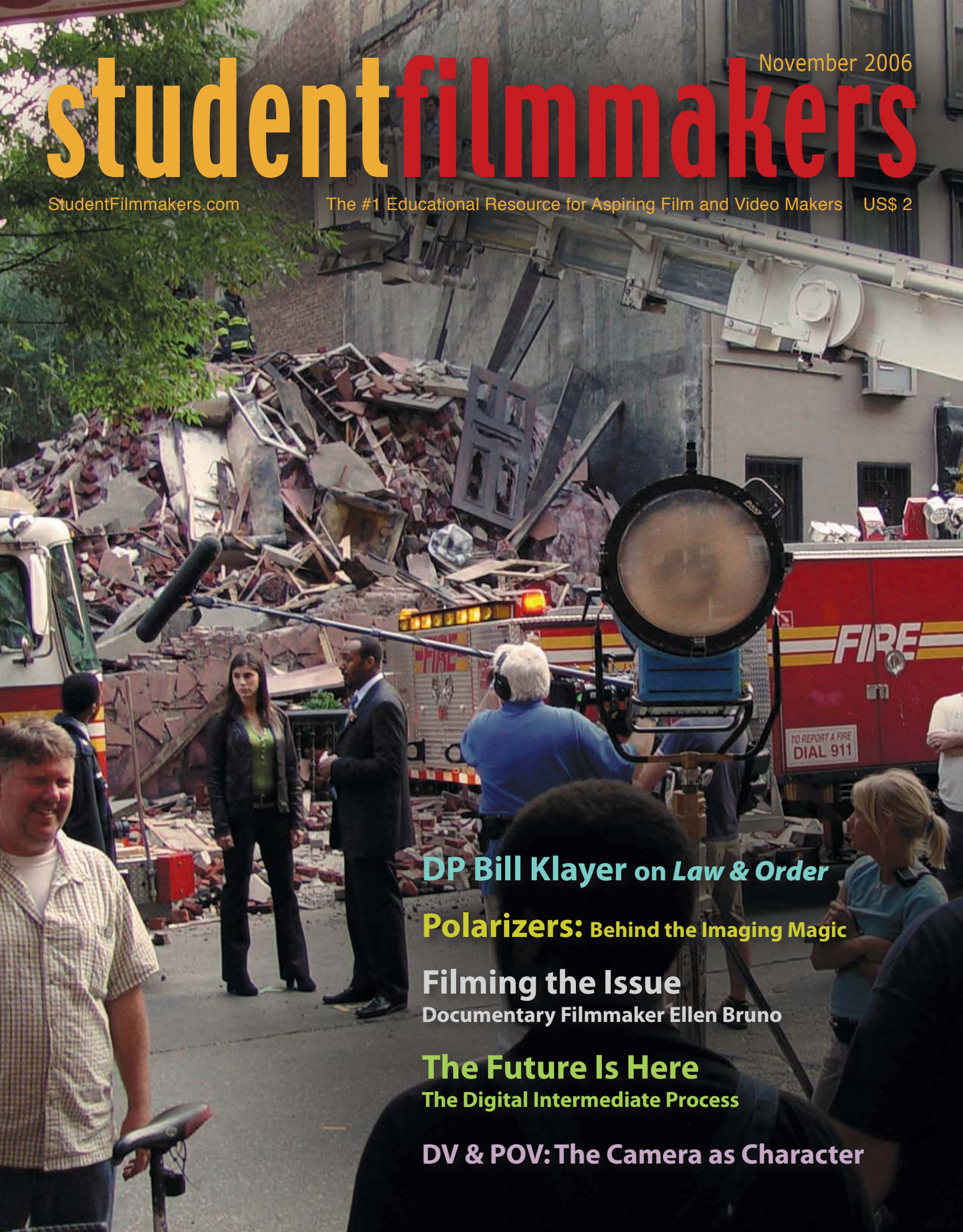
November 2006

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DP Bill Klayer on *Law & Order*

Polarizers: Behind the Imaging Magic

Filming the Issue

Documentary Filmmaker Ellen Bruno

The Future Is Here

The Digital Intermediate Process

DV & POV: The Camera as Character



The VidExpo show in Denver, Colorado, was a great show. It was very nice exhibiting, serving as a guest moderator at one of the Short Take Seminars, and people truly loved the magazine. About forty-five minutes after the doors opened and the show started all our magazines were gone from the front table where they were displayed. I put more out and watched as the crowd devoured them right before my eyes. I met many passionate filmmakers during the show. Jon Firestone helped me work the booth, and I think he must know half of Denver. Jon is headed off to South America and promises to get back to writing articles as soon as he returns. His brother was in the Matrox booth next to us. This was overall one of the best shows I have been to in a long time.

NAB New York just finished up, and it was also an awesome show for us, and it reaffirmed what happened at the Denver show. People are looking for a good educational based magazine that covers all facets of filmmaking from development through distribution. We ran out of magazines the first day.

Anthony Q. Artis, one of our contributing writers, stopped by our booth at the NAB New York show. He is working on his new book, and the word is that Focal Press saw his article in our magazine and there will be a book deal. We are looking forward to reviewing it and selling it at our online store. We will be headed to DV Expo West soon and hope to see you there.

This is another great issue and starts with an interview with Bill Klayer the Director of Photography of my favorite TV series, *Law & Order*. Please enjoy all the articles, see if you can learn something, and be sure to sign up to get the magazine delivered to your doorstep every month. Visit us at www.studentfilmmakers.com for more great information.

Kim E. Welch
Publisher/Editor-in-Chief

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The # 1 Educational Resource for Aspiring Film and Video Makers

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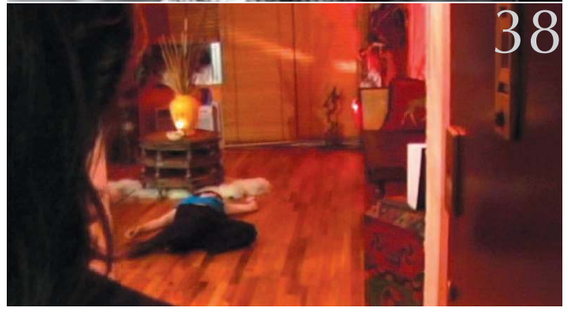
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On Our Cover:
On the set of the TV Series, *Law & Order.*


East 84th St. scene of "Home Sweet," *Law & Order*

Interview with *Law & Order* Cinematographer Bill Klayer

Episode, *Home Sweet*; shot on 84th St.

by Kim E. Welch

Law & Order depicts the tough process of maintaining law and order in the streets of New York City. It is the most successful brand in primetime television. It is the 1997 Emmy Award winner for Outstanding Drama Series and the record holder for the most consecutive (11) nominations for a drama series.

I had a chance to see the shooting of a scene from *Law & Order*. The episode is called *Home Sweet* and has a building falling down in it. I interviewed William Klayer the Director of Photography for *Home Sweet.*

What is your artistic background?

My artist background? I was a film student at Emerson College. I got a film production degree from Emerson College. I graduated from there in 1977, and then went to LA for a while to try to start a career in film, but friends of mine I'd gone to college with were making a film on the East Coast. Originally, I was going to be the Director of Photography for it. They were going to shoot a feature film, and it was going to be shot on 16mm, but they managed to get more money for it, so they bumped it to a 35mm project. They were able to hire a professional cameraman rather than an ex-student, and I had no problem with that, I just wanted to work on the film. I worked as a crewmember – it was a crew of six. They hired a Director of Photography, an Assistant Cameraman, a combination Grip/Gaffer, and then the Sound man; and then I was the sixth guy. I was involved in all of the departments except for sound. I was working as an assistant cameraman, and when I wasn't doing that I was gripping and electrician, and I just wanted to learn. And then that cameraman, based out of New York, said, "If you're going to be in New York, I'll hire you."

So that was your break kind of, how you got started?

Yeah, it was a break, so I never went back to California.

What came after that, what was your first real job and when did you start getting paid to be a DP?

I ended up becoming a gaffer. You're working to support yourself. I wanted to get involved in camera work, but I had a background in theatre lighting. When I was on a film set physically setting up lighting was like second nature to me. I ended up getting pulled into the gaffing area because it was just very easy for me, and I already knew what to do there. Then I'm trying to make a living in New York, so I ended up staying in the gaffing end, and I gaffed some really awful low budget films. I got fed up with that, and wanted to work on stuff with more money, I was an electrician/gaffer/electrician for a while. And, then I stayed in the gaffing arena. When I got on *Law & Order*, I originally started as a third electric, and then became the second electric, and then became the gaffer, and I was the gaffer for years. *Law & Order* was the most wonderful place to be because they were always promoting people from within. So, Constantine Makris, who was the director of photography when I started the show in season two, became the Director, and there's Chris Misiano (*West Wing*), he was DP for a while, and Richie Dobbs and they all became Directors of Photography, and then they all became Directors. And so the DP slot eventually opened up. A guy named John Beymer came in and I was gaffing. Then the company decided to initiate this thing where rather than having one DP do the whole season they decided to rotate DP's because they realized they would actually save money if the DP's were involved in prepping the episodes, so it became a money-saving thing. So it was wonderful.

How long have you been with the show?

I've been with the show since season two.

That's 19 years?

No, no, that's actually 16 years. We're on our 17th season.

People are always asking, should I go to film school, or should I just get a job. How do you answer this?

That is a very interesting question. I think it really depends on where you want to end up. School is a great place. I have nothing against film school or anything like that. But, in my case I think ultimately added to me actually getting employed. It's that whole thing about being at the right place at the right time.

And then having the tenacity and passion and desire?

Yeah, but if you want to get into the technical end, you can certainly get there somewhat quicker if you have some experience that's for sure. So, I wouldn't knock film school at all. A good example is my son because my son had always talked about going to film school but he wasn't always the best student. Then it just so happened that he ended up leaving high school and expressed a desire to work in the camera department, so he's actually working as a film loader on film sets now, he's in the union, and he's on his third year now. Close to three years.

You shoot on film?

Yeah, we've always shot on film.

And you've never used any video, any digital, or HD?

The future is definitely formats like the Panavision Genesis. They've always talked about it. The producers in California had us shoot tests because they were thinking about switching to a different format. But the real decision maker is what kind of story do you need to tell. For our show, *Law & Order* has a very specific style, and the show is conceived visually as almost a documentary. It's hand-held. We don't do any steadicam work except in very specific rare occasions. I could literally count them on half a hand. Even though we've had operators who have been so good with hand-held work, I've had people look at shots and say, "oh what a great steadicam shot." And you say, "no, that was not done on steadicam."

So it was originally to have the look of a documentary?

Yes because the camera on *Law & Order* is rather than photographing a scene – it's almost supposed to be another person who's there with our characters watching the scene happen with them. And that's not to say that every shot we do is handheld. We do a lot of stuff in the courtroom, and we're on the dollies there, but if you watch it, if we're doing the job right, the camera will never stop moving, the camera will never lock in anywhere, and if it does that means we weren't paying attention because it's really not supposed to do that. It's always moving, even if it's on a dolly. Your camera's never locked and it always has a little floating motion and it's supposed to feel like a handheld camera.

Now you said you did some test shots with HD. That's a hot topic. Are there any comments you can make about that, about HD?

There was a show produced by Dick Wolf called *Conviction* that was being produced and they shot that on a Panavision Genesis. They sent me over for a week to watch them work. That show rarely did any handheld work. For the way we shoot our show, it just wouldn't work. Not that there's anything wrong with it. For the style, for the stories we tell, and how we tell them, it wasn't the right tool. It would affect production schedule, it would affect locations. We do shots where we go in and out of doorways and into tiny little apartments. The Genesis camera is always tethered on a cable to a bank of monitors and for *Law & Order* it wasn't the right way to go. It's more than just the actual visual image, it's more the physical limitations in regards to how we shoot and tell our stories. And I have to agree, when it's all said and done, you could put two shots side by side, you could say which one was HD and which one was film, and maybe you can't tell. But when you're watching the story being told, I think film has this kind of magical quality that you can't really describe with words. It's something that your brain just perceives at more of a subconscious level. Film has a magical quality that you can't beat.

Could you kind of walk me through what happened on the East 84th Street scene?

They give us a script. And the amazing thing about that script – that script came at us very late in our prep. And they also said there's a building falling down. We literally had four days before we were supposed to start shooting. The main thing is finding a location– we're looking in the city at any available space, and usually they're building something on it. The first thing was we had to find an empty lot that didn't have any



Bill Klayer on the set

construction going on at all. They sent out location scouts who found a lot that just beautifully fell into schedule. It was at a cleared lot with no construction going up on it yet. And, it was in a nice area. We looked at a bunch of lots but some of them were in very down-scale neighborhoods, but part of the story was in a very nice neighborhood. We just really got very lucky. We found this location. And Gary Weist, our director, did an amazing job of conceiving how to create this thing. We don't have the luxury of having several days, like a feature film. In a feature film, they would spend a whole week shooting this one sequence. We literally had a whole day to shoot this entire sequence. In a single day, we have to shoot the scene that happens before the building falls down, we have to shoot the building falling down, and we have to shoot the scene that takes place after the building has fallen down. We also got some digital help which we don't usually do, but they (the West Coast) actually wanted to see a building fall down. If you see the episode you will actually see a building in this empty lot which didn't really exist, they had to put it in digitally, which we don't normally do. In reality the director and I were hoping to avoid that. We had conceived a way of filming the sequence where you wouldn't actually see the building – you would see a pile of rubble come out into the side walk. It was also because the story involved this little girl, who's standing in the wrong spot, and she gets killed, and we didn't want to lose the impact of that. But they asked us to shoot it in such a way that they could digitally put in a building. What you do in a TV show is a lot different than what you do in a movie. We have this tremendous amount of work, just page count work, just to get done in a single day. Because of the documentary look of our show, we don't really necessarily do lighting on day exteriors. If anything, we try to avoid it. But this scene I had to because we were literally shooting this sequence until the last drop of sun was in the sky. So the last couple shots of that scene I did have some lights out there.

How did you collaborate on the East 84th St. shoot?

You have a prep team which involves the Director, Production Manager, the Assistant Directors, the Art Director, and Locations Manager, and we'll get together in prep and we'll do a preliminary scout and we'll pick all our locations and since the directors kind of assemble them into doable days of work and the way you usually do it is you find that like that one day was an entire day in this vacant lot. Other days you kind of pick a location that's important to the story, like an office, or someone's home, and then you'll find other locations that you can shoot in close proximity to that location, you kind of build days that way, the assistant directors and production manager figure that part out, how it can all work. We're shooting entire episodes in an 8 day period. We do 8 days of prep and then 8 days of shooting on each episode.

So there are two teams working at the same time?

Well, yeah, there's a team that's shooting and one in prep - there's an episode that's being shot now, and I'm in prep for an episode that's being shot next.

What is it like to have more than one Director for the series and does the Director of Photography have a lot to do with the style?

Each show has its style. And the style is part of how we chose to tell the story, and so yes, in that case, David Tuttman the other Director of Photography and I kind of become the watchdogs to make sure the show is visually staying true to itself. Most directors that come in are familiar with the show, but some directors come in and aren't familiar with the style. It's always a great chance to collaborate. Some directors are more visual than others, and David and I are there to support the ones who aren't. It's always a different experience and it's always a great experience. It's always a way to learn more and grow. And everyone here is always easy and nice to work with.

How many takes do you do on average?

3 or 4 takes on average.

Do you use a storyboard?

Rarely. We actually never ended up storyboarding the sequence in *Home Sweet*. But I've had other sequences – I did an episode where there was a train wreck in the beginning, and since we were doing stunts for that so we used story boards.



Richie Dobbs, director; Jamie Crowell, production manager; Peter Giuliano, producer (in white baseball cap).

You pretty much know where you are going to shoot from without a storyboard, unless it's a complicated scene with stunts?

Yeah we rarely use a storyboard and sometimes if it's going to involve the sets and stunt work we will do a storyboard, and it just also helps with the communication with all the departments so everyone is kind of on board and knows 'this is what we need to get on film in this days work.' If you have a storyboard, and it's something a little out of the box, you know, special effects, gun firing, cars, or something like that, a storyboard will always help keep everybody on track of what we're doing now and what we need to do next.

Post production – what is that like with this particular 84th street shot? You said that they digitally put a building in, who did it?

Well, I'd love to tell you, but it's all done in California. I've been out to do post production on one of my episodes once, and basically, I was able to sit in with the color timer, and I sat in on the color time session for an episode. But all the post production work is done in California. On the Home Sweet episode they had the man who was going to supervise the digital effects – he flew out and he was there with us on the day of filming and basically he was just there so he'd be familiar with what we were photographing. He didn't really tell us how we had to film it; we just wanted to make sure he was going to get what he needed so he could do his work on the other end. And they actually had a still photographer go around and photograph fronts of buildings so he could find elements to use to create a building. He actually added extra rubble for us.

Specifically what kind of cameras do you use?

We shoot Panavision 35mm. We're using the Millenniums, the XL's right now, because they're the lightest camera, and we do a lot of handheld work, so it saves our camera operators a lot of aggravation and pain because they are the lightest Panavision camera available and the best tool available for what we do.

Anything else interesting that happened on that episode that you can remember?

What made filming that particular sequence a pleasure was how friendly the neighborhood was. We were a little apprehensive about showing up on the Upper East Side and making a lot of noise and making a lot of dust and making a lot of dirt. We felt welcomed and the day went smoothly.

When you're shooting a crime scene is there anything – to make an accurate, you know, to make a crime scene look like a crime scene?

All the scripts are read by a tech advisor and he gives us notes about what's right and what's wrong. Again, sometimes you kind of got to look the other way. We're still doing dramatic storytelling. When the day is done, it's still a fictitious story even if it's based on some kind of current reality, news story, or something like that. Sometimes you do have to take dramatic liberties with the reality, and there are a lot of factors that go into it.

I saw an episode where the blood went in an unreal direction. What was happening there?

You can't necessarily go into an existing location and throw blood on their walls because we're going to have to be responsible to clean it up afterwards. We're always worried about where the blood's going to go.

All Photos by Kim Welch.



Polarizers

The Truth Behind the Imaging Magic

by Ira Tiffen

Polarizers can produce real imaging magic, if you understand how they do what they do. As a film or video maker, you must know how to manipulate light in so many ways. Usually, it's a matter of illumination and exposure, light and shadow; hue and saturation, hard light and soft. But, what happens when the issue is reflection? The options dwindle rapidly, often leaving only one solution and means of control: the polarizer.

The polarizer is a unique optical entity, treating light, as it does, by how it vibrates. Not by the wavelengths that define its color, but by the direction in which it vibrates. Now, most light we see, and that we record, vibrates in all directions, 360 degrees around the axis of its travel. Polarized light, by definition, vibrates in only one plane, one direction. Why is this difference important?

It happens that light, which reflects from many surfaces, becomes polarized in doing so, at least in part. Let's look at blades of green grass in bright sunlight. The grass is green because, first, there is green in the sunlight illuminating it. Second, it is green because it happens to have the property of reflecting green and absorbing all other colors. Without both of these characteristics, the grass won't appear as what we consider green. That said we know that the light that reflects as green tends to remain unpolarized, in this case from the grass, and also from many other surfaces. So far, fairly intuitive, about what you'd expect. Until we look a bit further…

When the light intensity is of sufficient strength, as in bright sunlight, there is a secondary reflection of interest. This is light that reflects off the very surface of the object, in this case the blades of grass, without ever being converted to green, retaining its original (sunlight white) coloration. We call this 'reflected glare,' which often is polarized. Two overlapping reflections, one green, the other white; the former un-polarized, the latter polarized. What is the result of this mix? The white reflected glare washes out the colored light, reducing its saturation. Deep green grass appears paler than it is.

Here's where the polarizer can work its magic. Mounted on the lens, in a manner that allows for rotation, it filters the light entering the camera. The grass-green light vibrates in all directions, so that no matter how the polarizer is rotated, it will get through. The reflected glare, however, is another story.

Rotating the polarizer, so that its polarization axis is perpendicular to the direction of vibration of the glare, allows the filter to absorb most, if not all of it. You can actually see this effect through the filter. Once removed from the image-forming light, the green grass can record as deeper, more saturated in color. Truly saturated color in bright sunlight without having to paint it all in post. An otherwise difficult feat of prestidigitation, made easy with a polarizer.

Now the true "imagician" also knows that the trick doesn't function without setting the proper stage. You have to know how to make the magic work. With polarizers, that largely involves understanding reflection angles.

For example, let's look up at the sky. Often blue, our view of it is filled with myriad water droplets in the atmosphere. Each is a reflecting surface, producing glare that washes out the true blue of the sky. This, too, is a job for the polarizer.

Here, the important factor to remember is that the angle of the sun determines how strongly the glare is polarized and how much saturation you can restore to the sky. The basics: keep the sun at your side; the closer you are to aiming directly at or away from the sun, the less the effect of the filter. In addition, you can readily determine the area of greatest effect by making a right angle with your thumb and index filter. Point your index finger at the sun, and rotate your thumb around its axis to point out the band of deepest blue.

For example, at the equator at noon, with the sun directly overhead, the band of deepest blue is all around just above the horizon. At dusk or dawn, facing toward the sun on the horizon, deepest blue is in a band from your left side to your right, forming an arc straight above you. In providing dramatically bluer skies (if the sky is blue to start with), the polarizer will also bring out white clouds in greater detail, without any change in their color. Two caveats: be aware that using a wide angle lens may show enough of the sky to make this band visible; also, be careful when panning so that you don't find the sky going from lighter to darker as you change your camera's angle to the sun.

But wait, there's more! Reflections occurring from water and windows can also be reduced or removed. Don't aim straight at the window, for instance, but from an angle of about 33 degrees off to the side. Again, you can see the effect through the filter. Using this method, you can reduce distracting glare from a window to allow a clear view of what's on the other side; see further beneath the surface of a lake; provide a good view of the driver through a car windshield; and much more.

Some things to remember. You may not want to remove all reflected glare from, say, a pond, so that the frog you are filming can retain some of its watery context. Remove all of the reflection, and it may not appear to be in water at all. Rotate the filter until you get just the effect you want. Same is true of bluer skies…sometimes it isn't desirable to go all the way.

As for the car windshield, if at first you find that the filter doesn't give you a wide enough effect, move further away and zoom in to retain framing. This will increase the area of the windshield surface that is closer to the best reflection angle, improving the glare reduction from left to right.

Another thing to know: there are two key types of polarizers, linear and circular. Having nothing to do with their shape, the terms refer to how polarization is handled. Linear polarizers are the traditional types that transmit light vibrating in only one direction. Circular polarizers are linear polarizers with an added clear layer known as a retarder, which is on the side of the filter facing toward the lens, and effectively de-polarizes the light again before it enters the camera.

Many camera designs have internal optics that polarize some of the light, and which cause adverse effects, such as loss of autofocus and/or accurate metering, with linear polarizers. So for these types of camera systems (and your camera manual or dealer should be able to tell you which ones they are) you should use the circular polarizer. When in doubt go circular.

Remember to mount the filter in the proper orientation, with the retarder facing the lens. Filters with threads only go on in one way. Square filters and round Series sizes without threads should be labeled by the manufacturer to show the proper orientation. It's simple: if you don't see the polarization effect, the filter should be re-mounted facing the other way.

Finally, polarizers are available with different exposure compensation requirements. The traditional polarizer requires about one and two-thirds stop compensation. More recently, filters needing only about one stop are being offered. They may not be quite as polarization-efficient, but they are worth knowing about when lower light levels call for it.

And now, you are readier-than-ever to make some imaging magic of your own.

In over 30 years of making optical filters, Ira Tiffen created the Pro-Mist, Soft/FX, Ultra Contrast, GlimmerGlass, and others, netting him both a Technical Achievement Award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and a Prime-Time Emmy Award. Elected a Fellow of the SMPTE in 2002, he is also an Associate member of the ASC, and the author of the filter section of the "American Cinematographer Manual."



Revealing the Secrets of the Universe through Cinema

by Michael Karp, S.O.C.

Insights on what makes an emotionally gripping story

All of us who have worked on student and professional films have had the experience of suffering through a movie that just wasn't emotionally gripping. Perhaps the work was technically brilliant, but there was something indefinable that was "missing" about the story.

I had the pleasure of working on staff for James Cameron for six years and from that, I have some simple insights to share with you about what makes a great movie grab you by the heart and drag you on a ride that you won't forget.

If a filmmaker fails to make that visceral connection with the audience, your film is dead in the water. The brilliant directors that I've worked with, such as Ridley Scott and Ron Howard, really understood that concept.

Let's take some famous films and identify the flaw in the hero of the movie. Then we'll follow as our character travels from a virtual purgatory, into a symbolic hell and then arrives at a heaven at the other end of the road. Taking that journey is something that humans are deeply wired to desire and crave like a drug. Audiences love to watch interesting characters wrestle with their flaws, transcend them and then become better human beings. Perhaps this all sounds very artsy fartsy and theoretical, but we will take some concrete examples and use that analysis to improve your film project's story.

Consider that great crowd pleaser, *The Graduate*. Our hero Benjamin's flaw is that he is passive, has no friends and is confused about the meaning of life. Thus, he is easily seduced by an older woman named Mrs. Robinson, who is alcoholic, neurotic and manipulative. When Benjamin's father suggests that Ben should be dating Mrs. Robinson's beautiful, intelligent and (for the most part) emotionally healthy daughter Elaine, Ben foolishly refuses.

Do you see the cornucopia of flaws in the protagonist? Do you see that Ben's rich collection of flaws provides the fuel for the plot of the film?

If a film has no plot and no story, the audiences will not shell out ten dollars to see your movie. No ten dollars at the box office and your film career is over. It is vital that your characters have interesting flaws, and then overcome those flaws. If not, you have no story, and you have no audience.

When considering *The Graduate*, it is interesting to note that all of Ben's epiphanies are obvious in hindsight. It is not immediately obvious that Ben should give up Mrs. Robinson in favor of her

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