



# Visual-spatial intelligence in propaganda and public relations discourse: The case of Roberto Rossellini's early and educational-historical films



Ángel Quintana<sup>a,\*\*</sup>, Jordi Xifra<sup>b,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of History and History of Art, University of Girona, Spain

<sup>b</sup> Department of Communication, Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona, Spain

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 15 December 2014

Received in revised form 5 May 2015

Accepted 5 May 2015

Available online 21 May 2015

### Keywords:

Roberto Rossellini

Visual-spatial intelligence

Public relations films

Propaganda films

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyze two of the least known periods of Italian director Roberto Rossellini's career – the fascist trilogy and his educational project for TV – as a paradigm of visual-spatial intelligence, and show their contribution to the construction of a theory of film discourse in public relations. Regarding the fascist period, what stands out is the unique, anti-propaganda staging, a far cry from the fascist cinema of the age, and more characteristic of documentary cinema. By contrast, the films that form part of his educational project make them public relations techniques in the terms understood by filmmakers from the British documentary movement and PR practitioners like John Grierson. In those films, in order to achieve his purposes, Rossellini created a zoom lens device named *Pancinor* that can be considered a mechanism of visual-spatial intelligence as well as a public relations audiovisual technique.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Studies on the links between film and public relations have focused mainly on representations of the profession in fiction films (e.g., Ames, 2010; Miller, 1999). By contrast, with few exceptions (e.g., Halas, 1959; Parris, 1959a,b), less attention has been paid to documentary film as audiovisual discourse on public relations strategies, although in recent years, studies on John Grierson and public relations (L'Etang, 1999, 2000), Frank Capra (Xifra & Girona, 2012), and the role of documentary in public relations rhetoric (Anthony, 2012; Kilborn, 2006; Pompper & Higgins, 2007; Stokes & Holloway, 2009) has appeared as new objects of study in research into the elements of public relations film discourse.

This article focuses on the latter tradition to analyze the two less well-known and researched periods of Italian director Roberto Rossellini's career, leaving to one side his neo-realist films and those he made with his then-wife Ingrid Bergman, which have been the most common object of research work on the Italian filmmaker. Those films represent an example of visual-spatial intelligence, in particular the educational ones, in which Rossellini's, for staging purposes, invented and used a new zoom lens to improve the realistic effects: the *Pancinor*. This mechanism highlights the visual-spatial abilities of Rossellini, who becomes one of the great exponents of visual-spatial intelligence before the age of digital cinema.

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +34 935 42 14 84.

\*\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +34 972 41 87 13.

E-mail addresses: [angel.quintana@udg.edu](mailto:angel.quintana@udg.edu) (Á. Quintana), [jordi.xifra@upf.edu](mailto:jordi.xifra@upf.edu) (J. Xifra).

In the past century, numerous theories about intelligence have emerged. One of the more notorious was created by development psychologist [Howard Gardner \(1993\)](#). Gardner proposed that intelligence is not made up of one factor, but rather eight. Accordingly, one of the eight forms of intelligence is visual-spatial intelligence. People with high visual-spatial intelligence possess the ability to visualize the world accurately, modify their surroundings based upon their perceptions, and recreate the aspects of their visual experiences. They also have good spatial judgment and reasoning. That is, they are able to accurately judge the distance between them and an object, how far the object is to the right, etc. They are skilled at using their ability to imagine and their spatial judgment to complete tasks and projects that include design, judgment, and creativity. For this reason, they make good painters, artists, architects, designers, and filmmakers ([Gardner, 1993](#)).

Although we find between the contemporary filmmakers the most explicit examples of artists with a high level of visual-spatial intelligence (James Cameron, for instance, who relies on his spatial judgment and his ability to visualize creating alternate worlds for his movies, such as *Avatar*), filmmakers before the digital age have shown his ability of picturing the world. As aforementioned, Roberto Rossellini is one of them: he has visualized precisely the world – even the historical one – and has adapted his surroundings based upon his perceptions. Indeed, as [Brunette \(1996\)](#) indicates, in remarks made on a 1972 panel examining the state of Italian television, which were published in a book called *Informazione democrazia*, Rossellini stated:

“Images, with their naked purity, directly demonstrative, can show us the road to take in order to orient ourselves with the greatest possible knowledge.... All of our intelligence, as we know, expresses itself thanks to the eyes. Language. . . is the ensemble of the phonetic images by means of which, not being able to fix and save the images, we have catalogued all of our observations, the great majority of which are visual” ([Lopez, 1973](#); p. 59).

Considered one of the founders of neo-realism (e.g., [Caminati, 2012](#); [Cannella, 1973](#); [Frappat, 2007](#); [Gallagher, 1998](#); [Wagstaff, 2000](#)), Rossellini began his film career making three war propaganda films for Mussolini’s fascist regime and finished it with an educational film project unique until that date. In both periods, a common denominator is found in the use of narrative resources characteristic of documentary film, a form of expression which John Grierson, public relations professional and the man who coined the word “documentary”, and others (e.g., [L’Etang, 1999, 2000](#)) consider a public relations technique.

Indeed, in her study on Grierson and public relations, [L’Etang \(2000\)](#) stated that “public relations and documentary shared similar aspirations to objectivity and truthfulness while at the same time trying to encompass an educational and sometimes overtly persuasive role” (p. 90). On the other hand, [Kilborn \(2006\)](#) pointed out that documentaries are one of the few audiovisual genres to reach a better understanding of how institutions operate, stressing the full public relations potential of the genre. The definition of a documentary by American filmmaker W. Van Dyke is useful in this respect: “a film in which elements of dramatic conflict represent social or political forces rather than individual ones” (cited in [Fielding, 1978](#); p. 70). This provides a good verbal definition of the kind of films made for public relations and persuasive purposes, and especially those made by Grierson and other famous filmmakers like Robert Flaherty or Luis Buñuel.

The above definition by Van Dyke ([Fielding, 1978](#)) can be applied to the filmmaking of Rossellini which, although it may not be considered documentary in the strictest sense, employed a phenomenological approach to reality that often responded to a desire to document this reality in an even more reliable way than even a traditional documentary maker. This is why Rossellinian work is a good example of the above quotations, especially with regard to its “aspirations to objectivity”; that is, revealing the truth of what had happened during fascism, the postwar period and in the beginnings of the audiovisual revolution brought about by TV. And to achieve this, Rossellini used a very accurate staging technique.

From 1941 to 1943, Rossellini’s films formed part of the fascist regime’s propaganda filmmaking, within what was known as *crusade filmmaking*, which sought to justify and vindicate the military operations undertaken by the regime in certain territories ([Quintana et al., 2005](#)). In 1943, when Mussolini’s power waned and the allies landed in Italy to free it from German occupation, Rossellini distanced himself from official filmmaking. He changed direction and embarked upon the path that would allow him to make, from 1944 to 1948, films which glorified the struggle of the people and the Italian partisans against Nazi and fascist oppression. In doing so, Rossellini defended the cause of democracy and denounced the monstrosity of Nazi ideology ([Frappat, 2007](#)).

On the other hand, the director’s educational project came at the end of his career, with the making of nine TV movies: *L’età del ferro (The Iron Ageem, 1964)*, *La prise du pouvoir par Louis XIV (The Rise of Louis XIV, 1965)*, *La lotta dell’uomo per la sua sopravvivenzaem (1967–69)*, *Atti degli Apostolium (1968)*, *Socrate (Socrate, 1970)*, *Blaise Pascallem (1971)*, *Agostino d’Iponaem (1972)*, *L’età di Cosimo de Medicem (1972)*, and *Cartesiussem (1973)*. To these films we must add two works for the cinema, *Anno Unoem (1974)* and *Il Messia (The Messiah, 1975)*, as well as various short format works commissioned by different bodies, among them Italian national television. This cycle began to take shape in the project he undertook in India, working for the first time on an international joint production for television—*L’India Vista da Rossellini (RAI, 1957)* and *J’ai fait un bon voyage (ORTF, 1957)*—along with the feature film *India Matri Buhmi (1958)*.

Thus, these two periods of Rossellini’s filmmaking show how the Italian director’s work evolved coherently from propaganda to didacticism, approaching reality from the postulates of documentary cinema and always avoiding manipulation via cinematic language. This makes these films interesting objects of study for the investigation of a cinematographic grammar characteristic of public relations discourse, as opposed to the war propaganda discourse used by European and American cinema during World War II and the post-war years.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/138628>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/138628>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)