

THE TOOLS OF DIRECTING



Introducing Simon Phillips
‘Tools of Directing’

The tools of Directing Introductory Seminar will be delivered in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2013 by the Directors Guild of Great Britain and sponsored by Creative Skillset. This will be followed by a Bursary Scheme for attendees of these seminars that will bring the most talented applicants to London in June for The Tools of Directing Master Workshop - a full week's training in the Tools of Directing Actors, Casting, Script Development and Directing Camera. All events are at greatly reduced costs thanks to Creative Skillset and venue sponsors.

Saturday 9th March (1-5pm) - Sherman Theatre Cardiff
 Saturday 6th April (1-5pm) - Queens Film Theatre (QFT), Belfast
 Saturday 13th April (1-5pm) - Scottish Storytelling Centre, Edinburgh
 Saturday 27th April (1-5pm) - Mitchell Theatre, Glasgow

There are also two London Tools of Directing Weekend Masterclasses scheduled: Friday-Sunday 22-24 March - Tools of Directing Camera
 Friday-Sunday 31 May - 2 June - Tools of Directing Actors

I've been a script writer in film, TV and stage for many years, latterly also a script consultant. I've watched directors of all kinds work on my scripts and had the usual fun of playing an extra. So I thought I knew what I'd get when I went to Simon Phillips' Introduction to the Tools of Directing on a chilly Sunday in London last November.

I went because I might have to direct an experimental short film I've written. I thought I'd get technical stuff about camera angles and actors hitting their marks. Instead, I got an introduction to a quite extraordinary method of working with actors to create a specific emotional road map of the script and give them a way to strip characters back not just to the bones but even further, to their raw responses, so they can genuinely build up a character from the inside, cliché-free.

There's not room to describe the whole Tools of Directing masterclass here. I'll just address this core direction technique. In a nutshell, you take the actor through the script moment by moment identifying each sensory change the character experiences and to which it must physically react. The result is that the actor doesn't create a stereotype - Jodie, the hard-bitten journalist or Tim, the idealistic doctor - a role your actor takes from memory banks, dusts down and puts on like a coat, something which will always be external, second-hand, an act.

Instead, identifying these 'change points' makes the actor ignore trappings like gender, class, job, marital status and the like to identify only the character's raw sensory responses. The effect is to create something akin to an anonymous brain scan, the character's central nervous system if you like, a sequence of responses, reflexes, visceral and elemental. The actor can then build on this raw sensory experience from the inside out to create the individual identity of the character free of cliché - in the same way that those forensic sculptors build up a vividly original human face from a broken skull,

with the actor laying on the tissue of gender, class, race, psyche, neurosis, personal history and the rest. It's surprisingly easy to think you're writing Dr Tim's journey from co-dependency to independence when your storyline is actually just a sequence of medical crises with Tim inexplicably changing at the end.

"Simon Phillips is an expert in his field"

The joy for the writer is that all of this is based in the script. Whatever changes the script goes through, the film is tethered to what you originally wrote. Writing-wise, it reminds you that character IS what character DOES and that your storylines must provide the visible change points that take the characters on the arc you want them to travel.

From this core idea of stripping back to raw sensory experience, Simon proceeds to a whole range of other direction tools. I haven't covered the half of it. The bottom line is, whether you're a writer, producer or director, the Tools of Directing is very useful stuff indeed. Go!

Biographical info
 Linda Aronson is widely regarded as the world expert on non-linear and ensemble script structure.

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Full details and booking for all these events at www.dggb.org/training.php. Also see: www.toolsofdirecting.com