



# Writings on Cinema and Life

*Elio Petri*

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## **Writings on Cinema and Life** Elio Petri

Italian writer/director Elio Petri (1929-1982) is of the cinematic era of Pasolini, Bertolucci, and Bellocchio, and although he is recognized by film scholars as one of the major figures of Italian cinema, his work remains largely unknown outside of Italy. Hardly a marginal figure, Petri began as an assistant to Giuseppe De Santis and his future collaborators would include many of the most renowned film artists of the 20th century: Marcello Mastroianni, Gian Maria Volonté, Dante Ferretti, Ennio Morricone, Ugo Pirro, and Tonino Guerra. Due to Petri's belief that culture is inextricable from political struggle, he was a central figure in the fervent debates of his time on both Italian cinema and culture that arose from the aftermath of World War II to the 1980s. However, while generally characterized as a political filmmaker, this view is limited and reductive, for Petri's films are polemical interrogations of social, religious, and political phenomena as well as acute analyses of moral, psychological, and existential crises. His cinema is also informed by a rich and profound understanding of and engagement with literature, philosophy, psychology, and art, evident for instance in his adaptations of Sciascia's novels, Miller's *The American Clock* (for the stage), and Sartre's *Dirty Hands*, as well as in his use of Pop and Abstract Art in *The Tenth Victim*, *A Quiet Place in the Country*, and other films. Available for the first time in English, *Writings on Cinema and Life* is a collection of texts Petri originally published mainly in French and Italian journals. Also included are several art reviews, as well as Petri's essay on Sartre's *Dirty Hands*, a text forgotten until recently. Petri's affinity for subtle analysis is evident in his clear and precise writing style, which utilizes concrete concepts and observations, cinematographic references, and ideas drawn from literature, philosophy, and psychoanalysis. There is as well an acute and scathing sense of humor that permeates many of the texts. Petri was the recipient of the Palme d'Or, an Academy Award, and the Edgar Allan Poe award among many others, and in 2005 he was the subject of the documentary *Elio Petri: Appunti Su Un Autore*. This collection of Petri's writings is an important contribution to the history of cinema and offers further insight into the work, thought, and beliefs of one of cinema's most ambitious and innovative practitioners.

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