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## Trauma: How World War II Changed Cinematic Form

Leon Jack Derriey  
*Bard College*

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Trauma:  
How World War II Changed Cinematic Form

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Film and Electronic Arts  
of Bard College

By  
Leon Derriey

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## Introduction

In *Paisà* (1946), director Roberto Rossellini decided that to capture an Italian's trauma from the war he could not just follow a single character or even a single narrative. How could one understand the impact of the war from one story? The war was not fought by an individual, but by many. To even get a sense of what these countrymen went through, Rossellini partitioned the story into six. The film would explore a range of Italian war-experiences, some of which no one could have lived through, for all the characters perish. Witnessing a variety of traumatic events, the viewer would feel each Italian's suffering was a part of something bigger, a part of a whole. In each fragment was an impression of this whole. Once the Italian viewer understood what was around them, they would know they are not alone. A national identity was reborn.

There were high stakes for a director to articulate war trauma, for, in unison with other artists, they shaped how their respective nations would heal from the conflict. Making films at a time where such a resonant emotion permeated all facets of society, directors drastically shifted their narrative focus to confront these feelings. Beyond the story, they innovated the very essence of the filmic form. Aspects like lighting, editing and sound, that had become crucial to the movie-making process, would be altered to compound this new vision of cinema. One could analyze all of these fields of innovation, but this essay primarily revolves around advancements in lighting and editing. The reason for this choice is that these two areas of change influence most of the other filmic elements, such as the impact editing has on the viewer's overall perception of a narrative. For example, quick intersecting cuts of different shots may show time passing.

In the same way *Paisà* captured the Italian war experience by exploring a variety of vantage points, this essay analyses how the Second World War transformed film form by



investigating the way three prominent directors changed how they made films. Directors Fred Zinnemann, Roberto Rossellini and Akira Kurosawa were confronted by the war in different ways. The most blatant distinction between them is the nation they film from, but even this holds multiplicity in its resonance. Not only did America, Italy and Japan have different relationships to the war, but they also had distinct approaches to cinema before the war. In the post-war narrative they represent the ‘liberators,’ ‘the liberated’ and ‘the conquered,’ but grapple directly and indirectly with the fallacies of these titles, as well as their consequences.

Having said that, these directors are more than just products of their nations. Their styles were unique and discernible within their respective countries. Fred Zinnemann was an emigre from Germany, who studied cinematography in Paris and Berlin. Akira Kurosawa was a student of director Kajirō Yamamoto, yet began his artistic career as a painter. Roberto Rossellini was given the opportunity to direct films in part from his relationship to Benito Mussolini’s son, Vittorio, and made fascist propaganda films before making anti-fascist ones. Each brought with them experience that would alter how they approached the filmmaking process. Their films give us insight into what living through the Second World War was like. No single film or film-maker could give us a complete understanding, but with fragments we can get an impression of the whole. Before diving further into their work, one should know how these three directors came to filmmaking as a whole. How did they develop the style of artistry that defines them in post-war cinema? To know what changed over the war, we must first know what they were like prior to it.

## Fred Zinnemann

“Sure, I was in the hospital, but I didn't go crazy. I kept myself sane. You know how? I kept saying to myself: Joe, you're the only one alive that knows what he did. You're the one that's got to find him, Joe. I kept remembering. I kept thinking back to that prison camp.”

-Joe Parkson, *Act of Violence* (1949)

Fred Zinnemann was born in Rzeszów, in current day Poland, on April 29th 1907.

Moving from Vienna to Paris to study cinematography and then Paris to Berlin to work as an assistant cameraman, Zinnemann spent the first twenty-one years of his life in Europe, thus he might seem like a peculiar choice to represent American cinematic progression after World War Two. He is helpful in understanding American cinema's change for two important qualities. The first is precisely why one might initially be surprised by his mention, for his status as an immigrant was shared by many in Hollywood. Whether it was Fritz Lang from Germany, Alfred Hitchcock from the United Kingdom or Frank Capra from Italy, to name a few, Hollywood combined different styles and genius from around the world to foster a dynamic and innovative environment. This is not to say that ever present American directors like John Ford or Howard Hawks were idle in the face of innovation, but simply that foreign directors brought the weight of their nation's cultural history with them that could differ from the fresh, almost ahistorical American approach to film. Hollywood benefited from this flux of immigration, as some of the greatest filmmakers of their respective nations came to America, and were ready to work.

Unlike many of them, Zinnemann came to America without a repertoire of past films that would project him into the role of director.<sup>1 2</sup> He made his name in Hollywood working from the

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<sup>1</sup> Zinnemann's role as Director of Photography on *People on Sunday* had yet to get cult acclaim. Fred Zinnemann, *A Life in the Movies. An Autobiography* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1992), 16

<sup>2</sup> Zinnemann managed to land the role of director for a Mexican government film, but this was not until 1933. Zinnemann, *A Life*, 30

bottom up. From acting as an extra on large budget epic films to functioning as the personal assistant and assistant translator of renowned German scriptwriters, Zinnemann learned the many aspects of making a distinctly American feature film before he made his own.

Zinnemann had a special affinity for America relative to other emigres, because of America's role in Austria immediately after World War One. He describes in his autobiography that large groups of American Quakers would come with food to relieve the mass hunger that came from the wartime blockade. So impactful these visitors were that he claims that 'For years afterwards we regarded all American visitors as our saviors.'<sup>3</sup>

This distinction between Zinnemann and many other emigres leads us to the second reason why he is an insignia of change in American filmic style; he embraced the idea of America in his films. Zinnemann did not simply emulate the European style for an American audience, but instead accentuated what was uniquely American. He did so by dissecting different cultural aspects of American society. In *The Men* (1950) Zinnemann uses a variety of sports: basketball, bowling and water polo. Although they are used to show the main character's process of physical recovery they also emphasize that is distinctly American about these activities in such a way that his journey is intertwined with the society he inhabits. Basketball and football were not just sports, but means of social contact rooted in American culture. In *Act of Violence* (1949), mentioned with greater depth throughout this essay, Zinnemann employs another cultural epoch of American society with his depiction of suburbia. The character's adopted setting becomes essential to his identity. The film's narrative depiction of trauma and betrayal could be seen across nations, but the suburban life the main character starts off in holds distinctly American iconography. In other cases, Zinnemann even goes as far as to create a mythical

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<sup>3</sup> Zinnemann, *A Life*, 7

imagining of America. This happens in *High Noon* (1952) when Zinnemann explores the idea of the American frontier. One might claim that it was his status as an immigrant that enabled him to see what was new and different about the country.

While Zinnemann did not fight directly in the war, he did work tirelessly for recognition of Europe's struggle in the run up to the war, as well as the recognition of the hardship of returning GIs after the war. The war affected Zinnemann on multiple levels. As a relatively recent emigre, he saw America's change in distinct ways. Zinnemann's recollection of his first few years in America was that of adoring the excitement and energy of American industry and ambition. He found that "New York was a terrific experience, full of excitement, with a vitality and pace then totally lacking in Europe".<sup>4</sup> How the energy of the nation shifted from idealistic individualism to an industrious war effort was all the more stark to Zinnemann because he claimed that these prewar qualities were somewhat absent in Europe.

But the war also affected him on a personal level. While his younger brother survived the war and went as far as to achieve the rank of colonel in 1975, Zinnemann's parents did not. Waiting in Vienna for American visas they were separated by the Nazis and taken to concentration camps. Zinnemann discovers his parents' fate after the war. This can be seen as what inspires him to explore the war's traumatic effects in many of his post-war films.<sup>5</sup> He confronted darker, more contentious issues in his post-war films. Despite dealing with an audience that may not have been naturally inclined to discuss these problems, Zinnemann managed to stay in popularity.

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<sup>4</sup> Zinnemann, *A Life*, 17

<sup>5</sup> Zinnemann, *A Life*, 55

## Akira Kurosawa

‘They say there’s no such thing as a bad man. Only bad situations.’

-Detective Murakami, *Stray Dog* (1949)

Akira Kurosawa’s artistic career began with painting and literature, before finally settling in film. Kurosawa’s diverse artistic experiences gave him exposure to foreign artistic methods. Whether it be European landscape portraits, Russian novels or American westerns, Kurosawa’s films eloquently combine elements of foreign art with what is wholly Japanese, that of *Kabuki* and *Noh* theatre<sup>6</sup>. Kurosawa is unique in this aspect for few Japanese directors so happily embraced western styles with their own, but his use of such signifies the impact of the war on the country and him as a film-maker. Heigo Kurosawa, lead the way to film by taking Akira out to see late night screening in the next town. Heigo’s job writing program notes for the cinema and narrating silent films, a *benshi*, would be a major influence on Akira’s film-making. With this, Kurosawa gained an understanding of film theory and feel for storytelling at an early age.

On more profound level, Heigo shaped how Akira would deal with pain and death. The 1st of September 1923 is the date of the Great Kanto Earthquake, and with it the death of many Tokyo residents. A thirteen-year-old Akira initially presumed his family’s death, for they had been separated and their neighborhood had been devastated. When finally reunited, Heigo forced Akira to look around the rubble with him. Among the crumbling buildings were the dead that used to inhabit them. He recounts that ‘every manner of death possible to human beings displayed by corpses,’ and when looking away from the horror his brother would command him to ‘look carefully’<sup>7</sup>. Heigo instilled in him the temperament and will to confront subjects that

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<sup>6</sup> Akira Kurosawa, *Something like an Autobiography* (New York, Vintage Books, 1983), 72

<sup>7</sup> Kurosawa, *Something like an Autobiography*, 52

other directors instinctually presumed too controversial, too close to home. Making *Stray Dog* only four years after Japan's surrender, Kurosawa was bold to take on the sensitive subject of war trauma. Kurosawa's convictions were so strong that he sought to defy the occupying American censors who banned depictions of the war and its effects, as well as persuade a Japanese audience to confront the exhaustion of their defeat. It was this will to expose the country's suffering that led Kurosawa to push his pre-war film techniques to new bounds, and even to invent new ones. Innovation was spurred by the desire to use perspectival shots in order to engross the viewer in the mind of the traumatized returning soldier.

Although Heigo gave Akira a love for film and a unique vantage point as an artist, it was his experience at the Japanese film studio Photo Chemical Laboratory (PCL) that Kurosawa got his first real exposure to the actual process of making a film. At PCL Kurosawa met the director Kajirô Yamamoto, who brought Kurosawa on a journey through many films in a variety of roles. Kurosawa dabbled in a variety of roles, working as an Assistant Editor and part of the grip team on a few productions, but was mostly tasked with being the Assistant Director or script writer for Yamamoto. Many of the films were comedies, which is intriguing when one looks at Kurosawa's individual work, because they often contain comic elements with a serious undertone. Yamamoto did not simply hire Kurosawa, but teach him. Kurosawa declared Yamamoto to be 'the best teacher of my entire life'<sup>8</sup>. Although at this point Kurosawa's experience in film production was mostly learnt from Yamamoto, his teacher left him the autonomy to explore and contribute Kurosawa's own vision. Yamamoto went as far as to give Kurosawa's the reigns of directing his film, *Uma* (1941), when he was called back to PCL to work on another film. With the confidence of experience and a film under his belt, Kurosawa was ready to make films of his own.

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<sup>8</sup> Kurosawa, *Something like an Autobiography*, 90

Whilst Kurosawa's exposure to direct conflict was scant, the effects of it were unavoidably present. Despite coming from a long line of Samurai, Kurosawa failed the conscription fitness examination and so never participated in direct warfare. The army doctor deemed him 'physically unfit to serve.' He struggled, yet often succeeded in making films against the Japanese military censors. They claimed that his films did not promote Japanese values of decency and honor. Ironically, making films under the American censor he was told that his films were over glorifying Japan's historical identity. Kurosawa's directorial debut, *Sanshiro Sugata* (1943), was trimmed of seventeen minutes' worth of finalized footage. Kurosawa took these cuts as a personal attack claiming that at the time he would have 'taken the defendant's chair and hit the censors over the head with it' if not consoled by Ozu and Yamamoto in a cafe before the trial.<sup>9</sup> With vigor and furious determination many of his films were allowed through to release despite initial setbacks. Some hurdles were not simply production complications, but situations of life and death. Some of the planned days for shooting *Sanshiro Sugata II* (1945) were postponed and disrupted by the continued firebombing of Tokyo. Out of the fire, Japan sought a new national identity based on democracy to replace the now humiliated idea of ethnic superiority and world domination. A postwar Kurosawa would be the architect of this rebirth, but to do so he would have to radically revise the film form.

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<sup>9</sup> Kurosawa, *Something like an Autobiography*, 131

## Roberto Rossellini

‘Now you’re all alike. Before it was different somehow. When we first entered Rome everyone, you know when we finally broke through, girls were all happy and laughing, fresh and full of color, but now it's all different’

-Fred, *Paisà* (1946)

The builder of Rome’s first cinema and father of Roberto, Angiolo Giuseppe Rossellini gave his son free reign to explore cinema. Recalling his special fondness for Charlie Chaplin, for a while Roberto Rossellini was content with a life watching movies in between romantic escapades. It was only when his father forced him to get a job in the industry, did he know that he wanted to work in film production. He began his odyssey in sound editing, treating Italian productions for an American and French audience, yet much like Kurosawa, Rossellini got much of his pre-directorial experience from script-writing. One Cesare Vico Lodovici would sponsor and mentor his skill for storytelling, even if later admitting that he would not always even read Rossellini’s scripts.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, it gave him the confidence of experience necessary to sell himself to film companies. This paid off and he would start to work on films of his own when suddenly the war started.

Rossellini’s direct participation in the war was limited due his family’s exuberant wealth. This wealth gave Rossellini the ability to be a voyeur in the midst of chaos and conflict before, during and after the war.<sup>11</sup> When using the term ‘voyeur’ most will presume that the subject is passive in their voyeurism. Rossellini was not passive in politics or art. Few directors have been influential in the films of two opposing regimes. Simplifying his repertoire of films into groupings of three one might see his first breakthrough triplet as being made under the Fascist

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<sup>10</sup> Tag Gallagher, *The Adventures of Roberto Rossellini*, (New York, Da Capo Press, 1998), 39-41

<sup>11</sup> Gallagher, *The Adventures of Roberto Rossellini*, 20-25



Regime of Benito Mussolini. Rossellini friendship with Benito Mussolini's son Vittorio enabled Rossellini to get the funding to make three quasi-propagandistic films: *The White Ship* (1941), *A Pilot Returns* (1942) and *The Man with a Cross* (1943). Later in the war, Rossellini would lose sympathy for fascism and start to create anti-fascist films. He claimed that 'Fascism got bad after twelve years in power, when it was tired and tried to compete with Nazi Germany'<sup>12</sup>.

Nonetheless, working with the blank cheque of fascist film companies gave Rossellini the room to explore different filmic techniques and quite generally the ability to construct a compelling story. The spirit of experimentation that was nurtured before and during the war would aid him in forming techniques to portray realism post-war.

As an Italian living in Italy during the country's 'liberation,' Rossellini saw newsreel footage that depicting the Italian campaign as swift and valiant, but most of all 'successful'. The ambiguity of what was 'success' would become apparent when many Romans would live in poverty. Rossellini did not live in material constraint himself, but witnessed this carnage around him. The war existed in two forms; it was between the Allies and the Germans, but also the fascists and the partisans. The latter was often overlooked, yet the wounds of its activity was arguably deepest. Rossellini's confrontation of the issue was brave for the suffering it would re-conjure in people's minds could have repercussions, but he did so with delicacy so as to not pull the rift of conflict any further. He would not participate in shooting the post-war show trials with directors like Visconti. He sought to participate in a rebuilding of Italian art and culture through a confrontation of its past, and by doing so poignantly looking to its future. Rossellini would use this rethinking of Italian identity after the war to distinguish Italian cinema. From Rossellini, the world would mimic Italian Neorealist methods, rather than Italy mimicking the world.

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<sup>12</sup> Gallagher, *The Adventures of Roberto Rossellini*, 59

# Light

## The New Shadow

Cinema is essentially a projection of light on a screen in a dark room. How is it that in the wake of World War Two the fundamental components of cinema, light and darkness, would change so drastically?

As America returns from war, the encroachment of darkness becomes a topic and a style that Hollywood adopted with such determined enthusiasm that it gave the films their own genre; Film Noir. The use of lighting was no longer simply to illuminate characters and setting. Whole story arcs could be simplified to the shift from light to darkness. *Act of Violence* (1949) follows this trope. The main character, Frank, is first presented in sunshine. The first distinctive decision Zinnemann makes is to rely on the natural lighting of the location for the first scene. Although natural light is unorchestrated, the way characters are placed to face towards the light can be attributed to the director. Fill lights aid what was unavoidable. The scene exhibits Zinnemann's precise lighting capabilities in that he can use natural light and achieve the same effect as one might get from using extensive artificial light. The crowd of grey suits and white dresses brighten the scene, because their docile colors absorb the light. Realizing that the houses behind Frank are painted pale colors, one can see how every element of the scene is made to accompany, adjust and improve the lighting. Nothing is left out of sight or in shadow. As everything appears to be in the open, there is a connotation that life in the suburban community is simple and without secrets. The impact of this is that our impression of Frank comes from the presumption that he is a product of his surroundings. Because his surroundings are clean cut and in plain sight the viewer presumes Frank is as well.

A sense of wholesome normality is constructed only to be brought down later in the film. At Joe's arrival, the pallet of the shot becomes darker, and with it the narrative shows first signs of Frank's life becoming more complex. When Frank returns from his fishing trip the house is lit so that at any point only half of Frank's face is illuminated. Conversely, his wife, Edith, is not in shadow at all. It is only when she acknowledges the change in Frank's demeanor that her face is only half illuminated. As opposed to the location lighting of Frank's first scene, his return from the fishing trip Zinnemann is constructed with the aid of a studio.

Zinnemann flaunts his meticulous hand in the lighting process by matching the character's dialogue with the way they interact with shadow. This manifests itself in both subtle and bombastic ways. The latter occurs when Frank hears the phone ring and rushes to turn off the lights. His reaction to light is radical, not slow and progressive; it shows his ability to react decisively and distinctively to situations. The subtler techniques Van Heflin employs consist of avoiding spots of light only to

lean his neck in to answer one of Edith's worried questions. He had to enter the light, a signifier of suburban clarity, to provide answers. The relationship Frank has to light and darkness mirrors the experience forced upon soldiers. As Gerald Linderman



describes in his book, *The World within War: America's Combat Experience in World War II*,

soldiers would gain heightened senses within or near combat.<sup>13</sup> There was a heightened sense of being ‘in the moment’. This explains the immediacy and decisive nature of his actions. Knowing Joe is hunting him, his awareness of his surroundings has become acute. Zinnemann’s depiction of war experience through filmic techniques also acts as a means the viewer can feel the reality of the situation. The lighting is not realism in the sense that the camera acting as a plain voyeur. It is instead arguably expressionism, as the camera becomes a window into the mind.

Directors realized that the use of darkness created a visceral sensation. Limiting the source of light to a minimum does more than direct the viewer’s sight; it also hones the viewer’s other senses. The significance of sound is elevated, for every word takes the place of a visual stimulus. One may object to the claim that limiting light is not unique in how it restricts visual choice, claiming that a close-up has this effect as well. There are two issues with this objection. The first is that in darkness one cannot differentiate details of objects or elements within the darkness, thus there is no visual prompt or point of intrigue beyond what is illuminated. The second is that, for a shot like a close-up, there is still room for the eye to explore. Unlike the homogenous color of darkness, a well-lit close-up has a pallet of color to scan. With this freedom there is the possibility that sound is not elevated in the same manner. By honing the viewer’s senses and forcing the visual objective of the image through rationed lighting, Zinnemann grants the type of combat experience Linderman describes.

Zinnemann’s employment of shadow was a recent invention when used in *Act of Violence*. New to the industry, but also new to his shooting style. The *Kid Glove Killer* (1942), a mystery crime film, was made seven years earlier and adorns a completely different outlook to light. As Zinnemann’s first feature-length film, *Kid Glove Killer* poignantly displays his

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<sup>13</sup> Gerald Linderman, *The World Within War: America's Combat Experience in World War II*, (New York, Free Press, 1997), 235-236

progression as a film-maker. One quite noticeable way in which his style progresses from his earlier films is his use of light. In *Kid Glove Killer* the studio lighting used to depict scenes with different atmospheres and heightened stakes is standardized. One such occasion is the how the depiction of comic romantics of the two main characters, Jane and Gordon, over a Bunsen burner does not vary significantly how the final confrontation with Gerald as he attempts to kill Gordon is lit. When Jane and Gordon chat in the lab together in the final scene it is lit so that every visual element in the frame is visible. Whether it be the colored jars and forensic paraphernalia in the background or Jane's earring in the foreground, nothing is in shadow. In what is an otherwise intense scene, Gerald's reveal to Gordon as the orchestrator of the recent violence they are investigating is lit as if they were to have a light-hearted conversation. The mid shot that Gerald inhabits is not



paired with minimal lighting hides half of his face, as does happen when Frank reveals his past to his wife in *Act of Violence*. The way the two scenes are lit is not completely homogenous, for the periphery of the confrontation is shadowed. The lighting enforces that the scene is depicting night time, and hence forebodes his Zinnemann's future relationship to manipulating light in an imposing way. Despite being a far cry from Zinnemann's later work, *The Kid Glove Killer* still contains significantly more provocative lighting than *I Am the Law* (1938), *Lady Killer* (1933) and other crime films of the 30s. One might attribute the relatively muted use of light in *The Kid Glove Killer* as the film not longing to be realism or expressionism; it is simply telling the story.

In that I mean that the film does not contain the realism attributed to relying on natural light nor the exaggerated fluctuation between light and darkness that can be found in expressionist cinema.

Film critic, Patrick Keating points to how this was an industry wide change in the way directors use light. Whereas in the 30s there was an established standard convention of how to light every scene, by the 40s this convention was being replaced by a variety of techniques. Keatings quotes Hal Wallis, the producer of *Casablanca* (1943) among other classic Hollywood movies, in a memo he wrote to instruct the director of photography Ernest Haller that said he should ‘give some character lighting to [James] Cagney in the close-ups, instead of making him look so beautiful.’<sup>14</sup> Wallis’s memo marks a shift in what Hollywood would now expect from lighting in film. A scene with Cagney could not just follow the same mold used to light a scene without him; it had to personify his character through lighting. Instructing a cinematographer on how to light a scene is a director’s role, and so when a producer like Wallis intervenes, however influential and artistically vested in the project the producer is, it signifies the studio’s requirement for that artistry to be in place. While many modern critics and directors, like Sherry Ortner, Guillermo del Toro and Kevin Smith, will be quick to point out Hollywood’s restrictive qualities on the artistic process, one might also mention that the studios prompted an intrepid use of light to create vivid narratives.<sup>15</sup> This is not to say that Zinnemann and other filmmakers should not be given credit for how adventurous their experimentation was, but instead that something was changing in the audience that required such innovations. What changed in America that would bring people to expect newer, darker themes?

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<sup>14</sup> Patrick Keating, *Hollywood Lighting from the Silent Era to Film Noir*, (Columbia University Press, 2010), 128-130

<sup>15</sup> Sherry B. Ortner, *Not Hollywood: Independent Film at the Twilight of the American Dream*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 2013), 39

By 1949 the war had ended, yet violence still ensued in the traumatic memories of returning soldiers. Before the war violence was depicted in film as something somewhat abstracted from daily life. The theatrical fight scenes of the 30s had the protagonist and antagonist lit as though they were on a stage with an audience looking for jovial entertainment. This shifts so dramatically that a film like *Act of Violence* will portray the protagonist so complexly, the viewer does not know whether they are meant to root for him or not. Take the scene where he reveals to his wife his true experience of war. The half-lit face and blank stare are ominous, because the frantic state he was in moments before is now unexpectedly calm. With this one questions whether he is simply an innocent man, running from a former colleague turned mad killer. The narrative follows this atmospheric lighting with Frank explaining how he got his colleagues killed. Often when a change of lighting forebodes a film's narrative the technique is over-dramatized, so that the viewer can predict rather than question what is to come.



*Act of Violence* does something else. Zinnemann's use of lighting does not leave the viewer anticipating a reveal, but instead grants them a sense of mystery that draws them into the reality of the scene. When the violence of the penultimate scene arrives it is shocking and bold simply because of the variety and complexity of the lighting that leads up to the moment. The

viewer of the 1940s longed for this experience so that the sensation of ‘feeling alive’ that they gained from combat was reintroduced in a way that did not invoke the trauma that came with it.

*The world within war : America's combat experience in World War II* describes how the danger of war had multiple appeals, two of which are the ‘spectacle’<sup>16</sup> of war and the sense of being ‘in the moment’<sup>17</sup> mentioned earlier. A viewer could be exhilarated by witnessing Frank about to dance with death, and yet understand that the actor will be alive when one leaves the cinema.

The line between satisfying a viewer longing to feel ‘alive’ and reiterating a traumatic experience was fine, and for some *Act of Violence* was too close to the latter. Despite receiving positive reviews and critical acclaim in the New York Times, Variety and Cannes film festival, the film was a loss at the box office. The average returning GI did not want to be reminded of war. The power of lighting to create a visceral experience pushed this act of reminding to its limits by forcing an experience rather than complacent voyeurism.

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<sup>16</sup> Linderman, *The World Within War*, 250

<sup>17</sup> Linderman, *The World within War*, 236



## Breaking from the Studio

Outside the United States the scars of war were unavoidable and had to be dealt with head on. In order to go through a process of societal healing, both directors and viewers had to embrace this plan. If one considers the contrast between Hollywood cinema before and after 1940 to be a drastic change in lighting then the difference between Italian 'White Telephone' films and Neorealist films is nothing less than revolutionary. A radical redux of Italian cinema would counter every aspect of the industry prior to the war. The films would be a reaction to both the Hollywood style before Fascist rule and the propaganda films of the regime. Instead of depicting escapist worlds in over lit studios, directors would portray the 'real' with the 'real'. Instead of portraying a dominant and domineering nation, primed to take over the world, directors would call attention to how the nation was broken spiritually and economically. Directors like Fellini, Visconti and Rossellini would seek non-actors to play the genuine citizens of Italy. Natural, on location, lighting would become the default form used in composing a scene. The theory of their practice being that natural light conveys a character's surroundings in a way that is so believable to the viewer imagines himself as a voyeur into the life around them. By highlighting aspects of the viewer's life that they otherwise did not realize they were involved with, the hope was that they may change their imagining of the world around them. In other cases, realist lighting was used to portray what the viewer never would have been able to see, such as a story where the only witnesses are dead, but it is nonetheless creating a world where the reality matches the viewer's. Although the viewer might not have fought in Italy's Po Valley during the Second World War, they can still imagine the event depicted as something that happened in the world outside the cinema.

Unlike in America, where the fight happened abroad, the fallout of war could be seen on every street corner. Whether there be someone mourning their loved ones or the rubble of shell fire. This world of suffering was seen better in day than in night. As American Noir represented the underlying impact of the war in night, Neorealism portrayed the brash and bold horrors of day. The same intensity built by the shadow would be brought by the blinding sunlight. In Roberto Rossellini's *Paisà*, episode four, Massimo, a partisan who is determined to reunite with his family, is running to cross enemy lines. The scene conjures the similar sense of anguish and suspense in the viewer as *Act of Violence* does, but uses blaring light rather than shadow to achieve this

effect. The lighting of the scene is so bright that the cement road Massimo runs across is a glowing white. Renzo Avanzo, the actor portraying Massimo, interacts with the light by wearing sunglasses, and



prior to that squinting as he looked across the city. Everything is in sight: their goal of reaching the other side of the city and the enemy that stands in their way. What makes the situation frustrating for the two characters is the fact that what is in plain sight they cannot act upon. In the end their actions put others in danger, despite the warnings other partisans gave them. While one might use the mystery of darkness to create tension, Rossellini uses light to show what is in sight and unavoidable.

In another lens, one might see Rossellini's use of bright natural light as a way of clouding the viewer's vision. Unlike the shadows of noir, the brightness of neorealist light can coalesce the detail and depth of surroundings till a character is walking in an almost abstract plain of white. As the film is shot in black and white, the palette of white, grays and black are more susceptible to being saturated into one bland color. The effect of using black and white film and shooting in bright natural light is that in a scene like the one discussed prior, where Matissimo runs across the street, the road and the sidewalk lose all their features that differentiate from one inch to the next. The two levels of ground merge into the bright gray that Matissimo walks on. It highlights the character through the blandness of the road's features and accentuates the renaissance architecture that are in shadow. The choice of background and weather harkens back to an earlier scene where two British privates admire Florence's architectural gems, while the city is in violent chaos. Overexposed and overstimulated, the scene shocks the viewer into attentiveness, because the viewer's eyes had just become accustomed to the relatively dark lighting of the first and third episodes that preceded it. Rossellini's intended audience were not people returning from war to a place untouched, they were people bearing the trauma of its fallout. Seeing ruins on the way to work were an everyday reminder of what Italy had recently been through. Rossellini translates this sentiment into filmic form by the way he clashes light and darkness. The fact that he uses natural light furthers this depiction of the feeling of suffering as being genuine and realist.

*Paisà* did not rely exclusively on natural light, or even for that matter orchestrated light. At this one might claim that Rossellini was not seeking realism any more than Zinnemann was, because both had scenes with natural light and studio lighting. The fault in this is that in the limited moments Rossellini orchestrates lighting it is not in a studio, and is still giving the

illusion of realism. The two most iconic scenes where it is clear he has manipulated the lighting artificially are when Fred and Francesca chat in episode three and when a child walks through a pile of dead in episode six. Both are helpful, because they are scenes in which they had the potential to mirror pre-war Italian or American noir styles of lighting, but instead opted to exhibit a new form: neorealism.

In episode three Fred and Francesca are framed in a simple two shot. As they discuss life before Rome's liberation from Nazi occupation, they are lit from a source that is off-screen, and thus not simply taken from the lighting of the location. Relying wholly on a lamp or light from inside the room were possibilities, but instead Rossellini chose to bring in artificial lights that would better illuminate the character's faces. Crucially differing from the three-point lighting of pre-war Italian cinema in films such as *La Signora Di Tutti* (1934) or *T'amerò Sempre* (1933), this scene has a single source of light.



The single source seems to be located around where the camera is. As the shadows diverge in opposite directions, the light must be in between the characters and out of the frame, and thus it comes from the camera's direction. The impact of this is that the camera appears to be illuminating as well as capturing the scene. This secondary function for the camera to illuminate breaks with the style of lighting used in the rest of the film, but perhaps this divergence from realism is a comment on the direction and origin of neorealist lighting. By juxtaposing what is closer to pre-war imitations of Hollywood's lighting with the newly forged

technique of neorealist lighting, the episode highlights how significant this change was. When one considers the use of lighting in the scene with its narrative context the purpose of this contrast becomes clearer. This specific moment is part of a five-minute flashback sequence revealing that Francesca is the lost woman Fred had met at the start of Rome's liberation. They had changed so much during the war that they did not recognize each other by the end of it. The light composition is different from the rest of the film and is closer to, if not completely like, the lighting of pre-war Italian film, because it is depicting a time before the poverty and trauma that was inspiration for realism. The scene matches the warped and idealistic memories that the pair has of their past interactions. What one might call 'the reality of the present,' being the moment Fred and Francesca exist in outside the confines of the flashback, is grounded in the realist lighting of how much of the film is lit. The purpose of this bold choice is to show that memories cannot provide the viewer realism. The 'real' is lost in the moment, and only through fragments of realist depictions can one gain a highly personalized sense of what happened at a given time.<sup>18</sup>

The sixth episode of *Paisà* n Rossellini uses artificial lighting in a way that fundamentally differs from episode four, but may lead one to similar conclusions as to the essence of neorealism. Midway through the episode the American and partisan collaborative forces return to their safe house to find their hosts dead and an infant crying over them. The scene is hot outside and, while the sky portrays the evening, the bodies are in a dark night-time shadow and lit from behind. At first glance it is easy for one to mistake the scene as a fragment of a noir film, for its saturation of light and darkness. Furthermore, the shadows cover the child's face for the entirety of the scene and only the frame of the bodies are visible, thus pushing the noir aesthetic to a hyper stylized extreme. As the shot progresses, Rossellini cuts to the two

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<sup>18</sup> André Bazin, "An Aesthetic of Reality: Cinematic Realism and the Italian School of Liberation" In *What Is Cinema? Volume 2* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2005) 16-40

soldiers witnessing the event and back to the child, but now the child walks into what is seemingly a different place entirely. This new place has the natural sunlight of the scenes that came before it and reveals the face of the crying child and her mother dead behind her. One might see noir was an American style of depicting war experience that differed from newsreel, as shown through films like *Act of Violence*, but Rossellini uses noir in one shocking scene to show how the trauma of the event is so personalized that it must be depicted in unique eyes of its beholders, two American soldiers. He highlights how the soldiers' way of remembering life has been influenced by the art that surrounds them. Henceforth, their regional cinematic form, in this case noir, is a cinematic translation of the



shocking sight. When the child walks into the light the camera returns to the perspective of the ethereal voyeur, and with it realist lighting. The sequence's impact on the viewer is that of shock and confusion. On one level the image of a child with its dead parents is something in its own right to shock the viewer, but on another level the sudden stylistic shift is jarring in a different manner. While in darkness one looks for detail, in light the viewer looks for what details hold significance, thus the sudden change from a scene episode to a light one causes conflict in the viewer understanding of the scene.

The choices of natural and artificial light in *Paisà n* work to create an atmosphere and mold an emotion in the audience respective to the scene. One such feeling that alludes to the

experience of war is heat. The fourth episode exhibits this especially well. Paired with Massimo's sweating, the bright natural light conveys heat. The depiction of heat serves historical accuracy, because the Allied liberation of Florence took place in Italy's hottest time of the year, from June to August 1944.<sup>19</sup> By recreating the actual circumstances the partisans had to fight in, Rossellini coaxes his viewers into seeing this as a true account of what happened in Florence. Furthermore, the heat prompts the actor act differently, due to uncomfortable nature of harsh weather. When the viewer sees the actor in discomfort, however slight, and they project that the anguish comes from the character's predicament. This manifests itself in small ways such as when Harriet squirms as the pair get closer to the frontline between the Partisans and the Fascists. Harriet Medin and Renzo Avanzo were not trained actors, and the pressure of being in the heat and sunlight was likely the cause of their squinting, but when captured by Rossellini it looks as if Harriet and Massimo are worried about the task ahead of them leading them to question how they proceed. Rossellini's use of actors and enforcement of a non-actor aesthetic is crucial to the process towards achieving realism, but is touched on in a later chapter.

Rossellini's use of light to convey heat changes how the viewer reacts to the screen. As Zinnemann orchestrates a visceral experience by repressing the viewer's sense of sight, so does Rossellini with heat and light. Watching Massimo pant and sweat, the viewer gets the sense of heat in the scene. Pairing that with a realism that brings the audience into the reality of the character, the viewer can feel an intense sense of discomfort in themselves. Through the shared experience of discomfort, the viewer and the character are brought closer together. The technique of lighting to convey heat was also notably used in Japanese cinema.

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<sup>19</sup> Christian Jennings, *At War on the Gothic Line: Fighting in Italy 1944 -45*, (New York, St Martin's Press, 2016), 64-72

## The Third Position

‘The Third Position’ was a term pre-war fascists used to promote their positions. They were neither capitalist or communist.<sup>20 21</sup> In a way, the phrase could be used to describe the lighting of Japanese films after the war. Kurosawa embraced aspects of both Hollywood Noir and steadfast realism, as well as differing itself in ways that were distinctly Japanese. His films often gave emphasis to shadow just by the nature of the location he decided to shoot at, and paint an image of Japan as chaotic or lingering in the humiliation of surrender. In *Stray Dog* (1949) this imagery is a fundamental component of the narrative, manifesting itself in both the protagonist and the antagonist. Kurosawa’s use of shadow serves this portrayal of trauma. At one moment in the film, Detective Murakami finds some respite from his quest to find his gun on the ruined wooden platforms of a nearby building. Although not a momentous event, the scene theatrically exhibits its commonalities of American Noir like *Act of Violence*. The scene is shot at night and on location, thus it is naturally dark. In the reality of the scene the character is lit through the light coming from a nearby window. The film is not realist, because the light coming from the window is disproportionate to how well lit Murakami is on the platform and how well lit the surrounding area is. This style echoes the way Zinnemann lights Frank when he returns from his fishing trip, yet there is a distinct difference in the way the light is framed. Instead of lighting half of his face in a medium shot like in *Act of Violence*, Kurosawa lights Murakami’s whole body, but shrouds his surroundings in darkness. The difference in how the two directors frame shadows in their scenes changes how the viewer is impacted by the scene. While Frank’s medium shot shadows present him as disturbed and fearful, the medium wide-shot presents

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<sup>20</sup> António Costa-Pinto, *Corporatism and fascism: the corporatist wave in Europe* (Basingstoke, UK, Taylor & Francis, 2017), 43-55

<sup>21</sup> Nick Ryan, *Into a World of Hate: A Journey Among the Extreme Right*, (New York, NY, Routledge, 2004), 61-63



Murakami as isolated and disheartened. This sense of him being alone comes from how small he is in scale of even a fragment of the city. The light accentuates this by making his allotment of light a small fragment of the overall frame. The only other person in the frame is a bystander in the foreground who is dimly lit. The difference in how Murakami and the bystander is lit represents the distance the two have from one another, and Murakami has from any form of personal connection. The trauma of war forced his world into a light and dark, where neither could give him the comfort he needed.



Kurosawa's analysis of war trauma is not exclusive to the juxtaposition of shadow and light. Throughout *Stray Dog*, Kurosawa uses light to convey heat, and while one might presume that he might does so in a similar manner to how Rossellini portrayed heat in *Paisà n*, he does not. In *Stray Dog* the emphasis on representing heat is geared further towards expressing the character's mental state than establishing any great sense of realism. This distinctive depiction of heat occurs in *Stray Dog* when Murakami walks through the market. In a merger of different shots, the viewer sees light trickle through the rough bamboo roof of a street market, which then becomes translucent to reveal a shot of Murakami tense face and sweating neck. The market roof becomes opaque and then translucent again, this time with the camera closer to Murakami's face, so close in fact that one can see the condensation on his

nose. One can interpret the ever zooming close-up as an attempt to depict Murakami's frantic and maddening state of mind from his perspective or interpret the scene as a way in which Kurosawa ruptures the passive complacency of the viewer as simply a voyeur, for they are being stared at. Nonetheless, neither interpretation would warrant any belief that the film is realist, or at least not in the way *Paisà n* is. In the first interpretation you can even go as far as to say the film is expressionistic, because the camera is warping reality according to the mental state of the character. This is made all the more convincing when one remembers that a similar method of portraying Murakami emotions was used on the shadowed ruins mentioned before.

The bold choice of portraying heat through a hypnotic cuts differs enormously from the long shots in *Paisà n* that show Massimo run along a street every step of the way. It reveals how interdependent the forms the post-war directors used to portray war experience. As the two directors exhibit, the editing of post-war cinema would raise the act of editing to a crucial role.

## Editing

### The Kyodatsu Condition

Cuts from one scene to the next were and remain a fundamental tool at the filmmaker's disposal, and yet increasingly after the war its rudimentary utility was matched by a purposeful show of atmosphere, emotional states and realism. These concepts came to form in many ways including a desire to establish a rhythm and pace through montage, to set a mood through transitioning cuts, and to convey realism through long takes. The way Kurosawa, Rossellini, and Zinnemann used these editing methods to achieve a conceptual goal intensified after the war, as each filmmaker strove to impact the viewer more intensely. As Murakami's market scene in *Stray Dog* mentioned in the previous chapter shows, lighting plays an important role in how and why one edits a scene, but lighting is not the only filmic component intertwined with editing, for story and sound are also interdependent with a style of editing.

Kurosawa's understanding of editing came from working under the pre-war established director Kajirô Yamamoto. Kurosawa paraphrased Yamamoto's approach to editing by saying that 'The art of cinema has been called an art of time, but time used to no purpose cannot be called anything but wasted time.'<sup>22</sup> The emphasis on portraying time with purpose when editing is noticeable in Yamamoto's films, of which Kurosawa worked as an Assistant Director on many of: *Chushingura* (1939), *Tsuzurikata kyôshitsu* (1938) and *Enoken no bikkuri jinsei* (1938) to name a few. The editing of *Uma* (1939), a film directed by both Yamamoto Kurosawa, is telling of how Yamamoto's approach to editing effected Kurosawa. The film was edited by Kurosawa under keen revision by Yamamoto. The film contains scenes depicting long passages of time, but

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<sup>22</sup> Kurosawa, *Something like an Autobiography*, 106

also manages to use second by second intensity when a sharp sense of drama is necessary in the narrative. An example of the former is when there are fade transitions between seasons. He uses snow and sun as unambiguous representations of weather, and subsequently signifiers of time changing. In the context of the narrative, the story is about Ine, the eldest child of a poor family, caring for a horse since birth until they must sell it out of financial necessity. Kurosawa needed to illustrate Ine's emotional investment in the horse, but do so succinctly as to not make the journey monotonous for the viewer.

Unlike in Neorealism where a director might use the mundane tasks of a person's daily ritual to serve an overarching portrayal of realism, Yamamoto's intentions when instructing Kurosawa to edit the mundane seem to emphasize the intensity of scenes that are not the everyday, but in fact the once in a lifetime. In an iconic climax of the film, where the horse's sale is being finalized, this 'once in a lifetime' comes into play and brings with it the time investment of Ine. Kurosawa cuts from reasonably long takes of the horse and auctioneer to quick emotional fragments of the family members, with a special emphasis on Ine. The impact of having both speed in revealing emotional reaction and long perspectival shots of the horse in auction is that the viewer takes on the role of the character and forms their own emotional reaction to the event. Where there is the possibility in this scene for the camera to dwell on the character and then for Kurosawa to have small cut backs of the horse, it would evoke a sense of sadness rather than drama. Yamamoto explained this to Kurosawa when giving feedback on his first draft of edited footage, saying "Kurosawa, this sequence is not drama." It's *mono-no-aware*. *Mono-no-aware* meaning the sadness of fleeting things.<sup>23</sup> Yamamoto showed Kurosawa how the pace of one's cuts can be deciding factor on the resulting emotion of the viewer.

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<sup>23</sup> Kurosawa, *Something like an Autobiography*, 105

Kurosawa takes the emotionally descriptive editing taught to him by Yamamoto to further extremes in *Stray Dog* by portraying the complexity of war-time trauma through a cut. Harkening back to the scene discussed in the previous chapter where the detective, Murakami, stumbles through a market, the viewer can see how Yamamoto's editing influences are brought into fruition. Short shots of Murakami's forlorn face cut to longer shots of his surroundings. While in *Uma*, a Kurosawa under the supervision of Yamamoto cut from short shots of Ine's face to its subject, the horse, in *Stray Dog* Kurosawa cuts to surroundings that have no clear subject. One expects that the detective will find a clue to lead him to his gun, yet instead we are presented with another bystander in their own isolated world of priorities irrespective of the torment Murakami is going through. Without context, one could interpret a woman running a market stall or a man reading his newspaper while walking to work as B-roll, footage that has irrelevance to the story, but helps to create an atmosphere or in a practical sense make a smoother transition from one scene to the next. Equipped with the narrative, one understands that these inconspicuous urban spaces represent what is not there as much as what is. *Stray Dog* is a furtherance of Yamamoto's editing style of giving the viewer a plain subject to attach emotional meaning to. The scene's absence of a subject altogether requires the viewer to form their own emotional atmosphere through an understanding of what is not in the shot, rather than what is. In other terms, Kurosawa extended the viewer's autonomy to interpret the scene. The 'drama,' as Yamamoto called the emotion that needed to be portrayed when the horse in *Uma* loses her foal, is an integral part of *Stray Dog*. This 'drama' is what gives the market scene in *Stray Dog* its intensity, as Murakami's mission goes from potentially saddening to exciting by propelling the viewer into a frantic analysis of every street stall and passerby. While both *Uma* and *Stray Dog* harbor anticipation, it is *Stray Dog* that brings the viewer into the realm of the character's

distraught mind. Whereas *Uma* brings takes the viewer into the scene as a voyeur in the midst of struggle, *Stray Dog* places the viewer in the character's mind.

The intensity of the drama is not the only change. The nature of the drama itself had been radically revised, with drama being derived from conflict and history off the screen. Kurosawa brought to light the experiences of returning Japanese soldiers under a censorship that did not permit cinematic portrayals of the war. Both Murakami and Yusa, the protagonist and antagonist respectively, fought in the war. It is this off-screen disturbance that propels Murakami to be mentored by Satō and become a police officer, but it is also what sets Yusa on a path of crime. Kurosawa emphasizes this in a scene where a police officer demands Murakami's papers, questioning Murakami's claim to be a policeman himself. As a filmmaker who did not directly fight in the war, Kurosawa witnessed the trauma of those who were on the front line and the victims of bombings from a different vantage point, and with this vantage point he was able to observe people's newfound behaviors. Kurosawa exaggerated these for the purpose of both accentuating the stakes of the scene and illuminating the internal conflict of the returning soldiers in an external, visual manner.

The evocation of these post-war emotions acted as a unifying banner that would bring people together over a shared mentality, as well as bring to light changes in activity that one might not have realized changed after the war. An example of such is how Murakami interacted with ruined buildings. The citizens of Tokyo at the time of *Stray Dog* were given visual reminders of the cities bombings throughout their day. Passing by torn buildings and wreckage, they may have become numb to the sight of it. Kurosawa brings the sting of this imagery back to the numbness of their memory. Due to an American censorship policy that banned films from depicting the effects of the bombing, Kurosawa had to be subtle with such an act. Instead of

explicitly portraying firebombed buildings in the same way one would see these places in a newsreel, Kurosawa mostly gives hints and brief glimpses of the destruction inflicted on the city. Having said that, Kurosawa boldly places Murakami in two locations that expose the damage in a noticeably visual manner. He sets a scene in the remains of a crumbling garden and a ruined dock. They are edited in a similar fashion; there are not many cuts in the scene. In the case of the dock scene there are no cuts, just a slight track inward. In both scenes Kurosawa lets the audience absorb the entirety of the setting, by giving them time to look at Murakami and what is around him before a cut limits your view. In the scene in the garden, for instance, Kurosawa could have cut right when the new character entered, say to a mid-shot or a wide shot of another angle. The problem with that would have been that the viewer would have had a whole new fragment of the setting to come to terms, while keeping track of the arrival of this other character. This almost single frame shot gives the viewer time to reflect on how the background reminds the character of the bombing and the deep shame of losing the war. Kurosawa gives the background the freedom to speak for itself. It is even more poignant as a form of editing style when one considers that throughout much of the rest of the film Kurosawa uses shorter scenes, with closer shots and faster cuts, culminating in the montage we see in the market scene.

The viewer is given a rhythm to follow that derives itself from the speed in which Kurosawa cuts from one shot to the next. This pace or beat distinguishes the mood, sentiment and mental state in the scene. The film breaks with the viewer's expectations by fluctuating the rhythm of the cut. Making the distance between cuts shorter and longer, the scene subconsciously signifies a change in what the viewer should be looking for. While in the ruined garden and the dockyard the viewer changes their sights to analyze the landscape, in the market the task is less clear. Unlike in the montage of director like Eisenstein, where one is given short

shots of clear, unambiguous images that one connects to form a clear and powerful connection between, with Kurosawa in *Stray Dog* the scene is cluttered, dynamic and anticipating interpretation. There is little that connects the images of light coming through a straw roof, rows of feet and walking commuters, but all the shots last only a little longer than a glance so the viewer gets the sense that Murakami is walking without purpose and looking anywhere for inspiration or guidance. Kurosawa asserts that these visions are Murakami's point of view by cutting to an opaque image of eyes intensely looking from side to side. As the pace of cuts becomes faster, it

becomes clear that

Murakami's glances are frantic and desperate. It is not just what he sees, it is an impressionistic portrayal of his state of mind as he interprets what he sees. How does the viewer gauge what is



impressionistic and what is from the perspective of an 'impartial' voyeur? The extreme close up of Murakami's eyes and flurry of light from the market roof give the viewer the sense of his agitation beyond the rudimentary visual fact that he looks at the sun. Similar to the montage of old, that of Eisenstein, the image in quick succession leaves a connotation or theme rather than a fully explored narrative event. The light establishes a theme of heat and his sweating face



enforces this, but it is his intense eyes and flurrying feet that show how this heat has affected how he feels, and subsequently how he views his surroundings.

The implication of portraying characters in an expressionistic fashion is that the viewer can understand a character's process of thought beyond a simple presumption of how they might feel in their scenario. If the viewer were to see Murakami in the market without Kurosawa's expressionistic lens they would have to presume that he is fatigued and maddened by the loss of his gun. It is only with this change in vantage point that we can see that Murakami has such a desperate longing for his gun that he views everything around him as a potential clue. The expressionistic emotion is discovered, and in turn felt by the viewer, thus having greater meaning and impact on the viewer due to the process of understanding that they went through.

Kurosawa's post-war emphasis on transforming the emotional state of a character into that of the viewer's is part of a larger, even more ambitious, quest to translate the sentiment of the nation into an almost tangible sensation. To a Japanese audience in 1949 the tired weakness Murakami felt in the film was not simply lassitude, but part of the greater 'kyodatsu condition,' a phrase used to describe the deep exhaustion experienced after the war. *Stray Dog* signifies a major post-war shift in Kurosawa's film-making process. The repertoire of editing techniques Yamamoto bestowed upon Kurosawa would have to be expanded upon in order to tell the narrative of the nation rather than just the individual. Kurosawa's exploration of form leads him to an approach to editing that Yamamoto had used much at all in his films. One notably different approach in Kurosawa's post-war films was his manipulation of the physical film. Not only did his altering of footage distinguish himself from Yamamoto, but also directors from around the world.

Despite his use of real locations, Kurosawa's editing in *Stray Dog* can be viewed as more manipulative of footage than Rossellini's in *Paisà* or Zinnemann's in *Act of Violence*. Not only

did his takes have various lengths, but the film material itself had been altered, such as his use of translucent film in the montage of the market. Transforming the very essence of the footage was an intriguing choice for it harkened back to artistically experimental directors who used these techniques before him. Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Jr* (1924) is one of the earliest uses among a long history of such a bold technique, thus making a film in 1949 Kurosawa had a plethora of films to reference. What is distinctive of Kurosawa's editing within this history is that it was expressionistic, as explained earlier, rather than a depiction of the reality the character inhabits. The projectionist in *Sherlock Jr*, for example, does not become translucent to juxtapose his changing mental state; the projectionist can leave his body as he dreams in the reality of the film. On the other hand, Detective Murakami is simply standing against a wall in the market, but is edited to juxtapose this reality. Kurosawa's bold, almost brash film manipulation is even more distinctive when in relation to how Rossellini and Zinnemann edit.

## The Illusion of Realism

Often our conception of cinematic style in the 1940s pictures Kurosawa as a bridge between American noir and Italian neorealism, yet in the realm of editing Kurosawa distinguishes himself as further than both movements in the extremities of image manipulation. Zinnemann filmed most of *Act of Violence* in the comfort of studio sets, with an acute precision to his lighting and smooth cuts on action in his transitions. Yet beyond chase scenes, Zinnemann rarely shaped the emotional texture of the film with his cutting. Rossellini, on the other hand, dared to form an emotional atmosphere, but sought to harness the raw energy of the film by not refining it for the comfort of the audience. Clashing with Kurosawa's iconic style of cutting on action, Rossellini happily let events run till completion. The third episode of *Paisà* displays this when an intoxicated Joe is tugged by Pasquale, and Rossellini decided to portray Joe's stumbling walk without cutting cleanly on action. While typically a director might shoot a character's walk for a few seconds to establish the scene, Rossellini shows his journey in its entirety, thus playing with a viewer's structural expectations.

The effect of Rossellini's play with editing tropes is that he calls attention to the fact the viewer is watching a movie. Once the cut eventually comes, it appears abrupt to the viewer. Conversely, Kurosawa's preferred method was aimed at hiding the 'seams,' or filming process, by distracting the cut with the stimulus of movement. One can see this in the early chase scene of *Stray Dog*, for Kurosawa does not task the audience with the full labor of watching Murakami run in wide shot from one side of the screen to the other. Instead, he cuts as soon as Murakami turns his head or blocks the camera. With Kurosawa's editorial intentions considered one might presume that Rossellini's opposing style is either aimed at consciously discomforting the viewer with a lack of constant stimuli or is simply directorially negligent. This presumption does not

take into account Rossellini's greater neorealist intentions. Rossellini was not attempting to coax the viewer into the reality of the film, but instead open their eyes to the reality already around them. Only a year earlier, the Italian viewer could have witnessed or heard of a scenario portrayed in one of the episodes. Neorealism was Rossellini's way of portraying recent history without losing the raw impact of war experience to seamless cuts, cuts that compare this film to the fictional dramas of the past, not the reality of the present.

Neorealism was reactionary, explorative and episodic, yet even among neorealist films *Paisà* pushed the boundaries of these elements to innovative extremities. The reaction was to both old Italian cinema and Hollywood. As explored earlier, Rossellini abandoned the three-point lighting of pre-war Italian cinema in favor of the natural light caught on location, which often made the scene over or under exposed due to the director's relative lack of control over the scenario. As with Fred and Francesca's dialogue hotel room dialogue scenes in episode three of *Paisà*, Rossellini would not always use natural light, but he always strived for the illusion of natural light, the illusion of realism. Editing was a crucial measure for Rossellini to achieve this mirage of realism. With editing, Rossellini established what Andre Bazin called 'great holes,' where Rossellini would require the viewer to bridge the narrative hole between two events. Rossellini and Eraldo da Roma, the editor, would cut in such a fashion that the ending of one scene and the beginning of another leave an event out. The viewer, although forming a potential narrative, will never completely understand what happened to the characters in the span of that cut. Bazin calls it a 'great hole' for there is what is left unknown in the hole of the viewer's knowledge.

These cinematic ellipses range in subtlety. The ellipses episode one of *Paisà* is strikingly bold. Carmela, the local guiding the American troops through the German minefield, has to take

refuge with Joe, a soldier, when an ambush of German soldiers come. After leaving to get water she finds that the soldiers found and killed Joe. In sadness and in rage she picks up his rifle and shoots at the Germans. Rossellini cuts at her shot, so that the viewer does not know how the conflict entailed. Even when the Americans find her body, the viewer still does not know if she managed to kill a German, gaining her revenge, was caught and divulged secrets or was simply shot a second after the cut. What is especially intriguing about this scene is that emphasizes how the 'great hole' exists for the American soldiers as well, but that their leap to understanding lead them to the wrong answer. The American soldiers presume that Carmela killed Joe when the truth cannot be further from that, for despite the viewer's gap of understanding we have still seen that Carmela did not kill Joe. With this poignantly edited sequence Rossellini makes comments on both wartime memory and the nature of portraying realism.

The narrative bridge the viewer has to construct mirrors the memory a soldier is left with. Although a soldier would have likely witnessed conflict first hand, he could not have been everywhere in the battlefield at once, and so formed a narrative of what experiences their peers around them felt after the event itself. Moreover, even his own memory can get distorted by the subconscious desire to imagine a conflict in another way. One could say that the soldiers in episode one believe that Joe was betrayed by Carmela, because it is a narrative that honors their former colleague better than the thought that he was simply found by a German recon team. If they were to believe that he was caught by the recon squad, then they might see themselves as responsible for not providing Joe the support and backup he needed. To Rossellini, people naturally reconstructed their memories of the war to picture themselves under a good light. By editing the film to provide 'great holes,' Rossellini encourages the Italian viewer question their image of themselves during the war.

The 'great hole' acted as a comment on the process of portraying realism, critiquing the style's newly popular use in Italian cinema by asking what is 'realism'. Is a scene 'real' if it portrays the experience of an individual? Is a scene 'real' if the camera is a neutral, almost ethereal voyeur simply capturing one's life? Is realism not subject to the reality of the viewer? The narrative jump portrays a hybrid reality, the perspective of both an individual and an abstracted voyeur. Portraying the reality of an individual comes with the limitations of that person's perspective. Where they are, who they are and what they know affect their view of an event, and in turn their memory of it. To incorporate these limitations, Rossellini does not show all the plot points that happen over a character's time on screen, such as the massacre of a partisan family in episode six. While this scene in episode six shows the limitation of place, the previously described scene in episode one, where the soldiers find Carmela's body, reveals the limitation of who one is and what they know. The soldiers do not know of the growing relationship Carmela had with Joe and might have had a distrusting disposition towards Italians for the nation's recent position as fascist. The point of Rossellini's attentiveness to editing a scene around a character's perspective is that it emphasizes what restrains their scope of a situation, and consequently their overall understanding of an event. Having said that, the fact that the viewer knows more of what is happening in the conflict than many of the characters shows that the perspective of the camera is not wholly of a single character, but a compromise between the character and an abstract voyeur.

Initially, one might see Rossellini's editing as one that jumps between the view of characters and perspective-less shots of a detached, almost objective, camera, yet on second glance the latter is shown to be its own character. From the very first moment of the film, Rossellini sets this subtle character up. Once the opening credits subside, news roll footage play

and a narrator announces the campaign these soldiers fight in. The voice describes the battle with simplicity; the outcome announced within seconds. It reduces the trauma the combatants had to go through to a simple soundbite, and with it that the war was won without complication. This style of newsreel opening is subsequently juxtaposed by Rossellini's graphic portrayal of deadly complications. By the end of episode one, we see the Sicilian invasion as a tragedy on an individual level, whether it was a success or not in the grand scheme of liberation. Rossellini's definition of realism after the Second World War distinguishes himself from both his realist peers and his former self, by integrating the relationship of macro and micro history.

The macro history is conveyed with *Paisà*'s episodic structure and narrator, as they speak of each conflict as a proud victory on the road to liberation. Each fight is announced as if the success was preordained, and that any single individual could have ceased to exist and the outcome would have been the same. A far cry from this teleological narrative, Rossellini presents scenarios from an imagined micro history. Unguided by the initial voiceover or background knowledge of the campaign, a viewer might watch the last scene of the first episode and presume that the Ally invasion was a failure, bringing with it extensive casualties due to logistics and miscommunication. Therefore, not only was Rossellini's micro history different from the promoted war narrative at the time but distinctly contrasting it. Rossellini redefined Italian neorealism with the precedent that one is portraying an event in history. His style clashes with the approach of directors using realism as a general portrayal of reality without adherence to a specific time or place.

One Italian director that sticks out among these contrasting styles is Luchino Visconti. His realism revolves around the narrative and a specific, unifying message. Visconti's film *La Terra Trema* (1948) showcases the director's emphasis on moral message rather than position

within history. While *Paisà* and *La Terra Trema* share certain neorealist techniques like using natural light and non-professional actors, but it is in editing that this contrasting approach becomes clear. Visconti's cuts are often smooth fades with the narrative moving from one consequential event to the next; like Chekhov's gun, most elements in a scene in *La Terra Trema* are to be brought up in a later moment and hold a certain interconnectivity to the narrative structure. One such moment is when the women of the Valastros fishing family reminisce over a photo. Rosa, the daughter, mentions how a character is in naval uniform, and that he leads much of the family at sea right at that moment. The first thing that strikes one as being different from *Paisà* is that this scene in *La Terra Trema* contains multiple zooming cuts, many of which are focused on inserts. The second aspect of change is that Visconti uses these editing techniques to

lead the viewer to plot points by foreshadowing a character's fate.

In *Paisà*, the introduction of a new character or a prop being brought into view or a conflict occurring can have little to no impact on the 'main character' or 'main plot,' but it serves the purpose of establishing the



atmosphere and sentiment necessary to understand a specific time and place. Visconti's adherence to mostly narrative dependent scenes was a necessary break from Rossellini's form of realism in order to convey a clear message.



For Visconti, the goal of showing class struggle and national identity surpassed the desire to show the every-day. In the penultimate scene of *La Terra Trema* we see this moral declaration in full fruition. Fishermen discuss politics in a cafe with a hammer and sickle on the wall and a wholesaler, one of the story's antagonists, jokes that 'the country is full of communists!' Visconti declared his support for communism on and off, officially joining the Italian communist party during the war.<sup>24</sup> Rossellini had been approached to make *Paisà* more nationalistic, to which he replied that his first film in the post-war films, *Roma Città Aperta* (1945), was his ode to national-populism, a tribute to 'the Party and the Church.'<sup>25</sup> Having a six part film moving from south to north had the potential to carry political implications, yet Rossellini insisted that he did not want *Paisà* to follow this way. Since Rossellini was without a distinct agenda, he could put more concentration towards the neorealist experiment. Having said that, who is to say that Visconti's realism was less committed to an adaptation of reality than Rossellini's.

Visconti was among a group of other Italian filmmakers that were the first to criticize the White Telephone films and propose a newer realist form. Therefore, one might presume they have weight to the claim that what they were making was the true definition of neorealism. After all, they coined the term 'neorealism'. On the other hand, Rossellini addition of *Roma Città Aperta* was arguably what really gave the style praise and attention, winning awards at major film festivals. One might view the authority on a style of filmmaking to be from the director who used it most 'successfully,' rather than who supposedly made the first neorealist film. As this 'success' is so heavily defined by the subjective eye of the viewer, it is difficult to say what filmmaker truly captured realism. Another factor to consider is that *La Terra Trema* was made two years after *Paisà*, during what was a major stylistic shift in how filmmakers dealt with

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<sup>24</sup> Henry Bacon, *Visconti: explorations of beauty and decay*, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1998), 34

<sup>25</sup> Gallagher, *The Adventures of Roberto Rossellini*, 184

neorealism. What was needed in cinema right after the war was different to what was needed a few years later.

The neorealist style, structure and editing directly after the war was intertwined with a desire to portray the poverty and despair that was not present in the fantastical films prior to the war. Once Italy was on a trajectory to prosperity, the average viewer longed for aspirational narratives. Filmmakers looking to rebuild the nation with their art either used new hopeful language to portray the modern day or positioned the narrative at an arm's length to convey their social view. Visconti's *La Terra Trema*, being a part of the latter, uses an imagined reality to portray class struggle and national identity. Making *Paisà* at the time he did, Rossellini worked an imagined story around the reality of the viewer, and in doing so hoped to heal the trauma of those who had to witness similar events. But, what is it about Rossellini's narrative structuring and editing that conveys the reality of the viewer? The reason Rossellini's style of editing emulates realism is that the viewer typically does not perceive their life beyond the screen as teleological. The clearest way to understand this is to look at films that do not prioritize realism.

## Trying to Forget

In films not attempting to suggest realism, the camera guides the viewer from one subject to the next in order to explain the sequence of events. *Act of Violence* is a film that does not prioritize realism, and as such, from the first scene we can see that subjects are placed for the coherence of the narrative. As soon as Joe enters his apartment he looks through his drawer and inspects his pistol, and with that the viewer gets the ‘image fact’ that he has the intent to kill. When he leaves his apartment, he takes a bus across state and checks in at a hotel. The first thing Joe does is check a phonebook for Frank’s name. He circles Frank’s address, and the viewer gains the second ‘image fact’. Frank is Joe’s target. At no point does Zinnemann leave an element in the scene that can divert the viewer from the projection of the general narrative. One consequence of Zinnemann meticulously guiding the viewer from scene to scene is that the viewer naturally attempts to predict what is to come. As explored during the chapter on lighting, Zinnemann can still leave the viewer with uncertainty within the scene such as Frank’s lurking in and out the shadows. Van Heflin’s defined and clearly recognizable emotions forebode the path he is to take. More important than foreshadowing, what distinguishes Zinnemann’s style from realism is that these ‘image facts’ are referenced later to show how the decisions the characters made have affected the outcome of the overall narrative. It is Frank’s fear that leads him to hire a hitman and it is guilt that forces him to stop the assassination with his life. The film portrays a man whose consequences lead to real actions. While his intentions may not lead to the desired effect, that is more to do with his internal conflict than it is the narrative structure.

Rossellini forcefully distances *Paisà* from *Act of Violence*’s consequential structure. The grand efforts characters go through in *Paisà* have little to no effect on the outcome of a situation. Rossellini’s exploration of individuals being ineffective in changing the swaying the course of an

event is epitomized in episode 6 of *Paisà* when both the protesting British airmen and the Italian partisans are shot. The airmen are taken as prisoners and protected by the Geneva convention, but the partisans are rounded up to be thrown off a ship and drown. When the airmen run in protest they are gunned down. The process of drowning the partisans continues till completion. The film cuts to black and the viewer is left with the knowledge that soldiers sacrificed their lives for no return. Whether it was the overwhelming circumstances that caused tragedy in *Paisà*, as in episode 6, or miscommunication, as in episode one, Rossellini's attention to fruitless acts is overwhelming. As distributed by MGM, an American cinema-goer might have seen *Paisà* and be struck by the conditions depicted. Following the newsreel footage one would presume that an Italian would be enjoying their new found liberation from the torments of fascism. While they were liberated from fascism, they were not liberated from poverty. One might go as far as to say that Rossellini prized the concept of futility just as much as he does realism in *Paisà* in order to show the extent of the damage caused. Beyond the overarching structural divergence, *Paisà* and *Act of Violence* also exhibit certain technical differences.

The length of cuts in *Paisà* does not differ much from that in *Act of Violence*, with the former only lasting a few seconds longer at points, but how this length is used to portray an event is where a divergence occurs. One clear example of this separation is how the two directors treat scenes of conflict. The long takes that portray conflict in *Act of Violence* are filled with stimuli. The penultimate scene, in which Frank sacrifices his life to save Joe's from a hitman by jumping in front of the car, exhibits this nicely. From the moment Frank appears in the dark gloom of the train yard there is always something for the viewer to be entranced by. Frank's worried stare and slow walk provide both a striking target for the viewer to lock onto and movement to follow,

thus the event is established to be momentous in relation to the safe, Frank's simple life in suburbia is established at the beginning of the film.

Zinnemann pushed the boundaries of comfort by talking about trauma in the war, and this effected how he approached editing. Many Americans simply wanted to forget, or at least reimagine, the war. This societal distance from discussing war trauma is reflected in the box office of *Act of Violence*. The film did not recover its budget, despite gathering critical acclaim from many sources. One might see this as a reason for why Zinnemann did not use editing methods to discomfort the viewer any more than they did. Unlike Rossellini does in *Paisà*, Zinnemann cuts on action. Unlike Kurosawa does in *Stray Dog*; he does not manipulate the footage by making the image opaque with flashing light. The emotional environment is inherently present in *Act of Violence*'s narrative, for the film explicitly describes the character's state of mind as a product of their war experience. The story was enough of a discomfort without emulating trauma through editing.

That being said, why then is Zinnemann weary to cause discomfort through a cut, but so readily causes tension with lighting. The reason for this is that the anxiety that comes from the film's lighting is associated with the drama of the film rather than the outside world. In fact, the thrill and excitement of dynamic shadows, paired with smooth editing, distracts the viewer from the severity of the narrative. We see this distraction in play in some of *Act of Violence*'s most impactful scenes. Zinnemann expresses post-war trauma explicitly in the scene where Frank explains to his wife what led Joe to go on a vendetta against him by directly recalling the experience he had in war. Basing the scene purely on its dialogue, the viewer would be struck by how the scene cuts to certain sentiments felt in prisoner of war camps and the conflict in general. He talks of how he would be given more food and certain amenities for cooperation and intel

against his subordinate soldiers. In addition, he shares how death among his ranks filled him with guilt even at times when he was not truly responsible. What should be an uncomfortable scene to watch for a viewer returning from war, and trying to forget what they saw, materializes as exciting and thrilling suspense.

The reason that the scene was not so harrowing for the post-war American viewer is that the reality on the screen was detached from the reality of the viewer. Every aspect outside the dialogue worked to establish a feeling of distance in the viewer from the character's reality. Zinnemann uses a variety of editing techniques to achieve this. One of which, is the act of cutting on action. Because the viewer is distracted by movement, they do not notice a cut in the same way a stagnant image cuts to another motionless one. This method of cutting is used throughout the film, yet is rapidly employed when Joe chases Frank through winding urban streets. In one shot Frank scales down some winding steps and stops to catch his breath. As he leaves, he covers half the view of the camera's view with his shadow. Complimenting this exit, Zinnemann has Frank enter the next shot covering part of the camera in shadow until his run gets far enough for panoramic vision. The effect of this cut is that the viewer is not taken out of the suspense of the scene by imagining how the scene was constructed. The 'magic of cinema,' as some call it, maintained. Incubated by this smooth editing, *Act of Violence* can be seen by a viewer as a reality confined to the hour and a half in the cinema. This is because the film has seamless transitions but few of the shots are perspectival. Hence, the viewer can feel the fabric of the story as a voyeur rather than as the character themselves. This conclusion leads to another question though, for what does it mean for a scene to be shot and edited from the perspective of a character?

Hearing of this chase scene in *Act of Violence* one might be struck by how similar it sounds to the procedure used by Kurosawa to portray Murakami chase the gun thief at the beginning of *Stray Dog*. What differs between the two scenes is that Kurosawa uses the sequence to grow to establish that the story will be told from Murakami's viewpoint, rather than a viewer estranged from the character's emotions. *Stray Dog* portrays the character's perspective with tracking shots of its protagonist, point of view shots and an increasing pace to its cuts. Although the choice to record tracking and point of view shots was done before and on set, the selection of the shot, as seen in the finished film, was done in editing process. Tracking shots, where the camera moves to keep a character in the frame, are used in both *Act of Violence* and *Stray Dog*, but in the latter the choice was made to make the tracking of the character sharper, closer to the face and over a longer period of time. Towards the end of the chase sequence Kurosawa wanted to translate Murakami's sense of bewilderment in such a way that the tension is felt by the viewer as much as the character. In this penultimate shot of the chase the camera follows him stumble from left to right, keeping him centered the whole time. Murakami is tight in the frame, his body taking up a third of the screen and his head nearly being cut off at the top. Kurosawa contrasts the claustrophobia of Murakami's place in the frame with the otherwise wide and open backdrop of the scene. This juxtaposition establishes that the filmic form will describe the mental state of the character without dialogue or overly explicit image facts. The viewer can take the role of a distant voyeur when Frank reveals his past in *Act of Violence*, because Zinnemann portrays Frank's mental state plainly through dialogue, harsh lighting and the facial expression.

Kurosawa gives us Murakami's mind through the cinematic language in a manner that one cannot escape, for it is intertwined with the essential process of watching the film.

Kurosawa's perspectival editing stems from his ability to place the camera as the character, while hiding the filmmaking process from the forefront of the viewer's mind. One might presume then Rossellini's editing does not forge as strong an emotional connection to the characters, because he does not hide all the 'seams' of the filmmaking process when editing. The problem with this presumption is that it assumes there is only one type of character viewer relation. Rossellini harnesses a style of emotional connection that drastically diverges from both Kurosawa and Zinnemann. Instead of hiding the 'seams,' Rossellini embraces them. The signs of his film-making add to the aesthetic of the film as documenting reality. One knows they are watching a documentary, because the camera does not prioritize hiding its presence over its search for an aspect of reality. The character's connection to the viewer is based on the presumption that the events they are going through are real and beyond the camera. Rossellini is not wholly bound by the 'cinematic magic' that Kurosawa perfects to portray his characters.

The viewer sees the camera as reporting rather than storytelling, thus encouraging a feeling of sorrow for how true and real the character's circumstances are. This style of documenting is boldly introduced



when Rossellini mimics newsreel footage in his opening of episode one, and subsequently



following the opening of every episode. Subtler though is his use of cutting to portray scenes of action. In episode four of *Paisà* Harriet and Massimo frantically knock at a door to be let in and escape enemy gunfire. Rossellini tracks the two run to the door, and then leaves the camera stagnantly focused on them without changing camera position for an uncomfortable ten seconds. One would expect that Rossellini cuts to a close-up or at least to a tighter angle as to convey the intensity of the scene through cinematic language, yet he keeps the camera the camera neutrally centered and still. The fact that Rossellini does over intensify the scene with a sequence of tighter shots gives the viewer the sense of worried agitation. Because the event is made to look ‘real’ in its documentation, the stakes of the scene are increased as these are ‘real’ people in danger. The viewer’s inability to help them is what creates this sense of unease. The lighting and editing that makes the viewer aware of *Act of Violence* as a movie, and not a series of potentially true events, is what dampens how emotionally forceful the film would have been on an American viewer as to how *Paisà* would have affected an Italian viewer.

The contrast between Rossellini and Zinnemann’s use of editing to portray action is accentuated when one looks at how they treat the simplest of movements. In *Paisà*, scenes of conflict can be mostly eventless up until, and sometimes including, the point of death. One such inconspicuous act is that of walking in potential danger. When characters in *Paisà* walk into harm and danger, like Frank does in the penultimate scene of *Act of Violence*, Rossellini emphasizes the walk rather than the danger in his editing style. Returning to episode four of *Paisà*, there is a scene where Harriet and Massimo traverse the rubble of a block of buildings near the recent report of gunfire. Rossellini captures the pair walk from one side of the screen to the other. The angle he shoots them running is an acute angle so that their exit from the scene is slower than they would have had to should he have cut sooner or framed the scene differently.

them in assures that their exit from the frame is long. Watching a transition from one event to the next is tedious for most viewers as they are constantly expecting an event, a stimulus of intrigue. This tedium adds to the sense that Rossellini is mirroring a documentarian style. In documentary one might not be able to fully orchestrate or plan what they catch on camera, as many directors of the genre do not want to interfere and break the nature of what they are shooting, hoping to capture the subject living as if the camera were not there. In the same way, Rossellini's angle gives the viewer the impression that the way the characters run was unexpected. Rossellini style in this way is a reaction yet again to newsreel footage where everything from marching to heavy conflict is perfectly centered in the frame and cut in montage so as to constantly engage the viewer. This contrast works among many others throughout the film in Rossellini mission to distance cinema from an American style of visual efficiency, so that post-war Italian cinema can have a defined form of its own.

Another stylistic element that Rossellini uses to build a post-war Italian identity is to tell a parallel story in the background of the scene. As Harriet and Massimo run through the rubble in episode four, the top of the Duomo stands boldly among ruin. The image harkens back to the scene earlier of a British officer admiring the monuments, all the while the people of Florence suffer in the fight against fascists. The two scenes pair as yet another critique on the newsreel reports of victories that typically show a general parade along a monument with a narrator giving a quick claim about the victory's place within Italy's romanticized past. Rarely do these newsreels include the carnage that lies past these monuments. Rossellini's argument materializes as he surrounds the frame with war-torn life, making what is hidden in the newsreels unavoidable present. The reason behind this choice is that without including the scars of the war with its eventual victory the viewer forgets the many who perished to make that success possible. In turn,

this may have lead survivors of the conflict to repress their inner trauma. He refutes the type of soldier that saw the Italian campaign as part of ‘the grand tour of Europe. He replaces the image of the liberator with that of the tourist.’<sup>26</sup> Rossellini uses the background to defend the trauma of Italians who suffered in the war from being forgotten to ‘aesthetic contemplation.’<sup>27</sup>

The Duomo is part of an overall style of framing and editing Rossellini uses to let the background speak for itself. For a brief moment a parallel narrative is being told, that of how the country as a whole is suffering. While the events being told drastically affect a few people, the nation of Italy as a united force crumbles as signified by the monuments of Rome and Florence in episode three and four respectively, but also the bombardment and denial of land in all the other episodes. To the ‘White Telephone’ films of pre-war Italy, a background was a tool in expressing and enforcing the viewer’s understanding of the narrative’s place and time. With this it lacked the ability to draw the viewer into the scene, to give them a sense of the stakes involved with the scene. Rossellini’s response is nothing less than revolutionary when one considers the state of Italian cinema prior to the war. As Harriet and Massimo run through the rubble their lives are in jeopardy, but moreover the country is in pandemonium. The stakes are not just joy and sadness, but life and death. What is remarkable about Rossellini’s hand in film form is that he can balance the aesthetic of an impromptu camera, as previously described through the angle which the captures the pair running, with this deeply planned out and considered allegorical background.

One might question whether a director’s use of the background is truly an editing matter. They might presume that background is wholly a matter of art design and narrative. Film editing

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<sup>26</sup> Marcus Millicent, *After Fellini: National Cinema in the Postmodern Age*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 26

<sup>27</sup> Amberson, *Battling History*, 392–407

is a process of structuring and altering footage, but also story. Editing can be thought about by a director before and during shooting, as the structuring of the story happens before production. In turn, composing the story in pre-production involves considering what surrounds the event being portrayed; it involves describing the scene, background and all. The six-part episodic framework of *Paisà* was imagined in the early stages of the film's conception and his use of background is intrinsic to this structure. As the viewer is forced to decompress six stories of impactful significance, a rolling thread among them, the inglorious struggle of Italy, brings the greater story into unison. Thus the use of background is both a tool in production to aid the edit and an element of constructing the story established in the pre-production state. Each director approached how to use background from different vantage points. For Rossellini it fit in with his image of shooting 'the real'.

Kurosawa did not give the viewer the impression that any shot was done without extensive planning, scrutiny and precision. With this he lost the viewer's perspective of realism, or at least in the way that Rossellini's rough and awkward cuts illicit the real. While he also tells an alternative narrative through the background, he combines it with stylistic choices other than realism for an effect that is quite different. As explored earlier in the chapter, in two scenes of *Stray Dog* Kurosawa frames detective Murakami within the rubble of a garden, and in another scene is framed among the planks of a bombarded dock. The setting is quite an understated display of war wreckage when one looks at it from having just watched *Paisà*, but when one remembers that Kurosawa created the film at a time when the occupying American regulatory body banned all portrayals of war in film, thus the fact that the scenes were able to sneak through at all is a credit to Kurosawa's artful method of film-making. Ironically, the only real censorship issue Kurosawa had to deal with in post-production was from the Society for the Prevention of

Cruelty to Animals branch of the occupying American censor. The censor deemed that a panting dog connoted that they injected rabies into the animal.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, the censor unknowingly pushed Kurosawa to be all the more poignant in his commentary on war experience.

Kurosawa was bold and artistically confident enough to go as far as to portray the effects of firebombing in the montage of the market scene. Broken concrete and torn canopies intersect Murakami's begrudging walk. The beauty of Kurosawa's craft is that the use of such images fits the narrative, with Murakami in a frantic state of despair looking everywhere and anywhere for the gun, but also fits with the underlying message that war trauma can define one's perception of a situation. This is a key distinction between Kurosawa and Rossellini. In *Paisà*, Rossellini takes detours from the overall narrative of an episode to give the viewer a vignette of a background character's life. One such moment occurs when Massimo and Harriet come across a group towing water across a road guarded by snipers. We never see these people again and it has little significance for the main pair's journey, but it gives commentary to how even the simplest of tasks were a struggle. While Kurosawa does use the backdrop to bring conversation to aspects of post-war life outside the immediate narrative, he never lets this outside narrative take the viewer too far away from Murakami's journey. No new characters are introduced in *Stray Dog* without them having an impact on how Murakami finds his gun, and thus the side narratives of these people do not linger in their abstraction. With the water peddlers of *Paisà* the viewer can still be questioning their well-being when Harriet and Massimo run through rubble. When Murakami finds Honda, a gun-runner, in *Stray Dog* the two interact, we get an insight into this man's life and then the two never see each other for the rest of the film. In that interaction, however, Honda gives Murakami a lead to chase, pushing the detective further along his trail. Kurosawa is able to

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<sup>28</sup> Kurosawa, *Something like an Autobiography*, 174

comment on Japan's social decay in the wake losing an identity once filled by imperial conquest, all the while supplying the viewer a 'story fact'. This difference between the two directors is telling of how censorship affected artistic expression at the time, but also how their different audiences received societal critique.

In some ways the American cultural reaction to traumatic experiences from the Second World War went along the lines of "forget and move on". Zinnemann works with this theme when he plays with setting and background in *Act of Violence*. In the baseline narrative of the film Frank returns from war and moves to the suburbs from the city. When Frank describes his experiences to Edith, he explains that their move from the city was motivated by the want to get away from anyone who could have known him before the war. Suburbia would be his new identity. The imagery of the two main settings of the film, the city and the suburb, are clearly distinguishable. In the exterior scenes of the suburbs, Zinnemann lets the sky into frame, which itself gives the sense of the area being tranquil and spacious. In the interior scenes, the camera still leaves Frank and Edith head room, so that in their conversations there is the freedom to walk around in the frame expressing themselves. Only when Joe makes his presence known does the camera press into the character's faces, suppressing their movement. The distinction between the urban portrayal is drastic. Instead of including the sky in the shot, in urban spaces Zinnemann shows the ground. The incorporation of the floor into the space's background gives the viewer the sense that the space is revealing. We see dirt, grime and every detail which makes the city floor what it is. There is a raw, brutal truth to the image, as nothing is left out or sanitized. It is no coincidence that this change in framing and location comes at the same time Frank reveals his past, with all the difficult truths that came with it. Suburbia held the fragile false feeling of normality, while the city was a place of uncomfortable truths.

Zinnemann asserts this theme again when Frank talks to a lawyer stating Frank's predicament, saying "You made a new life for yourself, didn't you? Then you're entitled to protect it." So ingrained in the post-war American psyche that one should forget, that a person forcing one to remember is infringement one should 'protect from'. Making someone remember is an attack. While Joe's attack is intended to be primarily physical by killing Frank, the people around Frank are more concerned about the sociological offence Joe's presence brings. It connotes that every citizen not only has the right, but the duty to suppress their war experience, unless it be some superficial narrative of the war being calm and courageous. In this way, Rossellini and Zinnemann both draw attention to what newsreels of the time left out; that the war's casualties were far reaching. Yet the pair come at the issue from different vantage points. Rossellini critiques the falsehoods of the post-war narrative that is highly visible: ruins, poverty and death. Conversely, Zinnemann brings to light what is often not seen. The psychological impact on the war on individuals and the consequential sociological impact of escapism. Frank's physical shift of location mirrors the suppression of traumatic experience that moved swaths of America to the suburbs. Zinnemann's use of Frank as an allegory of the post-war American mindset to mental healing is subtle and non-confrontational, at least one compares it to Rossellini's brash title sequence conflicting with the images the viewer sees.

Although poignant and impactful, his sub-narrative is seemingly muted in part by how Zinnemann distracts the viewer. He uses the staple features of noir, sensational lighting and dramatic performances, to divert the viewer from a story that might be too close to home, too tough to handle head on in the manner Rossellini and Kurosawa does. The vibrancy of action and death hide's the viewer from what is actually a harrowing story of pain, betrayal and tragic redemption. Zinnemann shows Frank's life as momentous and theatrical once Joe seeks him out.

To avoid the mundane and the everyday, Zinnemann does not let the shot go for any longer than it has to. His cuts are sharp and poignant. In one scene Frank runs along the winding streets of the city. Zinnemann cuts as soon as or right before Frank leaves or would leave the frame. The viewer does not have time to ponder his state of mind let alone their own attitude to war trauma. Only in the final scene do we have this luxury to think and are burdened with what the film truly implies. The quick cuts die down and a long take guides us and Joe from a crowd of bystanders to the city scape.

Despite how suspenseful the climax of Frank's death was, his death achieved little. This is another commonality between Zinnemann and Rossellini with the latter also highlighting the futility of some attempts at heroism when in the face of death, it means nothing. *Paisà* ends with the camera tilting away from the drowning partisans to a vacant river. Both directors end their films by moving from death to the greater world, the world of the living and the world of the viewer. How do the survivors live on? For Kurosawa the question is equally true and open. Detective Murakami insinuates at the end of *Stray Dog* that the only difference between himself and the killer he stopped was a mentor to lead him the right path. The luck of circumstance brought Murakami away from crime after witnessing so much death around him. The three filmmakers strove to construct a new identity for their fellow countrymen by questioning the viewer's perception of the past, so that they can understand where they are now. Whether intentional or not, they have also questioned our perception of cinema's past, guiding a new understanding of what one is watching today and what we can expect of the future.



## Conclusion

Akira Kurosawa, Roberto Rossellini and Fred Zinnemann are innovators, not just as filmmakers, but as communicators. They were able to translate emotions in ways one might have thought unavailable to the filmic form. Kurosawa put the camera in the mind of a character. Rossellini used the unadulterated images around Italy to portray a narrative of vivid reality. Zinnemann built upon a genre of dynamic thrill, and shifted this excited energy to ways one could explore societal change.

But most all they healed nations and ushered in an age of cultural prosperity. Art was to be an essential part of one's identity. Following Kurosawa's lead, a plethora of Japanese filmmakers would continue questioning what it meant to be Japanese in the post-war era. Kurosawa would continue to confront existential issues, of which national identity always lingered, till his death. Likewise, Italian cinema would be adored and studied across the world for its developments in neorealism. The style would inspire filmmakers elsewhere to create films in a similar vein with their own stylistic twist. Director John Cassavetes would bring neorealist influences to American independent cinema in how he approached acting and location shooting in films like *Faces* (1968) and *Shadows* (1959). Among many prominent filmmakers of the French New Wave Film, the film critic and theorist Andre Bazin found Rossellini to be the gatekeeper to a new style that could be adopted and transformed to infinite possibilities.

Noir would illuminate what most of American media would not. Filmmakers, like Zinnemann, would show the other side to America's post-war prosperity. Not only did these director's help define their own nation's cultural identity, they expanded international artistic cooperation and influence. There was a cross-proliferation of styles fueled by a shared feeling

across different experiences. A reciprocal artistic exchange occurred that highlighted each country's cultural identity, but sought to see its worth as incorporated in another's.

Post-war films by Kurosawa, Zinnemann and Rossellini have gained secondary properties to being art. They are now social artifacts. They indicate the feeling of their time. The national spirit of America, Japan and Italy directly after the war could be surmised by dates of surrender, trials and tense Soviet relations, but this does not truly capture the mind of the citizen. This is crucial in an overall understanding of the time, for it their experience that shapes how the country's rebuilt and healed. If one considers foreign relations and grand strategy exclusive of culture they may not understand that a leader made a decision in compromise with the will of the people. The synthesis of art and history is what reflects the national consciousness. Without knowing the intricacies of such a personal past, it is hard to imagine we can know why decisions are made in the present, let alone prepare for the future.

That being said, to claim that these directors reflect the spirit of their nations after the war has the danger of looking over the fact that they brought upon the change in sentiment as much as they are in hindsight signifiers of it. Rossellini did not simply seek to capture the spirit of Italy after the war; he sought to do so in a way that was pioneering, and would subsequently change the feeling of the nation. All three films question our narrative pre-conceptions of villains and heroes that their respective nations had put forth. Rossellini's protagonists in *Paisà* are often ineffective. They make great sacrifices, which often amount to their death, yet achieve nothing. The story of the victor is replaced by the truest sense of tragedy. The viewer should find solace beyond the screen. In *Act of Violence*, Zinnemann casts doubt on whether Frank is a protagonist for his war-time betrayal, but he also questions Joe's place as a villain considering that his quest for vengeance is well founded. Kurosawa's protagonist is a warped reflection of the antagonist,

diverging from one moment in their lives. Murakami was able to find a job, a mentor, and with those the purpose to live. They were both traumatized by the war, but only one was able to move on. The stylistic advancements the directors made are distinct from one other, but united by a theme of reconciling one's trauma.

How can a director learn, use and build upon the works of filmmakers making art right after the Second World War? Do the films of Kurosawa, Rossellini and Zinnemann translate the war experience in such a way that a film could depict it today with comparable validity and emotional impact?

Countless films have built upon the styles and techniques developed by directors right after the war, but few have captured the underlying sentiment of loss. Behind every new innovation Kurosawa, Rossellini and Zinnemann made, there existed the will to portray war trauma. Capturing an experience required a visceral sensation, something that was so all-encompassing that the viewer felt the character's anguish in themselves. A recent film sought to do so by intersecting one specific moment in war. Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk* sought to portray the Battle of Dunkirk through the fragmented experiences of fishermen, generals and soldiers, both British and French. As *Paisà* did, *Dunkirk* dissects one event in the war by following a series of characters across different plains. Although the many stories intersect, each tell of individuals that are battling to survive, struggling to aid others or conflicted in their own sense of personal doom. The film perpetually enacts the perspectival shooting that we see in *Stray Dog*. Like Kurosawa, Nolan gives mood to characters by using quick intersecting cuts that mimic the tempo of a frantic mind. The accompanying dynamic soundtrack Nolan adds to the film gives an additional sense of intensity to an individual's action. But beyond the individual, the sound's consistent rhythm links each narrative to a greater sense of the whole. At times it is intentionally

unclear whether the soundtrack is diegetic or non-diegetic as the beats of the music sometimes intersect with wind, gunfire and bombardment. Likewise, there is a play with one's perception of time, as an event, like a plane crashing, might occur at different moments in different personal narratives. The impact of these two stylistic devices, sound and perception, is that the film briefly throws the viewer into bewilderment, emulating what a soldier on the beaches were feeling when they witnessed a plane shoot at them or a destroyer sunk. This jarring experience mirrors how Kurosawa portrayed Murakami in the market, yet in an updated fashion. Film viewers of the 21st Century has seen image manipulation, in the way Kurosawa used it when he blended images of Murakami with the straw roof, so many times that they have become somewhat desensitized to the awe-intending technique. While it does not mean we do not feel Murakami's mental state in the scene, fading a translucent image over another does not throw the viewer out of their seat like the thunderous beat in *Dunkirk*.

Like Rossellini and Kurosawa, Nolan shot on the beaches of Malo-les-Bains near Dunkirk, rather than a constructed set or just a convenient new place.<sup>29</sup> He used what is real and natural to speak for itself. The size of the beach, its aesthetic color palette and the general emotion tide in with the site are evident, because of this on location shooting. The dynamism of *Act of Violence*'s shadows is distinctly not present in Dunkirk, for Nolan highlights the essential impactful features of his filmic style by restricting the exploration of other features. The same principle applies even within certain features, like shadow and color. The pale colors that paint most scenes give the viewer an impactful contrast to the vibrant reds of an emergency alarm and the ending sunset. The film does not just differ from *Act of Violence*, but all three of the films discussed in this essay in large because it is from the perspective of a different nation. *Dunkirk* is

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<sup>29</sup> Hugh Skyes, "What Do People in Dunkirk Make of the Film Dunkirk?"  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40803431>

a British experience of the war, just as *Paisà* is unavoidably Italian. It is the story of a British evacuation, as told by a British director, starring British actors, but even that is not what truly makes the film feel like the British experience of the war. Nolan emotes a tone of fear and hopelessness till the film's final moments of longing relief. Built with lighting, editing, sound and the countless other filmic techniques that make up the form, *Dunkirk* captures the British national consciousness at that moment. Showing a viewer where a nation's underlying identity came from is powerful. For a viewer to question who they are they must first know where they are now. How can someone find the essence of their identity without knowing what is around them? As much as people define themselves in the actions they make throughout their lives, they are still, at least in part, a product of what they were born into. The national consciousness, as found from looking at the past, shines through in its citizens in the present. If a director can capture the traumas of war that lead to this consciousness, then they can help the viewer find who they truly are. Kurosawa, Rossellini, Zinnemann and now Nolan have achieved this feat. One can only hope that the filmmakers to come will seek to do the same.

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