Student Filmmakers

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On the Cover: "Adisa," directed by Simon Denda, was filmed in the breathtaking cities and countryside of Kenya.

Background image by Jordy Meow

PUBLISHER'S DESK

I hope this issue finds you well and that you enjoy reading and learning about the art of filmmaking, as well as the tools and technologies applied in the creation of motion pictures. This issue marks our 17th year in publication. Seventeen years ago, we exhibited and distributed our debut edition of *Student Filmmakers* Magazine at the NAB Show in Las Vegas. I remember an older gentleman arriving at our booth saying, "You know, we are all students."

I continue to learn more about making movies and how to tell stories with motion pictures. I am grateful for the work that I get to do. It's creative and brings me into contact with a host of like-minded people working in the entertainment industry. It's exciting, inspiring and rewarding.

I want to thank our magazine crew, contributing writers and sponsors who have helped to make this new year issue come to life. I hope you will take the time to visit our sponsors and get to know how they can help you create and distribute your work. I am sure you will find new ideas, inspiration and insights in this issue that you can use for your 2022 productions!

Truly
Kim Edward Welch

Cinematography with an 'Emotional Lens'

Tony Westman csc, dga, dgc

The director turned to me after blocking with actors and stunt performers and said he wanted the scene to have a brooding and threatening feeling at which point he left the set to have a coffee.

There I stood along with my operator, 1st AC, key grip, gaffer, stunt coordinator and visual effects crew now looking at me for inspiration and instruction as to what needed to be done. Just then the first AD stepped up and asked how long until we would be ready to shoot. Welcome to my world.

Working as a Director of Photography can be a challenging endeavor as you are at the mercy of all the creative forces that conspire to create a finished motion picture. In as much as it is a process of applying technical solutions to animate the dramatic aspects of story, character, location, sets, effects, stunts, etc., there is no simple tool that can define and realize a 'feeling', which is a rather subjective, intangible, and often elusive phenomenon.

My solution is what I call the 'emotional lens', a tool not made by Zeiss nor Canon but one forged by years of responding visually to experiences of life, art, memory, joy, and tragedy. The countless hours spent watching TV, theater or films at the local cinema are certainly a part of one's reference points to whatever is the state of the art, award-winning production, but these are other peoples' visions and are really just building blocks to your own unique, synthesized visual language that must be filtered and formalized by you so to provide the confidence and capacity to create something unique and compelling on the big (or small) screen. Filmmaking is a team effort, so you are not alone in this creative adventure, but the ability to lead your crew through a labyrinth of possibilities that must follow the slender thread of directorial vision is your unique hero's journey.

Enjoy the ride.

Challenge #1: In an episode of the Paramount series, "The 4400", the script called for a dream sequence where the hero meets his muse in a kind of 'star chamber' set where he was to experience some kind of spiritual enlightenment. The location was a kind of theater space that was just a big black box to play out a scene that might be real or simply a dream state. *Image 1* was done with only a 12 K outside the doorway. *Image 2* was more complicated, as the scene needed coverage that implied the dream state. The ghost image of the two characters was achieved with a TV monitor with the happy faces of our two characters reflected off a piece of glass in front of the camera while shooting the full figures around the table.

Challenge #2: Budget is always an issue, either there is no money to help you make cinema magic, or there is a big budget, and your career is on the line for not making the best picture ever made. *Here is a no budget example:* This was a dramatic scene in a documentary called "Air India 182", where a plane was blown up by terrorists and our scene was to illustrate the painful process of families identifying the dead from photos taken of the victims. The location was a hospital, we had only a few hours to film the scene and the director had asked for the scene to have an unpleasant, edgy look to underscore the painful emotional content of the scene. The solution was to wrap the existing fluorescent lighting with green gel and preserving the silhouette effect on the actors by flagging off any fill light creating a very unnatural hospital environment.

Tony Westman, BA, MA, CSC, DGA, DGC has been making films for over fifty years both as Director and Director of Photography and past president of IATSE 669. His film projects include drama, documentaries, television, features, and corporate productions. His roster of clients includes Castle Rock, Warner Brothers, 20th Century Fox, NBC, ABC, CBS, CBC, National Film Board of Canada.

His film awards include Canadian Society of Cinematographers, Yorkton Film Festival, Leo Awards.

He has taught film production at Simon Fraser University, Emily Carr University and Art Institute of Vancouver and Capilano University.

Lighting Your Talking Heads

Peter Warren csc

In news, they are called **talking heads**. In my 40 years as a news shooter and now DP, I have lit and filmed hundreds, if not thousands, of talking heads. They come in all shapes and sizes; some with hair, others without; they are different colors; they talk about different things. And I am not just referring to news stories and documentaries. These talking heads are also actors delivering lines or presenters talking to camera. Talking heads are the single most common thing you will light. And, the one thing they all have in common is they are all essentially lit the same way. I'll get to that in a minute, but let's go step by step through

a complete location lighting set up. Lighting the talking head is easy. The real challenge is the background.

When I arrive at a location, I am always looking for options for the interview. The room they think will be best is often the worst place for an interview. When I look around at options, the first thing I do is listen for sound. HVAC can be a deal breaker although a constant hum can be eliminated in post, they tell me. Then I see if I have control of the lights. If I don't have control, then I will either be unscrewing bulbs or covering up overhead lights. A large garbage bag is a great thing

to shove into your kit. I don't want overhead light falling on my talking head. Then I look for interesting backgrounds. I love windows. Even if it is completely overcast and dreary outside, I know I can make it look like a sunny day. More on that later. I want to make sure the talking head is as far away from the background as possible. I spend a lot of time moving furniture. Then, finally, I make sure that there is nothing distracting in the background. Nothing worse than a Ficus Benjamina growing out of someone's head.

Now decide which direction the person will be looking; camera left, right or to camera,

then frame the shot. If using two cameras, frame both shots. I often use a second camera on a slider, so there is a larger area to consider. And remember, you still need to get lights in.

Once you are happy with the framing, there are two critical things to adjust before you break out your lighting kit. Number one is depth of field. If you are using a fast lens, you will want to adjust your aperture and decide how 'soft' you want your background to be. There is no right or wrong, this is up to you. But remember, if you are shooting F1.4, the entire face will not be in focus. If the nose is sharp, the ear will be just slightly soft, and if they move a lot, you will have to stay on your toes to maintain focus, unless you have face tracking… which I love! I often settle at F1.8 to F2.8. It creates a softish background, but you can still see what's back there. Once you have set this, do not touch your aperture again.

Now using your ISO, expose for the room. This is where I can turn a dreary day into a sunny one by overexposing that window in the background. I also travel with a Leko and will create a natural looking light coming in from the window. It is quite believable. Again, once you have set this, do not touch your ISO again.

Now it's time to light the talking head. As I said earlier, this is done the same way every time. Key, fill, backlight (or hair light), and for those that go the extra mile, the 'kicker'. I always use all four. How you use them is what will set you apart.

They don't all have to be lighting fixtures. Think of the four as lighting sources. More on that later. Let's start with the key, which is where you should always start. Generally, it is always preferred that this be as soft a source as possible. You want the light to 'wrap' around the face. The larger the source, the softer the light. Placement is key. The person should always be looking toward the key. The camera should be facing the shady side of the face. This is how it is done 99.9% of the time. Not only in interviews but also in movies and TV shows. Check it out the next time you're watching your favourite streaming channel.

Now it's time to fine-tune the key. I use a technique called the 'Rembrandt Triangle'. The famous Dutch painter, Rembrandt would use a painting technique where the light source created a triangle of light on the shady side of the face illuminating the eye and highlighting the cheekbone. To create this look, I have the person look in the direction they will be looking, and then, adjust the key to create this triangle of light. Now adjust the light level for the exposure settings you have previously set. Do not adjust your aperture or ISO.

The fill light is not to illuminate per say, it is to control the contrast. It sets the tone or the mood. How dark do you want that shadow created by the key? The fill doesn't

have to be a light fixture, it could be the ambient light in the room or a reflector. Sometimes you may want to take light away to create greater contrast, 'negative fill'. If you are using a fixture, the placement is more flexible. It can go anywhere on the opposite side of the key from directly in front, to the side. The quality (hard or soft) doesn't matter because it will never cast a shadow.

I like to use a small hair light on a boom and put it right over the head. Purists have argued that this has to be motivated… To me, it always looks better with it than without it… Unless the person is bald, that's the only time I don't use it.

The kicker is motivated, if there is a window in the shot, which I always look for, then it will be more intense. If there is no window, then I make it very subtle. It should be behind the person at head height and opposite the key so that it illuminates on the shadow side of the face.

Any of these four sources of light can be from an existing source like a window or ambient light in the room. These sources can be modified with scrims, flags or reflectors. But I will always go with a light fixture for the key so that I can precisely place it and create that Rembrandt Triangle. This will always make the talking head look good.

*After graduating from the Radio and Television program at Ryerson Polytechnic University, **Peter Warren csc** began his career in television news working at CITY TV in Toronto as a Citypulse news cameraman. He was proud to be one of Canada's first video journalists, telling stories from behind the camera. Moving on to Global TV, Peter was able to do more national stories where he won several awards including a Gemini award for Best News Photography. CTV Ottawa offered Peter a senior news cameraman position which gave him the opportunity to come back home. After seven years and several more awards, Peter went freelance which opened up a whole new world of production. Since then, he has been the Director of Photography on 6 Canadian television series and worked on many others as camera operator. Peter is also very busy with corporate videos, news and commercials. www.peterwarrendop.ca*

Zoom Lenses
vs.
Prime Lenses

Snehal Patel

Zoom lenses are an important tool for filmmaking in general, but even more important for multicamera cinematography. With the ability to quickly reframe, change focal lengths and maintain sharp focus, zooms become invaluable for achieving the shot under challenging conditions. Many cinematographers utilize zooms for various productions from films to television to broadcast.

So, what is the difference between a zoom and a prime? First and foremost, it's the difference between a fixed focal length (primes) and a variable focal length (zoom). Focal lengths are magnifications, much like magnifications for a microscope. The longer the focal length, the closer you feel to a distant object. The wider the focal length, the lesser the magnification which results in objects in the distance feeling further away.

In these cases, the "object" is relative. A person's eye can be a distant object if they are only seven feet away from the camera. A wider focal length lens would see a lot of the person's body and face, along with the eye. With an appropriate telephoto focal length, we can get a tight shot of just the eye. Zoom lenses can render both extremes and all the in-between magnifications, with the turn of the zoom ring.

This ability comes at a cost, which is reflected in the fact that zoom lenses are typically larger, heavier and have slower T-stops. This is due to the complexity of the optical design and mechanics. Modern zoom lenses do a great job of covering a large focal range, while performing quite well compared to older lenses. Even so, primes typically offer a cleaner more precise look, especially when wide open. Since primes are generally faster than zooms, you can achieve a shallower depth of field with smaller T-stops (larger IRIS opening). These are the reasons why primes are preferred for creative purposes, while zooms are seen as being more utilitarian.

Optical Design. Zooms typically have many glass elements in their designs, where two or more groups of elements are variable and moving while zooming or focusing the lens. It's not easy to design optics to cover large focal ranges like 70 to 200mm. Zoom designs are more complex than fixed focal length lenses (primes), and the designer must decide what compromises will be made and what is an acceptable level of distortion, chromatic aberration and exposure fall off from the center of the frame to the edge.

Mechanics. Since several glass elements in a zoom lens must shift when the focal length is changed, the mechanics have to be precise and repeatable. Well-designed cinema zooms will perform similarly even after a lot of time in the field. They are built with robust housings and well-lubricated moving parts, but the barrel designs are more complex than prime lenses, so servicing a zoom take more time and effort. Plus, there are more things that can go wrong with the mechanics, which means zooms are more likely to require servicing after heavy use.

Snehal Patel is a film and television professional with over two decades of experience creating content and adapting new technology. He started the first Canon Bootcamp in Los Angeles during the Canon 5D DSLR craze and has over twenty years of experience in cinema. Snehal has lived and worked in Chicago, Mumbai and Los Angeles as a freelance Producer & Director. He was a camera technical salesperson at ARRI, and currently is the Head of Cinema Sales at ZEISS. He represents the Americas for ZEISS and is proud to call Hollywood his home.

Production Equipment Rental Advice John Marino

Key Ingredients

To me, the key ingredients to a successful equipment rental company is not just the equipment you provide, but the service.

Top 10 Rental Tips

1. Work with rental houses that have an interest in your project.
2. Try to use a one stop shopping style rental house.
3. Save money with *camera packages.*
4. Find out what the rental house *replacement gear/response time policy* is.
5. Know what *operating hours* they have and what *after-hours/phone support* they offer.
6. Check all *lenses* for scratches, nicks, etc., as well as *camera gear*.
7. Confirm *Return Time* and *Dates* so you are not charged an extra rental day.
8. Rent *over the weekend* for a one-day rate.
9. Make sure that the *camera techs* are knowledgeable about the rental gear.

10. Make sure the rental house does not sell you more than you need.

Do's

1. Have *insurance coverage* for all gear and production.
2. *Fully test and check out all gear* before leaving with rental.
3. *Shop around* and see what deals are available.
4. Make sure you receive an *itemized gear list* on your Rental Contract.
5. *Develop a good standing long-term relationship* with a rental house.

Don'ts

1. Never ever leave equipment *unattended.* Especially in any vehicle.
2. Never let the rental house try to sell you *what you do not need.*
3. *Don't just sign* and not read rental agreement.
4. Don't return gear/cables *in a mess.*

Student and New Filmmaker Advice

Students and new filmmakers should speak in advance with the rental house to schedule a pick time and date as well as return time and date. They should have their insurance coverage in place and emailed a copy of the certificate at least 2 days prior to the pickup date. They also will need to fill out in advance of the rental dates their personal/business information.

Student Rental Check List

1. Make *a detailed gear* list. Include batteries, chargers, memory cards, card readers, cables, expendables, etc.
2. Bring *proper ID* with you.
3. Check with the rental house on what their *COVID-19 protocol* is.
4. *Have a testing plan.* Most rental houses have test bays with focus charts, color charts to test cameras and lenses.
5. Have all necessary items for environments where you are shooting, e.g., rain covers for cameras and various gear, tents, heaters, etc.

What Camera Should We Use?

From our experience the two major cameras that are being currently used are the Sony PXW-FS7 and the Canon C300 MK II. Some also use the Blackmagic Pocket Cam and the newer Sony A7S MK III or the Sony FX3.

Both the Sony FS7 and the Canon C300 MK II are designed for run-and-gun, *cinéma verité* style shooting, especially when equipped with shoulder rigs and rails. They are both light weight, yet rugged enough to stand the vigors of reality style shooting. They both offer 35MM Sensors, and 4K recording. As well as a wide range of frame rates. They both offer cinematic imaging at a fraction of the cost. As well as great dynamic range, and image resolution.

Encouraging Words

This is a very tough industry, only the very few survive due to the nature of the beast. Stay strong, stay vigilant, listen to those who have been around, learn from the old timers, they know this game all too well and have managed to survive. But most of all, believe in yourself, when it seems like all is falling apart, hang in there, and keep moving forward. Not everyone will understand your art, but eventually if it is great, all will see the beauty of it. This is a very large industry, but a very small world. The ones who show up on time, never complain, do their job well, and go home, those are the ones who last forever.

John Marino has worked over 30 years in the entertainment production industry.

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For more information, visit www.jmrny.com
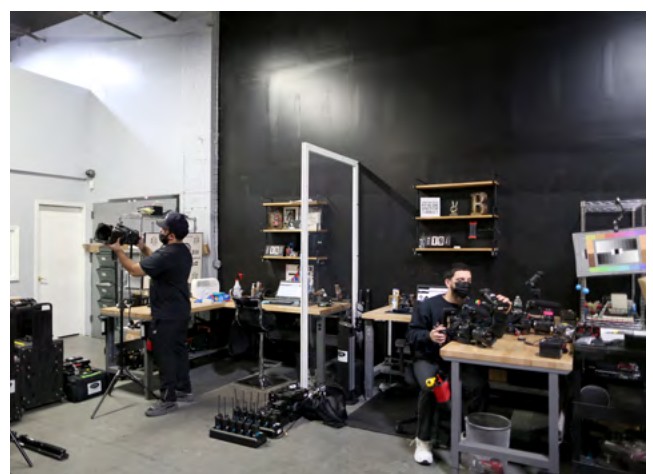
Talent Does Not Matter
in Movie Making

Jared Isham

Your talent does not matter.

A pretty bold statement in an industry that celebrates talent, I know. Beyond the potentially misleading statement about your talent, there are some very deep truths to the statement. In essence, your work ethic will get you much further than your talent ever will.

The first thing anyone likely knows, and probably should if they don't know already, is that the movie making industry is a collaborative industry. This should be evident enough as you have to work with other people. They also have to enjoy working with you and you with them. Without that, you will likely be fired or never asked to work with that team again.

Your work ethic matters.

As a crew member, you need to look beyond the job you are doing and try to see the bigger picture. The producers have worked tirelessly to find the funds to pay for the production of the movie. If you are on a studio film, then the producers have been entrusted with a large sum of money. Knowing that someone's reputation, job, or even livelihood is on the line based on your performance, consideration, and attitude that you bring to the set each day will change the way you approach your job.

I have worked on enough low-budget projects that are up against tight deadlines to know the pressure of staying on schedule or risk losing hundreds of thousands of dollars. If you slack off, carry your ego, show up late, or do any number of things that slow the production down, you likely won't last long.

Once you accept that your actions could directly impact each member of an entire crew, you will more easily be able to shape your work ethic and turn yourself into someone that will be valued and sought after.

Remember, sometimes it is not about the end result of the project you are working on. Yes, it needs to make money and it needs to look good – all that business stuff. It may not be a story or subject you're proud of, but the people you work with and how you treat them will go much further.

Talent is never seen if no one wants to work with you. So have a quality work ethic and that will also shape your talent for years to come.

Jared Isham is an independent filmmaker and creative strategist. He directed "Bounty" (2009, Lionsgate) and "Turn Around Jake" (2015, PureFlix Entertainment) starring Michael Madsen and Jen Lilley. He is the Co-Founder, CCO at Stage Ham Entertainment, LLC., which develops and produces independent entertainment for and "in association" with distribution partners. www.stageham.com

He also provides filmmaking resources and tutorials on his website. www.jaredisham.com

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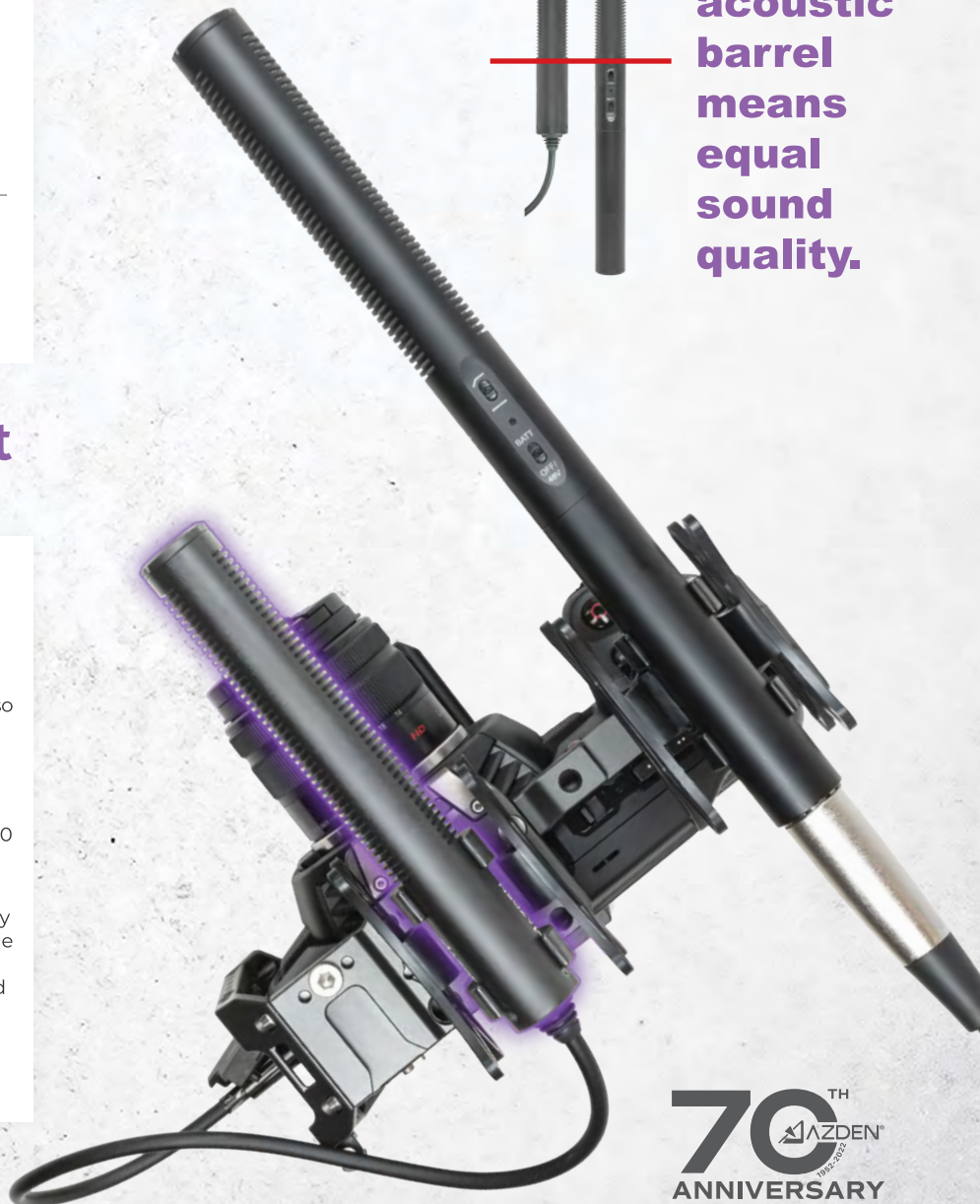
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Planning a Shoot:
My Way of Storyboarding

Marco Schleicher, MA

I really like the process of storyboarding. It gives me a clear vision of what I want and what the film should look like. It also helps me to communicate my ideas to other people who are involved.

My way of storyboarding is influenced by my former professor Michael Haneke. Like him, I storyboard all shots in the order we see them in the film. I also try to edit the whole movie inside my head in pre-production.

For me, the process of storyboarding is a highly important stage of filmmaking. In this article, I will describe my approach to visual storytelling and how I prepare for a shoot.

Storyboarding

When I storyboard, I draw six shots per page. I sketch the shots quite small, since it gets more effort the bigger you sketch. Normally, the shots should cover the main actions and convey to the audience what is important in the scene. During the process of storyboarding, you have to decide for clear shot sizes. It's also important that the shots really fit together, so that you can edit with them later on. When I'm drawing, I also think about which camera lenses I want to use.

Besides each shot, I draw a small floorplan. A floorplan is a map to clarify where the actors, the camera and the main light will be. Next to the floorplan, I write down the main actions which happen in the shot. If a shot is changing a lot, I draw two sketches and connect them with a small arrow. (*See picture below.*)

On top of each scene, I write the scene number and the amount of shots and camera setups. A setup describes the position of the camera. If you move the camera to
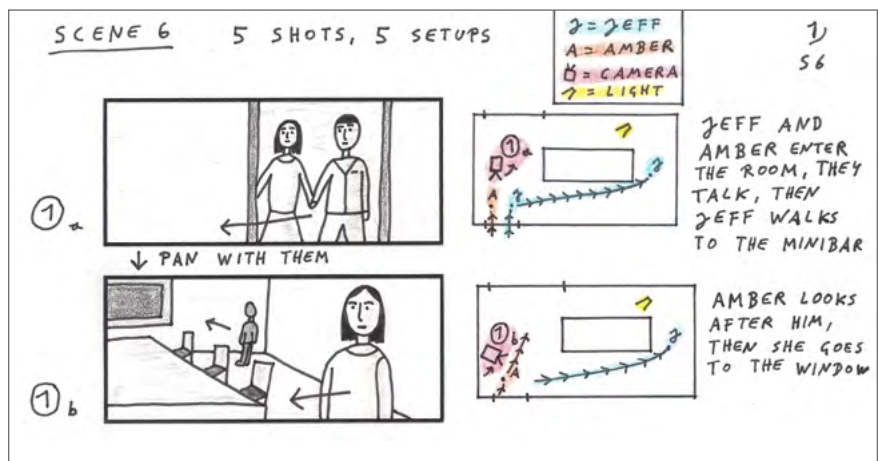
Shots with shot numbers (left) and small floorplans (right)
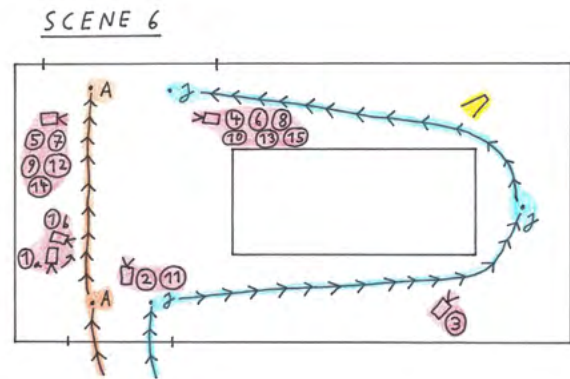
another place in the room, it's a new setup. Often, you can get more than one shot from the same setup if you work with different lenses. In my experience, you can get about 17 shots (not setups) per day; but obviously, it depends on the length and the complexity of the shots.

I also put a small legend for the floorplan on top of each scene. On the left side, I write a number for each shot (shot number). If we see the same shot again later in the scene, I give it a new number (but I write the initial shot number next to it).

The first shot of a scene also depends on how the last scene ended. If the scene before ended, e.g., with a close-up of someone's reaction, you can start the next scene with a wide shot. A wide shot also gives the audience orientation. However, my former professor Michael Haneke said, that you shouldn't always start a new scene with a wide shot.

It can also be good to start a new scene on a building or an object. If you cut straight from a medium close-up to another medium close-up of the same person in a different location, it might feel that the person just jumped from A to B.

The Script

When I'm done with storyboarding a scene, I write each shot number to the right moment in the script. On the left side, I make lines to illustrate which shot covers which parts of the scene. In general, it's good to have a master shot which covers the whole scene; this is also important for safety in case you cannot get a shot due to time reasons.

Floorplan

Next, I draw a bigger floorplan for the entire scene. This floorplan provides an overview for the crew members how you want to shoot the scene and how many camera setups you plan. Furthermore, it helps to avoid problems with the axis.

For the floorplan, you should have a specific location in mind. I put dots where the actors will stand and write the first letter of their characters next to it (A = Amber, J = Jeff). Then, I draw lines with arrows to clarify in which direction they will walk. Close to the small camera icons, I write down all shot numbers which belong to the same setup.

In this scene, the main light is placed in the right corner of the room. Where you put the main light also depends on the director of photography, how he/she wants to light the
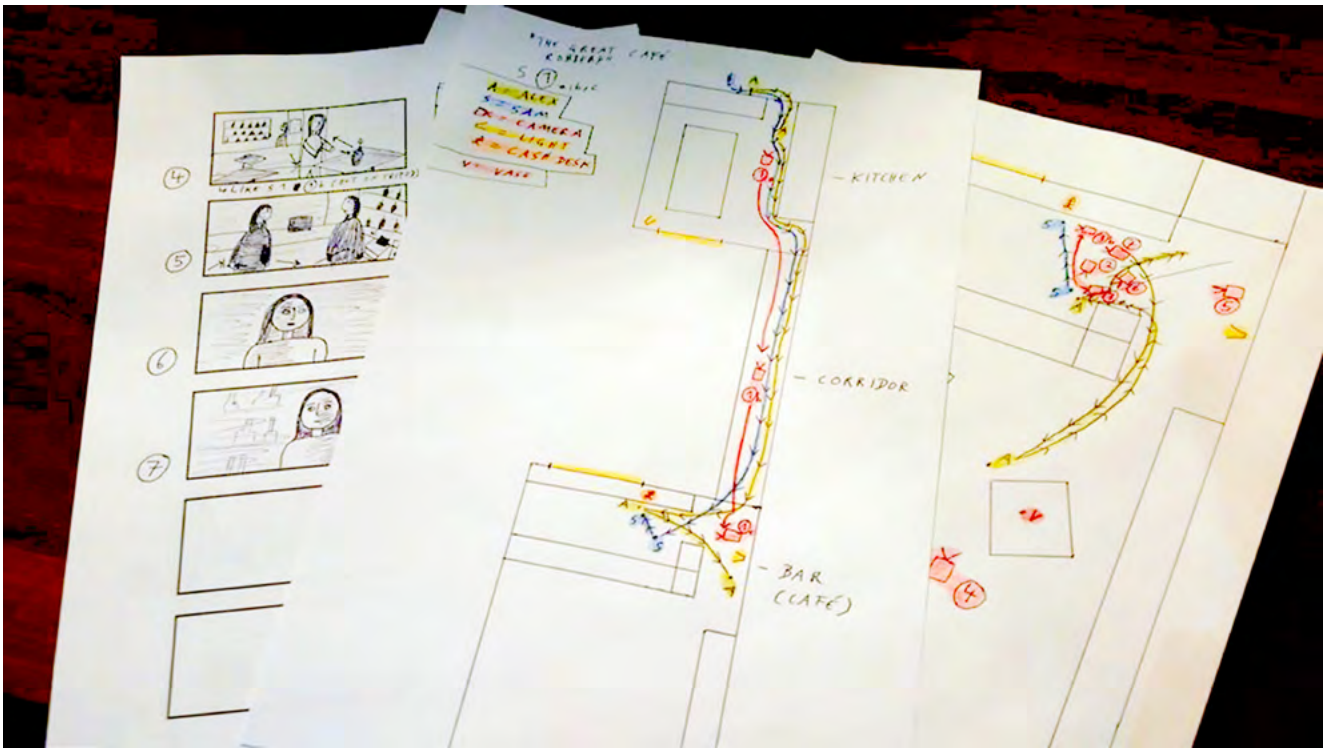
scene. It's also good to know where the natural light is coming from. I mark the characters, the camera and the main light in different colors so that it's easy for everyone to understand.

Balance

I try to make sure that my sketches are balanced. This helps me on set when I compose the shots. Normally, you place the characters slightly off center ("golden ratio"). If you put a character right in the middle of a shot, he/she might feel lost ("loser's point"). It might also feel uncomfortable, if you put a character too close to the edge of frame. However, unbalanced shots can be good if, e.g., the world falls apart or if a character is confused or drunk.

Here are a few examples of unbalanced and balanced shots:

Unbalanced

Balanced

Unbalanced

Balanced

Unbalanced

Balanced

Directions

Directions are also important to me when I storyboard. If a character walks from left to right, the character might feel slightly more positive than if he/she is coming from the other side. This has to do with the direction we read in the western world. If you storyboard a journey, you have to decide in which direction the journey is going (except if it shall feel like a long and confusing one).

Even if a character is looking from left to right, he or she might feel more positive. The left side of a shot is also slightly more featured since we tend to scan an image from left to right.
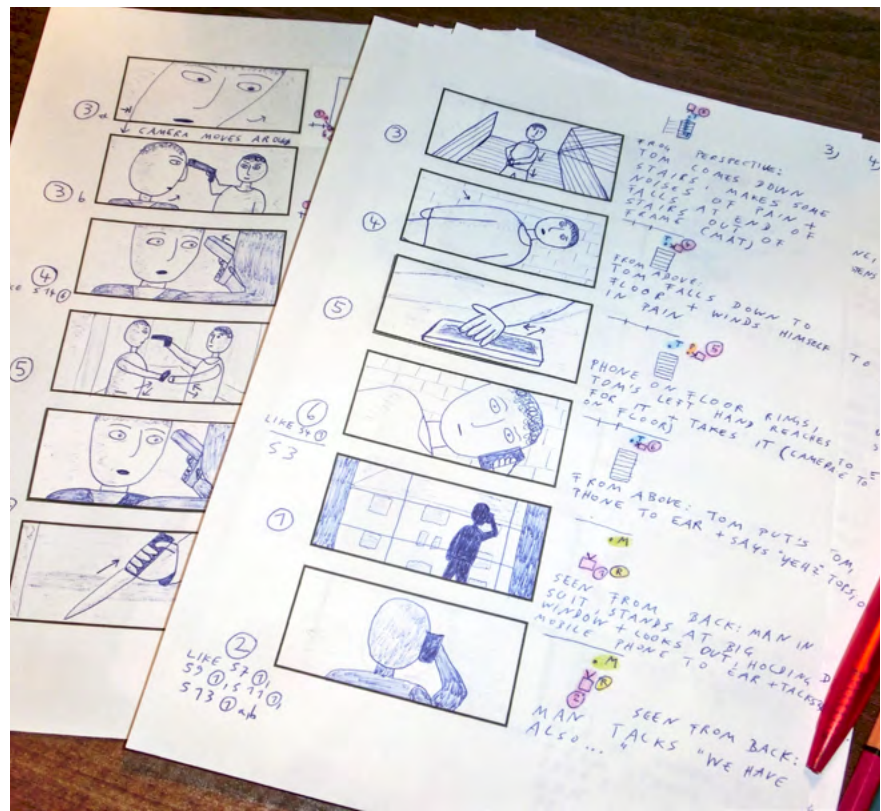
Placing the Actors & Depth

Normally, when you place the actors and the camera you want to create depth. There are a few exceptions, e.g., when a character shall feel trapped or if the film has an unconventional style.

In my opinion, it's important to know which shots you will mainly use in the edit. Then you can place the actors and the camera particularly for these shots.

If you shoot a scene with a table and two actors, you can place both actors close to the corner of the table. This creates more connection
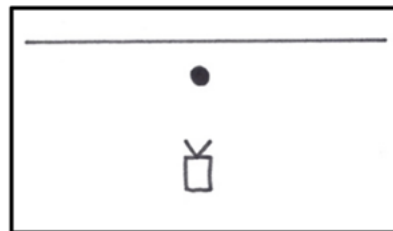
Flat
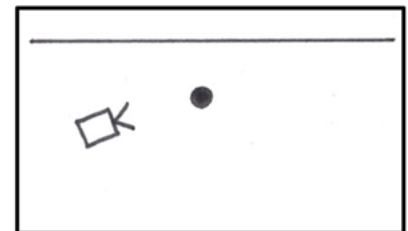
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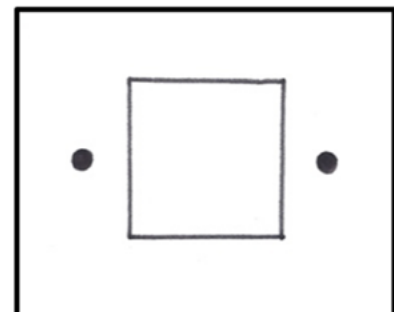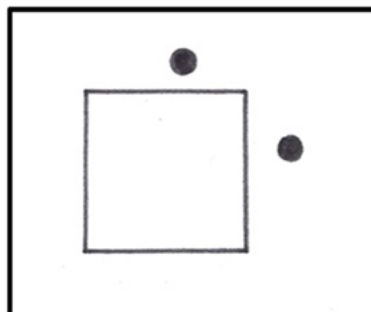
between them and makes the framing easier. If you place both actors opposite to each other, you create distance between them, which can be good for a confrontation.

I also like to give an actor a reason to lean in or to come closer to the camera at a specific point. Sometimes, this can be more elegant than just cutting to a close-up. You can also create depth by placing another actor or an object in the foreground.

Background

I also think about the background when I storyboard. In my opinion, it's important to know what you want to put in the background. It tells a different story if you have, e.g., the same shot with or without a door in the background. This especially matters when a character is in danger.

If you place objects in the background close to the edge of shot, you should decide if you want them clearly in or out. This also applies to other characters. In general, your backgrounds shouldn't look too similar. If you have

a shot-reverse shot with very similar backgrounds, e.g., just white walls, it might jump when you cut from one actor to another. At the same time, the backgrounds shouldn't look too different so that it doesn't feel like the actors are in different locations.

Budget & Equipment

The circumstances of a production usually have an influence on the aesthetic of a film. You have to plan things differently depending on the budget, the time and the equipment you have. There is

Shooting in London, UK

Marco Schleicher on the set in London, UK

a big difference if you have to shoot 2.5 or 7 minutes per day. Normally, you can go for more complex shots the more time you have.

I remember an exercise in film school with the key grip from *Harry Potter* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*. There, I learned that it's very different if you are working with heavy equipment than shooting with a small and light camera. If you lay tracks for a dolly, it might take 45 minutes every time you want to change them. Therefore, you should get as many shots as possible from the same track (also by using different lenses).

Conclusion

Besides writing on scripts and working with actors, drawing storyboards is one of my favorite things about filmmaking. It fascinates me to transform a story into pictures. I also like the collaboration with the director of photography. Together you create the look of the film.

In my opinion, proper planning and knowing what you want is crucial for a successful shoot. The process of storyboarding is a key stage of pre-production, and it helps me to get a clear vision for the film. I hope this article is inspiring for your own storyboards. *Happy drawing!*

Marco Schleicher is an Austrian filmmaker and a former student from Michael Haneke. In London, he completed his MA in Directing. Besides writing and directing his own projects, Marco works in the Assistant Director and Casting department. He worked on Blockbuster movies - including "Terminator" and "Hellboy" - as well as on TV series for Netflix and Amazon. Further information can be found on his website: www.marco-schleicher.at

Director Simon Denda on the set of "Adisa"

Making *Adisa*
Interview with Simon Denda

Kenyan-German short film, "Adisa", directed by Simon Denda, stars Victoria Mayer, Jackline Wanjiku, Götz Otto, and Robert Agengo. Based on a true story – Susanne, chief diplomat and representative of the European Union, visits a remote village on the Somali border that was the victim of a terrorist attack. While the bereaved put all hope in her, the date and promises made for Susanne are purely a real political routine. But after a fatal accident caused by her presence, she is forced to leave her comfort zone and fight against the established patterns of behaviour in Europe.

After several years as a best boy and gaffer in the industry, Simon improved his directing skills at the University of Television and Film in Munich. Since then, he directed several short films and commercials. He is known for his craft in working with actors and his ability to combine creativity and technology to tell heartwarming and strong stories. With his graduation film, "Adisa", he won the Student Academy Award in Silver.

Stills from "Adisa"

Can you describe your process working with Laura Anweiler, your director-screenwriter collaboration, and how you turned an idea into a 30-minute screenplay that became an award-winning film?

Simon Denda: Working with Laura was very collaborative in any way. In the beginning, we talked a lot about the real incident and how we could adapt it into a story that tries to summon this many topics in a very personal story. Laura wrote a great first draft, but we knew that we needed to challenge ourselves to get more and more precise to reach that goal. So, we wrote a few more drafts where we looked into different directions to find our answers. But it did not stop there. Laura was also involved in the main casting process

and in the editing room. In my opinion, it is of great value that there is a person who is so deep into the story as you and knows all the versions you had before. The next challenge was to translate the script into a movie. I think that there is not an award formula! You need to find partners that are not only

supporting your vision but also challenge it. Only then the story and your own work has the possibility to grow. Shooting a film is a huge team effort, so if you have the possibility, you need to pick your closest team members wisely, but after that you need to let it flow so everyone can do their best

work. Often this works out, and sometimes it does not. I think that this was also an important lesson to me. Sometimes things do not work out, and this is ok. With "Adisa", everything worked, and I am really happy that it resonated with the audience.

What were some of the major challenges filming for 7 days in Kenya, and how did you overcome the challenges?

Simon Denda: Shooting in a different country with a different culture is always difficult. You never know if you get what you are used to from the different departments, actors, etc. In the end, we were quite lucky to find a very strong and passionate partner in Film Crew in Africa. Through them, we were able to work on a very professional level. Still, shooting such a film in 7 days was challenging. To keep your focus during these long days and try to get the best out of each scene was quite a task. What helped me the most was first, to think one step after the other. Of course, sometimes you need to think a bit ahead to avoid unsolvable situations. And second, to stay open to receive what the actors had to offer

in each scene and not to stick to your narrow-minded version of the scene.

What are *3 Important Things* you learned working with actors while filming "Adisa"?

Simon Denda: Less is more. I am not a native English speaker. When I am directing in German, I have the tendency to get very precise in what I want. I did know that I won't have these precise words in English, so I decided to work mainly with action verbs and *what if...* constructions. That gave the actors and actresses space where they could be the characters. Actors are all different, especially when they come from different cultural backgrounds. As a director you need to develop a sense of what the actor in front of you needs to bring his best performances. Trust is a very big ingredient in this. So do not only talk about the characters but also about how you want to approach the directing, your workflow and your own insecurities. The third thing is: not everyone needs to like you sometimes. Acting means that you are lenting your body, your feelings and your mind to a

character. That also means that there are boundaries and insecurities that need to be overcome to get good performances. You as the director need to address these things sometimes, which puts you in a pushy and "mean guy" position. So, you need to withstand this disharmony. That also means, that it is okay if the actors/characters relief their pressure on you, as long as you are in a healthy work relationship.

What was the most important thing you learned during post-production?

Simon Denda: In the end, there will always be a film. You can discuss quality but not the fact that after shooting there will be a film regardless of how bad your material is. This is somehow comforting. *[smiles]*

In your own words, what is the message of "Adisa"? What advice would you give to student filmmakers and visual storytellers?

Simon Denda: Most of the emerging filmmakers think of themselves, that they are the unicorns in this business. "The other people only need to understand how good I am" - mindset. I think this is a fatal mindset because it shifts your work focus on you and not the stories you are going to tell. In the end, people in the industry will watch your films because they want to know how you approach the world,

a character, etc. That is a part of your USP in the end. So, use your time to develop who you are and what stories you care about. Success will come eventually along the way. To everyone who disagrees, aiming for success does not mean that you are going to be successful in the end. When you focus on your own development and you fail in the end, at least you will have grown as a person, and that, no one can take away from you.

Unforgotten,
Experimental CG
Animated Documentary
Q&A with **Sujin Kim**

Sujin Kim is a visual artist, filmmaker, and tenure-track assistant professor of 3D Animation at Arizona State University. Kim received her MFA in Experimental Animation at California Institute of the Arts. Her experimental films have been exhibited and screened at many film festivals around the world including 2019 Annecy International Animated Film Festival. Her 3D animation, "Unforgotten", received the Gold Medal at the 48th Student Academy Awards in the Animation category. She is also a recipient of the ASIFA-Hollywood Animation Educators Forum Scholarship, Jules Engel Scholarship, Vision Ewha Artist Award, and Adobe Prize at 2019 Ewha Media Art Presentation. Her commercial CG projects include collaborations with Roc Nation, Epitaph Records, and Warner Music UK.

Can you share with us your reasons for choosing Animation to tell your documentary story?

Sujin Kim: I think the most powerful visual language that Animation as a medium can display is Magical Realism. Animation allows me to deliver someone's trauma or tragic events via metaphorical and indirect imageries and motions rather than typical realism and exact reproduction of a factual event. "Unforgotten" tells tremendously tragic wartime sexual violence that happened to the most vulnerable human beings during World War II. In delivering such a sexually traumatic event to the audience, I did not want to display women's bodies as a medium to depict sexual violence. One of the truly unique aspects of "Unforgotten" is that it can tell the tragic story of those women exposed to forced sex slavery without focusing on the violence committed to them. Even without one single violent image, the audience can see victims' physical and mental pains and life-long trauma in the film. The power of Animation that allows magical realism helped me to find an alternative visual language that prevents the "Comfort Women" survivors from being re-traumatized through media content.

Can you tell us about your decision to use real interviews instead of voiceovers to tell your story? What was the process like?

Sujin Kim: "Comfort Women" is the euphemism for sex slaves who suffered from sexual slavery at Comfort Stations worldwide committed by the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II. Since the first testimony was given to the world by one of the survivors Hak-sun Kim in 1991, the "Comfort Women" issue has been one of the most critical political and social topics in South Korea. The issue has been the key reason for strained ties between South Korea and Japan.

In 2015, the former South Korean President Geun-Hye Park signed an agreement with Japan to remove a comfort woman statue in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul and end any future demand for reparations and criticism of Japan on the "Comfort Women" issue. This Blue House decision caused huge public outrage in South Korea because the agreement was a top-down imposed decision that

didn't include the voices of the victims. This unthoughtful and unilateral decision between two governments in 2015 caught my attention to the voices of the victims that were excluded under the social power structure. I have since thought about making a film that is victim-centered approach and committed to giving power to the voices of the victims.

In 2018, when I was in the United States, the new South Korean administration canceled the imposed former agreement between governments while demanding Japan to empower the survivors as engaged participants in the process of negotiation. That caused huge political tension between South Korea and Japan. The critical political situation led me to research the "Comfort Women" issue in depth through which I had approached numerous oral testimonies given by "Comfort Women" survivors.

How did you approach aesthetic decisions for the most dramatic moments of the film? Can you describe your process?

Sujin Kim: I decided on my approach to aesthetics in this film based on my criticism of other films about the same topic, "Comfort Women." I think filmmakers should respect someone's real-life story and trauma delivered through their films. Filmmakers should be thoughtful about their visual language when depicting someone's memory and pains. When I decided to make an animation about "Comfort Women," I watched almost every film, documentary, and Animation about "Comfort Women." I found that many of them bluntly illustrated how violently those victims were sexually abused and cruelly tortured by soldiers. I thought their way of displaying sexual violence was highly objectifying and visually consuming women's bodies and traumas. I think the easiest way to attract audience attention to a film that tells someone's trauma is to display violence

and pains vividly with blood and broken mental health. I did not want to take the cliché in approaching survivors' life-long traumas via film language. Instead of going straight up to simple reproduction of the survivor's memory, I tried to create symbolic and poetic imageries that reflect the victims' status of mind and shadow of a tragic historical event.

What were some of the major challenges of making "Unforgotten", and how did you overcome the challenges?

Sujin Kim: "Unforgotten" is my thesis at CalArts (California Institute of the Arts). Unfortunately, COVID-19 broke out in my senior year, 2020, just three months before my graduation. Most of those working on their theses suddenly could not go to school and lost our access to facilities and resources necessary for our animation-making. Most importantly, sudden isolation and transition to an unfamiliar virtual system without having enough time to prepare for those changes put our animation production on pause. Everyone did not know what to do and when we could go back to school to finish our projects. Many of us were losing motivation to finish our theses. We had to adapt ourselves to a new virtual system within a very short period.

I could overcome those challenges and finish my project during the COVID-19 surge because I had to keep all my promises. "Unforgotten" was selected as one of the animation projects supported by ASIFA-Hollywood's Animation Educators Forum Scholarship. Also, I promised the War and Women's Human Rights museum in Korea to complete this project when I asked for permission to use the voices of "Comfort Women" survivors in this film. Every time I found myself losing motivation, I tried to remind myself that I am using significant historical

testimonies in my film, and I have people supporting me and waiting for me to complete my animation, "Unforgotten."

In your own words, what is the message of "Unforgotten"? What advice would you give to students of storytelling, animation, and documentary filmmaking?

Sujin Kim: When I was developing my film idea for "Unforgotten," I was fascinated by the voices of the survivors and their will of resistance that I could feel through their testimonies. I thought the archived testimonies by the Korean government were strong evidence to show that the "Comfort Women" survivors were not only victims but also brave human rights activists who have tried to stop women from being sacrificed sexually during wartime. I think the important message of "Unforgotten" is the victims' bravery and their lifelong commitment to women's human rights. I would like to see more student filmmakers listening to people who have been excluded and marginalized in society and empowering the voices of those people through their films. I think filmmaking is an amazing activity to make this world less exclusive and more inclusive.
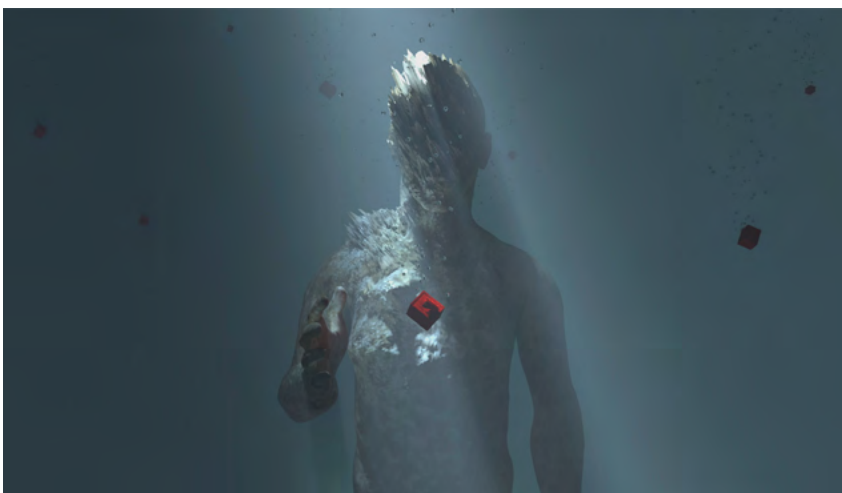
Commit to Reinvention

Use these story-starters to improve your scene-writing chops.

Christina Hamlett

Did you make any resolutions on New Year's Day? January 1st has a longstanding tradition of being the date everyone equates with a clean slate, a fresh chart, a commitment to reinvention. While over half the population makes resolutions, 22% fail in the first week, 40% after one month, and 60% after six months. It's not that they didn't have good intentions. Most of the time it's just a matter of not having a clearly defined goal to begin with, not creating an action plan to implement it, or setting an unreasonable expectation and then becoming frustrated it's not being met overnight. The following screenwriting lessons are all about the self-improvement promises we make...and the challenges of seeing them through.

Before you get started…

1. Do you make New Year's resolutions? Why or why not?
2. What was the most recent resolution you made? Were you successful at keeping it? If yes, what were the influences? If no, what were the obstacles?
3. Do you think it's harder to break a bad habit or to incorporate a good habit into your behavior?
4. Should you tell anyone what your New Year's resolutions are or just keep them to yourself?
5. If you had all of the support you needed to steadfastly keep to the code of a resolution, what is it you'd most like to change about yourself?
6. What are some ways people could/should reward themselves for the discipline of maintaining a bold new reinvention plan?

DRIVING LESSON

The crone of Gingerbread Lane has decided to turn over a new leaf and be nice instead of luring lost children to her Candyland house wherein they are never seen again. She has started trolling the classifieds and discovered there are quite a few good jobs to be had in the city. The trouble is there is no bus stop in the forest, and she'll have to learn how to drive something other than a broomstick to get to work. She decides that the next two kids who wander into her zip code will teach her how to drive a car.

Your assignment:
Write a three-page scene at her first time behind the wheel with Hansel. Write a second scene in which her instructor is Gretel.

GIRLFRIEND VS. GALAXY

"It's either that stupid game or me!" The protagonist of your SciFi flick is obsessed with an old pinball game in the trailer park where he lives. (Yes, this is from a real movie in 1984 called *The Last Starfighter*.) His girlfriend wants him to pay more attention to her, his mom wants him to pay more attention to his chores, and the neighbors are lobbying to have the machine removed because they think it's a nuisance.

Your assignment:
The hero reluctantly makes a New Year's resolution to stop playing the game and get serious about his studies. A visitor from outer space, however, shows up and tells him he is the only chance the universe has to protect Earth from total annihilation. Write a three-page scene in which he argues that his commitment to do what his girlfriend and mom want is more important. Write a second scene between the hero and his girlfriend in which he tries to convince her he needs to go back on his word and defend their home planet.

MY TWO LEFT FEET

The protagonist of your movie has never learned how to dance, but with the high school prom coming up in two months, s/he resolves to take lessons at the nearby studio. If your main character is a guy, he wants to ask out the cutest girl at school. If your protagonist is a female, she's hoping the cutest guy will ask her to be his prom date.

Your assignment:
Your main character shows up at the studio for the first day of dance lessons and discovers to his/her horror that the instructor is none other than the object of his/her affections. Write a one-page film synopsis of how this dynamic plays out.

DECLUTTERIZATION

"Getting more organized" is a fairly common New Year's resolution. When closets are about to burst, attics are overflowing, and the home garage can no longer accommodate the family car, maybe it's time to take stock of why things are being held onto long past their date of usefulness.

Your assignment:
The mother in your family-oriented film has sent her two balky teenagers out to the garage on a mission to clean it up. Items are to be put into three categories – throw it out, clean it up for a yard sale, or keep it. Stuffed back in a corner is a sealed box without any markings. Write a three-page scene in which the siblings open the box and discover something they never expected to find.

VACATION DETOUR

Another popular New Year's resolution is to get out and about and do more travel. Now retired from a job that s/he didn't really enjoy, the main character in your film wants to see what the world is like beyond the dreary office cubicle. S/he accordingly books a trip overseas to a dream destination. This adventure, however, does not go accordingly to a well-planned itinerary.

Your assignment:
Not only does your lead character's luggage go astray but s/he ends up in a completely different country. Although lodging is found at a local inn, your character is a combination of fretful, anxious and bewildered about what's going to happen next. Write a three-page scene in which your lead character is joined at dinner by a helpful local. For variety, write this same scene in three different genres – comedy, romance and horror.

*Former actress and director **Christina Hamlett** is an award-winning author whose credits to date include 44 books, 256 stage plays and squillions of articles. She is also a script consultant for stage and screen and a professional ghostwriter.*
www.authorhamlett.com

One Sheet Pitch
Sell Your Story Idea

Sherri Sheridan

TV and film deals at companies like Netflix are being made with one sheet of paper. Imagine you are a busy producer or executive trying to spend billions in production budgets for the next big show. Are you reading ten 110-page scripts a day to find your next hit? No! You are shuffling around a stack of one sheet pitches on your desk looking for an idea to reach out and grab you with that tingling feeling of a smash show in your future.

"Yellowstone" is all about preserving the land from developers. Why tell this story now? The land is disappearing. This show uses long stunning landscape shots to keep driving home the goal of saving the beauty of the place.

What Is a One Sheet?

* Marketing tool to sell story idea, also called a "one pager" or "leave behind"

* One sheet of 8.5 by 11 paper with standard margins and font size

* Title of script

* Writer names

* One sentence logline, 30-second elevator pitch

* Three act structure summary of your story

* Theme or *why this story is important*

Sounds easy right? Actually, it takes some practice to boil a story down to one page.

The Logline

The best way to learn how to write a logline is to see how one works with films you have already seen. Do a search for "loglines" to see many examples from famous films.

Finding Nemo Logline

Marlin the clownfish loses his whole family except for his son Nemo, who then gets taken by a scuba diver dentist, forcing Marlin to face his fears and swim across the ocean to find his only son.

Yellowstone Logline

John Dutton is a cowboy who owns the largest ranch in Montana and has to fight to keep the land for his children, while he worries about taxes, land developers and Native Americans who want their tribal lands back.

How can a tiny clownfish take on giant sharks, whales and jellyfish? If Marlin can do this stuff, you can get through your hard day too. Orange fish looks good visually against the blue water and the famous reef is the most colorful setting for an ocean story.

Three Act Summary

Two to three sentences for each act on the main story points. A beginning, middle and an end to summarize your character's main adventures. What is the hook of your story? Make sure to include that to grab the person reading. Do not hide your shock ending either. Put all the good parts in to make people want to read the script.

Finding Nemo Three Act Summary for a One Page

Marlin the clownfish loses his wife and 399 baby fish eggs during a violent encounter with a menacing barracuda while moving into his new home on the edge of the Great Barrier reef. One egg survives to become his only son Nemo. A scuba diver takes Nemo forcing a very paranoid Marlin with PTSD to leave the reef and find his only son.

Marlin meets Dori a Bluefish with memory problems who becomes his mentor in swimming across the vast ocean. The two tiny fish survive getting eaten by hungry sharks, shipwreck bombs, jellyfish swarms, surfing turtles, being swallowed by a whale and pelicans on the dock who want to eat them at every turn. Nemo gets placed in a dentist office aquarium and has to plan his escape back into the ocean to meet up with his father.

Marlin and Dori get a ride to Sydney inside a whale, then hitch a ride in a pelican's mouth who knows Nemo to the dentist office. Nemo escapes from the aquarium by playing dead while being bagged as a present for the fish killer girl Darla. Marlin and Dori stop the dentist from throwing Nemo into the trash by making the pelican fly into the room. Nemo lands in the drain and floats down into the ocean below to meet Marlin and Dori.

Why Make This Film Now?

How is this story relevant to today's audiences? Why make it now? Usually this is a good spot to introduce your theme or invisible message.

Why Now for Finding Nemo?

Marlin suffers from PTSD from losing his family and needs to learn how to overcome his fears to live a full life again. Children and people today need to learn how to deal with adversity in their daily lives and not give up. The tagline, "Keep swimming!" is a constant reminder in the film of how to face your fears and achieve your goals in the face of insurmountable obstacles.

One Pages Uses

Not only can you use this outline format to get a producer to want to read your script for a deal, you can also use this concise page for getting feedback from family, friends or other industry professionals. Maybe you have bunch of complicated story ideas, and you need to organize them a little better. Get in the practice of writing a one page for each project, and you will be ready to go when you meet the right person who asks you, *"What are you working on now?"*

Sherri Sheridan is a leading world expert in teaching story to digital filmmakers, animators, screenwriters and novelists. New book coming soon, "Filmmaking Script to Screen Step-By-Step," with an app. Other books include "Maya 2 Character Animation" (New Riders 1999), "Developing Digital Short Films" (New Riders / Peachpit / Pearson 2004) and "Writing A Great Script Fast" (2007). Sherri is the CEO and Creative Director at MindsEyeMedia.com and MyFlik.com in San Francisco.
www.mindseyemedia.com
www.myflik.com

My Mom Can Pull Cable

David K. Irving

This is our first pandemic. Shooting protocols have become restrictive, forcing small and student shoots to pare down their gear and crews. A combination of a cellphone, the app FiLMiC Pro, and a stabilizer, turns your phone into a semi-professional camera rig. Parents, brothers and sisters, with minimal shouting and training can double as crew.

Short film projects employ a crew of from three to thirty members. If you are filming a small, non-sync (MOS) film with available light in a few locations, it could be accomplished with three people: a Writer/Director/Producer; DP/AC; and Art Department/AD/Grip. The size of the crew expands to fulfill the needs of the production. Add multiple locations, sync sound shooting, set design, the decision to rent a dolly, and you may be up to fifteen crew members or more. The budget, however, may restrict how many crew members can be hired.

Your challenge, should you have fewer than this number, is to determine how the positions will be filled by the number of personnel employed on your shoot. For example, if the script requires nine crew positions, but you can afford a crew of only three, each person will have to perform an average of three jobs. Producers may have to double as assistant directors, editors as script supervisors, and so on. This requires, however, that every member of the crew knows exactly what jobs he is responsible for. Set operations must function like clockwork. If a piece of furniture needs to be moved, you can't have three people grabbing it at the same time.

While mothers often take on the role of craft services, there is no reason she shouldn't be able to pull focus as well.

*NYU Professor **David K. Irving** is the author of several textbooks, including, "The Fundamentals of Film Directing" and "Producing and Directing the Short Film and Video."*

Image by Dimitris Vetsikas

On set of "Garden Party" with grip Joey Luu, master DP Rex Metz ASC, and AD Michael Starr.

Speed Filmmaking Do's and Don'ts

Tamar Kummel

I've done a dozen or so competition short films. You know the kind you hear about: *You have 48 hours, 72 hours, 24 hours* to make an entire short film and turn it in at the appointed time. Each competition has certain required elements, usually a prop, a line of dialogue, a character name. And they will often give you the genre drawn out of a hat. This is a fantastic way of learning to write/direct/produce/act quickly. You have to make good, fast decisions. You need to play well with others. You can meet a ton of people. You can connect with other filmmakers and start to build your crew. And best of all, it's a great way to just simply know you're going to finish a film at the end of the competition. You'll have something for your reel. Unfortunately, the films don't always, or should I say, *NEVER*, turn out exactly how you pictured them in your head. These are usually not masterpieces. But if you set yourself up for success, there's no reason that your little film that cost you almost nothing to make (most competitions don't allow anyone to get paid) can't send you to film festivals all over and get your work seen by lots of people. And if it didn't turn out the way you wanted, it's still a great experience, something for a resume and IMDB, and fun. Hopefully fun. It should be fun. Filmmaking should always be fun.

Important Do's

1. **Do hire people that have multiple skills** (edit/boom, sound/lights, costume/cook). You want overlaps for safety's sake.

2. **Do have a location or two already set up.** This is one less thing to scramble to find, and puts limitations on the writing, which can help narrow down the story.

3. **Do have professional actors on standby** of all types. (Just a few; not twenty.)

4. **Do arrange great meals for all.** This is important for ALL film shoots.

5. **Do prepare people for what the weekend will be like.** This includes the emotional and experiential feel of the game. Be prepared for fast schedules, be 100% ready to jump, and 100% equipped to change everything as needed – *quickly*.

6. **Do rehearse for camera.** *Always.*

7. **Do get flexible people that can roll with the punches.** This is always important. No divas, no one counting lines, no one asking for closeups or extra takes. This is not the time for that. But really – who *ever* has time for that?

8. **Do get it in on time.** If you miss being eligible for the awards, or having it screened, what was the point?

9. **Do have a couple basic storylines** floating around your head based on pre-cast and locations.

10. **Do put it on IMDB fast.** Cast and crew will appreciate it. Double check and make sure you give the right credits to the right people.

11. **Do submit the finished film** to other short film festivals. That's the only big cost you'll have.

12. **Do make a schedule and stick to it.**

   Example schedule:
   Brainstorm for 1 hour.
   Write for 2 hours.
   Call actors.
   Set call times for early in the AM.
   Shoot for 4 hours.

Tamar Kummel.
On the set of "Apt. 2B".
Photo by Maverick Sean Photography.

At the Women's Independent Film Festival with award for "Apt. 2B".

Important Don'ts

1. **Don't say, "I'll fix it in post"** There's no time for that. Fix it now.

2. **Don't expect it to be your masterpiece.**

3. **Don't expect everything to go swimmingly.** Have a lot of Plan B's.

4. **Don't expect a lot of sleep.** But please, get some sleep.

5. **Don't expect to win awards.** If it's not a great film, it was great experience and goes on the resume. No one will know if it's good or not besides the people at the festival.

6. **Don't forget the required elements or the required tags in the editing.** You don't want to be disqualified for forgetting a prop, a line or adding a two-second credit.

7. **Don't assume someone else is taking care of something** you haven't discussed. Someone organized *must* be in charge.

8. **Don't assume your DP knows how every camera works.** Discuss that ahead of time.

9. **Don't do everything yourself.** Act/write/direct/produce. Pick one or two at most.

10. **Don't forget to have fun.**

11. **Don't forget normal rules** of *set etiquette*.

Tamar Kummel is an actress, writer, director, and producer in New York City and Los Angeles. She has a background in stand-up comedy, having produced several comedy shows in New York City. She's also written and performed sketch comedy, a one-person show, "Cultural Immersion", and several plays and films. In 2011, she formed Captain Purple Productions LLC, a production company for films and more. She is also the author of the self-published book, "How to Run Auditions". She wrote and directed the documentary film, "Fighting for Allergy-Free Food" (2020).
www.captainpurpleproductions.com

For "Apt. 2B" at the NY 48 Hour Film Festival with Catherine Frels, Gregory Isaac, Tracey Conyer Lee, Sean Harris and Tamar Kummel.

Adopt New Ways of Filming

Reel Story #302

JC Cummings

I feel privileged to have experienced the change in formats from analog, film with several format levels to HD and beyond. With change comes adopting new ways of doing the old with (hopefully) better results.

I was brought in to produce a very large shoot in Central Park, New York. The script and storyboards outlined various shots to be achieved. I hired several utility bucket cranes and brought out one of my camera truck cranes to capture every angle according to the storyboards.

Dealing with large shoots in a public common area requires plenty of "Certificates of Insurance" with the clause "Additional Payee" including (we'll address that in another article) several meetings with authorities and departments. Bringing in the heavy rigs requires carefully orchestrated maneuvering involving several operators, safety personnel and security. Don't forget the grass, sprinklers, and things you never see. *By the way:* if the grass is soft or wet, get some ¾ inch plywood to move the gear in place by piggy backing panels to set the equipment.

However, today, producers can hire camera jib arms, remote arms that extend to 30+ feet down to 6 feet or eliminate expensive aircraft shooting aerials with

drones. *The bottom line:* achieving the same results at far less the cost. When your end result is to get height and camera movement, newer devices are the best. With that said, make sure you have very good crane or camera operators. Generally, an operator will come with the gear eliminating additional personnel (but have a couple of grips on hand to help setup).

The days of 150lb + cameras completely dressed out are behind us (unless you're shooting 35 or 65mm film). Now, newer cameras fully dressed out with batteries and other gear attached won't exceed a weight factor of 50lbs. For the new filmmaker, feel very fortunate that you're experiencing a time when gear can fit in a few cases. You might still need the wood planks (2X6) or plywood.

Large gear is still important on some productions, but we live in a changing time where smaller equipment is so superior, thanks to the computer and well thought out chip design. I've seen these great improvements helping filmmakers achieve their creative concept goals while reducing cost and heavy equipment on set.

I'm still not there when it comes to shooting a feature with a phone. But who knows, stranger things have happened. Someday, even I may see it differently.

That's the REEL STORY…

JC Cummings *has become a sought-after Producer, Director, Showrunner and production logistics specialist in the film and television industries. Mr. Cummings continues to share his knowledge with over 40 years of "on set" production experience and storytelling as an independent producer. Beginning in radio for a short time, moving to film and broadcast TV, his career led him to acquire rights and later producing a successful nationally syndicated children's series. As success continued, Mr. Cummings was contracted to develop other television projects for broadcast networks and outside companies.* *www.motionpicturecompany.com*

Crew on the Move

Take It on the Road:
Behind the Scenes of "Night Train"

Shane Stanley

I hope this finds everyone healthy and recharged ready to get back in the saddle making 2022 your most productive year yet! I am coming off back-to-back productions and jumping into post- on our latest female-led action/thriller "Night Train" and wanted to share a little about the experience because this one was filmed entirely on location. As I emphasize in my book, "What You Don't Learn in Film School," a large part of your success will come from the relationships you have, whether they are in the biz or not. I spend almost an entire chapter discussing the importance of getting to know small business owners and restauranteurs who can provide you great locations, and of course, the cast and crew you can pull on because of your history working together, and this couldn't have been more a factor in producing "Night Train" which was our biggest indie project to date.

It's no secret I like making dirt movies. You know the ones that include fast cars and faster women who kick butt and live by the seat of their pants. For "Night Train", our story focuses on a single mom struggling to make ends meet

People skills are more important in your career now than ever before.

Austin Harris & Shane

Paul Haapaniemi & Danielle C. Ryan

who evades capture by a ruthless FBI Agent while running black market medical supplies in her legendary souped-up pickup truck. As most of you know, I've built a career of making low-budget, high output films that look like we have a lot of dollars to spend, when in fact we only have a few dimes, and before I continue, it's important to note this could not be possible without my loyal and tireless team. We shot 90% of "Night Train" in Palm Springs and Las Vegas which meant we had to house cast and crew as well as feed and water 'em because thanks to COVID and a record-breaking heatwave that ran through

Joel Layogan

Mapping out a Shot

the desert, crew was extremely scarce. So, justifying bringing everyone out for five weeks and spending all the travel dollars was a huge concern, especially with the costs of COVID tests which can be quite a financial burden to boot.

Years ago, I reached out to Levi Vincent of the Greater Palm Spring Film Office and mentioned one day I'd like to bring my circus to his town and kick up some dirt. Understand, Levi gets roughly a dozen calls a week by producers trying to make contact for productions - most that never happen - so I didn't blame him for being less than my level of enthusiastic at first, especially since he was juggling a few *little* projects like "A Star is Born" and "Tenet". So, as you can see, I was quite the small fish heading out to swim in the Salton Sea but because of the foundation I started in our early communication, it allowed me to build to the point where

once we had the green light and it became a reality, Levi pushed everything, and I mean everything else aside and became one of Night Train's biggest allies. He moved heaven and earth hooking us up with locations that would make any studio executive proud. He connected us with lodging that was not only affordable but was the same place that housed Lady GaGa and Bradley Cooper while they were making their Oscar-winning excuse for a tryst in the desert. Basically, because of Levi, the entire Palm Springs area, which included the Coachella Valley, Desert Hot Springs, and everywhere surrounding it, rolled out the red carpet for us to help make "Night Train" one of the most enjoyable and easiest productions I have ever been involved with in my 30-plus years producing motion pictures. And we're already planning our next one out there before the year is over.

I tell you this because I want you to remember, it all starts with a "hello", and not to sound cliché, you only get one chance to make a first impression. People will want to help you because they like you, which allows us to do what we do and put it all on the screen. So, when you watch a film that you know wasn't backed by studio dollars or endless recourses and you marvel at the production value and wonder, *"How did they do it?"* It's quite simple, really. It's because of relationships. Now go out and forge your own so people want to jump aboard **your** train.

Until next time...

Shane Stanley, *filmmaker and author of the popular new book, "What You Don't Learn in Film School," is a lifelong entertainment industry insider, who has worked in every aspect of the business, covering a multitude of movies, television shows and other successful projects. At 49 years old, Stanley has been a steady earner in film and television since he was in diapers with a career that started in front of the camera at 9 months old and grew into a life of a multi-Emmy Award-winning filmmaker spanning more than three decades. To order a copy of Shane's book and for his seminar schedule, please visit* *www.whatyoudontlearninfilmschool.com*

Photos from the top:
• Danielle C. Ryan and Paige Powers
• Moving the Silk
• Ordering Lunch

Testing Your Movie
with an Audience

Peter John Ross

Big Hollywood movies do test screenings, as most people are aware. They bring in audiences, and afterwards, do focus group discussions with people of various ages and groups, asking questions about what they liked and did not like about the movie. This can shape the edit of the film. Whole sequences and scenes can be removed from the edit. Reshoots can occur to make story points more clear.

The step of audience testing is something more indie films should do, even on a much smaller scale. The ultimate goal of a film is to communicate the story and ideas to audiences. You don't know if you succeeded or failed until that ultimate test, when people watch your movie.

There is a euphoria when you get to those final cuts of the film. All the hard work has come together, you're seeing everything put together. It makes sense to you. But does it make sense to you because of how much of everything you are seeing that is no longer there? It can be incredibly difficult for a filmmaker to divorce themselves from their work, especially if you were on the shoot where you saw the sets, all the takes, and have a relationship with the actors or how much effort went into getting that incredible camera shot.

Editing takes a totally different mindset. The editor represents the audience. They have to take the images and words only of what is presented to them. The editor(s) remains the only filmmaking job that have to know story and script as well as a screenwriter, performances as well as an actor or director, and camera shots as well as a cinematographer. And then editors have their own set of skills with pacing and style unique to editing.

If you are one of those writer/director/producer/editors, editing your own film requires a form of role playing. You are forced to forget everything you knew from the shoot and only deal with the footage you have and then see the movie from the perspective of an audience that has never seen a frame of the film. It's not an easy task, and this is what separates good editors from great ones.

After you pass the stage of an assembly cut, an edit where the entire film is put together in sequential order, and you've done some re-edits amongst the editor and director or only production staff, it is time to consider screening the film for a small audience. The best time is during the Fine Cut, the edit that has temp music

but much more than just a rough cut of your film. Because you have not committed to final score, final sound mix, and all those last steps, your film should be able to tell the story and you have exhausted the perspectives of those involved in making the movie.

The important steps in an audience screening is getting an unbiased audience, people who do not know you, that won't have an issue telling you the truth about how they feel. If you invite your pals, they will be biased towards you and also less likely to say something that might hurt your feelings. That doesn't help your film get better. Asking friends of friends or people that have no association with the filmmakers is crucial. Getting a diverse group of ages, race, and ethnicity can help get a broader range of opinions.

Another thing to prepare for this is to create your comment cards. Create it however you want with scoring 1-5 or 1-10, ask who their favorite character was, or if one section of the film was slow or boring. When your film is at this stage,

	Please rate various aspects of the movie	Excellent	Very Good	Good Effort	Needs Work	Bad	Sucked	Don't Know	Total
3	Story/Plot								0
4	Dialogue								0
5	Camera work / Cinematography								0
6	Acting								0
7	Music								0
8	Costumes								0
9	Design & Props								0
10	Sound								0
11	Editing								0
12	Direction								0
13	OVERALL OPINION of the movie								0
15	Did you care about the characters in the story?				Yes		No		
16	Did the movie capture and keep your attention?				Yes		No		
17	Did the movie make you laugh?				Yes		No		
18	Did the movie encourage you to want to tell people about it?				Yes		No		
19	Would you buy a DVD of this movie?				Yes		No		
20	Would you watch this movie if it was shown on TV?				Yes		No		
21	Circle the genre that you feel best describes								
22	DRAMA COMEDY SATIRE SOCIAL-ISSUE NOT-SURE								

COMMENT CARDS

Creating custom comment cards with specific goals can be really helpful. Asking, *"Who was your favorite character?"* and having some checkboxes, likely to include a little detail like *'Gary, the detective'* or *'Sally, the mom'* so that people not great with names can still give an honest answer.

Be bold and ask, *"Was there any part of the movie you felt could be removed?"* and find out what they think.

Always allow these comment cards to be anonymous. You'll get more honesty if they don't have to put their name to the criticisms they levy against your movie.

you might be a little sensitive about criticism. Get over it. There are going to be people who hate your film and people who love it and everything in between. Creating the comment cards or questionnaire is your chance to find out what makes them love it or hate it.

Customizing the questions for your film helps solidify the goals and intent of the film. Asking the audience pointedly, did you feel this way at the end of Act II during that specific scene would help you understand if you succeeded in your intentions.

In today's world, you can arrange these screenings somewhat safely with something like a Zoom or Google Hangout private screening, password protected Vimeo links, or unlisted YouTube videos. Or, if you want to just use a room at the public library with a digital projector, or even invite these people to your house or apartment in smaller groups like 6 people.

Here's the real challenge. *When to not take feedback.* There is an automatic reaction to negative feedback, to just ignore it or be angry about things said, taking it personally. It's not personal. They are talking about your film, no matter how much blood, sweat and tears you poured into making it. And truthfully, their opinions are valid. Everyone's opinion is valid.

That doesn't mean you always have to listen. There is a real delicate balance to taking the criticism and making your film better and taking an artistic stand. Every film is going to be different, and every filmmaker is unique unto themselves. The difficulty resides in knowing when to listen to the viewers and when to listen to your own artistic voice. Be open to the ideas and criticisms you get from these audiences. Be willing to take a few days to consider what people thought might not be working.

Speaking only for myself, I have found these audience screenings and comment cards to be invaluable. They spurred reshoots and sometimes extensive re-edits. In the end, audience reaction screenings improved my film. Every time. You never truly know what you have until that amorphous, ever-changing audience starts to share the story with each other in a dark room with a bunch of strangers.

Peter John Ross is a filmmaker from Columbus, Ohio, who has been nominated for 4 regional Emmy awards, and has won numerous filmmaking awards for his film work. Ross is making a documentary series currently . www.sonnyboo.com

The Craft of Remaking a Movie

Dr. Rajeev Kamineni

Reboots and remakes are the current flavour of the season. *Spiderman, Blade Runner, Psycho, Godzilla…* The list goes on. Despite the popular adage—if it isn't broken don't fix it—movie producers and directors seem to favour a remake or a reboot either to offer a fresh perspective or fall back on the commercial safety of a successful product. However, it is not an easy task to remake a classic or a successful movie. It is not as simple as changing the packaging and giving a fresh look and marketing the old product as a new launch. The commercial dynamics of the movie industry are constantly changing, sometimes in tune with audience taste and sometimes out of tune with audience preferences. Against the backdrop of these changing dynamic, it is really a craft to successfully remake a movie.

The production house that I was involved with acquired the remake rights of a French blockbuster, *Intouchables,* from the French production company, Gaumont. It was remade into *Thozha in Tamil* and *Oopiri in Telugu*, both regional languages in the Indian movie industry. It was a valuable learning curve/experience for me to negotiate the deal with Gaumont and then to adapt content to suit Indian audience taste. The entire process took about a year with script development itself taking more than 6 months. Though the original was a blockbuster, it had to be re-written keeping in mind the regional sensibility and audience preference.

A second-generation movie producer narrates the experience of his father in building a career based on remakes:

"My father was very successful, he produced only remakes and he had a golden run of successes, I mean every movie that he made was a back-to-back super hit, even the low budget movies that he made. There are certain subjects that work in every language, and it is universal. My father's USP was very simple, he never thought of an original at any given time. Those days there was no Google and no checking on what is going on. So, he would take a flight to any city that was screening a successful movie sit in the taxi, ask the taxi driver what the good movies are, and the taxi driver will take him to the successful movies. He will buy a ticket for him and the taxi driver and watch it together. He will just watch for the reaction of the audience and try to understand if it will work when he remakes it in a different language. If he likes the movie, he will watch it again at a late-night screening. He will watch the day-time screening with the taxi driver and the night show he will go alone and watch it again to see if the reactions are consistent. Especially where the applause and appreciation are and where the audience is restless. Next day morning he will go and meet the producer and spin the yarn that he has come from a relatively small regional market and returns are comparatively very meagre. He will proceed and buy the remake rights; he will buy rights for multiple languages. He was very good with his business negotiation and deals, he used to be a very hard negotiator on prices. He had the natural instinct to pick up plots and judge from audience reactions. He used to say that he is doing a remake and the template is already there, he didn't want to reinvent the wheel and have rocket science. If the film was done well then something has worked in it and let us keep to it, what is not working needs to be identified and removed from the remake."

This producer concludes by remarking about the unique traits of his father that made him a very successful remake producer:

> # "There are certain subjects that work in every language, and it is universal."

"My father used to buy the scripts from the original and he also used to purchase the stock shots that he felt were useful and could be replicated or reused because they might be expensive or not easy to shoot here. So, it worked for him, somehow whatever he did for the longest time it worked. But he had a legal brain and ability to think like a lawyer and he would vet all his legal documents and agreements."

Building on my personal experience and the experience narrated by the second-generation producer, I can offer some tips about the craft of remaking a movie.

Five Important Takeaways

1. Ensure that the central plot is universal, and audience across markets can connect.

2. Be very thorough with the legal documentation so that there are no copyright issues.

3. Develop the uncanny ability to spot out the flaws and lag in the script of a successful original. Then, remove these flaws or change the plot treatment so that there is no lag in the narration.

4. If there is a back end, profit share deal with the original copyright holder, then be very transparent with the receipts and accounts so that a long-term relationship based on trust and credibility can be built that might result in continuous collaboration.

5. Finally, there are some classics that cannot be recreated, and it is better to leave them untouched because what worked in 1950's might not work in 2022.

Rajeev Kamineni started his working career in a bookstore almost three decades ago and then moved onto area sales manager, director, executive director, chief officer, lecturer and head of program positions. He is a multiple award-winning lecturer with lecturing stints in Australia, South Africa, Singapore, Japan, India and Dubai. Rajeev has a PhD in movie entrepreneurship and currently teaches management at University of Adelaide, Australia. Apart from owning and operating businesses, Rajeev was actively involved in financing 35 movies and producing 14 movies in the Indian movie industry. With a lifelong passion for cinema, Rajeev has authored a book on Indian cinema published by Routledge, UK. He was also actively involved as an organizer and executive committee member of the Chennai International Film Festival (CIFF).

" Discovery consists of seeing what everybody has seen and thinking what nobody has thought. "

Albert von Szent-Györgyi, 1937 Nobel Laureate

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