

Ettore Scola

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that's outside all of us. What counts is putting the actors in a situation where they can become the characters. When Depardieu made *The Last Woman and Bye Bye Monkey*, he gave everything. So did Hanna Schygulla in *Storia di Piera*; she participated totally in the role.

"That's the way I worked with Mastroianni and Tognazzi as well. In those days, Tognazzi was a bit like Depardieu today, but with less contradictions. Mastroianni for me always stands for reason. He represents the logical, the daily routine. Piccoli was like that too at the time, but I can't use him now. The women most important to me were Annie Girardot, Ornella Muti, and Hanna. Ornella represents what cannot be expressed. I like Isabelle Huppert too, but I preferred the mother's character in *Storia di Piera*, which I gave to Hanna. My next film will have Ornella and Hanna."

One thing Ferreri doesn't do is cast actors he considers as alteregos. "I don't think we need an alterego," he states. "We need to get into the belly of others, to explore others. You see, I've never looked back, never looked in the mirror to decipher whether I was happy or not. Now I'd like to find out how I managed to travel for 15 years without a moment of boredom. I used to be a 'hippie,' a free man, until I went to Spain and discovered the book *El Pisito* by Azcona. Then I started 'working.' I had discovered cinema as a child, but I was no film buff. It was a game of sorts. But if you ask me if I was happy then, well, I don't know the meaning of happiness—what it means to feel at ease with one's body."

Underneath the ferocious satire, the outrageous situations, and the subversive spirit, isn't there an unquenchable thirst for all things moderate, for "normality"? "Of course," agrees the director, "but for the moment we're abnormal, not in harmony with others. In this time of transition, people will seek this harmony—not a meaningless happiness. Maybe man is tragic and his life is nothing but suffering, but this suffering is harmonious with his way of being."

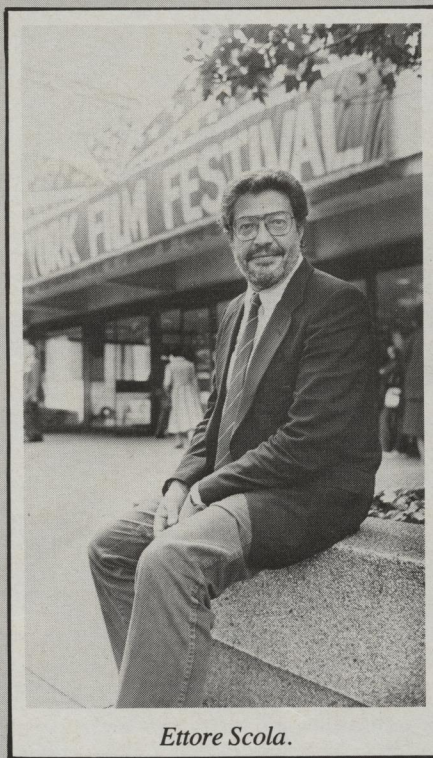
In several of his films, Ferreri uses the beach as the final image. "The sea," he explains, "is central to our lives. We're born in salt water, in the womb. But I don't use the sea as a symbol of hope. I no longer have hope; I have the certainty of change. We keep changing, for the better. We are the protagonists of our time and a protagonist doesn't need hope. We may be in the midst of a tragic moment, but it's active, productive, and strong."

—DAN YAKIR

## Ettore Scola

Few filmmakers have ventured to explore human dignity—or its absence—with more zeal than Ettore Scola. In films as different as *Down and Dirty* and his latest, *La nuit de Varennes*, he reveals a sensibility as refined as it is crude, as compassionate as it is cruel, as precise as it is loose. All these contradictions coexist peacefully and provocatively in a career that consists of the 15 features he has directed (plus some sketches in omnibus films) and the 50 scripts he wrote for others over the past decades. At 51, he is gradually becoming the most respected filmmaker in his country, which has done nothing to modify his vigor, a strength that survived consistent commercial success as well.

Born in 1931, Scola entered the film industry in the early Fifties and began collaborating on dozens of comedies—first pure romantic slapstick, then the stiletto of acute social observation. In this period Scola's scripts helped shape the personalities of Italy's most popular male stars. For Alberto Sordi he wrote *Due Notti con Cleopatra* (*Two Nights with Cleopatra*, 1954) and *Made in Italy* (1965); for Vittorio Gassman, *Il Mattatore* (*Love and Larceny*, 1960), *Il Sorpasso* (*The Easy Life*, 1962), and *Il Successo* (1963); for Ugo Tognazzi, *Alta Infedeltà* (*High Infidelity*) and *Il Magnifico Cornuto* (*The Magnificent Cuckold*), both 1964.



Ettore Scola.

That was the year he turned to directing, and again the maturing process—from farce to social comedy—was evident. His first international success was *Drama della Gelosia* (*The Pizza Triangle*, 1970), a pre-Wertmuller comedy with Marcello Mastroianni, Monica Vitti, and Giancarlo Giannini. With *C'era-vamo tanto Amati* (*We All Loved Each Other So Much*, 1975), his valentine to the early Italian cinema, Scola established his reputation as a critical and festival favorite, winning prizes at Cannes for *Brutti Sporchi e Cattivi* (*Down and Dirty*, 1976) and *Una Giornata Particolare* (*A Special Day*, 1977). The balletic camera movements of his films, including a complicated six-minute tracking shot that opens *A Special Day*, provide ironic commentary to the bitter travails of his characters. Scola can kick the spectator in the gut, spit in his face, drag him through the muck—and leave him equipped with a new consciousness, an awareness that is social, political, and aesthetic.

—DAN YAKIR

You began as a screenwriter, with dozens of screenplays for, among others, Dino Risi, Mario Monicelli, and Antonio Pietrangeli. How does an Italian screenwriter collaborate with the director?

It's always a give-and-take situation. From Pietrangeli, I learned to pay attention to women at a time when nobody spoke of feminism or even of women. Women in Italian cinema were always mothers, sisters, or whores, and nobody ever tried to understand what went on in a woman's mind. I wrote all of his films—*Io La Conoscevo Bene*, *Adua e le Compagne*, *La Parmigiana*, *Nata Di Marzo*—all with major female roles.

From Risi, I learned to include very light moments—add a meaningful touch without overstressing things. His camera appears to roam around casually, but it's really very observant. He's naturally talented, which is why I get upset when he makes a bad film. We made eight films together, including *The Easy Life* [*Il Sorpasso*] and *I Mostri*.

What kind of a rapport do you have with people like Risi?

In Italy, unlike in France, the auteurs see each other often. We get together every week; we're friends. We're not competitive the way they are in America. It doesn't matter who makes less.

How do you generate projects?

I don't know the exact moment when an idea is born, but ideas circulate



and you start studying them. My films are always preceded by long periods of writing—sometimes up to a year. I start alone, then invite other collaborators like Age-Scarpelli [the team of Agenore Incrocci and Furio Scarpelli] or Ruggero Maccari, the screenwriters with whom I work most often.

As to *We All Loved Each Other So Much*, I wanted to make an epic film about Italy at the end of the War, when I was very young, which would spill into our time—a film about the hope and despair regarding what we hoped for that didn't materialize. It took a year to write.

Italian cinema has almost always been concerned with the national reality—unlike the more “personal” French filmmakers. Maybe they're greater artists than we are, but they don't look around them. In Italy, on a few happy occasions, the cinema even anticipated the mentality and customs of the Italians. Divorce, for example, became legal partly due to some Italian films, which helped some people overcome the taboos of sex, family, and authority.

*Do you think that Italian cinema benefits artistically from its constant financial crisis?*

It has always been in a crisis, as long as I can recall. Without a crisis, Italian cinema would seem strange, as if it were controlled by the Mafia. And the cinema is just about the only field in Italy where the Mafia isn't present. We're not protected by the government and we're often disliked by it, because we're always critical, always poking fun. They prefer television, which is completely servile to the powers-that-be.

*You're considered an actor's director.*

I like actors a lot, because they're the ones to transmit my ideas to the public. So, before shooting, I try to make my ideas clear to them. They're my first public. I respect them. I think that even actors with great careers are used a bit differently in my films. Not because I force them to forget their personality, but I think the character is more important than the actor.

*What was it you wanted to bring out in Stefania Sandrelli and Vittorio Gassman in *We All Loved Each Other So Much* or *La Terrazza*?*

I wanted to use Stefania's instinct and intelligence. She has a natural outlook, almost like an animal. I know I can confide a character to her and she'll instinctively flesh it out. She forgets

herself completely and plunges into the character, which is why I sometimes keep in a film the mistakes she's made—say, when she forgets a line—because she's already so much into her role that she makes up for it.

In Gassman, there are many different actors—even some bad ones! He can do almost anything. But there's also a private side to him—I've known him very well, since I was 20 and he 30—and he has a timid, uncertain side, which contradicts his physique and looks.

*Do you feel like a marginal, or is it simply a useful position from which to examine your characters?*

I used to feel that way, when I arrived in Rome from Treviso in the south. I was four years old and felt quite different from the other kids at school. When I started making films, I also felt not too satisfied with what I was doing. I started as gagman, a ghostwriter. Now I feel that it wasn't such a bad way to break into filmmaking. It's a craft that no longer exists.

*When did you become interested in film?*

I've always been interested in images. I used to draw as a kid and published my drawing in satiric journals like *Marc Aurelio*. Then I started writing for them and then for radio—reviews, sketches, gags. Through that, I met filmmakers like Age-Scarpelli and Monicelli, and I began collaborating with them, first anonymously, then with a byline.

I like writing. I consider myself first and foremost a screenwriter, and only then a director. I still don't mind writing for Risi or Monicelli. It's not really painful for me. I must harbor inside me a desire not to finish things, which is why a script takes me a year, while the scenario is ready after three or four months. But I rewrite again and again, so as not to finish.

*How then do you see the function of the camera?*

There's a double thing here. I like the *mise en scène*, moving the camera, but I refuse to pre-plan it. I use no storyboards. When you work with the actors it just happens. Then the camera movement becomes as important as the writing; it is, in fact, a parallel writing. In Italy, scripts are divided into left and right columns. On the left you write what's to be shown and acted. I pay a lot of attention to it when I write—choosing the right adjectives and adverbs—because the camera will have to choose

among them, too. And not at all casually.

*In *La nuit de Varennes*, you focus on historical event, in which the protagonists are trapped. Why your interest in the French Revolution?*

The revolution began on French soil two centuries ago and created new values that the world must still take into account today. That night in Varennes, when Louis XVI and the Royal Family tried to escape from Paris, determined the question of the value of Man. The film is about a king who departs from the scene and the people who love him but decide that they have to arrest him. To me, this is evidence that History is made of the history of the individual. In *A Special Day*, I showed history looming above the destiny of two humble people who hope to divorce themselves from their environment. There, history dictated particular destinies. In *La nuit de Varennes*, it is the individual who helps trigger the forces of history.

So you see, my interests remain the same even when themes, periods, and formats change. People said that *Passione d'Amore* was a departure for me. But to me the ugly woman [Valeria D'Obici] in *Passione*, the homosexual [Marcello Mastroianni] in *A Special Day*, the slum dwellers in *Down and Dirty*, they're all apart from the rest of the world; they're marginal because of their nature. My approach is always the same. In fact, I often have the impression of making the same picture over and over again.

*In *La nuit de Varennes*, as in *La Terrazza* and *We All Loved Each Other So Much*, you express disillusionment over lost ideals.*

Yes, there are moments in history—as in the French Revolution—when exalted man believes that everything will change, but other forces prevail. In terms of action, you have to be optimistic. You have to do things, work, make films, become politically engaged. But it's hard not to be pessimistic about ideas, about man, because you can't ignore everything that happened in the past and is happening now.

*What's your notion of a political film?*

A political film doesn't necessarily have to deal with a specific political situation. Politics means man and his mentality. The fascist mentality of man is a political factor. Therefore *Passione d'Amore* is a political film about the way people look at beauty and ugliness. But I don't talk about “messages.” I'm not



the Pope. I talk about things that interest or amuse me, ordinary things like love and work. If there's a message somewhere within, it's not willed.

*Alongside Dino Risi and Mario Monicelli, you're considered a pillar of Italian comedy. What is it that makes your brand of comedy so successful?*

In life, the dimension of play and laughter is present no less forcefully than that of tragedy. In Shakespeare there's a lot of laughter, and these instances of laughter underline the trag-

edy. So, the *real* Italian comedy resembles life by being more human.

*Is this Italian comedy naturalistic?*

It's the offspring of neo-realism. It's also based on the realization that you can't follow a man's daily routine without exploring his fantasies, his imagination. The screenwriter Cesare Zavattini said that film should follow man's every step—eating, working, gestures, actions, and feelings—just the way a policeman tracks a thief. The best Italian comedy did that too.

*What influences on your work do you acknowledge? Vittorio De Sica? Roberto Rossellini?*

Yes, these two and Cesare Zavattini. And Sergio Amidei, with whom I wrote *La nuit de Varennes*. The film is dedicated to him. I think my films can be called neo-realistic, but with a little extra magic—because, although it's imbedded in reality, there's always an element that's more ambiguous, more imagined than real. It's Magical Neo-Realism.



*Hanna Schygulla, Marcello Mastroianni, and Jean-Louis Barrault in La nuit de Varennes.*