

## **WORKSHOP OUTLINE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

1. Writing is more important than directing. Oral storytelling tradition. Each part of the process is writing in different forms.
  - a. Therefore, read! We're not only competing with Fellini, Kubrick and Scorsese, but with Shakespeare, Melville and Faulkner!
2. What does the director do?
  - a. This varies from director to director of course. There are total-control directors, like Kubrick, then there are others who might be almost totally hands-off (mumble-core people, for example).
  - b. RESPONSIBILITIES: Put the camera in the right spot. Guide the actors. Have the deciding vote on all creative aspects of the production – from set design to post-production color grading.
3. Watch movies as directors.
  - a. Don't forget the experience of losing yourself in a movie, but on repeated viewings, read scenes as a director. Break it down into its component parts.
  - b. Watch scenes (or entire movies!) shot by shot.
4. Two main tasks of directing: DOING THE HOMEWORK & BEING THERE

### **DOING THE HOMEWORK**

This is the work you do late at night in your bedroom. The goal is to have as concrete an idea of what you want to do on set as possible.

*"Homework" Oriented Directors: Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Kubrick, Steven Spielberg, Jane Campion, Martin Scorsese, The Coen Brothers.*

- First, read the script. Is it good? Is there drama Does one character want something from another character? Is the behavior and dialogue believable? If the answer is no to any of that, rewrite it.
- Next, do detective work on each scene. What is it about? Who is the main character? What is the turning point? What does the audience need to understand? What do you want to emphasize? What do you not want to emphasize?
- Know your location. Take pictures of it before-hand, one from each corner of the room. Also take measurements of the room to have a practical understanding of the space you're working with.
  - o If possible, rehearse with your actors. They'll give you blocking ideas. In the best possible case, you'd rehearse with your actors in your locations.
- Plan your blocking. Will the actors move during the scene? If so, when? Do they sit? Where? Is there some kind of activity they could be doing?
- Plan your shots. Shots the building blocks of the movies, so this could be the most important part of the whole process (which some directors claim more so than others).
  - o Know the tools: frame size, lens length, pans, tilts, dollies (lateral movement), booms (vertical motion), zooms, handheld shots, tripod shots, steadicam.
  - o Apply the tools as necessary to your scenes. If there's something from another movie that would work – steal it.
  - o REMEMBER: shots are for an audience. You're trying to communicate something to somebody else. Always opt for clarity over complication.
  - o Many ways to plan your shots: shot lists, storyboards, overhead diagrams. Can do one, all, or none. Different methods are more or less useful for different directors. Just make sure you are as prepared as possible, in whatever way works best.
  - o Always have a plan of how to do a scene in one or two setups. Because the time could come (and often does!) where you run out of time and need to finish a scene very quickly.

## **BEING THERE**

So you've done the homework. The second part of directing is all about being on set. "Being there" simply means being present on set – being observant about what's happening in front of you and being able to run with better ideas than the ones you came in with, and reject bad ideas that come up.

*"Being There" Oriented Directors: John Cassavetes, Woody Allen, Lucretia Martel, Ramin Bahrani, Andrea Arnold, Robert Altman.*

- First off, take all this with a grain of salt. DON'T come to set without a plan (as Cassavetes urges us to). We're not good enough for that yet (after 20 years of directing experience, you can improvise on set without a plan, as Kubrick did on *The Shining*).
- One of my teachers has a mantra on set: "Fuck the script." It's an extreme sentiment, but one to learn from. You must be willing to throw out all of your writing and planning if something better presents itself!
  - o These better ideas can come from anyone. Woody Allen talks about getting good advice from a burly camera operator, Sidney Lumet from a set construction worker. Surround yourself with creative people and you'll inevitably get creative ideas.
  - o Though, at the same time, *don't take every piece of advice*. Be decisive. Remember the detective work you did on your scene, and never lose sight of what it's about.
- Cassavetes talks about the need to create an atmosphere. This is extremely difficult. Everyone has to take things seriously.
  - o Hone your skills of interaction. Pay attention to how you manipulate people in your day-to-day life. You're doing it constantly. This is a vital skill to create an atmosphere on set.
  - o Know how to do everyone's job, and why it's important. If you don't know how to light a scene, record sound, schedule a shooting day, lay out dolly track... learn how to. Work on other peoples' sets. If you don't know what you're talking about, you'll lose respect.
  - o This is crucially important for your actors. What they're doing is vulnerable, humiliating and hard. If they do feel like they're being taken seriously, and that they're protected by you, they won't do their best work.
- Don't have time to rehearse beforehand? Take the time to do it on set.
  - o Woody Allen spends the first half of his days rehearsing with his actors, the second half shooting. You almost certainly won't have this kind of time at our level, but a mini-version of this is possible.
  - o Actors – if they're good – often have good dramatic impulses for staging. Go with their ideas if they're good ideas.
- WORK WITH AN AD (Assistant Director). Managing time is essential. You'll always be fighting time, so have somebody on your team whose job is to think of solutions when problems arise.
- Think like an editor. Sidney Lumet always said that he imagined himself in the editing room when he was on set. On set, don't think "*I'm making a movie*" but "*I'm gathering material to make a movie.*"
- Know how to do every job on a film set. Act (extremely important! If nothing else, act). Be an AD, a cinematographer, a sound recordist, a gaffer, a dolly grip, a PA, a producer, an editor. They say David Fincher is as respected as he is because everybody feels like he can do their jobs as well as they can. There is no unimportant job on a film set, and knowing how to do each of them will earn you respect.
- Above all, be a leader. Be collaborative. All good directors are. But don't forget – at the same time – that a set could not function if it was a democracy. It isn't one. If people don't trust you, respect you and believe in you, the movie will suffer. Have answers! Know your movie better than anybody in the world.