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**Author:** Alberto Luca Zuliani

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Lombardi, Giancarlo, and Christian Uva, eds. *Italian Political Cinema. Public Life, Imaginary, and Identity in Contemporary Italian Film*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2016. Pp. 439. ISBN 978-3-034-32217-1 and 978-3-03530-815-0. \$ 40.95 (paperback and eBook).

If a comprehensive definition of the category of political cinema can easily result in a kind of mirage, as Maurizio Grande notoriously claimed more than twenty years ago,<sup>1</sup> then identifying the political nature of contemporary filmmaking can rightly be thought of as an extremely complex critical operation, entailing the handling of an already problematic label in the typically post-modern context of a variety of forms of commitment. Well aware of this intrinsic impasse, Giancarlo Lombardi and Christian Uva have edited a volume, *Italian Political Cinema. Public Life, Imaginary, and Identity in Contemporary Italian Film*, which does not avoid the challenge, but rather exploits the inherent tension of the topic to open a fruitful dialogue about the very concept of new Italian political cinema. The book—divided into three sections dealing with thematic issues, some of the most significant directors, and recent works of political cinema, respectively—finds its strength in the fertile polyphony that the wide array of critical positions and academic backgrounds of its contributors allows. And yet, it is exactly in its endeavor to carve the boundaries of an elusive category that the volume enjoys its most appealing character, turning a nearly impossible task into the source of a sometimes contradictory—and thus fascinating—critical approximation to the core of recent Italian cinema.

The first section of the book is already telling in this sense. After Gaetana Marrone's brief overview of the relationships between politics and film from Neorealism to the 1970s, and Christian Uva's attempt at tracing the possible continuity between this tradition and contemporary Italian cinema, the volume immediately addresses one of the main issues in defining the nature of new political cinema in Italy, namely its obligation to face the pervasive mediatization of politics in the Berlusconi era. In this respect, Nicoletta Marini-Maio's analysis of the ubiquity of the figure of the former Prime Minister in Italian films proves compelling not only because of its unique approach, but also because of its intrinsic appeal to the need for critics to take into account the deep renewal of cinematic language which the last twenty years of politics have required. The subsequent articles, dealing with specific issues such as the cinematic representation of the phenomenon of migration (Áine O'Healy and Anita Angelone) and the problem of Ecomafia (Elena Past), do indeed follow this lead. Even more so, the essays by Mary P. Wood and Alan O'Leary respectively focus on the political dimension of Italian *film noir* on the one hand and on the sub-genres of *poliziotteschi* and *cinepanettoni* on the other. The discrepancy between O'Leary's idea of an "engaged" popular cinema and Vito Zagarrío's contrasting assumption that "cinema is all the more political when its form is high" (120) clearly underlines both the range of the directors' attempts at finding a new place for political commitment in cinema (and Paolo Russo's statistical analysis of the subsidization of recent Italian cinema gives us an idea of the state's role behind it), and the scholarly difficulty in identifying an all-encompassing definition of films' political nature.

By shifting the focus towards the recent production of some of the most prominent Italian directors, the second part of the book enriches, in this sense, the picture. Simona Bondavalli's analysis of the auteurist characteristics of Daniele Luchetti's production, Anna Paparcone's investigation of the political trajectory of the cinema of Marco Tullio Giordana, Ruth Glynn's study of Marco Bellocchio's political reawakening, and, most notably, Marcia Landy's examination of Nanni Moretti's political use of the biopic as "counter-history" all insist on the necessity of considering the post-ideological nature of political commitment as a major key to understanding the new Italian cinema. In this vein, the same can also be said for the recurring criticism, in films, of the use of image and media in the construction and maintenance of the existing political power. This is partially the focus of Glynn's article on Bellocchio, but it

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Maurizio Grande, *Eros e politica* (Siena: Protagon, 1995).

plays a crucial role in Marguerite Waller's analysis of Sabina Guzzanti's cinema, too, and in Laura Di Bianco's examination of the female-centered narratives in Francesca Comencini's cinematic production, where the condemnation of the pervasive sexism of Italian television and society results in an articulated discourse on the marginality of women in Italy. Clarissa Clò's study of the cinema of Gustav Hofer and Luca Ragazzi, and again Waller's contribution about Guzzanti, draw attention in addition to the search for new modes of expression that characterizes recent Italian documentaries, while Cosetta Gaudenzi's examination of Guido Chiesa's cinematic production offers an example of the study of the relationship between postmodern *impegno* and collective memory. The section emblematically closes with two articles—by Monica Jansen and Claudio Bisoni—on the reception of the works of Daniele Vicari and Paolo Sorrentino, respectively, the latter in particular stressing the need to consider the public's response to films in analyzing their political features.

By narrowing down the field of analysis from specific directors to specific films, the third section of the volume can be seen to be subtly informed by the recurring attention to the theme of historical reinterpretation as a crucial element of recent political cinema. The reshaping of Italian historical past, in this sense, emerges as a critical preoccupation from Marini-Maio's study of the treatment of communist history in Susanna Nicchiarelli's *Cosmonauta* to Dana Renga's analysis of Michele Placido's *Romanzo criminale* as a male melodrama. This could actually be said, however, to play a fundamental role in Luca Caminati's analysis of Gianni Amelio's *L'America*, too; in Gius Gargiulo's study of Mario Martone's *Noi credevamo*; in Giovanna De Luca's investigation of both *Placido Rizzotto* and *Segreti di stato* by Pasquale Scimeca; in Catherine O'Rawe's analysis of Renato De Maria's *La prima linea*; and, significantly, in Pierpaolo Antonello's article on Paolo Sorrentino's *Il Divo*. Along with Millicent Marcus's analysis of Matteo Garrone's *Gomorra* and Danielle Hipkins's study of Massimiliano Bruno's *Nessuno mi può giudicare*, Antonello's essay returns to the issue of the cinematic forms of political engagement, discussing the alleged effectiveness of Sorrentino's peculiar filmic language. Yet it is in the last two articles that the issue of efficacy finally surfaces: if Ellen Nerenberg's study deals with the concrete possibility of change that Davide Ferrario's *Tutta colpa di Giuda* could have signified for its cast in detention, then Giancarlo Lombardi's analysis of Roberto Andò's *Viva la libertà* emblematically closes the volume with the investigation of the work's success in depicting the semiotic transformation of Italian politics towards a content-related vacuum.

With Lombardi's final essay, the volume comes full circle, by closing with the analysis of a film which appears both on the cover of the book and at the beginning of the editors' brief introduction. The occurrence is apparently casual, however: the heavily deductive structure of the volume—progressing from general overviews to particular case studies—seems to find, in this almost insignificant detail, a sign of the underlying irrelevance of a prearranged order, and a hint to read the book as it actually is—a magmatic and free-dialoguing flow. The result is an extremely rich investigation which proceeds through accumulations and subtractions, connections and disconnections, specifications and expansions, intersecting the ongoing debate around the resurgence of Italian political cinema with a unique perspective and the clear intention of creating and fostering a lively scholarly discussion.

ALBERTO LUCA ZULIANI  
Johns Hopkins University