 'scant work [...] exists exploring the technological development of TV special effects, its role within a changing broadcast industry and contribution to television storytelling' (2013, p. vii). She adds:

[B]udgets for television production are generally much smaller than for film and required to stretch further, particularly in long-running serial narratives. Furthermore, the speed with which television is often produced and the quality of broadcast on the small screen with poor resolutions appeared to preclude the production of sophisticated effects.

(pp. vii-viii)

Abbott observes that budgets, seriality, production speed, and exhibition method affect the positioning of television special effects. Despite this, they represent a space of technological improvement, spectacle and special effects. Bob Rehak points out that television offers another site for technological development and appreciation due to recording and other 'playback technologies that would later allow [audiences] to collect, scrutinize and deconstruct the show's stylistic canon' (Rehak, 2018, p. 38). Similarly, if we look at the modern growth of fantasy television franchises, we can see that special effects are not limited to the silver screen. This is a context that Baker finds himself entering when asked to design the romantic lead for a network drama.

As Baker's career progressed, so did his standing in the film industry, which meant he could employ and rely on other craftspeople to help cast, mould and sculpt the creatures he designed. This chapter argues that Baker sits on both sides of production culture: a below-the-line technician and an above-the-line artist. This is clear when one looks at John Thornton Caldwell's thorough categorisation of the type of production stories surrounding Baker. Earlier in his career, Baker tells what Caldwell describes as 'War Stories' or 'Against-All-Odds' (2008, p. 38.) However, as he grows in stature, Baker is able to tell stories that also fit into Caldwell's

‘Genesis Myths’ or ‘Paths-Not-Taken parables’ (p. 38), which above-the-line workers usually tell. These narratives are also associated with the establishment of ‘professional legitimacy and accumulation of career capital’ (p. 38). Within television production, much like in a film, Baker is considered to be ‘the face’ of special effects. However, others work under him, doing the critical work of application and repair when he is elsewhere.

This collaborative nature of production in fantasy television is evident in Rehak’s examination of special effects and franchise building within *Star Trek*. Designing a franchise ‘required the contributions of many artists and craftspeople to construct a diegesis whose scope ranged from vessels and hardware to uniforms and hairstyles’ (2018, p. 34). This is, in turn, affected by the seriality of television, which affects not only narrative but also production. Baker and his effects are required over a more extended period; in the case of *Beauty and the Beast*, three years. However, as an employer, he cannot work on one project for that long and must rely on employees and his crew to engage in the crafting of this fantasy series.

Defining what affective spectacle means and how it relates to Vincent and Rick Baker is also important. Rehak argues that ‘special effects worked either invisibly to suture viewers into diegetic and dramatic spaces, or visibly create screen events that could not have been attained without the intervention of a technologized “magic”’ (2018, p. 16). However, Angela Ndaljian writes in *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* that the special effects in *Star Wars* through ‘their spatial orientation and their depiction of objects in space [...] produces a neo-baroque relationship between spectator and image’ (2004, p. 189). Rehak takes this as a new method of understanding special effects and the spectacle they bring to an audience. However, he only explores this concerning how these build ‘shared worlds, reminding texts and generating authorship, moving as circulatory agents and building characters and performances that expand transmedially’ (2018, p. 19). This thesis argues that Vincent in *Beauty and the Beast* fits into this different understanding of spectacle. The spectacle he

produces transcends and overrides the technical appreciation for Baker's craftsmanship to create a more personal relationship to the effect than one mediated through technical recognition.

This section will also draw on Alexia Smit's 'tele-affectivity' (2013) to further expand on the term affective spectacle. While Smit uses this term to explore the gruesome viscera present in police procedurals and medical dramas, the nature of her exploration of the deconstructed body is still vital to understanding the constructed body of Vincent. Smit is 'more interested in what the arousal, intimacy and excess of the explicitly revealed body means in terms of the branding of contemporary television' (Smit, 2013, p. 93). For Smit, then, viewing a special effect is more experiential than visual. She continues, 'the technologically mediated gaze into the body in these programmes seems to encourage not just a visual encounter with the images that it presents, but also a potentially overwhelming embodied engagement with the suggestive sounds and textures of television's fleshy, onscreen worlds' (p. 93). Through the exploration and examination of Vincent as a locus of affective spectacle, the critical discourses that surround how he is received focus on more than just the visual but also on the way he sounds, behaves, and acts, despite how Baker designed it, which marks his work as a site of affective spectacle.

Smit adds one further point when discussing affective spectacle: intimacy and proximity. Television can create an incredibly intimate relationship with a viewer as seen in private spaces. As Smit points out, 'this intimate style was understood in terms of the perceived limitations of television that steered television style "away from films space-expanding possibilities"' (2013, p. 95). Furthermore, Misha Kavka argues that:

[B]y bringing things spatially, temporally and emotionally close, television offers to remove the viewing subject – not in the sense of informative distancing, but precisely through its opposite, a collapse of distance and time through the production of affective proximity.

(2008, p. 7)

The fact that television is within the private sphere, being brought directly to the viewer, means that Vincent's proximity to the viewer creates an emotional personal relationship with him and his arousing affective spectacle. *Beauty and the Beast*, a show that predominantly appealed to women, constructed a new mode of engagement with the special effects beyond that of knowledge collection. However, in this direct address, is there also space for Baker and his team as the designer and make-up artists partially responsible for this affective spectacle?

***Planet of the Apes* (Tim Burton, 2001): Same Typewriters, Different Monkeys**

Chapter Five, which examines Tim Burton's 2001 version of *Planet of the Apes*, returns to old themes. As a blockbuster seeking to remake a piece of genre film history, this chapter appears to cover similar issues to *KKII at first glance*. However, due to a shift in Rick Baker's career and Hollywood history, *Planet of the Apes* offers new perspectives and angles on these themes of remakes and how they are affected by discussions of the visuals of auteurism, blockbuster film culture, and spectacle.

Much like the earlier chapter on *KKII*, this chapter examines the nature of remakes as they relate to special effects. According to Constantine Verevis (and based on the narrative circulated by the producers) '*Planet of the Apes* is not a remake but a "reimagining" of Schaffner's film (and Pierre Boulle's novel)' (2006, p. 10). While a lot of the promotion and critical reception is focused on the inclusion of star director Tim Burton and how he has 'reimagined' the franchise, this thesis will focus on how this relates to Rick Baker and the film's special effects. As such, this chapter will borrow ideas from auteur theory, including Grant's argument that these directors 'make aspects of texts their own, overwriting them with their own traceable signatures, perhaps reconfiguring them by incorporating references to other intertexts' (2002, p. 58), and seeing how these apply to Baker and his effects. This is interesting because while the narrative from producers distanced them from the idea of a film remake,

Baker's effects sought to place the film as part of a natural continuity from the original films, using the same techniques only with new technology. However, much like *KKII*, when an effect is so central to the film, these understandings of remakes and the need for novelty are increased tenfold. So then, how do Baker and his effects fit within these same discussions? Can we think of his Apes as original?

Around this time, the age of the blockbuster in Hollywood was well and truly established. It had been since *Jaws* and *Star Wars* codified the modern understanding of the blockbuster and restructured the economic machines of Hollywood. As Thomas Schatz observes:

We might see the New Hollywood as producing three different classes of movie: the calculated blockbuster designed with the multimedia marketplace and franchise status in mind, the mainstream A-class star vehicle with sleeper-hit potential, and the low-cost independent feature targeted for a specific market and with little chance of anything more than 'cult film' status.

(2003, p. 41)

Schatz argues that these categories are not static and that films and directors can move between them. As a cult auteur, Burton flits between these spaces. Whether it is a blockbuster or independent feature, he retains his singular style and subject matter. However, Gillian Roberts points out a new category of Hollywood blockbusters: that of the awards darlings. In her analysis of *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997), she argues that due to its success at the Academy Awards, it 'managed to distinguish itself from the "brainlessness" of other action films to claim "artistic legitimacy"' (2003, p. 164). Roberts argues that taste and hierarchies are at play within the modern state of late twentieth and early twenty-first-century cinema. This separates blockbusters, with all their special effects-driven spectacle (that Baker and other special effects practitioners provide), as lesser than unoriginal and tired. However, those that do are repurposed into something else, changed into something 'better', and legitimised as smart or sophisticated, based on the critic's value judgements.

Due to *Planet of the Apes's* visual nature, its blockbuster status, and the apparent use of special effects, its critical reception is underpinned by a hierarchical understanding of visual aesthetics, delegitimising them for apparently dominating a film's narrative.¹⁹ This seems to echo elements of King's examination of the myths of how spectacle dominates narrative, where he states that:

These films still tell reasonably coherent stories, even if they may sometimes be looser and less well integrated than some classical models. This is one dimension of narrative that needs to be considered: the forward-moving development of plot. More central to my argument, contemporary spectaculars also continue to manifest the kinds of underlying thematic oppositions and reconciliations associated with a broadly 'structuralist' analysis of narrative. This dimension has been largely ignored by those who identify, celebrate or more often bemoan a weakening plot or character development in many spectacular films.

(2009, p. 2)

King also argues that 'narrative and spectacle can work together in a variety of changing relationships and there is no single, all-embracing answer to the question of how the two are related' (p. 2). He also succinctly points to and challenges the myth of how spectacle and narrative conflict within film aesthetics. However, this hierarchical dismissal of spectacle or aesthetics over narrative is evident within the reception of *Planet of the Apes*. This springs from what Yvonne Tasker argues is the way 'academic film criticism has often placed an inordinate emphasis on the operations of narrative, hence the significance given to the moment of narrative resolution as a way to decode the politics of a given text' (1993, p. 9). As Baker is a provider of artifice and spectacle, while his work is to be praised, it will still not be considered as important as the philosophical or ideological underpinnings of a film's narrative. The relationship between *Planet of the Apes*, remakes, spectacle and special effects is essential to

¹⁹ With Larry Tetewski claiming in a 2001 issue of *Cinefantastique* that the film was 'a triumph of summer cinema, at least in certain select categories' (2001, p. 61).

an examination of how critics discuss the remake of *Planet of the Apes*, along with its relationship to special effects, political satire and visual aesthetic.

However, much like the chapter on *King Kong*, it is important to ask how this relates to the special effects. What does this mean for Rick Baker? Is Baker similarly treated as an auteur; a star special effects designer? What kind of technological updates are taking place within *Planet of the Apes*? How are the apes in *Planet of the Apes* remade? What is the response to this update/departure/continuation of effect?

***The Wolfman* (Joe Johnston, 2010): Special Effects Transformation**

Chapter Six acts as a conclusion to Rick Baker's career. Though Baker's last film as a make-up artist was technically *Maleficent* (Robert Stromberg, 2014), *The Wolfman* demonstrates the changing position that Baker and practical make-up effects had within the film industry. While *The Wolfman* is a remake of a Universal 1941 *The Wolf Man* (George Waggner), it allows this thesis to look specifically at digital effects and their impact on practical effects and film production culture, specifically within the above-the-line and below-the-line dichotomy. This chapter asks, how much does using digital effects change the understandings and perceptions of Rick Baker's practical make-up effects? As this chapter deals directly with digital effects, it is important to ask this question in the context of the history of digital effects in film production. Though it was not the first film to contain digital images, when *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) was released, and audiences first bore witness to the tropic landscapes populated with extinct beasts, it 'heralded a revolution in movies as profound as the coming of sound in 1927' according to Tom Shone (2004, p. 213). Similarly, Prince argues that the producers of *Jurassic Park* 'demonstrated their dramatic and economic potential [of CGI] more vividly than any previous film' (2012, p. 25). Pierson points out that through clever marketing, the use of digital visual effects was positioned as a core part of the film's appeal

(2002, p. 120). However, Oliver Gaycken (2015) shows this was a great deception; *Jurassic Park* only had 50 VFX shots. This did not seem to matter, as *the film* and its digital dinosaurs raked in around a billion dollars worldwide as Hollywood looked on with digital dollar signs in its eyes. The industry saw that with CGI, special effects could be produced cheaply and quickly while still leading to significant box office returns. This deeply impacted Baker's career and position within the film industry. Despite his longevity and star power, he was still subject to the industrial changes within Hollywood, as seen in the production history of *The Wolfman*. As the industry looked to CGI for cost-cutting measures, the film press and audiences reacted to this new technology differently. As Prince observes:

[M]uch of the writing on the transition from analogue to digital imaging has sounded an anxious tone, posing crises of form and function and meaning. By eroding the indexical basis of photography (in its photo-chemical mode), digital images are said to undermine the reality status of cinematic images, rendering viewers doubtful about the credibility of all cinematic images. As a result, some observers report a techno-nostalgia for the older analogue forms. Apparent in the use of digital elements to emulate such photographic features as motion blur, grain, and the response curves characteristic of particular film stocks.

(2012, p. 4)

Prince also argues that the change from analogue to digital effects is ultimately a visual or aesthetic continuum (p. 4). This challenges Pierson's assertions that special effects fans read specific publications to learn about and marvel at this new technology. Similarly, by reviewing the evidence provided in the critical reception of *The Wolfman*'s special effects, this thesis argues that there is an interruption or a rejection of new technology which challenges the ideas of technological novelty that Pierson puts forward (2002, p. 156). In this regard, Baker makes a fascinating figure to study. According to Pierson, his effects should have been left behind despite Baker's industrial reputation as the focus moved to new technological development. However, in the light of Prince's assertion of a critical techno-nostalgia, as a producer of 'older analogue forms' Baker should be placed centrally in discussions of *The Wolfman*'s effects. So then, how should critics respond to him and his new werewolf transformation?

Lisa Bode, in her 2018 article “‘It’s a Fake’: Early and Late Incredulous Viewers, Trick Effects, and CGI’ provides an excellent theoretical basis to build a framework of how film critics receive, understand and perceive digital effects. Bode concludes that the new modes of exhibition in the 2010s and the proliferation of the internet have affected how viewers engage with ‘dubious’ images. An exciting feature of Bode’s criticism is her historical comparison of the reception of digital effects of the early twenty-first century with the trick effects of the 1910s and the 1920s, whereby ‘production companies used the spectre of a public that could “no longer be fooled by low-grade pictures”²⁰ in their advertising to persuade exhibitors to rent their films’ (p. 4). This positions audiences as knowledgeable and connoisseurs of special effects, able to delegitimise bad special effects and legitimise the good, investing more power in film critics and others who guide audience discussions. There is an assertion of taste positioned in the General Film Company’s statement, which leads to the question of what constitutes low-grade pictures and, more relevantly, what constitutes low-grade special effects.

As Bode argues, the ‘2010s gives the possibility of rowdy communal viewing at home, which, unlike the hushed dark of the cinema, allows for the vocalisation of incredulity and ridicule’ (p. 16). Similarly, Miriam Hansen argues that these complaints show ‘that the classical principle by which reception is controlled by the film as an integral product and commodity is weakened by the social proliferation of film consumption in institutionally less regulated viewing situations’ (1993, p. 198). The change in how films are being received and discussed, brought about by this ‘rowdy’ viewing practice, allows for more critical discussions centred on quality. Is there a similar rowdiness when explicitly looking at Baker's effects in *The Wolfman*?

Bode concludes that the culture of criticism speaks to ‘a pleasure of detection – gleeful participation in the puncturing of expensive illusion - but it is also about performative

²⁰ Here referencing a General Film Company advertisement posted in the October 1913 issue of *Variety* (p. 28).

demonstration of one's own knowledge and the honing of perceptual skills' (2018, p. 17). This game of knowledge can be seen within the critical reception of *The Wolfman*, with critics discussing how they can see through the cheap, rubbery digital effects, legitimising or delegitimising art, as Klinger discusses in her assessment of historical reception studies. More than that, it speaks to the games of cultural capital within special effects audiences and film critics, using knowledge to prove positions of superiority. Baker stands out as a focus for these kinds of discussions, as a star of sorts within special effects production with a reputation for high-quality werewolf make-up. Would his effects, as practical, be considered easy to puncture? Would they be delegitimised because of that?

Ultimately, while this thesis is about Rick Baker and his special effects, it is also a study of trickery and visibility in film. Each section deals with this in some way. Chapter One concerns the failure to deliver on production promises and the invisibility of specific special effects. Chapter Two deals with Baker breaking through the divide between the invisible below-the-line and visible above-the-line filmmakers. Chapter Three deals with the reception of invisible effects. In Chapter Four, Baker is not only overly visible for his contribution to a television show, but his effects are seen in a new way to create a new mode of spectacle. Chapter Five deals with the hierarchies, placing the film's visual elements at a lower level than the narrative elements. Finally, Chapter Six deals again with Baker's visibility and the trickery and ever-changing film industry, pushing out and re-examining its labourers. Each of these chapters, while dealing specifically with films that Baker worked on, can also speak to more general discussions of special effects and special effects practitioners in the broader sense. By centring Baker and his special effects in the discussions of film production and reception, this thesis hopes to cast more light on and closely examine this often-invisible group of filmmakers to add to our understanding of how they are perceived.

Method to the Madness: Issues of Reception, Promotion, Primary Sources and the Perception of Special Effects

Voices from the Past: Historical Materialist Reception Studies and Special Effects

To fully explore the perception of Rick Baker and his practical special effects make-up within the critical and production discourses surrounding the case studies chosen for this research, this thesis will take the form of a historical materialist reception study. By looking at the materials that appeared in various film presses, I aim to chart how different publications position Baker and his effects concerning their discussions of the films and television shows they appear in. While this is not the first historical materialist study to focus on special effects, it is still important to ask, what is a historical materialist reception study? How is one done? Moreover, how does this methodological approach relate to this type of research?

As a Historical Materialist study, I have taken a great deal of inspiration from the idea of New Cinema History. James Chapman, Mark Clancy and Sue Harper distinguish this from what they call 'old film history'. According to Chapman, Clancy and Harper, 'there were two paradigms within the old or traditional film history: one focused on the history of film as an art form, the other on the idea of film as a reflection or mirror of society' (2007, p. 2). The nature of 'old' film history then focused on the text as the primary source of the historians' research, containing meanings meant for uncovering and exploration. However, according to Chapman et al, new film history has three major features. Firstly, it involves a 'greater attention to the cultural dynamics of film production and an awareness of the extent to which the style and content of films are determined by the context of production' (p.6). As they put it, there is a methodological complexity which includes 'historical analysis of films from the moment of their production to the moment(s) of their reception' (p. 6). This neatly ties into the 'central importance of primary sources' (p. 7). In this respect, Chapman et al compare the historian to

‘an archaeologist who unearths new sources and materials, especially those which have been previously disregarded or overlooked’ (p.7). This includes press material, marketing, and critical reception, which is the focus of this study. Rather than aiming to investigate the perception of Baker’s special effects through, for example, constructing this research around interviews with Baker and those he worked with, the primary focus of this thesis is an analysis of the marketing and critical receptions surrounding his films. However, this study is also informed by several studies addressing the historical, biographical and technical aspects of being a special effects person. For instance, the work of John Brosnan, who, during the beginning of Baker’s career, interviewed special effects practitioners about their worries and ‘status within the industry’ provides valuable historical context (1974. p. 12). The work of Tom Weaver (1988), Richard Rickitt (2000: 2006), Norman Cabrera (2019), Paul M. Jensen (1996) and Thomas Morawetz (2006) have also informed this thesis. Morawertz’s *Making Faces Playing God: Identity and the Art of Transformational Makeup*, an illustrated analysis of technique in cinematic make-up effects that delves into Rick Baker’s projects a little, provides useful in-depth information on Baker’s practice. Similarly, Tom Weaver and Brosnan, who interview special effects practitioners and those who worked with them, reveal personal histories and insider knowledge, not only of special effects techniques but of the practitioners and their views on the industry they operate within. Indeed, in the concluding chapter of *Movie Magic*, Brosnan picks up on the anxieties of the changing special effects landscape at the beginning of the 1970s, discussing economic issues within Hollywood and Britain, charting how this leads to studios getting rid of their own special effects departments in favour of precarious freelance workers; a world that Baker would be entering at the start of his career (1974, pp. 250-252). These books and accounts provide useful historical, industrial, and technological context for understanding special effects. However, these can only provide the producers’ perspective on special effects; I argue that it is also important to understand how

special effects and special effect practitioners are perceived outside of the industrial context by those who consume these spectacular images.

This investigation of the perception of special effects will instead centre on an analysis of the marketing of films (like trailers and posters) and their critical reception. In this regard, this thesis will examine the marketing materials studios used to sell their films to audiences by drawing attention to the various names and attractions a film had to offer. It will also examine contemporary reviews by film critics and how they functioned as guided discussions to steer audiences to think in specific ways about a film.

Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery, significant theorists in the conceptualisations of ‘New Film History’, argue

[A] study of the critical discourse on the cinema at a particular point in film history is valuable to the film historian in that, like advertising discourse, it tends to establish the critical vocabulary and frames reference used not only by reviewers but by film audiences as well.

(1985, p. 90)

They continue, ‘critical discourse on the cinema has had an ‘agenda-setting’ function in aesthetic film history; that is, it has not told audiences what to think so much as it has told them what to think *about*’ (p. 90). While not providing an exact response from the film spectator as an audience study would, through a study of film reviews, it is possible to chart how a review would influence audience perceptions of a film. This idea is perhaps most important in this study, where the discourses around special effects are created, maintained and cultivated by the promotional and marketing material from studios and the responses from the film press.

As Allen and Gomery observe

[C]ritical discourse also helps the historian to establish the normative limits of the dominant style of cinema at a given point in the past. These limits are exposed when critics are confronted with a film that is “different”, that doesn’t fit neatly into the customary frames of references.

(1985, p. 90)

While critical reception provides a set of discourses surrounding a film made meaningful by producers and reviewers, here is also an element of taste present within them. This is particularly apparent when a film does not align with the dominant mode of cinema either in terms of genre or target audience. This idea is taken up by Barbara Klinger, who claims:

The critic distinguished legitimate from illegitimate art and proper from improper modes of aesthetic appropriation. As the epigraph suggests, it also often secures a class position far from the vulgar crowd in the process. As examples of such arbitrations of taste, film reviews do more than provide information about how a particular film was received. They also offer some insight into broader cultural attitudes toward art and the public during given historical periods.

(1994, p. 70)

This narrative of taste within critical discourse is central when considering special effects, genre and spectacle.

While Pierson's work is a vital influence for the structure and aims of the research, another major inspiration on the methodology behind approaching the perception of special effects in critical discourse is Janet Staiger, who argues that:

[R]eception studies is not textual interpretation. Instead, it seeks to understand textual interpretations as they are produced historically. [...] Another way of putting it is that reception studies tries to explain an event (the interpretation of a film), while textual studies is working toward elucidating an object (the film).

(1992 p. 9)

This theme is continued by Mark Jancovich, who claims 'meaning never resides in the text itself, but is rather produced through the encounter between texts and readers, and on the basis of the knowledges, expectations and dispositions which specific readers bring to that encounter' (2001, p. 2). For Staiger, these interactions between audiences reveal the 'cognitive and affective activities of spectators in relation to the event of interpretation. A historical materialist approach acknowledges modes of address and exhibition, but also establishes the

identities and interpretative strategies and tactics brought by spectators to the cinema' (2000, p. 23). Similarly, Staiger argues that the method also 'combines contemporary critical and cultural studies to understand why distinct interpretative and affective experiences circulate historical in specific social formations' (p. 163). Understanding this encounter between text and audience is at the heart of the analysis of the perception of Rick Baker and his special effects within this thesis. For this research, the aim is not to examine the mechanics of a make-up effect or the meaning behind certain design choices; rather it attempts to explore how the historical context behind the reception of a certain kind of effect changed how it was seen, and similarly, how visible the person that made the effect was. A historical materialist reception study allows for an exploration of these issues. It also allows for a consideration of the contexts in which a critic might be discussing and guiding the perception of Rick Baker's special effects, so answering the core question of how and in what ways the perception of Baker changes over time.

In *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*, Staiger lays out how to formulate and execute a historical materialist study. However, she identifies two interesting factors. Firstly, Staiger argues that an 'object [of study] is an event, not a text: that is, it is a set of interpretations or affective experiences produced by individuals from an encounter with a text or set of texts' (2000, p. 163). For Staiger, this is a continuation of separating the act of textual analysis from reception studies. Furthermore, alongside analysing 'traces of the event', reviews, interviews, features, and marketing material also reveal 'not only what seems possible at the moment but also what readings did not consider. That is, structuring absences are important as well' (p. 163). Staiger here points to a tendency within materialist studies for some researchers to focus solely on the materials, precisely the words and images in the object of research. She also reminds us that through the construction of the context of what is being said, we may seek out those important absences.

An example of this can be found in Rayna Denison's analysis of the American adaptation of *Speed Racer* (The Wachowskis, 2008), where she argues that

[T]he failure of *Speed Racer* [...] provides an example of the kinds of "structuring absences" sought in reception studies: in order to understand the extent of anime's success, this study focuses on how an otherwise long-lived and successful manga-originated franchise can lead to "the costliest misfire of the year".

(2014, p. 271)

By focusing on the reception of the American film in this way, Denison tackles those elements of film history, such as transnational media franchises, special effects and adaptation, that while they may only be hinted at in terms of the reception, may still have a significant effect on the discourse surrounding the film. This way of 'structuring absences' will form a vital part of this study. Regarding special effects, 'structuring absences' is a useful approach when examining this below-the-line production practice where its practitioners are usually kept invisible and considered unimportant to film production. While looking at how visible Baker and his visual effects are in discussing the film's pre-release material and in the film's reception, we need to ask why this is so. What factors within the materials have been privileged while others have been elided? Is this a result of the nature of the publication, the genre, or the historical context? The absence of special effects from film discourse in itself points to different priorities and perspectives that affect the reception and marketing of films.

However, in terms of reception studies, a number of academics have built upon Staiger's theories. Among these is Klinger, whose essay 'Film History Terminable and Interminable: Recovering the Past in Reception Studies' divides reception studies into two separate modes: the synchronic and the diachronic (1997, pp. 108-109), with the synchronic study focusing on a singular point of reception and a diachronic study 'consider[ing] a film's fluid, changeable and volatile relation to history' (p. 112). As an example, Staiger analyses the initial reception of *The Silence in the Lambs* (Johnathan Demme, 1991), where 'the debates

over the film had solidified into a set of propositions' that focused on the possible transphobic and homophobic content, as well as the outing of star Jodie Foster (2000, p. 161). Her analysis of the film's initial reactions, presented in reviews and think pieces published during that initial period of release, differs from a diachronic study which seeks to explore the 'films fluid, changeable and volatile relation to history' (1997, p. 110). A diachronic study seeks then to chart the changing reception of a film, something akin to Cynthia Erb's discussions of the changing meanings given to 'The Eighth Wonder of the World' in various versions of King Kong (2009). Klinger argues that these types of studies are vital as they advance 'the film/culture relation well beyond even "the massive data of its origins", addressing how that relation is remade continuously through diverse institutions and historical circumstances over the decades subsequent to initial release dates' (1997, p. 112). By taking snapshots of the time in which each case study was released and applying Klinger's method of combining the synchronic and the diachronic to create a total history or *histoire totale*, one of the aims of this research is to create a total history of the arch of Baker's career, and how his effects within them are perceived.

Histoire totale, a term borrowed from Fernand Braudel (1967),²¹ is more of an aspiration than an achievable goal for the researcher. While the idea of a total history has multiple definitions and is a hotly debated term, in essence, it refers to how a film historian engages with the history of the chosen subject and the tension of an attempt to be objective and to cover multiple histories while also knowing that this is an impossibility. Klinger herself 'acknowledge[s] both the unattainability of such a history and the benefits of its pursuit' (1997, p. 108). However, as Klinger maintains, it is still a valuable goal for a historian to work towards

²¹ Braudel was a French historian who, in his book *Capitalism and Material Life 1400-1800*, concluded that his version of this history 'does not claim to have depicted all material life throughout the whole complex world [...] What it offers is an attempt to see all these scenes as a whole [...] if not to see everything, at least locate everything, and on the requisite world scale' (1967, pp. 441-442).

when examining the complex interactive environments or levels of society involved in producing a particular event. In turn, this would affect a historical synthesis, an integrated picture of synchronic as well as diachronic change.

Applying reception studies as a method, with total history as an aim, can be problematic. Indeed, as Staiger argues, ‘the researcher who is doing historical materialist reception studies is as susceptible to the subjective contexts of interpretation as are those individuals being studied’ (1992, p. 79). The biggest challenge of synchronic research, argues Klinger, is the danger ‘that researchers can find themselves attempting to settle a film’s historical meaning, much like a standard interpretation would fix its textual meaning’ (1997, p. 112). Ernest Mathijs argues that Staiger does exactly this in her description of the controversy caused by *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974), claiming that ‘she treats the different instances of its reception as a whole - instead of describing a process she offers a snapshot’ (2005, p. 451). Both Klinger and Mathijs point to Staiger’s warning about attempting to pin meaning to a specific time and place rather than allowing or exploring the way that time and context continue to change the meaning of the text. They then seek to expand the scopes of reception studies beyond the synchronic snapshots that seek to the more contextual diachronic studies of changing meanings. But what does that mean for this study? Mathijs asks if it is possible to ‘push Klinger’s argument one step further and develop tools for the combined analysis of diachronic and synchronic discourses?’ (2005, p. 452) What is needed, he claims, is:

[W]hat I call reception trajectory: an integrated view of specific discourses operating in particular situations (synchronically) and as a process over time (diachronically), all analysed as types of ‘talk about film – all with their own rhetorical significance – in order to map both the individual strategies used to forge meaning (or fail to).

(p. 452)

This is what this thesis will attempt to do. Though the structure of the research will focus on the films and television shows to which Rick Baker has contributed, the focus of this examination is on Baker himself and the perception of his special effects within those productions. Furthermore, each chapter of this thesis will consist primarily of synchronic studies to formulate the historical and contextual variables that affect how the effects and Baker have been perceived and positioned within the broader discussions of the text.

This may seem like playing directly into the synchronic study's weaknesses and that the synchronic analysis of each case study would end up locking the reception of a film into a singular reading. However, the films and the television shows are not the things that are being analysed; instead, it is the response to the effects and to Baker that are central to the research. Thus, by combining this with the diachronic analysis, I aim to show how these responses change over time.

While each film has the opportunity to make an equal cultural and historical impact, this somewhat utopian view comes up against the harsh realities of historical record. Most of the case studies chosen, due to their cultural impact, have not been discussed far beyond the initial point of reception. Also, while this research is partially guided by the available materials, creating a chain of snapshots of reception out of those materials becomes essential. Rather than just examining the specific historical contexts that affect how special effects are seen, I will also aim to identify any changes in the positioning of Rick Baker as his film career and reputation develop.

Latex and Yak Hair: Material Selection, Magazines, Marketing and Analysis of Ancillary Materials

A key issue in a study of this sort is selecting the sources to analyse the ancillary discourses. These choices have a somewhat conflicting drive, specifically regarding this study. The first drive is the drive of the total history, to be as comprehensive as possible, to try and present a

complete picture of a text's production and critical reception. However, there is also the acknowledgement that this is ultimately impossible and that while it should be an aim to be holistic, generating a complete picture of a film's reception, this is the ideal, not the goal. I aim in this analysis to create and formulate. I also hope to demonstrate a commitment to the ideal of total history and the idea of comprehensiveness. However, I am aware of the impossibility of this task. Thus, it becomes crucial to think carefully about what kinds of sources are selected, what is left out, and how this affects the type of analysis this work can achieve. Similarly, it is essential to remember that each type of source chosen, such as a trailer, poster, magazine article, or newspaper review, has an academic approach to analysis and an ideological bias inherent in the kind of publication these discourses come from.

This analysis aims to chart the visibility of the special effects of Rick Baker within reviews and news in both production and critical reception of the projects he has worked on and the factors that can affect the kinds of discourses that are contained within. This is a large and impossible task, so the first and obvious task is to decide what kinds of sources of information I will use to analyse the reception discourse. To help me narrow down the types of sources, I needed to ask several questions about the types of sources I would pick. Firstly, language and region are important. Due to the practicalities of this research, I am limited to the English language; thus, that decision has been made for me. As Rick Baker is a figure within the Hollywood film industry, it similarly makes sense to use American sources as to ascertain how visible Baker is within those sources coming out of the United States. I will similarly also be looking at the British press. While, again, this is partially guided by the ease of access, Rick Baker is here to be seen as working as a transnational media producer. This is especially true within the second chapter of this thesis, which looks explicitly at *An American Werewolf in London*. As an American and British co-production, Baker and his effects operate within different transnational spaces. This will follow a similar strand of analysis for *The Muppet*

Show's critical reception, as discussed by Rayna Denison, who argues that although the creators were American 'at the time of its initial broadcasts, *The Muppet Show*'s Britishness appears to have been a significant factor in newspaper comment on the show within the UK' (2009, p. 155). This leads to the question that will be considered, especially for chapter two, if the publication's location also affects the review's content.

Before exploring the different types of sources used in this work, defining the term 'ancillary materials' is also important. Martin Barker coined this term in his 2004 essay 'News, Reviews, Clues, Interviews and other Ancillary Materials – A Critique and Research Proposal', where he argues for the 'acknowledgement of the importance of (what has been variously called) secondary, ancillary or satellite texts which shape in advance the conditions under which interpretations of films are formed' (p.1). These secondary, ancillary, and satellite texts include newspaper and magazine reviews and other forms of critical reception such as the trailers, posters and other materials that studios use to promote their texts. Although this term is broad, covering as it does a wide variety of texts, Barker argues that they all serve to shape the way audiences interact with and interpret the text that they orbit. Barker's essay also challenges Klinger's 1989 work 'Digressions at the Cinema: Reception and Mass Culture' in which she argues that rather than audiences falling under a kind of 'textual enthrallment' (p. 14), they are saved from that through a series of 'digressions' which:

[P]resent an example of a difference in viewing – that is, a type of viewing that does not reproduce the single intended structure and meaning of a text – that is not therefore oppositional or alternative. Digression designates a sphere of reactions, available to the 'everyday' social spectator, that are influenced by social interactions seeking to multiply readings of a text within ideological parameters.

(p. 16)

Klinger then argues that it is the addition of these 'social interactions', whether they be promotional material or critical reception or even interaction with those who are considered knowledgeable about film, that leads the audience member to different modes of textual

engagement. She then states that these texts 'are [not] able to dictate responses', then referencing Allen and Gomery she concludes that 'reviews may tell us what to think about, rather than what to think' (2004, p. 2). However, Barker argues that Klinger cites 'a very general principle from the Uses and Gratifications tradition [that] worryingly forecloses research on the concrete consequences of modes of reviewing practice' (p. 2). According to Barker, Klinger presents a linear input-output led approach to how reviews 'affect' an audience, arguing as she does that while the audience is acted upon or influenced by the social interactions they have, it is the central film text that has a more significant amount of power to influence the audience.

Regarding this study, the secondary effects on audiences are not as explicit as they would be in a study of audiences' reactions to special effects. However, it is still important to classify and discuss the critical reception and promotion of films because of their ability to guide the conversation of film audiences. Thus, I would concur with some of Klinger's conclusions, specifically about the relationship between review and audience. While a film review, trailer or poster guides an audience's expectations for a film, based on elements mentioned or displayed that could relate to such as the stars, genre, the director, or elements of spectacle like special effects, Barker's theory is valuable in that it allows for a study of multiple filmic discourses. This also challenges Klinger's focus on a particular type of research, allowing for analyses of the effects of these multiple discourses on the visibility of a text's special effects and the creator that made them. Indeed, as Mathijs argues:

Barker's emphasis on the analysis of the discourses used in ancillary materials comes closer to being a tool for making distinctions between the different discourses operating within the battlefield of reception, as it allows comparisons of discourses (of kinds of "talk" about films) across practices and over time but it is insufficiently discriminatory; discourses are lumped together as all being more or less equally important.

(2005, p. 452)

As Mathijs also observes, Barker's ideas of ancillary materials can provide 'a view of the complex pattern of influences and opinions that makes up a film's reception' (p. 452). This

does not just refer to critical reception but also to the various kinds of marketing that reveal the types of narratives that the filmmakers wish to promote. In relation to this thesis, this could also prove a fruitful approach to exploring the visibility of Rick Baker and his special effects within these ancillary materials.

These ancillary materials could also be considered part of a film's paratext, as coined by Gerard Genette in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretations* (2009). Although initially applied to literary texts, the term can be equally applied to filmic texts. As Genette observes, a text is rarely presented

[U]naccompanied [...] unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations. And although we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it.

(p.1)

Lisa Kernan (2004), in her examination of film trailers, expands this to include 'those textual elements that emerge from and impart significance to a (literary) text but aren't considered integral to the text itself, such as all prefatory material, dust jacket blurbs, advertisements and reviews' (p. 7). Indeed, she adds film trailers to that number (p. 7). In his discussions of filmic promotional material, Johnathan Gray (2010) seeks to broaden this definition further:

[O]ther, intangible entities can at times work in paratextual fashion. Thus, for instance, while a genre is not a paratext it can work paratextually to frame a text, as can talk about a text (though, of course, once such talk is written or typed, it becomes a tangible paratext).

(p. 6)

This study is focused on the more physical paratextual elements such as posters, reviews and trailers, which will be the repository of much of the discussions on special effects and Rick Baker. However, it is important to acknowledge, or rather, it is vital to the premise of this thesis, that other extra-textual elements affect how Baker and his special effects are discussed or seen within their texts. In this regard, it is also worth noting Gray's assertion that although

genre is not paratextual, it operates as a paratext does by extending and expanding the central text, albeit on a metatextual rather than individual level.

However, according to Johnston, ‘the recent paratextual turn can be read as reinforcing the hierarchical structure between promotional material and media text that currently dominates scholarly approaches’ (2019, p. 646). For Johnston, the term paratext implies that these texts are secondary to the related text. Johnston and Daniel Hesford expand this, arguing that:

[I]f we pull back from the reductive notion of the trailer as a paratext or “irritating distraction” and consider all promotional materials as texts, it allows us to explore them as complete entities, with their own aesthetic traits and approaches, rather than a paratextual entryway.

(2015)

While this refers specifically to promotional trailers, it could also apply to the critical reception. Though each review, poster or trailer, is a separate text, they may be related due to their shared connection to a central text. Nevertheless, their context and function are also entirely different, based on who wrote/made it, where it was published, and when. Each of these factors affects the meanings generated in these paratexts. Just as defining the paratext exclusively by the text they are related to can be seen as a reductive approach that restricts the avenues of research and exploration, Johnston and Hesford seek to develop this further by moving beyond the ‘text/paratext [binary] to an acceptance that such divisions and distinctions restrict rather than reveal’ (2015). This argument is central to this thesis, focused, as it is, on a study of the perception of special effects and the figure that made them within these paratexts. As this thesis will focus on a singular element of the film, namely special effects, the relationship between text and paratext will be central to this. I would also argue that there is a two-way influence between the paratext and the text, with the text guiding the kinds of elements discussed or displayed in the paratext and the paratext guiding audiences to focus on specific elements of the film, such as the special effects.

Although it is also essential to define the terms ancillary discourses and paratexts, as I will use them throughout the research, they will ultimately function as interchangeable terms at certain points. Indeed, as the verb ‘ancillary’ and the prefix ‘para’ both refer to things closely related to something else, this is perhaps inevitable. However, defining both terms and the discussions around them is still important. While both the critical reception of a film and its promotional material can be thought of as paratexts or ancillary discourses, I will be treating them, as well as the types of sources used, as vital and distinct types of sources that are worthy of study as texts in their own right.

Howling from the Roof Tops: Newspapers

Firstly, in this thesis, I will draw heavily on reviews, articles, news, and features that appear in American and British newspapers. While I have already mentioned the need to examine newspaper publications’ nation of origin, it is also important to be informed by how newspapers function. According to Peter Cole and Tony Harcup, a newspaper can be ‘described as a portable reading device’ (2009, p. 3). According to David Randall, a newspaper’s role ‘is to find fresh information on matters of public interest and to relay it as quickly and as accurately as possible to readers in an honest and balanced way’ (2016, p. 31). Newspapers are usually published according to a schedule, sometimes daily or weekly, with an inherent focus on a fleeting present, making them rather ephemeral; yesterday’s paper is yesterday’s news. While Randall presents a somewhat idealistic definition of a newspaper as an objective source for current events, it is undoubtedly a succinct one that communicates the function of a newspaper. However, Randall qualifies this definition when he states that a newspaper ‘may do lots of other things, like telling them what it thinks about the latest movies, how to plant potatoes, what kind of day Taureans might have or why the government should resign’ (p. 31). So then, while newspapers report on current events, they also act as cultural influences, offering up

subjective opinions in the form of (for instance) opinion pieces and (of particular interest to this thesis) reviews of films.

Furthermore, as John E. Richardson reminds us, while journalism could be viewed as part of the entertainment industry or to distribute propaganda for the powerful, ‘many have argued that journalism is a business, that newspapers exist purely to make profit and this single observation explains their contents’ (2007, pp. 6-7). However, he adds that ‘detecting that newspapers are businesses should only ever be the starting point of analysis, not the conclusion’ (p. 7). Thus, it becomes clear that there is an element of profit motive within journalism; the question for this research is, how does this then affect the reviews that are contained within the newspapers, specifically how does this affect the positioning of Rick Baker and his special effects?

Ultimately, I would argue that the primary way this drive for profit affects the journalistic content of a paper is the search for an audience. This would relate to Barker’s observation that:

[S]eeing reviews rather as indicators of reception processes at the very least reminds us that the film viewing often takes place for quite specific purposes – and to be a writer of reviews is to be one particular kind of audience.

(2004, p.3).

As Barker reminds us, the film critic for a newspaper, magazine, or any other kind of review format is writing for a particular audience and tailoring their views to that audience.

Thus, in relation to this thesis, it is important to analyse and define the differences between various newspapers to ascertain which elements could affect the reviews of Baker and his special effects, as well as how these are positioned. There are usually considered to be two different kinds of newspapers: the tabloid and the broadsheet. Firstly, the tabloid papers, otherwise called redtops, like *The Sun*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Metro* and *The*

Morning Star in the United Kingdom, as well as *The New York Post*, *The Chicago Sun-Times*, *The San Francisco Examiner* and *The Boston Herald* in the United States. Cole and Harcup argue that these papers are usually 'the most popular newspapers, targeted first at the working man, now more broadly at readers of both sexes' (2009, p. 22). Interestingly, from a design point of view, they were also 'once referred to as the "picture papers" because of the predominance of pictures over words – emphasised by the small format' (p. 22). These papers, as Sofia Johansson found in her study of *The Mirror* and *The Sun* readership, have 'a typically sensationalist news style, a celebrity oriented and sexualised news agenda and the use of aggressive journalistic methods such as paparazzi coverage and chequebook journalism' (2008, p. 402).

While Cole and Harcup argue for a third category of 'the mid-market paper' (2009, p. 27) the other major category of newspaper that will be used in this analysis is that of the broadsheets. Although, as Cole and Harcup point out, 'no longer can we call them broadsheets, because three of them aren't [due to] the so-called "compact revolution"', calling them instead 'the serious or "quality" sector' (2009, p. 31). These more 'serious' publications are 'traditionally strong on text and debate, less interested in human interest, tittle-tattle and popular culture, have a presence and influence beyond their relatively modest circulations' (p. 31). It is clear then that there is a marked binary between the tabloid and the broadsheet, not least in terms of the language used by Cole and Harcup. There is an element of class and taste that pervades newspapers. The broadsheets, as they are considered to be more upper-class, tend towards intellectual aspirations courting a bourgeois readership, while the tabloid is more interested in popular culture and popularity and seemingly are pitched at a more working-class or proletariat audience. As these papers have different ideological origins and target audiences, this, of course, affects the way in which their critics approach the films they are reviewing. For example, *The Guardian's* film critic, Peter Bradshaw, may view those fantastical films or use

the spectacle of special effects as lesser than those that are more realistic and serious. While Dulice Pearce, *The Sun's* film critic, might focus on those spectacular elements positively, in line with the paper's focus on popular culture and entertainment.

There are many other ways in which newspapers can be categorised, including stylistically or in terms of class and taste, as outlined above. Perhaps most significant is the political divide between various papers, with broadsheets like *The Washington Post* or *The Guardian* attracting very different readerships in terms of ideology than those of *The Telegraph* or *The Times*. While the political coverage of *The Telegraph* and *The Times*, for instance, is situated on the right of the political spectrum, this, in turn, affects their coverage of art and popular culture. With this in mind, my analyses of those newspaper reviews that reference special effects and special effects practitioners will be informed by the various and contrasting ideological and cultural values of the publications covered.

What a Glossy Cover You Have: Magazine Studies

This thesis will also consist of an analysis of magazines, including the genre fan magazines *Cinefantastique*, *Fangoria* and *Famous Monsters of Filmland*; consumer film magazines *Empire* and *Sight and Sound*, as well as industry-focused publications such as *Cinefex* and *American Cinematographer*. This is an essential vein of analysis as, according to David Abrahamson,

[M]agazines – even more than newspapers, which are geographically limited, or the broadcast media, which are largely derivative, amplifying rather than creating social and cultural trends – serve both as a mirror of and a catalyst for the tenor and tone of the sociocultural realities of their times.

(2015, p. 1)

While newspapers can provide a smaller snapshot of a cultural-historical event like a film or television show, magazines can speak to a broader culture across geographical borders. Furthermore, as Michele Pierson argues, due to this diversity of address, magazines can

‘provide an unusually rich site for investigating the relation between aesthetics and reception’ (2002, p. 56). According to Pierson then, magazines, specifically those focused on special effects or film, are important to study because of the variety of those who read them and the focus that those readers have. This can range from the appreciation of a film’s visuals to an analysis of technical achievements. This focus provides a different perspective on the special effects and the special effects artist that created them. This approach, inherently different from that of a newspaper, is particularly worthy of examination.

There are also several key differences in presentation, distribution method and audience that make it necessary to differentiate these magazines from other print media. According to Elizabeth Crisp Crawford, newspapers ‘differ from magazines because they are published more frequently than other print media, often daily, and often intended for a local or community audience. In addition, when compared with magazines, newspaper articles tend to be brief and fact-driven’ (2015, p. 286). Crawford also identifies two core differences between magazines and newspapers. Firstly, magazines are periodically published, sometimes weekly, sometimes monthly. This means that the content is treated as differently as it has ‘more *permanence*’ than the daily publication of the newspaper, allowing the readership to peruse the content repeatedly (p. 286). Furthermore, Crawford points to differences in the content of magazines and newspapers, arguing that newspapers offer a more functional type of content, serving ‘a local or community audience’, providing information about specific events in a given area, depending on the audience that has been chosen (p, 286). While magazines

are unique because they are feature-driven. Instead of covering a wide range of stories, magazines are published periodically, focusing on fewer items, and discussing them in greater depth. The depth of coverage that magazines provide includes more visual content, including photographs and other images.

(p. 296)

Similarly, David Abrahamson claims that ‘The basic strategic model of *narrow-casting* - serving the specific information needs of specific audiences for whom advertisers will pay a

premium - will certainly continue to prevail' (2015, p. 2). While Abrahamson is referring to the economic strategies of magazines, as Tamar Jeffers McDonald and Lies Lanckman do in the introduction to their edited collection *Star Attractions: Twentieth-Century Movie Magazines and Global Fandom* (2019, p. 3), this *narrow-casting* acts as a way of constructing a magazine to fulfil the needs or interests of a niche audience.

The content within cinema magazines is also specialist, focusing on the type of subject it has chosen. So, while *Cinefantastique* and *Cinefex* may have some overlap in their interests in special effects, each has tied that to a different lens. *Cinefantastique* treats special effects as part of the wider issue of fan responses to genre films, while *Cinefex* views special effects as a technical endeavour. Awareness of how each magazine uniquely positions the special effects and special effects creator is vital to this research.

Pierson has similarly discussed and divided up the type of discourse about computer-generated imagery that exists in different specialist magazines, arguing that:

Fan-oriented publications such as *Cinefantastique* and the now-defunct *Sci-Fi Universe* – magazines concerned with developing an aesthetic (and to a lesser extent critical) vocabulary for describing computer-generated images - already apply something like an art historical framework to their analysis of computer animation.

(2002, p. 56)

Pierson also refers to the way that an article about *Toy Story* appears to legitimise computer animation by making connections to 'other aesthetic practices and movements' (p. 56), although ultimately, 'commentaries on the aesthetics of the computer-generated image are always commentaries on the reception of this imagery' (p. 52). This echoes Adrienne L. McLean's observation that:

Fan magazines, too, contain material that, while certainly connected to movies and their stars and aimed at fans thereof, straddles the divide not only between the fan magazine and the woman's magazine but between 'hobby book' and 'consensus magazine'.

(2019, p. 12)

For McLean, then, the fan magazine can be a how-to-guide in the more amateur sense, while it can also dictate how special effects are discussed. Through their discussion and appreciation of special effects imagery, these magazines set discussions in the same way that other tastemakers can,²² commenting on such topics as what is a ‘worthwhile’ special effect, which techniques can be categorised as special effects, and technological developments. As part of this, they can also elevate the creator above the line of visibility. Similarly, Pierson observes that:

[The more technical] publications such as *Cinefex* and *Computer Graphics World* continue to focus on the technical aspects of special effects production, in *Wired* – a second-generation computer lifestyle magazine – special effects acquired more rhetorical and even metaphorical functions, becoming the sign around which readers might image a place for themselves in the new media future.

(2002, p. 58)

While there is a connection to be made between the readership of both *Cinefantastique* and *Cinefex*, with both readerships having an interest in special effects and a desire to enter that world as a practitioner, as Pierson points out in her analysis of *Astounding Science-Fiction*, ‘fans with aspirations of working in the film industry had a range of publications to choose from for analysis and review of special effects’ (2002, p. 97). Similarly, there is a demand for knowledge in these publications, with readers seeking answers to questions such as, What kinds of computers and software are used to construct computer-generated images? Where an article discusses more practical effects, details of types of materials and mechanical elements will usually be provided. However, while it is important to categorise the various kinds of magazines based on the readership and aims, there is still a connection between them. Despite the differences in what kind of knowledge each magazine provides - ranging from the more factual and technical content of *Cinefex* to the opinion-based discussions of *Cinefantastique* –

²² As laid out by Barbara Klinger in *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk*.

they are all responding to the need for information about special effects within film production. In turn, this guides the kinds of observations made about special effects and special effects practitioners, whether discussing their processes or presenting them as figures to be admired, with levels of skills that readers would aspire to.

Finally, a core difference between magazines and newspapers is that of design. Magazines differ from newspapers in how the page is set up and laid out. As Carol Holstead argues, 'the intimate experience that magazines offer readers is as much visual as textual' (2015, p. 392). Similarly, as Jeremy Aynsely and Kate Forde argue, 'magazines also deviate from other printed sources in both content and appearance because editorials and advertisements, pictures and words are constantly competing for our attention' (2007, p. 2). Thus, due to magazines' emphasis on visual material, it becomes important to comment on the typography, the layout of text, the use of titles and perhaps most importantly, the images used in the article. This is especially vital to acknowledge within a discussion of special effects. As Aynsely and Forde argue in *Design and the Modern Magazine*, there is a paradox in the way magazines are designed:

To the design historian, the magazine presents a number of challenges of interpretation and understanding. Its distinguishing feature is that it is a serial publication. This means that considerable efforts are put towards guaranteeing that individual titles are recognised over time, establishing continuity in the reader's mind. The character of a magazine's appearance and editorial content is, therefore, central to this.

(2007, p. 1)

This concurs with Holstead's observation that 'a magazine expresses its personality through its visual style – its symbolic use of type, art and photos, colours and space' (2019, p. 392). When a consumer chooses a magazine, the first thing they notice is the cover. For instance, the covers of *Fangoria*, *Cinefantastique* and *Cinefex* are laid out similarly, with each using a specific font to demonstrate their brand identity. The cover of *Fangoria*, for instance, has its main story represented by a large cover-sized picture, flanked on the left by three small stories and pictures

placed within a border resembling a film reel. Conversely, part of the magazine's function is that of 'an industrial product remaining essentially the same from week to week or month to month, it must depend on novelty and change to encourage loyalty among readers, or attract new ones, if it is to prove a success' (Aynsley and Forde, 2007, p. 1). Also, according to Aynsley and Forde, magazines need an element of spectacle or novelty to bring the readers in. This can be seen in either the type of content, the promise of access to new information, or the images presented. While it is important to see who is mentioned within the text of the essay, what the writer says about a film, whether it is good, and what they focus on, images from a film set or a film itself can either illustrate the points in the text or reflect on something else. Specifically, images of special effects can give the reader a sense of the spectacle of the special effect itself. Furthermore, the images in the magazines can also make visible those figures in the film production which would otherwise be invisible. For instance, a feature about special effects may be illustrated with a picture of a special effects artist making up an extra. While the special effects crew may not be interviewed for a story or have their work spoken about, the use of images of their work, either complete or in the process of it being made, offers a peek behind the curtain into the processes of movie-making. The spectacle of the film itself, or of the special effects, may also be used in the visual display rather than the discussion of the film.

There are, of course, a number of ways to approach the study of magazines. Carolyn Kitch (2015), in her chapter of *The Routledge Handbook of Magazine Research*, discusses how scholars have discussed the magazine as control, community and culture. Drawing on reception studies' Marxist analysis of a media guided by tastemakers, Kitch argues that magazines are also 'instruments of power, and the typical research question investigates how they work to maintain it' (2015, p. 10). While most of these analyses are concerned with exploring the various ways in which magazines represent ideas of class, gender and sexuality, my specific

aim is to apply these approaches to examine how magazines position or make visible the effects and special effects practitioners within a given film or television text. While it is less important for this study to discuss magazines as bringing together a community, it is important to recognise, as has been done earlier, that each magazine brings together or caters to ‘ready-made social groups, collections of people united by shared interests’ (p. 12). These shared interests guide the presentation of the information that is within the magazine, what is focused on, and why. Finally, while there are many ways to study and explore the magazine as culture, as Kitch outlines, my analysis aligns with that of Norman Sims, who writes that magazines, as well as delivering facts to their readers also convey ‘feelings, emotions, and expectations – the consciousness behind events and actions that can provide reflexive cultural insights into other times and places’ (2009, p. 15). This is vital to a historical examination of the perception of special effects and, specifically, to my aim of gauging how visible Rick Baker and his special effects were within the films he worked on. Through an examination of these film magazines, we can not only hope to glimpse what was said about the effects but also identify why certain things were being said, especially in relation to definitions of genre, technology or special effects techniques themselves. I find that this type of analysis is exceptionally useful when it comes to special effects. As Matthew Schneirov argues, popular magazines can present ‘visions of the future’ (1994, p. 255). Special effects are, as both a technological and artistic image, seen to be attached to the excitement of development and novelty thus though they also construct images of the future in science fiction films, they also represent a development in film production techniques as a marker of the future of film. In his examination of travel magazines, Richard Popp argues that they constituted a site where ‘genuine excitement thus converged with marketing strategy’ (2012, p. 143). Similarly, while film magazines represent commercial enterprises, they also convey a genuine excitement around films and filmmaking, aimed at fans

and aspiring filmmakers. With this in mind, it becomes vital to use and examine the content of magazines to explore how visible Baker and his special effects are.

Selling You Their Soul: Promotional and Pre-release Materials

While critical reception is important, covering Baker's positioning within the studios' promotional material is also essential. Thus, this analysis will also draw on trailers, posters, press books, and other pre-release materials to analyse the positioning of Baker and his special effects within the film. This analysis will be important as a point of comparison to see whether the narratives, interviews, and discussions of the films before the film was released impact the way in which the film is reviewed.

However, it is also important to state that the promotional material will be looked on as a valuable source of information in its own right. As Derek Malcom, speaking in 1998, argued, 'most of the public doesn't read reviews' (1998). It becomes important to include other means of disseminating information to would-be-viewers, particularly promotional materials. In this respect, the studios have a more direct address to audiences to tell them information about a film. They can draw an audience's attention to specific parts of the film they want to emphasise in trailers and posters, use stars or directors in press junkets to tell stories about the production or guide the press to certain talking points with press books. As outlined by Staiger, Klinger, Jankovich, Mathijs and others, reviews and critical reception analyses are important within discourse analysis. However, as Martin Barker argues, 'there is a problem in the sheer privileging of reviews over other kinds of ancillary materials, a privileging which associates with the greater attention this leads to, towards "serious" over popular films' (2004, p. 4). It is also important for the film historian not to get fixated on one type of discourse production, as each can provide a different kind of information both to the consumer and the. Barker also argues that the way ancillary materials are sometimes ignored 'is troublesome because, of

course, it is popular cinema which is most seriously engrossed in the phenomenon of publicity, gossip, and other ancillary materials' (p. 4). Within this discussion of including other sources, Barker also draws out the issue of taste, observing that popular films rely more heavily on marketing material. This is a particularly pertinent observation regarding special effects, primarily associated with the popular genre cinema. All of the films that Baker has worked on, from the blockbusters *King Kong* (1976) and *Planet of the Apes* (2001), to the horror comedies *An American Werewolf in London* (1981) and *The Wolfman*, to the television show *Beauty and the Beast*, with its elements of crime procedural and romance, are all popular and genre-driven and so rely more heavily on promotional materials than critical reviews in order to create meaning. That is not to say that the other film texts used in this study do not include elements of promotion within their meaning-making, but instead that they use other avenues to construct and build the discourse that creates meaning for audiences. Barker places reviews in a broader flow of publicity campaigns, stating that:

Reviews need to be considered for the place in the flow of talk around a film; for the extent to which they speak only to their target community, or alternatively how far their argument flows beyond into an interdiscursive terrain where wider debates about a film's status may take place.

(p. 4)

Thus, to chart the various narratives surrounding the visibility of Rick Baker and his special effects films, it is vital to also explore these pre-release materials. However, because there are various promotional materials, they have their own definitions, methodologies, and approaches.

To return to Klinger, Jon Kraszewski wrote in 2002 that her work presents:

[A] model of cinematic digressions in which the film industry's promotional materials (i.e., advertisements, lobby cards, posters, behind-the-scenes documentaries, interviews, etc.) function as socially constructed intertextual relays that fracture the film and fetishize meaningful features.

(2002, p. 2)

However, Kraszewski does not view Klinger's model as a complete representation of the multitude of meanings that can be generated by the viewer of such materials, arguing instead for bringing 'articulation theory into this discussion' to allow for a 'focus of promotional material on the plurality of meanings, but [...] also offers new insights into spectator identities, specifically in regard to race' (p. 2). Kraszewski applies this to his exploration of the nature of race and identity with the reception and marketing of Blaxploitation films, where he argues that 'advertisements become the "circumstances" that "forge connections" for spectators, preparing the elements of identity they will draw on to make sense of the film' (p.2). While this thesis is not focused on the importance of identity in the reception of Baker's special effects or on the audience response to these promotional materials, elements of Kraszewski's work will inform this thesis. While the promotional material of certain texts can be made with particular meanings in mind by the producers, as Kraszewski observes, audiences can create their own meanings separate from any prescribed meanings. Secondly, also as observed by Kraszewski, these meanings are not solid or stable but are constructed upon interaction with the material.

Although the critical reception and promotional materials are all ancillary materials, it is vital to be aware of their differences. As Barker states:

Publicity campaigns have a distinctive rhythm. They flow from leaks and teasers, advance information, website presentations, through poster campaigns, advertorials, television advertising, into – as release finally approaches – publications of *Making Of* books, released with interviews with stars, director, and others Electronic Press Kits, and the final flood and push to persuade people to give the movie a try.

(2004, p. 4)

Although they differ from the critical reception, these materials are also diverse types of promotional materials that can offer up valuable information to the researcher. This leads to two key questions: firstly, why is studying these kinds of sources important? And secondly,

but more importantly, how does one study these kinds of sources? On the study of promotional materials, Ellen Wright states that:

Whilst individual films can, and do, indicate to their audiences (and to the historian) a range of ideological constructs, the advertising materials and publicity used to promote these films in many ways can offer more immediate, lasting and public, but by no means any less ideologically contentious or complex, examples of the messages and values, both direct and mixed, that producers wished and considered acceptable to express to their audiences in order to sell their products during this period.

(2013)

Wright here reminds the film researcher that while films themselves are highly central to the history of cinema, both as historical artefacts and cultural commentary, the trailer and the promotional material that surrounds the film or television show are equally valuable as they can tell us what a film-viewing culture views as important or significant features. Similarly, the insights provided by these promotional materials can be just as valuable as the film itself.

As Wright observes:

Film advertising and promotion then presented a carefully constructed and multifaceted blend of textual signifiers which, amongst other saleable commodities, such as genre or prestige, commonly emphasised elements upon which this study focuses – a star's established persona and a recognisable character archetype (frequently closely linked and complimentary to the performers established star persona; what Barbara Klinger refers to as the "character/star Unit") and an indication as to the function of that character within the films narrative, with a view to creating what Barbara Klinger terms as a "consumable identity" for the film and making the film as appealing and saleable to as broad an audience as possible.

(2013)

When looking at the visibility of Rick Baker within the production, marketing and reception of the films he has worked on, this 'star unit' is an important concept. While, as argued previously, the term star does not apply to Baker, who is arguably something entirely different, he is still a name certain films use to advertise or increase excitement for the upcoming project. Although neither auteur nor star, as a well-known special effects make-up artist who produces high-quality and realistic apes for the most part and other fantastical creatures, Baker could indeed

be said to constitute a character unit. Thus, for specific audiences, his name attached to a project carries weight like a director or a star.

Keith M. Johnston, perhaps more than other scholars, sets out an excellent framework for analysing promotional materials, arguing as he does that while there has been a rise within the study of promotional materials:

The lack of parallel histories that consider the growth and impact of promotional materials across different media and platforms – and in terms of their aesthetic, industrial, technological or social purpose – has always been a particular lacuna within media studies. The recent shift to concentrate on the relationship between promotional materials and the finished film or television programme – what might be called the paratextual turn – may have raised the profile of such materials.

(2019, pp. 643-644)

While I have discussed the use of terms like paratexts and ancillary materials in terms of critical receptions, pre-release or promotional materials, these terms can become unwieldy when discussing the wide variety of materials this study will employ in its analysis. Thus, a more specific and accurate terminology must be employed to communicate the kinds of material being discussed.

Ultimately, promotional material, like ancillary material and paratext, is another umbrella term that I use in this analysis to refer to material that has been released by a film studio to market or sell its product. As Johnston argues, ‘any such term has to deal with clear discursive overlaps within popular, industrial and academic work around advertising, marketing and publicity’ (2019, p. 644). Thus, as Johnston points out, when dealing with promotional materials, it is important that the researcher is aware of these extra critical factors that affect these materials. While the promotional materials for a filmic or televisual text related to that text have to act as means by which to sell that said text, the aim of this analysis is not to judge the effectiveness of the selling, but to identify what elements are being sold to an

audience, in order to ascertain the visibility of special effects and Rick Baker within that marketing.

Furthermore, it is also essential to identify which materials will be categorised as promotional materials for the purposes of this thesis. In this regard, I will broadly be aligning my definitions to those of Johnston's, who states that:

[H]istorically, the poster, trailer and press/campaign book are the most dominant materials found in industrial, popular and academic contexts, although the recent rise of official and unofficial websites, online aggregators, and fan blogs has begun to challenge that.

(2019, p. 645)

While this study may contain references to and analysis of these unofficial websites, the main focus of the analysis of promotional materials will be centred on three types of material: the trailer, the poster and the press book. However, why have I selected these three types of material? Moreover, why, if this study examines the perception of special effects and the visibility of the special effects artist that made them, examine promotional materials at all?

As Barker and others have stated, it is important not to view these ancillary materials or paratexts as ultimately lesser than the text they are made to promote or only have value because they are connected to the text that they advertise. In the context of promotional materials, Johnston provides five key propositions to help the researcher and scholar think about their research. The most important of these is that of 'treat[ing] the promotional material(s) as text' (2019, p. 655). This relates to the earlier discussions of promotional materials as paratexts or ancillary materials. As Johnston argues, treating the poster, trailer or pressbook as their own text will 'reduce the insistence on such texts having value only in terms of what they reveal about the relationship with a feature film' (p. 655). While, of course, there are connections between the film text and its various marketing materials, these texts can reveal information about and outside of the text itself. This is especially valuable for a researcher

looking into the position and visibility of special effects and special effects artists. It also leads me to ask several questions when looking at trailers, posters and pressbooks: Does Baker appear by name in any of this material? If so, how is he related to the rest of the production? Is he spoken of positively? If he is not, why is he not? What other elements have the production team decided are necessary to discuss? However, each type of promotional material, the trailer, the poster and the pressbook, all have different ways of disseminating information.

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, I shall discuss the trailer, a feature that several scholars have discussed in relation to its place within the film industry and film studies. However, what, exactly, is a trailer? Lisa Kernan defines it as ‘a brief film text that usually displays images from a specific feature film while asserting its excellence, and that is created for the purpose of projecting in theatres to promote a film’s theatrical release’ (2004, p. 1). Meanwhile, Vinzenz Hediger defines the trailer in a more historical context, stating that ‘originally, however, the term ‘trailer’ referred to a strip of black film attached to the end of a print in order to protect it’ (2003, p. 299). While he emphasises that the trailer has importance ‘as an advertising tool for films’, he also places it within a timeline of historical development (p. 297). In the same way, while studying trailers from various periods, they should also be considered within the historical context of when they were made. As Kernan notes ‘trailers are film paratexts that are especially important to study in an era where promotion and visual narrative have become increasingly difficult to disentangle in all kinds of popular media, whether music, television, children’s cartoons, “infotainment,” or films themselves’ (2004, p. 1). While Kernan's definition ignores the other avenues for delivering filmic advertising, such as social media, online video-sharing sites, television spots, and even radio, he succinctly lays out the purpose of a trailer. Indeed, as Keith M. Johnston wrote in 2008:

[The] ‘film’ trailer is itself a disingenuous term: [Reducing] trailers to a purely theatrical concept [in this way] limits our perception of what trailers are, what they can mean, who they target, and why we should be interested in them.

(2008, p. 145)

He continues:

The trailer grew beyond the borders of the cinema screen over 50 years ago, when 1950s television trailers for new film releases demonstrated the ability of the trailer format to move between visual media. Since then, the trailer has been transferred onto the various iterations of home video.

(p. 145)

It should be noted then that Johnston also argues that, just like other ancillary discourses or paratexts, ‘the trailer [should be treated] as a unique short film, rather than a lesser (abbreviated) form of the feature film’ (2009, p. 2). Thus, Johnston aims to separate the trailer from the film it is advertising to expand what can be analysed within trailer history and aesthetics. While Kernan, on the other hand, points to a strong connection between the trailer and the film it orbits. Johnston’s argument speaks to the importance of the trailer as a source of primary examination and what it can tell the researcher about its history, aesthetic development, etc. This theory will be at the heart of this study. While I will be commenting on one element of production (i.e. the special effects and the people who made them), a significant focus of this study will be examining how trailers use their specific aesthetics and language to sell a film. It is vital then that this study looks at the images picked and the film title fonts to investigate the elements that the film producers select as ‘elements of excellence’. While one could look at promotional material, as Kernan does, focusing on ‘who the film industry *thinks* it is addressing within trailer texts’ (2004, p. 3), this project, by examining these trailers and other promotional materials, seeks to understand what the film industry thinks about elements of itself.

Also interesting and essential for this study - focusing as it does on the visibility and spectacle of special effects - is Kernan’s observation that:

[T]railers [...] have often spoken to us directly, frequently telling us to SEE! COME! JOIN IN! THRILL TO! ..., even at times using characters or actors shown looking directly into the camera and the audience (although contemporary trailers usually display such injunctions more obliquely).

(2004, p. 2)

Much like Gunning's 'cinema of attractions' or the spectacle of special effects themselves, Kernan identifies the trailer as a site of spectacle. The direct address of the trailer uses the film texts' most noteworthy or spectacular images, whether that be the spectacle of emotions, of the stars in the text, the director, or even the more obvious and overt spectacle of the special effects themselves. According to Kernan:

Trailers [...] are attractions that combine and/or alternate these two temporal modes, [my footnote]²³ offering an intensified present tense into which is woven the anticipatory dimension of the "announcing gesture." Trailers are a specific, persuasive kind of attraction: while they continually invoke a heightened presence through their display of spectacular images, essentially the announcement (of a not-yet-seen-film) is the event.

(pp. 17-18)

The trailer then is a multi-temporal text, for not only what it announces in the present but what it promises in the future. Johnathan Gray echoes this sentiment, saying that while trailers 'are ads [...] they are also a taste of films to come, offering some of film's first pleasures, meanings and ideas' (2010, p. 50). These promises use the elements of excellence, such as the film's genre, its star, the director, or the spectacle as that site of anticipation. This is especially true when a trailer reveals a monster in a horror film, with its promise or hints at what this creature looks like, one that will be fulfilled in the film itself. But the trailer may also make spectacular those elements of the film that may not necessarily be considered spectacular in the traditional sense, such as narrative mystery or a setting. This will be explored further in chapter three.

²³ Here referring to Tom Gunning's work in "'Now You See It, Now You Don't': The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions' (1993) in which he states that 'the temporality of the attraction itself then, is limited to the pure present tense of its appearance, but the announcing gesture creates a temporal frame of expectation and even suspense. It differs from diegetic suspense, of course, in being concerned less with *how* an event will occur' (p. 7).

Similarly, in *Coming Attractions: Film Trailers and the Selling of Hollywood Technology*, Keith M. Johnston argues that the trailer is a site where spectacle meets technology. This would make it a vital source of analysis of both special effects and genre films. As Johnston argues:

[The trailer] would be the likely venue for any spectacle-based sales message, the logical vehicle to display such visuals to future audiences. Instead, unified analysis of these trailers reveals a complex and shifting interrelation between narrative, character and generic elements, with underlying production limitations often restricting the dominance of the effects spectacle. This analysis demonstrates that the genre trailer – and by extension, the feature film it advertises – cannot be reduced to a single element of visual spectacle, but must examine how such spectacle functions within the larger text.

(2009, p. 91)

Johnston echoes the likes of Geoff King, who argues that there is a misconception that a film's spectacle is somehow overwhelming and distracting from the film's narrative. This ultimately ties into issues of taste and popular culture that are very present in discussions of special effects. This perhaps starts when critics view the spectacle provided in popular cinema, including the spectacle found in special effects, rendering the film an ideological monologue rather than one with a complex narrative, allowing audiences to engage in a dialogue with the film.

To return to trailers, spectacle, and special effects, while Johnston's claim that the spectacle of the technology on display is tied to the narrative pleasures of the film is valid, I would argue that it is still something separate from it. However, it is not a complete separation but rather a contradictory one that *should* be mutually exclusive but is not. There is an invitation to come and see the technology in the film. Indeed 'this emphasis on display (or a showcase, to use Thompson and Bordwell's term) suggests the ability of effects work to stand outside the narrative, to create spectacle within these generic products' (2009, p. 92). While Johnston focuses on the science fiction genre, his insights into the relationship between technological developments and cinematic spectacle are incredibly useful when examining the

position of special effects and special effects practitioners within a film's promotional material.

Johnston discusses this point directly as it relates to CGI within the film trailer, as follows:

Trailers outside the science fiction genre often reduced the screen time given over to the display of CGI work, but effects-based images still retained their impact through repetition (the 'White House' effect, in posters, television and other media), and placement (with effects images often being the first of last image within a trailer). The teaser for *The Perfect Storm* gradually builds its display of CGI effects, highlighting its recreation of contemporary technology and weather conditions before reaching a crescendo with its promotional 'money shot'.

(2009, p. 120)

However, this only refers to CGI, which will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis. As Baker's primary form of special effects was practical, I would ask whether these rules still apply to the pre-CGI effects of the 1980s to early 2000s? Baker has worked on science fiction films, updating the ape masks for *Planet of the Apes* and developing and improving the technology of the applications seen in the original film. But what of the horror films he worked on? These display a different kind of spectacle: the anticipatory spectacle that comes from the implications of special effects technology that is seen in glimpses. Not only is this anticipation generically complementary to fantasy genres, but it also invites audiences to speculate on the look and design of the monster. This is related to a secondary element of *Planet of the Apes*, as well as *King Kong*, which, as remakes, also invite speculation on technological developments as compared to the original films. Thus, the trailer offers an excellent site of exploration, not only showing what Hollywood thinks of itself but also (in terms of my particular concern with the film technology of special effects) a productive site for investigating the role of spectacle within film advertising.

Other elements of the promotional materials that this study will cover are those of the poster and the pressbook. Mary Beth Haralovich (1999), in her analysis of how studios sold *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1941), provides a good example of how one would begin to think about and define the key parts of marketing campaigns; the pressbook and poster.

According to Haralovich, 'pressbooks included two types of material: advertising (primarily mats used for newspaper ads) and publicity (stories and exploitation ideas)' (1999, p. 196). She continues:

Advertising was designed to engage the potential moviegoer's interest in the film's story by stressing genre, the conjectures of star and character, narrative suspense, and the special qualities of a film, such as its adaptation from a popular novel. Publicity [meanwhile] presented a film in more detail through prepared reviews, and it also extended beyond the film itself through production stories and stills, merchandising tie-ins, praise for the studio's expertise, suggestions for exploitation stunts, and so on.

(p. 196)

Haralovich argues that the advertising information in the pressbooks focuses mainly on factual information. It is used to categorise the film, outlines the cast and crew, and states what the film is about. The publicity is also extra-textual, with stories that move outside of a text's diegetic narrative, providing information on the people who have worked on the film, and its production history, as well as providing entertaining stories that cinephiles and film press can share and display as cultural capital in terms of their knowledge of how the films and television shows were made.

It is then necessary to remember that these two types of information are both presented within the pressbooks and to ask how these can be related to the examination of Baker and his effects, as well as how visible or invisible these are made. While the advertising information of pressbooks will be important in this analysis in order to establish the facts of a film, it will also be vital to see what facts are left out of the pressbook. That is not to say that the advertising will not be important as it could reveal some factors that made Baker and his special effects visible or invisible within the critical reception and marketing; factors such as the genre of a text or its status as a remake. However, it will be the publicity that will help to construct a kind of production history within discussions of each case study explored in this thesis. While this analysis aims to include production histories, these will not be objective factual production

histories but those created from the subjective recollections of directors, actors, producers and the special effects crew themselves. An analysis of these recollections, as seen within marketing materials as well as pre-release interviews and features, will help to formulate history that, while unreliable, will highlight the visibility of the special effects within the discussion of the text.

Much like the magazine and the pressbook, the poster of a film uses not just text but graphics and images to transmit ‘the essential attributes of the film, generating viewer expectations and forming what Barabara Klinger has termed "a tentative contract between producer and consumer”’ (Haralovich, 1999, p. 197). Posters also ‘identified the genre of the film and placed its stars/characters at the point of narrative suspense. Poster graphics often linked headshots of stars/characters to each other and to a central narrative enigma through glances and tag lines’ (p. 197). These are similar to the types of information provided in the pressbook; only here is it presented differently within the dense design of graphics, typeface, and images. For these reasons, I will be examining posters to explore if the special effects are on full display within the poster itself, as well as what elements of narrative or which stars are included. Indeed, posters can use the spectacular image of special effects or the spectacular promise of special effects to entice audiences to see a film at the theatre. While a poster would not normally announce the name of a below-the-line worker like Baker in the same way as it would for actors or directors. For instance, the inclusion of images of special effects can still privilege a special effects practitioner without naming them.

I am also aware that analysing a range of different kinds of sources from a multitude of different perspectives in this way risks falling into the ‘trap’ of the *history totale*, as discussed earlier. However, I have decided to examine such a wide variety of sources due to an attempt at a complex perspective. As Thomas Austin argues, ‘intertextual investigations have also played an important part in histories of “reputation building” - that is, of the discursive

construction of, and shifts in, the critical standing of films and filmmakers' (2002, p. 24). As this study looks explicitly at the reputation of Rick Baker and his special effects as a means to provide models to further investigate special effects practitioners, by absorbing and analysing multiple perspectives in this way, I aim to create a more complex and dynamic picture of Rick Baker's reputation. While it would be less complex to look exclusively at the articles and reviews in magazines like *Cinefantastique* and *Fangoria*, where his name may be more well-known to its readership, this would only offer up one perspective, possibly a more stable one. Instead, I want to see how (and if) other publications, such as tabloid and broadsheet newspapers, develop his reputation. By these means, I aim to explore how (and if), over time, the film studios themselves build Baker's reputation as a special effects wunderkind. I will also explore how (and if), due to factors beyond Baker's control, such as film genre and avenues of promotion or publication, his reputation changes over time.

Chapter 1: Bigger is Not Always Better: Narratives of Failure and Special Effects

Techniques in the Production and Reception of *King Kong* (John Guillermin, 1976)

Introduction

In the early half of the 1970s, Rick Baker had been making inroads as a make-up artist. Baker's first film was *Octaman* (Harry Essex, 1971), a B-Movie he worked on during his second year of junior college.²⁴ After designing the suit for the titular anthropomorphic octopus, Baker worked on several independent monster projects, including *Schlock* (John Landis, 1973).²⁵ By 1973, Baker was also beginning to be offered larger projects like Roger Moore's first outing as James Bond in *Live and Let Die* (Guy Hamilton, 1973). Baker also worked as an assistant to mentor Dick Smith on *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973). A year later, in 1974, Baker would win his first award for make-up, a Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Make-up for a Single-Camera Series (Non-Prosthetic) for his work on the 1974 CBS television movie, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (John Korty). He had even acquired his own protégé, Rob Bottin.²⁶ Baker was rising through the ranks of special effects make-up, having gone from assisting to an award-winning artist with his own assistant. He was, in short, building a career as a below-the-line make-up artist. Then, in 1974, 'John Landis called to tell [Baker] about 'some Italian guy' who was going to do a remake of *King Kong*' (Rinzler, 2019a, p. 108).

²⁴ According to *Metamorphosis*, Baker was handed the job after the previous artists, Baker's colleagues at Cloaky Studios Tom Sherman (Special effects artist on *Flesh Gordon* (Michael Benveniste and Howard Ziehm, 1974) and *The Crater Lake Monster* (William R. Stromberg, 1977)) and Bill Hedge (best known for his work on *Airplane!* (Jim Abrahams, David Zucker and Jerry Zucker, 1980) *Species* (Roger Donaldson, 1995) and *Air Force One* (Wolfgang Petersen, 1997)) left the project when they were offered better things (Rinzler, 2019a, p. 48).

²⁵ We will talk more about *Schlock* in the next chapter, as it is integral to how Landis and Baker met. This partnership eventually led to the production of *An American Werewolf in London* (John Landis, 1981).

²⁶ Best known for his work on *The Howling* (Joe Dante, 1981) and *The Thing* (John Carpenter, 1982).



[Fig. 1.1] The film's promotional tagline on the original poster, where Kong can be seen straddling the World Trade Centre. *King Kong* (John Guillermin, 1976) original film poster

That 'Italian guy', Dino De Laurentiis, whose film was to be promoted as "The Most Exciting Original Motion Picture Event of All Time" [Fig. 1.1]. *King Kong* was the most anticipated, talked about, and expensive movie of the year. Kong was making his return, not as a 'jerky' miniature stop motion puppet (Kelley, 1977, p. 20), but as a 40ft tall, fully functional 'million dollar robot' designed by Carlo Rambaldi and Glen Robinson (Robinson, 1976, p. 9). However, when Peter Jackson released his 2005 version thirty years later, *KKII* was considered 'A

Folly' (Nathan, 2006, p. 96), while *Empire* placed it in their 'Top 10 Worst Special Effects' list.

Critics mocked Rick Baker for replacing the

mechanical marvel with 'a hastily knitted monkey suit so unconvincing that audiences kept looking out for the zipper' (Crook, 2007, p. 177). The effects themselves were thought of badly, and the production of *KKII* was 'plagued with danger and disaster' (Bahrenburg, 1976, p. i).²⁷ All the ballyhoo and hyperbolic promises De Laurentiis and his team at Paramount made to the press and to promote the film belied the end product.

This is not to defend *KKII* or to reclaim it as a scorned technological marvel. Similarly, the chapter does not aim to examine the production history to discover the cause of the film's issues. Instead, because this research is focused on exploring the visibility and perception of

²⁷ From *The Creation of Dino De Laurentiis' 'King Kong'* a book published to chart the behind-the-scenes goings on as a promotional tool.

special effects and Rick Baker, I aim to see what elements have affected that visibility. By looking at the general discussions of *KKII*'s failure, this chapter examines how its special effects, the animatronic designed by Rambaldi and the suit provided by Rick Baker, are situated within them. It also aims to identify where Baker is placed within these discussions and how visible he is within the film's production, marketing and reception at this point in his career. Furthermore, this chapter seeks to explore how all of this relates to a hierarchy of special effects that was seemingly constructed during the production and in the film's reception.

This chapter will apply a threefold structure to chart the 'reception trajectory' of *KKII* (Mathijs, 2005, p. 452). Instead of just charting the reception of *KKII*, as this would only provide one aspect of the visibility of Rick Baker and his effects on the production, the first section will analyse the perception of the production history of *KKII*. This section will introduce the key figures in the production and present the turbulent events that took place in making the film and the internal studio politics that arguably made the filmmaking process more problematic. However, this is only one version of the history, the one that was presented to audiences in the promotional materials and interviews with the producers during 1976 and 1977. Then there is another history provided by newspapers and other film press observing the production. This first version of history includes Bruce Bahrenburg's *The Creation of Dino De Laurentiis' King Kong*, the tie-in book produced by Paramount to help promote the film. In this section, I will explore which figures and aspects of the film in the production are made visible and which are rendered invisible. I will also explore the promises and narratives of De Laurentiis and the other film producers, arguably to cover up the production difficulties and differentiate and market their film.

Acting as both a continuation and counterpoint to the first section, the second section will focus specifically on Rick Baker's view of his involvement in the production of *KKII*. This information is collected from interviews with Baker that were conducted sometime after the

film's release and after his reputation-making work on *An American Werewolf in London*. During this period, he is more able to discuss and critique his position in the production, especially in those special effects and genre film-focused publications like *Cinefex* and *Cinefantastique*. By examining these two histories, I aim to identify how different industrial perspectives shaped Baker's perception and visibility and his involvement with the special effects of *KKII*'s production.

It should be said that both production histories provided in the first two sections of this chapter are taken from promotional documents and interviews produced around the time of *KKII*'s production, as well as recollections of Rick Baker after the fact. Of course, this is not, and cannot represent the 'truth' of the matter. Instead, they are biased recollections of the production, made either to promote the film, features and reviews on the broader film press, or as a way for Baker to tell a biased version of the story after he had become more famous, visible and influential within the industry. I have chosen to include these sections in the research as they offer an interesting and exciting way to explore how the production history of certain films can be constructed, either through purposeful control by film producers and marketers or by film critics to create a certain kind of narrative around the film.

The third section of this chapter will analyse the critical response to *KKII*, specifically, the response to the film's special effects. This analysis will be split into two sections, focusing specifically on the reception of the special effects. The first section will examine how critics compared the film's special effects with the stop-motion animation of the 1933 original, while the second part will look more specifically at critics' reactions to the 'suit-mation' of the film and how this was contrasted with De Laurentiis' promises of a 40ft tall robot. Structuring the chapter this way, involving as it does multiple production histories and comparisons with the original *King Kong*, places *KKII* within a chain of history in relation to special effects and film.

This allows for a greater understanding of cultural memory and the issues surrounding films that rely on technological development, such as the special effects-heavy *King Kong* films.

Building the Eighth Wonder of the World: *King Kong*'s Production History

This first section focuses on the 'official' production history as presented by Dino De Laurentiis and the studio. While it may seem odd for the first section on a thesis that is focused on Rick Baker to be about his absence, this process of what Janet Staiger refers to as 'structure[ing] absences' and identifying 'what a text cannot say but says in spite of itself' (1997, p. 189) is one of the approaches that makes reception studies fascinating so vital. While Staiger implies that these absences are structured so that the film's meaning can be explored, I aim to structure Baker's absence from the 'official' production history to ask why he is made invisible from this production version. If Baker is absent, what elements are visible in the production? And why?

It was perhaps Dino De Laurentiis, due to how he positioned himself, who was the central figure in the promotional discourse for *KKII*. Indeed, in Stuart Byron's 1977 interview with the producer for *Film Comment*, De Laurentiis is pictured being held by 'his' new mechanical Kong [figure 1.2]. Similarly, In an



[Fig. 1.2] Image of Dino De Laurentiis in King Kong's giant hands taken from an interview by Stuart Byron from the January/February 1977 issue of *Film Comment*.

interview with *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, when asked, 'will this be an actual remake of the original?' (1977, p. 20), De Laurentiis responded, 'no, my version takes place in 1977 and is an entirely new story, a romantic adventure with some humor but no details similar to the

original' (p. 20). There is even more evidence of a change of genre as the director of *KKII*, John Guillemin, had recently made *Towering Inferno* (1974). This marks the transition of Kong from a horror film as it was understood in the 1930s into a more modern disaster film, focusing on melodrama and technological spectacle. However, what is interesting here is that De Laurentiis lays claim to the film as his version, arguing that he has more control over the picture than John Guillermin, the director.

De Laurentiis' visibility within the production was not necessarily a positive thing. While De Laurentiis was known for producing critically acclaimed films like Federico Fellini's *La Strada* (1954) and *Serpico* (Sidney Lumet, 1973), his reputation later changed. As Bernard Drew describes in a 1976 issue of *American Film*, 'a year later, [De Laurentiis'] flops outnumber the hits' (7), as he became known for exploitation films like *Mandingo* (Richard Fleischer, 1975) and *Death Wish* (Michael Winner, 1974). Byron describes De Laurentiis as 'a follower [who] hardly seems one of the more courageous ones around. He not only constricts himself to known quantities to direct his films but wants them to be quantities which have previously (and recently) directed the same kind of films' (p. 18). Drew argued that *KKII* was as a way for De Laurentiis to 'rescue' his flagging career (1976 p. 7). This perceived focus on commercial success rather than artistic ventures led critics to view De Laurentiis negatively, with some even comparing him to a con artist (Kelley, 1977, p. 21). This will later impact his remake of *KKII* and his attempt to model it as a 1970s blockbuster, with all the merchandising opportunities that would afford.

These discussions seem to echo Verevis' assertion that 'remakes are "pre-sold" to their audience because viewers are assumed to have some prior experience [...] of the original story' (2006, p. 3). This then ties De Laurentiis to the negative view of the remake model of filmmaking that critics will use as the foundation for their dislike of *KKII*. More than that, there is a lack of trust that De Laurentiis will deliver on the spirit of the original. In turn, this makes

it more likely that the film press will revel in the failures and difficulties faced by the production, as they do in their coverage of the production and their reviews.

The other major figures mentioned are inherently tied to each other and to De Laurentiis, including Carlo Rambaldi and the mechanical Kong itself.²⁸ According to Bahrenberg:

Rambaldi would create [what] was determined in part by De Laurentiis' instructions. The mechanical monster had to be *big*. Animation had been used for the legendary special effects in the first *King Kong* [...] but De Laurentiis felt that the original ape's movements had been too jerky, and he had intended to keep his Kong's motion fluid.

(1976, p. 21)

De Laurentiis hoped to use the technological marvel of the animatronic to differentiate his version from the 1933 original. Again, we see that De Laurentiis is gifted a level of centrality and control over the production; it is 'his Kong', and the special effects engineer Rambaldi is asked, as John T. Caldwell argues, that any below-the-line worker is to fulfil the demands of the director or in this case the producer.

Once production was well on its way, producers seemed to emphasise the spectacular nature of this animatronic in interviews and press releases. For example, in *The Observer*, Federico De Laurentiis stated that 'the finished Kong was wonderful ... It can take 15-foot strides, make 16 different hand movements and roll its eyes, too' (Foley, 1976, p. 7). Dino De Laurentiis' publicist Gordon Armstrong promised that Kong's face could 'contort into expressions of rage - they have pulleys and levers inside him that make him scowl and roar. His arms go up and down, and he can beat his chest. He can do anything, it's unreal' (Winchester, 1976, p. 2). Furthermore, in *The Aberdeen Press and Journal*, Ken Cooper mentions 'the 31,000ft of hydraulic hose and 4500ft of electrical wiring' (1976, p.10). In these

²⁸ The Italian special effects artist best known for his work on *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979), *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (Steven Spielberg, 1982) and *Dune* (David Lynch, 1984) who built the mechanical Kong.

and other promotions, the producers are making promises to the public about the impressiveness of what this new Kong can do. This publicity also reflects a narrative of size and scale that, as Julian Stringer discusses, would position the film as a blockbuster (2003, p. 4). Also, as with the cinephiles that Barbara Klinger discusses in her exploration of home movie collections, these types of narratives allow special effects audiences to engage with those spectacular images with a certain amount of ‘inside knowledge’. As Klinger states, the ‘media industries offer consumers the rhetoric of intimacy (i.e. “secrets” of the cinema) and mastery (i.e. technological expertise or media knowledge)’ (2006, p.89). While *KKII* was released before the home video, the news reports and sharing of knowledge of behind-the-scenes information combine to create a sense of ownership and appreciation for the work and the scale of the production scale. With the focus on the new Kong, readers can understand and appreciate the work that went into making him.

However, this view of the production outside the producer's control was less optimistic. *The Observer* wryly commented during the eight-month production, ‘rarely has a disaster movie earned its name so well’ (Foley, 1976, p. 7). This is due mainly to issues in the time allotted to make the film. Firstly, this was affected by a race to make the film due to legal disputes between Universal and Paramount over who had the rights to make a new version of *King Kong* (Harmetz, 1978, p. 20; Bahrenburg, 1976, p.53; Blyth, 1976, p. 7). This and other legal issues hurt the film’s budget. Due to time pressures, what was initially supposed to cost \$5 million ended up costing \$23 million by the time the film had wrapped (Foley, 1976, p. 7: *Screen International*, 1976a, p. 1). Furthermore:

[E]veryone had been trapped by a line of copy from Paramount’s poster announcement of its new Kong “One year from today Paramount Pictures and Dino De Laurentiis will bring you the most exciting original motion picture event of all time”.

(Barenberg, 1976 p. 31)

With this type of hyperbolic language in its marketing, *KKII* was promoted as ‘a “must see” attraction’ (Stringer, 2003, p.1), and an ‘event film’ (Neale, 2003, p. 47). It also suggests that the film producers are keying into the film’s large budget of \$5 million and the spectacular language used to describe *KKII*. The producers were also promoting it as a blockbuster. At the same time, Julian Stringer would argue that the term blockbuster is ‘a complex notion for categorizing and so thinking about certain kinds of film. In short, [he] understands the blockbuster as a genre’, however the reference to scale is in line with a core part of Stringer’s definition of a blockbuster which deals with its ‘size’ (2003, p. 2-3).

This issue of size meant that there was a lot of pressure to finish the building Kong and finish making the film on time, especially as a poster tagline boasted that the film would be released ‘one year from today’. In relation to this, Glen Robinson stated in a special issue of *American Cinematographer* that Carlo Rambaldi had the preliminary designs for the mechanism, which was initially going to be constructed by an aircraft company but could not be finished due to the time constraints (1977, p. 51).²⁹ Furthermore, an issue of *Variety* called the animatronic ‘A Budget Wrecker’ (1976c, p. 424) and claimed that the expensive robot delayed production for three weeks (p. 424). Not only did the animatronic cause problems for the production, but it also had problems of its own. As *Time Magazine* reported in August, ‘Kong’s most embarrassing problem [was], because of leaky jacks, a steady stream of fluid oozes down his right leg’ (1976b). Again, we see discussions of size regarding *KKII* and its failure s effects; as Stringer points out, ‘the language of “flop of flops” is used for “failed” blockbusters’ (Stringer, 2003, p. 4). What is interesting here is that the very scale of the production, a site for spectacle in blockbusters, can be turned against a film. De Laurentiis wanted to use the specular scale of the animatronic Kong to differentiate the production from

²⁹ An American special effects artist who has worked on films ranging from *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939), *Forbidden Planet* to *Earthquake* and *Dead Men Don’t Wear Plaid* (Carl Reiner, 1982).

the original. However, the issues with the new Kong provide a more ‘visible’ and negative counterpoint to the original, one that critics appeared to latch onto as the film is being made.

Even Bahrenburg, writing a promotional book, adds to this by pointing out that Rambaldi and Robinson did not speak the same language (1976, p. 21). This is also addressed by *Variety*, whose writer describes how two different teams constructed ‘two right paws’ and that there were issues with using the different measuring systems (1976e, p. 424). However, in that same *Variety* report, a ‘spokesman avers that the production is going ‘beautifully’’ (p. 424). This continues to reveal the conflict between different views on how the production was going, as well as tensions regarding time, technological and communication issues, and the ways in which the producers and spokespeople wished for the production to be viewed.

As we have seen, while promises were being made about Kong's abilities, the reality was being reported in the wider press. While Bahrenburg presented the difficulties as problems that the production would overcome, the wider press did not provide that positive spin, charting the scale of the failure in a production that suggested it was doomed.

While Rick Baker is absent from most of the ‘official’ production history, as his presence was hidden behind the larger presences of De Laurentiis, Rambaldi and the 40ft mechanical shadow of their animatronic Kong, he is not wholly invisible. Bruce Bahrenburg’s promotional tie-in book briefly mentions Baker, stating that ‘the producer wishes to acknowledge that Kong has been designed and engineered by Carlo Rambaldi and Glen Robinson with special contributions by Rick Baker’ (1976, p. v). This phrase is interesting for its vagueness. What is meant by the term ‘special contributions’? And what, exactly, was the nature of Baker’s involvement in the production?

While Baker is present in Bahrenburg’s account of the making of *KKII*, his role and contributions are rendered ephemeral. According to Bahrenburg, Baker was discovered by

director John Guillermin after his work on *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*. (1976, p. 29). This act of discovering Baker marginalises him within the Hollywood industry; he is positioned as outside. Secondly, this account also contradictorily lists Baker's previous successes, pointing to his quality as a practitioner and his ability to produce a sense of spectacle. Paradoxically, while placed as an insider within Hollywood, his reputation and the quality of his effects work are used to increase that of the production. Furthermore, he is distanced from his expertise. Bahrenburg, for example, reports that:

Baker was hired [by Guillermin], along with several other young men, to alternate as the man in the monkey suit. And, making use of his experience with faces and with primates, he began helping Rambaldi with the design of Kong's face.

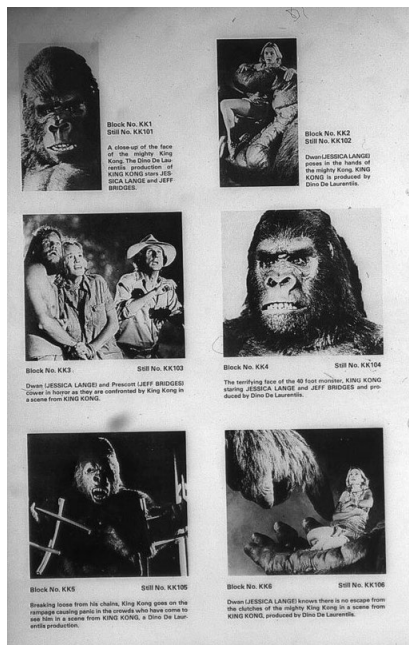
(Bahrenburg, 1976, p, 29-30)

According to this account, Baker is not hired as a special effects artist but as a man-in-the-monkey-suit. Bahrenburg also states that Baker provided 'invaluable suggestions' to Rambaldi as he designed this version of Kong (p. 176). This implication, that he is merely helping the other special effects creator, places Baker in a lower position in the production hierarchy. This vagueness in the 'suggestions' that Baker gave to Rambaldi, coupled with the fact that interviews with Rick Baker around the time of *KKII*'s release are virtually absent from the critical and production reception of the film, renders Baker voiceless during the time of the film's production and release.

As Jason Bailey says, 'you shouldn't judge a movie by its production history, but knowing that history is often useful in understanding how the end product is such a mess' (Bailey, 2017). It is also imprudent not to find out the underlying reasons why a film is bad. This production history of *KKII* and the perception of its failure seems to be primarily due to De Laurentiis and his producers' inability to meet the extravagant promises made during production. This is further enforced by accusations that De Laurentiis was a 'con man', with *Empire* describing the film as a 'sham' (Crook, 2007, p. 177). While De Laurentiis was

promising a fully functional and expressive mechanical ape, there were issues of time and communication, causing difficulties with those attempting to build the large animatronic. These difficulties show the state of the production, specifically what it was like making the special effects. Furthermore, while Baker is absent from most sources (other than Bahrenburg's book), his position within the production renders him a marginal figure with rather vague contributions, helping Rambaldi provide suggestions and his performance in a suit rather than contributing his own work. With this version of the production history of *KKII* in place, it allows for a better understanding of how the producers wished to present the film to audiences. Similarly, it will act as a point of comparison between Baker's interpretation of history after the fact and the film's critical reception. Within this context, the chapter will trace how the issues with the production and its effects fed into the critical discourse surrounding the film.

Technological Devolution: Rick Baker, Alternative Production Histories and Special Effects. *King Kong* (1976)



[Fig. 1.3] Images presented in the press book for *King Kong* (John Guillermin, 1976) show actors Jeff Bridges and Jessica Lange and the star King Kong.

One production history, presented by Dino De Laurentiis and other producers, focused on the production of Rambaldi and Robinson's large animatronic versions of Kong. Indeed, in a June 1976 edition of *The Guardian*, Armstrong states that "there are these three things: a living Kong that is being built on the MGM set here; a 10ft long mechanical arm that is going to do all the grabbing of the blondes; and the dead Kong we are shipping up to New York next week' (Winchester, 1976, p. 2). Furthermore, in the pressbook for

the production, two of the pictures selected [see Fig. 1.3], deal with the spectacular image of Jessica Lange held in the giant hand of Kong, the close-ups themselves, of which

there are three, are of 'the terrifying face of the 40-foot monster' (Pressbook, 1976, p. 4).³⁰ [Fig. 1.3] While there is mention of Rick Baker within the tie-in book, his contributions are rendered vague, as someone who simply provided 'suggestions'.³¹ While Baker is voiceless and mostly sidelined in the production history of *KKII* at the time of the film's production and release, however, this would change as he grew in reputation and standing in the industry.

In the few mentions of *KKII* after its release, Baker clarifies that his involvement in the film was a frustrating experience for him. In an interview for a 1982 issue of *StarBurst*, Baker says that his experience on *KKII*

was f***ed! It was a big disappointment. How many times in a guy's life – especially for a guy like me who really likes gorillas and would like to do a really really decent realistic gorilla suit – is there going to be a film like *King Kong* made, where the lead in the film is the gorilla? When I went in there and talked to them they wanted it to be a Neanderthal man. They didn't even want it to be a gorilla. My God, these guys were so off-base I was really disappointed. I thought, now we'll have some money and the time to really do this properly and they'll want it really good because it'll have to be good to work.

(Edwards, 1982, p. 20)

Baker goes on to complain that the production made Kong look like a 'scrawny hairy ape man' version of Kong (Fox, 1984, p. 30). This reflects a sense of disappointment that permeates through all of Baker's recollections of the production of *KKII*. Baker would continue this narrative in a Q&A panel for a 2016 film screening. He said that when he found out about the remake from John Landis, 'I just shook my head and I said they're just going to get some idiot and put him in an ape suit. And I was right, you know. But [...] to me it was sacrilege' (Nino7500, 2017, 10:08). These statements play into the discussions of special effects hierarchies that will be discussed in more depth in the third section. But for now, it is important

³⁰ Though interestingly, these would be images of Rick Baker in a King Kong suit.

³¹ Although in that very same book, Baker is said to have been approached when De Laurentiis was thinking about using a man-in-a-suit, though according to Bahrenburg, 'He assigned Rambaldi to the construction of the suit and various face masks' (1976, pp. 21-22).

to remember that Baker and others generally hold a negative attitude toward the production's approach to creating Kong.

These statements also reveal Baker's vested interest in Kong as a character and a property. Similarly, it reveals attitudes on maintaining consistency in King Kong's form, which will be analysed later. They also changed the narrative from Baker volunteering or being hired by the producers to one of his fighting those same producers who viewed the film as 'a disaster movie' and sought to change how Kong looked (Edwards, 1982, p. 21). According to Baker's narrative, his role in the production is much more active. However, it is crucial to recognise that Baker's much more combative tone only appears after his star-making make-up in *American Werewolf*, when his position in industrial Hollywood is more secure. Similarly, it is also crucial to recognize that this is a biased telling of history from his own perspective.

This theme continues in Baker's discussion about his relationship with Carlo Rambaldi. *Cinefex* would report in its April 1984 issue (which was entirely given over to a biography of Baker) that:

Baker found the collaborative process frustrating and the overall experience largely unrewarding. And while the producers tried to convince the public that much of the film had been shot with a forty-foot mechanical ape, in reality, all but a few cuts featured the Kong suit – with Rick Baker inside.

(Fox, 1984, p. 25)

Baker was astonished by the design choice and offered to work on the film to improve Kong's design, but claims he was refused because 'Dino brought his friend from Italy, Carlo Rambaldi, and we're thinking that we might not even need a whole ape suit because Carlo thinks that he can build a 40ft robot that can do the whole movie' (Nino7500, 2017, 12:28). However, the production team still wanted a man in a suit as a back-up plan. They tried to get Baker to work with Rambaldi, but as Baker stated to the audience of the panel, he didn't know who Rambaldi was (13:00).

Cinefex details that rather than a collaboration, Baker's relationship with Rambaldi was more competitive, not least because 'a test-suite competition was proposed' (Fox, 1984, p. 30). Here, Baker and Rambaldi were instructed to construct their Kong suits within six weeks. Baker went to work in his garage with one assistant, while Rob Bottin worked a gruelling 'fifteen-hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week effort' (p. 30). Even though Baker finished on time, he claims to have irritated the crew by ignoring their design brief to make Kong appear more Neanderthal. However, Baker claimed that Rambaldi's suit, which he had assumed would have been more in line with the design brief, was not completed despite having a team of twenty people (Nino7500, 2017, 14:39).³² Baker also quotes John Guillerman's reaction: 'Rick was right! His suit is much more what Kong should be' (15:59). De Laurentiis then asked Baker to work with Rambaldi on the project. As noted by Fox, 'on paper it seemed a good match-up – [with] Baker's vastly greater expertise with moulds and foam work, and Rambaldi's much greater experience with mechanical systems' (1984, p. 33). While Barhenburg credits Baker for providing valuable suggestions to the production, Baker claims he did far more, that he singlehandedly saved the production from disastrous design decisions. Baker also claimed that his work was better than Rambaldi's, which remained unfinished. However, he is only able to express these feelings of bitterness and acrimony six years after the fact, when he has established himself as a 'name' within the industry.

It should also be noted that *StarBurst* and *Cinefex* are different from publications like *Film Comment* and the newspapers that were also reporting on *KKII*'s production at the time. As mentioned previously, *StarBurst* and *Cinefex* focus on specific areas of film. While *StarBurst* is a genre-focused magazine, *Cinefex* is a periodical that focuses on special effects in film and television, with a particular focus on the technical construction of the craft. As a

³² The production team apparently claimed that this was because Rambaldi had been working on the animatronic Kong.

special effects artist who works on genre films, the readership of both publications would be interested in learning about Baker's side of history. Publications, like *The Observer* and *Film Comment* (mentioned in the previous section),³³ while different, one being a broadsheet newspaper and the other being a film-specific magazine, by dint of the types of audiences they write for, represent 'intellectual taste'. They would, therefore, be more negative if they are writing or covering a film that relies on spectacle, as it is considered a lower form of art or covering a filmmaker that focuses on the economics of filmmaking. As the focus of *StarBurst* and *Cinefex* was that of genre films and special effects, respectively, Baker becomes a more visible figure within the productions they cover.

With this visibility, he positions himself as an active hero in these narratives, challenges the narratives that the production companies were telling at the time, and centers himself as an expert who knows what is best and how Kong should look. He also claims to have influenced *KKII*, stating that '[The] differences in the film [are] because of my involvement with it' (Edwards, 1982, p. 21). Whatever his influence on the design of Kong, Baker remained elliptically credited for his role in the production and uncredited for the performance he gave in that suit. The production narrative at the time pushed Baker to the sidelines in favour of Carlo Rambaldi and his 40ft robot, most likely due to the spectacle and novelty of the animatronic. In contrast, according to Baker's retrospective framing of his experiences on this film, he is a valiant figure who attempts to save Kong from a production that does not know better.

Baker, through his telling, is relating a narrative of marginalisation with production history. According to him, he was fighting production from day one and battling producers on

³³ a magazine that, according to the website 'About' section, "as been the home of independent film journalism, publishing in-depth interviews, critical analysis, and featuring coverage of mainstream, art-house and avant-garde filmmaking from around the world' (*Film Comment* About).

the design and construction of Kong. His frustration is palpable here, and the consistency of his narrative has remained unchanged since 1982.

In their history of Baker's career, *Cinefex* points out that after another competition between Baker and Rambaldi, Baker's sculpture was still picked as the better model: 'though successful in gaining acceptance of his model making procedures and choice of materials for the head, on virtually every other design idea for making a better ape, Baker ran into an implacable stone wall' (Fox, 1984, p. 33). Of course, as Baker was only just beginning his career as a special effects artist when working on *KKII*, he was given less opportunity to express his views on the production in broader discussions of the film. Perhaps inevitably, his position within the production was relatively low, as he was below Carlo Rambaldi, who was tasked with providing the true 'star' of *KKII*. Later, following his work on *An American Werewolf in London*, Baker could look back at the production from his privileged position as a 'name' within the special effects field.

As we have seen, within the production of *KKII*, Baker was a liminal figure, present and removed, talked about in the tie-in making-of book as the man in the suit, providing suggestions but not the special effects he would later be known for. This is mainly because the focus for press and marketing was the malfunctioning spectacle of the 40ft animatronic, replacing Willis O'Brien's original stop-motion animation. However, as this history comes from Baker himself, we should be careful with this version of events. The fact that these stories come out after the production was wrapped and after *KKII* garnered its reputation as a special effects disaster means that we have to take this narrative with a certain amount of scepticism. There is also an element of ego within these stories. Indeed, this gives us the first hints of Baker's 'Against-All-Odds' narratives that foreground his graft and tenacity, as told to Caldwell (2008, p. 38). However, these are not the kinds of narratives that underscore 'the humble, unexceptional origins needed to create rising action and dramatic arc of the classic

myth of heroism' (p. 40). Instead, Baker presents this as his own heroic tale rather than one of solidarity with other below-the-line workers. However, the ability to tell this heroic narrative can only happen as he becomes more visible in film production and the industry in general. This visibility allows for more control over the narratives he can tell.

The producer's version of the production history and Baker's account reveal a sense of conflict regarding Baker's importance to the special effects for *KKII*. While Baker claims he was instrumental in executing Kong's performance, as we have seen, the marketing, pre-release and production material downplay his role in the film, focusing instead on the 40ft animatronic that Carlo Rambaldi would build. While Baker's presence is mentioned in some reviews and production notes, he is a marginalised and 'awkward' figure to discuss. He is absent from most of the production and pre-release material discourses at the time, and when he is present, it is only as an aside due to the production's focus on the animatronics. As we move away from the initial release, the perception of the film's central attraction, the 40-foot-tall mechanical Kong, solidifies into an embarrassment. However, after *An American Werewolf in London* in 1981 and solidifying himself as Rick Baker 'Monster Maker', he was able to inflate his importance within the film's production. Ultimately, this conflict provides a benchmark for the perception of special effects artists starting in their careers or working under a more experienced artist.

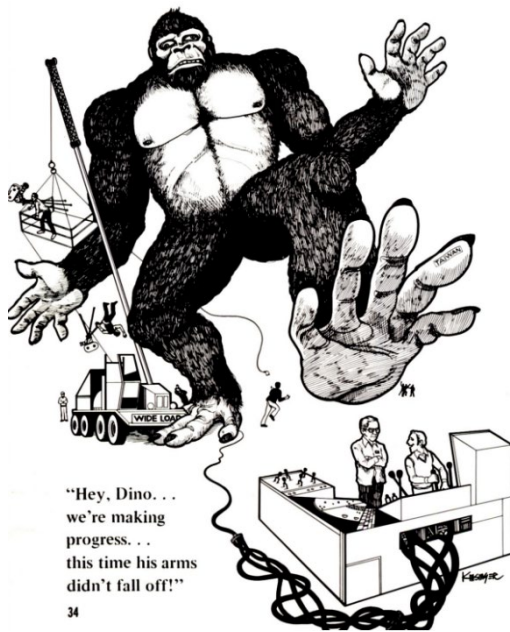
Kong Remade: The Critical Reaction to *King Kong* as a Remake and as an Animatronic Special Effect

As discussed earlier in this thesis, despite De Laurentiis' confidence in the originality of his version of King Kong, the technological wonder of the animatronic, and the changes made in his version, critics were not as impressed.

The most vitriolic admonishing of *KKII* came from *Cinefantastique*, with its Spring 1976 issue running an open letter decrying the remake. Underneath the large impact font of the title, Paul Mandell subtitled the question, ‘Can film producers hope to improve on a film classic? No. They only hope to get rich trying’ (Mandell, 1976, p. 40). While complimenting the ‘technical genius of Willis Harold O’Brien’ and the stop motion animation in the original *King Kong*, the major issue that Mandell has with the remake is its special effects (p. 40). According to Mandell, his intention was not ‘to merely make a pitch for stop-motion techniques to the moguls it is addressed to; rather, it is to make them realise how well stop-motion models worked in the original film’ (p. 43). Mandell goes on to claim that Kong’s ‘classic style’ must be maintained by using stop-motion (p. 40). Indeed, this open letter is illustrated by a parody of the film poster, complete with a caricature of the ape in an ill-fitting suit with toy planes attached to string [Fig. 1.4].



[Fig. 1.4] a cartoon from the spring 1976 issue of *Cinefantastique* that presents a caricature of the special effects of *King Kong* (John Guillermin, 1976) that accompanied “an open letter to Universal and Dino De Laurentis” by Paul Mandell.



[fig. 1. 5] A cartoon of an out-of-control animatronic Kong about to cause chaos on the set of *King Kong* (John Guillermin, 1976) that companies Bill Warren's "Model animation? What'sa dat?" in a Winter 1976 Edition of *Cinefantastique*.

The cartoons and criticisms did not stop there. A Winter 1976 edition of *Cinefantastique* ran a similarly negative article titled 'Model Animation? What'sa dat?' (Warren, 1976, p. 34). This rather discriminatory title came from a quote from De Laurentiis when he was asked about the technique that would be used to bring his Kong to life.³⁴ Interestingly, this article is one of the only ones to mention Rick Baker by name, although it is only to reveal that 'mention that most of the time on the screen, you won't be seeing the electronic marvel, you'll be seeing one of the two guys in a monkey suit.

Their names, Rick Baker and William Shepard' (1976, p. 34). Furthermore, Bill Warren³⁵ continues, Rick Baker, the guy who designed and wears the King Kong suit in the film, says that the robot looks nothing like [the suit]' (p. 34). Baker is only visible here to draw attention to the failure of the large robot, which is central to the mockery of the *Cinefantastique* writers.

One line is particularly telling:

[T]he original KING KONG ran recently at a local theatre and Guillerman was spotted attending a showing. Supposedly he hadn't seen it in years and hated it, saying the ape looked unrealistic, that there were few thrills, no good dialogue and terrible characterizations. Gee, this means the new one will be better in all those departments, right John? (This is only heresay; perhaps Guillerman loves the old picture, but that's doubtful considering what his is doing to it.)

(p. 34)³⁶

³⁴ De Laurentiis is Italian and English is his second language. Other Italian stereotypes are used derogatorily in figure 6. which was a cartoon placed above the letters section of a 1976 issue of *Cinefantastique*.

³⁵ Who had participated as an extra during the filming of Kong's escape scene, and chronicled his experience, including telling of a comedian hired to keep the extras entertained.

³⁶ John Guillermin's name is misspelt in the article.

Again, we see the conflict between the need to distinguish the new version of Kong from the original, as well as the negative way that this was received in the more genre-centric press. What is interesting here, is that this story of Guillermin and the title of the article are both based on stories that Warren admits are apocryphal. Even so, this still adds to the negative view of the film for not only distancing itself too much from the 1933 Kong but appearing to insult it (p. 34).

The constant comparisons to the original and references to stop motion continue in *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, where the interviewer asks if Ray Harryhausen will be involved in the film's production (1977, p. 18). However, even Harryhausen is not safe from Mandell's screed, with Mandell claiming that Harryhausen had lost



[Fig. 1.6] A cartoon appearing alongside the letters section of a Spring 1976 issue of *Cinefantastique* depicting Dino De Laurentiis being crushed under the weight of his animatronic, complete with Italian stereotypes.

his way due to having 'abandoned or limited' O'Brien's original techniques (1976, p. 42). So Harryhausen, another highly regarded stop-motion special effects artist, is placed, almost irrationally, lower on this stringent hierarchy of special effects. Why all this hatred? Why was *Cinefantastique* so critical of a remake of a forty-year-old film and the updating of its special effects?

This may have something to do with *KKII*'s status as a remake, a term with negative connotations. As Verevis claims, 'remaking is often taken as a sign of Hollywood film having exhausted its creative potential' (2006, p. 3). Indeed, remakes also seem tied to commercial interests. As Verevis comments, the remake of *KKII* seemed like an economically safe option

due to name-brand recognition and tie-in promotions (p. 3). Similarly, Lesley Stern argues, 'Remakes reflect the conservative nature of the industry; they are motivated by an economic imperative to repeat proven success' (1997). This reflects the image that some critics have of Dino De Laurentiis, a man who always bet on the safe option, making critically flawed but economically successful films. However, one of the key concerns for those remaking a film is how to differentiate the remake from the original. While many academics outline different types of remakes, the discourse surrounding the making of *KKII* means that it fits into Harvey Roy Greenberg's 'acknowledged transformed remake' (1991, p. 170). This is defined as a remake that acknowledges its origin as a remake but changes the time, setting, and character (p. 170). *Cinefantastique's* coverage of *KKII* seems to fit into the derogatory mindset that Verevis sets out: audiences are sceptical of the commercial implications of remakes. This sentiment seems to run through all of *Cinefantastique's* film coverage and the general understanding of De Laurentiis as a producer.

However, the discussion of special effects in *KKII* adds another interesting dimension and introduces us to the hierarchical categorisation of the special effects techniques in the critical reception of *KKII*. Spectacle was another way *KKII* could be separated from the original. However, this refers to a different category of remake, specifically Thomas M. Leitch's 'update' (Leitch, 1990, p.143), which is similar to the acknowledged, transformed remake. Leitch describes the update as competing directly with the source of origin, claiming that it takes an 'overtly revisionary stance toward an original text they treat as classic even though they transform it in some obvious way' (p. 143). But perhaps updates can also refer to technological updates, as *KKII* is not only updating the story of Kong but also the visuals, allowing audiences to see the eighth wonder of the world in colour as well as towering above the cast as the mechanical ape the production promised. However, despite these claims, critics

and commentators were still sceptical, constantly showering praise on the original film's special effects, while casting doubts as to the validity and quality of the remake.

Furthering the film press's hierarchising of special effects, Mandell condemns a previous reimagining of the giant ape. The 1962 Toho film *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (Ishiro Honda) and the sequel *King Kong Escapes* (Ishiro Honda, 1967), used suit-motion to bring Kong to the screen.³⁷ Mandell states, 'that degenerative development certainly warrants no further exploration but illustrates just what happens when a classic film creation is purchased from the original source and blasphemed by the producers of shlock' (1976, p. 40).³⁸ This is interesting as there seems to be a further development of hierarchies in special effects, this time dealing with suit-mation specifically, something that Baker was involved in and something for which *KKII* will be infamously remembered. However, there seems to be an attachment of cultural value to the original *King Kong* as part of this culture of connoisseurship and appreciation that floats around special effects is taken to the extreme. But there is a demand for the aesthetics of a film to remain the same. This seems to fly in the face of most academics' understanding of special effects audiences, wanting to see technological development and new spectacle while fiercely protecting what has come before and, in fact, arguing for a return to old techniques.³⁹ Baker's name may be absent from the critical reception of *KKII* for the most part because he is a below-the-line worker, but he is also not seen as responsible for the film's failures in the same way that De Laurentiis is. When the promise to make the animatronic the visible source of spectacle and the site of attraction was broken, the ape in the suit that Baker had worked on was held up as part of that collective failure.

³⁷ Indeed, the suit in the cartoon in figure 4 has a label that denotes it as the property of Toho.

³⁸ This is troubling in itself as Mandell assigns this transcultural reinterpretation of Kong as Schlock. Similarly, he does not dig into the different industrial contexts between the US Kong and the Japanese films. Though this is not the focus of the thesis, it is important to draw attention to the tone and content of the quote other than how it denigrates suit-mation as a special effect.

³⁹ It also echoes Baker's need to be aesthetically accurate to how King Kong looked in the original film.

Bill Kelley offers an explanation of why these effects are seen as a failure. In his 1977 review of *KKII* in *Cinefantastique* he states that ‘taken on their merits with no comparison to any other film, [the effects] are just plain bad. You can see through the edges of a lot of the process photography’ (p. 21). This quote is fascinating as it seems to echo Dan North’s argument in *Performing Illusions*. North states that one of the joys for enthusiasts of filmic special effects is the challenge to ‘spot the join’ (2008, p. 2), much like being in the know with stage illusions. There seems to be an issue with such a pronounced join between the special effect and the filmic reality of *KKII*.

However, how does this apply to the film critic? Ultimately, this relates to the understanding of film critics as cultural gatekeepers. Film critics use knowledge to gain power over regular audiences and, as such, are viewed as trusted figures who can distinguish between good and bad art. In other words, they are connoisseurs. If we apply this to North’s speculations on areas of pleasure in engaging with special effects, the fact that the seam is obvious lacks the challenge that a connoisseur would relish. Building upon King’s assertion that there is a critical hierarchy between spectacle and narrative, special effects make it necessary to look at this not as a duality but as a triad that also involves issues of realism. While it may seem odd to consider anything spectacular to be real, as Prince theorises in his exploration of ‘perceptual realism’, it is remarkably important. While *KKII* is undoubtedly spectacular, critics viewed these effects as unrealistic and overly visible, interrupting the narrative through incongruity instead of spectacle. Part of the power of special effects comes from the multiple levels of visibility and the gaze we use to engage with them.⁴⁰ Audiences and critics travel through these layers during their viewing; effects that are considered too unrealistic mean that an important aspect of perceiving the special effect is interrupted, making them a failure. The break and mismatched

⁴⁰ As will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 3 alongside ‘perceptual realism’.

nature of ‘trans-photographic contact’ (North, 2008, p. 1), the fact that one can spot the splicing, means that this illusion, the magic of the special effects and film, is broken. Similarly, this obvious trickery is a blatant intrusion of spectacle into the narrative. Thus, the negative response to it, unfortunately, champions the critical idea that spectacle seeks to ‘eclipse’ narrative (King, 2009, p. 2).

Kelley’s review addresses the hierarchising of special effects as presented in the two versions of Kong. Of the remake, he argues that ‘Kong always looks like a man in a suit, and his movements, particularly the changes of facial expression, are too slow and deliberate to seem natural’ (1977, p. 21). The suit-mation is placed on a similar plane with ‘the 40-foot mock-up [that] only makes about a three-second appearance and looks about as lively as a cigar store Indian on roller skates’ (p. 21). What is interesting here is the difference in the reception of special effects and the promises made by De Laurentiis and other producers. While the production discourse suggested that the animatronic would take centre stage, with a full range of movement, the actual special effects primarily consisted of suit-mation. With this in mind, we can conclude that the negative criticism stems largely from a failure to meet the audience expectations that the production set. Again, the suit is pointed at by critics as a failure of the production to produce the working animatronic, but also because it does not look or feel like the original film's effects. Baker is not named or visible within the discussion of the effects, but his work is used as a point of comparison, and it is often found wanting, largely due to the promises of De Laurentiis.

While Kelley is exposing the false promises of De Laurentiis, he still views stop-motion animation as the best way to bring Kong to the big screen, arguing that someone should have shown De Laurentiis

The Golden Voyage of Sinbad, or some other, recent Ray Harryhausen film, which could have been shown to [him] to demonstrate that animation isn’t

‘jerky’ anymore [...] If De Laurentiis isn’t enlightened enough to know that mode animation has progressed beyond the days when audiences could see Willis O’Brien’s fingerprints on Kong’s shoulder, then let him blow \$24 million on a movie that could cost less than half that figure if he knew what he was doing.

(1977, p. 21)

Kelley also appears to be demonstrating a hierarchisation of special effects, placing stop-motion as the *only* technique to bring Kong to life. Kelley does not blame the practitioners for this failure, although this is only because, with neither Baker’s nor Rambaldi’s name mentioned in the review, they are apparently invisible. Instead, Kelley flings vitriol at De Laurentiis for not using the stop-motion effects that appear so crucial to Kong fans. Above all, critics place the blame at De Laurentiis’ feet for trying to make a quick buck from remaking *King Kong* without fully understanding what made the original great.

What is interesting here is that it is not just the genre-focused magazines that hold this attitude. The broadsheet newspapers similarly construct the hierarchy of remakes and special effects practices. In an issue of *The New York Times*, Vincent Canby titled his review of the film ‘*King Kong* Bigger, not Better, in a Return to the Scene of the Crime’ (Canby, 1976, p. 16). Canby continues, stating that the special effects in *KKII* are ‘a dazzling display of what the special-effects people can do when commissioned to construct a 40-foot-tall ape who can walk, make fondling gestures, is slightly cross-eyed and smiles a lot’ (p. 16). Canby continues that the original film was not ‘overwhelmed by an awareness of the terrific time and expense that went into them’ (p. 16). This type of discourse continues in the December 26th issue of *The Times*. The review expounds on the skills of Willis O’Brien in the original film before going on to condemn the De Laurentiis version for focusing too much ‘on effects and spectacle with far too little consideration of the script, the story or what *King Kong* is about’ (Robinson, 1976, p. 9). Interestingly, this is a perfect example of Geoff King’s assertion in his book *Spectacular Narratives*, where he writes that while film criticism sees the narrative as a site to

uncover a film's message or meaning, 'this over-emphasis on narrative may have encouraged a response that too readily dismisses the importance of the narrative dimension of Hollywood spectacle' (King, 2009, p. 4). We begin to see that due to *KKII*'s more obvious and overt reliance on the blockbuster spectacle, it is viewed as illegitimate compared to the original version. Even though the film's main draw is the stop-motion monkey carrying Fay Wray up the Empire State Building, for critics, the 1933 *King Kong* relies less on special effects fuelled spectacle. While these critics, writing for 'high class' publications, praise the use of special effects in the original, they argue that *KKII* uses technology as a crutch. For example, Richard Schickel, writing for *Time*, argues that 'it is technology that betrays the new Kong. He smiles, he frowns, he looks sad. He is, in short, capable of subtle responses, and so, one is neither puzzled by him nor genuinely frightened' (1976). The modern technology of the remake, claims Schickel, removes something indefinable that the original had. However, this also seems contrary to how people engage with technological development, as we will be discussing later in relation to the motion capture technology in Peter Jackson's *King Kong* (2005).⁴¹ Although this seems to offer a counterpoint to Schickel, these discussions also lead to several questions: Why is it just the animatronic that receives this dismissal? Is this because the animatronic is different to the original's stop-motion puppet? Ultimately, Schickel is further delegitimising the work of special effects artists whose output, he claims, is not crucial to creating what Kong should be.

However, the most egregious example of this hierarchising of special effects happens after the film's release, as recounted in the spring 1977 issue of *Cinefantastique* in a news report on Jim Danforth's²⁵ resignation from the Academy. This was because, the report claims,

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced that the Academy Board of Governors had voted to give Special Achievement Awards (Oscars)

⁴¹ Indeed, Lisa Bode points out that the critical response to Andy Serkis's performance as Ceasar in *Planet of the Apes* was praising the level of 'expressivity' (2015, p. 40).

for visual effects to both *King Kong* and *Logan's Run*, to be handed out at the Oscar ceremonies March 28th.

(CFQ. 1977, p. 28)

The resignation was due to several factors, including Danforth not being consulted for the nominations of both films, although he was part of a special effects nominating committee. According to Danforth, *KKII*'s special effects 'are a joke' (CFQ, 1977, p. 24). Not only is this a personal opinion expressed as criticism of the film, but it also introduces the industrial hierarchies at play with Jim Danforth determining what can be a special effect. In the interview, Danforth tells *Cinefantastique* that he wrote to the Academy and 'went to great lengths to point out that Rick Baker was not in any way in my opinion to be considered a "special visual effect"' (p. 24). While Baker has remained a mainly absent figure during the film's special effects discussions, Danforth now brings him to the forefront. However, whether Danforth is blaming Baker for the poor special effects is something that cannot entirely be gleaned from the interview. Danforth also reveals his apparent confusion over what the committee was voting for, saying:

I don't know if they were voting for the full-sized robot, or if they were voting for the mechanical hand, which I think was pretty marvellous, or whether they were voting for Rick Baker in the monkey suit under the delusion that it was the robot!

(CFQ, 1977, p. 25)

He also goes on to imply that there was a certain amount of misdirection and trickery following the film's announcement, accusing De Laurentiis of pressurising critics and the committee through the weight of his promotion:

It's the kind of thing that will make Richard Shickel⁴² write a glowing review for *Time* magazine of a film that he hasn't even seen. And the person who did see it for *Time* magazine didn't see it at all, and yet they're able to say that the man-in-the-suit is so skilfully integrated with the full-size mechanical model that it's impossible to tell where the one stops and the other begins! I know for an absolute fact from people who were there, such as Rick Baker, that the person from *Time* magazine saw no part of the film which contained the full-sized

⁴² Though he did not really write a glowing review of the film.

mechanical model, and yet they feel no compunction about making the statement that it's so perfectly integrated that you can't tell the difference!

(p. 25)

In response to the question, '[B]ut wouldn't Baker's suit come under make-up rather than special effects?' (p. 25). Danforth replies:

It was proposed that Rick Baker be qualified for a special Board of Governor's award for make-up which they've given in the past to films like *Seven Faces of Dr Lao* (George Pal, 1964) and *Planet of the Apes* (Franklin J Schaffner, 1968). Bill Taylor, one of the effects Committee members, actually wrote a formal letter to the Board of Governors to officially propose that Baker get such an award and they turned it down.

(p. 25)

While Danforth was impressed by the mechanical Kong, the fact that Baker's suit-mation should not be considered a special effect, even though it brought an impossible being to life, speaks volumes about the snobbery around what constitutes a special effect. While this is not as explicit in the position of special effects with film industry hierarchies, it does speak to how techniques used in special effects are separated from each other, or rather separated from the term special effects entirely.

Danforth states that the four special effects categories have further internal hierarchies: mechanical, optical, miniature and matte paintings. A film has to demonstrate all four to be nominated for an academy award and, on those grounds, he discounts *KKII* as only having one of these (CFQ., 1977, p. 24). He continues:

I am very disappointed and annoyed that these people who are able in this industry to have the ability to cause a film like *King Kong* are the ones who have no comprehension of what the film was originally about and what made it a memorable film. So in that regard you might say I have a feeling of 'sour grapes', that someone with integrity didn't remake it, if it was going to be remade. And I think Universal was a thousand miles closer to doing it right than Dino De Laurentiis ever was.

(p. 25)

Despite this industrial knowledge and professionalism, a sense of what it means to do a film 'correctly' still exists. This could refer to the modern updating of setting or character, or to how

the special effects created Kong. While Danforth reflects this hierarchising of remakes and special effects that we have seen elsewhere, his rhetoric seems directed more at De Laurentiis, rather than the creators who made faulty special effects, as well as at a monkey suit that doesn't fit into what the industry terms as special effects.

Within the critical reception of *KKII*, the special effects themselves are a site of spectacular failure, with the animatronic, in particular, being viewed as a colossal malfunctioning failure. Beyond these technological failings, the film is viewed as a failure because it fails to encapsulate the original film. Because of its use of spectacular technology, which was seen as overwhelming the original's narrative, the De Laurentiis' version is considered to be a lesser remake. Furthermore, he is parodied for trying to claim his film is better because of the way in which Kong is made, denigrating the original version. De Laurentiis' attempts to differentiate his film from the original are reflected back at him by the press, who revel in the spectacular nature of the film's failures and the failures of the mechanical robot in particular.

Rick Baker sits uncomfortably within this discourse. As we have already seen, his work was maligned and denigrated in the production discourse, either used to uncover the lies that the film producers peddled or to point out the failures of the central attraction of the million-dollar robot. Baker's suit-mation was also insulted, even if his name, for the most part, is not mentioned. Danforth's interview suggests that the production and marketing of the film deliberately mis-sold the film with its privileging of the mechanical animatronic when it was mainly Baker as Kong superimposed into the shot. Furthermore, it seems that at this point in his career, the industry marginalised Baker by separating his work from the broader terms of special effects. As a result, Baker's contributions were not defined as special effects because they did not conform to the definitions set out by other industry professionals.

Kong-clusion

Released on December 17th 1976, *KKII* would ultimately take “36.5 million in domestic rentals and \$80 million worldwide” (Hall and Neale, 2010, p. 213). Despite Danforth’s opposition, Carlo Rambaldi, Glen Robinson and Frank Van der Veer all won an Oscar for Special Achievement for Visual Effects. As J.W. Rinzler observes, ‘Scheider was provided a script that, incredibly, spoke only of the giant robot. It didn’t mention Baker, nor did any of the three recipients’ (Rinzler, 2019a p. 126). However, as David A. Cook points out, due to the precedent that *Jaws* set in terms of box office earnings, *KKII* was ‘widely perceived as a flop’ (2000, p. 44). This combination of relatively poor commercial performance and a poor critical reception meant that *KKII*’s time in the spotlight was rather short, overshadowed as it was by a new science fiction film called *Star Wars*. In 1985, after he finished working with Dino De Laurentiis, Rick Baker said, ‘my mind tries to repress the memory of *King Kong*’ (Rinzler, 2019a, p. 126). However, ‘In spite of all of [his] bitching about the film, [Baker says] it was kind of fun acting like a big ape’ (p. 126).

Later, when Peter Jackson announced his 2005 *King Kong* remake, critics quickly retraced the old criticism of the 1976 version. However, this time, a minority of critics defended *KKII*. Kim Newman, for example, wrote, ‘[For] all its hideous mistakes, the 1976 *King Kong* was a radical reworking of the material’ (p. 66). Similarly, in a 2005 edition of *Variety* Todd McCarthy commented that ‘the 1976 Dino De Laurentiis remake wasn’t as bad as its current reputation would have it’ (2005, p. 46). Despite a few more sympathetic reviews, *KKII*’s reputation as a disappointment has stuck around. The failure of the production to deliver on its promises of a giant mechanised Kong and its modern update appears to have forever marked *KKII* as a failure. These types of comments remain the main areas of discussion surrounding *KKII*, derided as it is for its status as a remake, lack of authenticity, and failure to deliver on promises but instead delivering special effects considered worse than the original. Although

Baker was later able to add to this in his discussions of his time on the production, he is absent from this criticism.

This chapter offers the 1976 *King Kong* as an interesting case study for the narratives of failure surrounding its critical reception. This chapter also examines the ways in which special effects are perceived as either a success or a failure. The production of *KKII* created three separate narratives from three different parties. The first, the official line from the production, paints the picture of a challenging production with tremendous promise due to the spectacular 40ft robot. The second is the critical consensus that surrounds the production, as reported by those critics who point out the failure of the production to meet its promises. Finally, the narrative is supplied after the fact by Rick Baker. Due to his elevated status as a special effects ‘name’ after 1981, Baker could claim a point of privilege, more visibly make his post-mortem criticisms, recentring himself as he did as a ‘saviour’ figure at war with the production. There is, of course, a conflict between these narratives, mainly around *KKII*’s validity as a remake. While De Laurentiis and others tried to separate their version of the film through the spectacular aesthetic of a giant robot, the critics and Baker were ferociously defending what a King Kong film should be and how it should look.

The analysis of the critical reception of *KKII* delves into the two possible reasons why critics considered the film a failure. Firstly, as we have seen, it is considered to be a film that broke a lot of the promises that it made. Secondly, the critical consensus was that it was not as good as the original *King Kong*. Critics perceived it as a cash grab, claiming that its producers did not fully understand what made the original a great film. However, it also revealed interesting methods of hierarchising special effects, both in the critical and industrial space, where stop motion was considered better than animatronics, and animatronics were considered better than the suit-mation that Baker was involved in.

While *KKII* was not the start of Rick Baker's special effects career, it is an important industrial milestone for him. *KKII* also provides a broader example of examining the arbitrary hierarchies constructed around special effects and the visibility of special effects artists. Through the examination of *KKII*'s critical discourses, this thesis has demonstrated that there was a deviation from the narratives the producers and marketing team attempted to put forward. This multi-narrative historical perspective best demonstrates the collaborative nature of film production. Furthermore, it also shows how film productions place specific figures more visibly to centre certain aspects of their films. Rambaldi was the more critical special effects artist because his animatronics significantly differentiated this version of King Kong from the one that came before. Through this, the critical discourse presented an arbitrarily constructed hierarchy of special effects that was reinforced by industrial professionals, placing Baker's work as lesser than. This ties into hierarchies of taste that are evident in all critical discussions of legitimate or illegitimate art. While Rambaldi's animatronic is certainly spectacular, it did not work, so it was not a functioning effect, yet Baker's make-ups and suits are not even considered effects.

There are still gaps in this area of study that further chapters explore. Firstly, while this chapter has demonstrated that these value judgments are present in critical discourses, it is important to see whether other factors affect these judgments of taste, not specifically tied to the concept of film remakes. Does an artist's reputation make an effect legitimate? What of realism and visibility? If an effect is too realistic to be noticed, is it considered superior to one that is noticeable because it does not intrude spectacularly on a film's narrative? Does the mode of production affect the understanding of special effects? How does one view them on the big screen at a cinema or television? What if the special effects are considered a successful remake of older effects? How do film critics pass the visual repetition of specific images with the technological advancement present in special effects? Baker's heroic narrative of his time in

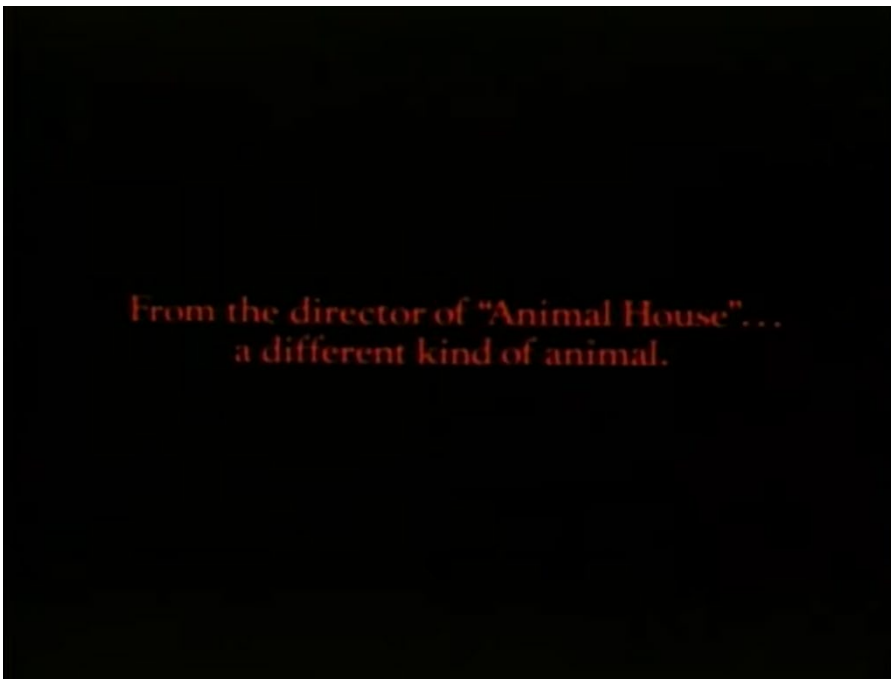
KKII is evident in later interviews. There is evidence that he did become a star of sorts in the film industry, however, this chapter did not look at how this happened. The next chapter will ask specifically what factors allow someone to move from below-the-line to above-the-line. How can a figure like Baker, who was so invisible and marginalised during his time in *KKII*, become more visible and central to a film's legacy? What processes and what contexts need to be in place for this to happen? Finally, how do these same hierarchies play out in the critical conflict between practical and digital effects?

Chapter 2: ‘A Different Sort of Animal’: Lycanthropic Nostalgia, Genre and the Effects of *American Werewolf in London*

Rick Baker has coined the term make-up special effects because there hasn't been this kind of thing done before. It's not just make-up; it's more elaborate.

John Landis (Making of Documentary, 1981)

After *King Kong* (1976), Rick Baker's career went from strength to strength. He returned to his B-Movie origins with *The Incredible Melting Man* (William Sachs, 1977), and helped his friend John Landis on *The Kentucky Fried Movie* (1977). Baker also worked with the newly formed visual effects company Industrial Light and Magic to create the effects of the iconic scene where alien creatures gather in the Mos Eisley Cantina. In 1978 Baker was tapped to work under Dick Smith on Brian De Palma's supernatural horror film *The Fury*. As the next decade rolled around, Baker began work on the film that would make his name in special effects, *The Howling* (Joe Dante, 1981). However, while working on *The Howling*, John Landis



[fig. 2.1] Image taken from the teaser trailer for *An American Werewolf in London* (John Landis, 1981).

called to demand that Baker work on his werewolf picture, *An American Werewolf in London* instead. The original tagline for this 1981 comedy-horror film announced, ‘From the director of *Animal House*... a different sort of animal’.

Werewolf was to revolutionise the very idea of lycanthropic transformation. The bone-shattering effects brought to audiences a version of the werewolf they had never seen before.

It broke with the previous bipedal images of the lycanthropes in earlier films such as *Werewolf of London* (Stuart Walker, 1935), *The Wolfman* (George Waggner, 1941) and, the Oliver Reed vehicle, *The Curse of the Werewolf* (Terrence Fisher, 1961). The effects would go on to inspire every other werewolf transformation, from Remus Lupin in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2004) to the British Television show *Being Human* (2008-2013).⁴³ It was also the film that marked a turning point in Baker's career, as the one for which he won the first-ever Oscar for Best Make-Up and Hair Design. Baker's name as a special effects make-up artist would become synonymous with this film.

As Baker said in an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter*, '[my] tombstone will read "This is the guy who did the *American Werewolf in London* make-up"' (Appelo, 2013, p. 52). From this, it would seem Baker's career and *American Werewolf's* critical reputation are inextricably linked, but this was not always true. When looking at the historical discourses surrounding *American Werewolf's* production, promotional and critical reception, there appears to be a somewhat complex discussion of, if not authorship, then artistic responsibility for the film's long-term perception. This leads to the question, to what extent are Rick Baker's contributions to *American Werewolf's* legacy as a special effects artist more significant than Landis' as a director? In searching for an answer to this question, other discursive elements, namely authorship and genre, must be considered as they affect the positioning of *American Werewolf's* special effects. Using the werewolf transformation in *American Werewolf* as a case study, this chapter will examine how discourses around production history and critical reception place different figures within the making of the film and assign responsibility for a film's reputation. Ultimately, this chapter explores the tensions of responsibility between the

⁴³ As show creator Toby Whithouse admitted in an interview with *Film Review Online* (Sloane, 2009).

director John Landis and special effects artist Rick Baker, as well as the discussions of genre and authorship that come out of this tension.

Instead of taking specific snapshots of perception, this chapter seeks to chart the changing nature of *American Werewolf's* perception and Baker's position within it. This chapter will also provide a diachronic study of the promotional and critical reception, charting how the critical reputation of the film has changed. This chapter will be divided into three sections, each referring to a particular period in the reputational evaluation of *American Werewolf*. Firstly, it will examine how the film was marketed and promoted, exploring how Rick Baker and his effects are positioned, as well as the way John Landis positions himself and tells his story within the production of the film. Secondly, it will examine the film's reception, which has been long-lasting and dynamic, charting how the critical responses to *American Werewolf* and the special effects have changed over time. Finally, this chapter will turn its attention to the home releases of *American Werewolf*. This section will act both as a point of comparison and the final solidifying of *American Werewolf's* critical reputation. It will take the discourses revealed in the previous sections and compare them to the synchronic moments contained on the physical discs. The aim is to show how the perception of the special effects has been affected by the evolving narratives in the film's reception and whether Baker has become more central to the film's legacy. This final section will act as a bookend, providing a complete narrative of the development of discourses around *American Werewolf* and Rick Baker's relationship to it.

“Stick to the Road”: Examining the Marketing and Pre-release material surrounding *American Werewolf in London*

The original behind-the-scenes featurette for *American Werewolf* starts with a clip from *The Wolf Man* and a voice-over saying:

In the 1930s, a character emerged from the misty darkness to join the ranks of the great horror film monsters; he was the Werewolf. He was presented as a vicious yet sympathetic creature and became a favourite of film audiences around the world. Now John Landis, director of *Animal House* and *The Blues Brothers*, has written and directed a modern-day version of the werewolf tale. (Glenn Fernandez, 2019, 00:21)⁴⁴

Through this featurette, PolyGram and Universal set out to focus the marketing of *American Werewolf* on John Landis and his remake of a classic movie monster. Landis had previously directed three successful comedy films: *The Kentucky Fried Movie*, *National Lampoon’s Animal House* and *The Blues Brothers*. One trailer for *American Werewolf* describes Landis as a ‘brilliant young director’ (AndyStego, 2008, 0:41), while *American Werewolf’s* press book asserts that *Animal House* ‘turned [Landis] into one of the most sought-after young directors in the business’ (1981, p. 2). This is not something new. Keith M. Johnston points out, ‘directors positioned themselves as a central creator in the trailers for *Psycho* (1961), *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and *Quiz Show* (1994)’ (2009, p. 1). However, what is notable is how Landis aggressively sets himself up as the central figure of the film’s production and narrativises the history to emphasise this.

⁴⁴ Produced in 1981 by Universal Pictures and The Film Company on the 25th Anniversary DVD and Blu-Ray release of the film.



Director John Landis shows one of *AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON*'s various ghouls how he should slit the throat of David Kessler (David Naughton).

[Fig. 2.2] Image of John Landis directing the ghoulish Nazis on how to properly kill David Naughton's David Kessler in *An American Werewolf in London* from Alan Jones preview of the film for a 1981 issue of *Cinefantastique*.

John Landis, as the director, is highly visible within this production history, mostly due to his positioning in various interviews and features on the film. According to Landis, as told in various pieces, including an article he wrote for a 1981 issue of *Film Illustrated*, the original idea for *American Werewolf* was born in Yugoslavia while he was a runner and stuntman on the Clint

Eastwood vehicle *Kelly's Heroes* (Brian G. Hutton, 1970) (Jones 1981, p. 8; Landis, 1981, pp. 122-123). By name-dropping significant Hollywood figures like Eastwood, Landis connects himself with the establishment, so elevating himself to that position. relates in part due to the fact he is the one relating its history. Nevertheless, even in Landis' self-promoting version of the film's history, Baker is still present, but only as a tool of production, helping bring Landis' vision to the screen [Fig. 2.3]. As the writer and the director, both roles are traditionally considered to be worthy of artistic responsibility in the production of a film and its critical reputation, and Landis is more able to tell his version of this history.

The production of *American Werewolf* was not smooth sailing; the film sat in limbo for a while because the studios had issues with identifying the film's genre. This added a layer of

difficulty to the production, which Landis would have to overcome. Landis claims that he had written the script back in 1969, but studios were not interested, mainly because they felt ‘it’s much too frightening to be funny’ (Landis, 1981, p. 122). While it is not surprising that in this narrative, Landis once again places himself as the central figure in creating the film. However, his account of the difficulty in getting the film financed is worthy of examination. There was indeed confusion among studios that did not fully understand it. As will become evident, this confusion continued into the films in the critical reception. Landis’ account of his difficulties in discussing his vision matches a phenomenon that Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto describes as a pattern in auteurist criticism whereby critics would favour those auteur Hollywood directors as they would push against a rigid studio system (2000, p. 56). In Landis’ account of the studio’s misunderstanding of his vision, together with his name-dropping, he is elevating himself above the line even further.

This narrativisation becomes all the more apparent when examining the film’s marketing, designed as it is to attract interest from horror film fans. For example, Landis sent a letter to a 1980 issue of *Cinefantastique*, correcting the magazine's mistake over who played the titular Shlockthropus in his first feature, *Shlock* (1973)⁴⁵ to which he adds:

I am also delighted to announce for the first time that Rick Baker will be in charge of all the extremely elaborate make-up special effects for my next film AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON, which I am shooting in January 1981 in England.

(1980, p. 47).

Even when praising Baker and his technical accomplishments in this way, Landis will identify this as *his* film. This also reveals a tension between Landis and Baker that is evident throughout

⁴⁵ This mistake was made during a review of *Tanya’s Island* (Alfred Sole, 1980), another movie where Baker provided make-up for an ape.

discussions of *American Werewolf*, matching the division between artists and technicians discussed by Caldwell. More than that, Landis situates himself as personally responsible for



[fig. 2.3] Pictures taken from John Landis' article written for *Film Illustrated* in 1981. Landis is placed somewhat centrally, surrounded by images of Baker making up Griffen Dunne's zombified Jack and the start of David Norton's transformation.

discovering Rick Baker. Writing a promotional piece for a 1981 issue of *Film Illustrated*, Landis himself recalls, 'when I first walked into his room and looked on the walls and saw his work, I knew it was vastly superior to anything I had ever seen in any studio' (1981, p. 123). This narrative that Landis presents suggests that it was Landis who first recognised Baker's talent and gave him his start in film. This story, as told by Landis, removes Baker's agency as a film professional, along with all the work he had done previously, while Baker's narrative contradicts Landis' version. In his biography,⁴⁶ Baker gives an account of how he had been actively pursuing his career before he met Landis, describing his previous work at Clokey Productions and the work he did with his mentor, the special effects make-up artist Dick Smith.⁴⁷ Landis, on the other hand, both incorporates and erases his previous collaboration with Baker on *Schlock*, to present Baker as an artist he had 'discovered' for *American Werewolf*.

⁴⁶ Which admittedly is similarly biased due to its focus on Baker as the central figure in its historical narrative.

⁴⁷ Rick Baker's mentor and special effects make-up artist best known for his work on *Scanners* (David Cronenberg, 1981) and *Amadeus* (Miloš Forman, 1984).

This narrativised production history is useful for informing our understanding of the continuing working relationship between the two, with Landis constructing a production hierarchy with himself over Baker. This ‘discovery’ of Baker, which echoes the kinds of production narratives at play within *KKII*, serves to marginalise Baker’s agency in the production. Instead of being an active part of the production, his talent is ‘discovered’ by the director who, as someone who holds a position of power within filmmaking culture, ‘uses’ Baker’s skills in *his* projects.

Furthermore, Landis positions himself, rather than Baker, as responsible for the look of the titular werewolf. As he states in the making-of-featurette, ‘in most of the *Wolf Man* movies that have gone before, the beast himself, the Werewolf, is almost always a two-legged creature [...] But I couldn’t [...] do that because I feel like an audience wouldn’t buy that now’ (Glenn Fernandez, 2019, 0:54). Landis makes it apparent that he is breaking with tradition by changing the Werewolf’s form. Indeed, while paying tribute to the werewolves of the past, he also finds them unrealistic, even laughable:⁴⁸

In all the *Wolf Man* movies that Lon Chaney made, which were wonderful, [...] I was uncomfortable with the lap dissolves, would just [...] have Chaney [...] getting hairier and hairier because I wanted to show how [...] this human, this young man who’s standing there becomes this beast. And I wanted to show that, on camera.

(01:23)

Landis views *American Werewolf in London* as his ‘personal vision’; he changes the genre by breaking traditional visions of the werewolf movie, challenging and improving on the special effects of the past (Landis, 1981, p. 123). As we can also see in the pre-release material, Landis always claims to have made it ‘a four-legged beast instead of a man with two legs and a hairy face [...] I mean actually seeing a man’s flesh and bone and sinew actually change and evolve into this thing’ (p.123). Much like De Laurentiis did when promoting *KKII*, Landis promises

⁴⁸ Landis compares the image of Henry Hull in *Werewolf of London* to something from *Grease* (Randal Kleiser, 1978).

improved technology, painting his film as an improvement. It also echoes Bode's observation of how film studios set up audiences as effects connoisseurs, able to see through these old techniques and argue for technical development and novelty. However, more than that, he argues that it is *his* idea and his artistic vision that below-the-line technicians fulfil by building the animatronics, make-up and puppetry that go into the transformation of the *American Werewolf*. Ultimately, the discussions of *American Werewolf* uncover the tension between the aesthetic and the technical as it relates to film and the hierarchies inherent to that discussion.

While Landis dominates the narrative of the pre-release material, in other narratives, Baker's reputation for making good-quality effects is central to the film's success in other narratives. In *Cinefantastique*,⁴⁹ a preview of *American Werewolf* refers to how 'make-up wizard Rick Baker' was responsible for the 'second live transformation from man into wolf we will see this year' (Jones, 1981, p. 8). However, while it situates Baker as 'responsible' for the technical aspects of the transformation, it also foregrounds Landis' assertion of his artistic vision of the 'huge *four-footed* wolf' (p. 8):

Landis is ecstatic over Baker's work "I will read you exactly what I gave Rick to read in 1971" he said "The Metamorphosis from man to beast is not an easy one. His bones and muscles bend and reform themselves. The body suffers lacerating pain. We can actually see David's flesh move, rearranging itself. His whole face distorts as his jaw extends, his skull literally changing shape before your eyes. Well, Rick's done just that. The brilliance of Rick Baker has made my dream come true.

(p. 8)

This echoes Adrian Turner's comment in a 1981 *Sight and Sound* interview, stating that 'Landis is full of praise for Rick Baker's special effects wizardry (and indeed the metamorphosis is a remarkable piece of engineering)' (Turner, 1981, pp. 7-8). Once again, this reveals an interesting tension between the two. While Baker is the technician within this auteur structure,

⁴⁹ A fantasy film magazine that ran from 1967 to 2006.

aware of the technical apparatus of film and able to put it into practice, Landis is presented as the creative force behind the film whose vision truly makes *American Werewolf* unique.

This is strikingly similar to something John T. Caldwell examines in his chapter ‘Authorship Below-the-Line’ where he argues that this ‘cultural downgrading of certain workers as non-authors survives as a legacy of basic binary oppositions established by management in the early years of the industry’ (2013a, p. 350). Baker is then part of this structure; he is a non-author due to this binary structure of ‘art’ versus ‘craft’, with Landis and Baker sitting at their respective ends. This is something that Landis uses in his pre-release articles and interviews, situating himself as the above-the-line artistic talent, authoring the text while Baker is there to assist in his vision. What is interesting is that Caldwell then defines authorship and artistic credit as:

‘[I]ndustrial’ matters dictated by union policies and labor contracts. In other ways, however, authorship and artistic credit are explicit ‘cultural’ phenomena within production, negotiated interpersonally and collectively through a wide range of socio-professional and habitual workaday routines.

(p. 350)

While we can see in the credits who is responsible for which elements of the production, this may not truly reflect the creative responsibilities. Indeed, this shows how the way we discuss credit is part of discussions of power and visibility in these cultural industries. This is why more genre-focused publications with a culture of discussing, for example, horror and science fiction are more likely to mention and talk to special effects artists. This also relates to the ways in which Caldwell argues that while different types of film-makers share information, the directors share information as ‘an explicit form of self-attribution and authorial signing. On the other hand, unauthorized BTL tweeting, leaking, or blogging by disgruntled crew members [...] can function as *signature-nulling*’ (p. 352). While Caldwell discusses the internet as a means of sharing information, these observations could also be applied to Landis and Baker's discussion.

Landis can be said to be displaying ‘self-attribution and authorial signing’ when using official channels of genre magazines like *Cinefantastique* to sign his name on the film. He also makes sure to remind audiences that this is *his* film, *his* idea to change the werewolf and *his* new special effects designs. Baker is not made invisible but is rather presented as a tool to help the authorial signing. Similarly, Baker, as can be seen through an exploration of the vast critical discourses on *American Werewolf*, never indulged in any ‘signature-nulling’ of his own name (See Caldwell, above.).

As the making-of-featurette states, Baker is either collaborating' with Landis or 'assisting' Landis in bringing his vision to life. Baker is then present but not visible, subsumed as he is into the author's signature of Landis. This is apparent in a sequence where Baker casts a mould of David Naughton's⁵⁰ head for the transformation set piece (Glenn Fernandez, 2019, 2:20). However, instead of Baker being given a voice to detail his work, Landis describes what is happening and the importance of getting the initial mould of Naughton's head correct. Quite literally, Baker has his voice removed from the film's production, pushing him below the line, even while he is demonstrating his intricate work. The press book states that Baker interpreted what ‘Landis describes in his screenplay’ (1981, p. 3), this echoes Caldwell's assertions that below-the-line technicians are there to assist the above-the-line directors. While this featurette does begin to allow Baker to share a spotlight of sorts, crediting Baker with creating the aliens in the *Star Wars* cantina scene, he is subsumed into a more traditional directorial-driven attitude towards production. This conservative presentation of how, as a special effects artist, Baker assists Landis' vision reflects how Baker and his effects are perceived in the broader production of the film.

⁵⁰ Who plays the titular American werewolf David Kessler.

This differs from the narrative presented within a more niche publication. For instance, in an article for *Cinefantastique* titled, ‘*American Werewolf in London*, can John Landis and Rick Baker top THE HOWLING’, Jordan R. Fox places Baker firmly at the centre:

Baker really doesn’t like doing gore-makeups, though in his career he has found them hard to avoid. What he *is* interested in is the creation of character through make-up effects. With the industry slowed by the protracted writers’ strike and the possibility of a director’s strike, Baker has made tentative plans to film a test reel showcasing his anatomation⁵¹ [my footnote] process.

(Fox, 1981, p. 5)

This article stresses the technical elements by comparing effects, detailing how Baker improved on techniques that had already been seen in *The Howling*, and describing the technical aspects of the transformation as much as can be revealed before the film’s release. It also displays an image of Baker as an artist in his own right. Rather than placing him as an assistant, he is given credit for his technical skills in constructing the Werewolf and Jack’s gruesome decomposition. It also reminds the reader that Baker is responsible for the bizarre aliens in *Star Wars*’ famous cantina scene. Its entire focus, in fact, is that of presenting Baker as an artist in his own right, who is far more than a below-the-line worker, and while not a star in the traditional sense, he is being presented as a ‘name’.

According to the promotional material, one of *American Werewolf’s* attractions for audiences is its new take on the werewolf genre. It is a film that attempts to be both connected to and separate from the images of the past. Although Baker is mentioned briefly and shown in promotional material, it is clear that Landis dominates the narratives that surround the film, while in the prerelease and marketing material, there is no interview with Baker. Lacking a voice, he is presented as, at best, a collaborator and, at worst, a tool within Landis’ creative

⁵¹ A process where ‘an electro-mechanical character is made to duplicate the movements of its offscreen operator’ (Fox, 1981, p. 5).

arsenal who plays his role according to the traditional pattern of below-the-line workers in film production.

“Keep Clear of the Moors”: Exploring the initial reaction to *An American Werewolf in London*

By examining a combination of the pre-release material, together with Landis’ own words, there is no doubt that Landis is presented as the central creative figure in the production. On the other hand, while Baker is visible, he is rendered voiceless and presented as little more than a tool for Landis. However, as we shall see, this attribution of artistic responsibility in the critical reception of the film would, over time, begin to shift.

The first key element discussed by critics was the blend of genre, as *The Film Journal’s* Candace Burke-Block observes:

[T]he director of *Animal House* has created a very funny film about carnivorous lunar activities. If you thought Lon Chaney and company were funny, you ain’t seen nothing yet. Played for laughs and chills, this should do well with the teen crowd.

(1981, p. 15)

This is echoed by *Screen International*, where the film is praised as ‘a must for all horror addicts that will also attract discriminating regulars and film buffs who welcome tongue-in-cheek humour’ (Bilbow, 1981, p. 34). Similarly, Jimmy Summers credits ‘director-writer John Landis [for doing] an excellent job of making the audience laugh and shriek at the same time [so] combining the two elements’ (1981, p. 40).

While presenting a narrative of Landis as responsible for *American Werewolf’s* critical reputation, the reviews also emphasise the genre mixing as a vital part of the film’s appeal, with its combination of horror and comedy viewed as the main attraction. Although Landis claims it is a horror film, first and foremost, the critics view *American Werewolf* as a hybrid film. This hybridity will become a vital part of the film’s legacy. The discussions of the genre

also underscore the authorial signing that Landis was attempting, fully placing him as the visible creative lead for the film.

It may seem odd to discuss how critics see the genre of a film in relation to a thesis that explores the visibility of special effects. However, it is essential to recognise the effect of the discussion of genre on the perception of special effects. This is something that will be explored further in the next chapter. For now, however, the hybrid nature of *An American Werewolf in London* allows for an examination of genre as a ‘bad’ object, or rather, through shifting the genre or discussion of genre, critics can focus on ‘worthy’ elements of the film. Rick Altman points to multiple meanings for this kind of qualitative assessment, including uses by a studio to influence moviegoers’ decisions (1999, p. 112). This thesis applies Altman’s genre theory to identify critical judgements on the genres themselves. This aligns with Jamie Sexton’s aims to understand genres as being constructed discursively (2012). Indeed, as Sexton argues in his article ‘US ‘Indie Horror’: Critical Reception, Genre, Construction and Suspect Hybridity’, ‘these critical manoeuvres not only combine to construct horror as a bad object, but also participate in the strengthening of American independent cinema as a generic category that is devoid, for the most part, of horror elements’ (2012, p. 85). While Sexton’s study focuses on the separation of horror from independent cinema, of relevance to this thesis are his observations of the ways that genre is used to construct bad objects, either not worthy of mention or, as will be revealed, worthy of criticism. Similarly, the production discourses, as outlined by Caldwell, reveal an inherent focus on those elements of more visible above-the-line film producers. This focus on the genre’s more ‘artistic’ elements allows for Landis to become a larger, more visible presence in the critical reception of *American Werewolf*.

While the focus may be on how Landis blends horror and comedy, the exhibitors' publications were less favourable towards the film's effects. While Burke-Block initially praises 'the transformation process, wherein David Naughton is changed into a werewolf is well done by Rick Baker' (1981, p. 15). she is less than positive about the design of the werewolf itself, which she claims 'looks like a coyote with a savage baboon face' (p. 15), and is not 'worthy of the appellation horror' (p. 15). Indeed, the picture accompanying the article is



Gun-blazing werewolf in nightmare in *An American Werewolf in London*

[fig. 2.4] Image the stormtrooper werewolf in *An American Werewolf in London* (John Landis, 1981) from Candace Burke-Block's exhibitor's review in *The Film Journal*.

of the rather rubber-faced nazi-werewolf that appears in one of David Kessler's pre-transformation dreams, which is admittedly not the best-looking effect in the film.

In a similar vein, *Variety* chides the film for being 'very bloody and grotesque

at times' (Cart., 1981, p. 21), then adds that 'special effects freaks will get more than their money's worth' (p. 21). These reviews differ in their focus from the marketing, which gives equal treatment of the genre and special effects equally, although attributing both to the above-the-line director, Landis. However, the exhibitor-focused publications list blending genres as the main attraction for *American Werewolf*.

Notably, elements of taste have entered discussions of the film, with distinctions made between the film's directors using unique genres. On the other hand, Baker's effects are diminished and mocked, while audiences who enjoy those kinds of spectacular images are reduced and referred to as 'freaks'. Certainly, these reviews reflect a hierarchy of what is vital

or what is worthy of discussion within film narrative and genre. The more spectacular images, often associated with horror, are delegitimised, criticised either for being too ‘grotesque’ or ugly. The critics within these more generalised publications then distinguish between the legitimate art, using discussions of the film’s narrative and genre, while diminishing the spectacle of the effects, much like the reaction to *KKII*.

When *American Werewolf* was released in theatres in 1981, the film received mixed reviews from the press. The critical consensus was that the mixture of horror and comedy did not work, contrary to how it was pushed in the marketing and the reviews from exhibitor’s magazines. In the 1981 *Cinefantastique* review of the film, for example, Steven Dimeo is incredibly scathing, laying most of the blame for the perceived problems of the film at the feet of John Landis, calling it ‘a monument to mishmash’ (1981, p. 10). His main criticism is that Landis has an ‘irrepressible weakness for humor and excess at the damndest times, invariably undercutting any real development of suspense or horror’ (p. 10). Gary Arnold is similarly negative in his *Washington Post* review, stating that ‘John Landis must have entertained greater aspirations for his new movie [...] a minor fiasco destined for an obscure niche in the scrap heap of horror movies’ (1981). Philip Strick, for *Films and Filming*, calls Landis ‘clumsy’, suggesting that his lack of subtlety will doom the film to failure (1981, pp. 36-37). At the same time, John Pym for *Monthly Film Bulletin* echoes this, arguing that Landis approached the film in ‘hobnail boots’ (Pym, 1981, p. 2). While Janet Maslin for *The New York Times* is far more constructive in her criticism. Claiming that the film ‘gets off to a wonderful start’, she praises Landis for being ‘equally balanced between comedy and horror [...] that also has a fine touch of restraint’ (1981). However, she concludes that ‘the movie backfires’ because:

[T]oo much grisly footage has been used too lightly. Mr Landis’s comic detachment, which has been fascinating throughout much of the movie is something he holds on to even when a deeper response is needed. Eventually, it becomes less comic than callow.

(1981)

Interestingly, Maslin's argument that *American Werewolf's* ability to blend the genres ultimately undercuts the film's effects and the horror (which could be said to reflect the tone of the 'upper-class' *New York Times* that she is writing for) also concurs with the opinion of a publication focused on fantasy genres. This view that the comedy gets in the way of the film's emotional core. also echoes, if only in part, King's assertion that critics view spectacle as getting in the way of and detracting from the narrative of a film.

Roger Ebert is perhaps *American Werewolf's* harshest critic. For him, the film is 'curiously unfinished', concluding that:

Landis never seems very sure whether he's making a comedy or a horror film, so he winds up with genuinely funny moments acting as a counterpoint to the gruesome undead. Combining horror and comedy is an old tradition (my favourite example is *Bride of Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1935)), but the laughs and the blood coexist very uneasily in this film.

(1981)

This conveys a sense of confusion. Much like the movie executives before them, there is resistance among critics to identify the film within previously established frameworks of the genre. While the marketing tries to place the film in the horror genre, the comedy elements are enough for some critics to think that a disjointed script ruins the movie. This also serves as a reminder that genre is malleable and changeable. The reference to *Bride of Frankenstein* as a horror comedy is certainly not how the Universal horror sequel would have been perceived at the time of its release.

While genre publications, newspapers and film periodicals appear to agree that this blending of horror and comedy is unsuccessful, on closer inspection, we can see there are differences. While *Cinefantastique* argues that blending comedy undercuts the horror as a fantasy genre-focused publication, it is unsurprising that they adopt this narrative. *The Washington Post*, however, appears to view this horror mash-up as a failure due to its

attachment to the horror genre. Meanwhile, the film periodicals view the genre-blending as a miss-step in itself. While Landis' blending of horror and comedy may have been a retread of something that had been done before, as some critics acknowledge, the majority of critics consider this a 'mishmash' that detracts from one or the other genre. As Rick Altman suggests, critics set the definitions of genre by reference to the past and knowledge, as we have seen in Ebert's review, while studios will stress uniqueness and individuality, which we have seen in the marketing (1999, p. 124-127).⁵² As *American Werewolf* does not sit comfortably in either the genres of comedy or horror, this makes it harder for critics to recommend and discuss the film, despite the long tradition of genre blending that exists.



[Fig. 2.5] Image of Rick Baker making Griffin Dunne into the Zombie Jack in *An American Werewolf in London* (John Landis, 1981) from a 1983 issue of *Famous Monsters of Filmland*.

Famous Monsters of Filmland seems to place Landis not only as central to the making of *American Werewolf*, but also central to the construction of the effects themselves. Interestingly, after setting up Landis as an authentic horror fan, the magazine continues the narrative that Landis 'discovered Rick

Baker, Monster Maker' (1982a, p. 80). As has been discussed previously, asserting that Landis 'discovered' Baker undercuts his contribution to the film. Similarly, Landis tells *Famous*

⁵² Altman also points to the need for film critics to create senses of identity within the field, and one of the ways they do that is by attaching themselves to genre (p. 127).

Monsters, 'my Werewolf does not prowl the night thru desolate graveyards and ruined castles, baying at the full moon. My lycanthrope lopes thru the foggy lanes of present-day London' (p. 82). Not only does he assert that his version of the werewolf is different from those that have come before, but he is also staking his claim on the monster's design, placing himself as responsible for the special effects. However, in *Famous Monsters, American Werewolf* is referred to as 'Baker's Monsterpiece', reminding readers that his name

is synonymous with *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973), *Star Wars*, *The Fury* (Brian De Palma, 1978), *The Howling* ..and on & on... nothing but the best. In a class with Harryhausen, Dick Smith, Bill Tuttle—one of those modest unassuming geniuses whose wonder work contributed so much to our enjoyment of imagimovies.

(p. 84)

Yet this endorsement is undermined by its attribution of responsibility for the film's attractiveness to Landis. Also, as the speaker is Landis, the endorsement itself is mediated by him.

So where has Baker's creative agency over his special effects been within this discussion of *American Werewolf*? His image has been used in magazine coverage, and his special effects are a core part of these images, but he has not been written about a great deal. Interestingly, there are also signs of a move to separate the responsibility of the special effects from the director. Steve Dimeo, for example, claims that Landis 'discards the talents of his crew' (1981, p. 10), concluding that 'even Rick Baker's special effects, while impressive and perhaps more technically proficient than protégé Rob Bottin's effects in *The Howling*, seem wasted and at times phoney in a film that wears too many costumes' (p. 10). While we will return to the comparison with *The Howling* later, Dimeo's argument is that while technically competent, the special effects cannot save the film from its confusing genre tone. Parallel with that, Dimeo seems to be moving away from the idea of placing the film's below-the-lines workers as tools for the director, who exists only to fill out his vision. Writing for the genre-

focused *Cinefantastique*, he praises the film's effects while placing them as lesser in a hierarchy of filmic elements. In Dimeo's review, the special effects are once again presented as not as important to the film's overall quality as the narrative. However, reviews like this are beginning to bring Baker out of invisibility and attribute some agency and responsibility to him.

Indeed, Philip Strick, in *Films and Filming*, writes, 'thanks to Baker, *American Werewolf* is often splendidly macabre to contemplative with its abrupt ghouls, its decomposing dead and its catalogue of appalling injuries' (1981, p. 37). Similarly, John Pym refers to 'Rick Baker's werewolf make-up' stating how the metamorphosis happens 'with the sort of effortless expertise that makes one quite forget the artistry' (1981, p. 2). Furthermore, Roger Ebert states that 'one of the offscreen stars is Rick Baker, the young make-up genius who created the movie's wounds, gore and werewolves' (1981). Here we get an acknowledgement of Baker's skill, offering him as a unique attraction to the film. There is recognition of Baker's work and even some reference to his eventual stardom. While some articles do not mention the special effects or Rick Baker, most use images of his work, such as the Nazi Demons or the famous hand elongation scene.

Interestingly, while most critics praise Baker's work, there is also a twisting of discourse that can read as a backhanded compliment or a diminishing of Baker's contribution to the film. According to Strick, 'the film's other imbalance, and at the same time its most remarkable asset is the superb special effects work by Rick Baker' (1981, p. 37). He continues, 'like any conventional monster movie, it can't avoid making the monster far more of an attraction than the expendable humans' (p. 37). While this review conveys an ambiguous acceptance of the spectacle of Baker's special effects, there is also an element of taste at work, as seen in Strick's implication that the placing of the spectacle at the forefront of the film would somehow demean it. This may be why so many reviews focus on genre mixing over the effects.

Yet this begrudging element in conceding Baker's technical efforts seems at odds with the choices of images in the reviews. And while these images add a bit of visual spectacle to the article, they also suggest that the effects are an important part of the film, although, it is usually Landis, not Baker, who is credited for them.⁵³ Even though Baker is contributing an attraction to the film through the spectacle of his effects and his name, his efforts are still weighted as lesser to the narrative and genre in terms of marks of quality. The narrative elements of *American Werewolf*, as well as its genre, are viewed as more important to a film's critical reputation than its special effects.

John Brosnan compares the effects of *The Howling* to those in *American Werewolf*, arguing that *The Howling* is a more ambitious movie in terms of its effects:

I did find the full-grown werewolves in *The Howling* more impressive than the one in *Werewolf*. In the long-shots, the latter simply resembles a large dog (or bear), and I wasn't too impressed by the way it moved either. (I presumed it was an actor on all-fours but have since been told it was a mechanically operated dummy.) The two-legged creatures in *The Howling* were much more sinister and supernatural in appearance – once you show a monster on all-fours, it becomes nothing but an ordinary animal, no matter how potentially dangerous it may be.

(1981, p. 35)

This seems to contradict his previous statements on the realistic nature of the film, as well as Dimeo's assertion of technical superiority, criticising the seemingly real physiology of a werewolf, something that he praised in the presentation of other aspects of *American Werewolf*. Interestingly, Brosnan comments on the method by which the Werewolf was made. While this may reveal a bias toward preconceived notions of what a werewolf is, it also speaks to a notion of hierarchy in aesthetics and technique. By dismissing the werewolf as ordinary, Brosnan dismisses this part of the film, arguing that it is the weakest moment. This is noteworthy in two ways; firstly it demonstrates Pierson's understanding that novelty plays a big role in the

⁵³ Hierarchy is clearly at play within these reviews. As Bruce A. Austin identifies, for someone seeing a film, it is the film's plot and genre that are the most important elements (1989, p. 74).

perception of special effects, with *The Howling* as the first being deemed superior to *American Werewolf*, which came after it.⁵⁴ Secondly, there are conflicting definitions of realism within Brosnan's claim that the realism of *American Werewolf's* lycanthrope undermines the spectacle by being 'too real'. Ebert, by far the most critical of Baker's special effects, continues this line of argument:

[The] work is impressive, yes, but unless you're single-mindedly interested in special effects, *American Werewolf* is a disappointment. And even the special effects, good as they are, come as an anticlimax if you're a really dedicated horror fan, because if you are, you've already seen this movie's high point before: the onscreen transformation of a man into a werewolf was anticipated in *The Howling*, in which the special effects were done by a Baker protégé named Rob Bottin.

(1981)

While Ebert compliments Baker for a 'well done' transformation, his criticism is of technique rather than style. Reflecting the taste hierarchy that is apparent in Strick's work, Ebert writes that 'John Landis thought the technology would be enough' (1981). His review implies that while the story and characters of *American Werewolf* are flawed, the effects serve as a distraction that offers little in the way of quality of its own. The issue of timing, and, because *American Werewolf* came out after *The Howling*, a perceived lack of novelty, is, as many theorists argue, at the core of the scepticism around the film's special effects.⁵⁵

It is clear then that the critical reception for *American Werewolf* does change somewhat from the time of the film's initial announcement to the film's release in 1981, especially when it comes to the visibility of Baker as a significant figure within the production. While, once again, most critics place greater importance on John Landis' failure as a director, Baker does become more visible in that discussion. While some credit Baker's technical efforts as the

⁵⁴ Even though Baker designed effects for both using similar techniques that Rob Bottin built on as Baker left *The Howling* to work on *American Werewolf*.

⁵⁵ Like North.

highlights of the film, this is not enough to save it from a rather mixed reputation. Film critics then persist in the idea that Landis, the director, is responsible for *American Werewolf's* legacy, so reflecting a clear hierarchy of importance. As Austin (1989) identifies, the genre and other narrative elements are placed as legitimate parts of the discourses surrounding the film regarding its quality. That being said, critics begin to build Baker as a star within the film, commenting on the skill he used to create the werewolf design. However, the film's other issues drag down these compliments, as Baker continues to be placed lower within the hierarchy. While the debate has now moved away from the authorial discourse, the marketing of Baker's efforts is still tied to Landis' 'mistakes' and issues of taste relating to the genre.

“Beware the Moon” – Charting the Changing Reception of *An American Werewolf in London*

At the 54th Academy Awards, hosted on 29th March 1982, Rick Baker won the first Oscar for Best Makeup for his work on *An American Werewolf in London*. In an article covering the winners in the May 1982 issue of *American Cinematographer*, the award is described as a 'famous first' (Lightman, 1982, p. 500). This comes at the end of a section of an article called 'Salute to the Technicians', which recounts the best cinematography, visual effects, sound and editing (p. 444). *American Cinematographer* is a trade journal with a tie to the American Guild of Cinematographers, so it is perhaps surprising that they would make the distinction between artist and technician, although they do hint at an awareness of the hierarchical nature of 'the so-called "big awards" (Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Director, Best Picture)' (p. 501). However, it does not mean that by recognising the inherent separation of these two sides of the film industry (above-the-line and below-the-line), *American Cinematographer* is enforcing a hierarchy of labour within the film industry. Instead, it is an acknowledgement of the structure inherent in ideas of credit and reputation. The article also comments that the 'most significant Oscars are bestowed upon the artist/technicians, without

whose genius and meticulous dedication there could be no cinema' (p. 444). This represents a critical and historical moment as it changes how *American Werewolf* is discussed and how Baker is factored into that discussion. Like the later reviews of *American Werewolf*, Baker's first-ever Academy Award for make-up also acknowledges the film as an impressive technical feat.

After *American Werewolf*'s initial theatrical release, it became a mainstay on television. One of the first references to the film's television appearance is in *The Times* on Saturday, Feb 16, 1985, stating that it will be on BBC 1 at 10 pm. Peter Dear and Peter Davalle, for *The Times*, describe it as 'A thriller spiced with a little humour' (1985, p. 27). Notably, following their brief description of the film in a format that lists the main stars and the director, it also mentions Rick Baker's Oscar win. This is similar to a 1988 issue of *The Times* that describes the film as a 'classic horror that won an Oscar for the special effects make-up which includes an on-screen transformation of man into wolf' (1988, p. 17).⁵⁶ This marks a turning point for Baker and his relationship to the film. While previously he was left voiceless as Landis' assistant, he is now a key figure in promoting the film. Now, Baker and his award-winning special effects constitute a substantial part of the film's reputation. While in the same issue, Peter Waymark does not mention Baker by name, he similarly references the 'excellent special effects' alongside the 'astute mixture of horror and comedy from writer/director John Landis' (1985, p. 37). It is also important to mention the order in which these articles place the genre mixing and special effects, with the humour being placed before the idea of spectacle. This shows that although the transformation is becoming a regular selling point in mainstream publications, the blend of laughs and screams is still central to *American Werewolf*'s appeal.

⁵⁶ Airing on BBC1 at 10:20 pm.

However, the review in *The Times* is perhaps the most interesting in its depiction of *American Werewolf's* legacy beyond the quality of the film.

Tiresome though it may be to see the old joke trotted out again, it is almost impossible to avoid saying about John Landis's horror movie that, after its advent fangs could never more be what they used to be. Gone forever were the days when two overlength teeth and a mass of hair, created by camera 'dissolves', were considered enough to scare the living daylights out of us. From now on, wolf jaws pushed their way out of human skin before our very eyes, and unspeakable things happen to hands and feet. Landis's film is about the untypical things that can happen to hikers in Yorkshire Dales. The violent climax may prove too much for sensitive souls. You have been warned.

(Davalle and Dear, 1990, p. 25)

This marks the first time film critics show an awareness of how the film changed the concept of werewolves. While it does not attribute the responsibility to Baker, maintaining as it does a classic auteurist approach to the credits, the review places the ground-breaking effects as central to the draw of the film. There is no mention of the mixing of genres, another indication of how the reviews of *American Werewolf* are starting to shift. While at the time of its release, the reviews were focused on the genre of the film with the make-up effects as a detail to be expected from a horror film, now, rather than the afterthought they were in the original reception, the effects are taking an equal role in both the discussions and the attraction of the film.

An American Werewolf In London appears to also be a similar metamorphosis in terms of its retrospectives and re-reviews, with Baker being profiled in an examination of his career until 1984 in the 16th issue of *Cinefex*.⁵⁷ Among other pieces of information, the article reveals that *American Werewolf in London* was the first film for which Baker required a team to help him complete the effects (Fox, 1984, p. 48). This shows that *American Werewolf*, which saw Baker in charge of his own crew rather than a part of someone else's, was indeed a step up for him. However, *Cinefex* concludes their assessment of his work by saying that 'Baker's

⁵⁷ When the issue of *Cinefex* was released.

accomplishment was perhaps as much that he and actor David Naughton managed to fill Landis' list as it was a series of great technical feats' (p. 48). We can see here how *Cinefex* portions out responsibility; while Baker is in charge of the technical aspects of the transformation, Landis is responsible for the artistry, fitting in with Caldwell's assessments of below-the-line workers. This remains a common thread within the discourses that the marketing of *American Werewolf* attempts to create and which critics pick up on. Despite the detailed artistic and technical descriptions of how Baker created these effects, it still speaks to the separation of the auteur director from the craftsman whose job it is to fulfil the director's vision.

While a 1996 edition of *Film Review*⁵⁸ re-treads the narrative Landis introduced in the pre-release material, there are also some significant new pieces of information. Firstly, it includes a revelation of a disagreement's reflections on the exchange: 'I was looking at the film strictly as a make-up artist', he comments, 'whereas he was looking at the film as a whole' (p. 46). Finally, when asked how the film has endured after it was received so negatively, Baker presents another heroic narrative:

I think the movie was way ahead of its time in a lot of respects, [...] and I think it holds up pretty well today. As far as my own work is concerned it still looks okay, but it's been done to death since. After *American Werewolf* and *The Howling* everyone and his brother who did a transformation scene duplicated that stuff.

(p. 47)

While at first, this article sticks to a traditional narrative regarding the film's production, this last section privileges Baker's work on *American Werewolf* and the claim that it had inspired many other versions of the transformation. This narrative reappears in the flurry of re-

⁵⁸ An article that would later be reprinted and edited slightly in a 2002 edition of *StarBurst*.

examinations and reviews of the film, including a review in in the 2002 issue of *StarBurst* in which Howard Maxford states:

[W]hen it first appeared back in 1981, this classic blend of fantasy, comedy, and horror shocked audiences, thanks primarily to the work of make-up artist Rick Baker, whose ground-breaking effects featured the most convincing transformation of a man into a werewolf the cinema had ever seen. Over two decades on, the effects still dazzle, while the film hasn't lost its ability to frighten and amuse in equal measure.

(2002, p. 45)

While Maxford re-treads the same historical points he discussed in his older retrospective for a 1996 edition of *Film Review* (pp. 44-47), he gives greater credit to Baker and 'the effects [that] seemed nothing short of miraculous' (p. 50). He also gives Baker more page space, allowing Baker to share the director's spotlight. This theme can also be seen in the reviews of the home release. The DVD reviews in both *USA Today* (2002) and *Sight and Sound* (2002) make specific reference to bonus features offering behind the scenes footage and interviews about how Baker made the effects. *USA Today* described this behind-the-scenes footage as a 'highlight'" (Rothenberg, 2002, p. 68). This not only taps into the pleasure of seeing behind the curtain that DVD extras allow collectors and fans, but it also demonstrates how Baker and the monster he created have become a main attraction of *American Werewolf*.

In 2001, *American Werewolf* was re-released on DVD to celebrate its 20th anniversary. The disc includes actors' commentary, a short behind-the-scenes clip that turned out to be the original promotional making-of featurette present in the marketing, outtakes, and interviews with Rick Baker and John Landis. While the interviews trot out the same history as we have heard before, the fact that the DVD has given equal space to both Landis and Baker says something about the shift in the relationship between the two and the way their roles in the film are perceived. While the featurette reminds us that the film's original marketing was very traditionally focused on Landis as the auteur, the DVD offers the viewer the pleasure of peeping behind the curtain to see how the film is made. Furthermore, both Landis and Baker share the

space. While the film has had multiple home releases, the Blu-Ray format is the only one that includes the featurette *I Walked with a Wolf*, focusing on the then up-and-coming remake of *The Wolfman*.⁵⁹

The image of *American Werewolf* is now solidified, reflecting the perception with more recent reviews of the film. Even the production note seems to suggest a change in relationship, identifying a creative partnership in the creation of the effects. Instead of Landis approaching Baker, the booklet that comes with the 20th anniversary DVD says:

Landis and Make-up effect genius Rick Baker first discussed the extraordinary FX that would be necessary for *American Werewolf* ten years earlier [...] The idea of creating a man-into-wolf transformation that would happen before the audiences' eyes, without use of optical effects, was rooted in Baker's mind for a decade.

(2002 p. 1)

Thus, Baker has become a powerful creative element behind the film's reputation. Previously, the vision behind the effects was placed at Landis' door alone. However, now we see a picture of collaborative creation, with Baker being the main driving force in bringing it to fruition. Baker is now being represented as an artist who is solely responsible for the reputation of *American Werewolf* as a film with landmark effects rather than a technician bringing Landis' concepts into reality.

Conclusion: Blue Moon

American Werewolf has remained with Landis and Baker throughout their careers. In a 1993 issue, *StarBurst* interviewed John Landis for his new film *Innocent Blood* (John Landis, 1994). Much of the interview is given over to *American Werewolf*, focusing on genre mixing. Pat Jankiewicz argues that '*American Werewolf* not only reinvented the monster movie but changed commercial films entirely. [Landis'] daring mix of hip comedy and graphic horror began a wave of "genre mixing" that continues to this day' (1993, 31). Jankiewicz then sights

⁵⁹ Which will be examined in chapter six, as it focuses on that film.

Lost Boys (Joel Schumacher, 1987), *Return of the Living Dead* (Dan O'Bannon, 1985) and *Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven 1984) as examples of films with merged opposing genres that *American Werewolf* inspired.

At the same time, Baker was interviewed for his contribution to the Jack Nicholson vehicle *Wolf* (Mike Nichols, 1994) in an expose focusing on Guiseppe Rotunno (the cinematographer for the film) in *American Cinematographer*. The section starts by saying

[I]t's ironic that Rick Baker, the man whose Academy Award-winning Change-o effects for *An American Werewolf In London* practically defined a cinematic era, should find himself, in this age of computer effects, creating a make-up that harks back to the earliest techniques of cinema and stage.

(Magid, 1994b, p. 54)

This relates to some significant elements that will be analysed later in this thesis. Crucially, Baker is now credited as the person responsible changing the way werewolves are looked at. Unlike the original marketing and reception of the film, this, along with other retrospectives, demonstrates a new readiness to give credit to Baker for creating the make-up, separately from Landis's directorial influence. Particularly after working on *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes* and *Harry and the Hendersons* (William Dear, 1987), Baker has become more of a star in his own right.

Similarly, *Sight and Sound* has referred to *American Werewolf* in almost every review of a werewolf movie since *Wolf*. In reviews of films including *Company of Wolves* (Neil Jordan, 1984) to *Ginger Snaps* (John Fawcett, 2000) *American Werewolf* has been cited as a point of comparison of tone and technique with these films (Kemp, 1994, p. 52; Leyland, 2003, pp. 58-59; Richards, 2001, p. 11-12; Davies, 2005, p. 49-50; Walters, 2003, p. 43-44; Newman, 2007a, p. 50-51; Williams, 2001, P. 36-37). These reviews, coupled with the countless revisitings, re-reviews and retrospectives of the film and the genre it helped to shape, all position *American Werewolf* as a touchstone in the werewolf genre. Not only that, but the film

has become synonymous with its amazing special effects and, at the centre of it all, with Baker's work as an effects artist. No longer seen as just a part of Landis' team, Baker is now viewed as a star in his own right who shaped the visual language of *American Werewolf*. While Landis, as the film's scriptwriter as well as director, is responsible for creating the film's entertaining blend of horror and comedy, Baker's role as the artist who transformed the look of the beast (a look that is still copied today) is now well established.

The reputation of *American Werewolf in London* has indeed changed over time. As we have seen, the promotional and pre-released material presented the film as a modern retelling of a classic tale, focusing on the auteurist image of Landis and the spectacle that he was bringing audiences, only briefly mentioning Baker and his contribution, while the original reception critiques Landis' heavy-handed blending of opposing genres. However, when there was an element of praise in those reviews, most of it was given to Baker. The period after the film's theatrical release until the film's home release sees Baker beginning to share some of the spotlight with Landis as creatively responsible for the award-winning effects. *American Werewolf* is now remembered as a groundbreaking defining moment of horror and comedy, with Baker behind the Oscar-worthy transformation and Landis taking command of the blending of genre.

While the original reception and marketing of the film minimised Baker's relation to the effects work, his special effects now constitute a major part of the film's appeal. Today, *American Werewolf* is perceived as a horror comedy with award-winning special effects that changed how werewolves are constructed, with a reputation that now embraces both aspects equally. This change of narrative is also partly a response to Baker's other work, like the ape effects *Harry and the Hendersons* (William Dear, 1987) and *Mighty Joe Young* (Ron Underwood, 1998). Over a period of 20 years Baker has become solidified as a new kind of 'name' within film production. While a number of post-2002 reviews and retrospectives still

trot out the same auteur and genre-focused histories behind the making of the film, many more focus on an appreciation of Baker and his work as time has progressed.

Despite this reassessment of Baker's contribution, elements of the hierarchy still persist, not just in terms of special effects but also of film producers. Although Baker's Oscar for *American Werewolf* demonstrates that a below-the-line technician can transition into an above-the-line artist, further questions remain to be asked. Is this reassessment of Baker a permanent one, or is it only apply to this particular film? Is this journey one way, or can people move constantly between being below-the-line and above its? Now that he has the ability to hire a crew to help, how does this affect his relationship to his employees? How does this also affect the way he produces special effects? Does this image of Baker remain solid during the rest of his career, or is he still made to work below-the-line? Despite his Oscar-winning make-up, is he still in part a 'lesser than' figure?

Chapter 3: They Made a Monkey out of Me: Issues of Performance and the Spectacular Real in *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes* (Hugh Hudson, 1984) and *Gorillas in the Mist* (Michael Apted, 1988)

By 1984, According to his biography, Rick Baker ‘was arguably the king of dimensional makeup/creature design or at least one of its leading practitioners’ (Rinzler, 2019a, p. 285). After *American Werewolf*, Baker was now responsible for the wages of his non-union crew. Now more than a makeup artist, Baker had become an ‘entrepreneur in a precarious business with all the associated headaches’ (p. 285). The next film he was approached to work on was *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes* (hereafter referred to as *Greystoke*)⁶⁰, where he made realistic-looking apes to interact with the film's star, Christopher Lambert. This new version of the Tarzan story was one of the largest projects Baker had worked on up until that point. After *Greystoke*, the projects kept rolling in, with highlights including *Starman* (John Carpenter, 1984) and the film Baker is most proud of, *Harry and the Hendersons* (William Dear, 1987) (p. 322). Then, in 1985, Rick Baker got a call from Michael Apted about the biopic *Gorillas in the Mist* (Michael Apted, 1988). The film tells the real-life story of Primatologist Dian Fossey, a controversial figure in the world of wildlife conservation and an expert in the study of Mountain Gorillas (Montgomery, 1991, p.149).

At first glance, *Greystoke*, a piece of historical fiction⁶¹, and *Gorillas in the Mist*, a biopic, may appear to be very different movies. Nevertheless, despite this difference in genre, both films feature realistic recreations of encounters between gorillas and human characters necessitated by Baker's special effects. Similarly, the two movies are very similar in how the production and film critics discuss these special effects. Instead of using the spectacle of its fantastical origins and Baker's effects, the promotion and reception of *Greystoke* focused on

⁶⁰ Interestingly as Baker's biography *Metamorphosis* reports the production, led by director Hugh Hudson approached Carlo Rambaldi before Baker (Rinzler, 2019a, 246).

⁶¹ This is how the filmmakers and studio promoted the film, though this assertion is ironic, considering the B-movie origins of *Greystoke*.

how authentic it was for a fantastical story. In *Greystoke*, Baker sought to naturalise the effects, tying them to primatologists and documentary filmmaking traditions, thus allowing audiences to experience a kind of perceptual realism of realist effects. In comparison, *Gorillas in the Mist* has a complicated relationship with its special effects artists. The producers of the film sought to obfuscate the special effects entirely, denying their existence and trying to remove the visibility of the inherently visual effects.

The last two chapters have discussed how taste and production hierarchies within promotion and reception discourses have obscured the special effects and how, at the start of his career, Baker's position as a below-the-line worker was meant to fulfil the director's artistic vision. However, as shown through the diachronic examination of *American Werewolf*, Baker's prominence and visibility within the critical discourse has seemingly grown in tandem with his own standing in the film industry. This prominence is partly due to his awards in the field of special make-up effects and his name being attached to some well-respected cult films and franchises. However, what separates *Greystoke* and *Gorillas in the Mist* from *KKII* and *American Werewolf* is that the former films value the idea of 'realism', thus making the special effects invisible somehow, while the latter two contain obvious and overt special effects. The giant ape climbing the tallest tower in New York and the Lycanthrope causing mayhem in Piccadilly Circus are there, plain as latex and yak hair, and are the central attraction at the heart of the films' marketing and press coverage. The aim of this chapter, then, is to measure how the hierarchy of taste surrounding special effects relates to discussions of visibility.

To thoroughly explore this, the chapter will take on the form of a comparative synchronic study. Each film has left few cultural ripples that can lead to a diachronic study of their changing reception. However, the main aim of this chapter is to look at how each film discusses issues of realism and the attempt to render their effects and the man who made them invisible. Firstly, the chapter will examine how *Greystoke* attempts to assert a sense of

authenticity and realism onto its pulp adventure origins by discussing its genre, and crew. After that, this chapter will explore *Gorillas in the Mist*'s attempt to render its special effects entirely invisible and how this impacts the way critics engaged with the film. This will be carried out to explore how these invisible effects fit within previous discussions of academic understandings of special effects. The effects in *KKII* and *American Werewolf* align with the spectacular; however, with *Greystoke* and *Gorillas in the Mist*, there is no spectacular interruption, and there is no "look at me moment" that stops the narrative. They are effects designed to mesh with the rest of the film's diegesis as a physical object normally would. Their aim is to be perceived as real, or in the case of *Gorillas in the Mist*, to be perceived as reality itself. This leads to several questions: What is the purpose of those effects? How and why have these effects been rendered 'invisible'? What does this do to the reputation of the special effects artist who creates them? Can the effects remain 'invisible' if the special effects artist is a star in their own right?

Stephen Prince's theories of 'perceptual realism' are undoubtedly helpful in setting up our understanding of alternatives to these less spectacular effects. However, his focus on digital effects ignores all the predigital techniques that also served similar functions, like matte paintings, superimpositions, blue/green screens, etc., which have been used to cover the joins in cinema between the indexically captured filmic images and the special effects work. These effects can also cross genres, as rear projection can be seen in most driving sections of classical Hollywood dramas. This chapter argues that it is important to reconsider and rethink predigital effects and how they relate to perceptual reality.

**Me Tarzan, You Tarzan: Issues of Performance, Prestige and Perceptual Realism
in *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes***

Greystoke, adapted from the pulp adventure books by Edgar Rice Burroughs, tells the story of an English lord raised in the jungle by apes after being orphaned during his parents' unfortunate holiday excursion. The first adaptation was in 1918, with actor Elmo Lincoln in the titular role that inspired countless serials and B-grade features (Abate and Wannamaker, 2012; Cheatwood; 1982). Film versions of Tarzan have continued beyond *Greystoke*, with the most recent big-budget appearance being *The Legend of Tarzan* (David Yates, 2016). With a history almost as old as cinema itself, how did the creators of *Greystoke* attempt to evolve past this ancestral image to differentiate their film? The answer seems to be dominated by the film's remarkable and spectacular (impossible) realism, even though Rick Baker constructed Tarzan's adopted family.

Baker's name and special effects are present within the critical discourses surrounding *Greystoke*, but critics focus on how realistic these effects are, leading to some interesting critical reactions. Those who mention Baker or his special effects do so briefly despite his growing fame. *Variety*'s review of the film states, 'Rick Baker's primate suit creations - and the performance of those within them - are generally outstanding, as they needed to be for audience acceptance of the realistic approach' (Cart., 1984, p. 16). *Film and Filming*'s Philip Strick argues that Baker's ape effects 'are a triumph of appearance, expression and behaviour as if recruited directly from an Attenborough documentary' (1984, p. 39). Anthony P. Montesano's piece for *American Film* expands this narrative as it supposes that Baker's growth as a make-up artist is intertwined with his 'certain affinity to apes' (1988, p. 24). Montesano quotes Baker, stating, 'I became fascinated with gorillas and most of my concentration has been in *that* area. My dream has been to create the ultimate gorilla suit and the technology to accompany it' (p. 24). Baker's star image marks him out not only as a 'Monster Maker', as

discussed in Fox's 1984 *Cinefex* biography, but also as a 1984 issue of *Starburst* calls him, 'the master of simian make-up effects' (1984, p. 24). This is also corroborated by Strick, who comments that 'Baker has been working at apes for years and this time he's got them absolutely right' (1984, p. 39). Baker is a known figure in speciality magazines and industry publications, but more than that, he is also known as a man who can make realistic ape make-up. These publications were serious film-specific publications that focused on giving credit and visibility even to the technical workers below the line. Thus, Baker's name being present in these kinds of reviews should not be surprising.

Even when Baker is not named, critics still praise the effects for how convincing they are. Alan Karp for *Boxoffice* writes that there should be recognition of 'the creators of the startlingly real looking apes' (1984, p. 61). There is an appreciation for Baker's work, even if he is not named. Still, instead of these effects and the spectacle they provide being seen as an interrupting disruptive force in the narrative, their realism becomes a kind of spectacle in itself. These critics, writing for film-specific publications, create a spectacular realism where the fact that the apes look realistic is a thing to marvel at, in the same way as people marvelled at the werewolf transformation in *American Werewolf*. Vincent Canby takes this notion and adds another dimension. In his *New York Times* review, he states that

[M]ention should also be made of the work of Rick Baker, who designed the ape make up; Peter Elliot, who is listed as "primate choreographer" and Roger Fouts "primate consultant". Real chimpanzees and small human actors in chimpanzee suits are so effectively integrated that, I suspect, only a sharp-eyed fault-finding chimp could tell which is which.

(1984a, p. 5)

Canby here describes the importance of the collaboration between the three figures in the film production to create this spectacular, manufactured realism, drawing on a spectacle of craft, praising Baker and the others for the realistic depiction of simians. Baker, Elliot and Fouts

have reproduced something natural unnaturally so well that Canby issues a challenge or game to spot the join. This echoes Dan North's argument that effects challenge 'the spectator to spot the join between' the real and unreal (2008, p. 1-2). More than that, Canby shows that instead of drawing on the typical critical binary conflict between narrative and spectacle, as identified by the likes of Geoff King and Yvonne Tasker, the issue of realism affects the hierarchisation of these seemingly opposed elements. While Canby's statement focuses on the appreciation of craftsmanship, the review also challenges the audience; it invites them to play a game of knowledge and train them to spot the trickery. This enacts the multiple viewing pleasures that arise when one watches special effects. However, it also trains viewers to become connoisseurs, discerning members of an active audience. Conversely, it draws attention to the effects that do not want to be noticed through the challenge and praise of craftsmanship.

This is the perfect example of the multilevel gaze that occurs when one approaches a special effect. While the more noticeable effects provide a challenge in ignoring their artificial and spectacular nature, they can be rendered more visibly invisible through perceptual realism. Much like the digital dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park*, the apes in *Greystoke* are both spectacular in their appearance, yet the way they interact with the world and the narrative means they are accepted by audiences as part of the generic verisimilitude. Stephen Prince argues that CGI challenges previous notions of filmic realism centred around ideas of indexicality (1996, 29).⁶² Indeed, he continues this definition in his 2019 book *Digital Cinema*, stating that:

[P]erceptual realism is a powerful constituent of contemporary digital films, helping to establish credible environments and characters when these are created digitally through live-action cinematography. Even though characters *might* be referentially false, non-existent or never existing, they can be made to appear perceptually real.

(2019, 57)

⁶² The way the camera captures objects as they are.

As such, Prince's work seems to focus purely on post-production, visual and digital effects. However, I would argue that Baker's physical make-up effects for *Greystoke* also contain an element of 'perceptual realism' despite their indexical nature. Prince's understanding of perceptual realism suggests it 'designates a relationship between the image or film and the spectator, and it can encompass both unreal and referentially realistic images. Because of this, unreal images may be referentially fictional but perceptually realistic' (1996, 32). There is an acceptance of the unreality of the image but also an acceptance that within the film's fiction, the image holds verisimilitude within it. The ephemeral digital is rendered physical through the filmmaker's construction of the picture. Though, this only seems to apply to the more noticeable effects. However, perceptual realism can also apply to practical and predigital effects. The ways that critics praise the realistic special effects of *Greystoke* show how Prince's ideas of perceptual realism interact with the film's reception of Baker's apes. The realism of the special effects are the focus; they are indistinguishable from reality, blended seemingly seamlessly with actual apes. Drawing attention to the unreal reality of the effects suggests an oscillation between these two points of awareness of the 'constructed and false' effects and how they fit seamlessly into the world they are in (Ndalianis, 2000, p. 261). Baker's effects then are both acknowledged and praised for how hard it is to notice them and though some mention his name, it is in praise of his ability to render reality out of unreality. This suggests that critics are negotiating their relationship with this unreality in a film steeped in realism.

While other reviewers praise the effects, *The Film Journal's* review is less than positive about *Greystoke's* 'realistic' effects, pointing to the 'elaborate apes suits and make-up, which are impressive enough to encourage willing suspension of disbelief, though not uncritical conviction' (M. M. 1984, 23). As this review suggests, while the effects are well made, they still do not stop negative criticism. This echoes the same hierarchy of production elements seen in the reviews of *An American Werewolf in London*. The review also reflects Guy Debord's

dismissal of spectacle and his claim that spectacle is: ‘the existing order’s uninterrupted discourse about itself, its laudatory monologue. It is the self-portrait of power in the epoch of its totalitarian management of the conditions of existence’ (*Society of the Spectacle*, 1977). Like Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1944), Debord argues that spectacle (of which special effects are a part) is a stupefying agent that presents itself to be absorbed passively. For Debord, Adorno and Horkheimer, Baker’s effects would be this stupefying agent. In turn, this attitude would affect the critical reception of those effects, making them lesser than the other more ‘worthy’ aspects of a film’s production.

This is a somewhat outmoded way of thinking, as fans of special effects engage actively with their chosen area of fascination, as shown by North and Pierson. The hierarchies of importance or legitimacy present in this dismissal of spectacle echo King’s arguments that an ‘over-emphasis on narrative may have encouraged a response that too readily dismisses the importance of the narrative dimension of Hollywood spectacle’ (King, 2009, p. 4). Critics view the spectacle as an interrupting presence in a film narrative that is less important than the said narrative. However, when this comes up against ‘perceptual realism’ or effects that are to be ignored in general, this viewpoint does not change. The effects, an obvious source of Hollywood spectacle, are still viewed with suspicion; its realism is a sight of mistrust rather than quality. The awareness of *Greystoke*’s need for special effects, while also being a narrative theme-heavy movie, could explain why Baker is absent from most reviews. He is rewarded for his skill by being visibly invisible; his craft allows critics to comment on how unnoticeable his effects are. However, the next question becomes, If Baker is replaced in the discussions, what techniques are used to obfuscate or excuse his involvement within *Greystoke*?

While Baker is not often mentioned within the film’s critical, marketing and production discourse, outside of more film-specific publications, it is Dr Roger Fouts who becomes the named figure responsible for creating the fake apes. In his *New York Times* article ‘Man as Ape

Was the Key to Filming *Greystoke*', Bayard Webster credits Fouts as an 'internationally known primatologist who served as the film's consultant on great ape behaviour and coached and rehearsed the actors in their roles as anthropoids' (1984, p. 19). He continues, 'the realistic acting by human chimps was the result of coaching by Dr Fouts and a choreographer⁶³ [my footnote] in the west African jungle of Cameroon in his primate centre in Ellensburg and on the outskirts of London' (p. 19). Perhaps most interesting is the statement that Fouts is responsible for specific designs for the ape suits: 'Noting that chimps had longer arms than humans, the primatologist saw to it that the apes' costumes were designed with arms and hands that extended beyond the actors' normal arm length' (p. 19). This is backed up by Benedict Nightingale, in a piece about Hugh Hudson and *Greystoke*, again for *The New York Times*, who writes that Fouts trained the actors who were to be playing the apes to get the movements correct in more advanced social interactions (1983, p. 17). These articles naturalise the special effects and seek to tie the fakery of the special effects to a truth that comes more from scientific study than movie magic. This creates a narrative of reality around an unreality that is constructed for a film.

More than that, these reviews in these newspapers place performance as the main element of importance, reflecting Lisa Bode's observation on performance as it relates to special effects. She states that 'acting and special effects have so often been perceived as demanding divergent modes of evaluation, dividing viewership between attention to artifice and authenticity, interiority and exteriority, craft or technical apparatus and emotion' (Bode, 2015, p. 41). Bode is highly aware of the hierarchies present within these binaries and that, despite this, the relationship between special effects and performance remains deeply connected. We have also seen this in the newspaper reviews. Webster and Nightingale, for

⁶³ Here referring to Peter Elliot, dubbed the "primary primate" (Campbell, 2011), the British actor best known for his work as other movie apes in *The Missing Link* (Carol and David Hughes, 1988) and *Congo* (Frank Marshall, 1995).

example, seek to place the ideas of authenticity and emotion of performance at a higher importance than the artifice of the special effects. Both articles appeared in the broadsheet, *The New York Times*, a paper that arguable focuses on art over apparatus. As Bode argues ‘the discourse of “fidelity” encourages us to see performance capture as “conveyance” rather than “mask” even as the prosthetic appliance or rubber creature suit is used as the legitimating connection to cinemas analogue past’ (p. 41). While Bode does indeed discuss a continuity between practical make-up and digital motion capture, she also points to the prejudices some publications, such as *The New York Times*, hold when it comes to special effects as they relate to film performance. The critic looks beyond the make-up,⁶⁴ or rather looks at the make-up as an extension of the performance rather than as a separate part of film production.

The New York Times critics are holding two contradictory pieces of information at once. They are aware that the monkeys are not real; however, the apes are positioned as realistic due to their connection to reality through primatologists and the physicality of the trained actors, creating a manufactured reality through the special effects. As a secondary effect of this sort of discourse, Baker is virtually elided from the film's production. Much like his treatment of *KKII*, he is ignored and marginalised in favour of other figures. This removes the story of Baker’s own expertise and his interest in great apes, which was noted during the production of *KKII*.

In comparison to *The New York Times*’ focus on performance and authenticity, Jordan Fox, writing for *Cinefex*, provides a more technically minded narrative that foregrounds Baker, claiming that his work ‘may have far-reaching implications for the future of make-up’ (Fox, 1984, p. 69). Fox also writes that Baker and Kenny Clarke⁶⁵ developed silicone moulding and

⁶⁴ This idea is something that will be discussed later on in chapter 4 of this thesis as we begin to focus on *Beauty and the Beast*.

⁶⁵ Baker’s “chief moldmaker” (Fox, 1984, p. 69), best known for his work as a plasterer on *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Stephen Spielberg, 1981) and *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* (George Lucas, 1983).

other types of materials that allow for multiple casts of the same mould. If these experiments were later considered successful (which they were), then, as Baker argues, ‘it would be a real advance and a lot of the cumbersome plaster mould techniques may become obsolete’ (p. 69). This discussion of techniques demonstrates the fine balance between technology and art that exists in film, especially in special effects. Baker’s experiments with these materials allowed for more realistic make-up applications and for those appliances to be more easily fabricated. While Baker is dismissed and removed from film discourses within newspapers, he is pioneering techniques behind the scenes that would significantly impact the industry. However, this innovative and significant change to how special effects make-up is produced is dismissed in the broader discourse around *Greystoke* in favour of some other, more preferable narrative. However, this should not be unexpected, as *Cinefex* is specifically focused on the production of special effects, while newspapers and more general film publications will not have a readership that demands that level of detail or focus on filmic special effects. So, while Baker is presented in a heroic light as an innovator, this is only within the context of this very specific type of technical publication.

This heroic narrative that Fox and *Cinefex* present also offers up an illustration of the differences between sources. Mainstream news publications like *The New York Times* focus on the more visible above-the-line figures, such as the stars, directors, and writers, while only giving brief attention to Baker and others as craftsmen. When they do discuss the film’s effects, it is only to comment on their realism, which is presented as an essential and legitimate aspect of the effects that is worthy of attention. In contrast, the more genre or industry-focused publications value Baker’s technical and artistic contributions to *Greystoke*, with each painting their own narrative of dismissal and focus, claiming the importance of specific figures over others. This attitude should not be surprising as the review pages in the more general publications tend not to feature special effects as their primary focus. However, this makes the

few mentions there are of special effects all the more significant. While Baker's technological advancement can render his more naturalistic effects 'invisible', making him seemingly easier to erase, this is contradicted by those mentions of his invisible effects. Within the critical discourse, there is an element of oscillation between the two stages of gaze when experiencing special effects: an awareness of the effect and the ability to accept them as (an invisible) part of the work.

Another feature of these critical responses to *Greystoke* is their elevation of the film above its origins as a pulp novel and B-Movie serials. As part of this, many critics sought to 'naturalise' the effects that Baker made. While there is a certain amount of appreciation of the special effects, specifically around their realism and the skills behind the creation of the realistic suits, there is also an assumption that special effects in a film must make it somehow lower. While special effects are often viewed as synonymous with overtly spectacular genres or films deemed to be of low cultural importance, where they are praised at all, it is for their accuracy to nature and realism. While acknowledging the effects makes them noticeable and perceptible, there is also an attempt to obfuscate the make-up artist's work and what makes the effects spectacular. The fact that these effects are realistic is their main attraction; they are spectacular because they do not call attention to themselves within the film's narrative. As such, Baker's make-up artist was mostly sidelined in favour of either discussions of how Hugh Hudson, as a documentarian, provided authenticity to *The Legend of Tarzan*, or of how a primatologist (Dr Roger Fouts) trained actors to behave as simians. When Baker's name was brought up, it was to show the pedigree of the production as an Oscar winner and through his skills as a technician producing realistic work. While Baker's name did not appear in the production and promotional material, the emphasis was on how the film presented an 'authentic' telling of the Tarzan story. Yet, for those critics who did pay attention to the effects,

like Jordan Fox, Baker's reputation was not affected by his obfuscation. Instead, it seems to have solidified his status and 'name' as a special effects artist.

Peering through the Mists of Reality: Issues of Realism, Labour and Visibility in *Gorillas in the Mist*

While Rick Baker is marginalised and rendered lesser in the discourses of *Greystoke*, he is completely erased from the discourses surrounding *Gorillas in the Mist*. This begins with the studio's conscious decision not to credit Baker as a special effect make-up artist. Rather, he was credited as Executive Producer. This mirrors his treatment on *KKII*, where he was credited as a consultant, reflecting Baker's professional development as he moves up the chain of importance. Although paradoxically, these advancements also remove his artistic agency, as an Executive Producer does not contribute to the artistic side of a film, being focused more on economics and logistics. What is fascinating is that his role is obscured even though he is no longer a newcomer to the industry and has worked on several large-scale productions and prestige pictures before *Gorillas in the Mist*. As we have seen, Baker's suit work on *KKII* was hidden in favour of the more spectacular animatronic, and his make-up in *Greystoke* was given far less attention than the performance and authenticity of the apes. Now, with *Gorillas in the Mist*, the production did not even want his work acknowledged.

So then, why was Baker ignored or hidden, especially when he was at this advanced stage of his career? Why was he only credited as an executive producer, not a special effects artist? According to Anthony Montesano in a 1988 edition of *American Film*:

Baker's involvement with *Gorillas In the Mist* – Michael Apted-directed, Sigourney Weaver vehicle – is being downplayed by Universal it would seem, in an effort to not draw attention to the fact that some of the gorillas are men in suits. As with *Greystoke*, Baker's creation in *Gorillas* must be completely believable.

(1988, p. 25)

Camilla Henneman, the artist and puppeteer who worked for Baker on *Gorillas in the Mist*, backed up this in a 2015 article for *Puppeteers of America*, saying:

Rick was told that there would be no acknowledgment of gorilla costumes and puppets, or of the crew that built them. He was given a producer credit. I heard it said many times, that “if we were successful, no one would know that we had done anything at all.” Publicly, the producers were claiming that all of the film was done with real gorillas.

(2015a)

Henneman also explains how the make-up crew fit into this production. A small group of on-set artists filmed in Rwanda, while a larger crew back in Los Angeles built exact replicas of the apes that Sigourney Weaver interacted with.

There would be notes about what sequences might form the basis of scenes. Rick would then guide his crew in recreating specific gorilla costumes that matched the real gorillas in feature, color and size. Much of the reason this succeeded was due to the brilliant editing of Stuart Baird. The script was built around the footage they shot of real gorillas interacting with Sigourney.

(2015a)

Though this account of the production represents a specific version of its history from one member of Rick Baker’s crew, it reveals an interesting omission by the studio and promotional material. The film’s production process appears highly collaborative, especially in terms of the special effects artists and editors collaborating to smooth over the joins between the actual apes and the ones constructed by the make-up crew. Revisiting Street’s seven categories,⁶⁶ it becomes essential to recognise who is telling us this story. Henneman is writing this piece of history after the fact for *Puppeteers of America*, a niche trade journal. However, it is still an important story as it contrasts with the narrative that the film’s producers present. While Baker and his team were involved in constructing entire sequences of the film, the studio pushed a narrative of naturalism and authenticity.

⁶⁶ type, authorship, agency, context, impact, archival scheme and interpretive significance (2016, pp. 6-8).

In the article, Henneman reiterates earlier statements of Baker as the film's preeminent expert on making ape suits, building him up as a person of worth and import in filmmaking, particularly in creating ape effects. She continues that while the production company eventually revealed that ape suits were used during the death scenes, they keenly stressed that most of the apes were real. However, Henneman claims that 'about half the footage of gorillas used in the film was of gorilla costumes, or puppets' (2015a). These different versions reveal the multi-narrative histories surrounding *Gorillas in the Mist*. While the producers claim they used as much footage of real gorillas as possible, Henneman claims this was not the case. By removing Henneman, Baker, and other team members by not crediting them for the special effects work, the producers are attempting to hide from the film's audience that the apes – at least at the beginning of the film – are fake.

Henneman concludes, 'since the production company denied using puppets and gorilla suits, the crew of over 50 sculptors, painters, mould makers, mechanics, puppeteers, sculptors, suit performers and costumers were never acknowledged or credited for their work' (2015a). She continues, 'The small group that went to Kenya were the only ones given screen credit. Sadly, this was very divisive to the crew' (2015b). Baker was still credited as an executive producer and promoted to an above-the-line worker, yet (either intentionally or unintentionally) this was to obscure his work as leader of the special effects team. Here, the below-the-line team that works under him are not even being presented as tools to bring the director's vision to life but are removed from the production entirely. In her thesis, Katie Bird discusses the 'snark-discourse' of below-the-line workers and their relationships to power (2018, p. 36). Her research reveals the ways in which those who work below-the-line use 'outlets of frustrations, in the guise of jokes (regularly at the expense of amateurs, lower-rank workers, and above-the line personnel) or as illustrative metaphors' (p. 37). This is inspired in part by John T. Caldwell's arguments that 'below-the-line workers tend to mix hard-edged

corporate critiques with affirmations of fortitude, commitment, and physical suffering require[d] by the craft' (2011, p. 304). These types of narrative have been used by Baker when discussing *KKII* and *Greystoke*; he railed against his treatment on both of these films as well as the amateurish nature of those productions. However, Henneman's accounts expand the scope of this thesis beyond Baker to all special effects artists whose frustrations are not heard. Those who are not able to transcend the line are forced into precarious situations, often mistreated and unable to complain due to fear of losing their jobs.

This is underscored by the fact that Henneman's statements are contradicted by the director of *Gorillas in the Mist*, Michael Apted, who attempts to distance Baker from the production of the film. In an interview with Quentin Falk for *The Guardian* in 1988, Apted said 'Rick was only ever going to be a backup. He gave me two gorillas I could properly photograph and made me another four that wore suits which one couldn't obviously shoot in close-up' (p. 23). This renders Baker secondary to the production. This emphasis on the narrative of the film's realism and the associated reluctance to acknowledge the ape suits in the promotional material leaves audiences stuck at the seeing phase of perception, seeing the effects but not noticing their existence.

Baker and his effects are virtually absent from *Gorillas in the Mist* reviews. However, when people discuss the apes and the ape suits, it repeats the appreciation of craft seen in *Greystoke*. Janet Maslin, in a review for *The New York Times*, states in parentheses that 'the fact that Rick Baker, the make-up wizard who specialises in simians, has contributed special effects indicates that a little of this footage is artificial but it all looks utterly convincing' (1988, p. 19). This is echoed by Roger Ebert, who comments on Baker's skill as a make-up artist, stating, 'I imagine some of the gorillas in the jungle are real, and some are men inside gorilla suits. However, the work is so seamlessly that I could never be sure' (1988). However, *Variety*'s review adds another element to these discussions, stating that:

[The] presence of Rick Baker as associate producer and creator of special effects make up is a tip off that not all of the gorillas are for real. Knowing this, one can make educated guesses as to the authenticity of the apes, but the fact, they are all completely convincing, the ultimate tribute to Baker's work. General Audiences never will suspect there's a ringer in the bunch.

(1988b, p. 30)

While this statement compliments Baker's skills, it also indicates a knowledge game being played. *Variety* seemingly separates the general audience, who would be unaware of Rick Baker's work, from the industry insiders, mainly entertainment executives, who are. This echoes Klinger's assertion that critics act as tastemakers, using their perceived standing as experts to guide discussions of films (1994, pp. 69-70). However, it also creates a new dimension of appreciation. Just as critics could appreciate how hard it would be to get a camera up a mountain, they also appreciate the skill it takes for Baker to make the suits, especially when they cannot see the difference between real apes and effects. Paradoxically, the way critics draw attention to how invisible the effects are and renders both Baker and them visible. By complimenting the contribution of Baker, the 'Master of Apes' to this film, the critic is here signalling that they have seen through the film producers' trickery.

Not all are pleased with Baker's presence in the production of *Gorillas in the Mist*. According to Philip Strick in his review for *Monthly Film Bulletin*, this knowledge of Baker's presence breaks the illusion:

[A]lthough Rick Baker's fake gorillas are indistinguishable from reality in the film, the result of his artifice and our awareness of it is to render all the screen gorillas suspiciously humanoid: we are unable, as Dian was, to trust them for themselves in many of her close encounters.

(Strick, 1989, p. 49).

For Strick, his awareness of Baker and his effects overwhelms the film's realism. Strick does not appear to oscillate between the stages of awareness and denial by recognising and accepting the effects but instead remains in that state of awareness. For him, the very presence of the special effects contaminates *Gorillas in the Mist's* realism, preventing this oscillation between

awareness and denial of the presence of the special effects. This differs from the dismissal of *KKII*'s special effects. While those effects are discussed as bad and obvious, the effects in *Gorillas in the Mist* are highly thought of *because of* their realism, yet their very presence actively disturbs the film's realism. Furthermore, the effects prevent the acceptance of the very narrative of the film, preventing the initial step an audience member must make in order to accept the events of any film as real.

While some critics reject *Gorillas in the Mist* for its manufactured reality, others perceive them as real. Angie Errigo, for instance, comments that 'the gorillas themselves inspire wonder and emotion' (1989, p. 9). While Hilary Mantel, writing for *The Spectator*, wryly observes, 'The gorillas seem very well rehearsed, though it's hard to imagine how' (1989, p. 37). Critics focus on aspects of *Gorillas in the Mist* that echo the act of showing and seeing central to the travel film or documentary in early cinema, as discussed in Gunning's *Cinema of Attractions*. While these images have been seen before, the realism of the apes provides a kind of spectacle in itself. This discussion of realism aligns *Gorillas in the Mist* with nature documentaries, while the truth is that some of the apes are people in suits cleverly edited to appear real. This spectacular reality provides a core part of the film's attraction. This spectacle of the real is continued even more with discussions of *Gorillas in the Mist*'s exotic locations, as Janet Maslin for *The New York Times* observes:

[A]s directed by Michael Apted *Gorillas in the Mist*, has an unusually powerful sense of place. The glimpses of mountainous Rwanda where these rare gorillas live, are indeed breath-taking, and the local culture is made as palpable as the landscape itself.

(1988, p. 19)

Similarly, Errigo writes that '*Gorillas in the Mist* makes for magnificent viewing of jungle and mountains' (1989, p. 9). This address of the spectacular locales almost seems to reflect the travel films of early cinema, how filmmakers can place the world within easy reach of their audiences. Both the reality of the locales and the actuality of the film are sources of spectacle

in *Gorillas in the Mist*. Critics also describe the location's remote nature. Nancy Kolomitz, writing for *The Film Journal*, observes that the film was shot in 'remote areas, only accessible by foot' (1988, p. 64). She adds, 'Apted and crew were able to capture well the wild gorilla colonies, who almost appear to have taken to Apted's direction as well' (p. 64). Meanwhile, Giuliana Mercurio, for a 1989 *Films and Filming* review of *Gorillas in the Mist* states that 'it certainly took dedication – and the gruelling months of slogging up the Virunga mountains of central Africa to make friends and film with gorillas – to complete this very taxing film (1989, p. 33). This develops a narrative of difficulty that adds a layer of appreciation to the elements of spectacle. Not only are the locations beautiful to look at, but there is a difficulty getting there. The critical discourse generates potential audience interest due to the discussion of difficulty. Furthermore, it allows for a level of appreciation similar to how critics discuss the appreciation of special effects. However, these discourses root *Gorillas in the Mist* as real. Critics relay a narrative of filmmakers being challenged to capture the reality of gorillas and the landscape, which further hides the unreality of the effects as the audience is focused on a different and more real spectacle.

These discussions of the special effects in *Gorillas in the Mist* reveal an interesting discourse surrounding special effects and realism. Prince has worked to tie these two parts together and provide a way to understand how the ephemeral digital effects can be made to interact with the film's diegesis realistically. Practical effects engage with this as well; the physical monkey suits were designed to interact seamlessly with the natural environment to hide the cuts between footage of actual apes so the filmmakers could get shots that they would have been unable to get. Regarding *Gorillas in the Mist*, instead of the fantastic interacting with the real, there is an act of replacement and covering to obfuscate the seams. Similarly, it becomes difficult to talk about special effects when they are not visible or meant to be noticed. Special effects are inherently visible by nature; they demand our attention, and they demand

we look at them. Due to the invisible nature of the effects in *Gorillas in the Mist*, the discussion becomes both a game of knowledge and a process of removal and diversion. Those critics who are aware of Baker and his work display appreciation and connoisseurship (Michele Pierson, 2002, p. 46). However, it appears that realism becomes a double-edged sword for special effects, either being so real they are not noticeable and are therefore effects of quality, or if they are visible, the effect is not good, and the presence of the effect breaks the film's realism. Which perhaps subsumes the spectacle of the special effect into the spectacle of the real.

Conclusion: Out of the Jungle

While *Greystoke* and *Gorillas in the Mist* were made four years apart, they still share a similarity in how film producers and critics discussed the role of special effects. Both films focus their promotional campaigns on naturalising the film, relying on the spectacle of the locations and the ‘actuality’ presented in both movies. The verdant jungles or the rolling hills of a British estate provide the focus for many trying to push this idea of naturalism and realism in *Greystoke* and *Gorillas in the Mist*. The spectacle as a function of ‘nature’ or the natural world captured in these films works directly against the idea of manufactured reality or artificiality, which are linked heavily to special effects. Baker and his ape suits are removed from these narratives, or at the very least, his input to the films is downplayed in favour of more ‘legitimate’ contributions from primatologists and the like. However, the way each film interacts with its special effects is somewhat different.

Greystoke pivots on its genre roots and attempts to spin the narrative of telling the authentic version of a legend. As the critical reception drifts away from the source material’s pulp fiction origins, Baker’s place within the production is changed from a special effects artist to leading a team of skilled craftsmen, from a craftsperson with a highly publicised interest in primates to a technician creating realistic apes under the instruction of primatologists and

movement coaches. Yet those in the know are aware of his status as a master of ape make-up effects, just as they are aware that Baker's role in the production was to create realism out of trickery. This allows people to engage with the special effects in pre-established modes of appreciation and connoisseurship, as espoused by Pierson, while some may also identify that which Prince has termed 'perceptual realism'.

Gorillas in the Mist, on the other hand, seeks to hide the special effects actively. There have even been attempts to remove Baker and his special effects from the production history, although these have not been entirely effective. He is reclassified as having a different role, that of associate producer. According to recollections within Baker's biography, as well as accounts from members of his crew, he was told that he would receive no credit for the ape suits. He is in effect positioned again as a purely secondary member of the crew; his work is to help the filmmakers do things that were too dangerous to do with real apes. Instead of becoming part of the team, he is hidden and relegated to being invisible, and his artistic agency is reduced. The discourses surrounding Baker's displacement, his role on the set, and the omission of most of his crew from credits leads to several conclusions. Firstly, Baker is now in a unique position, both a below-the-line worker as a technician and, due to his work, he is also something of a special effects wunderkind, above-the-line filmmaker and a 'name'. While he is credited, those who worked under him still are not. In *Gorillas in the Mist*, we can see the treatment that Baker received early in his career, which is now affecting those under his employ. However, this position of trying to stake a claim beyond technical capabilities is a tenuous one, removed in service of the old narratives of taste and realism.

Despite Baker's 'removal', there are still elements of spectacle that come through. While Baker's special effects are hidden as a site of illegitimate spectacle, critics can revel in the legitimate spectacle of authenticity, actuality and realism, such as the film's locales and the apes themselves. Critics of *Gorillas in the Mist* oscillate between acknowledging and denying

the effects. Some choose not to find the trickery, viewing it instead as a realist film. Removed from this pattern of thinking, they are later shocked out of the game of knowledge through a recognition of Baker's name and what this implies. However, the majority of critics play the game, as described by Dan North (2008, pp. 1-2), of trying to figure out the joins between the real apes and those that are suits. As such, they similarly discuss the apes as being perceptually real, a fake thing that behaves as one would expect it to within the context of the film's world.

However, in many instances, the studio's refusal to acknowledge the special effects is revealing in terms of notions of filmic reality as they apply to special effects. As stated at the beginning of the chapter, many special effects critics discuss the obvious special effects, such as the dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park*; ones that audiences are able to see, notice and perceive. However, what of the effects that have a different purpose than creating spectacle, the ones that are not supposed to be noticed? The effects in *Greystoke* and *Gorillas in the Mist* do not have the same kind of oscillation between the three gazes; they remain seen and not understood, so they lack the recognition and suspension of belief that is necessary for engagement with the effect. This is partly due to the fact that the focus of the promotional material was on the film's naturalism. However, as the film's critical reception also denies Baker's presence, it is proof that this tactic was successful, as well as Baker's success as a producer of 'quality' and 'invisible' special effects. This thesis argues that this moves beyond perceptual realism, as the stages of acknowledgement and acceptance are skipped. Instead, the audience and critics buy into a manufactured realism, where the film's artificially built reality has been rendered so accurately that the viewer assumes and accepts it to be indexically captured.

While this chapter seeks to find out whether there is a specific way to approach effects that do not draw attention to themselves, as the apes in *Greystoke* or *Gorillas in the Mist* do, it has, in fact, done something else. The way film critics typically divide their filmic discourses between realism and spectacle comes with the assumption that effects are only successful if

they go unnoticed. Sometimes this means that we can discuss the effects as being perceptually real, according to Prince, especially in the cases of films like *Superman* (Richard Donner, 1978) where they aim to make the audience almost believe a man can fly. However, for films like *Greystoke* and *Gorillas in the Mist* the purpose of the effects is to present a seamless manufactured realist set of special effects that ‘ape’ indexical realism. Further study of other films like *Greystoke* and *Gorillas in the Mist*, films that use special effects and special effects artists to manufacture the film’s reality, may reveal if this is a larger trend. Further study of this nature may also create a vocabulary for critics and academics to discuss these effects. However, while in previous films, Baker has made us ‘believe’ that monsters and giant apes exist, here his trick is to persuade audiences to accept that a projected image has life and movement. In fact, Baker’s special effects do not just disappear into the mist; they manufacture realism.

But are these kinds of distinctions applicable to other production discourses? While the first three chapters of this thesis discuss films and film production, the question remains: do special effects hierarchies, below-the-line stardom, and invisible effects affect how critics would approach special effects in another production context? Similarly, how do genre and audiences affect how special effects are conceptualised? It has been shown how the idea of prestige affects the understanding of realism, narrative and spectacle. However, what of the more fantastical genres? Can there be invisible effects in those contexts, and what would render them invisible?

Chapter 4: The Beauty of the Beast: *Beauty and the Beast* (Ron Koslow, 1987-1990), Television Production, Genre and Affective Spectacle

The period between 1987 and 1993 saw Rick Baker re-enter television production.⁶⁷ Here he was involved with *Werewolf* (Frank Lupo, 1987-1988)⁶⁸, *Something is Out There* (Frank Lupo, 1988)⁶⁹ and *Dark Avenger (Phantom)* (Guy Magar, 1990)⁷⁰. Baker also brought his proudest achievement to the small screen; *Harry and the Hendersons* (1991-1993), which ran for three seasons on Universal Television. Then came the television fantasy romance *Beauty and the Beast* (Ron Koslow, 1987-1990) (the focus of this chapter), which ran for three seasons on CBS. This centred on the chaste romance between Catherine Chandler (Linda Hamilton), a New York socialite turned District Attorney investigator, and the beastly Vincent (Ron Perlman), a man with leonine features who lives in a secret commune of outcasts under the streets of the city. With a lead that quoted Shakespeare, Keats and other Romantic poets, this highly literary show drew from both the original French fairy tale and Jean Cocteau's 1946 film adaptation. It immediately attracted an incredibly fervent, primarily female fanbase. So passionate was this fanbase that they managed to get the show resurrected after CBS cancelled it after its second season. However, it could be argued that the core attraction for that audience was the effective spectacle of Vincent, the hairy cat-man with the face of a lion and the soul of a poet, played by Perlman and designed by Baker.

Years later, in an interview for Emmy TV Legends, Baker reflects on his involvement in the series, saying:

I don't remember who first called me about it but [...] I've gotten a number of calls in my life like this and it's kind of one of the fun things about this business [...] They said, 'we're doing this *Beauty and the Beast* thing for TV and it has

⁶⁷ Having previously apprenticed at Clokey Studios and worked on the television film *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1974).

⁶⁸ A teen horror television show that was one of the original shows on the (then) brand new Fox Network.

⁶⁹ An NBC science fiction miniseries that ran for 9 episodes.

⁷⁰ A CBS TV movie penned again by Frank Lupo about a scarred vigilante.

to be a beast. It has to be [...] a frightening thing, I mean you look at it, it's a beast. But women have to think he's like the sexiest thing alive'.

(FoundationINTERVIEWS, 12:44, 2009)⁷¹

Unlike the other special effects previously discussed, Vincent is not an intrusive spectacular image like King Kong or the werewolf transformation in *American Werewolf*. Neither is he a hidden creature who is concealed in the jungles of *Greystoke* or *Gorillas in the Mist*. Instead, he is both a character in his own right and a key component in the show's sustained spectacle. Furthermore, Vincent stands as an interesting example of a different kind of more intimate emotional affective spectacle. In contrast, King Kong and werewolves provide momentary and immediate spectacle based on awe-inspiring images focused on technique and technology. The question becomes, How, and in what ways, is Rick Baker involved in creating an affective spectacle in the first season of *Beauty and the Beast*?

To explore this issue, this chapter diverges from other sections by taking the form of a thematic analysis of the critical reception of the first season of *Beauty and the Beast*. This is because of the nature and volume of the documents that have been selected for analysis in the case study. As the series lasted for 56 episodes, there were a great deal of discussions on the show, with much of it repeating previous discussions of above-the-line factors like performance and story. In my research, I also found that the majority of discussions of Vincent as a special effect take place in the first season or just before the show was released, with critics discussing what kind of audience would like *Beauty the Beast* and what kind of genre it is. Through the research I found that as the show went on, the more critics relied on discussions from the initial response to *Beauty and the Beast's* first season, with less discussion on Vincent's appearance. Similarly, this approach would align with the focus of this thesis, which examines the visibility of Baker and his special effects within the production and critical reception of each case study.

⁷¹ This story would be repeated in Baker's Autobiography as well (Rinzler, 2019a, p. 324).

As Vincent is a site of spectacle, his physical appearance is tied to the idea of novelty and the new, and as the show continues, this is somewhat lessened. While this is important in itself, and something that I will draw on in the conclusion of this chapter, the types of discussion this thesis focuses on are more present within the critical discourse around the initial release of *Beauty and the Beast*. It may require a more specific study to fully explore this topic, but for now, I hope that this chapter provides groundwork for others to use in their own analysis of the reception of special effects within television.

Returning to the chapter structure, it will focus on two major themes. Firstly, the perception of genre as a factor in approaching the first season of *Beauty and the Beast*. This will be done to better demonstrate the lens through which critics view the show. By doing so, it will be better set to discuss the second part of the chapter. This is because, as has been demonstrated in previous chapters, the perception of a text genre also affects the perception of the text's special effects and Rick Baker himself. Secondly, it will then examine the issues of responsibility and stardom as they relate to Ron Perlman playing Vincent and Rick Baker as Vincent's designer. Vincent's character is the result of collaboration. It will be essential to see where Baker is situated, first being responsible for the creation of Vincent and then for how important his name and skill are to the promotion of the show. This chapter will conclude with a comparison between how Baker is discussed within the production of *Beauty and the Beast* and *Werewolf*, the show Baker worked on at the same time on the Fox Network. By providing these narratives in this way, the aim is to show how the factors of genre and stardom affected the ways in which Baker and his effects were discussed within television production. Similarly, an analysis of Vincent is also vital for understanding Baker's career. Baker's work on Vincent is a collaboration with Perlman, each in charge of a different aspect of the character, creating a long-form spectacle at the heart of the show's appeal.

Although not the main focus of this chapter, differences in production techniques between television and film play some part in the perception of the special effects within *Beauty and the Beast*. The more pertinent elements evident in Baker's quote (above) are how the issues of genre, gender, and this design philosophy of attraction affect how these effects are perceived.

Tale as Old as Time: Issues of Gender and Genre in *Beauty and the Beast*'s First Season

As stated previously, to best assess the perception of Baker's work on Vincent in *Beauty and the Beast*, it is important to explore the perception of the show's genre. Before *Beauty and the Beast* aired its pilot on 25 September 1987, the show already had a reputation for being an oddity, as Diane Haithman, writing for *The Los Angeles Times*, comments

Beauty and the Beast first unveiled at the annual meeting of representatives of CBS-affiliated stations here last summer, was met with suspicion by the mostly male group, some of whom called it 'that weird show'. Network executives soothed them by explaining that the series could have the same appeal as the bizarre 1978 hit *The Incredible Hulk* (Kenneth Johnson, 1977-1982).⁷²

Instead of comic-book aficionados, however, *Beauty and the Beast*, a Ron Koslow Films and Witt/ Thomas production in association with Republic Pictures, has attracted women – women who have willingly forsaken the monosyllabic Don Johnson, the slick Harry Hamlin, the sensitive tough-guy Tom Selleck types and the roguish Bruce Willises because they're sizzled by the beauty of the Beast.

(Haithman, 1988, p.1)

Firstly, and overarchingly, the affiliates thought that the show was weird and could only be soothed when the comparison was made to *The Incredible Hulk*. Indeed, this narrative of oddness around *Beauty and the Beast* is reflective of its wider reception discussion.⁷³ *Washington Post* writer Michael E. Hill classed the series as one of a trio of 'high-risk programs [that] test[s] the bounds of plausibility' (1987, p. 10).⁷⁴ It is a tall order, Hill continues, 'when

⁷² A CBS fantasy series running from 1977 to 1982, based on the Marvel superhero of the same name, the show starred Bill Bixby as Dr David Banner and Lou Ferrigno as the titular green giant.

⁷³ John Haslett Cuff for *The Globe Mail* called it "The oddest new show" on television (1987). Jerry Buck of *The Associated Press* wrote that "CBS is taking a big risk with the show" (1987b).

⁷⁴ The other two shows being the Vietnam war drama *Tour of Duty* (Steve Duncan and L/ Travis Clark, 1987-1990) and *Frank's Place* (High Wilson, 1987-1988) a show feature a majority black cast set around a family restaurant in New Orleans.

the show – with a perfectly straight-faced approach – asks you to believe it’s possible for a whole colony of social misfits, rejects and dissenters to reside under the streets of New York City’ (p. 10). Neil MacVicar, in a 1987 edition of the Canadian *Globe and Mail*, uses a rather insensitive turn of phrase, calling *Beauty and the Beast* ‘the most schizophrenic show imaginable. The first half-hour is a lushly romantic retelling of the fairy tale. The second half is *The Incredible Hulk*’ (1987). These reviews suggest a certain level of confusion among affiliates and television critics regarding *Beauty and The Beast*’s genre. Given that genre itself is a shifting and complicated term related to television, this confusion is perhaps not so surprising. Henry Jenkins speaks to this genre confusion, observing that:

traditional notions of genre as a class of texts, a set of textual features and conventions, or a formula by which texts are constructed do not seem adequate to the type of struggle over generic placement that surrounded *Beauty and the Beast*.

(1991, p. 93)

As a series, *Beauty and The Beast* contains elements of the crime procedural, fantasy and romance all blended together. While the objective of this chapter is not to identify its genre, it is important to recognise the generic confusion that surrounds the show. This is not unique to *Beauty and the Beast*. As Jenkins argues, the nature of genre in television is different to film:

If film scholars were forced to rethink the broad generic classifications of literary criticism (such as comedy and tragedy) into the much more specific categories of the Hollywood marketplace (such as screwball comedy, film noir, or the adult western), television critics are often forced to make the opposite move, creating relatively broad categories which reflect the blurring boundaries between genres within network programming.

(p. 94)

It is vital to remember that television genre theory and film genre theory are not the same. According to Jenkins, television genres are far more fluid than film genres. Therefore, the blending evident in *Beauty and the Beast* should not cause such a visceral reaction. Is there another reason why the show is considered odd or weird?

While it would be easy to take the discussion of fantasy within film and apply that to *Beauty and the Beast*, Catherine Johnson is aware of how serialisation can affect a genre text, stating that:

The difficulties raised when apply genre theory to television are particularly pronounced in relation to television series and serials, whose narrative structures are constructed precisely around the notions of flow and interruptions. Unlike the contained narrative of a movie a series is made up of a sequence of discrete yet linked episodes that must share a narrative and visual format while also developing and extending that format over time.

(2005, p. 5)

Again, we see how the form of television can affect the perception of television genre, and how the television form shapes not only the narrative structure of a show, but also must necessarily affect the genre meanings of television shows. Furthermore, as Jason Mittell argues:

The vast body of genre theory, as produced within literary and film studies, has trouble accounting for many of the specific industry and audience practices unique to television (such as scheduling decisions, commonplace serialization, habitual viewing, and channel segmentation), as well as for the mixture of fictional and nonfictional programming that constitutes the lineup on nearly every TV channel.

(2004a, p. 1)

Mittell reminds us that the factors of exhibition and distribution affect the ways in which the generic components of a particular text can be discussed and defined. When one considers *Beauty and the Beast*, it is important to recognise that CBS, the television network that broadcasts the show, is an American commercial channel. Thus, its genre perception is affected by the time at which the show is broadcast, the basic narrative structure of a fictional television show, and the advertisements chosen to be placed in the show's commercial breaks.

Thus, when discussing the perception of *Beauty and the Beast's* genre, it is important to consider these factors. Interestingly, however, the genre confusion seems to come from male critics and affiliates. This feeds into a specifically gendered response to the show, dismissing it because of its appeal to female audiences. This will also play a major role in the reception of

Beauty and the Beast and its special effects. It will ultimately lead to network executives pushing ‘the producers to incorporate more and more elements of conventional action-adventure television into the series’ (Jenkins, 1991, p. 96).⁷⁵ Janis D. Froelich says, ‘*Beauty and the Beast* caught my fancy because I thought it was the most absurd idea to come down the pipeline’ (1987b, p. 1). While confused, Froelich concludes, ‘If I figure out why I liked this (the reason must be Freudian), I’ll let you know’ (p. 1). This Freudian attraction may be related to Froelich’s attraction to Vincent. This attraction, the central element of his affective spectacle, will be something to keep in mind, as other male critics are much harsher in their judgements of the show. Robert P. Laurence, writing in *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, is dismissive. Opining that the series ‘may be too sweet for some and too weird for others’ (1987a, p. 1), he adds, ‘yes, it’s the greatest of all love – a love that can never be fulfilled. Sigh. Sounds a little too strange’ (p. 1). Laurence’s review, and those of other male critics, reflect a gendered, even misogynistic, rejection of the appeal of romance and fantasy that the series offers. This difference in reaction speaks to the importance of understanding and discussing the origins of historical sources in academic explorations. An analysis of this strand of criticism by male critics can reveal the biases and lenses within the critical and production responses to the show.

Genre can also affect how special effects are placed within a property's production and reception narratives. In a fantasy epic, Vincent’s feline face would not be out of place. However, what would this gendering of genre mean for the special effects and how they are seen in the context of this romantic show?

Not all genres or genre mixes are created equal. As Betty Kaklamanidou points out, the ‘negative adjectives and phrases are no “strangers” to the genre of the romantic comedy’ (2013, p. 1). While, as stated, Kaklamanidou’s focus is the romantic comedy, her examination of ‘the

⁷⁵ Especially in the controversial third season when the network tried to make *Beauty and the Beast* more appealing to men, by adding more action and making it darker.

“underdog” of film genre theory and history’ is still helpful for the intersection of genre, gender and special effects, as revealed in the reception of *Beauty and the Beast* (p. 7). Indeed, as Kaklamanidou argues:

[R]omantic comedies are more than often dismissed and/or singled out as specifically addressing a certain part of the audience, that is the female audience. In this way, the narratives that place a woman or a girl at their centre become instantly the ‘Other’ to a norm that is never actually articulated in the reviews.

(p. 10)

Kaklamanidou also challenges this initial dismissal, stating that ‘the intertextual layers found in a given romantic narrative should be seen as enriching and not undermining the evolution of the genre’ (p. 10). The comments by male critics in relation to *Beauty and the Beast*, in the first season specifically, are ones that dismiss this and other the romantic elements of the show. Their reviews also reveal their discomfort with the emotional core of the series, so separating the enjoyment out to another (female) audience that would be more inclined to enjoy the illegitimate aspects of the show. Indeed, Mark Schwed separates out the gendered elements of enjoyment while placing a specific qualifier around the romantic elements, warning viewers the premise ‘sounds kind of dumb, but it will tingle the toes of those who are romantically inclined’ (1987b).

Again, it is not the aim of this chapter, nor this thesis, to assign or investigate genre in television, but rather to explore the visibility and perception of special effects within various productions. However, in examining the perception of Baker and his special effects within *Beauty and the Beast*, it is also essential to consider the perception of the show’s genre, including how this term may be applied in the context of television. Also, as Su Holmes points out, it is important to remember (drawing on Jane Feuer and Steve Neale) ‘that because television programmes do not operate as discrete texts to the same extent as films (they are part of a continuous flow), there is a greater tendency toward hybridity and intertextuality’ (2008, p. 13). Furthermore, Mittell speaks to this, arguing that he dislikes the term ‘genre hybridity’

due to its biological connotations, leaning instead towards ‘genre mixing’ as a term used to describe the act of combining genres (2004a, p. 154).

Holmes also discusses the nature of television genre. While the focus of her book *The Quiz Show* is that of non-fiction formats, her analysis could equally be applied to the more ‘traditional’ fictional fantasy genres to which *Beauty and the Beast* could be said to belong. She writes:

While earlier approaches mapped out the concept of genre as existing within a triangle of expectations between industry, text and audience, there has since been more emphasis on conflict and struggle over generic definitions. Critics, academics, fans or media producers do not all have the same investment in the concept of genre. While academics might be aiming to delimit a field of study or plan topics for an undergraduate module, media producers may be just as interested in stressing multiple generic markers in order to maximise the potential appeal of their product.

(2008, p. 17)

There can be different ways of interpreting this ‘hybridity’. Indeed, Mittell speaks more directly about *Beauty and the Beast*, pointing to Henry Jenkins’ own examination of the show, claiming that fans defined the program’s mixture of romance and action in quite different terms than the producers and network did, as fans refused to cede the terrain of genre to the text and its creators’ (2004a, p. 156). It is then important to remember that audiences will interpret the ‘genre mixing’ differently, and as will be shown, there is indeed a difference between how female and male television critics discussed *Beauty and the Beast*.

What is interesting is that Kaklamanidou’s exploration seeks to re-establish the importance of fantasy and romantic comedies as a site of critical and cultural examination, thus challenging the dismissal of these two genres. John O’Connor does just this by writing, in *The New York Times*, that after ““once upon a time, the city of New York...”⁷⁶ [my footnote] loud

⁷⁶ *Beauty and the Beast*’s opening title card is present in the first episode, setting up the romantic fairy-tale of New York.

groaning will no doubt be heard from legions of whimsy haters across the nation' (1987b, p. 38). There is also a reaction to the show, not just from critics, but as a supposed backlash to its fantastical elements, reflecting attempts to denigrate or dismiss a type of genre as a piece of escapism. This denigration of the show as a classic fantasy romance appears to endure. As revealed in the responses to seasons two and three, this becomes the new core of the narrative around the genre of the show. The fact that fantasy and romance are considered lesser genres is important to consider when discussing how the special effects and Baker fit into the production.

When *Beauty and the Beast* entered its second season, it was still dogged by the critics' misgivings over Season One. As Michael E. Hill observes, *Beauty and the Beast* was received with 'scepticism and outright snickering' (1988, p. 6). John Peel seems to challenge this assumption, asking in *StarBurst* if *Beauty and the Beast* was 'soppy? Maudlin? Tear-jerking? Well, maybe the latter (almost every episode leaves my wife in tears at the end with its wonder and beauty) but certainly never the former' (1988, p. 34). However, even this more positive challenge ties the emotive reactions to the female audience. Due to falling viewer figures and CBS's interest in courting a more male demographic, the show would undergo a series of tonal changes over seasons two and three (Peel, 1988, p. 34; Endrst, 1989, p. 8). For the most part, however, the reception of *Beauty and the Beast* revolved mainly around the understanding that the show was a fantastical romance that never really found its feet with male viewers but was adored by its ardent following of female fans so much so they petitioned to get the show uncanceled at the end of its second season. The initial reaction to *Beauty and the Beast* is then clearly a gendered response. The focus of the show on romance over action leads male critics and executives to dismiss its female-centric narrative. The show's genre and the gender it attempts to court as a core audience lead us to understand the character of Vincent as a sight for affective spectacle.

However, while *Beauty and the Beast* attracted a gendered perspective, how does this specifically affect how critics view the show's special effects? Is there a similar gendered difference in how Vincent, Ron Perlman and Rick Baker are perceived within the critical discourse? Who is placed as most responsible for creating our leading man? Is this also affected by the differences in production cultures between film and television? How visible are the special effects that were used to create Vincent? Do they, and Baker, play a part in the production of the affective spectacle? Perhaps here we also see the start of the way in which Vincent came to be and speak a little more about the creation of television's most attractive lion.

Man Behind the Mask: Issues of Stardom and Affective Spectacle in the Portrayal of Vincent

Now that we have discussed the perception of *Beauty and the Beast's* genre and how gender affected the discussions of it, we can move on to the more specific discussions of Baker and his special effects within the television show. According to Baker's biography, the make-up artist was hired in 1986 to design the Beast to fulfil the rather confusing brief that Vincent must be both attractive and repellent (Rinzler, 2019a, p.324). Baker then reused his design for a 1977 version of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (Don Taylor, 1977) (p. 328). Baker also points to Vincent's elements of horror, especially with the requirement that he be visually appealing and monstrous. According to Baker, he had a say about which actor got cast for the part due to his previous experience with actors' struggles with prosthetics. He comments:

If you ask an actor if they can ride a horse [...] they say yes, and then you find out they can't. They all say yes. Can you wear make-up? The first day they say 'I can't deal with this stuff!' I wanted the right actor.

(p. 328)

Ron Perlman concurs with Baker's narrative that he pushed for the actor to play Vincent due to his previous experience with heavily made-up roles in films like *Quest for Fire* (Jean-

Jacques Annaud, 1981) and *The Name of the Rose* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1986)⁷⁷ (Rinzler, 2019a, p. 328; Gross; 2012, p. 22). Vincent is, of course, more than Baker's make-up; he is also Perlman's character, and discourses surrounding Vincent show how a star's image is forged.

What is clear from the critical reception of *Beauty and the Beast* is that Vincent acts as the key attractant within the series. Kathryn Baker, writing for *The Associated Press*, states that the show is 'carried largely by the charismatic Ron Perlman as a Renaissance half-man, half-beast' (1987). Similarly, Diane Haithman views Vincent as a sort of new man acting as an alternative to more traditional aspects of masculinity (1988, p. 1). What makes Vincent interesting is that, as Baker has said, he is both beastly and beautiful, especially in the romantic sense, however, the focus seems to be his beauty despite his physical appearance. When reviewing the show for the *St Petersburg Times*⁷⁸, Janis D. Froelich comments, 'give me a romantic monster who reads poetry and lives beneath New York City's streets any day over, say, an unshaven cop with a fast car' (1987a, p. 1). Froelich and Haithman place Vincent at odds with other television heroes and leading men, so they challenge the ideas of traditional heroic masculinity as an attraction. Vincent is now presented as a romantic hero, someone who is an affective romantic spectacle rather than a visual one. It is the fact that Vincent reads poetry, is a romantic, and is a challenge to the 1980s understanding of masculinity.⁷⁹ This is where we begin to see tension between the way Vincent looks, as designed by Baker, and the way he acts and sounds, as provided by Perlman and the writers on *Beauty and the Beast*.

⁷⁷ Even if it did turn out that Perlman was allergic to a lot of the make-up Baker would use.

⁷⁸ Now known as the *Tampa Bay Times* a newspaper based in Florida.

⁷⁹ like Lou Ferrigno in *The Incredible Hulk* or Tom Selleck in *Magnum P.I.* (Donald P. Bellisario and Glen A. Larson, 1980).

The production seems aware of this as Monika Guttman, in a November issue of *The St Petersburg Times*, quotes Ron Pearlman, the actor who portrays Vincent, stating that, ‘Vincent is written on the level of a Shakespearean character, with all the nobility and complexities of a stage character’ (1987, p. 6). This brings the theatrical influences and ‘high art’ in *Beauty and the Beast* to the forefront as a way to legitimise Perlman-as-Vincent, rather



Linda Hamilton and Ron Perlman, who star in CBS's update of the fairy tale

[Fig. 4.1] Despite O'Connor discussing Vincent's (Perlman) grotesque appearance, the image in *The New York Times* article shows Vincent's sensitive side with co-star Catherine (Linda Hamilton) from *Beauty and the Beast*.

than Vincent-as-effect. While this theoretically goes some way towards defining the nature of the show and the themes of the fairy tale, it also moves the focus away from the visual aspects of Vincent and onto his personality. This commentary serves to further remove Baker's special effects from the show.

However, there is also a discussion of Vincent as a site of

spectacle. Robert P. Laurence for *The San Diego Union-Tribune* describes Vincent as ‘a hairy, fang-toothed guy with a heart of gold who lives in the real underworld’ (1987b, p. 9). Meanwhile, Alan Bunce writes, ‘there's the way Vincent climbs, somewhat magically, over buildings and steals rides on top of subways, and the way his soft almost angelic voice contrasts with his werewolf looks’ (1987, p. 22). Here, there is another gendered difference in critical reception. While the female critics place the attractiveness of Vincent and the high art influences first and foremost, the male critics seem more interested in Vincent's more beastly aspect. Aesthetically, Vincent is understood as a magical dual figure, the ideal despite his

hideous looks. In all these examples, Vincent is attractive despite how he looks, romantic because of how he acts, rather than because of his appearance.

Critics talk more about Vincent's personality and performance rather than, or despite, his appearance. As Guttman puts it, there is a focus on Vincent's 'noble soul and character [that] struggle to be recognized underneath his rather grotesque features' (1987, p. 6). Robert P. Laurence, in his September 1987 description of the show's pilot, observes that when Catherine's mysterious benefactor reveals his face, 'he is literally, a beast, a man with the face of a jungle cat, covered with long coarse, animal-like hair. He is Vincent, played with powerful dignity by Ron Perlman' (1987a, p. E-1). While John O'Connor claims that Vincent has a 'grotesque physical appearance, including canine fangs and animal-like body hair' (1987, p. 35),⁸⁰ he adds that 'Vincent is a model of a noble understanding fully away there is no place for him in Catherine's world' (p. 35). This contrast is clear in the picture selected for O'Connor's article (See Figure 4.1). Again, both Laurence and O'Connor contrast Vincent's animalistic visage with the character underneath. They describe his 'hideous' appearance in terms of the contrast to his soul and character. This comparison, while a purposeful motif in the show, also does a lot to place this affective spectacle in the minds of viewers. Critics are placing Vincent's interiority front and centre to allow for intimacy between him and the audience, in line with Smit's theory of 'tele-affectivity' (2013). Through Vincent's proximity

⁸⁰ Though one could make a strong case that Vincent isn't hideous at all.



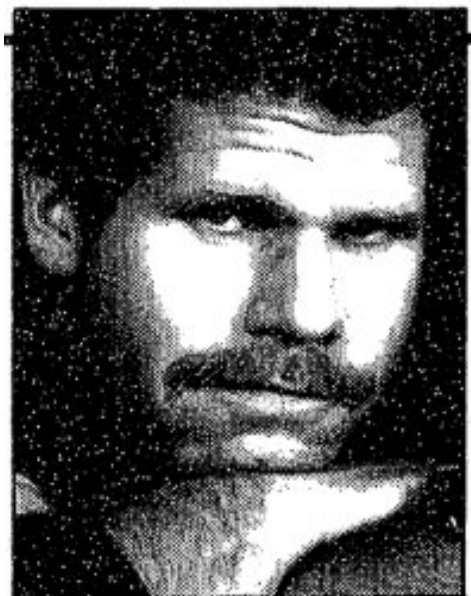
Linda Hamilton as a lawyer and Ron Perlman, in background, as the noble creature in the romantic fantasy series beginning Friday

[Fig. 4.2] An image of Linda Hamilton as Catherine Chandler and her hirsute love Vincent (Ron Perlman) in *Shadow* providing a sense of mystery accompanying Steve Oney's *New York Times* article on *Beauty and the Beast*.

looks, as though his beastly appearance offers more obvious pleasure than the romantic soul underneath.

While critics discuss the difference between Vincent's appearance and actions, how do they discuss those responsible for bringing him to the screen? Steve Oney, writing in *The New York Times*, taps into a narrative of suffering through make-up, relating how Perlman wore 'five layers of gear and a 20-pound cape as well as a thick mask of facial make-up' in an un-air-

to his audience due to the intimacy of television, being broadcast into domestic space, and the repetition of his appearance allows for this affectivity, viewers can get to know him over a more extended period. They can see through the special effects, as Catherine sees beyond Vincent's physical appearance in the show. More than that, while the female viewers may want to look beyond the physicality of Vincent, male critics are seemingly more interested in discussing the way he



[Fig 4.3] A head shot of Ron Perlman accompanying an article about the process of getting into make-up to play Vincent in *Beauty and the Beast*.

conditioned studio (1987, p. 37). Oney similarly notes that Perlman's schedule started with a '7 am shooting call [that] he must rise at 3 am [for]' (p. 37). This is echoed by Jerry Buck, who writes that Perlman 'is back in the make-up again, spending four hours being transformed into Vincent before starting a full day of filming. He is fitted, glued, moulded and painted while an assemblage of facial prosthetics and hairpieces are put into place' (1987b). Both Oney and Buck focus on the mechanics of creating Vincent, how long it takes Perlman to get ready, what time he has to get up for it, and the conditions he works in. However, Oney's account is also a 'discourse of heroism' around those actors who endure significant discomfort for their heavily made-up roles. Perlman is presented here as a hero who sits through this make-up process, or alternatively, as a victim having to put up with the layers of make-up and discomfort inflicted on him by the 'villainous' make-up artist. While this notion of the make-up artist as villainous is not overtly discussed by critics, it is sometimes implied through the discourse. That will be the major narrative surrounding Baker and his make-up in the wider newspaper presses, where the effects are not considered as important as the above-the-line elements of *Beauty and the Beast*.

This echoes the discussions Lisa Bode points to in her analysis of Lon Chaney and *The Elephant Man* (David Lynch, 1980). When it came to Chaney and his work of performing in make-up, Bode notes that contemporary reviews of his performances were incredibly overwrought (2015, p. 36). While current critics praise Chaney's expressiveness, at the time, 'critics ranked Chaney's facial transformations fairly low on a hierarchy of cinematic aesthetics' (p. 36), as the make-up was said to obscure the performance. Bode then analyses the response to John Hurt's performance as John Meric in *The Elephant Man*, noting that as Meric, Hurt had 'viscous snuffles, groans and wheezes, his excruciating pauses and inhalations, his audible exertions to breathe and speak, give a fleshy, suffering materiality to rubber, a sense of mouth and airways obstructed by wayward growths and bony protrusions' (pp. 38-39). Hurt

fought to perform under his make-up, so hinting at a discourse of difficulty around make-up. This account of the actor's struggles to work with make-up effects can also be found in the critical commentaries around Vincent. Similarly, some critics view Ron Perlman as the actor struggling with the make-up, reminiscent of the way that Vincent struggles against his appearance. However, it is more heroic than that: the make-up becomes something to be overcome rather than something to help the performance. Thus, Perlman heroically fights his prosthetics to present audiences with the romantic lead, Vincent.

This positioning of Perlman against the make-up effects seeks to present a hierarchy of production, legitimising Perlman and his performance over Baker's effects. This is nothing new, as it speaks to the hierarchies within the production that we have seen elsewhere, with actors as visible above-the-line artists and special effects artists as invisible below-the-line technicians. Critics further legitimise Perlman's performance as they discuss his voice. Robert P. Laurence, for example, describes Vincent as having a

kind and strong, with a smooth deep and masterful voice. He speaks as if he were reading poetry in slow measured, almost hypnotic cadences. At last the bandages are removed, and she sees him. He is literally, a beast, a man with the face of a jungle cat covered with long coarse, animal-like hair.

(1987a, p. 1)

This separation of Vincent's/Perlman's vocalisations from his physical appearance echoes the separation of Vincent's physical appearance from his characterisation and actions. Nevertheless, the theme of the discourse is the same, Perlman's voice and performance overcomes the 'coarse' beastly appearance.

While Perlman had minimal print space during the first season of *Beauty and the Beast*, Rick Baker had even less. Baker is only mentioned by name in relation to the series during the first season, including a review by Ivor Davis, who comments that 'each week, with a lot of help from Oscar-winning makeup artist Rick Baker, Perlman dons his disguise and wages his

war ... a sort of underground equaliser' (1987). However, as Oney and Perlman point out, Davis' claim that Baker applies the Vincent make-up to Perlman is incorrect. Instead, the make-up is applied by crew member Margaret Breserra (now Prentice). Bressara, whom Perlman calls 'very skilled' (Oney, 1987, p. 37), has worked on such films as *Planet of the Apes* (Tim Burton, 2001)⁸¹ and *Thor: The Dark World* (Alan Taylor, 2013). However, she is not the only special effects make-up artist to work on the show; Gregor Punchatz, Brain Wad, Vincent Prentice, Kevin Yagher, James Leonard and Tim Turner are all credited as part of the special make-up department on the IMDb page of *Beauty and the Beast*. This mistaken attribution of responsibility raises another issue: scheduling in television productions. Baker cannot apply the make-up over the long production period of the show. Indeed, his busy schedule working on other shows like *Werewolf*, *Harry and the Henderson* and movies like *Gorillas in the Mist* prevents him from working on the one job. This speaks to something that was discussed briefly in the critical reception of *Gorillas in the Mist*. Baker is more than a singular artist; he has his own company and those who work under him. Again, he has transitioned from a below-the-line technician to an above-the-line artist. In later films like *Gorillas in the Mist* or *Gremlins 2: A New Batch* (Joe Dante, 1990), there is a theme of Baker working as the head of a team (Rinzler, 2019a, p. 337). Instead of a hands-on creative, doing the below-the-line work of applying prosthetics, he is a businessman running his own special effects company, employing sculptors, fabricators, mould-makers and other staff.⁸² This means that he is not the only figure to be commented on in special effects production when it comes to *Beauty and the Beast*. However, it is his name, from his reputation working on films like *American Werewolf*, that *Beauty and the Beast* cashes in on as cultural capital, while those under him who actually carry out the tasks that he is credited for are once again ignored.

⁸¹ Under Rick Baker.

⁸² Especially on *Gremlins 2* due to the number of unique Gremlin designs.

As we have seen, those male critics who covered *Beauty and the Beast* focused more on the design of Vincent, as well as the show's darker, more action-orientated aspects. When male critics comment on the make-up, this is usually related to this more traditionally masculine action genre side of the show. This raises the gendering of film make-up in general. As Kim Allen points out, '87 per cent of the workforce in make-up, hair and costume are female, yet women comprise only a very small minority in technical roles' (2013, p. 232). Indeed, throughout Caldwell's exploration of production culture and trade magazines, there is an understanding that men dominate the technical aspects of filmmaking. A Television advert for a non-linear postproduction software called Blue, for instance, has a caption that reads that it is 'so easy to use – even a girl can do it' (Caldwell, 2008, p. 167), while *Camera Ready Cosmetics*⁸³ list of the top ten best special effects make-up artists of all time only includes two women (2018). While trying to break through to an above-the-line worker, Baker sits on this gendered boundary, straddling make-up artistry, a space dominated predominantly by women, and special effects technician, a space dominated by men. While Perlman seems to have given Vincent the more romantic and 'cultured' parts, Baker's work becomes more visible in relation to the show's appeal to male viewers.

While the processes of filmmaking and the spectacle of technique are attached to Baker's name, the more immediate affective spectacle of Vincent, in the way he talks and acts, is presented as the core of *Beauty and the Beast*'s attraction. The critical view of Baker's position within the production shows a rather shallow understanding of special effects production, the critical perception of Perlman's Vincent was evolving into something else. Reiterating the narrative line of confusion and risk that was a large part of the pre-season one critical discourse, Jerry Buck states that 'CBS is taking a big risk with the show. If it should

⁸³ A site dedicated to supplying make-up products to amateurs and professional film make-up artists alike.

grab the audience's interest, television might have itself a new, but rather hirsute sex symbol' (1987b). Vincent is presented here as a site for affective spectacle, albeit of a different kind. Instead of the spectacle coming from the technological marvel of an animatronic King Kong, or the long-drawn-out transformation in *American Werewolf*, the spectacle of Vincent is placed in a more intimate place. Though this intimacy is usually situated in the visceral of police or medical procedurals, it is still centred on a body. The intimacy here comes from the character shining through the layers of prosthetic make-up. In an article for *The Los Angeles Times* titled 'An Unlikely Sex Symbol: Idealized Romance, Compassion Brings Out the Beauty in *Beast*', Diane Haithman writes:

[N]o one expected that Vincent, the Beast of this romantic fantasy drama would become TV's most unlikely sex symbol. Fan mail for Vincent has been recently flooding the production office at a rate of several hundred letters per week.

(1988, p. 6)

Similarly, an *Associated Press* article written in July 1988, quotes Perlman's comment that letters from audience members 'are filled with sexual fantasies [...] Women say that Vincent is the ultimate fantasy lover, someone who asks for nothing in return but gives 110 per cent' (1988). In Sue Martin's article for *The Los Angeles Times* titled 'Tunnelling his way to her heart: Notes on Falling in love with a two-legged tabby' (1988, p. 2), she writes that while Vincent looks like a cuddling cat, 'He's also a man with a soul of a poet. What more could one want?' (p. 2). The domestication of Vincent is fascinating here. Baker said that he chose a lion partly because he was reusing his design from *The Island of Dr Moreau*, but also to give Vincent

this kind of feline thing. I mean cats are attractive, you know, and I thought that if we made him kind of a lion man [and] we gave him this big mane of hair [...] like a rock star, you could probably make him attractive to women.

(FoundationINTERVIEWS, 13:17, 2016)

This is echoed by Haithman, who writes:

Though crediting women with appreciating the more spiritual side of romance Barbach⁸⁴ [my footnote] said that in this case the attraction is partly physical. The Beast may not be human, but he's definitely not ugly.

That was the intention of makeup designer Baker.

'The major concern was where to draw the line between animal and human' he said. 'He had to be beastly, but also elegant and attractive. In the story, the lady has to love this character'.

Baker said he combined the 'ferocious but attractive' qualities of a lion with those of a tall handsome man, and added a long, rock star mane of hair that might be appropriate for either one.

(Haithman, 1988, p. 1)

This attribution of certain kinds of traits to certain kinds of animals, like the attractiveness of cats, fits into Gregg E.A. Solomon and Deborah Zaitchik's understanding of the folkbiological. Solomon and Zaitchik say the folkbiological 'supports predication and explanations about living things; it is central to our understanding of such phenomena as growth, inheritance of properties, digestion, illness, and death' (2012, p. 105). Examples of this 'predication and explanations about living things' could include the anthropomorphising of animals by attaching human traits to them; for example, lions are considered kings of the jungle as they are seen as regal, powerful and strong. Similarly, Baker claims his decision to make Vincent a cat was taken because while they are considered beast-like, they are also attractive, sleek and sexy. While Vincent's looks are acknowledged, critics also pointed to the act of looking past them to the soul of the character as providing a greater level of attraction for viewers, the attraction despite the make-up. While there are discussions of Vincent as a sex symbol, Baker and the effects he designed are obfuscated in favour of this perception of Vincent's artistic soul.

When discussing Vincent in *Beauty and the Beast*, critics' perceptions seem to be affected by how they view the show. While generically the show is similar to *Greystoke* and *Gorillas in the Mist*, unlike the apes in these films (or indeed, in *King Kong*), Vincent has more

⁸⁴ Here meaning "Psychologist Lonnie Barbach, a member of the clinical faculty of the university of California, San Francisco, and author of the recently published book *Erotic Interludes: Tales Told for Women*" (Haithman, 1988, p. 1).

agency within the narrative. He is more than the spectacle of his presence; he does not interrupt the narrative as Kong does, nor is he invisible, like the gorillas in *Gorillas in the Mist*. This adds the extra dimension of stardom and how that relates to actors within these elaborate prosthetics, as well as how this ties into our understanding of affective spectacle. Vincent's design was intended to be attractive. Baker drew inspiration from felines and rock star mullets for his physical appearance, so Vincent is hardly beastly in the traditional sense. However, he is also attractive for his character, as a character who reads romantic poetry, which challenges the standards of masculine television heroes at the time. However, when examining the critical discourse around Vincent, critics seem to argue that he is attractive in spite of the way he looks, his character shining through his appearance. This might fit in with the themes of *Beauty and the Beast*, but it also, when discussed in relation to the perception of special effects, reaffirms and solidifies hierarchies of filmic elements and production talent. Perlman as the above-the-line star is easy to discuss in relation to Vincent, as he can be interviewed without the make-up, while his star image at that point was tied to special effects make-up. Similarly, during interviews, Perlman presented parallels between his own childhood and Vincent's character, sharing his own personal struggles with his physical appearance. What is interesting specifically about *Beauty and the Beast* is that the show made Perlman a mainstream star, revealing the composite nature of television stardom. While multiple people created Vincent, the framing of this collaborative narrative is presented in a typical 'heroic' discourse of a lead actor suffering through the make-up process which in turn becomes a shorthand way of recognising the work of an entire team. However, the perception is that narrative changes the type of relationship between the actor and the make-up artist. Instead of collaborative, it is presented as combative, with the actors performing in spite of the make-up, with the make-up artists as 'torturers' and 'villains' while the actors are 'heroes' who endure the process for their art.

Conclusion: Happily Ever After

When one looks at the initial reaction to *Beauty and the Beast*'s first season the critical discourse seems to be in a state of confusion. Generically, *Beauty and the Beast*, due to its blend of crime, action, romance and fantasy, led many male critics to call the show weird, odd or a risk. This also speaks to the gendered reaction to the romantic and fantastical elements of the show, with male critics misogynistically disparaging the emotional core of the series. More than that, there was also a male focus on Vincent's beastly appearance, rather than what most female critics were doing, which was moving beyond what was visible into the actions of the romantic lead. These discussions of the dual nature of *Beauty and the Beast* then have a knock-on effect when critics are discussing the male lead of Vincent, as played by Perlman. Vincent takes a key role in the popularity of *Beauty and the Beast* as a romance. It is Perlman's performance, characterisation, and voice that are the centre of attention; it is a romantic affective spectacle that works despite the heavy pressure of wearing layer upon layer of latex and fur.

Baker is mostly absent in the critical and production discourse surrounding *Beauty and the Beast*. When he is mentioned, it is in relation to the series' action and through inaccurate assertions that he applied the makeup rather than the team effort it was. This reveals the hierarchies in the production of special effects, echoing the idea that a name acts as brand type.

The removal of Baker and the combative perception of the make-up effects within the discourse of *Beauty and the Beast* stands in contrast to *Werewolf*, another television show that he was involved in at the same time. Created by Frank Lupo, *Werewolf* aired from 1987-1988 on the new Fox network. The story focuses on college student Eric Cord, who is cursed with lycanthropy and tries to remove the curse by killing its originator. Here Baker is placed firmly

within the promotion of the show, as illustrated in a contemporary *Washington Post* review by Patricia Brennan who writes that while the show is not suitable for kids,

Their teen-age siblings will love the special effects by Rick Baker. Baker won an Oscar for his work of *American Werewolf in London* and a British award for *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes*, worked with Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, *Star Wars*, *The Incredible Shrinking Woman* (Joel Schumacker, 1981), *Fury* and the recent *Harry and the Hendersons*.

(1987, p. 5)

Brennan is here invoking Baker's established stardom as an authority in the realm of special effects to legitimate the show. This view is echoed by Gideon Davis, who writes:

To ensure the transformations scenes are appropriately chilling, the producers have hired one of the best special effects teams in the business. They chose Rick Baker, who won an Academy Award for his work on the John Landis film *An American Werewolf in London*.

(1987)

Here, we see that, unlike *Beauty and the Beast*, Baker is a key site of interest in the critical discussion of *Werewolf*. His legacy is here used as a way to leverage *Werewolf* as a show that should belong to the lycanthrope cannon of horror that Baker is indelibly tied to. Similarly, he is a more important part of the show's marketing and promotion than are its actors, so challenging Baker's status as an invisible below-the-line worker.

But why is this the case for *Werewolf* but not for *Beauty and the Beast*? One key area of distinction between *Beauty and the Beast* and *Werewolf* is the difference in genre. *Werewolf*, unlike *Beauty and the Beast*, has all four paws firmly rooted in horror. For instance, Gideon Davis, writing in *The Globe and Mail*, hails *Werewolf* as 'the first television show dealing with the wolfman legend and a rare exploration of the horror genre' (1987). *Werewolf*, he continues, 'owes more to the cult classics, *The Howling* and *An American Werewolf in London* than to the creaky Wolfman thrillers of the 1940's' (1987).⁸⁵ Indeed, to confirm this, *Variety*, in their

⁸⁵ As Brennan reports, the producers want to position this as a horror show, with Co-Executive producer John Ashley promising that they will "do it in a way that is truly frightening" (1987, p. 5).

review of *Werewolf*, praises Baker for ‘horrendously good job of designing the ugly creatures’ (Tone, 1987, p. 50). Thus, when it comes to genres more traditionally associated with special effects, as well as genres Baker has worked in before, he and his effects become more important to the show’s critical discourse.

To return to the examination of *Beauty and the Beast*, the series offers a new mode of considering special effects. While most academic discussions of effects have been in relation to film, examining Baker’s involvement in *Beauty and the Beast* in this way can illuminate the treatment of make-up in production discourses surrounding television.

Abbott’s assertion (outlined earlier in this thesis) that the budgets, seriality, production speed and exhibition method of television all affect television special effects, we can see that these all have had an impact on the ways in which Baker’s effects were implemented and discussed. For example, to save time and money, he re-used a design from a previous pitch that he did not get, *The Isle of Dr Moureaux*. However, it is the seriality and production speed of *Beauty and the Beast* that presented the most direct and overt challenge to Baker and his special effects.

While it has not been the intention of this work to canonise Baker as an auteur, the act of focusing on him as a case study in this way comes with a risk of mythologising his name and his work. However, *Beauty and the Beast*, as a case study in this research, offers a particular challenge to this type of myth-making, revealing as it does a more ambivalent picture of Baker, who, at this point in his career, was running a giant studio. While he was not applying the make-up day to day but instead was delegating it to those who worked under him, he is the only special effects name mentioned by television critics. While critics seek to provide the top-down singular artist narrative, as this case study reveals, special effects production culture is a highly collaborative one. Of course, all of these factors have had an effect on the way that

Baker makes his monsters. Although his name is still the one people refer to when talking about his designs, it should also be remembered that while he had poked his head up from above the invisible line of below-the-line film work, he was also standing on the shoulders of those who worked for him.

However, combining the exhibition method and generic application is also crucial to understanding why *Beauty and the Beast* offer new understandings of special effects. The romantic and fantastical elements are a departure for Baker and speak to the differences in how Baker designed his monsters. However, more than that, *Beauty and the Beast* offers a new method of understanding and engaging with spectacle, and the place of special effects within it. Instead of the special effect interrupting and overwhelming the narrative, Vincent is intertwined with it intimately. It is this intimacy Vincent that provides the affective spectacle. Vincent was integral to *Beauty and the Beast*'s popularity; he did not just appeal to our needs to see but connected on a deeper, more emotional level. Vincent is more than just a special effect; his being beamed directly into homes every week enabled him to affect his audience intimately within the private sphere of their own homes rather than the more overwhelming novelty of an image in a cinema. Vincent's physical and emotional intimacy and the purposeful design of his appearance and performance were both targeted to attract female audiences and encourage them to share Catherine's romantic feelings for Vincent. Special effects can trigger more emotions through spectacle other than intellectual curiosity over how it was made or the wonder of seeing it. While Baker was not named in the critical discourse, his presence is certainly felt, both through the attractiveness of Baker's design of Vincent and the 'heroic' narrative of Perlman sitting through his make-up transformation.

This affective spectacle adds another layer to the perception of special effects, not only as it is generated through Vincent, but as a way in which other special effects fuelled characters can be viewed; characters such as Baby Yoda (from Disney+'s *The Mandalorian* (John

Favreau, 2019-Present), The Hulk or the cast of *The Muppet Show* (Jim Henson, 1976-1981). The affective spectacle can even be seen in the visceral bone crunching transformations in *American Werewolf*, as David Kessler morphs from man to beast. However, this type of spectacle is highly collaborative, and the position of the special effects artist is still positioned below that of the actor portraying the character, and sometimes even placed as an antagonising force obscuring the performance. These hierarchies within film production are also a constant within film production discourses. In turn, Baker, while present within the discourses that surround *Beauty and the Beast*, obscures those below-the-line technicians who actually apply Perlman's prosthetics week after week. How then can it be possible to view an entire production from the outside? Is it possible to attribute credit so accurately? These are questions that this thesis will consider in the next two chapters.

Chapter 5: War on the Planet of the Apes: Issues of Auteurism, ‘Re-imaginings’ and Narrative versus Spectacle in the Make-Up effects of *Planet of the Apes* (Tim Burton, 2001)

Coming into the new millennium, Rick Baker was as busy as ever. Cinovation Studios⁸⁶ was in charge of delivering two of that year’s most anticipated comedies, *Nutty Professor II: The Klumps* (Peter Segel, 2000) and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (Ron Howard, 2000). According to Baker’s Biography, *Metamorphosis*, the special effects make-up artist’s schedule was intense, and he ‘was often jumping into a golf cart to race back and forth between *The Grinch*’s soundstages and those of *Nutty Professor II* being filmed a few buildings away’ (Rinzler, 2019b, p. 177). According to his biography, Baker was burnt out; as a company owner, he had responsibilities to keep people employed, and he was taking on films that he did not necessarily want to do (p. 182). Rinzler would assert that Baker needed a break, especially to grieve the loss of his mother.⁸⁷ That was when Tim Burton called about returning to *Planet of the Apes* (Tim Burton, 2001).

During the press run to promote *Planet of the Apes*, 20th Century Fox was adamant that this film was not a remake of the 1968 version but a bold ‘re-imagining’ of Pierre Boulle’s original 1963 novel (Thorpe, 2000, p. 13). Similarly, a *Planet of the Apes* trailer declared that Burton had a ‘Singular cinematic vision’ for the film (The Trailer Guys, 2010, 0:24; Levy, 2001, p. 22). It touted its stars like Mark Wahlberg, Helena Bonham Carter and Tim Roth, as well as Terry Notary,⁸⁸ who led the actors through his ‘ape school’ (Barrett, 2000, p. 16). However, the reception was mixed. As Larry Tetewski pointedly claims, the film was ‘a triumph of summer cinema, at least in certain select categories’ (2001, p. 61). The consensus was that Burton’s remake, although stylish, lacked the original’s narrative grit and topical satire

⁸⁶ A permeant company that Baker set up to assist him on 1990’s *Gremlins 2: The New Batch* (Joe Dante).

⁸⁷ Who had died that year.

⁸⁸ An American stunt coordinator and movement coach, best known for his work on Peter Jackson’s *The Hobbit* trilogy and *Kong: Skull Island* (Jordan Vogt-Roberts, 2017).

of Cold War politics that the ‘classic of its time had’ (Spelling, 2001, p. 21). There was even contention about whether Baker’s ape make-up was an improvement of John Chambers’ original special effects. The two core factors that affected the perception of *Planet of the Apes*’s special effects are apparent: firstly, the relationship that Baker’s effects had to Chambers’ original make-up, and secondly, the critics’ value judgement that narrative and story are more important to a film of quality than its aesthetics.

Another factor must be taken into account when discussing the film and its special effects. Contextually, the film trends of 2001 saw the release of a plethora of big-budget remakes and sequels.⁸⁹ As contemporary critic Edward Helmore wrote, ‘Hollywood has found an advanced and seemingly failsafe way of flogging its predictable and generally disappointing product to audiences with ever-diminishing attention spans’ (2001, p. 7). This is an example of the view that Stringer explores in his work on blockbusters and cultural value (2003, p. 8). He seeks to challenge the critical instability of the definition of blockbuster as a label ‘to describe a veritable throng of extremely diverse cinematic products’ (p. 9). Stringer also raises a provocative critical stance:

[B]lockbusters ‘then’ were good but that blockbusters ‘now’ are bad. Second, that compared to developments of the recent past, contemporary ‘remarkable advances’ in the realms of technology and aesthetics are somehow “not enough”.

(p.9)

As these instabilities can easily be applied to Burton’s *Planet of the Apes*, this chapter discusses the value judgements critics make on the perceived conflict between narrative and spectacle. Also, due to the rather consistent reception image of *Planet of the Apes*, this chapter will provide a synchronic study of the pre-release and reception material to be split into two key thematic sections, with each focusing on one of these key themes. Firstly, drawing on the work

⁸⁹ At the same time as *Planet of the Apes*, sequels to *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) and *The Mummy* (Stephen Summers, 1999) were also released.

of Constantine Verevis, it will explore the discussion of *Planet of the Apes* as a ‘re-imagining’, and the issues of remakes as they specifically relate to Baker’s special effects, as well as the reactions of critics who compare them to Chambers’ make-up. This chapter will also apply Philip Hayward and Tana Wollen’s definition of techno-futurism, i.e., new technologies are seen as an improvement on older ones to these discussions (1993, p. 3). The second section will draw out the value judgements, hierarchising narrative factors as more important than the aesthetic as they apply to discussions of *Planet of the Apes*’ status as a remake and Baker’s updated special effects.

This structure will allow the chapter to holistically explore how the industrial factors of remakes, authorship and the economics of blockbuster filmmaking that would all affect the perception of Baker and his special effects. Similarly, picking up on these issues allows for points of comparison between the other chapters. *KKII* and *Planet of the Apes* are both ‘re-imaginings’ seeking an independent identity from the original while suffering from the comparison nonetheless.⁹⁰ What is now different about these films is Baker’s position within the industry. When working on *KKII*, Baker was a relative newcomer, while for *Planet of the Apes*, his reputation in film make-up was cemented. He is now hailed by critics as ‘the Oscar-winning Rick Baker’ (Thorpe, 2000, p. 13), the ‘Monkey Meister’ (Magid, 2002b, p. 11), or the ‘expert with hairy creatures and, especially, at creating simians for the screen’ (Borges, 2000, p. 18). While Baker’s position may have changed, just how much has the ‘Rick Baker’ name brand affected his position within the critical and production reception of *Planet of the Apes*?

⁹⁰ Similarly, they are also considered to be underwhelming middle children in the series of films overshadowed by the classic older original and the flashier motion capture fuelled experience starring Andy Serkis.

Monkeying Around with the Formula: Issues of Remakes in the Special Effects in *Planet of the Apes*

It is important to point out that 20th Century Fox tried to distance themselves from the term 'remake', choosing instead to use euphemisms like 'reinterpretation' (Tetewski, 2001, p. 61), 'revisiting' (Svetkey, 2001), 'redefinition' (*StarBurst*, 2001, p. 53). As Tom Rothman, co-chairman of Fox Filmed Entertainment, said at the time:

Planet of the Apes is categorically and absolutely not a remake, because the story and the characters are entirely new. What is the same is the base thematics and the title. There is a planet where the apes are the dominant species, and it casts a mirror on human society. But it's an entirely new story that does not take place on the planet Earth, there is no Statue of Liberty at the end. It has a totally new look and feel.

(Lyman, 2001, p. 26)

While this rather hyperbolic and dismissive explanation separates 2001's *Planet of the Apes* from its predecessor, it also seeks to emphasise the film's above-the-line elements of narrative and stars and its aesthetics. This strong stance against any connection of the film connected to the original's plot is reminiscent of Dino De Laurentiis' approach to remaking *KKII* with a modern setting, new genre, new set of buildings to climb, and new technology. It is important to remember this quote as the critical response is a reaction to these alternative interpretations of what the film was. This could explain some of the negative reception of this version of *Planet of the Apes*.

Ultimately, it is not surprising that the production would try to distance this version of *The Planet of the Apes* from the idea of a film remake and the associated perception that remakes lack originality and are made solely for cynical commercial reasons. As Verevis points out, these films are "pre-sold" to their audience because viewers are assumed to have some prior experience, or at least possess a "narrative image" of the original story' (2006, p. 3). Tim Burton's *Planet of the Apes* uses the iconography from the original film, a man out of place,

sentient monkeys and humans as a (mostly white) underclass, undermining its attempts to distance itself from the original and its status as a remake. However, as Verevis adds:

The general repetitions of generic patterns and exclusive stars (actors/directors) help frame the interpretative horizon (narrative image) for those viewers with little experience with, or collection of, a precursor text. But equally, the string of (remake) euphemisms that attends the description of these films – *encore, reworking, refitting, retooling, retread, redo, makeover, new version* – encourages some viewers to place the remake within the generic category of ‘remaking’ and adopt (to some degree a transtextual reading of the film. This may have the effect of inviting viewers to restrict attention to the comparison of particular elements or details, or abandon broader generic or cultural analysis as a means of establishing the films contemporary meaning and value.

(2006, p. 146-147)

While the producers insist that this is not a ‘remake’, Verevis suggests that referencing the original to differentiate it leads to a discursive trap. By denying any connection of the remake, or re-imagining, to the original in this way frames the film as what it is not, rather than what it is. Therefore, it cannot legitimise itself on its own merits, either as science fiction or another genre. The quality of the film is then tied to that of a comparison rather than how it stands apart.

However, while the producers were trying to distance themselves from the original film, Baker was tasked with updating the effects of the ‘original “Apes” Maestro John Chambers’ (Magid, 2002b, p. 11) which further complicated this strategy of differentiation. Ralph Winter, Executive Producer, as quoted in *Cinefantastique*, claims Baker ‘is the only guy for the job’, placing him as central to the film’s special effects (Plesset, 2001a, p. 22). Baker is now synonymous with the creation of ape make-up in Hollywood, called on to produce high-quality spectacle for a production. The producers of *Planet of the Apes* seem aware of Baker’s talent, as they use very similar language to promote him that was used to promote Burton as ‘the only one for the job’, so legitimising their own production through Baker’s prestige. Indeed, *Planet of the Apes* shows Baker again rising above the line with this massive technological

advancement in the production of make-up effects. As an *IGN*⁹¹ article, originally released in 2000, reveals, “Baker and his department are working long hours to complete around 500 apes for the film’ (KJB, 2000). Baker is placed as the key leader and designer of the make-up effects: someone with a large crew working under him.

However, there is an odd dissonance in that the discussion of Baker’s effects focuses on a connection to the original make-up, while the rest of the film is stated overtly not to be a remake. There is then this tension between difference and similarity at the centre of these two parts of the *Planet of the Apes* discussion. Jason McGatlin, production supervisor on *Planet of the Apes*, discusses how Baker approached the task

[i]n spite of all the technical advances made in makeup since the 1968 PLANET OF THE APES, Baker used similar techniques in this film. ‘They were trying to figure out different ways of doing the makeup’ said McGatlin ‘and they ultimately came back to doing film aesthetics, which is the exact same profess they did for the original PLANET OF THE APES, except it’s more skilled today’.

(Plesset, 2001a, p. 24)

While the 2001 version of *The Planet of the Apes* is not a remake of the 1968 film, Jason McGatlin seems to suggest two incompatible attitudes to the way the special effects should be seen. First they are similar through the techniques used and how they look, but secondly, they are also different due to the development of technology.

Ron Magid continues this theme in *The Hollywood Reporter*, commenting on a tension between animatronic realism or ‘following the lead of Oscar-winning makeup artist John Chambers on the first *Apes*’ (2001a, p. 24). Baker decided that realism was ‘not *Planet of the Apes*. Part of the charm of the original movies was that they had such actor driven performances, which meant it had to be a makeup approach’ (p. 24). As with *KKII*, there is a discourse of aesthetic purity. There is also a particular understanding of the effects in the

⁹¹ An online publication most well-known for game reviews and popular culture news.

original film, and those effects become inextricably linked to the idea of what the movie is. While the producers state that it is not remaking *Planet of the Apes*, Baker makes even more of the connection to the original film by claiming that he remade its effects. This contradicts Pierson's view that 'special effects represent a mode of visual display that privileges aesthetic novelty over realism' (2002, p. 156). Instead of acceptance of novelty and advancement in technology, there is a call to aesthetic nostalgia and consistency from the filmmakers, focused on the effect's look and technique. While *KKII* fell prey to this mode of thinking but tried to fight against it, *Planet of the Apes* fully embraced this understanding of the special effects and Baker's position within it. This discussion of *Planet of the Apes* and its relationship to the 1968 film would appear to corroborate Catherine Grant's assertion that:

film adaptations acquire their meaning, as well as at least part of their intrinsic cultural and economic value, through an openly acknowledged and socially sanctioned form of imitation of, or borrowing from, an earlier text.

(2002, p. 57)

While Grant is here discussing adaptations, the producers of 2001's *Planet of the Apes* discuss their film in a similar way. Much like the way that remakes are inherently tied to the original through their reliance on an already existing audience, this also applies to these readaptations. Thus, Baker's effects gain some kind of cultural value by being seen as a continuation of John Chambers' original effects. Through the eyes of those critics from industry-specific publications like *The Hollywood Reporter* and popular culture-focused magazines like *Cinefantastique*, Baker's name now carries a good deal of weight in discussions of quality effects. Nevertheless, in order to shore up perceptions of the film as a whole, the effects are tied to the originals, but also through Baker's recognised name as a master craftsman and through the technological development they display, so framing them as improvements on those of the original version. This approach would also echo Grant's observations on auteurs and their relationship to film adaptations that through

The vehicle of the free adaptation, contemporary film auteurs can attempt to make aspects of literary classics and other texts their own, over-writing them with their own traceable signatures, perhaps reconfiguring them by incorporating references to other (rewritten) intertexts.

(2002, p. 58).

Following on from Grant's assertion, I would argue that during this talk of the film as a remake, Burton has attempted to return to the original text to distance his version from the first film; claiming it as an adaptation on which he applies his own particular aesthetic style and brand of humour. While Grant discusses adaptation from an auteurist perspective as it traditionally relates to a film's director, and while Baker is certainly not an auteur or star, I argue that these passages still demonstrate aspects of Grant's argument to explore Baker's status as a below-the-line worker. Similar to Burton, Baker is trying to stake authorial ownership on his own effects; while using similar techniques to John Chambers, he is also making them his own through technological development. However, this idea of technical evolution complicates the idea of distancing *Planet of the Apes* 2001 from the 1968 original. The production's positioning of the film would also align with Thomas M. Leitch's observations on readaptation which claim that 'the goal [...] is fidelity (however defined) to the original text, which it undertakes to translate as scrupulously as possible (presumably more scrupulously than earlier versions) into the film' (1990, p. 142). Similarly, Baker's effects seek validity and quality by remaking Chambers' effects while at the same time distancing his work from his through his use of technological development.

Much of the critical discourse on the effects of *Planet of the Apes* includes an appreciation of the new and different. Magid writes that Baker 'was determined to address the limitations in Chambers' original designs' (2001a, p. 24). Chambers' ape prosthetic make-up was cutting edge for its time,⁹² in part due to 'an important breakthrough: facial appliances that

⁹² Which won an honorary Oscar in 1969.

allowed sweat to seep through the material's pores' and quick production of prosthetic appliances (McLellan, 2001). As Magid reports in *American Cinematographer*, Baker sought to improve on certain elements, including the apes' teeth which in the original, had been

glued into the prosthetic mouths, making it impossible for the apes' lips to move independently over their choppers. Baker's solution was to create as large a set of false teeth as possible, distorting the actor's mouth into a rudimentary muzzle that projected out to be nearly even with the tip of his nose.

(Magid, 2001c, p. 53)

Simon Braund for *Empire* notes Baker's combination of reverence for the original film's effects and his desire to improve upon them. In his article 'Apeocalypse now', he quotes Baker as saying 'the original was such an important make-up film [...] It inspired a whole generation of make-up artists. But the one thing I didn't like about John Chambers' apes was that you didn't see their teeth' (2001, p. 64). In a film fan magazine, Baker also aligns himself as a fan of the original *Planet of the Ape*. Instead of taking an artistic departure from the original, he is connecting his make-up directly with Chambers' prosthetics, marking it more as a technical iteration rather than a new work, so maintaining specific aesthetic nostalgia and continuity.

The critical response to this improved make-up was primarily positive, and indeed, Baker seems fully visible and worthy of praise in film-specific publications. In *Sight and Sound*, for instance, Kim Newman wrote that Baker's 'ape outfits [are] several degrees more impressive and credible than the Oscar-winning originals' (2001, p. 5). This is later corroborated by Kirk Honeycutt, who writes in *The Hollywood Reporter* that 'Rick Baker's Make up improves on the masks of the 1968 version, giving the apes scary, nonhuman teeth and different facial looks' (2001, p. 23). Mark Kermode echoes this in a review for *Time Out* in which he admires 'Baker's marvellously advanced make-up effects [for solving] those long-standing facial-paralysis problems, [while still retaining] recognisable vestiges of the basic hair-and-snout appendages which prompted Oscar recognition back in the 60s' (2001, p. 20). Chris Hewitt, for *Empire*, similarly notes how 'make-up maestro Rick Baker certainly seem to

deliver. Perfecting ape make-up has been Baker's obsession since the ill-fated 1976 King Kong remake, and he seems to have finally achieved his goal' (2001, p. 62).⁹³

Baker's star status as a special effects artist is now all but confirmed. This is implied by an article in the August 2001 issue of *Fangoria*, which poses the theoretical question, 'who else but Rick Baker would you call on to create a "Planet" full of simians?' (Bernstein, 2001a, p. 34). This type of critical commentary demonstrates the difference between Baker's current position in the film industry compared with that of his early beginnings. In genre publications such as *Fangoria* and in film-focused magazines like *Sight and Sound* and *Empire*, as well as industry publication *The Hollywood Reporter*, Baker is now hailed as a name in special effects make-up whose brand of simian effects lends any production legitimacy and prestige.

Yet, although Baker is now more visible and recognisable, there are still similarities between this kind of discourse and that in *KKII*. For instance, the critics and Baker are still tied to this idea of aesthetic nostalgia and purity, focused on what the effects should be. In turn, Baker is consigned to improving on what has come before rather than making anything wholly new. Also, despite his career advancement, he is still often unnamed outside of most special interest and industry journals, where critics again attribute the design of the special effects to the director, Tim Burton. One example of this can be seen in Rick Groen's review in *The Globe and Mail*, which, like many others, credits Burton, rather than Baker, for these achievements 'the apes are terrific in this incarnation. Burton has fallen in love with the breed, taking advantage of makeup advances to enhance their realism, but also choosing to emphasize their wild atavistic streak' (2001, p. 1). Given the different contexts, this difference in narrative should not be surprising. As Staiger observes 'contexts of social formations and constructed identities of the self in relation to historical conditions [that] explain the interpretative strategies

⁹³ This adds is a sort of redemption arc to Bakers Career. There was a level of scorn heaped upon the special effects of *KKII* by all outlets, especially by *Empire* who would consider it one of the worst special effects of all time.

and affective responses of readers. Thus, receptions need to be related to specific historical conditions as events' (2000, p.162). Since the type of audience that each publication aims to court leads to a different focus, the historical materialist method (as observed by Staiger) allows the historian to structure the absences more accurately. The fact that Baker remains absent from publications like *The Globe and Mail* means that other narratives will privilege Burton's authorship, as well as realism in special effects, so presenting these as artefacts that guide their readers' taste.

As we have seen, it is those genre-specific publications, as Michele Pierson points out, that provide 'first-hand accounts of the business, technology and craft of special effects production' they also play 'a role in the social formation of cultures of special effects connoisseurship, appreciation, and fandom' (2002 p. 2). Publications like *Empire*, by their design, guide these fandoms and circulate specific and cult knowledge, while those like *American Cinematographer* exist in order to properly credit technical crew and provide more technical information about certain films. But it can be easy to get lost focusing on that singular element and mythologise the figure of Baker within the production. So then it is important to be aware that Baker's passage through film history is just one strand in a tapestry of interconnected discourses that affect each other.

One of those strands relates to the normalisation of digital effects in the early 2000s. Ron Magid writes that while 'blockbusters are propelled by plenty of digital firepower [...] there's an awful lot of analogue technology on hand as well' (2001a, p. 22). Indeed, Burton (as reported by Terry Lawson) said that 'Fox encouraged him to use computer-animated apes, but he would have none of it' (2001). Burton continues, 'to me, it always had to be humans playing apes, that was part of the upside-down appeal of the thing' (2001). This demonstrates a need for aesthetic consistency with *Planet of the Apes*, but much like the discussion of Burton and

Baker as fans, it continues to put fans at ease through their awareness of what *Planet of the Apes* is and how it needs to look.

Prince's understanding of techno-nostalgia (discussed earlier in this thesis) is also central to this debate, especially as it pertains to the transitional period of the noughties. John Patterson, writing for *The Guardian*, justifies the use of updated technology on the grounds that 'it's extremely doubtful that 21st-Century movie-goers would sit still for the rickety sets and silly monkey suits of the original, no matter how many intriguing ideas were lodged in the script' (2001, p. 11). This almost exactly echoes Bode's examination of educated and rowdy special effects audiences. As technology improves, audiences and critics are more able to engage and uncover the secrets of special effects, rendering out the wonder and awe at the core of their appeal. While *Planet of the Apes* does not offer an overhaul of the original's make-up, it seemingly treads this fine balance between the new and the old. There is also an attempt to not quite delegitimise the original film but point to how the original shows its age, allowing the new film to find its niche. While Patterson's review shows the importance of special effects and technological development as a justification for the *Planet of the Apes* remake, it also demonstrates that critics hold different opinions about those effects and how that opinion is based on the difference in readership.

Not everyone was so complimentary about Baker's improvement on the original special effects. For example, Philip Kerr, for the *New Statesmen* writes 'for all the money that has been spent on this new film, nothing about it improves upon the original. To my eyes, even the make-up looks hardly better than John Chambers' Oscar-winning work for the 1968 version' (2001). Kerr's observation refers to the cynical commercial side of Hollywood, claiming that it is not focused on change or originality but instead produces effects that look no different to the originals. Donato Totaro for *Offscreen* similarly writes, 'What we get is humans in ape suits

(not to knock Rick Baker's make-up, which is great [...] but then again so was John Chambers' in 1968)' (2001). Todd McCarthy for *Variety* continues this theme:

[W]ith the talent involved as well as the advances in make-up and special effects in recent years, an 'Apes' redo seemed justifiable as these things go; certainly there was also room for an edgier and more provocative table-turning of human-simian relations. But while the technology has permitted some advances- rather mild ones, as it turns out.

(2001, p. 383)

Many of these critics seem to delegitimise Baker's effects because they do not notice much difference between them and the original. This also reveals how the production has fallen into Verevis's discursive trap again; instead of using difference to define the film, the effects are too closely tied to the original and are compared all the more. McCarthy adds that improving effects technology should justify the remake, yet because of the minimal improvement, that justification is wasted. This puts Baker into a lose-lose situation whereby something too different from the original would not fit into the aesthetic nostalgia of *Planet of the Apes*, while something too similar would not differentiate his work enough.

As we have seen, within the discussion of the special effects in *Planet of the Apes*, there are a number of features that demonstrate a change in the positioning of Baker. For example, Baker's name is mentioned in more than just specialist publications. Similarly, more than just the specialist publications mention the importance of the special effects in *Planet of the Apes*. Baker used the techniques to create the apes for Burton's version, based on the designs and ideas originally created by John Chambers, demonstrating similarity rather than the differences that are pushed as part of the production's narrative that this version of *Planet of the Apes* was a visionary reimagining of the original version. They sought to improve upon those designs thanks to Baker's experience and the improvement of technology due to a preconceived understanding of what a *Planet of the Apes* film is supposed to look like. However, there is still a fraught comparison between the original make-up, similar to the discussion that occurs within

the critical reception of *KKII*. However, *Planet of the Apes* accepts and embraces the special effects origins and aesthetics and, thus, is praised as improving upon the original effects through using new technology, so justifying the remake in the eyes of many reviewers. Despite this acceptance, there is also a certain amount of dismissal of the effects as unoriginal. This presents a contradictory discussion with a critical reception of the effects that goes against the understanding that novelty is a mark of quality, yet its unoriginality also directly ties *Planet of the Apes* as a remake, so challenging the producers' narratives.

Puffing out their Chest: Hierarchies of Aesthetic and Narrative Elements in the Critical Reception of *Planet of the Apes*

The production's contradictory attempts to differentiate and connect Tim Burton's *Planet of the Apes* and Rick Baker's apes on that planet to the 1968 version ultimately did not do the film any favours in terms of the critical reception. As Richard Schickel of *Time Magazine* argues:

[I]t would be perfectly possible to prefer director Tim Burton's smart-looking new version to Franklin J Schaffner's less populous, less intensely, designed original. Certainly, the art of ape prosthesis has proceeded apace. So has the technology of taking a spaceship through a time warp and crash-landing it in never-never land.

But the 1968 film had something going for it that Burton's doesn't: profound novelty. It was wonderfully instructive to see Waspy Charlton Heston on the receiving end of formerly despised underclass's contempt.

(2001)

This somewhat backhanded assessment, filled as it is with value taste judgements, is a perfect example of Tasker's assertion that critics place importance on a film's narrative elements rather than on the aesthetic or visual ones (1993). But it also reveals the different discursive elements that would eventually crystallise into *Planet of the Apes*' legacy. The film fails to match up to the original due to its reliance on the visual and Baker's spectacular aesthetics in particular. Just as Schickel's review reflects a dismissal of popular or mass art, *Planet of the*

Apes' historical status as a blockbuster has similarly affected the assessment of the film's quality.

To return to Groen's review, he directly compares the original to the remake, arguing that Rod Serling, writer of the script for the original version,⁹⁴ 'deals in a watered-down version of Swiftian satire, punctuated with his trademark twist at the climax' (2001, p. 1). By making allusions to a range of issues, from Darwinian theory to the McCarthy trials (p. 1), Groen is raising the cultural value of the original *Planet of the Apes* and, by implication, downgrading the cultural value of the remake. While David Germain, of *The Associated Press*, is outrightly dismissive of Burton's version. Despite all the new 'trappings', he writes, 'courtesy of today's makeup and special-effects wizardry, the movie still feels like a retread of the same old thing', then adds the damning conclusion that, 'the story is so simple it's downright dumb' (2001). Furthermore, *Sight and Sound*'s Andrew O'Hehir laments that the remake's writers do not take the opportunity to do anything original, just 'rehash[es] the plot of the Heston film' (2001, p.13). He also praises the original film as a document

of racial guilt – as it became increasingly obvious the longer the series went on – this one is a document of species guilt. Burton and his screenwriters (William Broyles Jr, Lawrence Konner and Mark D. Rosenthal) offer a jittery catalogue of millennial anxieties, from the hazards of genetic engineering and the corrupting influence of technology to ecological catastrophe and weapons of mass destruction.

(p. 13)

These readings by Groen, Germain, and O'Hehir all demonstrate how critics use their power as cultural gatekeepers to delegitimise or legitimise certain pieces of art. In these instances, they have contrasted the perceived differences in quality between the 2001 remake and the original on the grounds of narrative originality and the perceived intelligence of the narrative.

⁹⁴ Here referring to Rod Serling, one of the screenwriters for the original version of *Planet of the Apes* and creator of the highly influential television anthology series *The Twilight Zone* (Rod Serling, 1959-1964) and well known for genre programs that dealt with political themes of racism and nuclear panic.

They also imply that the 1968 *Planet of the Apes* should be considered high art due to its weighty political themes and literary satire of the contemporary political climate. They are also claiming that while *Planet of the Apes* was good then, Burton's version tries to tackle weighty subjects, the critics are hypocritically dismissed as less important and less clear. Similarly, due to its reliance on its 'visionary' auteur director and modern special effects, the remake is considered lower art and less intelligent. More than that, for Schickle, these elements are a distraction, and unable to hide the remake's inability to differentiate itself. This dismissal of the 2001 *Planet of the Apes* as 'popular' and 'dumb' speaks directly to Bourdieu's writings on how art is delegitimised on a class basis:

Accessible versions of avant-garde experiments or accessible works which pass for avant-garde experiments [...] in short, everything that goes to make up 'quality' weeklies and 'quality' shows, which are entirely organized to give the impression of legitimate culture within the reach of all, by combining two normally exclusive characteristics, immediate accessibility and the outward signs of cultural legitimacy.

(2010, p. 321)

As Bourdieu observes, middlebrow art, attempting as it does to bridge the gap between the lowbrow and the highbrow, feels hollow as it aims to achieve the impossible by making the inaccessible accessible. Bourdieu also observes how a person's class dictates their tastes; that highbrow art requires more education and a privileged upbringing to understand it, so that those without those privileges are unable to appreciate it. This play of cultural capital and power can be seen at work within these reviews.

According to the cultural hierarchy that is relayed by publications of 'quality' such as *Time Magazine* and *The Globe and Mail* are said to designate, Baker's contribution to the aesthetics of *Planet of the Apes* is not considered to high-art and is therefore dismissed as of little value.

Andrew O’Hehir continues this narrative when he comments that ‘in the era of the global mass audience and CGI effects, mainstream cinema – or at least spectacle cinema – is becoming an increasingly conservative and almost anti-narrative form’ (2001, p. 15). This testament of mass art as conservative and anti-narrative can serve as an illustration of King’s assessment of film critics’ approach to spectacle, as discussed earlier in this thesis. It is also in line with the Marxist understanding of spectacle as an ideological tool for the status quo, who use it as a means of relaying ideology to the pacified masses, as put forward by Debord (1977), Adorno and Horkheimer (1986). As a maker of special effects, Baker is considered part of the spectacle production and is thus tarred with the same brush.

What is interesting is that the producers try to create a narrative of high art when producer Richard Zanuck, claimed in an issue of *Empire* that ‘We’re not trying to deal with any of the philosophical questions that [the original] did [...] But it’ll be just as surprising: more entertaining than intellectually provocative’ (Braund, 2001, p. 66). However, the producers’ admission at the end still links the film to the populist, blockbuster commercial aspirations. In line with the scale, large budgets, stars and audiences of the blockbuster genre, Burton’s *Planet of the Apes* was made to appeal to a mass audience. This aim of achieving significant box office returns came at the expense of what critics view to be artistic and political merit. Its emphasis on entertainment, spectacle, and special effects, rather than narrative themes, means that Burton’s *Planet of the Apes* is perceived as lesser.

This discursive distinction between 'lowbrow' and 'highbrow' is then used to further compare and contrast the remake of *Planet of the Apes* with the original. Specifically, as it relates to the special effects, Peter Keogh writes in *Film Ireland*

Imagine an old/low budget movie with a great basic premise but lousy special effects. Now imagine a twenty-first century remake, benefiting from generous studio backing and state-of-the-art technology. Can only be an improvement, right? Well ... there was that 70’s *King Kong*. That stunk worse than a gorilla

enclosure in a protracted zookeepers' strike. Come to think of it, *King Kong* is a far from isolated example.

(2001, p. 37).

Keogh implies that the narrative novelty is the core of the appeal of *King Kong* or *Planet of the Apes*, with their special effects and technology as added extras that speak to a false understanding of quality improvement. This is echoed by John Simon, who in *The National Review* comments that that the film is, 'wholly without interest. But the original versions' emotional and philosophical impact has been greatly reduced in favour of technological spectacle' (2001). Xan Brooks for *Sight and Sound* concurs, commenting that 'instead of a dark parable of a primal society, Burton gives us an accelerated, superficial romp replete with state-of-the-art special effects' (p. 56). Though Brooks does concede that Baker's effects 'are one obvious improvement on the original's cup-faced drones' (p. 56), these reviews continue the assertion that the remake's reliance on new technology, special effects and a large budget cannot overcome the thematic weakness or a lack of narrative novelty. Due to its relationship to the perceived baser elements of film, the large budget and spectacular visual effects of the 2001 version are considered lesser than. While a number of critics praised Baker for his continuation of Chambers' original make-up, this is overshadowed by the narrative's inability to separate itself from the original.

This narrative of dismissing 'ow art' and spectacle continues into the discussion of *Planet of the Apes* as part of 2001's blockbuster cycle. Although Baker's name is not usually mentioned in this criticism, it inevitably affects how his effects are perceived. O'Hehir, in his review of *Planet of the Apes*, expresses an exasperation with the blockbuster cycles of films like *Pearl Harbor* (Michael Bay, 2001), released at the same time, claiming that these films 'make no pretence of offering plot or character beyond a set of reassuring poses and gestures, as familiar as the stock figures of grand guignol were in an early day' (2001, p. 15). Johnathan Romney, in his *Independent on Sunday* review, continues that 'this remake shows that middle-

budget Hollywood sci-fi in the Sixties was more alert and more zeitgeist-attuned than today's blockbuster, which inhabit their own void of opening weekend grosses' (2001, p. 10). Similarly, Rob Sheffield from *Rolling Stone* refers to 'a summer of lameness' (2001), saying that 'the summer's big-whoop records were duds' (2001). Much like Sheffield, Tom Carson, and Elizabeth Einstein write in *Esquire* that after 'one crappy blockbuster after another. Judging from this past summer, you'd think Hollywood had it in for us' (2001). O'Hehir, Romney Carson and Einstein's reviews can all serve as examples of how the critic guides taste-making conversations through their legitimising and delegitimising of certain art.

This ties directly to Gillian Roberts's discussions *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997) as an award-winning blockbuster. Through *Titanic*'s Oscar nominations, it was raised up to a status beyond the 'brainless blockbusters and sophomoric comedies, forc[ing Hollywood] to relinquish artistic legitimacy to the imports and no-budget homegrown curiosities' (Lacey, 1998, C1). The other blockbusters, by comparison act as a corrupting force offering:

no human emotion except visual amazement and wonder as to how it was done. The attempt is not to stimulate the imagination, but to gorge the senses. Even this attempt is unsuccessful, because the illusion is not played for honestly; one is astounded at the tricks the expense, the machinery of the production.

(Soule, 1916, 101).

Special effects, as part of this technologically focused blockbuster model, overwhelm the emotions and imagination of audiences, much in the way critics accuse the visuals of *Planet of the Apes* of overwhelming the core themes of the original. Yet, strangely, the original science fiction franchise is considered above its 'brainless' remake due to its perceived political commentary, so allowing the films to fit tidily into this discursive category. Yet this fatigue with blockbusters could also affect the perception of Baker and his effects. Critics seem to dehumanise the audience of *Planet of the Apes* in part due to the part the use of technology within it. Thus, for critics, Baker and those like him, those that create spectacle out of technology overwhelms the human, artistic and 'worthy' above-the-line elements.

In an article with a standfirst that reads 'Quality is forsaken as studios perfect the "hit" and run', *The Observer*'s Edward Helmore writes, 'Hollywood has found an advanced and seemingly failsafe way of flogging its predictable and generally disappointing product to audiences with ever diminishing attention spans' (2001, p. 7). In this attempt to provide historical context to the state of Hollywood at the turn of the millennium, he colourfully describes the process of front loading as 'fuck and run'. Helmore continues, 'Week after week, Hollywood's blockbuster films have opened to huge numbers, often exceeding \$40 million. Box-office takings then abruptly collapse as audiences move on' (p. 7). His use of such inflammatory language speaks to the disgust Helmore holds for the current state of the film industry, and the way Hollywood is focused on those parts of film that are considered less artistic and more commercial. This is similar to the discussion of De Laurentiis's motives for remaking *KKII*, a founding film in the modern understanding of blockbusters. In both films, Baker's special effects, while not usually referred to directly, due to the connection between spectacle and blockbusters, are a visual symptom of Hollywood's slide into mass-marketed, low-brow art.

Critics continue delegitimising *Planet of the Apes* by claiming a lack of intelligence both on the part of Burton and of the audience themselves. Peter Bradshaw's review of the film in *The Guardian*, for instance, dismisses Burton's 're-imagining [as] a dumbed-down, screeching gibbering, banana-peeling, PG Tips-drinking festival of nonsense [while the] Charlton Heston movie was a brilliant Swiftian satire: sly, disturbing, subversive' (2001, p. 12). Carson and Einstein take a similarly dismissive stance:

The 1968 original is one of the most entertaining comic-strip movies, and its ingredients are about as surefire as Hollywood formulas get [while] Tim Burton seems drawn to projects exclusively for their nifty décor, and as usual he forgot to make the movie that all those ultracool sets and costumes were supposed to provide the trappings for. Since he is the first director you sometimes suspect has literally never learned to read, it's probably no wonder that Burton didn't notice how devoid of playfulness the clumsy script was.

(2001)

Finally, David Denby, writing in *The New Yorker*, dismisses Burton's 'enormous production' as, 'spectacular but empty, and I can think of no better measure of the ebbing intelligence of American movies that a comparison between this film and the original "Planet" from 1968' (2001, p. 88). As we have already seen, there is, of course, also a play at cultural capital and power within these reviews. The critics can easily read the mean of the film, it does not provide a challenge, in a similar way to the challenge of knowledge issued by critics of *Gorillas in the Mist*. Due to the ease of which the critics are able to uncover the films political or thematic meaning, the art lacks the need for the sophisticated educated cultural gatekeepers to interpret and can only be assigned as lowbrow art.

However, not all critics were so negative towards the film, however. Steve Grant from *The Scotsman*, for example, writes:

[W]hatever its deficiencies in the area of script and plotting, this is a masterful piece of work, as expertly crafted and lovingly put together as a fresco from a team of old masters. It will not have the cultural social impact of the original series, but it does raise family entertainment to a whole new level.

(2001, p. 11)

In his review for *The Mirror*, Jonathan Ross makes an even stronger statement against the overly negative and elitist criticisms of Burton's *Planet of the Apes*, claiming that readers should 'ignore the armchair critics who may poo-poo this as silly or insubstantial, Burton has done us proud and this film was made to be watched and enjoyed by all' (2001, p. 6). Certainly, the tone of these reviews feels more inclusive, focusing as they do on how entertaining the film is in its own right. While Ross perhaps takes a more defensive and obvious challenge to those that would hierarchise the original *Planet of the Apes* and Burton's version, Grant acknowledges that the Burton version is lighter on 'substance' and narrative. So even within these more positive reviews, there is still a bias against visual spectacle in favour of stronger narrative themes.

When the 2001 version of *Planet of the Apes* was released on DVD its reputation had been solidified. Steve Daly, writing for *Entertainment Weekly*, called it ‘the most disposable hit movie of 2001. By the end of its opening week in theatres last July, Tim Burton’s *Planet of the Apes* redo had already lost its cachet’ (2001). Directly addressing the DVD commentary, provided by Burton, Daly concludes, ‘Despite Burton’s insistence on a DVD commentary that “literal people” need to chill out and enjoy the mystery and illogic as much as he does, the gaudily costumed ape emperors of this fantasy misfire aren’t wearing any clothes’ (2001). With this, as the final nail in the coffin, *Planet of the Apes*’ critical image was hammered home; the film would forever be remembered as a lesser version of the original tale.

This delegitimising of the film was largely based on the premise that while the effects provided by Baker were considered good and an improvement on the originals (for the most part), they could not replace the sophisticated narrative of the original. Critics saw *Planet of the Apes* as a bland remake; however, it was also a prime example of Hollywood’s commercial instincts and proof of film audiences’ decreasing cultural intelligence. Baker’s effects then not only became a force that overtook the narrative, but they were also responsible for destroying Hollywood as a producer of highbrow art.

Conclusion: Survival of the Smartest

The common critical consensus of Burton’s *Planet of the Apes* has maintained this stance through the years.⁹⁵ However, Radheyen Simonpillai provides a re-examination of the film in an article for *The Guardian* published in January 2021, claiming that it ‘isn’t a bad movie’ (2021, p. 2). The film, he argues, ‘is a remake that has the forward momentum and expansive qualities of a sequel: a love letter assuming a familiarity with the 1968 sci-fi classic,

⁹⁵ Briefly remembered as a misstep as critics began discussing the newest trilogy of *Apes* movies with motion Capture messiah Andy Serkis as the central character, Ceaser.

counting on our expectations so that it could playfully thwart them' (p. 2). Addressing the effects, he writes, 'in a time before CGI completely took over, Burton relished what actors accomplish with prosthetics' (2021, p. 2). Simonpallai even attempts to give the remake a greater thematic understanding by arguing that it is not 'completely apolitical. Tim Roth's sneering and menacing General Thade is like a forecast for the kind of military manoeuvring to come after 9/11, which took place weeks after the movie was released' (p. 2). However, despite these reassessments, the critical consensus as a whole has remained the same since its release.

Burton and 20th Century Fox sought to claim that their *Planet of the Apes* was a reimagining of Pierre Boulle's book that used Burton's unique auteurial visual style to differentiate it from Schaffner's 1968 film. Burton is here presented as both director and fan who can bring a unique vision to the big screen. However, due to this definition by difference, critics still insisted on the comparison. Reviews drew on the original film's pedigree (the narrative themes, the classic ending and the crew involved) to place the 1968 version as part of a cinematic canon. Meanwhile, they delegitimised Burton's version by arguing that the visual aesthetics took the focus away from the narrative and historical themes of the original. More than that, there was also an argument that the remake lacked the narrative novelty and thematic spectacle of the original.

Regarding the spectacle itself, the opposite seems true. Rather than trying to differentiate the effects as De Laurentiis did with *KKII*, Baker instead creates a narrative of aesthetic verisimilitude, nostalgia and continuation. In contrast to his treatment during the production of *KKII*, Baker is placed as centrally responsible for the special effects, just as Burton is for the whole film. Producers now use Baker's name as a way to legitimise the film and the effects, and his reputation as a master of monkeys is used to heighten the quality of the film. Indeed, due to Baker's reputation, many more critics are aware of his work and the

responsibility he had on the film. As we have seen, some are even complimentary, arguing that his effects keep the spirit of John Chambers' original prosthetics, while improving on their main flaws. Similarly, despite the trend for most films of the time to contain modern computer-generated images, the use of practical make-up is seen as a positive, a continuation of what *Planet of the Apes* is supposed to look like.

What this examination of *Planet of the Apes* reveals more broadly for Baker and his effects is that, while there appears to be a development in the perception of Baker, the perception of special effects and the spectacle they provide has yet to change. Baker is discussed more; his artistic and technical agency are asserted more due to his growing reputation in the film industry, and the effects he produces are considered to be good, if not great. However, the effects, due to their technical, visual and spectacular nature, are still affected by the issues of taste and the hierarchy of importance of narrative over visuals. They are considered of lesser importance to the film's overall success or quality, or in the worst case, are thought of as an impediment, a crutch to smooth over a weak story and narrative elements.

As the new millennium rolled on into its second decade the issue of computer-generated images still needed to be addressed. While not touching this particular production as much as others of the time, it did raise some interesting questions and challenges. Baker's star as a special effects make-up artist has been assured. However, was he affected by the changing trends in special effects production? If so, how? How was the hierarchy of special effects technique affected by the introduction of digital effects? And how did this new method of constructing spectacle affect aesthetic nostalgia?

Chapter 6: Digital Dogs: Issues of Labour, Quality and Computer-Generated Special Effects in Joe Johnston's *The Wolfman* (2010)

Despite the mixed reviews of the 2001 *Planet of the Apes*, the 2000s continued to be a busy period for Baker and his workshop. During this time, he continued working on major blockbusters like the 2002 sequel to Barry Sonnenfeld's *Men in Black* (1997), and *Hellboy* (Guillermo Del Toro, 2004). Returning to horror, he helped design the VHS-haunting spirit Samantha⁹⁶ for Gore Verbinski's American version of *The Ring* (2002). Baker was also heavily involved in some major comedies of that decade; *The Haunted Mansion* (Rob Minkoff, 2003), *Click* (Frank Soraci, 2006), *Tropic Thunder* (Ben Stiller, 2008), and the Eddie Murphy vehicle *Norbit* (Brian Robbins, 2007).⁹⁷ It was during this project that he learned that Universal Studios had plans to remake *The Wolf Man* (George Waggner, 1941).

According to Baker, who was quoted in a report for the effects-based publication *Cinefex*:

I went into the office of somebody I knew there to see if this was really going to happen. I wanted to be involved because I was such a fan of the original film and werewolves in general. I usually don't pursue jobs like that, but this was too good to pass up. *The Wolf Man* was important to me. It got me into this business.

(Fordham, 2010, p. 34)

The Wolfman was a dream project for Baker, whose love of the original film is what originally inspired him to pursue make-up effects. However, he claims that the production turned into a nightmare. As he said to *IndieWire*, 'The whole transformation was done on computers, but it was based a lot on ideas I had and sculptures that I did [...] But I was kind of pushed out of that' (Gilchrist, 2011). But how could this be? Rick Baker 'Monster Maker' was a six-time winner academy award winner, the man behind the influential lycanthropic transformation in

⁹⁶ Originally Sadako.

⁹⁷ Where Baker would gender and, rather unfortunately, race swap Eddie Murphy and Robert Downey Jr.

American Werewolf. His name-brand recognition had risen to its peak visibility, arguably allowing him to cross the divide between a below-the-line technician and an above-the-line artist. However, due to changing industrial factors, Baker would find his practical methods of producing spectacle overlooked or ignored in favour of quick and cheap digital effects. Ultimately then, *The Wolfman* signalled the end of Baker's career. This chapter will attempt to assess the ways in which Baker's role in the production of *The Wolfman* was changed and made more difficult by the inclusion of CGI and the impact this had on the reception of his effects.

To explore this issue, this chapter will take a two-part synchronic approach. Firstly, it will examine how the production history of *The Wolfman* was reported on in pre-release and promotional material at the time, comparing how the critics viewed Baker's inclusion in the production and the production's view on Baker's position within it. This will also provide some industrial perspective for Baker's visibility within the production of *The Wolfman*, how his name and reputation are used in the promotion of the film. Furthermore, it will examine how critics respond to the possibility of computer-generated images in the making of *The Wolfman*. As a remake, *The Wolfman*'s critical discourse could be seen to be quite similar to those outlined in chapters one and five. However, the key difference here would be the technological inclusion of CGI as well as the cementing of Baker's name and reputation outside of niche publications. Thus, this section will explore these factors to see how critics perceive and discuss them in their publications. Furthermore, it will allow for more perspectives to be explored and examine how information between film professionals and the film press travels. Secondly, it will look at the film's critical reception in order to engage with the ways in which Baker's special effects are discussed by film critics, specifically looking at how the critics discuss Baker concerning the inclusion of computer-generated images.

This chapter seeks to provide an understanding of how the changing industrial practices state of Hollywood affected the perception and production of special effects in Hollywood

during the early 2000s and 2010s. While there has been academic writing on the application of CGI in special effects before, specifically Michele Pierson's study of the critical reception of CGI in specific technology magazines, they are primarily philosophical examinations of how digital effects affected the nature of reality or as part of a historical development of film technology. In contrast, by placing Baker as a central figure and case study, this chapter seeks to explore this technological transitional point as a sight of critical industrial struggle and critical taste-making. Through this analysis, I will seek to explore the effects that the introduction of CGI had both on the established special effects industry and the critical reception of those images beyond the niche publications explored by Pierson.

As this chapter deals specifically with the perception of digital effects, it will draw on the likes of Stephen Prince (1996; 2012), and his assessment of the response to the digital revolution. Here the aim is to see if this can be directly applied to the perception of the special effects within *The Wolfman*. Similarly, as with the method of this research, it will draw on those academics engaged in historical materialist reception studies and discourse analysis, such as Klinger, Staiger, Barker and Mathijs; in particular, their examinations of the ways in which film critics as cultural gatekeepers define 'legitimate' artistic tools and aesthetics. Furthermore, this chapter also seeks to deal with how information on film production is communicated to the film press. In this regard, I will draw on the work of Oliver Gaycken (2015) who deals directly with the way in which information about the digital visual effects are communicated to audiences through promotional material and news sources.

Using *Jurassic Park* as a case study, Gaycken argues that:

[T]he role of computers in the generation of the film's special effects was not restricted to the relatively limited (and extraordinarily expensive) CGI dinosaur shots; computers permeate the film's effects in ways that a dichotomy of old vs new effects obscures.

(2015, p. 241)

As Gaycken points out, it is important to remember that the information received by the wider press is not the full story. While critics of *Jurassic Park* focused on the presence and inclusion of CGI in the creation of the dinosaurs there are other elements of film production that go undiscussed, akin to constructing the absences. Furthermore, it is also important to think beyond the idea of old versus new effects when it comes to analysing the critical discussions of special effects. While it would be easy to demonstrate that old versus new narrative within the critical reception of *The Wolfman*, that would be to ignore the other factors that affected both the film production, Baker's visibility within it, and the effects themselves.

Gaycken concludes that the effects within *Jurassic Park* echo a sort of evolutionary track, stating that 'evolution is not solely punctual nor straightforward, since fragments or components of organisms and technology live on in decedents' (p. 250). While the nature of film history and the development of film technology is never singular or linear, I would also argue that there are elements that where Gaycken does not go far enough. While Gaycken's analysis is more of a positive view of the development of film technologies, it is important to remember that evolution also connotes competition for resources where those less suited to the current ecosystems die out. Through the analysis of Baker and his position with in the production of *The Wolfman* we can see how his influence is felt and examine whether this is part of a transitory period where he passes the proverbial torch or whether this is an example of the ways that film production had changed so much that it moved beyond what Baker was able to adapt to. Thus with Baker as our central figure, we will examine if it was because Baker was 'not fit' to survive.

The Runt of the Litter: The Perception of Spectacle Production and CGI in the Making of *The Wolfman*

Before examining how Baker is positioned within the production of *The Wolfman*, it is important to provide three important facts about the making of the film: firstly, the 2010 version of *The Wolfman* had originally brought Mark Romanek⁹⁸ to helm the project as director; secondly, Baker lobbied to be a part of the production; and finally, Romanek left the production to be replaced by Joe Johnston three weeks before filming was set to begin. While it would be possible to provide a more detailed production history of the making of *The Wolfman*, this is not the aim of this chapter. Instead, I want to explore how information about a production, or specifically the information about the special effects, is disseminated to wider critical reception, how it is reported, and how this affected the perception of Rick Baker and the special



[fig 6.1] The first images of Benicio Del Toro in Rick Baker's make-up as the titular Wolfman in Joe Johnston's *The Wolfman* 2010

effects within the film. Thus, with these three key facts, we can fully explore how Baker is positioned and discussed by the producers and critics in the pre-release and promotional material.

According to the press, Baker was part of the production as early as 2008. Indeed, in the August 2008 issue of *Empire*, Olly Richards commented that 'Rick Baker, the man responsible for the An American Werewolf in London transformation leapt at the opportunity to join the movie' (2008, p. 105). Richards later wrote in July 2009 that Baker, the 'effects god [...] lobbied for the opportunity to pay tribute to one of his

⁹⁸ the director best known for the Robin Williams thriller *One Hour Photo* (2002).

make-up heroes' (2009b, p. 71). From these previews within a popular film magazine, it appears that Baker's name recognition is at its peak. Indeed, *The Wolfman's* producer, Scott Stuber, interviewed in the August 2008 'Big Preview', said that 'for us, Rick is the equivalent of an A-list star' (2008, p. 105). However, despite this glowing praise for Baker within *Empire*, the majority of the accompanying images are of actors, with the early make-up test present only in *Empire's* early coverage [figure 6.1]. Richard's article shows that Baker's name is not only known to readers of *Empire* but is just as important to the film as the names of the stars or the director. Furthermore, the fact that the production is using Baker's name and reputation to promote their film is revealing, even if they do not, as it turns out, use his effects. The above references to *American Werewolf* also canonise it as *the* best werewolf transformation. Baker's legacy, skill, reputation, and association with *American Werewolf* and other werewolf transformations are here fully acknowledged and form part of *The Wolfman's* promotional strategy. Similarly, as with *KKII* and *Planet of the Apes*, Richards paints Baker as a fan of the original Universal Monster Movie. This, then, is an attempt to assuage the fans who were worried about this new attempt to update to another 'classic' film. Indeed, Richards focuses on the special effects, reassuring readers that because of Baker's involvement, they should 'panic not [...] most of the wolf segments will use prosthetics rather than computers, though there will be some finessing with CGI' (2008, p. 105). This confirms Baker's status as a 'name' and his legacy in relation to *American Werewolf*, a transformation that has been canonised in film history. The film producers and the film press are using this title to draw comparisons between the two projects and to draw on the prestige Baker has acquired as the creator of that special effect. Richards is also addressing a narrative of distrust when it comes to the reception of computer-generated imagery. As Prince argues, the prevailing attitude to digital effects is reminiscent of on the way critics view spectacle more generally (as noted by King) and that 'visual effects are sometimes viewed as having taken over Hollywood blockbusters and

overwhelmed good storytelling' (Prince, 2012, p. 1). Similarly, Dan North argues that this criticism of digital effects comes from 'a condescending presumption of a correct function for cinema, and a miscalculation of the viewer's ability to discriminate' (2008, p. 6). It could also be argued that this 'correct function' is based in the indexical recording of reality. Digital filmmaking techniques break with this tradition, leading to critics not only being distracted by the spectacle of the digital but also distrusting the 'unreality' of the effects.

This sentiment was still felt a year later. The producers are aware of this, as Stuber when discussing the plans to update the film, quips in a 'first look' article for *Empire*, that the changes 'might cynically be construed as producer-speak for 'well, we've hacked it to bits to chuck in some more CG' (2009b, p. 69). Once again, we can see a reluctance to accept computer-generated effects in the film. Whether this is a hierarchical assertion of the types of special effects to be associated with the film is unclear. Baker is here clearly positioned as a reputable artist with a high degree of name-brand recognition for providing quality special effects, yet the modern production contexts lead film producers to position him at the forefront of making the special effects in order to generate a degree of authenticity. As we have seen, this was also the case in the discourse surrounding *KKII* and *Planet of the Apes*. However, here, Richards is connecting CGI with the more commercial parts of the industry in an attempt to delegitimise the technique. This commercial element was indeed discussed during production when deciding where CGI could be added later, so reducing the amount of time and manpower that are required for practical effects. Critics also discuss the commercial elements of this new mode of visual effects in a similar way, although they arrive at different conclusions. This critical response speaks to a fear of the film being over-reliant on spectacle and special effects, similar to the critical reception of *Planet of the Apes*.

It should also be noted that Baker himself was not averse to digital tools and was using them to design his make-ups with software like Photoshop. Aware of the benefits of CGI in

film production, he states in *Cinefex* that ‘the advantage to digital work is it’s not done during the beat the clock production time. It’s expensive to have a lot of people standing around on set; and when you shoot practically, you get a couple of shots, and it is what it is.’ (Fordham, 2010, p. 45). Furthermore, Baker tells *IndieWire*’s Todd Gilchrist, in September 2011, that he “so wanted to have that opportunity to do like what [he] did with ‘*American Werewolf*’ but 30 years later, utilizing the technology but still doing some old-school stuff” (2011). (Although it should also be noted that this interview was given after the fact.) Also, coming as it does from Baker himself,⁹⁹ his biases and needs to present himself as the hero of the story (that have been noted previously) should also be taken into account. However, this story’s personal nature reveals Baker’s excitement about doing the project, mostly as a fan but also as a professional. Much like the other remakes, the recent technological developments in the production of special effects provide a great opportunity for Baker to update the classic transformation from a cross dissolves in the original 1941 film to something new and exciting in this version while still maintaining the aesthetic ‘purity’ of the original. Much like the discussion of the special effects within *Planet of the Apes* reveals the tension between the old aesthetics and the new technology. However, this tension is more elevated because of the looming digital spectre of CGI.

Not all in the wider film press were mistrustful of this new mode of bringing the iconic universal monster to modern-day silver screens. As Andrew L. Urban writes in *The Sun Herald*:

A major difference between the original and the new film, of course, is that the tools of cinema to create such illusions have developed enormously since 1941. It is now possible to seamlessly fuse prosthetic make-up effects with digital work that enables audiences to watch in horrific fascination as the leading man turns into the wolfman.

⁹⁹ And from an article titled ‘Rick Baker says he’s still stinging about *The Wolfman* despite Oscar win, CGI won over make-up’.

(2010, p. 14).

Similarly, Susan Wloszczyna, for *USA Today*, comments that ‘both men⁹ [my footnote] contributed to the hybrid creature on the screen, a blend of meticulously applied foam, fur and prosthetics with state-of-the-art computer generation’ (2010a. p. 2D). Both the above reviews emphasise the excitement of witnessing the novelty of new technology. To echo the assertions of Michele Pierson, discussed earlier in this thesis, the driving force behind the development of effects and one of the basis for their quality is based on aesthetic and technological novelty (2002, p. 156). Similarly, the digital effects used in *The Wolfman* were cutting-edge state of the art, representing an appeal to connoisseurs of special effects to engage fully with the technical apparatus behind blending the practical and the digital together.

These discussions are also important as they remind us of *The Wolfman*’s status as a remake. Richards quotes Stuber, explaining that the production ‘changed a few things [...] The Wolfman will be more present. It’s more out there than in the original because [they] have the tools to recreate it in a way that they couldn’t’ (2008, p. 105). Within the discussion of *The Wolfman*, there appears to be a line between the old and the new, both in terms of producers as fans of the original film and the use of old and new technologies to redesign an old effect. Within these discussions, a distinct positioning of new and old techniques is evident, one in which they are kept separate and do not appear to conflict. Furthermore, much like the discussion of *Planet of the Apes*, there is a call for aesthetic continuity in the remaking of *The Wolfman*’s special effects. Baker’s reputation as a practical special effects make-up artist could be seen as part of that continuity from the original make-up applied by Jack Pierce. However, unlike the discussion that surrounds *Planet of the Apes*, there seems to be a specific discussion of the techniques that are used to update the special effects. Some critics are excited to see this new interpretation of the werewolf transformation, looking toward the novelty of new technology reinterpreting old images, while others perhaps present a bit more caution.

Interestingly, it is the writers for newspapers that fit into the former category, while Richards, writing for a popular film magazine, is keen for a more traditional werewolf transformation. Either way, Baker is seen as a valuable and visible figure in these discussions.

Despite Baker's optimism with this opportunity to remake a classic horror movie make-up transformation using modern technology, there were also concerns around how digital effects changed the way *The Wolfman* and its effects were made. According to *Metamorphosis*, Baker joined the production 'about eight months before principal photography was to start in March 2008 [...] and the artist was given about two weeks to come up with some wolfman design' (Rinzler, 2019b, p. 266). As Baker would later recount, while he provided Romanek and the producers with multiple designs painted digitally, the director 'didn't like the results or any of the concepts' and would ask for more and more minute changes (p. 266). It was not just Romanek who was providing feedback, but the producers as well. Later, Baker wrote in his biography that the process:

sucks your soul out and your heart and your passion, you work really hard on a design, and you know that it's just one of a thousand that you're going to do. And everybody's got input, and it just becomes this watered-down mess. It was much better when it was an artist's vision, not a dozen people and a thousand drawings.

(p. 268)

This is the first example of Baker's feelings of being 'pushed out' during the production of *The Wolfman*. This is because it was not just the director that wanted to have control of the look of the special effects, but producers and other members of the production. From Baker's own words, told after the fact, he implies that the process stifled his creativity.

However, we should also be aware that this version of history comes from Baker himself, told over ten years after the fact. Thus, he has the space and focus in order to present his own version of the production history. As with his narrative around *KKII*, Baker places himself as a victim of the production, and as such, this account can be viewed as another

example of Baker's 'against-all-odds' stories.¹⁰⁰ Here he 'underscores the humble, unexceptional origins need to create the rising action and dramatic arc of the classic myth of heroism' (Caldwell, 2008, p. 40). Baker is the hero of this narrative specifically as it relates to the way in which 'industrial exclusion suggest[s] that the craftsman has the related ability to make art of creatively innovate with few temporal or financial resources and support' (p. 41). Baker, now at the whims of the industry, the growing reliance on CGI has changed how he engages with his colleagues and how his colleagues engage with him and his work.

Mark Romanek would ultimately leave the project. Both Borys Kit of *The Hollywood Reporter* and Mark Salisbury for *Time Out* would quote budgeting disagreements as the main reason for the split (Kit, 2008, p. 1; Salisbury, 2010b; p. 70). The person who was eventually found to fill the role was Joe Johnston, the director behind special-effects-heavy films like *Jurassic Park III* (2001) and *The Rocketeer* (1991). This late addition would have a major effect on *The Wolfman*'s special effects, as Johnston himself noted in an interview with *Cinematical*'s Kevin Kelly:

I know that Rick originally thought that he would do the transformations with mechanisms and prosthetics and rubber, like the way he had done with *An American Werewolf in London*. And nobody does that kind of stuff better than Rick, obviously. But the problem I had was I was coming in starting three weeks from principal photography, and in order to have Rick do the transformation, I would have to decide almost immediately exactly what the stages of the transformation were. And by letting them be CG, I could make those decisions deep into post.

(Kelly, 2010b)

Johnston gives a valid reason for using CGI instead of practical effects, which Baker appears to agree with. After all, Baker was among the first to say that high-quality special effects make-up requires time and money. The studio had also set a limited budget due to the risk they felt they were taking with the project. While Johnston is ultimately positive about Baker, aware of

¹⁰⁰ Here referring to Caldwell's theories on below-the-line workers and the narratives they tell.

his reputation and complimentary about his work, his decision came down to the ease of digital, allowing for more time to discuss and design the effects as they would be implemented in post-production. Johnston's quote offers a counterpoint and expansion on the production history of *The Wolfman*. While this thesis is focused on special effects, it is essential to acknowledge that this is only one strand of history. More issues with budgeting and time constraints also affected how the special effects became a secondary consideration.

Cinefex would offer an interesting counterpoint to Johnston's reasoning why he would use CGI to create the werewolf transformation. As a specialist publication targeted at special effects producers and fans, *Cinefex* covers film production from the point of view of those technicians, as well as the technical 'how-they-made-it' information aimed at special effects enthusiasts. *Cinefex* allowed Baker to vent his frustration, as much as he was able, with the production. As Joe Fordham would report 'the decision to abandon juxtapositions of puppetry and digital effects in favor of a wholly digital transformation was frustrating for the creative team' (Fordham, 2010, p. 45). Furthermore, as Dave Elsey⁶ recounts, this decision was not communicated to the team:

[W]e were building animatronics for the transformations right up to the day that they were scheduled to shoot [...] we had people on night shifts and day shifts, working weekends. And then we sat around with our crew standing by, waiting, and then the day was over, and we didn't shoot it.

(p. 45)

Although the narrative of difficulty does not come from Baker himself,¹⁰¹ the above comment also serves as another important reminder that he was not working on these projects alone. While Baker is certainly the most visible outside of special effects-specific publications, the inclusion of other voices is important when understanding how special effects are produced.

¹⁰¹ Though Baker did have complaints about the production in the *Cinefex* article and his biography after the fact.

As Elsey describes, the practical special effects crew were treated as secondary. This moves beyond the tongue-in-cheek ‘snark-discourse’, as described by Bird and Caldwell, as it places the frustration front and centre. Ultimately, Elsey’s grievances seem closer to Caldwell’s ‘making-it sagas’ or ‘cautionary tales’, which he identifies as a way for the unregulated sectors to enact career salvage operations (2008, p. 38). This also can be said to illustrate how the practical special effects technicians have moved further down the hierarchy of production cultures to below-the-line workers, as there is a level of precarity in special effects production due to a greater amount of competition and specialisation in effects work.¹⁰² Similarly, this statement:

[O]ffer[s] a goldmine of information about how media industries actually work on the ground. Taken together, they provide incredibly specific insights into economic and labour conditions for creative workers, new technology theorizing and damning critiques of the industry as a whole.

(Caldwell, 2013b, p. 724).

The information that industry-focused publications, like *Cinefex*, allow researchers to see are these snapshots of moments in film production history and the economic motivations behind these decisions. In the case of *The Wolfman*, while the issues in production also stem from the classic issues of time and money, there is also the issue of computer-generated effects affecting the method of production.

Despite the production problems and director replacements, *The Wolfman* was finally released in time for Valentine’s Day weekend, 2010. It is clear from the pre-release reporting that the perception of *The Wolfman*’s special effects and Baker’s position within the production is a complicated one. Baker is clearly visible within these discussions as a recognisable name. His reputation for werewolf special effects, gained from his work on *An American Werewolf in London*, also brings to the production a sense of authenticity. However, there was a divide

¹⁰² As evidenced by the ever-lengthening credits of MCU films.

in critical discussion on the proposed special effects. While some considered Baker's presence as a calming one that would imply the use of practical effects and also denote a continuity of aesthetics from the original Universal Monster Movie, other critics were excited by the prospect of including digital effects as a novel way of visualising werewolf transformations. This seems somewhat guided by how the production would present information about the special effects. Once again, Baker was placed centrally in the coverage, which in turn allowed the producers to say that they would be using more practical effects than were ultimately used. Then, when Joe Johnston took over the reins, he made the practical decision to use CGI to complete a sizable majority of the werewolf transformation effects. Nevertheless, producers were still claiming the use of practical effects, albeit they hedged this with discussions of how they have also had to update certain things. Here, Baker's presence implied both a sense of aesthetic continuity and a reassurance to critics that the changes were not going to be too drastic, despite the fact that due to time constraints and cost *The Wolfman* would rely on CGI. With the pre-release discussions of *The Wolfman* and its special effects, as presented by the producers, it now becomes important to compare these to how the critics actually responded to the film upon its release.

Left to the Wolves: Critical Reception and Computer-Generated Images in *The Wolfman*

Despite the delays and problems in production, Kim Newman in his review of *The Wolfman* for *Sight and Sound* writes that:

Rick Baker reinvented the werewolf transformation scene a generation ago in *An American Werewolf in London* and revised Jack P Pierce's Henry Hull werewolf look for *Wolf* (1994); here in collaboration with designer Dave Elsey, he delivers a creature that looks fearsome.

(2010, p 81).

Here Newman recognises Baker's reputation, linking his earlier work and previous types of werewolf make-up. This legitimises Baker as part of a tradition of make-up and design through

repetition of the original effects. Once again, his name is used as a mark of quality and legacy. What is also interesting here is that Baker, while not the only person who worked on the creature, is the only one with the star power to be credited.

This visibility of Baker allows for positive responses to the effects. As Barbara Vancheri for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* says, ‘the best thing about *The Wolfman* may be the Rick Baker makeup and Mr Del Toro’s terrifying transformation’ (2010, p. E-1). Similarly, *The Waterloo Chronicle* comments that by:

combining computer animation and makeup effects by creature maestro Rick Baker, Del Toro’s transformation into a werewolf is pretty gnarly. The metamorphosis certainly is cooler than that of last fall’s *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* where shirtless hunks turned into wolves the size of Buicks in the blink of an eye.

(2010a, p. 1)

The article praises the production for the way it combines old and new technologies. Furthermore, the novelty of seeing this new method of transformation come from the hand of someone with Baker’s legacy suggests a mark of quality, contributing as it does to the construction of an artistic brand for him. However, there is also something interesting in the comparison to the *Twilight* series, namely an apparent lack of process. While this is not stated overtly, it could speak to the unreality of the CGI effects, breaking the perceptual realism of the werewolves. Similarly, as Del Toro changes from one state to another, there is a lack of physicality that is present in *The Wolfman*. Significantly, this review goes on to note that; Baker and his colleagues on *An American Werewolf in London* still did the man-to-werewolf makeover much more viscerally nearly 30 years ago’ (2010a, p. 1). This introduces the idea that the novelty of watching a man turn into a beast may be wearing off. Indeed, Shaun de Waal, reviewing *The Wolfman* for *The Mail and Guardian*, observes that:

Once the movie starts, it’s just a matter of waiting for the spectacular transformation. When it comes it’s less of a set-piece than Landis’s lupine transformation of his all-American protagonist, but then my memories of that

film are now at least 20 years old and I might not be so impressed were I to see it again today. In some ways, special effects have got more, er, special.

(2010).

As this review acknowledges, the main reason or main attraction for a werewolf movie is the transformation, the act of man turning into a beast. However, the connections made between Baker's Oscar-winning make-up transformation in *American Werewolf* and *The Wolfman*, while also being used to legitimise the film, can also act as a negative. Instead of being a remake of the original *Wolf Man*, the transformation in *The Wolfman* becomes a remake of *American Werewolf*. De Waal's discussion of Baker's reputation again reveals that *An American Werewolf in London* has clearly entered the cultural zeitgeist as the werewolf transformation that others will be compared to. Similarly, it speaks directly to how novelty and the new determine special effects quality. Because these things have been 'better' or rather they have been done before, the fact that people are seeing it again makes them lesser, in an odd sort of call back to Gunning's 'The Cinema of Attractions' or this idea that novelty is a mark of quality in special effects. Thus, because Baker is almost repeating himself, his effects are perceived to be of less quality than those he had made previously.

Other critics, however, are negative about the film's effects in their own right. For example, Kevin Lynch's review in *The Mirror*'s quips that *The Wolfman* has 'a monster resembling Bungle from the kids show *Rainbow*, if this mangy mongrel limped into a vets, it would be put down on the spot' (2010, p. 8-9). Furthermore, Benjamin Mercer, writing for *Atlantic Online*, opines that *The Wolfman* is:

not good enough to repay any emotional investment in its characters, and it's not bad enough to induce consistent derisive laughter (Though the awkward mix of unconvincing CGI and man-in-suit makeup by legendary Rick Baker, does so fitfully).

(2010)

These reviews can be seen as early hints of a negative reception to the special effects. While the announcement of Baker's working with digital artists was originally seen as an exciting and novel method of lycanthropic transformation, there is a strong negative reaction to the way this is executed in the film.

There is an overall conflicted discussion of Baker's effects and their meshing with computer-generated imagery. Indeed, Helen O'Hara adds, in her review of *The Wolfman* published in the April 2010 edition of *Empire*, that:

The pieces largely work, but they never work together – rather like the wolfman's transformation. While the film's commitment to the man-in-suit model of special effects is in keeping with the filmmakers obvious love of the original movie, with werewolf supremo Rick Baker delivering an impressively mobile result, the mixture of CG transformation and furry prosthetics never quite ring true.

(2010, p. 52)

O'Hara's review unpicks the narrative put forward by the crew wherein the CGI and practical effects can act in tandem. She is aware of the connection the practical effects have with the original but is unconvinced that modern techniques can update the transformation in the way that is promised, so signalling a return to the tension between new technology, traditional techniques and aesthetic nostalgia. Indeed, as Bode argues, as media audiences become more technologically savvy, they are no longer fooled by older effects (2018). This seems to have combined somewhat with the issues of connection and comparison in film remakes put forward by Verevis (2006). Baker ties the effects to older aesthetics of practical transformations that audiences have seen before to assert aesthetic consistency or respect for the original film. However, because of this connection, the review challenges the idea of technological advancement as a marker of quality for a special effect, as O'Hara has seen the same kinds of effects in the original *Wolf Man* and *American Werewolf*.

However, the dominant narrative within the reception of *The Wolfman*'s special effects is that of the conflict between the digital and the practical. As John Gholson writes, in his review of *The Wolfman* for *Cinematical*, despite the film being subpar, he 'can mostly forgive *The Wolfman* for being such a hollow experience because [he likes] Rick Baker's make-up work (though the film is chock full of rubbery, unconvincing CGI at every turn' (2010). Here we see Gholson attempting to assemble a hierarchy of effects by comparing CGI and Baker's practical make-up. This hierarchy that places Baker above the CGI effects feeds into Prince's assertion that the negativity toward computer-generated effects is based in the presumption that cinema's purpose is indexical in nature. It is also interesting that, despite Baker's own effects being made of rubber, the computer effects are spotlighted for how they look. Baker's effects can be seen to have reality. In-camera effects that need to be filmed are seen as having a kind of reality, or at least a greater reality than the digital visual effects. However, there is an assumption that the two departments of special effects were in conflict or distinct from each other, including over the way in which the special effects were presented. But as discussed in the production history of *The Wolfman*, this is perhaps not the truth. While Baker was indeed squeezed out of the production, this was not the "fault" of the visual effects department, rather it was an issue of time management and budget.

This narrative of conflict is continued by A.O Scott who writes, in a February 2010 issue of *The New York Times*, that 'when Mr. Del Toro is shown, in close-up decked out in furry masks and Rick Baker's makeup effects, a hint of old-fashioned handmade horror style creeps into the film' (2010, p. 10). He continues:

[W]hen the computer-generated monstrosities take over much of the Gothic fun leaks out of the picture, which has already nearly drowned in viscera and gore. The implied violence of the original gives way to a literal-minded bloodbath, with severed heads and limbs and lingering attention to the effects of lupine claws and teeth on human flesh.

(p. 10).

Roger Ebert continues in a similarly negative vein:

The film has one flaw, and faithful readers will not be surprised to find it involves the special effects by CGI. No doubt there are whole scenes done so well in CGI I didn't even spot them; but when the wolf-creature bounds through the forest, he does so with too much speed. The wolfman moves so lightly here he almost cries out: Look! I'm animated!

(2010).

Again, the hierarchy of effects is on full display. Not only does Ebert express his dislike of the use of CGI, but he speaks directly to the breaking of perceptual realism. Through this, he feels that the werewolf does not interact with the world as would be expected. Scott, on the other hand, is more interested in the overwhelming spectacle of CGI. What is interesting is his discussions focus on a shift in genre. The practical effects are tied with an elevated, more legitimate form of horror over the baser gory spectacle of the digital effects. The value judgements are clear as Scott attempts to delegitimise the use of CGI by attaching it to an overwhelming spectacle.

The ways in which critics place the practical effects against the digital is a narrative that is not held by Baker himself. In a 2010 interview with *Cinematical's* Kevin Kelly Baker, he comments, 'people always try to pit the rubber guys against the digital guys. It is another tool. It is another trick in your bag of tricks' (2010b). He even says that if he was in charge of the whole transformation, he 'would have used a lot of CG. [he thought] it would be crazy not to' (2010b). This challenges the usual understanding critics have of those who practise special effects, viewing them in a hierarchal conflict. While critics are wary of modernising the Universal Wolfman with digital fur and fangs, directors and producers marvel at computer-generated imagery's ease of use and its cost-effectiveness compared to prosthetics, with those that work in special effects viewing it as another tool in their arsenal of movie magic.

The critical reception of *The Wolfman* provides another interesting perspective on special effects. While there are similar narratives, such as Baker's name brand recognition, that

have been discussed in previous chapters, the issues of remaking effects and the issues of spectacle as well as the inclusion of digital visual effects add more dimensions to the discussion. As with the effects of *KKII*, critics are here presenting a hierarchy of effects and aesthetics based on a kind of technical nostalgia, one that challenges the notion that novelty underpins the quality of special effects. Here, however, there is also a certain excitement to see the new technology on display, with effects formulated by Rick Baker, whose star image has been fully crystallised in the film press. Yet upon the film's release, the critics positioned the different kinds of effects in conflict, presenting this as a battle for dominance and relevancy in the film industry. The digital effects are here positioned as lower due to their perceived unreality, as critics appear to separate them out into a different kind of film entirely; a more spectacular film that seeks to interrupt and subsume the quieter, more traditional horror of the practical effects. This, like the way critics report on the production history, is challenged by the special effects crew's own perspectives, who view CGI as a new tool to use in their craft.

Conclusion: Survival of the Fittest

While the process of bringing 2010's *The Wolfman* to the screen was difficult, Baker was to receive another Oscar for his collection. His reputation as one of the greatest make-up artists was further solidified by the addition of his star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on the 7th of December 2012. However, in a prophetic interview for *Hero Complex* in May 2012, he discusses the fate of Jack Pierce, the legendary universal make-up artist who created the iconic looks for Boris Karloff's Frankenstein's Monster and Lon Chaney Jr's Wolfman, saying:

Jack didn't progress with the times and in early 1940 they booted him out of Universal. It was just a sad story that this guy actually saved the studio, and then all of a sudden he didn't have a job. I learned a lesson from that. I wanted to make sure to always stay current, try to find new material and stay with the modern techniques. And half the time I invented my own techniques, just because I didn't want to have that happen to me. Plus it's just fun to find new ways to do things.

(Clark, 2012)

Two years later Baker would retire from working on special effects make up for good. Although he never stated it outrightly, Baker's time working on *The Wolfman* appears to have affected his decision.

It was clear by the way *The Wolfman*'s production was handled that there was a lack of communication between the special effects people and the rest of the film. While Baker pursued this role assuming that he would be in charge of the transformation, due to his star power, decisions on his effects were left until the last minute, and even removed entirely. Unfortunately, this was due to the budgetary and time constraints suffered in the production, which led one director to leave and another to join soon before filming was due to begin. The encroachment of CGI as a time and money-saving technique meant that, for the most part, his effects and expertise were mostly left at the wayside.

However, how the production difficulties were reported in the press also suggests there were issues with the effects themselves. There is tension in this reporting, with some critics excited about the inclusion of new technology updating a classic film scene, while others see the inclusion of CGI as a more threatening presence. This tension can also be seen by the ways in which Baker was situated as part of the film production. His name was added as a means of legitimising the film and its effects, providing an aesthetic similarity between the original make-up and the modern master of monster making. He was a point of continuity who was known for *American Werewolf*, with the producers using his reputation assuage fans who were worried that *The Wolfman* would be too full of CGI. However, in truth, his role was minimalised within the film's production.

While *The Wolfman* itself received negative reviews, Baker and his effects were seen as highlights, for the most part. However, there was criticism for the inclusion of computer-generated images. This is where a perceived narrative of conflict between the different effects

departments becomes apparent. While Baker was still a mark of quality, and his stardom seemed all but assured, the digital effects seemed to overwhelm his practical effects and turn *The Wolfman* into a different film in the eyes of critics. However, Baker, who worked with the digital effects team, would later counteract the narrative of conflict between the practical and digital. What is interesting, though is that while Baker's name was used as a legitimising presence in *The Wolfman*, his overt connection to previous werewolf transformations removed the quality of novelty from the effects, so damning the effects as remakes, both of the original *Wolf Man* transformation but also of Baker's own work on *American Werewolf*.

This closing chapter of this thesis, covering as it does the 'closing chapter' of Baker's career, aims to offer insights into the perception of special effects at the turn of the 2010s. Much like those silent stars who could not maintain their fame in the age of sound, Baker's practical effects make-up could not compete with these new digital monsters. This period of special effects history was a turbulent and exciting one. Due to the industrial, economic and technological developments, there was a restructuring of special effects in general, one that deserves a specific and targeted examination. There was also a growth in specialisations as contractors in a race to the bottom strived to be competitive. While this chapter has focused on Baker and *The Wolfman* specifically, the industrial changes also stand out as a factor that should be taken into account while examining this period of special effects history.

As we have seen, there was also a resurgence in the perceived hierarchy of effects techniques, specifically in relation to *The Wolfman*, especially in the divide between computer-generated and practical effects. This is also worth exploring further, beyond this one case study. Most academics assert that the hierarchy constructed is in part due to the lack of physicality or challenge to the indexical nature of film. However, the assertions that digital effects' unreality is the main cause for the delegitimisation of CGI at this period of film history is something that

also could be examined. Surely, there are other factors that contribute to this narrative. Baker and *The Wolfman* is only one part of this period of effects production.

Conclusions – Silicon’s Short Shelf Life

Following a two-year break after *The Wolfman*, Baker’s next project, *Men in Black 3* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 2012), was reported to be a return to form in terms of his make-up effects and his enjoyment of the process. Bart Mixon¹⁰³ claimed that after the issues with *The Wolfman* ‘it was like the old Rick, where he was running around building stuff [...] he was really happy, and he was very enthusiastic, and he was doing some really cool shit’ (Rinzler, 2019b, p. 303). This was one of the largest projects that Rick Baker had worked on, involving as it did some 127 different aliens inspired by the crew’s ‘collective knowledge of sci-fi/horror movies and literature, that vast B-movie and TV-series treasure’ (p. 286).

However, after 2014’s *Maleficent* (Robert Stromberg), Rick Baker announced to the Southern Californian radio station KPCC 89.3FM, on the 27th of May 2015, ‘I’m kind of basically retiring from the film industry’ (Lance, 2015). In this interview, Baker cites a changed industrial landscape, claiming, ‘the time is right, I am 64 years old, and the business is crazy right now. I live to do things right, and they wanted cheap and fast. That is not what I want to do, so I decided it is basically time to get out’ (2015). Baker added that ‘the CGI stuff definitely took away the animatronics part of what I do. It’s also started to take away the make-up part’ (2015). He continues to say that ‘big make-up films don’t seem to exist anymore, and I was hoping that something would come along. I did *Men in Black 3*, which was good for that, but the last film I did was *Maleficent*, and I could’ve done that in a garage basically’ (2015). There were personal reasons for retirement as well, as Baker said, after the death of his parents and his mentor Dick Smith. ‘if I have to keep taking jobs just to pay for my studio’ he adds, ‘I will never have the time to do all of the things that I really want to do [So] I thought to myself, If I die working on a project that I have taken just to help pay for my studio, I would be pissed’

¹⁰³ Best known for his work on work on the TV mini-series *IT* (Tommy Lee Wallace, 1990) as well as work in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

(Rinzler, 2019b, p. 322). He auctioned his collection of prosthetic appliances, moulds, animatronic armatures and props with The Prop Store,¹⁰⁴ and a career that had spanned four decades, seven Oscar wins, and a star on the Walk of Fame was over.

As this thesis concludes its exploration of the perception of Rick Baker, it is important to return to the question posed in the introduction; How, why, and in what way does the discourse surrounding Rick Baker's practical creature effects change over time? As this thesis has revealed, there are many factors that affect the discourse surrounding Baker and his effects, ranging from genre, star recognition, authorial responsibility, remakes, new technology and the industrial context of release. Also, as the research has shown, Baker, as a special effects practitioner, stands as a locus of several discursive crossroads within film history and special effects. His career has seen him engage with the birth of the modern blockbuster, the creation of more overt industrial recognition, different genres, the rise of fantasy television, as well as the remaking effects, and the early days of digital imagery. As such, he stands as an important figure worthy of exploration.

However, visibility is one of the surprising, yet obvious, factors that is key to the changing discourse surrounding Baker and his effects. This is no surprise, as special effects are a visual aspect of an ostensibly visual medium. More of a surprise is the revelation, as discovered in the course of this research, that despite the differences between the case studies used, each one provided unique perspectives on how visible special effects and the artists that created them were. In Chapter One, *KKII* provided a case study for the visible overpromises of a special effects-driven spectacle, the deviation from an original aesthetic in a remake, and the downplaying of Baker's involvement. Chapter Two dealt with Rick Baker's rising stardom in the wake of his work on *American Werewolf*. It followed his beginnings as a below-the-line

¹⁰⁴ An auction house specialising in film props established in 1998 by Stephen Lane.

figure and charted his ability to move between the line that separates technicians from above-the-line artists. This chapter also charted the importance of special effects in a film's legacy. Chapter Three confronted the invisible spectacle of the real in *Greystoke* and *Gorillas in the Mist* and directly addressed the manufactured reality that comes from rendering special effects unseen. Chapter Four engaged with the gendered responses to both special effects and genre in the television show *Beauty and the Beast*, exploring the act of seeing past special effects and the over-importance of Baker-as-name in different methods of special effects production. Chapter Five explored the tension between aesthetic nostalgia and technological novelty at the heart of remaking *Planet of the Apes*' special effects while examining how these fit into the hierarchies of narrative and spectacle within blockbuster discourse. Finally, Chapter Six examined Baker's relationship to new digital technologies in the production of *The Wolfman*, while identifying how the industry used computer-generated images and how the critical press viewed their implementation concerning issues of remaking a cult classic.

Through this study of Rick Baker and the range of his career and his special effects, this thesis has hoped to 'make up for the impossibility of fully accounting for this range by formulating a few provisional hypotheses about what makes certain types of visual effects imagery special, about why these matter, and for whom' (Pierson, 2002, p. 159). In an age that sees the dominance of special effects-driven blockbusters yet still holds 'the idea of illusion [as] the negative characterisation of mass culture against high art' (Allen, 1995, p. 81), examinations of special effects and how certain audiences perceive them, and why, is particularly relevant. This exploration has also unearthed a number of value judgements within the critical and production discourses surrounding special effects. Chapters One, Five and Six all posited that the hierarchy imposed on the remaking of films has similarly affected the perception of special effects within *KKII*, *Planet of the Apes* and *The Wolfman*. Aesthetic

nostalgia and franchise verisimilitude can all override the quality of novelty attached to special effects technology, particularly when audiences find their expectations challenged.

Similarly, there is also a hierarchy imposed on genre, and what kinds of genres are expected to have special effects. As Chapter Four demonstrates, the complicated identification game changed how *Beauty and the Beast's* effects were seen, based on the genre that critics assumed the show to be. This can also be affected by a hierarchy of gender, with specific genres considered lesser than others due to their association with the female gender. While this is not new in film studies, the specific application of this theory to special effects, as seen in this chapter, may offer up a unique angle.

Meanwhile, Chapter Three argued that issues of realism allowed for the obfuscation of the special effects in *Greystoke* and *Gorillas in the Mist*. This realism speaks to the perceived quality of special effects when they go unnoticed by the public. In these terms, a visible special effect can be a mark against a film. In turn, this relates to and expands upon the already much-discussed conflict between narrative and spectacle. The more noticeable and intrusive the effects are, the more they are seen as interrupting the narrative elements, and so the more they are criticised. As outlined in his chapter, even when the effects are considered to be of 'good quality', it is not enough to save a film from being delegitimised in the eyes of some sections of the film press. As we have seen, this can be used to further condemn a film, with critics accusing the effects and the spectacle of being a 'crutch' that covers up a poor plot.

Furthermore, the film critics who guide taste conversation around film and perceptions of film can decide what is and what is not a valid aspect of the film production. However, critics are themselves not free from being classified. As Bourdieu argues, 'the social agents whom the sociologist classifies are producers not only of classifiable acts but also acts of classification which are themselves classified' (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 469). The critics

themselves, through their publication - whether it be a newspaper, genre fan magazine or industry periodical - make their own value judgements based on what is considered to be important to readers. Thus, the perception of Baker and his special effects, in general, is a varied and dynamic multitude of narratives and discussions.

However, the question this thesis poses remains partially unanswered. As Bourdieu argues, ‘those who suppose they are producing a materialist theory of knowledge [...] forget that all knowledge, and in particular all knowledge of the social world, is an act of construction’ (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 469). In that regard, through its focus on Baker, this thesis has constructed a particular type of history. Although I have tried to remain aware of this hazard and avoid it where possible, the lens used to observe this specific film history has shaped it into the history of Rick Baker. While this research has attempted to examine the perception and discussion surrounding Baker and his effects, it is also essential to acknowledge the bias that the methods used have imposed upon the piece. Firstly, focusing on the singular figure in parts has led to a certain shortsightedness in other areas. As Maule observes, within film studies, there is a ‘conflict between the notion of individual expression, on the one hand, and the status of cinema as a social practice based on collective and commercial activities on the other’ (2008, p. 14). While Baker exemplifies some of the issues that plague the perception of special effects, he is not the only figure at work during this time.

Furthermore, while touched on, there is still room for expansion on the tension between Baker, as a name within special effects, and those he employs to help with the more technical aspects of the fabrication and application process, who, unlike Baker, are stuck within obscurity. As an archetypal example of the collaborative form of filmmaking, special effects provide excellent grounds to examine the division and perception of labour and the tension between art and technology. The issue of gender is also something worthy of investigation. Film production and especially special effects are an ostensibly male space, while make-up is

one of the few areas of filmmaking that women dominate. In his context, make-up special effects can offer up fertile ground for exploring how gender impacts film production, position and perception, especially when there are hierarchies of technique designating what is counted as a special effect and what is not.

Through examining Baker's momentum through film history, this thesis has briefly touched on areas and periods worthy of further examination. As James Chapman concludes, 'for much of the history of film as an academic subject, the argument seems to have been about whether to privilege either text *or* context' (2013, pp. 128-129). Chapman also defines the problems with textual studies as 'detaching films entirely from the material conditions in which they are produced and consumed' (p. 129). In the case of this type of study, an overly textual analysis would ignore the external factors that affect the perception of the films special effects. On the other hand, a context-focused study 'does not allow either for the culturally specific meanings of films for their audiences or for the very real aesthetic and stylistic differences between films' (p. 129), meaning that the specificity of each text is ignored. The aim in writing this thesis has been to combine these to understand 'films *as films* but also in relation to their institutional, economic, social and cultural contexts' (p. 129). Another aim of this thesis has been to combine both historical context with the text itself, allowing for a more holistic interaction between the film, how it was made, Baker's effects, and the perceptions of them within the film press. However, due to the method and structure of the research, there has been more focus on Rick Baker, the man, rather than the periods that he existed within. As such, it would be worth revisiting these periods and areas, which I feel are ripe for scholastic examination.

Chapter One, as well as touching on the birth of the modern blockbuster outside of *Jaws* and *Star Wars* - another vital area worth further exploration - reveals a smaller subset of examinations to be made about so-called 'bad special effects'. While issues of realism were

revealed to be a part of a marker of quality, this feels like a simplistic and incomplete answer. Are there other factors to consider in placing effects into this category? Do they hold any cultural value or importance? Furthermore, with the rise in fantasy television ‘of quality’ it is perhaps worthy of examining the place of special effects within different modes of production all the more. Chapter Four raises interesting and dynamic questions that this work only briefly evaluates in regard to one series. This leads to more specific questions related to the production of special effects for television. What is the workflow in making special effects throughout a series? Do outside contractors make them? How is labour and credit circulated and attributed?

However, perhaps most interesting is the period when Baker put down his sculpting tools. This happens during a time when, as North, Rehak and Duffy point out, the industrial world of visual effects shrinks and the closing down of in-house effects staff. As North et al observe, today, ‘effects houses, which may specialise in very specific types of visual effects (for example, particle systems, virtual actors, matte painting), must bid competitively for the chance to complete certain scenes or even individual shots for films’ (2015, pp. 2-3). The historical development of digital technology, the effect of these tools on previous special effects practices, and the economic and industrial shifts that took place in Hollywood more generally are also ripe for academic exploration. Similarly, the responses that film critics to these effects, outside of technologically driven magazines, like the ones covered by Michele Pierson in her work, have caused fascinating problems in this examination. While Stephen Prince points to one explanation for this critical distrust of digital effects, tying it to the breakdown of the cinematic mode of indexicality, however, much like the judgement of bad special effects, this feels like only half an answer.

There is also an obvious bias toward the Hollywood history of special effects. While this thesis touches on the work of the Italian special effects artist Carlo Rambaldi, there is still much work to be done on situating Baker and his special effects in a more global context. For

example, the mention of and castigation of *Godzilla vs King Kong* is fascinating as a transnational value judgement, as it speaks to the separation of national special effects practices on lines of taste and technique. As Chris Berry argues, ‘the blockbuster is no longer American owned’ (2003, p. 218); it should be the same for the special effects that are a significant factor in the production of the spectacle within those blockbusters.

This research has also expanded on and challenged previous writings on special effects, such as those of Michele Pierson and Stephen Prince. Pierson, in particular, has provided several key models to understand how viewers engaged with and discuss special effects within industry-specific texts while also providing the method for this thesis that could be used to apply to case studies. Firstly, Pierson noted that the acts of appreciation and connoisseurship are in full effect within the critical reception of Baker’s effects in genre publications like *Cinefantastique* and *Fangoria*. Meanwhile, *Cinefex* and *American Cinematographer* provide more technical examinations of Baker’s work. While Pierson discusses the function that these types of publications had within the construction of these areas of fannish devotion, this research has aimed to explore the way critics guide and construct the discussions of the effects within the context of the films they are placed within, rather than purely based on their technological development. By examining newspapers and general press, rather than special interest publications, this research applied these narratives to specific case studies in order to assess their validity and to add to them.

These new sources provided more exciting challenges to these modes of thinking by defining a hierarchy of taste and power within film discussions and how special effects fit into them. More than that, they also revealed a range of different perceptions of special effects. While more technological-focused publications created a criteria of quality focused on novelty and technological development, an exploration of more general sources revealed that critics are also concerned with aesthetic continuation, especially in cases of remakes of previous special

effects. Chapters one and five, in particular, have revealed this, through the examination of how critics delegitimised *KKII* because it deviated from the original aesthetics of what made *King Kong*, while they praised the effects in *Planet of the Apes* due to the connection the remake had to the original.

Furthermore, the period explored allowed for something of a completion of special effects history. As mentioned in the introduction of this research, most critics tend to jump from the early cinematic effects to the development of the digital. Returning to those areas that are under-examined due to the perception that they are less important, in comparison to the development of digital imaging technology, therefore becomes essential. This thesis also contributes to a movement to revisit the birth of modern spectacle, one that Julie A Turnock also explores in her analysis of the blockbuster effects in *Star Wars*. This demonstrates that these are still exciting areas for a researcher to re-examine, both in terms of the development of film technology, but also film technique and aesthetics.

Similarly, while Pierson's focus on science fiction and digital technology makes a lot of sense as a genre that stages 'wondrous encounters with futuristic technologies' (2002, p. 160), this leaves not only the other fantasy genres left unexplored but also other special effects techniques. As Shilo T. McClean observes, 'as soon as one moves into the wider field of filmmaking, the nonspectacular uses of effects become more apparent and the nonspectacular uses of effects with the traditional genres also becomes obvious' (2007, p. 72). With regards to chapter three, and to a lesser extent, chapter four, the nature of *Greystoke*, *Gorillas in the Mist* and *Beauty and the Beast*'s genre is heavily affected by the perception of the special effects. Therefore, it is important to view special effects not as things that are limited to the overtly fantastical, but as part of the mechanics of filmmaking as a whole.

It is hoped that this thesis has carved a valuable space for the re-examination of practical make-up effects in future scholarship. It was never intended to create a divide between digital and practical effects, but there needs to be recognition and examination of these effects in constructing filmgoing memories. While there are philosophical ramifications for the development of digital visual effects, there are also similar issues to develop and discuss in practical and make-up effects. It is essential that we examine how, within the hundred-plus years of film history, these practical effects have helped to manufacture reality for viewers.

Although this examination was focused explicitly on Rick Baker, in its structure and method, as one of the first long-form examinations of a special effects practitioner, it may also provide a model for examinations of similar figures. Future researchers may see and apply the approach taken here to others, such as Rob Bottin, Dick Smith, Stan Winston and Tom Savini. Like Baker, these so-called ‘below-the-line’ filmmakers challenge this understanding that the special effects artist is invisible. When approaching the modern cinematic landscape, where each special effects house specialises in smaller and smaller parts of the workflow, this challenge to the ‘invisibility’ of below-the-line workers becomes particularly important, as countless names are rendered invisible by the scale of the task of creating box office spectacle for these films.

Film technology seems to develop at an accelerated rate, as special effects artists are able to create alien worlds and magical creatures with more exactitude on a computer. However, practical effects still have a specific hold on the discussion of movie production. They are often replicated and discussed by avid fans, whether through the appreciation of craft or aesthetic nostalgia.¹⁰⁵ Through returning to and examining these practical effects, the hope

¹⁰⁵ In the case of this thesis that is due to a misty night in the west of England with *American Werewolf*.

is that this thesis has contributed to pulling back the layers of latex, glue and yak hair within this niche but engaging, exciting, and growing aspect of film studies.

Filmography

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