

a gut statement on politics in greece

MICHAEL SMITH

"Z" tells the story of the assassination of Gregorios Lambrakis, a deputy of the Greek EDA (Union of the Democratic Left) in 1963. These are the facts: Members of a fanatical right wing organization murdered Lambrakis. Some government officials were apparently involved in the plot. The police tried to cover up, dismissing the affair as an unfortunate traffic accident. Popular sentiment was aroused in Greece, however, and eventually the government of President Caramanlis fell. Those directly involved in the murder were sentenced to rather short prison terms. George Papandreou took over the government, but, six months later, there was a coup d'etat. The former Prosecutor General under Caramanlis, who had been forced to resign by Papandreou because of his possible connection with the Lambrakis murder, replaced Papandreou. The general and colonel who had been implicated in the plot were then "cleared" of all charges.

These facts are the basis of "Z," but the film is no documentary, at least not until the very end. Instead, it follows the well-established fictional format of the typical mystery thriller. The good guys and the bad guys are delineated at the outset. The assassinated deputy is pictured as larger than life, while the murderers are perverts and dupes. The general and colonel, who are behind the plot, appear as sinister buffoons.

This opening section of the film, I think, presents such stereotypes that it would not be dramatically successful were it not for the hyperactive camera work and crisp editing that maintains suspense until the deputy is attacked the second time. After this point, however, the pace sags and some flaws in the film become particularly apparent. While the deputy is in a coma, his wife arrives. Overly emotional scenes ensue. She walks about her husband's hotel room, for example, sniffing his shaving lotion and being generally distraught. Short, two or three second flashbacks are inserted as she thinks back to her dying husband's caress and to her daughter's answering the phone to take the terrible message about the "accident."

This overt sentimentality serves no real purpose, and it is accompanied by some gimmickry. When the deputy finally dies, a brief shot through the door of the operating room shows the doctor throwing a sheet over the body. It is repeated three times, with the doctor casting the sheet in dramatic fashion.

This sort of emotional heavyhandedness is evident elsewhere in the film in the use of sound. As the camera follows the two murderers shortly before the crime, the sound of the deputy's speech, being broadcast to the restless crowd outside the hall, is overlaid in so pointed a fashion as to make the whole sequence seem contrived. "The poor are manipulated," he is saying. "Now it's as if it's every man for himself." And also, just before the deputy walks through the angry mob to get to the lecture hall a thumping heart beat intrudes on the sound track.



Later in the film, though, the presentation becomes more direct. Costa-Gavras exploits the detective motif to its fullest as the investigating magistrate, played with appropriate woodenness by Trintignant, puts together the pieces of the puzzle,

catches the suspects in their lies, and presses charges despite the danger to his career and life. This action sets up the audience in fine fashion. We become engrossed in the unraveling of the murder mystery plot and are savoring the dual satisfaction of having the plot fully revealed and also seeing the real villains humiliated.

But here the main body of the film abruptly stops. A brief epilogue follows. Not only is the optimistic conclusion reversed, but the very form of the medium changes. We are rudely snatched from the comfortable frame of the fictional murder mystery and instead hit with straight documentary techniques of slides and narration. The effect is startling, and it's this epilogue that lifts the film well above the level of hackneyed entertainment (or propaganda, as one irate Agnew-type reviewer has labeled it).

This ending, and other parts of the film too, reminds me of "Blow-Up." The plots of both films reconstruct crimes and rely on photographs and photographers as a way of separating (or blurring) reality and mere suspicion. Both end by pulling back from the central action in an unconventional way. But, while Antonioni concludes with a comment on the ill-siveness of reality, Costa-Gavras is after something different. Reality is obvious at the end of "Z." What's lacking is Truth, with an intentional, moralizing capital T, and Justice.

Although this is not an actor's picture, Marcel Bozzuffi as Vago the homosexual murderer and Geroge Geret as the witness are outstanding. Also the camera work is remarkable, employing not only a frenetic series of different camera angles in almost every scene but also a lot of close-ups with the camera tracking, which puts the viewer continually in the center of the action. (In one brief fight scene in the back of a truck, the camera is variously positioned in the truck bed, in the cab, in the bed looking forward into the cab, on the front fender, in a trailing car, with the final scene composed of these shots all scrambled together.) The music by Theodorakis, who did "Zorba the Greek," is also fine.

All this means that "Z" should be seen. It's heavyhanded in places, and it's not, as the New York Film Critics have it, the best picture of '69, but it's a powerful gut statement on the political situation in Greece and the potential for similar occurrences

Reprinted from the Carolina Anvil, Feb. 28, 1970.

"Z" * DIRECTED BY COSTA-GAVRAS *
SCREEN PLAY BY JORGE SEMPRUN AND
COSTA-GAVRAS FROM A NOVEL BY VISSILI
VASSILIKOS * MUSIC BY MIKIS THEODORAKIS
* PHOTOGRAPHY BY RAOUL COUTARD *
EDITED BY FRANCOISE BONNET * STARRING
YVES MONTAND, IRENE PAPAS, AND JEAN-
LOUIS TRINTIGNANT.

elsewhere. In addition, there's the bonus of enough action to fully satisfy the James Bond entertainment types and enough screen goodies to interest the film buffs.



Nature's weak have already died. Her stream's are clogged with wastes from man's industrial enterprises. Her skies are opaque with man's carbon fumes and her vast countryside suffers from excessive littering. No longer does nature have the aesthetic appeal she once had. But more important, soon she will be unable to support the life cycles she once did.

Man in his materialistic endeavors, has offset nature's ecological balance. All youth of all nations are crying out. They feel the frustration of facing future extermination of all mankind. It is imperative that not just we the youth, but all people acknowledge the ecological realities of contemporary life. Should the problems of our environment continue to be neglected, earth will be known by future inhabitants as "the dead civilization".

Although presently we at Elon are not as heavily infested with the problem of pollution as are the more metropolitan areas, we will soon be confronted with massive amounts of chemicals in our waters, skies, and bodies. Many of these chemicals cause birth defects, cancer, mental disorders and various other deterrents to our health. If the present trends of pollution are left unaffected, all life on earth will cease to exist in 35 years.

As students, we at Elon have a commitment to our fellow man and to our environment. Soon we will be taking ecological actions to alienate the pollution situation.