

It's relatively easy to tear up the rule book. But to do so while also retaining a place of safety within a film for those who are its subjects, to blur the boundaries between factual filmmaking and fiction but to also maintain an essential truthfulness, is a rather more complex undertaking. And this is what distinguishes Roberto Minervini and his approach to the reimagination of the cinema of the real.

An Italian filmmaker who lives and works in America (he is based in Houston, Texas, and has made films in the Bible Belt southern states of Texas and Louisiana), Minervini has an outsider's eye on the worlds he invites us to explore and to learn about. These worlds include the fundamentalist Christian goat farmers and rodeo riders of Texas in *Stop the Pounding Heart* (2013); Louisiana's disenfranchised army veterans and the victims of the opioid epidemic in *The Other Side* (2015); and the struggling working class New Orleans Black communities of *What You Gonna Do When the World's on Fire?* (2018). But Minervini's genius is to realise that even an outsider's perspective comes with its own preconceived notions and prejudices, both about the subjects of the film and about the form that the work should take. Speaking in an interview with *Film Comment*, Minervini said, 'I have to be very careful and aware of the fact that I am there, that I am very dangerous, that I could ruin everything. So the more I sabotage myself, the better it is for the film.'

That self-'sabotage' takes the form of protecting the purity of the material that is shot – in uninterrupted takes, without cuts, captured by Minervini and regular collaborator Diego Romero – by not allowing himself the opportunity to review the footage. To watch the footage, Minervini argues, would mean that he might impose a shape on the story, to bring expectations that might skew the power structure between the people in front of the lens and those behind it.

Instead, Minervini hands over the footage, with no directorial guidance, to his editor Marie-Hélène Dozo. The edit is a process of discovery for Dozo, who finds her own stories; and rediscovery for Minervini, who reconnects with the film several months along the line. Trust and collaboration are key in Minervini's democratic way of working, which strips back the ego inherent in the idea of storytelling and instead offers the audience the same journey upon which Minervini himself embarked. Essentially, as a director, Minervini has reimagined the most fundamental aspect – the role of the film 'maker' itself.

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