



MOVING PICTURES

THE STORIES BEHIND THE MOVIES

On Being a Producer:

...and The Five Stages of Production
By Jonathan D. Krane
(from the 2008 Cannes Film Festival)

In Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates explains his definition of love which he believed is found in everyone. The force that compels human beings to share with others the truth, beauty and enlightenment they find. This is experienced by all of us today and is, in fact, the fundamental dynamic that drives the motion picture industry.

With more than 30 years as a successful working producer and having produced close to 70 feature films including the history-making *Look Who's Talking* three-film franchise, *Face/Off*, *Swordfish* and *The Trail of the Pink Panther*, among many others, one of my greatest pleasures continues to be fostering new talent and sharing my hard-earned knowledge with up-and-coming filmmakers. That is one of the main reasons I continue to make films, established a film academy, wrote a book and, quite frankly - besides the incredible food and breathtaking scenery - enjoy going to events such as the Cannes Film Festival where there is an exciting mix of new and established talent bumping shoulders on the busy Croisette.

I realized early on in my career that filmmaking is an accidental industry that can be turned into a rationale, predictable Art and Science like all of the other multi-billion-dollar manufacturing industries in the world, as I explain in depth in my book *A Revolutionary Approach to the Art and Science of Moviemaking: A Treatise on Fixing the Accidental Industry*.

I am honored to share this excerpt with my fellow filmmakers currently bumping shoulders on the busy Croisette...and everywhere.

Before delineating the Five Stages of Production, the definition of what I mean by the "producer" of a film must be provided. Obviously, he is the one who is involved in moving the five stages forward, but this definition has never been articulated. Also, the commonly held erroneous belief that the producer is the person on the set with a producer credit must be debunked now - at the very beginning.

When I taught my course on producing, whether to a group of industry professionals at the UCLA Extension School, film students at AFI and USC, or to a high school class, I began with a joke. I asked them, "What is a producer?" Before they could answer, I offered two definitions, ostensibly as jokes, but in fact to lay out the problems implicit in the question:

1. A producer is anyone who knows a writer.
2. A producer is the only person who can die during the shooting of a movie and no one would notice.

Actually, these two answers nicely set up our discussion on just how we can define a producer. First, anyone who knows a writer often calls himself/herself a producer in the Accidental Industry; anyone can call himself anything. Answer number 1 is, of course, false, but it illustrates the current state of the motion picture industry: the lack of regulation; the absence of defined job functions; the lack of definitions for commonly used terms; and the absence of explained processes, activities, and goals. Many people who simply know writers and talk for years about developing a screenplay, without the least notion of what that

means, call themselves "producers" in various settings and for various reasons.

The second joke is both funnier and closer to the truth. Shooting a film, or "principal photography" as it's called, is just a part of the fifth stage of production, physical production. If a producer has performed all of his job functions properly up until that point, accomplishing the goals of the previous stages, everything should fall into place during shooting, with the producer's job functions then being to anticipate and solve the very few problems the director and the "line producers" can't solve themselves. If the producer died during shooting, the show would go on. In fact, producers who don't know their own job descriptions often cover up their ignorance by staying on the set to try to make themselves seem important during shooting. If problems do arise, some producers wind up exacerbating them. There are times and places when the producer must be on the set, and if he has mastered the film correctly (the "right" film) thus far, he will use his mastery of creative problem solving to collaborate to solve the problem. Only a handful of producers are "right" - which is the term I use for people and processes that are part of the New Art and Science.

The producer is the person (or persons) who successfully follows and achieves the functions, process and goals of the five stages of production. He (they) does this by knowing and by personally performing all of the processes within his (their) job purview. Each stage of production requires the participation of hundreds of other people - cast and crew - and experienced producers know how to hire the personnel that can accomplish their goals so that the producer can remain actively involved in accomplishing his.

The five stages of production are: 1) finding, acquiring or creating the right idea; 2) developing the idea into the right screenplay; 3) packaging the right director and lead actors to the script; 4) financing the film either through the studio system or independently; and 5) physically producing the film through pre-production, preproduction, principal photography and postproduction.

I have always had this need to share the beauty I have seen, the truth I have learned and the enlightenment I have experienced with anyone who is interested.