

Notes on shooting

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For the scenes that included actors, we worked with a larger team on set. As the project grew it became increasingly important to define working methods clearly from the beginning so that logistics wouldn't force us into conventional thinking and mediocre solutions. I was determined to develop new ways to work that weren't based on the axiom "this is how it's usually done." I wanted to avoid the traditions associated with film shoots: stress, long working days, hierarchal structures and industrial reasoning – traditions that have been formed by economic rationale in a male-dominated and competitive sector. Traditions that promote stereotypical cinematic narratives and exclude many people from filmmaking.

I wanted to explore knowledge beyond thought and language. One of Zen Buddhism's fundamental concepts is *beginner's mind*. It is the notion of an original state similar to that of the open, creative mind of childhood, where everything is possible and there are no rules or yet acquired knowledge standing in the way of true creativity. It could also be an expression of film-making's essence, its core, where everything unnecessary and mediocre has been peeled back.

I wondered how I would be able to transmit *beginner's mind* to the work on set. Most of the team members had years of experience in the film industry and they were very skilled professionals. How would I be able to make us all work like beginners? How could I get my team to forget everything they knew and start over from the beginning?

And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
T S Eliot ¹

I suggested that we start each day with a fairly long, seated meditation. Everyone agreed to it, but some of the team were hesitant. It is not custom for technical team members to take part in that kind of practice. The actors were less reluctant, being used to similar warm up exercises at the theatre.

In the beginning, sitting on the floor together and being quiet with the entire team felt uncomfortable, almost embarrassing, but the resistance itself was interesting. Starting the day with something unaccustomed was a challenge, something new to supersede the old. Our bodies began the day doing something that didn't have any direct relationship to the shooting of a film.

The impatience and awkwardness of the first few days gradually gave way to a sort of relief. For a few moments, we had access to a shared and boundless realm. The rest of the day was affected by that sense of stillness and simplicity. I believe that it made us calmer, more playful and less bound by traditional hierarchies. It created an association between the work and something other than money and technology.

The playfulness was also enabled by the organization of work.

When planning the schedule with the producers we were careful not to plan any long workdays. Each workday started at nine a.m. and finished at five p.m. (An eight hour work day might seem like the most natural thing, but in the film industry it is not.)

We did only two scenes per day, and each scene was shot using one single camera setting. One scene in the morning. One scene in the afternoon. This light schedule gave us room for repetition and reflection and improvisation. To liberate time and resources we took the decision to transform some of the scenes into black scenes and only record the sound. It gave us more time to work with the non-black scenes. In that way, the aesthetics informed the method.

No knowledge.

No attainment.

No realization.

For there is nothing to attain.²

Notes:

1. Eliot, T.S. Utdrag ur dikten *Four Quartets* (*East Coker*, Faber and Faber 1940)

2. The Heart Sutra, *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, Jacquelynne Baas and Mary Jane Jacob (ed.) (University of California Press, 2004) (sid 95)