

# FILM, THE ARTISTIC CREATION OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATORS

by

MEOR ZAILAN SULAIMAN  
*BA(USM), MA (Syracuse)*

## Introduction

The filmmaker is both an artist and a maker of an expositional motion picture or one who understands pictorial continuity whereby shots are executed systematically according to the shooting script and put together to tell a story. Among the most well known categories are the documentary and movie feature. It may vary from three minutes to a block-buster of several hours in length.

The artist is a person who possesses the talent for creativity. If it were not for the tireless pursuits of Edison in inventing something for the humankind, film might still be non-existent or at its infancy. The development of the prototype cine camera of the late 1890s has changed our daily lives.

## The Inspiration

It is the artist who can realize a dream or an idea and the process of a film production reflects this vital requirement. The film form is not just a puppetlike dance of arrested still shots, for it manages to approximate and even to surpass real life by means of illusion (Mc Luhan 1964:254).

Upon seizing an idea, the artist satisfies his psychological need by sharing his experience with others, especially those of whom he has confidence will derive some benefit from it. In effect, there has to be some purpose of making a film. Is it to entertain, educate, inform or persuade the target audience? This is an important aspect because what you produced is directed towards meeting that purpose.

Audience characteristics is a useful consideration and the final determinant of the success of the film. Then there are the other questions

such as, is it for children or grown-ups from different socio-economic levels? Is the audience homogeneous or heterogeneous? Is the audience free or captive? The former is a group who has the means to avoid your message or has access to other channels of communication.

If the audience is free, the presentation has to be compelling and if the audience is captive, you might get away with a dull story. But the serious filmmaker and artist is a conscientious and socially responsible communicator.

When an idea becomes an inspiration to produce a film, a simple description of how the film looks as you would see in the mind's eye is made. If not, good ideas thought up beforehand are often lost. Putting it into a tangible form reminds you at the time of filming a scene.

Gene Roddenberry, from time to time, would jot down ideas and file them away. In the back of his mind he began to toy around with the idea of doing a science fiction series some day (Whitfield and Roddenberry 1977: 32). Today Star Trek is a household word. Star Trek The Movie was produced and its sequel will be on the screen soon.

Then a proposal is made. This is called treatment which is a more detailed presentation of material and approach, so dramatized — that is, made vividly expressive — as to excite the client in regard to the picture-to-be, as well as to inform him (Swain 1977:25). The ideas presented should enable the producer and others involved to experience with the audience the emotions and moods of the characters.

The artist then relates this in a visual structure on paper. He draws a series of pictures showing extracts of the main scenes and sequences. This is the storyboard which acts as a guide and provides some idea of visual continuity.

A final description of what happens in your film is given in the script. It spells out what is seen and what is heard, the action and dialogue within the framework of the setting ... that the director can direct it as a film, the actors can act it, and the crew perform their

respected duties (Swain 1977:171). It goes without saying that film script must above all be creative. Creativity is one of the major, if not the major, tools in the writer's craft-kit.

### **The Medium**

Besides being artistically motivated, the filmmaker has to know and understand thoroughly the particular medium or the chosen conveyor of his message. It also involves the right choice of highly sophisticated tools and instruments, knowledge of financial management, and human relationships.

The choice of the right equipment is the first step towards the success in film production. The entire range of present-day equipment, which Samuelson has termed as the bewildering array of items require carefully weighing up the cost, versatility and other practical aspects – not all of which are widely known even to experienced workers in the field.

Film is not really a single medium like the written word, but a collective art form involving different individuals (McLuhan 1964:255). Besides the inspired originator and scriptwriter, is the producer (if he is not the one and the same person as the former), the director, the cinematographer, the editor, actors, actresses, costume designers, and choreographers (Bluem and Squire 1975:122). These are the creative personnel who are responsible for getting the idea, planning it and then executing it. Others are the technicians who primarily operate the equipment and who are involved in a production only during the actual physical production itself (Costa 1978:92). But this does not imply that technicians are not creative and a clear delineation only applies to some categories.

### **The Producer**

Stanley Kramer of the "High Noon" and "It's A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World" fame thinks that a creative producer, someone with the dream, has to participate every inch of the way – from story to release besides being the financial man (Bluem and Squire 1975:161). The story would still be untold until it is on

celluloid. Telling that final story involves sound, music, casting, costumes and sets (Whitfield and Roddenberry 1977:32). As in a novel, in order to be realistically suited to a visual medium, the producer has to have the right actors, actresses, costumes, flavor and pace. He enjoys the interplay of ideas from the people who contribute their talents for the success of his production.

He is the decision maker, creative beginner and the judge of what is tasteful or not. Sometimes he has to make difficult decisions concerning moral and ethical issues. The group he employs consists of aspiring individuals and the producer is in a position to shatter the dreams of some of them. He hires the ones who can work to his satisfaction and who can dutifully contribute to the realization of his dream and not the dreams of his adversaries. And when personal standards of quality are set, then there is bound to be disagreements, especially on matters of artistic interpretation (Allosso 1978: 138-139).

### **The Director**

Production is really the producer's rather than the director's game. However, a number of directors perform dual roles, e.g. in 2001, Kubrick operates as a director and producer. If it is not the case, then the director works closely with the producer to make major decisions about the production. He has the primary responsibility for the success of the production and must have an excellent imagination in order to elaborate on the script, thus bringing the screenplay to life on the screen.

For one who wishes to embark on a directing career, experience and an appropriate background are an asset. Prior to becoming one, many of them held different jobs such as writers, actors, film editors, assistant directors, etc. Allosso (1978:41) termed him the psychologist to the actors besides worrying about the sets, lights and costumes as he should be able to answer any questions they might have about their roles.

To directors like Hitchcock (MacCann 1966:35) working on the script is the real

making of the film. He does not find it necessary to do more than supervise the editing process. However, he is of the opinion that a director ought to edit his own pictures if he wants to control their final form, for it is in the editing that the film is really brought into being.

In any case, very few directors stay on after shooting has stopped or had any say of what happens to their film after they shot it. That is usually worked out between the editor and the producer (Meor 1978:12).

### **The Editor**

Editing is basically a matter of communicating. The editor interprets what the director is trying to put on the screen. The final product is in a style which is an expression of both the director and himself (Allosso 1978:117). He edits the movie film and with the help of the sound editor edits the sound tracks. He is responsible for moulding the assorted pieces of film into one cohesive product, and in making a creative statement on film.

In a dramatic motion picture, the editor has the greatest opportunity for creative decision-making. As Pudovkin has stated, the editing process is the selection, timing, and arrangements of given shots into a film continuity. This is the crucial creative act in the production of a film (Reisz 1973:15).

### **The Creative Experience**

Evidently, film production is a complex process. At the earlier period film was purely a visual medium. Before Warner Brothers produced *The Jazz Singer*, the first of the talkies, silent movies were screened with piano accompaniment (Prendergast 1977:4). Today, several significant advances have been achieved in this field. Film has become the favorite subject for discussions.

In one of the seminars organized by an institution of higher learning recently, a topic on the curriculum development for a film-making program was on the agenda. It had the objective of not only to enable students to acquire the knowledge of film production, but

to inculcate among them an analytical, critical, and discerning attitude about films themselves. The proven approach is for them to be involved directly in the production process after accepting the best idea from the group.

In the exploration of the cinematic world, various problems are identified, defined and discussed in order to seek their solutions. For example, students found that it could take a whole day's shooting of the ten-minute jungle sequence for the film, *Prince of the Jungle*, produced by the author.

In this film, the students assumed the roles of the creative talents and technicians themselves. These mass communicators of the future were not really involved in producing a jungle adventure film, but to experiment the finer techniques of imparting a message of social significance to the audience. It is intended to arouse the sympathy of their fellowmen on the need to realize the inevitable extinction of the jungle dwellers and the destruction of the ecological system through the exploitation of the natural environment.

For one who contemplates to pursue this field, it is beneficial to attend the university for it provides ample opportunity, without fear of failure, to take the time to experiment or to develop his knowledge of the art.

### **Conclusion**

The process of film-making is indeed an art for it involves selection. This implies, as Read pointed out (MacCann 1966:166), a standard for which selection is made and sensibility to distinguish according to the standard. The exercise of sensibility in the interests of a standard is an elementary definition of art. Selection is the very first principle of the film; the film is therefore essentially an art.

---

## Reference

1. Allosso, Michael, *Your career in theater, radio, television or filmmaking* (New York: Arco Publishing, 1978)
2. Bluem and Squire (ed), *The Movie Business* (New York: Communication Arts Books, 1975)
3. Costa, Sylvia Allen, *How to prepare a production budget for film and video tape* (2nd ed) (Pa.: TAB Books, 1973)
4. MacCann, Richard Dyer, *Film. A Montage of theories* (New York: Dutton & Co. 1966)
5. McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Signet Books, 1964)
6. Meor Zailan Sulaiman, *Film Business* (1978) (a collection of lecture series on the subject)
7. Prendergast, Roy M, *Film Music* (New York: Norton & Co., 1977)
8. Reisz, Karel and Millar, Gavier, *The Technique of Film Editing* (New York: Hastings House, 1973)
9. Swain, Dwight V, *Film Scriptwriting* (New York: Hastings House, 1978)
10. Whitfield, S.E. and Roddenberry, G., *The Making of Star Trek* (New York, Ballantine Books, 1977)