

THE FILM SET AS INFORMATION INFRASTRUCTURE

AND

THE CAMERA REPORT SHEET AS INDICATOR OF INDUSTRY POLITICS

The film set - especially when constructed in support of an ambitious project - may be seen as an information infrastructure. Indeed, the film set fulfills all three of Star's criteria for reading information infrastructure (387) in that it is a physical property (*ibid.*) with "effects on human organization," (*ibid.*) it requires practices for keeping a "record of activities," (*ibid.*) and this record is typically seen as an unquestionable "mirror of actions." (388) The primary record in this case is the camera report sheet, which - as an information-based artifact - (Winner 19) reveals political realities behind said infrastructure.

The film set exemplifies Star's notion of infrastructure as a relational ecology. (380) "Infrastructure is a fundamentally relational concept," she says, "becoming real infrastructure in relation to organized practices." (*ibid.*) The physical space of the set - such as the pseudo buildings constructed for filming - are an example of its tangible infrastructure. (Buckland 352) Additionally, many technologies are essential for the smooth functioning of the infrastructure. Lights, batteries, cranes, dollies, automobiles, walkie-talkies, cell phones, monitors and - of course - cameras all come into play. Following Star's notion of the infrastructure itself becoming an information-collecting device, (387) the camera may in fact be seen as this device. It may also be taken "unproblematically as a mirror of actions in the world," (388) as the camera eye is often interpreted to be an objective representation of whatever it happens to be focusing on. This may be seen as even more true in the case of an electronic press kit, (Electronic)

where filmmakers assign a series of cameras to record the goings-on of the set at all hours of the day. But since Star emphasizes the benefits of analyzing classifications “for evidence of cultural values, conflicts, or other decisions taken in construction...” (387) let us instead turn to an artifact that has a more obvious classification system built into it - the camera report sheet (CRS). It is usually the duty of a single crew member - second assistant camera - to fill in the CRS over the course of a shooting day. The CRS includes general information on the production, but also specific information on each individual shot. It is important to keep an accurate CRS, as details on the shots are necessary for film developers and editors. If a particular shot was thought to be underexposed, for example, the film developer will see that noted in the CRS and therefore correct for it in the development process.

A quick glance over the CRS does not reveal anything too meaningful on an ethnographic level. A closer consideration of its organizational decisions, however, reveals political dimensions inherent in the artifact. (Winner 19) The sheet starts with date, camera roll number, and sound roll number. Below that, there are fields for - in this order - production company, title, director, cinematographer/recordist, and type of film. Clearly, this categorization is not alphabetical. What, then, is this categorization based on? One begins to wonder about the rationale behind putting production company ahead of title and director ahead of cinematographer. One also wonders about the decision to include only director and cinematographer in the CRS. As Star encourages, let us now listen for the master narrative (385) by “identifying with that which has been made other, or unnamed.” (*ibid.*) What about all of the other individuals on a film set who are crucial for the production, yet have been excluded from this classification? Like Star’s medical

history form for women that excludes lesbians, (384) diversity here has not been problematized (*ibid*) at all. A “deletion of modalities” (385) seems to have occurred here on the CRS. The director and cinematographer may be making the aesthetic decisions on the shots, but without the producer there would be no money to even afford said shots. What, then, is the rationale behind prioritizing aesthetics over business? Let us remember that the production company, however, is on top. This may certainly be read as a political statement, as no objective classification rationale - such as alphabetization - is apparent here. Through the CRS classification, the production company is asserting that they are indeed in control, and their voice shall be prioritized over all others. It seems clear, then, which master narrative (385) has won out. The production company has asserted its “monolithic agenda,” (*ibid.*) making clear to us that they - ultimately - are calling the shots. The master voice (*ibid.*) of business, then, has unsurprisingly been prioritized over creative judgement.

The intangible infrastructure (Buckland 352) is exemplified by the culture of the film set - a necessary standardization of relationships between people. Just as James Madison’s new nation “required standardized laws for the regulation of commerce” (Bettig 26) because of emerging heterogeneity between the states, the heterogeneity of the film set requires a standardized process to run smoothly. There exists a communication protocol behind how information is disseminated across a film set - the lighting technician tells the production assistant, the production assistant tells the second AC, the second AC tells the cinematographer, the cinematographer tells the director and so on. This standardized process of communication exists because - if a film set is constructed upon existing infrastructures, as it often is - then it needs to, as Star says,

embody the standards (381) of those existing infrastructures. For instance, a film set may be entirely self-contained save for the water system of the city that it is built in, which its cast and crew still have to use. The infrastructure of the film set must be capable of smoothly embodying the standards (*ibid.*) of the city's water system infrastructure; otherwise, the set will not function. As members of the film set are already used to standardization in their process of communication, it becomes somewhat easier for them to adapt to another standardized process - in this case, the water system. This example also speaks to Star's dimension of infrastructure built on an installed base (*ibid.*) in that the infrastructure of the film set is quite literally built on top of the infrastructure of the water system.

Regarding another of the nine dimensions - the "taken-for-grantedness of artifacts and organizational arrangements," (*ibid.*) artifacts may be seen as elements such as the aforementioned lights, cranes, dollies, monitors, cameras, and camera report sheets. Organizational arrangements may be seen as the aforementioned standardized process of communication. For a random passerby walking onto a film set, they may have some idea that a movie is being shot but they are not going to understand how to read a camera report sheet. They are also not going to realize that the guy setting up the lights is not supposed to directly talk to the director. Just as Star says, then, "strangers and outsiders encounter infrastructure as a target object to be learned about." (*ibid.*) As members of the set were first becoming introduced to this infrastructure, however, they likely acquired a naturalized familiarity (*ibid.*) with these artifacts and communication processes - they were "learned as part of membership," (*ibid.*) sometimes even subconsciously. (*ibid.*) Much like Star's ethnographers overlooked what they had already naturalized, (*ibid.*) in

the process of talking to people and attempting to learn how to read a CRT, a member of the crew may internalize the standardized process of how to communicate with other members on the set without even realizing it.

Star's notion of transparency (*ibid.*) is partially but not entirely amenable to the infrastructure of the film set. The task of efficiently moving from shot to shot - for members of the set - is invisibly supported (*ibid.*) by the infrastructure in the sense that they do not necessarily think about every step that goes into the task while accomplishing it. When a shot has been completed to the director's satisfaction and another one has to be set up, tons of equipment often has to be moved around and talent needs to be reorganized. Thanks to the standardized process of communication and well-defined purposes behind the artifacts involved, crew members will likely not give a second thought to how to most efficiently move that massive crane to the other side of the set, for instance. In this regard, then, the infrastructure is transparent. (*ibid.*) But Star also says that the infrastructure "does not have to be reinvented each time or assembled for each task..." (*ibid.*) This may not necessarily be the case for every infrastructure. The infrastructure of a film set *does* in fact have to be reassembled for each task in the sense that people and equipment have to be frequently moved from shot to shot, though the processes that are used to achieve this mobilization may remain the same. The infrastructure of a water system, then, may be seen to be less mobile than the infrastructure of a film set - its artifacts are more permanently in place and do not have to be mobilized as often.

Just as Lawrence Lessig accomplished with his Creative Commons project, (Creative) analyzing the infrastructure of the film set may result in a "surfacing of

silenced voices.” (Star 383) Lessig cut through red tape, creating a system that allows previously unheard creators to voice their copyright concerns. People are now finally able to say which rights of their works are reserved and which rights they are comfortable with releasing. Creating an entirely new film industry system that gives equal weight to creative and business decisions may be too ambitious, but at least people may now develop a greater understanding of the hidden meanings behind the artifacts (Winner 19) that they are working with.

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INF1001 Assignment 2 : Marking Rubric

Student Name and tutorial number: GRANT PATTEN

Evaluation Factors (note there is no specific weighting of these factors in the final assignment grade)	Comments
Introduction	<p>This is a very strong paper. You use Star's work well to uncover and understand the infrastructure at play in a Camera Report Sheet (CRS). In particular, your discussion of the master narrative and the deletion of modalities to reveal aspects of the CRS was excellent. In fact, you could have spent more space considering the CRS from this perspective and drawing even more conclusions.</p> <p>It is unclear what part of your encounter was not amenable to Star's approach (which was part of the assignment), but overall this is a well written and structured paper.</p> <p>Small note, but when discussing the work of an author within a paragraph, the use of <i>ibid</i> can be distracting. The manner in which you write makes the source of the ideas you present clear, so in many cases it's enough to let the initial reference to the author (in most cases Star) or a single citation near the close of the paragraph stand. Again - a small note to keep in mind.</p> <p>Well done.</p>
Clarity in describing your infrastructure encounter	
Reflection on Star's claims regarding infrastructure in relation to the encounter	
Incorporation of at least three of Star's nine dimensions	
Articulation of which "trick of the trade" was most helpful	
Demonstration of the utility of concepts and the clear explanation of your reasoning	
Articulation of the most interesting infrastructure encounter not amenable to Star's approach	
Appropriate reference to at least two relevant sources in addition to Star	
Conclusion	
Quality of writing, including clarity, conciseness, liveliness of style	
Correctness, including spelling, citation, grammatical construction	

Grade: A-