ABSTRACT

Editing as Directing: Editing the Feature Film, *In Paradise*

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The editing process of a narrative film shares many artistic similarities to directing. Through a critical examination of the editing process for the film *In Paradise*, this thesis will highlight the directorial aspects of editing and how the post-production stage directly shapes the final form of the film. This thesis will also describe the methodological process of editing the film. Storytelling and professional goals are provided, as are films, literature, and insights that are influential to the editing process of the film.

Editing as Directing: Editing the Feature Film, *In Paradise*

by

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A Thesis

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The following is a theoretical and methodological outline of my work editing

Philip Heinrich and Aaron Youngblood's feature film *In Paradise*. In addition to

fulfilling my master's thesis credit, undertaking the editing portion of the film also serves

as a personal endeavor toward further understanding narrative film direction. Through

explaining my intentions and methods behind editing the film, this thesis dissects my

contributions to the project and defines my personal goal of learning to direct motion

pictures in a further, more professional, degree.

Conveying Theme

In Paradise is essentially a character study. Leon, the main character of the film,

is dangerously obsessed with building and utilizing a machine that will fulfill a dream of

his. Once the focus of a research group, the machine was thought to provide access to an

alternate universal dimension. However, it took the life of his beloved fiancé, a tragic

incident that halted research amongst his peers. Yet the accident only reinforced Leon's

state of undivided obsession. In hopes of understanding the secrets of the unknown and

escaping his pain, Leon dreams of finishing the machine and uncovering the secrets that

cost the life of the one closest to him.

Ultimately, *In Paradise* challenges the destructive nature of the American notion

of chasing dreams. Leon's dreams are unrealistic and destructive. Following his heart will

only lead him to danger and further isolation. Leon does not know where the machine

will take him when he finishes it or what will even happen when it is utilized, but the mystery of it provides him with a sense of false assurance that it will solve his problems. Throughout the film, Leon is also forced to come to terms with becoming the legal guardian of Caroline, his niece, after the unfortunate death of his brother Andy. On top of all this, Leon has cancer. Yet, in a consistent disregard of reality, Leon neglects his niece and illness and descends into a state of delusion from his compulsive desire to finish the machine.

Leon's journey exists as a cautionary tale. Through the experience of the film's story and the characters' journey, the directors and myself share the belief that the message of the film will be potent. Following in the footsteps of Stanley Kubrick, Terrence Malick, and Paul Thomas Anderson (to limit myself to a select few American filmmakers), our goal is for viewers to establish a connection with the characters so they could define the severity of each situation themselves. In effect, this allows audience members to connect with the characters and relate to their circumstances according to their own experiences. The dangers of chasing dreams, reclaiming the past, clinging to false hope, and ignoring reality and those around you are issues that audiences can respond to. Thus, we hope for the viewers to develop a personalized sense of empathy toward the characters, caring for their struggles and well-being. Ultimately, Leon is a character for viewers to examine and learn from whereas Caroline is one that viewers can relate to. Like Caroline, the audience is uncovering the truth behind Leon's eccentricities and becoming more and more concerned by his negligence as they watch the film.

Likewise, the audience must interpret the film's cautionary intent themselves. Just as Leon, the audience does not know where the machine will take him or what will happen when he uses it. Yet, viewers are given several moments that can be used to gradually define his character and his situation. Initially, audiences might perceive him as socially awkward and distracted by his hobbies (ritualistically working in his study and visiting a mysterious warehouse), but after neglecting his estranged niece time after time (as well as his worsening cancer) viewers begin to understand that his dreams are getting in the way of reality. Thus, the audience rides alongside him in his journey and is able to perceive the gradual damage his unrealistic ambitions are causing to Leon's life and those surrounding him. We intend the audiences to then understand the film's message that, sometimes, present life is better than the dream. However, the cautionary notion of the story depends on accurate audience interpretation.

The film is intended to connect viewers with the characters and their decisions through relevant themes, recognizable visual cues, and a familiar story schema. This is to give audience members a story they can relate to and figure out. The film's dependency of the audience to accurately interpret the story's caution is meant to add to the intrigue of the picture and result in a more rewarding experience in the end. Throughout the film, Leon's negligence gradually worsens and the damage he is causing to himself and others becomes more transparent. Even after being reminded of his cancer and vomiting in the field lot, Leon can't help walking back into the warehouse to continue his work on the machine. By leaving these breadcrumbs, the nature of Leon's obsessive delusion is supposed to be recognizable by the end of the film so that audiences could make that

connection and find worth in his final decision to give up his dreams of finishing the

Paykel Device to start living his life with Caroline.

My goal as an editor is to give the audience enough to connect with so they can

define the situations themselves. In a 1975 *Time* interview, Kubrick stated that, "The

essence of the dramatic form is to let an idea come over people without it being plainly

stated. When you say something directly, it is simply not as potent as when you allow

people to discover it for themselves". Therefore, by allowing viewers to discover the

film's cautionary nature themselves, I hope for the lesson to have much more of a sting.

While a film can retain information to add appeal, it could also become vague if

audiences are spared too much. Like directing, this type of careful poetry could be

salvaged, destroyed, or amplified in editing.

To resonate with the audience, the film also relies on subtextual and metaphorical

motivations for exploring the potentially self-destructive dangers of chasing dreams.

Inspired uses of color, lighting, framing, cuts, sound, movements, behaviors, and

dialogue all work to suggest Leon's emotional journey and state of mind. While much of

the film's ideas and intentions are inspired by literature, Leon's character arc is one of

visual poetry. In one scene, while Leon is nearing completion of the Paykel device, we

see a glimpse of his shadow working away. The shadow is huge and very dark,

suggesting that Leon's darker and more delusional side is taking over and overpowering

his rational sensibilities (Figure 1).

Fig. 1. Leon's Shadow in the Warehouse

Ultimately, I intend to communicate a message that the audience can discover for themselves and resonate with, encouraging thought and questioning long after viewing. Deciding how to effectively translate the film's cautionary message from page to screen is my prime storytelling goal as the editor.

Execution

As the editor, my main duty is to ensure that the film's message is evident on the screen. Like directing, editing can make a visual message more powerful and poetic than expected. However, while the film's message needs to be clear, it also needs to be done according to the story's artistic restraints. This is in order to ensure its profundity. The act of shaping the film into its final form, and the dependency editing has on a film's effectiveness, shares a close relation to the direction of the film.

The clarity of a story and the effectiveness of a message rely equally on editing as with directing. Good directing can be ruined with bad editing, as bad directing can be somewhat salvaged and hidden by good editing. The "we'll fix it in post" idea that is all too common with filmmakers suggests an amount of artistic control that closely mirrors

directing. Thus, my efforts in editing the film, while loyal to the directors' vision and intention, are to explore, discover, and further understand methods of narrative film direction in a different realm.

For this reason, I was very active within the production of the film as the script supervisor and crew member. Often, editors avoid any connection with the production of a film to prevent the development of bias with irrelevant aspects of the film, such as choosing a specific shot not because of its power and honesty but simply because it was such a difficult shot to achieve for whatever external reasons. However, in my efforts to better understand the intended direction of the film and how I could improve upon it as an editor, I fully participated in and contributed to the production of the film. In all honesty, I was not really given a choice anyway. Besides, I felt that a more subjective view could account for some of the on-set limitations and challenges that are inherent to such a lower budget feature film. Rather than meeting such challenges face-to-face in the editing room, I felt that it was wiser to become aware of such limitations and prepare for the best way to overcome them beforehand within a collaborative environment with the directors. Thus, working on-set was intended to allow me to examine the directors at work to better prepare myself for my own personal endeavors into narrative film direction for feature films with large crews. Finally, contributing my efforts to the production also allowed me to experience the dynamics of the director-editor relationship outside of the editing lab arena. Overall, my decision to contribute to the production of the film was to better understand directing as a whole and also to understand how I could edit the film as best as possible, perhaps making the picture better overall.

The editing of the film was completed with Adobe Premiere. Given that all of my experience was with Final Cut Pro, this was also a learning experience mechanically. However, as an aspiring editor, I feel that it is important to understand how different editing programs operate and how to best utilize each one. Aside from the frustrating technical limitations and inabilities of the newest version of Final Cut Pro, the directors chose Premiere for its ability to smoothly handle obsolete codecs and larger files.

Professional Goals

Overall, my goal is for the film to achieve a very professional quality. Given that my main contribution is during the last portion of the film's development, I held this goal in high regard. The "professional" quality I desire is aimed at achieving the look and feel of a real film, not a student film. Considering that the merit of my professional work will be judged according to this, I believe that committing to this goal will result in a better film and will also reflect my degree of skill and professionalism as an editor.

Therefore, I expect this film to compete and screen in festivals and to launch my career in editing. The directors intend for the film to compete in the 2014 circuit. They have chosen to submit the film to major festivals that have a history of supporting more independent productions. To account for rejection, the directors will also submit the film to smaller festivals. Depending on its reception at festivals, the directors plan for the film to be distributed digitally.

However, with previous and ongoing personal side projects that I am directing, I also hope that my experience with a film of this scope will introduce new opportunities for me as a director. While my role within the film is the editor, my involvement with this project is to also better understand directing. Thus, I expect my experience with the

project to provide me with more versatile experience as an aspiring director. Given all is successful, I would also like to use my experience to teach others in a university environment.

The film's scope was intimidating, but ambitious. Regardless of its outcome, it is certainly a monumental learning experience personally and professionally.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The strategies and intentions for editing *In Paradise* are inspired by existing theories of editing. While these resources provide practical strategies toward editing the film, they also suggest ways to add ideological layers to a story. These strategies will are used to clarify, emphasize, and even exaggerate elements of the story, and shape the final form of the film. The following review highlights the scholarly and professional inspirations that influence the editing of *In Paradise*, from non-fictional insights and theories to examples of ideological accomplishments from other films.

Non-Fictional Theories and Insights

A significant portion of the inspiration behind my approach to the film's editing is grounded in theory that has shaped the artistic process of editing. Specifically, this includes the insights of Walter Murch, Dylan Tichenor, and David Lowery. Walter Murch's theories examine the physiological and psychological effects of editing, whereas Dylan Tichenor's and David Lowery's insights on editing are specifically relevant to the artistic intentions of *In Paradise*. Walter Murch is a celebrated editor and sound editor that has edited films such as *Apocalypse Now, The Godfather: Part III*, and *The English Patient*. Murch's book, *In the Blink of an Eye*, an essay on the psychological implications of film editing, is paramount to my research as an editor and is included in this section. Dylan Tichenor is a modern-day editor that has edited films such as *Magnolia, Royal Tenenbaums,* and *There Will Be Blood*. David Lowery is a rising editor and director that

edited the film *Upstream Color*. Tichenor and Lowery's work is included because their work is stylistically similar to the editing of *In Paradise*.

The foundation of editing is grounded in comprehension of the amount of aesthetic impact that juxtaposition can have upon a film. The editor communicates information visually, which is used to tell a story. This role is pivotal in the shaping of a film. "Like any language, film has its own particular grammar and once fluent in it, an editor can ultimately shape the overall tone and feel of a piece purely through the timing of the cuts. Editing can make (or break) an actor's performance, make comedy funnier, action more exciting and drama more intense" (Walker, "Round the mind of a film editor"). Understanding the aesthetic and narrative impact of editing is crucial to an editor telling stories with effectiveness and impact. Without this knowledge, the film could appear uninspired and bland. The editor must be knowledgeable of this pivotal impact so that the film's message can be made clear, if not exaggerated. Justin Chang, senior film critic at Variety and author of FilmCraft's *Editing* book, (10) explains, "A film editor maximizes the aesthetic and contextual aspects of the film. Editing involves attention to rhythm and tempo, music and sound, quality and range of performance, and emotional contexts." Thus, an editor is directly responsible for the clarity and potency of a film's messages and aspirations.

Therefore, much of my discussion on editing also relates to editing as directing. Specifically, this refers to the choice of shots, colors, styles, and performances that an editor chooses to shape the final form of the film with. Similar to a director, the editor has a degree of control over the aesthetics of the film that directly impact viewer

interpretation. For this reason, much of my research is devoted to editing as another form of directing.

With *In Paradise,* this insight became specifically relevant in efforts to tell the story as it was originally intended. For example, Leon is often socially distant from those around him, so the selection of shots with him isolated and farther away are utilized to emphasize this. Also, metaphorical cues within the film, such as the overabundance of the color green, is made more subtle so that viewers will not be distracted by the color, but rather notice it and apply meaning to it given its ironic placement throughout the film. The inclusion, exclusion, extensions, and compressions of a scene or shot can alter a story entirely. Doing so can reshape the story and characters to guide audience perceptions and interpretations. Editing is what ensures the film's message gets across to its viewers in the best way possible.

As an editor, shots can be chosen to intensify empathy with the characters and tension within the story. For example, scenes with Leon giving monotonous lectures in his class includes shots stabilized and locked down (although that is how the majority of the film was shot), but the arguments between him and Caroline includes more hand-held shots with a participant aesthetic where the camera was floating around the characters as if someone was watching the event take place in-person. While the editor is not responsible for creating good shot composition, the choice of shots that emphasize the scene's purpose is of prime importance. For example, in the audition scene, the selected shot should result in the audience looking down at Leon, feeling far away from him, analyzing him as he awkwardly sings and dances. Also, through juxtapositions of wider shots with shots that appear closer to the actor, the characters' yearnings and relationships

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can be visually clarified and emphasized on screen. Thus, the editor's control over shot selection directly impacts the sub-textual elements of the scene.

The degree of control an editor has on the film's aesthetics can reinvent a film's story and reshape its characters, much like directing. Editor Walter Murch states, "Good editing makes a director look good. Great editing makes a film look like it wasn't directed at all. Editing provides a sexual joy of the creative elements. Mixing together different ideas to provide the birth of a third idea" (Chambers, "Perspectives On Editing: A Conversation With Walter Murch"). The final outcome of the film - the look, feel, tone, influence, and effectiveness - all rest in the hands of the editor. This third phase can often reinvent a film entirely by rearranging, adding, or deleting scenes that best fit the development of characters and the telling of the story. Thus, the amount of control, although through collaboration, influences the impact of directing. "There is a benefit that arises between the collaboration between the editor and the director, but the editor has the ability to lend a guiding hand in the direction of the story that a director, who is so immersed in the shots, may not see" (Chambers, "Perspectives On Editing: A Conversation With Walter Murch"). The editor, having not conceptualized how to shoot a scene or how a line should be acted, is connected to the film in a much different way than the director, which allows the editor's unique vision to be exercised into telling the story.

Much of the inspiration behind editing *In Paradise* comes from Walter Murch's foundational analyses of the aesthetic and physiological implications of film editing. In Murch's book, *In the Blink of an Eye*, he relates the human blink as the emotional punctuation, or cut, of a moment, or scene (Murch, 2001). Murch states:

> Our rate of blinking is somehow geared more to our emotional state and to the nature and frequency of our thoughts than to the atmospheric environment we happen to find ourselves in. The blink is either something that helps an internal separation of thought to take place, or it is an involuntary reflex accompanying the mental separation that is taking place anyway. (Murch, 2001).

To mock representations of life-moments, narrative film editing must be invisible and unnoticeable. Following Murch's theory, to cut invisibly requires editors to find the right emotional rhythm of the scene. In this fashion, the rate and style of the film's cutting closely relates to the viewers' frequency of change of emotions and thoughts, or "blinks", and the editing in the film, the compression of time, will not be evident. Thus, the editing rate must match our rate of change of ideas. This method can also be used to amplify contexts within a scene, whether narrative or aesthetic. To add, Murch also stated that, "a good rule of thumb is to only present 2.5 thematic layers at any moment, shifting every 15 seconds. This creates a perfect balance and a melodic integration of density and clarity" (Murch 20). As with any edit, accomplishing this effect for *In Paradise* is paramount. Given that the cuts should match the frequency of emotions and ideas, it is also crucial for the film to not overwhelm audiences with too many layered themes and ideas. The potency of a message is derived from its clarity, thus it is supremely important that the editing scheme of *In Paradise* adhere to Murch's theories.

Murch also suggested rules, known as the *Rule of 6*, on when to cut (Murch 18).

1. The cut is true to the **emotion** of the moment (51%)
2. The cut advances the **story** (23%)
3. The cut occurs when it is **rhythm**ically interesting and "right" (10%)
4. The cut acknowledges "**eye-trace**" – the concern with the location and movement of the audience's focus of interest within the frame (7%)
5. The cut respects "**planarity**" – the grammar of three dimensions transposed by photography to two (questions of stage-line, etc) (5%)
6. The cut respects the **3-dimensional** continuity of actual space (where people are in a room and in relation to each other) (4%)

In order of their percentage of importance, the goal of Murch's theory is to satisfy all rules at once when making a cut. The editing technique of *In Paradise* follows this guideline. For example, in the scene where Leon is in the doctor's office, flustered because he has just learned that his cancer is worsening, the cut out of the line that suggests he look into chemotherapy to the next shot of Leon reacting is applied to this guideline (Figure 2). First, the reaction shot of Leon is timed and chosen according to the emotional impact of the timing and moment in the next shot. Yet, the cut also exists to progress the story, following the same "blinking" rhythm, and connecting the eye-trace from Leon to the doctor (or to his eyes sinking), as well as the staging of the characters and spatial relation to one another in the doctor's room. Other than occasional intuition, the timing of cuts for the film follows Murch's guideline to ensure that overall integrity of the scene.

Fig. 2. Action and Reaction Shots in the Doctor's Office

Editor Dylan Tichenor has also applied calculated measures to his film editing approach. "The precise design of films extends to their editing rhythms. Film is action over time, so in a way, mathematics, as it applies to music, also applies to film. One frame more and one frame less, it all really adds up" (Chang 61). *In Paradise* utilizes a slow and deliberate pace. Like *There Will Be Blood*, it is to let viewers sink into the moment. However, such a slow pace for one scene must extend to the rest of the film for it to feel tonally and stylistically cohesive as it builds collectively. Such a rhythmic approach is relevant to *In Paradise* also due to its multiple facets of style and tone. Like *In Paradise*, *Magnolia* combines realistic and eccentric story elements into one film. Yet, *Magnolia* is consistent in rhythm, tone, and style. This issue is of particular importance with *In Paradise*, in which director Philip Heinrich has a more gaudy and extravagant vision and director Aaron Youngblood favors character studies more grounded in gritty reality. Thus, to balance the directors' styles, the cutting technique of *In Paradise* follows Tichenor's rhythmic approach to achieve a sense of consistency so that everything builds in a collective manner. Tichenor also adds that, "Editing allows you to reinvent, and sometimes that necessitates trimming scenes or taking them out altogether. There is always an opportunity in editing to make things better or worse" (Chang 64). To find an aesthetic balance as in *Magnolia*, it is plausible that the alteration of a scene from *In Paradise* can establish a consistent flow. Thus, Tichenor's mathematical rhythm technique provides an answer to balancing stylistic inconsistencies inherent with *In Paradise*.

While Tichenor's film design is mathematical, his way of telling a story through editing is also intuitive. Tichenor explains, "I like to structure things so that there is a moment where the ideas come together and resonate. I'm looking for connections and associations- not overtly or intellectually, but in my mind that's how I'm building a story" (Kaufman, "Pieces of Dylan Tichenor"). Tichenor's aims of discovering a unified idea through the process of editing inspires the editing of *In Paradise*. Although the directors solidified their intentions, viewers needed an occasional reshaping of the film, given the differing styles of filmmaking. Tichenor goes on to add, " The main part of the editor's job is to be a surrogate audience, to react to footage and say what's important and not important to the story" (Kaufman, "Pieces of Dylan Tichenor"). Therefore, the editing process of *In Paradise* requires me to view the film as an audience member, as objectively as possible. This enables me to *see* the ideas of the film and how to juxtapose them in a way that best expressed them. Overall, Tichenor's intuitive approach introduced ways for the film to be discovered and reinvented.

In Paradise blends surreal dream-like images with those of a conventional narrative. Stylistically, this is an element that needs to be handled delicately in the editing so that the film can retain its sense of clarity, fluidity, and symbolism. As a result of the ethereal aesthetics of the dream sequences, the film can be incomprehensible and stylistically dislocated if not shaped correctly. For the film *Upstream Color,* editor David Lowery faced similar issues. Lowery explained, "The movie is built out of all these little sequences, these multiple overtures. Each piece works on its own, and also as a part of the greater mechanism of the whole thing" (Hynes, "A Team Player Becomes the Captain: David Lowery Directs 'Ain't Them Bodies Saints'"). In regards to mixing the

surreal imagery with the grounded narrative, *In Paradise* attempts to follow the editing scheme of *Upstream Color*, where the film retains a consistent style by keeping the ethereal imagery in a steady rhythm with the surface-level story. Viewers watching the film are made aware of what story to follow linearly and what story to interpret as allegory. Lowery's delicate pacing allows audiences to recognize this schema not as a dislocated mess, but as a more lyrical enigma. While *Upstream Color* is much more puzzling than *In Paradise*, such juxtaposition serves as a plan to retain cohesiveness with a stylistic balance. Lowery explains, "The purpose of an editor is to, with clarity and purpose, present the best possible version of the story at hand" (Hasan, "Interview: Director David Lowery on 'Ain't Them Bodies Saints'"). By finding the right rhythm, tone, and style of the film for all the different types of story, the surreal, with the conventional, and the extravagant, the best possible version of *In Paradise* is discovered during the editing process.

Filmic Inspirations

Several films also inspire the editing of *In Paradise*. To ensure originality and an efficient strategy, I researched numerous films according to story and aesthetic similarities. The story, style, and surrealism of *In Paradise* are all grounded in past works. Therefore, the editing of *In Paradise* looks to such films to learn from them so the final form of the film appears neither bland nor duplicated.

The story of the film has strong similarities to Christopher Nolan's *Inception*. In *Inception*, the obsessive main character, Cobb, mentally haunted by memories of his past with his deceased wife, yearns for his old life back with his children. Cobb believes reclaiming this life will be his salvation. However, in order to achieve this, he has to

complete an impossible and deadly task, implanting a thought into someone's

subconscious via dreams. Similar to *Inception*, the main character of *In Paradise* is

obsessed with escaping to the past. Furthermore, it is a dream guided by lost love. The

obsession is also a destructive one, challenging the notions of dreams and desires. The

film also deals with alternate realities, and, in the end, both conclude with enigmatic

sequences of the main character possibly existing inside of those realities.

However, *In Paradise* is a dramatic character study, whereas *Inception* is an

action/thriller. Therefore, there are significant differences within the genre conventions of

each. Yet, in this regard, *In Paradise* also relates to Darren Aronofsky's ambitious

character study *The Fountain*, where the main character, Dr. Tom Creo, is working on a

medicinal cure for his wife Izzi, who is ill with an incurable disease. Torn between

spending time with her and finding the cure, Tom's obsession takes hold and he is left

with deep regret as she dies. Like Leon and Cobb, Tom yearns to reclaim the past. Such

desires are exhibited through surrealistic passages of the characters interacting through

Tom's sub-conscious. As with *Inception*, the story's similarities to *In Paradise* are very

recognizable.

However, the point of relating the three films is to match to a story-wide reference

for editing. All of the aforementioned films examine the destructive nature of chasing

dreams and yearning for the past. Despite the similarities, as a model for editing,

Inception is a much more suitable fit. *Inception*, while still a challenging story, is a much

more comprehensible and appropriate model for *In Paradise* than *The Fountain*.

Furthermore, the format of *Inception* is much like the psychological character study of *In

Paradise*. While it is likely that the directors' ambitions relate more with the transcendent

idea behind *The Fountain*, *Inception* matches the conventionality of *In Paradise*. *The Fountain*, told non-linearly, does not match the linear style of juxtaposition for *In Paradise*. *Inception*, however, provides a linear style of narrative and character development that can be used as a stylistic model. Moreover, like *In Paradise*, there are several scenes throughout *Inception* that depicted indefinite realities coexisting within the narrative. Just as *In Paradise*, these scenes add layers to the theme of the story, progressively developing the character, and culminating in an enigmatic conclusion. Genre conventions aside, the use of *Inception* as a story-wide model helps to achieve a narrative consistency and clear character development throughout *In Paradise*'s inherent stylistic and tonal inconsistencies.

 In Paradise juxtaposes scenes of an alternate reality, or a sub-conscious dream reality, with those of naturalistic reality without any narrative distinction. In order to have audiences question what is real or an illusion, viewers are meant to initially be unable to distinguish the dream scenes from the reality scenes. While this is used to visually progress Leon's state of detachment and delusion, the two types of sequences are edited in very different fashions. The dream-like scenes are edited in an evocative fashion, often cut in accordance to musical or emotional highs. Such scenes exist to express an emotion, feeling, or memory, whereas the scenes grounded in reality are meant to progress the story and the characters. The editing of the reality scenes follow a traditional narrative approach while the dream sequences are edited in a much more free-form approach. These scenes are cut to music, an ominous atmospheric drone, where visuals that best evoked the emotion of the given dream were utilized. Instead of being driven by dialogue, these scenes are driven by sound and image (which is a nice break for the film).

Another driving force of the dream sequences is to establish some of the film's motifs (Figure 3). One is of Leon being left abandoned mid-waist in a swamp of water. Another is an exaggeration of Leon's delusion – the out-of-focus shots of Mariana. In the dreams, Mariana is never fully in-focus in order to show that Leon's dream cannot be fulfilled. Mariana is out of his reach, and the shots emphasize that.
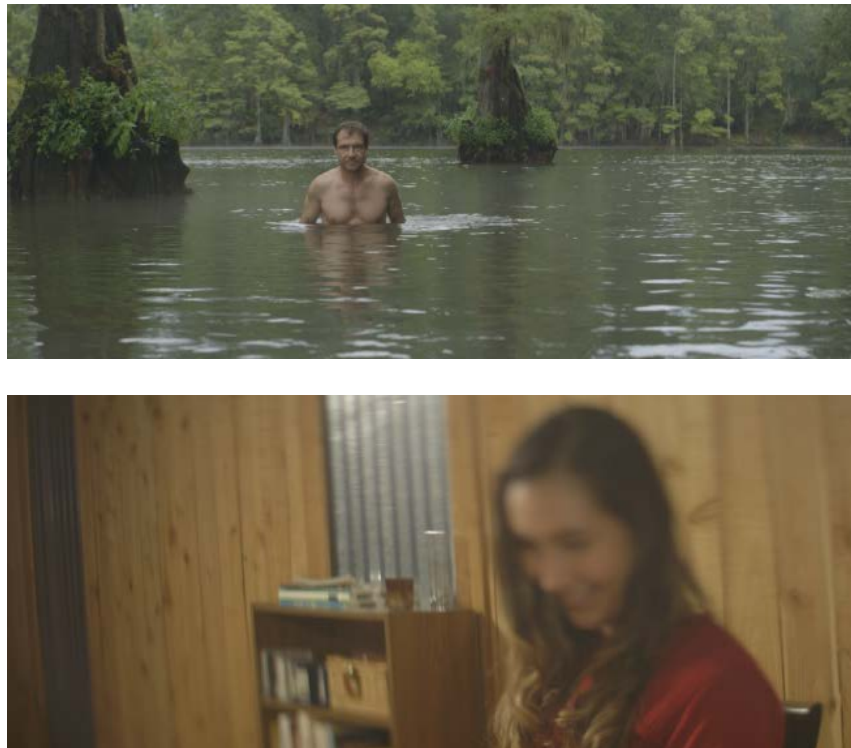
Fig. 3. Dream Motifs

However, given the necessity of each style to each type of sequence, there has to be a stylistic blend for uniformity. Films such as Shane Carruth's *Upstream Color* exemplifies how to mix the ethereal with more grounded narrative styles, while Paul Thomas Anderson's drama *Magnolia* exhibits how to blend the exaggerated with the realistic. *Upstream Color* features two characters who become entangled by dealing with their wrecked lives. Their unusually common bond is that they were hypnotized, drugged,

and inflicted with an ageless parasite. While the film features this surface-level narrative, it is juxtaposed with experiential images of life cycles as the parasite moves from humans to pigs to orchids. Partly a linear narrative and partly avant-garde transcendental cinema, *Upstream Color* never distracts the viewer with its commitment to its ethereal feel. This is due to the film spending long durations establishing the narrative before occasionally dividing its focus to the experiential components of the film, all the while cutting in a shorthanded fashion. Thus, audience members discover the story first and then create a dichotomy between that which is to be interpreted as the story and that which is to be interpreted as montages of feelings. The shorthand approach to cutting (inspired from Gestalt psychology) enables the film to avoid using establishing or connecting shots of people arriving or leaving every location and to instead stick to the meat of the scene. This style of editing shares symmetry with the abstract style of cutting of the surreal imagery, which gives the film a consistent style. *In Paradise* attempts to follow this schema in order to achieve the same effect with the juxtaposing of dream sequences alongside more conventional narrative sequences. As the film progresses with Leon's delusional visions, the cutting is intended to become more visceral and erratic.

  Magnolia also shares stylistic intentions with *In Paradise*. Paul Thomas Anderson's film, a multi-faceted narrative that implies an emotional connectedness amongst a group of people during 24 hours in Los Angeles, combines serious melodrama with exaggerated symbolism and metaphors. One scene depicts an estranged father attempting to reconnect with his cocaine-addicted daughter by revealing to her that he has cancer, while another scene in the film has all of the characters immersed in a sudden sing-a-long in their own time and space. However, the juxtaposition of dramatic reality

with reflexive fiction (raining frogs and sing-alongs) is effectively balanced. Tichenor explains that, "Cutting can also be literal or point to a symbolic metaphor, but the key is to build ideas, one beat at a time" (Chang 62). Thus, perhaps the rhythmic and inspired cutting of *Magnolia* is what provides a balance. The rhythms of the cuts should culminate to the exaggeration being necessary or useful to the scene's purpose. With *In Paradise*, the dream sequences are juxtaposed in rhythmic accordance to the eccentric shots so that the viewer will stay invested in the story and Leon's sense of reality.

Several films specifically influence the editing of the dream sequences for *In Paradise*. The scenes in which Leon imagines himself in the other-world "paradise" are presented as fleeting memories and emotions, with images cut to music according to ways that best amplify the emotional high and low of the scene. For example, in one of the first dreams we see a younger Leon speaking with Mariana, out-of-focus. Upon talking to her, the music becomes louder and ominous as the shot changes. Leon is shown much older and disappointed, realizing that he is no longer there, but abandoned and half-submerged in a vast swamp. Therefore, these scenes utilize a drastically different editing style than a typical narrative would. The overall stylistic influence is derived from Terrence Malick's elliptical odyssey *The Tree of Life*. Malick's film is an experiential drama that explores life by juxtaposing the origins, end, and purpose of life against a middle-aged man's memories of his childhood. The film is told in a non-linear and fragmented fashion and exists to emphasize emotions and feelings of memories. Much of the film's editing is fleeting, like memories of a bygone moment, composed of jump-cuts set to musical notes that match the essence of a moment. The editing of the dream sequences for *In Paradise* uses this film as a stylistic template.

Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* also influences the editing of the dream sequences. Bergman's film, a story about an old man coming to terms with inevitable death, features a dream sequence in which the main character, Professor Isak Borg, finds himself on an empty street and, in an attempt to find his place, glances up at a street clock to find that it has no hands. Such symbolism, much like the spinning top from *Inception*, requires the film to be cut specifically to provide the object with symbolism. For *In Paradise*, I plan to provide the same compositional and juxtapositional emphasis upon the multiple cars in the dream sequence to suggest that his dreams haunt him endlessly. However, without the same amount of aesthetic emphasis, the sequence will lose its symbolic and metaphorical impact.

Another film that inspires the enigmatic portion of the dream sequences is Luis Buñuel's *Belle de Jour*. Buñuel's film exhibits notions of duality that sustain the ambiguity of the story. However, it does not destroy the plotline that precedes it. Instead, the indefinite possibility at the end of the film adds an additional thematic layer, providing depth and supplying viewers with multiple ways to interpret portions of the story. *Belle de Jour* follows Severine, a sexually discontent housewife who decides to work in a brothel to entertain her erotic desires. Severine dreams up extreme sexual fantasies that could very well be reality. Likewise, in the end, when a thug she rejected paralyzes her husband, the viewers wonder if all that preceded it was one of her erotic fantasies. *Belle de Jour*'s suggestive dream ending does not disrupt Severine's solution from her problem of wanting to leave the brothel because it does not reinstate her status with the problem. Even if the story was a dream, her problem was created and solved in

that narrative as well. Therefore, the indefinite meaning of *In Paradise* is not cut to suggest anything that can disrupt the reality of the problem within the main story.

Overall, the editing of *In Paradise* is grounded in many literary and filmic influences. Just as with directing, editing shapes the film and discovers its best form. As Jean-Luc Godard swrites, "Editing is the transformation of chance into destiny" (Chambers, "Perspectives On Editing: A Conversation With Walter Murch"). Out of intuition and calculation, editing is the clarification and exaggeration of a filmic message, which can reinvent an entire film for better or worse.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology and Script Analysis

The following chapter maps out my specific plans and intentions for editing the film, professionally and artistically. My methodological goals are explained through analyses of comparing and matching the directors' styles and aesthetic intentions, researching and finding the right poetic balance of the film, and breaking down the script as it applies to editing. Each of the decisions is intended to support the directors' visions while also shaping the story in an innovative and strategic fashion.

Differing Directing Styles

The art of editing is the act of creating something new, retelling the story, but it also requires the editor to adhere to the visions and intentions of another. This typically relates to the one-on-one dynamic relationship between the director and editor, but, with *In Paradise*, the balance is to be made with two directors. While the directors of *In Paradise* managed to find a common thread, their individual differences in style were evident within the story, direction, and visuals. On one hand, director Philip Heinrich favors the quirky and eccentric, an atmosphere that one would find in a Wes Anderson, Terry Gilliam, or Gullermo del Toro film. Yet, he also finds inspiration through more evocative and enigmatic works from filmmakers such as Ingmar Bergman, Stanley Kubrick, and Terrence Malick. Director Aaron Youngblood, on the other hand, aims to tell stories that are more grounded in reality. His stylistic focus seems to be driven more toward contemporary character studies, such as the works of Andrew Dominik and Paul

Thomas Anderson. Considering that this film was written by director Philip Heinrich while the cinematography was under the direction of director Aaron Youngblood, the clash of visual and tonal styles was inevitable.

To aid in balancing such stylistic differences, I familiarized myself with these discrepancies early on during the production of the film. This enabled me to take notes on these differences and prepare for issues during the post-production phase. For example, the first scene of the film depicts Leon preparing a lime-aid and walking to his study as he speaks in distress on the phone with Michael. The camera follows behind him as it does with Mickey Rourke in Aronofsky's *The Wrestler*, inviting audiences to wonder what he is thinking and going through. When Leon sits at his study, the camera looms behind him, following suit. While this scene is full of melancholy, it is absent of any exaggerated quirk that is common with the style of director Philip Heinrich. Yet, the majority of the film follows this trend.

In only small doses does Heinrich's eccentric vision seem evident. For this reason, there is often a disruption in the film's fluidity, aesthetic balance, and believability. Early on in the film, there is an audition scene where Leon practically breaks out of character to perform a song and dance routine with a lime green umbrella as the camera belittles him in an object inferior shot. In its original spot following the first scene, this scene comes without any identifiable development and, instead of existing as an interesting analysis and reveal of character, results in being distracting to the flow of the story and the development of character. In another scene, Leon is shown driving up to Michael's house, which appears decorated in resemblance to a set piece from the *Lemony Snicket* series. Amidst the atmosphere and tone of the rest of the film, aesthetic decisions

such as this appear more extravagant than intended. However, the eccentricity of these select scenes and moments is not the sole cause of disruption. Instead, the degree of such eccentricity and the amount of those scenes as compared to the rest in the film is what creates an inconsistency. Critique and preference aside, such a potential tonal inconsistency is balanced in editing, often requiring the exclusion of an entire scene. This issue of fluidity and consistency is one that requires special care and attention considering that the film was the work of two different directors. However, my awareness of these discrepancies during the production of the film has provided me with strategies for achieving a balance, whether it be toning down the more quirky scenes or trimming the more casual and realistic scenes.

The same problem also exists in regards to the visual elements within the film. This issue is nearly interchangeable with the tonal inconsistencies in that the quirkier or more eccentric scenes require a more exaggerated style of cinematography whereas the more grounded scenes only require coverage. The more eccentric scenes are often visually imposing and showy (and rightfully so), filmed in such a way that the poetry is obvious and the subtext is explicit. They feature strong composition, lighting, and color and often leave viewers with the sense that the shot was inspired and pre-conceived. However, based on the fact that most of the film is composed of more grounded scenes such as Leon in his study, Leon teaching, Leon talking to Caroline, etc, much of the film does not retain the type of visual style associated with the more extravagant scenes. While the film will certainly be pretty, perhaps even aiding the fluidity of juxtaposition a bit, much of the film consists of simpler, more coverage-focused shots. The directorial intention was to not be heavy-handed or showy, and it can be argued that the visuals did

not need to overwhelm audiences, but it is likely that the majority of scenes being limited to common establishing, medium, medium close-up, and close-up shots result in a visual imbalance. Considering that the bulk of the film consists of these simpler shots, the more eccentric and exaggerated scenes become distracting when juxtaposed with the other, sticking out like a sore thumb. While there is certainly more narrative and subtextual opportunity for visual innovation than resources would allow (for example, a scene of Leon breaking the bottles of colored water), it is also possible that director Aaron Younglood's intentions for such decisions were to make the more eccentric scenes more striking and powerful and to create an obvious dichotomy.

As the editor, though, I view scenes objectively to find a visual fluidity and consistency. When scenes were filmed in both basic and exaggerated fashions, I occasionally favor more visually simple shots in order to not seem contrived and to not distract and overwhelm viewers. Therefore, scenes such as Leon compulsively writing notes over the Metaverse tape, the audition, the warehouse song and dance, and Michael's house exterior are heavily altered to remain tonally and visually consistent. To establish such a balance in editing, I attempt to hide the overabundant visual simplicity with an implied suggestion that the scenes are intended to be emotionally subtle rather than simply uninspired.

Another inconsistency to correct in the editing room was the specific visual, tonal, and editing style of the dream/paradise sequences as opposed to the rest of the film. As intended by the directors, those specific scenes are supposed to elicit the same feelings one would get from a Terrence Malick film, namely one from his latter catalogue of more ethereal films such as *The Tree of Life*. As in that film, such scenes are intended to exist

as a surreal essence of feelings and memories. Naturally, this calls for a more intuitive style of editing that is unlike the conventional narrative approach. These scenes exist to convey the highs and lows of vague feelings and memories, so they are often cut to emotional rhythms. These rhythms are often established by music or the overarching idea of the scene. However, these scenes are basically instances in brief splices, rather than long scenes, so there may have to be a compromise of style to find a balance with the rest of the film. In further consideration of the film's abundance of visual subtlety, the visual style of these sequences must also flow in that regard.

Finding the Poetic Balance: Style, Tone, and Pace

In Paradise has widespread narrative, aesthetic, and philosophical influences. Thus, like the two directors, I had to find a common thread, or a poetic balance, in their intentions with what is aesthetically practical and efficient. To establish a tonal balance within the film, the more eccentric scenes are to be altered in length or placement. Additionally, the more grounded scenes are trimmed according to a shorthand-approach. For example, it is not always necessary to see Leon walk through a hallway or open and close a door. To balance the visual rhythm and strength of the film, I select shots by looking at everything as objectively as possible, as if I was never there to see how things were being filmed. Additionally, there must be a poetic balance in the style of editing as well, especially considering the more enigmatic nature of the dream sequences as opposed to the rest of the film, which is more conventionally narrative and linear.

One of my specific duties in editing the film is to edit the beginning scenes first and then immediately move on the latter scenes in the film that contain effects sequences so that effects can be completed in a timely manner. These scenes are largely composed

of the warehouse shots towards the latter part of the film where Leon is building the machine and then, close to the end of the story, when he tries to use the machine and nearly dies. This complicates the issue of aesthetic imbalance even further.

Adhering to this request, I discovered a solution. Within the first few scenes, the film moves through all of its different aesthetic styles. The film opens with a more grounded and melodramatic scene, moves on to the title sequence (which takes place in the elliptical dream/paradise environment), and then only a few short scenes later moves on to the quirky and over-the-top audition scene. By editing these scenes first, and then moving onto the effects shots, I can establish an aesthetic balance of style, tone, and pace that effectively progresses linearly throughout the film.

However, there is a major gap in the story that I was initially required to skip across during the process of editing. All the while, I was to retain a balance based on a widespread range of influences behind the film's story, visuals, and direction. Therefore, I found it best to research already-established editors who have a catalogue of similar works. Editors often have to establish an aesthetic consistency that differs in every project, so, in hopes of learning how to better establish a balance for this project, my goal is to locate and research editors who had already achieved similar stylistic balances.

To achieve a balance in the style of editing of the more elliptical scenes with the rest of the narrative, I researched editor David Lowery (*Upstream Color*). In *Upstream Color*, Lowery conveyed narrative sequences in a loosely ethereal manner that is somewhat comparable to Terrence Malick's later films. "Because the film has such lush nature photography and ethereal soundtrack, it occasionally evokes the work of Terrence Malick. It's a film explicated on very specific ideas and there is a sense of fine

craftsmanship that Malick's films, especially his later ones, do not share" (McKellop, "'Upstream Color': Embrace the mystery"). Thus, the resulting style and scope of Lowery's work is largely atmospheric without seeming aimless. While feeling experiential, the film is lean with very specific ideas and sharp editing. In terms of the editing style of the film, I aim to edit *In Paradise* in a similar fashion. While the story of *In Paradise* is not as atmospheric as *Upstream Color*, there are resemblances. The more experiential nature of *Upstream Color* relates to the dream sequences of *In Paradise*. Also, *Upstream Color*, like *In Paradise*, contains a clear narrative structure as well. My goal in editing *In Paradise* is to have a consistent style of editing with regard to the dream sequences, the more grounded scenes, and the more extravagant scenes, much like *Upstream Color* has with the exhibition of transcendent ideas of connectedness with its more surface-level narrative. As it stands now, *In Paradise* looks and feels as if it is from several different filmmakers. Finding such a unified style could possibly reinvent the film into a stylistically unified and cohesive whole. This, in a way, is another example of how editing can be very similar to directing.

For the film's tone, I researched editor Dylan Tichenor (*Magnolia, The Royal Tenenbaums, There Will Be Blood*). The heaviest imbalance of the film is in its tone, so I needed to seek an editor with a broad filmography, who is also respectful of the intentions of style and pace of each of the directors. For this purpose, I aimed to find a film that would match both of the directors' styles. For example, if director Philip Heinrich were to make this film alone, it would likely model the tone of *The Royal Tenenbaums*. If director Aaron Youngblood were to make this film himself, it would likely model the tone of *There Will Be Blood*. However, there had to be a balance so that

the film would feel like one film rather than several. I chose to model the tone of *In Paradise* after *Magnolia*. While told in a multifaceted narrative, the tone of *Magnolia*, specifically as edited by Tichenor, best matches and balances the discrepancies similar to that of *In Paradise*. One scene in *Magnolia* depicts a neglected adult son emotionally making a connection with his dying father, while another scene depicts raining frogs. Yet, the film's tone feels consistent. Tichenor maintained an emotional pitch and momentum by portraying the story in rhythms (Chang 61). Tichenor's insights in regard to editing *Magnolia* exemplify a way to balance the discrepancies of *In Paradise*, such as moving from the singing and dancing in the warehouse scene to something more grounded, or from driving up to Michael's flamboyant house to the next scene where he is speaking with her about his cancer. Furthermore, the multiple stories of *Magnolia* loosely relate to the format of *In Paradise* in that the film can be separated according to three categories: dream sequences, grounded scenes, and fantastical scenes. By way of finding an effective tonal consistency, whether it's from trimming scenes or removing them altogether, it is also a matter of finding the right rhythm. Therefore, establishing a consistent tone for a film is relative to finding the right balance of pace and style.

I also researched Dylan Tichenor's insights for pacing, also specifically with *Magnolia*. Much of the same rules for tonal and stylistic consistency also apply for pacing. Tichenor explains, "The precise design of a film extends to its editing rhythms. There are often lingering moments in which the audience is allowed to sink further in the zone, letting their minds wander a bit, but you can go too far and slow the pace to the point where the motion of ideas is stopping" (Chang 62). Thus, for *In Paradise*, it is crucial for the film to establish an efficient and consistent pace throughout all types of the

scenes and shots. Modeled as a character study, the directors' intentions for the film are to have moments linger so that they leave a mental stain on the audience. The audience is left to define moments and judge characters themselves. Yet, by establishing this in a progressive rhythm, the film can remain consistent and cloak all the visual and stylistic differences. Establishing a consistent pace and rhythm also depends on staying faithful the appropriate overall tone and style. All of these aesthetic elements work together to provide such a poetic balance within a film. The style of the edit must work with the pace, and the pace must work with the tone of the film and so on. Thus, the insights of Lowery and Tichenor provided me with a strategy and mind-frame to map out the poetic balance of the film with. This mental map can be found with the analytical break down of the script.

Script Analysis

Working as the film's editor, I have aesthetic and narrative goals that were pre-determined from reading the script and being on set as a script supervisor during production. Each goal relates to shaping the story, characters, and providing important subtextual information.

The opening of the film, a scene depicting Leon speaking on the phone with Michael, is intended to be abrupt. The idea is for the viewer to be thrown into Leon's world, which forces them to discover it themselves. They become aware of the format of the film early on. This way, the cuts to and from the dream sequences are more expected and are not as disorienting.

The dream sequences serve as a trip to Leon's mind, and thus a digression into delusion. While such sequences are cut and arranged according to an appropriate rhythm

of feeling and emotion, the dream sequences play as reality in the first of the story. Only as the film moves on can viewers recognize such scenes as a dream or delusion, which also parallels with Leon's digression into a state of obsession and madness. The dreams are presented as not only enigmas, but also subtextual information that highlight Leon's thoughts and motivations behind his obsession. Rather than cutting these scenes according to a strong narrative moment or plot point to reveal new visual or aural information, these shots exist to suggest an idea or feeling that relates to Leon's memory. Therefore, they are not cut in a conventional narrative fashion. These scenes, some containing effects, are juxtaposed for experiential purposes that may appropriate an emotional high of an image with an emotional high of a song. The intention is for these scenes to enable the audience to experience Leon's feelings and thoughts in a montage setting. Such music will be provided or recorded by the director Philip Heinrich. The dream sequences mainly exist as evocations of Leon's obsessive thoughts, feelings, and memories. As they reveal Leon's state of mind, the dreams are intended to become much more visceral, with more cuts, and aesthetically delusional, with more effects, as the story moves along and Leon gets dangerously closer to his obsession.

Relationships with characters are also exaggerated though the editing. Leon's relationship with Caroline is shown with only sparingly used close-ups of Leon. Emotionally, he is often distant from her and socially unreachable. I represent this through the editing and choice of shots. Toward the end of the film (such as in the diner scene), however, I make their closer connection evident with more close-ups. As for Caroline with Leon, I use more close-up shots of her, as if she was eager to gain his comfort and become closer with him. Yet, when cut together, I intend the scenes to

visually emphasize the distance Leon places between them. As for Michael and Leon, however, I plan to primarily stick with close-up shots to distinguish that she is one of the few people Leon is comfortably close with. I also mean to exaggerate the same idea with Dakota and Caroline, as their relationship blossoms very quickly. Furthermore, the closest I plan to ever get to Leon is when he is working on the machine, either in his study or the warehouse. In those moments, the audience is nearly face-to-face with him, closer than they certainly want to be. Perhaps, in this fashion, they can identify that his priorities are out of order. Similarly, I plan to emphasize shots that isolate Leon, whether the shots are the result of framing, a wider lens, or a shallower focus. I also intend to make rhythms and motifs out of a consistent use of similar shots. Throughout the production, many scenes are filmed in very similar and simpler shots as a result of an aggressive shooting schedule and a lack of resources. However, I plan to use these shots in a rhythmic manner to hide the lack of intricate camera work and instead visually imply that Leon follows a strict and orderly regime. To account for the more calm shots, I plan to use more locked down angles. For the more emotionally or physically intense scenes, I intend to select more hand-held shots so that audiences would be able to feel that they were witnessing an actual moment rather than a decorated portrait. For shots that were originally locked-down (Leon breaking the glasses of colored water and Leon hearing that his cancer is worsening), I plan to add a very subtle wiggle as an effect to mimic the visceral hand-held feel of the moment. Overall, the visual power that subtext can have on a film's story and characters was to be fully utilized.

Another powerful visual element that I utilize was placing the audience in the role of analyst, allowing them to occasionally look up or down at Leon (or any of the other characters). This is a psychological effect that cannot be avoided and should be taken advantage of. For example, during the audition scene, it is important to emphasize Leon's emotional position in the scene. While he pitifully sings and dances, the audience should be far away and distant, looking down at him, judging him, analyzing him, and trying to uncover why he is doing this. If it was filmed up-close and below in an object superior angle, it would supply Leon with fearsome power and significance, all of which he is empty of, especially in this scene. I also aim to depict Leon's house as a claustrophobic space, especially for the rooms in which Leon studies and obsesses. Overall, the effective selection and juxtaposition of camera angles that suggest or emphasize psychological effects is one of my priorities in editing the film.

However, this exaggeration and extravagance is balanced with other scenes. The audition scene, along with Leon obsessively taking notes on the Metaverse videos, the scenes at Michael's house at the wind farm, the scenes with Michael riding a bicycle, the scenes with Malachi, when Leon is singing in the warehouse as he builds the machine, and the scenes at the gravesite are all handled delicately in order to maintain a consistent style, tone, and pace within the film. In the script and during production, these were the scenes that felt much more eccentric than the rest of the story. Many of these scenes are altered or trimmed for this reason. Despite the gap in linear editing that was originally to be endured, I plan for the film to build a progressive rhythm and cutting pace that parallels Leon's delusion and obsession. As the film progresses, there is faster cutting and more hand-held (unsteady) shots. To balance all of the differing aesthetic elements, I

entertain the possibility of editing in more quick and visceral daydream splices of the paradise shots, which was not how those scenes were scripted. One goal with this is to introduce a seriousness or darker tone to the more gaudy scenes that need to be handled delicately. My intention is to make the audience feel that things are falling out of control, away from any recognizable reality. For this reason, among others, I am skeptical of the necessary length (and inclusion) of the audition scene so early on in the story. While the precedent is to adhere to the directors' visions, I still intend to balance the extravagance of content with the desired tone of the film.

There are a few troublesome scenes that require very careful attention. To achieve an effective sense of consistency, balance, and linearity, I feel that the effects shots need to be edited wide with more coverage so that they can be cut down later according to the appropriate progression of the film. Also, several shots need to be excluded because of narrative clichés or heavy-handedness. For example, Leon throwing up at the warehouse, Michael riding a bicycle, and Malachi's theatrical death are too contrived for audiences to take seriously. Additionally, several lines need to be altered, such as Dakota's mom's voicemail message to Leon, to make them more realistic and natural. Lastly, several of the metaphorical elements of the film can be altered to seem suggestive rather than overt. A clear example was the use of the color green. While this is an important subtextual color, green carpet, green bathrobes, green food, green drinks, green window shades, green clothes, and green bedsheets all taken together became a bit too on-the-nose. Through editing, I plan to maximize the intentions of the directors by paying close attention to the more troublesome scenes that could compromise their visions.

The film was edited on Adobe Premiere. On set as the script supervisor, I took notes of directors' opinions of the shots. However, I chose not to note any of my thoughts so that I could examine the footage as objectively as possible considering the circumstance of me having to be on set. Thus, as I edited the film, I had the directors' notes to turn to for guidance on any shot. Likewise, I created a binder that separated every scene and listed all that was needed to allow me to triple-check for continuity errors and assist me through the gaps in the editing process. Overall, I plan to significantly shape the story, possibly reinventing it to some degree, in adherence of the directors' visions.

CHAPTER FOUR

In Paradise

The following chapter includes an online link for the film *In Paradise*. The film is

presented in its final editing cut, but may undergo small changes before its festival run.

https://vimeo.com/87308347
Password: baylorthesis2014

Philip Heinrich and Aaron Youngblood. *In Paradise.* 2014.

CHAPTER FIVE

Self-Critique and Film Analysis

The following chapter includes a personal critique and analysis of the final edit of the film. Additionally, this chapter will map out the process behind the editing of the film as it is also relevant to my critique. My thoughts on editing as directing, in regards to what I learned during the process of editing *In Paradise*, will conclude the chapter.

Process and Critique

The editing process of *In Paradise* had several stages. Considering the short amount of time I had to edit the film, organization of these stages was a key factor in finishing the film with a desirable quality within that amount of time. The film's production took place during August 1 to the 23, with pick-ups in November, and the post-production process began directly after. Considering that there are over 300 effects shots in the film, the directors requested that a rough cut be completed by November so that the visual effects artist could have a rough idea as to how and when the effects needed to be completed. Along with the color correction and audio mixing of the film, it was also so that there would be enough time to complete the film by the March deadline.

My position as the editor began on set in August. On set, I was the script supervisor. My main duty was to serve as the continuity sheriff, making sure cups stayed in the same places, clocks were at the correct times, wedding rings were not on any fingers, and that lines be said as they are listed in the script. However, I failed in doing so a few times as my position as the film's editor started to begin. As the script supervisor, I

was required to be on set at all times. While I was often busy with those duties in the house location, where we shot multiple days and the majority of the film's scenes at, there was little for me to do at the other locations where we were only shooting for a day. During that time, I would often be left standing around, occasionally helping to carry things or offering suggestions to people. Feeling the pressure of how long it would take to edit the film and how much time we actually had to edit the film, I decided to begin my role as the editor early during the lag-time on set. I ultimately felt that I was wasting precious time by standing around on set and, given that my main duty was editing the film and not serving as the script supervisor, that time could be more efficiently spent if I began work on duties like labeling and organizing clips. While I missed a wedding ring or two in my continuity duties, I found this to be a wise decision. By the time the film wrapped, I had already finished labeling and organizing all of the footage and audio. This was paramount to editing the film within the desired frame of time.

The footage was separated into folders labeled by scenes and cutaway shots. If scenes were not slated, I would describe them in key words (such as "Leon's car in town"). The footage was also labeled by take and scene. For example, "29D2" would mean scene 29, shot/angle D, take 2. Most of the time, cutaways were not slated so they would be labeled according to key words such as "House Cutaway 1". While on set, during the lag-time as scenes were being shot, I would refrain from watching the scenes too closely and instead ask the directors which take they considered the best. While this was a feeble attempt to retain some degree of objectivity, it was also to label takes according to their opinion of them. The scale typically ranged in order from "no", "ok", "good", "pretty good", "great", to even "yes, this is the one" a few times. Regardless if it

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was "the one" or not, I circled what they thought was the best take. Sometimes there were several. While labeling the clips on the computer, I also followed through with this by highlighting the file names of the best takes in green. Following this organization, and by following the script breakdown while editing, I was able to quickly locate clips and see which clips the directors liked best during the production. Likewise, the audio was also organized according to scenes. However, the individual files were not labeled because much of the audio was to be synced automatically with a software program called PluralEyes.

Ultimately, I felt that my central role to the film was to be the editor and that being on set often got in the way of that. While my near-obsessive attention to detail was what they desired in a script supervisor, I was often distracted by my role as the editor and the time-pressure that was inherent with that. The hours it took to organize and label all of the footage were often very long, sometimes even taking up the entire time of a shoot or the majority of a day. Thankfully, I finished the organization and labeling process by the time production wrapped, which streamlined the process a bit more. Yet, it still felt like a rush job given that I still had to synchronize all of the audio and familiarize myself with the footage. Looking back, I believe it would have been a much wiser choice to have a different crew member serve as script supervisor and to have me organize, label, and sync up all the footage and audio in the meantime. To me, this would have resulted in a much more efficient workflow and a much less stressful and segregated process.

However, I am thankful for being able to be on set as I learned a lot about directing and time-and-resource management. While my faith in successfully making student-level feature films has been shattered, it was very insightful to observe what to do and not to do while on set. Acting as an observer and another crew member allowed me to look at the process objectively to evaluate and utilize these insights for myself on my own projects. Things that worried me on set, such as rushing through shots, not having storyboards, and not having much time for rehearsals nor many takes became even more evident during the editing of the film as their effects were devastatingly noticeable and irreparable. There were several instances when I needed a shot, but it didn't exist so I had to differentiate shots by digitally zooming in. One scene, which is now deleted, was when Leon asks Caroline about Jose Cortazar. In the scene, Leon goes and sits by Caroline, which is the first time he shows any affinity for her. I needed to use a close-up of her and him, but there were only two takes of her close-ups. The first take was the entire scene, but it was reverse recorded, and the second take was only the first half of the scene. As a result, this scene suffered and we ultimately had to scrap it (to our benefit). Overall, I was able to actually see the cause and effect of a hurried production. While this unfortunately reflected on me as an editor, I was very thankful to see the importance of careful directing firsthand.

Looking in on the process from the outside, I was also able to see how positive relations with cast and crew on set are invaluable to a successful production. There were instances of hasty attitudes from time-to-time, as with any production, and I was able to witness and experience the long-term effects of this. For a crew that fulfills multiple positions at once, and for me as the editor also being on set serving as the script

supervisor before editing the entire film, upholding positive morale and energy amongst everyone on set is crucial, especially for an unpaid shoot without breaks. We went over on hours every day and at times, people became burnt out for different reasons and stopped caring, both the crew and the cast (through they never verbally admitted it, it was impossible not to). While many friends were made, several working relationships were scarred. Resources were simply stretched too thin. While it may seem irrelevant, and maybe even commonplace when discussing a film's production, I feel that it all exhibits the importance of effective direction. Therefore, as an editor standing by on set and also working with others during the post-production process, I was able to see the long-term impact directing has on a film and the people involved. People are hesitant to work together because they felt that the production was inefficiently run and that the end result of the film may not equate with the experience being worth their while.

Sometimes, I felt that the directors might have been too tired or rushed to actually hone in and direct. Without having much time for rehearsals, and not shooting more than a handful of takes, it was inevitable that performances would be uneven. Had there been a storyboard, we could have set everything up for one room and filmed all of those scenes, and moved onto the next room. Instead, we filmed by the scene, which required a new set up for each shot. The time saved could have been devoted to trying things out with the actors or shooting multiple takes. However, this is all not to say there were not instances where there were multiple takes and a bit of rehearsing. They happened, but only sparingly. Overall, I was able to see how these circumstances also reflect upon the ability of myself as the editor, for better or worse. I could only do so much for the film, and working with the material I had and under their guidance, I did the best I could.

After production wrapped, the post-production process immediately began. While I had to wait on a computer to arrive (I had to order one to edit the film), I learned how to use Adobe Premiere and mentally mapped how I would edit the film. In doing so, I decided that the film should be edited in chunks, or chapters. This was intended to keep me on a good pace, where I would sync audio for two to three chapters one day and then edit those chapters on the next day. Overall, it helped me establish a schedule for editing the film and also aided me in understanding the story. Doing so helped me find redundancies in the story so that I could watch out for them in editing. I was also able to map out which chapters were longer so that I could plan in advance which chapters I would get to on certain days. This enabled the directors to stay on the same path as me and keep me up to speed. After each chapter, I would send them the Premiere workfile and an xml of the edit (we used the same hard-drive organization). They would know what I was doing each day and were able to forewarn me if an unsuspecting shot was actually important or if a specific cut was crucial before editing the scene. The chapters were labeled according to their scenes and the general description of what happens. The chapters that I devised for *In Paradise* can be seen as follows:

1. Intro/Audition (Scenes1-7)
2. Metaverse Institute (Scenes 8-13)
3. Classtime (Scene 14)
4. Caroline (Scenes 15-22)
5. Cancer (Scenes 23-25)
6. Adjusting (Scenes 26-28)
7. Closer (Scenes 29-33)
8. Caroline at School (Scenes 34-39)
9. Driving Dakota (Scenes 40-44)
10. Leon's Film (Scenes 45-48)
11. The Blueprint (Scenes 49-53)
12. The Machine (Scenes 54-58)
13. Final Exam (Scenes 59-60)
14. Home Life (Scenes 61-63)
15. Friends (Scenes 64-67)
16. The Brinkley's (Scenes 68-70)
17. Aftermath (Scenes 71-77)
18. Missing (Scenes 78-81)
19. Fit of Rage (Scenes 82-87)
20. Going Places (Scenes 88-92)
21. Reasons (Scenes 93-104)
22. Racing (Scenes 105-113)
23. The Paykel Device (Scenes 114-120)
24. New Life (Scenes 121-123)
25. In Paradise (Scenes 124-131)

During this stage was when I also starting to brainstorm ways I could blend the two directing styles as well as come up with an overall editing style of the film. One problem I encountered was that one of the directors requested that I begin editing the film by finishing the scenes with effects first, namely the dream sequences and the machine/warehouse scenes (which are mainly during the latter portions of the film). This was problematic to my plan to edit the film in a linear fashion, from beginning to end. My intention was to do this to find a better pace for the film and to also balance the different filmmaking styles of the directors. I warned that doing those scenes first would likely result in the film not have the most effective pacing. The scenes could be stylistically imbalanced from the rest of the film. I persuaded him that it could be seen as a possible distraction, which could be a devastating effect for such a do-or-die moment that was key to the film working as intended. The warehouse scene was the climax of the film, where all of the film's mysteries and unanswered questions are resolved in an action/science-fiction type setting. Typically, such a scene would call for faster cutting, but that also depended on how the rest of the film was edited, specifically the pace and style. The dream sequences were also delicate in that they blend in with the rest of the film, sometimes even with match-cuts, and serve as a "is this real?" moment up until a final cut out of the dream to the next scene. They exist to shake the audiences up a bit and to keep them guessing. Therefore, the editing of these scenes, and their impact, depends on what comes before or after each scene. These scenes also require specific music and are quite different from the rest of the film. Furthermore, they aren't as specific to the script and are meant to feel much more ethereal. For such key scenes, it felt like a mistake to edit these scenes first especially given that the majority of the film is different

from these scenes; they are not conversation-based or in a controlled environment like the majority of the film. Therefore, in efforts to maximize the impact of such scenes and have the film feel consistent, I persuaded the directors to at least let me edit the first 10-15 scenes first to get a feel for the film and to establish the most effective pace and consistent style for it as well.

I suggested that by doing so I would be able to find a balance due to the radical stylistic differences between the first few scenes. The film originally opened with Leon speaking on the phone sounding doubtful and worrisome, while pouring and sipping lime-aid, and then going into his study afterwards to listen to a tape to collect his thoughts. The nature of the scene is very mysterious, but nothing too eccentric. The character seems bothered, and in a dark place, but nothing too abnormal. Overall, without any context and serving as the opening of the film, it's a scene that the audience perceives as normal and grounded. This reflects director Aaron Youngblood's directing style. However, directly after, the film cuts to the scene where Leon auditions for a play. With Leon stuttering every word, abruptly changing moods, and gleefully (and pitifully) singing and dancing "Modern Major General" the nature of the film suddenly changes and all pre-existing perceptions of the film fly out of the window. I felt that the abrupt, radical change in the film's tone style is disruptive and off-putting. The material alone is not off-putting, but instead feels like it belongs to a different film. The extravagant and quirky nature of this scene is inherent to director Philip Heinrich's storytelling style. To add to that, the aesthetic styles of each of the scenes add to this effect. The original opening is subtle and grounded. The cinematography is simple and does not speak over the happenings. However, the audition scene is loud, in your face, and the visuals are

equally extravagant. Leon is often framed inferior in an extremely wide shot and, when he loses himself, we see him in abrupt close-ups. The two scenes in the film could not be more tonally and stylistically different and, to me, both serve as exemplars of each of the directors' distinct visions. Since this balancing act occurs so early in the film, I used this to persuade the directors to let me find a consistent feel for the film first before jumping on to the effects-heavy scenes.

I would ultimately not return to the dream and warehouse scenes until the very end. I expressed my fears that jumping to the effects shots first would be no different than how rushed the shoot was and would result in an equal amount of setbacks. We all knew the film was really going to need some careful work because of that, and we ultimately decided that editing the film linearly would be the best way as long as it was done in a timely manner. As with labeling the footage, sorting out the film by chapters helped immensely. Everyone was on the same track, and I finished the rough cut ahead of schedule, around the last week of October.

My main guide for the edit was the script. For the majority of the film, I followed it very closely. My process in editing the film was to first read the section I was editing, ask the directors if they had any specific intentions or shots that must be included, and then to watch every clip. I often watched every clip as I synchronized the audio. Most of the audio was synced automatically with a program called PluralEyes, but some of the film was synced manually. All of the audio was synced during the same month that it took to edit the film. I used this to my advantage by scheduling sync days in between creative cutting days so that I could let my mind have a break between each day of cutting. Although I had notes of what the directors' thoughts were with regard to the best

take of each setup, I still watched every clip. What they chose as the best shot was the case only about half of the time, in my opinion. Typically, I would watch every clip and mark the best takes of each shot. After each chapter edit, I would send the directors the work files online. To stay on track, they withheld providing any feedback or instruction for re-edits while I was editing the rough cut. Given the short amount of time, we agreed that I would completely edit the rough cut at once and without changes and then we would meet and fine tune together in sort of a round-table collaboration. This way my edits could resonate with them if it was different than their original intentions. During fine-tuning, the directors were able to see the edits I made for themselves and could better understand the specific reasons for my cut. I found this to be the best method of persuasion. Moreover, this process allowed me to give the film my own signature, sometimes editing scenes completely differently than they had envisioned (although such scenes were often rejected).

Sometimes, after sending the scenes, they would tell me later in person how it was completely different than they expected and how we would have to fix it later because of something important that I missed. In the opening audition/montage scene, the first scene I edited, I excluded a shot of Leon grading a paper because I felt like it did not have any mystery behind it and did not belong with the other clips being shown. The montage showed Leon punching a bag, looking through a microscope, and downing a thick green slush. Although I begged to remove the punching bag, everything else had a mysterious undertone to it. For that reason, I thought the grading shot did not belong. However, Aaron informed me after the fact that it needed to be included because a friend's name was on the paper that Leon was grading. Thankfully, I talked him out of it during the

fine-tuning process. Later on in the editing process, I would often text them the more radical ideas I would have, such as wanting to use a longer take instead of cut, or chopping a line completely, but was often shut down. This happened repeatedly, so I stopped asking and just stuck to the script, occasionally making an alternate edit in hopes that it would convince them by seeing it. They would watch every scene I sent, and occasionally give brief feedback, but only under the agreement that we wouldn't touch it again until we fine-tuned it together. I therefore remained faithful to the script and asked for their intentions beforehand. I was brave with the edits on very rare occasions.

However, there is one section in which I significantly altered the film from the script. During production, shoot days were so rushed that there was hardly any time devoted to the direction of actors. Shots were mostly completed with fewer than five takes, and the actors were not given lengthy instruction (not that they always have to be). However, the performance of the lead actor is often the downfall of the film. The problem is a sum of parts. The lead actor plays Leon Vincent as a very jittery, odd, and alienating middle-aged man. He stutters constantly, refuses to look anyone in the eye, and is extremely awkward in social situations. While this is in line with the directors' intentions, the perceptions of the character are different. While the directors intended for something darker and a bit sinister (as in the teaser trailer), the actor's performance comes across as goofy and over-the-top. Perhaps the cinematography, intended for the darker, more grounded perception of the character, calls attention to the lead's performance. To me, this was in instance in which the directors' filmmaking sensibilities clashed the hardest, as if a Philip Heinrich character was trapped in an Aaron Youngblood movie. Regardless, the character behaves in a way that makes him hard to

take seriously. For this reason, the authenticity of conversations between him and other characters within the film is hindered, specifically those with his niece Caroline. The other characters in the film generally play it straight, despite having a quirky characteristic or two (Michael rides a bicycle everywhere, and Malachi wears a glowing purple robe). Yet, Leon is the main character, and much of the film is him talking, so the problem is ultimately permanent and unavoidable. Therefore, I would watch every clip to pick the takes that weren't as over-the-top. Still, selecting the best takes of this did not solve the problem adequately, so the only option was to own up to it. This was the only way for the film to have a consistent feel and style. Therefore, changing the introduction of the film, the only big exception to me following the script, was done with this in mind. As it is in the script, people would watch the film and initially interpret it as a normal, grounded drama only to be completely thrown off at the audition scene and possibly never recover.

Initially, before shooting, I wanted to try to persuade the directors to remove the audition scene from the film. It felt like it did not belong and was never solved or referenced to again. I understood that it was intended to provide insight into the character, but I always thought it was too exaggerated to belong with the rest of the film (I always wanted to try and work around showing Michael riding a bike as well). As it turned out, the way the character was played for the remainder of the movie better matched the audition scene than it read on paper. What was once one scene that was overtly extravagant turned into the entire film. Therefore, to familiarize audiences with Leon immediately to prepare them for the eccentricities of the film, I thought it best to have the audition scene introduce the film and have the lime-aid/phone scene come after. This

way, rather than confusing audiences with the grounded nature of the phone scene, audiences are introduced to the real Leon. They become immediately aware of the kind of movie they are watching, and it is also much more visually striking and engaging as it is ultimately a stronger opening. The original opening didn't have enough context. The scene's vague ambiguity made it uninteresting. Likewise, the audition scene always felt randomly placed otherwise. By placing the scene first, I feel that perceptions of Leon's character become more consistent and, considering that nothing too exaggerated happens story-wise until the final warehouse/machine scene, the story finds a better tonal and stylistic balance. In a way, the audition scene works as the thesis for Leon. We are familiarized with his speech and mannerisms, we see his social and personal eccentricities, and we also are made aware of his habits that are expanded on in the remainder of the film.

Another way I changed the film from what it was in the script was by cutting certain lines of dialogue or taking out sections of scenes. One such moment is the scene in which Leon picks Caroline up from the airport. In the script, she sits next to him and plops her head onto him, hugging him, seeking some form of comfort (Figure 4). However, they remain at a considerable emotional distance for the majority of the film. The hug felt out-of-character and did not have the desired effect. It also resulted in the following scenes being interpreted differently. Instead, the scene cuts after she sits down, right before she hugs Leon's shoulder.

Fig. 4. Caroline Hugs Leon at Airport

Another scene in particular was when Dakota calls Caroline, and she excitedly answers the phone, saying, "Hello? Dakota! Hey! How's it going? …Nothing much, just chilling I guess". While the line delivery on the second half was unsuccessful, it was also unnecessary. Ending it on "How's it going?" solves issues of redundancies that were prominent throughout the film. Several times in the rough cut, we would see characters go in and out of every door, walk into and out of every room, and hold their looks as long as possible. While this was vastly cut down while fine-tuning the film, the original intent from the directors was to create a very slow and deliberate pace. Inspired by Michael Haneke's *Amour*, they initially requested that I hold takes for an awkward amount of time. In one way, it matched Leon's awkward personality, and in another it felt extremely redundant. Several repeated images in the film were intended to be a motif, such as Leon walking into the house and hanging his necklace by the door, but by the sixth time we see

it, it becomes unnecessary. Another scene was when Leon finishes cooking the potato balls. In the scene, he opens the oven, takes out the balls, and dispenses them on a plate. I suggested that we could cut into the scene as he is pouring the potato balls, but director Philip Heinrich loved the aesthetic of the oven opening. Another example was a scene that exhibits Leon's declining health. After a visit to the doctor, in which the audience learns he has cancer, Leon goes to his place of refuge – a mysterious warehouse. We see him pull up to a field, run out of the car, and vomit (Figure 5). Ultimately, I wished to delete the scene altogether because I thought it was too cliché. However, it was necessary in that it revealed the warehouse. The thing that still bothered me was that the scene had Leon getting out of the car and running a distance into the field to vomit, returning to the car, shutting the door, and walking back to the warehouse (probably a 40 second – 1 minute shot). While the pacing of the walking to the warehouse was unnecessarily slow, what was the most redundant was Leon running into a field to throw up. I didn't understand why did not just run a few steps to vomit since it was a field. Eventually, the scene was cut down, and the running was removed.

Fig 5. Leon Runs to Vomit in Field

On rare occasions, I would get the irresistible urge to add in a stylistic flair and be brave with the editing. One such scene was when Leon sneaks into the refinery to steal a barrel of sulfur. While sneaking around, Leon has to duck, hide, and run around a janitor working nearby. While editing the scene, I saw that the character was listening to music on his headphones so I thought it would be interesting to put the audience in his headspace for his intercut close-up shots as Leon snuck around him. To do so, I thought that the audio should bluntly change to play just the music he is listening to, instead of warehouse sounds. For fun, I originally picked Bad Brains' "Don't Bother Me". I always liked the edit, and although the music had to be swapped for copyright purposes, I was happy to see that my brief moment of bravery was rewarded by my cut staying in the final cut. Another moment of rewarded courage was during the scene in which Caroline watches the Metaverse tape. In the scene, she sneaks the mysterious tape out of Leon's office and watches it while she is left alone at the house. She is surprised to see Leon on the tape. Suddenly she hears a car pull into the driveway and a car door open. In the script, Caroline simply takes the tape out and rushes it back to Leon's study before he walks in the door. Although a tad cliché, I wanted to give the scene more momentum so I intercut Leon coming in the door with Caroline hurrying to eject the tape and hide the all

evidence of her watching it. As it is now, it picks up the pace a bit and builds tension that never quite existed for that scene. Thankfully, the directors approved the edit.

Other than these circumstances, situations such as this were the only times I would stray from the script. For the rough cut, even though I disagreed with them on their emphasis on certain motifs (such as the close-up insert shot of the theatre director inserting a tape into the tape player) and certain redundancies (the Haneke-inspired pacing), I would edit it according to their intentions. Occasionally I would pick battles, but I would mostly lose. Therefore, I would mostly edit the scenes according to their visions.

However, there was no storyboard, so I would map out what I wanted to say visually. In that sense, I had an agenda, but otherwise I followed the script and respected the directors' intentions. When I would edit, I would often make multiple versions. I would do so by either stacking cutting options on top of each other (one clip may have two stacked on top, meaning that the top is the one I prefer and the two below are solid alternates) or by creating an altogether different edit. I did this for several scenes. In a way, it was to save time. For example, one of the edits would be a more radical idea of mine (which the directors were typically not in favor of), whereas the other one stuck to the script and was edited as I thought they would like. I didn't want to send them something and then have to drastically change it later, so I would create both while the material was still very familiar with me. One example was the scene with Leon and Caroline arguing in the kitchen after the fight at the Brinkley's house (Figure 6). In the scene, Caroline confronts Leon about being alone as Leon is trying to reassure Caroline about Dakota. They are alienating each other from the words they say. The scene was

filmed as a single long-take that was carefully staged and blocked. The actors performed the scene well, moving their bodies according to their emotions as the camera hid in the distance. However, the directors suggest that I cut to close-ups towards the latter part of the shot. Normally this would be an understandable stylistic compromise, but the problem was that the entire film followed this formula. Nearly every scene began wide and gradually moved in. This redundancy resulted in the film feeling overly conventional, safe, and stale (although the shots themselves were pretty, I must admit). This problem also affected this scene in that, by this moment in the film, the formula had lost its effect – the desired impact of utilizing close-up shots had softened. However, the scene had great potential. The actors' body language spoke louder than their faces in the close-ups and the longer take allowed viewers to become more immersed in the moment. Unfortunately, it was another battle that was lost.

Fig. 6. Alternate vs. Close-Up Shot of Kitchen Argument

Typically the directors favored the use of every angle for a scene, even if redundant. Because the film was not storyboarded, many of the shots feel similar to each other, as does the organization and structure of the scenes themselves. As I edited the film, I developed a sense of what the directors wanted, which was often a conventional edit of the scene that used wider establishing shots and then moved us in towards the characters. There were never just *Autumn Sonata* close-ups or Tarkovsky long-takes and the film ultimately feels uninspired. Perhaps the directors felt that the actors just could not pull it off, or perhaps the directors never desired to try, but the kitchen scene was one example that would have provided a nice break from the visual repetitiveness of the film. Overall, at times, it feels like a film made by people that do not watch films (which is sadly not the case). There are lines are extremely cliché ("I want to see what's on the other side"), story details that are nonsensical and distracting (the bathrobes and work-out headbands), and there are story events that are accidentally humorous. For example, during the scene when the warehouse implodes, Malachi is clearly staggering and impaled, yet Dakota yells, "Are you alright?!". When Dakota reaches him, Malachi grabs hold of him and smiles before falling dead. In the midst of all the death and destruction, we hear a bicycle peel in and Michael conveniently arrives.

Yet, I am not guaranteed to provide a solution to this problem, and I also contributed to this error somehow. Still, I do feel that some of my suggestions would have helped the film to feel more inspired. In the end, aside from a few scenes, I feel that I was too creatively limited either by the material or by direction. When I would suggest a radical alternate edit, often for visual relief, they would choose the simpler option or offer to create a hybrid which, sadly, still felt visually redundant. Thankfully, a lot of the

redundancies and doubtful feelings about the film were lessened during the fine-tuning portion of the film, during which we cut down the rough-cut duration from 2½ hours down to about/approximately 110 minutes.

After I had edited the majority of the film, the final scenes I edited were the dream sequences and the machine/warehouse scene. These were the most intuitive and challenging edits mainly because of the free-form approach to the dream sequences and the effects-heavy nature of the final machine scene. For the dreams, I worked loosely with the script, but mainly worked with writer/director Philip Heinrich. Philip was able to give me a mental template of what the scenes should feel like, and I ran with it. To set the mood, I used a temporary audio drone that had a sense of dread to it, and I edited to the music. Aaron and Philip then took the song and mixed things into it to make it sound a bit more ethereal (for example, a low hum that was created by Philip can now be heard with the track). To me, these scenes are a breath of fresh air compared against the predictability of the rest of the film. A large portion of the film takes place at the house location, and I feel that the dream sequences are largely responsible for audience engagement during that chunk of the film.

The last scene I edited was the machine sequence. While I was able to edit the character actions, for the sections of the scene with the machine effects shot, I was only able to add in titled-plates that saved a spot for effects shots (Figure 7). To finish the scene, the directors and I met and worked on it together. In the end, it was cut exactly to Philip's desires so that he could complete the effects shots for it and also score the music. This scene was especially difficult because Philip had worked everything out in his head and had difficulty communicating it clearly. While trying to save Leon from being

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electrocuted by the machine in the warehouse, the characters do not seem to hurry and panic as one might expect. However, no one really quite understood what was intended with the scene nor could they visualize what Philip would describe. For these reasons, the pacing feels too slow and the scene feels a bit anti-climactic. Looking back, it would have been impossible to edit this scene first. It was an aimless procedure even after editing everything else. When it was being edited, the majority of the scene looked like the frame below:
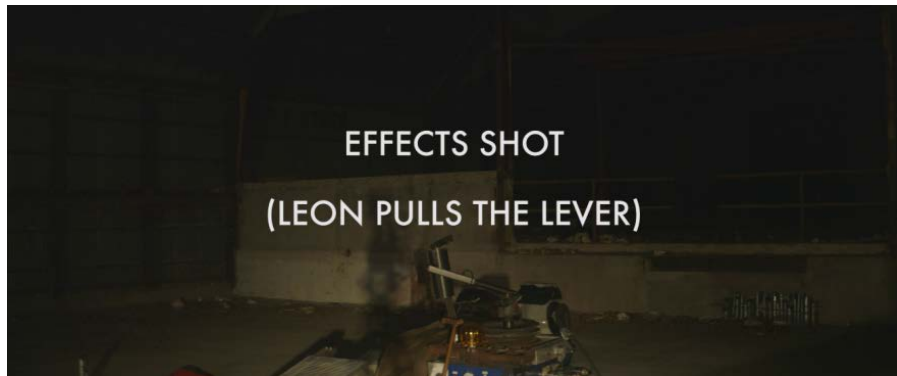

Fig. 7. Warehouse Effects Shot Plate

After finishing the rough cut, I took a break for a week or two before we dove into the fine-tuning process. At that time, I was very doubtful about the quality of the film. There were many things that were irreparable that I was skeptical about being able to fix. One of these things was the story. One of the biggest discoveries I had during the editing process was that many of the events in the story were repetitive. Several times in the story, Leon leaves the house, leaving Caroline alone to wander and snoop through his things only for him to return even more alienated and awkward. The problem was that such scenes all had specific outcomes with something important to the story. Otherwise, they could have been scrapped. Another issue was the film's pacing, particularly in the

first half where the story seems to be barely moving. Lastly, the other problem was the occasional harsh clash of directing styles, most notably in the direction of the lead actor versus the cinematography and direction of the other actors. Ultimately, the film felt rather uninteresting and very hard to connect with. I was also fearful that this reflected on my ability as an editor. I was unsure of how much I had helped or was to blame. Thankfully, the fine-tuning helped out considerably, and the film vastly improved.

The fine-tuning process was the most insightful learning experience. This stage of the editing process was a collaborative effort where the directors and I were in the editing room together. We would fine-tune the film as I edited the rough cut, linearly and by chapter. Our main goal was to trim the film and work together to create the best edit. There were times when they needed to argue a point, and there were times when I needed to do the same, but it was always a very collaborative process. However, to do this, I had to separate myself from the film personally. As the directors, they were entitled to rightfully make whatever changes they desired. However, in the instances where I argued strongly for a change, they mostly agreed. For example, they initially argued for keeping the running vomit shot and the head plop in the airport, but I was able to convince them on the basis of them being overtly cliché and nonsensical (vomit shot) or abnormal in regards to character behaviors and relationships (airport hug).

During this process, several scenes were shortened or cut altogether. As I originally intended, a more traditional cinematic approach to editing was utilized as we inevitably cut out shots of characters entering and exiting every door. Likewise, long reaction shots were also shortened, as were lines of dialogue throughout the film. For example, the Wilma Brinkley voicemail, once problematic due to its problematic

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performance, is now cut from the film. Some scenes were also reordered. The vomit

scene is now before the doctor's office visit, which replaced the scene where Leon hurts

his arm lifting weights. Doing so removes the cliché nature of the vomit scene and also

cuts the weight lifting scene, which was nonsensical and irrelevant to the story. This

process also alleviated problems with the redundant pacing and the over-the-top nature of

the lead character. For example, much of the schoolroom lecture was cut, much of the

Metaverse videos were cut down, and two living room scenes were completely cut (the

"Jose Cortazar" scene where Leon asks Caroline about her play and the "Did Dakota

pass?" scene where Caroline offers Leon tarts). In the "Jose Cortazar" scene, the lead

actor's performance was exceptionally exaggerated, and the connection between the two

characters did not seem authentic, despite my attempts to cut the scene multiple ways. In

the end, we axed the scene in hopes of removing one of the noticeably over-the-top

performances by the lead character and also to generate more of a surprise effect when

Leon receives the play-book from Caroline in his study and states aloud, "…adapted for

the stage by Caroline Vincent." The "Did Dakota pass?" scene was victim to similar

circumstances. Aside from performance problems, the scene felt narratively redundant.

At this point, Leon had returned home only to disappoint Caroline repeatedly, so

removing the scene enhanced the story's pace.

Overall, as a result of this process, the film was cut down by nearly an hour. For

the most part, everyone was in agreement on all points. There was never any disrespect or

haste. Above all, I felt like I was treated as a trusted collaborator. I did not feel this way

until this stage in the process, and it was at this point that I felt like I contributed to the

film. They accepted my opinions and we often changed scenes accordingly (such as on cutting the "Jose Cortazar" scene).

Among the most insightful experiences during the fine-tuning process was seeing the directors notice the clash of different styles among themselves within the film. One of the most vivid examples is of the final shot in the film in which Leon stand upon a precipice and looks upon a far away land beyond a sea of fog (Figure 8) This scene reflects director Philip Heinrich's more fantastical and imaginative style, while it does not reflect Aaron Youngblood's directorial style at all. As a result, Aaron wanted the shot to be cut from the film. I suggested that a possible solution would be to zoom into the shot more and add a subtle artificial camera wiggle so that the spectacle of the shot, i.e. the fantastical nature of it, would not be as prominent. Still, the shot remains. However, because it comes at the very end of the film, it does not impact the film's stylistic balance in a negative way. I believe it makes the film more interesting and leaves the audience with questions.

Fig. 8. Leon Walking upon Fantastical Precipice

It was also interesting to see the directors notice the effects of a rushed production. By witnessing the limited number of takes and the same types of shots, the directors were able to see the importance of careful direction. One of the most valuable things I gained from my involvement was being able to objectively see the process of directing a film from the beginning of production to the tail-end of post-production. Many of the things I worried about, such as the clash of styles and the effects of a hurried production with no storyboard, came to light during the fine-tuning of the film. I believe it was a learning experience for all of us to look back in hindsight and see what might have been and what we can do better next time.

Ultimately, as a result of the fine-tuning and the addition of color correction and music, the film has greatly improved but is still far from perfect. There are still things I am unhappy with that the directors will keep in the film, including the redundant and overly ambiguous "On the Dream" tape scene near the opening of the film, the convenient arrival of Michael (and on a bicycle) during the warehouse implosion, and the use of close-up shots rather than the long take during the kitchen argument. Still, I have come to understand that this is their film and it must be what they want it to be. More than anything, I have been able to observe directing through my duties as an editor and to see the impact editing has on a film's final form. As Jean-Luc Godard wrote, "The most that efficient editing will give a film is precisely the initial impression of having been directed. Editing can restore to actuality that ephemeral grace neglected by both snob and film-lover or can transform chance into destiny" (39). While this film is not my crowning achievement as an editor, I have learned an incredible amount about directing throughout the entire process fulfilling my duties as the film's editor.

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