

Questions From the Screen: Manifestations and Reflections of Art and Audiovisual Post-Production in Contemporaneity

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1. Aesthetics of post-production

It is difficult to find on today's screens any shot or scene that has not been filtered through the digital sieve or that, in this sense, has not been altered using computerized tools to enhance the result. From those scenes that greet us with their overwhelming special effects in cinemas (*Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Avatar*, *The Avengers*, etc.³) or in video games (*The Last of Us II*, *GTA V*, etc.)⁴, to those that we open in the windows of web pages or social networks under the crudest of their design templates (such as the image filters of Instagram or TikTok).

The same could be said of another vast number of works that, being exhibited in different cultural circuits, such as museums or art galleries, configure their screens in a digital regime equally important as far as their plastic production is concerned. Whether in terms of their planning or aesthetic discourse, or in the way in which they relate to the viewer or the exhibition space itself. The immersive and multi-projection installations of creators such as Marina Núñez, Rafaël Rozendaal or Tony Oursler would be, among many other examples, a direct sample of these forces and positions of digital post-production in contemporary art proposals. But, in the same way, so would be the paintings or sculptures by artists such as Albert Oehlen, Tony Cragg or Jeff Koons which, in principle, might seem alien to these digital screens, when in fact they contain a computer root in their sketches or in the works prior to their execution—when they are the direct method

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³ Directed by Gore Verbinski (2003), James Cameron (2009) and Joss Whedon, (2012), respectively.

⁴ Developed by Rockstar Games (2013) and Naughty Dog (2020), respectively.

of their development-, equally relevant if we wish to understand the essence of these works.



Figure 1: *Eclipse*. Tony Oursler (2019)

Source: <<https://tonyoursler.com>>

Based on these examples and qualities, it would be possible to point out two tendencies regarding the use (and the footprint) of digital post-production in the artistic and cultural field. The one that does not usually reveal the “tricks” that comprise its digital development; that is, that naturalizes them on stage, seeking their integration in a plausible construct or close to reality. And that which, at the other extreme, displays its pyrotechnics as the ostensible flag of the work itself, making digital post-production a shared boast between the message and the medium.

The first option, as mentioned above, involves applying post-production processes as a mechanism or as one more layer in the constructive exercise of the work, whose presence, in reality, is not intended to acquire a significant role, but to operate in the background as a stimulant intended to favor the visual result of the product.

In the second option, on the other hand, we have works that advocate not only for making this special effect the main verb of their discourse, but also for showing the “entrails” of the project. Plotting (meta)exercises that unveil or exalt the backstage of its post-production, or that show us the wiring, the connections, the supports and other pieces that feed and generate the work in its own constructive and instructive process.

Lev Manovich would very lucidly call these audiovisual phenomena as “cinema-brush” (2005), referring to screen productions doped with post-production by digital software. Darley (2003) or Riambau (2001), extending these concepts to a broader plastic spectrum, would coin these modes under the terms of “cine-spectacle” or “concert films.” Underlining the relevance acquired by the digital in this kind of cinema, and its inherent relationship with the new means of entertainment and communication such as video games, internet, virtual reality, etc. (Martínez, 2024) and proposing a scopic regime where the “digital visual culture” is the dominant one in the contemporary space.

But these are just some of the many examples cited in this preamble and in this book dedicated to shed light on this phenomenon of digital visuality—simple or baroque, covert or exuberant—and dedicated to high-lighting, in any of the cases, the importance of digital post-production as a medium and message of contemporary audiovisals.

Having pointed out, therefore, these fundamental aspects of post-production through the computer, we should take a step beyond the questions that concern its typology or the development of its technique, to ask ourselves not only what these representations are or how they operate, but also what they are trying to tell us or express. In other words, what do the authors who make digital post-production the medium and/or the message of their own work intend? This is, in essence, the leitmotiv and the primary idea of the volume that the reader has in his or her hands: to expose the aspects and phenomenology of digital post-production through the cases and tendencies that contemporaneity brings us.

2. Aesthetics and fundamentals of digital post-production in contemporary plastic arts

We begin the volume with an initial block dedicated to the fundamentals of technology and digital post-production through significant trends and cases of current art. First with the chapters *Cinematography as a Transmitter of Pictorial Imagery in Filmmaking* by Dr. Vicente Javier Pérez Valero and Dr. Francisco Cuéllar Santiago, and *From Analog Photography to Digital Construction: A Journey from Kindel to Post-Photography* by Hernando Gómez Gómez and Valeria Levratto, which address the foundations of a photography

that, in its post-production modalities, has as much a debt with the pictorial past as with the present of digital photography and its network expansion. And second, with the chapters *Tron: Art and Technology at the Dawn of the Computer-Generated Image* by Francisco Manuel Poveda Baeza, and *The Digital Sinister: The Revolution of Emerging Technologies in Hyperrealist Sculpture and the Fantastic Genre* by Roberto Català Nacher, which deal with the confluence of different artistic disciplines and digital post-production techniques to build and enhance new fictions and (hyper)realities.

In the first text, Cuéllar and Pérez point out the important legacy and linkage of the fictions constructed between painting, cinema and photography. Especially, and quoting Ortiz and Piqueras, among the issues concerning “trompe l’oeil and anamorphosis” (1995), which are, in essence, an integral part of the technique and conceptualization of the cinematographic image, as well as of its post-production methodologies. In the second text, Gómez and Levratto analyze the photographic practice from the analogical manifestations of Joaquín del Palacio’s work “Kindel” in the context of the decolonized villages in Spain, to the contemporary practices of digital post-photography carried out by authors such as Joan Fontcuberta. A journey that reflects on the continuity of the aesthetic and poetic search between both approaches (despite the technological differences and their modes of post-production) and offers a critical view on the historical memory through the medium itself and the consumption of images today.

In the third chapter, Poveda highlights the relevance of a film like *Tron* (Lisberger, 1982) in the field of post-production and audiovisual plastics, to successfully materialize a visual fiction, never seen before on the screen. A production, in this sense, whose incorporation and use of computers in cinema together with classic animation techniques, to merge with real images, caused at the time an exponential leap in the challenges of the image against the limits of the “real.” A phenomenon that, in his text and this time in the space of hyperrealist sculpture, Roberto Català Nacher takes up again with *The Digital Sinister: The Revolution of Emerging Technologies in Hyperrealist Sculpture and the Fantastic Genre*. In which he points out how the confluence between artistic disciplines, cinematography and digital post-production techniques, is generating a creative revolution that is equally breaking with the notions of the “real” and its expansion toward the horizons of the fantastic. Specifically, focusing on tools such as 3D printing, 3D scanning, digital

modeling or artificial intelligence, whose ways of working are radically redefining the way artists conceive and materialize their hyper-realistic sculptural works.



Figure 2: *Disney Plus Content Generation.* Beeple (2020)

Source: Beeple/Twitter

It is followed by chapters focused on the animation technique *Rotoscoping and Other Animation Techniques: Audiovisual Hybrids for Storytelling* by Ben Manzanera, who analyzes the rotoscoping technique as a field of post-production especially related to the new and classic experimental languages of audiovisuals, capable of hybridizing other plastic media such as painting or comics. And *Sex, Death and Magic: Metamorphoses in the Sand Animation Films of Gisèle Ansorge* by Elisa Martínez, in which the author recounts the ten short films made by Ansorge and her husband, Narge Ansorge, using their own technique such as “sand animation,” under the particular themes of sex, death and magic that impregnated their works.

We open the next block of chapters dedicated to the “Techniques, creative processes and audiovisual narratives” used in current digital post-production, with the research by Damià Jordà Bou entitled *Art and Aesthetics in the Post-production Workflow of an Indie Fantasy Film*. A text that starts with the film *Irati* (Urkijo, 2022) as a case study to draw an analysis of the processes and workflows carried out in the field of current visual effects (VFX). Examining not only its technological aspects, but also the artistic and plastic motivations that are linked to these procedures through a series of questions about the

director himself, Paul Urkijo, and through the analysis of his own making of, breakdowns, art book, etc.

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In the same block, but already from the technical processes that concern, in this case, the use of post-production to expand and enhance the narrative, we continue with the chapters *Evolution of the Classic Script Structure in Interactive Cinema: Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* by Clara López Cantos and *Liminality And the Epistemological Boundaries Within the Series Attack on Titan from a Mythoanalytical and Existentialist Perspective* by Alfonso Freire-Sánchez and Swen Seebach. The former delves into the current capabilities of digital programming to construct new typologies of interactive storytelling using as a case study the *Bandersnatch* episode of the *Black Mirror* series (Brooker 2011–2025). The second offers a novel approach to address the intertextuality of the manga *Attack on Titan* (Isayama, 2013) and the animated series of the same name (Araki, Koizuka, Hayashi and Shishido, 2013), from which we examine the philosophical, political and social conflicts and dilemmas that make this work one of the most interesting in the recent Japanese audiovisual scene.

The next block of the book is dedicated to genres, devices and modes of representation beyond the conventional film screen, and their connection with other plastic media such as radio, comics, TV series, or plastic works destined for galleries and art spaces. We begin with *Pulp and Science Fiction Press Comics: Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon* by Diego Mollá Furió, to delve into the beginnings of this genre of popular consumption of North American origin, where characters from paper and radio serials such as Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon, soon established themselves as catalysts and first bridges with other audiovisual media such as TV or film, exploiting the narrative

and plastic possibilities of *science fiction* in what would come to glimpse a model of *transmedia* consumption today established in the entertainment industry.

In his case, Ricardo González-García extends this aesthetic relationship with science fiction toward the most current directions of Marina Núñez's art in his chapter *The Fantastic and the Influence of Science Fiction Cinema in the Audiovisual Work of Marina Núñez*. Establishing digital post-production and cinematography as key points for the understanding of her trajectory and the pieces that explore identity and transhumanism: from the concept of the *cyborg*, to that of the thinking machine and the new autonomies of artificial intelligence.

While these narratives of plastic and *science fiction* allow us to explore other utopian or impossible worlds, where we have the freedom to examine our potentialities as a human collective, in the following chapters *Filmic Ekphrases: Artistic Portrayals of Old Age in Contemporary Art Horror Films* by Marta Miquel-Baldellou and *Dying of Laughter: The Awakening of Hope in Post-Apocalyptic Cinema through Warm Bodies* by Carmen Sáez González, a selection of films revolving around the fantastic and the various varieties of in-between connections within artistic and cinematic representations of old age are exhibited. Examples of other fictional spaces and attributive ekphrasis that portray old age and where, in addition, archetypes and cinematographic scenes are analyzed that include, in the second text, explicit allusions to iconic paintings from the history of art.

These narratives of *Otherness* are those approached by the author Fernando Fernández Torres in the following chapter *Queer Reveal: Anagnorisis and Post-Production in Music Videos*. A study of the queer periphery from the gestation of the music video and its storytelling tools, where he highlights the importance of the aesthetic discourse of post-production for the very narrativity of the medium and for the very definition of this audiovisual genre of the LGBTQ+ movement, in question.

Closing this section of chapters, we have *The Model is Galatea but Which of the Two Male Leads is Pygmalion? Calcifying Galatea and Referencing the Pygmalion Myth in The Song of Songs (Mamoulían, 1933)* by Sílvia Catarina Pereira Diogo. A text that analyzes this early Hollywood film where two variants of the Pygmalion myth come together, the Ovidian version and the interpretation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's tale. And from which the author

breaks down the antagonistic ways of approaching and perceiving love in each cinematographic counterpart.

The last section of the book, *History and Education*, is made up of four chapters dedicated to the relationship between history and audiovisual production and to the possibilities of its didactic application. If the chapter *The TV Fanta-Horror of the 1970s. An Example of Italian Media "Folklore"* by Silvia Casolari and Davide Monopoli, analyzes a key period in the history of Italian television production dedicated to fantasy and horror (also known as *Fantaterror*), the chapter developed by Kevin Díaz Alché, *Mythmaking and Oblivion: The Construction of Spanish History in Video Games*, explores the representation of the Spanish past and the mythology of its "empire" and its history through digital games. Two texts that approach the fictions of the past from their connections with the fantastic narrative, and with the entertainment modalities of the living room screen. *The Art of Horror Movie Posters. A Study Through Analysis, Research, and Innovation in Teaching* by Amparo Alepuz Rostoll and *Education in Children's and Youth Classrooms Through Folklore, Audiovisual Media, and the Fantasy Genre* by Marina Díaz-Caneja Alepuz, switch places to bring the themes of the fantastic and plastic production into the classroom. In the last two texts of the book, they propose how to develop formative activities focused on learning through the fantasy genre, folklore and the various means of artistic and audiovisual expression.

With *The Screen is the Message*, the title of our book in evident harmony with McLuhan's sentence (which states that the way in which information is transmitted affects its meaning)⁵, we allude to this digital screen from which today we communicate, and process and post-produce most of our creations. That screen whose digital essence defines, as we pointed out, a good part of the ways of seeing and doing of today's visual culture and, in this sense, a good part of our communicative relationship through these same processes and the results transmitted through its works of art. This is the title, in short, from which we intend to glimpse what are the manifestations and what are the antecedents that, from inside and outside the screen, have led us to this particular moment. And from which we intend to appreciate a plot of where the hybridizations and experiments that are going through the currents of audiovisual art, cinematography and its post-production formulas lead us, in

⁵ "The medium is the message," McLuhan (2009).

a cultural space like the current one, where any image or video on the cinema or TV screen, or uploaded to the internet and its social networks, goes through digital retouching or even through the corrections of artificial intelligence.

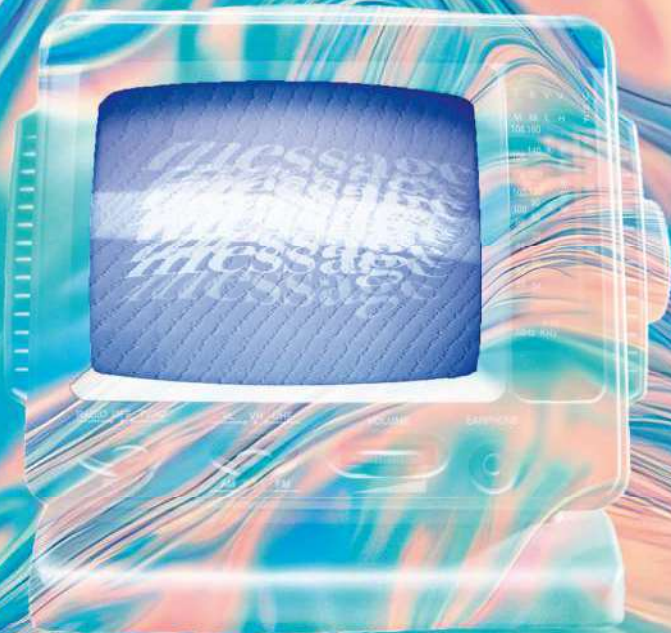
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Mario-Paul Martínez and Fran Mateu (eds.)

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Post-Production



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