MICHAEL RABIGER · MICK HURBIS-CHERRIER

DIRECTING

FILM TECHNIQUES AND AESTHETICS

A **Focal Press** Book

SIXTH EDITION

Routledge

DIRECTING

Directing: Film Techniques and Aesthetics is a comprehensive exploration into the art and craft of directing for film and television. It's filled with practical advice, essential technical information, and inspiring case studies for every stage of production. This book covers the methods, technologies, thought processes, and judgments that a director must use throughout the fascinating process of making a film, and concentrates on developing the human aspects of cinema to connect with audiences.

The fully revised and updated 6th edition features new sections on using improvisation, the development of characters for long form television series, visual design, the role of the digital imaging technician, film promotion and distribution, alongside expanded information on contemporary color grading tools, stylistic approaches and genre, workflows, blocking scenes for the camera and more. The book emphasizes independent and short form cinema which allows cutting-edge creativity and professionalism on shoestring budgets. Recognizing that you learn best by doing, it includes dozens of practical hands-on projects and activities to help you master technical and conceptual skills.

Just as important as surmounting technological hurdles is the conceptual and authorial side of filmmaking. This book provides an unusually clear view of the artistic process, particularly in working with actors and principle crew members. It offers eminently practical tools and exercises to help you develop your artistic identity, find credible and compelling stories, choose and work with your cast, and hone your narrative skills. *Directing* shows you how to surpass mere technical proficiency and become a storyteller with a distinctive voice and style.

The accompanying companion website includes film analysis exercises, shooting projects, checklists and assignment forms, analytical questionnaires, updated production forms and logs for all phases of a project with links to additional resources and set safety advice.

Michael Rabiger has directed or edited over 35 films, was a founding faculty member and then Chair of the Film/Video Department at Columbia College Chicago, and has given workshops in over 23 countries. He is an Honorary Professor at Buenos Aires University, and a Fulbright Specialist. Rabiger is also the author of *Developing Story Ideas* and the enormously successful *Directing the Documentary*, both for Routledge/Focal Press.

Mick Hurbis-Cherrier teaches filmmaking at Hunter College in New York City. Professionally, he has worked as a screenwriter, director, cinematographer, and editor, and his films have garnered prizes at numerous festivals. He is the author of *Voice & Vision: A Creative Approach to Filmmaking* (Routledge/Focal Press), in its third edition.

DIRECTING

FILM TECHNIQUES AND AESTHETICS

Sixth Edition

Michael Rabiger
and Mick Hurbis-Cherrier
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INTRODUCTION

Telling stories through the screen is tomorrow's literacy. Everyone will eventually need skills in this intensely human, collaborative artform—be they young or old. If directing already calls to you, it's because you are a film student; media teacher; photographer seeking broader skills; film technician ready to direct; or a beginner intent on self-education with friends as collaborators. Whoever you are, here is your step-by-step guide. It is written in everyday language by cinema enthusiasts informed by many decades of filmmaking and teaching.

Directing: Film Techniques and Aesthetics explains everything the director must know about the technical and conceptual areas. Like no other manual, it shares the intimate thought processes, feelings, and judgments so important to liberating the screen author in you, to finding your own themes, and to developing stories for audiences. It shows how to work with actors and cinema technicians to tell *your* stories in *your* way. This is not vanity or egotism; it's the rocky road to making cinema art, the longtime ultimate in entertainment and human communication.

We know people learn best from doing, so we treat you as a colleague ready to start shooting short fiction immediately—using nothing more than your smartphone, if need be. There's a range of hands-on projects from the ground upward, each designed to make learning practical, enjoyable, and illuminating. We have also provided for different learning styles: some like to read first then do a project to consolidate their understanding; others do the projects, then read the relevant text after hitting interesting bumps in the road. However you proceed, cost no longer blocks your path since cameras and computers are everywhere. Start building your experience at storytelling, and solve artistic and technical difficulties as they occur: it's a guerrilla approach that sees problems and difficulties as intrinsic to learning.

Like no other book on directing, we explain the entire spectrum of skills, not just the technological. Using analogies and self-investigation exercises and encouraging mentorship, we guide you the entire way through the portals of self-expression. Making films that embody your artistic voice and identity won't ever be easy, but it will engage your heart, hands, and mind from the beginning. This book takes you deep into the professional experience, which is nothing less than the artistic experience lived by filmmakers. With the explosion of distribution on the Internet, this book opens the door to many new career possibilities.

WHAT'S NEW

This, the 6th edition, introduces what the director must know about new trends, techniques, and terminology. It teaches equipment principles rather than the fast-changing particularities covered more accessibly as online texts and tutorials. Here is the core knowledge you won't find elsewhere: the human, psychological, and embracing technical grasp that every good director needs.

Every chapter has been revised, its information and citations updated, its new information integrated and organized to make it as accessible as possible, and outdated information eliminated. These changes expand and emphasize all that is enduringly central to the director's creative and logistical responsibilities, no matter how much the technologies of sound, image, and editing develop in the future.

CRITICAL AND AESTHETIC:

- Many film examples and references are updated and expanded to include the explosion of exciting new independent and international films as well as television series.
- Expanded discussion exploring the range of stylistic approaches, cinematic tone and genre.

PREPRODUCTION

- New section on using improvisation to develop scenes or entire scripts during preproduction.
- New discussion on the development of characters for long form television series.
- Updated information on contemporary workflows.
- New material on visual design and the development of custom color LUTs as a creative tool for production and postproduction.

PRODUCTION

- Updated and expanded exploration into digital cameras, shooting formats, color space, and using Log Gamma.
- Added sections on the role of the digital imaging technician.
- Expanded discussion on blocking scenes for the camera.
- Overview of techniques for directing non-actors.

POSTPRODUCTION

- Updated and expanded section on contemporary color grading tools and the creative use of LUTs.
- New section on the contemporary landscape of film promotion and distribution.

AVAILABLE ON THIS BOOK'S WEBSITE (ROUTLEDGE.COM/CW/RABIGER)

To enhance this book's portability, some material has been shifted to the book's website for simple downloading. Teachers will find that projects and forms can be edited or augmented at will. You will find:

- Suggested shooting projects and film analysis exercises
- Checklists and project assessment forms
- Analytical questionnaires
- Updated forms and logs for all phases of a project (including a short film budget form, location scouting forms, storyboards, camera and sound logs, SFX spotting sheets and more)
- Links to other websites, particularly those concerned with safety on the set.

PREPARATION VS. EXECUTION

You may wonder why a film directing book devotes so many chapters to the thinking, planning, and arrangements prior to beginning the production phase. From years of teaching we know that most beginners think you direct by knowing screen techniques and filmmaking technology. This is a fatal simplification: fiction is a very difficult genre to make credible and even the most elaborate equipment is never an alchemy that transforms lead into gold. Rather, it magnifies success and failure equally. When beginners' work falls short, it's usually because:

- The film is theatrically based on dialogue. (The director needs to understand the visual and aural forms that make cinema powerful.)
- The story is imitative and lacks dramatic unity, individuality, and the force of conviction. (Film stories need originality, momentum in the narrative, and something worthwhile and deeply felt to say.)
- The film's world and characters aren't credible. (The director needs greater understanding of actors, acting, dramatic structure, and the psychological processes of human perception that underlie drama and film language.)

This book takes the bull by the horns and provides proven remedies for all these common failings. For every phase of fiction production, it says clearly and succinctly what a director must know, how professionals handle each of the tasks in the process, and what you need do to put moving, deeply felt stories on the screen.

The thinking, analysis procedures and disciplines you learn here will prepare any dedicated person for a life as a professional in the film industry.

OUR COLLABORATION

Michael Rabiger writes: The organization and writing in this book began evolving in the 5th edition from a collaboration between myself (as the original writer) and the distinguished teacher, film-maker, and writer Mick Hurbis-Cherrier, whose production experience, teaching, and involvement with contemporary fiction cinema are all more current than my own. Since so much information about film technology, techniques, and equipment now exists in specialized texts and on the Internet, we decided in this, the 6th edition, to concentrate more on the experiential core of the director's art. For me it continues to be a stimulating delight to debate methods and explanations every step of the way.

Anyone writing a book like this stands on the shoulders of all the professional communities to which they ever belonged. In my case these include Pinewood and Shepperton Studios, the BBC, and Granada TV—all in England. Many of my subsequent ideas and realizations about film and film education grew from decades of working with students and faculty at Columbia College Chicago, and shorter residencies at New York University and other film schools around the world.

For this edition and the previous edition we benefitted from advice and criticism from film industry and teaching colleagues including Ben Benesh; Jacqueline Frost, California State University, Fullerton; Gary Goldsmith, formerly of the University of Southern California; Dewi Griffiths, Red Sea Institute Jordan and UK; Robert Lewis, California State University, Northridge; Simon Tarr, University of South Carolina; Patrick Titley, University of Leeds; George Chun Han Wang, University of Hawaii. And, of course the reviewers for this edition, including Daniel Hopkins and Bruce Hutchinson.

Through the years I have also benefitted greatly from advice, help, and criticism from colleagues in Columbia College Chicago's Cinema Arts and Sciences Department: Doreen Bartoni, Robert Buchar, Judd Chesler, Gina Chorak, Sandy Cuprisin, Dan Dinello, Chap Freeman, Paul Hettel, T.W. Li, Joan McGrath, Chris Peppey, Emily Reible, Joe Steiff, the late Diego Trejo, Jr., and Wenhwa Ts'ao.

I must also mention Tod Lending of Nomadic Pictures, the late Milos Stehlik of Facets Multimedia, and Elinor Actipis formerly of Focal Press. Also, thanks to my son Paul Rabiger of Cologne, Germany; daughters Joanna Rabiger of Austin, Texas, and Penelope Rabiger of London; and the good folks at Taylor & Francis, especially Senior Editor Sheni Kruger and project manager Sarah Pickles, and copyeditor Mary Dalton, who shepherded this project through to the end.

Finally, I must thank my wife and closest friend Nancy Mattei, who does so much to support the writing that I love to do.

Mick Hurbis-Cherrier writes: Working with Michael Rabiger on the 6th edition of this classic text was, as always, an immensely rewarding experience. Our collaboration again allowed me to benefit from, and enjoy, his broad knowledge, profound generosity, keen language facility, and cunning humor throughout the writing of this book.

I would also like to join Professor Rabiger in thanking the excellent team at Taylor & Francis, and the external reviewers—their meticulous evaluation and suggestions unquestionably helped to make this edition stronger and more relevant.

PART 1

THE DIRECTOR AND ARTISTIC IDENTITY

CHAPTER 1

THE WORLD OF THE FILM DIRECTOR

Exploring the art of filmmaking and the world of the film director is like exploring an ocean; there are the depths to consider, the shorelines, the currents, and the sea life; one can examine the trade routes and their impact on history and culture, or even the ocean's effect on the climate and civilizations. So where should we begin with our exploration into filmmaking? Let's start with what is clearly most important—go make a film. Now!

Why? Filmmaking is an art you acquire through practice, like dancing, painting, or playing an instrument. You learn by *doing*—however and wherever you can, over and over. Don't wait to gain knowledge of film equipment, technology, and film techniques because they won't lead to the stories you must tell, nor will they help you direct your actors. Don't wait to feel grounded in history, theory, and criticism—important though these disciplines are. Jump in where you are now and just start doing it. All you need is access to a laptop computer and a DSLR[1], or even just a smartphone, to start amassing experience right now.

For practice films of just a few minutes, try restaging a small incident that occurred to you recently, at home, on the street, at the park, wherever. Think of a recent event where you learned something or had one of those "Ah-Ha!" moments. It need not be a huge lesson or profound moment; it doesn't even need to involve spoken exchanges. Keep it small and compact but apply it to a character *un*like yourself. Imagining someone different gives you a character to develop, generates new ideas, and avoids the self-indulgence that often afflicts beginners' films. Recreate moments you can shoot in an hour or two and edit immediately. Finish in a day or two, then make another and another. Get used to crafting small, believable moments on film, regularly. The idea is not to produce a magnum opus, but to cut your teeth on small, do-able exercises. You want to begin experiencing the creative flow that links ideas, acting, shooting, editing, and audience response (your family?). Go ahead, we'll be happy if you put the book down and go make a two-minute movie. When you return with a bit more experience, we'll still be here.

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[1] Digital single lens reflex camera