Intensive Post-Production and Creative Infrastructures

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Over the last two decades, the spaces and places of cinematic pre-production, production, and post-production have become increasingly intertwined. VFX previsualization becomes critical for planning out the on-set cinematography of *Gravity* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2013);[2] *Gone Girl* (David Fincher, 2014) was shot in 6K so that Fincher had the flexibility to reframe shots after principle photography was complete;[3] George Miller sat in a Sydney theater and remotely directed colorist Eric Whipp, who graded *Mad Max: Fury Road* (George Miller, 2015) in a Toronto post-production facility.[4] The boundaries that mark where and when the moving image is 'produced' are increasingly blurred, which also blurs the creative responsibilities of roles like that of the director, producer, cinematographer, editor, colorist, and visual effects artist.

One of the primary reasons for this spatial ambiguity is an expansion and intensification of post-production practices. Prior to the 1990s, cinematic post-production primarily included film processing, linear editing, and sound editing. However, as noted by Murch's *In the Blink of an Eye: A Perspective on Film Editing* and Arundale & Trieu's *Modern Post: Workflows and Techniques for Digital Filmmakers*,[5] the widespread adoption of computer platforms for film editing throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s enabled a significant expansion of the techniques that were financially and creatively viable 'in post'. In addition to linear and sound editing, post began to function as a more complex ecology

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[2] David S. Cohen, 'Cutting Production Costs With Cheaper Previs?', *Variety,* (29 August 2014), <http://variety.com/2014/artisans/production/cutting-production-costs-via-previs-1201292223/> [accessed 2 March 2016].

[3] Jonny Elwyn, 'The Making of *Gone Girl*: Inside the *Gone Girl* Post-Production Workflow', <http://jonnyelwyn.co.uk/film-and-video-editing/the-making-of-gone-girl/> [accessed 2 March 2016].

[4] 'Meet The Colourist: Eric Whipp', <http://www.filmlight.ltd.uk/customers/meet-the-colourist/eric_whipp.php> [accessed 2 March 2016].

[5] Walter Murch, *In the Blink of an Eye: A Perspective on Film Editing* (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 2001); Scott Arundale and Tashi Trieu, *Modern Post: Workflows and Techniques for Digital Filmmakers* (New York: Focal Press, 2015).

of color grading, visual effects, image compositing, asset management, and mastering & delivery.

What's significant in this shift is not the presence of these practices alone. What is significant is that intensive post has become an increasingly normative work practice. While intense post-production is historically associated with the contemporary blockbuster or special-effects intensive genres like science fiction or action films, intensive post is a refinement process that increasingly sustains multiple genres and production scales. These post-production practices and the ways they support cinematic storytelling are not inherent to the medium of the computer, nor have they occurred as a neutral product of technological 'progress'. Rather, what we understand as contemporary post-production emerges through a messy (and ongoing) period of infrastructural development. Creative weight is displaced from medium specific roles onto a more distributed framework of creative collaboration. At best, these workflows integrate the potential for expression in a collaborative human environment; at worst, workflows subordinate creative expression to managerial interests in efficiency and distribution.

Conceptions of creative space have been central, I argue, to the ways in which creative management have sought to secure the consent and creative energies of editors, directors, and audiovisual artists in the ambiguously successful project of coordinating cinema's digitization. As film became file, producers and studios drew upon spatial conceptions of editing and post-production in an attempt to organize the shifting temporality of the when and where of digital cinema production. Intensive post practices have been accompanied by, and indeed instituted by, spatial logic that attempted to manage and locate creative control in an expanding creative field that challenged extant hierarchies of creative control. The expanding creative practices of post-production have been rationalized through spatial logic aimed at 1) mapping out creative spaces and 2) making these creative spaces 'flow'. While these economic rationales of space do not determine the kinds of work artists will or can produce, they do incentivize certain kinds of creative labor and make other kinds more difficult.[6]

This project will investigate a set of questions concerning digitization, creative space, and the state of infrastructure in commercial creative practice. I am still early in my research process and am hesitant to offer up the specific body of films or particular subset of practices upon which this project will move. My intention, though, is to make a contribution towards understanding how contemporary post-production apparatuses coordinate with what Nadia Bozak has called 'the ecological image economy'.[7] If post is the conceptual infrastructure by which

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[6] This project intends to perform the kind of infrastructural inquiry modeled in: Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999); Alexander Galloway, *Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralization* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004); Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015).

[7] Nadia Bozak, *The Cinematic Footprint: Lights, Camera, Natural Resources* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), p. 192.

studios refine an aesthetically seamless cinema, it may also be the space in which we reclaim a space for sustainable and 'imperfect' creative labor.

In examining the spaces of contemporary post-production practices, I seek to understand the political conditions for creativity that have been shaped by economically-minded imaginations of creative space during a period of intensified practice expansion. The goal in this project, then, is to both to trace an area of cinema production that often renders itself into invisibility, consider the long-term effects of these changes in practice, and make a contribution to understanding what kind of creative infrastructure these protocols sustain for the horizon of creative labor in cinema production.