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## What is Italian Cinema?\*

Alan O'Leary

Let's start in 2013. Italy produced 167 films in that year, and 2013 was notable for the release of three emblematic films that testify to the continued variety of Italian filmmaking.<sup>1</sup> These three were the international arthouse hit *La grande bellezza* (*The Great Beauty*, Paolo Sorrentino), the popular comedy *Sole a catinelle* (*Buckets of Sunshine*, Gennaro Nunziante), and the acclaimed documentary *Sacro GRA* (*Sacred GRA*, Gianfranco Rosi).

*La grande bellezza* was a reprise of certain modes and motifs from the golden age of Italian cinema—Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960) is to be found everywhere in it—just as much as it was a tribute to the adoptive Rome of its Neapolitan director. The film's foregrounding of sensibility and decadence in the exquisite discernment (social, sartorial, aesthetic) and jaded demeanor of its protagonist licensed an indulgence in technique that had seemed excessive in Sorrentino's previous work.<sup>2</sup> An Italian-French co-production, *La grande bellezza* may have been, financially speaking, only the twenty-first most successful film in Italy itself in 2013, but it went on to win the Oscar for Best Foreign Film, and earned 55.5 percent of its box office abroad.<sup>3</sup>

Quite a different beast, *Sole a catinelle* was a vehicle for Checco Zalone (real name Luca Medici), an unprepossessing comic from Puglia who with two previous films had already made an enormously lucrative switch from Italian cabaret television to family friendly comedy on the big screen. The Checco Zalone persona is that of a resourceful plebian bungler, good-natured but careless of the effect he has on others. His indifference to social form tends to unveil pomposity and pretentiousness in his betters, but it also flatters a viewer allowed to enjoy Checco's average-Joe defects while feeling superior to him. Produced by Taodue, an Italian company that once specialized in TV films and miniseries, and given saturation release by Medusa, *Sole a Catinelle* has barely been exported, and it earned almost all its box office within Italy itself.<sup>4</sup> Despite this, *Sole a Catinelle* became the most successful Italian film of all time, with more than three times the total earnings of *La grande bellezza*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The figure of 167 includes co-productions. See the industry report at

[http://www.anica.it/online/allegati/Tutti\\_numeri\\_cinema\\_italiano\\_2013\\_15aprile2014.pdf](http://www.anica.it/online/allegati/Tutti_numeri_cinema_italiano_2013_15aprile2014.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> David Bordwell once commented of Sorrentino that "he never met a crane shot he didn't like." "Vancouver Wrapup (Long-play Version)," *Observations on Film Art*, October 13, 2008,

<http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2008/10/13/vancouver-wrapup-long-play-version/>.

<sup>3</sup> Source: *Box Office Mojo*, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=greatbeauty.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> *Sole a catinelle* debuted with 1,250 copies in Italy, and was also distributed in Switzerland where there is a large Italian-speaking population. The film's Italian distributor Medusa, part of Silvio Berlusconi's media empire, also co-produced *La grande bellezza* and distributed it in Italy.

<sup>5</sup> The final box office for *Sole a Catinelle* came to nearly fifty-two million Euros. Source: <http://www.mymovies.it/film/2013/ancoraesisto/>.

*Sacro GRA* is a mood piece about the highway that encircles Rome, the *Grande Raccordo Annulare* (Great Ring Road). The film refuses voiceover and conventional documentary argument to construct a choral tableau showing the lives of a few ordinary and less ordinary inhabitants living along the literal periphery of the great city. Just one facet of a multimedia project recorded at [www.sacrogra.it](http://www.sacrogra.it), the film is quintessentially of our time but can be placed in the tradition of Italian urbanist thought and of Italian cinema's concern with the Roman outskirts seen, for example, in neorealism and from Pasolini.<sup>6</sup> *Sacro GRA* showed modest numbers at the Italian box office but was the first documentary ever to win the top prize at the Venice Film Festival.<sup>7</sup>

These then represent at least three Italian cinemas. A first is exportable, and often takes the form of "tainted heritage" cinema that conforms to a foreign taste for a picturesque Italy stained by corruption.<sup>8</sup> A second is consumed almost exclusively within Italy itself and is all-but-invisible outside it. It is dominated by comedies, sometimes with a limited target market of younger people, sometimes (as with *Sole a catinelle*) characterized by multiple address to "all the family."<sup>9</sup> A third lays claim to the humanist and documentary vocation of Italian cinema and achieves niche distribution via the festival circuit.

The real inference to be drawn from these films, however, is not that there are three (or fewer or more) Italian cinemas—it is that Italian cinema appears to be something different according to your perspective: according to where you are watching and what criteria of value you employ in your analysis. In this article I want to describe some of the perspectives adopted especially in the Anglophone academy (with some reference as well to theory and criticism from France), ranging across contemporary, classic, and lesser-known Italian cinema, by analyzing the means and priorities that are employed when studying it. My title, alluding to André Bazin, is "what is Italian cinema?," but an additional clause might read, "and how do we think we know?"<sup>10</sup> My title question, though, is partly a bluff: I do not want to offer an ontology of Italian cinema on the Bazinian model. Still less do I wish to give an account of Italian cinema's "ontogenesis," meaning its "coming to maturity" (implying a focus on the "best" films). An ontogenesis of cinema is the project of one of Bazin's preeminent commentators, Dudley Andrew, in his *What Cinema Is!* of 2010, and part of my purpose in this article is to refuse the

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<sup>6</sup> See Mark Shiel, *Italian Neorealism: Rebuilding the Cinematic City* (London: Wallflower, 2005); John David Rhodes, *Stupendous, Miserable City: Pasolini's Rome* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); and Robert S.C. Gordon, *Bicycle Thieves* (London: BFI/ Macmillan Education, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> The film earned a total of €970k. Source: <http://www.mymovies.it/film/2013/sacrogra/>.

<sup>8</sup> A 2010 investigation, "L'export di cinema italiano" by ANICA (the representative association of the cinema industry in Italy) found that slightly less than half of the Italian films produced over a three-year period achieved distribution abroad, with France and Spain exhibiting the highest number apart from Switzerland. See the summary of findings at <http://www.anica.it/ricerche-e-studi/c45-ricerche-e-studi/ricerca-anica-lexport-di-cinema-italiano>. For the idea of "tainted heritage cinema," See Moya Luckett, "Image and Nation in 1990s British Cinema," in *British Cinema of the '90s*, ed. Robert Murphy (London: British Film Institute), 88–99. I apply the notion to Italian cinema in O'Leary, *Tragedia all'italiana: Italian Cinema and Italian Terrorisms 1970–2010* (Bern/Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> In an analysis of the period 2000–20005, Fabrizio Montanari found that although films classified as "dramatic" outnumbered those classified as "comedies," 209 to 279, comedies attracted three times as many spectators. See "I film nelle sale," in *È tutto un altro film: più coraggio e più idee per il cinema italiano*, ed. Francesco Casetti and Severino Salvemini (Milan: EGEA, 2007), 11–52, at 39.

<sup>10</sup> "What is Italian Cinema?" is also the title of the opening chapter of Mary Wood's *Italian Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), which discusses industry, legislation and discourse in a sophisticated way that is a commentary on knowledge and not simply an introduction to it, and which informs my analysis.

prescriptive cinephilia found in Andrew's erudite book,<sup>11</sup> and found, indeed, in much of the most sophisticated work on Italian cinema.

## The Standard Model

I am writing from within the discipline (or sub-discipline) of Italian cinema studies, which—it is generally agreed—has “come of age” in the new century.<sup>12</sup> The first university courses devoted to Italian cinema in the Anglophone context date back to the 1970s, and the first textbooks from the following decade. Peter Bondanella began teaching his Italian cinema course at Bloomington in 1974 and went on to publish *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present*, the most popular introductory book in English, in 1983.<sup>13</sup> Millicent Marcus' seminal *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism*, a book that established a canon and modeled the close-reading approach that came to be favored in Italian cinema studies, was published in 1986.<sup>14</sup> Even leaving aside important texts in French and, of course, Italian, one could mention several other important writers and texts in English, but discussion of Bondanella's and Marcus' influential texts allows me to show that the legacy of the institutional, practical, and discursive conditions that first determined the concerns of Italian cinema studies is still with us.

Bondanella has described how the focus of the earliest edition of *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* was restricted by the films available to him (in 16mm and later videotape) and by the requirements of publishers and public. He is speaking of himself when he writes that:

[S]cholars in the US were forced by economic necessity (but also by a sensible assessment of the publishing market at the time), to consider the audiences of the period and to concentrate on the major [Italian] art-film directors of the post-war period. In so doing, they consciously and unavoidably slighted the silent era, the pre-World War II era marking the coming of the talkies in Italy during the fascist period, and a number of Italian genre films (the peplum, the *giallo*, the *poliziesco* [1970s cop film], the horror film), many of which were simply unavailable for viewing and analysis. A substantial amount of attention was paid to the *commedia all'italiana* [Comedy Italian Style] and the spaghetti western, since those films were readily available in 16mm prints.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is! Bazin's "Quest" and its Charge* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Millicent Marcus, “A Coming-of-Age Story: Some Thoughts on the Rise of Italian Film Studies in the United States,” *Italian Studies* 63/2 (2008): 266–69.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* (New York: Ungar, 1983). Expanded editions were published in 1990 and 2001. Bondanella gave up teaching some years ago and has been joined in retirement by other senior figures in the field, including the great historian of Italian cinema, Gian Piero Brunetta, whose towering and expansive *Storia del cinema italiano* was first published in two volumes by the Roman publisher Editori Riuniti in 1979 and 1982. Some material by Brunetta has been published in English but he has not always been well served by his translators (he writes in a highly metaphorical and sometimes grammatically complex style), and the one book of his available in English must be considered a missed opportunity: *The History of Italian Cinema: A Guide to Italian Film from its Origins to the Twenty-first Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). For a discussion of Brunetta's work and legacy see my “After Brunetta: Italian Cinema Studies in Italy, 2000–2007,” *Italian Studies* 63/2 (2008): 279–307.

<sup>14</sup> Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> Peter Bondanella, “Writing Italian Film History: A First-Person Account,” *Italian Studies* 67/2 (2012): 252–66, at 257.



For eminently pragmatic reasons, then, a history of Italian cinema was produced that effectively excluded its first fifty years, along with much that was consumed in Italy itself and some that had been exported for what has been called “back door” distribution.<sup>16</sup> This truncated version of Italian cinema history would be nuanced and augmented, not least in the “complete rewriting” of Bondanella’s book that became his 2009 *A History of Italian Cinema*, and certain films and characteristics of Italian silent cinema that especially have come to be foregrounded in the histories.<sup>17</sup> But it is fair to say that the lineaments of the representation of Italian cinema adumbrated in the early years and exemplified in Bondanella remain in strong outline.<sup>18</sup>

Let me refer to this approach as the “Standard Model” of Italian cinema history. As it has evolved, it might appear something like this: innovation and export in the early period, when ambitious historical epics from Italy influence Hollywood and a star system emerges based on the female “diva”; eclipse and crisis follows WWI, with compromise and modernization under fascism. Neorealism accompanies democratic renewal after WWII and marks a split (more or less definitive) with what went before: it comes to be perceived as the ineluctable core of Italian cinema and is seen to generate the golden age of the auteurs (Fellini, Antonioni, Pasolini, et al.) who flourish in parallel with the quaint and exportable subgenres or cycles of films known as *filoni* (e.g., the peplum, the spaghetti western; *filone* means vein or seam). This period of renewed international success for Italian cinema is again followed by crisis and decline, and a profound sense of belatedness that still persists in the criticism, punctuated by reports of rebirth and infrequent *causes célèbres* of the ilk of *Cinema Paradiso* (Giuseppe Tornatore, 1988), *La vita è bella* (*Life is Beautiful*, Roberto Benigni, 1997) and, of course, *La grande bellezza*.

This in broad outline is the body of arguments, assumptions, and received wisdom that make up the Standard Model. This Standard Model, of course, is a discourse that allows the production of “truth” (historical reconstruction or plausible interpretation) but it constrains as well as generates scholarship, and in its totality takes on the quality of myth. One reason for the tenacity of the Standard Model is that the pragmatic account of Italian cinema found in American scholarship, and which forms its core, finds an unexpected parallel in high French theory.

<sup>16</sup> Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (another early and major scholar of Italian cinema) has written of Britain that “the market for foreign films in [the 1960s and 1970s] was a dual one, with a front door and a back door. The front door was art cinema [...]. The back door was mainly for genre films and was through companies which supplied inexpensive programming to the many independent cinemas which still existed around the country.” “My Italian Cinema,” *The Italianist* 31/2 (2011): 270–75, at 271.

<sup>17</sup> “Complete rewriting” is Bondanella’s own phrase to describe his work on *A History of Italian Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2009). See Bondanella, “My Path to Italian Cinema,” *The Italianist* 31/2 (2011): 276–80, at 279. In terms of silent cinema, the publication of Giorgio Bertellini’s massive edited collection *Italian Silent Cinema: A Reader* (New Barnet: John Libbey Publishing, 2013) should revolutionize our impression of early Italian cinema and may instill a new set of priorities even in work on other periods. Certainly it should help to remedy a situation in which, according to John Welle, “early Italian cinema still remains largely unknown in the Anglophone countries perhaps because relatively few scholars seem to be engaged in this area of research.” See Welle, “The Beginning of Film Star and the Print Media of *Divismo*,” in *The Italian Cinema Book*, ed. Peter Bondanella (London/Basingstoke: BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 17–23, at 17.

<sup>18</sup> It is notable that an early study of Italian cinema, Mira Liehm’s *Passion and Defiance: Italian Film from 1942 to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), does contain short, discrete sections on genre cinema, but treats 1950s melodrama, for instance, as “ersatz realism” (146). The criteria at play in the book are clarified in the main text’s penultimate sentence, which is explicit about Italian cinema’s masculine character and auteurist and realist vocation: “Olmi, the Tavianis, Bellocchio, Ferreri [all male directors], and all their cinematic fathers and brothers, seem to have achieved new ways of interrogating the social reality that has always been the challenge and the inspiration of Italian cinema” (317).

Generations of commentators have failed to agree on the character or definition of neorealism (a style, a school, a moment, a movement?), but its exceptional place in Italian and world cinema was established by André Bazin and elevated still further by Gilles Deleuze.

The story is well known but worth reviewing here. Bazin, in a series of articles on Italian cinema first published in English translation by Hugh Gray in 1971, found (as Ricciardi puts it) “the source of an original aesthetics and a renovated humanism” in the films of Vittorio De Sica and his scriptwriter Cesare Zavattini, of Roberto Rossellini and of Luchino Visconti.<sup>19</sup> Neorealism was (rather approximately) described as the cinema of the non-professional actor and the long take, a cinema born with and equipped for democratic and national renewal in the wake of fascism and war. Deleuze, in turn, makes neorealism the “hinge” that articulates his “natural history of the film medium.”<sup>20</sup> It opens the second volume of his book on cinema and marks the shift from movement-image to time-image, being a response to a world crisis (the Second World War) that implies a crisis in human agency and, therefore (for Deleuze), the cinema of action.<sup>21</sup> A cinema of dilation and contemplation in Deleuze’s account, neorealism was for him the quintessentially modern cinema. It set the template for all that mattered later, from Italian auteurs to French *Nouvelle Vague* to Third Cinema and so on—indeed for art cinema to this day (what else is “slow cinema” but an attempt to look modern in the way Deleuze characterized neorealism?).

One must appreciate the power of Bazin and Deleuze’s accounts even if a frustration is inevitable with the way their work implies that neorealism and its so-called sons are all there is to know about Italian cinema.<sup>22</sup> The irony is that in their construction of neorealism as the form fit for a world remade, “an aesthetic on which the redemption of modernity as such may be predicated,”<sup>23</sup> both Bazin and Deleuze were obliged to lift the Italian films clear of their context in Italian cinema and Italian history.<sup>24</sup> Deleuze, especially, tends to construct a personal playlist of favorite scenes to elaborate his thesis.

Millicent Marcus’ assembly, in her *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism*, of a list of admirable films with a putative origin in neorealism is a procedure operated in the wake of Bazin and in parallel with Deleuze. She shares the estimation of the aesthetic importance and ethical charge of neorealism with the two Frenchmen, but her method is different. Marcus treats the individual film (rather than the scene) as the coherent unit of meaning, and devotes a chapter

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<sup>19</sup> Alessia Ricciardi, “The Italian Redemption of Cinema: Neorealism from Bazin to Godard,” *The Romanic Review* 97/3-4 (2006): 483–500, at 485. A selection of Bazin’s writings on Italian cinema were contained in *What is Cinema*, vol 2, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971). More recently, Bazin’s writings on neorealism have been collected and introduced by Bert Cardullo in *André Bazin and Italian Neorealism* (New York: Continuum, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Ricciardi, “The Italian Redemption of Cinema,” 495.

<sup>21</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: L’image-temps* (Paris: Editions de Minuits, 1985). Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta as *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

<sup>22</sup> Catherine O’Rawe has critiqued the use of paternal and Oedipal metaphors in histories of Italian cinema in the important article “I padri e i maestri: Genres, Auteurs and Absences in Italian Film Studies,” *Italian Studies* 63/2 (2008): 173–94.

<sup>23</sup> Ricciardi, “The Italian Redemption of Cinema,” 499–550.

<sup>24</sup> “Bazin and Deleuze are writing about a zero cinema, a zero nation, and a zero people which never existed.” Lorenzo Fabbri, “Neorealism as Ideology: Bazin, Deleuze and the Avoidance of Fascism,” *The Italianist* 35/2 (2015): 182–201, at 193. This is the case even if the accounts of both Bazin and Deleuze are constructed upon the historical fact of WWII, and their understanding that it represented a historical break. For an account of neorealism that places it more securely in the Italian historical context, see Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

each in her book to the brilliant close reading and interpretation of seventeen films.<sup>25</sup> Again, though, as with Bondanella, the reasons for the selection are to some extent pragmatic and related to institutional conditions. Marcus writes as follows about her early career and the experience of working on Italian cinema when the subject was still perceived as unserious:

Film's identity as a medium of entertainment presented us with a paradox: though we were not averse to exploiting the cinema's mass appeal to attract enrollments, that very appeal made it suspect [...]. Film courses were seen as a form of pandering—a bias which held firm despite the most persuasive structuralist and postmodern critical arguments for the broadening of the text to include all levels of cultural production, and the subjection of popular media to the same interpretive scrutiny accorded to canonical literary works.<sup>26</sup>

Marcus talks of cinema as one among the “popular media”; but in fact the institutional context she describes meant that it was imperative to assert a canon of individual film texts of undoubted aesthetic or ethical appeal: a canon, by analogy with the received litany of literary greats, which implied an analytical focus on the director-as-auteur and which asserted Italian cinema's national vocation. Cinema, Marcus writes, came to supplant literature as “the venue for the enactment of the Italian national self.”<sup>27</sup>

This influential vision of Italian cinema has been criticized as nationalistic,<sup>28</sup> but I think the key value it asserts and takes for granted is that cinema is to be valued to the extent that it acquits an edifying function.<sup>29</sup> This value is reinforced in circular fashion through the selection of a narrow canon of Italian films that illustrate and prove it. It is also a value shared with the standard version of cinephilia deriving from a tradition of prescriptive film theory associated with the *Cahiers di Cinéma*, profoundly suspicious of the “spectacular” vocation of cinema, a vocation exemplified in a tradition of Italian cinema at least as dominant as its realist one. Cinema's essential triviality is disavowed by such prescriptive cinephilia in order to insist on its cultural legitimacy and pertinence to “Big Important Things like Politics, History, or Ethics”—even (if you're one of a number of French *maîtres à penser*) to “Thought” itself.<sup>30</sup>

In parallel with the standard *Cahiers*-derived version of cinephilia, however, is another (and markedly gendered) brand of cinephilia that finds its identity precisely in the *enjoyment* of trivia, and especially in the appreciation of cult cinema. The Italian cinema of *filoni*, subgenres or cycles of films, often designed for dubbing and export, have traditionally been dear to this other

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<sup>25</sup> The earliest film allotted a chapter is *Roma città aperta* (*Rome, Open City*, Roberto Rossellini, 1945) and the latest *C'eravamo tanto amanti* (*We All Loved Each Other So Much*, Ettore Scola, 1974).

<sup>26</sup> Marcus, “A Coming-of-Age Story,” 267.

<sup>27</sup> Marcus, “A Coming-of-Age Story,” 269. I am re-elaborating here material from Alan O'Leary and Catherine O'Rawe, “Against Realism: On a ‘Certain Tendency’ in Italian Film Criticism,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 16/1 (2011): 107–19.

<sup>28</sup> See the discussion in O'Leary and O'Rawe, “Against Realism.”

<sup>29</sup> See the appreciative but critical review of Marcus' *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* in which Dalle Vacche argues that Marcus reprises the idea of Italian cinema as a political engaged cinema (“cinema d'impegno”) from an early study by Pierre Leprohon, *Italian Cinema* (New York: Praeger, 1972), first published in French in 1966. See *Substance*, 19/1:61 (1990): 120–22. Dalle Vacche doubts “how reliable this interpretive key is in interpreting the history of post-war Italian cinema” (121); she wonders if Marcus may have “become too quickly enamored with this notion reverberating with all the energy of a humanist referent” (122), but the same question might usefully still be asked of the whole discipline.

<sup>30</sup> See Alain Badiou, *Cinema* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

cinephilia. The spaghetti western, of course, as well as the *giallo* and other forms of horror; the peplum, muscleman or “sword and sandal” film; the *poliziesco*; spy movies swiftly made to cash in on the success of James Bond, and so on: though these still have an ambiguous place in the Standard Model, all have found ever greater purchase in the revisions of Peter Bondanella’s history of Italian cinema and in scholarship more generally, even as specialist publishers, fanzines, and websites have come to serve the international community of cult appreciation. What is striking, though, is how the notion of canon tends to persist even as the scope of Italian cinema studies broadens, and *filone* material is often analysed using criteria developed for the appreciation of aesthetically or ethically “admirable” films.<sup>31</sup> In addition, *filone* cinema, designed for international distribution, is typically understood as having a masculine address.<sup>32</sup> Modes or genres characterized by an intra-national address to women, couples, or families—the melodrama, the Christmas film (the “cinepanettone”), the teen film or date movie, the consolatory comedy, to name a few—have, until recently, tended not to find a place in scholarship and history.<sup>33</sup>

### Italian Cinema and its Companions

This account of the development of Italian cinema studies and its convergences with “world cinephilia” is tendentious and telegraphic. Absent is any discussion of the study of Italian cinema in Italy itself, and of those writers in the Anglophone context (including Angela Dalle Vacche, Marcia Landy, and Mary P. Wood) who have emphasized Italian cinema’s melodramatic and spectacular rather than realistic or auteurist traditions.<sup>34</sup> The account is provided, however, to indicate how a certain set of institutional, practical, and discursive factors helped to determine the concerns of Italian cinema studies in the Anglophone context—helped to make a mainstream, in other words—and to suggest that the legacy is still with us, both in terms of the choice of texts and themes to be studied and of the approach to those texts and themes. Nonetheless, the discipline itself has taken to reflexively considering its own history and priorities in recent years—asking why we study what we study, how we study it, and what are our assumptions. The current article resumes this undertaking.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Prominent exceptions include Christopher Wagstaff, “A Forkfull of Westerns: Industry, Audiences and the Italian Western,” in *Popular European Cinema*, ed. Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau (London: Routledge, 1997), 245–61; Mikel Koven, *La dolce morte: Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2006); Dana Renga, “Pastapocalypse! End Times in Italian Trash Cinema,” *The Italianist* 31/2 (2011): 243–57; Giacomo Manzoli, *Da Ercole a Fantozzi: cinema popolare e società italiana dal boom economico alla neotelevisione (1958–1976)* (Rome: Carocci, 2012). I hope to have provided an approach to popular cinema as popular in my *Fenomenologia del cinepanettone* (Soveria Manelli: Rubbettino, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> See Joanne Hollows, “The Masculinity of Cult,” in *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste*, ed. M. Jancovich (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 35–53.

<sup>33</sup> Happily, there is now too much material to cite here, but a good place to start is *Popular Italian Cinema*, ed. Louis Bayman and Sergio Rigoletto (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> See also Louis Bayman, *The Operatic and the Everyday in post-war Italian Film Melodrama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, the special issue of *Italian Studies* 63/2 (2008), entitled “Thinking Italian Cinema” edited by Catherine O’Rawe and myself; the articles batched in the “Mise-en-Scène” section of *The Italianist* 31/2 (2011); the group of articles on cinema edited by Dom Holdaway and Mariarita Martino in *Italian Studies* 67/2 (2012); and the special section entitled “Italian Screen Studies: Present and Future,” edited by Dana Renga, in *The Italianist* 34/2 (2014). For early examples of reflective pieces by the two pioneers of Italian cinema studies foregrounded in the present article, see Millicent Marcus, “Who Owns Film Studies?” *Romance Languages Annual* 5 (1993): 239–45; and Peter Bondanella, “Recent Work on Italian Cinema,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 1/1 (1995): 101–23.

If a reflexive taking stock is, in part, a sign of the maturity of Italian cinema studies, it is also a consequence of the discipline's expansion within the broader fields of Italian studies and of screen studies.<sup>36</sup> Suggestive of the scale of scholarly production on Italian cinema (and suggesting a market for it) is the presence of three multiauthored English language companion volumes issued or forthcoming with major publishers: Peter Bondanella's *The Italian Cinema Book* from the British Film Institute (2013), Frank Burke's *A Companion to Italian Cinema* from Wiley-Blackwell (2017), and Joseph Luzzi's *The Total Art: Italian Cinema from Silent Screen to Digital Image* from Bloomsbury Academic (forthcoming 2018). I analyze the contents, or better the *content pages*, of the three volumes in the table below. Note that my discussion is emphatically *not* a review (I have myself contributed to all three books) but rather an attempt to glean from their contents the current concerns of Italian cinema studies and so to signpost the state of knowledge about Italian cinema—at least as it exists in English.

Frank Burke writes of nation, neorealism, and the auteurs of the golden age being “baselines” in his volume, “foundational critical and aesthetic categories of discussion.”<sup>37</sup> Burke maintains that his volume “illustrates the erosion of all three for historical, political, economic, and to some degree aesthetic reasons,” and to an extent this also seems true of Bondanella's and Luzzi's books. Burke goes on: “Perhaps all three [i.e., nation, neorealism and the golden-age auteurs] dissolve at the most profound level for paradigmatic reasons: i.e., the loss of confidence in ‘unitary subjects’ such as the nation, the ‘father’ (the ‘Oedipal’ role neorealism has played in the postwar), and the ‘great artist.’” One feels then the pressure on the Standard Model in the lists of contents in the three companions even as its tenacity is clear in the space and status granted to Burke's “baselines” of nation, neorealism, and the auteurs of the golden age. The tenacity of the Standard Mode is also clear in the received timeline and periodization of Italian cinema found intact in each companion. Chronology in history-telling is a convenience (a convention that forgets its own artifice) which grants a disguise of common-sense to melodramatic narratives of rise and fall; however, contrasting temporalities are suggested in the volumes with the attention paid to pre-cinema, “minor” forms, and the relationship of cinema to other media. Several threads might be picked out that point to continuities and survivals that contrast the received narrative of progress (neorealism and golden age) and decline (crisis following the 1970s). One is that of non-fiction or documentary. Already present in the “cinema of attractions” days before multi-reel films in Italy (as internationally),<sup>38</sup> and for the most part produced by non-Italian filmmakers, documentary is reprised in the newsreel reportage produced by the Luce Institute from the 1920s under the auspices of the fascist regime.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The major disciplinary meetings, for example the annual conference of the American Association of Italian Studies (AAIS), have hosted an ever-greater number of panels and roundtables devoted to Italian cinema (though the AAIS steering committee blocked the creation of a cinema caucus, apparently fearing inundation). This is true also of a forum such as the annual conference of the North American Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS), where once upon a time almost the sole allusions to Italy were in the listings of local restaurants that traditionally preface the conference program.

<sup>37</sup> Email to the author 15 July 2015.

<sup>38</sup> The “cinema of attractions” is a coinage of Russian director Sergei Eisenstein deployed by film historian Tom Gunning to put the emphasis on the vaudeville origins or conditions of exhibition of early cinema. For Gunning, this was an “exhibitionist cinema” characterized by its “ability to *show* something” rather than its capacity to tell a story. See Gunning, “The Cinema of Attractions” in *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: BFI, 1990), 56–62, at 57.

<sup>39</sup> The films produced by the Luce institute are now available online at <http://www.archivioluce.com/archivio/>, though in very low quality and sometimes redacted form.

**Table: Themes and Topics in Three Companions to Italian Cinema**

Section titles have been retained in order to indicate the organization of the books, but I have “generalized” chapter themes, omitted authors, and excluded the editorial introductions.

<i>The Italian Cinema Book</i> (Bondanella)	<i>A Companion to Italian Cinema</i> (Burke)	<i>The Total Art</i> (Luzzi)
<p><b>1: The Silent Era, 1900–1922</b></p> <p>Silent cinema as international phenomenon Stardom The Diva film Silent film genres</p> <p><b>2: The Birth of the Talkies and the Fascist Era</b></p> <p>Fascism and Italian cinema Matinee idols Comedy Censorship from Fascism to the present</p> <p><b>3: Post-war Cinematic Culture: Realism and Beyond</b></p> <p>Neorealism and left-wing culture Cities and space Neorealist film and literature Children in Italian cinema Italian cinema and female friendship Female stars Hollywood and Italy</p> <p><b>4: The Golden Age of Italian Cinema</b></p>	<p><b>1: Historical/Chronological Perspectives</b></p> <p>Silent cinema Fascism and cinema The Italian cinema industry Neorealism Stardom and 1950s France and Italy from neorealism to 1960s Comedy, especially Comedy, Italian Style Auteur Cinema Terrorism in Italian cinema Italian cinema 1970s to present</p> <p><b>2: Film forms and genres</b></p> <p>The essay film Experimental cinema Nonfiction film</p> <p><b>3: Critical and Theoretical Issues</b></p> <p>Music Soundtrack Italian cinema and national character Italian cinema and Catholicism Gender, the gaze and modernity Women in Italian cinema</p>	<p><b>1: Theory and Practice</b></p> <p>Silent film Futurism and film Fascist cinema Neorealism Orphaned generation Italian cinema in the new millennium The Femme Fatale Italian Women Directors Comedy, Italian Style The <i>giallo</i> Italian film theory Film and photography Film and music Film and television Popular cinema Film and neuroscience Italian cinema in the digital age Future of the past Documentary Italian cinema/World cinema</p> <p><b>2: Films in focus</b></p> <p><i>L'inferno</i> <i>/Dante's Inferno</i> (1911) <i>Cabiria</i> (1914) <i>Riso amaro/Bitter Rice</i> (1949) <i>Stromboli</i> (1950) <i>Suspiria</i> (1977) <i>L'avventura</i> (1960) <i>Teorema/Theorem</i> (1968) <i>I vitelloni</i> (1953)</p>



<p>Costume and couture Music Production around 1960 in statistics The musclemann peplum <i>Mondo cane</i> and the “shockumentary” The Spaghetti Western Comedy, Italian Style The Political Film <i>Giallo</i> and horror Co-production Italian audiences</p> <p><b>5. An Age of Crisis, Transition and Consolidation</b></p> <p>Scriptwriting for Fellini Gangster movies Terrorism in Italian cinema Cinema and the Holocaust The Christmas film Stars and masculinity Women filmmakers</p> <p><b>6: New Directions in Critical Approaches to Italian Cinema</b></p> <p>Post-national cinema Post-colonial cinema Genres Cinema and psychoanalysis Italian film history now</p>	<p>Queer issues Globalization Gilles Deleuze and Italian cinema Thematic and textual reflexivity Intertextuality</p> <p><b>4: Roundtable on Italian cinema and Italian cinema studies</b></p>	<p><i>Il conformist/The Conformist</i> (1970) <i>C’era una volta il West/Once upon Time in the West</i> (1968) <i>Film d’amore e d’anarchia/Love and Anarchy</i> (1973) <i>La meglio gioventù/The Best of Youth</i> (2003)</p> <p><b>3. Behind the scenes</b></p> <p>Spaces of Cinema Sound and Soundtrack Cinematography Screenwriters</p>
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The Luce films were shown in program with fiction features (they were also exported), a practice that continued after WWII. The documentary vocation some commentators find in neorealism (a vocation not in fact inconsistent with the “demon of melodrama” that Bazin famously found in the films) might well be placed in this tradition, as could a film like *The Battle of Algiers* (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966), made by Italian filmmakers on commission from the Algerians to celebrate

independence from France. Like Pontecorvo's "based-on-real-events" narrative feature, many documentaries (Pontecorvo himself made several) were made to express and cement the worldview of a given political constituency in the period of the Cold War, the stiff breezes of which were of course strongly felt in Italy. Important recent scholarship has recuperated the history and features of the industry films that were produced in parallel to *engagé* documentary—often, it seems, with equally ideological aspirations.<sup>40</sup> More recently, documentary production has thrived with the advent of digital technology. Typically referred to by its makers or champions as a "cinema del reale" (cinema of the real)—probably in order to claim descent from neorealism as well as virtuous distinction from Hollywood fantasy or home-grown genre films—contemporary non-fiction material finds distribution through alternative circuits like small festivals or the web, gaining greater visibility in unusual cases such as the anti-Berlusconi films of Sabina Guzzanti (e.g., *Viva Zapatero!*, 2005) and *Sacro GRA*, mentioned in my introduction.

It is worth dwelling for a moment on another strain in the Italian documentary tradition, the *filone* of "Mondo" films sometimes referred to as "shockumentary." The Mondo films show that an apparently marginal phenomenon—one practically invisible in the Standard Model, at any rate—can be understood to be at the center of Italian cinema's concerns. Films like *Mondo cane* (*A Dog's World*, Cavara, Jacopetti, and Prosperi, 1962) and those made in its wake were "exploitation" documentaries that offered voyeuristic commentary on cultural practices and taboo subjects in both the "modern/First" and "primitive/Third" worlds. The sensational aspects of the films have obvious links to the "cinema of attractions"; the ironic tone of the voiceover recalls the Luce films at their most supercilious; the employment of found footage and associative structure (where conceptual or visual echoes generate the sequencing of scenes according to a "logic of contiguity") recalls experimental film;<sup>41</sup> the restaging (sometimes frank, sometimes dissembled) of "real" events or practices will be characteristic of postmodern filmmaking; and the voyeurism anticipates reality television. In terms of themes, the fascination with sex and with the female body, inherited from earlier titillating documentaries like *Europa di notte* (*Europe by Night*, Alessandro Blasetti, 1959), is held in common with Italian and European auteur cinema, and looks forward to the erotic comedies of the 1970s (which do not seem to find space in the three companion volumes). The "ethnographic" strain in the films—the fascination with naked dark skinned bodies of both sexes, the condescending presentation of "tribal" practices and, in *Africa addio* (*Goodbye Africa*, Jacopetti and Prosperi, 1966), the assertion that Africans cannot govern themselves—links them to the colonial films produced at the behest of the fascists in the 1930s, but also to Orientalist spectacle like the sacrifice of children to a Carthaginian God in the influential silent epic *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914).<sup>42</sup>

The "shockumentary" troubles the received chronological account of Italian cinema and the

<sup>40</sup> See Paola Bonifazio, *Schooling in Modernity: The Politics of Sponsored Films in Postwar Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

<sup>41</sup> Gino Moliterno, "Mondo cane and the Invention of the Shockumentary," in Bondanella, *The Italian Cinema Book*, 172–80, at 173. The "Mondo" films' use of found footage also anticipates, though in a radically different register, the use of found footage in the films of Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi, as discussed in Robert Lumley's important study *Entering the Frame: Cinema and History in the Films of Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011).

<sup>42</sup> See Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism's Empire Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015). Áine O'Healy points out that *Africa addio* "explores in pseudo-documentary fashion the violence unleashed by decolonization in several African nations, while ignoring those countries that had been colonized by Italians." See O'Healy, "[Non] è una somala": Deconstructing African Femininity in Italian Film," *The Italianist* 29/2 (2009): 175–198, at 182.

narrative of progress and decline typically offered by it. The Mondo films can be seen to offer, at least as much as neorealism, a set of characteristics and concerns that recall or anticipate earlier or later periods. Yet they were hardly studied until the 2000s (and still not primarily by Italianists) because they failed to fit the Standard Model and could not straightforwardly be discussed in terms of an ethical idea of cinema.<sup>43</sup> In addition, the manner of their study in recent years has something to tell us about what's at stake in bringing marginal forms to disciplinary attention. Mark Goodall writes of the provocative *Addio zio Tom* (*Goodbye Uncle Tom*, Jacopetti and Prosperi, 1971), a historical reconstruction of slavery in which the filmmakers picture themselves making a documentary in the American antebellum South, that it is "one of the most staggering contributions to the history of film art."<sup>44</sup> The film was deplored on release as racist and hypocritical,<sup>45</sup> but for Goodall, "the very aspects of the film that offended in the past are those which now excite and mesmerize."<sup>46</sup> There is something posturing (even macho) in the ostentatious unorthodoxy of a judgment like this, which puts the cult back in cultural capital in its claim to speak for a neglected mode.<sup>47</sup> It seems that a certain rhetorical gaucheness, even violence, is required when established paradigms have to be shifted.

Many more pages than would once have been the case are devoted to genre filmmaking in the three companions under discussion here, though, arguably, the lineaments of the Standard Model persist precisely in the division of *filoni* into categories like the peplum and spaghetti western. Again, there is a common-sense appeal in such a division, but it may conceal the fact that the distinction between such forms is essentially one of *mise-en-scène*. Christopher Wagstaff has argued that *filone* cinema is best understood as a mechanism for generating a set of gratifications: thrill, sexual arousal, and laughter. They are, says Wagstaff, "three physiological responses, provoked not by whole films, but by items or moments in films. Italian formula cinema simply juggled with plot items to produce the required recipe that would stimulate the appropriate number and kind of these 'physiological' responses."<sup>48</sup> As a result, says Wagstaff, "it can sometimes be hard to tell from the credits of a film and its synopsis whether a particular film is a spaghetti western or an example of another formula such as bandit, gangster, mafia, thriller or political suspense. A still, particularly if someone in the shot is wearing a hat, usually clears up the mystery."<sup>49</sup> The suggestion is intriguing and challenging for a discipline whose practitioners have typically been trained in the methods of literary analysis with its focus on narrative and ideology. Wagstaff here shifts the emphasis to pleasure, still under-theorized (not only in relation to Italian cinema), and points to the role of the visual *stuff* in a film (costume, color, location, props), a dimension of Italian cinema that remains to be mapped, notwithstanding the essay on costume and couture in the Bondanella volume.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Moliterno gives an introduction to the scholarship in "Mondo cane and the Invention of the Shockumentary," but the key work is Mark Goodall's *Sweet and Savage: The World Through the Shockumentary Film Lens* (London: Headpress, 2006), soon to be published in a revised edition.

<sup>44</sup> Goodall, *Sweet and Savage*, 86.

<sup>45</sup> Pauline Kael described the directors Jacopetti and Prosperi as "perhaps the most devious and irresponsible filmmakers who have ever lived." Cited in Goodall, *Sweet and Savage*, 86.

<sup>46</sup> Goodall, *Sweet and Savage*, 86.

<sup>47</sup> I mean this comment sympathetically—it has been said with greater justice of some of my own writing.

<sup>48</sup> Wagstaff, "A Forkfull of Westerns," 253.

<sup>49</sup> Wagstaff, "A Forkfull of Westerns," 252.

<sup>50</sup> Réka Buckley, "Material Dreams: Costume and Couture Italian Style. From Hollywood on the Tiber to the Italian Screen," in Bondanella, *The Italian Cinema Book*, 132–41.

The conventional division of *filoni* tends also to conceal those characteristics shared with the realist or auteur filmmaking traditionally opposed to genre in the Standard Model. Richard Dyer has suggested that

Almost everything in Italian cinema—except perhaps (and importantly) comedy—can be related back to melodrama. The word is ambiguous, referring both to melodrama as understood in the rest of the world and to opera, and from them both stem spectacle and stardom, adventure and thriller genres, as well as actual opera films and melodramas, and even realism.<sup>51</sup>

In speaking in these terms of melodrama, comedy, spectacle, and realism, Dyer is speaking of modes rather than genres, and pointing to a different kind of analysis that might be made.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, a history of Italian cinema in terms of its modes might help to clarify the elusive particularity of the “national” cinema while avoiding any assumption that Italian films somehow “reflect” the nation. Angela Dalle Vacche pointed to this particularity when she observed that Italian cinema tends to deal with contemporary or historical events in terms of “macroscopic” and operatic stories but tends to deal with “the long duration of deep structures of behaviour” on the “microscopic” scale of comedy.<sup>53</sup> It may be that academics are wary of working on “deep structures of behaviour” because of the danger of speaking in the simplistic or stereotypical terms of national character.<sup>54</sup> This reluctance may be one reason that filmmakers’ engagement with events, politics, and historical circumstances continues to be the bread and butter of Italian cinema studies. On the other hand, the emphasis on such themes might again be a legacy of the values that generated the Standard Model: it implies that the “true” vocation of Italian cinema is to speak of national, historical, and political themes. In any case, mafia, migration, terrorism, and the Holocaust are topics that have been particularly prominent in studies of recent years,<sup>55</sup> more

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<sup>51</sup> Richard Dyer, “Italian Cinema,” in *The Cinema Book*, ed. Pam Cook, 3rd ed. (London/Basingstoke: BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 231–32, at 231.

<sup>52</sup> Christine Gledhill writes of the “notion of modality” that it “defines a specific mode of aesthetic articulation adaptable across a range of genres, across decades and across national cultures.” “Rethinking Genre,” in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Hodder, 2000), 221–43, at 229. Dyer’s suggestive schema might have to be modified to be applicable across Italian cinema. For example, Catherine O’Rawe has shown how the middlebrow comedies of the 2000s typically merge comic and melodramatic modes in their articulation of masculine crisis, so that the two modes do not seem to be opposed, as Dyer might be understood to suggest. See the chapter “Comedy and Masculinity, Italian Style,” in O’Rawe, *Stars and Masculinities in Contemporary Italian Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 45–67.

<sup>53</sup> Angela Dalle Vacche, *The Body in the Mirror: Shapes of History in Italian Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 12. See also Dalle Vacche’s “The Diva Film,” in Bondanella, *The Italian Cinema Book*, 24–30.

<sup>54</sup> Stephen Gundle in the essay “Italian Cinema and the Italian National Character” in Burke’s Blackwell volume argues that “‘national character’ is merely one of several discursive modes for addressing problems of society and politics, and one that is not necessarily the most fruitful.” Thanks to Frank Burke for allowing me to read this essay prior to publication.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Dana Renga, ed., *Mafia Movies: A Reader* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2011); O’Leary, *Tragedia all’italiana*; Millicent Marcus, *Italian Cinema in the Shadow of Auschwitz* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2007). For good reason, migration has become maybe the most prominent theme in “engaged” Italian film studies. See for example *The Cinemas of Italian Migration: European and Transatlantic Narratives*, ed. Sabine Schrader and Daniel Winkler (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), *Destination Italy: Representing Migration in Contemporary Media and Narrative*, ed. Emma Bond, Guido Bonsaver, and Federico Faloppa (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015), as well as the associated database that collects details of migrant characters in Italian films at [http://www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/mml\\_apps/italian\\_movies/index.php](http://www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/mml_apps/italian_movies/index.php). Vetri Nathan has recently published a monograph

prominent in Italian cinema scholarship than in Italian cinema it might be suspected. It seems to me that entertainment rather than political commitment continues to be the presiding motivation and goal of most Italian cinema, sometimes to the distaste of students of that cinema.<sup>56</sup>

### The Particularity of Italian Cinema

In a valedictory essay that closes Bondanella's BFI volume, the great Italian cinema historian Gian Piero Brunetta suggests four main ways in which Italy has contributed to world cinema.<sup>57</sup> These are: Italian cinema's employment and dissemination of Western cultural patrimony and history; its confirmation of cinema as a medium equipped to express the worldview and style of the individual filmmaker as auteur; its recuperation and validation of craftsmanship and technical expertise (for Brunetta, an Italian tradition dating back to the Renaissance); its effective exploitation of the body and the visible to equip cinema to become *the* universal modern storyteller.

As Brunetta himself points out, these are lines along which histories might be and sometimes have been written, though the assumptions behind them should not be left untested. For example, a danger of treating Italian cinema as a vehicle of cultural patrimony (beyond the glaring one of Eurocentrism) is that of treating the cinema itself as heritage object. The heritage approach is, naturally, essential in some respects: the study of silent Italian cinema, for example, has benefitted immeasurably from research and restoration that has given us access to many films once thought lost. But the heritage approach becomes obstructive when it takes the form of moralistic proselytising for a presumed aesthetic or ethical or political "best" in Italian screen culture, something countenanced by—indeed *essential to*—the Standard Model as described above.

Certainly, it seems to me that a study of the tradition of craftsmanship commended by Brunetta has been displaced in the scholarship by the concern with nation, history, and the celebration of auteurs. I have already mentioned the absence of *mise-en-scène* as an object of study, but technology, too, has been neglected in the histories. Technology might be seen (as a set of conditions of possibility that intersect with economic, institutional, and political circumstances) to have just as determining an influence on the development of Italian cinema as the creative preoccupations of directors—something that can be observed, for example, in the shift to digital in recent years. Still, if we insist on thinking in terms of what Frank Burke calls "unitary subjects," we can note that technology itself has had its own "auteurs."<sup>58</sup> Italian cinema

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on the theme, *Marvelous Bodies: Italy's New Migrant Cinema* (Purdue University Press, 2017). Nathan's approach, confidently derived from the Standard Model (though enriched with Homi Bhabha), promises to be challenged in Áine O'Healy's forthcoming *Migrant Anxieties: Italian Cinema in a Transnational Frame* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018).

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, William Hope's introductions to *Italian Film Directors in the New Millennium*, ed. William Hope (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 1–36, and *Un nuovo cinema politico Italiano? I: Lavoro, migrazione, relazioni di genere*, ed. Luciana d'Arcangeli, William Hope, and Silvana Serra (Kibworth Beauchamp: Troubadour, 2013), ix–xx.

<sup>57</sup> Gian Piero Brunetta, "The Heritage of the Past and New frontiers for the History of Italian Cinema," in Bondanella, *The Italian Cinema Book*, 330–34.

<sup>58</sup> The art of the screenplay in Italian cinema has also traditionally been neglected but important studies include *Sulla carta: storia e storie della sceneggiatura in Italia*, ed. Mariapia Comand (Turin: Lindau, 2006) and the dedicated journal issue entitled "Nero su bianco: sceneggiatura e sceneggiatori in Italia" edited by Paolo Russo in *Quaderni del CSCI* 10 (2014). See also Mariapia Comand, "La sceneggiatura nel tempo della cultura visuale," in *Sinergie*

is renowned for its photography, for instance, but I note that the great cinematographer Vittorio Storaro gets only two fleeting mentions in Bondanella's BFI book. This seems perverse given that Storaro's expressive, even expressionist, use of light and color has influenced modern cinema to a greater extent, perhaps, than the directors (among them Bertolucci and Coppola) with whom he has worked. That influence might well be exceeded by the composer Ennio Morricone. Prolific and ubiquitous, and recently the recipient of a second Oscar for *The Hateful Eight* (Quentin Tarantino, 2015), Morricone is still best known for the work he did with Sergio Leone, work that showed him to be the quintessential exponent of Italian cinema's anti-naturalistic—again, one might say expressionist—use of sound, something that distinguishes Italian cinema from most of the American tradition. The use of dubbing and post-synchronization typical of a majority of Italian films until the 1980s (the reason Italian films are often alienating to the novice “audient”) has recently come into the disciplinary purview.<sup>59</sup> Italian film music too, including the use of popular song, rock, and electronic music, has begun to be studied beyond the famous names of Morricone and Nino Rota (Fellini's collaborator), even if the latter continue to command most attention.<sup>60</sup>

At its most perceptive, work on the *maestri* of film music composition can identify the particularities of Italian cinema and justify a focus on the “national” tradition. Richard Dyer's argument that Nino Rota's film music is characterized by “ironic attachment” might usefully be made about much Italian cinema.<sup>61</sup> For example, the attitude of the *commedia all'italiana* (prominent in the 1960s) was one of “satirical proximity” rather than critical distance, according to which the questionable behavior of the protagonist was not deplored but, as it were, relished with a grimace and a raised eyebrow. This attitude is reprised in the Checco Zalone films mentioned above. It is for the audience to judge, or not, the character of the protagonist and the society that forms him: the film itself evinces an ambivalent complicity.<sup>62</sup>

I used the gendered pronoun “him” deliberately in the previous sentence: comic personae in Italian cinema, as elsewhere, tend to be male, and the license to misbehave is a masculine near-monopoly. This points to a gendered division of labor disguised in Brunetta's praise for Italian cinema's exploitation of bodies, and so Italian star studies is inevitably also gender studies—or *should* be at any rate. Work on star masculinities by Jacqueline Reich, Catherine O'Rawe, and others confirms this even as discussion of female stardom has sometimes been limited by innocence of or indifference to gender theory.<sup>63</sup> Sophisticated work has been done, however, on

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narrative: *cinema e letteratura nell'Italia contemporanea*, ed. Guido Bonsaver et al. (Florence: Franco Cesati, 2008), 83–98.

<sup>59</sup> Antonella Sisto, *Film Sound in Italy: Listening to the Screen* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Emanuele D'Onofrio, “Italian Cinema Revisits the 1970s: Film Music and Youth Identity in De Maria's *Paz!*,” *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 1/2 (2007): 161–86; Catherine O'Rawe, “More More Moro: Music and Montage in *Romanzo criminale*,” *The Italianist* 29/2 (2009): 214–26.

<sup>61</sup> Richard Dyer, *Nino Rota: Music, Film and Feeling* (London/Basingstoke: BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>62</sup> See Catherine O'Rawe, “Esordi popolari: Italiani medi e prossimità di satira,” in *Nuovocinema/Pesaro 77*, ed. Pedro Armocida (Venice: Marsilio, 2015), 155–64.

<sup>63</sup> Catherine O'Rawe, *Stars and Masculinities*; Jacqueline Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover: Marcello Mastroianni, Masculinity, and Italian Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); also Reich's *The Maciste Films of Italian Silent Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015) and O'Rawe and Reich's jointly authored *Divi: la mascolinità nel cinema italiano* (Rome: Donzelli, 2015). See also Sergio Rigoletto, *Masculinity and Italian Cinema: Sexual Politics, Social Conflict and Male Crisis in the 1970s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014). Stephen Gundle refrains from employing gender theory in *Bellissima: Feminine Beauty and the Idea of Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) and the book has been criticized for replicating the objectifying processes he analyses.



Italian silent cinema's development of a kind of star system that elevated certain female actors to the status of "diva."<sup>64</sup> Later the diva mantel has been worn in their individual ways by figures like Anna Magnani, Sophia Loren, and Monica Bellucci, all of whom have been the object of scholarly scrutiny, but some female "typologies" have so far escaped academic attention.<sup>65</sup> Edwige Fenech, *the* female star of the Italian erotic comedies of the 1970s and a household name to this day, is one example; another is Margherita Buy, "serious" star of several Nanni Moretti films, including his most recent *Mia madre* (*My Mother*, 2015), as well as many other films in recent years.<sup>66</sup>

Margherita Buy's success points to a key characteristic of contemporary Italian cinema: the significant amount of public funding for film production administered by Italy's state television (RAI) and culture ministry. The effect of the funding system is to encourage films to resemble each other stylistically and to employ the same faces again and again—Margherita Buy being one of these, and Toni Servillo, star of *La grande bellezza*, another. Indeed, the prominent Italian scholar Giacomo Manzoli has described contemporary "serious" Italian cinema as a "regime cinema," meaning that its form and content are determined to a remarkable extent by appointees on state quangos.<sup>67</sup> As these ruminations imply, the discussion of industry and economics is essential for a proper understanding of form, cast, and content in Italian cinema, though these were topics effectively excluded from the Standard Model of Italian cinema history.<sup>68</sup> They achieve greater space in the companion volumes edited by Bondanella, Burke, and Luzzi, and they lead naturally to questions of the transnational (with co-production by two or more countries a big theme) and to the consideration of cinema not only as a question of products (film texts) but as a set of legislative, financial, and infrastructural conditions—and also, of course, of consumption and audiences.<sup>69</sup> A key datum to bear in mind is that Italian audiences have most often watched more American films than any others, including their own, and, as Christopher Wagstaff points out, this "has consequences for a 'cultural history' approach to Italian cinema, for it means that the public has for the most part been consuming the popular culture of another

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<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Angela Dalle Vacche, *Diva: Defiance and Passion in Early Italian Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008) and the bibliographic discussion in Welle, "The Beginnings of Film Stardom and the Print Media of *Divismo*."

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Gundle, *Bellissima*, and Pauline Small, *Sophia Loren: Moulding the Star* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2009).

<sup>66</sup> The Buy persona is discussed in Pauline Small, "Representing the Female: Rural Idylls, Urban Nightmares," in William Hope, ed., *Italian Cinemas: New Directions* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), 151–73.

<sup>67</sup> Giacomo Manzoli, "Politica e mercato nel cinema italiano," *The Italianist* 33/2 (2013): 261–69. The bravura roving camera found in Paolo Sorrentino is a prominent stylistic feature of the "regime cinema" identified by Manzoli (see note 2, above).

<sup>68</sup> Despite this, the question of industry has been dealt with *passim* in much of Gian Piero Brunetta's scholarship and is a theme in Pierre Sorlin's *Italian National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1996). It is the subject of an important book by Barbara Corsi, *Con qualche dollaro in meno: storia economica del cinema italiano*, 2nd ed. (Florence: Le Lettere, 2012), and has been a career-long concern of Christopher Wagstaff: see, for example, his essay "Production Around 1960," in Bondanella, *The Italian Cinema Book*, 149–62. See also David Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era, 1880–1980: Cultural Industries, Politics and the Public* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), and David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

<sup>69</sup> Regional film commissions have assumed greater importance in film production and in film scholarship in recent years. See, for example, Marco Cucco, "From the State to the Regions: The Devolution of Italian Cinema," *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies* 1/3 (2013): 263–278. The idea of regional cinema (as distinct from national or translational cinema) is usefully theorized in Alex Marlow-Mann, *The New Neapolitan Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

nation.”<sup>70</sup>

Still, in a short history of Italian cinema-going in the Bondanella volume, Pierre Sorlin can talk of “an Italian way of enjoying movies.”<sup>71</sup> Sorlin’s piece makes clear that the study of economic-industrial structures and circumstances is always also a study of culture. Take for example the cinema’s relationship with political constituencies in post-WWII Italy. In this period, the cultural power of the Catholic Church was expressed not only through its influence on censorship, but also in terms of exhibition: many Italians would have watched their movies in one of the Church’s extensive network of parish cinemas, originally set up in the 1930s. Rival political “churches” made up of the Italian communist, socialist, or “extra-parliamentary” parties developed in the postwar period their own capillary infrastructures of exhibition through youth and cultural organizations and cineclubs. As a result, the various religio-political cultures developed parallel models of cinephilia and canons of film. Of course, these canons would have been made up only partly of *Italian* films, and any study of audiences tends to lead once more to questions of the transnational. But the diversion from the national to other questions should not blind scholarship to the particularities of the Italian context and the country’s cinema. In other words, we still need to work on *Italian* cinema.

### Watching from a Distance

What then *is* Italian cinema? It will not come as a surprise that I will offer no more conclusive answer to that question than the piecemeal suggestions already made above. In my introduction I used three different “Italian cinemas” to suggest that the answer is in any case a matter of perspective and I will return to these “three cinemas” again. But one perspective that has not yet been adopted is that of “comprehensiveness.” It is worth considering the implications of another number, 167, mentioned at the beginning of this article, the number of films produced in 2013. What would Italian cinema appear to be if every single one of those 167 films entered our purview? What would it become if we were to study *every* film produced in *every* year of Italian cinema history? The idea might seem unworkable, not to say absurd, but the thought experiment reveals the regularity with which our histories have been based on the pragmatics of institutional circumstances and “accidental” factors such as the availability of films, and it reveals how often those histories have been constructed around unacknowledged values rather than empirical observation.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Christopher Wagstaff, “Cinema,” in *Italian Cultural Studies*, ed. David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 216–32, at 220.

<sup>71</sup> Pierre Sorlin, “How the Italians Happened to Cherish and Then to Disdain the Cinema,” in Bondanella, *The Italian Cinema Book*, 219–25, at 219. Work on audiences and reception in Italy has been done for many years by Mariagrazia Fanchi; see, for example, her “‘Tra donne sole’: Cinema, Cultural Consumption and the Female Condition in Post-war Italy,” in *Film-Kino-Zuschauer: Filmrezeption/Film-Cinema-Spectator: Film Reception*, ed. Irmbert Schenk et al. (Marburg: Schüren, 2010), 305–18. A major project entitled “In search of Italian cinema audiences in the 1940s and 1950s: Gender, Genre and National Identity,” is currently underway at the UK universities of Oxford-Brookes, Exeter, and Bristol, led by Daniella Treveri Gennari with Danielle Hipkins and Catherine O’Rawe. Such work responds to Pauline Small’s call for more attention to the cultural dynamics of film production in “The New *Italian* film history,” *The Italianist* 30/2 (2010): 272–77.

<sup>72</sup> I am risking, for the purposes of the thought experiment, the naïve and itself ideological assumption that some more “scientific” enquiry can evade arguable values. The Humanities are living a moment in which they are obliged to “seek methodological (and financial) support from the sciences and a foundation that is not marred by the taint of politics” (Nico Baumbach, “What Does it Mean to Call Film an Art?,” in *Rancière and Film*, ed. Paul Bowman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 20–33, at 20): economic and institutional conditions, as always, still

In other words, we don't yet know what Italian cinema is. This article has tried to suggest some of the reasons this might be the case: in short, the Standard Model has aided but impeded us, generating a powerful account of Italian cinema that has obscured as much as it has illuminated. Still, as David Bordwell has written, "it is exhilarating but not very enlightening to criticize a position without proposing one of your own."<sup>73</sup> Allow me to propose, then, that we can employ quantitative and digital methods, at least in judicious combination with the qualitative and hermeneutical means more familiar to most of us, to help us grasp what Italian cinema has been. Methods of so-called distant reading championed by Franco Moretti in the study of literature—quantitative study, mapping, and diagrammatic representation, network analysis, models from evolutionary theory—have much to offer film and screen studies and therefore the study of Italian cinema.<sup>74</sup> They might allow us, for instance, to displace the film itself as the unit of analysis, without thereby returning us to the cinephile selectiveness of the Deleuzian "playlist" described above. As Moretti says, distant reading methods allow us "to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems."<sup>75</sup> I am not suggesting we refuse traditional competences in (Italian) film studies, but am arguing for "a blending of expertise from previously antipathetic disciplines":<sup>76</sup> a holistic and mixed methods approach (quantitative *and* qualitative) that adopts empirical, theoretical, historical, and cultural perspectives, dealing with production, aesthetics, reception, and discourse. The use of mixed methods should facilitate the "togglng" of scales from the very largest to the very smallest in order to "ground quantitative generalizations in the concrete particulars of microhistorical studies."<sup>77</sup> The challenge though would be to deploy the effort of being exhaustive to *reconfigure* knowledge rather than merely to accumulate detail. Speaking about cultural production more broadly, Fredric Jameson several decades ago proposed a reading of "high and mass culture as objectively related and dialectically interdependent phenomena, as twin and inseparable forms of the fission of aesthetic production under late capitalism."<sup>78</sup> Leaving to one side Jameson's Marxist idiom, it is worth repeating the point that popular Italian

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pertain. But beyond expanding the number (and type) of films to be considered, a more empirical approach might correct certain prescriptive disciplinary habits. Brunetta, working in the wake of the "Annales" school of history in his massive accounts of Italian cinema, has always attempted a kind of exhaustiveness, so that whole paragraphs sometimes become lists of titles and names; but the greater allocation of space and attention to preferred modes and the explicit value judgments made in Brunetta's histories mean his approach is different from what I have in mind.

<sup>73</sup> David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), xiii.

<sup>74</sup> See Moretti's collection of essays *Distant Reading* (London: Verso, 2013). Moretti himself has applied some of his quantitative methods to cinema in a not altogether satisfying article on genre and national markets ("Planet Hollywood," originally 2001, now in *Distant reading*, 91–106), and they have been discussed by Dudley Andrew in his article "An Atlas of World Cinema," in *Remapping World Cinema: Identity, Culture and politics in Film*, ed. Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim (London: Wallflower, 2006), 19–29. Andrea Miconi has undertaken a Morettian analysis of cinema in an interesting pair of articles, including one on the presence of Hollywood in Italy: "Il cinema hollywoodiano in Italia, 1930–1996: uno studio di storia quantitativa," in *La cultura italiana: Economia e comunicazione* (Turin: UTET, 2009), 507–33, and "Vendere Hollywood: studio quantitativo su 11.800 titoli di film," *Studi culturali* 3 (2014): 469–92. See also the methodological discussion in my "Cinema, storia, Italia: appunti per una ricerca in espansione," *Studi Culturali* 7/2 (2015): 265–84 (English version available at <http://tinyurl.com/nkssrmt>).

<sup>75</sup> Moretti, *Distant Reading*, 48–49.

<sup>76</sup> Jeremy G. Butler, "Statistical Analysis of Television Style: What Can Numbers Tell Us About TV Editing?," *Cinema Journal* 54/1 (2014): 25–44, at 26.

<sup>77</sup> Richard Maltby, "On the Prospect of Writing Cinema History from Below," *Tijdschrift Voor Mediageschiedenis* 9/2 (2006): 74–96, at 91.

<sup>78</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text* 1 (1979): 130–48, at 133–34.

cinema (be it praised or derided) is typically treated in terms derived from the appreciation of canonical films, while auteurs and art-house cinema are rarely treated in terms derived from the popular. My impression is that the project of treating Italian cinema as a single if complex phenomenon has yet to be actualized.<sup>79</sup>

Let me approach a conclusion by returning to the filmmakers and modes of filmmaking with which I began this article, starting again with Paolo Sorrentino. It is striking that the international success of Sorrentino's Italian-language films has led on two occasions to English-language productions, which would suggest a readiness on the part of the filmmaker to surrender a certain cultural specificity, even if not necessarily thereby to court an American embrace. *This Must be the Place* (2011) and Sorrentino's most recent film *Youth* (2015) were not Hollywood but European (co-)productions, made with the backing of the bodies of the Irish Film Board, Eurimages (the Council of Europe cinema support fund), and MiBAC (the Italian Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Tourism). The "Italian character" of Sorrentino's filmmaking has in fact been anything but effaced: it functions as a mark of quality European cinema and is deployed as artistic capital to attract funding and audience.<sup>80</sup> Thus *Youth*, though an English-language film starring Michael Caine, Harvey Keitel, and Rachel Weisz, is a kind of sequel to *La grande bellezza*, in that if the earlier film was Sorrentino's *Dolce vita*, then *Youth* proclaims itself as his 8½. As its most internationally visible products, Sorrentino's films assert the "authentic" Italian cinema to be that which directly recalls the auteur cinema of the so-called golden age.<sup>81</sup>

The extent to which the international success of Paolo Sorrentino's cinema is due to its satisfaction of a middlebrow cinephile nostalgia for a particular register and mode is not always acknowledged.<sup>82</sup> No such disavowal operates in relation to the *intra*-national success of Italian middlebrow comedy. The latest Checco Zalone film, *Quo vado?* (Gennaro Nunziante, 2016), earned almost as much in its first weekend of release as the new Star Wars film earned in Italy in a full three weeks,<sup>83</sup> and commentators have discussed its success in terms of the audience's self-recognition in the Checco Zalone persona.<sup>84</sup> They argue that the film appeals by allowing its viewers to laugh at themselves, flattering their ability to digest the satire. Though sometimes articulated in a dismissive tone, such a view resounds with the remarks above about Italian cinema's distinctive attitude of ironic attachment and satirical proximity. But it is worth noting

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<sup>79</sup> Italian cinema history has always operated by its metaphors, auteurist "paternity," and crisis being the most persistent (see O'Rawe, "I padri e i maestri"). A figure more apt for the kind of study envisaged is "ecology." The metaphor challenges us to build a methodology equal to complexity and to the study of relationships rather than objects (texts) or authors.

<sup>80</sup> This article was originally completed in early 2016 and so I do not deal here with Sorrentino's English language television series *The Young Pope* (2016-17), a European-American co-production with HBO. I would note that discussion of the series seems to have overlooked the fact that biographical shows about popes are a staple of Italian television. [note added 7 May 2017]

<sup>81</sup> The Sorrentino "brand" confirms Mary P. Wood's intuition in her *Italian Cinema* that the auteur is best conceptualized in Foucauldian terms as an institutional, discursive, and marketing necessity.

<sup>82</sup> Interesting that disdain for Sorrentino's cinema is loudest from the ancestral home of cinephilia, French journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*. For the *Cahiers* critics, there is "nothing uglier" than a film by Sorrentino (Vincente Malausa, "Un invité envahissant," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 689 (2013), 23). Perhaps it is the revelation of the essential middlebrow of cinephilia, exemplified in Sorrentino's work (the spectacle of an ostentatious style one is flattered or "challenged" to notice and so forced to account for), that so offends the *cinéphilie française*.

<sup>83</sup> Source *Box Office Mojo*, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/italy/?yr=2016&wk=1&p=.htm>. At the time of writing, the film has gone on to earn an amazing €65.2m (see <http://www.mymovies.it/film/2016/quovado/>) to displace *Sole a catinelle* as the most financially successful Italian film to date.

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, Maurizio Crippa, "'Come e perché io e Checco Zalone abbiamo dimostrato che il cinema italiano è nudo.' Parla Pietro Valsecchi," *Il Foglio* 5 (January 2016), available at <http://tinyurl.com/h6j4x9e>.

that middlebrow Italian comedy, standing in parallel and only in apparent contrast to the arthouse cinema of Sorrentino, is constructed like Sorrentino's in implicit collaboration with its audience.

The new documentary by Gianfranco Rosi, the last of the filmmakers mentioned in my introduction, has repeated the critical success of *Sacro Gra*, winning the Golden Bear, the top prize at the 2016 Berlin film festival. Entitled *Fuocoammare* (*Fire at Sea*, 2016), the film deals with life on Lampedusa, the small Mediterranean island that has become one of the main landing points for migrants attempting the treacherous crossing by sea from North Africa to Europe. It is likely that the film will become an essential reference point in academic discourse on migration in Italian cinema, though it is also likely to be discussed in the common sense terms of its director's social and ethical commitment. In other words, *Fuocoammare* will seem to confirm the auteur approach as the natural one to adopt for Italian cinema identified as "serious." And why not?—it might still be objected. After all, some have argued that the analysis of auteurist style offers a path to a kind of political enlightenment. For John David Rhodes, such analysis is a "labor of identifying the image as the surface on which an experience of class, of historical reality, is made visible, perceptible, and criticizable."<sup>85</sup> In a more common sense register, critic Dave Kehr has suggested that the focus on the director is "the simplest, most empirically satisfying way of connecting an audience to a work of art: through a human figure."<sup>86</sup> If Rhode's approach risks making the sensibility of the critic the center of attention, the problem with Kehr's "human figure" is that it disavows intersectional questions: human figures are gendered after all, and have (among other things) a class, ethnicity, and sexuality as well as a nationality. When the history of a national cinema has been a list of human beings sharing a common gender, class, ethnicity, and citizenship, and often also a sexuality, then we need to wonder what and who has been left out of the story. It may not be the best solution to the blind spots in Italian cinema history merely to fetishize the exceptions or to extend auteur and classic status to directors of other categories and their films.<sup>87</sup> (Likewise, it may not serve the interests of the recent immigrant to Italy to put the figure of the male Italian director once again at the center of the account of Italian cinema.) Wiser to challenge the very criteria and values that set the terms of the inherited history in the first place, in this case the Standard Model of Italian cinema.

On the evidence of the three companion volumes discussed above, this challenge is already happening in Italian cinema studies. It is notable that of the three books only Luzzi's dedicates chapters to the analysis of individual films.<sup>88</sup> This suggests that Italian cinema is no longer (only) a canon of texts by name directors: it has become a matter of audiences, of industrial, economic, and discursive conditions, and of genres, themes, and dimensions (like soundtrack). Indeed, one reviewer of *A History of Italian Cinema*, Peter Bondanella's "complete rewriting" of the text that

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<sup>85</sup> John David Rhodes, "Pasolini's Exquisite Flowers: The 'Cinema of Poetry' as a Theory of Art Cinema," in Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, eds., *Global Art Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 142–63, at 159.

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in David Bordwell, "Academics vs. Critics: Never the Twain Shall Meet," *Film Comment* (May/June 2011), available at <http://www.filmcomment.com/article/never-the-twain-shall-meet/>.

<sup>87</sup> Fetishization of the exception has been the fate of the homosexual and politically eccentric Pier Paolo Pasolini, even if the work of the equally outré Franco Zeffirelli has mostly been ignored (though see Mary Wood, "Sixty Years a Celebrity Auteur: Franco Zeffirelli," *Celebrity Studies* 3/2 (2012): 138–149). Bernadette Luciano and Susanna Scarparo adopt an auteurist approach in their *Reframing Italy: New Trends in Italian Women's Filmmaking* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2013).

<sup>88</sup> The choice of films probably reflects a compromise between the interests of the writers concerned and the availability of subtitled copies rather than any more ambitious criterion. Still, it is interesting to find (in the list that editor Luzzi was kind enough to provide me with) just two films from the silent period, and none from the fascist period or from Italian cinema's decades of "crisis" (the Twenties, Eighties, and Nineties).

helped to establish what I have dubbed here the Standard Model of Italian cinema, describes the experience of reading the book as “like watching the tectonic plates of a discipline shifting.”<sup>89</sup> Perhaps, as I have tried to show in this essay, the legacy of the Standard Model persists in Italian cinema scholarship. Not only that, but the Standard Model itself retains tenacious hold in the canon of world cinephilia. Neorealism and the Italian golden age auteurs still jostle on the World Cinema Pantheon where they were placed by Bazin, Deleuze, and others.<sup>90</sup> But the foundations of that Pantheon are unstable and its construction has helped to obscure the variety, complexity, and particularity that have made Italian cinema what it is.

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<sup>89</sup> Robert S.C. Gordon, “Film History Recut,” *Times Literary Supplement* 1 July 2011: 28.

<sup>90</sup> The values, arguments, and conditions that generated the Standard Model are naturalized in the canon of world cinephilia, so that the history itself and the films and filmmakers it spotlights come to be accepted as common sense—or, as I suggest earlier, as myth. Undertakings like the recent seasons—admirable and valuable though they are—devoted to neorealism, Pasolini, and De Sica at London’s British Film Institute cinema (BFI Southbank) seem to confirm that the familiar greats are “all that needs to be known” about Italian cinema, though counter-currents are discernable in, say, the Criterion release, on its “no-frills” Eclipse label, of a box set of 1950s melodramas directed by Raffaello Matarazzo. A common-sense auteurism seems unshakeable however—see the extracts from reviews of the Matarazzo box set collected at <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/1908-press-notes-raffaello-matarazzo-s-runaway-melodramas>, even if more sophisticated account of the films’ appeal can be read in Erik Bachman and Evan Calder Williams, “Reopening the Matarazzo Case,” *Film Quarterly* 65/3 (2012): 59–65.



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