

Investigating the Relationship between Causes and Effects: An Interview with Francesco Rosi

Author(s): Gary Crowdus and Francesco Rosi

Source: *Cinéaste*, 1994, Vol. 20, No. 4 (1994), pp. 26-27

.Published by: Cineaste Publishers, Inc

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41687351>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Cineaste Publishers, Inc. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Cinéaste*

Investigating the Relationship between Causes and Effects

An Interview with Francesco Rosi

by Gary Crowdus

During his visit to New York in December 1993 for screenings of *Neapolitan Diary* at the Public Theater, Francesco Rosi was interviewed at the Italian Cultural Institute by Cineaste Editor Gary Crowdus. Simultaneous translation from the Italian was provided by Michael Moore.

Cineaste: Your films are political, it seems to me, as much because of the way they are structured as because of your subject matter.

Francesco Rosi: Yes, many of my films—such as *Salvatore Giuliano*, *Hands Over the City*, *Lucky Luciano*, and *The Mattei Affair*—are structured as investigations into the relationship between causes and effects. When I devised this method in *Salvatore Giuliano*, this search for the truth became the narrative line of the film. I wanted to pose questions to the audience, questions I either didn't know the answers to or did not wish to give answers to. My films are not *policiers*, or thrillers, but instead aim to provoke, to insinuate doubts, to challenge the official statements and certainties from the powers that be which hide real interests and the truth.

As the narrator, the storyteller, I communicate my impressions to the audience, whom I consider a traveling companion in my investigation into human feelings and into facts that cannot always be accepted for what they appear to be. These facts, these events, need to be interpreted, and this interpretation is what gives rise to ambiguity.

In some of the Italian mysteries that my films have dealt with, a single truth doesn't exist, so I don't want to offer a simple answer. The films are interested in the search for truth and in encouraging reflection. To be effective, the questions the films ask must continue to live in the viewer even after the film is over. After my first few films, in fact, I stopped putting the words 'The End' at the conclusion because I think films should not end but should continue to grow inside us. Ideally, they should grow inside us over the years, the same way that our historical memory grows inside of us—and films are our most vital historical documentation. This power of suggestion is what defines the greatness of a film, and what I would even say is its function.

Cineaste: What sort of political influence does the cinema, vis-à-vis television or the press, have in Italy today?

Rosi: Some films have anticipated what is currently going on in Italy. One example is my film, *Hands Over the City*, not because of any particular prophetic qualities or talents, but because films are a testimony to the reality in which we live and to a filmmaker's desire to

understand, to his or her ability to know how to see. Sometimes a filmmaker can see things before they've become clear to everyone else. Some things are just sitting there waiting to be seen by eyes that know how to see or by the political will to show these things to other people.

The political function of a film is to provoke and sometimes films produce results. I don't think films can change politics or history, but sometimes they can influence events. For example, thanks to the public showings of *Salvatore Giuliano* in 1962, two Italian politicians—Girolamo Li Causi of the Italian Communist Party and Simone Gatto of the Italian Socialist Party—called for the establishment of the first Antimafia Commission. A few months after the first screenings of the film, Parliament agreed to establish the commission because, in the face of a film like this—which documented the cooperation between the Mafia, government institutions, and the various police forces in Italy—it could no longer deny to the public the existence of such activities.

Cineaste: Do you prefer to have your films shown in theaters or would you be more interested in having them shown on TV so as to reach a larger audience?

Rosi: I prefer theaters because the true destination of a film is movie theaters. The showing of a film on TV can naturally reach a large public, but it's not the same thing. Films shown on TV tend to be seen in a very distracted manner because of all the interruptions that occur at home—the telephone ringing, talking to friends, going to the bathroom, whatever—whereas seeing a film in a theater requires concentration. The moviegoing ritual is part of the mysterious power that films have. When I go to a movie theater, and sit down in the dark amidst hundreds of people I don't know, I can feel their response to the film, and it becomes a social event.

Cineaste: One of the characteristics of classic neorealism that one sees continuing in your work is the prominent use of nonprofessional actors. Would you explain your reasons for that?

Rosi: Well, a film like *Salvatore Giuliano* was made almost entirely without professional actors because I wanted to make it, in a very real sense, as a psychodrama. That is, I wanted to shoot in the places where Giuliano had lived, in the town where he was from, under the eyes of his mother and family, in the courtyard where his body was found, and, above all, with the participation of many of the people who ten years earlier had known Salvatore Giuliano and who had lived with him.

I wanted to involve these people in my film



Photo by Judy Janda



Two more Italian soldiers die in a futile assault on an impregnable Austrian position in Francesco Rosi's World War I drama, *Uomini Contro* (1970).

because I was sure their participation would convey elements of their suffering. In the scene shot in Montelepre, for example, where the women rush from their homes to the town square to protest the army's arrest of their husbands and sons, these women had been involved in the actual events. I knew that involving them in the film would provoke a huge emotional response, a remembrance of what had happened to them.

There were also only two or three professional actors in *Hands Over the City*. Carlo Fermariello, who played De Vita, the opposition councilman, and who became the lead actor in the film along with Rod Steiger, was not a professional actor. The guy who played the outgoing mayor in the film was a Neapolitan who had previously been a car salesman in Detroit before returning home. And the lawyer who was on the committee of inquiry was a real Neapolitan lawyer. I knew that their participation, because of their personal experience and sensitivity, would add a great deal to the film. When I chose Charles Siragusa to play himself in *Lucky Luciano*, I knew that by not using a professional actor for the part I would lose something in terms of the ability of an actor, but I was also sure I would gain something because of Siragusa's involvement in the actual prosecution of Luciano.

Cineaste: *One sees a real continuity among the key technicians you work with from film to film.*

Rosi: I always prefer working with the same collaborators because we know each other and our working methods well. Gianni Di Venanzo was the director of photography on my first five films, and, following his death in 1966, all my other films have been made with Pasqualino De Santis. But even on the films with Di Venanzo, Pasqualino was the camera operator on three of them, so we had already begun to develop an intimate working relationship. Pasqualino is a great cameraman. We were able to take shots with a hand-held camera for *The Mattei Affair* and *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* that would be impossible to repeat today. De Santis is an extremely sensitive director of photography, but one who always likes to take risks, to try different ways of lighting a scene. He lights with very minimal means, with few artificial lights. He's also a great connoisseur of film stocks and is always willing to try new things.

Cineaste: *Who makes decisions regarding camera placement and movement?*

Rosi: These are decisions the director makes and then with the cameraman you translate these decisions technically.

Cineaste: *Do you do this in advance or on the set? Do you do much storyboarding?*

Rosi: I decide the day before how I'm going to shoot a scene. The last thing I do in the evening, before closing up the set for the night, is to explain what I'm going to do the next day. I think this sort of work has to be prepared in advance, but obviously this can't be a set rule, and many times I decide on the camera position when I'm on location. There are many circumstances in which you may have to change everything at the last minute.

Sometimes, for some sequences, I prepare a little storyboard, as in *Illustrious Corpses* or *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, but I don't use the American system of preparing a storyboard for the entire film before it's shot. I do like to prepare the work in advance so I can explain it first to my cameraman and director of photography to assure that it will be done in the best possible way from a technical point of view.

Cineaste: *How do you work with your editor?*

Rosi: First of all, I only begin to edit a film after I've finished shooting. I never let the editor edit the film on his own. I sit at the moviola with the editor and we work together because I've thought about the editing while I'm shooting, so I already have the montage in mind. Nevertheless, while working at the moviola I might decide to change many things. With *The*

Mattei Affair, for example, many changes were made right at the moviola. This is something you can tell because of all the different kinds of material I used in that film. I don't often shoot a lot of coverage but many times I shoot with two cameras, not to have more choices but to have different perspectives on the same scene.

Cineaste: *In many of your films, the Mafia is portrayed as a very powerful element of society, and so thoroughly entrenched as to perhaps be ineradicable.*

Rosi: The Mafia has great power but it is not invincible. This has been proved in Italy over the last few years. For example, a so-called maxi-trial was instigated by a group of magistrates in Palermo—including Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsalino—which showed that a lot can be accomplished in the war against the Mafia. This trial marked a turning point and recently the state has been hitting the Mafia very hard. This doesn't mean that in a short period of time you're going to achieve significant results against such a complex phenomenon as the Mafia, but it does signal a major change in public opinion. We must also recognize a fundamental change in the Mafia culture itself. The Mafia and the Camorra—the Neapolitan version of the Mafia—are not just criminal societies, they're also cultures, certain mentalities.

When I made *Salvatore Giuliano*, they didn't even say the word 'Mafia' in Sicily. But in Sicily today young people organize protest marches against the Mafia and civic society has responded very strongly to such protests: People are aware of the sacrifice on the part of many judges, policemen, journalists, and even politicians who have paid with their lives in this struggle, and so there is a growing public awareness that we can and must achieve results against the Mafia.

Cineaste: *How do you evaluate the overall political situation in Italy today?*

Rosi: Everything's in movement in Italy today. On the part of Italian civic society, there's a huge demand for change, a very strong protest against a system of political and economic corruption, in connection with organized crime. We can't really say there are definite efforts today that will lead to conclusions, but I and many others believe that there is a movement of sorts that will lead to a second *risorgimento*, a second rising up, like the first *risorgimento* for Italian independence in the nineteenth century.

Cineaste: *What political party is going to be able to take the lead here? Are we looking for a new Garibaldi?*

Rosi: No, there is no new Garibaldi for now. But what is important is that there is all this movement, a very strong demand for change, and a rejection of a system of corruption that has tarnished, more or less, every political party. ■

RARE VIDEO

Discover **Facets Video**—the nation's great collection of over 20,000 foreign, classic American, silent, documentary, cult, experimental, animation, music, fine arts and children's videos and laser disks!

Purchase at prices as low as \$9.99, or rent-by-mail!

For free sampler catalog, call toll-free: 1-800-331-6197

FA
C
E
T
S
V
I
D
E
O

1517 West Fullerton Avenue

Chicago, Illinois 60614

Fax 312/929-5437