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A G R I C E N T O . B E R L I N

THE EMPIRICAL EFFECT. PRINTED CINEMA, 2010

16MM TRANSFERRED TO BLUERAY, 28 MIN.

The volcano Mount Vesuvius is a metaphor for the complex relationships that exist between society and politics in Italy. It's unpredictable, powerful, sexy, destructive, and located in the midst of a densely populated area that lies along the Mediterranean coast. It is beyond the power of humans to control this immense force of nature, and yet it constitutes an invisible bond connecting the inhabitants and their environment. Any attempt to tame the volcano is futile, but at the same time it engenders a high level of awareness for even the most marginal aspects of life. The society portrayed in *The Empirical Effect* lives at a high level of tension, yet it is paralysed and somnambulist. On the hillsides of the sleeping monster, the mafia finds places to hide and innumerable illegal Chinese workers have established a secret, parallel society. The main focus of attention, however, is Vesuvius itself, where nature is exploited like a huge media spectacle. Cameras track the volcano's activity, and seismographs detect the slightest earth tremor. Tourists love the sight of the mighty mountain. Whenever people need to be distracted from what's going on in politics, the *telegiornale* news programme announces unusual activity in Vesuvius. Even history is ironical there: the last major eruption took place parallel to the bombardments of the Second World War. The protagonists of *The Empirical Effect* are witnesses of this catastrophic outbreak of 1944. This community is taken out of its original context and transplanted to a new setting (the old observatory next to the crater) in order to reveal unexplored aspects of their lives. The mix of intentions and biographies creates a realised utopia, a place where nothing seems contradictory, but includes absurd ideas and paradoxical