

Second Edition

VIDEO SHOOTER

Storytelling with HD Cameras

BARRY BRAVERMAN



Video Shooter

Storytelling with HD Cameras

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藏书章

Barry Braverman



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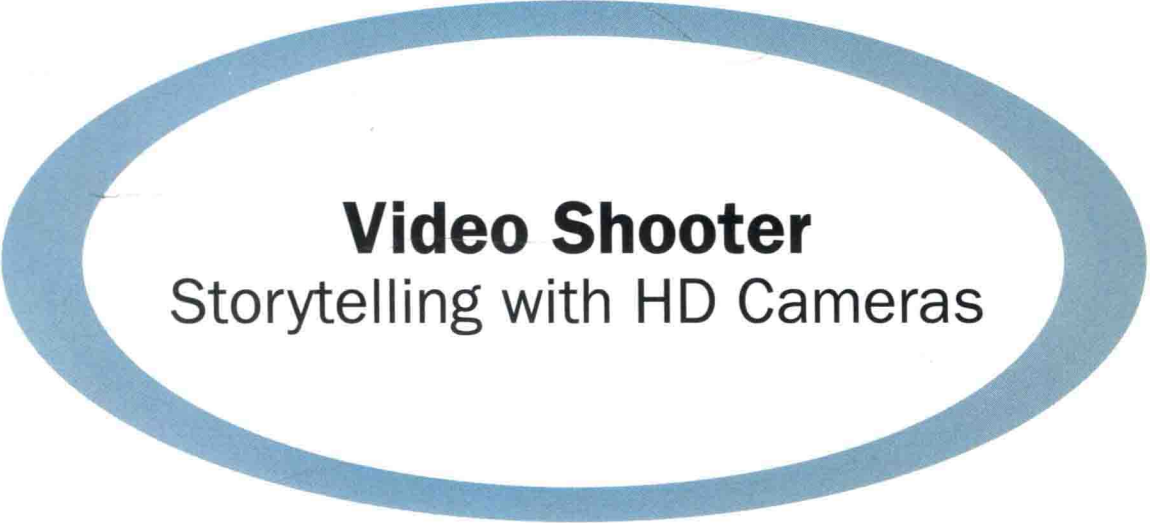
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Video Shooter

Storytelling with HD Cameras

Dedication

v

To my father, who taught me to see the beauty in technical things

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ONLINE RESOURCES FOR *VIDEO SHOOTER*

Companion Website

Please visit the companion website for *Video Shooter* to find exclusive online resources! You will find:

- EXCLUSIVE chapter on shooting video for DVD, Blu-ray, and the Web
- Video tutorials demonstrating storytelling techniques
- Technical matter, such as a comparison of various filters

The companion website for *Video Shooter* can be found here: <http://booksite.focalpress.com/Braverman>.

Please click on the "Register" link on this page. Please use the following access or pass code to validate your registration: VIDBRAVE2E

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Author's Website

Also, please check out Barry Braverman's web material. You'll always find something new and useful at these two sites: tips on cameras, lighting, lenses and accessories, craft lessons for the shooter-storyteller, and more.

www.videocycles.com (comprehensive video storytelling resource)

www.barrybraverman.com (blog)

Always jaded. Always with an attitude. With no sacred cows.

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BONUS CHAPTER Shooting for DVD, Blu-ray, and Web

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Access code located in "Online Resources for
Video Shooter"

CHAPTER 1

The Shooter's Point of View

1

Dear Video Shooter:

This is your task. This is your struggle to uniquely and eloquently express your point of view, whatever it is and wherever it takes you. For the shooter storyteller, this exploration can be highly exhilarating and personal. This is what makes your point of view different and enables you to tell visually compelling stories like no other video shooter in the world.

In May 1988, while on assignment for National Geographic in Poland, I learned a profound lesson about the power of personal video. The aging Communist regime had amassed a thousand soldiers and tanks in front of the Gdansk Shipyards to crush a strike by workers belonging to the banned Solidarity union. I happened to be shooting in Gdansk at the time and despite it not being part of my official assignment, I ventured over to the shipyard anyway in light of the world's attention being focused there and the compelling human drama unfolding inside.

Out of sight of my government "minder," I understood I could've been beaten or rendered *persona non grata*, but I took the chance anyway as I was convinced that history was in the making. The night before, the military had stormed a coalmine in south Poland and brutally beat many strikers while they were sleeping. Not a single photo or frame of video emerged to tell the horrid tale, but the news of the carnage spread anyway through unofficial channels. The shipyard workers figured that they were in for a similar fate, and I wanted to record a piece of it.

Considering the regime's total control over the press and TV, it was no surprise that the Press Office would deny my Arriflex and me access to the shipyard. But that didn't stop my two friends with less obvious video gear from slipping inside the complex in the back of a delivery van.

Throughout the fall and winter, Piotr and Leszek had been secretly shooting and editing weekly Solidarity newsreels out of a Gdansk church loft. Circumventing

the regime's chokehold on the media, the two men distributed the programs through a makeshift network of churches and schools, recruiting daring young grammar school students to ferry the cassettes home in their backpacks.

Piotr and Leszek swore to stay with the strikers to the bitter end to capture the assault and almost certain bloodbath. Piotr's physical well-being didn't matter, he kept telling me. In fact, he looked forward to being beaten, provided, of course, he could get the footage out of the shipyard to me and the watchful world.

But for days, the attack didn't happen, and Piotr and Leszek simply held their ground, capturing the spirit-sapping exhaustion of the strikers as the siege dragged on. In scenes reminiscent of the Alamo, 75 men and women facing almost certain annihilation stood firm against a phalanx of tanks and troops and the provocateurs who would occasionally feign an assault to probe the strikers' defenses.

Amid the tension and long days of the siege, Piotr and Leszek made a startling discovery: their little 8-mm camcorder (Fig. 1.1) could be a potent weapon against the amassed military force. On the night of what was surely to be the final assault, the strikers broadcasted an urgent plea over the shipyard loudspeakers: "Camera to the Gate! Camera to the Gate!" The strikers pleaded for Piotr and Leszek to come with their camera and point it at the soldiers. It was pitch dark at 2 A.M., and the camera couldn't see much. But it didn't matter. When the soldiers saw the camera, they retreated. They were terrified of having their faces recorded!

As weeks rolled by, the strikers' camera became a growing irritant to the Communist regime. Finally in desperation, a government agent posing as a striker grabbed Piotr's camera, ripped it from his arms, and dashed off! The agent ducked into a building housing other agents, not realizing, incredibly, the camera was still running! (Fig. 1.2)

Inside a manager's office, we see what the camera sees: the Sony on a table pointing nowhere in particular dutifully recording the gaggle of nervous agents plotting to smuggle the camera back out of the shipyard. We see the camera then placed inside a brown paper bag and the story continues from this point of view; the screen is completely dark as the camera inside the bag passes from one set of agents' arms to another. And this became the filmmakers' point of view – a black screen with no video at all – conveying a story to the world that would ultimately prove devastating to the totalitarian regime.



FIGURE 1.1

The little camera that could: the Sony model CCD-V110 that changed the world in 1988.

**FIGURE 1.2**

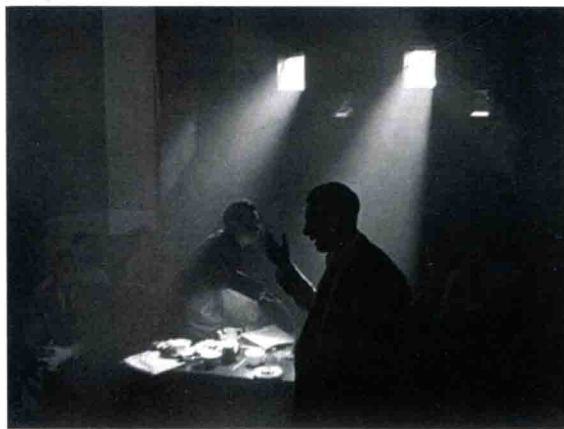
When a government agent suddenly grabbed Piotr's camera, no one thought about turning the camera off!

**FIGURE 1.3**

What's this? A completely black screen? If the context is right, you don't need much to tell a compelling story!

**FIGURE 1.5**

Conversely, we can force the viewer to focus more intensely on the visual, in this case, on the horrors of the war, by lowering or eliminating the audio entirely. Managing the interplay of picture and sound is the essence of the video shooter's craft!

**FIGURE 1.4**

In this scene from Orson Welles' "Citizen Kane," we listen to crucial exposition from mostly unseen characters in a dark projection room. Withholding visual content is the key if you want to communicate critical information in dialogue!

**FIGURE 1.6**

In video stories, 90% of the storytelling is communicated visually. Given the choice viewers always prefer to watch rather than to listen. They cannot effectively do both at the same time!

**FIGURE 1.7**

This man's eyes are shifty and avoiding eye contact with the viewer. He may look great on the camera – but do you believe a word he says?

**FIGURE 1.8**

Show me, don't tell me! Good storytelling requires strong visuals to communicate effectively.

STORY, STORY, STORY

This business of developing the shooter's craft is really very simple. As the great director Sidney Lumet famously observed,¹ story is the conduit through which all creative and practical decisions flow. And this includes your choice of camera, lens, recording format, resolution, and a thousand other technical and nontechnical things.

Truth is, audiences couldn't care less if you shoot your story on DV, RED Code, 35-mm Cinemascope or Pixelvision.² No one walks out of a movie theater and says, "Great movie but it was shot 4:2:0." So as you read through and hopefully learn from this book, let's keep this tech talk in perspective. Stories work for different reasons and often can be quite successful despite a substandard script, poor lighting, or even, I hate to say, amateur camerawork.

At the same time, we video storytellers have to understand there is a limit to this notion, as our technical craft really does matter even if audiences cannot readily recognize these shortcomings. Expressed viewer perceptions can be misleading, but as with all things technical, we only need to know what we need to know to support our story. Beyond that is pure geekiness, and geeks in my experience almost always make lousy storytellers.

THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

I'm often asked by new shooters, "Which camera should I buy?" "Which camera is best?" These questions are rather loaded and are usually laced with fear. Yet the answer is obvious: It's the camera that best supports the story you've chosen to tell.

¹ Making Movies by Sidney Lumet 1996 Random House, New York

² Pixelvision From 1986 to 1989 the toy company Fisher-Price manufactured a primitive black and white camera that recorded to a standard audiocassette.