

Steven Spielberg's Early Career as a Television Director at Universal Studios

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Introduction

Steven Spielberg (1946-) is one of the greatest movie directors and producers in the history of motion picture. In his four-decade career, Spielberg has been admired for making blockbusters such as *Jaws* (1975), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), *E.T.: the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), *Indiana Jones* series (1981, 1984, 1989, 2008), *Schindler's List* (1993), *Jurassic Park* series (1993, 1997, 2001, 2015), *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *Lincoln* (2012) and many other smash hits. Spielberg's life as a filmmaker has been so brilliant that it looks like no one believes that there was any moment he spent at the bottom of the ladder in the movie industry. Much to the surprise of the skeptics, Spielberg was once just another director at Universal Television for the first couple years after launching himself into the cinema making world. Learning how to make good movies by trial and error, Spielberg made a breakthrough with his second feature-length telefilm *Duel* (1971) at the age of 25 and advanced into the big screen, where he would direct and produce more than 100 movies, including many great hits and some commercial or critical failures, in the next 40-something years. This paper will examine Spielberg's early career both as an amateur video cameraman and as a professional television director before his epoch-making *Duel*, with some focus on several movies he made around this period.

Steven Allan Spielberg was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, on December 18, 1946, to an Orthodox Jewish family. His father, Arnold (1917-), was an electrical engineer involved in the development of computers at the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) and then General Electric (GM), and his mother, Leah (née Posner, 1920-), was a concert pianist and a restaurateur. Due to Arnold's work at RCA, the Spielbergs moved to Camden, New Jersey in 1950. While living in New Jersey in 1952, Steven Spielberg had his first cinematic experience. He saw *The Greatest Show on Earth* (1952) in Philadelphia, where his father took him to see "a circus." *The Greatest Show on Earth*, directed by Cecil B. DeMille and starring Cornel Wilde, Betty Hutton, Charlton Heston and James Stewart, is a drama film featuring the existing Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Though Steven, who had thought he would see a real circus, felt disappointed and even angry at first, excitement soon came over him. He was fascinated by a lavish spectacle coming up under the big top on the silver screen: colorful costumes, large animals such as lions, tigers, elephants, hippopotami and giraffes,

and acrobatic feats like flying trapezes, somersaults, riding horses and monocycles, walking a tightrope, juggling, etc. Among other things, the train crash at the climax captured young Steven's heart. The locomotive pulling a circus train hits an automobile on the track and then smashes into the rear end of another circus train stopping ahead. The crash is so violent that it derails the two trains and turns over some carriages, throwing the circus company into chaos, with some members dead, others injured and animals leaping out of cages. It is such a spectacular collision that it made an indelible impact on Steven; he would set up a deadly, though disproportional, car crash for the last scene of *Duel* almost twenty years later.¹

In winter, 1957, the Spielbergs moved from New Jersey west to Phoenix, Arizona, where Arnold prospected for a better job at GM. Steven spent much of his teen age there and would call Phoenix his hometown. In fact, the family relocation from New Jersey to Arizona made a significant change to their life and had a profound effect on Steven. He enjoyed the unique environment in the desert vista where he could get a firsthand look at wild animals including lizards, snakes and spiders which he could only see in the zoos back in New Jersey.²

Around this time, the Spielbergs started using a home video camera. Leah gave Arnold an 8mm Eastman Kodak Brownie Movie Camera II as a gift. It was not a luxury, high-tech camera, but rather a cheap, simple one. Arnold shot the family vacations and his family enjoyed watching them later at home. But young Steven was meticulous about technical aspects of video shooting and criticized his father's unstable camera movements and poor photographic skills. Then Steven took his father's place as the family photographer and documented the family trips and events. However, he soon found household documentaries pretty unsatisfactory and staging real life more exciting, so he started giving a dramatic touch to whatever he pointed his camera at, using a bit of imagination.³

Steven's first creative film work is *The Last Train Wreck* (1957). Since he was impressed with the climactic train crash in *The Greatest Show on Earth*, Steven enjoyed reproducing it on his miniature railroad. He repeated the crash so often that his father threatened to take the toy trains and tracks away from him. Taking the threat very seriously, Steven set up the destruction for the last time and recorded it with his Kodak video camera to enjoy watching it over and over again later. Steven used the engines of his scale Lionel model trains for the collision, put the lighting in right position and shot the camera on the tripod from various angles. One going from right to left, the other from left to right, the two trains smashed head-on into each other. The film is in black and white and runs three minutes.⁴

In 1958, Steven Spielberg joined the Boy Scouts and made his second film, *The Last Gun* (1958), a nine-minute black and white western, for a photography merit badge. The film starred neighborhood friends, Jim Sollenberger and Barry Sollenberger, and fellow Scouts and was shot outside Pinnacle Peak Patio, a cowboy-style steak house in Scottsdale, Arizona. The restaurant had a red stagecoach parked out front, which made itself a good location for filming a western. Spielberg won the badge as he had hoped.⁵

In the next few years, Spielberg filmed several monochrome short movies: *A Day in the Life of Thunder* (1958), an experimental documentary with the family cocker spaniel,

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Thunder, towing the camera around the neighborhood; *USSR Documentary* (1959), a travelogue of the Spielbergs visiting Russia; *Untitled Western* (1959), a robbery western filmed in a friend's house; *Films of Ingleside Elementary School* (1959), footage of the school's flag football matches; *Film Noir* (1960), an experiment with an anamorphic lens and using numerous low angles to create menacing effects; *Steve Spielberg Home Movies* (1960), slapstick comedy with a series of sight gags and Keystone Kops-style chases, including extensive trick photography; *Career Exploration Project* (1961), a western with a primitive tape-recorded soundtrack involving screams and gallops; *Scary Hollow* (1961), a record of the school play staging a mystery. A more noteworthy piece of work is *Fighter Squadron* (1960). In this World War II movie, Spielberg even filmed actors in the cockpits of vintage air craft at the local airport and tilted the camera to represent planes banking, also using footage of real dogfights from documentaries. Spielberg's early interest in the Second World War and aviation, which was developed by his father's war stories, bloomed professionally into *1941* (1979) and *Empire of the Sun* (1987) years later.⁶

Spielberg's attention turned from air battles to ground battles in a more ambitious motion picture. *Escape to Nowhere* (1962) deals with the US military at war with Nazi Germany for a strategic hill in East Africa during WWII. Though geographically and historically contradictory to the fact that the US military fought against the allied armies of Germany and Italy in North Africa (e.g. El Alamein, Tobruk), this war film is on a grander scale in many aspects than his previous works. Having been filmed in Camelback Mountain in Arizona, it runs 40 minutes in color with 20 to 30 fellow high school students Spielberg cast as soldiers. Properties and physical effects were extensive, too. Spielberg mobilized real rifles and machine guns as well as model guns and let his parents drive their jeep. Dust clouds were effectively used to make bullet impact and explosion look real. However, Spielberg was thrift of human resources and properties. To make soldiers look larger in number, Spielberg had the cast play both American and German troops one at a time so that they could maintain the good size of each. Besides, to cover the limited supplies of guns and helmets, he set up a relay system under which the cast passed the equipment to each other soon after they went off camera. Light-blue German uniforms are white T-shirts Spielberg failed to dye grey. Spielberg's good sense of economy in his early days would be of great help in shooting and editing *Duel* on tight budget and schedule. Spielberg won a 16 mm Kodak movie camera as the prize in the state amateur film contest. However, he found film-stock for the high-scale camera unaffordable and traded it in for a new 8 mm camera which enabled him to make good visual effects such as double exposures and stop motion.⁷

Spielberg's next and greatest project to date was *Firelight* (1964). Spielberg's imagination nurtured by his indulgence in science-fiction literature and movies was fueled by a tall tale told by fellow Boy Scouts; to tease Spielberg, they alleged to have seen a red light rising in the sky in a Scout's camp he missed. After completing the screenplay which he wrote staying up late at night for a week, Spielberg started making *Firelight*. The plot is that a bunch of scientists and UFO freaks investigate the colored light that appears in the sky and

disappearance of people, animals and objects, which culminates in discovering the existence of aliens and their plan to kidnap people and put them in a human zoo. This is obviously a prototype for *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). To raise money for the budget, he earned 100 dollars by whitewashing citrus trees and his father invested 400 dollars. The players were chosen from Arcadia High School students, though Spielberg suffered from minor deficits: exaggerated dialogue and wooden performances with hindsight, and, more seriously, the recasting of two actors who quit after the first two weeks of shooting. The film was shot in and around Spielberg's house and garage on weekends and in the evenings for roughly a year. He even went on location in a local hospital and borrowed a jet plane at the local airport. As for visual effects, Spielberg's father helped him as a computer engineer in addition to sophisticated functions of his new 8mm camera. Some of the teenage director's shooting techniques and props are rather ingenious, too; Spielberg shot the spacecraft through jelly that filled two glass plates and the battle scene between aliens and the army in miniature via stop-motion photography. Not only directing and script writing but also other work did Spielberg take on; he re-recorded all the dialogue and composed music for the film on his clarinet with an aid from his mother who was a concert pianist. On March 24, 1964, *Firelight* was viewed with a running time of about 140 minutes in color at a local cinema, Phoenix Little Theatre. 500 tickets were sold for a dollar each and the movie made a profit. Though *Firelight* is visually audacious and manifests Spielberg's showmanship, he called it 'one of the five worst movies ever made.'⁸

The sub-plot of *Firelight* is a marital discordance between a main male character and his wife, which reflects the sour relationship between Arnold and Leah Spielberg at that time. Spielberg's parents divorced in the end in 1965 and he moved from Phoenix, Arizona to Saratoga, California with his father while his three sisters remained with his mother in Phoenix. Spielberg had spent about three years at Arcadia High School in Phoenix, where he didn't have a very good time except for making films. He felt isolated and was bullied at school because his skinny physique, as well as his big eyes and nose for the size of his face, was a target for mockery from classmates as opposed to the popularity of robust, athletic students.

After graduating from Saratoga High School in California in 1965, Spielberg made an application to University of Southern California School of Theater, Film and Television three separate times but failed in getting an offer due to his poor academic performances at high schools. Instead, he was accepted into California State University, Long Beach. While attending CSULB as an English major, Spielberg became an unpaid, seven-day-a-week intern and guest of the editing department. After shooting a few 8 mm short documentaries around this time, Spielberg moved on to 16 mm dramatic films. The first of the kind is *Encounter* (1965): a 20-minute, black-and-white noirish thriller involving a knife and gun fight. Another is a slapstick comedy, *The Great Race* (1966), in which a young man chases his

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ex-girl friend around the college campus.⁹

In 1968, Spielberg created a very sophisticated film to get a ticket to the professional motion picture industry. *Amblin'* (1968) is a 26-minute, 35mm colored showreel directed by Spielberg and produced by Denis Hoffman. Hoffman was a co-owner of a film titling company called Cinefx. As a financier of 20,000 dollars, Hoffman suggested that Spielberg shoot the film on the following condition: the film would have no dialogue, part of the film must be filmed at Hoffman's Cinefx studio, and the background music must be played by October Country, a pop group managed by Hoffman. After his first idea was turned down by Hoffman, Spielberg came up with a story that met the criteria; a young man hitchhikes from a desert in South California to the Pacific Coast with a girl joining him, enjoying an olive-stone spitting contest, smoking grass and sleeping together. While it has appeal to young generations at the end of the 1960s, it contains a tinge of skepticism about hippiedom. When the girl opens the boy's guitar case which he has securely strapped, she finds inside daily necessities such as a toothbrush, toothpaste and a roll of toilet paper, and a copy of Arthur C. Clarke's *The City and the Stars* (1956). None of them reveal anything countercultural but rather conventional about him. The lead actor and actress are Richard Levin, a librarian at the Beverly Hills library, and Pamela McMyler, whose name Spielberg found in the Academy Players Directory and who had been a member of the Pasadena Playhouse and had previously played a minor role in *The Boston Strangler* (1968).¹⁰

In July in 1968, *Amblin'* was shot in Hoffman's Cinefx soundstage in Malibu and desert locations around Pearblossom, North California. Due to the rough terrain and high temperatures, many of the unpaid camera crew quit before the shooting was completed. Spielberg first showed *Amblin'* to Chuck Silvers, an acquaintance of his father and a librarian at Universal. Silvers was impressed with the picture and arranged for it to be screened to Sidney Sheinberg, vice president in charge of television production at Universal. On seeing *Amblin'*, Sheinberg saw Spielberg's maturity and professionalism in it and offered him a seven-year-contract as a director for the Television Division of Universal. Spielberg, who had always wanted to be a one, accepted the offer and quit college for Universal. On December 18, 1968, *Amblin'* was released at Lowe's Crest Theater in Los Angeles with Otto Preminger's *Skidoo* in a double bill. *Amblin'* won an award at the Atlanta Film Festival in 1968.¹¹

As Spielberg's first contractual assignment for Universal, Sidney Sheinberg had him direct 'Eyes,' the second of the three segments in the pilot episode of the new TV series, *Night Gallery*, in 1969. *Night Gallery* was written by Rod Serling, who had written for *Twilight Zone*, one of the most popular TV shows in the US in 1959-1964, and produced by William Sackheim. 'Eyes' is based on Serling's short story of the same title included in his anthology *The Season to Be Wary* (1967).

The original lead actress for 'Eyes' was Bette Davis, a star in the Golden Age of Hollywood, but she refused the offer for the show on knowing that the director was a

23-year-old novice. The role then went to another legendary actress, Joan Crawford, who accepted it though she also objected to his age at first. Despite the fact that 'Eyes' was Spielberg's debut and he was still professionally immature, he won over Crawford and the other cast with his charming personality, intelligence and imaginativeness, though some of the veteran crew in their 50s and 60s didn't trust him and treated him scornfully or, even worse, contemptuously.¹²

The plot of 'Eyes' is centered around Claudia Menlo (Joan Crawford), who is a rich, powerful but blind born middle-aged woman living on the top floor of a skyscraper in New York City. To get herself eyesight, only temporarily, though, Menlo ruthlessly blackmails her long-time friend ophthalmologist, Dr. Heatherton (Barry Sullivan), who illegally arranged for a young woman to have a sloppy and fatal abortion, to transplant an indebted gambler's healthy eyeballs to her. The doctor performs the transplantation on her successfully, but as soon as she unties her bandage, her rooms black out as part of power failure in the whole city. After spending the night alone in her penthouse in total darkness, Menlo sees the sun rise at last. However, because the effect of the surgery wears off, she loses her sight again and staggers toward the cracked floor-to-ceiling window and falls, breaking through it, to the ground.

While shooting this episode, Both Spielberg and Crawford had a tough time with this new series. They were new comers to the television industry and 'Eyes' was Spielberg's first ever professional direction and Crawford's first appearance in TV drama. What is worse, the script was not written well enough; dialogues are tilt although its storyline is passable with the blackout as a twist, and consequently Crawford's acting is somewhat exaggerated in an attempt to represent the eruption of Menlo's emotions such as anger and frustration. Nonetheless, Crawford's mere presence dominates the whole episode, and whether Menlo can see things or not, her eyes conveyed a strong sense of determination to get eyesight and her despair when she loses it again after she only catches a glance of the sunrise, which nearly symbolizes the day break of her new life.¹³

As a visual adaptation of Serling's short story, 'Eyes' is replete with Spielberg's showy techniques. Obviously aware of the New Hollywood style, which was already outdated by the end of the 1960s, Spielberg defied traditional photography in the Hollywood film and television industry. Some of his techniques appear to have been employed only to draw attention or to avoid conventional shot patterns such as shot/reverse shot. Throughout 'Eyes,' there are too many perspective changes. Indeed, abrupt cuts are not always motivated by the action and some cuts from telephoto to wide-angle shots are seen where unnecessary.¹⁴

However, there are some positive sides to Spielberg's shooting skills. For example, he used the opening and closing of Menlo's high rise's doors very effectively. In Dr. Heatherton bumping into her portrait painter when the elevator doors open, the viewers see a vividly painted Menlo loom in the dark background on the canvass and hear from the painter that she has refused to accept the portrait. This glimpse of the spitting image of Menlo, which is a two-dimensional incarnation of her strong personality and her sinister and cruel nature, is a

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good introduction to the TV viewers. The scene of Menlo's apartment follows that of the elevator in accordance with the shift from the closing elevator doors to the opening apartment doors.

Nonetheless, this smooth and functional change of the scenes is interrupted by too artistic a shot. When Dr. Heatherton walks through the hall in the apartment, he is photographed through a small crystal bauble in the chandelier overhead, which shows him upside down and distorted. From suspense point of view, this chandelier shot is too graphically ornamental and almost meaningless. Besides, after revealing Menlo's picture to the viewers, fully exposing real Menlo in three shots is a little bit lengthy. In fact, the direction changes cause spatial disruption and make the scene rather slow and awkward.¹⁵

There are many other graphic deficiencies throughout the film: weak visual links between scenes, too many variations of angles, spatial unclarity due to lack of screen direction, overused zoom, etc.¹⁶ For instance, in the first half of the episode, there are many more close-ups of Dr. Heatherton than of any other character. In his meeting with Menlo in her penthouse, whether it is frontal or, more stylistically, in profile, he often appears in the foreground in focus with her out of focus in the background. The color scheme works better for Dr. Heatherton than for Menlo, too. The light-blue color of her clothes fails in making a clear difference from the generally pale walls and ceiling and giving a strong impression as the protagonist as well as a woman of a fierce character, while the doctor's dark outfit matches his gloomy countenance shadowed by his guilty past that was dug out by relentless Menlo. By this contrast in hue between the two, their roles appear to be changed: Dr. Heatherton as a tragic hero and Menlo as a torturing villainess. Some of their actions strike the viewers odd, too. The distance between Dr. Heatherton and Menlo, which also suggests their mutual distrust, is so far that she has to speak unnaturally loudly to him in her own room, which makes their dialogue more stogy than televisional. Dr. Heatherton's silent reading of the report on his secret crime with his back to Menlo in contradistinction to her eloquence well depicts a mentally devastating blow and speechless shock to him. However, his sudden turning around to her is too excessively theatrical though it carried out its main function of showing the viewers the picture of the woman who died due to the abortion.

Even for Crawford, who had a four-decade career as an actress then, playing a blind woman was not an easy job. Her out-of-focus eye movement expresses Menlo's optical defect very well, but she moves around too smoothly in her apartment though, despite her innate blindness, she may be used to walking freely where she lives. It is quite unnatural that Menlo navigates through the furniture such as a cupboard, a table and chairs without even bumping into or tripping over any of them.

The scene change from Menlo's room to the park in the city is another avant-garde aspect of this TV output. On Dr. Heatherton leaving her penthouse, Menlo presses the button on the side of the chair she sits in and it turns around, leading graphically similarly to the revolving playground equipment on which the indebted gambler and his creditor meet. After giving a dizziness to the viewers as well as to one of the men on the equipment, the close-up of the fast

moving ground switches over to the long shot of the equipment, elaborately through branches of a tree. It is not unusual for adults to meet at a park, but it is a bizarre behavior that two male adults ride the revolving playground equipment. A park bench would be a good enough place for them to inconspicuously talk about how to pay debts.

As seen in the park scene, 'revolving' is a buzzword in this installment. In the operating theater, where Menlo and the eye donor, Sidney Resnick (Tom Bosley), lie in bed waiting for their eyes to be exchanged, a close shot of their faces connected upside down to each other at their eyes comes up and their faces spin on the middle of their foreheads superposed on the closing doors to the theater behind the surgeon. After the spin stops and Resnick blinks a few times and finally closes his eyes, Menlo opens her eyes and their faces are wiped away in a circle from the center to the outer edge, with the profile of a doll looming up in her room in the next sequence.

Back in Menlo's living room hours after the operation, the viewers are visually overwhelmed by a series of quick cuts among plaster, marble and granite heads and busts. Lights and shadows on the statues successfully give Baroque dignity to the scene and consequently dignify Dr. Heatherton's agonized conscience that is hidden up in his expressionless complexion but that is represented by the deep and shaded wrinkles furrowed there. However, Spielberg made this scene rather cheap by repeating the upside-down, decorative chandelier shot, this time with Menlo, when she starts untying the bandages from her eyes immediately after the doctor turns on the chandelier and leaves her room. To make matters worse, the sudden shift from the radiant glow to the absolute blackness due to the New York power down is kind of an abuse of the antinomy between light and darkness in addition to the clumsy time scheme that Menlo takes off her eye bandages after 5:00pm, which means that Menlo could only see the nighttown because she can stay sighted for around twelve hours while it would be more pleasant to see things in broad daylight.

Although Crawford acted out Menlo's frustration at seeing nothing but darkness just as she did before the surgery, it strikes almost impossible that she hardly gets injured with her clothes a little torn and comes safe back to her room after she stumbles on the stairs, and it is also unlikely that no one attends her though she desperately screams for help outside her penthouse. At the end of the episode, even the way Menlo dies is equally abrupt and unconvincing. It is true that a window glass is already cracked and that Menlo leans against it, but it appears unrealistic that the window breaks only with that. Moreover, the spinning image of Menlo's face and shattering glass superimposed over her portrait while she is falling headlong are too fussy and repetitive.¹⁷

After all, though Spielberg tried hard to visually sophisticate the tedious screenplay, he made it overblown and optically excessive, and gave his shooting crew the impression that he was an avant-garde, rather than conventional, director with showy techniques. Unfortunately, the completed 'Eyes' is not an excellent piece of work, and Spielberg learned a lot of lessons from his first professional film-making experience. This was not a brilliant start in his career but not a bad one either, considering the fact that Spielberg got a chance to shoot an episode

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for TV for his young age. It was a small but steady step forward for him as a gifted art creator.

After 'Eyes', Spielberg made one trial and error after another for both television and movies at Universal. After directing 'The Daredevil Gesture,' an episode of *Marcus Welby, M.D.* for broadcast in March, 1970, which doesn't show much of his distinction except for a winding tracking shot through a high school locker room, Spielberg developed three ideas for cinematization and pitched them to Universal. One was a modern adaptation of the Brothers Grimm's classic 'Snow White' set in a Chinese food plant in San Francisco. Another was a film biography of Thomas Crapper, a notable English plumber and toilet-related inventor, based on the book published in the previous year. The third was Spielberg's original idea: an airplane stuntman in the Roaring Twenties and his relationship with his son. Despite their uniqueness, Universal turned down all of the three. Faced with this abrupt refusal, Spielberg found himself in an impasse and took an unpaid leave that was specified in a clause of his contract. While on leave, he further developed the aforementioned story of the flyer and his son. Since 20th Century Fox took interest in it, Spielberg sold it to the filmmaker for 50,000 dollars. The film was released under the title of *Ace Eli and Roger of the Skies* in 1973, directed by John Erman and starring Cliff Robertson. However, Spielberg couldn't write any more good screenplays and got back to Universal within a year.¹⁸

Back on the contract with Universal, supported by his boss Sidney Sheinberg and producers, Spielberg honed his directorial skills by shooting more TV series, which transformed him from an amateurish experimentalist to a more mature professional film creator. Toward the end of 1970, Spielberg directed 'Make Me Laugh,' his second and last episode for *Night Gallery*, aired on January 6, 1971. 'Make Me Laugh' is plotted on a standup comedian whose popularity has been lost and who depends on a miracle maker to regain his popularity, with tragedy in the end. According to Ian Freer, 'Make Me Laugh' lacks 'the visual sophistication and dramatic subtleties of Spielberg's other small screen outings' and is 'the director's least interesting television offering.'¹⁹ However, some progress in Spielberg's direction is noteworthy in this episode. Though its script is worse than that of 'Eyes' because of the unreality of the miracle maker doing miracles, the camerawork is a lot better than in his previous assignment. Compared with many quick cuts and avant-garde representations in the pilot episode, 'Make Me Laugh' was photographed with characters well-balanced in frames. For example, in the nightclub where comedian Jackie Slater (Godfrey Cambridge) cracks jokes that fall flat, the man in the background, who is listening to the jokes and beats him out in one of them, is well-focused and therefore the TV viewers easily notice his importance as a customer well-versed in jokes and comedy while the two other customers in the foreground in the same cut are out of focus and just eat and drink without paying any attention to the jokes. On the platform, the close-up of Slater clearly shows sweats on his

smiling face, which reveals the shame he feels deep down as a professional comedian. As he used an opening and closing door effectively for a scene change in 'Eyes,' so did Spielberg in the one from the stage to the dressing room; Slater at the door in the back, his agent Jules (Tom Bosley) in the chair on the left and the dressing table on the right keeps a very good equilibrium.

Even back in the dressing room, which is, as opposed to the stage outside, a place in depth where he is supposed to be able to give a piece of his mind to his agent, Slater doesn't look straight at him and tell him the truth that his jokes failed but tells him a lie that '(My performance was) Not bad for the first shot.' When Slater sits at the dressing table, a physical balance is kept again, between Jules, Slater with his back to Jules, and Slater's reflection on the mirror. This time, Slater and his reflection are closely face to face, and though Slater refused to tell Jules the truth and turned his back to him, his puzzled face in the mirror silently tells it. Looking himself in the mirror, Slater can't bear self-deception and takes it out on his good-natured agent. The well-balanced photography of this dressing-room scene is much more stable than any in 'Eyes' and Spielberg took great advantage of the mirror to reflect the comedian's silent agony which is more immense than it looks considering the big gap between his innate funny face for which he was bullied as a boy and which is hardly good at showing sorrow and his profound mortification he suffers as a pro jester.

In the next sequence, at the bar, the equipoise is continuously maintained between a different set of three men: Slater at the corner of the counter, the bartender close to him behind the counter and a mysterious man in the turban at a table in the background. Slater and the bartender are in the center with the latter's red jacket as the bull's eye of the scene among the customers in drab colored clothes. The man in the turban, who turns out to be a miracle maker, walks from the background to the fore while a couple of customers cross his way, and takes a seat next to Slater. The miracle maker's move from the back to the front closes the distance between Slater and the bartender and him and as the result reinforces the focal point of the scene: in the foreground Slater on the left and the miracle maker on the right in focus with the bartender in between out of focus in the back. Slater and the miracle maker talk eagerly with each other and it turns out that they are in similar situations, namely, they are failing in their businesses. On the other hand, the bartender places himself in a totally different position; he takes a third man's standpoint and looks fairly dubious about the miracle making, listening objectively to the conversation. At the risk of making a failure, the miracle maker granted Slater's request to give him the power to make people laugh. Indeed, all the people in the bar burst into uproarious laughter no matter what Slater says. The pink brooch in the shape of a flower a young woman wears symbolizes his jokes in full bloom, which foregoes his bright future as a comedian. Just as expected, he rocks the whole nightclub in the aisles.

However, Slater soon gets fed up with himself as a comedian because people laugh hilariously even at trite jests and no laughable matters. So he quits comedy for 'a straight dramatic role' offered by a drama producer David Garrick, who evokes Shakespeare and other

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highbrow theatrical performances because he bears the same name as the eighteenth century English actor-manager. Nevertheless, the staff at the theater including the director, the producer and players laugh out loud at every single line he says and never take him seriously. Disappointed by their frivolity and insincerity, Slater leaves the theater and runs into the miracle maker, whom he asks to make it always happen that he touches people and make them cry. To see if his wish has come true, Slater walks across the street to speak to a florist, but he is run over by a cab and dies. At the sight of Slater's unfortunate sudden death, the florist shed tears, which ironically proves that the miracle was worked and that Slater succeeds in moving her to tears. The last scene of the episode was very well photographed. Firstly, people and vehicles are in appropriate positions: Slater lying on face surrounded in a semicircle by passers-by, the cab parked on the right, another car in the background and the flower-wagon in the fore. These positions create a beautiful spatial structure. Secondly, the color scheme is exquisite; the yellow cab and the red car draw the viewers' attention to themselves and Slater's body beside it whereas the white-and-blue stripe of the awing and flowers in various colors in the foreground make an ironic contrast between the fatal accident and the busy live street. Slater's death is that of the one who was captured between comedy and tragedy. Though the script of 'Make Me Laugh' was insipid, Spielberg made it over into a stereoscopic, color-coordinated and spatially well-proportioned teleplay.

After Spielberg's last contribution to *Night Gallery* came 'LA 2017' (1971) in *The Name of the Game*. 'LA 2017' is important for Spielberg because it is his first feature-length teleplay (74 min.) and veteran movie and TV actors such as Gene Barry, Barry Sullivan and Edmond O'Brien are starred. As the title suggests, 'LA 2017' depicts Los Angeles in 2017 as a police state, where people live underground to protect themselves against toxic air pollution. The environmentally oriented theme and the car chase preceded *Duel*, and, in spite of so many stale sci-fi clichés and the static plot, Spielberg succeeded in creating frightening and expressionistic imagery.²⁰ After 'LA 2017' was broadcast in January 1971, Spielberg directed two episodes for *The Psychiatrist* on NBC, starring Roy Thinnes, at the request of Jerrold Freedman, the producer of the TV series and a friend of Spielberg's at Universal. *The Psychiatrist* was a short-lived, hour-long weekly drama, centered around two psychiatrists: an idealistic young one, who helps his patients in unorthodox ways, and his down-to-earth, old partner. It was aired from December 14, 1970 to March 10, 1971 with a pilot and 6 regular episodes. Spielberg directed 'The Private World of Martin Dalton' (episode #2) and 'Par for the Course' (episode #6). 'The Private World of Martin Dalton' depicts a young boy who coops himself up in an imaginary world of TV and cartoons to avoid facing tough reality. Spielberg well represented dream scenes and sensitivity of the nervous child. 'Par for the Course' is preferred by the director's boss, Sidney Sheinberg. This final episode of the series deals with the relationship between a professional golfer diagnosed with duodenal cancer and his wife and friends. Spielberg used the less-is-more approach to the full in the scene where the

golfer's wife talks in tears to her mother on the phone with her back turned to the camera. In both episodes, especially in the latter, Spielberg found himself reinvigorated and handled drama and characters very sensitively, proving that he was not just an artful technobrat but also a full-fledged filmmaker with much potential for a wide variety of material.²¹ This potential led him to his next assignment in a detective story which would be immensely popular very soon. After two pilots were aired, the *Columbo* creators and producers Richard Levinson and William Link picked out Spielberg to direct its first regular installment, 'Murder by the Book' (1971).

Including the pilot episodes, *Columbo* adopts the inverted narrative format, that is, at the beginning of each episode a premeditated murder and its subsequent cover-up generate tension, which develops later into a fierce confrontation between Lieutenant Columbo and the criminal and finally settles the investigation by the arrest of the murderer. Following this general rule, Spielberg directed 'Murder by the Book,' and, among others, the first sequences of committing murder and covering it up were ingenious. Spielberg's mature photography in 'Make Me Laugh' in *Night Gallery* was polished further up here.

The first episode of *Columbo* starts with shots of the best-selling mystery writing duo. The two men are physically separate and doing completely different things. Ken Franklin (Jack Cassidy) is driving a Mercedes Benz on the street and Jim Ferris (Martin Milner) is typing a crime fiction in their shared office on the top floor of a high rise in Los Angeles. There is no music but the mechanical sound of Jim's typewriter. A skull on his desk makes the viewers feel something sinister. Though their physical distance shortens as Ken reaches the foot of the building, parks his car and takes an elevator up to their office, their mental gap is too wide to bridge. From the very beginning of their career, their co-authorship is only nominal because Jim, as a professional writer, engages in writing by himself, coming up with tricks and story-lines, while Ken, as a salesman, only promotes the books to publishers and lavishes money dining at fancy restaurants and going to theaters. Due to this division of roles based on the presence and absence of their literary gifts, Jim finds himself up on the top-floor of the skyscraper virtually as the sole occupant of their shared office while Ken's territory is way down on the ground, though they share the profits equally. This difference in height between them represents their substantial disparity in human nature. Ken's gaze from the foot of the building up to de facto Jim's workplace is interpreted as a sign of the former's inferiority and jealousy to the latter. Together with the revolver in his pocket, Ken's grinning face suggests his ferocity and intensified hostility hidden under the surface since Jack Cassidy was well-known to the TV viewers for playing cunning and cruel villains. When Ken points his gun at Jim, Jim finds out that Ken is playing a practical joke on him because his gun is unloaded, he puts no finger on the trigger and he leaves fingerprints on it. Jim's detection of Ken's joke means not that Jim is smarter than Ken but that Ken lower Jim's guard and lets him believe that Ken's gun will be also unloaded afterwards.

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Once Ken joins Jim in their office, their contrast is very clear on camera. In one cut, Jim stands in the foreground with the portrait of the fictional private detective Mrs. Melville hung on the wall behind him. This juxtaposition of Jim and Mrs. Melville elucidates a close relationship between the creator and his creation with more emphasis on Jim as her inventor. On the other hand, Ken takes his position behind a row of the fifteen books of the Mrs. Melville series, which indicates that Ken is a businessman who sells the books as products to make money. In other words, Ken as a materialist is incompatible with Jim full of imagination and creativity. In consequence, the dissolution of their partnership is unavoidable. When Ken coaxes Jim to go to his villa with him, a poster of a Mrs. Melville book looms up vaguely in the background between them under the tile of 'Mrs. Melville's Favorite Murder' in red ink. This ominous title foreshadows Ken's murder of Jim and the conversation they hold when walking to Ken's car bears an equally sinister connotation:

Jim: Actually, the timing is not bad. I was just finishing up the final chapter.

Ken: Ah, Mrs. Melville's last case. You know we ought to send that broad some flowers.

They are talking about putting an end to the series, which Jim planned beforehand because he is sick and tired of writing mysteries now and he will not have to any more thanks to disengaging himself from Ken. However, Mrs. Melville's eternal departure does not eventually occur at Jim's authorial will but at Ken's criminal will against him. The above dialogue about their farewell to Mrs. Melville hints at Jim's funeral and burial after Ken kills him. When Ken goes back to their office on the pretext of fetching his misplaced lighter and leaves the office after messing it up to give the impression that the office is burglarized, he walks past the portrait of Mrs. Melville and her smiling face remains on camera for a moment. Her smile shifts over to Ken's while driving in the next scene.²² These two smiles mean totally different things. Ken grins because he is confident about the perfection of the crime he is going to commit while Mrs. Melville's smile means that his crime will be definitely found out. As if to unconsciously prove the validity of the portrait's prediction of his crime, Ken makes a fatal mistake. In fact, Ken drops in at Mrs. La Sanka's general store on the way and, without knowing it, gives her a chance to see Jim in the car. Later, unexpectedly to Ken, she blackmails him to pay her 5,000 dollars for silence on his slaughter of Jim, and Ken retaliates against her threat by killing her off. This second murder by Ken eventually leads Lieutenant Columbo to reveal his whole crime and subsequently arrest him. Just like it does when Ken leaves the office, Mrs. Melville's picture smiles again at the end of the episode. At the end of the investigation, Ken's criminality is defeated by Columbo, who is an incarnation of his partner's creation Mrs. Melville. Throughout the episode, Spielberg's camerawork was far better in stability, balance between the characters and other photographic techniques than in his previous TV works.

Conclusion

Spielberg's apprenticeship in Universal Television in his early years as a professional film maker following his movie freak teenage days was more important than it looks. For the first few years there Spielberg had tough times and learned a lot of hard lessons. Nevertheless, he never succumbed to them but rather overcame them and grew up to be a more skilled and matured television director. Naturally, in accordance with his growth, his teleplays became more and more sophisticated and dramatic. These etudes in the early stage of his career would come into bloom as *Duel*, his first hit on TV in November 1971. *Duel* is a very suspenseful horror telefilm in itself, but there is more to it than that. Theatrical releases of *Duel* in Europe would take Spielberg on a transatlantic tour, which would enable him to have European cinematic and cultural experiences. As a result, Spielberg would bring fame to himself as a director and broaden the scope of his film making. Young Spielberg as a TV director was an indispensable springboard to Spielberg as a grand-scale movie director and producer in his later career.

Notes

- 1 Steven Awalt, *Steven Spielberg and Duel: the Making of a Film Career* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield, 2014), 2-4; Andrew Yule, *Spielberg: Father of the Man* (London: A Warner Book, 1996), 3.
- 2 Awalt, 4; Yule, 2-3.
- 3 Awalt, 4-5.
- 4 Awalt, 6-7; Ian Freer, *The Complete Spielberg* (London: Virgin, 2001), 1; Yule, 11.
- 5 Freer, 1; Yule, 15.
- 6 Freer, 2-4; Yule, 15.
- 7 Freer, 4-5; Yule, 15.
- 8 Awalt, 35; Freer, 5-8; Yule, 17-18.
- 9 Awalt, 37; Freer, 9.
- 10 Awalt, 37-38; Freer, 9-12.
- 11 Awalt, 37-38; Freer, 9-12.
- 12 Awalt, 38-40; Freer, 13-14;
- 13 Yule, 27.
- 14 Warren Buckland, *Directed by Spielberg: Poetics of the Contemporary Hollywood Blockbuster* (New York & London: Continuum, 2006), 59-60.
- 15 Buckland, 60-61.
- 16 Buckland, 62-64.
- 17 Buckland, 64; Joseph McBride, *Steven Spielberg: a Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 170.
- 18 Awalt, 40-41.
- 19 Freer, 16.
- 20 Awalt, 42; Freer, 16-17.

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21 Awalt, 42; Freer, 18-20.

22 Buckland, 68.