In episodic filmmaking, one thing you never have is time. Even as budgets have grown and productions have become more ambitious with big sets and large crews, you're still under pressure to work very fast. On House of Cards, you're making an hour-long episode in 10 days, consistently shooting six pages every day. On a show with more stunts, like Umbrella, you may have a two-page day of fight choreography and then a 10-page day of dialogue to make up for it.

The hierarchy of creative decision-making in episodic is different from that of features; directors answer to showrunners, writers, and networks, and need to create inside of the framework of an established series. As a DP, you need to provide continuity in the look of the show, but I also think it's my responsibility to embrace the energy and fresh ideas of new directors, to take the series further and to explore new territory.

Pilots are creative but can also be heartbreaking. There is so much work that goes into setting up a new show and when it's not picked up, not even that first episode gets seen. Amazon streams its pilots to let the audience decide, so at least they don't just disappear. On the other hand, with a direct pick-up of a whole season, like on Netflix, you have a chance to finish the complete vision without worrying about selling it all in the first episode.

Some producers think they're saving money and "putting it all on the screen" by hiring one DP to shoot all episodes (rather than hiring alternating DPs). Seriously, we don't cost that much money, and if you're interested in putting money on the screen, you'd be better off having a DP with enough time to come in well prepared instead of just flying by the seat of their pants.

On Altered Carbon, we did two-episode blocks as alternating cinematographers. When one block was ending, a new director would take over the main unit with the other cinematographer, while the outgoing director and DP would continue with the standing tandem crew to finish the block. This made it possible for us to finish our own episodes, while also allowing time in between blocks to prep with the next director.

Some old-school television directors will tell you that directors never say "we need to shift coverage because they will want options. No, not necessarily. "They" like a strong point of view, and you can be bold. On House of Cards, we would look at a scene and try to figure out..."
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INSTINCT (Season 1)

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