

OPENING CONFERENCE: ROMAN GUBERN

As screenwriters we create the literary caterpillar that later turns into a butterfly on the screen. We very often wonder if the scriptwriting profession can be taught. Before we start our training course on theory and technique of the script I usually explain to my students that, just like the art schools where students are shown how to calculate a perspective or how to mix the colours on the palette, I am going to show them the rules of this peculiar literary genre, its routines and tricks. However, no teacher can ensure that masters like Matisse, Picasso or Francis Bacon will come out of their classes. In a few words I show them the standard rule and the canon, which is represented by masterpieces such as "The Battleship Potemkin", "La Strada", "The marriage of Maria Braun", "Viridiana", "The Rules of the Game", "The Third Man" or "Novecento". But I also immediately add that in the art there are more exceptions than rules and that the best works, or at least the most original ones are among the exceptions. As a matter of fact, the submissiveness to the canon's tyranny would have prevented from shooting such singular films as "Un perro andaluz" ("An andalusian dog"), "Eight and a half" or "Persona". In short, the rules exist to be known and understood but also to be infringed as once did Picasso and Joyce in a rationally motivated and aesthetically productive way.

Tradition is the one that forges the canon. This is what happens with the rules of the different genres and their plots typology, their range of typical characters that change from one genre to another. But when we talk about thrillers or melodramas, one thing must be taken into account, some genres are pure and others impure or hybrids, besides, each artist, grants his work, even though it belongs to a genre, with a personal touch. Fassbinder's melodramas are not the same as Lars Von Triers's. And our Pedro Almodovar has reached audience and universal success re-elaborating, with a post-modern codified interpretation, our peculiar cultural roots, such as the ones coming from the picaresque, the one-act farce, the melodrama or the grotesque.

The screenwriter's writing is specific, because the audiovisual show combines the narrative technique of the novel with its own technique that originates in the theatre. The scriptwriter's writing is a peculiar and distinctive writing, it is a literary dialect meant to serve an audiovisual project. Thus, it is an instrumental writing that lacks the aesthetic autonomy of the novelist's writing.

We know that a masterpiece of literature can hardly originate an audiovisual masterpiece since it has already reached its aesthetic plenitude and excellence in its original medium. This is what happened with "Don Quijote", "Peace and war", "Madame Bovary" or "Crime and punishment", since obviously no screen version has been able to reach the greatness of their original text. These texts have already reached their aesthetic excellence in their own literary nature and therefore cannot be overcome in any way. However, it is likely that minor novels, mediocre novels, newsstand novels, as we used to call them, are able to give light to important masterpieces. I am thinking about Orson Welles, when he takes novels from the newsstand, like "The Lady from Shanghai" or "Touch of Evil" and turns them into audiovisual masterpieces, or Alfred Hitchcock. Why? Because sometimes minor novels are potential scripts. Thus, the author should be demanding, self critic and with a capacity of visualizing and dramatising in his mind whatever he is writing.

In addition, we are now facing a new challenge, the challenge of the new digital world's technologies. Nowadays the screenwriter should be open to the audiovisual research and face the challenge of these new technologies. It is true that in many movies coming from the United States such as *Van Helsing*, the Harry Potter saga, the *Lord of the Rings* or *Matrix*, we can see that the new technologies are used to address the audience's line of least psychological resistance, that is to say, what do we see on screen? We can see flying characters, characters that spectacularly metamorphose in real time, a man turns into a horse, a horse into a hippo; thus, characters that fly and metamorphose in real time. Well, this is back to the haunted house, back to George Méliès, back to the circus world. It is legitimate, it is legitimate but in Europe we don't have the economic capacity to compete with these expensive audiovisual products based on the digital laboratory. But it is also true that in Europe we have faced the challenge of the new technologies, and sometimes with even more imagination. I am thinking of a German film that won many prizes and had an international success, included in the North American market. The German film "Run, Lola, Run" ("Lola rennt") by Tim Tykwer that offers a cinematographic version of the computer's hypertext options, that is to say, an argument, a conflictive situation, can generate three different argumental possibilities.

Of course, there is no interactivity with the spectators such as the one created with the computer, since they are three solutions or consecutive alternatives. But this idea of re-using the hypertextual structure, the branching options, the alternative options to the same argument is definitely provocative, original and allowed the film to gain prizes and reach popularity. Besides, I find exemplary the experiment of intermediate dialogue created in "Run, Lola, Run" between the different media such as the photo novel, the musical videos and cartoons.

In another register, still referring to new technologies experiments, I want to remind Eric Rohmer's film "The Englishwoman and the Duke" that in a very austere way, faithful to his style, uses digital sets because he digitalised some paintings. This allows to create an absolutely amazing diegetic space that looks to me like an original bet in the field of digital investigation. One of the last examples, in fact the last I am going to mention comes from a Russian movie. After all, Russia is Europe and one day it will be a member of the European Community. The admirable Russian film, by Alexandre Sokurov, "Russian Arch" is shot in one plan-sequence through the corridors of the Hermitage Museum. I remember Pasolini, referring to the plan-sequence, used to say human life is a very long plan-sequence with its travellings, panoramics and zooms. Well, as Pasolini used to say, human life is a very long plan-sequence that provisionally interrupts when we sleep and definitely cancels itself when we die. Through his camera and this one and a half hours film, longer than "The Rope" of Hitchcock, Sokurov guides us through the Russian history.

We inevitably face the challenge of North American cinema. In many European countries the American cinema represents an 80% of the narrative fiction material we see on the small and big screens. As you know, the American industry reached in many countries a coercitive hegemony, a coactive hegemony through the block-booking and the blind-booking formulas, imposing lots of films on producers and distributors. Unfortunately, as a result, the plains of Texas or Nevada are in general more familiar to the European spectator than the ones from Denmark or Hungary. Nowadays, in the European imaginary and

after a long work on our imagination, the American cowboy is more familiar or closer than the Hungarian shepherd. Well, in Europe, we are fighting to try and break this hegemony of the North American industry and we face numerous obstacles: the disconnection of the industries, the lack of a harmonized legislation, the linguistic diversity. The linguistic diversity is a cultural treasure, but in relation to the Anglophone market represented by the United States and Canada it is a commercial obstacle. Therefore, in order to dismantle this hegemony we have to arbitrate - we have to fight. In my opinion, if we had to schematically and simply define the European cinema, the European audiovisual, I would say that it is fundamentally based on its cultural diversity, a diversity of traditions that converge on that concept. In Europe, from the Sicilian comedy to the Dogma group's Scandinavian tragedy there is a wide range, a wide span of possibilities, such as Almodovar's melodramas, example of this wealth. On the other hand, Europe's audiovisual belongs to what I call "the lost of innocence". Europe is an old continent, as Bush said, in a pejorative way, when he mentioned the "old Europe", I want to say it in a positive way. Europe is a continent with a long and complex history and this turbulent historical past has given it an intellectual maturity that we rarely find in this dominant American cinema. Finally, I am going to read an extract of a manifesto that was presented on June 7th, few weeks ago, called "For a Europe founded on its tradition". This manifesto presented to the president Romano Prodi, claims the roots and the traditions of the European culture in all the fields related to the artistic creation. One of the paragraphs I am going to read says: "we call upon the artists and cultural leaders to play an active and prominent role in supporting a Europe of culture and of different cultures. As European citizens we are all heirs to Homer and Virgil, Van Eyck and Michelangelo, Shakespeare and Cervantes, Bach and Mozart, Chopin and Liszt, Flaubert and Kafka, Eisenstein and Bergman. Their art has fashioned a culture which passes on to us a common past." This manifesto ended asking us to pass on this tradition and defend it tooth and nail. Thank you very much.

Román Gubern