

# Victoria

(2015, Sebastian Schlipper, Germany)

## Component 2: Global Filmmaking Perspectives (AL)

## Component 2: European Film (AS)

### Core Study Areas:

### Key Elements of Film Form

### Meaning & Response

### The Contexts of Film

### Rationale for study

- *Victoria* offers a genuinely exciting and innovative way of approaching film form, with the film shot in an audacious 138 minute single take. It covers a number of issues in its narrative; it is a tragic love story, a crime thriller and meditation on loss and exile. It also is hymn to the twilight urban experience and the possibilities of being young. It already feels like a modern European classic.

### STARTING POINTS - Useful Sequences and timings/links

- 37.03- 48.00 – *Victoria's* secret. The real-time development of *Victoria* and Sonne's relationship and the reveal of her talent as a pianist. The movement of the camera and use of diegetic sound with the piano piece are useful to assess here.
- 134.50-139.57 – The Shootout. An interesting way of approaching a standard action sequence without cutting, but utilising the camera and sound to create tension.

### CORE STUDY AREAS 1 - STARTING POINTS - Key Elements of Film Form (Micro Features)

#### Cinematography

- The director of photography on the film, Sturla Brandth Grøvlen, gets the rare privilege of

getting his name before the director's on the credits of *Victoria* and this is fully warranted as this is a bravura piece of utilising the camera.

- The film's momentum is fully in the DP's hands with the handheld digital camera following the action (and inaction) as the film snakes its way across Berlin. One of the interesting things about this ultimate one take approach is the way the camera dictates the spectator's point of view at all points from a variety of different angles and shots. Framing techniques are almost totally ignored. There is the feeling in some parts of this film of a journalistic approach to shooting, much in the style of the war photographer.
- Equally lighting decisions are largely out of the filmmaker's hands, certainly in relation to the exterior shots where one can see the shift in this early spring morning from night to day. There is slightly more control in the interiors, that said, without the use of any lighting rigs the film is captured in total natural light.
- The pace of the film is also determined by the camera, rather than the editing. In the action sequences it is constantly moving fast, capturing the chaos of the shootout or the meeting with the gangsters. That said, the camera also slows the pace of the film down and this is very apparent in the developmental scenes where *Victoria* gets to know the boys and particularly in the café scene with Sonne.

#### Mise-en-Scène

- The film uses 22 different locations across Berlin starting at a techno club in the Mitte district (which is returned to after the robbery) as the city is transformed initially as a nocturnal playground for *Victoria* and her new found friends. Only the club is returned to in the narrative and the protagonists (and spectators) are never allowed to settle in one place for very long.
- This almost perpetual movement still offers moments of reflection and introspection in some of the use of settings. *Victoria's* background as a classical pianist is revealed

subtly in her place of work at the café. The hotel room, towards the end of the film sees Sonne's death and can be seen to represent the transient nature of *Victoria's* characters.

- Of course *Victoria* does utilise some of the generic props and settings associated with the crime film, the main use of costume is rooted in a clear realist approach. A slight exception to this may be the way that Boxer is represented (shaved head, tattoos). This is probably one of the few indications that these young men may not be what they initially seem.

### Editing

- Clearly this main focus here is the fact that there are no standard aspects of editing utilised such as cuts, fades or dissolves. This was a conscious decision made by the director to place the spectator directly within the action of the film and this certainly works.
- That said as stated earlier in the section on cinematography, perspective is determined by the movement of the camera and the speed by which it moves. This also fixes attention on what is being done and what is being said within the frame.
- The feeling of spontaneity is created by this full use of the (very) long take. The spectator is carried along on this journey in real time as the film starts in the aftermath of leaving the night club and ends tragically. It is a rollercoaster ride full of ups and downs and unlike any other film it is strictly shot in real time so this also helps the spectator to feel very much as part of the night's events.

### Sound

- The sound is largely diegetic, with a great deal of emphasis on the sound of the street at night and the interactions in terms of dialogue are interesting. The film was based on a twelve page script so nearly all of this dialogue is improvised. This does add to the feelings that we have about the characters and how they are developed in a very naturalistic fashion over the duration of the narrative.
- The loud banging techno of DJ Koze which opens the film with *Victoria* dancing seems to set the mood initially for the film, however this isn't the case. The score is made up of short understated pieces by the German composer Nils Frahm. This largely minimalist score adds to the interesting mood created by Schlipper in the film which veers between excitement,

fear, euphoria and melancholy. In the final shootout sequence Frahm's plaintive score acts in a contrapuntal fashion to the violence and language used as the police close in on the gang.

- The use of English in the film is also interesting. This is the common language between *Victoria* and the gang, although the slight majority of the film is in German there is a pan-European feeling created here.

## CORE STUDY AREAS 2 - STARTING POINTS – Meaning & Response

### Representations

- *Victoria* herself offers a fascinating representation of a young modern woman. Her face is largely impassive during the first part of the film. She is presented at the outset as someone who is alone and looking for some connection with others. The way that she trusts the group of young men, does suggest a certain amount of naivety and innocence. However as the film progresses she becomes more and more resourceful and reveals an inner steeliness which is difficult to reconcile with the opening of the film.
- The representation of youth, through *Victoria* and the gang does suggest a number of issues around what it might mean to be a twenty-something European. The feeling of rootlessness as typified by *Victoria's* own position as a Spaniard in Germany's capital city is interesting contextually. With the young men, while they are proud of being proper Berliners their feckless and freewheeling attitude to life also suggests a feeling of a crisis of identity. They also counter the well-received stereotype of the hard-working German workforce to good effect.
- The representation of Berlin itself is fundamental to the narrative and the film's protagonists. As Schlipper himself has said; *'But it also has to do with our times. I wanted this European aspect. I wanted this aspect of Berlin, being a little refuge for people of Europe. The solidarity amongst young people is very touching, they stand for each other, they help each other...'*

### Aesthetics (i.e. the 'look and feel' of the film including visual style, influences, auteur, motifs)

- Certainly the lack of conventional editing techniques has a powerful aesthetic effect on how the film might be received and this goes

far beyond the act of not cutting as a mere cinematic trick. The way that the film pulls the spectator into the events of the night is completely based on this approach. As a result the film can be seen to have a similar exhausting effect to that experienced by the main characters through the main events of the narrative.

- In its use of real locations and real time the mood of the film is at once far more unconventional than nearly all mainstream film. Equally it might be seen as echoing some of the filmmaking that people now daily make on their smartphones albeit in a more artistic and aesthetically pleasing manner.
- The real time flirtation and development of *Victoria* and Sonne's relationship is extremely well-handled as it moves from awkward introductions to ultimate tragedy. Given the short timeframe here, it is also remarkably plausible in the way that it unfurls. It certainly suggests verisimilitude. Even the volte-face in the narrative with the robbery works to an extent here.

### CORE STUDY AREAS 3 - STARTING POINTS - Contexts

#### Social

- The way that *Victoria* is represented is very interesting here. Although she is attractive, she is never really sexualised. She becomes part of the gang largely on her own terms and through Sonne's growing fascination with her. Her growing resourcefulness and her subsequent position as the 'last person standing' underline her undoubted strengths as a strong female lead.

#### Historical

- Spain was one of the countries most affected by the economic crash of 2008, creating mass youth unemployment and subsequent migration to richer European countries such as the UK and in this case Germany. Although *Victoria*'s reasons for leaving her native land may be more complex than this, she certainly represents the fact that emigration within the EU is for a

huge number of people an economic reality.

#### Political

- Viewing this film in a post-Brexit European context is fascinating as this might be considered as the perfect advertisement for the pan-European project envisioned by the EU. A Spanish young woman befriending some German men by speaking English in one of the great European cities. With the growth of right-wing parties across the continent and growing discontent with the status of free-movement within the EU, it will be interesting to see how this film is read ten years from now.

#### Technological

- The fact that the camera is able to move in this way and capture a high quality resolution in its images, shows how far modern technology can enable continuing innovation in filmmaking.

#### Institutional

- The film was finally shot on the third attempt and there feels like this directly impacts on the claustrophobic mood, particularly in its final act. *Victoria* did win a number of awards but wasn't allowed to be entered as Germany's film at the Oscars in 2015 as it was deemed that not enough of the film was in German.