
Mussolini at the Movies

Fascism, Film, and Culture

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An examination of the body of films produced in the 1930s and early 1940s suggests that the principle of film as entertainment certainly appeared to be the rule. Italian commercial cinema focused on cinema's capacity to delight and enthrall. Comedies, melodramas, and literary adaptations dominated feature film production during those years. The film industry's reliance on cinema's entertainment value formed the basis for a cultural politics of evasion. What the industry wanted were not feature films that functioned as overt, dogmatic political mouthpieces. The task of the directors, scriptwriters, and performers involved was not to make the spectator think, but rather to induce him or her to forget.

This politic of temporary social amnesia, however, often wound up thwarting its own intentions. In looking for a guaranteed model of financial and artistic success, Italian commercial cinema turned to the United States, and to Hollywood in particular, for industrial and aesthetic inspiration. Seeking in part to exploit Italy's fascination with the myth of the American dream, these Italian films deliberately relied on the images of pleasure, wealth, beauty, and opportunity that permeated Hollywood imports. The fundamental difference, then, between Hollywood and Cinecittà was not so much textual as contextual. When Italian cinema refashioned these American texts, new models of proper male and female subjectivity appeared on the screen, which contrasted strongly with the masculine and feminine ideals promoted by the regime and propagated in other forms of mass media.

It is my contention that Italian feature film production of the Fascist

period was rife with other conflicts and contradictions which superseded its often self-defeating reliance on American cultural production. These films reflected the greater inconsistencies inherent in Fascist ideology itself. Contradictory and ambiguous visions of "reality" appear in the films, revealing the many cultural and political conflicts which characterized Italian Fascism. Furthermore, the publicity materials created to help promote the films in the marketplace often deliberately made recourse to these conflictual and non-conformist elements in selling the films to the audience. Thus, most feature films produced during the Fascist period wound up publicizing and displaying a picture of life under Fascism in which contrast and contradiction rather than harmony and unity came to dominate.

The aim of this particular essay is thus both theoretical and historical. I will analyze how Italian Fascism in general and its cultural politics in particular (or rather the lack thereof) created conditions of interpretive plurality. My critical examination of the Italian film industry under Fascism follows much the same line of argument: there existed much space for maneuvering in between the lines of government intervention, and the American industrial and artistic models were the means that made these cinematic negotiations possible. As a textual example of this cultural ambiguity, I will examine Luigi Chiarini's 1942 film *Via delle cinque lune* (*Five Moon Street*), a film which draws on both Hollywood and national models in its problematic representation of deviant female subjectivity.

Fascism and Culture

An exploration of various interpretations of Fascism, while it is a "fascinating" subject, is not the purpose of this study.¹ Explanations differ in scope from the psychoanalytical, for which Fascism served as the depository of childhood's ideal self as well as the expression of all that is irrational in human beings; the Marxist, for which Fascism was a defense of the social order by industrialists and landowners against the rising threat of working-class solidarity; the parenthetical, which saw Fascism as an aberration, a parenthesis in Italian history; or the consequential, in which the Fascist rise to power was directly connected to the failures of post-World War I liberalism.²

Historians now tend to agree that Italian Fascism represented not one political ideology but rather a synthesis of various ideological and political positions, implying constant negotiations between political factions, social institutions, and popular support. According to Roland Sarti, the Fascist movement was born out of "competing and often in-

compatible" ideologies and philosophies, including liberal capitalism, revolutionary syndicalism, democratic revisionism, and anarchism. Fascism's roots can be traced, in Zeev Sternhell's view, to a conglomeration of an anti-materialist and anti-rationalist strain of revisionist Marxism (which in Italy assumed the form of revolutionary syndicalism), tribal nationalism (which contributed the cult of the powerful leader), and Futurism (providing its avant-garde element). Alexander De Grand uses the term "hyphenated Fascism" to denote the ideological fragmentation behind the façade of unity, stressing the fact that much of Fascism's popular appeal can be attributed to this very plurality: since Italian Fascism, unlike Marxist-Leninism or Nazism, did not limit itself to one coherent ideology, it attracted a broader camp of supporters. Mussolini thus assumed the guise not so much of charismatic leader as that of "charismatic negotiator" who, particularly in Fascism's early days of consolidation, attempted to reconcile the various factions and not alienate his base of support.³

As a consequence of these ideological and political conflicts characteristic of Italian Fascism, gaps emerged between government self-proclamations of total domination and the actual state of the state. Instances of deviations from the Fascist ideal emerged across a wide variety of cultural practices, including cinema. The relationship between the Fascist regime and culture was constantly in flux, a "negotiated relation" in which intellectuals assumed the role of "brokers" or "mediators" between their own interests and those of the political power.⁴ These notions of reciprocity, negotiation, and conflict take into consideration the imperfectly totalitarian and fluctuating nature of Fascist power. The mediations between culture and Fascism had the potential to exploit the conflicts in the dominant discourse and to maneuver between its inherent gaps and fissures, often with the effect (if not the explicit intent) of thwarting ideological hegemony.

Facilitating such an interpretation is the fact that Italian Fascism, unlike National Socialism, lacked a clear-cut cultural policy or dominant artistic style with respect to high culture. In the regime's grandiose plans, art, architecture, literature, and theater would serve to exalt the glory of the third Roman Empire through the propagation of certain myths and images. Certainly there were artists, such as Mario Sironi and Ardengo Soffici, who came to be associated with a Fascist style which in turn corresponded aesthetically with many of the regime's ideological imperatives: a cultural representation which was cemented in the social and/or political world of Fascism and based on a spectacular and mythic vision of Fascist reality.⁵

On the whole, however, culture under Fascism can be characterized

by Marla Stone's pertinent phrase as one of "hegemonic pluralism," encompassing works from such diverse cultural tendencies as Futurism, modernism, neo-classicism and the *Novecento* school.⁶ Although there was censorship with respect to the arts, the Fascist government, particularly during its first decade in power, tended toward inclusivity rather than exclusivity when it came to cultural policy. In fact, there were many such "free zones" in Italian cultural life, some of which were temporary, others of which were permanent, and many of which continued even as the government cracked down on all forms of deviation. Notable instances of cultural tolerance included the contribution of non-Fascist and anti-Fascist scholars to the *Enciclopedia italiana* (*Italian Encyclopedia*), staged productions of Bertolt Brecht's plays, and screen distribution of Chaplin's *Modern Times*.⁷ These vacillations indicate that Fascist cultural policy was far from stable and solid. Instead, it left room for incorporation of a plurality of artistic experimentations and points of view.

Low, or popular, culture attempted to serve more of a propagandistic purpose, with the intent of creating consent through the dissemination of recurring words and images that would serve to glorify the Fascist empire and deify its leader. Organization of cultural activities, often in conjunction with the OND (Opera Nazionale del Dopolavoro), the Fascist organization created to regulate lower-middle-class and working-class leisure time, became the means by which the regime attempted to build consent for its policies among the masses. The idea was to bridge the gap between the state apparatuses and the people through the media, popular literature, theater, and film. The press, along with radio, was the government's most useful weapon in reaching its audience. The Fascist party directly controlled such newspapers as *Il popolo d'Italia*, and its input and influence was felt in other non-government-controlled dailies.⁸ Just as with high culture, however, the results often did not meet government expectations. Cinema in particular was wrought with contradictory goals that were subject to negotiation among a variety of concerns and, as a result, far from solidly conformist in its production. It constantly had to reconcile and appease the individual interests of hard-line party members, private industrialists, and intellectuals, who all played integral roles in the restructuring and reshaping of the Italian film industry in the 1930s.

Italian Cinema during the Fascist Period

When approaching Italy's cinematic production between 1922 and 1943, the first issue to confront is one of terminology. In referring to the body

of films as a whole, should one use the term "Fascist cinema," implying intentional service to and direct correspondence with Fascist ideological and cultural imperatives? Or should the more general and generous phrase "the cinema of the Fascist period" be applied, implying a margin of freedom and independence framed within the confines of Fascist structures and institutions? In order for the first term to be appropriate, cinema as both art form and institution/industry must have a clearly elaborated cultural policy, rigid control over film production, distribution, and exhibition, and a keen eye for deviations from these firmly established boundaries. Although the regime did infiltrate some aspects of the feature film industry, Italian Fascism never had a far-reaching and all-encompassing control over the film industry. The reasons for this lack of total domination are several. First, given the fact that Fascism could not achieve the status of a monolithic totalitarian power, it is not surprising that the various cultural figures involved could neither agree upon nor implement a lucid, fixed cultural program with regard to the propagandistic potential of feature film production.⁹ Second, the regime was late in realizing the enormous potential of feature film as a capable means of creating cultural consensus. Keen on the ideological use of documentary, the government was quick to generate propagandistic newsreels (*cinegiornali*) and educational and/or patriotic short subjects under the auspices of the Istituto LUCE (L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa—the Educational Film Institute), established in 1924.¹⁰ Another significant reason for this rather slow start was the state of total economic, technical, and financial disarray in which the feature film industry found itself in the 1920s and early 1930s. The Italian film industry virtually collapsed after its so-called Golden Age before World War I. It was unable to keep pace with foreign (particularly American) competition, it lagged behind technologically, and it faced high exportation tariffs abroad as well as growing production costs and poor management at home.¹¹

To refer to the entire body of feature films produced during the *ventennio*—the roughly twenty-year period of Fascist rule—as "Fascist cinema" is clearly erroneous. Nevertheless, to say that it was not politically or ideologically oriented is equally misleading. With its penchant for melodramatic love stories, banal comedies, and costume epics, the *ventennio's* cinematic production did not reflect an open agenda of ideological saturation via cinematic images. The primary modus operandi of the films of this period was entertainment and enjoyment, from the moment the spectator entered the darkness of the movie house or the reader avidly began consuming the pages of numerous fan magazines. Moreover, in projecting this image of "kinder, gentler" Fascism, these

films, as Mino Argentieri and others have noted, reflected a general complicity with the regime: its imperial ambitions, its social values, and even some of its political policies.¹²

In this cultural gap between collusion and diversion, there arose occasions for deviations and even subversions. In order to best analyze and comprehend this fundamental friction, it is necessary to examine the historical, economic, and social development of the complex and constantly shifting relationship between the state and the film industry during the Fascist period.¹³ Initially, the regime did not recognize commercial cinema's potential and advantages as a cultural tool. Before 1930, much of the power and influence over the industry rested in the hands of one man: Stefano Pittaluga. His company, the Società Anonima Stefano Pittaluga (SASP), with the help of capital from the Banca Commerciale Italiana, took control of the government's flailing production trust, L'Unione Cinematografica Italiana (UCI), and set about rebuilding the industry. In 1929, Pittaluga acquired the Cines studio and officially reopened it in the following year, producing several films, including Italy's first sound film, Gennaro Righelli's *La canzone dell'amore* (*The Song of Love*, 1930). Two important legislative pronouncements concurrently supported Pittaluga's personal initiatives: in order to combat the pervasive presence of foreign (specifically American) films on Italian soil, the Regio Decreto Legge no. 1121 stated that 10 percent of all films shown in theaters in Italy must be of Italian origin; and under Regio Decreto Legge no. 1117, LUCE films became required viewing, to precede the main feature films screened in all theaters. The introduction of the LUCE films into commercial theaters illustrates the separation of film as education and film as entertainment. Although united in the process of filmgoing, these two types of film constituted distinct cultural industries producing radically different products for consumption.

It was the addition of sound to cinema that convinced the regime to act quickly in aiding Pittaluga and others, including Emilio Cecchi, in reviving the film industry. Legislation was both constructive and prohibitive. In 1931, Regio Decreto Legge no. 1121 specifically set forth the concept of Italian cinema, offering a precise definition of what constitutes an "Italian" film: 1) the story must either be written by an Italian or adapted from a foreign source by an Italian; 2) the majority of filmmakers involved in all phases of product production, distribution, and exhibition must be Italian; and 3) all scenes must be shot on Italian soil.¹⁴ In 1933, laws further curtailed foreign imports. The required number of Italian films exhibited per theater increased, so that one out of every four films screened had to be Italian, all imports faced higher

tariffs, and all foreign films had to be dubbed into Italian, initiating a practice which still flourishes in Italy today. Films dubbed outside of Italy faced a supplemental tax as well.

The motivations behind this early financial assistance, however, were not to use commercial film as propaganda. As Giuseppe Bottai, the minister of corporations, who initially oversaw this initial government intervention, explained in a 1931 speech:

I rarely go to the movies, but I have always observed that the audience becomes bored when the cinema wants to educate them. The audience wants to be entertained, and it is precisely on this terrain that we would like to help the Italian [film] industry today.¹⁵

Thus, government involvement in feature film production from its preliminary stages focused on its entertainment value, not on its potential service to the state. LUCE films were responsible for the cinematic education of the masses. With these early initiatives, the regime was not only attempting to solidify a position in a growing industry but also to define its national cinematic production.

A journalist by the name of Luigi Freddi would play an integral role in reconstructing the Italian film industry. In 1933, Freddi had the opportunity to go to the United States to cover Italo Balbo's long-distance flight from North America back to Italy. During that trip, he also proposed to his editors a detour to Hollywood, where he planned to stay for ten days. Instead, he remained there for two months, keenly observing the American film industry at work. He came to the conclusion that Italian cinema trailed other national cinemas in terms of industrial organization, technical capabilities, artistic criteria, and public relations. After Freddi wrote a series of articles decrying the sorry state of Italian cinema, an intrigued Mussolini invited him to devise a plan to help revive the Italian film industry.

The principal missing link, Freddi discerned, was massive state intervention.¹⁶ He proposed government participation in film production, exhibition, and distribution based on capitalist models of financial control. His plan involved a fusion of both public and private moneys that would be backed by regulatory legislation. Culturally, he wanted a cinematic production which would appeal to a wide audience, would be non-political, and yet would still offer an image of a solid, permanent, Fascist nation. Thus, for Freddi and the Fascist regime, there were two fundamental concerns: 1) to rebuild the Italian film industry in order to exalt the artistic merits and cultural glories of the third Roman Empire to those at home and abroad; and 2) to use film as an indirect tool in the creation of consensus among the masses (particularly the lower middle

class, or *piccola borghesia*) by aligning it ideologically with the regime's politics and policies.

On 24 September 1934, the Fascist government established the Direzione Generale per la Cinematografia (The General Film Office) with Luigi Freddi as general director. It fell under the auspices of the Ministero per la Stampa e la Propaganda (The Press and Propaganda Ministry), directed by Mussolini's son-in-law, Galeazzo Ciano. The Press and Propaganda Ministry aimed for the greater centralization and coordination of state authority in cultural matters. Although journalism was its primary tool, it oversaw the administration of over sixteen cultural institutions, including theater, publishing, and cinema. Its purpose, as summarized in one of Ciano's speeches to the Senate, was to create a national popular Italian culture by echoing its glories, capturing the essence of its people, and highlighting its natural beauty.¹⁷ In 1936, Ciano, off to Africa to oversee colonial expansion, passed control over to Dino Alfieri, a fervid Fascist with a penchant for propaganda. In the following year, the ministry underwent a face-lift in both name and orientation. Now called the Ministero della Cultura Popolare (The Ministry of Popular Culture), commonly known as the Minculpop, it envisioned a larger role for itself in the everyday lives of Italian citizens. While its major focus up to that point had been censorial, it would now operate more as a coordinator of popular culture. This change signaled a shift in Fascist cultural policy. Instead of focusing solely on the static repression of cultural deviations, the new agenda emphasized the dynamic construction of a new Fascist culture in which cinema was to play an extremely central role.

Even though they predated Alfieri and the Minculpop by some three years, Freddi's own plans for the Direzione and the film industry coincided with the Minculpop's subsequent agenda of active participation rather than repression. He divided his plan into five principal areas of state intervention: 1) organization (i.e., legislation); 2) financial assistance; 3) prizes and awards; 4) control (i.e., censorship); and 5) artistic and commercial encouragement and incentives.¹⁸ The focus rested primarily on production. Regio Decreto Legge no. 1143, enacted on 13 June 1935, set up an autonomous division of the national bank (Banca Nazionale del Lavoro) that would help finance motion pictures with money from private industry. Of course, a film would have to receive the go-ahead from the Direzione before it could receive financing. Between 1934 and 1939, over 300 scripts passed through Freddi's office, which served not only to regulate and politically align potential films but also to boost production numbers (and hence profits) through financial assistance. In fact, the number of Italian films made during the period in-

creased drastically. In 1937, only 40 were released; by 1942, that number had reached 117.¹⁹

A good example of how cinema, under Freddi, became a tool through which the government promulgated its policies was language. The regime's agenda of Italianization manifested itself on a linguistic as well as a geographic plane. The standardization of language, spearheaded by Achille Starace, became an integral component of collective unification. The attempt to eliminate the use of regional dialects in favor of "standard" Italian, to decontaminate the "standard" of barbarisms, and to substitute the personal pronoun "*Voi*" for the Spanish-influenced "*Lei*" in formal situations all aimed to purify the Italian spirit and abolish difference. These initiatives directly affected the film industry. Tuscan pronunciation, in accordance with the use of Florentine as standard Italian, became the regulated norm. The Direzione forbade the use of dialects in films in 1934, and *Voi* became the pronoun of preference in 1937. Here, under Freddi, cinema, like other mass media, became a tool through which the government promulgated its policies.²⁰

Freddi resigned as director of the Direzione in 1939 following a long disagreement with the Minculpop over the latter's new emphasis on quantity over Freddi's dictum of quality.²¹ Nevertheless, many of his policies and initiatives in the film industry proved lasting. He helped establish Italy's premiere film school, the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia (CSC) and contributed to its subsequently influential publication, *Bianco & Nero (Black and White)*. He created the Cineguf, a university cinema club linked to the Fascist party, and helped foster another important periodical, *Cinema* (under the firm editorial hand of Vittorio Mussolini). His greatest innovation by far, however, was coordinating the construction and establishment of *La Città del Cinema*, or Cinecittà. Officially inaugurated on 28 April 1937, it contained on its vast property the most technologically advanced facilities needed for filmmaking: sets, costumes, editing and dubbing facilities, sound stages, and the possibility of constructing ample exterior sets. Although its primary concern was modernizing the industry and centralizing the means of production, the promotional campaign concentrated instead on its impending role in glorifying the Italian empire through diffusion of its cultural production.²² Financed by state money, it nevertheless remained under private ownership until 1939, when the state assumed total control of its administration. Cinecittà gradually became the center of the film industry: between April 1937 and July 1943, approximately 300 full-length feature films (over two-thirds of total production) were in some part made or produced on its premises.²³

State intervention in exhibition and distribution revolved around the

formation of one agency, the ENIC (L'Ente Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche), which began its operations in 1935 funded by the IRI (Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale). Its aim was to stimulate production and to defend those national products through guaranteed distribution and profit minimums. The ENIC first began by buying up the theaters themselves from the previous autonomous film agency (SASP), at first owning only 29 in 1935 and gradually building up to 95 by 1941. It managed to distribute on average only 16–18 percent of total film production: private companies and studios released the remaining films. The films under its wing did not differ much in character from the general trend of light-hearted films. The ENIC even lent its hand to production, eschewing overtly propagandistic films.²⁴

Apart from ENIC's involvement in theater management, most of the new policies concerning exhibition centered on curbing foreign imports, specifically American ones. In 1935, the government placed a ceiling of 250 on the number of American films allowed into Italian theaters. In 1938, Alfieri sponsored a law giving the ENIC a monopolistic control over the importation and distribution of foreign films, aimed primarily at American films, which controlled 80 percent of the market. He found cause for this initiative by accusing Hollywood of monopolistic practices and citing incongruities with Italy's own autarchic policies. As a result, the "Big Four" American studios (Warner Brothers, Twentieth Century Fox, MGM, and Paramount) withdrew their films in Italy. Between 1938 and 1942, the number of Hollywood imports shrank from 187 to a mere eight. By 1942, all foreign imports were reduced to a total of 127, Italian films dominated the market, and the number of Italian productions and their box-office receipts rose significantly.²⁵

Another important aspect of the feature film industry during the entire Fascist period was the question of censorship, in which not only the Direzione but also Mussolini as film spectator played a large role. Drawing on existing Liberal-era policies, legislation introduced in September 1923 made it obligatory for the few films being produced in the 1920s to have government approval. The most significant early development was the constitution of a censorship board one year later, which would decide which films, both domestic and foreign, were appropriate for Italian viewers. The board initially consisted of an official from the Office of Public Security, a magistrate, and an Italian mother—presumably the voice of true morality. It fluctuated in size, membership, and influence during the *ventennio*, gradually evolving in its directives from the moral and the political to the administrative and the political. By 1935, control had passed from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministero per la Stampa e la Propaganda (the Press and Propaganda Ministry). Now

comprised only of ministers and party representatives, its objective also changed. Initially it merely partially or totally censored those scenes it deemed inappropriate. After it passed to the Ministero per la stampa e la propaganda (and later the Minculpop), the censorial emphasis shifted to the dual project of control and encouragement. Nevertheless, while the board did play an important role in pre- and post-production censorship, the real power rested with the men in charge: Freddi, Alfieri, and, of course, Mussolini, who, functioning in the capacity of supreme censor, privately viewed almost all films before the general public could see them.²⁶

It is remarkable, however, how few times the board actually censored feature films from 1930 to 1944. Dubbing was a way to evade dubious elements in foreign films: it was easy to change dialogue that denigrated Italy in any way or could pose other potential menacing influences.²⁷ Hollywood films, however, did not suffer any particular prejudice, since they too were subject to the comprehensive restrictions of the Production Code. Of the 700 or so Italian films completed between 1930 and 1944, only one was never released at all (Ivo Perilli's 1933 *Ragazzo*).²⁸ Few were subject to minor changes: Mario Camerini was forced to remove all jokes about dictators and unfair taxes in his 1935 film *Il cappello a tre punte* (*The Three-Pointed Hat*) and to use the *Voi* in his screen adaptation of Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*.²⁹ A few films which had evaded the censors were later withdrawn from circulation: Goffredo Alessandrini's version of Ayn Rand's *Noi vivi/Addio Kira* (*We the Living/Goodbye Kira*, 1942) for its sympathetic portrayal of a Communist official, and Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (*Obsession*, 1942) for its sexual and political undertones.

There are several reasons for the relatively inactive censorship process during the Fascist period. First, rejection occurred in the pre-production phase, since films would not get financial assistance without official approval. Both Alberto Lattuada's attempts to adapt Alberto Moravia's significant novel *Gli indifferenti* (*The Time of Indifference*, 1929) into a film and Visconti's similar desire to bring Giovanni Verga's work to the screen failed at this stage of development.³⁰ Second, as Lino Micciché concludes, the filmmakers' most effective weapon was to not be overtly propagandistic or militaristic. As a result, the space of permissibility would be more expansive and not easily delineated by specific regulatory parameters.³¹ Third, there was what Cesare Zavattini, a frequent collaborator to many films during the era, described as "self-censorship."³² The various artists involved (writers, directors, and producers) knew which projects they could and could not propose. In order to avoid confrontation and detrimental reverberations, they chose not to

pursue certain treatments or abandoned them at the first sign of reluctance. Finally, after Freddi's dismissal from the Direzione, censorship became decidedly more relaxed, since the main preoccupation was with increasing production numbers in order to fill the gap created by the exclusion of most Hollywood imports.

An important external influence upon the moral constitution of Italian cinema was the Catholic Church. Throughout the *ventennio*, the church assumed two rhetorical positions with respect to the growing industry: it either professed a repugnance toward cinema in general, deeming it an immoral vice, or tolerated films, especially if they aspired to high moral principles. Although the Church rarely intervened at the production stage, it remained a force which exerted both conscious and unconscious influence on all levels of the film industry. The Catholic Church voiced its official pronouncements on the cinema in a series of outlets which often paralleled but did not necessarily interfere with the government's own plans of intervention. Acknowledging the propagandistic potential of film, it established its own theaters (*sale parrocchiali*), exhibiting films which it deemed possessed the appropriate ethical and spiritual values and excluding those which were morally degenerate. On the other hand, the Church voiced its campaign against cinema's moral degeneracy through written pronouncements: in an encyclical letter of 1929, a *Vigilanti cura* in 1936, and a 1936 article published in *Cinema* by Padre Agostino Gemelli, "Enciclica e cinematografia" ["Encyclical and Cinema"].³³ Each treatise advocated a "moral and moralizing" cinematic production, one which corroborated many Fascist moral and political imperatives, had Christian principles at its guide, addressed the masses and not the individual, taught by positive and not negative example, and promoted justice and virtue.

In 1934, the Catholic Church established the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico (The Catholic Film Center, or CCC) with its own censorship board, designed to complement the government agency with an emphasis on moral and religious values. Its annual publication, *Segnalazioni cinematografiche*, circulated the CCC's moral ratings for each film, deciding for whom the film was appropriate and if it could be screened in their *sale parrocchiali*.³⁴ Their judgments were quite severe, but they did not actually deter spectators from flocking to the movies. For example, they scolded Mario Camerini's 1939 film *Grandi magazzini* (*Department Store*) for "too many clear references to illicit relationships, and a vague sense of amorality [that] pervades the story." It was, nonetheless, one of the most popular films of the year. Even a film such as *Scipione l'Africano* (*Scipio the African*, Carmine Gallone, 1937), a production supervised by Mussolini himself, received an advisory rat-

ing—the CCC said that it was fine for the *sale pubbliche* but would need "some touches in order to eliminate a few scenes with too much of a heathen flavor."³⁵

What were most of the films produced during the Fascist period like? Most opted for images of beauty, glamour, wealth, and luxury. The majority of Italian feature films released in the 1930s evidenced little or no trace of the regime's constant presence in the daily lives of Italian citizens. For example, in the many schoolgirl comedies produced during the 1930s and 1940s, the obligatory portrait of Mussolini does not hang on the wall, nor do the students read the many Fascist revisionist textbooks published during the era.³⁶ In Fascism's waning years, for instance, it was as if the war did not exist. Ferdinando Maria Poggioli's 1942 film *La bisbetica domata* (*The Taming of the Shrew*), a modernized version of the Shakespeare original set in contemporary Italy, contains one of the only allusions to the detrimental consequences of the conflict. It actually refers both to the effects of repeated bombings on Rome and features a scene where the characters seek refuge from an air raid in a bomb shelter.

Among the most popular films were the so-called white-telephone parlor comedies, which were closely associated with the bourgeois theatrical tradition and labeled as such due to their opulent living-room settings featuring the obligatory status symbol of the white telephone.³⁷ Other genres included films showcasing new comic talents such as Totò and Macario; sentimental love stories; melodramas, including a series of four films by Mario Mattòli with the telling catchphrase "Films which speak to your heart"; historical epics; and literary adaptations from Italian and other sources (particularly French). This is not to say that there were no political feature films at all. There were several, such as *L'Assedio dell'Alcazar* (*The Siege of the Alcazar*, Augusto Genina, 1939) and *Bengasi* (Genina, 1941), both heavily promoted by the film industry and lauded at the annual Venice film festival. During the war years, filmmakers such as a young Roberto Rossellini began making realist documentary-like films, indicating a future trend which would come to characterize post-Fascist Italian production. Important players in the Italian film industry during the Fascist period, other than those mentioned above, included the directors Alessandro Blasetti, Mario Camerini, and Vittorio De Sica (one of the most popular actors as well); the actors Amedeo Nazzari, Fosco Giachetti, and Gino Cervi; and the actresses Isa Miranda, Alida Valli, and Assia Noris.³⁸

Italian commercial cinema did not differ greatly from the cinematic productions of other countries. In fact, it drew much of its inspiration from them, especially from Hungarian and American cinema. Hungar-

ian literature, theater, and cinema proved politically and morally non-threatening in both form and content with their evasive and escapist principles and innocent (hence non-sexual) love stories.³⁹ Hollywood functioned as industrial model and artistic spark. With their conscious imitation of settings and characters typical of Hollywood films, Italian films attempted to take advantage of the established popularity in Italy of Hollywood products. According to James Hay's *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy*, America projected an almost "divine power" which captivated Italian audiences. With respect to cinema, it was the myth of America as propagated by Hollywood which entranced the Italian populace: the images of opulence, extravagance, and splendor; the triumph of good over evil and right over wrong; and the attraction of exotic adventure.⁴⁰

It is important to compare Italian cinema during the Fascist period not only to American and Hungarian cinema but also with the feature film production of its closest ally: Nazi Germany. In his recent study of Nazi cinema, Eric Rentschler places the commercial cinema of National Socialism in several important contexts: 1) the totalitarian state's attempt to create a culture industry in the service of mass deception by controlling production, distribution, and exhibition; 2) the significant role that entertainment, as opposed to propaganda, played in the creation of Nazi culture; and 3) the pervasive influence of Hollywood cinema, not just Nazi "kitsch," as a model for that entertainment. He dispels the myth that propaganda films dominated German cinema of the era; they constituted only 153 out of a total of 1,094 feature films.

Despite the similarities between Italian and German cinema of the era, there remain crucial differences between the film industries of the two axis powers. Although Luigi Freddi, during his tenure at the Direzione, was the man in charge of all things cinematic, the breadth of his power never reached the scope of Joseph Goebbels's control. Furthermore, although most German films produced in the 1930s and early 1940s were "escapist" in nature, the Nazis placed more emphasis on the feature film as a tool of propaganda conditioning.⁴¹

Thus, despite the many rules and regulations that Freddi and his associates enacted in order to overhaul and oversee the film industry, the relationship between regime and filmmakers remained more a question of the regime's influence rather than its absolute control over filmmakers, at least in the arena of production. If the word *control* is applicable at all, it is most appropriate to the more commercial aspects of the industry, such as film distribution and exhibition. Certainly, the influence the regime exerted in script selection, financial incentives, and cultural accolades reverberated in the films produced and released during the

ventennio. However, this influence was not static or fixed. In fact, it varied by degrees chronologically, taking a decidedly more lax turn after Freddi's departure, and individually, allowing many questionable films to squeak by without a problem.

Furthermore, there existed a remarkably open artistic environment within the film community, in which many anti-Fascist intellectuals and Jews continued to participate, even after the 1938 racial laws. Aldo de Benedetti, one of the most prolific screenwriters of the era, continued to collaborate on many screenplays without receiving screen credit. In other instances, ongoing participation depended on a quick name change, as was the case with the Jewish actress Anna Proclemer, the future wife of Vitaliano Brancati, who simply took the stage name of Anna Vivaldi. Ultimately, many of Freddi's initiatives in attempting to cultivate an intellectual cinematic climate worked against him. Both the CSC and the Cineguf turned into anti-Fascist breeding grounds, with the regime fully aware of the dissent being fostered but electing, as it often did with intellectuals, to look the other way. Filmmakers and intellectuals such as Roberto Rossellini and Giuseppe De Santis nurtured their interest in cinema through those very institutions.⁴²

Another fundamental contradiction centers on both text and context, in that it involves Italian commercial cinema's artistic dependence upon and Italy's cultural fascination with Hollywood. It was Freddi's openly declared goal to mold Italian films along the lines of "Hollywood masterpieces." In fact, many films do appear as inferior American imitations (although this is not always the case). However, what Freddi and others failed to consider were the implications of employing these American models out of context. American films showcased on the whole a greater sense of social liberty, economic mobility, and financial prosperity. Consequently, Italian films based on popular Hollywood configurations often presented images of everyday life which conflicted strongly with the way in which the regime was attempting to dictate the lives of its citizens. Many of these feature films explicitly contradict state-circumscribed modes and codes of behavior for ideal Fascist subjects. Hollywood models could thus prove potentially disrupting to the government undertakings of constructing proper Fascist subjectivity through mass media. The cultural ministries allowed them to flourish because of the popularity (and revenues) they guaranteed.

This wide diffusion of oppositional models and images has important consequences for the construction of subjectivity, and female subjectivity in particular, in both cinema and Fascist society. In Italian versions of such American genres as the shop-girl film and the schoolgirl comedy, a decidedly liberated portrayal of gender subjectivity emerges.⁴³

The representation of the feminine does not necessarily correspond with the Fascist ideal. Rather, it is multiplicity and non-conformity which reigns in both the cinematic and extracine-matic arenas, providing not one but rather many models of behavior for women during the Fascist period.

Fascism, Melodrama, and Subversion

The Italian maternal melodrama offers a window into the machinations of ideology, gender subjectivity, cinema, and subversion. The maternal melodrama speaks, in E. Ann Kaplan's words, to the "unconscious Oedipal needs, fears and desires" of both the male and female spectator.⁴⁴ Goffredo Alessandrini's *La vedova* (*The Widow*, 1939) is an Italian maternal melodrama in which a mother's obsessive love for her dead son results in her malicious and unforgiving attitude toward his impoverished and bereaved widow. An Oedipal drama from a mother's point of view, the film depicts the consequences of those mothers who take their roles to extremes: a woman's intense maternal devotion becomes eerily sexually neurotic. The mother/son bond grows only stronger in death, for the mother has reciprocated the child's Oedipal desires while the son has successfully transferred his desires into heterosexual norms.

Similarly, the maternal woman's film is more aware of and concerned with motherhood's social and political role. It contains a decidedly female point of view which, for Annette Kuhn, "specifically addresses the female spectators and resists dominant ideology."⁴⁵ The American maternal woman's film usually has as its subject a strong mother-daughter relationship that resists patriarchal constructs. In an Italian film such as *Catene invisibili* (*Invisible Chains*, Mario Mattòli, 1942), for example, the mothers are the rebels who transgress socially prescribed boundaries of conduct. In the end, some form of patriarchal authority returns them to their traditional roles.

What emerges in the Italian women's films are depictions of mothers who deviate strongly from the image propagated by the Fascist government. The regime's demographic politics played an integral part in its deliberate attempt to construct gender roles and to reinforce its own power over the general populace. Fascism aimed to control male and female sexuality, "absorb and tame" new sexual attitudes, and create a "passionless" sexuality of its own in its quest to create norms of respectability.⁴⁶ The prestige of the fatherland was tied to the Fascist image of Italy as a virile, productive, and reproductive nation. Italian men and women had to conform to traditional gender roles in order to achieve this goal. Masculinity was directly linked to sexual prowess and

fecundity, femininity to the predestined call of marriage and motherhood. The role of dutiful wife was the first phase in securing a woman her correct place in the social and sexual economy of Fascist Italy.⁴⁷ Several feature films dealing with motherhood counter this ubiquitous propaganda, showcasing women who are independent, sexual beings who disregard the social and moral limits imposed upon them. The mother-daughter bond between the characters is far from cohesive and resists the dominant ideology, for any lack of maternal instinct necessarily counters the Fascist position of motherhood as a woman's natural and sole destiny.

Via delle cinque lune is an example of a film that challenges this Fascist belief. Set in nineteenth-century Rome, the film tells the story of Ines, a pious and innocent young woman who works as a seamstress at her local convent. Ines's father dies, leaving her at the mercy of the unscrupulous Teta, her stepmother. Interested in money and profit at all costs, Teta takes over the family watch business, turning it into a pawnshop/usury front. Meanwhile, Ines has fallen in love with Checco, a handsome young assistant to a sculptor; they plan to marry. Teta, once again thinking of potential profit, fiercely opposes her stepdaughter's marriage to an impoverished worker. Checco deliberately charms Teta, persuading her to accept him. Her motives, however, are far from pure, as she now desires Checco for herself. She hires him at the pawnshop, gives him spending money, and, arousing the gossip of her neighbors and the jealousy and suspicion of Ines, openly flirts and cavorts with him in public. Ines, believing that Checco is giving in to temptation, retreats into the convent for eight days to pray for their souls, during which time Teta's seduction of Checco is complete. Upon hearing that Ines has decided to enter the convent permanently, Checco begins to realize the error of his ways and rejects a bitter Teta. After their reconciliation, Ines and Checco celebrate their engagement. Teta, seemingly converted, even sells the pawnshop and returns the items to their rightful owners, but her passion for Checco remains. One evening, when Checco and Ines fail to meet through a miscommunication, Checco winds up alone with Teta in her apartment. Ines returns home to discover them in Teta's bedroom. In a delirium, Ines plunges to her death from the stairwell balcony.

Through the veil of the past, *Via delle cinque lune* offers a critique of existing social conditions, in particular the sexual construction of woman as mother. The film was one of the few produced entirely by the CSC, the film school under Chiarini's direction. Chiarini's intention was to intermingle content and form and create meaning not only through the events themselves but also through the formal elements of cinema: the

sets, the costumes, the cinematography, and the acting.⁴⁸ This emphasis on film form places *Via della cinque lune* in the category of films by the so-called calligraphers or formalists, including filmmakers such as Mario Soldati, who brought versions of Fogazzaro's *Piccolo mondo antico* (*Old-Fashioned World*, 1941) and *Malombra* (1943) to the screen.⁴⁹ In order to avoid the formulaic Hollywood-style comedies and melodramas typical of the era, these directors forged their own artistic path through high stylization, attention to detail, and composition. Their focus was on the surface and decoration, including, in the case of *Via delle cinque lune*, with its elaborate construction of the arched stairwell from which Ines commits suicide, magnificent production design. The efficacious lighting constantly fills Checco and Ines's scenes together in dark shadows while angelic close-ups in soft focus dominate Ines's images. Commentative parallel editing and transitions highlight diegetic contrasts (for instance, the peace and tranquillity of the convent versus the rowdy theater crowd indulging in pleasure). Intricate camera work and extradiegetic music heighten the dramatic tension and foreshadow the tragic consequence of the characters' actions.

This refuge into the formal had political implications. Fused with this predilection for the formal were realist, even pre-neorealist, elements, such as the psychological veracity of the characters.⁵⁰ Characterized by a heightened eroticism, the characters' sexual transgressions serve to counter more than just bourgeois and Catholic morality. They also implode the gender constructions of male and female sexuality that the regime attempted to propagate. Chiarini's film portrays Teta as a mother who defies the female ideal of motherhood: she is self-serving as opposed to self-sacrificing, greedy and materialistic, sexually non-conformist, and ultimately responsible for her daughter's death.

For Chiarini, *Via delle cinque lune* was a cinematic manifestation of the true artistic and spiritual essence of the Matilde Serao short story, "O Giovannino o la morte" ("Give Me Giovannino or Give Me Death").⁵¹ The film strategically exaggerates the Serao story's character dichotomies by increasing the stepmother's culpability and decreasing the daughter's autonomy. It also deepens the polarities between the female characters and heightens the subversive portrait of the mother figure. While in the novella the stepmother's primary preoccupation is with money, she is not the primary figure of reproach that she is in the film. Giovannino (aka Checco) is fully complicit in the affair, not a casualty of monetary and sexual seduction. A loafer, he sees mother and daughter as his meal ticket and must work to keep both happy. Chiarina (Ines) is more independent, diffident, and defiant than her cinematic counterpart: it is she who declares, "O Giovannino o la morte." Her

relegation to innocent victim status in the film serves to enhance the mother's infraction of her "intrinsic" maternal nature. Consequently, a complex portrayal of a deviant mother dominates a large part of the film's narrative space, contrasting sharply with the official image propagated by the regime of woman as self-sacrificing mother in service to her family and to the state.

Although, as one character aptly puts it, "a stepmother is not a mother," Teta self-fashions that role, referring to herself as Ines's mother and to Ines as her daughter more than once in the course of the film. Thus, her transgression of that role is all the more resonant, for it is a duty which she consciously accepts. However, it is a part that she plays on her own terms. The first time the spectator sees Teta in the film is in the watch shop as she attempts to cheat a customer. One moment she is a grieving widow at her husband's funeral, hours later she partakes in a full-fledged feast complete with shady commercial wheeling and dealing. Her job as *strozzina* (literally, a choker) involves profiting from the misery of others: as she prepares to go to the theater, she wonders, after one desperate client has dared to come to her home, why "these people" must ruin her evening. She openly flaunts her relationship with the much younger Checco as they parade publicly arm in arm through the town's streets and attend the theater side by side. Her relationship with Ines is wrought with tension and contradiction from their first scene together. Cruelly authoritarian in her treatment of Ines, Teta refuses to allow her stepdaughter any degree of freedom, slapping her in the face and telling her: "I will teach you to respect me!"

Chiarini also infuses the text with a clear moral reproach of Teta as mother from a decidedly Catholic point of view. The filmmakers elaborate on the pervasive religiosity of the original text by clearly delineating between good and evil. The figure of the mother comes to personify everything un-Christian and immoral: she is a symbol of temptation, sin, and corruption.⁵² In this film, sexual deviance from accepted social norms is connected to greed: avarice and adultery are both sins of the flesh. Chiarini and the filmmakers use commentative transitions to accentuate their point. Teta and Checco's first love scene concludes with a shot of Teta's body covering Checco's. The next scene takes place in a church, where Ines and others in the convent listen to a sermon about the weakness of flesh. The priest declares that "the strength of the spirit must defeat the weakness of the flesh" and says that the young women must "stamp out with faith and prayer the evil desires which bring us to sin." Throughout the homily, the film features Madonna-like close-up shots of Ines and others in prayer, contemplating the words. In one group shot, the priest's shadow "reprimands" the female

congregation below. One parishioner faints from the force of his words. Ines, prominently featured in this scene, is a symbol of Christian piety and devotion throughout the film: the addition to the film of Ines's convent life, which is not present in the Serao story, reinforces her spirituality. In her innocence, Ines blames money, not lust, as the root of all evil. Believing that Checco succumbed to greed, she tells him they can survive through hard work and faith in God. It is Ines's faith and her desire to devote herself entirely to God that brings Checco to see the error of his "disgusting" ways.

On the surface, it appears as though Teta as well has seen the light as she decides to liquidate the pawnshop and return to her duties as mother. However, her conversion to proper female subjectivity is incomplete: her passion for Checco is overwhelming, and it is their final tryst that literally sends the innocent Ines over the edge. The final scene is an artistically efficacious sequence as the camera follows Ines on her fatal discovery. The spectator sees an extreme close-up of eyes, shadowed on all sides, slowly revealed by an opening door. Ines's horrified reaction seals the mother's (and lover's) complicity in the daughter's death. The film's last words, shouted by the grief-stricken and guilt-ridden Checco, resonate through the closing images, further placing responsibility on the mother: "It was she who killed her!" The punishment and judgment end there.

Ines's suicide, however, is not just an object lesson for spectators in the audience. By remaining sexually and socially deviant to the tragic end, the figure of Teta presents a portrait of motherhood that not only does not conform to Fascist and Catholic norms but also persists in resisting those very norms to the end. Linda Williams, in her interpretation of the similar conclusion to a Hollywood maternal melodrama, King Vidor's 1937 *Stella Dallas*, notes that this type of tragic ending reflects the consequences of a woman's attempts to be "something else besides a mother," that is, to break down the parameters of her socially prescribed maternal role. The female spectator would thus identify with Stella's "heroic attempt to live out the contradiction" between socially constructed roles and personal desire.⁵³ Such is the case with *Via delle cinque lune*. Teta, with her deviation from "acceptable" female behavior, personifies the very contradiction Stella faces with social expectations of motherhood. Moreover, when placed in the context of Fascist Italy, her divergence from culturally propagated and legislatively reinforced norms assumes a greater importance. Far from the de-sexualized image presented in such LUCE films as *Madri d'Italia (Mothers of Italy, 1935)*, which portrays motherhood as personally, socially, and politically

fulfilling, Teta sets forth a maternal figure whose open sexuality counters those very ideals.⁵⁴

The conditions for open readings such as the one I suggest for *Via delle cinque lune* existed despite Fascism's attempts to dictate and regulate the consumption and interpretation of its gender constructions. How this and other films "spoke" to their audience varied greatly from those constructions for several reasons. Since the state elected not to impose a comprehensive cultural policy and/or style, the ensuing tolerance of an aesthetic pluralism at the levels of high and low culture allowed for a greater variety of forms and structures of expression. Cinema benefited from this lack of systematic repression, in which the various government offices and officials influenced rather than controlled its feature film production. As a result, the film industry also experienced a relatively large margin of freedom, as evidenced in part by the relatively few seditious scandals that took place in the 1930s and 1940s. Furthermore, in relying on Hollywood for both structural and artistic inspiration, Italian feature film production transposed the textual body of American films, which were decidedly more permissive, even with their own codes and modes of repression, into the context of a more repressive and regulated Italian society. Consequently, these cultural translations, much like the literary translations of American works that proliferated during the Fascist period, offered a multitude of new subject positions to their audience; from the unconventional consumer to the rebellious schoolgirl to the socially and sexually deviant mother. The remaining essays in this volume address the many areas of the film industry in which text, audience, and ideology interacted during the Fascist period, from the star system to consumer culture to the colonies, and the wildly varying responses to these encounters.

Notes

1. I chose to bracket the word "fascinating" with quotation marks because in the world of scholarship about Fascism, it has come to symbolize the appeal both Italian and German fascism held for its contemporaries as well as the attraction it wields now for those engaged in academic research. The term originates in Susan Sontag's now canonical essay "Fascinating Fascism," anthologized in *Movies and Methods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), I: 31-43, and was used as a title for the symposium "Fascinating Fascism," held at Stanford University in October 1993.

2. For the best survey of the historiography of Fascism, consult the most recent edition of Renzo De Felice's *Le interpretazioni del fascismo* (Bari: Laterza, 1989), with a revised preface/introduction (v–xxiii). More psychologically and/or psychoanalytically oriented interpretations are proposed by Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, trans. Vincent Carfagno (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970); and Simona Argentieri, "Il ridicolo e il sublime," *Risate di regime. La commedia italiana 1930–1944*, ed. Mino Argentieri (Venezia: Marsilio, 1991), 19–33. Alice Yaeger Kaplan also notes how it is possible to explain and understand Fascism's appeal through mother-bound rather than father-bound desire, in which "recognizing oneself as manly and safeguarding mother-nation go together." Alice Yaeger Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
3. Roland Sarti, "Introduction," in *The Ax Within: Italian Fascism in Action*, ed. Roland Sarti (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974), 2–5; Zeev Sternhall with Mario Snajder and Maia Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, trans. David Maisel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Alexander De Grand, *Italian Fascism: Its Origins and Development*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 137–145.
4. David Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era, 1880–1980: Cultural Industries, Politics, and the Public* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 1–11, 55–82.
5. Guido Armellini, *Le immagini del fascismo nelle arti figurative* (Milano: Fabbrini, 1980); Walter Adamson, "Ardengo Soffici and the Religion of Art" and Emily Braun, "Mario Sironi's Urban Landscapes: The Futurist/Fascist Nexus," both in *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy*, ed. Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 25–45 and 101–133, respectively.
6. Marla S. Stone, "The State as Patron: Making Official Culture in Fascist Italy," in *Fascist Visions*, 205–238; and Marla S. Stone, *The Patron State: Cultural & Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
7. Renzo De Felice, "Fascism and Culture in Italy: Outlines for Further Study," *Stanford Italian Review* 8, nos. 1–2 (1990): 5–11.
8. Phillip Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso. Fascismo e mass media* (Bari: Laterza, 1975); Victoria de Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era*, 55–82; and Edward Tannenbaum, *The Fascist Experience: Italian Society and Culture, 1922–1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), 219–225. For more on the press and the publishing industry during Fascism, see Paolo Muraldi, *La stampa del regime fascista* (Bari: Laterza, 1986).

9. Christopher Wagstaff notes how the regime acted almost as mediator between various positions regarding the function of culture in the regime's overall politics. See "The Italian Cinema Industry During the Fascist Regime," *The Italianist* 4 (1984): 160–174.
10. For a discussion of LUCE films and their role in the regime's cultural policies, see Mino Argentieri, *L'occhio del regime. Informazione e propaganda nel cinema del fascismo* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1979); James Hay, *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy: The Passing of the Rex* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 201–232; and Elaine Mancini, *Struggles of the Italian Film Industry during Fascism, 1930–1935* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), 121–160.
11. Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano: Il cinema muto 1895–1929* (Roma: Riuniti, 1993), I: 231–259.
12. See Mino Argentieri, "Dal teatro allo schermo," in *Risate di regime*, ed. Mino Argentieri, 71; and Gian Piero Brunetta, "Mille lire (e più di mille lire) al mese," in *Risate di regime*, 98–99. See also Gianfranco Casadio, et al., *Telefoni bianchi. Realtà e finzione nella società e nel cinema italiano degli anni quaranta* (Ravenna: Longo, 1991), 13–14. Brunetta: "In effect, Fascism preferred the middle road of emotions and situations, geared toward a middle-class audience to excessive and exasperated propaganda." *Intelletuali, cinema e propaganda fra le due guerre* (Bologna: Patrón, 1972), 127.
13. I base my historical analysis on the following sources: Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso*, 273–322; Claudio Carabba, *Il cinema del ventennio nero* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1974); Jean Gili, *Stato fascista e cinematografia. Repressione e promozione* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1981); Mancini, *Struggles of the Italian Film Industry during Fascism*; Lorenzo Quaglietti, *Storia economica-politica dalle origini ad oggi* (Roma: Riuniti, 1980), 13–33; and Wagstaff, "The Italian Cinema during the Fascist Regime," 160–174.
14. Reprinted in Gian Piero Brunetta, *Cinema italiano tra le due guerre. Fascismo e politica cinematografica* (Milano: Mursia, 1975), 107–108.
15. Reprinted in Brunetta, *Cinema italiano tra le due guerre*, 106.
16. "Since we are dealing with an industry which directly involves the dignity, love and the economic and moral interests of the State with its products, I do not hesitate to declare that it is finally necessary for the State to intervene directly, imposing on the solution its authoritarian and severe mark of intervention and control. Where states have had the authority to impose intervention, they have done it. And it has not impeded the development of a flourishing, effective, profitable, and leading state film industry." Luigi Freddi, *Il cinema. Miti, esperienze e realtà di un regime totalitario*, 2 vols. (Roma: L'Arnia, 1949), I: 70.
17. See Ciano's "Discorso al Senato sulla cinematografia fascista" of 22 May 1936, reprinted in Carabba, *Il cinema del ventennio nero*, 123–125. For a developmental history of the Ministry of Popular Culture, see Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso*, 101–171; and Teresa Maria Mazzatosta, *Il regime*

- fascista tra educazione e propaganda (1935-1943)* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1978), 27-28.
18. Luigi Freddi, "Nascita della Direzione Generale della Cinematografia," in Carabba, *Il cinema del ventennio nero*, 120-123.
 19. See Massimo Mida e Lorenzo Quaglietti, *Dai telefoni bianchi al neorealismo* (Bari: Laterza, 1980), 48.
 20. For one of the few discussions of cinema's linguistic policies during Fascism, see Paola Micheli, *Il cinema di Blasetti parlò così . . . Un'analisi linguistica dei film (1929-1942)* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1990), 19-42.
 21. Freddi felt that he was forced out of his position. See *Il cinema. Miti, esperienze e realtà di un regime totalitario*, 2: 153-176.
 22. For more on Cinecittà, see G. Paulucci di Calboli, "La Città del cinema," *Cinema* 1, no. 1 (10 luglio 1936): 12-14.
 23. The accomplishment attains greater significance when one considers the number of short films produced (85) and foreign films dubbed (248) on the premises. See Freddi, *Il cinema. Miti, esperienze e realtà di un regime totalitario*, 2: 287-294.
 24. Gili, *Stato fascista e cinematografia*, 100-109, and Freddi, *Il cinema. Miti, esperienze e realtà di un regime totalitario*, 2: 361-375.
 25. Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano*, II: 22-23; and Mida and Quaglietti, *Dai telefoni bianchi al neorealismo*, 50. See also an interview with Dino Alfieri from *Corriere della sera* (20 novembre 1938), reproduced in Carabba, *Il cinema del ventennio nero*, 133-136.
 26. The two best sources on film censorship during the Fascist period are Mino Argentieri, *La censura nel cinema italiano* (Roma: Riuniti, 1974); and Gili, *Stato fascista e cinematografia*. All subsequent information on Fascism and censorship is derived from these sources, unless otherwise noted.
 27. Guido Fink notes that the authorities found the gangster films' portrayal of Italian Americans as gangsters particularly offensive and had some of the names de-Italianized through dubbing. Guido Fink, "Orgoglio e pregiudizio: stereotipi hollywoodiani e doppiaggio di casa nostra," *Cinema & Cinema* 11 (gennaio-marzo 1984): 26-35.
 28. Intended to be a picaresque tale of Fascist enlightenment, *Ragazzo* recounts the story of a working-class orphan boy who eventually learns the error of his criminal ways through conversion to the Fascist cause. In attempting to make the story realistic, Ivo Perilli opted to shoot much of the film on location in Rome, particularly in the poorer sections and among the delinquents, aspects of daily life that the regime said no longer existed. Furthermore, the fact that a model Fascist could arise from a criminal gang of hooligans was certain to displease Fascist officials. In fact, after being reviewed by the censorship commission and Mussolini himself, *Ragazzo* was banned from all Italian screens. Gili, *Stato fascista e cinematografia*, 31-33.

29. Mussolini's sons Vittorio and Bruno accused Camerini of being both anti-Fascist and anti-Italian. The film was re-edited and released but was soon withdrawn from theaters to avoid further criticism. See Francesco Savio's interview with Mario Camerini in *Cinecittà anni trenta. Parlano 116 protagonisti del secondo cinema italiano (1930-1944)*, 3 vols. (Roma: Bulzoni, 1979), 1: 211-212, and Gili, *Stato fascista e cinematografia*, 55.
30. Visconti got his wish after the war, when Verga's *I Malavoglia* (*The House by the Medlar Trees*) became the basis for his classic 1948 neorealist film *La terra trema* (*The Earth Shakes*).
31. Lino Micciché, "Il cinema italiano sotto il fascismo. Elementi per un ripensamento possibile," in Argentieri, *Risate di regime*, 41.
32. Cited in Gili, *Stato fascista e cinematografia*, 55.
33. The latter two pieces are anthologized in Carabba, *Il cinema del ventennio nero*, 157-167. See also his discussion of Church attempts to intervene in the film industry, 27-28.
34. Gili, *Stato fascista e cinematografia*, 121-122. Another important periodical was *La rivista del cinematografo*, which, before the publication of the first volume of *Segnalazioni cinematografiche*, functioned as the Church's mouthpiece on all that had to do with cinema. It continued on with its Catholic orientation even after 1934, publishing such articles as "La produzione cinematografica italiana" and "L'apostolato diretto e il cinematografo," both in no. 11, 1938.
35. *Nuovi materiali sul cinema italiano, 1929-43*, Quaderno 71 (Pesaro: Mostra del cinema di Pesaro, 1976), 77.
36. For more on the schoolgirl comedy, see Jacqueline Reich, "Reading, Writing, and Rebellion: Collectivity, Specularity, and Sexuality in the Italian Schoolgirl Comedy, 1934-1943," in *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, Culture*, ed. Robin Pickering-Iazzi (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 220-251.
37. Many of these white-telephone comedies were adapted from past and contemporary theatrical successes, including works by Pirandello (*Ma non è una cosa seria* and *Pensaci, Giacomino*), Aldo De Benedetti, and Alessandro De Stefani. For more on the relationship between cinema and theater, consult Mino Argentieri, "Dal teatro allo schermo," in Argentieri, *Risate di regime*, 67-95; and Cristina Bragaglia and Fernaldo Di Giammatteo, "Dal teatro al cinema: L'Italia in commedia," article housed in the collection of the Mediateca Regionale Toscana, Firenze.
38. For more on the types of films produced during the Fascist period, see Fabio Carpi, "Il cinema rosa del ventennio nero." *Cinema nuovo* 6, no. 109 (15 giugno 1957); Casadio, *Telefoni bianchi*, and his *Il grigio e il nero. Spettacolo e propaganda nel cinema italiano degli anni trenta (1931-1943)* (Ravenna: Longo, 1991); Carabba, *Il cinema del ventennio nero*, 29-65; Francesco Savio, *Ma l'amore no. Realismo, formalismo, propaganda e telefoni bianchi nel cinema italiano di regime (1930-1943)* (Milano: Sonzogno,

- 1975); Argentieri, *Risate di regime*; and Riccardo Redi, ed., *Cinema italiano sotto il fascismo* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1979).
39. Francesco Bolzoni, "La commedia all'ungherese nel cinema italiano," *Bianco & Nero* 49, no. 3 (1988): 7-41.
 40. Hay, *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy*, 66-72; Lucilla Albano, "Hollywood: Cinelandia," in Redi, *Cinema italiano sotto il fascismo*, 219-232; Casadio, *Il grigio e il nero*, 9; and Casadio, *Telefoni bianchi*, 11-30.
 41. Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996). Linda Schulte-Sasse bases her approach on Slavoj Žižek's theories on politics and fantasy in *Entertaining the Third Reich: Illusions of Wholeness in Nazi Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996). See also Tom Reiss's article on the Lincoln Center Film Society series of German films produced between 1933 and 1945: Tom Reiss, "How the Nazis Created a Dream Factory in Hell," *The New York Times*, 6 November 1994, 2: 15-16.
 42. Brunetta, *Cent'anni del cinema italiano*, 188-190; Luisa Quartermaine, "Tempo di storia e tempo di miti: teoria e prassi nel cinema durante il fascismo," in *Moving in Measure: Essays in Honour of Brian Moloney*, ed. Judith Bryce and Doug Thompson (Hull: Hull University Press, 1989), 152-168.
 43. Reich, "Reading, Writing, and Rebellion"; and Reich, "Consuming Ideologies: Fascism, Commodification, and Female Subjectivity in Mario Camerini's *Grandi Magazzini*," *Annali d'Italianistica* 16 (1998): 195-212.
 44. E. Ann Kaplan, "Mothering, Feminism and Representation: The Maternal in Melodrama and the Woman's Film 1910-40," in *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 113-137.
 45. Annette Kuhn, "Women's Genres: Melodrama, Soap Opera and Theory," in Gledhill, *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, 339-349.
 46. George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985), 10.
 47. Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy 1922-1943* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); and Maria Addis Saba, "La donna 'muliebri,'" in *La corporazione della donna. Ricerche e studi sui modelli femminili nel ventennio*, ed. Maria Addis Saba (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1988), 1-71.
 48. R. Mastrostefano, "Via delle cinque lune," *Bianco & Nero* 6, no. 5-7 (maggio-luglio 1942): 5-16.
 49. Other films which belong to this category are Alberto Lattuada's *Giacomo l'idealista* (*Giacomo the Idealist*, 1943); Renato Castellani's *Un colpo di pistola* (*Pistol Shot*, 1942); two other Chiarini films, *La bella addormentata* (*Sleeping Beauty*, 1942) and *La locandiera* (*The Innkeeper*, 1943); and Ferdinando Maria Poggioli's *Gelosia* (*Jealousy*, 1943).
 50. Marcia Landy, *Fascism in Film: The Italian Commercial Cinema 1930-1944*

- (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 276-277; and Brunetta, *Cent'anni di cinema italiano*, 257-261.
51. Even though he transposed the setting from Serao's Naples to Belli's Rome in the film and changed the characters' names, Chiarini had to struggle with the censorship board in order to maintain fidelity to the short story's tragic conclusion of Ines's suicide, since any mention of suicides was prohibited. However, a verse of a poem by Belli which alluded to poverty was cut from the film, prompting Jean Gili to remark how the regime was more accommodating in dealing with cinematic depictions of moral problems than it was in dealing with economic problems. Gili, *Stato fascista e cinematografia*, 64-65, and Francesco Savio's interview with Luigi Chiarini in *Cinecittà anni trenta*, 1: 322-330. "O Giovannino o la morte" can be found in Matilde Serao, *All'erta, Sentinella!* (Milano: Baldini, 1904), 309-366.
 52. Landy, in her discussion of the film, elaborates on Checco's role as vulnerable victim in Teta's hands. Landy, *Fascism in Film*, 298.
 53. Linda Williams, "'Something Else Besides a Mother': Stella Dallas and the Maternal Melodrama," in Gledhill, *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, 314.
 54. Leslie Caldwell, "Madri d'Italia: Film and Fascist Concern with Motherhood" in *Women and Italy: Essays on Gender, Culture and History*, ed. Zygmunt G. Baránski and Shirley W. Vinall (London: Macmillan, 1991), 59-61.