

Freedom to Create

Kolkata: In the recently-held 9th Kolkata film festival, the trilogy: 'The Room', 'Pentamagica' and 'The Dark Side of Our Inner Space' by the controversial German film-maker and head of 'wtp international filmproduction', Roland Reber, was screened. In a conversation with Romain Maitra, Mr Reber explains that he makes and produces films differently — with a small, fixed team whose members share many responsibilities together:

You wrote many plays, and acted and directed in quite a few in the past. What made you switch over to film making?

Yes, I have been a playwright, director, stage actor and a teacher for acting in Germany and other countries. Among many other things, I also founded the Theatre Institute in Hamburg in 1981 and the World Theatre Project in 1989. An essential part of my earlier activities was dealing with the intercultural aspects as well as innovative techniques for actors and directors.

When I wanted to say something about a particular subject, I wrote a play and directed it myself. However, there came a point when I realised that the stage has a limited boundary. That is how I came to film-making because cinema gives me more creative freedom. For me, film-making is like speaking and it is closer to my constitution. However, as I do not understand myself fully, I do not understand my films fully either.

Although there is a recognisable stamp in the films I make, my style and treatment of film-making depends on the subject. It can differ from one film to another. That is why, the 'Dogme' films, for example, which originated in Denmark in 1995 with its fixed genre formula, can never be my way of film-making. *You have a completely novel way of making and producing films.*

I always work with the same persons and we call ourselves a family. We produce, discuss and develop our ideas together. The ideas come from all over — from my actors, assistants, technical crew and producers who are all the same handful of people, each with multiple responsibilities. The script, based on a concept, starts with only a few pages. It could begin as a monologue, a dialogue or a passage which gets expanded and changed in the final version which I write myself. However, this slim script gets further developed during the shoot.

I don't believe in story-telling in a narrative pattern because our lives are not written like stories with preconceived structure and order. It is multi-dimensional with abrupt transitions and all my films, in some way, are a quest for life, identity and self. Although, as a director, I decide the final shots, the settings and the music, my

companion Mira Gittner, who is also the chief actor and producer in my films, also decides on the cinematography and editing. *You always use the same actors and they seem to engage in a way which defies conventional acting.*

Everybody, including the manager and the crew, acts in my films. I do not relate to my actors like a trainer in a circus. I ask them to go ahead with what they think about the roles. My actors like Gittner, Marina Anna Eich and Patricia Koch often try to relate themselves to the characters of the film by reflecting on their own nature and experience. I don't believe in the conventional notion of 'acting' either. The real acting, in my opinion, is possible only when it is personal and authentic. Those viewing the actor act should completely identify with the character.

Your films are critical of German society. How are they viewed by your compatriots?

In general, the Germans have become decadent. They are much more interested in money and career than in questioning the values of life. In that sense, my kind of cinema is very un-German. I touch the raw nerves of society by posing questions and my films can be uncomfortable. There exists an 'official' Germany which celebrates the same figures in the domain of art

or of cinema and, in this way, for example, Doris Doerrie has become the official symbol of feminist film-making. However, I make films for everyone, not for the spectators of any particular country.

What is the best way to become an independent film-maker devoid of the

Q&A

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usual pressures that the market brings?

We make films with very meagre budgets and we do not listen to anybody outside when we make films. When we have an idea, all we need is a camera and a sound system. We shoot on digital and have it transferred to 35mm. This gives us the freedom to go experimental. In Germany, most of the film-makers now are just like bankers — without any philosophical or aesthetic vision. They make well-designed, tailored films which are mostly dictated, through the producer, by the market.

My team and I don't depend on the German or the West European market. The film market in Germany is very grim, thanks to the domination of Hollywood. If it is 65 per cent Hollywood films, it only 16 per cent German films. In this context, I have found a solution. My group and I travel round the world, show our films, and look for space where they can run. My trilogy was sold in Slovenia, Croatia, South America, and Egypt. *The Room* was first released in Egypt. In that sense, I am one of the pioneers in Germany and I hope my example will be followed by others.



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