

Review – Astrid van Nimwegen 2012

*The work of Roy Andersson, a Swedish film director.*

Roy Andersson made a lot of commercials in which he seemed to develop his personal style for making his feature films 'Songs from the second floor' (2000) and 'You, the living' (2007).

Roy Andersson's films and commercials are immediately recognized by their significant absurdist style. Andersson uses only long wide takes, shot from a fixed camera point. His films are recognizable by their raw atmosphere, carefully constructed scenes display everyday environments with depressed looking people in it.

Every element in each shot is deliberately chosen, 'Why else shoot it?' Roy Andersson said once in an interview.

In this review I want to focus on 'Songs from the second floor', a feature film that definitely surpasses Anderson's commercial work.

I think his feature films are generally a lot stronger than his advertisement spots because of how he structures time in order to create a complete second reality.

'Songs from the second floor' is a feature film consisting of 46 steady shots.

(The camera only once zoomed out, during scene 32 where a man named Kalle, walks towards the camera on a train station.)

Kalle seems to be sort of the main character of the film, while he isn't introduced till scene 15. Kalle is a middle aged, pale looking man who is desperate because his business went up in smoke. Although he himself was the one who lighted the fire. He has two sons of whom one is in a mental hospital, a poet who does not speak anymore.

The sentence 'Beloved be the one who sit down' is pronounced several times throughout the whole film. Desperation, humiliation and vulnerability of the human being are main themes in Andersson's work. We follow Kalle in diverse situations, seeking for some understanding by other people but nobody seems concerned with his situation.

They are all focused on their own problems. Kalle fails in everything and is at his 'wits end' becoming more and more desperate.



'Songs from the second floor' 2000 Kalle in Subway – Roy Andersson

The film seems to reflect and comment on society and the system we live in. Give living meaning by having a good job and make money, Andersson's focus is mainly on the working class.

We see how a man, very committed to his work, is being fired after 30 years of loyal service without a reason, his world collapses completely.

A long corridor is displayed, the man fired is clinging to another man's leg, begging him to let him keep his job. Doors open and close on both sides of the corridor; colleagues are peeking at the spectacle without doing a thing.

We saw the managing director behind this decision earlier in the opening scene of the film, invisible, lying underneath a sun bed.

Even the situations of entertainment and fun are ending up in a disaster. A magician is doing the magic trick where people are cut in half with an enormous saw.

The trick failed because the man who volunteered for the act is by accident really wounded by the saw. The next scene takes place in the hospital.

This situation is not directly related to Kalle's life but is clearly part of the same miserable world. Again, we see people suffering and struggling and being screwed over by fate within their every day situation.

By linking scenes in a subtle way, Andersson creates a total world out of the separate scenes and every situation finds its connection to the bigger whole.

Often the characters are telling their story to the camera, what their situation is and how they feel about this.

For instance, there is a sex scene in Andersson's other feature film 'You the living' where a woman sits on top of a man, wearing a helmet, enjoying the wonderful sex with her husband. The husband is telling a story to the camera in the meantime, he is worried about his financial situation and tells us that he plays in a band. In the next scene, we see the man playing in a brass band, wearing the same helmet as his wife the night before. In another scene, the man appears again, playing at a funeral.



*'You the living' 2007 Roy Andersson*

In the advertisement spots, the same themes are displayed in single takes. Most of the commercials consist of one shot; we see everyday life and then the unexpected desperation strikes.

The commercials are absurdist and often funny in a cruel manner.

In one of the commercials we are witnessing people in an airplane, the door is open and the stewardess is explaining three business men how to put their parachutes on, then they jump out of the plane, holding a suitcase in one hand and tax free shopping ware in the other hand, the stewardess follows. Then the cabin door in the front opens and the cabin crew also jump out of the plane. The remaining passengers gaze at the spectacle, first not understanding what is happening. Slowly they turn their heads towards the empty cabin. And realize that the plane is out of control. Then the slogan 'nu kan alla teckna fallskärmsavtal' ('now everyone can take golden parachutes') and the logo of a commercial bank appear in the screen.

In a second part of this commercial we see two of the businessmen after their jump, landed in the middle of a field, talking about their tax free cognac and shouting to their colleague who hangs in a tree at the background. Again the slogan and logo of the commercial bank appears.

The insurance companies like 'Trygg Hansa'; Lotto and several commercial banks, which Andersson essentially makes fun of in his feature films, are the ones who are his best clients for the commercial work and thus the main funders who made it possible to make his own work.