



Kristen Whissel

The Digital Multitude: Visual Effects and the Spatialization of Time in Contemporary Cinema

Kristen Whissel is Associate Professor of Film Studies at UC Berkeley. She received her Ph.D. from Brown University in 1999, and has taught at Berkeley since 2003. Her book, *Picturing American Modernity: Traffic, Technology and the Silent Cinema* was published in 2008 by Duke University Press. This talk is from her current book project, *Digital Effects Cinema*.

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Communications 150

Over the past fifteen years, CG hordes, swarms, armies, armadas, flocks and crowds have appeared in popular films with the aid of motion capture technologies and software programs such as MASSIVE, Render Man, and Stadium Guy. Given the grand scale of digital multitudes (they often number in the tens or hundreds of thousands) and the overwhelming force they imply, digital multitudes often seem to emblemize the epic themes at work in contemporary visual effects films. Though films that feature such multitudes span a number of genres, they all use the digital multitude as an emblem for accelerated historical change; moreover, the digital multitude's spatial composition within the frame often amounts to the cinematic figuration of temporal or historical concepts such as "infinite," the "historical threshold," and "apocalypse." Focusing on films such as *Troy*, *The Two Towers*, *The Return of the King*, *I, Robot*, *Independence Day*, *300*, *Curse of the Golden Flower*, and *Starship Troopers*, this talk will address how such spatio-temporal formations allow contemporary films to use their digital multitudes to interrogate—often in a spectacular fashion—the relationship between the individual and the collective along with the idea that there is great power in numbers.

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*For more information about the colloquium or accessibility:
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