

Making a Film - Anne-Marie Miéville

The first shots...

How to enter into the heart of the matter, starting from the first image, the first sound, with only a few clues? With “My Favourite Story” for instance, I asked myself: “But how does it begin?” There are all those shots of Agnes walking, that forty-year-old woman, halfway between her mother and her daughter... who goes on, who has to continue. Then there is her first encounter, during a funeral service – because in “My Favourite Story” there is death, birth, death, birth. How does the idea emerge, how does the process start? How to cut into the fabric, how to begin? How to present something explicitly but without being heavy-handed, while at the same time quickly establishing the context? That is more or less the idea of the “prologues”; in other words, the way in which I put together the opening sequences of my films. In “Lou Didn’t Say No” those sequences provide clues about the characters of Pierre and Lou, about their personalities – clues that have to do with psychoanalysis.

The music...

In the case of “We’re All Still Here” I handled the question of the music afterwards. But in all my other films, the music came at the same time as the research and the development of the script, and certain sequences were actually born out of a piece of music. In “The Book of Marie” the little girl dances to a movement from a Mahler symphony, and there is also the Chopin concerto which she listens to with her father and which leads to an exchange, to a scene. Similarly, in “Lou Didn’t Say No” there is Rossini’s “Petite Messe solennelle”, which Lou and Pierre listen to after a night of discussion, confrontation and finally reconciliation, before they leave on their trip to Rilke’s tomb; it was the music that made me write those scenes. When I heard that “Little Mass” which is so stirring, I got up from my chair and started to move. The music had brought me the idea for that sequence. It’s true that the music has always come of its own accord, or does me the honour of joining me during the planning stages of the work. I have never used music like a spice to be added afterwards, in the sense of, “This is a sad passage, let’s use some violin, and that passage is upbeat, so we’ll add a fanfare.” No, the music is always there right at the start and during the development of the project, and at times it has even given birth to certain sequences.

I have a passionate amateur’s knowledge of music and lyrical expression. During my childhood it was a way of expressing myself. In that petit-bourgeois milieu, people did not express themselves, didn’t really talk to one another. For me, discovering physical self-expression and singing was very important. I did a lot of singing in my childhood and in my youth, I even made some records, but I never dreamed of being a lyric singer like Angèle. My daughter used to sing as well; in fact, in “My Favourite Subject” she sings the very beautiful song she wrote herself. It’s true that I am very sensitive to women’s voices. Even if one cannot forget men’s singing, men’s voices – I am thinking of Corsican singing, for instance. There are forms of masculine vocal expression which are more poignant, but women’s vocal expression has a much greater quantitative presence. Women talk a lot, scream out their pain while giving birth, and their vocal expression generally has a greater presence; men, even if they talk, don’t do it the same way, and I myself am more

sensitive to women's voices. I hear not only the beauty of their voices, but also something feminine which emanates from them.

The dialogue...

In general it's a rather long and painful process. In constructing a film, you have an idea of what you would like to express using certain movements, certain characters. Then you look for a title, and try to develop a structure out of a number of different sequences which begin to come together and form something. I already have a notion of what should be said at those moments, but finding the way to say it, well... I know that many critics often find my dialogues too literary, too psychological. But since dialogue is a form of writing, I find it physically difficult to write the way people talk in everyday life. Still, what I write is going to be put into the bodies and mouths of the actors; so it should more or less fit. For example, with "Lou Didn't Say No" I was criticized because "people don't talk like that in real life." But if it's all about copying what happens in real life, we could just film ourselves at home and watch ourselves on Sunday evenings. In order to develop a thought expressed as dialogue, it is always necessary to use a form that displays a certain respect for language. Our language gets poorer by the day. I feel that I have a task to accomplish, and this seems to me like a good occasion for carrying it out.

A laboratory...

Making a film is like a laboratory for a whole thought process, a place where one can take stock, not only of one's own personal development, but also other people's. It's a very privileged creative space where something can be grasped that might otherwise drift off like smoke and disappear. However, at times I have dreamed of doing something completely different, because filmmaking is the work of sublimation, as they say, and therefore restrictive. Afterwards there isn't necessarily an exchange or a return which could keep things alive. You have to start over and begin creating again immediately. If you stop, things get very quiet. The cinema is a form of artistic expression that is also an industry. Like a busy beehive, a group of people try to assemble their skills and their efforts, in the course of one day, to bring one shot, or a few shots, into existence. That moment, even when it's plagued by difficulties and pitfalls, is an ideal image of sharing in creating something.

When a film is finished, you continue the process of distribution and presentation. You enter into a system – which, at least for the kind of film I make, is constantly shrinking and will soon cease to exist. It's a circuit of mostly unchanging traditions: you take the train; you go, for instance, to Lyon to present the film; you go to the hotel; you meet five journalists; you are interviewed on the radio; you have dinner with a city dignitary; you are propelled into a theatre in the midst of spectators who have just seen your film and who must ask questions in order to play their role, and you must answer them.

However, real moments of encounter are rare. For me, they only occur with those people who talk about what they felt and who are brave enough to express it in a sentence or two... I wouldn't be able to travel with a film for a year or more, as other filmmakers do; after a while, I feel that the film now belongs to the others, that they can make of it what they will. You have to cut the cord, or you go crazy. It usually

happens after a minimum of two years of work – a long time, in other words. What is sometimes painful with the cinema (because it's an expensive form of expression) is not being able to start over again right away. You are a little worn out, and you need to replenish yourself with real life, in order to find ideas and build something anew. You are stimulated, you want to begin again right away, and it's impossible: you have to write, produce dossiers and papers... There are empty moments, where I regret that there isn't more contact between filmmakers.

Interview by Danièle Hibon

Translated from the French by Marcy Goldberg