

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR ANDY FETSCHER

1) Urbex is your first feature. How was it?

Fantastic! I was delivered a script with a topic and atmosphere I immediately was enthusiastic about. And I had the opportunity of working with producers who allowed me great liberty from the very first moment and who trusted me more than I could have ever expected it from any local TV production. Indeed for a short moment I considered what consequences it might have for me, if I decided to make my debut with a horror movie (these flicks are not welcome in Germany) – but I soon came to the conclusion, that life is much too short, to bother yourself with that kind of question...

2) Why did you choose the theme of Nazism and the Second World War?

Berlin is very crucial for this movie. It seems to be one of the most popular cities in the world these days. And for foreigners that come to Berlin to experience something very outstanding – what this movie is about - National Socialism plays a very important role. People from every country have a very different background and have learned in different ways to deal with the past. But it would be a lie to suggest that what happened during World War II does not affect the sensitivity of the tourists coming to Berlin. It's macabre, but it's true. And in the process of the story it's our intention to break with these expectations swiftly and systematically by moving away in a utterly different and unpredictable direction.

3) How did you choose your actors?

For me the most important point was to find people who were keen to join my crew and me in this delicate and unpredictable adventure. We were mainly shooting in real locations, places you don't want to be in. From the very first moment I told every actor: On each day you will get a new scratch, and you'll have to scramble through puddles of dirt without moist toilet tissues everywhere around, this won't be a holiday! And those who were the most prepared to face these very difficult shooting conditions were the ones we chose. Besides, the actors we picked were the ones who made their characters the most intriguing.

4) How did you choose the locations?

I deliberately chose locations where I knew I would have to confine myself once we would start working. Whenever I can, I avoid shooting in a studio and prefer to shoot on locations where one has to make sacrifices. That keeps one awake. Apart from this I was appealed by the idea of working in sealed up, land places that were abandoned and forgotten a long time ago – even if sometimes that implied breaking the law. I was ready to pay the price with the justice for the troubles and the aggravation that went with this choice.

5) How and with what technique did you shoot the film?

Fast and visceral! We had to improvise a lot, to always stay flexible. Or to be able to strike the set and run in case the authorities got wind of us and came to arrest us. Our small camera and the limited equipment was always advantageous to us. I can remember that on one of the last days of shooting we vacated a location at the last second just before more than a dozen security officials showed up and the tunnel in which we were shooting descended into sheer chaos. The producers that day were also there, and they had a lot of fun as well.

6) Most of the scenes take place at night or in interiors. How did you resolve the lighting problems?

Like I said I appreciate to be challenged by difficult situations. You have to be inventive. Of course we did not have a big lighting package as on other projects. But I can say that one can light a whole factory building with just one flashlight. And that's what we did sometimes. Only the filming on the subway tracks made my heart race thinking that at any second a train could pass by as the electrical cables were running diagonally across the rails. But the electricians were all in good condition and could sprint in case of an emergency...

7) Is it true that part of your crew got arrested while shooting "Urban Explorer"?

We very badly needed a pov from the tracks of an approaching subway train, but couldn't get the permission of the the BVG (Berlin Transportation Association). So Peter, the assistant director and I sneaked on the tracks and into a tunnel - which of course was very stupid. But your mind is not rational while shooting a picture. Nobody saw us, not even the passengers on the platform. But Peter and I only had flashlights to do the lighting effects and these flashlights must have somehow attracted the attention of the train driver. I don't know, but suddenly the platform was full of policemen. They wouldn't come down to get us, but they ordered us to come back. Peter and I thought about running all the way to the next station, but we had a very tight shooting schedule, so we tried our luck. And we were not lucky. We had to spend the night in jail. Man that was funny! But stupid, we lost one day of shooting...

8) Why is the only survivor the guide, who by the way is not your main character?

Because he is the one who is responsible for the trip and its deadly consequence. The epilogue of the movie is so much the sweeter that the only survivor will have to bear the guilt for all the people who had to die. Just imagine how this guy is going to feel like once he grasps the whole extent of the terror...

9) Do urban explorers exist in Berlin?

Of course! In every large city on this planet there is a second city below the surface. And especially in urban places where you still can find so many significant leftovers of the past, as in Berlin, urban exploring gains an ever larger dimension. I can remember that during pre-production a friend and I broke into a shut down and half-collapsed beer factory in East Berlin at about 3 am. In a seedy storage depot we almost burst through the rotten floor and would have been swallowed by the huge evil-smelling abyss. At that very moment it became obvious to me that this movie had to be done.

10) Does this film have a message or is it just for entertainment?

I refuse to answer that question in a profound and sophisticated way: Life is short – savor every minute you have – and if there is someone you love, let him or her know.

11) What criteria for you defines a good film?

A good conflict. In our particular case a good villain. Because he is the mirror image of our soul – and the deeper we have to look into our own soul, the faster our heart beats.

12) Are you satisfied of the end result?

No, I've never been satisfied. Needless to say that I'd still like to shoot some additional sequences and every second night I wake up with a new concept to re-edit. All the same I know that at some point it's enough. Producers want to have a finished movie as soon as possible. And once the child is born into the world, you love it. Right?

13) Why did you choose the horror / thriller genre?

Horror movies are probably the earliest and most archaic way of story telling. In ancient times men sat around the fire telling one another ghost stories to make a night of it. The old Greeks who invented the drama called it catharsis: by fear and compassion your soul will be purified. Eerie stories keep you awake and alert. They tell you in no uncertain terms of what ilk you are made of. And it's a good thing to not lose the sight of how valuable life is. Yet if your shrieking girlfriend or boyfriend during the movie dig their nails into your upper arm the screening is even more pleasant!