

Report on the PERSONAL ASSISTANT 2011 Grant to IVANA LALOVIC (21.02.-21.06.2011) on the film „A DOVE SAT ON A BRANCH REFLECTING ON EXISTENCE“ by Roy Andersson (Sweden).

During my four months stay at the Studio 24 I have gotten an insight in how a feature film is prepared and shot in a „Roy Andersson-way“. **I've experienced a unique approach to filmmaking and not a classical film shooting.**

What I mean with „Roy-Andersson-way-of shooting-a-movie“ is that the process of filmmaking is different. During 4 months, we shot only 7 scenes with the entire film crew (including a D.O.P., a light and camera department, 4 scenographers, me and the production department) in the studio every day from 9 till 18 o'clock.

During this time, the scenes were discussed, developed, prepared, the scenography was built, rebuilt, shaped and reshaped.

There is no script, each scene exists only as a drawing or sketch that Roy has made.

I've never gotten to read a single line off the script, since the script didn't exist in a classical sense. Each scene was a drawing or sketch that Roy had made.

Most of the preparing discussions concerned the look, the colour and the lightning of the scenes.

In the first 3 weeks it was difficult to understand the content of those conversations in details, but after one month of intense Swedish lessons in the evenings, I was able to.

In the end of my stay, I could even express my opinion, come forward with a proposal for an actor or a costume-outfit and so influence Roy's decisions.

In the very beginning, when I was helping in the art department, I would assist with the buliding of the scenography (paint, repaint, screw boards together etc.) or I would help in the costume department (reorder the existing costumes, fetch, rent or pick-up

new costumes). During the shootings, I would mostly help to apply the typical white-face make-up on the actors, fix their hair and fit them in their costumes.

After the shooting, there would always be a little gathering where one could discuss with Roy his way of film-making or talk about Swedish films, arts and politics in general.

INSIGHT THE CAMERA DEPARTMENT

After the shooting of the scene called „CEO“, I had a long conversation with the D.O.P. Istvan Borbas. Istvan explained me how much influence, respectively freedom, he has as a D.O.P. when creating, framing and lightning each scene.

Regarding the fact that the entire movie is shot in wide, steady single shots in a specific „Roy Andersson“-Style, I was curious to get to know more about the collaboration between the D.O.P. and the director.

What makes a Roy Andersson shooting differ from a regular film production is, that they do not start with a written scene, but with a sketch of a scene.

According to Roys draft, the scenographers make a suggestion on how the room (e.g. a kitchen) could look like. The objects which are going to be in the frame like furniture, pictures, tools and gadgets are put together carefully piece by piece. They are selected out of a huge accumulation of objects, which Roy has collected over the past 50 years.

The shooting tests, which follow the preparation, are made in order to see if the scene works in the intended tragic and humoristic way Roy has planned it.

"The scene is lightened as a painting, it does not so much resemble reality as it resembles a dream."

In a second step, the whole team gathers in the little cinema in the Studio 24, watches the test and discusses the scene in order to make different suggestions on how the scenography and the scene can be improved.

This work, which is repeated several times, is quite a long process but it is clearly a teamwork where you can follow how Roy's visions become reality.

What I considered the most interesting, were the discussions on the mood of the scenes. **Respectively the question: What should the scene transport to the viewer in order to evoke certain feelings?**

I realised that through the changes in light, each image creates a different feeling and that this specific feeling makes the important difference.

In the CEO-scene, the most important thing was that the spectator would feel that the rich man in the room is lonely.

We started working with the scenography to soon discover that if the room isn't big enough, you can never feel the protagonist's loneliness.

Since the man had to be very rich, all the decor, like the table, the lamp and wood on the walls needed to emanate wealth.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

On the wall behind the camera, one can find a moodboard with pictures that specify the construction of the scene. These images are possible options, ideas and suggestions how the set should look like. They are the research-results which finally turn Roy's dream into reality. For the "Cleaning lady scene" for example, we had pictures of different floors, halls, patterns on the floor, patterns of the scales, different styles of the banister, different types of the light switch, cleaner costumes and flamenco dancer costumes. **During the casting tests, I could observe how Roy would work with the potential actors. The aim of the rehearsals was to define his vision.**

He would try out how the frame would look when the actor would kneel and how it would look when it would stand. On my question why he decided in the end that the actress should kneel instead of stand, he answered that it looks more existential, more strong, more vulnerable. I wasn't aware that a position of an actor could influence so subtly the feeling of the spectator.

CASTING

After 6 weeks, Johan Carlsson (the production manager) asked me if I was interested in doing the casting for the following scene called „The kitchen scene“. I said yes and looked at the 50 binders full with possible actors, extras and random people that had been casted for all the commercials and past films made during the last 40 years.

These people, mostly non-professional actors with little or no theater experience, had that specific look which would make a Roy Andersson film so unique: they had a characteristic face.

During the Casting, Roy would describe his vision of the sought-after actors by saying to me only the following words: „I want the actors to be vulnerable, naked and innocent“.

According to that, I would search 40-50 years old actors in the database of the Studio 24. This search would contain hundreds of faces and applications that the alphabetically ordered Casting-binders contained. In the end, I had ten couples out of which Roy picked seven. He was satisfied with my work and gave me green light to call and invite the selected actors to the casting.

During these castings, Roy would use the actors to try out camera positions, test the atmosphere of the scene and see, if the dialogues work in the way he wanted them to be. One could clearly follow his process and the shaping of an idea into a film scene.

This task made me become more sensitive to people's appearance and facial expressions.

I knew in the end what Roy was paying attention to, when selecting the actors for his scenes and I enjoyed working with the Casting much more than working with the scenography, since the Casting was the field where I could work closer to a director and contribute much more.

DISTRIBUTION AND BOOKKEEPING

The last two weeks I could assist Jane who was taking care of the daily mail and distribution office. Together we were maintainig the incoming e-mails and phone calls. Most of the e-mails regarded questions about Roy or Roy's films, respectively the distribution of his films.

Some of the questions, respectively phone calls that I had to answer concerned press requests. Journalists were calling in, in order to make an appointment with Roy.

APPENDIX

Pictures 1-3: Shaping of the „Cleaning-lady“ scene



1-4

Pictures 4-7 : Other stills from the shooting process
(courtesy of Studio 24 – Stockholm)



4-7

SUMMARY OF LEARNINGS

During my stay at Studio 24 on the film “A DOVE SAT ON A BRANCH REFLECTING ON EXISTENCE” by Roy Andersson, I have:

- gotten an insight in how a feature film is prepared and shot in a film studio
- participated in the discussions and learned how the director and the head of departments develop and prepare film scenes together (from the sketch to the final shooting)
- learned how the different departments work together regarding look, colour and the lightning of the scenes
- **learned how the mood of the scene is created in order to trigger certain feelings inside the viewer**
- learned how the scenography in a film studio is built, rebuilt and reshaped
- **learned how a vision is turned into reality with cinematic means**
- **followed the rehearsals and the shootings with the actors (with up to 50 takes per scene)**
- acquired basic techniques when building a film set (paint, repaint, mix colours, work with different types of wood, work with different craft-machines etc.)
- worked in the costume department (re-ordered existing costumes, fetched second-hand costumes, rented or picked-up new costumes in Stockholm and the area)
- gotten an insight in the props department (maintained existing requisites, props and décor objects, fetched, rented or picked them up)
- organized a little film festival with short films from our film crew in Roy's cinema that is attached to the Studio 24
- done field or computer research in order to find the appropriate look/ shape/ colours/ patterns for the set (e.g. depending on the request I have collected different pictures of bars/ kitchens/ barber shops/ balkonies/ aulas but also more specific like floors/ walls/ doors or floor-patterns/ light switches/ banisters etc.)

Ivana Lalovic – September 20011