

Roberto Rossellini

MY METHOD

Writings and Interviews

America the great Flaherty, in the U.S.S.R. Yutkevitch and Zguridi, in Switzerland Leopold Lindtberg with La Dernière chance [The last chance], or, finally, in France, René Clément with La Bataille du rail [The battle of the rails], and Georges Rouquier with Farrebique.

I ask Rossellini about his future projects.

I have just signed a contract with a big American company. If I have to work in the United States it will be to shoot a film taken from a novel I find very good: *Christ in Concrete*, or, if you prefer, *Jésus Christ dans le béton*. It is the story of the construction of a building by Italian masons. There is also another subject inspired by the marriages between American men and Italian women. Fifty-eight thousand soldiers have found their wives among my compatriots. It hasn't always worked out. On the other hand I'd much rather go on filming in Italy. There are plenty of contemporary subjects. I am thinking of Naples with its hordes of abandoned children, its beggars, its thieves. One should also do something about that camp near La Spezia where all the Jews not allowed to return to Palestine have been gathered.

We talked for a long time. I told Rossellini about all my hopes for Italian cinema. But he doesn't seem to know the work of other Italian directors very well. He hasn't yet seen Lattuada's latest film, Il bandito; he respects Mario Soldati's later works as well as his intelligence, and he speaks enthusiastically of Il sole sorge ancora [The sun rises again], a film about the Italian partisans directed by his friend, Vergano, and of Sciuscià [Shoeshine], a movie about the life of young Neapolitan shoe shine boys that De Sica has just finished shooting. I don't know whether Italian film, as burdened as French film is by hard commercial contracts with America, will be able to sustain its current impetus in the next few years, but I know that, since its liberation and its resurrection, it has given us four or five of the most original films that have been produced in the world in the last twenty years.

"Un Grand réalisateur italien, Rossellini, qui vendit ses meubles pour tourner Rome ville ouverte, a recruté les acteurs de Païsa parmi les badauds," in L'Écran Français, no. 72, November 12, 1946, pp. 17-18.

GERMANY YEAR ZERO

BY ROBERTO ROSSELLINI

In *Open City* I treated the problem of the occupation of a world-famous capital, the center of Christianity; it was a direct statement of what I myself saw and suffered. I deal with the problem of liberation in *Paisan*. In my opinion, there remained two great themes of modern significance, which derived from the experience of war each people in its own way had passed through: the first, the atomic bombings of Japan, the second, the destruction of Germany. As a European I chose the theme of conquered Germany and made *Germany Year Zero*. For various reasons I have not yet been able to work on the atomic bomb picture.

I made a child the protagonist in *Germany Year Zero* to accentuate the contrast between the mentality of a generation born and brought up in a certain political climate, and that of the older generation as represented by Edmund's father. Whether he excites pity or horror I do not know, nor did I wish to know. I wanted to reproduce the truth, under the impulse of a strong artistic emotion.

Although the story of Edmund and his family was invented by me, it nevertheless resembles that of most German families. Thus it is a mixture of reality and fiction treated with that license which is the prerogative of any artist. There is no doubt that every child, every woman, and every man in Germany would see in my film at least some phase of their own experience.

Germany Year Zero was financed by a major French company and I set up the general headquarters of my filmmaking group in the

French zone, but the shooting took place in all four. The Americans, British, French, and Russians tried to outdo each other in their help to me. This included hard-to-come-by food rations and lodgings, camera and other technical equipment, jeeps to carry us and our equipment, and a military escort to see us on our way.

I brought my crew to Berlin with me, but found myself short-handed. On the list of available technicians I found the name of an old boyhood friend, one I had not seen for twenty years—Count Bubi Treuberg. Count Treuberg, who had just been released from prison where the Nazis had kept him for many years, became my right-hand man, and has since joined my permanent filmmaking company.

For my cast I roamed the streets of Berlin, looking for satisfactory physical types. The boy, Edmund, I discovered in a circus, where he had been born and lived all his life with his mother, and his father, the riding master. The old father I found sitting on the steps of a public home for the aged. Curiously enough he had been an actor for silent pictures in the early 1900s. The sister attracted my attention by the expression of resigned despair on her pretty face as she stood on a food line. She was a ballet dancer in a chorus who supported her mother and herself. The Nazi brother comes from an outstanding academic family. He and his father were both imprisoned by the Gestapo.

Besides these leading players, in my wanderings I collected a Wehrmacht general, an ex-wrestler, a professor of literature and the history of art, a beautiful model, groups of boys and girls who were dying of boredom on the streets of Berlin. Most of the players had never acted before, but anyone can act provided he is in familiar surroundings and given lines that are natural.

During the shooting in the streets of Berlin I was struck by the indifference of people. In New York, London, Paris, or Rome, a motion picture camera and a filming crew are an irresistible magnet for the citizenry. The people of Berlin, it seemed to me, were interested in only one thing: to eat and to survive. This, I believe, is the fruit of a defeat unparalleled in history, which has annihilated the conscience of an entire people.

The exteriors in Berlin finished, we traveled, cast and crew, on a French military train, to Rome. Here we made the interiors in circum-

stances which were luxurious compared to the almost unbearable discomfort of filmmaking in battered Berlin. Our quarters in Rome were adequate; our rations, supplied in some part by the Vatican, were excellent. Many of the German players were unwilling to go back to their desolate homeland. With only temporary visas they could not openly stay in Italy so they scattered through the countryside hoping to elude the police. A few escaped, but many were caught and sent home.

Most Germans who have seen my film reacted as I thought they would, negatively. They found the story too pessimistic. A few, however, were willing to accept the grim realism of the story. Many members of the cast were horrified, when they saw the finished film, of what they had unconsciously perpetrated. Edmund, after the long strain of the difficult role, became ill and had to go to the hospital for a couple of weeks.

In making *Germany Year Zero* my goal was the same as in all work I undertake. I wanted to reproduce the truth exactly as the camera saw it for that audience throughout the entire world which has a heart capable of love and a brain capable of thought.

*From the Press Book for Germany Year Zero,
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