



Neus Ballús.

DIREC- TOR'S STATEMENT

“You’re gonna make it filthy.”

My father is a plumber. I heard all kinds of stories over the years about his job and the weird situations he would come across in customers’ homes. This certainly explains how this all started. One of the recurring stories was of a rich lady who would not let him use her bathroom because she said he would “make it filthy.” When he would get home from work, he wouldn’t greet me with kisses because he felt dirty. Even after showering and changing, he felt beneath that snobby lady from the fancy apartment. Over the years, I have been struck by the prejudices and complexities these situations revealed and the stories have stuck with me. How could she not see him as more than just a “dirty worker” and how could he not see more than just a “snobby lady”?

I decided to start this film project three years ago, tagging along with plumbers as they went about their day, collecting all sorts of stories and characters. What I have turned up over this extended process only confirms the wealth of possibilities their world offers. When a worker steps into the private world of the person who hired them, there is a relationship—usually quite brief—that provokes situations with a wealth of narrative, dramatic and comedic potential. Identity clashes, prejudices and what they lead to are extremely revealing of human nature and behavior.

In *The Odd-Job Men* there are rich and poor, young and old, from myriad background and ethnicity, diverse sexual identities, a wide variety of professions and a range of outlooks on life. When these distinct characters interact,

they must reckon with their own prejudices and those they awaken in others. Likewise, the way they are perceived by others generates conflicts and provokes complexes and insecurity in themselves. In each of the film's six chapters, and central to the overall narrative, is the question of whether the protagonists will be able to overcome their first impressions and be open enough to get to know and accept the other as a unique being.

On the surface, the film's humour and mundanity revolves around seemingly banal and light-hearted situations. But below this surface there are matters of great consequence. We aim to make a film that engages with one of the more pressing challenges of our time: how to understand one another.

Approach and methodology

The Odd-Job Men is a surreal comedy where all the characters—from the protagonists to the supporting cast—are non-professionals who play characters based on themselves: The same profession, the same conflicts, the same prejudices. Only in this way will what happens in front of the camera be authentic and fresh.

The film will be structured as chapters with each story taking place for the most part in a single location, and the overall narrative spans one week. In one sense, the six stories allow us to delve into the brief and intense worker-

customer relationships, while the central plot of the film, which develops over a week, explores the conflicts within the team of plumbers themselves.

This approach involves a *modus operandi* I have already explored in my previous works: to start with exhaustive and rigorous fieldwork with special emphasis on researching the characters' worlds, then to flesh out the film's narrative turns, and finally to go into production with a malleable script that can be tweaked to match reality as it unfolds.

A central element of this project's preparations are on-camera improvisation sessions with the main characters. For the last two years, we have held weekly workshops with the three protagonists led by acting coach Gerard Oms and occasionally by others (such as the clown Jango Edwards). Through these sessions we have dived into the personalities of the protagonists, their prejudices, their yearnings and their ways of understanding life. We have examined, distilled and structured this complex reality into the current treatment/script, which will be our roadmap during filming.

This back-and-forth flow between reality and a construction or script will be a constant throughout even the editing process. It will be at that stage that we will develop a key element to shaping scenes: Moha's voice-over. He is the most addition to the team of plumbers—as well as to our country—and provides an added layer of meaning to everyday situations most of us have encountered at some point in our lives. We will see how Moha, who provokes the most prejudices of the three, also has plenty to say about his partners and the customers they encounter. What is more, he



La plaga (Neus Ballús, 2013)



Inmersión (Neus Ballús, 2009)

has a certain distance that allows him to analyse situations from an alternative point of view.

Production

After intense preparation of all the film's elements (its characters, narrative threads, locations,...), it will be while shooting that it all comes together. Quite unlike an observational documentary, we will stage situations and conflicts and work as provocateurs in the development of the action. Even so, our characters will not be aware of where the story is headed. While shooting they will face actual malfunctions, which they will have to repair, and they will encounter customers they have never met before. This will create a free-wheeling environment in which they will act and react in whatever way comes naturally to them.

We will construct *The Odd-Job Men* with two approaches to shooting and mise-en-scène: on the one hand, a free-flowing, shoulder-mounted camera will allow us to get close to the characters and experience their conflicts from right inside the scene. Dynamic yet precise documentary camerawork will capture all the emotions of our characters' authentic reactions. On the other hand, the narrative will be punctuated by moments from a different point of view farther back from the protagonists—a calmer and more removed vision of the conflicts between the characters in a given social and human context, and where comedic elements will emerge naturally.



City Lights (Charles Chaplin, 1931)

Both approaches share the same aim, but in a different way: to capture those precious moments all lovers of cinéma vérité know—magical moments, singular moments, moments of truth never before seen on screen that can make us laugh and move us while offering a window into human nature.

Neus Ballús, director and scriptwriter



Mon oncle (Jacques Tati, 1958)

References: *The Odd-Job Men* draws on major works as varied as those of Charlie Chaplin or Jacques Tati (with their subtle and poetic humour), *Night on Earth* by Jim Jarmusch (with its chaptered structure) or Raymond Carver's short stories (of ordinary situations that reveal the extraordinary).



Coffee and cigarettes (Jim Jarmusch, 2003)



Night on earth (Jim Jarmusch, 1991)