

## PRODUCTION NOTES

In the wake of the Lambrakis Case (see pages 10 & 11) —which took place in his original home town, Thessaloniki —journalist and screenwriter Vasilis Vasilikos spent three years mastering the voluminous records of the examining magistrate, then wrote his documentary novel *Z* in six months. In Athens to visit his family, director Costa-Gavras was told by his brother, a friend of Vasilikos, to read the book, and hadn't yet finished it when the colonels' coup took place. Gavras immediately read the book to his friend, writer Jorge Semprun, who said, "If you're in, so am I."

Their script practically wrote itself—it is, in fact, almost completely faithful to the novel—and Montand (first choice for the Deputy) and others actors were quickly contracted, all for heavily discounted fees. (Montand at first objected to the one letter title, fearing the audience might expect a story about Zorro.) But the original producer, on reading the script, backed out, seeing it as uncommercial and fearing a blacklisting similar to what experienced in Spain when a film he had worked on had irked Franco.

At this point with the script prepared, the actors ready, and locations in Trieste and Palermo already scouted, the film was effectively dead. However, Jacques Perrin, already cast as the Journalist (a composite of 5 or 6 real people), asked if Algiers would do. It would, and Perrin proved to have important Algerian connections, including the Minister of Culture Ben Yaya himself – although Perrin would still ride the phone soliciting more money during breaks throughout the shooting.

Filming proceeded all over the city. The scenes of the attack on the square were shot over a two-week period of night shooting on the central square of Algiers, a traffic nightmare for residents because most of the principal roads converged on it. The police and demonstrators were both mainly students, but, given uniforms (Costa-Gavras insisted that they be individually fitted), helmets, truncheons, and basic elements of drill, the "cops" started acting like them and thoroughly roughing up the onlookers. (For the scene where Salvatori and Bozzufi attack the leafletters, Costa-Gavras demanded a real fight and got it, causing real injuries. Since the budget did not allow for stunt men, Marcel Bozzufi and Maurice Baquet both performed their very dangerous falls off the "kamikaze.")

The low budget entailed numerous creative solutions. Only so many actors could be brought over from France, and actors and non-actors mingled throughout, combining professional skills and visual authenticity. In the opening lecture, only the General and the Colonel are actors, the audience mostly production assistants. Of the doctors at the

hospital, the first inspection of the X-rays was conducted by an assistant producer, cameraman Raoul Coutard announces “He’s gone” (in English) to Irene Papas, and the pivotal X-ray examination, where Trintignant first starts to smell a rat, was taken over by an actual doctor when the actor hired couldn’t handle all the technical details. (The X-rays were actually found in the Algerian hospital’s archives and fit the injuries specified in the script.) Périer’s female assistant was played by Perrin’s sister, while Bozzufi’s lawyer was a lawyer hired for the scene, and none of the attackers at the demonstration who were recruited by the underground organization CROC and later grilled by Trintignant were actors—some in fact were found on the street and looked right. The onlookers standing over Georges G ret as he lies injured in the street were Coutard’s camera crew. As the Chief Justice who arrives late to give Trintignant one last warning, Costa-Gavras cast distinguished documentarist Georges Rouquier.

(Costa-Gavras and Trintignant agreed on the slightly opaque glasses – which he doffs once – so he could see but not be seen, which apparently disconcerted some of the other actors, to the benefit of their performances.)

Except for one set, as noted below, Z was totally shot on location. Montand’s hotel was the actual St. Georges hotel, where the most important officials lived during the War for Independence; Trintignant’s interrogation scenes were shot in actual judge’s chambers in the Algerian palace of justice – which room had to be exactly reproduced in Paris, when Charles Denner, freaked by an airplane hijacking by extremists from the Algiers airport, demanded to return home before his scene with Trintignant had been shot. This was the only constructed set.

The film’s documentary look reinforced authenticity, but was necessitated by the all-location shooting, often with low ceilings. Coutard had to hang lights from the ceilings, but out of camera range, and sufficiently wide-ranging to enable free camerawork with the actors throughout.

Costa-Gavras always wanted the music of Mikis Theodorakis, but he was confined by the junta to the village of Alton in the Peloponese; Michelle Gavras, the director’s wife, visited the composer and got his permission to use anything in his oeuvre. Only the music for Bozzufi’s ecstatic kibitzing at the pinball game is not by Theodorakis. But in the finished film, the composer failed to recognize the music that underscores Montand’s disoriented entrance into the meeting hall; Costa-Gavras and his arranger had played it backwards.

Greece is never mentioned, although newspapers, posters, and beer bottles are obviously Greek; and even the tiniest details – the fireman who helps with Salvatori’s arrest, the immense, empty hospital room where Géret convalesces – are taken straight from the record. The General’s final line, “Dreyfus was guilty,” was taken as manipulative by some critics, but was also an actual quote from the record.

The entire production proceeded at a breakneck pace, taking only a little over six months from start of shooting to premiere. The first week was a flop, with only the distributor remaining optimistic, but the second week’s takings skyrocketed and Z would play in Paris for over 40 weeks in its first run. It repeated this phenomenal success in London, New York and around the world.

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