

‘State of distrust: Interpreting 1970s Italy through the seriality of news media and the *poliziottesco*’ (2019)

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Giulio Olesen is a lecturer in media at Bournemouth University (United Kingdom). He holds a Ph.D. in film studies and has research interests in the areas of Italian cinema and history, cinema and social conflict, and genre studies. Olesen has participated in academic events and conferences in Prague, at Canterbury Christ Church University, the American University of Rome, and The Ohio State University. He has published an interview with *filone* director Sergio Martino in the *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies* (2017) and is currently working on a research project on the representation and historical significance of lynching in Italian cinema.

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‘State of distrust: Interpreting 1970s Italy through the seriality of news media and the *poliziottesco*’ (2019) focuses on the genre of Italian police thrillers produced in the 1970s, the *poliziottesco*. Exploring the industrial and socio-political context of production, Giulio Olesen examines a sum of individual films as a serial text and a historical document of the negotiation of blame for state inefficiencies surrounding the struggle against criminality and political violence. He argues that the films were part of the public debate concerning the meaning of

state, political, and criminal violence during the first half of the decade while evidencing the relationship between films, news media, and the perception of social reality. Focusing specifically on films that deployed state-driven conspiracies, Olesen argues that repetitions and innovations in the representation of Italian civic institutions can be linked to the evolution of news media discourses on the so-called *strategia della tensione* (strategy of tension).

The dissertation builds on scholarship on *filone* cinema (Bondanella 2009; O’Leary 2011; Marlow-Mann 2013; Fisher 2014) – a ‘formulaic’ expression of low-budget, fast-produced film production that characterized Italy from the late 1950s to the early 1980s (Wagstaff 1992). Moreover, it mobilizes the concepts of remediation (Bolter and Grusin 2000) and intermediality (Rajewsky 2005) to analyse the merging of fiction and non-fiction in the films through the use of news media as devices and the adoption of specific tropes of newspaper and television idioms. Even if single movies like *La polizia ringrazia* (*Execution Squad*) (Vanzina 1972), *Milano trema: la polizia vuole giustizia* (*The Violent Professionals*) (Martino 1973) and *La polizia ha le mani legate* (*Killer Cop*) (Ercoli 1975) presented imprecise representations of real events, the operation of merging events and interpretations gained strength from serial features of both news media and films, which provided internal coherence to the *filone* and its depiction of power in Italy. In this respect, Elliot’s (1981) conceptualization of press performance as ‘political ritual’ links the *poliziottesco* to newspapers, as the ritualistic features of press performance are connected to the ritualistic catharsis and recognition of familiar tenets in the *poliziottesco* (O’Leary 2011; Fisher 2014).

The dissertation employs Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis (Baker et al. 2008) to support the analysis of news media discourses, covering front-page articles from two Italian newspapers, *Corriere della Sera* and *l’Unità*. One original contribution of this investigation is the use of corpora in film analysis to identify representational patterns in common with news media. Through this methodological approach, Olesen connects the cinematic depiction of

judges as scapegoats for the failures of the Italian state to a shift in the perception of the judiciary in relation to the *strategia della tensione*. In the wake of increased police casualties, blaming judges invited audiences to identify with the angry reaction of the police. It also permitted the release of emotional tension related to audiences' distrust towards sectors of the Italian state. Conversely, reimagining actual institutional victims, like police officer Luigi Calabresi, served to transform violent police officers into symbols of sacrifice. Accordingly, their deaths in the films became moments of trauma necessary to create the condition of using force to restore order, aligning with the intransigent approach towards political violence and terrorism advocated by parliamentary parties and the mainstream press.

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