

'People have huge egos in this business'

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steers him to the casting director.

A P.A. does everything politely. Though the set stays silent and well-policed during shooting, outsiders are handled with gentility. Staffers occasionally request compliance with the jesting sternness of a bouncer, but they're conscious of being guests in the city and carefully refrain from insulting their hosts.

A crewman can be hired in two ways: through the producer (or director, if he's powerful enough to insist upon his own crew), or through the unit manager of the production company. Actors and technicians are subject to the first, production staffers to the second.

Each production assistant calls himself a "filmmaker," and justly so. Most studied the cinema in college or worked on industrial films or documentaries before coming here. And all, from Malle to the lowest warder-off of crowds, do a job without which the film cannot be properly made.

On the set, each P.A. becomes part of a network linked by electronics. The soldiers in Malle's army speak furtively into their walkie-talkies, as if planning a *coup d'etat*, and drift about looking for trouble to prevent.

In a freelance market, where making the right contacts may forestall long periods of unemployment, cooperation is crucial.

On the other hand, as production assistant Todd Elgin says, "Most of us will be here four or five weeks, and certain kinds of people worry more about what they can grab for themselves and who they can get to know than how the film goes. People have huge egos in this business no matter what side of the camera they're on, they want to move up, and it's hard to balance everybody's demands."

2 p.m.: Clouds re-appear. The caretakers of make-up, wardrobe and props bounce onto the set as if on pogo sticks and just as swiftly bounce off after touch-ups. The crew smokes impatiently, trying to fend off lassitude: boredom numbs the set swiftly when progress slows for a few minutes. Malle, who will smoke anything from cigarettes to cloying cigars, puffs thoughtfully on a Tiparillo.

2:30 p.m.: The overcast day clears, revealing another problem. McInnes rehearses a scene where his gangster character attacks Sarandon and bounces her off the pointed base of a stone pillar. She gurgles with dismay — too realistically for comfort — and topples.

Malle decides to have the offending corner blunted on the spot. Workmen appear like elves and hammer away until all is smooth, then vanish into the building. Though the crew has promised to leave the apartments as it found them, none of the residents is likely to notice.

4 p.m.: Further remodeling, this time of the Golden Gate Motel in Absecon. Ciupka wants less light,

so crew members tack up posters and shift curtains. Set carpenters can work miracles in minutes: replacing a modern glass door with a dilapidated wooden one, they resemble A.J. Foyt's pit crew changing a tire at Indy.

A cold buffet materializes in a corner of the lobby. Food follows the crew wherever it goes: pastries at breakfast, a banquet at lunch, nuts and cookies and fresh fruit between meals (grapes go fastest) and enough coffee to drown a herd of elephants.

The munching abates when Board calls for quiet. Lancaster and Sarandon wait out of camera range to walk into the scene; she's flippant and exuberant, but he stands at parade rest, leaning anxiously toward the scene like a sprinter coiled in the blocks.

Upstairs, behind a glass wall that separates the rooms from the front desk, a crowd gathers. Jostling for position, guests stomp about on the thick carpet. After a word from Board, who says they can stay if they're quiet, the manager decides it will be simpler to clear the room. Bystanders file out sadly, looking like upstanding citizens caught in a raid.

5 p.m.: Rehearsals and retakes, retakes and rehearsals. As dusk envelops the motel, the extras catnap and sip coffee, waiting to be released from a job that pays \$35 for a much longer and less glamorous day than they expected.

For Malle, there is no release. He will return to the motel to view the rushes, to plan the next day's shooting, to discuss changes in the set design or the performances or the script. He'll call the producer to revise the budget or phone the editing labs to find out how they're handling his work. He'll ingest dinner — and, if he's lucky, digest it — and fall limply into bed.

First call tomorrow, 6:30 a.m.

(Next week: An interview with Burt Lancaster.)



Susan Sarandon listens pensively to Louis Malle's directions for a night interior shot.



Sarandon, caught in a rare solemn moment, pauses before walking into a scene.