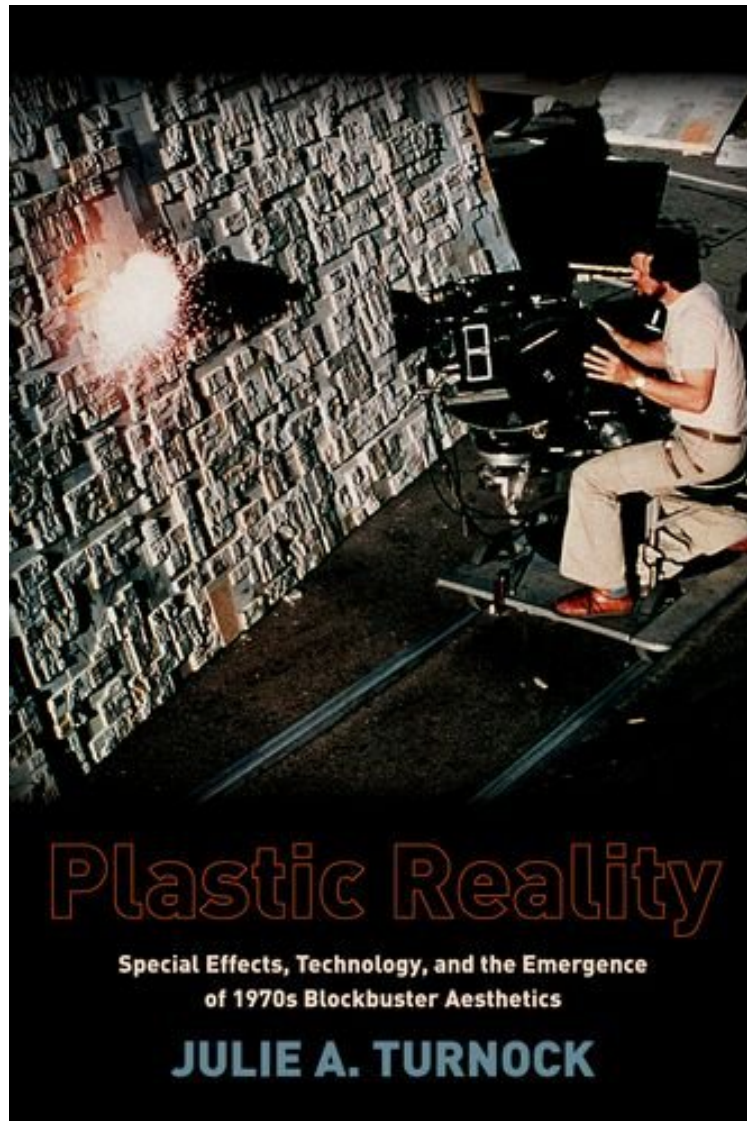


[Mobile pdf] Plastic Reality: Special Effects, Technology, and the Emergence of 1970s Blockbuster Aesthetics (Film and Culture Series)

Plastic Reality: Special Effects, Technology, and the Emergence of 1970s Blockbuster Aesthetics (Film and Culture Series)

Julie Turnock

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Julie Turnock : Plastic Reality: Special Effects, Technology, and the Emergence of 1970s Blockbuster Aesthetics (Film and Culture Series) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Plastic Reality: Special Effects, Technology, and the Emergence of 1970s Blockbuster Aesthetics (Film and Culture Series):

2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. outstanding analysis/insights, digs below the standard mythology

By C. Kollars

Within the realm of its subject (the "special effects" revolution heralded by the movies 'Star Wars' [the original Episode IV] and 'Close Encounters'), this is by leaps and bounds the broadest and deepest and most perceptive coverage I've ever read. It contains more information and more insight than all the other books I've read put together. Based purely on its analysis in its subject area, it could have been the standard against which other books are measured. So, I hear you asking, if the analysis is so great, why not a five-star rating? Well, the rating is my inadequate attempt to average together all the different aspects of the book. Despite the outstanding analysis, I felt this book should have had something different: maybe a much much longer gestation, or maybe a much more picky and detail-oriented editor, or maybe a really serious red pencil pass by a writer. The book includes not only the text but also Notes by chapter, a Bibliography, and an Index; all presented in familiar formats. The Notes are the newer way of organizing what used to be Footnotes. They're fairly numerous, something like the equivalent of a couple per page on average. The Bibliography is quite lengthy, but neither categorized by contents nor annotated (it is categorized by source). The index is extensive, and has an automated-then-edited or concordance look about it (although I really don't know). It should make the book more useful as a reference (although that's certainly not the book's primary purpose). Altogether the feeling I got was of a typical book produced by a scholar but sold to the general public. (And as usual -- despite targeting an amateur market-- these auxiliary materials will probably be of more use to scholars than to other types of readers.) Don't let the page count lead you to conclude the book is a giant thud-buster; it's not. The volume is actually rather small and thin. And the print is not crowded and is large enough to read comfortably. On the one hand it's true it's not a trivially short read -but on the other hand it's definitely not a major chore either. The macro-organization (parts, chapters, sections) is quite fine, bringing a reasonable structure to what could have been an inchoate mass. Faced with the typical choice between a chronological organization and a thematic organization, this book avoids both poles and instead chooses a hybrid. At the top level the sequence of parts each covers an era of time. And at the bottom level the sections are definitely thematic. Of course it's still not perfect; sometimes the same thing is referenced several times - but that's minor. It's the micro-organization (paragraphs, sentences) that I found problematic. Too often a paragraph would list two options, describe one of them in great detail, but then end without describing the other one. Or a related subject would be hinted at but no detail whatsoever provided, so the hint became a sort of "inside joke". Or something would make it clear the meat of the discussion was elsewhere, but there would be only a vague reference, not a section name (let alone a specific page number). Or a compound sentence whose two parts were barely related would appear. But take the previous paragraph with a grain of salt, because by the end I barely even noticed what had initially been so intensely irritating. Maybe I became acclimated to the somewhat fractured micro-structure. Or maybe some chapters were honed much more finely and so didn't present the same problems as the others. Or maybe I got more used to the initially novel analysis. Or ... Sometimes it felt a bit like I was perceiving only the presenter's audio track of a multi-media, interactive presentation - that I had no access to the visuals and pointer or to the audience reactions and exchanges. I felt like there was a logic to when the text moved on to a different topic, but I had no access to it. I found it annoying that frequently a novel and interesting term would be introduced, but be "defined" only incompletely, often by little more than plays on words. There was always enough description to make sense of the term's use in the current context. But I wished for a complete description (or at least the promise that one was coming). It turned out that all the terms were indeed eventually fully described, often somewhere in the last part. I wished that either many of the full descriptions had appeared much earlier, or else that I would at least have been given more confidence that full descriptions would eventually appear. In the meantime, my impression was often one of meandering around the term over and over again until finally all the little bits added up to something I could construct a full description out of myself. I especially regretted the paucity of visual examples. I wish there had been twenty times more pictures, some in color, with callouts (arrows and notes) right on the pictures, and with detailed and specific references from the text to each individual picture (rather than nothing more than an indication that "this page of pictures goes with that section"). For example there are many references to the "house style" of ILM (Industrial Light Magic), and to ILM's choice to eschew several other possible styles. My frequent frustrated reaction was SHOW ME. Give me illustrations of this "house style", and tell me specifically where to look and for what. And help me compare illustrations of some of the _other_ ways ILM could have gone, but didn't. There are also several references to the inconsistent (even chaotic) visual effects style in the original Star Wars. Again my frequent frustrated reaction was SHOW ME. Give me pictures of two different scenes from the movie, and point out the specific stylistic differences. Finally, there are quite a few references to excessive matte lines showing the borders of composited parts in Star Wars. Once again my reaction was SHOW ME. If matte lines don't show at the small picture sizes necessary for a book, then magnify a portion of the image (all the way to individual pixels if necessary). It was pretty obvious whenever there was an important and unique perception. I liked those parts very much. What I didn't like is there was hardly any provision for learning it for myself. The cogniscenti saw something, and from their description I grasped it was important, but initially I couldn't see it myself, and at the end I _still_ couldn't see it myself. There was no path I could follow to get just a little closer to being an independent cognoscenti myself. In summary, it depends on your purpose: If you're already somewhat familiar with the subject area, and would like to benefit from huge insights and

from manifold corrections to the "common wisdom", this is the book for you. But if you're seeking an Introduction or a Primer, this book may be more frustrating than enlightening.

Julie A. Turnock tracks the use and evolution of special effects in 1970s filmmaking, a development as revolutionary to film as the form's transition to sound in the 1920s. Beginning with the classical studio era's early approaches to special effects, she follows the industry's slow build toward the significant advances of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which set the stage for the groundbreaking achievements of 1977. Turnock analyzes the far-reaching impact of the convincing, absorbing, and seemingly unlimited fantasy environments of that year's iconic films, dedicating a major section of her book to the unparalleled innovations of *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. She then traces these films' technological, cultural, and aesthetic influence into the 1980s in the deployment of optical special effects as well as the "not-too-realistic" and hyper-realistic techniques of traditional stop motion and Showscan. She concludes with a critique of special effects practices in the 2000s and their implications for the future of filmmaking and the production and experience of other visual media.

With consummate research and clear explanations, Turnock shows how the special effects revolution actually took place before CGI and how the way the blockbusters of the late sixties and seventies, *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, introduced new conceptions of cinema's relation to reality and fantasy and how it relates to the cinema of today. (Tom Gunning, author of *Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*) Turnock's contribution is rich at multiple levels... *Plastic Reality* well merits pride of place within the burgeoning area of special effects study. (Film Quarterly) About the Author Julie A. Turnock is assistant professor of media and cinema studies at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.