

Practical Hints to the Film Director

YOU are concerned in directing a film on African soil with African characters for eventual exhibition to African audiences. It is probable that the subject will be educational in nature, with beneficial purpose towards the people.

Your task is to organise, control and direct the making of a large number of separate visuals ("shots") that by their individual content and smooth story flow when joined in correct order will translate the message of the Film Script into an unfolding narrative, through "living pictures," that is within the comprehension of the audiences for whom it is designed.

The task is not easy; a few hints deriving from much trial and error may be helpful.

Before Shooting a Scene

Stand before your proposed setting; let imagination people it with characters; reach decision regarding your picture form and content. Note the sun position; this will decide your camera position. Examine the tone value of the background; this may be buildings or trees, or landscape. Make sure that there will be sufficient contrast in the tone values of your characters' clothes or faces.

Bring in Your Characters

Place your characters as far from the background as possible, at the same time examining the background for disturbing objects that may be confused with your characters' faces or bodies.

Next look through the camera to see if with profit you might bring the characters nearer the camera, or take the camera nearer to them. Every foot, even every inch that you can gain in this approach will benefit your picture result.

Fill your picture screen space with that which matters, people and objects. Waste no space on unnecessary sky or foreground; for excessive sky or foreground there must be some designed purpose.

Finally use a tone-glass. Appreciate your scene as a pattern of bits or shapes of varying degrees of light and shade; rearrange if necessary your jig-saw of tones into a pleasing tonal pattern.

Note especially the tones nearest the camera. Many a shot is spoiled by some too prominent tone in the foreground.

Character Set-ups

In grouping characters there is wisdom in imagining them in a triangular frame . . . equilateral, isosceles, or scalene. If the characters as they are posed can be held well within this frame they will present a pleasing pictorial composition.

In close-up work avoid the huge head from crown to neck. The

most satisfying human close shot is from head to waist ; such shots are best when taken with a three-inch lens.

In solo shots watch the eyes ; much more is gathered by the audience if two eyes are seen rather than one only.

If two people are talking, or working together, a two-shot is much better than two isolated solo shots.

When filming a solo close shot of a dark-skinned person, try to supply some means of reflecting light just below the head to lighten the heavy chin and neck shadows. If the character is seated at a table, a newspaper or a white tablecloth would serve.

Camera Angle Change

Never change the camera angle without purpose. There is only one legitimate purpose for change . . . NEW EMPHASIS in the scene. Something has become *more important*, demanding a new eye approach by the audience in the cinema.

This sudden change of camera approach angle is the "asses" bridge in filming. More slips in directing are due to errors at this stage than at any other time during shooting. These slips give endless trouble at the editing stage. Whatever action was proceeding at the change of camera angle must be repeated exactly at the start of the filming from the new angle. This is known as overlapping action ; what was happening at the end of the one shot is repeated at the opening of the next shot.

Visual Continuity

Visualise in your mind the scene that will eventually join the scene you are now shooting ; be one jump ahead of the present scene on the retina of your mind. This will enable you to control present tempo, mood, and visual continuity from shot to shot. This forward-seeing is the fundamental technical attribute of the competent director.

Endeavour to secure some human movement from scene to scene if such are finally to be joined together. Though these scenes that will eventually come together may not be shot one after the other, it is the director's responsibility to remember the visual moving link from one to the other, interrupted as he may have been by other scenes shot between, due to reasons of location or other disturbing factor.

When opening a scene try to catch the eye by some movement. Having done this, see that no other screen movement confuses the audience *without purpose*. Only paint one picture on one canvas.

A Word to the Wise

Do not stand close by the camera when filming is proceeding ; keep just a little way away. If the characters happen to glance out of their scene, as they are apt to do, they will look towards you, and that is far preferable than looking at the camera.

It is a good plan, at times, to stuff the fingers in the ears to exclude all sound when watching a final rehearsal, or even a take. It is amazing

how much more alert and critical the eyes are when they alone are the way to the mind.

Be Your Own Critic

At the conclusion of every shot have quiet communion with yourself. You are responsible for what has just been filmed. Ask yourself whether anything in the shot was dubious, confused, muddled, or missed. Ponder well whether you have captured what you set out to capture . . . and if you are making educational material the question you should weigh is "Have I fully captured the *ONE* thing in this shot that I desired?" For a shot of this educational nature is better if there is but one purpose rather than two.

Finally . . . forget everything except your scene of LIFE BEING LIVED whilst directing. Forget the onlookers . . . forget the world. You may cut a ludicrous figure involuntarily gesticulating or even grimacing in accord with your human puppets on your little stage. What does it matter? You *are* in another world, inhabited only by you and your characters, and between you and them is a bond of understanding . . . if you *are* a Director.

The Film Editor

AN editor, according to a standard English dictionary, is "a person who prepares for publication."

A book, a newspaper, a cinematograph film—all require infinite preparation before publication.

My business is that of a film editor. When you see the list of credit titles preceding a commercial film you will see the editor among the many key technicians who have contributed to the making of the film. Briefly, this is the work which is the responsibility of the film editor:

He is present at all script conferences. In the building of the shooting script his opinion is sought as to the linking of the various shots, the coverage of passages of time, the use of film aids such as fades, dissolves, trick effects, etc. He has to be satisfied that the film, if shot to the approved script, will tell its story smoothly and without the use of footage which will only detract from the film.

The editor is usually present in the studio during production and can often advise the director on the use of additional shots which will help to punch home any significant part of the story.

After filming is finished, the editor, armed with the script, continuity notes, and a list of the director's selected shots, goes to the cutting room. There, a competent editor does not merely say what is to be done and from there leave it to assistants to assemble the film; he handles the film himself and builds it up, using both sound and picture, into his first "cut."